

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 7

The Concept of Berachot

Part 2

What in essence is a beracha? This is no doubt one of the most fascinating topics we have had the privilege to write about so far, which is why we felt it deserves an essay of its own. It has also proven to be a very difficult question to answer. In order to understand the '**science**' of **berachot** one would have to delve into the depths of deep Kabbalistic thinking and address concepts that would otherwise be inappropriate or futile for this forum. What makes matters even more challenging is the issue of trying to translate and explain certain mystical ideas through our limited medium of communication... that being the English language. Nevertheless, since this is such a fundamental question we will attempt to answer it with the limited tools available.

The Jew's **ability** to give a beracha or simply recite a beracha is a unique characteristic of our people, distinguishing us from the nations of the world. We also find many times in Scripture¹ that the Jew is the very **source of beracha** in this world. Interestingly, in this week's perasha of Balak² we see this idea depicted when Balak, the evil King of Moab, asks the non-Jewish prophet Bilaam to curse the Nation of Israel. Hashem appears to Bilaam in a prophetic dream and warns him not to do so, simply because we are blessed:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל בִּלְעָם לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תֵאָר אֶת הָעָם כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא:

And G-d said to Bilaam, 'Do not go with them, do not curse the nation, for it is blessed!'

In light of this, surely we deserve a proper glimpse into the concept of what a 'beracha' is and what it essentially means on a deeper level?

1. נראה דזהו כוונת רש"י על הפסוק (בראשית יב:ב) 'והיה ברכה', וע"ע בתרגום (שם) של הפסוק 'ונברכו בך'.
2. במדבר כב:יב.

Let us begin our study with analysing the key word of this topic, which is the word - **בְּרִיךְ** - *Baruch*. It is well known that if one ever wants to understand the real or deeper meaning behind a certain Hebrew word or concept, one should find exactly where that word or concept **first** appears in the Torah, and the connection should then be apparent. So where do we find the first place that a 'beracha' is mentioned in the Torah? And in what context is it mentioned?

If we look back to Bereshis we find that on the fifth day of the creation, after Hashem fashioned all forms of aquatic life, flying creatures and bird life, He says the following:³

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱתָם אֱ-לֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הַיַּמִּים בַּיַּמִּים וְהָעוֹף יִרֶב בְּאֶרֶץ:

And G-d blessed them saying: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the oceans.'

This is the first place in the Torah where we are introduced to the root word of a blessing, **וַיְבָרֶךְ** '*VayeVorech*' (*And [G-d] Blessed*). In order to arrive at the deeper meaning of this word we need to note in what context it was used, and it is evident that the word **וַיְבָרֶךְ** was said in order to **cause** the power or ability for the newly created organisms to produce offspring and **increase** in numbers. Hashem blessed them so that they should be fruitful and multiply. Therefore, if we purport to say that *the* very **first place** the Torah uses a specific word or concept should really tell you about **the essence** of that thing, then it would seem that there is a direct parallel between a 'beracha' and the concept of **increasing**.

Indeed we find that the great Torah Scholar and Mekubal, the Nefesh HaChaim (Rabbi Chaim ben Yitzchok Ickovitz of Volozhin, 1749-1821) explains that the **deeper meaning** of a beracha is in fact the act of causing an increase or a multiplication.⁴ He explains that whilst the word 'baruch' normally connotes praise, prayer and beseeching, the real essence of the word means **תוֹסֶפֶת וְרֵבוי** - **increasing and multiplying**. Similarly, we also find that the word **בְּרִיכה** *Brecha* can mean a 'spreading out' or a 'pool of water', the nature of water being that it spreads.

3. בראשית א:כ

4. שער ב, פרק ב

Other examples of this idea from Scripture are:

⁵ וברך את לחמך - *Uberach et Lahmecha* - 'And He shall bless your bread,' and

⁶ וברך פרי בטנך - *Uberach Peri Vitnecha* - 'And He will bless the fruit of your womb.'

In both of these pasukim the idea is that there will be an increase in those necessities.

Now, if the Nefesh HaChaim is saying that the word ברוך means 'an increasing', how do we understand what the concept of a beracha is? What are we essentially saying or intending when we recite a beracha?

HaRav Dessler (R' Eliyahu Eliezer ben R' Reuven Dov: 1892 - 1953) sheds some light on the Nefesh HaChaim in his sefer Michtav Eliyahu.⁷ He writes that Hashem is the source of **increasing or spreading 'shefah'** (spiritual sustenance) to the world. So when one recites a beracha he is, in essence, proclaiming the **recognition** that Hashem is the source of all *shefah* in the world. This noble recognition in turn **enables** the person's request to be answered from Above. The recital of every beracha can thus be depicted in the following words;

"Just like I know Hashem is the source and root cause of *shefah* in the world, so too should I be the root cause of such spiritual abundance to increase and flow in my direction."

Rav Dessler therefore advises that whenever one recites the first three words of any given beracha - 'ברוך אתה ה' *Baruch Atah Hashem*, he should have in mind the following intention:

אני מבקש ריבוי והתפשטות אורו יתברך בנשמה שלי

I hereby request an increase and spreading of Hashem's Light into my soul.

The Nefesh HaChaim also warns that it would be a grave fallacy to believe that when one recites a beracha he is actually 'blessing Hashem'⁸ - Heaven forbid! It should be undoubtedly clear to all that Hashem does not lack or require anything... His Almighty Exaltedness is above all blessing.

5. שמות כג:כה

6. דברים ז:יג

7. Vol. 3, page 79

8. ע"פ הגמ' בברכות דף ז - א"ר ישמעאל

The Hinuch⁹ also stresses that one should not think he is blessing Hashem when making a beracha. The correct understanding should be that a beracha is an acknowledgement of Hashem being the ultimate **source of all blessing**. After one acknowledges this fact, he then makes his **request**, or praises a certain attribute of Hashem in the rest of the beracha.

[As a side point, it is useful to note that today the *nusah* (constitution) of our berachot have been fixed since the time they were formulated by the אנשי כנסת הגדולה, the Men of the Great Assembly, over two thousand years ago. With their *Ru'ah HaKodesh* (prophetic insight) these 'Giants' of our history were able to conjure up the precise *nusah* of each and every beracha. Today we have lost this level of *ru'ah hakodesh* and we are therefore not able, and not allowed, to change or add to the *nusah* of our berachot.]

We seem to have partly answered our question of what a beracha is exactly. But what we have not answered is what in fact occurs in the upper realms when a beracha is recited. What is the 'science' behind a beracha? What *really* happens? This is where we begin to charter into really unfamiliar territory. We saw in Part 1 of this essay that the only Biblical obligation to make a beracha is found in perashat Ekev,¹⁰ and it is depicted in the following verse.... ואכלת ושבעת וברכת. The Zohar¹¹ comments on this verse and then reveals a cosmic occurrence which happens in the spiritual realms whenever a Jew recites a beracha. We will try to explain the Zohar with the help of the Sullam commentary, written by Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ashlag HaLevi and printed in the year 1926.

In a nutshell, the Zohar says that when one recites a beracha what happens is that **"he draws חיים Haim (life), from the מקור חיים Mekor Haim (Source of Life) i.e. Hashem, to the actual Name of Hashem..."**

So the mere utterance of a beracha causes an increase of 'life' in the Name of Hashem!!! What does this mean? Why would there be a necessity to draw 'life' from Hashem to His Name? Is there really a difference between Hashem and His Name? Surely they are one and the same! And what do we mean by 'life' exactly? The answers to these questions are not as complicated as we may think.

9. מצוה ת"ל וכן באבודרהם סדר שחרית של חול.

10. דברים ח"י.

11. רעיא מהימנא, ריש פרשת עקב ע"א וע"ב.

We all know that Hashem governs this world in a 'hidden' fashion, i.e. we cannot see Hashem and we cannot physically experience Him, nor the reasoning behind His actions. He is constantly 'masked' by the laws of nature which He has set into motion from the very beginning of the creation of this world. Everything that transpires is ultimately perceived as a natural consequence of cause and effect with no explicit Divine control. This extent of Hashem's interaction with this world and the level of his revelation in the creation is what the Zohar coins as '**life**'.

It is interesting to note, *lehavdil*, that the scientific definition of 'life' is more or less the same as the Zohar's! Science defines 'life' as the ability of something to grow or reproduce or, more importantly for our discussion, has within it **self-sustaining processes**. So too is the level of Hashem's *hashgacha* or interaction with the world a direct indication of how much 'life' He is projecting into His Name. Therefore the expression of Hashem giving life to His Name is a metaphor for Hashem revealing His Omnipresence more significantly in the world. If this information is not fascinating enough, let us address our next question... what do we mean by Hashem's Name?

The way in which Hashem reveals Himself in this world is only via the various Divine attributes that are manifested by the Names of Hashem. For example, Hashem's Name of **א-להים Elokim** denotes **strength and power**, indicating that He is the Master and Source of all the spiritual and physical forces in the world. The four-letter Name Hashem (**י-ה-ו-ה**), which cannot be pronounced, represents Hashem's characteristic of Mercy and reveals His **miraculous** control and governance of this world. For example, all the miracles associated with *Yetziat Mitzrayim* (e.g. the ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, the manna, etc.) were all performed through the revelation of this four-letter Name.

When we recite a beracha, interestingly, we recall both these names; **ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu**. According to the Zohar then, it would seem that when one recites a beracha he is really asking for Hashem to a) reveal Himself in a greater way in this world, and b) manifest His governance and *shefah* over him through both of those Divine names, i.e. through the natural as well as the miraculous!

And is this not what a Jew is all about? To acknowledge Hashem and cause a greater revelation of Hashem's presence in this world? We can now see how the whole concept of a beracha penetrates deep into what a Jew is exactly and why we were placed in this world. This was the epitome achievement of Avraham Avinu, the founder of the Jewish nation, who taught mankind that there is a One Creator of the World, G-d, whom we have to acknowledge in all of our physical actions. And this is the deeper meaning of why reciting one hundred berachot a day (see Part 1) instills *Yir'at Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) in a person, because one ultimately causes an increase of Divine *shefah* and governance upon him through each and every beracha he recites!

Now that we have answered our question, we are certainly in a better position to appreciate the following halachot associated with reciting berachot.

The Shulhan Aruch¹² writes the following:

יכון בברכות פרוש המלות.

כשיזכיר השם יכון פרוש קריאתו באדנות שהוא אדון הכל

ויכן בכתבתו ביו"ד ה"א שהיה והיה ויהיה,

ובהזכירו א-להים יכון שהוא תקיף בעל היכלת ובעל הכוחות כלם.

One should concentrate in berachot the meaning of the words.

And when one recites the Name [of Hashem] he should have in mind the meaning of how

it is pronounced in 'Adnut' (i.e. Adonai) - that He is the Master over everything,

And he should have in mind on how the Name is actually written with 'Yud' and 'Hei'

etc. (י-ה-ו-ה) meaning that Hashem was, is and will always be,

And when one recites the name Elokim א-להים he should have the following kavana;

that Hashem is the All-powerful, All-capable and the Master & Source of all forces.

HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu zt'l writes in his 'Sefer Halacha'¹³ that if one finds it too difficult to have all these essential kavanot every time he makes a beracha, then there is something he can do as a temporary aid. He should ensure he has the correct kavanot in the **first beracha** he recites that day, and then he should have in mind that these kavanot will 'cover' all the berachot that are due to be recited by him that day.

12. סימן ה, סע' א.

13. חלק ראשון, פרק ה'.

Rav Yosef Haim Mizrahi quotes¹⁴ a beautifully written *Gilui Da'at*, which means an Inner Mind Declaration, that can be recited every day to help one fulfill HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu's advice. This can be found in the first page of his well known siddur called 'Od Yosef Hai' :

הריני מגלה דעתי ורצוני, בכל-פעם שאזכיר שם אדנות ברוך הוא, כונתי שהוא אדון הכל.
 ובמקום שנכתב שם הויה ברוך הוא, כונתי שהוא אדון הכל, והיה והיה ויהיה.
 וכשאזכיר שם א-להים ברוך הוא, כונתי שהוא תקיף, בעל היכלת ובעל הכחות כלם.

I hereby reveal my inner-mind and my desire, that for every time I will recall the name אדני (Blessed is He), my intention is that He is the Master of everything.

And wherever the name י-ה-ו-ה (Blessed is He) is written, my intention is that He is the Master of everything, and He Was, Is and Will Be.

And when I recall the name Elokim א-להים (Blessed is He), my intention is that He is All-Powerful, the All-Capable and the Master & Source of all the forces.

Rabbi Yosef Haim David

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

14. מקורו מתפלה לדוד.