

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

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Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, MeTzoRaH

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*We need questions! Please **send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com** In this issue we review some Rashis which look like Talmudic nitpicking. We show how to unlock the code to these Rashis. After reading this they will appear as conversational and intuitive. This post will help anyone – beginner to advanced – involved in Talmudic analysis.*

Biblical Text: Lv15-04a,b

[Note text is speaking about person who is ritually impure from certain discharges]

***Any bed** on which the ritually impure person **lies**, will become ritually impure

***Any utensil** on which the ritually impure person **sits**, will become ritually impure.

STEP 1: GOALS

We review today certain Talmudic practices which people consider picky and nitpicking. We show the underlying logic. We also show that they are intuitive.

A much larger version of this Rashi comment occurs in in the Sifray [Chapter 15, Number 128]. Here is the version which sounds picky (Rashi condensed it but the same comments apply to both Rashi and the larger analysis)

STEP 2: PICKY TALMUDIC TEXT

- Any beds beds/seats on which the ritually impure person lies shall become impure
- Perhaps, this [becoming impure] applies to anything he sits on (including a stool, or a car).
- Therefore, it says Any Seats implying something that is really a seat. So, boxes, stools, etc. are included.
- Perhaps then it applies even if the ritually impure person sits on a car.
- Therefore, it says "on which he lies" rather than "on which he lied" implying that if some one sat on a car it is not ritually impure. The test for this is that a driver could come by and tell the sitting person, *Please get off as I need the car to drive.*

This certainly looks nitpicking and silly. It gives people a sour taste. RashiYomi states that all Rashis are intuitive. Can this be done here?

STEP 3: BORDERLINE CASES

To prepare ourselves, we must review certain concepts. We all know about *day* and *night* but also know about *twilight* and *dawn*. Twilight and dawn are called borderline cases. Whenever a law is made for day or not night one has to clarify if it applies to twilight and dawn.

For example, everyone knows that one must drive with headlights on at night to increase visibility and prevent accidents. There is no obligation to have your headlights on during the day. How about twilight? Do we say it is like day and does not require headlights or do we say it is like night and does require headlights?

Actual laws may differ by state, but some states use the half hour rule: starting from a half hour prior to sunset one must turn on the headlights.

The idea of borderline cases applies to serious matters also. We all know that breaking a table is not murder. Even breaking a bone is not murder. Breaking a person is considered murder. How about the borderline case: breaking a fetus?

We will not settle this question here but do point out that the issue can be reformulated as to what the status of breaking a borderline life case is: Murder or not? Is it like breaking a bone or breaking a person?

STEP 4: BORDERLINES - EXPANSIVE AND RESTRICTIVE

How does Bible indicate about borderline cases? It uses the techniques of *expanding* and *restriction*. Certain words are restrictive, they specify, this and only this. Certain words are expansive; they specify, this and anything like this.

What are these methods of expansion and restriction? Here are a few rules:

- Words like *the* restrict; words like *any* or *all* expand
- Repetition restricts
- Verbs indicating habitual behavior restrict; verbs indicated one-time behavior expand.

STEP 5: APPLICATION

The Bible introduced a simply stated rule: People who possess certain ritual impurities confer that ritual impurity to chairs they sit on. So far so good

The Talmudist must always ask:

- But what about the borderline cases?
- Do borderline chairs obtain impurity or not?

More importantly:

- What are examples of borderline chairs?
- Which expansive and restrictive words help us answer these questions.

Before proceeding we already see why the Rashi and Talmud appear more intuitive now. They are dealing with a question that always arises. They are dealing with it through known techniques of expansion and restriction. And there are known words that indicate expansion and restriction.

In the Talmud and Midrash, the Hebrew words *ribui* and *meeut* mean *expansion* and *restriction*. They are a major Talmudic concern particularly in matters of Biblical exegesis.

STEP 6: BORDERLINE CHAIRS

- A chair that is "named" or "called" a chair that you buy as a chair is a real honest to goodness chair
- Something that you sit on which is made for other purposes - for example, a box, a stool, a

cushion on the ground - are borderline chairs. They weren't made for the purpose of sitting but that is one of their uses.

- Finally: An extreme borderline case are items like cars which even though you can sit on, do not get sat on that much, because they are typically used for other things.

STEP 7: EXPANSION AND RESTRICTION IN Lv15

The Bible speaks about "the bed on which he lies" It is not the pickiness but the repetition bed on which he sleeps which indicates emphasis and restriction.

The Bible uses the word any which indicates expansion. Any implies *any* thing you sit on even like a box or stool even if it is not called a chair.

The Bible uses the habitual present. To understand this, recall the difference between "I ate an apple" and "I eat apples." I ate an apple is simple past tense and could denote something done once. "I eat apples" refers to ones' habits. It doesn't refer to any specific time of eating but refers to the fact that when you eat fruit you eat apples; it is your habit. Hence, we refer to I eat apples as the habitual present.

STEP 8: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- Chairs: Definitely become impure if the ritually impure person sits on them. Indeed, the Bible speaks about any bed on which he lies thus emphasizing real chairs and beds.
- Cars: The Bible uses the habitual present in this verse: All beds on which he lies vs the simple past The bed on which he lied The habitual present is

restrictive and indicates an ongoing habit, not something that happens once.

- One does not sit habitually on cars. So, this borderline case is out. A ritually impure person who sits on a car once or twice does not convey ritual impurity. Notice the Talmud phases this with a test: "A car is something that you must get up if someone says, 'Get up I need to use the car'" The Talmud is not however being picky. The Talmud is indicating a method for recognizing the habitual present. If someone can ask you to leave the car it couldn't be your habit to sit on them.
- Stools and boxes: These are less borderline than cars. The verse speaks about any bed on which the person lies, thus connoting even borderline chairs like stools and boxes which are made for other purposes but can be designated habitually for sitting.

STEP 9: SUMMARY

The table below summarizes the i) Biblical phrase ii) its status as expansive or restrictive, iii) typical objects to which it could refer, the iv) laws governing them. Seen from this perspective the law is deep and profound dealing with complicated legal questions through carefully selected keywords.

Item	Does it become ritually impure?	Does this require expansion or restriction?	Biblical phrase indicating expansion or restriction
Chair	Yes	Restriction	Bed on which he lies
Stool, Box	Yes	Expansion	Any bed, Any seat
Cars	No	Restriction	Any bed/seat on which he habitually lies/sits

Praise Be Him Who Chose Them & 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