SECOND BERAKHA: God’s Power To Heal

The second berakha (blessing) of the ‘Amida is called Geburot, “the powers of God.” In the first blessing, Abot, we saw how HaShem uses His powers to protect His people, Israel. In this berakha we will see how HaShem uses His powers to preserve life, prevent death and overcome it.

TEXT (Sephardic nusach)

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You are infinitely powerful, HaShem; You restore the life of“
the dead, and You save [from death] in many ways. [In summer:
You bring down the dew] [In winter: You make the wind blow and
”.[the rain fall

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You sustain living beings with goodness, You restore life“
with great compassion, You support those who are about to
”.fall, You heal the sick and You free the captives

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And You fulfill Your promise with those who sleep in the dust“
[our ancestors]. Who is like You, Almighty, and who resembles
You, the King who takes life away and restores life, and makes
”?salvation flourish

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And in You we trust, that You will revive the dead. Blessed“ ”.are You, HaShem, who revives the dead

POWER TO GIVE LIFE, NOT TO TAKE IT

The mythological gods used their powers to defeat other gods, destroy their enemies and spread panic among humans. The power of a god or a mythological hero was measured by his ability to kill: the more, and the more efficiently, he killed, the more powerful he was. We Jews see the power of HaShem in everything that is beneficial to mankind. HaShem uses His powers to sustain life and prevent death: He provides food to all living creatures, heals the sick and frees the captives.

This berakha inspires us to act with kindness. It teaches that, like HaShem, we too must use our powers, resources and abilities (strength, wisdom, money) to save, heal, help, sustain and nourish.

FOUR LEVELS OF RESURRECTION

The idea of resurrection appears several times in this blessing, each time in a different context. It seems to me that the berakha shows, step by step, how HaShem’s intervention revives and renews life on four different levels.

1. PLANET EARTH (TEXT 1). HaShem’s power to renew life appears first in the rain: “You make the wind blow and the rain fall.” Without rainwater, death would be inevitable. Without precipitation, and without the climate system that produces fresh water, no living being could exist. Thanks to the rain, a seed that looks dry and dead, buried in the ground, comes back to life and produces new plants, trees and fruit. We may not notice it in our daily lives, but rain is responsible for the constant renewal of life on the planet.

2. HUMANITY (TEXT 2). The second level is human society. The berakha presents situations in which the line between life and

death is very subtle. First we affirm that HaShem provides sustenance to all creatures, without which life could not exist. Then, that HaShem supports those who are about to collapse, heals the sick who are about to die, and frees the captives who are sentenced to death. In all these cases, death would be imminent if not for HaShem's intervention. In other words: when Divine intervention stops poverty, illness or captivity from progressing toward death, that too is a form of "resurrection," of Techiyat haMetim. That is why the berakha uses the same expression, mechaye metim, to describe these situations.

3. THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL (TEXT 3). The third level is the survival of the Jewish people. HaShem fulfills the promise He made to our ancestors, Abraham, Yitschaq and Ya'aqob, whom the berakha calls "those who sleep in the dust." That promise is that the people of Israel will never disappear. Israel might be on the verge of total extinction, as in Egypt, in the days of King Chizqiyahu, in the days of Haman, or in the Shoah. But even on the verge of its "death," HaShem restores the life of His people.

4. THE TSADIQIM (TEXT 4). The ultimate expression of HaShem's power is Techiyat haMetim, the resurrection of the dead, the idea with which the blessing ends. Resurrection (not to be confused with "reincarnation") is a central belief in Judaism. According to Maimonides, it will apply only to the tsadiqim, the righteous. Techiyat haMetim means that in messianic times God will restore life to the tsadiqim: body and soul will be together again, as before death. Maimonides explains that this does not mean that people will no longer die; they will live longer, but they will remain mortal. How this will happen, how bodies will come back to life, is beyond our power of imagination.

MORE ON TEXT 3: THE RESURRECTION OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Some 2500 years ago the prophet Yechezqel (Ezekiel) had a very

special prophetic vision (chapter 37). HaShem transported him to a valley. And in that valley there were bones. Many bones. Human bones. Dry bones. There is nothing more dead than a dry bone. HaShem said to Yechezqel: "Son of man, do you believe these bones can come back to life?" And Yechezqel, with a mixture of humility and surprise, answered: "HaShem, only You know." Then there was a deafening noise. The bones began to move. They joined one another and formed skeletons. The skeletons were covered with sinews, then with flesh, and finally with skin. They were no longer bones but lifeless human bodies. Corpses. And HaShem said to Yechezqel: "Prophesy, so that the breath of life may come into these bodies and they may live again." And so it was: "And the breath of life entered the bodies, and they rose to their feet. It was a very great army." Then HaShem said to the prophet: "Son of man, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say: our bones have dried up, our hope is lost, we are doomed. Therefore prophesy and tell them: thus says HaShem God: I will open your graves, I will raise you from your graves, My people, and I will bring you to the land of Israel. And you will know that I am HaShem when I open your graves and bring you out of them. I will put My spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. And you will know that I, HaShem, have spoken and have done it."

It is impossible not to connect this prophecy with 1945 and 1948. In 1945 we were doomed to disappear. We were dry bones, or perhaps worse: ashes. And then, when the Goyim (and even we ourselves!) thought that we had disappeared, that we would never again be a people, that the ancient prophecies would never be fulfilled, the greatest miracle happened: HaShem opened our graves, raised us up, restored our life and brought us to Israel. HaShem promised it. And He delivered. This is a modern example of Techiyat haMetim, one we can see with our own eyes.