

Parashat V'Zot Ha'Bracha The Blessings of Blessing

Blessings Create Positive Reality

"It's my birthday today so I would love to give you a bracha (blessing). May you discover your true place in Judaism, find your soulmate, express your potential in the service of Hashem and feel fulfillment in life!" Blessings like these are not only on my lips time and again, but Torah observant people the world over, also frequently express such blessings at various occasions. Hebrew birthdays are prime times for blessings, when the energy that created us is in its element, empowering us with spiritual alignment. Other elevating junctures, such as the bride on her wedding-day and the Sandak who has held the newborn at his brit are also occasions for blessings. We believe that words have power, as reflected in the classical incantation of the magician, *אֲבִרָא כְּאֲדַבְרָה*/Abra K'adabra – "I will create as I speak!" It was through speech that Hashem created the world as it states, "G-d said let there be light, and there was light" (*Bereishit* 1:3). Words, indeed, create reality, so we must use them well, and by all means avoid negative speech. Even fine nuances of speech can make a positive difference. For example, instead of saying, "If you don't put antibiotic cream on your wound, it will take a lot longer to heal," try turning your speech around for the good, in the following way: "If you put antibiotic cream on your wound, it will heal a lot faster." This way you can attach a blessing to your advice, rather than the opposite. The more we express optimism, hope, gratitude, and pleasure, the more we bring about a flow of goodness to ourselves and to the world. It takes a bit of conscious practice to develop greater awareness and fine-tune the constant stream of words emanating from our eager lips, but it is surely worth the effort.

The Torah Culminates in Blessing

It is not by chance that the very last *parasha* in the Torah is called *וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה*/V'Zot Ha'Bracha – This is the blessing, for "all is well that ends well!" We all like to squeeze out the last drops of goodness left in the honey jar, we enjoy the precious moment with our children before they go to sleep, and we relish in the last piece of chocolate or in picking the very last grapes from the vine. The end is always precious and people are especially open to read the conclusion of a book, hear the last words of their Rabbi's lecture, and listen intently to family members before they go on a journey or pass on. Therefore, Moshe blessed the Israelites on the day of his demise, as Rashi comments, "if not now when?"

"He Who Blesses Will Become Blessed"

ספר דברים פרק לג (א) וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בָּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנָי מוֹתוֹ:

"This is the blessing that Moshe – the man of G-d – blessed Israel before his death" (*Devarim* 33:1).

Ohr Hachayim points out that it was specifically when blessing the people that Moshe became elevated to merit the great title: "Man of G-d." Therefore, the verse starts with "and *this*" through *this* ability to bless the Israelites, Moshe reached his highest potential as a man of G-d. It is an all-inclusive principle that "he who blesses will become blessed" (*Babylonian Talmud, Sotah* 38b). The art of bestowing blessings is to become divinely inspired to give exactly the blessing each person needs. Hashem rewards our desire to generate goodness, by allowing us to become a channel for His blessings.

Holding the Key of Blessing

Although all blessings emanate from G-d, Hashem desires the blessings of people, and thus He commanded us, "You shall bless Hashem your G-d" (*Devarim* 8:10). Blessings have everlasting effects. This is why the Torah begins with the letter ב/*beit* (the first letter of the word 'bracha') describing the creation of the world, as a blessing that is established forever. Hashem blessed Adam and Noach but to Avraham – the Father of our Faith – He handed over the power to bless, saying, "It shall be a blessing" (*Bereishit* 12:2). With these words, Hashem told him, "You are the source of blessing, you have the ability to bless whoever you desire. From Avraham and on, the power of blessing was handed over to the *tzaddikim*. Thus, Yitzchak blessed Ya'acov before his death, and Ya'acov blessed his children on his deathbed as it states, " וַיִּזְכֹּר / *V'Zot* – and this is what their father spoke and blessed them" (*Bereishit* 49:28). Moshe Rabbeinu, likewise, blessed the tribes before his passing, and began his blessing with the word וַיִּזְכֹּר / *V'Zot* – "and this," as he continued where Ya'acov ended (Rabbeinu Bachaya, *Devarim* 33:1).

Actualizing the Blessing by Believing in its Power

We learn from Chana – the Mother of our Prayer – that when we receive a bracha it is important to believe in the power of the blessing, in order that the blessing will come true. After Eli, the high priest blessed her saying: "Go in peace, and may the G-d of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him," Chana was no longer depressed, and was immediately able to eat again (I *Shemuel* 1:17-17-18). This teaches us that she trusted that Eli's blessing would be fulfilled. Her faith and positive attitude attracted the baby of her dreams, and soon afterwards, she conceived. I certainly believe in the importance of receiving a bracha from a holy *tzaddik*, as the prayer on our behalf by someone close to Hashem is very powerful. Yet on the other hand, a blessing from anyone, especially someone who loves you, may be no less potent, as the Talmud states:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ז/א שלא תהא ברכת הדיוט קלה בעיניך:

"Do not take a blessing from a commoner lightly" (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 7a).

Becoming a Channel for Hashem's Perpetual Blessing

Every blessing – no matter from whom – is packed with potential, as long as we take it seriously and believe in its power. By responding "Amen" to a blessing, we unpack its goodness and actualize its blessed potential. Let us, therefore, take advantage of each occasion to bless each other and to answer amen at every opportunity! Let us hold on to the key of blessing that we inherited from Avraham Avinu (our father) and apply it to refine our speech, so that constant blessings become second nature in our daily interactions! I bless us all, that we may merit to become divinely inspired and be a channel for Hashem's perpetual blessing!