



Hebrew Berachot -

The Name and the Sovereignty

יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבָרָךְ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם:

Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and forevermore!

- Psalm 113:2



If you enjoy something in this world
without saying a blessing, it is as if you stole it.

- Talmud Berachot 35A

THERE ARE HUNDREDS upon hundreds of Hebrew blessings (*b'rakhot* or *berachot*). These are short kinds of prayers uttered directly to God that are used to thank God for daily events (such as eating or drinking), as part of the synagogue service, or as a thankful response to special events in one's life. Blessings are part of the warp and woof of daily Jewish existence...

Among the blessings listed in the Siddur are those regarding waking up in the morning, putting on a new garment, seeing a rainbow, washing ones hands, eating various foods, etc., as well as those said when we fulfill a commandment (*birkhot mitzvah*). In fact, the Talmudic Rabbis said that it was forbidden to enjoy such things without saying a blessing (Tractate *Berachot* 35a).

Hebrew blessings are easy to recognize since they all begin with the phrase "blessed art Thou" (*barukh atah*). This phrase is sometimes called the ***Shem umalkhut***, meaning "the Name and the Sovereignty," and makes the affirmation that Adonai is King over the universe.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

ha'olam	me-lekh	e-lo-hey-nu	Adonai	attah	barukh
the universe	king (of)	our God	Lord	are you	Blessed

"Blessed are You, Lord our God, Master of the universe..."



Jewish tradition requires that we personally bless the LORD for each detail of our daily experience. Such a requirement (if not practiced legalistically) surely points to a deep inward appreciation for the good things God personally provides for us throughout each day. As the Lord Jesus said, our heavenly Father knows the very number of the hairs on our head (Matt 10:30), and -- if our eyes are open to His grace -- we too will notice His provision even in the smallest details of our lives. And we will thank Him for His care.

It is interesting to note that the word translated "blessed" (*barukh*) is related to the Hebrew word for "knee" (*berekh*), as is the word for "blessing" (*b'rakha*), thus implying an association between humbling ourselves (i.e., kneeling before Him in recognition of His blessedness) and receiving personal blessing from Him. Indeed, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Messiah Jesus" (Eph. 1:3).

Note: Some people find the idea of *berachot* confusing. How can a mere human "bless" God? Is not the one who confers a blessing greater than the recipient? Perhaps the confusion will dissipate once we understand that when we recite a *bracha*, we are not blessing God but are expressing how blessed God is: "*Blessed are YOU, LORD Our God...*"

Expressing Gratitude

The Essence of the Berachot

At bottom, reciting blessings is a means of expressing your gratitude for the gift of life that God has freely given to you. "Freely you have received, freely give," as our Master Yeshua has taught us.

In that regard, a human life lived with a grateful attitude is itself a form of blessing, as this old Chassidic story will relate:

A chassid once asked Rebbe Elimelech, "How is it possible to bless God for bad news with equal fervor as for good news?"

"Go to the study hall" replied the Rebbe, "and ask your question to my brother, the saintly Reb Zusia."

When the chassid saw Reb Zusia, he could easily discern the suffering this man must have experienced during his lifetime. The pain of illness, tsuris and poverty were all etched indelibly on his face. The chassid then asked Zusia, "How is it possible to bless God for bad news with equal fervor as for good news?"

Reb Zusia replied, "But why are you asking me? How would I know the answer? Nothing bad has ever happened to me!"



I am sure the point of this story is not lost on you, my dear reader. Everything depends upon your attitude. God is One. His will is perfect. If you want joy in this life, you must learn to focus on the good. As Ben Zoma said (*Pirkei Avot*) "Who is a rich person? One who is happy with his lot":

אִיזְהוּ עָשִׁיר? הַשִּׂמְחִים בְּחֶלְקוֹ

*One who rejoices
in their portion*

Who then is rich?

Engaging the mind with the awareness that God is the Source of all that is good is a means, then, of increasing your joy in this life. And that's what the Hebrew blessings are all about.

Terms

Siddur - (pl. Siddurim); Jewish Prayer Book used on Shabbat and weekdays throughout the year. It contains the prayers created by the Jewish People over the ages beginning with the Avot (Avraham instituted "Shacharit," the Morning Prayer, Yitzchak taught the idea of "Minchah," the Afternoon Prayer, and Ya'akov began the practice of reciting "Maariv," the Evening Prayer).

The "Anshei K'nesset HaGedolah," "Men of the Great Assembly," formulated the main prayers, including the classic prayer, the "Shemoneh Esreh," the set of "eighteen" (the literal meaning of the Prayer's name) blessings which the Jew uses to pray to G-d.