

CHAPTER AS: A LAND FLOWING WITH WHITE WINE AND SWEET FRUIT

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AS.1 – Overview: People are familiar with the following Hebrew phrase praising the land of Israel

Eretz Zavath Chalav ODevash (Dt06-03)

The usual English Translation is

A land flowing with milk and honey

Rashi translates (but not on this verse) as

A land flowing with goat's milk and sweet fruit

The true translation, the *peshat*, is that the phrase means

A land flowing with white wine and sweet fruits.

The goal of this digest is to show that the latter translation is the most accurate. Consistent with what we have advocated throughout Rashiyomi, something is *peshat* only if

it is the spontaneous and instant reaction of native speakers familiar with the subject area to a verse.

Therefore, we must show that this translation satisfies this criteria.

We also note that this contradicts Rashi. This raises questions: Can we correct Rashi? If so, on what basis? All this will be discussed.

AS.2 – Can We Correct Rashi? Historically, we must understand that Rashi's commentary as we have it was not simply written by Rashi and finalized. Rather it was written and rewritten. It seems that the current manuscript was at least the third attempt. Thus, the Rashi manuscripts point not to one finalized text but to a textual process that underwent continual refinement.

Furthermore, there is sufficient evidence that both during Rashi's lifetime and after his death, his students particularly Shamayah further refined the text. It is not necessary to assume that they did this on their own; nor it is necessary to assume that Rashi ordered them to do it in each case. A more coherent picture is that they edited the text based on a combination *principles* communicated by Rashi as well as explicit statements.

Finally, we do have at least one explicit statement by Rashi, "Had I the opportunity I would further revise my commentary."

These three facts all point to a dynamic process rather than a finalized text. This implies, at least theoretically, that we can correct Rashi.

However, that raises a bigger question: On what basis can we so correct? Can anyone do it? The answer given by Rashiyomi, is that since we are familiar with Rashi's broad underlying principles, the four pillars of exegesis, we are justified in such corrections if they follow the four pillars. Such corrections gain more value (or are more believable) if they are consistent with the very Midrashim that Rashi used to write his commentary. Such is the case with the phrase we analyze today.

AS.3 – Interdisciplinarity: Before continuing, we briefly introduce the reader to the very charming theory of adjectives.

Aristotle had what today we would call a naïve theory of adjectives. A *red table* for example is an object that is simultaneously a table and also a red object. We call such adjectives *intersective* since the object, in this case the *red table*, belongs to the intersection, the common elements, of *red objects* and *tables*.

Computer scientists are eager to allow machines to assist in translation and other language related activities. Therefore, it is necessary to teach machines how to deal with adjectives. Unfortunately, Aristotle's naïve view of adjectives falls apart. The computational linguists are still debating the best way to deal with this problem. But we can mention at least two very blatant counterexamples to the *intersective* approach.

Example 1: A *big mouse* is *small*, and a *small elephant* is *big*. A *white wine* is not *white*; a *moderate terrorist* is not moderate. The adjectives *big*, *small*, *white*, *moderate* are *subsecutive* adjectives. Their meaning changes and depends on the noun they are modifying. Perhaps the best example are the adjectives *big* and *small*. *Bigness* for mice and elephants simply has different meanings.

Example 2: One might naively think that at least an adjective modifies the noun. However, no, that too is not true. A *fake gun* is not something *fake* that is also a *gun*. In fact, a *fake gun* is not a gun. The adjective *fake* here is called a privative adjective since it deprives the noun it modifies of its original meaning.

AS.3 – A Possible Approach: We have already given part of our explanation. *White wines* are not *white*; rather, they are relatively *white*. This is true of subsecutive adjectives. This of course is English. However, interdisciplinarity says we can learn from other disciplines and other languages. In Biblical Hebrew what in English we call *white wines* are called *milky wines* (Ez. 27:18, see Rashi). So the idea that *milk* refers to *wine* is not that strange after all.

Rashi himself explains that in *Biblical Hebrew* just as in *Modern English*, anything sweet can be called *honey* (Rashi Lv02-11a, Dt26-02c). This uses the synecdoche principle, a principle for figures of speech that states that good examples of attributes may be used to describe those attributes. Hence, *sweet* things are called *honey*; the entire 24 hour day is called after by its lit part, the *day*; a request for help can be expressed as *give me a hand*, since of all parts of the body, the *hand* is the best example of help. In all these cases the synecdoche principle operates.

It would seem we are done. After all

- Milk subsecutively refers to white wine
- Honey synecdochically refers to something sweet like fruit particularly dates and figs.

AS.4 – Needed Justification: But we are not done. We have explained numerous times that you are unjustified in using puns and figures of speech unless the text demands it! Think back to our classic example of Abe who is dating Rose and asks at a dinner date *Pass me the Roisens* which we interpret to mean a pass at Rose (whom he requests to pass herself). If Abe had said *Pass me the Raisins* we would not be justified in interpreting the passage this way. It is only because of the deliberate misspelling and mispronunciation that we are so justified.

We therefore cannot translate *eretz zavath chalav odvash* as *a land flowing with white wines and sweet fruits* unless the biblical text demands and requires it. And the text does so demand. In enumerating these demands I avail myself of a beautiful paper by Rabbi Reuven Margalioth and published in the Journal Hayd, Hebrew year,

696, Volume 12. The very purpose of this paper was to defend the position that *eretz zavath chalav odvash* means *land flowing with white wine and sweet fruit*.

Although the article is lengthy (quite a number of references) there are three main arguments, problems with the text, that prompt us to use figures of speech to re-interpret milk and honey

Problem 1: Nu13 tells the stories of the spies who scouted Israel and reported back to the Jewish people. The story and narrative when laid in parallel state the following

They (the spies) cut a branch with a *grape cluster* and from the *pomegranates and dates*
They said: This land is indeed a land flowing with *milk and honey*

One immediately sees from the parallelism that *milk* corresponds to *grapes* and *honey* to *dates and pomegranates*. Furthermore, as Margolioth notes: “We don’t find that the spies brought back a jar of milk; how then could they praise the land for it.”

In making this inference, Margolioth uses what we have called the *parallelism* pillar of exegesis.

Problem 2: *Flowing with milk and honey* is an adjectival phrase modifying *land* (a *land flowing with..*). Other praises of the *land* typically refer to direct products of the land for example *a land of wheat and barley, grape-vines dates and pomegranates, a land of oil producing olives and honey* (Rashi: Figs) (Dt08-08) Milk however is not a land-grown item like fruit. The phrase *land ..milk and honey* does not make sense.

One can immediately ask what *honey* is doing in this list of land-based items. Rashi is silent at Dt08-08 but explains these phrases at Dt26-02c: *honey* refers to *figs*. The entire biblical discussion in Dt26 refers to *taking from the first fruits of the ground and bringing them to Jerusalem for an offering*. So it couldn’t be honey. Rashi points out that only the first fruits of the seven fruit products listed in Dt08-08 must be brought. Clearly, honey is not *fruit of the ground* and Rashi explains this as *figs*.

In making this inference Margolioth uses what we have called the *parallelism* pillar of exegesis; more specifically he uses the *contradiction method*.

Problem 3: Finally, Margolioth uses the *parallelism – database* method. He asks the simple query: How is the land of Israel praised in the bible. There are about a dozen verses which praise the land for its *vines* and *dates*. For example, Michah 4:4 says that in the Messianic era people will sit *each person under his vine and date*. Similarly, when Hosea describes the misfortunes that will happen to the people and land he states *I will destroy her vines and dates* (Hosea 2:14).

Thus the database method shows that the typical way of praising Israel is for its *vines and dates*. Therefore the phrase *milk and honey* is incongruous.

AS.5 – Recap: Now that we have our needed justification, the needed problem with the literal translation, we are justified in re-interpreting *eretz zavath chalav odvash* as *a land flowing with white wines and sweet fruits*. Notice, that we have not arbitrarily re-translated the phrase to fit. Rather we have used the problems justifying the re-translation to use well-known figures of speech such as substantive adjectives and synecdoche.

AS.6 – Spontaneity: So far I have only proven that this is the way the phrase should be translated. But our very strong criteria for *peshat* is that it is the

Instant reaction of a native speaker expert in the subject area of the verse

We must therefore justify spontaneity. To do so, we recall our 8-th anniversary example, the husband who on his 8th anniversary hands his wife a bouquet of 8 roses and says “I love you.” The spontaneous reaction is not that it is their 8th anniversary. Indeed, unless we know the couple we have no way of knowing this. But if we do archival research in the newspapers of their hometown and find that this is the exact date they were married we are justified in asserting that native speakers who are familiar with the couple would spontaneously see the 8 roses as symbolic of 8 years of marriage.

A similar approach applies here. The people of Israel (in ancient times (and today)) would frequently drink white wines and frequently eat sweets like dates and figs. We do not have any historical records of the words they used to describe these things. However, as can be seen from the verses cited in the justification section it seems very reasonable that this *is* the praise of the land. Then using our knowledge of *figures of speech* we can infer that *milk and Honey* are a punchy way to describe *white wines and dates*.

Thus we conclude, that this is the way the native speakers of the time spoke. Can we be certain? No. But it is very reasonable. However, we can be certain that *land flowing with milk and honey* could not possibly have its literal translation.

I might add that Margolioth cites many supportive midrashim for his thesis. He even cites a responsum of the Tashbaytz. He shows that the Midrash Rabbah interprets many verses that would sound peculiar without this translation: For example Songs 5:1 *I have drunk my wine and milk* is translated as *I have drunk my red wine and white wine*. What we have contributed is that this is not *midrash and homily*; it is *peshat*. To recap our objection to using a literal translation, when you are with your lover you do drink wine; you do not drink milk. Therefore the context of the verse requires retranslation.

AS.7 – Another Figure of Speech Example: A major position of Rashiyomi is that other scholars have erred in their understanding of Rashi by restricting themselves to only 2 exegetical pillars instead of all 4, the grammar pillar and dictionary meaning pillar (dictionary meaning is part of meaning in general which includes figures of speech, new meanings not yet in the dictionary). The above example nicely illustrates both the power and elegance of allowing figures of speech when the text requires it.

We again review the fundamental idea of figures of speech by using the example of *to google*. In 1998 when Google first formed it was a proper noun, not a dictionary word. However, consistent with the synecdoche example which allows for example *honey* to refer to anything *sweet*, gradually *to google* came to mean by virtue of a figure of speech, to do an internet search. At that time, *to google* was still not in the dictionary. Only when the usage becomes established does it enter the dictionary. Therefore it is a mistake to understand *figures of speech* as referring to dictionary meaning; on the contrary the whole point of *figures of speech* is that it refers to new coined terms that are *not yet* in the dictionary. To prove the *figure of speech* we use the *principles of figure of speech*; the historical approach is merely supportive to this.

To examine another example where a difficult Rashi can be made simple using Figures of Speech, we review the following verse and text:

Gn03-22 [God speaking] Behold, Adam has become *like one of us* to know good and evil; and now lest he stretch forth his hand and eat from the tree of life and live forever. So He banished Adam and set the Cherubim up to guard paradise.

Rashi: We translate the Hebrew phrase

Hayn Ha'Adam hayah ceachad mimenu

Not as meaning

Adam has become like one of us

But rather

Adam is now unique one of us [the angels] since he knows good and evil

The question then becomes how can the word *echad* which clearly means *one*, mean *unique*.

AS.8 – Sarah Qamin’s Thesis: Sarah Qamin received her doctoral degree from Hebrew University in the last half of the last century. Her doctoral thesis is on *peshat* in Rashi. In analyzing the above text she uses the historical geographic approach and has difficulty. Here are some sample statements (pp. 74-77 of her thesis)

1. The word *echad* (one) never means *unique*
2. Rashi explains *echad* as meaning unique also in Zach 14:9, Gnu 49:16, and Dt06-04
3. The Ra’am (cited by Qamin) breaks up the grammar of the sentence by breaking up the phrase *achad mimenu*
Adam has become like *the one* (Unique); his species (*mimenu* meaning *from us* is translated as *min* species)
4. Gur Aryeh translates as *the unique one of us* (in the heavens) Gur Aryeh cites the following verse:
5. Gn26:10 [By not telling us she is your wife] One of the people [the unique one of the people, namely me, the King] almost slept with her

Let us carefully review these arguments.

1. On the one hand Qamin claims that *echad* (one) never means *unique* but then cites the Gur Aryeh that *the one of the nation* in Gn26:10 means *the unique one* and acknowledges that Rashi translated *one* as *unique* in three places! Why does she ignore this evidence? She ignored the evidence because she didn’t see the Bible or Rashi as coining metaphors
2. As already indicated Rashi’s dictionary was different from Qamins’. Apparently he thought *acahd* can mean one or unique. We will explain this below
3. The Ra’am has distorted the verse quite a lot. *Mimenu* means *from us* and has no relation to *species* (*min*). Also Rashi is always consistent with biblical grammar as indicated by the cantillations and here Ra’am breaks up the verse based on the cantillations
4. Gur Aryeh explains the verse as *peshat* provided we accept the position that *one* can mean *unique*.
5. Qamin does not respond at all to this verse. Isn’t it clear that the King’s statement *why didn’t you tell me she is your wife; one of the nation could have slept with her* refers to his own desires. Certainly this deserves a response. But Qamin is silent since she does not see the world through figures of speech. She only knows what is in the dictionary.

AS.9 – One can mean Unique: To defend that *one* can mean *unique* we as usual cite a principle of figures of speech. Synecdoche says that words like honey can develop a new meaning referring to attributes of which the word is a good example, in this case, sweetness. Clearly, *oneness* is a good example of *uniqueness*. Thus synecdoche says that *one* can mean unique; and as pointed out above, this is true even if it is not in the dictionary.

In this case I do have a proof text a little bit stronger than the Gur Aryehs. In Songs 6:8-10 the author speaks about his harem (symbolically referring to God’s Harem, the many nations in the world)

There are 60 queens, 80 concubines, and unlimited damsels [But] There is only one *my-dove, my perfect-one*; she is one to her mother; radiant to she who gave birth to her; the daughters saw her and expressed appreciation; the queens and concubines [saw her] and praised her. Who is this? Who appears as the dawn, with soft beauty like the moon; with radiance like the sun; awe inspiring as the constellations

This paragraph clearly shows *one* meaning *unique*. For example, her mother may have had several children but she is *the one*. Similarly, the statement there is only *one my-dove my-perfect one* contradicts the 60 queens and 80 concubines just mentioned. Certainly they were also told that they are the one. Rather, one in this paragraph means unique and it does so by synecdoche.

Now we understand Rashi

- Song 6 justifies that one can mean unique;
- The transformation of meaning reflects the synecdoche principle
- Based on this other verses like Gn26-10 use *one* in the sense of uniqueness
- Finally, Rashi armed with these examples *applied* this translation in at least three other verses.

AS.10 – Recap and Summary: Some statistics may illuminate this. *One* occurs 1000 times in the Bible. Rashi is asserting that in ½% of these occurrences it means *unique*. In each case, the verse is problematic. Rashi is claiming that the native speaker of biblical times heard *one* as *the one* as meaning *unique* based on context; therefore this translation is *peshat*.

Most metaphors when they start are rare. When *to google* started to be used it also was not that prevalent. That is the whole point of evolution of meaning. It is a non-dictionary meaning that starts gently and then accelerates in usage.

But Qamin did not have lenses to see *Figures of Speech*. Something was either in the dictionary or not. She totally ignores the other verses cited by Rashi and the Rashi commenters. She acts as if this Rashi was made up and a derash when such is not the case. She then must develop all sorts of distinctions to *explain* Rashi's *strange* behavior of not presenting *peshat*.

And what we have said about Qamin, not recognizing figures of speech, applies to other modern Rashi commenters such as Gelles, Halivni, and Grossman for example.

To the extent that our examples have shown this a legitimate approach we hope the reader appreciates the availability of such a tool since it greatly enhances the appreciation not only of Rashi but of the Bible itself

The goal of Rashiyomi is to present the four pillars and show how to apply them in a wide variety of circumstances. While we acknowledge the contributions of the Rashi commenters from whom we derived these four pillars, it really does not help the reader, and may even confuse them, to continuously cite Rashi commenters and say “these used the four pillars and these deviated.” For this reason, we do not on every Rashi cite the commenters, it being understood that our comments are derived from them. By focusing exclusively on the four pillars we achieve greater clarity.

Similarly, we only cite secular researchers as needed to show that their fundamental error was using only two pillars of exegesis and ignoring the other two parallelism, and symbolism, including figures of speech. In fact as we shall see it seems to be universally agreed that Rashi did not use parallelism while in fact statistically it is a major exegetical pillar of Rashi commenters. Therefore, while we feel obligated to cite these researchers and outline their omissions, a more detailed analysis would not add to understanding and detour from our main goal.

The situation with Sarah Qamin is typical. As shown above, she ignored half a dozen verses where a different meaning was present, she ignored figures of speech, and therefore was forced to invent contrived approaches to Rashi.

Thus the major thrust in Rashi-yomi will be presenting the four pillars and showing how they can be used to gain higher appreciation and understanding of Rashi.