

Likkutei Sichos

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Blessing Delayed

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

Feedback is appreciated — please share your thoughts at info@projectlikkuteisichos.org

1.

THE BLESSING OF AVRAHAM

Concerning Yitzchak's blessing to Yaakov before Yitzchak sent him to Padan Aram, the verse states:¹ “May He bestow upon you וְיִבְרַכְךָ ² the blessing of Avraham.” Rashi quotes the words “ וְיִבְרַכְךָ the blessing of Avraham” and explains: “The blessing He said to Avraham,³ ‘I will make you into a great nation,’ and,⁴ ‘all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants.’ May those mentioned blessings...” (as will be discussed below in Section 4).

We need to clarify:

a) Scripture itself, in this verse, goes on to explain “the blessing of Avraham”: “For you to possess the land on which you have been sojourning.” (a) As such, why does Rashi need to draw our attention to this blessing and offer an explanation? (b) Furthermore, why does Rashi explain that “the blessing of Avraham” refers to **other** blessings (“I will make you into a great nation” and “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants”) and not the blessing mentioned explicitly in this verse?

b) Even if, for some reason, Rashi sees a compelling reason to interpret this verse as referring to additional blessings, how do we know that the additional blessings alluded to here are precisely the two blessings: “I will make you into a great nation,” and “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants”? Moreover, we find the content of the clause “I will make you into a great nation” conveyed in Avraham's blessings with greater emphasis and magnitude elsewhere, such as when Hashem told **Avraham**:⁵ “I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth...,” and, “I will surely increase your descendants like the stars of the heavens...”⁶

[Perhaps we can answer: The blessings “...like the dust of the earth” and “...like the stars of the heavens” merely serve to describe in detail the quantitative dimension of the blessing “I will make you into a great nation,” which is the primary and fundamental blessing — and Rashi refers to the general and primary blessing, not to the details.

¹ *Bereishis* 28:4.

² {In Hebrew, the word וְיִבְרַכְךָ is a grammatical particle that primarily functions as a direct object marker, identifying the direct object of a verb. The word וְיִבְרַכְךָ has no direct English equivalent. It is included in the translation here because it is relevant to the discussion below, starting in Section 4.}

³ *Bereishis* 12:2.

⁴ *Bereishis* 22:18.

⁵ *Bereishis* 13:16.

⁶ *Bereishis* 22:17.

This answer does not hold because (a) this approach is not at all smooth, for the fact that Hashem conveyed the promises — “I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth...,” and, “I will surely increase your descendants like the stars of the heavens” — as independent blessings indicates that these promises add something specific beyond the blessing “I will make you into a great nation.” (This is also readily understood, as “a great nation” could suggest a smaller group that falls short of, and is incomparable to, “the dust of the earth” or “the stars of the heavens” in size.) Furthermore, and more importantly, (b) even Yishmael received the blessing to become a “great nation.”⁷

Hence, we can appreciate the necessity of the blessings “like the dust of the earth” and “like the stars of the heavens” — which are additional and distinctive blessings — since these blessings were given exclusively to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.]

(c) Even more difficult to understand: It seems necessary to say that the reason this verse **specifically does not** refer to these two blessings is because these blessings were already given to Yitzchak (earlier):⁸ “I will increase your descendants like the stars of the heavens... and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants.” {For if the verse refers to these two blessings,} why did Yitzchak need to bless Yaakov with the blessing of **Avraham** when he already received these same blessings? It would be more fitting for Yitzchak to say that he was giving Yaakov the blessings **Yitzchak** had received himself.

2.

GIFTS AND BLESSINGS

Some commentators⁹ explain that the reason for Rashi’s interpretation that “the blessing of Avraham” does not refer to possession of the land is that possession of the land was a *מתנה* {a gift}, not a blessing.

[Perhaps we can add:¹⁰ (The reason Rashi does not interpret “the blessing of Avraham” to refer to the continuation of the verse, “for you to possess the land on which you have been sojourning,” is) because the verse itself concludes, “which Hashem *נתן* {gave} to Avraham.” Meaning, Hashem had **already given** the land to Avraham. Thus, it is inappropriate to say, “*וינתן* {He will grant} you the **blessing of Avraham**,” since for Avraham, it was already **gifted** (not a blessing to be fulfilled in the future, but) — in the past.]

⁷ Bereishis 17:20

⁸ Bereishis 26:4.

⁹ *Re'em* and *Gur Aryeh*, commenting on Rashi; see *Be'er Yitzchok's* explanation of *Re'em's* words.

¹⁰ And perhaps this is *Re'em* and *Gur Aryeh's* intention.

However, we still need to clarify: We understand the promise, “I will make you into a great nation” (which Hashem promised to Avraham and) with which Yitzchak again blessed Yaakov to mean that **this** promise should be fulfilled through Yaakov and his descendants. So, we can assume that the same should apply to the possession of the land. Since in actuality (according to *pshat*)¹¹ the land had not yet been given to Avraham — it’s just that “the statement of the Holy One is **as if** it had been performed”¹² — it follows that the blessing intended that Hashem’s promise to give the land of Israel to Avraham should be fulfilled through Yaakov and his descendants so that they should be the ones to possess the land of Israel in actuality.

[And if the compelling proof for this interpretation were (only) from the continuation of the verse, Rashi would have quoted not only the words, “the blessing of Avraham,” but also the continuation of the verse. Or at least Rashi would have hinted at the continuation of the verse by adding “etc.”]

3.

MAYBE NOT SPECIFICALLY THESE TWO

Perhaps we can answer: When Rashi says, “I will make you into a great nation,’ and ‘all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants,’” he did not specifically mean these two blessings. Instead, he means that these blessings include **all** the blessings with which Hashem blessed Avraham (which are situated between these two: “I will make you into a great nation,” is the first blessing from Hashem to Avraham, and “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants” — the last).

However, we can appreciate why this answer is a stretch: (a) Rashi would have needed to at least hint that he also means all the blessings in between. (b) Moreover and more importantly, Rashi concludes (as will be discussed), “May that nation and those blessed descendants come forth from you,” which indicates that he explicitly means these two blessings.

¹¹ {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

¹² Rashi on *Bereishis* 15:18.

4.

SO MANY WORDS

Rashi continues: “May those mentioned blessings be for you. May that nation and those blessed descendants come forth from you.”

It is entirely unclear what this lengthy phrasing adds. It is straightforward in *pshat* that the blessings, “I will make you into a great nation,” and “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants,” which Rashi defines as “the blessing of Avraham,” refer to the phrase “May He bestow upon you” — to Yaakov.

[One could answer, albeit with difficulty, that by saying, “May **those** mentioned blessings be **for you**,” Rashi means (as commentators¹³ explain Rashi’s intention) that “May He bestow upon you the blessing of Avraham,” signifies that he gives **these blessings** to Yaakov, as opposed to Yaakov being blessed with blessings that are *similar* to the blessing of Avraham. In that case, those blessings (the blessing of Avraham) could be transferred to someone else.

However, the continuation and conclusion of the phrase, “May that nation and those blessed descendants come forth from you,” is simply redundant, as this is already understood from “May those mentioned blessings be for you.”]

We must also clarify: Rashi interprets the words “the blessing of Avraham.” Why does he quote the word “תָּאֵלֶיךָ” from the verse?

5.

WHY NO CONTEXT FOR THE BLESSING

The explanation of all the above difficulties:

The problem in the verse that Rashi addresses is as follows:

When the Torah describes a blessing someone received, unless self-evident, the Torah usually provides its reason and purpose. This is borne out by the previous blessing bestowed by Yitzchak, when he said,¹⁴ “See now I have aged... make delicacies for me... so that my soul may bless you before I die.” We find an example of this in the blessings that Hashem gave

¹³ *Re'em* and *Gur Aryeh*; see *Be'er Yitzchak's* explanation of *Re'em's* words.

¹⁴ *Bereishis* 27:2-4

Yitzchak when He said,¹⁵ “Sojourn in this land” — these blessings were bestowed because “he (Yitzchak) intended to go down to Egypt...”¹⁶ As well, after the *Akeidah*,¹⁷ the verse says,¹⁸ “Because you have listened to My voice.” Similar examples can be found in various places.

However, in our case, the verse does not specify why Yitzchak now blessed Yaakov, and the reason is not self-evident.

We can appreciate why Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, saying,¹⁹ “May Hashem Almighty bless you, **make you fruitful and make you numerous...**,” since Yitzchak was sending Yaakov to find a wife. But what connection does this have to the following verse:²⁰ “May He bestow upon you the blessing of Avraham, to you and your descendants with you for you to possess the land on which you have been sojourning”? [If “the blessing of Avraham” refers to possession of the land, then this blessing should have been bestowed in the context of Yaakov’s earlier blessings: “May Hashem give you... of the fatness of the land...”²¹ (This was Yitzchak’s blessing to Yaakov, “before I die.”)]

6.

THE DOWNSIDE OF A JOURNEY

Therefore, Rashi explains that the “blessing of Avraham” is also a blessing related to {Yaakov’s} *shidduch*,²² because Avraham’s blessing refers to the blessings, “I will make you into a great nation,” and “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants.” In turn, these blessings are a continuation of and specification of the earlier blessing, “May Hashem bless you, make you fruitful and make you numerous”). And all these blessings were prompted by the directive to “take for yourself a wife from there.”²³

In other words, Yitzchak sent Yaakov to go and take a wife, blessing him to have many children (“I will make you into a great nation”) — children of the caliber that “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants.”

However, Rashi is precise in adding the phrase, “the blessing of Avraham,” because here it is necessary to emphasize that this blessing was not just any blessing related to a

¹⁵ *Bereishis* 26:3 ff.

¹⁶ Rashi on *Bereishis* 26:2.

¹⁷ {The binding of Yitzchak.}

¹⁸ *Bereishis* 22:18.

¹⁹ {*Bereishis* 28:3.}

²⁰ {*Bereishis* 28:4.}

²¹ *Bereishis* 27:27.

²² {A *shidduch* is a match or matchmaking arrangement, facilitated with the intent of finding a marriage partner.}

²³ {*Bereishis* 28:2.}

shidduch (“make you fruitful and make you numerous”) and (also) not just any blessing that was given to Avraham, but the specific blessing that was particularly relevant to Avraham (and therefore Rashi also quotes the word, “**נָס**”).²⁴

Yaakov had to embark on a journey (“**go** to Paddan Aram”)²⁵ and we already learned that “a journey... reduces procreation and one’s reputation.”²⁶ Therefore, Yitzchak added: “May He bestow upon you the blessing of **Avraham**.” The blessing, “I will make you into a great nation,” was given to Avraham precisely because of the journey (“**לְךָ לְךָ, go for yourself** from your land”),²⁷ which reduces procreation, as Rashi explains there.

The same applies to the blessing, “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants.” This blessing was intended to ensure that the journey should not diminish the repute of his children. [In contrast, the blessings that pertain to **him** (Yaakov) alone, including the blessing that **his** repute should not be diminished,²⁸ are included in the blessing that Yitzchak gave him earlier.]²⁹

7.

THE ACTUAL SAME BLESSINGS

However, a question remains: What was Yitzchak’s intention in blessing Yaakov with **these** special blessings — “the blessing of Avraham” — since these blessings were seemingly not fulfilled for Avraham?

[Indeed, the intention of the blessings was for the future and for generations to come, but **this** blessing was given to Avraham because **his** “journey” would reduce procreation — the blessing relates to Avraham himself procreating — and ostensibly, we do not see that this blessing was fulfilled.]

Avraham fathered only one son from Sarah — Yitzchak — and specifically, “your {true} descendants will be through Yitzchak”³⁰ (as opposed to through Yishmael and the sons of Keturah).³¹ How can we say that the blessing of procreation, which counteracts the

²⁴ {The word **נָס** can be used to add emphasis to the direct object.}

²⁵ {*Bereishis* 28:2.}

²⁶ Rashi on *Bereishis* 12:2.

²⁷ {*Bereishis* 12:1.}

²⁸ And similarly, his money.

²⁹ *Bereishis* 17:29 — May peoples serve you and nations bow down to you.... There was no need to repeat this blessing again before Yaakov embarked on his journey. By contrast, in Avraham’s case, it was his initial blessing.

³⁰ *Bereishis* 21:12.

³¹ See *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel*, ad loc; *Ramban*, *Bereishis* 25:19; *Tur HaAroch* and *Paneiach Raza*, *Bereishis* 25:5; note the commentary (attributed to) Rashi on *Divrei HaYamim I* 1:1.

limitation on procreation caused by a journey, is expressed in the birth of {only} one son (Yitzchak)?

The same applies to the blessing: “And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants.” On the face of it, this blessing was not fulfilled with Avraham’s children. On the contrary (besides the fact that specifically “your {true} descendants will be through Yitzchak,” as mentioned above), even before Yitzchak was born, the verse says about Yishmael,³² “And he will be a wild man, his hand in everything, and everyone’s hand against him” – “**all hate him and attack him.**”

Therefore, Rashi continues, “May those mentioned blessings be for you.” The blessings conveyed to Avraham – **they** will be for Yaakov. The blessings will be fulfilled specifically for Yaakov, in **actuality**. In fact, this came to pass. Yaakov fathered twelve tribes,³³ which already heralds the beginning and foundation of a great nation. In this, we see the effect of this blessing that countered and negated the diminution of procreation caused by a journey.

8.

WHY NO SHLLACH

Perhaps we can suggest further that with his remarks, Rashi answers another question in *pshat*: Why did Yitzchak send Yaakov alone “to Padan Aram...” and instruct him to “take for yourself a wife from there” rather than follow his father Avraham’s example, who sent a messenger and instructed **him**,³⁴ “Take a wife for my son from there”?

[The reason Yitzchak sent Yaakov was solely with the intention for Yaakov to find a wife there — not to flee from Esav. This is because (according to *pshat*) Rivkah did not disclose Esav’s nefarious intentions to Yitzchak.]³⁵

We cannot argue that Yitzchak’s *shidduch* had to be arranged by a messenger because Yitzchak was an “unblemished *olah*”³⁶ (due to the *Akeidah*), and therefore, he could not leave the land of Israel (whereas Yaakov could). This is because, **according to *pshat***, this was **not** the reason why Avraham did not want Yitzchak himself to go to Aram Naharaim.³⁷ It was only

³² *Bereishis* 16:12 and Rashi there.

³³ And our Rabbis explained that with {the birth of} each tribe a twin sister was born, but with Binyamin an additional twin sister was born (Rashi, *Bereishis* 35:17; see Rashi, *Bereishis* 37:35).

³⁴ *Bereishis* 24:7.

³⁵ Cf. *Biurei Maharai*; *Chiddushei* and *Beurei Maharik*; *Or HaChaim* on *Bereishis* 24:7.

³⁶ {An *olah* is a sacrifice that was entirely burnt on the Altar.}

³⁷ In the narrative of *parshas Chayei Sarah*.

later that Yitzchak **became aware** that he was an “unblemished *olah*, and the lands outside Israel are not fitting for you.”³⁸

This question³⁹ as to why Yitzchak sent Yaakov to Padan Aram is answered by the fact that Yitzchak added, “May He bestow upon you the blessing of Avraham — ‘I will make you into a great nation,’ and ‘all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants’”:

The blessing given to Avraham — “I will make you into a great nation” — was connected to the command, “*לך לך*, go for yourself”; it was bestowed because of (and as a reward for) this journey, etc. Therefore, Yitzchak sent Yaakov, “Arise, *לך*, **go** to Padan Aram, to the house of Besuel... and take for yourself a wife from there” so that in the merit of undertaking this journey, he would receive the blessing, “I will make you into a great nation” (“and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants”).

9.

NOT YISHMAEL

However, a question arises: Yishmael was blessed by Hashem with a similar blessing:⁴⁰ “I have blessed him, **I will make him fruitful and will increase him most exceedingly; he will beget twelve** princes, I will make him into a **great nation.**” What, then, is the unique advantage of Yaakov’s blessing? Moreover, in Hashem’s prophetic message, Esav, as a “nation,” is equated to Yaakov — “two **nations**” and “two **peoples.**”⁴¹

To address this, Rashi adds, “May **that** nation and **those blessed descendants** come forth from you.” In contrast, the blessings given to Yishmael and Esav have no connection to the blessing Hashem gave Avraham.

³⁸ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 203, fn. 29, and the sources listed there.

³⁹ In the straightforward approach of Scripture, we find a difference between Yitzchak and Yaakov’s *shidduchim*. In Yitzchak’s case, Avraham instructed {Eliezer} (*Bereishis* 24:4), “Instead, you must go to my land and my birthplace,” {without specifying further}. In contrast, Yitzchak gave Yaakov more detailed instructions {*Bereishis* 28:2}: “{Go to...} the house of Besuel, your mother’s father, and take yourself a wife from there, from among the daughters of Lavan, your mother’s brother” (note Rashi, *Bereishis* 29:17, which mentions that “**everyone** would say: Rivkah has two sons {and Lavan, two daughters, the older [son would marry] the older [daughter] and the younger son [would marry] the younger daughter}”). Nevertheless, this seemingly provides no justification for sending Yaakov himself; on the contrary, the clear directives would have made it even simpler for an emissary to bring a wife from Lavan’s daughters {than Eliezer’s mission for Yitzchak}.

⁴⁰ *Bereishis* 17:20.

⁴¹ *Bereishis* 25:23; see Rashi on *Bereishis* 36:7.

10.

HE WAS ON HIS WAY OUT OF ISRAEL

On this basis, we can also appreciate the continuation and conclusion of the verse: After all, Yaakov was leaving the land of Israel to establish his family. Moreover, Yaakov's blessing that he would become a "great nation" was connected explicitly with his journey (outside the land of Israel). In contrast, Esav remained in the land of Israel. Therefore, one might have thought Esav remained the de facto legitimate claimant of the land of Israel.

Therefore, the verse concludes by telling us that Yitzchak added, "for you to possess the land on which you have been sojourning, which Hashem gave to Avraham." Furthermore, since {Rashi explains this to mean} "May those mentioned blessings be **for you**. May that nation and those blessed descendants come forth from you," it self-evident that the land given by Hashem to **Avraham** belongs only and exclusively to Yaakov and his descendants.⁴²

Since they were "that nation and those blessed descendants," only they were given the land.

11.

ALWAYS CONNECTED TO OUR FOREFATHERS

There is another aspect of Yitzchak's blessing — "May those mentioned blessings be for you. May that nation and those blessed descendants come forth from you" — that is particularly relevant to the blessings, "I will make you into a great nation," and "all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants":

The wording of the blessing, "I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth..." and similarly, "like the stars of the heavens," "and like the sand on the seashore" (and similarly, the beginning of the blessing Yitzchak gave to Yaakov, "make you fruitful and make you numerous") highlight the tremendous number of his descendants. However, from the blessing, the relationship and association between the descendants and Avraham is not apparent, viz., that his descendants will be called by his name.

⁴² On this basis, we can understand simply why the phrase, "which Hashem gave to Avraham," is not superfluous, answering the question of the *Alshich*, ad loc.

In contrast, the blessing, “**I will make you** into a great nation,” emphasizes that all his children and descendants will be associated with him — **he** is the “great nation.”⁴³ The same applies to the blessing: “All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants,” indicating that people will bless one another by referring to them as **your** descendants — his children, the children of **Avraham**.

This was Yitzchak’s blessing, “May He bestow upon you the blessing of Avraham — ‘I will make you into a great nation,’ and ‘all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants.’ May those mentioned blessings be for you. May that nation and those blessed descendants come forth from you.” And the blessing, “I will make you into a great nation,” shall materialize only with Yaakov. As we see, all the Jewish people are called “the tribes of **Israel** (the Children of Israel),”⁴⁴ named after Yaakov.⁴⁵ Similarly, when “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants,” they will refer to “your descendants” as the children of Yaakov.

— From talks delivered *Shabbos parshas Toldos*, 5731 (1970)

⁴³ By contrast, regarding Yishmael, Hashem said, “I will grant him to be a great nation” (but not, “I will make him”). However, in *Bereishis* 21:18, it says “For I will make him a great nation.” Nonetheless, this is not the same as Avraham’s blessings, as mentioned above in the text.

⁴⁴ {In the Hebrew original, “*Bnei Yisrael*”; more commonly translated as the “Jewish people.”}

⁴⁵ {Hashem gave Yaakov the additional name “Yisrael — Israel”; see *Bereishis* 32:29.}