

RECOGNIZING THE SOURCE OF OUR GOOD

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

This week's Torah portion contains the first recorded occasion of one human blessing another in the name of G-d. It followed the War of the Four Kings versus the Five Kings, in which our forefather Avram (not yet known as Avraham) became involved in his effort to save his nephew, Lot, who had been taken captive. After the War, Malchizedek, King of Shalem (later to become Jerusalem) and the Priest of G-d, went out to greet Avram and the other battle weary soldiers with bread and wine, as was the custom of the time. Rashi tells us Malchizedek was actually Shem, the son of Noah, one of the eight human beings to survive the flood. His appreciation of G-d as the Master of the Universe and His Torah as the blueprint for the creation of the universe, borne in his unique experience of G-d's mercy and benevolence, was manifest in his service of G-d as the Priest of His service and the Dean of the only Yeshiva (Torah academy) of the era. Upon meeting Avram he recited the blessing (Beraishis/Genesis 14:19-20) "Blessed is Avram, of G-d the Most High, Maker of heaven and earth; and blessed is G-d the Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hands."

Two ingredients are necessary to bestow blessing. One must have the power to give, and that which is given must be lacking from the recipient. So how can he offer the blessing "and blessed is G-d" when G-d lacks nothing? Even Shem/Malchizedek, for all his personal greatness in his devotion to G-d and his wealth as the King of Shalem could not possibly be in the position to give G-d anything! What was he saying?

In fact, are we not guilty of the same non-sequitor countless times a day? There is a Rabbinic mitzvah to recite 100 blessings every day (Shulchan Aruch/Code of Jewish Law 46:3), each one starting, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe..." If Shem was in no position to offer blessing to G-d, how much less so are we? What are we doing?

Sefer HaChinuch (the classic work on the 613 Torah commandments, their rationale and their regulations, assumed to be authored by Rabbi Aharon HeLevi of thirteenth century Spain)(#430) explains that G-d has the greatest compassion and wants all of His creations to have the best of life, and to merit to continue receiving the best from Him, as a manifestation of His complete and perfect goodness. When we recite a blessing, we are actively stirring our awareness that He is the SOURCE of all blessing and good. Through the inspiration of our souls and the focus of our minds on our gratitude to Him, rooted in the knowledge that all good originates from Him and He has dominion over all good to direct it as He sees fit, we generate the merit to continue receiving His blessing. Only after this recollection and recognition do we first start to ask Him for all of the things we "need".

Shem's blessing "of" G-d, incorporating the credo "We have nothing, save for the grace of G-d," set the paradigm for the generations throughout history: Avram is blessed BECAUSE he is of G-d, dedicated to His service, recognizing His absolute majesty of heaven and earth; G-d is the source of all blessing, the wellspring of all good, who in his infinite goodness has given your enemies into your hands. Our Sages of Old knew that only with the concretization of the truth do we merit further blessing; thus, they mandated we utter one hundred times a day: YOU are the source of all of our good, Hashem, our G-d, Master of the Universe...who creates the fruit of the tree...who brings forth bread from the ground...who forms the human body with genius and allows it to function properly.

Our father Avraham is memorialized as the embodiment of chesed, of acts of selfless loving kindness. It was not out of a secular humanism or because "Jews are a giving people". Rather, he maintained an awareness that all he had came from the grace of G-d, and he dedicated his existence to imparting that reality upon the rest of the human race. With his generosity toward others, he actively introduced them to the concept of the Creator of the World as the True Source of the goodness they enjoyed. Avraham lived this truth. Let us, his progeny, carry his torch high.

Have a good Shabbos!

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