

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Toldos

5 Kislev, 5781 – November 21, 2020

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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית כ"ז, ב': וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא זָקַנְתִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי:

רש"י ד"ה לא ידעתי יום מותי: אמר רבי יהושע בן קרחא אם מגיע אדם לפרק אבותיו ידאג חמש שנים לפניהם וחמש לאחר כן, ויצחק היה בן מאה עשרים ושלש, אמר שמא לפרק אמי אני מגיע, והיא מתה בת מאה עשרים ושבע והריני בן חמש שנים סמוך לפרקה, לפיכך לא ידעתי יום מותי, שמא לפרק אמי, שמא לפרק אבא:

Bereishis 27:2: And he said, "Behold now, I have grown old; I do not know the day of my death."

Rashi Heading – I do not know the day of my death: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchoh said that if a person reaches his parent's age (when they passed away), he should worry five years beforehand and five years afterward. Yitzchok was 123 years old (at this time). He said, "Perhaps I will reach the age of (the passing of) my mother, who died at 127. I am thus within five years of her age. Therefore, 'I do not know the day of my death.' Perhaps I will reach my mother's age, and maybe my father's age."

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Toldos, our patriarch Yitzchok says that he has grown old and does not know the day of his death, i.e., how long he has left to live. Why was he suddenly concerned at this point? Rashi explains this by quoting the words of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchoh¹. He states that one should be concerned when he reaches the age of five years earlier than his mother's age at the time of her passing and five years afterward. He should similarly be concerned regarding the age at which his father passed away. Yitzchok was now 123 years old; hence he was concerned because he was five years younger than his mother was at the time of her passing. His mother Soroh lived to be 127.

Why does Rashi need to explain anything whatsoever here? Yitzchok himself explicitly said that he has grown old! That is why he was concerned!

The explanation is that we find earlier that instead of Yitzchok's father, Avrohom, blessing him, G-d Almighty Himself blessed him. Hashem is limitless. His blessing certainly included that of a long

1. See Bereishis Rabbah 65:121.

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life. He wouldn't be concerned because he reached old age. Rashi explains the reason for his concern by citing the teaching of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchoh.

In addition to blessing Yitzchok, G-d also blessed his parents. They both had a longer life-span than that which was pre-destined according to the laws of nature. Avrohom would have lived until the age of one-hundred, and Soroh until the age of ninety. If not for G-d's blessing, Yitzchok would have needed to be concerned beginning with age 85. He had already passed that many years earlier. Hence, based on Hashem's blessing to his parents, Yitzchok knew that he had at least until the age of 123.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Toldos, we find that our patriarch Yitzchok said,² "Behold now, I have grown old; I do not know the day of my death." Rashi explains the reason for Yitzchok's concern about not knowing the day he would pass away. He does this by quoting the Midrash³. "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchoh said that if a person reaches the age of his parent's (passing), he should worry five years beforehand and five years afterward. Yitzchok was 123 years old⁴. He said, 'Perhaps I will reach the age of (the passing of) my mother, who passed away at 127⁵. I am thus within five years of her age. Therefore, 'I do not know the day of my death.' Perhaps I will reach my mother's age, and maybe my father's age.'" With these words, Rashi explains Yitzchok's concern at that particular point.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

It would seem that there is no question as to why Yitzchok expressed concern regarding the day of his passing here. He said, "Behold now, I have grown old." That would certainly seem to be reason enough for concern over how much longer he would live! Why does Rashi need to offer any explanation whatsoever here?

Additionally, why does Rashi mention that this teaching was said by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchoh? It's unusual for Rashi to cite a source for what he writes. Only very rarely does he name the Sage who he is quoting. Here we see that Rashi does not mention his source; this entire teaching is from

2. Our Parshah, Bereishis 27:2.

3. See Footnote 1.

4. It would seem that Yitzchok's concern should have begun at the age of 122. The Rebbe cites a note at the beginning of the Alter Rebbe's Laws of Torah Study which is related to this. See there for further insight into the question.

5. Parshas Chayei Soroh, Bereishis 23:1.

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Bereishis Rabbah, yet Rashi does not credit the Midrash. He does, however, name the Sage who the Midrash mentions. Rashi only does so when it adds to our understanding of Peshat. What does our knowledge that Rabbi ben Korchoh taught this add to how we understand the verse's simple meaning?

The Explanation

We can understand this by looking at Rashi's comments on an earlier verse. The Torah wrote earlier that⁶ "it came to pass after Avrohom's death, that G-d blessed his son Yitzchok ..." Rashi gives two explanations as to why Hashem blessed Yitzchok Himself. One of these is that "even though the Holy One, blessed be He, delivered the blessings to Avrohom, he was afraid to bless Yitzchok, because he foresaw Aisov coming from him. Therefore, he said 'May the Master of blessings come and bless whomever He pleases.' And the Holy One, blessed be He, came and blessed him."

From this, we see that G-d Almighty Himself blessed Yitzchok. A blessing from G-d Almighty certainly includes long life. With such a Berochoh, we can understand that the arrival of old age is not a cause for concern over one's life coming to an end. Therefore, Rashi's explanation is necessary. He lets us know that according to nature, the time for concern over one's passing is five years before and after the age his parents (both father and mother) were at the time of their demise. Since Yitzchok was 123 years old, and his mother passed away at age 127, he was worried. His concern was because of his specific age, not because he was old.

However, this still leaves us with a question. If Rashi's teaching is the natural pattern of life, why should Yitzchok have been concerned? He had a blessing directly from Hashem. This blessing included long life. That blessing meant that he would live past the typical life expectancy. What was the cause of his concern? Yitzchok lived until the age of 180. That was five years longer than his father, who passed away at the age of 175⁷. Why was his life-span within the typical life expectancy, and no longer?

The explanation is that Avrohom and Soroh were also blessed directly by Hashem. Therefore, their lifetimes were even longer than expected. When Avrohom was 100 years old, and Soroh was 90, the Torah tells us that they were not merely old, but they were⁸ "old, and coming in years ..." What is the meaning of the phrase, "coming in years?" They had both "come," meaning passed all of their years. In other words,

6. Parshas Chayei Soroh, Bereishis 25:11.

7. Parshas Chayei Soroh, Bereishis 25:7.

8. Parshas Vayairo, Bereishis 18:11.

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without the Divine blessing which they both received, Soroh would have lived to be 90, and Avrohom to be 100. Hashem's blessing added thirty-seven years to Soroh's life and seventy-five years to Avrohom's.

Had Yitzchok lived to be 105, his life would have extended five years beyond the number of years Hashem initially allotted his father. We see from this that G-d's blessing added many years to his life. It was the same amount of years that Hashem by which Hashem increased Avrohom's lifetime. Yitzchok lived to the age of 180. Had his life-span followed the typical way things happen, he could have only lived until the age of 105. In other words, he merited to live an extra seventy-five years, just as his father.

The same is true regarding his mother. He began to consider when he would pass away five years before he reached his mother's age at the time of her death. Had she lived the ninety years that Hashem initially allotted her, he may have only lived until the age of eighty-five. However, his concern only began thirty-seven years later, after he passed the age of 122, and started the 123rd year of his life.

However, we remain with a question. The Torah told us earlier that Hashem blessed Avrohom that⁹ "you will be buried in a good old age." The meaning of that is that all of his children would be righteous at the time of his death. Rashi explains that because of the blessing of being "buried in a good old age," Avrohom would lose five years from his life. Rashi writes¹⁰ "that Aisov would not embark on his evil ways during his (Avrohom's) lifetime. Therefore, Avrohom died five years before his time, and on that very day, Aisov rebelled." In other words, to fulfill both the blessing of longevity and having righteous children, he passed away at 175 instead of 180. Hashem allotted him 180 years. That was the life-span which he could have expected. Hashem shortened his life to fulfill *both* blessings. However, it would seem that Yitzchok, who G-d only blessed with longevity, should have lived to be 185!

Rashi answers this question by telling us the name of the one who taught this. The Talmud tells us the response of several Sages to the reason for their longevity¹¹. Each gave several answers. They answered by stating certain Mitzvos regarding which they were exceptionally scrupulous. Each was particular in the fulfillment of all Mitzvos. However, they were unusually scrupulous in the Mitzvos with which they responded. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchoh was one of the Sages who had to answer this question. He was the only one who responded with just one answer. He replied that throughout his entire life, not once did he ever gaze upon an evil person.

9. Parshas Lech Lecho, Bereishis 15:15.

10. *ibid.*

11. See Tractate Megillah, beginning with 27, b.

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From this, we see that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchoh's position was that not gazing at an evil person is equivalent to several other merits in bringing about long life. From this, we can understand the converse. Staring upon wicked people alone can cause a shortening of one's life. Therefore, we can understand why Yitzchok lived to the age of 180, rather than 185. He believed his son Aisov to be righteous. However, despite his belief, Aisov was evil. Gazing at Aisov shortened his life.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Toldos and Shabbos Parshas Vayishlach 5728))

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

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