

# PARSHAS MASEI

*by Gedalia Litke*

This is being written on Erev Shabbos. We celebrate today (29 Tammuz) the 900th yahrzeit of Rashi. One cannot overstate the impact of Rashi. He has given us both simple access to every word of Torah as well as the opportunity to obtain profound and intricate understandings. It is almost impossible to fathom, but both the simple and the intricate are delivered in a single, unified commentary of extraordinary elegance and beauty.

In my opinion, perhaps his most important contribution for our times is the irrefutable demonstration that the Written Torah and the Oral Torah are intertwined to the point that one simply cannot be addressed without the other.

Aharon went up to Hor Hahor 'al pi Hashem' (by the "mouth" of Hashem) and he died there. 33:38. Normally al pi Hashem means according to the word of, or following the instructions of Hashem. Here Rashi says that al pi Hashem teaches us that Aharon died b'nishika (with a "kiss"). [This is generally understood to mean that due to his righteousness his death was painless.] If al pi Hashem is to teach us the manner in which Aharon died, then, under standard biblical grammar rules, we would have expected al pi Hashem to appear after 'and he died' - it should read "and he died al pi Hashem"; why is al pi Hashem written before "and he died"? Furthermore, the words al pi Hashem are needed to describe the circumstances under which Aharon ascended Hor Hahor - he went up on Hashem's say-so (the usual interpretation of al pi). So how can al pi Hashem be used for an unusual meaning if it is needed, right where it is, for its plain meaning?

Rashi here is utilizing a fascinating device whereby words in the Chumash can sometimes be understood as being virtually repeated. In this instance al pi Hashem is understood both (a) in its normal sense, modifying what precedes it, so that Aharon ascended Hor Hahor because Hashem said to, and also (b) in the unusual sense of modifying what follows it, so that Aharon died with a "kiss". [Perhaps the justification for this is that al pi Hashem was not really necessary to be used at all to describe Aharon's ascendance to Hor Hahor; the pasuk could have said, even more typically, 'as he was commanded, or 'as Hashem said' - by utilizing al pi Hashem the pasuk is alluding to the availability of the double usage.]

There is a perfect parallel to this in Parshas V'zos Habrocho where Rashi uses one phrase of al pi Hashem to prove both that Moshe died "with a kiss" (Moshe's death precedes al pi Hashem) and was also buried by Hashem (the burial follows al pi Hashem). See M'forsihei Rashi there on 33:5,6.

Gal Einai, Copyright © 2006 by Gedalia Litke and **Torah.org**