

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 31#9, May 16th, 2019
Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, BeHaR

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Please send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com A special treat this week: We see Rashi as a Bais Yaakov teacher teaching little children. Enjoy

Biblical Text: *God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, to say over.*

Rashi Text:

- a) *What do the 7th year laws (mentioned in this chapter) have to do with Mount Sinai?*
- b) *This teaches you, just as the 7th year laws had the general and particular laws taught at Mount Sinai, so too, for the rest of the commandments, their general and detailed form were taught at Mount Sinai*
- c) *This (a,b) is a citation from the Torath Kohanim (The Sifray).*
- d) *And to me it appears that this is the explanation:*
- e) *The driving force for this comment is the fact that the details of the 7th year laws found here in Lv were not repeated in Deuteronomy in Moses' farewell address.*
- f) *Therefore, there had to be emphasis that the details mentioned here were in fact taught at Mount Sinai.*
- g) *The inference from this example, is that any law, and independent of the level of detail found in the various revelatory texts, had both details and generalities taught at Sinai and restated in Deuteronomy.*

Did you notice the childish almost silly way Rashi introduced this comment: *What do the 7th year laws (mentioned in this chapter) have to do with Mount Sinai?* It sounds like the type of silly riddles that children run around asking (which no adult knows the answer to). And in fact, I will argue, that is exactly what it is.

To fully appreciate this Rashi we offer the following sections and outline

- I. What is the real reason behind the Rashi comment (Ans: The **Rashi Database Method**)
- II. **Rashi Database Method** part II (The three revelations; the Deuteronomic repetition)
- III. Why didn't Rashi say so? To intensify the question, we show examples where Rashi *did* use a database approach. Why didn't he use it here?
- IV. Can this Rashi comment really be regarded as a children's riddle? (Ans: Yes, with some model children answers)
- V. The Biblical concept of universal access to learning.
- VI. Sources for Universal Access
- VII. Recap of the Rashi.

I: Rashi Database Method

We think of Databases as a modern phenomenon. However, our Talmudic Sages performed the equivalent of Database inquiries. The following database inquiry

Biblical paragraphs frequently begin

God spoke to Moses/Aaron to say over

What are the forms and variations of this? In passing this Database inquiry can be performed by anyone using modern search engines such as Bar Ilan or Davka if they know how to use AND, OR, and a few other basics. The results of the Database inquiry are found in the following table and are in fact the subject of Sifray and beautiful Malbim on **Lv01-01**.

70 times – God cited (**D-B-R**) to Moses
1 time – God cited to Aaron
10 times – God cited to Moses and Aaron
5 Times – God spoke (**A-M-R**) to Moses
2 times – God spoke to Moses and Aaron
1 time – God spoke to Moses and Aaron
2 times – God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai

This table is exactly and precisely how Rashi comments are born. It is the essence of the **Rashi Database method**. We see from this table that the *normal* method is to say *God cited to Moses to say over*. This occurs over 75% of the time. This *naturally* generates the question: *Why are different rarer forms used in the other verses*. For example, why does it say only once, *God cited to Aaron to say over*. This in fact is the subject of an interesting and important Rashi.

Today we deal with the fact that only twice, that is twice out of 91 times, does it say *God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai*. This is the question Rashi is dealing with. It is a question resulting not from a silly, childish, and haphazard juxtaposition of the 7th year laws and Sinai, but rather from a deep Database result pointing to a

deliberate anomaly intended by the Author to communicate a message.

But what message? The verse seems to emphasize that God's revelations to Moses were indeed *at Mount Sinai*. This seems to counter the idea that it *might be otherwise*.

To fully understand this, we must visit Part II of the Database inquiry.

II: Part II of the Database Inquiry.

Following the Sifray, we perform the following Database inquiry

What were the major sources for (or places where) the laws Moses taught the people

The Sifrey identified the following three places:

I: God revealed himself at Mount Sinai where we find the Civil laws and the Temple laws (**Ex 19 – Ex 40**)

II: God revealed Himself to Moses in the Temple proper where he taught Moses all Laws of Offerings (**Lv01-01** and all of Leviticus)

III: Deuteronomy contains Moses farewell speech to the Jewish people in which he reviews most of the Torah. The farewell speech was done in the Moabite plains.

To proceed further we digress on an interesting aside in pedagogy. As everyone knows there are 7 grammatical tenses (active, passive, intensive, causative etc.). Every Jewish school child learns how to conjugate verbs in the 7 tenses.

But how do you *illustrate* these 7 tenses. The Radaq, one of our great grammarians, grapple with this problem. His solution was deceptively simply. *Pick a verb that has all 7 conjugations present in the Bible*. Some verbs for example only occur in one or two tenses throughout the entire Bible. But only two of the Biblical verbs occur in *all seven* tenses in the Bible. Therefore,

Radaq chose to illustrate the 7 tenses with the biblical root, **S-M-R**, and this example still occurs in many modern textbooks.

In an analogous manner, we can ask the simple question: These three sources of law teaching – Sinai, The Temple and the Moabite plains – did they teach the same laws or different laws? Were laws taught in the same detail in all three places?

The Biblical viewpoint is that all laws were taught and in the same detail in all three places. The best way to illustrate this principle is to make the point with a law that occurs in all three places and the 7th year laws do occur in all three places as show in the following table

Mount Sinai: **Ex23-11** *Right of the poor to freely take from anyone's field in the 7th year*

Temple: **Lv25-01:06** *Prohibitions of owners performing agricultural work in their own fields in the 7th years*

Moabite Plains: **Dt15-01:06** *absolving all debts in the 7th year*

Summary: So now we understand this Rashi

- Using the **Rashi Database method**, Rashi found a peculiarity in the introductory sentence. Instead of the usual *God cited to Moses*, we found, *God cited to Moses at Mount Sinai*.
- Why the emphasis on Mount Sinai?
- Another Database inquiry exposes three places where Moses taught laws: Mount Sinai, the Temple, and the Moabite Plains
- However, not all laws are repeated in all three places. Furthermore, the degree of detail of the laws differ
- Therefore, the Bible chose a law mentioned in all three places, the 7th year laws, which are mentioned in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, to emphasize that although the details mentioned in these 3 places differ, the content taught in all three places was in

fact all taught at Mount Sinai and therefore the emphasis *God cited to Moses at Mount Sinai*.

III: Why the riddle form

The word *Database* is a modern word. However, as I indicated earlier Rashi and other Talmudic scholars frequently used the equivalent of Modern Database inquiries.

Although they did not use the word *Database*, they had other words to indicate databases. I will not go give a complete overview here but suffice it to point out that the phrase *in all places* was frequently used to indicate a *Database Inquiry*. This phrase (and others like it) are frequently found in Rashi.

Some sample verses are **Lv11-45**, **Dt06-07b**, **Nu27-13a**, **Nu06-02b**. For example, at **Dt06-07b** justifies the translation of the word *sons* to refer to *students* by noting that *in all places* *sons refers to* students which basically translates, using modern phraseology, *a database on verses with the word son confirms that in many verses, son means student*.

Similarly, on **Lv11-45**, Rashi does a rather sophisticated Database inquiry researching the verb used to describe God taking us out of Egypt. The Rashi comment is in parenthesis which means it is not in all manuscripts; sometimes this means that Rashi's immediate students in his academy added it. The results of the database inquiry show that the verb *take out* is the usual verb used to indicate God taking us out of Egypt while at **Lv11-45** the verb used is *raised* (God who raised you from Egypt). The inference from this unusual occurrence is that Egypt *sunk* its slaves into a depressed state from which they couldn't emerge by using its abusive practices and therefore God had to *raise us* from Egypt. In fact, **Lv11** deals with the rules of purity and impurity. Here I am taking the liberty of translating impurity as referring to a sort of depressive state in which you are sunk. This translation follows the insightful translations of Rabbi Samson

Raphael Hirsch.

So, we see that Rashi knew how to professionally indicate that a Database inquiry was being used. But in the verse, we are studying today. He did not so indicate. Instead he uses a silly, childish riddle form: *Why is Mount Sinai mentioned by the 7th year.*

To appreciate that this is a children's riddle we look at some sample answers to this riddle from children. (In passing, I spent several years of my life pleasantly doing homeschooling and learned a great deal.

IV: Responses to the children's riddle

I give some sample responses of children to this riddle.

I know why!

Anyone can go to any farm in the 7th year just like anyone can go to a mountain

I know why

You can eat whatever you want in a field in the 7th year just as anyone can go fishing in a mountain stream

I know why

In the 7th year Hashem (God) owns the fields [the owners can't do anything to their own field]

Just as God owns the mountains

V: Universal Access

Well the examples are charming. But what do these children answers have to do with what Rashi was trying to teach. Superficially nothing.

But Rashi created the riddle for the same reason that he frequently gives puns or word associations for a Rashi comment when the real reason is deeper.

Rashi wanted to make sure the Rashi comment was retained and remembered. After all, it was not like today when you google anything you have forgotten. You can't even take notes on everything because paper is not readily available. Those Rashi comments with a cute punchline were remembered. Other Rashi comments may be forgotten.

In this case, no child is going to remember a Database inquiry. A Database inquiry is something technical. However, the child does remember the riddle and the riddle enables him or her to remember the comment.

In other words, Rashi used the riddle to *introduce* the Rashi comment, so as to create retention. In doing this, Rashi emphasized a major biblical goal: All Torah concepts and all learning should be accessible. Accordingly, we review the universal access doctrine in the next session.

VI: Sources of the Universal Access

Dt30-11:14 is the basis for the idea that learning should be universally accessible. It should not be product of the elite.

For this which I teach to you today

- *It is not above you*
- *It is not distant from you*
- *It is not in heaven; in other words, you don't have to ask who will go to heaven and bring us the Torah*
- *It is not overseas; in other words, you don't have to ask who will go overseas and bring us the Torah*
- *Rather, this teaching is very close to you*
- *To be done mentally and in action*

The idea of universal access is seen throughout the Talmud and in human history. We cite three examples.

Rabbi Hiyyah, upset by the lack of Torah knowledge in the periphery, took off from his

Talmudic duties. He went from town to town, used fish skins to write Torahs, and used a *train the trainer* method. He would teach five children, one child each, one of the five books of the Torah. After leaving the five children would teach each other and then teach the town. Similarly, he taught each of six children the six orders of the Mishnah, the corpus of Jewish law in those days and upon leaving they trained each other and then the town.

Talmudic law had the following incentivization process to encourage students, not to accept everything taught by their teacher, but to try and outdo their teachers. The high courts had surrounding benches in which the greatest students in each city sat. *Any* student who during a live trial could come up with a defense argument not thought of by the court, automatically got promoted to the court. Such a procedure incentivized students to learn and try and outdo their teachers.

Finally, I might mention the modern era. The Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, of blessed memory, who headed the Lubavitch movement, made a priority to universalize access to Judaism. He set up over a 1000 Lubavitch centers and created a network of emissaries who went to these centers, often in very rural and remote areas. These centers provided basic education. Today, the centers continue. Online materials are developed in two tracks, one for students of the emissaries and one for rural Jews, thus providing a uniform foundational education to all Jews.

Many other modern leaders have similarly emphasized the need to prioritize education.

We collectively refer to these examples as universal access and it is an important principle of Judaism.

VII: Recap and Summary

- Using Database Methods Rashi found the introductory verse *God cited to*

Moses at Mount Sinai to be an outlier with an unusual phrase

- The emphasis on Mount Sinai suggests we might have thought otherwise. Still another Database query shows us that Moses gave laws in three places: Mount Sinai, The Temple (actually he received them there), the Plains of Moab
- Charming, the 7th year laws are one of the few laws stated in all three books. So, the Bible is emphasizing that despite the different details, all versions were Sinaitic.
- However, Rashi did not *state* this idea in his traditional language *in all places* connoting Databases. Rather, he *formulated* the Rashi in terms of a children's riddle. The purpose here was to increase retention and remembering.
- By so doing, Rashi emphasized universality of access a fundamental Torah approach
- We add two other points: First, there is actually one other verse where the introduction *God cited to Moses at Mount Sinai* at Nu03-01 discussing the census of the Levites. This fits into our theory and approach. Recall that originally the firstborn were supposed to be the firstborn. We might think therefore, that since the Priests replaced the firstborn *after* the sin of the Golden calf, therefore the laws associated with Priests and Levites were stated *afterwards*, that is after Mount Sinai. Therefore, the verse emphasizes that post-golden-calf sin laws were also stated at Sinai, consistent with the fact that Moses ascended to Mount Sinai 3 times the last time dealing with the Golden Calf
- Second some may wonder why the fact that there is one exceptional introductory verse proves that *all* laws were given completely (general and details) at Mount Sinai. Here Rashi follows the Rabbi Ishmael rules which teaches that if
 - You have a general category (for

- example the category of all introductory verses)
- And one of them is exceptional (such as **Lv25-01** which adds the phrase *at Mount Sinai*) then
 - The exceptional verse doesn't just teach about itself but rather teaches about all verses in the category (unless the biblical text specifically excludes the teaching to that exceptional verse) Note: That we already explained why the biblical narrative found it most convenient to teach this lesson here.

Praise be Him Who Chose Them and 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.

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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