

בס"ד

# THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

## Parshas Beshalach

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

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### Rashi in His Own Words

שמות י"ד, י': ופרעה הקריב נישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם והנה מצרים | נסע אחריהם ויראו מאד ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה':  
רש"י ד"ה ויצעקו: תפשו אומנות אבותם. באברהם הוא אומר (בראשית י"ט, כ"ז) אל המקום אשר עמד שם, ביצחק (שם כ"ד,  
ס"ג) לשוב בשדה, ביעקב (שם כ"ח, י"א) ויפגע במקום:

**Shemos 14:10:** Pharaoh drew near, and the Jewish people lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were advancing after them. They were very frightened. And the Jewish people cried out to Hashem.

**Rashi Heading - and they cried out:** They grabbed onto the trade of their forefathers (i.e., they prayed). Concerning Avrohom, it says, "to the place where he had stood before the Lord" (Bereishis 19:27). Concerning Yitzchok, (it says) "to pray in the field" (Bereishis 24:63). Concerning Yaakov, "And he entreated Hashem" (Bereishis 28:11).

### Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Beshalach, the Torah tells us of the exodus from Egypt. The Red Sea was before us, and the Egyptian army was behind us. It seemed that there was no way out of this dangerous situation. What did we do? We cried out to G-d in prayer. Rashi explains that we pursued the "trade," or the "craft" of our forefathers. Rashi cites verses from the Torah, which demonstrate that every one of our patriarchs, Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, prayed.

We need to understand why Rashi needs to explain this verse at all. We were in an untenable situation, surrounded. Naturally, we prayed to G-d! Even the beginning student understands the need for prayer.

However, this is not all that simple. If we believed in G-d, we did not need to worry; He had already promised us salvation. What possible reason was there for prayer? On the other hand, if we, G-d forbid, did not believe, what point would there be in praying? Additionally, other verses in the Torah cite more clearly that our patriarchs prayed. Why does Rashi choose these particular examples to make his point?

The explanation is that Rashi is not merely telling us why the Jews prayed. He is explaining why they cried out. They grabbed onto their forefathers' trade. They prayed; that was what they did. G-d was a part of their lives. The verses Rashi cites demonstrate that they did even **when** there was no particular reason

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to pray. Likewise, here, their children believed that Hashem would save them. Despite that, they did what their forefathers did. They cried out in prayer.

### Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Beshalach, the Torah tells us the story of the Jews leaving Egypt. The Red Sea was before them, and the Egyptians were closing in on them from behind. The Torah says that<sup>1</sup> "Pharaoh was drawing close. The Children of Israel lifted their eyes, and Egypt traveled after them. The Jewish People were terrified, and they cried out to Hashem." Rashi cites the words from the verse, "and they cried out," and explains that "they grabbed onto the trade of their ancestors." This means that they prayed.

Rashi continues by showing that prayer was the trade of each of our forefathers. "Regarding Avrohom, it says<sup>2</sup> 'to the place where he had stood (עמד means he had stood in Hebrew) before Hashem.' Regarding Yitzchok, it says<sup>3</sup> 'to speak (לשוח is the Hebrew word for speak) in the field.' Regarding Yaakov, it says<sup>4</sup>, 'he beseeched (ויפגע means he beseeched in Hebrew) Hashem.' "

In other words, Rashi is telling us that the words "stood – עמד, " "speak – לשוח, "and "beseech – ויפגע" all convey the idea of prayer. Hence, from here, we see that all of our patriarchs prayed.

### Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Why does Rashi find the need to give any explanation whatsoever here? The verse stands on its own quite well! The Jewish people saw that the Egyptian army was chasing them; they were in grave danger. Naturally, we cried out to G-d in prayer to save us!

One possible approach might be to say that Rashi is explaining the nature of the Jewish people's outcry and that they cried out in prayer and not out of anger to Hashem for placing them in this predicament. This explanation would seem to fit well with the flow of the verses. We find that immediately after our verse, the Torah says,<sup>5</sup> "They said to Moshe, is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the desert?"

However, this explanation is untenable. If Rashi intended to negate this explanation of the verse, he would have phrased his comments differently. Upon citing the words "and they cried out," he would have

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1. Our Parshah, Shemos 14:10.  
2. Parshas Vayeiros, Bereishis 19:27.  
3. Parshas Chayei Soroh, Bereishis 24:63.  
4. Parshas Vayetzit, Bereishis 28:11.  
5. Our Parshah, Shemos 14:11.

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first written that they prayed. Afterward, he could have written that they grabbed onto the trade of their forefathers.

Furthermore, if there is a need to explain why the Jewish people cried out, Rashi should have explained it earlier, the first time it was mentioned in the Torah! The Torah already told us that<sup>6</sup> "the Jewish people cried out, and their cry ascended to Hashem ..." The context there is that they cried because of their suffering in Egypt. We cannot say that it means they cried out due to anger from their great grief because it is already said in the same verse, "and the Children of Israel sighed from the labor."

Furthermore, we must understand how it is suitable to describe prayer as a trade. Is prayer a vocation? Our forefathers did have a trade, an occupation, which the Torah frequently describes. Torah repeatedly tells us what our forefather's work was. Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov were all shepherds; that was their profession, not prayer.

As mentioned above, Rashi cites three verses hinting that each patriarch, Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, prayed. However, many verses clearly state that they prayed regarding each of them. Rashi cites three specific verses to prove they prayed; however, there are many others!

Regarding Avrohom, it says<sup>7</sup> (a verse that precedes the one Rashi cites), "He built an altar to G-d there, and called out in the name of Hashem." Rashi could also have quoted the verse immediately before this, "He built an altar there to G-d Who had appeared to him."

Moreover, the verse Rashi cites for Avrohom, "to the place where he stood," comes after the story of Avrohom's prayers to Hashem to save the cities of S'dom and Amora (Sodom and Gomorrah). Throughout this episode, Avrohom beseeched G-d many times to save these people. Yet Rashi chose a verse that appears after Hashem destroyed the cities, and this verse only hints that he had prayed earlier.

Regarding Yitzchok, we find the same thing. The Torah says<sup>8</sup> that "Yitzchok prayed to Hashem." Rashi explains this to mean that "he prayed much and entreated Hashem with prayer." This is undoubtedly more definitive proof that Yitzchok prayed than Rashi's verse. Likewise, we find that the Torah tells us clearly that Yaakov prayed. The Torah says that he prayed to G-d,<sup>9</sup> "Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav."

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6. Parshas Shemos, Shemos 2:23.

7. Parshas Lech Lecho, Bereishis 12:8.

8. Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 25:21.

9. Parshas Vayishlach, Bereishis 32:10–13.

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### The Explanation

The answer to all of these questions is as follows. Rashi answers a question on the word(s)<sup>10</sup>, "and they cried out." Why did they feel a need not only to pray but to *cry out* in prayer to G-d? Hashem already assured us that we would enter Israel, so it was apparent that He would save us! Not only that, but the Torah told us that<sup>11</sup> the Jewish people were "marching out (of Egypt) triumphantly."

If they believed in Hashem's assurance, what need was there to pray? On the other hand, if they did not believe, what was the purpose of prayer? What did they think that it would accomplish?

Rashi explains this by saying that the Jewish People grabbed their forefathers' trade. The Patriarchs were, so to speak, "in the business" of praying. It was what they did. They did not need a "reason" to pray, and they did not wait for a difficult situation to pray. They were as one with the Almighty and hence communicated with him regularly. The same is true of the Jewish Nation their children. Despite their confidence in Hashem's promise, they prayed.

The fact that afterward, the Jewish people said to Moshe<sup>12</sup>, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the desert?" was not because of a lack of faith. Instead, they had already cried out to G-d, and He did not answer their prayers. The Egyptians were coming closer and closer!

They did not speak these words due to a lack of faith. Instead, they said this because of their seemingly impending doom. Human nature is that one speaks out of pain without giving the situation much thought. Our Sages say in the Talmud,<sup>13</sup> "A person is not held accountable for what he says at a time of distress." He is not speaking out of wickedness but rather out of a lack of judgment resulting from his seemingly impossible situation.

The above is why Rashi did not cite any of the other verses we mentioned above. They all demonstrate that the Patriarchs prayed for a specific need, and those verses would not make Rashi's point. Each example that Rashi cites describes that prayer was our Patriarchs' occupation; it was something they (and we) do regularly.

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10. Hebrew is a very concise language. Linguists say that a Hebrew translation of something written in English will be on average 30% shorter than the original. That is the reason for the letter "s" (which indicates the plural) in parenthesis. The English translation of the single Hebrew word "ויצעקו" is "and they cried out."

11. Our Parshah, Shemos 14:6.

12. Our Parshah, Shemos 14:11.

13. Talmud Bava Basra 16, b.

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### **A Deeper Explanation**

We must all remember that prayer is our business, our occupation. It is not limited to stressful situations in which we need God's help. Instead, it is what we, as Jews, do. We speak to G-d to connect with Him; we know He is here with us.

The same is true of the Torah study. It's not just something we do to know the commandments we must perform; it's our profession. We are in the business of connecting with Hashem through studying His Torah. The same is true of fulfilling the Mitzvos. Furthermore, we must "market" our business – sharing it with everyone around us.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach 573)*

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

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