

# RAV ELYA MEIR BLOCH INTERPRETS RASHI

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Acharei Mos

### Rav Elya Meir Bloch Interprets Rashi's Imagery

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 546 Treating Mitzvos with Respect. Good Shabbos!

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Parshas Achrei Mos contains the prohibition of eating blood. The Torah states: "Any man of the House of Israel and of the proselyte who dwells among them who will consume any blood - I shall concentrate My attention (literally 'I will turn My Face') upon the soul consuming the blood, and I will cut it off from its people." [Vayikra 17:10]. The expression "v'nasati Pannai" (I will turn My Face) is peculiar.

Parshas Bechukosai contains a similar expression: "I will turn My attention to you (u'faneesi Aleichem), I will make you fruitful and increase you; and I will establish My covenant with you." [Vayikra 26:9].

In both places, Rashi explains the expressions "v'nasati Pannai" and "u'faneesi Aleichem" to mean "I will turn away from all my other involvements and I will concentrate on giving you your just reward (or punishment)."

The difficulty with this Rashi is that this gives the impression that the Almighty is a very busy CEO, having a very busy day, with a cluttered desk and multiple phone lines ringing. His appointment book is full, He is snowed under with work, and then some angel comes in and tells Him "You have to pay off this fellow." The Almighty, as it were, buzzes His secretary and says "Hold My calls. Clear My desk. Cancel all My appointments for the rest of the day. I need to be able to turn My attention to giving this fellow his just reward."

That may be an accurate image of the CEO of a multi-billion dollar corporation. No matter how good a chief executive he is, people are only human and they can only handle so many things at once, so the concept of "clearing the desk to concentrate on something" does exist.

But the Almighty examines the whole world in a single glance. This whole imagery is irrelevant for the Almighty. So what does the Torah mean -- "V'nasati Pannai" or "U'faneesi Aleichem"?

Rav Elya Meir Bloch writes that when we observe events that occur in the world, we often consider the event itself without sufficiently considering the peripheral events. For instance, there may be a war in a particular region that displaces entire populations of the region who then become refugees. Because of all the refugees, another region that is not directly affected by the war has a dramatic increase in population that will escalate the price of food and housing. People in that second region who have large inventories of goods that have now gone up in value will make a lot of money.

It is an old principle that one man's disaster is another man's gold mine. But we often consider such secondary affects as merely peripheral. We assume that Divine Providence (Hashgacha) directed the cosmic issue (the war) -- the macro issue. The collateral damage or the collateral improvement that affects other people is assumed to be just an afterthought and not the major focus of the "Divine Plan."

It doesn't always work like that. Sometimes the Almighty moves worlds -- literally -- to bring about "minor" or "peripheral" outcomes. He might engage nations in war to either punish or reward a single individual.

I am loathe to engage in such speculation in practical terms. Interpreting the intent of the Hashgacha is a dangerous game to play. But I was recently at the wedding of one of my students who married a girl whose family immigrated to the United States several years ago from Uzbekistan. He came from New Jersey and she came from Tashkent. Twenty years ago, her parents had never heard of New Jersey and his parents had never heard of Uzbekistan. Great world events -- the literal fall of great empires and the collapse of the Iron Curtain -- were necessary for this match to take place.

Perhaps it is a stretch to say that the Hashgacha brought down the Soviet Union so that this marriage could take place. But perhaps it is not such a stretch to say that the geo-political world of more than two-thirds of the twentieth century was stood on its head so that tens of thousands of Jews could go to Eretz Yisrael from the former Soviet Union.

This is the point that Rav Elya Meir is making. This is Rashi's intent. "I turn Myself away from all My other business to deal with meeting out appropriate reward and punishment. I can move mountains, I can make wars, I can make headlines, not necessarily for the event itself, but because some person must be rewarded or some person must be punished. I can certainly create events to exercise Divine Providence over My chosen people. I will do whatever needs to be done to insure that justice will be served."

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