

בס"ד

# THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

## Parshas Terumah

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

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**Rashi in His Own Words**

שמות כ"ה, ה': וערת אילם מאדמים וערת תחשים ועצי שטים:

רש"י ד"ה ועצי שטים: מאין היו להם במדבר, פירש רבי תנחומא יעקב אבינו צפה ברוח הקודש, שעתידין ישראל לבנות משכן במדבר, והביא ארזים למצרים ונטעם, וצוה לבניו ליטלם עמהם, כשיצאו ממצרים:

**Shemos 25:5:** ram skins dyed red, tachash skins, and acacia wood;

**Rashi Heading - and acacia wood:** Where did they get these [trees] in the desert? Rabbi Tanchumah explained that our father Yaakov foresaw with the Holy Spirit that the Israelites would build a Mishkan in the desert. He brought cedars to Egypt and planted them. He commanded his sons to take them with them when they left Egypt.

**Synopsis**

In this week's Torah portion, Terumah, Hashem commands us to build the Mishkan<sup>1 2</sup>. Hashem commanded us to<sup>3</sup> "separate an offering" that should be<sup>4</sup> "taken for Me." Hashem then tells us to take specific items<sup>5</sup> to build the Mishkan. Among the things was acacia wood<sup>6 7</sup>. Rashi comments, citing "and acacia wood," as follows. "Where did they get these (trees) in the desert? Rabbi Tanchumah<sup>8</sup> explained that our father Yaakov foresaw prophetically that the Jews would build a Mishkan in the desert, so he brought cedars to Egypt and planted them. He commanded his progeny to take them with them when they left Egypt."

Why does Rashi find Rabbi Tanchumah's explanation necessary? Why can't he say that the Jews bought wood from local merchants in the wilderness?

The explanation is that G-d did not say to "give" an offering, implying that each Jew is to acquire the

1. Our Parshah, Shemos 25:8.

2. The Mishkan is called the Tabernacle in English. Throughout our years wandering through the desert, and for some time thereafter, it was to be our temporary Holy Temple. The essence of G-d Almighty would be manifest there. From there it would spread throughout the world.

3. Ibid, Shemos 25:2.

4. Ibid, Shemos 25:3.

5. Ibid, Shemos 25:3-6.

6. See the end of our Parshah, 25:5.

7. From Rashi's explanation we shall see that it must be a type of cedar.

8. Rabbi Tanchumah was the author of the Midrash Tanchumah. There are actually three different versions of the Midrash Tanchumah, the most authoritative of which is Midrash Tanchumah Buber which was compiled by S. Buber in Vilna in 1885. It is a collection of Midrashic and Aggadic texts explaining the Torah which were compiled by Rabbi Tanchumah in the fifth century, prior to the completion of the Babylonian Talmud.

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appropriate items and give them to those in charge of building the Mishkan. Instead, He said to "take" an offering, i.e., separate it from what we already had. The treasurers of the Tabernacle would then come and take the items from us. Therefore, Rashi cites Rabbi Tanchumah's explanation. All the Jews owned vast amounts of gold and silver for the treasurers to take. We received these treasures when we left Egypt and at the Red Sea. However, why would we carry lumber in the wilderness even if it was available? Therefore, Rashi explains that Yaakov prepared us for this when we left Israel to travel to Egypt.

This is still quite difficult to explain! Why would Yaakov have to start preparing wood over 200 years before the building of the Mishkan? Why did he need to bring the trees from Israel and replant them in Egypt?

The answer is that it was to offer consolation to the Jews for their bitter slavery. We knew that we would be slaves in Egypt and that Hashem promised to redeem us and have us build a Mishkan. However, removing the trees from Israel (which symbolizes redemption) and replanting them in Egypt gave us a physical, concrete sign of the ultimate Exodus from Egypt.

### **Rashi's Explanation**

In this week's Torah portion, Terumah, Hashem commands us to build the Mishkan. He commands us to "separate an offering," which should be "taken for Me." He then commands us to take specific items used in the building of the Mishkan. Hashem told us to bring gold, silver, copper, blue, purple, crimson wool, linen, goat hair, ram's skins died red, and tachash<sup>9</sup> skins. Among the other offerings, He told us to bring acacia wood. Rashi cites the verse "and acacia wood" and explains it. "Where did they get these (trees) in the desert? Rabbi Tanchumah explained that our father Yaakov foresaw with prophecy that the Jews would build a Mishkan in the desert, so he brought cedars to Egypt and planted them. He commanded his descendants to take the trees with them when they left Egypt." Rashi seems to be quoting Rabbi Tanchumah to explain how the Jews got lumber in a desert.

### **Difficulties in Understanding Rashi**

Rabbi Tanchumah's teaching is a Midrash, which seemingly has no place in Peshat! Why does Rabbi Tanchumah need to say that Yaakov brought trees from Israel over 200 years earlier to have wood to donate for the Mishkan? There are other ways we could have acquired wood; for example, we could have purchased wood

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9. A *tachash* is a species of wild animal which was only available for a short time. It had many colors. Its colorful skins were used as part of the covering of the Mishkan.

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from neighboring nations. The Ibn Ezra<sup>10</sup> and the commentary of the Torah by the Baalei Tosfos<sup>11</sup> offer explanations far closer to Peshat. They both say there was a forest near Mount Sinai from which we took the wood.

Additionally, it's not typical for Rashi to use an expression such as "Rabbi Tanchumah explained." Usually, Rashi would say something to the effect of "We find in the Midrash Tanchumah," or as he often does, he could have stated the explanation and, at its conclusion, cited the source. What is the reason for Rashi's stylistic change?

Moreover, it does not seem true that "Rabbi Tanchumah explained," as Rashi states. He is not explaining the verse; he is merely teaching us something that answers a question that arises from the verse.

### The Explanation

These questions explain that G-d did not command us to "give" an offering. That would have implied that each Jew must acquire the appropriate items and give them to those in charge of building the Mishkan. Hashem said to separate an offering from what we already have in our possession. Thus, the only thing incumbent upon those who made the donations was to separate what they would give. In other words, we separated those items from the property we wished to donate. The treasurers of the Tabernacle would then come and take the things from us. Rashi emphasizes this point by explaining the Torah's words<sup>12</sup> "an offering" as "a separation; they shall set apart from their property an offering for Me."

This is why Rashi cites Rabbi Tanchumah's explanation. The Jews owned vast amounts of gold and silver that they could designate as donations. We received this wealth upon leaving Egypt and at the Red Sea. However, why would we have lumber? From where would it have come? Rashi explains that Yaakov prepared us for this when we left Israel to descend to Egypt. That is how it came to be that the Jews had a supply of lumber to build the Mishkan. That is why Rashi uses the unusual expression "Rabbi Tanchumah explained." Rashi was not bothered by where the Jews acquired the wood. There are other ways to explain that, as we said above. The gifts had to be separated by the donors and taken by the treasurers. Therefore, the Torah tells us that the Jews already had wood. The Jews had the objects needed for the Mishkan. Rabbi Tanchumah explains the verse itself by telling

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10. Rabbi Avrohom Ibn Ezra (1089 – 1167) wrote a great commentary on the entire Tanach – Bible. His commentary to Divrei Hayomim – Chronicles has been lost over the centuries. Aside from his Biblical commentary, he was a great astronomer, philosopher, poet and linguist.

11. After Rashi's passing in 1105, the era of the Baalei Tosfos continued for about 200 years. The rabbis that made up this elite group of scholars were students of Rashi, including his sons-in-law and grandchildren. Their primary work was a deep insightful commentary of the Talmud, which to a large extent served as a supercommentary to Rashi's commentary to the Talmud. They also did write a commentary to the Torah which we are citing here.

12. Shemos 25:2.

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us how it came about that the Jews owned lumber.

This also explains Rashi's comments on the previous verse<sup>13</sup>, "blue, purple... *sheish*." Rashi explains "blue" as wool dyed with the blood of the *chilazon*<sup>14</sup> which bears a blue color." He explains "purple" as "wool dyed with a sort of dye named *argomon*." Finally, he defines "*sheish*" as "linen." It would appear as if Rashi is explaining what these three things are. However, that cannot be the case. Firstly, Rashi never defines *argomon*, regarding which there is a dispute among other medieval commentators about exactly what color it is. Secondly, why does Rashi find it necessary to define "*sheish*?" The word appeared earlier<sup>15</sup>, and there, Rashi did not explain it. That makes it evident that even the beginning student knows the word's meaning!

This makes it clear that Rashi's purpose is *not* to explain the meaning of these words. Rather, he answers the same question that bothered him regarding the wood. The Jewish people needed to own these items. How could they have had a *chilazon*? How could they have had *argomon*? Therefore, Rashi explains that the Torah means *wool* dyed these colors, and we know that the Jewish Nation had many sheep. Rashi also tells us here that "*sheish*" means linen. This emphasizes what he already told us<sup>16</sup>: Egypt has linen. Thus, it is evident that when the Jews left and "emptied" Egypt, they brought linen. Rashi is just showing that we owned everything needed for the Mishkan. Since we know how precise Rashi is, we can now understand why he begins his commentary on our verse with "and." added. "*And* from where did they have wood in the wilderness?" It continues his explanation of the previous verse, where he explained that we had wool and linen.

It remains difficult to know why Yaakov started preparing for this over 200 years before it was time to build the Mishkan. We also do not understand the need to bring trees from Israel and replant them in Egypt. We can explain that Yaakov prophetically knew that Hashem would tell us to "take" the donations. But the fact that Hashem would require us to take trees from Israel and replant them in Egypt, only to carry them out of Egypt more than 200 years later, requires explanation!

Rashi answers this question by telling us that "Rabbi Tanchumah explained." Tanchumah is from the Hebrew word "*nechomoh*," meaning consolation. The Jews knew that G-d had promised to redeem us. However, throughout all of the years of slavery, we could look at actual, physical cedars brought from Israel (conveying the idea of redemption) and be comforted from our suffering by a solid, concrete sign of redemption.

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13. Ibid, Shemos 25:4.

14. The *chilazon* is an aquatic or semi-aquatic creature that is the source of a blue dye.

15. Parshas Mikeitz, Bereishis 41:42.

16. Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 2:11.

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### A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The teaching of Rabbi Tanchumah – meaning consolation, quoted by Rashi, is not only a consolation for the Egyptian exile. Rather, it comforts us in all of our exiles, including our prolonged present exile, for each exile is called Egypt. The Midrash teaches us that exile is comparable to our wandering in the wilderness of the nations. The purpose of our wandering was to *build a sanctuary in the wilderness*. We were to take a barren wasteland, void of holiness, a place of "snakes, vipers, scorpions, and thirst ..." and build a sanctuary there. We are to make a Mishkan and a Sanctuary to Hashem, a dwelling place for Him in the lowest of all places. After this work, we can fulfill the commandment<sup>17</sup>, "They shall make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them," in the simplest sense. We will actually build the third Bais Hamikdosh, which will reveal the original Mishkan built by Moshe. We can accomplish this and break through the darkness of exile because Yaakov brought the cedars from Israel.

The significance of Yaakov bringing the trees from Egypt is that cedars (from which the Mishkan was built) allude to Tzaddikim. Notably, because of their grandeur, they allude to the leaders of the Jewish Nation. This is the connection to Yaakov. The Hebrew word for the leader of the Jews is Nasi – נשיא, which is an acronym for "Nitzuso Shel Yaakov Avienu," a spark of Yaakov, our forefather. This is as the Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya<sup>18</sup>. The soul of Yaakov "included those of all Jews *from all times*." This is why Rashi explains that "*Yaakov, our forefather, brought 'cedars' to Egypt.*" All of our leaders, who are sparks of Yaakov, stem from Yaakov and are above exile. However, to implant within us the ability to overcome the darkness of exile, they had to be "planted" in Egypt, i.e., during exile.

This is our consolation. Even while we are in the wilderness of the nations, we can see the "cedars which Yaakov planted," our Tzaddikim, leaders of each generation. They inspire us to overpower the darkness of exile rather than being influenced by it. Then, we can finally merit the only possible comfort for this lengthy exile: the complete and true redemption through our righteous Moshiach in the simplest sense of the word.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Terumah 5747)*

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

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17. Our Parshah, Shemos 25:8.

18. Page 111, b.

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