

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 31#17, July 11th, 2019 *Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, BaLaQ*

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Today we examine the Parallelism method. Some scholars believed that Rashi did not fully understand this method. We shall show how Rashi used the most modern form of Parallelism. We will also explain the principle. Please feel free to send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Nu22-12 Biblical Text

[God, in response to Bilam's request to go with the Moabite delegation and curse the Jews]

- A) Don't go with them
- B) Don't curse the nation
- C) For it is blessed.

Rashi

[Rashi here uses the Parallelism method. According to the advanced use of Parallelism, each verse unit (A, B, C) adds to previous]

- A) Don't go to Moab to *blast* the Jews
- B) Don't even sting them (to steer them away)
- C) Don't even bless them!

I: The Parallelism Method

The Rashi **Parallelism method** may be understood at two levels.

Prior to explaining these two levels we have to clarify the difference in nuance between two words connoting *curse* used in this chapter and commented on by Rashi (**Nu22-11a**)

- The Moabites requested that Bilam *insult/sting/burn* (**Aleph-Resh-Hey**) the Jewish people. Their goal was not to destroy the Jews but rather to steer them away from their land. The other phrases in their request (**Nu22-05:06**) suggest that Moab just wanted to nick them, so they are expelled from [his] land.
- Balak on the other hand summarized their request with a stronger word: (**Quph-Beth-Hey**) which means to *curse/blast/destroy*.
- In fact, **Quph-Beth-Hey** means to hollow out (to blast empty) while **Aleph-Resh-Hey** means to burn.

We now explain the two levels of **Parallelism**.

At the simplest level, we can see all three verse components as saying the same thing. Here, at a superficial level we see Parallelism as indicating *repetition*.

- Component A) simply says, *don't go with the Moabites who request you to curse the Jewish people*
- Component B) generally says, *do not curse the Jewish people*
- Component C) says the complement of not cursing: *The Jews are blessed*.

At a deeper level, **Parallelism** means that each verse component – A, B, C – repeats the previous component and also adds some nuance. To understand this, we have to use our (loose and approximate) translations of **Kuph-Beth-Hey** and **Aleph-Resh-Hey** as *curse/blast* and *insult/sting*.

- In A), God tells Bilam not to do as he requested, to *blast the Jews*.

- In component B), God tells Bilam that besides not blasting the Jews (as Bilam himself requested) he should also not even sting/insult them (to steer them away from Moab).
- Component C is very interesting. Superficially, it appears that C) is the *reason* for the previous two components. Don't curse *because they are blessed*. But Rashi comments differently

Besides not cursing the Jews, one should not bless them!

Rashi here uses the well-known idiom in modern Hebrew: *Not from your sting nor from your honey*.

In America we would say *Just leave them alone*.

It is very important to emphasize that without the **Parallelism method**, this Rashi looks peculiar. After all, why couldn't Rashi simply accept that component C) is the reason for A) and B). The answer does not lie with language nor grammar. Rather, **Parallelism** is a separate and distinct method which *requires* an interpretation that builds on previous components and is otherwise similar to them. For this reason, Rashi interprets component C as meaning *don't curse them and don't bless them*.

How Goodly Are your Tents, Israel?

Let us use the famous **Nu24-05**, the verse in our daily prayers, to further illustrate **Parallelism**

Biblical Text	Rashi Interpretation
How good are your Tents, Israel	Personal privacy: Tents (individual homes) each have their own space
Campings, Jacob	Tribal, privacy – each tribe has its own space in the encampment

Here again, Rashi uses the **Parallelism principle**.

Superficially, Rashi could have taken the two verse components as *repeating* each other: *Your tents and campings are good*. But Rashi listened to the nuances of the **Parallelism method**.

- First, Rashi explains that the Jewish homes (tents) are good. Based on the next verse (*like plantings on a stream*) Rashi interprets this *goodness* as referring to *tent privacy*, each tent had its own space. Very often in crowded conditions, privacy is lacking. There were 600,000 adults in the desert campings – it might be expected there was no privacy, no space, but the tents were spaced apart. (Rashi gives a specific example, *the doors of tents were not opposite each other so neighbors could not see what is going on*, but this example is reflective of general privacy concerns)
- Second, Rashi, *because of the Parallelism principle*, must see the second verse component as building on the first verse component. Rashi therefore sees the second component as adding to the first component: *Besides the individual space and privacy of each family, each tribe had its own space in the campings of all 12 tribes*.

To further understand this, we have to go to an obscure Rashi on **Nu02-02a** which relates the camping configurations to the blessings of the Patriarch Jacob in **Gn49**.

To give background to Rashi, we must recall that the brothers fought with each other. It is famous that Shimon and Levi instigated the other brothers to sell Joseph. Certain tribes which had partnerships (for example, Yisachar and Zevulun) are also famous.

The Patriarch Jacob was indeed interested in the unity of the Jewish people. But he was also

interested in a unity that did not lead to fights. Therefore, he encouraged *clans*. The tribes camped in a rectangular formation. Each side of the rectangle had three tribes. Jacob ordered a similar rectangular formation for his burial. Sets of three brothers that got along with each other were assigned to each side while brothers who did not get along with each other were placed on other sides. In this way, the Patriarch Jacob preserved unity without sacrificing peace.

The second half of the *how good* verse deals with this aspect: *How good are your campings* that give each tribe their own space and prevent them from fighting.

We again emphasize: Why did Rashi interpret this verse as referring to *personal homes/tents and tribal campings*? Some might say it is the technical meanings of the words used. While this does contribute, it is not the entire answer. We must emphasize that the **Parallelism Method** itself encourages such interpretations where the verse components build on each other.

We hope you enjoyed this digest. The **Parallelism principle** is a very important principle. By applying what we have illustrated in this digest you can open your eyes and greatly enrich your Torah experience.

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 offerings* 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)

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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

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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