

## CHAPTER AT: EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF RASHIYOMI METHODS

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**AT.1 – Goals:** We have stated many times that we are replacing the 2-value current language by which to describe Rashi comments, the language of 1) *peshat*, and 2) *derash*, with a 10 valued language of 1) *beginning words* (on what is Rashi commenting?), 2) *the four exegetical pillars* (grammar including grammar of style, parallelism (of consecutive and distant verses as well as overall paragraphs), symbolism (of individual words and entire passages), and meaning (including, and in fact emphasizing, figures of speech), 3) the *peshat* (instant reaction to the text by a native speaker expert in the subject area of the verse), 4) the *form of the Rashi comment*, 5) *the derash-process* (investigations surrounding the verse), 6) *the derash outcome*, 7) *fill-ins*, 8) *2-stage Rashi comments*, 9) *historical*, and 10) *moral or exhortational comments*.

In this section we will examine a Rashi comment showing the stark and blatant difference between the two approaches. This will also lead to greater insight and appreciation of what we are, and what we are not, doing.

**AT.2 – Biblical text and Rashi comment:** We start with the actual texts

Biblical text (Dt07-11:12) Guard the commandments, statutes, and civil laws, which I command you today to do them. And it will be, that *on the heels of intensively listening* to these civil laws, to guard and do them, that God your Lord will guard for you the covenant and kindness that he swore to your forefathers.

Rashi text: *On the heels of intensively listening:* This [the reward for watching God's laws] will come from the light commandments which people trample on with their heels.

**AT.3 – The Rashiyomi approach – *Intensely listen*:** We will take the texts presented in Section AT.2 and show and contrast the Rashiyomi approach and the classical approach. This, as mentioned in the introduction, will afford us the opportunity to show how the expanded 10-value language removes many difficulties from the traditional 2-value language approach. We first present the Rashiyomi approach.

Notice how the translation in Section AT.2 of the biblical text uses the word *intense*; “*On the heels of intensively listening*”. Where did this word come from? It is certainly not in any current English translation. In fact, most people know enough Hebrew to know that *smah* means to listen (The verb occurs in the *shmah* prayer said twice daily thus giving practicing Jews opportunities of familiarity). The verb *smah* is conjugate din the plural-2<sup>nd</sup> person-future-active: *on the heels of* (if you) *will listen* which we have summarized as *on the heels of listening* (Some English translations may prefer *if you will listen* but this avoids the play on the word *heel* which Rashi employs; hence the translation we provided above is used).

So the question remains: Where did the word *intensely* come from? This translation comes from the fact that the conjugation does not just say *tishmeu* (you will listen) but says *tishmeoon* with a

terminal *nun*. This terminal *nun* goes by a variety of names among grammatical scholars for example *nun emphaticum*. Many scholars believe this terminal nun to be ornamental (not carrying any meaning). Here is a citation from a dissenting scholar, Samuel Lee (2015, p. 137) who in his book *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language* (Scholar's Choice), writes as follows:

This intensive letter nun is frequently attached to verbs and has been termed *paragoric* or *epenthetic*. It is found in the Arabic in the same situation and is termed by Arab grammarians *the confirmatory nun*; its office is to impart certainty or intensity to the verb to which it is attached. The same powers have been ascribed to the Hebrew *Nun* similarly situated, though it must be confessed, such powers are not always apparent from the context.

This gives a balanced picture. Lee basically says

- The terminal *nun* exists in Arabic where it indicates confirmation and intensity
- Some scholars say that it has the same function in Hebrew
- However, it is not always apparent from context what the point of emphasis is.

We may augment this citation with the opinions of the classical biblical commenters.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his commentary on the following biblical verse

Ex21-18:19 When two men *intensely dispute*, with one person hitting the other with a stone or fist, and there is no death but there is bed-ridden illness: If the (smitten) person gets up and walks about in health then the smiter is not liable for murder but will pay disability and sickness damages.

Rabbi Hirsch points out that the terminal nun on the Hebrew verb for *dispute* transforms it to mean *intensely dispute* which as R. Hirsch points out means, in this case, *fight*.

Lee does not dispute that there are examples; he rather says that sometimes we can't understand what the examples are emphasizing. Lee gives no examples of what is bothering him so I found a verse that seems to fit this lack of appearance. In the famous dialogue between God and Abraham on the intended Divine destruction of the two cities, Sedom and Amorah, Abraham pleads

Gn18:29 Perhaps there will *intensely* be *found* 40 [righteous people] in the city. ... Will you then destroy

What does *intensely find* add to *find*? I would suggest that Abraham's plea could be interpreted to mean:

Maybe there are no publicly righteous people in Sedom and Amorah; but, there are people who are righteous in private. If so, these people would warrant not classifying the city as totally evil and the city need not be destroyed.

It turns out that the translation *intensely listen* versus *listen* is exactly what Rashi is commenting on in the verse studied in this section. So it is another example of where *intensity* is "not apparent" but is nevertheless there.

**AT.4 – The Rashiomi approach:** We now recap the verse and Rashi comment with added fill-in to show the Rashi thought process. Throughout we emphasize the 10-valued system we have proposed. As usual we use color coding to indicate the various Rashi layers.

Biblical Text: *It will be: On the heels of intensely listening:*

Rashi: [Actual beginning text on which Rashi comments:] Intensely **listening** [Note: Rashi manuscripts list as a beginning text *on the heels of intensely listening*)]

[Implicit Rashi question a la Lee's comment] [ *Intensely* listen? What does the adverb *intensely* listen add to listen? The verse already speaks about guarding the commandments; so what else does *intensely* add]

[We use the grammar pillar. Grammar teaches us that the terminal nun to a verb can indicate emphasis and intensity.]

***Intensely listen refers to the light commandments. In other words, this blessing does not come from simply listening to the heavy commandments (like the Decalogue prohibitions of murder, robbery, adultery, etc.) but from intensely listening to all commandments, even the light commandments that one thinks are not that important.*** [Note: Here, Rashi answers Lees objection: The terminal *nun*'s meaning of intensity is not apparent; Rashi agrees and therefore explains the terminal *nun* meaning *intensity* to refer to listening to even the light commandments]

[Rashi form] [To ensure that people remember this Rashi comment, Rashi *expresses* the comment, not with an abstract boring grammatical speech about terminal *nuns*, but rather by a punchy pun] ***The verse on the heels of listening is referring to the heel commandments, the commandments that people trample on with their heels because they are not serious commandments.***

The color coding exposes the layers of the Rashi comment:

Blue – indicates the *beginning words* what Rashi is commenting on. As we have pointed out in our discussion of the 10-word approach to Rashi, the actual phrase Rashi is commenting on does not necessarily coincide with what the actual beginning words in manuscripts are]

Grey – Indicates the four exegetical pillars

***Green – The peshat: In this case, a native speaker familiar with commandments upon hearing if you intensely listen would instantly respond, “Oh – intensely listen; you mean even the light commandments”***

***Orange – Rashi form: Rashi expresses the comment as a pun on heel. Rashi never intended that the Rashi comment be derived from this pun!!!***

**AT.5 – The classical approach:** The classical approach knows two words *peshat* and *derash*. It introduces or invents various ideas like omni-significance and the Divine Authorship of the Bible justifying non-natural meaning in order to be morally exhortative which supports the *peshat*-

*derash* distinction. Upon seeing this verse, and the attempted explanations of the various Rashi commenters, scholars such as Grossman, Halivni, and even Leibowitz and Qamin might comment (as they have on numerous Rashi comments that do not have an apparent explanation):

There is nothing bothersome in this text. The phrase *on the heels of listening* may seem strange but as the Rashi commenters themselves point out, it is perfectly normal citing Gn26-05 as a precedent. *Therefore* [because we do not see any linguistic or grammatical reason for the Rashi comment] we assume it is *derash*. The *derash* is not the natural meaning of the text, *the Peshat*. The *derash* however has legitimacy; since the Bible is perceived as Divinely authored, it is therefore one legitimate approach to add a layer of meaning which is not true, but morally exhortative, in order to encourage adherents of the Bible to be more observant.

Such comments are plentiful in the scholars just cited and others; in formulating the above we have used the language they use.

To recap what Rashiyomi has done

It points out that discovering what Rashi is commenting on (the *divrey mathchil*) is challenging and not necessarily what the manuscripts list as what is being commented on

It points out that a pun may be a *form* to remember a well derived grammatical comment. Rashi may have preferred not to be abstract but to be punchy so as to ensure that people remember the comment.

It further points out that there are four exegetical pillars. The greatest challenge in any Rashi is ascertaining which pillar is operative.

Finally, not every layer in the Rashi comment is explicit. Some may be understood and elliptical. Even the true explanation may not be explicit; Why? Rashi's goal was to ensure retention not to be scholarly.

**AT.6 – Texts from Sample Rashi commenters:** To solidify the contrast between the classical approach just using *peshat* –*derash* and the Rashiyomi approach which allows for different *beginning words*, *a form-content distinction*, and *reasons not explicitly given*, we cite the various other commenters both on the biblical text and Rashi. These commenters focused on the following issues.

Issue #1: The previous verse states (See Section AT.2) above

Guard *the* commandments, statutes, and civil laws

This verse Dt07-11:12 by contrast says

On the heels of listening to the civil laws

Thus the disparity between mentioning civil laws versus commandments, statutes, and civil laws is noted.

Issue #2: Several commenters (Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Kli Yakar, Mizrachi) site another verse using the expression *on the heels* to indicate consequence. Gn26-05 discussing Abraham and the promises God made to him states:

On the heels that Abraham listened to my voice: He guarded what has to be guarded in Gods laws; commandments, statutes, and civil laws.

However, while *on the heels* can mean terminal consequence, it typically refers to something definite (such as Abraham's past actions) not to something presently uncertain (like the future observance of the commandments). With this background let us look at what several commenters say

Ibn Ezra: Ibn Ezra explains that *heels* means terminal consequence of an activity

Ramban: (He comments on the Ibn Ezra and defends him) He points out that *beginnings* are referred to using the metaphor *head*; therefore, it is consistent to refer to *ends* and *terminations* using the word *heel*.

Ramban in discussing which commandments are *light* (echoing Rashis' explanation but not deriving it) suggests that the civil laws mentioned in this verse are the light commandments. Here Ramban focuses on a well-known tendency to belittle non-ritual commandments as not important and to consider the ritual commandments the most important

Kli Yakar: Kli Yakar disagrees with the Ramban. He cites a well-known Midrashic opinion (also cited by Rashi elsewhere) that the statutes (laws without transparent reasons) are the types of commandments that non Jewish nations belittle to the Jews, "Why do you need these laws?" Kli Yakar then cites the contrast of the previous verse mentioning commandments, statutes, and civil laws, and this verse only mentioning civil laws and claims that the *light commandments* mentioned by Rashi refer to the statutes mentioned in the previous verse but not this one

Finally, in a brilliant piece of scholarship, Kli Yakar cites the Yalkut on Ps49:06, *the sins of my heels surround me*. The Yalkut explains *heels* as referring to the *heel commandments* the *light* commandments. Kli Yakar points out that this Yalkut may be the Midrashic origin of the Rashi comment.

So far no one has explained *why* the word *heel* is reinterpreted to refer to *light* commandments. Let us visit some other commenters.

Mizrachi, Sifsay Chachamim: These Rashi commenters point out that *on the heels* cannot mean *consequence* since *on the heels* refers to something definite while here, in this verse Dt07-11:12, the future is discussed. They conclude that because of this, *heel* does not mean *consequence* but acquires the meaning of a noun, the object of the verb *to listen*. The verse reads *if you listen to my heel commandments*, which is then interpreted to mean the *light* commandments. In other words, Rashi was coining a new term.

Gur Aryeh: Gur Aryeh acknowledges that this Rashi appears as *derash* (in the sense of fanciful homily) and very far removed from the *peshat*. He notes that, "It is not Rashi's nature to bring such

far-fetched *derashoth*.” Instead Gur Aryeh contrasts this verse with Lv26-03 also speaking about the reward for observing commandments.

Lv26-03 *If you walk in my statutes and guard my commandments and do them*

This is contrasted with this verse which reads

Dt07-12 On the *heels* of listening to my civil laws.

Gur Aryeh suggests that Dt07-12 could more simply say, using the style of Lv26-03,

If you will listen to my civil laws, then God your Lord will guard for you

Gur Aryeh concludes that the word *heel* is unusual and therefore may be used for *midrashic* purposes; it therefore refers to the light commandments.

Levush Orah: The Levush also notes the opinions of the Rashi commenters and observes that their explanations are far-fetched. He offers what he considers the simple meaning: The previous verse mentioned a requirement to

observe commandments, statutes, and civil laws

while this verse only mentions

the consequences of listening to the civil laws.

Furthermore, the next verses mention the blessings in cattle and fields for observance which is a reward in this world. Levush points out that reward for observance is supposed to be in the next world not this world. Thus the Levush claims there are two verses dealing with two different things:

One verse is mentioning commandments, statutes, and civil laws for which one gets rewarded in the next world while

This verse speaks about observing the civil laws, which are the light laws, for which one gets rewarded in this world

Thus the Levush seeks to avoid the derivation of the Rashi comment from the word *heel*. He instead derives it from the paragraph structure.

**AT.7 – Concluding Remarks:** Notice how none of the other commenters mention the terminal *nun*. The advantage of the terminal *nun* explanation is that the Rashi comment is a consequence of the verb conjugation. The intensity indicated by the terminal *nun* points to extra observance, the observance of things that are *light*. The entire derivation of the Rashi comment from a pun on *heel* meaning a *heel commandments* is not necessary. However, this requires a 10-word vocabulary which allows us to speak about Rashi *form* versus Rashi *content*, and allows us to challenge what the *beginning words* are.

Often I am asked how I discovered something that none of the classical commenters mention. I might also add that Dr. Samuel Lee, a secular linguist knew certain subtleties of Hebrew grammar

that most grammar books are either silent on or consider to have no significance in terms of meaning.

The answer is: The Bible is still an open work. It is incorrect to say that everything that can be known about the Bible is already known and our job is simply to learn. There is much unknown in the Bible; much that can be discovered; each of us must attempt; each of us may come up with novelty not previously discovered.

Finally, we again mention the difference between the historical-geographic approach and the historical logical approach. We did not approach the Rashi on Dt07-11:12 by asking i) What do the *peshat* and *derash* schools say? ii) What was the historical context of the Rashi? Were people of his time lax in observance of light commandments prompting him to find encouragement on light commandments in the biblical text? iii) What did the grammar books available to Rashi teach? iv) Are there other midrashim on *light* commandments (such as the brilliancy of the Kli Yakar?); v) What do the other commenters saying? The reason we didn't ask these questions, is because we do not think them very productive, neither for understanding the Bible nor for understanding Rashi.

Rather, we asked the interdisciplinary question: What grammatical constructs can help us understand this Rashi? This led us the Lee comment on *nun emphaticum*. We already pointed out that Rav Hirsch (a contemporary of Lee) held a similar view. We have also pointed out that interdisciplinarity, for example, relying on the grammar of other cultures, was common in the centuries preceding Rashi. We believe this the most fruitful approach to understanding the Bible and Rashi.

Finally, we did not take the excessive humility approach that *the generations have dwindled; the closer a generation was to Sinai the more they understood the Bible given there*. Not so: We believe that each of us can make contributions and novelty that are deep and mature with relevance.