1 Introduction

Many attest to the fact that the very first moments after awakening may determine their mood and wellbeing for the rest of the day. The way one separates oneself from sleep and from the nocturnal realm and greets the new day can be revealing. This is why many cultures and religions ascribe special importance to this particular transition. In this paper, I will explore what the sages of the Talmud have to say on this liminal moment. I will focus on the early morning ritual, described in the last chapter of Tractate Berakhot in the Babylonian Talmud, the tractate dealing with liturgical matters. Current Jewish practices in part divert from the Talmudic one and I will briefly relate to them in an excursus.

2 The Morning Ritual as a Miniature Rite of Passage

The Talmudic Morning Blessings ritual was intended to help the individual cope with the transition from the nocturnal domain into the day. One may consider it as a miniature rite of passage, a term coined by Arnold van Gennep (van Gennep 1960). Rites of passage are a category of rituals performed during a person’s transition from one stage, state, or status to another. They mark this transformation and, no less importantly, they effect it. Van Gennep identified three components that can be found in every rite of passage: each includes a situation of disconnection or separation from the former status; a state that was later referred to by Victor Turner as the liminal stage, in which the actual transition occurs (Turner 1964); and a third state, the incorporation and entry into the new status.

According to Turner, a person undergoing a rite of passage who is in the liminal stage constitutes a kind of ‘primordial matter’ that has lost its previous form and has not yet acquired a new form (Turner 1969, 94–97). He or she are effectively simultaneously present in two contrary states, and yet does not belong to either. The ritual permits the individual to experience the structured and controlled breaking of cognitive forms and conventional perceptions; in a “moment within and outside time” (Turner 1969, 96), the individual stands without identity, status, or property, in what Turner calls “sanctified poverty” (Turner 1967, 98–99). The function of this period of time (which may be extremely brief) is that it creates a state in which the individual is removed from the routine flow of their life and is given an opportunity to
examine the reality they have come to take for granted. Accordingly, this time may be marked by reflection and creative thought.

Turner emphasizes that the purpose of rites of passage is not to create a subversive experience liable to erode the existing order of life. On the contrary: the successful completion of the rite of passage will lead the individual into an acceptance and embrace of the new state they have entered. In other words, the chaotic nature of the liminal state is actually intended to affirm the structure from which the individual has departed and the structure into which they will enter (Turner 1964).

The attempt to apply the theory of rites of passage, which usually refers to dramatic, acute, and irreversible transitions relating to key stages of life (birth, sexual maturation, the forming of spousal partnership, and death) to the recitation of the Morning Blessings in accordance with the instructions in the Talmud – a routine and daily task – is certainly far from simple. It must be admitted that, in the vast majority of cases, awakening in the morning is not accompanied by a crisis in either the clinical or the existential sense of the word. In contrast to the individual undergoing a rite of passage in the context of the life cycle, the daily transition between day and night is generally muted and mundane. However, the location of the Morning Blessings within the framework of the Talmudic discussion of blessings recited on occasions of crisis may testify to the manner in which these were perceived by the Rabbis. I shall now attempt to suggest why transformational qualities may be identified in the Talmudic Morning Ritual, and why it may be considered a repeated and miniature rite of passage.

It is often suggested that rituals are created as a response to a genuine human need, reflecting the challenges presented by life. I would argue that the Morning Ritual, as presented in the Talmud, seeks to address such a moment of crisis – the point of transition between the nocturnal domain of sleep, which is characterized by a lack of control and discernment, and the diurnal domain of awakening, characterized by the demand for control, restraint, and the capacity to create categories and distinctions. Awakening in the morning, therefore, is a routine occurrence, yet one that may be experienced as a minor crisis.

What, then, is the nature of the crisis that may be involved in sleep? A person who sleeps undergoes an experience that is somewhat similar to that of one who is dead and indeed they can appear to be dead to an observer. Like the dead person, a person who is asleep is exempt from the commandments, since they are no more than a body whose soul is inactive and, perhaps, not even present within them. On going to sleep, people submit themselves to uncertainty. They are no longer the masters of their own thoughts and dreams; they have no control over their bodies, and no real certainty that tomorrow the sun will shine; alternately – they have no certainty that they themselves will awaken from their sleep. The person retiring to sleep – willingly, in most cases – removes his or her clothes and the other symbols of social status and identity as an alert being with conscience and the ability to choose, and hence, to an extent, waives his or her very aliveness. The concept of the separation of body and soul during sleep was elaborated in depth in the *Zohar* and in later Kab-
balistic thought, but the kernel of this concept may already be found in the late rabbinic literature. For example, the following, attributed to Rabbi Alexandri:

When one lends new things to a person of flesh and blood, he [the borrower] returns them worn and torn; but the Holy One, blessed be He, is given them worn and torn and returns them new. Know that the laborer works all day, and his soul is tired and worn, and when he sleeps, he returns his soul to the Holy One, blessed be He, and it is deposited with Him, and in the morning it returns to his body as a new creation, as it is written: New every morning, abundant is your faith (Lamentations 3). We believe and acknowledge that You return our souls at the [time of the] resurrection of the dead. (Midrash Tehillim 22:2 [ed. Solomon Buber])

Going to sleep at the close of the day is a human reflection of the changing seasons of nature, mimicking (at least on the symbolic level) the death that comes at the close of life. The perception of sleep as resembling death, or even having some of the characteristics of death, is reflected in several sayings of the Rabbis, the best known of which is, “Sleep is one-sixtieth of death” (bavli Ber. 57b). Human curiosity about what happens to our body and soul during sleep, and the anxiety this question may arouse, are somewhat analogous to human curiosity about what happens to our body and soul after death, and this similarity underlies the rituals relating to sleep. Sleep is described as containing the taste of death, and the impurity of the sleeping person is often likened to that of the dead (Moelin 1979, 23), underscoring the status of the Morning Ritual as symbolizing (or creating) a divide between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The Rabbis are aware that the awakening human is no longer a denizen of the nocturnal realm but has also yet to take his or her place in the diurnal one. The blessings in the Morning Ritual accompany each of the normal morning actions, helping the individual to gradually return to his state as an active, conscious human.

Rabbinic prayer seeks to provide protecting shelter to those who need this in any situation and in every transition in the passing of the day, the year, and the life cycle. Equally, prayer constitutes the arena in which the worshippers cope with their existence, their surroundings, and their Creator. The Morning Ritual constitutes one plank in this structure, by which the liturgy accompanies those who observe it into situations of dilemma and conflict and supports them through perils and transitions.

If the person going to sleep is afraid of the loss of control and of death (whether symbolic or actual, since, as discussed, sleep is perceived as a microcosm of death), then on awakening, the individual feels – or, at least, is encouraged to feel – a sense of relief and gratitude that they have been guarded through sleep and into awakening. Nevertheless, I would argue that this is also a time of crisis that may be accompanied by anxieties. I believe that at least three kinds of anxiety might face the person awakening from sleep, and assuaged by the Morning Ritual; all three relate to the fact that this ritual is recited at a liminal point in time: Anxieties relating to the sleep from which the individual has just awoken, to nightmares or unresolved dreams, and to aspects of
the separation from the world of sleep – a fetal and primordial world whose essence does not lend itself to simple explanations or rational analysis. One may also experience anxieties relating to the new day and the need to cope with leaving the private, domestic realm to enter the public one. And finally, one may have anxieties of an existential nature: as order is restored and creation is renewed in the morning, questions may emerge regarding the fragile nature of this order, its disturbance and cessation, the disappearance of divine providence, or the fear of being unworthy and inadequate in one’s actions and hence undeserving of divine mercy. If we employ Turner’s terms, consciousness is structure while sleep is a liminal state, as illustrated in the following figure:

![Figure 2: Sleep as Liminal State.](image)

Sleep is a liminal state since the conventional divisions of functions, status, and so forth do not apply when one is asleep. The borders of sleep consist of falling asleep and awakening, but during its course, the sleeper is in a structureless state of an extreme nature. Man and woman, free person and slave, Jew, and Gentile, the mighty and the lowly – all are equal in standing and status as they sleep.

In a way, sleep defies all definitions of category and structure. Yet it may also be perceived as a structureless structure, since it is clearly defined and limited. When we add the ritual relief provided at both ends of the night, we see that, in addition to sleep, another level of liminality is present: the ritual designed to lead the individual from the state of being awake to that of sleep (the recitation of the bedtime shema) and from sleep to awakening (the Morning Ritual). These two rituals, both of which are presented in the same Talmudic discussion, serve as guards, as it were, at the borders between the two realms. More accurately, perhaps, they may be described as border stations through which those who recite the blessings pass from one realm to the other (Zerubavel 1993, 5–20). This is reflected in the following figure:

![Figure 3: Talmudic Morning Ritual.](image)
This figure also requires elaboration. The reality of human life as it progresses is not simply linear, but also cyclical, advancing in a kind of spiral. Just as both extremities of sleep are wrapped in rituals, so the period of awakening is marked at its beginning by the Morning Ritual, and at its end by the recitation of the *sh'ma* before going to bed.

According to the biblical stories of the creation, the original state of the world was one of chaos, which out of and in opposition to which God established His world (this terminology appears in Psalm 136, and thereafter in the blessing for standing upon the ground in the Morning Ritual, see below). Similarly, the initial state of the human is latent and passive; against this, the person reciting the blessings resume and, in a way, recreate their talents, capabilities, and regain their identity through actions and their verbalization in the blessings. Just as the daily setting and rising of the sun is perceived by the Rabbis as corroborative evidence of the existence of God and, no less importantly, of God’s merciful providence, so, I would argue, is the daily miracle of awakening from sleep and from miniature or symbolic death.

3 The Talmudic Ritual of Awakening

According to the Mishnah (the first Jewish legal compendia, redacted around 220 in the Land of Israel), the first liturgical text recited in the morning is *Sh'ma Yishrael* (a central liturgical unit comprised of three biblical paragraphs, encased with liturgical blessings). It seems, that the sages of the Mishnah, the *Tana'im*, did not know of any liturgy preceding it. The *Sh'ma*, a statement Jews are required to recite twice daily at least, is the closest statement to a creed in the Jewish tradition (Kimelman 2001). Apparently, later authorities around the fifth century (the last generators of the Amoraim), may have felt that the *Sh'ma*, text which requires the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven and of the commandments, was too mentally and spiritually demanding a text for the tender moments of transition between sleep and awakening. They believed that the worshippers needed liturgy that would help them to gradually rise up for the new day. The ritual they developed is one that involves the body and soul, aiming to help one get the worshipper ready for the new day (Marx 2008).

The core of the morning blessings appears in the framework of a *suggiah* (a Talmudic discussion) on the blessings one should recite when entering a dangerous place such as a foreign city, and on those recited upon leaving those places in peace. The ‘entering’ in our case, which is the last part of the *suggiah*, is not into a place but, rather, to a state, that of sleep, and the departure of it is wakefulness. As mentioned above, sleep was considered by the rabbis as ‘one sixtieth of death’, and a special prayer, the bedtime *sh’ma* is specified when entering this state. The Morning Blessings, the most elaborate part of the *suggiah*, is the response upon ‘exiting’ from this dangerous place (Marx 2007).
The first blessing in this collection, *Birkat Neshamah* (the blessing regarding the soul) opens with the words: “My God, the soul that you have given me is pure,” rather than the blessing traditional formula (“Blessed are You, Eternal our God”). This may attest to its antiquity (even though it appears for the first time in the Talmud). This is an optimistic statement, it declares that our soul, the source of our very being, is pure and good. The implication is that human existence is good at its core and therefore we can strive to do good. There is some debate about the actual meaning of the conclusion of the blessing: “Blessed […] who restores souls to dead corpses”, with different opinions regarding whether this refers to the mercy of the ‘daily resurrection’ of waking up, or to the resurrection of the dead at the end of time (Petuchowski 1981). This ambiguous language may plausibly suggest both interpretations.

*Birkat Neshamah* is followed by a collection of short blessings. Rabbi Sa’adia Ga’on (882–943, Egypt and Babylon) called this collection *Birkhot Hape’ulot* (The Blessings Over Activities), since each one of them is recited while performing a routine morning activity. Here are the blessings as they appear in the Talmud:

*Upon awakening* one should say: “My God, the soul which You have bestowed in me is pure. You formed it within me, You breathed it into me, and You preserve it within me. And You will take it from me and restore it to me in the time to come. As long as my soul is within me, I give thanks to You, Eternal, my God and God of my ancestors, Ruler of all worlds, Sovereign of all souls. Blessed are You, Eternal, Who restores souls to dead bodies.”

*On hearing the sound of the rooster* [crowing], one should say: “Blessed Who gives understanding to the rooster to distinguish between day and night;”

*When opening the eyes*, one should say: “Blessed, Who gives sight to the blind;”

*On straightening and sitting up*, one should say: “Blessed, Who releases the imprisoned;”

*When dressing*, one should say: “Blessed, Who clothes the naked;”

*Upon standing up*, one should say: “Blessed, Who straightens the bent;”

*On stepping on the ground*, one should say: “Blessed, who spreads the earth above the waters;”

*Upon walking*, one should say, “Blessed, Who prepares the steps of man;”

*When putting on one’s shoes*, one should say: “Blessed, Who has provided me with all my needs;”

*On fastening one’s belt*, one should say: “Blessed, Who girds Israel with might;”

*When pulling a cape over one’s head*, one should say: “Blessed, Who crowns Israel with glory;”

*When putting on the tisitsit (fringed garment)*, one should say: “Blessed, Who has sanctified us with the commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves with tisitsit;”

*On placing the tefillin (phylacteries) on the arm*, one should say: “Blessed, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to put on tefillin;”

*When [placing the tefillin] on the head*, one should say: “Blessed, Who has sanctified us concerning the commandment of tefillin;”
On washing one’s hands, one should say: “Blessed, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding the washing of hands;”

On washing one’s face, one should say: “Blessed, Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids. [And] may it be Your will, Eternal my God, to accustom me to the study of Your Torah and to let me adhere to Your commandments. And bring me not into the grasp of sin, nor into the grasp of iniquity, nor into the grasp of transgression, nor into the grasp of trial, nor into the grasp of disgrace. And turn my inclination to submit to you, and keep me far from an evil person and from an evil companion, and make me hold fast to the good inclination, and to a good companion in Your world, and grant me today and every day favor, kindness, and compassion in Your eyes and in the eyes of all those who see me, and bestow bountiful kindness upon me. Blessed are You, Eternal, who bestows bountiful kindness upon His people Israel” (Bavli, Ber. 60b).

These Talmudic blessings accompany the routine activities of the morning from the moment of waking up, indeed, even before opening the eyes, ascribing them with holiness, there follows the increasing awareness of one’s surroundings (the blessing on hearing the crowing of the rooster), opening the eyes (“Who gives sight to the blind”), stretching out (“Who releases the imprisoned”) etc. It seems that the Talmud is citing an abridged form of the full blessing formula, “Blessed are You, Eternal, Ruler of the Universe, who [...]”, which was known to all. The first blessings have a universal character (e.g., the two blessings cited above), while the later blessings have more particular nature (e.g., “Who girds Israel with might”). This carries over to the blessings over the commandments (over the tsitsit, Tefillin and ritual hand washing) that follow.

4 The Narrative of the Talmudic Morning Ritual

The blessings as presented in the Talmud are occasional blessings, that is, ones recited upon performing specific actions (in this case, the ordinary actions of the morning). Accordingly, the assertion that they are constructed in a quasi-narrative form does not relate to the original manner of their performance, but rather to the manner in which they are presented in the Talmudic discussion.

The blessing over the restoration of the soul, the first of the Talmudic Morning Ritual, offers thanks for the return of the soul with morning. It is recited when the individual awakens in their bed, their eyes still closed, not yet confronting the external world. This blessing draws an explicit analogy between awakening from sleep in the morning and the expectation of awakening from death at the End of Days, “You will take my soul from me, to restore it to me in the time to come,” (Petuchowski 1981). In the next blessing, recited upon hearing the rooster crow, the awakening person relates to the wisdom that the Creator has implanted within the natural world (“Who gives understanding to the rooster.”) The worshipper gradually emerges from the primal state of sleep and, to the accompaniment of the blessings, becomes a responsible and active being. While the blessing over the rooster’s discerning of
dawn relates to the human sense of hearing, the next blessing relates to the sense of sight and the opening of the eyes as one awakens (“Who gives sight to the blind,”).

Through reciting the Morning Blessings, the awakening person passes from blindness to sight; is liberated from the shackles of body at sleep (“Who releases the bound,”); moves from a raw, naked state to one in which s/he may move about freely in public (“Who clothes the naked,”); from lying on their bed to standing in an upright position (“Who straightens the bent,”); from involuntary to voluntary motion (“Who spreads the earth over the water”); and self-ambulation (“Who prepares the steps of man”); and from being unable to care for themselves (and indeed requiring nothing), to being aware of their needs and able to go out and tend to their livelihood (“Who provided me with all my needs”).

These blessings, and the actions over which they are recited, thus gradually lead the reciter from the nocturnal, primal, and passive state into the diurnal, dynamic, and active one. Their recitation encourages awareness of the body and of physiological capabilities. They also draw the individual, to employ the terminology the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, from nature to culture (Levi-Strauss 1963, 1). While asleep, the human is no more than a shell, a body strewn helplessly on a bed. Through awakening, dressing, and bathing, the human gradually becomes an enculturated, civilized being. It should be noted that the reference so far is to culture in general; these blessings do not explicitly contain any particularistic Jewish dimension (beyond their redolent use of biblical language) and could be recited by any individual.

Now begins the next significant stage in the transition: the transformation of the awakening person into a Jew. On fastening one’s belt and putting on a cape, two blessings are recited that emphasize the reciter’s membership amongst the Jewish people (“Who girds Israel with might” and “Who crowns Israel with glory.”) These ‘Jewish’ blessings mark out the restructuring of the personality and the body of the reciter. What is perceived as Jewish in these blessings is not the mere action of fastening a belt or putting on a cape, neither of which were exclusive to Jews; rather the language of the blessings is particularistic, affirming the awakening person’s reconstitution as a Jew.

The unit continues with four blessings relating to the commandments of donning tsitsit (fringed garment), tefillin (phylacteries) of the arm and of the head, and the washing of hands. The principle behind these blessings is, to a large extent, the opposite of the blessings over occasional actions. In the latter, the routine ‘mundane’ action acquires a religious status through the addition of the blessing. In the case of the blessings over performance of the commandments, the blessing accompanies an action that has no independent meaning outside of its religious dimension. Just as the recitation of the blessings over generic actions reaffirms and demonstrates human capacities and capabilities, so the particularistic blessings reaffirm and demonstrate Jewish identity, as manifested and modeled in the commandments and their associated blessings.
The Talmudic early morning ritual ends with a blessing thanking God “Who removes sleep,” in which the worshipper expresses the completion of the process of awakening and renewed creation by washing their face. This blessing begins and ends in the blessing formula (“Blessed are You [...]”). It is significantly longer than the other blessing over activities, as it includes a supplication for preservation and protection from evil forces outside the home: “May it be Your will, Eternal, my God, to accustom me to the study of Torah [...] and keep me far from an evil person and from an evil companion, and make me hold fast to the good inclination and to a good companion in Your world.” The action with which the blessing is associated is washing the face – preparing the public aspect of the body that was hidden during the night.

5 The Complex Meaning of the Talmudic Morning Blessings

Though modest in length, the Morning Ritual addresses diverse aspects of life. I shall illustrate the broad fields of meaning created by the blessings by examining one in particular, “Who gives sight to the blind,” which is recited when one opens the eyes in the morning. As with the other blessings, this short blessing would seem to allude to several aspects that must surely have been apparent both to those who formulated these blessings and to those who used them:

- **Awakening** – Thanksgiving for the mere ability to open one’s eyes. The person awakening from sleep, who was as good as blind while sleeping, offers thanks for the restoration of sight that comes with the awakening.

- **Birth** – As mentioned above, the Rabbis perceived sleep as a miniature experience of death. Accordingly, upon awakening the reciter of the blessings is likened to a newborn baby (i.e., *Lev. Rabbah* 14:2). Just as the baby, while still a fetus in its mother’s womb, can hear vague sounds, and perhaps even see blurred shadows, so a sleeping person sees only dream images. The regaining of sight in the morning appears to symbolize reemergence into the world and the potency of the awakened and active individual.

- **Creation** – After Adam and Eve have eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, it is said “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen 3:7). The insight they are granted relates to their sight and constitutes the realization of a hitherto dormant potential. The opening of the eyes and the capacity for sight (and, on an extended level, ‘insight’) are associated with understanding and with the capability of discernment. Light is perceived not only as part of creation, but also as testimony to creation. Thus sight, or better, the ability to perceive light, is also a testimony to creation.

- **Moral Awakening** – The image of blindness is often used to denote moral blindness (i.e., *Is. 42:16 – 19; 43:8*). The opening of the eyes may be perceived symboli-
cally as awakening from a state of moral blindness (and, perhaps, symbolic death), as suggested in the following *midrash*:

> There is no sorrow so great and no torment so burdened and difficult as blindness... And when [God] comes to heal the world, He begins with none other than the blind, as it is said, *God opens the eyes of the blind* (Ps 146:8). And who are the blind? Those generations that walk in the Torah like blind people, as it is said: *We grope for the wall like the blind* (Isa 59:10). All read and know not what they read, repeat and know not what they repeat. But in the time to come: *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened* (Isa 35:5) (*Midrash on Pss*, 146:5 [ed. Solomon Buber]).

The act of opening one’s eyes in the morning may thus be likened to a reenactment of a moral awakening, and hence a commitment to a proper and sober life.

Wake up as an Allusion to Future Redemption – If sleep is perceived as a miniature form of death, awakening from sleep is likened in metaphoric terms (and perhaps even in metonymic ones) to the resurrection of the dead. Accordingly, we may likely identify in the action of opening the eyes of the blind eschatological allusions to the future, as evident, for example, in the *midrash* quoted in the previous paragraph.

These interpretations, which relate to diverse layers of understanding and consciousness, seem to be present simultaneously (though not necessarily consciously) in the formulation of the blessing, and are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are intertwined and support one another: the opening of the eyes, an almost instinctive physiological act, is testimony of God’s mercy to those He has created; symbolic daily creation recalls the primal creation of the world and the creation of life through human birth and, in the same manner, the eschatological expectation of rebirth after death.

Even if it cannot be expected that this plethora of meanings was regularly present in the consciousness of most worshippers, these meanings would seem to lie on the margins of their awareness, and among the images through which they interpret their being and their daily experiences. The same multivocal and multilayered quality may be seen in the remaining blessings, manifested in their concrete, cosmic, and eschatological fields and in the simultaneous connection between a primordial beginning and eschatological end.

As mentioned above, this liturgical rubric is included in the ninth and last chapter of Tractate *Berakhot* of the Babylonian Talmud. This chapter deals with event-specific and occasional blessings, rather than prayers that must be recited every day. The occasional nature of the Morning Blessings may be inferred by its location among the event-specific liturgical utterances. Perhaps the redactors of the Talmud did not intend to specify a fixed unit but to give examples of blessings one may recite over daily activities. Be that as it may, this collection of blessings is designed to help those just waking up in the morning to revitalize their bodies and souls anew after their hours of sleep.
6 Excursus: Post-Talmudic Early Morning Ritual

The first Jewish prayer books appeared in the 9th–10th centuries, that is, about three centuries after the redaction of the Talmud. The early morning ritual depicted in them is rather different than the one described in the Talmud.

During the early Islamic period, concern was raised by rabbinic authorities in Babylon that the hands of the awakening person might have become ritually impure during sleep. A responsa of Rav Natronai Gaon, quoted with certain changes in Seder Rav Amram, acknowledges the Talmudic teaching but adds: “But because of impurity [of the hands], this is the rule: once a person has awakened from his sleep, he may not recite even a single blessing until he has washed his hands”. (Responsa of Rav Natronai, 107; cf. Seder Rav Amram Gaon, 2). Thus, upon awakening, the worshipper was now required to wash their hands and attend to their bodily needs before reciting all blessings together as a complete sequence rather than singly, upon performing each individual morning action. The custom of reciting the Morning Ritual as a single unit in the synagogue (or at home) has since been the practice of most Jewish communities.

Over time, the blessings of the Morning Ritual came to be viewed as a required list of blessings, part of the one hundred blessings a Jew is required to recite each day; they no longer belonged to the category of occasional blessings. Does this mean, therefore, that the entire content of this article is no longer relevant to today’s worshippers as they recite the Morning Ritual? That is, has any affinity between the sequential blessings in the synagogue and the Talmudic Morning Ritual, which seeks to transfer the reciter in practical terms from the nocturnal domain to the diurnal domain, been broken? I would suggest that the connection with these actions indeed remains at least on the connotative level, or, at least, through the study of the sources, even if the blessings are no longer recited in the manner in which they were originally cast.

Further, as is often the case, Jewish liturgical units, originally concise, tend to absorb many components and become rather large pieces. The Morning ritual is no exception to the rule. Post-Talmudic authorities wedded the blessings over activities, with three blessings framed in a negative form, thanking God who “did not make me a gentile, a woman and a boor/slave” (Kahn 2011). Unlike the blessings over actions, these blessings already appear in tannaitic literature (Tosefta Ber. 6:8). As far as we know, they were not originally connected to any morning ritual, and hence are not fully within the scope of this current discussion. However, the two clusters of blessings appear alongside each other from the earliest siddurim in our possession onwards, as part of the Morning Ritual. These blessings are disconcerting many contemporary Jews who replace them with positive and non-discriminatory formulations (Tabory 2001).
Many more rubrics were added along the generations to the early morning ritual, such as a symbolic Torah study, recitation of biblical and rabbinical passages concerning the Temple sacrifices, poems, supplications and more (Elbogen 1993, 3–9).

Even if the spirit of daily creation and rebirth is weakened when the blessings are recited in the manner as a fix list, which is necessarily immediately after awakening, that has now become customary, it still flows within them, helping the individual to set down roots in their daily reality, after a night of sleep.

Bibliography


