

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 31#21, August 8st, 2019 *Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, VaEthChaNaN*

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Special treat today. Prayer! An entire issue on the 10 methods of prayer. Something for everyone to enjoy. Therefore, please feel free to send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Dt04-23a I requested grace (VaEthChaNaN) from God, at that time, to be responded to:

Rashi text:

- A. *Grace (Chanan)* always denotes *for free*
- B. Even though the Righteous have good deeds they nevertheless request items *for free* (not because of their merit)
- C. This is consistent with the biblical verse Ex33-19, *I [God] will have grace on those whom I have grace*
- D. Additionally, this *grace* is one of the 10 synonyms for prayer as presented in the Sifre

I: Rashi Synonym Method

Comments A) and D) of Rashi form a whole. Rashi both

- Explains that there were 10 synonyms from which to indicate Moses' prayer
- Rashi explains the meaning of *Grace* as it applies to Moses in this particular instance

Rashi here uses the Rashi **Meaning** method. He also uses the **Synonym submethod** of Meaning. This is a powerful method since it explores nuances and richness. A person who properly understands Synonyms is capable of reading the biblical text with nuance and flow.

In presenting this Sifre we should become aware how we can and should learn such a list. The approach I present applies to Rabbis who

give sermons, adults who learn in a group, researchers, and classroom situations.

One last point before we dive in: Too often we here how *modern* scholarship treats the bible more professionally. But this Sifre is a beautiful example of the Talmudic Rabbis using modern methods; this type of paper, an exploration of different terms meaning prayer, is precisely the type of technical professional paper that might appear in a biblical journal. The important point to emphasize is that the Rabbis knew of such professional modern approaches. The modern approach occurs frequently in the Talmudic and Midrashic commentaries.

II: The 10 Prayer Synonyms

Biblical Root	Rough meaning
<i>Tzak</i>	Scream
<i>Shavah</i>	Copious crying
<i>Naak</i>	Choking
<i>Chalah</i>	Sick
<i>Nofel</i>	Depressed
<i>Tefillah</i>	(Self) Judgement
<i>Chinun</i>	Grace – for free
<i>Rinah</i>	Cheerful tunes
<i>Pegiah</i>	Bump into (God)
<i>Atar</i>	Tunnel (Deep prayer)

Rashi in a rare move actually references the Midrashic source, the Sifre. Rashi wanted his readers, you and me!, to look up the ten

synonyms, to explore the nuances, to laugh, cajole and cry, to experience the varied ways we approach God.

What a beautiful exercise suggestion. We now list ten sections. Each one will show how to explore. It will show how to read a Midrash list like this. This is the way Synonyms should be taken.

Along the way we will discuss how best to translate these terms; we will discuss their nuances.

Let us begin.

III: *Tzak*

Tzak means scream. It can also refer to prayer. The Sifre gives a verse where *Tzak* means prayer. You can of course, with a modern search engine, review all verses with *Tzak* and see which ones mean prayer.

But, if we see a dozen verses with *Tzak*, does that help us understand *Tzak*?

I would use a different approach. Where do we see in modern times, in our own life, in the life of public figures, that *Tzak* can mean prayer. We present below a famous rock star that used *Tzak* as prayer and discuss why.

I was privileged to hear the famous Israeli rock star, Yehuda Glanz, play *rak litzok el hashem, we can only scream to God*, the hit song he wrote in reaction to the bombing of Machaney Yehuda. I heard him shortly after he wrote this song. He explained that it was within 100 meters of his studio.

Let us explore this. Everyone remembers the famous *scream* scene of the Kent State National Guard shooting where the national guard opened fire on defenseless peaceful college students several of whom died. Certain incidents naturally result in screaming.

But it is screaming without prayer. Upon seeing the bombing, Yehuda also felt like screaming, but his screaming was directed to God.

We don't think of this as prayer. Shouldn't prayer be like a Psalm. Well, yes if it is a Tefillah prayer. But if a person sees a shocking incident and screams *oh my God, please help us*, that too is prayer. It is characteristically short.

By calling this prayer, the bible uplifts the spirits of these people showing them that they are relating properly to God.

IV: *Shavah*

The Hebrew *Shavah* means supplication. But why? How?

Shavah means *wax* (It occurs in one biblical verse meaning that). If you look at a person copiously crying, say a child, the tears streaming down the face resemble a wax candle. Such a copious crying could easily refer to supplication: It is a prayer where the person praying, copiously cries from their great vicissitudes.

Again, the person is spending most of their time crying not uttering words. The bible by referring to this wax-like crying as prayer is encouraging the person, it redeems the person to a spiritual level where the crying is seen as a spiritual act.

It is useful to think of incidents in one's own life where a person was copiously crying. This reflection allows the person to view their experience in terms of prayer.

V: *Naak*

Naak is an onomatopoeia and is best translated as choking. It can refer to a shocking situation where a person is gasping and for example saying *God... please ... help me*. It is a useful exercise to think back to illnesses or bad

experiences in one's own life or the life of relatives where one had such a reaction.

Again: By calling such choking/gasping prayer the bible elevates the person's experiences to a spiritual level; it too is a form of prayer.

VI: *Chalah, Nofel*

Chalah means sickness. *Nofel* means falling which can happen from a lowered blood pressure. It can easily therefore refer to depression.

Certain incidents are so shocking that the listener experiences symptoms of sickness or depression.

Here we can look at biblical examples. **Ex32-11** describes a shocking incident that could easily lead to depression. Moses was at the pinnacle of his career. He had successfully taken the Jews out of Egypt; he crossed the Reed Sea; and now, the climax, he was receiving the Torah.

Shockingly, God tells him, *You must go down (No longer stay here); your nation failed; they are back to worshipping idols.*

How must have Moses felt? Have you had incidents like this in your life or do you know friends or relatives with such letdowns? The Bible describes Moses' prayer as a *Vayechal* prayer from sick-like depressive symptoms. He wasn't crying or choking, but the letdown caused illness. When we turn to God during these periods, it is a form of prayer.

Similarly, in **Nu16-01:04**, after God sealed the doom of the desert Jews, Korach decided to rebel and *Moses heard and fell on his face*. Here we have no prayer. Very often in such cases we can't pray. In a similar incident in **Dt09-25** (regarding the golden calf where we saw earlier that the word *sicken* refers to prayer) we also find *fall* indicating depression from losing one's entire life. Here the falling was accompanied by words, words of prayer.

We too often identify prayer with long elaborate prayer. That certainly *can* be prayer. But the short prayer of depressed, choking, screaming, and crying people, are also prayer.

It is important to think back in one's life on the times when one, or one's loved ones, had such experiences. Were a few words uttered referring to *God please help me?* Then these are prayers. They are no different than the prayers of King David. Not all prayer is supposed to be accompanied by choirs and elaborate poetry.

Interestingly, the Talmud in Beracoth does not learn about prayer from King David; they learn about prayer from the drunken like anguish of an abused childless woman, Channah (Talmud Beracoth 31b commenting on 1 Samuel 1). The Talmud does not describe her as writing elaborate poetry. The Bible describes her as looking drunk. The Talmud guesses the words of anguish she uttered: *God why did you give me breasts if I can't nurse a child*. Such emotional explosions have the full status of prayer. The Talmud apparently thought it more important to learn about prayer from her than King David.

We must internalize these ideas into our own lives. Our anguish, screams, chokings, emotional tirades, as long as they mention God, are true prayer.

VII: *Tefillah*

Tefillah is the main word for prayer. It denotes polished prayer. It denotes *self-judgement*. An example is found in **Ex32-11**. Moses reflects on the fact that Jews have worshipped idols and deserve to die (Self-judgement) And so he pleabargains. *Forgive them for the sake of the oath to the Patriarchs*. He asks for extenuating circumstances during sentencing.

Many of Moses' prayers are *plea bargains*. They are *sentencing arguments* after conviction. They reflect extenuating circumstances. A good example is the one given by Moses: How would

the punishment of the Jewish people affect the Patriarchs who were promised something.

VIII: *Chinun*

We already explained above that *chinun* means *grace*, something for *free*. The example in **Dt04-23** is a good one. Moses had successfully completed his career; he had sinned and was deprived of entry to Israel. He has *no* basis for extenuating circumstances. His life is a good one even if he doesn't go into Israel. The most he can do is ask God to grant him a favor for free.

This too is prayer. Very often, we feel embarrassed to pray for something unless we in some sense deserve it. A prayer for free is also a prayer.

IX: *Pegiah, Rinnah, Atar*

The last three synonyms referring to prayer refer to certain types of situations. Rather than exhaustively exploring the meaning of these words we indicate what we think they mean and how that relates to prayer.

- *Pegiah* refers to *bumping into* someone. When it refers to prayer it refers to *bumping into God*. What does that mean? It means while praying about the things of most concern to you, you remember something you need from God. Thus, *pegiah* refers to a need that is not so essential.
- *Rinah* refers (in most verses where it occurs) as a cheerful-tune type attitude. It refers to the emotions of a person who is not suddenly joyous, and not ordinary, but in a cheerful state. It can refer to simple thank yous we give God, not on being saved, but on simply having our daily routine preserved by God – career, family, life-cycle events. This too is prayer.
- *Atar* refers to digging a tunnel. In the secular literature it can refer to *making a deal with God* when one is desperate. It refers to a

twisted type of thinking reflecting desperation.

An example is given above with Channah: She argues that since she has breasts God must have intended for her to have children. Too often we make fun of people making deals with God, calling them desperate. But this too is an approach to God recognized by the Bible. No term denoting prayer is disparaging. All approaches to God are legitimate.

X: *Conclusion*

The main takeaway from this digest is to review your own life: Have you had instances where you were choking, depressed, crying, feeling totally underserving or where you made intricate arguments before God. All these are prayer; they don't have to be elaborate.

Similarly, your daily cheerful routine, the daily rememberings of things to ask God, these too are prayers.

Please look back on your own lives, the lives of your friends, and loved ones: Reexamine times you have felt like this and take pride in that your reactions were spiritual events.

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

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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

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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)

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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

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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.

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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

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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