

## **The Bracha on Joy** **Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

According to the Rambam and the Sefer HaChinuch (who follows his count) the last Mitzva (commandment) was given in last week's parsha. This week is a song which is laden with meaning but does not contain any new Biblical directives. Ramban, however, disagrees and finds a Mitzva in the opening words of this week's parsha. There is a well known argument between the Rambam and Ramban regarding the status of the blessing we make regarding Torah each morning, *Birchas HaTorah*. The Ramban (shichechas HaAsein #15) feels that this is one of only two Biblical blessings; the other being *Birchas HaMazone* (the bracha after bread meals). The Rambam feels there is only one Biblical blessing. The blessing on Torah is Rabbinic as are the vast majority of brachos.

The source for *Birchas HaTorah* being Biblical is the pasuk, '*ki shem Hashem ekrah, havu godel l'Elokeinu* (Devarim 32:3).' Rashi and Rashbam explain that the '*ki*' here means 'when.' 'When the name of Hashem is called, ascribe greatness to our Lord.' The Rashbam says that ascribing greatness simple means admitting the truth of Hashem's great good for us. Rashi says that it means to bless Hashem. Rashi comments that this pasuk is the source for the practice in the Beis HaMikdash of saying '*baruch shem kevod malchuso l'olam vaed*' after the Kohein pronounced Hashem's name. When Hashem's name was spoken, we were to respond by calling Hashem blessed. The Rashbam and Rashi both have credible readings of the pasuk, but how would the Ramban read the pasuk? In what way is the pasuk speaking about a bracha before Torah study?

The Maharsha (Brachos 21a) and Ohr HaChayim both give the same answer. They point to a statement that the Ramban himself makes in his introduction to the Torah. He explains that the entire Torah is really names of Hashem. The Torah is really, on some level, the essence of Hashem given to the Jewish people in order for us to understand Him. With this understanding, the pasuk reads very well. When we read Hashem's name, meaning the Torah, we must ascribe greatness to Him, in the form of a Bracha. The Ramban explains that the Bracha on the Torah is one of thankfulness for the great gift we have received. The purpose of thanking Hashem is to help us recognize the greatness of this gift.

The fact that we have the opportunity to study Hashem and to strive to be close to our creator is nothing short of amazing. The Bracha we say each morning highlights the proper approach to Torah study. Torah study must not be a chore, it is a fantastic opportunity. We know that we are not supposed to study Torah on Tisha B'Av except for certain selected texts (Shulchan Aruch O.C. siman 554). The reason for this is that Torah study is pure joy, which we are to avoid on the day the Temples were destroyed. This feeling is the goal of *Birchas HaTorah*. When we educate our children, aside from the information and skills which we want them to obtain, they must be imbued with this feeling of excitement and joy in Torah study. If we can

infuse ourselves and our families with this attitude of Birchas HaTorah then we will merit to see a new generation involved in the study of Torah.