
פרשת חיי שרה

פרק כד פסוק מב

וְאָבָא הַיּוֹם אֶל־הַעֲוִין וְאָמַר יְ-הוָה אֶל־לֵהי אֲדוֹנֵי אַבְרָהָם אִם־יִשְׁדָּ-נָא מִצְלִים נִרְפִּי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הִלְדָּה עֲלֵיָהּ:

רש"י

וְאָבָא הַיּוֹם. הַיּוֹם יִצְאָתִי וְהַיּוֹם בָּאתִי. מִפְּאֵן שֶׁקִּפְצָה לּוֹ הָאָרֶץ. אָמַר רַבִּי אֶחָא, יָפָה שִׁיחַתָּן שֶׁל עֲבָדֵי אֲבוֹת לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם מִתּוֹרָתָן שֶׁל בְּנִים, שֶׁהָרִי פָרְשָׁה שֶׁל אֱלִיעֶזֶר כְּפוּלָה בַּתּוֹרָה, וְהַרְבֵּה גּוֹפֵי תּוֹרָה לֹא נִתְּנוּ אֶלָּא בְּרַמְיָזָה.

מושג

יָפָה שִׁיחַתָּן שֶׁל עֲבָדֵי אֲבוֹת לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם מִתּוֹרָתָן שֶׁל בְּנִים.

Translation:

The conversation of the servants of the אבות is dearer to Hashem than the Torah of the sons.

Explanation:

This Musag teaches that the entire episode of all that Eliezer said and all he did is recorded because Hashem found his words and actions to be incredibly unique. Eliezer, known here only as העבד, put aside his personal interest to have Yitzchok marry his own daughter, and sought to be a true servant, acting purely for אברהם and for Hashem. His will and Hashem's will became the same, leading Hashem to fully agree to Eliezer's test¹. Such speech (and action), which allows one to turn his words into Torah itself, are particularly beautiful in Hashem's eyes.

Looking in the Pasuk:

This Musag explains why the Torah felt it necessary to dedicate over sixty Pesukim to telling and repeating the story of Eliezer finding a wife for Yitzchok. This is especially difficult given the fact that many important laws are only hinted to in the Torah.

Rashi brings the Musag on this Pasuk² because we find in it Eliezer's prayer that Hashem agree to the conditions of his test and make his דרך successful.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: When one acts purely לשם שמים his will becomes one with Hashem's will, making his words and actions particularly beautiful to Hashem. Eliezer, known here only as העבד, puts aside his self-interest, making everything he did important to write and even repeat, even though the Torah is usually extremely concise.

Understand: A person can turn his will into the will of Hashem by striving to act only לשם שמים. Hashem agreed to provide a wife for Yitzchok according to the conditions set forth by Eliezer, because Eliezer was able to put aside his self-interest.

Think: The general brevity of the Torah highlights areas in which the Torah dedicates what seems to be exaggerated amount of text to one story.

1 See note #1

2 See footnote #5

NOTES

1. The commentary of Rashi on this פסוק makes two points and is taken from two separate sources. The first point of Rashi is the idea of the land 'jumping' or more accurately, contracting³ for Eliezer. That is to say he reached his destination quickly, in a miraculous fashion⁴. Rashi's source is found in מסכת סנהדרין (צה).

תנו רבנן: שלשה קפצה להם הארץ: אליעזר עבד אברהם, ויעקב אבינו, ואבישי בן צרויה... אליעזר עבד אברהם דכתיב ואבא היום אל העין, למימרא דההוא יומא נפק (לומר שאותו היום יצא).

The Gemoroh is explaining the seemingly irrelevant comment of Eliezer in which he said that he arrived that day to ארם נהרים. The Gemoroh teaches that Eliezer was relaying that a miracle had taken place in that his journey which should have taken several days had taken only one day.

The second point Rashi makes is regarding the fact that the Torah, which is often written in the most concise of manners, details the conversation of Eliezer with Lavan and Besuel. This is particularly puzzling given the fact that most of the conversation simply repeats what the Torah had already written as the events unfolded. To this Rashi comments that the conversation of the servant of our Avos was dearer to Hashem even more so than תורתן של בנים, the other parts of the Torah which are written concisely and left for the sages to explain. Rashi's source for this is found in the Midrash Rabba בראשית ה:רבה פרשה ס סימן ה

"ויתן תבן ומספוא לגמלים", א"ר אחא יפה שיחתן של עבדי בתי אבות מתורתן של בנים, פרשתו של אליעזר שנים וג' דפים הוא אומרה ושונה, ושרץ מגופי תורה ואין דמו מטמא כבשרו אלא מריבוי המקרא...

"And he gave straw and feed to the camels", Rav Acha said, "Dearer is the speech of the servants of the house of our Avos than the Torah of the children. The Parsha of Eliezer is two or three columns as it is said (in the Torah) and repeated, while a שרץ is an integral part of the Torah, and yet we do not know that its blood is impure as its meat only through a ריבוי המקרא (an extrapolation made from an extra word in the Torah)."

The Midrash underscores the importance of the conversation of Eliezer, highlighted by the fact that the Torah dedicated several columns to his words, while leaving important matters of impurity to be extrapolated by the Rabbis using textual analysis. What the Midrash, however, does not explain is why this is so. What was so important about the words of Eliezer that made them so dear to Hashem?

One might try to explain by examining Eliezer's speech and find within it hints to spiritual matters, proving that Eliezer's speech was rife with deep significance and meaning. For these reasons Hashem found his words indeed unique, in that a servant could reach such spiritual heights. However, if one reads on in the Midrash this explanation does not hold. The Midrash continues:

ומים לרחץ רגליו, אמר ר' אחא יפה רחיצת רגלי עבדי בתי אבות מתורתן ש בנים שאפילו רחיצת רגלים צריך לכתב, והשרץ מגופי תורה וכו'

The Midrash considers even the washing of the feet to be incredibly important, since the Torah felt the need to write about it. What could possibly be so significant regarding washing their feet?

One other issue is extremely puzzling. Why does Rashi put these two Midrashim together? While the first חז"ל regarding the קפיצת הארץ certainly belongs to the Pasuk of ואבא היום, the second Midrash regarding the שיחת עבדי אבות seems to have no connection whatsoever to this Pasuk⁵. Why would Rashi insert it here?

In order to fully understand the Midrash we must first pay attention to something incredible that is happening in this Parsha. Eliezer, the servant of Avrohom, comes to the well and creates a test which will decide who will marry Yitzchok and be the mother of the Jewish nation. But he does not simply

3 The Shoresh ק.פ.צ is best translated as to close quickly, as in the Pasuk (דברים טו:1) וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת-יְדֶךָ מֵאֲחִידֶךָ הָאָבִיוֹן (דברים טו:1) It also means to jump as in (שיר השירים ב:ח) מְדַלֵּג עַל-הַקְּרִים מְקַפֵּץ עַל-הַקְּבָעוֹת (שיר השירים ב:ח) as one who jumps closes the distance quickly. Rashi in (צא:) explains the word in our context to mean the land contracted, and he brings the Pasuk in דברים as proof. However, the Midrash Rabbah (נט:יא) references a Pasuk in (ד:ט) ספר תהילים which uses the word פצמתה, which means to break apart, which it says relates to the קפיצת הארץ of Eliezer. The Midrash seems to be understanding that the land that Eliezer was standing on broke off and connected to another piece of land. This would lead us to translate the word קפצה as jumping not contracting.

4 Even in modern Hebrew when someone reaches his or her destination quickly we say they had קפיצת הדרך.

5 As we saw above, the Midrash brought the concept of שיחת עבדי אבות on the Pasuk of ומים לרחץ רגליו וימספוא לגמלים probably because the end of the Midrash regarding רחיצת רגלים quotes the end of the Pasuk. It is only Rashi's commentary which mentions the Midrash on the Pasuk of ואבא היום, which remains baffling.

pray to Hashem to supply the girl, rather he sets the conditions. In effect, he is dictating to G-d how he will find the appropriate wife. It seems quite presumptuous of Eliezer to feel free to dictate the conditions⁶.

The Midrash Rabba (א:ס) picks up on this brazen behavior and relates it to a Pasuk in (י:ישיעיהו):
מי בכם ירא ה' שמע בקול עבדו, "מי בכם ירא ה' שמע בקול עבדו", אשר שמע הקדוש ברוך הוא בקולו של עבדו.
Hashem listens to the voice of Eliezer, follows the terms of his test and brings out Rivka. But why does Hashem listen? What gave Eliezer the merit to have Hashem do his bidding? The answer is that Eliezer was acting as an עבד, without any interest in personal gain. In fact, finding a wife for יצחק was not at all what he wanted. He knew the perfect girl; his own daughter. He had lived with the dream that through marriage he would join the family of Avrohom, but now his hopes had been dashed, for אברהם had informed him אין ארור מתדבק בברוך. And yet, he travels against his personal interest to do the bidding of his master. For this reason Eliezer is not called by his name in the entire episode; he is acting as an עבד, nothing more. Since his actions are completely pure and לשם שמים he becomes a vessel to relay the will of G-d. His way then becomes Hashem's way as the Mishnah in Avos (ב:ד) teaches: עשה רצונו פן רצונו פן רצונו, כדי שיעשה רצונו פן רצונו.

This is the 'wonder' which Eliezer experiences when the Torah tells us והאיש מן־תאה לה מתריש. Eliezer wonders if Hashem has approved of his דרך and if Hashem has adopted his plan. He will soon find out that indeed Hashem has answered his prayers and that his "דרך" has become Hashem's "דרך".

The ability of one to act with such self-sacrifice is what turns his will into Hashem's will, and every action into דבר ה'. For this reason his every word and every action become Torah itself and this Torah, created as it were by man, is especially dear to Hashem.

The above explains the words of Eliezer in Pasuk מב, where he beseeches G-d to adopt the terms of his test: אם ישך נא מצליח דרכי אשר אנכי הלך עליה. It is on these words that Rashi brings the Midrash which states יפה שיחתן של עבדי אבות. The ability to have Hashem embrace your דרך, to 'create' Torah through the self-effacing efforts of a true עבד describes the beauty of Eliezer's words - and actions - יפה שיחתן - and actions - ואבא היום קפצה הארץ, to explain the words דברי חז"ל. The first, יפה שיחתן, and the second, יפה שיחתן, to explain the words מצליח דרכי⁷.

2. Question for further thought:

- Eliezer reveals his hope for יצחק to marry his daughter in פסוק ט, when the Torah uses the word אלי (see Rashi). Why in פסוק ה, when Eliezer actually relays his question to אברהם, is it written אולי?
- The Midrash uses the law of the blood of a שרץ being impure like it's meat as an example of a law that was not written explicitly. Couldn't the Midrash have found more profound examples, such as the Torah not explicitly stating how to slaughter an animal or what the 39 אב are?

⁶ The Gemoroh in (ד:ד) מסכת תענית tells us that in reality the test of Eliezer was inappropriate, but even so Hashem answered him appropriately:

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: שלשה שאלו שלא כהוגן, לשנים השיבוהו כהוגן, לאחד השיבוהו שלא כהוגן. ואלו הן: אליעזר עבד אברהם, ושאלו בן קיש, ויפתח הגלעדי. אליעזר עבד אברהם דכתוב והיה הנערה אשר אמר אליה הטי נא כדך וגו', יכול אפילו חגרת אפילו סומא השיבו כהוגן, ונזדמנה לו רבקה.

⁷ Using an incredibly unique thought written by the ערוגת הבשם we can directly connect the two Midrashim brought by Rashi. The ערוגת הבשם explains why the ארץ contracted for Eliezer. He quotes the חז"ל which states that the reason land is called ארץ is because it was willing (רצתה) to do the will of Hashem. For when Hashem created the world he asked each creation if it agreed to be created as such (ר"ה יא.). When questioned if it agreed to be created as earth, the land could have requested a more elevated position. However, it sought simply to do the will of Hashem - רצתה לעשות רצון קונה - and therefore is known as ארץ. We now understand why the one person who sought to be more than Hashem had give him, קרה, was swallowed up by the ארץ. Therefore, concludes the ערוגת הבשם when the land saw Eliezer putting aside all self-interest and seeking only to do the will of his master, it identified with his mission and was only too happy to assist by contracting itself. The two brought by Rashi now connect beautifully. For the very reason the land contracted itself, Eliezer's becoming the true עבד, was the very same reason his words and actions became an integral part of the Torah and became dear to Hashem. It is interesting to note that Eliezer begins his recitation of the story by noting (through the use of the word אלי instead of אולי - see Rashi on Pasuk לט) that he has taken on this mission even though his dream had been denied.