

ParShaT *ChaYaY SaRaH*- One Pager Series

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[Background: Avraham Grossman is a leading Rashi scholar and wrote a wonderful book on Rashi, "Rashi", which has been translated into English. In this one pager I cite one example where Grossman following all major Rashi commentators did not understand Rashi. We will show that Rashi has a simple explanation, *peshat*]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Gn24-55:58a [Eliezer has just obtained agreement for Isaac to marry Rivkah]

*Her brother and mother said: Let her stay with us another year or 10 months and then go.

*Eliezer said to them: Do not delay me since God has made my trip successful; allow me to go [back]

*They said: We will call her and **ask** her.

*They called her and **said** to her: "Will you {really} go with this man {now}?".

*She said: I will go.

Rashi: #1: *I will go by myself; even if you don't want it.*

Modern Scholarship: Grossman (2012, p. 87) states as follows in his book: "*Rashi may have selected this midrash because Rebecca used the verb "I will go" instead of simply replying "Yes", but he was familiar enough with biblical style to know that there is no real problem here requiring explanation. In any case, there is no linguistic or substantive basis for the interpretation. He evidently cited the midrash because he wanted to portray Rebecca in a positive light, as one who rejected her father's house a place of idolatry and deceit.*"

The Classical Rashi Commentators: Several of the commentators that explain Rashi – this includes, the *Raam*, the *Mizrachi*, the *Gur Aryeh*, as well as the commentaries on the *Midrash Rabbah* such as the *Matnoth Kehuna* - explain that the source of the Rashi comment is the fact that Rivkah answered "Will you go" with "I will go" instead of "Yes." Grossman cites this explanation (without attribution to the Rashi commentators just enumerated) and points out "*but he [Rashi] was familiar enough with biblical style to know there is no real problem here*" [that is there is no real problem with responding to "Will you go" with "I will go"]

Rashi, our approach, tone: The approach of this newsletter is to emphasize *tone*. In the biblical passage above two words have bold, underline, italics: **ask her** and **said to her**. Quite simply, they did not **ask her the question**, but rather, *they said to her the question*. *Saying a question* has a tone, a tone of cynicism. We have indicated this tone with the bracketed words [really] in the translation "Will you [really] go with this person?" The "[really]" reflects the tone of cynicism indicated by *said to her*.

Another example of an exegetical comment of Rashi based on *tone* occurs with the famous 4 sons of Passover. By the wise and simple son, the biblical text speaks about *when your child(ren) ask*. Contrastively, by the wicked son (Ex12:26) the biblical text speaks about *when your children say*, "*What is this service*". There is nothing wrong with asking, "What the is meaning of a service is." In fact, that is what the wise son does (Dt06-20) "What are the testimonials, statutes, and civil law which our God commanded you?" It is the tone of the wicked son, "What is this?" indicated by his *saying* vs. *asking* his question.

Reading literacy: We emphasize that this interpretation of Rashi could easily occur on a reading-literacy test. Reading tests examine not only knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; they also examine the ability to sense tone and to evaluate. A perfectly reasonable reading literacy test could ask, "Evaluate the attitude of Rivkah's family toward the marriage." Typical choices might be A) Can't be determined, B) Positive, C) Negative.

The correct response is C), negative. This is indicated in multiple ways (some stronger than other). Earlier (not cited above) they "gave in" to the request "because this matter as indicated by the coincidences came from God." Furthermore, they wanted her to say a bit more (were not anxious to finalize). Finally, they *said their question* encouraging Rivkah, through their cynicism, to realize that she shouldn't jump at the matter. An alternative answer is D) Cautious.