

PARSHAS LECH LECHA: LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD, AND CHARTING ONE'S PATH

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

Hashem blessed Avraham by informing him "V'heyey bracha (Bereishis 12:2). A single, precise translation of these two words is elusive, as commentaries offer different interpretations of these two words. While a simple reading would seem to indicate that v'heyey bracha means that Avraham will be blessed, Rashi translates this to mean that Avraham would become a 'bless-er.' According to this view, Avraham was now given the 'proximate' power of blessing others. This was a significant accomplishment, as Hashem had not given any human that ability until He granted it to Avraham.

Rashi offers an additional translation - one that draws from the initial bracha of Magen Avraham, which we recite in every Shmone Esrei tefilah. Rashi, quoting a gemorah (Pesachim 117b), notes that although each of our Avos (Patriarchs) are mentioned in the opening bracha (Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, v'Elokei Yakov), we close the blessing with the name of Avraham only - Magen Avraham. Thus the words "V'heyey bracha" would be translated as, "You will be [exclusively mentioned in the] blessing."

Creating Our Own Wealth

Rabbi Shimon Schwab z"tl offers a profound insight into the words of this pasuk and the initial bracha of Shmone Esrei. In his sefer Mayan Beis Hashoeivah, he explains that we are all obligated to look back to previous generations as we develop our goals and chart a course for our future. At the same time, we cannot become stagnant and lead uninspired lives by 'living off the money in the bank' - the accomplishments of our ancestors.

He maintains that this message is vividly transmitted to us several times each day. We open Shmone Esrei by mentioning each of our three Avos - Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov, as we give thanks to Hashem for providing us with such a rich past and a sacred heritage. Reciting the names of our Avos drives home the significance of looking back at our grandfathers and grandmothers who preceded us. We value the legacy they left us and strive to emulate the living example of their actions.

We conclude the bracha, however, solely with the name of Avraham. For Avraham was the first to chart his own path, and - on his own initiative - acknowledge the presence of Hashem (Chagigah 3a). He was called 'Avraham the Ivri' since he had the courage to stand alone and recognize Hashem as the Supreme Being (See Midrash Bereishis 42:8).

Rabbi Schwab maintains that by noting these attributes of Avraham, we are reinforcing the notion that each person needs to develop his or her unique strengths and chart a course that will lead to a life filled with purpose and meaning.

Three Diverse Paths

I would like to add to the theme of Rabbi Schwab's dvar Torah and suggest that these dual messages of the importance of tradition and the value of individual striving can be found in the first portion of the initial bracha where we recite the memory of our three Avos.

Yitzchak was raised in the home of Avraham where chesed (kindness) was the dominant feature. Nevertheless, Yitzchak did not enroll in the family business' of chesed, but rather charted a course for his unique path to Hashem - gevurah (strength). Following his father's lead, Yakov as well developed his own middah - one of Emes/Tiferes (truth/majesty).

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov shared a joint mission; to serve Hashem with all their skills and talents. They merely took different paths to their common destination.

We begin our prayers each day by recalling the towering accomplishments of our forefathers. We bask in the glow of their memories and are inspired to do our very best to add yet another link in the chain of our mesorah (tradition). We look back to the lives of our Avos and Imahos, and learn the lessons they left us. At the same time, we move forward in our quest to lead meaningful lives ourselves - preparing for the time when we will pass to our children the eternal chain of our glorious heritage.

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