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## פרשת לך לך

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פרק טז פסוק א

וְשָׂרִי אֲנֹשֶׁת אֲבָרָם לֹא יֵלְדָה לוֹ וְלֵה שִׁפְתֶיהָ מִצָּרִית וְשָׂמָה הֶגֶר:  
חז"ל

מפני מה היו אבותינו עקורים? מפני שהקב"ה מתאונה לתפלתן של צדיקים (יבמות דס).

מושג

הקדוש ברוך הוא מתאונה לתפלתן של צדיקים

**Translation:** Hashem desires the Tefilos of Tzaddikim.

**Explanation:** When we daven or make a ברכה what we are actually doing is acknowledging that we know that Hashem is the source of all blessing and good. Even if one is worthy of being blessed by Hashem, He will not bless them until they daven and demonstrate that they recognize that He is the source of the blessing. This recognition is הכרת הטוב which allows Hashem to bless us. To teach this important lesson, Hashem did not give the Avos children until they davened for them. Since Hashem, who is טוב, wants to provide us with blessing, He desires our Tefilah which allows him to do so.

**Looking in the Pasuk:** This Musag comes to explain why we find that all of our אבות ואמהות had trouble having children. By all the אמהות, with the exception of לאה, the Torah tells us that they were עקרות<sup>1</sup>, this certainly was no coincidence<sup>2</sup>.

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שרה - יא:ל ונתהי שרי עקרה אין לה ולד: <sup>1</sup>

רבקה - כה:כא ונעמר יצחק לי-הנה לנכח אשתו פי עקרה הוא...:

רחל - כט:לא ונרא י-הנה פי-שנוא לאה ויפסח את-רחמה ורחל עקרה:

<sup>2</sup> The Gemoroh quoted above teaches that יצחק and possibly אברהם were also עקורים.

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## NOTES

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A simple interpretation of the Musag would have us understand that Hashem makes the wives of Tzaddikim barren because he desires to hear their prayers. However, it is difficult to understand why Hashem would cause anguish to the wives of צדיקים so that He could hear their תפילות. Even if we were to explain that we should not interpret the Musag to mean that Hashem made them barren to hear their תפילות, but rather that Hashem did not immediately heal them<sup>3</sup>, even though they were deserving, so that He could hear their תפילות, we would still find it difficult to justify the seemingly needless suffering.

We must begin by trying to understand why Hashem ‘desires’ the Tefilos of the צדיקים. Would it not be sufficient to say Hashem listens to their תפילות and answers their requests? The wording of מתאווה makes it seem as if Hashem has a need that can only be fulfilled by the תפילה of a צדיק. How are we to understand this need?

Many times we use words that describe concepts which we do not fully comprehend. One perfect example is the concept of making a ברכה, making a blessing. How exactly do we make a ברכה? What do we mean when we say ברוך אתה ה'? Are we truly blessing G-d? And, does Hashem need our blessing? We might take the question a step further and ask not only why do we need to bless Hashem, but why even daven to Him? Doesn't He know what we need and if we are worthy? Does Hashem need us, our תפילות, and our ברכות?

The מפרשים explain that we, as physical beings, cannot ever truly understand G-d. We are, however, provided with a glimpse into the Divine through the מידות – the characteristics – with which Hashem has revealed Himself to us. One of these central characteristics is that He is טוב; Hashem is good. However, there is a catch. For the characteristic of טוב is expressed by being מטיב to others. Therefore, if we are not worthy of G-d's goodness, then He cannot express His מידת הטוב. In effect, our lack of worthiness of Hashem's blessing hinders G-d's ability to be a מטיב, thus causing a ‘weakness’ in His מידה of טוב.

We might have thought that worthiness of Hashem's blessing is based solely on heeding His commandments: doing מצוות and refraining from doing עבירות הטוב. But this is not so. There is another factor on which all ברכות ה' are contingent: הכרת הטוב, recognizing and acknowledging Hashem's beneficence.

This idea is beautifully illustrated by Rashi in פרשת בראשית, who quotes a גמרא which also uses our Musag. What makes the Rashi truly unique is that Rashi does not simply quote or sum up the גמרא, but adds a fascinating twist to the גמרא's words. The גמרא (חולין ס.) comes to explain why the Torah first teaches that vegetation began to sprout on the third day of creation, but afterwards seems to teach that this actually took place only on the sixth day:

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<sup>3</sup> In essence we would explain the Musag to mean: Why did the wives of the Avos *remain* barren? This interpretation would go well with the גמרא (שם) which teaches that שרה was an אילנית and was physically unable to have children.

רב אסי רמי(הביא סתירה) כתיב: (בראשית א') ותוצא הארץ דשא, בתלת בשבתא (בשלישי בשבת), וכתוב, (בראשית ב') וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ, במעלי שבתא (ערב שבת)! מלמד שיצאו דשאים ועמדו על פתח קרקע, עד שבא אדם הראשון ובקש עליהם רחמים, וירדו גשמים וצמחו, ללמדך שהקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן של צדיקים.

The Gemara answers that the vegetation was ready to sprout forth on the third day but had to wait for the creation of man on the sixth day. Only when man davened for the vegetation could the rain fall and the vegetation grow forth.

Rashi quotes the Gemara, but pay attention to the exact wording of his commentary:

כָּל עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמָח. עֵדִין לֹא צָמַח, וּבִגְוֹ שְׁפָתוֹב "וּתוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ" (לעיל א:יב), לֹא יִצְאוּ, אֲלָא עַל פְּתַח הַקְּרָע עָמְדוּ עַד יוֹם ו' (ס"א: וְלָמָּה): כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר. וּמֵאֵי טַעְמָא "לֹא הִמְטִיר", לְפִי שֵׁ"אָדָם אֵין לְעִבּוֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה", וְאֵין מִכִּיר בְּטוֹבָתוֹן שֶׁל גְּשָׁמִים, וּכְשֶׁבֵּא אָדָם וְנִדְעַ שְׁהֵם צוֹרְךְ לְעוֹלָם, הִתְפַּלֵּל עֲלֵיהֶם וְיָרְדוּ, וְצָמְחוּ הָאֵילָנוֹת וְהַדְּשָׁאִים.

While the Gemara seems to teach that man davened for the vegetation to break through, Rashi understands differently: that man davened for the rain. While we could explain Rashi's novel interpretation on the wording of the Pasuk, which seems to support Rashi's focus on the rain:

וְכָל שֵׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ וְכָל-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמָח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר ה' אֱלֹקִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵין וכו' I believe Rashi is touching upon a deeper point and trying to explain the last line of the Gemara: הקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן של צדיקים.

As we asked above, Rashi wondered why G-d should have to wait for man to daven. Rashi came to the conclusion, mentioned above, that G-d will not bless man unless man is מכיר טוב. While there is little concern that man will not thank G-d for the food He provides directly, there is definitely a concern that man will not sufficiently thank Hashem for all the things that are needed to help the food to appear.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, explains Rashi, the Torah tells us that G-d did not let the vegetation appear until man prayed for rain. Since rain is necessary for growth, and man might not be מכיר טוב to Hashem for the rain, G-d could not provide rain until man davened and thereby demonstrated his הכרת הטוב.

This is the meaning of a ברכה. We are not blessing G-d, but rather acknowledging that He is the source of all blessing! Once we do this, and thus demonstrate our הכרת הטוב, we allow for Him to shower His blessings upon us<sup>5</sup>. And so too every Tefilah. When we daven for a sick person, for

<sup>4</sup> This is an incredibly important point. When we speak of being appreciative, חז"ל termed it הכרת הטוב. We might ask why we call it הכרת הטוב, recognizing good. Is recognizing the good sufficient? Should we not call it החזרת הטוב, returning the good, or תודה על הטוב, thanking for the good? If someone simply recognizes the good but does not act in any way on that recognition, have they indeed fulfilled their moral obligation?

The answer is that it is completely natural for one who has received something from another to feel a need to return the favor. Giving to another immediately creates a feeling of indebtedness. If one chooses not to return the favor, he must first minimize the good which he has received, otherwise his feelings of indebtedness will simply not allow him to ignore the favor. Therefore, חז"ל, placed the focus on recognizing the good. Once one truly recognizes all the good that has been done for him, repaying that good is sure to follow.

A perfect example of the above is if one prepares a meal for a family. They would surely be indebted for the food itself. However, true הכרת הטוב would include feeling indebted for the time it took to shop for and prepare the food etc. Many times we do exactly the opposite. We say, "It wasn't such a big deal, after all they were making dinner anyway!" In order to not feel so indebted we choose to minimize rather than maximize the good others have done for us.

<sup>5</sup> This explains the Gemara in (לה:): גמרא which considers one who eats without making a ברכה as if they have stolen the food: ככל הנהגה מן העולם הזה בלי ברכה כאילו גזול להקב"ה וכנסת ישראל. If so, should making a ברכה change this? The answer is that when one takes from the world he is stealing that object, as he does not own nature. However, by making a ברכה he allows for Hashem's blessing to come and thus replace that which he has taken.

example, we are not simply informing G-d that the person is ill and needs a רפואה; G-d already knows that. What we are saying is that if that person is to get well we realize that it is because Hashem will heal them. Tefilah thus does not try to change G-d, but rather to change Man, making us more cognizant that Hashem controls our well-being, and we must act accordingly. For this reason we do not say לפלל but להתפלל, something that is to be internalized and self-changing.

This is also the meaning of הקב"ה מתאוה לתפילתן של צדיקים. G-d does truly desire our Tefilos. For only when we daven and demonstrate that we are מכיר טוב can Hashem continue to bless us and actualize His מדת הטוב. For this reason Hashem kept the vegetation waiting until man could come and daven for rain. For this reason נשותיהן של צדיקים עקרות. Through the suffering and Tefilos of the Tzaddikim Hashem teaches the world an incredibly important lesson: No blessings are possible without Hashem's will and Hashem's will is contingent on our acknowledgement of this fact. Even Tzaddikim, though surely deserving of blessing because of their good deeds, will only receive blessings when they demonstrate הכרת הטוב. This recognition, true הכרת הטוב, is the source of all blessing. Hashem thus desires the Tefilos of Tzaddikim not because they bless Him, but rather because they allow Him to bless us.

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. As mentioned above (in footnote #1) all the אמהות were עקרות except for לאה. Why do you think she was different?
- b. Why do you think Hashem will only bless us if we are מכיר טוב? If Hashem is truly good why not bless us whether we are deserving or not?