

Parsha Ponders

HaAzinu | September 17, 2021 | 11 Tishrei 5782

The plan to save Moshe¹

וידבר יקוק אל-משה בעצם היום הזה לאמר: עלה אל-הר וגו' ומת בהר אשר אתה עלה שמה וגו'
Hashem spoke to Moshe *on that very day*, saying: "Go up the mountain...and you will die on the mountain that you will ascend..."²

The Torah says that Hashem told Moshe on that very day to go up the mountain to meet his demise. Rashi brings³ that the Torah says the expression "on that very day" three different times. The first is with Noach⁴, when he entered the ark he had built as a salvation from the flood. The second is when the Jews left Egypt. The third is in this week's *parsha* with Moshe. Rashi says that all three of these instances of this expression are teaching us the same thing.

With Noach, the people of that generation threatened to destroy the ark if Noach attempted to enter it. To prove their powerlessness against the flood, Hashem had Noach enter the ark *on that very day*, meaning in the middle of the day, in broad view of everyone. He entered and there was nothing they could do. Similarly, the Egyptians said that if the Jews try to leave, they will stop them. Hashem had the Jews leave *on that very day*, in broad daylight. Nothing stood in their way.

So too, the Jews said that if Moshe looked like he was going to perish, they would do everything they could to stop it from happening. Moshe had taken them out of Egypt, split the sea, brought down the *munn* and the quail, brought forth water from the well, and gave them the Torah. How could they let him perish? Hashem said: "I will bring him to the mountain to perish in broad daylight. Just try to stop it from happening".

At first glance, this lengthy comment of Rashi has numerous issues. Why is Rashi choosing to explain the usage of the expression *on that very day* in this instance, and not when it appeared the first two times? Rashi stresses *so too* in this instance the expression *on that very day* has this meaning. What does "so too" add? How could the Jews ever think they could stop Moshe from dying? Why did Rashi have to specify all the good things that Moshe did for the people? We know that Moshe did plenty for the Jews, and it's obvious why they wouldn't want him to be taken from them. And why specifically these things? There are plenty of other things Moshe did for the people⁵.

What prompted Rashi's comment is "*on that very day*" is seemingly extraneous. The reason is the earlier verse⁶ already said that what was to follow occurred on the day that Moshe turned one-hundred and twenty. Therefore, Rashi tells us that the usage of this expression is to teach us that the Jews didn't want Moshe to die, and were planning on stopping it at all costs. Hashem therefore had Moshe go to the mountain in the middle of the day, to show that they were powerless to stop his demise.

¹ Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichos XIX parshas HaAzinu #2* p. 339 – 347, given in 5727, translated and summarized into Hebrew in *Biurim L'Peirush Rashi* to *Deuteronomy 32:48*

² *Deuteronomy 32:48-50*

³ *Ad. loc.*, quoting *Sifrei Devarim* § 337

⁴ *Genesis 7:13*

⁵ Such as sweetening the water at *Marah*, and winning the battle against Sichon and Og. See also *Sifrei loc. cit.* which says ויעשה לנו נסים וגבורות, which *Rashi* left out

⁶ *Deuteronomy 31:2*. See *Rashi ad. loc.*

The problem with this, is how could we suspect the Jewish people of wanting to rebel against Hashem's will? Hashem already made it clear that Moshe was going to die. Rashi therefore prefaced his comment by showing that this expression has appeared two other times. In the first two instances it's clear that the perpetrators intended on rebelling against Hashem. This is why Rashi stressed "so too" here in our instance, we find it has this meaning.

This also explains how the Jews could ever think to stop Moshe's demise. The first two instances were examples of people stopping someone from transferring location. They wanted to stop Noach from entering the ark, and they wanted to stop the Jews from leaving Egypt. *So too* here, the Jews wanted to stop Moshe from ascending the mountain. Since Hashem made Moshe's death contingent with his ascent to the mountain, they thought if he stayed below, he wouldn't die.

Still, we could ask, how could the Jews plan to rebel against Hashem's will? Hashem said Moshe was to die. How could they plan to stop Moshe's ascent of the mountain, to keep him alive? This is why Rashi lists all the good things Moshe did for the Jewish people. Since he did so much for them, they felt obligated in *hakaras hatov*, to be grateful⁷. It became obvious to them that they had to repay this kindness by saving Moshe's life. As well, it was specifically these things that Moshe did which gave them this obligation. For all the things Moshe did in the past, they for sure had already expressed their gratitude. They specified these things because they are things from which they constantly benefited.

Moshe took the Jews out of Egypt and split the sea, something from which they and all their descendants will forever benefit. Moshe brought down the *manna* and the quail, and brought forth the water from the well. The Jews benefited from these means of sustenance the entire time they were in the wilderness. Finally, Moshe gave the Jews the Torah. The Torah wasn't just for that generation, but for all generations⁸.

Again, we can still ask, how could the Jews plan against Hashem's will? Albeit they felt an obligation of gratitude, and wanted to save Moshe, at the end of the day it was against Hashem's will. This is why the Torah stresses⁹ that Hashem told *Moshe* to go up the mountain. This command was only given to Moshe, and not the Jewish people. Since the Jews weren't commanded, and if they stopped Moshe, it would be against his will, it would turn out that they are only guilty of causing Moshe to fail in his own *mitzvah*. They felt their direct obligation to express their gratitude to Moshe outweighed causing Moshe to fail in his own *mitzvah*^{10 11}.

We see that every detail in Rashi was written with intent and purpose. This is just one of example of the genius of Rashi's commentary. Things that seemingly problematic are brimming with wisdom.

⁷ See Rashi to Deuteronomy 26:3

⁸ This is why Rashi left out *וגבורות לנו נסים ועשה*, as it was in the past

⁹ More accurately, the Lubavitcher Rebbe points this out from the *dibbur hamaschil* of Rashi, which includes *וידבר משה אל משה יקוק אל משה*. Seemingly he could have simply written *בעצם היום הזה*. This extra inclusion was to allude to this point

¹⁰ This sounds like they thought their own *mitzvos* could come at other's expense, which doesn't sound right. In truth, the Lubavitcher Rebbe used the language of *גרם*, which usually means something permitted because it was done indirectly. I wasn't sure how this was *indirectly* causing Moshe to fail in his *mitzvah*, so I translated it as "cause" (its literal translation)

¹¹ See also Rashi to Exodus 32:10