Parshas Toldot · 5786

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

What blessing does a Jew wish for himself before withdrawing money from an ATM?

That the ATM should be like a package of wet wipes...

You pull on one and ten come out...!

G-D GIVEN GIFT

One of the headline revelations in this week's parsha, Toldos, is the story of the blessings that Yitzchok Avinu wanted to give to his firstborn son, Esav (usually referred to with the title of 'rasha'), and ultimately, through the intervention and cleverness of Rivka Imeinu, he blessed Yaakov Avinu.

The opening of the blessings in question sounds somewhat strange: "And may G-d give you" - since when does a blessing begin with a vav (the Hebrew letter meaning "and" when used as a prefix)? The vav can serve as an opening for the second or third blessing, but to begin a blessing/sentence/declaration with vav sounds very strange...

Rashi addresses this grammatical problem and explains: "Give and give again" - Yaakov's blessings begin with vav to hint that G-d will give an abundance of blessings and... "give again" more and more. But Rashi's explanation is also difficult - after all, we're talking about the giving of the Holy One, Blessed be He, who is infinite and all-powerful. So what could be lacking in His first giving that would require Him to give and give again? After all, G-d can give everything already the first time!

And besides, since when do you bless someone with the name "Elokim," a name that indicates the attribute of strength, judgment, and limitation? If you're blessing someone, it would be appropriate to use the name Havaya which alludes to the attribute of kindness and mercy, not the name Elokim!

The introduction to the blessings also sounds very jarring to the ear. Before Yitzchok blessed Yaakov, he said: "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that G-d has blessed." About these words we find a Medrash explaining that at that moment Yitzchok saw with his

spiritual vision the Mikdash that Yaakov's sons would build in Yerushalayim in the future. He saw the Mikdash in three states: "See, the smell of my son" - (bni from the word) built; "like the smell of a field" - destroyed (as in the verse: "Zion shall be plowed as a field"); "that G-d has blessed" - built and perfected in the future to come.

Is it possible that seeing the destruction of the Mikdash was part of the introduction to giving the blessings? Is this the proper way to bless a son? By telling him all the troubles that are going to happen to him in the future, and ending with a positive conclusion: Don't worry, in the end it will be okay?!

In a wonderful sicha (Likutei Sichos vol. 10, Toldos beis), the Rebbe explains the depth of the matter through an analogy to a teacher and student. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had many students, two of whom stood out. The first was Rabi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, about whom it was said: "A cemented cistern that doesn't lose a drop" - doesn't miss a word from his rebbi's teachings and doesn't forget any idea or utterance he heard. In contrast stands Rabi Elazar ben Arach, about whom it was said: "Like an ever-flowing spring" - he hears one word and makes from it a complete essay, he discovers a small innovation and can write a book about it; from a drop he fills a bottle, and from the tip of a fork he makes a royal feast. Rabi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus symbolizes the ability to receive in the most perfect way, while Rabi Elazar ben Arach represents the ability to innovate, expand, and add with his own powers.

It goes without saying that the quality of Rabi Elazar is greater than that of Rabi Eliezer, because Rabi Eliezer can receive what is given to him, but ultimately the wisdom he receives will be limited according to the value of the giving, whereas Rabi Elazar is like "an ever-flowing spring" that flows by itself and continues to give and give endlessly, without limit!

GIVE OR TAKE?

In light of the above, the Rebbe explains a novel interpretation of Rashi's words. G-d will give Yaakov an abundance of blessings, "May G-d give you" - the main blessing is that G-d will give Yaakov the ability "to give again," the ability to develop, expand, improve and add more and more abundance upon G-d's blessings. That is to say, G-d will give Yaakov only one giving, because G-d's giving is perfect and includes within it all types of necessary blessings. As part of that giving, Hashem will give Yaakov a special power, the power of development and expansion, a power through which Yaakov himself will add more and more blessings. In the words "give and give again," Rashi's intention wasn't to say that G-d "will give and give

again," but rather that He will give and then Yaakov will "give again" more and more, endlessly, through developing the powers given to him in the first giving.

These two levels, Rabi Eliezer and Rabi Elazar, "cemented cistern" and "ever-flowing spring," the ability to receive and the ability to add, also exist in the service of man, and they represent the difference between the service of the tzaddik and the service of baalei teshuva. The tzaddik is a "cemented cistern" while the baal teshuva is "like an ever-flowing spring." The tzaddik is a vessel for receiving all influences from above, while the baal teshuva is the one who transforms intentional sins into merits, transgressions into mitzvos, impurity into purity, and the forces of evil into forces of holiness. This power, to do teshuva, G-d gave to Yaakov in the first giving, "And may G-d give you" - G-d gave us the power and we will give again endlessly. This power that He gave us is the power of teshuva, the infinite power to change existing reality forever and ever!

This is also the reason why only in this blessing do we find the use of the name Elokim - the attribute of judgment and strength. Because the ability to refine evil and transform it into holiness comes originally from the name Elokim, which at its first root symbolizes a deeper giving than the name Havaya. The name Havaya symbolizes general kindness, ordinary giving, the normal powers given to man, while the name Elokim symbolizes the ability to overcome (gevura/strength) ourselves and our desires, to overcome our inclinations and make a true and meaningful change in our lives. This is a very deep power that contains within it extraordinary abilities for internal spiritual improvement, and such powers come specifically from the name "Elokim."

This is also the meaning of the strange introduction to the giving of the blessings. Seeing the first Mikdash symbolizes the service of tzaddikim, seeing the destruction of the Mikdash and its building in the future symbolizes the service of the baalei teshuva. This is not a strange vision but rather a necessary preparation and introduction to the giving of the blessings. As mentioned above, Yitzchok blessed Yaakov with the ability to serve G-d in two ways: the ability to receive, the service of the tzaddik, and the ability to improve, the service of baalei teshuva. Exactly a moment before giving these blessings, Yitzchok sees with his spiritual vision what the service of the tzaddikim and the service of the baalei teshuva will cause in the future.

The tzaddikim will bring about the building of the first Mikdash, while the baalei teshuva are those who will bring about the Geula and the building of the third Mikdash, "built and perfected for the Future to Come." This is also the reason why the allusion to the destruction of the Mikdash is in the vision of a "field," "like the smell of a field." The field is a place of

growth and development, the field symbolizes our ability to make the desolation bloom and turn an abandoned and destroyed place into a flourishing and wonderful place. This is our ability to change the future through the avoda of teshuva. And specifically this avoda, the avoda of teshuva, will ultimately bring the revelation of the true and complete Geula, about which it is said: “No eye has seen, O G-d, besides You,” now mamosh!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We’ll end with a story about the Rebbe’s dollar that “gives and gives again.” Rabbi Yosef Leviev, director of Chabad in Netanya, shared the following: “I was a young married man with two children, and I went to the Rebbe for Shavuos. On Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5749, I stood on line to receive a dollar from the Rebbe for a blessing before returning to Eretz Yisrael. The Rebbe gave me several dollars and I immediately wrote on them ‘Received from the holy hands of the Admor shlita, Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5749.’

“I put one of the bills in a frame that we hung in our house. I put the second one in my wallet and it was with me all the time. In 5769, we moved to our new home in the Chabad neighborhood in Netanya. The building was still under construction and everything was open, without electricity, gas, or water. It was the Hei Av and I traveled to Tzfas for the yahrtzeit of the Arizal. I returned before dawn and went to sleep. When I woke up, I saw that my pants were stolen along with my wallet. I didn’t really care about the money in the wallet (and there wasn’t much money anyway), but the Rebbe’s dollar was stolen!

“17 years passed, and my son Ariel went to study at 770 in Crown Heights. It was around Pesach, and he took his clothes to a local laundromat. He had a $20 bill and asked the owner to break it for him. She gave him a $10 bill, a $5 bill, and five more $1 bills. He used 4 of the single dollars for the machines. When he returned to the yeshiva dormitory, he took out the single bill to buy a drink from the soda machine.

As he was about to insert it, he noticed words in Hebrew handwriting on the dollar. It said that this was a dollar from the Rebbe received on Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5749. He recognized the handwriting. It was indeed my handwriting. The dollar that was stolen from me was returned to me after 18 years.”

Good Shabbos!