



Likkutei Sichos

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The Age of the World

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

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1.

THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD

Regarding the verse,¹ “Noach was six hundred years old, and the Flood was water upon the earth,” the Midrash remarks:² “The year of the Flood³ is not counted.” This means (as commentators⁴ point out) that the year of the Flood itself was not counted “toward Noach’s years,” as we see:⁵

When the Holy One counted Noach’s years, He excluded the year of the Flood: Noach lived for 951 years, including the year of the Flood, as the verse says, “Noach was 600 years old, and the Flood was...,” implying that the Flood began after Noach had turned 600. As it says in Scripture,⁶ “It came to pass in the six hundred and first year (...) the waters had dried.” Scripture also says⁷ that “Noach lived after the Flood 350 years” and that “all the days of Noach (that he lived)⁸ were 950 years.”⁹ It should have said 951 years. Thus, we see that the year of the Flood was not included in the count of Noach’s years.

(The commentators clarify the reason: “Since it was a year of suffering, the year of the Flood was not included in the count of his years.”)

We have discussed several times¹⁰ that when Rashi comments, “I do not know,” or something similar, as he does in several places in his Torah commentary, it proves that whenever there is difficulty in *pshat*,¹¹ Rashi addresses it in his commentary. In places where Rashi does not write any commentary (and does not say, “I do not know,” or the like), the matter is self-evident — either from this verse itself, the preceding verses, or Rashi’s earlier remarks.

On this basis, we need to explain the following: The fact that the sum of Noach’s years in **Scripture** does not match the number of years before and after the Flood (which compels us to say that “the year of the Flood is not counted”) is a glaring contradiction in the

¹ *Bereishis* 7:6.

² *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 32, par. 6; *Yerushalmi*, beg. of *Rosh Hashanah*.

³ {From beginning to end, the Flood lasted a year.}

⁴ Rashi and *Matnos Kehunah* on *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 32, par. 6; also see *Tzror Hamor* on *Bereishis* 7:11.

⁵ Words of Rashi on *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 32, par. 6.

⁶ *Bereishis* 8:13.

⁷ *Bereishis* 9:28.

⁸ These words are not in the verse.

⁹ *Bereishis* 9:29.

¹⁰ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 10, p. 13, et al.

¹¹ {*Pshat* refers to 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.}

straightforward understanding of the verses. Why doesn't Rashi address this problem in his Torah commentary?

We cannot say that Rashi simply maintains that “the year of the Flood is not counted.” After all, this is a significant novelty that Rashi should have discussed explicitly, especially considering that the Torah **includes** the year of the Flood when making individual calculations, as mentioned above: First, the verse says that the Flood began “in the six hundredth year of Noach’s life.”¹² Then later it says that “in the six hundred and **first** year... the waters had dried.”¹³

2.

AN ATTEMPTED SOLUTION

This can be clarified as follows:

The verse says, “בַּשָּׁנָה שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת וּשְׁנָיִם, in the six hundredth year of Noach’s life..., {all the fountains...,} burst forth....” The **simple** meaning of “בַּשָּׁנָה, **in** the year,” is **in** (the middle of) *the year*. Consequently, we can understand the verse, “**In the** six hundredth **year**..., burst forth...” to mean that the Flood occurred **at the beginning** of the year. This means the Flood began at the beginning of the six hundredth year of Noach’s life — when Noach was slightly older than 599.

Because the verse is precise in stating, “**In the** six hundredth **year**...,” it compels us to say that when the verse says, “Noach was six hundred years old, and the Flood was water upon the earth,” it also refers to the beginning of his six hundredth year [or it means (as the verse’s precise language — “and the Flood **was**” — in past tense) that when Noach was “six hundred years old,” the Flood had **already occurred** (previously)].

Likewise, the verse, “It came to pass in the six hundredth... year..., the waters had dried,” means (not the entire 601 years, but rather) at the beginning of the six hundred and first year, that is, when Noach was slightly over 600 years old.¹⁴

However, regarding the total sum of Noach’s years, the Torah records the complete years and does not consider a **partial** year a complete year. Consequently, Noach’s years amounted to 950 (600 [and a bit] until after the Flood, and another 350 years after the Flood).

¹² Bereishis 7:11.

¹³ Bereishis 8:13.

¹⁴ Similar to the Gemara’s explanation, *Rosh Hashanah* 10b.

3.

THE PROBLEM

However, this explanation is inadequate:

Regarding the verse,¹⁵ “For in another seven days’ time...,” Rashi comments:¹⁶ “Go and calculate the years of Mesushelach, and you will find that they end in the six hundredth year of the life of Noach.” The calculation is: Mesushelach lived for 969 years;¹⁷ since Mesushelach was 187 years old when Lemech was born,¹⁸ and Lemech was 182 years old when Noach was born¹⁹ (the combined sum: 369), it follows that “the years of Mesushelach (969 years)..., end in the six hundredth year of the life of Noach” (as 600 {Noach’s age} plus 369 {the age of Mesushelach when Noach was born} was 969).

Since Mesushelach’s death preceded the Flood, the clause, “In the six hundredth year of Noach’s life..., burst forth...” means that Noach had already turned 600.

We could have answered this simply: The number of years when each person fathered a child (187, 182, and the like) does not mean that they fathered the child on **the day** they turned that age.

[For if this were so, Shais, Enosh, and the subsequent “generations” — about whom it is said, “He lived for... years and fathered” — would all be born on the same date that their father was born. This would mean they were all born on (the date Adam’s was born —) Rosh Hashanah!]

Instead, it means that **after** reaching a certain age, they fathered a child sometime during that year.

Consequently, the 187 years of Mesushelach, when he fathered Lemech, and the 182 years of Lemech, when Noach was born, include additional months. Combining these additional months with the partial year of Noach’s six hundredth year adds up to an entire year, which aligns with the total years of Mesushelach.

However, this explanation is not entirely smooth:

¹⁵ *Bereishis* 7:4.

¹⁶ {Rashi on *Bereishis* 7:4.}

¹⁷ *Bereishis* 5:27.

¹⁸ *Bereishis* 5:25.

¹⁹ *Bereishis* 5:28.

Regarding the sin of the Generation of the Dispersion,²⁰ Rashi says:²¹ “They said, ‘Once in 1,656 years, the firmament collapses, as it did in the days of the Flood.’” The calculation of 1,656 years is the total sum of the years of the enumerated generations between Adam and Noach. —

However, if we understand this calculation in the manner that was explained above — that the number of years includes uncounted surplus time — it would mean that each of the ten generations had a surplus of time (days, weeks, or months) that is not included in the overall count of years. Seemingly, reason dictates that over **ten** generations of people who **lived long lives**, these surpluses would (at least) add up to more than the days in a single year, in a manner that the total amount would not be 1,656 years but even more (1,657 years)!

4.

ANOTHER ATTEMPT

We could have understood that the total sum of “1,656 years” is calculated because “the years of man are counted according to the years of the world” (**Rashi’s** wording in *parshas Ki Sisa*).²² This means that when counting the sum of the years of people, it is not done based on their years but according to the years of the world.

However, it is extremely difficult to posit that Rashi interprets it this way in our *parshah* without stating so explicitly. According to the *pshat* understanding of Scripture, it is a significant novelty to suggest that when the Torah counts the years of a **single person’s** life, it does not mean their individual years, but the years of the world!²³

5.

THE SOLUTION

The explanation:

According to the *pshat* approach, when the Torah says that so-and-so is a certain number of years old (not like the expression, “I am one hundred and twenty years old

²⁰ {Refers to the people who constructed the Tower of Babel (*Bereishis* 11:1-9), and as punishment, were divided and dispersed throughout the world.}

²¹ Rashi on *Bereishis* 11:1.

²² Rashi on *Shemos* 30:16.

²³ As *Ramban* comments, beg. of *parshas Ki Sisa*.

today”),²⁴ it refers to an approximate number of years — he could be less than half a year older or younger since **simply**, the Torah follows the majority (even regarding years).

In light of this, the “1,656 years” calculation becomes smoother. Since we can ordinarily assume that just as there were “generations” with **surplus** days not included in the number of years written in the Torah, there were also those “generations” with **missing** days (or months) that were not accounted for in the number of years stated in the Torah. Thus, the **total sum** of years would roughly even out (to the age of the world).

6.

THE PURPOSE OF IT ALL

This can be clarified further (though not strictly according to *pshat*). To preface:

The simple reason the Torah lists the age at which people in each of the “generations” fathered children — for seemingly, what difference does it make? — is to inform us of the year in which different events in the Torah occurred.

On this basis (that the number of years provided concerning the births of the generations is [primarily] to enable us to calculate the world’s exact age), we can posit that the number of years stated in the Torah (concerning the birth of each individual) might vary up to two years: **Nearly** the entire year the person was approaching that age or **nearly** the entire year after they had already reached that age. [For example, 187 years in the verse mentioned above, “Mesushelach lived 187 years,” could refer to **the beginning** of the year going into year 187 (186 years and a bit); or it could refer to the very end of the year as being 187 years (just short of 188 years)].

Although, according to the above logic, we cannot know the precise date of an individual’s birth, recording these dates still serves its primary purpose: Namely, these dates collectively attest to the age of the world since the **total sum** of all these recorded years matches the reckoning of the age of the world, give or take a **portion** of a year.

²⁴ *Devarim* 31:2, Rashi on this verse.

THE DEEPER REASON

The deeper reason why the Torah is precise regarding the age of the world can be understood by first examining a midrash:²⁵ One virtue of the Jewish people that “Akilas” (a gentile) listed (as a reason for his desire to convert) was that “the smallest among them knows... how much time has passed since the world was created.”

Since Akilas listed the Jewish people’s virtues that prompted him to **convert**, it is understood that these virtues were not related to the Jewish people's great wisdom but to the Jewish **faith**.

The explanation for this is as follows:

The belief in the world’s creation is one of the foundations of the Torah. In the words of *Ramban*:²⁶

This is a cornerstone of faith. Anyone who does not believe in Creation and who imagines that the world always existed repudiates a fundamental principle and has no {connection with the} Torah at all.

However, faith has various levels: A person may have complete faith but lack certainty. They may have faith without clear knowledge. As our Sages say,²⁷ “Hearing something is not like seeing it.” Even if someone is confident of the veracity of something they hear, it is not the same as the certainty that comes from seeing.

This is the virtue of “the smallest among them knows... how much time has passed since the world was created.” This belief (including the **source** of this belief [discussed above] — the world's creation) is known clearly to them. They know the (precise)²⁸ time when Hashem created the world.

For this reason, the Torah speaks extensively (regarding the number of years of the generations) to impart the exact number of years since the world’s creation.

— From the letters of Sivan, 5741 (1981)

²⁵ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 30, par. 12.

²⁶ *Ramban*, beg. of *Bereishis*.

²⁷ See *Mechilta*, “*Yisro*,” sec. 19, par. 9.

²⁸ For the explanation of this idea, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 10, p. 185.