

ParShaT **VaAyRaH** 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 insight into probably one of the most controversial verses in the Bible.]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Ex05-21:06-08 [After Moses' 1st attempt to free the Jews from Pharoh and Egypt.] *And the Jews said to them [Moses and Aaron] May God see and judge you...for you have given Pharoh a sword to kill us. And Moses said to God: Why did you send me? Since I have come things have gotten worse. And God said: You will see now what I do to Pharoh that he will let the people go. ...God said ...I am God [Tetragrammaton]. I appeared to the Patriachs as God Almighty but my name of Tetragrammaton was not known to them. But I will fulfill my treaty to them,, I see the suffering of the Jews, and remember my promises. Therefore tell the Jews...I am God and I am taking you out of Egypt.*

Rashi Text: [There are several Rashi comments of which we bring two] #1) Why can't you Moses be like the Patriarchs? They never complained that my promises were not being kept; yet at the first sign of mishap you complain. #2) I promised the Patriarchs to eventually give their descendants Israel; I have seen the suffering of the Jews at the hands of Egypt; I remember my covenant. Tell them I am God and will redeem them.

Rashi Text continued: Explanation #1 is not consistent with the entire passage. That is, the simple meaning of the passage is that God has heard the cries of the Jews and will redeem them. The simple meaning of the text is not that God compared Moses to the Patriarchs and noted the decline from the Patriarchs in prophetic faith. *Therefore I say that the text should be given an instantaneous flowing interpretation and nuances should be nuanced as the verse says, "The word of God: My prophetic words are like fire, like a hammer bashing a rock to pieces." Sparks separate into several sparks.*

Modern Scholarship: Modern academic scholars, read into the italicized words of Rashi that: *There is something called the peshat, the simple straightforward*

meaning of the verse, and something else called derash, which we have correctly translated as nuance. They see the two as distinct. They argue that Rashi was against the derash approach which he however tolerated. Rashi as part of the Northern Peshat school, established a new path, the path of Peshat.

The Rashiyomi approach: My favorite example (from my book, Chapter 21), is the following sentence: The stupid Mayor finally allowed the building permit. What is the *peshat* of this statement?. In my book I argue that the *peshat*, in the sense of the spontaneous and instant reaction to hearing this consists of three separate statements that are heard simultaneously: i) The Mayor allowed the building permit; ii) The Mayor is stupid; iii) The Mayor and requestors of the permit had a long back-and-forth on allowing this (as indicated by the word *finally*.) I again emphasize: All three of these statements are heard simultaneously by any literate speaker; it is a mistake to say that only one of them is the *peshat* and the others are homily.

The Rashi revisited: Rashi is doing the same thing on Ex05-23--Ex06-09. The overall paragraph is stating that God remembers his covenant with the patriarchs and will redeem the Jewish people from Egypt. But along the way, God repeatedly uses the Tetragrammaton whose nuances are *not all prophecies happen immediately; some take centuries such as the promise to the Patriarchs that their children would inherit Israel.*

The Rashi Citation of the Jeremiah verse: The verse explicitly compares God's words to a fire, to sparks that divide into many more sparks. There is no preference for the sparks. All of them are *peshat*. The *peshat* of the overall paragraph is that God will redeem the Jewish people. The *peshat* of the use of the Tetragrammaton (like the *peshat* of the word *stupid* in *stupid mayor*) is that the Patriarchs were used to prophecies taking a long time but Moses wasn't.

God's Names: We also obtain a way of understanding prophecies and dreams. If you expect a dream to come true in a day or two it is not a prophecy; it is a personal wish. If like Joseph, you wait 20 years for a dream, your dream is pre-prophetic. If like the Patriarchs you wait several centuries it is a Tetragrammaton prophecy.