

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Vayeiros

17 Cheshvan, 5782 – October 23, 2021

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 Vayeiro

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית י"ח, כ"ג: ויגש אברהם ויאמר האם תקפה צדיק עם רשע:

רש"י ד"ה ויגש אברהם: מצינו הגשה למלחמה (ש"ב י', י"ג) ויגש יואב וגו', הגשה לפיוס (להלן מ"ד, י"ח) ויגש אליו יהודה, והגשה לתפלה (מלכים א' י"ח, ל"ו) ויגש אליהו הנביא, ולכל אלה נכנס אברהם, לדבר קשות, ולפיוס ולתפלה:

Bereishis 18:23: And Avrohom approached and said, "Will You (Hashem) even destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

Rashi Heading - And Avrohom approached and said: We find (the expression) "approaching" for war¹, "And Yoav drew forward (meaning approached), etc."; and "approaching" for placating² "And Yehudah approached him"; and "approaching" for prayer³ "And Eliyohu the prophet came near." For all of these, Avrohom entered, to speak harshly, to appease, and to pray.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Vayeiro, we are told that Hashem sent three angels to visit Avrohom. They came in the form of people. Each one had a separate task to perform. One of the angels' mission was to destroy the evil city of Sodom. Even though they were all so wicked, the Torah tells us that Avrohom approached Hashem on their behalf to plead with Hashem to save their lives. The Hebrew word with the Torah uses for "approach" is "ויגש." Rashi explains that "ויגש" has three possible meanings, and cites examples for each. We find this word used to imply war, appeasement, and prayer. Rashi concludes his comments by saying that Avrohom approached Hashem for all three of these; to speak harshly, appease, and pray.

We have discussed that Rashi explains everything that a beginning student needs to know to understand the Torah. This being the case, we need to understand why Rashi finds it necessary to explain "ויגש – and he approached." It is a common word that is used throughout the Torah. Additionally, we just said that Rashi concludes his comments by saying that Avrohom approached Hashem for all three, to speak harshly to Hashem, to appease Him, and to pray to Him. Why is there a need for Rashi to tell us

1. II Shmuel 10:13.

2. Parshas Mikeitz, Bereishis 44:8.

3. I Kings 18:36.

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how many things the word "approach" implied?

Furthermore, why does Rashi need to cite proofs to demonstrate the meaning of "approach?" All he needs is to look at the following verses. They tell us explicitly the purpose of this word. The following verses also spell out what those things are.

The explanation is that here the meaning of the word "approached" is different than what it means throughout the Torah. That is why Rashi needs to translate it here. Generally, "approached" implies that one went from point "A" to point "B." However, that cannot be the case here. Before telling us that Avrohom "approached" Hashem, the Torah tells us that "Avrohom was still standing before Hashem." This makes it clear that Avrohom did not physically move to approach Hashem, such as the standard translation of the word would imply. Instead, the point here is that Avrohom changed his frame of mind, not his geographic location. He began by speaking harshly to Hashem. He then changed his approach; he began appeasing Hashem. Finally, he prayed to Hashem on behalf of the people of Sodom.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Vayeyiro, we find that Hashem sent three angels (in the form of people) to visit Avrohom. Each angel had a different mission. One of the angel's mission was to destroy Sodom, which was an evil city. Despite their wickedness, Avrohom approached Hashem to plead on their behalf. The Torah tells us that⁴ "Avrohom approached (Hashem) and said, 'Will You even destroy the righteous with the wicked?'" Rashi cites the words, "and Avrohom approached and said," and comments as follows. "We find (the expression) 'approaching' for war¹, "And Yoav drew forward (meaning approached), etc."; and 'approaching' for placating² "And Yehudah approached him"; and "approaching" for prayer³ "And Eliyohu the prophet came near." For all of these, Avrohom entered, to speak harshly, to appease, and to pray.

We find in this instance that Avrohom spoke harshly⁵. He told Hashem, "Will You even destroy the righteous with the wicked." We also find that he appeased Hashem⁶; "Far be it from You to do such a thing." We also find that he prayed to Hashem⁷. He said, "I have begun to speak to Hashem even though

4. Our Parshah, Bereishis 18:23.

5. Ibid, ibid, ibid.

6. Ibid, ibid. 18:25.

7. Ibid, ibid, 18:27.

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I am just dust and ashes." Avrohom approached Hashem with all three methods. Hence Rashi makes a point to show that they are all included in the word "approached."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

We have discussed many times that Rashi explains Peshat, i.e., the simple meaning of the verse. He gives the beginning student everything that he needs to know just what the Torah is saying. Therefore if a word is unusual, Rashi will explain its meaning. However, the term "approach – ויגש" is used frequently throughout the Torah. Why does Rashi find any need to explain the word's meaning?

Furthermore, "approach – ויגש" is the one word which Rashi is explaining. Why does Rashi also cite the word *Avrohom* - "and Avrohom approached?" Rashi is precise with his language. He is not only careful with the words he uses in his comments. He is even particular with words that he uses as the header of his remarks. He is only explaining the word "approach." He is not describing the word Avrohom!

Additionally, we need to understand why Rashi concludes his comments with the words "for all of these Avrohom entered ...?" If one reads the following verses, it is evident that Avrohom entered into his conversation with Hashem for all three types of approaching! Furthermore, Rashi changes the word from that which the actual verse uses. The Torah writes "approach," while Rashi changes and uses the word "enters."

The Explanation

To explain Rashi, we must look at the verse in context. Before our verse, the Torah tells us that⁸ "Avrohom was still standing before Hashem." Usually, the verb *approach* implies movement. I can only approach someone if I am somewhere else. However, if "Avrohom was still standing before Hashem," how was it possible for him to draw close to Hashem?

This is what Rashi is emphasizing by saying, "for all of these Avrohom entered." Even before he spoke to Hashem, Avrohom was in a state of mind that prepared him to speak harshly, appease Hashem, and pray. The fact that he talked to Hashem in a particular manner does not prove that he approached Him (mentally) with that intention.

From this, we see that we cannot prove from the following verses that Avrohom spoke harshly, tried to appease Hashem, and prayed to Him. These passages do not tell us the meaning of "approaching." That is not the point here. The point is that he entered a state of mind whereby he was ready to approach Hashem in these ways. The fact that he spoke that way tells us nothing.

8. Ibid, ibid, 18:22.

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Rashi still needs to prove that "ויגש - הגשה" applies to these three states of mind. This is especially true because Rashi began by saying, "Will You destroy the righteous with the wicked?" These are harsh words, and we might think that Avrohom's entire approach was to speak harshly!

That is why Rashi begins by quoting the words from the verse, "And Avrohom approached." Rashi explains that "we find the term approaching used ..." Since the Torah repeated that Avrohom approached Hashem, although he was still standing before Hashem, Rashi shows us that the verb "approach" has the connotation of any or all of these three states of mind.

Rashi is not comparing the actual meaning of the word ויגש- approach here and in the above-cited verse to show that Yehudah approached Yosef. In both places, it conveyed the idea of moving from one position to another. However, here we are describing a completely different type of movement. Avrohom moved from one mental state to another. However, Yehudah's approaching implies physical motion. At first, he was together with his brothers. He then left them to speak with Yosef. Since "approaching" there had its usual meaning, there was no reason for Rashi to explain it.

In the case of Yehudah approaching Yosef, the motion was obviously to appease Yosef. The first thing he said to Yosef was,⁹ "Please my master, allow your servant to speak to you ..." However, despite Yehudah telling Yosef not to "be angry ..." there is no implication that he approached Yosef to speak to him harshly. All it means is that he did talk harshly.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Avrohom's primary attribute was that of "Chesed," which means kindness. This is rooted in the character trait of loving Hashem. Avrohom had this characteristic in great abundance. Each of our forefathers had whatever attributes were needed to serve G-d. However, the driving force behind Avrohom was that of "Chesed." He was the physical manifestation of the G-dly quality of kindness. Therefore, the prophet refers to the Jewish people as "the seed of Avrohom who loved Me."¹⁰

Accordingly, we need to understand why Avrohom found it necessary to approach G-d with harsh words! Moreover, he chose to approach Hashem with severity *first*. He approached G-d in three different manners; severity, appeasement, and prayer. Let us assume that he had a reason to approach G-d with harsh words. Why should he begin in that manner? He could have started with appeasement or prayer, either of which would be keeping with his nature. In that way, he may have avoided harshness altogether.

9. Parshah Vayigash, Bereishis 44:18.

10. Yeshayahu 41:8.

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The explanation is that love was not merely his nature. What it means is that love was the root of his soul. It was the primary method in which he served Hashem. However, upon seeing that people's lives are at stake, he was perfectly willing to do whatever it took to save them.

The Torah writes this to give us a practical lesson in the service of Hashem. If there is a danger to human life, we *may* not limit ourselves to conduct, which is in keeping with our natural characteristics¹¹. Instead, we must do whatever it takes to rectify a situation. There is no difference if it threatens the body or the soul.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vayeiros 5730)

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

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11. This is why Hashem did not say until after Avrohom's tenth test (Our Parshah, Bereishis 22:12) "now I know that you are a G-d fearing man." G-d commanded him to offer his beloved son Yitzchok as an offering. This is a polar opposite to Avrohom's nature. Only a G-d fearing person is was willing to go completely against his nature in order to fulfill Hashem's will.

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