
פרשת וישב

פרק לז פסוק א

וַיִּשָׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרַי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

רש"י

וַיִּשָׁב: בְּקִשׁ יַעֲקֹב לֵישֵׁב בְּשָׁלוֹה, קִפֵּץ עָלָיו רָגֶזוּ שְׁל יוֹסֵף, צְדִיקִים מְבַקְּשִׁים לֵישֵׁב בְּשָׁלוֹה, אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, לֹא יֵן לְצְדִיקִים מִה שְׁמִתְקֹן לָהֶם לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא אֲלֵא שְׁמִבְקָשִׁים לֵישֵׁב בְּשָׁלוֹה בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה.

מושג

בְּקִשׁ יַעֲקֹב לֵישֵׁב בְּשָׁלוֹה, קִפֵּץ עָלָיו רָגֶזוּ שְׁל יוֹסֵף.

Translation:

Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility, but the ordeal of Yosef sprang upon him.

Explanation:

Yaakov wanted to serve Hashem from a position of quiet and serenity. He sought to live out his days in Eretz Yisrael, without the need to fight off the influences of a Lavan or the danger of an Eisav. However, Hashem informed him that the service of man in this world is to achieve spiritual growth by overcoming challenges. The battles and achievements of Yosef are the perfect examples of this service¹.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Midrash Rashi quotes explains the word וישב to mean not only dwell, but dwell in tranquility. The Midrash is explaining why this Pasuk is used as the introduction to the story of Yosef² when it would have been more appropriate to mention Yaakov's dwelling place towards the end of פרק לה. Additionally, חז"ל are reacting to the change in Shoresh from ב.ש.י at the beginning of the Pasuk to ג.ו.ר at the end of the Pasuk.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Yaakov wished to live his life in tranquility but was challenged with the episode of Yosef.

Understand: Man must seek to constantly strive towards growth and not be content with the level of spirituality he has achieved. Yosef is the perfect example of one who achieved tremendous spiritual heights³ by serving Hashem in extremely challenging circumstances. Yosef is thus the proof that Yaakov's search for tranquility was inappropriate.

Think: Changes in wording used within a Pasuk as well as wording that is out of context lead us to deeper understanding of the Torah's intent.

1 See note #1

2 See note #2

3 Yosef is one of the few who merited to be called הצדיק.

NOTES

1. There are two issues to be dealt with regarding this Rashi. The first is the philosophical: Why can a Tzaddik not seek peace and tranquility in this world? The second issue is textual: What exactly does Rashi mean when he says קפץ עליו רוגזו של יוסף? What message is contained in these rather obscure words?

Rashi's commentary here is based on the (פרשה פד:ג) מדרש רבה which clues us in on why the word רגז is used.

א"ר אחא בשעה שהצדיקים יושבים בשלוח ומבקשים לישב בשלוח בעולם הזה השטן בא ומקטרג אמר לא דיין שהוא מתוקן להם לעולם הבא אלא שהם מבקשים לישב בשלוח בעולם הזה, תדע לך שהוא כן, יעקב אבינו על ידי שבקש לישב בשלוח בעוה"ז נזדווג לו שטנו של יוסף - "וישב יעקב": לא שְׁלַחְתִּי וְלֹא־שָׁקַצְתִּי וְלֹא־נָחַתִּי וְנִבְאָה רִגְזוֹ: (איוב ג:כו) לא שלותי מעשו ולא שקטתי מלבן ולא נחתי מדינה, ויבא רוגז, בא עלי רגזו של יוסף.

While reading the Midrash helps us understand where the term רגז came from, we still need to understand why the Pasuk in איוב termed the episode of Yosef with the word רגז⁴.

The Shoresh ר.ג.ז has multiple meanings. In the Torah the Shoresh appears four times and mostly means fear. The three times the Shoresh is used in ספר שמות and in ספר דברים all follow this pattern⁵. The fourth example of the Shoresh, (בראשית מה:כד), אל תרגזו בדרך, however, does not lend itself to being defined as fear. Rashi follows the lead of אונקלוס and translates the word as fight. Finally, in modern Hebrew, the Shoresh is generally defined as anger. In נביאים we find an example: יָעַן אֶשֶׁר. In addition, אונקלוס always translates anger as רגז. The common thread in all definitions seems to be agitated or disquieted⁷.

This leads us to ponder how to translate the Midrash's words רגזו של יוסף. Anger, fighting or fear do not seem appropriate in this context. Perhaps the best definition would be turmoil. This would fit as the most appropriate counter to the tranquility being sought by Yaakov as understood from the word וישב.

However, I believe that Rashi sees something deeper here. Piquing my interest is the word קפץ עליו that Rashi adds, which is not found in the words of the Midrash. Why did Rashi not say בא עליו, which would be a more accurate quote from the Midrash?

A closer look at the Midrash forces a different understanding. The Midrash first used the term נזדווג בא לו, and only later, when commenting on the Pasuk in איוב, did they use the term רגזו של יוסף. What does the initial term mean?

To fully understand we must begin by returning to the philosophical question of why was Yaakov punished for wanting to live in tranquility in עולם הזה? This question is sharpened by a passage in (מסכת הוריות י:):

אשריהם לצדיקים שמגיע אליהם כמעשה הרשעים של עולם הבא בעולם הזה... אמר רבא: אטו צדיקי אי אכלי תרי עולמי מי סני להו? אלא אמר רבא: אשריהם לצדיקים שמגיע אליהם כמעשה הרשעים של עולם הזה בעולם הזה...

The Gemoroh began by saying that fortunate are the Tzaddikim who suffer the bitter fate of the wicked (who will be punished in the next world) in this world. This initial thought implied that it is preferable for a Tzadik to suffer in this world. Rava rejected this contention claiming that there is nothing wrong with a Tzaddik enjoying both this world and the next. Rather, corrected Rava, a Tzaddik is fortunate if he merits to enjoy this world in the same fashion that it is enjoyed by a wicked person. This directly contradicts our Musag!

It would seem therefore that a Tzaddik does not have to suffer in this world (other than whatever suffering is necessary to atone for his sins). The mistake of Yaakov was not in that he did not wish to suffer, but in the fact that he wished לישב בשלוח, to *constantly* remain in a constant state of

4 The Sefer Targum writes that the Gematria of רגז is the same as רדו, hinting that the episode of Yosef will begin the 210 years of the Egyptian exile.

5 יָעַן אֶשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּן שְׁמַעְךָ וְרָגְזוּ וְחָלוּ מִפְּנֶיךָ: (דברים ב:כה) - לב רגז וכליון עינים (שם כח:סה)

6 מצודת ציון: ענין כעס, וכן במצודת דוד: הכעסת אותי

7 The Malbim indeed understands the Shoresh to be an absence of tranquility, the opposite of שלוח.

8 The basic idea of the Gemoroh is that a wicked person is allowed to enjoy this world as a compensation for his Mitzvos while his punishment will be meted out in the next world. A Tzaddik, on the other hand, is punished for his sins in this world in order to allow him full reward for his Mitzvos in the next world.

tranquility without challenge. A person must strive towards growth; to successfully face situations that challenge his current spiritual level in order to achieve even higher levels⁹. In the words of Pirkei Avos (פרק ה משנה כג) לפום צערא אגרא¹⁰.

Yaakov, at the beginning of our Parsha is living in tranquility. However, he sought not only to *live* in tranquility, but to *sit* in tranquility, to constantly remain in such a state. His mistake can be summed up with one word, יושב¹¹.

This, in Hashem's eyes, was unacceptable. Hashem wanted to provide for Yaakov an example, probably the very best example in all of Tanach, of someone who used life's challenges as a springboard for greatness; Yosef. Hashem provided a partner, a counter balance, to Yaakov. Yosef's life became the ultimate prosecution, שטן, to Yaakov's wish to live the unchallenged life. This is the intent of the Midrash when it says נזדווג לו שטנו של יוסף. Yaakov was not being punished by having to endure the turmoil caused by Yosef's sale, but rather was being educated as to the correct service of Hashem. Rashi, therefore, did not wish to simply quote the words of the end of the Midrash, בא עלי רגזו של יוסף, since those words could be understood as a punishment. But rather קפץ עליו, which does not connote something negative but rather something that came immediately and unexpectedly.

We may therefore define the words רגזו של יוסף as the battle of Yosef¹². Thus the Pasuk in Iyov uses the best word to describe the life lesson provided by the story of Yosef, רגז, battle. Not the battle with his brothers, but the battle with life's challenges. In summation, when Yaakov sought to serve Hashem through tranquility, without challenge, change or growth (בקש יעקב לישב בשלוה), he was immediately corrected ((קפץ עליו)) to learn from the battles of Yosef (רגזו של יוסף), and his subsequent rise to greatness.

2. The Torah never tells us explicitly why Yaakov must suffer the loss of his son Yosef. One might claim that the selling of Yosef was not a punishment but rather part of the Divine plan to begin the Egyptian exile¹³. The selling of Yosef actually assisted in this regard. In fact, the Gemoroh in מסכת (פס:) teaches that the descent to Egypt through the story of Yosef was due to the merit of Yaakov:

אמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן: ראוי היה יעקב אבינו לירד למצרים בשלשלאות של ברזל, אלא שזכותו גרמה לו דכתיב (הושע יא:ד) בחבלי אדם אמשכם בעבתות אהבה.

A similar thought is found in the (פרשת וישב סימן יח) מדרש תנחומא:

ויוסף הורד מצרימה: זה שאמר הכתוב בחבלי אדם אמשכם בעבתות אהבה, ראויין היו ישראל לירד למצרים בשלשלאות ובקולרין, כשם שירדו לבבל, אילולי שקדם יוסף.

However, while this might explain why Yosef went to מצרים, we still need to understand why it happened in a way that caused Yaakov such pain. We understand that the Torah is coming to answer this question by introducing the story of Yosef with the words יושב יעקב.

3. Questions for further discussion:

According to our understanding of Yaakov's mistake, can we understand why when Yaakov lives in Mitzrayim the Torah tells us ויחי יעקב¹⁴?

Can you think of other examples in Jewish history when times of tranquility lead to assimilation, but times of challenge led to Torah growth?

9 Many commentators explain the Pasuk (זכריה ז:ז) ונתתי לך מהלכים בין העמדים האלה, to be conveying this message.

Angels are referred to as עומדים, as they retain a constant state, while humans are called מהלכים, as they are expected to attain a pattern of constant movement and growth. We might add that spirituality is called רוח precisely because wind by definition always moves.

10 A more modern adaptation: No Pain No Gain.

11 A careful reading of our Midrash supports this thought. The beginning of the Midrash reads: בשעה שהצדיקים יושבים יושבים בשלוה ומבקשים לישב בשלוה ומבקשים לישב בשלוה בעולם הזה השטן בא ומקטרג יושבים בשלוה ומבקשים לישב בשלוה. How can we understand the words יושבים בשלוה ומבקשים לישב בשלוה? If they are already living in tranquility, why would they seek to sit in tranquility? Perhaps the Midrash means that they seek to constantly sit in tranquility, to never be challenged to be better.

12 The Shoresh in the Pasuk אל תרגזו בדרך which appears at the conclusion of the story of Yosef.

13 The Midrash says: וישלחהו מעמק חברון (לז:יד) teaches this explicitly from the Pasuk (פד:יג) והלא אין חברון נתונה אלא בהר! וכתיב וישלחהו מעמק חברון? אמר רב אחא הלך להשלים אותה העצה העמוקה שנתן הקב"ה בינו ובין חבר הנאה (הכוונה לאברהם אבינו. וקוראים לו חבר הנאה על שם חברון) שהיה קבור בחברון ועבדו וענו אותו

14 Additionally, when Yaakov sees the wagons that will bring him to Mitzrayim the Torah tells us ותחי רוח יעקב (מה:כז).