

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Lech Lecho

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Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Lech Lecho

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית י"ז, ה': וְלֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת שְׁמֹךְ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֹךְ אַבְרָהָם כִּי אַב הָמוֹן גּוֹיִם נִמְתָּיֵךְ:

רש"י ד"ה כי אב המון גוים: לשון נוטריקון של שמו. ור"ש שהיתה בו בתחלה, שלא היה אב אלא לארם שהוא מקומו ועכשיו אב לכל העולם, לא זזה ממקומה, שאף יו"ד של שרי נתרעמה על השכינה עד שנתוספה ליהושע, שנאמר (במדבר יג טז) ויקרא משה להושע בן נון יהושע:

Bereishis 17:5: And your name shall no longer be called Avrom, but your name shall be Avrohom, because I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

Rashi Heading - because the father of a multitude of nations: ("אב הַמּוֹן" – Av Hamon - The father of a multitude" is) an acrostic of his name (*Av Ra Ham*). The "Resh - ר" originally in his name denoted that he was the father only of Aram, which was his native place. Now, he has become the father of the entire world. Nevertheless, the "Resh - ר" that was there originally was not moved from its place. For even the "Yud - י" (that was originally) in Sorai's name¹ complained to the Shechinah until it was added to Yehoshua, as it is said, "and Moshe called Hoshea (הוֹשֵׁעַ) the son of Nun, Yehoshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ)."

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Lech Lecho, Hashem changes Avrom's name to Avrohom. He says,² "And your name shall no longer be called Avrom, but your name shall be Avrohom because I have made you the father of many nations." Rashi cites the words "because ... the father of a multitude of nations" and explains that Avrohom's new name is an acrostic; "the father" (*Av*) "of a multitude" (*hamon*). The "Resh - ר" originally in his name denoted that he was the father only of Aram, which was his native place. Now, he has become the father of the entire world. Nevertheless, the "Resh - ר" that was there originally was not moved from its place. For even the "Yud - י" (that was originally) in Sorai's name complained to the Shechinah until it was added to Yehoshua, as it is said, "and Moshe called Hoshea (הוֹשֵׁעַ) the son of Nun, Yehoshua - יְהוֹשֻׁעַ."³

1. Avrohom's wife's name was originally "Sorai - שרי."

2. Bereishis 17:5.

3. Bamidbar 13:16.

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The proof that Rashi brings from Soroh's name contradicts what he says. Rashi points out that despite the acrostic, the letter "Resh - ר" was not moved from its place. However, in the case of Soroh, the letter "Yud - י" was removed. It was replaced in someone else's name several centuries later.

The answer to this question can be seen from the fact that Rashi does not mention Avrohom's original name; he only says that the "Resh - ר" which was initially in his name, indicated that he was the father of Aram and that this letter was not moved from its place. This is because, in most cases, according to Peshat, we are not concerned with the reason for names⁴. However, from the fact that Hashem named Avrohom, specifying an acrostic, and nevertheless the letter "Resh - ר" remained⁵, we see that it is significant. From this, Rashi understands that he was first the father of Aram and then became the father of the entire world. Being the father of Aram is included within being the father of the world; hence, the "Resh - ר" is not moved from its place. However, Soroh's original name had no significance.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Lech Lecho, Hashem changes Avrom's name to Avrohom. He says, "And your name shall no longer be called Avrom, but your name shall be Avrohom because I have made you the father of many nations." Rashi cites the words "because ... the father of a multitude of nations" and explains that ("the father of a multitude – *Av Hamon* is) an acrostic of his name (*Av Ra Ham*). The "Resh - ר" originally in his name denoted that he was the father only of Aram, which was his native place. Now, he has become the father of the entire world. Nevertheless, the "Resh - ר" that was originally a part of his name was not moved from its place. For even the "Yud - י" (that was originally) in Sorai's name complained to the Shechinah until it was added to Yehoshua, as it is said, "and Moshe called Hoshea (הוֹשֵׁעַ) the son of Nun, Yehoshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ)."

The simple meaning of Rashi's comments is that the word "because" ("because I have made you") is the reason for changing his name from Avrom to Avrohom. Therefore, Rashi says that the name change is due to this acrostic. Instead of Avrom, his name was changed to Avrohom. He became the father - "Av" - of a multitude - "hamon" of nations. The question remains that according to this, his name should have become "Avhom" rather than "Avrohom." Therefore, Rashi explains that "Avrom" had the letter "Resh - ר." This

4. The only exceptions would be significant names, i.e. names which were given by G-d.

5. The letter "Resh - ר" was part of his original name, but had no place in the acrostic.

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signified that he was the father of Aram, where he lived. The "Resh" remained in his name, or as Rashi says, "was not moved from its place," in addition to the acrostic.

Rashi cites an example (and proof) from the name change of Avrohom's wife, Sorai. Further on, Hashem says to Avrohom⁶, "And G-d said to Avrohom, "Your wife Sorai (שרַי - spelled with a י) you shall not call her name Sorai, for Soroh (spelled with a ה with the letter י removed) is her name. The name Sorai connotes "my princess," while the name Soroh connotes a princess over everyone. The letter "Yud - י" had "complaints" to Hashem because it was removed from Sorai's name. The same is true here as well. So that the Resh would not have a complaint to Hashem, it was left in Avrohom's name.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The first difficulty in understanding what Rashi says is that the proof he brings from Soroh's name seems to indicate the exact opposite of Rashi's point. The letter "Yud - י" was removed from Soroh's name. The letter did have a complaint and was later replaced. However, it was replaced several centuries later in someone else's name. In the meantime, it was removed from Soroh's name. Why could the letter "Resh - ר" not be removed from Avrohom's name similarly?

Secondly, the way that Rashi phrases his comments seems to be unusual. He writes, "*Even* the 'Yud - י' originally in Sorai's name had complaints to the Shechinah." One would think that he should write "likewise the 'Yud - י.'" "Even the Yud - י" implies that the "Resh - ר" from Avrohom's name should certainly have had complaints to the Shechinah. However, even the "Yud - י" could have complaints as well. What is the difference between the "Resh - ר" from Avrohom's name and the "Yud - י" from Soroh's name?

The Explanation

The explanation will become clear once we look more closely at Rashi's words. Rashi does not mention that Avrohom's original name was Avrom. He also does not note that this name is formed by an acrostic for "Av – the father of Rom - Aram." Instead, he begins his comments by saying that "The "Resh - ר" that was originally in his name, denoted that he was the father only of Aram, his native place. Now, however, he became the father of the entire world." This tells us that Rashi is not concerned with the original name. He is also not worried about the acrostic. The reason for this is quite simple. According to Peshat, we do not concern ourselves with the meaning of names. The only exceptions would be names that have great significance, for example, names that Hashem gave. However, here, Avrohom's original name was given by his father, Terach.

6. Bereishis 17:15.

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The one thing that teaches us the significance of the name Avrom is that the "Resh - ר" was not moved from his name. This teaches us that it is essential to know that he was first named Avrom. The fact that he was the father of Aram before becoming the father of the entire world is necessary.

Why was the "Resh - ר" not moved from his name? Because being the father of Aram is included within being the father of the world. The "Resh - ר" did not need to move because he still had his status as the head of Aram. However, Soroh was a completely different story. Her birth name does not have real significance, at least not in the world of Peshat. Therefore, the "Yud - י" from her original name could only have complaints, but not more. This being the case, the letter was removed from her name.

If this is so, why does Rashi mention this? To teach us that the Hebrew letters can have "complaints" and that their complaints must be dealt with. In the case of Soroh, it took quite some time to soothe the "Yud - י" from her name. That was because that particular letter did not have as strong a claim as the "Resh - ר" from Avrohom. Yet, it was ultimately pacified.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

In the Chassidic work Torah Ohr⁷, the Alter Rebbe teaches us that the name Avrom is also an acrostic for the spiritual level, called the Supernal Father. "Av" means father, and "Rom" means high. The spiritual concept of Father is that of the G-dly level of Chochmah. Chochmah is generally translated as wisdom, yet that translation does not begin to explain the true meaning of Chochmah. It is the original "flash" of understanding. It contains all of the wisdom that can be extracted from it, but at this point, until the flash, the point of knowledge is given dimensions it is not possible to understand.

Regarding our spiritual service, we begin at the stage of Avrom, the Supernal Father. It is Divine wisdom, but it is too high to be drawn down into the world. We can ultimately reach the level of Avrohom - the father of many nations. At that point, we can bring down this hidden, supernatural wisdom in a manner that the entire world, a multitude of nations, can understand.

One might mistakenly think that we are degrading it because of drawing something so high down to such a low level. Therefore, Rashi tells us that the "Resh - ר" is not moved from its place. The letter Resh, which stands for "Rom – High," retains its stature. G-dly light is such that it can be brought down to the lowest of levels and retain its original holiness.

7. See Torah Ohr, at the beginning of Parshas Lech Lecho.

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All Jews have three patriarchs: Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. We each have these three specific forefathers because every Jew, without exception, has inherited qualities from each of these giants.

In other words, without exception, we all can draw down G-dly light throughout the entire world, wherever it may be. We can teach G-dliness and spirituality so that it reaches even the multitude of nations. Since we are all empowered to do so, we must also perform this task.

Despite our obligation to become fathers throughout the world, we must also remember that Avrom is included in our global outreach. We must be fathers of our native land as well.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecho 5744)

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

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