

Meet and Greet the Exegete Rashi – Can anyone definitely say what the Torah means?

Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, Isaacides) was born in Troyes, in northern France in 1040; and died in Worms in 1105. He studied in the academies of Troyes, Mainz, and Worms. His teachers, Rabbi Jacob ben Yakar and Rabbi Isaac ben Judah, were students of Rabbenu Gershom, Me'or Ha-Golah. In 1070, Rashi returned to Troyes and founded a yeshiva there, which was attended by students from far and near. Rashi had three daughters, two of whom married prominent Torah scholars. His grandsons included such illustrious scholars as Rabbenu Jacob Tam and the Rabbi Samuel ben Rabbi Meir (Rashbam), both of whom were among the founders of the Franco-German Tosafist school of Talmud study.

1. Bereshit 3:8

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת-קוֹל ה' אֱלֹקִים מְתַהַלֵּךְ בְּגֵן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹקִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגֵּן:
They heard the *kol Hashem Elokim mithalech bagan le ruach hayom*; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

2. Rashi

וישמעו. יש מדרשי אגדה רבים וקבר סדרים רבותינו על מכוונם בכ"ר ובשאר מדרשות; ואני לא באתי אלא לפשוטו של מקרא ולאגדה המינשבת דברי המקרא דבר דבור על אפניו. וישמעו? שמעו את קול הקב"ה שהיה מתהלך בגן:

And they heard. There are many Midrashic explanations and our Teachers have already collected them in their appropriate places in Genesis Rabbah and in other Midrashim; I, however, am only concerned with the plain sense of Scripture (*peshuto shel mikra*) and with such Agadoth that explain the words of Scripture in a manner that fits in with them. **And they heard.** What did they hear? They heard the sound of the Holy One, blessed be He, as He walked in the garden.

3. Bereshit Rabba 19:8

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ, אֵל תִּקְרִי וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֵלָא וַיִּשְׁמִיעוּ, שְׁמֵעוּ קוֹלָן שֶׁל אֵילָנוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים הֵא גִבְרָא דְגִנְבָא דְעֵתִיָּה דְבְרִיָּה.
“They heard.” Don’t read it as if it is vocalized “they heard,” Rather, “they caused to be heard.” They heard the voices of the trees that were saying “Here is the cheater that cheated his creator.”

What’s an acceptable Midrash?

4. Dr. Avigail Rock, Great Biblical Commentators

<https://www.etzion.org.il/he/%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%99-%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%A7-%D7%90>

לנגד עיני רש"י עמדו מספר רב של מדרשים לכל פסוק; מהי שיטת ה"סינון" של רש"י? מהי אמת המידה של רש"י בבחירת מדרשים ובדחייתם? רש"י, כפשוטו, יביא בפני הקורא רק מדרשי חז"ל אשר "מיושבים" על מבנהו התחבירי של הכתוב, והפרטים הנוספים המצויים במדרש משתלבים בהקשר וברצף הענייני. במדרשים שרש"י מביא אמנם יש תוספת אינפורמציה על האמור בכתוב, אך תוספת זו איננה סותרת את הפשט, אלא מתיישבת עמו.

Rashi saw a number of midrashim on each verse; how did he pick and choose? What was his yardstick for selecting some midrashim and rejecting others? Rashi, as a pashtan, brings before the reader only those midrashim which are harmonious with the syntactic structure of the verse, only if the additional details which are found in the midrashim dovetail with the context and sequence of the verses. In the midrashim which Rashi cites, there is supplementary information, beyond what is mentioned in the verse, but this addition must not contradict the peshat; it must be harmonious with it.

5. Bemidbar 8:1-4

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּהִעָלְתָּךְ אֶת־הַנְּזָרוֹת אֶל־מִוֶּל פְּנֵי הַמִּנְוָה יֵאָרוּ שְׁבַעַת הַנְּזָרוֹת: וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן אַהֲרֹן אֶל־מִוֶּל פְּנֵי הַמִּנְוָה הֵעָלָה נְרִיתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמִּנְוָה מִקִּשָׁה זָהָב עֲד־יִרְכָה עֲד־פְּרָחָה מִקִּשָׁה הוּא כַּמְרָאָה אֲשֶׁר הָרָאָה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה כֵּן עָשָׂה אֶת־הַמִּנְוָה:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and say to him, “When you mount the lamps, let the seven lamps give light at the front of the lampstand.” Aaron did so; he mounted the lamps at the front of the lampstand, as the LORD had commanded Moses.— Now this is how the lampstand was made: it was hammered work of gold, hammered from base to petal. According to the pattern that the LORD had shown Moses, *so the lampstand made*.

6. Rashi

כֵּן עָשָׂה אֶת הַמִּנְוָה. מי שעשאה. ומדרש הגדה על ידי הקב"ה נעשית מאליה.

So he made the lampstand. He who made the lampstand. A Midrashic explanation is: By the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He, it was made of itself.

Midrash solves a problem

7. Bereshit 37:13-17

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אָחִיךָ רַעִים בְּשִׁבְכֶם לָכֵה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֵלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַגִּנֵּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָךְ־נָא רֵאָה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אָחִיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְהַשְׁבֵּנִי דָבָר וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֶבְרוֹן וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂכֵמָה: וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ אִישׁ וְהָיָה תַעֲנֵה בְשָׂדֶה וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר מַה־תִּבְקָשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־אֲחֵי אָנֹכִי מִבְּקָשׁ הַגִּידְהָ־נָא לִי אֵיפֹה הֵם רַעִים: וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ נִסְעוּ מִזֶּה כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֲמָרִים גְּלֻכָה דַתְּיָנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחֵר אָחָיו וַיִּמְצְאוּם בְּדוֹתָן:

And Yisra'el said to Yosef, Do not thy brothers feed the flock in Shekhem? come, and I will send thee to them. And he said to him, Here I am. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brothers, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shekhem. And a man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brothers: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. And the man said, They are departed from here; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dotan. And Yosef went after his brothers, and found them in Dotan.

8. Rashi

וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ אִישׁ. זה גבריאל, שְׁנֵאָמַר "וְהָאִישׁ גְּבֻרִיאֵל"

This was the angel Gabriel as it is said, “and the man Gabriel”

Choosing the right Midrash to solve the problem

9. Shemot 15:22-25

וַיִּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם־סוּף וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל־מִדְבַר־שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת־יָמִים בְּמִדְבָר וְלֹא־מִצְאוּ מַיִם: וַיִּבְאוּ מִרְתָּה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִישְׁתֹּת מַיִם מִמֶּרְה כִּי מָרִים הֵם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמָה מֶרְה: וַיֵּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה־נַּשְׁתָּה: וַיִּצְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּרְהוּ יְהוָה עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶל־הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ:

Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He put them to the test.

10. Mechilta DeRabi Yishmael 15:22

ויסע משה את ישראל להודיע שבחן של ישראל שכיון שאמר להם משה קומו סעו לא אמרו היאך אנו יוצאין במדבר ואין בידינו מחיה לדרך אלא האמינו והלכו אחר משה...

"Moses caused Israel to wander." This is praiseworthy for Israel, since Moses told them to get up and go, and they didn't respond "how will we go out into the desert? We don't have any food for the road!" Rather, they had faith and they followed after Moses.

11. Midrash Tanchuma 16:1

מדרש תנחומא טז:א

ויסע משה. מהו ויסע משה, שהסיען בעל כרחן... כשבאו לים וטבען הקב"ה היו צפין על שפת הים כל אותן האבנים טובות ומרגליות והיו מושלכים, והיו ישראל יורדין בכל יום ונוטלין מהם ולא היו מבקשים לזוז משם, כיון שראה משה כך, אמר להם מה אתם סבורים, שבכל יום הים מעלה לכם אבנים טובות ומרגליות, עמד והסיען בעל כרחן.
"Moses caused them to wander." What does it mean that he caused them to wander? That he forced them against their will... When they came to the Sea, and God drowned [the Egyptians], the people were watching the sea shore. All the precious stones and jewels [of the Egyptians] were tossed on the shore, and the Israelites would go down every day and gather them and so they didn't want to leave there. Once Moses saw this, he said to them, "What do you think? That every day the sea is going to give you precious stones and jewels?!" He stood them up and forced them to move.

12. Rashi

ויסע משה. הסיען בעל כרחם, שעטרו מצרים את סוסיהם בתכשיטי זהב וקסף ואבנים טובות, והיו ישראל מוצאין אותן בים... לפיכך הצרד להסיען בעל כרחם:

And Moses caused [Israel] to journey — He made them journey against their own will, because the Egyptians had adorned their horses with ornaments of gold and silver and with precious stones, and the Israelites were finding these in the sea... On this account he was compelled to make them journey on against their will.