

ParShaT *ShoFeTiM* 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 present an academic scholar whose writings appear moral, as if written by a religious Rabbi.]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Dt20-04a *When you go out to war, if you see horses, chariots, and an army that outnumbers you, then it is prohibited to fear them because God your Lord is with you who raised you from Egypt....When you get close to the battle the priest comes and speaks to the nation....you are going to battle today on your enemies: It is prohibited to be soft-hearted, it is prohibited to fear, it is prohibited to become anxious, it is prohibited to freeze up because God your Lord walks with you to fight for you from your enemies, to save you*

Rashi Text: Because *It is a fight between God and man. For example, Golyath outarmed David who defeated him because God was on his side.*

Analysis: Besides giving the law, *don't fear*, God is portrayed as a role model. God is not afraid and can conquer [as He did with Egypt and Golyath] hence you should not be afraid.

Academic Scholarship: A modern biblical scholar, Eryl W. Davies says as follows:

A reappraisal is needed of the way in which ethical teaching is often viewed. It has been customary for those discussing the ethics of the Old Testament to focus on the revealed will of God; the common perception of Old Testament morality is that it is framed in language of command and obedience. However, the presence in the biblical documents of concepts such as *natural law* and *imitating God* should serve as a salutary reminder that *there is far more to OT ethics than the mere observance of prescribed rules.*

The Flavors of Academic Scholarship: Academic scholars are typically stereotyped as denying Mosaic authorship to the Torah, seeing the Torah as evolving in segments and pasted together at a late date; not all segments of the Torah were written by Moses. Academic scholars are also stereotyped as painting the biblical people as primitive people incapable of thinking and feeling (except for fear). This is partially true. But there are

aspects of academic scholarship that are moralistic, inspiring, and modern in flavor. In today's one pager Davies sees the bible as using the modern concept of *role models* as a basic for ethics and prescribed behavior. We explore this in the rest of this one pager.

The Legal Basis for Imitating God: There is a biblical commandment to *cling to God* which is interpreted using the universal figure of speech *cling*, as in *clinging to a friend*. God is a role model we *cling to*. Maimonides in his great legal code discusses this commandment. Furthermore, as the Rav (Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchick) has pointed out citing Maimonides in his Guide for the Perplexed, that the Torah has at least two ways of giving a law: 1) *prescribing or ordering it*, and 2) *saying that God acts this way* (implying man should also). Let us look at examples from the Midrash.

*God was hair-dresser for Eve, prior to bringing her to Adam.

*God says to the Jews: Your families have four parties – husband, wife, son, and daughter – my family also has 4 parties – the orphan, widow, non-citizen, and Levite.

Notice the delicious softness in these two Midrashim, God *suggests* that hair-dressing brides and *caring* for orphans, widows, non-citizens, and Levites – are moral requirements because He does them. This softness is in stark contrast to the traditional picture of a commanding God amidst fire, thunderous voice, and demands. Davies is correct! A reappraisal *is* needed.

Here are sources Davies brings:

*Martin Buber (1926) published an article arguing that *imitating God* was a source of ethics for the Torah.

*There is evidence (in 1999) that academic scholars consider imitation of God vieing with obedience to His will as a source of ethics.

Here are some examples Davies brings:

*(Lv19-02) *You be holy because I God am holy*

*(Ex20-08:11, 31:12-17) Slaves and non-citizens are to be given rest on the Sabbath because God Himself rested on the Sabbath