

[**This week's issue was motivated by inquiries from readers.** Background: We continue to bring controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Today we examine a case where Ramban assists Rashi; however it is not that obvious that he is *explaining* vs. *disagreeing* with Rashi]

**Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Gn37-18a** [Joseph was coming to his brothers. They say] *Here comes the master of dreams. Let us kill him now. And we will see what happens to his dreams.*

**Rashi Text:** This verse must be read as *derash*.

**Our Approach:** In our book on Rashi ([Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm](http://Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm), Chapters 12-16 we list 5 distinct meanings of *derash*. *Derash* can sometimes be interpreted as homily, an interpretation that goes against the spontaneous natural meaning of the sentence, the *peshat*. But *derash* can also mean *nuanced*, the reading of a literate reader versed in nuances and style of the language.

**Ramban:** Ramban explains “This verse is stated *poetically*, in a *cynical derisive tone*.”

**Ramban and Rashi together:** We can view this Ramban as explaining Rashi's meaning of *derash*. Rashi means a *nuanced reading* of a *literate* speaker. Ramban explains that the verse in context is said cynically and derisively (easier to do when speaking) “Look here is the master of dreams “ (But said derisively as is clear from the next words). “Let's kill him now.” Similarly, the last phrase “*Let's see what happens to his dreams*” is said cynically and derisively in effect saying they are meaningless. Note that in almost any language, a literate speaker would *hear* the verse as cynical and derisive: If they call him *master of dreams* and then say *let's kill him* and *let's see what happens to his dreams* clearly they are speaking cynically.

**Why didn't Rashi say so:** Rashi lived in northern France. The scholars there concentrated on grammar. Ramban lived in Spain. The Andalusian scholars developed a powerful poetic school. The words Ramban uses, *poetic style (melizah)* and *mocking (la'ag)* were terms of art used by the Spanish scholars. However Rashi did not have this vocabulary available. Indeed, if you search through all of Rashi on Chumash you will never find him using *poetic style (melitzah)* or *cynical style (la'ag)*. The only word he had available was *derash*, one of whose 5 meanings is *nuanced*, which we render the *tone and nuance* of a literate speaker.

**Modern times, Spain, Rashi:** Today we would simply say the verse uses the figure of speech *irony*. Modern man has several dozen words to describe figures of Speech. Contrastively, Ramban had only one main category, *poetic style (melitzah)*. He also coined the phrase *the way of mockery* (derisive style, *la'ag*). Rashi had an even weaker vocabulary since the French school did not deal with poetry extensively. Rashi simply says *nuanced*, by which he covers a broad range of styles including *irony*.

**Are there other examples of cynicism in Rashi:** Yes: The wicked son is called *wicked* because he doesn't *ask* his question but rather *says* his question (Rashi Ex13-14b on Ex12-26) A literate speaker in any language would hear *saying a question* as a *cynical saying*, a *derisive saying*. The wicked son does not *ask* why we observe laws, *he says it*. Similarly, (Gn23-58) Rashi interprets the question of Rivkah's relatives “They *said* will you go with this man” as cynical and derisive and hence Rivkah simply said “No discussion; I am going”.

**A Talmudic Play on words:** There is more to the Rashi text that we left out. First we explain a Talmudic method of punning. There are two verses in the bible discussing finding a wife: *If you found a wife you found good* (Pr18-22) and *I find a shrewish wife worse than death* (Ecc7-26). Based on the contrast of these two verses, the ancient Babylonians and Israelites would ask newlyweds: “A *find* or a *found*” cross referencing these two verses.

**A Similar Play:** Similarly, there are two verses where *we will see* is said cynically: (Is05-19) ...*Let him hasten His actions so we can see* (said in mockery by the sinners-see the text); and Is41-23 *And we will be astonished and see* (said cynically on idolatry – see text)

**The Rest of Rashi:** *This verse must be read nuanced (derash (Rashi); poetic style, derisively (Ramban))* But the Holy Spirit responds: You say *we will see what happens to his dreams* and I God say *and we will see his dreams*. Rashi does not bring this as *peshat* in the text. He rather brings it as an *illustration* of the *see* vs. *and-see* paradigm just discussed (Explanation of the Maharzu, *Midrash Rabbah*). Very often Rashi will bring a moral point *after* stating the simple meaning. For example Rashi's statement that Noah's suffering in the ark from poor ark conditions was a punishment in this world for his sins (Clearly not in the text but a moral inference; (Gn07-23a).

**Additional text in Rashi:** Although there is additional text in Rashi this seems to be the editing of a copyist who didn't understand Rashi and thought he was making a *derash* in the sense of homily. The *matnoth kahuna* on the Midrash Rabbah discusses textual corruption in Rashi