

# Sefer HaBahir

## The Book of Brilliance

### *An Ancient Guide To Experiencing Spiritual Truths*

With Commentary  
by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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***“And how do we know that the [word] blessing (Berakha)  
is derived from the word Barukh (blessed)?***

***Maybe it is derived from the word Berekh (knee)?***

***It is written, “For to Me every knee will bow” (Is. 44:23),  
the place where every knee bows.***

***What can this be compared to?***

***To those who request to see the face of the king,  
but they do not know where the king is, nor where his house is.***

***They [must] ask first where is the king's house  
and only afterward ask where is the king?***

***Therefore, “to Me every knee shall bow”  
and those above, every tongue shall swear.”***

Bahir 4

Here we have revealed to us many secrets in the path of ascent. Words in Hebrew are potent in meaning. As is known, there are no vowels in the Hebrew alphabet, therefore, two completely different words can be spelled exactly the same, only to be differentiated by how they are pronounced, with different vowels. In some books, such as modern Hebrew Bibles, words are written with vowels, however original Torah scrolls contained none. Written vowels in Hebrew are of rather modern origin when compared to the antiquity of the letters themselves. Therefore, the meanings of ancient texts, the Torah and the rest of the Bible included was orally passed down from generation to generation until the invention of written vowels and the widespread adoption of their usage.

It would seem clear to us that the Hebrew word for blessing (Berakha) would come from the root Barekh (to bless). What the Bahir wishes to address here is a simple, yet true question, when viewed from the perspective of Hebrew grammar. The Hebrew word for knee is Berekh. It is spelled identically to the word Barekh (to bless), the only difference between the two are their vowels. So, the Bahir asks, how do we know that Berakha comes from Barekh and not Berekh? One can offer a simplistic answer based upon the traditions of Hebrew grammar. Yet, the Bahir is not here to challenge basic Hebrew grammar. The author's intent in his question is to subtly, in coded form, reveal to us a secret teaching. This teaching is the secret of receiving Divine blessing.

The verse in Isaiah says, "every knee shall bow." The bowing of the knee, on one level, signifies total subservience. This is the absolute essential step in any path of spiritual ascent. One must give up his/her attachments to this world and be willing to surrender completely to the Will of Heaven, regardless of whatever this may mean. This psychological prerequisite is the essential criteria for unleashing the individual mind from its attachments to the things of this world and all the psychic focus we place on them. Surrender means enabling the mind to float free, in a state of detachment from anything physical. In this state the inner mind/soul can then begin to control mental navigation and allow the mind to naturally flow towards spiritual perceptions and reality.

This mental state of detachment is called in Hebrew, Hitbodedut. Literally it means isolation. This is an isolation of the mind, in a state of detachment from any and all physical concerns. While some modern Hasidic philosophies have adopted this term Hitbodedut to describe their prayer practices and traditions, they have only adopted the word itself. Its actual inner meanings and applications are completely unknown to them.

Surrender and isolation of the mind, symbolized by the bending of the knee, a symbol of submission, is not a state that is as easily acquired as falling down on one's physical knees. Although the process of releasing the mind is an arduous one and it is symbolized by the bowed knee, the relationship to the bowed position and the bending of the knee is much more than merely a metaphorical association. The process of mental isolation is closely associated with a physical body position that actually assists one greatly to focus the mind away from the physical world. This bodily position is known as the position of the prophet.

The position is mentioned with regards to Elijah in 1 Kings 18:42. It is performed by the prophet bowing down completely on his knees and then bending his entire body, lowering the forehead to the ground directly opposite the knees. One's buttocks should be resting close to one's feet, one's head on the ground and one's hands should be to the sides of one's face, with the fingers open and spread wide, just opposite the mouth and the ears. One is essentially curled up into a ball.

Needless to say, one who is overweight and has any amount of stomach or abdominal fat cannot get into this position. As such, being overweight is considered to be a significant impediment to not only getting into what is called the prophetic position, but also to acquiring mental isolation, the bowing of the mind before Heaven. One who is significantly overweight indicates a strong attraction to food for the flesh and indicates other strong attachments to this physical world. One who is so attached to this world cannot become attached to the spiritual world. Therefore, one of the foundational practices of spiritual discipline is to fast.

Fasting is done to gain control of the physical body, by controlling its most natural physical desires and needs. Those who do not fast or speak against fasting indicate their distance from actual accomplishments in spiritual ascent. No one, but no one, who is obese can connect with Heaven. All such ones will have only their philosophical or other religious accomplishments, but they will never be able to transcend the physical, simply because they are too weighed down, both physically and spiritually.

Now, the power in the prophetic position is by no means magical. There is nothing mystical or symbolic about it. It is almost similar to a fetal position and in this is its true biological power. When the body is curled up in the proper manner, one finds that one cannot breathe deeply, but only shallowly. This subtle and slight lack of oxygen actually helps the mind to detach from physical attachments and to focus on inner realities. This position also aligns up the body's internal life-force energy, enabling it to circulate almost cyclically.

These biological occurrences therefore affect the consciousness enabling an easier realignment with inner reality. This then is the secret of the position of the prophet. Again, there is nothing mystical or magical about it, rather it is purely biological in nature. But the bottom line is that it works to induce the psychic state of mind necessary for spiritual ascent.

Submission and surrender must be both physical and psychological. It is not enough that one is intent upon mental surrender to God. More than this must also be accomplished in that one's physical body must also be properly aligned. One's physical body is here symbolized as the house of the king. Unless one first seeks the king's house one will never see the king's face. This means that one must prepare and discipline one's flesh first before one will be able to discipline and prepare one's spirit. This is the natural way and it is essential that this be learned and practiced in order for there to be any success in the path of ascent.

The bowing of the knee is the surrender of the flesh before God. In this comes true blessing. So, essentially even though the word Berakha (blessing) literally comes from the root verb Barekh (to bless), its symbolic relationship with Berekh (knee) indicting surrender and submission is also implied. For being that blessing is an actual flow of spiritual energy that descends from above to dwell upon those below, it can only reside in a vessel that is empty and waiting to be filled. Thus surrender of one's self leaves one empty of self in order to become full of God. This is the path of ascent in its most raw and natural form.

One must never forget the relationship of the physical to the spiritual. Although we have to remove physical attachments from our minds in order to ascend, we cannot violate the natural laws ordained by our Creator that govern the physical body. The body symbolically refers to the house of the king, whereas the soul refers to the face of the king. In other words, the major reason why the majority of people fail to make spiritual ascents is because they either deny or are ignorant of this basic principle of body/spirit balance.

One must enter the palace of the king before one can enter his throne room and thus before his presence. While some will desire to interpret this as referring to the specific movements amongst spiritual palaces in the Heavenly realms, these cannot be accessed until one first climbs the proper ladder in the proper way.

One's body is symbolically called the temple of God. One must therefore serve in the holy temple and follow its rituals for proper observance. These are discussed in scripture and their symbolic applications are recorded in numerous works of mystical Judaic literature. One can reference the book Nefesh HaHayim, The Living Soul, by Rabbi Hayim of Volozin for an example of this. One's own body is sacred and has to be treated as such. One's own body is the receptacle of the soul and the first step along the path of ascent.

Therefore, one must take every precaution to safeguard one's body and to properly safeguard its health. This not only includes keeping a healthy diet but also includes keeping away from everything else that can have a negative affect on the body. This is why tobacco, drugs and alcohol use are frowned upon and shunned. These substances in excess can pollute the body, making it sick, therefore forcing the mind to focus on physical healing instead of allowing spiritual ascent.

Unless one first finds the palace of the king, one stands no chance in ever seeing his face. The source of blessing is the submission symbolized by bending the knee. These symbols used in the text both teach the same message. Physical health and spiritual health go hand in hand. Granted, not everyone can have complete robust health all of the time. Nevertheless, while uncontrollable illnesses can affect us from the outside, we can still control those illnesses and weaknesses that are under our influence. God will take care of His own, yet, we must also take care of ours.

When these prerequisites are met, then we open doorways to spiritual ascent and then in ascent we can join with those above who are at the level symbolized here as those "whose every tongue shall swear." These are those who know how to channel the flow the spiritual energy from below to above creating the scared circuit of spiritual energy.

Life force energy resides in the center of the body below the navel. It can descend below into sexual energy through the genitals or it can ascend and lead to spiritual ascent through the mouth, specifically the tongue. This is why physical prerequisites are required. They tame the physical energy in the body and enable it to focus in the proper direction, up and not down. I discuss more about this in my Sefer Yetzirah course.

