

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Yisro

17 Shevat, 5785 – February 15, 2025

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 21, Pages 100 – 107

Rashi in His Own Words

שמות י"ט – ב': ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו מדבר סיני ויחננו במדבר ויחן שם ישראל נגד ה'הר:

רש"י ד"ה ויחן שם ישראל: כאיש אחד בלב אחד, אבל שאר כל החניות בתרעומת ובמחלוקת:

Shemos 19: 2: They journeyed from Rephidim, and arrived in the desert of Sinai. They encamped in the desert, and Yisroel encamped there opposite the mountain.

Rashi Heading - and Yisroel encamped there: (The Hebrew for encamped is written in the singular form,) as one man with one heart. However, all the other encampments were (written in the plural, i.e., "they camped"), with complaints and strife.

Synopsis

Our Torah portion, Yisro, tells of the historical moment of the giving of the Torah. Before receiving the Torah, the Jewish Nation camped opposite Mount Sinai. The Torah says, "Yisroel (meaning the Jewish Nation) encamped there." However, it uses the Hebrew word for *encamped* in the singular form rather than the plural. It does not say "they camped," as is generally the case. Instead, the Torah uses the word which means that "he (singular) camped." Rashi explains that the reason for this is because the Jews camped "as one man with one heart. However, all of the other encampments were with complaints and strife."

Rashi seems to be explaining the reason for the difference between the encampment in Sinai and the others. At all other encampments, there was strife and plurality among the Jews. Hence, the word "encamped" is written in the plural. In this one instance, the Jews were in total unity. The word camped is therefore used in the singular form.

However, here we find that the Torah uses the word "Yisroel" to describe the Jews. The word Yisroel means the Jewish Nation, a singular entity. Since the verse discusses one Nation (as opposed to millions of individuals, i.e., "the Children of Yisroel"), the Torah had to use the verb encamped. Since the sentence's subject, "Yisroel," is in the singular, the verb "camped" must also be in the singular. Hence, it would appear that we can derive nothing from the Torah's use of the word camped in the singular.

The explanation is that we find collective nouns, such as Yisroel, throughout the Torah, which are used in singular and plural forms. The difference is as follows. When the Torah says that "Yisroel (the single group of Jews) saw," it is logical, according to Peshat, to use the singular form; each individual saw the same thing.

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However, the plural form must be used when the Torah says the group felt an emotion or understood something. Each individual felt or understood on their level.

Here, the Torah tells us of the Jews camping in preparation to receive the Torah. In this regard, each Jew was united "as one man." Our desire to receive the Torah "with one heart" united us.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Yisro, the Torah tells us of the momentous occasion of the Jewish Nation receiving the Torah. In preparation, the Torah says¹, "They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived in the desert of Sinai. They encamped in the desert, and Yisroel encamped there opposite the mountain." Rashi cites the words from the verse, "and Yisroel encamped there." He explains that they camped "as one man with one heart." However, all the other encampments were with complaints and strife."

Rashi seems to be explaining the significance of the encampment of the Jewish Nation in anticipation of receiving the Torah. He contrasts that with their encampments throughout their forty years in the wilderness. Here, the Torah uses the word encamped in the singular; at other times, the Torah uses the same word in the plural². The fact that it is used in the singular here teaches us that they were of a *single mind* when they camped at Mount Sinai "as one man with one heart." Rashi contrasts this with the other encampments of the Jewish people, which were all "with complaints and with strife."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Rashi is very precise with his wording. His precision does not only apply to the words which he uses in his commentary. Instead, it applies equally to the words he cites from the verse he explains. Those words alone are the ones that he is explaining. They also form the basis of his explanation. Here, Rashi cites the words, "and Yisroel encamped there." The word *encamped*, in the singular, is essential. That is how Rashi derives that all Jews were of one mind. The word *there* is also necessary. That teaches us that it was only there that the Jews were of a single mind, not at any of their other encampments.

However, we need to understand why Rashi adds the word *Yisroel*. It does not seem to add a thing to his explanation. Quite to the contrary, it seems to detract from his comments. The word Yisroel (meaning Israel, i.e.,

1. Our Parshas, Shemos 19:2.

2. Unlike English, Hebrew verbs are either singular or plural. To use our verse as an example, in English the verb would be "camped." One would need to specify *who* camped in order to know whether it was singular or plural. "He camped" would be singular, and "they camped" would be plural. In contrast Hebrew, the verb itself would either be singular or plural. Generally, when discussing encampments of the Jewish People in the wilderness, the Torah says "Vayachanu – וַיַּחֲנוּ," meaning "and they camped," i.e. in plural form. In our verse, the Torah says "Vayichan - וַיִּחַן," meaning "and *he* camped."

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the Jewish Nation) is a collective noun. It refers to the Jewish Nation as one singular object. The Jews are not referred to as the "Children of Israel," which would mean millions of individual Jews. If that were the case, it would be appropriate to use the plural form. However, from the word Yisroel, it seems *only* grammatically correct to use the word *encamped* in the singular. The word Yisroel indicates that we cannot learn anything from this verse regarding the singularity of the Jewish Nation.

Additionally, Rashi expressed the same idea in last week's Torah portion. However, he phrases his conclusion differently, which is said to be regarding the Egyptians rather than the Jews. Before the miracle of the splitting of the sea, the Torah told us³ that "Paroh drew near, and the Jewish people lifted their eyes, and behold! Egypt was traveling after them." Rashi cites the words "was traveling after them." He explains that since the Egyptians were traveling "with one heart, like one man," the Torah uses the singular form of traveling.

That instance is very similar to ours. The Torah uses the singular word *Egypt* rather than the plural form of *the Egyptians*. It also uses the singular *was traveling*, as opposed to *were traveling*. There, too, Rashi explains that the reason for the singular being traveling was that all Egyptians were of the same mind. However, the words he cites from the verse are "was traveling after them." He does not include the word Egypt (was traveling after them) in his header. The apparent reason is, as we said before. The singular form of the verb *travel* must be used with the singular noun *Egypt*. Yet, in our verse, Rashi does include the word *Yisroel*.

Furthermore, Rashi says Egypt was "with one heart, like one man." In our verse, Rashi says that the Jews were "like one man with one heart." We need to understand the reason for the different orders.

The Explanation

We find many instances in the Torah of collective nouns, which are used both in the singular and the plural. Sometimes, there is a mixture of the two in the same verse. The simple reason is that it depends on precisely what is being discussed. When the Torah says that "Yisroel (the single group of Jews) saw," it is logical, according to Peshat, to use the singular form. Each individual saw the same thing simultaneously. However, the plural form must be used when the Torah says the group felt an emotion or understood something. Each individual felt or understood on their level. The Sages teach us⁴ that the way that people understand any given thing is not equal. The same applies to thoughts and emotions. No two of us experience or understand the same thing in the same manner.

One example would be the verse⁵, "Yisroel saw the great hand which the Lord had used upon the Egyptians. The Nation feared and believed in the Lord and Moshe, His servant." "Yisroel saw" is in the singular.

3. Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 14:10.

4. See Talmud Sanhedrin 38, a.

5. Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 14:31.

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The entire Nation saw the same thing! However, that the people "feared the Lord" and believed in the Lord" are in the plural. No two people attain the same level of fear or belief.

Another example is from our Parshah. After Hashem gave the Jews the Torah, it says⁶, "... the nation saw and trembled; therefore, they stood from afar." The Torah uses the collective noun "the nation." It says that *he* saw, meaning that the word is used in the singular. Yet it says that "they trembled" in the plural. That is because each Jew experienced a different level of trembling, of fear of G-d.

This is why Rashi explained the verse regarding the Egyptians, which we asked earlier. The Torah says⁷, "Paroh drew near, and the Jewish people lifted their eyes, and behold! Egypt was traveling after them ..." Rashi explained that the Egyptians were "with one heart like one man." Why does he transpose the order which he uses here?

The emphasis there is not on the fact that Egypt was traveling. Instead, the main point is that they were traveling *after them*, after the Jews. They were all out to get the Jews; it was their hatred of the Jews that prompted their chase. What was the reason for their hatred? It was because⁸ "Paroh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people. They said, 'What is this that we have done, that we have released Israel from serving us?'" It was their wickedness.

One might think that there were various levels of hatred among the Egyptians toward the Jews. Paroh's hatred was undoubtedly different than an Egyptian soldier's. A soldier's hatred would be different from that of a regular Egyptian citizen. Rashi teaches us that they were all united. What was it that united them? Their wicked hearts caused them to become one united Nation. They were "with one heart" and therefore "like one man."

That is quite different than our verse. There was a vast difference between one Jew and another in preparing to receive the Torah. Who from among the Jews could be compared to Moshe, the one and only who received the Torah from Hashem? We cannot even begin to fathom the preparations made by Aharon. What about the seventy elders? How could their preparations to receive the Torah compare to those of a simple Jew?

Rashi explains that they were like one man, and therefore, it says that "Yisroel (he) camped." Why were the Jews like one man? The reason is that they were Yisroel; each had a G-dly soul. The entire Jewish Nation is one large, united entity. Because we were as one man, we were also of one heart. There are differences between one Jew and another when studying the Torah. However, when receiving the Torah, all Jews have one heart.

That is the difference between the unity of the Jews and the Egyptians. Because the Jews are one man, each Jew is a part of an inseparable whole; therefore, they are of one heart. The converse is true of the Egyptians.

6. Our Parshas, Shemos 20:15.

7. See Footnote 3.

8. Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 14:5.

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Because they are of one heart, because of the enmity toward the Jews for each of them, therefore they unite and become one person.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

This world is called a "public domain"⁹. In the public domain, we see many different things on the street, none of which are connected to each other¹⁰. This is especially obvious in the realm of human beings. Our Sages tell us¹¹ that "not one person is comparable to another." Each person is involved in activities that are not at all comparable to those of his fellow. Many people are engaged in activities that contradict those of their fellow.

The way to unite the world is by revealing the true one, G-d. He transcends the limitations of the world. How can His presence be shown here? It can only happen through those two things above the world's limitations: the Torah and the Jewish Nation.

Rashi, teaching us Peshat, tells us this very thing. As the Jews prepared to receive the Torah, they became one person. This is brought about through the "spark," the essence of the Jewish soul. This is what truly makes the Jews "as one person with one heart."

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach (Tu Bishvat) and Shabbos Parshas Yisro, 5740)

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

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

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9. See Tanya, at the end of Chapter 33.

10. See Likkutei Sichos, Volume 15, Page 47.

11. See Talmud Sanhedrin, 37, a.

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