

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shemos

Teves 19, 5778 – January 6, 2018

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Shemos

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Rashi in His Own Words

שמות ב', י"ד: וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שָׂמְךָ לְאִישׁ שָׂר וְשֹׁפֵט עָלֵינוּ הֲלִהְרַגְנִי אַתָּה אִמֵּר כְּפִשׁוּטוֹ. וּמִדְרָשׁוֹ דַּאֲג לֹא עַל שְׂרָאָה בִּישְׂרָאֵל רִשְׁעִים דְּלְטוּרִין, אִמֵּר מֵעַתָּה שְׂמָא אִינַם רַאוּיִין לְהַגְּאֵל:

Shemos 2:14: And he retorted, "Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us? Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Egyptian?" Moshe became frightened and said, "Indeed, the matter has become known!"

Rashi Heading - Moshe became frightened: (This is to be explained) according to its simple meaning, (namely, that Moshe was afraid that “*Paroh* – Pharaoh” would kill him). According to the Midrash, it is interpreted to mean that he was worried because he saw in Israel wicked men, informers. He said that since this is so perhaps the Jews do not deserve to be redeemed!

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Shemos, is the beginning of the second book of the Torah. We are told how Moshe is brought up in Pharaoh's palace. He leaves the palace to see what the situation is with his fellow Jews. He sees an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Jewish slave. Moshe slays the Egyptian. The next day, he sees two Jews fighting with each other, and tells them to stop. They respond by asking him whether he plans on killing them, as he killed the Egyptian. The verse tells us that Moshe was afraid, and goes on to say that the matter has become known.

Rashi gives two explanations for Moshe's fear. The first is in keeping with the simple implication of the Torah. His actions became public knowledge! His second explanation follows the Midrashic explanation. Since Jews were actually fighting with each other, he was afraid that perhaps they did not deserve to be redeemed!

The Rebbe asks why Rashi felt a need to give two different explanations. The first explanation seems to fit in fine with the simple explanation of the verse. We know that Rashi's primary objective is to explain just that, the simple meaning of the verse! In this case it is especially difficult, because according to the Midrashic explanation, Rashi needs to explain the end of the verse, "the matter has become known," homiletically as well. Aside from the simple meaning, he also needs to add that *Moshe* was the one who knew, who became aware of why the Jews, among all of the nations of the world, deserved such a severe punishment!

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The explanation is that Rashi uses the Midrashic explanation to answer a different question. Why does the Torah tell us that Moshe was afraid? What does it teach us? It seems to be entirely irrelevant. Rashi uses the Midrash to explain its relevance.

The Rebbe goes on to reconcile the verse according to its simple meaning. He also reconciles the concept of absolute trust in G-d with the fear of worldly matters.

Rashi's Explanation

This week we begin reading the second book of the Torah, which is called Shemos. We are told of the birth of Moshe, and how he is brought up in Pharaoh's palace. We read¹ that "... Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers (his fellow Jews) ... he saw an Egyptian man strike a Hebrew man ... he (Moshe) struck the Egyptian. He went out on the next day ... and he said to the wicked man ... why will you strike your friend? He responded ... do you plan to kill me as you killed the Egyptian? Moshe became frightened and said 'The matter has become known.' Pharaoh heard of this occurrence ... and wanted to execute Moshe; and Moshe fled. "

Rashi cites the words "Moshe became frightened" and gives two explanations. The first is (that the verse should be explained) "according to its simple meaning." In other words, Rashi is saying that Moshe was afraid that Pharaoh would kill him. The second explanation Rashi offers is that it is to be explained "according to the Midrash. Moshe was worried because he saw wicked people, informers, in Israel. He said that since this is the case, perhaps they do not deserve to be redeemed."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Why is Rashi not satisfied with his first explanation? We find a general rule in Rashi's commentary to the Torah, that when he brings two disparate explanations for the same thing, there is some difficulty in each of them. However, the explanation he cites first is closer to Peshat. Furthermore, there does not seem to be anything lacking in his first explanation. Moshe was frightened because he discovered that what he had done to the Egyptian had become public knowledge! Why did Rashi also find it necessary to cite a *Midrashic* explanation "that Moshe was worried ... that perhaps the Jews did not deserve to be redeemed." The Midrash's explanation does not even seem to be hinted at in the verse².

It is especially problematic to explain our verse according to the Midrash. In the very same verse, after telling us that Moshe was afraid, Moshe says that "the matter has become known." According to Peshat

1. Shemos 2:11 – 15

2. This is especially true in this instance! Earlier, Hashem told Avrohom that his progeny would be enslaved. However, (Bereishis 15:9–21) He made a covenant with Avrohom that his descendants would be freed. G-d's covenant should have been enough to assuage any fear which Moshe may have otherwise had regarding the redemption of the Jews!

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these words present no problem. Moshe was afraid because the death of the Egyptian had become known. However, if we are explaining the verse according to the Midrash these words are very difficult to understand. What is the meaning of the words that "the matter has become known?" This difficulty forces Rashi to explain the words "the matter has become known" (in his second, Midrashic explanation) that now, he, *Moshe*, knew why the Jews from among all of the nations of the world, deserve such a very difficult punishment. This is also a seemingly difficult explanation, which does not seem to be alluded to in the verse.

The Explanation

The explanation to these apparent "difficulties" is as follows. Rashi is using the Midrash in order to answer a question which could be asked on our verse. Namely, why does the Torah tell us that "Moshe was afraid and said that the matter has become known?"

The Torah is not a history book. It is not meant to give us a chronological accounting of what happened. Rather, it provides each one of us with an "owner's manual" for our lives. It teaches us how to live. In as much as his fear did not instigate any action on Moshe's part, why should the Torah tell us that he was afraid. It was only later, when the news of what Moshe had done reached "*Paroh* – Pharaoh" that Moshe left Egypt and fled to Midian. This was prompted by the fact that *Paroh* wanted to execute him. What is the benefit of telling us here of Moshe's fear? What does it teach us? In what way is it relevant to us?

That is why Rashi quotes the Midrash. According to the Midrash we understand the benefit of our being told that Moshe was afraid. We now understand that his fear was because he now had a reason to suspect that perhaps the Jews did not deserve to be redeemed from Egypt.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

However, looking at the simple understanding of Rashi, there is still one difficulty remaining. There is a rule of the Sages that³ "a verse in Scripture always maintains its simple meaning." No matter how many layers of explanation we have for every letter of Torah, the simple explanation is true. This is especially true here, where Rashi cites the Peshat before the Midrash. The Torah must be teaching us something according to Peshat by telling us that Moshe was afraid.

In order to explain this, we must first preface the words of the Midrash⁴ on the verse⁵ "Yaakov was very frightened and was distressed." The Midrash says that "R' Pinchas said in the name of R' Reuven, there were two people who were assured (of success) by G-d, and nevertheless were afraid. (One was) the choicest of our forefathers and the other was the choicest of our prophets. The choicest of our forefathers was Yaakov ... Hashem said to him⁶ 'Behold I am with you,' and nevertheless he ultimately was afraid, as it says 'and

3. Talmud Shabbos 63, a

4. Bereishis Rabbah, at the beginning of Parshah 76

5. Bereishis 32:8

6. Bereishis 28:15

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Yaakov feared.’ The choicest of our prophets was Moshe ... G-d said to him⁷ ‘For I will be with you,’ and ultimately he was (also) afraid, as it says⁸ (regarding Og the king of Bashan) ‘Hashem said to Moshe, do not fear him.’ It is clear that Hashem would not have told him not to fear, had he not been afraid.”

The commentaries of the Midrash disagree about whether we are being told something positive, i.e. something which we should emulate, or not. Perhaps the Midrash is teaching us how *not* to behave.

According to some commentaries, both Yaakov and Moshe did not rely on an explicit promise from G-d due to their humility. They were afraid that perhaps they had sinned, and hence no longer deserved the fulfillment of Hashem's promise.

On the other hand, other commentaries explain that the Midrash is telling us not to learn from them. The proper form of conduct is not to fear, but rather always to be confident in G-d. This is actually implied by the continuation of the Midrash itself. The prophet scolds the Jewish people and tells us⁹ “And you forgot Hashem your Maker ... and you fear constantly the entire day.” In other words the prophet is rebuking the Jews for being afraid.

These opinions require analysis. Why should it be “proper not to fear?” Why should we not be concerned that a sin may have caused one to lose a Divine promise? Why should this be considered a lack in their perfection? To the contrary, this attitude seems to display great humility. Despite one's great piety he is concerned that he may have sinned!

These questions are answered by the commandment which we are given throughout the Torah to trust in G-d. Obviously we must believe that He has the power to save us from any situation, no matter how hopeless it may seem. However, the commandment to have trust in G-d is not merely to believe that what He does is in one's best interest, whether it seems so or not. Rather, it is to be confident that he actually *will* help me in a revealed manner. I must be certain of his salvation, to the extent that I have no concerns or worries whatsoever. I must have total peace of mind.

This is explained by the explanation of this Mitzvah in the work Chovos HaLevovos¹⁰. He writes that¹¹ “the essence of trust is the total peace of mind of he who trusts. His heart must rely on the One in Whom he trusts, that He will do that which is good and proper for him.”

We still need to understand why indeed Hashem should treat us with absolute, revealed kindness,

7. Shemos 3:12

8. Bamidbar 21:34.

9. Yeshayahu 51:13.

10. This is a major ethical work written by Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pakuda. He was a great sage and philosopher who lived in Saragossa, Spain during the first half of the 11th century. This fundamental work, which remains popular until this day, was written in Judeo – Arabic in the year 1040. It was apparently translated into Hebrew between the years 1161 – 1180.

11. The Gate (Section) of Trust in G-d, at the beginning of Chapter One

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despite the fact that we may not be worthy. This can be understood in light of the popular aphorism often stated by the leaders of Chabad – Lubavitch; "Think positively, and the result will be positive." In short, the explanation is that by virtue of the very merit of total trust in G-d, He brings about a positive outcome.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Shemos 5726 and Shabbos Parshas Beshalach 5723)

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

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