

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Miketz

The Earliest Commentary on the Torah

— Concept: The Relationship of Chumash with Neviim and Kesuvim —

וַיִּפְתַּח הָאֶחָד אֶת שַׁקּוֹ... בְּמִלּוֹן וַיֵּרָא אֶת כֶּסֶפוֹ וְהִנֵּה הוּא בְּפִי אֲמֹתָתָיו... וַיֵּצֵא לָבָם וַיִּחְרְדוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו לֵאמֹר מַה זֹאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ

One of [the brothers] opened his sack... at the inn, he saw his money, behold, it was in the opening of his sack... their hearts sank, they were afraid, saying to one another: "What is this that God has done to us?"¹

INTRODUCTION

When Yosef's brothers return from buying food in Egypt, they discover, to their alarm, that their money they had brought with them to purchase food was still in their bags. With no notion of how this possibly could have occurred, and fearful of repercussions from the already suspicious Egyptian ruler, their eyes turn heavenwards, trying to fathom what Divine message is intended for them.

This verse, aside from depicting one of many pieces in the story of Yosef and the brothers, also forms the basis for a discussion in the Talmud which could potentially revolutionize the way we look at the three sections that comprise Tanach known as: Torah, Neviim (Prophets) and Kesuvim (Writings).

R' YOCHANAN'S AXIOM

The Gemara in Massechet Taanis² relates the following exchange that took place between R' Yochanan and his nephew:

R' Yochanan encountered Reish Lakish's son who was sitting and reciting [the verse]:³ "The foolishness of a man frustrates his way, and [yet] his heart frets against Hashem."

R' Yochanan sat and expressed his astonishment: "Is there anything written in Scripture that

1 Bereishis 42:27-28.

2 9a.

3 Mishlei 19:3.

is not alluded to in the Torah?”

[The young boy] said to [R' Yochanan]: “Is this not alluded to? Behold, the verse states: ‘And their hearts sank, they were afraid, saying to one another: “What is this that God has done to us?”’”

Firstly, it is worth noting the novel interpretation R' Yochanan's nephew brings to our verse, for he is saying that rather than the brothers casting their eyes heavenward and asking why God was doing this to them, they should instead have checked their bags before they left Egypt!

However, of primary interest to our discussion is the axiom implicit in R' Yochanan's words: “Is there anything written in Scripture that is not alluded to in the Torah?” As if to say, anything written later in Tanach must necessarily be found in the Torah. As Rashi explains:⁴ “For the Chumash is the foundation of the Neviim and Kesuvim, and everything contained therein has an allusion that can be found in the Torah.”

FURTHER EXAMPLES: “THE MENTION OF A TZADDIK IS FOR A BLESSING”

This idea finds similar expression elsewhere in the Talmud. The Gemara in Maseches Yoma⁵ records the following exchange:

Said Ravina to the rabbi who would recites Aggados before him: “What is the source of that which the Rabbis say ‘The mention of a tzaddik is for a blessing’?”

He [the rabbi] said to him [Ravina]: for the verse states,⁶ ‘The mention of a tzaddik is for a blessing.’

[Ravina continued]: “From where do we know this in the Torah [i.e. the Chumash]?”

[The rabbi answered]: “For it is written, ‘And Hashem said, “Shall I hide from Avraham that which I am doing?”’ And it [then] states, “And Avraham will be a great and powerful nation.”⁸

Let us ask, if Ravina does not know from where in the Torah the idea that “the mention of a tzaddik is for a blessing” is derived, how does he know that it is to be derived from there at all? Apparently, it is obvious to Ravina that if something is written later in Tanach, it must be contained somewhere within the Torah; all that remains is to find out where in the Torah it is contained.

THE PRINCIPLE: NEVIIM, AND KESUVIM AS EXPLICATING IDEAS OF THE TORAH

The question that now arises is: If indeed, every idea mentioned in Neviim and Kesuvim is already to be found in the Torah, what then is the purpose of these ideas being “repeated” in Neviim and Kesuvim?

4 Taanis loc. cit. s.v. velo.

5 38b.

6 Mishlei 10:7.

7 Bereishis 18:17.

8 Ibid. verse 18. [See glosses of R' Akiva Eiger to Yoma loc. cit. who refers to Rashi's comments at the beginning of Parshas Noach (Bereishis 6:9 s.v. *eileh*), where he adduces the principle that “the remembrance of a tzaddik is for a blessing” in his explanation of the verse there. With this reference, R' Akiva Eiger is implicitly raising the question as to why the Gemara does not likewise identify this earlier verse as the source of this principle, deriving it rather from the later verses dealing with Avraham.]

Clearly, although these ideas are all *contained* within the Torah, they are not necessarily readily *discernible* from reading the Torah itself. To this end, they are stated clearly in the Neviim and Kesuvim. It is worth noting that R' Yochanan's statement informs us that the relationship between ideas alluded to in the Torah and expressed in Nach is exclusive in nature; for if there is nothing written in Nach that is not alluded to in the Torah, then nothing exists in Nach which is not an explication of an idea in the Torah and, moreover, it is for the very purpose of such explication that it is written later on.⁹

To put it differently: The earliest commentary on the Torah is Neviim and Kesuvim!

"THAT I HAVE WRITTEN" – THESE ARE NEVIIM AND KESUVIM

It is possible to perceive this idea within a statement of Reish Lakish, as recorded in Maseches Berachos:¹⁰

What is the meaning of the verse: "And I will give you the Tablets of Stone and the Torah and the Commandment that I have written to instruct them"?¹¹

- **The Tablets of Stone** — these are the Ten Commandments.
- **The Torah** — this is Scripture.¹²
- **And the Commandment** — this is Mishnah.
- **That I have written** — these are Nevi'im and Kesuvim.
- **To instruct them** — this is Gemara.

This teaches that all of them were given to Moshe at Sinai.

We note that the reference to Neviim and Kesuvim is contained within the words "That I have written." Let us suggest that the intention is that although the events described in the Neviim and Kesuvim had not yet occurred, nor had the verses of those sections of Tanach been written, nonetheless, the ideas which they discuss are all to be found *in the Torah itself* – "which I have [already] written!"

NEVIIM, KESUVIM AND THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF

This idea will help illuminate a statement found in Maseches Nedarim:¹³

Said Rav Ada son of Rav Chanina: Had Israel not sinned [with the Golden Calf], they would have been given only the five chumashim and the Book of Yehoshua, which contains the [allotted] portions of the Land of Israel.

On the face of it, this statement is somewhat baffling, for it implies that had we not made the Golden Calf, we would have missed out on all the lessons found within Neviim and Kesuvim! How can sinning give us access to Torah ideas from which we would otherwise have been deprived?

Rather, the point is that had we not sinned and fallen from the exalted level which we attained at Mount Sinai, we would not have needed Neviim and Kesuvim to explicate the ideas of the Torah for us. Our vision would have been keen enough to detect these ideas ourselves within the

9 With regard to the parameters of deriving halachic teachings from Neviim and Kesuvim to matters of Torah law, see Chagigah 10b, Bava Kama 2b and Niddah 23a.

10 5a.

11 Shemos 24:12.

12 I.e., the Chumash.

13 22b.

Torah, rendering the formulations of the Neviim and Kesuvim redundant.¹⁴

Indeed, in this light we can understand the statement of the Talmud Yerushalmi,¹⁵ as codified by the Rambam,¹⁶ that in the future all the books of Neviim and Kesuvim will be discontinued, with the exception of Megillas Esther, concerning which it says,¹⁷ “And their remembrance [of the events of Purim] will not depart from their [the Jewish People’s] descendants.” Needless to say, this statement requires some explanation. Why should works of Torah be discontinued in the future?¹⁸ The commentators¹⁹ explain this assertion based on the above idea: In the future, we will yet return to a level where we will be able to perceive all the principles concepts contained within the Torah from our study of the Torah itself, and will no longer need the Neviim and Kesuvim to identify them for us. The only exception will be the Book of Esther, where there is a specific mitzvah to read it in order to commemorate the miracle described therein.

“JOYOUS AS WHEN THEY WERE GIVEN AT SINAI”

Moreover, this idea will give us further insight into a phrase which is found concerning certain cases in the words of Chazal. The Talmud Yerushalmi²⁰ describes the event of the bris of Elisha ben Avuya. All the notables of Jerusalem were assembled but the bris was late in starting. R’ Eliezer and R’ Yehoshua, who were also present, decided to use the time to study Torah, which they proceeded to do, whereupon they were enveloped by fire. Avuya, their host, rushed over to them in alarm and exclaimed: “Have you come to burn down my house?!” The sages replied:

Heaven forbid! Rather, we were sitting and reviewing words of Torah, from the Torah to the Neviim and from the Neviim to the Kesuvim, and the words were joyous as when they were given from Sinai. Were the words of Torah not themselves given in fire?

What is the meaning of this distinctive description? What was it about the way these sages were learning which rendered the words of Torah “joyous”, and why specifically as “when they were given from Sinai”?

Interestingly this phrase appears elsewhere in the Aggadic Literature, and is adduced regarding a similar form of learning Torah. Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabbah states:²¹

Ben Azzai was sitting and expounding and a fire surrounded him. R’ Akiva inquired as to what he was involving himself with. Ben Azzai replied: “I was sitting and threading through (חור) words of Torah, and from the Torah to Neviim and from Neviim to Kesuvim, and the words were joyous as when they were given at Sinai.”

It appears that the unusual distinction of words that were “as joyous as when they were given from Sinai” derives from the way in which these scholars were engaged in Torah study. In both cases, they were learning, or “threading through,” from Torah to Neviim and from Neviim to Kesuvim. This “threading through” involved identifying the ideas embedded within the Torah as

14 Netziv, Second Introduction *Kidmas Ha’emek* to the Shei’iltos of Rav Achai, R’ Yaakov Kamenetzky, Preface *Mevo L’kimud Hamikra* to Commentary Emes le’Yaakov on the Torah.

15 Megillah 1:5.

16 Hilchos Chanukah u’Megillah 2:8.

17 Esther 9:28.

18 See glosses of Raavad to Rambam *ibid.*, and Responsa Radvaz, Vol. II sec. 666.

19 See Commentary Manos Halevi (by R’ Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz) and Commentary of R’ Moshe Alshich to Esther *loc. cit.*

20 Chagigah chap. 2, cited in Tosafos *ibid.* 15a s.v. shuvu.

21 1:10 s.v. tzavarech.

they were subsequently explicated in the Neviim and Kesuvim.²² Essentially, they were learning the Chumash with the vision that the Jewish people originally had when the Torah was given to them at Sinai, and hence they succeeded as well in reproducing the conditions in which the Torah itself was given and became surrounded by fire.

This fascinating and far-reaching idea of the role of Neviim and Kesuvim as “The Earliest Commentary on the Torah” will no doubt serve as a basis for approaching these areas of Tanach with new eyes, and will hopefully in turn yield further insight into the words of the Chumash itself – rendering its messages “as joyous as when they were given at Sinai!”

22 A simple reading of these words implies that the ideas Ben Azzai found in the Torah were explicated both in the Neviim and the Kesuvim. From numerous places in the Gemara, however, it appears that there are only certain noteworthy cases where an idea appears in all three sections of the Tanach, see e.g. Megillah 31a, Moed Katan 17b and Makkos 10b.