

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shemini Parshas Poroh

23 Adar II, 5782 – March 26, 2022

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 Poroh¹

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר י"ט, ב': זאת חקת התורה אשר צננה ה' לאמר דבר | אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליהם פרה אדמה תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא-
עלה עליה על:

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 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 Hebrew word Poroh means a cow. The Poroh Adumah, Red Heifer, was used in a most extraordinary procedure. The Torah says, "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, "Because the Satan and the world's nations 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 has already given this same explanation (with minor differences) earlier. 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 why the Torah uses

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" was brought on the eve of Pesach, had to be brought in a complete state of ritual purity (with few exceptions).

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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 does not need to repeat the lengthy explanation that he already gave multiple times.

The explanation is that there are two types of statutes. One category includes only the "Red Heifer," which is totally beyond human understanding, and all other statutes are in the other category, which has some connection to human intelligence.

Rashi's Explanation

The Torah says, "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 Satan and the world's nations 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 that is beyond comprehension. Therefore, the other nations taunt the Jews 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" earlier². 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. Therefore, we might think that Rashi needs to remind the beginner of its meaning. However, this cannot be the case. The word has been used earlier in Bamidbar³, and Rashi found no need to define it there. Instead, 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

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

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

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is explaining why the Torah does not merely say "law." Why does Rashi repeat this explanation here at such great length?

We know that Rashi is extremely precise in the words he chooses, including the terms he uses as the heading of his comments, and those are the words he is clarifying. If we presume that Rashi is only explaining the use of 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." Rashi says that the inciter "raises objections" or "complains in these earlier places." Here, Rashi says that he "taunts" the Jews. One of Rashi's earlier comments writes that "one is forbidden to exempt oneself from the statutes⁴." Here he writes that one is "forbidden to challenge them."

The Explanation

The explanation is as follows. Here the Torah writes, "this is the statute of the Torah." This 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 the Torah offers no reason. Examples of this, given by Rashi himself, would include 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:

1. Those Mitzvos are partially within the grasp of human intelligence. However, they contain details that are inexplicable to the human mind.
2. Which are entirely beyond the grasp of a human being.

The phrase "this is the statute of the Torah" teaches us that this is the only statute that falls in the second category. The "Red Heifer" procedure 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. We call this combination "waters of purification⁵."

Rashi never includes immersion in a ritual pool or a Mikvah in the category of statutes. This is because we can understand it to a degree. Just as immersing oneself in a bath can clean physical dirt, so too can it be

4. See Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 18:4.

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

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that immersion in a specially constructed pool can purify spiritual impurity. One might consider that perhaps the same is true of the "waters of purification." Sprinkling water on an individual may cleanse him of spiritual impurity.

However, upon further consideration, this cannot be. One must immerse his entire body in a Mikvah, which is somewhat understandable and therefore belongs to the first category of a statute. However, cleansing one by merely sprinkling a few drops on him has no place in human intelligence.

From all of the above, it is clear that the Paroh Adumah, Red Heifer, belongs to the second statute category, 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."

We all understand that Divine intellect is infinitely greater than that of men. Therefore, if Hashem tells us 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 we partially understand a commandment, 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 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 different, it cannot be "refuted" by the "Evil Inclination" or the nations of the world. They can "provoke" the Jew by saying, "what meaning has this commandment for you, and what is its reason?" Granted, you must obey Hashem; however, you are performing an irrational action by doing so.

Therefore, Rashi uses the word "Satan" because all it can do is trouble a Jew when performing this Mitzvah⁶; it cannot stop him from performing it. That is also why Rashi does not write here "it is forbidden to 'exempt yourself' from the command," because one cannot persuade a Jew 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 clarify that the "Red Heifer" is a unique sort of Mitzvah. We

6. 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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are supposed to work at understanding the entire Torah to the best of our ability. May Hashem help us fulfill all of His commandments with the same joy and enthusiasm no matter how well we understand them. In this merit, we will undoubtedly bring Moshiach now!

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

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

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**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE**

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

**Dr. Mindel Rivka (Muriel) bas Reb Menachem Mendel Shlomo ע"ה
Stitt**

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Lech Lecha, 10 Mar-Cheshvan, 5782
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY שיהיו

* * *

IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of "Tzivos Hashem"

Chaim and Aiden Oded שיהיו

Morris

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. **Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיהיו**

Morris

* * *

IN HONOR OF

Mrs. Esther שתחי' Sharabani

May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON

Mr. Gershon (Geri) ש' Bentov

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

*** * ***

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סתית

נפטרה ש"ק פרשת לך לך, יו"ד מר-חשון תשפ"ב

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

נדבת בני משפחתה שיחיו

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מאריס

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו

מאריס

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