

## ParShaT *BeHaR* One Pager Series

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[**Background:** We have been bringing controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Today we examine a 6 way controversy between, the Talmud, Sifre, Rashi, Ramban, Rambam, and Malbim. We offer a novel solution]

**Rashi #1a Biblical Text: Lv25-36:37** [Background: Your brother is down (economically) and you strengthen him. When this occurs...]

(A) Do not take from him *profit-bites* and *inflation* ...*fear God; your brother should live with you*

(B) (1) Your money: do not give to him with *profit bites*

(2) With *inflation* do not give foods.

**Rashiyomi approach:** Because of the complexity of this controversy, we first explain our approach to it and then list the 5 opinions By way of background, Jewish Biblical law prohibits *loaning* whether, money or goods, with an absolute condition of a return of more than is loaned. Let us look at some examples

(B1) *Profit Bites:* Suppose your friend needs \$10,000 for a deal on which he expects to make 20%. You give him the money but consider it legitimate to ask for a return of \$10,500 (extra 5%). Your argument is that you are helping your friend and just taking a *bite* (5%) of the profits, leaving him with a 15% return.

(B2) *Inflation:* Your friend needs 1000 bushels of wheat or alfalfa to feed his animals before sale. But because there was a good harvest this year, you expect the price of wheat or alfalfa to go down (*deflation of prices*). 1000 bushels of wheat when returned would be worth significantly less than what it is worth now. You therefore ask him to return 1500 bushels of wheat or alfalfa to counteract the effects of this deflation.

(A)The Bible prohibits both scenarios B1 and B2. But then sentence (A) above looks totally repetitive. (A) seems to be saying the exact same thing as (B). Therefore, (A) is seen as *repetition for a double offense*. If you violate the prohibition of *profit bites* or *inflation*, you have not only violated verse (B) but also violated verse (A).

**Evolution of language:** Before presenting the 6 interpretations we need one piece of background on the evolution of language. Consider the terms *preposition* and *lemma*. Both of these are examples of *types of true statements*. Originally, in the time of Euclid *proposition* referred to statements of logic while *lemma* referred to statements with content. For example the assertion that *a number is divisible by 10 if and only if it ends in 0* is a lemma since it reports a statement with content. Contrastively, the statement, *if the sentence S and T is false then either S is false or T is false or both are false* is a *proposition* since it refers to a statement of logic. However, even though originally *lemma* and *proposition* had different meanings, today they are synonyms: They are used interchangeably and both are considered to have the same meaning. We call this process the evolution of language since at one point in time the words had different meanings while today they are considered the same.

**Ramban & Malbim:** Ramban says that the *peshat* of *profit-bite* and *inflation* are the examples we gave above. Malbim further elaborates on these examples showing why one would think they are legitimate approaches. Rashiyomi adds the idea of skillful translation: *profit-bite* and *inflation*. In my opinion, Ramban is giving *the original historical meaning of profit-bite and inflation*.

**Rashi:** Rashi explains why both (A) and (B) are needed in the biblical citation: "The transgressor violates two biblical laws."

**Rambam (Loans 4:1).** Rambam in my opinion is reporting the current state of the words after the historical evolution. "*profit-bite* and *inflation* are [now] the same. Although verse B above says that *profit-bites* refer to monetary loans and *inflation* refers to food commodities, Dt23-20 explicitly states that the prohibition of *profit bites* applies to *profit bites of money, profit bites of food, profit bites of anything where a bite is taken*.

**Talmud and Sifre:** The Talmud *explains* the historical evolution of two distinct terms *profit-bite* and *inflation* which now mean the same thing: "Wherever there is profit there will be inflation/deflation of prices; wherever there is inflation/deflation of prices there is profit." This explains why the historical evolution resulted in the two terms meaning the same thing. The Sifre adds to this by noting the verse sources for the opinions of Rashi, Ramban, Rambam, and Malbim as noted above.

**Conclusion:** It appears that Rashi, Ramban, Rambam, Malbim, are involved in controversy. Not so: Ramban, explains original meaning, Rambam explains current meaning, and Rashi explains the repetition of (A) and (B).