



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Ki Savo | Sichah 2

Reading Blessings

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RASHI SECRETS IN THE CURSES

As we have discussed many times,¹ although Rashi seeks primarily to clarify the simple meaning of verses, his commentary contains “wine of Torah,” i.e., the deeper aspects and secrets of the Torah. This is expressed in the well-known saying of the Alter Rebbe,² whose birthday falls out this week, *parshas Kumi Ori*,³ on 18 Elul. The statement of the Baal Shem Tov, whose birthday is on 18 Elul (regarding the birth of the Alter Rebbe on this day) is {also} well-known.⁴

We see the “wine of Torah” in Rashi’s comments on the verses of the *tochachah*⁵ in our *parshah*.

This concept is even more evident with respect to Rashi’s comments on the *tochachah*, based on the Alter Rebbe’s explanation in *Likkutei Torah*⁶ about the content of the *tochachah*: Although on the surface, it contains the opposite of blessings, but “in truth they are **only** blessings.”⁷ Torah comprises revealed and

¹ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 1, ff.

² *Hayom Yom*, p. 24. {*Hayom Yom* for 29 Shevat: “Rashi’s commentary on Scripture is the “wine of Torah.” It opens the heart and uncovers a Jew’s essential-love and fear of Hashem. Rashi’s commentary on Talmud opens the mind and uncovers a Jew’s essential-intellect.”}

³ {The *Haftorah* for the week of *parshas Ki Savo*, during which the 18th of Elul coincides, opens with the words, *Kumi ori ki va orech* — Arise! Shine! For your light has arrived...”}

⁴ *Sefer Hasichos* 5705, p. 129. {On the day that the Alter Rebbe was born, the Baal Shem Tov told his students the following: “A new soul has descended into this world. This person will illuminate the world with Torah, *nigleh* and *Chassidus*. He will sacrifice himself for the way of *Chassidus*, and he will succeed until the time of the coming of *Moshiach*.”}

⁵ {The *tochachah*, lit., “admonition” or “rebuke,” refers to a passage in our *parshah* (and a similar passage in *parshas Behaaloscha*) that describes the dire consequences to the Jewish people if they fail to heed Hashem’s commands.}

⁶ *Parshas Bechukosai*, 48b, ff., regarding the curses in *parshas Bechukosai* {and the same is understood here as well}. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 233, et al. See *Shach al HaTorah* in our *parshah*, (28:15): “According to the revealed aspect of Torah, these are curses, but according to the hidden aspects of Torah, this is an expression of Hashem’s love and words of love” (and he then goes on to explain them in detail). And at the end of the curses he writes, “According to the hidden aspects of Torah, this passage is all comfort.” See also *Ohr HaTorah, Devarim*, vol. 2, p. 645, ff.

⁷ See *Hayom Yom*, p. 88 (mentioned in *Likkutei Sichos*, *ibid*) regarding the curses of our *parshah*. {*Hayom Yom* for 17 Elul: “The Alter Rebbe himself was the regular Torah-reader. Once he was away from Lyozna on the Shabbos of *parshas Ki Savo*, and the Mittler Rebbe... heard the Torah-reading from another. His anguish at the curses... caused him so much heartache, that on Yom Kippur the Alter Rebbe doubted whether his son would be able to fast. When they asked the Mittler Rebbe - ‘Don’t you hear this *parshah* every year?’ - he replied, ‘When Father reads, one hears no curses.’”}

hidden aspects, and the hidden aspects, the depth, and the soul⁸ of the curses is a matter of extremely lofty blessings. (This is similar to what the Talmud says,⁹ “These are all blessings.”)¹⁰

This understanding can similarly be applied to **Rashi’s commentary** on the curses. According to the **simple understanding** of Rashi’s remarks, he illustrates the severity of the consequences according to *pshat*.¹¹ But according to the “wine of Torah” in Rashi’s commentary, his same words bring to the surface the inner dimension, as well as emphasize the great blessings implicit in the rebuke.

2.

THE FINAL CURSE

At the conclusion of the rebuke, the Torah says:¹²

Hashem will return you to Egypt *ba’oniyyos* {in ships}, by the route {תַּיִם} of which I said to you, “You shall never again see it!” And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maidservants — but there will be no buyer.

Evidently, since this verse appears at the end of, and concludes, the *tochachah*, it must express the greatest measure of the opposite of goodness.¹³

⁸ *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 152a.

⁹ *Moed Katan* 9b. {This statement was made by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai regarding that which on the surface appeared to be curses.} It is noteworthy that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai particularly, whose main achievement was to reveal the deeper aspects and secret of the Torah, revealed that these are blessings. (See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 1, p. 283, ff.)

¹⁰ This also explains why the curses are read during the most prominent *aliyos*. In *parshas Bechukosai*, the *tochachah* is read in the third *aliyah* (see *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, ch. 136) and in our *parshah*, it is read in the sixth *aliyah* (see *Shaar Hakavanos*, “*inyan krias Sefer Torah*,” *drush* 2; (*Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar* 18, ch. 19, and others) mentioned in *Beer Heitev, Orach Chaim*, end of ch. 282; see also *Magen Avraham*, *ibid*, sec. 9.)

¹¹ {The plain meaning of Scripture. Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

¹² *Devarim* 28:68.

¹³ {i.e., negative consequences.}

Thus, we need to clarify: What is so disastrous about the Jewish people returning to Egypt, etc., and no one wanting to purchase them as slaves and maidservants?

Rashi clarifies: “*ba’oniyyos*” means, “*be’sefinos, beshivya* — in ships, in **captivity**.” Meaning, the Jewish people will return to Egypt as **captives**; and on the words, “but there will be no buyer,” Rashi comments, “For they will decree upon you death and annihilation.”

At first glance, the verse seems to contain (primarily) two punishments: a) the Jewish people will return to Egypt as captives; and b) “they will decree upon you death and annihilation.” The additional words in the verse (“in ships, by the route of which I said to you, ‘You shall never again see it!’ And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maidservants”) are merely **details** of the two issues mentioned above.

However, we may suggest that Rashi, by his nuanced wording and commentary, seeks to clarify how every detail in the verse **contributes** an additional negative detail (as will be explained). Similarly, according to the “wine of Torah,” every word and idea augments the great ascent and blessings that will come to the Jewish people.

3.

MOST OF THE VERSE SEEMS IRRELEVANT

We will clarify this by prefacing with an explanation of why the verse emphasizes, “Hashem will return you... by the route of which I said to you, ‘You shall never again see it!’” What difference does this make, and how is it relevant to the *tochachah*? Seemingly, Rashi does not address this in his commentary.

Some commentators suggest that the intent of this verse is to explain why “Hashem will return you” specifically “in ships.” Since Hashem has already said, “you shall never again see it” — {travelling} on this route, וְרָאָה (“You shall no

longer return on this *road*, דרך, again”).¹⁴ Thus, it is impossible for the Jewish people to travel to Egypt “on this *road*,” i.e., on **dry land** — the verse therefore emphasizes that “Hashem will return you... in **ships**...”

This interpretation, however, does not conform well to *pshat* (Rashi’s approach to Torah commentary) because this explanation — that {the prophecy} “Hashem will return you to Egypt” does not contradict {the promise} “you shall never again see it” — does not address the relevance {of Hashem returning you by this route} to the *tochachah*. Moreover, the verse should have omitted the clause, “by the route of which I said to you, “You shall never again see it!”, for seemingly, this is irrelevant to the *tochachah* — consequently, the Torah would also not need to specify, “in ships.”¹⁵

4.

MAYBE THE PUNISHMENT IS MORE SINS

Seemingly, we could answer— similar to what the *Midrash Lekach Tov*¹⁶ writes — that the intent of this verse is to emphasize the {grave} consequences that sins are able to bring about. Although Hashem said, “You shall never again see it,” sins can cause Hashem to rescind his promise.

However, this explanation, too, does not dovetail with *pshat* so well: To prove this concept — that a sin (especially grave sins) can cause Hashem to rescind a promise — we do not need the greatest curses (and specifically, the **conclusion**) of the *tochachah*, for we have already learned of this dynamic regarding Yaakov.¹⁷ Moreover, why is this specifically relevant to (and therefore, specifically applicable to) the issue of returning to Egypt?

¹⁴ *Devarim* 17:16.

¹⁵ Moreover, according to the simple reading of the verse, the words, “by the route of which I said to you...,” continues the subject being discussed, “in ships” (see *Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel* on the verse), and not that these words come to resolve a difficulty regarding the words, “in ships.”

¹⁶ *Midrash Lekach Tov* on *Devarim* 17:16; see *Sifri*, *ibid.*, but the verse from our *parshah* is not mentioned there.

¹⁷ *Bereishis* 32:11, and in Rashi’s commentary there. {Yaakov was afraid that he may have inadvertently sinned, and consequently, Hashem would rescind his promise to protect him from Eisav.}

Obviously, it is not feasible — according to *pshat* — to presume that although Hashem **commanded** {them} not to return “on this road,” to Egypt, sins would cause Hashem to overlook this, and would **also** lead the Jewish people to transgress this imperative. For how is it germane to the *tochachah* that {their} sins would cause them to violate another commandment against their will?

5.

MISPLACED INTERPRETATION

We will clarify the above by prefacing with an additional explanation for Rashi’s explanation of the word, “*ba’oniyyos*” — “In ships, in captivity.” Ostensibly, clarifying that the Jewish people will travel to Egypt “**in captivity**” connects (not to the word, “*ba’oniyyos*,” but rather) to the word, “**will return you**” (i.e., Hashem will return them there as captives). Thus, Rashi should have offered this interpretation on the phrase, “will return you,” and not in his gloss in which he defines the word, “*ba’oniyyos*”!

*Baalei HaTosafos*¹⁸ explain that the word “*ba’oniyyos*” **injects** {a connotation of harshness} to the captivity: “For if the enemy lead the Jewish people on foot, they would take only the grownups who could walk by foot as captives,” but by using ships, “they would {also} take the women and children as captives.”

However, Rashi **just** writes, “in captivity,” without offering any explanation. This indicates that according to Rashi, the point here is not that **all of the people** will be taken captive (including women and children), but rather that their journey itself in ships will be “in captivity.”

¹⁸ A similar explanation is found in *Paaneach Raza*; *Chizkuni*; and others.

6.

TORTUROUS SHIPS AND PATHS

The explanation:

Rashi clarifies how all the details mentioned in the verse (are not merely components of the general *tochachah*, that the Jewish people will be returned to Egypt, but rather) each detail (also) adds a specific affliction.

Therefore, Rashi understands that the verse's lengthy wording, "ships, {and} by the route of which I said to you, 'You shall never again see it!'" adds an additional element. Aside from the curse of actually returning to Egypt, the **journey there** will also take place in a most horrid fashion.

This holds true in two aspects:

a) "In ships — in captivity." Meaning, aside from the fact that in **Egypt** they will be captives, they will also make the **journey** to Egypt as captives in ships. This entails a great deal of torment and suffering, much more than the travail of travelling as captives over land. For, as plainly evident, on a ship, captives are under greater and more forceful domination of their captors.

[On this basis we can also appreciate why Rashi does not explain the verse as do the *Tosafists*. For (aside from the fact that, simply-speaking, women and children can also travel on foot (at least at a slow pace) as was the case at the exodus from Egypt. Additionally) according to their interpretation, it emerges that the return in ships is not a curse in and of itself. Rather, it only intensifies the general curse that "Hashem will **return** you to **Egypt**," i.e., it clarifies that this return includes all of the people {including women and children}. Thus, the verse, **from the outset**, should have said, "Hashem will return *all* of you..." or something to that effect (instead of mentioning ships separately).]

b) “By the route of which I said to you, ‘You shall never again see it!’” — they will return to Egypt on the route that they have already traveled — through “the great and awesome wilderness — snakes, fiery serpents, and scorpions, and thirst where there was no water,”¹⁹ (and obviously, *without* the miracles and kindnesses {that Hashem performed for them} during their first journey through the desert). In fact, for this reason, Hashem promised that by this route, “You shall never again see it!” Thus, we understand the grave curse of traveling on **this** route.²⁰

[Rashi does not need to spell this out explicitly — just as he does not need to spell out explicitly the severe punishment, that “Hashem will return you to **Egypt**,” for Rashi had just clarified that²¹ “one can instill fear into a person only through something he fears.” Just as returning to Egypt was something that the Jewish people feared, the same held true regarding taking this route back to Egypt.]

7.

EACH DETAIL

On this basis, we can also appreciate Rashi’s subsequent remarks on the words in this same verse: “*And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies* — you will seek to be sold to them as slaves and maidservants.” Meaning (**others** will not sell you, but rather), you will seek to sell **yourselves**, as Rashi clarifies (in his next gloss).

Ostensibly, this is puzzling: This interpretation conflicts with Rashi’s previous explanation that they will be led to Egypt **as captives**, i.e., their circumstance will not allow them to sell themselves, but rather, specifically **others** will sell them!

¹⁹ *Devarim* 8:15.

²⁰ On this basis, there are two types of routes: a) where they have to travel by sea, they will travel in “in ships” (see *Chizkuni* on *Devarim* 28:68); b) the majority of the journey will follow, “the route of which I said to you, ‘You shall never again see it!’” — through the desert. This parallels the Jews’ route during the Exodus: a sea route (at the Splitting of the Reed Sea), and a desert route.

²¹ *Devarim* 28:60.

In addition, we need to clarify: Why, in fact, does the verse specify that “you will offer yourselves” (as opposed to other people selling them)? Since, at the end of the day, “there will be no buyer” because “they will decree upon you death and annihilation,” the identity of the seller does not matter at all!

Rather, the explanation:

Since every detail of the verse **injects another** discrete element to the curse, as discussed, Rashi assumes that the verse does not refer to the captors selling them (for this is not such a great curse and is not a new, independent element). Rather, the conditions of the captivity will become so harrowing that: a) “you will seek to be sold to them as slaves and maidservants.” You will (want, and therefore) endeavour, on your own accord, to sell yourselves as slaves and maidservants (by imploring and convincing your captors) and; b) furthermore, to whom? to your enemies!

This also further clarifies Rashi’s remarks on the words, “but there will be no buyer” — “for they will decree upon you death and annihilation.”

In light of this, we could conclude that “there will be no buyer” only serves to conclude the previous curse, “you will offer yourselves for sale.” Meaning, (because of the dire circumstances) you will want to sell yourselves to your enemy, “but there will be no buyer.” That is, your enemy will not want to buy you (and thus, you will remain in your **previous** {horrific} condition).

Rashi, therefore, negates such a conclusion {and teaches} that this clause, too, contains (not only the negative consequence of you offering yourselves for sale, but rather) an **additional** independent curse (unrelated to offering yourselves for sale). That is, “there will be no buyer” because “they will decree upon you death and annihilation” — the ultimate catastrophe (and for this reason, its declaration **concludes** the entire *tochachah* section).

8.

TESHUVAH

As discussed (in section 1), according to the “wine of Torah,” Rashi alludes to how the deeper meaning of the *tochachah* touch upon exceedingly lofty matters.

The purpose of the *tochachah* is to bring the virtue of *teshuvah*²² to the Jewish people, as the verse says,²³ “It will be when all these things come upon you — the blessing and the curse... then you will take it to your heart... and you will **return** unto Hashem, your L-rd...” For this reason, the conclusion and culmination of the *tochachah* hints that the purpose of the *tochachah* (and the ascent it achieves) is *teshuvah*.

The unique virtue of *teshuvah*: as the *Talmud* says,²⁴ “*Teshuvah* is extraordinary, since a person’s intentional sins are thereby counted for him as merits.” A penitent attains a **unique and complementary** merit that even a perfectly righteous *tzaddik*²⁵ does not possess.

According to the deeper dimension {of Torah exposition}: Even the sparks of holiness that fell into *shalosh kelipos ha’tmeios*²⁶ through sin are transformed into merits. In contrast, a perfectly righteous *tzaddik*, with his *avodah*,²⁷ can only extract the divine sparks that exist in permitted items, whose source is in *kelipas nogah*.

²² {Lit., “return,” *teshuvah* denotes repentance and a return to Hashem.}

²³ *Devarim* 30:1,2.

²⁴ *Yoma* 86b.

²⁵ {*Tzaddik* — Lit., “a righteous person”; the term *tzaddik* in *Chassidic* literature refers to an individual who is completely righteous, who will never sin, and who possesses no evil inclination l.}

²⁶ {*Kelipah* — *Kelipah* translates literally as “a shell” or “a peel.” The term refers to anything that conceals, and thus opposes G-dliness, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within. *Kelipah* is often used to refer to evil or impurity. *Kabbalah* delineates two distinct types of *kelipah*: *Kelipas nogah*—literally *kelipah* that is translucent and so can be illuminated; and the *shalosh kelipos hatmeios* — “three totally impure *kelipos*.” *Kelipas nogah* can be uplifted and refined, while conventionally, the only form of reformation or redemption for the three impure *kelipos* is their destruction. Yet through *teshuvah* motivated by great love, one can even elevate the G-dly sparks which were entrapped in the *shalosh kelipos hatmeios* as a result of his sins. (See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, “*VeZos Haberachah*,” 1st *sicha*, section 6.)}

²⁷ {Divine service.}

The fact that the sparks of holiness, found in *shalosh kelipos hatmeios*, fell extremely low, into the depths of the nether forces, itself illustrates that these sparks have a very lofty source in holiness, surpassing the source of the sparks that fell into *kelipas nogah* (based on the well-known principle “that which is higher, falls lower”²⁸). Therefore, when a person extracts and transforms these sparks into holiness, a great supernal light is drawn down.²⁹

This, then, is the deeper explanation of the verse, “Hashem will return you to Egypt...”: The objective behind the entire *tochachah* contains is indicated at its conclusion and culmination — “*veheshivcha* — והשיבך” {Hashem will return you}” (etymologically related to the word “*teshuvah* — תשובה”) to bring {a person to} the virtue of *teshuvah*. The verse goes on to allude to this virtue: a) “And **there** you will offer yourselves for sale **to your enemies** as slaves and maidservants.” Meaning, from the level of “there,” i.e., from the domain of *kelipah* — your enemies — we extract the sparks of holiness. b) This brings about, “*ve’ain koneh* — ואין קונה” {there will be no buyer}” (understood in light of the two interpretations³⁰ of the expression,³¹ “There is no {ain} *mazal* for the Jewish people”)³² i.e., “*ayin* — אין” will buy them — the {G-dly} influence stems from the level of *ayin*, which is beyond the level of “*koneh* {buyer}.” As known, *koneh* refers to the world of *Atzilus*³³ (as per the well-known explanation³⁴ of the words,³⁵ “*baruch konech* — ברוך קונך” {blessed is your Master}, but *ayin* is beyond *Atzilus*.

This is all accomplished through the *avodah* of *teshuvah*.

²⁸ See, at length and with many analogies, *Shaarei Orah*, s.v., “*Yoviu Levush Malchus*,” ch. 12, ff.; ch. 32, ff.

²⁹ *Likkutei Torah*, “*parshas Re’eh*,” 32c.

³⁰ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*parshas Ha’azinu*,” p. 71d.

³¹ {*Shabbos* 156a.}

³² {“*Mazal*,” lit., “a flow (from Above).” The two interpretations: 1. The constellations have *no influence* on the Jewish people; 2. The Jewish people are influenced from the Divine level of *ayin*, Hashem’s single Infinite Unity beyond any description or limitation.}

³³ {*Atzilus* is the highest and most exalted of the four spiritual “worlds” which were emanated by Hashem. Each world is composed of ten *sefiros* or Divine attributes, which are manifestations of Divinity.}

³⁴ *Torah Or*, p. 76b., et al.

³⁵ {In the *Kiddush Levanah* liturgy, *Siddur*.}

9.

YOU WILL SEEK

Regarding this matter, Rashi — according to the “**wine** of Torah” — adds an even deeper dimension. Since Jews are a veritable piece of Hashem above,³⁶ it is implausible to suggest that the entire purpose of the descent of the *tochachah* is only for the virtue obtained through {extricating} the **sparks**. Rather, it is also (and primarily) for the ascent of the Jewish people themselves.³⁷

As is commonly acknowledged,³⁸ *teshuvah* causes an ascent {to a level} incomparably loftier than an entity’s previous state, not only for an object (i.e., the sparks of holiness) but also for a **person**. Rashi clarifies the particulars of this ascent in his explanation of the clauses, “you will offer yourselves as slaves,” and, “there will be no buyer”:

“*And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maidservants — you will seek to be sold to them.*” The ascent attained through the *avodah* of *teshuvah* is that the Jew, thereby, becomes Hashem’s slave. The virtue of a **slave** is {expressed in the clause}, “**you will seek** to be sold,” i.e., he engages in *avodah* **on his own volition**. In contrast to the *avodah* of “children”³⁹ (the *avodah* of *tzadikim*) whose *avodah* and connection to G-dliness is the **nature** of their souls. For a *tzaddik*’s recognition of, and attraction to, G-dliness in his *avodah* is not a result primarily of his efforts and *avodah*, but rather, is initiated by G-dliness, from On High.

In contrast, the *avodah* of a *baal teshuvah*⁴⁰ who outwardly was distant from G-dliness, is not prompted by a revelation from On High, initiated by G-dliness. Thus, there is no external cause for him to {naturally} feel pleasure

³⁶ *Tanya*, ch. 2.

³⁷ *Tanya*, ch. 37 (p. 48b) says that the purpose of the soul’s descent is in order to fix the body, the animal soul, and a person’s portion of the world. However, see *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5700, *mamaar* “*Va’Yarach*,” p. 8 Note that in *Likkutei Torah*, *parshas Balak*, p. 73a, it says, “However, the **true solution** as to why a soul descends is because it achieves the level of a *baal teshuvah*, whereas prior to its descent, the soul is on the level of a *tzaddik*.”

³⁸ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p. 187ff.

³⁹ {A Jew’s relationship with Hashem comprises two modes: child and slave.}

⁴⁰ {*Baal Teshuvah*, lit., “a master of return”; the term *baal teshuvah* refers to an individual who has sinned in the past, has regretted his behavior, and turned himself around, resolving never to repeat his sins.}

from his *avodah* or to be drawn to it. On the contrary! This {longing of his to Hashem} is the opposite of his current nature — but he has transformed himself, on his own volition, and on his own accord, he yearns for G-dliness — “**you will seek** to be sold.” This is the primary method of serving Hashem — similar to a slave who performs his work not because he senses {the greatness of} his **master**. On the contrary! This is against his nature — but he devotes himself to serving his master on his own volition and with *kabbalas ol*.⁴¹

10.

A GOOD DEATH AND ANNIHILATION

Along similar lines, in his commentary on, “there will be no buyer,” Rashi remarks, “because they will decree upon you death and annihilation.” This alludes to a loftier quality in the Jewish people achieved through the *avodah* of *teshuvah*.

The deeper meaning of death and annihilation {*kilyon*}: A person living in this physical world operates with an attitude of “death” (toward his desires and his past {i.e., his materialistic desires are “dead” for him}; in his outlook,) he is removed from the world. He experiences *kilayon*, {etymologically related to the word} “*kalsah nafshi* {my soul pines},”⁴² with *kelos hanefesh*⁴³ to G-dliness. Meaning, while remaining in this world, a soul enclothed in a body, he reaches the level that the soul will attain when it leaves the body.

[This is similar to interpretation according to *Chassidus*⁴⁴ of the *Mishnah*’s statement,⁴⁵ “at one hundred (years), it is as if he were dead, passed on, and totally divested⁴⁶ from the world.” When a Jew attains the spiritual level

⁴¹ {*Kabbalas Ol* — Lit., “accepting the yoke,” connoting an unequivocal commitment to divine service, based not on a person’s own desire or understanding, but rather on his selfless submission to Hashem.}

⁴² {*Tehillim* 84:3.}

⁴³ {Lit., “the expiration of the soul”; yearning for closeness to Hashem to the extent that the soul aches to be subsumed in G-dliness.}

⁴⁴ See *Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis vol. 1*, p. 110b; *parshas Beshalach*, p. 530; *parshas Chukas*, p. 817.

⁴⁵ *Pirkei Avos*, ch. 5, *mishnah* 21 (according to the Alter Rebbe’s version, this *mishnah* concludes the chapter).

⁴⁶ {In the Hebrew original, “*batul*”; lit., “nullified.”}

characteristic of one hundred years — he (attains all one hundred **diverse** levels {i.e.,}, he) has refined all the ten faculties of his soul (each faculty including a particular dimension of each of the ten) — he has then, “passed on and totally divested from the world.” That is, he has totally transcended the world and so, “it is as if he were dead,” to the extent that even down here {in this world} he can perceive G-dliness. For although “no human can see Him and live”⁴⁷ {nevertheless}, “during their lives they cannot see, but in their death they can see.”⁴⁸ However, since he “is as if he were dead, passed on, and totally divested from the world,” he can already see, during his lifetime, as a soul invested in a corporeal body, what “in their death, they can see.”]

11.

IT ALL COMES FROM ON-HIGH

The truth is that not only is the *tochachah* itself for the sake of {attaining the} virtue of *teshuvah*, but the catalyst that brought about the *tochachah* {i.e., sin} is also for the sake of *teshuvah*.

Meaning, although outwardly the sins that the Jews transgressed by their own free-will were the catalyst for the *tochachah*, on a deeper level, this matter {choice} was also influenced from On High. Hashem brings the Jewish people to this {fallen} state in order that they obtain the benefit of *teshuvah*.⁴⁹

This is also hinted at in the beginning of the verse, “**Hashem will return you** to Egypt in ships, by the route of which I said to you, ‘You shall never again see it!’” Meaning, even the Jewish people’s journey down the forbidden path, down the path regarding which Hashem told them, “You shall never again see it!” {i.e., iniquity} is, on a deeper level, {also} orchestrated from **On High** — “Hashem will return you,” with the goal of elevating (afterwards) the Jewish people to *teshuvah*.

⁴⁷ {*Shemos* 33:20.}

⁴⁸ *Sifrei, parshas Behaaloscha*, ch. 12, par. 8.

⁴⁹ See *Toras Chaim, parshas Toldos*, 13a; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 18, p. 395, ff.

Rashi also teaches this in his explanation, “*ba’oniyos... in captivity.*” The Jewish people’s descent into “*Mitzrayim*” {Egypt, etymologically related to the word} *meitzarim* {boundaries}, limitations, concealment, and hiddenness {of Hashem’s presence} is not by their own will. Rather, they are “in **captivity**” — Hashem leads them there against their will, with the intention of steering them to the superior plane of *teshuvah*.

12.

THE TARGUM: SEFINOS

Based on all the above, we can also appreciate Rashi’s explanation “*ba’oniyos — be’sefinos* {in ships}.” Rashi does not only seek to clarify the meaning of the word *oniyos*, but {moreover,} in doing so, Rashi hints that according to the deeper explanation of the verse (which Rashi brings out according to the “wine of Torah”), the term “*oniyos*,” meaning ships, is also relevant.

The explanation:

Ships protect the passengers when they traverse the waters of a sea or a river. Similarly, in spiritual matters: When a soul descends into the lower realms, into “the raging waters”⁵⁰ of this world, it needs to be protected from drowning, G-d forbid. This is accomplished with “ships,” the *avodah* of Torah and *mitzvos* (as explained in several places).⁵¹

Within this *avodah*, there are two levels: a) *oniyos* {ships} (a word connoting an entity that offers protection) in ***lashon hakodesh***⁵² {alluding to} the *avodah* of Torah and *mitzvos* as performed within the realm of **holiness**; b)

⁵⁰ {Cf. *Tehillim* 124:5.}

⁵¹ See the *Baal Shem Tov*’s teachings on the verse {*Tehillim* 107:23}, “Those who descend into the water in *oniyos*.” (*Keser Shem Tov, Hosafos*, sec. 58. See also the *Mitteler Rebbe’s Biurei HaZohar*, p. 43a, and the *Tzemach Tzedek’s Biurei HaZohar*, p. 210, ff.)

⁵² {Lit., “the Holy Tongue,” denoting biblical Hebrew.}

sefinos {ships} in (the vernacular of) *Targum*,⁵³ alluding to the descent {of the Holy Tongue} into the realm of the *Targum*, i.e., the language of the seventy nations, which must be refined and transformed to {the realm of} holiness. This refers to the *avodah* of *teshuvah*, when deliberate sins are transformed into merits.

Rashi teaches that since here we are discussing how to remedy a fallen state caused by sins, etc. — “the route of which I said to you, ‘You shall never again see it!’” — we need recourse to the *avodah* and conduct that is expressed not (only) by *oniyos* but (also) by ***sefinos***.

13.

CLEAR AND OBVIOUS GOODNESS

May it be Hashem’s will that by studying the “wine of Torah” and the deeper dimension of Torah relating to the *tochachah*, very soon the deeper goodness behind the *tochachah* will be revealed as visible, revealed goodness. Every person will be able to see with their fleshy eyes, the clear and obvious goodness regarding children, health and abundant livelihood.

And all the curses should befall “your enemies and those who hate you, who pursued you.”⁵⁴ Every Jew amongst the general Jewish nation should be inscribed and sealed for a *kesivah va’chasimah tovah*, for a good and sweet year, with **clear and obvious** goodness. So much so, we reach the overarching blessing, the coming of our righteous Moshiach, speedily, in our days.

-Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Ki Savo*, 5734 (1974)

⁵³ {An Aramaic translation of the Torah.}

⁵⁴ *Devarim* 30:7.