

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Emor

19 Iyar, 5781 – May 1, 2021

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': ויאמר ה' אל-משה אומר אל-הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם לגפש לא-יטמא בעמיו:
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 – Speak 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. The specific words he uses are to "Say to the Kohanim ... and to say to them." Rashi begins his comments seemingly by explaining this redundancy. He explains that this verse teaches us that the adult Kohanim must take care that the minors do not defile themselves. Rashi begins his comments with heading from the verse "Speak to the Kohanim."

We have discussed many times how precise Rashi is with the words that he uses. This is also true of the words that 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 use the words "speak to the Kohanim" as his header? It must mean that the difficulty with the verse which prompts him to give his particular explanation arises from those words.

Rashi explains elsewhere that the Jewish court must assure that Kohanim maintain their holiness. It is the court's responsibility. Why does Rashi not say the same thing here? Why does Rashi introduce a new law that adult Kohanim are responsible for seeing that children do not defile themselves?

That is why Rashi uses as his heading the words "speak to the Kohanim." In general, we know that Kohanim are always swift, eager, and ready to fulfill their service. We can explain this in one of two ways. Either this refers to their service in the Bais Hamikdosh. The holiness of being in the Temple causes their

1. To become defiled is a state of spiritual "uncleanliness." One can reach this state through contact with a dead body, among various other things. The Torah is saying that with the exception of several close relatives (as listed further) a Kohen may not be occupied with a corpse, i.e. take part in a funeral.

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alacrity. We can also attribute it 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 that has nothing to do with the Temple service. A Kohen may not *contaminate* himself regardless of where or when. This is true even if he is outside of Israel or Jerusalem. Additionally, this applies at the time of exile when there is no Temple. Hashem told Moshe that there is no need for the court to supervise them due to their priestly status. However, Moshe made a² "fence around the Torah." He decreed that 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 says,³ "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 to the Kohanim is not to allow themselves to become Tomei. Rashi cites the words "Speak to the Kohanim" and explains it 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 Tomei⁴. 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 after that, the Torah uses the same word; "and say to them – ואמרת אליהם." Rashi seemingly makes this clear by beginning his comments with the phrase "say ... and say." He is accentuating the fact that the Torah repeats the same word twice in rapid succession.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

As mentioned many times, Rashi is always extremely precise with the words that he chooses. This is not only true of the words in his comments themselves. It is equally valid of the words that he uses as the heading for his remarks.

2. See Mishnah Avos Chapter 1, Mishnah 1.

3. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 21:1.

4. In other words, those Kohanim who are beneath the age of Bar Mitzvah.

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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 comments with those very words. Why does he use the words "say to the Kohanim" as the heading? The difficulty with the verse he explains must arise from the terms "Say to the Kohanim." We need to understand just what problem these words present.

The Explanation

Rashi is teaching us a novel law. We find Rashi's comments further on which teach us a very different lesson according to Peshat. Beginning his remarks with the heading "Say to the Kohanim," Rashi alludes to his reason for the novel interpretation.

Later in the Parshah, it says,⁵ "Moshe told this to Aharon and his sons, and all of the Jewish people." There, the Torah discusses 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 all 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 must 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 refers solely to their service in the Temple. The aura of the holiness of the Temple and the importance of their service causes their alacrity. However, we can also explain this as something which Kohanim inherit at birth. Perhaps this is a natural characteristic of a Kohen. To coin a phrase, it may be a part of their "Kohanic DNA."

The difference between the two possibilities is a case that has nothing to do with the Temple service. If it is a natural part of a Kohen's personality, the zeal is still there. Otherwise, they may need help in fulfilling their obligations.

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 at all times (even when there is no Bais Hamikdosh) and all places (even outside of Israel).

5. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 21:24.

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Hashem told Moshe to command the Kohanim to take care not to defile themselves. The keyword 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 about the Kehunah⁶ that⁷ "Hashem set them aside to serve Him and minister unto Him ... removing from their neck the yoke of the many worldly things which people seek. He sanctifies them as holy of holies. Hashem will be their portion and heritage *forever and ever* ..."

One thing is clear from this. One who is up to this standard is always standing before Hashem. The time and place are 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 has not (yet) quite reached that level needs someone to hasten him in his priestly service when he is not serving in the Bais Hamikdosh.

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 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 surrenders to this, it will not be able to accomplish that which it needs to do.

However, there is a higher level of the soul that 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 that exist within each of us. In terms of the soul's essence, 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

6. The priestly family.

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).

11. Shir Hashirim 5:2.

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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) amid their impurity."

However, when we discuss a Kohen who is not connected with the essence of his soul, he does require urging and help to assure that he does not contaminate himself. Nonetheless, he is merely asleep. All that is needed is to awaken him. He does not require a total "makeover."

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Emor 5725)

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

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12. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 16:16.

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