

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Tazria-Metzora

1 Iyar, 5780 – April 25, 2020

Compiled from the works of  
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi**  
**Parshas Tazria-Metzora**  
**Likkutei Sichos Volume 12, Pages 78 – 82**

**Rashi in His Own Words**

ויקרא י"ד, ב': זאת תהיה תורת המצורע ביום טהרתו והיבא אל הכהן:  
רש"י ד"ה זאת תהיה תורת המצורע וגו': מלמד שאין מטהרין אותו בלילה:

**Vayikroh 14:2:** This shall be the law of the Metzora<sup>1</sup> on the day of his cleansing. He will be brought to the Kohen.

**Rashi Heading: This shall be the law of the Metzora etc.:** This teaches that (a Metzora) is not (pronounced<sup>2</sup>) ritually pure at night.

**Synopsis**

This week's Torah portion, Tazria-Metzora, tells us (among other things) the laws of Tzora'as. The Torah says<sup>3</sup> "This shall be the law of the Metzora on the day of his cleansing ..." Rashi cites the words "This shall be the law of the Metzora etc." and explains that "this teaches that a Metzora may not be pronounced ritually pure at night." Several Rashi's supercommentaries clarify that the words "on the day of his cleansing" are superfluous; hence we understand that he may only be declared ritually pure during the daytime. However, if this was so, why would Rashi not cite the words from the verse "on the day of his cleansing?" He merely alludes to these words by writing the word "etc.-" וכו'-. Therefore, we must say that he derives the fact that a Metzora may not be pronounced ritually impure at night from the words "this shall be the law of the Metzora," which are the words he cites verbatim from the verse. However, these words alone are not enough to force us to draw this conclusion, so he adds "etc." to allude to the end of the verse as well.

Rashi could have kept everything simple by explaining that one cannot declare a Metzora to be ritually pure at night because the verse says clearly, "on the *day* of his cleansing." Why does he have to

1. A Metzora is one who is afflicted with the disease Tzora'as. Both words are difficult to translate. Tzora'as is a spiritual malaise. This sickness no longer exists. It could neither be diagnosed nor cured by a doctor. Only a Kohen could diagnose Tzora'as, and it could only be cured by a procedure carried out by a Kohen. It took the form of a blotch of skin discolored with various shades of white. It was not caused by bacteria or germs, but rather by the sin of speaking ill of another. Tzora'as could also be found on a house or on clothing.

2. One did not have the status or the impurity of a Metzora until a Kohen declared him as such. Likewise, one was not "cured" of Tzora'as until a Kohen declared so.

3. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 14:2.

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look further? How can Rashi possibly derive this law from the words "this shall be the law of the Metzora" alone?

The Rebbe explains that the Hebrew word "day" does not at always imply daytime rather than nighttime. More often than not, it means a twenty-four-hour day. Therefore, we can learn nothing from the fact that it says "on the day of his cleansing."

The first words of the verse - "This shall be the law of," are all words that connote specificity. The term "this" implies this to the exclusion of anything else. It refers to something at which one can point. The words "shall be" means that it remains as it is. Finally, the term "the law of" means all of the rules which apply to a specific thing. Since Rashi cites these first three words and adds the phrase "etc.," he is teaching us that the words which appear further on in our verse, "on the day of his cleansing," are also meant to be specific. This means that even though elsewhere, the word "day" means a twenty-four-hour period, here it means specifically day and not night.

### **Rashi's Explanation**

This week's Torah portion, Tazria-Metzora, tells us (among other things) the laws of Tzora'as. The Torah says <sup>3</sup> "This shall be the law of the Metzora on the day of his cleansing ..." Rashi cites the words "This shall be the law of the Metzora etc." and explains that "this teaches that a Metzora may not be pronounced ritually pure at night." Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi<sup>4</sup>, the Be'er Mayim Chaim<sup>5</sup> and several other supercommentaries to Rashi explain that the words "on the day of his cleansing" are superfluous. This teaches us that he may only be declared ritually pure during the daytime hours.

However, we have already demonstrated very clearly on many occasions that Rashi carefully chooses all of his words. This includes the words which he cites from the verse in the heading of his comments. Those are the only words that he is explaining. Those are the words from which our difficulty arises. Those are also the words that explain the true meaning of the verse. If it was as the Mizrachi and the Be'er Mayim Chaim say, why does Rashi not cite the words "on the day of his cleansing" in the heading of his commentary? He merely alludes to these words by writing "etc."

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4. Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi was a great Talmudist and authority on Jewish law. However, he is best known for the commentary he wrote to Rashi's commentary on the Torah. He was born in Constantinople in the year 1455. He passed away there in the year 1525 or 1526. Before becoming the chief rabbi of Constantinople, he headed an advanced Torah Academy there.

5. This is the name of a commentary to Rashi's commentary of the Torah. It was written by Rabbi Chaim ben Betzalel (1515 - 1588) who was the chief rabbi of Worms. He was the older brother of the famous Maharal of Prague.

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We must say that Rashi derives the fact that a Metzora may not be pronounced ritually impure at night from the words "this shall be the law of the Metzora." However, these words alone are not enough to draw an absolute conclusion that a Metzora may only be declared to be ritually pure during the day. Hence, he adds, "etc." to allude to the words at the end of the verse as well.

### Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Why could Rashi not explain simply, that one may not declare a Metzora ritually impure at night, because the Torah says, "on the *day* of his cleansing?" The fact is that the Midrash<sup>6</sup> says so explicitly. The Talmud<sup>7</sup> implies this as well.

On the other hand, how can we possibly derive that a Metzora may not be declared pure at night from the words "This shall be the law of the Metzora?" What do those words have to do with what time of day it is? Additionally, why does Rashi find it necessary to add the seemingly extra words, "This teaches?"

### The Explanation

Rashi does not derive this law from the Torah words "on the day of his cleansing," for a different reason. Rashi's rationale is, because he is explaining the verse according to Peshat. In the realm of Peshat, the word "day" (the Hebrew word יום - Yom) refers to a twenty-four-hour day. It does not negate night. We see this throughout the Torah<sup>8</sup>. For example, throughout the story of creation<sup>9</sup>, the Torah writes, "And it was evening, and it was morning *one* day ... the *sixth* day." Also, when telling us of Shabbos, the Torah says<sup>10</sup> "Six *days*, you shall work, and on the seventh *day*, you shall rest."

Moreover, we even find an instance where the word "day" is used, and nevertheless, it refers specifically to night, as it says<sup>11</sup>, "On the day that I smote all of the firstborn in Egypt." It says elsewhere that the killing of the Egyptian firstborn was at *midnight*<sup>12</sup>! Instead of writing "on the *day* that I smote the firstborn," the Torah could have written, "when I smote the firstborn." The word *day* is superfluous. We see from this that the Hebrew word "day – יום" does not negate nighttime. Its simple meaning is an entire twenty-four-hour period.

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6. Toras Kohanim 14:3.

7. Talmud Megillah 21, a.

8. The exception to this is when the Torah uses the word "day - יום" in contrast to "night - לילה."

9. Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 1:5 – 31.

10. Parshas Mishpotim, Shemos 23:12, Parshas Ki Siso 34:21.

11. Parshas Bamidbar, Bamidbar 3:13, Parshas Beha'aloscho, Bamidbar 8:17.

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The words in our verse which Rashi is explaining are the exact words which he cites, "This shall be the law of the Metzora," as we said earlier. These words present a severe difficulty to one learning Peshat. This verse is a direct continuation of an explanation of the ritual impurity caused by one who contracts Tzora'as. The Torah did not suddenly change the subject. We are still discussing a Metzora. Why would the Torah interrupt and say, "this shall be the law of a Metzora?"

To answer this question, Rashi cites the words from the verse "This shall be the law of the Metzora, etc." and explains that "*This teaches* that (a Metzora) is not (pronounced) ritually pure at night." These words teach us this law.

How is this so? The three Hebrew words which Rashi cites, "This shall be the law of a Metzora," are three words that denote precision. Each of them conveys specificity and leaves no room for any other meaning.

- "*This*" means a particular object, something at which one can point.
- "*Shall be*" means something that shall be, i.e., shall remain as it is.
- "*The law of*" means the rules of something with all of its laws, the particular way in which something must be fulfilled.

These three words make it clear that the words following them (as hinted at by Rashi's word "etc.") also indicate a specific, precise thing which excludes anything else; hence when it says "on the day of his cleansing" here, it means precisely day and not night. The first three words *teach us* that here the word day serves to exclude night.

### A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

As we said above, the Torah begins telling us of the purification of a Metzora with the words, "This shall be the law of a Metzora." The Alter Rebbe<sup>13</sup> explains<sup>14</sup> that this is the way to purify a Metzora spiritually. We stated above that Tzora'as is a spiritual disease. It is caused by "Motzi Shem Ra - מוציא שם רע," which is translated as libel, spreading false rumors which besmirch another's name. However, the literal translation of these Hebrew words is "bringing forth a bad name." In a spiritual sense, one brings forth and draws down holy, Divine names (letters and vessels) from objects that are not connected to positive, G-dly things. The way to rectify this is through "this shall be the law of," being occupied in words

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13. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745 – 1812). He was the founder of Chassidus Chabad.

14. Likkutei Torah, Parshas Metzora, Page 24, the end of Column 4.

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of Torah. This is in keeping with the teaching of the Sages that<sup>15</sup>, “the entire Torah is names of Hashem.” By learning Torah, one draws down a holy name which purifies an impure name.

This is why the Torah begins telling us of the Metzora's remedy with the words “this shall be the law (*Torah* in Hebrew) of the Metzora. The *first* spiritual rectification of Tzora'as is *Torah*. It is only afterward that it says that “he shall be brought before the Kohen.” That is because, for the Torah to have the desired effect, the Metzora must be brought to the Kohen. This is because the Kohen is the one that assures that the Torah study is with proper humility.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Metzora, 5725)*

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

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15. The Ramban in his introduction to the Torah. His source for this is Zohar, Section 2, Page 87, a.

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