

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 Rashi comment to the reader

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

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

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DATE/AUTHOR: Apr 10, 2026, Russell Jay Hendel DSJS, Ph.D.

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PESHAT: THE SPONTANEOUS REACTION OF NATIVE SPEAKERS FAMILIAR WITH WORD NUANCES

WHAT IS NEW IN THIS ISSUE

- Three examples are brought today, each emphasizing a unique aspect of the Rashiyomi approach.
- Rashiyomi shows that Rashi used the principle of *climactic parallelism* under which any two similar consecutive verse phrases *must* be interpreted climactically even if the nuances of the underlying words are changed from what they usually mean.
- Rashiyomi shows that at times Rashi presents *simpleton* explanations, that is, the way a simpleton, an untrained reader would interpret a verse. We show how to recognize these *simpleton* explanations and how to identify the true Rashi explanation.
- Rashiyomi shows that several other biblical commentators such as Ramban, were unfamiliar with all the principles that Rashi used. Hence, these commentators may disagree with Rashi. However, they can simply be answered by pointing out that they were unaware of these principles.

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: Parallelism

Rashi Comment: Clearly, Ex22-20, Ex23-09, and Lv19-33:34 are saying the same thing in slightly different formulations. By using the parallelism principle, we get more precise insights

into what *abuse* and *cramping* refer to.

The *climax* principle says that consecutive parallel passages are interpreted climactically:

- Do not *abuse* a non-citizen and [moreover]
- Do not *cramp* him Ex22-20.

The simplest approach to *climactic* interpretation is to say that

- *Abuse* refers to *verbal abuse* while
- *Cramping* refers to *monetary abuse*, e.g. *overcharging*.

The important point to emphasize is that

- Just using the dictionary does not help us; dictionary meaning does not distinguish that finely between *abuse* and *cramping*.
- Parallelism *creates* meaning by requiring *climactic* interpretation.

Having used Ex22-20 to understand the Bible's unique approach to *abuse*, *cramping*, we can then

- Interpret Ex23-03 *don't cramp a non-citizen* as referring to monetary abuse. And indeed, Ex23-01:02 is speaking about the prohibition of taking bribes thus clinching this approach
- Interpret Lv19-33:34 *don't tease non-citizens because you were non-citizens in Egypt [and remember how distasteful teasing was]* Here too the context is fully consistent with *verbal teasing* [since slaves didn't own anything anyway and it was the verbal abuse that bothered them].

Rashi additionally gives psychological insights: *Do not abuse (verbally) because the non-citizen can hit you back with verbal abuse*, However, we need not go into this further here.

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: Parallelism

Rashi Comment: Rashi explains 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 senior person as he passed by so I didn't stand for him*, or *I could loan my money to a non-Jew to loan it to Jews on interest and pay me part of the profit to circumvent the prohibition of loaning on interest*. 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, prohibiting charging interest on loans, 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 a second alternative Rashi explanation; rather, the money temptation explanation is an oversimplified explanation based on only one example (and quite reasonable for that one example) while in the main (2nd) Rashi explanation, *any commandment whose fulfillment is based on intent*, Rashi 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*).

Lv19-32a, 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: Parallelism

Rashi Comment: By way of introduction, we explain the two synonyms for elderly people:

- *Za-ken*, corresponds to the English *senior*. It connotes someone with seniority who has acquired (*ka-nah*) a lot of experience in life and various subjects. In the Jewish context, the *za-ken* typically refers to a *Torah scholar* who has acquired much experience in matters of Jewish law and lore.
- *Say-Vah*, from the same root that means *sitting*, **Shin-Beth**, with the **Shin** replaced by a **Sin**, refers to a sit-in, a person whose level of fitness is so poor, that they find it difficult to get up from the sitting position. This is consistent with modern theory that states that a simple *sit-to-stand* test, counting how often a person can go from the sitting position to the standing position in 30 seconds, is sufficient to accurately predict expected life duration, the tendency to fall, and several other matters (A score of 9 or less makes you a *sit-in* an elder who is out of shape who is prone to falls and who is expected to live less)

Next, recall that parallelism *creates* meaning. It can also change the nuances of words in a sequence of parallel consecutive phrases. The argument is that since

- The 2nd part of the verse refers to *honor* implied by standing out of respect
- The 1st part of the verse refers to *intent to stand* but not standing itself; it is sufficient to show a token of this intent, say, by bending the hips forward in gesture to the elderly person to see if they want a seat.

Hence, the verse, *based on parallelism*, is interpreted to mean

- Gesture the intent of standing for a general *sit-in* and [moreover]
- Actually, stand in honor for a senior scholar.

This is in fact the law as codified in Rambam, in the *Shulchan Aruch*, and also is the interpretation provided by the *Sifray* and the Aramaic translation, *Oonkelos*.

Rashi adopts this translation. However, Ramban, who apparently was *unaware* of the parallelism principle and how *climactic parallelism* refines meaning, expresses surprise over the *Sifray*,

Oonkelos, the Talmud (which adopts the Sifray), and Rashi. Because Ramban was unaware of this principle, he interprets *Stand before a sit-in* to mean that one must fully stand before a sit-in. Here, Ramban follows the *dictionary meaning* of *stand*; contrastively, Rashi, Sifrey, Talmud, and Oonkelos, follow the principle climactic parallelism which allows the parallel structure to modify meaning in order to achieve context *even* if this modification is not fully consistent with the ordinary meaning of the words. Thus, in this verse, *stand before a sit-in* is reinterpreted to mean *gesture to stand before a sit-in* referring to a bending at the waist forward when a sit-in passes by in order to offer them a seat should they want it.
