

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Re'eh

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Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Re'eh

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים י"ב, כ"ג: רק חזק לבלתי אכל הדם כי הדם הוא הנפש ולא תאכל הנפש עם הבשר: רש"י רק חזק לבלתי אכל הדם: ממה שנאמר חזק אתה למד שהיו שטופים בדם לאכלו, לפיכך הוצרך לומר חזק, דברי רבי יהודה. רבי שמעון בן עזאי אומר, לא בא הכתוב אלא להזהירך וללמדך עד כמה אתה צריך להתחזק במצות, אם הדם, שהוא קל להשמר ממנו, שאין אדם מתאוה לו, הוצרך לחזקך באזהרתו, קל וחומר לשאר מצות:

Devorim 12:23: However, be strong not to eat the blood; for the blood is the soul; and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh.

Rashi Heading - However, be strong not to eat the blood: Since it is stated “be strong,” you can learn that the Jews were inclined to eating blood. Therefore, it was necessary to state “be strong.” These are the words of Rabbi Yehudah. Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai however said that the Torah comes only to warn you and to teach you to what extent you must be careful in fulfilling the commandments. The Torah needed to strengthen you with its admonition regarding blood which is easy to watch out for because a person does not want it. How much more so must one strengthen oneself for all other commandments!

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Re'eh, the Torah warns us not to eat blood. Prior to prohibiting blood the Torah tells us to be strong. Rashi offers two explanations for the Torah's injunction to be strengthen ourselves. First he quotes Rabbi Yehudah who says that the fact that the Torah tells us to be strong implies that the Jews were obviously inclined to eat blood. He then quotes Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai¹, who said that Jews had no interest whatsoever in eating blood. Nevertheless the Torah warned us to be strong. That comes to teach us how strong we must be regarding other admonitions which we *do* desire.

Very often we need to work at understanding what is bothering Rashi. Here, however, it seems to be clear. We do not find other instances where the Torah tells us to “be strong”

1. He is at times referred to by the Sages as Ben Azzai, at times as Shimon ben Azzai and other times (such as here) as Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

regarding a particular Mitzvah. This is an exception. Why does the Torah find it necessary to tell us to “be strong not to eat blood?” Rashi explains this exception by telling us the opinions of Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai.

When Rashi offers two answers to one question, it is because there is a difficulty with each explanation according to Peshat. However the first is closer to the simple meaning of the Torah than the first. What is the difficulty with each of Rashi’s explanations?

An added difficulty is that Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai disagreed as to what the actual facts were. According to one the Jews desired to eat blood and according to the other they had no such desire. A factual difference of opinion is the most difficult to reconcile. How can we do so?

Rashi’s commentary seems to come from the Sifri. But a more careful look shows us that this is not the case. The actual quote of Rabbi Yehudah from the Sifri is that the Jews were “inclined to eat blood *before* the giving of the Torah.” In other words the inclination toward blood was when we were in Egypt. However this was a totally new generation; the generation which was about to enter Israel. We were commanded not to eat blood a number of times since the giving of the Torah. Why are we told to be strong here², at the end of the 40 years?

That is why Rashi goes on at length telling us that now too, at the end of the 40 years we were told to be strong in order to keep this commandment. It is possible that a person not desire something. It is even possible that it disgusts him. Yet he is still inclined toward it. He feels that it has a benefit for him which causes him to desire it. He feels that it has some physical or spiritual benefit for him. That is why Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai were not arguing over what the reality was. According to both opinions Jews were disgusted by eating or drinking blood. The difference is that according to Rabbi Yehudah the Jews felt that there would be a side benefit from eating/drinking blood. Therefore Hashem said to strengthen themselves.

Rashi’s Explanation

In our Torah portion, Re’eh, the Torah tells us³ “However, be strong not to eat the blood;

2. We were not told this at the other instances that we were commanded not to eat blood.

3. Devorim 12:23.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

for the blood is the soul; and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh.” Rashi cites the words “However, be strong not to eat the blood” and offers two interpretations⁴. “Since it is stated “be strong,” you can learn that the Jews were inclined to eating blood. Therefore, it was necessary for the Torah to warn us to “be strong.” These are the words of Rabbi Yehudah.

Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai however said that the Torah comes only to teach us to what extent you must be careful in fulfilling the commandments. The Torah needed to strengthen the Jews with the admonition not to eat blood. This was easy to watch out for; Jews were not interested in doing so. How much more so must one strengthen oneself regarding all of the other commandments in the Torah?”

In other words, the Torah first tells us to be strong. It then commands us not to eat blood. According to Rabbi Yehudah this means that we were inclined to eat blood. Hence the Torah told us to strengthen ourselves in order not to do so. Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai on the other hand tells us that the Jews had no interest whatsoever in eating blood. Nonetheless the Torah had a need to tell us to be strong regarding a prohibition which we found repulsive. How much more so must we strengthen ourselves regarding prohibitions which we actually desired?

Often it takes an effort in order to understand what is bothering Rashi. This is because in the vast majority of cases Rashi does not ask questions; rather he tells us the answers. Here Rashi’s difficulty seems to be clear. Why does the Torah tell us “to be strong not to eat blood?” We find no other similar instance in the Torah⁵. Therefore Rashi tells us the opinions of Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

This presents us with a number of difficulties. For one thing, we have a rule that has to do with understanding Rashi. Every time that Rashi gives two answers to a single question, it is because according to Peshat each explanation has a difficulty. The first explanation which Rashi offers is closer to the simple meaning of the Torah. Based on this we need to understand why Rashi needs two explanations. What is difficult about both explanations, and why the first is closer to Peshat?

4. Rashi’s source is from the Sifri, *ibid*.

5. See the commentary of the Ramban (*ibid.*). He writes that the Torah *does* use the expression of strength regarding *all* Mitzvos in a number of instances. Here, however, is the one instance where the Torah tells us to be strong regarding a specific Mitzvah.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Additionally we must understand this disagreement between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai. There are all sorts of differences between our Sages. Most often we find a difference in understanding the underlying reason between two things. However here they disagree as to what the actual situation was. According to Rabbi Yehudah, at that time Jews were inclined to eat blood. They had a perverse desire to do so. According to Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai they had no such desire. Explaining a disagreement regarding a fact is more difficult than explaining any other sort of difference of opinion. At the time that the Torah was given did the Jews desire to eat blood or not?

The Explanation

Rashi's commentary seems to come from the Sifri. But a more careful look at the Sifri's actual words shows us that this is not the case. The quote of Rabbi Yehudah from the Sifri is that the Jews were "inclined to eat blood *before* the giving of the Torah." In other words the inclination toward blood was when we were in Egypt. However Moshe was speaking to a totally new generation; the generation which was about to enter Israel. We were commanded not to eat blood a number of times since the giving of the Torah. Why are we told to be strong here, at the end of the 40 years? This was a brand new generation! This generation did not desire blood.

That is why Rashi goes on at length telling us that now too, at the end of the 40 years, we were told to be strong in order to keep this commandment. It is possible that a person not desire something. It is even possible that it disgusts him. Yet he may still have an inclination toward it. He may feel that this particular item has a benefit for him. This can cause him to desire it. He feels that it has some physical or spiritual benefit for him. That is why Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai were not arguing over what the reality was. According to both opinions Jews were disgusted by eating or drinking blood. The difference is that according to Rabbi Yehudah the Jews felt that there would be a side benefit from eating/drinking blood. Therefore Hashem commanded them to strengthen themselves.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Torah tells us the reason for the prohibition against eating blood⁶; "... for the blood is the soul; and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh." The commentaries⁷ explain that the

6. Devorim 12:23.

7 See the Ramban (Vayikroh 17:11), the Sefer Hachinuch at the beginning of Mitzvah 148, the Akedah for Parshas Acharei (Chapter 46), the Ohr Hachaim Vayikroh ibid. and the Abarbenel here.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

soul of an animal is found within its flesh. Nevertheless there is a major difference between the flesh within which the soul is *found*⁸, and the blood which *is* the soul itself.

Each food that one eats becomes his own flesh. Therefore one develops the nature of the animals that he eats. The blood of an animal represents the character traits of the animal soul.

May we all connect ourselves with G-dliness. In this manner we will connect ourselves with Hashem. That will certainly help us bring Moshiach one moment sooner.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Re'eh 5730)

**For questions, subscriptions or dedications our email address is
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8. There are commentaries who say that the only reason that the soul is found there is because of the blood.

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the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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Chaim and Aiden Oded שייקו Morris**

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&

Mrs. Berocho bas Soroh שתח' Cohen

For a complete and speedy recovery

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Hatomim Moshe Shlomoh Zohar ש' Mars

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

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