

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Vayeitzei

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית כ"ח, י': וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שְׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֶרֶנָּה:

רש"י ד"ה ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע: לא היה צריך לכתוב אלא וילך יעקב חרנה, ולמה הזכיר יציאתו, אלא מגיד שיציאת צדיק מן המקום עושה רושם, שבזמן שהצדיק בעיר הוא הודה הוא זיוה הוא הדרה, יצא משם פנה הודה פנה זיוה פנה הדרה וכן ותצא מן המקום, האמור בנעמי ורות:

Bereishis 28:10: And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, and he went to Choron.

Rashi Heading - And Yaakov left: The Torah had only to write, "And Yaakov went to Choron." Why did it mention his departure? But this tells us that the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression. While the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor, and he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty has departed, its splendor has left, and its majesty has departed. And likewise, "And she went forth from the place," which is stated about Naomi and Ruth.

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Vayeitzei, tells us that Yaakov left his parent's home in Be'er Sheva and went to Choron. Rashi asks why the Torah told us that Yaakov left Be'er Sheva. We already knew that he was there. It could have simply stated that he went to Choron! Rashi answers this question by saying, "This tells us that the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression. While the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, splendor, and majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty, splendor, and majesty have departed." This is why the Torah mentioned that Yaakov left Be'er Sheva. Rashi also cites a verse in the book of Rus. Naomi left the fields of Moav (together with her two daughters-in-law) to return to Israel. The verse also says, "and she went forth from the place." Additionally, we find a Midrash similar to Rashi's comments here, and it may have been the source for his comments, yet it is different than here.

The Rebbe explains that according to Peshat, "the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression" because of everything his fellow residents can learn from him. He teaches them humility and illuminates them, thereby causing the city to become honorable. When he leaves, all of these things go with him.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Vayeitzei, begins with the words,¹ "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, and he went to Choron." Our forefather Yaakov left Israel and went to Choron. Rashi appears to be bothered by the redundancy of

1. Our Parshah, Bereishis 28:10.

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the text. Why does it have to say that he left Be'er Sheva? It would have sufficed to say that he went to Choron. Rashi cites the words, "And Yaakov left," and comments, "The Torah had only to write, 'And Yaakov went to Choron.' Why did it mention his departure? But this tells us that the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression. While the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor, and he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty, splendor, and majesty have departed. And likewise,² 'And she went forth from the place,' referring to Naomi and Ruth."

Rashi is citing proof from Naomi leaving the fields of Moav. She left together with her two daughters-in-law. She was returning to Israel. The book of Rus does not just say that "they went on the road to return to the land of Judah." Instead, it tells us³, "Then she went forth from the place." Just as is the case here, the departure of the righteous woman Naomi made an impression.

Rashi makes a similar comment in the book of Rus. He cites the words "then she went forth from the place" and says, "Why is this stated? It already says, 'and she returned from the fields of Moav,' and from where would she return if not from the place where she was? But Scripture wishes to tell us that the departure of a righteous person from a place is conspicuous and makes an impression. Its splendor has turned away, its majesty has turned away, and the praise of a city has turned away. Likewise, (in our verse) it says, 'And Yaakov went forth from Be'er Sheva.'"

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

There is a Midrash that is similar to Rashi's explanation⁴. However, there are significant differences between the two. The Midrash begins by saying, "While the righteous man is in the city, he is its splendor, and he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its splendor has departed, and its majesty has departed." The Midrash concludes by asking a question. In the case of Rus, Rashi's explanation is relatively easy to understand. Naomi was the only righteous person in the fields of Moav. Hence, when she left, there was no righteous person left. However, even after Yaakov left Israel, his parents, who were both righteous people, remained! As long as Yitzchok and Rivkah were still in Be'er Sheva, there was still beauty, splendor, and majesty! Rabbi Azariah responds in the name of Rabbi Simon that the merit of one righteous person, one Tzaddik, is not comparable to that of two⁵.

This seems to pose two questions. The first difficulty is that Rashi lists three things that are affected by the presence or absence of a righteous person; "beauty," "splendor," and "majesty." The Midrash only lists the last two, "splendor" and "majesty." We need to understand the reason for this addition. Rashi, in his comments on Rus, lists "splendor" and "majesty," leaving out "beauty" as does the Midrash. Yet he also adds something new; "praise."

2. Rus 1:7.

3. This is the continuation of the verse cited in footnote 2.

4. Bereishis Rabbah 68, 6.

5. We need to understand the wording of the Midrash. It would seem that the Midrash meant to say that the merit of three Tzaddikim is not comparable to the merit of two.

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Knowing how precise Rashi is, we realize that these words are not mere accolades. We need to understand why Rashi adds a word to those used by the Midrash. Not only that, but he places the other word before those used by the Midrash.

The second difficulty is Rashi cites proof from Rus. However, as the Midrash asks, the two instances are not comparable. Why isn't Rashi bothered by the same question that concerns the Midrash? When Yaakov left the land of Israel, two righteous people remained, namely his parents. However, when Naomi left Moav, no Tzaddikim remained! Both the question and the answer of the Midrash seem to work perfectly, according to Peshat. We must understand why Rashi does not cite the question and the solution.

We must also understand the difference between Rashi's comments here and in Rus. Here, he goes on at length, stating both the positive and negative ways the Tzaddik affects the city. He writes, "while the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, splendor, and majesty." In other words, Rashi is spelling out the effects of the Tzaddik's presence in the city. He then tells us the converse; "When he departs from there, its beauty, its splendor, and its majesty have departed."

Meanwhile, in Rus, he tells us simply that when Naomi left, "Its splendor has turned away, its majesty has turned away, and the praise of a city has turned away." He only tells us the effect of the righteous one leaving the city. It would seemingly have sufficed for Rashi to mention only the adverse effects in both instances.

In our Torah portion, where he begins by telling us at length how the presence of the Tzaddik benefits the city, he is teaching us that the righteous person is the *entire* beauty, splendor, and majesty of the city. Conversely, in Rus, Rashi emphasizes the loss that the city suffers due to the Tzaddik leaving. We need to understand the reason for this difference.

All of the above questions tell us that there is an essential difference in the content of Rashi's comments here compared to those in the book of Rus and the Midrash.

The Explanation

The basis of understanding Rashi is knowing the correct definition of the words used by Rashi and the Midrash. The Hebrew words are הודָה – "Hodoh," which we translated as its beauty, זיוה – "Zivoh," which we translated as its splendor, and הדרָה – "Hadoroh" which we translated as majesty. There are many different translations for these three words, which Rashi's supercommentaries and the commentaries of the Midrash offer. By understanding these words correctly, we truly appreciate the effect of a Tzaddik on a city, according to Rashi. We can also understand why his explanation here differs from his explanation of the Midrash.

Rashi's explanation is understandable even to a total beginner. Furthermore, he does not translate these words here. We must say that he is relying on how the Torah uses these words. We shall now examine how each of these three words is used in the Torah:

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1. "Hadoroh – הדרה": We find the word "Hodor – הדר" used in the Torah in the verse⁶, "... you shall honor (והדרת - from the word הדר) the elderly ..." This is true in our verse. The honor of the city consists of the presence of honorable things. The fact that a righteous person lives in the city causes it to be proper.
2. "Zivoh – זיבה": We find a common expression "זיו השמש," meaning sunshine. This refers to the illumination caused by the rays of the sun. The presence of a Tzaddik in the city sheds light on the city and its inhabitants. In other words, everyone in the city learns to conduct themselves from his good actions.
3. "Hodoh – הודה": The Torah says that⁷, "You shall bestow some of your majesty (מהודך – from the word הוד) upon him (Yehoshua)." The meaning of "Hod" is also light, but it is not merely sunshine or the rays of the sun, which one enjoys. It refers to a very bright light, which causes fear and awe. It causes the people of the city to feel humbled. The presence of the righteous individual in the city brings its inhabitants to self-nullification and humility.

This is all true, according to Rashi. According to Peshat, the positive effect of the Tzaddik is explained by his serving as a good example. He demonstrates to the people how to live. The Midrash, on the other hand, understands that it is the merit of the Tzaddik that benefits the city. Therefore, the Midrash cannot say that the righteous imbues the city's inhabitants with humility. They will not become humble because of the Tzaddik's merit. His merit merely enhances the quality of the city. However, for Rashi, who understands that the righteous person sets an example for those around him, humility is the beginning of all other qualities.

This also explains why the question that bothers the Midrash does not concern Rashi. As the Midrash points out, it is true that even after Yaakov left Israel, his parents remained there. If the point is that the merit of a Tzaddik raises the city's stature, we can indeed ask that the city still have two righteous people, Yitzchok and Rivkah. However, according to Rashi, who explains the Torah according to Peshat, it would seem that Yitzchok and Rivkah could not help much. They benefitted the city by teaching others and setting an example for them. Rashi tells us regarding Yitzchok⁸ that "his eyes had become dim, and he could not leave his house. He was comparable to a dead person." Because Yitzchok was blind and confined to the house, it is evident that Rivkah had to take care of him. Their *merit* did indeed shield the people of Be'er Sheva. However, they did not mix with the people of the city. Hence, they could neither teach nor serve as an example to them.

This also explains the difference between Rashi's comments here and those of his in the book of Rus. Naomi could not serve as much of an example to the people of Moav. Instead, that righteous woman's presence elevated her

6. Parshas Kedoshim, Vayikroh 19:32.

7. Parshas Pinchos, Bamidbar 27:20.

8. See Rashi to our Parshah, Bereishis 28:13, the heading "and the G-d of Yitzchok."

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city's status and shielded them. This is along the way that the Midrash understands our verse. Rashi emphasizes this by adding that when she left, the praise of the city went with her. Just the fact that she was there caused the city to be praiseworthy. However, leaving the city did provide its populace with a great lesson. Rashi is not merely referring to Naomi's leaving Moav. He is also talking about Rus herself. This is why Rashi explains that her citation from the book of Rus is "regarding Naomi and Rus." Even though she was a princess, she decided to leave with her mother-in-law and connect herself to Hashem by becoming a Jew. She provided them with a life lesson by her leaving the city.

A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

The explanation of the holy Ohr Hachaim⁹ in the verse "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, and he went to Choron" is well known. It is a reference to the descent of the soul into the body. Spiritually, Be'er Sheva refers to the source of the soul. Choron is the spiritual concept of this world. Only by descending to this physical and material world can the soul reach the most incredible heights.

Rashi is teaching us an additional lesson. *"The Torah had only to write, 'And Yaakov went to Choron.'"* All that is necessary for the Torah to tell us is that the soul descends to this world. Here, the soul faces all sorts of obstacles to serving G-d, Whose presence is concealed. Yet the soul overcomes these obstacles and elevates this world, transforming it into a dwelling place for the Almighty. *"Why did it mention his departure?"* The entire point would be that the soul is in this world! Rashi answers this question by telling us that *"the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression. While the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor, and he is its majesty."* The world of souls makes an impression upon the soul. It feels Hashem's beauty, splendor, and majesty. The fact that despite basking in the light of Hashem, the soul comes down here is absolute self-sacrifice. It is clear that in the merit of this sacrifice alone, all souls will return to where they belong with the coming of Moshiach!

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vayetztei 5725 and 5748)

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

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9. Our Parshah, Bereishis 28:14.

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