

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Emor

13 Iyar, 5779 – May 18, 2019

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': וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲמַר אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לִגְפֹשׁ לֹא יִטְמָא בְּעַמִּי:

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 – Say 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. Rashi, citing the words from the verse “say to the Kohanim,” comments on this. He begins his explanation with the words “Say to the Kohanim ... and to say to them.” This makes it appear as if Rashi is explaining this redundancy. He explains that the repetition of the word “say” teaches us that the adult Kohanim must also see to it that the minors not defile themselves.

We have discussed many times how precise Rashi is with the words which he uses. This is also true of the words 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 only use the words “say to the Kohanim” as his header? He should at least allude to the repetition of the word “say” (by writing “etc.” or the like). This demonstrates that the difficulty with this verse which prompts him to offer this explanation has nothing to do with the repetition of the word “say.”

Rashi explains elsewhere that the Jewish court must assure that Kohanim maintain their holiness; meaning that this responsibility 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?

1. The meaning of becoming defiled in this context, is synonymous with becoming Tomei. This is a state of spiritual “uncleanliness,” which one can reach through contact with a dead body, among various other things. What the Torah is saying, is that, with the exception of several close relatives (as listed further), a Kohen may not take part in a funeral.

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That is why Rashi uses as his heading the words “say 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 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 which is not directly related to the Temple service. A Kohen may not become Tomei, i.e. defile 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, they can supervise themselves. 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 which Moshe delivered to the Kohanim was not to allow themselves to become Tomei. Rashi cites the words “Say 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.

2. See Talmud Shabbos 20, a.

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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Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

We have discussed many times that Rashi is always extremely precise with the words that he chooses. This is not only true of the words contained in his actual commentary; 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 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. Rashi make a comment further on which seems to teach us a very different lesson according to Peshat, then what he writes here. 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 only regards their service in the Temple. The aura of the holiness of the Temple and the importance of their service causes their alacrity. However, this can also be explained as an inborn trait of Kohanim. Perhaps all Kohanim inherit this trait at birth from Aharon, the first Kohen. Maybe this is a natural characteristic shared by all Kohanim. To coin a phrase, it may be a part of their "Kohanic DNA."

The practical difference between these two possibilities, would be an instance which concerns Kohanim, but 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.

6. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 21:24.

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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 be careful 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.

An Ethical Lesson from Rashi

The Rambam writes that Kohanim⁷ “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* ...” Furthermore, the Rambam writes that “Not only the tribe of Levi, but any one whose spirit generously motivates him and understands with his wisdom to set himself aside and stand before Hashem, to serve Him, minister to Him and to know God, proceeding justly as God made him, removing from his neck the yoke of the many reckonings which people seek, he is sanctified as holy of holies ...”

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 is a minor, one who has not quite reached the level needed to maintain his sanctity, requires someone to watch over him.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya⁸ that the Infinite One is constantly clothed within the power of Chochmah⁹ of the G-dly Soul of each and every Jew. This Divine spark can certainly never be in “exile¹⁰,” 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.

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

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

9. 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.

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

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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 that¹¹ “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 it¹² “dwells with them (even) amidst their defilement.”

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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11. Shir Hashirim 5:2.

12. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 16:16.

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Mr. **Sholom Moshe** ben Reb **Shlomo Meir** Hacoheh ע"ה **Cohen**

Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

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