

The Rashi Database Project

GOALS: * Show that all Rashid comments are spontaneous, instant, effortless reactions of a native speaker to the biblical text.

*This is accomplished by skillful English translations instantly suggesting the Rashid comment to the reader

* Additionally, each Rashid comment is examined using the 10 organs of the Rashid anatomy.

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(MAIN BIBLIOGRAPHY): DT = Doctoral Thesis (www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm,

MG=Modern Grammar with Applications to Rashi (www.Rashiyom.com/Rashibook2.htm)}

OTHER COMMENTATORS (ABBREVIATIONS): R=Ramban, T=Baal Turim, K=Kli Yakar, I=Ibn Ezra, H=Hendel

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PESHAT, SPONTANEOUS, REACTION TO SKILLFUL ENGLISH TRANSLATION

RASHI vs. MIDRASH: We will continue with the *routine* Rashi comments begun recently. Although there are already encyclopedic works documenting Rashi's rich approach to dictionary meaning such as Avineri's *Rashi's Palace*, my emphasis will be on the half dozen principles and figures of speech used to explain meaning. Additionally, as done in my doctoral thesis, I will emphasize that *peshat* the straightforward meaning of the text coincides with what reading literacy examinations test.

The techniques covered in this *routine Rashi* series are: *Metonymy, hypernymy, synecdoche, meronymy, root meaning, grammar, parallelism, the paragraph, and reading literacy*. By repeatedly emphasizing these principles and reinforcing them with English examples it is hoped that the reader will acquire a natural skill for these approaches thereby leading to greater Rashi appreciation.

READING LITERACY: There are about a half dozen Rashi comments on the opening narrative in this week's biblical portion. We therefore state the narrative and then ask reading literacy questions, the type one would encounter on actual examinations.

Judah approached Joseph and said: "I would like to speak into your ears(1) the following thoughts. Please don't be angry with me(2) because you are to me like Pharoh. When we came you asked about our family and despite our protests asked that Benjamin be brought to prove that we are not spies. We were concerned that if Benjamin is taken and we return without him that our father whose soul is tied to Benjamin's soul when he sees Benjamin is not with us would die. Therefore let me take the place of Benjamin so that he can return."

And Joseph could not control himself (3) and asked that all present leave so that no one else was there when he admitted his identity to his brothers. He started crying, Egypt heard and Pharoh's house heard (4).

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph" and his brothers could not answer him because they were frightened (5). Joseph said come close so they came closer. Joseph said, "I am Joseph your brother that you sold towards Egypt." Don't be depressed or angry that you sold me here because God did it so that we can survive. God made me an av to Pharoh (6) and master on his household and ruler over Egypt. Hurry, go up to my father and bring him here so I can support you lest you de-inherit (7). I will support you... He fell on Benjamin's neck and cried and

Benjamin cried on his neck. And afterwards his brothers spoke to him.(8) And the voice throughout Pharoh's house was (9) , "Josephs' brothers have come."

Question (1): What does the phrase speak into your ears(1) mean?

- A. Judah wanted to whisper to Joseph
- B. It doesn't mean anything special; just ordinary listening
- C. He asked Joseph to understand what he was saying
- D. He emphasized that he was putting forth a serious proposition for Joseph to decide.

Question (2): Why did Judah say, please don't be angry with me (2).

- A. Judah still thought of Joseph as a bratty teenager who through temper tantrums
- B. Judah spoke in a harsh confrontational tone
- C. It is improper to speak to a king after the king sentences you

Question (3): The narrative says Joseph could not control himself (3). What was he worried about

- A. People would see him cry
- B. People would find out the he is a Hebrew and not an Egyptian
- C. People would see his brothers frightened and humiliated

Question (4): What does the phrase Pharoh's house heard (4).

- A. His house was wiretapped and the conversation was recorded
- B. There were people hidden in the walls of the house who recorded all conversations
- C. The workers who fix the house would hear
- D. Pharoh's household heard.

Question (5): Based on the story what does the phrase Joseph's brothers could not answer him because they were frightened (5) mean?

- A. They were so frightened they could not say anything
- B. They couldn't answer him but Judah continued with his proposition to let him take Benjamin's place
- C. They answered Joseph by saying, "Give us some time to answer you because right now we are frightened."

Question (6): What does the word **av** mean in the sentence God made me an av to Pharoh (6)

- A. Father
- B. Patron
- C. Mentor
- D. Boss

Question (7). What does the word *de-inherit* (7) mean.

- A. Starve
- B. Have to continually come to Egypt for food
- C. Become poor by losing your inheritance to get food

Question (8). The narrative says, *And afterwards his brothers spoke to him.*(8). After what? What happened that now his brothers felt comfortable speaking to him?

- A. Nothing special. The brothers just needed time to adjust. After Joseph spoke they had had some time and felt fine.
- B. After he told him that he was Joseph.
- C. After they saw him cry and hug Benjamin and they realized he loved them and wasn't angry they sold him.

Question (9). What does the sentence *And the voice throughout Pharoh's house* (9) mean?

- A. The news and local gossip/rumor was that Joseph's brothers had come.
- B. People announced in a loud voice, "Joseph's brothers have come"
- C. Pharoh's household heard

Answers and comments to all questions.

(1) **Answer (D).** The phrase *speak in one's ears* only occurs about 6 times in the bible and always indicates a very serious speech about which a decision must be made. The other five occurrences are i) the ten commandments (Dt05-01), ii) the petition for an accidental murderer to enter a refuge city (Jo20-04), iii) The proposal by Avner former chief of staff for Saul, King David's opposition, to form an alliance, (2S03-19), iv) Jeremiah's plea not to execute him for presenting bad prophecies (Jer28-07), v) an explanation of the rules of prophecy which allow a bad prophecy not to happen if people repent (Jer28-07). Interestingly, Rashi gives answer (C), *speaking in one's ears* means *understanding*. I am not claiming to know Hebrew better than Rashi; rather I am claiming to know English better than Rashi since there is no good word in medieval Hebrew for seriousness.

(2)**Answer (B).** From the request not to be angry with him we infer that Judah spoke in a harsh confrontational tone.

(3) **Answer (C).** Joseph was worried that others would see his brothers humiliated. He wasn't worried about people seeing him cry since people heard his crying anyway.

(4) **Answer (D).** The phrase *Pharoh's house heard* means *Pharoh's household heard*. This is an example of *metonymy*, which allows substituting place for occupants as in e.g. *The white house said* which really means *The President who occupies the white house said* or *Israel won the war* which really means the *Israelis won the war*.

(5) **Answer (A).** The statement that Joseph's brother's couldn't answer him because they were frightened means they couldn't talk at all (it doesn't mean only an inability to answer him). We see this because later on it says *and afterwards his brothers spoke to him* (8).

(6) Answer (C). The sentence *God made me an av to Pharoh, master of his household, and ruler of Egypt* means that Joseph was Pharoh's *mentor*. It couldn't mean, as *av* means, that he became Joseph's father since Pharoh was king and supreme ruler. Interestingly Rashi explains with the French words for *friend and patron* (Answers (A),(B)). But being a *mentor* is more than patronizing or befriending someone. It is not that I know Hebrew better than Rashi but that I know English better than him since there is no word in medieval Hebrew for *mentor*.

(7) Answer (C). *De-inherit* means to lose or squander one's inheritance. Notice that in both English and Hebrew there are means to indicate the *negation* of a word. Thus *up-root* means to remove the root; *de-escalate* means to remove or stop the escalation. Thus, English uses the prefixes *up* and *de*. Similarly, Hebrew uses the intensive conjugation *piel* to indicate negation. The Hebrew word *tivaresh* is in fact conjugated in the Piel and Rashi explains its meaning.

(8) Answer (C). The brothers were frightened that Joseph might be angry at them for selling him as a slave. When he saw Joseph crying, hugging Benjamin, and speaking soothingly they were no longer frightened and spoke to him.

(9) Answer (A). The idiom *the voice heard in Pharoh's house* refers to the local gossip, rumor, or news. It doesn't just say *Pharoh's house heard* but rather *the voice heard in Pharoh's house* thus referring to the general murmur, news, and gossip.

PARALLELISM: *Parallelism can refer to two similar passages that are almost identical but differ in key places. The differences indicate intended nuances and communications. Parallelism can also refer to climax; to a sequential listing of items in an increasing climactic manner. Very often, the meaning inferred from parallelism is our only way of understanding meaning.*

Gn45-23b,c,d. And to his father Joseph sent as follows: 10 male donkey loads of *the best of Egypt* and 10 female donkey loads carrying *grain, bread, and beans*

The verse simply lists items in biblical Hebrew: *bar, lechem, mazon*. We know that *lechem* means food in general and bread in particular. *Mazon* generally means *food*. *Bar* is a rare term but can refer to *grain fields* (Ps 72:16). The phrase *best of Egypt* does not really tell us what was sent.

Thus we have a situation here where the dictionary meanings do not really help us. Rashi apparently uses climactic parallelism to understand what was sent. In terms of food sent, using limited transportation means, Rashi based himself on important components of a meal

Biblical phrase	Place in meal	Meaning	Relevance to meal
<i>Egypt's best</i>	1	wine, beer	Good meal starter. Aids in digestion and is a rich a source of vitamins. <i>Egypt's best</i> is the type of catchy phrase by which wines are named.
<i>Bar</i>	2	Grains (cereals, pasta)	Used to prepare bread and also as a main dish in meals. Grains are good sources of protein and filling. This is an important consideration if you are limited in transportation capacity and need the highest quality food in lightweight fashion
<i>Lechem</i>	3	Bread	Mainstay of meals. Rich in protein, calories, and vitamins. Also filling because of its fiber. All

			components of meals were typically eaten by bread accompaniment
<i>Mazon</i>	4	Pulses and legumes	<i>Mazon</i> generally means food and here (because of the climax) means pulses and legumes. As Ibn Ezra points out, pulses and legumes are similar to grains (even if they are not in the big five like wheat and barley). They are lightweight, rich in protein, and non-perishable making them ideal for transport.

One can read the various Midrashim but there really isn't any other good argument for justifying these translations except the climactic parallelism. Note that the Midrash Rabbah cites various Talmudic phrases on what words can refer to (they ingeniously use the laws of oaths which require understanding the extent of reference of certain words). However, this is a historical approach showing how words were used rather than our approach showing where they came from. The approach Rashi took based on the components of the meal and nutritional considerations seems best.

GRAMMAR: Gn28-02b, Gn32-04a, Ex15-23a, Gn46-01a, Gn14-10b, Dt3 In these verses Rashi lays down the principle that an intended goal of motion can be indicated either by the prefix letter *lamed* or by a terminal letter *hey*. Hence, e.g., Gn46-01 Yisroel and everyone belonging to him journeyed *towards Beer Sheva* (Beer Sheva with a terminal hey).

Rashi simply lists these as two methods of indicating a terminal goal. I would point out the further nuance that terminal hey indicates *towards* while prefix lamed indicates *to* (*towards* indicates a general direction without a commitment to actually arrive there).

Note that the Rashi comment on Dt33-27 is an error. Several scholars have pointed this out. First of all *to* or *towards* does not make sense in this verse. Secondly whenever there is a terminal *hey* indicating *towards*, the accent of the word is penultimate while on this word it is on the last syllable. Throughout his commentary Rashi is very sensitive to matters of accent so he couldn't have overlooked this (Most probably a printer inserted it).

We can explain the word *MeONaH* by recalling other noun pairs one word of which has a feminine suffix: e.g. *tzedeck-tzedakah* – *justice, charity*. So *meon-meonah* would probably be *lair* – *base (of operations)*. Dt 33-26:27 would then be translated: *Nice-people (nickname of the Jews) there is none like God; He rides the skies when helping you and his braggings are about heavens; The First of gods, (he) is your base of operation for underneath him are the powerful nations which He (can therefore) oustes from you and then allows you to destroy them.*

Finally, we use this example, to illustrate the position of my doctoral thesis on Rashi manuscripts: A Rashi comment even with the best of manuscripts cannot be understood in isolation but rather must be viewed amidst the collection of similar manuscripts: In this case Ex15-23a introduces the additional subrule that a *terminal hey* on a word *already ending in a hey* becomes a *terminal tauv-hey* (similar to *leaf-leaves* in English).