
פרשת וישב

פרק לז פסוק יג

ויאמר ישראל אל-יוסף הלא אחיך רעים בשכם לכה ואשלחך אליהם ויאמר לו הנני:

רש"י ומושג

הנני: לשון ענוה וזריזות. נזדרז למצות אביו, ואף על פי שהיה יודע באחיו ששונאים אותו:

Translation:

Hineni, “Here I am”, is a term of humility and enthusiasm. He (Yosef) was quick to fulfill the command of his father, even though he knew that his brothers hated him.

Explanation:

One who says הניני exhibits a sentiment of complete humility, ready and willing to do whatever he will be commanded even before knowing what it will entail. When Yosef says הניני, *after* being commanded by his father, he too is exhibiting this trait of humility, but which he means, “I will not delay, and I will be like a true servant whose only interest is to do the will of my master”. This very trait led Yosef to carry out the mission of his father even though he knew his brothers might harm him.

Looking in the Pasuk:

Rashi is bothered by Yosef’s declaration of הניני, as it is usually said before a command is given, expressing a willingness to carry out a mission even before being told the nature of the mission. Yosef, however, says הניני after his father told him to go to his brothers. Rashi explains which trait הניני reflects in this context.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: When one declares הניני they are exhibiting a trait of humility towards the one commanding; communicating a willingness to do all that will be commanded, to do so without delay and to do so even at the risk of physical harm.

Understand: One who acts with true humility towards Hashem acts with complete trust and therefore can agree to act even before knowing what is being asked of him. This ultimate confidence in the mission and the commander will ensure that the messenger will act without delay and even at the risk of harm, as we find with אברהם אבינו by the Akeidah and with Yosef here.

Think: Rashi’s commentary adds words to the Midrash and combines two different Midrashim. What forced Rashi to explain in this fashion and how do these different ideas mesh together into one?

NOTES

Rashi comments on the meaning of the word הנני and writes that it is a term which represents humility and alacrity. It is very difficult to understand how these two terms, humility and alacrity, go together. On the surface, while they both seem to be positive traits, they do not seem to speak of a similar trait.

Interestingly, the Midrash which Rashi quotes, a מדרש תנחומא found in (כב) פרשת וירא, on the Pasuk: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֲבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי: מהו לשון הנני לשון ענוה לשון חסידות...

While ענוות and חסידות represent similar traits, the traits Rashi mentions, ענוה וזריזות, do not.

The second part of Rashi, which comes to explain the זריזות of Yosef, in that he hastened to do the will of his father, is taken from the מדרש רבה on our Pasuk:

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנִנִּי, א"ר חמא בר חנינא הדברים הללו היה יעקב אבינו נזכר ומעיו מתחתכין, יודע היית שאהיך שונאים אותך והיית אומר לי הנני (מדרש רבה פד:ג)

Here too, we do not find the trait of זריזות mentioned, only Yosef's נפש מסירת to do his father's will¹. It is therefore rather perplexing that Rashi chose to add the מידה of זריזות to explain the word הנני. Additionally, why does Rashi connect Yosef's זריזות to his נפש מסירת?

Also of note is the fact that Rashi first chose to explain the word הנני here. The term הנני is used twice by אברהם and once by Yaakov (also once by Moshe) and yet Rashi never comments on its meaning until Yosef. Why wait until now?

It is rather obvious that the meaning of the word הנני, here I am, is not a statement declaring that I am physically present, since Hashem surely knows that. Rather, it is a statement of complete readiness to do all which will be commanded even before the command has been communicated. The מדרש תנחומא describes this as ענוות, a humble self effacement in which I subjugate my will to that of Hashem.² Since this description is somewhat obvious, it is possible that Rashi saw no compelling reason to quote this Midrash when Hashem called to אברהם or to יעקב.

However, with Yosef the above explanation does not suffice, because in our Pasuk Yaakov has already told Yosef what he wants him to do. For Yosef to answer הנני at this juncture requires a new interpretation; it cannot mean I will do whatever you will command, for he has already been commanded. Therefore, Rashi adds that what Yosef is saying is that he will not only do what he has been commanded, but he will do it immediately, זריזות.

However, we must still explain why Rashi also included the interpretation of the Tanchumah; לשון ענוה. If it does not fit here, why mention it at all? Additionally, it is very rare that Rashi adds any novel commentary of his own, making it very unlikely that he would add the new interpretation of זריזות.

Perhaps Rashi is teaching us that the trait of זריזות is rooted in ענוה, allowing the term הנני, which really describes humility, to be used also to describe זריזות. The logic behind the connection is that one who acts with no self interest, only as a true messenger, will always act not only without questioning, but will also act quickly and without delay. Thus, in truth, ענוה and זריזות do compliment each other quite accurately.

Rashi adds one more thought. Not only will the one acting with humility act quickly, they will also act with complete devotion, paying no heed to personal danger. Rashi's commentary is now perfectly understood. Rashi begins by explaining to us why the term הנני is used by Yosef. Rashi quotes the Midrash which teaches us that the term is one of ענוה, which in this context can not be taken in its simplest form, humility, but rather must be understood in the context of an outgrowth of humility, alacrity, זריזות. Rashi completes his commentary by adding that in the case of Yosef another outgrowth of humility is present as well, מסירת נפש, sacrificial devotion. Yosef was not only

¹ According to the Targum Yonason there was a reason Yosef was sent to check the welfare of his brothers. Since the brothers were grazing near the city of שכם, Yaakov feared that the inhabitants of the land might seek to exact revenge on them due to the fact that they had killed the people of שכם. Yosef was thus not only being מוסר נפש for his father but for his brothers as well.

² The perfect example is אברהם's willingness to do the will of Hashem by the story of the עקידה as the מדרש תנחומא relates.

willing to act immediately and without delay on his father's request, but also to do so without regard to his own personal safety.

One final note: If indeed we are correct that both Yosef's זריזות and מסירת נפש are rooted in his מדה of ענווה, we can readily understand why the word הנני, which communicates these traits, was so painful for Yaakov to remember, as the Midrash relates: הדברים הללו היה יעקב אבינו נזכר ומעיו מתחתכין. For Yaakov had previously criticized Yosef for his arrogant dreams, telling him הבוא נבוא אני ואמך והאחיד להשתחוות לך ארצה, and now Yaakov reflects on the tremendous עניוּת Yosef displayed when he said הנני. Nothing is more painful than having criticized someone you love, and then realizing how wrong you were and not having the opportunity to apologize. This tore Yaakov apart in his mourning, ומעליו מתחתכין, and for this he could not be comforted.

Questions for further thought:

- a. Can you find other instances in the story of Yosef where this מדה of ענווה is present?
- b. Yosef in his dreams does indeed seem to be portraying a bit of arrogance. Yet, in our Musag we reveal this מידה of ענווה! Do you think the two can go hand in hand?