

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Vayeitze

Rabbi Pinches Friedman

Parshas Vayeitze 5771

Translation by Dr. Baruch Fox

“והיה ה' לי לאלקים”

Rashi's Incredible Revelation concerning Yaakov's Prayer: “That His Name Will Rest Upon Me from Beginning to End”

In this week's parsha, parshas Vayeitzei, we read (Bereishis 28,20): **“וידר יעקב נדר לאמר, אם יהיה אלקים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אנכי הולך, ונתן לי לחם לאכול ובגד ללבוש, ושבתו בשלום אל בית אבי והיה ה' לי לאלקים”** — Yaakov took a vow saying, “If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this way that I am going; and He will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I will return in peace to my father's house, and Hashem will be a G-d to me. . .” Rashi comments: **“והיה ה' לי לאלקים - שיחול שמו עלי מתחילה ועד סוף, שלא ימצא פסול בזרעי”** — That His name will rest upon me from beginning to end, that no defect should be found in my offspring.

The words of the Chida in “Shem HaGedolim,” concerning the greatness and sanctity of Rashi's commentary on the Torah are well-known. He writes:

“ושמעתי מפה קדוש רב מופלג שקיבל מרבו, דרש”י התענה תרי”ג תעניות קודם שכתב פירוש התורה, והיה אומר רבינו תם נכדו, מה שפירש אדוני זקני הש”ס אף אני אעשה זאת, אבל פירוש המקרא לית בחילי [אין בכוחי] כי לא אוכל עשוהו.”

“I heard from a holy source, who was taught by his Rebbe, that Rashi fasted 613 fasts before writing his commentary on the Torah; and his grandson, Rabbeinu Tam used to say: I, too, will compile a commentary on the Talmud like my master, my grandfather; however, I cannot possibly write a commentary on the Torah.”

It is apparent that Rashi's commentary can be understood on several different levels—such as PaRDeS: (1) P'shat - the simple explanation, (2) R'emez - allusion, (3) D'rush - exegesis, and (4) S'od - deeper, hidden meaning. Now, let us examine the holy words of Rashi concerning Yaakov's prayer. According to Rashi, when Yaakov states: **“והיה ה' לי לאלקים”**—“And Hashem will be a G-d to me”—his true meaning was: **“שיחול שמו עלי מתחילה ועד סוף, שלא ימצא פסול בזרעי”**—That His name will rest upon me from beginning to end, that no defect should be found in my offspring. What can we deduce from Rashi's cryptic words: “from beginning to end”? Why didn't it suffice for Rashi to merely write: “that no defect should be found in my offspring”?

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When a Man and a Woman Get Married They Form the First Half of Hashem's Name י"ה

I want to suggest that a deeper meaning is concealed here in Rashi's comments. Let us recall the Gemorah (Sotah 17.): "דריש רבי עקיבא, איש ואשה זכו שכינה ביניהן" — "Rabbi Akiva expounds, if a man and his wife are meritorious, the Divine Presence rests between them." Rashi explains: "שכינה ביניהן, שהרי חלק" — "that when a man and woman get married they form the first half of Hashem's four letter name, י"ה—the letter "yod" comes from the Hebrew word for man, איש, and the letter "heh" comes from the Hebrew word for woman, אשה. We are still missing the last two letters of the holy, four-letter name; so, where do the letters ו"ה come from to complete Hashem's name?"

We can provide an answer based on the writings of our master, the Arizal, in "Likutei Shas." He addresses the Mishnah (Yevamos 61:) where we find the opinion of Beis Hillel that one only fulfills the mitzvah of "pru u'rvu," be fruitful and multiply, by having both a son and a daughter; by doing so, the four letters of the holy name הוי"ה are completed. In his own enlightening words: "הנה האדם ואשתו הם רומזים לשם י"ה, וכשיש לו בן הוא ו', וכשיש לו בת הוא ה', והרי הוי"ה שלם, ועל כן חייב אדם להסתכל ולהשתדל שיהיה לו בן ובת כמו בית הלל" — "the man and the woman supply the first two letters of the holy name, the "yud keh," while the son and daughter supply the last two letters, the "vav keh"; thus, completing the holy, four-letter name.

This ties in beautifully with Yaakov's dream which we read in this week's parsha (Bereishis 28,13): "והנה ה' נצב עליו ויאמר אני ה' אלקי אברהם אביך ואלקי יצחק, הארץ אשר אתה שוכב עליה לך אתננה" — "And behold! Hashem was standing over him, and He said, "I am Hashem, G-d of Avraham your father and G-d of Yitzchak; the ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants." Yaakov experiences this vision as he is embarking on his journey to Charan—on his mission to establish a Jewish household and to fulfill the mitzvah of "pru u'rvu, which will complete and unify the four letters of the name הוי"ה. This possuk specifically mentions that Hashem in the form of the four-letter name הוי"ה is standing over Yaakov in his dream.

We can now understand why Yaakov Avinu formulates the following prayer to Hashem: "If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this way that I am going; and He will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I will return in peace to my father's house, and Hashem will be a G-d to me," and Rashi's comment: "That His name will rest upon me from beginning to end." He prays that when he merits to marry the holy matriarchs, all four letters of the holy name should rest upon him—not only the first two letters deriving from the man and his wife, but also the last two letters which are realized with the birth of a son and a daughter.

This is the implication in Rashi's comment: "That His name will rest upon me from beginning to end." Nevertheless, the holy name will only be successfully completed on the following condition: "שלא ימצא פסול בזרעו" — "that no defect be found in my offspring." Only if the children are worthy and without defect, are they able, in their sanctity, to complete the name הוי"ה by providing the letters ו"ה.

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Due to Yaakov HKB”H Bestows All of His Blessings in the Form of “והיה”

As it is the nature of Torah to be expounded in seventy different ways, let us entertain ourselves and enjoy Rashi’s comment from a different perspective. We find a fascinating Midrash on this very same possuk (B.R. 70,6):

“ושבתי בשלום אל בית אבי, נטל הקב”ה שיחתן של אבות ועשאן מפתח לגאולתן של בנים, אמר לו הקב”ה, אתה אמרת והיה לי לאלקים, חיך כל טובות וברכות ונחמות שאני נותן לבניך, איני נותן אלא בלשון הזה, שנאמר (זכריה יד ח) והיה ביום ההוא יצאו מים חיים מירושלים, (ישעיה יא יא) והיה ביום ההוא יוסיף ה’ שנית ידו לקנות את שאר עמו, (יואל ד יח) והיה ביום ההוא יטפו ההרים עסיס, (ישעיה כז יג) והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול וגו’.”

According to the Midrash, since Yaakov formulates his prayer with the word “והיה”—and it shall be—HKB”H responds that He, too, will bestow all favors, blessings and consolations upon Yaakov’s children utilizing this same formula.

Numerous commentaries have attempted, each in his own unique and sanctified way, to explain why it is beneficial for Yisroel to be blessed by HKB”H with the formula “והיה.” I, too, will propose an explanation based on several precious introductions from our beloved Rabbis, zy”a, to guide us on our journey. Firstly, when HKB”H sends Moshe on his mission to facilitate Yisroel’s exodus from Egypt, He says (Shemos 3, 15): “זוה שמי לעלם וזה זכרי לדור ודור”—“This is my name forever, and this is my remembrance from generation to generation.” The Tikunei Zohar (Introduction 4:) elaborates: “שמי עם י”ה שס”ה, זכרי עם”—the numerical value of the word שמי, my name, plus the numerical value of the first two letters of the name הוי”ה, yud keh, equals 365 (350+15); the numerical value of the word זכרי, my remembrance, plus the numerical value of the last two letters of הוי”ה, vav keh, equals 248 (237+11).

Clearly, the former is the number of negative commandments, while the latter is the number of positive commandments. We learn from this that the 365 prohibitions are associated with the first two letters of Hashem’s name, whereas the 248 positive commandments are associated with the last two letters of Hashem’s name. If so, let us attempt to understand why HKB”H saw fit to have the two letters “yud keh”—which are the source of the 365 mitzvos lo taaseh—precede the two letters “vav keh”—the source of the 248 mitzvos aseh.

“Avoid Wrongdoing and Do Good”

It seems that we can explain this matter based on the possuk (Tehillim 34,13): “סור מרע ועשה טוב”—“Avoid wrongdoing and do good.” Here Dovid HaMelech teaches us that first we must cleanse ourselves of our sins, “סור מרע”; afterwards, only then, should we turn our attention to the performance of mitzvos and good deeds, “ועשה טוב”.

Pertaining to this idea, we find a wonderful allusion presented in Sidduro shel Shabbos cited in the name of the luminary of his generation, Rabbi Yeshayah of Dinovitz, zts”l. He addresses a saying in the Gemorah

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(Kiddushin 13.): “כל שאינו יודע בטיב גיטין וקידושין לא יהא לו עסק עמהן”—“anyone not well-versed in matters of gittin and kiddushin, should not involve himself with them.” He explains, allegorically, that “גיטין” alludes to “avoidance of wrongdoing”—divorcing oneself from the yetzer horah; whereas, “קידושין” alludes to “doing good”—sanctifying oneself by the performance of good deeds.

We see that it is necessary to deal with “gittin” first—to drive away the forces of evil—before engaging in matters of “kiddushin”—sanctification by means of mitzvahs and good deeds. Additionally, “anyone not well-versed in matters of gittin and kiddushin”—i.e. who does not know that it is necessary to avoid wrongdoing prior to engaging in the performance of good deeds—“should not involve himself with them”—is better off not engaging in Torah study, as it is written (Tehillim 50,16): “ולרשע אמר אלקים מה לך” —“and to the wicked, G-d said, what purpose does it serve for you to recount my laws and to bear my covenant on your lips?”

Now, we can suggest that this is the reason that HKB”H chose to have the two letters “yud keh”—which are associated with the 365 negative commandments—precede the two letters “vav keh”—which are associated with the 248 positive commandments—in his sacred four letter name. The appearance of the letters י”ה at the beginning of the holy name, reminds us that our first order of business is not to violate any of the three hundred and sixty five mitzvos lo taaseh; afterwards, only then, should we progress to the next order of business, the two hundred and forty eight mitzvos aseh.

The Disagreement between Yaakov and Yosef in the Matter of Avoiding Wrongdoing Versus Doing Good

Regarding this matter, our sacred sources teach us a very important principle. For those simple Jews like us, it is often preferable to engage in the performance of good deeds first, even though we have not completed our task of “avoidance of wrongdoing.”

This lesson is learned from the momentous disagreement between Yaakov and Yosef in parshas Vayeichi. Yosef placed Menashe by Yaakov’s right hand and Ephraim by his left hand. He intended that Yaakov should bless the firstborn Menashe with his more important hand, his right. Yaakov Avinu, however, switched his hands and blessed Menashe with his left hand while blessing Ephraim with his right. Concerning this event, it is written (Bereishis 48,17):

“וירא יוסף כי ישית אביו יד ימינו על ראש אפרים וירע בעיניו, ויתמוך יד אביו להסיר אותה מעל ראש אפרים על ראש מנשה, ויאמר יוסף אל אביו לא כן אבי כי זה הבכור שים ימינך על ראשו, וימאן אביו ויאמר, ידעתי בני ידעתי גם הוא יהיה לעם וגם הוא יגדל, ואולם אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו וזרעו יהיה מלוא הגוים”

“Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head and it displeased him; so he supported his father’s hand to remove it from upon Ephraim’s head to Menashe’s head. And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, Father, for this is the firstborn; place your right hand on his head.” But his father refused,

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saying, “I know, my son, I know; he too will become a people, and he too will become great; however his younger brother shall become greater than he, and his offspring’s fame will fill the nations.”

Many of our righteous luminaries have interpreted this historic disagreement between Yaakov and Yosef in a similar fashion. These include the Chidushei HaRim, the Divrei Yechezkel, the Tzemach Tzaddik the Imrei Yosef and the Torah Ohr.

Essentially, they explain that Menashe alludes to the path of “avoiding wrongdoing.” For the name Menashe reflects the fact that (Bereishis 41,51): “**כי נשני אלקים מכל עמלי**”—“G-d has made me forget all my hardship.” The word **נשני** and the name Menashe share the same root. The possuk is stating: “**כי נשני**”—I have been made to forget—“**כל עמלי**”—all of my transgressions. This is a clear cut allusion to separating oneself from wrongdoing. The name Ephraim, on the other hand, alludes to “performance of good deeds.” As it states (ibid. 52): “**כי הפרני אלקים בארץ עניי**”—“G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.” Here, too, we find that the word **הפרני** and the name Ephraim share the same root; this name suggests being fruitful and acting in a positive manner.

Yosef, the pillar of righteousness, supported the position that first one must correct all matters by avoidance of wrongdoing and only afterwards engage in the performance of good deeds—in keeping with the dictum of “**סור מרע ועשה טוב**.” Consequently, he named his firstborn son Menashe—a reflection of this philosophy. Only then did he name his second son Ephraim—an allusion to “**aseh tov**,” doing good.

Yaakov Instituted the Pathway of “Doing Good” First

Yaakov, however, was of a different opinion. Albeit, the truly righteous, whose transgressions are minimal, are best served by following the sequence of “avoiding wrongdoing” first and only then proceeding to “doing good.” For simple Jews, however, those not as righteous, this sequence poses a problem. If they do not begin the work of “**aseh tov**” until they complete the job of “**sur merah**,” there is a legitimate danger that they will never reach the realm of “doing good”; for, the yetzer horah will always find sins to trip them up with preventing them from advancing to the stage of “**aseh tov**.”

The suggestion, therefore, is that they contemplate teshuvah and begin engaging in Torah study and performance of mitzvos immediately, without any delay. In theory, the immense light of the sacred Torah will dispel the darkness of the yetzer, allowing us, at that point, to complete the task of “**sur merah**”—avoidance of wrongdoing. This is the reason that Yaakov blessed Ephraim before Menashe; he was hinting at the fact that for most of the world, it is preferable to begin with the performance of good deeds—as represented by Ephraim—before completing the business of “avoiding wrongdoing”—as represented by Menashe.

This is reflected in Yaakov’s response to Yosef (ibid. 48,19): **גם הוא יהיה לעם וגם ידעתי בני ידעתי, גם הוא יגדל**—“I know my son, I know; he too will become a people, and he too will become great.” Yaakov was telling Yosef that, indeed, Menashe’s path of engaging in “avoidance of wrongdoing” first represents an advanced form of service; nevertheless, **ואולם אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו**—“his younger brother shall

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become greater than he.” For, everyone is not capable of functioning on that high of a level; in fact, for the majority of people, it is preferable to begin with the performance of good deeds before attempting to complete the work of “sur merah.” As mentioned above, beginning with the task of “avoiding wrongdoing” poses the inherent danger that one, chas v’shalom, will never advance out of that realm.

“והיה ה' לי לאלקים”

a Prayer Placing the ו"ה before the ה"י

Now, we can begin to understand Yaakov’s prayer: **“והיה ה' לי לאלקים”**. Yaakov, himself, was a complete tzaddik and was able to complete the task of **“סור מרע”** before proceeding to the realm of **“עשה טוב”**. This fact is reflected in the possuk: “And behold! Hashem was standing over him.” Specifically, Hashem, the holy four letter name with the letters in their proper order—was standing over him, since he was able to perform the service represented by the letters **י"ה** (which are associated with the 365 negative commandments) first and then proceed to the service represented by the letters **ו"ה** (which are associated with the 248 positive commandments).

Yet, when he embarked on his journey to Charan to establish the house of Yisroel for generations to come, he realized through divine inspiration that his descendants would not be on this same level and would not be able to succeed if required to follow the sequence of “avoid wrongdoing” first and, only then, “do good.” Therefore, he beseeched HKB”H to accept their service even in the reverse order—“do good” prior to “avoid wrongdoing.” Following this sequence, the letters **ו"ה**, associated with the mitzvos aseh, precede the letters **ה"י**, associated with the mitzvos lo taaseh. Arranged in this sequence the letters form the word **והי"ה**.

This then was Yaakov’s intention when he prayed: **“והיה ה' לי לאלקים”**. We find that he specifically used the formula **והי"ה**, imploring HKB”H that even if future generations of Yisroel are only able to serve Hashem in the reverse sequence—“aseh tov” prior to “sur merah”—He should still accept their well-intended service. We can suggest that HKB”H already promised Yaakov that He would honor this request. For, in the dream involving the ladder, it states (Bereishis 28,14): **“והיה זרעך בעפר הארץ”**—once again, we find the formula **והי"ה** being employed. This, too, is the inference in Rashi’s comment: **“שיחול שמו עלי”**—מתחילה ועד סופו, שלא ימצא פסול בזרעי—Yaakov is praying to Hashem that He not consider it a defect in Yaakov’s descendants even if they are only able to serve Hashem by engaging in “do good” before engaging in “avoid wrongdoing.”

We are now able to shed light on our sages puzzling words in the Midrash: **“נטל הקב"ה שיחתן של אבות ועשאו מפתח לגאולתן של בניו, אמר לו הקב"ה, אתה אמרת והיה לי לאלקים, חייך כל טובות וברכות ונחמות שאני נותן לבניך, איני נותן אלא בלשון הזה, שנאמר והיה ביום ההוא יצאו מים חיים”**—HKB”H utilized the formula of the Patriarchs as a key for their children’s redemption. Just as Yaakov formulated his prayer with the word **“והיה”**—and it shall be—HKB”H responds that He, too, will bestow all favors, blessings and consolations upon Yaakov’s children utilizing this same formula.

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In other words, HKB”H promises Yaakov that He will bestow upon Yisroel all of the blessings they are destined to receive, even if they are only able to serve Hashem in the form of **והי”ה**—where they perform good deeds prior to avoiding wrongdoing. Furthermore, even the future redemption which will be forthcoming only in the merit of teshuvah [as it is stated (Yevamos 86.): **גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את הגאולה**—the merit of teshuvah is so great that it hastens the redemption], will be accepted by HKB”H even if performed out of sequence, in the form of **והיה”ה**. In this regard, the possuk states: **והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול**—“And it shall be, on that day, the great shofar will be blown.” Once again, the possuk specifically employs the formula **והיה”ה**.

Yaakov Prayed to Transform the Combination וְהִי”ה into the Name in Its Proper Order

Continuing our journey along this path, we gain an even greater insight into the wonders of Rashi’s commentary. It is well-known that when the letters of the holy name **וְהִי”ה** appear in their proper order, this name signifies “divine mercy.” This attribute is alluded to in the first letters of the words (Tehillim 96,11): **יִשְׂמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיִתְגַּל הָאָרֶץ**—both the heaven and the earth rejoice when divine mercy is displayed in the world; however, when the letters of the holy name are combined in reverse order, it indicates that the attribute of mercy has turned into the attribute of judgment.

Accordingly, when Yisroel serve Hashem in the sequence of “do good” prior to “avoiding wrongdoing,” resulting in the combination of letters **וְהִי”ה**—with the “vav keh” and the “yud keh” reversed—this, in theory, implies judgment. So, although Yaakov beseeched HKB”H to accept Yisroel’s holy, well-intended service even if performed in this sequence, a slight danger exists, chas v’shalom, that the attribute of judgment could be initiated against Yisroel.

Therefore, it appears that Yaakov’s prayer covered this as well. In his prayer: **וְהִי”ה לִי לְאֱלֹקִים**, he immediately mentions the holy name “yud keh vav keh” in its proper sequence after the word **וְהִי”ה**. This can be understood as follows: even if Yisroel serve Hashem by performing “aseh tov” before “sur merah,” Yaakov is beseeching HKB”H to transform the order of the letters **וְהִי”ה** into “yud keh vav keh.”

This is consistent with what we have learned in the Gemorah (Kiddushin 40.): **מִחֻשְׁבָּה טוֹבָה מִצְרָפָה לְמַעֲשֵׂה**—a good intention is considered as a good deed. In reality, every Jew desires to serve Hashem in the best manner possible—such as “avoiding wrongdoing” prior to “doing good”; however, the yetzer horah overwhelms him and prevents him from doing so. Nevertheless, HKB”H combines his good intention with a positive deed and considers it as if he had properly completed the task of “sur merah” before engaging in “aseh tov.” As a result, the letters **וְהִי”ה** are transformed into the name “yud keh vav keh.”

We can now return to the illuminating words of Rashi. **וְהִי”ה לִי לְאֱלֹקִים - שִׁיחֹל שְׂמוֹ עָלַי מִתְחִילָה וְעַד סוּפוֹ**. In other words, Yaakov prays that even if my descendants serve Hashem in the form of **וְהִי”ה**—performing “do good” before “avoiding wrongdoing,” nevertheless, **שִׁיחֹל שְׂמוֹ עָלַי מִתְחִילָה וְעַד סוּפוֹ**—that it should be viewed as if the letters of the holy name appear in their proper sequence from beginning to end.