

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Vayeiros

Cheshvan 15, 5778 – November 4, 2017

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 10, Pages 55 – 59

Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית י"ח, כ"ג: ויגש אברהם ויאמר האף תקפה צדיק עם רשע:

רש"י ד"ה ויגש אברהם: מצינו הגשה למלחמה (ש"ב י', י"ג) ויגש יואב וגו', הגשה לפיוס (להלן מ"ד, י"ח) ויגש אליו יהודה, והגשה לתפלה (מלכים א' י"ח, ל"ו) ויגש אליהו הנביא, ולכל אלה נכנס אברהם, לדבר קשות, ולפיוס ולתפלה:

Bereishis 18:23: And Avrohom approached and said, "Will You (Hashem) even destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

Rashi Heading - And Avrohom approached and said: We find (the expression) “approaching” for war¹, “And Yoav drew forward (meaning approached) etc.”; and “approaching” for placating² “And Yehudah approached him”; and “approaching” for prayer³ “And Eliyohu the prophet came near.” For all of these Avrohom entered; to speak harshly, to placate, and to pray.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Vayeiro, we are told that Hashem sent three angels to visit Avrohom. They came in the form of people. Each one had a separate task to perform. One of the angels' mission was to destroy the evil city of Sodom. Despite the fact that they were all so wicked, the Torah tells us that Avrohom approached Hashem on their behalf in order to plead with Hashem to save their lives. The Hebrew word with the Torah uses for “approach,” is “ויגש.” Rashi explains that “ויגש” has three possible meanings, and cites examples for each. We find the word “approach” used to imply war, appeasement and prayer. Rashi concludes his comments by saying that Avrohom approached Hashem for all three of these; to speak harshly, to appease and to pray.

We have discussed many times that Rashi explains everything that a beginning student needs to know in order to understand the Torah. This being the case we need to understand why Rashi finds it necessary to explain “ויגש – and he approached.” It is a common word which is used throughout the Torah. Additionally, we just said that Rashi concludes his comments by saying that Avrohom approached Hashem for all three; to speak harshly to Hashem, to appease Him and to

1. II Shmuel 10:13.
2. Bereishis 44:8.
3. I Kings 18:36.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

pray to Him. Why is there a need to for Rashi to tell us how many things the word “approach” implied? Furthermore why does Rashi need to cite proofs to show us exactly how this word is used? All that is needed is to look at the following verses. They tell us explicitly how many things the word “approach” is used for. The following verses also spell out what those thing are.

The explanation is that here the meaning of the word “approached” is different than its meaning throughout the Torah. That is why Rashi needs to translate it here. Generally “approached” means that one went from point “A” to point “B.” However that cannot be the case here. Prior to telling us that Avrohom “approached” Hashem, the Torah tells us that “Avrohom was still standing before Hashem.” This makes it clear that Avrohom did not physically move in order to approach Hashem. That would be the common translation of the word. Rather the point here is that Avrohom changed his frame of mind; not his geographic location. He began by speaking harshly to Hashem. He then changed his approach; he began appeasing Hashem. Finally he prayed to Hashem on behalf of the people of Sodom.

Rashi’s Explanation

In this week’s Torah portion, Vayeiuro, we find that Hashem sent three angels (in the form of people) to visit Avrohom. Each angel had a different mission. One of the angel’s mission was to destroy Sodom; which was an evil city. Despite their wickedness, Avrohom approached Hashem to plead on their behalf. The Torah tells us that⁴ “Avrohom approached (Hashem) and said, ‘Will You even destroy the righteous with the wicked?’” Rashi cites the words “and Avrohom approached and said,” and comments as follows. “We find (the expression) ‘approaching’ for war¹, “And Yoav drew forward (meaning approached) etc.”; and ‘approaching’ for placating² “And Yehudah approached him”; and “approaching” for prayer³ “And Eliyohu the prophet came near.” For all of these Avrohom entered; to speak harshly, to placate, and to pray.

We find in this instance that Avrohom spoke harshly⁵. He told Hashem “Will You even destroy the righteous with the wicked.” We also find that he appeased Hashem⁶; “Far be it from You to do such a thing.” We also find that he prayed to Hashem⁷. He said “I have begun to speak

4. Bereishis 18:23.

5. Bereishis 18:23.

6. Bereishis 18:25.

7. Bereishis 18:27.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

to Hashem even though I am just dust and ashes.” Avrohom approached Hashem with all three methods. Hence Rashi makes a point to show that they are all included in the word “approached.”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

We have discussed many times that Rashi explains Peshat, i.e. the simple meaning of the verse. He gives the beginning student everything that he needs to know just what the Torah is saying. Therefore if a word is unusual Rashi will explain its meaning. However the word “approach – ויגש” is used frequently throughout the Torah. Why does Rashi find any need to explain the word’s meaning? Furthermore “approach – ויגש” is the one word which Rashi is explaining. Why does Rashi also cite the word *Avrohom* - “and Avrohom approached?” He is only explaining the word “approach.” He is not explaining the word *Avrohom*!

Additionally, we need to understand why Rashi concludes his comments with the words “for all of these Avrohom entered ...?” If one reads the following verses it is obvious that Avrohom entered for all three types of approaching! It is clearly written in each of the verses. Furthermore Rashi changes the word from that which the actual verse uses. The Torah uses the word “approach,” while Rashi changes and uses the word “enters.”

The Explanation

In order to explain Rashi we must look at the verse in context. Immediately prior to the verse which we are explaining, the Torah says that⁸ “Avrohom was still standing before Hashem.” Usually the verb *approach* implies movement. I can only approach someone if I am with someone else. However, if “Avrohom was still standing before Hashem,” how was it possible for him to approach Hashem?

This is what Rashi is emphasizing by saying “for all of these Avrohom entered.” Even before he actually spoke to Hashem, Avrohom was in a state of mind that prepared him to speak harshly, to appease Hashem and to pray. The fact that he spoke to Hashem in a particular manner does not prove that he approached Him (mentally) with that intention.

From this we see that we cannot possibly prove from the following verses that say that Avrohom spoke harshly, tried to appease Hashem and prayed to Him that this is the meaning of “approaching.” That is not the point here. Rather the point is that he entered a state of mind whereby he was prepared to approach Hashem in these ways. The fact that he actually spoke that way tells us nothing.

8. Bereishis 18:22.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Rashi still needs to prove that “ויגש - הגשד” applies to these three states of mind. This is especially true because Rashi began by saying “Will You destroy the righteous with the wicked?” These are harsh words, and we might think that Avrohom’s entire approach was to speak harshly!

Therefore Rashi begins by quoting the words from the verse “And Avrohom approached” and explains that “we find the term approaching used ...” Since the Torah repeated that Avrohom approached Hashem despite the fact that he was still standing before Hashem, Rashi shows us that the verb “approach” has the connotation of any or all of these three states of mind.

Rashi is not comparing the actual meaning of the word ויגש - approach here and in the above cited verse in order to show that Yehudah approached Yosef. In both places it meant moving from one position to another. However, they are both completely different types of movement. Avrohom moved from one mental state to another. However Yehudah’s approaching implies physical motion. At first he was together with his brothers. He then left them in order to speak with Yosef. Since “approaching” there had its usual meaning, there was no reason for Rashi to explain it.

In the case of Yehudah approaching Yosef the motion was obviously in order to appease Yosef. We see this from the fact that when he begins speaking to Yosef he says⁹ “Please my master, allow your servant to speak to you ...” However, despite Yehudah telling Yosef not to allow “his anger to be kindled ...” there is no implication that he approached Yosef in order to speak to him harshly. All it means is that he actually did speak harshly.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Avrohom’s primary attribute was that of “Chesed,” meaning kindness. This is rooted in the character trait of loving Hashem, which Avrohom had in great abundance. Obviously each of our forefathers had whatever attributes were needed to serve G-d. However the driving force behind Avrohom was that of “Chesed.” In fact he was the physical manifestation of the G-dly attribute of kindness. This is why we find that the prophet himself refers to the Jewish people as “the seed of Avrohom who loved Me.¹⁰”

Based on this we need to understand why Avrohom found it necessary to approach G-d with harsh words! Moreover, he chose to approach Hashem with severity *first*. He approached G-d in three different manners; severity, appeasement and prayer. Let us assume that he had a reason

9. Bereishis 44:18.

10. Yeshayahu 41:8.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

to approach G-d with harsh words. Why should he begin with that approach? He could have begun with appeasement or prayer; either of which would be keeping with his nature. In that way he may have avoided harshness altogether.

The explanation is that love was not merely his nature. What it means is that love was the root of his soul. It was the primary method in which he served Hashem. However upon seeing that people's lives are at stake he was perfectly willing to do whatever it took to save them.

This is written in the Torah in order to give us a practical lesson in the service of Hashem. If there is a danger to human life we *may* not limit ourselves to conduct which is in keeping with our natural characteristics¹¹. Rather we must do whatever it takes to rectify a situation. This is true whether the danger is physical or spiritual.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vayeyiro 5730)

**I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.
For questions, subscriptions or dedications our email address is shmuel@rebbe teachesrashi.org.**

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11. This is why Hashem did not say until after Avrohom's tenth test (Bereishis 22:12) "now I know that you are a G-d fearing man." G-d commanded him to offer his beloved son Yitzchok as an offering. This is a polar opposite to Avrohom's nature. Only a G-d fearing person is was willing to go completely against his nature in order to fulfill Hashem's will.

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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**IN HONOR OF
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו Morris**

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**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיחיו Morris**

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Mr. Sholom Moshe Hacoheh ben Tzivia שי' Cohen
&**

**Mrs. Berocho bas Soroh שתחי' Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery**

* * *

**DEDICATED BY
Hatomim Moshe Shlomoh Zohar שי' Mars**

*

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

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' מארס

יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן