

תנא דבי אליהו, כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא

IT WAS TAUGHT IN THE ACADEMY OF ELIYAHU, WHOEVER STUDIES TORAH LAWS  
EVERY DAY IS ASSURED THAT HE WILL BE PRESENT IN THE 'WORLD TO COME'

## *Chapter 2, Question 6*

### *The Concept of 'Berachot' (Blessings)*

#### *Part 1*

**What in essence is a beracha? Where do we find the source of making a beracha?  
Why do we make so many berachot? And how do they affect us exactly?**

For a nation who spends a good part of their time reciting berachot, this ought to be very topical subject. We recite blessings over nearly every aspect of our daily lives. There is a beracha we make every morning for simply putting on our belts! There is a beracha recited after drinking a cup of water..... for seeing a rainbow, for putting on tefillin, for buying a new suit, for the brit millah of one's son, for the daily declaration of Hashem's eternal love for Am Yisrael, and so on. What is this all about?

The questions cited above are actually going to be addressed slightly in the reverse order. This is because the topic of this essay, which more or less touches upon the very core of what it means to be a Jew, is such a fundamental one that we felt it necessary to address last two question first and clarify initially **why we recite so many berachot?** and **how they affect us exactly?** The answer to the first question of why the concept of a 'beracha' exists is a much deeper subject and really deserves an essay of its own. It will therefore be addressed in Part 2 of this essay b'e'H. But first we should really try and learn some basic background information before Part 2.

So, where do we see the first concept/s of reciting berachot in the Torah?

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In perashat Ekev we find the first and **only obligation** to recite a beracha:<sup>1</sup>

ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך:

*And you will eat and you will be satisfied, **and bless***

*Hashem your G-d on the good Land that He gave you.*

This is the **only** Biblical commandment to make a beracha, and it is a **ברכת הנייה** a blessing made on the physical pleasure of eating bread in Eretz Yisrael.

The first place we see some form of a **ברכת הודאה** - thanksgiving blessing (albeit it is not a commandment), is in Bereishis where Avram Avinu battled and defeated the 'great' Kings of that time who waged war against Sodom & Amora and captured his nephew Lot. Malki Tzedek, otherwise known as the prophet Shem, blesses Avram in the following manner:

ויברכהו ויאמר **ברוך אברם** לאל עליון קונה שמים וארץ:

**וברוך אל עליון** אשר מגן צריך בידך...

*And he blessed him and said: **Blessed is Avram of G-d, the Most High, acquirer of heaven and earth: And blessed is G-d, the Most High, who has delivered your foes in your hand:***

So the Torah shows us that berachot are used in situations of experiencing physical pleasure or benefit, as well as a means to praise or express thanks to the Almighty or a person. [The reason why berachot recited in such situations will be addressed in Part 2.] This brings us to the next question... why do we recite so many berachot?

Almost three thousand years ago, at the historic moment when David Hamelech was anointed by Sh'muel HaNavi to reign over the Kingdom of Yisrael, there was a terribly bizarre epidemic that was costing the lives of many Jews. The nation discovered that there was a **daily death toll of one hundred men** exactly! The Medrash in Bamidbar Rabah<sup>2</sup> reveals that when David Hamelech was appointed as King, one of the first salvations he brought to the nation was finding the root cause of this epidemic and rectifying it.

1. פרשת קרח יח פיסקא כא, וע"ע טור סימן מו. 2. דברים 1.

David Hamelech saw, with *Ru'ah HaKodesh* (Divine inspiration), that there was an evident spiritual void in Bnei Yisrael at that time, which was the cause of the one hundred deaths. This spiritual void was a general lack of *Yir'at Shamayim - Fear of Heaven* in the people.

What could be done in such a situation? How could a whole nation's level of *yir'at Shamayim* be increased in such an urgently short space of time? David Hamelech had to think fast, and with pure logic he enacted a new edict that remains with us till this very day. He decreed that every Jew has to actively acknowledge Hashem's presence, and praise His sovereignty at least 100 times a day! And this would be achieved through the obligation of reciting **100 berachot**. As soon as the edict was passed, the epidemic miraculously ceased and the nation was saved.

The great Tanna, Rabbi Meir, is quoted in the Talmud in tractate Menahot<sup>3</sup> as saying the following:

תניא: היה רבי מאיר אומר, חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום.

*It was taught in a Beraita: Rabbi Meir would say,*

*'A man is obligated to recite one hundred blessings every day.'*

One may have asked at this point... why did our Sages feel that David HaMelech's edict applies to all generations? Maybe it was relevant only to the generation of that time. However, since Rabbi Meir expounded this obligation from none other than the Torah itself (in sefer Devarim<sup>4</sup>), this clearly shows that the mitzvah of reciting one hundred blessings a day is an obligation for all generations:

ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה' אלקיך...

*And now, O Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to fear Hashem...*

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3. דף מג:.

4. דברים י"ב.

Rebbi Meir expounded the verse above in the following way:<sup>5</sup> He said that one should not read the word in the above pasuk as **מָה** *mah*, rather, it should be read as **מֵאָה** *me'ah*, meaning 'one hundred'. The pasuk now reads as follows:

***"And now, O Israel, One Hundred is what Hashem is asking of you, only to fear Him!"***

The connection is now evident between the necessity to recite one hundred berachot a day and one's ability to attain *yir'at Shamayim*. The implications of this *darush* are quite surprising! It seems that reciting one hundred berachot a day is, for some reason, one of the main principles of our *Avodat Hashem*. For the pasuk above implies that one who does this, automatically instills within him *yir'at Shamayim* and what is more important than *yir'at Shamayim*? A Jew could be the greatest Scholar, the greatest charity-giver, but if he does not have basic *yir'at Shamayim* then what is he exactly?

So how does this happen? How does the reciting of a hundred berachot instill fear of Heaven in a person? The Rambam<sup>6</sup> explains this simply as follows;

***There are three types of berachot,***

***ברכות הנייה Blessings for physical pleasures,***

***ברכות מצות Blessings made on mitzvot, and***

***ברכות הודאה Blessings made for praise & thanksgiving purposes.***

***These three types of blessings were instituted so that one will constantly remember the Creator and have fear from Him.***

Based on the Rambam,<sup>7</sup> HaRav Pinhas Zevihi שליט"א offers an answer to our question in his sefer *Birchat Tov*.<sup>8</sup> One of David HaMelech's most famous verses in Tehillim shows how the reciting one hundred berachot every day instills *yir'at Shamayim* in a person:<sup>9</sup>

5. רש"י שם ד"ה מה, וע"ע תוס' ד"ה שואל

6. הלכות ברכות, פרק א, הלכה ד

7. סוף פרק יא, הלכה טז

8. בהקדמה דף ח-ט

9. תהילים

## בכל יום אברכך, ואהללה שמך לעולם ועד.

*Every day I will bless You, and praise Your Name **forever**.*

HaRav Zevihi asks the following on this verse; How is it possible to praise Hashem forever, i.e. without cessation? He offers a fascinating answer, which may in fact be his own *hiddush* (novelty). Once a person is engaged in a process of reciting one hundred berachot a day, it automatically becomes the case that **all his days** are spent praising Hashem. This is because from the moment you begin the first beracha of 'Al Netilat Yadayim' in the morning, you have **begun the process** of targeting the mitzvah of one hundred berachot a day. So, in essence, your whole day is a period of time where one is engaged in a mitzvah of trying to achieve this tally, until the mitzvah is fulfilled. This idea parallels the mitzvah of *Sefirat HaOmer* where there are many authorities<sup>10</sup> who hold that all the days of the counting are considered like one long day. Indeed there are well known stories of Gedolim who before going to bed at night would recall how many berachot they had recited that day in order to ensure the one hundred quota was achieved.

We have now answered our second question regarding why we recite so many berachot. The next question was; how do all these berachot effect **us** exactly?<sup>11</sup> What are the **benefits** one can reap by reciting one hundred berachot a day? Firstly, it is logical to assume that David Hamelech knew that being on a high level of *yir'at Shamayim* is an automatic antidote to untimely death. For that is the reason why he tried to bring the nation to a high level of *yir'at Shamayim*, knowing that this would put a end to the epidemic. So the first benefit we see is that reciting many berachot will subsequently ensure a person receives *arihut yamim* (**long life**) by saving him from life-threatening epidemics and all forms of harm for that matter.

Shelomo HaMelech (David HaMelech's son), internalised this lesson from his father and wrote the following in Mishlei:<sup>12</sup>

**יראת ה' תוסיף ימים** "Fear of Hashem adds days..."

10. אור זרוע ס' שכט, ותרומת הדשן ס' לו.

11. The question at this stage is how do they affect us, and not the wider question of how berachot affect the universe or greater scheme of things. That question will be addressed in Part 2 of this essay, as mentioned.

12. משלי י"ב.

Another important benefit we find is that mentioned by the Kaf HaHaim<sup>13</sup> in the name of the Ari z'l. That reciting berachot in the correct manner leads one to attain a level of **רוח הקודש Divine Inspiration**, which is the highest level a Jew can reach in a world without prophecy.

It would be fitting to conclude Part 1 of this essay with a powerful statement by the Seder Hayom, a sefer written in the year 5359 (1598) by HaRav Moshe ben Yehuda Machir who was a talmid of the Ar'i z'l. He writes the following:<sup>14</sup>

וטוב לאדם לכוין בברכותיו ולמנות אותם מתחילה הלילה אחת אחת למצוא חשבון

למען דעת כמה ברכות הוא מברך שלא יפחות ממאה בכל יום...

ומה טוב חלקו

ומה נעים גורלו

אם יוכל למנות אותם כולם בכוונה, כי ודאי עושה רושם למעלה

ומברכותיו יבורכו עליונים ותחתונים.

*And it is good for a man to concentrate in his blessings, and to count them from the beginning of the night one by one, to have an accounting, in order to know how many blessings he recited so that he is not lacking from one hundred every day.*

*And how good is his portion,*

*and how pleasant is his lot,*

*if he is able to count them all with concentration.*

*For without a doubt will he create an impression Above,*

*and from his blessings will the upper worlds and lower worlds become blessed!*

It seems this Seder HaYom has just given us a small glimpse into Part 2 of this essay....

**Rabbi Yosef Haim David**

This document contains divrei Torah. Please treat it with the necessary respect.

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