The talmudic text contains another difference from the version that was to become standard in prayer books. Its third blessing is "who did not make me an ignoramus." But the prayer book has "who did not make me a slave." The Talmud itself explains this change with a story:

> Rav Acha bar Jacob heard his son reciting the blessing "[Praised are You...] who did not make me an ignoramus." [Rabbi Acha] said to [his son]: "Such arrogance!" [i.e., isn't that condescending?]. He [the son] responded: "What should I say instead?" [His father replied: "Say...] who has not made me a slave."

Based on this story, the sequence "gentile...woman...slave" became standard. However, not everyone accepted Rabbi Acha's change; in many early prayer book manuscripts, "not an ignoramus" appears, either instead of or in addition to "not a slave."

Where did the blessings come from in the first place? How did it all begin?

From Slogan to Prayer

These three blessings were not always part of the liturgy, and it is not even clear that they were meant to be. The Talmud is filled with inspirational comments, so the force of its statement may have been, "A pious person might want to do this daily" rather than any kind of fixed requirement. But where did this set of ideas originate? Traditional Jewish teaching is that they were the invention of the Rabbis or, perhaps, a rediscovered older practice going back even beyond them. The tradition cannot imagine that Jewish prayers originated from a non-Jewish source. But in fact, in this case at least, they did. Originally these were not prayers at all but slogans that affirmed the identity of the people who said them. Our Jewish text is a response to similar sayings that Jews living in late antiquity heard from their Greek neighbors.

A central tenet of ancient Greek culture was faith in the superiority of Greeks over others. Non-Hellenic groups were universally characterized as "barbarian." This assertion of Greek superiority, along with other ideas about Greek identity, were summed up in an aphorism that the fourth-century B.C.E. Greek biographer Diogenes Laertius attributed to none other than Socrates: "[Socrates] used to say there were three blessings for which he was grateful to fortune: first, that I was born a person and not a beast; next, that I was born a man and not a woman; third, a Greek and not a barbarian."

Variations on these themes are found in a variety of classical texts, almost all in the form "I am grateful for being *affirmative* and not *negative*." Jews in late antiquity were no doubt familiar with such widely circulating slogans, hearing them in the public bathhouse, the marketplace, and other shared cultural locations. The saying that Diogenes puts in the mouth of Socrates is not an exact replica of the Talmud's three blessings, but it is similar, and fortunately, the Talmud is not our only source for what rabbinic Jews were doing and saying. In the Genizah, the storeroom of the

medieval Jewish community of Cairo, we have many documents with different liturgical traditions than those found in the Talmud or those that became canonized by the Geonim in the ninth and tenth centuries. In general, the Genizah preserves the liturgy and practices of the Land of Israel and its surrounding areas, including Egypt, in contrast to the Babylonian Talmud's emphasis on Babylonian practice. Of the Genizah's many different formulations of these blessings, virtually all have the form "made me *affirmative* and not *negative*." A typical example is, "Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe, who made me a person and not a beast, a man and not a woman, an Israelite and not a gentile, one who circumcises [others] and [is] not uncircumcised [himself], free and not a slave."[2]

This example contains five paired identity-statements, but some scholars believe that the last two are later additions.[3] If this was the case, the "original" Palestinian Jewish formulation may have exactly mirrored the Greek version as recorded by Diogenes.

Comparison of Hellenistic and Palestinian Texts

Diogenes Laertius, "Thales," i. 33	Genizah fragment, TS NS 121:5
[I] was grateful to fortune	Praised are You...who made me
that I was born a person and not a beast	a person and not a beast
I was born a man and not a woman	a man and not a woman
a Greek and not a barbarian.	an Israelite and not a gentile.

In contrast to the Babylonian Talmud's formulation of the blessing, which places "not a gentile" first in the sequence, the Genizah locates it third, perfectly mirroring the Greek version, "Greek and not a barbarian."[4] This suggests that the earliest Jewish form of the saying may have been a direct adaptation of the Hellenistic version. The first two oppositions ("a person and not a beast" and "a man and not a woman") made as much sense for Jews as for Greeks, so were adopted without change. The third, however ("a Greek and not a barbarian"), needed some editing. We can imagine Jews hearing this pro-Greek slogan and throwing it right back by thanking the God of Israel, instead of the Greek gods, for having made oneself a Jew, and not Greek. In late antiquity, the Hebrew word *goy* may have had the dual connotation of not just "gentile," but "Greek" in particular, so that the barb was even sharper, as both Jews and their Greek hearers knew that Jews were distinguishing themselves not just from non-Jews generally, but Greeks especially.

Further evidence for the popular familiarity of this saying comes from the New Testament. Both Jewish and Greek versions of these dichotomies circulated widely in the first century C.E., so Paul tried to trump them both by asserting the ultimate superiority of "baptism into Christ" (Gal. 3:28): "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there