

Parshas Emor

The Omer Offering

When Rashi explains the prohibition of using the new grain before the Omer offering is brought he offers two explanations as to the parameters of the prohibition. This Sicha investigates the need for both explanations, the advantages of each of them and the mechanism of how the offering affects the Jewish people.

This week’s Torah portion discusses the prohibition of eating of the new grain (“*chadash*”) before the *Omer* sacrifice was brought. The Torah tells us¹, “When you come to the Land which I am giving you, and you reap its harvest, you shall bring to the *kohen* (priest) an *omer* of the beginning of your reaping.” Until the *Omer* is brought as an offering, the new grain is forbidden to be used.

When the Torah records this prohibition, it makes the following statement:

Text 1

You shall not eat bread or [flour made from] parched grain or fresh grain, until this very day, until you bring your G-d’s sacrifice. [This is] an eternal statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

Vayikra 23:14

Though the words “in all your dwelling places” implies that the prohibition of the new grain is even outside the land of Israel, Rashi comments on the words “in all your dwelling places” and explains that there are two opinions as to where this prohibition applies.

Text 2

The Sages of Israel differ concerning this. Some learned from here that [the prohibition of eating] the new crop [before the *Omer*] applies [even] outside the Land [of Israel], while others say that this phrase comes only to teach [us] that they were commanded regarding the new crop only after possession and settlement, after they had conquered and apportioned [the land].

Rashi, ibid

Why explain anything?

When Rashi explains something on a verse it is because there was a specific difficulty that would not have been understood, were Rashi not to have added his explanation. Seemingly, in this verse there is no difficulty in the words “in all your dwelling places” at all which would require an explanation, as the translation of these words seems to be straightforward according to the simple explanation of the Torah. This is because

- A) The rudimentary translation of the verse means in all the places that the Jewish people will dwell. There is ostensibly no need to explain the basic understanding of the verse.
- B) These words, “in all your dwelling places” are used in regard to many other *mitzvos* as well, even prior to the current

¹ Vayikra 23:10.

verse, and in the vast majority of them Rashi did not feel the need to explain this phrase.

If so, why in this case regarding the new grain, does Rashi feel the need to explain the meaning of the words “in all your dwelling places” when he did not do so on other occasions?

The importance of explaining

In order to understand the reason that Rashi explains the words “in all of your dwelling places” in this verse and clarifies that (according to the first interpretation) it means that the law of the new grain applies outside the land of Israel, can be understood through first prefacing Rashi’s explanation to the same words found in another verse.

This similar terminology of “in any of your dwelling places” is employed in the verse concerning the prohibition to consume blood. The verse states:

Text 3

And you shall not eat any blood in any of your dwelling places, whether from birds or from animals.

Vayikra 7:26

Rashi there elucidates that the prohibition of eating blood is applicable both in the land of Israel and outside of it and explains the reason for this as follows:

Text 4

Since this prohibition [of eating blood] is an obligation relevant to a person, rather than being dependent on land, it applies to all dwelling places.

Rashi, ibid

The rationale that *causes* the prohibition of eating blood to be forbidden in all places—i.e., the fact that it is an obligation on the *individual* rather than the *land* and is therefore prohibited no matter the person—is the *same* logic that would cause one to think that the prohibition of new grain *only* stands in the land of Israel. This is because

- A) The prohibition of eating the new grain is *not* an obligation upon the individual, it is rather a prohibition pertaining to the grain and therefore dependent on the land. It should presumably only be prohibited in the land of Israel.
- B) In the simple sense, not only is the prohibition of the grain itself not one that relates to the individual but the prohibition of the new grain is dependent on the bringing of the *Omer* offering, which must be brought from the *land of Israel*. Consequently, the prohibition against using the new grain *should* also only pertain in the land of Israel, and thus one would not understand that “in all your dwellings” would be a reference to *all* places.

It was due to these two logical assumptions that could cause one to think that the law of the new grain is not applicable outside the land of Israel, which necessitated Rashi to explain the words “in all your dwelling places” in this verse, though it would have otherwise have been obvious.

He therefore clarifies with his commentary, that although it may seem that there are reasons that this law should apply *only* in the land of Israel, it nevertheless is applicable everywhere because this is the simple meaning of the words “in all your dwelling places.”

Two explanations

In Rashi’s second interpretation of the words “in all your dwelling places” he says: “this phrase

comes only to teach [us] that they were commanded regarding the new crop only after possession and settlement, after they had conquered and apportioned [the land].”

What must be understood is why Rashi found it necessary to bring his second explanation as well. If the first explanation adequately explains the basic understanding of the verse, what is the purpose of bringing a second interpretation?

Not only does this explanation seem to be extra, but it runs contrary to the way that the words “in all your dwelling places” are usually understood. For, whereas the phrase is generally used to *include* the land outside of Israel, here those very words *exclude* those lands.

What makes this question more bothersome is the fact that he prefaces his explanation to the verse with the atypical declaration and says, “The Sages of Israel differ concerning this.”

Typically, when Rashi brings two explanations on the same verse and prefaces one to the other, it is because the first is more viable in the simple explanation of the verse, yet because of some specific difficulty with it, he brings a second interpretation as well.

However, this is not the case when Rashi prefaces both explanations by telling us on the onset that there are two interpretations concerning the verse’s meaning.

In such a case—when he introduces his commentary by explaining that the interpretation of the verse is a matter of dispute—he is conveying that *both* of the following explanations are *equally* viable according to the simple meaning of the verse. Since, however, it is impossible to bring both explanations at once, he is bringing one before the other and prefaces that they are *both* the simple explanation.

Accordingly we must understand the verse concerning the new grain. When Rashi specifically mentions that “the Sages of Israel differ concerning this,” he is implying that both explanations of the phrase “in all your dwelling places” are *equally* sustainable according to the simple understanding of the verse. The second explanation (that the prohibition only began after the Israelites were completely settled in their land) is not any further removed from the verse’s simple meaning than the first (that the prohibition applies even both inside and outside the land of Israel).

This point though, is not understood: How can it be that the second explanation is as much the rudimentary explanation of the verse as the first, when the former is the simple meaning of the words and congruous to the way that these words are explained throughout the Torah, while the second interpretation is neither?

Even if there is some reason that necessitated Rashi’s bringing the second explanation of the verse, (due to the difficulty with the first reason—being that it is not understood why indeed a prohibition regarding the land could apply even outside of Israel) how is possible that the second interpretation of the words “in all your dwelling places,” (i.e., that the prohibition of the eating the new grain only stood after the Israelites were completely settled in their land,) be *as close* to the rudimentary understanding of the verse as the *basic* translation of the words “in all your dwelling places,” which seem to *include* the land outside of Israel?

Explanation

The reason that the second explanation is as rudimentary to the basic explanation of the Torah can be understood through first understanding another prohibition expressed in this week’s Torah portion as well, which is *also* applicable outside the land of Israel.

The Torah states:

Text 5

[Any animal whose testicles were] squashed, crushed, pulled out, or severed, you shall not offer up to the Lord, and in your land, you shall not do [it].

Vayikra 22:24

Though the Torah states regarding this prohibition, “in your land, you shall not do [it],” which implies that this prohibition is *only* in the land of Israel, Rashi comments on the words “and in your land, you shall not do [it]” and explains that according to the *simple* explanation of the Torah this cannot be. He says,

Text 6

This thing, to castrate any livestock or wild animal, even of an unclean species. This is why [our verse] says here “in your land” -to include any species found in your land. For it is impossible to say that castration is prohibited only in the land of Israel [“your land,”] because [the prohibition of] castration is an obligation [associated with] the body [of a person], and every commandment associated with the body [of a person] applies both in the Land [of Israel] and outside the Land [of Israel].

Rashi, ibid

Though the verse says “in your land,” which would seem that this prohibition is only in the land of Israel, Rashi nevertheless explains that according to the simple explanation of the Torah, this prohibition applies also outside the land of Israel.

Rashi felt compelled to explain the verse in way that runs contrary to the basic translation of the verse due to the essential rule (even according to a rudimentary understanding of the Torah) that any commandment which is associated with the body applies both in the land of Israel as well as outside of it.

From the fact that Rashi specifically brings an explanation to the verse which runs contrary to the translation of the words “in your land,” (explaining that this includes areas outside of Israel as well) it is clear that the rule that serves as the foundation to his statement must be a fundamental and basic precept according to the simple explanation of the Torah.

From this it is understood as well concerning the other half of the same rule, concerning that which is obligatory solely in regard to the land itself. It too, is also a basic rule in the understanding of the Torah, as the Talmud states,

Text 7

Every precept which is a personal obligation is practiced both within and without the Land; but what is an obligation of the soil has force only within the Land.

Talmud, Kiddushin 37a

Being that the above precept is basic in understanding of the Torah, it is for this reason that Rashi considers the second explanation to be of equal validity in the simple meaning of the verse.

With this in mind, he presents both explanations and does not only explain the words “in all your dwelling places” according to the view of the first opinion (i.e., that this prohibition includes also those who live outside of Israel). Rather, he

presents an alternate interpretation stating that indeed this prohibition is applicable only in the land of Israel and that these words express that the prohibition only begins once the Israelites are completely settled in their land.

Each is insufficient

Rashi's intention with bringing both interpretations on the verse is due to a difficulty found within each. While both fit with the simple meaning of the verse, each one contains a difficulty that necessitates the alternate explanation.

The difficulty with the first explanation: Being that the *mitzvah* of offering the new grain pertains to the Land itself and is not a responsibility of the individual, saying that it is an obligation that applies even outside the land of Israel goes against the precept of "what is an obligation of the soil has force only within the Land."

The difficulty with the second explanation: This opinion runs contrary to the usual understanding of the words "all your dwelling places," and instead suggests that these words qualify when the prohibition of the new grain began.

Since each one has a separate type of difficulty according to the simple explanation of the Torah, it is clear that both explanations are of equal status. It is for this reason that Rashi brings both views and also prefaces that "the Sages of Israel differ concerning this," thereby conveying that each explanation is as viable as the other.

The argument

What remains to be understood is that since both explanations are equally problematic and equally viable, what is the reason that some "Sages of Israel" chose one explanation and other chose the other?

The answer to this is embedded in Rashi's words, "the Sages of Israel differ concerning this." Instead of writing as he usually does with the term, "our Rabbis differ concerning this."

With this expression Rashi imparts, that instead of the argument revolving around how the verse should be *learned*, it is rather an intuitive argument regarding how to understand and evaluate the nature of the Jewish people, "Israel." He therefore calls them "the Sages of Israel" instead of "our Rabbis," as depending on the way the Sages understood the nature of the Jewish people is the way that they chose to explain the prohibition.

Awakening the heart

The explanation of this as follows: When a person offers a sacrifice, the purpose of the offering is not merely the act of sacrificing the animal on top of the altar, but it is in order to arouse a certain emotional reaction within the person, depending on the nature of the sacrifice.

A sin offering is meant to awaken a feeling of regret and repentance, an offering of thanksgiving should bring a feeling of gratitude to the Almighty, etc.

This concept is expressed by Rashi in the following statement:

Text 8

Whether one offers much or little, [it is equally pleasing to G-d,] provided that he directs his heart to Heaven.

Rashi, Vayikra 1:17

The emphasis and importance of the offering is not only in regard to the actual sacrifice that one offers, but primarily in the *intention* of the

person, and the feelings directed to G-d via the sacrifice. The intent of the offering to arouse the emotions of an individual is not only in regard to private offerings, but with communal ones as well.

Accordingly, it is understood that the prohibition of eating of the new grain before the communal *Omer* offering was brought from its yield—a law whose intent was that the first of the grain be dedicated as an offering to the Almighty—was meant to arouse within each person the realization that the first of his produce should be bequeathed to G-d and only afterwards can the individual partake of the remaining grain.

The *Omer* offering however, was brought from the produce of the land of Israel and therefore posed a certain difficulty:

How can the feeling of one's first crop belonging to the Almighty be instilled in the hearts of those Jews that resided outside the land of Israel?

In response to this conundrum are the two opinions of the Sages of Israel:

The first opinion holds that these individuals should be prohibited from eating their new grains as well. Not being able to benefit from their grain until the offering of the *Omer* was brought in the land of Israel would remind and arouse them of the realization that they must give their initial yield to G-d, although the actual offering was not brought from their personal produce, but from grain in Israel.

The second opinion is of the view that on the contrary, the manner in which to arouse those that live outside of Israel in *not* through forbidding them to partake of their new produce. Rather, from the very realization that their produce is *permitted* to them, and the knowledge that they cannot be part of this communal *mitzvah* of offering the *Omer*, they will be reminded of their lowly situation and this itself will serve as a catalyst for the desire to give

of their fruits to G-d in a *stronger* way; even more so than those living inside the land of Israel.

A deeper look

According to the above, Rashi's choice of order concerning the presentation of the two explanations can be appreciated as well.

First he brought the opinion of which the prohibition of the new grain is *prohibited* outside the land of Israel, and only after did he present the explanation stating that it is only prohibited *within* the land of Israel.

Each of the above approaches of the Sages in regards to inspiring the Jew who lived outside of Israel operates in a variant way in their choice of method to affect an individual in the best manner.

The first: Through forbidding the grain, the person's body and animal soul is affected, but not as much their G-dly soul.

The second: Not forbidding the grain awakens in them the *yearning* to be at the same level as those Jews living in the land of Israel, thus arousing their G-dly soul's inner desire to be close to G-dliness.

Accordingly, Rashi's order is understood. He begins with explaining the easier task—to start working with and refining the animal soul, as it stands at its natural strength. Only afterwards does he explain the next stage, where the soul itself can be directly affected.

In the land of Israel too

The difference of the two explanations is not only in regards to how the prohibition applies *outside* of Israel, and the appreciation of the two approaches concerning those individuals. The variant opinions also concern those living in the land of Israel itself: Does the prohibition stand immediately upon the entrance into the land, or

does it only begin after the possession and settlement?

According to the first explanation, the prohibition of the new grain began *before* the Land of Israel was completely settled, and according to the second explanation it only began *after* it was completely settled.

Based on the deeper insight regarding both explanations however, it is understood that the two explanations are interdependent, as the abovementioned stages in serving G-d are not only applicable to the Jews residing outside the land of Israel but also to those who live inside Israel as well.

The first opinion emphasizes affecting the body by way of a prohibition. Even within the land of Israel, the recognition that the first grains belong to the Almighty is primarily accomplished through the prohibition that affects the body (abstaining from eating the grain) and not from the actual offering of the *Omer* to G-d.

Therefore, according to this view, this prohibition began *immediately* upon entering the land of Israel, even before the Jewish people were completely settled there and thus enveloped by the holiness of the land. For, though their souls were not yet permeated with the G-dly vitality of the land, it was still possible for their bodies to begin to be affected and refined. Through the prohibition of the new grain directly affecting their body, this could be achieved.

However, according to **the second opinion**, which was of the approach that the main medium to affect the Jewish people is through their souls, accomplished via the bringing of the *Omer*, it was only possible to attain this affect after the Jewish people were completely settled in the land of Israel, and attached to its holiness in a permanent way.

(Based on Likutei Sichos 17, Emor 2, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: www.Neirot.com.)