

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Devorim

4 Menachem Av, 5786 – July 18, 2026

Compiled from the works of

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A Project of

Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Devorim**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 14, Pages 1 – 7

Rashi in His Own Words

דברים א', א': אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה מול סוף בין פארן ובין תפל ולבן וחצרת ודי זקב:

רש"י ד"ה אלה הדברים: לפי שהן דברי תוכחות ומנה כאן כל המקומות שהכעיסו לפני המקום בהן, לפיכך סתם את הדברים והזכירם ברמז מפני כבודן של ישראל:

רש"י ד"ה ודי זקב: הוכיחן על העגל שעשו בשביל רוב זהב שהיה להם, שנאמר (הושע ב', י') "וכסף הרביתי לה וזהב עשו לבעל":

Devorim 1:1: These are the words which Moshe spoke to all of the Jews on that side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeros and Di Zahav.

Rashi Heading - These are the words: These are words of chastisement. He (meaning Moshe) enumerates all the places where they angered Hashem. Therefore, it does not explicitly mention the incidents (in which they transgressed) but merely alludes to them (by mentioning the names of the places). This is done out of respect for Israel.

Rashi Heading - and Di-Zahav: He rebuked them for the calf they had made due to their abundance of gold, as it is said, ¹ "and I gave her much silver and gold, but they made it for Baal."

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Devorim, begins the fifth book of the Torah. It takes place at the end of the forty years in the wilderness and tells us the words that Moshe spoke to the Jewish Nation on the eastern side of the Jordan. It lists many places where the Jews were during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. Rashi explains to us that listing these places was a subtle way of rebuking the Jews. He was alluding to sins that the Jewish people in various areas committed. However, three words in this verse seem to be the names of places, but they are not. These "cities" are Tofel, Lavan, and Di Zahav. "Di Zahav" literally means "too much gold," Rashi explains. With these words, Moshe is rebuking the Jews for the sin of the Golden Calf. The reason for this sin was that we were given too much gold. Rashi cites a proof text from the prophet Hoshea, "and I gave her much silver and gold, but they made it for Baal."

1. Hoshea 2:10.

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Rashi teaches that "Di Zahav" was not the name of a place; rather, the words themselves alluded to the sin. Why is it impossible to say that it is the name of a place, and it was called by that name because the sin took place there? We find many instances in the Torah of places that are called by a particular name because of an event that occurred there. The fact that no place called "Di Zahav" is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible does not present a difficulty. Other places are mentioned only once in the Bible.

Additionally, when the Torah tells us of the actual sin of the Golden Calf and how Moshe prayed to G-d to save the Jewish Nation, Rashi states the same idea that he states here. Moshe says to G-d, "Please! These people have committed a grave sin. They have made themselves a god of gold." Rashi cites the words "a god of gold" and explains that "It was You Who caused them (to sin), for You lavished upon them gold and whatever they desired. How could they have not sinned?" Why does Rashi use a proof text from the Prophets rather than one the beginning student learned earlier?

The earlier mention of the large amount of gold the Jews were given was meant to mitigate their sin; Moshe prayed for their forgiveness. He told G-d that the sin could be partly attributed to the large amount of gold He gave them. Here, Moshe is rebuking the people; he says they used the large amount of gold that Hashem gave them to build an idol. One cannot be used to prove the other because they are opposites.

However, in neither case was the gold the *reason* that the Jews sinned. Hence, there was no reason to call the place "Di Zahav."

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Devorim, begins the fifth book of the Torah. It starts with,² "These are the words which Moshe spoke to all of the Jews on that side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeros and Di Zahav." Rashi begins his explanation of this verse by citing "These are the words," and explains that Moshe used this as an opportunity to rebuke the Jewish people discreetly. Instead of mentioning the sins they committed, he said the names of the places where they committed these sins. This was done to avoid embarrassing them. Further on, Rashi cites the words "and Di Zahav" and explains that Moshe "rebuked them for the calf they had made as a result of their abundance of gold, as it is said, 'and I gave her much silver and gold, but they made it for Baal.' "

The fact is that Rashi has already explained that this verse is a subtle rebuke. Why does he need

2. Our Parshah, Devorim 1:1.

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to repeat in his explanation of "Di Zahav" that "he rebuked them ...?" The reason is that Rashi is teaching us that Di Zahav is not the name of a place. Hence, we may not have been aware that these are also words of rebuke³. Therefore, Rashi teaches that, even though "Di Zahav" is not the name of a place, it is a form of rebuke, as the actual meaning of these words is "enough gold." He was rebuking them for using the gold Hashem gave them to make an idol rather than for positive purposes. This is similar to Rashi's comments on "between Paran and Tofel and Lavan." Rashi explains there that "Moshe rebuked them about the foolish things which they said (Taflu - תפלו in Hebrew) about the Manna, which was white (Lovon - לבן in Hebrew)." In other words, Tofel and Lavan were also not names of places. Why does Rashi understand that the "cities" listed in the verse, Lavan, Tofel, and Di Zahav, are not real places? As he wrote about Lavan and Tofel, "Rabbi Yochanan said, 'We have reviewed the entire Bible, and have found no place named Lavan or Tofel.' "

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Why must Rashi assume that Di Zahav is not the name of a place? We find many places that were named after an event that took place there ⁴; in this case, it would be a place where the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf. Furthermore, some places are mentioned only once in the Tanach. The fact that these places are not found elsewhere does not seem to rule this out.

We cannot say the same regarding Lavan and Tofel. "Foolish things done with the Manna, which was white" does not allude to any particular sin. The fact that Manna is white is merely one of its attributes, its color. Additionally, all sins involve foolishness. As names of places, they would not allude to any particular sin. Di Zahav, however, at least explains the cause of the sin of the Golden Calf.

Rashi previously stated the same point, which he makes here. The sin of the Golden Calf was caused by the fact that the Jews were given too much gold. When the Torah tells us of this sin and Moshe's beseeching G-d for forgiveness, it says, ⁵ "Moshe returned to the Lord and said, 'Please! These people have committed a grave sin. They have made themselves a god of gold.' "Rashi cites the words "a god of gold" and explains that Moshe was telling Hashem that "It was You Who caused them (to sin), for You lavished upon them gold and whatever they desired. How could they have avoided sinning?"

3. In other words, since Rashi begins by saying that "Moshe enumerates all of the places ...," we understand that all of the locations listed are words of rebuke. However, we would assume that Tofel, Lavan and Di Zahav which are *not* names of places, are also not words of rebuke.

4. See for example Parshas Noach, Bereishis 11:9, Parshas Vayeiros, Bereishis 21:31, Parshas Vayechi, Bereishis 50:11, Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 17:6, Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 13:24. Please note that there are additional instances of this.

5. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:31.

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Instead of proving his position from the Prophets, the book of Hoshea, why did he not bring proof from an earlier verse in the Torah, something which the beginning student had already learned?

The Explanation

It is quite clear why Rashi explains in the earlier verse that the Jews sinned because Hashem gave them too much gold. Otherwise, it is impossible to understand Moshe's prayer on behalf of the Jews. What does he say? "Please! These people have committed a grave sin. They have made themselves a god of gold." What sort of prayer is that? He emphasizes the greatness of our sin rather than trying to minimize it! Therefore, Rashi explains that Moshe could not reduce the sin; to the contrary, he said that "they committed a grave sin." However, he could rationalize the sin. His plea was that the Jewish people were "guilty with an explanation." The Jews only sinned because G-d gave them too much gold.

From this, it is clear that Rashi could not provide proof. There, Rashi was trying to emphasize that we were not responsible. Here, Rashi explains how Moshe rebuked the Jews, i.e., he used this to highlight the severity of the sin. They sinned with the large amount of gold that G-d had given them.

Based on this, we can understand why "Di Zahav" could not have been the place's name. One can explain the earlier verse where Moshe was praying for the Jews, that a large amount of gold was a mitigating factor in the commission of the sin. According to our verse, one can also say that a large amount of gold added to the severity of the sin. However, in either case, it was not the *actual cause* of the sin. It is merely a superficial issue that explains how the sin was committed. The exact cause of the sin was that ⁶ "the people saw that Moshe was late in coming down from the mountain" after having spent forty days and nights there receiving the Torah. Therefore, where the sin occurred would not be called "Di Zahav" based on the amount of gold the people had.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

We still need to understand Rashi's choice of words. Why does Rashi say that "he rebuked them for the calf they had made as a result of their abundance of gold?" Since Moshe is rebuking them, it would seem that "he rebuked them for the calf they had made *with* their abundance of gold." It appears that while rebuking them, Moshe also explains their sin. He offers a rationalization as to why it might not *entirely* be their fault. Why would Rashi use the exact words to allude to their guilt and innocence?

The explanation is that this is precisely what Rashi is doing, and for a good reason. Rashi began his explanation of this verse and this book by saying that the rebuke is stated in a manner that "makes no explicit mention of the incidents (in which they transgressed), but rather merely alludes to them (by

6. Beginning with Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:1.

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mentioning the names of the places). This is done out of respect for Israel." He also added something to minimize the sin out of respect for Israel. Rashi specifically wrote that they made the calf "due to their abundance of gold."

It is understood that just as Moshe was careful to show "respect to Israel" regarding Di Zahav, the same was true regarding all the other places/rebukes mentioned. To mention just one example from the beginning of the verse, the first rebuke that Moshe alluded to was mentioning the desert. Rashi explains that this is a rebuke for angering Hashem in the desert, saying,⁷ "If only we had died by the hand of G-d." Why does the Torah use a general term, such as desert wilderness? This word includes everywhere the Jewish people were for forty years! Instead, the Torah mentions a word that minimizes their sins to show respect to Israel. It demonstrates the incredible test our ancestors faced. They were in "a great and awesome desert, (in which there were) snakes, vipers, scorpions, and drought, in which there was no water ⁸." Finding themselves in such a situation, such a severe test would undoubtedly mitigate the sins of the Jewish people. Aside from rebuke, it would also demonstrate the respect due to them.

The fact that we are in Exile now is a rebuke. However, this rebuke is tempered with the respect the Jewish people deserve. The ultimate purpose of Exile is to bring about an ascent, which will raise the honor and respect of the Jewish Nation to an unprecedented level. The true purpose of the descent is to rise to an even higher level.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Devorim 5731)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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7. Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 16:3.

8. Parshas Shoftim, Devorim 8:15.

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