

KINDNESS ALL AROUND US

by Ben Goldberg

Last class we continued looking at the first bracha of Shemonah Esrai, moving to our praise of some of G-d's specific attributes. Today we will continue looking at the first bracha, taking a closer look at the next phrase. As a reminder, the first bracha states:

"Blessed are You, Ha-Shem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac, and G-d of Jacob; the great, mighty, and awesome G-d, the supreme G-d, **Who bestows beneficial kindnesses and creates everything, Who recalls the kindnesses of the Patriarchs** and brings a Redeemer to their children's children, for His Name's sake, with love. O King, Helper, Savior, and Shield. Blessed are You, Ha-Shem, Shield of Abraham."

Today we will focus on the bolded text – "Who bestows kindnesses and creates everything, Who recalls the kindnesses of the Patriarchs."

Last week, we took an in-depth look at why we describe G-d as great, mighty, awesome, and supreme. Now we begin to get to the heart of this first blessing – kindness. As we will discuss in depth in the coming weeks (and as we have briefly touched on in previous classes), the first verse focuses on our patriarch Avraham, who personified the attribute of *chessed*, or kindness.

Why do we mention the beneficial kindness of G-d and immediately follow it by noting that He creates everything? What's the connection? And wouldn't it seem more logical to reverse the order and first state that G-d creates everything and then discuss how He bestows His kindness on those creations?

The first answer is that it was an act of kindness to even create the world. G-d lacks for nothing and had no need to create the world and all that inhabit it. To do so was pure kindness and the fact that He sustains our world is an everlasting sign of G-d's boundless kindness as well.

There is, however, another explanation. Perhaps the blessing is reminding us that G-d uses everything He created to bestow kindness on us as well. The beautiful smell of a flower, the taste of a good piece of chocolate, the resplendent beauty of a sunset – all created around us and there for us to take advantage of! A flower did not need to smell nice to function correctly, chocolate (and all other food for that matter) could taste bland and still sustain us, and the sun could certainly set without giving us a show. G-d, in His kindness, created everything in a way that ultimately benefits us. As we say this first blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrai* we should keep this in mind and remember to be grateful for all that is around us.