

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

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Korbanos, Kings – and Counting...

Concept: Identifying Redundancy in Pshat and in Drash

וּמֵאֵת עֵדֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִקַּח שְׁנֵי שְׂעִירֵי עִזִּים לְחַטָּאת

*And from the congregation of the Children of Israel he shall take two goats for a sin-offering.*¹

INTRODUCTION: THE TWO GOATS OF YOM KIPPUR

The Mishnah in Maseches Yoma² stipulates that the two goats used as a sin-offering on Yom Kippur need to be as similar to each other as possible, in terms of size, appearance value etc. The Gemara³ explains that the background for this requirement is the word “שְׁנֵי – two” in our verse. Seeing as the minimum plural is two unless otherwise specified, the word “שְׂעִירִים – goats” would itself tell me that there are two, making the word “שְׁנֵי” redundant! Rather, the extra word “שְׁנֵי” informs us that not only should there be two goats, but they should be a pair, i.e. similar to each other. The Gemara adds that the same idea applies to the two daily *tamid* offerings, the two lambs for the *mussaf* offering on Shabbos and the two birds used in the purification process of the *metzora*. In all these cases, the verse’s use of the word “two” is redundant, and teaches us that they should be similar to each other.

RASHI’S APPROACH

It is noteworthy that, throughout the course of his entire commentary on the Torah, Rashi does not mention this idea in any of the above-mentioned cases. This seems puzzling, since responding to a seeming redundancy in the verse is a basic part of Rashi’s commentary! Why would he not do so here? The simple but important answer is that in terms of the way of approaching the verse that Rashi has chosen in his commentary – *pshuto shel mikra* – there is no redundancy. Indeed, here we have a classic example of the question of what constitutes an issue in the realms of pshat and drash. As we have seen, pshat reflects the straightforward reading of the verse. In this mode, for the verse to state that there are two of something, even though it has used the plural form, does not constitute a redundancy; that is a completely normal way of presenting two things. It is only when we shift to the mode of drash, which scrutinizes the words of the verse with a much higher level of sensitivity, that we begin to see the word “two” as extra, seeing as the plural form could already be seen to denote that number. Therefore, while

1 Vayikra 16:5.

2 62a.

3 Ibid. 62b.

these discussions of the meaning of the word “two” in those verses are totally in place within the Gemara which, as a rule, approaches the words of the Torah with drash sensitivity, they are entirely absent from Rashi’s pshat commentary.

THE SUN AND THE MOON

The Gemara in Maseches Chullin⁴ notes that there appears to be a contradiction in the verse that describes the creation of the luminaries.⁵ In the beginning of the verse, they are referred to as “שְׁנֵי הַמְאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים – the two great luminaries,” while subsequently, they are called “הַמְאֹר הַגְּדֹל... הַמְאֹר הַקָּטָן – the great luminary and the small luminary.” The Gemara explains that although the two luminaries were indeed originally created equal, the moon was subsequently diminished when it complained that there should be only one luminary greater than all the others.

The Vilna Gaon is cited as explaining that the basis of the idea that the sun and the moon were originally equal is the verse’s use of the term “שְׁנֵי” which, as we have seen, is explained by the Gemara as implying an equation.⁶

Notably, Rashi also cites the above explanation of the Gemara in his comments to that verse. However, equally noteworthy in terms of our discussion are the words he quotes as his headline (*dibbur hamaschil*), and upon which he forms his comment, which are, “הַמְאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים – the great luminaries”. In other words, Rashi understands that it is the verse’s initial use of the word “great” for both luminaries that implies they were originally created equal. As we have seen, the verse’s use of the word “two” does not indicate equality on a pshat level, and hence, would not have been grounds for a comment from Rashi on the verse.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE? THE FIVE KINGS OF MIDIAN

Having established this, however, we proceed to consider one case where Rashi does seem to adopt the Gemara’s approach to this matter. In the beginning of Parshas Matos, the Jewish people wage a war against Midian. In the course of that war, the verse relates, “וְאֵת מְלָכֵי מִדְיָן הָרְגוּ... אֶת אֵוִי וְאֶת רְקֵם וְאֶת צוּר וְאֶת חוּר – They killed the kings of Midian... Evi, Rekem, Tzur, Chur and Reva, the five kings of Midian.”⁷ Commenting on the words, “The five kings of Midian,” Rashi writes:

וכי איני רואה שחמשה מנה הכתוב? למה הוזקק לומר חמשת? אלא, ללמדך ששוו כולם בעצה והושוו כולם בפורענות

Do I not see that the verse has listed five, why then does it need to say “five”? Rather, it is to teach you that they were all equal in their involvement in the counsel [to cause the people to sin], and they were [likewise] all equal in receiving retribution.

Why is Rashi reacting to the seemingly redundant mention of the word “five”? Have we not established that, on a pshat level, mentioning the number is part of the way the verse presents things?

CALLING ATTENTION TO ORDER

It appears that the basis for this exceptional comment from Rashi lies in the order in which things were presented. For the verse to introduce the idea that there are two of something and then specify what

4 60b.

5 Bereishis 1:16.

6 Kol Eliyahu.

7 Bamidbar 31:8.

they are is considered completely normal on a pshat level. However, in our case, the verse first mentions them all by name and *then* tells me that there were five of them. For Rashi, this mention constitutes a redundancy even on a pshat level. Thus Rashi exclaims, “Do I not see that the verse *has listed five*,” i.e. has already listed them. To then say there were five of them become a bone fide pshat issue, and hence even Rashi gets involved.

It is fascinating to consider that the question of redundancy is not purely based on the amount of words the verse uses, but also on the order in which it does so. Once again, Rashi is encouraging us to pay attention to all of the above as we learn through Chumash.