

# You Can Be A Rashi

Category: Bamidbar, Masei, Matos

*Who was Rashi, why is he so important, and how can we emulate him? (A plug for Hebrew School).*

## Rashi's Yahrzeit

This past week, on the 29th of Tammuz, we marked the 917th Yahrzeit of Rashi. Anyone who ever learned Torah has heard the name Rashi; every Jewish schoolchild knows this name.

Rashi is an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki. Shlomo was his name and Yitzchak his father's name. This great sage lived in the French city of Troyes (pronounced Twah) with his two daughters and their families. He earned his living from vineyards he owned. These were tended to by hired help, of course, for Rashi spent all of his time studying and teaching Torah.

Rashi composed a commentary on the entire Tanach and most of the Talmud. It's hard to understand how he achieved so much in his short 65-year life.

Now, there were many erudite commentaries composed by great scholars before and after Rashi, yet Rashi's commentary was universally accepted and 900 years later is still the first commentary Jewish children learn. What was so special about this man and his work?

## The Beis Hamikdash

We are presently in the middle of the three weeks of mourning over the destruction of the Temple. The Rebbe encouraged us to study the laws of building the Holy Temple during this time, based on the Midrash where G-d tells Ezekiel to instruct the people to study the laws of the Temple's construction and G-d would consider that study as if they were actually building the Temple.

One interesting law is, that everybody is obligated to assist in the construction of the Temple; men and woman, with their hands and their money; from morning till night. However, the Torah study of Jewish school children is not to be disturbed

for the construction. Why? Rabbi Yehuda explained that the world exists only through the merit of the sweet torah study of children. Upon hearing this R' Papa turned to Abaye and asked, "What about our Torah study?" and Abaye responded, "You can't compare our sin stained words to the words of innocent children."

When a person sins, G-d forbid, he creates a barrier between himself and G-d and no man is completely free of sin. Children however are completely innocent since they are not obligated to keep the mitzvos until they are Bar or Bat Mitzvah. There is therefore nothing that stands between a child and G-d, for a child never can create such a barrier.

## **The Power of Children**

It is due to this fact that when Haman was threatening the Jews with annihilation, Mordechai gathered 22,000 Jewish children together to pray and to study Torah. Indeed, it was the lovable voices of these children that finally pierced the heavens. When G-d heard their sweet entreaties, His mercy was aroused and He tore up the decree of destruction against the Jewish nation. The children had done what the righteous Mordechai and his seventy holy colleagues of the Sanhedrin could not.

Children's prayers have such power that often when a person is sick, family members will go to the Cheder and ask the school children to pray on the sick man's behalf. Also, on the night before a bris it is the custom for children to gather around the baby to pray and recite words of Torah for the baby's safety.

This is why, when the tension was building in the Middle East before the Yom Kippur War, the Rebbe instructed his Chassidim to gather children at the Western Wall for prayer and Torah study.

There is a statement in the Talmud that says, "Remember that man for good!" That man is Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla, a High Priest at the end of the second Temple. It used to be a father's responsibility to teach his sons Torah. Hence, children with no father never learned Torah. Although there was a yeshiva for orphans in Jerusalem it was only for older, self sufficient boys. Often a child who never studied would be sent to that yeshiva at fifteen or sixteen years of age and would already have developed a dislike for study. It was Yehoshua ben Gamla who sent teachers all around the land and instituted schools for children in every

city.

Rabbi Yehoshua understood that you can't depend on fathers to teach their children. Some fathers are too busy, others are too lazy, still others might not be good teachers or might themselves be ignorant and have nothing to teach their children! Elementary schools are his invention!

Since then, it has become the law that every Jewish community must support a teacher. In fact, the community can force the wealthier members to pay for the Torah education of the poorer children. Even one who doesn't have elementary school aged children must partake in the support of an elementary school; so important is the education and Torah study of children.

## **The Secret to Rashi's Popularity**

This then, might be the secret to Rashi's popularity. Rashi wrote his commentary for the five year old who is just beginning to learn. His clear simple explanations teach children how Torah is to be learned. He took the entire Talmud and Midrash and condensed it so that every child should be able to understand Chumash like a scholar.

Like Yehoshua ben Gamla, Rashi concerned himself with the education of children. That's why hundreds of years later every child feels that Rashi is their personal teacher.

The lesson for each of us, as the new school year approaches, is to do all that is within our power to ensure that our children and that all Jewish children should receive a proper Torah education, either by sending your children to Jewish schools and convincing other parents to do the same or by helping in the support of your local Hebrew School. And everyone who concerns him or herself with the education of Jewish children will be, as the Talmud says, "Remembered for good."