

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shemos

25 Teves, 5784 – January 6, 2024

Compiled from the works of

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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: ויאמר מי שמך לאיש שר ושפט עלינו הלהרגני אתה אמר פאָר אַר הַרְגַת אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּירָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר:
רש"י ד"ה ויירא משה: כפשוטו. ומדרשו דאג לו על שראה בישראל רשעים דלטורין, אמר מעתה שמא אינם ראויין להגאל:

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 wicked men informers in Israel. 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. Here, the Torah describes how Paroh's daughter raised Moshe in her father's palace. He leaves there 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 that the matter had become known.

Rashi gives two explanations for Moshe's fear. The first is in keeping with the simple implication of the Torah. His earlier actions became public knowledge! His second explanation follows the Midrashic explanation. Since Jews were 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 with the simple interpretation of the verse. Explaining Peshat is precisely Rashi's primary objective! In this case, it is challenging to understand because according to the Midrashic explanation, Rashi needs to explain the end of the verse, "the matter has become known," homiletically. Aside from the simple meaning, he also needs to add that *Moshe* was the one who knew. *He* became aware of why the Jews, among all of the nations of the world, deserved such a severe punishment!

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 combines the concept of absolute trust in G-d with the fear of worldly matters.

Rashi's Explanation

This week, we begin reading Shemos, the second book of the Torah. The Torah tells us of Moshe's birth and upbringing in Paroh's palace. The Torah tells us that¹ "... 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 man. Moshe went out the next day and asked the wicked man why will you hit 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.' Paroh heard of this occurrence and wanted to execute Moshe; Moshe fled."

Rashi cites the words "Moshe became frightened" and gives two explanations. First, the verse should be explained: "according to its simple meaning." In other words, Rashi says that Moshe feared Paroh would kill him. Rashi's second explanation is that the verse 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, they may 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 on the Torah: when he brings two different reasons for the same thing, each has some difficulty. However, the explanation he cites first is closer to Peshat. Furthermore, nothing seems to be lacking in his first explanation. Moshe was frightened because he discovered that what he had done to the Egyptian man 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 verse does not even hint at the Midrash's account².

It is especially problematic to explain our verse according to the Midrash. In the same verse, after telling us that Moshe was afraid, Moshe says that "the matter has become known." According to Peshat, these words present no problem. Moshe was fearful because the death of the Egyptian man had become known. However, if we are explaining the verse according to the Midrash, these words are challenging to understand. What is the

1. Our Parshah, Shemos 2:11 – 15

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

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meaning of the phrase that "the matter has become known?" This difficulty forced Rashi to explain that the words "the matter has become known" (in his second, Midrashic explanation) that now, he, *Moshe*, knew why the Jews from among the world's nations deserved such a severe punishment. This is also a seemingly complicated explanation, which the verse does not seem to suggest.

The Explanation

The explanation for these apparent "difficulties" is as follows. Rashi is using the Midrash to answer a question that one may ask regarding 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. Instead, it provides each 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? Only later, when the news of what Moshe had done reached Paroh, did Moshe leave Egypt and flee to Midian. The discovery that Paroh heard what had happened was the reason that he wanted to execute him. Why does the Torah tell this to us at this point? 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 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, one difficulty remains. 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 the Torah, the simple meaning applies. This rule is especially apparent 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.

To explain this, we must first preface the words of the Midrash⁴ in the verse,⁵ "Yaakov was very frightened and was distressed." The Midrash says, "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 greatest of our prophets. The greatest of our forefathers was Yaakov. Hashem said to him,⁶ 'Behold I am with you,' nevertheless, he ultimately was afraid, as it says, 'and Yaakov feared.' The greatest prophet was

3. Talmud Shabbos 63, a

4. Bereishis Rabbah, at the beginning of Parshah 76

5. Parshas Vayishlach, Bereishis 32:8

6. Parshas Vayeitzei, Bereishis 28:15

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Moshe. Hashem said to him,⁷ '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.' Hashem would not have told him not to fear had he not been afraid."

The commentaries of the Midrash disagree about whether the Torah is telling us 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, 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 no longer deserved the fulfillment of Hashem's promise.

On the other hand, other commentaries explain that the Midrash is telling us that the proper form of conduct is not to fear but always to be confident in G-d. The continuation of the Midrash itself implies this. The prophet scolds the Jewish people and tells us,⁹ "And you forgot Hashem your Maker ... and you constantly fear 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 sin may have caused one to lose a Divine promise? Why should this be considered a lack of their perfection? On the contrary, this attitude seems to display great humility. Despite one's great righteousness, he is concerned that he may have sinned!

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

The classic work Chovos HaLevovos¹⁰ explains this. He writes¹¹, "The essence of trust is the total peace of mind of one who trusts in Hashem. His heart must rely on the One in Whom he trusts, that He will do what is good and proper for him."

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

7. Our Parshah, Shemos 3:12

8. Parshas Chukas, Bamidbar 21:34.

9. Yeshayahu 51:13.

10. This is a major ethical work written by Rabbi Bechaya 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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we may not be worthy. Our need to trust that G-d will shower us with goodness can be explained in light of the famous aphorism often stated by the leaders of Chabad – Lubavitch; "Think positively, and the result will be positive." In short, the explanation is that by the 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)

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

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