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Your Ring and Seal

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1.

QUESTIONS ON RASHI

From the verse,¹ “He (Yehudah) asked, ‘What is the security that I should give you?’ she (Tamar) replied, ‘חֲתָמְךָ וּפְתִילְךָ וּמַטְּךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְךָ — your signet, your robe, and the staff that is in your hand,’” Rashi quotes {in his caption} the words “חֲתָמְךָ וּפְתִילְךָ,” and translates {into Aramaic}, quoting the Targum: “עֲזָרְתְּךָ וְשׂוּשְׁפָךָ — your ring and your robe.” Rashi goes on to explain: “The ring that you sign with, and your robe with which you cover yourself.”

We need to clarify:

a) Why does Rashi have to understand the word “חֲתָמְךָ” differently than its simple translation (your signet), and instead, use the translation of *Targum Onkelos*, “your ring?”

b) A similar difficulty relates to Rashi’s interpretation of the word “פְּתִילְךָ” (which he translates like Targum, “your robe... your robe that you attire yourself with”). In Scripture, we don’t find that “פְּתִיל” means robe. Rather, when the word “פְּתִיל” is used, it means a thread or a cord!²

c) According to Rashi’s commentary on the Torah we must say that the word “פְּתִיל” doesn’t need any explanation at all (like the **vast** majority of words in Scripture, which Rashi does **not** explain), which is why Rashi doesn’t translate the word “פְּתִיל” in the Torah.³

d) Even if we find a proof that פְּתִיל in our *parshah* cannot mean “thread” (or “cord”) like in other places, Rashi should have translated “פְּתִילְךָ” (in our verse) like Rashbam does; “פְּתִילְךָ — belt” (since a belt is like a cord and a thread).

¹ Bereishis 38:18.

² Yechezkel 40:3.

³ Shemos 28:28; Bamidbar 15:38.

e) Why does Rashi need to give the reason (after quoting the wording of the Targum): “(The ring) that you sign with (and your robe) with which you cover yourself”?

2.

CLOAK IS REALLY TZITZIS

Some commentaries⁴ explain that by adding “(the ring) that you sign with (and your robe) with which you cover yourself,” Rashi addresses the following question: How do the words “חֲתָמְךָ וּפְתִילֶיךָ” translate as “your ring and your robe”? Rashi explains: “The ring that you **sign** with,” and therefore, your ring is called “your signet.” By using the words, “your robe with which you cover yourself,” Rashi alludes to the verse,⁵ “You shall make yourself twisted threads {on the four corners of your garment} with which you **cover yourself**.” (“Twisted threads” — tzitzis and פְּתִילִים — are recorded {in the Torah} together with the clause, “your garment [robe] with which you cover yourself.”) Therefore, a robe is also called “פְּתִילֶיךָ” because of its tzitzis and threads.

With this explanation, the commentaries⁶ address the following difficulty raised by Ramban: “It cannot be correct that he gave her his robe and departed naked,” because here we are talking about a separate article of clothing which he wore (besides his usual clothing) in order to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzis.

Nonetheless, all this only explains how “חֲתָמְךָ וּפְתִילֶיךָ” **can** mean “your ring and your robe.” However: (a) It doesn’t **prove** the necessity, according to *pshat*, to interpret the word as such (and **not** like its usual straightforward meaning, as signet and belt,⁷ as mentioned above). (b) According to this explanation, **in any case**, we are left with a greater difficulty: Why does the Torah **say**, “Your signet and your thread,” but **mean**, your ring and robe {understanding that it means

⁴ *Reem and Sifsei Chachamim*.

⁵ *Devarim* 22:12.

⁶ *Reem and Gur Aryeh* on this verse.

⁷ Which would also answer Ramban’s question: how could Yehudah have given his clothing to Tamar? – He only gave her his belt.

ring, etc.}, on the grounds that it was a ring with which a person signs, etc. It could have said simply and explicitly, “Your ring and your robe” (terms that are used many times throughout Torah).⁸ (c) On this basis, the verse should have used the word “גְּדָלִים” to allude to his {outer} robe {with the tzitzis}, because that is what tzitzis are called in the verse that is hinted at: “גְּדָלִים {threads}... you cover yourself.” (d) The major problem is that a novice student of Torah⁹ has not yet learned anything at all about the mitzvah of tzitzis. Even if we say that he at least **knows** about tzitzis from Rashi’s commentary¹⁰ where Rashi mentions that Jews have a mitzvah comprising “a tallis with tzitzis,” Rashi, though, doesn’t mention there the matter of a “פְּתִיל,” and here, Rashi doesn’t mention the idea of tzitzis. So why would a novice student think to connect these two comments of Rashi? Even if we say that Rashi didn’t need to mention it {the connection between “פְּתִיל” and tzitzis} because the student himself wears tzitzis (and says in the reading of the Shema {concerning tzitzis}, “פְּתִיל תְּכַלֵּת”), Rashi should have cited the verse “גְּדָלִים — threads... with which **you cover** yourself” {which the student didn’t yet learn}.

3.

THE ANSWER IS IN THE STORY

The explanation: Rashi has proof that “הַתְּמָךְ” is not to be understood simply (as “your signet”) based on the narrative of our *parshah*. Yehudah went to Timnah (as the verse says)¹¹ “to shear his sheep,” a type of work that would not require the usage of a signet at all.¹² Therefore, it is difficult to define “הַתְּמָךְ” as “your signet” because simply: (a) Why would Yehudah take his signet for no

⁸ “*Simlah* — cloak” is used **earlier**: *Bereishis* 9:23; 35:2; 37:34.

⁹ {“*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 the student to know more than the plain meaning of the earlier verses in the Torah.}

¹⁰ *Bereishis* 9:23.

¹¹ *Bereishis* 38:13.

¹² From a straightforward reading, the verse seems to indicate it was a signet used for stamping documents and letters, and the like.

reason? (b) How did Tamar know he had his signet with him for her to say to him with certainty, and as the first thing, he should give her, “your signet”?

Therefore, Rashi translates (like the Targum): “your ring” (that has a signet in it), and it is common to wear a ring on one’s finger. It would not have been surprising for Yehudah to be wearing it when going “to shear his sheep.”

Still, explanation is needed: Understandably, when Tamar wanted to take “security” from Yehudah, she chose items: (a) that were dear to him (so Yehudah would figure out why she chose them); (b) which were connected to him **personally** (in order make her point with them when she later pleaded: “Please notice to whom these items belong”).¹³

For this reason, we must say that when she asked Yehudah for “חֲטָטְךָ,” she didn’t just want his ring, because a ring’s value would not ensure that Yehudah **would need** to retrieve it, and it is not “personal” enough. Instead, she asked for — and Rashi emphasizes this by adding, “the ring that **you** sign with” — the ring that **Yehudah** (“you”) use to **sign** with, and he certainly would not relinquish it to her.¹⁴

On this basis, we can also understand the reason the ring **here** is called “חֲטָטְךָ — your signet” (and not “טַבַּעְתְּךָ — your ring”), because by using the word “חֲטָטְךָ” specifically, we understand Tamar’s intention when asking Yehudah for his ring.

¹³ Bereishis 38:25.

¹⁴ Especially since he suspected her of being a harlot (verse 15).

4.

NO ORDINARY CLOAK

Accordingly, it is also clear why Rashi cannot say that “פָּתִילֶיךָ” here means “belt,” because a belt is of little value, and Yehudah’s belt would have had no personal connection to Yehudah.

Therefore, Rashi concludes that here, “פָּתִילֶיךָ” means “your robe,” and he immediately adds that this is no regular robe, but, “your robe, that **you** attire yourself with.” The robe that you, **Yehudah**, yourself, attire yourself with. Important people wear distinguished clothing, like¹⁵ “the {immaculately} clean {or much coveted} garments of Esav, her elder son,” and,¹⁶ “the servant took out... clothing, and gave them to Rivkah.” Because of Yehudah’s prominence, being the leader of the brothers,¹⁷ he also wore a special robe; therefore, Tamar was confident that Yehudah would certainly return for **this** robe (“that **you** attire yourself with”).

[Similar to the word “מַטְּךָ — your staff,” regarding which the verse itself adds, “**which is in your hand**” in order to emphasize that Tamar asked (not just for any cane, but) for **Yehudah’s** staff specifically — the one which expressed Yehudah’s greatness.]¹⁸

Considering this explanation, we can also resolve the difficulty raised by Ramban how Yehudah could have left his clothing with Tamar. It wasn’t the only article of clothing that Yehudah was wearing; rather, it was a special robe that he wore as a sign of his distinction.

¹⁵ Bereishis 27:15.

¹⁶ Bereishis 24:53.

¹⁷ Based on Bereishis 37:26.

¹⁸ See Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachya and *Seforno* on the verse.

5.

CONNECTED TO HIS CLOAK

The answer to the question (raised in Section 1, above) how the word “פְּתִילָה” could mean “robe,” can be resolved based on Rashi’s commentary in an **earlier parshah**.

On the verse,¹⁹ “with divine bonds I have been joined — וּגְפֻתֵי לִּי,” Rashi²⁰ says that “פְּתִילָה” connotes “connection.” Therefore, a robe with which a person **clothes himself** is called a “פְּתִילָה” because he is close to and connected to it.

Just like “הַתְּמָרָה” here is precise, as discussed, the same applies to the word “פְּתִילָה” and for the same reason. The word “פְּתִילָה” (an expression meaning connection) helps to explain why Tamar requested Yehudah’s robe — a garment with which he had a connection to, was covered with, and also had a special association with **Yehudah**, with his prominence as **Yehudah**.

6.

A DEEPER LOOK

From the “wine of Torah”²¹ in Rashi’s commentary:

Previously, we mentioned two aspects of “the ring that you sign with”:

- a) On one hand, as security, Tamar wanted (not the **ring**, since it wasn’t important or linked with **Yehudah**, but rather) its **signet**, because it showed the authority and prominence of Yehudah.

¹⁹ Bereishis 30:8.

²⁰ Rashi quotes this interpretation from Menachem ben Saruk, and places it first, before his own interpretation, conveying that it is the primary interpretation according to *pshat* — the plain meaning of Scripture.

²¹ {The deeper ideas in Torah, alluded to in Rashi’s commentary.}

b) On the other hand, the signet was (not something on its own, but) a **part** of the **ring**.

Both aspects fit with the idea of a “ring that has a signet in it” as it is explained in the deeper teachings of Torah, and is connected with the general explanation (in the deeper teachings of Torah) why Tamar asked Yehudah specifically for these three things, “חֶמְדָּךָ וּפְתִילֶיךָ וּמַטְּךָ,” as will be explained.

7.

SHABBOS IS HASHEM’S SIGNET

On the verse,²² “Hashem completed, on the seventh day, His work which he had done,” the Midrash comments:²³

The Sages illustrated this idea with an analogy of a king who had a ring made for him. What was it missing? A signet. So, too, {Hashem made the entire world in six days;} What was the world missing? Shabbos.

In other words, without Shabbos, the world is like a “ring” (without a signet) and Shabbos is like a ring’s “signet.”

The explanation:²⁴ “טַבְעָה — ring” is etymologically related to “nature — טֶבַע.” The natural conduct of the world leaves room for the possibility of overlooking that the world has a Master — that it belongs to Hashem.

Shabbos is a signet — a testimony and a remembrance to the creation of the world. As *Sefer Hachinuch* says,²⁵ Shabbos instills “in our hearts faith in the creation of the world.” Consequently, we also know that the world is renewed every day **constantly**, as the Alter Rebbe explains at length.²⁶

²² Bereishis 2:2.

²³ Bereishis Rabbah 10:9.

²⁴ See *Or HaTorah*, “Bereishis” (vol. 3), 511a; “Ki Sisa,” pp. 1957-8; the *Maamar “Es Shabsosai”* 5700, sec. 1.

²⁵ *Sefer HaChinuch*, mitzvah 31, 32.

²⁶ *Tanya*, beg. of “*Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah*.”

Concerning the Divine names: *Elokim* has the numerical value of the word “הַטָּבַע — nature,”²⁷ and *Havayah*²⁸ is *Hayah*, *Hoveh*, *Veyihiyeh* — was, is, and will be, as one.²⁹ “הַתָּמָּ — signet” refers to the revelation of the name ***Havayah***, (as our Sages say:³⁰ “The seal of Hashem is **truth**, and as it says,³¹ ‘And the truth of ***Havayah*** is forever.’”) *Havayah* is the spiritual source of miracles, and miracles express the **truth** of *Havayah*; they openly reveal how Hashem is completely beyond the world.

We can relate the above quality of a signet to the narrative of Yehudah and Tamar. It was specifically the signet that could serve as an effective form of security for Tamar, because the ring, on its **own**, had no discernible connection with its owner, Yehudah. The signet, however, was clearly seen to have belonged to **Yehudah**.

As discussed, this is also the difference between the six days of Creation and Shabbos:

During the six days of Creation, the world was created with the Divine name *Elokim*, the natural order. Although the vivification derives from the name *Havayah* (*Havayah* is etymologically related to the word *mehaveh* — vivify),³² the vivification occurs as a result of the name *Havayah* illuminating and working through the name *Elokim*. On Shabbos, however, the “Signet of Hashem — the truth” was added to the mix of Creation — “the truth of ***Havayah*** is forever”: The name *Havayah*, *per se*, is drawn into the world.

This also fits with the difference between “signet” and “ring” with respect to the³³ *sefiros*.³⁴ “Signet” refers to the *sefirah* of *yesod*,³⁵ and “ring” refers to the

²⁷ *Pardes, Shaar 12*, ch. 2; *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah*,” ch. 6.

²⁸ {*Havayah* and *Elokim* — *Havayah*, Hashem’s four-letter name (the Tetragrammaton) represents G-dliness itself, which transcends worlds. *Elokim* represents the level of G-dliness that is limited and clothed within this world (nature).}

²⁹ *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 257b; *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah*,” ch. 7.

³⁰ *Shabbos 55a*.

³¹ *Tehillim 117:2*.

³² See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 257b; *Pardes, Shaar 1*, ch. 9; *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah*,” ch. 4.

³³ *Or HaTorah*, “*Bereishis*.”

³⁴ {*Sefiros* are Divine emanations. There are ten *sefiros*, which are various phases in the manifestation of Divinity categorized by intellectual and emotional faculties.}

³⁵ {Lit., “foundation,” the sixth of the seven Divine *middos*, or emotional attributes.}

sefirah of *malchus*.³⁶ The *sefirah* of *malchus* is the spiritual source of nature, while *yesod* (*zeir anpin*)³⁷ is the source of miracles.

8.

CONNECTING SHABBOS TO THE WEEK

We said above that a signet is not a separate object but a part of the ring. (Consequently, through the signet, it was evident that the **ring** also belonged to Yehudah.) Similarly, Shabbos (the miraculous) is not distinct from the six days of Creation (the natural order), but it is the **seventh** day following the six days. Shabbos instills perfection **in** Creation, as our Sages say,³⁸ “What was **the world** missing? Shabbos.” Meaning, the wholesomeness of **nature itself** depends upon an effusion from a plane that surpasses nature — the name of *Havayah*, per se, altogether removed from the world.

The same also applies to a person’s *avodas*³⁹ Hashem:

There are two ways to serve Hashem: (a) An *avodah* that is rational (through which a person can draw down a G-dly *light*⁴⁰ that is relative to Creation); and (b) the *avodah* of self-sacrifice, which is beyond rationale (through which a person can draw down the G-dly light that is beyond Creation, which expresses itself in miracles).

The *avodah* based on rationale is perfected specifically when it is also infused with the *avodah* of self sacrifice, which is beyond rationale.

³⁶ {*Malchus* — Lit., “kingship,” is the lowest level of the *sefiros* of each spiritual world; it acts as a transitory link to a lower world.}

³⁷ {The six emotional *sefiros* from *chesed* through *yesod*.}

³⁸ {*Bereishis Rabbah* ch.10, sec. 9.}

³⁹ {*Avodah* denotes a person’s divine service.}

⁴⁰ {I.e., revelation.}

9.

CONNECTIONS BRING TO PERFECTION

The above explanation (in Sections 7 and 8) about the signet and the ring — that they reflect a combination of the miraculous (*yesod*) and nature (*malchus*) — is connected with the deeper reason why Tamar requested these three things: “הַתְּמָה וּפְתִילָה וּמִטָּה.”

It says in {kabbalistic} literature⁴¹ that “Tamar” refers to the level of *malchus*. Therefore, she asked for the three things — “הַתְּמָה וּפְתִילָה וּמִטָּה” — because they correspond to the three *sefiros*: *yesod* (הַתְּמָה), *netzach* (פְּתִילָה), and *hod* (מִטָּה).⁴² By making this request, she wanted to combine the *sefiros* that are above *malchus* with the *sefirah* of *malchus* — in the words of Chassidus, “the building of *malchus*.”

Therefore, from the “incident of Yehudah and Tamar” came the birth of “Peretz,” who was the progenitor of the kingdom of the House of David,⁴³ and ultimately Moshiach.⁴⁴ This means that the concept of “the building of *malchus*,” which will culminate in the Future Era, all began with Yehudah and Tamar.

Possibly, this is the deeper reason Rashi defined “הַתְּמָה” as a “**ring**” with a signet, because the idea of a signet and a ring is, as we said above, the combination of *yesod* with *malchus*. It turns out that the idea of a signet and a ring fits with the general theme of the incident of Yehudah and Tamar — the building of *malchus* — drawing the signet (*yesod*) **into** the ring (*malchus*).

⁴¹ *Likkutei Torah of the Arizal*, “Vayeishev.”

⁴² *Zohar*, vol. 3, 72a.

⁴³ End of *Megillas Rus*.

⁴⁴ See Rashi on *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 85, sec. 14.

10.

MOSHIACH BEGAN WITH THIS MARRIAGE

Accordingly, we can also explain what our Rabbis, the *Baalei Tosafos*,⁴⁵ say (about “הָתָּהָרָה”) — that “she became betrothed with the ring.” By giving Tamar his signet (ring), Yehudah betrothed her [and this is the source for the custom to betroth using a ring].⁴⁶

Seemingly, we need to clarify what the connection is between betrothal and a ring (so much so that it is customary to betroth with a ring). Also, since the Torah alluded to the idea of betrothal with a ring specifically in the context of the betrothal of Yehudah and Tamar, there must be a connection.

The explanation: As known,⁴⁷ the manifestation of the power of the infinite within the world is echoed in the idea of marriage, which lays the foundation of an everlasting house — something infinite. This means that marriage is analogous to the combination of the signet (miracle) with the ring, טַבַּעַת, (nature, טָבַעַת): the revelation of the power of the **infinite** within the world **itself**.

Since the true and complete “building of *malchus*” — the combination of the infinite with the world (miracle and nature, *yesod* [*zeir anpin*] and *malchus*) which will occur when Moshiach comes — began with the betrothal of Yehudah and Tamar, as discussed, therefore, the idea of betrothal with a ring is specifically alluded to in their story.

—Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Vayeishev*, 5733 (1972) and 5715 (1954)

⁴⁵ *Hadar Zekeinim; Moshav Zekeinim al HaTorah.*

⁴⁶ See *Rema, Shulchan Aruch, “Even HaEzer,”* beg. of ch. 27.

⁴⁷ See *Likkutei Torah, “Shir Hashirim,”* 40a.