

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Toldos

Cheshvan 29, 5778 – November 18, 2017

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית כ"ה, כ"ד: וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לִלְדֹת וְהָיָה תוֹמִים בְּבֶטְנָהּ:

רש"י ד"ה וימלאו ימיה: אבל בתמר כתיב ויהי בעת לדתה. שלא מלאו ימיה כי לשבעה חדשים ילדתם: ד"ה והנה תומים: חסר, ובתמר תאומים מלא לפי ששניהם צדיקים, אבל כאן אחד צדיק ואחד רשע:

Bereishis 25:24: And her days to give birth were completed, and behold, there were twins in her womb.

Rashi Heading - And her days...were completed: But regarding Tamar it is written: "And it came about at the time of her travail," because her term (of pregnancy) was not filled, for she gave birth to them after seven months.

here were twins in her womb: (תוֹמִים - twins is spelled) defectively¹ (missing an "aleph" and a "yud"), but concerning Tamar, it is written תְּאוּמִים with the full spelling, (with an "aleph" and "yud") because they (Tamar's children, Peretz and Zerach) were both righteous, but here, one was righteous (Ya'akov) and one was wicked (Aisov)

A Brief Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Toldos, the Torah tell us of our matriarch Rivkah conceiving and giving birth. Rashi comments on two points. Firstly, regarding Rivkah it says that her days (of pregnancy) were completed. Whereas further on, when the Torah describes Tamar giving birth, it does not use this expression. Rashi explains that this is because Rivkah was pregnant for a full nine months, while Tamar gave birth after seven months. Secondly, regarding Rivkah it spells the Hebrew word for twins (Te'omim) defectively, i.e. missing two letters. Regarding Tamar it spells the word completely. Rashi explains that Tamar's children were both righteous. However Rivkah's gave birth to one righteous son, and one wicked son.

The questions Rashi discusses here will not bother the student yet. They will not bother him until he learns the following thirteen chapters. Only then will he reach the verse regarding Tamar. Why is Rashi explaining this here? We also need to understand why Rashi points out the difference between the complete spelling, and the spelling of the same word missing letters. This is generally a non-issue in Peshat. The only exception is when it answers a question. What question does Rashi answer by pointing out the difference in spelling between the two

1. Throughout all of the books of the Bible, most words are written מלא with all of the letters present. There are, however, also words which are written חסר defectively. This means that they are missing letters which are to be understood. The Hebrew word for twins, תאומים is spelled fully when the Torah tells us of Tamar giving birth. However here, regarding Rivkah, it is spelled תוּמִים. It is missing the א and the י.

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places?

The explanation is, that Rashi was not bothered by the differences between the Torah's description of Rivkah and Tamar. Rather what does bother Rashi is that the Torah tells us about Rivkah that "her days to give birth were completed." It is an expression which we have not found anywhere in the Torah until this point. Rashi is explaining to us that reason that the Torah uses that expression here. It is to show us the contrast to Tamar's pregnancy. It was not complete. He is showing us, that there is such a thing as carrying full term (nine months), and such a thing as carrying for only seven months. The fact that this expression is not used for Tamar teaches us that she only carried for seven months. She merited to have less of the pain that accompanies pregnancy, because both of her children were Tzaddikim.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Toldos we are told of our matriarch Rivkah conceived and gave birth to twins; the righteous Yaakov, the father of the Jewish nation, and the wicked Aisov, father of Edom. The Torah tells us of their birth². "And her days to give birth were completed, and behold, there were twins in her womb." Rashi explains that "But regarding Tamar it is written³, 'And it came about at the time of her travail,' because her term (of pregnancy) was not filled, for she gave birth to them after seven months." Tamar also gave birth to twins. However, regarding Rivkah the Torah says that "her days to give birth were completed." The Torah does not say this regarding Tamar. Rashi explains the difference between the two. Rivkah carried to term, for a complete nine months. Tamar, on the other hand, only carried for seven months.

Following this explanation, Rashi goes on to explain other words of the verse. When the Torah tells us that she gave birth to twins, Te'omim - תאומים it leaves out the letters Aleph - א and Yud , י spelling the word תומים. On the other hand, regarding Tamar, the Torah uses the complete spelling, תאומים. Rashi explains the reason for the change in spelling. Tamar's children were both righteous. However in the case of Rivkah, one was righteous and the other wicked.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

When there is seemingly a contradiction between two different verses, Rashi always points it out when the Torah tells us the second verse. Until that point no question has arisen. However here Rashi is pointing out the difference between Rivkah and Tamar *more than thirteen chapters* before the Torah tells us about Tamar! It will be quite some time before the beginning student has a question, yet Rashi discusses it here! Moreover, Rashi answers the same question further on, when the Torah does tell us about Tamar giving birth!

2. Bereishis 25:24.

3. Bereishis 38:27.

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Obviously, we can ask the same question about Rashi's second comments on the difference between the way the Hebrew word for twins is spelled both here and there. The student has no question yet, because he has yet to learn about Tamar.

Furthermore, as a general rule, whether a word is spelled in its completely or not, is not an issue according to Peshat. That is why in the overwhelming majority of cases, Rashi does not comment on a word which is spelled "defectively." The only instances on which he does comment, is when the word being spelled missing letters, answers a question according to Peshat. We need to understand what the question is, and how leaving missing two letters from the word answers the question.

The Explanation

Rashi is not bothered by the difference between what the Torah says here and what it says further on regarding Tamar. The question which bothers Rashi is why the Torah uses the words, "and her days to give birth were completed." Up until this point, we find no such expression in the Torah. What do these words add to our understanding of what the Torah is saying? The natural way for a woman to give birth is after nine months.

Rashi answers this question by pointing out what the Torah says regarding Tamar, "And it came about at the time of her travail." If not for what is written here, we may have assumed that there the Torah is just telling us that when Tamar gave birth after nine months, she realized that she had twins. Because the Torah uses this unusual expression for Rivkah, we understand that Tamar did not carry to term.

However, this explanation opens up a number of other questions. Based on what we just said, the entire reason for the Torah saying that "and her days to give birth were completed" was to teach us, that Tamar's days of pregnancy were not completed. In other words, she only carried her twins for seven months. Why did the Torah teach us this lesson here? There are others who gave birth closer to the story of Tamar.

Additionally, why does it matter that she gave birth after seven months. The Torah is not a story book. It does not tell us all of the details regarding everything that happened. Why do we need to know how many months Tamar was expecting? What does it come to teach us?

Finally, why did the righteous Rivkah have to carry her babies for a complete nine months? We know that pregnancy is painful, as Hashem said to Chava⁴, "I shall surely increase your sorrow and your pregnancy." Rashi, there, explains this to mean that "your pregnancy" refers to the pain of pregnancy. We also know that Rivkah's pregnancy was especially difficult. We are clearly told in our Torah portion that⁵, "And the children struggled within her, and she said, 'If it will be so, why am I like this?' And she went to inquire of G-d." Rashi explains that with the words "if it be so," she was saying "that the pain of pregnancy is so great." He further says that with the words "why am I like this," she was saying "why did I desire and pray to conceive?" Why did Hashem cause this

4. Bereishis 3:16.

5. Bereishis 25:22.

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poor, righteous woman to suffer for nine complete months? He could have allowed her to give birth after seven months!

In order to answer these questions, Rashi says that תּוּמִים twins is spelled defectively (missing an “Aleph” and a “Yud”), but concerning Tamar it is written, תְּאוּמִים with the full spelling, (with an “Aleph” and “Yud”) because they were both righteous, but here, one was righteous and one was wicked." We see that the Torah compares these two pregnancies. Both women gave birth to twins. But by pointing out differences between the two, we see that all aspects of the pregnancies can be compared and contrasted to each other. The fact that Rashi points out that in the case of Rivkah the Hebrew word for twins is spelled incompletely, unlike the case of Tamar, we see that there is an essential difference between the two.

This answers all of our questions. It answers why Rivkah was specifically chosen to be the one from whom we would learn about Tamar's pregnancy. It also explains why Rivkah carried her twins for the entire nine months, and Tamar did not carry to term. It is because Tamar gave birth to two righteous babies, she merited to experience less of the pain of carrying the babies, and hence she only carried them for seven months. Rivkah, who gave birth to one wicked child, had to carry them for the entire nine months.

A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

One question however remains. Tamar's conception came about in a manner that seemed to be very immodest⁶. On the other hand, we see in our Torah portion that Rivkah conceived in the most modest way imaginable. Her conception came about as an answer from G-d to the prayers of her and her husband Yitzchok. Why is it that one of her children was wicked? Why was it that she had to suffer for nine months?

This can question be answered by the mystical interpretation of a strange saying of the Sages, which is quoted by Rashi. When it says that⁷ "the children struggled within her," Rashi explains that "When she passed by the entrances of the Torah academies of Shem and Ever, Yaakov would run and struggle to come out; when she passed the entrance of a temple of idolatry, Aisov would run and struggle to come out." This requires a great deal of explanation. How is it possible that a child of Yitzchok and Rivkah, who were each the epitome of holiness, and were conceived in total purity, should have a natural inclination to idolatry and evil?

The explanation will be understood based on what the Rambam writes⁸. There are two types of Tzaddikim. There are those who have no inclination toward evil whatsoever. There are also those who are born with a nature which draws them to evil and impurity. Their purpose in life is to conquer their evil inclination. Aisov was such an individual. He had the potential to fully overcome his natural instincts. Had he done so, he would have been, as the Rambam writes, "more complete and perfected" than the natural Tzaddik.

6. See Bereishis 38:13 and further.

7. Bereishis 25:22.

8. Shmoneh Perokim, Chapter 6.

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That is why Rashi wrote that "one was righteous and the other evil." He did not mean to say that Aisov was actually evil. He meant that that was his nature, but he was given the ability to overcome it, had he only used his potential.

That is also the reason that Tamar's pregnancy is alluded to as far back as Rivkah. Her son Peretz was the ancestor of Moshiach. He is the one and only who has the power to nullify the evil of Aisov.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Toldos 5744 and Shabbos Parshas Re'eh 5743)

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