

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, Vayelech

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I am unable vs. I am not allowed (Dt31-02a)

Rashi, at **Dt31-02a**, discusses the statement of Moses in his farewell speech, in which he indicates that he won't be leading, but Joshua will.

Rashi points out, that Moses' statement is ambiguous and can be interpreted in two ways:

- *I am 120 years old today; I am unable to further lead*
- *I am 120 years old today; I am not allowed to further lead*

The Hebrew verb used, like its corresponding English verb, can equally mean *unable* *physically* or *not allowed*.

Rashi settles this ambiguity by using the **Rashi Reference Method**. Rashi references another verse which settles the ambiguity. **Dt34-07** clearly states that at his death, *Moses was 120 years old when he died, his vision had not dimmed, and his skin had not lost its moisture*. Hence, the proper translation of **Dt31-02** is *I am not allowed*

Commentary: Some Rashi-ists might approach this Rashi using the **Rashi Contradiction Method**. They would say that **Dt34-07** states that *Moses had full vigor* while **Dt31-02** states *Moses was unable to lead*. They would then resolve this contradiction by pointing out that the same Hebrew verb means *allowed* or *able*.

You'll lead them vs. They'll come with you (Dt31-07a)

In this week's Parshah, *Vayayelech*, the leadership of Joshua and his relationship with his followers, the Jewish people, is discussed twice.

- *This nation will come with you* (**Dt31-07**)
- *You will lead this nation* (**Dt31-23**)

Moses stated the **Dt31-07** statement; God stated the **Dt31-23** statement. The two statements create an ambiguity. Who does the leading? Joshua or the nation?

Rashi resolves this using the **Rashi Contradiction Method**.

It all depends on your initiative, Joshua.

- If you are aggressive in your leadership, the nation will follow you.
- Otherwise, the nation will take the initiative.

Commentary: According to the Rabbi Ishmael *beraitha* on the 13 exegetical rules, contradictions between two verses are resolved through a third verse. But, as seen in this case, and many others, the contradictions between two verses are sometimes resolved through an obvious logical distinction.

*Men, Women, Children, Converts vs.
Train, Understand, Watch, Revere (Dt31-12)*

Dt31-12 presents the commandments for the nation to listen to the reading of the Torah, the Bible, during the annual pilgrimages. **Dt31-12** illustrates the **Rashi Parallelism Method**. **Dt31-12** states that

- *Men, Women, Children, and Converts,*
- *Train, Understand, Watch, and Revere*

The parallelism between *who* is coming and *the activity* done is compactly summarized in the following Parallelism table.

| Who? | Men | Women | Children | Converts |
|-----------|-------|------------|----------|----------|
| Activity? | Train | Understand | Watch | Revere |

Parallelism Table for Dt31-12

Rashi, in 3 comments, connects the four groups of people *who* are coming to the pilgrimage, with the four *activities* performed by these four groups of people. Each of the first three columns in the above table corresponds to one Rashi comment.

- **Men:** (Come) To train
- **Women:** (Come) To understand
- **Children:** (Come) To bring (emotional) support to those (their parents) who bring them.

Commentary: In the rest of this posting we comment, explain, or answer the following questions:

- I. Why didn't Rash make a 4th comment that the converts come to revere God, corresponding to the 4th column in the table?
- II. Why did Rashi say that children come to bring (emotional) support to their parents? Why didn't he simply use the same style and say that children come to watch.
- III. What have I translated the Hebrew word *shamah* as *understand* when it is usually translated as *listen*. Similarly, why have I translated the word *sachar* in Rashi as

emotional support when it is usually translated as *reward*.

- IV. The actual order of activities in the verse is *understand, train, revere, watch*. Why did Rashi shuffle this order in his comments.

Response to Question I: Quite often, when Rashi bases himself on a parallelism, he only offers a partial list of comments. He expects his readers, the instructors and their students, to fill in the remaining comments. The accuracy of filling in the remaining comments is confirmed by the underlying Parallelism Table

Response to Question II: The actual biblical text states, *they will come and watch to do all the words of this Torah*. The emphasis in *watch to do*, vs. *do*, seems to be on watching, and this corresponds nicely to the activities of little children as they grow up. Very often, initial learning takes place by watching the adults around them do religious activities.

However, there is a slight problem here, pointed out by the Talmud (Chagigah, 3 and 4). Men and women are *obligated* to perform commandments; children are *not obligated*. Furthermore, as the Talmud itself queries, even the obligation to educate children in commandment observance once they are old enough, is only rabbinic. But if there is no obligation, then whom is the verse addressing. On the one hand, the statement about men and women is a *command* for certain activities to be done, *training and understanding*, while contrastively, the statement that *children watch* seems to be a *description, not a command*.

To address this subtlety, Rashi, following the Talmud, states that the obligation is on the parent to bring their children and hence Rashi's wording. However, in terms of derivation of the Rashi comment, the Parallelism Table shows that the proper approach is that four groups of people each have one of four activities associated with them. When deriving the comment we are not concerned that some activities are commands while others are descriptions.

Response to Question III: The actual meaning of the word *sachar* is *wages*. It also means *reward and* can generally refer to any *good consequence* of an action. The translation *wages* of course is inappropriate here since parents do not get paid for bringing their children; on the contrary they incur a cost. The translation *wages* is appropriate but too general. One gets reward for doing any commandment. I therefore think the best translation here is *good consequence* which in this case means *emotional support*. Parents very often have to contend with children who don't want to listen. Bringing them to a national pilgrimage where children can see peers who are brought up similarly to their own upbringing reinforces parenting behavior and gives emotional support to their parents.

As to the translation *understand* vs. *listen*, bear in mind that the Hebrew *shamah* does mean either *listen* or *understand*. The word *listen* is too passive. Adults, whether men or women, should be actively listening, that is, *understanding* what they hear. Therefore, I think *understand* is a more appropriate translation. Although a posting is not the place to fully document this, *shamah* in other places does mean *understand*. For example, the requirement to have focus and attention while praying the *shemah* prayer everyday arises from the translation of *shemah* as *understand*. You cannot fulfill your prayer obligations by simply *listening*.

Notwithstanding my defenses, if a reader wants to retranslate these words, they are invited to do so. My primary goal here is to show that the Rashi comment emanates from the parallelism.

Response to question IV: The actual sequence of four activities is as follows:

- i. *Understand*
- ii. *Train*
- iii. *They will revere your God*
- iv. *Watch*

Notice the shift in pronouns in iii), *they will revere your God*. This shift demonstrates that the bible is speaking about (aspiring) converts who haven't yet fully accepted our God. But converts are number four in the list of groups of people:

- i. *Men*
- ii. *Women*
- iii. *Children*
- iv. *Converts*

So, we see that the third activity, *revering*, corresponds to the fourth group of people. This shuffling of order, is also consistent with the activity of *watching*, the fourth activity, which seems to correspond to the upbringing of children, the third group of people.

It follows, that not Rashi, but the Bible shuffled the order. Shuffling of order (even in a parallel list) is a style and this style indicates that all members in the list – all groups of people and all activities done – are equally important. Contrastively, when a list is always repeated in the same sequence it indicates that the first named member is more important (See Rashi Nu36-11 for the explicit statement and source of this rule of style).

Since the third and fourth activity were shuffled, Rashi shuffled the first and second consistent with the fact that *training* is typically associated with *men* while *understanding* is typically associated with *women*. However, it should be obvious that men too must understand and that women too must train.

Bottom line: The main point in this posting is that the Rashi comments arose from the parallelism of four groups of people and four activities. As Rashi explained this parallel correspondence, various subtleties arose; however, these subtleties are a secondary aspect of the Rashi comments.

APPENDIX

THE 10 RASHI RULE CATEGORIES

A Lightning Summary with Examples

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Rule I-REFERENCE: EXAMPLE: Dt26-05d *We went down to Egypt with a few people* explained by Gn46-27: with 70 people

Rule II-MEANING / Lexicography / Dictionary:
EXAMPLE (Connectives) KI means IF,PERHAPS,RATHER,BECAUSE,WHEN,THAT (Rashi on Gn18-15a Gn24-33a) **EXAMPLE (Nuances):** YDA means FAMILIAR, not KNOW (e.g. Dt34-10a) egg Gn04-01 Adam was FAMILIAR with his wife **EXAMPLE (Idioms)** ON THE FACE OF means DURING THE LIFETIME (Rashi on Nu03-04a Gn11-28a Ex20-03c Dt05-07a) **EXAMPLE (Synonyms)** *Marchese* means pot; *Machinate* means frying pan (Lv02-05a, 07a) **EXAMPLE (Homonyms)** SHAMAH can mean listen, hear, understand: (Gn42-23a) *They didn't appreciate that Joseph understood them* (Note: They knew he was listening) **EXAMPLE (Metonymy)** (Lv02-11a) *Don't offer ...any honey as sacrifices* RASHI: *honey* includes any sweet fruit juice

Rule III-GRAMMAR: EXAMPLE: BA-ah means Candelabras means COMING(Gn46-26a)

EXAMPLE: Whiptail conjugation has different rules if 1st root letter is Trade (Gn44-16a)

Rule IV-PARALLELISM: EXAMPLE: (Ex20-04) Don't **POSSESS** the gods of others Don't **MAKE** idols RASHI: So both **POSSESS**ion & **MAKING** of idols are prohibited

Rule V-CONTRADICTION: EXAMPLE: (Nu04-03, Nu08-24a) Levites start Temple work at 25; Levites start temple work at 30. RASHI: They apprentice at 25 but start actual service at 30.

Rule VI-STYLE: RABBI ISHMAEL RULES: EXAMPLE: (Simple verses should be generalized): (Rashi Pesachim 6) (Dt25-04a) *Don't MUZZLE an OX while THRESHING* RASHI: Don't STOP any WORKING ANIMAL from eating

Rule VII-FORMATting: EXAMPLE (BOLD indicated by Repetition): Ex12-09c) COOK it in water (So COOKED-COOKED is understood the same way bold is understood by modern reader) RASHI: Preferred to COOK it in water; But COOK it at all costs(Even if you don't have water) **EXAMPLE: (BULLETS indicated by Repeating keywords)** (Ex03-11a) Who am I - **THAT** I should go to Pharaoh - **THAT** I should take the Jews out of Egypt RASHI: Repeated word **THAT** creates BULLET effect - Pharaoh was a difficult king (Bullet one) - Jews were not yet ready for freedom (Bullet two) **EXAMPLE (Climax assumed in any Biblical list):** (Dt19-11a) *If a man HATES, SPIES, CONFRONTS & KILLS.* RASHI: Bible identifies 4 stages to murder (indicated by capped words)

Rule VIII-DATABASE: EXAMPLE: *God spoke to Moses to say over* introduces about 7 dozen biblical commandments; *God spoke to Aaron to say over* only introduces 2 commandments. RASHI: (Lv10-03b) Aaron was silent when his sons died because they served in the Temple drunk; hence he merited that the commandment prohibiting priests to work in the Temple drunk, was given to him

Rule IX-NON VERSE: EXAMPLE: (Use of Algebra)(Ex38-26b) *Temple donations of silver were 100 Kikar and 1775 Shekel from 630,550 half-shekels* RASHI: So one Kikar of silver = 3000 Shekel.

Rule X: SYMBOLISM: EXAMPLE: (Use of puns) Moses made a copper snake for people to look up to when bitten by snakes (so they should pray and recover) RASHI: (Nu21-09a) The Hebrew root for copper and snake are identical (Cf. The English *copperhead*) Moses made the metal snake copper colored to symbolize the snake