

בס"ד

# THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

# Parshas Chukas

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## An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Chukas

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### Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר כ"א, כ"א: וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל סיחון מלך האמרי לאמר:

רש"י ד"ה וישלח ישראל מלאכים: ובמקום אחר תולה השליחות במשה, שנאמר (דברים ב', כ"ו) ואשלח מלאכים ממדבר קדמות, וכן (במדבר כ', י"ד) וישלח משה מלאכים מקדש אל מלך אדום, וביפתח הוא אומר (שופטים י"א, י"ז) וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל מלך אדום וגו', הכתובים הללו צריכים זה לזה, זה נועל וזה פותח, שמשה הוא ישראל וישראל הם משה, לומר לך שנשיא הדור הוא ככל הדור, כי הנשיא הוא הכל:

**Bamidbar 21:21:** Yisroel, (the Jewish people,) sent messengers to Sichon the king of the Emorites, saying:

**Rashi Heading - Yisroel sent messengers:** Elsewhere, the sending (of messengers) is ascribed to Moshe, as it says<sup>1</sup>, "So I sent messengers from the desert of Kedamos." Similarly,<sup>2</sup> "Moshe sent messengers to the king of Edom..." Concerning Yiftach, it says<sup>3</sup>, "Yisroel sent messengers to the king of Edom..." These verses supplement each other; one holds back, and the other reveals. Moshe is Yisroel, and Yisroel is Moshe. This teaches you that the generation's leader is comparable to the entire generation because the leader is everything.

#### Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Chukas, tells us how the Jewish people, traveling through the desert, wished to pass through the land of the giant Sichon. The Torah tells us that "Yisroel<sup>4</sup> sent messengers to Sichon." Rashi cites the words, "Yisroel sent messengers." He explains that "Elsewhere, the sending (of messengers) is ascribed to Moshe, as it says<sup>1</sup>, 'So I (meaning Moshe) sent messengers from the desert of Kedamos.' Similarly<sup>2</sup>, 'Moshe sent messengers to the king of Edom...', and concerning Yiftach, it says<sup>3</sup>, 'Yisroel sent messengers to the king of Edom...' These verses supplement each other; one holds back (information by not informing us who authorized the sending of the messengers), and the other reveals (that Moshe sent them). Moshe is Yisroel, and Yisroel is Moshe. This teaches you that the generation's leader is comparable to the entire generation because the leader is everything."

It would seem as if Rashi is explaining an apparent contradiction. Who sent the messengers, Moshe or Yisroel? Further on, we find that Moshe sent the messengers. Yet here we see that Yisroel sent them. However, this cannot be what is bothering Rashi. When two verses seem to contradict each other, Rashi explains the second verse; only then does the question arise! Additionally, why does Rashi give such a lengthy explanation?

Rashi is explaining something else. A few verses earlier, it said<sup>5</sup>, "Moshe sent messengers," but the same verse says, "So said your brother Yisroel." Our verse says that Yisroel sent messengers, but from further on, it seems that Moshe sent them! Who sent the messengers, Moshe or the Jewish people?

1. Devorim 2:26.

2. Bamidbar 20:14.

3. Shoftim 11:17.

4. Wherever it says "Yisroel" in our context it refers to the Jewish nation.

5. Bamidbar 20:14.

## THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Rashi answers this question by saying that if we look at just one verse, it holds back, i.e., it is unclear. It is only by looking at the other verses that we get everything in perspective. Moshe sending the messengers is the same as Yisroel sending them, and Yisroel is the same as Moshe. The only difference is to whom the mission is being ascribed. This is because "Moshe is Yisroel, and Yisroel is Moshe. This teaches you that the generation's leader is comparable to the entire generation because the leader is everything."

### Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Chukas, tells us how the Jewish people, on their way through the desert, wished to pass through the land of the giant Sichon. They first sent messengers to make their request. The verse we are discussing tells us, "Yisroel sent messengers to Sichon." Rashi cites the words "Yisroel sent messengers" and explains that "Elsewhere, the sending (of messengers) is ascribed to Moshe, as it says, 'So I (meaning Moshe) sent messengers from the desert of Kedamos.' Similarly, 'Moshe sent messengers to the king of Edom...,' and concerning Yiftach, it says, 'Yisroel sent messengers to the king of Edom...'. These verses supplement each other; one holds back (information by not informing us who authorized the sending of the messengers), and the other reveals (that Moshe sent them). Moshe is Yisroel, and Yisroel is Moshe. This teaches you that the generation's leader is comparable to the entire generation because the leader is everything."

From a superficial perusal of Rashi, it would appear that Rashi is reconciling the seeming contradiction between these verses. Who sent the messengers to the land of Sichon, Moshe, or the Jewish nation? However, we know that this is not what is bothering Rashi. We have often discussed that Rashi will not answer a question or reconcile two contradictory verses until the Torah writes the second verse, which poses the contradiction. In this case, our verse, which says that the Jews sent the messengers, appears in Bamidbar, the fourth book of the Torah; the verse that indicates that Moshe sent the messengers appears in Devorim, the fifth book of the Torah. That is where Rashi should explain the situation.

It may be possible to explain that Rashi's question is from a previous verse, which Rashi also mentions. In the last chapter, it says,<sup>5</sup> "Moshe sent messengers to the king of Edom ..." To answer this question, Rashi also explains the statement in Devorim, which says that Moshe sent messengers.

### Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Rashi's wording is exceptionally unusual. Why does he need the introduction, "These verses supplement each other; one holds back, and the other reveals<sup>6</sup>?" Additionally, why does Rashi use the seemingly redundant expression, "Moshe is the Jewish people and the Jewish people are Moshe?"

Rashi uses the double expression "Moshe is the Jewish people, and the Jewish people are Moshe." Suppose it is important to phrase it in this manner. Rashi should also say that "the leader of the generation is comparable to the entire generation, and the entire generation is like the leader of the generation."

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6. Rashi is quoting these words from a Midrash. However, we know that Rashi only quotes a Midrash when it adds to our understanding of Peshat. Additionally, the actual Midrash says that "all words of Torah supplement each other; one holds back and the other reveals." This means that the Midrash is using this as a general explanation of the entire Torah, while Rashi is using the same phrase to explain these verses.

## THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

What is Rashi adding with the words "because the leader is everything<sup>7</sup>?" What do these words add to what he already wrote? "The leader of the generation is comparable to the entire generation?" On the contrary, Rashi says that the leader is only *comparable* to the entire generation. He then says that the leader of the generation *is actually* everything!

Rashi begins his explanation by saying that "elsewhere, the sending (of messengers) is ascribed to Moshe, as it says<sup>1</sup>, 'So I (meaning Moshe) sent messengers from the desert of Kedamos.' "Rashi does not use unnecessary words, and why does he not just say, "Elsewhere it says, 'so I sent messengers'?"

### The Explanation

The last of the above questions, the fact that Rashi goes on at length explaining that "elsewhere, the sending (of messengers) is ascribed to Moshe ...," emphasizes the difficulty *here*, in our verse, according to *Peshat*. The fact that regarding the mission to Sichon, it says that "Yisroel sent messengers," and regarding the mission to the king of Edom, it says that "Moshe sent messengers," does not mean that there was a difference in who sent the messengers. We cannot say that Moshe sent the emissaries to the king of Edom, but the nation sent them to Sichon. It is clear from the narrative in the Torah that the Jewish people were the ones who sent the emissaries to the king of Edom. It says clearly<sup>8</sup>, "So says your brother, Yisroel ... Our fathers went down to Egypt ... We cried out to the Lord, and He heard our voice ...." That being the case, why does it begin the narrative by saying, "And Moshe sent?" Because Moshe represented the Jews, whatever they did was done through him. Likewise, when it says that the Jewish nation sent, the act of dispatching the emissaries was performed by Moshe on behalf of Yisroel.

Based on this, we see that the only difference between a mission that begins with "and Yisroel sent" and one which starts with "and Moshe sent" is the *language* used by the Torah. They both mean the same thing, at least in terms of *Peshat*. That is why Rashi says that "elsewhere, the sending (of messengers) is ascribed to Moshe." In other words, there is no difference sent the emissaries; the only difference is to whom the Torah ascribes their sending.

The only thing which requires explanation is why the Torah ascribes sending the messengers to the king of Edom to Moshe and sending messengers to Sichon, the king of the Emorites, to Yisroel. This is especially true in light of the Torah's seeming to express that sending the messengers to the Edomite king involved the entire nation, as it says, "So says *your brother, Yisroel*." Nevertheless, there it says, "And Moshe sent."

We may attempt to explain that the one to whom the mission is ascribed is not merely a question of language; it is a question of who initiated the mission. Therefore, sending emissaries to Edom was ascribed to Moshe because Hashem commanded him to do so. Moshe was Hashem's servant and emissary and carried out whatever Hashem decreed. Therefore sending the messengers is ascribed to Moshe. However, regarding the mission to Sichon, Rashi clearly says that Hashem did not command us to approach him with the option of making peace. That could lead us to believe that the entire mission was the initiative of the Jews. Therefore, it is ascribed to the Jews; "and Yisroel sent."

It is to negate this explanation that Rashi begins his commentary by saying that "elsewhere, the *sending (of messengers) is ascribed to Moshe*, as it says, 'So I (meaning Moshe) sent messengers from the desert of Kedamos.'" It is explicit that this mission was Moshe's and could not be ascribed (solely) to Yisroel. Rashi continues and says that "*Similarly*, 'Moshe sent

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7. The first printed edition of Rashi, as well as a number of Rashi's manuscripts say that "the leader is the entire generation," rather than saying (as in our editions) that "the leader is everything."

8. Bamidbar 20:14 - 16.

## THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

messengers to the king of Edom...,' and concerning Yiftach, it says, 'Yisroel sent messengers to the king of Edom...' In other words, when the Torah says "And Moshe sent," it is not singling out *Moshe* exclusively and saying that the nation was not involved because it explicitly says "and Yisroel sent."

This is why Rashi continues and says that "These verses supplement each other; one holds back (information by not informing us who authorized the sending of the messengers), and the other reveals (that Moshe sent them). Moshe is Yisroel, and Yisroel is Moshe."

If regarding sending messengers to the king of Edom, it only said "and Moshe sent," it would be "holding back." It would be forcing us to explain that Moshe and only Moshe sent the messengers. Moshe did so as the Almighty's messenger; this mission could not be ascribed to the Jewish people, although it was for their benefit. The same is true of the mission to Edom. If it had only said "and Yisroel sent," it would be "holding back." We would be forced to explain that only the nation sent the emissaries, and Moshe was not involved.

Therefore, the other verse reveals (that Moshe sent them). Moshe is Yisroel, and Yisroel is Moshe. When the Torah says "And Moshe sent," it is as if it said "and Yisroel sent," because Moshe is Yisroel. When the Torah says "and Yisroel sent," it is as if it said "and Moshe sent," because Yisroel is Moshe.

The remaining question is, how is it possible to say that Moshe is Yisroel, and Yisroel is Moshe? Rashi answers this question by concluding, "This is to teach you that the leader of the generation is comparable to the entire generation because the leader is everything."

Rashi is making two statements here. The first is that "the leader of the generation is comparable to the entire generation." He then teaches us that "the leader is everything." Rashi's first statement teaches us that "Moshe is Yisroel," and the second that "Yisroel is Moshe." The statement that "Moshe is Yisroel" is because "the leader of the generation is comparable to the entire generation." This does not mean that Moshe is a communal figure, and what he does is *on the community's behalf*, not as an individual. Instead, it means that Moshe's very being, his existence, is the generation's leader. Therefore, whatever he does is as if Yisroel did it.

Likewise, "Yisroel is Moshe" because "the leader is everything." Here Rashi does not write that he is like the entire generation. Instead, here Rashi writes that *he is everything!* All the needs of the generation are Moshe's needs, and they all come to us through Moshe. We saw this clearly in the wilderness; all people's needs, food, and drink came through Moshe. Therefore Yisroel, the Jewish Nation, *is* Moshe.

Whether the Torah attributes a mission to Moshe or the Jews is irrelevant, for it is all the same, and there is no difference. Likewise, if it was attributed to the Jewish nation, it is the same as if it was attributed to Moshe.

### A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

In the Midrash, which is the source of Rashi's comments, the expression which is used is the head (ראש) of the generation rather than its leader or prince (נשיא). We can explain how this is in keeping with the novel concept taught to us by Rashi above. The meaning of the head (ראש) of the generation is that one's head conducts whatever goes on within his body. So too does the head of the generation conduct and lead the entire generation. However, the word prince (נשיא) of the generation is related to the Hebrew words "נשיאה והרמה," meaning uplifted; it is a description of one who is above the nation or the community.

Therefore, when the Midrash says that the *head* of the generation is the entire *generation*, it is possible to explain that it

## THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

is as follows. The head controls the whole body, every single part of the body equally. This makes the entire generation into one being, a being that is one with its head. That is the real reason that the Midrash says that the head of the generation is the entire generation. However, this applies only to communal matters. Through acts he performs for the whole nation, he unites the entire nation into one entity.

However, the expression which Rashi uses has a different connotation. The *leader, prince* - נשיא of the generation is comparable to the entire generation because the leader is everything. The leader of the generation is uplifted above the entire generation, and simultaneously he is the whole generation.

This presents us with two contrasting aspects of a prince - נשיא. On the one hand, one may have thought that his actions are equal, or at least proportionate to those of the entire nation. Every aspect of his life is a part of his existence as a prince. Therefore, his actions are elevated above those of the rest of the nation. On the other hand, since, as Rashi says, "the leader of the generation is comparable to the entire generation, because the leader is everything," even though he is head and shoulders above the rest of the nation<sup>9</sup>, his actions still affect and can be drawn down into the entire generation.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Chukas 5741)*

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

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9. This expression is based on the description of King Saul in I Shmuel 9:2.

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the Soldiers of Tzivos Hashem **Chaim, Aiden Oded, and Zacharya Matan** שיהיו Morris  
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in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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