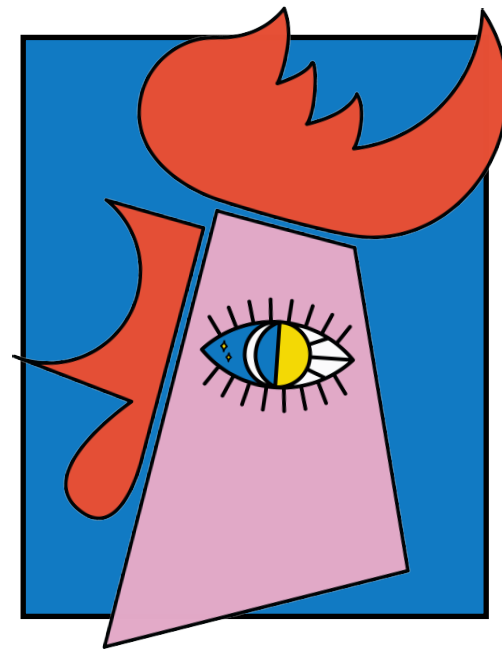


The Blessing of Distinction

In this source sheet, we will explore traditional blessings that express gratitude for the ability to make distinctions, to separate and discern. Interestingly, one of these blessings is in the context of the desire and pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. An additional layer and blessing is added on Saturday night, during the liminal transitional period between Shabbat and the rest of the week, as a significant element of the *Havdalah* ritual. The Hebrew word *Havdalah* means "separation" or "distinction" and the ritual helps us move from one time to another while paying attention to the space in between.

We invite you to explore these blessings along with additional sources and find out how they can serve as a recipe for gratitude.



"For learning wisdom and discipline; For understanding words of discernment."
-Proverbs 1:2

The beginning of wisdom is—acquire wisdom; With all your acquisitions, acquire discernment.
-Proverbs 4:7

לְדַעַת חֲכָמָה וּמוֹסָר לְהָבִין אִמְרֵי בִינָה:

-משלי א,ב

רִאשִׁית חֲכָמָה קִנָּה חֲכָמָה וּבְכָל-קִנְיָנָךְ קִנָּה בִינָה:

-משלי ד,ז

In both of the verses above, from the book of Proverbs, the word *bina* is translated as discernment.

- What is the relationship between knowledge, wisdom and discernment?
- Why do you think the author of Proverbs feels the need to add the element of discernment as a significant part of the process of knowledge acquisition?
- Can you think of people who are wise and knowledgeable but do not have the quality of discernment? How does this affect your ability to learn from them?



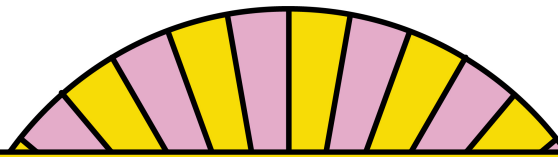
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The Amida prayer, which according to tradition is recited three times a day, includes thirteen blessings of requests- each dedicated to a different human desire or need. The first of the series, is the blessing for wisdom. On Saturday night, when transitioning from Shabbat to the rest of the week, there's an addition in this blessing which is recited.

Read both the blessing and the addition below:

You favor humans with perception and teach humankind understanding (*bina*).* Grant us knowledge, understanding (*bina*) and intellect from You [or: Grant us from Your wisdom, understanding (*bina*) and knowledge.] Blessed are You, Hashem, Grantor of perception.

**Additional insertion for Saturday night prayer:*

You have favored us [with the ability] to know Your Torah and taught us to fulfill the statutes of Your will. You made a distinction, Hashem, our G-d, between sacred and unhallowed, between light and darkness, between Israel and the peoples, between the seventh day and the six work days. Our Father, our King, commence for us the days that approach us, in peace, devoid of all sin, and cleansed of all iniquity, and devoted to the fear of You.

-From the daily *Amidah* prayer

אַתָּה חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דָּעַת וּמַלְמֵד לְאָנוּשׁ בִּינָה: * חָנְנוּ
מֵאֲתָךְ דָּעָה בִּינָה וְהַשְׁכֵּל [או: חָנְנוּ מֵאֲתָךְ חִכְמָה
בִּינָה וְדַעַת]: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' חוֹנֵן הַדָּעַת:

*אַתָּה חוֹנֵנֵתָנוּ לְמַדַּע תּוֹרָתְךָ. וּתְלַמְּדֵנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת
חֻקֵּי רְצוֹנְךָ. וּתְבַדֵּל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחַל בֵּין
אוֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
לְשֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. אָבִינוּ מְלָכֵנוּ הַחַל עָלֵינוּ
הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים לְקִרְאָתָנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם חֲשׂוֹכִים מִכָּל
חֵטָא וּמִנְקִים מִכָּל עוֹן וּמַדְבְּקִים בִּירְאָתְךָ: וְ...]

-תפילת העמידה

- What is the focus of the additional insertion for Saturday night?
- What is the relationship between distinctions and knowledge?



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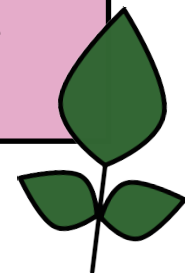
We must have proper concentration, for this is the primary request that a person must ask of G-d to grant them intellect and proper knowledge to despise evil and to choose good... And that which we recite *Havdalah* during this blessing is because it is a wisdom that a person can distinguish between one thing and another, therefore it was instituted in the blessing about wisdom, and a hint to this is that the word *binah* is an acronym for *besamim* (spices), *yayin* (wine), *ner* (candle), and *havdalah*.

-Mishna Brura, 115:1

צריך לכוין בה כראוי שזה עיקר השאלה שצריך האדם לשאול מאת הבורא ית' שיתן לו שכל ודעת ישר למאוס ברע ולבחור בטוב ... והא דמבדילין בברכה זו לפי שהוא חכמה שהאדם מבדיל בין דבר לדבר לכן קבעוהו בברכת החכמה ורמז לדבר בינה ראשי תיבות: בשמים יין נר הבדלה.

-משנה ברורה סימן קטו ס"ק א

- The Mishna Brura helps make the connection between the daily prayer and the Havdalah prayer. How does it do so?



Havdalah is the Jewish ritual for ending Shabbat. The Hebrew word Havdalah means "separation" or "distinction". The ritual takes place on Saturday night, when it is dark and three stars can be seen in the sky. It is a liminal rite that helps us move from one time to another while paying attention to the space in between. While the ritual consists of a few blessings, including blessings over wine, spices and fire, the final, culminating blessing, is the one that is unique to this ritual, and focuses on discernment and distinction.

The *Havdalah* Distinction Blessing

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who distinguishes between the holy and the profane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six working days. Blessed are You, O Lord, who distinguishes between the holy and the profane.

ברכת המבדיל

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמְבַדִּיל
בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחוֹל, בֵּין אֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ, בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְעַמִּים, בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה,
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחוֹל:

One of the key verbs in Genesis, Chapter One, is b-d-l, "to separate, distinguish, divide," the root of the word *Havdalah*. It appears five times in the chapter. By inviting human beings to engage in *Havdalah* at the end of Shabbat, G-d invites us to create worlds. Creation involved the ability to make distinctions, to rescue order from chaos, to respect the integrity of creation. *Havdalah* is thus not only a human blessing over the end of the day of rest, but as it were a divine blessing over the days of work. The Creator invites us to be creative - but always and only in a way that respects differences and distinctions, the laws of nature and the moral law. The message of *Havdalah* is: if we respect the integrity of boundaries, we can turn chaos into order, darkness into light.

-Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Koren Siddur*

Reflection Questions

- What are your unique, distinct qualities, for which you are grateful?
- What boundaries or distinctions do you need in order to be able to recognize others?
- How can you create and delineate time and space in your life to make room for appreciation?