

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #4, Oct 7, 2018

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, NoAch

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Ach Noach remained

Rashi #1: Only Noach remained

Rashi #2: Most of Noach remained – He lost a lot of weight from ark conditions (Gn07-23b)

This verse occurs in the description of the flood. The verse uses the Hebrew word **Ach** highlighted in color.

Rashi presents two interpretations.

- Interpretation #1 he calls the *Peshat*: He translates **Ach** as meaning *only* and translates the verse *only Noach remained from the flood*
- Interpretation #2 he calls *Derash*: I argue that he translates **Ach** as meaning *most of*. The verse therefore means that *most of Noach remained in the ark*. The Midrash explains that Noach lost a lot of weight from ark conditions of crowding and cold. Since he lost weight, *most* of him remained. There is a more exotic explanation of *most of* according to which Noach came late to give the lion his meal and the lion struck him causing bodily injury (hence only *most* of Noach remained).

Outline of Today's Posting

Our goals today are rather novel. We show that

- I. Rashi's second interpretation is the true meaning of the text.
- II. In fact, we shall show, that David Weiss HaLivni, who thought he was criticizing Midrash would actually agree that the 2nd interpretation is the true meaning and the 1st explanation is incorrect.
- III. We will show that the first reading of the text is an incorrect reading, a misreading.
- IV. This seems to contradict what Rashi says. We shall show that Rashi used *Peshat* in two ways. One as referring to the true in-context

meaning of the text and the 2nd referring to how a simple person would misread the text.

- V. We will emphasize, that the fact that there is a true meaning to the text – *most of Noach remained* – is not inconsistent with textual ambiguity or multiple approaches to the text.

I: **Ach** means most of throughout the Bible

We start with a simple exercise. Let us simply look at verses where the Hebrew word **Ach** occurs and examine its meaning.

Before doing so we point out that throughout the Talmud there is a statement

Ach implies limitation.

However, this statement is not *in and of itself* an interpretation; rather, it is the *consequence* of the interpretation. To fully understand the idea that **Ach** connotes limitation we need a translation. Such a translation into English was not given to Moses by God at Sinai since they did not speak English at Sinai.

After examining the 43 occurrences of **Ach** in the Torah, I suggested in at least 2 articles: i) *The Meaning of Ach*, JBQ, Vol 33, #2, pp 100-109, 2005 and ii) *Peshat and Dersah: A New Intuitive and Analytic Approach*: Vol 18#4, pp 327-342, 1980, that **Ach** should be translated as *most of*. *Most of* in turn has several English equivalents

- *Usually*, most of the time
- *Probably*, mostly
- *Most of*

Before examining some verses notice how the Talmudic inference from **Ach** now makes

sense:

Ach implies limitation →
Usually implies limitation
(sometimes not)

In other words, if Ach means *usually* then it makes sense to say Ach, usually, implies limitation (sometimes not).

In a NewsLetter, we do not intend to review all 43 verses with Ach. However, we show some sample verses and how **ach** as meaning *usually* or *probably* fits “just right” These examples are presented in Figure 1. The underlined word represents our suggested translation of **Ach**.

- Usually observe the Sabbath (but not if there is danger to life) (Ex31-13)
- Usually you will have atonement on Yom Kippur (but not if it is an interpersonal sin for which you have not attained forgiveness)(Lv23-27)
- [Avimelech speaking to Isaac who claimed Rivkah was his sister but was caught playing with her] She is probably your wife; how can you call her your sister (Gn26-09)
- [Judah describing Jacob’s anguish over Joseph missing] He probably was attacked by animals; I have not seen him till now (Gn44-28)
- [Laws of festivals] You shall be joyous most of the time [but not necessarily the first day or last day when you have weekday matters on your mind] (Dt16-15)
- Most of Noach remained in the ark (Gn07-23)

Figure 1: Sample verses where **Ach** means *most of*, *probably* or *usually*. For further details and discussion see the two articles cited above.

Paradoxically, bible scholars would agree

David Weiss Halivni wrote a book, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis*, Oxford University Press, 1998. In this book, Halivni incorrectly criticizes Talmudic midrash. His examples are poor and they also lack critical defense using simply grammatical methods. In this section, I will show that using his own methods, Halivni would have to agree that what Rashi calls

derash is in fact the true meaning, the *peshat* of the text,

Quite simply, Halivni gives a criteria for recognizing *peshat*, simple meaning of the text, and *derash*, homiletic (fanciful) meaning of the text. Figures 2 and 3 present his methods and apply them to **Gn07:23**.

Criteria for *derash*, homiletic fancy
An interpretation of a verse is homiletic fancy if it interprets the verse by itself as a standalone entity not in its context.

Suppose we look at **Gn07:23** by itself with the mysterious word **ach**

God destroyed all living creatures ... **ach** Noach and those with him in the ark remained

Following Halivni, if this verse is read without any context, we would naturally translate **ach** as meaning *only* since that fits in with the verse.

Thus using Halivni’s criteria for homiletic fancy we show that Rashi’s first interpretation which Rashi calls, *peshat*, is in fact *derash*, homiletic fancy.

Figure 2: Application of Halivni’s criteria for Derash on **Gn07-23**

Criteria for *peshat* straightforward text meaning
Peshat interprets a verse in its natural straightforward meaning when the verse is read in context.

As shown in Figure 1, in the context of the Bible, **Ach**, means *most of*. Thus reading **Gn07:23** in context would result in the following interpretation

Most of Noach remain^{3e} in the ark

The statement naturally suggests that part of Noach was missing, most probably because of weight loss because of ark conditions.

Figure 3: Halivni criteria of *Peshat* applied to **Gn07-23**.

Rashi's 1st translation, is a textual misreading

As seen in Figure 2, if we just read **Gn07-23** by itself without any context, then *ach* would naturally mean *only*.

To understand this as a misreading we cite the great set of 32 principles of interpretation of Rabbi Eliezer, particularly, as commented on by the Maharzu, a commentator on Midrash Rabbah. Principle #2 deals with words of limitation. The actual Rabbi Eliezer narrative mentions three words, *from*, *only*, and *ach* (*usually*). Maharzu points out that the principle covers all words of limitation. The rule basically states that when a limitation word is used, it justifies *application* of the limitation or expansion to the verse.

We can see all these words, *from*, *only*, *usually*, *except*, *but*, *however*, *etc.* as being instances of *limitation*. Here, *limitation* is the general category while *from*, *only*, *usually*, *but*, *however*, *etc.* are instances of the general category.

In English grammar the big category is called the hypernym while the instances are called hyponyms. I claim that simple people very often do not make distinctions and call things by their hypernym (general category). Let us look at some simple examples.

A person may be simple and not distinguish between shades of blue such as blue, azure, purple violet. Such a person may call any hyponym (instance) of the hypernym (category) blue with the word blue. Thus, the sky is called blue even though it is really azure; a purple gown may also be called blue even though it is blue.

Here is another example. *Fruit* is a hypernym (category) while *apples*, *oranges*, *pears*, *nectarines* are hyponyms (instances). Most people can distinguish the various types of fruits. However, a simple person may simply speak about *my apple a day*. He will use this phrase even if one day he has an apple, another day he has an orange, and on still another day he has plum.

Rashi, in his first explanation on **Gn07-23** is empathizing with the simple person. Such a person is not very big on language. To such a person, all words of limitation interchange (just as all shades of blue or all fruits interchange). Such a simple person sees nothing wrong with translating *ach* as *only*, since *only* is also a limitation word. It is no different than calling the sky blue when in fact the sky is azure not blue.

Thus, Rashi first mentions the simple way of taking the verse. The Midrashic interpretation given by Rashi in this verse, in this case, is the interpretation of a person who is sufficiently versed in Hebrew to be able to distinguish between *most of*, *from*, *only*, *except*. Such a person would realize that the nuances of *most of* differ from the nuances of *only*.

The idea that Rashi sometimes addressed the simple person (and called this the *pershat*) can be found on the very first Rashi in the Bible on **Gn01-01**. Rashi explains that the *peshat* of **Gn01-01** is the following:

In the beginning of God creating the heaven and earth, the earth was formless and void...

And why am I so certain that Rashi was addressing a simple person's reading of **Gn01-01**? Because the verse does not use the infinitive, *in the beginning of God creating*. It turns out that the *only* way to make sense of the verse and be consistent with the grammar is to translate the verse as follows:

For the sake of the beginnings (the firsts, the choicest) God created the heavenly (spiritual) and materialistic (earth). [Despite] The earth being formless and void...God said let there be the light [of prophecy]

This certainly doesn't sound like the simple

meaning of the text but analysis shows that it is the only meaning consistent with grammar. If however, you don't care that much about conjugations you can interpret *in the beginning, God created...* This is not different than a simple person calling the sky, blue, when in fact it is azure.

But Rashi says elsewhere that his goal is to teach the Peshat. Yet here he is teaching derash.

So far we have mostly dealt with what the verse, **Gn07-23**, says. We have shown two interpretations, one superficial and one based on the biblical meaning of **ach**.

What about what Rashi says he is doing. In fact, in many places (e.g. **Gn03-08**, **Gn33-20**) Rashi explicitly says

There are many aggadah and midrash on this verse. I however, am only explaining the *peshat* of the verse according to its context.

Most Rashi scholars point to these verses as proof that Rashi was basically concerned with the contextual straightforward meaning of the verse. There are some Rashi scholars, for example, Abraham Grossman, who also point to some verses where Rashi *seems* to be deviating from the *Peshat*. In fact, Grossman argues that Rashi did occasionally use Midrash as a basis for interpretation. My own opinion (which we will deal with throughout the year) is that Grossman, like HaLivni, ignored certain grammatical methods of rule-based interpretation and had he used them he would see that Rashi always gives the *Peshat*, the context based straightforward meaning of the verse.

But if Rashi's main goal (even according to scholars like Grossman) is explanation of the *Peshat*. why, in **Gn07-23**, did he call the *derash* the *peshat*, and the *peshat* the *derash*.

We can make some preliminary points.

First: Rashi definitely had two distinct usages of *peshat*:

- *Peshat* can mean the context-based straightforward meaning of a verse
- *Peshat* can also mean the way a simple untrained person reads a verse.

Here we see a subtly justifying Rashi's dual usage of *Peshat*. In other verses, where there is a *context based straightforward meaning of the verse (Peshat)* the Midrashim are usually just that, legitimate readings of the verse as a stand-alone entity with the goal of encouraging the masses on some modern situation. For example, a Rabbi today may sermonize a verse as applying to a political situation.

However, when an interpretation reflects the reading of the simple masses, one should not call it *derash*. To call it *derash* is to give legitimacy to it where in reality the interpretation is only valid if you confuse hyponyms and hypernyms.

Here is a summary:

Rashi uses 3 types of interpretation:

- The straightforward context-based meaning of a verse. This is called *peshat*.
- A midrash on a verse usually representing a reading of the verse as a standalone entity without context which however serves to encourage listeners. Rashi calls this *derash*. Even HaLivni acknowledges that such *derash* is a legitimate literary activity and has its place.
- A superficial reading of a verse by a simpleton who doesn't distinguish between hypernyms and hyponyms. Rashi calls such a reading *peshat* as it represents the simple

person's (pashut) reading of the text. However, unlike midrash, this peshat has no value whatsoever.

Does the Rashiyomi approach preclude multiple interpretations

As I stated in my 1980 article, *Peshat and Derash*, by stating that the true meaning of *ach* is *most of* we are not ruling out different readings of the text or interpretational plurality.

We already noted the plurality on this verse. Although both the following interpretations accept *ach* as meaning *most of* they differ in their world view.

- **Environmental concerns:** In a natural disaster the primary cause of harm are environmental. Hence, this interpretation sees *most of Noach* as referring to Noach losing weight due to ark environmental conditions.
- **Human concerns:** In a natural disaster, the primary cause of harm is personal. Because of the disaster there are more complaints leading to fighting. Hence, this interpretation sees *most of Noach* as referring to Noach losing some body limb or flesh due to an irate lion attacking him because meals were not timely.

Praise be him who chose them and their learning

APPENDIX

THE 10 RASHI RULE CATEGORIES

A Lightning Summary with Examples

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Rule I-REFERENCE: EXAMPLE: Dt26-05d We went down to Egypt with a few people explained by Gn46-27: with 70 people

Rule II-MEANING / Lexicography / Dictionary: EXAMPLE (Connectives) KI means IF,PERHAPS,RATHER,BECAUSE,WHEN,THAT (Rashi on Gn18-15a Gn24-33a) EXAMPLE (Nuances): YDA means FAMILIAR, not KNOW (e.g. Dt34-10a) egg Gn04-01 Adam was FAMILIAR with his wife **EXAMPLE (Idioms)** ON THE FACE OF means DURING THE LIFETIME (Rashi on Nu03-04a Gn11-28a Ex20-03c Dt05-07a) **EXAMPLE (Synonyms)** *Marchese* means pot; *Machinate* means frying pan (Lv02-05a, 07a) **EXAMPLE (Homonyms)** SHAMAH can mean listen, hear, understand: (Gn42-23a) *They didn't appreciate that Joseph understood them* (Note: They knew he was listening) **EXAMPLE (Metonymy)** (Lv02-11a) *Don't offer ...any honey as sacrifices* RASHI: *honey* includes any sweet fruit juice

Rule III-GRAMMAR: EXAMPLE: BA-ah means Candelabras means COMING(Gn46-26a) **EXAMPLE:** Whiptail conjugation has different rules if 1st root letter is Trade (Gn44-16a)

Rule IV-PARALLELISM: EXAMPLE: (Ex20-04) Don't POSSESS the gods of others Don't MAKE idols RASHI: So both POSSESSION & MAKING of idols are prohibited

Rule V-CONTRADICTION: EXAMPLE: (Nu04-03, Nu08-24a) Levites start Temple work at 25; Levites start temple work at 30. RASHI: They apprentice at 25 but start actual service at 30.

Rule VI-STYLE: RABBI ISHMAEL RULES: EXAMPLE: (Simple verses should be generalized): (Rashi Pesachim 6) (Dt25-04a) *Don't MUZZLE an OX while THRESHING* RASHI: Don't STOP any WORKING ANIMAL from eating

Rule VII-FORMATTING: EXAMPLE (BOLD indicated by Repetition): Ex12-09c) COOK it in water (So COOKED-COOKED is understood the same way bold is understood by modern reader) RASHI: Preferred to COOK it in water; But COOK it at all costs(Even if you don't have water) **EXAMPLE: (BULLETS indicated by Repeating keywords)** (Ex03-11a) Who am I - **THAT I**

should go to Pharaoh - **THAT** I should take the Jews out of Egypt RASHI: Repeated word **THAT** creates BULLET effect - Pharaoh was a difficult king (Bullet one) - Jews were not yet ready for freedom (Bullet two) **EXAMPLE** (*Climax assumed in any Biblical list*): (Dt19-11a) *If a man HATES, SPIES, CONFRONTS & KILLS*. RASHI: Bible identifies 4 stages to murder (indicated by capped words)

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Rule VIII-DATABASE: EXAMPLE: *God spoke to Moses to say over* introduces about 7 dozen biblical commandments; *God spoke to Aaron to say over* only introduces 2 commandments. RASHI: (Lv10-03b) Aaron was silent when his sons died because they served in the Temple drunk; hence he merited that the commandment prohibiting priests to work in the Temple drunk, was given to him

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Rule IX-NON VERSE: EXAMPLE: (Use of Algebra)(Ex38-26b) *Temple donations of silver were 100 Kikar and 1775 Shekel from 630,550 half-shekels* RASHI: So one Kikar of silver = 3000 Shekel.

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Rule X: SYMBOLISM: EXAMPLE: (Use of puns) Moses made a copper snake for people to look up to when bitten by snakes (so they should pray and recover) RASHI: (Nu21-09a) The Hebrew root for copper and snake are identical (Cf. The English *copperhead*) Moses made the metal snake copper colored to symbolize the snake