

# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

After listing twelve categories of sin which bring, G-d forbid, curse and destruction, the Torah then describes the opposite - the blessings and goodness which will befall those who diligently guard and uphold its mitzvos. "And it shall be that if you diligently listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe and perform all His mitzvos... then all these blessings will come upon you and overtake you, if you listen to the voice of Hashem. (28:1-2)" What does it mean that the blessings of the Torah will "overtake you?" Why couldn't the pasuk (verse) simply say, "then all these blessings will come upon you?"

The story is told of a violent flood that threatened to drown anyone who didn't escape the deluged town within a short time. One by one, rescue teams succeeded in locating the town's inhabitants and bringing them to safety. All available means of rescue were used; they came with canoes, with motorboats, by foot, and with helicopters. Yet as each rescue team succeeded in saving more and more of the panic-stricken townsfolk, one brave man simply refused to take refuge, even as the waters rose until they threatened to drown him. When the canoes came to rescue, he would not get in: "Take the others," he said, "and don't worry about me. I have faith - Hashem will save me!" When the motor boats took away hundreds more, he refused to join them. "Go ahead," he said, "Hashem will take care of me!" Even as a helicopter courageously rescued the town's last stranded inhabitants perched precariously in the branches of a tree, he remained steadfast. "Go along now - you see Hashem has helped me stay alive to this point. I have complete faith - He will take care of me."

Of course, the brave man ultimately drowns; the flood's only casualty. His neshama (soul) ascends upon high, where he is brought before the Heavenly tribunal. He is crushed. "Almighty G-d," he pleads, "if I may be so bold as to ask a question?"

"Ask My son."

"Hashem, I trusted You. When everyone else was scrambling aboard boats and helicopters to save their lives, I never wavered in my faith. How could You let this happen to me? Everyone else survived, yet I perished!"

"My dear child," replies the Almighty, "Who do you think it was that sent you the canoe, and the motor-boat, and the helicopter?"

A pious disciple of the holy Choize (Seer) of Lublin zt"l once came to his Rebbe after having spent an extended period in his court. The time had come for him to return home. "Rebbe," he said, "I have

only one request: For many years I have fasted and abstained from worldly pleasures in the hope that the holy prophet Eliyahu would one day reveal himself to me as he reveals himself to the righteous of each generation, as the Rebbe surely knows. I pray each day that I may meet the holy prophet even once in my life. Yet I grow older, and I have yet to see him. Please, Rebbe, bless me that I too may with my own eyes see the holy Eliyahu at least once!"

The Choize's reply was cryptic at best, and did little to allay the distraught disciple's longing: "And when one does see Eliyahu HaNavi - one still needs to have sense..."

On his way home, the disciple stayed overnight in a small village. When he got up in the morning, the lobby of the inn where he lodged, which also housed the village shul, was bustling with people. It seemed one of the villagers had been blessed with a son, and today was the bris milah (circumcision). After the morning prayers, the assembled waited until all was ready. "Baruch Ha-Ba!" cried out the mohel. Everything went as expected. The child was brought in, placed in the lap of the sandek, and final preparations were hurriedly made.

It was then that the guest witnessed the strangest thing; so strange he was sure at first his eyes were deceiving him. Just as the mohel was about to perform the circumcision, another man walked in, took the baby from the sandek, and sat down in the sandek's lap, holding the baby in his arms. There the two grown men sat, one in the other's lap, as the bris milah was performed. After its conclusion, the second man stood up, replaced the child in the first man's lap, gave the child a blessing, and left.

Unable to restrain his wonder, the guest turned to one of the villagers and exclaimed, "That's the strangest custom I've ever seen! Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"To what do you refer?" asked the bewildered villager.

"What's this business about the two sandeks sitting on each other's lap? And why did the second sandek just come and go like that? Is this some kind of obscure village custom?"

"Excuse me? Two sandeks - in each other's lap? What in the world are you talking about?"

He excitedly asked everyone within earshot whether they had seen the spectacle, yet none had. "How strange," he thought, "how totally strange." It was then that he recalled the mysterious words of his Rebbe, "And when one sees Eliyahu HaNavi - one still needs to have seichel..." "Here I was, witnessing Eliyahu, the 'Angel of bris milah,' with my own eyes, yet all I could think of was how strange and bizarre were the people of this village. Indeed, one still needs sense!"

It's one thing to receive Hashem's blessings. To realize and recognize that we are the recipients of blessing is a blessing in itself. One could live what many would consider a blessed life, yet while away his time waiting for blessings to come, never realizing that he's had them all along. One who's healthy often takes his health for granted. "Of course I'm healthy - why shouldn't I be?" There's so much we take for granted; our children, our spouses, our friends, our freedom, Shabbos, Yom Tov... every day, Hashem's blessings await us in ways we may never have even considered. Yet often we

lack the foresight and wisdom to recognize them as such, and be thankful for them, focusing (and sometimes obsessing!) instead on the "blessings" we have yet to acquire, be they material or even spiritual in nature.

While there's nothing wrong with ambition, it's important to recognize the natural tendency we have to overlook the blessings in our lives and focus instead on the perceived blessings we see by others and hope ourselves to acquire. "For each breath that you take, praise G- d," teach our Sages (Bereishis Rabbah 14:9). All these blessings will come upon you - the Torah promises blessings and goodness will be the lot of those who keep its mitzvos. And (they will) overtake you - not only will the Torah be the source of blessing for you; it will also give you the insight and discernment to recognize and appreciate the blessings you have.

Have a good Shabbos.

**\*\*\*\*\* This week's publication is sponsored by Mr. Hershy Weinberg, in memory of the holy members of his father's and mother's families who perished in the Holocaust. L'iluy nishmas the mishpachos of R' Meshulam Zalman ben R' Yisrael Avraham, and Chaya Sura bas R' Chaim Tzvi Aryeh Ha-Cohen Berkstein. May Hashem avenge their blood, and may their memories be a blessing. \*\*\*\*\***