



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 15 | Vayeshev | Sichah 3

Primed for Suffering

---

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

© Copyright by Sichos In English 2022 ◦ 5783

A note on the translation: Rounded and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; curly brackets are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in curly brackets are those of the translator or editors and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Bolded words are italicized in the original text.

Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

**Your feedback is appreciated — please send all comments to: [info@projectlikkuteisichos.org](mailto:info@projectlikkuteisichos.org)**

## 1.

### SHECHEM

On the verse,<sup>1</sup> “He said to him (Yaakov said to Yosef), ‘Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers...,’ so he sent him... and he arrived at Shechem,” Rashi quotes the words, “and he arrived at Shechem,” and explains: “a place predisposed to misfortunes...” (as explained in Section 3).

We need to clarify:

What difficulty in *pshat*<sup>2</sup> compels Rashi to explain that Shechem was “a place predisposed to misfortunes”?

Some commentators maintain as follows: Scripture already said,<sup>3</sup> “Are your brothers not pasturing in **Shechem**?” Thus, Scripture does not need to spell out again “(and he arrived) at **Shechem**.” Scripture could have said, “and he arrived *there*,” and we would know that this means Shechem. By emphasizing, “and he arrived at **Shechem**,” Scripture implies that this is “the well-known Shechem, the place predisposed to misfortunes.”<sup>4</sup>

However, according to a simple understanding, it is difficult to suggest that this difficulty is what Rashi wishes to address because:

(a) In numerous sources, Scripture **repeats** the name of a location and does not refer to it with a pronoun. For example, in our *parshah*:<sup>5</sup> “So Yosef’s master... put him in prison... and he was there in **prison**... all the prisoners who were in that **prison**....” Meaning, within the framework of *pshat*, it is unremarkable that Scripture explicitly records and repeats the name of the place.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Bereishis* 37:14.

<sup>2</sup> {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” When the plain meaning is understood clearly, Rashi does not comment. Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

<sup>3</sup> *Bereishis* 37:13.

<sup>4</sup> *Re'em*.

<sup>5</sup> *Bereishis* 39:20-22.

(b) If Rashi was indeed bothered by this above question, he should have addressed this in the **previous** verse — “Yisrael said... ‘Are your brothers not pasturing in Shechem?’” Already there, Scripture apparently did not need to specify, “pasturing in **Shechem**,” for the verse already said,<sup>6</sup> “his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock in Shechem.” (Here, too, Yaakov<sup>7</sup> could have just said, “Go now, and I will send you to your brothers,” or the like.)

(c) On this basis, Rashi should have quoted “at Shechem” as the caption of his gloss, and need not (also) have quoted the phrase, “and he arrived.”

## 2.

### ATTEMPT NUMBER TWO

Some commentators<sup>8</sup> maintain otherwise: Rashi’s intent was to explain why Scripture needed to include the clause “and he arrived at Shechem” at all. What difference does it make where “a man discovered him...”?<sup>9</sup> Rashi explains it is noteworthy because Shechem is “a place predisposed to misfortunes....”

However, on a simple level, this explanation is also difficult.

Scripture recounts how Yosef’s brothers were in Shechem and that Yaakov dispatched Yosef to check on them. Obviously, it is the scriptural style to recount how Yosef went to the place where Yaakov had sent him<sup>10</sup> — to Shechem.

Furthermore, the following passage<sup>11</sup> describes how Yosef was “wandering in the field,” and he said to a man, “I seek my brothers... and the man said, **they journeyed from here.**” It is no surprise that, for the continuation of the narrative, Scripture needs to first tell us that Yosef arrived in Shechem. (If it did

---

<sup>6</sup> *Bereishis* 37:12.

<sup>7</sup> Although this is a quote of what Yaakov had said (and is not part of Scripture’s narration), obviously the Torah does not record all the details of what was spoken, just those parts that are germane to the story.

<sup>8</sup> *Maharshal* quoted by *Sifsei Chachamim; Divrei David* (by *Taz*).

<sup>9</sup> {*Bereishis* 37:15.}

<sup>10</sup> See *Bereishis* 24:10, 28:5; et al.

<sup>11</sup> *Bereishis* 37:16-17.

not tell us this, the continuation of the narrative makes little sense — “wandering in the field... I seek my brothers... they journeyed **from here.**”)

### 3.

#### FIVE QUESTIONS

Rashi then continues: “There the brothers<sup>12</sup> stumbled; there the Shechemites violated Dinah; and there the kingdom of David was divided, as it says,<sup>13</sup> ‘And Rechavam went to Shechem.’”

We need to clarify:

(a) Rashi’s **ordering** of the misfortunes: Dinah was violated **before** the brothers stumbled. Rashi should have placed these events in chronological order.

(b) Furthermore, the source for Rashi’s commentary is the Gemara<sup>14</sup> and Midrash Tanchuma.<sup>15</sup> Both sources record the events in chronological order (“violated Dinah” is recorded first). Why does Rashi **deviate** and change the order?

(c) The Gemara and Midrash say, “In Shechem, they (Yosef’s brothers) sold Yosef.” Why does Rashi **revise** the wording and write, “there the brothers stumbled”?

Seemingly, on the contrary, the word “stumbled” can be used even to describe a lapse that is not severe. [As Rashi explains earlier regarding Reuven:<sup>16</sup> “Even when Scripture speaks of his **stumbling**, Reuven is referred to as the

---

<sup>12</sup> {In the Hebrew original, “*ha’shevativ*”; lit., “the Tribes.” The sons of Yaakov are often referred to as “the Tribes,” since they became the progenitors of the respective Jewish tribes which arose from them.}

<sup>13</sup> *Divrei Hayamim II* 10:1.

<sup>14</sup> *Sanhedrin* 102a.

<sup>15</sup> *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Vayeshev*,” sec. 2.

<sup>16</sup> On *Bereishis* 35:23.

firstborn.”] Here, Rashi refers to the brothers **selling Yosef** — a grave offense. Why does Rashi say, “there the brothers (merely) **stumbled**.”

(d) In the Prophets, we find another cause of misfortune that occurred in Shechem (**before** the narrative in which “Rechavam went to Shechem”): “Avimelech son of Yerubaal went to **Shechem**... and **killed** his brothers.”<sup>17</sup> Why does Rashi, in his commentary, not include mention of **this** misfortune?

[Perhaps the reason is that this event did not negatively affect the entire Jewish nation. But this answer does not bear scrutiny because the violation of Dinah also only affected individuals.]

(e) Conversely, we find good things occurred in Shechem. As **Rashi already** mentioned,<sup>18</sup> it was in Shechem that “the Jewish people took upon themselves the oath to observe the Torah.” [As Scripture recounts, Yehoshua forged a covenant with the Jewish people in Shechem by which they bound themselves to observe Torah and mitzvos.] Also, it was in Shechem that Hashem gave Avraham “tidings regarding offspring,” and “tidings regarding the land of Israel.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, according to *pshat*, what proves that Shechem is a place predisposed specifically for misfortunes?

#### 4.

DOSAN

Regarding the question why Rashi says, “there the brothers stumbled,” and not, “they (Yosef’s brothers) sold him,” we can posit that Rashi’s approach here is consistent with his general approach in his Torah commentary:

On the verse,<sup>20</sup> “Let us go to Dosan,” Rashi comments:

---

<sup>17</sup> *Shoftim* 9:1 ff.

<sup>18</sup> *Bereishis* 12:6.

<sup>19</sup> Rashi on *Bereishis* 12:7.

<sup>20</sup> *Bereishis* 37:17.

To search for legal {*dasos*} pretexts to put you to death. But according to *pshat*, it is the name of a place. And a verse does not lose its simple meaning.

Following **the two interpretations** {in this gloss}, Rashi adds: “And a verse does not lose its simple meaning.” This is unusual, as Rashi does not (usually) mention this rule in other places where he offers two interpretations (one according to Aggadah and one according to *pshat*). Rashi writes this in order to explain that even according to the **first** interpretation, “a verse does not lose its simple meaning,” and Dosan was a name of a place. Meaning (as the commentators explain),<sup>21</sup> {when the man who Yosef encountered repeated what he had overheard the brothers say}, “Let us go to Dosan,” the statement conveyed **both** ideas:

(a) It is the name of a place — Yosef’s brothers traveled from Shechem to a place called Dosan; and (b) they journeyed there in order “to search for legal pretexts to put you to death.”

Thus, according to Rashi’s Torah commentary — which is based on *pshat* — the brothers sold Yosef in Dosan, and **not** in Shechem (according to **both** interpretations). Consequently, Rashi cannot use the wording of the Gemara and the Tanchuma, “In Shechem, they (Yosef’s brothers) **sold** him.”

[In his commentary on the **Gemara**,<sup>22</sup> Rashi addresses this question and explains:

Dosan, mentioned in the verse, was a village near Shechem, and it was thus named after Shechem. Alternatively, according to the Midrash, it is so named because they judged Yosef in order to kill him.

(As Rashi explains in a different source<sup>23</sup> [according to the Midrash], “Dosan was **not** a place.”) However, according to *pshat*, Dosan was, in fact, the name of a place. It makes little sense that Shechem would be considered “a place predisposed to misfortunes” because of events that occurred in a village near Shechem. (Additionally, Scripture **emphasizes** that Dosan was a **separate**

---

<sup>21</sup> Ramban, *Divrei David* on *Bereishis* 37:14.

<sup>22</sup> Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 102a, s.v., “*biShechem*.”

<sup>23</sup> Rashi on *Sotah* 13b, s.v., “*miShechem gnavuhu*.”

location — “**they journeyed from here...** let us go to Dosan.” Thus, it is difficult to presume that, according to *pshat*, Dosan was (a village near Shechem which was) “**named after Shechem.**”)]

Therefore, Rashi explains that “there (in Shechem) the brothers stumbled” — they did not sell Yosef there, but they stumbled there (which is less grave).

But we need to clarify: The brothers sold Yosef (not **there** but) in Dosan. So what does Rashi mean by saying, “there the brothers stumbled”?

## 5.

ONLY WITH RESPECT TO YOSEF

The explanation:

Understood simply, “a place predisposed to misfortunes” means that Yosef arrived at a place that was “predisposed to misfortunes”<sup>24</sup> in a **general** sense (as the continuation of this citation lists many misfortunes that occurred there). Therefore, a misfortune also befell him in that location — he was sold.

In order to **forestall** the above misunderstanding of the statement — “a place predisposed to misfortunes,” Rashi changes the order of the misfortunes, and says first, “there the brothers stumbled.” This misfortune is, in fact, the one described **here**, in these passages, regarding **Yosef**.

In doing so, Rashi clarifies that “a place predisposed to misfortunes” means that it is predisposed to misfortunes in a particular sense — only regarding **Yosef** and his being sold {into slavery by his brothers}. Meaning, with his arrival in Shechem, (the preparations for) Yosef’s misfortunes began, because “there the brothers stumbled” (as elucidated below in Section 6).

---

<sup>24</sup> Analogous to Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 13:18: “Some lands produce....”

[On this basis, we can understand that also the other two misfortunes that occurred in Shechem, which Rashi cites (“there the Shechemites violated Dinah; there the kingdom of David was divided”) also relate to the fact that Shechem was a place predisposed to **Yosef’s** misfortunes, as explained below in Section 7.]

## 6.

### YOSEF’S ARRIVAL WAS SIGNIFICANT

The words of the verse, “and he arrived at Shechem” — which Rashi quotes as the caption of his gloss — raise a question that requires an explanation from Rashi:

The passage (“He said to him, ‘Go now...,’ and he sent him...”) concludes with the words, “and he arrived at Shechem.” Only in the next verse, the Torah recounts the details of the events that occurred there — “A man discovered him...” This shows that Yosef’s arrival in Shechem was, independently, a major component of the narrative (of his sale). Meaning, Yosef’s arrival in Shechem is not a detail of secondary importance, but his **arrival** there is an important detail that Torah wants us to know.

This is difficult to understand:

Yosef’s brothers were no longer in Shechem; they were in Dosan (as discussed above in Section 3). Consequently, Yosef merely passed through Shechem on his way (to travel further) to his brothers in Dosan. Granted, Scripture found it necessary to recount how Yosef arrived in Shechem for the continuation of the narrative (as discussed above in Section 2). However, why was it necessary to **separate** this detail concerning his arrival as a stand-alone event? Scripture could have said, “A man discovered him in Shechem, and behold...” (the emphasis that “**he arrived** at Shechem” is seemingly superfluous).



Therefore, Rashi says: “*And he arrived at Shechem* — a place predisposed to misfortunes; there the brothers stumbled...”: Yosef’s arrival in Shechem is not a detail of secondary importance in the narrative of his sale; rather, it is an independent, central component. Yosef’s misfortunes **began** there, because “**there** the brothers stumbled”: True, they actually sold Yosef in Dosan, but their debasement already began (when they were still) in Shechem. They already began thinking about and preparing Yosef’s misfortunes there — “**to search for** legal pretexts to put **you** to death.”

## 7.

### GOOD THINGS ALSO HAPPENED THERE

The connection between the other two misfortunes (“there the Shechemites violated Dinah; there the kingdom of David was divided”) and the fact that Shechem was the place predisposed to the misfortunes of Yosef is as follows:

Rashi **already**<sup>25</sup> explained:

Yosef reported to his father that his brothers would eat the limb of a living animal, that they treated the sons of the handmaids with contempt, calling them slaves, and that they were suspected of behaving immorally. In retribution, he was stricken in these three areas: For his having said that they would eat the limb of a living animal, Scripture says,<sup>26</sup> “And they slew a goat...”; and because of the slander... he was sold as a slave; and because he accused them of immoral behavior, “his master’s wife cast her eyes upon him....”<sup>27</sup>

Yosef’s punishment was related to three things: (a) eating a limb taken from a living animal, (b) treating the sons of the handmaids contemptuously, referring to them as slaves, and (c) behaving immorally. Therefore, we must say that Shechem, where the **groundwork was laid** for Yosef’s misfortunes and punishments and where they **began**, was “predisposed to misfortunes” — for

---

<sup>25</sup> *Bereishis* 37:2.

<sup>26</sup> {*Bereishis* 37:31.}

<sup>27</sup> {*Bereishis* 39:7.}

**three** types of misfortunes, resembling the three subjects in the slanderous reports Yosef gave about his brothers:

Regarding the lapse of the brothers, searching “for legal pretexts to put you to **death**” — a matter involving the **spilling of blood**, this served as a preparation for Yosef’s misfortune for having alleged that his brothers were not careful about eating the limb taken from a living animal. {Namely, “they {the brothers} slaughtered...” {a goat... to cover up Yosef’s sale}. Regarding the violation of Dinah by the Shechemites, Shechem was predisposed to this misfortune because of Yosef’s allegations to his father that his brothers were suspected of immorality. {His personal misfortune:} “His master’s wife cast her eyes upon him, etc.” Regarding what it says, “there the kingdom of David was divided” (which illustrates a disrespect for, and a degradation of, the kingdom of the House of David — brought about by Yerovam of the tribe of Ephraim, son of Yosef), Shechem was a place predisposed to misfortune for Yosef’s reports that his brothers had degraded the “sons of the handmaids... calling them slaves.” {His personal misfortune:} Yosef was sold as a slave, etc.

Thus, all the questions (raised above in Section 3) — there were other misfortunes that occurred in Shechem, and also positive events — fall away automatically, because according to *pshat*, Shechem was a place predisposed to misfortunes only related to Yosef {and the slander he had spoken} but not to other Jews.

In fact, it was specifically in Shechem that Yehoshua forged a covenant with all the Jewish people to observe Torah and mitzvos.

— Based on a talk delivered on *Shabbos parshas Va’yeshev* 5737 (1976)