

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Vayigash

7 Teves, 5779 – December 15, 2018

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית מ"ה, ג': ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אתו כי נבהלו מפניו:

Bereishis 45:3: And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" However, his brothers could not answer him because they were startled by his presence.

Synopsis

This week's portion, Vayigash, begins by telling us that Yehudah approached Yosef and spoke harshly to him, demanding his brother's release. He told him at length their father Yaakov did not want to allow his youngest son, Binyomin, to accompany his brothers to Egypt, because he was afraid for Binyomin's life. Nevertheless, Yaakov did give in and allow Binyomin to go, because Yosef had told them that otherwise he would not meet with them. Yehudah told Yosef that after having accepted responsibility for Binyomin, he could not face his father if he returned without Binyomin. Yosef, no longer able to maintain the charade, told his brothers who he really was. He said¹ "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" What sort of question was that? Throughout the discussions between Yosef and his brothers, they had discussed his father. Obviously, a beginning student would be bothered by this difficulty. Yet Rashi remains silent!

The explanation is that Rashi answered this question earlier. After Yaakov was shown Yosef's bloody coat, and was convinced that a wild animal must have devoured him², the Torah tells us that³ "Yaakov mourned for his son many days." Rashi explains there that it means that he mourned for his beloved son for 22 years! The Torah goes on to tell us that⁴ "he (Yaakov) refused to be consoled." Yosef was not asking whether his father was still alive. Rather it was an exclamation. Can my father possibly still be alive after 22 years of constant anguish from such a great loss?

Rashi's Explanation

In this talk, the Rebbe is explaining why Rashi remains silent and does not explain something which seems to require explanation. Rashi *always* explains whatever the beginning student needs to know in order to understand the Torah's simple meaning. This is made clear by the instances in the Torah that Rashi writes "I do

1. Our Parshah, Bereishis 45:3.
2. Parshas Vayeishev, Bereishis 37:33.
3. Parshas Vayeishev, Bereishis 37:34.
4. Parshas Vayeishev, Bereishis 37:35.

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not know⁵." He writes that he doesn't know despite the fact that other commentaries offer explanations. What Rashi actually means to say by "I don't know" is that he doesn't know an explanation according to Peshat.

If we encounter something which seems to be difficult to understand, yet Rashi does not comment, it must mean one of two things. Either in reality there is no difficulty, or Rashi answered the question earlier.

In our Parshah we find that Yosef asks whether his father is still alive; something which Yosef obviously knew from his discussions with his brothers. Despite that, Rashi offers no explanation.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

This week's Torah portion, Vayigash, begins with Yehudah confronting his brother Yosef. They have a long conversation, in which Yehudah tells Yosef that their father had not wished to allow them to return to Egypt with Binyomin, Yaakov's youngest son. Finally, Yehudah prevailed upon his father, because he accepted responsibility for Binyomin's welfare.

The Torah goes on to tell us how Yosef finally revealed his identity to his brothers. Twenty-two years earlier they had thrown him into a pit and he was sold into slavery. They had no idea what had become of him. They were not aware that he ultimately became the viceroy of Egypt. When they came to Egypt to request provisions from the viceroy during the years of famine, they were not aware that they were actually speaking to their brother. It reached a point that Yosef could no longer maintain the charade. The Torah tells us that⁶ "Yosef could not bear all those (Egyptians) standing beside him, and he called out, 'Take everyone away from me!' He did this in order that one stood with him when he made himself known to his brothers." When he finally revealed himself to his brothers, he said⁷ "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?"

Up until that point, Yosef and Yehudah had been discussing Yaakov. Why would Yosef suddenly ask whether or not he was alive? It is such a strange, inappropriate question. Yet Rashi does not offers no explanation whatsoever to the beginning student!

The Abarbanel explains in his commentary, that Yosef meant to engage his brothers in conversation. Due to the manner in which they parted ways 22 years earlier, he knew that his brothers would be embarrassed to meet him. He was "making conversation" in order to give them a chance to regain their composure.

The beginning student already encountered two instances where Rashi gave a similar explanation:

5. See for example Parshas Vayishlach, Bereishis 35:13, Parshas Terumah, Shemos 25:29, Parshas Terumah, Shemos 26:24, Parshas Terumah, Shemos 27:10, Parshas Tzav, Vayikroh 8:11, Parshas Shemini, Vayikroh 10:15, Parshas Tazriah, Vayikroh 13:4, Parshas Chukas, Bamidbar 21:11, Parshas Pinchas, Bamidbar 26:13, Parshas Pinchas, Bamidbar 26:16 and Parshas V'zos Haberochoh, Devorim 33:24.

6. Our Parshah, Bereishis 45:1.

7. Our Parshah, Bereishis 45:3.

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1. After Adam and Chavah committed the sin of eating from the forbidden fruit, Hashem appeared to them. The Torah tells us that⁸ “the Lord G-d called to man, and He said to him, ‘Where are you?’” Rashi explains⁹ that “Hashem knew where he was, but He asked him in order to enter into conversation with him, in order that he should not be frightened to answer if He should punish him suddenly.”
2. After Kayin (Cain) killed his brother Hevel (Abel), Hashem approached him and said the following¹⁰. “Where is Hevel your brother?” Here Rashi cites the words “where is Hevel your brother,” and explains that Hashem wanted “to enter with him into mild words, perhaps he would repent and say, ‘I killed him, and I sinned against You.’”

Having learned these two explanations of Rashi earlier, the beginning student would understand why Yosef asked his brothers whether his father is still alive. Rashi already explained it twice. He knew that they would be embarrassed before him because of the way they treated him in the past. He therefore started off by engaging them in conversation in order to lighten the tension and help them remain calm.

However, here this answer is untenable according to Peshat. Yosef and Yehudah had already spent quite some time discussing his father. They had spoken about how Binyomin’s imprisonment would affect his father’s health. If Yosef only wanted to calm them down by entering into conversation, why did he choose to ask whether their father is alive? Why did he not ask them about their families?

There is another explanation which Rashi gave earlier which could perhaps also serve as an answer to the beginning student’s question. It is possible to explain Yosef’s words as a statement of wonder rather than a question which was asked in order to ascertain information. We find a similar explanation from Rashi earlier. When G-d approached Kayin and asked where his brother is, his response was¹¹ “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” There Rashi explains that “This is a question asked in astonishment, as is every “hey” prefix vocalized with a “chataf patach¹².”

However, this explanation does not work either. For one thing, at the time Yaakov was 130 years old. This was much less than the life span of both his father Yitzchok and his grandfather Avrohom. Based on that, there was no reason for Yosef to have been astonished. Secondly, what is the connection between this statement, and the words with which he began, namely “I am Yosef?”

8. Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 3:9.

9. *ibid.*

10. Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 4:9.

11. *ibid.* For similar explanations of Rashi, see also Parshas Vayeiros, Bereishis 18:25, Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 27:36, Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 27:38 and Parshas Vayetzei, Bereishis 29:15. This is not a complete list.

12. The Hebrew letter “Hay – ה” when used as a prefix usually means “the.” However, the letter “Hay – ה” at the beginning of a word together with the vowel “Chataf Patach” (◌ֿ) indicates either a factual question or, as Rashi states here, a question which serves as a declaration of surprise.

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Additionally, what was Yosef's point in sharing his surprise that his father was still alive with his brothers? It certainly does not seem to have been appropriate at this point, at the exact time that he was revealing to his brothers his true identity. If, however, Yosef was indeed asking a question that would have been the perfect time to ask it!

The Explanation

There is, in fact, a very simple explanation to all of the above questions. After Yaakov's children showed him Yosef's bloodied coat, he was sure that his favorite son had been killed. The Torah tells us that¹³ "all his sons and all his daughters arose to console him, but he refused to be consoled." As a result of this¹⁴, "he mourned for his son many days." Rashi explains that "many days" means 22 years. He explains that this was a punishment for the 22 years that Yaakov neglected to honor his father¹⁵.

It seems strange that he was able to continue mourning for all of the 22 years that he thought his son was dead! Rashi explains, that "No one accepts consolation for a person who is really alive but believed to be dead. It is decreed that a dead person should be forgotten from the heart, but not a living person."

Knowing all of this, the beginning student understands Yosef's words were a declaration of shock that his father was still alive. The student learned how beloved Yosef was to his father. He therefore grasps the sort of grief and pain which Yaakov underwent. It is indeed amazing that he was able to endure so much constant pain for 22 consecutive years, and yet remain alive!

Based on this, we can also understand why Yosef was so focused on telling his brothers to return to their father quickly. He also emphasized that they should bring him back to Egypt quickly. He told them to "*Hurry* and go up to my father, and tell him that this is what your son Yosef said. 'G-d has made me a lord over all the Egyptians. Come down to me, *do not tarry*.'" Yosef was concerned that any delay could actually endanger his father's life!

This also explains why Yosef said "my father" and not "our father." Yaakov had been punished for not fulfilling the Mitzvah of honoring his father. Throughout those 22 years, the ability to fulfill this Mitzvah was withheld from Yosef.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

There was another reason for Yosef's haste to be reunited with his father. Yosef knew that the 22 years with which his father was to be punished had finally come to an end. His punishment was complete. That being the case, he wanted to assure that his father would not be punished for even one moment longer than necessary.

13. Parshas Vayeishev, Bereishis 37:35.

14. Parshas Vayeishev, Bereishis 37:34.

15. He spent 20 years at Lovon's house, and it took him two years to return home. Hence, he was not home, and therefore was unable to honor his father for 22 years. He was physically unable to honor his father; nonetheless, a Tzaddik of Yaakov's caliber is held to a much higher standard than anyone else.

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We know that there are two approaches to education. Our Sages tell us¹⁶ regarding education, that one must push away with the left hand¹⁷, and draw near with the right hand¹⁸. One must make sure, that the very moment that there is no longer a need to inflict a punishment, that it must be stopped as quickly as possible. One's focus must be one raising students with the attribute of kindness.

So too was the case with Yaakov; the very moment that his punishment was complete, he was to be relieved of it. As a result of our service of Hashem in exile, may He immediately bring us into the complete and true redemption.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vayigash, 5734)

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16. See Talmud Sotah 47, a and Sanhedrin 107, b.

17. The left hand refers to the weaker hand. Even when a punishment is necessary, it should be kept to a minimum.

18. The stronger hand must be used to reward students, and to demonstrate kindness to them.

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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

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

* * *

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR MOTHER
Mrs. Brocha bas Reb Tzvi Nechemiah Hacoheh ע"ה Cohen
Passed away on 8 Shevat, 5778
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life**

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Mr. Sholom Moshe Hacoheh ben Tzivia ש"י Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery**

* * *

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May he merit to be a Chossid, a Yerei Shomayim and a Lamdon

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