

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

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Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, ToLeDoTh

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In this issue, we show the RashiYomi approach to understanding a Rashi as deep and profound even though it fanciful and whimsical

Background: In Gn27 Isaac had asked Esauv for his favorite dish so that he (Isaac) could bless him. Instead Jacob brings him his favorite dish and gets blessed. Here is the text

First, let us look at the dialogue between Isaac and Jacob. In this dialogue I use the following convention: Hebrew has two words for *I*: One connotes a caring *I* while the other is the confrontational *I*. I have indicated the *caring I* with a small *i*.

We have no analogy in English. In French there is a personal *you* and a distant *you*. When you greet, *How are you?* you use the word *tu* if you know the person well (personal *you*) and you use the word *vous* if you are not that familiar with the person (distant *you*)

{Jacob} *i am Esauv your firstborn (1), I have done as you asked (2), please (3) get up, sit please (4) at the table, please eat from my venison, in order that your soul bless me. Isaac asked: How could you find venison so quickly: Jacob responded, Because God, Your Lord, facilitated my finding (5) ...He [Isaac] said: Are you my son Esauv and he [Jacob] said, it is I (6). (Gn27-19:24)*

Now let's examine the Isaac-Esauv dialogue.

{Esauv} *My father should get up and eat from the venison of his son in order that your soul should bless me. Isaac said, who are you, son, and he [Esauv] said I am your son, your firstborn, Esauv (Gn31-32)*

There are half a dozen Rashis on this passage which we list altogether below (and then explain). Numbers refer to the text indicators in the above citations.

(1) i am Esauv your first born:

*I am the bringer of food;
Esauv is your firstborn*

(2) I have done as you asked

You requested many items of preparation

(3) Please Get up

Jacob spoke in a gentle tone (please) while Esauv spoke confrontationally (get up)

(4) Sit at the table please

Rashi here explains the Hebrew words used

(5) God, your Lord, facilitated my finding

Isaac found this response peculiar since Esauv never mentions God in his daily speech. Isaac therefore requested to feel Jacob to make sure he is Jacob

(6) Are you my son Esauv? He said, It is I

He didn't answer, I am Esauv your son.

We shall first discuss the Rashiyomi approach to these texts. The Rashi comments are based on the **Parallelism method**, the comparison of the Jacob and Esauv dialogues and one simple contrastive principle:

Jacob: Perceived himself as doing Isaac a favor. True, he was getting a blessing, but that was because Isaac wanted to give it to him. Jacob therefore spoke in soft tones

Esauv: Perceived himself as the rightful heir to the blessings. He was coming to get what he deserved. Esauv therefore spoke in confrontational tones.

We now list the texts in a side by side comparison showing the parallel structure. We use this structure to show how this one theme generates the half dozen Rashi comments. We also show how the Rashi comments generalize. The asterisked items indicate explicit Rashi comments or explanations of them according to the principle just mentioned.

Jacob's dialogue	Esauv's dialogue	Explanation
<i>i</i>	<i>I</i>	*Jacob: Caring Esauv: Confrontational
<i>Am Esauv your first born</i>	<i>Am Esauv your first born <u>your</u> son</i>	*Esauv adds emphasis "I am your son" He emphasizes the <i>heir</i> aspect- he has a right to the blessing
<i>I have done as you asked</i>	[Absent]	*Jacob emphasizes that he is coming to his father not for a blessing but to do what his father asked to please him
<i>Please get up</i>	<i>Get up</i>	*Jacob speaks softly; Esauv speaks confrontationally
<i>Please sit at table</i>	[absent]	Jacob emphasizes Isaac's needs; He didn't come for a blessing but to give him a meal (Esauv however just wanted to get the blessing)
<i>Please eat</i>	<i>Eat</i>	The terminal <i>hey</i> on a verb indicates the subjunctive ("please") This is consistent with Rashi's emphasis on soft tone
<i>God, your Lord, has facilitated my finding</i>	[Absent]	*Esauv emphasized the "I", his accomplishments. Jacob attributed accomplishments to God. Isaac couldn't understand why Esauv (whom Jacob was impersonating) mentioned God
<i>It is I (response to are you Esauv?)</i>	<i>I am Esauv your firstborn</i>	*Esauv emphasizes he is heir and demands blessing; Jacob is soft.

We have explained the Rashis using the theme mentioned above that Jacob cared about his father's needs but Esauv wanted the blessings and only cared about himself.

To show one example of an alternative approach to Rashi, we look at Jacob's original response to Rashi: *i am Esauv your Firstborn*.

Rashi says *i am the one who brings you food; Esauv is your firstborn*.

Some Rashi commenters interpret this in terms of lying. They read the text as *I, am Esauv your first born* and then ala Rashi divide it into two sentences; *I* and *Esauv is your first born*; then they further embellish the one sentence *I*, by stating, *I am the one bringing you food; Esauv is your firstborn*. They read Rashi as indicating an attempt to minimize lying.

This is really stretching it; it is inconsistent with grammar and moreover Rashi doesn't mention lying at all!! The way Rashiyomi has taken this Rashi is, after using **Parallelism**, to contrast the *personal i* with the *confrontational I*. Jacob uses the *soft caring i*; Rashi indicates this with an emphasis on caring: *i am the one bringing you food* (that is, doing what you ask). Rashi notes that Esauv is always bragging how he is "*your son*", the true person entitled to the blessing. Contrastively, Jacob avoids this phrase. I argue that this way of taking the Rashi is more palatable.

Similar comments can be made on other Rashi commenters. The tables we have provided emphasize the power of the **Parallelism** method and how it can be used to offer insights that are consistent with the nuances of the text.

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 means COMING not CAME(Gn46-26a) **EXAMPLE:** A grammatical conjugation in the Hitpa'el if 1st root letter is Tzade (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