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From Grace to Service

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1.

HASHEM WAS ANGRY UNTIL AVRAM

At the end of our *parshah*, Rashi quotes the words, “{Terach died} בְּתָרְוֹן, in Charan,”¹ and explains, “The ׀ {the *nun*, the final letter of the word “בְּתָרְוֹן”} is inverted² {in the Torah scroll} to tell you that until Avram, Hashem was angry, *charon af* (at the world).”³

The simple meaning of Rashi’s interpretation is (not that the **inverted *nun*** means “until Avram, Hashem was angry” – because how is this related to an inverted *nun*? Rather) that the inverted *nun* alludes to the fact that in addition to the literal meaning of the word “בְּתָרְוֹן” – in the **city** of Charan – the word contains another idea (meaning): The word also means “*charon (af)* {anger}. How is anger relevant to this verse? Rashi explains: Until Avram, Hashem was angry.

But this is difficult to understand: Rashi’s interpretation of the word “בְּתָרְוֹן” (*charon af*) must fit in with the content of **this** verse. This verse speaks not about Avram but Terach – “*Terach died in Charan.*” Why does Rashi say, “**Until Avram**, Hashem was angry”? Rashi should have connected the anger with **Terach!**⁴

¹ {Rashi on *Bereishis* 11:32.}

² {In the original, the Rebbe analyzes two points regarding Rashi’s opinion on the “inverted *nun*”: a) Which *nun* is under discussion, and b) in which manner is it inverted. The need for clarity is due to the lack of appearance of this *nun* in today’s Torah scrolls.

Regarding the first point, the Rebbe decisively clarifies that it is the “long *nun*” of the word Charan, explaining that Rashi’s wording, “**the *nun*,**” points to the *nun* at hand (as opposed to other interpretations that suggest it refers to an extra *nun* appended after the word Charan).

Regarding the second point, the Rebbe refutes the possibility of it being a “regular *nun*” (being bent connotes inversion), for as is well known, Rashi’s explanations are intended for a child to understand, so his words must be taken literally. This leaves room for two more options: (a) an upside-down “long *nun*”; or (b) a mirrored “long *nun*.” However, sticking to the above approach that Rashi’s words are to be taken literally, it seems clear that it is an upside-down “long *nun*.”}

³ It appears this way in several editions {i.e., it adds the words “in the world”}.

⁴ Like *Radak*’s commentary on *Bereishis* 11:32: “Terach **died** while Hashem was angry with him.”

2.

IT'S ALL ABOUT AVRAM

The explanation is as follows: The verse says,⁵ “Terach died in Charan.” If we are to assume that Hashem’s anger was about Terach, we would then need to assume that Hashem’s anger abated only after Terach died. But this cannot be the case because Rashi maintains⁶ that a long time before Terach died, he repented from his idolatrous ways.⁷

Therefore, Rashi must learn that Hashem’s anger, alluded to in the verse, had nothing to do with **Terach**. Instead, Hashem’s anger was directed at the **world in general**.⁸

But then the following question emerges: What correlation does Hashem’s anger toward the entire **world** have with the verse, “Terach died in Charan”? The anger had nothing to do with Terach specifically, especially because he repented before he died!

To address this, Rashi says: “**until Avram...**” This relates to Avram — to the verse immediately following the inverted *nun* — “Hashem said to **Avram**, ‘Go for yourself.’”⁹ Meaning, by using the inverted *nun* in the word “בְּקֶרֶן,” the Torah alludes to the fact that Hashem’s anger was directed at the world until Avram came around. Avram “began to shine the light”¹⁰ — he illuminated the world with G-dliness, as Scripture says,¹¹ “He proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the universe.” Avram removed Hashem’s anger from the world.

⁵ { *Bereishis* 11:32. }

⁶ *Bereishis* 15:15.

⁷ See Rashi on *Bereishis* 15:15, which conveys that by the time of Covenant Between the Parts, Terach had already repented. The Covenant Between the Parts took place when Terach was 140 years old (Rashi on *Shemos* 12:40) {65 years before his death}.

⁸ Especially according to the version “*charon af... in the world*.”

⁹ { *Bereishis* 12:1. }

¹⁰ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 15, sec. 26; see *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 2, sec. 3.

¹¹ *Bereishis* 21:33.

3.

THE END

But we still need to clarify: True, the verse, “Hashem said to Avram...,” **immediately** follows the word “בְּתָרֵן.” But it is still difficult to construe the inverted *nun* of the word “בְּתָרֵן” as referring to a **later verse**.

The explanation is as follows: A long *nun* is a (final)¹² letter that **underscores** the end or boundary (of a word). Moreover, among the final letters themselves, the shape of the long *nun*¹³ actually appears as such because it is a long **line** that divides two sides, creating a complete separation. The shape of the long *nun* leaves no space to allow passage from one side to the other¹⁴ (in contrast to, for example, the letter *kuf*, ק — between the *reish* ר {the upper} part of the *kuf*, and {the lower part of the *kuf*,} the line, there is a gap).

The Torah chose to alter the *nun* of בְּתָרֵן specifically to allude to Hashem’s anger; and it chose to **only** alter the *nun* — although, seemingly, it should have changed the entire word — in the word בְּתָרֵן (particularly since in many places in the Torah,¹⁵ *charon* {anger} is spelled without the *vav* {תָּרֵן}).

This proves that, at the same time, Torah is alluding to the fact that Hashem’s anger **dissipated** at the end of our *parshah*.¹⁶ Therefore, Rashi learns, “until Avram, Hashem was angry” — there was *charon af*; **until** Avram, there was *charon af*, but that anger ceased.

¹² {In the Hebrew alphabet, some letters change their form when they appear at the end of a word (known as the letters “מְנַצֵּף־ךְ.” For example, the letter *nun* in the middle of a word appears like this: ן, but at the end of a word appears like this: ן; this is called the “long *nun*.”}

¹³ See Rashi on *Bereishis* 2:4, where he draws an allusion from the form of the letters.

¹⁴ Although the final letters ר, ך, and ף also lack space for passage between the sides, they feature an additional form alongside the line, signifying that they encompass additional content beyond their role as a separation. In contrast, the long *nun* is nothing more than a prolonged line, signifying that this comprises its **entire** content.

¹⁵ *Shemos* 16:7. {Meaning, drawing an equivalency between the place, *Charan*, and *charon*, anger, is more evident from the fact that the word *charon*, anger, is often spelled the same as the place, *Charan*.}

¹⁶ See the manuscripts of Rashi: “To teach you, **until here** — until Avram....”

4.

UNTIL AVRAM

But we still need to clarify: Although the *nun* alludes to a break between two sides — in our context, the conclusion of *parshas Noach* and the beginning of *parshas Lech Lecha* — there are two possible ways to illustrate this break: (a) Hashem’s anger remained until the end of the era spoken about in *parshas Noach*, meaning, the **affirmative** side — the anger **persisted** until then. (b) Hashem’s anger remained present until the era spoken about in *parshas Lech Lecha*, meaning, the **opposite** side — the anger **abated** then.

Since Rashi seeks to explain the meaning behind the word “בְּתָרוֹן,” ostensibly, he should have said that the anger lasted until the end of the era spoken about in *parshas Noach* (in accordance with the first option). Why does Rashi say, “until Avram...,” while emphasizing the **cessation** (termination) of the anger?

In truth, however, this question carries no weight: (The era of) *parshas Noach* closes with the verse, “And Terach **died** in Charan.” — Terach’s death (as Rashi explains in his previous gloss) occurred more than 60 years after Avram came to the land of Canaan. Therefore, Rashi cannot say that Hashem’s anger persisted in the world until the time of Terach’s death because the anger already abated from the time that Avram arrived and brought light into the world (at least 60 years **before** Terach’s death).

Therefore, Rashi uses nuanced wording: “Until Avram...” In doing so, Rashi highlights the fact that the *nun* — {that alludes to} the cessation of Hashem’s anger — is not connected to the time of Terach’s death, even though this cessation is alluded to at the end of our *parshah*. Rather, the cessation of Hashem’s anger is connected generally with the conclusion of the period of “until Avram,” meaning, the conclusion of the ten generations {from Noach to Avram} — the beginning of Avram’s epoch.

5.

THEY LIVED LONG, BUT THEY WERE SINNERS

However, we need to clarify further:

To what end does the Torah need to (include an inverted *nun* to) teach us that during the era of the ten generations before Avram, Hashem's anger was directed at the world? This is obvious: The people of that period sinned profusely, worshiping idols,¹⁷ etc. Obviously,¹⁸ Hashem was unhappy with their behavior and was angry at the world!

The explanation: When we study, in our *parshah*, about the people of those generations, we learn of people who lived very long lives, significantly longer than 120 years. This is difficult to understand: How is it possible for sinners to have been granted such longevity?

In response to this question, one could have formulated the following answer: Although they were sinners, perhaps nonetheless (for some reason — either because, for example, “as one people with one language for all,”¹⁹ they lived peacefully; or because they honored their parents, as Rashi says here) Hashem was pleased with an element of their conduct, and they made Him happy. The Torah negates this possibility by using the inverted *nun*. Hashem was **not** happy with them. On the contrary, Hashem was angry at them. But why, then, did they live such long lives? Because Hashem so desired, and we do not know the reason.²⁰

¹⁷ Rashi on *Bereishis* 4:26; 10:9; et al.

¹⁸ If the sins of the tree of knowledge and Kayin's murder of Hevel provoked Hashem's anger, certainly these also would do so.

¹⁹ {*Bereishis* 11:6.}

²⁰ It is obvious that Rashi, as a commentator, was not compelled to answer how it is that evildoers are successful. (In contrast, he was compelled to discuss Hashem's anger, for without him saying so one may err and assume that He was not angry.)

It can be added, however, that the answer is evident from Rashi's statement that there was “anger in the world.” The fact that Hashem expressed anger toward the world undoubtedly led to punishment (although it is not spelled out — see Rashi on *Bereishis* 4:15 and 5:29). Moreover, the statement must be understood in this manner, even according to the straightforward understanding. Otherwise, why would Hashem's anger with the world be significant?

Alternatively (according to *pshat*) we can understand logically that since Adam, the first man, was Hashem's actual handiwork, surely he would have had the longest lifespan (if not for the sin of the Tree of Knowledge). Following him, the people of subsequent generations, in general, would be more frail, and their lifespan would be closer to the lifespan of our times.

6.

SUPER-KINDNESS

Although explicitly, in the **straightforward understanding**, Rashi does not provide a reason why the ten (or twenty)²¹ generations before Avram lived long lives, he does allude to the reason for this according to the inner dimension of the Torah. As discussed many times in the past, Rashi's commentary contains the "wine of Torah"²² concealed within it (that is, the inner dimension of Torah).

Our Rabbis say²³ that the 26 generations who lived before the Giving of the Torah were sustained by Hashem's kindness. Chassidus²⁴ explains that these generations were sustained by the G-dly attribute of kindness as it exists beyond the continuum of Creation.²⁵ At that level,²⁶ "If you have sinned... and your transgressions multiply, what have you done to Him? If you were righteous, what have you given Him?..." This level is beyond a realm where *mitzvos* and sins make a difference. Therefore, even sinners can receive vitality and sustenance from this level.

Just as there is a general difference between the 26 generations preceding the Giving of the Torah and the generations that followed, so, too, within the 26 generations themselves, there were different periods. The first 20 generations —

²¹ {Ten generations from Adam to Noach, and another ten generations from Noach to Avram.}

²² *HaYom Yom* p. 24 (29 Shevat).

²³ *Pesachim* 118a.

²⁴ *Or HaTorah*, "Bereishis," 288a; *Kuntres Umaayan*, discourse 8, ff.; see at length *Sefer HaMaamarim*, 5562, s.v., "Vayehi Beshalach," p. 146.

²⁵ {In the original Hebrew, "*seder hishtaleshelus*." This term refers to the chain-like descent of spiritual worlds until this world. Each spiritual world denotes a complete realm of existence, resulting from its general proximity to or distance from Divine revelation.}

²⁶ *Iyov* 35:6, 7.

the time before the “two thousand years of Torah”²⁷ — were sustained by Hashem’s kindness emanating from beyond the continuum of Creation more so than the final six generations.²⁸

Rashi alludes to this idea by adding the word, “*charon af*,”²⁹ because seemingly, why does Rashi need to add the word “*af*”? In this context, only the word, “*charon* {anger}” is relevant because this word explains the allusion behind the name “Charan.”

By also using the word “*af*,” however, Rashi alludes to the idea that Hashem’s kindness sustained the people of that era; this kindness originated from beyond the continuum of Creation. This is because “*af*” alludes to the light beyond the continuum of Creation, as we will explain.

7.

NOSE AND THROAT

Rashi writes in *parshas Beshalach*³⁰ that *Charan* is etymologically related to the word “*charah*” {burn}. The word “*charah*” is found not only in the context of the “*af*” (“*charah af*”) but also in the context of the word “*garon*,” {throat}, as the verse says,³¹ “בְּחַר גְּרוֹנִי, My throat is *nichar*” and Rashi explains that the word “*nichar*” is etymologically related to the word “*charah*” (the throat is parched).

These two interpretations are also pertinent in the context of *Charan*: (a) as Rashi explains it here, “*charon af* of Hashem {Hashem’s anger}”; and (b) the numerical equivalent of the word חָרָן (by also including in the count the word itself as one)³² is the same as the word “גְּרוֹן” {throat, numerically

²⁷ *Sanhedrin* 97a; *Avodah Zarah* 9a.

²⁸ *Or HaTorah*, “*Bereishis*,” 288a.

²⁹ {Literally, “nose.” The expression “*charon af*,” when translated literally means, “the anger of the nose,” but the word, “*af*” is often coupled with the word “*charon*” in the context of *anger*. As Rashi explains in his commentary on *Shemos* 15:8, and the *sichah* quotes Rashi later, “When a person is angry, wind comes out of his nostrils... when a person’s rage subsides, his breath is long, and when he is angry, his breath is short.”}

³⁰ *Shemos* 15:8.

³¹ *Tehillim* 69:4.

³² {In the original, עַם הַכּוֹלֵל.}

equivalent to 259}.³³ “תָּרֵן” (containing the same letters as the word “נִחַר”) alludes to a parched throat.³⁴ When a throat is parched, a person’s voice cannot properly pass through it.

The difference between these two ideas:

The throat mediates between the head, the brain, and the heart.³⁵ Meaning, the influence of the brain’s intellect that descends into the emotion of the heart passes through the throat. But when “my throat is נִחַר {parched},” it does not allow the intellectual influence to descend into the heart. This effect is absent in the case of the nose. The nose is higher on the body than the throat, symbolizing that which is beyond *chochmah*.³⁶ For *chochmah* is the starting point in the continuum of Creation, whereas “aroma” reaches beyond the continuum of Creation.³⁷

Rashi’s nuanced wording in his commentary on our verse, “*charon af*,” alludes to this idea: The word “*Charan*” in our verse does not refer to the expression, “**My throat** is *nichar* {parched}.” This verse discusses the generations before the two millennia of Torah that were sustained by Hashem’s kindness beyond the continuum of Creation. Thus, the idea of a throat serving as the conduit between *chochmah* and levels that are lower than it is irrelevant. Therefore, Rashi emphasizes “*charon af*,” which points to the level of G-dly light emanating from beyond the continuum of Creation.

Rashi then teaches that this dynamic by which sinners received vitality from beyond the continuum of Creation only was in place until Avram’s era. This is because the era before Avram was defined as two millennia of chaos. But once the two millennia of Torah began, “*charon af*” ended. Meaning, the flow of vitality from beyond the continuum of Creation was shut off. Subsequently, an

³³ Arizal’s *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of “*Vayeitzei*”; “*Vayeishev*”; *Torah Or*, “*Va’erah*” 58c; et al.

³⁴ Arizal’s *Likkutei Torah*, “*Vayeishev*”; *Torah Or*, “*Vayeitzei*,” 21c; et al.

³⁵ Arizal’s *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid*; *Torah Or* and *Toras Chaim*, “*Vaera*” (the explanation of the *Maamar* “*Lachen Emor*”); et al.

³⁶ {*Chochmah*, lit., “wisdom” — the first of the ten *sefiros*, corresponding to the highest of the intellectual faculties.}

³⁷ *Maamar* “*VeHaricho*” 5562 (p. 64); *Likkutei Torah*, “*Massei*,” 90d; “*Shir Hashirim*,” 33a; et al.

era began during which the Heavenly outflow was measured according to the Torah's rules; all outflow had to be calculated according to the Torah's criteria.

8.

THE HIGHEST HIGHS AND THE LOWEST LOWS

This idea also explains and offers a deeper reason as to how the idea that “until Avram, Hashem was angry, *charon af*, at the world,” is alluded to specifically by the unusual inverted *nun*:

With the beginning of the two millennia of Torah, which began with Avram,³⁸ the encompassing light {from beyond the continuum of Creation} began to be drawn in an inward fashion. When the light from beyond the continuum of Creation is being drawn in an internalized fashion, the forces of negativity can squeeze no vitality from it.

As known,³⁹ the forces of negativity can extract vitality from the encompassing light {from beyond the continuum of Creation} only as long as the light **remains** in an extrinsic state. But when this G-dly encompassing light is drawn down inwardly, the outflow enters only that which is holy.

The final, long *nun* alludes to this idea because this letter contains two diametrically opposed dimensions.⁴⁰ (a) The numerical equivalent of the letter *nun* is 50. The number 50 refers to the 50th Gate {of Understanding},⁴¹ which is beyond the continuum of Creation;⁴² and (b) the image and form of the letter⁴³ — a long “leg” — illustrates a flow to the very bottom.⁴⁴

³⁸ *Avodah Zarah* 9a.

³⁹ *Torah Or*, “*Vayechi*” (103d), s.v., “*Va’ani Nosati Lach*” (as explained in *Or HaTorah*, 529a ff.); *Toras Chaim*, “*Shemos*” (s.v., “*Vayomer... Lameyaldos Haivriyos*”); s.v., “*Ner Chanukah*,” *Sefer Hamaamorim* 5659; *Maamar Vayigash*, 5704; et al.

⁴⁰ *Or HaTorah*, “*Reeh*,” p. 681; Tzemach Tzedek’s *Biurei HaZohar*, p. 459.

⁴¹ {See *Rosh Hashanah* 21a — “Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all of them were given to Moses, except for one gate.”}

⁴² See *Or HaTorah* and *Biurei HaZohar*, *ibid.*, that (specifically) the long *nun* is the 50th gate.

⁴³ See *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah*” (ch. 11; ch. 12 in the annotation), which states that the form of the letters signifies the form of the effluence, etc.

⁴⁴ *Torah Or* 110c; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Reeh*,” 20b; *Biurei HaZohar*, “*Behaaloscha*,” 90a.

Meaning, the elongated *nun* alludes to the process of drawing down the light from beyond the continuum of Creation — the “unlimited highs” — into the “unlimited lows.” In this way, the flow of vitality to the negative forces is cut off, and the G-dly light flows only to that which is holy.

As the Alter Rebbe explains in *Likkutei Torah*⁴⁵ regarding the elongated *nun* {written in a Torah scroll} in the verse, “וּבִּוּ תִּדְבְּקוּן, and you shall cleave to Him”:⁴⁶ The ultimate achievement of “and you shall cleave to Him” must be brought to the very bottom, to the extent that even the lowest world of *Asiyah* becomes “entirely holy for Hashem.” Then, “the external forces and the *sitra achra*⁴⁷ will be unable to draw any vitality.”

The two millennia of Torah served to prepare us for the two millennia of Moshiach. When Moshiach comes, all the present-day external light will permeate the world. Then, automatically (as the Alter Rebbe concludes there in *Likkutei Torah*) “I will remove the spirit of impurity from the land,”⁴⁸ with the coming of our righteous Moshiach. May it be very soon.

— From talks delivered on Shabbos, *Parshas Noach*, 5727 (1966)

⁴⁵ *Parshas Re'eh*, 20b, ff.; see *Or HaTorah*, and (Tzemach Tzedek's) *Biurei HaZohar*, “Behaaloscha,” 90a.

⁴⁶ *Devarim* 13:5.

⁴⁷ {Lit., “the other side.” Meaning, the side opposed to G-dliness, often identified with evil or impurity.}

⁴⁸ *Zecharyah* 13:2.