

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Bereishis

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Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

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 היה ערום מפל סגת השדה אשר עשה ה' אלקים 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:** The woman told the serpent, "Of the fruit of the garden's trees 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 our Torah portion, Bereishis, the Torah tells us of a discussion between Chavah, the first woman, and the serpent.¹ In this discussion, the serpent enticed Chavah to eat from the fruit 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 describes how the serpent persuaded Chavah. He said to her, "Did G-d indeed say, 'you shall not eat of any of the trees of the garden?'"

Rashi explains every word in the Torah, which is difficult to understand, according to Peshat. In other words, he explains everything that would be difficult for a beginning student. Why does he not tell us how the serpent could speak?

Suddenly, describing a conversation between Chavah and the serpent is most perplexing. We do not mention anywhere that any beasts have the power of speech. Moreover, we see that the serpent's descendants cannot speak. It seems the original snake

1. Our Parshah, Bereishis 3:1-5.

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could talk, but Hashem punished him and removed that power from his descendants. We do not find that Hashem gave the serpent any such curse.

Whenever there is difficulty understanding a verse, as in our case, that Rashi does not address, it can mean one of two things. Either (a), in reality, it is not a question, or (b.) it is a question, but Rashi answered it earlier. Yet we find no explanation for why the original serpent could speak or its descendants could not.

We may be able to understand this based on the following. Before telling us the incident of Chavah and the serpent, the Torah says, ² "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 ³. "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.'" Hashem punished the snake because he had "done this," i.e., he seduced Chavah to sin. From this, we understand that Hashem punished him by taking away those faculties which enabled him to influence her. Chiefly among these is the power of speech. If he could not speak, the snake would not have been able to convince Chavah to sin.

Rashi's Explanation

This Torah portion, Bereishis, begins the five books of the Torah. It tells us of the beginning – the world's creation. 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: not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil's fruit. The Torah tells us the serpent spoke with Chava. During this conversation, he seduced her to eat the forbidden fruit. He also convinced her to give the fruit to her husband to eat. The three of them, the snake, the man, and the woman, were all punished for their sin.

We find that all of the animals could make sounds; they could growl, roar, etc. However, we find no other animal that could speak. Not only that, but we find that the serpent's descendants cannot talk. For that matter, they cannot make any sound besides

2. Our Parshah, Bereishis 3:1.

3. Ibid. Bereishis 3:14.

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hissing. It is likely that, at first, the serpent could speak. However, as a part of its punishment, it lost this ability. We find in the Torah that part of the snake's punishment was losing its 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 that was later taken from him.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The fact that the snake could speak at first and later lost this power seems difficult to understand. Yet Rashi ignores this difficulty. We have discussed many times that Rashi teaches us the Torah's simple explanation. Rashi explains whatever information a beginning student needs to understand the Torah. If something appears to be a question and Rashi does not address it, it is either because it is not a question or because Rashi explained it earlier. Why does Rashi not tell us that this serpent could speak? Why does the Torah not tell us that the snake's nature was that it had the power of speech? The serpent's entire curse was that ⁵ "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 the woman, between your seed and 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 thing. ⁶

The Explanation

We can explain the above as follows. As an introduction to Chava's encounter with the snake, the Torah tells us, ⁷ "Now the serpent was cunning, more than all the beasts of the field that the Lord G-d had made." That he was more cunning than all the beasts does not mean that the serpent was more cunning than Chava. Adam and Chava were (so to speak) G-d Almighty's handiwork. However, the message is that the snake is

4. Ibid. Bereishis 3:14.

5. Ibid. 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 (Parshas Balak, 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. Our Parshah, Bereishis 3:1.

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more cunning than the other animals. The serpent was smart enough to persuade Chava to do what Hashem had prohibited her from doing. The snake could only entice Chava through the power of speech, and the serpent could not convince 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 the beasts of the field." How did the serpent manage to do this? It was because he could speak. "Because you have done this," you will not be "greater than all of the beasts of the field." You will be "cursed more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field." The other animals could bark, growl, etc. The snake lost his power of speech because of his sin. Instead, he lost the ability to make sounds like the other animals could.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Sages teach us 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 serpent's evil actions that it was transformed from "more cunning than all" to "more cursed than all." How much more so is this true regarding a proper, positive deed? One can transform himself from the lowest level to the highest through one good act.

This idea is alluded to explicitly through a serpent. We find further ⁸ that serpents plagued the Jewish Nation, that bit and killed us. The salvation and cure came from a copper snake that Moshe Rabbeinu made. Chassidic texts teach us ⁹ 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 disease¹⁰, we can always find the treatment in the sin. This sin seems to have caused humanity to fall. Before this sin, there was no death in the world; we all would have lived eternally. Therefore, in this place where the Torah tells us of the greatest sin, it also alludes to its cure. Here, we are taught what we can accomplish at the very beginning of the Torah. By looking up and

8. See Parshas Balak, Bamidbar, beginning with 21:6.

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

10. See Talmud Megillah 13, b.

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doing Teshuvah, we can go from the deepest depths to the most incredible heights in one moment.¹¹

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Bereishis, 5733)

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

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11. The idea of the “Copper Snake” made by Moshe 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 Ibid. ibid. 21:8. See also Likkutei Sichos Volume 13 beginning with Page 75, Chapter 3.

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מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם"

חיים, עדן עודד, זכרי' מתן, ונח אריאל שיחיו מאריס

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

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

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לזכות

ר' ארי נתנאל וזוגתו מרת רחל שיחיו לאריק

ר' אליעזר ברוך וזוגתו מרת חי' שיחיו סאלינס

לאריכות ימים ושנים טובות עד ביאת גואל צדק

ומתוך בריאות הנכונה ולשנת ברכה והצלחה בגו"ר

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

ר' יוסף וזוגתו מרת מרים שיחיו גולדשטיין

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נדפס ע"י בנה

ר' גרשון שי' בן טוב