

## CHAPTER AM: PARALLELISM AND DERASH IN RASHI

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**ISRAEL – DISAPORA:** *Since for the next few weeks the weekly Torah portion in Israel and US (diaspora) are different, issues will cite Rashis from each parshah and the web site will have double listings.*

**AM.1 – Overview:** In previous issues we have laid down important points about the meaning of *peshat* and *derash*. In this issue, we look at two illustrative examples. The first example treats *Peshat* in parallelism. We present an important interpretive tool for parallel passages, that is, passages which are basically the same but differ in certain words; this tool allows us to see these passages as *peshat*. Note, we disagree with all Rashi scholars who claim that Rashi did not extensively use parallelism and that such use of parallelism when cited from Midrashic sources is *derash* not *peshat*. This example is therefore crucial and paves the way for a critical review of the opinions of Rashi scholars on Parallelism, a review which will take us about 10 issues to cover.

In the second example Rashi chose between three competing interpretations. He even says *our sages derash-ed this to mean*. It would appear that Rashi is not giving the *peshat*. We will show how to interpret this important passage. This second example is very important since all four major Rashi interpretive pillars – *grammar, parallelism, symbolism, and meaning* – are presented in this example. Thus this example affords us a unique opportunity to capture the flavor of each Rashi interpretive method.

**AM.2 - Biblical Text:** Nu18-08:10 discusses the rights of the priests to various offering items or items taxed as gifts to the Priesthood. The Table below summarizes the verses

Table AM.2A: Parallel study of Nu18-09:11 by grammatical function (what, who, where)

Verse	What: (Grammatical object)	To Whom (indirect object)	Where (indirect object)	By Whom (Grammatical subject: Who is eating)
Nu18-09:10	Items from altar fire such as sin-offerings etc.	These items belong to you your sons	Eat it in the Holy of Holies (part of the Temple)	All males may eat it
Nu18-11	Items that are waived (like the peace-offerings)	These items belong to you, your Sons, and <i>your daughters with you</i>		All ritually pure in your household
Parallelistic contrasts		Note that Nu18-11 explicitly mentions daughters while the previous row does not	Note that Nu18-11 does not restrict consumption to any place	Gender requirement for Nu18-09:10, Only a purity requirement for Nu18-11

**AM.3 – Rashi Text:** The laws are as follows: “altar fire gifts” are only available to males and must be consumed in the Temple itself (since they must be consumed in the Temple itself it goes without saying that they must be eaten in purity since impure people may not be in the Temple.) The “waiving” gifts are available to male and female, may be consumed anywhere, but require a state of ritual purity.

Rashi’s actual language is as follows:

All pure people: And not impure people. Another matter: To include his wife

It appears that Rashi may be learning this from the word “all” (all pure vs. pure). Still another derivation is the idea (found elsewhere in exegetical literature) that *house* refers to one’s wife.

However, a glance at the AM.2 Table shows that Rashi inferred that a wife may eat this from two parallelisms:

From the contrast of *you, your sons* vs. *you, your sons, your daughters*

From the contrast *all males may eat it* vs. *all pure in your house*

In other words, it is the parallelism from which Rashi infers this. But if Rashi derived this from the parallelism, why does Rashi bring this comment on the biblical phrase *all pure people*: Because in the AM.2 Table, *all pure* is beneath (parallel to) *all males*. Thus we infer two things from *all pure*:

Inference from meaning: From the *meaning of the word* we infer that only those in ritual purity may eat it, not those who are ritually impure

Inference from Parallelism: From the *parallelistic contrast of pure and male* we infer that **females may consume the waivings also.**

**AM.4 – Lessons Learned:** From the analysis just given, several points emerge.

First, it is not sufficient to look at the “beginning words” of the Rashi. The actual Rashi inference may or may not come from these words (Though they are certainly connected to them). To understand the Rashi we must apply principles. In this case the parallelism principle clearly shows two strong supportive proofs that wives may eat the waivings.

Second, notice how we analyzed the parallel differences using categories of grammatical function such as what (the *object* is being spoken about), place (where) (the *indirect object*), and who may eat them (the *subject*). These keywords – what, where, who – are placed as headers to the columns. By restricting our analysis of parallel differences to grammatical categories (what, where, who, how, etc.) we obtain a very clean analysis.

At this point it might be appropriate to mention, that Kugel, who, in his book, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, re-introduced parallelism as a primary tool of biblical interpretation, did not grasp the principle that the interpretation of parallel differences evolves from grammatical-category considerations. Not being aware of this, he advocated an approach called omnisignificance:

In a parallelistic contrastive passage, each difference has impregnated with meaning. This extraction of meaning from each difference, reflects the belief that the book in question is divine with a divine Author.

We totally disagree with this: First, not any difference, but only differences consistent with grammatical function justify inference. Second, the divine Authorship of the Bible is really irrelevant. Even though the Author is Divine, He is still writing for a human audience and a well-known Talmudic approach is that the Bible uses human phraseology. So, Divine authorship *by itself* does not justify making inferences on minutiae. Third, even if we were to grant that omnisignificance is the proper way to read the Bible, as stated, it is an incomplete principle. How do we know how to implement it? How do we know how to go from a minute difference to an exegetical interpretation? Omnisignificance theory does not provide this detail! If we don't have a method of interpretation, we cannot proceed. By contrast, if we study differences using grammatical function then the grammatical function *by itself* dictates interpretation. If one passage says *you, your sons, your daughters*, while the other says *you, your sons*, and, if we agree to use grammatical categories – who is the subject? who is allowed to eat? – then we conclude that the parallelism is telling us that for one gift males may eat one but not females, while the other gift may be consumed by all. The biblical narrative is not only telling us this, but evoking it spontaneously and instantly. That is, as soon as a native speaker hears the difference *you, your sons*, vs. *you, your sons, your daughters* they immediately react, *Oh; So the first gift may not be consumed by women*.

Historically, Kugel came out with his book in 1980. Although it was a pioneering work, it lacked operational details. Berlin, 5 years later, came out with another (also brilliant) work on parallelism. Berlin shows that there are many modalities of parallelism, grammatical syntax being one. Thus Berlin's work complements Kugel's work. In fact, both Kugel and Berlin could have benefited from the grammatical approach of the Malbim. Malbim in turn based himself on the grammatical approach hinted at in the *Sifrah* and *Sifrey* by such sages as Rabbi Hiyyah. Suffice it to say, that Kugel's work was a pioneering beginning, placing parallelism back as a fundamental biblical technique while Berlin who could have further supported her thesis by relying on medieval and more ancient texts, supplemented this parallelism approach with a grammatical overlay.

Before continuing with lessons learned, we point out that other scholars have also fallen into this ignorance-of-method error. For example, Halivni in his book on Peshat and Derash only uses a handful of examples to show that that Talmudic sages were not interested in *peshat*, and therefore concludes that *peshat* is a modern concern, while the Talmudists saw the text as of Divine Authorship thereby justifying extracting inferences from minutiae. It turns out, that Halivni uses the biblical prohibition of placing a stumbling block before the blind. Had he used the simple grammatical-parallelism approach exhibited in the AM.2 Table he would have immediately seen that not only Rashi but all Talmudic inferences on these passages are *peshat*. We will in fact devote a chapter to this example.

Thirdly, we infer from this whole analysis, that parallelism, in and of itself, is a major pillar of biblical exegesis. Traditionally, Rashi is perceived as only dealing with meaning and grammar. Grossman even finds an explicit Rashi text (Isiah 26:11) identifying these two pillars. However,

this Rashi text does not imply there are no others. We in fact advocate four major interpretive pillars, *grammar, parallelism, symbolism, and meaning* including figures of speech. We will elaborate on this as we develop our ideas.

However, at this point, we acknowledge that every major Rashi scholar has denied that Rashi used parallelism, let alone that it is major pillar of his exegesis. This is simply not true. We will devote about 10 issues to critically examining the works of recent Rashi books and Doctoral theses, works of Gelles, Kamin, Kugel, and Grossman, to show that Rashi knew all about parallelism, and heavily used it. Furthermore, Rashi in fact used parallelism in the modern sense of Kugel and Berlin emphasizing climax and grammatical functional analysis.

**AM.5 – Peshat and Derash:** The Biblical Text, Nu15-03:09 states as follows

When you offer an (animal) offering....

There should be an accompanying rest offering: of one tenth (a measure) of flour  
Mingled with  $\frac{1}{4}$  hin of oil  
Accompanied by  $\frac{1}{4}$  hin of libation wine, for the lamb

Or, for the ram,

There should be an accompanying offering: two tenths of flour  
Mingled with  $\frac{1}{3}$  hin of oil  
Accompanied by  $\frac{1}{3}$  hin of libation wine

When you make cattle (for an offering)

There should be an accompanying rest offering  
three tenths of flour  
Mingled with  $\frac{1}{2}$  hin oil  
Accompanied by  $\frac{1}{2}$  hin of libation wine.

**AM.6 – The Three Interpretations:** On the above biblical, passage, particularly on the passage, or for the ram, we find three interpretations.

Interpretation #1 (Sifrah): It refers to the Ram offered on the Day of atonement

Interpretation #2 (Sifrah): It emphasizes that although rams and lambs differ in quantities (one has 1 “tenth” of flour while the ram has double, 2 tenths), calves and oxen do not; they both have 3 “tenths” (Without the verse I might by analogy have for example, assigned 3 for calves and 4 for adult cattle, or, 2 for calves and 3 for adult cattle.)

Interpretation #3(Rashi, Talmud Bavli, Chulin): *or for the ram* means *if you offer a ram*. And our sages interpreted (*derash*) it as meaning the lamb teenagers (between the ages of lamb and ram) are treated as adult rams (They get 2 tenths).

Notice how Rashi identifies this interpretation as *derash*.

**AM.7 – Geographic Historical vs. Analytic Historical:** We revu the two possible schools of approach to multiple interpretations.

The geographic-historical approach looks on interpretation as somewhat arbitrary. It does not have to follow logical rules (of grammar, meaning, parallelism, and symbolism). Instead it may follow approaches of a particular school of thought, of a particular period, or of a particular geographic location. Furthermore, there is no point in trying to harmonize these opinions as they reflect an intrinsically pluralistic approach.

Contrastively, the analytic-historical approach views Rashi as living at the dawn of grammar. Aaron ben Asher, author of the Aleppo codex, advocated studying grammar as a separate subject. In the next two centuries the “root” was developed with a beautiful scholarship developing and discussing the question of whether biblical roots were 3-letter (triliteral) or 2-letter (biliteral). Rashi lived at the end of this period. He was the first biblical commenter to have these grammatical tools which in fact were further developed by Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Radaq.

Consequently Rashi using the newly formed science of grammar, coupled with the emergence of biblical dictionaries, and his own profound knowledge of symbolism and figures of speech breathed new blood not only into biblical interpretation but into the concept of *peshat*, the spontaneous meaning of the text. Using this analytic-historical approach it is preferable to see all interpretations as reflecting grammatical, parallelistic, symbolic, or figure-of-speech nuances in the verse. The plurality does not involve contradiction but involves complementation, with different scholars emphasizing different nuances.

We now apply the analytic-historical approach to the passage in question and the 3 interpretations presented.

**AM.8 – Parallel Structure:** Malbim already points out the violation of parallel form in the biblical text presented in Section AM.5. Malbim citing numerous examples (which apply in the writing of any language including English) points out that one of the following forms should have been used

If you offer a lamb, then the rest offering...

If you offer a ram, then the rest offering...

If you offer cattle, then the rest offering.

In this form, each case is introduced by the same phrase facilitating understanding by the reader that there are in fact three cases. The same parallel argument of facilitation applies, as the Malbim points out, when the cases are cited at the end of each paragraph

Rest offerings of one tenth... for the lamb

Rest offerings of two tenths...for the ram

Rest offerings of three tenths for cattle.

Instead, as can be seen in Section AM.5, the following form is used:

Rest offerings of one tenth for the lamb

Or for the ram, offering...

If you offer cattle

There is no parallel structure! This requirement of parallel structure, as just mentioned, is true in all languages and in fact required for ease of reading; it is not just a convention but rather a requirement driven by reader need. Amusingly, if you had submitted the above biblical narrative in a College English composition class, you would have been graded down for violating proper style!

Malbim then explains that the reversal of placing *or for a ram* up front, is for emphasis. It emphasizes that even though lambs and rams have different rest offerings (one tenth vs. two tenths flour), calves and oxen have the same rest offering. Without the emphasis I might have generalized the lamb-ram situation and interpreted the three tenths for oxen as applying to calves with four tenths applying to oxen (or interpreted the three tenths mentioned in the biblical text to adult cattle and assigning two tenths to calves).

AM.9 - Grammar and Figures of Speech: Quite beautifully, most people and in fact most translations totally ignore the use of the definite article in the Biblical text.

A) For *the* lamb. Or for *the* ram

B) For *a* lamb. Or for *a* ram

The biblical text uses version A not B. But grammatically, they are giving a general rule and therefore should use version B.

Malbim in fact points this out. He explains, that use of *the* indicates unspecified emphasis. It therefore refers to a known offering. But which one?

In this case we need a partnership of the *peshat* with the *derash process*. The *pehsat* is hinting that this general rule applies to all known (*the*) lamb and ram offerings. However, it doesn't tell us which ones. In other words, the spontaneous reaction of a native speaker is that *the* is hinting at something without telling me what.

To find out what we look over Num15 which in earlier verses speaks about *voluntary offerings*, *vow-driven offerings*, or *holiday offerings*. So it is a simple matter of looking up the list of offerings to find ones which are neither voluntary, nor driven by vows, nor part of the festival celebration. In fact, if you review this list you find

A mother with a newborn child brings a lamb offering

The High Priest on the Day of Atonement offers a ram offering.

To recap, these offerings are neither voluntary, obligatory, nor a festival celebration.

Consequently the word *the* points to these offerings.

Let us summarize how the interpretation of this verse proceeds. The *peshat* of the verse, the instant spontaneous reaction to it, is an unspecified emphasis brought on by the rules of

grammar; the interpretation does not end with this unspecified emphasis; the *derash process* identifies the specification of the emphasis.

There is still an open issue: If we interpret the verse as referring to the birth and Atonement day offering (that they too must have rest offerings of flour, oil, and wine) then it seems that the verse is only speaking about it for the verse says *or for the ram* ...How can we read two interpretations into the verse

If you offer *a* ram you must bring rest offerings  
If you offer *the* ram you must bring rest-offerings.

This is a good question. It is however, *peshat*. It turns out that double meanings are exactly the way puns operate. Many (even secular)scholars consider puns as a *peshat* mechanism used by authors. We will have ample occasion to discuss the *peshat* of several sentences that have blatant double meanings on several occasions. In those chapters I give the simple secular example of a man dating a woman Rose, who on a dinner date says, “Pass me the Roisens” Here the man creates a pun “Raisins” calling them “Rosens”. All listeners would spontaneously and instantly agree that a double meaning has been given: He wants the raisins passed; but he wants Rose to pass herself also. Thus double meaning can be *pehsat*.

**AM.10 - Meaning** We have left to deal with the third interpretation, the interpretation of Rashi citing the Talmud and dealing with the word *or*. It turns out that in biblical Hebrew, but not in say English or modern Hebrew, there are two words for *or*. If you want to indicate an ordinary or (*A or B* means *either A or B or both*) you use a prefix *vav* prior to the word. This prefix *vav* can mean both *and* and *or*. However, if you want to indicate exclusive or (*A xor B* means *either A alone or B alone but not both*) you use the word *oh* (*Aleph vav*). Here *xor* refers to exclusive or, either A alone or B alone.

The emotional reaction to this distinction may be surprise since modern Hebrew does not reflect this. Interestingly, the computer scientists have emphasized the two different forms of *or*, introduced the term *xor*, and have further clarified its meaning using the concepts of truth tables and Venn diagrams. Here (and throughout Rashiyomi) we are not using an anachronism in explaining the Malbim (who introduced this idea here) or Rashi using a modern computer science concept. Rather we are saying that Rashi used the distinction between *A or B or both* vs. *either A alone or B alone* for which we find an excellent clarification in modern day computer science. This is not an anachronism, but rather an analogy, the borrowing of a modern concept to illuminate a concept used by Rashi.

Here is another example of the use of Xor in a Rashi comment:

Biblical Text (Lv13-49): The leprous garment is either pure-red XOR pure-green  
Sifray: From the word XOR we infer that a garment that has mixed red-green stain is not leprous (the stain has to be either pure red or pure green but not mixed).

Returning to our text we again see a partnership of *peshat* and *derash process*. As indicated in former chapters while previous Rashi theses, such as those of Gelles and Kamin, acknowledged

such a partnership, the details of *how* the partnership takes place were never made explicit and is in fact a contribution of Rashiyomi.

Peshat(Spontaneous reaction of native speaker)...for the lamb. XOR for a ram....So there are only two categories. Either you are a lamb or a ram (but not both) Depending on which category you are, you bring the rest offering of that category.

Derash process: But lambs and rams are already mutually exclusive. What does the XOR contribute. The Talmud explains that it negates the creation of a borderline case, the teenage lamb who is neither lamb nor ram. The Bible is indicating that once you leave the lamb stage you immediately become a ram (and bring the rest offering of a ram)

**AM.11 – Summary:** This deceptively innocent Rashi actually is quite a gem, illustrating all four exegetical pillars of interpretation. To recap

The Grammar pillar – Use of *the* implies something known and creates an unspecified emphasis. This unspecified emphasis is further clarified by the *derash process*.

The Parallelism Pillar – Lack of parallelism in the three cases creates emphasis preventing an improper generalization

Symbolism (Figures of speech) – Use of *the* where *a* should be used creates a spontaneous reaction of a double meaning which is further clarified by the derash process

Meaning – *Aleph-vav* means XOR not OR.

Thus we encourage serious students of Rashi at whatever stage of learning they are, to fully study this example as it captures the main approach of Rashiyomi, the four exegetical pillars, *grammar*, *parallelism*, *symbolism*, and *meaning*.