

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Shabbos Chol Hamoed
Pesach
Shir Hashirim

17 Nissan, 5779 – April 11, 2020

Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Shir Hashirim

Likkutei Sichos Volume 1, Page 59

Rashi in His Own Words

שיר השירים א', ב': יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי טוֹבִים דְּדִידְךָ מִיַּיִן:

רש"י ד"ה כי טובים: ונאמר דוגמא שלו על שם שנתן להם תורתו ודבר עמהם פנים אל פנים ואותם דודים עודם ערבים עליהם מכל שעשוע ומובטחים מאתו להופיע עוד עליהם לבאר להם סוד טעמיה ומסתר צפונותיה ומחלים פניו לקיים דברו וזהו ישקני מנשיקות פיהו:

Shir Hashirim 1:2: Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for your love is better than wine.

Rashi Heading: for ...is better: This figure of speech was used because He gave them His Torah and spoke to them face to face, and that love is still more pleasant to them than any pleasure. They are assured by Him that He will appear to them to explain to them the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries, and they implore Him to fulfill His word, and this is the meaning of "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth."

Introduction

This week we will not begin by examining an apparent difficulty in one of Rashi's comments to the weekly Parshah. The reason is that this Shabbos we will not read the regular weekly Torah Portion. This Shabbos, we will be celebrating the holiday of Pesach – Passover. Hence, we will read a different portion from the Torah related to the Parshah. After the festival, we will continue the regular order of reading the Torah.

However, there is never a difficulty in finding Rashi's comments on every book of the Tanach. Rashi's commentary became the gold standard for biblical commentaries. He interpreted and explained nearly all aspects of the Torah. His explanation covers almost the entire Bible - Tanach, meaning the Chumash, the Books of the Prophets, and the Writings - Kesuvim. Additionally, he explained nearly the whole Talmud. For an academic with lots of time, this would be no small accomplishment. However, for one who served as the rabbi of a community, was busy helping Jews from the devastation wrought by the Crusades, taught daily classes in a Yeshivah which he founded, worked as a vintner and only lived to the age of 65, this was truly incredible.

However, this only reflects the quantity of his work; the quality is indescribable. Before Rashi's commentary, the Talmud was only available to scholars. It is written in a very concise manner, without punctuation, seemingly digressing from topic to topic. It is difficult for a layperson to realize whether something the Talmud says is a question or an answer. Rashi changed all of that. He supplied the "key," which opened the Talmud and made it available to everyone. He explains clearly and concisely, phrase by phrase, exactly what the Talmud is saying. In much the same way that he made the Chumash available to beginners, he did the same for the Talmud.

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Whoever follows our “Rashi of the Week,” knows how succinctly Rashi explains the Peshat, the simple meaning, of the entire Torah. The Rebbe explains in an incredibly precise manner what Rashi is saying. Since Rashi, for the most part, gives answers rather than questions, at times, it is difficult to understand what is bothering Rashi. The Rebbe always clarifies this. Rashi’s comments include everything that the youngest student with the least background needs to understand the simple meaning of each verse.

He also hid in his commentary the greatest mysteries of the Torah. Furthermore, it contains practical lessons for each of us in our service of Hashem. The Alter Rebbe, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, said that “Rashi's commentary on Chumash is the ‘wine of Torah.’ It opens the heart and uncovers one's essential love and essential fear (of G-d). Rashi's commentary on Talmud opens the mind and reveals the essential intellect¹.” In addition to explaining the simple meaning of Rashi, the Rebbe uncovers many instances where in addition to Peshat, we see both the "wine of Torah," the mystical secrets of Torah revealed in Rashi, as well as the instances where we find practical lessons in the service of Hashem hidden in Rashi.

Rashi himself points out in his commentary to the Chumash a number of times, and the Rebbe's commentary on Rashi serves as a constant reminder, that Rashi is there (primarily) to explain Peshat. However, Peshat is a relative term. In Rashi’s explanation of the Chumash, he explains the Torah’s simple meaning for a total beginner. However, in the books of the Prophets, the level of Peshat, which he explains, is not quite as simple. We see this clearly in Rashi's commentary, and the Rebbe explains a very logical reason for this. In a letter from 5732 - 1972, the Rebbe notes that "Rashi's explanations of the Prophets and Scriptures are also according to Peshat; They are a continuation of his commentary to the Torah. However, in the books of the Prophets and Writings, he is not as particular regarding what constitutes Peshat; it is likely that this is because the student studying the latter books of the Bible is older." He clarifies this further in a talk given on 7 Tammuz, 5743 - 1983. There he states that "Rashi's style in explaining the latter books of the Bible is not as precise as his style in explaining the Chumash. Although both explain the simple meaning of the verse, the definition of what constitutes the simple meaning of the latter books is not as limited as the simple meaning of the Chumash. It has a broader connotation. This is because one's Torah studies begin with the Chumash, the Five Books of Moshe. This is in keeping with the curriculum for the Torah study, which the Sages laid out for us². Once he has completed the Chumash, before he begins studying the Prophets, he has already completed the entire Chumash with Rashi's commentary, including all of the teachings of the Sages that Rashi quoted. Therefore, the student is ready for a broader definition of Peshat.

Shir Hashirim - The Song of Songs

1. See Hayom Yom, entry for Shevat 29.

2. See Pirkei Avos, 5, 22. "He (Ben Hai Hai) would say, ‘Five years is the age for the study of Scripture (which begins with Chumash). Ten, for the study of Mishnah ...’"

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Of all of the books in the Bible, the Song of Songs seems to be the most enigmatic. Without any commentary or explanation, this book does not seem to be at all “Biblical.” Yet it is called the “*Song of Songs*,” implying that it is the holiest song of all. Rashi comments on its very first verse that “it is the greatest of all songs uttered to the Holy One, blessed be He, by His nation.” Rabbi Akiva said that³ “the entire universe is unworthy of the day on which the Song of Songs was given to the Jewish Nation. All of the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies.” How do we reconcile the two? On the one hand, the book does not seem particularly holy; on the other hand, the Sages, who truly understood what sanctity means, deemed it holier than all of the other books of the Writings?

The explanation is that the entire work is an analogy. It describes the relationship between Hashem, our husband, and the Jewish people, His wife. Even though we left Him and (seemingly) consorted with different men - gods (with a lowercase “g”), we will return to Him, and He will take us back.

There is a widespread custom to read Shir Hashirim on Pesach. This is not the custom in Chabad. However, it is the custom in many fine Jewish communities to do so. Additionally, the custom is cited in the Code of Jewish Law. There is also a connection between the text of the Song of Songs and Pesach. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to use this time to explore one of several comments the Rebbe made about a Rashi in Shir Hashirim

We need to understand just what sort of connection there is between Shir Hashirim and Pesach. The answer can be found in the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law. The Ramoh⁴ states⁵ that it is customary to read Shir Hashirim on the Shabbos of the intermediate days of the festival. If the festival begins on Shabbos, one is to read it on the last day of Pesach.” In the Shulchan Aruch Horav⁶, it says the same thing⁷. “We are accustomed to reading Shir Hashirim on the Shabbos of the intermediate days of Pesach because it contains the concept of the exodus from Egypt. The connection to the exodus is that it is written:⁸ “With My mighty steeds who battled Pharaoh’s riders, I revealed that you are My beloved.”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Shir Hashirim – the Song of Songs, tells us of a request made by the Jewish people to the Holy One blessed be He, their “husband.” Their request is⁹, “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for your love is better than wine.” Rashi explains this with the following comments. “This figure of speech was used because He gave

3. Mishnah Yadayim 3, 5.

4. Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1520 - 1572), who was born and lived in Krakow, Poland. Since the Code of Jewish Law was written by Rabbi Yoseph Karo who followed the Sephardic customs, Rabbi Isserles added notes wherever the Ashkenazi custom is different.

5. Shulchan Aruch, Section Orach Chaim. Chapter 490, Paragraph 9.

6. This is the Code of Jewish Law composed by the Alter Rebbe, the first Rebbe of Chabad.

7. Chapter 490, Paragraph 17.

8. Shir Hashirim 1:9.

9. Shir Hashirim 1:2.

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them His Torah and spoke to them face to face. That love is still more pleasant to them than any pleasure. They are assured by Him that He will appear to them to explain to them the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries. They entreat Him to fulfill His word. This is the meaning of 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.'”

Rashi's words seem to require explanation. The Sages taught us that we must use great care in disseminating “the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries.” The Mishnah teaches that¹⁰ “One may not expound ... the subject of the Chariot before one person alone unless he is a sage and comprehends of his own knowledge.” The subject of the Chariot refers to the Prophet Yechezkel's vision of a Heavenly chariot. This was a prophetic revelation of Divine mysteries¹¹, meaning Kabbalah. The Mishnah is teaching that the Sages placed severe restrictions on teaching “the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries.” How can Rashi say that the Jews “are assured by Him that He will appear to them to explain the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries.” This is precisely what the Mishnah says not to expound.

The Explanation

The Rebbe explains¹² that throughout the generations, the Sages granted more and more leniency regarding the study of the mysteries of the Torah. During the era of the Talmud, permission was only given to select individuals to study Kabbalah. This required a great deal of spiritual preparation. Later on, the Ari Zal¹³ taught that not only is it permissible to spread the study of the mysteries of the Torah, but it is a Mitzvah. Later on, the Baal Shem Tov¹⁴ was told that the Ultimate Redemption will not come until his fountains, which include the mystical aspects of Torah, have been spread forth to the outside, i.e., to those that appear to be outside, meaning far from such concepts. By the time of the Alter Rebbe, all restrictions were lifted. The commandment to spread forth mystical teachings became more important and stronger with each ensuing generation. That which Shir Hashirim tells us that "Your love is better than wine," means that "He will appear to them to explain to them the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries," Rashi is explaining that the true innermost secrets of the Torah will not be completely revealed until Hashem appears to us, in other words until the coming of Moshiach. Nevertheless, we must prepare ourselves now.

10. Mishnah Chagigah Chapter 1, Mishnah 2.

11. See Yechezkel, beginning with 1:1.

12. Likkutei Sichos, Volume 1, Page 59.

13. Rabbi Yitzchok Luria (1534 – 1572), who lived in the Holy city of Tzefas. He was the most famous Kabbalist of his day.

14. Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov was the eighteenth century Eastern-European rabbi who founded the Chassidic movement.

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The Ari Zal said that one must taste the Shabbos food on Friday afternoon¹⁵. He says that it this is based on the statement,¹⁶ "Those who taste it will merit life." This is cited as law¹⁷. The week is divided into seven days. So too is the world is divided into seven millennia, each millennium represents a day of the week. Now that we are more than halfway through the sixth millennium, it is Friday afternoon. We must taste the Shabbos food, the Torah of Moshiach. In Rashi's words, this refers to the "secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries." Now we all have an obligation to study Chassidic philosophy to at least "taste" that which is to come.

The Rebbe explains¹⁸ that aside from the redemption of each one of us for which we yearn with the coming of Moshiach, there is also the redemption of Hashem (as so to speak) because He placed Himself into exile with us. Hashem will also redeem the Torah. Throughout our exile, the entire Torah could not be revealed. It will first be when Moshiach comes, that "He will appear to them to explain to them the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries," the Torah which Moshiach will teach us.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Toldos, 5718)

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15. Sha'ar Hakavanos 62, a.

16. This is taken from the Mussaf service for Shabbos.

17. Mogen Avrohom to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Chapter 250.

18. Likkutei Sichos Volume 25, Page 59.

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