

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #10, Nov 21, 2018

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, VaYiShLaCh

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We spend the entire issue answering one question from a reader. The question allows us to discuss the very beautiful and deep topic on how Rashi uses Midrash. This is a must issue for all deep Rashi-ists. We encourage questions on difficult Rashis. Send to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Dr. Hendel,
I am wondering if you might be able to help me.

In the famous Rashi on Gn01-16, Rashi brings down the Aggadah about the moon being rebuked by Hashem and diminished. However, this is actually not the entire Aggadah. Masechet Chulin 60b relays the rest- to a very interesting and different conclusion. I was hoping to find other similar Rashis. I know of course that Rashi filters, amends, and changes midrashim to suit his parshanut needs on any given pasuk- but this particular one intrigued me because ultimately it makes God seem apologetic- something rashi didn't have the luxury to portray.

I am wondering if you have come across others like this.

I'd be appreciative of your insight.

Thanks

We shall respond to this question by:

- I. Stating the fundamental principle guiding Rashi in Midrashim
- II. Citing the verses Rashi commented on
- III. Citing the Chulin version of the Midrash

IV. Citing the Midrash Rabbah version of the Midrash

V. Citing what Rashi actually say.

First, we state:

I: The fundamental principle of Rashi in Midrash Citation

Rashi's goal is to explain the *simple meaning (peshat)* of the verse. RashiYomi identifies *simple meaning* with the 10 RashiYomi principles such as *meaning, grammar, parallelism etc.*

RashiYomi, (in disagreement with many other scholars) does not believe that Rashi *ever* changed, modified, or even cited a midrash for any other purpose than explaining the *Peshat*. Rashi, in his commentary, was not primarily concerned with the plight of the Jews of the medieval ages, with middoth (character traits), or any other praiseworthy concern.

Just to be clear, Rashi wrote beautiful *piyyutim* depicting the horrors of the crusades through which he lived. Those *piyyutim* are in our prayer books but they are not in his commentary.

II: The verse Rashi commented on **Gn01-14:16.**

God said let there be light-sources...
God made the two big light sources; the

- Big light-source for rule by day
- For rule by night
 - The small light-source
 - With the Stars

We now study the issues with this verse indicated by the underlines and bullets

- The verse uses 3 different descriptions
 - Light-sources
 - Big light-sources
 - Big light source & small light sources
- Note the bullet structure. The header on the 2nd line talks about *two* big light sources which however are followed by *three* light sources (sun, moon, stars).

In writing out the verse I have untwisted the apposition (I rearranged the phrases and placed *for rule by night* first) This rearrangement is a technique Rashi himself uses. It just makes the meaning of the verse clearer. The way I have taken the verse it reads as follows:

- God made the two big lights
 - The big light source (by day)
 - The small light source+stars (by night)

In other words: The second of the big-lights is the combination of moon+stars. This reading states that i) the sun is a big-light source ii) the moon and stars (together) are a big light source, iii) the moon itself is a small light source. Hence the header *two light sources* refers to two primary sources of light: sun and moon-stars. This reading also explains the changing words, *lights, big lights, big-light & small light*.

Note also that it is very reasonable to call the stars (+moon) a big light: For example, the Bible refers to these lights as being *signs* and indeed navigation (at sea and on trails) happens by way of the stars whose constellations allow you to ascertain your position. In other words, the *bigness* of sun/moon-stars differs: One is big in size (light) while the other is big in function (navigation). People need both.

Armed with this reading of the text let us look at the various Midrashim. The person who asks

points out Rashi's source is Chulin 60b. But this Midrash occurs in both Chulin 60b and Genesis Rabbah. *This is an important principle in reading Rashi. Rashi may not be modifying a midrash but rather using another version of it.*

III: Chulin 60b

The citation with the Soncino translation of Davka.com is presented below.

R. Simeon b. Pazzi pointed out a contradiction [between verses]. One verse says: *And God made the two great lights*, and immediately the verse continues: *The greater light . . . and the lesser light*.

The moon said unto the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe! Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown? He answered: Go then and make thyself smaller.

Sovereign of the Universe! cried the moon, Because I have suggested that which is proper must I then make myself smaller? He replied: Go and thou wilt rule by day and by night.

But what is the value of this? cried the moon; Of what use is a lamp in broad daylight? He replied: Go. Israel shall reckon by thee the days and the years.

But it is impossible, said the moon, to do without the sun for the reckoning of the seasons, as it is written: And let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. He replied: Go! The righteous shall be named after thee as we find, Jacob the Small, Samuel the Small, David the Small

On seeing that it would not be consoled the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Bring an atonement for Me for making the moon smaller.

This is what was meant by R. Simeon b. Lakish when he declared: Why is it that the he-goat offered on the new moon is distinguished in that there is written concerning it unto the Lord? Because God, said: Let this he-goat be an atonement for Me for making the moon smaller.

Before presenting the Midrash Rabbah, let us examine this Midrash in Chulin *from the point of view of the simple meaning of the text including grammatical and contradictory anomalies.*

The following items in this lengthy Midrash don't seem to be anyplace even hinted in the Genesis text:

- It doesn't say that the moon complained
- It doesn't say that God punished the moon by making it smaller (remember we have taken the simple meaning of the text to be that the 2nd great light is the moon-star combo which is great in functionally and competes with the sun)
- It doesn't say anywhere that God felt apologetic.

We will return to these problems later on. But remember, Rashiyomi holds that Rashi will only say something if it relates to the *peshat* of the text.

IV: Genesis Rabbah 6:3

Rabbi Yudan in the name of Rabbi Tanchum, son of Rabbi Chiyyah, and also, Rabbi Pinchas in the name of Rabbi Simon stated: After the verse calls them *big* the verse continues and calls them *big* and *small*. Amazing?

But this happened because the moon invades the sun's territory [you can see the moon during the day towards evening].

Rabbi Pinchas states: In all sacrifices it says *one he-goat a sin offering* but in the new-month offering it says *one he-goat sin offering for God*.

God says: *Bring atonement for me that I have made the moon smaller*, because it was Me who caused the moon to enter the Sun's territory.

And what if the moon who with permission entered the sun's territory is so punished, how much more so someone who enters without permission into someone else's territory.

In the next section of the Newsletter we will explore the differences between these versions of the Midrash. For the moment, we have to explain the statement that *God asked for atonement for making the moon small*.

The Genesis Rabbah uses the Rashi **Parallelism** method. A simple search using a search engine for the phrase *...he-goat sin offering* shows about 2 dozen examples. Let us look at a few.

Nu28-30 1 he-goat to atone for you
Nu29-05 1 he-goat sin offering to atone for you
Nu28-15 1 he-goat for a sin offering for God

I believe this list strengthen's the **Parallelism**. It is not just the *extra word for God* but rather the parallelism contrast *to atone for you* vs. *for God*

The Midrash becomes punchier now

- The Shavuoth and Rosh Hashana sacrifices atone for you, the Jews
- The new-month sacrifice atones for God.

This is the Rashiyomi approach, fully examining the verses and making the Midrash as punchy as possible.

In fact, Rashi on **Nu28-15** explicitly says *Bring atonement for me because I made the moon smaller*.

V: Why did Rashi Say as He Did

What does the *peshat*, simple meaning of the verses, which according to Rashiyomi includes nuances of parallelism, say. Note: Some folks might say that nuances are not *peshat*. Not so! If a husband and wife are talking, there are probably many nuances. They are all part of the *simple meaning* of their dialogue. To understand their dialogue, you have to know how to *hear* these nuances. The same is true with the Bible. We shouldn't read into the text whatever we want but if the text varies two parallel verses in some nuance then we can be certain that the nuance was intended and therefore speak about it as *peshat*.

With this in mind let us look at what Rashi says and what he omits. In each case we shall see that Rashi follows the fundamental principle of Midrash citation enumerated above: *Only say what in the Midrash clarifies the Peshat*. Our results are summarized in the Table below.

Before presenting the table, we point out that there are two versions in the Midrash's description of the moon's problem:

- The Chulin version describes the moon as complaining to God about sharing rulership with the sun
- The Midrash Rabbah version describes the moon as trespassing on the sun's territory.

It is very important to understand that there are two versions of the Midrash. Rashi brings both of them. In the first Rashi in **Gn01-15a** he mentions that the moon complains while in the very next Rashi **Gn01-15b** it mentions that God wanted to appease the moon and gave her the stars. Furthermore, in **Nu28-15a** Rashi only mentions God as causing this (God needs atonement) and doesn't blame the moon for complaining.

My opinion is that the two Rashi comments in Genesis should be read as one Rashi with Rashi giving a first and second possible interpretation. Rashiyomi believes that whenever there are two versions it is the second version that Rashi believes in, and he rejects the first. As to why there are two Rashis in our text (instead of one Rashi with two interpretations), my opinion is that there was originally only one Rashi. However, Rashi mentioned the phrase *the stars* which is part of the biblical text and therefore some copyist thought this was the beginning of a new Rashi comment (bolded in our texts) instead of a continuation of the original Rashi.

To recap, the principles, we used in answering this question are as follows:

- What does the text say? Using the 10 Rashiyomi principles what can be derived?
- Are there one or more versions of the

Midrash?

- Can the Rashi be perceived as starting with one explanation and then giving another?
- Are there Rashis on other verses which supplement this Rashi.

The Table summarizes our discussion.

Idea	Support in text	Does Rashi mention
Moon complains	None	He mentions it as a first opinion which he rejects. Only Chulin mentions this not Genesis Rabbah
God made moon smaller	Yes: <i>big light source, small light source</i>	Yes, and this is consistent with Genesis Rabbah but not Chulin
Bring atonement	Yes: explicitly says <i>Sin offering for God vs for you</i>	Yes: He mentions it in Numbers. He also mentions <i>to appease the moon</i> in Genesis
Stars given to moon	Yes: Bullet structure: 2 big lights: i) sun by day ii) moon /star by night	Yes. <i>I gave the moon the stars to appease her</i>
Moral exhortation: Don't trespass on boundaries of others	None	No
Dialog of God and moon. Moon complains that she shouldn't be punished for offering a good idea	None	No

To answer the inquirer's last question: Yes: There are many such examples from Rashi. From time to time I will bring them and analyze them this way.

Or, if you have questions on some Rashi let me know by emailing Rashiyomi@GMail.Com

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 COMING not CAME(Gn46-26a)

EXAMPLE: A grammatical conjugation in the Hitpa'el 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