**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbie and David Sable

Steven Weiner & Lisa Wise

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In loving memory of Rabbi Dr. Barrett (Chaim Dov) Broyde ztz"l

הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפֹעֵל צֶדֶק וְדֹבֵר אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ

Steven Weiner & Lisa Wise

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**She-lo-asani Isha, She-asani Kirtzono**

Why do men say she-lo asani isha? What is the meaning of she-asani kirtzono?

**By Deracheha Staff; Laurie Novick, Director**

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*She-lo-asani Isha, She-asani Kirtzono*

# She-lo Asani Isha

[*Birchot Ha-shachar*](http://www.deracheha.org/prayer-4-birchot-ha-shachar) include a series of three *berachot* thanking God for establishing aspects of a person’s identity. In the first two, we thank God for the fact that we are neither non-Jews (*she-lo asani goy)* nor bondsmen (*she-lo asani aved*). Men then conclude the series with *she-lo asani isha*, "Who did not make me a woman," while women recite the *beracha* *she-asani kirtzono*, “Who made me according to His will.” These *berachot* are naturally of particular interest to women.

**The *Beracha*** The forerunner to the current set of three *berachot* appears in the Talmud: [[1]](#footnote-1)

*Menachot* 43b

Rabbi Meir would say: A person must recite three *berachot* every day. They are these—'Who did not make me a non-Jew,' 'Who did not make me a woman,' 'Who did not make me a boor.'

These *berachot* center around identity. A man praises God for not making him other than he is, in three respects, including "Who did not make me a woman."

**The Rationale** Why should a man be grateful for this? The Tosefta has a parallel version of this teaching, which includes rationales for the blessings.

Tosefta *Berachot* 6:18 Who did not make me a woman.…"A woman" because women are not obligated in [as many] *mitzvot*…

This explanation of 'Who did not make me a woman' is fairly straightforward. A man should be grateful for being obligated in more *mitzvot* than women are, presumably because each *mitzva* provides a unique opportunity to serve God, and this *beracha* expresses his gratitude.[[2]](#footnote-2) Given that the Talmud Yerushalmi presents the same rationale,[[3]](#footnote-3) this explanation for the *beracha* seems authoritative.

## *● Why are the identity* berachot *phrased in the negative? (See Appendix One.)*

Both the Talmud and the Tosefta list "Who has not made me a boor" among the three blessings. A Talmudic passage explains the switch from boor to "Who has not made me a bondsman," as recited today.[[4]](#footnote-4)

*Menachot* 43b-44a

Rav Acha son of Yaakov heard his son reciting the *beracha*, "Who did not make me a boor." He [Rav Acha] said to him, "All this also?" He [the son] said to him [to Rav Acha], "Rather, what [does one] bless? 'Who did not make me a bondsman?' That's like a woman, a bondsman!" [Rav Acha responded,] "*Zil tefei."* [He is lesser. Alternatively, "Go add more" (i.e., add the bondsman blessing).]

Rav Acha hears the *beracha* "Who did not make me a boor" and objects to it. His son understands him as suggesting that he say the *beracha* “Who did not make me a bondsman” in its place. The son argues that one cannot recite a *beracha* on not being made a bondsman, because a bondsman is equivalent to a woman and the two *berachot* would be redundant. Rav Acha disagrees and tells him to add the bondsman blessing anyway.

Two key elements of the Talmudic story are unclear: (1) Why does Rav Acha object to the recitation of the blessing about boorishness? (2) In what respect does his son see a similarity between women and bondsmen?

Rashi gives two possible interpretations of the passage:

The first interpretation reads *"zil tefei"* as "he is lesser," which would be an expression of social status. Rav Acha rates a man's status above a woman's and a woman's above a bondsman's.[[5]](#footnote-5) On this reading, the identity *berachot* revolve around social status and a man thanks God both that he is not a woman and that he is not a bondsman, who has a lower status.

However, this approach to the passage does not line up with the explanation given above for this *beracha,* which is found in the Tosefta and Yerushalmi.

On the other hand, Rashi's second interpretation lines up perfectly with the other sources. It reads the comparison between women and bondsmen in terms of their shared exemption from positive time-bound commandments and reads "*zil tefei"* as "Go [add more]."

Rashi, *Menachot* 43b-44a (second version)

**That’s like a woman**… (Alternate explanation:) Is like a woman in that regarding *mitzvot,* a woman and a bondsman are equivalent.

**Go more**… (Alternate explanation:) Go more, meaning go and add more and bless 'Who did not make me a bondsman' in order to complete [the set of *berachot*].

Here Rashi answers both of our questions.

(1) Rav Acha objects to his son's recitation of the beracha “Who did not make me a boor” because a boor is fully obligated in all *mitzvot* and the identity blessings are specifically about mitzva obligation.

(2) The son assumes women and bondsmen are equivalent for the purposes of reciting *berachot* about mitzva obligation, because both groups are exempt from positive time-bound commandments.[[6]](#footnote-6) (His father apparently thinks there is sufficient difference in their obligations to allow for two blessings.)

Although some commentators include social status in their discussion of the *beracha*,[[7]](#footnote-7) Tur and Beit Yosef[[8]](#footnote-8) both emphasize mitzva obligation as the rationale behind it.

*Tur* OC 46

For he blesses "Who did not make me a woman," for she, too, [like the bondsman] is not obligated in positive time-bound commandments.

# In Practice

Unfortunately, as Rav Yehuda H. Henkin observes, many men recite the *beracha* without being aware that, according to the most authoritative explanation, its purpose is to thank God for their obligation in additional *mitzvot*:

Responsa *Benei Banim* 4:1

If everyone knew that the second language in Rashi is primary, and if all men were to bless out of joy in serving God and in His *mitzvot*, then there would be no place for this bitterness [of women], because it is a scriptural decree that men are obligated in more *mitzvot* than women and one cannot lodge a complaint over that. But since out-of-place thoughts have become intermingled with [men's] intentionality [in reciting] the *beracha*…that the man blesses over his superior social status, even though Rashi's second explanation is primary, therefore, women object.

Rav Henkin laments the fact that many men do not understand the true meaning and intent of the *beracha*. Men should not think of the *beracha* as expressing superiority. As we have seen, many halachic authorities do *not* follow Rashi’s first interpretation, that the *beracha* refers to the fact that men have a loftier social status. Because some of those reciting it still take the *beracha* in this direction, it is understandable that many people find it difficult.

We have a report from as early as the eighteenth century of a woman feeling offended by the *beracha:*

Rav Yisachar Tamar, *Alei Tamar*, Yerushalmi *Berachot* 4:4

I heard that the learned and wise Rebbitzen, daughter of Rav Yitzchak [Ha-levi Horovitz] of Hamburg and wife of Rav Menachem [Mendel Rubin] of Lesko and mother of [Admor Naftali Tzvi Horovitz] of Ropczyce asked her husband the Rav, "Is the water carrier from this cistern more important than me, that he recites *she-lo asani isha*?" And her husband appeased her…

Reporting the story, Rav Tamar is careful to establish Rebbetzin Horovitz's bona fides as a learned and wise woman whose father and husband were both Torah scholars. She raises her question as a faithful, religious, and wise woman from an important rabbinic family, living well before the modern feminist era. It is clear therefore that these concerns are of long-standing and are not a response unique to contemporary women.

**Education and Privilege** What can be done in response to these concerns? First and foremost, it is important to educate our communities.

In his modern code of Jewish law, Rav Chayim David Ha-levy specifies what men should think about when reciting the *beracha*:

Rav Chaim David Ha-levy, *Mekor Chayim* Volume 7, p. 76

And when he blesses "Who did not make me a woman," he should have in mind that even though she [a woman] is just as important as he is, she is not obligated in all the *mitzvot* like a man. And from here [we learn] that these *berachot* are intended primarily in order to thank God for the obligation of Torah and *mitzvot* in which we are obligated.

Rav Ha-levy notes that men's being commanded in more *mitzvot* is a privilege, *not* a sign of superiority. "Even though she is just as important as he is, she is not obligated in all the *mitzvot.*"Men should be careful to keep this in mind, and not to mistake their privilege for anything more than that.

How can a man succeed in in balancing gratitude for his obligations with humility about himself? Rav Hirsch suggests one possible approach:

Rav S. R. Hirsch, The Hirsch Siddur, p. 13.

This is not a prayer of thanks that God did not make us heathens, slaves or women. Rather, it calls upon us to contemplate the task which God has imposed upon us by making us free Jewish men, and to pledge ourselves to do justice to this mission.

Men should recognize that the privilege of being obligated in more *mitzvot* brings with it great responsibility. The *berachot* they recite bear a message beyond simple praise. Men's focus when reciting the *beracha* should be on undertaking their unique obligations with utmost seriousness.

# Can the Beracha Change?

As Rav Henkin notes, many of those reciting the *beracha* are unaware of its primary meaning. One might wonder why we don’t omit or alter the *beracha* if we find the wording to be misleading.

We cannot simply drop *berachot* that our sages enacted as obligatory. This is especially the case here, where the number of *berachot* of identity seems to be of particular importance and where the Talmud presents the identity *berachot* together as a package.

Revising the *berachot* is a more complex question especially because there seem to be many historical cases of alterations to *birchot ha-shachar*. In response to the censor, and the fear of repercussions from non-Jewish authorities, the blessing "*she-asani Yisrael"* or *"she-asani Yehudi"* was recited for many years.[[9]](#footnote-9) We have evidence that some individual women in medieval times commissioned prayer books in which *she-lo asani isha* was replaced by *she-asani isha ve-lo ish,* "Who made me a woman and not a man."[[10]](#footnote-10) Furthermore, many variants of *birchot ha-shachar* have arisen in different eras.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In light of these considerations, some more liberal rabbis have called for altering the *beracha*.[[12]](#footnote-12) At the same time, all concede that this specific blessing's formulation derives from the Talmud and was codified by *Shulchan Aruch*, which places limitations on change. Therefore, the question of whether or not a revision is permissible looms large.

Rav Eliezer Roke'ach of seventeenth-century Ashkenaz summarizes the Halacha well, drawing on a position in the Talmud that decries changing the language in which our sages coined *berachot*:[[13]](#footnote-13)

*Ma'aseh Roke'ach*, The Laws of *Keri'at Shema*, 1

The general rule is that anyone who changes the formula that the sages coined for *berachot* is in error. This refers to adding to or removing from the text that our sages enacted. However, if one said the core matter that our sages enacted, but changed to a different text, even though it is not proper to do this from the outset, after the fact one has discharged [the obligation of reciting the *beracha*].

Roke’ach rules that a minor change to a *beracha* is acceptable after the fact or in a pressing circumstance. But a person who substantively alters a *beracha* has not discharged his or her obligation to recite it.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Any addition or alteration that is sufficiently substantive to really satisfy those seeking change would probably change the core meaning of the *beracha*. In that case, a person reciting the altered *beracha* might not discharge the obligation at all.[[15]](#footnote-15)

For this reason, even those contemplating change tend to focus on introducing a positive formulation into the *beracha,* or possibly adding the positive onto the negative formulation. For example, replacing "*She-lo asani isha*" with "*She-asani ish*," "Who has made me a man" or "*She-asani Yisrael*." Or even "*She-asani gever (ve-lo asani isha)*," "Who has made me a man (and has not made me a woman)."[[16]](#footnote-16)

Rav Henkin addresses various possibilities for change in his responsum:

Rav Yehuda Henkin, *Benei Banim* IV:1

There are those who wish to stop saying the *beracha* entirely, but one cannot cast one's hand against a *beracha*  that our sages enacted if not for a great need and a "time to act for God," and this would also require wide halachic consensus… Others suggest changing the men's blessing from negative to positive, as to recite "Who made me a man," but whether one can recite that with mention of God's name and kingship requires further investigation, because it is not in accordance with the language that our sages set…. We cannot bring "Who made me an Israelite," which is found in some prayer books, as a proof, because it is known that its source is fear of the censor…

According to Rav Henkin, it is by no means clear that an altered *beracha* would satisfy the obligation to recite it or could be recited with God's name. "*She-asani Yisrael*" does not create precedent for changing other *berachot* to a positive formulation, because that change was in response to a real threat.

Rav Henkin adds that omitting or revising the *beracha* would require "wide halachic consensus," which we have not reached.

Attaining wide consensus on a revised text is unlikely. It is extremely difficult nowadays to countenance changing a *beracha* that appears in the Talmud*.* For there to be any change, there would first have to be wider rabbinic acknowledgement that there is an issue that demands attention. That acknowledgement might be building.

## ● How can we address *she-lo asani isha*? *(See Appendix two.)*

# She-asani Kirtzono

A woman clearly cannot recite a *beracha* over not being made a woman.

And yet, a woman owes God gratitude for being created as a woman. Additionally, a woman may arguably be required to recite a hundred *berachot* daily, and we would not want to deprive her of the opportunity to make a *beracha* thanking God for her creation. (See [here](https://www.deracheha.org/birchot-ha-shachar).)

Over centuries of post-Talmudic halachic practice and discussion, consensus has formed around an alternative blessing, "Who has made me according to His will."

*Tur* OC

The women are accustomed to recite the *beracha* *'she-asani kirtzono*' [who made me in accordance with His will].

Note *Tur*'s wording, "the women are accustomed to recite the *beracha*." It sounds as though women took the initiative to replace the men's *beracha* with this particular *beracha* before rabbis gave it approbation. This may be a *beracha* by women, for women.

There is no indication in Tur that this *beracha*'s format is any different from the standard formula. Since this *beracha* is post-Talmudic, some halachic authorities[[17]](#footnote-17) maintain that it should be recited without the classic hallmarks of a *beracha,* namely, without mention of God's name or kingship (“*Hashem Elokenu Melekh haolam*”).

This position is particularly prevalent among Sefardi authorities, such as Rav Ovadya Yosef.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Rav Ovadya Yosef, Responsa *Yechaveh Da'at* 4:4

But regarding the matter of the *beracha* *She-asani Kirtzono*, even though in some prayer books it is printed with God's name and kingship, it seems that since this *beracha* is mentioned neither in the Talmud nor in Geonic literature, one should be concerned when saying it about the prohibition of reciting a *beracha* in vain.

Shulchan Aruch, however, does seem to permit its recitation with mention of God's name and kingship, which means acknowledging its status as a full *beracha*.[[19]](#footnote-19) He does not provide an explanation for why this is possible. If women did in fact initiate reciting the *beracha*, then this would be an extraordinary example of the rabbinic establishment respecting and adopting a liturgical initiative by women.

**Explanation** There are two major views regarding how to interpret "*She-asani Kirtzono*" and how it relates to gender distinction.

**1. Acceptance** Tur understands the blessing as an expression of acceptance of God’s will, complementary to the man's blessing:[[20]](#footnote-20)

*Tur* OC 46

"Blessed are You Lord our God, King of the world, Who did not make me a woman," because she is not obligated in positive time-bound commandments. And women have been accustomed to bless "Who made me according to His will," and it is possible that this practice is like acknowledging the [Divine] justice of adversity.

While men bless in gratitude for being obligated in these *mitzvot*, women express acceptance of the Divine decree of exemption.

Tur raises the possibility that a woman's verbal acceptance of her exemption from *mitzvot* is comparable to the recitation of *baruch dayan ha-emet* on very bad tidings*.* While he emphasizes acceptance, Tur implicitly acknowledges how difficult confronting this exemption might be.

**2.** **Positive Recognition** An alternative view sees this *beracha* as a positive recognition of woman's creation in the Divine image. Taz puts this simply:

Taz OC 46

There is value to the creation of woman, therefore she must indeed recite a *beracha* on her value.

In the eighteenth century, Rav Pinchas Horowitz of Frankfurt expresses this view in even more positive terms:

*Hafla'a*, *Ketubot* 8a

Even though in the beginning she [woman] was created from his [man's] side, it was established for future generations that she be born complete in herself, as first arose in God's will and thought. It seems that they enacted for women to recite *She-asani Kirtzono* over this. Meaning, over being made [i.e., born] complete, as arose in God's will from the first.

To Rav Horowitz, this *beracha* expresses the idea that, although man and woman were originally created as a single, [hybrid creature](https://www.deracheha.org/status),[[21]](#footnote-21) God's original vision and will for humanity was that woman should be a distinct "complete" entity. In "*She-asani Kirtzono*" a woman blesses God who made her a complete human being, distinct from man, as God always willed it.

**Summary** Women are not strictly obligated to recite *"She-asani Kirtzono."* Many women of Chabad, for example, omit it.[[22]](#footnote-22) When a woman does recite it, however, she can actively choose what she means by it, much as a man can consciously focus his intention when reciting *"She-lo asani isha*."

Dr. Erica Brown exemplifies this approach*:[[23]](#footnote-23)*

Dr. Erica Brown, "According to His Will: The View from a Pew"

And I happen to love reciting *birkot ha-shachar* daily and take particular comfort in the expression *she-asani kirtzono.* If there is a more beautiful blessing that embodies God's love for the individual, then I do not know of it. I find the blessing stunning. And, for this reason, I feel sorry for men who do not recite it….It is an affirmation of what every single person is, a unique and special creation and manifestation of God's will.

## *● How should we understand She-asani Kirtzono? (See Appendix three.)*

## *● Appendix One: Why are the identity* berachot *phrased in the negative?*

*For many, the identity* berachot *would be more palatable if recited in the positive, for example, "Who made me a Jew" as opposed to "Who did not make me a non-Jew." Even though we are grateful for the mitzva opportunities associated with our identities, speaking in the negative seems insulting to those who do not share those opportunities.*

*So why are the* berachot *phrased in the negative?*

*Of the various explanations given, two seem most compelling:*

*I. Perhaps using the negative was just a common way to express identity in the time of our sages.[[24]](#footnote-24) These negative descriptions may not always have carried the same connotations they do now. Our current cultural paradigm may exacerbate discomfort with openly negating identification with other groups.*

*II. Perhaps the context for the Talmud's discussion of these three* berachot *gives a clue to their language. Shortly before the teaching about these three* berachot*, the Talmud records Rabbi Meir's exhortation to make* [*one hundred* berachot](http://www.deracheha.org/prayer-4-birchot-ha-shachar) *per day.*

*Menachot* 43b

Rabbi Meir would say: A person must recite one hundred blessings every day.

*Rabbi Meir's project to maximize the* berachot *a person recites may influence the formulation of the three* berachot *in the negative. How? If a man were to praise God "for making me a Jew," recited in masculine singular, that could render the* berachot *about being free and a man redundant.*

*Bach makes this argument:*

Bach OC 46

For if he were to bless 'Who made me a *Yisra'el* [an Israelite],' he would no longer be able to bless 'Who made me a free person' and 'Who made me a man.' For the language of 'Who made me an Israelite' that he already blessed connotes a free person and also connotes an Israelite man and not a woman. For a woman is called a *Yisra'elit*. If so, he would not recite three *berachot* but a single *beracha*. It is not our intention to shorten [the series of *berachot*] but to prolong thanksgiving and to recite a *beracha* independently on each and every kindness.

*On this reading, the negative formulation is simply a way to make the* beracha *more specific and leave room for three, differentiated* berachot *that add praise to God and bring men closer to the goal of reciting a hundred blessings per day.*

*Nevertheless, the discomfort with the formulation of these* berachot *may seem stronger than the suggested rationales.*

## ● Appendix Two: How can we address *she-lo asani isha*?

*The explanations for this blessing and its negative language do not change the fact that many women still find it difficult to hear and many men find it difficult to recite.*

*We are committed to Halacha, which explains both why just dropping the* beracha *is not an option and why it is important to have this discussion.*

*We have seen that, barring a new halachic consensus, or at least the support of a few major halachic authorities, the* beracha *cannot be omitted or altered. Some have advocated reciting just this* beracha *in a whisper,[[25]](#footnote-25) but this approach is controversial because it may serve only to draw negative attention to it.[[26]](#footnote-26)*

*Here are some other ideas:*

*I. In line with Rav Ha-levi, communities can redouble efforts to make the precise meaning of this* beracha *clear out of sensitivity to those of us who are troubled by it. Prayer books can add an explanatory note about the proper meaning of the* beracha*, as well as a note about how important we consider proper intentionality, much as they do for other select lines of prayer.*

*More than that, there is no halachic barrier to making a statement between the various* berachot *of* birchot ha-shachar. *Our communities and prayer books could make it a standard to recite a short line that adds clarification after reciting this* beracha.

*For example, men and women could say "*petura kirtzono mi-mitzvot achadot," meaning: "*exempt, in accordance with His will, from some* mitzvot." *If this, or something like it, became common practice, it might help assuage ill feeling.*

*II. A synagogue can choose to follow the practice of the many shuls where the recitation of communal prayers aloud begins at a later stage of the prayer service, after these blessings.[[27]](#footnote-27) This is common practice in Israel. In this way, we can naturally avoid public recitation of a* beracha *that can cause discomfort.*

*III. Men can use the recitation of this* beracha *as a daily opportunity to heighten awareness of the privileges they have in their lives, to thank God for the religious opportunities afforded to them while simultaneously committing themselves to be more sensitive to those who lack them.*

*IV. Men and women can remember that a quantitative advantage in mitzva observance is only one lens through which to view gender distinction in Judaism.*

*A* beracha *recited in recognition of the exemption from some* mitzvot *(or even advantages in social status) does not detract from men's and women's spiritual equality. Contemporary writer Devorah (Heshelis) Fastag makes this point in her book,* The Moon's Lost Light.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Devorah (Heshelis) Fastag, *The Moon’s Lost Light*

Men say the blessing for not having been created a woman because this is the aspect of truth which is seen by people. The woman's role, which entails exemption or exclusion from certain mitzvos,…is, therefore, from our human view, less desirable. Although this is true in terms of this world, it does not reflect objective heavenly truth, for it does not show a person's true spiritual worth…But blessings are said on what is felt in this world, and not on objective Heavenly truth.

*IV. Women and men can continue to communicate with halachic authorities about these blessings, in the hopes that new and productive ideas will arise.*

## *● Appendix Three: How should we understand "She-asani Kirtzono?"*

*If a woman chooses to, she can keep in mind gender distinction in mitzva obligation when reciting* "She-asani kirtzono*."*

*But if she so chooses, she can also see the* beracha *as a sort of rejoinder to the man's, as if to say, 'Mitzva obligation is just one part of the picture. My reality as a woman is broader than that. God's vision is broader than that, and I am grateful for my role in it.'[[29]](#footnote-29)*

*Or she can tune out the context and rejoice in the* beracha *as an independent affirmation of her knowledge that her being exactly who she is is a manifestation of God's will, much as Erica Brown does in our concluding quotation.*

**Further Reading:**

1. Henkin, Rav Yehuda, *Benei Banim* IV:1.

Available here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=20023&st=&pgnum=7>

1. Tabory, Joseph. ["The benedictions of self identity and the changing status of women and of Orthodoxy](http://herzog-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do;jsessionid=52FA9FBA3D3C3A3823181F9CDD6DCBB8?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=TN_rambi000372085&indx=1&recIds=TN_rambi000372085&recIdxs=0&elementId=0&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrVersion=&frbg=&&vl(1UI0)=contains&dscnt=0&scp.scps=scope%3A%28972LIF_ALEPH%29%2Cscope%3A%28972HRZ_ALEPH%29%2Cscope%3A%28972ETZ_ALEPH%29%2Cprimo_central_multiple_fe&tb=t&vid=972HRZ_V1&vl(1069030332UI1)=all_items&mode=Basic&vl(238226997UI0)=any&srt=rank&tab=combined_search&dum=true&vl(freeText0)=The%20benedictions%20of%20self-identity%20and%20the%20changing%20status%20of%20women%20and%20of%20Orthodoxy&dstmp=1548666377227)." *Kenishta* [1] (2001): 107-138.

Available here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T3uXKYe_jP-WMaYsrS_-PU4ubXNmSgwtgIe_VGI87X8nKf1OhodF9X4NQMqseYzGOJs2_EEZC-masSXx/view>.

1. This text follows the overwhelming evidence from manuscripts. "*She-asani Yisrael*," which appears in the printed version, is most likely a result of the censor. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to the Tosefta, the other *berachot* are about status, and only the *beracha* concerning women centers on the obligation in *mitzvot.* This further supports the idea that the authoritative explanation for this *beracha* concerns mitzva obligation.

Tosefta *Berachot* 6:18

A non-Jew, as it is said, "all non-Jews are like nothing before Him, like nought and vanity are they counted to Him" (cf. Yeshayahu 40:17). A boor, for a boor [out of ignorance] does not fear sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Yerushalmi *Berachot* 9:1

Blessed [is He] who did not make me a woman, for a woman is not commanded in [all] the *mitzvot.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Our analysis of this passage and the commentaries on it follows Rav Yehuda H. Henkin's in Responsa *Benei Banim* IV:1, available here:

<http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=20023&st=&pgnum=7> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rashi, *Menachot* 43b-44a (first version)

**That’s like woman**… (First explanation:) For a woman is also a maidservant to her husband like a bondsman to his master.

**Is lesser**… Even so a bondsman is more demeaned than a woman.

In our discussion of marriage (forthcoming) we address this perspective on the marital relationship. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Chagiga 4a. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, for example, Rabbeinu Manoach *Hilchot Tefilla* 7:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Beit Yosef* OC 46

And afterwards we bless “Who did not make me a woman” because even though she is of higher status than a slave, she still is not obligated in all the *mitzvot*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Magen Avraham* 46:9

"Who did not make me a non-Jew" – Thus one should say, and the version "*she-asani Yehudi"* is a change by the printers. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ##  Tabory, ["Benedictions of self-identity,”](http://herzog-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do;jsessionid=52FA9FBA3D3C3A3823181F9CDD6DCBB8?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=TN_rambi000372085&indx=1&recIds=TN_rambi000372085&recIdxs=0&elementId=0&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrVersion=&frbg=&&vl(1UI0)=contains&dscnt=0&scp.scps=scope%3A%28972LIF_ALEPH%29%2Cscope%3A%28972HRZ_ALEPH%29%2Cscope%3A%28972ETZ_ALEPH%29%2Cprimo_central_multiple_fe&tb=t&vid=972HRZ_V1&vl(1069030332UI1)=all_items&mode=Basic&vl(238226997UI0)=any&srt=rank&tab=combined_search&dum=true&vl(freeText0)=The%20benedictions%20of%20self-identity%20and%20the%20changing%20status%20of%20women%20and%20of%20Orthodoxy&dstmp=1548666377227) (2001): 123-124.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 114-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See, for example, Rabbi Daniel Sperber, *On Changes in Jewish Liturgy: Options and Limitations* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2010), 41-46*.* See also, in response, Rabbi Aryeh Frimer, "Review Essay," *Hakirah* 12 (2011): 65-87. Available here:

[*http://www.hakirah.org/Vol%2012%20FrimerA.pdf*](http://www.hakirah.org/Vol%2012%20FrimerA.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Berachot* 40b

Rabbi Yosei says: Whoever alters the language that our sages coined for *berachot* has not discharged his obligation. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of *Berachot* 1:5

Ezra and his *beit din* established the text of all the *berachot*, and it is not proper to change them or to add to one of them or to remove from it, and anyone who changes the formula coined by the sages for *berachot* is one who errs.

Rosh *Berachot* 1

If the decree of the *Ge’onim* is to say it, from where do we learn that we make him go back? This is not considering changing the formula of *berachot*, since it was not mentioned in the gemara.

*Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 185

Whoever changes the formula that the sages coined is one who errs. That is to say that he has still discharged his obligation in the manner that he concluded [the *beracha*], since he mentioned [God’s name] and kingship and the core matter of the *beracha*.

Bach OC 187

And whoever changes the formula etc.: In *Berachot* 40b. And it seems to refer to changing the core matter of the formula, about which the *beracha* was established. For example, in the *beracha* “*Ha-zan*” changing it to the matter of the land, and similarly with the *beracha* on the land or the *beracha* on Yerushalayim, changing it to other matters. Or if he says the primary matter of the *beracha* but did not mention that which the sages obligate one to mention. For example, if he did not say “the fine, good, and broad land” or if he did not mention the covenant and the Torah in the *beracha* on the land, or the kingship of the house of David in “*Boneh Yerushalayim*.” But if he mentioned that which the sages obligate one to mention and also did not change the core matter of the *beracha* to another matter, but said it with different wording, it is clear that he discharged his obligation. There is clear proof from Binyamin the shepherd, who wrapped bread [ate a meal of bread wrapped around a filling] and said, ‘Blessed is the Merciful One, master of this bread,’ and Rav said there that he discharged his obligation, and we accept this. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For example, a man reciting *She-asani Kirtzono* would not discharge his obligation to recite *She-lo Asani Isha*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Gili Zivan, *"She-lo Asani Isha Ve-she-asani Kirtzono, Hatza'ah le-Girsa Acheret*," in *Nashim Be-diyun Hilchati* (1998), pp. 5-25. Rav Shlomo Riskin, “*Birkat She-lo Asani Isha, Efsharuyut Le-shinui,*”in *Lihyot Isha Yehudiya* I, 2001, pp. 139-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ben Ish Chai, First Year, *Parashat Vayeshev*

And the women bless *She-asani Kirtzono* without [God’s] name or kingship, since there is a dispute regarding this and in a situation of doubt regarding *berachot* we are lenient. And it is good to silently think [God’s] name and kingship within the *beracha*.

Chida, *Kesher Godel* 5:23

Women bless *She-asani Kirtzono* without [God’s] name or kingship.

Available here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=34941&st=&pgnum=8>. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This is particularly interesting given that he usually follows *Shulchan Aruch*, who does not give any indication here that a woman should omit God's name or kingship. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Shulhan Aruch OC 46:4

The women recite the *beracha "she-asani kirtzono."* [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See also Abudarham:

Abudarham, *Birchot ha-shachar*

The women are accustomed to recite instead of *she-lo asani isha, she-asani kirtzono,* are like someone who acknowledges the [Divine] justice of adversity. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Based on the midrashic understanding of *Bereishit* 2:21, see Rashi ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *"She-asani Kirtzono: Minhag Beit Ha-Rav,"* available here: http://www.shturem.net/index.php?section=artdays&id=512 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Erica Brown, "According to His Will: The View from a Pew," *Keren* II (5774): 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. ##  See Dr. Joseph Tabory, ["The benedictions of self-identity and the changing status of women and of Orthodoxy](http://herzog-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do;jsessionid=52FA9FBA3D3C3A3823181F9CDD6DCBB8?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=TN_rambi000372085&indx=1&recIds=TN_rambi000372085&recIdxs=0&elementId=0&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrVersion=&frbg=&&vl(1UI0)=contains&dscnt=0&scp.scps=scope%3A%28972LIF_ALEPH%29%2Cscope%3A%28972HRZ_ALEPH%29%2Cscope%3A%28972ETZ_ALEPH%29%2Cprimo_central_multiple_fe&tb=t&vid=972HRZ_V1&vl(1069030332UI1)=all_items&mode=Basic&vl(238226997UI0)=any&srt=rank&tab=combined_search&dum=true&vl(freeText0)=The%20benedictions%20of%20self-identity%20and%20the%20changing%20status%20of%20women%20and%20of%20Orthodoxy&dstmp=1548666377227)," Kenishta [1] (2001) 114-117.

Available here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T3uXKYe_jP-WMaYsrS_-PU4ubXNmSgwtgIe_VGI87X8nKf1OhodF9X4NQMqseYzGOJs2_EEZC-masSXx/view> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, based on *Me'orai Or* 4:20. See also Dr. Joel Wolowelsky (*Tradition* 29:4).

Available here:

<http://traditionarchive.org/news/originals/Volume%2029/No.%204/Who%20has%20not%20made.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Rav Emanuel Feldman (*Tradition* 29:4) who also argues that whispering reinforces an interpretation of the blessing as deliberately insulting. Available here:

<http://traditionarchive.org/news/originals/Volume%2029/No.%204/Who%20has%20not%20made.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Benei Banim* 4:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Devorah (Heshelis) Fastag, *The Moon's Lost Light* (Southfield: Targum Press, 2006), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. This suggestion is inspired by Dr. Tamar Ross, "*Ma'amadah Shel Ha-isha Be-Yahadut*," in *Yeshayahu Leibovotz Olamo Ve-haguto*, ed. Avi Sagi (Jerusalem: Keter, 1995), 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)