

בס"ד

# THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

# Parshas Mikeitz

4 Teves, 5784 – December 16, 2023

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

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### Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית מ"ד, ז': ויאמרו אליו למה ידבר אדני פדברים האלה חלילה לעבדיך מעשות פדבר הזה:

רש"י ד"ה חלילה לעבדיך: חולין הוא לנו, לשון גנאי. ותרגום חס לעבדיך, חס מאת הקב"ה יהי עלינו מעשות זאת והרבה חס ושלום יש בתלמוד בלשון הזה:

**Bereishis 44:7:** And they said to him, "Why should my master say such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do a thing like this!

**Rashi Heading - Far be it from your servants:** Heb. חלילה it is mundane for us (חולין an expression of disgrace). The Targum renders: חס לעבד may Hashem spare us, i.e., may the Holy One, blessed be He, save us from doing this. (May He never allow us to do such a thing!) There are many such expressions in the Talmud: חס ושלום G-d forbid.

### Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Mikeitz, tells us that Yaakov's children went down to Egypt to procure food during the years of famine. They did not recognize the ruler of Egypt, from whom they received food, but he recognized them. He was none other than their brother Yosef, who they had sold into slavery in Egypt years earlier. He gave them food to bring back to Israel, but he also gave them a warning. They may not come back without their youngest brother, Binyomin.

Their father, Yaakov, was afraid to send Binyomin, but he ultimately relented and sent him. Yosef again gave them provisions and sent them on their way. However, he had someone place his goblet in Binyomin's sack this time. He (falsely) accused them of stealing his cup. They asked why he should speak such words! Far be it from us (חלילה in Hebrew) to do such a thing. Rashi gives two explanations of the Hebrew word חלילה. One is that the word which the Torah uses is related to the word חולין, meaning mundane. Rashi goes on to say that this word implies something disgraceful. Rashi then cites an explanation from Onkelos, an Aramaic translation of the Torah. He explains the Hebrew word חלילה to mean that Hashem should spare them from doing something of this sort.

Earlier, the Torah used the same Hebrew word in a different context. When Avrohom pleaded with G-d to save the people of Sodom, he used the exact phrase. "Far be it from You to do such a thing" means killing the righteous and the wicked. There, Rashi explains the name as saying it is "mundane" for You. Far be it from You to do such a thing! However, Rashi does not mention that it is a disgrace. Rashi also does not add the explanation of Onkelos, as he does here. We need to understand why.

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The explanation is that there it was talking about Hashem. Hashem will not do something mundane. Here, however, we are talking about people. They are great people; everyone could tell that they were people for whom that which is mundane is considered disgraceful. Hence, they would not steal Yosef's cup. However, it is still not all that clear. He accused them of stealing. Is doing something mundane any worse? Therefore, Rashi adds a second explanation, that they were praying to Hashem; G-d forbid they should do something of that sort.

### Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah Portion, Mikeitz, we are told that Yosef's brothers came to Mitzraim to seek food during the years of famine. They had to deal with their younger brother Yosef to procure food. After they had sold him into slavery in last week's Torah portion, he had become the second in command in all of Egypt. It was he who controlled all of the distribution of food. However, they did not recognize him, yet he knew them<sup>1</sup>. After he sent them on their way, he told them not to return without their youngest brother, Binyomin. Their father had not wanted to send Binyomin, fearing for his youngest son's life. However, having no choice but to comply with the ruler's demand, they returned with Binyomin. When Yosef again sent them on their way, he had the overseer of his house hide his goblet in Binyomin's sack. He then had them accused of stealing his property.

The Torah tells us<sup>2</sup>, "They told him, why should my master speak such words? Far be it (Hebrew חלילה - Chalilah) from your servants to do such a thing." Rashi gives two different explanations for the word "חלילה - Chalilah" far be it."

In his first explanation, he says that the word "Chalilah" comes from the word "חולין – Chulin<sup>3</sup>" meaning mundane. "It is mundane (unfitting) for us, (the word that the Torah uses is) an expression of disgrace."

Rashi quotes Onkelus, the classic Aramaic translation/commentary of the Torah, for his second explanation. Onkelus says that the word חלילה is related to the Aramaic word "חס – Chas." "The Targum translates it 'חס לעבדיך – May Hashem spare your servants,' may Hashem spare us from doing this. There are many such expressions in the Talmud, such as חס ושלום (May G-d protect us)."

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1. Rashi explains (our Parshah, Bereishis 42:8) that the reason that they did not recognize them was because when they took leave of each other he did not yet have a beard. However, he recognized them because they were older, and they already had beards.

2. Our Parshah, Bereishis 44:7.

3. We find many instances of the word Chullin being used to describe something mundane. For example, sanctified sacrificial meat is described as קודש or קדשים, meaning holy. Meat which has not been sanctified and has not been used for sacrificial purposes is described as חולין. Likewise, we find that weekdays, as opposed to Shabbos and festivals are referred to as ימות החול.

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Previously, when Avrohom was pleading with Hashem to save the people of Sodom,<sup>4</sup> he said: "Will You destroy the righteous together with the wicked?" There, the expression "חלילה - Chalilah" is also used. Avrohom continues beseeching Hashem, saying<sup>5</sup>, "Chalilah - חלילה Far be it from You to do such a thing." Rashi explains, "It is mundane (meaning unfitting) for You. They will say that this is His craft ..."

### Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

When the Torah uses the word "Chalilah - חלילה" for the first time, Rashi is satisfied with explaining that its meaning is that "it is mundane for You." However, in our Torah portion, Rashi explains that it is an "expression of disgrace."

Moreover, in addition to this, Rashi also quotes Onkelos' translation. If this translation is necessary for us to understand the meaning of the word, why did Rashi not cite it the first time that the Torah used this term?

### The Explanation

The Torah first mentions the word "Chalilah" when Avrohom uses it in his plea to Hashem. The term "mundane" cannot apply to G-d. Merely saying that the act of destroying Sodom would be "mundane" means that G-d would not do so; Hashem would never perform such a deed. There is no need to say anything further.

However, in our verse, we are using the word "mundane" regarding human beings. People regularly perform mundane acts. Saying that stealing the cup would be a small act would not persuade Yosef that the brothers would not have taken the cup. They are human beings, and at times, they perform small actions. Therefore, if the point is to clarify to Yosef that they would not have stolen his cup, Rashi must explain that the word "Chalilah," as the Torah uses it here, has an additional connotation. That is why Rashi found it necessary to tell us that the word "Chalilah" also means a disgrace here. The brothers declared their innocence because such a deed would be not merely mundane but disgraceful. Even the lowly Egyptians could see this. Everyone saw that Yaakov's sons were honorable people. To them, an action that others consider mundane would be disgraceful.

However, Rashi's comments leave us with a question. We are saying that, according to Rashi, Yosef's brothers were incredibly pious. In other words, they were religious to the extent that a mundane activity would be considered disgraceful. However, he says an ordinary act is even more shameful than stealing!

Therefore, to justify themselves and declare their innocence, they would have to state something demonstrating that robbery would be out of the question for them. Thus, Rashi adds a second interpretation. He cites the Aramaic translation of "Chalilah," which we find throughout the Talmud. It means "far be it from us." Based on this explanation, the brothers were praying to G-d. They asked Hashem to be merciful and spare them from such horrendous actions.

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4. Parshas Vayeiros, Bereishis 18:23.

5. Parshas Vayeiros, Bereishis 18:25.

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However, since we do not find the word "Chalilah - חלילה" used in this manner in the Bible at all, Rashi uses this as a second explanation. The fact that Rashi uses two answers is the basis of one of the fundamental rules for the Rebbe's methodology for understanding Rashi. Whenever Rashi gives two answers for something, each has difficulty, which is not present in the other. However, the first explanation is closer to Peshat.

### A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

In Torah Ohr, the Alter Rebbe writes<sup>6</sup> that every Jew contains attributes from our three patriarchs, Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. To coin a phrase, we can say that the characteristics of our forefathers are a part of our spiritual DNA.

Contrast this to Yaakov's children, who were the fathers of the "Shevotim," meaning the tribes of Israel. All Jews do not inherit all of their traits. Only their descendants, the members of each tribe, inherited their characteristics. The tribe they belong to determines and marks the differences between the spiritual service of one and another. However, they did bequeath *general* characteristics shared by Yaakov's children to every Jew.

The claim that "this is mundane, which is an expression which connotes disgrace" is a statement that we cannot attribute to any of the brothers in particular. It came from all of Yaakov's children equally.

A Jew must be aware that *his entire being* is holiness. He and the mundane world exist on totally different planes. The fact that one does need to busy oneself with physical, daily activities should be considered a disgrace in one's eyes.

The disgrace of being engaged in physicality should not remain in the recesses of his soul. It must be evident to everyone, including a gentile from the lowest of all nations, that anything that is not holy is every bit as disgraceful for a Jew as robbery is for someone else.

The above is true despite the Torah's command that<sup>7</sup> "six days shall you work and perform all of your labor." We spend the bulk of our time occupied with mundane weekday activities. Nevertheless, rather than drawing ourselves down to the physical, we elevate the material to transform it into holiness. We can do this by following the guidelines<sup>8</sup> : "All of your deeds shall be for the sake of Heaven," and<sup>9</sup> "In all of your ways you shall know Him."

One may ask how a Jew becomes empowered to be within the physical, mundane world and to deal with it while at the same time remaining separate from it. How can I be in the world while finding ordinary activities disgraceful simultaneously? The answer is that we derive that power from Hashem; the G-dly spark within us,

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6. See the discourse at the beginning of Parshas Va'airo.

7. Parshas Yisro, Shemos 20:9. Please note that there is an opinion that this is considered a positive commandment.

8. Mishnah Avos Chapter 2 Mishnah 12.

9. Mishlei 3:6.

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our G-dly soul, empowers us. Creation comes from a level of Divine light that Hashem measures out so the world can handle it. Nonetheless, this light transcends the world, and this world can never truly grasp it.

Our work within the world transforms it into His "dwelling place." This paves the way for Moshiach. Our work in this world should finally bring "Moshiach Now!"

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz 5725)*

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

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