All these examples come to inform and remind us that no good deed, no kind word, no pure thought goes to waste without reward. All join together to form the large stock of good deeds through whose power and merit, directly and indirectly, future generations survive.

Should someone claim that in the passage of time all that we do is forgotten, we reply that every good deed, every kind word, every pure thought, is like a seed sown or planted in the ground: it will germinate and thrive, and many will sit in the shade of the tree that grows, eat its fruit and enjoy its beauty. True, those who sit in its shade, who eat its fruit and who enjoy its beauty do not know who planted it, but does this obscure its spelendour?

RASHI'S CRITERIA FOR CITING MIDRASHIM

This article should be read with a Chumash available, so as to compare references in the original Hebrew.

In our study of the weekly sections of the book of Exodus we occasionally considered midrashim cited by Rashi in his commentary (whether as his sole explanation or as additional to a more straightforward one), and asked: 'What led or compelled Rashi to choose this particular midrash from among all the available midrashim dealing with the verse in question?'

Here we will survey Rashi's overall system for choosing midrashim in his Torah commentary. Did Rashi indeed have a particular system in choosing which midrashim to cite and which ones not to cite? Did he apply a criterion to his choice of midrashim? If so, what is the system and what is the criterion? Or was this a more or less random collection to decorate the Torah text with Talmudic phrases, to please his readers?

With respect to one particular type of midrash which Rashi uses, those who comment on Rashi are in agreement. This is the midrash that interprets the proximity – or, more accurately, the juxtaposition – of sections dealing with different subjects. Two examples will illustrate this.

Rashi on Exodus 17:8.

> This section [i.e. the story of Amalek] is placed next to this text [i.e. the people's questioning whether God was present among them or not, see verse 7] to teach 'I am always present among you and at hand for all your needs, yet you ask "Is God present among us or not?" When a dog comes to bite you, you will cry out to me and find out where I am!'

> It is illustrated by the case of a man who took his son on his shoulder and went on a journey. Each time the boy saw something he fancied, he asked his father to give it to him, and his father did so. When they met someone on the way, the boy asked him 'Have you seen my father?' Thereupon the father said 'don't you know where I am?', threw the boy down, and a dog came and bit him.

The super-commentator Rabbi Jacob **Kanizal** (in *Perushim*) queries Rashi's statement 'This section is placed next to this text .....'

> Since the arrival of Amalek occurred just after the previous incident related, where Moses struck the rock, why does Rashi need to comment on the juxtaposition? This is how it actually happened!

Rabbi Elijah **Mizrahi** (*Re'em*) raises the question from a fundamental angle:

> Rashi explains 'this section is placed next to this text .....'. In *Midrash Rabbah* [which Rashi is quoting], this is just *a mere homily*, since this section must of necessity be placed next to this text because both incidents occurred at Rephidim. What is puzzling about Rashi is that throughout the entire Torah he has ignored numerous midrashim dealing with the juxtaposition of different sections, and in his commentary *has cited only those cases where [one of] the adjacent sections seems out of place* according to the plain text of the Torah – yet here he has cited this midrash about juxtaposition where the two sections *have to be* next to each other!

Here we notice the way Mizrahi draws a distinction between the midrash itself and the use Rashi makes of midrashim. He assumes that the authors of the midrash often make a comment on two sections being adjacent even when there is no reason to query the sequence, calling this a 'mere homily'. But he admits that Rashi only cites this type of midrash where the juxtaposition demands an explanation because the chronological order is not being followed; hence he fails to understand why Rashi cites this midrash in the present instance.

Many of Rashi's super-commentators have sought for a solution in some detail in the main text, in the precise wording of either the first verse of the story of Amalek or the last verse of the preceding

paragraph. Some focus on the unusual expression Rashi uses here: not 'this section is next to that *section*' but 'this section is next to that *text*'. Rashi is not attempting to explain why the two sections are adjacent (which, as stated, does not require explanation) but why this section is adjacent to the *last verse* of the previous section, which belongs logically between verses 2 and 3.

The various answers as to why Rashi cites this midrash here are not relevant to our discussion. The point we wish to make is merely that Rashi's citing of this midrash here puzzled all his commentators as being contrary to his usual method.

Rashi on Numbers 13:1.

> Why is the section on the spies placed next to that dealing with Miriam? Because she was punished for slander, talking about her brother, and these wicked men saw what happened and yet did not draw a lesson from it.

Most of Rashi's commentators are puzzled by these words, and to illustrate their approach we will quote a few.

Almosnino:

> Rashi's question 'why is ..... placed next to .....?' implies that this did not happen soon after the story of Miriam. Yet the text implies that the spies were sent out on the first stage of the journey after leaving Hazeroth [where the incident of Miriam occurred]. Numbers 33:18 states that 'they moved on from Hazeroth and encamped at Rithmah', on which Rashi himself comments that Rithmah was so called because of the slander of the spies, citing Psalm 120:3-4 [to show the connection between the root of the word Rithmah and deceitful talk].

Mizrahi, in explaining Rashi's system in citing midrashim dealing with juxtaposition of sections, also asks:

> We have already explained several times why, in his commentary on the Torah, Rashi cites some midrashim dealing with juxtaposition of sections and does not cite others: Rashi only cites midrashim which are close to the plain meaning of the text ..... hence where one of two adjacent sections appears out of place, there must be a special reason

for its presentation there, and a midrash that explains why one immediately follows the other is close to the meaning of the plain text: such a midrash is one that Rashi will cite. However, a midrash that comments on why two sections are linked together, where there seems no reason for them to be otherwise, is one that Rashi prefers to ignore.

Rabbi Abraham **Bukrat**, author of *Sefer Hazzikkaron*, was among those expelled from Spain, a contemporary of Mizrahi (whom he did not know and of whose book he was unaware). He presents his question as one already raised by students of Rashi:

'The question is raised here' – what is the problem? That is the way it actually happened, and it was written the way it occurred! Several unacceptable answers have been proposed ..... The one I accept is that there was no intention here to explain why these portions adjoin each other in the Torah in the style of other 'why do they adjoin' homilies (midrashim). The problem was why the command to send spies was linked to the incident of Miriam. Why did God issue the order to send the spies immediately after the Miriam episode? And he replies 'Because she was punished for slander.' God said to Moses: 'If you wish to send men, send them now, so that they might remember what they saw me do to Miriam, and they will not slander the Land. The purpose was to prevent them from sinning, but they still sinned.

R. Eliezer Levi **Heilperin**, author of *Be'urey Mohar'el*, expresses a similar idea, more precisely:

In my humble opinion, while Rashi obviously accepts that the episode of the spies preceded the argument with Korah, the problem that he sees is why Scripture deleted the sin the people committed by asking to send spies. Why is the story not told here in its proper sequence – that first the people came to Moses and asked him to send spies, and only then did God instruct him to send them? Rashi is asking why the story of the spies adjoins that of Miriam while the sin of those who requested them is omitted. To this he replies that the Torah links the two to indicate that those sinners saw Miriam punished for the crime of slander and yet they learned no lesson from it.

Basically, Rashi's commentators agree that Rashi does not cite a midrash of this type, i.e. on adjoining portions (*lamah nismekhah*), unless the juxtaposition, *per se*, is problematic. Even Rabbi **I. B.**

disagrees

Eilenberg, author of *Tsedah Ladderekh*, who does not agree with Mizrahi that Rashi cites such a midrash only when the juxtaposition does not fit the chronological sequence, admits that Rashi would still not cite them unless the adjoining sections lacked a thematic connection:

It is an established principle that Rashi's custom is to cite midrashim on juxtaposition even where the sections are written in chronological order, if they bear no relation to one another.

Many examples of this sort can be brought from Rashi regarding this type of midrash.

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The uniformity of opinion among the super-commentators, however, relates only to one type of midrash cited by Rashi, namely that of '*lamah nismekhah*' (juxtaposition). Regarding the other midrashim – which constitute the overwhelming majority of those he cites – this is not the case.

Here Rashi's commentators disagree. Some claim that he cites midrashim only when he finds a problem in the text (such as a grammatical deviation, a redundancy, or a divergence from the context), and could find no other solution. Others claim that at times[2] Rashi cites midrashim even when the language of the text does not require them; he brings them for some message, or lesson, or intimation for the future, etc., and they merely supplement the text – cf. 'Whenever one can provide a homily – do so' (*Kol heikha de'ika lemidrash – darshinan;* Talmud *Pesahim* 24b, *Bekhorot* 6b, et al.).

We will illustrate two examples of the latter opinion:

(a) **Mizrahi** states in several places (e.g. Gen. 12:1, 43:20; Ex. 1:10, 14:23) regarding a midrash cited by Rashi:

Even though the verse means simply what it says, wherever one can provide a homily – do so, and wherever one cannot – don't.

In this way he explains why Rashi cited a midrash on a particular verse even though there appears to be no difficulty in the language which would require this midrash; and further, why he cited it apropos of this verse, yet refrained from citing it apropos of another, similar, verse, where the identical unusual style, or problem of logic or language, appears.

(b) brings it for a message

(b) Rabbi Isaac **Horowitz**, one of the later super-commentators, author of *Be'er Yits'hak*, adheres to this opinion categorically:

> (On Gen. 37:14): The text does not demand this homily (as if the homily explained what the text is trying to say), but the homily states an underlying truth.
>
> (On Gen. 42:2): This presents no difficulty for me (to understand), since this homily was recorded by the 'homileticists'[3] and I have already explained that these do not produce their homilies to provide a solution to a problem in the text, or to explain a redundant word, but to reveal textual allusions ..... that do not necessarily follow.

He evidently does not distinguish between the reasons that prompted the author of the midrash to formulate his homily and those that prompted Rashi to cite it. ('They do not produce their homilies to provide a solution to a problem in the text'). He adopts this approach frequently, even where we have no difficulty in understanding why Rashi cites a particular midrash.

For example, **Rashi** on 'May GOD ..... appoint a man over the community' (Num. 27:16):

> This illustrates the virtues of the righteous, who, when about to leave this world, put aside their personal problems and worry about those of the community.

Be'er Yits'hak comments:

> The account obviously comes, essentially, for its own purposes, but the Sages characteristically look for an implicit lesson whereby the text informs us of the virtues of the righteous. They do not suggest that this is the sole purpose of the story, but that while relating it the text draws attention to an inherent praise of the virtues of the righteous.

The Sages then do not speak, nor does Rashi cite them, in order to solve a difficulty in the text, but to draw our attention to important incidental side-issues that emerge from the story. It is surprising that Rashi did not explain 'to inform us of the virtues of the righteous' as an answer to a different question: Why here, immediately after 'you will be brought in to your people', where we would expect to find the pleas Moses offered on his own behalf (about which we hear later, Deut. 3:23-25), do we find Moses's request for the appointment of a communal leader, a request which stems from concern about the community? Rashi could then solve this difficulty by citing the Sages regarding the virtues of the righteous.

Even in passages where his predecessors provide a reason for Rashi's citation of a midrash, *Be'er Yits'hak* does not accept their explanation and does not look for an alternative – even when Rashi treats a word metaphorically and thereby contradicts the *peshat* of the verse!

For example, in the case of: 'Why have you abandoned the man? Call him and let him eat bread!' (Exodus 2:20), **Rashi** says:

> 'Perhaps he will marry one of you', according to the verse (Gen. 39:6): 'Except for the bread which he eats' [where the midrash understands 'the bread' to be a reference to Potiphar's wife, hence the connection, here, with marriage.]

Be'er Yits'hak comments:

> *Tsedah Ladderekh* brings various opinions as to the textual basis of this homily. In fact, however, this homily is one of the allusions of the 'homileticists' whose comments do not flow from the text. Their observation serves only for allusion and rhetoric (*tsehut melitsah*), showing that what actually happened to Moses later on, i.e. that he married Jethro's daughter, is already alluded to figuratively (*bederekh melitsah*) in Jethro's opening words. It is most likely that once Jethro learned of Moses's gallantry towards his daughters, and his heroism *vis-à-vis* the shepherds ..... he immediately sought to attract Moses [i.e. felt that he would like such a person as his son-in-law] ..... but the truth is that this midrash is simply the work of the 'homileticists'[4].

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On the other hand, many of Rashi's commentators – including some of the earliest and some of the most recent, and in particular Bukrat (*Sefer Hazzikkaron*), Pardo (*Maskil LeDavid*) and Heidenheim (*Havanat Hammikra*) – insist that Rashi never cites any midrash unless he is forced to do so by the text. These commentators, therefore, do not give up until they discover a minute allusion in the verse – a deviation from the rules of grammar, or from Biblical language, or from logic, or from the Torah's narrative style – for whose solution Rashi required the homily in question.

Rabbi David **Pardo**, among the outstanding of the super-commentators, comments decisively on Rashi on Leviticus 5:17 as follows:

> It is well known that it is not Rashi's habit to cite homiletic material [i.e. midrashim] in his Torah commentary, unless it is essential in order to understand the text and to make sense of the verse in its context. There are no exceptions!

N.L.'s opinion

We will demonstrate that this opinion is preferable to that quoted earlier. It can be shown that Rashi's citation and selection of midrashim throughout his Torah commentary[5] invariably serves to explain the text, and not 'to adorn the words of the Torah with the Rabbinic pearls'.[6]

Rashi's statements provide both direct and indirect supporting evidence for this view.

Direct evidence

1. Unlike Ibn Ezra and Ramban, Rashi did not write an introduction to his Torah commentary to explain its goals and methods. Nevertheless in a few places we do find methodological notes, and specifically concerning the question under discussion, namely his use of midrashim.

Rashi comments on 'And they heard' (Gen. 3:8):

> There are many aggadic *midrashim* which our Sages have already arranged suitably in *Bereshit Rabbah* and other midrashic anthologies. I, however, am concerned exclusively with the straightforward meaning (*peshat*) of the verse, and with such *aggadot* as explain the Scriptural account in its context.

This bibliographical note – 'which our Sages have already arranged suitably in *Bereshit Rabbah* and other midrashic anthologies' – already shows that Rashi did not intend in this commentary to provide an 'assortment of midrashim', or a Rabbinic anthology. Midrashim and *aggadic* anthologies were available for anyone interested in studying them. 'I, however, am concerned exclusively with the straightforward meaning of the verse, and with such *aggadot* as explain .....'. In other words, Rashi seeks to explain difficulties and answer questions, and not to adorn, beautify or supplement Scripture.

2. In addition to this explicit declaration of intent with regard to citing midrashim, we also hear of Rashi's method in selecting midrashim in cases where he quotes a midrash, rejects it, and explains his rejection in words such as the following:

> Our Sages connected this to the preceding subject .....
> ..... but the homily is not consistent with the text for several reasons: first, in that it does not say .....
> ..... moreover, how is the text connected .....?
> ..... therefore I say that the verse must be interpreted simply according to the context (*peshat*), and let the midrash be taught as a midrash!

In other words, he does not accept the midrash as an explanation of the verse, based on the language of the verse or its context.

3. Similarly, his opposition to a halakhic midrash in Exodus 23:2, s.v. 'Do not follow the majority to do wrong:'

> There are several Rabbinic *midrashim* on this verse, but they fail to explain the language of Scripture in its context ..... while I intend to resolve it in its context and according to the *peshat*,[7] as follows .....

4. At times he distinguishes between midrashim which are closer to, or more distant from, the *peshat* of the verse. On 'Girls stepped onto the wall' (Gen. 49:22) **Rashi** says:

> There are numerous *midreshey aggadah*, but this one tends to explain the verse ..... There are also *midreshey aggadah* which are consistent with the language .....

In the above examples, Rashi states his view explicitly. We shall see, however, that what emerges implicitly from his commentaries is no less important.

Indirect evidence

Three of his methods in utilizing midrashim demonstrate Rashi's viewpoint.

1. At times he notes the existence of certain midrashim to a particular verse without actually quoting them. If you carefully examine these midrashim, you will understand why he refrained from quoting them, yet could not ignore them to the point of not mentioning them at all.

2. He may present a midrash which – in its source – deals with several verses in different places in the Torah, and cite it in connection with just one verse, or apply it to but some of the verses which it addresses. If you compare all these verses, you will see that he could not have applied that midrash to any verse(s) other than the one(s) that he chose.

3. He may transfer a midrash from the verse to which it was originally addressed, to another verse. If you examine this, you will see that from a commentator's viewpoint the midrash chosen actually explains only the verse to which Rashi applied it; while the verse on which it originally appears contains no language or subject problem, and the midrash there really does not shed light on the text as such.

We will bring various examples of each of these approaches.

1. Referring to a midrash without quoting it.

(a) (Genesis 4:8) **Then Cain said to Abel.**

Rashi:

> He started to argue and fight with him in order to fall on him and kill him. There is a midrash on this, but the above is the plain meaning of the verse.

This verse indeed requires further elucidation, because elsewhere in the Torah 'So and so said to so and so' is invariably followed by the words which he said. The midrash in ***Bereshit Rabbah*** (chapter 23) provides three options from which to fill in the gap:

> 'Then Cain said to Abel while they were in the field'. What were they arguing about?
>
> They said: Come and let us divide up the world. One took the land and the other took the movable property. The former said: 'The land you are standing on belongs to me', and the latter said: 'The clothes you are wearing belong to me'. The latter said 'Take them off', and the former said: 'Get off!' The result: 'Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him'.
>
> R. Joshua of Sakhnin quotes R. Levi: Each took both land and movable property. What did they argue about? One said: 'The Temple will be built on my property', and the other said: 'It will be built on my property'. The verse says: 'While they were on the open land (*sadeh*)', and *sadeh* is a reference to the Temple, as it says 'Zion will be ploughed up as open land (*sadeh*)' [Micah 3:12, where the rest of the verse makes it clear that the Temple is referred to]. As a result, 'Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him'.
>
> Judah son of R. Ami: They were arguing over Eve (the first).

Rashi could not refrain from mentioning the three reasons for the argument given by the midrash (i.e. acquisition of property, faith, and sex) because even after his presentation of 'the plain meaning of the verse', the question still remains: 'What did Cain say?' Yet Rashi could not bring any one of these three elements – not because they contradict the *peshat*, but because they deviate from its message. The midrash offered three answers to the question: 'Why do people kill

each other?' In all three cases the brothers argue, they rise up against each other, and as a result one kills the other. In other words they are equally guilty. Yet the whole principle behind our chapter is that Cain was wicked and slew his brother who was innocent. They did not both start an argument and then get up to fight, but, as it is explicitly stated: 'Cain said to his brother Abel .....'. The challenge to quarrel, and its continuation to the point of murder, was one-sided and not mutual.[8]

(b) (Exodus 13:17) **..... for it is/was near.**

Rashi:

> And it was therefore convenient to return by the same route to Egypt. There are also numerous *midreshey aggadah* on this.[9]

The following are the midrashim to which he is alluding without citing them:

***Mekhilta*:**

> That which God had mentioned to Moses was near: 'When you take the people out of Egypt you will worship God on this mountain' (Exodus 3:12).

***Tanhuma*:**

> It was (too) near, because the Canaanites still possessed the land, as it says: 'The fourth generation will return here' (Gen. 15:16), and the fourth generation referred to had not yet arisen.

Pesikta deRav Kahana (chapter 10):

> The kindness which the Canaanites showed Jacob was (too) near, as it says 'When the Canaanite inhabitants saw .....' (Gen. 50:11).

Those of Rashi's commentators who believe that his quotation or rejection of midrashim is deliberate (e.g. to embellish the text), try to explain why Rashi referred to the above without actually quoting them.

Rabbi **Judah L. Eilenburg**, author of *Minhat Yehudah*, comments:

> According to those midrashim, the phrase 'because God said' refers not

> to 'for it is near' but to 'He did not lead them.' In other words, a further reason why he did not lead them was 'because God said .....'

According to this opinion, Rashi could not quote these midrashim because according to their interpretation our verse would not fit well into its context, since it does not actually say: 'because it is near, and because God said.'

Minhat Yehudah does not ask what prompted Rashi to mention these midrashim at all. This is asked by another super-commentator, **Pardo**, in *Maskil LeDavid*:

> What sort of reference is 'There are also numerous *midreshey aggadah*'? Elsewhere, if Rashi cites a midrash it is because a difficulty remains which he intends to resolve by means of the aggadah. Here, however, what has he accomplished?

Pardo attempts to show (in a very complicated way, in my opinion) that even after explaining 'for it is near' according to its *peshat*, there remained a difficulty. He continues:

> On account of this (remaining difficulty) he was compelled to comment that there are *midreshey aggadah*, but these are inconsistent with the continuation of the verse. Rashi did not cite them because he only addresses those which are consistent with the basic sense of the verse. Here he took account of the many interpretations in the midrashim, but since none is closer than any other in explaining the language of the text, he omitted them.

It seems to me that his reason for omitting them was that in these midrashim the word 'it' (*hu*) does not refer to 'the route' (*derekh*), but to something to which there is no reference in the verse (i.e. God's pronouncement, the Canaanite settlement, or their act of kindness) and Rashi does not like to relate a pronoun to a noun which does not appear either in the verse in question or in the preceding verse.[10]

(c) (Exodus 33:13) **..... and now, if I have found favour in Your eyes, let me know Your ways, and that I may know You, so that I may find favour in Your eyes, and see that this nation is Your people.**

Rashi:

'And now': If I have truly found favour in Your eyes.

'Let me know Your ways': i.e. what reward You give to those who find Your favour.

'That I may know You, so that I may .....': By means of your reward I will know what this favour is that I have found. 'So that I may find favour' therefore means 'so that I may know the reward for finding favour'.

'And see that this nation is Your people': Do not say 'And I will make *you* (Moses) a great nation' and abandon *them*. See that they are Your people of old, and if You reject them I cannot be sure that my own descendants will survive – and let me know the payment of my reward with this people.

Our rabbis dealt with this verse in *Berakhot*, but I have come to explain the texts.

Here is the text of the ***Talmud*** (*Berakhot* 7a) which Rashi alludes to without quoting it:

Moses approached God with three requests, and they were granted:

He asked that the *Shekhina* should rest upon Israel – and this was granted, as it says (Exodus 33:16): 'Is it not by Your accompanying us'?

He asked that the *Shekhina* should not rest upon the other nations of the world – and this was granted, as it says (*ibid.*): 'I and Your people will be separate.'

He asked God to disclose His ways to him – and this was granted; as it says (verse 13): 'Let me know Your ways'. He said before Him: 'Master of the Universe! Why are there the good who prosper and the good who suffer, the wicked who prosper and the wicked who suffer?'

The Rabbinic interpretation of the expression 'Your ways' reflects the normal meaning of the word and its usage in the Bible better than that offered by Rashi. From the wider aspect, namely God's disclosure of His attributes (Exodus 34:6-7), their interpretation is also more appropriate. Despite this, Rashi rejected their interpretation on the grounds that he had come to explain the verses in their context.

Rabbi **Loewe** (*Maharal*) of Prague, author of *Gur Aryeh*, explains:

'What reward do you bestow?' The common interpretation (that this simply meant that He should tell him His ways) is unacceptable, for how would we then explain: 'so that I may find Your favour' which follows it? 'Let me know Your ways' cannot mean 'so that I may know what my reward is for finding favour', because even if He lets him know His ways, Moses still does not know how much favour he has found. Moses continued: 'And see that this nation is Your people' – Do not say: 'I will make you a great nation' and relegate my reward for the future, but let me know it through this people. If you inform me that you accept my request and on account of that you do not reject them, that will signify that I have a reward .....'

Rashi adopted this construction in order to explain the relevance here of 'and see that this nation is Your people' after saying 'Let me know Your ways', namely that Moses implied 'Let me know the reward'.

Indeed, according to Rashi the scope of Moses's request is severely limited, lacking the grandeur given it by the Talmud (and by our philosophical literature) of seeking sublime truths. But Rashi accepted this limitation in order to integrate the verse into its immediate context – the preceding and following verses – so that it would not deviate from the message of the account, nor be a statement isolated from its narrative, local and chronological background.[11]

2. Confining a midrash, which relates to several verses in different places, to a particular passage.

(a) (Genesis 11:2 and 13:11) Twice the word *'mikedem'* (from the east) is not given its literal meaning by the midrash:

Bereshit Rabbah 38(7): **'When they travelled from the east'** (11:2):

Did they travel from the east (*har hakedem*, Gen. 10:30) to arrive in the east (Shinar, i.e. Sumer, which is likewise in the east)? Eliezer son of R. Simeon said: 'They removed themselves from the Eternal (*kadmono shel 'olam*), saying "We desire neither Him nor His sovereignty"' (i.e. they rebelled against God and His authority).

Bereshit Rabbah 41(7): **'and Lot travelled from the east'** (13:11).

He removed himself from the Eternal, saying 'I want neither Abraham, nor his God.'

Rashi applies the midrash only to the second of these two verses. Evidently in the former instance he did not share the problem of the midrash, since he explains in many places – as formulated by Almosnino: '*Mikedem* is not independent, but connected'. That means that you must specify east of *somewhere*, and if the first story refers to places east of the Land of Israel, then both their original habitation (*har hakedem* – 10:30) and their subsequent settlement (Shinar – 11:2) are to the east of Israel. In the second verse, however, the expression is difficult in itself (and Rashi tried, unsuccessfully, to render its *peshat*),[12] since why should it say 'from the east', when the only thing that matters is that he moved away from Abraham? The verse should have said 'he moved from Beth-el', or: 'he moved from east of Beth-el', because that is where they had been living previously ('to the east of Beth-el, Beth-el being to the west and The Ai to the east' – 12:8), and on their return from Egypt Abraham went 'to the place where his tent had stood previously, between Beth-el and The Ai' (13:3). Therefore, only here did Rashi cite the midrash which interprets a geographical designation as a theological concept, and interpret Lot's separation from Abraham's place as a separation from Abraham's entire spiritual world.

(b) (Numbers 31:21) **Eleazar the priest said.**

Rashi:

Because he lost his temper, Moses erred and forgot the laws of purifying non-Israelite articles. Similarly, on the eighth of the days of consecration: 'He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar' (Lev. 10:16) – when he lost his temper he came to err. Also: 'Listen here you rebels ..... and he struck the rock' (Num. 20:10) – on account of his anger he erred.

Rashi's source is ***Sifrey***, Numbers 31:21:

When our master, Moses, became angry, he erred. R.Eleazar said: In three instances he became angry and (consequently) erred. Thus:

– 'He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's surviving sons' (Lev. 10:16), followed by: 'Why have you not eaten of the *hatat* .....?'
– 'He said: "Listen you rebels!"' (Num. 20:10), followed by: 'Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff.'
– 'Moses was angry with the army officers' (Num. 31:14), followed by: 'Eleazar the Priest said to the soldiers.' Our master Moses became angry and consequently erred.

Rashi did not apply this *Sifrey* to either Leviticus 10 or to Numbers 20. If you look closely at these two passages, you will realize that there is no textual difficulty there for *Sifrey* to explain. The difficulty here, however, is evident. The preceding verses pertain to the details of the war in which they were currently engaged, and the active agent is Moses. (Verse 14: 'Moses became angry'; verses 15-20: 'Moses said to them .....'). In verse 21, however, when an instruction is given which is to apply also at all times in the future ('This is the regulation of the procedure .....'), the speaker is not Moses, but Eleazar! This amazing feature demands an explanation. Had Rashi applied this *Sifrey* to the other two places, he would not have been solving any difficulty in language or style, but merely adding a psychological explanation of what happened, which is not his method. (Nevertheless, here he saw fit to mention also these other places because he is quoting his source in its entirety.)

(c) (Numbers 12:13) **Moses cried out to GOD, saying: 'Please, God, cure her, now!'**

Rashi on 'saying' cites *Sifrey*:

Why does Scripture use: 'saying' (i.e. 'to say')*? Moses said 'Let me

* [A word of explanation is needed here for English readers, in order to understand what follows. The Hebrew word *lémor* is really a contraction of *le'emor* meaning 'to say'. We treat it as being idiomatic: 'He said to him, saying: ...', taking the word 'saying' as the equivalent of opening quotation marks, both spoken and written. The midrash, however, considers that if that were the case, the word would be unnecessary and superfluous, and instead treats the word as meaning literally 'to say', implying that what follows it either must be passed on to someone else, or demands a reply. What follows

know whether or not You will cure her', whereupon God replied: 'If her father had spat in her face ..... '.

R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Four times Moses asked God to tell him whether or not He would meet his requests:

'Moses spoke before GOD, saying:' (Exodus 6:12). Why does Scripture use 'saying'? 'Tell me whether or not You will redeem them,' whereupon God replied: 'Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh' (6:1 – see below).

'Moses spoke to GOD, saying: "Let GOD, source of the breath of all flesh ..... "' (Num. 27:16), and He replied: 'Take for yourself .....' (verse 18).

'I pleaded with GOD at that time, saying: .....' (Deut. 3:23), and He replied: 'Enough!' (verse 26).

Rashi's commentators all point out that the Sages interpret every instance of 'GOD spoke to Moses, saying' to mean that Moses should repeat it to Israel. Since this interpretation fits none of these four cases (nor Exodus 17:4, which is included in *Sifrey* on Deut. 3:23), we must interpret *lémor* as a request for a reply. Rashi quotes the words of the Sages in three of the four cases mentioned above: on our verse (Num. 12:13); on Num. 27:16 'He said to Him, let me know whether or not You will appoint a provider for them'; and on Deut. 3:23 'This is one of three places where Moses said to God "I will not desist until You tell me whether or not You will fulfil my request."'

But on Exodus 6:12, Rashi did not quote or even allude to this *Sifrey*, and it appears that the verse we have chosen, here, provides an excellent illustration of Rashi's method in citing midrashim or ignoring them.

Anyone investigating the words of R. Eleazar ben Azariah as they relate to Exodus 6:12 will find them difficult to comprehend. ***Tsedah Ladderekh*** formulates this difficulty aptly:

The two [verses R. Eleazar quotes, viz. 6:12 and 6:1] are totally

here is the consequence of this.]

unconnected, since the verse 'Now You will see' (6:1) appears at the end of the portion of *Shemot* [i.e. earlier] in response to Moses's question of God: 'Why have You caused harm to this people?', while the verse: 'Moses spoke before GOD, saying "The children of Israel have not listened to me ....."' (6:12) appears in the portion of *Va'era* [i.e. later].

The commentators on *Sifrey* tried to solve this difficulty by reversing the chronological order (*mukdam shehu me'uhar*), but Rashi, who only cites the Sages when their words fit well into the language of the verse and its context, did not cite them here. As to his citation of the *Sifrey* on Numbers 12:13, Pardo (*Maskil LeDavid*) explains: 'Nevertheless, in the portion of *Beha'alotekha* [i.e. 12:13] Rashi cites the *baraitha* verbatim.' That is to say, this is not the interpretation of this verse, but a quotation from a source, in order to rely in this commentary (12:13) upon a general rule.

(d) (Deuteronomy 32:48) **GOD spoke to Moses on that very day.**

Here too, **Rashi** uses *Sifrey* in his commentary:

Three times we find: 'On that very day'.

With Noah: 'On that very day Noah ..... came into the ark' (Genesis 7:13), i.e. by the light of day, because his contemporaries took an oath: 'If we see him, we will not let him enter the ark. Moreover, we will take hatchets and axes and break it down!' Said God: 'I will bring him in at mid-day; let anyone who wants to keep him out just come and try.'

In Egypt: 'On that very day God took the children of Israel out of Egypt' (Exodus 12:51). The Egyptians took an oath: 'If we see them, we will prevent them from leaving. Moreover, we will take swords and other weapons and kill them!' Said God: 'I will take them out at mid-day; if anyone thinks he can prevent them, let him come and try.'

Here, too, at Moses's death, it says: 'On that very day', because the Israelites were taking an oath: 'If we see him, we will not let him go. The man who took us out of Egypt, split the sea, gave us manna and quail, raised up the well, and delivered the Torah – we will not let him go!' Said God: 'I will take him away at mid-day' (the text in *Sifrey* is 'I will bring him into the cave in mid-day'), and let anyone who thinks he can prevent it come and try'. This is why it says: 'GOD spoke to Moses on that very day.'

Rashi indeed cited this on Genesis 7:13, but not on Exodus 12:51 (where establishing the precise time is superfluous, since 'on that very day' has already been stated in 12:41)! Apparently Rashi did not cite it there because 'If we see them, we will prevent them from leaving' conflicts with what we are explicitly told (12:33), namely that the Egyptians were in a hurry and pushed them to leave! [13] In Deuteronomy Rashi mentioned all three places, as is his habit in comprehensive quotations, as we have seen above.

(e) From among the midrashim which identify anonymous people with well-known heroes,[14] Rashi cites only those which are required to solve a language problem.

For instance, he cited the midrashim which identified: 'the youth' (*na'ar;* Gen. 18:7) with Ishmael; 'the interpreter' (*melits;* Gen.42:23) with Manasseh, the son of Joseph; 'the fugitive' (*palit;* Gen. 14:13) with Og, the king of the Bashan; 'the youth' who ran to Moses (*na'ar;* Num. 11:27) with Moses's son, Gershom; 'the creditor' who came to take the widow's son (*nosheh;* 2 Kings 4:1) with King Jehoram; and 'the place' where Jacob stopped (*hamakom;* Gen. 27:11) with the Temple Mount. All of these identifications were cited by Rashi because the definite article is attached to them although they are appearing for the very first time.[15] Thus, he identifies Abraham's 'two servants' (Gen. 22:3) as Eliezer and Ishmael, because it says 'his two servants', not 'two of his servants.'

On the other hand, Rashi does not bring the Sages' well-known identification of 'the elder servant of (Abraham's) household' (Gen. 24:2) with Eliezer, although this identification accords well with the *peshat* on the basis of Abraham's own remark 'The superintendent of my household is Eliezer of Damascus' (Gen. 15:2-3). Similarly, he did not cite the identification of 'Phinehas is Elijah' (though unlike Ibn Ezra, he does not argue against it), nor that of Micah the idol-maker (Judges 17) with the fashioner of the Golden Calf, nor that of: 'The God-fearing who took his cattle indoors' (Exodus 9:20) with Job (Talmud *Sotah* 11a), because in none of the verses in which these names appear is there a language problem demanding 'midrashic treatment'.

Rashi's consistence of method stands out in the identification of the three donkeys: that of Abraham, on his way to the Binding of Isaac (*akedah*) (Gen. 22:3); that of Moses on his return to Egypt from Midian (Exodus 4:20); and that of the King Messiah in the prophecy of Zechariah (Zech. 9:9). Rashi only applies this midrash on 'and he rode them on the donkey' (Exodus 4:20), commenting: 'The specific donkey, the one Abraham saddled for the Binding (*akedah*) of Isaac, the one on which King Messiah will eventually appear'.[16] This is because the noun carries the definite article ('*the* donkey'), while in the other two verses: 'Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey' (Gen. 22:3), and: 'Your king is about to come to you, he is ..... poor and riding on a donkey' (Zechariah 9:9), there is no basis for such a comment.

Similarly, he did not cite the identification of the (Sabbath) wood chopper with Zelophehad in its original context (Num. 15:32), but only in connection with the speech of his daughters, on account of the difficulties raised by the laconic statement 'For he died of his own sin' (Num. 27:3). Rashi's commentators have dealt with this at length. Nor did Rashi cite the identification of Joshua's two spies as Phinehas and Caleb at their first appearance (Joshua 2:1), but only on verse 4 ('The woman took the two men and hid him') where he uses this midrash to explain the use of a singular pronominal suffix ('him') when referring to a plural noun ('men').

(f) In many midrashim the Sages treat the word 'mountains' (*harim*) not literally but as a metaphor for the patriarchs (*horim*). By analogy they treated the word 'hills' (*geva'ot*) as a metaphor for the matriarchs, and likewise the word 'head' or 'top' (*rosh*) as 'beginning', hence 'root' or 'ancestors'.

For instance, ***Pesikta de Rav Kahana*** *(Parashat Zakhor)*:

> 'Tomorrow I shall stand on the top (*rosh*) of the hill (Exodus 17:9). 'On the top of .....' – I shall cite the virtues of the patriarchs; as it is written: 'For I see him from the top of the boulders' (Num. 23:9); '..... the hill' – I shall cite the virtues of the matriarchs; as it is written: 'and gaze on him from the hills' (*ibid.*).

More briefly, ***Mekhilta*** to the same verse:

> 'Tomorrow I shall stand on top of the hill'. Our future depends on the deeds of our ancestors. 'On top of .....' refers to the deeds of the patriarchs, and '..... the hill' to the deeds of the matriarchs.'

And in ***Shemot Rabbah*** (28:3):

> 'Moses went up to God, and GOD called to him from the mountain, saying .....' (Exodus 19:3). Because of the merit of the mountain, 'mountain' referring certainly to the patriarchs, as it says: 'Mountains! Listen to GOD's argument!' (Micah 6:2).

Again, ***Sifrey*** (Deut. 33:15):

> '..... and from the top of the ancient mountains, and from the treasure of the hills of yore .....'. This teaches us that the patriarchs and matriarchs are called 'mountains' and 'hills', as in the verse: 'I will take myself to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense' (Song of Solomon 4:6).

In all of these places **Rashi** refrained from quoting the midrash and refrained from treating 'mountains' and 'hills' metaphorically. He did, however. draw on the midrash on the verse 'For I see him from the top of the boulders, and gaze on him from the hills' (Num. 23:9):

> I look at their heads (i.e. leaders) and their basic roots, and I see that they are well-founded and as strong as these boulders and hills by virtue of the patriarchs and matriarchs.

But even here Rashi retained some of the original significance of boulders and hills, treating them as imagery, not metaphors. It appears that here, and only here, Rashi found the *peshat* of the verse difficult because Balaam's seeing the people from the tops of mountains and hills does not lead to what follows, and he could not find a connection. Perhaps he even drew on the midrash on account of the relative heights of the three observation points to which Balak had led Balaam, each point being higher than the previous one: (a) '*Bamot Ba'al*' (the high places of Baal; Num. 22:41); (b) 'the top of the Pisgah, the terrain of the scouts' (23:14) [i.e. from which anyone approaching could be spotted at a distance]; (c) 'the peak of Pe'or

which overlooks the Yeshimon [the Judaean desert]' (23:28) [i.e. from which one could clearly see the other side of the Aravah-Jordan rift]. Only from the last does he see the Israelites 'dwelling according to their tribes'. From the first site he saw only a section of them (22:41), so Rashi did not want to explain that he actually saw them from the top of rocks. He may likewise have been influenced by Isaiah 51:1: 'Regard ..... the boulder from which you were hewn,' where Rashi explains: 'Who does that boulder refer to? Your father Abraham.' The plural form, 'boulders' and 'hills', may also have prompted Rashi to cite the midrash.

It is likewise enlightening to contrast Rashi's comments on Micah 6:1 and Ezekiel 6:2-3 respectively. On the former: 'Arise and argue with the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice,' he says: 'The mountains are the patriarchs, and the hills are the matriarchs.' However, Ezekiel 6:2: 'Turn your face towards the mountains of Israel,' and 6:3: 'Mountains of Israel! Listen to the word of my Lord GOD!' are followed by: 'Thus said my Lord GOD to the mountains and to the hills, to the river beds and to the ravines'. Rashi does not feel that a metaphorical interpretation is appropriate here. Nor did he cite this midrash to Ezekiel 36:1 (where the theme is similar, see verse 4 and, particularly, verse 8).

(g) Rashi makes sparing use of those midrashim that explain metaphorically or figuratively expressions which can be readily understood literally (according to their *peshat*). Where he does use them, there is generally a linguistic reason.

Many midrashim interpret 'ascending' and 'descending' in a non-literal sense as denoting a change in spiritual, social or economic status.[17] We encounter them in Rashi occasionally, but frequently he refrains from citing them, and this is not accidental.

(1) (Deut. 32:49) **Ascend this mountain, the Mountain of Avarim.**

Sifrey comments:

> This is an ascent and not a descent.

(2) (Deut. 34:1) **Moses ascended from the *aravot* of Moab to Mount Nebo.**

Sifrey:

It is an ascent and not a descent.

Rashi cited neither of these, yet he did cite other midrashim treating ascent and descent.

(3) (Exodus 32:7) **Go! Go down!**

Descend from your greatness, for I only granted you greatness for their sake.

(4) (Exodus 33:1) **Go, ascend from here.**

Since *Erets Yisrael* is higher than all other countries, it says 'ascend'. Alternatively, since God had said to Moses, in anger, 'go down', He now said, in a favourable disposition, 'go up'.

Rashi explained the verbs of ascent and descent here as metaphors because the word 'go' (*lekh*) already indicates actual activity, and since from a mountain top one cannot 'go' other than 'down', the word 'descend' would be superfluous unless interpreted metaphorically. Since the journey to Canaan (*Erets Yisrael*) involved walking across level country before reaching the mountains, Rashi there brought both a *peshat* and a *derash*.

Rashi's citation or avoidance of midrashim is likewise evident in Gen. 42:2 ('Go down there'), 42:4 ('Joseph's brothers went down') and 43:20 ('We indeed came down'), where **Rashi** comments on the last:

'It is a come-down for us. We who are accustomed to supporting others now need your support'.

Rashi accurately distinguishes between direct address and the third-person narrative in describing the situation. Here, too, we can discover two schools of thought among Rashi's super-commentators.

Mizrahi, on Rashi's comment to Gen. 43:20:

Rashi does not base this on the use of the expression 'came down', since *Erets Yisrael* is [physically] higher than the surrounding countries and whoever enters it 'goes up' – as Rashi has written (cf. on Gen. 45:9: 'and go up to my father') – so that whoever leaves Israel

'goes down'. Hence the statement that 'they got up and went down to Egypt' (43:15) arouses no comment. What prompted Rashi was the expression 'we have *indeed* come down' [expressed in Hebrew as a duplication, *yarod yaradnu*], just as the Talmud (*Bava Metsia* 31b and elsewhere) treats other [similar] duplications as redundancies, for instance in Deut. 15: *pato'ah tiftah* in verse 8, *naton titten* in verse 10, and *ha'anek ta'anik* in verse 15. The principle that 'The Torah expresses itself in normal human language' [where, in Classical Hebrew, such duplication is used for emphasis], is applied only where there is no basis for a homily, but where there is we apply one.

Be'er Yits'hak is more forceful:

This homily is not grounded in the text. It is a pertinent comment concerning something that is independently true, in its own right, which the homily attaches to the verse *(asmakhta be'alma)*. It is the custom of the 'homileticists' to do this, but such homilies do not flow from any requirement of the text.

Neither of these super-commentators distinguished between the question: 'What led the author of the midrash to treat the verse this way?' and the question: 'What induced Rashi to cite this midrash?' They merely replied to both, that there is no textual need for this homily. Contrast the comment of ***Gur Aryeh*** (Gen. 43:20):

'For it is a come-down for us': As I have already written above, whenever the language of descent appears in the first person it calls for a homily, for the speaker need not speak of himself as descending. When the [narrative] text uses it, however, there is nothing special about it.

Tsedah Ladderekh and others followed him in this approach.

(h) (Leviticus 26:1) **You are not to make idols for yourselves.**

Of the following two comments, which share the same idea as well as the same midrashic technique, Rashi cited one, but not the other.

Tosefta *Arakhin* 5:5; ***Talmud*** *Arakhin* 30b and *Kiddushin* 20b:

R. Yosey b. Hanina said: Come and see the gravity of even ancillary laws of the Sabbatical year. A man who deals in Sabbatical year produce eventually sells his (movable) possessions: 'When you sell

goods to one another' (Lev. 25:14). If he remains insensitive (i.e. he pays no attention to the impending disaster and fails to repent from his sin – *Rashi*), he then sells his legacy land [i.e. that allocated to every Israelite in the Land of Israel]: 'Should your brother be impoverished and sell part of his legacy' (verse 25). If this is not enough [to make him feel remorse – *Rashi*] he must sell his home: 'Should a man sell a dwelling house' (verse 29). If he still does not improve, he comes to borrow money on interest: 'If your brother is impoverished ..... and you hold sway over him ..... you are not to take interest ..... from him' (verses 35-36). If he remains defiant, he eventually sells himself: 'If your brother becomes poor and sells himself to you' (verse 39). Not only to you, but to a (non-Israelite) resident: 'And is sold to an alien *(ger)*' (verse 47). Not even a *ger tsedek* [proselyte] but a *ger toshav* [one who is merely allowed to live among you]: 'And is sold to a *ger toshav* ..... to the root of a resident family' (ibid.) – namely a foreigner! 'To the root' signifies one who is sold and is made to be a servant to idols [which is the 'root' of pagan practice].

Ruth Rabbah (2:11)

When exacting His due, the Master of Mercy does not start by attacking the person bodily. We learn this from the story of Job. 'A messenger came and told him "The oxen were ploughing ..... when the Sabeans attacked them ....."; in the meantime another one came and said ..... and another one came and said ..... "and (the house) collapsed upon the young people and they died"' (Job 1:14-19). The same applies to the scourge of *tsara'at*: first it attacks his house. If he repents – fine; if not – parts have to be removed. If he (now) repents – fine; if not – the house has to be demolished. If he repents – fine; if not – it attacks his clothing which has to be washed. If he repents – fine; if not – the clothing must be ripped. If he repents – fine; if not – it must be burnt. Eventually, it attacks his body. If he repents – fine; if not – he goes into temporary quarantine. If he repents – fine; if not – 'He is to live isolated; his dwelling is to be outside the camp' (Lev. 13:46).

Rashi (on Lev. 26:1):

You are not to make idols for yourselves: This refers to (a Jew) who is sold to a non-Jew, that he should not say: 'Since my master is licentious, I will act likewise; since my master is idolatrous, I will act likewise; since my master profanes the Sabbath, I will do the same.' It is for this reason that these verses were written.

These sections, too, were written in sequence: First the warning regarding the Sabbatical year. If he is greedy for money and is suspected of violating the Sabbatical year, he eventually sells his movable possessions, hence the verse: 'If you sell goods to one another' follows. If he fails to repent, he then sells his legacy land; if he still fails to repent he sells his house; and if he still does not repent, he borrows money on interest. Each of these in turn is worse than the previous one. If after all this he still does not repent, he sells himself, and if he still fails to repent, (he sells himself) not merely to a Jew, but even to a Gentile!

Rashi did not cite the parallel midrash regarding *tsara'at*, because there the sequence in the midrash contradicts that in the text itself! The Torah first deals with human beings attacked by the scourge, then clothing, and finally houses[18]! In his commentary on Leviticus 25 *(Behar)*, however, in keeping with his method, he used R. Yosey b. Hanina's remarks to explain why the prohibition against idolatry (26:1) [and the reference to the Sabbath (26:2)] is placed immediately after the law of the impoverished Jew who sells himself to a foreigner (25:47-55), subsequently explaining the juxtaposition (and sequence) of all the portions of *Behar* (s.v. 'These portions were written in sequence').

3. Transferring a midrash from its original place to another verse – near or distant – where it is needed more to explain the text. This is particularly instructive.

3.1 *Transfer of a midrash to a near verse:*

(a) (Genesis 24:26-27) **The man bowed and prostrated himself to GOD, and said: 'Blessed is GOD the God of my master Abraham'.**

Bereshit Rabbah (60:6) comments:

'And the man bowed and prostrated himself.' From here (we learn) to 'give thanks' on hearing good news.' [The Hebrew word *modim* ('giving thanks') is often taken by the rabbis to mean 'bowing down'.]

Rashi did not apply this midrash to this verse, but delayed its application until after the servant had told his story, presented his petition, and received the reply: 'The matter comes from GOD .....' etc. On verse 52, 'When Abraham's servant heard their words, he prostrated himself upon the ground before GOD', Rashi comments: From here (we learn) to give thanks [i.e. bow down] on hearing good news.'

Rashi's commentators deal with this. Rabbi Israel **Isserlein**, in his super-commentary *Be'urim*, explains the need to transfer the midrash to this verse because in verses 26-27 the prostration is followed by an expression of gratitude 'Blessed is GOD,' and it is on account of this that he bowed. We cannot learn from this that one needs to bow merely on the receipt of good news. But the bowing in verse 22 is not followed by any statement, so the prostration was only because he heard the good news.[19]

Mizrahi provides a different answer:

> 'From here we learn to give thanks.' *Bereshit Rabbah* makes this comment on verse 26 but says nothing regarding verse 52. Rashi does the reverse, because the good news is only in verse 51 – 'Here is Rebekah, take her and go' – whereas during his early conversation with Rebekah he still did not know if she would accompany him.

Isserlein gives a reason based on *halakhah*, whereas Mizrahi gives a reason based on the narrative plot. Both agree that Rashi's transfer of this midrash from one verse to another is intentional.

(b) (Numbers 22) Three times Balaam asks God if he may go and curse Israel, and in the very repetition of his request ('like a dog returning to its vomit,' comments R. Isaac Arama) he emphasises his intense desire to go. The first time he does not relay God's absolute refusal to the emissaries, but leaves the door open for them to call on him again. The second time, therefore, there is no explicit prohibition, but permission – albeit severely restricted. He again displays his fervent desire to go by not ignoring those severe restrictions and by following the messengers wholeheartedly.

Targum Yonatan (an Aramaic translation) already notes that God had said to him 'If these men have come to call you, get up and go

with them *(ittam)*' (Num. 22:20), whereas Balaam 'rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with *(im)* the Moabite officers' (verse 21). *Yonatan* translated the first 'get up and *travel* with them,' but the second as 'he *went* with .....'. This implies that going 'with them' (*ittam*) means following the same road but not for the same purpose, while going 'with them' (*immam*) means close attachment and shared purpose.[20] Therefore Rashi comments on 'and went with the Moabite officers' (verse 21): 'His heart was at one (*shaveh*) with theirs.' [In English, 'he went along with them' in two senses.]

The third time, after the angel has been sent to 'oppose' him (i.e. to prevent him from going), and after the donkey's speech demonstrated his obduracy, he still repeated his request as though he did not yet know the answer: 'If it displeases You, I'll go back' (verse 34). Now he is told without reservation: 'Go with *(im)* these men' (verse 35).[21]

With regard to God's second response (verse 20), which appears [if we disregard the difference between *et* and *im*] to entirely contradict the first response (verse 12), the midrash ***Bemidbar Rabbah*** (20:10) says:

> From here we learn that a man is helped to follow whichever path he chooses. At first he was told 'Do not go with them' (verse 12), but when he arrogantly made up his mind to go – he went. 'GOD was angered by his going'. God said to him: 'Sinner! I do not desire the destruction of sinners, but if you are determined to go and to be destroyed then get up and go!'

Rashi, however, transfers this statement from verse 20 to verse 35, viz. the third response:

> A man is helped to follow whichever path he chooses.

Only from this point onwards is Balaam no longer interfered with and delayed, nor is any attempt made to induce him to do good. Here he is not forbidden to go, nor is he given only partial permission to go with (*et*) them, but is explicitly told 'Go with (*im*) these men'.

Only at this point is it correct to say 'A man is helped to follow whichever path he chooses.'

3.2 *Transfer of a midrash to a distant verse:*

(a) (Genesis 49:5 – Jacob's blessing) **Simeon and Levi (are) brothers.**

Rashi:

> They were of one mind regarding both Shechem and Joseph: 'One said to his brother ..... let us go and kill him' (37:19). Who were they? Reuben and Judah did not agree to his being killed. The sons of Bilhah and Zilpah did not hate him so deeply, as it says: 'And he (Joseph) acted as an attendant with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah' (37:2). Issachar and Zebulun would not have spoken before their older brothers. There remain Simeon and Levi, whom their father called 'brothers'.

Some of Rashi's commentators ask why he did not cite this midrash in its original place, 37:19 (*Vayyeshev*), in order to identify the speakers, but transferred it to 49:5 (*Vayehhi*). The author of ***Diverey David*** answers:

> Rashi did not see fit to apply this in the story of Joseph *(Vayyeshev)* because there, although it only says 'they said one to his brother', they were all in agreement, and each one said this to his brother. (Similarly we find 'They said one to another' in the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:3) where they all acted by common consent.) Jacob in his blessing (49:5), however, said 'Simeon and Levi are *brothers*'. Were we not aware of this? Moreover, what is the connection between these 'brothers' and the 'instruments of violence' which are mentioned next?

In other words, in the story of Joseph the entire context makes it clear that the expression 'one to his brother' is a figure of speech signifying 'one to another', without specifying identities, so that Rashi has no need for a midrash. But in Jacob's blessing, the word 'brothers' appears superfluous, so Rashi turns to the midrash.

(b) (Exodus 35:34) **and Aholiab.**

The appointment of two craftsmen to build the Tabernacle. Compare the words of God's instructions to Moses with the words Moses used when relaying these instructions to Israel:

KI TISSA		VAYYAK'HEL	
31:1	GOD instructed Moses, saying:	35:30	Moses said to the Israelites:
31:2	See, I have called by name, Bezalel ben Uri ben Hur of the tribe of Judah.		See, GOD has called by name Bezalel ben Uri ben Hur of the tribe of Judah.
31:6	And I have given him Aholiab ben Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan	35:34	He and Aholiab ben Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan

On 'And Aholiab' (35:34), **Rashi** comments:

> 'From the tribe of Dan' – from the lowest of the tribes, from the sons of the slaves [i.e. Bilhah] – yet God compared him to Bezalel, who was from the greatest tribe, in the building of the Tabernacle, to lend substance to the declaration 'The noble are not preferred to the wretched' (Job 34:19).

These remarks appear in the midrashim (*Tanhuma* and *Shemot Rabbah*) to *Ki Tissa* (the instructions to Moses), but Rashi transferred them to *Vayyak'hel* (where Moses relays the instructions), where the midrashim are silent. As usual, the determining factor in his choice was the linguistic one. Only in *Vayyak'hel* can we say 'God compared him,' because of the superfluous word 'He' (in verse 34 above), whereas there is no problem of language or syntax in *Ki Tissa.*

(c) (Deut. 1:1) **Di Zahab**

The ***Talmud*** (*Berakhot* 32a) remarks:

> Moses remonstrated with (God) above ..... The School of R. Yannay deduced it from the words 'and *Di Zahav*'. What is *Di Zahav*? The School of R. Yannay said that Moses pleaded with God: 'Master of the Universe! It was all the silver and gold (*zahav*) which you showered upon Israel until they called "enough" (*dai*) that led them to make the golden calf .....'
>
> R. Hiyya bar Abba quoted R. Yohanan: 'This resembles the case of a

man who had a son whom he washed, anointed, fed, and gave drink. He then tied a purse around his neck and set him down at the entrance to a house of prostitution. How can that son avoid sinning?'

Rashi transferred these remarks to Exodus 32:31: 'Please! This people has committed a great sin by making for themselves a golden god.' **Rashi** comments there:

> You caused them to do this by showering them with gold and whatever they wanted. Can they do anything to avoid sinning? This resembles the case of a king who fed his son and gave him to drink, adorned him, hung a purse around his neck, and stood him at the entrance to a house of prostitution. How can the son avoid sinning?

He transferred the midrash to this verse because it contains words of entreaty and presents a defence for Israel, while in *Devarim* (Deut. 1:1), departing considerably from the language of his source, **Rashi** interprets *Di Zahav* not as an entreaty to God but as a rebuke to Israel:

> He rebuked them for the calf which they made on account of all the gold they possessed. As it says: 'I lavished silver on her, and gold which they used for Baal' (Hosea 2:10).

*

We will bring one further eminent example to support our thesis that Rashi only cites a midrash when he encounters a difficulty in the verse which he cannot explain in a simple (*peshat*) fashion.

Rashi comments on 'And Balaam ben Beor they killed with the sword' (Num. 31:8):

> He came upon Israel and exchanged his craft for theirs. For they can only conquer by words, by prayer and request, and he (Balaam) came and seized upon their craft to curse them with words. They, in turn, came upon him and exchanged their craft for that of the nations who depend upon the sword, as it says (Gen. 27:40; to Esau): 'And you shall live by your sword.'

Midrash Tanhuma comments on 'with his sword drawn in his hand' (Num. 22:23):

> Could the angel not blow at him and cause him to expire? Did he have to draw his sword? ..... Instead, he said to him: 'The mouth was given to Jacob as it says "And the voice is the voice of Jacob" (Gen. 27:22), and the hands are Esau's as it says "You will live by your sword" (Gen. 27:40). All the nations live by the sword, and you, Balaam, wish to exchange your craft and attack them with their own? I, too, will attack you with yours.' Hence: 'With his sword drawn in his hand'.

Rashi cites this midrash there, and concludes:

> Such, too, was his end: 'And Balaam ben Beor they killed with the sword' (Num. 31:8).

The super-commentators wondered why Rashi repeated this midrash in *Mattot* (Num. 31:8), and what difficulty he encountered in the verse to require this homily? Mizrahi tried to solve this problem by saying simply that otherwise 'with the sword' would be superfluous. This answer is not acceptable, because frequently the phrase 'to kill with the sword' occurs and Rashi makes no comment.

Nimmukey Shemuel says, similarly:

> This is not a sufficient cause for the use of this homily, because we have found elsewhere: 'Hamor and his son Shechem they killed with the sword-edge' (Gen. 34:26), where the previous verse already says: 'Then the two sons of Jacob ..... each took his sword'. And one should abide by the principle that 'Whenever there is an opportunity to offer a homily – do so!' [Yet Rashi does not do so there!]
>
> I feel however, that all this is irrelevant, because Rashi was not troubled, as Rabbi Mizrahi maintained, by the superfluous word 'sword', but that the word 'with the sword' was not inserted in the previous verse. It would then have read: 'They marched against Midian ..... and killed all the males with the sword; and they killed the kings of Midian and Balaam ben Beor.' The fact that only Balaam was reported to have been killed 'with the sword' implies the need for a homily to teach us that 'he attacked Israel by word of mouth .....' This is a true, solid, and correct *(emet, veyatziv, venakhon)* insight.

These remarks may well have pleased their author, but fail to put the mind at ease. What difference does it make whether 'with the sword' is written in the beginning and applies to all those mentioned

as being killed, or if it is written at the end? How does the midrash cited by Rashi relate to the placing of the word in the verse?

For many years I searched Rashi's super-commentaries for an answer, without success, until I came across *Nefesh HaGer*, a commentary on *Targum Onkelos* by **Mordecai ben Zevi Lowenstein** (Piotrkow, 1906). In the introduction to Genesis entitled 'The Ways of the Targum' I found the entry: 'By the edge of the sword' (*lefi herev*) which I quote with deletions:

> Throughout the Torah, *Onkelos* translates *lefi herev* ('by the edge of the sword') as *lepitgam deharba* ('by the word of the sword'), and *Targum Yonatan* does the same throughout the Neviim. This occurs frequently, and requires explanation. [English readers should note that the Hebrew for 'edge' when referring to a sword is *peh*, the same word that normally means 'mouth'.] The translators noticed that throughout the Torah and Neviim, wherever the sword was held by Israel the text says 'by the edge of the sword' *(lefi herev)*. This applies whether they are killing foreign enemies, or each other in a civil war, or carrying out a legal execution as in the case of the 'corrupt town' (Deut. 13:16).
>
> However, when the sword is in Gentile hands, the text simply says 'by the sword' (*laherev* or *baherev*, or at the end of a verse, *lèharev* or *bèharev*.) This applies whether they are attacking Israel or each other. This is a remarkable fact!
>
> We read in the Talmud: '"And I have given you one *Shekhem* above your brothers, which I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow" (Gen. 48:22). Did he take it with sword and bow? Does it not say: "For I do not depend on my bow, nor will my sword save me" (Psalm 44:7)? Hence "my sword" [i.e. in Genesis] means my prayer, and "my bow" means my request' (*Bava Bathra* 123a).
>
> This tradition prompted the translators to refer 'by the edge ["the mouth"] of the sword', when it appears regarding Israel, to 'the words of prayer', which they rendered [in Aramaic] as *lepitgam deharba* ('by the word of the sword').[22] However, as regards the sword used by other nations – where the expression 'by the edge of the sword' (*lefi herev*) appears neither in the Torah nor in the Neviim, only 'by (or with) the sword' (*baherev* or *laherev*) – they wisely adjusted their translations and rendered it as *(bideqatlin) beharba*, '(slain) by the sword'.

> How pleasing is Rashi's comment in *Mattot* (Num. 31:8) on 'And Balaam ..... they killed by (or with) the sword'. 'He exchanged his craft for theirs, for they are saved only by words of mouth ..... they, too, exchanged their craft for his .....' appears to raise the problem 'Why was Rashi prompted to cite this homily?' But Rashi had observed that here Scripture used 'by the sword', instead of the expression 'by the edge ["mouth"] of the sword' which is used whenever the sword is held by Israel. Hence his comment that because he (Balaam) changed crafts, they changed .....
>
> This also explains Rashi in *Behukkotay* (Lev. 26:7,8): 'and they will fall before you by the sword' (lèharev) – 'Each by his neighbour's sword'. Rashi apparently faced the problem that (according to the rule that we have established) a verse referring to Israel killing their enemies should have said 'by the edge of the sword.' He therefore explained: 'Each by his neighbour's sword', to which the word 'lèharev' is appropriate.

*

These few examples have been brought to illustrate Rashi's consistent method in using midrashim. They barely explore his methods, and a great deal of in-depth analysis is needed to clarify his comments, citations, omissions, and departures from his sources.

As to Rashi's method in selecting one midrash from among several which appear on the same verse, we hope, God willing, to address this question elsewhere.

*

NOTES

1. **Mizrahi** expresses this more sharply in his comment on Rashi's remark 'Why is the section on judgements adjacent to the law dealing with the altar?' (Exodus 21:1):

> 'What leads Rashi to consider that the section on laws does not follow naturally from the preceding section, to the extent of having to ask why the section on laws is adjacent to that concerning the altar? Of all the

midrashim concerning juxtaposition Rashi only cites *those where the expected order is not followed, and which are near to the plain text* of the Torah. He does not cite *those which are not claimed to be out of order,* where *there is no need to give a reason for their juxtaposition!'*

2. Even those who believe that Rashi will bring a midrash not required to resolve a text acknowledge that he does this only infrequently.

3. He frequently uses this term (*dorshey reshumot*), not in the traditional sense but simply referring to 'those who explain difficulties' in general.

4. *Tsedah Ladderekh* cites, among his other reasons, a subtle point of language on which, in his opinion, Rashi's interpretation is based, namely the distinction between 'call to eat' (*kera' le'ekhol*) and 'call and he will eat' (*kera' veyokhal*). He claims that *veyokhal* is not a subordinate verb (so that he may eat) equivalent to the infinitive prefixed by a lamed (*le'ekhol*) – 'call him so that he may eat', equivalent to 'call him to eat'. [Compare Judges 12:2: 'And you did not call us to go' (*velanu lo kara'ta lalekhet*), or Judges 14:15: 'Did you call us to dispossess us?' (*hale-yoreshenu kera'tem lanu*)]. It is an independent main verb, reflecting a subsequent and separate action: (1) 'call him' and (2) 'he will eat'.

Maharshal writes similarly:

(Rashi) did not provide the *peshat* explanation, since in that case he [Jethro] would have said: 'to eat bread' (*le'ekhol lehem*) – what other purpose was there to the call? It cannot be compared to 2 Samuel 2:14: 'Let the young men come and play before us' [an inaccurate quotation, the Bible says 'rise', not 'come'], because there he first said: 'Let them come' – one action, to come – then explained what they would do after they came: whether they would just stand around, or play. You will never find a 'call' which serves no subsequent purpose, as Rashi himself explained in Leviticus 1:1. Therefore, if the word 'call' (here) were for the purpose of eating it should have said 'to eat' because it is impossible otherwise, since the 'calling' was to eat – in the manner of calling to a meal. In German, too, the word 'call' *(gebeten)* applies to an invitation to a meal even if the word meal is omitted. If so, 'and he will eat bread', which follows the 'call', is a separate matter and stands independently.

5. I cannot yet say this with any certainty regarding Rashi on *Neviim* and *Ketuvim.*

6. This opinion is diametrically opposed to that of many authors of monographs on Rashi and his methods in explaining the Torah. I will cite, here, only one of many examples. The Polish-born French Jewish scholar *M.Lieber* wrote in his book '*Rashi*' earlier this century: 'When there are several Midrashic interpretations, he chooses the one that accords best with the simple sense, but he is especially apt to fall back upon the Midrash *when the passage does not offer any difficulties.*' (English translation by A. Sold, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1906.) He is of the opinion that Rashi introduced delightful legends and heartening stories into his commentaries in order to sweeten the words of Torah in the mouths of his readers who were 'simple and naïve'. This opinion is followed, in particular, by all the popular articles and pamphlets which try to describe Rashi's commentaries on the Bible as written for simpletons and children – an attitude in which only someone who has never delved into the depths of Rashi's difficult commentaries could take pride. Contrast the words of *E.M. Lifschitz* (*Sefer Rashi*, Jerusalem, 1957; p.228): 'Rashi knew the spirit of his average contemporary, who was imbued, even if only partially, with Talmudic wisdom, and towards whom his commentary was addressed.'

7. Other comments which diverge from halakhic midrashim include those on Exodus 16:28; 22:8. This was noted by all those who have written about Rashi, such as *Poznanski* in his lengthy essay on French exegetes (*Introduction to the Commentary of Eliezer of Beaugency*, published by Mekitsey Nirdamim, 1913). Lately, several sources such as these were collected in an essay entitled *Peshuto shel mikra*, appendix 62 to *Torah Shelemah* vol. 17, p.286.

8. I cannot accept Mizrahi's explanation of Rashi's rejection on purely external formal grounds: 'Were it so, it should either have said "Cain said to his brother Abel such and such", or have omitted the words: "Cain said to his brother Abel" entirely, since it does not tell us what he actually said.'

9. For an explanation of this Rashi, see my *Studies in Shemot* at the beginning of the portion of *Beshallah.*

10. He does, however, accept midrashim which relate a third-person pronoun or pronominal suffix to God, even if He is not mentioned previously. For example: 'And she opened it and saw him, the child' (Exodus 2:6), or: 'Because he is stronger than us' (Numbers 13:31). [Translator's note: 'Than us' in Hebrew *(mimmennu)* could also be read as 'than him', and is so

interpreted by the midrash.] But this type of midrash is rare in Rashi, and in these two cases there are also language and subject difficulties which forced him to treat the word in an irregular manner.

11. Compare this with Genesis 27:41 where Rashi refrained from citing the wide-ranging midrash in *Vayyikra Rabbah* (27:11) illuminating the relationship of Israel to the nations from its inception until the Messianic Age, because he sought to interpret the verse within the context of the story in line with the character of its heroes. See my *Studies in Bereshit*, p.197.

12. Most of Rashi's commentators have noted his error (and of Ibn Ezra likewise) regarding the geography of the Land of Israel which emerges in the course of his commentary here, but this is not relevant to our discussion. Maps in those days were not readily available, and those that existed were quite strange, fundamentally erroneous, and totally misleading. (See Shatner: *The Map of Israel and Its History*, (Hebrew), Mossad Bialik 1951).

13. I have not found any super-commentator who discusses why Rashi does not apply this midrash to Exodus 12:51, but most of them do discuss another difficulty in the Rashi above (on Deut. 32:48). For example, Rabbi Nathan **Shapira**, author of *Imerey Shefer*:

> I do not know why he only mentions these three passages, when it also says 'on that very day' concerning Abraham (Gen. 17:23), where Rashi comments: 'On the very day he was commanded. By day, not at night. Nor was he afraid of the Gentiles or the scoffers, despite the enemies among his contemporaries who might have said 'Had we seen him, we would not have allowed him to circumcise himself and fulfil God's commandment.' This needs further analysis!

Tsedah Ladderekh cites this question and replies:

> The phrase 'on that very day' in connection with Abraham can be explained, as Rashi explained it, as an indication that Abraham was circumcised on the same day he was so commanded; and that is why Rashi (on Deut. 32:48) refers to only three places. Alternatively, Rashi referred to three places where God insisted that something take place on that very day, and the three he mentions were, indeed, on God's initiative, whereas in Abraham's case 'on that very day' was not God's initiative, but his own.

R. Samuel Tzarfati of Fez, author of *Nimmukey Shemuel*, quotes other super-commentators and offers another answer:

> I shall add another solution. We can note a difference between those three places and the case of Abraham. In the former, Rashi says 'because ... they *were saying*', whereas concerning Abraham he remarks 'that the enemies ... *might not say*'. Hence when Rashi enumerated the other three cases he omitted that of Abraham.

14. Isaac Heinemann, in chapter 4 of *Darekhey HaAggadah* (1954), discusses the nature of these midrashim, their aims and character.

15. Contemporary grammar [of Classical Hebrew] also regards this use of the definite article as special, although it differs from the way the midrash explains it. **P. Jouon**: *Grammaire de l'Hébreu Biblique* (1965), p.137:

> 'Une chose qui n'est pas déterminée dans la connaissance de l'écrivain ou de celui à qui l'on parle est parfois particulièrement *déterminée en elle-même;* en conséquence le nom prend ou peut prendre l'article ... En français, on ne peut traduire alors que par *"un"*, parfois "un certain".'
>
> (Something not known consciously to the author or the one he is addressing as 'definite' is sometimes in a special way 'definite' *in itself*; the noun consequently takes or may take the definite article ... In French it can then only be translated by an indefinite article.) [Likewise in English – translator's note].

Thus we find the definite article in the case of 'Une personne nomée au cours d'un récit dans des circonstances qui lui donnent une détermination particulière.' (Someone who is mentioned during the course of a story, in circumstances which provide him with a particular definitiveness.) He brings the examples of the fugitive, the youth, the interpreter, and others which we have cited above.

16. *Akedat Yits'hak* aptly illustrates the symbolic message of this midrash in his commentary on the portion of *Vayyera*, but it is beyond our present scope.

17. This metaphorical use of ascent and descent as elevation and degradation is well anchored both in our language (Hebrew) and in other languages. It also reflects the structure of the human body and the force of gravity. On this, see the illuminating remarks of Edwyn Bevan: *Symbolism and Belief*, Beacon Press (paperback), Boston, 1957, chapters 2, 3, ... 'Height'.

18. Commentators on the midrash laboured to reconcile this midrash (*Ruth Rabbah*) with the actual sequence in the Torah. How could the midrash say: 'First the scourge attacks his house' when the attack of *tsara'at* on houses comes at the very end of the list in Leviticus? Their answers, however, are not germane to our study.

19. On 'This is the sign of the contract' (Gen. 9:17) Rashi remarked: 'He showed him the rainbow and said – this is the sign of which I spoke'. We can now understand why Rashi did not make this comment earlier, on the identical words in verse 12. In the first verse the word *zot* ('this') refers to the detail which follows it, according to Scripture's habit of first giving generalities and then details. But nothing follows verse 17 to which 'this' could refer, so Rashi was obliged to explain 'this' as referring to the subject itself. R. Wolf Heidenheim explains it likewise.

20. Rabbi Jacob **Mecklenburg** (in *Hakketav Vehakkabbalah*) and **Malbim** both deal with the difference between 'with' (*et*) and 'with' (*im*).

[For English readers: Two Hebrew words, *et* and *im*, both mean 'with' in the sense of 'together with'. A difference has been suggested, corresponding roughly to the two meanings of the English sentence 'I travelled down in the train *with* a group of ...', there being a difference between whether the person travelled as a member of that group *(im)*, or happened to find himself *with* them in the train *(et)*. In the first of the two verses quoted here *et* is used, in the second verse *im*; the commentators suggest that the choice of word in each case was deliberate.

In each case, the Hebrew uses the verb 'go' ('go', 'he went'), but the author of *Targum Yonatan* (an Aramaic translation) translated only the second with the word meaning 'go', and the first with a word meaning 'travel'. He did not have the choice in Aramaic, which like English has only one word for 'with', so he amended the previous word to show that in the first case Balaam was told to 'accompany them' but in the second he 'went along with them'. In other words, Yonatan chooses two different Aramaic words meaning 'to go', in order to convey the same idea that he sees conveyed in the orginal Hebrew by the use of two different words meaning 'with'.]

21. To understand the ways of Providence (*hashgahah*) which are described here, and to clarify the midrash which will be cited below, see **Franz Rosenzweig** *On the Form of Biblical Narratives* in his book: *Naharayim*, pp. 15-16.

.... Sometimes the meaning of a story becomes clear only from the illumination the author has cast by reiterating certain words. For instance, the reiteration of words provides the only clue to understanding a section (of Torah) that cries out for a midrash. The first time that Balak sent envoys to invite Balaam to follow them, the latter, on God's instruction, declined the invitation. The second time, God apparently told him to go, yet when he went 'God was angry that he was going'. Why? Had we not just been told that God told him to go? And was he not going with a clear understanding that he would only be able to do what God would instruct him to do? The answer to this problem is found from the allusions implied by the reiteration of words in the chapter.

Balak **again** sent many envoys ...
And now, please stay here you too to-night
  so that I may find out what God will **again** speak to me ...
The donkey saw God's angel and pressed herself against the wall
  and pressed Balaam's leg against the wall
  and he struck her **again.**
Then God's angel **again** passed ...

One can say that the hinge on which the story turns is the problem or string of problems of going back to start again, of repetition. [Hebrew *yasof le-*, 'to do something *again*']. In general the proverb *'einmal ist keinmal'* is correct. [Literally 'once is not at all', the proverb means approximately that a first offence doesn't count, or you may sin once and get away with it.] Balak might make a second attempt and 'again' send officers. Balaam thought likewise: he again struck his donkey, but it did not enter his mind that the angel was watching him, and that he too acted 'again'. For God does not say 'once is not at all', but that once definitely counts. And if Balaam – or anyone else like him – after God's first instruction tries again, hoping that even God's 'once' can be cancelled, he will receive his punishment. And what is his punishment? That his own 'once' will indeed be a once, only not the first but specifically the second. If God's first, explicit statement is not enough for us, if we try to find out what God will 'again' say to us, we can be certain that this time God will cause the words of the inclination that dwells within our mind to be heard. The above highlights Balaam's journey, which evokes God's displeasure throughout the whole story, as that of one out to curse who is forced to bless. As reiterated in these three chapters (with but minor variations) no less than six times, Balaam was prevented from uttering

anything but that conveyed to him by God. Indeed he was determined to curse Israel. His decision to enquire what God might 'again' tell him graphically exposed what lay hidden in the recesses of his mind.

22. [Translator's note] It is interesting to note that **Jastrow** translates *pitgam* as 'word, decree' and specifically *lepitgam deharba* as 'according to the law of war' (i.e. 'by the law of the sword') – compare the Hebrew *peh* in the phrase *al pi hashem* meaning 'according to God's decree'. However this is clearly not the way it was understood by the author of *Nefesh HaGer*.

In *Bitzaron* vol.2 (1940), pp. 426-437, Dr. Israel Shapiro provides a bibliography which lists 143 super-commentaries to Rashi on the Torah. In the *Rashi Anniversary Volume* (N.Y. 1941), Aaron Freimann dedicated a special bibliography listing a further 133 which remain in manuscript. Those quoted in the above article are included in a list of commentators at the end of this volume, together with short biographical notes on their authors.

TANAKH FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS

The reader should have a Tanakh at hand when reading this article, so that the various quotations may be viewed in context in the original Hebrew.

Baraitha Kinyan Torah lists forty-eight means by which Torah is acquired, one of which is 'listening'. Only one out of forty-eight, yet in practice we tend to push all our Torah studies into that category, in the belief that Torah is acquired through listening exclusively, by the student listening to the teacher who stands [or sits] and lectures to him. But it's not that simple. 'How good it would be if wisdom would flow from the full into the empty upon contact, just as water in a cup flows from the full into the empty via a thread of wool!' (From the words of Socrates to Plato).

How good it would be if .....! But it isn't, so we must look for alternatives.

In the past few decades educationalists in various countries have carried out research and discovered that it is difficult for a student of any age to learn by listening alone, by passive absorption. He needs activity, to exercise his abilities, to overcome difficulties, to wrestle with the subject matter until he overcomes it.

Passivity in class weakens the muscles, saps the student's spiritual abilities which are given no opportunity for exercise, and leads to drowsiness and sleep. So these educationalists demanded independent work by the student as preferable to much of the teacher's work: discussion, analysis and questions on the students' part rather than the teacher's lecture to paralysed students.

Some maintain that the entire difference between the old-style school and the new is based essentially on the contrast between the