



BADERECH

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Blessings

Rebbi Yaaqov Mutzafi, zy'a, was one of the last spiritual leaders of the ancient Jewish community of Iraq. Upon arrival in Eretz Yisrael, Rebbi Yaaqov became the leader of the Sefardic Edah Chareidit. He would often sit, adorned in his traditional *jalabiya*, in the "Shemesh Sedaqah" Beit Knesset on Rechov Haggai in Yerushalayim, teaching Torah, giving guidance and distributing blessings to petitioners of all stripes. He was known for his fiery *drashot* on the importance of *emunah*. In the course of one *drasha*, he shared the following story of a family from his hometown:

A baby born to a sweet and righteous couple was suffering from an extreme case of colic, and cried day and night. None of the doctors or specialists could figure out the cause of the incessant crying and screaming. After exhausting all medical options, the parents consulted with Chachamim and holy people and tried various *segulot* and

mystically potent remedies, but to no avail. The child continued to scream, and his worn down parents felt helpless.

One day, while walking in the market, the mother found a page of sacred writing laying in the dirt. Though illiterate and unable to identify what it was, she recognized it was a *davar sheb'kedusha*, and quickly picked it up, out of respect. When she got home, the righteous woman cleaned off the page and thought to herself that perhaps Hashem was sending her a healing message for her ailing son.

With simple faith, the mother put the crumpled page under her crying baby's pillow and spoke directly to Hashem: "*Ribbono Shel Olam..* You know very well that I can't read or write. But I do know that this page is holy. Master of the World! In the merit of this holy page, may my son be healed from his suffering!"

That night, for the very first time, the baby slept soundly. This miracle was a complete surprise to the child's father (and neighbors) who had become used to the non-stop screaming. After a few days of peace and

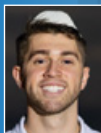
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quiet, the baby's father reflected on the amazing turn of events and wondered aloud as to what had changed. His wife heard him, went to the crib, pulled out the page from under the pillow and showed her husband, saying, "Is there any *segulah* in the world greater than words of Torah?" The husband grew pale as he scanned the page. Trembling he shouted, "Do you realize what you have done? This is a page of the *Tochacha*, the rebukes and fearful punishments... this is what you put under our child's head!"

Smiling, she responded, "My dear husband, you know I can't read... how could I possibly know what's written there? All I know is that it is from the Torah — the sweetest gift that our Father in Heaven has given us as an expression of His love. And look! In the merit of the Torah, Hashem has sent a complete healing to our son!"

When the great maggid of Brooklyn Heights, Reb Yitzhak Buxbaum, zy'a, shared this story of *temimus*, sincerity and simple faith, he added: "How great is the power of faith that turns Hashem's judgment to mercy and turns curses into blessings!"

Our *sedra* lays out the multitude of blessings inherent in living a life of following Hashem's will, including health, happiness and peace of mind:

וּבָאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל־הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהַשִּׁיגָךְ כִּי תִשְׁמַע
בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

"And all these blessings will come upon you and *hisigucha* ('cleave to you'), if you obey the Lord, your God...." (Devarim, 28:2)

It is interesting to note that parallel language frames the ramifications that will befall us in the *Tochacha* if we turn our backs on Hashem:

הָיָה אִם־לֹא תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּמֹר לְעִשׂוֹת

אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵצִוְךָ הַיּוֹם וּבָאוּ
עֲלֶיךָ כָּל־הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהַשִּׁיגוֹךְ:

"And it will be, if you do not obey the Lord, your God, to observe to fulfill all His commandments and statutes which I am commanding you this day, that all these curses will **come upon you** and *hisigucha* ('over-take you')." (Devarim, 28:2, 15)

In both passages there are two steps: first the blessings or curses "come upon you", and then "*hisigucha*" (they 'cleave to you' or 'over-take you'). The word *hisigucha* is a construction of the verb להשיג, meaning 'to grasp' or 'understand', and also 'to reach' or 'acquire'. This alludes to our process of interpretation; first something comes upon us, and then we 'acquire' an experience of it according to our *hasagah*, our understanding. The way we 'reach' out to and interpret phenomena is the same way we 'acquire' and experience them. Whether something is a curse or a blessing depends on our *da'as*, our consciousness. This is illustrated in a story of the Alter Rebbe, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi:

The Alter Rebbe was the regular *baal korei* in his shul. It happened that one year that the Rebbe was away for Parshas Ki Savo, and someone else *leined* instead. That week after *kriyas haTorah*, Dov Ber, the Rebbe's twelve year old son, fell ill, and it became clear that the cause had been the stress and heaviness of the reading of the *Tochacha*. The effect upon little Dov Ber was so intense that his father was even hesitant to let him fast on Yom Kippur almost a month later. The doctors were astounded at the physiological response, and asked the boy, "But don't you hear the *Tochacha* every year?" Dov Ber responded, "When my Father reads the *Tochacha*, you don't hear curses!"

The days of Elul revolve around Teshuva, the premise of which is our *emunah peshutah*, wholehearted and simple faith in Hashem's promise for forgiveness: "*Vayomer Hashem, Salachti k'devarecha*, "And Hashem said, 'I have forgiven them in accordance with your word.'" (Bamidbar, 14:20). With our own 'word', our own compassionate understanding and interpretation of the mistakes that have come upon us, Hashem will forgive us.

Then, when we approach the Compassionate One with *emunah peshutah* in honest *teshuvah*, the words of Selichos can turn our *aveiros* into expressions of yearning and even closeness to Hashem. Indeed, how great is the power of simple faith in Hashem's desire to forgive us, heal us, and draw us close — for it turns curses into blessings!

May we all experience a year of revealed health, blessings, and closeness to Hashem.

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