

בס"ד

# THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

# Parshas Vo'eiro

28 Teves, 5782 – January 1, 2022

Compiled from the works of

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi  
Parshas Vo'eiro**

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**Rashi in His Own Words**

שמות ו', כ': וַיִּקַּח עַמְרָם אֶת יוֹכֶבֶד דַּתּוֹ לֹא לְאִשָּׁה וְתִלְדַּד לּוֹ אֶת אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת מֹשֶׁה וּשְׁנֵי חַיֵּי עַמְרָם שִׁבְעַת וּשְׁלִשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה:  
רש"י ד"ה יוכבד דדתו: אחת אבוהי בת לוי אחות קהת:

**Shemos 6:20:** Amram took Yocheved, his aunt, as his wife, and she bore him Aharon and Moshe. The years of Amram's life were one hundred thirty-seven years.

**Rashi Heading - Yocheved, his aunt:** His father's sister, the daughter of Levi, the sister of Kehos.

**Synopsis**

In this week's Torah portion, Vo'eiro, the Torah tells us the lineage of Yaakov's children, Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi. While describing Levi's descendants, the Torah tells us that Amram married Yocheved, his aunt. Rashi comments on the words "Yocheved, his aunt," quoting from Onkelus<sup>1</sup> that she was "his father's sister, (in other words) the daughter of Levi and the sister of Kehos."

This all seems quite clear, aside from one point. One wonders why Rashi finds a need to explain it. According to several commentaries, it is because the Hebrew word "aunt - דודה" is used throughout the Torah to mean one's father's brother's wife. Rashi is explaining that this instance is an exception. Here the word aunt means his father's sister. Hence Rashi needs to explain. Since he is changing the word's meaning from every other instance in the Torah, he must let us know.

However, this leaves us with several other questions. Why does Rashi quote Targum in Aramaic? Rashi wrote his commentary in Hebrew. Why does Rashi not credit Onkelus with the explanation? Why does Rashi need to change the meaning of the word here? Perhaps most importantly, why does the Torah need to tell us that Yocheved was Amram's aunt? We already know that Yocheved was Levi's daughter, hence her husband Amram's aunt. What does the Torah add here, according to Rashi?

Rashi himself answers these questions. The Torah reviews the lineage of Levi and his descendants to tell us how special they are. That's why the Torah says that Yocheved was Amram's aunt, and that was why he married her – they both had the same superb lineage. The fact that based on this, the meaning of the word "aunt - דודה" is changed is not a significant issue. The word "uncle - דוד" is always used to mean one's father's brother. The

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1. Onkelus translated the Torah into Aramaic. There are several other Aramaic translations of the Torah; that of Onkelus is primarily based on Peshat. Here, the words which Rashi quotes from Onkelus are in the original Aramaic.

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feminine form of דוד is דודה. Therefore, the definition of an aunt as one's father's sibling is correct. However, Rashi quotes Onkelus' words to prove that they can be used in that manner.

### Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Vo'eiro, the Torah enumerates the descendants of Yaakov's children Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi. The Torah tells us that<sup>2</sup> "Amram took Yocheved, his aunt as his wife." Rashi cites the words from the verse "Yocheved his aunt" and begins his comments by quoting Onkelus' translation of the word "aunt" in Aramaic (without attributing this to him<sup>3</sup>), אהת אבוי – His father's sister." Rashi further says that "she was the daughter of Levi and the sister of Kehos (who was Amram's father)."

Why does Rashi find it necessary to explain the Hebrew word "דודה - aunt," a common word which appears throughout the Torah many times? Several of Rashi's supercommentaries explain that we find that the Hebrew word "דודה - aunt" as used in the Torah always refers to one's uncle's wife – his father's brother's wife. The English word "aunt" can either mean one's father's brother's wife, or father's sister. The Hebrew word we translate as aunt only has the former meaning in the Torah. This is apparent from the Torah's list of prohibited relationships. The Torah says<sup>4</sup> regarding the prohibition of having relations with one's father's brother's wife, "you shall not come near his wife; she is your 'aunt – דודה.'" However, regarding the prohibition of having relations with one's father's sister<sup>5</sup>, the Torah does not use the word "aunt – דודה."

Having established that the Hebrew word דודה refers to one's uncle's wife, we would think that Yocheved had been married to Amram's father's brother. Therefore, Rashi explains that the word דודה in this context does not have the same meaning as it usually does throughout the Torah. Yocheved was the sister of Kehos, who was Amram's father.

Rashi also proves that this was their relationship. He writes that Yocheved was the daughter of Levi. We know this because the Torah tells us that<sup>6</sup> "The name of Amram's wife was Yocheved, who was born to Levi." We also know that Kehos, Amram's father, was a child of Levi. The Torah states this clearly, saying that<sup>7</sup> "These were the names of Levi's sons... Kehos." In other words, Yocheved and Kehos were brother and sister.

This explanation would also answer two additional questions. Firstly, we know that besides being precise in the language with which Rashi phrases his comments, he is also particular about the words he cites from the

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2. Our Parshah, Shemos 6:20.

3. This is noteworthy. Rashi quotes Onkelus quite often. However, in the vast majority of cases Rashi credits him.

4. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:14.

5. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:12.

6. Parshas Pinchas, Bamidbar 26:59.

7. Our Parshah, Shemos 6:16.

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verse, i.e., the words that serve as the heading of his remarks. Since Rashi is only explaining the word "דודה – aunt," why does he cite the words "*Yocheved*, his aunt?" Based on our explanation, the reason is simple. The fact that we are discussing Yocheved, who was Amram's father's sister, serves as proof of the unique definition of "aunt" in our verse. This clarifies that the meaning of "aunt" here is different from everywhere else in the Torah.

Secondly, our explanation of Rashi's comments also explains why Rashi writes the words "אחזת אביוהי" – His father's sister" in Aramaic, quoting the words of Onkelus verbatim. Rashi's commentary is in Hebrew! Our explanation of Rashi provides the answer to this question as well. Rashi quotes the words of Targum to support the fact that his translation of the Hebrew word "aunt" here is different than elsewhere. Here it means his father's sister, just as Onkelus writes.

### Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Whenever Rashi quotes Targum Onkelus, he says so explicitly; he will say, "As Targum says," or use such an expression. Why does he suffice here with merely quoting Onkelus' Aramaic words? One would expect him to attribute the words to Targum, whether or not he quotes them verbatim.

We are trying to explain that Rashi defines the word "aunt" as it is used in our verse. He is telling us that here, as opposed to its general usage, the Hebrew word דודה means one's father's sister. Furthermore, to prove this interpretation, Rashi concluded his commentary by saying that Yocheved was "the daughter of Levi and (consequently) the sister of Kehos." However, Rashi does not need to prove this! He had told us earlier that Yocheved was Levi's daughter. Near the end of the book of Bereishis, the Torah enumerates those that descended to Egypt. The Torah says, that<sup>8</sup> "These are the sons of Leah, that she bore to Yaacov in Padan Aram, and (she also bore) Dinah, his daughter. All the souls of his sons and daughters were thirty-three." Rashi cites the words "thirty-three" and explains the reason for the number. "But if you count them individually, you find only thirty-two. The missing one is Yocheved, who was born between the walls when they entered the city, as it says: 'whom she bore to Levi in Egypt.' Her birth was in Egypt, but her conception was not in Egypt." In other words, Rashi already clearly told the beginning student that Yocheved was Levi's daughter. Why does he find it necessary to repeat it here?

We might be able to answer this question, albeit with difficulty. Since Rashi taught us this in an earlier book of the Torah, perhaps he needs to repeat it here. It could be that the beginner may have forgotten it by now. However, even if he does need to say that Yocheved was Levi's daughter, he certainly does not need to say that Kehos was also his child; the Torah stated that just a few short verses earlier. Rashi indeed could have merely said that Levi was Yocheved's father (to remind the beginner).

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8. Parshas Vayigash, Bereishis 46:15.

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Since the definition of the word "דודה – aunt" is *always* a woman who was married to one's father's brother, there is no reason for us not to say that the same is not the case here. Aside from being Kehos' sister, she may have also been his brother's wife<sup>9</sup>. Levi may have had a second wife, and she may have had a son who would be Kehos' paternal brother. It's further possible that Yocheved was married and divorced before she married Amram.

Granted, this would require many assumptions, which the Torah does not mention. We would be assuming that Levi had a second wife. Furthermore, we would have to consider her giving birth to a son. Then we would be required to believe that he married (and later divorced) his half-sister Yocheved and that Yocheved later married Amram. We would need a long list of assumptions. Our assumptions would include things at which the Torah does not even hint. Nevertheless, it may be easier to assume all of this instead of introducing a new translation to a word that appears in the Torah many times.

Aside from the standard, accepted version of Rashi's commentary, which is printed in our Chumashim, there are other older versions, including a number that exists only in manuscripts. There are versions of our Rashi, which include the Hebrew word "Es –"א<sup>10</sup>" What purpose would be served by having this word in the heading of Rashi's commentary? We already stated that Rashi is extremely precise regarding the words he does and does not include.

Finally, based on what we have said, it is clear that Yocheved and Kehos, Amram's father, were siblings. Why does the Torah tell us that Yocheved was Amram's aunt? It is certainly something which we would understand on our own.

### The Explanation

The explanation is as follows: The Torah tells us that Amram married his aunt Yocheved to let us know that she had great lineage. However, based on the usual translation of "דודה – aunt," she was a divorcee, who was previously married to Kehos' brother! This does not seem to emphasize her great lineage; it does nothing to tell us of the great and pious people from whom she was descended.

That is why Rashi tells us that the word "דודה – aunt" has a different meaning than usual. The term "דודה – aunt" here means that Yocheved descended from the same saintly people as Amram. That's why Rashi concludes his commentary that she was "the sister of Kehos," who was the greatest of Levi's children.

How do we know that the point in these verses is to emphasize their lineage? Rashi said so clearly. He told us<sup>11</sup> that the Torah repeats Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi's family line to teach us that it is held in high esteem.

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9. Please keep in mind that the rules were different before the giving of the Torah.

10. The Hebrew word אֵשׁ does not have any English translation; however, it designates a direct object. Additionally, it is used throughout the works of the Sages, in order to derive laws from the Torah which were not explicitly written.

11. Our Parshah, Shemos 6:14.

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By referring to her as his "דודה – aunt," the Torah is telling us one reason that he married her. Her lineage was as high as his.

The fact that we do not find the word "דודה – aunt" used anywhere else in the Bible to mean one's father's sister is not problematic. We see the name "דוד – uncle" used to describe one's father's brother. The feminine form of the Hebrew word דוד is דודה, namely one's father's sister. However, as evident as it may be that the Hebrew word דודה can mean one's father's sister, Rashi does find a need to prove this since we do not see that the word דודה carries this meaning elsewhere. Therefore, Rashi uses the translation of Targum Onkelus. However, since this translation applies, Rashi does not feel the need to expressly state that his commentary is "according to Targum," as he often does.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vo'eiro 5728)*

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

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**Chaim and Aiden Oded** שיהיו

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May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride  
to their family and a Torah light to their community

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Rabbi & Mrs. **Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka** שיהיו

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**IN HONOR OF**

**Mrs. Esther** שתחי' **Sharabani**

May she go from strength to strength  
in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF**

Dr. **Mindel Rivka (Muriel)** bas Reb **Menachem Mendel Shlomo** ע"ה  
**Stitt**

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Lech Lecha, 10 Mar-Cheshvan, 5782

**May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life**

\*

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**כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש**

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**ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.**

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**נדבת בני משפחתה שיחיו**