



Likkutei Sichos

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Still Standing

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1.

WHAT DOES RASHI ADD?

On the words,¹ “You are standing² (today),”³ Rashi remarks, “This teaches us that Moshe assembled them {the Jewish people} before Hashem on the day of his death, to bring them into the covenant.”

It is unclear what novel idea Rashi contributes by saying, “This teaches us that Moshe assembled them... to bring them into the covenant,” when the Torah says so clearly,⁴ “You are all standing today... **that you may pass into the covenant** of Hashem, your L-rd”?

Commentators⁵ explain that Rashi’s *chiddush*⁶ in his remarks, “this teaches us...” is not {to teach us that Moshe assembled the Jews in order} “to bring them into the covenant,” since the Torah says so clearly. Rashi’s *chiddush* is in the clause, “Moshe assembled them...”: The Torah only says “You are standing,” so perhaps Moshe did not assemble them, but rather, they remained in their places (encamped surrounding {the *Mishkan* and} the ark). To forestall this misunderstanding, Rashi adds, “This teaches us that Moshe assembled them... to bring them into the covenant.” Rashi is compelled to say that Moshe “assembled them,” because {his intent was} “to bring them into **the covenant**”; and bringing them into the covenant was accomplished by **passing**, for which there must first be an assembly.

But explaining Rashi this way is difficult, because if so:

a) When quoting from the verse, Rashi should have also included the (later) words, “that you may pass into the covenant,” which are the basis for his explanation.

¹ {*Devarim* 29:9.}

² {“*Nitzavim*.”}

³ In many printed versions, Rashi only quotes “You are standing”; but in most manuscript versions it is “You are standing today.”

⁴ {*Devarim* 29:9-11.}

⁵ See *Shach*. It seems that *Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi* explains similarly; see beg. of *Gur Aryeh* on this verse.

⁶ {A novel idea. Rashi does not state the obvious in his commentary; he offers novel solutions to difficulties in the plain reading of the text.}

b) Rashi should not have used the wording “to bring them into {the covenant}” but rather “**to pass them into** the covenant” (similar to the Torah’s wording), since that is the proof that “he assembled them.”

c) Rashi’s wording, “This teaches us that Moshe assembled them... to bring them into the covenant,” implies that Rashi’s *chiddush* concerns {as Rashi says}, “**to bring them into the covenant**” (and not the “assembly,” *per se*, which were this the case would mean that the phrase “to bring them into the covenant” was meant only to prove that Moshe had assembled them).

2.

ADDITIONAL EXPLANATIONS

After explaining the verses up until, and including, the verse,⁷ “In order to establish you this day as His people, and that He will be your L-rd,” Rashi offers two more explanations of this {opening} verse:

*Midrash Aggadah*⁸ says:⁹ Why is *parshas Nitzavim* juxtaposed to the curses {in the previous *parshah*}? Because the Jewish people heard a hundred {minus two¹⁰} curses.... Moshe began to appease them: “You are standing today... indeed, you still exist before Hashem.”

Then Rashi interprets the word “today” (according to this explanation) to mean “Just as this day exists...,” and continues:

Another explanation: {Moshe said,} “You are standing,” because the Jews were now transitioning from one leader to the next, from Moshe

⁷ {Ibid., 12.}

⁸ {This is a homiletic explanation.}

⁹ See *Tanchuma*, beg. of *parshas Nitzavim*.

¹⁰ {The *tochachah* in *parshas Ki Savo* — a passage of warning and rebuke, urging the Jews to observe the Torah — contains 98 curses.}

to Yehoshua, he therefore made a standing assembly of them, in order to encourage them....

We need to clarify:

a) What difficulty in the first explanation compelled Rashi to offer a second explanation, and moreover, a “*Midrash Aggadah*” (especially since Rashi himself emphasizes regarding his first explanation, that “Until here, I have explained this passage according to its **plain** meaning,”¹¹ and regarding his second explanation, he emphasizes {that it is a} “***Midrash Aggadah.***” Subsequently, not content with the second explanation either, Rashi adds a third explanation: “Another explanation: ‘You...’”

On the other hand, as discussed many times, the first explanation (that Rashi offers, in all instances) is the primary one, and the second explanation is more in line with *pshat*¹² than the third explanation. So we must clarify: {In this case,} how is the third explanation less in line with *pshat* than the second explanation?

b) By Rashi offering the “*Midrash Aggadah,*” and then the third explanation, “another explanation,” only later when the Torah says “in order to establish you...,” and not immediately at the beginning of the *parshah* in his remarks on the first verse, “you are standing today...,” Rashi indicates that his two other explanations {given in his commentary on v. 12} relate not only to the words “you are standing today...,”¹³ but also to all the subsequent verses, until “in order to establish you...”¹⁴ As Rashi says regarding this verse,¹⁵ “**Until here**, I have explained **this passage** according to *pshat*, but *Midrash Aggadah* says...,” implying that the “*Midrash Aggadah*” is also a second explanation for the other verses up to this point. Yet Rashi

¹¹ {Rashi’s commentary on *Devarim* 29:12.}

¹² {The plain, straightforward meaning of Scripture.}

¹³ {Verse 9.}

¹⁴ {Verse 12.}

¹⁵ {Verse 12.}

does not spell out in detail how the “*Midrash Aggadah*” and the “other explanation” can be applied to all of the other verses. It is unclear: Since the meaning of all the verses now changes, why does Rashi only explain (according to the “*Midrash Aggadah*”) the word “*today* — just as this day exists...”?

3.

COVENANT BEFORE CROSSING

The explanation: Rashi says, “This teaches us that Moshe assembled them... to bring them into the covenant,” rather than the wording of the verse, “to pass them into the covenant.” This implies that Rashi’s intent is not to explain Moshe’s words, “You are all standing here... that you may pass into the covenant” (because this is spelled out clearly in the verse). Rather, Rashi derives a different *chiddush* from the clause “you are standing today.”

Simply speaking, the {beginning of our} *parshah*, “You are **all** standing here today,” continues the subject of the previous *parshah*’s conclusion:¹⁶ “Moshe called **all** the Jewish people and said to them ‘You have seen....’”¹⁷ [Because if this was a separate call and a separate assembly, the beginning of our *parshah* should have also said that “Moshe called all of the Jewish people,” or the like.]

We would assume {without Rashi’s explanation} that the reason why “Moshe called all the Jewish people” — the assembly of all the Jews at the conclusion of *parshas Ki Savo* — was in order to tell them what the Torah says immediately afterwards in that *parshah*:¹⁸ “He said to them, ‘You have seen... the great trials... you shall observe the words of this covenant and fulfill them....’” That was the purpose of the assembly, and only as a follow-up, did Moshe say “You are standing today...”

¹⁶ {*Devarim* 29:1.}

¹⁷ {Meaning, this was a continuous event; Moshe called the people once, and they were still present.}

¹⁸ {*Devarim* 29:1-8.}

To address this {potential misconception}, Rashi introduces a *chiddush*: “this teaches us.” — we learn from the clause, “You are standing today” that “Moshe assembled them **before Hashem... to bring them into the covenant.**” The purpose of this assembly was not to impart the message (at the end of *Ki Savo*), but “Moshe assembled them before Hashem... {in order} to bring them into the covenant.”

The proof {of this explanation}:

a) The clause “you are standing” seems to be out of place, since the Torah already said earlier that “Moshe called **all** the Jewish people.” Meaning, all the Jews were already present, so Moshe should have started {his statement at the end of *Ki Savo*} with this {“you are standing”}. And if for whatever reason ({e.g.} to emphasize that this {covenant} is “before Hashem,” etc.) it does have to be said {specifically here}, then the Torah should have said, “**and**¹⁹ you are standing — ואתם נצבים,” the extra letter *vav*²⁰ implying {that the opening words of our *parshah* are} a continuation of, “You have seen... then you arrived...” Thus, we must say that this wording “teaches us” something.

b) The verse goes on to say, “You are all standing today **before Hashem your L-rd.**” Seemingly, they were “standing before Moshe” in order to hear what he was telling them.

c) “Today” — meaning, “the day of his death.” [For at the end of *parshas Ki Savo* Moshe says,²¹ “Hashem has not given you a heart to know... until this day,” and Rashi remarks that this was said when Moshe gave the Torah scroll to the tribe of Levi on the day of his death, as described in *parshas Vayelech*; and *parshas Vayelech* is a continuation of *parshas Nitzavim*.] Were we to interpret that the

¹⁹ {Emphasis added.}

²⁰ {Meaning “and.”}

²¹ Ibid., 29:3.

purpose of the assembly was for Moshe to say “You have seen all that Hashem did... the great trials... you shall fulfill them...” — encouragement to observe Torah and *mitzvos* — why did he wait until the day of his death, rather than saying it earlier? (After all, Moshe began recounting *Mishneh Torah*²² “in the eleventh month on the first of the month.”²³)

All of the above compels us to say that the purpose of the assembly (at the end of *Ki Savo*) {when} “Moshe called all the Jewish people,” was in order to bring them into the covenant (in our *parshah*). The covenant was applicable (primarily) after the Jews crossed the Jordan River (as Rashi notes later in our *parshah*²⁴), therefore, Moshe postponed it until “the day of his death,” as close as possible to when the Jews would cross the Jordan.

4.

CHILDREN AND INTRODUCTIONS

Based on the above — that “You are standing today...” is a continuation of Moshe’s previous call “to all of the Jewish people,” while at the same time the purpose of the assembly was {to gather them} “before Hashem... to bring them into the covenant,” and what Moshe said at the end of *parshas Ki Savo* was **like** a subtopic,²⁵ merely an introduction for the covenant — we can also clarify two additional details in the *pshat* of these verses, which Rashi does **not** address:

a) The Torah here mentions “your {young} children.” Seemingly, nowhere does Torah mention that Moshe also included the “children” when he assembled all the Jews (for whatever purpose the assembly may have been). Furthermore, later on, in *parshas Vayelech*, when the Torah says,²⁶ “Assemble the people: the men, the women, **and**

²² {The Book of *Devarim*.}

²³ *Devarim* 1:3.

²⁴ *Devarim* 29:28.

²⁵ {In the Yiddish original, “*al derech vee a maamar ha’muzgar.*”}

²⁶ *Devarim* 31:12.

the {young} children,” Rashi comments, and remarks: “**Why did they come?** So that a reward would be given to those who bring them.” (It is obvious that (according to Rashi) this is not the reason {that the children were included} in our *parshah*, for if so, Rashi should have commented the first time {children are mentioned} — **here** — rather than relying on his explanation in a **later parshah**).

Although in the context of our *parshah*, the children did have to participate in the assembly in order to be included in the covenant — which was for everyone — since “You are standing today” refers to the assembly recorded at the end of *Ki Savo*, the children were already present at the beginning of the assembly, when Moshe said, “You have seen... the great trials... you shall observe the words of this covenant and fulfill them...” But that {assembly} was irrelevant to children, since they are not obligated to perform *mitzvos*.

But based on the above explanation of Rashi, that the purpose of “Moshe called” was {to gather them} “before Hashem... **to bring them into the covenant,**” it is clear why the children were brought at the beginning of the assembly, because the purpose of the assembly was to bring all those gathered into the covenant, while Moshe’s words, “you have seen...,” were merely a preface.

b) Before any obligation can be placed upon a person, not to mention an oath, etc., prefatory explanations must be given.²⁷ One cannot simply assign an obligation, an oath, etc. {without explanation}.

In our case {the assembly described by the verse} “you are standing,” was in order “that you may pass into the covenant of Hashem, your L-rd and his oath...,” a covenant and an oath for all Jews — comprising various groups within the Jewish people. Since this was such a serious matter, why didn’t Moshe offer a prefatory explanation? [This question {as to why there was no prefatory

²⁷ {Explaining the background of the obligation or oath, and preparing the person intellectually and emotionally, so that he should understand its significance and gravity.}

remarks} is germane if we say that “Moshe called all the Jewish people” for the purpose of telling them, “you have seen...” and **by default**, then and there {the other event transpired, i.e.,} “that you may pass into the covenant of Hashem, your L-rd” {also} took place; and of course this question is germane were we to say that “you are standing” in our *parshah* entailed a separate assembly.]

But according to Rashi — according to whom the objective was “Moshe assembled them before Hashem... {in order} to bring them into the covenant” — everything is understood, since according to his explanation, the verse “you have seen... the great trials...” was indeed the explanation and preface for (the end-result), “that you may pass into the covenant of Hashem, your L-rd....”

5.

TODAY

This explanation, however, does not clarify the **somewhat** unusual usage of the word “*nitzavim*” {for “standing”}. Based on the above — that this wording of the verse indicates that “Moshe assembled them... to bring them into the covenant” — why is the atypical term “*nitzavim*” used, rather than “*omdim*” {the conventional way of saying “standing”}, which is far more common in the Torah — and is used in this **same dialogue** (below in the *parshah*):²⁸ “Those **standing** here with us today”?

Moreover, not only is this wording uncommon, seemingly it does not fit within the **context** of the verse. The definition of “*nitzavim*” is, as Rashi says,²⁹ “standing upright,” as opposed to “*omdim*” {which denotes a regular upright posture}. Here, “Moshe assembled them before Hashem... to bring them into the covenant,” so they were obviously in a state of submission and humility. This being the case, why is the word “*nitzavim*” used, as it implies power and eminence?

²⁸ Ibid., 29:14.

²⁹ *Bamidbar* 16:27.

Rashi therefore offers a second explanation — a “*Midrash Aggadah*” — that as a follow-up to the curses, “Moshe began to console them: ‘You are **standing** {**upright**} today... (to the extent that although) you have provoked Hashem many times, yet He has not made an end to you. Indeed, you still exist {as a nation} before Hashem.’” There is {therefore} a particular emphasis on the word “*nitzavim*,” implying *standing strongly*, etc.

According to this explanation (not only does the point and meaning of the word “*nitzavim*” change but) the meaning of the word “today” also changes:

Since this was a message of consolation following the curses, we must say that simply-speaking, it was said shortly after the *tochachah*. Therefore, it is unreasonable to assume that it was said on the day of Moshe’s death, because: a) the purpose of the *tochachah* was to encourage the Jews to observe Torah and *mitzvos*, so Moshe certainly would not have postponed the *tochachah* until the day of his death;³⁰ and b) it is implausible that Moshe would invoke curses on the day of his death (on the contrary — on the day of his death, just prior to his passing, he blessed them³¹).

Rashi must therefore also explain the word “today” differently, in order for it to correspond to **this** explanation of “You are standing.” Since “You are standing” means, “you still exist before Hashem... the curses and sufferings preserve and enable you to stand before Him,” the word “today” means, “just as this day exists....” And since the message of consolation had to be juxtaposed to the curses, Rashi adds that the verses that were most closely juxtaposed in “the previous *parshah* were words of consolation, ‘You have seen....’”

³⁰ {If we say that *Nitzavim* is a continuation to the *tochachah*, it would be reasonable to assume that since *Nitzavim* was said on the day of Moshe’s death, the *tochachah* was also said on that day. But if so, why would Moshe have postponed saying the *tochachah* until then?}

³¹ As described in the beg. of *parshas Vezos Habrachah*, and in Rashi’s commentary there.

6.

NEW LEADERSHIP FOR ALL

But this explanation is also difficult, because:

- a) According to this, the Torah should have first said “you are standing,” and only afterward, “you have seen...,” because “you are standing” is the **primary**³² message of consolation: “He has not made an end to you... the curses and sufferings preserve you and enable you to stand...”
- b) If this *parshah* comprises Moshe’s message of consolation, why were “children” present? They do not understand reprimand, and so have no need to be consoled.

Rashi therefore offers a third explanation: “Because the Jews were now transitioning from one leader to another, from Moshe to Yehoshua, he made a **standing assembly** of them, in order to encourage them...” This explains the use of the word “*nitzavim*” (rather than “*omdim*”), since “*nitzavim*” connotes encouragement.

And according to this explanation:

- a) The definition of “today” is “the day of his death” (similar to the first explanation {in Rashi of “you are standing”}) – which is obvious, since it relates to transitioning from one leader to another.
- b) We also understand why Moshe first said, “you have seen...” and only afterwards, “you are standing today.” Because “you are standing” had to take place as close to his death as possible, when the Jews would transition from one leader to another.

³² {The verses starting with, “you have seen...” (merely) reflect back on all the miracles that Hashem did for the Jewish people, which is obviously some measure of consolation, but it doesn't directly deal with the curses, nor does it explain why the Jewish people should not be afraid.}

c) Bringing children {to this assembly} was reasonable, since they also transitioned from one leader to another.

7.

CLOSER TO *PSHAT*

The difficulty with this explanation: Since this episode relates to **transitioning** from one leader to another, Moshe should have postponed it as much as possible, until after *parshas Vayelech*, **immediately** prior to his death. So why was it said earlier?

[This is not difficult according to the first explanation, that “Moshe assembled them... on the day of his death, to bring them into the covenant.” Since this would be relevant only after they crossed the Jordan River, it did not have to take place **immediately prior to his death** (since this would already have been somewhat in advance of when it would **come into effect**). But according to the third explanation, that this assembly was linked with the people transitioning from one leader to another, it should have taken place immediately prior to Moshe’s demise.]

Although the second explanation is based on a “*Midrash Aggadah*,” it is closer to *pshat* than the third explanation. Because according to the third explanation, “you are standing” is a distinct subject, unrelated to Moshe summoning the Jewish people at the end of *Ki Savo*. But according to the second explanation, not only does “you are standing” come as a continuation to Moshe’s words, “you have seen...,” at the end of *Ki Savo*, it was in fact the purpose of the entire gathering — “to console them” — since the primary consolation was expressed in the statement, “you are standing,” as discussed above. In this context, it is closer and more similar to the first explanation — the purpose for which “Moshe assembled” them, as described in our *parshah* — “to bring them into the covenant.”

8.

DOWN TO EARTH

From the “wine of Torah”³³ in Rashi’s commentary: *Parshas Nitzavim* is always read {on the Shabbos} before Rosh Hashanah; this connection is alluded to by the word “today,” which refers to Rosh Hashanah.³⁴

Regarding this, Rashi remarks, “This teaches us that Moshe assembled them before Hashem on the day of his death, to bring them into the covenant.” Although at the end of *parshas Ki Savo*, the Torah already described what Moshe told the Jews — “You have seen... the great trials... you shall observe the words of this covenant and fulfill them...,” referring to the fulfilment of Torah and *mitzvos* — the purpose of the assembly, on the day of his death, a day of judgement, was “to bring them into the covenant.” A covenant transcends logic and understanding, and on Rosh Hashanah the essential bond between Jews and Hashem is established. This bond is {alluded to in Rashi’s remarks}, “Moshe assembled them **before Hashem**” — a unification with Hashem Himself, which is greater than even Torah and *mitzvos*.

Nevertheless, to serve as preparation for this {covenant}, Moshe spoke with the intention that “you shall observe the words of this covenant and fulfill them.” Because this essential bond making the Jews and Hashem one is achieved (openly) through the Torah, because the Torah is the medium connecting the Jewish people with Hashem.

In the words found (in several places) in the *Zohar*:³⁵ “There are **three** bonds bound one to the other — the Jewish people are bound to Torah, and Torah {is bound} to Hashem.” Seemingly, when three objects are bound together, there are only two bonds. {Why does the Zohar mention “three bonds”?} However, once the Jewish people become bound

³³ {I.e., the deeper teachings of Torah. See *Hayom Yom*, entry for 29 Shevat.}

³⁴ *Paneiach Raza*, end of *parshas Nitzavim*; *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of *parshas Nitzavim*; a teaching of the *Baal Shem Tov*, quoted in *Hayom Yom*, entry for 25 Elul.

³⁵ {*Zohar*, vol. 3, 73a.}

to Hashem through Torah, the Jews are also bound to Hashem on their own with a bond that transcends the bond achieved through Torah. Thus, there are indeed three bonds (the Jews, the Torah, Hashem, the Jews — like a circle).

Accordingly, first, we³⁶ must preface with, “you shall observe...,” {referring to the bond with Hashem established through Torah}, but the actual purpose of the assembly on Rosh Hashanah was {to disclose} the essential bond Jews have with Hashem {which transcends the bond established through Torah}.

But this is insufficient: The covenant, the essential bond, must be revealed, both spiritually and (also) physically, causing a flow of material goodness from Hashem — manifest and revealed good.

[Just as Hashem expects the Jewish people to actually fulfill Torah (a good teaching)³⁷ and *mitzvos*, in physical action, for action is primary,³⁸ so too Jews request and receive from Hashem all manner of Divine benevolence, and it becomes manifest on this physical plane, in visible and revealed good — in actuality.]

This is where Rashi’s second explanation comes in: “Moshe began to console them.” Moshe, the intermediary connecting³⁹ Hashem with the Jewish people, enables the Jews to “exist before Hashem” in a manner of “*nitzavim*” — physically “standing upright.” Moreover, “the curses and afflictions preserve you and enable you to stand before Him” — the unwanted remnants of the past become transformed into revealed blessings, visible and revealed goodness.

-Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Nitzavim*, 5725 (1965)

³⁶ {I.e., every Jew must first keep the Torah, and then our covenant with Hashem can be revealed.}

³⁷ {*Mishlei* 4:2.}

³⁸ *Avos* 1:17.

³⁹ {Moshe was a ממוצע המחבר — an intermediary connecting the Jewish people to Hashem. In this capacity, Moshe was completely transparent — he caused no change in that which he conveyed. He was able to serve in this role because he was completely selfless — his level of *bitul* was so lofty that he was not an independent entity — he was loftier than the world; while at the same time, he personified the most perfect existence possible within the world. See *Rambam’s Perush HaMishnayos*, “*Sanhedrin*, ch. *Chelek*, 7th principle”: “The choicest of all humanity.”}