

בס"ז

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Emor

17 Iyar, 5777 – May 13, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Emor**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 37, Pages 61 – 66

Rashi in His Own Words

ויקרא כ"א – א': ויאמר ה' אל-מֹשֶׁה אֵמַר אֶל-הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לִגְפֹשׁ לֹא-יִטְמָא בְּעַמִּיו:
רש"י ד"ה אמר אל הכהנים: אמור ואמרת, להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים:

Vayikroh 21:1: And Hashem said to Moshe, say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them, “none of you may defile himself¹ (become Tomei) for a dead person among his people.”

Rashi Heading – Speak to the Kohanim: “Say (to the Kohanim) ... and say (to them),” (This comes) to admonish the adult (Kohanim to be responsible) for the minors.

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Emor, begins with Hashem issuing a command to Moshe. He tells Moshe to tell the Kohanim not to become Tomei. The specific words which he uses are to “Say to the Kohanim ... and to say to them.” Rashi begins his comments seemingly by explaining this redundancy. He explains that this verse teaches us that the adult Kohanim must also take care that the minors not defile themselves. Rashi begins his comments with heading from the verse “Speak to the Kohanim.”

We have discussed many time how precise Rashi is with the words that he uses. This is also true of the words that he chooses to use as the heading for his comments. If Rashi's comments are based on the redundancy of the word “say,” why does he use the words “speak to the Kohanim” as his header? It must mean that the difficulty with the verse which prompts him to give his particular explanation arises from those words.

Rashi explains elsewhere that the Jewish court must assure that Kohanim maintain their holiness. It is a responsibility which is given over to the court. Why does Rashi not say the same thing here? Why does Rashi introduce a new law that adult Kohanim are responsible to see to it that children not defile themselves?

That is why Rashi uses as his heading the words “speak to the Kohanim.” There is a general rule that² Kohanim are always swift, eager and ready to fulfill their service. This can be explained in one of two ways. Either this refers to their service in the Bais Hamikdosh. The holiness of being in the

1. To become defiled is a state of spiritual “uncleanliness.” One can reach this state through contact with a dead body, among various other things. The Torah is saying that with the exception of several close relatives (as listed further) a Kohen may not be occupied with a corpse, i.e. take part in a funeral.

2. See Talmud Shabbos 20, a.

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Temple causes their alacrity. It can also be explained as something which is due to the fact that they are Kohanim. It may be, to coin a phrase, a part of their “Kohanic DNA.

Here we are discussing something that has nothing to do with the Temple service. A Kohen may not *contaminate* himself regardless of the place (even outside of Israel or Jerusalem) or the time (even at the time of exile when there is no Temple). Hashem told Moshe that due to their priestly status there is no need for the court to supervise them. However Moshe made a³ “fence around the Torah” by saying that regarding this law which applies outside of the Bais Hamikdosh they do require supervision. Therefore the adults must supervise the children.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Emor, begins by telling us laws which concern Kohanim. In the very beginning of the Torah portion it says⁴ “Hashem said to Moshe, say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them, ‘none of you may defile himself for a dead person among his people.’” In other words, the commandment to the Kohanim is not to allow themselves to become Tomei. Rashi cites the words “Speak to the Kohanim” and explains as follows. “‘Say (to the Kohanim) ... and say (to them),’ (This comes) to admonish the adult (Kohanim to be responsible) for the minors.”

Rashi is explaining that there is an additional commandment here. The Torah is not only saying that Kohanim may not become defiled. It is also teaching us that adult Kohanim are responsible not to allow children to become Tomei⁵. He seems to derive this from the apparent redundancy of the verse. First it says to “say to the Kohanim – אמור אל הכהנים.” Almost immediately thereafter the Torah uses the same word; “and say to them – ואמרת אליהם.” Rashi seemingly makes this clear by beginning his comments with the words “say ... and say.” He is accentuating the fact that the Torah repeats the same word twice in rapid succession.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

As mentioned many times, Rashi is always extremely precise with the words that he chooses. This is not only true of the words in his comments themselves. It is equally true of the words that he uses as the heading for his comments.

If Rashi's comments are based on the redundancy of the word “say,” one would think that the heading of this commentary should be “say ... you shall say.” He does indeed begin his commentary with those very words. Why does he use the words “say to the Kohanim” as the heading? The

3. See Mishnah Avos Chapter 1, Mishnah 1.

4. Vayikroh 21:1.

5. In other words, those Kohanim who are beneath the age of Bar Mitzvah.

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difficulty with the verse which he is explaining must arise from the words “say to the Kohanim. We need to understand just what difficulty these words present.

The Explanation

Rashi is teaching us a novel law. We find Rashi’s comments further on which teach us a very different lesson according to Peshat. By beginning his comments with the heading “say to the Kohanim” Rashi alludes to his reason for the novel interpretation.

Further on in our Parshah it says⁶ “Moshe told this to Aharon and his sons, and to all of the Jewish people.” There the Torah is discussing the law that a Kohen with a blemish is not permitted to serve in the Temple service. Rashi cites the words “to Aharon and his sons, and to all of the Jewish people.” He explains that “So that the courts of law (with judges who are not Kohanim) should warn Kohanim (who have defects, to separate themselves from the Holy Service).”

Why doesn’t Rashi offer the same explanation here? Why does he feel compelled to introduce a new law; that adult Kohanim are commanded to watch over minor Kohanim? He could have taught the pre-existing law that the “Bais Din – Court” should watch over the Kohanim!

The explanation is that we find a rule from the Sages that² “Kohanim are always swift, eager and ready to fulfill their service.” We can question the scope of this rule. One possibility is that this refers solely to their service in the Temple. The aura of the holiness of the Temple and the importance of their service causes their alacrity. However it can also be explained as something which Kohanim inherit at birth. Perhaps this is a natural characteristic of a Kohen. To coin a phrase, it may be a part of their “Kohanic DNA.”

The difference between the two possibilities is what the case is regarding something which has nothing to do with the Temple service. If it is a natural part of a Kohen’s personality the alacrity is still there. Otherwise they may need help in fulfilling their obligations.

That is why Rashi began his comments with the heading “say to the Kohanim.” That is the point – they are Kohanim. However the Torah is discussing something which has nothing to do with the Temple service. It applies in all times (even when there is no Bais Hamikdosh) and in all places (even outside of Israel).

Hashem told Moshe to command the Kohanim to take care not to defile themselves. The key word here is Kohanim. They are naturally swift and eager to perform all of their obligations. However Moshe was concerned about the obligation instituted by the Sages³ to “make a fence” around the Torah. Taking that into consideration, he taught that the adults must assure that the minors maintain their purity.

6. Vayikroh 21:24.

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An Ethical Lesson from Rashi

The Rambam writes about the Kehunah⁷ that⁸ “they were set aside to serve G-d and minister unto Him ... removing from their neck the yoke of the many worldly things which people seek. They are sanctified as holy of holies. Hashem will be their portion and heritage *forever and ever* ...”

One thing is perfectly clear from this. One who is up to this standard is always standing before Hashem. The time and place are totally irrelevant. He never requires admonition. He doesn't need someone else to make sure that he fulfills all of his obligations. Only a Kohen who has not (yet) quite reached that level needs someone to hasten him in his priestly service at the time that he is not actually serving in the Bais Hamikdosh.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya⁹ that the Infinite One is constantly clothed within the power of Chochmah¹⁰ of the G-dly Soul of each and every Jew. This Divine spark can certainly never be in “exile¹¹,” i.e. controlled by the Animal Soul. Nevertheless, we do find that the G-dly spark can succumb to a spiritual state which is called “sleep.” Once the soul succumbs to this, it will not be capable of accomplishing that which it needs to do.

However there is a higher level of the soul which is not even subject to “sleep.” This is the essence of the soul. This level is not subject to revelation or concealment. Regarding this level, Shlomo Hamelech says that¹² “I am asleep, but my heart is awake.” The heart, the essence of every Jew is constantly awake.

These are the two levels which exist within each of us. In terms of the essence of the soul there is never a need to urge or admonish a Kohen to refrain from contaminating himself. There is no difference whether he lives at the time that the Temple stood or not. Likewise there is no difference whether or not he lives in Israel. He is always before Hashem. The Torah says clearly regarding the Mishkan (and so too the Bais Hamikdosh), that it¹³ “dwells with them (even) in the midst of their impurity.”

7. The priestly family.

8. See the Laws of Shemittah and Yovel Chapter 13, 12-13.

9. See Tanya Chapter 18 (Page 23, b).

10. Chochmah is the highest of the ten revealed powers of the soul. It is generally translated as “wisdom,” but “nullification” would be a more accurate translation.

11. See Tanya Chapter 19 (Page 25, a).

12. Shir Hashirim 5:2.

13. Vayikroh 16:16.

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However, when we are discussing a Kohen who is not connected with the essence of his soul, he does require urging and help in order to assure that he does not contaminate himself. Nonetheless, he is merely asleep. All that is needed is to awaken him. He has no need for a total “makeover.”

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Emor 5725)

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