

# Likkutei Sichos

## Volume 24 | Vayelech | Sichah 3

# Silent Summons

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1.

A PECULIAR RASHI

At the end of our *parshah*,<sup>1</sup> the Torah relates that Moshe instructed the “*levi'im*, the bearers of Hashem’s Ark of the Covenant” to “take this book of the Torah.... Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, and I shall speak into their ears....”

Rashi quotes the phrase, “Assemble to me,”<sup>2</sup> and comments:

On that day, they did not blow the trumpets to assemble the people, for it says {regarding the trumpets},<sup>3</sup> “Make for *yourself*,”<sup>4</sup> and Yehoshua was not given authority over them {the trumpets}. Even during Moshe’s lifetime, the day before Moshe died, the trumpets were hidden away in fulfillment of the adage:<sup>5</sup> “On the day of one’s death, there is no power {rulership}.”

Understood simply,<sup>6</sup> the question concerning this verse that Rashi addresses is (as Rashi himself remarks, “On that day, they did not blow the trumpets to assemble the people”): Why didn’t they assemble the people with trumpets (as stated in *parshas Behaaloscha*:<sup>7</sup> “Make for yourself two trumpets... for the summoning of the assembly”)?

— Rashi is compelled to say that “assemble” does not mean to assemble “per the **established** practice, by use of trumpeting”<sup>8</sup> because<sup>9</sup> the command (given by Moshe) to “assemble” was directed to the *levi'im*, whereas the trumpets **had to** be explicitly blown by the *kohanim*, as it says, “The sons of Aharon, **the kohanim**....”<sup>10</sup> —

However, it remains unclear why Rashi says, “for it says, ‘Make for yourself,’ and Yehoshua was not given authority over them.” How did Yehoshua come into the picture!?

After all, since {we have assumed that} Rashi aims to address why **Moshe** did not assemble the people using trumpets, Rashi should have stated (concisely), “They did not blow..., to assemble the people, in fulfillment of the teaching, ‘on the day of one’s death, there is no power’”!

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<sup>1</sup> *Devarim* 31:25, ff.

<sup>2</sup> Rashi on *Devarim* 31:28.

<sup>3</sup> *Bamidbar* 10:2.

<sup>4</sup> {I.e., “You, Moshe, make for your own use....”}

<sup>5</sup> *Koheles* 8:8.

<sup>6</sup> *Sifsei Chachamim* on *Devarim* 31:28.

<sup>7</sup> *Bamidbar* 10:2.

<sup>8</sup> Wording of *Maskil LeDavid* on *Devarim* 31:28.

<sup>9</sup> *Maskil L’David; Melech HaKodesh* gives a similar explanation; see also *Be’er Yitzchak*.

<sup>10</sup> *Bamidbar* 10:8.

Moreover, Rashi's commentary is based on *Tanchuma*<sup>11</sup> (and *Midrash Rabbah*)<sup>12</sup> on the verse,<sup>13</sup> "Make for yourself." However, in these sources, the idea that "Yehoshua was not given authority over them" is **not** mentioned concerning the assembly "on that day" (the day of Moshe's passing). Instead, it says that in **general**, "They did not use them {the trumpets}" because the verse says, "*Make for yourself...*, it implies you {Moshe} may use them; others may not. This is evidenced by the fact that Yehoshua, Moshe's student, did not use them..., when **he waged war against Yericho**." Only after this does the midrash tag on as a **separate**, novel idea: "Do not say that only Yehoshua {did not use the trumpets}; while he was still alive, Moshe himself had the trumpets buried.... *Assemble to me...* — where were the trumpets?... they were buried..., fulfilling the teaching, "On the day of one's death, there is no power."

This is bewildering: How could it be that specifically Rashi, who is focussed on explaining the *pshat*<sup>14</sup> of Scripture, mentions at length, "For it says..., Yehoshua was not given authority over them," in connection to the assembly by Moshe ("Assemble to me")!?

[Some commentators<sup>15</sup> clarify that "if Yehoshua had been given authority over the trumpets after Moshe passed away, they would have blown them even on the day of Moshe's death." Therefore, Rashi addresses this by saying, "Yehoshua was not given authority over them."

Yet, this does not explain Rashi's sentence structure. Rashi should have explained at the outset why **Moshe** did not use the trumpets (because "on the day of one's death, there is no power"). Then, he could have **added** that the reason the trumpets were not used (at least) by Yehoshua was that "Yehoshua was not given authority over them." However, Rashi should not have **begun** with: "For it says..., Yehoshua was not given authority over them"!]

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<sup>11</sup> *Midrash Tanchuma*, "Behaaloscha," sec. 10 (likewise in *Tanchuma*, ed. Buber, op cit., sec. 18).

<sup>12</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 15, par. 15.

<sup>13</sup> {*Bamidbar* 10:2.}

<sup>14</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 Scripture."}

<sup>15</sup> *Sifsei Chachamim* on *Devarim* 31:28; similarly in *Nazer HaKodesh* on *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 96, par. 3; see, also, *Be'er Yitzchak* on *Devarim* 31:28.

## 2.

### NUANCES IN RASHI

There are also some {troublesome} nuances in Rashi's wording. Among them:

- a) Why is the word “authority” used in the phrase, “And Yehoshua was not given **authority**<sup>16</sup> over them,” in connection with the trumpets? The use of “authority” seems odd here. Rashi could have expressed it differently, perhaps saying, “and Yehoshua could not **use** them,” or something similar, which would align better with the wording of the midrash. This is especially true since, according to many versions, Rashi also says, “*Make for yourself*<sup>17</sup> — you make and **use** them, and no one else.”
- b) Why does Rashi quote the phrase “to me” in his caption? Rashi seemingly only explains the word “assemble,” indicating that the **assembly** was not done with trumpets.

## 3.

### RASHI'S METHOD

The explanation is as follows. To preface:

As known, Rashi's usual approach in his Torah commentary (and in his commentary on the Talmud) is not to explicitly state the question he intends to answer. Instead, he immediately interprets the verse, **automatically** eliminating the question (or questions).

Moreover, in those places where Rashi begins his commentary with a question, he does not do so because this is the primary question in the verse he intends to address. Instead, he does so because the answer to the **articulated** question **automatically** addresses the bigger question of the verse (which Rashi does **not** spell out).<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, in our verse, when Rashi explains, “On that day, they did not blow the trumpets,” this is not his primary issue with the verse.

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<sup>16</sup> {In the Hebrew original, “*hishleet*,” lit., “control,” the question is more glaring. To speak about “controlling” the trumpets is very unusual.}

<sup>17</sup> *Bamidbar* 10:8.

<sup>18</sup> See *Maskil LeDavid's* Introduction, s.v., “*bo*”; see also “*Klalim BeRashi*,” printed at the end of tractate *Brachos* (Vilna ed.).

— On the contrary, **several** *pshat* commentators<sup>19</sup> understand the clause, “(Moshe commanded) the **levi'im**..., take this book of the Torah...,” to be referring to the **kohanim** (as mentioned earlier,<sup>20</sup> “And he gave it (the book of the Torah) to the **kohanim**, the sons of Levi...”). Based on this, it could be understood (at least according to *pshat*) that “assemble” means “following the usual procedure, namely, with trumpets.”

However, Rashi (mainly) intends to clarify a (fundamental) question regarding (both) words, “**Assemble to me**” (which will be explained below). To answer this question, Rashi explains that they did not blow the trumpets that day to “assemble” the people. The larger question about the verse is automatically resolved by explaining why the assembly was not done with trumpets.

#### 4.

#### RASHI'S QUESTION

The question (about the phrase, “assemble to me”) that Rashi intends to forestall:

At the beginning of the *parshah*,<sup>21</sup> Rashi comments, “*I can no longer go out and come in...* ‘I can no longer’ — I am not allowed, for authority has been **taken away** from me and **given to Yehoshua**.” A few verses later,<sup>22</sup> Rashi states a principle: “There is **one** leader of a generation and **not two**.” It follows that Yehoshua **had already become**<sup>23</sup> the “(one) leader of a generation.”

A difficulty arises: By what right, then, did Moshe assemble the Jewish people?

Indeed, Moshe wanted to address the Jewish people himself, “And I call the heavens and the earth to bear witness against them...”<sup>24</sup> However, an **assembly** can only be convened by the *nasi*, the **leader** of the generation. Since Yehoshua had already become the “one leader of the generation,” **he** should have been the one to gather the Jewish people, whereas Moshe could speak to them.

[At the very least, both of them together should have assembled the people, similar to the speech made to the Jewish people (at their assembly) by **both of them**, “He and Hoshea,

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni on Devarim 31:25; Ramban on Devarim 31:24*; However, from Rashi's silence, it is evident that he explains the verse to refer to the *levi'im*.

<sup>20</sup> *Devarim 31:9*.

<sup>21</sup> *Devarim 31:2*.

<sup>22</sup> *Devarim 31:7*.

<sup>23</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 29 (p. 198 ff) where this is explained in a different manner.

<sup>24</sup> *Devarim 31:28* and Rashi there; see earlier *Devarim 31:19* (and Rashi there).

the son of Nun.”<sup>25</sup> However, {if *both* Moshe and Yehoshua had assembled the people}, then Moshe would not have said “assemble to me” {but either just “assemble” or “assemble to us”}. However, the pronoun “**me**” refers exclusively to Moshe, who said “assemble,” and this **precludes** Yehoshua.]

To address **this** question, Rashi prefaces with, “They did not blow the trumpets that day to assemble the people” (and Rashi immediately clarifies regarding **Yehoshua:**) “for it says, ‘Make for yourself’” (and Rashi concludes from this:) “and Yehoshua was not **given authority** over them.” This idea (that “Yehoshua was not **given authority** over them”) automatically clarifies why Moshe assembled the people, as explained below.

## 5.

### MOSHE’S AUTHORITY

The idea that “make for yourself” means “Yehoshua was not given authority over them” seemingly requires clarification:

The nuance, “*Make for yourself* — You make and use them, and not another,” seemingly only negates their use by an ordinary person. Yet when speaking about Yehoshua, about whom it says, “May Hashem..., appoint a man over the assembly who shall go out before them...”<sup>26</sup> — the leader of the Jewish people and the **shepherd** of **Hashem’s congregation**, taking Moshe our teacher’s place — why shouldn’t the trumpets have been given over to Yehoshua (for his use, “for the summoning of the assembly,”) just as Moshe’s **authority** was transferred to Yehoshua?

This itself proves that not all matters of Moshe’s authority were transferred to Yehoshua, as Moshe’s authority over the Jewish people was higher than that of Yehoshua (similar to what **Rashi previously**<sup>27</sup> said: “The face of Moshe was like the sun and the face of Yehoshua was like the moon.”) This is the basis of Rashi’s nuanced wording, “Yehoshua was not **given authority over them.**” Yehoshua had no **authority** over the trumpets because Moshe’s authority was not entirely transferred to Yehoshua.

In light of this, it is understood that as long as Moshe was living, even after “the authority had been taken away from me and given to Yehoshua,” it would have been inappropriate for Yehoshua to assemble the Jewish people (in Moshe’s presence). This is because some matters were not transferred to Yehoshua. Concerning these matters, Moshe **alone** was the **sole** authority.

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<sup>25</sup> *Devarim* 32:44.

<sup>26</sup> *Bamidbar* 27:16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Rashi on *Bamidbar* 27:20.

— Only after Rashi answers the **fundamental** question regarding the **general** gathering, “Assemble to me” (explaining why the gathering was “to me” — conducted by Moshe), does he clarify the **details** — how the assembly was initiated, viz., why **Moshe** did not use the trumpets. Rashi explains: “They were hidden away even during his lifetime, before the day of his death, in fulfillment of the teaching, ‘And on the day of one’s death, there is no power.’”

## 6.

### THE INNER MEANING

From the “wine of Torah”<sup>28</sup> in Rashi’s commentary:

We must clarify: We can understand that the assembly could not have been done using trumpets (since they are a sign of authority). However, what necessitated the **other** difference, viz., that the *levi'im*, and not of the **kohanim**, assembled the Jewish people?

We can make sense of this by examining the deeper meaning behind the dictum: “On the day of one’s death, there is no power {rulership}.” How could it be that Moshe would be deposed on the day of his passing (“no power”)? For tzaddikim, the opposite is true: “They proceed from strength to strength.”<sup>29</sup> Every day, they ascend spiritually, even more so on the final day of their earthly life.<sup>30</sup> Surely, Moshe stood at the pinnacle of virtue. This is especially evident based on the well-known teaching<sup>31</sup> that on the day of his death, Moshe (also) attained the fiftieth measure (of the **fifty measures of binah** {understanding} conferred to the world, which, until then, Moshe was **lacking**).<sup>32</sup>

We can posit the following explanation: “On the day of one’s death, there is no power” (as it applies to tzaddikim) reflects the **virtue** of the day of death when they **transcend** the concept of power:

Rulership implies a connection between the ruler and his subjects. Regarding a king, indeed, it says, “From his shoulder up, he was higher than the entire nation.”<sup>33</sup> Even a king’s “shoulder” is “higher than the entire nation,” and even more so, “his head.” However, the king’s exaltedness is still relative to and associated with the nation despite this exaltedness.

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<sup>28</sup> {In the Hebrew original, “*yeino shel Torah*”; the deeper teachings of Torah.}

<sup>29</sup> *Tehillim* 84:8; end of *Berachos*.

<sup>30</sup> *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaKodesh*,” ch. 27 and its clarification, ch. 28.

<sup>31</sup> *Shnei Luchos HaBris*, 369a-b; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 12a (in the name of the Maggid of Mezritch); et al.

<sup>32</sup> *Rosh HaShanah* 21b. {*Nedarim* 38a.}

<sup>33</sup> *Shmuel I* 9:2.

This relationship between the king and his nation forms the bedrock of his authority over them.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, on the day of death, a king is elevated to transcend the nation entirely. Consequently, it is impossible to attribute him with rulership over the nation.

It can be thought that since Moshe ascended to a rank beyond having dominion over the Jewish people, there might not be any connection between Moshe and the Jewish people. Therefore, the verse says that even as Moshe stood at **this** rank (on the day of his passing), Moshe said, “Assemble to me,” to himself. This is because the Jewish people are (in essence) **one entity** with (the essence of) Moshe. In **Rashi’s** words,<sup>35</sup> “Moshe is the Jewish people and the Jewish people are Moshe.”

This is the (deeper) reason why the assembly was initiated without trumpets: Assembly of the people with trumpets (implies that the gathering) entails effort. However, regarding the assembly of the Jewish people by Moshe per his stature on the day of his death (when his **essence** was manifest), the **inherent** connection between the Jewish people and Moshe was evident and compelling.

[This aligns with the statement of our Sages<sup>36</sup> about **every Jew**: “Fear<sup>37</sup> {of Hashem} is a small matter,” because “for **Moshe**, it was a small matter.” The Alter Rebbe clarifies<sup>38</sup> that within every Jew, there is “an aspect of Moshe.” True, not every person **feels** the presence of Moshe within his soul. Nonetheless, “Moshe is the Jewish people and the Jewish people are Moshe.” Accordingly, Moshe’s spiritual standing influences every Jew **naturally**, cultivating a state in other Jews in which “fear is a small matter.”]

In light of this explanation, we now understand why the assembly was initiated precisely by the *levi'im*: The difference between *kohanim* and *levi'im* is that *kohanim* personify the spiritual attribute of “kindness,”<sup>39</sup> eliciting from above to below, while *levi'im* personify the spiritual attribute of “might,”<sup>40</sup> elevating from below to above.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In the original, and cryptic, Yiddish, “*in dem bashteit inyan ha’shlita.*”]

<sup>35</sup> *Bamidbar* 21:21.

<sup>36</sup> *Berachos* 33b.

<sup>37</sup> This is the version of the Gemara as it appears in *Ein Yaakov*, ad loc., and cited in *Tanya*, beg. of ch. 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” beg. of ch. 42.

<sup>39</sup> {In the original Hebrew, “*chessed.*”}

<sup>40</sup> {In the original Hebrew, “*gevurah.*”}

<sup>41</sup> See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 48b; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Sukkos*,” 80a; **et al**; *Sefer HaLikkutim* (from the Tzemach Tzedek’s *maamarim* and other teachings), “*Kohanim*” (p. 38 ff), “*Levi'im*” (p. 472 ff), **and the sources mentioned there.**



Therefore, the assembly of the Jewish people “**to me**” — to Moshe, when, on his elevated station on the day of his death, he was **higher** than “authority” — was accomplished by the *levi'im*, who helped uplift the Jewish people to Moshe’s level.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Nitzavim Vayelech*, 5742 (1982)