

ParShaT *PiNChas* 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 whether puns can be peshat]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Nu26-05:49

To the grandson of Jacob, ChaNoCH, there was the HA-CaNoCH-Y family

To the grandson of Jacob, BeLa, there was the HA-Bal-Y family

To the grandson of Jacob, AShBayL, there was the HA-AShBayL-Y family

To the grandson of Jacob, AChiRaM, there was the HA-AChiRaMI-Y family

To the grandson of Jacob, YiMNaH, there was the YiMNaH family

Rashi Text: Notice that about 5 dozen grandchildren have a HA and Y added to their name to create the tribal family subname, while the subfamily for YiMNaH is called YiMNaH (not HA-YiMNY).

The reason for this is as follows: The added letters Y, HA, spell YHA, the name of God. Each tribal family wished to affirm their relationship with God by placing His name in the name of their family. [By putting the letters of God's name before and after their name they affirmed that they were surrounded by God who saved them.] But YiMNaH already had a Y and H surrounding his name; hence his tribal family did not need the extra letters.

Also, other nations would tease the Jews about their family purity: *You were slaves owned by your masters; if they owned you did they not own your wives? Why are you certain who the real fathers are?* Therefore the tribes asserted their commitment to God.

Puns: This Rashi looks sermonic and homiletic. It does not appear to be *peshat* the simple meaning of the text. This is the viewpoint of many scholars both academic and religious,

Rashiyomi response: In my book on Rashi, accessible at www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm I provide answers to this objection which we now summarize. First, following Rashi himself, we define *peshat*, the straightforward meaning of the text, as the *spontaneous reaction of a literate speaker knowledgeable of the situation being spoken about to the text* (Gn03-08). Let's give some secular and religious examples:

(1) Abe on a dinner date with Rose says, "Pass me the *Roisens*".

ANALYSIS: We spontaneously hear his request as a pass at Rose. Thus the *peshat* in this sentence is in fact the *peshat* of the pun.

(2) King Achashverosh when he was tipsy in the wine called his wife to appear in royal crown to show his party guests her beauty. She refused (Ester, Ch 1)

ANALYSIS: We spontaneously here Achashverosh's request as a request for a display of nakedness, a strip act. Here too the *peshat* in this sentence is the *peshat* of innuendo.

(3) People in all cultures very often make appendages and modification to names to emphasize some point. The blatant anomaly that all but one of 60 names have H and Y added to their name, but the one name which already has a H and Y did not further add, shows intentionality (Hendel, Article Puns, JBQ, 34(3), 190—198). People knowledgeable of Hebrew immediately recognize YHa as God's name. Thus the spontaneous reaction to the text is understanding the added letters as a reference to being surrounded by God, an affirmation of the Jews identity with God.

The Teasing about Slaves not knowing the True Father: That is not in the text. In my book I explain this part of Rashi as a *reasonable speculative fill-in*, an additional motivating factor.