

And I will make of you a great nation; and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (12:2)

In an alternative explanation, *Rashi* says, “And I will make you a great nation” is a reference to the words *Elokei Avraham*, G-d of Avraham, which is recited in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrai*. *Vaavarchecha*, ‘and I will bless you,’ refers to *Elokei Yitzchak*; and *Vaagadlah shemecha* refers to *Elokei Yaakov*. While I might think that they conclude the blessing of the *Avos*, Patriarchs, with all three of them, the *pasuk* states *Ve’heyey b’rachah*, ‘And you will be a blessing,’ *Becha chosmin*, *v’lo bahem*, ‘With you, Avraham, they conclude the blessing, and not with them.’”

A well-known exposition is attributed to **Horav Elimelech, zl, m’Lishensk**, author of the *Noam Elimelech*, who explains the concept of *Becha chosmin*, “With you they will conclude.” This applies to the *chasimas hagalus*, conclusion of the exile, prior to the *Geulah Haasidah*, Future Redemption, with the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. The end of our long *galus* will be realized through the merit of Avraham’s *middah*, attribute, of *chesed*. Each Patriarch had a unique quality which personified his specific *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. Clearly, each Patriarch exemplified all *middos tovos*, good character traits, but each one had a specific attribute upon which he focused more so than on others.

Avraham *Avinu* was the *amud ha’chesed*, pillar of kindness. His life was devoted to reaching out to people of all stripes and persuasions, with acts of kindness. This endeared him to them; hence giving him the opportunity to draw them into conversation about Hashem. He used the attribute of kindness as his vehicle for reaching out. Yitzchak *Avinu* represents the *middah* of *avodah*, service to Hashem through intense prayer and profound devotion. Yaakov devoted himself to Torah study. Thus, the attribute of Torah is connected with him.

Becha chosmin, “With you they will conclude,” means that, at the End of Days, our People will be in great need of *zchusim*, merits, by which we may be worthy of redemption. Our *davening*, prayer, will sadly not be up to par. Our *shul* attendance, *minyana* three times daily, something to which every European Jew adhered, will be but a memory. Torah study will be relegated to the *yeshivah* student, while we will rely on tapes, cds and mp3s for our *shiurim* and Torah study. The days of spending a few hours in the *bais hamedrash* on a nightly basis will be something of the past. The only area in which we will still remain strongly committed will be *chesed*, kindness. It will be our multifold acts of kindness, following in the footsteps of our Patriarch Avraham, which will, hopefully very soon, allow us to see the conclusion of our *galus*.

Another point which the **Chidushei HaRim** expressed concerning *Becha chosmin* focuses on the inextricable bond which every Jew – regardless of how far-removed he may be from religious observance – maintains with Judaism. We have seen this throughout the generations as Jews who reneged everything-- who turned their backs on G-d and His People, who assimilated themselves,

so that they were completely indiscernible from the non-Jews -- have returned, have come back and embraced their heritage. What keeps them connected? What impels them to return? The *Pintele Yid*? The Jewish Spark? But what is the *Pintele Yid*? From where is it derived? What gives it the strength to survive generations of assimilation and self-loathing?

The strength is derived from the blessing, *Becha chosmin*, "with you they will conclude." We conclude the *Bircas ha'Avos* with *Magen Avraham*, the Shield of Avraham; the protective shield of our Patriarch has protected us throughout time. Yitzchak and Yaakov descended from worthy and holy lineage, imbued with a passion and love to serve the Almighty. Avraham did not. He discovered it all by himself, nurturing it and bringing it to the point of unshakeable faith in the Almighty. Hashem has infused every Jewish soul with the Avraham *Avinu* factor, a unique strain of belief that transcends time; withstands the vicissitudes of various physical and emotional adversities; triumphs over assimilation and self-inflicted loathing of everything connected with religion-- so that when the *Pintele Yid* breaks through, he can come back. *Becha chosmin*: the Shield of Avraham is our "seal" of protection.

Horav Zev Weinberg, Shlita, takes this idea one step further. In the blessings following the *Haftarah*, we recite the blessing, *Magen David*, the Shield of David. He suggests that this blessing implies that Hashem protects the future, such that no stranger will sit on his throne (Davidic dynasty). In other words, our people will continually yearn for *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. It will remain a tennet of our belief and another unbreakable bond with the Almighty. Indeed, throughout our persecution, and despite all of our trials and sufferings, we have maintained a strong belief in *Moshiach*. Thus, we have two *magens*/shields: *Magen Avraham*, which heralds back to the past; and *Magen David*, which represents our hope for the future. Together, they work to keep our people focused, regardless of how far they may stray.