

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

# Parshas Bereishis

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Compiled from the works of  
**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**  
**The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

by  
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn  
North Miami Beach, FL

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

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**Rashi in His Own Words**

**בראשית א', א':** בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

**רש"י ד"ה בראשית:** אמר רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל [את] התורה אלא מ"החודש הזה לכם", שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו [בה] ישראל, ומה טעם פתח בבראשית? משום "כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים", שאם יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל לסטים אתם, שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים, הם אומרים להם כל הארץ של הקב"ה היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו:

**Bereishis 1:1:** In the beginning of G-d's creation of the heavens and the earth...

**Rashi Heading - In the beginning:** Said Rabbi Yitzchok: It was not necessary to begin the Torah except from<sup>1</sup> "This month is to you," which is the first commandment that the Jews were commanded. Now why did He commence with "In the beginning?" Because of (the verse)<sup>2</sup> "The strength of His works He told His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations." For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, "You are robbers, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations (of Canaan)," they will reply, "The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us."

**Synopsis**

This Torah portion, Bereishis, begins with the words<sup>3</sup> "In the beginning of G-d's creation of the heavens and the earth ..." Rashi questions the Torah's need to begin with a discussion of creation. Torah is a book of laws; it is not a history book. He explains in the name of Rabbi Yitzchok that "if the nations of the world should say to Israel, 'You are robbers, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations (of Canaan),' they will reply, 'The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us.'"

Each of us "the nations of the world" that are within us; we all have an evil inclination. Rashi begins his commentary of the Torah by teaching that G-d only gave the world over to the laws of nature temporarily. Our job in life is to "conquer" every part of the world with which we come into contact, and transform it into holiness, i.e. Israel.

1. Parshas Bo, Shemos 12:2.  
2. Tehillim 111:6.  
3. Our Parshah, Bereishis 1:1.

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### Rashi's Explanation

In this Torah portion, Bereishis, we begin anew the reading of the Torah. The Torah starts off by saying that "In the beginning of G-d's creation of the heavens and the earth ..." Rashi cites the words "In the beginning," which he explains with the following comment. "Said Rabbi Yitzchok: It was only necessary to begin the Torah with the words<sup>4</sup> 'This month is to you,' which is the first commandment that the Jews were commanded. Now why did He commence with 'In the beginning?' Because of (the verse)<sup>5</sup> 'The strength of His works He told His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations.' For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, 'You are robbers, for you conquered the lands of the seven (Canaanite) nations,' they will reply, 'The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us.'"

Apparently, Rashi is making the point that the Torah is a book of laws; it is not a history book. Hence, Rashi explains why the Torah begins by telling us about Hashem's creation of the world, rather than beginning with the first commandment given to the Jewish people.

The purpose of Rashi's commentary to the Torah is first and foremost to explain Peshat, i.e. the simple meaning of each verse. Rashi himself tells us this a number of times<sup>6</sup>. However, his commentary also contains and alludes to wondrous, Kabbalistic mysteries, as well as to life lessons. We find that the Alter Rebbe said that Rashi's commentary is the *wine* of Torah<sup>7</sup>. This applies to every word of Rashi's comments to each of the five books of the Torah. How much more so does this apply to the very beginning of his commentary. In general, the beginning of a work contains a summary of sorts of what is to follow. At the beginning of the Torah, Rashi is summarizing what we need to know. Unlike a number of other Torah commentaries, Rashi did not compose an introduction to his work. We can therefore view this opening explanation of his to the Torah as an introduction of sorts. The "wine of Torah" contained within these words serve as a general lesson and insight into all aspects of Torah.

It is quite clear what lesson Rashi is teaching us here. There are times that the world seems to stand in opposition to our Torah study and Mitzvah observance. The world seems to *claim* that Torah and Mitzvos have no place in this physical world. Do we really believe that we could *conquer* the Canaanite nations? Do we think that our Torah can take precedence over the laws of nature? Rashi is teaching us that we must not allow this

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4. See footnote 1.

5. Tehillim 111:6.

6. See Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 3:8, 3:22, 3:24, 4:8 and 6:3.

7. See Hayom Yom pp. 24. The significance of wine, is that just as wine reveals the secrets that are contained within a person, so too do Rashi's comments reveal the secrets and mysteries of the Torah.

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attitude to affect us. To the contrary; we must remain firm in our resolve to do whatever it is that G-d demands of us.

### Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The above lesson is absolutely true. However, it is only a general lesson in the service of G-d. There must be something more specific which Rashi is teaching us here. Furthermore, the basis of Rashi's explanation is the verse, "The strength of His works He told His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations." His comments are built upon this verse. What is its significance? Additionally, why does the verse focus upon "the *strength* of His *deeds*?" It's quite simple, that because the Almighty created the world, He can give it to whomever He pleases. What is being brought out by the word *strength* and the word *deeds*? Finally, why does Rashi's proof text use the words "He told His people (הגיד in Hebrew)," rather than the more common "He said to his people (אמר in Hebrew)?"

### The Explanation

We will understand the answer to these questions by first explaining the spiritual significance of the Land of Israel. The Torah tells us that Israel is the land which<sup>8</sup> "the eyes of Lord your God are always upon ..., from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." In other words, in the Land of Israel Divine Providence is far more revealed than anywhere else in the world. G-dliness is *felt* more in Israel than it is anywhere else in the world. Furthermore, the above quoted text states that "the eyes (as so to speak) of Lord your G-d are always upon it." This means to say, that were it not for the individual's freedom of choice, it would be impossible to sin. Evil would be non-existent.

From this it is understood that the spiritual "Israel," is perfection of Divine service. It is constantly drawing G-dly light into the world. It is a situation where nothing bad can exist. This is also alluded to in its name. The Land of Israel in Hebrew is "ארץ ישראל." As the Sages teach us<sup>9</sup>, "Why is it called 'the land?' Because it wants, and it runs to fulfill the will of its Creator." It is called "the land - ארץ" from the Hebrew root meaning "will, wanting - רצון," and the Hebrew root meaning "running - רץ."

It seems as if Israel should be totally pure and holy. However, after the great flood, the physical land of Israel was given to Shem, who was the ancestor of the Jewish people. However, the impure Canaanites took it away from the descendants of Shem. When the time came for the Jewish people to leave the servitude of Egypt, receive the Torah and enter Israel, the land had to first be taken back and conquered by the Jews. In the spiritual sense, this conquering of the Holy Land is the spiritual service of using the physical world in the service of the

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8. Parshas Aikev, Devorim 11:12.

9. Bereishis Rabbah, Chapter 5, 8.

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Almighty. It's not enough to serve G-d in the synagogue, or while occupied in Torah study. Rather, it must be the occupation of each and every Jew every moment of every day. We must "*conquer*" the material world for the service of Hashem. We must transform it into the Holy Land.

However, we find, that while traversing through the desert on their way to Israel, the Jewish Nation committed the sin of the spies<sup>10</sup>. Moshe sent twelve spies, each of whom was righteous and the leader of a tribe. He sent them on a mission to spy out the land of Israel which the Jews were about to enter. Yet all of them, save two, brought back a negative report. They said that it would be impossible, even for G-d Himself, to conquer this land. How were such pious people able to make such a grave mistake and commit such a sin?

The explanation, in terms of our daily service of G-d, is that they felt that it's not possible to "*conquer*" an inhabited land. The world was created by Hashem according to the laws of nature. The Torah commands us to respect nature, and to take care of our bodies and our *physical* world. The spies felt that Hashem could only be served in an uninhabited wilderness, where the rules of the "*real*" world do not apply. How could we transform a physical, material world into something Divine? Spirituality is fine for a desert, but how can it mesh with a limited, earthly world?

In the same manner, there are those who mistakenly believe that G-d belongs in a synagogue, or a hall of Torah study. However, does He really belong in an office or in a place of business? How can we "*conquer*" such places and transform them into something holy? In this world we must be concerned with maintaining worldly matters!

This is a tremendous, and a dangerous mistake. Our entire purpose in being in this world is in order to convert it to something G-dly. We can, and we must, conquer this world for Hashem. We are given the ability to transform the "land of the seven nations" into the Holy Land. In fact, as our Sages teach<sup>11</sup>, this is why the Almighty created the world; "for the sake of the Torah, and for the sake of the Jews." In other words, the very reason of creation is in order for Jews to study Torah and perform Mitzvos, thereby conquering the world and sanctifying it.

This is the reason, that at the very outset of the Torah, Rashi guides us in our path of life. The nations of the world, the "gentile" within us, will approach us with a complaint. Not only that, but his complaint will appear to be valid. How can we steal things from the domain of this physical world, and elevate them to G-dliness? The explanation is, that not only is the creation of the world Hashem's action, His deed, but it is the *might* of His deed. Based on nature, if Hashem created something to be a physical object, in a manner that it seems to be separate

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10. See the Book of Bamidbar beginning with Chapter 13.

11. Bereishis Rabbah Chapter 1, 6, and Vayikroh Rabbah Chapter 36, 4.

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from Him, how dare I change it into something holy? What gives me the ability to do so? The answer is that Hashem invested the power of His actions into creation. He empowered us to be able to remove something from the laws of physics, and transform it into something G-dly.

This also explains why Rashi cites a verse which says that Hashem *told* His people, rather than merely *said* to them. The Hebrew word for *told* is **הגיד**. This word also implies drawing down. G-d drew down and transmitted to the Jewish Nation the power and the strength to be able to reveal the holiness which already exists within this world. We are able to "conquer" the land of Canaan, and transform it to Israel, the Holy Land.

*(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Bereishis 5731)*

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