

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #14, Dec. 20, 2018

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, VaYeChi

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We do some quickies, Rashis with quick explanations, today. We also emphasize how Rashi comments should be analyzed; this will be useful to teachers, Rabbis, and secular researchers. We encourage questions on difficult Rashis. Send inquiries to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Rashi, on **Gn48-02a**, *Someone told Jacob, 'Your son Joseph is coming to you,' so Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed, states* From this passage we learn that all must show honor to leadership.

But as stated, there is no Rashi rule. The traditional way of taking this Rashi is that there is an *extra phrase*, *Jacob strengthened himself and sat up on the bed*, and from this *extraness*, Rashi inferred that honor should be shown to leadership. But this is not one of the RashiYomi rules.

To fully understand this Rashi, we must review Rashi's continued own explanation of his inference.

We find the following examples

- **Gn48-02a** Jacob strengthened himself and sat up on the bed
- **Ex11-08** Moses prophesized to Pharoh *All your servants will come down to me and say to me to say over [to the Jews] 'Get out [leave Egypt] you and the nation with you'* even though what actually happened is that only Pharoh called to Moses to leave (and beseeched him to bless him (**Ex12-31**))
- **1K18-46** *Elijah girded his loins* [when going to Achav

So, we see that Rashi used the **Rashi Database method**. His inference is not based on an isolated verse and incident, but rather on a repeated theme.

As is typical, when a Rashi is based on the **Database method**, examining the verses allows us to *add and expand* on what Rashi said (and Rashi intended that teachers, Rabbis, and sermonists, add and expand on his comments). A simple examination of the 3 cases brought by Rashi shows the added emphasis that great people (Moses and Elijah) showed respect *even* to a thoroughly wicked King such as Pharoh or Achav known for their murders.

Rashi, on **Gn48-19d**, [Jacob talking to Joseph about his two children] *However, the younger brother [of your two children] will be more important than him [the older brother]; his descendants will fill the nations* [of the world, with the news of his deeds], states, The Bible here refers to Joshua who descended from Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph. For in Joshua's great military victory it says *the sun stopped in Givon and the moon in the valley of Ayalon*

The Rashi itself imposes no problems. Rashi, here uses the **Rashi Reference Method**, referring to **Other Verses** clarifying an existing verse.

However, I brought this Rashi to discuss the alleged miracle that the sun and moon stopped in the orbit. The Ralbag one of our great Jewish commentators and philosophers, on a level with the Rambam in philosophical contributions to Judaism, expresses astonishment at the literal interpretation of this verse: This would be an extraordinary miracle involving a direct cessation of natural law. This contradicts the fact that throughout the Bible a miracle does not refer to cessation of natural law but rather to a well-timed coincidence.

I would add to the Ralbag that there are in fact strong Talmudic supporting statements to his view. For example, the Talmud discusses the case of a person whose wife had died, and the surviving husband grew (female) breasts and was able to nurse his son. Indeed, one Talmudic Rabbi states, 'Look how great this person is that such a miracle happened for him'. But a dissenting Talmudic Rabbi states, 'Look how evil this person is that God had to give him female breasts (rather than release him from poverty).' Here we indeed find a very strong viewpoint that violations of natural law are frowned upon. They are not great.

The incident, male lactation, is not a violation of natural law but rather a rare medical condition, galactorrhea, which in fact may also be induced by increased production of the hormone prolactin.

Returning to the Rashi, it is not Rashi's intent to endorse a total change of natural law. The Ralbag explains the verse in question using a well-known idiomatic usage present in all languages. Consider the simple English statement: *While the train stopped through the Rockies I obtained some spectacular photographs.* Here, *stopped through*, does not necessarily mean total stoppage; it can mean a relative stoppage (that is, in the brief time that the train went through the Rockies). Such uses of exaggeration (*stopped through* to refer to a

quick stay) is common in *subsecutive* adjectives. For example, *a white wine* is not literally *white* but relatively white. Similarly, the sun *stopping* would be used in a subsecutive sense: *During the short time that the sun stopped through (that is, passed through) in Givon, Joshua was able to win the war.* As the Ralbag points out, the miracle was the swiftness of victory not that the sun stopped!

I bring this explanation here, because I constantly meet people who think that miraculous disruptions of natural law are important to the religious experience. It isn't. In fact, as Rabbi Doctor Soloveitchick so beautifully and eloquently stated in his *The Legal Person (Halachic Man)* Judaism is about stability not about highs. The Rav, attacks the mystical personalities as being inferior to the legal personalities: The mystics achieve high highs followed by sudden drops and returns to reality. They have no stability. Contrastively, *legal man* has achieved stability, an important goal of Judaism. Although the Rav's *The Legal Person* is read, readers tend to regard it as a religious work when additionally, it is a profound psychological work.

A beautiful application of the **Rashi Grammatical method** may be found in **Gn49-28d**

This [Biblical Chapter] is what THEIR father spoke to THEM and blessed THEM

EACH person according to HIS talents he blessed THEM

Notice to exquisite use of language. In one verse, the brothers are referred to 6 times, 4 in the plural but 2 in the singular.

Hidden in this Rashi is a delightful pun: The word *blessing* can refer to the *blessing of someone else*, an *external blessing* or it can refer to a *natural internal blessing, a talent*.

As Rashi says: It should say each person

according to his talent he blessed him. Instead it says, each person according to this talent he blessed them.

From this subtle shift of plurality Rashi infers the important principle: Each tribe had a natural blessing, a talent. Jacob blessed that tribe that they should develop that talent to such an extent that they would transfer the talent to the other tribes. In this way, all the tribes co-shared in each other's talents.

To recap, Rashi infers this from the **Grammar Method** and the **Meaning (Figures of Speech) method** since he uses the double meaning of *bless* to refer to both an external blessing and a natural internal blessing, a talent.

Gn49-01a provides an interesting application of the **Parallelism Method**. It says there that

Jacob Paged his sons and he said:

A) Gather, I will tell you the end of days

B) Gather, listen, listen to Jacob your father

Note the differences between the A) and B) versions.

- A) says *I will tell*; B) says *listen*
- B) has emphasis: *listen, listen to your father*
- A) speaks about end of days, B) doesn't

Rashi simply says that A) indicates Jacob's intention while B) indicates what happened. Rashi explains he was prophetically barred from knowing what would happen in the end of days.

One might ask: *But couldn't A) and B) be together. Couldn't Jacob have said: Gather, Listen, Listen to Father, I will tell you what will happen to you in the end of days.*

The answer to this involves the use of the *climax rule* a subrule of the **Format Rule**.

Verses always proceed in a climactic manner. Indeed, the verses could have said

Gather

Gather and listen

Listen to your father

I'll tell you about end of days

That would indeed be climactic. First *gather*; then *Gather and listen*; then a further emphasis, *listen to your father*; finally, *the climax*, you will find about the end of days.

But the verse is anti-climactic. The end of days is said first and only then does it speak about listening with an emphasis on listening to one's father.

I believe, what drives the Rashi comment is not the repetition (*Gather, Gather*) since that is normal in the Bible. It is also not the absence of *end of days* in one phrase since very often **Parallel** passages complement each other. Rather I believe what drives Rashi is the **anti-climax**. Hence Rashi concludes that there are two passages here: One passage connotes intent while the other connotes what actually happened.

The major purpose of this Newsletter is elucidating the principles that drive Rashi. The newsletter does not focus primarily on philosophical issues. However, we outline the consequences of this Rashi

- **Gn49** does *not* discuss the Messianic era (Rashi explicitly says so!!!)
- The reason Jacob couldn't tell his sons what would happen is that the good parts of the Messianic era are not unconditional but rather conditional on people's obedience. Therefore, the important message from Jacob was not the good that will happen, but rather the obedience that will bring this good.
- One important aspect of the blessings (as indicated in the previous Rashi) is that all of us have talents, and we must develop these talents and share them and help each other. There is emphasis on a world where each person is respected for what they have and

can contribute. Recall that Rabbi Akivah's 20,000+ students died because there was no such respect

- Another key point is that the blessings aren't messianic and hence the Judaeen blessings are not a promise of monarchy but rather a promise of educational and legal leadership. Indeed, just as we showed above that an important strand in Judaism is lack of emphasis on miracles that violate natural law, there are also strong opinions in Jewish law that the Bible does not want Monarchy.

- One of our great commentators, the Abarbanel, pointed out that the commandment for kingship in Deuteronomy is conditional: *If you want a government like other nations then the leader must have the following characteristics and requirements*. There is no absolute requirement to have a leader.
- Samuel when the nation asked for a leader, also tried to talk the Jews out of it: *True, you will have a king like other nations, but the king will interfere with your internal lives; he will take your sons and daughters to work in his palace etc.*
- In a certain sense, Samuel saw the law of monarchy like the law of the captive woman. True, a man whose passion overcame him in war, has the right to marry the woman, but the Bible insisted that he delay things a month so that she should cry and make herself ugly so that he will lose his passion. Similarly, a nation that wants a king, can get one, but first let them realize all the bad parts of monarchy and how the monarchy will interfere with their personal lives.

The RashiYomi Newsletter would like to contribute to this opposition to monarchy. Unlike the Bible critics who see the opposition as something early which later was overridden (and then yes, the Bible critics therefore consider Deuteronomy to be written after Samuel because it didn't make sense to them that it could be written before), unlike these Bible critics, the RashiYomi Newsletter sees the original opposition to the monarchy as coming

from Jacob himself. Jacob does outline an alternate form of government. Each tribe has a talent and the tribes take turns teaching each other their talents. There is no need for monarchy since each tribe is master of their own destiny. As for Judah, he specializes in legal formulation, legal enforcement, and statutory writing. But that is all. He is just a person with good skills contributing one part to the Jewish nation; not the entire nation.

Summary: In this issue we have continued our tradition of explaining Rashis as emanating from rules. We have, in this particular issue, dealt with some traditional philosophical misconceptions about Judaism. We have shown that there are strong forces opposing belief in miracles and an unconditional requirement of monarchy.

We hope you find this issue enlightening enough to stimulate you to further reading on these important subjects.

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 Hitpael 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