

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 30 #22, Feb. 14, 2019 *Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, Ki TiSSaH*

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We explore one incident, the golden calf this week. We explore i) using the RashiYomi methods to obtain plurality of opinion, ii) show how grammatical methods can establish objectivity of Rashi comments, iii) show how to see layers in Rashi comments, some objective and some guesswork, iv) show how to properly explore magic-like haggadic passages and establishing them as meaningful, reasonable, and relevant. Please send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Here is the Biblical text for today's digest.

Biblical Text:

[The nation had given Aaron their gold jewelry]

A) He [Aaron] took from them, smoldered it in the cauldron, he made it a metal calf^{II},

B) and they said, this is your^{III} god, Israel, who took you from Egypt.

C) Aaron saw, built an altar before it, Aaron proclaimed and said, a holiday to God^V, tomorrow^{IV}.

D) They woke up, They offered elevation offerings and peace offerings,

E) they arose for foul play^{VI}

Here is the Rashi text, as indicated by the footnotes in the Biblical text box, for today's digest.

I) There are two possible translations:

- He smoldered it in a cauldron
- He fashioned it with an engraving instrument

II) ... Some say Micah who came from mothers who were crushed in pyramid buildings came

and showed the slip, "Arise Ox", by which Moses raised Joseph's body from the Nile when he left Egypt. He threw this slip into the fire and a calf came out.

III) It does not say, *This is our god*, but rather, *this is your god*, showing that the Egyptians who fled Egypt with the Jews instigated the building of the golden calf

IV) *A holiday to God tomorrow* and not *today*. Aaron stalled hoping Moses would come

V) *To God*: To *God* but not to the golden calf *god*. This shows that Aaron's intentions were to prevent the idolatry

VI) This term connotes sexual immorality and murder

We now explore the 6 Rashi comments. Our goals today are:

- Show possibilities of multiple

interpretations despite one set of Rashiomi methods

- ii. Show how the Rashi **Grammar Method** can establish objectivity of Rashi comments
- iii. Train one's eye to see multiple layers in Rashi, some fully objective and some reasonable but based on guess work
- iv. Explore how magic-like Aggadah can be interpreted reasonably with relevance.

Comment III

Let us begin with Rashi comment III. An important point when understanding a Rashi is to expand on the proofs that Rashi gives with additional proofs. Such an approach gives richness to the appreciation of the Rashi comment. Note the underlined words in the following verse

- He [Aaron] took from them the gold
- He fashioned it in a cauldron
 - o They said,
 - o This is your god, Israel
 - o Who took you out of Egypt
- Aaron saw

Figure 1: Aaron vs. the instigators

Look closely at Figure 1. Notice how the middle bullets were not said by Aaron. This is indicated by the change from *he* to *they*. It is also indicated by use of *your* vs. *our* and *you* vs. *us*. Rashi only mentions the *your-our* distinction. The Rashiomi Newsletter however brings two more distinctions: *he-they* and *you-us*. This enriches the appreciation of the Rashi comment.

It becomes clear that Aaron did not make this comment, but some group said it. This is based on the Rashi **Grammar method**. It is an objective inference since it is based on the grammatical pronouns used.

This is the first layer in this Rashi, an observation that even though the text only

mentions Aaron, another group is acting here.

Which group? This is the 2nd layer in Rashi. Here, Rashi cannot be objective since the text does not tell us. Rather, Rashi makes a very reasonable guess.

Rashi uses the **Reference Method**. He finds reference to a foreign Egyptian element that fled Egypt with the Jews. This foreign element is mentioned at Ex12-38 and Nu11-04. Rashi reasonably conjectures that this foreign attachment which is described elsewhere as troublemakers instigated the Jews to make a golden calf.

Comments IV and V

Look now at Figure 2 which describes Aaron's proclamation of a God holiday the next day.

- This [Golden calf] is your god, Israel
- Aaron saw and proclaimed, a holiday to God tomorrow
-

Figure 2: References to G/god in golden calf story

Here we use the **Parallelism method**: *god* is parallel to *God*. In Hebrew *God* is indicated by use of the Tetragrammaton.

Rashi infers from this difference that *Aaron tried to stall. Although they made an idolatrous god, he proclaimed a holiday to the true God.*

Having established this through the parallelism, Rashi notes other textual nuances supportive of this idea of stalling. For example, Aaron proclaimed a holiday to God, *tomorrow*. Rashi amplifies: *Tomorrow* not *today*. He stalled for time expecting Moses to come.

This explains Rashi comments IV, and V in the introduction. Notice how we made the Rashi comment on *God-god* primary and the Rashi comment on *tomorrow-today* supportive. This primary vs. secondary aspect is hinted in the text; Rashi says, "This (*God-god*) shows that Aaron was stalling." We again emphasize the

use of the Rashiomi methods.

Let us now analyze comment VI. The Hebrew biblical root used is **Tzade-Cheth-Kuph** which means laughter, perhaps fun. Why does Rashi translate, *they proceeded to foul play*. Why not translate *they proceeded to have fun*.

Rashi here uses the **Rashi Grammar method**:

- In the Standard **Qal** conjugation, **Tzade-Cheth-Kuph**, does mean *laughter* and *fun*
- In the Intensive **Piel** conjugation, **Tzade-Cheth-Kuph** means *foul play* and can connote sexual immorality or excessive roughness.

Thus, we see that the Rashi comment is not read into the text but rather inferred from the text based on sound grammatical evidence. This is an important point. It is tempting to see a Rashi like this and say *Rashi was motivated to paint idolatry as harmful*. Not so! Rashi did not read this into the text; rather the text clearly communicated this.

Comment II

The following Rashi comment strikes us as fanciful and almost magic-like:

Some say Micah who came from mothers who were crushed in pyramid buildings came and showed the slip, "Arise Ox", by which Moses raised Joseph's body from the Nile when he left Egypt. He threw this slip into the fire and the calf came out.

Figure 3: How the Golden calf was made

Indeed, there is an entire literature in Judaism about people with magic-like powers who can write things on slips, typically with the "Divine Name" on it and these slips can make people out of clay (The Golem) and do all types of magic stunts.

First, and foremost. Such a belief is contrary to the legal rulings of one of the founders of our legal codes. The great Maimonides clearly states in Laws of Idolatry 11:17-18, that

It is improper for Jews to believe that these stories have any substance. Whoever does think there is substance in these matters, something to learn, is a fool and boorish person. The Jews are a wise people and should not believe that these things have substance.

How then should we understand the passage cited by Rashi? We should understand it symbolically. Here is one proposed explanation

Aaron, we know was stalling. He placed the gold in the fire; but then what. What should he make it? It is reasonable to assume that distinct groups had different ideas. The Egyptians among them probably wanted their Egyptian god, the sheep. But that would offend the Jews who just left Egypt. And so an argument ensued. Micah therefore came and mentioned that Joseph was a Jewish ruler in Egypt. Joseph's personality is symbolized by the Ox. Why not make a golden calf to symbolize how Joseph redeemed the Jews. This idea caught on.

There is no need to assume any magic. The Aggadah paints an intellectual discussion in using the literary technique of hyperbole, something quite common.

Comment I:

We close with explaining comment I. The Bible uses a very rare term *Cheret*. Most people are unaware that most Biblical words occur only a few times in the Bible making it difficult to understand its meaning. There are two verses giving precedent for the meaning of *Cheret*. One verse

- Isaiah 3:22 *Cheret* means a *container* (a pocket). Radaq brings proof from the Arabic meaning of the word
- Isaiah 8:1 *Cheret* means a sort of *pen*.

Similarly, the verb used **Tzade-Vav-Resh** can equally mean to *create, molded, fashion, form*. Hence the two Rashi explanations

- Aaron fashioned the calf with a metallic engraving instrument
- Aaron molded the calf in a cauldron like container.

We have no way of knowing which of these two explanations **Meaning-Reference method** are true. They are both based on the Rashi. Ideally, we should have many verses pointing to one explanation. But in this case, we have isolated verses pointing to two explanations.

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.

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