



The Blessing of Growth

Birkat HaShanim, the ninth blessing in the *Shemoneh Esrei*, reads as follows:

Bless for us, Hashem our G-d, the coming year,

And all kinds of its produce for good.

And grant (dew and rain as) a blessing to the face of the earth, and satisfy us with Your goodness, and bless our year like the good years.

Blessed are You... who blesses the years.

The word “year” in this *beracha* is striking for the simple reason we would not normally have chosen a unit of time as the object of blessing. This is reflected by the standard rabbinic name for this *beracha* – *Birkat HaShanim*, the blessing of the years. This demands explanation.

A second difficulty centers on the verb of this *beracha*. One action is repeated three times – blessing. There is nothing inappropriate about this until we realize that all blessings are about blessing.

We could just as easily have asked G-d to bless us with knowledge, with forgiveness and with health.

For some reason, this *beracha* is about blessing per se. This is all the more striking since there is no clear indication just what sort of blessing we are asking for. Were it not for the reference to “the earth” in the third line, the *beracha* would sound like a general request for anything good. Since it is clear that material prosperity is the object of this request, we have to ask ourselves why this sort of good is described simply and generically as “blessing.” These

two questions come together when we examine the conclusion – the G-d to whom we address this request is He who “blesses the years.”

What is Blessing?

To understand this better, we must remember that *beracha*, blessing, means the power of growth and reproduction.

The first *beracha* in the Torah was *p’ru ur’vu*, be fruitful and multiply. G-d gave this after Creation. Everything created is created according to a plan, bound by its limits. Every created object is equal to itself and can contain no more than what was accorded it by creation. G-d blessed the animal world with the blessing of *p’ru ur’vu*, meaning He gave it the power to create more, to be more than the given, more than what is there from the start.

6699 | **The power of G-d Himself, expressed in creation ex nihilo, is carried over and granted to created things, to continue their living growth and development**

The power of G-d Himself, expressed in creation ex nihilo, is carried over and granted to created things, to continue their living growth and development.

Within the natural world, the place where we see this power of growth and reproduction is first and foremost in the land. Land, earth and soil are metaphors for the source of growth. When we ask for prosperity and sustenance,

we are not merely asking for the objects we need to live. We are not asking for G-d to give us food, or money, or other objects that He can create and hand us. We are asking for blessing, the blessing of G-d, i.e., the power to produce more, to be productive and creative.

This power is the power of G-d Himself, and if we are blessed with it, it is only because G-d is present within us.

This is also the key to the choice of the year, a unit of time, as the ‘object’ that receives the blessing. Because the blessing is not the material object itself, but the growth and development through which the objects are the products, the blessing is applied to time.

For without time, there can be no growth.

A stationary, non-living thing can exist outside of time, or without relating to time.

If I were only asking for a piece of bread, the response would not relate specifically to time, but if I am asking for the presence of G-d within to be expressed in growth and development, I am asking for the blessing of time.

I am asking to be part of a process, to become part of that value which can exist only within time – the value of growth. This then is *mevarech haShanim*, I appeal to G-d who blesses the years, for that is the source and the substance of prosperity. G-d’s presence within time is what humans need and yearn for, and this blessing will express itself in the land.

Rabbi Ezra Bick has been a Ram at Yeshivat Har Etzion since his aliyah from New York in 1977.