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PARALLELISM

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ABSTRACT: Parallelism, which refers to two or more verses having identical themes and almost identical language with minor differences, is a basic source and driver of many Rashi comments. Understanding the basics of parallelism is fundamental for any serious student of Rashi. In many instances, it is parallelism that enables us to see Rashi comments as *peshat* the straightforward meaning of the text. This essay introduces the basic principles of parallelism including graphical techniques to assist in understanding it. Two examples are selected each with several laws inferred from parallel passages. We also review the history of parallelism explaining why it wasn't used as much as it should have.

PARALLELISM BASICS

Parallelism and its repertoire of techniques is a basic and fundamental biblical exegetical method. Let us begin with some definitions and illustrations. Parallelism refers to two or more verses or verse phrases that are nearly identical in theme but differ in one or two words or phrases. These differences are seen as intentional by the author; the listener and reader must understand how to recognize parallelism as well as how to interpret it. There are three basic types of parallelism.

Consecutive parallelism refers to a case where the two or more verses or verse phrases are consecutive within the biblical narrative. An excellent example is afforded by Ex20-03: *You should not have the gods of others; you should not manufacturer idols....* Parallelism is best understood through a parallelism table.[1] The parallelism table for Ex20-03 is presented in Table Ex20-03

TABLE Ex20-03

Prohibition	Verb	Object of Verb
You should not	Have	The gods of others
You should not	Make (manufacturer)	idols

To show how such tables are used, we note that reading from left to right and from top to bottom, results in the actual biblical text cited above: *you should not have the gods of others; you should make(manufacturer) idols*. However, the table also allows vertical readings showing the contrast and commonalities of the two verse parts. For example, the verbs in the two verse halves are *have* and *make*. The objects of the verb, the entities on which the verb acts are *the gods of others* and *idols*. Finally, both verses are what we colloquially call *don't* commandments introduced by the phrase *you should not*.

Clearly, both verse phrases prohibit idolatry. However, one verse phrase prohibits *having* idols while the other verse phrase prohibits *making* idols. (There are other differences which we will not go into here). The two phrases can be interpreted as stages of prohibition. For example, it is prohibited to *own* idols; it is also prohibited to *manufacturer* them for sale even if you personally do not own them; that is, it is prohibited to own the idol object or the monetary benefit of that object. Rashi, Ex20-03a, perhaps noting that manufacturer of idols is already well established and prohibited at Ex34-17 and Lv19-04, offers another interpretation: *Besides a prohibition of making (manufacturing) an idol, once one is made, there is an additional prohibition of keeping it*.

Both these interpretations show multiple stages of prohibition with increasing intensity: Do not *own* an idol; furthermore, do not *benefit* from an idol by making and selling it; or, do not *manufacturer* an idol and furthermore once made *destroy* it. The biblical scholars call this *climactic* parallelism wherein the two parallel phrases call them X and Y are interpreted as *X and moreover building on X, do not even do Y* (Rashi's interpretation of Ex20-03a reverses the climax: *do not do Y and moreover if Y was done do not do X*). Thus, climactic parallelism requires seeing the two consecutive verses or verse halves as continuations of each other building up in climax and as noted the intensity can increase in the two verse halves or decrease in them.

But parallelism need not be between items that are consecutive. Table Ex19-07:Lv19-12 illustrates:

TABLE Ex19-07:Lv19-12

Verse ID	Prohibition	Verb	Indirect Object	Adverb
Ex20-03(a)	Do not	Bear	The name of God	For nought
Lv19-12(a)	Do not	Swear	By my Name	Falsely
Differences		(1)	(2)	(3)

Clearly the two verses have identical themes, the prohibition of swearing improperly. And yet the words chosen to reflect impropriety, the name of God, and the act of swearing are all different. *Each* of these differences implies exegetical nuance as follows:

- 1) The prohibition applies whether one uses the word *swear* or one uses a recognized slang word in the person's dialect indicating swearing (e.g. *So help me God...*)
- 2) (Lv19-12a) The prohibition of improper swearing applies whether one uses the known name of God, *a-do-noy* or whether one uses an established reference to God like *the All-Merciful*
- 3) (Ex20-07a) The prohibition of improper swearing applies whether one swears falsely, e.g. *I swear this wooden table is made of gold* or a tautological oath without real content, e.g. *I swear this wooden table is made of wood*.

In analyzing commonalities and differences it greatly helps if the table records the grammatical function of the words thus showing that this function subtly changes between them. Thus, *bear* and *swear* are verbs or an activity; *for nought* and *falsely* are adverbial explaining the type of improper oath prohibits.

Interestingly, Rashi comments on only 2 of the 3 differences. We are not fully aware of why Rashi is sometimes more detailed and sometimes less detailed. My own opinion, is that Rashi, in his commentary, targeted teachers. By reminding them of one or two nuances from a parallelism, Rashi expected the teacher to review all nuances in teaching his students.

In my doctoral thesis, [2] I present a 3rd type of parallelism which I call *paragraph* parallelism. It consists of 3 or more consecutive phrases each of which climactically continues the preceding ones. A classic example is presented in Table Lv05-21:26. The Bible discusses a person who under oath denied a monetary obligation to a fellow Jew. Besides restitution of the obligation, there is also a fine and offering associated with this oath. The Bible presents five examples of monetary obligations that might be denied. I have classified them with decreasing intensity with respect to the dimension of *the likelihood that the denial would lead to a fist fight and violence*.

TABLE Lv05-21:26

Phrase ID	1	2	3	4	5
Phrase content	Denies deposit	Denies loan	Denies stealing	Denies owing wages	Denies a found article
Climactic aspect	Most likely to cause a fight because the person trusted the thief when they gave the deposit	Same as #1 with the difference that only the value of the loan need be returned unlike a deposit where the actual object must be returned	Not as likely to cause a fight as a case like #1 and #2 where the colleague showed initial trust to the thief	Not as likely to cause a fight because nothing is really taken; the denier is simply delaying paying owed wages	Least likely to cause a fight as the finder can argue that he was unaware of the true owner.

Several points of interest can be made. First, the climax is decreasing in the table from #1 to #5 similar to Rashi's treatment of Ex20-03a. Second, Rashi here makes three comments (Lv05-21b,c,d). Rashi in these comments elucidates the meaning of rare phrases and bases his interpretation on the position in the climactic sequence. For example, the biblical phrase for item two is *a placement of a hand* a phrase which does not occur elsewhere in the bible. *Because* of the place of this phrase in the sequence of biblically listed items, Rashi interprets this as an idiom referring to investorship or loans: *he placed money in the other person's hand (possession) (for purposes of investment) or he loaned him*.

This last point is critical to understanding the role of climax in biblical exegesis. Parallelism justifies, in and of itself, understanding of meaning. Many scholars and commenters overlook this and mistakenly think that all meaning comes from the dictionary. Not so. As can be seen in this example, and as is quite common, the climactic parallel structure or even an ordinary parallel structure, justifies, by itself, without support from a dictionary or other sources, the inference of meaning.

HISTORY OF PARALLELISM

Parallelism has an unfortunate history which has prevented both religious and secular scholars from applying it more often. I detail a discussion on this in my doctoral thesis. Some basic points are the following: It is a mistake to think that parallelism even in legal passages is rare. For example, a systemic sample of Rashis on Ex21 shows that 15% of them are based on parallelism despite this being a predominantly legal passage. Parallelism is even more common in poetic passages.

Menachem an early medieval grammarian who published one of the first dictionaries mistakenly thought that Rashi overlooked parallelism. Twelve examples are presented. They are fully answered in my doctoral thesis where I show that not only did Rashi employ parallelism but he employed and skillfully used the climactic parallelism we have discussed above. However, *Menachem's* analysis veered other commenters from using parallelism.

In modern scholarship, the prestige of Greek poetry based on rhythm and meter blinded people to the presence of parallelism. Kugel who championed climactic parallelism details this history in his book.[3] Kugel also points out that the important attribute of climactic parallelism that the X and Y verses or verse phrases are linked by climactic intensity is also ignored.

We should also mention modern typology. It is quite easy today to create parallelism tables in many available software products used for typing. However, tables were much more challenging to produce several centuries ago. Thus, entire sets of Rashi comments may be blatantly based on a parallelism table, but because Rashi did not present this table, readers may be hesitant to use it. A significant percentage of Rashi comments are based on parallelism; the only reason Rashi does not mention parallelism tables is because he lived several hundred years before the invention of the printing press and even after the printing press was created it took another several hundred years before table creation was easy.

The above sketch of parallelism history should enable the reader to appreciate the difficulty in applying it. A fundamental tenet of the Rashi website is to begin the explanation of many Rashi comments with a statement of parallelism. The parallelism table is not necessary but neatly introduces with clarity the underling ideas. [1]

PARALLELISM OF THE BLIND PERSON AND KIDNAPPING PASSAGES

Today's essay studies two (of the many parallelism's) underlying Rashi comments in this week's Parshah, *Ki TayTzaY*. Amusingly, a rather rare actuarial-statistical comment found in the Midrash points out the anomaly that despite the fact that there are 613 commandments and 52-54 weekly readings so that we expect on average a dozen commandments per weekly reading, and furthermore, even if we subtract the 11 Genesis weekly readings (which only have 3 commandments) so that we still expect about 15 commandments per weekly reading, nevertheless, there are three outlier weekly readings, *MishPaTiM*, *QeDoShiM*, and *Ki TayTzay* each of which has over 10% (60 or more) of all the commandments. Many comments, laws, and insights in these weekly readings are in fact based on parallelism.

For this week's essay we have selected two such passages. These passages particularly emphasize key ideas in parallelism. Contrary to popular opinion, although final law always follows traditions, many of these inferences are quite logical and can be inferred without prior knowledge. Table Ex21-16:Dt24-07 presents, and rather compactly, the two verses requiring a death penalty for kidnapping with usage. The underlying 4 Rashi comments are presented in the table and need very little supportive explanation.

As the table shows, there is a death penalty for any adult, man or woman, kidnapping anyone, man, woman, or child provided the four requirements listed in the two verses are met: There was an act of stealing, the kidnapped person was brought to the thief's possession, the thief used the kidnapped person for some purpose, and then stole him. As seen, Rashi comments on most of the differences. The presence of *is found* in one verse but not the other is interpreted to require that there be witnesses. However, witnesses and a trial or general requirements for any death penalty. The laws of kidnapping are summarized nicely in Rambam, *HilCoTh GeNayVaH*, Chapter 9.

A second example, presented in Table Lv19-14:Dt27-18 summarizes the two verses addressing abuse of blind people

TABLE Ex21-16:Dt24-07

Verse	Subject	Adjectival phrase	Verb	Object	Requirement (a)	Requirement (b)	Requirement © *	Consequence
Ex21-16a, Ex21-16b			(he who) steals	a person		And sells him	& is found in his possession	Shall die
Dt24-07a, Dt24-07b	When a person	Is found	stealing	A soul from his brothers from the Jewish people	He uses him	And sells him	1	That thief shall die.
Rashi	One line is blank so subject <i>ish</i> is not translated restrictively <i>man</i> but broadly as <i>person</i> including a female thief		Commonality of both verses justifying parallelism	The contrast <i>person</i> vs. <i>soul</i> implies that <i>ish</i> should be translated as <i>person</i> (e.g. child) not <i>man</i>	For a death penalty there are 4 requirements: stealing, the kidnapped person is retained in his possession(c), the kidnapper uses him (a), and the kidnapper sells him (b).	For a death penalty there are 4 requirements: stealing, the kidnapped person is retained in his possession(c), the kidnapper uses him (a), and the kidnapper sells him (b).	For a death penalty there are 4 requirements: stealing, the kidnapped person is retained in his possession(c), the kidnapper uses him (a), and the kidnapper sells him (b).	

TABLE Lv19-14:Dt27-18

	Col #1: Prohibition/ Curse	Col #2: Object	Col #3: Verb	Col #4: Object	Col #5: Indirect Object	Col #6: Motivation
Lv19-14b Lv19-14c	Do not	Before a blind person	Place an obstacle	(See column 1)		Fear God
Dt27-18a	Cursed be he who	(See column 3)	Misleads	A blind person	On the road	(See col #1)
Rashi	See col #5 Rashi	Rashi does not comment on the contrast <i>before a blind person</i> (col #2) vs a <i>blind person</i> (col #4). However, Jewish law sees emphasis in <i>before</i> ; there is only a biblical prohibition if you place it directly before him. So e.g. I can't sell an animal exclusively used for idolatrous sacrifices to an idolater because I am aiding him to sin (obstacle). But I can sell an animal used for both idol worship and food consumption; the obstacle is not direct here but only a possibility.	Rashi does not comment on the contrast <i>place an obstacle</i> vs. <i>misleads</i> but Jewish law sees emphasis that the biblical prohibition only comes if you <i>place an obstacle</i> . So, if a forbidden food is on the table and I pass it to someone I have not <i>placed the obstacle</i> (it was already there) and there is no biblical prohibition. But if I go to the store or Frigidaire to obtain the prohibited food, I do violate it. (Note: There is a rabbinic prohibition of misleading people).	See Rashi comment in col #2.	Both placing a physical obstacle as well as misleading a person in business practices (who is metaphorically blind about the obstacle) are prohibited. Interestingly, the Hebrew <i>michshol</i> from Col #3 where this Rashi comment occurs, occurs 11 other times in the Bible and in 10 of these it refers to misleading rather than a physical obstacle.	(Rashi) Fearing God is specifically mentioned here since it is easy to defend oneself and argue, "I intended to give good advice; not mislead" In Col #1, we see that the prohibition is made into a curse consistent with this emphasis on fearing God.

This parallelism is unusual in several respects. First, the prohibition *do not* in Lv19-14 is parallel to a curse, *cursed be he who*. Second there are sequence differences making the use of tabular presentation more challenging. Lv19-14 states *do not before a blind person place an obstacle* while Dt27-18 states *cursed be he who misleads a blind person*. Here the blind person is the object of the verb; objects usually come after the verb in a sentence as happens in Dt27-18; but in Lv19-14 they come before the verb. We have tried to capture this nuance using cross reference of columns. Unfortunately, these cross references can interfere with the smooth reading across of each row. (So, we put the point about cross references in parenthesis and in different font.).

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. Suffice it to say that authors should not

write about Rashi, exegesis, and the *straightforward meaning of the text, the peshat*, without firmly understanding parallelism and its principles.

NOTES

[1] Russell Jay Hendel, *Visual Representations of Biblical Poetic Parallelism*, **Bridges 2011: Mathematics, Music, Art, Architecture, and Culture**, 2011, accessible at <https://archive.bridgesmathart.org/2011/bridges2011-279.pdf>

[2] Russell Jay Hendel, **The Dynamics of Peshat and Derash in Rashi**, Doctoral Thesis, Chicago, Ill: The Spertus Institute, Dr. Dean Bell Advisor, 2020-2022, accessible at <http://www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm>

[3] James Kugel, **The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History**, New Haven, CT:, Yale University Press, 1983, Reprinted, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998