

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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MG=Modern Grammar with Applications to Rashid (www.Rashiyomi.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

WHAT IS NEW: *An exciting sets of controversies this week. Rashi and Oonkelos seem to interpret one way. Ramban however cites the Talmud that the verses refer to more. Then Ramban cites the official legal ruling and says, "Maybe we can work that into Rashi." Meanwhile, Rambam seems to say one thing in the book of commandments and another thing in the Mishneh Torah. I present an approach explaining all contradictions.*

From the Rashiyomi Website

(c) Dr. Russell Jay Hendel, May 8th, 2025

Lv19-32a, Lv19-32b, Lv19x32b

- Stand up [to offer a seat] *when in the presence of a sit-in* [lit. a very old person]
- Show honor to seniority [lit. elders]
- Fear your Lord, I am God.

Rashi Rule: Word Meaning-Etymology, Paragraph context

Rashi Comment: Note: There is some corruption in the current Rashi texts which led to Ramban criticizing Rashi. Even with the correct version there are still questions raised by Ramban and an apparent contradiction between the Rambam in the Book of Commandments and the *Mishneh Torah* [his legal code]. To present the best exposition, we first (I) state what all the texts mean, (II) show how this is implicit in the two versions of the Rambam, (III) then show how Rashi was corrupted, and (IV) finally resolve Ramban's objections.

(I) First (A) we explain the two terms for *elder* in this verse and then (B) explain the commandments in this verse.

(I-A) Word meanings. The two words for *elder* are *sayvah* and *zaken*. *Zaken* is the easier one and in fact its etymology is already mentioned in the Sifrah and Talmud. It comes from the root *k-n-h* (**Kuph-Nun-Hey**) which means *acquisition*. It corresponds to our English *seniority* a person with experience (lit. *acquired experience*). *Sayvah* is not explained in the Talmud. Rambam

explains *a very old person*. I think it obvious it comes from the root *shin-veth* to *sit*. It would correspond to the English Idiom, *a shut-in* that is a person who is slightly immobilized to the extent that he is shut in and does not go out much. In Hebrew they use the term *sit-in* referring to a person who has difficulty transitioning from the sitting to the standing position (and hence is called a *sit-in*). It should be noted that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States uses a sit-up test, the number of times in 30 seconds that a sitting person can get up and return to the sitting position, to assess the lack of fitness that typically occurs in old age.

(I-B) Textual Content. Earlier in this chapter the text says, *show caring to your friend as you would to yourself* (lit. *love your neighbor like yourself*) (Lv19-18) which requires us to show social niceties to people that we ourselves expect, for example, assisting or supporting life-style events (celebrating births, marriages, deaths) and more generally doing any social activity for another person that we would personally like done for ourselves. It follows that this commandment obligates us to *stand up and offer an elder (a sit-in) a seat when they pass by* or more generally *to extend a hand to help support him if (s)he needs it* [Rambam, Laws of Talmud Torah, 6:8]

The verse Lv19-32 requires more than what is required by the verse *show caring to your friend as you would to yourself*. It requires showing *honor* to seniority. This requires standing up in their presence (not to offer seats) but as a gesture of honor.

(II) The Two Texts of the Rambam: With this background of what the biblical text requires we can analyze (A) the Rambam's enumeration of commandments including what he says in the book of commandments, and (B) what he says in his legal code.

(II-A) Rambam: Enumeration of Commandments. Of course, the Rambam lists the commandment to *showing care to others as you would for yourself* (Positive Commandment #206). Therefore, consistent with our analysis above that *standing up to offer a seat to a sit-in* is part of *showing care for others as you would for yourself* the Rambam does not separately list the commandment in Lv19-32 of *standing up [to offer a seat] to a sit-in*. Why? Because this is not a separate commandment but part of *showing care to others as you would for yourself*. The only reason it is brought in Lv19-32 is to provide contrastive background for the new commandment there, *to stand up in honor* (not necessarily to offer a seat) *before seniority*.

But why am I so certain that the Rambam classified *stand up for a sit-in* as offering support? Because he explicitly says so (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Talmud Torah, 6:8): *similarly, extend a hand to support him; offer him verbal support*. In fact, the Rambam (ibid) explains that while showing honor to scholars (elders) is accomplished through fully standing, standing up for a sit in (shut in) only consists of leaning forward (as a gesture to that you offering the sit-in (shut in) a seat [Rambam, ibid.].

(II-B) Rambam: The Legal Code: The legal code of the Rambam, the Mishneh Torah, lists the biblical commandments in each section at the beginning of each section of the legal guide; in Learning Torah laws (*Talmud Torah*) only 2 commandments are listed, to *study torah* and to *honor its learners*. In the book of commandments the Rambam only lists the requirement to *show honor to seniority* since as we just explained there is no separate commandment to *stand up* [to

offer a seat] *to the sit-in* as it is part of *showing care towards others as you would to yourself*.

(III) Rashi Texts: Before (B) analyzing the Rashi texts we analyze (A) the Talmudic and Sifrah texts on which the Rashi is based. The Talmud and Sifrah mentions the opinions of various authorities.

(Version 1) *Stand in the presence of a sit-in (shut-in)*. Does that refer to any very old person? No! Because the verse continues *honor the presence of a seniority person (elder)*.

- Rabbi Yosi Haglili explains that *seniority person* refers to people who have a wealth of experience and acquired knowledge and wisdom (*The elders*). ...
- Isi ben Yehuda explains that *sit-in (shut-in)* includes all elders.

It thus *appears* that there is a controversy to what the verse refers to (all old people or just wise old people). To explain this I utilize a textual analysis I learned from the Rav, Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchick (He explained the principle but did not apply it to this verse). According to the Rav, the original text looked as follows.

(Version 2) *Stand in the presence of a sit-in (shut-in) and honor the presence of seniority persons*. Does that refer to any very old person? No! Because the verse continues *honor the presence of a seniority person (elder)*.

- Rabbi Yosi Haglili explains that *seniority person* refers to people who have a wealth of experience and acquired knowledge and wisdom (*The elders*). ...
- Isi ben Yehuda explains that *sit-in (shut-in)* includes all elders.

According to this probably initial version, the verse contains two acts: *standing, honoring*. Rabbi Yosi Haglili and Isi Ben Yehuda's comments therefore are not contradictory but supplementary.

- Leaning forward to offer a seat applies to a sit in (shut in)
- A full standing, showing honor, only applies to the elders (the wise).

This of course is Rambam's formulation as we have explained above. The Rav notes that two distortions of the probably original text happened over the course of time. These happened because copyists were hand-copyists and abbreviations crept in. The first abbreviation was probably

(Version 3) *Stand in the presence of a sit-in (shut-in) etc.* Does that refer to any very old person? No! Because the verse continues *honor the presence of a seniority person (elder)*.

- Rabbi Yosi Haglili explains that *seniority person* refers to people who have a wealth of experience and acquired knowledge and wisdom (*The elders*). ...
- Isi ben Yehuda explains that *sit-in (shut-in)* includes all elders.

Here *etc* summarizes the last half of the verse. A follow up distortion would have the copyist omit the *etc.* transforming Version 3 into Version 1. This explains the text we currently have. It also explains Rashi who simply *appears* to cite Version 1. Rashi probably cited Version 2 which

over time degenerated into Version 3 and then into Version 1 giving us our current Rashi text (Recall that Rashi lived several 100 years before the invention of the printing press).

(IV) The Ramban: The Ramban simply noted the Rashi text before him. He was kind to Rashi and admitted it came from the Sifrah. Ramban then cites Oonkelos. Ramban attempts to reconcile the Sifrah-Rashi-Oonkelos text with the established law. Thus all this is unnecessary if we have the correct text.

One further point. Lv19-32b besides explaining the requirement of honoring the seniority-person also explains the 3rd phrase in the verse *fear your Lord, I am God*. This supports the idea of textual corruption since the explanation of this 3rd phrase should have been a separate Rashi comment.

Lv19x32b, Lv25-17a, Lv25-36b [There are 5 commandments which end with *fear your Lord*]
Lv19-14 *Don't put a stumbling block before the blind, fear your Lord, I am God.*
Lv19-32 *Honor the presence of seniority people, fear your Lord, I am God.*
Lv25-17 *Don't abuse your colleague, fear your Lord, I am God.*
Lv25-36 *Don't charge interest on loans, fear your Lord, I am God.*
Lv25-43 *Don't overwork a locked-in contracted worker, fear your Lord, I am God.*

Rashi Rule: Unifying Explanation

Rashi Comment: Rashi deals with the unifying idea that drives including *fear your Lord* in only these five commandments. Rashi explains *any commandment dependent on intent states Fear Your Lord since there is no way of proving violation*. For example, you could argue, *I wasn't abusing the person; I was giving constructive criticism*, or, *I didn't see the seniority person as he passed by*, or *I could loan my money to a non-Jew to loan it to Jews on interest and pay me part of the profit*. Since the commandment fulfillment is based on *intent*, these verses state *fear your Lord* who knows your inner thoughts.

It is interesting that on Lv25-36 Rashi's first explanation is *the verse says Fear your Lord because people are attracted to money and are tempted to charge interest*. However, I don't view this as two Rashi explanations but rather, the money temptation explanation is an oversimplified explanation based on only one example (and quite reasonable for that one example) while the main (2nd) Rashi explanation successfully explains all five verses. Therefore the first explanation is called *midrashic* in the sense that it is *oversimplified* while the second explanation which works for all 5 cases is the straightforward meaning of the text (*peshat*).

Lv19-33a, Lv19-34a, Ex22-20a, Ex22-20b, Ex22-20c, Ex23-09a, Ex23-09b

Ex22-20 *A non-citizen: do not abuse or cramp him because you were non-citizens in Egypt*

Ex23-09 [Do not take bribes...] *Don't cramp the non-citizen, because you know the feelings of the non-citizen since you were non-citizens in Egypt*

Lv19-33:34 *When a non-citizen lives with you in your land do not abuse him. Like one of your citizens the non-citizen living with you should be; show caring towards him as for yourself,*

because you were non-citizens in Egypt

Rashi Rule: Cross References, Intertextuality, Parallelism

Rashi Comment: Clearly, Ex22-20, Ex23-09, and Lv19-33:34 are saying the same thing in slightly different formulations. Thus, understanding the three verses is enhanced through cross-reference. The academic scholars refer to textual explanation through cross-reference as Intertextuality since the text is commenting on itself. Intertextuality occurs frequently. Rashi explicitly notes that there are many biblical verses on non-citizens because of the Bible's sensitivity to non-citizen emotions.

Ex22-20 uses two terms *abuse* and *cramp*. Ex23-09 uses one term, *cramp*; this verse is said in a chapter prohibiting bribes and is likely referring to a monetary crime. Lv19-33:34 uses one term, *abuse*, and this occurs in a collection of verses dealing with respect and is likely to refer to verbal teasing.

All this is speculative: However we can clinch these speculations using the principle of climactic parallelism (that a sequence of text phrases becomes more and more severe); *abuse* is seen as referring to *teasing* while *cramping* (*making him feel tight*) is seen as referring to *overcharging* (The argument of climax in going from verbal teasing to overcharging being that *teasing* is purposeless, it is just designed to hurt someone while *overcharging* might appear permissible on the grounds that citizens get a better deal; therefore it is prohibited). This also follows the Rashbam's approach.

Thus when Lv19-33 mentions *abuse* we can use the intertextuality to cross reference Ex22-20 and explain it refers to *teasing*.

Rashi gives examples of *teasing*: *You want to become a Torah scholar and leader? But last year you were a non-citizen indulging in what is to us forbidden pleasures. (Hence the law, do not remind non-citizens of their past).*

The last part of Rashi deals with the reason the biblical text gives for the prohibitions against abusing or cramping non-citizens. The reason in Ex23-09 is the clearest: *Don't do these things to non-citizens because you know how non-citizens feel since you were non-citizens in Egypt.*

On the other verses the bible simply says *you were non-citizens in Egypt* without mentioning *you know how they feel*. Rashi apparently adds further supplemental arguments against abusing non-citizens; as far as I can tell these are simply supplemental arguments without having connection to the verses in question. Rashi mentions 2 additional reasons.

First, Rashi mentions the possibility of *retaliation*. For example, if you tease a non-citizen, *You want to become a Torah scholar when last year you were non-Jewish and engaging in all types of practices that are prohibited?* the non-citizen can retaliate: *Look who is talking; you were slaves in Egypt and did all the things that slaves traditionally do!!!*

Second, Rashi gives a *psychological insight*. After all, most people would not enjoy teasing

someone and seeing them suffer. People who enjoy seeing people suffer are typically suffering from a psychological illness. In this case, the primary symptom of the psychological illness is a symptom called *projection*. *Projection* occurs when you can't self-criticize because you can't see your own faults; instead you project your faults onto others and criticize them. This is psychologically unhealthy since you are unnecessarily criticizing other people. In this case, when you tease a non-citizen you in effect are criticizing those aspects of your own life where you are still not a complete citizen person.
