

Blessings

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

What is a Beracha, a blessing? What does it mean?

Just before Jacob dies, he blesses his grandsons Ephraim and Menashe. We still use the words he used when we bless our children every Friday night before we sit down to the meal. This in addition of course to the text of the blessing the priests gave the people of Israel in the Temple. In the blessing, he gives he is saying that one person, one tribe will succeed more than the other. Is this determinism? Does it mean the kids no longer have a choice? That it has all been decide on high? Or is it rather a prediction based on their qualities?

After that Jacob calls all his sons together, not for a blessing "to tell them what will be in the future."

Very often the two very different concepts are confused. We think a beracha is some sort of promise or guarantee for the future. But is not a guarantee that the future will be rosy. It is not a declaration of certainty. It is an expression of love, care and concern. In a similar way when recite a beracha before enjoying anything material in this world we are expressing our gratitude, love and devotion to the Divine source of everything.

When we bless our children, we express our love and concern for them and the hope that life will be good to them.

What Jacob was telling all his sons was what he saw in their different characters and how that would affect them and their futures. That is a gift of prophecy that none of us have nowadays although a lot of professional mind readers, astrologers and card readers claim to be able to do. The Torah rejects such attempts to preempt or predict. Instead it demands of us that we are proactive and do our best to succeed in whatever area it may be. Humans are weak however and often need to find props.

But we all need the support of love that parents, family and friends can give us. We need the encouragement of teachers, rabbis and leaders. And that is what a beracha really does, no more no less.