CHAPTER AD: SKILLFUL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

VaYiQRaH – Lv01-02b When a mensch brings an offering
Lv02-01a When a life bring a rest offering

AD.1 – Introduction. We continue the technique of skillful English translations begun last week. Here is the overview, repeated from last week. In my paper, *Peshat and Derash,* (Tradition 1980), I introduced the idea of *skillful English translation* as a means of showing that Rashi was presenting *Peshat,* the simple straightforward meaning of the text, in contrast to engaging in homily and fanciful readings of the text. This chapter will explore what a *skillful English translation* does and show how it to be an important tool in establishing the natural meaning of the text, the *Peshat.* We present examples from this week's parshah. We also show how the technique of *skillful English translations* integrates with other Rashi rules.

AD.2 – The Database Inquiry: This Parshah, Vayiqrah, in Chapters 1-6, presents various type of Temple offerings: Elevation offerings, Peace offerings, Sin offerings, Guilt offerings, Rest offerings. Each chapter begins with a statement of the form *When so and so brings an offering.* The list below shows the various instances of *so and so* used throughout. They are quite varied. The idea of comparing different biblical passages for some attribute is called a database query.

Verse	Offering	Introduction
Lv01-02	Elevation	When an *Adam (Human, mensch)*
Lv02-01	Rest offering	When a *nefesh (soul, life)*
Lv04-02	Sin offering	When a *nefesh* (*soul, life) ....if the high priest*
Lv04-13	Sin offering	If the *entire nation* sins
Lv04-22	Sin offering	If a *king sins*
Lv04-27	Sin offering	If one *nefesh (soul, life)*
Lv05-01	Up/Down offering	If a *nefesh (soul, life)*
Lv05-14	Guilt offering	When a *nefesh (soul, life)*
Lv05-17	Doubt guilt offering	When a *nefesh (soul, life)*
Lv05-21	Guilt offering	When a *nefesh (soul life)*
Remaining paragraphs		If *(s)he*

AD.3 – **The Database Differences:** The reader will immediately notice the wide variety in the above list. The position of Rashiyomi is that the Rashi comments are not milking nuances of each word per se, but rather Rashi is commenting on the blatant differences. The typical word in the Bible for *person* is *person*: e.g. If a *person* …If *he.* But, instead of using this normal language we have all types of words: *Adam, nefesh* which roughly could be translated as shown above. Thus, Rashi is commenting on the *different introductions* and it is this *comparative difference* which justifies examining nuance since the Author indicates a deliberate intention to vary introductory words.

AD.4 – The Zohar as a Grammatical Commentary: The Zohar is the basic book of Jewish Mysticism. Most people, scholars and religious people, think of it as speaking about emanations of God. However, many people, scholars and religious people, are surprised when they find out that the Zohar also has many keen grammatical and linguistic insights.

> We have learnt: Man, in the Scripture has four names- *adam, geber, enosh, ish*-and the highest of them is adam. (Zohar, Vayiqrah, 48a)

This of course is the **Rashi Synonym** method a submethod of the **Meaning** method. To implement it in English we must use the method of *skillful English translations.* The following are terms that could be used to indicate a person in English

> Human, mensch, person, life, soul

The word *mensch* is not technically an English word; it is Hebrew-Yiddish word connoting a very fine person.

The task before us is how to best translated *adam* and *nefesh.* Note the following two approaches

> **Approach 1**: We use the closest translation based on grammar. For example, we would reject translating *nefesh* as *life* since in Hebrew *life* means *chai* while *nefesh* means soul. That is, if the criteria for interpretation is grammatical consistency then we would lean to not translating *nefesh* as *life.* Similarly, since the word *mensch* clearly comes from the word *men* which in Hebrew is *ish*, we would, if we use grammatical consistency, reject the translation *adam* as meaning *mensh.*

> **Approach 2**: But our goal is not grammar! It is rather *skillful English translation.* And what is *skillful English translation*? *Skillful English translation* consists of identifying words in English that capture the nuances of the Hebrew words used.

So which approach will we use: translation based on grammar or translation based on nuance? The whole idea of *skillful English translation* is to focus on *nuance* rather than *grammar.*

AD.5 - Adam as meaning *mensch*: To show how this translation captures nuances of the verse as heard by the Biblical reader we cite the commentaries of Rashi, and the follow-up of the Zohar cited above. Notice how the comments flow once we have a *skillful English translation.*

> Rashi: When a *mensch* [fine person] brings an offering. This implies that the bringing must be done as the bringing of fine person which invalidates an offering of stolen property (Because *mensch* would never sin)

> [Zohar, Vayiqrah, 48a] We have learnt: Man, in the Scripture has four names- adam, geber, enosh, ish-and the highest of them is adam.

> [Objection #1] Said R. Judah: But is it not written,

> When a man (adam) shall bring from you an offering (Lev. I. 2),

> and who is it that requires to bring an offering? Is it not a sinner? [So why call him, *mensch*]

[Response #1] R. Isaac replied: The offering is the mainstay of the world, of upper and lower beings, the solace of the Almighty, and who is fitting to offer it? Surely this man who is called Adam [for he is a fine mensch and worthy of bringing an offering].

[Objection #2] Said R. Judah: If so, what of the verse,

> When a man (adam) has on the skin of his flesh... and it becomes in the skin

of his flesh the plague of leprosy? [If he has leprosy, how can we call him a *mensch*]

[Response #2] He replied: This one, [the Adam, the mensch who has the leprosy, this person] God desires to heal more than all others [because he is a fine person, a mensch and God wants him restored], and therefore it is written concerning him, he shall be brought unto the priest; it is the duty of anyone who sees him to bring him to the priest, in order that the holy image may not remain thus (stained with leprosy).

[Objection #3] Said R. Judah: But it is written,

> Now Moses the man (ish); why is he not called adam?

[Response #3] He replied: Because he was the servant of the king, and therefore he is called ish in relation to the supernal Adam. [In other words, it is disrespectful to call Moses *a mensch* when in the context of God who is the true *Mensch.*]

[Objection #4a] But, he said, why then is it written,

> The Lord is a man (ish) of war?

[Response #4a] He replied: The secret of the Lord is to them that fear him. [I can't tell you unless you fear God]

[Objection #4b] Said R. Judah: I too am one of them (who fears God), yet I have not been privileged to hear this.

[Response #4b] Said the other: Go to R. Abba, for I learnt it from him only on condition that I should not tell. So, he went to R. Abba, and found him discoursing and saying: When is there said to be completeness above? When the Holy One, blessed be He, sits on his throne. For so it is written: And upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man (adam) upon it above (Ezek. 1, 26); the term adam, *mensch,* indicates wholeness and completeness.

[Objection #4c] Said R. Judah: God be blessed that I have found you discoursing thus. Tell me, is it not written,

> The Lord is a man (ish) of war?

[Response #4c] Said R. Abba: Your question is a good one, and the answer is this. At the Red Sea there was not yet full consummation, and therefore God was called *ish*; but in the vision of Ezekiel there was full consummation, and therefore God was called adam. [In other words, at the Reed Sea when God had to destroy the Egyptians to save the Jews, His

Kingship was not yet full and complete and therefore he could not be called a *mensch* (after all he was killing the Egyptians]; but when Ezekiel saw God sitting on a throne, God was in fullness and completeness and therefore Ezekiel called him *mensch.*

[Objection #5] The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver (Ps. CXIX, 72), exclaimed R. Judah. But he continued, it is also written,

> O Lord, you preserve man (adam) and beast (Ps. XXXVI, 7).

Should not the term ish be used here?

[Response #5] He said: This is analogous to the expression: From the cedar which is in Lebanon to the hyssop that springe out of the wall (I Kings v, I3); it is the way of the Scripture in such cases to mention the two extremes (beast-man and mensch) [[Note the unusual feature that the Zohar is using literary pattern analysis several 100 years before it was officially discovered]]

[Objection #6] But, he went on, is it not written:

> And there was no man (adam) (mensch) to till the ground (Gen. II, 5)?

[If discussing menial labor like agriculture the word *ish person* should be used, not *adam, mensch]*

[Response #6] He answered: Everything in the world was only made for the sake of man, and all things were kept back until he that was called Adam, the *mensch,* should appear, since his form was after the divine prototype, and when he was created all was complete.

AD.6 – Nefesh as Life: Here is the Rashi on the verse *When a nefesh offers a rest offering*

Rashi: If you go back to the list in section AD.2, you will see that in all voluntary offerings [sin and guilt offerings *must* be brought, they are obligatory] the rest-offering (minchah) consisting not of an expensive animal but of flour, oil, and incense, is the only offering where the word *nefesh* is brought. Why? Who would bring such a cheap offering? Undoubtedly, someone who couldn't afford more, a poor person. By calling him *nefesh* the Torah indicates that it perceives the offering as if he offered himself as an offering.

Based on this Rashi and on the method of *skillful English translations,* we think the best translation is *life.* To illustrate the nuances of *life* versus *person* consider the following two sentences:

A) The village has 2000 people
B) The village has 2000 lives

Clearly *lives* in version B) connotes people on bear existence, they are just alive. Based on this we would translate, Lv02-01 as follows:

When a *life* brings a rest offering to God, his offering shall be of fine flour…

Here, *life* indicates that, he is just barely subsisting (and nevertheless he offers to God).