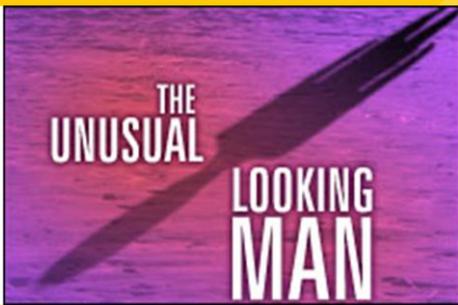


PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



The Unusual Looking Man

by I. Batsheva

The surprising impact one blessing can make.

For most of my life as an assimilated American Jew, the only blessings I knew were the ones for bread, wine, and candle lighting. But one day, when I was browsing in a bookstore, a volume devoted entirely to Jewish blessings drew itself to my attention.

To my astonishment and delight there was a rich array of blessings -- for everything from rainbows to scholars to oceans. There were blessings to be said upon hearing good news or thunder; for experiencing an earthquake or seeing a comet; for learning especially good news, or the opposite. Among others, there was also a blessing to be said upon seeing exceptionally beautiful creations, and one reserved for the exceptionally strange.

This one impressed me deeply and I read it over a number of times:

"Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who varies the forms of His many creatures."

Weeks later I was walking with my 8-year-old daughter on a city street, when in the distance we

noticed a man approaching -- his unusual silhouette accentuated by the harsh light of the noonday sun. He was uncommonly tall, seven feet or more, and rail thin. But this was not the strangest thing about his distinctive form.

His exceedingly long legs were as bowed as McDonald's golden arch, and by contrast, his small body perched on top as though an afterthought. My daughter squeezed my hand and pointed. "Look at that man!" she exclaimed. I pulled in my breath. How could I respond? He was coming closer towards us on the broad sidewalk.

Then I remembered the blessing. "When you see an unusual looking person, it's a wonderful chance to do something special," I whispered. "Let's say a blessing."

I wasn't prepared for the immediate and powerful effect of the blessing's few simple words. My shoulders immediately released, and my breath relaxed -- as though a heavy weight had been lifted. As this exceptional man passed by, a glow of affection for him flushed through me. Something, it seems, had shifted inside. In an instant everything about this extraordinary human being, his very existence, and our seeing him on this bright fall day had been made right.