

CHAPTER BB: A REVIEW OF THE RASHI ANATOMY

<https://www.Rashiyomi.com/rule3402.pdf> Adapted from The Rashi Newsletter,

(c) Rashiyomi.com Oct 2020, Dr. Hendel, President,

NoaCh

Full statement of copyright is found at www.Rashiyomi.com/copyrights.htm

BB.1 – Overview: A fundamental position of Rashiyomi is that

Previous researchers basically use a 3-word vocabulary, i) Peshat, ii) Derash, and iii) 2-3 exegetical pillars (dictionary meaning, grammar, and context of verse sequence) when dealing with Rashi

We advocate use of a 10 word vocabulary i) Peshat, ii) Rashi form vs. content, iii) number of comments in Rashi, iv) what Rashi is commenting on, v) 4-5 exegetical pillars, vi) *derash* as the *process* of research, vii) *derash* as the *outcome* of research, viii) 2-stage Rashis, ix) fill-in Rashis, x) historical and exhortational material.

By using a richer vocabulary many items which appear fanciful may be *peshat*. It is worthwhile, periodically, to review these 10 Rashi components, or as we have called them more precisely, the *anatomy* of a Rashi comment. We have also employed color schemes to differentiate the 10 anatomical pieces of each Rashi. By calling these components an *anatomy* we acknowledge that they are more than a list, they are like a living organism with dynamic interaction.

We review the Rashi anatomy. Although no one Rashi has all 10 anatomical parts, we have selected a relatively simple Rashi with eight components. We will show how to correctly analyze this Rashi. We will also show how use of a three-word vocabulary is inadequate and leads to false conclusions.

This analysis will take places of two to three chapters. The structure of these chapter is simple. We state the biblical text and Rashi comment below. Then we discuss each of the ten anatomical organs of the Rashi comment. We show both the correct way to analyze the Rashi and also the traditional way which is sometimes superficial and leads to misunderstanding.

Biblical text: (Gn-07:23b) [Discussion of Noah and his ark after the great flood which wiped out the earth came] And *ach* Noah (and those with him) remained/survived in the ark.

Rashi: *Ach* Noah means *only* Noah. This is the *peshat*.

But the Midrash Aggadah states:

Groaning and oozing blood from the toil of dealing with the animals and beasts.

And there are those who say that Noah delivered the Lion's meal late one day and the lion smote him.

And on Noah it is said, Behold: The righteous will pay in this world (Prv 11:31)

BB.2 What is Rashi Commenting On? This is the first component of the Rashi anatomy. This component is also formulated as the *beginning words*, or in Hebrew, *divrey hamathchil*. In all modern texts, the *beginning words* are textual words from the biblical verse commented on, and are in bold. Rashi of course did not have bold font accessible. Instead he cited the words of the biblical text, followed by a grammatical delimiter (typically a period).

Obviously the *beginning words* is an important part of each Rashi since it directs attention to the part of the verse being commented on. Some scholars have studied the characteristics of the *beginning words*. However, corruption can arise from three sources:

1st) The earliest Rashi manuscripts emerged about a 100 years after Rashi wrote them; scribal transcribers injected their own interpretations. For example, a scribal transcriber might shorten a long biblical phrase thereby erasing the word Rashi was commenting on; similarly, a scribal transcriber might punctuate with a period every word from the biblical verse thus breaking up a single Rashi comment into multiple Rashi comments, resulting in confusion.

2nd) Frequently, when Rashi comments on parallel passages the *beginning words* can at most capture one of the parallel passages since the other passage may lie elsewhere. In such a case Rashi may or may not be explicit on the parallelism. In fact, all scholars (Gelles, Gruber, Kugel, Grossman) do not believe that Rashi was fully aware of parallelism. About a dozen chapters in this series will be devoted to a line by line analysis of the comments of these scholars and their refutation.

3rd) Finally, it is not clear to me that Rashi intended his *beginning words* to be precise. He may have simply intended them as placeholders. I have not found definitive studies proving how *beginning words* (in contrast to the Rashi comments themselves) illuminate what is commented on.

In any event, I personally have found *beginning words* to be more confusing than helpful. Consequently throughout this series I have relied on the Rashi comments themselves to ascertain what Rashi is commenting on. We briefly look at some examples in the next section.

BB.3 Examples of Beginning Words: In the following two examples, the actual *beginning words* found in current Rashi texts do not clearly indicate *what* Rashi is commenting on.

Example 1: Here is the biblical text, the current Rashi text, and an emended Rashi text explicitly stating what Rashi is commenting on.

Biblical Text: Dt12-07 On the heels of listening to these civil laws, guarding and doing them [will come that] God will guard for you the covenant and kindness that He swore to your patriarchs.

Rashi Text: **On the heels:** This refers to the light commandments which a person tramples on with ones heels [The verse is saying if you observe the light commandments you will get rewarded]

We correct the beginning text below by citing the phrase in its entirety. Notice how this changes the Rashi comment from homily to straightforward meaning.

Correct Biblical Text: Dt12-07 On the heels of listening *intensively* to these civil law: guarding and doing them [will come that] God will guard for you the covenant and kindness that He swore to your patriarchs.

Emended Rashi Text: **On the heels of listening intensively to these civil laws:** This refers to [listening to] the light commandments which a person tramples on with ones heels [The verse is saying if you observe the light commandments you will get rewarded]

Let us carefully compare the current Rashi texts and our suggested emendation. Under our emendation Rashi's real point is a punchy clear grammatical point: The terminal nun in Hebrew, also known as the *paragogic* nun, is properly translated as *intensely*. Rashi is explaining that *intensely listening to God's commandments* means listening to the light commandments.

However, Rashi *expresses* himself using a pun: The light commandments are the commandments one tramples on with one's heels, echoing a pun on the verse's opening phrase *on the heels of listening*. The early transcribers were probably unaware of the principle of the paragogic nun. They really thought Rashi was *deriving* his comment from a pun. Hence the contrast of the current texts and the emended texts.

The concluding point to be made here is that *what* Rashi is saying as well as *why* he is saying it strongly depend on *what* Rashi is commenting on and unfortunately the *beginning words* don't always tell us that. It is for this reason that I include *beginning words* in the 10-value Rashi anatomy but exclude it from the traditional Rashi approach. True, scholars do pay attention to the *beginning words* but they assume that what they see there *is* the real thing Rashi is commenting on and as just shown this can twist a punchy *peshat* into a homily.

Example 2: Again we present current translations and texts as well as emended translations and texts.

Biblical text: Lv10-03 [A fire came from God and killed Aaron's two children who had violated Temple Sanctity by improperly entering the Temple (apparently when drunk). Aaron was silent

Rashi text: Aaron was silent: He received reward for his silence. What is the reward he received? That the prohibition of serving in the Temple while drunk was given to him personally (most biblical commandments were given to Moses)

We now present the emended Rashi *beginning words*. Notice, that we also change the verse on which Rashi is commenting.

Emended Biblical Text: Lv10-08 God spoke to Aaron to say over. Wine and strong wine, do not drink (you and your sons) when you come to the Temple...

Emended Rashi Text: **God spoke to Aaron:** This biblical paragraph is communicated solely to Aaron (while most biblical paragraphs are communicated to Moses and/or Aaron) This receipt of the prohibition of serving in the Temple while drunk by Aaron was a reward for his silence at the death of his sons reflecting his understanding that it was a just act of God who punished those who violated the holiness integrity of the Temple.

By focusing on the anomaly that about 9 dozen biblical paragraphs begin with God speaking either to Moses alone or Moses and Aaron while only a few paragraphs (such as the prohibition of drunkenness) were exclusively communicated by God to Aaron. We again see how the Rashi is *peshat* by virtue of *nuance* (God spoke to Aaron (not to Moses)). On the other hand if the *beginning words* are *Aaron was silent* it incorrectly appears that Rashi is expressing moralistic ideas *he deserved to be spoken to because of his silence* without any indication of whether this speaking to Aaron is that rare.

In passing, we note that the idea of a database inquiry, comparing all beginning paragraphs and noting anomalies, a rather modern concept, is actually performed by the Talmudic sages. This particular database inquiry is mentioned in the Sifray on Lv01-01.

BB.4 The Number of Rashi Comments: The second component of the Rashi anatomy is the number of items Rashi is commenting on. Rashi typically comments on one issue in the verse. But there are times when he comments on one general issue with several components. Furthermore, some Rashi comments address two distinct comments.

Let us revisit the Rashi we are studying today cited in Section BB.2

Rashi: A1) *Ach* Noah means *only* Noah. This is the *peshat*.

A2) But the Midrash Aggadah states:

Groaning and oozing blood from the toil of dealing with the animals and beasts.

And there are those who say that Noah delivered the Lion's meal late one day and the lion smote him.

B) And on Noah it is said, Behold: The righteous will pay on land (Prv 11:31)

We first present an analysis using the current two valued system for analyzing Rashi *Peshat*, *Derash*. Then we present the analysis using the Rashi anatomy, the 10-value system.

Two value system: In this system there are just two words, *peshat*, *derash*. So everything is classified as either *peshat* or *derash*. As shown in the citation there are 3 parts to this Rashi

Part A1) commenting on the *peshat* of the Hebrew *ach* which means *only*

Part A2 presenting a *derash* a homily on the word *only*

Part B presenting the reason a righteous person like Noah was punished.

The 10-value system of the Rashi anatomy would analyze it this way

10-value system: Part A1 presents the *peshat* of the Hebrew word *ach* which as we will show below really means *most of* (even though Rashi says it means *only* something we will have to deal with)

Part A2 presents neither *peshat* nor *derash*. It rather is a speculative fill in on how *most of Noah remained in the ark*: Maybe he lost weight from the cold; or maybe he was hit by a lion whom he didn't serve on time. The important point here is that the 10-word vocabulary does not look at every statement as *peshat* or *derash*. A word might be a speculative fill in (We of course owe the reader an explanation why Rashi calls this *derash* and that will be presented below)

Part B is also neither *peshat* nor *derash*. It is a moral exhortative afterthought. It is a nostalgic speculation on the fact that the righteous sometimes have to pay for minor things (like bringing a lion food late). It is not intended to *explain* anything; certainly it is not explaining anything in the biblical verse.

What emerges from this analysis is interesting:

According to the two-word vocabulary Rashi was explaining two things and giving both *peshat* and *derash* for one of them

According to the Rashi anatomy however, Rashi was *only* explaining the word *ach* which means *most of*. Rashi does speculate on *how* most of Noah remained. He also makes a moral observation about how the righteous sometimes are punished for minor things. The important point here, is that using the 10-valued system we see Rashi as only giving *peshat*. He wasn't trying to explain anything else nor was he trying to give two explanations to the word *ach*. An important component of this analysis is that Rashi was only explaining one item in the verse.

BB.5 The Four Exegetical Pillars: The third and perhaps the most important component of the Rashi anatomy is the four exegetical pillars. What are the vehicles by which Rashi explains biblical text? I am indebted to Grossman who makes explicit the source for the classical approach that only uses 2-3 exegetical pillars, grammar, (dictionary) meaning, and sequence.

Is26:11 Rashi Text: I have seen many homilies (Midrash Aggadah) to the beginning through ending text of this chapter; but they are not consistent with either

The grammar of the language
The context (sequence) of the chapter

Therefore I was compelled to explain this chapter according to its sequence.

To be more precise, Rashi identifies here three legitimate exegetical activities

Grammar
Language (Dictionary meaning)
Sequence

The sequencing of sentences or paragraphs is a sub-topic of grammar which also includes conjugational grammar, the grammar of taking a biblical root and conjugating it according to mood, meaning, person, plurality, and time (e.g. *I watched, I had watched, I would like to watch, We watched, I am a watcher*).

To the traditional Rashi approach, language and grammar (including both conjugational grammar and sequence grammar as well as other branches of grammar recognized in all languages) we add two-three more exegetical pillars

Additional Method #1: Parallelism: For example

You will *not have* other gods before me
You will *not make* idols

From the parallelistic alignment of *don't have* and *don't make* Rashi, following the Talmud and Sifrah infers that both i) possession (*have*) and even ii) mere production (*make*) (with intent that others should possess, not yourself) are prohibited. This inference is quite clear in the text but is neither a result of dictionary meaning nor grammar. One could (as is often done) try and include parallelistic analysis in meaning analysis: E.g.

Well the word *have* strictly means having and excludes when you only have monetary value such as when you *make* the object. Similarly, the word *make* strictly means producing and has nothing to do with possession.

However, this fails because strict interpretation is simply not always followed. If the Bible had just said *Don't have idols* it could equally mean don't have in any way (broad interpretation) including temporary having in an inventory because of production with an intent to sell. It is the parallelism which explicitly indicates two prohibitions and decides if *have* and *make* are broad or restrictive/literal.

Suffice it to say that enough biblical passages are interpreted broadly that we can't say that meaning requires strict reading unless something in the text indicates it such as parallelism.

To say that parallelism is a method means that the biblical speakers and the biblical listeners heard the text this way and it was understood that parallel passages are understood this way. Kugel goes at great lengths in his book to show that parallelism was a universal idiom in many near-eastern languages.

We take note that all Rashi scholars without exception do not believe that Rashi used parallelism in his commentary. This is not true. We will spend about ten issues carefully reviewing the evidence and showing it to be unfounded, based on misreading of Rashi texts without looking up their sources.

To take another simple example (where the Rashi comment makes explicit the parallelism) we have

When a person *opens* a pit or
when a person *digs* a pit

The parallelistic contrast of *open* and *dig* indicates that liability for torts applies whether the person created the public obstacle (e.g. by *digging* the pit) or removed protections (by e.g. *opening* the pit, i.e. removing a cover). There are many such examples.

Additional Method #2: Symbolism is a major method of *peshat*. Symbolism includes all *figures of speech*. Unfortunately many scholars while acknowledging symbolism as a method do not consider it *peshat*. That is because they never defined *peshat*. We use the following definition:

peshat is the spontaneous instant reaction of a native speaker familiar with the subject matter to statement of a verse. A key point is that peshat is instant and spontaneous. If it is not instant, it is not peshat.

This is a very strong definition. The classical example illustrating *figures of speech* as *peshat* is the pun which many secular scholars consider a method of *peshat*.

Abe while on a dinner date with Rose says to her, can you please pass me the *Roisens*.

Anyone seeing this in a movie would instantly interpret this as a pass by Abe at Rose. He did not want raisins, he wanted Rose herself. In this case we are not using symbolism per se but the pun which is a broad subcategory of figures of speech which itself lies on the border connecting meaning and symbolism.

A biblical parallel is the following

Biblical text Ester 1-10:12: On the 7th day (of the wine party) when the King's heart was good in wine he said that his seven eunuchs should bring Queen Vashti with a royal crown to show all nations her beauty because she was very attractive ... Queen Vashti refused to come according to the requests of royal eunuchs and he was very angry

Rashi/Midrash: He ordered her brought *only* with a royal crown (naked with a crown).

Method #3: Symbolism (when not applying to figures of speech) can also be *peshat* in the sense of an instant reaction. A classical secular example might be a husband handing his wife 8 roses on their 8th anniversary; an instant reaction is that the 8 roses symbolize 8 years of marriage.

To recap, proper approach to Rashi employs 4 exegetical pillars

Grammar, including conjugational and agreement grammar, grammar of sequence, grammar of emphasis etc.,

Parallelism, including same verse parallelism, distant parallelism from similar verses, and paragraph climactic parallelism

Symbolism whether of individual items or parable like symbols

Meaning including dictionary meaning but also including figures of speech.

The statement that these are exegetical pillars does not mean one can whimsically twist a verse with a figure of speech and say it is a legitimate comment; on the contrary; all these exegetical pillars follow strict rules and guidelines. They are each explained in their respective places.