

## Rabbi's Article IV

"Ah 'Shrek' is this 'Donkey'!"

Very often, in the Rebbe's *Sicha* ('talk') on a Rashi, the Rebbe would reveal to us its deeper esoteric teaching. And so it is with the Rebbe's 'talk' concerning the Rashi upon the verse (-Exodus 23:5), "If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its burden and you refrain from helping him(?) You shall surely help along with him," IN WHICH Rashi comments, "And you refrain from helping him," This is the interrogative... Midrashically, our Rabbis interpreted it as follows, "If you see..., you may refrain," sometimes you may refrain, and sometimes you must help. How so? (i) An elder who (finds it) beneath his dignity (to unload a donkey) -'You may refrain.' Or (ii) if the animal belongs to a gentile and the burden belongs to an Israelite, 'You may refrain' (-See the article: "Help --Even-- Thy Enemy")." The Rebbe reveals the, "Wonders" of Rashi.

The Baal Shem Tov (-[Link](#)) teaches upon this verse -its Hebrew wording, "If you see the donkey (*chamor* - חומר), your enemy," if you take a good look at your material (*chomer* - חומר), your physical body, you will see that it is your enemy, (in its desires being only self-centered, being lazy, etc.), "lying under its burden," buckling under the load of Torah and Mitzvot, "and you --will want to-- refrain from helping him," but rather, to break it through fasting and mortification, you should not. Rather, "You shall surely help along with him."

Comes along Rashi and tells us of the two cases in which, "you may refrain from helping him," and are allowed to fast: (i) "An elder who (finds it) beneath his dignity (to unload a donkey)," and (ii) "the animal belongs to a gentile and the burden belongs to an Israelite." Which, these two cases match with the two cases that Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the *Alter Rebbe* (-[Link](#)), lists as permissible to fast, in his *Code of Jewish Law*<sup>1</sup> (-Choshen Mishpat, Laws of Damages of the Body, Law 4): (i) *Fasts of Teshuvah*, and (ii) *Fasts to Polish the Soul*.

1. So too in the *Alter Rebbe's Tanya*, Part III: *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*: (i) End of chapter 1: *Fasts of Teshuvah*: "There are descriptions in the Musar literature... of numerous fasts and mortifications for excision and capital sins. The same is true of sins punished by death by divine agency... These fasts and mortifications are intended to avoid the punishment of suffering at the hand of Heaven... and also to urge on and expedite the conclusion of his soul's atonement. Also, perhaps he does not return to G-d with all his heart and soul out of love, but only out of fear." (ii) Beginning of chapter 2: *Fasts of Polishing the Soul*: "Nonetheless, that he may be acceptable before G-d, as beloved of Him as before the sin, that his Creator may derive delight from his service... Today we have no offerings to call forth G-d's pleasure; fasting replaces the offering. The Talmud says, 'May my loss of fat and blood be regarded as though I had offered before You...'"

- (i) "The animal belongs to a gentile and the burden belongs to an Israelite": This refers to, *Fasts of Teshuvah*. For when one sins, his body (*chamor*) disconnects from holiness, and momentarily, crosses over into the domain of the *Husks* -impurity. Hence, "The animal belongs to a gentile." Nevertheless, being that (Eiruvim 19a; Chagigah 27a), even, "the sinners of Israel are filled with good deeds as a pomegranate (is full of seeds)," hence, even for the one whose, "animal belongs to a gentile," nevertheless, "and the burden (good deeds) belongs to an Israelite"!
- (ii) "An elder who (finds it) beneath his dignity (to unload a donkey)": This refers to, *Fasts of Polishing the Soul*. For we are speaking of an 'Elder' (-Kedushin 32b), "and an 'elder' means nothing other than a wise man," meaning one who is submerged in Torah-study --does not have sins--, to whom, "to unload a donkey," -to deal with his physical body and its refinement, he, "(finds it) beneath his dignity." Hence, his fasting is one of, "Polishing the Soul," in completing the refinement of his body, which is the service that is lacking by him.

And this is why Rashi omits the case brought by the *Mechilta*, "If he were a Kohain (-[Link](#)) and it (the animal) were in the cemetery, he does not become unclean for it." For it is similar to the case of, "The animal belongs to a gentile and the burden belongs to an Israelite," in which his body is in the cemetery, through sins it was brought to a place of death and impurity, while his soul is a *Kohain's Daughter*, which (-Tanya, Chapter 24), "Always believes in the One G-d and remains faithful to Him even while the sin is being committed." And nevertheless, Rashi specifically chooses the case of, "The animal belongs to a gentile and the burden belongs to an Israelite," over the case of, "If he were a Kohain and it (the animal) were in the cemetery," because in holiness there is no true case of a Jew's body, "were in the cemetery," being that the Jewish body is (Sanhedrin, Chapter 11, Mishna 1), "The work of My hands, for My name to be glorified."

And this is the mystical meaning between the two interpretations of Rashi:

- (i) "And you refrain from helping him," This is the interrogative": For in the, "simple meaning of the verse," the, "And you refrain from helping him," arouse a "interrogative": For the person who, "Walks straight," in the ways of G-d, for him it is forbidden, it is out of the question ("interrogative") to fast ("refrain from helping him"), but rather, upon him it is only to refine and to crystalize the body ("You shall surely help along with him"), as per the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov.
- (ii) "Midrashically, our Rabbis interpreted it...": Here we are speaking of those who have sinned, and therefore fall under the category of, "you may refrain," with fasts and mortifications.

Nevertheless, even for the latter group, the *Alter Rebbe* established (-*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, Chapter 3) that, "But whoever would be affected by many fasts, and might suffer illness or pain, G-d forbid, as in contemporary generations, is forbidden to engage in many fasts," and therefore, "Your sin redeem with charity." In other words, by G-d making our generation too physically weak to fast, G-d is granting us to reach *Complete Teshuvah*, not through pain and suffering, but through joy and with a gladdened heart!