

## Parallel Thinking Part 15: The Torah Time-Machine Section II

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The previous article examined the Torah's method of 'time-travel' to the past, to negate the harmful spiritual effects of our prior transgressions (*teshuvah*). Is it also possible for one to affect the future?

God has the capacity to make changes to our future reality through our requests for blessing and providence. The Talmud (Berachot 34a) notes that there are three sections to our daily prayer; *shevach* (praise), *bakashot* (requests) and *hoda'ah* (thanksgiving).

The central part of prayer, in which we ask God to fulfill our needs, both physical and spiritual, appears puzzling. Many verses in the Torah describe our relationship with God in parent-child terms (see Devarim 8:5 and 14:1); Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (d. 1746) explains that these indicate that God loves us and only ever desires our good. In addition, he asserts that one of the fundamental features of God is that He knows everything. If God loves us and knows everything, what is the purpose of relating our needs to Him? Surely if He knows what our needs are and He loves us, He would provide for them without us having to ask.

There is another aspect to our requests. While the word *tefillah* is often translated as prayer, *tefillah* actually implies a deep, meditative process of introspection. *Tefillah* highlights the dependency we have on God, emphasizing that parent-child dimension of the relationship. The founder and Rosh Yeshiva of Kerem B'Yavneh, Rabbi Chaim Goldvicht (d. 1995) notes that the punishment of the snake in Bereishit was to "eat the dust of ground" (Bereishit 3:14). This meant that the snake's food could be found anywhere; there would never be a need to ask God for sustenance and therefore no opportunity to develop a relationship with Him.

The Talmud states that if one is about to determine the amount of grain in one's silo, he may pray that God should increase the quantity; even though all the grain has already been deposited in the silo, the paryer may continue right up until the last grain has been measured. Yet once the measurement is complete, such a prayer is considered wasted (Bava Metzia 42a). Rabbi Yitzchak Arama (d. 1494) explains that this statement is teaching us that genuine blessing is not found in the physical, quantifiable benefits of wealth or our commercial success. The most profound blessings are found in our spiritual successes such as through learning Torah and the performance of mitzvot.

Through prayer, we have the capacity to change our future by developing our relationship with the Divine and making positive, incremental changes to the way we live our lives. Sometimes, God's answer to our requests is negative. As the prophet Yeshaya (Isaiah) states, only God knows what is ultimately for the best (55:8).

