God's Great Power: גבורה

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| אַתָּה גִּבּור לְעולָם אֲדנָי.  מְחַיֵּה מֵתִים אַתָּה רַב לְהושִׁיעַ:  **בקיץ -**מורִיד הַטָּל:  **בחורף -**מַשִּׁיב הָרוּחַ וּמורִיד הַגָּשֶּׁם:  מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד. מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים. סומֵךְ נופְלִים. וְרופֵא חולִים וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים. וּמְקַיֵּם אֱמוּנָתו לִישֵׁנֵי עָפָר.  מִי כָמוךָ בַּעַל גְּבוּרות וּמִי דומֶה לָּךְ. מֶלֶךְ מֵמִית וּמְחַיֶּה וּמַצְמִיחַ יְשׁוּעָה:  וְנֶאֱמָן אַתָּה לְהַחֲיות מֵתִים:  בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים: | You are forever mighty, Adonai, giving life to the dead. You are a mighty savior.  In summer say: You bring down the dew.  In winter say: You cause the wind to blow and you bring down the rain.  You sustain life with kindness. You give life to the dead with great mercy. You support the fallen. You heal the sick. You free the captive. And You keep Your faith with sleepers in the dust.  Who is like You, master of might? Who is similar to You, a king who causes death and life, and causes salvation to flourish.  And You are faithful to give life to the dead.  Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives life to the dead. |

**What Does God Do? What Do We Do?**

In this prayer we praise God for all sorts of attributes. It seems that there are several different types of attributes in this berakhah, some of which only God can do (bring down rain, for instance) and some which humans can sometimes do as well (support the fallen, heal the sick and free the captive).

* What do you make of these different attributes?
* Why does the author pick out these attributes specifically?
* What are other things that we might praise God for doing?
* Why do we praise God for things we can do ourselves?

**Gives Life to the Dead**

This berakah three times refers to "giving life to the dead" which has also been translated as "revives the dead" or "resurrects the dead." This is how the translation and the Hebrew blessing appears in traditional siddurim. Conservative and Reform Jews often do not believe literally that God will bring the dead back to life.

Therefore, Conservative siddurim have kept the Hebrew but have usually given a symbolic translation such as "Master over life and death."

Reform and Reconstructionist siddurim have replaced both the Hebrew and the English with phrases such as "who has planted within us immortal life" "giving life to everything" "source of life."

The translation above is somewhat ambiguous—"gives life to the dead." One can take it literally, as many traditional Jews do, that someday God will bring the dead back to life. Or one can understand it spiritually, that by remembering people we knew who have died, we can continue to give them life.

* Of all of the powers of God, why would the author have focused so much on this power?
* Even if you personally don't believe in the literal "resurrection of the dead" why do you think that so many Jews believe in it?
* Are there values we can learn from the belief in resurrection even if we don't literally believe that the dead will someday come back to life?

**Dew and Rain: Mentioning God's "Wet" Powers**

There are words in this prayer that vary depending on the season. From the end of Sukkot until Pesah we praise God for causing the wind to blow and the rain to fall. During the summer months, when it doesn't rain in Israel, we no longer mention rain. According to some versions of the siddur during these months we praise God for dew.

There is an interesting debate about this in the following mishnah (Taanit 1:1):

From when do they mention the powers of [bringing] rain?

Rabbi Eliezer says: from the first day of the Festival [of Sukkot].

Rabbi Joshua says: on the last day of the Festival [of Sukkot].

Rabbi Joshua said to him: Since rain on the Festival is nothing but a sign of [God’s] curse why should he mention it?

Rabbi Eliezer said to him: I also did not say to request [rain] but to make mention, “He causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall” in its due season.

He replied to him: if so one should at all times make mention of it.

**Explanation of the Mishnah**

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua both agree that we begin to mention "rain" only on Sukkot. Sukkot is when the rainy season begins in Israel. However, rain on Sukkot is considered to be a bad sign from God because it prevents one from being able to dwell (eat and sleep) in the Sukkah. Therefore, Rabbi Joshua argues, it does not make sense to mention God’s rain-giving powers at a time when we don't want to experience this power.

Rabbi Eliezer agrees that rain on Sukkot is a curse. However, he responds that he was not suggesting that we **ask** for rain at the beginning of Sukkot, but rather that we just **mention** that God has the power to bring rain in its due season. We ask for rain later the Amidah when we say, “And provide dew and rain (*ten tal umatar*).”

Rabbi Joshua responds that if all we are doing in this prayer is mentioning rain, why not mention it all throughout the year.

**Questions for further thought:**

* Why is mentioning rain one of the main issues we discuss in this berakhah?

**Morid Hatal—The Power to Bring Dew**

The custom to say "מוריד הטל" was originally a Sephardi custom. In dry lands such as Israel and other parts of the Middle East, including Babylonia, dew helps keep the vegetation dry during the summer months. The Jews who added these words into the berakhah felt that God should be praised even for the small amount of moisture that falls to the ground. Ashkenazi Jews, whose customs originated in Germany and northern France, did not rely much on dew, for it rained there in the summer as well as the winter. Therefore, they did not add these words to their prayers. In Israel all Jews, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, say these words as part of their Amidah.