

Likkutei Sichos

On the weekly Torah readings and holidays

From the Talks of
The Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

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With Your Very Life

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining its clarity. However, as in all translations, inadvertent errors may occur.

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1.

I TOOK YOU OUT OF SLAVERY; BE MY SLAVES

In his commentary on the verse,¹ “I am Hashem, your L-rd, Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” Rashi cites the words “Who took you out of the land of Egypt” and explains: “Taking you out is sufficient reason for subservience to Me.”

[He then offers two additional interpretations, as discussed in Section 5 below.]

What difficulty in the verse is Rashi attempting to resolve with his interpretation?

Mizrachi (as well as other commentators)² suggest that the difficulty is the following: Why did Hashem “predicate His Divine Authority on the Exodus from Egypt by saying, ‘Who took you out,’ rather than saying, ‘Who created heaven and earth’”? Rashi addresses this by explaining that “by taking them out of Egypt, where the Jews were slaves, He acquired them to be subservient to Him and to be their Master, their L-rd.”

However, this explanation is not altogether smooth: According to *pshat*,³ from the outset, there is **no basis** for the question as to why Hashem did not say, “Who created heaven and earth.” This is because this declaration {“Who took you out of the land of Egypt”} follows directly after (and is a reason for), “I am Hashem, **your** L-rd.” That is, Hashem is the L-rd of the Jewish people. Therefore, He **had** to mention something explicitly connected with the Jewish people (because of which the Jewish people are **set apart** from the rest of the world).

Hashem selected **this** factor specifically — “Who took you out of the land of Egypt” (concerning the Jewish people) — for a **self-evident reason**: The Jewish people’s redemption led to the Torah’s Giving at Mount Sinai.

The question {on *Mizrachi*’s explanation of Rashi} is even stronger: The fact that the Exodus from Egypt was the reason for “I am Hashem, your L-rd” (or in other words — the Exodus happened so that the Jewish people would accept Hashem as their “L-rd” and serve Him) is **already** mentioned several times:

In *parshas Shemos*, the Torah says,⁴ “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve Hashem on this mountain.” Similarly, at the beginning of *parshas Vaeira*, it says,⁵ “Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: ... ‘I shall take you out from under the oppression of Egypt... I shall take you to Me as a people, and I will be your L-rd, and you will know that I am Hashem your L-rd, Who took you out from under the oppression of Egypt.’” Moreover, in our

¹ *Shemos* 20:2.

² *Gur Aryeh, Devek Tov*, et al, commenting on this verse.

³ {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.” Although there are many levels of Torah interpretation, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

⁴ *Shemos* 3:12.

⁵ *Shemos* 6:6-7.

very **parshah itself**, in describing the **preparations** for the Giving of the Torah, the Torah says,⁶ “You have seen what I did to Egypt; I carried you... and I brought you to Me.... Hearken to My voice and keep My covenant.... You shall be to Me... a holy nation.”

Thus, we need to clarify: What is uniquely challenging about **this** verse such that Rashi must specifically explain **here** (and not earlier) that “taking you out is sufficient...”?

2.

NUANCES IN RASHI’S WORDING

In Rashi's wording, there are several noteworthy nuances:

Understood simply, the words (in Rashi’s commentary), “for subservience to Me,” serve to explain the beginning of the verse, “I am Hashem, your L-rd.” (As *Mizrachi*, cited above, writes: “to be subservient to Him and to be their L-rd.”) According to this explanation, the phrase, “Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” is the **reason** for, “I am Hashem, your L-rd.” (Because “I took you out of the land of Egypt,” the Jewish people became subservient to Hashem.) This is similar to the verse at the end of *parshas Shelach*⁷ (and in several other places),⁸ “I am Hashem your L-rd, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your L-rd,” and as Rashi explains⁹ — “on this condition did I redeem you....”

On this basis, however, several things are unclear:

a) Why does Rashi not cite the words, “I am Hashem, your L-rd” in his caption (**which** he then proceeds to explain)?

b) In the **vast majority**¹⁰ of places where Rashi teaches us this idea (that the Exodus occurred so that the Jewish people would accept Hashem as their “L-rd”), Rashi uses the phrase, “**On this condition** did I redeem you...” (or the like). Why specifically **here** does Rashi use a different expression — “Taking you out is **sufficient reason**...”?

c) Rashi should have said — in line with the language of the verse (“I am Hashem, your L-rd”) — “Taking you out is sufficient reason for you **to accept Me as your L-rd**”¹¹ [or (as **Rashi** writes elsewhere)¹² “for you to accept My **sovereignty**,” or something to that effect.]

⁶ *Shemos* 19:4-6; see Rashi there.

⁷ {*Bamidbar* 15:41;} cited by *Mizrachi* on *Shemos* 20:2.

⁸ *Shemos* 29:45-46; *Vayikra* 11:45; *Vayikra* 19:36; *Vayikra* 22:33; *Vayikra* 25:38; *Vayikra* 26:13; *Vayikra* 26:45.

⁹ {Rashi on *Bamidbar* 15:41,} the first (and primary) explanation.

¹⁰ See *Shemos* 29:45-46; *Vayikra* 11:45; *Vayikra* 19:36; *Vayikra* 22:33; *Vayikra* 25:38; *Vayikra* 26:13; *Vayikra* 26:45; and the same wording appears in *Shemos Rabbah* here (ch. 29, sec. 3).

¹¹ Echoing the formulation in *Shemos Rabbah* here (ch. 29, sec. 3).

¹² *Vayikra* 18:2, “I said at Sinai, ‘I am Hashem, your L-rd, **and you accepted my kingship upon yourselves**’”; and the same wording appears in *Mechilta, parshas Yisro*, 20:3; see also *Ramban* here (verse 2) **and elsewhere**.

Why does Rashi deviate from the language of the verse and employ new wording (and content) — “for subservience to Me”?

Perhaps we can answer: Rashi deduces this from the end of the verse — “from the house of slaves.” Since Hashem took the Jewish people out of the “**house of slaves**,” therefore, “taking you out is sufficient,” so that the Jewish people should become **servants of Hashem**¹³ (similar to the verse,¹⁴ “They are My servants, whom I took out of the land of Egypt.”)

However, this explanation does not suffice because:

(a) Rashi’s nuanced wording is still unclear according to this explanation, as he should have said, in line with the language of the verse, “Taking you out is sufficient reason for you to be **My servants**.”¹⁵ Why does he deviate from the wording of the verse and say “**subservience**”?

(b) **More importantly**, in his caption, Rashi only cites the words, “Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” and **not** the conclusion of the verse, “from the house of slaves.” (He does not even allude to this with the word “etc.”) Evidently, Rashi derives his interpretation, “Taking you out is sufficient reason for subservience to Me” (not from the words “from the house of slaves,” but rather) from the words “Who took you out of the land of Egypt” themselves. [This is especially apparent as even **in this commentary**, Rashi {simply} writes, “Taking you out is sufficient reason...,” without specifying {from where He took you out}; he does not say, “Taking you out of the **house of slaves** is sufficient reason....”]

3.

ABSOLUTE SUBSERVIENCE

We can explain all this as follows:

The difficulty with the words “Who took you out of the land of Egypt” is (not why the verse connects “I am Hashem, your L-rd” with “Who took you out of Egypt.” Rather, the **opposite** issue needs resolution): What do these words come to teach us?!

As mentioned, the Jewish people already knew that the Giving of the Torah (“you shall serve Hashem {on this mountain}”)¹⁶ was the purpose of the Exodus. Moreover, Hashem commanded that this goal be conveyed to the Jewish people during the days of preparation for the Giving of the Torah, as cited above:¹⁷ “You have seen what I did to Egypt; I carried you... and I brought you to Me... Hearken to My voice and keep My covenant... you shall be to Me a kingdom of *kohanim* and a holy nation.”

¹³ See also *Ibn Ezra*; *Ramban*; and *Chizkuni*, here.

¹⁴ *Vayikra* 25:42 and similarly *Vayikra* 25:45.

¹⁵ Similar to the wording used by *Ibn Ezra*, *Ramban* and *Chizkuni*, here. **Rashi** also uses this wording in his commentary on *Devarim* 5:15, “that you shall be His servant.”

¹⁶ {*Shemos* 3:12.}

¹⁷ *Shemos* 19:4-6.

As such, **what is the novelty** in declaring that “I am Hashem, your L-rd” is the outcome and purpose of “Who took you out of Egypt”?

Rashi, therefore, explains that the words, “Who took you out of the land of Egypt” (do not constitute a reason [or explanation] for “I am Hashem, your L-rd.” Rather, they) represent a **distinctly new** concept — “Taking you out is sufficient reason for subservience to Me.”

“I am Hashem, your L-rd” connotes the acceptance of Hashem’s sovereignty¹⁸ — accepting Hashem as the ruler and king, obligating oneself to obey all His commands, etc. Hashem then adds an element: To accept His sovereignty (which introduces acceptance of the yoke of mitzvos and obedience to Hashem’s decrees) is insufficient. Instead, the Jewish people need to be **subservient**. Absolute subservience to Hashem is required.

The mere “acceptance of sovereignty” does not preclude freedom in a person’s private life. It only means that a person obeys the king and performs the specific actions that the king commands. [Concerning acts that the person must actively perform, he obeys; likewise, he refrains from the actions the king prohibits.] So, too, regarding the King of Kings, Hashem: the Jewish people accept upon themselves to fulfill all of the King’s commandments (and decrees).

But “**subservience** to Me” means more. It means that a Jew entirely negates his independent existence. He has **absolutely no (personal) freedom**. He is (entirely) subjugated to Hashem with all he has and does.

Therefore, Rashi is precise in his wording and says, “Taking you out is **sufficient**...” (and does not say “on condition...”). Rashi uses the expression “on condition” in cases where two matters appear in the verse, one of which is a condition for the other. (For example, “I am Hashem, your L-rd, Who took you out... to be your L-rd.”) In contrast, in our case (according to Rashi), “subservience to Me” is not a condition. It is the meaning (and intent) of the clause “who took you out of the land of Egypt.” The Exodus is “**sufficient**” (and entails) that the Jewish people will adopt “subservience to Me.”

¹⁸ Rashi on *Vayikra* 18:2; *Mechilta*, *parshas Yisro*, 20:3.

A CONSTANT YOKE

On this basis, we can appreciate why Rashi does not cite the end of the verse “from the house of slaves ” in his caption, nor even allude to it with “etc.”).

The difference between the expression “subservience to Me” as opposed to the (unqualified) term “servant” is the following:

The term “servant” unqualified does not emphasize that the individual has no freedom. True, a servant is not an independent being. He is unlike a laborer who merely works for the employer but is the **property of his master**. Nevertheless, the **yoke** of servitude is primarily manifest in the servant’s work for his master. Consequently, when the servant eats, sleeps, etc., he does not feel the same burden of his master’s yoke. And it is possible that, on occasion, the master does not need the servant to work, and the servant is at liberty to rest. (He is not obligated to **go looking** for work from the master.)

In contrast, the expression “**subservient, מְשֻׁעָבְדִים**” emphasizes the servant’s subservience to his master in the manner of a **constant yoke**. [This is etymologically **related** to the term, “שֶׁבַע {a lien},” used in the context of finance where the property becomes “subservient” and “bound” to the lender.]¹⁹ In all his actions, the servant feels the yoke of the master to the extent that even when the master does not impose work, the servant senses that his entire being is subservient to the master.²⁰

Therefore, Rashi is precise in his wording and says, “for subservience to Me,” and not “that you should be **My servants**” (or a similar expression):

The novelty of the Giving of the Torah in transforming the Jewish people into “servants of Hashem” (without qualification) was already included in the words “I am Hashem, **your L-rd**.” Since Hashem is our L-rd, our ruler and king, the Jewish people “belong” to Hashem (“I have taken you to Me as a people, and I will be your L-rd”).²¹ Consequently, every Jew must obey and serve Him as an actual servant.

However, the words, “Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” convey an additional novelty — “Taking you out is sufficient reason for subservience to Me.”

Indeed, the “condition” of the Exodus from Egypt is (merely) that the Jews should be “a people unto Me.” (This could refer to something similar to the relationship between a king of flesh and blood and a nation.) But, “the Exodus (from the land of Egypt) is **sufficient** for subservience to Me”:

¹⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Malveh Veloveh*,” ch. 18, sec. 1.

²⁰ See the extensive discussion in the *Maamar “UMikneh Rav”* (and subsequent *Maamarim*) from 5666 regarding the nature of the “Simple Servant’s” yoke of servitude. See there for details.

²¹ *Shemos* 6:7.

The Jewish people were slaves in **the land of Egypt**. There, they were not just “servants” — a “house of slaves,” but oppressed in the manner of **subservience**²² — **backbreaking** labor,²³ to the point where Pharaoh said, “**Let the work weigh heavier**”²⁴ beyond any measure and limit. Therefore, “the Exodus (from the ‘land of Egypt’) is sufficient reason for subservience to Me” (and not just servants).

5.

MISTAKING HIM FOR TWO GODS?

Based on this explanation of Rashi’s remarks — the phrase, “Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” (does not constitute a reason that “I am Hashem, your L-rd,” but rather) teaches a new and **distinct** idea — we can also appreciate why, after offering this interpretation on the verse, “Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” Rashi presents two additional interpretations. He writes as follows:

Another explanation: Because He revealed Himself at the Splitting of the Sea as a mighty warrior, and He revealed Himself here as an old man full of mercy, as it says,²⁵ “and under His feet...,” {Hashem declared:} “Since I change appearances do not mistakenly believe that there are two deities. I am the One who took you out of Egypt, and the One {who revealed Himself} at the Sea.” Another explanation: Because the Jews heard many voices from all four directions, the heavens and the earth, they should not mistakenly believe that there are numerous deities.

[Rashi then concludes:

Why did He use the singular form, “your L-rd”?²⁶ To provide an opening for Moshe to offer a defense regarding the incident of the Golden Calf.... {Moshe said in their defense:} “To them, You did not give the command “there shall be no other gods for you”; you only commanded me.”]

This is seemingly puzzling: Rashi’s commentary is based on **pshat**. What is lacking in the first interpretation [the content of which is straightforward and appears in similar forms across many other verses as mentioned above] for which reason Rashi finds it necessary to add and offer two other interpretations that ostensibly appear (very) remote from **pshat**?

²² This expression is used in numerous places, “**the subservience under the hands of the Egyptians**” (see, for example, **Rashi** on *Shemos* 5:4, 11:5, in our *parshah*, on this verse (in the second interpretation), *Shemos* 24:10, **and elsewhere**).

²³ *Shemos* 1:13-14, see also Rashi on our *parshah* 18:10, **and elsewhere**.

²⁴ *Shemos* 5:9.

²⁵ *Shemos* 24:10.

²⁶ {This difference in form is imperceptible in the English language. In the original, the verse says “*elokecha*, your (s.) L-rd,” which uses the singular pronominal suffix. The plural pronominal suffix, which would seem to be more appropriate in this context is “*elokeichem*, your (pl.) L-rd.”}

The significant disparity from the *pshat* of the verse becomes apparent when considering the **general** substance of these interpretations regarding the need to forestall the Jewish people's mistake of believing in "two deities" or "many deities": How is it conceivable that after witnessing all the miracles in Egypt, at the Sea, etc., and while standing at Mount Sinai, it would now be necessary to caution the Jewish people against mistakenly believing in dualism or polytheism"?!]

[Even the claim that "I change in **appearances**" is an inadequate explanation for such a mistake. It is readily understood (and we even see a **similar** empirical phenomenon with people) that, at the very least, a person's facial expression changes depending on their actions. When fighting in war, a person's facial expression differs from when engaging in kindness and mercy.

It certainly seems that there is no need to caution the Jewish people against mistakingly believing in **polytheism**, although they had heard "numerous voices." After all, these **numerous** voices conveyed the **exact** words whose (primary) content was, "I am Hashem, your L-rd... **there shall be no other gods for you besides Me**"!]

Additionally, each of these two interpretations has its difficulty:

In the first interpretation, the following is unclear: The Divine appearance described in the words, "He revealed Himself here as an old man full of mercy" had (according to **Rashi**)²⁷ already occurred on the **fifth** of Sivan (or at least sometime before Hashem began to proclaim the Ten Commandments).²⁸ If so, **right at that time**, Hashem should have warned the Jewish people not to err (in one of the fundamental principles of faith) and think that "there are two deities." (He should not have waited to do so by **interrupting** in the **middle** of the Ten Commandments).

According to the second interpretation— that the possibility of error was from the multiplicity of **voices**²⁹ heard when the Ten Commandments were spoken — there is a difficulty (as Rashi himself continues and says): "And why did He use the singular form 'your L-rd'?" Generally, there is no difficulty with this: We find in many places that Hashem speaks to the Jewish people in the singular (especially at the Giving of the Torah, when "the Jewish people encamped there" — "as one man with one heart").³⁰ Here, however, since the voices were heard in a manner that allowed them to think mistakenly that there are many gods, it would have been specifically necessary to use the plural and not the singular, which could **strengthen** the

²⁷ Rashi on *Shemos* 24:4 — although then only Moshe, Aaron, Nadav, Avihu, and seventy elders saw this (*Shemos* 24:10); see the next footnote.

²⁸ See *Shemos* 19:20 ff. From, "Hashem descended...", until, "Hashem spoke....":

²⁹ Hence the need to negate the potential error **here** (this being the advantage of Rashi's third explanation over the second).

³⁰ **Rashi** on *Shemos* 19:2. {In the original, the verse uses the singular form "וַיִּחַן, he encamped," rather than the plural "וַיִּחַנו, they encamped." As Rashi explains, this grammatical choice emphasizes the extraordinary unity of the Jewish people at that time.}

possibility of thinking mistakenly that, “one god speaks with one person, and another god speaks with another person, Heaven forbid.”³¹

[Rashi’s explanation for this — “to provide an opening for Moshe to offer a defense regarding the incident of the Golden Calf” — is seemingly far from *pshat*, as the commentators ask,³² “Of what use is this defense?”]

In light of all this, the following is most perplexing: What compels Rashi — according to *pshat* — to add these two interpretations?

However, based on the explanation above, the answer is clear: According to Rashi’s first interpretation, the phrase, “Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” deals with something **distinct** from, “I am Hashem, your L-rd.” Thus, the wording, “I am Hashem, your L-rd, **who** took you out of the land of Egypt,” is not so smooth because, generally, the preposition “who” signals a continuation of the previous clause (and not an inclusion of an altogether new point).

Therefore, Rashi offers the other two interpretations, which smoothen the flow of the verse. As **Rashi** emphasizes, the second (and third) interpretations say the verse means, “**I am the One who** took you out....”

6.

THE LESSON

From Rashi’s conclusion — “And why did He use the singular form? ... To provide an opening for Moshe to offer a defense regarding the incident of the Golden Calf” — we can learn a wondrous lesson about how dear every Jew is to Hashem:

Here, the Torah speaks of Jews for whom not only was the concept of “subservience to Me” lacking, but they were in a state opposite for accepting Hashem’s proclamation, “I am Hashem, your L-rd.” Yet, for the sake of **such** Jews, Hashem spoke at the **Giving of the Torah and for all generations** using the “singular” {possessive suffix} so that Moshe could “plead” on behalf of **these Jews!**

Moreover, the very grammatical syntax that made it possible for Moshe to plead on their behalf **contributed** to the possibility that one might erroneously think that “there are many deities” (as mentioned above). On the other hand (as mentioned above based on the commentators), the “defense” {arising from the use of this grammatical form} is seemingly flimsy. Yet, despite this, Hashem said that its use was worthwhile to grant an opportunity to advocate on behalf of a Jew — and even on behalf of such an errant Jew. True, Scripture’s use of this grammatical form allows for an erroneous understanding. However, concerning giving such

³¹ *Maskil LeDavid*, here.

³² *Gur Aryeh* on *Shemos* 20:2 (and his solution is not based on *pshat*).

leeway for error, we apply the dictum: “It is so written {in a way that promotes something positive}, and one who wishes to err, let him err”!³³

The lesson for all of us is obvious. We must work to bring **every Jew** closer. A person should not differentiate between Jews, thinking that for **this** Jew, it is worthwhile to expend effort, while for another {it is not}. The Torah states clearly, in the very **first** of the **Ten Commandments**, that Hashem provided an opening to aid the defense of a Jew who stumbled in “the incident of the Golden Calf” (an act of repudiation of **this** very statement — “I am Hashem, your L-rd”)!

All the much more so in our generation, when the vast majority of Jews who need to be drawn closer to Judaism are like “a baby who was taken captive by the enemy.”³⁴ Indeed, we must find a way to reach every Jew.

By strengthening every Jew’s connection to our Father in Heaven, we will collectively form the “great congregation”³⁵ to greet our righteous Mashiach. May this happen speedily in our days, literally.

Based on talks delivered on *Shabbos parshas Yisro*, 5730 (1970)

³³ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 8, sec. 8, commenting on the verse *Bereishis* 1:26.

³⁴ {In the original, “העכו”ם.” *Shabbos* 68b. Meaning, from a tender age, the person was raised with no Judaism.}

³⁵ *Yirmiyahu* 31:7.