

Insights from the Meshech Chochma
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פרשיות נצבים-וילך תשפ"ג

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כִּי אַתֶּם יָדַעְתֶּם אֶת אֲשֶׁר יָשַׁבְנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר עָבַרְנוּ בְּקֶרֶב הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עִבְרְתֶם. וַתִּרְאוּ אֶת שְׁקִיּוֹצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גִּלְלֵיהֶם עֵץ וְאֶבֶן כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם. (פרק כט' טו-טז)
*For you know how we dwelled in the land of Mitzraim and that **we** passed through the midst of the nations through **whom** you passed. And you saw their abominations and their detestable idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, that were with them.*

These pasukim are filled with grammar issues that require clarification. The words אֲשֶׁר יָשַׁבְנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר עָבַרְנוּ בְּקֶרֶב הַגּוֹיִם certainly establishes that “we” i.e., Moshe and the people were exposed to the immoral lifestyles of the Egyptians and other nations. Why then does he repeat עִבְרְתֶם אֲשֶׁר? Furthermore, why change the person from עָבַרְנוּ/**we** passed to עִבְרְתֶם/**you** passed?

The Meshech Chochma explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was pointing out to them that there were *two* “passing throughs.” One with regards to himself and like-minded people on a high spiritual level. The other was what the general population experienced. He illustrates this as follows: A father and son are passing through a city and end up walking in a spiritually depleted neighborhood. The father continues to walk but the son stops “to take in the view.” Later, the father confronts his son and tells him that “I am concerned about your spiritual welfare for you seem to be enticed by what you saw and may fall prey to those temptations.” Moshe told the people that “although עָבַרְנוּ-we all passed through foreign lands, I was totally oblivious to the depravity of the other nations. I was traveling with Hashem at my side. Some of you on the other hand, when passing through these lands were seduced into doing terrible transgressions-as Rav Meir Simcha writes, כִּי נִכְשָׁלוּ בִּי אֲשֶׁר עָבַרְתֶּם. בְּשֵׁטִים... וַיִּצְמְדוּ לִבְעַל פְּעוֹר. And I am very worried about you. You must be doubly careful when you go into Eretz Yisrael, where you will be exposed to other repulsive cultures.” The words of a concerned leader, about to leave his people, entreating them to keep to the straight and narrow.

Rav Meir Simcha continues to analyze our next pasuk: *And you saw their abominations and their detestable idols*, עֵץ וְאֶבֶן כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם. Rav Meir Simcha is bothered by this last phrase. It is understandable that since the people saw and some had even succumbed to idol worshipping *before* entering the Land, that it will be very difficult for them to resist this יִצְרֵה הָרָע upon entering the Land. But why would their exposure to the wood, stone, silver or gold of the Egyptians and other nations have any significant impact on their being

able to withstand the יִצָר הָרָע of עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה? Rashi is clearly bothered by this and interprets עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה as referring to the עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה themselves and explains it as follows: “The pagan idols made of wood and stone, you saw in the open, for the non-Jew who owned them was not afraid that they might be stolen. But those of silver and gold were עִמָּהֶם, with them-they were in the interior of their houses, for they were afraid that they might be stolen.” The theme of the pasukim is consistent-Moshe is concerned that their will to not serve עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה may not be as strong as it should be to protect them from life in Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Meir Simcha attempts to explain this verse along its נֶשְׁטוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא and proposes that like Rashi, אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם is referring to the silver and gold idols but specifically, what the Jews took from the gentiles. The general population’s exposure to this (Jewish) gold and silver may have made them more susceptible to falling prey to the idols that they will encounter in Eretz Yisrael and that was Moshe Rabbeinu’s concern. He supports this approach with the exegesis of the Mechilta on the pasuk in לה' שָׁמוֹת יב' לה' ... שְׁמוֹת יב' לה' ... *Hashem gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians... and so they emptied Mitzraim:* This teaches us that the Egyptians’ idols were melted down and returned to their former state so that the Jews were now permitted to take them. But this tainted silver and gold still had the “stench” and potential harm of עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה. (Rav Meir Simcha feels that this Mechilta gives added meaning to the pasuk in יב' לה' ... שְׁמוֹת יב' לה' ... *and against all the gods of Mitzraim I shall mete out punishment* i.e., referring to Hashem melting the gods/idols!) Moshe’s concern then was not only for the people’s exposure to the idols of Mitzraim and the other nations they traveled through but also for the ongoing exposure to the silver and gold of transformed idols in the possession of the Jewish people.

Rav Meir Simcha addresses one last point: If these (erstwhile) idols belonged to the Jews, why does the pasuk write עִמָּהֶם i.e., *with them*, would not עִמָּכֶם *with you* be more grammatically correct? Rav Meir Simcha enlightens us with the following: In all מְשָׁנָה, when Moshe Rabbeinu speaks to the people as a group, he speaks בְּנוֹכַח-directly at them i.e., you. When he speaks to individuals, as he is in our pasukim, he does so בְּנִסְתָּר, in third person, which is עִמָּהֶם.

In explaining a pasuk, Rav Meir Simcha leaves “no stone unturned,” culling pearls from all areas of the Torah-נִשְׁבָּעְלָהּ וְנִשְׁבָּעְלָהּ to develop and support נֶשְׁטוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא!

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לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
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