

CHAPTER BA: THE MOST DIFFICULT RASHI IN CHUMASH

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BA.1 – Overview: Today we deal with the most difficult Rashi in Chumash. In this Rashi comment, Rashi explicitly declares his commentary goal:

Gn03-08 There are many aggadic homilies; the Sages have already arranged these homilies in the Genesis Rabbah Midrash compilation.

A) But I, I have only come for the peshat of the biblical text;

B) to homilies which resolve the biblical text

C) biblical texts which roll (flow) according to the words

This is the famous and most explicit Rashi comment, where Rashi declares that the goal of his commentary is exclusively to give the *peshat* the natural roll or natural flow of the text according to its words.

But a problem immediately arises when one compares the verse and the actual Rashi comment on Gn03-08

Biblical text: [After Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, it says] They heard the voice of God, Lord strolling in the garden according to the sides of the days; so they, Adam and his wife, attempted to make himself hidden from God in the midst of the trees of the Garden.

Rashi Text: What did they hear? They heard the voice of God.
Rashi Text: What does the phrase “according to the sides of the day” mean? To the side of the day that the sun comes, that is the western side, because at Eve the sun is in the west, and they [Adam and Eve] sinned at the 10th hour of the day [Here Rashi refers to a remarkable homily in Sanhedrin:

(TB Sanhedrin 38b) R. Johanan b. Hanina said: The day consisted of twelve hours. In the first hour, his [Adam's] dust was gathered; in the second, it was kneaded into a shapeless mass. In the third, his limbs were shaped; in the fourth, a soul was infused into him; in the fifth, he arose and stood on his feet; in the sixth, he gave [the animals] their names; in the seventh, Eve became his mate; in the eighth, they ascended to bed as two and descended as four; in the ninth, he was commanded not to eat of the tree, in the tenth, he sinned; in the eleventh, he was tried, and in the twelfth he was expelled [from Eden] and departed, for it is written, Man abideth not in honour.

The *problem* emerges clearly:

Rashi states: I have exclusively come to give the natural flow of the text, the *peshat*. But the actual Rashi comment interprets the simple verse as indicating that Adam and Eve sinned at 4 PM (10th hour) on their day of their creation towards evening.

Thus the problem is how the actual Rashi comment fulfills the Rashi mission of the natural flow of the text.

Our view, the view expressed throughout this Rashi-yomi 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 particularly beautiful because it illustrates the extent to which scholars will deviate from rationality when they do not understand something.

BA.2 God's Voice Strolling: What does that mean?

Here we use the powerful symbolism exegetical pillar and focus it on dream-prophecies. Some clarifications are in order. In contrast to Maimonides, who sees prophecy as totally distinct from dreams, Gersonides (Ralbag) views prophecies and dreams on a continuum. We therefore have to discuss how dreams and prophecies are spoken about in the bible.

Of course it might simply say *so and so dreamed*. Or it might simply say that *God appeared to so and so and said the following*. This is certainly possible. But there are terms used to connote prophecy and dreams. The word *voice* especially when used in conjunction with God but also otherwise can connote dreams and prophecies, things that we hear (cf. Dt04-13, Dt04-33, Nu07-89, 1Ki19-13:14, Job04-16). In general obedience to God in the Bible is described equally as *listening to God* or *listening to God's voice*.

Now if *God's voice* refers to dreams, what does *God's voice strolling* mean? What is the *stroll* or *walk* of dreams. But a little reflection shows the following:

Genesis 3 describes *sin*. No one gets up and just sins. There are stages and development. First you are aware of sin but reject it as ridiculous. Then there is a stage where you see the arguments to sin. Then there is full temptation and the actual sin. This is following by regret

and a *why did I do it* mentality. Furthermore, biblical people do not just engage in these processes mentally but through the agency of dreams.

This verse, Gn03-08 coins a beautiful metaphor for the stages, colors, and development of interactive dreams on guilt. There is the *dawn* of the idea of sin, the arguments enabling *seeing* the idea of sin (midday of sin), the glaring temptation of sin (*noon*), the post-sin phrase with its depression (the eve and dusk of sin). Gn03-08 describes Adam and Eve strolling (interacting for that is what the reflexive tense means) with God's voice on the garden. They didn't just sin; at first sin was a glimmer, then something they could see (daylight), then overwhelming (temptation, noon) and then guilt. In the words of the verse

They heard (in their dreams) the voice of God strolling according to the sides of the day.

BA.3 Other Approaches: Several questions emerge on this.

Qamin cites commentators dealing with the Rashi comment *What did they hear? They heard the voice of God.*" Qamin explains that the phrase *heard the voice of God strolling* could either mean

God was strolling and the voice of that stroll was heard
God's voice itself was strolling.

I was privileged to read a recent doctoral dissertation of Hillel Novetsky (owner of www.alhatorah.org) wherein he studies some lost commentary of the Rashbam on the first few chapters of Genesis. Novetsky points out other verses where it is not clear whether a verb refers to the word immediately preceding it or to a more distant word in the verse.

Our response to Qamin, Novetsky, and Rashbam, is the same: They are looking at the verse using the grammatical exegetical pillar. Therefore they can't reach a decision. Notice our approach in section BA.2. We approached Rashi not through grammar but through meaning. It doesn't make sense to say *God strolled*; if we know that *voice* refers to *dreams* it makes sense to say that *dreams stroll* meaning they have development and stages. Here we use the mantra stated throughout this Rashiomi series, that the mistakes of other scholars were using only some of the exegetical pillars, not all of them.

Finally, one may challenge the approach enunciated above. Are there indeed other examples of the phrase *sides of the day* referring to *stages in a dream cycle*? The short answer is that there aren't but other cases are not needed for justification. Recall that most biblical words occur less than 10 times in the Bible. Identifying the meaning of any word is a challenge because of lack of cases. The same is true for Biblical phrases.

How then should the veracity of the symbolic meaning of a phrase be interpreted? Using the principles of symbolism, including use of other biblical metaphors (*voice* means *dreams*), and including the four primary methods of interpreting symbols: *form, function, biblical precedents, and nuances of words describing the item*. Biblical precedents is only one of four methods.

BA.4 A Useful Precedent: Consider the following rather simple verse from 1Sam01:20. Chana, who had been childless, prayed a lot, was blessed by the high-priest, and gave birth to a boy

Biblical Text: She call his name, Samuel, Godheard (God Heard) because I asked for him from God

If we just look at the structure of the sentence (say we were computers), we might infer from the sentence structure that

Interpretation #1: *Godheard* should be read *Fromgod* since the Hebrew letters of the root *to ask*, **shin-aleph-lamed** do occur in the Hebrew word, Samuel, and additionally there is the letter **mem** which means *from*. So the name Samuel, can easily be connected with *Asked From* corresponding to the justifying phrase in the verse *I asked for him from God*.

Interpretation #2: But a more reasonable explanation is to note that the first three letters of Samuel, **shin-mem-vav**, correspond to the root **shim-mem-ayin**, *to hear*, and the last two letters **aleph-lamed**, correspond to **Ayl**, the word for *God*. So the verse reads *I called him Godheard since I asked for him from God*. Notice how this interpretation requires an intermediate step

I asked him from God (Justifying clause in the verse)
And indeed God heard my prayers, so that
His name, is *HeardGod*

Someone might ask: If interpretation #2 is correct why doesn't the verse simply say so

I called him *Godheard* because God heard my prayers

Why does it introduce this missing extra elliptical sentence

I called him *Godheard* because God heard the prayers when I asked for him from God

The point of the above analysis is that we need not be literal when interpreting verses; we are fully justified in introducing middle steps, intermediate steps which are not explicitly there. This principle will be useful when we reexamine the Rashi text on Gn03-08.

BA.5 Our interpretation and Rashi's actual statement: To recap what we said above we interpreted the verse

They heard the voice of God Lord walking in the Garden to the sides of the day

As meaning

They had interactive dreams (voice of God) corresponding to the day cycle (dawn, morning, noon, eve) of temptation-sin-guilt.

But Rashi does not say that. He interprets *walking to the sides of the day* as meaning

To that side of the day when the sun sets, the west; for indeed they sinned at 4 PM

Leaving aside the problem of 4 PM, does this Rashi disagree with our interpretation? After all we have said that *sides of the day* refers to all parts of the day cycle, while Rashi seems to say that *sides of the day* refers to the west.

We answer this the same way we analyzed the verse from Samuel analyzed in 1Sam01:20: I called his name *God-heard* because I *asked him from God*. As noted in Section BA, we use the most reasonable interpretation even if we must use an intermediate step. In this case *sides of the day* most naturally refers to the complete day-cycle of dreams on the temptation-sin-guilt cycle. This is because the day has multiple sides *and also* the temptation-sin-guilt cycle has many sides or aspects. Rashi however emphasized that it is only during the guilt stage that they realized that they should have listened to God (in contrast to the snake who said *if you sin you will have power and know good and evil*, they found out the hard way, that by sinning, they lost their power, the power of their innocence). As indicated earlier, this struggle with temptation as well as the withdrawal symptoms of the guilt stage are common and well known.

This method of approaching Rashi,

First, using exegetical principles to arrive at the *peshat*

Second, reading the actual Rashi and supplying intermediate steps

is very useful not only in understanding Rashi but in enriching the text. We obtain a richer perspective by so doing. In this case, we not only look at the guilt stage, but we look at the entire day cycle of temptation-sin-guilt. The discussion between Eve and the snake takes on more meaning and the various stages within that discussion. We see the stages of *discussion*, Eve *looked* (on her own), *emotional awareness* (lustful to the eyes), and *eventual sin*. Such a reading of the text is the proper one.

BA.6 But is this the *Peshat*? We have defied *peshat* as the spontaneous reaction to a verse. We are claiming that the verse

They heard the voice of God strolling in the garden according to the sides of the day

Means

They had interactive dreams about their temptation according to the *day cycle* of temptation

We are not merely claiming that this is a *reasonable* interpretation! We are claiming it is *spontaneous*. What is to prevent a counterargument that

I do not spontaneously respond to the verse that way. In fact after listening to the arguments cited above I am still struggling to understand the day cycle of sin. Hence, since this is not spontaneous, it can't be peshat.

The response to such an objection is important since it lies at the heart of what we consider to be *peshat*. First some clarification. We never claimed that

peshat is the spontaneous reaction to the statement of a verse

Rather we claimed that

Peshat is the spontaneous reaction of a native speaker of the biblical culture to the verse statement.

The important issue is not what you and I think; the important issue is how the biblical speaker heard this verse. To clarify this further recall the example of a husband giving his wife a bouquet of 8 roses. We don't immediately know why. Upon research in the local newspapers we may find that they got married 8 years ago today. Such research points to the fact that the spontaneous reaction of the wife to the 8 roses is that it is a symbolic gift celebrating their anniversary. Notice the contrast

We: We had to do research (something time consuming and not spontaneous)

The wife: Our time-consuming research shows that the wife probably spontaneously sees the 8 roses as a symbolic gesture on their anniversary.

Thus it is very important to distinguish between *our research* and the *wife's spontaneity*.

With that background we can delve into the biblical speaker and their culture., The following bullet points (no different than looking up a wedding 8 years ago in local newspapers) are relevant

- The native speakers were former slaves with numerous psychological problems arising from lack of control of their environment
- The native speakers *according to the Bible's belief*, were prophets (Ex 20) who witnessed the theophany of the Decalogue.
- Note especially that all prophecies are basically dreams at some level of detail (We follow here the Ralbag's approach to the dream-prophecy continuum).
- According to the biblical belief the native speakers did not have to *earn a living* in the desert since they had much cattle and sheep from Egypt and additionally had the manna.
- They must have therefore spent their day socializing and helping each other with their personal problems such as the personal problems arising from being slaves. In fact, the infamous Nu12, the story of Aaron and Miriam speaking about Moses' separation from his wife (and their apparent plot to get them back together) shows just such a setting. Of course, since, the native speakers were prophets anyway, they employed the medium of dreams in

their helping each other (Again, Nu 12 illustrates how interactive dreams were used in people dealing with social problems).

Now we can finally state our position:

The native biblical speakers were former slaves become prophets who spent some time helping each other transition from the slave state to the free state. They employed the medium of dreams. As slaves they were more familiar than most people with the temptation-indulgence-remorse cycle (most of the literature is religious; but secular psychology knows of this cycle also. One proposal for analyzing it is the delay-discounting model (See <https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/26/health/pleasure-guilt-partner/index.html>) Throughout the bible *voice of God* refers to dreams-prophecies. Thus the spontaneous reaction of this biblical native speaker to

They heard the voice of God strolling according to the sides of the day
is spontaneously heard as

Their dreams and waking analysis went through the *day cycle of sin (temptation-indulgence-remorse* which nicely corresponds to *dawn-noon-eve*).

BA.6 Critique of Qamin and further comments: With this background we can critically examine what Qamin did. First, she read the verse, read Rashi's comments and came to the conclusion that even though Rashi said his goal was to give the *peshat* he was giving *midrash*. Her problem was how to deal with the apparent disparity of Rashi's goal of *peshat* and his final conclusion of *derash*.

She does this through extensive academic analysis of Rashi's language She spends in all 10-20 pages dealing with Rashi's statement that *peshat* is something that flows naturally and resolves the scriptural text. By examining the word resolve she comes to the conclusion that Rashi doesn't always seek to give full *peshat*; sometimes a verse is so problematic that the best Rashi can do is find a midrash/homily which attempts at resolution; it is more an issue of going in a direction than reaching a goal.

However, to reiterate the mantra of this series on Rashi, she felt obligated to nuance Rashi's statement of resolving the scripture precisely because she didn't see the homily as *peshat*; and the reason she didn't see the homily as *Peshat* was because she only used two exegetical pillars: meaning and grammar; the pillars of parallelism and symbolism including figures of speech were unknown to her. Of utmost importance is the following: Had she known about them she probably would not have said what she did.

We close this brief look at Qamin with one more point. Independent of her motivation, Rashi does use this language: *resolving the scripture*. It *does* have a nuance of *direction* rather than a terminal goal of *peshat*. How does this weekly series deal with that. The answer is simple: There are aspects

of the Midrash (originally from TB Sanhedrin 38b) that are not *Peshat*. For example, the Talmud which Rashi cites states

Adam and Eve ate from the tree at 4 PM

This is not *Peshat*! All one can infer from the verse is that their dreams dealt with the temptation-indulgence-remorse cycle for which the Bible coins the term *sides of the day*. It is meaningless (and in fact hurts the metaphor) to say that something happened at 4 pm rather than evening. In fact, it interferes with our understanding of what happened. Adam and Eve didn't have one conversation and sin. They probably had many conversations; it probably lasted many weeks., There was a dawn of temptation including conversations, there was the heat of the day, noon, when indulgence finally took place, and then there was the classical remorse period, the eve of their "day" in paradise. This took place over weeks or months. The Talmud is simply using an exaggeration, a hyperbole, to get its point across.

BA.7 Summary and Main Points: We summarize our conclusions

- The native biblical speakers were former slaves, current prophets
- The native biblical speakers spent part of their day helping each other transition from their slavery and resolving social problems; they did not have to earn a living. (See Nu12)
- The native speaker, a former slave was all too familiar with the lifecycle of *temptation-indulgence-remorse* for which the biblical verse coins the term *sides of the day*
- The native speaker, in resolving social problems, utilized the medium of dreams which throughout the Bible are referred to as the *voice of God*.
- The Talmud which Rashi cites goes *beyond* the Peshat and engages in overly detailed exaggeration: Instead of saying they sinned towards evening it says they sinned at 4 PM. We, however, need not take this literally.
- The above shows that Rashi in this verse fulfilled his goal of giving the *peshat*, words which roll naturally from the biblical text. This *peshat* resolves the scriptures.
- Qamin however, who was unaware of symbolism as a method of *Peshat*, did not see Rashi as stating *peshat*; she saw him as *pointing to problems and hinting at resolutions*. She did this through an extensive semantic analysis of Rashi's language. However this attempt of hers was unnecessary and ignores the simple approach we have taken to Rashi in these pages.