

בס"ד

# THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

# Parshas Vayeitzei

Kislev 7, 5778 – November 28, 2017

Compiled from the works of  
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**The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

by  
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi  
**Parshas Vayitzei**

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**Rashi in His Own Words**

בראשית ל"א, נ': אִם־תַּעֲנֶנָּה אֶת־בְּנֹתַי וְאִם־תִּקַּח נָשִׁים עַל־בְּנֹתַי אִין אִישׁ עִמָּנוּ רְאֵה אֱלֹקִים עַד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ:

רש"י ד"ה בנתי בנתי: שתי פעמים, אף בלהה וזלפה בנותיו היו מפלגש:

רש"י ד"ה אם תענה את בנתי: למנוע מהם עונת תשמיש:

**Bereishis 31:50:** If you afflict my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters when no one is with us; Behold! G-d is a witness between me and you."

**Rashi Heading - ...my daughters...my daughters:** Twice. Bilhah and Zilpah were also his daughters from a concubine.

**Rashi Heading - If you afflict my daughters:** By depriving them of their conjugal rights

**Synopsis**

There are a number of ironclad rules which Rashi consistently follows (see <http://rebbeteachesrashi.org/rashi-s-principles>) in his commentary to the Torah. One of the principles which Rashi always follows is that he explains the entire Torah according to Peshat – meaning the simple explanation of the Torah. His explanation is such that it must be understood even by a beginning student. That is why at times we find a question in the Torah portion which other commentaries explain. Nevertheless, Rashi says “I don’t know the reason for this,” or uses other words to that effect<sup>1</sup>, It is not because the other commentaries know more than Rashi. Rather what Rashi means to say is that he cannot answer the question according to the Torah’s literal explanation. The other commentators explain the question according to other approaches in Torah.

Based on this we seem to have a question in our Torah portion, Vayitzei. Yet Rashi is silent. Not only does he not answer the question; he does not even mention that there is a question which requires an explanation! Rashi tells us further on that our Patriarchs, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov fulfilled each and every Mitzvah in the Torah. They even fulfilled all of the rabbinic commandments.

1. We find this in the previous Parshah, Bereishis 28:5. The Torah says that Rivkah was the mother of Yaakov and Aisov. Rashi comments that we do not know what this teaches us; we already know who Rivkah’s children were.

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The explanation is as follows. What was the reason for our forefathers following the Torah's commandments? Until our exodus from Egypt and receiving the Torah we were not yet considered Jews. As children of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov we were children of Noach as well. However, we fit into a special category of Noachide children. The category to which we belonged was deemed greatly praiseworthy by Hashem. Our praiseworthiness was for undertaking His commands on a voluntary basis. Hence, we were not permitted to obey any commandment which would be given to the Jews which would contradict their current obligations. We know that the entire human race was obligated to keep the seven commandments which applied to all of mankind. However, in addition to this, mankind was obligated to perform other commandments. These were obligations which all of mankind accepted upon themselves. One of these was a prohibition against deceiving one's fellow. Therefore, once Yaakov promised to marry Rochel, he was obligated to do so. This promise contradicted the Torah law (which was not yet given to Jews) against marrying two sisters. Therefore, Yaakov was not only permitted to marry two sisters. Because of his promise he was obligated to do so.

### **Rashi's Explanation**

In this week's Torah portion, Vayetzei, we encounter an extremely powerful question on the Torah's words. Yet Rashi does not deal with this question in any way, shape or form. Rashi's *raison d'être* is to explain the simple, literal meaning of the Torah. If there is a question which would bother a beginning student from understanding the Torah's meaning, it would seem that Rashi has not done his job. That is the reason for the numerous places in the Torah where there is an obvious question which Rashi does not explain. He will often say "I don't know" or the like<sup>1</sup>. Yet other commentaries do answer the same question. This does not demonstrate that the other commentaries know something which Rashi did not. Rather it shows that there is an answer to the question in facets of Torah learning other than Peshat. However, Rashi is looking for an explanation according to the literal explanation of the Torah. According to Peshat there is no answer.

The obvious question in our Torah portion (with which other commentators aside from

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Rashi do deal) is that we find that our forefather Yaakov married four (or two) sisters<sup>2</sup>. We know that further on Rashi tells us that<sup>3</sup> “that is to say: I lived with the wicked Lavan, but I kept the 613 commandments, and I did not learn from his evil deeds.” This makes it clear that our Forefathers, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, kept all of the Mitzvos of the Torah before they had been given. The Torah commands one person not to marry two (or more) sisters. It is written<sup>4</sup> “and you shall not take a woman with her sister in marriage as rivals ... in her lifetime.”

Perhaps the reason that Rashi neither asks nor answers this question here is because the prohibition is given much further on in the Torah. Hence the beginning student is not yet aware of the prohibition or the question. However, this explanation is not viable. Later, when the Torah pronounces the commandment Rashi could have asked and answered the question. He could have asked why we learned earlier that Yaakov married more than one sister?

### **Difficulties in Understanding Rashi**

The Ramban answers this question by telling us that the Patriarchs were particular to keep all of the Mitzvos only when they were in Israel. However, Yaakov got married to Lavan’s daughters when he was in Charan; which was outside of Israel.

However, this cannot be reconciled with Rashi’s opinion. The Torah tells us that Yaakov said<sup>5</sup> “I stayed with Lavan.” The Hebrew word for “stayed” is “Garti – גרתי.” “Garti” has the numeric equivalent of 613. That is the exact number of Mitzvos which every Jew is obligated to perform. In other words, Rashi is alluding to the fact that even in Charan, which is the antithesis of the Holy Land, Yaakov was obligated to keep all of the Mitzvos,

Another one of the commentaries answers by saying that in fact Yaakov was obligated to marry all four sisters. Yaakov knew prophetically that he would need to have 12 sons; the 12 tribes of Israel. However, this is certainly not according to Peshat. At the outset he was not commanded to marry Bilhah or Zilpah. They were given to him as handmaidens for Rochel and Leah. His original plan according to Peshat was to just marry Rochel. It was only because Lovon tricked him that he ended up marrying the other wives as well.

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2. The Torah makes it clear that Rochel and Leah were both daughters of Lavan. In Bereishis 31:50 Rashi writes that Bilhah and Zilpah were Lavan’s daughters from a concubine, hence the four of them were not full sisters.

3. See Rashi’s comments to Bereishis 32:5 Please note that this verse is speaking specifically about Yaakov. The subject which we are discussing here is his marriage to sisters.

4. Vayikroh 18:18.

5. Bereishis 32:5.

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There is deep speculation among the Sages as to whether the Forefather's acceptance of all of the Mitzvos before they were given only applied when they were stricter than the Noachide laws, which were already obligatory. Perhaps they only accepted those Mitzvos which were more lenient. A practical difference between the two opinions could be as follows. The Talmud says that one who converts is considered a new person<sup>6</sup>. Before conversion, the individual was a gentile. Now he is a Jew, who is a totally different being. It is obvious that before Yaakov married each of his wives they converted. They were no longer sisters because each one became a new person. This being the case, Yaakov did not marry two or four sisters. He married women who were totally unrelated to each other. That is however only true if we follow the second opinion. In that case their lineage was affected by their conversion. Hence, they were no longer considered sisters.

However, we cannot say that Lavan's daughters' conversion changed their lineage for a number of reasons:

- a. There is no evidence from the Bible that any laws whatsoever applied to the Jews before the giving of the Torah. This of course excludes the seven Noachide Laws<sup>7</sup>. We can also not say that voluntarily undertaking the fulfillment of the 613 commandments is considered a conversion of sorts. This is a self-imposed *stringency*, and could not include the *lenient* ruling that a convert is considered a new-born child.
- b. Not once in his commentary does Rashi mention this law. Quite to the contrary, the Torah implies that a convert (before the giving of the Torah) is not considered a new-born child. Hashem said to Avrohom that after his conversion<sup>8</sup> "he shall come to his fathers in peace." In other words, even after Avrohom's conversion, Terach is still considered his father. He will be joined to him after death.
- c. There is a list of people in the Torah who one may not marry. There is a major difference between the category of two sisters and the other categories on the list. There is a psychological reason for not marrying two sisters. There is a natural love which exists between siblings. Two sisters marrying the same man would compromise that love. It would cause jealousy between the sisters. It makes no difference whether or not before the giving of the Torah a convert is considered as a new baby. One would still

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6. See Talmud Yevomos, 22a.

7. There are various other exceptions, such as circumcision.

8. Bereishis 15:15.

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not be allowed to marry two sisters who converted; as it would damage the natural love which exists between them.

### The Explanation

The explanation is that for Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, accepting all of the laws of the Torah was a self-imposed stringency. This is why they were so precious to G-d. As it is written<sup>9</sup> “Inasmuch as Avrohom listened to My voice, kept My charge, My commands, ordinances and laws.”

From this it is obvious that if there is a conflict between an obligatory law and one which is self-imposed, the obligation takes precedence.

That is the reason that Avrohom did not circumcise himself until he was commanded to do so<sup>10</sup>. One of the prohibitions incumbent upon all mankind is shedding blood. It is irrelevant whether or not it causes pain. Until G-d Almighty commanded him to do so, he had no right to circumcise himself. This would cause him to transgress a prohibition.

The same is true regarding Yaakov marrying sisters. Despite the fact that deception was not one of the seven commandments, it was nevertheless prohibited. That is why at the beginning of our Parshah, Yaakov said to Lavan<sup>11</sup> ““What is this that you have done to me? Did I not work with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?” Yaakov’s claim was based on the fact that all people of the world had accepted upon themselves not to deceive. Yaakov had promised Rochel to marry her. In addition, he had given her the “signs” in order to ensure that he married the right sister. This being the case, the obligation of keeping one’s word took precedence over the prohibition of marrying two sisters.

### A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

From this story we learn a very important lesson. It is very important to follow every small detail of the Torah. Yet it is even more important to make sure that in the process one does not hurt someone else.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz 5728)*

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**You can find us on the web at [www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org](http://www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org).**

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9. Bereishis 26:5.

10. This is true despite the fact that he kept all of the other 612 Mitzvos.

11. Bereishis 28:25.

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the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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

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For a complete and speedy recovery**

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**DEDICATED BY HIS CHILDREN  
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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

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## 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

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## לזכות

ר' משה חיים בן פערעל שי'

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

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## נדפס ע"י בניו

ר' יצחק מאיר וזוגתו מרת לאה שיחיו שפאלטער

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## לזכות

ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן

ומרת ברכה בת שרה שתחי' כהן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

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הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מארס

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יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן