

Toldot: Changing The Past Into The Future

- Nisson Shulman.

The last bracha Yitzvhok gave Yaakov as he left for Padan Aram, was a mirror of Avraham's beracha. In the bracha of the Patriachs we find a key word, which according to the Midrash is VEHAYITA. All brachot till geulah come from its power. How so? (It is also found by Yaakov, Vehaya Hashem li LeElokim...)

In the Sidrah this Shabbat, there are three sets of brachot from father to son. Yitzchok's bracha to Yaakov in disguise; his blessing to Esav afterwards; and finally his bracha to Yaakov when Yitzchok knew the truth, and sent him to Padan Aram with the command to take a wife from his own family and not from the daughters of Canaan.

These last brachot to Yaakov are significant, especially in contrast to the earlier brachot to Esav and Yaakov. For the earlier brachot were, at least prima facia, especially of the material world, MITAL HASHAMAYIM UMISHMANEI HAARETZ and not particularly related to our mission as Jews, as children of Yitzchok and Avraham. In fact, these brachot are totally different from the bracha God gave Avraham, to be an AV HAMON GOYIM, especially expressed in children, KEKOCHAVEI HASHAMAYIM and in the land of Israel, KEAFAR HAARETZ; especially expressed in the words LEZARACHA ETEN ET HAARETZ HAZOT.

The last bracha that Yitzchok gave Yaakov as he left, on the other hand, are exactly like the brachot Yitzchok received and inherited from Avraham; brachot that mirror the ideals of our people: VEKEL SHADAI YEVARECH OTCHA VEYAFRICH, VYARBECHA, VEHAYITA LIKEHAL AMIM. VEYITEN LECHA ES BIRCHAT AVRAHAM, LECHA ULEZARACHA ITACH, LERISHTecha ET ERETZ MEGURECHA ASHER NATAN E-KIM LEAVRAHAM.

Apparently, this most important bracha of the ideals and hopes of kenesset Yisrael had always been held in reserve for Yaakov. Blind Yitzchok was not so blind after all. He saw his duty clearly, to transmit the Jewish heritage through Yaakov.

There is one word in these last brachot, one of the key words, which is often overlooked, but which is characteristic of the mission of Yaakov. That word is VEHAYITA – VEHAYITA LIKEHAL AMIM.

This same word in that same form was said to Avraham, VEHAYITA AV HAMON GOYIM.

In almost the same form we see it in next week's sedrah when Yaakov declares, VEHAYAH HASHEM LI LEELOKIM. That is where the Midrash Rabbah on Toldot, emphasizes and explains the significance of this little word. It called this word the symbol of our people's joy and hope, the gateway to GEULAH.

RABI YEHOSHUA DESICHNIN BESHEM RAV LEVI – NATAL HAKADOSH BARUCH HU SICHATAN SHEL AVOT VEASAAN MAFTEACH LEGEULATAM SHEL BANIM.

AMAR HAKADOSH BARUCH HU LEYAAKOV: ATA AMARTA VEHAYAH HASHEM LI LEELOKIM; HAYECHA, KOL TOVOT UBRACHOT VENECHAMOT SHEANI NOTEN LIBANECHA, EYNI NOTNAM ELA BILASHON HAZE, SHENEEMAR “VEHAYAH BAYOM HAHU YETZEU MAYIM HAYIM MIYERUSHALAYIM (Zecharyah 14:8); VEHAYAH BAYOM HAHU YOSIF HASHEM SHENIT YADAV LIKNOT ET SHEAR AMO (Yeshayahu 1:13); VEHAHAH BAYOM HAHU YITFU HARIM ASIS (Yoel 4:18); VEHAYAH BAYOM HAHU YITAKA BESHOFAR GADOL... (Yeshayahu 27:13). [HAOT VAV MISHEM HAKADOSH BARUCH HU MEKOR HABRACHA. (Nezer Hakodesh al Midrash Rabbah, Haye Sarah)]

What gives this little word VEHAYAH, and according to the Nezer Hakodesh the little letter VAV, that profound meaning and strange power? Why does it signify the greatest of blessings, of joy, hope, even GULAH?

Let me lead to an answer by first complicating the problem.

Doesn't this very word in another form mean just the reverse? Consider the word VAYEHI! The Gemarah reminds us of an old tradition from the Anshe Knesset HaGedolah, which teaches that wherever it says VAYEHI BIYEMEI it indicates tragedy, sorrow, misfortune! AMAR RAV LEVI VEITEIMA RABBI YOCHANAN, DAVAR ZE MESORET BEYADENU MEANSHEI KNESSET HADEDOLAH, KOL MAKOM SHENEEMAR VAYEHI BIYEMEI EINO ELA LASHON TZAAR: VAYEHI BIYEMEI AHASVEROSH – HAVA HAMAN; VAYEHI BIYEMEI SHEFOT HASHOFTIM, HAVA RAAV; VAYEHI BIYEMEI AMRAFEL ASU MILCHAMA... and so on.

How can the same word, the verb to be, in the form of VEHAYA OR VEHAYITA MEAN JOY, GLADNESS, GEULAH, AND IN THE FORM VAYEHI MEAN SADNESS AND MISFORTUNE?

The answer lies in the letter Vav, the first letter, in Hebrew Grammer terms, THE VAV HAMEHAPECHET, the VAV which changes the tense.

YEHI is the future form. VAYEHI changes the future to a past. When you take a beautiful, hopeful, even brilliant future and turn it into a mere remembrance of things past – that is tragedy, for the past alone without a future spells misfortune and death. On the other hand, HAYA is a past form. VEHAYA changes the past into a future. When you take the past in all its glory and cause it to live again and make it into a future, brilliant and glorious, that is joy; that is hope; that is the secret of GEULAH.

Yitzchak blessed Yaakov that the berachot of Avraham's past and his own shall become the bracha of his future, yours and your children after you. And that is Yaakov's statement, VEHAYA HASHEM LI LEELOKIM; Just as in the past for AVRAHAM VEYITZVCHOK, so in the future Hashem shall be My God, and all the promises till GEULAH SHELEMA will come true. HAYA in the past shall become the VEHAYA of the future, and we shall reach that time of RANI VESIMCHI BAT TZIYON (Zechariah 2:14).

