

Class 11 – Parshanut Rabbi Moshe Davis

Class Outline

- Review
- Pshat vs. Drash
- The Development of Parshanut
- Parshanim

I. Review

During the period of the Rishonim there was a tremendous boom in Torah scholarship and the need for codification once again arose. Different Rishonim took on this task in different ways, the work of Rambam being the most monumental. At the end of the period there was again a need for codification, which gave rise to the development of the Shulchan Aruch.

II. Pshat Vs. Drash

- *Pshat* or *Pshuto shel mikra* is the simple, literal meaning of the text.
- *Drash* is the non literal, often figurative or allegorical, meaning of the text.

Example

שמות כה:יא

וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר, מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ תִּצְפֹּנּוּ; וְעָשִׂיתָ עָלָיו זָרְזָהָב, סָבִיב.

Exodus 25:11

And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a gold diadem round about.

מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ – Within and Without

Pshat: The Ark had a gold layer on its inside and on its outside.

Drash: “The inner character of a Torah scholar should be just as beautiful as his exterior (Yoma 72b).”

זָרְזָהָב – Golden diadem

Pshat – A golden crown

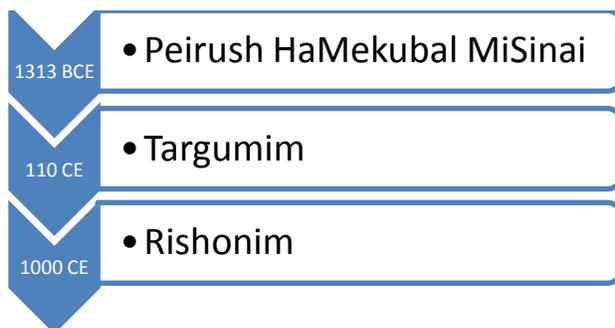
Drash – “and this is symbolic of the crown of Torah (Rashi ibid).”

- Sometimes Pshat and Drash are separate and distinct, as in the examples above. At other times the drash becomes the pshat.

Four rules of Rav Saadia Gaon (882-942) when drash becomes pshat.

1. When the literal meaning of the verse contradicts sense experience.
Example: In Bereishit 3:20 Chava is described as the ‘mother of all living things.’ Is she actually the mother of lizards and mice? Obviously not.
2. When the literal meaning contradicts reason
Example: In Deuteronomy 24:4 God is described as “an all consuming fire.” If that really who/what G-d is? Obviously not.
3. When the literal meaning of two verses contradict each other.
Example: In Exodus 12:5 the Passover sacrifice is defined as sheep and in Deuteronomy it is defined as cattle.
4. When the literal meaning contradicts the *mesorah*, Jewish tradition
Example: In Deuteronomy 25:3 the Torah uses the term “40 lashes,” which is really 39.

III. The Development of Parshanut



Why was there an explosion in studying *Pshuto shel Mikra* in 900-1000 CE?

1. **Internal Factors** – There was a general shift in the narrow study of Jewish law that emerges from the Talmud, to studying the Talmud itself. Whereas the Geonim mostly wrote on matters of Jewish law, during the period of the Rishonim there was more of a focus on commentary on the Talmud. This change in the approach of Talmud study carried over to study of Tanach as well (The Rishonim who wrote commentaries to the Talmud [Rashi, Ramban], also wrote commentaries to the Torah).
2. **External Factors** – Disputations with the Christians began around 900 CE, which entailed a heavy focus on pshat of the Tanach.

What is the purpose of a Commentary on Tanach?

1. **Look to the past** – Bridge the gap between the reader and the text. The text was given a long time ago, in a different setting with a different Hebrew language.
2. **Look to the present** – As history progresses people have new experiences and therefore understand Tanach in new ways.

IV. Parshanim

Bereishit Chapter 26

א וַיְהִי רָעָב, בְּאֶרֶץ, מִלְּבַד הָרָעָב
הָרִאשׁוֹן, אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בַיָּמֵי אַבְרָהָם; וַיֵּלֶךְ
יִצְחָק אֶל-אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ-פְּלִשְׁתִּים, גְּרָרָה.

1 And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.

ב וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה, וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל-תֵּרַד
מִצְרָיִמָּה: שָׁכֵן בְּאֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אִמַּר אֵלָיִךְ.

2 And the LORD appeared unto him, and said: 'Go not down unto Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of.

ג גֹּיֵר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת, וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ
וְאַבְרָכְךָ: כִּי-לֶךְ וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ, אֶתֵּן אֶת-כָּל-
הָאָרֶצַת הָאֵל, וְהִקְמַתִי אֶת-הַשְּׂבִעָה,
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ.

3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father;

ד וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת-זֶרְעֶךָ, כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם,
וְנָתַתִּי לְזֶרְעֶךָ, אֶת כָּל-הָאָרֶצַת הָאֵל;
וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזֶרְעֶךָ, כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ.

4 and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these lands; and by thy seed shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves;

ה עָקַב, אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי;
וַיִּשְׁמַר, מִשְׁמַרְתִּי, מִצְוֹתַי, חֻקּוֹתַי
וְתוֹרֹתַי.

5 because that Abraham hearkened to My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.'

ו וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק, בְּגְרָר.

6 And Isaac dwelt in Gerar.

What is the meaning of all those words in verse 5?

1. Shama B'Koli
2. Mishmeret
3. Mitzvah
4. Chukah
5. Torah

Eight Different Approaches in the Rishonim

A. Rashbam – Simple Pshat

Rashbam identifies specific examples from the life of Avraham to account for the first three words.

1. Shama B’Koli – Bereishit 22:18 (Akeida)
2. Mishmeret – Bereishit 17:9 (Brit Milah)
3. Mitzvah – Bereishit 21:4 (Brit Milah of Yitschak)

Rashbam is unable to find specific examples for the last two, so he creates a broader category:

“Chukotai ve’toratei’ – According to ikar pshuto, the simple meaning, all of the ethical commandments like stealing, coveting, justice, and welcoming guests were applied before the giving of the Torah, but were renewed and expounded at the giving of the Torah”

B. Chizkuni – Even more connections

1. Shama B’Koli – Bereishit 22:18 (Akeida)
2. Mishmeret – Bereishit 17:9 (Brit Milah)
3. Mitzvah – Bereishit 21:4 (Brit Milah of Yitschak)
4. Chukah – Bereishit 17:13 (Brit is referred to as Brit Olam) then Psalms 105:8-10 (Brit Olam is referred to as Chok)
5. Torah – Tehillim 32:8 (Avraham’s aliya)

Chizkuni ultimately concludes that this may be a stretch, so these latter two could just be referring to the 7 Noahide laws.

C. Ibn Ezra - A different type of Pshat

Approach One

1. Shama B’Koli –
2. Mishmeret – General category that includes the next three
3. Mitzvah –
4. Chukah –
5. Torah –

Approach Two

6. Mitzvah – Avraham’s aliya
7. Chukah – Avraham’s way of life
8. Torah – Mitzvah of Brit Milah

Ibn Ezra provides no textual examples, only thematic examples.

D. Radak – A wider approach to the Pshat

Mitzvah, Chukah, Torah – All mitzvot of Bnei Noach [Sichliyot]

E. Rashi – Midrashic Approach

1. Shama B’Koli – Bereishit 22:18 (Akeida)
2. Mishmeret – Rabbinic laws that protect Torah laws
3. Mitzvah – Rational and ethical laws of the Torah
4. Chukah – Torah laws that have no apparent reason
5. Torah – The Oral law, Halacha Le’Moshe MiSinai

What was the pshat problem that led Rashi to invoke the Midrash?

F. Ramban – Pshat and Midrash

If Rashi is correct, how did Yaakov marry two sisters, etc.?

9. Shama B’Koli –
10. Mishmeret – Teaching to others his belief in God
11. Mitzvah – All the specific commandments God asked of Abraham
12. Chukah – Acting in God’s ways (mercy, justice)
13. Torah – Actual mitzvot (brit milah, Noahide laws)

G. Seforno – Broader Context

...After these verses, Yitschak gets into trouble with Avimelech, and only later does he “call out in God’s name” (26:25-29)

Toldot Aron – quotes gemaras that relate the psukim

Rashi – Gives pshat, unless needs a drash to understand. over 300 commentaries on Rashi, best are Mizrachi, Maharal, Levush

Ibn Ezra

Ohr HaChayim – very long, kabbalistic.

Rashbam –

Ba'al Haturim –

Da'at Zekenim – no specific author, ba'alei Tosaphot

Sforno – Very concise, doctor, had outside knowledge

R' Saadia Gaon – traditional translation

R' Chananel

Chizkuni

Radak –

Ralbag – very long, Gives middot tovot learned from each section of Chumash