

בס"ז

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Bo

6 Shevat, 5782 – January 8, 2022

Compiled from the works of
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn
North Miami Beach, FL

A Project of
Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos
Copyright 2022©

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 21, Pages 55 – 61

Rashi in His Own Words

שמות י"א, ד': ויאמר משה ליהוה אלהי ישראל יוצא בתוך מצרים:

רש"י ד"ה כחצות הלילה: כהחלק הלילה, כחצות, כמו (מלכים א' י"ט, כ"ה) כעלות, (תהלים קכ"ד, ג') בחרות אפם בנו, זהו פשוטו לישבו על אופניו, שאין חצות שם דבר של חצי. ורבותינו דרשוהו כמו בחצי הלילה (שמות י"ב, כ"ט) ואמרו, שאמר משה כחצות, דמשמע סמוך לו או לפניו או לאחריו, ולא אמר בחצות, שמא יטעו אצטגניני פרעה, ויאמרו משה בדאי הוא, אבל הקב"ה יודע עתיו ורגעיו אמר בחצות:

Shemos 11:4: Moshe said, "So said the Lord, At the dividing point of the night, I will go out into the midst of Egypt.

Rashi Heading - At the dividing point of the night: When the night is divided. כְּחֻצָה is like (II Kings 3:20) “when the meal offering was offered up (כְּעֹלוֹת)”; (it is also like) (Tehillim 124:3) “when their anger was kindled (בְּקִרוֹת) against us.” This is its simple meaning, which fits its context that חֻצָה is not a noun denoting a half. Our Rabbis, however, interpreted it like כְּחֻצָה at about midnight (lit., half the night), and they said that Moshe said, כְּחֻצָה about midnight, meaning near midnight, either before it or after it, but he did not say בְּחֻצָה meaning at midnight, lest Pharaoh’s astrologers err and say, “Moshe is a liar.” But the Holy One, blessed be He, Who knows His times and His seconds, said, בְּחֻצָה at midnight.

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Bo, tells us of the last of the ten plagues. Moshe warned Pharaoh of the tenth plague, the smiting of the firstborn with the words¹, "Moshe said, 'So said the Lord, At the dividing point of the night, I will go out into the midst of Egypt.'"

The words "at the dividing point of the night" seem somewhat ambiguous. We can translate the words as written; however, we can also translate them as "at about midnight." Rashi uses both translations. As usual, we ask why Rashi needs two translations. This is especially true in this instance because Moshe said at approximately midnight. As the Talmud asks, is it possible that Hashem wasn't sure of the time? Instead, as Rashi explains, Hashem told Moshe that He would come at exactly midnight. Fearing that the Egyptian astronomers would miscalculate, Moshe changed G-d's words from "at midnight" to "at about midnight."

Among the other questions is why Hashem found it necessary to give a time for the plague to occur, which was not the case with most plagues. Additionally, telling Pharaoh that it would happen at or about midnight was of no benefit to him because Moshe did not tell him what day it would occur.

Rashi is answering all of these questions with his definition. Moshe was telling Pharaoh that G-d Almighty would carry out this plague. He and he alone can distinguish between one moment and the next.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Bo, we are told that² "So said Hashem, 'כחצות הלילה – *Kachatzos Halaylo*h - when the

1. Our Parshah, Shemos 11:4.
2. See the previous note.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

night is divided / at about midnight³, 'I will go out in the middle of Mitzraim.' This was the prelude to the tenth and most severe plague when G-d Almighty smote the firstborn of Egypt.

As you can see, Rashi translated the Hebrew words "Kachatzos Halayloh" with both of its possible translations. The first is as follows. The Hebrew prefix "כ - Ka" has various translations, and it can mean "when." The word "הצות - Chatzos," can mean "it is divided in half." The term "הלילה - HaLayloh," means "the night." Hence, "כהצות הלילה - Kachatzos HaLayloh" means "when the night is divided in half." The Hebrew prefix "כ - Ka" can also be translated as "approximately." The word "הצות - Chatzos," can also mean the noun "midnight," i.e., half of the night. Based on this translation, "כהצות הלילה - Kachatzos HaLayloh" would mean "at approximately midnight."

Rashi gives us both translations. Rashi first quotes the words from the verse "כהצות הלילה - Kachatzos HaLayloh" and tells us that they mean "when the night is divided." He then continues, bringing various proofs that a noun can serve as a verb in this grammatical form. He writes that⁴ " 'when the meal offering was offered up - כעלות-.' He then cites another example from a verse in Tehillim⁵ 'When their anger was kindled - בהרות against us.' (He continues stating that) this is its simple meaning which fits its context, that הצות is not a noun connoting a half."

Rashi then offers the second translation. "Our Rabbis, however, interpreted it as כהצי הלילה – at about midnight. They said that Moshe said *about* midnight, meaning either slightly before or after midnight. Moshe did not say *at (precisely)* midnight. (He was concerned that) Pharaoh's astrologers would themselves miscalculate and say that Moshe is a liar. (According to many versions of Rashi, including ours, he finishes his explanation with the words) but Hashem Who knows His times and His seconds (actually) said 'at midnight,' "In other words, even though Moshe generally repeated what Hashem said verbatim, in this instance, he changed Hashem's words. The idea was that even for a fraction of a second by which the Egyptians may have miscalculated, they would not think that Moshe, and consequently Hashem, was not telling the truth.

The supercommentary to Rashi, Sefer HaMizrachi⁶, and others explain that Rashi states both translations to explain an apparent difficulty with the verse. It is the same question which the Talmud⁷ asks; "Does G-d have a doubt?" If the verse is using the words "הצות הלילה - Chatzos HaLayloh" as a noun, meaning midnight, Moshe is declaring that G-d said that He would slay the firstborn at about midnight. Yet it's impossible to say that Hashem does not know the exact time! Why would G-d approximate the time?

To explain this, Rashi cites two explanations. The first is that "הצות הלילה - Chatzos HaLayloh" is not being used as a noun, meaning midnight, and it is instead expressing the night being divided. The verse uses the prefix "כ - Ka" to convey "when." According to this explanation, Moshe is announcing that Hashem said that "at the exact moment when the night is divided in two, i.e., midnight, He will go out to Egypt and smite the firstborn.

Rashi's second explanation answers this question. G-d did not say that he would come out at about midnight, rather He told Moshe that he would come "at midnight." However, to avoid a suspicion of the Egyptians that G-d is not aware of

3. In Jewish law, Chatzos, which is usually translated as either midnight or noon, is not necessarily 12:00. Chatzos HaYom – midday, is the time which is the halfway mark between sunrise and sunset. Chatzos HaLayloh is 12 hours later.

4. Melochim Bais 3:20.

5. Tehillim 124:3.

6. Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1455 – 1525 or 26) was a great Talmudist and Halachic codifier who was born in Constantinople. He is perhaps best known for his supercommentary to Rashi.

7. See Talmud Berachos 3, b

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

the exact time, Moshe changed Hashem's words from "at" to "at about."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

We assume that when one says "about" or "approximately," it shows that they have a doubt. Why should we assume that? Perhaps Hashem would go out in Egypt a few minutes before or after midnight. This is especially true in light of the question that the Levush asks⁸; people often say "approximately" because they are rounding off a number rather than using a precise amount.

The seemingly obvious answer is that it says further on⁹ that "it happened at midnight that G-d smote every firstborn in Egypt." This clarifies that the killing of the firstborn was at *precisely* midnight, neither later nor earlier. However, we cannot say that Rashi is basing his commentary here on something the Torah will say further on. One of Rashi's principles is that he does not rely on the beginner knowing a verse he has not yet learned.

Rashi states regarding his first explanation that "this is its simple meaning which fits its context, that 'הצות - Chatzos' is not a noun denoting a half." However, in his second explanation, he says that "Our Rabbis, however, interpreted it as 'כהצי הלילה - at about midnight.'" Rashi is saying that this is a Midrashic, Aggadic explanation. Why does Rashi consider the first explanation Peshat – the simple meaning of the verse? Why should explaining the Hebrew word "הצות - Chatzos" as meaning when the night is divided be more in keeping with Peshat than defining it as a noun, midnight. This word is used in two other places in the Tanach¹⁰, and in both places, it means midnight! We must say that when Rashi concludes his first explanation and writes that "this is its simple meaning ... that 'הצות – Chatzos' is not a noun denoting a half," he means that to have the word fit into its present context, we must translate it differently than usual.

Why is Moshe so concerned that *perhaps* Pharaoh's astrologers will *suspect* that he is a liar? Ultimately all of the firstborn of Egypt will die simultaneously within moments of the time that Pharaoh's "scientists" calculated is the midpoint of the night, and they will know that he was telling the truth. Why would this be the reason to change G-d's words?

According to our version of Rashi, he concludes his commentary with the words "but Hashem Who knows His times His seconds said 'at midnight' (rather than 'at about midnight' as said by Moshe)." We have stated many times that even when Rashi does quote Midrashic material from the Sages, he only quotes those parts which explain Peshat. Why does Rashi say that G-d told Moshe "at midnight," which forces us to say that Moshe changed Hashem's words? Perhaps Hashem, realizing that the Egyptians would not know the exact moment of midnight, actually told Moshe to say "at about midnight."

Rashi is precise about the words he quotes for his commentary's heading. Why does Rashi cite the words "כהצות הלילה – when the night is divided / at about midnight," when he is not explaining the term "הלילה – night?" All that he is explaining is the word(s) "כהצות - Kachatzos." According to Rashi's first explanation, it means when it is divided, and it means about halfway according to the second explanation. However, in either case, Rashi is not explaining the word "night."

The Explanation

We will understand the answer to these questions by first explaining the unusual expression Rashi uses here. There are instances that Rashi gives two explanations, one according to Peshat and the second according to a Midrash. Generally,

8. The Levush was the name given to ten volume work, primarily dealing with Jewish law, written by Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe (1530 – 1612). He was a great Talmudist, Halachic codifier and Kabbalist who was born in Prague.

9. Shemos 12:29.

10. Tehillim 119:62 and Iyov 34:20.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

after Rashi explains the answer according to Peshat, he will say something along the lines of "This is the explanation according to Peshat. However, our Sages said in a Midrash, etc. "Here he says, "this is its simple meaning which fits its context... Our Rabbis, however, interpreted it as..." This is how Rashi clarified the difficulty in the verse. It is neither because of the word *הצות*, nor because Hashem has no doubt. Rashi explains why the explanation does not fit with the context of the verse.

When the beginning student learns this verse, the obvious question which immediately bothers him is why Hashem had to give a time when the plague will strike, unlike most of the previous nine plagues. Among the other nine plagues, there were only three which Hashem made known when they would take place; pestilence, hail, and locusts. Regarding pestilence and locusts, Hashem only let Pharaoh know that they would occur the next day. Besides the death of the firstborn, the only plague, where Hashem informed Pharaoh exactly when it would happen, was hail. The verse states¹¹, "I am going to rain down at this time tomorrow." Rashi comments there that Moshe "made a scratch on the wall (to show that) 'Tomorrow when the sun reaches here, the hail will come down.'" However, there was a reason for that. It allowed the Egyptians that feared G-d the opportunity to remove their livestock, etc., from the fields. Here that reason does not apply at all.

By explaining "*הצות* - Chatzos," Hashem's words did not inform Pharaoh when the plague would take place, and all that he knew was that it would take place at about midnight, and Moshe never told him the day on which it would occur. This knowledge was seemingly useless to Pharaoh.

Therefore, we must say that the purpose of telling Pharaoh that the plague would occur at *about* midnight was not to let him know when to expect it. We must say that Moshe gave a qualitative idea about the plague. Saying that it would be "at approximately midnight" emphasized the fact that "*I will go out*," this plague will be performed by G-d Almighty Himself in His essence and His glory.

We need to understand how foretelling that the plague would occur at about midnight would help express that Hashem Himself would slay the firstborn. On the contrary, Moshe demonstrated to Pharaoh that the plague of hail would be at the exact time that G-d promised. On the other hand, Moshe told Pharaoh that it would be at *about* midnight! How could that help Pharaoh understand that this plague is coming directly from G-d!

To answer this question, Rashi begins his comments by translating "*כחצות* - Kachatzos" as "when the night was divided." The moment that the night is divided in half is not a duration of time; it's not a second or a nanosecond, and it cannot be measured in any way, shape, or form. If it were a duration of time that could be measured, it would also be divisible. Only G-d Almighty Himself could be able to determine this moment. That is how the words "*כחצות הלילה* – when the night is divided" demonstrates that Hashem Himself would go out into Mitzraim and destroy the firstborn¹².

However, we still need to explain why the Torah uses the word "*כחצות* - Kachatzos" which we can understand in two different ways. Not only does this make the meaning unclear, but to make his point, Rashi must bring proof from the Tanach. Moreover, one proof did not suffice; he needed to cite two. It would have been much clearer, and understandable

11. Shemos 9:18.

12. This also explains why Rashi also cites the word "*הלילה* – the night" in the heading, despite the fact that he only seems to be explaining the word "*הצות* – half." By including the seemingly extra words, he emphasizes that unlike the plague of hail it was 1.) At night, so there was no way to make a scratch on the wall in order to see when the sun reaches it, and 2.) It was not at a particular second, but rather at an immeasurable moment of time.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

according to Peshat had the Torah said: "כהצות – at midnight!"

Therefore, Rashi adds a second explanation which is not totally consistent with *Peshat* (although it is compatible with the *Midrash*). According to the second explanation, Moshe began saying "So said Hashem" and concluded, "at about midnight." However, even according to what our Rabbis said in a Midrash, Hashem said, "at midnight." According to "Our Rabbis," this also makes the point that "I will go out in Mitzraim." Otherwise, there would have been no reason to assign a time to the plague (as explained above at length). However, since we do not find any mention of G-d telling Moshe one thing and then telling him to transmit to Pharaoh differently, it is Midrashic rather than Peshat.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Bo and Yisro 5740)

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

To dedicate a week, a month, or a year of the Rashi of the Week, [click here](#).

You can find us on the web at www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org.

You can find our blog [here](#).

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE**

* * *

IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of "Tzivos Hashem"

Chaim and Aiden Oded שיהיו

Morris

MAY THEY MERIT TO BE A SOURCE OF
CHASSIDIC PRIDE TO THEIR FAMILY AND A
TORAH LIGHT TO THEIR COMMUNITY

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. **Menachem M.**

and **Chaya Mushka** שיהיו

Morris

* * *

IN HONOR OF

Mrs. Esther שתהי **Sharabani**

MAY SHE GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH
IN HEALTH, HAPPINESS, TORAH, AND MITZVOT

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON

Mr. Gershon (Geri) שי' **Bentov**

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY

OF OUR FATHER

Dr. Menachem Mendel Shlomoh

ben Reb **Chaim Aryeh Leib** ע"ה

Mendelsohn

Passed away on 11 Shevat, 5747

MAY HIS SOUL BE BOUND
IN THE ETERNAL BOND OF LIFE

*

DEDICATED BY HIS SON

AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

RABBI SHMUEL AND RIFKA שי'

MENDELSON

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY

OF OUR MOTHER

Mrs. Brocha bas Reb **Tzvi Nechemiah**

Hacohen Cohen

Passed away on 8 Shevat, 5778

MAY HER SOUL BE BOUND
IN THE ETERNAL BOND OF LIFE

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON-IN-LAW

AND DAUGHTER

RABBI SHMUEL AND RIFKA שיהיו

MENDELSON

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY

OF OUR FATHER

Mr. Sholom Moshe ben Reb **Shlomo Meir**

Hacohen ע"ה **Cohen**

Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach,
13 Shevat, 5779

MAY HIS SOUL BE BOUND
IN THE ETERNAL BOND OF LIFE

*

DEDICATED BY HIS SON-IN-LAW

AND DAUGHTER

Rabbi Shmuel and **Rifka** שיהיו **Mendelsohn**

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Dr. Mindel Rivka (Muriel)

bas Reb **Menachem Mendel Shlomo** ע"ה

Stitt

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Lech
Lecha, 10 Mar-Cheshvan, 5782

MAY HER SOUL BE BOUND
IN THE ETERNAL BOND OF LIFE

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY שיהיו

מוקדש לזכות
כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

* * *

לעילוי נשמת
אמנו מרת ברכה בת ר' צבי נחמי' הכהן ע"ה
כהן
נפטרה ביום ח' שבט, ה'תשע"ח
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*

נדפס ע"י חתנה ובתה
הרה"ת ר' שמואל ורבקה שיחיו מענדלסאהן
* * *

לעילוי נשמת
ר' שלום משה בן ר' שלמה מאיר הכהן ע"ה
כהן
נפטר ש"ק פ' בשלח, י"ג שבט, ה'תשע"ט
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*

נדפס ע"י חתנו ובתו
הרה"ת ר' שמואל ורבקה שיחיו מענדלסאהן
* * *

לעילוי נשמת
מרת מינדל רבקה
בת ר' מנחם מענדל שלמה ע"ה
סתית
נפטרה ש"ק פרשת לך לך,
יו"ד מר-חשון תשפ"ב
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*

נדבת בני משפחתה שיחיו

לזכות
חיילי "צבאות השם"
חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו
מאריס
*

נדפס ע"י הוריהם
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו
מאריס
* * *

לזכות
מרת אסתר שתחי' שרבני
לאריכות ימים ושנים טובות עד ביאת גואל צדק
ומתוך בריאות הנכונה ולשנת ברכה והצלחה
בגו"ר
*

נדפס ע"י בנה
ר' גרשון שי' בן טוב
* * *

לעילוי נשמת
אבינו ר' מנחם מענדל שלמה בן ר' חיים ארי'
ליב ע"ה מענדלסאהן
נפטר ביום י"א שבט, ה'תשמ"ז
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*

נדפס ע"י בנו וכלתו
הרה"ת ר' שמואל ורבקה שיחיו מענדלסאהן
* * *