

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

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Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, AchaRaY MoTH

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*We need questions! Please **send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com** Many people think that Chukim are Torah laws without reasons. Not so! All Torah Laws have reasons. In fact, in this week's Parshah Rashi hints of the requirement to learn the reason for so called Chukim. In this week's issue we present a new perspective on the Chukim*

Biblical Text: Lv18-04,a,b,c; 05a,b

[God is speaking to Jewish people]

A) My monetary code, do

B) My regulations, watch

C) - until your paths are in them

Watch my regulations and monetary codes , so that a person by doing them [spiritual] lives by them

RASHI:

A) Monetary codes are laws man would make had they not been given by God They must be done

B) Regulations are Divine laws that we are tempted to question – *What difference does it make if I violate them;* also, non-Jewish nations tend to ask – *Why do you observe these.* The answer is I, God have decreed it, you can't be freed from them

C) Your daily paths (conversations, leisure time etc.) must be in these laws. It is not enough to say *I learned what I must do but now let me [enjoy myself by going to] learn other cultures.*

The next verse repeats the obligation but with double verbs (Watch and do each of monetary codes and regulations) to show that they both should be watched and done. Finally, Rashi explains that *live by them* means to *spiritually live* not *physically live* [This is also an important principle mentioned by the Rambam that the laws are for spiritual life not physical life]

STEP 1: PARALLELISM

To understand this Rashi we must review the Rashi Parallelism method. This method was fully explained by James Kugel in his book *The Idea of Biblical Poetry, Parallelism and Its History*, Yale University Press, 1981 which is well worth reading.

Parallelism superficially means *repetition*. Some examples (from daily prayers) are

- I will exalt you My God the King
- I will bless you name forever

Or

- Every day I will bless you
- I will praise your name forever

On a deeper level, and this in fact was Kugel's great contribution, Parallelism is never pure repetition but climactic repetition. The 2nd clause expands on the first clause. Let us look at the last example to illustrate this.

- Every day I will bless you
- I will praise your name forever

Notice the climax.

- In the first verselet praise is *by day*
- In the second verselet, praise is *forever*.

Clearly *forever* is more than *by day*. In this

sense, the second clause expands on the first clause.

There is another climax in the verselets

- Every day I will bless you
- I will praise your name forever

Notice that

- The blessing is to you, God himself
- The praise is of his name, in other words a connotation of spreading the word throughout the world not just privately blessing God.

You can ask: Is *praise* in the second verselet more than *bless*. Perhaps? I don't know offhand. But at this point the goal is to show how parallelism involves some type of climax. The second verselet says more than the first.

STEP 2: PARALLELISM OF Lv18-04

Now let us apply the Parallelism Principle as explained by Kugel to **Lv18-04**. There are three verselets. Notice the climax (highlighted in blue, yellow, orange or A, B, C)

- A) At the very least do the monetary laws and codes. This is simple. You would have done them even if God had not commanded them.
- B) What about laws like eating Kosher or observing laws of purity? You have to *watch* them as well as do them since it is tempting to think one can be religious if one is meticulous about one's monetary behavior.
- C) The climax gets more intense: It is not enough to *watch out* for the regulations; for example, you can watch out and do them and then to get your kicks you can read secular philosophy or get involved in non-Jewish cultural studies. In other words
 - o The laws are observed once and then
 - o Your leisure time, your paths in life, are spent with things you enjoy.
 - o The Torah therefore requires us

to *walk in these regulations*; their philosophy and reasons should be enjoyable to us. We shouldn't feel the need to go to other cultures to be stimulated and entertained.

STEP 3: WHAT IS THE TRANSLATION

Now that we understand the parallelism, we can interpret the words. In this case Rashi used the **Rashi Parallelism Method** to interpret the synonyms used in the verse which

- In Hebrew are *mishpatim*, *chukim*
- In standard English, *ordinances*, *statutes*
- I suggest, *monetary codes*, *regulations*.

But words are approximations. Let us carefully examine.

- *Mishpatim* are laws that we would have made even if God had not given them. The best translation is *monetary codes*.
- Rashi never says that *Chukim* are laws without reasons. If one goes through Rashi one finds that he makes the following points. *Chukim*
 - o Do not have a good taste (they don't click like a monetary law)
 - o One is tempted to say *Why should I observe these laws*
 - o One is asked by one's non-Jewish neighbors *Why do you observe these things*.
 - o They are decreed by God
 - o You can't escape them
- I would therefore translate them as *statutes or regulations*. Here is a good analogy: You see a speed limit, a town regulation of 30 miles per hour. You are tempted to ask *Is it wrong if I go 31 or 35 miles per hour?* This is stronger on the highway when going 60 miles per hour seems like a non-crime. But speed limits are not laws without reason.
- Surely, they have a reason, to prevent accidents. But we don't always see the details in the cutoffs.

- It is similar with *chukim*. Certainly, the laws of Kashruth are there to make us holy and teach us to abstain from physical pleasures. But we don't fully understand all details. The laws themselves have reasons.
- Another analogy is with requirements whose effects are long term. If a doctor says to a person with high blood pressure, *Do not eat excessive salt* that certainly has a reason to prevent higher blood pressure. But the person is tempted to *cheat* and have salty foods now and then thinking it won't hurt him. The person might not even comply not realizing that the damage will only happen many years forward.
- Thus, best translation of *Chukim* are *regulations* or *statutes*. These are laws that do have reasons, but their cutoffs and the time of their effects is long term.

I find support for my interpretation of *Chukim* from Rashi's comment that one should *walk in the Chukim*. Rashi explains that one should not just guard about doing them and then [for one's leisure time and culture] one should learn non-Jewish cultures. Not so! Let me give examples

In the time of the Talmud there was the *society of friends* (*Chaverim*) The *friend* society tried to walk in the ways of the Torah regulations. They would observe laws of purity observed by priests in their own personal life. They felt it gave them a higher spirituality. Thus, they acted like they were priests in the temple and observe all laws about eating in purity. This is an example of studying the culture of *Chukim* to arrive at a greater spirituality.

Step 4: Lv18-05

In the previous sections we have explored the climax in **Lv18-04** and showed how that was the basis for the Rashi comment using the Kugel parallelism method. Now let us look at the parallelism of the verbs in **Lv18-04,05**

Lv18-04 do monetary law, *watch* regulations

Lv18-05 *Watch* regulations and monetary law
By doing them one achieves spiritual life.

Rashi explains that to emphasize the climactic nature of the parallelism the Torah emphasizes that both regulations *and* monetary law have to be watched. They also must both be done.

You could ask, why then do we have two verses? Why not just one?

The answer is

- One verse comes to emphasize the climax
- While the 2nd verse emphasizes that doing and watching belong to all types of commandments.

STEP 5: LIVE BY THEM

The actual text of Rashi is

Live by them in the next world. Because if you say it refers to this world, that is contradicted by the fact that people die.

One can superficially say Rashi is using the contradiction method. But a deeper explanation refers to *life* as *way of life*. Thus

Lv18-04 walk (path in life) in the regulations

Lv18-05.... Your life is through involvement with them

Thus, Rashi's real point is that *life* refers to the way one behaves. Rashi simply emphasizes that this brings us to the next world

It is interesting (to defend this Rashi) that the Rambam has similar sentiments in his great legal code

- Rambam explains that the Torah is not for physical healing but for spiritual living
- Rambam emphasizes that *the next world*

doesn't refer to something that is not here now.

In other words, both Rashi and Rambam would understand both verses to mean that *one's way of life, his path through life on which he walks and how he lives reflects use of the regulations (for example, the Society of Friends emphasis on constantly trying to observe the laws of purity).*

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 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