

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Re'ah

Menachem Av 25, 5783 – August 12, 2023
Shnas Hakhel

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 14, Pages 45 – 52

Rashi in His Own Words

דברים י"ב, כ"ג: רק חזק לבלתי אכל הדם כי הדם הוא הנפש ולא תאכל הנפש עם הבשר:
רש"י רק חזק לבלתי אכל הדם: ממה שנאמר חזק אתה למד שהיו שטופים בדם לאכלו, לפיכך הוצרך לומר חזק,
דברי רבי יהודה. רבי שמעון בן עזאי אומר, לא בא הכתוב אלא להזהירך וללמדך עד כמה אתה צריך להתחזק במצות,
אם הדם, שהוא קל להשמר ממנו, שאין אדם מתאוה לו, הוצרך לחזקך באזהרתו, קל וחומר לשאר מצות:

Devorim 12:23: However, be strong not to eat the blood; for the blood is the soul; and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh.

Rashi Heading - However, be strong not to eat the blood: Since the Torah writes "be strong," you can learn that the Jews were inclined to eat blood. Therefore, it was necessary to write "be strong." These are the words of Rabbi Yehudah. However, Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai said that the Torah comes only to warn you and teach you to what extent you must be careful in fulfilling the commandments. The Torah needed to strengthen you with its admonition regarding blood, which is easy to watch out for because a person does not want it. How much more so must one strengthen oneself for all other commandments!

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Re'eh, the Torah warns us not to eat blood. Before prohibiting blood, the Torah tells us to be strong. Rashi offers two explanations for the Torah's injunction to strengthen ourselves. Firstly, he quotes Rabbi Yehudah, who says that the Torah tells us to be strong, implying that the Jews were inclined to eat blood. He then quotes Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai¹, who said Jews had no interest in eating blood. Nevertheless, the Torah warned us to be strong. That comes to teach us how strong we must be regarding other cautions that we *do* desire.

It is often difficult to understand what is bothering Rashi; what difficulty he finds in understanding the simple meaning of the verse. Here, however, it seems to be obvious. We do not see other instances where the Torah tells us to "be strong" regarding a particular Mitzvah.

1. This Sage is at times referred to by the Sages as Ben Azzai, at times as Shimon ben Azzai and other times (such as here) as Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai.

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This instance is an exception. Why does the Torah say, "Be strong not to eat blood?" Rashi explains this exception by telling us the opinions of Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai.

When Rashi offers two answers to one question, each answer poses a difficulty in understanding Peshat. However, the first explanation is closer to the simple meaning of the Torah than the first. What is the problem with each of Rashi's explanations?

An added difficulty is that Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai disagreed with the facts. According to one, the Jews desired to eat blood. According to the other, they had no such desire. A factual difference of opinion is the most difficult to reconcile. How can we do so?

Rashi's commentary seems to come from the Sifri. But a more careful look shows us that this is not the case. The actual quote of Rabbi Yehudah from the Sifri is that the Jews were "inclined to eat blood *before* the giving of the Torah." In other words, the inclination toward blood was when we were in Egypt. However, this was a new generation about to enter Israel. We were commanded not to eat blood several times since the giving of the Torah. Why are we told to be strong here², at the end of the forty years?

That is why Rashi goes on at length, telling us that now too, the Torah tells us to be strong to keep this commandment. Perhaps a person does not desire something. It may even disgust him. Yet, he still is inclined toward it. He feels that it benefits him, which causes him to want it. He thinks it will help him physically, spiritually, or both. That is why Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai were not arguing over the reality. According to both opinions, Jews were disgusted by eating or drinking blood. According to Rabbi Yehudah, the difference is that the Jews felt there would be a side benefit from eating/drinking blood. Therefore, Hashem told them to strengthen themselves.

Rashi's Explanation

In our Torah portion, Re'ah, the Torah tells us,³ "However, be strong not to eat the blood; for the blood is the soul, and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh." Rashi cites the words "However, be strong not to eat the blood" and offers two interpretations⁴. "Since the Torah writes

2. We were not told this at the other instances that we were commanded not to eat blood.

3. Our Parshah, Devorim 12:23.

4. Rashi's source is from the Sifri, *ibid*.

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to "be strong," you can learn that the Jews were inclined to eat blood. Therefore, the Torah needed to warn us to "be strong." These are the words of Rabbi Yehudah.

Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai, however, said that the Torah comes only to teach us to what extent you must be careful in fulfilling the commandments. The Torah needed to strengthen the Jews with the warning not to eat blood. This was easy to watch out for since the Jews had no interest in so doing. How much more so must one strengthen oneself regarding all of the other commandments in the Torah?"

In other words, the Torah first tells us to be strong. It then commands us not to eat blood. According to Rabbi Yehudah, we were inclined to eat blood. Hence the Torah told us to strengthen ourselves to avoid doing so. Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai, on the other hand, tells us that the Jews had no interest whatsoever in eating blood. Nonetheless, the Torah needed to tell us to be strong regarding a prohibition that we found repulsive. How much more so must we strengthen ourselves regarding prohibitions which we desire?

Often it takes an effort to understand what is bothering Rashi because, in the vast majority of cases, Rashi does not ask questions; instead, he tells us the answers. Here Rashi's difficulty seems to be obvious. Why does the Torah tell us "to be strong, not to eat blood?" We find no other similar instance in the Torah⁵. Therefore, Rashi tells us the opinions of Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The above presents us with several difficulties. For one thing, we have a rule that has to do with understanding Rashi. Every time Rashi gives two answers to a single question, according to Peshat, there is a difficulty with each explanation. The first explanation that Rashi offers is closer to the simple meaning of the Torah. Based on this, we need to understand why Rashi needs two answers, what difficulty exists with both, and why the first is closer to Peshat.

Additionally, we must understand this disagreement between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai. There are all sorts of differences of opinion between our Sages. We often find a difference in understanding the underlying reason between two things. However, here they disagree as to what the actual situation was. According to Rabbi Yehudah, at that time, Jews

5. See the commentary of the Ramban (ibid.). He writes that the Torah *does* use the expression of strength regarding *all* Mitzvos in a number of instances. Here, however, is the one instance where the Torah tells us to be strong regarding a specific Mitzvah.

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were inclined to eat blood. They had a perverse desire to do so. According to Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai, they had no such desire. Explaining a disagreement regarding a fact is more complex than explaining any other sort of difference of opinion. When Hashem gave us the Torah, did the Jews desire to eat blood or not?

The Explanation

Rashi's commentary seems to come from the Sifri. But a more careful look at Sifri's words shows us that this is not the case. The quote of Rabbi Yehudah from the Sifri is that the Jews were "inclined to eat blood *before* the giving of the Torah." In other words, the inclination toward eating blood was when we were in Egypt. However, Moshe was speaking to a new generation about to enter Israel. We were commanded not to eat blood several times since the giving of the Torah. Why does the Torah say to be strong here, specifically at the end of the forty years? This was a new generation! This generation did not desire blood.

That is why Rashi goes on at length, telling us that now too, at the end of the forty years, we were commanded to be strong to keep this commandment. Perhaps a person does not desire something. Moreover, it may disgust him. Yet, he may still be inclined toward it. He may feel that this particular item has a benefit for him. This perceived benefit can cause him to want it. He thinks that it will provide him with some physical or spiritual benefit. That is why Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai argued this point. They were not arguing over what the reality was. According to both opinions, Jews were disgusted by eating or drinking blood. According to Rabbi Yehudah, the difference is that the Jews felt there would be a side benefit from eating/drinking blood. Therefore, Hashem commanded them to strengthen themselves.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Torah tells us the reason for the prohibition against eating blood⁶; "... for the blood is the soul, and you shall not eat the soul with the flesh." The commentaries⁷ explain that the soul of an animal is within its flesh. Nevertheless, the flesh within which the soul exists⁸ is not the same as the blood, which *is* the soul itself.

Each food that one eats becomes a part of his flesh. Therefore, one develops the nature of

6. Devorim 12:23.

7 See the Ramban (Parshah Acharei Vayikroh 17:11), the Sefer Hachinuch at the beginning of Mitzvah 148, the Akedah to Parshas Acharei (Chapter 46), the Ohr Hachaim Vayikroh *ibid.* and the Abarbenel here.

8. There are commentaries who say that the only reason that the soul is found there is because of the blood.

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the animals that he eats. The blood of an animal represents the character traits of the animal soul.

May we all connect ourselves with G-dliness. In this manner, we will be one with Hashem. That will certainly help us bring Moshiach one moment sooner.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Re'ah 5730)

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

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