

THE GREAT JEWISH BOOKS COURSE

IN MEMORY OF DR. MARK WAINBERG Z"l

RASHI – A LIGHT IN THE DARK AGES

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I Biographical Sketch

- A. Simply no words to describe his influence in the Jewish world
 - a. He has no equal in providing education to the masses, inspiration to the scholars, and guidance to his people.
 - b. With absolute commitment to clarifying the complexity of every letter, word and phrase in the Torah (and Talmud), he seamlessly blended explanations, story telling and moral lessons into the gift he left us – a timeless commentary that is both concise, sweet and illuminating, as relevant today as when it was first published
 - c. Holds the student's hand through the text, wishing to clarify *pehuto shel mikra*, with words both simple, concise and direct, yet deep and intricate, he his "simultaneously our first grade teacher spreading honey to make Torah sweet, and our post graduate mentor, where only after years of study do we appreciate his genius and depth"
 - d. His personality shines forth from his writings: intellectually honest and humble, unassuming faith, he is soft, gentle and compassionate, strong in his convictions and confident in Divine justice and salvation, tolerant of humanity and its foibles. Most of all, his love of Torah, the Jewish people and our Land drips from his every word.
- B. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rabban Shel Yisrael)
 - a. Born in Troyes, Champagne in Northern France in 1040
 - i. It is claimed he descended from Dovid HaMelech, but he himself never makes such a claim, nor is there any definitive proof
 - ii. Legends: father found a gem, refused to sell; pregnant mother avoiding horses
 - b. From an early age distinguished as a scholar and studied with the leading sages in Worms and Mainz from about age 8, eventually returning to Troyes (1065) where he headed Beit Din and founded a Yeshiva
 - c. Alleged to have been a vintner (his father was)
- C. House of Rashi
 - a. Had 3 daughters (no sons): Yocheved Miriam and Rachel (we know almost nothing of his wife, scholars conjecture she died young)
 - i. Legends abound about their scholarship, tefilin
 - b. Sons in law and grandsons became known as Baalei Tosfos
 - i. Rashbam, Rivam, Rabbeinu Tam
- D. The Crusades
 - a. Launched in 1096, and in the early years were a tragic calamity for the Jewish communities of the Rhineland.

- b. Many questions of the time centered around Jews who forcibly converted and wanted to return: Ruled leniently – always have to accept them
- c. Legend (almost definitively apocryphal) surrounding Duke Godfrey of Bouillon, returning to France in defeat with just 3 horses

II Commentary on Chumash

- A. His greatest Legacy: Most Widely reproduced and disseminated commentary
 - a. Rabbeinu Tam: “I could have duplicated my grandfather’s commentary to the Talmud, but no one could duplicate his commentary to the Chumash”
 - b. Well over 300 commentaries on his commentary
 - c. Cannot print a Chumash without it or using it as a starting point for the discussion – he is literally the Rebbe of every Jew
- B. Masterful in choosing relevant midrashim and gemarah and weaving them in the text
 - a. Blended lessons in Hebrew grammar and vocabulary, intuitive and logical explanations of the text, penetrating human psychology, use of metaphor and allegory to bring the Torah to life
 - b. his commentaries show a keen understanding of the science, medicine, technology, and the society of his times
- C. What’s bothering Rashi? working backwards to understand the problem
- D. Rashi script
 - a. Would be unrecognizable to Rashi himself (created in a 1475 printing based of a Sephardic semi cursive handwriting)

III Commentary on the Talmud

- A. Known as the *Kuntress* – The Notebook – compiled, edited, abridged, and organized the notes and traditions of previous generations
 - a. Diligently amended and corrected the text
- B. Goal was a running phrase by phrase guide to elucidate the text (which has no punctuation)
 - a. As opposed to Tosafos, who analyzed the passage in contrast to others in the Talmud
 - b. Worst feeling for a student is getting stuck on a line with no comment from Rashi
- C. First step of every Talmud student and springboard for every discussion

IV Final Thoughts

- A. We have over 300 responsa from him as well as several liturgic elegies and poems
- B. Buried in Troyes (1105), but the cemetery location was lost over time. A University professor in recent years discovered an ancient map and located the cemetery under a public square in the modern city. There is a monument currently in the square with a plaque recognizing the site.

Addendum and Sources

1. First comment on Bereishit 1:1

בראשית. אמר רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל את התורה אלא מהחדש הזה לכם, שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו בה ישראל, ומה טעם פתח בבראשית? משום כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים (תהילים קי"א), שאם יאמרו אמות העולם

לישראל לסטים אתם, שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים, הם אומרים להם כל הארץ של הקב"ה היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר
:בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם, וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו

IN THE BEGINNING – Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah which is the Law book of Israel should have commenced with the verse (Exodus 12:2) “This month shall be unto you the first of the months” which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation? Because of the thought expressed in the text (Psalms 111:6) “He declared to His people the strength of His works, in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations.” For should the peoples of the world say to Israel, “You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan”, Israel may reply to them, “All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us” (Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 187).

2. First comment on Shmot 1:1

ואלה שמות בני ישראל. אע"פ שמתנאן בה"ייהם בשמותם, חזר ומנאם במיתתם, **להודיע חבתם**, שגמגמלו לזכובים, שמוציאם
:ומכניסם במספר ובשמותם (שמות רבה), שג' "המוציא במספר צבאם לזלם בשם יקרא" (ישעיהו מ')

NOW THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL – Although the Torah has already enumerated them by name whilst they were living, it again enumerates them when it tells us of their death, thus showing how dear they were to G-d – that they are compared to the stars which also G-d brings out and brings in by number and name when they cease to shine, as it is said, (Isaiah 40:26) “He bringeth out their host by number, He calleth them all by name” (Exodus Rabbah 1:3)

3. First comment on Vayikra 1:1

ויקרא אל משה. לזל דברות ולזל אמירות ולזל צוויים קדמה קריאה, **לשון חבה**, לשון שמלאכי השרת משתמשין בו, שגאמר
:יקרא זל אל זל (ישעיהו ו'), אכל לנביאי אמות העולם נגלה עליהן בלשון עראי וטמאה, שגאמר ויקר אלהים אל בלעם (במדבר
:כ"ג)

AND [THE L-RD] CALLED UNTO MOSES – All oral communications of the L-rd to Moshe whether they are introduced by דבר or by אמר or by צו were preceded by a “call”. It is a way of expressing affection, the mode used by the ministering angels when addressing each other, as it is said (Isaiah 6:3) “And one called unto another [and said, Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of hosts]”. To the prophets of the nations of the world, however, G-d revealed himself in a manner which Scripture describes by an expression ordinarily used for denoting events of a casual character and of uncleanness, as it is said, (Numbers 23:4) “and G-d happened to meet (ויקר) Balaam” (cf. Bereishit Rabbah 52:5).

4. First comment on Bamidbar 1:1

וידבר. במדבר סיני באחד לחדש וגו'. **מתוך חבתו לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה** – קשיצאו ממצרים מנאן, וכשנפלו בעגל מנאן
:לידע מנין הנותרים, קשבא להשרות שכינתו עליהם מנאם, באחד בניסן הוקם המשכן ובאחד באדר מנאם

AND [THE L-RD] SPOKE [UNTO MOSHE] IN THE DESERT OF SINAI ... etc. – Because they were dear to him, He counts them every now and then: when they went forth from Egypt He counted them (Exodus 12:37), when many of them fell in consequence of their having worshipped the golden calf He counted them to ascertain the number of those left (cf. Rashi Exodus 30:16); when he was about to make His Shechinah dwell amongst them (i. e. when He commanded them to make a Tabernacle), He again took

their census; for on the first day of Nisan the Tabernacle was erected (Exodus 40:2) and shortly afterwards, on the first day of Iyar, He counted them.

5. First comment on Devarim 1:1

אלה הדברים. לפי שהן דברי תוכחות ומנה קאן כל המקומות שהקעיסו לפני המקום בהן, לפיכך סתם את הדברים והזכירם ברמז מפני כבודן של ישראל (עי' ספרי):

THESE ARE THE WORDS – Because these are words of reproof and he is enumerating here all the places where they provoked G-d to anger, therefore he suppresses all mention of the matters in which they sinned and refers to them only by a mere allusion contained in the names of these places out of regard and honour for Israel (cf. Sifrei Devarim 1:1;).

6. Beginning of Parshat Vayeira

א וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵנִי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל כְּחֵם הַיּוֹם :

(1) Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. (2) He lifted his eyes and saw, behold! Three men were standing over him....

וירא אליו. לבקר את החולה. אמר רבי חמא בר חנינא, יום שלישי למילתו היה, ובא הקב"ה ושאל בשלומו (בבא מציעא פ"ו)

AND THE L-RD APPEARED UNTO HIM to visit the sick man. R. Hama the son of Hanina said: it was the third day after his circumcision and the Holy One, blessed be He, came and inquired after the state of his health (Bava Metzia 86b)

באלוני ממרא. הוא שנתן לו עצה על המילה, לפיכך נגלה עליו בחלקו (בראשית רבה)

BY THE PLAINS OF MAMRÉ – It was he (Mamre) who advised him (Abraham) regarding the circumcision and therefore He revealed himself to him in his (Mamre's) territory (Genesis Rabbah 42:8).

יושב. יושב קתיב, בקש לעמד, אמר לו הקב"ה שב ואני אעמד, ואתה סימן לבניך שעתיד אני להתיצב בעדת הדינים והן יושבין, שְׁנֵאמַר אֱלֹהִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדַת אֵל (תהילים פ"ב) (בראשית רבה)

WAS SITTING – The word is written יושב (without the i) and therefore may he translated "he sat": He wished to rise, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, Sit and I will stand. You shall form an example to your descendants – that I, in time to come, will stand in the assembly of the judges while they will sit, as it is said, (Psalms 82:1) "G-d stands in the assembly of the judges" (Genesis Rabbah 48:7)

פתח האהל. לראות אם יש עובר ושב ויכניסם בביתו

AT THE TENT-DOOR – that he might see whether anyone passed by, and invite him into the house

כחום היום. הוציא הקב"ה חמה מנרתיקה, שלא להטריחו באורחים, ולפי שראהו מצטער שלא היו אורחים באים, הביא המלאכים עליו בדמות אנשים (בבא מציעא שם)

IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY – The Holy One, blessed be He, brought the sun out of its sheath that he might not be troubled by travellers, and when He perceived that he was grieved that no travellers came He brought to him angels in the form of men (Bava Metzia 86b).

7. Our Rebbe in Humility (part 1): It's ok to not know

וישלח יצחק את יעקב ויגלו פדנה ארם אל לבן בן-בתואל הארמי אתי רבקה אם יעקב ועשו: (בראשית כח:ה)

Then Isaac sent Jacob off, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.

אם יעקב ועשו. איני יודע מה מלמדנו

MOTHER OF JACOB AND ESAU – I do not know what these words are teaching us.

8. Our Rebbe in Humility (part 2): how to introduce your own thoughts

ואפוד. לא שמעתי ולא מצאתי בבריתא פרוש תבניתו, ולבי אומר לי שהוא חגורה לו מאחוריו, רחבו כרחב גב איש, כמין סינר שקורין פורציי"נט בלעז, שחוגרות השרות קשרוכבות על הסוסים, כך מעשהו מלמטה, שנקמר ודוד חגור אפוד בד, למדנו שהאפוד חגורה היא... ועוד אומר לי לבי שיש ראייה שהוא מין לבוש, שתרגם יונתן ודוד חגור אפוד בד (שמואל ב' ו') – כרדוט דבוץ, ותרגם כמו כן מעילים כרדוטין, במעשה תמר אחות אבשלום, כי כן תלבשנה בנות המלך הבתולות מעילים (שם י"ג)

AND AN EPHOD – I have heard no tradition nor have I found in the Boraitha any description of its shape, but my heart (mind) tells me that it was tied on behind him; its breadth was the same as the breadth of a man's back like a kind of apron which is called pourceint in old French which ladies of rank tie on when they ride on horse-back. Such, as mentioned, was the way in which the lower part was made, as it is said, (II Samuel 6:14) "And David was girded with a linen ephod" – this informs us that the ephod was something tied on the body... Further, my heart (mind) tells me that there is evidence that it was a kind of garment, for Jonathan ben Uzziel translates (II Samuel 6:14) "And David was girded with a linen ephod" by "a linen כרדוט" and exactly similarly does he translate מעילים, "robes", by כרדוטין in the story of Tamar, Absolom's sister, (II Samuel 13:18) "For with such robes (מעילים) were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled".

9. Our Rebbe in Humility (part 3): Leadership

אשר נשיא יחטא ועשה אחת מכל-מצות ה' אלהיו אשר לא-תעשינה בשגגה ואשם: (ויקרא ד':כ"ב)

When a ruler sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hshem that shall not be done and has become guilty...

אשר נשיא יחטא, לשון אשרי — אשרי הדור שהנשיא שלו נותן לב להביא כפרה על שגגתו, קל וחמר שמתחרט על זדונותיו (ספרא):

The word אשר is connected in meaning with אשרי "happy". Happy is the generation whose prince (king) takes care to bring an atonement sacrifice even for an inadvertent act of his; how much the more certain is it that he will do penance for his wilful sins

10. Our ethical guidepost to interpret Jewish trauma

לא־יהיה לך בכיסך אבן ואבן גדולה וקטנה: לא־יהיה לך בביתך איפה ואיפה גדולה וקטנה: אבן שלמה וצדק יהיה־לך איפה שלמה וצדק יהיה־לך למען יאריכו ימיך על האדמה אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך: כי תועבת־ה' אלהיך כל־עשה אלה כל עשה עול: זכור את אשר־עשה לך עמלק בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים: (דברים כה:טו-יז)

זכור את אשר עשה לך. אם שקרית במדות ובמשקלות הו' דואג מגרתי האויב, שנאמר (משלי י"א) "מאזני מרמה תועבת ה'", וכתוב בתרי"ג "בא זדון ויבא קלון" (תנחומא)

REMEMBER WHAT [AMALEK] DID TO YOU – If you use false weights and measures then you must apprehend the provocation of the enemy, as it states (Proverbs 11:1): "A false balance is an abomination to the L-rd, etc.", and there is written immediately after this (v. 2): "If intentional sin comes, shame comes" (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei 8).

11. Our spiritual conscience

לא־תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלקיך אג' ה':

You shall not curse the deaf, nor place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your G-d: I am the L-RD.

ויראת מאלהיך. לפי שהדבר הזה אינו מסור לבריות לידע אם דעתו של זה לטובה או לרעה, ויכול להשטט ולומר לטובה נתפונתי, לפיכך נאמר בו ויראת מאלהיך המפיר מחשבותיך; וכן כל דבר המסור ללב של אדם העושהו ואין שאר הבריות מכירות בו, נאמר בו ויראת מאלקיך

BUT THOU SHALT BE AFRAID OF THY G-D – Because in this case it is not given to human beings to know whether the intention of this man (the offender) was for the advantage or the disadvantage of the person whom he advised, and he thus might be able to evade the responsibility by saying: "I meant it for the best", Scripture therefore states with reference to him: "But thou shall be afraid of thy G-d" Who is cognizant of thy secret thoughts. Similarly in all actions where it is given only to the heart of him who does it to know the motive that prompts him and where other people have no insight into it, Scripture states, "But be afraid of thy G-d!" (Sifra, Kedoshim, Section 2 14; Bava Metzia 58b).

12. Confident in compassionate Redemption

כְּנֶשֶׁר יַעִיר קִנּוֹ עַל־גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחַף יִפְרֹשׁ כְּנָפָיו יִקְחֵהוּ יִשְׂאֵהוּ עַל־אֲבָרְתוֹ: (דברים לבי:א)

Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings, Gliding down to his young, So did He spread His wings and take him, Bear him along on His pinions.

AS AN EAGLE STIRRETH UP ITS NEST – He guided them with mercy and pity like the eagle which is full of pity towards his young and does not enter its nest suddenly – before it beats and flaps with its wings above its young passing between tree and tree, between branch and branch, in order that its young may awake and have enough strength to receive it – When it comes to remove them (the young) from one place to another, it does not take them with its claws, as other birds do: because other

birds are afraid of the eagle that soars so high and flies above them, therefore they carry them (the young) by their (the mother's) claws for fear of the eagle. But the eagle is afraid only of an arrow, therefore it carries them (the young) on its wings, saying, "It is better that the arrow pierce me than that it should pierce my young". So, too, the Holy One, blessed be He, says, (Exodus 19:4) "I bare you as on eagles wings" (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 19:4:3): when the Egyptians marched after them and overtook them at the Red Sea, they threw arrows and stone missiles at them