
פרשת וירא

פרק כא פסוק א

וַיִּהְיֶה הַנֶּגֶד פָּקֵד אֶת־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר וַיַּעַשׂ יְיָ־הַנֶּגֶד לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר:
רש"י

א וְהָיָה פָּקֵד אֶת שָׂרָה וְגוֹמֵר: סָמַךְ פִּרְשָׁה זֶה לְכַאוֹן, לְלַמְּדָךְ שְׁפָל הַמְּבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל חֲבֵרוֹ וְהוּא צָרִיךְ לְאוֹתוֹ דְּבַר הוּא נֶעֱנֶה תַּחֲלָה, שְׁנֵאמַר וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל (אֲבָרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֹ- לֵהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִמְהָתָיו וַיִּלְדוּ) וְסָמַךְ לִיָּהּ "וְהָיָה פָּקֵד אֶת שָׂרָה", שְׁפָקֵדָה כְּבָר קוֹדֵם שְׁרָפָא אֶת אֲבִימֶלֶךְ¹

מושג

כָּל הַמְּבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל חֲבֵרוֹ וְהוּא צָרִיךְ לְאוֹתוֹ דְּבַר הוּא נֶעֱנֶה תַּחֲלָה (בבא קמא צב.).

Translation:

Whoever *davens* for his friend, and he needs the same thing, he is answered first.

Explanation:

Even though אברהם and שרה were childless, when אברהם davened for אבימלך he was focused only on the need of אבימלך. It did not occur to אברהם to add a short תפילה for himself as he thought only of the pain and suffering of others². This incredible level of גמילות חסדים was the מדה of אברהם, which was set into the Jewish people as one of the pillars on which the world stands. When אברהם davened in this way for אבימלך, displaying this character trait at the highest possible level, Hashem answered אברהם first, leading to the birth of יצחק³. Our Musag is teaching us the level of care and feeling we should have for others and the reward for such behavior.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Torah should have written וַיִּפְקֵד ה' אֶת שָׂרָה, but instead wrote וְהָיָה פָּקֵד. This use of the past tense was meant to instruct us to connect what is written here to the previous incident recorded. We therefore connect שָׂרָה's being answered to אברהם's davening for אבימלך and his being answered, teaching us that שָׂרָה was answered before אבימלך.

¹ See Note #1

² See Note #2

³ See Note #3

NOTES

1. The source for Rashi's commentary on this Pasuk is the (בבא קמא צב.) which teaches:

א"ל רבא לרבה בר מרי, מנא הא מילתא (מאיפה זה הדבר) דאמור רבנן: כל המבקש רחמים על חבירו והוא צריך לאותו דבר, הוא נענה תחילה? א"ל, דכתיב: (איוב מ"ב) וה' שב את שבות איוב בהתפללו בעד רעהו. אמר ליה: את אמרת מהתם, ואנא אמינא מהכא: (בראשית כ') ויתפלל אברהם אל הא-להים וירפא א-להים את אבימלך ואת אשתו ואמהותיו [וגו'], וכתוב: (בראשית כ"א) וה' פקד את שרה כאשר אמר וגו', כאשר אמר אברהם אל אבימלך.

What is important to notice is that the גמרא did not use the concept of סמוכין to explain the connection between the birth of יצחק and the incident with אבימלך. The גמרא seems to be supporting the connection from the words אשר אמר אברהם, which they understand to be referring to אברהם's prayers on אבימלך's behalf. Why then, we might ask, did Rashi choose to insert the idea of סמוכין to create the connection? This is doubly puzzling when we consider the fact that Rashi rarely uses סמוכין mostly because they are not ⁴ מקרא של פשוטו leaving us to wonder why he would bring it up here when the גמרא itself did not⁵. And, even more so, we might argue that here there is no reason whatsoever to apply the דרשה of סמוכין, because the two incidents are reported in the Torah in close proximity simply due to the fact that they happened one after the other!⁶

However, it is clear that Rashi here is not relying solely on the סמוכין from the fact that Rashi towards the end of his commentary on this Pasuk adds: "וה' פקד את שרה" שפקד כבר קודם שרפא את אבימלך. Rashi adds that we know that שרה was answered first from the fact that the Torah says ה' פקד, in the past tense. Without this we would know that the פרשיות were somehow connected and we might even know that שרה was answered together with אבימלך⁷, however in order to know that שרה was answered first we must infer this from the word פקד in the past tense. We may now ask, if so why did Rashi need the idea of סמוכין? The answer is because if not for the fact that the Torah recorded the proximity of the incidents I would not know how to understand the fact that the word פקד was written in the past tense.

In summary, it is the word פקד, written in the past tense, that informs us that the Torah is trying to teach us a lesson⁸. To understand what that lesson is we look at the previous incident recorded and are led to the message taught by our Musag.

⁴ See our comments on (ה:י) פרשת נשא, note #1

⁵ There are other sources which connect the two פרשיות. One is the (נג:ו) מדרש רבה which teaches: וה' פקד את שרה אמר רבי יצחק כתיב (במדבר ה) ואם לא נטמאה האשה וטהורה היא ונקתה ונזרעה זרע, זו שנכנסה לביתו של פרעה ולביתו של אבימלך ויצאת טהורה אינו דין שתפקד.

However, this is not Rashi's source as it does not mention the idea of davening for אבימלך. Another possible source is the (סימן יד) מדרש תנחומא (סימן יד) which teaches:

אמר הקב"ה אברהם התפלל לפני על אבימלך הרשע ונתמלאתי רחמים עליו הריני פוקד לאברהם עמו שנאמר וירפא אלהים את אבימלך ואת אשתו ואמהותיו וילדו מה כתיב אחריו וה' פקד את שרה.

Here we do find the connection regarding אברהם davening for אבימלך and שרה. The Midrash also seems to be proving the connection from the fact that the two are סמוכין. However, it is clear that Rashi learned the lesson of תחילה הוא נענה תחילה על חבירו כל המתפלל על חבירו from the גמרא in בבא קמא as it is not mentioned in the תנחומא.

⁶ While there is no definitive timeline as to the dates of the incidents recorded in the past פרקים, many agree that the מלאכים came to Avrohom on Pesach, from there they went to Sdom and then אברהם went to גרר. גרר takes place on ראש השנה, leaving just over 7 months (according to the גמרא the year was a leap year) for יצחק to be born on Pesach. See the מזרחי.

⁷ See the מדרש תנחומא mentioned in the above footnote which actually understands exactly thus.

⁸ However, the proximity of the incidents, the סמוכין, does not warrant our attention. Therefore the גמרא does not mention the idea of סמוכין.

What remains difficult to explain is the fact that the גמרא seems to be proving our Musag from the words אשר אמר אברהם אל אבימלך, וה' פקד את שרה כאשר אמר וגו', on which they comment. And yet Rashi ignores the textual inference of the גמרא and instead creates his own from the word פקד.

2. Our Musag seems to be stressing the point that אברהם davened for others even though he needed the same thing. One might ask, is there really such a significant difference between davening for someone else when you don't need the same thing and davening for them when you do need the same thing? The answer is yes. When one davens for a childless couple he naturally focuses on the pain and suffering they feel by not having children. If he himself is childless, his own pain and suffering will be aroused as well. These feelings of suffering are in themselves a תפילה to Hashem and will obviously be included in his תפילות for others. However, when אברהם davened for אבימלך he was so focused on the needs of others that he completely forgot about the fact that he too was childless. It did not occur to him in the slightest to feel for himself at that time, even though he was focused on an exact need that he too shared. This ability to totally immerse oneself in the pain of others, to the extent that your own needs completely disappear, is the ultimate חסד⁹ of מדרגה.

3. It is difficult to understand why אברהם and שרה must wait until אברהם davens for אבימלך to merit having a child. Also, didn't the מלאך already tell them last Pesach, before the incident with אבימלך, that they would have a child in a year's time? We might answer that שרה would have merited a child with or without אברהם davening for אבימלך. However, חז"ל were bothered by the fact that the Torah made a point of telling us that שרה was remembered by G-d in the midst of the previous story. Why should this be important for us to know?¹⁰ Therefore, חז"ל saw in the peculiar wording of the Torah a hint which led them to teaching us our Musag.

Additionally, we might answer that אברהם אבינו was the עמוד החסד. Therefore, everything about אברהם had to center on חסד. Even at this juncture in which he and שרה would finally be on the receiving end and not on the giving end, the מדה of חסד had to be present. The pillar of גמילות חסדים on which the world stands was established by אברהם and it would be inconceivable that the house of Israel could be built – that יצחק should be born- without this מדה being displayed. As such, they were only to be answered if there was an aspect of חסד connected to becoming pregnant with יצחק. Only when אברהם davened for someone else to have a child, thereby displaying an incredible חסד to others, (which we will describe below in note #3) could שרה herself finally merit a child.

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Can you think of other examples where אברהם totally ignored his own pain and thought only of others?
- b. Do you think בלשון יהיד said רבים are more effective than those said יהיד?

However, Rashi himself on the גמרא already comments that the גמרא's inference is not from the words כאשר אמר, but rather from the word פקד as Rashi there teaches:

פקד - מדלא כתיב ויפקוד את שרה וכתוב פקד משמע פקד כבר תחילה לאבימלך.

Rashi evidently understood that the גמרא could not infer from the words כאשר אמר alone, as those words could more easily be understood as referring to the promise of Hashem to אברהם. Only the problematic word פקד leads us to explain that כאשר אמר refers to אברהם davening for אבימלך. In truth, once we have the inference from the word פקד we no longer need to understand that כאשר אמר refers to אבימלך at all. Rather, the word פקד could teach us our Musag, while the word אמר could very well be understood as that which Hashem had promised אברהם. This is how Rashi on our Pasuk understands. Rashi preferred to learn this way as it allows the כאשר אמר and כאשר דבר to both be referring to Hashem's promises to אברהם.

⁹ There is another amazing fact to consider. As we explained in footnote #3 אברהם and שרה are 'running against the clock'. They had been told that they were to have a baby by Pesach. Being that it was a leap year and a minimum of 7 months is needed for a viable child, if שרה does not conceive by תשרי the promise will not be fulfilled. When אברהם davens for אבימלך it is on or near השנה, his and שרה's own deadline. For אברהם to not be thinking of his need at this time is truly an extraordinary testament to his מדה of חסד.

¹⁰ I would have imagined that the Torah would have sought to separate the stories so as to not give credence to the rumors that שרה became pregnant by אבימלך! Why connect the stories?