

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #7, Oct 29, 2018

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, ChaYaY SaRaH

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This issue responds to an inquiry from our readers. We present a simple technique for dealing with Rashis which seem to suggest that a different Torah text existed in Rashi's time.

Rashi on Gn11-32, "Terach (Abraham's father) died in Charan", states "Overturned Nun: This teaches us that until Abraham came God's anger was in the world."

QUESTION: There is no overturned nun in our Torah text. Does that mean that Rashi's Torah was different?

Before we answer this question let us explain it. If one looks in a Torah Scroll or in a good Hebrew Chumash on **Nu10-35:36** one finds that this biblical paragraph has an upside-down *nun* before it and an upside-down *nun* after it (sort of like our parenthesis in English). In fact, this paragraph **Nu10-35:36** is a parenthetical remark and does not fit into the context of the rest of the Chapter.

The upside down *nun* is officially recognized in the Unicode standard!

Therefore, when Rashi at **Gn11-32** talks about overturned *nuns*, it is logical to think that he is referring to upside-down *nuns* in the text. But there aren't any such *nuns*. This suggests that Rashi had a different Torah Scroll than us: His Torah scroll has upside down *nuns* while ours do not.

There is a simple *trick* to answer this and several other Rashis where Rashi appears to be describing something in his Torah scroll which does not occur in our Torah scroll.

When Rashi refers to letter *forms* in the Torah which are in fact not there, it is useful to remember that every word and phrase that refers to *letter forms* can also refer to *content*. This duality of *form* and *content* will help us solve many Rashis.

Let us apply this principle to the Rashi at **Gn11-32**. The word *Charan* ends in a *nun*.

- *Charah* means anger
- *Charan* means destructive anger, an anger that leads to destruction.

In other words, Rashi here is using the principle that a terminal *nun* attached to a noun indicates intensity. I learned this principle from the commentary of Rabbi Hirsch who uses it to explain **Ex21-13** discussing the damages that come from a fist fight. Rabbi Hirsch explains

- **Resh-Yud-Beth** means *to dispute*
- **Resh-Yud-Beth-Nun** with a terminal *nun* means *to (fist) fight*.

Rashi uses the term *nun hafucah* which can refer to a letter *form*, the upside-down *nun*; *nun hafucah* can also refer to the added meaning of a terminal *nun*; the terminal *nun changes* the

meaning of the noun to something more intense. In fact, the word *hafucah* also means *change*.

Rashi explains that the city of Charan as well as the person Charan were named because of the destructive anger God showed on the world both on the generation of the flood and the generation of the tower of Babel. Terach had been an idolater and had probably seen God's wrath on a lesser scale. The Bible explicitly states that Charan in fact died prematurely. The Midrash conjectures that he died because he refused to worship idols. Hence the Rashi, *the terminal changing nun of Charan refers not just to anger (charah) but destructive anger (charah + nun) since there was destructive anger in the world until Abraham came. The destructive anger resulted in the destruction of cities (flood, Babel Tower) as well as individuals (Charan).*

As indicated in the principle or trick we explained above, we elegantly explained this Rashi by interpreting his opening statement "*changing nun*" as referring

- To a suffix letter which *changes* the content meaning of a word to a more intense form (destructive anger vs anger); rather than as referring to
- A letter form of an upside-down *nun*.

In this digest, we review other examples where this principle applies.

I. Abraham took another wife Keturah from whom he had the following (grand)children...

II. Abraham gave all his possessions to Isaac

III. To the children of the concubines he gave gifts and sent them away while Isaac was still alive eastward (Gn26-01:06)

RASHI: Concubines: Deficient. This teaches us that there was only one concubine.

Let us start with the wrong interpretation of Rashi. This in fact is the approach of many

Rashi commenters!

To understand this approach, we have to explain the word *Deficient* occurring in Rashi. Throughout the Bible words may be spelled *deficiently* or *fully*. Here are two examples:

Recall that the sound *oh* can be indicated by a *cholam*, a dot above the word, or equally, by a *cholam*, dot, followed by a *vav*. There is no difference in meaning whether the word indicates the *oh* sound with a simple dot above the word or with a dot above the word followed by a *vav*. If the Bible uses the *dot-vav* form, we say the spelling is *full* since it includes the letter *vav*. If the Bible uses the *dot only* form, we say the spelling is *deficient* since excludes the letter *vav*. The terminology *full-deficient* is accepted and used by all Hebrew grammarians and grammar books.

Similarly, the sound *ee* can be indicated in two ways. It can be indicated by a single dot under the word (a *chirik*), or, it can be indicated by a single dot followed by a *yud*. When it only has the single dot, we say the word is spelled *deficiently*; when it has the dot followed by a *yud* we say the word is spelled *fully*. There is never a difference in meaning.

Although the meanings of the *full* and *deficient* forms are the same, these forms can indicate Midrashic content. The use of spelling to indicate puns is an established literary technique in all languages and is called *metaplasmus*.

It is sufficient for a scholar (like Rashi or any scholar) to use a one-word indication *-full*, *deficient* – to indicate the status of the word.

Rashi does indicate comments based on *full-deficient* spellings in several places. Hence, if the Rashi on **Gn26-04** begins *Deficient* it would naturally imply that the Hebrew word for concubines, *Pilagsheem*, is written deficiently with the *ee* sound indicated by a *chirik* (dot under the word) without a *yud* following it.

The Rashi pun then makes sense. The word *Pilagsheem* is spelled deficiently to indicate via pun a deficiency in number; there was only one concubine.

So far so good. Unfortunately, there are two very serious problems with this approach to this Rashi which the Rashi commenters grapple with.

First, in our text of the Torah the word *Pilagsheem* is spelled fully. The *yud* is there! Did Rashi then have a different version of the Masoretic text?

An even more serious problem is that even if Rashi had a different version of the Masoretic text, the pun does not make sense. The word *Pilagsheem* is plural. A pun might minimize this plurality (only two) but it can't erase it!

The commenters come up with ingenious solutions to these problems. There is also scholarly comparison to other puns in Rashi on deficient spellings where this problem does not exist.

The Rashiomi Newsletter has a simpler solution. We use our distinction between *form* and *content*. The *form* approach looks at the word *Deficient* as referring to letter forms; it indicates a missing letter.

However, if we interpret the word *Deficient* as referring to content the Rashi reads smoothly. Let us look at the text again:

- I. Abraham took another wife Keturah from whom he had the following (grand)children...
- II. Abraham gave all his possessions to Isaac
- III. To the children of the concubines he gave gifts and sent them away while Isaac was still alive eastward (Gn26-01:05)

Do you see the problem? The Bible tells us I, II, and III. It spends 3 verses talking about Abraham's marriage to Keturah and his children and grandchildren. It then mentions Isaac whom we know about. It then mentions the concubines. Concubines? What concubines? The bible neither here nor before tells us about any concubines. So Rashi simply says *Deficient*. That is, the Torah content is *Deficient*; it mentions the concubines without telling you when he married them or anything about them.

But if that is so, and concubines is plural, why does Rashi say there was only one? To understand this, we have to understand the Rashi on **Gn26-01a** the Keturah was Hagar (with another name).

Again, the Rashi commenters come up with all types of ingenious explanations. The Rashiomi approach is to use the **Contradiction Method**:

- Indeed, **1C01-32:34** explicitly speaks about the children of Keturah the concubine of Abraham.
- But **Gn26-01** calls Keturah his wife.

This contradiction is resolved by Rashi stating that Keturah and Hagar are the same person (Hagar was Sarah's maid which Abraham took for a concubine at Sarah's request as discussed in **Gn16**.)

Now let us return to the Rashi text on Gn26-06. [The content of the biblical paragraph is] *deficient*. This [paragraph which tells us about Keturah=Hagar's children but tells us nothing about the other concubines] teaches us that [of

all his concubines, there was only one [that he married].

I think this the simplest way to take this Rashi. Of course, one can object: "Couldn't Rashi have supplied one or more extra words." Yes. He in fact could have. Thus, the Rashiyomi explanation does have some weakness. But it is superior to the other explanations that either attribute to Rashi a different Torah text or attribute a pun to the text that contradicts, not supplements, its plain meaning (one concubine when the text uses the plurals and calls them concubines). The way I have taken it Abraham had many concubines of which he married one and this is learned from the contradiction (actually supplementation) of Chronicles and Genesis. The other concubines he sent away early during his lifetime eastward and were never heard of again (nor were they heard of to begin with).

In summary, we have resolved this difficult Rashi by interpreting the word deficient as referring to

- A deficiency in the textual content, rather than
- A deficient spelling form.

I [God] will meet with you there [on the Ark cover] [to prophetically speak to you] and I will speak to you prophetically there on top of the Ark Cover between the Two Cherubim, all that I command you for the Jewish People (Ex25-21c)

RASHI: This vav is extra. And there are many like it throughout the Bible.

First, we give the incorrect approach to this Rashi in which we interpret Rashi as speaking about form. Rashi mentions an extra *vav*. In fact, *vav* is the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and when prefixed to a word it means *and* and connotes conjunction.

Rashi speaks about the extra *vav* implying that his Torah text had a word with an extra *vav*

prefixing it; Rashi then comments that the *vav* is extra and doesn't mean *and* but is just; Rashi further explains there are many *extra vavs* like this throughout the Torah. So, the Rashi commenters think Rashi had a text as follows:

I [God] will meet with you there [on the Ark cover] [to prophetically speak to you] and I will speak to you prophetically there on top of the Ark Cover between the Two Cherubim, [and] all that I command you for the Jewish People

In other words, the Rashi commenters think that Rashi had the extra *and* indicated with a bracket [and]. Of course, there is no reason to say *and* here. So Rashi points out (which is true) that sometimes a clause has a *vav* before it without meaning *and* (it is simply a textual beautifier).

This point of Rashi is grammatically correct; there are beautifying *vavs* throughout the Bible. But our verse has no such extra *vav*. Again, the implication seems to be that Rashi had a different Masoretic text.

The Rashiyomi interprets *vav* as indicating content. In English, we distinguish between the conjunction and conjunct. The conjunction is a word meaning *and* or *or* or something similar. The conjunct refers to the parts of the sentence that the conjunction connects. For example, consider the sentence

It rained today,
and
I wore my raincoat.

In this sentence *and* is the conjunction while *It rained today*, and *I wore my raincoat* are the conjuncts.

Quite simply, I suggest that the letter *vav* in Hebrew can refer either to the conjunction itself (the letter) or to the conjuncts it joins. This makes sense since in Rashi's time there was no word for conjunct. Furthermore, *vav* can refer to any major component part of a sentence like a clause which is in effect a sub-sentence. Again, this makes sense since there is no word in the Hebrew in Rashi's time for a clause

(Grammarians refer to sentence-parts but there is no special word for clause)

But then the Rashi becomes very simple. Rashi is not talking about an extra *vav*. He is rather talking about an extra clause which is underlined in the following.

I [God] will meet with you there [on the Ark cover] [to prophetically speak to you] and I will speak to you prophetically there on top of the Ark Cover between the Two Cherubim, all that I command you for the Jewish People (Ex25-21c)

In other words, Rashi is saying that the verse reads fine without the underlined clause (*vav*).

I [God] will meet with you there [on the Ark cover] [to prophetically speak to you] and I will speak to you prophetically there on top of the Ark Cover between the Two Cherubim,

Rashi does not explain what the extra clause all that I command you for the Jewish People

adds. Rashi notes that the major sentence is a general statement (*God will meet above the Cherubim*) while the last clause is a detail (*all that I command you for the Jewish people*.) If we use the **Rabbi Ishmael Style-Rule Method**, then we obtain that God does talk to and meet Moses above the Ark cover, but God only discusses matters affecting the Jewish people; there are no other prophecies that occur in the Temple. This idea, that prophecy is for the sake of the community is also in fact mentioned elsewhere by Rashi (**Dt02-17a**).

To recap, today, we have seen three examples where Rashi appears to say something very peculiar if we interpret the Rashi as dealing with the *form* of letters; but if we interpret the Rashi as dealing with *content*, the Rashi becomes straightforward and meaningful. We hope you find this *form-content* distinction useful in your own studies of Rashi.

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

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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

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Rule III-GRAMMAR: EXAMPLE: BA-ah means means COMING not CAME(Gn46-26a)

EXAMPLE: A grammatical conjugation in the Hitpael if 1st root letter is Tzade (Gn44-16a)

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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

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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.

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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

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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)

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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

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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.

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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