

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #12, Dec. 5, 2018

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, MiKeTz

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We answer one question today on “On what does Rashi comment; why doesn't he comment on certain things.” We also use this issue to go over some advanced RashiYomi rules and approaches which are easily understood. This will be very useful to teachers and Rabbis. We encourage questions on difficult Rashis. Send inquiries to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Question: *I have been thinking about the situation where Rashi DOES NOT COMMENT on a word that we have difficulty with. (We were taught, when Rashi does not comment, that means that he knows the meaning, it is obvious, so we should know it...and go with the generally accepted meaning.) The word in question is SULLAM, from Vayetzei, and even though it is a loan word from the Egyptian, SOLEL Root, and it could be: 'ramp' etc. RASHI DOES NOT COMMENT.*

Is this another general Rashi rule? When Rashi does not comment on a questioned word.... go with the generally accepted meaning?? (And, is this an important question, or am I just spinning my wheels?)

Best for a good week, and soon Happy Chanukah.

This is an important question. I will give you the beginning of an answer, some basic principles. Perhaps we can have more of a conversation on this since it is a very big topic.

I will start with an old theory of mine which scholars I spoke to were not very enthused about. I advocated at one point in my life that Rashi's primary goal was not biblical exegesis

but biblical preservation (of text). Quite simply, Rashi was a Masorite, one of the great scholars who guarded the Mesorah, the accuracy of our biblical text. One method of guarding the Mesorah is clarifying minute differences using punchy and cute Midrashim which has a lasting impression on memory and prevents error.

There are several Rashis where Rashi's clear reason for commenting is that the same word could have two forms and Rashi clarifies why the two forms are there. Here are some examples

- Here is a peachy example, **Dt32-14**. Moses in his farewell poem is describing the bounty of Israel: *The cream of cattle and the **milk** of goats, with the **fat** of lambs ... with the **fat** of kidney-shaped grain...*

The Hebrew word **cheth-lamed-beth**, occurs three times in the verse! Once it means *milk*, once it means *fat*, and once it means *the plumpest*. All three words are spelled the same way **cheth-lamed-beth** but differ in their vocalization.

By explaining the differences in meaning in identically spelled words

Rashi preserves the Mesorah

- Gn37-31: *They took Joseph's coat, they slaughtered a goat, and dipped the coat in blood.*

Here again the same word is, *coat*, occurs twice in one verse but is spelled differently because in Hebrew the possessive or construct state, *Joseph's coat*, requires a different spelling.

Here again, Rashi preserves the Mesorah, the accuracy of the Biblical text by commenting on minute differences.

- A more sophisticated example is found in **Dt28-68**. There the Bible uses the Hebrew word *Aniyah* to refer to a ship. But Hebrew has two words to refer to ships: *Aniyah* and *Sefinah*. In the Bible *Sefinah* is rare while *Aniyah* is more common. In Talmudic times *Sefinah* is more common.

Hence, Rashi clarifies to someone who is familiar with Talmudic (or modern Hebrew) that *Aniyah* means *sefinah*. Here again Rashi preserves the biblical text by commenting on a rare form of the word.

Returning to the question: *Sulam*, occurs only once in the Bible. It frequently occurs in the Talmud where it means ladder not ramp. Rashi did not comment on it since its meaning was well known and he had nothing further to add.

As to the Egyptian meaning of the word, while near-eastern language usage is important, in this verse it does not add anything. Jacob's dream is about a ladder not about a ramp. Hence, Rashi did not comment.

If readers are interested in this topic, please write more questions so we can examine more closely when Rashi does and does not comment.

In the rest of this issue we illustrate some simply explained but advanced Rashi techniques. This will be especially useful to elementary school teachers, sermonists, and Rabbis who want to make the punchiest case for the commentaries they cite.

Gn40-05 discussing the dreams of the master baker and master bartender of Pharoh states, *They dreamt the dream of both of them, each person his dream in one night, the bartender and the baker who belonged to Pharoh.*

On the underlined words Rashi says two things:

- The *Peshat* meaning is that *The two of them had dreams* [in other words read the verse by rearranging the words]
- The *Midrash* is that *each person dreamt both his dream and the interpretation of this friends dream.*

The traditional way of taking this is that

- The *Peshat* refers to the straightforward meaning of the text, the way it should be read in context. The simply straightforward meaning of the text is that *both of them dreamt.*
- The *Midrash* refers to homiletic fancy of the Rabbis who *read material into* the text which however is not really there. They did this because they were not interested in the straightforward meaning of the text as we are today. They had other interests such as moral exhortation of showing the greatness of miracles.

I particularly note that David Weiss HaLivni gives a modern account of this view which is quite common. The view is completely wrong and without any foundation.

I have several times criticized HaLivni; I have criticized him not so much for being wrong but for not using the most modern and up to date knowledge of grammar which we now have available.

The recent advances in grammar show that

word sequence is very important in determining meaning and this is true in all languages. *Boy eats lamb* and *lamb eats boy* have two different meanings (except in Latin). Similarly, *both dreamt a dream* has a totally different meaning than *they dream the dream of both*. Placement and sequence matters! The simple meaning of the text, even in English, is that each dreamt the dream of both of them – why? Because the text *explicitly* says so.

What is new is our understanding of grammar. The entire science of adjectives has advanced tremendously in modern times. In English there are seven classes of adjectives and strict rules on where everything should be placed. Several master's and doctoral theses have been written on this and it is important for computer understanding of written texts.

How then do I understand Rashi? I interpret

- *Peshat* as referring to the understanding of a *simple* (*pashut*) person; how a person untrained in grammatical nuance interprets the text
- *Midrash* does not mean *homily read into the text!* It simply refers to reading something consistent with the rules of language. *Apples* means *more than one apple* because of the *terminal s*. That is not *homily*, it is the simple meaning of the text. But it is only clear to someone who knows grammatical nuances, that one letter can *s* can change meaning. Similarly *dreaming the dream of both of them* means exactly that: Each one dream the dream of both; why? Because the text explicitly says so.

It is for this reason that I reject the viewpoint of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, z'tl, who stated that when Rashi gives two explanations he wasn't happy with either. As this Rashi shows, Rashi couldn't have believed in his first explanation since it violates grammar. He had to believe in the 2nd explanation and therefore if he calls it *Midrash* is it not *Midrash* in the sense of *homily* but *Midrash* in the sense of a *nuance reading based on sound principles*.

Know this and your Rashi experiences will be deeper and more satisfying.

I now present a Rashi with several possible layers of explanation. I show how skillful use of Rashi rules can deepen the understanding of Rashi

Gn39-22 speaking about the master baker's reaction to Joseph's interpretation saving him and Joseph's request to be freed from jail, is stated as follows:

He didn't remember him
He forgot him.

Rashi explains: *He didn't remember him that day and didn't remember him afterwards.*

We approach this Rashi comment on three levels

➤ Level 1: Extra word approach

At this level we simply note the *extraneous* of words. The text could have said, *He didn't remember him*. Why did the text have to repeat *He didn't remember him, he forgot him?*

The idea then is that the extra phrase teaches us something. Rashi explains, that he didn't remember him that day or afterwards.

➤ Level 2: **Parallelism** Approach

This is very similar to the extra word approach but is more specific. There are many repetitions in the Bible. James Kugel in his beautiful book, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, explains that **Parallelism** is a method of communication used in the Bible and for that matter in all near-eastern cultures.

The idea of parallelism is that it is expected that the 2nd half of the verse accepts the first half and builds further

on it. This in fact was Kugel's contribution to parallelism

Kugel derives numerous consequences from his approach which are very important in interpreting Rashi and Midrashim.

For one thing, Kugel's approach does not accept an interpretation where the 2nd half of the verse is totally different than the first half. Rather, the 2nd half of the verse must always accept the first half and build on it. Thus, Kugel's approach discriminates among Midrashim; some are consistent with the text, but some aren't.

Kugel would probably look at this verse and see it as an example of parallelism. *The baker gets out of prison and he should be overjoyed he met Joseph and tell everyone about him but didn't do so; moreover, after he reunited with his family and Pharaoh's staff and things stabilized, from time to time he had reminiscences of Joseph but he got over them and forgot them.*

By interpreting the verse this way, we see drama and dynamics. The interpretation is more nuanced than the *extra word* approach since it gives the text a sense of development over time.

Level III: Multiple Rashi methods: Parallelism and Other Verses

One thing is lacking in Kugel's approach: How do I go from the parallel repetition to the fact that it was over time that he forgot him? Where does the Rashi comment derive this from? Yes, the parallelism indicates *something is developing* but does not specify what.

There is an **other verse, Gn42:10**, where the baker explicitly says *Today I remember (make memorable) my sins.*

Notice the plural and notice the pun on *memory* (which in this verse means *mention* (cause others to remember).

Thus, this verse explicitly says that there were *sins* (notice the plural) and emphasizes that *today* he is making it known but not other days.

Now the Rashi comment is more than a vague appreciation of extra words or of parallel climax. The parallelism is echoing a collection of sins. It is this other verse which gives an added dimension to the Rashi and increases its credibility.

Rashi hints at this extra verse by mentioning the keyword *today* used by the baker: *He didn't remember him that day of release from jail; and he forgot him afterwards.*

The three levels are summarized in Figure 1. I hope you find them useful in your study of Rashi.

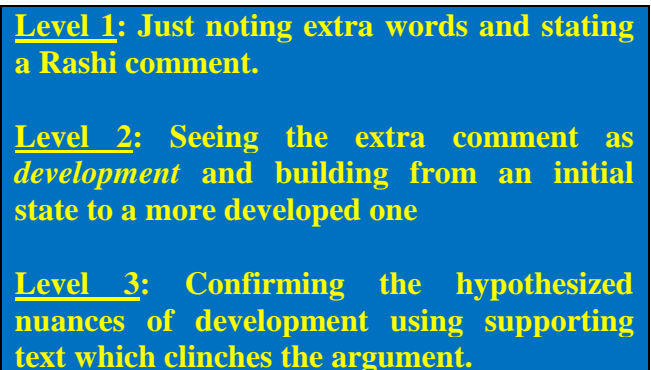


Figure 1: Three levels of Rashi interpretation.

Praise be Him who Chose Them and Their learning.

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 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