

# Kindert Torah

## Parashas Vayishlach

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### Food to Serve You

"Yitzchak Avinu had a very big *bracha* when he settled in Gerar, Abba."

"He certainly did, Avi – *meah shearim!*"

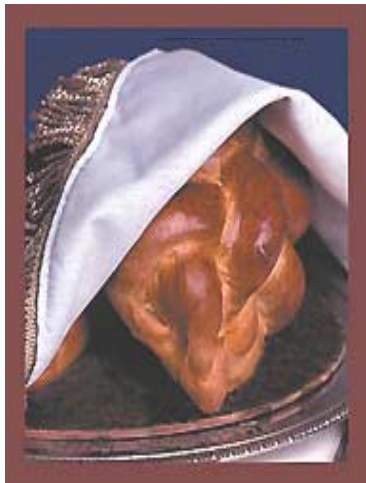
"That means that the grain he planted yielded a crop one hundred times greater than expected!"<sup>1</sup>

"Precisely, Avi. When the *melochim* (heavenly angels) saw this they proclaimed, 'Blessed are You Hashem, who blesses the years.' The Elders subsequently fixed these words into the ninth *bracha* in the *Amida* – the blessing for *parnassa* (livelihood).<sup>2</sup> In this *bracha* we ask the Almighty to bring us *parnassa* with *nachas* (pleasantly) and not with *tsar* (stress); with *heter* (in a permissible manner) and not with *issur* (forbidden ways and means). We do not desire riches in order to take pleasures from this world; rather we need sustenance in order to serve Hashem without *tirdos* (hassles) by toiling in Torah, and fulfilling mitzvot."<sup>3</sup>

"Abba, over two months have passed since Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Our judgments for life, death, poverty, suffering, losses, and profits, were decided back then. What is the point of further prayer?"

"You are really on the ball, Avi. The Meiri<sup>4</sup> presents two answers to your thoughtful question. Firstly, some sages are of the opinion that we are judged every day. According to the second opinion, although our judgment was on Rosh Hashanah, we need not despair; rather, we should pray and do *teshuva* every day. Even a harsh *gezar din* (decree) can be overturned with *teshuva* and profuse *tefillah*. Hashem's gate is never locked before one who prays and does *teshuva*."

"Now that we have a background on this *bracha* Avi, let us explain the meaning of the words, 'Bless on our behalf, O Hashem our G-d, this year'. This refers to all of the events that will happen in the world this year in general. 'And all the varieties of its produce'. This is a request for a specific blessing for the produce.<sup>5</sup> 'For the good' – it should be a year of good business dealings that result in low prices.<sup>6</sup> Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch explains that the year may be blessed with abundant produce; however, we may not benefit from that good. For example, the food may be expensive because people crookedly try to inflate the price by withholding produce from the market or destroying it. Therefore, we ask Hashem not only to 'bless' the fields, but also to arrange events in such a manner that the 'blessed' year may provide a blessing to mankind also, and that the abundant



harvest of field and pasture may bring happiness and prosperity to the homes of men. Another explanation of 'for the good' is that the blessing should fulfill a purpose that is good in Your eyes, Hashem, and not utilized to transgress or rebel.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, wealth can bring a person to sin, lead a life without *yiras shomayim* (fear of heaven) full of embarrassment and disgrace, or run after *kovod* (honor) which drives him out of reality."<sup>5</sup> "Oy vey! We hope that never happens Abba."

"I agree Avi. Let us continue with the words, 'and bestow (dew and rain for) blessing on the face of the earth'. We request that the rain and dew be blessed – that they fall at the right time, the right strength, and in the right place. Additionally, no one should have *tsar ayin* (jealousy of another's prosperity), and may there be peace in the world.<sup>6</sup> The Maggid Tsedek adds another explanation. 'And bestow (dew and rain for) blessing' – our handiwork should be blessed, as the Gemora<sup>8</sup> relates, 'Great is the day of rain, as even the coin in the pocket is blessed from it, as the verse<sup>9</sup> states, "to provide rain for your Land in its time, and to bless all your handiwork."<sup>10</sup>

"Abba, what good is all the blessing if we are not satisfied?"

"That is precisely the next request in the *bracha*, 'and satisfy us from Your bounty'. The Vilna Gaon explains that the word bounty is referring to the

plenty of Eretz Yisrael. The entire world receives blessing from the Holy Land. Rashi elucidates the words, 'And you will eat and be satisfied'<sup>10</sup> to mean that although we may eat only a little food, we will nonetheless be satisfied. We should also be spiritually contented and not drawn after our base desires.<sup>11</sup> Others relate that we should be alive and merit satisfaction from the good bounty that Hashem gives this year. 'Like the good years' – like the year that Yitzchak planted and harvested *meah shearim*."<sup>6</sup>

"Abba, I understand that the impoverished and those of modest income need to ask Hashem for *parnassa*. However, why do wealthy people need to say this blessing three times a day?"

"That is a very good question, Avi. The affluent ones can pray for their less fortunate brethren who are not so blessed with riches. The sefer *Yesod Vi'shoresh Ho'avodah* exhorts us to beseech Hashem with a broken heart. 'Please bring us good produce this year so that the poor people, the destitute, and the unfortunate can have a bit of relief!' The wealthy

should also have *kavannah* that they themselves and their families not lose their possessions, as did Marta Bas Baytus, a woman of immense wealth who became destitute during the siege of Yerushalayim.<sup>12</sup>

"Lastly, Rav Yonason Eibushitz in his sefer *Yaaros Devash* elucidates a request for the spiritual content of the food. In the morning prayers, one should turn his heart towards Hashem to provide him his bread permissibly, and not in a forbidden manner. If there is a hint of any forbidden thing in the food, it will defile the person's entire body and he will have no nourishment for his soul. If his bread is stolen, or violates Torah prohibitions, or he sits down to eat with people who will cause him to sin, such a table is full of vomit and excrement without the Omnipresent. Consequently, the spirit of holiness leaves the food, and the spirit of defilement that remains sticks to his soul and turns him to evil. On the other hand, if the food is totally permissible, it contains sustenance for the soul, for it elevates all of the sparks (of holiness) in the food, as the verse<sup>13</sup> states, 'Not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live.'"

"Abba, you have really whetted my appetite to recite the ninth *bracha* with tremendous *kavannah*."

"May Hashem answer all of your *tefillot* and provide you with abundant *parnassa* so that you can serve Him with *nachas* your entire life."

#### Kindertlach . . .

Hashem created us with a body that needs food to survive. This food is not automatically available to us; rather we need to acquire it. We need His *siyata di'shmaya* (heavenly assistance) to obtain our sustenance. Therefore, we pray to Him three times a day 'Bless on our behalf, O Hashem our G-d, this year' and all the varieties of its produce for the good.' With Your help may the land, its produce, and indeed all the fruits of our labors be blessed. May we have more than we need, and may it come to us in a permissible manner. May it be used only for the good – to serve You by toiling in Torah and keeping mitzvot. And may we succeed in uplifting our souls by elevating all of the sparks of *kedusha* in the food.

<sup>1</sup> Rashi on Bereshis 26:12

<sup>2</sup> Levush in Otzer HaTefillos

<sup>3</sup> Seder HaYom

<sup>4</sup> Nedarim 49b

<sup>5</sup> Iyun Tefillah

<sup>6</sup> Eitz Yosef, Maggid Tsedek

<sup>7</sup> Avodas HaTomid in Avodas HaTefillah

<sup>8</sup> Taanis 8b

<sup>9</sup> Devarim 28:12

<sup>10</sup> Devarim 11:15

<sup>11</sup> Siach Yitzchak in Avodas HaTefillah

<sup>12</sup> Gittin 56a

<sup>13</sup> Devarim 8:3