

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shoftim

2 Elul, 5786 – August 15, 2026

Compiled from the works of

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by

Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn
North Miami Beach, FL

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

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים כ"א, ד': והורדו זקני העיר ההוא את העגלה אל גסל איתן אשר לא יעבד בו ולא יזרע ויערפו־שם את העגלה בגסל רש"י וערפו: קוצץ ערפה בקופץ. אמר הקב"ה תבא עגלה בת שנתה שלא עשתה פירות ותערף במקום שאינו עושה פירות, לכפר על הריגתו של זה שלא הניחוהו 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 its 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, hence) 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 Mitzvah ¹. 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 that is between various cities. It is not known who murdered the corpse. The Sages of these cities leave the holiness of their respective rabbinic courts; they must travel to the area in question. They then measure to see which city is closest to the corpse. The elders from the town nearest the body must take a calf with which no work was done and had never drawn a yoke. The city's elders must bring the calf down to a rugged valley 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 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

1. See Our Parshah, Devorim 21:1-9.

2. Rashi explains further (Our Parshah, 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."

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(shedding of) innocent blood from among you, for you shall do what is proper in the eyes of the Lord."

This Mitzvah is most unusual. It is explained there, in Rashi and the Talmud ³, 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).'*" What is the relevance of the fact that Hashem made this declaration?

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

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion is Shoftim. It teaches us, "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 its 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 his words. We need to understand why Rashi adds the words from the Talmud, "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 explain that Rashi is quoting the Talmud. However, those words are appropriate in the Talmud, and the Talmud is not limited to Peshat. However, Rashi only explains the verse's literal meaning. Why does Rashi 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 Sages ⁴. The Sages add even more elements than what Rashi quotes. However, the Torah itself goes into quite a bit of detail ⁵. "The Sages of the city closer to the corpse will perform this Mitzvah. They will

3. See Talmud Sotah Page 45, at the end of Side B in the Mishnah. See *ibid.* Page 46 at the end of Side A in the Mishnah. The Talmud's phrasing is somewhat different than Rashi's.

4. See footnote 3.

5. Our Parshah, Devorim 21:9.

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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. The Kohanim, the sons of Levi, shall approach, for Hashem, your G-d, chose them to serve Him and to bless in His name. By their mouths shall every controversy and every lesion be judged. All the elders of the city who are the nearest to the corpse wash their hands over the calf that was decapitated in the valley. They shall announce, "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 on the Torah, Rashi does not generally explain the reason for Mitzvos. This is true regarding sacrifices, which we can divide into three types. Some sacrifices serve a person as atonement, and others thank Hashem for the blessings He has brought upon us. Thirdly, there are those which serve as purification. These offerings are a token of thanks for His blessings. A sacrifice to mark the end of impurity is also brought to thank Hashem ⁶. 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 that are offered to mark the end of the impurity of a Metzora. Two goats are brought on Yom Kippur, which atone for our sins. Marking the end of impurity is an occasion to give thanks. The goat offering on Yom Kippur is not brought in the Temple, yet it is called a sin offering. This is because each goat was prepared for use in the Sanctuary. The red heifer is also called a sin offering, although it was brought outside the Sanctuary.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

This Mitzvah is performed as follows. A corpse is found in a field that 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 to see which city is closest to the corpse. The elders from the town nearest to the corpse must take a calf with which no work was done. The calf also had never drawn a yoke. The city's elders 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 city's

6. Parshah Vayikroh, Vayikroh 1:3.

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elders nearest the corpse. They must wash their hands over the calf beheaded in the valley. They must then announce, "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.

How this Rashi (and the Talmud⁴) explain this particular Mitzvah is incredibly 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 the fact that Hashem makes this declaration add to the meaning of this unusual ritual?

The Explanation

Two sacrifices were brought outside the Temple. One was the goat thrown down a mountain to atone for our sins, and this was sent outside of all three camps⁷. The other was the two birds that were removed to complete the purification of a Metzora. The goat that was sent away was called a "sin offering."⁸Even though it was not brought on the altar, this goat brought about the main atonement⁹ 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)." Rashi then writes, "The Holy One Blessed be He says ..." Arifah – עריפה, the act of cutting off an animal's head from behind with a very sharp knife, is a callous manner in which to kill an animal, which tortures the animal ¹⁰. That is why Rashi emphasizes that G-d Almighty Himself said this. Sometimes, something seems evil, for example, taking a sharp knife away from a baby. However, in reality, this is the most incredible kindness!

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

This teaches us a lesson about the "Eglah Arufah." It does not just affect those who live in the closest city to the corpse. It even affects the city's elders; here, the word 'elders' conveys the sense of

7. This was one of a pair; each had to be exactly alike. 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.

8. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 16:5.

9. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 16:10

10. See the Me'iri's commentary to the Mishnah in Sotah which we quoted earlier. It can be found on Page 45, Side B. The Me'iri quotes that "he cuts the animal with great strength from behind.

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'Sages'. Moreover, it even affected the city's Supreme Court. 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 effect that decapitating an animal can have upon a Jew, not just any Jew but a Tzaddik! Although there was a difference of opinion on how many members of the Great Sanhedrin had to be present for the calf's beheading, at least some of them were required.

There was a need for even the greatest of the great 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)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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

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