

## The 10 RashiYomi Rules

*Their presence in Rashis on VaYeChi*

### Vol 22#25 - Adapted from **Rashi-is-Simple**

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### GOALS

*The goal of the Weekly Rashi Digest is to use the weekly Torah portion to expose students at all levels to the ten major methods of Rashi's commentary. Continual weekly exposure to these ten major methods facilitate the acquisition, familiarity, and facility with the major exegetical methods.*

*The most frequent questions I receive about the Daily Newsletter are the following.*

- *What do the classical commentators on Rashi say about his reasons?*
- *If they say such and such what are you adding?*
- *If they don't say what you say, why are you saying it?*

*So the next year, or perhaps more, will be devoted to citing Rashi commentators and explaining how the methods of the Newsletter sharpen and crystallize them. We will be citing mostly from the 4-6 classical Rashi commentators: Sifsay Chachamin, Gur Aryeh, Mizrachi, and Chizkuni. We will occasionally add insights of Rav Hirsch and Malbim.*

*As usual, when making transitions in the Rashi Newsletter we welcome positive and negative comments as well as requests. Please send all comments to [RashiYomi@GMail.Com](mailto:RashiYomi@GMail.Com).*

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*Hi. Welcome to another year of Rashiyomi. In addition to presenting the classical Rashi commentators, we will emphasize my unique contribution to the biblical understanding of Genesis, namely, that Genesis is a book about prophecy. Genesis is not about history and is not about cosmology. It is about the creation of prophecy and the*

*contribution of the prophets to human history.*

## **Meaning-Idiom *Daily Rashi* Thursday 1/1/2015 Gn49-03a**

### **Biblical Text: Gn49-03a**

[The verse is the beginning of the blessings that the Patriarch Jacob gave his children] *Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my virility*[most English translations, translate *strength*] *the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power;*

**Rashi Text:** The phrase *beginning of my strength* [virility] means that Jacob had not experienced any emissions until he gave birth to Reuben.

As we read the approach of the commentators notice that they interpret this Rashi literally: Jacob had *never* experienced an emission until he married and *immediately* had Reuben.

**Mizrachi, Rashi commentator:** But if Rashi, interpreted literally was true, then Leah would have a child from the first act of intimacy and women, as the Talmud points out, generally don't have children from their first act.

But there are rare cases where they do. One such case is Tamar [and further details are given.]

**Gur Aryeh, Rashi commentator:** But if Rashi, interpreted literally was true, then Leah would have had a child from the first act of intimacy and women, as the Talmud points out, generally don't have children from their first act.

But, the Talmud, cites a preferred marital practice of having relations twice [the first act meeting men's needs of immediate release and the 2nd act meeting the women's needs of preparation]. Thus we can argue that Jacob practiced this and Leah gave birth from the 2nd act.

**Rashi Newsletter Approach:** We have seen in the past few weeks that Rashi need not be taken literally if the biblical text supports this. Here are the examples

Example 1: Two weeks ago, Rashi cited a Midrash Rabbah that there are 10 fortioris in the Torah. The Rashi commentators note that the examples occur in the prophets and later portions of the bible. *Based on the biblical examples*, the Rashi commentators state that the Rashi should not be taken literally; the word *Torah* is simply a *good example*. The 10 fortioris are found throughout the entire Bible.

Example 2: 3 weeks ago Rashi explained that *the man* that found him was not *a man* but *the man*, the ArchAngel Gabriel. Rashi, *proves* his point by citing the verse *and the man Gabriel....*

Mizrachi, a Rashi commentator, cites the Midrash Rabbah, the source of Rashi. He points out *you cannot argue that Rashi literally believed that the word man means Gabrielle because otherwise you would have to take every occurrence of the man as referring to Gabrielle and that is ridiculous.*

So we see that if there is clear biblical support we need not take Rashi literally. But lo and behold see the following verse

speaking about the obligation of every man to give the firstborn a double portion.

**Dt21-17** *But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he has; for he is the beginning of his virility; the right of the firstborn is his.*

So to paraphrase the Mizrachi, if you say Jacob never had an emission until he gave birth to Reuven you would have to say that every man with a male firstborn never had an emission until his first child. Clearly, that is absurd.

How then do I interpret Rashi. I will not pass judgement on whether Jacob had relations of some type before his marriage. Joseph we know did. However, it is possible that Jacob met women who treated him with disrespect and as a result he experience Rashi. They were unsatisfying or to use the biblical phrase, they were not exemplary of virility. However, in Rachel and Leah he experienced the respect he needed to have virility (otherwise he wouldn't have married her). This is true of Jacob and many men. Hence the phrase *beginning of virility* simply refers to a respectfull relationship which happens frequently in successful marriages.

In creating this explanation I am not deviating from Rashi. I am interpreting the phrase *he saw no emission until he had Reuven* to refer to his relationship with Rachel. He had no emission from his interactions with Rachel because Rachel gave him proper respect and he didn't have any relations with her until the actual marriage (which is why he married her). This is consistent with the biblical phrase that the 7 years he waited for her went

like a few days because of his love of her. The bible (and Rashi) are not taking a stand on what happened before.

There is also no problem about when he had Reuven. Rashi is not committing himself to his having Reuven from his wedding night. That is silly. Rather the simple meaning of *beginning of virility* for Jacob is the same as it is for other men; it refers to a mature patient relationship inspired by the woman they love. A characteristic of that type of relationship is not having an emission. Rashi is not saying about what happened before he met Rachel nor is he saying anything about how long it took her to become pregnant.

In terms of Rashi rules I am interpreting *beginning of virility* as an **Idiom** which means a respectful relationship with abstention from relations.

### **Meaning-Synonyms *Daily Rashi* Friday-Monday 1/2-4/2015 Gn49-03b, Ex16-33a, Gn49-11d, Gn11-29a**

We discuss here 4 Rashis with comments on meaning. They are summarized in the Table below. In each case The **Rashi Newsletter** rejects the literal interpretation of Rashi and chooses a more specific meaning. We will discuss the justification for this below. Sometimes the Rashi commentators agree!

Verse	Biblical Text	Rashi interpretation of underlined word	Rashi newsletter interpretation
Gn49-03b	<i>Reuven you are the beginning of my <u>on</u></i>	Beginning of strength	Beginning of virility
Ex16-33a	<i>Take a <u>Tzintzeneth</u> and store for generations in it the manna</i>	A vessel for storage	A thermos
Gn49-11d	<i>Washi in wine his garment; [wash] in grape blood <u>his suth</u></i>	Garment	Lingeree
Gn11-29a	Sarah [the matriarch]	Princess	Ruler – giving everyone exactly what they deserve

**Rashi Newsletter Approach:** First some background on word meanings.

- A *hypernym* refers to a general category, for example, *snack*
- A *hyponym* refers to specific examples of a general category, for example, *MMs, chocolate kisses, potato chips*

With this background we can state some Rashi principles. Rashi will frequently translate a word using its hypernym instead of its more detailed nuances. Why? Because Rashi addressed the masses without a good vocabulary and they might not be (in some cases) aware of nuances. So Rashi will state something general.

However by looking over the verse and similar verses one can infer the true meaning.

In other words, the fact that Rashi translates a word as a hypernym does not necessarily mean that the word is a hypernym instead of a hyponym.

Let us apply this theory to the various examples The table below summarizes the hyponym, hypernym and the Rashi Newsletter support for the more restrictive interpretation as well as Rashi commentators opinions.

Verse	Rashi: Hyponym General Category approach	Rashi Newsletter: Specific Hyponym	Support for Rashi newsletter approach
<b>Gn49-03b</b>	<i>Beginning of strength</i>	Beginning of virility	Rashi himself talks about emissions and other indications that we are speaking about a <i>strong</i> relationship
<b>Ex16-33a</b>	<i>Tzintzenteh means vessel or container</i>	It means a thermos	<b>Gur Aryeh:</b> Its function was to preserve food. The name TzinTzeneth from Tzinah means cold. So indeed it was a vessel that stores cold (A thermos)
<b>Gn49-11d</b>	<i>Wash clothes in wine</i>	Wash lingeree in wine	<b>Mizrachi</b> says <i>people don't wash clothes in wine</i> . But that is not true. It is one type of playfulness during relations to spill wine on each other and wash it off. There is more support given below
<b>Gn11-29a</b>	Sarah [the matriarch] is called princess	Ruler – giving everyone exactly what they deserve	<b>Levush Orah</b> explains that Sarah was called by various names and each one described one aspect of her personality. No one word was sufficient. So Levush Orah was searching for specificity (But did not give it) Throughout her life Sarah exercised power not by destroying but by giving people what they deserve.

Let us now examine each of these in detail to see if we are justified in deviating from Rashi.

### Ex16-33a:

Rashi simply says that the Hebrew word *Tzinteneth* means an earthen vessel. He does not further identify the vessel. It is the **Gur Aryeh**, Rashi commentator who identifies this storage vessel as a thermos. Here are his arguments.

- The Bible identifies the function of the Tzinteneth to preserve food for generations
- The Bible uses a rare noun form with a repeated biblical root. Not *Tzineth* but *Tzinzeneth*.
- The biblical root, *tzinah* means *cold*.
- Gur Aryeh puts together these supportive (not determinative) arguments and argues that Rashi should not be taken literally. It is not the general hypernym, storage vessel but the more specific hyponym, thermos, a vessel designed to keep cool

### **Gen49-03b**

We have already discussed this Rashi. Rashi states that *on* means *strength* the general hypernym. But

- Rashi speaks about non emissions
- The bible speaks here and in Deut about a firstborn being the beginning of strength

So it seems more reasonable to interpret this hyponymically, *virility* the strength needed in a marital relationship which is different then ordinary physical strength.

### **Gn49-11d**

This is an interesting verse. Jacob is blessing Judah with reign, including the messianic reign. The verse says during his reign *one will wash clothes with wine; wash lingeree with grape-blood*.

The word *suth* only occurs once in the Bible. It is parallel to

clothes and therefore Rashi says *a type of garment*. Notice that here the Rashi language hints that he does not literally mean the *hypernym*, garment, since Rashi explicitly says *a type of garment*. So Rashi hints that he refers to the *hyponym*. But Rashi does not specify which one.

I approached this the same way Gur Aryeh approached the thermos, by studying the root. *Suth* means to seduce. A garment that seduces suggests the *hyponym*, lingerie.

Mizrachi states *People don't wash their clothes in wine*. That is true, but one form of playfulness between couples involves spilling wine on clothing and scrubbing it off. Jacob was explaining that fear would vanish in the Messianic era allowing a resumption of playfulness.

Some people might think this too loud. But in two other blessings Rashi refers to marital happiness. In his blessing of Reuven he refers to Reuven as the beginning of virility; he blesses Joseph that girls should tiptoe over the wall to gaze at him.

**Summary:** In any event I wished to bring the issue of literal Rashi translation to your attention.

- Sometimes Rashi uses specific language (For example: *A type of clothing*) hinting he is not literal
- But sometimes Rashi does not use such language. We can then justify deviating from the literal translation by citing verses.
- I have brought support from the Rashi commentators showing that this happens. For example, the Gur Aryeh interprets *tzintzeneth* as meaning a thermos based on vague supportive

evidence. In this particular Rashi, Rashi did not indicate any language forcing the issue.

- I should also add, that modern scholarship has based itself on linguistic hints and forms. The study of Rambam in Jewish law also rests on such hints and forms. I am claiming that Rashi is different. Different rules govern learning Rashi than learning Rambam or legal passages. One clear proof might be Rashi's statements that there are 10 fortiori's in the Torah when in fact they occur in the Bible.
- At the very least, let this be something to think about.

## APPENDIX

### THE 10 RASHI RULE CATEGORIES / THE 30 RASHI RULES

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**I-REFERENCE:** Dt26-05d *We went down to Egypt with a few people* explained by Gn46-27: with 70 people

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**II-MEANING / Lexicography / Dictionary:** EXAMPLE (Connectives) KI means

IF,PERHAPS,RATHER,BECAUSE,WHEN,THAT (Rashi on Gn18-15a Gn24-33a ) EXAMPLE (Nuances): YDA means FAMILIAR, not KNOW (eg Dt34-10a) eg Gn04-01 Adam was FAMILIAR with his wife EXAMPLE

(Idioms) ON THE FACE OF means DURING THE LIFETIME (Rashi on Nu03-04a Gn11-28a Ex20-03c Dt05-07a) EXAMPLE (Synonyms) *Marchesheth* means pot; *Machavath* means frying pan (Lv02-05a, 07a)

EXAMPLE (Hononyms) SHAMAH can mean listen, hear, understand: (Gn42-23a) *They didn't appreciate that Joseph understood them* (Note: They knew he was listening) EXAMPLE (Metonymy) (Lv02-11a) *Don't offer ...any honey as sacrifices* RASHI: *honey* includes any sweet fruit juice

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**III-GRAMMAR:** EXAMPLE: BA-ah means CAME;ba-AH means COMING(Gn46-26a)

EXAMPLE: Hitpael conjugation has different rules if 1st root letter is Tzade (Gn44-16a)

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**IV-PARALLELISM:** (Ex20-04) Dont POSSESS the gods of others Dont MAKE idols RASHI: So both POSSESSion & MAKING of idols are prohibited

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**V-CONTRADICTION:** (Nu04-03, Nu08-24a)Levites start Temple work at 25; Levites start temple work at 30. RASHI: They apprentice at 25 but start actual service at 30.

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**VI-STYLE: RABBI ISHMAEL RULES: EXAMPLE:** (Simple verses should be generalized): (Rashi Pesachim 6) (Dt25-04a) *Dont MUZZLE an OX while THRESHING* RASHI: Dont STOP any WORKING ANIMAL from eating

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**VII-FORMATting: EXAMPLE** (*BOLD indicated by Repetition*): Ex12-09c) COOK COOK it in water (So COOKED-COOKED is understood the same way bold is understood by modern reader) RASHI: Preferred to COOK it in water; But COOK it at all costs(Even if you dont have water) **EXAMPLE:** (*BULLETS indicated by Repeating keywords*) (Ex03-11a) Who am I - **THAT** I should go to Pharaoh - **THAT** I should take the Jews out of Egypt RASHI: Repeated word **THAT** creates BULLET effect - Pharaoh was a difficult king (Bullet one) - Jews were not yet ready for freedom (Bullet two) **EXAMPLE** (*Climax assumed in any Biblical list*): (Dt19-11a) *If a man HATES, SPIES, CONFRONTS & KILLS.* RASHI: Bible identifies 4 stages to murder(indicated by capped words)

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**VIII-DATABASE: EXAMPLE:** *God spoke to Moses to say over* introduces about 7 dozen biblical commandments; *God spoke to Aaron to say over* only introduces 2 commandments. RASHI: (Lv10-03b) Aaron was silent when his sons died because they served in the Temple drunk; hence he merited that the commandment prohibiting priests to work in the Temple drunk, was given to him

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**IX-NON VERSE: EXAMPLE:** (Use of Algebra)(Ex38-26b) *Temple donations of silver were 100 Kikar and 1775 Shekel from 630,550 half-shekels* RASHI: So one Kikar of silver = 3000 Shekel.

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**X: SYMBOLISM: EXAMPLE:** (Use of puns) (NuXX-XX) Moses made a copper snake for people to look up to when bitten by snakes (so they should pray and recover) RASHI: (Nu21-09a) The Hebrew root for copper and snake are identical (Cf. The English *copperhead*) Moses made the metal snake copper colored to symbolize the snake