# CHAPTER AR: SOME SHORT RASHI

## *DeVaRiM*

**AR.1 – Overview:** In this issue we bring four examples. We simply apply the methodology we have been discussing the last few issues. The examples illustrate subtleties such as i) use of skillful English translation, ii) Rashi's which are not *peshat,* in fact, *homily* and identified as such, iii) nuance analysis, iv) inferences which are true but not *peshat.*

**AR.2 – Skillful English Translations – The Text:** We first present the Biblical and Rashi text.

> Biblical Text: Dt01-05a: On the shores of the Jordan in the plains of Moav, Moses *approached* a *nuanced* explanation of the Torah

> Rashi Text #1: The Hebrew *ho'il* means *begin* similar to its usage in Gn. 18:27 [In that verse, Abraham was praying to God about the destruction of Sedom and Amorah and said *Please, I have approach begun speaking to God* [Abraham then continues his prayers]

> *Rashi Text #2:* The Hebrew *baer* means that Moses translated the Torah into 70 languages.

**AR.2 – Skillful English Translations -*Approach - Begin*:** The Rashiyomi classifies these Rashis using the **Meaning Pillar**. This is an excellent examples of *figures of speech*.

We have translated *ho'il* as meaning *approached.* We feel this is a more nuanced and better translation than *begin.* To explain our thinking we note the following:

> We have used in other chapters the idea of hypernymy. Recall that for example *fruit* is a hypernym with *apples, bananas, oranges,* hyponyms. You can also think of this as the group-member relation. So we ask the question:

> Rashi translates *ho'il* as beginning. *Beginning* is therefore according to our way of understanding Rashi, a hypernym, a general category. It is up to us the reader to search for the best example of *beginning* the best hyponym.

With this background we feel that *approached* would more correctly catch the nuances both here and in Gn. 18:27. Abraham for example did not really *begin* to speak to God. It was more cautious. He *approached* God but never really got there. Similarly, here, Moses did not begin a translation since one can never translate the bible in all its nuances. Rather, Moses *approached* translation.

Our basic defense of this is based on the nuances. It fits the verse better. *Perhaps* also *ho'il* comes from the preposition *il* or *el* which means *to* or *towards.* The verb form or *to* would mean to *approach* but emphasizes you never really get there. *Perhaps* this is a derivation; but we do not commit ourselves to it and do not need it.

To recap what we have said about *skillful English Translation:*

- They should be done in conjunction with Rashi's actual language using hypernymy
- The best English translation should capture the nuances of this and similar verses.

**AR.3 – Skillful English Translations -*Explain – Translate – Footnote - Nuance*:** The verse uses the Hebrew *baer* which usually is translated as *explain.* Again we use hypernymy. Rashi selects a particular hyponym of *explain,* to *translate.* We however, would prefer the translation *nuance* or *footnote.*

Note first that Rashi's statement

> Translated it into 70 languages

Has two possible meanings

> Translated it into 70 languages (So languages like Akadian, Arabic, etc.)
>
> Translated it with 70 nuances (The Hebrew *lashon* can also refer to *nuances* or *figures of speech* or *tone* as in for example the famous Psalmic verse, *He who watches his mouth and tongue (nuances/tone) [also] watches against travails on his life.*)

Which of these two translation is the most valid: Did Moses really as Rashi says literally, translate the Torah into 70 languages. If so, to whom. The Jews? Did the Jews in the wilderness really care how the Torah is interpreted in other languages? That doesn't make sense.

It makes more sense that Moses translated it with 70 tones, 70 figures of speech, or footnoted. Here 70 is not interpreted literally but rather means *many.* Someone might object that my translation *footnote* is too specific. That is fine. I was simply trying to capture the meaning and used an English translation. Perhaps *nuance* is best since it lacks the specificity of *footnote* and is grammatically more correct than *tone.*

In summary we do not translate the verse

> On the shore of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses *began to translate* the Torah,

Rather we translate

> On the shore of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses *approached* explaining the Torah with *nuances*

In evaluating our approach, the following would be wrong

> You are translating *ho'il* and *baer* as *approached* and *nuanced.* You don't have a basis for this. Let us therefore go with *begin* and translate.

The following is also wrong

> This is a clear and correct understanding of Rashi and a proper translation of the verse

We think the following captures our approach

> By translating as *approached the nuanced explanation of the Torah* we capture the mood and direction of the verse; we *approximate* how the biblical listener in Moses time would hear this verse. This type of translation is the best we can do with our limited resources (the 20th century English language) Although we may never know for certain what the true translation is, this translation is consistent with other verses and gives us a better feeling of what happened.

And of course, this translation is also relevant: It explains how we should teach and read the Torah: As an approach (not as something complete) and as something nuanced and explored

**AR.4 – True but Not Peshat – The text:** Remember; *peshat* is the instant spontaneous response to a biblical verse. Here is a good example

> Biblical Text: Dt01-03 In the 40th year, in the 11th month, on the 1st day, Moses spoke to the Jewish people…

> Rashi Text: This [verse] teaches that Moses rebuked them [the contents of Dt01] near his death.

>> [Example 1:] Moses followed the example of Jacob who rebuked on his death bed. [Most probably Jacob felt as follows] If I rebuke my children earlier they will leave me and cling to Esauv.

>> There are four reasons why rebuke should be done near the time of death

>>> 1) So he shouldn't have to repeat himself [if the rebuked person does not listen]
>>> 2) To avoid embarrassment [if the person rebuked has to continue with the living person]
>>> 3) So the person should not leave the relationship
>>> 4) So the person rebuked should not have hard feeling to the rebuke [who is about to die]

>> [Other examples]

>> [Example 2:] Joshua rebuked near death

>> [Example 3] Samuel rebuked near death

>> [Example 4] David rebuked Solomon near death

**AR.5 – True but Not Peshat:** The above Rashi affords us a wonderful opportunity to illustrate several concepts we have introduced.

First: The Rashi is not *peshat.* A person hearing the verse *At 40 years, in month 11, day 1, Moses …* would not *instantly and spontaneously* respond: *He rebuked them near death.* Our sole criteria for *peshat* is instantness. It is not present here.

Second: We do not follow the omnisignificant school that since these words are in the text they must serve some purpose and that purpose must be moral .That is simply not the way texts are read. The book of Deuteronomy is simply dating the events that happened.

Third: The Rashi is an example of *derash-process, research.* It employs the powerful Parallelism-Database method. It answers the database *query* `At what point of life do biblical rebukes happen?` The research uncovers the four examples cited by Rashi showing that rebuke happens near death.

Fourth: This research, this *derash-process* results in a *true derash-outcome,* It is true that rebuke is done near death. However truth and *peshat* are two different things. *Peshat* is the instant reaction to a verse; truth can be instant or after thinking. By introducing a vocabulary with *truth, peshat, derash,* we are able to intelligently classify this Rashi as *true but not Peshat.* Such a classification does not antagonize anyone with transcendental conceptions of multiple layers of a text.

Fifth: What about the four reasons *for* rebuking near death. We have called that *fill-in.* It is not in the text but since a valid textual inference is that rebuke should happen near death, we can easily identify the reasons for so doing. *Fill in* is something reasonable but does not have Divine authority

Furthermore, If your knowledge of psychology affords other reasons for rebuking near death or suggests that sometimes rebuke should happen before death that is fine. In fact, the Sifray which Rashi cites, does cite *successful* rebukes that did not happen near death such as the rebuke of Abraham of Abimelech (Gn21-25) or the rebuke of Isaac of Abimelech (Gn27-27). Thus we see that Rashi only told half a story. There *are* times when one should rebuke not near death. They are noted by the Sifray authors. Proper reading of this Rashi requires more exploration of rebuke.

In summary: The concepts of *instant peshat, derash-research-process, valid-derash-outcome, fill-ins, and truth,* give us a vocabulary for discussing and understanding Rashi properly.

**AR.6 – Not True, Not Peshat!!** A beautiful example where the *peshat* is *peshat* and the *derash* is fancy.

> Biblical Verse: Dt01-06:  God spoke to us at Chorev (Sinai) as follows: You have dwelled here long enough

> Rashi: Long enough has its normal idiomatic meaning. But there is a Midrash Aggadah which translates as *You have dwelled here with high quality:* You obtained the Torah, built a Temple, etc.

How do we take this Rashi? First, in all languages words of big quantity also metaphorically refer to high quality. For example in English and Hebrew *big person* (*gadol*) can refer either to person of big size *or* a person who is *great.* In Hebrew the word *rav* can mean enough or can mean a Rabbi, a person who suffices in transmission. Most synonyms of bigness and smallness have a similar dual nuance.

So why not assume the verse has a double nuance? After all we have seen puns in biblical verses before. The answer is simple, you can not just create puns; there has to be a nuance in the verse that suggests it is punning. Think back to Abe who was dating Rose who asks *pass me the Roisens.* He is making a pass at her and by using a deliberate misspelling, he so indicates.

Thus the author of this midrash is using a *derash-research process.* The person correctly notes that words of great quantity also indicate high quality. But the *derash-outcome* is incorrectly derived. There is nothing in the verse to suggest a pun, a dual meaning, or a meaning other than a quantitative stay. Thus the derash process does not result in a true derash-outcome.

**AR.7 – Other Theories of Midrash:** Some people argue that *because* the Torah is Divine it is legitimate to see the Torah on multiple levels including levels where *peshat* meaning is distorted for a morally normal purpose.

The response of Rashiyomi is twofold.

> First, the idea that the reception of the Torah and the building of the Temple are high quality accomplishments is not derived from our verse. It is known from other verses (So why read it into this verse).

> Second, if you allow non-valid inferences you are cheapening the entire translation and understanding process. That process has intrinsic validity as Talmud Torah, learning. You basically state that any statement goes if it has moral value without carefully researching the parameters of when that moral value applies. This careful reading must be preserved.

**AR.8 – Rashi Language**: Almost every other Rashi scholar attempts to find a *consistent* use of terms in Rashi for *truth* versus homily. No one has succeeded. The Rashi is not the Rambam. The Rambam was a legalist to whom every term had a precise meaning. Rashi was a poet. He could use the same word with different meanings; we have already seen that *peshat* can mean *the simple meaning of the text* and also mean *the simplistic meaning of the text.*

As to the claim, that such a viewpoint, allowing terms with multiple meanings, is confusing and leads to poor understanding, we have already pointed out that use of metaphors and dual meanings occurs even in computer programming where precision is desired. In computer programming we refer to this as *overloading.* It is common even in good languages like Java. The human being in his quest for a language that is useful needs terms whose interpretation is based on context; it makes language more useful. Even or perhaps especially sophisticated languages use overloading based on context. This is also true in mathematics. It is not a fault in Rashi; rather it is a different approach than the legalists.