
Bless Our Years: Learning to Want What We Have

The Bracha We All Say... But Don't Really Think About

In the *Amidah*, there is a bracha we rattle off three times a day, almost on autopilot:

“Barech aleinu Hashem
Elokeinu et ha’shanah hazot...
Bless for us this year... all
kinds of grain for good...
and grant dew and rain for
blessing on the face of the
earth...
and satisfy us from Your
bounty... and bless our years
like the good years...”

Sounds beautiful. But what are we really asking for?

The nusach changes in winter and summer. The wording is slightly longer in the winter, with more emphasis on rain and crops. But the **main body** of the bracha is almost identical year-round.

We’re not actually just davening for “money.” We’re davening for something much deeper and more dangerous:

- How we see other people’s success.
- How much is “enough” for us.
- What our *parnassa* does to our souls.

“All Kinds of Grain” – Why So Specific?

The bracha doesn’t just say, “Bless the crops” or “Bless the economy.” It says:

“Bless... *kol minei tevuatah* —
all different kinds of grain.”

Why this long shopping list? Why not keep it simple?

Chazal explain: different people plant different crops.

One person plants wheat.

Another plants corn.

One grows alfalfa sprouts (which, let’s be honest, nobody wanted until a health influencer in California decided we all have to pretend to enjoy crunchy grass).

Someone else grows wheatgrass. (And if your kid goes to school and tells the teacher, “My grandfather grows weed on his

kitchen counter,” you have some explaining to do.)

The siddur is training us to say:

“Hashem, don’t just bless *my* field.
Bless **every** field.”

If I sell socks, I’m not just davening for the sock industry. I’m also davening for:

- t-shirt companies
- trucking companies
- grocery stores
- wheat farmers
- fishermen

Because **my** parnassa is tied to **their** parnassa.

This bracha is a spiritual detox from the most natural feeling in the world:

“Hashem, bless me... and if
You have some leftover, maybe
bless my neighbor — but not as
much.”

We don’t say that out loud, of course. But inside, many people are secretly okay with others doing well... as long as they’re half a step behind.

“I’ll take the presidential suite; they can have vice-president.”

“I’ll be top of the market; they can be the runner-up.”

The bracha of “kol minei tevuatah” says:

“I actually *want* every lane of
the economy to do well.
I want *other people’s* grain to
be blessed too.”

Hashem’s Economy Is Not a Pizza Pie

Judaism’s view of parnassa is radically different from the secular world.

In a human economy, more for you means less for me.

In Hashem’s economy, **no one can take a single cent that was meant for you.**

If someone opens a pizza shop across from your pizza shop, he cannot steal even one penny of your Heaven-assigned parnassa. If your store closes, it was going to close anyway; the competition was just the *delivery system* for a decree that was already written.

If we truly internalized this, envy would evaporate overnight.

“Envy is the thief of joy.”

It doesn’t reduce your bank balance; it just empties your heart. It takes what you *do* have and whispers, “Not enough.”

So the first layer of this bracha is:

“Hashem, let there be enough
blessing in the world that I can
be happy for others too.
Let me not need their failure for
my success.
Let there be shalom — peace

— between people over money.”

When Hashem Creates a Shortfall... On Purpose

There's another layer.

Hashem doesn't need us to daven in order to *have* what to give. But sometimes He **creates a gap** specifically so we will turn to Him.

If we don't ask — we often don't get.

So we live in this dance:
Hashem creates need → we daven → He fills it.

But once He decides we should have something, it can arrive in ways that make zero sense:

- A random bonus.
- An unexpected client.
- “Out of nowhere” generosity from someone you barely know.

One of my favorite examples of this:

When we moved from London to New York, we were worried about raising our kids in a more materialistic environment. Manhattan private school, brand-name everything, logos with their own kippah lines.

Our kids were *amazing*. They didn't ask for Prada, Aviator Nation, Canada Goose.

Then winter hit.

In London, winter is “annoying.” In New York, winter is “Why do my eyelashes hurt?”

My daughter walked to school in her London coat and froze.

She admired a classmate's coat and asked what brand it was.

“Canada Goose,” the girl said. “But... you probably can't afford it.”

Ouch.

The painful part? She was right.

What my daughter didn't know is that the night before, I had spoken to a woman from the community about where to buy proper coats. That woman quietly decided:

“They're new, they're freezing, they need help. I'll just send them coats.”

Friday night, in the middle of the Shabbat meal, a Bloomingdale's delivery arrived with **seven Canada Goose coats**.

Next time my daughter walked into school...

“Hi.”

Hashem has endless ways to answer tefillah — and to protect our dignity at the same time.

Dew, Rain, and the Maslow Pyramid of Parnassa

The bracha asks for **tal u'matar** — dew and rain.

Picture Hashem's hand on the "gas pedal" of blessing:

- **Rain** = full downpour, heavy flow of abundance.
- **Dew** = the minimal, subtle moisture keeping life alive.

We're asking for both:

1. **Basic survival** – food, shelter, warmth.
2. **Beyond survival** – that we not just live, but be *happy* with how we live.
3. **Inner peace** – that we can look back on our life and feel at peace with what we had.

Because if Hashem gives you more than your spiritual "stomach" can handle, the blessing becomes poison.

The Hebrew Word for Money... and the Math of Never Enough

What's the Hebrew word for money?

Kesef.

But **kesef** also means **yearning** — *kisufim*.

Money and wanting are welded together.

Chazal say:

"Whoever has 100 wants 200.
Whoever has 200 wants 400."

The Kotzker Rebbe adds:

- The one with 100 is 100 away from what he wants.
- The one with 200 is 200 away from what he wants.

The more you have, the **further** you get from what you *want* — if "want" always means "double."

No wonder the king in the Midrash meets a pauper who says, "I'm richer than you."

"How so?" asks the king.

"You," says the pauper, "are miles away from what you think you need.

Me? I am always only a few pennies away from what I need."

Sometimes the richer we become, the *poorer* we feel.

So part of this bracha is a frightening question:

"Hashem... am I even asking for the right thing?"

We may walk into the pharmacy of Heaven, needing something for a headache... and ask for spiritual hemorrhoid cream.

Marta bat Baisus and the Tragedy of Only Wanting the Best

The Gemara tells of a wealthy woman during the siege of Jerusalem: **Marta bat Baisus**.

She sends her servant to get the finest flour.

He comes back: “Sold out. But they still have regular flour.”

“Fine,” she says, “get that.”

By the time he returns, the regular flour is gone. Only coarse flour remains.

She sends him again — but now even the coarse flour is gone. Only bran, the lowest quality, is left.

Step by step, she slowly lowers her standards.

But each time she finally accepts the new reality... it has already disappeared.

The commentaries ask: why didn't she just say, “**Buy whatever they have**”?

Because psychologically, for someone used to the highest level, each step down felt worse than death.

“I would rather starve than eat food beneath my station.”

And eventually... she did.

When we ask Hashem to bless *all kinds* of grain, we're also asking:

“Hashem, help me be the kind of person who can find joy in

simple blessings too.

Don't let my life become a tragic story of chasing the 'finest flour' while starving in a world full of perfectly good bread.”

Scones, Kichel, and Learning to Like What You Have

You can actually watch this process happen in real time.

Raise your hand if you've ever eaten a **scone**.

Most people's first reaction:

“How do English people like this thing?!”

It's dry.

It's crumbly.

It tastes like someone started making a cake and quit halfway.

And yet, an Englishman will proudly refuse a moist, fluffy “improved” scone.

Because they've **trained themselves** to enjoy:

- the dryness
- the crumble
- the ritual of butter, jam, clotted cream

It became a cultural delicacy.

Jews do the same thing with **kichel**.
It's just a cracker... and yet there are 97 kinds of it in the bakery, and your family will die on the hill that *only* "our" brand is edible.

What changed?

Did the scone or the kichel transform into something magical?

No. **We did**.

We learned to enjoy what we have.

"The only way I will ever have what I want is if I learn to want what I have."

That's a huge part of this bracha.

Jobs as Different Grains: Thank You for Many Kinds of Work

"All kinds of grain" also means **all kinds of jobs**.

There are:

- jobs that demand youth and physical strength
- jobs that trade on wisdom and experience
- jobs that fit introverts
- jobs that fit extroverts
- jobs that use creativity, others that use analysis

When we say this bracha, we can also be saying:

"Hashem, thank You for creating a world with a role for everyone.

Let each person find the kind of *parnassa* that uses their **talents** and gives them **dignity and satisfaction**, not just a paycheck."

I often tell people: **don't let your parents retire** completely.

Not because you want to save on babysitting.

Because when people retire from all responsibility, they start to *expire*:

- Their mind gets dull.
- They go out less.
- Their world shrinks.

In Hebrew, an old person is a **zaken** — but Chazal also read it as an acronym:

"Zeh she-kanah chochmah" — one who has acquired wisdom.

The people who age best are the ones still **thinking**, still **using** what they've acquired.

Hashem created jobs that:

- a 25-year-old can do with energy
- a 75-year-old can do with wisdom

That too is "kol minei tevuatah."

A Sticker, a Child, and a Reset Button

Once I visited a family that had almost nothing.

The father had passed away. The single mother was doing her best to raise the kids with dignity.

Someone who came with me brought a little gift — a simple sticker — for the youngest child.

The boy's eyes lit up.

“Wow! The colors are so bright!
It's so beautiful.
I don't know where to put it...
because wherever I stick it, I
won't be able to see it all the
time.”

For a **sticker**.

Sometimes the best thing we can do for our parnassa is not to add more **income**, but to reset our **expectations** — to re-learn how to be amazed by a sticker.

This is also part of the bracha:

“Hashem, let people in the
world find *satiation*
not only in how *much* they
have, but in how deeply they
can appreciate even a little.”

Chewing Slowly: Not Just for Food

Do you ever wonder why dieticians tell people to **chew slowly**?

- It gives your brain time to register fullness.
- It slows your pace, so you don't overshoot what you need.

If you eat at high speed, you'll definitely eat more than you needed.

The same is true with life.

We consume:

- experiences
- purchases
- accomplishments

so fast that our emotional “stomach” never has time to say:

“You know what? I'm already full.”

If we would **chew our blessings more slowly** — notice them, savor them, speak about them — we'd need a lot less “food” to feel satisfied.

So in this bracha we're also asking:

“Hashem, slow down the
treadmill just a bit.
Help me feel full from what I
already have.”

“Fill Our Hands” – But Only As Big As Our Hands Actually Are

Later in the bracha we say:

“U’vaerch shenoteinu
ka-shanim ha-tovot.
U’maleh yadeinu
mi-birchotecha...
Fill our hands from Your
blessings...”

What does it mean to have our **hands filled**?

Each person has different-sized hands — physically and spiritually.

- Some can handle huge amounts of money without losing themselves.
- Others are destroyed by even a modest raise.

We’re asking:

“Hashem, fill **my** hands — not my neighbor’s.
Give me as much as I can hold
without getting sick.”

Too much of anything — even ice cream, pizza, wealth — eventually makes you ill.

And here’s a powerful re-reading:

“Fill my hands from Your
blessings...
and from the **greatest gift of**

all — the hands themselves
You designed for me.”

Hashem custom-made your “capacity”:

- your ability to handle success
- your resilience in the face of pressure
- your tolerance for responsibility

He knows how much blessing can sit in your bank account without crushing your soul.

So maybe the bracha isn’t:

“Hashem, give me what I think my hands can hold,”

but:

“Hashem, You designed these hands.
Please match the blessing to the hands You built.”

“Poteach Et Yadecha” – Whose Hands Are Those, Really?

We say every day in *Ashrei*:

“Poteach et **yadecha** u’masbia
lechol chai ratzon”
“You open Your hands and
satisfy every living being.”

Whose hands?

On one level — Hashem’s.

On another level — **ours**.

Hashem feeds the world by moving **our** hands:

- the hand that writes a check
- the hand that bags groceries
- the hand that holds another hand so someone doesn't feel alone

When we ask Hashem to fill our hands, we're also asking:

"Let my hands be an honest extension of Yours.
Let the way I use money reflect that it came from the Ribono Shel Olam."

Rav Chanina ben Dosa: Praying for "Everyone"... Including Himself

The Gemara tells of **Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa**, whose prayers were famously answered.

Once he was carrying home a bag of salt. Rain started pouring, and his salt was getting ruined.

He looked up and said:

"Master of the world, the whole world is happy and Chanina is sad?"

Immediately the rain stopped.

When he got home and put the salt away, he prayed again:

"Master of the world, now Chanina is happy and the whole world is sad?"

And the rain returned.

My rabbi used to say: it sounds like he had split personalities!

But there's a profound idea here.

Rabbi Chanina never separated his "self" from "everyone."

- When the world was blessed but he was not, that wasn't *really* "everyone."
- When he was blessed but the world was not, that also wasn't "everyone."

So even when he asked for himself, he framed it as:

"I'm part of the klal.
Please let **everyone**, including me, be okay."

That sincerity is what Hashem responds to.

The Golden Table Leg: When Heaven *Takes Back* a Blessing

Another famous story:

Rabbi Chanina and his wife were desperately poor. She begged him:

“Daven that Hashem should pay you in advance from your reward in Olam HaBa.”

He did, and miraculously a **golden table leg** appeared from Heaven.

They were elated... until his wife had a dream.

They were in Gan Eden, and every tzaddik sat at a golden table with **three legs**.

Theirs had only **two**.

“Take it back!” she cried. “I don’t want us to be missing a leg in the World to Come.”

Rabbi Chanina davened again, and the leg was taken back.

The Gemara comments: The most astonishing part of the story is not that they received the golden leg — but that **Heaven agreed to take back a blessing**. That almost never happens.

Hashem generally **gives** more easily than He **removes**.

Which means:

It’s usually much harder to daven, “Hashem, take this blessing away, it’s too much for me,” than to daven, “Please give it in the right size to begin with.”

So when Hashem limits our success, or closes one door, this might *already* be the merciful calibration we would never dare to ask for.

When “No” Is Actually “Yes” – To Your Own Tefillah

Sometimes:

- You don’t have enough to live in that fancy neighborhood.
- You can’t keep up a certain lifestyle.
- You’re forced to move, to downsize, to change schools, to change careers.

At the time, it feels like exile, embarrassment, failure.

Years later, you look back and realize:

“That move gave my kids better friends.

That school was perfect for them.

That community saved my family.

That ‘no’ was the greatest ‘yes’ of my life.”

What if many of the things we *didn’t* receive were actually direct answers to this very bracha?

“Hashem, bless my years like the **good years** —

the years where the blessing **made me better**, not just richer.”

The “Good Old Days” and the Art of Not Lying to Yourself

We end the bracha:

“U’varech shenoteinu
ka-shanim ha-tovot — bless our
years like the good years.”

Everyone loves to talk about “the good old days.”

- “School used to be better.”
- “Kids used to be simpler.”
- “Raising children today is so much harder.”

Is it?

- Yes, technology makes parenting harder.
- But technology also lets you track your kid’s bus, see your grandchildren on video from Israel, get world-class shiurim on your phone, help your child understand math via Khan Academy instead of screaming over homework.

Every generation has its **gifts** and its **challenges**.

The yetzer hara’s trick is to:

- take the **best** of the past

- compare it to the **worst** of the present
- and then say, “See? Your life is worse now.”

So we daven:

“Hashem, bless *these* years —
and help us see the good in
them
like we selectively see the
good in the past.”

Don’t trade all your **today**s for one imagined **tomorrow**, or for a polished, fake memory of *yesterday*.

Hatov VeHaMeitiv – Good, and Good in a Good Way

The bracha ends:

“Ki Kel tov u’meytiv Atah —
for You are a good God, Who
does good.”

We know this phrase from another bracha:
“**HaTov veHaMeitiv**” — said when you
drink a second, *better* wine after already
having made *Borei pri ha’gafen* on the first.

- First wine: good.
- Second, better wine: **good on top of good**.

That’s what we’re saying here:

“Hashem, You didn’t just create
a world with *parnassa*.

You created **layers** of good inside it:
different jobs, different seasons, different paths, different timings.”

Sometimes the goodness is obvious — a raise, a windfall, a perfect job.

Sometimes the goodness is hidden — a closed door, a delayed payment, moving to a cheaper place that ends up saving your kids spiritually.

Hashem is **tov** — He gives good.
And also **meitiv** — He gives good *in the best possible way*, even when we don’t see it.

Bringing It All Together

When we say **Barech Aleinu**, we are not simply asking:

“Hashem, send money.”

We’re really saying:

- Bless *everyone’s* grain, *everyone’s* job.
- Calm my envy.
- Help me see that no one can steal what’s truly mine.
- Let me be satisfied with less, if that is healthier for my soul.
- Match my income to the size of my spiritual “hands.”

- Allow me to be Your hand to others.
- Give me not just more stuff — but the **ability to enjoy** what I already have.
- Bless my *now* like I romanticize my *then*, and help me stop lying about how perfect the past was.
- Make my *parnassa* a *bracha*, not a curse.

“Barech aleinu... ki Kel tov u’mektiv Atah
– Bless us, because You are good, and You do good, in good ways.”

Amen.

Key Takeaways

1. **Parnassa is not a zero-sum game.**
No one can take what Heaven truly assigned to you. Competition is just the delivery system of God’s decrees, not their cause.
2. **“All kinds of grain” means all kinds of people.**
We’re davening for everyone’s field, everyone’s industry, everyone’s job — not just our own.
3. **Satisfaction is as much a miracle as income.**
Hashem can bless us to feel full on “one bite” — not just in quantity, but in our ability to appreciate small

gifts.

4. **Your “hand size” is custom-built.**
Some people can handle more money without breaking; some can't. Barech Aleinu is a request for the right-sized bracha, not infinite numbers.
5. **Sometimes “no” is the deepest “yes.”**
What we didn't get may be Heaven protecting our Olam HaBa, our children, or our future self.
6. **Don't trade all your todays for one imaginary tomorrow.**
Blessing our years “like the good years” means learning to see *these* years as the good years too — with their own unique gifts.

see your current challenges?

4. **What kind of “grain” is your job?**
Does your work fit your talents and soul, or is it only about the paycheck? What would a healthier alignment look like?
 5. **If Hashem offered you either twice your current income or double your current *satisfaction* — which would you choose, honestly?**
What does that answer reveal?
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Shabbat Table Questions

1. **When have you seen someone else's success trigger envy in you?**
How might the belief that “no one can take my parnassa” change your emotional reaction?
2. **What's one “simple sticker” in your life right now that you've stopped noticing?**
How can you start “chewing more slowly” and enjoying it?
3. **Can you think of a time when a financial or life “setback” turned out to be a blessing later?**
How might that reframe how you