
פרשת ויצא

פרק ל פסוק כב

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת-רַחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵי אַ-לֵיָהּ וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת-רַחֲמָהּ:
חז"ל

שְׁלֹשָׁה מִפְתָּחוֹת בְּיָדוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁלֹּא נִמְסְרוּ בְּיַד שְׁלִיחַ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: מִפְתָּח שֶׁל גְּשָׁמִים, מִפְתָּח שֶׁל חַיָּה, וּמִפְתָּח שֶׁל תַּחֲיִית הַמֵּתִים. מִפְתָּח שֶׁל חַיָּה מִנַּיִן? דְּכַתִּיב וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת רַחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵי אַ-לֵיָהּ וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רַחֲמָהּ. (תענית ב.)

מושיג

שְׁלֹשָׁה מִפְתָּחוֹת בְּיָדוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁלֹּא נִמְסְרוּ בְּיַד שְׁלִיחַ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: מִפְתָּח שֶׁל גְּשָׁמִים, מִפְתָּח שֶׁל חַיָּה, וּמִפְתָּח שֶׁל תַּחֲיִית הַמֵּתִים.

Translation:

Three keys are in the hands of G-d and have never been given to the hands of a messenger. And they are: the key to rain, the key to childbirth and the key to reviving the dead.

Explanation:

At the time of creation, Hashem set the laws of nature which control the physical world. However Hashem kept the control (keys) to three things which are not governed by the precise laws of nature: rain, childbirth and reviving the dead¹. We learn about the key to childbirth from the story of לאה ורחל, two sisters who shared many identical factors, and yet one had children while the other did not. This demonstrates that the 'key' to having children is indeed G-d's decision alone².

Looking in the Pasuk:

The words ויפתח את רחמה, from which our Musag is learned, appear both by לאה and by רחל, but nowhere else in Tanach! Thus, the גמרא understands that the Torah is teaching us the lesson of our Musag. The Musag, however, is not learned from לאה, with whom Hashem intervened using the name י-הוה, which connotes מדת הרחמים, as a result of her being שנואה. In the case of רחל however, the name אלקים is repeated in our פסוק. This serves to stress that although she was given a child within מדת הדין, which refers to Hashem working within the natural laws, she nevertheless required Divine intervention.

¹ See note #1

² See note #2

NOTES

1. Our Musag is taken from the גמרא in (ב.) מסכת תענית which teaches:

שלושה מפתחות בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו ביד שליח, ואלו הן: מפתח של גשמים, מפתח של חיה, ומפתח של תחיית המתים. מפתח של גשמים - דכתיב (דברים כ"ח) יפתח ה' לך את אוצרו הטוב את השמים לתת מטר ארצך בעתו. מפתח של חיה מנין - דכתיב (בראשית ל') ויזכר א-להים את רחל וישמע אליה א-להים ויפתח את רחמה. מפתח של תחיית המתים מנין - דכתיב (יחזקאל לז) וידעתם כי אני ה' בפתחי את קברותיכם.

The commentators ask that while the Musag seems to teach that the 'keys', or abilities, to provide rain, children or revive the dead were never given to anyone, this is not so. We know that אליהו was given both the key to rain and to reviving the dead as the גמרא in (ק.ג.) סנהדרין relates³.

Rashi in סנהדרין⁴ comes to answer this question, and by doing so offers insight into the meaning of our Musag. Rashi writes:

שלוש מפתחות לא נמסרו ביד שליח: על אוצרו של הקדוש ברוך הוא יש מפתחות, ומסרם ליד שלוחים הממונים, אבל שלוש מפתחות יש לו בידו, שלא מינה שליח עליהם... אותם שלוש מפתחות עכבתי בידי מבראשית ולא מניתי שליח עליהם

Rashi explains that at the time of creation Hashem appointed 'messengers' to be in charge of his 'storehouses'. However, three of these 'storehouses' remained under Hashem's direct control and no 'messenger' was given control over them. According to Rashi, therefore, Hashem could, at times, give control over these three things to others. All our Musag teaches is that at the time of creation they were not handed over to any other messenger. Thus, our Musag would not preclude Hashem deciding afterwards to give them to another, as we see regarding אליהו.

Rashi's words also help us understand who these 'messengers' might be. From the fact that these messengers were appointed at the time of creation we might propose that they are what we call today the laws of nature. For Hashem set natural, physical, laws by which the universe runs with incredible precision. These laws seem to govern themselves without Divine interference or intervention. We know that they do so because Hashem set them in motion so that they might run 'by themselves' or what our Musag calls 'in the hands of a messenger'. These laws, once uncovered, become predictable, such as the orbit of the earth around the sun, or the laws of physics which govern matter.

However, teaches our Musag, this does not apply to all of our physical world. For there are three areas in which Hashem set no natural laws: rain, childbirth and revival of the dead. These, therefore, have no precise laws that govern when, if or how they will appear, and remain outside the realm of predictability as they require direct Divine intervention.

³Below is the full text of the fascinating גמרא with Rashi's commentary:

(מלכים א' י"ז) ויאמר אליהו התשבי מתשבי גלעד חי ה' אלקי ישראל... אם יהיה... טל ומטר וגו', בעי רחמי והבו ליה אקלידא דמטרא, וקם ואזל... כיון דחזא דאיכא צערא בעלמא כתיב ויהי דבר ה' אליו לאמר קום לך צרפתה, וכתיב ויהי אחר הדברים האלה חלה בן האשה בעלת הבית. בעא רחמי למיתן ליה אקלידא דתחיית המתים, אמרי ליה: שלוש מפתחות לא נמסרו לשליח: של חיה, ושל גשמים, ושל תחיית המתים. יאמרו: שתים ביד תלמיד ואחת ביד הרב? אייתי הא ושקיל האי, דכתיב (שם יח) לך הראה אל אחאב ואתנה מטר. דרש ההוא גלילאה קמיה דרב חסדא: משל דאליהו למה הדבר דומה, לגברא דטרקיה לגליה ואבדיה למפתחיה. רש"י על הגמרא:

אקלידא דמטרא - מפתח של מטר. **כיון דחזא** - הקדוש ברוך הוא דאיכא צערא בעלמא, אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא לאליהו לך צרפתה, לגלגל הדבר שיחזיר לו מפתח של מטר כדקא מפרש ואזיל. **שלוש מפתחות לא נמסרו ביד שליח** - על אוצרו של הקדוש ברוך הוא יש מפתחות, ומסרם ליד שלוחים הממונים, אבל שלוש מפתחות יש לו בידו, שלא מינה שליח עליהם, וקאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לאליהו אותם שלוש מפתחות עכבתי בידי מבראשית ולא מניתי שליח עליהם אלא אותך שעשיתי ממונה על אחת מהם, ועתה תשאל מפתח שני? יאמרו שנים ביד תלמיד ואחד ביד הרב. **דטרקיה לגליה** - שסתם שער שלו ואבדיה למפתחיה, כך עשה אליהו נעל לשערי מטר ולבסוף אבד המפתח של גשמים, שלא נפתח השער של מטר על ידו. **דכתב לך הראה אל אחאב ואתנה מטר** - ולא כתיב ותן מטר.

⁴ Rashi on the גמרא in תענית writes that all three were never given to anyone at the same time. there תוספות answer that they were never given to anyone permanently.

2. If you were to ask most people how many times the term ויפתח את רחמה is used in the entire Tanach, I believe many would answer that it is found multiple times. In truth, the words ויפתח את רחמה are found nowhere else in all of Tanach aside from these two Pesukim by לאה and רחל. Since the words are so rare, חז"ל realized that through this extraordinary wording the Torah is teaching us an important lesson. The lesson is our Musag, that the מפתח of birth is solely in the hands of G-d: ויפתח את רחמה.

This however leads us to ask, why did the Torah wait until now to teach this lesson? לאה and רחל were not the first of the אמהות whose wombs were opened by Hashem. Why did the Torah not say by them ויפתח את רחמה?

Also problematic is the fact that the גמרא proves that Hashem holds the key, the מפתח, to childbirth from the fact that it says by רחל that ויפתח את רחמה. But, we may wonder, why did the גמרא not bring the proof from the earlier Pasuk by לאה (פרק כט פסוק לא), which also says ויפתח את רחמה.⁵

Perhaps we might answer, according to that which we have previously written (see note #1), that having children is something that is not ruled by natural laws, but rather requires constant Divine intervention. To highlight this point the Torah uses the story of לאה ורחל as the perfect example. Here we have two sisters, who share the same husband, who were brought up and live in an identical environment, and yet one has children while the other remains barren! Natural law would have predicted that with almost every factor being similar, the results would be similar as well. And yet, they are not. This, explains the Torah, is because ויפתח את רחמה; Hashem holds the keys to childbirth and decides to whom and when a child will be born.

The fact that there are no natural laws that can predict childbirth, but that even by 'natural means' Hashem decides, may help us understand why the גמרא proves our Musag from רחל and not from לאה. When we look closely at the פסוקים we notice two important differences⁶. The first is that by לאה a reason is given why Hashem gave her a child at that time: וירא ה' כי שנואה לאה, while by רחל we are told that Hashem remembered her and listened to her but no specific reason is given why. The second is that by לאה the name י-הוה is used, while by רחל the name אלקים is used (twice in one Pasuk!). The Torah is making it clear that לאה is answered by י-הוה, which is מדת הרחמים, because she was hated. Since מדת הרחמים works also outside of nature (that is to say that Hashem will most certainly interfere in the natural process – even the regular process of שכר ועונש – if His מדת הרחמים is aroused) there is no clear proof from לאה that there are no regular natural laws that govern childbirth. However, by writing twice in the same פסוק in reference to רחל the name אלקים the Torah is stressing the point that רחל is answered by אלקים, the מדת הדין, the name of Hashem which works within the natural processes. Thereby, the Torah is teaching that even within this natural process ויפתח את רחמה; even here it is Hashem who must open her womb because the keys to childbirth were not given to any messenger.

3. Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Our Musag mentioned three 'keys'. What common denominator do you think connects the three? (Interestingly, we mention משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם in the ברכה of המתים)
- b. Why do you think Hashem kept these three in His hands? Why not create laws of nature that govern them as well?

⁵ Indeed the מדרש רבה also teaches our Musag, and also learns it from the Pasuk by רחל!

⁶ וירא ה' הנה כי שנואה לאה ויפתח את רחמה ורחל עקרה:
ויזכר א-להים את רחל וישמע אליה א-להים ויפתח את רחמה: