
פרשת ויגש

פרק מז פסוק ז

אָנְכִי אֶרְדָּ עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶנְכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם-עִלָּה וְיֹסֵף יֵשִׁית יְדוֹ עִלַּי-עִנְיֶיךָ:

חז"ל ומושג

בְּשִׁירְדוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִצְרַיִם שְׂכִינָה יֵרְדֶה עִמָּהֶם (מכילתא)

Translation:

When they went down to Egypt the Shechina went down with them.

Explanation:

The Midrash teaches us that Hashem went down to Egypt with the Jewish people as a way of sharing in their pain, עמו אנכי בצרה. The meaning of Hashem sharing our pain should not be understood as Hashem somehow feeling pain. Hashem does not feel pain and having Him do so would not benefit the Jewish people. Rather, Hashem is telling us that He will intensify his presence in Egypt so that even during the most painful periods of galus we will still feel His presence.

In the second part of the Pasuk, Hashem informs Yaakov that Yosef will take care of all his needs, making interaction with the Egyptians unnecessary. This Pasuk therefore provides the Jewish people with a blueprint for survival in the long and bitter galus that will now begin. They must always remember that Hashem is there with them, feel His presence, and turn to Him for salvation. At the same time, they must minimize their interaction with the foreign cultures in which they live, effectively living focused on the enhanced presence of Hashem while closing their eyes to the unholy values that surround them.

Looking in the Pasuk:

Other than telling Yaakov that His שכינה will go down to Egypt with the Jewish people, Hashem also informs him that He will go down before them, ארד עמך, and leave after them אעלך גם עלה. Hashem continues by informing Yaakov that Yosef will take care of his physical and spiritual needs, ישית ידו על עיניך, thus allaying Yaakov's fears of going down to מצרים.

NOTES

The Midrash (מכילתא הוספות שמות פרשה א) on which our Musag is based comes to explain why Hashem appears to Moshe from the סנה, a lowly bush:

ר"א אומר מפני מה נגלה הקב"ה משמי מרום והיה מדבר עמו מהסנה? אלא מה הסנה הזה שפל מכל אילנות שבעולם כך ירדו ישראל למדרגה התחתונה והקב"ה ירד עמהם וגאלם שנאמר וארד להצילו מיד מצרים. ר' יהושע אומר מפני מה וכו' והלא כשירדו ישראל למצרים שכונה ירדה עמהם שנאמר אנכי ארד עמך וגו' כשיצאו נגלה שכונה עמהם שנאמר (דברים א') ובמדבר אשר ראית אשר נשאך ה' אלקיך¹. ר' חייא ור' יהודה אומרים בוא וראה רחמי של מי שאמר והיה העולם עם שכל זמן שבני אדם נתונים בצער צרה כביכול לפניו שנאמר (ישעיה ס"ג) בכל צרתם לו צר. אין לי אלא צרת צבור צרת יחיד מנין ת"ל (תהלים צ"א) יקראני וגו' עמו אנכי בצרה².

There are a number of significant difficulties with our Musag:

1. What do we mean when we say the שכונה went down to מצרים with them? One might ask, "Isn't Hashem's presence everywhere"? Does the (ישעיהו ו:ג) פסוק not teach us מלא כל־הארץ? קבודו?
2. What does it help if Hashem is there with us? Why is it considered רחמי של מי שאמר והיה העולם if Hashem is in pain when we are in pain? Does it make us feel better if Hashem is in pain? Does Hashem's presence in גלות make the גלות somehow more bearable? How is this connected to Hashem's רחמים?

We must begin by trying to understand what we mean when we say that Hashem's שכונה resides in a specific place, such as the בית המקדש. We generally answer that while Hashem is found everywhere, He intensified His 'presence' in certain places giving those places a level of קדושה not felt elsewhere. When we enter these places we can 'feel' the presence of Hashem, helping us connect to Him. While Hashem has no physical presence, this השראת שכונה – intensification of Hashem's spiritual presence – is as close as we can come to 'feeling' that Hashem is present.

The purpose of גלות is to refine the Jew³ by putting him in a foreign, often hostile, environment and challenging him to stay true to his values and heritage. However, many times the persecution he undergoes may have the opposite effect, causing many to believe that G-d has abandoned them⁴. In order to counter this effect during the long and harsh Egyptian bondage, Hashem intensified His presence in Egypt so that the Jews would not feel a sense of abandonment. Even during the darkest and most difficult times they could 'feel' that Hashem was near.

I believe that this understanding of עמו אנכי בצרה is found in the (שמות פרשה ב) מדרש רבה:

מהו עמו אנכי בצרה? כשיש להם צרה אינם קוראים אלא להקב"ה! במצרים ותעל שועתם אל האלקים, בים ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה' וכאלה רבים, ואומר (ישעיה סג) בכל צרתם לו צר, א"ל הקב"ה למשה אי אתה מרגיש שאני שרוי בצער כשם שישראל שרוים בצער? הוי יודע ממקום שאני מדבר עמך מתוך הקוצים כביכול אני שותף בצערן (ב"ר פרשה ב)

The Midrash seems to be mixing two ideas: one that the people always turn to G-d when they are suffering, and another that Hashem is with them in their suffering. However, the two ideas are not competing explanations of what עמו אנכי בצרה means, but rather they come to compliment each other. The Midrash is explaining that the Jewish people call out to G-d when they are in pain

Hashem is there with them! When dealing with intense suffering we are able to "feel" Hashem's presence in that painful situation, as if Hashem is suffering with us, enabling us to turn to Him for comfort and salvation. This is exactly what the Midrash means when it says: א"ל הקב"ה למשה אי אתה מרגיש שאני שרוי בצער כשם שישראל שרוים בצער Hashem is so close to us at these times that we can

¹ ובמדבר אשר ראית אשר נשאך ה' אלקיך פאשר ישא־איש את־בנו ככל־הדרך אשר הלכתם עד־המקום הזה:

² Rashi in (ג:ב) quotes the מדרש תנחומא which similarly teaches:

מתוך הסנה. ולא אילן אחר משום "עמו אנכי בצרה"

³ For this reason the ב"ר refers to גלות מצרים as כור הברזל:

כור הברזל ונתלתה הם אשר הוצאת ממצרים מתוך כור הברזל: (מלכים א ח:נא)

⁴ The (סוכה נב:) teaches us that because of this Hashem 'regretted' sending the Jews into גלות:

ארבעה מתחרט עליהן הקדוש ברוך הוא שבראם, ואלו הן: גלות, כשדים, וישמעלים, ויצר הרע.

actually feel his presence. When we look at the full Pasuk from which our Musag is derived we see this idea expressed explicitly: יקראני ואענהו עמו אנכי בצרה אחלצהו, Hashem shares in our צרה so that when we call He will be there to listen and save us.

The יקר כלי makes a beautiful comment regarding Hashem's presence in מצרים based on a careful reading of the Pasuk. When speaking of Hashem going down to מצרים Hashem mentions His name first and then Yaakov: אנכי ארד עמך, *I will go down with you*. However when speaking of leaving מצרים, the Torah mentions בני ישראל first and then Hashem: ואנכי אעלך גם עלה, *I will bring you up and also I will go up*⁵. Hashem is thus assuring Yaakov that He will not leave the Jews alone in מצרים even for a moment. Hashem will always be there ready to answer the prayers of His people.

Perhaps with this insight we might understand the connection between the first part of the Pasuk and the second half. The Pasuk ends with Hashem telling Yaakov that Yosef will place his hands on Yaakov's eyes. This is usually taken to mean that Hashem is informing Yaakov that he will die in מצרים and that Yosef will be there to close Yaakov's eyes. Why does Hashem tell Yaakov this in the same Pasuk as telling him of His presence in מצרים?

One way to understand this is that Hashem is telling Yaakov that even though He had just told Yaakov that he will bring them up out of מצרים, this will not happen in his lifetime⁶. However, many commentators question this understanding for surely יעקב understood full well that this ירידה למצרים was a fulfillment of the prophecy told to אברהם אבינו by בתריים. He knew that they would not leave מצרים for many decades if not centuries. Therefore they learn that the words יוסף יוסיף ידו על עיניך do not mean that he will close your eyes when you die, but rather that Yosef will take care of all your needs⁷. The Sforno agrees with this interpretation and explains the meaning of 'putting his hands on your eyes' thus:

לא תצטרך לפקוח עיניך להשיג חפצריך כי יוסף יגיעם אליך בזולת השגחתך ולא תצטרך אתה להתעסק עם המצרים הבלתי ראויים לקרוב אליך.

Our Pasuk can now be read as Hashem telling Yaakov that he should not fear going down to מצרים; for the spiritual needs of the people will be safeguarded as Hashem will go down with them and that Yosef will take care of his physical needs. According to the Sforno, Yosef's attending to Yaakov's needs was for his spiritual benefit as well as it negated the need for Yaakov to interact with the Egyptians.

Our Pasuk thus sets a blueprint for the spiritual survival of the Jewish people in galus. They must remember at all times that no matter how much suffering is heaped upon them, Hashem is there with them. Additionally, for them to survive they must limit the interaction they have with the non-Jewish population. They must live with their 'hands over their eyes' ignoring the siren call of foreign cultures.⁸

Questions for Further Thought:

- Do you think that people who are suffering feel Hashem's presence more acutely? What do you think Hashem's presence feels like?
- This is the last time Hashem appears to Yaakov or to any of his descendants until the time of Moshe. Why do you think on the one hand Hashem intensifies His presence and yet on the other hand He no longer appears?

⁵ The יקר כלי compares this to someone who carries another who cannot swim into deep water. First the swimmer will enter the water, then he will grasp the non-swimmer and he will not leave the water until he has placed the non-swimmer safely on dry land.

⁶ This is the understanding of the תרגום יונתן who translates the words יוסף יוסיף ידו על עיניך as וברם יוסף יוסיף ידו על עיניך, meaning "however Yosef will place his hands".

⁷ See יוסיף ידו על עיניך: על ענייך וצרכיך, ישתדל לעשותם, כדכתיב (איוב ט:לג) ישית ידו על שנינו: רשב"ם

⁸ Perhaps for this reason we have adopted the practice of saying שמע ישראל with our hand over our eyes.