

# PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH - BARUCH HASHEM!

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

## Baruch Hashem!<sup>1</sup>

*He [Eliezer] said, Baruch Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, Who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master.*

Most of us don't enjoy getting credit for something we did not do. Except for the truly humble, most of us certainly don't appreciate when someone else gets credit for something that was our doing. Poor Eliezer is ignored by Chazal, who deny him the credit for an innovation of his in our parshah, awarding it instead to Yisro!

The words of the familiar exclamation roll off our lips without difficulty. "Baruch Hashem!" As popular an expression as it is, it was not always the standard reaction to learning about something exciting and positive. Chazal<sup>[2]</sup> point to Yisro's "Baruch Hashem<sup>[3]</sup>" as the first time that Man offered a berachah to Hashem for His performance of a miracle. In Yisro's case, it was the news of all the wonders that Hashem had performed for the Bnei Yisrael at the time of the Exodus. Why do Chazal ignore the same words of berachah offered by Eliezer, as he looked back at the wondrous way in which Hashem bestowed quick success upon the mission that Avraham had assigned him? Moreover, the gemara elsewhere<sup>[4]</sup> criticizes Moshe and his people for failing to say, "Baruch Hashem," at the time of yetzias Mitzrayim, leaving it for Yisro. Why had they not in fact learned the practice from Eliezer, and followed his example?

Of course, Eliezer was not really being shortchanged. "Berachah" means different things in different contexts. The most frequent use of the word is decidedly not as an expression of acknowledgment or thanks. Primarily, it is related to the idea of become full or enriched. It expresses the wish that Heaven should be enabled, kevayochal, to overflow with even greater abundance in its influence upon our world<sup>[5]</sup>. HKBH willed it that Man's berachos should have an effect upon the Upper Worlds. Man's recital of the formula of a berachah, is the spiritual currency with which he pays for even greater berachah to flow from Heaven. It is as if the berachah is a bit of spiritual lubricant that keeps the flow of blessings to gain strength.

This effect, however, is limited entirely to natural phenomena in the natural world. In the world of "ordinary" events, our berachos feed into the system. Overt, manifest miracles are different. These

extraordinary events are not part of the pattern of ordinary natural phenomena, but a consequence of Hashem apparently overriding the laws He established to govern "ordinary" time. They are not dependent upon Man's immediate spiritual input; they are not empowered by any berachah recited over previous episodes of such miracles. When a miraculous outcome has been previously assured, it will occur whether or not Man davens for it or acknowledges some other miracle by reciting a berachah. Thus, Hashem prods Moshe at the banks of the Yam Suf: "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Bnei Yisrael and let them move forth[6]!" Hashem had assured both the outcome, and the miraculous manner it would occur. Further davening was therefore unnecessary[7].

Eliezer had witnessed a miracle. The miraculous answer to Avraham's need came, however, completely within the boundaries of teva, of natural law. Eliezer knew that he had to utter a berachah, and he understood that such a berachah would facilitate other wonderful interventions by Hashem - all within the parameters of the laws of nature. His berachah was not only significant, but it can be seen as the model for all berachos of thanksgiving.

Eliezer's "baruch Hashem" did not speak to the events surrounding yetzias Mitzrayim, all of which mocked the laws of Nature. Moshe and the Bnei Yisrael saw no room for a berachah, since no natural order stood behind those events. Eliezer's berachah was irrelevant to their situation.

It took Yisro to invent a new sort of beracha - pure thanks and acknowledgment for a pure, open miracle.

### **A Different Relationship<sup>8</sup>**

*[Rivkah] said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" The servant said, "He is my master." She then took the veil and covered herself.*

"That man" (halozeh) implies a person who leaves a strong, frightful impression. Rivkah noted that his very appearance was overpowering. When she learned that he was the man to whom she was to be married, she felt unworthy and small. She therefore veiled herself - in embarrassment!

From this first meeting with her future husband, the nature of their relationship was set. It was not to be the more open relationship that existed between Sorah and Avrohom, and between Rochel and Yaakov. When those matriarchs disagreed with their spouses, or had something strong to say, they did not hold back. Rivka's strong awe at first sight of her husband to be placed an obstacle in their relationship that would never be removed. It would never become one of relaxed candor.

Divine Hashgachah was at work in making this happen. The incident described in our pasuk made a crucial difference in the unfolding of the story of Yaakov and Esav in parshas Toldos. Rivka knew the bitter truth about Esav. She understood Esav's manipulative powers, how he could glibly convince his father that he was righteous, or at least not evil in the extreme. Nonetheless, Rivka did not - could not bring herself to - share her observations and suggestions with her husband, in order to deny Esav a beracha that would be inappropriate to him. The upshot of this is that Yaakov received a

different berachah from his father than he would otherwise have gotten. It was HKBH's Will that this should happen - and the first encounter between Rivka and Yitzchok was an example of His Will at work long before the event, setting the stage for this to happen.

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1. *Based on Harchev Davar, Bereishis 24:27*

2. Berachos 54A

3. Shemos 18:10

4. Sanhedrin 94A

5. This idea is developed at length in R. Chaim Volozhin's Nefesh ha-Chaim, after grappling with the question of how human beings can confer a blessing upon G-d, Who is the source of all blessing. See especially 2:4

6. Shemos 14:15

7. Tefila is obviated only by the conjunction of both conditions - an assured outcome, and its accomplishment outside the laws of nature. Where only one condition hold, Man is still instructed to daven.

8. *Based on Ha'amek Davar, Bereishis 24:65*

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