

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #11, Nov 27, 2018

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, VaYaySheV

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I have received several positive emails on the last two issues asking me for more in-depth Rashi explanations. Remember this is your NewsLetter. So, we will spend the entire issue on the famous Rashis on the infamous Timnah. Although it is not a Rashi in VaYaySheV it is a Rashi in last week's Parshah, VaYishLach. We encourage questions on difficult Rashis. Send inquiries to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Question: Rashi on Gn36-12a, *Timnah had been a mistress (concubine) to Eliphaz, Esau's son*, says as follows:

This verse shows how great Abraham was and how much people wanted to marry into his family.

Timnah was a daughter of Royalty since **Gn36-20** lists the *Chorite inhabitants of the land* (the big people) and mentions that Timnah was a sister of one of the seven primary clans of the Chorite.

Despite her royalty (which implies a marriage with whomever she wanted) she chose to be a mistress (concubine) in Abraham's family rather than enter a royal marriage among the Chorites.

In Chronicles, Timnah is listed as a daughter of Eliphaz showing that Eliphaz had an affair with the Chori so that Timnah was his daughter. When she grew up she became his mistress.

Rashi follows up on this Timnah theme in **Gn36-24c**:

The Bible mentions the Chorite dynasty because of Timnah and to tell us how great Abraham was (that people wanted to marry into his family).

I: GOALS: While keeping with the texts of these two Rashis, we shall explain it with a slightly different emphasis. Personally, I find it distasteful to say that wicked people have laudable traits (like desiring to cling to Abraham). I will show a different perspective on the Rashi. I will also show why my suggested interpretation is more relevant.

Before proceeding we review the four principles laid down last week about dealing with difficult Rashis. These four principles are reviewed in Figure 1.

II: A CONTRADICTION: We start with the last comment in Rashi, the citation from Chronicles. Let us carefully examine the verses:

***1Chr01-36** Eliphaz's children were...Timnah
***Gn36-20:22** Chori's children were...Lotan, whose sister was Timnah

So Timnah was both Eliphaz's daughter and the sister of Lotan who was Chori's son!!

Rashi here uses the **Contradiction Method**. Rashi explains the contradiction that Timnah had two fathers, Chori and Eliphaz, by the obvious resolution that

- Eliphaz had an affair with Chori's wife
- The daughter of that affair was Timnah
- So Timnah was indeed Eliphaz's daughter
- She was also the sister of Lotan, Chori's son since they had a common mother.

The principles, to be used in explaining difficult Rashis are as follows.

- What does the text say? Using the 10 Rashiyomi principles what can be derived?
- Are there several 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.

Figure 1: Four principles for explaining difficult Rashis.

III: THE CLASSIC ABUSED WOMAN: But if Timnah was the result of incest, why would she return to the person who abused her mother, Eliphaz.

This is in fact a classic question in the psychology of abused people. We know that frequently an abused person will return to the abuser to give them another chance. A classic challenge in therapy of the abused is to convince them not to go back, not to give another chance.

Typically, the abused person does give another chance because of the *glimmer of hope*, some type of *promise* which of course is rarely kept.

Thus, when Rashi says, *people wanted to marry into Abraham's family* Rashi was not praising Timnah; rather, he was explaining why she returned to Eliphaz.

Most probably, she heard a lot about Eliphaz's

abuse from her mother. She complained a lot. Perhaps she even regularly insulted him in conversations.

Eliphaz could have pointed out that he was Abraham's grandson and Abraham emphasized family and lack of incest. Although this is hollow talk, an abused woman would not see through it and she gave Eliphaz the classic extra change by becoming his mistress.

IV TEXTUAL SUPPORT FOR THE ABUSED WOMAN THEORY: We can find support for this in the Rashi text, Biblical text and Midrashic texts.

- Rashi never says *This verse teaches us Timnah's greatness*. Rather he says, *this verse teaches us Abraham's greatness that people wished to marry in to his family*.
- Rashi further notes *she preferred to be a mistress to Eliphaz when her royal calling would justify a better marriage*. The fact that Eliphaz did not marry her, but took her as a mistress, shows us that Eliphaz abused Timnah.
- The text uses the past conjugation of the verb to be, *VeTimnah hayethah pilegesh*. The Bible never uses the verb *to be* when mentioning mistresses. For example, **Gn22-24**, *And his mistress, her name was Reumah, she also had children...* or **1C01-32**, *The children of Keturah, Abraham's mistress*. In Biblical Hebrew one point of view is that the past conjugation refers to the past perfect: *Timnah had been Eliphaz's mistress*, connoting a relationship that had been attempted and failed. Apparently, she finally realized that she, like her mother was being abused, and went back to her own people. (In Biblical Hebrew, the simple past would be indicated by the future conjugation with a conversive prefix *vav*).

Finally, we mention the Midrashic sources.

- The **Genesis Rabbah 82:12** mentions that there are several instances (like Timnah) of incestuous relationships in **Gn36**. In other words, the lack of family life is a central

theme of the chapter.

- It is only two paragraphs later in **Genesis Rabbah 82:14** that the idea of Abraham's greatness, that people wanted to marry into his family, is mentioned.

Thus, the *sequence* in the Midrash Rabbah is consistent with the way we have presented the Rashi. The main emphasis is on the illegitimacy of Timnah with a secondary emphasis being on Abraham's greatness. We have combined these two threads of the Rashi to indicate that Timnah like her mother was an abused woman who sought to give her abuser a second chance because of a glimmer of hope and, as the past perfect shows, then left the relationship when she found out how wrong she was.

V AMALAYK: Rashi states that *the Chorite chapter was mentioned (in the Bible) because of the Timnah incident and to show Abraham's greatness.*

Timnah's child from Eliphaz, was the infamous Amalek the arch-enemy of the Jewish people, the first nation to attack us after being miraculously saved from Egypt. There is a biblical command never to forget what Amalek did to us and there is yet another biblical command to exterminate him.

I think it very reasonable to interpret Rashi's mention of the Timnah incident to refer to the fact that out of these multiple incestuous relationships – Eliphaz with Chori's wife and Eliphaz with his own daughter, Timnah – came the infamous and wicked Amalek. By relating this to us, the Bible explores the horrible consequences of lack of family. Children from such relationships grow up without a sense of social identity and with a daily reminder that pleasure and urge outweighs the need for an orderly society. It is not unnatural for such children to grow up with an emphasis on disrespect for moral values (such as Amalek showed on the miraculous redemption from Egypt) as well as abuse (such as the biblical statement that Amalek picked on the Jews because they were tired and fatigued).

VI: RELEVANCE We argue that the way we have taken Rashi is more relevant. Let us consider the consequence of the two interpretations of Rashi.

- Suppose we interpret the Rashi in the traditional way that *both* Abraham and Timnah were praiseworthy. Does that help us in our day-to-day actions with our enemies? Do we, for example, have a strategy to tell our enemies, *We are descendants of Abraham and represent greatness and therefore you should wish to join us?* We do not see such an approach today.
- However, suppose we interpret the Rashi as suggested above: Abraham is great and praiseworthy but Timnah was a classic abused woman who reentered a relationship with her abuser because of a glimmer of hope. Besides failing in the relationship it produced evil people (Amalek). Such a viewpoint is relevant to us. We all come in contact in our social relationships with abused people (hopefully not as severely abused as Timnah) and we see the effects on both them and their children. It is important to have biblical role model stories giving us models on how to deal with such relationships. This enables us in our daily interactions to help prevent the severity of such relationships by using these biblical models to indicate consequences.

VII: FIGURE 1 – FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR DIFFICULT RASHI: Returning to the four principles in Figure 1 for dealing with difficult Rashis, we see that all four were used:

- We saw two threads in Rashi: The illegitimate thread, and the Abrahamitic-greatness thread
- We also saw the same two complementary Midrashim in the Genesis Rabbah: The illegitimacy theme and the Abrahamitic greatness thread.
- We brought textual support; the use of the Rashi **Contradiction** method as well as the Rashi **Grammar** method which indicates that the past conjugation indicates a past perfect.
- Finally, we combined two Rashis: The Rashi

explaining Timnah's incestuous beginning and affair with the Rashi that the purpose of the Bible mentioning these things was to teach us about Timnah who gave birth to Amalek.

We should note that our interpretation is not as far as one might think from the traditional approach to this Rashi. The traditional approach to this Rashi is that *both* Abraham and Timnah were great; the Rashiyomi approach is that Abraham was great but Timnah was an abused woman who hung to a glimmer of hope.

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 **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.

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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