

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Bereishis

24 Tishrei, 5778 – October 14, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Bereishis

Likkutei Sichos Volume 10, Pages 13 – 18

Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית ג', א': והנחש הנה ערום מפל סת השדה אשר עשה יהוה אלהים ויאמר אל האשה אף כי אמר אלקים לא תאכלו מפל עץ הגן: **ב':** ותאמר האשה אל הנחש מפרי עץ הגן נאכל: **ג':** ומפרי העץ אשר בתוך הגן אמר אלקים לא תאכלו ממנו ולא תגעו בו פן תמתו: **ד':** ויאמר הנחש אל האשה לא מות תמתו:

Bereishis 3:1: Now the serpent was cunning, more than all the beasts of the field that the Lord G-d had made, and it said to the woman, "Did G-d indeed say, 'You shall not eat of any of the trees of the garden?'" **2:** And the woman said to the serpent, "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. **3:** But of the fruit of the tree that is amid the garden, G-d said, 'You shall not eat of it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" **4:** And the serpent said to the woman, 'You will surely not die.'

Synopsis

In this Torah portion, Bereishis, the Torah tells us of a discussion between Chavah, the first woman, and the serpent¹. In this discussion, the serpent enticed Chavah to eat from the fruit from which G-d commanded them not to eat. Not only that, but Chavah also persuaded Adam to eat from the fruit. Adam, Chavah and the serpent were all punished for defying Hashem's commandment. The Torah tells us that the serpent "said to the woman, "Did G-d indeed say, 'You shall not eat of any of the trees of the garden?'" Yet we find no explanation, neither in the Torah nor in Rashi, as to how the serpent (unlike all of his descendants and all of the other animals) was able to speak.

Rashi explains everything which is difficult to understand in the Torah according to Peshat. In other words, he explains everything which would present a difficulty to a beginning student. Why does he not tell us how it was possible for the serpent to speak?

1. Bereishis 3:1-5.

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If there appears to be a question which Rashi does not address, it means one of two things. Either the reality is that it is not a question, or Rashi explained it previously. Yet we find no explanation for the fact that among all of the beasts that one serpent could speak, as opposed to any of its descendants. We understand from this, that it was the original serpent that lost its power of speech. It is logical that this was one of the curses which the serpent received. Nevertheless, we find no explicit mention of this in the Torah!

As an introduction to the incident of Chavah and the serpent, the Torah says that² "the serpent was cunning, more than all the beasts of the field that the Lord G-d had made." When Hashem punished the serpent, He said that³ "and the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed be you more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field." His punishment came about as a result of having "done this," seducing Chavah to sin. It is therefore understood, that he was punished by losing those faculties which enabled him to entice her. Chiefly among these is the power of speech. Otherwise, he never would have been able to seduce her.

Rashi's Explanation

This Torah portion, Bereishis, is the beginning of the five books of the Torah. As such, it tells us of the beginning – the creation of the world. On the sixth day of creation, after creating everything else, G-d created the first man and woman; Adam and Chavah. He gave them one commandment, namely not to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Torah tells us how the serpent had a discussion with Chava. During this discussion he seduced her to eat of the forbidden fruit. Not only that, but he convinced her to give of the fruit to her husband to eat as well. The three of them, the snake, the man and the woman were all punished for their sin.

We find that the other animals were able to make sounds; they could growl, roar, etc. However, we do not find any other animal that could speak. Not only that, but we find that the serpent's descendants are not able to speak. For that matter, they cannot make

2. Bereishis 3:1.

3. Bereishis 3:14.

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any sound besides hissing. It is likely that originally the nature of the serpent was that it could speak. However, as a part of its punishment, it lost this ability. We find in the Torah, that a part of the snake's punishment was to lose his feet. From that point on it⁴ "shall walk on his belly." However, we find no mention, neither in the Torah nor in Rashi that the snake had a natural ability to speak which was later taken from him.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

This seems to present us with a difficulty. We have discussed many times, that Rashi teaches us the simple explanation of the Torah. Whatever a beginning student needs in order to understand Peshat is explained by Rashi. If something appears to be a question, and Rashi does not address it, it is either because in reality it is not a question, or Rashi explained it earlier. Why is it that Rashi does not tell us that this serpent was capable of speaking? Why does the Torah itself not explain that the snake's nature was that it had the power of speech? The serpent's entire curse was that⁵ "cursed be you more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field; you shall walk on your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I shall place hatred between you and between the woman, and between your seed and between her seed. He will crush your head, and you will bite his heel." The Torah mentions nothing about speech, and Rashi doesn't explain a thing⁶.

The Explanation

The explanation of the above is as follows. As an introduction to Chava's encounter with the snake, the Torah tells us that⁷ "Now the serpent was cunning, more than all the beasts of the field that the Lord G-d had made." This obviously does not mean that the serpent was more cunning than Chava. Adam and Chava were (as so to speak) G-

4. Bereishis 3:14.

5. Bereishis 3:14-15.

6. Further on in the Torah, we do find an instance of an animal speaking. Bilaam's she-donkey spoke to him. But prior to that, the Torah tells us that (Bamidbar 22:28) "The Lord opened the mouth of the she-donkey, and she said to Bilaam ..." In other words, it was not a natural trait of the donkey, but was rather miraculous.

7. Bereishis 3:1.

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d Almighty's handiwork. However, it was greater than all of the other animals. It was clever enough to be able to persuade Chava to do that which Hashem had prohibited her from doing. The only way in which the serpent could entice Chava was through the power of speech. The serpent could not persuade her to do anything without first being able to speak to her.

The snake's punishment was "because you have done this, cursed be you more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field." How did the serpent manage to do this? It was due to his ability to speak. "Because you have done this," rather than being "greater than all of the beasts of the field," it became "cursed more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field." The other animals were able to bark, growl, etc. Not only did the snake lose its power of speech as a result of his sin. Rather he even lost the ability to make any sounds whatsoever, as the other animals could.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Sages teach us⁸, that "G-d repays good (a reward) in a greater measure than He does that which is not good (a punishment)." We see from the evil actions of the serpent that it was transformed from "more cunning than all" to "more cursed than all." How much more so is this true regarding a good, positive action. Through one good deed, one can transform himself from the lowest level of all, to the highest.

This idea is specifically alluded to through a serpent. We find further on⁹ that the Jewish Nation was plagued by serpents, which bit and killed us. The salvation, the cure, came from a copper snake which was made by Moshe Rabbeinu. It is written in Chassidic texts¹⁰ that this is also the idea of a transformation from the lowest level to the highest level.

Since the Almighty always brings the cure before the disease¹¹, we find the cure in the sin itself. In many ways, this sin brought a downfall to mankind. Prior to this sin,

8. See Talmud Sotah 11, a. It is also quoted by Rashi in his commentary to Shemos 20:6 and Shemos 34:7.

9. See Bamidbar, beginning with 21:6.

10. See Likkutei Sichos Volume 13 beginning with page 75 at length.

11. See Talmud Megillah 13, b.

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there was no death in the world. We all would have lived eternally. Therefore, in this very place where the Torah tells us of the greatest sin, it also alludes to its cure. Here we are taught, at the very beginning of the Torah, what we can accomplish. Through looking up and doing Teshuvah, we can go from the greatest depths to the greatest heights in one moment¹².

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Bereishis, 5733)

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12. The idea of the “Copper Snake” made by Moishé Rabbeinu, was that it was on a pole. By looking up to it, we would see the heavens, and G-d Who rests there. See Talmud Rosh Hashanah 29, a. It is also quoted in Rashi’s commentary to Bamidbar 21:8. See also Likkutei Sichos Volume 13 beginning with Page 75, Chapter 3.

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the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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Chaim and Aiden Oded שיקוי Morris**

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**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיקוי Morris**

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**IN HONOR OF
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&

Mrs. Berocho bas Soroh שתחיל' Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery

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May he merit to be a Chossid, a Yerei Shomayim and a Lamdon

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הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

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