
פרשת וישלח

פרק לט פסוק ב

וַיֹּאמֶר אִם-יָבוֹא עֲשׂוֹ אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאֵתָה וְהִכְּהוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לְפָלִיטָה:

רש"י

הַתְּקִין עֲצָמוֹ לְשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים, לְדוֹרוֹן לְתַפְלָה וְלַמְלַחְמָה. לְדוֹרוֹן, "וַתַּעֲבֹר הַמַּנְהֶגָה עַל פְּנֵיו" (פסוק כב). לְתַפְלָה, "אֶ-לֹהֵי אָבִי אֲבָרְקֶם" (פסוק י). לְמַלְחָמָה, "וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לְפָלִיטָה" (פסוק ט)

מושג

הַתְּקִין עֲצָמוֹ לְשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים לְדוֹרוֹן לְתַפְלָה וְלַמְלַחְמָה.

Translation:

He prepared himself for three things: to give gifts, to pray, and to wage war.

Explanation:

Yaakov prepared himself to confront his brother Eisav by giving Eisav gifts, by praying to Hashem and by preparing himself for battle. Yaakov did not suffice himself with prayer, even though Hashem had promised to protect him¹, for a person should not rely on miracles but rather do his or her personal effort. In addition, he feared שְׂמָא יִגְרוּם הַחַטָּא, that perhaps because of his sins he would not merit a miracle².

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Midrash³ that Rashi quotes learns this from the fact that Yaakov sent gifts to Eisav, davened for Hashem's help and split the camp in preparation for battle. The Midrash mentions the gifts first, even though in the Torah they are mentioned last, because Yaakov realized that Hashem would answer his Tefilos only after he had done his השתדלות, an effort to appease Eisav in a natural way⁴.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Yaakov prepares for his meeting with Eisav, not depending on miracles.

Understand: Why we believe that Hashem provides for us and protects us and yet we go to work to earn a living and establish police and armies to protect us.

Think: Compare the order of Yaakov's preparations mentioned in the Midrash to the order in which they are mentioned in the Pasuk. What do we learn from the changes?

1 פרק כח פסוק טו והנה אנכי עמך ושמרתיה בכל אשר תלך

2 See note #1

3 תנחומא ישן וישלח

4 See note #2

NOTES

1. The Gemoroh in ראש השנה טז: tells us⁵:

ואמר רבי יצחק: שלשה דברים מזכירין עונותיו של אדם, אלו הן: קיר נטוי, ועיון תפלה, ומוסר דין על חבירו

Three things call attention to the sins of man, and these are them: A falling wall, etc.

Rashi explains why a falling wall would call attention to one's sins:

קיר נטוי - ועובר תחתיו מזכיר עוונותיו, שאומר: כלום ראוי זה ליעשות לו נס, ומתוך כך הוא נבדק

When a person walks under a falling wall he calls attention to his sins because Hashem asks if the person is deserving of a miracle (after all, the laws of nature would have the wall collapse on him, therefore, saving him would call for a change to the laws of nature, i.e. a miracle). Because of this, his actions are examined. In effect, there could be a situation in which Hashem does not deem it necessary to punish a person, however, that person has put himself in a situation in which he is at odds with the forces of nature and requires a miracle to save him. In such a case his מצוות ועבירות will be examined to see whether or not he merits being saved.

For example, even though we are taught that those who do Mitzvos are not harmed, שלוחי מצוה אינם (פסחים ה:), when there is a clear and present danger, the protection of the Mitzvah is not necessarily forthcoming (שכיחא היזיקא שאני). The reason is as explained above; when a person puts himself in a situation in which the forces of nature would harm him, a miracle (change of the laws of nature) is needed to save him, and he may not warrant such a miracle. The greater the danger, the more obvious the miracle (נס נגלה), and only great Tzadikim warrant open miracles to save them⁶. Therefore, anything one might do to minimize either the danger or the need for an open miracle increases their chances for survival.

Yaakov is in an obviously dangerous predicament. By trying to bribe Eisav through giving gifts, he is not only trying to appease Eisav, but is also providing Hashem with an avenue by which he might be saved through a hidden miracle, i.e. Hashem having Eisav change his mind. The same is true regarding Yaakov's preparation for war. He strategizes so that he may win on a natural level, but at the same time his preparations provide Hashem with an avenue via which to effect a hidden miracle should the natural means not suffice.

When a person goes to work to earn a living he is basically doing the same thing. On one level he works so that he might be successful on the 'natural' level. On another level, even though his efforts may not lead to success on the natural level, he may daven that Hashem uses his actions as an avenue by which to effect success through a hidden miracle. The better he or she is at what they do (better training, harder work, etc.) not only increases the chances for success on the natural level, but also allows for any Divine intervention to work in a more hidden mode, thus increasing the chances for such intervention.

2. It is indeed difficult to understand the order in which the Midrash mentions Yaakov's three preparations. If we follow the order of the Pesukim that the Midrash itself uses as the source for each, the order should be first (פסוק ט) מלחמה, then (פסוק י) תפילה and finally (פסוק כב) דורון. We might answer that even though Yaakov immediately prepared for war,⁷ since it was obviously a last resort the Midrash mentions it last. However, why mention the gift, which the Torah mentions last, before Tefilah⁸?

According to what we have written above, Yaakov's Tefilah was for Hashem to use the 'natural' avenue (of bribing Eisav in order to calm him) to effect the 'hidden' miracle. Therefore, the

5 The following explanation appears in Parshas Miketz on the Musag בשעת סכנה

6 Why Yaakov felt he was not deserving of such a miracle will be discussed in the next Musag.

7 According to the Midrash (תנחומא ישן) Yaakov had secretly armed the entire מחנה.

8 The Midrash which Rashi quotes actually does mention תפילה first and then דורון. Our question, therefore, is on Rashi's version of the Midrash. According to the Ramban one might claim that the gift was actually mentioned first in the Torah. The Ramban explains that when Yaakov first sent the messengers to Eisav and told Eisav ויהי לי שור וחמור, he was communicating to Eisav that these would be given to Eisav as gifts. However, the Midrash does not quote this Pasuk, but rather Pasuk כב, and Rashi does not seem to agree with this Ramban, leaving our question unanswered.

Midrash mentions the gift first as this was to be the way in which his consequent Tefilos would be answered.

3. Questions for further discussion:

- a. When proving that Yaakov sent gifts, why does the Midrash first quote Pasuk כב and not Pasuk כד?
- b. Did Yaakov misread Eisav's intentions or was it the Tefilah and gifts that changed his mind?