



# TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

## TEFILLA

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### בְּרַךְ עֲלֵינוּ

**T**his week, there was a scheduled water outage in our Yishuv which was pre-planned to last about eight hours due to some major maintenance work. My children and I went about preparing for the outage by filling up about a dozen bottles of water and another two bathtubs to make sure we'd have enough water for drinking, flushing toilets, scrubbing dishes, and washing hands throughout the day. Beyond the minor discomfort of not being able to use our faucets, we learned an important lesson in how easily we take things for granted. Unlike those who lived generations ago and had to carry heavy water jugs back from the well and unlike farmers who are constantly waiting and praying for the next rainfall, we never give a second thought to our water supply.

On first glance, when you look at the bracha of בְּרַךְ עֲלֵינוּ, it seems like it is not very relevant to most of us, in our modern-day lives. How many of us are concerned with how much rain will fall this season, how well the crops will grow, and whether the ground will be fertile? These are concepts that are just not in our lexicon. For most of us, water comes from the sink and fruits and vegetables come from Rami Levi and they are both usually available in plenty, no matter the season or the weather.

But the commentaries explain that this bracha is not only about agriculture, but about *parnassa* (livelihood) in general. Agriculture is one example of a means to *parnassa*, and it was quite a common one in past generations, but there are many other examples as well. In this bracha, we daven to Hashem to have a good *parnassa*, to be able to support our families with ease and without stress. This is a request that is indeed very relevant to us all.

בְּרַךְ עֲלֵינוּ ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ אֵת הַשָּׁנָה הַזֹּאת וְאֵת כָּל מִינֵי יְבוֹאֲתֶיהָ לְטוֹבָה. וְתֵן בְּרַכָּה/טל וּמִטָּר לְבְרַכָּה עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה וְשִׁבְעֵנוּ מִטּוֹבָה. וּבְרַךְ עֲנִתָנוּ כְּשָׁנִים הַטּוֹבוֹת. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְבַרְכֵךְ הַשָּׁנִים:

*Bless for us Hashem our G-d this year and all varieties of its produce for good and grant blessing/dew and rain for blessing upon the face of the earth and satiate us from Your bounty. Bless our years like the good years. Blessed are You Hashem who blesses the years.*

The *Yisud Eshursh* ועבודה (written in the 1700's by Rav Alexander Ziskind of Horadna) points out that this Tefilla needs to be recited in a very heartfelt and deeply emotional way. Even if one is very wealthy, he needs to have a lot of concentration when he says this bracha because we all know that one's *mazal* can easily change and we always need to place our trust and Tefillot in Hashem. He writes very poignantly – *To my dear brothers and friends – if a person [says the Tefilla of*

*עליו and) asks for rain only with his lips and doesn't concentrate at all on what he is asking for, certainly it is not considered a request or a Tefilla before the One who is בוחן כליות ולב (who examines what is going inside our heart and "intestines"), ואוי לאוהו, בושח (and how deeply embarrassing that should be for us)!*

This bracha is such a vital request for us on a personal level that it is absurd that we are able to run through it on a daily basis without giving it a moment of thought. If you look at the words inside, you will notice that this is a very personal bracha. It's not a general request for a good farming season or general economic prosperity. It's an entreaty to Hashem to ensure that the global prosperity will impact positively on us on a personal level.

ברך עלינו – We ask Hashem that the year should be a good one specifically for us. **Rabbi Eliyahu Munk** in his book **Olam HaTefillot** points out that the **Gemara** in **Sanhedrin 97a** refers to a time period where the vines will yield plenty of grapes but wine will be extremely expensive. We want the year not to be plentiful for the world in general, but to specifically be a good bountiful year for ourselves.

לטובה – We ask that this blessing of abundance should be for our good. Having plenty is not always in our best interest. Sometimes too much materialism distracts us and overwhelms us. So we add in here – Hashem please give us a parnassa, support us and provide for us, but make sure whatever you give us, will be the right amount and will be good for us.

ושבעינו מטובה – The שיח יצחק explains that we can read these words homiletically

– ושבענו מטובה – ושבענו אף במקצת הטוב – we should be satiated even from just part of the good of the land. We ask Hashem to help us to be satisfied with whatever we are given. Without that ability to be happy with what we have, even if Hashem showers on us all the blessing in the world, we will always feel that we are lacking.

וברך שנתינו כשנים הטובות – We ask at the end of the bracha that Hashem should bless our year like the “good years”. On a pshat level, this seems to mean that we want Hashem to give us a year as prosperous as the most successful years that we've experienced in the past. The שיח יצחק adds that we can also understand this on a different level – we already asked Hashem to give us a plentiful year earlier in the bracha. Now we are requesting something else – we ask Hashem that despite our rise in materialistic gain, He should help us to be blessed spiritually like we were in the past. We want to remain as committed and as connected to Hashem as we were when we lived through more difficult times and felt a stronger reliance on Him.

May we all be zocheh to concentrate properly during this important bracha and to experience the fulfillment of all of the different aspects of this request. ■



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