

By your leave, my masters and teachers:

**BLESSED** be You, Hashem  
our God, King of  
the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

Blessed be You, Hashem our God, King of the universe, Who has chosen us from among all peoples, exalted us above all tongues, and has sanctified us by His commandments. And You have given us, Hashem our Lord, in love, (Sabbaths for rest and) festivals of assembly for rejoicing, feasts of rallying and seasons for delight, (this Shabbos day and) the

שמך — The soul of every living thing shall bless Your Name]. Consequently, although it is correct to say that Hashem is blessed (passively) there is no escaping the fact that man blesses Hashem (actively). And, indeed, why should we even try to avoid interpreting baruch in its simple sense? The moment God made the fulfillment of His will on earth dependent on the free will of man, He in effect said to him: *Bless me! I have entrusted you with the implementation of My purpose on earth. By promoting My purpose, fulfilling my commandments, carrying out My will you bless My work and bless Me!*

Just as "His messengers... all His hosts, His servants who do His bidding... all His works in all the places of His dominion..." (Tehillim 103:20-22), being instrumental in the fulfillment of His great purpose in the world, not only praise and thank God but *bless* Him, so does every Jew sense and say to himself: "You, too, o' my soul, bless Hashem" (*ibid.*)!

In other words, to say "Blessed be You..." means to pledge oneself to fulfill Hashem's will. Understood in this way, the concept of berachah, blessing, is the theme underlying all of a Jew's thinking. It is the idea which every Jew should convert into a reality, and the entire Torah exists only to teach us the way in which we can and should bless Hashem. Indeed, the word baruch, from which the noun

סְבִרִי מִרְנֹן וְרַבֵּנִי וְרַבּוֹתֵי:

**בָּרוּךְ** אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר  
בָּנוּ מִכָּל־עַם וְרוֹמַמְנוּ מִכָּל־לָשׁוֹן וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו.  
וְתַתֶּן לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה (שְׁבֻתוֹת לְמִנוּחָה  
(וּמוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה חַגִּים וְזִמְנִים לְשִׁשּׁוֹן אֶת יוֹם

also created the entire physical, material and spiritual world for this very purpose out of *His* own free will. If so, nothing in this whole world can impede the attainment of these spiritual and moral goals; indeed, how can it be other than that everything should work toward the realization of these goals. Since the gradual winning of mankind for all that is good and true had been God's purpose from the very beginning, the realization of this goal is the one thing sure of ultimate triumph. Thus, the fact that God created the world *ex nihilo* and of His own free will is not only the cornerstone of all human verities but is, moreover, the cornerstone of all human morality.

**BLESSED BE.** There are some who object to interpreting this term in the same way when directed by man to God and when emanating from God to man. [They cannot fathom how man could possibly "bless God". Does God need man's blessing? What purpose could such a blessing fulfill?] They interpret בָּרוּךְ as "blessed is..." an attribute of God denoting the "source of blessing" in the same way that חַנוּן and רַחוּם, for example, designate God as the source of grace and mercy. [For this reason, many translate "בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה: Blessed are you God."] But nothing much is gained by this interpretation of baruch in its passive form, because innumerable times, we find the expression "לְבַרֵךְ אֶת" — to bless Hashem [as in "לְבַרֵךְ אֶת" — to bless Hashem]



others [who may be beseeching God at the same time for the opposite result.]. Will this prayer make them succeed where thousands have failed?

However, to say "may God be Blessed through me" means that one's work is no longer his own doing; at the same time one is not trying to gain his own ends. His status may be ever so humble, his beginnings may well be ridiculed by others, but he has been assigned to his post by God, the Master of heaven and earth, the King of the universe. God knows a man's strength, God's spirit animates him and He has placed him within the particular context of his occupation so that he may perform His will there and then. Man is His worker and, consequently, he has God at his side always. He fights the struggle against nature and society for him. God is man's Shield and Protector. Before Him, not man, will the entire hostile world retreat. "Renounce your will for the sake of His will, so that He may nullify the will of others before your will" (*Pirkei Avos* 2:4). "Blessed be You, Hashem." *May Your work be implemented through me!* This is the Jewish call to arms in the ceaseless struggle of life.

*May God be Blessed through me!* means that one has reached the goal of his desire and remains there at every moment. Every moment — provided one has done his share in fulfilling of His will, provided that he has made use of it with all the strength granted him, in the service of his Master — every such moment, then, represents the summit of man's aspirations. Whether one has much or little is immaterial. That does not determine the measure of his blessing, nor even whether his exertions have been successful, for success, too, is God's, not his. As long as one can say to himself that he has dedicated himself with all his might to fulfilling His will, if to do so is his only and exclusive wish, then, surely, even when God gathers You to Him in the last moment of your life, He will leave you fulfilled and serenely contented in the knowledge that you have lived, not in order to receive blessing, but to give blessing. In this is found the only peace and the only happiness one can hope to obtain.

When the Almighty implanted the first Jew among mankind, He uprooted him from everything that is generally considered a source of blessing. He said to him: *Leave it to Me to bless you! And, you, for your part "become a blessing"* (*Bereishis* 12:2)! By this single expression He isolated Avram from among the rest of mankind who *sought blessing* and made him into a *source* of blessing. By this single expression, God showed Avram his mission for the rest of his life and the heritage he was to bequeath to his children and the generations after them.

berachah is derived, encompasses the entire mission of the life of the Jew. This understanding of blessing is what distinguishes Yisrael from the rest of the nations.

All other human beings approach their gods begging and beseeching them. Their prayer says: *Bless me!* Beginning with the savage kneeling in front of his idol and ending with the savant attempting to impart religion to the enlightened, what they call "religion" is the product of a feeling of dependence. Their sense of utter helplessness on the one hand, and their intuition of the existence of a higher being upon which all are dependent on the other — that is the faith on which their altars are built and which makes both savant and savage pray from their heart: *Bless me!*

But what leads the Jew to God is not the request: *Bless me*, for he understands that his blessing has already been granted. He realizes that everything — the forces of nature, the workings of history, and the highlights and pleasures, as well as the sorrows, of his personal life — are his blessing. He always considers himself blessed in both happiness and grief. What motivates him is not to *receive* blessing, but to *dispense* blessing, not בָּרַךְ, "bless me," but בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, *Be You blessed!* These are the words through which the Jew relates to God.

The Jew, in effect is saying: *You have entrusted the fulfillment of Your will, the granting of Your wishes, the promotion of Your Kingdom, the implementation of Your work, to man's free will. It is for this purpose that I am, that I exist. For this purpose You have created me a man and a Jew. For this purpose You have granted me, as a man, the energy to act and You have revealed to me, as a Jew, what You wish to see carried out by us on earth. Every event in nature and history that You are letting me experience, all that You allow me and whatever You deny me — it is all there to remind me of my mission, to revive the strength and resolve within me to fulfill it. My God, it is my wish to discharge my duty! Be Blessed in all that You give me and in all that You withhold from me.*

And the great power, serenity and joy with which this idea, to *bless Hashem*, infuses the heart of every Jew is beyond compare, impossible to describe!

Those who say "bless me" — can they ever find the fulfillment of their prayer? Standing alone, in impotent isolation, they seek to defy the hostile forest of nature and a destructive society and achieve their own aims and pleasures, even if these be for the good. They expect that simply mouthing "bless me" will enable them to do all this, that they will then gain the courage and strength to pursue these aims. But will this prayer on their lips ensure that they attain what is denied