

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Vayigash

Speaking Lashon Hakodesh

וְהָיָה עֵינֵיכֶם רְאוּת וְעֵינֵי אָחִי בְנֵימִין כִּי פִי הַמְדַבֵּר אֵלֵיכֶם

Behold, your eyes see, as do the eyes of my brother Binyamin, that it is my mouth that is speaking to you (45:12)

Commenting on the words “כִּי פִי הַמְדַבֵּר אֵלֵיכֶם,” Rashi quotes the Midrash that Yosef was referring to the fact that he was speaking to the brothers in their language, *Lashon Hakodesh*.¹

THE BEGINNING OF PEREK 45

The common understanding of Yosef emphasizing this fact is that it was for purposes of verifying that it was indeed him. As the pasuk describes earlier on, the brothers’ reaction upon Yosef revealing his identity to them was one of complete shock. After everything this Egyptian viceroy had put them through, they were not sure if they could believe anything he said, even if it was that he was Yosef! Thus, Yosef had to prove to them that it was really him.

In order to appreciate the Meshech Chochmah’s understanding of this midrash, let us preface by noting that the pesukim in the beginning of perek 45 discussing Yosef’s revelation can be divided into three sections:

- ▶ Pesukim 1-4: Yosef revealing his identity, and the brothers’ shock upon hearing this.
- ▶ Pesukim 5-8: Yosef comforting and reassuring the brothers that everything that had happened had been guided by Hashem toward a positive outcome.
- ▶ Pesukim 9-13: Discussing sharing the news with Yaakov and bringing him down to live in Mitzrayim, where Yosef would take care of him.

In light of this, it is most interesting that Yosef’s words concerning him speaking *Lashon Hakodesh* appear in pasuk 12 – the third section! If his intent in doing so was to verify

¹ Onkelos likewise translates these words: “אֲרִי בְלִישְׁנֹכּוֹן אֲנִי מְדַבֵּר אֵלֵיכֶם – for I am speaking to you in your language.”

that it was actually him, this should have taken place somewhere within the first four pesukim where he dealt with that issue!

PROPHECY IN ERETZ YISRAEL AND IN CHUTZ LA'ARETZ

The Meshech Chochmah explains that Yosef speaking *Lashon Hakodesh* was, in fact, part of the preparations to bring Yaakov down to Mitzrayim. For Yaakov to come to Mitzrayim was no simple matter. Aside from the basic reluctance he would have to leaving Eretz Canaan, there was another critical issue – *Ruach Hakodesh*. A central component of Yaakov's spiritual level, and of his relationship with Hashem, was his *Ruach Hakodesh*, which translates as Divine Inspiration and is a form of prophecy. Chazal inform us that Yaakov had been without *Ruach Hakodesh* for the past twenty-two years, due to his being in mourning over Yosef, for *Ruach Hakodesh* only rests upon a person who is in a state of joy. Now, upon hearing that Yosef was alive, he could once again enjoy that exalted level,² and would surely not wish to lose it again. Part of this means that Yaakov would not want to leave Eretz Canaan, for the Gemara³ states that prophecy does not exist outside of the Land of Israel. To this we may add, of all places, he would surely not wish to relocate himself in the impure and godless environment of Mitzrayim!

It is in the interests of alleviating this concern that Yosef speaks to the brothers in *Lashon Hakodesh*.

Although the Gemara states that there is no prophecy in chutz la'aretz, it qualifies this by saying that if a person has already experienced prophecy in Eretz Yisrael, he can continue to do so even if he is in chutz la'aretz. This is illustrated by the prophet Yechezkel, who had experienced prophecy while in Eretz Yisrael prior to the Babylonian exile, and was thus able to experience it in Bavel, as well. Indeed, this is indicated by the words which introduce his prophecy: “היה ה' דבר ה' אל יחזקאל בן בוזי הכהן בארץ כשדים – The word of Hashem came to Yechezkel ben Buzi, the Kohen, in the land of the Kasdim (Bavel).” The Gemara explains the double expression “היה ה'” to mean that since Hashem's word had *already come* to Yechezkel while he was still in Eretz Yisrael, it was able to come to him now while in Bavel. Similarly, Yosef told the brothers to communicate to Yaakov that coming to live in Mitzrayim would not require him to forfeit the *Ruach Hakodesh* he had already attained in Eretz Yisrael.

However, Yosef did more than merely *state* that this was the case, he *demonstrated* it.

LASHON HAKODESH AND RUACH HAKODESH

The language called *Lashon Hakodesh* is not merely another way of referring to Hebrew. Although it uses Hebrew words, *Lashon Hakodesh* refers to a holy way of using those words to insert maximum and multi-layered meaning into a minimum of words, in a way that approaches the form in which prophecy itself is expressed. It is for this reason it is called *Lashon Hakodesh* – the holy language, for in order to speak it effectively, the person needs *kedushah*; in fact, he requires a level of *Ruach Hakodesh*!

This gives us an entirely new appreciation of Yosef speaking in *Lashon Hakodesh*. It represents the fact that he had retained the *Ruach Hakodesh* required to speak in that way, even though he had been living in Mitzrayim for many years.

2 See pasuk 27 with Rashi's comments.

3 Moed Katan 25a.

This, says Meshech Chochmah, was Yosef's intention in speaking to the brothers in *Lashon Hakodesh* at this point. He was saying, "When suggesting to our father that he come to live in Mitzrayim, tell him that he will not need to abdicate the *Ruach Hakodesh* he attained in Canaan by living here. The proof of this is the fact that I have been here for twenty two years and yet, I am still speaking *Lashon Hakodesh* – the language of *Ruach Hakodesh*!"

Yosef's Hand Covering Yaakov's Eyes

אָנְכִי אֵרֵד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶנְכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם עָלַה וְיִוְסַף יְשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל עֵינֶיךָ

I will go down with you to Mitzrayim and I will surely bring you up ;and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes (46:4)

As the preceding pasuk indicates, Yaakov was fearful about going down to Mitzrayim, and justifiably so, for what beneficial purpose could conceivably be served by him and his family leaving Eretz Canaan for Mitzrayim?

To his end, Hashem informs Yaakov that it is not worthwhile for him to try and fathom how going down to Mitzrayim will be of ultimate benefit for the Jewish People, since the answer is beyond his capacity to see. Hashem's ways are exalted beyond human comprehension and their purpose is not always apparent to a human being, even one as elevated as Yaakov. As a salient illustration of this idea – and as a reassurance to Yaakov – Hashem refers to the episode of Yosef. Throughout the years Yosef was separated from Yaakov, it was impossible to perceive that any positive outcome was being served; and yet, in hindsight, Yaakov was able to appreciate that all of those events orchestrated by Hashem resulted in Yosef rising to prominence in Mitzrayim. In a similar way, the benefit of Yaakov and his family going down to Mitzrayim could not be fathomed by Yaakov at the time. However, Hashem says, "Yosef will place his hand on your eyes," as if to say, let the story of Yosef allow you to enter Mitzrayim with "eyes closed," relying on Hashem's guidance to bring about a positive outcome that you cannot currently perceive, as was the case with Yosef.