

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Kedoshim

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

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Rashi in his Own Words

ויקרא י"ט, י"ד: לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ונראת מאלקיך אני ה':
רש"י ד"ה ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל: לפני הסומא בדבר לא תתן עצה שאינה הוגנת לו, אל תאמר מכור שדך וקח לך חמור,
ואתה עוקף עליו ונוטלה הימנו:

Vayikroh 19:14: You shall not curse a deaf person. You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person, and you shall fear your G-d. I am Hashem.

Rashi Heading: You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person: Before a person who is "blind" regarding a matter, you shall not give advice that is improper for him. (For instance), do not say to someone, "Sell your field and buy a donkey (with the proceeds)" while you plan to cheat him since you will take it from him (by lending him money and taking the donkey as collateral. He will not be able to take the field because a previous creditor has a lien on it.)

Summary

This week's Torah portion, Kedoshim, tells us that one may "not place a stumbling block before a blind person¹." Rashi explains that here, a blind person refers to one who is "blind," meaning ignorant regarding a particular matter; "placing a stumbling block before him" means giving him bad advice. Rashi, as always, explains the simple meaning of the verse. Why does he not do so here? Why can he not simply say that the verse means that one may not place a stumbling block before one who is blind (G-d forbid), thereby causing him to suffer injury?

Rashi goes on to give an example of bad advice. He says, "One may not say to someone, 'Sell your field and buy a donkey (with the proceeds),' while you plan to cheat him since you will take it from him." Why does Rashi need to give us an example of bad advice; it is a straightforward concept. Once he does bring an example, why does he not offer a simpler example?

Additionally, the example of bad advice he cites is telling someone to sell his field and buy a donkey. Why does he add that "you plan to cheat him?" That does not make the advice better or worse. Aside from that, selling one's donkey may be good advice. There are advantages to having a

1. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 19:14

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donkey: the payment for work performed with a donkey is immediate, and the donkey is the one who does the work.

The explanation is as follows. When the Torah repeats the same concept twice, we must try to find something new that it teaches us. The Torah already discussed causing bodily harm to another, causing one to "stumble." The beginning student already learned that² "If a person opens a pit, or if a person digs a pit and does not cover it, and a bull or a donkey falls into it ... the owner of the pit shall pay, he shall return money to its owner ..." We were already taught not to cause damage to another. Although what we learned previously discusses the obligation for monetary compensation and not the prohibition of digging a pit, it is undoubtedly prohibited if one receives punishment for committing an act! According to Peshat, Rashi is telling us that the Torah is teaching us a novel concept; we already know that we may not cause harm to another. Therefore, Rashi explains that the Torah refers to giving bad advice.

However, there are times that I will be giving my fellow good advice, but I will also be thinking about what I can benefit from it. This, too, is not acceptable. The Torah says that we must love our fellow as ourselves. The advice I give my friend must be purely for his benefit. After suggesting buying a donkey, Rashi adds, "while you plan to cheat him." It is possible that purchasing a donkey may be good advice; nevertheless, I must have his benefit in mind and no one else's.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Kedoshim, tells us that one may "not place a stumbling block before a blind person." Rashi explains that here, a blind person refers to one who is "blind," meaning ignorant regarding a particular matter. Rashi further explains that "placing a stumbling block before him" means giving him bad advice.

Rashi continues with an example of "advice that is improper for him," saying that it means telling one's friend to "sell your field and buy a donkey (with the proceeds), while you plan to cheat him since you plan to take it from him."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

As we have stated many times, Rashi explains Peshat, which is the simple meaning of the verse. Why doesn't Rashi explain that the Torah refers to placing a stumbling block in front of one who is blind (G-d forbid)? In fact, why does Rashi need to state anything; it seems obvious.

2. Parshas Mishpotim, Shemos 21:33-34.

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Additionally, Rashi says that the meaning of a stumbling block here is "advice that is improper for him." He gives an example of telling one's friend to "sell his field and buy a donkey (with the proceeds), while you plan to cheat him since you will take it from him." There seems to be no need for an example. We all understand what improper advice is. Moreover, Rashi finds a need to give an example of inappropriate advice. Why can he not use a more straightforward example? There are many types of bad advice.

The source of this Rashi is a Midrash³. The Midrash gives other examples of bad advice, seemingly more straightforward than the one Rashi quotes. The first example is suggesting to someone that he leaves on a journey at the break of dawn so that highwaymen attack him. The second is that he goes in the middle of the afternoon so that he succumbs to a heatwave. The third is that he tells someone that a particular woman is fit according to Jewish law to marry a Kohen, but she is not. Finally, the Midrash uses the example that Rashi cites. Why does Rashi cite the last example used by the Midrash? The earlier examples are all simpler. Rashi chooses the final reason. However, why does he conclude by saying, "You plan to cheat him since you will take it from him?" That does not serve to make it less fitting advice!

The Explanation

Let us begin by dealing with the last two questions. Even the beginning Torah student understands that a donkey could be more beneficial than a field in terms of earning a livelihood. A donkey can work both day and night. The donkey carries heavy loads, meaning less work for the owner. One can usually take care of a field only during the day. It also involves tremendous exertion by the one who owns it. He must perform all of the labors associated with farming; he must plow, sow, reap, harvest, etc. Until the end of this procedure, he does not make any profit whatsoever. However, while working with a donkey, one can see a profit (almost) immediately. From this, it would seem that the advice to sell his field and buy a donkey is quite good, at least short-term.

That is why Rashi adds, "You plan to cheat him since you will take it from him." Although the advice is sound, the one giving the guidance does not have his friend's best interest in mind. In Rashi's words, it is "advice that is improper *for him*."

However, the fact is that in the long term, the advice is not suitable *for him*. A field does not die, unlike a donkey. Working with a donkey involves traveling, often far from home, whereas a field is usually nearby. There are numerous reasons why selling his field and buying a donkey may not be

3. Toras Kohanim 19, 34.

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good advice *for him*. This is similar to the other examples quoted by the Midrash. Leaving on a journey early in the morning is generally good advice, but it presents a stumbling block in this case. It was not good advice *for him*. Additionally, if it is better for the one receiving the suggestion to have a donkey, what difference does it make that the advisor will claim his field?

The answer to all of the above questions is understandable to beginners and advanced students alike. When the Torah repeats something we know from before, we must try to look for additional teaching added by its repetition.

We already know because the Torah said earlier that⁴ "If a person opens a pit, or if a person digs a pit and does not cover it, and a bull or a donkey falls into it ... the owner of the pit shall pay, he shall return money to its owner ..." In other words, we were already taught not to cause damage to another by placing a stumbling block, i.e., *doing damage*. We learned that such acts are *prohibited*. Even though what we learned previously discusses the obligation for monetary compensation and not the prohibition of damaging another, it *must* be prohibited if one receives punishment for committing the action! According to Peshat, Rashi tells us that we already know that it is forbidden to cause damage to another. Therefore, he explains that the Torah is teaching us a new concept. Therefore, Rashi explains that the Torah refers to giving bad advice, which is terrible for the one we are advising.

This is why Rashi does not quote the first three reasons of the Midrash. Suggesting to someone that he leaves on a journey at the break of dawn to be attacked by highwaymen is the equivalent of digging a pit in a public place. The same is true of indicating that he embarks on a trip in the middle of the afternoon so that he succumbs to a heatwave. Telling someone that a particular woman is fit according to Jewish law to marry a Kohen while she is not is causing spiritual damage.

However, there are times that I will be giving my fellow good advice, but I will also be thinking about what I can benefit from it. This, too, is not acceptable. The Torah says that we must love our fellow as ourselves. The advice that I give my friend must be purely for him. Therefore, after suggesting buying a donkey, Rashi adds, "while you plan to cheat him." It is possible that purchasing a donkey may be good advice; nevertheless, I must have his benefit in mind and no one else's. The Torah tells us to love our fellow as ourselves; I must place myself in his shoes while giving him advice.

4. Parshas Mishpotim, Shemos 21:33-34.

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A Practical Lesson from Rashi

As we said above, giving a friend good advice is not enough. I must consider only my friend's benefit, and I may not even consider any benefit I derive from this advice. When I advise him, I must entirely divest myself from the situation. That is the true fulfillment of "loving your fellow as yourself," bringing the true unity of all Jewish people.

(Compiled from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim 5741)

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

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

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

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