

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Yisro

20 Shevat, 5783 – February 11, 2023

Compiled from the works of

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A Project of

Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Yisro**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 21, Pages 100 – 107

Rashi in His Own Words

שמות י"ט – ב': וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגֵד הָהָר:

רש"י ד"ה ויחן שם ישראל: כאיש אחד בלב אחד, אבל שאר כל החניות בתרעומת ובמחלוקת:

Shemos 19: 2: They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived in the desert of Sinai. They encamped in the desert, and Yisroel encamped there opposite the mountain.

Rashi Heading - and Yisroel encamped there: (The Torah writes the Hebrew for encamped in the singular,) as one man with one heart. However, all the other encampments were (written in the plural, i.e., "they camped") with complaints and strife.

Synopsis

Our Torah portion, Yisro, tells of the historical moment of the giving of the Torah. Before receiving the Torah, the Jewish Nation camped opposite Mount Sinai. The Torah says, "Yisroel (meaning the Jewish Nation) encamped there." However, it uses the Hebrew word for *encamped* in the singular form rather than the plural. It does not say "they camped," as is generally the case. Instead, the Torah uses the word "he (singular) camped." Rashi explains that the reason for this is that the Jews camped "as one man with one heart. However, all of the other encampments were with complaints and strife."

Rashi seems to be explaining why the encampment at Sinai was different from all of the other encampments. At the others, there was strife and plurality among the Jews. Hence the word "encamped" is written in the plural. Here, the Jews were in total unity. Therefore, the Torah uses the phrase camped in the singular form.

However, here we find that the Torah uses the word "Yisroel" to describe the Jews. Yisroel means the Jewish Nation, a singular entity. Since the verse discusses one Nation (as opposed to millions of individuals, i.e., "the Children of Yisroel"), the Torah *had* to use the singular form of the verb *encamped*. Since the sentence's subject, "Yisroel," is in the singular tense, the verb "camped" must also be in the singular. Hence it would appear that we can derive nothing from the Torah's use of the word camped in the singular.

The explanation is that we find collective nouns, such as Yisroel, throughout the Torah, which are used both in singular and plural forms. The difference is as follows. When the Torah says that "Yisroel (the single group of Jews) saw," it is logical, according to Peshat, to use the singular form; each individual saw the same thing. However, the Torah must use the plural form when it says that the group felt emotion or understood

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something, and each individual felt or understood on their level.

Here, the Torah tells us of the Jews camping in preparation to receive the Torah. In this regard, every Jew was united "as one man." What joined us was our desire to receive the Torah "with one heart."

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Yisro, the Torah tells us of the momentous occasion of receiving the Torah. In preparation for this, the Torah says¹, "They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived in the desert of Sinai. They encamped in the desert, and Yisroel encamped there opposite the mountain." Rashi cites the words from the verse, "and Yisroel encamped there." He explains that they camped "as one man with one heart. However, all other encampments were with complaints and strife."

Rashi explains the significance of the Jewish Nation's encampment in anticipation of receiving the Torah. He contrasts that with their encampments throughout their forty years in the wilderness. Here the Torah uses the word encamped in the singular². The fact that the Torah uses the singular here teaches us that they were of a *single mind* when they camped at Mount Sinai "as one man with one heart." Rashi contrasts this with the other encampments of the Jewish people, which were all "with complaints and with strife."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Rashi is very precise with his wording. His precision applies to the words he uses in his commentary and the terms he cites from the verse he is explaining. Those words alone are the ones he describes and form the basis of his explanation. Here Rashi cites the words, "and Yisroel encamped there." The phrase *encamped* in the singular is essential. That is how Rashi derives that all Jews were of one mind. The word *there* is also necessary. That teaches us that it was only there that the Jews were of a single mind, not at any of their other encampments.

However, we need to understand why Rashi adds the word *Yisroel*. It does not seem to add a thing to his explanation. Quite to the contrary, it seems to detract from his comments. The word Yisroel (meaning Israel, i.e., the Jewish Nation) is a collective noun and refers to the Jewish Nation as one singular object. The Torah does not say the "Children of Israel," which would mean millions of individual Jews. If that were the case, it would be appropriate to use the plural form. However, from the word Yisroel, it would seem *only* grammatically correct to use the word *encamped* in the singular. The name Yisroel indicates that we cannot learn anything from this verse

1. Our Parshah, Shemos 19:2.

2. Unlike English, Hebrew verbs are either singular or plural. To use our verse as an example, in English, the verb would be "camped." One would need to specify *who* camped to know whether it was singular or plural. "He camped" would be singular, and "they camped" would be plural. In contrast Hebrew, the verb itself would either be singular or plural. Generally, when discussing encampments of the Jewish People in the wilderness, the Torah says "Vayachanu – וַיַּחֲנוּ," meaning "and they camped," i.e. in plural form. In our verse, the Torah says "Vayichan – וַיִּיחַן," meaning "and *he* camped."

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regarding the Jewish Nation's singularity.

Additionally, Rashi expressed the same idea in last week's Torah portion. However, he phrases his conclusion differently and directs it to the Egyptians rather than the Jews. Before the splitting of the sea, the Torah said³, "Pharaoh drew near, and the Jewish people lifted their eyes. Behold, Egypt was traveling after them." Rashi cites the words "was traveling after them." He explains that since the Egyptians traveled "with one heart, like one man," the Torah uses the singular form of traveling.

That instance is very similar to ours. The Torah uses the singular word *Egypt* rather than the plural form of *the Egyptians*, and it also uses the singular *was traveling*, as opposed to *were traveling*. Rashi explains that the reason for using the singular form was that all Egyptians agreed. However, the words he cites from the verse are "was traveling after them." He does not include the word *Egypt* in his header. The apparent reason is, as we said before. We must use the singular form of the verb *travel* with the singular noun *Egypt*. Yet, in our verse, Rashi does include the word *Yisroel*.

Furthermore, Rashi says *Egypt* was "with one heart, like one man." While in our verse Rashi says that the Jews were "like one man with one heart." We need to understand what the reason is for the different orders.

The Explanation

We find many instances in the Torah of collective nouns used both in the singular and the plural. There is even a mixture of the two within the same verse. The simple reason for this is that it depends on precisely what we are discussing. When the Torah says that "Yisroel (the single group of Jews) saw," it is logical, according to Peshat, to use the singular form. Each individual saw the same thing simultaneously. However, when the Torah says that the group felt emotion or understood something, we must use the plural form. Each individual felt or understood on their level. The Sages teach us⁴ that the way that people understand any given thing is not equal. The same applies to thoughts and emotions. No two of us experience or understand the same thing in the same manner.

One example would be the verse,⁵ "Yisroel saw the great hand which the Lord had used upon the Egyptians. The Nation feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and Moshe, His servant." "Yisroel saw" is in the singular. The entire Nation saw the same thing! However, this that the people "feared the Lord" and believed in the Lord" is plural. No two people attain the same level of fear or belief.

Another example is from our Parshah. After Hashem gave the Jews the Torah, it says that⁶ "... the nation

3. Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 14:10.

4. See Talmud Sanhedrin 38, a.

5. Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 14:31.

6. Our Parshas, Shemos 20:15.

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saw and trembled; therefore, they stood from afar." The Torah uses the collective noun "the nation." It says that *he* saw, meaning that the word is in the singular. Yet it says that "they trembled" in the plural. That is because each Jew experienced a different level of trembling, of fear of G-d.

The above explains Rashi's words regarding the Egyptians. The Torah says⁷, "Pharaoh drew near, and the Jewish people lifted their eyes, and behold! Egypt was traveling after them ..." Rashi explained that the Egyptians were "with one heart like one man." Why does he transpose the order that he uses here?

The emphasis there is not on the fact that Egypt was traveling. Instead, the main point is that they were traveling *after them*, after the Jews. They were all out to get the Jews; it was their hatred of the Jews which prompted their chase. What was the reason for their hatred? It was because⁸ "Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people. They said, 'What is this that we have done, that we have released Israel from serving us?'" It was their wickedness.

One might think that there were various levels of hatred among the Egyptians toward the Jews. Pharaoh's hatred was undoubtedly different than that of an Egyptian soldier. A soldier's contempt for the Jews would not be the same as a regular Egyptian citizen. Rashi teaches us that they were all united. What was it that united them? Their wicked hearts caused them to become one united Nation. They were "with one heart" and "like one man."

That is quite different than our verse. There was a vast difference between one Jew and another in preparing to receive the Torah. Who from among the Jews could we compare to Moshe? We cannot even begin to fathom the preparations made by his brother Aharon. What about the seventy elders? How could their preparation to receive the Torah compare to those of a simple Jew?

Therefore, Rashi explains that they were like one man, and thus it says that "Yisroel (he) camped." Why were the Jews like one man? The reason is that they were Yisroel; each had a G-dly soul. The entire Jewish Nation is one large, united entity. Because we were as one man, we were also of one heart. There are differences between one Jew and another when it comes to studying the Torah. However, when it comes to receiving the Torah, all Jews have one heart.

That is the difference between the unity of the Jews and that of the Egyptians. Because the Jews are as one man, each Jew is part of an inseparable whole; therefore, they are of one heart. The converse is true of the Egyptians. Because they are of one nature, they unite and become one person because of the hostility toward the Jews for each of them.

7. See Footnote 3.

8. Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 14:5.

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A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

This world is called a "public domain".⁹ We see many different, unrelated things in the public domain, the street¹⁰. We see this primarily among human beings. Our Sages tell us¹¹ that "no one person is comparable to another." Each person is involved in activities that are not comparable to those of his fellow, and many people are engaged in activities that contradict those of their fellow.

The way to unite the world is through *revealing* the true *one* G-d. He transcends the limitations of the world. How can His presence be shown here? It can only happen through that which is above the world's boundaries, namely Torah and the Jewish Nation.

Rashi, teaching us Peshat, tells us this very thing. As the Jews prepared to receive the Torah, they became one person. We achieve this through the "spark," the essence of the Jewish soul, which genuinely makes the Jews "as one person with one heart."

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach (Tu Bishvat) and Shabbos Parshas Yisro, 5740)

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

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

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9. See Tanya, at the end of Chapter 33.

10. See Likkutei Sichos, Volume 15, Page 47.

11. See Talmud Sanhedrin, 37, a.

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in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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