
פרשת נח

פרק ז פסוק א

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְנֹחַ בְּאֲ-צַתָּהּ וְכָל-בֵּיתָהּ אֶל-הַמַּבְּלָה כִּי-אַתָּה רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק לְפָנַי בְּדוֹר
הַזֶּה:

רש"י

רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק: וְלֹא נֶאֱמַר 'צַדִּיק תָּמִים', מִכַּאֲן שְׂאוּמְרִים מְקַצֵּת שְׂבָחוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם בְּפָנָיו
וְכֵלּוֹ שְׂלֵא בְּפָנָיו.

מושג

אוּמְרִים מְקַצֵּת שְׂבָחוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם בְּפָנָיו וְכֵלּוֹ שְׂלֵא בְּפָנָיו.

Translation:

One may praise his fellow only partially in his presence but fully when not in his presence.

Explanation:

Our Musag teaches us that even when praising another we must be careful. Not all praise is appreciated and taken in the context it was meant. This is certainly true with lavish praise said in the presence of the one you are praising. It may seem to others to be flattery, or may cause the one you are praising to feel slighted when you omit certain qualities. Our Musag applies as well to one who praises Hashem. When speaking directly to God, not just about God, one's lavish praises will inevitably fall short, making his omissions a slight to Hashem's honor.

Looking in the Pasuk:

Our Musag is bothered by the fact that in the beginning of the Parsha, Noach is called a צדיק תם and yet here he is called only a צדיק. Why the loss in status? Our Musag answers by pointing out that in the beginning of the Parsha, Hashem was talking about Noach, while here Hashem is talking to Noach. In his presence Hashem scaled back the praise that was due to him.

NOTES

This Musag is found in two different places:

The first is the (עירוּבין יח:) גמרא where the גמרא teaches:

ואמר רבי ירמיה בן אלעזר מקצת שבחו של אדם אומרים בפניו וכולו שלא בפניו מקצת שבחו בפניו דכתיב כי אותך ראיתי צדיק לפני בדור הזה כולו שלא בפניו דכתיב נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו.

The second is a (ב"ר לב:ד) גמרא which expands on the גמרא and teaches:

אמר ר' אלעזר בן עזריה מצינו שאומרים מקצת שבחו של אדם בפניו, וכולו שלא בפניו שכן הוא אומר בנח איש צדיק תמים היה שלא בפניו, וכתיב כי אותך ראיתי צדיק לפני בפניו, ר' אליעזר בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי אמר מצינו שאומרים מקצת שבחו של מי שאמר והיה העולם בפניו שנאמר (תהלים סו) אמרו לאלהים מה נורא מעשיך, שלא בפניו אומר (שם תהלים קלו) הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו.

The Midrash thus adds that not only is our Musag true when speaking בין אדם להבירו, but is true even when speaking בין אדם למקום.

Rashi on the גמרא explains why praising a person completely in his presence is ill advised:

אומרים מקצת שבחו כו': כלומר, דרך ארץ הוא, שאף על פי שאדם משבח את חברו שלא בפניו הרבה, אין מרבה בשבחו לפניו, מפני שנראה כמחניף.

Rashi explains that the Musag is a simple lesson in דרך ארץ, (which would explain why it is not quoted in any of the ספרי הלכה) teaching that if one were to extend lavish praise upon his fellow in his presence it appears as if he is trying to be flattering. According to Rashi, when the Musag says that one should not relate *all* his praise in front of him, it does not mean that if one were to say most of his praise it would be acceptable. Rather, the concept of all his praise is meant to mean lavish praise.

The מהרש"א on the גמרא floats the possibility that the reason behind not completely praising one in his or her presence is because it may cause them to become haughty. However, he continues, the fact that the Midrash teaches this rule regarding even בין אדם למקום disproves this reasoning. We obviously are not concerned that showering lavish praise on God will make Him arrogant, therefore the מהרש"א concludes that Rashi's reason is correct.

However, it seems that the same problem arises when trying to apply Rashi's reason to בין אדם למקום. I can easily understand that if one were to lavishly praise his friend in his presence it would appear as if he was simply trying to flatter him, while doing so while his friend was not present would not have this effect. However, when dealing with praising Hashem there is no possibility of Him not being present! Even though the Midrash differentiates between praise said to Hashem (אמרו לאלקים) and praise said about Hashem (כי לעולם חסדו), the difference should not apply if we are concerned about appearing flattering. For example, if I were to lavishly praise my friend in his presence, it would not make a difference if I was talking directly to him, or talking to someone about him within his earshot; both would appear as if I was trying to flatter him. If so, why by praise to Hashem should it make a difference?

Perhaps we might propose a different understanding of our Musag that might fit both the גמרא and the Midrash. The גמרא (ברכות לג:) relates the following incident:

ההוא דנחית קמיה דרבי חנינא (בן אדם שהיה שליח ציבור לפני רב חנינא), אמר: האל הגדול הגבור והנורא והאדיר והעוז והיראוי החזק והאמיץ והודאי והנכבד. המתין לו עד דסיים, כי סיים אמר ליה: סיימתניהו לכולהו שבחי דמריך (גמרת כל השבחים של אדונך)? למה לי כולי האי (למה צריכים לומר כל כך הרבה)? אן הני תלת דאמרינן (אנו השלשה שאנו אומרים – הגדול הגיבור והנורא) אי לאו דאמריננה משה רבינו באורייתא, ואתו אנשי כנסת הגדולה ותקניננה בתפלה לא הוינן יכולין למימר להו, ואת אמרת כולי האי ואזלת (ואתה אמרת כל כך הרבה והלכת)? משל, למלך בשר ודם שהיו לו אלף אלפים דינרי זהב, והיו מקלסין אותו בשל כסף, והלא גנאי הוא לו!

The above text teaches us that when one comes to offer lavish praise it is often counterproductive. One who hears lavish praise concludes that the speaker is indeed coming to innumerate all his positive qualities. Since it is usually impossible for one to know all of his qualities, the speaker will

many times leave out certain praise, causing the person who he came to praise to feel slighted and not complimented. Of course, with human beings this would apply only if he were to praise him in his presence. When praising God, who is always present, we may differentiate between when speaking directly to Him or when speaking about Him. For when speaking to Him one would be extremely careful with his speech, making any omission a slight to Hashem's honor. However, when speaking about God, but not to Him, one could be forgiven for not being as careful with their language, making omissions to lavish praise insignificant.

According to the above we may answer a different question on Rashi's commentary in the גמרא. Rashi understood that the terms מקצת שבחו and כולו, refer to lavish praise and less lavish praise, not to all their praise and part of their praise. If so, we might ask, why did the גמרא use the terms מקצת and כולו and not say מעט משבחו and הרבה משבחו? However, according to the explanation we gave above, although it agrees that we are referring to lavish praise and not all his praise, the גמרא uses this term to drive home the problem with using lavish praise: the person who hears the lavish praise will assume that you are saying all his praise, and feel slighted when you fall short.

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Since Hashem was the One who was praising Noach do we have to be concerned that it would look like flattery?
- b. Can you think of other reasons why one must be careful with the way they praise others? Did these apply to Noach?