

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Vo'eiro

3 Shevat, 5784 – January 13, 2024

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

שמות ו', כ': וַיָּקֵה עַמְרָם אֶת יוֹכֶבֶד דָּתוֹ לֹא לְאִשָּׁה וּמִלֶּד לֹא אֶת אֶהֱרֹן וְאֶת מֹשֶׁה וּשְׁנֵי חֵי עַמְרָם שִׁבְעָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה:

רש"י ד"ה יוכבד דדתו: אחת אבוהי בת לוי אחות קהת:

Shemos 6:20: Amram took Yocheved, his aunt, as his wife. She bore him Aharon and Moshe. Amram's life was one hundred thirty-seven years.

Rashi Heading - Yocheved, his aunt: His father's sister, the daughter of Levi, the sister of Kehos.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Vo'eiro, the Torah tells us the lineage of Yaakov's children, Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi. While describing Levi's descendants, the Torah tells us that Amram married Yocheved, his aunt. Rashi comments on the words "Yocheved his aunt," quoting from Onkelus¹ that she was "his father's sister, (in other words) the daughter of Levi and the sister of Kehos."

This all seems quite clear, aside from one point. One wonders why Rashi finds a need to explain it. According to several commentaries, it is because the Hebrew word "aunt - דודה" is used throughout the Torah to mean one's father's brother's wife. Rashi explains that this instance is an exception. The word aunt is used to indicate his father's sister. Hence, Rashi needs to explain. He must let us know since he is changing the word's meaning from how it is used in every other instance in the Torah.

However, this leaves us with several other questions. Why does Rashi quote Targum in Aramaic? Rashi's commentary is written in Hebrew. Why does Rashi not credit Onkelus with the explanation? Why does Rashi need to change the meaning of the word here? Perhaps most importantly, why does the Torah need to tell us that Yocheved was Amram's aunt? We know that Yocheved was Levi's daughter and her husband Amram's aunt. What does the Torah add here, according to Rashi?

Rashi himself answers these questions. The Torah reviews the lineage of Levi and his descendants to tell us how special they are. That's why the Torah says that Yocheved was Amram's aunt. That was why he married her – they had the same superb lineage. The fact that based on this, the meaning of the word "aunt - דודה" is changed is not a significant issue. The word "uncle - דוד" always means one's father's brother. The feminine form

1. Onkelus translated the Torah into Aramaic. There are several other Aramaic translations of the Torah; that of Onkelus is primarily based on Peshat. Here, the words which Rashi quotes from Onkelus are in the original Aramaic.

of דוד is דוד. Therefore, the definition of an aunt as one's father's sibling is correct. However, if one has a problem with it, Rashi quotes Onkelus' words as proof that it can be used in that manner.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Vo'eiro, the Torah enumerates the descendants of Yaakov's children Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi. The Torah says², "Amram took Yocheved, his aunt, as his wife." Rashi cites the words from the verse "Yocheved his aunt" and begins his comments by quoting Onkelus' translation of the word "aunt" in Aramaic (without attributing the comment to him³), "אחתי אביו – His father's sister." Rashi goes on to say that "she was the daughter of Levi and the sister of Kehos (who was Amram's father)."

Why does Rashi find it necessary to explain the Hebrew word "דודה - aunt," a common word that appears throughout the Torah many times? Several of Rashi's supercommentaries explain that we find that the Hebrew word "דודה - aunt," as used in the Torah, always refers to one's uncle's wife – his father's brother's wife. The English word "aunt" can either mean one's father's brother's wife or one's father's sister. In the Torah, the Hebrew word we translate as aunt only has the former meaning. This is apparent from the Torah's list of prohibited relationships. The Torah says⁴ regarding the prohibition of having relations with one's father's brother's wife, "You shall not come near his wife; she is your 'aunt – דודה.'" However, regarding the prohibition of having relations with one's father's sister⁵, the Torah does not use the word "aunt – דודה."

Having established that the Hebrew word דודה refers to one's uncle's wife, we would think that Yocheved had been married to Amram's father's brother. Therefore, Rashi explains that the word דודה in this context does not have the same meaning as it usually does throughout the Torah. Yocheved was the sister of Kehos, who was Amram's father.

Rashi also proves that this was their relationship. He writes that Yocheved was Levi's daughter. We know this because the Torah says⁶, "The name of Amram's wife was Yocheved, who was born to Levi." We also know that Kehos, who was Amram's father, was a child of Levi. The Torah states this clearly⁷, "These were the names of Levi's sons... Kehos." In other words, it is quite clear that Yocheved and Kehos were brother and sister.

This explanation would also answer two additional questions. Firstly, we know that besides being precise in the language with which Rashi phrases his comments, he is also particular about the words he cites from the

2. Our Parshah, Shemos 6:20.

3. This is noteworthy. Rashi quotes Onkelus quite often. However, in the vast majority of cases Rashi credits him.

4. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:14.

5. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:12.

6. Parshas Pinchas, Bamidbar 26:59.

7. Our Parshah, Shemos 6:16.

verse, i.e., the words that serve as the heading of his remarks. Since Rashi is only explaining the word "דודה – aunt," why does he cite the words "*Yocheved* his aunt?" Based on our explanation, the reason is simple. The fact that we are discussing *Yocheved*, who was Amram's father's sister, proves the unique definition of "aunt" in our verse. This clarifies that the meaning of "aunt" here differs from everywhere else in the Torah.

Secondly, our explanation of Rashi's comments also explains why Rashi writes the words "אחת אביו – His father's sister" in Aramaic, quoting the words of Onkelus verbatim. Rashi's commentary is written in Hebrew! Our explanation of Rashi provides the answer to this question as well. Rashi quotes the words of Targum to support that his translation of the Hebrew word "aunt" here differs from how it is used elsewhere. Here, it means his father's sister, just as Onkelus writes.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Whenever Rashi quotes Targum Onkelus, he says so explicitly; he will say, "As Targum says," or use some such expression. Why does he suffice here with merely quoting Onkelus' Aramaic words? One would expect him to attribute the words to Targum, whether or not he quotes them verbatim.

We are trying to explain that Rashi defines the word "aunt" in our verse. He is telling us that here, as opposed to its general usage, the Hebrew phrase דודה means one's father's sister. Furthermore, to prove this interpretation, Rashi concluded his commentary by saying that *Yocheved* was "the daughter of Levi and (consequently) the sister of Kehos." However, Rashi does not need to prove this! He told us earlier that *Yocheved* was Levi's daughter. Near the end of the book of Bereishis, the Torah enumerates those who descended to Egypt. The Torah says⁸, "These are the sons of Leah, that she bore to Yaacov in Padan Aram, and (she also bore) Dinah his daughter. All the souls of his sons and daughters were thirty-three." Rashi cites the words "thirty-three" and explains the reason for the number. "But if you count them individually, you find only thirty-two. The missing one is *Yocheved*, who was born between the walls when they entered the city, as it is said: 'whom she bore to Levi in Egypt.' Her birth was in Egypt, but her conception was not in Egypt." In other words, Rashi told the beginning student that *Yocheved* was Levi's daughter. Why does he find it necessary to repeat it here?

We might be able to answer this question, albeit with difficulty. Since Rashi taught us this in an earlier book of the Torah, perhaps he needs to repeat it here. It could be that the beginner may have forgotten it by now. However, even if he does need to say that *Yocheved* was Levi's daughter, he certainly does not need to say that Kehos was also his child; the Torah stated just a few short verses earlier. Rashi could have merely said that Levi was *Yocheved*'s father (to remind the beginner).

8. Parshas Vayigash, Bereishis 46:15.

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Since the definition of the word "דודה – aunt" is *always* a woman who was married to one's father's brother, there is no reason for us not to say that the same is not the case here. Aside from being Kehos' sister, she may have also been his brother's wife⁹. Levi may have had a second wife. She may have had a son who would be Kehos' paternal brother. It's further possible that Yocheved was married to him and divorced before she married Amram.

Granted, this would require many assumptions, which the Torah does not mention. We would be assuming that Levi had a second wife. Furthermore, we must consider that she gave birth to a son. Then, we would be required to believe that he married (and later divorced) his half-sister Yocheved and that Yocheved later married Amram. We would need a long list of assumptions. Our assumptions would include things at which the Torah does not even hint. Nevertheless, it may be easier (also according to Peshat) to assume all of this rather than introducing a new translation to a word that appears in the Torah many times.

Aside from the standard, accepted version of Rashi's commentary, which is printed in our Chumashim, there are other older versions, including a number only found in manuscripts. Some versions of our Rashi include the Hebrew word "Es –"אֵס¹⁰" What purpose would be served by having this word in the heading of Rashi's commentary? We already stated that Rashi is extremely precise regarding the words that he does and does not include.

Finally, based on what we have said, it is abundantly clear that Yocheved and Kehos, Amram's father, were siblings. Why does the Torah tell us that Yocheved was Amram's aunt? It is certainly something that we would understand on our own.

The Explanation

The explanation is as follows: The Torah tells us that Amram married his aunt Yocheved to tell us that she had great lineage. However, based on the usual translation of "דודה – aunt," she was a divorcee who was previously married to Kehos' brother! This does not seem to emphasize her great lineage; it does nothing to tell us of the great and pious people from whom she was descended.

That is why Rashi tells us that the word "דודה – aunt" has a different meaning than usual. The term "דודה – aunt" here means that Yocheved descended from the same saintly people as Amram. That's why Rashi concludes his commentary that she was "the sister of Kehos," who was the greatest of Levi's children.

9. Please keep in mind that the rules were different before the giving of the Torah.

10. The Hebrew word אֵס does not have any English translation; however, it designates a direct object. Additionally, it is used throughout the works of the Sages, in order to derive laws from the Torah which were not explicitly written.

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How do we know that the point of these verses is to emphasize their lineage? Rashi said so clearly. He told us¹¹ that the Torah repeats the family line of Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi to teach us that it is held in high esteem. By referring to her as his "דודה – aunt," the Torah is telling us that one of the reasons he married her was because her lineage was as high as his.

The fact that we do not find the word "דודה – aunt" used anywhere else in the Bible to mean one's father's sister is not problematic. The name "דוד – uncle" describes one's father's brother. The feminine form of the Hebrew word דוד is דודה, namely one's father's sister. However, as evident as it may be that the Hebrew word דודה can mean one's father's sister, Rashi does find a need to prove this since we do not see that the word דודה carries this meaning elsewhere. Therefore, Rashi uses the translation of Targum Onkelos. However, since this translation applies, Rashi does not feel the need to expressly state that his commentary is "according to Targum," as he often does.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vo'eiro 5728)

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

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11. Our Parshah, Shemos 6:14.

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