

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Ha'azinu

8 Tishrei, 5781 – September 26, 2020

Compiled from the works of
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Ha'azinu**

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים ל"ב, י': ימצאהו בארץ מדבר: רש"י ד"ה ימצאהו בארץ מדבר: רש"י ד"ה ימצאהו בארץ מדבר: רש"י ד"ה ימצאהו בארץ מדבר:

רש"י ד"ה ימצאהו בארץ מדבר: אותם מצא לו נאמנים בארץ המדבר, שקבלו עליהם תורתו ומלכותו ועולו מה שלא עשו ישמעאל ועשו, שנאמר, וזרח משעיר למו הופיע מהר פארן: ואונקלוס תרגם ימצאהו יספיקהו כל צרכו במדבר, כמו ומצא להם, לא ימצא לנו ההר:

Devorim 32:10: He found them in a desert land, and in a desolate, howling wasteland. He encompassed them and granted them understanding; He protected them as the pupil of His eye.

Rashi Heading - He found them in a desert land: G-d found them, (meaning the Jews) faithful to Him in a desert land, for they accepted His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke upon themselves. (This was) something that Yishmoel and Aisov did not do, as the Torah states, "The Lord... shone forth from Seir to them, and appeared from Mount Paran." Now, Targum Onkelus translates **He found them** as G-d provided Israel with all their needs in the desert. (The use of the word (מָצָא) "He found" is similar to "(Will flock and cattle be slaughtered for them) to provide (וּמָצָא) them?" and "The mountain is not enough (יִמְצָא) for us."

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Ha'azinu, the Torah tells us that¹ "He found them in a desert land, and a desolate, howling wasteland. He encompassed them and granted them understanding; He protected them as the pupil of His eye." Rashi, citing the words "He found them in a desert land," explains that "G-d found them, (meaning the Jews) faithful to Him in a desert land, for they accepted His Torah, His kingship, and His yoke upon themselves; unlike Yishmoel and Aisov, as the Torah states², 'The Lord... shone forth from Seir to them, and appeared from Mount Paran.'"

Rashi's explanation here is a continuation of his explanation of the previous verse, where it says,³ "Because the Lord's portion is His nation; Yaakov is the string of His inheritance." This isn't easy to understand. The verse begins talking about the Jewish Nation, and then it discusses Yaakov, our forefather. That is how Rashi is saying that our verse is a direct continuation of the previous one. Yaakov had three merits, unlike Yishmoel or Aisov. His own, his father's, and his grandfather's. The Torah continues by explaining that Yaakov's progeny also has threefold merit, that of accepting "*His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke,*" which parallels the merits of Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov.

1. Our Parshah, Devorim 32:10.
2. Our Parshah, Devorim 33:2.
3. Our Parshah, Devorim 32:9.

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Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Ha'azinu, the Torah writes that⁴ "He found them in a desert land, etc." First, Rashi explains, citing these words, that "Hashem found them, (meaning the Jews) faithful to Him in a desert land, for they accepted His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke upon themselves. (This was) something that Yishmoel and Aisov did not do, as the Torah writes⁵, "The Lord... shone forth from Seir to them, and appeared from Mount Paran." After explaining the entire verse at length, Rashi reinterprets this, according to Targum Onkelos. He states that "Now, Targum Onkelos translates, "He found them" as G-d provided Israel with all their needs in the desert. (The use of the word - אָצַף which we translated as "He found" is) similar to⁶ '(Will flock and cattle be slaughtered for them) to provide (אָצַף) them?' and⁷ 'The mountain is not enough (אָצַף) for us.'" In other words, Rashi is saying that according to Onkelos' explanation, the translation of the Hebrew אָצַף is not that "He found them," but instead that He supplied them with enough for all of their needs.

It would seem that Rashi could explain this verse, as others do. Hashem "found" this Nation, meaning that He "chose" the Jewish people in the desert, when He gave us the Torah. However, it is not all that simple to explain the verse in such a manner. G-d chose the Jewish Nation before we entered the wilderness; when we were still in Egypt. Thus, we find explicitly that⁸ "... He came *to take for Himself a nation* from the midst of another nation (meaning the Egyptians) ..." Therefore, rather than explaining that Hashem found, meaning "chose us" in the desert, Rashi gives two different explanations. The first is that He found us to be "faithful to Him" in the desert. The second is, according to Onkelos' explanation, that He supplied us with all of our needs in the wilderness.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

It seems as if Rashi's explanation does not fit with the flow of the verses. In this week's portion, the Jewish people are rebuked. We are told again and again of all of the good which G-d did for us. Conversely, we are told that we repaid Hashem's kindness with evil. Rashi himself says here⁹ that "these are words of reproof. Moshe called upon Heaven and earth as witnesses, and this Torah portion would also serve as a witness, that eventually the Jews would betray Hashem, and they would neither remember what G-d did for them in the past, nor what He was destined to do to them. Hence, this should be understood to refer to the past and the future. This entire passage is apropos of¹⁰ 'Remember the days of old; reflect upon the years of other generations.'... They should have remembered all this."

So too is the case with the very verse which we are explaining. After telling us that "He found them," our verse continues and says that "He encompassed them and bestowed understanding upon them; He protected them..." Rashi himself explains the words "He encompassed them" by "surrounding them with protective clouds ... and He

4. See Footnote 1.

5. See Footnote 2.

6. Parshas Beha'aloscho, Bamidbar 11:22.

7. Yehoshua 17:16.

8. Parshas Vo'eschanan, Devorim 4:34.

9. Our Parshah, Devorim 32:10.

10. Our Parshah, Devorim 32:7.

surrounded them with divisions in four directions." Rashi then explains this that "He bestowed understanding upon them," by saying that "He bestowed upon them Torah and understanding." Finally, he explains that "He protected them" from "from snakes, serpents, scorpions, and hostile nations."

The explanation of Onkelos that the verse describes G-d's kindness by explaining how He supplied us with all of our needs seems to fit much better with this portion. Even if it is possible to define the verse following Rashi's first explanation, Hashem chose us in the wilderness; it should not be his first resolution. Whenever Rashi cites two different explanations, it is because there is a difficulty with each. However, the explanation which he states first is closer to Peshat. The second explanation, which Rashi cites that of Onkelos, would seem more comparable to Peshat than the first.

We also need to understand why Rashi states his explanation in such a lengthy manner. Rashi tells us that the Jews accepted "*His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke* upon themselves." He then adds that "Yishmoel and Aisov did not do so, as the Torah states, 'The Lord... shone forth from Seir to them, and appeared from Mount Paran.'" It would have seemingly been sufficient to say in short that the Jews accepted "His Torah," without mentioning the other nations. Furthermore, the words *sovereignty* and *yoke* are seemingly synonymous. Throughout the works of the Sages, we find the expression "the yoke of the Kingship (of Heaven). Rashi himself uses this expression¹¹.

It may be possible to explain that the word yoke here means the yoke of His commandments rather than the yoke of His kingship or sovereignty. Rashi tells us elsewhere that these are two separate things¹²; "you have accepted upon yourselves the yoke of My sovereignty, now it is incumbent upon you to accept the yoke of My commandments."

It would not be easy to use this explanation. For one thing, Rashi writes that the Jews accepted "His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke upon themselves." The "yoke of My Torah" would be included within the words "His Torah," which Rashi mentioned. It is quite evident that it does not only refer to Torah study, but rather to Mitzvah observance as well. Also, why does Rashi use the word "yoke" without specifying which "yoke?" After all, this word can be explained in more than one way.

The Explanation

Rashi's explanation here is a continuation of his explanation of the previous verse. The verse just before ours says¹³, "Because the Lord's portion is His nation; Yaakov is the string of His inheritance." Rashi explains, "Why did Hashem go to all this effort (to save humanity, as discussed in the previous verse)? *His* portion was hidden within them. It was destined to come forth (from them). And who is G-d's portion? '*His nation*,' and who is His Nation? '*Yaakov*, the string of His inheritance.'" Rashi makes it quite clear that when the Torah says "Yaakov," it is not

11. See Rashi's commentary to Parshas Kedoshim, Vayikroh 20:26.

12. See Rashi's commentary to Parshas Kedoshim, Vayikroh 18:2.

13. Our Parshah, Devorim 32:9.

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discussing the Jewish Nation, which is also sometimes called by the name Yaakov. Rashi continues, that "he is the third among the Patriarchs. He is endowed with a threefold (parcel) of merits: The merit of his grandfather, the merit of his father, and his merit, totaling three, like a rope composed of three strands (twined together for added strength) ...not Yishmoel the son of Avrohom, and not Aisov, the son of Yitzchok."

We see that the verse begins speaking about "His nation," i.e., the Jewish Nation. Nevertheless, it concludes discussing Yaakov himself, the forefather of the Jewish people. To remain consistent, the verse should have ended by saying that "the *children* of Yaakov are the string of His inheritance," and not Yaakov himself.

Therefore, Rashi finds it necessary to explain our verse as a continuation of the words "Yaakov is the lot of his inheritance." First, the Torah describes the greatness of Yaakov. This greatness was only Yaakov's, neither Yishmoel's nor Aisov's. Only he was the third among the Patriarchs, who had three merits. Following that, the Torah explains that Yaakov's progeny inherited these three merits. The Jewish Nation has the merits of "*His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke,*" which parallel the merits of Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov.

This explains why Rashi has to tell us that the nations of "Yishmoel and Aisov did not do (as we did), as the Torah states, 'The Lord... shone forth from Seir to them, and appeared from Mount Paran.'" Just as Yaakov had threefold merit, which neither Yishmoel nor Aisov possessed. Likewise, his offspring possess triple merit, which the descendants of Yishmoel and Aisov did not.

We will understand this by first explaining the merit of G-d's Torah, sovereignty, and yoke. We will then explain how these parallel our three forefathers.

- **Torah:** This refers to Torah study, which is an intellectual pursuit. Accepting His *decrees*, which *transcend the intellect*, are not emphasized here. Hence, the Mitzvos, which one accepts as a result of Torah study, results from *rational commandments*.
- **Sovereignty:** He, who accepts Hashem's kingship, accepts the fulfillment of His decrees. An inherent part of accepting a monarch is accepting to do whatever he commands, whether one understands or not.
- **Yoke:** Accepting the yoke of a king is something far more profound. It is not merely accepting to *fulfill* the king's commands. It is making one's *essence* subservient to the king.

This explains the difference between the acceptance of sovereignty and the acceptance of a yoke. One can accept a king and remain free. He can have a personal life, provided he follows the king's rules. These would only apply to matters related to the country, i.e., the monarchy or the king himself. Acceptance of the *yoke*, however, is different. One must be totally and always subservient to the king in all matters without exception.

This is what was accomplished in the wilderness at Mount Sinai. Each Jew accepted not only to fulfill the commands of the Torah, and not only to take Hashem's sovereignty. Instead, we all accepted to be dedicated to G-d day and night, with every fiber of our being.

Based on all of the above, we can also explain the connection between these three merits and our forefathers. *According to Peshat*, each of them excelled in one of the three. We find a special connection which each had to one

of these three.

- **Torah:** Yaakov was primarily known for his greatness in Torah study, as the Torah says,¹⁴ "... Yaakov was an innocent man, dwelling in tents." Rashi says that the word "tents" refers to the Yeshiva of Shem and the Yeshiva of Aver.
- **Sovereignty:** This is particularly relevant to Avrohom. He dedicated his life to publicizing the kingship of Hashem over the world, as it says,¹⁵ "... and he called there in the name of the Lord, the G-d of the world." Rashi comments that as a result of Avrohom's efforts, Hashem was called "the G-d of the entire world."
- **Yoke:** Yitzchok always felt the yoke of Hashem. As Rashi explains¹⁶, he had been sanctified on Mount Moriah to be a perfect burnt offering.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The verse we are explaining begins with the words "He found them," meaning the Jewish people. What is the significance of a found object? If one acquires something by working for it, what he receives is proportional to the work he invested. On the other hand, an item which one found is infinitely more significant than any effort which was involved. Based on this, the Tzemach Tzedek explains Rashi's words¹⁷. "G-d found them (meaning the Jews) faithful to Him in a desert land, for they accepted His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke upon themselves." The "find" was that the Jews were faithful. We believed and had faith in Hashem. Just as a found object transcends nature, so too does trust transcend the intellect.

Based on this, we can also explain why Rashi says the Jews accepted not just Hashem's Torah, but also His sovereignty and His yoke. We accepted G-d's kingship fully and without question, in a manner which transcends nature. Since Hashem rewards us measure for measure, he *found* us in the desert. He connected with us at Mount Sinai in a way that is totally above nature.

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Parshas Ha'azinu 5732 and 5737)

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

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14. Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 25:27.

15. Parshas Vayeyiro, Bereishis 21:33.

16. Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 25:26 and 26:2.

17. See Ohr Hatorah on this verse, beginning with *pp.* 1,669.

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