

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Bereishis

29 Tishrei, 5781 – October 17, 2020

Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Bereishis

Likkutei Sichos Volume 10, Pages 13 – 18

Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית ג', א': והִנְחֹשׁ הָיָה עָרוֹם מִכָּל חַיֵּי הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹקִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל הָאִשָּׁה אַף כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים
לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגֶּן: **ב':** וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל הַנְּחֹשׁ מִפָּרִי עֵץ הַגֶּן נֹאכְלִים: **ג':** וּמִפָּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן אָמַר
אֱלֹקִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ פֶּן תָּמּוּתוּן: **ד':** וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּחֹשׁ אֶל הָאִשָּׁה לֹא מוֹת תָּמּוּתוּן:

Bereishis 3:1: Now the serpent was cunning, more than all the beasts of the field that the Lord G-d had made, and it said to the woman, "Did G-d indeed say, 'You shall not eat of any of the trees of the garden?'" **2:** And the woman said to the serpent, "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. **3:** But of the fruit of the tree that is amid the garden, G-d said, 'you shall not eat of it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" **4:** And the serpent said to the woman, 'You will surely not die.'

Synopsis

In our Torah portion, Bereishis, the Torah tells us of a discussion between Chavah, the first woman, and the serpent¹. In this discussion, the serpent enticed Chavah to eat from the fruit from which G-d commanded them not to eat. Not only that, but Chavah also persuaded Adam to eat from the fruit. Adam, Chavah, and the serpent were all punished for defying Hashem's commandment. The Torah describes how the serpent persuaded Chavah. He said to her, "Did G-d indeed say, 'you shall not eat of any of the trees of the garden?'"

Rashi explains every word in the Torah, which is difficult to understand, according to Peshat. In other words, he explains everything which would present a difficulty to a beginning student. Why does he not tell us how the serpent could speak?

Suddenly describing a conversation between Chavah and the serpent is most perplexing. We do not find mention anywhere that any beasts have the power of speech. Moreover, we see ourselves that the serpent's descendants cannot speak. It would seem that

1. Our Parshah, Bereishis 3:1-5.

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the original snake could talk, but Hashem punished him and removed that power from his descendants. We do not find that Hashem gave the serpent any such curse.

Whenever there is difficulty understanding a verse, as in our case, that Rashi does not address, it can mean one of two things. Either (a.), in reality, it is not a question, or (b.) it is a question, but Rashi answered it earlier. Yet we find no explanation for the fact that the original serpent could speak or that its descendants could not.

We may be able to understand this based on the following. Before telling us the incident of Chavah and the serpent, the Torah says that² "the serpent was cunning, more than all the beasts of the field that the Lord G-d had made." When Hashem punished the serpent, He said that³ "and the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed be you more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field." Hashem punished the snake because he had "done this," i.e., he seduced Chavah to sin. From this, we understand that Hashem punished him by taking away those faculties, which enabled him to influence her. Chiefly among these is the power of speech. If he could not speak, the snake would not have been able to convince Chavah to sin.

Rashi's Explanation

This Torah portion, Bereishis, is the beginning of the five books of the Torah. As such, it tells us of the beginning – the creation of the world. On the sixth day of creation, after creating everything else, G-d created the first man and woman; Adam and Chavah. He gave them one commandment: not to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Torah tells us that the serpent had a conversation with Chava. During this conversation, he seduced her to eat of the forbidden fruit. Not only that, but he convinced her to give of the fruit to her husband to eat as well. The three of them, the snake, the man, and the woman, were all punished for their sin.

We find that all of the animals could make sounds; they could growl, roar, etc. However, we do not find any other animal that could speak. Not only that, but we find that the serpent's descendants are not able to talk. For that matter, they cannot make any sound besides hissing. It is likely that at first, the nature of the serpent was that it could speak.

2. Our Parshah, Bereishis 3:1.

3. Ibid. Bereishis 3:14.

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However, as a part of its punishment, it lost this ability. We find in the Torah that a part of the snake's punishment was to lose his feet. From that point on, it⁴ "shall walk on his belly." However, we find no mention, neither in the Torah nor in Rashi, that the snake had a natural ability to speak, later taken from him.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The fact that the snake first could speak and later lost this power seems difficult to understand. Yet Rashi ignores this difficulty. We have discussed many times that Rashi teaches us the simple explanation of the Torah. Whatever information a beginning student needs to understand the Torah, Rashi explains. If something appears to be a question, and Rashi does not address it, it is either because, in reality, it is not a question, or Rashi explained it earlier. Why is it that Rashi does not tell us that this serpent was capable of speaking? Why does the Torah itself not tell us that the snake's nature was that it had the power of speech? The serpent's entire curse was that⁵ "cursed be you more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field; you shall walk on your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I shall place hatred between you and between the woman, and between your seed and between her seed. He will crush your head, and you will bite his heel." The Torah mentions nothing about speech, and Rashi doesn't explain a thing⁶.

The Explanation

We can explain the above as follows. As an introduction to Chava's encounter with the snake, the Torah tells us that⁷ "Now the serpent was cunning, more than all the beasts of the field that the Lord G-d had made." That he was more cunning than all of the beasts does not mean that the serpent was more cunning than Chava. Adam and Chava were (as so to speak) G-d Almighty's handiwork. However, the message is that the snake was more cunning than all of the other animals. The serpent was smart enough to persuade

4. Ibid. Bereishis 3:14.

5. Ibid. Bereishis 3:14-15.

6. Further on in the Torah, we do find an instance of an animal speaking. Bilaam's she-donkey spoke to him. But prior to that, the Torah tells us that (Parshas Balak, Bamidbar 22:28) "The Lord opened the mouth of the she-donkey, and she said to Bilaam ..." In other words, it was not a natural trait of the donkey, but was rather miraculous.

7. Our Parshah, Bereishis 3:1.

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Chava to do that which Hashem had prohibited her from doing. The only way in which the snake could entice Chava was through the power of speech. The serpent could not persuade her to do anything without first being able to speak to her.

The snake's punishment was "because you have done this, cursed be you more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field." How did the serpent manage to do this? It was due to his ability to speak. "Because you have done this," rather than being "greater than all of the beasts of the field," it became "cursed more than all the cattle and more than all the beasts of the field." The other animals were able to bark, growl, etc. Not only did the snake lose its power of speech as a result of his sin. Instead, he even lost the ability to make any sounds whatsoever, as the other animals could.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Sages teach us⁸that "G-d repays good (a reward) in a greater measure than He does that which is not good (a punishment)." We see from the serpent's evil actions that it was transformed from "more cunning than all" to "more cursed than all." How much more so is this true regarding a right, positive action. One can transform himself from the lowest level of all through one good deed to the highest.

This idea is alluded to explicitly through a serpent. We find further⁹ that serpents plagued the Jewish Nation, that bit and killed us. The salvation, the cure, came from a copper snake which was made by Moshe Rabbeinu. Chassidic texts teach us¹⁰ that this is also the idea of a transformation from the lowest level to the highest level.

Since the Almighty always brings the cure before the disease¹¹, we can always find the treatment in the sin itself. This sin seems to have caused humanity to fall. Before this sin, there was no death in the world. We all would have lived eternally. Therefore, in this very place where the Torah tells us of the greatest sin, it also alludes to its cure. Here we are taught, at the very beginning of the Torah, what we can accomplish. Through looking

8. See Talmud Sotah 11, a. It is also quoted by Rashi in his commentary to Parshas Yisro, Shemos 20:6 and Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 34:7.

9. See Parshas Balak, Bamidbar, beginning with 21:6.

10. See Likkutei Sichos Volume 13 beginning with page 75 at length.

11. See Talmud Megillah 13, b.

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up and doing Teshuvah, we can go from the greatest depths to the most incredible heights in one moment¹².

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Bereishis, 5733)

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

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12. The idea of the “Copper Snake” made by Moshe Rabbeinu, was that it was on a pole. By looking up to it, we would see the heavens, and G-d Who rests there. See Talmud Rosh Hashanah 29, a. It is also quoted in Rashi’s commentary to Ibid. ibid. 21:8. See also Likkutei Sichos Volume 13 beginning with Page 75, Chapter 3.

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