

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Tavo

18 Elul, 5777 – September 9, 2017

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים כ"ה, ט"ח: וְהָשִׁיבָה ה' | מִצָּרִים בְּאֲנִיּוֹת בְּדָרָךְ אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי לָךְ לֹא תִסִּיף עוֹד לִרְאֹתָהּ וְהִתְמַכְּרְתֶם שָׁם לְאֲבִיבֵי לְעַבְדִּים וְלִשְׁפָחוֹת וְאֵין קוֹנֵה:

רש"י ד"ה באניות: בספינות בשביה: ואין קונה: כי יגזרו עליך הרג וכליון:

Devorim 28:68: And the Lord will bring you back to Egypt in ships, through the way about which I had said to you, "You will never see it again;" And there, you will seek to be sold to your enemies for slaves and handmaids, but there will be no buyer.

Rashi Heading - in ships: In ships of captivity. **but there will be no buyer:** For they will decree death and destruction upon you.

A Brief Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Tavo, the Torah the Torah tells us of the horrendous punishments which will befall the Jewish people for neglecting to follow Hashem's commandments. At the conclusion of these "curses" Hashem says that He will bring us back to Egypt in ships. There we will seek to sell ourselves as slaves, but there will be no buyer. Rashi explains that these ships are "ships of captivity." He further explains that the reason that there will be no buyer is because they will decree death and destruction upon us.

It seems from Rashi that this verse contains two general curses. One is that we will be returned to Egypt as captives. The second is that death and destruction will be decreed upon us. The rest of the verse serves to tell us details regarding these two punishments. We will not even be able to save our lives be selling ourselves as slaves.

However, it would seem to be better to explain each of Rashi's comments as being an addition to the curse which precedes it. First the verse says that the Lord will bring us back to Egypt. We all know how terrible our experience was in Egypt. We will be brought in ships, as Rashi says "ships of captivity." In a ship, the captor has complete control and domination over his captive. The enemy has far greater control, and can torment his captive far more than he could on dry land. The captive has nowhere to escape from such a confined area. Not only this, but the verse goes a step further and says that we will be taken via the same route that we followed when we left Egypt. We went through a¹ "great and awesome desert, (in which there were) snakes, vipers and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." When we left Egypt, we had G-d's kindness and protection. Here, on the other hand, that would not be the case. Ultimately, Rashi explains that the final curse is that "death and destruction

1. Devorim 8:15.

would be decreed upon us."

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Tavo, the Torah tells us of the severe punishments which will befall the Jewish Nation if they do not follow the commands of Hashem. At the very conclusion of the list of these terrible consequences the Torah says that², "And the Lord will bring you back to Egypt in ships, through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again;' And there, you will seek to be sold to your enemies for slaves and handmaidens, but there will be no buyer."

Since this is the conclusion of these 98 severe rebukes, it would seem natural that this verse would express the severest "curse." However, is returning to Egypt truly that terrible, especially as compared to the previously mentioned consequences? Is not finding anyone willing to buy a Jew as a slave such a terrible punishment³?

Therefore, Rashi cites the words "in ships," and explains that it refers to "ships of captivity." We will return to Egypt *as captives*, which is indeed a punishment. Rashi then cites the words further in the verse, "but there will be no buyer." The reason for not having buyers is "because they will decree death and destruction upon you." In other words, no one will buy a Jew as a slave because they will decree death and destruction upon us.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Learning this verse simply, it seems to contain two primary punishments. The first is that we will be brought to Egypt as captives. The second is that death and destruction will be decreed upon us. If that is the case, what is the meaning of the rest of the verse? Why does it add that this will come about, "in ships, through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again;' and there, you will seek to be sold to your enemies for slaves and handmaids?" These are all just details in how the punishments will be brought about.

However, According to Peshat, it would certainly be preferable to say that Rashi, through his explanation and precise language, is explaining to us how each detail of the verse actually adds to the punishment. In order to attain this perspective, we must first answer another question. Why does the verse say that "the Lord will bring you back ... through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again ...'" "Why does it matter via which route we are brought into captivity? Why is this considered punishment? We do not find that Rashi answers this question.

Among the commentaries there are those who deal with this question. The Abarbanel explains that Hashem told the Jews that⁴ "you shall not return (to Egypt) that way anymore." That is the reason that G-d told us that He would bring us "in ships." In that manner we would not be returning *that way*, meaning on dry land.

2. Devorim 28:68.

3. Rabbeinu Bachya actually explains that this is something positive.

4. Devorim 17:16.

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We really cannot say this according to Peshat. There seems to be absolutely no difference in the punishment, which is the point here, whether or not Hashem brings us back to Egypt by land or by sea! In fact, in terms of punishment, there seems to be no reason for the Torah to write “through the way about which I had said to you, ‘You will never see it again.’ “

There is also another approach, which is taken by the Midrash Lekach Tov⁵. The Torah is teaching us the potential effect of sin. Hashem already told us that we will not return to Egypt in that way anymore. Nevertheless, sin can cause G-d to rescind His promise. However, this is also not understood according to the simple understanding of the verse. We have already learned that as a result of sin Hashem can rescind a promise⁶. Additionally, the fact that Hashem reneged on His promise seemingly has nothing to do with punishment, which is what the Torah is discussing here.

We will understand all of the above, after first explaining Rashi’s comments on the words “in ships.” Rashi says that it means “in ships of captivity.” What difference does it make *how* we will travel to Egypt? Our being captives is foretold when the verse states that the Lord “will bring you back” to Egypt. In other words, the Torah is saying that Hashem will return us to Egypt as captives. Rashi should have explained the fact that we would be in “captivity,” by first citing the words “will bring you back.” Why does he tell us that we will be captives as an explanation of the words “in ships?” What difference does it make how we are sent back to Egypt?

A number of commentaries explain that the fact that our journey back to Egypt was in ships, demonstrates the scope of our captivity. Had we gone by foot, only men could have made that journey. Women and children would have been excluded. The fact that our return to Egypt was by ship, meant that men, women and children were all taken captive. Yet mentions nothing about which Jews would be taken captive. He merely says the words “in ships of captivity.” This implies, that he is only commenting on the fact that we were captives, not who was included in the captivity.

The Explanation

By examining it carefully, you will see that Rashi is pointing out how each and every detail in the verse adds yet another aspect of punishment. Therefore, Rashi explains that the seeming excess words that the verse uses, "in ships, through the way about which I had said to you ..." This is adding to the punishment. Not only will you be forced to return to Egypt, but the way in which you will be brought there will be fraught with difficulties.

Firstly, not only will we be brought back to Egypt, but we will be brought there in "ships!" It is obvious, that the control which a nation has over captives in the confinement of a ship is far greater and more humiliating than that which it has on dry land.

Secondly, this punishment was compounded by this that we were told that we will be brought back

5. Devorim, *ibid*.

6. Bereishis 32:11. See also Rashi’s commentary there.

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"through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again.'" We left Egypt traversing a⁷ "great and awesome desert, (in which there were) snakes, vipers and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." We knew what the wilderness was about. We also knew that the kindness and miracles which followed us out of Egypt would not accompany us on our way back. The knowledge of what Egypt was like, caused a great deal of fear among us. The same was true of the return to the desert.

Thirdly, the verse comes to the next punishment. We would seek to sell ourselves. The servitude and captivity would be so great, that in order to escape it, we would even want to sell ourselves. If our captors were selling us, that would not be an additional punishment. However, finding the situation so intolerable that we would feel forced to sell ourselves is a far greater punishment.

Finally the fourth punishment is that no one would buy us. Why? The Egyptians will decree death and destruction upon us. That is the last blow, and hence the final punishment.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Despite the fact that Rashi's commentary of the Torah primarily explains Peshat, nevertheless it also contains "ינה של תורה" - the wine of Torah." As the Alter Rebbe said⁸ "Rashi's commentary of the Torah is 'the wine of Torah.' It opens the heart, and reveals the essential love and fear of G-d." This is certainly true regarding our Torah portion. It contains the most severe curses imaginable for straying from the Torah. Rashi's explanations bear out just how severe they actually are. However, it is known what the Alter Rebbe said regarding these curses. In truth they are *only* blessings⁹! There are both a body and a soul everything in Torah. The soul of the curses is actually blessings of the highest order.

It is possible to say regarding our Torah portion, that the *Peshat* in Rashi expresses just how great the curses are. However, the "wine of Torah," the soul of the Torah which is contained in Rashi expresses how great the blessings are.

The purpose of these curses is to help Jews attain the highest levels of Teshuvah. As it is written somewhat further¹⁰, "And it will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse ... that you will consider in your heart, ... and *you will return* to the Lord, your G-d ..." The greatness of Teshuvah is apparent from the statement of the Talmud¹¹. "Great is Teshuvah, it causes that even intentional sins are transformed into merits." This is a unique type of merit. A totally righteous person who has never sinned is incapable of reaching this level.

The "soul" of the Torah makes clear that through Teshuvah even those sparks of holiness which descended into the depths of impurity can be transformed into holiness. There is a rule, that whatever descends the lowest is

7. Devorim 8:15.

8. This is cited in Hayom Yom, Page 24.

9. Likkutei Torah Parshas Bechukosai, beginning with Page 48, at the end of Side a.

10. Devorim 30:1-2.

11. Talmud Yoma, 86, b.

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rooted in the highest level. Hence that, which descended to the depths of impurity, has its roots in the highest level of holiness.

That is the deeper meaning of the words "Hashem will bring you back to Egypt." Bringing one back, returning, is the idea of Teshuvah. Therefore this comes at the conclusions of these (seemingly) terrible things. That is the meaning of the continuation of the verse, "you will seek to sell yourselves there as slaves, but there will be no buyer." The word "there," implies that which is not holy, while "here" implies holiness. The word "no buyer" can be understood in Hebrew as "*nothing*". This "*nothing*" refers to the essence of Hashem, which is hidden from us. From our perspective it is "*nothing*." In other words, the essence of Hashem acquires us as slaves. We initiate this process. We seek to sell ourselves as slaves. This does not merely elevate the sparks of holiness in the world. Every Jewish soul is a "veritable part of G-d," and therefore the Jew himself is elevated!

What is the idea of a ship? It protects one from the water. Spiritually, it protects us from the torrential waters of this world; it keeps them from flooding us. The Torah uses the word אֲנִיּוֹת for ships. That is the word in Hebrew, the holy tongue. However, Rashi uses the word ספינות, which is the translation of the Hebrew into Aramaic, which was the spoken tongue. In other words, Rashi is explaining that this applies to one who is involved with this world. It is not only for one who is involved with holiness. It refers to the Torah and Mitzvos which protect us from the torrential waters of this world, and allow us to do Teshuvah and reach the highest levels!

Finally Rashi declares that they will declare death and destruction upon us. In spiritual terms, this is the idea of one who has totally transformed himself to G-dliness. We begin by selling ourselves as G-d's slaves. In other words, we keep Torah and Mitzvos because He wants us to, and not merely as a result of our nature. Through this we can reach the greatest heights. This is the culmination of the (seeming curses which are really) blessings. In this merit may we all be inscribed for a good year in all aspects. May we merit the ultimate blessing of "Moshiach Now!"

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Parshas Tavo 5734)

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For a complete and speedy recovery**

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

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

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

לזכות

ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן

ומרת ברכה בת שרה שתחי' כהן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

נתרם ע"י

הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מאריס

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יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן