

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

The First Days  
of  
Pesach  
Shir Hashirim

15 Nissan, 5779 – April 20, 2019

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 מִשִּׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי טוֹבִים דְּדִידָךְ 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 entreat Him to fulfill His word, and this is the meaning of "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth."

### Introduction

This week, as well as the next, we will not begin by examining an apparent difficulty in one of Rashi's comments to the weekly Parshah. The reason is, that neither this week nor next do we read the regular weekly Torah Portion. Both this Shabbos and next, we will celebrate the holiday of Pesach – Passover. Hence, we will read a special 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 comments of Rashi on every book of the Tanach. Rashi's commentary became the gold standard for biblical commentaries. He interpreted and explained nearly all aspects of Torah. His commentary covers nearly the entire Bible - Tanach, meaning the Chumash, the Books of the Prophets, and the Writings - Kesuvim. Additionally, he explained nearly the entire 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 to Jewish communities in Europe, 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 available to scholars alone. It is written in a very terse manner, without punctuation, seemingly digressing from topic to topic. It is difficult for a layman 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 clear 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 in order to understand the simple meaning of each verse. Additionally, he hid within his commentary the greatest mysteries of the Torah, as well as practical lessons for each of us in our service of Hashem. As a matter of fact, 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 uncovers the essential intellect<sup>1</sup>.” 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. Despite the fact that 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 Torah study which the Sages laid out for us<sup>2</sup>. 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.

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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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### Shir Hashirim - The Song of Songs

Of all of the books in the Bible, the Song of Songs seems to be the most enigmatic. Reading this book without any commentary or explanation, there does not seem to be anything Biblical or holy about it. Yet it is called the "Song of Songs," implying that it is the greatest song of all. In fact, 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 that<sup>3</sup> "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. Despite the fact that we left Him and consorted with (seemingly) 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. Nevertheless, this it 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 Ramoh<sup>4</sup> states<sup>5</sup> that it is customary to read Shir Hashirim on the Shabbos of the intermediate days of the festival. If the festival begins on Shabbos, as is the case this year, it is read on the last day of Pesach." In the Shulchan Aruch Horav<sup>6</sup>, it says basically the same thing<sup>7</sup>. "We are accustomed to read 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 because it is written<sup>8</sup> "With My mighty steeds who battled Pharaoh's riders I revealed that you are My beloved."

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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.

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### 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 is<sup>9</sup>, “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 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, and 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 clearly teaches that<sup>10</sup> “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 mysteries<sup>11</sup>, 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 to them the secret of the Torah's reasons and its hidden mysteries.” This is exactly what the Mishnah says not to expound.

### The Explanation

The Rebbe explains<sup>12</sup>, that throughout the generations more and more leniency has been granted regarding the study of the mysteries of the Torah. During the era of the Talmud, permission was only granted to select individuals to study Kabbalah. This required a great deal of spiritual preparation. Later on, the Ari Zal<sup>13</sup> 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 Tov<sup>14</sup> 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, far from such concepts. By the time of the Alter Rebbe, all restrictions were lifted. The commandment to spread forth mystical teachings became stronger and stronger with each ensuing generation. By telling us that what is written in Shir Hashirim 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

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9. Shir Hashirim 1:2.

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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Torah will not be totally revealed until Hashem appears to us, in other words until the coming of Moshiach. Nevertheless, we must prepare ourselves now.

The Ari Zal said that one must taste the Shabbos food on Friday afternoon<sup>15</sup>. He says that it this is based on the statement<sup>16</sup> "Those who taste it will merit life." This is cited as law<sup>17</sup>. 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 have an obligation to 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 in order to at least "taste" that which is to come.

The Rebbe explains<sup>18</sup> that aside from the redemption of each and every 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. However, additionally there will also be a redemption for the Torah. Now, throughout our exile the entire Torah cannot 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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Mr. **Sholom Moshe** ben Reb **Shlomo Meir** Hacoheh ע"ה **Cohen**

Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

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