

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLIV: Devarim (Deut. 1:1–3:22)

Essay 5. The “voice” of the words

”וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹל דְּבָרֵיכֶם וַיִּקְצֹף” וכו'. קִשְׁוּה לְמָה לֹא אָמַר ”וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת דְּבָרֵיכֶם” דְּמַהוּ ”קוֹל”, וּמִצְאָנוּ זֶה הַלְשׁוֹן בְּפָרָשַׁת וַאֲתַחֲנֶן שְׁתִּי פְעָמִים בְּפָסוּק אַחַד, ”וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹל דְּבָרֵיכֶם בְּדַבְּרְכֶם אֵלַי” וכו', ”שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת-קוֹל דְּבָרֵי הָעָם הַזֶּה” וכו', וּשְׁתִּי פְעָמִים בְּאִיּוֹב ל”ג וּל”ד ”וְקוֹל מַלְיָן אֲשַׁמְעֶה”, ”הַאֲזִינָה לְקוֹל מְלִי”, וְצָרִיךְ טַעַם מַהוּ תִּיבַת ”קוֹל”.

In recounting the Israelites’ reaction to the report of the spies, Moses said: “**The L-rd heard the voice of your words and He became angry**, and he made a vow, saying, ‘Not one of those involved, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers.’”¹ **A difficulty is why didn’t it say, “The L-rd heard your words,” for what is this “the voice of your words”?**

We find this language in parshat Va’etchanan, twice in one verse, as Moses recounted the Israelites’ reaction to hearing G-d speak at Mount Sinai.

When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, you came up to me, all your tribal heads and elders, And you said, “The L-rd our G-d has just shown us a majestic Presence, and we have heard G-d’s voice out of the fire; we have seen this day that humankind may live though addressed by G-d. Let us not die, then, for this fearsome fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the L-rd our G-d any longer, we shall die. For what mortal ever heard the voice of the living G-d speak out of the fire, as we did, and lived? You go closer and hear all that the L-rd our G-d says, and then you tell us everything that the L-rd our G-d tells you, and we will willingly do it. **The L-rd heard the voice of your words as you were speaking to me**, and the L-rd said to me, ‘**I have heard the voice of the words of this people** that they said to you; they did well to speak thus.’” May they always be of such mind, to fear Me and follow all My commandments, that it may go well with them and with their children forever!

- Deut. 5:20–25

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¹ Deut. 1:34.

The language **also** appears **two times in Job, chapter 33 and chapter 34**: “Indeed, you have spoken in my ears, **and I heard the voice of the words,**”² **and** “If you would understand, listen to this; **give ear to the voice of my words.**”³

A reason is needed to explain what is the intent of this word “voice” as it is used in the context, “The voice of the words.”

וּמָה שֶׁנִּמְצָא בְּפָרְשֵׁי נְאֻמֹתַי "קוֹל דְּבָרִים אֲתֶם שֹׁמְעִים", זֶה לֹא קִשְׁיָא וְלֹא מִיֵּדִי, מִשּׁוּם דְּמִיֵּירִי בְּדִיבּוּר הַקָּב"ה, וְאִמְרִינָן בְּמִדְרָשׁ שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים רַבָּה שֶׁהַדִּיבּוּר שֶׁהִנָּה יוֹצֵא מִפִּי הַקָּב"ה הִנָּה הוֹלֵךְ וְחוֹזֵר עַל כָּל אֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְאוֹמֵר לוֹ מִקְּבֻלְנִי אֲתָה עֹלֶיךָ. וְעוֹד דִּיבּוּר עֲלִיוֹן שֶׁאֵינִי דֹכְתִיב בֵּיהּ "וְכָל-הָעַם רֹאִים אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת".

Should we question **what is found in parashat Va'etchanan**, “The L-rd spoke to you out of the fire; **the voice of His words you heard**, but you perceived no shape, nothing but a voice”?⁴ No, **this is not a difficulty and not anything** to worry about, **because it is talking about the speech of the Holy One, Blessed be He. And it’s said in Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah (1:2)**, “**The utterance that came out of the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, would circulate before each and every Israelite, and say to him, ‘Do you accept me upon yourself?’**” I.e., based on this Midrash, “the voice of His words” in this context referred to a supernatural power of G-d’s speech, which would not be relevant to the use of the term for humans.

Also, Heavenly speech is different, as it is written regarding it, “And all the people saw the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance.”⁵

וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה: תּוֹרֵץ פְּסוּק שֶׁל דְּנִיָּאל "וְאִשְׁמַע אֶת-קוֹל דְּבָרָיו", שֶׁשָּׁם הִנָּה הַמְּלָאךָ מְדַבֵּר, אֲבָל כְּשִׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל הֵם הַמְּדַבְּרִים קִשְׁיָא.

In this way, a verse of Daniel will be solved, “I heard the voice of his words; and when I heard him speaking, overcome by a deep sleep, I lay prostrate on the ground.”⁶ For there, it was an angel that was speaking, and we understand that G-d has given supernatural power to the angels, **but when Israel are the ones speaking, there is a difficulty** why it says “the voice of the words.”

² Job 33:8.

³ Job 34:16.

⁴ Deut. 4:12.

⁵ Ex. 20:15.

⁶ Dan. 10:9.

וְנִשְׁׁ לֹאמֵר שֵׁשׁ בְּאִיּוֹב בְּסֻמוֹד כְּתִיב, "כִּי מְלִתִּי מִלִּים הִצִּיקְתָּנִי רוּחַ בְּטִנְי", כְּלֹאמֵר כְּשֵׁשׁ לְאֲדָם אִיזוֹ סִיבָה לְדַבֵּר אֵינָה דְבַר אוֹ מִחֲמַת פֶּעַס טְרַדָּה שֶׁנֶּאֱמָה וְאֵהָבָה וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּזֶה, אֵינּוּ יְכוּל לְעֲצוֹר בְּנִפְשׁוֹ וְלִמְשׁוֹל בְּרוּחֹו לְעַכְבֵּ דְבָרוֹ, וְצָרִיד שֶׁיִּדְבַר בְּעַל כְּרָחוֹ, וְכִשְׁהוּא מְדַבֵּר מִחֲמַת אֵלוֹ הַסִּיבּוֹת וְכִיּוֹצֵא אֵינּוּ רְאוּי לְשׁוּם לֵב לְדַבְּרִים שֶׁלּוֹ שֶׁהֵם בְּלֹא דַעַת רַק שֶׁאֲוֹתָהּ הַסִּיבָּה מְכַרַּחַת אוֹתוֹ לְדַבֵּר.

It can be said that there, in Job in the adjoining chapter, it is written, that Elihu states: “For I am full of words; the wind in my belly presses me.”⁷ This is as if to say, when a man has some reason to say something, or he is overcome with emotion because of anger, or bother, or hatred, or love, or the like, he cannot stop in his mind and dominate his soul to delay his speech. Rather, he must speak out of necessity, and when he speaks because of these reasons and the like, it is not appropriate to pay any attention to his words, which are senseless—it’s just that the reason that has overcome him compels him to speak.

Job was lamenting the tragedies he endured, and he protests that these things should not have happened to him, as he was a righteous man, and he demands that G-d answer him. Three friends were present and did not respond to him, but Elihu, a younger man who was waiting patiently for Job to finish, and who had expected the three older men to respond to Job, finally realized that it was up to him to speak.

וְלָכֵן אֵלִיהוּא אֶחָד שֶׁהִקְדִּים "כִּי מְלִתִּי מִלִּים" וְכוּ' רָצָה לְהוֹדִיעַ לְאִיּוֹב אֶף עַל פִּי שֶׁאֵינִי מוֹכְרָח לְדַבֵּר עִמָּךְ עִם כָּל זֶה "הֶאֱזִינָה לְקוֹל מְלִי", וְאִם הִיָּה אוֹמֵר "הֶאֱזִינָה מְלִי" פְּשִׁיטָא שֶׁאִיּוֹב לֹא הִיָּה מְשִׁית לְבֹו בְּאוֹמְרוֹ שֶׁהִדְבָּרִים שֶׁלּוֹ בְּאִים מִחֲמַת טְרַדָּא וְאֵינּוּ לְשִׁית לֵב עֲלֵיהֶם. וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי אָמַר "לְקוֹל מְלִי", כְּלֹאמֵר אֵינּוּ מְדַבֵּר בְּטְרַדָּא וּבְלִי דַעַת רַק בְּנִפְשׁוֹ צְלוּלָה וּבְדַעַת מִיּוֹשְׁבָת. וְהֶרְאָה הוּא ה"קוֹל" שֶׁעֲמֹו אֵינִי מוֹצִיא הַדְבָּרִים, שֶׁמִּי שֶׁאֵינּוּ מְכַנִּין לְדַבְּרֵיוֹ אֵינּוּ מְכַנִּין אֶף הַקוֹל, וְכִשְׁאֲתָהּ רוֹאֵה שֶׁאֵינִי מְכַנִּין הַקוֹל שֶׁמַּע מִינָה שֶׁאֵינִי מְדַבֵּר בְּדַעַת מִיּוֹשְׁבָת וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי "הֶאֱזִינָה לְקוֹל מְלִי".

Therefore, Elihu, after first advancing the words quoted above, “For I am full of words; The wind in my belly presses me,” wanted to inform Job, “Even though I am compelled to speak with you, nevertheless, “If you would understand, listen to this; give ear to the voice of my words.’ ” If he had simply said “give ear to my words,” Job would not have paid attention, because of [Elihu’s] saying that his words came because of his distress, i.e., that he was compelled to speak, and Job would have therefore felt that there was no reason to pay attention to them. Because of this, he said “give ear to the voice of my words,” as if to say that he wasn’t speaking because of distress and without knowing what he was saying, but rather with a clear soul and settled mind, and the proof is “the voice” with which I say the things, as if to say, “the intent,” for he who is not attentive to his words is not attentive even to his voice, and when you see that I am attentive to my voice, hear from this that I was speaking with a settled mind, and because of that, “give ear to the voice of my words.”

⁷ Job 32:18.

ונהכי נמי במה שדברו ישראל נגד הקב"ה במעשה המרגלים אין להאשימם, לפי שהיו טרודים ומתפחדים במה שאמרו להם המרגלים. רק מן הקול שהוציאו דבריהם הנה נודע כי בדעת מיושבת היו מדברים ובחטא ופשע, ומשום הכי כששמע ה' את קול דבריהם" דנקא "ויקצף וישבע לאמר אם יראו איש" וכו'.

Indeed, regarding what Israel said against the Holy One, Blessed be He, in the incident of the spies, “Why is the L-rd taking us to that land to fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be carried off! It would be better for us to go back to Egypt,”⁸ there is no blame against them, because of the anxiety and fear from what the spies said to them. It was only from the voice of their words, the intent, that it was known that they were speaking with a settled mind, and with sin and iniquity. Only then, because of this, when the L-rd heard “the voice of your words,” especially then “He became angry, and he made a vow, saying, ‘Not one of those involved, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers.’”

ובנה ותורין שפיר קושניא אחרת על פסוק "היטיבו כל אשר דברו", אם האמת שדברו אל משה שרוצים לשמוע מפיו, מקמת היראה שהיתה להם למות, כמו שגראה מפשט הכתוב "אם יספים אנחנו" וכו' "ונמתנו", אם כן דברו מקמת יראה וטרדא ואין ממש בדבריהם, ואיך אם כן שבחם הכתוב דקאמר "היטיבו" וכו'. ומפל שפן שלפי האמת לא יפה עשו, שאילו היו שומעים מפי הקב"ה הנה יצר הרע נעקר מהם לגמרי.

In this way, another question will be solved nicely, on the verses, “they did well to speak thus.” If the truth is that they spoke to Moses that they want to hear [the Torah] from His mouth, because of the fear they had of dying, as it appears from the plain meaning of the Scripture, “if we hear the voice of the L-rd our G-d any longer, we shall die.” If so, they spoke because of fear and distress, and there is no substance to their words. If so, how is it that Scripture praises them, saying, “they did well to speak thus”? Even more so, the truth is that they didn’t do well, for if they had listened to the voice of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the evil inclination would have been completely uprooted from them.

וצריך לומר שהאמת הוא שישראל נתפחדו מפני המיתה, אבל מלבד הפחד עוד היו חושבים בדעתם שאם יהיה נעקר היצר הרע מהם לא יהיה להם עוד שקר ועונש. והיו סבורים שיותר טוב להם שיהיה היצר הרע ומתוך כך יתרבה שכםם, שהיו בטוחים על היראה שהיתה להם אותה שעה בלבבם שהיצר הרע לא יחטאם. ומשום הכי על סברא זו משבם להו קרא "שמעתי את קול דברי העם הנה" וכו', ומשום הכי פתיב "קול דברי".

It’s necessary to say that the truth is that Israel was afraid of death, but apart from the fear, they also thought in their minds that if the evil inclination was uprooted from them, they would no longer have reward and punishment. They thought that it would be better for them to have the evil inclination and as a result, their reward would increase, for they were

⁸ Num. 14:3.

certain that because of the awe they had at that time in their hearts, that the evil inclination would not lead them to sin. Because of this, with this thinking, Scripture praised them, “I have heard the voice of the words of this people that they said to you,” and because of this, it is written, “the voice of the words.”

וראיה על זה דכתוב אחריו "מי יפן והיה לבבם" וכו' "ליראה אתי" וכו' דהיינו היראה שהיתה להם אותה שעה שהיו בטוהים בה, "למען ייטב להם" וכו' כדי שיתרבה שכרם אם יהיה להם נצח הרע, כי "לפום צערא אגרא".

The proof of this, as it is written afterward, “May they always be of such mind, to fear Me,” which is the fear they had at the time, with which they were certain that they could overcome the evil inclination. “That it may go well with them,” in order that their reward will increase if they will have the evil inclination and be able to overcome it, for, as Ben Hei Hei said, “According to the labor is the reward.”⁹

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⁹ Pirkei Avot 5:23.