

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shoftim

Elul 4, 5777 – August 26, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Shoftim

Likkutei Sichos Volume 24, Pages 121 – 131

Rashi in His Own Words

דברים כ"א, ד': והוֹרְדוּ זֶקֶנֶי הָעִיר הַהוּא אֶת־הָעֵגְלָה אֶל־גַּחַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִעֲבֹד בּוֹ וְלֹא יִגְרַע וְעָרְפוּ־שָׁם אֶת־הָעֵגְלָה בְּגַחַל:

רש"י וערפו: קוצץ ערפה בקופיץ. אמר הקב"ה תבא עגלה בת שנתה שלא עשתה פירות ותערף במקום שאינו עושה פירות, לכפר על הריגתו של זה שלא הניחיהו לעשות פירות:

Devorim 21:4: The elders of that city shall bring the calf down to a rugged valley which was neither tilled nor sown. There in the valley, they shall decapitate the calf.

Rashi Heading - shall decapitate: He breaks its neck with a hatchet (meaning from the back of his neck). The Holy One blessed be He says, "Let the calf which is in its first year and has therefore produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place where the valley was not tilled and had therefore) produced no fruits. This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos).

Synopsis

At the end of this week's Torah portion, Shoftim, we find a most unusual Mitzvah¹. The Mitzvah is called "Eglah Arufah – עגלה ערופה" which serves as an atonement. It is performed as follows. A body is found in a field which is between various cities. It is not known who murdered the corpse. The Sages of each of these cities leave the holiness of their respective rabbinic courts; they must travel to the area in question. They then measure, in order to see which city is closest to the corpse. The elders from the city which is closest to the body must take a calf with which no work was done and which had never drawn a yoke. The elders of that city must bring the calf down to a rugged valley which was neither tilled nor sown. There they shall decapitate the calf from the back of its neck. The Kohanim shall approach all the elders of the city who are nearest to the corpse. They shall wash their hands over the calf that was decapitated in the valley. They must announce, "Our hands did not shed

1. See Devorim 21:1-9.

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this blood, nor did our eyes see (this crime)². Atone for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed Hashem, and do not lay the guilt of innocent blood among your people Israel. And the blood will be atoned for them. And you shall abolish the [shedding of] innocent blood from among you, for you shall do what is proper in the eyes of the Lord.”

When looking at Rashi this Mitzvah is particularly unusual. It is explained there (in Rashi and the Talmud³) as follows. “The Holy One blessed be He says, ‘Let a calf which is in its first year and has therefore produced no fruits be decapitated in a valley which has not been tilled (and therefore bore no fruits). This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos).

In other words the murder of a calf who bore no fruits in a place which bore no fruits atones for the murder of a person who bore no fruit, meaning performed no Mitzvos.

Rashi’s Explanation

This week’s Torah portion is Shoftim. It teaches us that⁴ “The elders of that city shall bring the calf down to a rugged valley which was neither tilled nor sown. There in the valley, they shall decapitate the calf.” Rashi cites the words “shall decapitate” and writes the following. “He breaks its neck with a hatchet (meaning from the back of his neck). The Holy One blessed be He says, ‘Let the calf which is in its first year and has therefore produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place where the valley was not tilled and had therefore) produced no fruits. This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos).”

We know that Rashi is not verbose with the words he uses. We need to understand why Rashi adds the words from the Talmud, that”the Holy One Blessed is He says...” Those words add *nothing* to Peshat. There are many places where it may seem appropriate to say “Hashem says,” or something of that sort, However Rashi never writes such words.

One might try to explain that Rashi is quoting the words of the Talmud. However, in

2. Rashi explains further (Devorim 21:7) “Would it enter one’s mind that the elders of the court are murderers? Rather they say as follows. “We ourselves did not see him and let him depart without food. Likewise, we did not see him and not escort him.”

3. See Talmud Sotah Page 45, at the end of Side B in the Mishnah. See also there Sotah Page 46 at the end of Side A in the Mishnah. The Talmud’s phrasing is somewhat different.

4. Devorim 21:4.

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the Talmud those words are appropriate. The Talmud is not limited to Peshat. However, here Rashi is only explaining Peshat. Why does Rashi find a need to tell us that G-d said these words?

Rashi goes into great detail explaining this Peshat. For the most part he is quoting the Sages⁵. The Sages add even more detail than what Rashi quotes. However, the Torah itself goes into quite a bit of detail⁶. “The Sages of the city which is closer to the corpse will perform this Mitzvah. They will take a calf with which work has never been done and has never drawn a yoke. They will bring the calf down to a rugged valley, which was neither tilled nor sown. There they shall decapitate the calf. And the Kohanim, the sons of Levi, shall approach, for the Lord, your God, has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the Name of the Lord, and by their mouths shall every controversy and every lesion be judged. And all the elders of that city, who are the nearest to the corpse will wash their hands over the calf that was decapitated in the valley. They shall announce that "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen this crime. Atone for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, Hashem, and lay not the guilt of the innocent blood among your people Israel." And the blood shall be atoned for them. And you shall abolish the shedding of innocent blood from among you. You shall do what is proper in the eyes of Hashem.”

In his commentary to the Torah, Rashi does not generally explain the reason for Mitzvos. This is true regarding sacrifices, which we can divide into three types. There are sacrifices which serve a person as atonement. There are sacrifices which thank Hashem for blessings which He has brought upon us. Thirdly, there are those which serve as purification. These offerings serve as thanks for His blessings. A sacrifice which is brought to mark the end of impurity is also brought in order to thank Hashem⁷. These offerings must be brought “before Hashem.” This means that they must be brought in the Bais Hamikdosh.” That is because the Temple is the source of all blessings.

There are yet other types of sacrifices. There are the two birds which are offered to mark the end of the impurity of a Metzora. There are also two goats which are brought on

5. See Talmud Sotah Page 45, at the end of Side B in the Mishnah. See also there Sotah Page 46 at the end of Side A in the Mishnah. The Talmud’s phrasing is somewhat different than Rashi’s.

6. Devorim 21:9.

7. Vayikroh 1:3.

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Yom Kippur which atone for all of our sins. Marking the end of impurity is an occasion for giving thanks. The goat offering on Yom Kippur is not brought in the Temple. It is called a sin offering. The red heifer is also called a sin offering. Despite the fact that it was brought outside of the Sanctuary, each was prepared for use in the Sanctuary.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

This Mitzvah is performed as follows. A corpse is found in a field which is between various cities. It is not known who murdered the corpse. The rabbis from these cities leave the holiness of their respective rabbinic courts and must measure in order to see which city is closest to the corpse. The elders from the city which is closest to the corpse must take a calf with which no work was done. The calf also had never drawn a yoke. The elders of that city must bring a calf down to a rugged valley, which was neither tilled nor sown. There they shall decapitate the calf. And the Kohanim shall approach all the elders of that city, who are the nearest to the corpse, and shall wash their hands over the calf that was decapitated in the valley. And they shall announce and say, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see this crime. Atone for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, O Lord, and lay not the guilt of innocent blood among your people Israel." And so the blood shall be atoned for them. And you shall abolish the shedding of innocent blood from among you, for you shall do what is proper in the eyes of the Lord.

The way in which this Rashi (and the Talmud⁴) explain this particular Mitzvah is especially unusual. "The Holy One blessed be He says, 'Let the calf which is in its first year and has therefore produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place where the valley has not been tilled and had therefore produced no fruits. This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos). Why does it matter that G-d says this?'

The Explanation

There were two sacrifices which were brought outside of the Temple; they were diametrically opposed to each other. One was the goat which was thrown down a mountain in order to atone for our sins. This was sent outside of all three camps⁸. The other was the two

8. This was one of a pair; each had to be extremely similar. The goat which we are discussing was sent down a mountain outside of all three camps. Its partner was brought as an actual sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdosh.

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birds which were removed to complete the purification of a Metzora. The goat which was sent away was called a “sin-offering.”⁹ Despite the fact that it was not brought on the altar, nevertheless this goat brought about the main atonement¹⁰ for the Jewish people.

Based on this we can understand why Rashi first writes that “he breaks its neck with a hatchet (from the back),” and Rashi then writes “the Holy One Blessed be He says ...” “Arifah – עריפה,” (cutting off his head from behind with a very sharp knife) killing an animal in this manner is actual torture. It is extremely vicious¹¹. Despite the fact that this seems so wicked, it is G-d Almighty Who says it! There are times that something seems to be evil; taking a sharp knife away from a baby. However in reality this is the greatest kindness!

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

This teaches us a lesson about the “Eglah Arufah.” It does not just affect those that live in the closest city to the corpse. It affects even the elders of that city; here the word elders have the connotation of Sages. Moreover, it even has an effect on the Supreme Court of the city. Not only that court, but it even affected the Grand Supreme Court of the entire Jewish Nation! These people are Sages in the truest sense of the word. This is the negative affect which decapitating an animal can have upon a Jew; not just any Jew but a Tzaddik! Although it is a difference of opinion exactly how many members of the Great Sanhedrin had to be present for the calf’s decapitation, at least some of them did.

There was a need for even the greatest to witness this extreme act of cruelty. This brought about the atonement of all of the Jews for this act of murder.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Shoftim, Teitzei and Tavo 5730)

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9. Vayikroh 16:5.

10. Vayikroh 16:10

11. See the Me’i’ri’s commentary to the Mishnah in Sotah which we quoted earlier. It can be found on Page 45, Side B. The Me’i’ri quotes that “he cuts the animal with great strength from behind.

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the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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**IN HONOR OF
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו Morris**

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**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
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Mr. Sholom Moshe Hacoheh ben Tzivia של Cohen**

&

Mrs. Berocho bas Soroh שתחילי Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery

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May he merit to be a Chossid, a Yerei Shomayim and a Lamdon

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

לזכות

ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן

ומרת ברכה בת שרה שתחי' כהן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

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