

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Korach

3 Tammuz, 5778 – June 16, 2018

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר ט"ז, כ"ב: ויפלו על פניהם ויאמרו אל-אל-הי הרוחת לכל בשר האיש אֶחָד יִחַטָּא וְעַל כָּל הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָף:

רש"י ד"ה אל-אל-הי הרוחת: יודע מחשבות. אין מדתך כמדת בשר ודם, מלך בשר ודם שסרחו עליו מקצת מדינה אינו יודע מי החוטא, לפיכך כשהוא כועס נפרע מכולם, אבל אתה לפניך גלויות כל המחשבות ויודע אתה מי החוטא:

רש"י ד"ה האיש אחד: הוא החוטא ואתה על כל העדה תקצוף. אמר הקב"ה יפה אמרת, אני יודע ומודיע מי חטא ומי לא חטא:

Bamidbar 16:22: They fell on their faces and said, "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?"

Rashi Heading - Hashem, the G-d of the spirits: (Hashem Who) knows the thoughts (of every man). Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings. A mortal king against whom part of his country lapses does not know who the sinner is. Therefore, when he is angry, he punishes them all. But as for You, all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is.

Rashi Heading - if one man: is the sinner, will You be angry with the entire congregation? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "You have spoken well. I know and will make known who sinned and who did not sin."

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Korach, tells us how Korach and his group attempted to rebel against Moshe and Aharon. Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to "separate themselves from this congregation, and I will destroy them in a moment." To this Moshe responded "... Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" Rashi cites the words "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits," and explains that You are Hashem Who "knows the thoughts (of every man). Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings. A mortal king against whom part of his country lapses does not know who the sinner is, and, therefore, when he is angry, he punishes them all. But as for You, all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is."

It seems as if Rashi is trying to tell us that here the word "spirit" means "thought," rather than "soul" which is another possible definition. Hashem knows our thoughts, so, unlike a human king he does not need to punish everyone. He can punish only the guilty party.

However, this requires quite a bit of explanation. There does not seem to be any need for an analogy. Hashem knows everyone's thoughts, and therefore only punishes the guilty party - end of conversation. If for whatever reason an analogy is needed, we understand that a just king will only punish one after he first determines his guilt. Additionally, why does Rashi use two different expressions? He first uses the word *lapses*, and then the word *sinner*. Likewise, he first uses the plural, *part of his country*, then he changes to the singular, *the sinner*.

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There is a more basic question which needs to be asked. The Torah discussed Korach and 250 men. However here Moshe is speaking about one sinner. The explanation is that when a human king is confronted by a group of people who have lapsed, it does not mean that they are all truly rebelling against him. Often there is one (or more) real sinner, who is simply a rabble-rouser, and entices the others to follow him. A mortal king cannot necessarily distinguish between the real rebel and those who have merely lapsed. However, inasmuch as Hashem knows the thoughts of each person, can punish the one who is truly guilty.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Korach, tells us the story of Korach's rebellion against Moshe and Aharon, and how he persuaded many Jews to take part in his rebellion. Hashem told Moshe and Aharon¹ to "separate themselves from this congregation, and I will destroy them in a moment." To this Moshe responded² "... Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" Rashi cites the words "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits," and explains that You are Hashem Who "knows the thoughts [of every man]. Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings. A mortal king against whom part of his country lapses does not know who the sinner is, and, therefore, when he is angry, he punishes them all. But as for You, all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is."

What Rashi seems to be explaining is that the Hebrew word "רוח", translated as "spirits," can have a number of different translations³, including "souls." However, Rashi is telling us that here its meaning is "thoughts." "G-d, the Lord of thoughts," meaning the different thoughts of each man, as Rashi goes on to explain. This is the only manner in which we can understand the connection between the first half of the verse - "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh," with the second half, "if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" In as much as Hashem knows each person's thoughts, He knows at whom to direct His anger. However, if what the Torah is saying is that He is the G-d of souls, why is that a reason for not being angry at the entire congregation for one man's sins?

That is why Rashi continues and says that "Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings ... but as for You ... and You *know* who the sinner is." This is the reason that Rashi translates "רוחות" as "thoughts."

Further on, Rashi cites the words from the verse "if one man," and explains that if one man "is the sinner, will You be angry with the entire congregation? The Holy One, blessed be He said, 'You have spoken well. I know, and will make known who sinned and who did not sin.' "

1. Bamidbar 16:21.

2. Bamidbar 16:22.

3. This word refers to something which is intangible; either something spiritual, such as a soul, or something of the physical world such as wind. It can also mean thought, which is also intangible. We find all of these various meanings throughout the Torah.

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Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Why does Rashi need to add the allegory of a mortal king in order to explain that G-d's attributes are not like those of earthly kings? It seems to be quite obvious. If this allegory is necessary, Rashi should have cited it earlier. There were other times that it would have been appropriate, such as when Avrohom pled on behalf of the people of Sodom, which is very similar to this instance. Yet when Avrohom says⁴, "Will you destroy the righteous together with the wicked?" Rashi makes no mention of this allegory.

Furthermore, a just earthly king will not punish many people if one person sins. Even if he doesn't know exactly who the guilty party is, he will certainly not punish anyone without first investigating what the situation is.

Rashi begins his allegory by saying that, "A mortal king against whom part of his country *lapses*," and follows that up by saying that "he does not know who the *sinner* is." Why does he change from the word "lapse" to the word "sin?" Likewise, Rashi begins by saying that the guilty party is "part of his country," implying more than one person, and concludes with the words "the sinner," implying a single individual.

The Torah already says that "If one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?"⁵ What does Rashi add by saying that if one man "is the sinner, and You ..." He does not seem to be adding anything to what the Torah already says. If Rashi is (somehow) explaining the words from the verse "will sin" and the words "will You be angry with the entire congregation," why does he not cite them in the heading of his commentary. At least he could allude to them by writing *etc.* or the like?

What does Rashi gain by adding the sentence to his commentary "The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'You have spoken well. I know, and I will make known who sinned and who did not sin.'"

In response to Moshe's words, G-d responded by saying "withdraw from the dwelling of Korach, Dason and Avirom." The Torah then proceeds to tell us the punishment which was given to the three of them. This is after Rashi told us that Hashem had said to Moshe, "you have spoken well." What was it that Moshe had spoken well? He said that if one man sins, and here G-d is informing us that not one, but three men sinned!

Rashi quotes Hashem's words that "I know, and will make known who sinned and who did not sin." The words "I know" seem to be extra, being that the entire point is that he will make known who sinned.

There is a more general question, as well. In all of the verses leading up to this point, the Torah tells us of a large group of people who were rebelling against Moshe. At the beginning of the rebellion it says that⁶ "They confronted Moshe together with 250 men ... the assembled against Moshe and Aharon ..." Then "Moshe spoke⁶ to Korach and to all of his company ...," and he rebuked⁷ "Korach and *his entire company who were assembled with him*," and told him

4. Bereishis 18:23.

5. Bamidbar 16:2 – 3.

6. Bamidbar 16:5.

7. Bamidbar 16:11.

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that "*they* were against the Lord." It is quite clear that it was not just one person who rebelled; why did Moshe say that "if one person sins?"

The Explanation

On the verse⁸ "Korach assembled the entire congregation against them," Rashi explains that "all that night Korach went to the tribes and said to them, 'Do you think that I am only concerned for myself? I am concerned for all of you. These people (meaning Moshe and Aharon) come and take all of the high positions: the kingship for himself and the Kehunah for his brother.' Ultimately, they were all persuaded (to follow Korach)." In other words, Korach was the one who convinced those who were with him by persuading them that he was concerned for their benefit. The same is true of those who were at the forefront of the rebellion, Dason, Avirom and the 250 men. Rashi explains that⁹ "Since the tribe of Reuvain (the tribe of Dason, Avirom and the majority of the 250 men) was settled in the south when they camped, making them neighbors of Kehos and his children who were also camped in the south, they joined with Korach in his rebellion." In other words, on their own they would have remained faithful to Moshe. It was only because Korach enticed them and steered them away from the truth, that they became involved in the argument. He convinced him that his arguments were correct.

This is certainly not meant as a justification to anyone. It is never an excuse to proclaim that one was persuaded to do something wrong. One must stay clear of wicked people. One must be firm in his convictions, and not be swayed by others. However, the fact is, that they only became involved due to Korach's "campaign" against Moshe.

That is why Rashi specifically uses an allegory of "a mortal king against who part of his country *lapses*¹⁰." Their conduct was a lapse, but not an intentional act of rebellion against the king. That is why Rashi says that the mortal king does not know who the sinner is; since a large group lapsed, it is logical that among them is at least one person who actually sinned. This one person misled the others to misbehave, however only he truly deserves to be treated as a rebel against the king. Therefore, an earthly king who cannot determine the truly guilty party punishes everyone; after all, they did all lapse. However, before Hashem everything is revealed. Therefore, it would not make sense for the ones who merely lapsed to receive the same punishment as the one who actually sinned.

Rashi continues and explains this from the words of the Torah themselves, without using a separate heading (in the original manuscripts, unlike the way it is printed in our versions of the Torah¹¹). "If one man *is the sinner*, (but for the rest of the people it was only a lapse), will You (Who knows all thoughts) be angry with the entire congregation?"

8. Bamidbar 16:19.

9. Bamidbar 16:1.

10. The Hebrew word which Rashi uses is סרחה, which literally means malodorous or rotten. That is the point; the actions of this part of the country were unacceptable and wrong, but not a case of rebellion against a king for which one would be liable a death penalty.

11. This is clear from the manuscript and the first and second editions of Rashi. It is written there "if one man *he is the sinner*, with no period or separation between the words of the verse - "if one man" - and Rashi's words - "he is the sinner."

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To this G-d responded, that despite your opinion that only Korach was the sinner, only he deserved punishment, I know, and will make known, that Doson and Avirom were equally liable.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

It is told in the Parshah that Moshe called for Doson and Avirom. They responded with great audacity, refusing to come. This should have made it obvious that they were just as guilty, and were sinners, just as Korach was. However, despite all this Moshe Rabbeinu himself judged them favorably, and declared that there was but one sinner.

This provides us all with a lesson to what extent we must each work at acquiring the attribute of judging others favorably, because each of us contains a "spark" of Moshe. Even if it seems that one's conduct does not allow for him to be judged favorably, we must still judge him favorably. As a result of this, we will also do everything which is within our power to return him to the proper path.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Korach 5731)

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**IN HONOR OF
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו Morris**

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**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיחיו Morris**

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**IN HONOR OF
Hatomim Avrohom Moshe ben Mina Esther שי' Gordon
For a complete and speedy recovery**

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DEDICATED BY HIS CLASSMATES

in

YESHIVAH TORAH OHR שיחיו

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR MOTHER
Mrs. Brocha bas Reb Tzvi Nechemiah Hacoheן ע"ה Cohen
Passed away on 8 Shevat, 5778
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life**

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Mr. Sholom Moshe Hacoheן ben Tzivia שי' Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery**

* * *

**DEDICATED BY
Hatomim Moshe Shlomoh Zohar שי' Mars**

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May he merit to be a Chossid, a Yerei Shomayim and a Lamdon

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כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם
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לרפואה שלימה וקרובה
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נדפס ע"י חבריו התמימים
בישיבה תורה אור
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מרת ברכה בת ר' צבי נחמי' הכהן ע"ה כהן
נפטרה ביום ח' שבט, ה'תשע"ח
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
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נדפס ע"י בני משפחתה שיחיו
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ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן
לרפואה שלימה וקרובה
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נתרם ע"י
הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מארס
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יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן