



Likkutei Sichos

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Jewish Continuity

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1.

ESTABLISHING A COVENANT WITH UNBORN PEOPLE

At the beginning of our *parshah*, regarding the covenant {between Hashem and the Jewish people}, the verse says,¹ “Not with you alone do I forge this covenant and this oath, but with whoever is here, standing with us today before Hashem, our L-rd, and with whoever is not here with us today.”

Rashi quotes the words, “and with whoever is not here,” and explains, “and even with future generations.”

The commentators² explain that by his remarks, Rashi forestalls misinterpreting the phrase, “whoever is not here” as referring to Jews who lived in that generation but were absent from that gathering. The verse cannot be understood in this way, for the Torah has already said,³ “You are standing today, **all of you**... all the men of Israel,” meaning, **all** the Jews were present at that gathering. Therefore, Rashi says that “whoever is not here” refers to “future generations.”

This solution, however, is not altogether satisfactory:

After the verse says explicitly, “You are standing today, **all of you**,” it is self-understood (even without Rashi’s remarks) that “whoever is not here” refers to the people of the future generations. Thus, what novel idea does Rashi introduce with his interpretation, “future generations”?

Therefore, the commentators⁴ add:

Had Rashi not offered this interpretation, it would have been difficult to construe the phrase “whoever is not here” to refer to the future generations, because how is it possible to “forge a covenant with those who are non-existent”

¹ *Devarim* 29:13,14.

² *Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi, Gur Aryeh, Be'er Mayim Chaim, Sifsei Chachamim, Maskil LeDavid.*

³ {*Devarim* 29:9.}

⁴ *Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi.*

{i.e., people who have not yet been born}? Therefore, Rashi is compelled to say, “and even with future generations.” With his remarks, Rashi **introduces a novel idea** — that it was indeed possible to forge a covenant with people who are yet unborn, because: a) their souls were present at that time, and the covenant was made with their souls⁵; b) since, “a son is his father’s leg” {i.e., an extension of his father},⁶ {future} progeny were also included in the covenant with their forebears.

2.

SEVEN QUESTIONS ON THIS WAY OF UNDERSTANDING RASHI

However, we need to clarify:

a) As mentioned numerous times, Rashi wrote his commentary in a manner that even a novice student of Torah⁷ can understand the *pshat*⁸ in the verse based on Rashi’s words (without needing the clarifications and additions of other commentators). Thus, we must clarify in our context: A novice student of Scripture has not encountered the principle that “a son is his father’s leg” in any of the earlier *parshiyos*. Additionally, the student does not know whether the souls of the future generations were present at the forging of the covenant or not. Therefore, if Rashi wishes to introduce the novel idea that Hashem **could** forge a covenant even with unborn generations, he should have spelled out clearly **how** this was possible —

⁵ Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi. See *Be’er Mayim Chaim. Maskil LeDavid* writes, “The *Talmud* explicitly mentions this in *Shabbos*, ch. 22 (146a) ‘Even though they themselves were not present, their *mazal* {lit., “constellation,” a reference to their spiritual counterpart} were present...”

⁶ {Cf. *Eruvin* 70b. *Kesubos* 92a, Rashi s.v. “*kebaal*,” etal.} *Sifsei Chachamim*, ibid. *Gur Aryeh* writes, “One court cannot override the ruling of another court... therefore, they were certainly able to accept the covenant upon themselves...” {Meaning, since a later court is an extension of the earlier one, just a son is an extension of his father, in both cases, the latter cannot overlook the deeds or decisions of their predecessors.}

⁷ {“*Ben chamesh lemikra*,” in the Hebrew original, 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 5-year-old student would encounter in understanding the simple meaning of a verse. Additionally, Rashi never expects a student to know more than the plain meaning of the earlier verses in the Torah.}

⁸ {Simple meaning of the verse.}

whether because of the souls' existence or because "a son is his father's leg."

b) The question is even stronger: The student understands **on his own** that (the words, "whoever is not here," refers to) "future generations," (because the verse has already said, "You are standing today, **all of you**," as mentioned). Thus, what Rashi is innovating and explaining is (not that the phrase, "whoever is not here" refers to "future generations," but rather) **how** a covenant can be forged with the future generations. But Rashi's words, "and even with future generations," do not contain even a hint of this thought; so it turns out {according to the proposed explanation of Rashi} the **crux** of the answer is missing from his words!

c) The principle of forging a covenant with future generations (or similar to it) is found in earlier *parshiyos*. The Covenant Between the Parts⁹ concerns the **descendants** of Avraham, who would only live many generations later; likewise, a similar idea¹⁰ is found in *parshas Bechukosai*.¹¹ Additionally, the majority of the *mitzvos* that Hashem commanded through Moshe Rabbeinu are *mitzvos* that were commanded for all generations. On this basis, we could have asked the same question there: How could Hashem establish a covenant with Avraham *Avinu* or command *mitzvos* through Moshe Rabbeinu which would take effect on the Jewish people of the future generations, and so on? Nonetheless, in all these places Rashi does not address this question. Why, then, must he address it here in *parshas Nitzavim*?

d) The *Talmud*¹² writes that, "whoever is not here" refers to "(the future generations and) the converts who are destined to convert." Even according to *pshat*, converts are also included in the covenant, just as they are included in the general framework of all Torah and *mitzvos*. As the verse states at the beginning of the *parshah* (regarding that generation) "...

⁹ {*Bereishis* 15:9 ff.}

¹⁰ {That the covenant there between Hashem and the Jewish people, was also made with future generations.}

¹¹ See also Rashi, *parshas Ki Savo*, 28:69, "**Besides the covenant**: Namely, the curses that appear in *Vayikra* {26:14-39,} which were proclaimed at Mount Sinai."

¹² *Shavuos* 39a.

and your proselyte who is in the midst of your camp... for you to pass into the covenant...” But on the basis of the above, this is difficult to understand: The rationale, “a son is his father’s leg” does not apply to converts since they are not descendants of the ones present at the forging of the covenant.¹³ Additionally (according to *pshat*), the rationale that the souls of later generations were present at the time of the covenant does not apply. For a novice student of Scripture assumes that when a person converts, he receives, at that moment, a **new** soul.¹⁴ Thus, the question stands: How could a covenant be established with “converts who are destined to convert”?

e) On the other hand, logic dictates that this covenant was also made with the converts who were destined to convert. Thus, why does Rashi only write, “with future generations,” deviating from the wording of the *Talmud* and **omitting** converts? (Moreover, making a covenant with converts is a greater *chiddush*,¹⁵ since the two reasons mentioned above do not apply, as discussed.)¹⁶

f) The interpretation that, “whoever is not here,” refers to “future generations” is found in *Midrash Tanchuma*¹⁷ using the same wording (“future generations — דורות העתידים להיות”), but the *Babylonian*¹⁸ and *Jerusalem*¹⁹ *Talmuds* use different wording: “coming generations — דורות הבאים.”

We need to clarify: Although Rashi’s interpretation is supported by *pshat*, and not by the teachings of our Sages, or the like, since the substance of his explanation is identical to that of our Rabbis, seemingly he should have used the (shorter) wording of the *Babylonian* and *Jerusalem Talmuds*,

¹³ As the well-known responsum of *Rambam* to Rabbi Ovadya, the righteous convert (*Rambam*, *Shulzinger* print, end of vol. 1, sec. 19; *Shaalos U'tshuvos HaRambam*, Jerusalem version, 5720 {(1960)} vol. 2, sec. 293) that converts cannot trace their lineage back “to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, but rather to the One Who spoke and the world came to be.”

¹⁴ Cf. Rashi, *Bereishis* 12:5.

¹⁵ {Lit., “novelty,” or “innovation.”}

¹⁶ {All the more reason that Rashi should have mentioned this, and not omitted it.}

¹⁷ *Parshas Nitzavim*, sec 3.

¹⁸ *Shavuos* 39a.

¹⁹ *Sotah*, ch. 7, par. 1.

“coming,” instead of the wording of *Midrash Tanchuma*, “future generations...,” especially since the term, “coming,” is also a more common term than, “future.”²⁰ That is, since it is commonly acknowledged that Rashi’s wording is written with tremendous precision (to the extent that the nuances contain wondrous teachings), certainly Rashi says, “future generations,” (and not, “the coming generations,” as does the *Talmud*) intentionally, and this is meant to teach us something.

g) Rashi only introduces a novel interpretation regarding the phrase, “whoever is not here,” i.e., “future generations.” Thus, why does Rashi also quote {in his caption} the previous words, “and with whoever”? Not only does he quote the phrase, “and with whoever,” but he also explains it in his remarks: “And even with.” Seemingly, in doing so, Rashi teaches us nothing new about this verse.

3.

THERE IS NO QUESTION TO BEGIN WITH ACCORDING TO *PSHAT*

The explanation for all the above:

Rashi does not need to explain how a covenant can be made with future generations, because this is self-understood. **Hashem** is the one who made this covenant, as the verse says explicitly,²¹ “that **Hashem, your L-rd**, forges with you today.” Everyone understands that Hashem can also make a covenant with future generations.

[The fact that the verse (spoken by Moshe) uses the diction,²² “**I** forge this covenant,” does not mean that the covenant was between Moshe and the Jewish people. Rather, the covenant was between Hashem and the Jewish people

²⁰ {Rashi’s wording in the original Hebrew, “דורות העתידים להיות” – “generations who are destined to be in the future,” is uncommon.}

²¹ *Devarim* 29:11.

²² {*Devarim* 29:13.}

(including Moshe). With the words, “**I** forge...,” Moshe just meant that it was he who had made the preparations for the covenant.²³

(We can posit that just as making a covenant generally involved a physical action, as Rashi notes:²⁴ “{This was the method of those who forged covenants:} They would set up a partition on one side and a partition on the other, and the parties would pass between them.” Similarly, this covenant called for a physical action,²⁵ and it was Moshe who had carried it out.)²⁶

This fact is so obvious that Rashi does not even need to clarify that the earlier verse, “that **Hashem, your L-rd**, forges with you...,” does not contradict the later verse, “**I** forge this covenant.”]

This also explains why Rashi does not need to explain how Hashem instructed Moshe regarding the *mitzvos* for all {future} generations, and how the Covenant between the Parts (with Avraham) applied to later generations. For a novice student of Scripture takes for granted that Hashem is omnipotent, and He can also command future generations. Therefore (within *pshat*) even to begin with, there was no question to begin with, as discussed.

²³ Alternatively, according to *pshat*, the pronoun in the phrase, “I forge,” refers to Hashem. As is the case in several places in the book of *Devarim* {where Moshe speaks about something that Hashem will do, but uses the pronoun, “I”}: “See, I present before you today...,” *Devarim* 11:26; “I shall provide rain... I shall provide grass...,” *Devarim* 11:14,15; et al.

²⁴ *Devarim* 29:11.

²⁵ See *Ralbag*, *ibid*, who writes that {the Jewish people} passing between Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival was the activity {performed to forge the covenant}; see *Abarbenel*, *ibid*. {who disagrees.}

²⁶ Note that Rashi writes in the beginning of our *parshah*, “Moshe assembled the Jewish people in the presence of Hashem to bring them into His covenant.” Additionally, *Ramban*, *ibid*., who writes, “It is possible that Moshe made this covenant with them just as he had with the first covenant... {regarding which the verse says, that Moshe} took half the blood...”

4.

THE PRESENT PEOPLE EQUAL TO THOSE OF THE FUTURE

Rashi's intent is not to clarify the fact that the covenant was made even with future generations. Rather, Rashi intends to clarify **how** the covenant was established with "future generations":

The wording of the verse, "**Not with you alone** do I **forge this covenant** and this oath, **but** with whoever is here... and with whoever is not here..." implies that the covenant (not only obligates the future generations, but rather, the covenant) was established **directly** with "whoever is not here," in the **very** same manner as with "whoever is here."

This can be proven further: The verse says, "for you to pass into the covenant of Hashem, your L-rd," regarding those who "are **standing... all of you.**" Subsequently, the Torah repeats this and mentions these people again: "Not with you alone do I forge this covenant and this oath, but with **whoever is here....**" Ostensibly, this is redundant! Rather, Scripture means to emphasize the inclusion of "those who are not here" with "those who are here. In doing so, the Torah clarifies that the covenant with both categories of people was made in the same manner, **literally.**

For this reason, Rashi also quotes the phrase, "**and with whoever** (is not here)," and explains, "**and even with** (future generations)." By this remark, Rashi emphasizes that: a) this covenant was forged directly with the "future generations"; and, b) this was done in literally the same manner (as the term, "even {with}" {serves as a conjunction} linking and equating) {those who were not present} to those who were present.

5.

THIS IS THE *PSHAT*

On this basis, it emerges that not only does Rashi have no **need** to add that the souls of the future generations were present or that, “a son is his father’s leg,” but moreover, according to *pshat*, these explanations are precluded:

Were we to understand that the forging of the covenant with “whoever is not here” came about because, “a son is his father’s leg,” it would then turn out that the covenant was made in two different ways. The covenant with “whoever is here” was made with the people themselves, and the covenant with “whoever is not here” was not made with the people themselves, but rather, with the future generations in their capacity of “his father’s leg.”

Similarly, this distinction would apply if the covenant with “whoever is not here” was forged only with their **souls** (which were present at the forging of the covenant). Meaning, the covenant was forged with the bodies and souls of the people who were present, but only with the souls of the people who were not present.

However, according to Rashi’s understanding, the *pshat* of the verse, “**and even with** future generations” {i.e., in the very same manner as those who were alive} proves that the covenant was forged with the later generations *themselves* (and not in their capacity of {extensions of their forebears, i.e.,} “a son is his father’s leg”). This covenant was made with them in the very same manner as with “whoever is here,” namely, as souls in bodies.²⁷

[This point is especially germane based on Rashi’s earlier quoted explanation:²⁸ “This was the method of those who forged covenants: They would set up a partition on one side and a partition on the other, and the parties would

²⁷ The distinction between “with *whoever is here*, standing with us today before **Hashem, our L-rd**, and with *whoever is not here* with us today” is only perceived from our perspective; but from Hashem’s perspective — “before Hashem, our L-rd” — since He exists beyond time, they {“whoever is not here with us today”} also “are standing before Hashem, our L-rd.” Note the wording of *Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel* on this verse: “They all exist here **with us** today.” See *Kli Yakar* on *Devarim* 29:13 (beg.), regarding the explanation that this refers to souls.

²⁸ {*Devarim* 29:11.}

pass between. As it says,²⁹ ‘the calf which they cut in two, and they passed between its pieces.’” This indicates that all the people who “would pass between” would become one whole. Meaning, not only do they become one with the other party with whom they make the covenant (with Hashem), but additionally, all who are party to the covenant become one entity.]

6.

CONVERTS ARE PART OF THE GENERATIONS TO COME

On this basis, we can also appreciate why Rashi did not need to mention “the converts who are destined to convert.” According to Rashi, the covenant was with the very people themselves who were not present {i.e., future generations}. Thus, converts were included in the collective of the “future generations.” For obviously, the term “future generations” refers to **all** the Jewish people of each generation — of all the future generations, including converts. [However, this explanation is not tenable according to the interpretation that the covenant was possible with future generations because “a son is his father’s leg” (which does not apply to converts) or because the covenant was forged with the souls of future generation (which also does not include converts (according to *pshat*), as discussed in section 2, question d).]

Not only is there no need for Rashi to mention future converts, but on the contrary. Rashi cannot mention converts separately — and thereby **set them apart** as a distinct group — because that {covenant} would be different than this covenant, with those who were present, and in which (all the Jewish people were bound by the **same** covenant, and thus were) all are one unit.

Although previously,³⁰ the verse singled out converts as a distinct group, it did so {only} because that verse **specifies** all the categories of Jews, “your heads....” (There, Scripture does not discuss the covenant itself, but rather how the Jewish people were all “standing” (**in preparation**) “for you to pass into the

²⁹ *Yirmiyahu* 34:18.

³⁰ {*Devarim* 29:9.}

covenant.”) However, when Scripture discusses the covenant itself, “I forge this covenant...,” it does not make sense to distinguish between different classes of Jews.

7.

“COMING” GENERATIONS OR “FUTURE” GENERATIONS?

Based on all the above, we can also appreciate why Rashi says specifically “future” and not “coming”:

The definition of the term “coming” does not emphasize that what is to transpire has no correlation with, or connection to, something in the present. “Coming,” means that something will come **after (in continuation to, and related to)** the current (generation).

Thus, when we say “the coming generations,” although we refer to unborn generations, at the same time, they share a connection with the previous generation. That is, they will come as a continuation and as a result of the previous generation — they will be born from the generation that is already here now.

In other words, **this** generation “compels” the existence of the generation that follows. So it turns out that from the perspective of **this** generation, the future generation is already present, albeit in the time of this generation, not in **actuality**.

[This is akin to what *Rambam*³¹ writes:

The Sages did not use the expression “the World to Come” with the intention of implying that at present, this realm does not exist.... Rather, the World to Come exists and is present, as the verse says.... They only

³¹ *Mishneh Torah “Hilchos Teshuvah,”* ch. 8, par. 8.

called it the “World to Come” because that life comes to a person after living in this world in which we exist as souls enclothed in bodies.

Meaning, “the World to Come” even now “**exists** and is present,” but it is only called “(the World) **to Come**” because it is a consequence of a person’s life in this world, as a soul enclothed in a body.]

In contrast, the expression, “future generations” implies that now they are completely not present; not only in actuality are they not here, but moreover, their very existence still needs to **come to be**. In other words, they will not come as offspring (a result) of the previous generation.

Therefore, Rashi is extremely precise, and does not write, “the coming generations,” for this would lead us to believe that the covenant established with “whoever is not here” was brought about in light of their being, “the **coming** generations,” who come {into existence} as a result, and in continuation, of the current generation, similar to the interpretation that it was possible because “a son is his father’s leg.”

Furthermore {had Rashi used the expression, “the coming generations”}, his remarks would not be clear; and they may even be {construed as} **negating** converts, who are not included as part of **forthcoming** generations, because they are not a continuation and result of (the progeny of) the current generation.

Therefore, Rashi had to emphasize, “future generations.” This underscores that they will only **come into existence in the future**. Thus, it is understood that the covenant must have been forged with those (future) generations themselves, and not {merely} because they are a continuation and result of the current generation.

That converts are also included {in the covenant} is also clear, for they, too, are included in the term “future generations.”

8.

Rashi's words contain an amazing directive regarding a matter we have discussed many times.

A Jew can occasionally feel down; his *avodah* in Torah and *mitzvos* may lack vigor, especially when he goes out into the world to spread Judaism, etc., because³² “you are the least numerous of all the peoples.”

The solution: This only holds true when the Jewish people are measured quantitatively. Quantity is limited by time and space, and from this perspective, the Jewish people exist in a specific time and place, and {quantitatively} they are “the least numerous of all the peoples.”

But since for the Jewish people, spiritual metaphysical quality is of primary importance — Torah and *mitzvos* — when a Jew connects himself to Hashem through Torah and *mitzvos*, which transcend time and space, he is truly and practically joined with **all** the Jewish people **in the entire** world and over **all** generations.

Rashi emphasizes this idea by writing, “**And even** with future generations” {for as explained earlier, “even (with)” serves as a conjunction, linking and equating those who were *not* present to those who were. This linkage implies that they are} — just like the generation who “are standing today.” When Hashem forged the covenant with the Jewish people, all the Jewish people of **all** generations stood together. They were all **one unit**. This indicates that when a Jew connects himself (through a covenant) to Hashem **openly**, by actually fulfilling Torah and *mitzvos*, all the Jewish people of that generation and of **all** generations stand with him. They all stand together as one complete, integrated body.³³

³² *Devarim* 7:7.

³³ {In the original Hebrew, “קומה אחת שלימה.”} *Likkutei Torah*, beginning of our *parshah*; also *Maamarim* 5694, s.v. “*Zeh Hayom*,” at the beginning, “As it says, ‘You are all standing today...,’ referring both to souls as they are found Above..., and to souls below, which are en clothed in a body, etc.”

Then, the Jewish people are no longer “the least,” even in quantity. On the contrary! Even in quantity, the Jewish nation will be numerous, and so will have nothing to fear, even from the perspective of quantity – notwithstanding the greater number of non-Jews. The other way around! “Terror and dread will fall upon **them**.”³⁴

When “you are standing today, all of you,” “together, as one,”³⁵ i.e., when all Jews stand openly united, then, {we are assured} “you remain standing firmly upright, *nitzavim*; meaning, you will be vindicated in judgment.”³⁶

This ensures that on Rosh Hashanah, every single Jew will be written and sealed for good – for good that is both manifest and **revealed**.

- Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Nitzavim-Vayelech*, 5735 (1975)

³⁴ *Shemos* 15:16.

³⁵ *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of *parshas Nitzavim*.

³⁶ *Hayom Yom*, 25 *Elul*.