



Parashat Toldot: Our Two Blessings

Dear Friends,

This week we meet genealogy and blessings.

The Hebrew word for genealogy is “toldot”, which is also the name of the parasha. It first appears in the story of Creation, there it is used to summarize the entire enterprise called “Adam”: **“This is the record (toldot) of Adam’s line —When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God; male and female He created them.”** And then comes the next verse which is very significant: **“ And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Adam.”** (Bereishit 5:1-2)

The text tells us that the first human being - both the female and male aspects of him or her - was blessed from the moment of creation (Toldot).

Yaakov, unfortunately, did not know this. Do we?

When Yitzchak wishes to bless his eldest and favorite son, Eisav, Rivka, his wife, who thinks there is only one blessing to be had, hastens to bring her favorite - Jacob - to trick his father and earn the blessing.

We all know the outcome. Yaakov succeeds in getting the blessing that was not meant for him, for which he will spend the next twenty years in exile, in perpetual fear of the anger of his twin brother. Also, he will never see his loving mother again.

This story is not about Yaakov and Eisav. It is about all of us! The competition for blessing is the story of our lives - from Cain and Abel, through Yitzchak and Yishma’el, Yaakov and Eisav, Rachel and Leah, Yoseph and his brothers, and... us.

Humans tend to look outwards - some more, some less - envying the lot of others. We are sure that everyone else is more loved, popular, successful, and smarter than us, or simply put, more blessed.

From Adam’s story and all the way to our own, most of us long for the blessings bestowed on others (“I want what she’s having”)! We continuously compare ourselves, causing jealousy. Jealousy causes hatred and pain. But it also sends us in

search of our own blessing. Some people spend their entire life chasing such a blessing.

But this competition, this frenetic search for blessing, is rooted in an unfortunate error. As we have just read, we are all blessed from birth; we just don't know it. And if someone bothered to tell us (as I am doing now), we won't really believe them. After all, most of us don't feel very blessed most of the time.

Returning to the story of Creation, Adam was told twice that he is blessed. The first time is immediately following his creation: **"And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them.."** (Bereishit 1:27-28) The second time, quoted above, is **"And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Adam."** (Bereishit 5:1-2)

Ten generations later God blesses humans again, this time addressing Noah and his sons: **"God blessed Noah and his sons..."** (Bereishit 9:1)

An additional ten generations elapse, and again, God's blessing, this time to Avraham: **"...and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things."** (Bereishit 24:1)

Notice that while Adam and Noah's blessing come from God (Elohim), Avraham's blessing comes from the Lord (YHVH). Although the Divine is One, these names - "God" and "the Lord" - indicate entirely different aspects of the Divine, each with its own unique blessing!

Elohim - God - is considered the natural aspect of the Divine, i.e. the life-force that flows within everything. This is the God of Spinoza and Einstein. Therefore, the blessing of Elohim is that of continuity, as stated in God's blessing to Adam: **"Be fertile and multiply"**. In other words, Elohim - God - infused every living organism, from an ameba, through weeds, fruit trees, animals, and humans with the mechanism for reproduction and continuity: **"And God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so."** The potential for continuity IS God's blessing. Nachmanides - The Ramban - explains it in this way: "The blessing is the utterance which gave the strength of continuity."

In other words, the fact that Adam is blessed from the moment of creation means that he already has within him everything he needs in order to fully become who he was meant to be and fulfill his role in the world. There is nothing lacking. Every person contains the seeds of his or her own development from the moment of birth. All that is needed is to actualize that potential.

Spinoza taught that in God's blessing there is no free choice, because everything must be what it was created to be. A eucalyptus tree cannot be a cypress. Yaakov

cannot be the firstborn, and so his attempt to buy the birthright and to steal the blessing intended for Eisav turns out badly.

While Elohim is the God of nature and the universe, YHVH is the God of Israel. It is YHVH that is the great innovation of the Torah. YHVH is the God of freedom and of free choice. It is the God of the Exodus from Egypt and from bondage.

The blessing YHVH - the God of freedom and free will - is challenging. Where is our free will to be found? If the eucalyptus tree cannot grow to be a cypress tree, can we we become anything we want?

Let us continue with the Ramban's interpretation: "It is not with one utterance that they were blessed. By the utterance 'fill the earth...', in my opinion, they are given the blessing of filling the earth and separating into families throughout the earth, and not just in one place, as they tried to do" (in the Tower of Babel, when humanity attempted to come together with one language and one goal). According to the Ramban, God wanted them to separate, to scatter! He wanted each person to be unique and different, thereby bringing his own potential to the world.

This is where human freedom and freedom of choice may be found. We cannot change what is already within us, but we are free to fulfill that potential, or not! Fulfilling it is the second blessing.

So there are two kinds of blessings here, ones which we all desire: The blessing of "Elohim", and the blessing of "YHVH". The first is to be deeply validated for who we already are, complete with the seeds within us. The second is the radical permission to actualize those seeds and through them, actualize ourselves. While these blessings are intertwined, they may be distinguished by the name the Torah gives for each. In Bereishit 1 it is Elohim, along with His blessing, while in the second chapter it is YHVH's creation, along with His blessing.

The first struggle between Yaakov and Eisav takes place in-utero, and it centers on being first born (Elohim). Eisav wins that round and is born first, but Yaakov refuses to accept this and tries to steal his brother's birthright. The second struggle is over their father's blessing - an external validation of who they are to become. Yaakov, who does not know that his father has a blessing for him as well, steals the blessing or validation that is meant for Eisav.

Yaakov was blessed but he didn't know it. Am Yisrael, which will evolve from his seed, was there all along, but Yaakov requires another twenty years before he can accept this. In the parasha we will read in two weeks' time he will discover that blessing can arrive in unexpected ways, as they often do.

We are all blessed. Perhaps no one has told us that, and no one has validated who we already are or who we can become. So let us do so now - replace self-judgement and jealousy with validation, of ourselves and of others.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha