

ParShaT **KoRaX** 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 Ramban-Rashi-Ibn Ezra controversy]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Nu16-01b *Korax, son of Yitzhar, son of Kehath, son of Levy, took with Dathan and Aviram the sons of Eliauv, and On, son of Peles, Reubenites. They stood before Moses, with 250 Israelites, communal heads, men of renown*

Background for Commentaries: Example i) and ii) illustrate the meaning of a *transitive* verb.

i) I received the package. I opened the door. I ate the pizza.

ii) I agree. I am walking. I am listening.

In the 3 sentences in i) each verb or activity has an object on which the activity is done. For example, I didn't just *open*, but *opened the door*. The verb activity *transits* from me, the doer *to* the door. The verb is transitive. Contrastively, the 3 sentences in ii) are *intransitive*. I am performing the activity or verb, *walking*, but the *walking* is not received by any object. The verb does not transit; it is *intransitive*

All commentaries deal with the apparent contradiction that

i) *Take* (Korax *took*) is transitive

ii) But the verse does not indicate *what* he took

Rashi: Rashi uses a modern technique called *grammaticalization*, which asserts that over time words acquire new meanings in different grammatical forms. *For example the word hospital designating a building, over time, also acquired verb*

meaning: *to hospitalize, to place someone in a hospital*. Applying this technique to *take*, Rashi argues that the *transitive* verb *take*, over time, grammaticalized to a new *intransitive* verb meaning *to be assertive*, like the English idiom *to take hold of oneself*. So the verse reads smoothly: *Korax became assertive with Datan, Aviram, and On. They arose against Moses with 250 communal leader Israelites*.

Onkelos: Onkelos, the Aramaic translation, translates, *Korax took himself to the other side against Moses*. So the verb is transitive, the activity of *taking* applies to the sides of the arguments with Moses.

Critique of Onkelos: The problem with Onkelos' approach, is that the object of *taking*, sides in a controversy, is not mentioned explicitly in the verse.

Ramban: Ramban brilliantly argues, that Onkelos, whom Rashi quoted, did not intend to *translate take* as *take a side* (against Moses). Rather, harmonizing Rashi and Onkelos, Ramban takes the position that *take* really translates as *be assertive* which in this verse and context has a *consequence* that *as a result of his new assertiveness he took sides against Moses*. In other words

i) The true translation of *take* is *to be assertive*

ii) The consequence of this translation is *taking sides* against Moses.

Ibn Ezra: The Ibn Ezra suggests that the *object* of *take*, what was *taken*, is the 250 Israelites. Ibn Ezra translates, *Korax (with associates): He took and then they arose against Moses, 250 Israelites, communal leaders men of renown*

Conclusion: Of the four approaches, Rashi's is cleanest, simply asserting that the word *take* here is a new verb, meaning to be assertive. Furthermore, Rashi uses a technique unknown to Ibn Ezra, the modern technique of grammaticalization. Finally, Rashi's interpretation is consistent with other parts of the story: For example, Moses statement to Korax, Nu16-05a, *in the morning God will let us know whom he has chosen* on which Rashi comments, *in the morning*: perhaps you are assertive because of drinking; sleep it off and we will discuss in the morning.