

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Ki Siso

18 Adar, 5783 – March 11, 2023

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. He prayed after they had sinned with idolatry by making a golden calf, and Hashem said 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 committed 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 was angry at the Jews. When G-d said that "you shall have no other gods before Me," one might think that Hashem 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 did not need to attribute an utterly different cause here for Moshe's defense of the Jews!

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

1. Parshas Yisro, Shemos 20:2.

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Moshe was well aware that Hashem punished for a severe offense severely. However, even when the Torah warrants capital punishment, it only applies when two witnesses see one committing the crime, warn the offender, and he has their day in court. There must have been an unusual reason for punishing all Jews immediately without testimony, warning, or judgment. The only explanation that 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 found guilty. Here Moshe pleaded for mercy that Hashem destroys *no* Jew immediately. Therefore, Rashi explained that Moshe said 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 said He would eradicate all Jews. In response, the Torah tells us that Moshe pleaded,² "Why Hashem should You be angry at Your people whom You have brought up from the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand?" Rashi cites the words from this verse, "why Hashem." He then comments, "Is anyone jealous of another, except a wise man of a wise man, or a strong man of a strong man?"

Some supercommentaries explain³ that Rashi explains *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 severe violations in the Torah! Based on this question, other Torah commentators explain that Moshe was not asking Hashem a question, but He was requesting that Hashem *not* be angry⁴ rather than asking Him *why* He was angry.

However, Rashi explains the Torah's simple meaning and does not change the importance of the Hebrew word "למה - Why." That is the word that the Torah uses. He explains that Moshe asked his question because 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. Moreover, that explanation was utterly different from what he wrote here. 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 "your G-d." Hashem did this "to give

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.

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Moshe an opening to offer a defense for the sin of the calf. Therefore, 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 explain that Rashi does not quote the earlier description because he already taught it to the beginning student. However, this explanation is untenable. Here is the source upon which Rashi bases both commentaries. Rashi would undoubtedly mention his earlier comments, at least briefly, and he certainly would not rely on something he said in passing twelve chapters earlier!

From this, it seems clear that each explanation of Moshe's words negates a different claim against the Jews, and 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 mighty, while the calf is neither. At the very least, speaking to Hashem in such a manner is incredibly disrespectful. Was Moshe comparing Hashem to a piece of gold that He created? It would seem more respectful for Moshe to beg Hashem not to be angry at the Jews who made the calf. This is especially true as we find a Midrash that 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 severe transgression. After all, an idol has no substance.

The Explanation

In one verse before Moshe Rabbeinu's plea on behalf of the Jews, Hashem said,⁸ "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 eradicate all of the Jews! Based on this, it would seem that Moshe's first request to G-d should have been not to destroy the Jewish people. Why did he first ask Him not to be angry at the Jews?

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

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.

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However, this was very different than any other instance involving the death penalty. A sin that is punishable by death has strict conditions. First, the one who transgresses must be warned not to commit the offense, and it cannot be a general warning. The one warning must tell him that he will receive a specific punishment if he transgresses.

Additionally, he must warn him shortly before he sins. Two valid witnesses must see his sin. He must then be brought to a Jewish court and adequately tried. No one would receive any punishment decreed by the Torah, especially capital punishment, without meeting these conditions. The first sin committed in history was eating the Tree of Knowledge. G-d had warned Odom (Adam) that¹⁰ "... on the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." This was long before the giving of the Torah, which included the conditions and specific punishments. Nevertheless, we find that he lived for another *930 years*¹¹!

In our instance, it seems that none of the prerequisites were met. Hashem was going to wipe out the entire Jewish Nation. Hashem would wipe out the Jewish Nation except for Moshe, who was not present when the transgression occurred. The punishment included those *who were not warned and had no witnesses!* Furthermore, Hashem threatened 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 the death penalty in Jewish law. There must have been some additional reason for this punishment. He realized that now Hashem was angry. He began his petition on behalf of the Jewish people accordingly. Why are you upset, Hashem? Are You mad 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.

How 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 committed idolatry before witnesses with a proper warning, etc. That argument is only pertinent to those punishments decreed by Torah law. However, Moshe begins by beseeching Hashem not to punish all Jews due to 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, this does not seem to include a Jew who declares,¹² "These are your gods, Yisroel, who have brought you up from the land of Egypt!" It would seem that such behavior should warrant (G-d forbid) Divine wrath!

10. Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 2:17.

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

12. Our Parshah, Shemos 32:4.

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The explanation is that in the depth of his soul, a Jew can never honestly believe in an idol¹³. In reality, a Jew, even when he commits a grave sin, does not believe 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 the Jew remains faithful to G-d even at the time the Jew transgresses G-d's will¹⁴. The only reason for sinning is because¹⁵ "a spirit of folly enters him," meaning that he becomes temporarily insane. However, this is not the Jew; it is merely something that *enters him*. This concept was expressed by the Alter Rebbe, the first leader of Chabad, with the words that¹⁶ "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, remains *Your Nation*.

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

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

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13. See Tanya Chapter 10.

14. See Tanya Chapter 24.

15. See Talmud Sotah 3, a.

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

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in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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