

PARSHAS MIKETZ

by Gedalia Litke

During the famine Yaakov tells his sons to go down from Eretz Yisroel to Egypt to buy food. 42:2. "R'du shama v'shivru lanu misham - go down there and buy food for us from there". Rashi says that Yaakov didn't say "l'chu - go", rather he said "r'du-go down"; and the reason for this is that the 210 gematria of r'du functions as a hint to the 210 years of enslavement in Egypt.

There are numerous examples of Rashi explaining elsewhere that Eretz Yisroel is on a higher plane than all other lands and that therefore it is appropriate to speak of going up to or down from Eretz Yisroel.

If so, why isn't r'du appropriate for this pasuk where the instruction is to go down from Eretz Yisroel? On the strength of this difficulty many m'forsihei Rashi delete the first clause from this Rashi. According to them Rashi is saying simply, without pointing out anything curious about the terminology, that the 210 r'du equals the 210 years. If we follow these m'forsihei and delete the clause, however, we still must explain how Yaakov's use of r'du hints at anything deeper - it would only be a hint if the terminology would be somewhat unusual or unexpected - if it is exactly what we expect to hear then how can a deeper, alternative meaning be discerned?

Rashi's dibur hamatchil, his quote from the pasuk that he uses as the starting point for his comment, is an integral part of his commentary. In this case, a careful reading of the dibur hamatchil reveals the answer to the question above. Rashi's dibur hamatchil is "r'du shama - go down there"; if Rashi wanted to tell us about the r'du=210 connection the dibur hamatchil could have been simply "r'du" - why "r'du shama"?

Rashi's real issue in this pasuk is that it says both shama and misham - "Go down THERE and buy us food from THERE". By Rashi using the two word dibur hamatchil he is indicating his concern over the word shama. Rashi's question is why is it necessary. His answer is that it is repeated so that there will be a two word hint to the length of the enslavement - r'du shama - there you will be 210. R'du is the right word to use, but by adding a redundant shama the pasuk is hinting at the 210 years. (See Maskil L'Dovid and other m'forsihei Rashi.)

[According to those who retain the first clause in this Rashi, and Rashi is expressing a clearly stated question about the terminology (but not about the redundancy of sham/misham), it is useful to note as a general matter that whenever Rashi articulates his question you can be pretty sure that the real issue he is addressing, as always, remains unarticulated - see Maskil L'Dovid.]

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