Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 60:

1. **Leniency is stronger than stringency.** Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehuda debate whether or not a *shehecheyanu* is needed when a person buys clothes he already had. Rabbi Meir is more lenient, saying the blessing is not needed, and Rabbi Yehuda puts forth the stricter opinion that the blessing is needed. The gemara says it prefers to tell us the lenient view, because it is preferable for the *beraisa* to give a lenient ruling rather than a strict one. Rashi elsewhere (Beitzah 2b) says that the mishna in general prefers to share more permissive opinions. Why? Being strict is easy. If you’re not sure what the law is, you can play it safe by just saying no. For example, if you’re not sure whether or not a pot is kosher, you can simply not use it, because then you’re definitely not doing anything wrong. But that doesn’t prove that the pot is not kosher. It just means you don’t know the answer so you’re avoiding the issue. Leniency requires more knowledge. If a rabbi says that something is permitted, it is because he has researched it thoroughly and feels certain that doing this thing would not be a sin. Often those less knowledgeable will assume something isn’t permitted, while a greater scholar can find reasons to say that it is permitted. Therefore, the gemara considers lenient opinions to be stronger than stricter opinions.
2. **Anxiety and faith.** If you’re entering your city and you hear a wail, you shouldn’t pray, “Let that wail not be from my home.” Whatever has happened has already happened, and your prayer will not change it. Hillel was once entering his hometown when he heard a yell. He couldn’t tell where it came from, but he said, “I’m confident it is not coming from my home.” The rabbis said that the verse, “Bad news a person does not fear, and someone who is confident in G-d does not have anything to fear” (Psalms 112:7) is about Hillel. One who has faith in G-d has no need to fear, and Hillel’s faith in G-d was so strong that he knew for a fact the yell he heard could not be coming from his home. Rabbi Yishmael and his student were once walking in the marketplace in Zion, and Rabbi Yishmael noticed that his student was anxious. He asked his student, “Are you a sinner? There is a verse, ‘Sinners are afraid in Zion’” (Isaiah 33:14). The student responded, “But what about the verse in Proverbs (28:14) that says ‘Praiseworthy is the person who is always fearful?’” Rabbi Yishmael responded that the verse in Proverbs is about Torah study. It does not mean that one should go through life constantly afraid, but that one should always be diligent about studying and fearful of forgetting what they’ve learned. Yehuda bar Nassan was once following his teacher, Rav Hamnuna. Yehuda bar Nassan sighed, and Rav Hamnuna asked, “Are you trying to bring bad things about yourself? There is a verse that says, ‘For a sigh, and the fear that I have has overtaken me, what I dreaded has come to me’” (Job 3:25). In other words, anxiety can lead to negative things happening. The student responded like Rabbi Yishmael’s student, and Rav Hamnuna told him too that the verse in Proverbs is about Torah study. Anxiety is a real thing and it doesn’t go away on its own just because we want it to. But in a way, these rabbis were engaging in a type of cognitive behavioral therapy, helping their students change negative thought patterns. Anxiety can be treated with the help of a trained therapist who can help people change their thoughts. By changing our thoughts, we can change our feelings. One way to change our thoughts and thus ease our anxiety is by introducing faith.
3. ***Al tiftach peh l’satan***. The rabbis taught in a *beraisa*: If you go into a bathhouse, you should say, “May it be Your will, G-d, that You spare me from this danger and its like, and nothing bad should happen to me…but not because of a sin…and if I die may it be an atonement for all of my sins.” The reason for this prayer is that the bathhouse in those days could be dangerous. Tubs could break, or people could get crushed. Abaye says this prayer is not a good one, because “*al tiftach peh l’satan*” – do not open your mouth to the Satan. What does that mean? The story of Job begins with G-d asking the Satan if he has ever seen anyone in the world as wonderful as Job. The Satan responds that Job is indeed wonderful, but only because his life is easy. The Satan then proceeds to hit Job with a series of terrible misfortunes. It sounds like these misfortunes are entirely the Satan’s idea, but the Zohar and other midrashic sources suggest otherwise. They say that this story occurred at the same time as the Exodus from Egypt, and G-d needed the Satan to be focused elsewhere so that he wouldn’t be watching the people of Israel so carefully and would not be able to prevent them from leaving Egypt or entering Israel. So G-d praised Job in order to bait the Satan, knowing he wouldn’t be able to resist the challenge. And that is why we must always be so careful with our speech. The Satan is always looking for opportunities to challenge us, and we never want to give him ideas.

When a tzaddik makes a pronouncement that something will occur, his words will come true – even if his words are conditional and the condition is not met. Just verbalizing something can be enough to bring it into the world. Therefore, when we pray it is best to emphasize the positive and not focus deeply on negative possibilities. The mishna, too, is often careful to avoid negative language. For example, it uses the word “*or*,” which literally means “light,” to refer to night, and the term “not pure” rather than “impure.” But while it is important to take care with our words, the concept of *al tiftach peh l’satan* may be similar to the concept of *ayin hara* (the Evil Eye), in that, according to some, it only has real power if you fear it does.

1. **Doctors and the true Healer**. When you go to a bloodletter, you should say the prayer, “May it be Your will that this work should be for healing, because G-d is a faithful healer and His healing is true. It is not really right for people to seek out medical treatment, but it is what they have become accustomed to.” Abaye says not to say that last part about seeking medical treatment not being right, based on a teaching by Rabbi Yishmael: there is a verse that says “*v’rapo yirapeh*” – heal, and you should be healed. It sounds redundant, and from this we learn that whenever someone is sick a doctor has permission to heal him. Why would we have ever doubted that a doctor would have permission to heal? Let us explore four possible answers to this question:
	1. There was a book of healing that detailed medicines or magical charms to use to heal every illness. The book was hidden away, and the rabbis were glad because as long as the book was available people did not really pray. If the rabbis did not approve of a book of healing, that must mean it is not right to seek medical help from human sources. However, it may have only been the magical nature of this book that bothered the rabbis. Since doctors are not magicians, going to a doctor should not be a problem.
	2. The Torah tells us that G-d will never afflict us with the illnesses He caused the Egyptians to suffer, because G-d is our Healer. If G-d is our Healer, how can we deny His power by seeking help from human doctors? However, perhaps what the Torah is trying to tell us is that G-d is the ultimate Source of preventive medicine. The mitzvos He has given us are supposed to keep us healthy, so that we should not need doctors so much. Nonetheless, if someone does get sick it is definitely appropriate to see a doctor.
	3. Medicine can be dangerous. Even today, and more so in the days of the Talmud, medical care sometimes kills. Perhaps for this reason, we might think it is best to avoid medicine. But while there are risks involved, we are supposed to try. We cannot simply accept sickness and wait for death, but must do as much as we can to get better.
	4. Going to a doctor might make us forget Who the true Healer is. Still, this is not enough of a reason to eschew medical care. We just need to understand that the doctor is doing G-d’s will.
2. ***Asher yatzar.*** When you leave the bathroom, make the blessing, “…Who has created a person with wisdom and created within him opening, cavities. It is revealed and known before Your Throne of Glory that if one of them becomes ruptured or blocked it would be impossible to stand before You.” The rabbis debate how to conclude the blessing. Rav says, “Who heals the sick,” Shmuel says, “Who heals all flesh,” and Rav Sheshes says, “and Who acts wondrously.” Rav Papa says to combine the last two: “Who heals all flesh and is wonderful in His actions. When we are healthy we typically don’t spend a lot of time thinking about the wonder of bodily functions, but one little thing not working properly can truly be a matter of life or death. Rashi says that the beginning of the blessing – *asher yatzar es ha’adam b’chachma* (Who has created a person with wisdom) – and the end – “wonderful in His actions” – are repeating the same idea. G-d created the human body with wisdom and made all of its cavities, and despite all the cavities the oxygen we need doesn’t escape, and it is a wonder that organs do not deflate and holes do not close. Tosfos disagrees, quoting a midrash from Bereishis on the verse “G-d created man.” Rabbi Bon asks, what does it mean that G-d created a person with wisdom? That He first prepared his livelihood and then created him. The gemara in Sanhedrin says that G-d created man after everything else on the sixth day because when Shabbos comes in, the seudah should already be prepared. G-d made sure to prepare the whole world for Adam and Eve before He created them. But what does this have to do with the *asher yatzar* blessing? Biologically speaking, humans are not that different from chimpanzees. But while our bodies and the processes that sustain them may make us seem like just another animal, we are nothing like chimpanzees. We are so much more. We were not created until all of those other animals already populated the earth, because all of the creatures of the earth are there for our benefit. We are meant to rise high above the level of the animal kingdom, and that is the true wisdom for which we praise G-d.
3. **The Shema we say in bed.** The gemara now returns to a topic that was first introduced on the first page of Brachos, when Rashi and Tosfos debated which is the main Shema that we need to say to fulfill the Biblical obligation of the evening Shema. Is it the Shema that we say in Maariv, or the Shema that we say when we lie down to go to sleep? When we go to sleep, only the first paragraph of the Shema is needed, and the gemara here says that is enough to fulfill the Biblical obligation. Commentators add that it is a way of fulfilling your obligation in case you missed maariv. Then gemara then adds another bracha that should be recited right after the Shema at bedtime: “G-d Who causes bonds of sleep upon my eyes, Who illuminates the pupil of my eye, may it be Your will, my G-d, that I lie down in peace, and give me a portion in your Torah, and make it custom for me to do good deeds and not to sin, and not to bring me to wrongdoing, sin, or tests, or embarrassment, and let the Good Inclination rule over me and not the Evil Inclination, and save me from every evil and illness, and let not bad dreams and bad thoughts disturb me, and may my bed be complete before You, and let my eyes be lit up in Your Torah lest I die in my sleep. Blessed is G-d Who illuminates the whole world with His glory.” Various teachers, including the Arizal, say that when you go to sleep at night you’re not just reciting the most important beliefs of Judaism; you’re also doing a form of teshuva. Sleep is like a mini death – to a certain extent you’re letting go of your soul. It is therefore important to do teshuva for the day before going to sleep. Students of the Arizal today also include other prayers about forgiving others and accepting that anything bad that happened during the day should be atonement for bad deeds. The idea is to be using the time just before going to sleep to do *cheshbon hanefesh*, a soul accounting. You should think about everything that happened during the day and about ways you can improve yourself. Work on forgiving people who have wronged you and doing teshuva for the wrong you yourself have done.
4. ***Elokai neshama.*** Immediately after reciting *asher yatzar* in the morning, we add another blessing: My G-d, the soul that You gave me is pure. You created it, You fashioned it within me, You breathed it into me, You guard it within me, and You eventually will take it from me and bring it back to me in the future. So long as the soul is in me I acknowledge and give thanks to you, G-d, G-d of my forebears, Master of all worlds, Lord of all souls. Blessed are You, G-d, Who restores souls into corpses.” The blessing does not start with “Blessed are You” because it comes right after the *asher yatzar* blessing. But if the two blessings are so connected, why did the gemara interrupt its discussion of them with a section about the Shema? We had been discussing health and anxiety, the wonder of the human body and the fear of something going wrong with it. Going to sleep, because it is like a mini death, can also cause anxiety. But we fight anxiety with gratitude. We are thankful that we have the ability to use the bathroom and that sleep has the power to regenerate our souls. We are aware of our own responsibility to safeguard our souls and grateful that G-d also safeguards our souls. Therefore the progression from *asher yatzar* to the bedtime Shema to *elokai neshama* makes sense.

Rabbi Soloveitchik says that the two blessings go together because *asher yatzar* is about the body and *elokai neshama* is about the soul. The Arizal says that *asher yatzar is* about *chachma*, because the creation of the body involves Divine wisdom, while *elokai neshama* is about *binah*, understanding. The *neshama* is the third level of the soul. ”It is pure” – this refers to the highest *neshama* and the world of *Atzilus*, which is the world of *chachma*. “You created it” – this refers to the regular *neshama* and the world of *Bri’ah*, which corresponds to *binah*. “You fashioned it” – this refers to the *ruach* and the world of *Yetzirah*, which is the world of prayer. “You blew it within me” – this refers to the *nefesh* and the world of *Asiyah*, which is the world of actions, which are not necessarily connected to thought. The soul came down through the four worlds, and all of those levels are within us.

1. **Blessings in the morning.** Every morning when a person wakes up, there is a series of blessings he should say as he gets himself ready for the day. When he hears the sound of the rooster, he should say “Blessed are You…Who gives the rooster understanding to distinguish between night and day.” When he opens his eyes, he should say “Blessed are You…Who opens the eyes of the blind.” When he straightens up and should say “Blessed are You…Who releases the bound.” When he gets dressed, he should say “Blessed are You…Who clothes the naked.” When he stands up he should say “Blessed are You…Who straightens the bent.” When he stands on the ground he should say “Blessed are You…Who spreads the Earth upon the water.” When he walks, he should say “Blessed are You…Who firms a person’s steps.” When he puts on his shoes, he should say “Blessed are You…Who makes all of my needs.” When he puts on his belt, he should say “Blessed are You…Who girds Israel with strength.” When he puts something on his head, he should say “Blessed are You…Who crowns Israel with splendor.” When he wraps himself in *tzitzis*, he should say “Blessed are You…Who commanded us to put on *tzitzis*.” The Arizal says that the custom has become to make all of these blessings every morning, even if one doesn’t apply to you. For example, if you slept in your clothes and don’t need to get dressed when you wake up, you should still say “Blessed are You…Who clothes the naked.” Why? These blessings seem similar to *birchos hanehenin*, blessings we make upon benefiting from things, and those are not said unless a benefit is actually received. But the morning blessings are not quite the same as *birchos hanehenin*. Though they express personal gratitude, they are not purely personal. They are about the world in general. We are grateful that throughout the world, G-d clothes the naked and straightens the bent and releases the bound. Even a blind man makes the “Who opens the eyes of the blind” blessing, because other people can see and that is enough of a reason to be grateful to G-d. Not everyone agrees with the Arizal, and some medieval commentators make a distinction regarding the blessings that indicate a specific benefit, saying that these blessings should only be said when a person gets these specific benefits.

When we begin praying we also say, “I accept upon myself the mitzvah to love my neighbor as myself.” We aim to reach a level where we care enough about other people that we can genuinely make these blessings about other people having their needs taken care of. In a way this is a continuation of the blessing we make after the bedtime Shema. In that blessing, we forgive everybody who wronged us during the day. With that done, we should wake up feeling compassion for all people, and when other people benefit from things like clothes, vision, and freedom, it should feel like a benefit for us personally.

1. **The blessings on tefillin.** When you put tefillin on your arm, make the blessing “Blessed are You…that You have commanded us to put on tefillin.” When you put tefillin on your head, make the blessing “Blessed are You…for the mitzvah of tefillin.” Rashi says that only one blessing, “Blessed are You…on putting on tefillin,” is needed for both the head and the arm tefillin, but if you speak between making the blessing and putting on the head tefillin you also need to make the “for the mitzvah of tefillin” blessing. Rabbeinu Tam disagrees with Rashi, saying that because the head tefillin is the primary mitzvah, the second blessing is always needed even if you do not speak in the middle. But if you do speak, you need to say a second “on putting on tefillin” when you put on the head tefillin. Today, Sefardim and chassidim rule like Rashi, while the Rama rules like Rabbeinu Tam that both blessings are needed even if there is no interruption. But since there is a doubt about the “for the mitzvah of tefillin” blessing, many have the custom to add the phrase “*Baruch shem kevod malchuso le’olam va’ed*,” which is what we say in case we make an unneeded blessing. In a way it makes sense to require two separate blessings, because the head and arm tefillin are two independent mitzvos. If you don’t have both parts, you can put on only one. But at the same time, the two mitzvos are very connected to each other, so we can see why only blessing might be needed.
2. **Accepting bad things with joy.** Just like you make a blessing when a good thing happens, you also make a blessing when a bad thing happens. For a good thing the blessing is “*hatov vehametiv*,” and for a bad thing the blessing is “*baruch dayan ha’emes*” – Blessed is the true Judge.” Rava says this is meant to teach us to accept bad things with a sense of joy. How do we do that, asks Rashi? By making the “*baruch dayan ha’emes*” blessing with a full heart. In other words, Rashi is saying that we do not actually have to feel happy when bad things happen. All we have to do is find it in ourselves when we make the blessing to make it with a full heart. Even this is not easy, but we must learn to accept that while we do not understand why bad things happen, G-d has a plan and everything that He does is ultimately good. It was taught in the name of Rabbi Akiva that a person should regularly say, “Whatever G-d does is for the best.” Rabbi Akiva was once travelling, and he wanted to stay in a certain city but he was not allowed in. So he said, “Whatever G-d does is for the best,” and he slept outside in a field. He had with him only a rooster, a donkey, and a lantern. During the night a wind blew out the lantern, a cat ate the rooster, and a lion ate the donkey, but each time Rabbi Akiva said, “Whatever G-d does is for the best.” That night an army captured the city, and everyone there was either killed or led into captivity. It became clear then that everything that had happened to Rabbi Akiva had indeed been for the best. Rabbi Akiva had an extraordinary ability to see G-d in everything. He even said that he would never put a murderer to death; he would always find a way out of requiring this punishment. But the Torah allows the death penalty, and even Moses enforced it. The Ishbitzer explains how Rabbi Akiva was different from Moses. Moses judged the world in the moment. He saw people acting outside of G-d’s will and judged those people deserving of punishment for their actions. But Rabbi Akiva didn’t judge in the moment. Because he was able to see so clearly that everything came from G-d, he viewed events on a grander scale. He would wait and see how a person’s seemingly incorrect actions would ultimately lead to good. Of course, we are not all on the level of Rabbi Akiva, able to view negative events through this lens. But we make an effort, with the “*baruch dayan ha’emes*” blessing, to be aware that G-d does have a plan, and though we can’t understand it we can have faith that He will ultimately bring us good.