

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #17, Jan. 9, 2019

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, BeShaLach

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We give some quickies today: We show precedents for women leading the congregation as well as insights into Peshat vs. Derash. We invite questions on the Parshah; email questions to RashiYomi@GMail.Com.

On Ex15-21a, Miriam responsively to the woman echoed: Sing to God because He is Towering, the chariot and rider were shot into the sea, says the following:

(a) Moses led the men in prayer-song: He stated, and the men responded;

(b) and Miriam sang to the women.

Part (b) of this Rashi is easy. Rashi uses the **Meaning – root method**. The Hebrew verb used in **Ex15-21** is **Ayin-Nun-Hey**, which remarkable has 10 meanings including, *answer, poor, responsive reading, a euphemism for the time of intimacy, humble*, and a few more. Remarkably, all 10 meanings emanate from a unifying meaning of *responding*.

- Thus, a *humble* person is not so much a meek person but a responsive person who always responds to the needs of the situation (without being assertive on his/her own needs).
- *Intimacy*, refers to a time when each partner is *responsive* to the other's needs.
- *Poverty*, is a state where you have to *answer* to everyone; you are not your own boss.

So, the simply meaning of **Ex15-21** is that Miriam, **Ayin-Nun-Hey**, engaged in a *responsive* mode of prayer-song: She stated a refrain and the women answered.

But part (a) of the Rashi is troublesome. Rashi says two things:

- That just as Miriam led the women (explicitly stated in **Ex15-20**), Moses led the men.
- So far so good. But Rashi says more. He says Moses also engaged in a responsive mode of song.

How does Rashi infer this? By logic? since Miriam did it, Moses did it also? What I wish to show is that there is a textual basis.

Ex15-01 states *Then he sang: Moses and the Jewish people*.

We immediately notice a singular verb (*he*) with a plural subject (*Moses and the Jewish people*). I am indebted to the Rav, Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchick for explaining that a singular predicate with a plural subject indicates that the first mentioned subject instigated and initiated the activity indicated by the predicate with the second mentioned subject tagging along. There are many examples of this throughout the Bible.

So **Ex15-01** indicates that Moses and the Jewish people sang by Moses initiating the singing and the Jewish people tagging along.

This is an application of the Rashi **Grammar Rule**.

We close this section with two interesting observations. How do you count Rashis? It might seem obvious that **Ex15-21** is one Rashi. But as we see, **Ex15-21** contains two very different Rashi comments

- There is the **Rashi Meaning Method** applied to **Ex15-21** – *Miriam sang responsively*
- There is the **Rashi Grammar Method** applied to **Ex15-01** – Moses initiated singing and the Jewish people joined.

So, we have two Rashi comments on two different verses using two different methods. Indeed, there are two Rashis. This is an important methodological principle.

The second observation is that **Ex15-21** contains an explicit statement that women led women in prayer. Rivka Slonim a noted orthodox feminist author once told me that in her research, she found examples of this in the Middle ages: Women were in the balcony and frequently could not follow the male cantor who was at some distance. So female cantors assisted the male cantors by leading the women.

Too often we think we are modern and have discovered a liberation from ancient practices when in fact our modern thinking has roots in biblical practices with follow-ups throughout the ages.

Ex16-33a relates how Moses stored the Manna, the food that the Jews ate in the Wilderness, in a *Tzelochith*. Rashi explains that *Tzelochith* refers to an earthen jar.

Sometimes in analyzing a Rashi I go a step beyond the Rashi text. People often ask me what justifies my doing this. They also ask me if the resulting interpretation is mine or Rashis?

These are good questions. I illustrate with this Rashi. I use the **Rashi meaning method**. The

root of *Tzelochith* is **Tzade-Nun-Hey**, which means *thorn* and can also mean *cold*. In fact, this corresponds to the English *biting cold*. Here cold is named by a good example of the way it feels; cold can feel like a thorn prick. We use here the **Rashi Meaning Figure-of-Speech method**, since the Synecdoche principle states that good examples of attributes create new meaning: For example, *honey* can refer to anything *sweet*; similarly, *armed* can refer to a generally *strong* position. So too, *biting cold* can be named *thorn*.

I therefore translate *Tzelochith* as *thermos*. A *thermos* is more than an earthen vessel; it is a vessel specifically designed to preserve cold. One method of doing this is to create a double layered vessel with insulation between the two layers. In fact, certain apparel apply this principle of multiple layers with insulation between the two layers. (Today the insulation is typically a vacuum, which ancient technology did not allow creation of).

Is this a correct translation? Is it a Rashi or a Hendel comment? I would like to argue it was Rashi's intent. First, there was no word for *thermos* in Rashi's time; so, he couldn't have translated *tzelochith* as *Thermos*. Second, *thermos* carries correctly the nuances of the text; it was not a jar but a jar that preserved through temperature reduction. Finally, I do have support from the root **Tzade-Nun-Hey** which does refer to freezing cold. I think I have a case and I think this very rich nuanced approach to both Rashi and Chumash translation is correct.

Rashi on **Ex16-29c**, *Jews should not leave their place [to gather Manna] on the Sabbath day*, comments: This is reminiscent (*micahn samechu*) of the prohibition of walking outside your city limits on the Sabbath. However, the prohibition is not actually derived from this verse since the prohibition is rabbinic not biblical.

This is a very rare Rashi. It is one of those rare

Rashis where Rashi does not comment on a verse but rather provides historical information which is only superficially related to the verse. Such information is important, but the purpose of this Newsletter is clarifying Rashi's exegetical approach.

Rashi on **Ex17-11a**, *When Moses raised his hands, the Jews had a winning streak* [in the war with Amalayk]; *when he let his hands down, he had a losing streak*, comments, Do Moses' hands cause victory, etc. as indicated in the Tractate Rosh Hashana in the Babylonian Talmud. [The Talmud indicates that *raising hands* indicates *leaning in prayer*. It was the leaning in prayer that caused victory]

I have brought this Rashi to discuss issues of *Peshat and Derash*. What is the simple or straightforward meaning (*Peshat*) of this verse?

Some folks are tempted to translate *Peshat* as *literal*. According to this the *Peshat* of the text is that the Jews were victorious when Moses raised his hands. The idea that raising hands indicates prayer is a *Derash*, a homily read into the text but not its intended meaning!!

Needless, to say I am appalled at such an approach. What do we accomplish by using a literal translation? I think the problem here is that we first translate *Peshat* as *literal* and then get into difficulties.

Certainly, the *Peshat*, the *straightforward* meaning of the text, would include language as it is ordinarily spoken. A standard technique in all languages is synecdoche, which allows naming an activity by a good example of it. For example,

- *honey*, which specifically refers to *honey*, can also refer to *anything sweet*, since *honey* is a *good example* of sweetness.
- *head-count* is a synecdoche for *person*

count.

- *give me a hand*, is a synecdoche for *assist me*, the idea being that hand activity is a good example of personal assistance.

All these are the *peshat* meaning: Indeed, when someone says *give me a hand* it would be a ludicrous and grave mistake to say they wanted only a hand but not the entire person.

So too in **Ex17-11a**. It is ludicrous to say that the verse means that Moses' hands caused victory. A simple synecdoche identifies raising hands with prayer since that is a good example of an activity done during a prayer service. Thus indeed, the *straightforward intended meaning* of the verse is that *when Moses led in prayer the Jews were winning; when he abstained, they were losing*.

I brought this example to highlight the important of being careful in using terms like *Peshat and Derash*, *straightforward and homiletic* meaning, indiscriminately.

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