
פרשת מקץ

פרק מה פסוקים ז,ל

(ז) וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת-אֶחָיו וַיִּכְרַם וַיִּתְנַכֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתָם קְשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם
מֵאִין בָּאתֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן לְשֹׁבַר-אֶכָּל:
(ל) דַּבֵּר הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנָי הָאֶרֶץ אֲתָנוּ קְשׁוֹת וַיִּתֵּן אֲתָנוּ כַּמְרִגָּלִים אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ:

רש"י

וַתְּדַבֵּר: אין דבור בכל מקום אלא לשון קשה, וכן הוא אומר "דבר האיש אדני הארץ אתנו קשות". ואין אמירה בכל מקום אלא לשון תחנונים, וכן הוא אומר "ויאמר אל נא אחי תרעו" (בראשית יט:ז), "ויאמר שמעו נא דברי" (להלן פסוק ו), כל "נא" לשון בקשה: (רש"י במדבר יב:א)

מושג

אין דבור בכל מקום אלא לשון קשה.

Translation:

The word דיבור is to be understood as hard or strong language.

Explanation:

The Torah introduces Yosef's interaction with his brothers with the words וידבר אתם קשות. The Midrash learns from this that the word דבר is always to be understood as referring to strong language. This is not to mean that Yosef spoke to his brothers in a harsh tone, but rather that his words to them were strong and purposeful. That is to say, that from the very beginning Yosef had a plan to force his brothers and his father into a difficult test. Yosef manipulated his brothers in order to find out if they had done תשובה and would be willing to stand up for his brother בנימין. Also, Yosef needed to know why his father had sent him to שכם alone. Only when he saw how his brothers protected בנימין and heard how his father had mourned his loss, was he ready to reveal himself to his brothers and rejoin בני ישראל.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Midrash Rashi quotes learns an important lesson about the language of the Torah from the description of Yosef's speech to his brothers. The Torah uses the word וידבר together with the word קשות (and repeats the two together when the brothers relate the story to their father) thus teaching us that whenever the Torah uses the word דבר it refers to a לשון קשה. From the context of Yosef's words we better understand what the term לשון קשה means.

NOTES

Our Musag teaches that whenever the Torah uses the word דבר it is referring to a harsh type of speech. While here it is obvious that Yosef used a harsh tone, as it says קשות, our Pasuk is used as an example for the rest of the Torah when only the term דבר is used. Our Musag is taken from the מדרש תנחומא where it explains the Pasuk (במדבר יב:א) as follows:

ואין דבור בכל מקום אלא לשון קשה. וכן הוא אומר, דבר האיש אדני הארץ אתנו קשות¹. ואין אמירה אלא תחנונים. וכן הוא אומר, ויאמר אל נא אחי תרעו (בראשית יט:ז) ויאמר שמעו נא דברי, כל נא לשון בקשה. (מדרש תנחומא ויקרא צו אות יג)

It is difficult to understand what exactly did Yosef say to them at this point that is considered קשה? The question he asks, “Where are you from”, seems civil enough, and he does not accuse them of being spies until the following Pasuk. Interestingly, the next words in the Pasuk are ויאמר אליהם, which uses the word ויאמר which is, as the Midrash above taught, a term of תחנונים. Which was it לשון קשה or לשון תחנונים? How can the Pasuk mix both וידבר and ויאמר?

Perhaps we might answer that we have understood the Midrash incorrectly. When the Midrash taught that דבר is a לשון קשה it does not mean that it is a harsh tone as we translated above. I think to better understand what the Midrash meant by a לשון קשה we should juxtapose it to the Midrash’s understanding of the word אמר, which the Midrash explains is a לשון תחנונים. The word אמר is thus not to be understood as ‘soft’ speech (in which case it would have said רכה), but rather as pleading (תחנונים)². If so, the opposite, דבר לשון קשה, would not mean harsh speech, but rather strong speech. I believe the correct understanding of דבר is speech that is strong and purposeful. While אמר is used when referring to a request, leaving it up to the listener to decide, דבר is reserved for instances in which the speaker is almost commanding, or guiding the one being spoken to. For this reason we call them עשרת הדברות, and we call something that has a purpose a דבר. We also find the word דבר used to mean guiding, as in (תהלים מז:ד) ידבר עמים תחתינו, as well as meaning a leader as in (סנהדרין ח.) דבר אחד לדור (סנהדרין ח.).

What the Torah is thus informing us by introducing Yosef’s dialogue with his brothers with the words וידבר אתם קשות, is that Yosef had a plan and a clear goal in his speech. Yosef was not simply toying with his brothers, bent on revenge. Rather, he was strongly guiding his brothers into a situation in which they would be severely tested. Yosef was leading his brothers and his father forcibly, and with much additional suffering, into his trap, in order to ascertain whether he could reveal himself to them. This intent is perfectly reflected in the words וידבר אתם קשות.

The question that bothers us all is what did Yosef want to know? Perhaps, most troubling is why was he willing to put his father through the additional pain and suffering that would result from this charade and that would culminate with בנימין being taken from his home?

I believe the answer is that Yosef wanted to know two things. The first, and most obvious, is he had to know if his brothers had done תשובה. While they were willing to divest themselves of one son of Rochel, would they do the same to the other? Or would they stand up, at the threat of physical harm or incarceration, for their brother? But, why cause his father to suffer as well? It must be that he needed to know something else, something about his father.

¹ In every instance this חז"ל is taught, the proof of דבר being a לשון קשה is from the second Pasuk (ל) and not from the first Pasuk (ז). I do not know why.

² See Rashi on שמות יט:ד, who uses the term רכה. However see the מכילתא, which is Rashi’s source, from which it is clear that the term רכה does not mean a soft tone, but rather to tell them only a few מצות, so that they might easily accept the תורה. Thus the usage of the term רכה is similar to the term תחנונים that is used here.

Before we answer this, we must first ask another most difficult question. Why is it, in all the years he was the ruler in מצרים, that Yosef never saw fit to inform his father that he was alive? The answer that he did not want to embarrass his brothers seems insufficient. Why would he protect his brothers at the cost of paining his father? Rather, the answer is that Yosef never sent a message to his father because he was unsure of his father's role in his exile. This shocking idea is alluded to in the Zohar. The Zohar is bothered by the fact that the Pasuk (מו:כז) seems to tell us that upon seeing the עגלות that Yosef sent, Yaakov believed that Yosef was alive. What about the wagons convinced Yaakov? The Zohar answers³

(קיג) ר"א אמר, רמז רמז ליה יוסף ליעקב על עגלה ערופה, דהא בההיא פירקא אתפרש מיניה (רמז רמז לו יוסף על עגלה ערופה, שמתוך לימוד של אותו עניין פירש ממנו): (קטו) תא חזי יוסף כד אתפרש מאבוי בלא לוייה, ובלא אכילה אשתדר, והוה מה דהוה וכשאמר יעקב טרוף טרוף יוסף אמר כי ארד אל בני אבל שאולה, דאנא גרמא ליה, ותו דהוינא ידע דאחוי סניין ליה ושדרנא ליה, ורמז רמיז ליה (בא וראה, כשיוסף נשלח מאביו בלי ליווי ובלי אוכל נשלח, והיה מה שהיה, וכשאמר יעקב טרוף טרוף יוסף אמר כי ארד אל בני אבל שאולה כי אני גרמתי לו, וגם שהייתי יודע שאחיו שונאים אותו ושלחתי אותו. ורמז ורמז לו).

According to the Zohar, Yosef is sending to his father a much deeper message. He is not simply reminding his father of what they learned but of what the message of that learning was. As the גמרא teaches regarding עגלה ערופה:

ואמרו ידינו לא שפכו את הדם הזה ועינינו לא ראו (דברים כא:ז). וכי על לבנו עלתה שבי"ד שופכין דמים? אלא, לא בא לידינו ופטרנוהו בלא מזונות, ולא ראינוהו והנחנוהו בלא לוייה (סוטה מו:)

Yosef is reminding his father that on that day Yaakov taught him an important lesson. He taught him that one does not send off a traveler without food and protection. However, you my father, sent me off to my brothers, who you knew hated me, without food or protection!

Why is Yosef telling his father this?

I believe that Yosef is not interested in giving his father a reason to feel guilty. Rather, Yosef is providing his father with a reason to believe he is alive. Yosef realizes that his father will never believe that Yosef did not die, for the reason we mentioned above. If Yosef is alive, how is it possible he never contacted me? To answer this question Yosef sent a message (ידברו אליו כל דברי) (יוסף) and the wagons. Do you remember, he asks his father, the last thing we learned before you sent me to Shechem to check on my brothers? We learned the topic of עגלה ערופה. Do you see the wagons I sent to bring you to Mitzrayim? I sent them because we learned together that if a dead body is found on the road the elders of the city closest to the body are held responsible and they must bring an עגלה ערופה as an atonement. They are held responsible because one must not send a person out on the road all alone without protection and supplies. Therefore, I'm sending you wagons to offer you protection and supplies for the journey to Mitzrayim. But, Abba, I have just one question. Why, after you had just taught me this lesson, did you send me to Shechem all alone? Especially since you knew how my brothers felt about me! The only answer I could think of, says Yosef, is that you were in on the plan all along. I remember how you scolded me after my second dream; I guess you wanted me out of the house as much as my brothers did.

This was the second thing Yosef needed to know: How did his father feel? Was his being sent unescorted to Shechem simply an unfortunate oversight or a conscious decision? He therefore sets in motion the series of events that will cause his brothers, his father and indeed he himself, much suffering. But he must steel himself, he must be strong to see it through (קשות) for this is the only way he can ascertain the truth.

³ See Rashi on the above Pasuk. According to Rashi, Yosef was sending a sign to his father by reminding him of the last thing they learned together, עגלה ערופה. Rashi's source for this is the מדרש רבה which reads:

ר' לוי בשם ר' יוחנן בר שאול אמר להם אם יאמין לכם הרי מוטב ואם לאו אתם אומרים לו בשעה שפרשתי ממך לא בפרשת עגלה ערופה הייתי עוסק, הה"ד וירא את העגלות ותחי רוח:

It is very difficult to understand this Midrash. If they indeed told him that Yosef said to tell you that we were learning עגלה ערופה, what do the wagons add? Are we to understand that by seeing the עגלות, which happens to be a similar sounding word to that which they were last learning together (עגלות-עגלה), Yaakov was convinced?

To this end, Yosef constantly inquires as to his father's state. He would love to hear that his father has been in a state of mourning for his lost son! But, the brothers answer that all is well: שלום לעבדך (מג:כח) לאבינו, reinforcing Yosef's fears that his absence has not been felt. Only when the brothers finally tell the truth, (מד:כו-כט) how losing בנימין would add to his grief of losing his other son, did Yosef, for the first time, hear that his father has bitterly mourned his loss.

With his two questions now answered, Yosef reveals himself to his brothers.

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Do you think Yosef's dreams had anything to do with the way he treated his brothers?
- b. Do you think the way Yosef treated his brothers teaches us something about Yosef?