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EVENING AND DAWN, DAY ONE – DAY OF GODS ONENESS

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ABSTRACT: As defended elsewhere, Genesis describes *prophecy*, the unique contribution of the Jewish religion to the world. Genesis 1 describes the creation of the *first prophecy*, the prophecy to Adam by God *to reproduce and fill the world and also conquer it*. The creation of prophecy in turn takes place over 7 stages, called the 7 days of creation. The first day deals with the first component of prophecy, its medium, dreams. A dream is something *seen* at night and is referred to by Genesis as *light*, what we see when we sleep. Rashi explains the importance of this first stage of prophecy, the stage of dreams, a stage which all humans go through, prophets and non-prophets. Rashi explains *dreams, the light seen at night, create a level playing field, assuring that all people are given a chance*. The implication is that *the righteous see their dreams as opportunities given to them by God while the wicked see their dreams as internal fantasies, darkness if you will, nothing to do with the real world*. By creating dreams, God gave every one the same one chance to become wicked or righteous. The examination of this Rashi is quite fascinating and unfolds as a drama.

BACKGROUND ON THE CREATION

Today's Rashi, Gn01-05, addresses issues in Gen 1, the chapter of the *creation*. Therefore, to properly understand it, we first present necessary background on the interpretation of Gn1. The material in this very short introduction has been elaborated in several papers [1, 2, 3] which present more detail.

Gen 1 presents the first prophecy by God to man, the prophecy given to Adam, the first prophet, that the humans should proliferate, fill the earth, and conquer and control it (Gn01-28). Because the theme and climax of Gen 1 is prophecy, symbolic methods are used to interpret the chapter as prophecies throughout the Bible are presented in symbolic form. In particular, the seven days of creation, are symbolically interpreted to refer to seven stages necessary to become a prophet, through which Adam went through. The first stage, discussed on the first day of creation, is the stage of dreams, which symbolically is referred to as *seeing light*, since a person asleep at night who has a dream *sees* the dream and therefore for that person at that time it is still *day* the keyword associated with *light* and visions. That dreams are a prerequisite for prophecy is well documented in the bible, for example, Nu12-06.

THE BIBLICAL AND RASHI TEXT.

Consistent with the above background, Gn01-05, states *God named light (as) day, and for darkness He named (it) night; (thus) there was evening and morning day one*. On the underlined biblical narrative phrase, *day one*, Rashi comments: *According to the continuation of the chapter, it should have said, the first day, just as it says at the end of each of the other days, the 2nd day, the 3rd day, the 4th day, etc. Why does the biblical text change what should have been the first day to day one? The answer is, 'Because God was One in the world (it was the day of God's oneness); as the angels were not created till the 2nd day as is explained in the Be-rei-shith Rabbah Midrash (3:8-9).*

Already, we are asked to critically examine Rashi who sometimes summarizes and leaves out detail which might be important for us. Here, since Rashi refers to the *Be-rei-shith Rabbah* we should cite it. It actually lists 3 reasons for *day one*: (i) God set aside one day for the righteous (who see the light of dreams) and the wicked (who live in darkness), *that day being Yom Kippur* (the point here is that it is one day for everyone to repent which would unite the wicked and righteous); (ii) *God was one in the world because the angels were not created till the 2nd day*; (iii) *But there is a 3rd opinion that the angels (who are known to fly with wings) were not created till the 5th day (when flying beings were created)*. According to this opinion, *day one* wouldn't refer to God being one since he was also one on day 2,3,4. Apparently then the opinion that angels were created on the 5th day would join the original opinion that *day one* refers to Yom Kippur which gives an opportunity to make the world one again by joining the righteous and wicked.

DISSENTING OPINIONS TO RASHI

We continue the critical examination of Rashi by reviewing what other biblical commenters said on his remarks. We examine five such commentaries who question or address the Rashi grammatical assumption that the proper way to count is *first*, *2nd*, *3rd*, not *one*, *2nd*, *3rd*.

- (1) The *Sifsay Chachamim*; The four rivers of the Garden of Eden are enumerated *river one*, *2nd river*, *3rd river*, *4th river*, (Gn02-10:14). While the *Sifsay Chachamim* suggests some defenses for this, noteworthy is the example itself which contradicts the Rashi principle.
- (2) *Ramban*: Ramban ingeniously attempts to defend Rashi by arguing *you can't say 1st until a 2nd is present; but at the end of the 1st day there were no other days* (and hence, proper, is *day one*, not *first day*).
- (3) *Bechor Shor*: *Bechor Shor* answers the *Ramban*: But the 2nd day started at nightfall *immediately and instantly* after day one ended; So, day 2 had begun. *Bechor Shor* says *it is normal to count one*, *2nd*, *3rd*, *4th*. I might add, that modern grammarians side with the *Bechor Shor*. They are of the opinion that for small amounts, *one*, *2nd*, *3rd*, *4th* is a normal way of counting [4, Section 2.7.1(e)].
- (4) *Shadal*: The *Shadal* offers a totally different explanation of Gn01-05: *There was evening and there was morning thereby making a unit of a day*. He interprets, *day one*, as *a complete unit*. A similar usage of *one* occurs at Ex26-11: *connect the curtain hooks with the loop-clasps thereby making the tent a complete unit* (lit. *thereby making the tent one*).
- (5) *David Tzvi Hoffman*: Hoffman, continuing the approach of the *Sifsay Chachamim*, cites several biblical narratives where the counting is *one*, *2nd*, *3rd* (Gn02-11, Gn04-19, Gn08-05,13). As can be seen, among these are references to *day one* of the month instead of the *first of the month*. Finally, I might add the 4 rows of the Priestly breastplate which are enumerated, *row one*, *2nd row*, *3rd row*, *4th row* (Ex28-17:20).

RASHI REVISITED

As the examples, commenters, and authorities cited in the last section show, there is no grammatical rule that counting should be done *first*, *2nd*, *3rd*.... Rather the normal way of counting is *one*, *2nd*, *3rd*. There are two unpleasant options to deal with Rashi's apparent statement that he is basing himself on the inappropriateness of the sequence *day one*, *2nd day*, *3rd day*.

First: We can assume that this is the principle that Rashi held. But then we would be forced to confront that Rashi totally ignored all the counterexamples to this principle. This is unsatisfactory. Rashi knew Tanakh very well and couldn't have possibly overlooked so many counterexamples.

Second: We can assume that while Rashi was aware of these counterexamples, he had some mysterious new approach to them. This is believable *had* Rashi told us about it. Rashi is a commenter. His job is to explain things out of the ordinary. Not once does Rashi say anything on all the counterexamples cited above including for example, *row 1*, *2nd row*, *3rd row*, *4th row* or including *day one of the month*. So, we have to discard this approach also.

The approach we take is that Rashi's statement is a statement of *a mnemonic* not of *reason*. Here is a well know silly example from 4th grade.

TEACHER: Remember class: *Principle* refers to an abstract idea while *principal* refers to a person who runs something; you can see this in the last 3 letters of *principal*, *pal*, which implies the principal is your *pal* and friend.

CRITIQUE: It is super clear that even though the teacher said the reason for the meaning of *principal* is in the last 3 letters, the teacher could not possibly have believed that as words do not have meaning based on their last 3 letters. The word *because* in the form *principal means...because ...of its last 3 letters* refers to a *mnemonic* not a *grammatical reason*.

We approach Rashi the same way: Although he did say the principle that *one*, *2nd*, *3rd*, is anomalous, he did so as a clever mnemonic to help readers remember the statement. That applies to the catchy phrase *day of God's oneness* also.

But then we have left the issue: What is Rashi's comment and what is *its justification*?

RASHI EXPLAINED

As stated in the introductory section: Genesis 1 has as its theme *the creation of prophecy*; the chapter is interpreted symbolically, like all prophetic chapters; Genesis 1 states that to achieve prophecy, and Adam was the first prophet, one has to go through seven stages, the first of which is the stages of *dreams*, of *visions*, items *seen* at night. [1]

To appreciate the important of dreams as a stage in acquiring prophecy we can consider Joseph's dream (Gn37-50). Joseph was a 17-year-old immature teenager who dreamt that *his sheaf stood upright while other sheafs bowed down to his sheaf*. Gen 37 relates 3 approaches to this dream (1) The brothers particularly Shimon and Levi saw this as a physical dream normal to immature teenagers who quest and seek masculinity; the upright sheaf is a masculine symbol and also symbolizes power. (2) Contrastively, Joseph saw this dream as a pointer on how he could achieve parity with his brothers in becoming an adult and a productive member of the community. As actually happened 13 years later, the dream meant that Joseph would acquire agricultural expertise, an expertise he used during the 7 years of plentiful food in Egypt, an expertise that helped him store grain so that when the famine came his warehouses were the go-to resource for obtaining food. (3) Jacob took a wait and see attitude apparently believing the dream could go either way [2].

The important thing about this dream is that it shows how dreams provide a level playing field for everyone. Anyone can have a dream of upright sheafs; whether they become righteous or wicked depends on how they approach the dream. We see that Joseph used his dream as a motivation to help others and eventually became vice-roy of Egypt. Contrastively, Shimon interpreted the dream physically showing a contempt for dreams as coming from God. We witness, that at the *Baal Peor event* (Nu24) the governor of Shimon's tribe had public intimacy with a heathen princess and that because of his misbehavior the death toll in the punishment God brought was 24000 people, eight times the number who died in the idolatrous sin of the golden calf.

There are various ways to reinterpret level playing field including one chance for all or more simply one day for all. This is in fact Rashi's interpretation of Gn01-01:05, it was the day of one-ness, one chance for all, and moreover a chance to God to appear as one God for all giving everyone a chance.

CONCLUSION

We have critically examined the Rashi comment on Gn01-05a. We compared the opinion of five other commenters, examined supportive verses, and studied two options has Rashi's alleged grammatical explanation could not stand up a reason for the comment but rather as a mnemonic for the comment. We then gave a plausible explanation of Rashi's view of the meaning of *day one*, as the day on which the same one chance is given to all people. Moreover, this Rashi comment highlights how we in our own lives, should explore, cultivate, and follow-up on our dreams as when properly interpreted they can lead to helping others, communal service, and rewarding opportunities.

NOTES

[1] Russell Jay Hendel, (2002) *Genesis 1 Speaks about the Creation of Prophecy, Not the Creation of the World*, **BOR HATORAH**, 13e, 71—87.

[2] Russell Jay Hendel, (2011), *Joseph: A Biblical Approach to Dream Interpretation*, **Jewish Bible Quarterly**, 39 (4), 231—238.

[3] Russell Jay Hendel, (2012), *Dreams: The True religion-science conflict*, **CCAR: The Reform Jewish Quarterly**, Winter 2012, 111---124.

[4] B. Arnold and J. Choi (2003), **A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax**, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press