

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Nitzovim

28 Elul, 5782 – September 24, 2022

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Nitzovim**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 29, Pages 167 – 172

Rashi in His Own Words

דברים ל', ו': וּמָלֵא ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לִבְךָ וְאֶת לִבְּבָרְךָ לְאֵהָבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ:

Devorim 30:6: And the Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, (in order) to love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Nitzovim, we are told that upon returning to the Lord, He will gather our exiles and restore the land to the Jewish people. Furthermore, we are told¹, "The Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring. This is (in order) to love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life."

Rashi's primary goal is to explain Peshat. Hence Rashi answers any question which could be posed based on Peshat. Yet here, we have a seemingly obvious question that Rashi does not address. How can the Torah say that G-d will circumcise our hearts? Earlier, the Torah said we must circumcise our hearts' (spiritual) "foreskin." There are two explanations for this. One is the blockage of our hearts. In other words, this spiritual "foreskin" prevents our hearts from connecting with Hashem. The second explanation is the foolishness of our hearts, which leads us along improper paths. However, why would we need to circumcise, or cut, our heart itself? Yet Rashi does not explain to a beginning student the meaning of "circumcising a heart!"

The explanation is that before this verse, the Torah described our suffering throughout the long exile at great length. It also told what led to this bitter exile. Namely, it was our straying from Hashem and following our hearts. What caused us to stray from Hashem? The inappropriate things which we saw in Egypt. Human nature is that first, the eyes see, and then the heart desires. G-d "circumcising" our hearts means that He will separate the connection between our eyes and heart, thereby removing the cause of our straying. Love of Hashem will follow as a matter of course.

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Nitzovim, we are told that as a result of returning to the Lord, the exiles will

1. Our Parshah, Devorim 30:6.

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be gathered, and He will restore the land to the Jewish people. We are told that² "You will return to Hashem with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you and your children today; then Hashem will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you. He will again gather you from all the nations where He had dispersed you." In our verse, the Torah tells us the reward for returning to Him. It tells us that³ "The Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, (in order) to love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life." Rashi finds no need to explain anything whatsoever in this verse.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

As has been discussed numerous times, Rashi explains Peshat, meaning the simple understanding of the Torah. Not only that but Rashi answers each question that could be asked according to Peshat. Rashi's commentary is the only tool that a child who is just beginning to study the Torah needs to understand the Torah from beginning to end. This being the case, if we find a question with which Rashi does not deal, it must mean one of two things. Upon further examination, we will often discover that it is not a question. Alternatively, it may be a question Rashi answered in his earlier comments.

In the above-cited verse, we find a question that begs to be asked. Why does the Torah say G-d will "circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring?" What is the meaning of circumcising the heart? In an earlier verse, the Torah spoke of circumcising the *foreskin* of the heart. Rashi explained that this refers to a spiritual foreskin. The Torah said⁴, "you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart." There Rashi cites the words "the foreskin of your heart" and explains that it means "the blockage and covering of your heart." the spiritual "foreskin" of the heart must be removed

In our verse, Rashi does not deal with this obvious question, which poses an even more incredible difficulty. There are several Aramaic translations of the Torah, and Targum Onkelos is the standard translation. In most instances (unlike other Aramaic translations), it translates and explains the Torah according to Peshat. The Targum translates this verse as, "The Lord your G-d will remove the *foolishness* of your heart." This translation is a response to our question. However, Rashi does not deal with this question at all.

The Explanation

The reason that Hashem "will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring" can be understood based on the verses leading up to it. First, the Torah says⁵, "And it will be when all these things come upon you

2. Ibid. 30:2-3.

3. See Footnote 1.

4. Parshas Eikev, Devorim 10:16.

5. Our Parshah, Devorim 30:1-6.

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..., *and you will return* to the Lord, your G-d, *with all your heart and soul.*" The Torah says, "(the Lord, your G-d, will bring back your exiles ... And the Lord, your G-d, will bring you to the land ...). The Lord, your God, will circumcise your heart." This means that the prophecy that G-d will circumcise the hearts of all Jews follows the prophecy that the Jewish Nation will return to Hashem with a full heart. Once the Jew's heart is complete, it would not be appropriate to say that Hashem will circumcise the "foreskin" of their hearts. Both the "blockage and covering" (as previously stated by Rashi) and the "foolishness" of the Jew's hearts (as explained by Onkelus) will have been removed!

Therefore, we must say that by circumcision, the Torah is referring to a higher level of Divine service. Previously, the Torah spoke about "negative spiritual circumcision," i.e., removing the foolishness and blockage from our hearts. Here, the Torah discusses "positive spiritual circumcision," meaning that it is a product of the love of Hashem. This is in keeping with the end of the verse, "that you may love the Lord your G-d." To put it somewhat differently, earlier Torah spoke about returning to Hashem out of fear or awe, and here the Torah is discussing returning to G-d out of love for Him.

However, if the Torah is speaking of positive action, meaning loving Hashem, why is it expressed with negative language, circumcising, cutting off, or removing the blockage? Furthermore, why does the Torah say that *G-d* will circumcise our hearts? If the point is to love Hashem, that is something we must do ourselves; it is a positive commandment.

This, too, will be understood by understanding the verses leading up to it. The Torah extensively discussed the trouble that will occur to us in exile. The exile is caused by the fact that⁶ "they (the Jews) abandoned the covenant of the Lord." The Torah describes the factors which led to this behavior⁷. "For you know ... in the land of Egypt ... you *saw* their abominations ... Perhaps there is among you one ... *whose heart strays* ... to go and worship the deities of those nations ..." This makes it clear that "the Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart," is to remove the cause of the spiritual descent. It removes even the *possibility* of *seeing* their abominations, resulting in "our hearts *stray*."

In other words, there are two general causes for a Jew straying from the path of Torah and Mitzvos:

- a. Something is lacking in the heart itself; the "foolishness" or a "blockage" of the heart.
- b. Something outside of the heart, something external causes one to stray. This is in keeping with what Rashi says⁸, "the eyes see, and (consequently) the heart desires." The fact that one saw something tempting *made him* desire it with his heart.

6. Our Parshah, Devorim 29:24.

7. Our Parshah, Devorim 29:15–17.

8. See Rashi's comments to Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 15:39.

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Based on the above, it is understood that circumcision, cutting away or removing, appropriately describes and means to bring the heart to love Hashem. Cutting refers to removing the cause of straying from G-d, which means *cutting* the connection between the eyes and the heart.

Furthermore, we can understand why Hashem must circumcise our hearts; we cannot do it ourselves. Through his Divine service, a person can remove a blockage of the heart. However, one cannot remove the connection between vision and the heart. That is a part of a person's nature that G-d created; hence, only He can remove it.

This also explains the continuation of the verse. "The Lord, your G-d, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring. You will then love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and soul." He will remove the potential cause for straying; hence we will naturally come to love Hashem.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The two types of circumcision taught in the Torah represent two different levels of G-dly service. The type of circumcision whereby we remove the blockage from our hearts is the service of Teshuvah, meaning returning to G-d. The second is where Hashem circumcises our hearts. This immediately causes our love of G-d, and is associated with the love of Hashem.

Rashi's approach to our verse discusses the service of love of G-d. We have already returned to G-d with all of our heart and soul; he removes the one possible cause for straying, and we automatically love Him. However, according to Onkelos, Teshuvah's idea is to remove the foolishness from ourselves.

Our Torah portion, Nitzovim, is always read before Rosh Hashanah. In other words, it is read at the end of the month of Elul, which is the last month of the Jewish calendar. What is our job throughout the month of Elul? How do we prepare ourselves for the New Year? This is alluded to by an acronym formed from a verse in the Song of Songs, called in Hebrew Shir Hashirim⁹, namely¹⁰, "I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me." The Hebrew is "אני לדודי ודודי לי." The first letter of each word forms an acrostic which spells the name of this month, "Elul – אלול." The month of Elul is connected with "my beloved," demonstrates that an essential part of our service is the love of Hashem.

However, "I am to my beloved" precedes "my beloved is to me." in other words, the job begins with us. Only after our efforts is "my beloved is to me." This is Hashem's response to our efforts.

The Alter Rebbe uses a well-known allegory to describe this month. He compares our service throughout the month of Elul to a king returning to his palace. On his way back, he stops in a field. There, he graciously

9. The entire Song of Songs appears to be a love story. Indeed, it is the greatest love story of all time. It allegorically depicts the love between the Jewish people and G-d. He is our husband and we are His wife.

10. Shir Hashirim 6:3.

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greet everyone without exception, with a pleasant countenance. Once he returns to his palace, it is not easy to arrange to see the king. Moreover, the king does not smile at everyone. Even if one does merit entering the king's chamber, he must first make the proper preparations.

The same is true throughout this month. Hashem is, as so to speak, in the field. He greets each one of us with a "smiling countenance." Our service is in a manner of "I am to my beloved." However, He provides us with great help to attain that level. This means that He is *in the field* (metaphorically speaking) to grant us great revelations. This enables us to reach our goal. He reveals an extremely high level of G-dliness, known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. This gives us a "boost" and the strength to accomplish what we must do in preparation for the New Year.

Once the New Year begins, G-d is, as so to speak, in the palace. Then, one requires exceptional merit to greet "the King." We must have used all of the energy he bestowed upon us throughout the month of Elul to merit greeting Him.

Hashem should help all of us, without exception, be inscribed and sealed for a good, sweet year. In particular, we should merit the blessing foretold in our Torah portion of Moshiach Now!

(Adapted from talks given on Shabbos Parshas Nitzovim 5734 and Shabbos Parshas Nitzovim Vayelech 5743)

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

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**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE**

* * *

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

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY שיהיו

* * *

IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of "Tzivos Hashem"

Chaim and Aiden Oded שיהיו

Morris

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

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

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

Morris

* * *

IN HONOR OF

Mrs. Esther שתהי' Sharabani

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

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON

Mr. Gershon (Geri) שי' Bentov

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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לעילוי נשמת

מרת מינדל רבקה בת ר' מנחם מענדל שלמה ע"ה

סתית

נפטרה ש"ק פרשת לך לך, יו"ד מר-חשון תשפ"ב

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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נדבת בני משפחתה שיחיו

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לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם"

חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו

מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו

מאריס

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לאריכות ימים ושנים טובות עד ביאת גואל צדק

ומתוך בריאות הנכונה ולשנת ברכה והצלחה בגו"ר

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ר' גרשון שי' בן טוב