

BLESS YOU!

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Hashem said to Avram, "Go, for your benefit, from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house—to the Land I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you, and I will make your name great—and you will become a blessing." (12:2)

We all know what it means to be blessed, but what does it mean to "become a blessing?" Rashi cites two explanations: 1) Literally, you will become a blessing; here Hashem alludes to Avraham that in the Shemona Esrei prayer recited three times daily, the first blessing will conclude, "Baruch Ata Hashem, Magen Avraham—Shield of Avraham." 2) Hashem told Avraham, "Until now, blessings were in My hand: I blessed Adam, Noach, and you. But from now on, blessings will be in your hands—you will bless whomever you wish." The Midrash (Tanchuma 4) implies that from this point on, Avraham would assume all responsibility for blessings, taking over, as it were, from Hashem, Who bore the position until now! "Until now," Hashem told Avraham, "I needed to bless My creations. From now on, you'll be in charge."

Sifrei Chassidus (Hasidic literature) write that from our passage it emerges that from Avraham Avinu's times and on, one must attach oneself to a tzaddik (righteous person); Hashem told Avraham (and his successors, the righteous of each generation) that they now hold the key to blessing. In fact, many sefarim write that receiving beracha is not dependent on the tzaddik's blessing per-se, but rather that the righteous themselves are blessed ("ve-he'ye beracha—and you will be a blessing), and anyone who attaches themselves to the righteous (va'yavreich means to graft or bond) will likewise be blessed with all good (see Noam Elimelech, Mishmeres Issamar).

One might ask the following: If from that moment Hashem, so to speak, relinquished His authority over blessings and transferred it to Avraham, why does the Torah state in the very next verse, "I will bless those who bless you..." Didn't Hashem just tell Avraham that he was in charge of all blessings?

It was well known that the famous tzaddik R' Mottele of Chernobl zt"l knew the inner thoughts and hidden secrets of his followers. Nothing was hidden from his holy gaze. He would never chastise others directly though. Instead, he directed his criticism at himself, and the intended subject got the message without having to suffer the shame.

In Chernobl lived a rav who was a talmid chacham (Torah scholar) in his own right. This rav, however, wanted nothing to do with the Chasidim and their strange ways. He obstinately refused to pay R' Mottele so much as even a courteous visit.

On Pesach, many Jews refuse to eat any food that was not prepared in their home under their supervision. On the last day of Pesach (Acharon shel Pesach), though, most people "mish'n zich," i.e. they eat others' food as well. In fact, the holy Rebbe of Sanz, it is told, would on Acharon shel Pesach eat the food of even those whom he didn't trust all year long. Perhaps this Rav was inspired by the spirit of mish'n zich, because it was on one certain Acharon shel Pesach that he finally relented and made up his mind to once-and-for-all see what these Chasidim and their Rebbe were all about. He had heard about R' Mottele's custom of rebuking himself and meaning others, so it was with great surprise and shock that, no sooner had he entered the Rebbe's courtyard when he heard the Rebbe mutter, "Mottele, Mottele, you must do teshuva—you have partaken of chametz on Pesach!"

He realized right away the Rebbe meant him, but for the life of him, he couldn't imagine to what he referred. "Perhaps I didn't pay attention to some minute detail? Perhaps I overlooked some stringency that most people don't even adhere to, but me, being that I'm a Torah scholar, should have been more particular?" he thought to himself. "But what?" He decided he would immediately return home and look into the matter.

He searched his house high and low for any sign of an area that might not have been checked or cleaned thoroughly. He asked his wife, his sons, and his daughters, if they had done everything with the same caution as in previous years. They had. He was just about ready to give up when he saw it. There, at the bottom of the huge barrel they had drawn and prepared especially for Pesach, lay a huge chunk of bread. Examining the water more closely, he could see its tiny crumbs, barely visible, floating around. This was the only water they drank and cooked with on Pesach. Everything they ate had been tainted by it. He was devastated.

Broken-spirited, he returned to R' Mottele, and humbly requested that the Rebbe give him a program through which he could repent for his sin, albeit unintentional. "But Rebbe," he added, "with all due respect, one question gives me no rest. Your eyes see all; maybe I was wrong for not coming to visit you earlier, but you knew we were consuming chametz all Pesach—how could you not have sent someone to warn us, and saved us from such a grave sin?"

"G-d forbid," said R' Mottele, "that I should know of a Jew sinning, and refrain from telling him out of concerns for my honour! Believe me, until you passed through the gates to my courtyard, I had no idea what was going on in your home. It's only once you came, and decided to form a bond with us, that I saw what I saw, and made it known right away."

It is true, says the Noam Elimelech, that from Avraham on, blessing was to flow through the tzaddik. There is, however, one condition: You have to attach yourself to the tzaddik. And I will bless those that bless you— those that recognize and appreciate the elevated status of the righteous, and appreciate our need for them, will receive Hashem's blessings, channelled through the tzaddik. Bareich, writes the Mishmeres Issamar, also means to kneel down. Those who kneel down, so to speak, before the righteous, and humbly accept their leadership and guidance, will be blessed.

He quotes the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch (607:6) and the Rambam (Sh'ggagos 3:10) that Yom Kippur only brings atonement to those who believe in its power to atone. One who doubts its atonement will not receive it. Similarly, he writes, to the extent we believe the tzaddik is the channel through which Hashem confers blessings, will we merit those blessings.

The Midrash says (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:21) that in the times of Dovid Ha-melech there was a plague; 100 people died daily. To combat the plague, Dovid instituted 100 blessings a day. When we recite our blessings with concentration, we have the ability to channel Hashem's blessings to the world. But it too depends on how we concentrate, and how much we believe in the power of beracha.

People sometimes wonder, "It says that by wearing tzitzis (fringes), and gazing at them, we will not stray after the desires of our hearts and our eyes. I faithfully don my tzitzis daily, yet I still struggle with sin and sometimes fail?"

Perhaps at least part of the answer lies in the way we recite our birkas ha-mitzvos (blessings over mitzvos). When we say, "Asher kid'shanu be-mitzvosav...Who has sanctified us through His commandments, and commanded us to cloak ourselves with tzitzis," do we really concentrate on thanking Hashem for giving us a mitzvah that has the power to protect us from sin? Noam Elimelech writes (Tzet'l Katan) that the first thing we should do every morning (after reciting 'Modeh ani') is to thank Hashem, in our own words, for the mitzvah of tzitzis which surrounds us and protects us. Perhaps if we put more in to our berachos, whether blessings over mitzvos, over good foods, drinks, or smells, we would take more out of them.

Have a good Shabbos. Text Copyright © 2005 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**