

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shemos

25 Teves, 5781 – January 9, 2021

Compiled from the works of
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Shemos**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 16, Pages 1 – 12

Rashi in His Own Words

שמות א' - ח': וַיִּקַּם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף:

רש"י ד"ה ויקם מלך חדש: רב ושמואל חד אמר חדש ממש. וחד אמר, שנתחדשו גזרותיו: ואשר לא ידע: עשה עצמו כאלו לא ידע:

Shemos 1:8: A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.

Rashi Heading - A new king arose: (There is a difference of opinion between) Rav and Shmuel. One says that he was a new (king). The other says that his decrees were new. **Who did not know:** he acted as if he did not know him.

Synopsis

Our Torah portion, Shemos, tells us how the enslavement of the Jewish people began in Egypt. We went "from riches to rags" because the Egyptians, led by Pharaoh, plotted against us. Our Parshah tells us that a new king who did not know Yosef arose over Mitzrayim. Rashi explains this by quoting from the Talmud. There is a difference of opinion between two of our Sages, Rav and Shmuel. One says that the Torah is discussing a new king. The other says that it was the same king, but he changed his decrees.

Since the Torah tells us that a new king arose, why would we think it does not mean an actual new king? Furthermore, why does Rashi need to give us two explanations? The rule is that there is a difficulty in the first explanation, which the second answers, and vice versa. However, the first explanation which he offers is closer to Peshat than the second. How does that apply here?

The explanation is as follows. The Sages explain that the reason for saying that it was a new king is that the Torah says, "a new king arose over Egypt." The second opinion is that the Torah does not explicitly state that the old king died. The Torah usually discusses kings ruling, not arising. Therefore, there is an advantage to each opinion. However, each view also has a drawback.

The Torah said that it was a new king. Hence, it seems clear that it *was* a new king. According to the second opinion, we must explain that since a king rules by royal decrees, a new king can mean new laws. However, that seems to be further from Peshat. Additionally, if the Torah discusses the same king with new regulations, how can it be that he didn't know Yosef? This difficulty forces Rashi to explain, "and he did not know Yosef," meaning that he *behaved* as if he did not know Yosef.

Furthermore, the difficulty with the first explanation, that the Torah does not say "and he ruled," is in truth not all that difficult. The Torah is not a book of the history of Egyptian kings! Based on the above, we can see why Rashi offers us two explanations and the reason for their order.

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Rashi's Explanation

This week we begin reading and studying the second book of the Torah, Shemos. This book tells of the Jewish people's enslavement in Egypt and our ultimate redemption from there. At the end of last week's Parshah, we read that the Jews were welcome guests in Egypt. The reason for this was because Yosef saved Egypt from starvation during the seven years of famine. In our portion, Shemos, we learn that the Egyptians enslaved us. The entire Jewish Nation immigrated to Egypt, and Egypt gave them the choicest land to dwell. We went from that elevated status last week to becoming slaves in this week's portion. How did this change come about?

In our Torah portion, we read that¹ "The Jewish people were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very, very strong, and the land became filled with them." Therefore, the Torah tells us that² "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know about Yosef." He feared that the Jews might become a fifth column. That is how our trouble began. Rashi cites the words from the verse "a new king arose," and comments that "(there is a difference of opinion between) Rav and Shmuel. One says that he was a new king. The other says that (only) his decrees were new." Furthermore, Rashi cites the words from the verse "who did not know." Rashi explains that "he acted as if he did not know him."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

We have explained several times that when Rashi offers more than one explanation for a verse in the Torah, there is some difficulty in the first explanation. We do not find that particular difficulty in the second explanation. However, there is an even more serious difficulty in his second explanation, so the first is closer to Peshat. We need to understand what is problematic about each of Rashi's explanations. Additionally, we need to know why the first is more compatible with Peshat.

One additional difficulty is that the heading of Rashi's comments is "a new king arose." We know that Rashi is extremely precise with his language. This is even so of the words which appear in the heading of his comments. He only includes the words which he is explaining. It seems that he is merely describing the word "new." Why does he also cite the words "a (new) *king arose*" in his heading?

We have also explained earlier that Rashi rarely cites the particular Sage he is quoting. When he does so, it is to answer a question that would (only) bother an exceptionally bright student. We need to understand what Rashi is adding to our understanding of the verse by telling us Rav and Shmuel's opinions.

1. Our Parshah, Shemos 1:7.
2. Our Parshah, Shemos 1:8.

The Explanation

Rashi's source for this is from the Talmud³. The Talmud explains the reason for each position. It says that that "the one who says that he was a new king, says so because the Torah says the words 'a new king.' The reasoning of the one who says that it was merely the king's decrees which were new is because the Torah does not say that 'the old king died and the new king ruled.'" The Torah uses the expression that a new king "arose." Generally, the Torah uses the word "ruled." Because the Torah does not use this word, it is logical to infer that we speak about the same king who ruled previously. However, we do see from the Torah's words that something was new. Since a king leads through royal edicts or decrees, he understands that only the edicts changed.

Rashi is explaining Peshat, the simple meaning of the verse. Why is it that he based his comments upon the Talmud? The reason is simple; here, the Talmudic reasoning is according to Peshat, the Torah's simple meaning. The first opinion focuses on the words "new king," and the second opinion's focus word "arose," as opposed to "ruled." This also explains why Rashi includes in the header the terms "a new king arose." Both opinions are derived from the entire phrase.

Even though we can see the reason behind each view, the first is closer to Peshat for the following reasons:

1. Since we explain the verse's simple meaning, it is more logical to say that it was a new king. After all, the Torah does say that "a new king arose."
2. According to the second explanation, we must also explain the words "who did not know Yosef." If he is the same king, he knew Yosef. That is why Rashi also explains the words "who did not know Yosef." He explains that the Torah is saying that he *acted* as if he did not know Yosef. However, as we mentioned earlier, Rashi is very particular about the words he uses in his comments' headings. Rashi adds to his heading the word "and" writing "*and* who did not know Yosef." He connects these comments to those he made earlier, namely the second opinion of his previous explanation. According to the first opinion, however, those words present no difficulty.
3. The basis of the second opinion is that the Torah uses the word "arose" rather than "ruled." There is a relatively simple explanation for this. The Torah is speaking about the king of Egypt. It is not trying to teach us the history of gentile kings!

From the above, we can see why the first opinion, which Rashi quotes, is closer to Peshat than the second. That is the reason that he mentions it first.

3. See the Talmud Eirubin 53, a and Sotah 11, a. See also the Midrash Shemos Rabbah Chapter 1, 8.

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We still need to understand why Rashi mentions Rav and Shmuel by name. The explanation is that the verse "a new king arose ..." tells us the reason for the following verse⁴. "Get ready; let us deal shrewdly with them! If they continue to increase, and we become involved in a war, they may join our enemies, and we will need to leave our land."

Even according to the opinion that this Pharaoh was a new king, it is impossible to say that he was not aware of what Yosef had done. He was the king of Egypt, just one generation after Yosef saved the entire Nation. He must have been familiar with Yosef's actions!

Also, even a young child understands that he had no reason to suspect that the Jews would become a fifth column. Pharaoh and all of his advisors knew how good Egypt was to the Jews. Pharaoh had taken Yosef out of prison and made him the second in command of Egypt. Not only that, but he had even declared that no one might make a move without Yosef's permission⁵. Later, when all of the Jews arrived in Egypt, Pharaoh gave them the very best land in Egypt to dwell, the land of Goshen⁶. Even a generation later, it would not be natural for the Jews to repay goodness with evil. Anyone can understand that Pharaoh did not believe that the Jews would join with their enemies. It was merely an excuse for evil behavior.

The question is what sort of evil it was. One can be evil in his relationship with G-d or his relationship with his fellow man. Was Pharaoh's sin mainly directed against Hashem or the Jews? Rashi answers this question (or alludes to the answer) by naming Rav and Shmuel, as will be explained.

The Talmud says⁷ that when there is an argument in the Talmud regarding prohibitions, we rule according to Rav. When there is an argument regarding monetary law, the Halachah follows Shmuel. The rabbis of the Middle Ages explain this as follows⁸. Both Rav and Shmuel were experts in all areas of Torah law. However, since Shmuel was involved continuously with monetary law, he attained the most significant depth of their true meaning. The same is true of Rav regarding laws related to prohibited items. What is the difference between these two areas of Jewish law? Prohibitions concern what the Torah says about our relationship with Hashem. Monetary issues concern Torah law regarding our relationship with our fellow man. Hence, when Rav encountered a problem that could he could explain as related to our relationship with G-d or our relationship with our fellow, he was more inclined to approach it as it affects Hashem's relationship. On the other hand, Shmuel was more willing to link it to our relationship with each other.

4. Our Parshah, Shemos 1:9.

5. Parshas Mikeitz, Bereishis 41:44.

6. Parshas Vayigash, See Bereishis 47:6 and 47:11.

7. See Bechoros 49, b.

8. See the Rosh to Tractate Bava Kama, Chapter 4, Paragraph 4.

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According to Shmuel, he was the same king; the only thing which changed was his decrees. Based on Shmuel's focus on interpersonal laws, Pharaoh had an excuse⁹, which he felt that he could use with Hashem. Yaakov, our forefather, showed Pharaoh honor as a king. All of the Jews accepted Pharaoh's leadership. Furthermore, he displayed kindness to us by giving us the land of Goshen. Therefore, he had (at least in his own opinion) an excuse to deal with the Jews as he wished. He felt that "we owed him." However, regarding his relationship with the Jews, he had no "excuse" whatsoever. The Jews, especially Yosef, had showered him with kindness. Shmuel explained the verse according to his position. He focused on Torah law regarding the relationship between one Jew and another. Hence, he understood the "new king" as the original king who passed new edicts.

Rav, on the other hand, thought that it was a new king. That being the case, he had no "excuse" for mistreating the Jews. He did not rule when the Jews arrived in Egypt. The Jews never accepted his rule. He never showed us any kindness whatsoever. Hence, his wickedness was in his relationship with Hashem. He, therefore, found that Pharaoh sinned against Hashem. Consequently, he understood that the "new king" was, in fact, an actual new king¹⁰.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

We must be aware that there is no difference whether he is the same old king or a new king. If he is the king of Mitzrayim, he is interested in causing hardships for Jews¹¹. Moshe Rabbeinu spoke to Pharaoh to work within nature. However, we may not pay attention to any decree which hinders our Torah study, Torah observance, and providing our children with a proper Torah education. As a result of this, we will merit to have children who are indeed members of the "Army of Hashem." Just as Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim, so too will we merit the complete redemption through our righteous Moshiach!

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Shemos, 5736)

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

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For the Rashi of the Week, [click here](#).

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9. The Hebrew – Talmudic word for excuse is "Amaslo - אמסלו." The Rebbe often quoted that it is a contraction of two words; "Emes Lo – אמת לא meaning "not true."

10. The Rebbe cites other instances where Rashi writes "Rav and Shmuel; one says ... and the other says ..." He demonstrates how the same pattern applies. He also uses a different pattern to explain all of the arguments between Rav and Shmuel in the Talmud, but that is not according to Peshat.

11. Bereishis Rabbah Chapter 16, Section 4, tells us that the Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim is derived from the word מיצר - Meitzar, which means a strait – a difficult situation.

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