

Parashat Chayeh Sarah 5784, 2023:

The Gift of Brachot

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו, כל בני ישראל בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

In the last chapter of our *parasha*, the Torah informs us that *Avraham Avinu* married Keturah following the death of his beloved wife Sarah: “And Avraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 25, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In his *Commentary on the Torah* on this *pasuk*, and basing himself on *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 61:4, Rashi (1040-1105) notes that Keturah was none other than Hagar. She received this unusual name, since her deeds were as “beautiful as *ketoret* (incense).” Keturah gave birth to six children, who, in turn, had a number of children of their own. Toward the end of his life, Avraham gave gifts to Keturah’s sons and “sent them away from his son Yitzchak while he [Avraham] was still alive, eastward to the land of the East.” (25:6)

In the midst of this narrative, we are met with the following quizzical *pasuk*: “And Avraham gave (*va'yitane*) all that he possessed to Yitzchak.” (25:5) This is particularly difficult to understand, since during Eliezer’s presentation to Betuel and Lavan in our *sedrah*, the Torah had already informed us that Avraham had given Yitzchak his entire estate: “And Sarah, my master’s wife, bore a son to my master after she had become old, and he gave him (*va'yitane*) all that he possesses.” (24:36). As Rashi explains: “He [Eliezer] showed them [Betuel and Lavan] a gift deed (*shtar matanah*) [from Avraham to Yitzchak, of all his wealth].” If so, what is the Torah teaching us through this repetition in 25:5? (See Rabbeinu Eliyahu Mizrachi on our verse)

In his supercommentary on Rashi's *Torah Commentary*, entitled, *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal (Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Betzalel, 1526 approx.-1609) on *Sefer Bereishit* 25:5 provides insight regarding our question. He notes that in *Sefer Bereishit* 12:12, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* promises *Avraham Avinu*, “*v'heyai bracha*—and [you shall] be a blessing.” Rashi on this *pasuk* opines: “The blessings are entrusted into your hand. Until now, they were in My [Hashem's] hand; I blessed Adam and Noach. From now on, you may bless whomever you wish.” (See, *Bereishit Rabbah*, 39:11) The Maharal expands on this gloss and suggests, “[Avraham] gave this self-same gift (*matanah*) to Yitzchak, [that is,] to bless anyone he so desired.” This, then, is the rationale for the Torah's inclusion of the verse: “And Avraham gave (*va'yitane*) all that he possessed to Yitzchak,” for now, Yitzchak, as well, was gifted with the power to bless others.

Why is the ability to bless others considered a gift? At first glance, this seems to be supported by the wording of 25:5: “And Avraham gave (*va'yitane*) all that he possessed to Yitzchak,” since *matanah* is the nounal form of *va'yitane*, both of which derive from the infinitive, “*latet*—to give.” While this logic appears convincing, it is important to note that *latet* does not always connote the idea of a gift. We find, for example, in the first line of the *Aleinu*: “*latet gedulah l'Yotzer Bereishit*—to ascribe greatness to the Author of Creation.” Clearly, the acknowledgment of another's status is not a gift.

We are fortunate that the second Sochatchover rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain (1855-1926), shares his deep insights regarding the definitional structure of *matanah* in his classic work, *Shem MiShmuel*. In so doing, he explains why the power to bless someone is considered a gift:

The expression, “*matanah*,” refers to something that has no connection whatsoever to the receiver, for if it was directly relevant to the receiver, it would already belong to him, and he would have no need accept it as a gift. This is the brand-new idea (*chidush*) that Avraham [brought to the world] when he gave the *brachot* to Yitzchak and utilized the word, “*va'yitane*.” This means that even

though the *brachot* were not given to him [Yitzchak] *m'tzad hadin* (based on a legal right), they were nonetheless given to him *b'torat matanah* (through the conceptual category of a gift). (Parashat V'Zot HaBracha, 1912, translation and brackets my own)

In sum, Avraham's transfer of the power to bless others to Yitzchak was a true gift since it was not his *m'tzad hadin*. Yitzchak continued this practice when he blessed Ya'akov with a parallel phrase: "*Va'yiten HaElokim* (may G-d give) you of the dew of the heavens and [of] the fatness of the earth and an abundance of grain and wine." (*Sefer Bereishit* 27:28) *Ya'akov Avinu* then carried this tradition forward in his blessings to each of his sons before his death. Echoes of this act are found, as well, in Moshe's *brachot* to the Tribes of the Jewish people before their entry into *Eretz Yisrael*, and in the stirring words of our nation's prophets. As *Yeshayahu* proclaimed so long ago: "And He shall judge between the nations and reprove many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (2:4) May the fulfillment of this *nevuah* come soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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