

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Tavo

16 Elul, 5780 – September 5, 2020

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 19, Pages 235 – 243

Rashi in His Own Words

דברים כ"ח, ט"ח: וְהָשִׁיבָה ה' | מִצְרַיִם בְּאֲנִיּוֹת בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי לָךְ לֹא תִסִּיף עוֹד לְרֵאֲתָהּ וְהִתְמַכְרְתָם שָׁם לֹא־יִבָּיַד לְעַבְדִּים וְלִשְׁפָחוֹת וְאִין קָנָה:

רש"י ד"ה באניות: בספינות בשביה: ואין קנה: כי יגזרו עליך הרג וכליון:

Devorim 28:68: And the Lord will bring you back to Egypt in ships, through the way about which I had said to you, "You will never see it again;" And there, you will seek to be sold to your enemies for slaves and handmaids, but there will be no buyer.

Rashi Heading - in ships: In ships of captivity. **But there will be no buyer:** Because they will decree death and destruction upon you.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Tavo, the Torah tells us of the horrendous punishments which will befall the Jewish people for not following the commands of Hashem. After these "curses," Hashem says that He will bring you back to Egypt in ships. You will seek to sell yourselves as slaves, but no one will buy you. Rashi explains that by being returned to Egypt, the Torah means that you will be returned in ships of captivity. He further explains that the reason that there will be no buyer is that they will decree death and destruction upon you.

It seems from Rashi as if there are two general curses in this verse. One is that you will be returned to Egypt as captives. The second is that death and destruction will be decreed upon you. The rest of the verse serves to tell us details regarding these two punishments.

However, it would be preferable to explain Rashi's comments on this verse in the following manner. Each part of the verse is an additional curse, each with greater severity. First, the verse says that the Lord will bring us back to Egypt. We all know how terrible our experience there was. We will be brought in ships, as Rashi says, "ships of captivity." In a ship, the captor has complete control and domination over his captive. He has far greater control and can torment his captive far more than he could on dry land. Not only this, but the verse goes a step further and says that we will be taken via the same route that we followed when we left Egypt. We went through a "great and awesome desert, (in which were) snakes, vipers and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." When we left Egypt, we had G-d's kindness and protection. Here, on the other hand, that would not be the case. Ultimately, Rashi explains that the final curse is that "death and destruction would be decreed upon us."

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Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Tavo, the Torah tells us of the severe punishments which will befall the Jewish Nation if they do not follow the commands of Hashem. At the very conclusion of this list of consequences, the Torah says that¹ "And the Lord will bring you back to Egypt in ships, through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again;' And there, you will seek to be sold to your enemies for slaves and handmaidens, but there will be no buyer."

Since this is the conclusion of these 98 severe rebukes, it would seem natural that this verse would express the severest "curse." However, is returning to Egypt truly that terrible, especially as compared to the previously mentioned consequences? Is not finding anyone willing to buy a Jew as a slave such a terrible punishment²?

Therefore, Rashi cites the words "in ships," and explains that it refers to "ships of captivity." We will return to Egypt *as captives*, which is indeed a punishment. Rashi then cites the words further in the verse, "but there will be no buyer." The reason for not having buyers is "because they will decree death and destruction upon you." In other words, no one will buy a Jew as a slave because they will decree death and destruction upon us.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

This verse seems to contain two general punishments. The first is that we will be brought to Egypt as captives. The second is that death and destruction will be decreed upon us. If that is the case, what is the meaning of the rest of the verse? Why does it add that this will come about, "in ships, through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again;' and there, you will seek to be sold to your enemies for slaves and handmaids?" These are all just details about how the punishments will be brought about.

However, According to Peshat, it would certainly be preferable to say that Rashi, through his explanation and precise language, is explaining to us how each detail of the verse *adds* to the punishment. To "see things through Rashi's eyes," we must first answer another question. Why does the verse say that "the Lord will bring you back ... through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again ...'?" Why does it matter via which route we are brought into captivity? Why is this considered punishment? We do not find that Rashi answers this question.

Among the commentaries, some deal with this question. The Abarbenel explains that Hashem told the Jews earlier that³ "you shall not return (to Egypt) that way anymore." Therefore Hashem told us that He would bring us "in ships." In that manner, we would not be returning *that way*, meaning on dry land.

We really cannot say this, according to Peshat. There seems to be absolutely no difference in the punishment, which is the point here, whether or not Hashem brings us back to Egypt by land or by the sea! In

1. Our Parshah, Devorim 28:68.

2. Rabbeinu Bechaya actually explains that this is something positive.

3. Parshas Shoftim, Devorim 17:16.

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fact, in terms of punishment, there seems to be no reason for the Torah to write "through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again.' "

There is also another approach, which is taken by the Midrash Lekach Tov⁴. The Torah is teaching us the potential effect of sin. Although Hashem already told us that we will not return to Egypt in that way anymore, sin can cause G-d to rescind His promise⁵. However, this is also not understood according to the simple understanding of the verse. We have already learned that as a result of sin, Hashem can rescind a promise⁶. Additionally, the fact that Hashem reneged on His promise seemingly has nothing to do with punishment, which is the point here.

We will understand all of the above after first explaining Rashi's comments on the words "in ships." Rashi says that it means "in ships of captivity." Yet, what difference does it make that we will travel to Egypt in ships? Our being captives is foretold when the verse states that the Lord "will bring you back" to Egypt. In other words, the Torah is saying that Hashem will return us to Egypt as captives. Rashi should have explained the fact that we would be in "captivity," by first citing the words "will bring you back." Why does he tell us that we will be captives as an explanation of the words "in ships?" What difference does it make how we get to Egypt?

Several commentaries explain that the fact that our journey back to Egypt was in ships demonstrates the scope of our captivity. Had we gone by foot, only men could have made that journey. Women and children would have been excluded. The fact that our return to Egypt was by ship meant that men, women, and children were all taken captive. Yet the Torah mentions nothing about which Jews would be taken captive. It merely says that the Jews would be taken "in ships of captivity." This implies that he is only commenting on the fact that we were captives, not who was included in the captivity.

The Explanation

After careful examination, you will see that Rashi is pointing out how every detail in this verse adds yet another aspect of punishment. Therefore, Rashi explains the seemingly redundant words that the verse uses, "in ships, through the way about which I had said to you ..." This makes the punishment severe. Not only will you be forced to return to Egypt, but how you will be brought there will be fraught with difficulties.

Firstly, not only will we be brought back to Egypt, but we will be brought there in "ships!" It is obvious that the control which a nation has over captives in the confinement of a ship is far greater and more humiliating than that which it has on dry land.

Secondly, this punishment was compounded by the fact that we would be brought back "through the way about which I had said to you, 'You will never see it again.'" We left Egypt traversing a⁷ "great and awesome

4. Parshas Shoftim, *ibid*.

5. Obviously, nothing can cause Hashem to perform an action. Rather, He chose to have this reaction to sin.

6. Parshas Vayishlach, Bereishis 32:11. See also Rashi's commentary there.

7. Parshas Eikev, Devorim 8:15.

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desert, (in which there were) snakes, vipers and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." We knew what the wilderness was about. We also knew that the kindness and miracles which followed us out of Egypt would not accompany us on our way back. The knowledge of what Egypt was like, caused a great deal of fear among us. The same was true of the return to the desert.

Thirdly, the verse comes to the next punishment. We would seek to sell ourselves. The servitude and captivity would be so great that to escape it; we would even want to sell ourselves. If our captors were selling us, that would not be an additional punishment. However, finding the situation so intolerable that we would feel compelled to sell ourselves is a far greater punishment.

Finally, the fourth punishment is that no one would buy us. Why? Because the Egyptians will decree death and destruction upon us. That is the last blow, and hence the final punishment.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Even though Rashi's commentary of the Torah primarily explains Peshat, nevertheless, it also contains "ינה של תורה - the wine of Torah"⁸. As the Alter Rebbe said⁹, "Rashi's commentary of the Torah is 'the wine of Torah.' It opens the heart and reveals the essential love and fear of G-d." This is certainly true regarding our Torah portion. It contains the most severe curses imaginable for straying from the Torah. Rashi's explanations bear out just how intense they are. However, it is known that the Alter Rebbe said regarding these curses, that in truth, they are *only* blessings¹⁰! The entire Torah has both a body and a soul. The soul of the curses is the blessings of the highest order.

It is possible to say regarding our Torah portion that the *Peshat* in Rashi expresses just how great the curses are. However, the "wine of Torah," the soul of the Torah, which is contained in Rashi, expresses how great the blessings are.

The purpose of these curses is to help Jews attain the highest levels of Teshuvah. As it is written somewhat further¹¹, "And it will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse ... that you will consider in your heart, ... and *you will return* to the Lord, your G-d ..." The greatness of Teshuvah is apparent from the statement of the Talmud¹², that "Great is Teshuvah, (for) it causes that even intentional sins are transformed into merits." This is a unique type of merit. A righteous person who has never sinned is incapable of reaching this level.

The "soul" of the Torah explains that through Teshuvah, even those sparks of holiness which descended

8. This expression refers to the secrets of Torah. Allegorically, just as one who drinks wine reveals his secrets, so too does the "wine of Torah" teach us the secrets, mysteries of Torah.

9. This is cited in Hayom Yom, Page 24.

10. Likkutei Torah Parshas Bechukosai, beginning with Page 48, at the end of Side a.

11. Parshas Nitzovim, Devorim 30:1-2.

12. Talmud Yoma, 86, b.

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into the depths of impurity can be transformed into holiness. There is a rule that whatever descends to the lowest level is rooted in the highest level. Hence that which descended to the depths of impurity has its roots in the highest level of holiness.

That is the deeper meaning of the words "Hashem will bring you back to Egypt." Bringing one back, returning is the idea of Teshuvah. That is why this comes at the conclusions of these (seemingly) terrible things. That is the meaning of the continuation of the verse, "you will seek to sell yourselves there as slaves, but there will be no buyer." The word "there" implies that which is not holy, while "here" implies holiness. The word "no buyer" can be understood in Hebrew as "*nothing*." This "*nothing*" refers to the essence of Hashem, which is hidden from us. From our perspective, it is "*nothing*." In other words, the essence of Hashem acquires us as slaves. We initiate this process. We seek to sell ourselves as slaves. This does not merely elevate the sparks of holiness in the world. Every Jewish soul is a "veritable part of G-d," and therefore, the Jew himself is elevated!

What is the idea of a ship? It protects one from the water. Spiritually, it protects us from the torrential waters of this world; it keeps them from flooding us. The Torah uses the word אֲנוֹיֹת for ships. That is the word in Hebrew, the holy tongue. However, Rashi uses the word ספינות, which is the translation of the Hebrew into Aramaic, which was the spoken tongue. In other words, Rashi is explaining that this applies to one who is involved with this world, not only one who is exclusively involved with holiness. It refers to the Torah and Mitzvos, which protect us from the torrential waters of this world and allow us to do Teshuvah and reach the highest levels!

Finally, Rashi declares that they will declare death and destruction upon us. In spiritual terms, this is the idea of one who has transformed himself into G-dliness. We begin by selling ourselves as G-d's slaves. In other words, we keep Torah and Mitzvos because Hashem wants us to, not merely because of our nature. Through this, we can reach the greatest heights. This is the culmination of the (seeming curses, which are really) blessings. In this merit, Hashem should inscribe and seal each of us for a good year in all aspects. May we merit the ultimate blessing of "Moshiach Now!"

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Parshas Tavo 5734)

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

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