

טעמו וראו

A taste of the
Rebbe's teachings

Parshat Terumah

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The Power of the Palpable

Abraham planted cedars in Beer-Sheba, Jacob transplanted them to Egypt, and the Israelites took them along into the desert.

Why were we dragging cedars for four-hundred years? And what does it tell us about "being Jewish at heart"?

Dedicated in honor of
Berel Raichik
for his upsherenish, 23 Adar

by his parents,
Rabbi Levi & Chanee Raichik
Athens, Ohio

A. Rashi's Conundrum

Source 1 Exodus 25:1-8

G-d spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the Israelites and have them bring me an offering. Take my offering from everyone whose heart impels him to give. This is the offering you should take from them: Gold, silver, copper, greenish-blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool, fine linen and goat's hair. Red dyed ram's skins, tachash skins, and acacia wood. Oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and the sweet-smelling incense, and sardonyxes and other precious stones for the ephod and breastplate. They shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them."

Rashi:

Acacia Wood: Where did they get acacia wood in the desert? Rabbi Tanchuma explained: Our forefather Jacob foresaw through Divine inspiration that the Israelites were destined to build a Tabernacle in the desert, and he therefore brought cedars to Egypt and planted them and directed his children to take them along when they would leave Egypt.

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ־לִי
תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ
לְבו תִקְחוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמָתִי: וְזֹאת
הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֲתָם זָהָב
וְכֶסֶף וְנַחֲשֶׁת: וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן
וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים: וְעֹרֹת
אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תַּחְשִׁים
וְעֻצֵי שְׁטִים: שָׁמֶן לְמָאֵר בְּשָׂמִים
לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים:
אֲבָנֵי־שֹהֵם וְאֲבָנֵי מְלֵאִים לְאֹפֶד
וְלַחֹשֶׁן: וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנָתִי
בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

רש"י:

וְעֻצֵי שְׁטִים. וּמֵאֵין הָיוּ לָהֶם
בַּמִּדְבָּר? פֶּרֶשׁ רַבִּי תַנְחוּמָא: יַעֲקֹב
אֲבִינוּ צָפָה בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שְׁעֵתִידִין
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבָנוֹת מִשְׁכַּן בַּמִּדְבָּר,
וְהֵבִיא אֲרָזִים לְמִצְרַיִם וּנְטָעָם,
וְצִוָּה לְבָנָיו לְטַלֵּם עִמָּהֶם כְּשִׁי־צָאוּ
מִמִּצְרַיִם:

The verse speaks of a wood called שיטה, commonly translated as acacia, while Rashi uses the word ארז, commonly translated as cedar. According to the Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 23a, שיטה is a member of the ארז family.

Source 2 Bireishit Rabbah 94:4

Jacob began the journey, taking all his possessions, and he arrived in Beer-Sheba.

Why did he go there? Rabbi Nachman said, he went to cut down the cedars which had been planted by Abraham, his grandfather, in Beer-Sheba.

וַיֵּסַע יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וַיָּבֵא
בְּאֶרֶץ שֶׁבַע. לְהִיכֹן הָלֶךְ? אָמַר
רַב נַחֲמָן שֶׁהֵלֵךְ לְקַץ אֲרָזִים שֶׁנִּטְעַ
אֲבִרְהָם זְקֵנוּ בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע.

>> The Rebbe

Finding the Literal Interpretation

In the beginning of this week's Torah portion, G-d lists the items needed for the Tabernacle; "This is the offering you should take from them...greenish-blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool, fine linen and goat's hair. Red dyed ram's skins, *tachash* skins, and acacia wood."

Rashi comments, "Where did they get acacia wood in the desert? Rabbi Tanchuma explained: Our forefather Jacob foresaw through Divine inspiration that the Israelites were destined to build a Tabernacle in the desert, and he therefore brought cedars to Egypt and planted them and directed his children to take them along when they would leave Egypt."

Rashi's commentary demands explanation. The suggestion that Jacob, on his way to Egypt, brought along cedar-wood for the Tabernacle which would be built two hundred and ten years into the future, is clearly a homiletic explanation. But why is he compelled to interpret the verse homiletically? We can suggest a far simpler explanation: The Israelites purchased acacia wood from merchants of the surrounding nations!

Secondly: Rashi usually omits the name of the rabbi who taught the explanation. When he mentions a person by name, it is because knowing the name will help us understand some difficulty in the passage. If so, in our case—why does Rashi tell us that this explanation was proposed by Rabbi Tanchuma?

Source 3 Bireishit Rabbah 94:4

His Commentary is Literal

Rashi's goal is to explain the literal meaning of the text. In his own words, "I have only come to explain the straightforward meaning of the Scripture."

Rashi Doesn't Cite Sources

Although he culls his interpretations from the teachings of the sages, Rashi doesn't normally cite the name of the rabbi who proposed the explanation, because his goal is to explain the literal meaning of the text. In other words, the interpretation must grow out of the text itself—and the name of the sage is therefore irrelevant.

פירושו הוא רק לפי דרך הפשט
בלבד

ענינו של רש"י הוא לפרש את
הכתובים אך ורק לפי פשוטם,
כלומר בדרך הפשט, כלשונו:
"ואני לא באתי אלא לפשוטו של
מקרא."

רש"י אינו מביא דברים בציון שם
אומרם

דרכו של רש"י ברובם המוחלט
של פירושו שלא להביא דברים
בציון שם אומרם זאת על אף
שבמקור הדברים מוזכר שמו של
בעל המאמר, משום שענינו של
רש"י הוא "אני לא באתי אלא
לפשוטו של מקרא", ובלימוד לפי
דרך הפשט הרי כיוון שהפשט
מכריח לפרש כך אין כל צורך
בידיעת שמו של בעל המאמר.

>> The Rebbe

Contributions – Only From What’s Available

The answer lies in Torah’s choice of words: “Have them bring me an offering...take my offering...the offering you should take from them...” These verses seem to imply that all the necessary items were already among the possessions of the Israelites. These weren’t items that needed to be obtained from other sources; Moses was merely commanded to ‘take’ it from the people.

If some items were not available within the community and needed to be obtained from the surrounding nations, the Torah should have given this command in more general terms, using words like ‘obtain.’

Therefore, Rashi reached the conclusion that all the items listed in the verse were available within the Israelite encampment and needed only to be ‘taken.’ When G-d says, “Have them bring me an offering...this is the offering you should take from them,” it means that those items should be taken from among the possessions the Israelites already own.

So, Rashi must now explain how the Israelites actually owned all these items and didn’t need to obtain them from other sources.

This interpretation—that Jacob was Divinely inspired to bring cedar wood to Egypt—seems to be a homiletic explanation. It seems unlikely that Jacob began preparations for the Tabernacle two-hundred-ten years before G-d’s commandment, bringing cedars to Egypt and planting them there so that they would grow to maturity and then be fashioned into panels ten cubits tall. It would be more logical to assume that the wood was simply purchased through merchants of the surrounding nations.

Therefore, Rashi emphasizes his question: “Where did they get acacia wood in the desert?” Meaning, all the items listed needed to be available among the Israelites themselves, without the need to search and obtain them from other sources. This brought Rashi to his question, “Where did they get acacia wood in the desert?”

He therefore came to the conclusion that “Jacob foresaw through Divine inspiration that the Israelites were destined to build a Tabernacle in the desert, and he therefore brought cedars to Egypt and planted them and directed his children to take them along when they would leave Egypt.”

B. The Message of the Cedar Wood

>> The Rebbe

Being a Source of Comfort to Israel

A seasoned student will ask further:

Why was it so necessary for Jacob our forefather to bring and plant cedars in Egypt for the sake of a Tabernacle two hundred and ten years later?

Rashi hints to an answer by citing the source of his commentary—Rabbi Tanchuma. Tanchuma stems from the word *tanchumin*, which means consolation. Rabbi Tanchuma understood that Jacob’s inspiration to plant acacia wood was a form of consolation for the people of Israel.

When the Israelites were mired in the Egyptian exile, enslaved, persecuted, and their children put to death—they recalled Jacob’s promise of redemption and drew inspiration from the sight of the cedar wood which he had personally brought and planted with the vision that they would leave Egypt and build a Tabernacle in the desert!

In other words, the Israelites in the desert could have obtained acacia for the Tabernacle some other way. But to be a source of consolation to the Jewish people, Jacob was compelled to bring along those cedars, plant them in Egypt, and instruct his children to take them along on their return trip. Thus, throughout their entire period of subjugation in Egypt, they were able to gaze at those cedars and feel hopeful. Those cedars symbolized their future redemption.

This is a message of inspiration for our exile as well. We too, live in the darkness of exile, in our own limitations, in a spiritual desert, “a place of snakes, scorpions and thirst.” This is doubly true in the final moments before

the final redemption. Yet we are told by Rabbi Tanchuma, the consoler of the Jewish people, that we shouldn't be intimidated by our situation. The ultimate goal is "to build a Tabernacle for G-d in the desert," to transform the spiritual desert into a sanctuary for G-d, a dwelling place for G-d in our world, and then we will merit the rebuilding of a physical sanctuary, the third Holy Temple.

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Source 4 Klolei Rashi pg. 155

When Rashi departs from his usual custom and includes the source of his teaching, it is for a specific reason: the name of the sage sheds light on some element of understanding the literal reading of the text.

כאשר רש"י חורג מדרכו ומביא מאמר חז"ל בשם אומרו הרי זה מצד טעם מיוחד: כדי שעל-ידי הידיעה מיהו בעל המאמר תתווסף הסברה, ביאור והבנה הנוגעים לפירושו במקרא.

Source 5 Talmud, Tractate Yoma 83b

Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yosi were traveling together. Rabbi Meir would analyze names and thereby determine people's nature, but Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yosi would not. When they arrived at a location, they looked for lodging and were given it. They asked the innkeeper: "What is your name?" He responded, "Kidor." Rabbi Meir thought, "His name indicates he is a wicked person, for the verse states, 'For they are a generation [ki dor] of upheavals.' Before Shabbat, **Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yosi entrusted their purses to him,**

רבי מאיר ורבי יהודה ורבי יוסי הוו קא אזלי באורחא. רבי מאיר הוה דייק בשמא, רבי יהודה ורבי יוסי לא הוו דייקו בשמא. כי מטו לההוא דוכתא, בעו אושפיזא, יהבו להו. אמרו לו, "מה שמך?" אמר להו, "כידור." אמר, "ש"מ אדם רשע הוא שנאמר כי דור תהפוכות המה." רבי יהודה ורבי יוסי אשלימו ליה כיסייהו, רבי מאיר

but Rabbi Meir did not. Instead, he placed it on the grave of the innkeeper's father.

The father appeared to his son in a dream and said, "Go take the purse placed at my head." The next day, the innkeeper said to the rabbis, "This is what I saw in my dream." They said to him, "Dreams during twilight on Shabbat evening have no meaning." Rabbi Meir went and guarded his money all that day and then took it.

The next day, they said to the innkeeper, "Give us our purses." He denied receiving them. Rabbi Meir said to his colleagues, "Why didn't you analyze his name?" They responded, "Why didn't you tell us?" He said to them, "I said one should be suspicious, but did I say that a name establishes his character with certainty?"

They brought the innkeeper to a store and plied him with wine. They noticed lentils on his mustache, so they went and gave it as a sign to his wife, saying that her husband had instructed that she return the purses and had provided them with the details of his most recent meal as a sign of their authenticity. They took their purses and went. The innkeeper then killed his wife out of anger.

לא אשלים ליה כיסיה. אזל
אותביה בי קיבריה דאבוה.

אתחזי ליה בחלמיה, "תא
שקיל כיסא דמנח ארישא
דההוא גברא." למחר
אמר להו, "הכי אתחזי לי
בחלמאי." אמרי ליה, "חלמא
דבי שמשו לית בהו ממשא."
אזל רבי מאיר ונטריה כולי
יומא ואייתיה.

למחר אמרו לו, "הב לן כיסן."
אמר להו, "לא היו דברים
מעולם." אמר להו רבי מאיר,
"אמאי לא דייקיתו בשמא?"
אמרו ליה, "אמאי לא אמרת
לן מר?" אמר להו, "אימר
דאמרי אנא חששא. אחזוקי
מי אמרי?"

משכוהו ועיילוהו לחנותא.
חזו טלפחי אשפמיה, אזלו
ויהבו סימנא לדביתהו,
ושקלוהו לכיסייהו ואייתו.
אזל איהו וקטליה לאיתתיה.

C. Joseph's Tomb in Egypt

Source 6 Genesis 47:29-30

When Jacob realized he would soon die, he called for his son Joseph.

“If you really want to do me a kindness,” he said, “place your hand under my thigh. Act towards me with truth and kindness, and do not bury me in Egypt. Let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their grave.”

“I will do as you say,” replied Joseph.

וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוֹת וַיִּקְרָא
לְבָנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף,

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם־נָא מְצֵאתִי חַן
בְּעֵינֶיךָ שִׂים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי
וְעֲשֵׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת אֶל־נָא
תִּקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם: וְשִׁכַּבְתִּי עִם־
אֲבֹתַי וְנִשְׂאתַנִּי מִמִּצְרַיִם וְקִבַּרְתַּנִּי
בְּקִבְרָתָם,

וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֲעֲשֶׂה כְדִבְרֶיךָ:

Source 7 Genesis 50:24-26

Joseph said to his close family, “I am dying. G-d is sure to grant you special providence and bring you out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Joseph then bound the Israelites by an oath: “When G-d grants you this special providence, you must bring my remains out of this place.”

Joseph died at the age of 110 years. He was embalmed and placed in a tomb in Egypt.

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָחָיו אָנֹכִי מֵת
וְאֱלֹהִים פִּקְדוּ: פִּקְדוּ אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָה
אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק
וּלְיַעֲקֹב:

וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר
פִּקְדוּ יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלֶתֶם
אֶת־עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה:

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן־מָאָה וָעֶשְׂרִי שָׁנָיִם
וַיַּחַנְטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּישָׂם בְּאָרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם:

>> The Rebbe

Why Joseph Was Buried in Egypt

The conclusion of Genesis reads: “Joseph died at the age of 110 years. He was embalmed and placed in a tomb in Egypt.”

This seems to raise a basic question even for a young student:

At the beginning of the Torah portion, we read that Jacob told Joseph, “Do not bury me in Egypt; let me lie with my fathers...and bury me in their grave.” Clearly, there were two reasons for his request: First, he wanted to be interred with Abraham and Isaac. Second, he did not want to lie in Egypt, the most decadent society.

Yet the final passage seems to emphasize the very opposite about Joseph: “He was placed in a tomb in Egypt”— he was not buried in the cave of Machpelah and not even in the Land of Israel. Of all places, he was buried specifically in Egypt, and he was even “embalmed and placed in a tomb,” emphasizing that he was there to stay.

At the conclusion of the reading, the congregation calls out “*chazak chazak venitchazek*, be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened.” The question arises: What strength and inspiration are we to derive from the fact that Joseph was buried in Egypt?!

Joseph Remained with His Brethren

The answer lies in the next verse, the first verse of Exodus, “And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt...”

Exodus begins with the story of the Egyptians’ subjugation and enslavement of

the Israelites. Although the Israelites had arrived in Egypt earlier, as described in the Torah portion of Vayigash, they had lived comfortably in Goshen, the most fertile land in the region, where they had thrived and flourished. Only in Exodus, after the demise of Joseph and his brothers and the entire generation, were the Israelites subjugated, enslaved and persecuted.

Before the onset of this terrible period, the Israelites needed an extra dose of encouragement and inspiration—and that came in the form of Joseph's burial in Egypt. Joseph, the quintessential provider of the Jewish people, remained with them in their exile, embalmed and preserved in a tomb, awaiting the day of their salvation.

Therefore, after reading that he was “embalmed and placed in a tomb in Egypt,” we announce, “*chazak chazak venitchazek*, be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened.” Before heading into exile, the Jewish people draw strength to overcome their hardships from the knowledge that they are not alone in their plight—Joseph remains together with them.

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