ParShaT *VaYiGaSh-* One Pager Series

[Background: We continue to bring controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Today we examine a three way controversy between Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra.]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Gn45-01a [Joseph is threatening to hold Benjamin hostage. Judah however offers himself in place of Benjamin. Joseph becomes overwhelmed with emotions] *Joseph could not* control himself; *he announced, "Remove all persons present," so no one was present when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers.*

Rashi Text: Control himself: He couldn't bear that the Egyptians should hear when he revealed himself and his brothers are embarrassed.

Ibn Ezra Text: He couldn't control himself (that is, wait) until those standing around naturally left. So he asked them to leave.

Ramban Text: The Hebrew word used means *to be strong.* 1S13-12 gives an example where King Saul was waiting for Samuel to offer an offering but the people were restless and the Philistines were gathering. *And I (Saul) thought: Philistines are descending on me at Gilgal but I have not entreated God, and I strengthened myself and offered the offering.* In this verse, Saul, is strong enough to go against the people who were waiting for Samuel. Transferring this meaning to Gn45-01, *Joseph, after hearing Judah's entreaties to spare Benjamin and let Judah take his place, was worried that those standing around would have pity on Benjamin and place pressure on Joseph to accept Judah's deal. Joseph was not strong enough to overcome the crowds sentiment and therefore asked all in attendance to leave.* ....Another reason for the order is that if the Egyptians in attendance remained, they would hear that Joseph's brothers double crossed both Joseph and his father by selling their brother. Consequently, the public image of

the brothers would be tarnished, since the Egyptians could argue, *if they double cross their own family they can double cross us.*

Defense of Rashi: To defend Rashi we make three points. #1) The biblical word used, *vayithapak,* is conjugated in the reflexive tense. Hence, the most appropriate translation would be *he controlled himself.* True, sometimes one must control oneself *against* others. But, frequently, the word is used for self-control of ones emotions and that is the way it should always be translated.

Here are some examples: i) Gn43-41, [Joseph saw his brother who hadn't seen in 17 years, and quickly went to a private room to cry] *He controlled himself, washed his face and went out.* ii) 1S13-21 *And I (Saul) thought: Philistines are descending on me at Gilgal but I have not entreated God and I controlled myself* [i.e. of my fears] *and offered.*

2) Here too, the verse says *...Joseph could not control himself ..."Remove all people in attendance"...he cried.* Thus   Rashi reads *control himself* with respect to the <u>verse continuation</u> of crying.

3) Similarly, the <u>verse continuation,</u> states

> *Joseph could not control himself...he announced "Remove all people in attendance"*
>
> *No person was with him when he revealed himself to his brothers.*

Thus, while all 3 interpretations of *control oneself* - i) control oneself till everyone leaves (Ibn Ezra), ii) control oneself against the crowd who might petition for Benjamin's release (Ramban), and iii) control oneself in confessing to his brothers (Rashi)- all these interpretations are possible, but only Rashi's interpretation is consistent with the <u>verse continuation;</u> People should be removed so his revealing himself is done in private.

Ramban and Rashi: After defending Rashi, we can understand Ramban as *supplementing,* not disagreeing with Rashi. What would be embarrassing if Joseph revealed himself in front of others? The Ramban explains, *It would tarnish the brother's reputations since they would be perceived as double-crossers.*