

On Yom Kippur at Kol Nidre, I spoke about "Tzures and Naches" and how the rabbis teach us that one should bless the bad (*tzures*) as well as the good (*naches*):

חייב אדם	<i>A person is obligated</i>
לברך על הרעה	<i>to recite a blessing on bad things</i>
כשם שמברך	<i>just as a person is obligated</i>
על הטובה.	<i>to recite a blessing on good things.</i>
משנה ברכות ט:	Mishnah Berakhot 9:5

In the sermon, I only quoted that line. But the talmudic discussion based on it (Berakhot 60b), offers tremendous additional insights. The Talmud quotes that line and then asks this very straightforward, but audacious question:

מאי	What does it mean:
"חייב לברך על הרעה	"One is obligated to recite a
כשם שמברך על	blessing for the bad
הטובה?"	just as for the good"?

We so appreciate the urgency of this question. This is our question too. After all, if anyone were to tell you that you have to make a blessing for bad things just as you make a blessing for good things, it would not seem to make sense. It is counterintuitive because we tend to associate blessings with good things. **מאי - What does it mean?** is a question of content - *explain this to me* - and a question of emotion - *What are you talking about? Are you kidding me?* And, exactly what blessing are you supposed to say for that matter? We learn elsewhere in the mishna, that the blessing for good things is "הטוב והמטיב"- *Blessed are You God... Who is good and does good*. So, when the rabbis tell us to bless for *tzures* as well as *naches*, do they mean that we have to recite the *same* blessing for bad things as we do for good things?



אלימא	<i>If we say that you have to recite a blessing</i>
כשם שמברך	<i>for bad things, does it mean that</i>
על הטובה	<i>just as one recites a blessing for a good</i>
הטוב	<i>thing with the blessing formula:</i>
והמטיב,	<i>Who is good and does good,</i>
כך מברך על	<i>so too, one should recite a blessing</i>
הרעה	<i>for a bad thing</i>
הטוב	<i>with the same blessing formula:</i>
והמטיב?"	<i>Who is good and does good?</i>

That makes no sense! How can we say the blessing, "God is good" when life is bad? It feels cruel. And on top of that objection, we have another objection: the rabbis have told us elsewhere what we *should* say for bad things.

והתנן על בשורות	<i>After all, we learned in a different</i>
טובות אומר	<i>place in our mishna that over good</i>
"הטוב והמטיב,"	<i>tidings one recites: "Who is good</i>
על בשורות רעות	<i>and does good", while over bad</i>
אומר	<i>tidings one recites:</i>
... ברוך	<i>"Blessed (are you God, King...)</i>
דיין האמת!"	<i>the true Judge"?</i>

So why are the rabbis making this blanket statement, if we already know what we are supposed to say when bad things happen? What's the point that they are trying to make?

אמר רבא:	Rava said:
לא נצרכה,	The mishna's statement <i>was only necessary</i>
אלא	<i>to instruct us</i>
לקבולינהו	<i>to accept</i> bad things
בשמחה.	<i>with</i> the same <i>joy</i> with which we accept good
	things, and not about which blessing to recite.

Thus, when the mishnah tells us to bless the bad as we bless the good, it is not saying to us to use the same **blessing** formulation, but to have the same **disposition**: joy. That seems to be a tall order for most people. Most people would have a hard time facing their misery in a spirit of joy. Rashi is helpful on this point. He explains that the term:

לקבולינהו	To accept bad tidings with the same joy
בשמחה	- means
לברך על מדת	<i>to bless on the occasion of</i>
פריעות	<i>this misfortune</i>
בלבב שלם:	with a whole heart.

Joy may be too much to ask a person. But **wholeheartedness** is not. Wholeheartedness is a spirit of acceptance. Equanimity. Accepting misery with joy sounds masochistic. But accepting it with equanimity sounds quite wise. Now the talmud asks a key question:



אמר רב אחא	Rav Aha said in the name of Rabbi
משום רבי לוי:	Levi:
מאי קרא?	What is the verse that alludes to this?

When it comes to wisdom, you can't just pull things out of the air. Wisdom, especially wisdom that structures one's behavior in the form of what to do when you have *tzures*, has to be based on a biblical text. **What is the biblical basis for saying that you need to make a blessing for bad things?** Or what is the allusion for this wisdom in the Bible? **מאי קרא?** The talmud is going to present us with three different verses from three different rabbis.

1. Rav Aha: Blessing God is the Ethical Response

הקד ומשפט	"Of loving-kindness and justice
אשירה	I will sing;
לה ה' אומרה.	unto You, O Lord, will I sing praises"
— אם חסד	(Psalms 101:1). Rav Aha explains: If it
אשירה,	is loving-kindness - I will sing,
— ואם משפט	and if it is justice -
אשירה.	I will sing.

חסד-loving-kindness is a good thing. **משפט-justice**, can go either way. If you win your lawsuit, it's a good thing. If you lose, it's a bad thing. And that's the point. Either way, **I will sing unto You, O Lord**. When life is good, I will sing, and when life is tough, I will **also** sing. But that's not the only point. We have to



look deeper into the context of Psalm 101. For the sake of brevity, Rav Aha only quotes one verse from this psalm. But he is relying on us to recall the rest of it, in which we find this: *I will study the way of the blameless; when shall I attain it? I will live without blame within my house...* Psalm 101 is a psalm about the ethical life. By using a verse from this psalm about **ethics**, Rav Aha is saying: *The most important thing in life is to live **ethically**. Blessing God when bad things happen is an **ethical response**. It is what a blameless, ethical person does.*

2. R. Shmuel bar Nahmani: Blessing God out of Trust

<p>רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר, מהכא: "בה' אהלל דבר באלהים אהלל דבר". — בה' אהלל דבר זו מדה טובה, באלהים אהלל דבר — זו מדת פורענות.</p>	<p>Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said: The proof is <i>from here</i>, as it is stated: "In YHW-, I will praise His word; in Elohim, I will praise His word" (Psalms 56:11). The Gemara explains that YHW-, I will praise His word; that is for God's measure of goodness, while: In Elohim, I will praise His word; that stands for God's measure of justice demonstrated by punishment.</p>
--	---

God goes by many names. Each name reflects a different attribute. The name **YHW-**, represents the attribute of **goodness** (compassion); the name **Elohim**, represents the attribute of **justice**. When we perceive God's **goodness**, (when we have *naches*), we praise God. And when we perceive God's justice, (when we have *tzurres*), we should praise God as well. But a close examination of Psalm 56 yields an additional layer of meaning. It is a psalm about **trust** in God. *When I am afraid, I trust in You, in God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid; what can mortals do to me?* By using a verse from this psalm about trust, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani is saying: *Blessing God for the good and the bad is what a **trusting person** does. This is a response that emerges from the **trusting soul**. I trust God when I am afraid. And when I experience suffering I trust God just as when I experience joy. My blessing comes out of trust.*

3. Rabbi Tanhum: Blessing God out of Gratitude

<p>רבי תנחום אמר: מהכא: "כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא", "צרה ונגון אמצא ובשם ה' אקרא".</p>	<p>Rabbi Tanhum said: The proof is <i>from here</i>, as it is stated: "I will lift up the cup of salvation and I shall call upon the name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:13), and: "I found trouble and sorrow, but I called upon the name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:3-4).</p>
---	--

We lift up the cup of salvation in good times; we find trouble and sorrow in bad times. In both the good times and bad times, we call out to God. But let's examine Psalm 116. Of the three psalms that these prooftexts come from, we are most familiar with Psalm 116 because we recite it as part of the Hallel service. We usually sing verse **כוס ישועות**

following: **אשא** following: **מה אשוב להי כל תגמולהי עלי** - *How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?* The psalm is about gratitude to God. By using a verse from a psalm about gratitude, Rabbi Tanhum is saying: *I am grateful for everything in my life. I feel overwhelmed by God's blessings to me. For the goodness in my life, I am grateful. And I accept the bad things that happen. Though I would prefer not to have them, I am thankful nevertheless - for the kindness of others, for wisdom, for the ability to be a deeper human being to others who experience suffering.* What we have here with these three rabbis and their respective prooftexts, is not simply a rattling off of verses just to show erudition or ingenuity in interpretation. Rather, we have a profound debate about what ideas and emotions motivate our response to God in good times and in bad times. 1. For Rabbi Aha it's Ethics. 2. For Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani, it's Trust in God. 3. For Rabbi Tanhum it's Gratitude. But the talmud provides another source.

4. Job: the Ultimate Model of the Acceptance of the Good and the Bad

<p>ורבנו אמרי, מהכא: "ה' נתן וה' לקח יהי שם ה' מברך".</p>	<p>And the Rabbis (ie. the rest of them) said: The proof is <i>from here</i>, as it is stated: "The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be blessed." (Job 1:21).</p>
---	--

Job says this line upon learning of that all his children were killed. While he doesn't bless God in the formulaic way that we recognize, by saying *may the name of the Lord be blessed*, he is still blessing God. For the talmud, this is the best prooftext because there is no need to explain it. It means what it says. If we are familiar with the basic outline of the book of Job, we know exactly what is happening here: Job lost everything, and he still blesses God. We know from the beginning of the book that Job is an ethical, trusting, and grateful man. He is a man who encapsulates the three themes - Ethics, Trust, Gratitude - stated by the previous rabbis by the use of their prooftexts. Moreover, if we know the scene that follows Job's initial reaction, we will recall that his wife says to him, "Curse God and die," to which he responds, *Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?* Equal acceptance of the good and the bad is the main theme here and Job is the personification of acceptance.



We all have our own experiences of *tzurres* and *naches*. This rabbinic teaching **היב אדם לברך על הרעה** undoubtedly prompted endless conversations throughout the generations as it does now. Like all great Torah wisdom, we are meant to live in that conversation, and it, is meant to live in us.