

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shoftim

6 Elul, 5781 – August 14, 2021

Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Shoftim

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים כ"א, ד': והוֹרְדוּ וְקָנְוּ הָעִיר הַהוּא אֶת־הָעֵגְלָה אֶל־נֶסֶל אִיָּתוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִעֲבֹד בּוֹ וְלֹא יִזְרַע וְעָרְפוּ־שָׁם אֶת־הָעֵגְלָה בְּנֶסֶל:
רש"י וערפו: קוצץ ערפה בקופיץ. אמר הקב"ה תבא עגלה בת שנתה שלא עשתה פירות ותערף במקום שאינו עושה פירות, לכפר על הריגתו של זה שלא הניחהו לעשות פירות:

Devorim 21:4: The elders of that city shall bring the calf down to a rugged valley which was neither tilled nor sown. There in the valley, they shall decapitate the calf.

Rashi Heading - shall decapitate: He breaks its neck with a hatchet (meaning from the back of his neck). The Holy One blessed be He says, "Let the calf which is in its first year and has, therefore, produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place where the valley was not tilled and had, therefore) produced no fruits. This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos).

Synopsis

At the end of this week's Torah portion, Shoftim, we find a most unusual Mitzvah¹. The Mitzvah is called "Eglah Arufah – עגלה ערופה" which serves as an atonement. We perform it as follows. One finds a body in a field that is between various cities. We do not know who murdered the corpse. The Sages of each of these cities leave their respective rabbinic courts; they must travel to the area in question. They then measure to see which city is closest to the corpse. The elders from the town nearest to the body must take a calf with which had not worked and had never drawn a yoke. The elders of that city must bring the calf down to a rugged valley that was neither tilled nor sown. There they shall decapitate the calf from the back of its neck. The Kohanim shall approach all the elders of the city who are nearest to the corpse. They shall wash their hands over the calf that the elders decapitated in the valley. They must announce, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see (this crime)². Atone for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed Hashem, and do not lay the guilt of innocent blood among your people Israel. And the blood will be atoned for them. And you shall abolish the (shedding of) innocent blood from among you,

1. See Our Parshah, Devorim 21:1-9.

2. Rashi explains further (Our Parshah, Devorim 21:7) "Would it enter one's mind that the elders of the court are murderers? Rather they say as follows. "We ourselves did not see him and let him depart without food. Likewise, we did not see him and not escort him."

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for you shall do what is proper in the eyes of the Lord."

This Mitzvah is obviously most unusual. It is explained there, in both Rashi and the Talmud³, as follows. "*The Holy One blessed be He says, 'Let a calf which is in its first year and has, therefore, produced no fruits be decapitated in a valley which has not been tilled (and therefore bore no fruits). This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos).'*" What is the relevance of the fact that Hashem made this declaration?

In other words, the murder of a calf who bore no fruits in a place which bore no fruits atones for the murder of a person who bore no fruit, meaning performed no Mitzvos.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion is Shoftim. It teaches us that⁴ "The elders of that city shall bring the calf down to a rugged valley which was neither tilled nor sown. There in the valley, they shall decapitate the calf." Rashi cites the words "shall decapitate" and writes the following. "He breaks its neck with a hatchet (meaning from the back of his neck). The Holy One blessed be He says, 'Let the calf which is in its first year and has, therefore, produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place where the valley was not tilled and had, therefore) produced no fruits. This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos).'"

We know that Rashi is not verbose with the words he uses. We need to understand why Rashi adds the words from the Talmud, that "the Holy One Blessed is He says..." Those words add *nothing* to Peshat. There are many places where it may seem appropriate to say "Hashem says" or something of that sort; however, Rashi never writes such words.

One might try to explain that Rashi is quoting the words of the Talmud. However, in the Talmud, those words are appropriate. The Talmud is not limited to Peshat. However, here Rashi is only explaining the simple meaning of the verse. Why does Rashi find a need to tell us that G-d said these words?

Rashi goes into great detail explaining this Peshat. For the most part, he is quoting the Sages⁵. The Sages add even more details than Rashi quotes. However, the Torah itself goes into quite a bit of detail⁶. "The Sages of the city which is closer to the corpse will perform this Mitzvah. They will take a calf with

3. See Talmud Sotah Page 45, at the end of Side B in the Mishnah. See *ibid.* Page 46 at the end of Side A in the Mishnah. The Talmud's phrasing is somewhat different than Rashi's.

4. Our Parshah, Devorim 21:4.

5. See footnote 3.

6. Our Parshah, Devorim 21:9.

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which work has never been done and has never drawn a yoke. They will bring the calf down to a rugged valley, which was neither tilled nor sown. There they shall decapitate the calf. And the Kohanim, the sons of Levi approach, because Hashem chose them to serve Him and bless in His name. By their mouths shall every controversy and every lesion be judged. The city elders nearest the corpse will wash their hands over the calf decapitated in the valley. They shall announce that "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen this crime. Atone for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, Hashem, and lay not the guilt of the innocent blood among your people Israel." And the blood shall be atoned for them. And you shall abolish the shedding of innocent blood from among you. You shall do what is proper in the eyes of Hashem."

In his commentary on the Torah, Rashi does not generally explain the reason for Mitzvos. This is true regarding sacrifices, which we can divide into three types. Some offerings serve as atonement. Some thank Hashem for the blessings that He has brought upon us. Thirdly, there are those which serve as purification. The offerings that mark the end of impurity also thank Hashem⁷. These offerings must be brought "before Hashem." This means that one must bring them to the Bais Hamikdosh." That is because the Temple is the source of all blessings.

There are yet other types of sacrifices. There are the two birds that a Metzora offers to mark the end of his impurity. There are also two goats that the Kohen Gadol brings on Yom Kippur, which atone for all of our sins. Marking the end of impurity is an occasion for giving thanks. We do not offer the goat on Yom Kippur in the Temple, yet the Torah calls it a sin offering. This is because each goat was prepared for use in the Sanctuary. The red heifer is also called a sin offering, despite being brought outside of the Sanctuary.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

We perform this Mitzvah as follows. One finds a corpse in a field that is between various cities. We do not know who murdered the corpse. The rabbis from these cities leave the holiness of their respective rabbinic courts and must measure to see which city is closest to the corpse. The elders from the city closest to the corpse must take a calf with which performed no work. The calf had also never drawn a yoke. The elders of that city must bring the calf down to a rugged valley, which was neither tilled nor sown. There they shall decapitate the calf. The Kohanim shall approach all the elders of that city nearest to the corpse and wash their hands over the decapitated calf in the valley. They must then announce that

7. Parshah Vayikroh, Vayikroh 1:3.

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"Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see this crime. Atone for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, O Lord, and lay not the guilt of innocent blood among your people Israel." And so, the blood shall be atoned for them. And you shall abolish the shedding of innocent blood from among you, for you shall do what is proper in the eyes of the Lord.

How Rashi (and the Talmud⁴) explain this particular Mitzvah is especially unusual. "*The Holy One blessed be He says*, 'Let the calf which is in its first year and has, therefore, produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place where the valley has not been tilled and had consequently made no fruits. This will atone for the murder of this man, whom they (the murderers) did not allow to produce fruit (i.e., to perform Mitzvos). Why does the fact that Hashem makes this declaration add to the meaning of this unusual ritual?

The Explanation

We brought two sacrifices outside of the Temple. One was the goat which we threw down a mountain to atone for our sins. We sent the goat outside of all three camps⁸. The other was the two birds that were removed to complete the purification of a Metzora. The goat which we sent away was called a "sin-offering."⁹ Although we did not bring it on the altar, nevertheless, this goat provided the main atonement¹⁰ for the Jewish people.

Based on this, we can understand why Rashi first writes that "he breaks its neck with a hatchet (from the back)," and Rashi then writes "the Holy One Blessed be He says ..." Arifah – עריפה, the act of cutting off an animal's head from behind with a very sharp knife is very cruel. It tortures the animal¹¹. That is why Rashi emphasizes that G-d Almighty Himself said to do this. There are times when something seems to be evil, such as taking a sharp knife away from a baby. However, in reality, this is the most extraordinary kindness!

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

This teaches us a lesson about the "Eglah Arufah." It does not just affect those that live in the closest city to the corpse. It affects even the elders of that city; here, the word elders have the connotation of Sages. Moreover, it even affects the Supreme Court of the city. Not only that court, but it even affected

8. This was one of a pair; each had to be exactly alike. The goat which we are discussing was sent down a mountain outside of all three camps. Its partner was brought as an actual sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash.

9. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 16:5.

10. Parshas Acharei, Vayikroh 16:10

11. See the Me'iri's commentary to the Mishnah in Sotah which we quoted earlier. It can be found on Page 45, Side B. The Me'iri quotes that "he cuts the animal with great strength from behind.

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the Grand Supreme Court of the entire Jewish Nation! These people are Sages in the truest sense of the word. This is the negative effect that decapitating an animal can have upon a Jew, not just any Jew but a Tzaddik! Although it is a difference of opinion exactly how many members of the Great Sanhedrin had to be present for the calf's beheading, some of them had to be present.

There was a need for even the greatest of the great to witness this extreme act of cruelty. This brought about the atonement of all of the Jews for this act of murder.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Shoftim, Teitzei and Tavo 5730)

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

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the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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