
פרשת שמות

פרק ב פסוק ב

ותהר האשה נתלד בן ותרא אתו כי טוב הוא ותצפנהו שלשה ירחים:

רש"י

כי טוב הוא. כשנולד נתמלא הבית כלו אורה.

מושג

כי טוב הוא. כשנולד נתמלא הבית כלו אורה.

Translation:

That he/it was good: When he (Moshe) was born the house filled completely with light.

Explanation:

The Pasuk wishes to connect the birth of Moshe with the creation of light. In both instances the light was seen as טוב¹. Just as Hashem had chosen the positive power of light over the negative impact of darkness, so too Moshe's birth signaled a new era. This heralded the beginning of a new relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people, one built on love and reward rather than on fear and punishment².

Looking in the Pasuk:

There are a number of problems with the text which lead רש"י to understand the statement of הוא כי טוב as something more than a statement regarding Moshe's physical attributes. First, how does one connect the fact הוא כי טוב with the fact that יוכבד hid him? Second, why does יוכבד think that there is any chance that Moshe might survive being placed in the Nile? Finally, why does the Pasuk add the word אותו, when it could have simply written: ותרא כי טוב הוא. To answer all the above, Rashi brings the Midrash which tells of the miracle of the house filling with light. יוכבד realized that the appearance of light was good, just as it was at the time of creation, and that the birth of Moshe was a sign that times of light, miracles and redemption were ahead. Moshe would most certainly be that savior through whom, and for whom, miracles would be performed.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: The light created by מעשה בראשית is seen by Hashem as טוב, and the same light, also seen as טוב, appears at the time of Moshe's birth as a sign of the coming redemption.

Understand: Hashem relates to us with both אהבה and יראה, רחמים and דין, at times guiding us with positive reinforcement, and at times teaching us by punishing us for our wrongdoing. While each has its place and need, Hashem sees the former as the more powerful and beneficial.

Think: Analyzing the cause and effect flow of Pesukim and the presence of seemingly extra or out-of-the-ordinary words, yields enhanced understanding of the text.

1 See note #1

2 See note #2

NOTES

1. Rashi's source is found in the Gemoroh in (יב.) מסכת סוטה which teaches:

ותרא אותו כי טוב הוא: תניא, ר"מ אומר טוב שמו ר' יהודה אומר טוביה שמו רבי נחמיה אומר הגון לנביאות, אחרים אומרים נולד כשהוא מהול וחכמים אומרים בשעה שנולד משה נתמלא הבית כולו אור, כתיב הכא ותרא אותו כי טוב הוא, וכתוב התם (בראשית א) וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב.

It is interesting to explore why Rashi chose this explanation over the other explanations. Usually Rashi will choose the explanation closest to the simple meaning of the text; the house filling with light does not seem to qualify.

We might answer that Rashi is looking at the entire Pasuk and not only at the word טוב. Rashi is bothered by the seeming lack of connection between the first part of the Pasuk, ותרא אותו כי טוב הוא, and the second part, ותצפנו שלשה ירחים. Why would the fact that he was טוב be a reason to hide him? Would not every mother try to hide her child?

Before we discuss how Rashi solved this issue, we should explain that other commentaries struggled with the same question. The רשב"ם uses a practical approach, pointing to the fact, related by the Midrash, that Yocheved was able to hide Moshe for 3 months due to the fact that Moshe was born three months early³. Usually a baby born that young will not survive, leading Yocheved to believe that trying to save Moshe would be pointless. However, concludes the Rashbam, once she saw that he was healthy, טוב, she decided to hide him. This understanding, טוב meaning healthy, is found in the עוזיאל בן עוזיאל who translates טוב as בן קיומי טוב. The Ramban, however, understands טוב as referring to a spiritual goodness. He quotes the Midrash which related that Moshe was born circumcised and that the house filled with light, both of which exhibited the unique spiritual character of Moshe. יוכבד realized that this is the child מרים had prophesized would redeem the people, and as such would certainly benefit from miracles⁴. Therefore, she saw fit to try to save him in ways that normally would not be attempted⁵. The gain of the Ramban's interpretation over that of the Rashbam, is that according to the Ramban the use of the word טוב, the extraordinary miracle it symbolizes, helps us understand both why יוכבד hid Moshe *and* why she takes the unprecedented step of putting him in the Nile⁶.

We may conclude that Rashi would understand along the lines of the רמב"ן. He thus uses the Midrash's interpretation of טוב as referring to a significant spiritual event, such as the house filling with light, which is necessary to explain יוכבד's use of any and all means to save her unique son.

While the above is certainly possible, there may be an even more compelling reason for Rashi to choose this interpretation of the word טוב: ותרא אותו כי טוב הוא. It is obvious we are talking about Moshe, why the need for the word אותו? A closer look at the Midrash may reveal a different understanding of what הז"ל are telling us.

The Midrash teaches that the word טוב can be understood to be referring to light because in בראשית we find the word טוב connected to light: וירא ה' את האור כי טוב. Almost everyone assumes that the Pasuk thus calls Moshe טוב because the house filled with light at the time of his birth. However, a better explanation would be to parallel the two Pesukim in a more exact fashion. Doing so would

3 See Rashi on פסוק ג who comments: וְלִדְתּוֹ לִשְׁשֶׁה חֳדָשִׁים יוֹם אֶחָד. While not the subject of our Musag, it is important to note that most Midrashim and the Gemoroh do not credit her ability to hide Moshe for 3 months to the fact that he was born early. The more common explanation is that יוכבד was already three months pregnant when עמרם remarried her. Thus the Egyptians, who counted 9 months from the time of the remarriage were 3 months off. Why Rashi chose to understand that Moshe was premature by three months needs further discussion.

4 מרים had also realized that Moshe would benefit from miracles as the Pasuk tells us: ותתצב אחותו מרחוק לדעה מה יעשה לו. Miriam did not stand waiting to see *if* something would be done to save Moshe, but rather, *what* would be done.

5 The רמב"ן makes the same point but does so without the use of the Midrash. He agrees with the רשב"ם that the word טוב relates to the physical appearance of Moshe but agrees with the רמב"ן that this exhibited Moshe's unique spiritual gifts. He explains that one's extraordinary physical beauty mirrors his or her spiritual makeup: כי אמנם יופי התבנית יורה על טוב מזג החומר ושלמות הכה המייצר. This idea is often used to explain the reason the Torah saw fit to inform us of the physical beauty of the אמהות.

6 According to the Rashbam the fact that he was healthy does not explain the latter.

lead us to the conclusion that it was not Moshe who is being referred to by the word טוב, but the light itself. Just like when it says וירא ה' את האור כי טוב, it refers to Hashem seeing the light as טוב, so too when it says ותרא אותו כי טוב הוא, it should be understood as יוכבד seeing the light as טוב. The word אור is no longer extra, but rather needed to inform me of Moshe's mother seeing something else than Moshe and seeing it as טוב. Rashi, thus chose the interpretation of the בית מלא אור since it not only explains the text that follows, but also explains the word אור as well.

2. One might ask why did the house fill with light? What was the symbolism involved in this miracle? The simplest answer is that light symbolizes freedom. For this reason the ברכה we make on Pesach night at the end of מגיד reads גדול ומאפילה לאור גדול⁷. The connection of light - specifically the light of מעשה בראשית in which we find the word טוב - to freedom is found in the Midrash which teaches:

א"ר סימון ה' פעמים כתיב כאן אורה, כנגד חמשה חומשי תורה, ויאמר א-להים יהי אור, כנגד ספר בראשית, שבו נתעסק הקב"ה וברא את עולמו, ויהי אור, כנגד ספר ואלה שמות, שבו יצאו ישראל מאפילה לאורה⁸... (בראשית רבה פרשה ג סימן ה)

There, however, might be a deeper meaning⁹. Referring again to the parallel made between the word טוב in our Pasuk and the אור in בראשית, we find a fascinating Midrash:

רבי אבהו ור' חייא רבה, רבי אבהו אמר מתחלת ברייתו של עולם צפה הקדוש ברוך הוא במעשיהן של צדיקים, ומעשיהן של רשעים, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים א:1) כִּי יִדְעֶה ה' צְדִיקִים וְיִצְרֶה רָשָׁעִים תֹּאבֵד: "והארץ היתה תהו ובהו", אלו מעשיהן של רשעים, "ויאמר אלקים יהי אור" אלו מעשיהן של צדיקים, אבל איני יודע באיזה מהם חפץ אם במעשה אלו ואם במעשה אלו, כיון דכתיב "וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב", הוי במעשיהן של צדיקים חפץ ואינו חפץ במעשיהן של רשעים (בראשית רבה פרשה ב סימן ה)

The Midrash seems impossible to understand. How is it possible that we do not know which Hashem prefers, the acts of צדיקים or the acts of רשעים? And, how does this connect to the creation of light and darkness; did Hashem create the acts of the צדיקים and of the רשעים?

Perhaps we might answer by explaining that people can be influenced towards ה' עבודת either through observing the acts of the righteous or the acts of the wicked. They could be inspired by seeing the spiritual heights one might reach and the ensuing benefit it brings to both the צדיק and to mankind. Conversely, they might be disgusted by observing the depravity of evil and the ensuing destruction it brings both to the רשע and to all those who follow him. In the same vein, there are two ways in which Hashem might influence our behavior. One way is what is known as 'the carrot approach' the other is 'the stick'. Hashem might shower blessings upon us, leading us to keep His commandments out of gratitude, or He might punish us and make us realize how painful it can be when estranged from Hashem's favor. Which is more effective?

This is the question asked in the Midrash. There is light and darkness, אהבה ויראה, the carrot and the stick, good times and bad. There are the acts of the Tzadikim and the acts of the wicked, the acts that inspire us and the acts that revolt us. Which are more effective tools to bring us closer to Hashem?

The Midrash answers, וירא ה' את האור כי טוב. Hashem saw that the 'light' is better. Even though, at times, there is a need to punish and show displeasure, showering goodness on people will always lead to the strong and loving relationship.

7 למי ששעשה לאבותינו ולנו את כל הנסים האלו. הוציאנו מעבדות לחרות, מגזון לשמחה, ומאכל ליום טוב, ומאפילה לאור גדול, ומשעבוד לגאולה.

The motif of אור representing גאולה is found many times in the הגדה: הגיע זמן ק"ש של שחרית: הגדה. נתמלא הבית כולו אור. נתמלא הבית כולו אור. The Midrash Gemoroh in Sotah however, which is Rashi's source, writes it in the masculine: נתמלא הבית כולו אור. The Midrash Rabba, on the other hand, also writes in the feminine. Perhaps Rashi and the Rabba seek to connect to the Midrash of מעשה בראשית and therefore used the same feminine terminology. The differing terms are reflected in consecutive Pesukim in Tehilim (פרק קלט:יא-יב) נֹאמַר אֲדַחֲשֶׁה וְשׁוֹפְנֵי וְלִלְתָּ אֹרֶךְ בְּעֵדְנֵי: גַּם-חֲשֶׁה לֹא-תִשְׁחַד מִמֶּה וְלִלְתָּ כַּיּוֹם יֵאִיר בְּחִשְׁבָּה: (פסוק קל"ט:א-ב) כְּאוֹרֶה:

8 Interestingly, the Midrash writes the word אור in the feminine, לאורה. Rashi here also writes כלו אורה. The Gemoroh in Sotah however, which is Rashi's source, writes it in the masculine: נתמלא הבית כולו אור. The Midrash Rabba, on the other hand, also writes in the feminine. Perhaps Rashi and the Rabba seek to connect to the Midrash of מעשה בראשית and therefore used the same feminine terminology. The differing terms are reflected in consecutive Pesukim in Tehilim (פרק קלט:יא-יב) נֹאמַר אֲדַחֲשֶׁה וְשׁוֹפְנֵי וְלִלְתָּ אֹרֶךְ בְּעֵדְנֵי: גַּם-חֲשֶׁה לֹא-תִשְׁחַד מִמֶּה וְלִלְתָּ כַּיּוֹם יֵאִיר בְּחִשְׁבָּה: (פסוק קל"ט:א-ב) כְּאוֹרֶה:

9 I am somewhat bothered by the fact that the above Midrash refers to the גאולה as אור but uses the term טוב for something else. The word טוב in our Pasuk, thus, while relating to light, must refer to a deeper aspect of גאולה.

This is the lesson of the light, the טוב, that appears when Moshe is born. This is the מאפילה לאורה mentioned in the previous Midrash, that urges us to remember וירא את האור כי טוב. It is a sign that Hashem desires a different relationship, one built on אהבה and not on יראה, on reward and not on punishment.

3. Questions for further discussion:

- a. Where else do we use the term אורה instead of אור, and what connection might it have to our Musag? In addition, what significance could there be when using the feminine אורה instead of אור?
- b. How can we understand the fact that Moshe is *born* as the מושיע של ישראל? Does he not have to earn that title? Did he have a choice to be different?