

Parshat Shemot

Absolute Trust

After slaying the Egyptian who had oppressed a Jewish slave, Moshe discovered that the incident had become known, and was afraid. This Sicha analyzes Moshe’s fear according to Rashi’s explanation of the verse, and reveals the tremendous power of trusting in G-d.

Moshe’s first recorded act on behalf of the Jewish people is when he saves a Jew from the oppressive hands of an Egyptian taskmaster.

The Torah relates, that after growing up in the home of the Egyptian princess Basya, Moshe went out one day to observe how his brethren were faring. When he witnessed the harsh manner in which one of the Jews were treated, he decided to act and save his fellow Israelite.

Text 1

Now it came to pass in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers and looked at their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brothers. He turned this way and that way, and he saw that there was no man; so he struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. He went out on the second day, and behold, two Hebrew men were quarreling, and he said to the wicked one, "Why are you going to strike your friend?" And he retorted, "Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us? Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Egyptian?" Moses became frightened and said, "Indeed, the matter has become known!" Pharaoh heard of this incident, and he sought to slay Moshe; so Moshe fled from before Pharaoh...

Shemos 2:11-15

The Torah tells, that after Moshe killed the Egyptian taskmaster, two men had apparently

witnessed what he had done and threatened to inform on him. Eventually, Pharaoh found about the incident and Moshe was forced to flee.

The verse recounted that when the belligerent individual told Moshe, "Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Egyptian?" Moshe became frightened.

However, the Torah does not explicate what it was that frightened Moshe.

Rashi clarifies the reason for this fear in two different methods:

Text 2

[To be explained] according to its simple meaning [that Moshe was afraid Pharaoh would kill him]. Medrashically, it is interpreted to mean that he was worried because he saw in Israel wicked men [i.e.,] informers. He said, "Since this is so, perhaps they [the Israelites] do not deserve to be redeemed [from slavery]."

Rashi, Shemos 2:14

Rashi presents two reasons for Moshe’s fear: 1) Moshe was afraid that Pharaoh would discover what had happened. 2) He was fearful that perhaps the Jewish people did not merit to be redeemed.

The first explanation of Rashi is the simple interpretation of the verse, the second is brought from the Medrash.

The manner in which the medrash clarifies the verse however, is not the basic meaning of the text, and is not at all hinted to in the verse.

The fact though that Rashi—whose objective it to explain the Torah in the straightforward manner—decided to bring the Medrashic explanation solicits the obvious question:

What was lacking in the first interpretation that compelled Rashi to bring a non-literal Medrashic explanation?

The question

Generally, Rashi gives his commentary according to the simple meaning of the Torah. When he does not, and instead interprets the verse according to Medrash, it is because there is an inadequacy in the simple elucidation, which necessitates additional clarification.

In the above verse describing Moshe’s fear, Rashi is evidently not satisfied with the simple understanding that the justification of Moshe’s fear was that perhaps Pharaoh would discover his exploits.

Rashi therefore brings the Medrashic interpretation, that Moshe became frightened because he was no longer sure that the Jewish people merited to be redeemed.

What, however, was problematic with Moshe’s fear, that Rashi was compelled to explain the verse according to the Medrash?

Furthermore, Rashi’s use of the Medrash is especially difficult, as this additional explanation of Rashi necessitates that the continuation of the verse must be explained medrashicly as well.

The text reads as follows: “Moshe became frightened and said, ‘Indeed, the matter has become known!’” According to the verse’s simple meaning, Moshe became frightened because the incident was publicized, and he worried that Pharaoh would find out.

However, according to the Medrashic interpretation, that Moshe became frightened since “perhaps they do not deserve to be redeemed,” the words, “indeed, the matter has become known” is not understood.

What had become known to Moshe that caused Moshe to fear?

Rashi therefore offers explanation to the words “it had become known,” corresponding to the previous Medrashic explanation.

He adds, that at this point, after seeing how his brethren were sinful, Moshe understood the reason that the Jewish people were chosen to suffer in exile more than any other nation.

Text 3

Its Medrashic interpretation, however, is [as follows]: the matter I (Moshe) was wondering about, [i.e.,] why the Israelites are considered more sinful than all the seventy nations [of the world], to be subjugated with back-breaking labor, has become known to me. Indeed, I see that they deserve it.

Rashi, Shemos 2:14

Rashi altered his customary style of explaining things in a literal manner twice in the same verse.

This strengthens the question:

What was it that initially compelled Rashi to explain the verse in a non-literal manner?

The simple meaning

Rashi was compelled to explain the verse according to the Medrash, being that there is an elementary problem with the simple explanation that Rashi wished to resolve.

The verse states, that after the individual told Moshe, “Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us? Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Egyptian?” Moshe’s reaction was that he became frightened.

Rashi was bothered that this information is of no relevance.

We do not find that anything resulted because of this fright. Moshe did not flee Egypt when he became concerned; he only escaped Egypt *after* Pharaoh sought to kill him for his actions.

If the Torah tells us this specific detail though, it must bear significance. The Torah is not merely a history book that recounts every event. If a specific incident is recorded, there must be a purpose in relating it.

In explaining why it was indeed recorded, Rashi found it necessary to explain the verse Medrashicly.

(While seemingly, the entire affair of the two Hebrew men who were quarreling is superfluous, this is not the case. Rashi¹ explains their importance, being that “they informed on him.” However, the mention of Moshe’s fear does indeed seem to be unnecessary, as it did not cause any action on Moshe’s part.)

This is the reason that Rashi did not settle with the basic explanation but added that Moshe was worried that “perhaps they do not deserve to be redeemed.”

According to the Medrash, Moshe’s fear conveyed an important point in our understanding of the exile. It explains, that at that point, Moshe’s perspective of the Jewish people went through a dramatic shift as he now understood that perhaps they did not merit redemption.

Keeping it simple

While Rashi’s choice to explain the verse according to the Medrash is clearly justified, there is a principle regarding interpreting the Torah, that it must be explained on its most basic level as well.

Text 4

A verse cannot depart from its plain meaning.

Talmud, Shabbos 63a

One cannot discount the simple explanation of the verse merely because there is a difficulty in explaining it.

This concept applies all the more when Rashi *does* bring the simple explanation as part of his commentary. Even though Rashi viewed the rudimentary meaning as problematic, which caused him to bring the Medrash, he did not leave it out entirely.

Were Rashi to have not mentioned the simple meaning, it would be plausible to explain that the basic interpretation of the verse was so problematic, that even Rashi ignored it.

However, given the fact that Rashi *himself* explains the verse “according to its simple meaning [that Moshe was afraid Pharaoh would kill him],” it is clear that Rashi does not completely discredit it.

What then, can possibly be learned—on a simple level—of the Torah’s recount of Moshe’s fear, which necessitates its mention?

Being fearful

We can explain the significance to Moshe’s fear and its importance to the rest of the story

¹ Shemos 2:15.

through prefacing with the words of another Medrash:

Text 5

“Yaakov became very frightened and was distressed.”² R. Pinchas in the name of R. Reuven said: “Two people were given an assurance from the Holy One Blessed be He, yet they were scared: the choicest of the Patriarchs and the choicest of the Prophets. The choicest of the Patriarchs was Yaakov, as the verse³ says, ‘For G-d chose Yaakov for Himself.’ G-d told him,⁴ ‘And behold, I am with you,’ and in the end he was fearful; as the verse⁵ says, ‘Yaakov became frightened.’ The choicest of the Prophets was Moshe, as the verse⁶ says, ‘Were it not that Moshe, His chosen one.’ G-d told him,⁷ ‘And He said, “For I will be with you,”’ and in the end he was fearful; as the verse⁸ says, ‘Do not fear him.’ One does not say, ‘do not fear,’ unless the person is already fearful.”

Bereishis Rabba, Parsha 76

The Medrash tells that Yaakov and Moshe were both told not to be afraid, yet they each were fearful. Yaakov was told that the G-d would be with him, yet he was scared of Esav. Moshe was told not to fear Og, King of Bashan, yet he too was frightened.

There is a discussion amongst the commentators of the Medrash on how to view this fear:

They discuss if their fear was positive and should therefore be emulated or perhaps it was misplaced.

² Bereishis 32:8.

³ Tehillim 135:4.

⁴ Bereishis 28:15.

⁵ Bereishis 32:8.

The following is the rationale for both opinions:

- 1) Their fear was praiseworthy. Although these righteous individuals were guaranteed by the Almighty that they would experience no harm, they did not rely on this assurance due to their humility. Yaakov and Moshe each thought that perhaps they had sinned and were no longer worthy of G-d’s protection.
- 2) They should have trusted G-d. When G-d tells a person that they need not fear and that He will be with them, the individual should trust in G-d no matter what.

Why not fear?

The commentators who believe that Yaakov and Moshe were justified in being fearful, believe, that a person’s humility will bring about fear. When a person sees their own faults, they will view themselves unworthy Divine kindness.

The divergent opinion differs, saying that one should trust in G-d—regardless if they view themselves as deserving.

This, however, is not understood:

It does indeed seem correct to fear that due to one’s sins they may not be deserving of a miracle. What then was wrong with the actions of Yaakov and Moshe?

Chassidic thought indeed suggests that Yaakov’s fear was justified:

⁶ Tehillim 106:23.

⁷ Shemos 3:12.

⁸ Bamidbar 21:34.

Text 6

This (humility) is also the trait of Yaakov, and therewith he justified himself for his fear of Esav, and did not rely on the promise given to him— "And, behold, I am with you..," (That is), because Yaakov regarded himself as utterly insignificant [because of the multitude of favors, "for with my staff..."], and as unfit and unworthy to be saved ... and as the saying of our Sages, of blessed memory, "maybe sin will cause" for it appeared to him that he had sinned.

Tanya, Igeres Hakodesh, Epistle 2

Seemingly, their fear does not express a deficit in their faith, it rather *exemplifies* their extreme humility.

If so, what was wrong in Yaakov and Moshe's belief that perhaps they did not merit special salvation?

Trust in G-d

This question is extremely pertinent in our lives as well.

Similar to Yaakov and Moshe, we too are given a similar mandate not to fear:

Text 7

"When you go out to war against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, you shall not be afraid of them."⁹ We were commanded in this, that if a person sees any suffering approaching, he should, in his heart, trust in the salvation of G-d. As it says in the verse,¹⁰ "Truly, His salvation is

⁹ Devarim 20:1.

¹⁰ Tehillim 85:10.

near those who fear Him," and it says¹¹ as well, "Who are you that you fear man, who will die?"

Sha-arei Teshuvah 3:32

Even when a person is at war with a powerful enemy, he is entreated to put his trust in the Almighty and not to fear.

The concept of trust in G-d is that a person has absolute confidence that G-d will save him from all troubles. As such, he has no reason to fear *anything* that comes his way.

Trust in G-d is not only the belief that G-d *can* save him from his woes, but it is the *conviction* that He will. The person who has trust in G-d is so firm in this belief, that he does not have even a shred of worry, no matter what comes his way.

Text 8

What is trust? Peace of mind of the one who trusts. That one relies in his heart that the one he trusts in will do what is good and proper for him on the matter he has trusted him with, according to his ability and his understanding of what will further his good. But the main factor, which leads one to trust in the one trusted, and without which trust cannot exist, is for one's heart to be confident that the one trusted will keep his word and will do what he pledged, and that he will also think to do what is good for him even on what he did not pledge, out of pure generosity and kindness.

Chovas HaLevavos, Sha-ar Habitachon, Ch. 1

The person who has trust in the Almighty relies on Him completely. He is absolutely confident

¹¹ Yeshayahu 51: 12.

that G-d will be generous and kind to him, even when G-d did not pledge to do so. He is sure that G-d deal with him generously even though he may have imperfections and sin.

How can we be sure?

This concept however, that a person is to trust G-d no matter what, requires clarification as to the reason that he does so.

The individual is at peace of mind, though he has never received any promise from G-d—but why? From whence does the certitude come?

If a person does not have any assurance from the Almighty, how can he be sure that he will be saved from his troubles as a punishment for his sins?

If, when a person *does* have an assurance from G-d—as with Yaakov and Moshe—can they still be worried that they no longer deserve Divine intervention due to sin, all the more when the person has no such guarantee should a person be worried!

Why then should he place his absolute trust in G-d that He will show him kindness?

Every individual has misdeeds that can perhaps prevent Divine intervention:

Text 9

For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and sins not.

Koheles 7:20

If Yaakov was worried that he had sinned and was not deserving of salvation all the more so should we.

Trust and belief

It is possible to explain that the idea of *trust* (*bitachon*) in G-d is dependent on the concept of *belief* (*emuna*) in G-d.

The concept of *trust* in G-d hinges on the *belief* that all that happens in the world is orchestrated by the Almighty.

Any person who believes that G-d is just, should consequently trust in Him as well. Trusting in G-d essentially means that the person believes that all which G-d does is for a good purpose.

Accordingly, the individual who trusts in G-d does *not necessarily* believe that G-d will deal with him in the way the individual wishes, but that *no matter* what G-d does to him, he trusts that it is beneficial.

Even if the person is not saved from his predicament, he trusts that this too is for his good.

When a person who believes in the Almighty is in a dire situation, he knows that it is not the *situation* he should be fearful of, but only of *G-d*.

Therefore, it stands to reason, that being that it is G-d who placed the individual in the circumstances in which he finds himself, he should be calm and peace.

If he is worthy of G-d's kindness, and not deserving of any suffering, G-d will obviously not put him through undue hardship, and He will surely save him even if there does not seem to be a natural means to be saved. G-d controls nature and will definitely help him if he so deserves.

Conversely, if the person does not merit, he will *as well* be completely calm. This is so, because he knows that his situation is a result of his actions and that whatever is happening to him, comes from a kind and just G-d.

He is aware, that even if the Almighty is punishing him, it is ultimately for his own benefit. The purpose of punishment is a kindness to clean an individual's soul from any stain that he may have dirtied it with.

What are you afraid of?

According to the above, it is understood how everyone can have complete trust in the Almighty, *even* when he is aware that he is less than perfect. Because he knows that all that happens is from G-d, he is not fearful of the situation, but from *G-d*, who placed him in the situation.

This explains of the second group of commentators, who expressed that Yaakov and Moshe's fear was misplaced, in that it displayed a *lack* of faith.

According to this view, they were not fearful that they had sinned and afraid of *G-d*—they were instead fearful of their predicament.

This is seen in the wording of the respective verses describing these two incidents:

Concerning Yaakov, the verse¹² said, "Yaakov became very frightened and was distressed; so he divided the people who were with him..." A basic understanding of the verse implies that he was scared of *Esav* and not of his *sins*.

Regarding Moshe as well, it seems that he was scared of *Og* and not of his sins.

The verse¹³ states: "The Lord said to Moshe, 'Do not fear *him*, for I have delivered *him*, his people, and his land into your hand.'" From the fact that G-d told Moshe not to fear *him*, it is apparent that Moshe was afraid of *Og* himself.

These commentaries therefore entreat the individual not to learn this trait from our

ancestors, and instead, to entrust their fate entirely to G-d, no matter the outcome.

It will be good

The above interpretation of trusting in the Almighty, in which the individual is confident that no matter the outcome, it is for his good, is nevertheless, not a satisfactory explanation.

The concept of trust in G-d in its most basic understanding, is that one is certain that G-d will be kind to him in a *perceivable* manner.

Trusting in G-d is *not* merely that one is in a constant state of calm, knowing that all is for his best.

Rather, trust in G-d is the belief that G-d will be kind to him in a way that is clearly *apparent*.

In contrast, according to the previous explanation, the individual who has sinned is merely to trust that whatever happens is from G-d and therefore *intrinsically* good.

This would mean that the concept of trust in G-d in its most basic form—that G-d will show him revealed kindness—is not possible by most people who have some sins!

The only people who can have total trust that things will result in a manner of *revealed* good are perfectly righteous individuals. Only *they* can truly be sure that G-d will act towards them with tangible kindness.

The entire foundation though for trusting in G-d is that one is confident that G-d will be kind to him in a perceivable way, *whether he is deserving or not*.

¹² Bereishis 32:8.

¹³ Bamidbar 21:34.

Text 10

That the person he trusts is of the utmost generosity and kindness to those deserving and to those who are not deserving, and that his generosity and kindness is continuous, never ending and without interruption.

Chovas HaLevavos, Sha-ar Habitachon 2:7

Accordingly, *everyone* should trust in G-d, no matter if they possess sins or not. They should trust that G-d will be kind to them in His never-ending benevolence.

This needs clarification though: Even though G-d is kind to those that are not worthy, it is also possible that the person *does* deserve punishment.

That being the case, how can the individual be sure that G-d will show him kindness when he is not worthy?!

Think good

The concept of trusting in the Almighty's kindness—whether deserving or not—can be understood through a statement made by the third Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Text 11

Think good, and it will be good.

Igros Kodesh, Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, vol. 2, pg. 537

Thinking good thoughts in and of itself is what causes a positive outcome.

¹⁴ Tehilim 55:23.

¹⁵ This does not mean that the individual does not work within nature as well, but that he works within

Trust in G-d, it is not only a *derivative* of faith, but it is an entirely separate notion.

The concept of trusting in G-d is that a person relies *entirely* on the Almighty, putting his total fate into the hands of Heaven.

It is not a belief the outcome will be for his best, no matter if it is perceptible to his eyes or not, but is instead, the *act* of letting go of his burdens and *placing* his complete fate in the hands of the Almighty.

Trust in G-d is a difficult feat to master. A person must push aside any doubt or worries from his mind and figuratively give them to G-d. This is expressed in the verse,¹⁴ "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will bear you..."

When an individual relies on G-d, he does not look to any *natural* means as the source of his salvation, but is aware that it is *only* G-d that he should depend upon for all his needs.¹⁵

This is the intent of the following explanation:

Text 12

All matters of the one who trusts are entirely in the hands of the one he trusts, and no one else can hurt him, help him, benefit him, or protect him from harm, as a slave chained down in a prison is entirely in the hands of his master. If the one who trusts were in the hands of the one he trusts in this manner, it would be more fitting to trust in him.

Chovas HaLevavos, Sha-ar Habitachon, 2:3

No matter the situation, even if the deliverance seems impossible according to any logical

natural means because that is how G-d wishes him to act. See Chovas HaLevavos, Sha-ar Habitachon, ch. 3, Akeida Sha-ar 26.

means—he still relies on G-d, as his fate is only in His hands.

Trust in G-d is not a *belief* it is an *action*. It is not the *belief* that G-d is always kind to everyone—no matter what—it is rather the *act* of placing one's entire burden on G-d.

The definition of trust in G-d is that *because* of his trust, G-d will save him.

Trust in G-d is *not* that one has faith in G-d's everlasting benevolence, with the belief that since His kindness is endless, even one who transgresses will receive G-d's kindness, irrespective of his actions.

If this were the case, there would be no concept of reward and punishment.

Rather, it is the *merit* of a person's complete trust in G-d, which brings about G-d's favor.

When the individual believes in G-d, no matter which logical reasons tell him otherwise, this *itself* is the reason that G-d will show him revealed goodness—even if he does not *otherwise* merit G-d's benevolence.

Because he does not rely on anything besides G-d and *ignores* all logic telling him he cannot be saved, that, in turn, G-d *ignores* the fact that he may be undeserving, and showers him with kindness.

This is the meaning of, “*Think good, and it will be good.*” When a person *actively* believes that G-d will do kindness for him, this directly *causes* to indeed act kindly.

Moshe's fear

With this understanding, the significance of the simple meaning of the verse is understood.

Moshe had become frightened when the Israelite whom he chastised responded

insolently towards him, threatening to inform on him to Pharaoh.

The verse is not irrelevant, as it imparts the fundamental concept of trusting in G-d.

It was because Moshe did not trust G-d on the level that was demanded of him that the story played out in the way that it did.

Were Moshe to have conducted himself according to the appropriate level of trust in G-d, he would have been saved from his predicament and would not be forced to flee Egypt.

Text 13

R. Yehudah ben Nossan used to follow R. Hamnuna. Once he sighed, and the other said to him: “This man wants to bring suffering on himself, since it is written:¹⁶ ‘For the thing which I did fear has come upon me, and that which I was afraid of has overtaken me.’”

Talmud, Berachos 60a

When a person sighs and is worried about his situation, this *itself* is what brings hardship upon him. If the person is not scared, and instead trusts in the Almighty, then this very reliance causes G-d's salvation.

It is for this reason that all worry is destructive, as when a person worries, they are actually *preventing* G-d's salvation.

This is the meaning of the verse, when it relates that “Moshe became frightened and said, ‘Indeed, the matter has become known!’ Pharaoh heard of this incident, and he sought to slay Moshe...”

¹⁶ Iyov 3:25.

It was Moshe's fear and his lack of trust in G-d, which *brought about* Pharaoh's desire to kill him.

This as well is the reason that the Torah points out that Moshe *said* these words, as the verse recounts, "Moshe became frightened and *said*." This accentuates Moshe's deficiency of trust in G-d. Not only did he think these words, he expressed them verbally as well.

Were he to have trusted in the Almighty *completely*, and not to have worried about the situation that was before him, this *itself* would have caused the matter to have been forgotten.

The lesson

From here we can glean an important lesson in our own lives.

When a person is faced with obstacles which hold him back from performing *mitzvos*, he should know that in order for his troubles to dissipate, it depends on *his actions* and his trust in the Almighty.

If one has complete trust in G-d, in a manner in which he removes all worry, then he is assured

that through thinking good, it *will* indeed be good!

Concerning the redemption from Egypt it says, that the Jewish people were redeemed through the merit of their trust in G-d.

Text 14

In the merit of their trust, the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt.

Kad Kemach, Bitachon

So too concerning the future redemption. When the Jewish people will trust that their redemption is near, this itself will bring it about in actuality. May it be speedily in our time!

(Based on Likutei Sichos 36, Shemos 1, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel.

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