

Rashi on the Development of the Inner Life

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Rashi emphasizes in his commentaries on the Torah and *gemara* – and exemplifies through his own life – that key spiritual events can develop in an integrated fashion with the passage of time. In this, Rashi highlights a dialectic between the fact that the course and direction of future circumstances can be wholly anticipated by pivotal experiences, yet it takes time for them to meaningfully unfold. On the one hand, core spiritual events already contain later outcomes in potential. But a seed is not a tree. So, on the other hand, these central points of the spirit require engagement with life's gritty reality for a long time to become fully realized. The passage of time is essential for them to develop, whether on a personal level or in a broader sphere.

An Individual's Sustained Reflection

An individual's Torah learning takes decades of sustained reflection to mature and crystalize, as Rashi underscores in his comments to *Brachos* 6b and *Devarim* 29:6.

In *Brachos* 6b, Rebbe Zeira states: "The reward for attending a lecture is for running [to it]." Why does Rebbe Zeira focus on the act of rushing to attend the class, instead of the actual learning itself? Rashi explains:

עיקר קבול שכר הבריות הרצים לשמוע דרשה מפי חכם היא שכר המרוצה שהרי
רובם אינם מבינים להעמיד גרסא ולומר שמועה מפי רבן לאחר זמן שיקבלו שכר
למוד.

The main reward received by the people who run to hear the class from a

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chacham is the reward for the running because the majority of them do not understand how to retain the content and say a teaching from their master after [the passage of] time in order to receive a reward for learning.

HaRav Yitzchak Twersky ז"ל emphasizes that Rashi's definition of the higher reward for attending the lecture, which eludes most of its participants, depends on the student's ability to maintain the coherence of the ideas through time:

*"What Rashi is saying is ... limmud entails not only being physically present at a shiur, and not only the ability to follow the analysis and to understand the intricacies at the time that they are being presented, but the ability to reproduce accurately, at a later time, 'le'achar zman' ... that which the rebbe said – to retain [and] retrieve in all its vitality and pungency, without any distortion or deflection or dulling of the novel ideas and the new nuances that were heard in the shiur, not to allow time to impinge upon the content, the context or the contours of the shmua."*¹

This requirement does not result simply from how much the person understands initially. Instead, it reflects the student's ability to vividly recall it much later, *"le'achar zman,"* notwithstanding the passage of time.²

Rashi further develops this point in his comment on *Parshas Ki Savo* (*Devarim* 29:6), where he explains the verses in *Devarim* 29:3-4 to mean that it took forty years of continuing reflection for the people in the desert to really understand what they had experienced at Har Sinai:

... ד"א ולא נתן ה' לכם לב לדעת שאין אדם עומד על סוף דעתו של רבו וחכמת משנתו עד ארבעים שנה ולפיכך לא הקפיד עליכם המקום עד היום הזה אבל מכאן ואילך יקפיד ולפיכך ושמרתם את דברי הברית הזאת וגו'.

... Another explanation of [the verse] and "Hashem did not give you a heart to know [until this day]" [is that] a man does not understand the complete knowledge of his teacher and the wisdom of his teaching until [after] forty years; therefore Hashem has not been strict with you until this day, but from now on He will be strict. So, [the verse continues]: "keep the words of this covenant, etc."

1 HaRav Yitzchak Twersky, *"Chachamim VeSalmideihem,"* delivered at a Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) convention on June 13, 1994.

2 See also Rashi's comment to *Devarim* 12:28.

Hence, in his explanation of *Brachos* 6b, Rashi defines “*limmud*” as the ability to accurately recall one’s learning after a long period of time. In his comment to *Parshas Ki Savo*, he specifies that it takes forty years of ongoing engagement with this prior learning to completely comprehend it.

Rashi grounds his comment to *Parshas Ki Savo* on Rabba’s statement in *Avoda Zara* 5b, but with one significant change. The *gemara* states:

אף משה רבינו לא רמזה להן לישראל אלא לאחר ארבעים שנה שנאמר (דברים כט:ד) ואלך אתכם במדבר ארבעים שנה וכתיב (דברים כט:ג) ולא נתן ה' לכם לב וגו' אמר רבה ש"מ לא קאי איניש אדעתיה דרביה עד ארבעין שנין.

Even Moses our teacher did not allude to the Jewish people until after forty years, as it is stated: “And I have led you forty years in the wilderness” (Devarim 29:4). And it is written: “But the Lord has not given you a heart [to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day]” (Devarim 29:3). Rabba said: Conclude from here that a man does not understand the knowledge of his teacher until [after] forty years.

Yet, Rashi adds to Rabba’s statement, formulating it as follows: “a man does not understand [1] the complete knowledge of his teacher and [2] the wisdom of his teaching until after forty years.” By adding the phrase “and the wisdom of his teaching” to Rabba’s statement, Rashi distinguishes between the inner mind of the teacher (*da’ato shel rabbo*) and the content that has been taught (*chochmas mishnaso*). Rabba’s statement combines these two aspects (i.e., the quality of the teacher’s mind and the information conveyed to the student), but Rashi separates them, emphasizing that this forty-year process after the initial experience of learning involves not only diligent review of the subject matter acquired, but also sustained reflection on the personality of the great teacher encountered.

Indeed, if we want to be very precise, we can differentiate between the two phrases that Rashi uses: “*sof da’ato shel rabbo*” (the complete knowledge of his teacher) and “*chochmas mishnaso*” (the wisdom of his teaching). In *Parshas Ki Sisa* (Shemos 31:3), Rashi defines the word “*chochma*” as information that one person learns from another, and he defines the word “*da’as*” as *ruach hakodesh*.³ No matter how we understand the term *ruach hakodesh*, it necessarily expresses what an individual knows without having learned it from someone else. A teacher might guide the path

³ Rashi there also says that “*tevuna*,” the third term used in the verse to describe Betzalel, means what a person discerns independently based on prior learning.

toward *ruach hakodesh*, but the actual experience of *ruach hakodesh* results from inwardly cultivated insight and perception that enables the individual to directly engage an aspect of *hashra'as HaShechina*.⁴ Applying these specific definitions, Rashi very clearly is interpreting Rabba's phrase "*daitei derabbei*," the "knowledge of his teacher," to express two distinct components: (1) "*chochmas mishnaso*," the information that has been conveyed, and (2) "*sof da'ato*," the complete knowledge of the teacher, meaning nuances in the teacher's Torah personality that continue to inform and instruct the student's ongoing growth.

As a result, "*limmud*" means to actively review one's past learning for at least forty years to increasingly understand both the subject matter provided ("*chochmas mishnaso*") as well as – through continuing inner conversation – the qualities of character that the teacher has shared ("*sof da'ato shel rabbo*"). The passage of time, thereby, emerges as a basic aspect of mature learning because, as Rashi explains, "*limmud*" requires not only ready recollection but also persistent engagement with both the content and the experience of one's prior learning throughout the course of decades.⁵

Although Rashi did not write his commentaries autobiographically, it is poignant to note how closely the elaboration from his comment on *gemara* in *Brachos* to his comment on *Parsha Ki Savo* potentially tracks his own life. Rashi appears to have reviewed and edited his commentaries continually, and it is unclear when exactly he wrote each specific part of them. But he started writing his Talmudic commentary during his early-20's while studying with his revered teachers Rav Yaakov ben Yakar and Rav Yitzchak Halevi,⁶ and his statement there focuses on *future* review and recollection of the material learned. He completed his commentaries toward the end of his life, approximately four decades later,⁷ and the statement in his Torah commentary emphasizes the learning that continues to take place during the forty

⁴ See Rashi's comment to *Avoda Zara* 20b

⁵ See also Rashi's comments to *Kiddushin* 49b, s.v. *aniyus deTorah*, that haughty people are impoverished in Torah because a consequence of their arrogance is that they do not review what they have learned, and to *Sukka* 46b, s.v. *davar acher im ata shome'a beyashan* and s.v. *tishma bechadash*, that reviewing one's prior learning increases understanding of it and enables it to become a catalyst for new insights.

⁶ See, e.g., Avraham Grossman, *Rashi*, trans. Joel Linsider (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), pp. 15-18, 142, 144.

⁷ See, e.g., Nechama Leibowitz and Moshe Ahrend, *Rashi's Commentary on the Torah: Studies in His Methodology*, (Tel Aviv: The Open University of Israel, 1990), p. 460.

years *after* an individual first encounters great teachers.

A Family's Emerging Actualization

A family's core constitution can be established by the nature and disposition of its forebearers, as Rashi intimates through his comments to *Bereishis* 48:8-9.

Yaakov Avinu asks Yosef who Ephraim and Menashe are when he prepares to bless them, even though he references them by name just a few verses earlier and notwithstanding Rashi's comment to *Bereishis* 48:1 that Yaakov spent a significant amount of time with Ephraim. In his comments to *Bereishis* 48:8-9, Rashi explains Yaakov's question:

וירא ישראל את בני יוסף. בקש לברכם ונסתלקה שכינה ממנו לפי שעתיד ירעבם ואחאב לצאת מאפרים ויהוא ובניו ממנשה.

ויאמר מי אלה. מהיכן יצאו אלו שאינן ראויין לברכה.

בזה. הראה לו שטר אירוסין ושטר כתובה ובקש יוסף רחמים על הדבר ונחה עליו רוח הקודש.

And Israel saw Joseph's sons. He wished to bless them but the Shechina from him was removed because in the future Jeroboam and Ahab would descend from Ephraim and Jehu and his sons would descend from Manasseh.

And he said who are these. From where do these come who are not suited for blessing?

In this place (literally, by this, or by means of this). He showed him the contract of betrothal and the contract of marriage, and Joseph prayed about the matter and Ruach HaKodesh again rested on him.

Later in the parsha (*Bereishis* 49:1), Rashi uses a phrase similar to “*nistalka Shechina mimenu*” but changes its nuance and possibly its implication. He states:

ואגידה לכם. בקש לגלות את הקץ ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה והתחיל אומר דברים אחרים.
*That I may tell you. He wanted to reveal [to them] the end [of Israel's exile] but the Shechina was removed from him and he began to speak of other things*⁸

⁸ Rashi makes substantively the same comment earlier in the parsha, explaining why the Torah has no dividing space between *Parshas Vayigash* and *Parshas Vayechi*, but substitutes the milder formulation “*nistam mimenu*” instead of the phrase “*nistalka mimenu Shechina*.” (See HaRav Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky, *Torah of the Mind, Torah of the Heart: Divrei Torah of the Talner Rebbe – Bereishis*,

Three questions arise:

First, why does Rashi formulate the phrase as “*nistalka Shechina mimenu*” in *Bereishis* 48:8 but change the order of these words to state them as “*nistalka mimenu Shechina*” in *Bereishis* 49:1? This question is compounded by Rashi’s comment to *Bereishis* 46:30 where he presents the phrase as “*nistalka mimenu Shechina*” like in his comment to *Bereishis* 49:1, rather than the formulation of “*nistalka Shechina mimenu*” which he uses with regard to *Bereishis* 48:8.

Moreover, in his comment to *Bereishis* 48:8, Rashi explains why the *Shechina* was removed, but he gives no comparable explanation in his comment on 49:1. Why does Rashi specifically add this background regarding *Bereishis* 48:8 that the *Shechina* was removed from Yaakov because he foresaw the aberrances of Yeravam, Achav, and Yehu who would descend from Ephraim and Menashe, when he does not provide a reason for the *Shechina* to have been removed from Yaakov in the other contexts where he uses this phrase?

Also, how was Yosef, simply by showing his own marriage contracts with his own wife, able to alleviate Yaakov’s concern about the future sinfulness of Yeravam, Achav, and Yehu?

Regarding the first of these questions, the differences between “*nistalka mimenu Shechina*” and “*nistalka Shechina mimenu*” might result from slight variations in manuscripts of Rashi’s commentary. But another possibility also presents itself: Rashi appears to be using poetic language with simultaneous dual meanings, as he sometimes does, and is being very exact in changing the way he formulates this phrase, as follows.

The expression that Rashi uses about *Bereishis* 46:30 and 49:1 of “*nistalka mimenu Shechina*” implies that the *Shechina* is external to Yaakov – it is with him sometimes but at other times might feel removed from him. Rashi’s comment on *Bereishis* 45:27 concisely summarizes this experience:

ותחי רוח יעקב. שרתה עליו שכינה שפרשה ממנו.

The spirit of Yaakov revived. The Shechina that had departed from him rested again upon him.

Shemos, ed. Rabbi David Shapiro (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2020), p. 99 n.62.) This change in language can be attributed to the fact that Rashi’s comment at the beginning of the parsha closely tracks *Bereishis Rabba* 96:1, while his comment later in the parsha is an almost exact quote of the *gemara* in *Pesachim* 56a.

However, in *Bereishis* 48:8, something else troubles Yaakov, namely, he did not recognize the eventualities he perceived in Ephraim and Menashe and he felt that perhaps there was a fundamental deficiency within himself, i.e., “*mimenu*.” Indeed, Yaakov acknowledged that Ephraim and Menashe had been raised outside of his household but, nevertheless, considered them entirely in line with his own spiritual trajectory. As Rashi comments on *Bereishis* 48:5:

הנולדים לך וגו' עד באי אליך. לפני בואי אליך כלומר שנולדו משפרשת ממני עד שבאתי אליך.

לי הם. בחשבון שאר בניהם ליטול חלק בארץ איש כנגדו.

Who were born to you, etc., until I came to you. “Before I came to you” signifies “who were born” from when you separated from me “until I came to you.”

They are mine. They are among the total of my other sons to take a portion in the Land, each like his counterparts.

Now, as Yaakov proceeds to bless them, he perceives a spiritual nuance in Ephraim and Menashe that he does not recognize. He fears that this reflects a defect in himself, some absence of spiritual connectedness to *Shechina* within his own soul. In this sense, Rashi’s re-formulation of the phrase “*nistalka Shechina mimenu*” is exactly on point: Yaakov wished to bless Ephraim and Menashe but thought that a connectedness to *Shechina* in himself (i.e., “*mimenu*”) that should be present, in fact, was lacking. The reason that he realized – or mistakenly thought – that he was missing a nuanced but important connectedness to *Shechina* was because he saw the eventual outcome of Yeravam and Achav (vis-à-vis Ephraim) and of Yehu and his children (vis-à-vis Menashe). But Yosef resolved this for Yaakov by showing his *shtar eirusin u-shtar kesuva*, his marriage contracts with his own wife (who was the mother of Ephraim and Menashe), which demonstrated that the spiritual foundation of Ephraim and Menashe stood firmly within the *mesora*.

As a result, the phrase “*nistalka Shechina mimenu*” can mean two things: (1) Yaakov’s experience of closeness with the *Shechina* was temporarily removed from him, and, more subtly, (2) Yaakov perceived that some aspect of his connectedness with the *Shechina*, a portion of the “*Shechina mimenu*,” was missing. When Yaakov then realized that this was not the case and, in reality, the foundation of the spiritual lives of Ephraim and Menashe was whole and well rooted in the *kedusha* of marriage consistent with the *mesora*, then the broad consciousness of *ruach hakodesh*, which

was necessary for Yaakov to bestow a *bracha*, again rested on him.⁹

One beautiful aspect of Rashi's comments on these verses is Yaakov's conviction that his own inner spiritual constitution, and that of his children, endures and develops through subsequent generations, and that eventual manifestations of character are already present in potential. Moreover, the fact that Yaakov is mollified by Yosef showing him the *shtar eirusin u-shtar kesuva* reflects his deeply held belief that adherence to the *mesora* is sufficient in-and-of-itself to contain and temper the various ups and downs of any human inconsistencies, frailties, and moral-spiritual errors that might arise along the way, thereby stabilizing and enabling long standing spiritual continuity.

Rashi exemplified this through his own family. Uniquely among the *rishonim*, he generated a movement of learning within his family that grew for hundreds of years. He had three daughters: Yocheved, Miriam, and Rachel, whose sons – including the Rashbam, the Rivam, and Rabbenu Tam – established the French school of *Ba'alei HaTosfos*. They argued with Rashi on specific and general matters (the Rashbam felt that Rashi did not adhere closely enough to the plain meaning explanation of the Torah's verses and Rabbenu Tam innovated the dialectical approach of understanding *gemara*), but they also built upon and continued what Rashi had started. Thus, besides writing a classic commentary – arguably, “the” classic commentary – on both Chumash and *gemara*,¹⁰ Rashi sparked an enduringly creative center of Torah learning within his own family. This was not by accident. It was based on the spiritual insights that he lived, which his family then appropriated for themselves and brought to ever-increasing fruition.

Tanach's Integrated Formulation

Rashi emphasizes through his comments to *Shemos* 31:18, *Shabbos* 88a, and *Ta'anis* 9a that the spiritual and national history of the Jewish people was wholly anticipated at Har Sinai.

The *pasuk* in *Shemos* 31:18 says that Hashem gave Moshe the *luchos* when He finished speaking with him at Har Sinai. Noting that the word “*kechaloso*” is written

⁹ The fact that Rashi starts by saying “*nistalka Shechina mimenu*” and concludes by saying that, when Yosef alleviated Yaakov's concern, his “*ruach hakodesh*” returned to him reflects Rashi's comment on *Avoda Zara* 20b that identifies the term “*ruach hakodesh*” with a person's capacity to receive “*hashra'as HaShechina*.”

¹⁰ See Eric Lawee, *Rashi's Commentary on the Torah: Canonization and Resistance in the Reception of a Jewish Classic* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019), at p.1 & n.2.

without a *vav* so it resembles the word “*kala*,” a bride, Rashi comments:

ככלתו. ככלתו כתיב חסר שנמסרה לו תורה במתנה ככלה לחתן שלא היה יכול ללמוד
כולה בזמן מועט כזה. דבר אחר מה כלה מתקשטת בכ”ד קשוטין הן האמורים בספר
ישעיה (ג:יח-כד) אף תלמיד חכם צריך להיות בקי בכ”ד ספרים.

When He finished. The word “kechaloso” is written defectively [without a “vav” after the “lamed”] to intimate that the Torah was handed over to him as a gift like the bride is to a groom because he was unable to learn all of it in such a short time. Alternatively, just as a bride adorns herself with 24 ornaments – those [ornaments] which are mentioned in the book of Yeshayahu (3:18-24) – so, too, a Torah scholar must be thoroughly versed in the contents of the 24 books of Tanach.

The first of these approaches refers to *Torah SheBe’al Peh*; the second, *Torah SheBichsav*. Rashi cites each of these *midrashim*, interpreting this verse as simultaneously referencing both *Torah SheBe’al Peh* and *Torah SheBichsav*. In the first alternative, the Torah is given to Moshe as a gift because, otherwise, the enormous magnitude of the oral Torah could not be acquired in just forty days. Yet, a question arises with regard to the second alternative that this verse refers to knowledge of the 24 books in Tanach. When the Torah was given, the historical events and spiritual developments described in Tanach had not yet occurred. Most of the *sefarim* were not yet written. So, how could this *pasuk* in *Shemos* 31:18 be referring directly to the 24 books of Tanach?

This same question arises regarding Rashi’s comment on the *gemara* in *Shabbos* 88a, which states:

דרש ההוא גלילאה עליה דרב חסדא בריך רחמנא דיהב אוריין תליתאי לעם תליתאי
על ידי תליתאי ביום תליתאי בירחא תליתאי.

A Galilean taught while standing above Rav Chisda: Blessed is the all-Merciful One, Who gave the threefold Torah to the three-fold nation by means of a third-born, on the third day [of the separation of men and women], in the third month.

Rashi defines the phrase “*orayan telisai*,” the three-fold Torah, as referring to *Tanach*, i.e., Torah, *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim*. The Ritva explains how Rashi could conclude that all of *Tanach* was given at the time of *Matan Torah*. He states: “*kelomar shehakol nirmaz beSinai*,” “this is to say that all of it was alluded to at Sinai.”

Indeed, Rashi states expressly that, according to Rebbe Yochanan in *Ta’anis* 9a,

the *Chumash* implicitly makes reference to everything written in *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim*:

ולא רמזה. משה באורייטא שהחומש הוא יסוד נביאים וכתובים ובכולן יש סמך
למצוא מן התורה.

*And [is there anything that] Moshe did not hint at in the Torah; for the Chumash is the foundation of Nevi'im and Kesuvim, and there is basis to find everything that is in them within the Torah.*¹¹

Besides explaining Rashi's specific statements, this also informs Rashi's approach in his Torah commentary more generally. For example, his interpretation of the first word in the Torah, "*bereishis*," is that Hashem created the world for the sake of the Torah which *Mishlei* 8:22 calls "*reishis*" and for the sake of Yisrael which *Yermiyahu* 2:3 calls "*reishis*." But how could the meaning of the word "*bereishis*" that was given at *Har Sinai* be premised on the language of verses in the books of *Mishlei* and *Yermiyahu* which would not be written until centuries later? According to Rashi, the answer is that all of the 24 books of *Tanach* were inherent within *Matan Torah*, like a flower that emerges from a seed or a living creature that develops from DNA. In the words of the Ritva explaining Rashi: "*hakol nirmaz beSinai*," the whole *Tanach* was alluded to at *Har Sinai*.

During *Matan Torah*, Moshe received the expanse of *Torah SheBe'al Peh* (per Rashi's first explanation of *Shemos* 31:18) as well as the entirety of *Torah SheBichsav* (per Rashi's second explanation), which contained within it a kernel of core concepts that subsequently took shape through the spiritual and national unfolding of Jewish history. Hence, in his commentary on the Torah, Rashi is able to view *Tanach* as an integrated whole in which each part informs the others because all of it was anticipated by, and contained within, the Torah received by Moshe at *Har Sinai*.

Conclusion

Rashi highlights that, on the personal, familial, and national-historical levels, some inner points of focus become actualized only with time. Enduring concepts and deep-seated convictions continue to develop and make impact long after the

¹¹ This viewpoint is augmented and further borne out by the Vilna Gaon who endeavored to root every *halacha* of the *Shulchan Aruch* in the *gemara* and then find each of these within *Tanach*. Ultimately, the GRA was able to learn *kol HaTorah kula* from just a *Sefer Torah*, as Rav Yisroel of Shklov attests in his introduction to *Pe'as HaShulchan*: "Afterwards [the GRA] said that he knew the entire Torah that was given at Sinai in perfect manner, and all the Prophets and the Writings and the Mishna and the Oral Law, **how they are concealed within it ...**"

initial encounter which first precipitates the concentrated insight has passed. Rashi conveys this by his statements that (1) it takes decades of sustained reflection on Torah acquired from a great teacher for the student's learning to mature and become fully realized (the personal), (2) nuances in the inner character of the *Shevatim* were able to impact their descendants generations later (the familial), and (3) the 24 books of Tanach, which describe spiritual developments and national events in Jewish history occurring over the course of subsequent centuries, were already anticipated during *Matan Torah* (the national-historical). Rashi also was *na'eh doresh ve-na'eh mekayem* by exemplifying each of these statements through his own life and learning.

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