

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Ki Siso

18 Adar I, 5779 – February 23, 2019

Compiled from the works of

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Ki Siso**

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Rashi in His Own Words

שמות ל"ב - י"א: ויחל משה את פני ה' אלקיו ויאמר למה ה' יחרה אפך בעמך אשר הוצאת מארץ מצרים בכח גדול וביד חזקה:

רש"י ד"ה למה ה' יחרה אפך: כלום מתקנא אלא חכם בחכם, גבור בגבור:

Shemos 32:11: Moshe pleaded before Hashem his G-d and said, "Why Hashem should You be angry at Your people whom You have brought up from the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand?"

Rashi Heading – Why Hashem: Is anyone jealous of another, except a wise man of a wise man, or a strong man of a strong man?

Synopsis

In our Torah portion, Ki Siso, the Torah tells us how Moshe Rabbeinu prayed on behalf of the Jewish people. This was after they had committed the sin of idolatry by making a golden calf. Hashem said that their punishment would be destruction. Nevertheless, their "faithful shepherd," Moshe, prayed to G-d to save them. "Why, Hashem, should You be angry at Your people ..." Rashi explains the basis of Moshe's prayer, by writing that a wise man will only be jealous of another wise man. Likewise, a strong man will only be jealous of another strong man. Why should You be angry about a powerless golden calf?

The difficulty here is, that Rashi had explained earlier that Hashem left an "out" for the Jews in the eventuality that they commit such a sin. When G-d gave us the Torah, He declared in the Ten Commandments that¹ "I am the Lord, your G-d ..." Rashi points out that Hashem said "your G-d" in the singular possessive form. In this manner, Moshe Rabbeinu would later be able to ask Hashem why He is angry at the Jews. When G-d said that "you shall have no other gods before Me," one might think that He was speaking to Moshe alone! Moshe could tell Hashem that it was to him alone that He said "I am the Lord your G-d," not to the entire Jewish Nation! Therefore, they should not be found guilty of having "other gods." Why does Rashi offer a second explanation here for Moshe's plea? It would seem that Rashi had no need to attribute a completely different explanation here for Moshe's defense of the Jews!

The explanation is that just one verse prior to Moshe's prayers on behalf of the Jews, Hashem said that He would annihilate all of the Jews immediately. Nevertheless, Moshe asked Hashem why He was angry at the Jews. Why did he not ask Hashem why He will destroy them?

1. Parshas Yisro, Shemos 20:2.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Moshe was well aware that an extremely serious offense is punished in a severe manner. However, even when the Torah warrants capital punishment, it is administered only when two witnesses see the offense being committed, warn the offender, and he has his day in court. There must have been an unusual reason for punishing all Jews immediately without testimony, warning or judgment. The only explanation which Moshe could see for this was G-d's anger. The explanation offered by Rashi earlier would provide an out for those who were warned and actually found guilty. Here Moshe pleaded for mercy that *no* Jews be annihilated immediately. Rashi therefore explained that Moshe said that there was no reason for Hashem's anger; the calf was of no substance.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah reading, Ki Siso, Moshe pleads with Hashem to save the Jewish people. As punishment for the sin of making the golden calf, Hashem had said that He would annihilate all of the Jews. In response to this, the Torah tells us that Moshe pleaded² "Why Hashem should You be angry at Your people whom You have brought up from the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand?" Rashi cites the words from this verse "why Hashem," and comments that "Is anyone jealous of another, except a wise man of a wise man, or a strong man of a strong man?"

There are supercommentaries who explain³ that Rashi is explaining *why* Moshe would ask G-d the reason for His anger at the Jews. However, what sort of explanation is that? Of course, He was angry; they had committed one of the most serious violations in the Torah! Based on this question, there are other commentators of the Torah who explain that Moshe was not asking Hashem a question. He was requesting that Hashem *not* be angry⁴; rather than asking Him *why* He was angry.

However, Rashi who explains the simple meaning of the Torah, does not change the meaning of the Hebrew word "למה - Why." That is the word which the Torah uses. He explains that Moshe's question was based on the fact that only a wise man is jealous of a wise man, and a strong man is jealous of a strong man.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The fact is that Rashi already explained Moshe's question. What is more, that explanation was completely different than what he writes here. At the time of the giving of the Torah, when G-d gave the Ten Commandments to the entire Jewish Nation, He began by saying⁵ "I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage ..." Rashi there explains the reason that Hashem used the singular possessive form

2. Our Parshah, Shemos 32:11.

3. See the Mizrachi, the Gur Aryeh, the Be'er Mayim Chayim and others.

4. See the commentary of the Rasag, the ibn Ezra, the Ramban and others.

5. See Footnote 1.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

“your G-d.” He writes that this was done “in order to give Moshe an opening to offer a defense for the sin of the calf. This is the meaning of what Moshe later said ‘Why Hashem should You be angry against Your people?’ You did not command them, ‘You shall not have the gods of others before Me,’ but You commanded me alone.”

There are supercommentaries of Rashi who explain that both explanations are correct⁶. They go on to explain that the reason for Rashi not quoting the earlier explanation here is because he already taught it to the beginning student. However, this explanation is untenable. Here, which is the source upon which both commentaries are based, Rashi would certainly mention his earlier comments, at least briefly. He certainly would not rely on something he said in passing 12 chapters earlier!

From this it seems clear, that each explanation of Moshe's words comes to negate a different claim against the Jews. There must be two separate claims against the Jews.

Furthermore, the simple meaning of Rashi's words, “is anyone jealous of another, except a wise man of a wise man, or a strong man of a strong man,” is that they relate to the idol, namely the golden calf. Moshe seems to be saying that Hashem is both wise and strong, while the calf is neither. At the very least it is extremely disrespectful to speak to Hashem in such a manner. Was Moshe actually comparing Hashem to a piece of gold which He created? It would certainly seem more respectful were Moshe to say that Hashem not be angry at the Jews who made the calf. This is especially true as we find a Midrash which offers just this explanation⁷!

Additionally, according to Peshat we find no response to Moshe's plea (according to Rashi) as explained by Rashi here. This being the case, we need to understand why idolatry is such a serious transgression. After all, an idol has no substance.

The Explanation

We find that one verse prior to Moshe Rabbeinu's plea on behalf of the Jews, Hashem said⁸ “Now leave Me alone, and I will be angry at them so that *I will annihilate them ...*” This means to say, that Hashem had decided⁹ to annihilate all of the Jews! Based on this, it would seem that Moshe's first entreaty to G-d should have been not to destroy the Jewish people. Why did he begin by asking Him not to be angry at the Jews?

The answer to this question is that Moshe was well aware that reward and punishment is an integral part of Torah. There are sins for which the punishment is death. Moshe understood better than anyone else. However,

6. See the commentary of the Mizrachi.

7. See Shemos Rabbah Chapter 43, 6 (near the end). See also Midrash Tanchumah on our Parshah on our Parshah, 22, and other Midrashim.

8. Our Parshah, Shemos 32:10.

9. Hashem's decision was based on Moshe's “leaving him alone.” Rashi explains that the reason for beginning the verse with those words was in order to let Moshe Rabbeinu know that it was in his hands to change things. His prayers could change the Jews' fate.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

this was clearly very different than any other instance where a death penalty is involved. Whenever a sin is punishable by death, there are strict conditions which must be met. First, the one who transgresses must be warned not to commit the offense. It cannot be a general warning; he must be told that in case he does transgress, he will receive a specific punishment¹⁰. The one who sins must be warned a very short time after he receives the warning, and it must be witnessed by two people. He must then be brought to a Jewish court and properly tried. No one would receive any punishment decreed by Torah, particularly capital punishment, without all of these conditions being fully met. The very first sin which was committed in history was the sin of eating of the Tree of Knowledge. G-d had warned Odom (Adam) that¹¹ "... on the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die." This was long before the giving of the Torah, which includes the conditions and the specific punishments. Nevertheless, we find that he lived for another *930 years*¹²!

Here it seems that none of the prerequisites were met. Hashem was going to wipe out the entire Jewish Nation besides Moshe who was not present when the transgression took place. This included those *who were not warned and had no witnesses!* Furthermore, he was going to destroy them *without the benefit of a trial*, and he was going to do so *immediately!*

From this Moshe understood that this was not an ordinary instance of a death penalty in Jewish law. There must have been some additional reason for this punishment. He realized that now Hashem had been angered. He began his entreaty on behalf of the Jewish people accordingly. Why are you angry Hashem? Are You angry because they made an idol? That is not of any concern. It is a piece of gold! This is unlike You, who had the wisdom and strength to redeem them from Egypt.

The manner in which Rashi explained Moshe's prayer earlier does not speak to Hashem's anger. That explanation only provides a reason to have mercy on those who actually committed idolatry before witnesses with a proper warning, etc. That argument is only pertinent to those punishments decreed by Torah law. Here, however, Moshe begins by beseeching Hashem not to punish all Jews as a result of His anger.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Granted, what we have explained above teaches us that there is no reason for G-d to be jealous or angry at a piece of metal. However, what about anger against a Jew who declares¹³ "These are your gods, Yisroel who

10. This makes it clear that those who warn him must be Torah scholars, at least to a certain extent. In order for their warning to be valid, they must tell the one who commits the offense the punishment prescribed by the Torah for that particular sin.

11. Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 2:17.

12. Meaning that he did not on the day that "he ate thereof."

13. Our Parshah, Shemos 32:4.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

have brought you up from the land of Egypt!" It would seem that such behavior should warrant (G-d forbid) Divine wrath!

The explanation is, that in the depth of his soul, a Jew can never truly believe in an idol¹⁴. In reality a Jew never, even at the time that he commits a grave sin, seriously believes that an idol is of any value; he is well aware that it is nothing more than a piece of stone or gold. This is because even at the time he transgresses, a Jew remains faithful to G-d¹⁵. The only reason for committing a sin is because¹⁶ "a spirit of folly enters him," meaning that he becomes temporarily insane. However, this is not the Jew; it is merely something which *enters him*. This concept was expressed by the Alter Rebbe, the first leader of Chabad, with the words that¹⁷ "a Jew neither wishes to nor is capable of separating himself from G-d."

This was what Moshe begged of Hashem. "Do not become angry at *Your nation*" for making an impotent idol. However, *Your nation*, even when they sin, remain *Your nation*.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Tiso, 5732)

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14. See Tanya Chapter 10.

15. See Tanya Chapter 24.

16. See Talmud Sotah 3, a.

17. See the Chassidic Discourse Basi Legani 5710, Chapter 3 and Hayom Yom Page 73.

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Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

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