

# The RashiYomi NewsLetter

## The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 31#13, Jun 13th, 2019 *Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, BeHaaLotheChah*

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*We provide some insights into Nu12. Please feel free to send questions on Rashi to [RashiYomi@GMail.Com](mailto:RashiYomi@GMail.Com)*

**Nu12** Miriam and Aaron cited<sup>A,E</sup> about Moses about the Ethiopian<sup>B,C</sup> wife he had taken, because he had taken an Ethiopian<sup>B,C</sup> wife. They discussed<sup>A</sup>: Is it only in Moses that God spoke? Has he not also spoken in us?....

### Selected Rashis:

- A) Moses had separated from his wife even though
- B) His wife was very beautiful
- C) with a nice personality
- D) How did they know about the separation: Miriam overheard Tzipporah saying, upon hearing about the election of Prophets to the Sanhedrin: I hope these wives fare better than me.
- E) The actual verse says *She spoke – Aaron and Miriam*. This singular verb with a plural subject indicates that Miriam initiated the conversation, but Aaron joined along.

## I: What Happened

Numbers 12 is considered the biblical source against one of the worst sins known to Judaism: slander. It is therefore worthwhile to analyze the Biblical text. Here is some background. We will defend this in subsequent sections.

Moses had separated from his wife and remained separated. Aaron and Miriam did significant outreach to help the Jews in the

wilderness with their social problems. They saw this continued separation of Moses as uncalled for and in need of remedy. They probably intended to have some light social events to help bring them back together.

Tzipporah did not directly come to Miriam. Rather Miriam overheard comments Tzipporah made indicative of a separation. She was speaking to Aaron to discuss ways of bringing them back together.

The text emphasizes that the reason for the separation had nothing to do with either Tzipporah's looks or personality both of which were distinguished.

Our job will be to defend this description of what happened. Its importance to slander laws is as follows: Clearly Miriam was only trying to get the couple back together. She had no ill thoughts. In fact, she did much social outreach.

Nevertheless, because she spoke ill about Moses (accusing him of separation for no good reason) she was punished with leprosy. This shows how evil the sin of slander is: Even if intentions are good one is punished. (Rashi brings this argument also)

Let us now discuss the various aspects of this story.

## II: The Separation

How do we know that Moses separated from his wife? Many commentators use various subtle Rashi methods

- **Grammar method:** The text refers in the past perfect to the wife that Moses *had taken* implying a current separation
- **Grammar - Formatting Method:** Alternatively, the Bible repeats *the wife he had taken*. Since repetition connotes emphasis, the emphasis could be on the past tense, indicating that he had taken her but was no longer with her.

However, several times, for example in the last issue, I have emphasized the importance of the Rashi **Reference method** as the best means of explaining a Rashi comment (if it is applicable).

In this case, an other verse explicitly says, that Moses father-in-law took, when he went to visit Moses, Tzipporah, his wife and their two children *after she had been separated* (Ex18-02).

However, this proves there was an initial separation. We still need a way to show that after they were united Moses remained separated.

There is a hint of this in Exodus since his father-in-law points out to Moses that he spends all day helping the nation, the implication being he leaves no time for a personal life. But let us see something more concrete.

## III: Continued Separation

Before explaining Rashi, we point to an interesting Sifra, which comments on the description of Moses wife as *the Ethiopian*. Tzipporah was in fact a Midianitess; although Ethiopian could refer to the larger continent of all of Africa, it is still peculiar not to call Moses wife by either her name, Tzipporah, nor her country, Midian.

The Sifra notes that Africa is rich in mineral resources (Something still true today). Hence, the Sifra conjectures that using synecdoche (**Meaning - figure of speech method**), *African* could refer to a well-dressed woman with much jewelry (since the gems came from Africa). The Sifra then suggests that perhaps Tzipporah stopped wearing her Jewelry indicating a continued separation.

It is not clear why Rashi did not even cite this Sifra (He cites 4 other explanations to the use of *African*) Perhaps, because nowhere else in the Bible do we find that *African* means Jeweled.

Rashi focuses on two words indicating discussion.

- The normal term for discussion in Hebrew is *amar* indicating discussion
- The contrastive term *dbr*, means *to cite*. It indicates a citation of someone else.

It is interesting how we arrive at this. Rashi following the Talmud and Midrashim did not have English translations available. Instead we find the following explanation of *amar-vs.-dbr*

- *Amr* is softer in connotation
- *Dbr* is harsher in connotation.

The approach of Rashiyomi when seeing such contrasts is to *seek an appropriate English words that mirror the attributes – soft, hard – mentioned*. In other words, it is not sufficient to say

- *dbr* means *speaking harshly*
- *amr* means *speaking softly*

Rather, one must find a punchy English pair of words where the *harsh-soft* connotation applies.

After reviewing many texts, I came up with the English pair, *cite: speak*. This is consistent with the *harsh-soft* distinction

- *Speak* indicates discussion and flexibility
- *Cite* indicates an apodictic citation without any possibility of compromise.

If one reviews **Nu12-01** vs **Nu12-02** one finds

- Aaron and Miriam *discussed* (verse 2)
- Miriam and Aaron *cited* (verse 1)

Cited what? This is a very peculiar word to use when discussing a social situation.

The most reasonable explanation is that they were citing something Tzipporah said.

With this background we can guess reasonable examples. Tzipporah probably made a statement with innuendoes that being married to a prophet is not a picnic. The appointment in the previous chapter **Nu11** of prophets to help Moses supports this. Hence the Rashi comment *Miriam overheard Tzipporah expressing hope that the wives of these appointed prophets don't have done to them by their husbands what my husband did* (Separation).

It is also noteworthy, that the Sifsay Chachamim, points out

Religious people do not openly speak about their marital problems even to prophet-therapists like Miriam who do social work and help. Rashi asked the question *How did Miriam know* since it is taken for granted that Tzipporah would never have directly come to Miriam with the problem.

I might add that Jewish psychology emphasizes discretion, hints, and innuendoes rather than explicit discussion. The dignity and feelings of the person seeking help must be protected at all times. It would be humiliating for him/her to come out and say they have a problem.

#### IV: Tzipporah; beautiful and pleasant

There is a textual need to emphasize that the separation had nothing to do with the most obvious reason for separation, physical or social ugliness. The text emphasizes that Tzipporah was beautiful physically and nice socially.

The text does this by repeating that Tzipporah was an *Ethiopian/ African*. It is interesting to see how Rashi approaches this.

*Ethiopian/ African? Wasn't her name Tzipporah?*

A careful reading shows that Rashi is not being picky just on the lack of name. There were several ways to refer to Moses wife

- Tzipporah
- His wife
- Midianite
- African/Ethiopian.

Here are some examples of references to women:

- **Ex18-02** uses the phrase *Tzipporah the wife of Moses*.
- **Gn21-09** refers to Isaac playing with the son of *the Egyptian woman, Hagar*.
- **Gn12-19** refers to Sarah as *your wife* (When speaking to Abraham).

Here we are using the **Rashi Database method**, the comparison of passages similar in regard to talking about a woman. We find appellation by name, marital status, and nationality but never by super-nationality.

As usual, when the **Database method** uncovers an anomaly it is justified to seek reasons. We conclude that when Rashi asks *wasn't her name Tzipporah* as shown in the Green colored table above, Rashi was not just being specific to *why African vs. Tzipporah?* Rather, Rashi was more broadly asking *why not use one of the traditional three methods - name, status, immediate country*.

Rashi in fact gives four answers to why the anomalous *African / Ethiopian* is used. The simplest method is to use the **Meaning -Figure of Speech method**. Here synecdoche teaches that something can be named by a good example

- *Honey* synecdochally means *sweet* even

- though that it is not the original meaning
- *Give me a hand* synecdochally means to help someone not to just use your hands
- Similarly, *African* synecdochally means *easily distinguishable in a crowd* even though its original meaning is more specific.

The appellation of Tzipporah as *African/Ethiopian* occurs twice in the verse. The Rashi **Grammar-Formatting method** teaches that the Bible uses repetition the same way modern man uses bold and italics, to indicate unspecified emphasis

Here the repetition would indicate that Tzipporah being distinguished refers to both her looks and personality.

## V: Miriam/Aaron as Social workers

We should conclude this Newsletter by showing that Aaron and Miriam worked as team doing social work with all the Jews.

It is well known that Aaron was high priest. The primary purpose of biblical offerings was celebrating important life events such as

- Thanksgiving on being saved (*Thanksgiving offering*)
- Celebrating accomplishments (*Peace offering*)
- Recovering from sin and guilt (Sin/guilt offerings)
- Dedicating oneself to new projects (Elevation offering)

The priest through the biblical offerings had ample opportunity to instruct and advise people in their daily activities.

Miriam as social worker is seen in **Ex15**. Recall that Moses led the Jews in the *Song by the Sea* upon seeing the Egyptians drown. Let us carefully examine Miriam's role. Note the contrasts and improvements on what Moses did

- Miriam added instruments to the singing thus facilitating participation

- Miriam specifically introduced a refrain structure (She would say a phrase and the women would refrain). This also had the effect of facilitating participation.
- Miriam shortened Moses' song thus making it less burdensome to those people who could not fully participate in a longer song.

Thus, we see that Miriam focused on reaching out to individual needs.

In **Nu12** Miriam participates with Aaron for reasons of Modesty. Unlike the American approach, sensitivity is shown to gender barriers. Miriam enlisted Aaron's help so that if conversation was needed, Aaron would speak to Moses and Miriam to Tzipporah.

Rashi learns this from the opening phrase in **Nu12-01**

She spoke – Miriam and Aaron.

We see here a singular predicate *she spoke* accompanying a plural subject *Miriam and Aaron*.

I learned from my teacher, Rabbi Dr. Joseph Baer Soloveitchick, "the Rav", that a singular predicate with a plural subject indicates *instigation and initiation* by the first named member but *participation by all*. Such grammatical subtleties are not always covered in Grammar classes but are very relevant to understanding the biblical text.

## VI: Lessons Learned

We conclude with the lessons learned about slander. No matter how good our intentions, one should never be convinced that something has to be fixed without further investigation. Miriam took for granted that Moses separated from his wife because of his thinking that prophecy requires it (**Nu12-02**). As the Chafetz Chaim the authoritative person on slander explains, she should have been more hesitant and inquired further before planning to reunite Moses and Tzipporah.

# 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