



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 23 | Pinchas | Sichah 3

Counting Cows

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SACRIFICES OF SUKKOS

In his commentary on the verse,¹ “And their meal-offerings and their libations for the bulls” — on the second day of Sukkos — Rashi explains:²

The bulls of Sukkos are seventy, corresponding to the seventy nations whose number decreases gradually, an omen of their elimination.³ In the Temple era, these sacrifices protected the seventy nations from afflictions.

Understood at face value, Rashi is bothered by the following: Why do the bulls of Sukkos “decrease gradually”?⁴ He answers that the bulls of Sukkos correspond “to the seventy nations whose number gradually decreases.”

According to the above explanation, we can also understand why Rashi only comments on the verses regarding the **second** day of Sukkos. He does so because the difficulty with this verse (that compels Rashi to clarify that the bulls of Sukkos correspond to the seventy nations) only arises on the second day when we observe that the bulls of Sukkos decrease gradually.

However, this is most perplexing: The gradual decrease is evident immediately in the first verse dealing with the sacrifices of the second day:⁵ “And on the second day twelve... bulls” (one less than on the previous day). As such, why does Rashi wait until the **subsequent** verse — “and their meal offerings and their libations for the bulls” — to comment?!

This becomes even more perplexing: In this second verse, nothing is mentioned about the number of bulls!

¹ *Bamidbar* 29:18.

² {Rashi on *Bamidbar* 29:18.}

³ {In the original Hebrew, “כליה.”}

⁴ Rashi’s wording previously, *Bamidbar* 28:24.

⁵ {*Bamidbar* 29:17.}

2.

QUESTIONING RASHI

The substance of Rashi's interpretation is also perplexing since it appears self-contradictory:

Rashi starts his commentary by saying that the bulls of Sukkos correspond to the seventy nations since they “decrease gradually in number, an omen of their elimination.” He immediately continues to say the opposite: “In the Temple era,” the sacrifices did not precipitate the elimination of the nations. On the contrary, the sacrifices “**protected** them...”?!⁶

One might conjecture that these two opposite effects are connected with different elements. “An omen of their elimination” is connected with the **number** of bulls, whereas the sacrifices themselves protected the nations. Nonetheless, it is still utterly perplexing:

- a) How is the remark, “In the Temple era, they protected them...,” relevant to **our** verse?
- b) The main issue is that these two effects are, in the end, antithetical. How can the **same** sacrifices have **opposite** effects: “an omen of their elimination” and “protected”?!

⁶ As *Abarbanel* writes explicitly: “The Rabbis, of blessed memory, are of **two views**: One view is... so that the seventy nations will endure, and the second view is so that they will be annihilated.” Note that *Rabbeinu Bachya*, in his commentary on *Bamidbar* 29:13, only mentions that they “decrease gradually in number..., an omen of their {eventual} depletion,” **and does not mention** that the sacrifices protected the nations, etc.

3.

NUANCES IN RASHI'S INTERPRETATION

In addition, several questions arise from Rashi's **diction**, among them:

- a) Suppose Rashi is answering why the bulls of Sukkos decrease gradually. In that case, he should have **begun** his commentary: “*for the bulls* — corresponding to the nations whose number gradually decreases, an omen of their elimination” (or the like). Subsequently, he could have bolstered his interpretation with **proof**: “And (therefore,) they total seventy, corresponding to the seventy nations” (or the like). Why does Rashi begin by explaining **the total number** of bulls and only say that they “decrease gradually in number” afterward?

Furthermore, later in his commentary on the verse, when he explains, “and the lambs,” Rashi begins his remarks: “Corresponding to the Jewish people.... They are fixed” (unlike the bulls of Sukkos, which decrease gradually in number). Only **afterward**, he clarifies, “**and their number** is ninety-eight....”

- b) What is behind Rashi's apparent wordiness: “(whose number gradually decreases,) **an omen of their elimination**”? It seemingly would have been sufficient for Rashi to say, “(Corresponding to the seventy nations) whose number gradually decreases.” Such wording would be similar to the wording Rashi uses in his earlier commentary (concerning the “Covenant between the Parts”):⁷ “Therefore... it alludes to the fact that the nations will gradually be depleted.”
- c) The text is missing the principal point: the **offering** of the **bulls** afforded protection. Accordingly, Rashi should have said, “And the offering of the bulls protected them.”

⁷ Rashi, *Bereishis* 15:10.

- d) What is the point in saying, “**In the Temple era**, the sacrifices protected them...”? Would we have thought that the sacrifices — and the resultant protection — were offered in times of exile?!
- e) In his commentary on Gemara,⁸ Rashi says that the seventy bulls of Sukkos — corresponding to the seventy nations — were “to atone for them, so that rain would fall throughout the world since judgment concerning water is rendered during Sukkos.” In his Torah commentary, why does Rashi mention a **different** idea concerning the function of the sacrifices — “these sacrifices protected the seventy nations from **afflictions**”?

4.

CLARIFYING RASHI

We can offer a possible explanation for all of the above:

The inherent fact that the number of bulls of Sukkos decreases gradually does not pose a major hurdle (when learning Scripture according to *pshat*).⁹ This is because it makes sense even to a novice student of Scripture¹⁰ that any number associated with the sacrifices contains a particular allusion.¹¹ For the student learned earlier regarding the “Covenant between the Parts” (“three heifers...”),¹² and similarly in *parshas Nasso* regarding the sacrifices¹³ of the princes,¹⁴ of the allusions corresponding to the number of the sacrifices offered (and other similarities).

⁸ *Sukkah* 55b.

⁹ {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.” When the plain meaning is understood clearly, Rashi does not comment.}

¹⁰ {In the Hebrew original, “*ben chamesh lemikra*”; meaning “a five-year-old beginning to study Scripture.” This is a term borrowed from *Pirkei Avos*, which teaches that the appropriate age for a child to begin studying *Chumash* is at the age of five. Rashi wrote his commentary on *Chumash* to solve problems that a typical 5-year-old student might face in understanding the simple meaning of a verse.}

¹¹ {In the original Hebrew, “*remez*”; in this context, it refers to a deeper, symbolic meaning behind the sacrifice.}

¹² *Bereishis* 15:9.

¹³ See Rashi on *Bamidbar* 7:19.

¹⁴ {In the Hebrew original, “*nassi*” — the head of one of the twelve tribes.}

Likewise, in our context, we could have suggested that each day of Sukkos represents something connected to the specific number of bulls offered.

Rashi ostensibly did not need to spell out the allusions since they do not belong in the study of *pshat* but in the study of *remez* and *drush*.¹⁵

The novice student knows that the Torah consists (not only of the layer of *pshat* but) also of *remez* and *drush*. Therefore, he will not be troubled by the variable number of bulls.

However, Rashi provides an interpretation for the novice student based on the layer of *remez* when some difficulty in *pshat* can only be solved by knowing the *remez* allusion.

When, however, the student arrives at the verse, “and their meal offerings and their libations for the bulls..., according to their number, as prescribed,” he runs into a problem:

If the number of sacrifices offered on each day of Sukkos contains a **different** allusion, it means that the sacrifices (their deeper purpose and what they allude to) are **distinct**. Consequently, Scripture should have specified, on each day, all the details of that day’s sacrifices, including the sacrifices offered in the same quantity as the previous day.

As taught earlier regarding the princes’ sacrifices, each prince offered the same sacrifices as the others. Nevertheless, since “each of them brought according to his intent”¹⁶ — each prince had different intentions that were appropriate for his tribe — the Torah records all details of the sacrifices for each prince separately (twelve times, and it does not suffice with saying, “similarly, so-and-so offered...,” or the like).

¹⁵ {An exegetical method of commentary in which the words of a verse are used as a platform to express an ostensibly extrinsic idea.}

¹⁶ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 13, par. 14. This is also simply understood as discussed in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 8, p. 43.

Yet, in our context, the Torah does not repeat the meal offerings, etc. — the details of the sacrifice — separately on each day. On the contrary, the verse **emphasizes**, “and their meal offerings and their libations for the bulls..., according to their number, **as prescribed**” (the same “law” as applied to the sacrifices prescribed for the first days).¹⁷ In other words, this verse does not emphasize how each day's sacrifices **differed**. On the contrary, the verse emphasizes that on each day, the same procedure “as prescribed” on the first day was repeated.

Therefore, this raises a difficulty for Rashi: If the sacrifices all express the same concept, what causes the number of bulls of Sukkos to decrease gradually? If the number of sacrifices is to vary, then it should vary in a manner of **blessing**, increasing and “**ascending** in sanctity,” not “gradually **decreasing** in number”!

Furthermore, this is self-contradictory: The **change** in the number of sacrifices (decreasing) each day demonstrates that they are **different** sacrifices with distinct allusions, whereas the following verse emphasizes how the sacrifices of Sukkos express a **single** idea, one “law”!

To address this discrepancy, Rashi explains: “The bulls of Sukkos are seventy, corresponding to the seventy nations whose number gradually decreases”: The sacrifices of Sukkos indeed express **one** concept (and law). Yet, regarding the bulls of Sukkos (which allude to the nations), this concept is highlighted in their total over all the days of Sukkos — “The bulls of Sukkos are seventy, corresponding to the seventy nations”: The bulls sacrificed over all seven days collectively represent one concept (and consequently — one law) — seventy nations. This itself is the rationale as to why the sacrifices “decrease gradually,” alluding to “(the seventy nations, which) decrease gradually in number.”

¹⁷ See Ramban on Bamidbar 28:7; Sukkah 47a, Rashi. s.v., “Rav Ashi.”

5.

FURTHER CLARIFICATION

Still, for the novice student of Scripture, something remains unclear:

He has already learned about sacrifices in various places in the Torah. He has learned that all types of sacrifices, in all circumstances, achieve a positive result — forgiveness and atonement, “a pleasing fragrance to Hashem,”¹⁸ and so forth.

How, then, can the consequence of sacrificing the bulls on Sukkos **diminish** the nations?

Regarding this difficulty, Rashi further clarifies — “an **omen** of their elimination.” However, “in the Temple era, they **protected**” the nations”: Rashi’s statement regarding the bulls of Sukkos — “corresponding to the seventy nations whose number gradually decreases” — does not refer to the **effect** of offering the sacrifices. Instead, the sacrifices are “an **omen of their elimination**” — they merely symbolize that (the sacrifices correspond to those who) will eventually be depleted. However, in Temple times, these sacrifices **protected** the nations.

Also, the protective benefit of the offering was not (only) felt when the sacrifice was offered; the benefit lasted until the next offering — in the Temple era.¹⁹

The reason for the emphasis — “**in the Temple era...**” — is because Rashi is clarifying that particularly **this** concept (the sacrifices “protected them”) is linked with (the effect of the sacrifices in) the times of the Temple. In contrast, the idea that they were “an omen of their elimination” (which Rashi says

¹⁸ *Bamidbar* 15:14.

¹⁹ For according to the straightforward understanding of the verse — when the Temple was destroyed, a consequence of the sins of the Jewish people (as stated explicitly in *parshas Bechukoisai*, and other sources) — it is clear that the effect (and the protection) of the sacrifices offered there ceased.

beforehand) is a symbol linked with the nations generally²⁰ (not with the Temple era).

6.

PROTECTION FROM SUFFERING

However, based on all that was explained above — that the concept of “decrease gradually in number” is (not the effect of the sacrifice, but) merely “an **omen of their elimination**” — what emerges is that the two concepts regarding the bulls that correspond to the nations — (a) the total sum of seventy; and (b) offering the sacrifices that “decrease gradually in number” — are unrelated. Rashi, therefore, should have divided them: Seventy corresponding to seventy nations, and subsequently a second idea (perhaps with a distinct heading) — they decrease gradually in number, an omen of depletion....

The following is also not smooth: Why is it necessary for there to be **two** signs (alluding to the connection between the bulls and the nations)?²¹

We must say that even though the way the sacrifices “decrease gradually in number” is merely “an omen of their elimination,” it is still relevant to the effect of the sacrifices.

Therefore, Rashi uses nuanced wording, “they protected them from **afflictions**” (he does suffice by saying, “to atone for them,” so that they have **blessings, rain**). This itself was the effect of the sacrifices, even though Hashem initially created the nations in a manner that they “decrease gradually in number.” Still, “In the Temple era” — when the Jewish people sacrificed the bulls of Sukkos, and particularly, seventy bulls corresponding to the seventy nations — (regarding all seventy bulls,) “They **protected them from afflictions**” — the bulls of Sukkos protected the nations (at that time) from not

²⁰ On the contrary, this will come to pass only when “King Mashiach arrives” (Rashi on *Bereishis* 15:11, at the end).

²¹ This is particularly perplexing in light of what will be explained in Section 8 below.

being subject to a “decrease gradually in number,” not even diminishment through afflictions.

7.

CLARIFYING ANOTHER RASHI

In light of all the above, Rashi’s subsequent remarks, “*the lambs* — corresponding to the Jewish people, who are called,²² ‘A scattered lamb.’ The lambs have a fixed number, totaling ninety-eight, to eliminate for the Jewish people the ninety-eight curses spoken about in ‘*Mishneh Torah*,’”²³ will be better understood, for this seemingly requires clarification:

Rashi’s statement, “corresponding to the Jewish people... the lambs have a fixed number,” is reasonable. The lambs are the reverse of the Sukkos bulls, which “correspond to the seventy nations whose number gradually decreases.” However, why is it important (for the *pshat* of Scripture) to seek allusions for the total number ninety-eight?

We can understand that the number of bulls on Sukkos substantiates their correspondence to the (seventy) nations. But how do the ninety-eight lamb offerings help clarify how the lambs correspond to the Jewish people?

The explanation, however, is the following: Since the seventy bulls of the seven days of Sukkos symbolize **one** concept (as explained above), it is reasonable to say that the sacrifices of Sukkos that “allude to the Jewish people” together also comprise one concept. Since the lambs were offered following the bulls of Sukkos, it makes sense to say that both types of sacrifices have a comparable effect.

Rashi says, “totaling ninety-eight, to eliminate for the Jewish people the ninety-eight curses spoken about in ‘*Mishneh Torah*’”: Indeed, “*lambs* —

²² *Yirmiyahu* 50:17.

²³ {“*Mishneh Torah*” — Book of *Devarim*.}

corresponding to the Jewish people..., the lambs have a fixed number” — the Jewish people (are not a people who “decrease gradually in number” but) “are fixed,” they “exist for eternity.”²⁴ However, this does not preclude them from suffering.

Regarding this possibility, the “lambs” come “to **eliminate for the Jewish people** the ninety-eight curses...” This effect resembles the **elimination** alluded to by the bulls, just that here, the number of lambs alludes to something favorable for the Jews. Their lives remain fully intact. Moreover, they live in peace and tranquility without hardships.

8.

QUESTIONING RASHI

However, we must still clarify: The verse says, “For the bulls, for the rams, and the lambs.” Why does Rashi learn that “and the lambs” is “corresponding to the Jewish people” instead of “for the rams,” which is stated earlier in the verse?

The solution cannot be that the Jewish people are referred to as “lambs” and not “rams.” **Indeed**, previously in *parshas Lech Lecha*,²⁵ Rashi explained that the **nations** are compared to rams. We cannot offer this solution because:

a) Concerning the verse,²⁶ “One bull, one ram” (which the Torah records in connection with Shemini Atzeres), Rashi explains: “These allude to **the Jewish people**.” We see that a bull and ram can also “allude to the Jewish people” (due to their number, and so forth). Rashi could have also found a comprehensive allusion in the number of the rams of Sukkos — fourteen — that shares a

²⁴ Rashi, *Bereishis* 15:10.

²⁵ Rashi, *Bereishis* 15:10.

²⁶ *Bamidbar* 29:36.

connection with the Jewish people!²⁷

b) Even if we suggest, with difficulty, that no *remez* fits the *pshat* about the fourteen rams (and thus, we are compelled to say that the lambs correspond to the Jewish people), this solution does not fit seamlessly with the **verse**: Why does the Torah interpose the word “rams” between the “bulls” (corresponding to the nations) and the “lambs” (corresponding to the Jewish people)?²⁸

We can clarify this by prefacing with Rashi's reasoning that the bulls correspond to the nations (merely) because of the (total) sum of seventy. Seemingly, Rashi explained in *parshas Lech Lecha* that the nations are compared to bulls, as it says,²⁹ “Many bulls have surrounded me.” Why doesn't Rashi cite this idea when commenting on the Sukkos bulls?

This becomes increasingly bewildering: If concerning “the lambs,” Rashi provides a reason that the lamb as a species is a *remez* for the Jewish people, surely³⁰ Rashi should have provided a reason for the connection between the bulls, as a **species**, and the nations!

9.

CLARIFYING RASHI

We can posit an explanation of the foregoing — at least according to *remez*:

Regarding the sacrifices of Pesach,³¹ Rashi interprets: “*bulls* — corresponding to Avraham,” “*rams* — corresponding to Yitzchak's ram,” and “*lambs* — corresponding to Yaakov.”

²⁷ See *Zohar* {vol. 3}, end of *parshas Pinchas* (259a). See also *Maskil L'David* on our verse: “We can posit that they come to eliminate for the Jewish people the fourteen bad times {mentioned in *Koheles* [3:2-8]};” and other commentaries. Note *Abarbanel* on our verse, where he discusses the *remazim* behind the fourteen lambs: “They allude to the children of Yaakov... and when Yosef is split into two tribes... and Dinah {is included}... they total... fourteen.” Additionally, see *Or HaChaim* on *Bamidbar* 29:13; *Maskil LeDavid* on *Bamidbar* 28:19; et al.

²⁸ Although, according to *pshat*, this is {simply a reflection of} the sequence in which they were offered.

²⁹ {*Tehillim* 22:13.}

³⁰ Given that “one bull” corresponds to the Jewish people, as stated above in the text.

³¹ Rash on *Bamidbar* 28:19; 7:21.

Why does Rashi use the plural form, “rams,” when the verse says, “and a ram” (in the singular)? We can suggest that in doing so, Rashi clarifies that this interpretation applies (not only to **that verse** but) to all *musaf* sacrifices offered on the Festivals that consist of bulls, rams, or lambs. They all correspond to the Patriarchs.

For this reason, Rashi cannot say that the bulls of Sukkos correspond to the nations because they are symbolized by bulls. On the contrary, the species of bulls **in our verse** alludes to Avraham. It is only that the **number** of bulls corresponds to the seventy nations.

There is no contradiction in saying that the bulls allude to Avraham and the seventy nations. After all, the verse says about Avraham,³² “I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” Thus, on Sukkos, we offer bulls that allude to the nations concerning whom Avraham was told, “I have made you” their “father.”

The same applies to the “lambs.” The lambs alluding to the Jewish people are in line with the lambs corresponding to Yaakov since, specifically regarding Yaakov, we say,³³ “His bed was complete,” as he was the progenitor of only “the Jewish people” (in contrast to Yitzchak, who also fathered Eisav).

On this basis, (not only is it clear why the verse interrupts with the word “rams” — since they correspond to Yitzchak — but) the reason behind the **change** — where specifically during Sukkos, “**two** rams” were sacrificed (unlike the other Festivals during which only “one ram” was sacrificed) — is also apparent:

Since the bulls and lambs do not correspond with Avraham and Yaakov themselves but with the nations to which Avraham and Yaakov are “Patriarchs” — the seventy nations and the Children of Israel — it follows that the same applies to the “*rams* — corresponding to... Yitzchak.” Therefore, “two rams” were offered — corresponding to the two sons of Yitzchak: Yaakov and Eisav.

³² *Bereishis* 17:5 see Rashi, ad loc.

³³ Rashi, *Bereishis* 47:31, et al.

This is the sequence of sacrifices: First, the bulls, which correspond to the seventy nations; at the end, the lambs, which correspond to the Jewish people. Mediating between them are the “two rams,” which correspond to Eisav (the nations) and Yaakov (the Jewish people).

[For this reason, Rashi does not look for any *remez* in the total number of rams. The rams do not express a distinct concept. Instead, they are “associative”; they merely mediate between the bulls and the lambs, as explained above.]

10.

YITZCHAK’S RAM

To elaborate: Rashi employs nuanced wording: “*rams* — corresponding to Yitzchak’s **ram**.” What is the connection between the “two rams” — Yaakov and Eisav — and Yitzchak’s **ram**?

The explanation (according to *remez*) is as follows: *Pirkei DeRebbi Eliezer* says concerning Yitzchak’s ram:³⁴ “Two horns of the ram: the sound of the left one was heard at Mount Sinai... and the right horn... will be blown in the Future Era.”

The distinction between both concepts — the Giving of the Torah (at Mount Sinai) and the Future Era — is that Mount Sinai was specifically linked with the Jewish people — the Torah is “an inheritance for the congregation of Yaakov”³⁵ and “an idol worshiper who learns Torah is liable for the death penalty.”³⁶ In contrast, the revelations of the Future Era will also affect the nations so that³⁷ “the elder will serve the younger,” “and strangers will stand and pasture your sheep.”³⁸ Furthermore, it says,³⁹ “Then I will convert the nations to a pure language... to serve Him of one accord.”

³⁴ *Pirkei DeRebbi Eliezer*, ch. 31.

³⁵ *Devarim* 33:4.

³⁶ *Sanhedrin* 59a.

³⁷ *Bereishis* 25:23.

³⁸ *Yeshayahu* 61:5.

³⁹ *Tzefanyah* 3:9; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim U’Milchamos*,” ch. 11.

It emerges that the two horns of Yitzchak's ram are connected {with Yaakov and Eisav}: One horn with Yaakov (the Jewish people) and the second with Yaakov and Eisav (the nations).

11.

THE WINE OF TORAH

From the “wine of the Torah”⁴⁰ in Rashi's commentary:

Regarding the effect of the seventy bulls corresponding to the seventy nations, Rashi says, “**In the Temple era**, they protected them...” Conversely, regarding the lambs, Rashi says, “totaling ninety-eight, to eliminate for the Jewish people the ninety-eight curses spoken about in ‘*Mishneh Torah*.’” Why, then, are many of the “curses spoken about in ‘*Mishneh Torah*’” specifically applicable to the times of exile and to Temple times?

The explanation: Our Sages say,⁴¹ “Prayers were instituted corresponding to the sacrifices.” That which was accomplished through sacrifices in the Temple era is achieved now through prayers.

However, the difference is that physical sacrifices in the physical Temple affected the physical world,⁴² as it says, “in the world, externally, in actuality.”⁴³ In contrast, prayer affects only a person's soul.

We can posit that this is the difference between the effect of the bulls and the lambs.

The bulls of Sukkos, meant to influence the nations, could only be offered “in the Temple era” when we had **physical** sacrifices that affected the external

⁴⁰ {I.e., the deeper teachings of Torah.}

⁴¹ See *Berachos* 26a-b.

⁴² *Likkutei Torah*, “*Pinchas*,” 76b.

⁴³ Wording in *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid*.

layers of the world. However, after the Temple's destruction, this remedy ceased to be. As our Sages say,⁴⁴ “Woe to the idol worshippers who destroyed but do not know what they destroyed.”

In contrast, concerning the Jewish people, we offered “*lambs* — corresponding to the Jewish people.... they are fixed.” The deeper significance of this statement is that the sacrifices are “fixed” — their effect “exists for eternity.”

This lasting nature is because, through prayer, which corresponds to sacrifices, we “**eliminate for the Jewish people** the ninety-eight curses spoken about in ‘*Mishneh Torah*.’” Even after the destruction of our Temple, the exile from our land, and our subjugation to the other nations, we will not endure suffering, Heaven forbid. We will experience peace and tranquility.

“For all the Jewish people, there was light in their dwellings,”⁴⁵ while still in Egypt, in the throes of exile.

This becomes the immediate preparation for true repose and peace, which reaches the apex of perfection in the days of Mashiach. In that era, repose and peace will surpass even what was experienced in the days of David (delivered unharmed from his tribulations)⁴⁶ and Shlomo. May this come about with true and perfect redemption through our righteous Mashiach.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Pinchas*, 5741 (1981)

⁴⁴ *Sukkah* 47a.

⁴⁵ *Shemos* 10:23.

⁴⁶ {In the original Hebrew, “*beshalom*”; lit. “in peace.” Unlike Shlomo’s reign, characterized by peace with the neighboring countries, David’s reign experienced much bloodshed. Hence, the parenthetical remark in the text.}