

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #9, Nov 3, 2018

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, VaYayTzaY

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In this issue, we answer three recent questions. We encourage questions on difficult Rashis. Send to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Question: Rashi at **Gn27:28b** seems to get very philosophical about the phrase *May God give you*, by citing analogies with Solomon's prayers **1K08:39**. Do you consider this the *Peshat*?

To respond to this question, note that very often Rashi will *assume* the teacher has already taught certain ideas from the verse and *add* commentary based on this. If one is unaware of this *assumption* the Rashi can look contrived.

This verse is based on a simple parallelism

Gn27-28 Give dew of heaven, fat of land
Gn27-39 Your residence, fat of land

Here Isaac promises both Jacob and Esauv the fat of the land. However

- Esauv's blessing is unconditional: *Your resident country will have fat land*
- Jacob's blessing is contingent: *When you get dew and rain, you will have the fat of the land.*

We already know that rain is dependent on God's good will and constant providence e.g. **Dt11-10:12**. So the implication of the above verse is

- Esauv receives *fat of the land* unconditionally
- Jacob receives *fat of the land* conditional on receipt of rain (which in turn depends on God's providence)

Here Rashi uses the **Parallelism Method**. I should explicitly note that we have introduced a reversal: The actual verse says *the fat of the*

land should be your resident country while to create the parallelism we treated the verse as if it said *your resident country should have the fat of the land*. There is no loss of meaning in this.

Now we can understand the Rashi on the first phrase of the verse: *May God give you, from the dew of heaven and the fat of the land*

Building on the theme of *dew* which requires God's constant providence (**Dt11-10:12**) we can now understand the *added* point of Rashi that *merit on our part facilitates God granting the dew*.

To summarize our answer: Rashi was building a nuance on an already existing Parallelism which he expected the reader had already noticed.

Question: There is a 3-way controversy on the meaning of *lasuach* in **Gn24-43**. First note that *siach* means shrubs.

- i) Radak says *lasuach* means to take a walk among the shrubs
- ii) Ibn Ezra says *lasuach* means to plant shrubs
- iii) Rashi citing a precedent from Psalms says it means to prayer (so *shrub-prayer* refers to *chatting* with God – shrub-like words and would differ from other forms of prayer like intense supplication and self-judgement.

It seems this 3-way controversy is serious. How then can you claim (which RashiYomi does claim) that Rashi's interpretation is the true

A very important principle in learning Rashi is, to use the phrase popularized by Dr. Boncheck, *what is bothering Rashi*. Very often a Rashi seems to be focusing on one problem when the real problem in the verse lies elsewhere.

Suppose you decide that Rashi, in this verse, is bothered by the word *lasuach*. Then indeed, Rashi does not make sense. There are at least two other very good meanings of *lasuach* as provided by the Ibn Ezra and Radak. There is no reason in the world to prefer Rashi's explanation over the other two.

But the important principle I just mentioned states that we should seek the problem bothering Rashi elsewhere in the verse. Very often this will make Rashi deep and profound.

Before continuing further, I note another approach to such Rashis. It goes something like this.

The Torah is a holy book. It is not conversational. If it tells us something, it must have a deep spiritual meaning. If it tells us that Isaac went to stroll in the fields, there must be a deeper reason; *otherwise the Torah would not have told us*. It follows that we *must* interpret this verse spiritually, that he went out to pray.

Rashiyomi rejects this approach. It is not a Rashiyomi principle that all conversational items in the Bible indicate something spiritual. The Rashiyomi principles are summarized in the Appendix and are all grammatical and rule based.

This doesn't mean that we reject the holiness of the Bible. It rather means, that we don't use this holiness to make inferences. Inferences should be literary based without a need to refer to the Bible's special Author. In passing, I learned this principle from my teacher, Rabbi Dr. Joseph Baier Soloveitchick. *When you want to*

understand Rashi seek the placid waters of grammar and avoid the turbulent waters of philosophy.

In fact, in this verse there is a double verb and it is this which Rashi does comment on but the Ibn Ezra and Radak do not comment on. The verse says *Isaac went-out to siach in the field towards evening; he lifted his eyes and saw camels coming*. The verse could have used one verb: *Isaac was siaching in the field towards evening; he lifted his eyes and saw camels coming*.

The use of a double verb is a grammatical issue. In fact, every place a double verb occurs with the first one *he went out* creates a special emphasis that is caught by Rashi. Here are some examples. In each case, Rashi is responding to the need to emphasize *going out* without directly starting with the second verb. Notice how Rashi simply interprets the *went out* as indicating some type of special emphasis.

- **Gn28-10** *Jacob went out and journeyed to Charan.* Rashi: His leaving made an impression on the city since he was a righteous person
- **Ex09-32** *Moses went out from Pharoh and the city and prayed.* Rashi: He wouldn't pray in the city because of the presence of idols.
- **Ex18-08** *Moses went out towards his father-in-law, he bowed down and kissed him and each greeted the other* Rashi: His going out to meet him was a great honor. Undoubtedly as he was going out, many other went out with him.
- **Gn04-16** *Kayin went out from God and he settled in Nod east of Eden.* Rashi: Kayin went out with embarrassment and humility.

There are many more examples. We can now read **Gn24-43** using this principle of Rashi. *Isaac went out to siach in the field towards evening.* Rashi: He went out and left his 'work environment' in which he was working all day; then he prayed.

In other words, Rashi assumes that Isaac was working all day in the field (he was a shepherd). *He went out* connotes leaving his frame of mind to engage in prayer. (In passing: He couldn't have been planting trees, since once does not do that in the evening; as for strolling among the shrubs, since he was a shepherd, he did that all day long).

Not a question on Rashi, but a question on the verse. In **Gn14-17** after promising Abraham Israel, God says *Get up: Walk in the land on its length and width because I am giving it to you*. But we never find Abraham performing this walk. How could he ignore a prophetic order?

Interestingly Ramban notices this problem and indicates that it was an offer to *walk if you want to*.

A simple answer to this question (and in fact a defense of the Ramban) would note that the verse uses the *Hitpael* conjugation. There is a wide range of opinion on what the *hitpael* means. There are up to four possible usages. One of them is to indicate wishful thinking similar to the verse *there is a person who wishes/act like he is rich, but he has nothing* (**Pr13-07**). So, the *hitpael* conjugation here indicates or requires that Abraham should mentally trace out a walk along the length and width; not necessarily an actual walking.

The example highlights the need to know and apply Grammar when learning *Chumash*.

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 COMING not CAME(Gn46-26a)

EXAMPLE: A grammatical conjugation in the Hitpael 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 **POSSESSion** & **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)

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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