

Bless the Lord.

Receive God's blessings.

Bless others.

Blessings In Messiah!

***B'rakhot*: Blessings**

The Lord is leading us to focus this month on a foundational aspect of Judaism: blessings, *b'rakhot* in Hebrew (pronounced *brah-COAT*). While the confines of this newsletter do not allow us to give an in-depth treatment, we want to share some of the most significant truths about *b'rakhot* so that you, our Jewish Jewels family, may be blessed.

B'rakhot are at the very heart of Judaism. Most of them were formulated by the men of the Great Assembly around the year 350 B.C. There are *b'rakhot* for almost every conceivable situation, from seeing a rainbow to putting up a mezuzah on one's doorpost. The entire first tractate of the Talmud deals with *Brakhot*. One second century rabbi declared it to be the duty of everyone to say 100 *b'rakhot* daily. (Menahot 43b). Although this may seem absurd, consider the following from the New Covenant (*B'rit HaDasha*): "**Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua for you**" (1Thessalonians 5:17-18). When we regard everything in life as our opportunity to bless the Lord, we are entering into the spirit of the *b'rakhot*.

Three Types of *B'rakhot*

The *B'rakhot* have been divided into three categories since 15th century Spain. At this time Rabbi Abravanel identified blessings as follows: 1) God to people, 2) People to God, and 3) People to people. When we think of blessings, most of us think of the first group. We realize that all blessings flow from the hand of a good God. A verse in the *B'rit HaDasha* emphasizes this fact: "**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning**" (James 1:17). God blessing mankind is obvious. Man blessing God is much less a part of the daily lives of most people today. Yet, *b'rakhot* are one of God's chosen ways for people to live. They are a means of worship, a form of prayer, a way of giving pleasure to God, an acknowledgment of who we are and who He is, a way of expressing our love and appreciation of God, an expression of awe and reverence, and a way to integrate the secular and spiritual in our lives.

All of our life should be a "Blessed Art Thou." Since "**The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness**" (Psalm 24:1), it is reasoned that to enjoy anything on earth without saying a *b'rakhah* is tantamount to robbing God. Selah. The third category of *b'rakhot*, are the "people-to-people" *b'rakhot*. Aside from the blessing of children by their parents (especially in traditional Judaism), this type of *b'rakhot* has been relegated to the famous "Sneeze blessing": "God bless you" in English, "Gesundheit" in German and *la-bri'ut* in Hebrew. This is unfortunate since people to people *b'rakhot* can be life changing. When one person blesses another, the one who speaks is

actually requesting that God bless the recipient. A person who pronounces a *b'rakhot* over another imitates God, the originator of all *b'rakhot*. He takes on God's very nature, and becomes himself a *b'rakhah*, a blessing. This should be a life goal for each one of us: to **be a blessing**. This seems to be the underlying idea in I Peter 3:8-9: *"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary **blessing**, knowing that you were called to this, that you may **inherit a blessing**."*

God To People *B'rakhot*

The entire history of mankind as outlined in the Torah begins with God blessing man. Neil has been emphasizing this in his teachings at Temple Aron HaKodesh. We hear much about original sin, but the intent of God's heart was and has always been **original blessing!** We read in Genesis Chapter 1, that after God created the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, He blessed them (made a *b'rakhah*) (Genesis 1:22). After creating man in his own image, He blessed again: *"Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it'"* (Genesis 1:28). The *b'rakhot* of God are irreversible. They are a promise that will come to pass. We see an example of this in the Book of Numbers, Chapter 23 when Balaam (whose original intent had been to curse Israel) says: *"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it"* (verses 19-20). God's blessings (gifts) are covenantal and sure. That is why the Bible says in Romans 11:29 that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Note the context of Romans 11:29: **Israel will always** be beloved for the Father's sake. Jewish history itself began with a *b'rakhot*. When God called Abram, He said to him, *"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:2-3).

People To God *B'rakhot*

When God's people say (make) a *b'rakhah* it is much more than a "thank you." It is even more than praise. It is rather a deep acknowledgment of one's total dependence on God for all that he has. The prescribed blessings of enjoyment, performing a *mitzvah*, thanksgiving and praise that are followed in traditional Judaism can be effectively pronounced spontaneously in English by believers who love the Lord and want to delight His heart by blessing Him at all times. We can do as King David did: *"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth"* (Psalm 34:1).

We can say, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has brought me to the month of May, given me breath and life and the knowledge of eternal life through Yeshua HaMashiach." "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has placed me in a country where food is plentiful, freedoms abound, and there are luxuries unheard of in most other nations of the world."

Yeshua, the Messiah, must have grown up saying *b'rakhot* from an early age. We see Him in the Gospels blessing God for bringing forth bread from the earth (the "ha-motzi" – Matthew 14:19, Luke 22:19). Please note: **He did not bless the bread. He blessed God for providing the bread!** At His last Passover Seder, He also blessed God for creating the fruit of the vine. It is very possible that when He celebrated the Feast of Sukkot, He said the *b'rakhah* known as the "Shehekiyanu," the blessing still said today on festivals and all joyous occasions in Judaism.

This *b'rakhah* is very appropriate for believers to say at all celebrations, holidays, first-time events, graduations, etc.: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this season." This would be a good blessing to say on Mother's Day - May 14, 2006.

Structure of a *B'rakhah*

Every *B'rakhah* that Jewish people say to God begins with the same six words: *Barukh atah Adonai Eloheynu Melech ha'olam...* ("Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe...") These six words are divided into three parts: the Baruch, the Shem and the Malkhut.

#1 The *Barukh*: a statement that God is the source of all blessings. When we acknowledge Him as the Blessor, we place ourselves in the proper position of awe and reverence for our Creator. We bow or bend before Him. In fact, the word *b'rakhah* is related to the word *berekh* or knee. They both share the same three letter root. When we say *Baruch* (Blessed), it is as if we were bowing before royalty, acknowledging God's position and authority. In addition, we are ascribing life-giving, refreshing, cleansing qualities to God since another word *breikhah* (pool or well) is also related to *b'rakhah*.

Atah, "are You," includes the familiar form of you for God rather than the formal third person. This shows relationship and implies intimacy.

#2 The *Shem*: *Adonai Eloheynu*, "O Lord our God," is the name (shem) of God used in a *b'rakhah*. *Adonai* (Lord, in English) is actually the name used in place of the sacred Tetragrammaton, HWHY (see Exodus 6:2). This is done out of respect and concern that God's holy, personal name might be mispronounced and therefore taken in vain. Traditional Jews see *Adonai* as a name indicating close family relationship – like having God's private telephone number. (For more on this read, **And You Shall Be a Blessing by Joel L. Grishaver**).

#3 The *Malkhut*: *Melech Ha Olam*, "King of the Universe" reminds us that God is the Eternal King. He is King of all the earth (Psalm 47:1-3). He is King of all creation (Psalm 95:3-5). He is King forever (Psalm 10:16). He is the King of Glory (Psalm 24:8). The Kingship of God is also a part of the Shema. "*Blessed be His Name, whose glorious Kingdom is forever and ever.*" The *Malkhut* portion of each *B'rakhah* is a good way to continually dethrone self and put God in His proper place in our lives – as Lord and Master of all: our King. Yeshua, the Messiah, is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. His Kingdom is not of this world. The *Malkhut* reminds us that we are servants of a King who, being in the form of God, took on the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7).

With every *b'rakhah* that we say to God, we bring His blessedness, His name, His Kingship into our conscious realm. And we sanctify the moment! God becomes a part of all we do. We do not relegate Him to a few hours on Saturday or Sunday, but rather live and move and have our being in Him (Acts 17:28). **In essence, we come close to fulfilling the biblical injunction of I Corinthians 10:31: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."**

People To People *B'rakhot*

The Bible has many examples of people blessing people. Rebekah's family blessed her (Genesis 24:60), Isaac blessed Jacob (Genesis 28:1), Jacob blessed Pharaoh (Genesis 47:7), and Jacob blessed his grandsons, beginning a sabbath tradition (Genesis 48:20). Saul blessed

David (1 Samuel 26:25) and David blessed the men of Jabesh-Gilead (2 Samuel 6:18). Yeshua blessed little children (Mark 10:16) and His entire Kingdom message in Matthew 5-7 concerns people being blessed who bless others. It has been rightly said that saying a *b'rakhah* over another releases the creative power of God into their life. A *b'rakhah* can set in motion forces of life and good!

The most famous "people to people" *b'rakhah* is the **Priestly Benediction of Numbers 6:24-27**. God gave the *Kohanim* (priests) the power to bless His people in His name. In the same way, we, as a New Covenant royal priesthood, have that same power to pronounce *b'rakhot* over others in partnership with God and in His name.

In closing, we want to pronounce a *b'rakhah* over each one of you reading this letter:

"We bless you with eyes to see the wonders of God, ears to hear the voice of God, a spirit sensitive to the ways of God and a heart that touches the heart of God. We bless you with divine direction and empowerment to fulfill your individual destiny on this earth, as well as a passion for prayer and the things of God, and an ever-increasing dislike for the things of this world. We release you to bless and be a blessing, to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God, and to glorify the Messiah Yeshua in all you do."

In His Precious Name,

Neil and Jamie

Dear Friend of Yeshua,

With your help, Jewish Jewels will soon be "On-the-Air" in Philadelphia and Chicago. These two cities are home to the fourth and fifth largest Jewish populations in the United States (600,000+). We are **blessed** to have the opportunity to present the Good News in the unique Jewish Jewels style to these "Lost Sheep" (Matthew 10:6).

Neil