

Parsha Ponders

Lech Lecha | October 28, 2020 | 11 Marcheshvan 5781

Considering proper thoughts¹

ואברכה מברכיך ומקללך אאר וגברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה

I will bless those that bless you, and he² that curses you I will curse, and all the families of the land will be blessed through you³

The *parsha* begins with Hashem commanding Avraham to leave his homeland and to travel to an unknown destination. We know that Hashem intended to take Avraham to the land of Canaan, a prosperous and beautiful land promised to be given to his descendants. However, Avraham didn't yet know his destination. As a means of an introduction to what was in store for Avraham and his descendants, Hashem promised him tremendous blessings. Wealth, prosperity and fame were to await him. Hashem told Avraham that those that bless him will themselves be blessed, and those that curse him will themselves be cursed. However, the verse is presented with an anomaly. Regarding blessings, Hashem first said what He will do, and then said the subject of His action. He will bless those that bless Avraham. However, regarding curses, Hashem preceded the subject to the verb. Those that curse Avraham will be cursed. Why did Hashem speak this way and change the order⁴?

Usually, an organized person will formulate their thoughts before they speak. They will consider their choice of words, the content, and the order, and then speak out what they've decided to say. There's a rule that Hashem takes a person's good thoughts and considers them as if they had been actualized⁵. If a person intended to do a *mitzvah*, Hashem considers it as if they had done it, even if they were prevented from doing so. However, this is not true for improper thoughts. If a person considers doing a transgression, Hashem doesn't consider it actually done unless the person themselves carries it out⁶.

Let's apply this rule to prayer. When a person seeks out Hashem's help and beseeches mercy and assistance, before they vocalize their request, they have thoughts to turn to Hashem. As such, Hashem already considered it as if they had made this request. Hashem, in His infinite mercy, answers the request before they even speak it out⁷. This is unlike a human being, who doesn't know what the other is thinking until they are told. Hashem, who can plumb the depths of a person's heart can fulfill all the requests of the person's heart.

There's a verse⁸ in Proverbs which alludes to this concept: "A person may arrange their thoughts, but Hashem provides the ability to speak". In fact, this verse is answering a question. If Hashem knows our thoughts, why then does He require us to vocalize our request? The answer is that Hashem gave us the ability to speak. He desires our prayers⁹. Hashem is (so to speak) like a father delighting with his young

¹ Based on [Kli Yakar](#) to [Genesis](#) 12:3

² [Ibn Ezra](#) *ad. loc.* notes that this verb is in the singular, whereas those that will bless Avraham is plural. See [Chizkuni](#), and [Tur HaAroch](#) and [Radak](#) *ad. loc.*, who all say that it's because the amount of people who would curse Avraham is minimal.

³ [Genesis](#) *loc. cit.*

⁴ See also [Ohr HaChaim](#) *ad. loc.*, who addresses this question

⁵ למעשה טובה מצרף מחשבה למעשה ([Kiddushin](#) 40a)

⁶ [Ibid](#) 39b. See the [Chida's Chomas Anach](#) and [Penei Dovid](#) *ad. loc.* who asks on this that this rule is only said regarding Jews

⁷ יקראו ואני אענה ([Isaiah](#) 65:24)

⁸ [Proverbs](#) 16:1

⁹ [Yevamos](#) 64a

child. If the child requests something from the father, even though the father knows his child's needs, the father gets pleasure from the request. Hashem therefore enjoys when we articulate our requests, even though He knows what we want before we even say.

Therefore, Hashem was very precise with His words to Avraham¹⁰. Hashem will bless those that think to themselves bless Avraham, before they even do so. Hashem knows their thoughts, and considers those thoughts as if they had already been carried out. Thus, the verse says Hashem will bless those that bless Avraham. However, those that think to curse Avraham are not themselves cursed until they actually articulate their words. Hashem doesn't consider improper thoughts as deeds. He only punishes actual transgressions. As such, the verse says those that curse Avraham will themselves be cursed.

Good Shabbos

¹⁰ The Kli Yakar doesn't finish off this thought, but it's clear where his intent was going. This is also how the Chomas Anach understood his intent