

ParShaT *VaYeChI* 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 bring a beautiful and fundamental 3-way controversy between Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Gn49-22a [Jacob giving a blessing to Joseph]

- 1) A charming (*Porath*) son is Joseph
- 2) A charming (*Porath*) son ----- to the beholder

Rashi Text: i) The Hebrew word used, *Porath*, indicates *grace* and *charm* like the Aramaic *Apiryon*, the *garden*. ii) The phrases #1 and #2 in the biblical text indicate that 1) Joseph was good-looking, charming, graceful, and 2) created a feeling of comfortableness to the beholder.

Ramban Text: Commenting on item i) in Rashi, Ramban says: "Rashi's explanation is far-fetched since he is citing a Talmudic word, *apiryon*, which derives from Greek and Persian but has no analogy in Hebrew. My own opinion is that *Porath* coming from the root, pay-resh-hey, *fruit*, analogizes Joseph to a fruitful tree on a river bed.

Ibn Ezra Text: Commenting on item ii) in Rashi, Ibn Ezra states: "The repetition of the biblical phrases *a charming son*, in #1 and #2 of the biblical text, is simply a biblical style (to open two verse halves with the same phrase). The repetition indicates an ongoing trait of charm (in contrast to say something sporadic that happens occasionally).

Modern Scholarship: Using concepts from modern scholarship we can succinctly formulate the underlying controversies between Ramban-Rashi and Ramban-Ibn Ezra

* Ramban viewed Rashi as deriving the meaning of a Hebrew word from a Greek-Persian word; Contrastively, Ramban derives *metaphorical* meaning (like a fruitful tree)

* Ibn Ezra, a champion of the Northern Peshat school sees repetition as purely stylistic perhaps indicating permanence vs. transience; Contrastively, Rashi seems to identify two distinct properties: *charm, comfortableness*. The modern scholars call this *omnisignificance, significance in every word and detail*; the modern scholars criticize Rashi and Midrash for overly seeing meaning in what is simply style.

Resolution of the Rashi-Ramban controversy: Consider the English word *flowery*. *Flowery* speech for example has nothing to do with flowers. Rather, *flowery* is a metaphoric use of flowers, connoting something fragrant, beautiful, charming, and graceful. When Rashi cites the Aramaic, which literally means *garden* (BM 119a), he was not citing a *word* derivation but a *metaphor* derivation. Additionally, I am shocked that the great Ramban who claims this is Aramaic, Grecian, Persian *without any analogy in Hebrew*, overlooks the explicit verse, Songs 3:9, where *Apiryon* refers to a *marital* bed (the *charming* bed for consuming a wedding); clearly this is a metaphor as flowers need not be there.

Resolution of the Rashi-Ibn Ezra controversy: Modern scholars love to see Rashi and Ibn Ezra *at odds*, with the Ibn Ezra believing in pure style "without need for further explanation" and Rashi allegedly believing in Midrash, allegedly milking meaning from every word. But on this verse, Rashi and Ibn Ezra agree that the repetition, while stylistic, *does* have meaning. Ibn Ezra says *the repetition indicates that the charm was permanent, not sporadic*. I would argue that Rashi sees the repetition as indicating *some type of emphasis which is not explicitly specified*. Rashi further sees *emphasis* as *counteracting a contrary thought* you might have. In the case of a good looking, charming, graceful son, women might be apprehensive that with the good looks come social requests and demands; Rashi therefore sees in the repetition ==> emphasis ==> counteraction, that despite his good looks, women felt comfortable when they were with Joseph.

Clarification not controversy: Thus I see the Rashi-Ramban-Ibn Ezra controversies as clarifications: Ramban in disagreeing with Rashi paradoxically also explains the verse as metaphoric. Ibn Ezra agrees with Rashi that the repetition means something; Rashi's explanation addresses deeper emotions.