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THE PERSONAL ABOMINATION

From the Talks of
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1.

A Novel Prohibition

On the verse,¹ “You shall not eat any abomination,” Rashi comments:

“Any abomination — anything that I have made abominable to you. For example, if one nicked the ear of a firstborn animal in order to slaughter it in the provinces {outside the Beis HaMikdash}, behold, it is a matter that I have made abominable to you, {as it is written,} ‘there shall be no blemish in it.’² And this verse comes to teach here that he may not slaughter and eat it with such a blemish.”

(Afterward, Rashi provides a second example regarding “meat cooked in milk,” as will be discussed further on).

This means that the meaning of “You shall not eat any abomination” is that if an action was performed on an object that is “abominable to you” — which the Torah has forbidden to do — {the directive} “You shall not eat” applies, and the object becomes prohibited for consumption.³

{We can ask:} Why does Rashi not explain that the verse “You shall not eat any abomination” is a general introduction to the passage of forbidden foods,⁴ and that “any abomination” refers to the forbidden foods themselves, meaning that they are “abominable to the pure soul”?⁵

The reason is,⁶ as has been discussed many times,⁷ that wherever possible, one should explain that {with a specific verse or phrase} the Torah intends to state a novel commandment and law. (We avoid asserting that a commandment merely serves to add another negative commandment and warning to an already explicitly stated command.⁸)

1) *Devarim* 14:3.

2) *Vayikra* 22:21. {According to the straightforward meaning of Scripture, the verse seems to forbid offering a blemished sacrifice, rather than the act of inflicting the blemish itself. However, Rashi deduces from a redundancy elsewhere that inflicting a blemish is directly prohibited by Torah law.}

3) This rule does not apply universally to all prohibitions. See *Chullin* 114b ff., and the commentaries there.

4) See *Ibn Ezra*, *Ramban*, *Sforno*, *Abarbanel*, and others.

5) Wording of the *Ramban*. A similar approach is found in the *Ibn Ezra*. See the *Abarbanel* at length.

6) See also *Be'er Yitzchak* on Rashi here.

7) See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 332, footnote 36. And elsewhere. This aligns with the Halachic principle that “wherever we can derive a new teaching, we do so, and we do not establish it merely as an extraneous negative commandment” (*Pesachim* 24a).

8) The *Ramban* writes here that Scripture “desired to add an explanation regarding forbidden foods” (that the reason for their prohibition is because they are “abominable to the pure soul... engendering thickness and obtuseness in the soul”). However, the straightforward reading of the text implies that it comes to add a warning and a negative

Therefore, Rashi explains that “You shall not eat any abomination” **introduces** a completely **new** category of prohibited food (which we would not know from previous verses) — {namely, that} “anything that I have made abominable to you” is forbidden for consumption. And as Rashi precisely deduces later in his commentary, “This verse comes **and teaches here** that he may not slaughter and eat it.”

2.

Rashi's Choice of Blemish

However, we must understand the example Rashi gives of “one who nicked the ear of a firstborn etc.”:

Since the “item that I have made abominable to you” in this case is the abomination of “there shall be no blemish in it,” which speaks not only regarding a firstborn, but regarding **any** “peace offering” — why does Rashi bring the example specifically of “nicking the ear of a firstborn” (especially since this is not a common or frequent occurrence)?⁹ Rashi could have stated more **generally**:¹⁰ “For example, one who inflicts a blemish on consecrated offerings.”¹¹

The question is even greater: Rashi's source is in the *Sifri* on our verse,¹² but there, two opinions are cited:

“Rabbi Eliezer says: ‘From where do we know that one who nicks the ear of a firstborn and eats from it violates a negative commandment? The verse states: “You shall not eat any abomination.”’ Others {Rabbi Meir} say: ‘The verse is speaking of disqualified consecrated offerings.’”

The commentaries explain¹³ that according to the opinion of “Others,” “nicking the ear of a firstborn” does **not** fall under the category of “You shall not eat any abomination.” Since a blemished firstborn is permitted for consumption without any redemption, it is

commandment (and not merely an “explanation”).
See also Rashi on *Vayikra* 11:44.

9) Similar to {the principle} “Scripture speaks of the norm.”

10) Similar to the wording of the Rambam, *Hilchos Pesulei HaMukdashin* 18:3–5 (and see his *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Negative Commandment 140; *Chinuch*, Mitzvah 469).

11) Which are permitted in the provinces (through redemption), as Rashi comments earlier (*Devarim* 12:15).

12) *Devarim* 14:3.

13) *Sifri D’Vei Rav* and *Toldos Adam* to *Sifri* there (who use this to explain the Rambam’s view in *Hilchos Pesulei HaMukdashin* there). See *Tosafos*, s.v. U’mi, *Bechoros* 34a ff.; *Tosafos*, s.v. Rava, *Temurah* 4b. [However, *Tosafos* in *Chullin* 115a (cited by the *Re’em* here) uses the general term “consecrated offerings,” implying this rationale is not exclusive to a firstborn.]

therefore not an “abominable thing.” Rather, specifically disqualified consecrated offerings, which require redemption beforehand to permit them for consumption, fall under the category of “abomination” and are therefore forbidden to be eaten.

{If so,} it is not understood: Why does Rashi bring the example of “one who nicked the ear of a firstborn” (and thereby decides the *halachah* — at least according to the straightforward reading¹⁴ — like the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer¹⁵), and does not state the simpler and more general example of “disqualified consecrated offerings” (or bring only the second example, “meat cooked in milk”)¹⁶?

3.

Analyzing the Caveats

We must also understand Rashi’s **lengthy** wording in this example, for seemingly, Rashi could have stated it briefly:¹⁷ “For example, if one nicked the ear of a firstborn, it is an item that I have made abominable to you, {as it is written,} ‘there shall be no blemish in it,’ and this verse comes to teach that he may not eat it.”

Why does Rashi add {the following details}:

- a) **“in order to slaughter it in the provinces”**¹⁸ — What is the practical difference if the person’s intention when nicking the ear of the firstborn was “in order to slaughter it in the provinces”? Even if he did not intend “to slaughter it in the provinces,” he still performed an “item that I have made abominable to you” — {violating} “there shall be no blemish in it.”¹⁹

14) This distinction (that a blemished firstborn does not require redemption) is also true according to the straightforward meaning of Scripture (as Rashi explains later in *Devarim* 15:23).

15) He also decides that nicking the ear of a firstborn renders it forbidden for consumption by Torah law, and not merely as a Rabbinic penalty. (See *Bechoros* 34a ff., and *Tosafos* there; *Tosafos*, *Temurah* there; *Tosafos*, *Chullin* there; and the commentaries on Rashi here.)

16) Note that regarding several scenarios brought in *Chullin* there (such as one who cooks on Shabbos, mixed seeds, etc.), the Gemara’s reasons for why they are not forbidden under “You shall not eat any

abomination” seemingly do not align with the straightforward meaning of Scripture.

17) As it appears in the *Sifri*. Rashi adds these details to specify the nature of the “abomination” and to emphasize the novel teaching of this verse.

18) Rashi does not need to teach that a blemished firstborn is eaten in the provinces, as he already established this earlier (*Devarim* 12:15).

19) Halachically, the prohibition depends on the person’s intent because it is a Rabbinic penalty (*Bechoros* 35a). However, according to the straightforward meaning of Scripture, it is a Torah law, making the person’s intent seemingly irrelevant.

- b) “(And this comes to teach here) that he may not **slaughter** and eat it” — Why does Rashi need to add the word “slaughter”?²⁰
- c) From the conclusion of Rashi’s wording, “based on **that** blemish,” it is implied that Rashi intends to be precise: Specifically “based on that blemish” he may not slaughter it, but “if **another** blemish develops on it, he may slaughter it based upon it.”²¹

The following questions arise:

- (a) What is the compelling reason, within the **straightforward** meaning of Scripture, that a second blemish **removes** the prohibition of consumption that was placed upon the firstborn due to “You shall not eat any abomination”?²² Is it because another blemish developed on the animal that the “abomination” created within it through the prohibited infliction of the {first} blemish is thereby nullified?!
- (b) Even if we were to find a logical explanation for this — it is still not understood: What is the **practical difference**, within the straightforward meaning of Scripture, whether the prohibition of consumption remains forever, or only until “another blemish develops on it”? After all, Rashi’s commentary is not a halachic code that needs to qualify how the matter is applied in practical law.

4.

The Redundant Prohibition

Rashi continues, and brings a second example of “an item that I have made abominable to you”: “If he cooked meat in milk, it is an item that I have made abominable to you, and this verse warns here regarding its consumption.”

This is puzzling (as the commentaries ask):²³ Rashi has already explained (**twice**)²⁴ that:

20) Rashi’s addition of the word “slaughter” requires explanation, as the verse only mentions eating.

21) This aligns with the Sages (*Bechoros* 34a), unlike Rabbi Eliezer who forbids it forever.

22) Since the prohibition stems from “You shall not eat any abomination,” it is unclear why a subsequent blemish would permit it. Halachically, this debate centers on whether the prohibition is a Rabbinic

penalty or a Torah law, but within the straightforward meaning of Scripture, this exception requires explanation.

23) *Bartenura*; *Sefer Zikaron*; *Levush HaOrah*; *Divrei David*; *Tzeidah LaDerech*; and others.

24) *Shemos* 23:19; 34:26.

“(the prohibition of ‘You shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk’) is written in the Torah in three places:²⁵ one for the prohibition of eating it, one for the prohibition of deriving benefit from it, and one for the prohibition of cooking it.”

Why, then, do we need a **separate** negative commandment for the prohibition of eating it, when it is already forbidden based on the negative commandment of “You shall not eat any abomination”?

The source for this commentary of Rashi (“cooked meat in milk, etc.”) is in the *Gemara*:²⁶ “From where do we know that meat in milk is forbidden for consumption? Because it states, ‘You shall not eat any abomination.’” However, there in the *Gemara*, these are **two** {conflicting} opinions. One authority indeed derives it from “You shall not eat any abomination,” but a second authority²⁷ derives it from the fact that “You shall not cook etc.” is written three times. How, then, does Rashi adopt **both** derivations and opinions {simultaneously}?

Commentaries²⁸ answer this by explaining that the negative commandment of “You shall not eat any abomination” does not incur lashes, because it is an all-encompassing negative commandment, for which lashes are not administered. Therefore, one must have the specific negative commandment of “You shall not cook” to {establish liability for lashes for} the consumption of meat and milk.

However, while this resolution is appropriate²⁹ for study based on **halachah**, it is difficult to explain Rashi’s intent **in his commentary on the Torah** this way.³⁰ We do not find that Rashi brings the principle that “lashes are not administered for an all-encompassing negative commandment” {anywhere} in his commentary on the Torah.

25) *Shemos* there. Our Parshah, *Devarim* 14:21. (Though Rashi on *Devarim* interprets it somewhat differently, as discussed at length by his commentators.)

26) *Chullin* 114b.

27) *Ibid.*, 115b. See the Talmudic discussion there for additional opinions and derivations.

28) *Bartenura* and *Levush* there. This is also found in the *Re’em* on *Shemos* there.

29) However, see *Tzeidah LaDerech* here, who challenges this resolution based on the *Chinuch*,

who states that “You shall not eat any abomination” is not an all-encompassing negative commandment, and one does receive lashes for it. Others resolve this by stating that lashes are only administered for disqualified consecrated offerings, but not for other prohibitions derived from it.

30) In addition to the main point: From the straightforward wording of Rashi, “and this verse warns here regarding its consumption,” it is implied that the primary prohibition is here (and not in the verse “You shall not cook etc.”).

5.

Two Negative Commandments

Seemingly, one could answer that this is similar to what Rashi states in several places,³¹ that the Torah adds a negative commandment so that one will “transgress two negative commandments” (and the like). And similarly in our case, regarding eating meat in milk, one transgresses two negative commandments.

Based on this, we could also explain the **shift** in Rashi’s wording: In the first example {of the firstborn}, Rashi says, “and this comes and **teaches** here that he may not slaughter and eat it.” Whereas regarding “cooked meat in milk,” he **alters** {his wording} and says, “and this **warns** here regarding its consumption” (and not “and **teaches** here that it is forbidden for consumption,” or the like).

Because regarding “nicking the ear of a firstborn,” the prohibition of eating is **derived from here** (“comes and teaches here that he may not slaughter and eat it”); whereas regarding meat in milk, its prohibition of consumption is already known from beforehand (from the fact that “You shall not cook” is written three times). Therefore, here it merely adds a negative instruction — “**warns** here regarding its consumption.”

However, this is not a sufficient resolution, because:³²

- a) Ultimately, Rashi still emphasizes “and this verse **warns here** regarding its consumption.” This implies that the {primary} warning is “here” — not that an **additional** warning was simply **appended** here {to a primary prohibition located elsewhere}.
- b) Furthermore, and fundamentally: Rashi’s intent in his commentary on “You shall not eat any abomination” is (as mentioned above) to bring out how the verse comes to teach a **novel concept**, a new law and prohibition that is not stated anywhere else. How, then, is it appropriate to bring an example for this of a prohibition where the verse here does not introduce any novel law, but merely **adds** a second negative commandment so that one will “transgress two negative commandments”?!

31) See for example Rashi on *Shemos* 34:23; *Vayikra* 6:6; 11:44; 23:31; and others.

32) Additionally: If we establish the repetition merely as extraneous negative commandments, how do we know that “You shall not cook” being written

three times refers to the prohibition of eating (and benefiting from) meat in milk, and not simply to prohibit the act of cooking with multiple negative commandments?

6.

A Relative Abomination

The explanation for all this {Rashi bringing two examples, of a firstborn and mixing milk and meat,} can be said as follows:

Rashi comes to preempt a difficulty in the words “You shall not eat any abomination” themselves: Since the verse here is speaking about things which the verse itself describes as an “abomination” (without specifying what they are) — meaning, it is a known matter (from elsewhere) that they are a concept of abomination³³ — it is not clear what the verse accomplishes with the prohibition “**You shall not eat** any abomination.” Since they are an “abomination,” it is understood that they must be “abominated” — {meaning,} one must not eat them!

We must therefore say that the verse refers to a specific category of “abomination” which, were it not for the commandment “You shall not eat etc.,” we would not know is {an abominable thing, and therefore} forbidden for consumption. {It would be such an item that} only from the warning “You shall not eat **any** abomination” — {meaning} every type of “abomination” — we could derive that even such an “abomination” is forbidden for consumption.

And this is the novel concept Rashi introduces immediately at the beginning of his commentary: “Any abomination — anything that I have made abominable to you.” The emphasis here is on the word “(abominable) **to you**”: The abomination is not in the **object itself**, but rather relative to the **person** — “I have made it abominable to **you**.”

Meaning: The verse here does not mean standard forbidden foods which are abominable things in their own right (and the fact that they are forbidden only to Jews and not to Noahides is because the Torah did not forbid even an abominable thing³⁴ to a Noahide³⁵).

Rather, the verse here introduces a new parameter — that there are things which “I have made abominable **to you**”: The “abomination” is exclusively “to you” — relative to the person, but not that the object itself is an abominable thing.

Even **these** things — although they are **not intrinsically** abominable things — are {subject to the prohibition} “You shall not eat.”

33) See also *Sforno* on the verse.

35) See also *Sforno* on the verse.

34) Note *Shabbos* 86b (and references there) that eating detestable creatures and creeping things pollutes their bodies. See there 145b.

[And this follows the flow of the verses: After the Torah states the prohibition of “You shall not cut yourselves etc.” because “**You** are a holy nation to the L-rd your G-d, and the L-rd has chosen you to be **His treasured nation** out of all the nations that are upon the face of the earth,”³⁶ the Torah continues, “You shall not eat any abomination” — “anything that I have made abominable to **you**.” {This implies} that **this** {categorization as an} abomination is solely due to the elevated status of the Jewish people, as “a holy nation... to the L-rd your G-d etc.”]

7.

The Permitted Firstborn

For this reason, {to highlight that the “abomination” is solely in the violator’s act,} Rashi brings the first example — “For example, if one nicked the ear of a firstborn” — and does not simply state “one who inflicts a blemish on consecrated offerings.”

This is because specifically regarding a firstborn, it is emphasized how from the perspective of the “item” itself, **there is no** abomination³⁷ (and the abomination is solely relative to the person):

Regarding all {other} consecrated offerings, where a blemish disqualifies the animal for the Altar, the animal nevertheless remains consecrated until one redeems it. The physical reality of disqualified consecrated offerings (prior to redemption) is a forbidden item (“abominable”) due to the object itself (and only through redemption does it become permitted for consumption).

By contrast, since a blemished firstborn is permitted for consumption (without redemption), it emerges that there is no abominable thing in its physical reality. The flaw (“abomination”) here is entirely relative to the person, who (by inflicting the blemish) stripped the firstborn of its **sanctity** to be fit for the Altar³⁸ (but even afterward, the blemished firstborn is not an abominable thing).

And purely due to the fact that inflicting a blemish on a firstborn is an “item that I have made abominable **to you**” — {i.e., a flawed act performed by the person} — it becomes forbidden for consumption.³⁹

36) Our Parshah, *Devarim* 14:1–2.

37) See also Section 2 above regarding what the commentaries explain as the reason for the dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and “Others.”

38) Similar to what the *Gur Aryeh* writes here.

39) Note from *Beis Efraim, Yoreh Deah* (end of section 75), that the view of *Tosafos* (mentioned above in footnote 12) — that nicking the ear of a firstborn is not included in “You shall not eat any abomination” is based on the premise that it applies only when “the act itself is abominable.”

With this, it will also be understood why Rashi:

- a) Uses specifically the example of “**nicking the ear** of a firstborn” — and not another blemish — because with this Rashi emphasizes that no abominable thing was created here (through the infliction of the blemish) in the firstborn, not even in a literal, physical sense. For nicking the ear is not a blemish that impairs the animal and its functions in any way; on the contrary, the act of nicking the ear is a common and accepted practice even among human beings.⁴⁰
- b) Rashi adds “**in order to slaughter it in the provinces**” — with this, Rashi negates even further {the presence of any undesirable physical effect in the animal}. Even the **pain** the animal experiences from the nicking of the ear cannot be considered an undesirable thing, since he does it “in order to slaughter it”: If for the sake of human consumption one does not take into account the animal’s pain during its **slaughter**, how much more so is there no place to take into account the minimal pain of nicking its ear, if through this the animal can be utilized for human consumption!

8.

When the Blemish Changes

Based on this, the conclusion of Rashi’s wording — “and this verse comes and teaches here that he may not slaughter and eat it based on that blemish” — can also be better understood:

Since there is no “abomination” within the animal itself — it is solely “that I have made abominable to **you**,” meaning the Torah forbade the person from doing this, and therefore {the directive is} “You shall not eat” — the prohibition of “You shall **not eat**” (according to the straightforward meaning of the verse) applies exclusively to the person who transgressed “that I have made abominable **to you**.” By contrast, regarding others, who did not perform the prohibited action — and the object itself is thus **not** an abominable thing — there is no prohibition of consumption.

And this is what Rashi precisely deduces:

- a) “And this verse comes and teaches here that he may not **slaughter** and eat it” — meaning, it is not that the **firstborn** has become forbidden for consumption {in general}. Rather, there is merely a prohibition upon **this specific person** who

40) As is explicit even in the straightforward meaning of Scripture (*Shemos* 32:2-3). See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 11, p. 92.

“nicked the ear of a firstborn **in order to slaughter it**,” that “(he) **may not slaughter** (as he had intended) and eat it.”

- b) “Based on **that** blemish” — For the firstborn did not become forbidden for consumption, nor is it an abominable thing. It is solely that upon this person who nicked the ear of the firstborn there is a prohibition to slaughter it, due to his prohibited action — so that his intention of “nicking the ear... in order to slaughter it” (which is the only reason it is “abominable to you”) should not be fulfilled. Therefore, it is automatically understood that if another blemish develops on it, and the sanctity of the firstborn to be fit for the Altar is removed from the animal regardless, there is no place for the prohibition based on “anything that I have made abominable to you.” Since, even without his prohibited action, the animal would be fit for consumption.

9.

The Superiority of a Holy Nation

Based on all this, Rashi’s second example — “if he cooked meat in milk etc.” — is **easily** explained:

Rashi is precise in his wording “if he **cooked** meat in milk etc.” — unlike the wording of the *Gemara*, “From where do we know that meat in milk is forbidden for consumption” — because according to Rashi’s approach (in his commentary on the Torah, the straightforward meaning of the verse), the entire prohibition of “You shall not eat any abomination” is solely a matter related **to the person** who transgressed and performed the prohibited action (even when there is no concept of abomination in the object itself).

Similarly in our case: The prohibition of eating meat in milk derived from “You shall not eat any abomination” is not connected to the food object itself, but rather to the **person** who transgressed and cooked the meat in milk. Because of his prohibited action upon the food, the food became forbidden **to him** with an additional prohibition upon its **consumption** (“You shall not eat any abomination”).⁴¹

By contrast, other Jews, who did not transgress the prohibition of “if **he** cooked meat in milk,” are not forbidden in it due to “You shall not eat any abomination,” but solely due to the fact that “You shall not cook etc.” is written three times in the Torah.

41) This explains the order of Rashi’s examples (and why he brings two examples from two different sources, the *Sifri* and the *Gemara*): He first brings the primary novel teaching of the verse, where the prohibition is solely relative to the person (the

firstborn). He then adds that we also learn from this that even when the object is forbidden intrinsically (meat in milk), the prohibited act of cooking adds an additional personal prohibition upon the violator.

And this is what Rashi precisely deduces: “if he cooked meat in milk... and this verse warns here regarding its consumption” — from this verse we derive **a specific prohibition** (“warns here”) for the one who “**cooked** meat in milk,” since he performed an “item that I have made abominable to you.”

This brings out (as mentioned above) even more the superiority of the Jewish people, how they are “a holy nation to the L-rd” and in them “the L-rd has chosen to be His treasured nation out of all the nations that are upon the face of the earth.”

(From a Sichah delivered on Shabbos Parshas Re'eh 5744)