בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Vayeitzei

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

by
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn

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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 ל"א, נ': אִם־תְּעַנֶּה אֶת־בְּנֹתַי וְאִם־תִּקַּח נָשִׁים עַל־בְּנֹתָי אֵין אִישׁ עִמָּנוּ רְאֵה אֱלֹקִים עֵד 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 take wives in addition to my daughters when no one is with us; Behold! G-d is a witness between you and me."

Rashi Heading - my daughters, etc. 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

Rashi consistently follows several ironclad rules in his commentary on 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 even a beginner student can understand it. That is why, at times, we find a question in the Torah portion that other commentaries explain. Nevertheless, Rashi says, "I don't know the reason for this," or uses different words to that effect. [1] It is not because the other commentaries know more than Rashi. Instead, Rashi means that he cannot answer the question according to the Torah's literal explanation. The other commentators explain the question using different approaches in the Torah.

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

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 considered Jews. As children of Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, we were also children of Noach. However, we fit into a particular category of Noachide children. The category to which we belonged was deemed greatly

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.

praiseworthy by Hashem. Our praiseworthiness was for undertaking His commands voluntarily. Hence, we were not permitted to obey any commandment which would be given to the Jews that would contradict their current obligations. We know that the entire human race was obligated to keep the seven commandments that applied to all humankind. However, humankind was also obligated to perform other commandments. These were obligations that all humanity accepted. 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, Vayeitzei, we encounter a compelling question about 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 Torah's simple, literal meaning. If a question would keep a beginning student from understanding the Torah's intention, it would seem that Rashi has not done his job. That is why there are numerous places in the Torah where an obvious question goes unanswered by Rashi. He often says, "I don't know," or the like[1]. Yet other commentaries do answer the same question. This does not demonstrate that the other commentaries know something that Rashi did not. Rather, it shows that the question has an answer in facets of Torah learning other than Peshat. However, Rashi seeks an explanation according to the Torah's literal meaning. According to Peshat, there is no answer.

The obvious question in our Torah portion (with which other commentators aside from Rashi do deal) is that we find that our forefather Yaakov married four (or two) sisters. [2] Further on, Rashi tells us that [3] "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 were given. The Torah commands one person not to marry two (or more) sisters. It is written, [4] "You shall not take a woman with her sister in marriage as rivals … in her lifetime."

Perhaps Rashi neither asks nor answers this question here because the Torah's prohibition is given much later. Hence the beginning student is not yet aware of the prohibition or the question. However, this

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.

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 saying the Patriarchs were particular about keeping all the Mitzvos only when they were in Israel. However, Yaakov married Lavan's daughters when he was in Charan, which was outside Israel.

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

Another commentary answers that Yaakov was obligated to marry all four sisters. Yaakov prophetically knew that he would have twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. However, this certainly does not align with Peshat. At the outset, he was not commanded to marry Bilhah or Zilpah, and they were given to him as handmaidens for Rochel and Leah. According to Peshat, his original plan was to marry Rochel. He only married the other wives because Lovon tricked him.

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 accepted only those Mitzvos that were more lenient. A practical difference between the two opinions could be as follows. The Talmud says that a convert is considered a new person.[6] Before conversion, the individual was a gentile. Now he is a Jew, who is a 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. If this is the case, Yaakov did not marry two or four sisters. He married women who were 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 several reasons:

5. Bereishis 32:5.
6. See Talmud Yevomos, 22a.

a. The Torah does not write that any laws whatsoever applied to the Jews before the giving of the Torah. This, of course, excludes the seven Noachide Laws. [7] We also cannot say that voluntarily fulfilling 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 regarded as a newborn child.
b. Not once in his commentary does Rashi mention this law. Quite the contrary, the Torah implies that a convert (before the giving of the Torah) is not considered a newborn child. Hashem told Avrohom that "he shall come to his fathers in peace after his conversion." In other words, even after Avrohom's conversion, Terach is still considered his father, and he will be joined to him after death.
c. The Torah lists people one may not marry. There is a significant difference between the category of two sisters and the other categories. There is a psychological reason not to marry two sisters. A natural love exists between siblings. Two sisters marrying the same man would compromise that love and cause jealousy between them. It makes no difference whether or not, before the giving of the Torah, a convert is considered a new baby. One would still not be allowed to marry two sisters who converted, as it would damage the natural love 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, which is why they were so precious to G-d. As it is written, [8] "Since Avrohom listened to My voice, kept My charge, My commands, ordinances, and laws."

From this, it is evident that the obligation takes precedence when an obligatory law conflicts with a self-imposed law.

That is the reason that Avrohom did not circumcise himself until he was commanded to do so[9]. One of the prohibitions incumbent upon all humanity 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, as this would cause him to transgress a prohibition.

The same is true regarding Yaakov marrying sisters. Although deception was not one of the seven commandments, it was prohibited. That is why Yaakov said to Lavan[10], "What have you done to me? Did I not work with you for Rochel? Why have you deceived me?" Yaakov's claim was based on the fact that all people of the world had agreed not to deceive. Yaakov had promised to marry her. In addition, he had given

7. There are various other exceptions, such as circumcision.
8. Bereishis 26:5.
9. This is true despite the fact that he kept all of the other 612 Mitzvos.
10. Bereishis 28:25.

her the "signs" to ensure that he married the right sister. In this case, the obligation to keep one's word precedes the prohibition against marrying two sisters.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

From this story, we learn a fundamental lesson. It is imperative to follow every tiny detail of the Torah. Yet it is even more essential to ensure that one does not hurt someone else in the process.

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

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

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