

YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE HEART

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayeitzei

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 306, Making A Neder During Times of Trouble.
Good Shabbos!*

Word Of Consolation That Only G-d Can Offer

Yaakov made the following vow: "If G-d will be with me and guard me on this path that I am embarking on, and He will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear and I return peaceably to my father's house, then G-d will always be for me as a L-rd" [Bereishis 28:20-21].

The Medrash comments that G-d made the expressions of the Patriarchs into the keys for future redemption of their children. For instance, in response to Yaakov's expression "V'Haya HaShem li l'Elokim" [G-d will always be for me as a L-rd], G-d made an oath. G-d said, "All the goodness and favors and consolations that I will give to your descendants, I will give through this expression (V'Haya,) as it is written 'And it will be (V'Haya) on that day Living Waters will come out from Jerusalem...' [Zecharia 14:8] (and) 'And it will be (V'Haya) on that day a Great Shofar will be sounded...' [Isaiah 27:13]." These, and many other verses that announce the Final Redemption, begin with the expression "V'Haya".

In exchange for Yaakov's use of the expression "V'Haya" in his vow, G-d vowed that He will console Yaakov's children with promises that begin with the expression "V'Haya". What is the meaning of this Medrash?

The Sefas Emes (1847-1905) offers the following beautiful thought. It is very difficult to give a person consolation for troubles in this world. Unfortunately, as we know full well, troubles befall people all

too often. We try to be nice and we try to be kind. We try to say the right things, but our words often do not serve as much consolation. If anything, the consolation is the friendship and the shared pain as a result of the other person's misfortune. We really are not in a position to make it good and give true consolation.

Only the Master of the Universe is the Master of Consolation. Only He can deliver true consolation. Only He can show how that tragedy was the eventual reason for the entire redemption. He can demonstrate that out of the ashes will come deliverance. He will make 2000 years of Jewish suffering make sense. Then it will be a true consolation.

The Sefas Emes says that this is the interpretation of the Medrash. What does the word "V'Haya" mean? "Haya" means the past (it was). The prefix "V" is the famous "Vov hamehapeches" [the letter vov which changes the Hebrew grammatical tense from past to future]. The meaning of the Medrash is that G-d will take all the past - the history of suffering symbolized by the "haya"s - and turn it into the future, creating the consolation and the redemption out of those sufferings.

A couple of nights ago, a colleague of mine who is in the rabbinate called me, and told me he needed to deliver a eulogy the next day for a 73-year-old man in his community. This person who now died had a son who was killed ten months earlier, and the body was never found. Two nights before this 73-year-old man died, he found a second son of his - a severe diabetic and a double amputee - dead in bed.

My colleague asked what kind of words of consolation might be offered at such a tragic funeral. The sad fact is that there is really nothing that can be said by way of consolation. We can only trust our belief that somehow, one way or another, these troubles are going to be turned into salvation. There is only One who can do that - the Master of the Universe.

The classic example of this idea comes from this week's parsha. When Yaakov, who thought that he was marrying Rochel, woke up the next day and discovered that it was Leah, imagine how he felt. He worked for 7 years to marry Rochel and now it was the wrong woman! Imagine the disappointment. Yaakov must have wondered, "What good can ever come out of this?" But Chazal say that the Jewish people were redeemed from exile as a result of this incident.

The Medrash states that when the Jews were in the Babylonian exile, Moshe Rabbeinu himself came to G-d and asked that they be taken out of exile and G-d refused him. Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov each likewise pleaded that they should be taken out of exile and each in turn was refused. There was only one personality who saved the day. Who was that? Rochel. How did she do it? Rochel said "G-d, I had mercy on my sister, and I did not want her to be embarrassed. I gave her the secret code that I had arranged with Yaakov. Please, in exchange for the mercy that I had on my sister, have mercy on my children." G-d only responded affirmatively to Rochel's request.

When it happened, Yaakov Avinu rightly saw the events as a terrible tragedy. Yet thousands of years later, this was the incident that saved the day. Out of the terrible past, out of the terrible "Haya" came

the salvation of the Jewish people. However, no human can know such a thing. No one can say such words of consolation. No one, other than the Holy One, Blessed Be He.

You've Got To Have Heart

When Yaakov first arrived in Aram Naharaim, the following incident occurred. "And he saw, and behold, there was a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lay there beside it, for from that well they would water the flocks, and the stone over the mouth of the well was large." [Bereishis 29:2] Yaakov came upon this scene in the middle of the day. All the shepherds were standing around with the sheep. Yaakov inquires why they are all there in the middle of the day. He tells them that they should give the sheep to drink and go out to graze them in the pasture. Rashi elaborates that Yaakov told them that they were not doing the job that they were hired to do. They were supposed to be grazing sheep - not sitting around by the well.

Picture that scene! Now picture the following scene...

One of us passes by a construction site. It is one o'clock in the afternoon. There are a bunch of bricklayers that are supposed to be laying brick. They are sitting around talking, idling away their time. We go over to them and say "Guys, this is not right. It is the middle of the afternoon. You should not be sitting around, you should be laying bricks!" Just try that one time! Any one who has ever wondered what mortar tastes like between his teeth should try that -- he will find out very quickly.

But here, Yaakov, despite being a newcomer to town, immediately starts lecturing the shepherds on proper work ethics. The interesting thing is that they accepted it from him. They started explaining the special circumstances, etc. How did Yaakov accomplish that?

There is one word in the pasuk [verse] that explains how Yaakov was able to accomplish that. "And Yaakov said to them: 'My BROTHERS (ACHAI), from where do you come?'" [29:4]. In these few words, our patriarch Yaakov was able to convey his love for every human being. If one can convey that emotion to people, it will be possible to give 'mussar' [chastisement] that they will accept.

People will not accept 'mussar' when they feel "What business of yours is it what I am doing or not doing?" But if one can convey a sincere honest feeling of brotherhood and friendship, then one can get away with saying anything and people will accept it. They recognized that for Yaakov, "My brothers" was not a figure of speech - he meant it. That was his ability - to demonstrate to people that he was sincerely concerned about their welfare. Once the shepherds felt that, they accepted whatever he had to say.

I recently read a story about the Ponevitzer Rav, (R. Yosef Kahaneman, 1886-1969). Rav Kahaneman had a meeting with a certain wealthy individual at 3:00 in the afternoon. The Rav had tried to set up an appointment and the person promised him exactly 15 minutes between 3:00 and 3:15. The Ponevitzer Rav was driven to the businessman's office building. To make a long story short, they got lost along the way, and when they pulled up to the building at two minutes before three, there

were no parking spaces available. Clearly, if they started looking for parking in the middle of downtown, it could be 3:15 before they would get into the building.

There was only one available space in the parking lot, but it had a sign "Reserved for the President". The driver was hesitant, but the Ponevitzer Rav instructed him "Pull in over there." The driver protested, "But that's the man's parking spot." The Rav responded, "Trust me. Pull in over there."

They ascended up the elevator, they made it to the office at 3:00 on the nose. The Ponevitzer Rav was in the middle of his pitch to the President of the company, when an aide suddenly burst into the office and said, "Do you know that these Rabbis parked in your parking spot?" The aide was furious at the Chutzpah of the rabbis.

The Ponevitzer Rav turned to the aide and said "Reserved? Nothing in this world is reserved. Everything in this world is a gift. If you need it, then it is yours to have. G-d gives you things that you need for a certain amount of time. He can take it away from you. He can give it to your children. He does not have to give it to your children. Nothing in this world is reserved! Not his parking spot, not his money, not his health - it is all a gift. We are just guardians of the gift. When we have a gift, we are supposed to do what G-d wants with it. Nothing is reserved."

The wealthy man looked at the Ponevitzer Rav and smiled. He then wrote out a check. The Ponevitzer Rav went over to him and kissed him, like he did with so many Jews. His words were accepted.

I wonder to myself, what if I would try such a stunt? What if I would park in the man's parking spot, and then lecture him that nothing is reserved? He would make me pay for the parking spot, instead of writing out a check!

How did Rav Kahaneman get away with it? The answer is that for anyone who knew the Ponevitzer Rav, of Blessed Memory, this would not be a question. His warmth, his friendship and his concern shone through. People accepted mussar from him, because they knew that the man was genuine. They knew there was real concern for their welfare. When people feel "My brothers" (achai), then they will accept real mussar. The problem is that we who give mussar do not feel the "Achai" in our hearts. We do not feel the kinship and concern. If we would, we could say anything to anybody and they would accept our words.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics

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