

## ParShaT *VaEthChaNan* - One Pager Series

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**Rashi #1: Biblical Text: Dt03-23a:** [Background: Moses is praying that God should rescind his decree and allow him entry into Israel]

**Biblical Text:** At that time, I *petitioned* God for grace [for the right to enter Israel]

**Rashi text:** 1) All occurrences of *grace* connote a free gift. Even though the Righteous [in their prayers] can make requests based on their good deeds, they nevertheless request as an act of grace. [This #2 comment in Rashi is corrupted so I am filling in with the Midrash Rabbah; the courier font indicates text not in the current Rashi but in the Midrash Rabbah] #2) Moses' request to enter Israel was denied by God who already decreed he couldn't come in. Moses responded. Did you not tell me (Ex33,34) [when explaining to me your methods of dealing with the world] I will have grace on whom I will have grace. Let me therefore enter as an act of Grace. #3) Another approach: There are 10 synonyms for prayer as taught in the Sifrey [Note: This newsletter is using the Midrash Rabbah version]

**How Not to Read Rashi:** The traditional approach to Rashi is to see him as non-scholarly. Rashi *appears* to be connecting the verb *graced* God (to petition for grace) with the noun, *grace*. Already here, Rashi uses advanced grammatical methods, forming a verb from a noun, a technique called the *denominative*. Gottfurcht in her doctoral thesis found, in English, 8 methods of forming denominatives. Here are some examples: *to hospitalize* [denominative by location], *to hammer* [by usage], *to dust* [by removal], *to flower* [by production], *to bejewel* [by addition, ornamentation], *to guard* ... Despite the underlying scholarship Rashi *appears* to be playing with words to *grace-grace*. Rashi's idea sounds reasonable with moral overtones: "Moses did not pray based on his good deeds but rather as an act of God's grace." This is the traditional way of reading Rashi: *reasonable, moral, word associations*. In my opinion, it is a cheap way of reading Rashi.

**A Better Way to Read Rashi:** True, Rashi *expressed himself* in a non-scholarly form. He did not want to be known as Dr. Academic. He wanted to reach the masses. But Rashi was actually using one modern biblical critical method: *The database query*. Rashi citing Rabbi Yochanan in the Midrash Rabbah and Sifrey made the following database inquiry: `SELECT word-roots FROM database of biblical words WHERE meaning = prayer`, that is, Rashi was selecting all biblical words which have a connotation of prayer. The database inquiry results in a *view* of 10 such word-roots. And just as the native American Indian has multiple words for green reflecting his greater experience in the wild, just as the experienced pastoral counselor has multiple terms for feeling down, reflecting a rich human experience, so too the authentic Jewish experience has 10 words for prayer, each one reflecting a different life situation. Indeed, the true Jew should pray in all circumstances. Rabbi Yochanan points out how the synonym *graced* God fits perfectly here since Moses was asking God to override His decree; that is, Moses was asking God despite the fact that he didn't deserve it. In passing, one criterion for publication in an academic journal would be use of database methods. Many Rashis are based on database methods.

**The Database View:** In the rest of this one-pager we review the 10 synonyms of prayer showing their applicability to a wide, diverse range of human experience. In translating these 10 Hebrew words I have selected what I consider the best English translation which unfortunately may differ from standard English translations. When there is a difference I will explain or justify my explanation. To be clear, each of these terms occurs many times in the Bible (The Sifrey and Midrash give one sample verse for each). For reasons of space we omit textual illustrative examples; but they are easy to obtain using a standard search engine.

**SCREAM:** The Hebrew *zaak* naturally means scream. This indicates prayer on a matter that infuriates you.

**SOB:** The root of the Hebrew *shaavah* also means wax. And indeed, a dripping wax candle has the same form as a person sobbing, the tears streaming his cheeks resembling wax droplets. Adults tend to sob when they are very unhappy.

**CHOKER:** Traditional English translations look at *naak* as a synonym of scream. Closer examination shows that it seems to correspond to a situation where a person talking/praying chokes on his word. This indicates severe stress and shock.

**INVITE:** The word *karah* literally means to call. But it also as the BDB dictionary shows has connotations of *page, announce, invite*. The word invite is also not perfect. *Karah* simply refers to *planned* prayer. When a person says "We will say Psalms for the sick, or for the political situation in Israel, or whatever" they are *calling* for prayer. Here the prayer connotes something less urgent than those types of prayers

prayers	on	which	you	sob,	choke,	or	scream.
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**DEPRESSED:** *Nafal* literally means to fall. As in English (*I am down*) it refers to a depressive state where one does not feel like doing anything. Prayer here is not as glamorous as in the recitation of Psalms or in the great cantorial arias that take place on the holy days. But this is one approach to prayer.

**TROUBLES:** *Tzarah* literally as in English means a *tight situation*. You are more active than in a depressed state, but you are not screaming, sobbing, and choking.

**OUTBURST:** *Rinah* is a difficult word to translate. It refers both to happy and sad situations. My personal opinion is that it refers to a spontaneous outburst (contrastively, screaming refers to continuous screaming). An illustrative example is rockstar Yehuda Glatz's *outburst* to a bomb exploding a few hundred meters from his studio. It inspired his famous hit, *Only to scream to God*.

**PESTER:** *Pagah* does mean *pester* in Hebrew. This is where you pray, do not get answered, and pester God again and again.

**ARGUE:** *Pallal* also refers to judgement. Perhaps *judicial arguing*. The Talmud presents a beautiful example from the prayers of Channah who was barren. "God why did you give me breasts if you gave me no children to nurse"

**GRACE:** As already explained this refers to asking for something you acknowledge you don't deserve. The classic example is Moses praying that God should lead him into Israel after God decreed he couldn't come.