

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 29

Eikev, Sicha 1

The Context:

In his address to the Jewish people in the book of Devarim, Moshe recounts how he received the tablets from G-d and broke them when confronted with their idolatrous behavior:

9) When I ascended the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant which G-d made with you... 10) And G-d gave me two stone tablets, inscribed by the finger of G-d, and on them was [inscribed] according to all the words that G-d spoke with you on the mountain... 17) So I grasped the two tablets, cast them out of my two hands, and shattered them before your eyes. (Devarim 9:9-17)

In all the mentions of the tablets in this passage, the Hebrew word *luchos* is spelled deficiently (without the second *vav* appearing at the end of the word) which is the singular tense of the word instead of

the plural, even though the verse is speaking of two tablets.

Rashi comments on verse 10, "It is written *luchos*-לוחות to indicate that both of them were identical." The singular form illustrates that both tablets were of the same exact dimension and appearance.

The Questions:

The passage uses the deficient spelling numerous times from verse 9 through 17, yet Rashi does not comment after verse 9, but only after verse 10. Additionally, earlier in chapter 5, the Torah uses a deficient spelling in the verse, "G-d spoke these words to your entire assembly at the mountain... And He inscribed them on two stone tablets and gave them to me," yet Rashi does not comment on that spelling.

When does the deficient spelling impact the plain understanding of the narrative and warrant a comment from Rashi, and when does it not?

Preface to the Explanation:

When addressing deficient spellings, Rashi sometimes says, "it is missing a *vav*," or, "it is a deficient spelling." And sometimes, like

in our context, he simply restates the word, “It is written *luchos*-לוחות,” and then offers his commentary. What do these nuances suggest?

The Torah uses deficient spellings intentionally, to serve some purpose. However, it is possible that the meaning being conveyed is not relevant to the literal understanding of the verse, but to some deeper layer of interpretation. Rashi only comments on deficient spellings that, given the context, we would expect to be written correctly. These instances demand an explanation in the straightforward meaning of the verse.

For example: the first deficient spelling in the Torah appears when G-d creates the sun and moon, “And God said, “Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens...” (Bereishis 1:14) Rashi comments: “The word, “luminaries — מְאֹרֹת” is written without a “vav,” [thus, the word can be מְאֹרֹת meaning curses] because it [the fourth day] is a cursed day when children become ill with croup. This is what we learned (Ta’anith 27b): “on the fourth day [of the week], they [the men of the ma’amad] would fast so that children should not become ill with croup.”

In this context, the deficient spelling requires an explanation. The narrative means to convey the perfection and completion of G-d’s creation. Why, then, is the word “luminaries” spelled without the vav? Rashi answers that indeed the verse means to suggest that the day is deficient in

some way, in this case, because it is prone to illness.

When the deficient spelling is interpreted as alluding to a negative element, Rashi introduces the comment with “it is missing a vav,” or, “it is a deficient spelling,” which stresses the deficiency of the subject.

Sometimes, however, the deficient spelling does not convey a diminishment in the subject. For example, in the verse, “God created the great sea monsters... and God saw that it was good,” (Bereishis 1:21) Rashi comments: “The Leviathan and its mate... He slew the female and salted her away for the righteous in the future, for if they would propagate, the world could not exist because of them. הַיָּתִינִים is written. [i.e., the final “yud,” which denotes the plural, is missing, hence the implication that the Leviathan did not remain two, but that its number was reduced to one.]” In this case, the diminishment of the female leviathan alluded to in the spelling was not in itself negative — it allowed the world to exist, and it was preserved for the righteous in the future. Thus, Rashi does not say “it is spelled deficiently,” he merely states how it was spelled, “ הַיָּתִינִים is written.” Thus, Rashi uses that more neutral introduction when the deficient spelling does not convey a diminishment in the subject of the verse.

The Explanation:

We can now understand why Rashi did not comment on earlier deficient spellings of the tablets — a deficient spelling on its own does not require explanation in the plain sense of the verse. In our context, however,

the Torah means to emphasize how depraved the Jewish people's sin was, by contrasting how precious the tablets were that Moshe was compelled to shatter. Thus Moshe reiterates several times that these tablets were the handiwork of G-d Himself. In this context, we would expect the word tablets to be spelled "fully", with the second vav, to highlight the fullness of the tablets.

Rashi therefore explains that the deficient spelling actually does allude to the tablet's Divine craftsmanship. The fact that both tablets were hewn to exactly the same size, despite the fact that each one had a different amount of text engraved on it, points to its miraculous Divine author. Thus, Rashi introduces his comment not with the

negative tone, "it is spelled deficiently," but with the neutral, "It is written *luchos*-לוחות."

This also explains why Rashi did not comment on verse 9, but only on verse 10. In verse 9 Moshe tells of how he ascended to Heaven to receive the tablets. In Heaven, it is expected that the tablets exude Divinity. Moshe wanted to convey to the people that even the tablets as they descended to this world in his hands — "And G-d gave me two stone tablets (v. 10)" — were still Divine creations, "that both of them were identical." Thus Moshe's intended rebuke was to remind the people that they had caused him to break these Divine creations that descended to earth.
