

ParShaT *BeHa'aLoTheChaH* - One Pager Series

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Rashi #1-9: Biblical Text: Nu08-06a (Nu11-16c Gn02-15a, Gn16-03a, Gn43-15a, Lv08-02b, Nu27-18a Nu27-22a, Dt01-15a) *Take the Levites from the Jewish people....[the Text continues: They are chosen to serve the Priests in the Sanctuary]*

Rashi Text: *Take* them with words, “You are so fortunate to have been chosen by God to serve Him in the Temple.”

Take - Persuade: Rashi, as shown above, makes this comment 9 times in his commentary!! In 8 of them he does *not* explain *why* he is commenting. But on Gn43-15a we have an explicit statement with an additional characteristic Rashi use of modern methods (comparative linguistics with other languages) Rashi says at Gn43-15: *The translation of take money versus take a person uses two different verbs in Aramaic: Nsiṽ for taking money and Dbr for taking people by verbal persuasion.* Rashi literally translates the Hebrew as *take by words*, that is, *verbal leading* which will translate as *persuade*. Although Rashi supports his translation using Aramaic, there is also a logical reason for doing so. *Take* normally means *physically taking*. But clearly Moses is not commanded to physically take the Levites by hand! Rashi therefore interprets this to mean *take by words*.

Figures of Speech: The reason *persuade* is called *taking* in Hebrew is because both physical taking and persuasion result in the taken entity moving towards the taker. The figure of speech called metonymy says that words related to each other can be used to refer to each other. Hence *persuading*, leading to motion to the persuader, can be called (*physically*) *taking*.

Persuade-Congratulate: We have already seen that Rashi does not say *persuade* at Nu08-06 but does say *persuade* at Gn43-15a (literally: *verbal leading*). What Rashi actually says at Nu08-06 is ‘*Tell them, “You are fortunate to have been chosen by God to serve Him in the Temple.”*’ Thus, Rashi tells Moses to *congratulate them* not to *persuade* them. Since Rashi explicitly explains *take* as meaning *persuade* at Gn43-15, we must explain why Rashi at Nu08-06a translates *to congratulate them*.

We explain why Rashi says *to congratulate* them as follows: Very often a persuasion speech will offer a *congratulations in advance* as a means of persuasion; so to speak, ‘Y’know we will really appreciate this if you do it.’ The biblical text doesn’t however say that Moses was asked to congratulate them; rather it says *to take* them which means *to persuade* them. We have classified such Rashi comments as *fill-ins*; conjectures that probably describe how something (in this case the persuasion) happened.

Rashi Unique: Two other comments are worth mentioning: Comment #1) This email list has emphasized Rashi’s main contribution as applying the theory of Figures of Speech to the biblical text. It is noteworthy in this regard, that no other commenter (as can be seen on AlHatorah.org which contains several dozen commentaries) even cares about the use of the word *take*. At Rashi’s time, the French Northern school was focusing on grammar while the Spanish school was focusing on poetry. It was only Rashi that gave primary emphasis to Figures of Speech.

In fact, the Ibn Ezra does deal with the word *take*. “*Take the Levites from the midst of the Jewish people since at the time of Torah all the Jews were mixed together.*” There are two problems with this Ibn Ezra: i) We have just read (Numbers 2) that each tribe had a well assigned place in the camp; ii) furthermore, Ibn Ezra is translating *take* as *sift* or *sort* which it never means. Amusingly, the Shaddal points out that “Rashi is not linguistically precise in his use of Aramaic.” But Shaddal misses Rashi’s entire point. Rashi’s point is not the Aramaic translation per se but rather the two meanings of *take*, literal and figurative.

A Beautiful Example: Comment #2) This simple Rashi comment beautifully illustrates several Rashi characteristics: a) *Rashi method*, b) *Rashi form*, c) *Rashi fill in*, d) *multiple Rashi comments*; e) *lack of explicitness* a) The Rashi method is *figures of speech, metonymy* relating *take-persuade*. b) The form of Rashi emphasizes the emotional “You are indeed fortunate” as this facilitates memory and retention. c) The Rashi statement of *congratulations* is a conjecture, a fill-in, of *how* the persuasion took place; it is not something we are certain about, but just helps to understand what probably happened. d) Rashi does not state why he is translating *take* at Nu08-06; he does explain it elsewhere (Gn43-15). e) Rashi’s comment focuses on form (congratulations) not the real reason. In fact, the main thing we look for in Rashi, the reason for his comment, is not there!