

CHAPTER AZ: FIGURES OF SPEECH

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AZ.1 – Overview: In this and the next chapter we review contributions to *peshat* and *derash* made by the late Sarah Qamin. Qamin received her doctorate from Hebrew University in the last half of the last century; her thesis topic was *peshat* and *derash*. She is considered to have made good contributions to our understanding of P&D. Unfortunately, she died prematurely.

Our view, the view expressed throughout this Rashiyomi series, is that Qamin made the same error of omission as all other scholars; motivated by Is26:11 she viewed Rashi as dealing with grammar and linguistics; this has led to totally ignoring other major *peshat* methods including parallelism, symbolism, and figures of speech.. Because she didn't understand the *peshat* of the verses she dealt with, she was forced, as have other scholars, to *invent* exotic theories of Rashi's approach; had she known about these other methods she, as well as other Rashi scholars, would not have *invented* these exotic theories; they would have taken Rashi at his word that his goal was to explain the *peshat*,

We will develop this example the same way others are developed in this series. We first present the *peshat*. We then cite Qamin and show her struggles with Rashi because of omission of major Rashi methods. The example chosen today is particular beautiful because it illustrates the extent to which scholars will deviate from rationality when they do not understand something.

AZ.2 A Biblical Example: By way of background, Adam had just been disobeyed God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The following verse explains why Adam had to be banished from Paradise.

Gn03:22 And God Lord said: Indeed, Adam has become like *the one of us* knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch forth his hand and also take of the tree of life, and he will eat and live eternally [therefore] God Lord banished him from paradise...

Rashi: **He has become like *the one of us*[God] knowing good and evil: He is unique in the lower worlds just as I am unique in the spiritual worlds. What is his uniqueness: Knowing good and evil, which is not the case for animals and beasts.**

And now lest he stretch forth his hand and take and eat and live forever: If he lives forever he will cause others to err after him thinking he too is a god

There are [other] Midrash Agaddah on this verse however they do not reconcile with the Peshat.

AZ.3 Analysis, Citation of Biblical Text: We have color coded the Rashi to indicate the various parts of the anatomy:

- Blue: This is our opinion of the biblical text on which Rashi commented. We note that in many Rashi manuscripts (and current bibles), is *he is like the one of us* is listed as the text on which Rashi comments. But clearly, a reading of Rashi shows he is commenting on the entire biblical phrase *he is like the one of us knowing good and evil*. As I suggest many times, despite the great amount of scholarship and papers on Rashi's choice of citations, frequently, the actual phrase Rashi is commenting on is different. Although, we could exhaustively review major manuscripts, our main point here, is that the Rashi citations of biblical text should come *after* study of the Rashi comment and should not *precede* them.
- Green: This is the *peshat* the spontaneous instant reaction of a native speaker to the text. The text says *he has become like the one of us to know good and evil*; the spontaneous reaction to that would *he is unique like God in knowing good and evil*.
- Red: Rashi adds a fill in. God is unique among angels in knowing good and evil. But who is Adam unique amongst to know good and evil. Rashi fills-in: Adam is unique relative to the animals and beasts who although they have intelligence to not understand good and evil; for example they do not perceive nakedness as immodesty
- Blue: This is the 2nd part of the verse on which Rashi comments.
- Red: Rashi fills in here because there is no text explaining why Adam's uniqueness and living forever should be a problem; so what if he knows good and evil and lives forever. Rashi fills in, that if Adam is eternal and knows good and evil he will be perceived as a god.
- Grey: Rashi although not citing the *other midrash Aggadah* refers to them: Rashi explains that these Midrash Aggadah are *false derash* since they do not emanate from any *Peshat principles*.

AZ.4 Like the one of us: This is not the standard English translation of the biblical text. Most texts translate *like one of us*; perhaps *like one of them*. I have chosen *like the one of us* to reflect the Rashi exegetical pillar used. In this case Rashi uses the *meaning-symbolism* pillar, *figures of speech*. Avinezri, who compiled all Rashi translations of words in his monumental work, *Rashi's Palace*, points out that Rashi coined over a thousand terms in his commentary. He was an inch away from declaring that this was a major Rashi exegetical method. This however, the use and creation of figures of speech, is a fundamental position of this Rashiomi series. In adapting this position we are not allowing arbitrary whimsicality; on the contrary, *figures of speech* have rules governing them which we proceed to discuss.

All languages have a Figure of Speech principle called synecdoche, the naming of a group by a good example of that group (this is usually phrase as naming the whole by a part). For example, honey, because of synecdoche can refer to anything sweet. When a man says to his wife, *I love you honey*, referring to his wife as *honey*, he is using synecdoche.

This is universal to all languages. It doesn't need a dictionary entry. It is similar to the fact that *google* a company founded in 1998, began to mean *to search (to google)* because *google* was a good example of searching. There was no committee of language that declared that *google* meant to search; it simply started being used that way because figures of speech is a natural means of extending meaning in all languages.

So it is very reasonable that the word *one* can mean *unique*, since *oneness* is a good example of uniqueness. For example, in English we have the phrase

You are the only one

This phrase, sometimes used in romantic contexts clearly is not meant literally, that the person being spoken to is the only person, rather, the meaning is that the person is unique. It shouldn't surprise anyone that this very synecdoche is also found in the bible in a romantic context

Example 1:

Songs 6-8:9 There are 60 queens, 80 concubines, and unlimited maidens [but] there *is one my dove, my perfect one*, she *is one* to the mother.

Clearly in the above citation , *one* means *unique*. There are other examples which we now cite

Example 2:

Gn26-10 [King Avimelech to Isaac who claimed his wife is his sister] *What have you done to us, the [one of the nation almost slept with her.*

Rashi: *The one* means the *unique person* [That is the King]

Remarkably, Qamin, who denies that *one* can mean *unique* actually cites three verses where *Rashi translates one as unique contrary to its meaning!!* Qamin totally ignores the Song and Avimelech verse just cited because *figures of speech* is not a fundamental Rashi exegetical pillar. She also discounts the very evidence she brings presumably because the dictionaries do not list *one* as meaning *unique* (Which we have explained is similar to dictionaries not listing *google* as meaning *to search* (Though now they do, when the term first developed it was not in the dictionary)). Possibly Qamin can be excused for not knowing the Songs verse (it was discovered by me), but the Avimelech verse is cited by the Gur Aryeh commentary on which the Levush Orah Rashi commentary says, "This is undoubtedly the true and correct explanation of the Rashi comment."

Besides not citing good supportive evidence, some of which she had before her, Qamin cites examples where *one* does not really mean *unique* and then proceeds to simply ignore them (Without even a discussion). We now examine the three verses she brings (albeit in a footnote).

Qamin cites Rashi on Dt06-04, Gn49-16, and Zach14-09. Here are the examples.

Example 3:

Gn49-16 [Jacob's blessings] {The tribe of} Dan shall be a judge-leader to his nation, like the *number one* of the Jewish Tribes

Rashis: [Although *judge* is normally a verb, *to judge*, here it refers to] The leader-judges (as mentioned in the book of Shofetim) [One good example of the blessing] is Samson, who came from Dan and who as a leader-judge began the saving of the Jewish people from the Philistines. The verse continues that this type of leadership puts Dan on a par with the *number one* of the Jewish tribes, Judah, from whom, the Davidic monarchy came. In other words, the contributions of Dan to begin saving the Jewish people from the Philistines is on a par with the contributions of Judah who continued this trend.

Example 4:

Dt06-04 [Said after the Decalogue] Listen Jews: God is our Lord, God will be one.

Rashi: The God who is our Lord now but not yet the God of the idolatrous nations, is destined to be the *only* God (Rashi cites Zephaniah 3:9, and Zach 14:3 which announce that there will be one God in the Messianic era]

Comment: It is interesting that Qamin *reads* this Rashi as translating *one* as *unique*. I disagree. Rashi is translating *one* as *only*. In fact, in Hebrew (but not in English) the word one can mean, by synecdoche, *a few* (or in this case the *only one*). We again see a blindness of Qamin to Figures of Speech as a legitimate vehicle for interpretation. In passing, *one* as meaning *a few*, because *one* is a good example (synecdoche) of *fewness*, is actually listed in the Biblical Dictionaries such as Shoroshim (cf. Gn29-20, Dan11:20, Gn27-44).

Thus Qamin is unjustified in bringing this example to suggest *one* might mean *unique* when in fact this example does not illustrate this. The same can be said about the next example.

Example 5:

Zach14-09 God will be King over the entire world; on that day, God will be one, and his name will be one.

Rashi: The idolaters will leave their gods; consequently, there will not be with God any foreign gods.

Comment: Here also, I disagree with Qamin's reading of Rashi, that *one* means *unique*. Here, *one* means *only*.

It emerges that *one* using synecdoche can have three additional meanings: *a few*, *unique*, and *one*.

Let us summarize: Qamin is reviewing the idea that *one* means *unique*. She does not cite Avimelech example even though she had it before her. She does not discover the Songs example. While she does cite the Gn49 example she does not even discuss it. We clearly see here an unjustified bias. The bias can be summarized as follows

I Qamin like other scholars before me am unaware of Figures of Speech as fundamental exegetical pillar. My *sole* criteria for meaning is dictionary meaning and no dictionary lists *one* as meaning *unique*. *Therefore*, I need not search for other verses where *one* means *unique*. *Therefore*, I can ignore without even citing it, the excellent example of Avimelech brought by the Gur Aryeh which I had before me. *Therefore*, although I cite the Gn49 example, I can ignore it without discussion because there is no point in discussing something that I *know* to be false. Finally, *therefore*, I can cite weaker examples where *one does not mean unique* and claim the examples of *one meaning unique* so as to discredit Rashi.

I fully realize that the above is a bit harsh in tone. I invite the reader to re-examine the evidence in Examples 1-5 as well as the entire concept of synecdoche; this will enable each reader to form their own opinion on my criticism of Qamin.

AZ.5 Summary and Critiques: A summary of Rashi's commentary is as follows:

- We use the *figure-of-speech* exegetical pillar. More specifically we use *synecdoche*.
- Under synecdoche, and in several languages, *one* can mean *unique*
- Furthermore there are several biblical verses where *one* actually means *unique*
- Based on this, Gn03-22 states *And God said: Indeed, Adam is now like the one of us; and now if he stretches forth his hand and eats from the tree of life he will live forever; [therefore] God banished him from Paradise.*

Rashi's contributions are

- To identify the meaning of *one of us* as *unique*
- To explain the concern with Adam living forever [Since Adam resembles the *one of us* (God) he will cause others to err after him]

Our contribution to Rashi is

- To explain the *one-unique* relationship as using the *Figure of Speech* exegetical pillar, a technique common to all languages. It is not arbitrary; *synecdoche* will only apply if the word studies (like *honey*) is really a good example of the general category (like *sweetness*)
- To emphasize that this is *peshat*, the spontaneous, instant reaction by a native speaker to the verse since the above translation naturally motivates the Rashi fill in.
- To classify as a *fill-in* the missing connection between *living forever* and the need to banish him

All this is clear and accurate. Someone might object that we have translated *unique* as *the one* while Gn03-22 has no article *the*. In fact, such an article occurs in Gn26-09: *The one of the nation* (that is, me, the King) *almost slept with her* [because you said she was your sister].

This is easily answered. Songs 6:8-9 has no *the*; it does not say

My dove my perfect one, you are *the one*

Instead it says

She is *one*, my dove my perfect one.

Similar comments can be made on Gn49-16. We can now flip the question: If Hebrew does not require an article, *the*, why does Gn26-09 have a *the*? But that is easy to answer: Avimelech was a King; he didn't want to call himself *one of the nation*; he wanted more emphasis and called himself *the one of the nation*. Figures of speech is a semantic (meaning) method; we should not read too much into the grammar of figures of speech. More generally, *figures of speech* does not have strict grammatical constructions; in fact the grammatical construction will differ from language to language.

Finally we note that in some languages *one of the group* is a figure of speech for being an ordinary group member (just doing their share). This is a perfectly legitimate use of synecdoche; however the biblical Hebrew language does not use it.

AZ.6 Acknowledgements and Critique of Qamin: As already mentioned, the idea that *one of us* means the unique one of us (God) is explicitly mentioned by Gur Aryeh, a noted Rashi commenter. The Levush Orah, another Rashi commenter applauds the Gur Aryeh as *undoubtedly correct*. However, the Raam, another Rashi commenter, following the Aramaic translation which sometimes violates biblical grammar, translates Gn03-22 in a twisted manner

God said: Indeed, man has become the one; a species of knowing good and evil

In this translation the phrase *the one of us* is broken up into two parts *one* + *of us* and furthermore *of us* is mistranslated as species (in Hebrew the word for *of us* (*mimmenu*) and *species* (*min*) sound alike). This also violates the grammatical cantillations. Various Rashi commenters refute this as violating several grammatical principles and unnatural and point out the naturality of the Gur Aryeh's approach.

We summarize our comments on Qamin mentioned above. We note that the very purpose of her doctoral thesis was to explain Rashi's approach to *Peshat*. However:

- She denies that *one ever* means *unique*
- She ignores (does not even cite) the Gur Aryeh's verse
- She certainly does not cite the verse from Song of Songs

- She does bring 3 examples where she alleges *Rashi translates one as unique*. She however does not comment on the translation. As shown above, in two of these verses *one* means *only* not *unique*. In other words, in mentioning the other side she brings poor and irrelevant examples and furthermore has no discussion of why she chose to ignore the alternate approach to Rashi.
- Because she does not see Rashi as *peshat*, she is forced to develop distinctions and theories on *peshat*. Here is what she, following other Rashi scholars, says:
 - o Rashi explains the verse as *peshat* when there is a *peshat*. When the verse is so difficult that it can't be explained Rashi chooses Agaddah attempting to reconcile the verse text with reasonable meaning.
 - o Qamin further defends these distinctions by noting the various different phrases Rashi uses to describe *peshat*: *peshuto*;, *lifshuto*, *meyashev peshat* or *meyashev leshon hamiqrah*. However, unlike the Rambam, where each legal phrase used in the Mishneh Torah has *distinct* meaning, Rashi is a poet; very often he will use multiple phrases that have the *same* meaning. In fact, the use of multiple terms to mean the same thing actually reinforces the concepts from several viewpoints. We are only justified in seeing distinctions in Rashi's language if the Rashi text itself justifies it.

I have gone at length to discuss Qamin, who received a doctorate from a very prestigious university (Hebrew University) despite the blatant lack of scholarship and respect for other opinions. I did this to show that it does happen. However it is not the goal of the Rashiomi series to cite every wrong interpretation and point out their errors. The major goal is to give readers the tools and skills needed to read and understand Rashi as the *peshat*. No one really wants to hear about other's mistakes especially if they made an honest effort and devoted time and energy to understand Rashi. I will examine such attempts when needed (or when asked), but the major goal is to show how the four exegetical pillars do make all Rashi comments *peshat*, *the spontaneous instant reaction of a native knowledgeable speaker to the statement of a verse*