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REPETITION (Part I)

RUSSELL JAY HENDEL

ABSTRACT: This essay begins a multi-part series exploring the biblical use of repetition, always aiming for the *peshat* the simple straightforward meaning of the biblical text which we show does coincide with the standard exegetical meanings. Repetition comes in many flavors: the repetition can be in entire paragraphs, individual sentences, phrases, words, or even syllables of words. In this Part I we start with the basic cases of repetition of bigger units though other types are also brought in. Repetition is common in all languages and generally indicates emphasis which can manifest itself as the equivalent of an oath, a requirement of essentiality, or an emphasis on a restrictive reading without exceptions. We also examine what misled alternative explanations; very often some commentators lacked the tools to fully analyze repetitive texts since early biblical grammar which evolved from Arabic grammatical sources was a grammar of sentences and therefore could not yet handle the modern approach also found in Rashi of the grammar of paragraphs, narratives, and other higher units. Using these modern tools, we examine several instances of paragraph repetition for the sake of additional material and moreover show how the biblical text is clear with alternatives likely to cause more confusion.

REPETITION AS EMPHASIS

In modern times the idea of words that indicate emphasis was championed in *Emphatic Words*, the doctoral thesis of T. Muraoka, the first Japanese biblical Hebrew scholar to receive a doctorate from the Hebrew University.[1] Hendel added to this the idea of unspecified emphasis.[2] A simple example might be hearing someone say, *I dressed myself today*. The word *myself* is called an emphatic pronoun and indicates an unspecified emphasis. Most people get dressed themselves so a statement that someone dressed *themselves* indicates an unspecified emphasis which we don't fully know: Maybe the person was recovering from an injury and today was the first time the individual could dress themselves without assistance. Or maybe, a young child is speaking to his mother and informing her that he finally was able to dress himself without her assistance.

A key method of interpreting a repeated sentence is as indicating emphasis. For example, at Gn08-21b God repeats His statement, after Noah left the ark, that He will no longer destroy the world. Rashi citing Is54-09 which refers to God's oath not to bring another flood comments, *But we do not find that God took such an oath. We do find at Gn08-21 that God repeated His statement that he would not bring the flood*. Hence, Rashi concludes, that the repetition indicates the emphasis of an oath.

To explain the next example, we review the idea of *essentiality*. Suppose you were making cookies. The recipe may require flour, eggs, honey, and chocolate chips. If you baked the cookies without the chocolate chips you still have cookies; but if you baked the cookies without flour, you would not have cookies. We say that *flour* is an *essential* ingredient while *chocolate chips* are non-essential.

At Ex29-35a we find a repetition of the theme stated at Ex29-29:30 that the inauguration procedure of new high priests takes place over 7 days. Rashi explains the repetition to indicate that all procedure items enumerated in the inauguration are *essential* for the ceremony; if even one was not performed the inauguration would be invalid.

HOW WE UNRAVEL THE SPECIFICATION OF THE UNSPECIFIED EMPHASIS

An interesting clarifying example arises from the biblical prohibition of cooking a young kid in the mother of its milk, a prohibition that is repeated three times at Ex23-19b, Ex34-26b, Ex34-26c, and Dt14-21b. This example illuminates nicely how we identify the specifications of an unspecified emphasis indicated by repetition.

First, Rashi spends some time on these verses explaining the nuances of *ge-di*. The word *ge-di* besides occurring in the prohibition of cooking a *ge-di*, a *child*, in the milk of its mother, occurs only five other times in the Bible and in all of them the phrase occurring is *ge-di izim*, the *child of a goat*. This could lead one to suspect that *ge-di* exclusively refers to the child of a goat. But Rashi explains, *since the phrase ge-di i-zim is used, it follows that the specification i-zim is needed; that is, ge-di by itself could mean the child of any penned animal including sheep*.

Having explained *ge-di*, Rashi turns to the three-fold repetition. In one comment he says the prohibition does not apply to *birds, wild animals, or non-kosher animals*. (That is there is no prohibition of cooking the young of these animals in the milk of their mother). In another comment, Rashi explains the three-fold repetition to prohibit cooking, eating, and commerce (one cannot cook meat in the milk of its young and sell it).

It appears, and many commenters so explain, that because the repetition is three-fold, Rashi seeks out three possible exceptions. However, Rashi's comments are never based on counting games. Instead, we will show that the verses themselves identify the scope of the prohibition. The inference is based on the parallelism in Dt14-21 which is exhibited in Table Dt14-21.

TABLE Dt14-21

First half of verse	2nd half*
Do not eat any carcass	Rather give it as a gift to non-Jewish citizens, or sell it to non-Jews
Do not cook a young child in the milk of its mother	because you are holy nation.

* The actual sequence in the verse is *because you are a holy nation; do not cook a young child in the milk of its mother*

As can be seen, Dt14-21 itself, introduces the idea that something that cannot be eaten, such as a carcass, may nevertheless be sold for commercial purposes. If the verse then continues *you are a holy nation*, that is, you have a higher level of sanctity, the next prohibition in the verse, the prohibition of cooking a young child in the milk of its mother, that prohibition is at a higher level of sanctity, and besides the prohibition of cooking, there is a prohibition of selling and gifting, that is, commerce.

Undoubtedly, the repetition coupled with the parallelism gives rise to the added emphasis of *no cooking, eating, or commerce*. There are also other reasons which we mention lightly. The Jews had just come out of Egypt where they were slaves. Slaves typically have a collection of fears which inhibit them from ordinary daily activities.[3] To counteract these fears, the Torah, particularly on the festival emphasis two activities where inhibition may set in but shouldn't and one activity where there may be no inhibition but there should be: (i) slaves typically put off completion of activities because they have fears of criticism; to counteract this the Torah prohibited delaying consumption of the peace offering till the next morning; (ii) slaves typically are worried about dedicating items and therefore the Torah urged that the first-fruit of trees should be immediately dedicated to God; (iii) finally field workers who may be fatigued from working in the sun, naturally feel like cooking children in the milk of their mother; the Torah prohibited this emphasizing the need to balance impetuous desires with symbolic respect for motherhood.

Finally, we should deal with the Rashi which says that the prohibition of cooking children in the milk of their mother, does not apply to birds, non-kosher animals, and wild-animals. Again, we emphasize that Rashi *appears* to be playing counting games, but he is not. Birds do not milk their young. As to the exception of non-kosher animals and wild animals, Dt14-21 comes at the conclusion of Dt14 which lists the kosher animals. Thus, the verse in its conclusion prohibiting cooking children in their mother's milk applies, based on context, to kosher animals.

We have analyzed this repetition in depth to show that repeated verses exist in context such as the surrounding verses and chapters. Very often the inferences about repetition are related to this context. All in all, the chapter and verse now read smoothly: *You are children of God...these are the animals you can eat.....don't eat carcasses but you may gift and sell them and because you are a holy nation don't cook (nor benefit from) a young child in their mother's milk.*

REPETITION WITH OMISSION AS INDICATING EXCEPTIONS

An interesting example of omissions in repetition occurs at Gn17-13a which repeats the obligation of circumcision already stated at Gn17-12. One of these verses mentions the requirement of 8 days while the other verse omits repeating 8 days. Just as repetition indicates essentiality, as we have seen above, repetition with omissions, indicates possible exceptions as happens for example if the baby was too sick to allow the circumcision.

Of course, we already knew that danger to life overrides almost all Torah commandments, so the fact that the child is not circumcised on the 8th day because his physical condition cannot tolerate it is already known. But I might have erroneously thought that if a circumcision is not performed on the 8th day, then it can't be performed at all. In other words, I might have thought that *eight days* is an essential part of the requirement.

By repeating the verse without repeating *eight* the Torah communicates that *eight* is non-essential; therefore, if the child gets better on 13th or 20th day he is circumcised then.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to presenting the next example we first emphasize how strong the principle that repetition indicates emphasis is. The words for the colors red and green in biblical Hebrew are *a-dom* and *ya-rok*. At Lv13-49a and Lv13-49b we find these words with repeated syllables: *a-dam-dam* and *ye-rak-rak*. Rashi, consistent with the theme that repetition indicates emphasis simply explains that *a-dam-dam* and *ye-rak-rak* refer to intensely or pure red and green.

This seems straightforward enough. However, the Ibn Ezra has a different theory. Rather than accepting this as a controversy we should seek motivating factors. In fact, at Songs01-06 we find another word with a repeated syllable, *she-char-cho-reth*. The verse states, *Do not be afraid of me because I am she-char-cho-reth, burnt by the sun*. Ibn Ezra creates difficulties for himself by translating *she-char-cho-reth* as *tanned*. But *sha-chor* means *black*. Clearly *tan* is not an intense form of black but rather a weaker form. It is this verse that motivated Ibn Ezra to have a different approach.

But we can resolve these difficulties if we interpret *she-char-cho-reth* as *sun-burned*. Here, a person exposed to mild sun, has a heightened complexion which might be compared to the *dawn*, *sha-char*. We can look at a person who is red from the sunburn as *intensely dawned*. In other words, we view the underlying root, not as *sha-chor* meaning *black* but as *sha-char* meaning *dawn*. Then, a sunburned person is *intensely dawned*.

This approach is also consistent with the translation of the immediately preceding verse which can be translated as *I am reddened but comely ...like Kaydar tents, like Solomonic curtains*. It is much more likely for example that *Solomon's* curtains were not pure black but had some element of color.

Having introduced this example showing that how widespread the *repetition indicates emphasis* theme is, we turn to a very interesting controversy. Moses in his farewell speech, Dt34 blessed all the tribes. Some of the tribes had their names repeated in the description of their blessing, e.g. *To Dan he (Moses) said, "Dan: You are a young lion"*, while some tribes had no such repetition, e.g. *To Benjamin he (Moses) said, "You are God's beloved."* There are five tribes that have their names repeated. A quick glance at them shows that they were the stronger tribes compared to lions, such as Dan and Judah. This is rather straightforward. This idea that five of the tribes excelled at strength, finds its way into Rashi comments at Dt34-18a and Gn47-02a, where the five brothers that Joseph brought before Pharoh were in fact the strongest brothers. Pharoh himself hints at this when he tells Joseph, *Place your family where you want but if you know strong skilled people among them you can place them as overseers of my flocks*.

Rashi points out that there is a controversy between the Midrash Rabbah and the Babylonian Talmud on how to interpret these repetitions. While there is an opinion that the brothers with repeated names are the stronger brothers there is also, surprisingly, an opinion that the brothers whose names are repeated are the weaker brothers. Since they were weaker, they had to have their names repeated so as to encourage them. This view then has to deal with the fact that Judah had his name repeated and clearly he is one of the stronger tribes.

We needn't go into more details; suffice it to say that we are faced with the problem that there seems to be a serious viewpoint that repetition implies weakness contradicting all examples we have seen so far in this essay.

My own opinion, is that this minority view could not have possibly believed that the brothers with repeated names were the weaker brothers. Rather, they said this, for political reasons to avoid bragging to their non-Jewish neighbors where their strongest tribes are. Such political considerations and concerns are mentioned in sources. For example, after the miracle of Purim when the Jews escaped a royal decree to destroy them, they resisted Esther's attempts to memorialize the event as a holiday, saying, "But if we celebrate victory over non-Jewish enemies, we will arouse hatred among our non-Jewish neighbors." [4]

Additionally, by citing, the alternate opinion, Rashi expresses a legal opinion that we are allowed to distort biblical interpretation when we fear misunderstanding and anti-Semitism from our neighbors.

AN UNUSUAL USE OF REPETITION

A very unusual application of repetition occurs at Lv26-08a, *five of you will pursue 100 and 100 of you will pursue 10000*. Rashi along with many other commenters express surprise that the continuation is not *five will pursue 100 and 100 will pursue 2000*.

Without going into excessive and unnecessary detail, we point out that this unusual Rashi can be explained using the modern concept of linearity. The ratios 100:5 and 2000:20 illustrate a constant linear rate of 20 to 1. On the other-hand 100:5 and 10000:100 illustrate a non-linear say a logarithmic scale where a 3-digit number of pursued (100) is accounted for by a one-digit number (5) and a 5-digit number of pursued (10000) is accounted for by a 2-digit number. It would follow that a 7-digit number (e.g. 1 million) would require a 2-3-digit number of pursuers (say 1000). Those in the

modeling world are familiar with many situations where logarithmic models are more appropriate.

Rashi explains that the more observant people you have the more impact it can have. Such a multiplying effect is typically modeled with a logarithmic or exponential model.

CHAPTER REPETITION FOR ADDED DETAILS

We already mentioned that except for Rashi most medieval grammarians were aware of the grammar of sentences but not the grammar of paragraphs and scenes. Modern grammarians have begun developing the grammar of paragraphs. In this section we review cases where entire paragraphs are repeated albeit for only one or two additional items. Although this appears peculiar and unnecessary, it is perfectly natural, as we will show.

For our first example we start with the laws of individuals sold as servants (slaves) to pay off debts from theft, the laws of which are given at Ex21-01:06 presented in the bulleted list below

When you purchase a Jewish servant: (In all cases) he works 6 years and goes free on the 7th

- *If he enters single, he leaves single*
- *If he enters with a wife, then his wife leaves with him*
- *If (additionally) the master gives him a (non-Jewish) female (slave) and they have children then the female slave and children remain with the master and he leaves by himself*
- *If he refuses freedom saying he likes his setup: my master, wife, and children, then the master brings him to court (and pierces his ears after which he serves forever)*

Before continuing we notice several features of this paragraph: (i) it is a complicated nested if statement; (ii) the chapter focus is on the rights of the sold servant under various terms of exit.

A similar paragraph follows at Ex21-07:12 which discusses the parallel case of a person who sold his daughter. Again, 4 cases are mentioned (i) prohibition of resale if the purchaser does not like the child servant, (ii) possibility of marriage to his son; (iii) rights of the female servant if more wives are involved; (iv) rights of exit without monetary payment if (i)-(iii) have not been done.

Again, the emphasis is on a nested if statement and the rights of the sold daughter.

The chapter about the sold servant is repeated at Dt15:12-18. Rashi, at Dt15-12a, explains that the entire chapter is repeated for two additional laws, (i) the requirement of the master to give the servant gifts when he leaves and wishes him sell, (ii) female servants also leave at 6 years (even if they have not reached puberty which might allow a marriage to the owner's son).

As already explained, the entire chapter is repeated for the sake of the new material. One question, is why the new material could not have been stated prior in Ex21. But if we examine the laws of paragraphs this should be clear: Ex21 discusses the rights of the servant while Dt15 discusses the obligations of the master. Ex21 is complicated (a fourfold nested if statement) and by adding the material elsewhere the Torah avoids confusing text. Similarly, Ex21 deals with possible marriages of the sold daughter and her rights to exit and not be resold. That paragraph explicitly opens *she does not go out like male servants*. However, Dt15 points out that *like male servants* she does leave after 6 years if no other option materializes. Again, the Torah separated the complicated texts in Ex21 and placed the addendums in Dt15. A statement of master obligations would be out of place in Ex21 which deals with court administered procedures and people's rights.

To crystallize this idea of repetition of entire paragraphs we visit Lv03-06:11 and Lv03-12:16 dealing with the peace offerings of sheep and goats. Rashi Lv03-07a explains that there is only one difference between a sheep and goat peace offering (an extra internal organ is offered on the altar in the case of the sheep). So, we have a repetition of an entire chapter to deal with one difference. I challenge the reader to try and come up with some other way of indicating that the sheep and goat peace offerings are identical except for the one extra organ offered for a sheep peace offering. Of importance, is that once there is difference in one item, unless the text explicitly tells me, I might decide that other procedures are also different. By the reader attempting to come up with clear biblical language showing that the two procedures (sheep peace offering and goat peace offering) are identical except in one item, one can begin to appreciate the biblical solution. Although not the only one, paragraph repetition with one difference is a very simple approach.

We have put forth the idea that laws of a subject matter domain may be split between two paragraphs (which necessitate repetition of the entire paragraph to indicate what is new) if the *contexts* of the two paragraphs are different. This can be seen in the repetition at Nu05-05:10 of the paragraph at Lv05-20:26 concerning a person who denied under oath transactions with another person. The various commenters as well the exegetical Midrashim deal with why the repeated paragraph is needed, that is, why the laws couldn't have been stated in one place. An interesting idea, mentioned by the Ramban is that Nu05-05:10 comes right after the census *by family* in Nu01, Nu02. Such a census uprooted the

vagabonds that joined the Jews as they left Egypt; these vagabonds did not have lineage going back to Jacob. Having thrown them out of the community, they acquired a despised status which could easily lead to denial under oath of transactions with them. And this situation, an oath to a person without lineage is precisely what is added at Nu05-05:10 as Rashi points out at Nu05-06a. We can further extend Ramban's ideas by pointing out Nu01-Nu05 established a lineage-based camp with the Temple consecrated; there was now a calling for more religiosity and holiness among the Jews. Hence, Nu05-05:10 also adds the requirement of self-confession (vs. testimony by witnesses) as a prerequisite to the various procedures mentioned. Contrastively, Lv05-20:26, consistent with the context of Lv05 simply lays out the bare essentials of each offering.

To sum up, in this section we have reviewed several instances of repetition of paragraphs for the purpose of adding 1-2 extra laws to a previous statement of these laws. We have discussed the unique requirements of such a split of laws and pointed out that the context of the various paragraphs as well as their complexity may dictate the requirement to split.

CONCLUSION

This essay has begun a multi-part series reviewing how repetition is used in the bible. We have noted that all languages use repetition to indicate emphasis and shown several examples. We also examined lack of repetition as indicating non-essentiality. The presence of political considerations in some dissenting positions was examined. And we concluded our essay with repetition of paragraphs to indicate new points of law; we showed that it would have been confusing to state these in the original paragraphs.

While we gave some good references, we have carefully abstained from citing references that we consider totally wrong in their approach as it is not our custom to use *Essays* as vehicles of excessive criticism. We have however carefully addressed all objections and questions raised any place in the literature. We hope to continue this series in the coming months and years with a complete and full explanation of all repetitions.

NOTES

- [1] T. Muraoka, **Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew**, Leiden: Netherlands, Brill Academic Publishers, 1985
- [2] Russell Jay Hendel, *Biblical Formatting: Visual and Virtual*, **Jewish Bible Quarterly**, 35(1), 17--27, 2007, <https://www.jewishbible.org/articles/biblical-formatting-visual-and-virtual/>
- [3] Aneesh K Mishra & Anuj R Varma, *Comprehensive Review of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder*, **Cureus**. 15(9): 2023, <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.46115>
- [4] Bablyonian Talmud, Megillah, 7a