

WHY DOES "AND G-D BLESSED HIM" APPEAR AT THE END OF THE PASUK?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Toldos

Why Does "And G-d blessed him" Appear at the End of the Pasuk?

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #745, The Cost of Stealing a Mitzvah. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Toldos teaches a few short episodes from the life of the Patriarch Yitzchak. After the incident with Avimelech, Yitzchak planted in the land and the Torah relates that he found the yield from that crop to be 100 fold (meah-shearim) the normal expectation, an extremely bountiful harvest. The pasuk concludes "and Hashem Blessed him" [Bereishis 26:12].

Rav Elyakim Schlessinger (in his sefer "Beis Av") makes the interesting observation that the pasuk describing this scenario appears to be inverted. We would have expected the pasuk to write that Yitzchak planted, G-d blessed him, and he then had a bountiful crop. Surprisingly, the phrase "And Hashem blessed him" appears at the end of the pasuk, almost as an afterthought, rather than in the middle of the pasuk as part of a cause and effect.

Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] writes, "There is a sickening evil which I have seen under the sun; riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune." [Koheles 5:12] Sometimes a person can merit receiving tremendous wealth, but the wealth turns out to be a curse rather than a blessing. What determines whether wealth will be a blessing or a curse? It all depends on what the wealth does to the person. If it inspires him to give greater amounts to charity, if it convinces him that he is now more comfortable and can cut back on his working hours to spend more time to spiritual matters, then he takes that wealth and he turns it into a blessing from G-d. However, as happens all too often, if the wealth consumes the person or changes him to become a more conceited person, then the wealth becomes a curse (shamur l'balav l'ra-aso). Rather than using his wealth to learn more Torah, do more chessed, and do all the positive things one can do with money, he turns it into a curse.

Perhaps our pasuk in Toldos is alluding to this concept. Yitzchak was blessed with a tremendous crop, and the RESULT of that was "And G-d blessed him". Rashi mentions that this bountiful crop

came on the heels of a tremendous famine. In those days, when there was a tremendous famine, the poor did not get their due. The poor are only able to collect the tithe, the corner of the field (Peah), the forgotten gleanings (shikcha) and so forth. When nobody ate, the poor did not eat either.

Rashi comments, based on a Gemara [Tanis 8b] that when Yitzchak saw that he was having a bumper crop he had already given out the money to Tzedakah. This is an example of using the wealth one acquires for blessing. This explains why "And Hashem blessed him" appears at the end rather than the middle of the pasuk. The blessing was not the cause of his successful crop; it was the result of it.

For All Its Trouble and Down-side, Old Age Is Surely Worth It

We read in this week's Parsha "And it was when Yitzchak became old his eyes dimmed and he summoned Esav his older son..." [Bereishis 27:1] We know the rest of the story. As a result of his blindness, he was not able to discern whether he was talking to Yaakov or Eisav. Therefore, Yaakov was able to receive the blessing destined for his brother, Eisav.

The Medrash tells a story that Avraham requested an elderly appearance. Avraham said: "Master of the universe, a father and son will come into a town and people will not know who the father is and who is the son, in order to give proper respect to the elder of the two." Up until the time of Avraham, people did not show their age. No one had gray hair, no one had arthritis, and no one had to walk with a walker. It was not apparent that people were aging. Avraham complained about the situation and demanded, as it were, that G-d institute a new phenomenon in the world -- that of old age. Avraham argued that if an older person was crowned with the physical signs of old age, then people would give him the respect he deserves vis a vis his son.

The Almighty acquiesced to Avraham's request and told him that this phenomenon would begin with him. The first place where "ziknah" is mentioned in the Torah is the pasuk "And Avraham was old (zaken), coming of days" [Bereishis 24:1].

As we get up there in years and we see and feel the signs of old age, we might begin to wonder -- was this such a great idea that Avraham came up with after all? Obviously, it was a good idea because the Almighty responded to Avraham "You have asked for something worthwhile." (Davar tov ta'va'ta). Why is it so important that old age be recognizable? Why would it not have been sufficient if the world had continued as it began -- with no difference in appearance between one who was 17 and one who was 75?

Rav Simcha Zissel notes the following: The Torah is replete with the concept of "Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will relate it to you" [Devarim 32:7]. It is taken for granted that a certain wisdom comes with old age. This is so axiomatic that the Gemara in Kidushin teaches in the name of Isi ben Yehduah that the principle "You shall get up before an old person" [Vayikra 19:32] applies to any old person. The great Amora, Rabbi Yochanan, used to get up when an elderly Gentile would pass him by. Why? The Gemara explains that even such a person has witnessed many events

in his lifetime. A person with many decades of life experience has been through so much that inevitably he achieves a degree of wisdom. The Torah wants us to recognize that wisdom which accrues only through old age.

As a young man, when I have a question what to do, I am directed to consult with an elderly person. Now if everybody looks like they are 20 years old, how will I know who to ask? The Torah wants us to recognize elderly people easily. The Torah wants us to honor elderly people and in order to do so, it is necessary to recognize them first. This is so important for the welfare of society that G-d instituted the concept of old age, that had not existed at the beginning of Creation. "It is a good idea, Avraham. It is an INDESPENSIBLE idea!"

With all of our complaints about old age and all the troubles associated with it, it is worthwhile for society that the younger generation be able to recognize the elders. This is important so that they can give the elders the respect and courtesies they deserve by virtue of the fact that they have experienced so much. They can give the new generation insights that they would not otherwise possess.

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 covered in this series for Parshas Toldos Sarah are provided below:

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