CHAPTER AP: THE ANATOMY OF A RASHI COMMENT

PiNChaS

AP.1 – Overview: The last few weeks we have reviewed various aspects of *peshat* and *derash.* During this analysis we have identified various components of the Rashi statement, which we can think of as the *anatomy* of the Rashi comment. This issue summarizes with examples the various anatomical pieces of a Rashi.

The Table below summarizes the major parts of the Rashi anatomy. As can be seen there are up to 10 parts to each Rashi: The 1) *beginning words,* the biblical text on which Rashi comments, which however may involve other verses; the 2) four pillars of exegesis, *grammar, parallelism, symbolism*, and *meaning* including figures of speech, the 3) *peshat,* the spontaneous response of a native speaker expert in the field of the verse to the verse statement, 4) the *form* in which Rashi communicates the *peshat* which might include plays on words and gematrias; furthermore, the true Rashi explanation may be given in another Rashi comment but omitted here; 5) the *derash-process* which may be needed to demonstrate how native speakers reacted to certain words and phrases, the 6) stage 2 of a Rashi comment pointing to a unspecified emphasis, which clarifies how the unspecified emphasis should be implemented, 7) a *derash-outcome,* which Rashi paradoxically sometimes calls *peshat,* meaning, the interpretation of the simple person (*pashut*), or alternatively the simplistic (*pashut*) meaning of a text, 8) *derash-fill-ins* referring to possible ways a Rashi comment could have happened without our knowing definitively, 9) moral exhortation, referring to moral lessons and admonitions from the text and Rashi comment which are concluded from them (but are neither part of the text nor the Rashi comments), and 10) historical backgrounds which are neither part of the text nor Rashi comment but shedding light on a verse either through other languages, historical information, or other information.

This perspective requires that we see all Rashi comments in layers of interpretation. This doesn't require perceiving different layers as written at different times but rather, that each interpretive layer must be interpreted differently. Alternatively, we can color code components of Rashi comments depending on which of the ten categories are used. It is important to emphasize that sometimes Rashi *omits* one of these categories; Rashi may even omit the *peshat's* true derivation and engage in a mnemonic. Thus one cannot really read a Rashi comment till one understands the methods used to arrive at these comments.

To be clear, Rashi may bring several interpretations which *speculate* on how the event the verse and Rashi comment communicate about happened. These speculations are precisely that; they are not controversies but complementary opinions on what *could have led* to this. Furthermore, Rashi may bring a *peshat,* a *simplistic* reading of the verse, and a *derash,* the spontaneous meaning to a native speaker who is not simple. By doing so Rashi intends the *derash* be understood as the true verse meaning and the *peshat,* the simplistic meaning is to be rejected.

We have given examples of all of these in previous issues and will bring many examples today each one illustrating one or several aspects of the Rashi anatomy.

Anatomy component	Brief description	Comment or brief example
Divrey mathchil (beginning words)	The biblical text on which Rashi is commenting	This is tricky. 1) Rashi may in fact comment on the phrase he cites; 2) He may however comment on only one aspect of that phrase 3) Or, he may comment on the relation of other verses to this verse 4) Rashi may be solving 1 problem; he also could be solving 2 or more problems It is therefore important that the *divrey mathchil* be appropriately modified
4 Exegetical Pillars	Grammar, Parallelism, Symbolism, Meaning	*Grammar* includes conjugational grammar as well as paragraph grammar and the grammar of stylistic features. *Parallelism* includes consecutive phrase parallelism, distant phrase parallelism, and parallel paragraph structure. *Symbolism* can include individual symbols and symbolic narratives; the typical symbolic approach is through the parable. Meaning includes dictionary meaning and all figures of speech. The Rashiyomi position is that previous scholars have only used 1-2 of these pillars; had they used all four, all Rashi comments would be seen as having a *peshat* component. All *peshat* must be based on these four pillars.
Peshat	The spontaneous and instant reaction of a native speaker expert in the subject area of a verse to a verse statement	A key innovation of Rashiyomi is the emphasis on instantaneity. The biblical text should *immediately* evoke the Rashi comment. Instantaneity is a metric that enables us to test and assess whether a given interpretation is *peshat*.
Rashi form	The form in which Rashi explains the Peshat	1) This may involve puns, gematrias, and word plays. A familiar English example is *the principal is your pal*. No one seriously believes that the meaning of principal comes from its spelling; rather the rule is perceived mnemonically as something cute and punchy by which to remember the rule 2) Very often the true Rashi reason for a textual problem will be found in another Rashi but omitted on the current verse.
Derash outcome	Derash in its primary meaning refers to *process*	Very often a Rashi *peshat* will not appear spontaneous and immediate. The research –derash process may be needed to prove that people regarded the statement that way. As a simple example hearing a husband say "I love you" and giving a bouquet of 8 roses to his wife, does not immediately suggest a wedding anniversary gift unless we know the couple. Research may be necessary to show that the couple was married exactly 8 years ago; this justifies the assertion of spontaneity by those who knew them
A Stage 2 Rashi comment	Rashi may point to an unspecified emphasis. This is the *peshat*. Rashi may fill in and show how Jewish law interprets this unspecified emphasis. This stage 2 is not part of the *peshat*	
Derash-outcome / Peshat	Rashi can use *peshat* to refer to the outcome of an incorrect research process (usually through omission of context)	It is important to emphasize that Rashi is using *peshat* here in the sense of a *simplistic* (*pashut*) explanation or the explanation of a *simpleton*. To the extent that Rashi calls this *derash,* meaning interpretive process, he would maintain that *in this instance* the *derash-process* resulted in a simplistic outcome which is false and has no bearing on the verse.
Derash fill-in	A verse and Rashi comment may have a clear meaning and Rashi then shows *how* the event the verse is discussing could have taken place	We have emphasized many times, that multiple opinions on fill-ins (or for that matter in general) may not indicate controversy but complementarity. They should *not* be perceived as Rashi's opinion on what happened; on the contrary they should be perceived as speculative possibilities.
Moral Exhortation	After reviewing the statement of a verse and Rashi comment, Rashi may make a moral admonition or inference	It is important to emphasize that the moral inference is not part of the verse but a consequence of it. Rashi is not reading this inference *into* the verse but *out of it*.
Historical background	Rashi may complement a comment with historical or linguistic information.	

Table AP.1: The 10 parts of the Rashi anatomy, their descriptions and useful comments.

AP.2 – Moral Exhortation: We now bring the examples from this week's Parshah illustrating the above categories.

> **Biblical Text: Nu27-07a,b** [Background: Five women asked Moses to clarify if female daughters had the right to inherit their deceased father if the father had no male children. Moses in turn asked God. God in turn responded]
>
> *kayn* (properly) have the five women spoken; do give them their inheritance.
>
> Rashi comment: [The word *kayn* normally means *yes* or affirmative. Here it means] *properly.* [In passing: The biblical root **caph-vav-nun** means well established, proper]
>
> [God speaking] This argument of the women is how this biblical text is written before me in the heavenly Torah.
>
> It teaches that the five women saw a legal omission which Moses himself did not see
>
> *Beautifully* have they asked.
>
> Happy are the people that God acknowledges their arguments.

Consistent with our remarks in Section **AP.1**, we have colored the Rashi layers. The blue-colored text are the *peshat,* the way native speakers here the word *kayn.* The red-colored texts are moral inferences. Rashi never intended that they are derived from the text; rather they are inferred from the text's meaning.

AP.3 – Derash Fill-ins: Although Rashi does not cite the following comment of the Sifray on the five-woman argument for inheritance just presented in Section **AP.3**, it is a typical example of *derash fill-in.*

> When the five women (daughters of Slafchad) heard (previous biblical chapter) that the land of Israel was being divided by tribe but only to males, they gathered together for consultation. They said:
>
> The feelings (pity) of humans (human leadership) are not like the feelings of Him by whose word the world was created. Humans favor men over women; but our God has (equal) feelings for everyone as the Psalmist said: God is good to all and his feelings (pity) are on all His works.[Hence, we should ask our question about inheritance]

Just to be clear on this fill-in: The Sifray is neither claiming that it has a tradition going back to Sinai that this conversation happened, nor is it deriving this conversation from the biblical text. It is rather a reasonable fill-in on pre-conversations prior to asking Moses.

In passing, although, unfortunately, not the major topic of Rashiyomi, this (and many other statements)are historical support for the equality that Biblical and Talmudic women experienced. A comparative legal analysis of the Biblical-Talmudic and Modern law would show Biblical-Talmudic law vastly superior to modern law in the treatment of female equality. I personally lament that I do not have time to justify this very obvious fact.

AP.4 – Rashi form, beginning words, historical information: We present below the comparison of seven sets of almost identical verses in Nu27.

> Day 2: (v18,19) by numbers according to rule ….morning offering: rest offering and *their* libation**s**
> Day 3: (v21,v22) by numbers according to rule ….morning offering: rest offering and its libation
> Day 4: (v24,v25) by numbers according to rule ….morning offering: rest offering and their libation
> Day 5: (v27,v28) by numbers according to rule ….morning offering: rest offering and its libation

Day 6: (v30,v31) by numbers according to rule; …morning offering: it rest offering and its libation*S*

Day 7: (v33,v34) by numbers according to rule*S* ….morning offering: rest offering and its libations

Rashi: These passages in Nu27 are identical except for the three differences shown. The letters used to indicate these differences in Hebrew, are **Mem-Yud-Mem**, meaning water. This is a biblical hint at the water libation ceremony done on this Succoth holiday festival (for which the above are the offerings).

First, the actual Rashi comment is given on Verse 18 on the word *sheep,* which Rashi is not even commenting on! Rashi refers (explicitly) to three verses. So, the true *beginning words, the biblical words on which Rashi is commenting, is scattered through several verses* and not indicated at all in the actual beginning words that Rashi commented on.

More importantly, Rashi's statement is no different than *the principal is your pal* statement. It is a silly mnemonic. No one thinks the meaning of *principal* comes from its spelling; similarly, no one should think that Rashi derived the *water libation* ceremony from this play on letters.

So if this is Rashi form, what is the true source of the Rashi comment? Unfortunately, it is not explicit; it is elliptical, omitted. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of the great 19th century biblical commentators points out that the Hebrew letters used indicate *plurality.* That is, there is not one libation (singular) but several libations (plural as indicated in English by the terminal *s,* and in Hebrew by a terminal **mem**) So Rashi is using the **grammar** rule here.

Notice how the Rashi comment is a statement of multiple libations without indicating what the second libation is (We know the first libation to be the wine libation). Thus, Rashi must bring in *historical* information that in Temple times besides the wine libation there was a water libation on Succoth (a prayer-type ceremony praising God for the rainfall which enabled the harvest for which the Succoth holiday celebrates).

Although this is a simple Rashi we now color code the various items, with brackets indicating elliptical text. In the color-coding below the blue, green, and red indicate respectively the true peshat, the form, and the historical information. The orange indicates the filled in beginning words.

Sheep [**their libations, its libation, its libations, by their number according to rule, by their number according to rules**]

[**The terminal *s* indicates plurality. This indicates that besides the wine libation there was some other libation but the biblical text does not spell it out**]

[Historically] **It refers to the water libation ceremony performed on Succoth** [thanking God for providing rain enabling the harvest with the Jewish people celebrate]

The actual extra letters are *mem-yud-mem* which spells the word *mayim* which means water. Thus we have a hint to the water libation ceremony.

To recap, although this is a simple Rashi, as shown, it has four very different layers. This approach of layers greatly clarifies the entire approach to *peshat* and *derash*

AP.5 – Simplistic Explanations: In Numbers 27, Moses requested that God appoint a replacement for him to lead the nation.

Nu27-17 [Moses asked God, "Select a person for the congregation to lead them"]
Who will go out before them   Who will come back before them
Who will bring them out   Who will bring them back
…
[God speaking about the leader] He will stand before Elazar the Priest who will ask through the Urim and Tumim; by his word they will go out and by his word they will return

l come back .

Rashi Text: He will go out *before them*, first.
Not like the non-Jewish kings, who sit in their palace and order others to go out
But like I [Moses] did (Nu21-34) in the war against Sichon when God said You, do not fear him
Like Joshua (Jos 5:13) who (personally) went and asked the person: Are you with us or our enemies
Like David 1Sam18-16, Because he[David] comes and goes before them
He will bring them in/out: Through his merits.
Another matter: Moses asked God: Please do not do to this new leader the way you did to me [To appoint me and then when I sinned to deprive me of the right to bring the Jewish people into the land]

He will ask Elazar: When they wish to declare war (if God approves)

First we explain the *peshat:* The Rashi parallelism method is used. The parallel passages are highlighted in blue and red. As we will explain in future chapters when dealing with parallelism, parallelism does not believe in picking on every small minute difference and making an exegesis. This is the view of Kugel who paradoxically although he re-introduced parallelism did not fully grasp all its principles. Kugel published his book in 1980 while Berlin published her book in 1985. Berlin advocated the use of parallelism in grammatical categories.

As shown in the color passages, the first line and second line differ in the red-colored phrase. In grammatical categories, the idea of coming out (to war) and returning (coming back) is mentioned twice; but the first time the indirect object is mentioned: He will go *before them.*

Rashi comments on this parallelistic grammatical difference. He does so by bringing in comparative historical information

> Not like non-Jewish kings who sit in their palace and order his soldiers to go out

Rather the emphasis is on the Jewish King leading them out and leading them back. He is there in the thicket of battle.

Rashi brings three leaders (Moses, Joshua, and David) who personally went out and led the nation. This research is an example of a *derash-process*; researching the biblical texts to assure that *who leads the nation in war* is an issue.

It follows that the first phrase in blue and red has the emphasis on *the leaders going out first, leading the nation in war.* The second line (just in blue) refers to the fact that inspired by their role model, the King, the nation accompanies him (So e.g. it is not a king who hires a mercenary army). Rashi phrases this as

> He leads them with his merit

In light of the parallelism I have slightly reinterpreted this as

> He leads them as a role model because he goes out first

Just to recap:

Peshat: The true peshat comes from the grammatical parallelism emphasizing that the King leads them out

Historical: Rashi supplements this with contrastive historical information: Non-Jewish leaders to not lead their nations; they order them while they sit in the palace

Derash-process: Rashi further employs a derash process to show that *who leads* is in fact an issue.

As we have explained many times, the derash process is not the true cause of the Rashi comment. It rather uncovers to the non-expert that there is an issue on whether the leader should lead or order his army. Anyone familiar with this issue who heard the phrase

> *he will go out before them*

would immediately react:

> Oh so he is an active leader who takes his army out rather than a passive leader who orders.

This partnership of the derash-process and Peshat should not be seen as a compromise: Something is Peshat *only and exclusively* if there is a spontaneous reaction from a native speaker expert in the field. But very often we need research (*derash*) to uncover what the issues are. This is similar to the research in the example of the husband who gave his wife a bouquet of eight roses; the research uncovers that they were married eight years ago today thereby proving that the reaction is spontaneous.

We have left to deal with the Rashi <u>other explanation</u>:

> Another matter: Moses asked God: Please do not do to this new leader the way you did to me [To appoint me and then when I sinned to deprive me of the right to bring the Jewish people into the land]

This interpretation sees coming and going as coming and going into the land. It clearly is taken out of context. There is nothing in the verse to justify this as the verses are clearly talking about the general requirements of the leader not about a specific requirement such as entry into the land.

Thus we view this extra comment as *simplistic, the interpretation of a simpleton.* We so interpret, because it is taken out of context. Clearly the author of this comment emphasized with Moses' feelings:

> What could Moses be thinking at a time like this? He had refused leadership and after God forced him to take the leadership and he led the Jewish people for 40 years, because of his mistakes he was deprived of bringing the Jews into the land. Moses therefore prayed to God that God should not do to this new leader what God did to Moses.

Certainly, a comment like this has emotional validity and is worthy of discussion. We do not mean to belittle it. However, we must deny that it has anything to do with the Biblical text. Rather it is an interesting and justified speculation on how Moses felt which is however not communicated to us in the Biblical text. We think this the proper perspective on this passage.

AP.6 – Color Coded Rashi: This is quite a beautiful Rashi with numerous layers. It is color coded below. Each reader should now reevaluate whether this Rashiyomi perspective is justifiable and whether it indeed leads to enhanced appreciation of both the Biblical Text and Rashi.

Rashi Text: **He will go out *before them*, first.**

Not like the non-Jewish kings, who sit in their palace and order others to go out

But like I [Moses] did (Nu21-34) in the war against Sichon when God said You, do not fear him
Like Joshua (Jos 5:13) who (personally) went and asked the person: Are you with us or our enemies
Like David 1Sam18-16, Because he[David] comes and goes before them

He will bring them in/out: Through his merits.

Another matter: Moses asked God: Please do not do to this new leader the way you did to me [To appoint me and then when I sinned to deprive me of the right to bring the Jewish people into the land]

He will ask Elazar: When they wish to declare war (if God approves)

The four colors used here have the following explanation

Blue: The Peshat which is justified by parallelism. Note that the parallelism is only hinted at by Rashi not explicitly mentioned. The Parallelism is grammatical parallelism and not a pickiness on minutiae. The parallelism justifies three things: 1) The *before them* vs. *them* justifies that the Jewish King, *leads;* 2) The inclusion of two phrases *he will go before them* and *he will bring them out* implies that the nation is willing to follow his lead because he is a role model; 3) The going in and out is tied to the Urim and Tumim and the priest indicating that it is for military matters (a primary duty of the king

Green: This is comparative historical information; not part of the *peshat* but needed background to enable us to understand it.

Orange: This is *derash-process*. The native speaker (you and I for example) may not be that familiar with types of governments and their military leadership. The three examples show that Jewish kings do lead people out; contrastively, non-Jewish kings very often have mercenary armies. They do not lead. They order and sit in complacency in their palace.

Grey: This is important emotional speculative information; how did Moses feel. It is certainly very juicy. It is however not part of the *Peshat*. It has *nothing* to do with the verse. It is precisely speculation and empathy (at its finest)

AP.7 – To be continued: In future issues, we will again focus on examples of Rashi anatomy. We will also, as space permits, contrast our approach with the classical Rashi commenters as well as with modern scholarship. Our continued thesis is that they did not fully grasp all four exegetical pillars.