

בס"ה

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Naso

9 Sivan, 5777 – June 3, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Naso

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר ו', כ"ד: יברך יהוה וינשמר:

רש"י ד"ה יברך: שיתברכו נכדים:

ישمرך: שלא יבוא עלייך שודדים ליטול ממונך, שהנותן מתנה לעבדו אינו יכול לשמרו מכל אדם, וכיון שבאים לסתים עליו ונוטלין אותה ממנו, מה הנאה יש לו במתנה זו, אבל הקב"ה הוא הבונות הוא השומר. והרבה מדרשים דרשו בו בספר:

Bamidbar 6:24: May Hashem bless you and watch over you.

Rashi Heading: **May (He) bless you:** that your possessions shall be blessed. **and watch over you:** that no thieves shall attack you and steal your money. For when one gives his servant a gift he cannot protect it from anyone else. If robbers come and take it from him what benefit does he have from this gift? As for the Holy One blessed be He, however, He is the One who both gives and protects. There are many Midrashic interpretations of this verse in the Sifri.

Synopsis

This week we read the Torah portion of Naso. Hashem gives a special command to the Kohanim, the descendants of Aharon to bless the Jewish people with a special three-fold blessing. The first blessing is “May Hashem bless you and watch over you.” Rashi cites the words “may (He) bless you.” He explains that this means “that your possessions shall be blessed.” He then cites the words “and watch over you.” He explains this at great length with an allegory. He explains that when one gives his servant a present, he cannot protect it. However Hashem is both the One who gives and protects. Rashi concludes by saying that “there are many Midrashic interpretations of this in the Sifri.” The implication being that this is in contrast with his explanation which is Peshat.

Even according to Peshat it seems fitting to say that this special priestly blessing must be a unique, general sort of blessing. Why would Rashi explain that it merely blesses one’s property and not oneself? Furthermore the very first explanation which the Sifri offers for “may Hashem bless you” is quite different than that which Rashi uses. The Sifri explains that He may bless you with a known blessing which is written in the Torah. This blessing includes not only ones property. It is also a blessing for one’s health, his children and his spiritual needs. Why does Rashi choose to ignore this all-encompassing blessing which is explicit in the Torah? This certainly would seem much more likely to be Peshat!

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Additionally, *prior* to the priestly blessing all of the possible blessings were listed in the Torah portion of Bechukosai¹. These are the blessings which G-d promises us for keeping Torah and Mitzvos. Even in our Parshah we find that one would receive great wealth as a reward for giving the Kohanim the presents which are due to them².

That is the answer to our question. According to Peshat Rashi cannot say that these blessings include life, health, property, money, children or anything else. These are all included in other Berochos promised by the Torah. Therefore He says that “your possessions shall be blessed.” The blessing is in quality as opposed to quantity. That property which you already own will increase. It will grow and improve more than that which could be naturally expected.

Rashi’s Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Naso, we find that the Kohanim are commanded to bless the Jewish people. The Torah specifies the specific text of a three-part blessing. The fact that the descendants of Aharon would bless all of the Jews with this text throughout all generations tells us something. This is a very general blessing with a broad range of meaning.

The first part of this blessing is³ “May Hashem bless you and watch over you.” Rashi cites the words “may (He) bless you.” He explains these words by saying “that your possessions shall be blessed.” Rashi then cites the words “and watch over you.” He explains this by writing “that no thieves shall attack you and steal your money.” He continues with a lengthy allegory. “For when one gives his servant a gift he cannot protect it from anyone else. If robbers come and take it from him what benefit does he have from this gift? As for the Holy One blessed be He, however, He is the One who both gives and protects.” Rashi concludes his comments by saying that “there are many Midrashic interpretations of this verse in the Sifri.”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The blessing with which G-d commanded the Kohanim to bless the Jewish people must indeed be a unique Berochoh. The special priestly blessing should be expected to be very general, in a manner that it should affect all aspects of a Jew’s life. This being the case we need to understand how Rashi can explain that this special blessing applies only to our possessions!

Furthermore we must look at the first interpretation which the Sifri offers for the words “may Hashem bless you.” It writes that this refers to the Berochoh which is explicitly stated elsewhere in the

1. See the verses beginning with Vayikroh 26:3.
2. See Bamidbar 5:10 and Rashi’s comments.
3. Bamidbar 6:24.

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Torah. The Torah tells us that⁴ “You shall be blessed in the city and you shall be blessed in the field. Blessed will be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your soil, the fruit of your livestock, the offspring of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep. Blessed will be your basket and your kneading bowl. You shall be blessed when you come, and you shall be blessed when you depart.” Furthermore it is written that⁵ “And all these blessings will come upon you and cleave to you, (only) if you obey the Lord your G-d.” From here we clearly see that the priestly blessing does not merely refer to property. The blessing applies equally to one’s body, children and health. As we see in the continuation of the verses it even applies to spiritual matters. As it says⁶ “The Lord will establish you as His holy people as He swore to you if you observe the commandments of the Lord your G-d, and walk in His ways.”

We need to understand why Rashi ignores this explanation which seems to fit so well with Peshat. Instead he explains this blessing as merely referring to property! Moreover, Rashi’s source for this blessing is from the Sifri. However the Sifri writes that “He will bless you with property – יברך בנכסיים.” Why does Rashi change that to “your property shall be blessed – שיתברכו נכסיך.” Note that Rashi does not just change the wording; the change affects the meaning as well.

We also find something which is difficult to understand about Rashi’s explanation of the words “and watch over you.” The simple meaning would seem to be that Hashem will guard the individual. However, according to Rashi’s explanation G-d is promising to watch over that with which He blessed the individual.

The Explanation

We have learned *earlier* of the blessings which we will receive for fulfilling Torah and Mitzvos¹. When we read of the priestly blessings we immediately have a question. What is the novel blessing being added here? The priestly blessings must contain something over and above those blessings which we were promised earlier.

The blessings of which we spoke earlier serve as a reward for performing Hashem’s Will. Perhaps we can say that these blessings are greater. They apply even to one who has not done what G-d wanted. Even such a person will receive these blessings. However that is untenable. We must say that there is also an advantage in the blessings for one who does fulfill G-d’s Will. What do these blessings add to the blessings which the Torah promised us earlier?

This is why Rashi did not explain the words “may He bless you” according to the first explanation in the Sifri. Granted those blessings are stated explicitly in the Torah. Granted they do include

4. Devorim 28:3-6.

5. Devorim 28:2.

6. Devorim 28:9.

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everything; they apply equally to one's body, children, health, spiritual and physical needs. However, all of those blessings are included in those which we were already told are a reward. What does the priestly blessing add?

Rashi's explanation is that the priestly blessing adds qualitatively, not quantitatively. That is the difference between "being blessed with property" (as it is written in the Sifri) and your "property being blessed." The meaning here is that a special blessing will rest on whatever property and possessions one has. Everything will increase in a totally supernatural manner.

This is similar to that which happened with our forefather Yitzchok. His crops were blessed in a manner that⁷ "Yitzchok planted in that land and he found in that year a hundred fold. Hashem blessed him." As Rashi explains⁸ "despite the fact that the land was not as abundant as it should have been⁹... and the year was not as abundant as it should have been¹⁰... for each measure they estimated that it could produce it produced 100."

We see that Rashi is particular to write "your possessions" rather than "your money." That is because "possessions" includes everything which one owns without exception. This special Berochoh rested within everything.

We still need to understand why Rashi explains the words "watch over you" in a manner which deviates from the simple explanation. We just used an example from our forefather Yaakov. To cite another example, Hashem told Yaakov¹¹ "And behold, I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go..." G-d promised Yaakov simply that He would protect him. However here Rashi is explaining that Hashem will guard that with which we were blessed. Why does Rashi deviate from Peshat?

The explanation is that had the blessing of Hashem "watching over" us meant guarding our persons, it obviously should have preceded the blessing of Hashem "blessing us." Since Rashi explains that "blessing us" refers to our possessions, protecting our bodies must come before blessing our property. Once Rashi tells us that the very first Berochoh, "blessing us" refers to property, "watching over" us must also refer to property.

In fact Rashi's explanation of "watch over you" is a direct continuation of his explanation of "bless you." The blessing which Rashi is discussing is superior to all other blessings which are written in the Torah. It does not come as a reward for ones actions. Rather these blessings come to each and every Jew regardless of his performance of Torah and Mitzvos. Whatever he owns is blessed; it produces

7. Bereishis 26:12.

8. See ibid. Rashi's comments.

9. It was outside of Israel.

10. It was a year of famine.

11. Bereishis 28:15.

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far more than that which would be naturally expected. This could easily arouse the jealousy of those around us. Therefore in addition to blessing us, G-d watches over us. He assures us that no thieves will be able to take our blessed possessions.

That is the reason for Rashi's lengthy explanation. He describes in detail one who "gives his servant a gift." He explains that "he cannot protect the gift from anyone else. If robbers come and take it from him what benefit does he have from it?" People will be jealous of the incredible gift which we receive from Hashem. Therefore His gift comes together with His great protection. Only the Holy One blessed be He both gives and protects.

However we cannot say that this Berochoh is limited to simply guarding our property. Therefore Rashi concludes by saying that "there are many Midrashic interpretations of this verse in the Sifri."

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The priestly blessings apply in all times and places¹². In other words even outside of Israel during the time of exile it is a positive commandment for Kohanim to bless the Jewish people. These blessings help every Jew despite his spiritual circumstances.

The reason that these blessings are so special is explained in works of Chassidic philosophy¹³. It is because they come from an unusually lofty spiritual level. In relation to this level of spirituality the observance of a Jew is irrelevant. All that matters is the inherent connection between the essence of the soul and G-d. Therefore the blessings completely transcend nature. Additionally they reach each and every Jew in every time and place.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Naso 5737, and Shabbos Parshas Naso and Beha'uloscho 5741)

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12. These are the words of the Sefer Hachinuch Mitzvah 378.

13. See Likkutei Torah at the end of Parshas Korach. See also Ohr Hatorah on our Parshah beginning with page 270. See also Sefer Hamaamorim 5629.

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