

Toldot: The Real Bracha

- Three sets of Berachot in the Parsha. The Bracha of Avraham, land and children, was only transmitted by Yitzchok to Yaakov at the very end, when he was about to flee from Esav. Blind Yitzchok was not so blind after all. He was always saving this beracha for Yaakov... The key word in these last berachot, "Vehayita: What the "Vav" does. Changing future into past or past into future. What that means for our people.

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In the sidra this Shabbat there are three sets of berachot from father to son:

There is Yitzchok's beracha to Yaakov in disguise. There is his beracha to Esav afterwards.

And his final beracha to Yaakov after he knew the truth, sent Yaakov off to Padan Aram, with the command to take a wife from his own family and not from the daughters of Canaan.

This last set of berachot to Yaakov are significant, especially in contrast to the earlier groups of berachot to Yaakov and Esav.

For the earlier berachot were, at least prima facia, dealing with material things, mital hashamayim umishmane haaretz. They deal with economics and the political relationship between the descendants of the brothers. They are especially significant in what they omit!

They do not particularly relate to the mission of Jews as children of Yitzchok and bearers of the tradition of Avraham. Indeed, these blessings ignore the previous blessings God gave to Avraham and the covenant God made with him, altogether! They do not mention Avraham! Nor do they deal with the subject of Avraham's blessings, expressed in a promise of children, and a promise of the land of Israel.

The last set of blessings of Yitzchok to Yaakov as he left, on the other hand, are exactly like the blessings of Avraham, which mirror the ideals of our people. The very words to Avraham are paraphrased and repeated here. That God multiply his seed, that the land shall be given to him, and that the blessing God gave Avraham to be transmitted through Yitzchok should descend upon Yaakov and his children.

Apparently this, the most important beracha of all, expressing the ideals and the hopes of the people of Israel, 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 berachot, one of the key words, often overlooked, which can

be understood as especially characteristic of this charge to Yaakov to fulfill the ideals of our people and transmit them. That word is vehayita, "And you shall become." Vehayita likehal amim. "You shall become a congregations of nations."

To Avraham, this same word was said, vehayita leav hamon goyim, "For I have made you a father of a multitude of nations."

This word, and almost in the same form, is found again in next week's sidra when Yaakov declares, vehaya adoshem li leelokim, "The Lord shall be my God." It is there that the Midrash emphasizes and explains the significance of this little word. It calls it the symbol of joy and hope, the gateway to geula. Rabbi Yehoshua deSichnin beshem Rabi Levi, natal HaKadosh Baruch Hu sichatan shel avot veasaan maftach legeulatan shel banim. "The Lord took the conversation of the fathers of our people, and made their words the key to the children's redemption. Amar lo HaKadosh Baruch Hu,... ata amarta vehaya Hashem li leElokim, hayecha, kal tovot uberachot venehamot sheani noten lebanecha, eyni notnam ela belashon haze. sheneemar, 'vehaya bayom hahu yosiph Hashem shenit yado liknot et shear amo', (Isaiah 11:11). In response to the word vehaya and vehayita used by our forefathers, the Lord will repay all blessings promise and consolation by means of this very word. And all the most beautiful prophecies of the future will start with that word, vehaya bayom hahu.

What gives this little word, vehaya, such profound meaning and strange power? Why is it the key word to Yitzchok's beracha? Why does it signify, in the minds of our sages, the greatest blessings, joy, hope, even geula?

Let me complicate the problem. Does not this very word in another form imply just the reverse?

Consider the word vayehi: The Talmud reminds us of an old tradition, as old as the men of the great assembly, which teaches that the phrase vayehi biyemey "And it came to pass in the days of" indicates a time of woe, misfortune, tragedy! Thus Vayehi biyeme Ahashueros... Haman, veyehi biyeme shefot hashoftim,...Raav, veyehi biyemey Amraphel,... asu milchama... and so on.

How can the same simple word, from the verb to be, in the form vehaya or vehayita mean joy and gladness, and in the form vayehi mean sadness and misfortune?

The answer lies in the first letter of the word, the vav hamehapechet, the conjunctive vav which changes the tense. yehi is a future form. vayehi changes the future to the past.

When you take a beautiful, hopeful, even brilliant future and turn it into a past, then that is tragedy. The past alone, without a future is the essence of misfortune.

Haya, on the other hand, is a past form. Vehaya changes the past into the future. When you take the past in all its glory and cause it to live again and make it a future, as

brilliant and as glorious, then that is joy and hope and the secret of redemption, of geula.

So Yitzchok says to Yaakov: Vehayita likehal amim; and he means to say that the blessings which God gave to Avraham in the past with the very word vehayita, be yours in the future, for you and your children after you. Just so when Yaakov declares, Veehaya Hashem li leElokim, he means to say, just as in the past, so into the future, the Lord shall forever be my God.

That is why the prophecies of redemption in the Tanach usually begin with the word vehaya. (Vehaya beaharit hayamim, nachon yihiye har bet Hashem berosh heharim (Yeshayahu)

That is our challenge today; to bring our past, our Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, Jeremiah and Isaiah, Ezra and Nehemia, Rashi and Rambam, Vilna Gaon and Baal Shem, Yisrael Salanter and Samson Hirsh, to our children and fellow Jews. To make all, our sages our children and ourselves, part of the living future; to bring the glory of Yerushalayim, Yavne, Spiers, Worms, Mayence Pressburg, Vilna, Slabodke, Mir and Ponevezhe, yes and Gush Etzyon and Kerem BeYavneh and Hevron, to the people who will be our future. Then shall prophecies of geula which begin with this word of future hope, come true indeed, in our time.

VEHAYA BAYOM HAHU, It shall come to pass on that day the Lord will again stretch forth His hand to gather and take to Himself the remnant of His people... (Isaiah 11:11);

VEHAYA BAYOM HAHU, It shall come to pass on that day the great Shofar will sound, those lost in Ashur and straying in Egypt will be brought before God to bow in Jerusalem.. (Isaiah 27:13).

VEHAYA BAYOM HAHU, It shall come to pass on that day the mountain of God's house shall be established highest of the hills... VEHAYA BAYOM HAHU, It shall come to pass on that day Judah shall dwell secure forever, and Jerusalem for all generations, and the Lord shall dwell in Zion, AMEN VEAMEN. (Joel 4:18).

(Submitted by Nisson Shulman)