

GREAT BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS
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Lecture #10:
Rashbam, Part II

A. The Rashbam's Understanding of the Narrative Sections of the Torah

The Principle of Foreshadowing in the Rashbam's Methodology

One of the most important ideas that the Rashbam develops is the principle of foreshadowing. We have seen this in the past, when we discussed the commentary of Mahari Kara (see discussion on Pre-Emption), but the Rashbam develops the principle further, giving it a more central place in his methodology. According to this principle, when the Torah notes details that appear to be disconnected, extraneous, or anachronistic, it actually provides them in order to explain an event that comes afterwards.

Let us see an example in the Rashbam's commentary. Describing Yosef's experiences and success in Pharaoh's house, the Torah states:

And Yosef stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Yosef. Osnat, the daughter of Poti Fera, priest of On, bore them to him. (*Bereishit* 41:49-50)

Why is it important for the Torah to note that the two sons born to Yosef in Egypt were born before the year of famine? The Rashbam explains this by applying the principle of foreshadowing:

"Before the year of famine came" — Because Yaakov came at the beginning of the second year of famine, and seventeen years later, he said to Yosef (*ibid.* 48:5-6), "Your two sons, who were born to you... before I came to you... are mine," but "the children that you fathered after them," after I came to you, "shall be yours." Therefore, he explained here that Ephraim and Menasheh were born before the year of famine, before Yaakov came, but afterwards, [Yosef] had sons and grandsons "called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance," as Yaakov said.

Shortly before his death, Yaakov tells Yosef, “Your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine;” however, if Yosef has additional children, they will not be considered Yaakov’s children. Therefore, it is important that we know that Ephraim and Menasheh were born before Yaakov came down to Egypt.

As we noted in the previous lecture, the Rashbam formulates exegetical principles that he describes as “the way of the verses,” and foreshadowing is one of these techniques. Generally, the Rashbam signals this in his commentary by using the terminology “it prefaced,” “the verse prefaced,” or “it was necessary to write.”

In his introduction to *Bereishit*, the Rashbam explains the concept of foreshadowing at length and demonstrates it:

This is the essence of the simple meaning according to the way of the verses, which are accustomed to preface and to mention explicitly an item which is superfluous at that point, because of an issue which is mentioned below. As it says, “Shem, Cham, and Yefet” (*Bereishit* 9:18), and it says, “And Cham, he is the father of Canaan” (*ibid.*);¹ this is because it is written upon [after] it, “Cursed be Canaan” (*ibid.* v. 25), and if it were not explained who Canaan is, we would not know why Noach cursed him.

“And he slept with Bilha, his father’s concubine, and Yisrael heard” (*ibid.* 35:22). Why is it written here, “And Yisrael heard”? Is it written here that Yaakov said anything about Reuven? Nevertheless, at the time of his passing, he says, “Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father’s bed; then you defiled it – he went up to my couch!” Therefore, it prefaced, “And Yisrael heard,” that you should not be perplexed when you see that he rebuked him about this at the end of his days.

The Creation Narrative Prefaces the Commandments

In all of these cases, the preface or foreshadowing is a verse or a fragment thereof, but from the next words of the Rashbam, we shall see that it is possible to apply the principle of foreshadowing even to larger segments. In the continuation of the Rashbam’s introduction to *Bereishit*, he declares that the story of Creation interests us solely because it helps us understand the Ten Commandments:

In addition, Moshe Rabbeinu² prefaced this entire passage of the work of the six days to explain to you what the Holy One said at the time of

¹ The inexplicit question is why the verse says, “Cham is the father of Canaan” out of context.

² The Rashbam has a unique approach towards the identity of the author of the Torah. According to him, the narrative parts were written by Moshe (perhaps he even determined the lexicon and the style), while the halakhic parts were determined by God. See, for

the Giving of the Torah, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... For in six days God made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (*Shemot* 20:8-11). This is why it is written, “And it was evening, and it was morning, **the sixth day**” (*Bereishit* 1:31) – that sixth which is the conclusion of the six days that the Holy One, Blessed be He, mentioned at the Giving of the Torah. Therefore, Moshe told this to the Israelites to inform them that the word of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is truth, and that one might think that this world has always existed as it does today, full of every good thing — but this is not true. Rather, “In the beginning, God created...”

In other words, the story of Creation is written in the Torah in order to confirm that “in six days God made heaven and earth.” The Rashbam adds that in the commandment of the mitzva of Shabbat, one may see the verse’s reliance on the story of Creation — “This is what is written, ‘And it was evening, and it was morning, **the sixth day**’” – this sixth day, after which the Shabbat arrives, which God commands them about at the Convocation at Mount Sinai.³

In the continuation of his interpretation of Creation (v. 27), the Rashbam explains why other things created by God are omitted from the narrative, such as the angels, Gehennom, and the Divine Chariot:

Do not be perplexed by the omission of the creation of the angels, because Moshe did not write here anything about angels, Gehennom, or the Divine Chariot, but these things which we see in the world are mentioned in the Ten Commandments, because for this reason it is said the entire act of the six days, as I explained above.

In other words, in describing Creation, the Torah only mentions those items which are mentioned in the Ten Commandments — that is, that which is visible to the human eye.

An additional prominent example is the Yosef narrative, which the Rashbam (*Bereishit* 37:2) also justifies based on Moshe’s rhetorical needs:

It was necessary for Moshe Rabbeinu to write all of this, because he reproved them with the words (*Devarim* 10:22): “With seventy souls, your ancestors went down to Egypt.”

example, *Bereishit* 1:27, 19:37, etc. See also E. Touitou’s analysis in his book, *Ha-Peshatot Ha-Mitchaddeshim Be-Khol Yom: Iyunim Be-Feirusho shel Rashbam La-Torah* (Ramat Gan, 5763), pp. 120-121.

³ The Rashbam assumes that the Israelites first experienced the Giving of the Torah and only afterwards were told the stories of *Bereishit*, even though the chronological sequence of events is reversed in the text of the Torah. Therefore, when Moshe tells the Israelites the narratives of *Bereishit*, he can refer to the Convocation at Mount Sinai.

In other words, the aim of describing the story of Yosef and his brothers is to form the background to justify God's demand of the Israelites to keep the *mitzvot*, a demand which appears at a great distance (both chronological and literary) afterwards: "With seventy souls your ancestors went down to Egypt, and now Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of the heaven," followed immediately by the imperative (ibid. 11:1), "And you shall love Lord your God, and you shall keep His observance and His decrees and His laws and His commandments..."

From these explanations, in particular from the justification of the Creation narrative,⁴ it arises that the essence of the Torah is the *mitzvot*, while the narratives are secondary; the stories appear in order to explain the *mitzvot*.⁵

B. Rashbam's Interpretive Approach to *Mitzvot*

In his explanations of the halakhic portion of the Torah, the Rashbam employs the same method which he applies to the narrative portion of the Torah –the explanation of the verses without any reliance on Midrashic literature. This approach, which releases the *pashtan* from the chains of *derash*, is very difficult to apply to *mitzvot* because the binding *halakha* is not the simple meaning of the verse, but the interpretation of the verses as the Sages explain it.

It is clear to the Rashbam that one should adopt the views of the Sages for everything that relates to practical Halakha; the interpretation of the *peshat* and the halakhic *midrashim* can live under the same roof. The Rashbam repeatedly stresses that his interpretations are only and solely interpretations according to the way of *peshat*. They are never to be taken as a substitute for the words of the Sages; rather, they stand alongside the Sages' words. The words of the Sages are the essence, and they are binding in terms of practical Halakha. In his introduction to his commentary on *Parashat Mishpatim* (*Shemot* 21:1), the Rashbam clarifies his approach to explaining the halakhic parts of the Torah and his relationship to the Sages' words:

The knowers of **enlightenment** may understand **and be enlightened**, for I have not come to explain the laws, even though they are the essence, as I explained in *Bereishit*. The verbosity of the text teaches us both lore and law, and some of the derivations may be found in the

⁴ See also the Rashbam's commentary to *Bereishit* 5:1.

⁵ See Touitou, p. 114, who concludes that according to the view of the Rashbam, it may be that the entire *Parshiot* of *Noach* and *Lekh Lekha* serve only to justify half a line from the recitation upon bringing the first fruits. We cannot prove this definitely, since we do not have in our hands the Rashbam's commentary on these *parshiot*; this hypothesis is based on his explanation of *Devarim* 26:5:

"My father was a lost Aramean" — My father, Avraham, was Aramean, and he was exiled from Aram, as it says, "Go for yourself from your land" (*Bereishit* 12:1), and as it says, "When God made me wander from my father's house" (ibid. 20:13)... In other words, our ancestors came from a foreign land to this one, and God gave it to us.

commentaries of Rabbeinu Shelomo, my mother's father, of blessed memory. However, I have come to explain the simple meanings of the verses, and I will explain the rules and laws according to the way of the world. Even so, the laws are the essence, as our Rabbis have said (*Sota* 16a)...⁶

The Rashbam declares here that he is going to explain the verses, but he is not going to use the method of his grandfather Rashi, who explained the verses according to Midrashic sources. Nevertheless, the Rashbam stresses that the Halakha is the essence. His fidelity to the halakhic ruling is more adamantly expressed in the conclusion to his commentary on *Shemot* (40:35):

Whoever pays attention to the word of our Creator will not budge from or abandon the explications of my grandfather, Rabbeinu Shelomo, because most of the laws and derivations are close to the simple meanings of the verses; from the superfluous or altered language, one may learn all of them. "It is good to grasp the one" that I have explained "and not let go of the other..."

"Whoever pays attention to the word of our Creator" – that is, one who fears the word of God – will study the words of Rashi, a commentator who follows the Halakha, but not the simple meaning of the Torah. The reason for this is that the Halakha is binding, and therefore one is compelled to know it. However, there is also value to studying Scripture on the basis of *peshat*,⁷ even though one is not learning practical Halakha. The Rashbam quotes the words of *Kohelet* (7:18), "It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other," advising the reader to embrace the words of Rashi (to grasp the practical Halakha) as well as his own commentary (to understand the simple meaning of the verse).

C. Examples of the Rashbam's Explanations of *Mitzvot*

We will now see a number of examples of the Rashbam's readiness to diverge from the Sages in his hunt for *peshat*.

⁶ Touitou explains this well in his book *Ha-Peshatot Ha-Mitchaddeshim Be-Khol Yom*, pp. 72-73:

Observe that it is in the introduction to his commentary to the halakhic section of the Torah that the Rashbam finds it appropriate to write these words of his. The phrases are parallel both in structure and content. Every one of the phrases is built of two parts: a) a certain determination and b) programmatic declarations about the aim of the commentary, defining an interpretive approach. The declaration of the Rashbam, "Some of them may be found in the commentaries of Rabbeinu Shelomo," parallels and echoes the declaration of Rashi, "These are the aggadic *midrashim*... *Bereishit Rabba* and other Midrashic works." The declaration of the Rashbam about his general aim: "However, I have come to explain the simple meanings of the verses" parallels what Rashi says, "As for me, I have come for no purpose other than the simple meaning of Scripture." Finally, the definition of the approach of the Rashbam, "I will explain the rules and laws according to the way of the world," parallels the definition of Rashi's approach, "and the aggadic material which harmonizes the words of Scripture, each word according to its properties."

⁷ At the end of this lecture, we will deal with the question of the value of studying *peshat*.

a. One prominent example is the Rashbam's explanation of the mitzva of *tefillin*:

And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, so that the law of God may be in your mouth, for with a strong hand God has brought you out of Egypt. (*Shemot* 13:9)

Rashi explains the verses according to the Halakha:

"As a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes" — You shall write these paragraphs and bind them on the head and the arm.

In contrast, the Rashbam explains the verse according to the *peshat*:

"As a sign on your hand" — According to the depth of the simple meaning, it should be a constant memorial, as if it were written on your hand, like "Set me as a signet on your heart" (*Shir Ha-shirim* 8:6).

"Between your eyes" — It is like an ornament or a golden circlet, which we are accustomed to put on our forehead.⁸

The Rashbam gives this mitzva a metaphorical explanation – to internalize God's word as if it were inscribed on one's arm and the ornament between one's eyes.⁹

This interpretation of the Rashbam may not, perhaps, be the clear *peshat* of the verse, but it exemplifies how the Rashbam, when explaining the

⁸ It is interesting to note that the Rashbam believes that the explanation of the *peshat* of this verse is actually metaphorical, while the literal explanation (taking the words at face value) is an explanation that does not reflect *peshat*. Another example of this may be found when Avraham's servant goes to find a wife for Yitzchak. The Torah reports, "And all his master's goods were in his hand" (*Bereishit* 24:10). The explanation according to the *peshat* defines "in his hand" in a non-literal way, as "in his possession," while the explanation which explains the word "in his hand" literally (at face value) is an explanation which is not *peshat*. Rashi, for one, explains — against the *peshat* — "He put a bill of acquisition in his hand."

⁹ Ironically, perhaps the best explanation of the Rashbam's explanation may be found in the ibn Ezra's challenge to it:

There are those who question our holy ancestors, as it says that is a sign and a memorial, akin to "For a graceful wreath are they to your head and chains to your neck" (*Mishlei* 1:9), as well as "And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand" (*Devarim* 6:8), and "Bind them on your heart continually; bind them on your neck" (*Mishlei* 3:3). What is to be a sign and a memorial? You are to regularly mention that "with a strong hand God has brought you out of Egypt."

However, this is not correct, because the book [of *Mishlei*] begins with the title "Shelomo's parables," indicating that everything in it is to be understood as a parable; on the other hand, what is written in the Torah is not to be understood as a parable, God forbid, but rather by its literal meaning. Therefore, we will not abandon its simple meanings, unless doing so contradicts common sense, for example, "And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart" (*Devarim* 10:16).

In other words, "unless doing so contradicts common sense," there is no reason to pass over the literal meaning.

verse, feels totally unfettered by the practical Halakha if it seems to contradict the *peshat*.

b. The law of the Hebrew slave who does not want to be freed from his master's home is detailed in *Shemot* 21:6:

Then his master shall bring him to the judges, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, **and he shall serve him forever.**

The words of Rashi, following the Sages, are well-known:

“And he shall serve him forever” — That is, until the jubilee year. Or perhaps it means literally forever, as is its apparent meaning? Therefore, the Torah states: “And each man to his family you shall return” (*Vayikra* 25:10). This tells us that fifty years is called “forever”...

In other words, the Sages explain “forever” as only lasting until the jubilee year, since in *Vayikra*, the Torah indicates that all of the Hebrew slaves are to be emancipated in the jubilee year. It cannot be that there is a contradiction between the Book of *Shemot* and the Book of *Vayikra*, and thus the Sages explain that the meaning of the term “forever” in the book of *Shemot* is “until the jubilee year.”

However, the Rashbam, inveterate *pashtan* that he is, follows his customary approach:

“Forever” — According to the simple meaning, all of the days of his life, as it says of Shemuel, “And he will reside there forever” (*I Shemuel* 1:22).

The Rashbam proves from the vow of Channa in the Book of *Shemuel* that Scripture refers to “forever,” the intent is for the length of one's life; there is no doubt that Channa intends for her son to remain in the Tabernacle all of the days of his life.

c. Concerning the mitzva of *yibbum* (levirate marriage), the Torah says:

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the firstborn whom she bears, he shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. (*Devarim* 25:5-6)

How is this law of “he shall succeed to the name of his dead brother” to be understood? Rashi, following the Sages, explains that the reference is to the laws of inheritance, as affected by *yibbum*:

The one who marries his wife is to take the share of his deceased brother's inheritance of their father's property.

Rashi explains the verse, "And the firstborn whom she bears..." in a similar manner. The mother referred to here is the mother of the deceased, whose widow is married by her living son, the *levir*. He is called the firstborn because preference is given to the oldest surviving brother, but any of the surviving brothers can fulfill this role, assuming the role of the firstborn; "he shall succeed to the name of his dead brother," by taking the portion of the dead brother in their father's estate. This is the interpretation cited in the *gemara* (*Yevamot* 24a).

The Rashbam explains the verse differently. The mother mentioned in the verse is the widow and the firstborn is the child whom she has with the *levir* – who is to be named after the dead brother. In other words, the child is considered the offspring of the dead uncle, the first husband of his mother, and not of the biological father. This interpretation is rejected by the *gemara* in *Yevamot*.

This interpretation of the Rashbam is indeed appropriate for the simple reading of the passage. According to the *peshat*, there is no doubt that the mother mentioned is the widow, as she is the subject of the previous verse, and this verse continues to describe her situation: "The wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger... And the firstborn whom she bears..." Similarly, the Rashbam explains how the name of the deceased will not be blotted out – the child born from *yibbum* will be considered the child of the deceased.

d. The final example does not appear in a halakhic passage, but it is very significant from a practical point of view. During the Creation of the world, the Torah states (*Bereishit* 1:5): "And it was evening, and it was morning, one day." From this verse, the Sages derive that "the day follows the night" – that is, the 24-hour halakhic day starts at night and continues throughout the following day:¹⁰

This is what R. Shimon ben Zoma expounded: It says in the story of Creation, "One day," and it is said by [the prohibition to slaughter] a mother animal and its child [on the same day], "One day" (*Vayikra* 22:28). Just as in the "one day" which is said in the story of Creation, the day goes after the night, so too, in the "one day" which is said by a mother animal and its child, the day goes after the night." (*Chullin* 83a)

Here we encounter one of the most problematic interpretations of the Rashbam. According to the Rashbam, the *peshat* of the verses of Creation indicates the reverse – that the night follows the day! The creation of the universe starts in the morning, and the first creation is light; at the end of the first night, namely towards morning, the first day is completed and set. The

¹⁰ In the commentary of Torah Temima to *Bereishit* 1:5 (ch. 34), a number of exceptions to this rule are brought.

Rashbam states this idea a number of times in his commentary to the first chapter of *Bereishit*:

“And God separated between the light and the darkness” — That the day would be twelve hours, and afterwards the night would be twelve hours. The light was first and then the darkness, because at the beginning of the creation of the world came the statement (v. 3), “Let there be light.”

In other words, the first thing to be created was light; therefore, we are compelled to say that the creation of the universe started during the day, namely during the morning, and not at night. Thus, he explains v. 5:

“And the darkness he called night” — Forever light comes first, and afterwards darkness.

“And it was evening and it was morning” – The Torah does not say here: it was night and it was day, but rather “it was evening” – for the first day was coming to an end, the light was setting; “and it was morning” – the end of the night, for the dawn was breaking. And thus the first of the six days, mentioned by God in the Ten Commandments, was completed. And then began the second day... The Torah does not mean to teach us here that evening and morning constitute a day, for we need only understand how there were six days. Daybreak came and the night was finished; hence, one day ended and the second day began.

The Rashbam notes that the verse does not use the formula, “And it was night, and it was day, one day,” but rather, “And it was evening, and it was morning, one day.” The terms “night” and “day” indicate the times respectively between dusk and dawn and between dawn and dusk. Were it to say, “And it was night, and it was day,” this would indicate that nighttime was followed by daytime, completing a 24-hour day, what the Torah refers to as “one day.” However, the Torah says, “And it was evening, and it was morning;” the words “evening” and “morning” do not indicate time periods, but rather a specific point on the timeline, and the meaning of the verses is that evening arrived (daytime ended with dusk) and then the following morning arrived (nighttime ended with dawn). The dawn’s early light signaled that the first 24-hour day had come to a close.

“And God said, ‘Let there be a sky’” — After the first day ended, at its morning, “And God said.” (v. 6)

“And it was evening and it was morning, a second day” – The day became evening, and then “it was morning” – of the second day. Thus ended the second of the six days mentioned by God in the Ten Commandments, and now the third day begins in the morning. (v. 8)

The immediate implication of this commentary is that according to the *peshat* of the verses, Shabbat should start on Saturday morning, not Friday night!

This interpretation of the Rashbam aroused harsh criticism. It may be that this is the reason that his commentary proved so unpopular in earlier generations; at the very least, it may be that this is the reason that his commentaries on the early parts of *Bereishit* disappeared. (As we noted in the previous lecture, his commentary on chapter 1 only came to light a few years ago). The most famous criticism is that of R. Avraham ibn Ezra,¹¹ which may be found in his commentary on the passage of the manna (*Shemot* 16:25):

Now, pay attention, so that you may understand the foolishness of those who explain “And it was evening, and it was morning” as I mentioned, because the verse says “And God called the light ‘day’,” and this is from dawn until dusk, “And to the darkness, he called ‘night’,” from dusk until dawn; and behold the night is the opposite of day, just as the darkness is the opposite of the light. If so, how may we call from evening, which is the sun fading away, “day,” when it is in fact night?!¹²

¹¹ It is not clear if R. Avraham ibn Ezra knew the commentary of the Rashbam on the Torah, but it is known certainly that in the years of his wandering in Christian Europe (1140-1164), ibn Ezra was in contact with the Rashbam's brother, Rabbeinu Tam. In ibn Ezra's commentaries, there are some quotes which are very similar to the Rashbam's language, and it is feasible to see this as evidence that ibn Ezra was familiar with the commentary of the Rashbam. We cannot prove this definitively, however, because their interpretive approaches are similar, and it is logical to assume that they might arrive at similar conclusions.

¹² In *Iggeret Ha-Shabbat*, ibn Ezra takes the Rashbam to task. In this work, Ibn Ezra describes in an allegorical manner an experience which happened to him on the eve of Shabbat: A courier brings him a letter, written by Shabbat itself, and it beseeches ibn Ezra to fight for its honor. In the *Iggeret*, he sets out the interpretation of the Rashbam, that each 24-hour day begins at daybreak (this is the significance of receiving the missive in the middle of the eve of Shabbat, i.e., Friday night), and the ibn Ezra argues that this interpretation is misleading. *Iggeret Ha-Shabbat* was written by ibn Ezra himself, apparently after he saw the commentary of the Rashbam to the first chapter of *Bereishit* (as arises from the content of the missive), and this serves as a preface to his composition dealing with the temporal questions of defining the year, month, and day. An excerpt follows:

And the emissary of the Shabbat answered and said to me, “It has certainly been told to me that your student brought to your house yesterday books of biblical commentaries, and there it is written to violate Shabbat eve. Now you must gird your loins for the honor of Shabbat, to fight the war of the Torah with the enemies of the Shabbat. Show no favor to any man!”

And I awoke, and my spirit was troubled, and I was very much disturbed. I arose, with my fury burning in me, and I put on my clothes, washed my hands, and brought out the books by the light of the moon, and there it was written an interpretation of “And it was evening, and it was morning.” It said that when the morning of the second day came, then one day was complete, because the night follows the day. I almost rent my garments and rent this commentary as well, for I said, “Is it not better to desecrate one Sabbath, so that the Israelites will not desecrate many Sabbaths, should they see this evil commentary? Furthermore, we would become an object of ridicule and derision for the uncircumcised!”

Naturally, it is clear that the Rashbam welcomed the Sabbath on Friday evening, not Saturday morning; at the same time, he explains the verses according to their meaning in *peshat*, not their meaning in Halakha.

D. Between *Peshat* and *Derash*

This is the place to relate to the question of what meaning we should attach to the Rashbam's explanations that are not in accordance with Halakha. This is not a question on the Rashbam, but rather a question on *peshat* generally. What worth does *peshat* have when it does not fit with Halakha?

We cannot, in this framework, bring a comprehensive answer to this question, but one possibility to explain it is that the *peshat* reflects the ideal, while the *derash* deals with the real. The best example of this approach is the explication of the law of "eye for eye." There is no doubt that according to the simple meaning of the verse, the implication is that one must remove the eye of the assailant:

If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done, it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him. (*Vayikra* 24:19-20)

However, Halakha says that the assailant must make monetary compensation (see *Bava Kamma* 83b). If so, why is it written "eye for an eye"? Let us cite the words of Seforno in his commentary to *Shemot* 21:24:

"Eye for eye" — **It would have been fitting** [to do so] by the truest justice, which is measure for measure. The tradition is that one must make monetary compensation, because of the deficiency of our estimation, lest we make a mistake and punish him more severely than he deserves.¹³

Nevertheless, I held myself back because of the honor of Shabbat, and I made a vow not to let my eye sleep, after the end of the holy day, until I would write a long missive to explain what the beginning of the Torah's day is, to pick up an obstacle and to remove a snare and a trap. For all of the Pharisee Jews, and even all of the Sadducees with them, know that in *Parashat Bereishit*, God's actions are transcribed day-by-day only so that the Torah-observant will know how to keep the Shabbat, that they will rest just as God in His glory did, counting the days of the week. Behold, if the end of the sixth day was the morning of the seventh day, we should observe the night afterwards. Now this is a misleading interpretation for all of Israel, in the East and in the West, the close and the distant, the living and the dead! God will avenge the Shabbat's vengeance from anyone who believes in this difficult interpretation. Whoever reads it in a loud voice, may his tongue adhere to his palate; furthermore, the scribe who writes it among the commentaries of the Torah will surely find that his arm will wither and his right eye will be dimmed.

¹³ This is based on what the Rambam says in *Hilkhot Chovel U-Mazzik* 1:3:

The Torah's statement, "Whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him," should not be interpreted in a literal sense. It does not mean that the person who caused the injury should actually be subjected to a similar physical punishment. Instead, the intent is that he deserves to lose a limb or to be injured in the same

“Eye for an eye” is the punishment rightfully incurred by one who puts out his fellow’s eye, but because of other considerations of justice,¹⁴ this punishment is not applied. The idea that the *peshat* embodies the ideal can also be applied to the mitzva of *tefillin*. Indeed, it is appropriate that God’s commands constantly be remembered by us, but the reality is that most people cannot live such spiritually intense lives. The Sages therefore expounded the mitzva realistically: one should put on *tefillin* at least once a day.

As we have said, this is only one possibility, and there is still a great deal to say about this issue of the tension between *peshat*-based exegesis and binding halakhic guidelines.

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We have concluded our study of the Rashbam. God willing, our next lecture will deal with his contemporary, R. Yosef Bekhor Shor.

Translated by Rav Yoseif Bloch

manner as his colleague was, and therefore he should make financial restitution to him. This interpretation is supported by the verse (*Bamidbar* 35:31): "Do not accept a ransom for the soul of the murderer." Implied is that no ransom may be paid for a murderer alone, but a ransom may be paid for causing a loss of limb or other injuries.

¹⁴ For example, what would the law be in a case in which a one-eyed man blinded his fellow in one of his eyes? If we remove the eye of the assailant, he will be totally blinded, while he only partially blinded his fellow.