

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shemini Parshas Poroh

23 Adar II, 5779 – March 30, 2019

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Poroh¹

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר י"ט, ב': זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר דבר | אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליהם פרה אדמה תמימה אשר איננה מום אשר לא עלה עליה עול:

רש"י ד"ה זאת חקת התורה: לפי שהשטן ואומות העולם מונין את ישראל לומר, מה המצוה הזאת ומה טעם יש בה? לפיכך כתב בה חקה, גזירה היא מלפני, ואין לך רשות להרהר אחריה:

Bamidbar 19:2: This is the statute of the Torah which Hashem commanded, saying. Speak to the Jewish Nation and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow, upon which no yoke was laid.

Rashi Heading – This is the statute of the Torah: Because the Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, “What is this commandment, and what purpose does it serve?” Therefore, the Torah uses the term “statute.” I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it.

Synopsis

This week we have an additional Torah reading, Parshas Poroh. The definition of Poroh is a cow. It discusses the Poroh Adumah, the Red Heifer, which was used in a most extraordinary procedure². The Torah says that “This is the statute of the Torah which Hashem commanded, saying. Speak to the Jewish Nation and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow, upon which no yoke was laid.” We see that the Torah refers to this procedure as a statute. What is the specific meaning of the word statute - חוקה? Rashi explains that, “Because the Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, ‘What is this commandment, and what purpose does it serve?’ Therefore, the Torah uses the term ‘statute.’ I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it.”

We find that Rashi has already given this same explanation (with minor differences) earlier, to other statutes. Why does he find a need to explain it yet again? The beginning student already knows the meaning of the word. The fact is, that Rashi's intent is not to explain the meaning of the word statute. Rather, he is explaining

1. Our regular weekly Torah reading is Parshas Shemini. However, each year there are four additional readings which are added to the end of the Parshah. These are read on the weeks leading up to the holiday of Pesach. This week we read Parshas Poroh, which literally means a cow. One who was ritually defiled as a result of contact with a corpse could only be purified by undergoing a most unusual ritual. A heifer was burned, and its ashes were mixed with water. This mixture was sprinkled on the one who had become defiled. See Parshas Chukas, Bamidbar 19:1-13 for a detailed explanation of this ritual. This was needed in order for all Jews to be able to participate in the Korbon Pesach. The “Paschal Lamb – Korbon Pesach” which was brought on the eve of Pesach, had to be brought in a complete state of ritual purity (with few exceptions).

2. For the specific details regarding this procedure, see Parshas Chukas, Bamidbar 19:1-13.

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why the Torah uses this seemingly superfluous word here; it could simply have said “this is the Torah (meaning law),” without the word “statute?”

However, it is still difficult to understand why Rashi cites as the heading of his explanation the words “this is the statute of the Torah,” if he is only explaining the word statute? Furthermore, he certainly has no need to repeat the lengthy explanation which he already gave multiple times.

The explanation is that there are two types of statutes. One category includes only the “Red Heifer,” which totally transcends human understanding. All other statutes are in the other category, which have some connection to human intelligence.

Rashi’s Explanation

The Torah says that “This is the statute of the Torah which Hashem commanded, saying. Speak to the Jewish Nation and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow, upon which no yoke was laid.” Rashi cites the words “This is the statute of the Torah, and explains that “Because the Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, ‘What is this commandment, and what purpose does it serve?’ Therefore, the Torah uses the term ‘statute.’ I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it.” Because the Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, ‘What is this commandment, and what purpose does it serve?’ Therefore, the Torah uses the term ‘statute.’ I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it.”

Rashi appears to be explaining the Torah’s use of the word “statute.” A statute is a Mitzvah which is beyond comprehension. Therefore, we are taunted for keeping such Mitzvos. Nonetheless, it is Hashem’s decree, so we have no right to challenge. Even if we do not understand it, Hashem does.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

From Rashi’s words “therefore the Torah uses the word statute,” it appears that Rashi’s intention is not to define this word. Rashi already explained the meaning of the word “statute” earlier³. Therefore, it is clear that the beginning student already knows the meaning of this word. It is true that until this point Rashi has not yet explained this word in Chumash Bamidbar. We might think that therefore, Rashi needs to remind the beginner of its meaning. However, this cannot be the case. The word has been used earlier in Bamidbar⁴, and Rashi found no need to define it there. Rather, Rashi is confident that the beginning student understands this word, and his purpose here is not to define it. Rather, the word “statute” seems to be superfluous here. Rashi is explaining why the Torah does not merely say “law.” Why does Rashi repeat this explanation here, at such great length?

3. For example, see Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 26:5, Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 15:26, and Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:4.

4. See for example Parshas Beha’aloscho, Bamidbar 9:3 and 12:14, and Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 15:15.

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We know that Rashi is extremely precise in the words he chooses. This includes the words which he uses as the heading of his comments. Those are the words which he is clarifying. If we are correct in presuming that Rashi is only explaining the use the seemingly superfluous word statute, why does he include the words “this is the statute of the Torah” in the heading? It would seem that he should only have used the word “statute.”

Furthermore, despite the similarities between Rashi’s explanation here, and those he gave earlier, there are significant differences between them. In earlier comments the inciter is the “Yetzer Horah - evil inclination.” Here the inciter is “Satan.” In these earlier places, Rashi says that the inciter “raises objections⁵,” or “complains⁶.” Here, Rashi says that he “taunts” the Jews. In one of Rashi’s earlier comments, he writes that “one is forbidden to exempt oneself from the statutes⁷.” Here he writes that one is “forbidden to challenge them.”

The Explanation

The explanation is as follows. The wording of the verse, “this is the statute of the Torah” seems to imply that the law of the Red Heifer is the only statute in the Torah. Otherwise, the Torah would have said “this is the law of the Red Heifer. However, we know that there are many such laws in the Torah, i.e. commandments for which we are not given a reason. Examples of this, given by Rashi himself, would include such things as eating non-kosher food, or wearing clothing made from a mixture of wool and linen.

Based on this, we must say that there are two different types of “Chukim - חוקים - Statutes.” There are those:

1. which are partially within the grasp of human intelligence. However, they contain details which are totally inexplicable to the human mind.
2. which are completely beyond the grasp of a human being.

The phrase “this is the statute of the Torah” teaches us that this is the one and only statute which falls in the second category. The procedure of the “Red Heifer” involves mixing the ashes of the burnt heifer with water, and sprinkling this mixture on one who is ritually impure as a result of coming into contact with a corpse. This combination is referred to as “waters of purification⁸.”

Rashi never includes immersion in a ritual pool, or a Mikvah, in the category of statutes. This is because it can be understood to a degree. Just as immersing oneself in a bath can clean physical dirt, so too can it be that immersion in a specially constructed pool can purify spiritual impurity. One might consider that perhaps the same

5. See Parshas Toldos, Bereishis 26:5 and Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:4.

6. See Parshas Beshalach, Shemos 15:26.

7. See Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:4.

8. For the specific details regarding this procedure, see Parshas Chukas, Bamidbar 19:1-13.

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is true of the “waters of purification.” Sprinkling water on an individual may possibly cleanse him of spiritual impurity.

However, upon further consideration this cannot be. One’s entire body must be immersed in a Mikvah. This is somewhat understandable, and therefor belongs to the first category of statute. However, cleansing one by merely sprinkling a few drops on him has no place in human intelligence. Aside from this, there are many reasons that it cannot simply be regarded as a burnt offering. Among them are:

- a. No part of the animal was offered on the Mizbe’ach.
- b. None of the actions involved in the preparation of the “Red Heifer” were performed on the Temple Mount or within the court yard of the Bais Hamikdosh⁹. Contrast that with all sacrifices, which *had* to be performed within the complex of the Bais Hamikdosh.
- c. It had to be carried out by the assistant to the High Priest.¹⁰
- d. Despite the fact that it is not a sacrifice, nonetheless it is referred to as a sin offering. This demonstrates its similarity to sanctified objects, i.e. sacrifices¹¹.
- e. Its blood was to be sprinkled seven times toward the from of the Ohel Moed, meaning the Tent of Meeting¹².

From all of the above, it is clear that the Poroh Adumah, Red Heifer, belongs to the second category of statute. It is totally beyond human understanding.

In the light of this, we can understand why Rashi uses the expression “Satan” rather than “evil inclination”: “provokes” instead of “raising objections”; and “forbidden to speculate” instead of “forbidden to exempt oneself from them.”

It is understood that Divine intellect is infinitely greater than that of men. Therefore, if Hashem tells us that we cannot fathom a particular Mitzvah, the “Yetzer Hora – Evil Inclination” cannot argue the point. We cannot expect to comprehend Hashem’s understanding.

However, when a commandment is partially understood by us, the Yetzer Hora thinks (and can be very persuasive) that it can argue or raise objections that such a Mitzvah is not Divine. How can it be that Hashem would command us to do something that on the one hand we can understand, but on the other we cannot

9. See Rashi’s comments to our Parshah, Bamidbar 19:3.

10. See the above footnote.

11. See Rashi to our Parshah, Bamidbar 19:9.

12. See Rashi to our Parshah, Bamidbar 19:4.

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understand completely? The argument would be that such a Mitzvah is so peculiar that Hashem would not have commanded it.

But since the Red Heifer is totally different. it cannot be “refuted” by the “Evil Inclination” or the nations of the world. All they can do is to “provoke” the Jew by saying “what meaning has this commandment for you, and what is its reason?” Granted, you must obey Hashem. However, by doing so you are performing an irrational action.

Therefore, Rashi uses the word “Satan,” because all that it can do is trouble a Jew when he is performing this Mitzvah¹³; it cannot stop him from actually performing it. That is also why Rashi does not write here “it is forbidden to ‘exempt yourself’ from the command,” because a Jew cannot be persuaded that he is exempt from this Mitzvah. Rather, Rashi writes that one may not “challenge” this Mitzvah. The reason not to challenge this Mitzvah is because it is a G-dly decree.

This also explains why Rashi cites the whole phrase “this is the statute of the law” as his heading, rather than simply citing the word statute. These words make it clear that the “Red Heifer” is a totally unique sort of Mitzvah. We are supposed to work at understanding the entire Torah to the best of our ability. May Hashem help that we fulfill all of His commandments with the same joy and fervor no matter how well we understand them. In this merit we will certainly bring Moshiach now!

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

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13. The Hebrew word Satan has the meaning of “to cause discomfort.” See Bamidbar 22:22, *ibid.* 22:33, and Melochim Aleph 11:14.

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Mr. **Sholom Moshe** ben Reb **Shlomo Meir** Hacoheן 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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מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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