

*Pray and Mean It is an occasional listserv. Its aim is to build an understanding of and connection to Jewish prayer step by step. It is administered through googlegroups. (Your inclusion in this group is confidential. I am the only person who has access to the names and e-mail addresses on the list.) People who wish to be added to the listserv may visit the googlegroups site or e-mail me at [CantorJC@aol.com](mailto:CantorJC@aol.com). All postings can be viewed with clear legible Hebrew at my synagogue's website, [www.tiferethisrael.org](http://www.tiferethisrael.org) You are welcome to share this with others who might find it interesting or valuable. Recipients will NOT be able to respond to the entire list, but may correspond with me.*

*Thanks and best wishes – Cantor Jack Chomsky, Congregation Tifereth Israel, Columbus Ohio*

## **Pray and Mean It 15**

This is the 15th installment in this series.

As we have just recited a b'rachah regarding personal health and healing (*r'fuah*), we now turn our attention to the health of our planet. *Barech Aleinu* is a b'rachah for rain, or dew and rain, according to the proper season, and the hope that the provision of appropriate rain will result in bountiful harvest.

<i>Barech aleinu, Adonai eloheinu</i>	בְּרַךְ עָלֵינוּ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ
<i>Et hashanah hazot</i>	אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַזֹּאת
<i>V'et kol minei t'vuatah l'tovah</i>	וְאֶת כָּל מֵינֵי תְבוּאָתָה לְטוֹבָה
(Spring/summer:) <i>V'tein b'rachah</i>	וְיִתֵּן בְּרַכָּה (spring/summer)
(Fall/winter:) <i>V'tein tal umatar livrachah</i>	וְיִתֵּן טַל וּמָטָר לְבְרַכָּה (fall/winter)
<i>Al p'nei ha-adamah</i>	עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה
<i>V'sabeinu mituvah</i>	וְשַׁבְּעֵנוּ מִטוֹבָה
<i>Uvareich sh'nateinu kashanim hatovot.</i>	וּבְרַךְ שְׁנַתֵּנוּ כְּשָׁנִים הַטּוֹבוֹת.
<i>Baruch atah Adonai</i>	בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'
<i>M'vareich hashanim</i>	מִבְּרַךְ הַשָּׁנִים.

Bless for us, Adonai our God,  
this year, and all the kinds of good produce.

(*Spring/ Summer:*) Grant blessing, (*Fall/Winter:*) Grant dew and rain for blessing  
on the face of the earth.

And satisfy us with its goodness.

And bless our year like the best years.

Praised are You, Adonai,

Blessor of the years.

I find myself relating to this prayer on a number of levels. First, understanding the cultural context of the prayer's history, it's not just about agriculture, but truthfully about the entire economy. The prayer is the expression of a world in which a failed harvest could bring disaster that is difficult for us to imagine -- though if we look, we see this kind of disaster elsewhere in our world almost every day of every year. So

if we need a daily reminder about that contribution we promised ourselves to make to hunger relief somewhere on the globe, this is it.

Returning to the economic implications, when praying *barech aleinu* in the modern world, one can really keep in mind not just rain and the harvest, but also the general economy and well-being of our nation and its workers. So I am praying for prosperity -- to an extent in a personal sense, but even more so for the whole society.

At least as significant in my mind are the worries that we have of global warming and its effect on world ecology. In this sense, this paragraph makes a particularly good partner for the preceding paragraph -- health of body followed by health of planet. If I have a daily reminder to be concerned about this issue and about making sure that I am somehow engaged in ameliorating the problem of global warming -- whether by engagement politically, adjusting a thermostat, choosing which car -- or avoiding the use of the car -- this is the *b'rachah* that reminds me.

The language of this *b'rachah* is the language of *birkat hamazon*, the blessing after meals. *Sab'einu* -- let us be satisfied -- content, filled up with the food we eat, with the miracle of rain and sun, and with the work we do, the job we perform.

The liturgical toggle switch in this paragraph also helps remind us to pay attention in the middle of our prayers. One can easily lose track of what one is saying in the Amidah. We recite it at least 3 times daily, mostly unchanged. But those little change places help keep us on track. In the middle of this paragraph, I come to a fork in the road. What time of year is it, which do I say? After the beginning of Pesach, "*v'tein b'rachah*" -- and send blessing. After December 4 or 5 (a complicated matter that I won't discuss here), "*v'tein tal umatar livrachah*" -- send dew and rain for blessing. Sometimes, I find myself in the middle of a paragraph of the Amidah wondering how I got there -- just like we sometimes find ourselves driving without having noticed the last several blocks, etc. Having this fork in the road helps remind me to pay attention. What time of year is it? Which one do I say? (Do I remember saying the previous several *b'rachot* or has my mind been wandering? Strictly speaking, when one realizes that one has had a lapse in concentration and doesn't know whether one has recited certain passages, the halachic requirement is to return to an appropriate earlier part of the liturgy and to repeat it. I understand that idea -- but for my sake and perhaps yours, it may be more valuable to make a mental note of the lapse in concentration, to celebrate the return of concentration and to move forward.)

Recognizing this moment means recognizing that there are seasons. Which means that we are in a position to acknowledge the wonder of this planet on which we inexplicably and miraculously live our deeply blessed lives (bringing us back once again to global warming. . . a reminder that we have to try not to destroy that entity we are blessing).

May our bodies (the previous *b'rachah*) and our planet enjoy healthy years!

If you wish to respond, you may e-mail me at [CantorJC@aol.com](mailto:CantorJC@aol.com).