
פרשת ויגש

פרק מה פסוק כב

לְכֹלֵם נָתַן לְאִישׁ חֲלָפוֹת שְׂמֹלֶת וּלְבִנְיָמִן נָתַן שְׁלֹשׁ מְאוֹת כֹּסֶף וְחָמֵשׁ חֲלָפֹת שְׂמֹלֶת:
חז"ל

אֲפֹשֶׁר דָּבָר שְׁנַצְטַעַר בּוֹ אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק יִכְשַׁל בּוֹ? ... אָמַר רַבִּי בִּנְיָמִן בַּר יִפְתָּה רִמְזוּ רִמְזוּ לוֹ שְׁעֵתִיד
בֶּן לְצֵאת מִמֶּנּוּ שְׂיֵצֵא מִלְּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּחַמְשָׁה לְבוּשֵׁי מַלְכוּת שְׁנָאֵמַר וּמְרַדְכִי יֵצֵא מִלְּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
בְּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת תְּכַלֵּת וְחֹר וְעֵטְרַת זָהָב גְּדוּלָה וְתַכְרִיף בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן (מגילה טז):

מושג

רִמְזוּ רִמְזוּ לוֹ שְׁעֵתִיד בֶּן לְצֵאת מִמֶּנּוּ שְׂיֵצֵא מִלְּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּחַמְשָׁה לְבוּשֵׁי מַלְכוּת.

Translation:

He (Yosef) was hinting to him (Binyomin) that a son would come out from him who would go out from in front of the king with five types of royal clothes.

Explanation:

Yosef harbored no ill will towards his brothers for all they had done to him. However, he knew that it was important to address the מידה of jealousy that the brothers had displayed. He therefore gives בנימין a gift of 5 changes of clothing while only giving the brothers one change of clothing. Yosef was testing his brothers by recreating the exact same circumstances in which they previously failed. By not displaying any jealousy towards בנימין the brothers corrected this character flaw and ensured that even centuries later this trait would not appear. It thus allowed מרדכי, a descendant of בנימין, to wear 5 types of royal clothing and not arouse jealousy among the Jews of Shushan. Yosef's gifts thereby contained a רמז, a hidden purpose that would benefit בנימין's descendant when he leaves the palace of the king in royal garb.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The גמרא is perplexed as to how Yosef could have shown favoritism to בנימין, and not learn from his own experience where the favoritism he was shown resulted in disaster. Also perplexing is why the Torah saw a need to tell us the nature of Yosef's gifts, or even that he gave gifts at all!

NOTES

Our Musag is taken from the גמרא in מסכת מגילה which teaches:

לכלם נתן לאיש חליפות שמלות ולבנימן נתן חמש חליפות. אפשר דבר שנצטער בו אותו צדיק יכשל בו? דאמר רבא בר מחסיא אמר רב חמא בר גוריא אמר רב בשביל משקל שני סלעים מילת שהוסיף יעקב ליוסף משאר אחיו נתגלגל הדבר וירדו אבותינו למצרים! אמר רבי בנימן בר יפת רמז רמז לו שעתיד בן לצאת ממנו שיצא מלפני המלך בחמשה לבושי מלכות שנאמר ומרדכי יצא בלבוש מלכות תכלת וגו'

Our Pasuk teaches us that Yosef gave each of his brothers a change of clothes and to בנימין he gave 300 pieces of silver and 5 changes of clothes. The גמרא finds this behavior alarming. Is it possible, asks the גמרא, that in the very thing that had caused Yosef so much suffering he himself should now stumble in? The גמרא continues to show that even the small favoritism that Yaakov had shown to Yosef, by giving him a coat that had only 2 Selaim worth of fine wool¹, resulted in the end to the Jewish people being led down to מצרים. How could Yosef make the same terrible mistake by showing favoritism to בנימין? The גמרא answers that Yosef, while fully aware of the tremendous damage that may result from this, was compelled to gift בנימין as he did because he wanted to hint to him that one of his distant descendants would one day go out from a king wearing 5 types of royal clothes. This referred to מרדכי הצדיק of whom it is written (אסתר ה:טו):

וּמֵרַדְכִי יָצָא מִלְּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלִבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת תְּכֵלֶת נְחוּר וְעֶטְרַת זָהָב גְּדוּלָה וְתַכְרִיף בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן וְהַעִיר שׂוֹשׁן צְהָלָה וְשִׁמְחָה:

This is clearly one of the most enigmatic גמרא's one will ever encounter! Why in the world, we ask, was it so terribly important to send בנימין this hint? Was it worth arousing the jealousy of his brothers? We could just imagine if 2 Selaim worth of wool caused him and his whole family such suffering what would 5 times as many changes of clothing do? Why not just tell בנימין about his future illustrious descendant? This seems to make absolutely no sense!

The מהרש"א asks an interesting question on the text of the גמרא. He wonders why the גמרא only questioned about the 5 changes of clothes and answered about the clothes. Why does the גמרא not ask about the 300 pieces of silver²? It would seem very possible that the silver was worth much more than the clothes, and yet there does not seem to be any explanation regarding the silver coins Yosef gave בנימין!

The מהרש"א answers that giving בנימין more than his other brothers was not a problem. He explains that Yosef showing favoritism to his full brother over his half brothers is not at all the same as Yaakov showing favoritism to Yosef over his other sons. A father is expected to treat all his sons equally; this is not the case with a brother to his half brothers. Therefore, Yosef's brothers would fully understand Yosef showering בנימין with gifts or money. The only problem was clothes. Giving בנימין clothes reminded the brothers of the jealousy and hatred they had displayed to Yosef over clothes. It was as if Yosef was 'sticking it' to his brothers by reminding them of their sin³.

¹ The גמרא mentions that the גמטריא of פסים לו ועשה לו כתונת פסים is the same as מילת חמש חליפות. There are different opinions mentioned in the גמרא regarding this weight of two Selaim. Some learn the whole cloak was of such fine wool that it only weighted two Selaim. Others say that there were two strips of fine wool on the sleeves. Rashi in (:) quotes a similar opinion and explains that it was called a כתונת פסים because the fine wool was on the פסים.

² An additional question might be asked: Why did the גמרא wait until פרשת ויגש to ask about Yosef's show of favoritism to בנימין? Previously, in פרשת מקץ (מג:לד), we read of Yosef favoring בנימין:

וַיֵּשֶׂא מִשְׁאֵת מֵאֵת פְּנֵיו אֶלֵהֶם וַתִּרְבַּ מִשְׁאֵת בְּנִימִן מִמִּשְׁאֵת כָּלֶם חֲמֵשׁ יָדוֹת וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּשְׁכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ:

Why wasn't the גמרא concerned about the jealousy Yosef might arouse?

I believe that we might answer that at that time the brothers were feeling quite vulnerable, very much afraid of what might become of them. When faced by a common enemy, people tend to band together and achieve a strong sense of unity, leaving no time or room for jealousy.

³ We might add that the fact that he had given בנימין the 300 silver coins should have sufficed as an extremely generous gift, the additional gift of clothing therefore served no real purpose other than to make a point to the brothers. This would explain why Yosef added the money to בנימין's gift.

According to the מהרש"א when the גמרא says דבר שנצטער בו it is not referring to the favoritism shown to him, but more specifically to the clothes that were given to him. The question that bothers the גמרא is that he must have realized that his suffering at the hands of his brothers was aroused by clothes. Would giving בנימין more clothes than his brothers not be tantamount to sticking a knife in their backs? Therefore, concludes the מהרש"א the גמרא did not ask about the money only the clothes.

While the מהרש"א beautifully explains the text of the גמרא, the answer of the גמרא becomes even more perplexing! By giving בנימין clothes Yosef is seemingly destroying all the good will he has tried to build with his brothers. His declaration, ... ועתה אל תעזבו ואל יחר בעיניכם כי למחיה שלחני אלקים... rings hollow. He seems to be clearly reminding his brothers of the sale and the terrible injustice they have committed. All of this in order to send a hint to בנימין?

In order to answer I think we must first explain the meaning of רמז רמז לו. Obviously it does not mean that Yosef was simply trying to inform בנימין about his future descendant; that could have been accomplished by simply telling him. Instead, Yosef in a subtle way is trying to create a reality not to send a message. What is it?

Yosef truly forgave his brothers for the jealousy and hatred they displayed towards him. His position as viceroy of Egypt now enabled him to save his father and the entire family. In the end, their actions led to his exalted status and it was very easy for Yosef to see the יד ה' in his sale. When Yosef told his brothers כי למחיה שלחני אלקים he meant every word. Yosef himself, therefore, never dreamed of revenge. The thought of teaching his brothers a lesson was simply not on his agenda. In any case, his brothers were obviously in no position to do him any harm and would surely appreciate the fact that Yosef was now their provider and protector. However, he realized that the מידות רעות the brothers had displayed had to be addressed. Even though these מידות could no longer affect him, if they were not dealt with and eradicated they would reappear later in Jewish history with disastrous results.

Yosef knew that the מידה of jealousy could be just as destructive in the future if one of the Jews was to gain an elevated status of importance. He saw that there was to be a מרדכי who would wear the clothes of royalty and feared this would engender hatred, jealousy and divisiveness. This would be especially destructive at a time when the Jews already lacked unity: מפזר ומפרד. In order to preempt the possible damage Yosef felt he had to eradicate any possible jealousy the brothers could have for בנימין. By doing this he could create a מעשה אבות סימן לבנים that would erase any possible jealousy the Jews of Persia might have for בנימין's descendant מרדכי היהודי.

Yosef thus fashioned a type of test. He recreated the exact factors that would arouse the memory of jealousy his brothers had felt towards him. He gave his full brother more clothes than the others, exactly as his father had done, and hoped that his brothers would remember their feelings and decide whether to act as they had previously. This was the chance to rewrite the brothers' history, giving them the opportunity to relive past behavior but act differently⁴. Their reaction might make very little difference now, but it would make a tremendous difference at the time of מרדכי⁵. Once the brothers were able to be happy for בנימין and for his windfall they set into the DNA of our people the possibility to accept מרדכי's ascension to power with joy. This would become the process by which the Jews would return to rebuild בית שני during the time of כורש but it had to be preceded by unity and love; משלוח מנות איש לחבירו ומתנות לאביונים.

⁴ This is along the lines of the process of תשובה גמורה found in the Rambam (הל' תשובה ב:א):

אי זו היא תשובה גמורה, זה שבא לידו דבר שעבר בו ואפשר בידו לעשותו ופירש ולא עשה מפני התשובה...

⁵ Whether or not Yosef actually knew about a future מרדכי is not relevant. The intent of the גמרא is that Yosef knew that there could be a מרדכי or any future leader who would achieve a similar level of prominence.

This is the meaning of רמז רמז לו. In the act of Yosef there was a hint of something deeper that was happening. The gift of 5 types of clothes would have repercussions that would be felt many centuries later. The brothers were able to subdue, or indeed eradicate, any feelings of jealousy that might have been aroused upon seeing בנימין receiving preferential treatment. This allowed for מרדכי, the descendant of בנימין, to go out to greet his fellow Jews equally adorned and yet be met not with jealousy but with joy and jubilation as the Pasuk relates:

וּמְרַדְכֵי יֵצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת תְּכֵלֶת וְחֹר וְעֵטְרַת זָהָב גְּדוּלָה וְתַכְרִיף בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן וְהָעִיר שׁוֹשׂוֹן צְהָלָה וְשִׂמְחָה:

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Where else have you encountered the concept of סימן לבנים? According to what we have written above can you explain the concept in a non-mystical fashion?
- b. It is unclear why Yosef hides himself from his brothers and puts them through the ordeal recorded in פרשת מקץ. According to what we have written above can you explain Yosef's actions?