

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Vayeitzei

6 Kislev, 5785 – December 7, 2024

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Vayeitzei
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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית כ"ט, ל"ב: ונתתה לאה ונתלד בן ותקרא שמו ראובן כי אמרה פי-ראה ה' בענני כי עתה יאהבני אישי:

רש"י ד"ה ותקרא שמו ראובן: רבותינו פירשו, אמרה ראו מה בין בני לבן חמי שמכר הבכורה ליעקב, וזה לא מכרה ליוסף ולא ערער עליו, ולא עוד שלא ערער עליו אלא שביקש להוציאו מן הבור:

Bereishis 29:32: Leah conceived and bore a son. She named him Reuvain, because she said, "Because Hashem has seen my affliction¹, for now my husband will love me."

Rashi Heading – and she named him Reuvain: Our Sages explained that she said, "Look at the difference between my son and my father-in-law's son (Aisov). Aisov sold the birthright to Yaakov. (On the other hand,) this one (Reuvain) did not sell it to Yosef, and he did not contend against him. Furthermore, he even sought to take him out of the pit."

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion tells us about Yaakov Avinu's marriage to Rochel and Leah. The Parshah then describes to us the children to whom they gave birth. These children later became the forbearers of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. We read that² "Leah conceived and bore a son. She named him Reuvain because she said, 'Because Hashem has seen my affliction, for now, my husband will love me.'" *Rashi* teaches us that "Our Sages explained that she said, 'Look at the difference between my son and my father-in-law's son (Aisov)³. He sold the birthright to Yaakov. This one (Reuvain) did not sell it to Yosef, and he did not contend against him. Furthermore, even sought to take him out of the pit."

Rashi's words seem to pose an obvious question. The Torah tells us why Leah named her son Reuvain: "Hashem saw her affliction, and now her husband will love her." Why does Rashi offer a completely different reason for his being named Reuvain? The source of Rashi's explanation is from the Gemorah⁴. However, as we have often explained, Rashi explains Peshat, the Torah's simple meaning. According to Peshat, we know the importance of the name Reuvain.

1. In the Hebrew original, "כי ראה – *Ki ro'o*"

2. Our Parshah, Bereishis 29:32.

3. In the Hebrew original, "look at the difference between my son and my father-in-law's son" is "Re'u mah bayn b'ni l'ven chami – ראו מה בין בני לבן חמי."

4. Talmud Berochos 7b.

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The explanation is that Rashi does not give a new and different meaning to the name Reuvain. Instead, he is explaining the meaning behind what Leah meant to convey. In the previous verse, the Torah writes,⁵ "Hashem saw that Leah was hated." Why was she confident that giving birth to a son would cause her husband to love her? Eventually, Rochel, the beloved wife, would also give birth to a child. She gave birth to Yaakov's firstborn but could not know the future. Perhaps he would (G-d forbid) end up like his uncle Aisov? Aisov despised the responsibility and work that goes together with being the firstborn⁶.

Therefore, Rashi tells us that she saw through prophecy that her firstborn would *not* be like his uncle; instead, he would cherish the value of being firstborn. Therefore, she knew that giving birth to the firstborn would cause her husband to love her.

Rashi's Explanation

This week, we read of Yaakov Avinu's marriage to Rochel and Leah. The Parshah then tells us of the children to whom they gave birth. These children went on to be the Twelve Tribes of Israel. We read that⁷ "Leah conceived and bore a son. She named him Reuvain because she said⁸, 'Because Hashem has seen my affliction, for now, my husband will love me.'" Rashi explains, "Our Sages said, 'Look at the difference between my son and my father-in-law's son (Aisov)⁹. He sold the birthright to Yaakov. This one (Reuvain) did not sell it to Yosef, and he did not contend against him. Furthermore, even sought to take him out of the pit.'"

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

We know that Rashi's commentary explains the simple meaning of the Torah. Rashi explains every difficulty in understanding Peshat. He writes several times that he is *only* explaining Peshat¹⁰. What question do we still need to answer? This verse appears to be very straightforward.

Furthermore, Rashi's explanation seems to *contradict* the verse's simple meaning. The Torah tells us why Leah named her son Reuvain; "Hashem saw her affliction, and now her husband will love her." Yet Rashi offers a different interpretation. The basis of Rashi's comments is from the Gemorah¹¹. However, the Talmud is not explaining Peshat, which is the simple meaning of the Torah. According to the Torah's simple sense, the name Reuvain means "Hashem saw her affliction."

5. Ibid, ibid. 29:31.

6. Parshas Toldos, ibid. 25:34.

7. Our Parshah, ibid. 29:32.

8. See footnote 1.

9. See footnote 4.

10. See *for example* Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 3:8, and Bereishis 3:24.

11. See footnote 4.

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Some offer the following explanation for Rashi's seeming departure from Peshat¹². The Torah tells us that Leah called her son Reuvain "because Hashem has seen ("Ki ro'o – כי ראה") my affliction." This only accounts for the first half of Reuvain's name, "Reu - ראו." However, the words Rashi quotes from the Gemorah explain his full name; "Look at the difference between my son and my father-in-law's son." 'Re'u mah bayn b'ni l'ven chami – ראו מה בין בני לבן חמי, Re'u bayn, or Reuvain. Accordingly, we are saying that Rashi explained in addition to and different than what the Torah writes. If this was the case, Rashi certainly should tell us.

Additionally, this is no question whatsoever, according to Peshat. The Torah tells us that Leah's words were "Hashem has seen my affliction," which in the original Hebrew are "Ki ro'o Hashem b'oniy – כי ראה ה' בעניי." The words recorded in the Torah account for each letter of Reuvain's name.

Furthermore, Rashi teaches us that the difference between Aisov and Reuvain is that "he sold the birthright to Yaakov. (Contrast that with) Reuvain (who) did not sell the birthright Yosef. Instead, he did not complain." The issue with Reuvain's birthright was that 1.) It would take place in the distant future, and 2.) It says something negative about Reuvain, i.e., that he would lose the role of the firstborn¹³.

We also find that when quoting the above Gemorah, Rashi changes not just its words but also its meaning. The Gemorah writes, "The son of my father-in-law (Aisov) *voluntarily* sold his birthright, as the Torah says, 'He sold his birthright to Yaakov.'¹⁴ (Even though he chose to sell it,) it is written of him¹⁵, 'Aisov hated Yaakov.' The Torah also tells us, ¹⁶ 'Is this why he was named Yaakov? He tricked me twice.' (Contrast that with) My son. He lost his birthright against his will,' as the Bible writes¹⁷, 'his birthright was given to the sons of Yosef.' Despite that, Reuvain was not jealous of Yosef, as the Torah writes¹⁸, 'Reuvain heard it, and delivered him out of their hand.'"

In other words, the version written in the Talmud contrasts the fact that Aisov hated Yaakov because he had the merit of being firstborn, and Reuvain did not harbor any bad feelings toward his brother Yosef.

The Explanation

The explanation of these questions is as follows. By quoting the Gemorah, Rashi does not give a new and different reason for the name Reuvain. He is not introducing something new which is not written in the Chumash.

12. See the Maharshoh's commentary to the Talmud cited above in footnote 4.

13. We know that the Torah goes to great lengths to avoid writing something which is not positive. See Talmud Pesachim 3a, that the Torah uses eight unnecessary letters rather than saying something derogatory about an unclean animal.

14. Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 25:33.

15. Ibid, ibid. 27:41.

16. Ibid, ibid. 27:36.

17. Divrei Hayomim I, 5:1.

18. Parshas Vayeishev, Bereishis 37:21.

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Instead, he is explaining the meaning behind Leah's words. Leah was confident that "Hashem has seen my affliction; for now, my husband will love me."

Why was she sure that giving birth to a son would cause her husband to love her? When a couple has a child in the natural state of events, it brings them closer together. However, this would not necessarily be the case here. One verse earlier, the Torah writes,¹⁹ "Hashem saw that Leah was hated." It's hard to understand how having a baby, albeit a firstborn, would bring her from being hated to being loved. Furthermore, his beloved wife, Rochel, would likely also give birth.

Additionally, there was a chance that Reuvain would not be a Tzaddik like his father. Perhaps he would (G-d forbid) end up like his uncle Aisov, who despised the privilege of being the firstborn. Examining the other firstborn in Yaakov's family was a cause of concern. Yaakov's father's firstborn was Aisov, who was not righteous. Yaakov's grandfather, Avrohom's firstborn, was Yishmoel. He, too, was not a Tzaddik. Only a righteous son would invoke feelings of love within Yaakov.

Rashi explains her certainty that giving birth to Reuvain would awaken the love between her and her husband. Rashi tells us that she prophesized that her firstborn would *not* be like his uncle. He would cherish the value of being firstborn. Therefore, Reuvain's birth would cause her also to be beloved. By quoting the Gemorah, Rashi explains *why* she was sure: "Because Hashem has seen my affliction, now my husband will love me."

The above also explains why Rashi only cites the Gemorah to demonstrate that Leah's son would be righteous. He did not sell the privilege of being firstborn because he held it in great esteem. That would change Yaakov's feelings. However, it is irrelevant that Reuvain was not angry at Yosef. That has nothing to do with Rashi's point.

How does Rashi conclude his explanation of Leah's words? "He (Reuvain) did not contend against him (Yosef). Furthermore, he even sought to take him out of the pit." Rochel was the wife with whom Yaakov wanted to father children. What did Leah say? When Reuvain lost the privilege of being firstborn, Yaakov transferred it to Yosef, Rochel's firstborn. Not only did Reuvain not object, but he even saved Yosef's life!

A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

The names of Yaakov's children, i.e., the heads of Israel's tribes, are unique. Unlike our three Patriarchs, their mothers named each of them. Furthermore, the Matriarchs also explained the meaning of each name. A perfect example of this is the verse we are discussing. "*She* named him Reuvain, because she said, 'Because Hashem has seen (Ro'o - ראה) my affliction...' The same was true when she gave birth to the next child, Shimon.

19. Our Parshah, *ibid.* 29:31.

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The Torah writes,²⁰ "Since Hashem has heard (Shomah - שמע) that I am hated, He gave me this one too." So she named him Shimon." The Torah repeats for each of the children.

The explanation of each baby's name seems to be a private concern of their mothers; "Hashem has seen my affliction," "Hashem has heard that I am hated."

The fact is that these names concern the entire Jewish Nation and are not limited to their mother's experiences. Rashi tells us here, regarding the first son, that there is more to it than the simple meaning written in the Torah. She was declaring the unique quality of Reuvain and all of his descendants.

Let us all learn this lesson and use our forefathers and their children's strengths bequeathed to us. In this manner, Yaakov will defeat Aisov, and we will bring Moshiach now!

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Toldos 5724)

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

To dedicate a week, a month, or a year to the Rashi of the Week, [click here](#).

You can find us on the web at www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org.

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20. Ibid, ibid. 29:33.

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