

ParShaT **MiKeTz**- One Pager Series

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[**Background:** We continue to bring controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Today we examine a three way controversy between the Midrash Rabbah, the LeQaX Tov, and Rashi.]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Gn41-02b ...Pharoh is dreaming, "He is standing on the Nile. And all of a sudden, From the Nile comes up 7 cows, beautiful in appearance and of healthy flesh, and they grazed in the Marsh, And all of a sudden 7 other cows come up after them, of shattered appearance and emaciated flesh, and they stood next to the cows on the river edge

Rashi Text: The Hebrew word used, *achu*, refers to a marsh as in (Job 8:11) ...*can there be rapid marsh-growth without water.*

Midrash Rabbah: The Hebrew word for marsh, *achu*, has *ach*, brother, as its root showing that when there is plenty in the world [the symbolic meaning of the 7 health-flesh cows] there is brotherhood and cooperation among people

LeQaX ToV: [Background as provided by Cohen (2020): Most folks are familiar with the Spanish tradition (Radaq, Rambam) and the French tradition (Rashi, Rashbam, etc.). However, there was also a rich Byzantine tradition involving Asia minor, the Balkans, and souther Italy. The commentary of these scholars has recently been discovered. The LeQaX ToV was written Tobiah ben Eliezer and contains interesting insights into Peshat and Derash issues. Here is the commentary] No text leaves its simple meaning, the *Peshat*. As indicated by the Job 8:11 verse, *achu* means marsh. But there is also a Midrashic meaning as stated by our Rabbis: When there is plenty in the world, people act like brothers and act cooperatively.

Cohen's approach: Cohen like many academic scholars see the Jewish tradition as having 2 distinct approaches: The *peshat* approach which is based on grammar and dictionary meaning and the contrastive *derash* approach which is based according to these scholars on word plans and homilies.

The Rashiyomi approach: We believe all commentary is *peshat*, the instant reaction of a literate speaker to a spoken text. Very often there are multiple issues in a text which in turn give rise to multiple instant reactions. Certain, word meaning as determined by usage in comparable verses is a basis for *peshat*; it shows the way people used words. Grammar based

on biblical roots is also a basis for *peshat*. The word *achu* coming from the root aleph-cheth means brotherhood. This fits in with a marsh. Unlike fields where each tree and bush has its own space and distinctness, in a marsh the tall reeds grow together, so to speak, the reeds grow with their brother reeds.

Living in brotherhood and Cooperation: The Midrash Rabbah's phrase *living in cooperation* is *peshat* but does not come from the root of the word *achu*, *marsh*, which simply refers to the brotherhood of reeds, not of people. Rather the Midrash Rabbah comes from the parallel phrases one dealing with the healthy-flesh cows who grazed in the marsh when coming out of the river, the other dealing with the emaciated-looking cows who stood by the river edge when coming out of the river. The Midrash Rabbah addresses this difference of *graze-stood*. Quite simply, the healthy-flesh cows *grazed* in the marsh; contrastively, the emaciated-flesh cows could only *stand* on the river edge since during the 7 bad years there was little food growth. To echo Rashi's verse (Job 8:11) *Can there be rapid marsh growth without water*. There was no water during the poor years and therefore the emaciated-flesh cows could only stand. Now we understand the Midrash Rabbah: During times of plenty people can eat together (or if you are a cow) graze together; there is enough food for everyone. During times of famine there is no togetherness since food is scarce. You can at most stare and stand.

Why Did Rashi Ignore This: But he didn't ignore it. Cohen claims that Rashi stood midway between pure *peshat* and pure *midrash*. In this case, says Cohen, Rashi explains the meaning of the rare word for marsh. Cohen claims Rashi did not cite the Midrash because he found it fanciful. But as we just saw, by citing Job 8:11, that *rapid marsh growth only happens when there is water* Rashi does cite and in fact explains the Midrash; the Midrash was not commenting on the root of *achu* which refers to reeds growing in brotherhood. The Midrash refers to the *standing vs. grazing* pointing to a lack of mutual (brotherly) grazing. Without water, there is no rapid marsh growth and hence there is no brotherhood; the cows can at most stand; they cannot eat. In fact the Midrash Rabbah goes further (not cited by LeQaX ToV, Cohen or even Rashi) that the emphasis of the dream on the Nile for both sets of cows points to the water source as a reason for plenty or for famine.

How Can There Be Two Peshats: There are two *peshats* reflecting two distinct aspects of the verse. Both Rashi and the LeQaX ToV comment i) on the meaning of the word *achu*, meaning *marsh*, and ii) on the parallelism *health-fleshed cows graze; emaciated-cows stand*. They stood because the marsh had dried up leaving nothing to graze on.