

ParShaT *VaYiGaSh* – One Pager Series

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Rashi #1,#2: Biblical Text Gn46-16:18: [Background: Benjamin, Judah's brother was just caught stealing Joseph's cup. He was sentenced to slavery.] And Judah said, *What shall we say to my lord? what shall we speak? how shall we clear ourselves? God has found the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found.* And he [Joseph] said, God forbid that I should do so; but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, go up in peace to your father. Then Judah came near to him, and said, *Oh my lord, let your servant, I beg you, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant; .* [In the continuation, Judah points out that enslaving Benjamin would lead to Jacob's death; Judah offers himself to be enslaved in exchange for Benjamin's freedom]

Rashi Text: The *peshat*, the natural spontaneous meaning of the text is that [after Judah spoke so contritely as seen in the italicized words of the biblical text, *what can we say....you have found our sin*] Judah spoke harshly "You Joseph are like a King; you said you just wanted to meet Benjamin to be sure we had a brother, and now you want to enslave him [Is this the way a King acts]? Is this "just meeting him?" Furthermore, you asked if our father is still alive and now your actions will kill him. [However] there are many *fanciful homilies* [midrash] Fancy #i):Judah said: Remember your ancestor Pharaoh who was punished severely for marrying Sarah; the same will happen to you for enslaving Joseph. Fancy #ii) Pharaoh is a secular king; his decrees do not always come true; so too your decrees are not binding. Fancy #iii): Judah said: If you start up with me I will kill first you and then your master Pharaoh.

Rashiyomi explanation: We have already placed our comments in brackets in the Rashi. Rashi presents both a *peshat* and a *derash*; the *derash* is in the sense of homily and fantasy.

The *peshat*, the spontaneous instant reaction of the text is a spontaneous reaction to tone. Notice the progression *what can we say, we have no defense, God has exposed our sin*, but then suddenly *your actions will kill our father...*, *you asked to see Benjamin to verify that we are not spies, you turned an investigation into a justification for enslavement.* The change in tone is obvious, blatant, and clear. The spontaneous and instant reaction is that Judah was speaking harshly and *therefore* asked in advance that Joseph not get angry. Indeed, Judah may have deliberately provoked Joseph, so that Joseph should want to enslave Judah and free Benjamin.

The *derash*: The word *derash* as used by Rashi has five distinct meanings. One of them is fantasy, homily, and reading things into the text that are not there. Let us carefully review this so that it is understood. We have in the *peshat* established that Judah spoke harshly. We have also identified two areas where Judah spoke harshly: i) He accused Joseph of killing his father and ii) he accused Joseph of deceiving them about Benjamin that he just wanted to meet him. It is natural, for biblical scholars, whether Rabbinic or even modern (really!) to try and milk every last possible piece of harshness from the text even if it is not there. So Rashi brings three Talmudic attempts which view Judah's statements as ambiguous and hostile even though they are disguised as humble. Attempt #1: Judah says he compares Joseph to a King like Pharaoh but perhaps there is a hint and reference to the Pharaoh who was punished severely in Gn12 for stealing Sarah; in a similar manner Joseph who was stealing Benjamin would pay severely. Attempt #2: Pharaoh is not a divine King and therefore his decrees are not always kept; so too Joseph's decrees are not binding. Attempt #3: Rashi interprets Judah's *don't get angry at me* as elliptical macho language: "Start up with me and I will kill both you and your master."

The Rejection: And why does Rashi classify these as fantasies. Because they have no basis in the four exegetical pillars, *grammar, parallelism, symbolism, and figures of speech*. Furthermore, they do not fit into the context of the conversation flow: All that fits in is the accusation that Jacob would die and that Joseph lied to them when he said that he just wanted to meet Benjamin

Philosophy of Interpretation: Know that many scholars, ancient and modern, religious and secular see Rashi as *disagreeing* with the methods of Chazal; as being a pioneer in a new method of biblical interpretation, emphasis on the *peshat* of the text. This is false, ridiculous, and insulting to both Rashi and the Talmudic sages. Rather the truth is as follows: The Talmud records many *attempts* at interpretation that are rejected on the spot. They in fact knew how to differentiate between a bouncy spontaneous interpretation, *peshat*, and a fantasy. Sometimes the Talmud analyzes such positions and rejects them. But at other times we have no recorded rejection. Rashi, an accomplished Talmudic annotator who corrected many Talmudic manuscripts and who was schooled in the manuscript analysis techniques of the leading religious scholars of his time, was simply *filling in* missing rejections from our current Talmudic manuscripts. He was not disagreeing with anyone but rather communicating and assuring us that the Talmudists themselves knew that these interpretations had to be rejected. Know and understand this and your Rashi reading will be enriched.