



Echoes of Redemption

R. David Kasher – kasher@hadar.org

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One of the Torah's signature literary techniques is the use of textual echoes: the repetition of roots, words, or phrases that call us back to an earlier moment in the text. The echo establishes an associative link between the earlier passage and the latter, and encourages us to consider comparisons between two different sections of the Torah. In Parashat VaYehi we are given the epitome of all echoing phrases, one that became a symbol for the power of echoing itself.

In the very last lines of the Book of Genesis, Yosef turns to his brothers and offers them one final message, with a promise that sounds like a prophecy:

בראשית נ:כד-כה

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֶחָיו אֲנֹכִי מֵת וְאֱלֹקִים פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב: וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹקִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָתֶם אֶת
עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה:

Genesis 50:24-25

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am dying. But God **will surely attend** (*pakod yifkod*) to you, and bring you up from this land to the land that God swore to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya'akov." And Yosef made the Children of Israel swear, saying, "When God **does attend** (*pakod yifkod*) to you, then bring my bones up from here."



In these two lines, one verb stands out, recurring four times, with the root ט.ק.פ. This is a difficult word to translate. It can, in various contexts, mean: “attend,” “appoint,” “remember,” “count,” “assign,” “punish,” “care for,” “watch over,” “entrust,” “deposit,” “seek”—all of which are versions of giving someone special attention or designation. In this case, it seems to have the sense of “attend.”

Yosef’s use of the verb itself is doubled—פָּקַד יִפְקֹד (*pakod yifkod*)—a stylistic device in ancient Hebrew used to create emphasis.¹ Then Yosef repeats the doubled phrase in two successive verses. So the doubling has been doubled. We are undoubtedly meant to notice this word. There is already, even within these two verses, a sort of echoing.

But these words also echo earlier moments in Yosef’s life. This verb has been following him around for a while now, especially as it connotes “appointment.” When Yosef was first sold into slavery, and landed in Potiphar’s house in Egypt, we were told that:

בראשית לט:ד-ה

וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינֵי וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתוֹ וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל יֵשׁ לֹו נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ: וַיְהִי מֵאָז הַפְּקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְעַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לֹו וַיְבָרֶךְ ה' אֶת בֵּית הַמִּצְרִי בְּגִלְל יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בִּרְכַּת ה' בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לֹו בְּבֵית וּבְשָׂדֶה:

Genesis 39:4-5

Yosef found favor in his master’s eyes, who made Yosef his personal assistant, and **appointed** (*vayafkideihu*) him in charge of his house, placing in his hands all that he owned. And from the time that he **appointed** (*hifkid*) him over his house and all that he owned, God blessed the house of the Egyptian because of Yosef, so that the blessing of the Eternal was upon everything he had, in the house and in the field.

¹ The most well-known example is probably שְׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ, from the second paragraph of the Shema.



Despite his lowly station, Yosef seems to naturally ascend to positions of authority. Eventually, he is framed for a crime and winds up in prison. But even there, we read:

בראשית מ:ד

וַיִּפְקֹד יוֹסֵף הַטֹּבְחִים אֶת יוֹסֵף אֲתָם וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתָם:

Genesis 40:4

The captain of the guard **appointed** (*vayifkod*) Yosef in charge of [two other prisoners] and he took care of them.

Yosef is finally taken out of prison and brought to the palace to interpret Pharaoh's disturbing dreams. After warning Pharaoh of a coming famine, Yosef recommends specific action, and now he uses the verb himself:

בראשית מא:לג-לד

וַעֲתָה יֵרָא פַרְעֹה אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם וַיִּשְׁיִתְהוּ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: יַעֲשֶׂה פַרְעֹה וַיִּפְקֹד פִּקְדִּים עַל הָאָרֶץ:

Genesis 41:33-34

Now let Pharaoh find someone who is understanding and wise and place him in charge of the Land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh **appoint** (*vayafked*) **appointees** (*pekidim*) over the land.

Notice the doubling in Yosef's phrasing: **וַיִּפְקֹד פִּקְדִּים** (*vayafkeid pekidim*). This couplet acts as a kind of a prelude to the **פִּקְדֵי יִפְקֹד** (*pakod yifkod*) from our *parashah*. It is as if we are witnessing Yosef beginning to slowly formulate the code that he will one day pass on to his brothers.² Here it is not yet a message for the Children of Israel; but it is a plan for salvation delivered in God's name.

² Yosef continues advising Pharaoh, and uses the same root one more time, to refer to an “**appointed reserve** (*pikadon*) of food” (Genesis 41:36). This is becoming his favorite word. In the whole of Genesis, the root is used almost exclusively in connection to Yosef—10 times altogether. The one exception is the first usage, which is connected to Sarah: “וְהָיָה פִקְדֵי אֶת שָׂרָה” (Genesis 21:1). I wrote about this connection in my book *ParshaNut* (2022), “The Secret Code.”



Yosef has been “פוקד - appointed” again and again. He will, of course, be the one appointed by Pharaoh as well. He always seems to be the right person for the job, and the result of his appointment is that through him, God’s blessing can come into all that is under his domain.

So when Yosef tells his brothers, פִּקֹּד יִפְקֹד (pakod yifkod), he surely has some sense of himself as someone who has been appointed by God to bring salvation.³ When he says that God “יִפְקֹד - will attend/appoint,” he is imagining another figure one day taking his place as the savior of the people. That figure will be Moshe, the appointed savior of the Book of Exodus. The doubled phrasing, then, also acts as a foreshadowing of the pairing of Yosef and Moshe, God’s two פְּקִידִים (pekidim), appointed ones.

In fact, this phrase will connect Yosef to Moshe directly. In the third chapter of the Book of Exodus, God has just appeared to Moshe at the burning bush. God has called upon Moshe to go back to Egypt to free the Children of Israel, and gives Moshe specific language to announce upon his return:

שמות ג:טז

לך וְאַסַּפְתָּ אֶת זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם נִרְאָה אֵלַי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר
 פִּקֹּד פְּקִידְתִּי אֶתְכֶם וְאֵת הָעָשׂוּי לָכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם.

Exodus 3:16

Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them: “The Eternal, the God of your ancestors has appeared to me, the God of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya’akov, and said, “**I have surely attended** (*pakod, pakadeti*) to them, and to what has been done to them in Egypt.”

³ Yosef seems to understand that it is God doing the appointing, as he says to his brothers when he finally reveals himself: “Now it was not you who sent me here, but God who placed me as a father to Pharaoh, as the master of his house, and the ruler of the whole land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:8).



There's that verb again, and again it is doubled. It is in slightly different form, because God is speaking, rather than being spoken of (so "פִּקְדָתִי" - I have attended," not "יִפְקֹד" - God will attend"), but the meaning is the same. It appears to be a direct reference.⁴ God is, so to speak, quoting Yosef even as God fulfills Yosef's words, as if to say, "Remember what Yosef promised? Now it is coming true!" A *midrash* in Shemot Rabbah makes this explicit:

שמות רבה ג:ח

אָמַר לוֹ מִסּוּרָה הִיא בְּיָדָם מִיּוֹסֵף שֶׁבִּלְשׁוֹן הַזֶּה אָנִי גּוֹאֵלֶם, לֵךְ אָמַר לָהֶם זֶה הַסֵּימָן.

Shemot Rabbah 3:8

God said to Moshe: They have a tradition in their hands from Yosef that I would redeem them with exactly this language. Go and say to them, "This is the sign!"

The Ramban quotes this *midrash* and explains that it was specifically the "doubled *pekidah*" that let them know that Moshe was the "the true redeemer." The language, the wording itself, is the sign, like a secret password handed down from generation to generation.⁵ When the people heard Moshe say the magic words, they knew their redemption was at hand.

The Torah's own language supports this theory, for when Moshe and Aharon go back and repeat all of God's words to the elders of Israel:

⁴ There are other echoes of Yosef's words in this verse: the mention of God's relationship to the three Patriarchs. Even the opening verb, "וַיִּסְפָּד" - gather," is formed from the same root as יִפְקֹד.

⁵ Moshe, too, seems well aware of the "password." When the Exodus begins, as the Children of Israel are streaming out of Egypt, we find Moshe occupied with a task that hearkens back once again to Yosef's doubled phrase: "Moshe took with him the bones of Yosef, who had exacted an oath from the Children of Israel, saying, 'God will be sure to take notice of (*pakod yifkod*) you; then you shall carry up my bones from here with you" (Exodus 13:19). The Talmud (in Sotah 13a) tells us that Serah bat Asher, a mysterious woman who had lived since the days of Yosef, was the one who told Moshe where Yosef's bones could be found (in a metal casket at the bottom of the Nile). Serah is also credited (in Pirkei de-R. Eliezer 48) with being the one who remembered and recognized the phrase פִּקְדָתִי when Moshe said it.



שמות ד:לא

וַיֵּאֱמָן הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי פָקַד ה' אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה אֶת עֲנִיָּם וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ.

Exodus 4:31

The people believed when **they heard that the Eternal had attended (*pakad*)** to the Children of Israel, and that God had seen their suffering, and they bowed their heads to the ground.

They heard that God attended—that was what they were waiting to hear—and so they believed. They dropped and bowed to the ground in awe. The time had finally come.

When we spot the doubled פ.ק.ד here in Exodus, we are able to share in the sense of recognition that the Israelites must have felt when they heard the password. If we, reading carefully, are able to hear the echo of Yosef's promise in Genesis, now reverberating in God's message in Exodus, our own *parshanut* reenacts the wonder of that moment of revelation.

The textual echo of פָּקַד פָּקַד (pakod yifkod) is a manifestation of the message it contains. As God attends, so God will attend. As these words have appeared before, so will they appear again. We believe in God's deliverance from suffering because we have seen it before. Yosef knows it from the story of his life. We know it by paying attention to the recurring words that signal a pattern of salvation from Yosef to Moshe, from Genesis to Exodus, from exile to redemption.⁶

May we merit to hear the sounds of the final redemption echoing throughout the land.

⁶ In that sense, doubled language itself becomes a sign of redemption. A *midrash* from Pirkei de-R. Eliezer 48, playing with the five “doubled” Hebrew letters (those with a standard and a final form), מנצפ”ך, makes exactly that claim: “R. Eliezer said: The five doubled letters of the Torah all contain the secret of redemptions... With *peh* (פ) Israel was redeemed from Egypt, as it is says, ‘Attend, I have attended.’”

