

CHAPTER AQ: THE NEED FOR THE NEW RASHIYOMI APPROACH

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AP.1 – Overview: In this issue we bring four examples. Each example contrasts the traditional method of studying Rashi with the method used by Rashiyomi. These examples help lay out the reasons for the Rashiyomi approach. Each of the examples is rather simple but nevertheless brings home a powerful point.

AP.2 – Interdisciplinarity: First we examine the biblical text and Rashi.

Biblical Text: And Moses spoke to the nation: Arm from yourself people for the army

Rashi: The Hebrew *haychaltzu* is a language of armed forces; with armaments.

This doesn't seem like a very deep Rashi. Those who know grammar might observe that the Hebrew word used *haychaltzu* is in the causative mode. It clearly comes from the root *cheth-lamed-tzade* and clearly means arm yourself.

A traditional Rashi approach might review the status of grammar in Rashi's time. The traditional approach might investigate from which sources, available to Rashi, Rashi knew about the causative conjugation.

The Rashiyomi approach however is interdisciplinary. From the adjective *armed* we obtain the verb *to arm*. The transition from a noun or adjective to a verb is called a denominative. Rashi was not commenting on verbal conjugation but rather commenting on syntactic transformation. Rashi does this elsewhere. For example, on Nu04-13 *dust the altar* Rashi explains that *dust* is a denominative coming from the noun *dust*; in this verse, *dust* means *remove the dust*.

Two simple examples, yet already we have questions. In one case *dust* the denominative *negates* the noun or adjective it came from; in the other case, *arm* it affirms it. This immediately raises the question about types of denominatives.

Now for the surprise and new approach. The classification of denominatives is only recent. It appears in the doctoral thesis of Carolyn A Gottfurcht (2007) from Northwestern University. Gottfurcht uncovered 8 types of denominatives:

Resultative -the verb activity results in the noun object, for example, *to mummify, to flower,*

Privative- the verb activity remove the noun object, for example, *to dust*

Instrumental-the verb activity refers to the typical usage of the instrument or noun object, for example, *to hammer, to catharize, to sponge*

locative – the verb activity indicates arriving at the place of the noun or object, for example, *to hospitalize*

performative- the verb activity results in a performance of the noun object, for example *to tango*

ornative- the verb activity adds outer parts, for example *to bejewel*

ablative- the verb activity removes outer parts, for example, *to shell nuts*

simulative- the verb activity seeks to resemble the noun or object, for example, *to guard* (do activity of the guard)

This clarifies Rashi; Rashi sees *arm yourself* as an *ornative* denominative. In explaining this Rashi, I have used a recent doctoral thesis from another discipline, in short, I have used an interdisciplinary approach to Rashi; I have

not consulted the grammar books of his day (the geographic historical approach). Note especially that Gottfurcht is neither a religious nor secular biblical scholar. She belongs to another discipline. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinary approach is crisp and refreshing giving us insights we could not have obtained otherwise.

AP.3- Interdisciplinarity and Traditional Approaches: It might seem that the interdisciplinary approach is new. Not so. For example, all the Jewish grammarians starting from Rav Saadia, were heavily influenced by the Arabic grammarians. Thus interdisciplinarity is fully consistent with the history of biblical study.

What about the recency of this doctrine, 2007? Prior to the doctrine appearing Rashiyomi offered an analysis found in issues dealing with Nu04-13 my own personal analysis in which I uncovered three of the eight types of denominatives (the examples given by me were *to flower*, *to hammer*, and *to dust*, corresponding to the *resultative*, *privative*, and *instrumental* denominatives. This is the way it should be. All readers of the Bible should be on the frontiers of new research and current research.

True, Rashi does not talk about denominatives. He is very holistic: *The word arm is the language of armed soldiers*. However, I am not being anachronistic. I am asserting that Rashi was intuitively aware of a grammatical issue which today we have more detailed understanding of and a more detailed vocabulary. I am using current language and grammar to explain the Rashi intuition. Whether he actually knew about it is an interesting but irrelevant point. He is certainly pointing in the direction of a verb-noun interaction both here and on other verses and this is the main point I am trying to make.

Finally, we note, that there is a biblical blessing and promise that the logic-beauty of the Greeks should *reside* in the Talmudic tent halls of learning Gn09-27. All in all, we think interdisciplinarity the correct approach fully consistent with biblical theology and biblical history. This means however, that we spend more time citing outside discipline studies than we do citing other biblical and Rashi commenters. It is a holistic approach.

AP.4 – Figures of Speech, Rashi's greatest Strength. We have advocated four exegetical biblical pillars; the fourth and final pillar, is figures of speech. Avineri, a modern scholar who comprehensively compiled, in his book, Rashi's Palace, all Rashis on meanings notes that "Rashi coined over 1000 terms." Here Avineri is referring to figures of speech, the fourth exegetical pillar. Rashiyomi believes this to be Rashi's greatest contribution.

To fully appreciate figures of speech consider the English term *to google*. How did that term arise? Google after all is a company, founded on Sept 4, 1998. It quickly gained popularity as a search engine. If you had looked up the word google in a dictionary in 1998 you wouldn't have found it. In fact it is a proper noun. But as time grew, people used google more and more. Mysteriously, without a well-defined beginning people began to speak about *googling* or advising *to google*. Google still was not in the dictionary. Rather people were using a figure of speech. In fact, the synecdoche principle states that *a word can transfer meaning to a particularly good example of its use; hence we might speak about giving me a hand as a synecdoche for giving help; we might speak about honey as something sweet; or we might speak about to google meaning to search*. As time further evolved, *to google* entered the dictionary and this is the paradox.

After to google, entered the dictionary, it was just another English phrase with a dictionary meaning
Before to google entered the dictionary it was a dynamic figure of speech with well established meaning that transcended the meaning of its individual terms.

It immediately follows that to judge a Rashi by *is it in the dictionary* is intrinsically fallacious; Rashi may be pointing to a transition stage showing how a term developed. Thus we miss the whole point of Rashi if we ask whether it is *yet* in the dictionary.

AP.5 – The redeemer. Consider the following illustrative biblical text and Rashi.

Nu35-12 These [refuge] cities will protect [the inadvertent murderer] from the *redeemer*; the murderer will not die until he stands before the community for trial

Rashi: *Redeemer*: This refers to the *redeemer of blood*.

Rashi commenters (Sifsay Chachamim and others): Rashi refers to later verses (e.g. Nu35-19) where the term is spelled out, *redeemer of blood*.

Notice how the Rashi commenters have fallen into the classic approach of explaining Rashi through dictionary meaning and conjugational grammar. As Rashiyomi has pointed out numerous times the dictionary-grammar approach to Rashi is inadequate.

True, the Rashi commenters use what we have called the *reference* method; this is known in modern biblical circles as intertextuality, the use of one biblical verse to comment on another. But this too misses the mark.

And what is the mark? The mark is that both the term *redeemer* and *redeemer of blood* are coined terms, figures of speech. After all you don't redeem blood. You avenge someone's killing but how does that become *redeeming blood*; only through coined terms and figures of speech. Just as the Google company evolved into the verb *to google*, so too the act of *blood vengeance* evolved first into *blood redemption* and then into *redemption*. Rashi is painting a picture; the true Rashi picture of language as a dynamic evolving almost living thing.

This Rashi also sheds light on why we frequently avoid citing Rashi commenters and other commenters. The primary focus of Rashiyomi is not to continuously note the mistakes of our predecessors. Rather, it is to show the path that enables full understanding of the Rashi text. We have continuously acknowledged that all our methods have their roots in those of our predecessors; our contribution has been to organize the methods and apply them correctly.

AP.6 – Rashi as a living creature; the Rashi Anatomy: A fundamental contribution of Rashiyomi has been the replacement of the simplistic picture of Rashi based on two words *peshat* and *derash* with a dynamic picture based on an anatomy of ten categories: i) the text on which Rashi comment (*divrey mathchil*); ii) the four exegetical pillars, iii) the peshat, the spontaneous reaction of a native speaker to a verse, iv) the Rashi form, v) the Rashi derash process, vi) two-stage Rashis, vii) fill-ins, viii) derash outcomes, ix) moral exhortation, and x) historical information. The availability of ten categories facilitates a discussion of Rashi comments not laden with uncertainties and inconsistencies. The following Rashi is illustrative.

Biblical Text: Nu31-01:03 God spoke to Moses to say over. Avenge the Jews vengeance from the Midyanim; afterwards you will die. And Moses spoke to the nation to say over: Arm from yourself people for the army

Rashi: Moses immediately implemented God's command (he immediately relayed the obligation to fight Midyan to the nation) even though he knew he would die afterwards (and had reason to delay) This shows Moses' zealotry in fulfilling God's commandments.

A typical comment on this Rashi as found in many modern books might be the following.

This Rashi is not *peshat*. The verse is perfectly clear. There are no problems with it. Rather, someone is deriving and inferring moral lessons from the verse. These moral exhortations have religious value and are frequently used by Rashi. Rashi did not only give textual meaning but also engaged in moral exhortation.

We totally reject this. Rashi never gave a moral exhortation unless the verse justified it. If the only way you can infer a moral principle is by reading it into the verse, instead of reading it out of the verse, then it probably is not worth very much. The problem? There doesn't seem to be any justification for this Rashi comment in the verse. Nothing is problematic.

However, by using the Rashi anatomy, we gain insights. Rashi is not always commenting on the biblical text cited at the beginning of a Rashi comment. The text on which Rashi is commenting may lie in another verse. One requires skill to identify where the Rashi comment is coming from.

Such is the case here. Consider the biblical verse and Rashi comment a mere three verses later.

Biblical text – Nu31-05: And the Jews [who heard the order to prepare for war with Midyan] self-conscripted themselves, 1000 per tribe.

Rashi: This verse shows how dear Moses was to the Jewish leaders. Moses had complained that “The Jews will soon stone me (Ex17-04)” But here, when they found out that Moses would die after the war, were reluctant to go to war.

Rashiyomi explanation: Rashi is using the mighty *meaning* method. Here Rashi uses the *synonym-nuance* method. The background is known. Midyan sent female soldiers to seduce Jewish men and get them to worship idols resulting in God's wrath and a death toll of 24000. You might think they were eager for war. But it does not say here as it does elsewhere: *They assembled in armed units*. Rather the very rare biblical word *conscription* is used. They *self-conscripted*. *Conscripted*? Doesn't that mean a compulsory draft? Is that the right term to use here? Why would anyone have to force them to declare war on a nation that killed 24000 Jews!!! The nuances to a native speaker spontaneously suggest comment: *Conscripted? – they were reluctant*.

Here, we have used the Rashi *peshat method*. Something is *peshat* only it is the spontaneous reaction of a native speaker to a verse. We next complement this with the *fill-in* method. The *peshat* simply indicates reluctance. But why should they be reluctant. They lost 24,000. It is easy to suggest that they were aware that Moses would die afterwards and they wanted to delay. Notice, that this connection (Moses delay caused the reluctance) is not itself *peshat* but a result of the *fill-in* component of the Rashi anatomy.

But now we have the missing ingredient to the first Rashi we cited. If the Jews were reluctant to go to war knowing Moses would die afterwards, then so should Moses have been reluctant. But we find no reluctance. Hence the Rashi comment on verse 2, *this shows Moses' zealotry in fulfilling God's command*.

Again we use the Rashi anatomy: The *divrey mathchil*, the biblical text on which Rashi was commenting on in verse 2 was not apparent. Now however we have it.

Does that mean we lose the moral exhortation? Not at all. If anything we have strengthened it. We have however solidly derived the moral exhortation as a consequence of *peshat* not something read into the text.

AP.7 – The Color-Coding Approach: We have already discussed the use of perceiving the Rashi comments in layers or more succinctly of color coding them. We now do so thereby summarizing the preceding discussion.

[Background verses: Avenge the Jews vengeance from Midyan; then Moses you will die]

Verse 5: The Jews *conscripted* for military service: *Conscripted*? Why would anyone have to force them. Why should they be reluctant?

Most probably because they knew Moses would die after they went to war and they did not want to lose Moses.

Verse 3: God said to Moses: Avenge Jewish vengeance; and then die. Moses spoke to the people: Arm yourself for war on Midyan. Fill in: Moses too did not hesitate to fulfill Gods command even though he knew he would die

We see the value of zealously performing God's word even though aware of unpleasant consequences.

Color Scheme:

Green = spontaneous instant reaction of a native speaker, the peshat

Orange = Reasonable fill-ins. Not in the text but good guesses on how something happened

Red = moral exhortation based however on the Peshat.

We believe that this color-coding approach depicting a dynamic Rashi anatomy is a significant contribution to understanding both Rashi and Peshat and Derash.

AP.8 – The Rashi Commenters: Consider the following verse and Rashi comment (greatly paraphrased)

Nu31-02: Moses spoke to the Tribal Governors to be said over to the Jews: This is the command that God commanded.

Rashi (Paraphrased): We find that all commandments followed this pattern, as we find the prototype in Ex34-31:32 *Aaron and the (tribal) governors came to Moses: He spoke to them, and afterwards he spoke to all the Jews.* A further proof is found in Lv17: Moses was commanded to *Speak to Aaron, his children, and all Jews. This is the command that God commanded.* Both the current verse and the Leviticus verse have the phrase *this is the command* because the method of learning was the same.

Talmud Eruvin 54 (Not cited by Rashi but shedding light): What was the order of learning in the wilderness. 1) Moses taught Aaron, 2) Moses taught Aarons children (priests), 3) Moses taught the elders, 4) Moses taught the Jews. The Moses stepped aside and Aaron taught his children and the Jews... Thus we find that the Torah matters were reviewed 4 times.

Although there are many commenters to cite from I cite the Raam. The Raam struggles with deriving the Rashi comment from the verse. He takes the verse

Moses spoke to the Tribal Governors for the Jews, to say over

and tries to inject a conjunction (*and*) in its interpretation

Moses spoke to the Tribal Governors *and* for the Jews to say over.

Raam argues that this way of reading the text shows that Moses taught the tribes first and then the Jews justifying the Rashi comment.

Here Raam falls into the classical problem we have identified of reading all Rashi comments using dictionary meaning and grammar. Here Raam tried to justify the Rashi comment with a grammatical use of the conjunction even though the text does not have it.

In fact, the Ibn Ezra translates the verse the way I translated above.

Moses spoke to the tribal governors; to say over to the Jewish people.

But here again we have a grammatical approach.

This is not the approach Rashi used. The grammar approach is one of the exegetical pillars. The second exegetical pillar is the parallelism pillar which includes database inquiries. Rashi asked the following database question

Query: Give me all verses which relate how Moses taught over the law

Of course, most verses simply say

God spoke to Moses to say over. Speak to the Jews

But Rashi's database inquiry found the Ex34 verse

Moses spoke to Aaron and the Tribal Governors. Then he spoke to the Jews.

It is this verse, not the grammatical plays given by the Raam and Ibn Ezra which justify the Rashi inference.

We do not want to thoroughly analyze this Rashi today, as our sole goal is to show that the Rashiyomi approach uses the parallelism vs. Grammatical approach. But here are some other verses

God spoke to Aaron (e.g. Lv10-08)

God spoke to Moses and Aaron to say to them: Speak to the Jews (Lv11-01)

God spoke to the Tribal Governors (our verse, Nu30-02)

God spoke to Moses to speak to Aaron, his children, and all of Israel (Nu17-02)

A thorough analysis of these verses might show the learning trajectory mentioned in the Talmud:

Moses→Aaron→Children→Tribal Governors→ Jews

Our main points in bringing this was to show the following:

- It is easy and tempting to try and twist verses into a Midrash using some grammatical trick when in fact the real Rashi method is some other Rashi rule (such as the database or parallelism method)
- Rashi commenters can frequently both arrive at the correct Rashi method and frequently can get stuck in an incorrect method

Our goal in this Rashiyomi Newsletter is not to continuously state what is wrong and right in Rashi commenters; we don't consider such an endeavor useful or productive. Our goal is to list major Rashi methods and show how they neatly explain a variety of otherwise difficult verses.