

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas
Nitzovim-Vayelech

25 Elul, 5777 – September 16, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Nitzovim-Vayelech

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים ל', ו': ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב ורעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך למען חייך:

Devorim 30:6: And the Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, (in order that you may) love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life.

A Brief Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Nitzovim, we are told how upon returning to the Lord, He will gather the exiles and restore the land to the Jewish people. We are told that¹, "The Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, (in order that you may) love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life."

Rashi's primary goal is to explain Peshat. Hence Rashi answers any question which could be posed based on Peshat. Yet here we have a seemingly obvious question which Rashi does discuss at all. How can the Torah say that G-d will circumcise our hearts? Earlier, the Torah said that we must circumcise the (spiritual) "foreskin" of our hearts. There are two explanations of this. One is the blockage of our hearts. In other words, that which prevents our hearts from connecting with Hashem. The second explanation is the foolishness of our hearts, which leads us along improper paths. However, why would we need to circumcise, or cut, our heart itself?

The explanation is, that prior to this verse, the Torah goes on at great length describing our suffering throughout our long exile. It also describes what led to our exile. Namely, it is that we strayed from G-d and followed our hearts. What caused us to stray from Hashem? The fact that we saw all sorts of inappropriate things in Egypt. The nature is that the eyes see, and then the heart desires. G-d "circumcising" our hearts means that He will separate the connection between our eyes and heart, thereby removing the cause of our straying. Love of Hashem will follow as a matter of course.

1. Devorim 30:6.

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Rashi's Explanation

Up to this point the Torah discussed the rewards which the Jewish people will receive for keeping Torah and Mitzvos as commanded by Hashem. The Torah also tells of the consequences for not obeying these commandments. It is described in detail how the Jews will be exiled from their land. In this week's Torah portion, Nitzovim, we are told that upon returning to the Lord, He will gather the exiles and restore the land to the Jewish people. We are told that, "The Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, (in order that you may) love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life."

As has been discussed numerous times, Rashi explains Peshat, meaning the simple understanding of the Torah. Not only that, but Rashi answers each and every question which could be asked according to Peshat. The only tool which a child who is just beginning his studies needs in order to understand the Torah from beginning to end is Rashi's commentary. This being the case, if we find a question with which Rashi does not deal, it must mean one of two things. It is possible that in reality it is not a question to begin with. It is also possible that it is a question, however Rashi answered it in one of his earlier comments.

In the above cited verse, we find a question which begs to be asked. Why does the Torah say that G-d will "circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring.?" There is no need to circumcise the heart itself; it is only the spiritual "foreskin" of the heart which must be removed. In an earlier verse, the Torah itself used this expression, and Rashi explained what the meaning of a spiritual foreskin is. We were told, that² "you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart." There Rashi cites the words "the foreskin of your heart," and explains that it means "the blockage and covering of your heart."

The fact that Rashi does not deal with this apparent question is actually even more difficult to understand than it seems at first glance. Targum Onkelos, the standard Aramaic translation of the Torah, does explain this verse. This is even though Onkelos does not explain all verses according to Peshat. The Targum translates this verse as, "The Lord your G-d will remove the *foolishness* of your heart." This translation is obviously a response to our question, yet Rashi does not deal with the question at all.

The Explanation

The reason that the Torah does not write that Hashem will "will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring," can be understood from the verses leading up to it. First the Torah says³ that "And it will be, when all these things come upon you ... *and you will return* to the Lord, your G-d, *with all your heart and with all your soul.*" After this the Torah continues "(the Lord, your G-d, will bring back your exiles ... And the Lord, your G-d, will bring you to the land ...) and the Lord, your God, will circumcise your heart ..." In other words,

2. Devorim 10:16.

3. Devorim 30:1-2.

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the prophecy that G-d will circumcise the hearts of all Jews, follows the prophecy that the Jewish Nation will return to Hashem with a complete heart. It would not be appropriate to say that G-d will circumcise the "foreskin" of our hearts. Both the "blockage and covering" of our hearts (as previously stated by Rashi), and the "foolishness" of our hearts (as explained by Onkelus) will have been removed!

We must therefore say, that by circumcision, the Torah is referring to a higher level of Divine service. Previously, the Torah spoke about the "negative," removing the foolishness and the blockage from our hearts. Here, the Torah is discussing a higher level. This is in keeping with the end of the verse, "that you may love the Lord your G-d." To put it somewhat differently, earlier the Torah was talking about returning to Hashem out of fear, or awe. Here the Torah is discussing returning to G-d out of love for Him.

However, if the Torah is speaking of a positive action, loving Hashem, why is it expressed with negative language; circumcise, cut off or remove the blockage? Furthermore, why does the Torah say that *G-d* will circumcise our hearts? If the point is to love Hashem, that is something which we must do ourselves; it is a positive commandment.

This too will be understood by understanding the verses leading up to it. The Torah discussed at great length the trouble that will befall us in exile. The exile is caused by this that⁴ "they abandoned the covenant of the Lord." The Torah describes the factors which led to this behavior⁵. "For you know ... in the land of Egypt ... you *saw* their abominations ... Perhaps there is among you one ... *whose heart strays* ... to go and worship the deities of those nations ..." From this we can understand that "the Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart," is in order to remove the cause of the spiritual descent. It removes even the *possibility of seeing* their abominations, as a result of which "our hearts *stray*."

The explanation is, that there are two general causes for a Jew straying from the path of Torah and Mitzvos:

1. There is something lacking in the heart itself; the "foolishness" or a "blockage" of the heart.
2. Something external, something outside of the heart causes one to stray. This is in keeping with what Rashi says⁶, "the eyes see, and (consequently) the heart desires." The fact that one's eyes saw a temptation, *cause* one to desire it with his heart.

Based on the above it is understood:

1. How the term circumcision, cutting away or removing, is an appropriate description a means to cause the heart to love. The cutting refers to removing the cause of straying from G-d. It actually means *cutting* the connection between the eyes and the heart.

4. Devorim 29:24.

5. Devorim 29:15-17.

6. Bamidbar 15:39.

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2. Why it is necessary for Hashem to circumcise our hearts, and we cannot do it ourselves. A person, through his Divine service, can remove a blockage of the heart. However, one cannot remove the connection between vision and the heart. That is a part of a person's nature which was created by G-d. Hence only He can remove it.

This also explains the continuation of the verse. "the Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, (in order that you may) love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul." He will remove the potential for straying; hence as a matter of course we will come to love Hashem.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The two types of circumcision taught in the Torah, represent two different levels of G-dly service. The type of circumcision whereby we must remove the blockage from our hearts, is the service of Teshuvah; returning to G-d. The second is where Hashem circumcises our hearts. This immediately brings about our love of G-d. This is associated with Ahavoh, love of Hashem.

According to Rashi's approach to our verse, it involves the service of love of G-d. We have already returned to G-d with all of our heart and soul. He removes the one possible cause for straying, and we automatically love Him. However, according to Onkelos, it is the idea of Teshuvah, our removing the foolishness from ourselves.

The Torah portion of Nitzovim is always read before Rosh Hashanah. In other words, it is read at the end of the month of Elul, which is the last month of the Jewish calendar. What is our job throughout the month of Elul? How do we prepare ourselves for the New Year? This is alluded to by an acronym formed from a verse in the Song of Songs, which is called in Hebrew by the name Shir Hashirim. The verse is⁷, "I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me." The Hebrew is "אני לדודי ודודי לי." The first letter of each word spells the name of this month, "Elul - אלול." The fact that the month of Elul is connected with "my beloved," demonstrates that an essential part of our service is the love of Hashem.

This month is hinted at first by "I am to my beloved," in other words the job begins with us. Only then does it include "my beloved is to me, Hashem's response to our efforts.

There is a well-known allegory used by the Alter Rebbe to describe this month. He compares our service to a king who is returning to his palace. On his way back, he stops in a field. There, he graciously greets everyone without exception, with a smile. Once he returns to his palace, it is not all that easy to see the king, and he does not greet everyone. If one does qualify to enter the king's chamber, he must first make the proper preparations.

7. Shir Hashirim 6:3.

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The same is true throughout this month. Hashem is, as so to speak, in the field. He greets each one of us with a "smiling countenance." Our service is a manner of "I am to my beloved." However, he provides us with great help in order to attain that level. This means that He gives us great revelations, which enable us to accomplish what we need to. He reveals an extremely high level, which is known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. He gives us a "boost" to provide us with the strength to accomplish what we must in preparation of the new year.

Once the new year begins on Rosh Hashanah, G-d is, as so to speak, in the palace. Then, one requires special merit in order to greet "the King." We must have used all of the energy which he bestowed upon us throughout the month of Elul in order to merit to greet Him.

Hashem should help that all of us, without exception, should be inscribed and sealed for a good year. We should merit the blessing foretold in our Torah portion of Moshiach Now!

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Parshas Nitzovim 5734, and Shabbos Parshas Nitzovim Vayelech 5743)

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&
Mrs. Berocho bas Soroh שתחילי Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery**

* * *

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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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