

VeNafsho Keshura VeNafsho

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F. Scott Fitzgerald has noted that “[t]he test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” This describes many of Rashi’s comments on verses in the Torah. The central endeavor of Rashi’s commentary is to explain the straightforward meaning of the verses, but there are times when Rashi indicates that a verse suggests two or more equally compelling interpretations.¹ In such cases, Rashi expresses these alternate implications of the text by juxtaposing simultaneous, albeit differing, explanations – or, on occasion, by using allusion to suggest deeper, more subtle levels of meaning in such verses.

One example of Rashi’s second approach arises in Parashas Vayigash, which starts with Yehuda’s great speech to Yosef. The Ramban asks what unifies this extensive speech, which includes a recitation of manifold details of events that had happened until then. The Ramban concludes that the entire speech converges toward the single statement in Bereishis 44:33 when Yehuda offers to make himself Yosef’s servant in Binyamin’s place. So too, Rashi subtly suggests that this is the subtextual meaning of the phrase “*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*,” “and their souls are bound together,” which not only references the deep relationship between Yaakov and Binyamin but also simultaneously depicts the spiritual bond and fiduciary kinship of Yehuda toward Binyamin.

Thus, as discussed below, Rashi indicates two simultaneous meanings in the verse’s phrase “*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*.” And by using allusion rather than prose to state this point, Rashi also resonantly conveys the concurrent, multi-layered levels of the motivating convictions within Yehuda’s inner life during his high-stakes speech to Yosef.

¹ My father-in-law, Rabbi Levi Meier z”l, would often say that the Torah is called a song because of its many layers of simultaneous meaning. See also *Ha’amek Davar*, Intro. § 3.

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Rashi's Use of the Phrase *Niskasharti BeKesher Chazak*

Yehuda's main argument to Yosef asserts the profound pain that the loss of Binyamin would cause their father. This central assertion is triggered by Yosef's statement to Yehuda, apparently valuing the parent-child relationship highly, at the end of Parashas Mikeitz (Bereishis 44:17): "*va-yomer chalila li mei'asos zos ha-ish asher nimtza ha-gevia be-yado hu yehiyeh li aved ve-atem alu le-shalom el avichem*," "[Yosef] said, it would be beneath me to do [what you suggest of enslaving all of you]; [rather,] the man in whose possession the goblet was found, he shall be my slave, and, as for all of you, go up in peace to your father."

The centrality of their father in this speech is further underscored by the fact that "*av*," likewise, is the concluding word of Yehuda's own speech: "*ki eich e'eleh el avi ve-hana'ar einenu iti pen ereh va-ra asher yimtza es avi*," "for how can I go up to my father and the youth is not with me, lest I see the evil that will find my father."

Nechama Leibowitz additionally emphasizes that the word "*av*" recurs 14 times in Yehuda's speech, far more than any other word in Bereishis 44:18-44. This focus on the importance of Yaakov's relationship with Binyamin, and the trauma that losing Binyamin would cause to Yaakov, is the pronounced center of Yehuda's petition to Yosef.

While acknowledging this as the petition's central point (such as in his comment to Bereishis 44:31), Rashi's interpretation of Bereishis 44:18-44 also pointedly shifts and expands the central focus of Yehuda's speech. For instance, Yehuda states in Bereishis 44:22: "*ve-azav es aviv va-meis*," "and if he were to leave his father he would die." The verse is ambiguous regarding who Yehuda says would be at risk of dying. The Rashbam comments: "*aviv yamus*," "his father would die." But Rashi takes another approach stating that the primary risk in this instance would be to Binyamin, not Yaakov.

Along these lines, it is remarkable how Rashi deals with the phrase in Bereishis 44:30: "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*," "and their souls are bound together." Significantly, Rashi does not make any comment on Bereishis 44:30 directly because there is nothing problematic about its plain meaning to require explanation. Yet, commenting two verses later, Rashi weaves in the language from this verse, using the phrase "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*" which he does not use anywhere else in his Tanach commentary. He states (Bereishis 44:32):

כי עבדך ערב את הנער. ואם תאמר למה אני נכנס לתגר יותר משאר אחי הם כלם
מבחוץ אבל אני נתקשרתי בקשר חזק להיות מנודה בשני עולמות.

Because your servant made himself the guarantor of the youth. And if you were to say why is it that I enter the fray more than my other brothers, [it is because] they are all on the outside – but I bound myself up with a strong bond [and am in jeopardy] of being banished from two worlds [i.e., this world and the world to come].

The conclusion of Rashi's comment that Yehuda was at risk of being "banished from two worlds" is based on his commitment in Parashas Mikeitz when he convinced Yaakov to allow Binyamin to go with them to Egypt and stated (Bereishis 43:9): "*anochi e'ervenu mi-yadi tevakshenu im lo haviosiv eilecha ve-hitzagtiv lefanecha ve-chatasi lecha kol ha-yamim*," "I will be the guarantor for him; of my hand you can demand him – if I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, then I will have sinned against you all of the days." Rashi's comment there adds two words of explanation:

וחטאתי לך כל הימים. לעולם הבא.

Then I will have sinned against you all of the days. For the world to come.

Yehuda assumed a fiduciary duty toward Binyamin. Their inner lives became linked by the force of Yehuda's covenant to Yaakov when he stated "*anochi e'ervenu mi-yadi tevakshenu*." And, in making himself the guarantor for Binyamin's welfare and formulating the recourse as being that he will have sinned toward his father "*kol ha-yamim*," "all of the days," he placed his entire spiritual well-being at stake.

This is what Rashi restates in Parashas Vayigash: Yehuda tacitly was telling Yosef that the reason he was taking the risk of stepping forward is because he had assigned his own spiritual well-being as the collateral for Binyamin's welfare. Rashi's comment fits squarely in the verse's language because of the similarity of expression between the two verses. In Parashas Vayigash, the verse states (Bereishis 44:32): "*ki avdecha arav es ha-na'ar*," "[b]ecause your servant made himself the guarantor of the youth." Likewise, in Parashas Mikeitz the verse uses the same term (Bereishis 43:9): "*anochi e'ervenu mi-yadi tevakshenu anochi e'ervenu mi-yadi tevakshenu*," "I will be the guarantor for him; of my hand you can demand him." Rashi connects these verses that contain the same terminology (*areiv*) and states that Yehuda was explaining to Yosef that he, over and above the other brothers, now offers himself as Binyamin's surrogate to bear the punishment because he earlier had made himself Binyamin's *areiv* (surety or guarantor).²

² Moreover, in Bereishis 43:9, Rashi interprets the phrase "*chatasi lecha chol ha-yamim*" to mean "*le-olam ha-ba*"

But, if this is Yehuda's point, then why does Rashi introduce the phrase "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*," "I have bound myself up with a strong bond," in his comment, rather than sticking with the verse's phrase "*areiiv*" (as stated in Bereishis 43:9 and 44:32)? This question is accentuated by the fact that Rashi does not use anything approximating the phrase "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*" anywhere else in his Tanach commentary. Indeed, it is made even more striking by the fact that Rashi's unique formulation in his comment on this verse, "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*" ("I bound myself up with a strong bond"), **is a direct paraphrase** of the Torah's formulation just two verses earlier, "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*" ("and his soul is bound with his soul"). By choosing the words "*va-ani niskasharti be-kesher chazak*" and, moreover, doubling the term "*niskasharti be-kesher*" for emphasis, Rashi is making a clear reference back to the verse's phrase "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*."

There is no credible way to conclude that Rashi's use of the phrase from two verses earlier is merely coincidental, especially when he changes the verb from "*arav*" (which the verse he is interpreting uses) to "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*," and in view of the fact that he does not use this phrase anywhere else – and given Rashi's meticulous care with his choice of language throughout his Torah commentary. Rather, Rashi's using the phrase "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*" to explain the verse's phrase "*ki avdecha arav es ha-na'ar*" indicates that, in his view, the phrase "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*" has a dual implication: the simple syntax is that Yaakov's soul was bound up with Binyamin's, but the *sotto voce* secondary meaning – of no less spiritual (or textual) force simply because it lays beneath the surface – is that Yehuda's soul was strongly bound up with Binyamin's, as well.³

This was an under-the-surface meaning behind Yehuda's words that had deep force and profound effect. Yehuda spoke the words "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*" to mean that a strong bond exists between Binyamin and their father, but – at the same time, through this same phrase – he also expressed the more deeply-hidden truth of his own enduring bond with his brother. Rashi does not state this in his comments to verse 30 because the overt meaning of that verse is that Yaakov's soul is bound up with Binyamin's. Yet, there is also a concurrent expression of the fact that Yehuda's soul is

and Yehuda uses these same words in Parashas Vayigash: "*ve-chatasi le-avi chol ha-yamim*," further prompting Rashi to connect these two verses with the same key phrase.

³ In his comments to Bereishis 37:20 & 22 and Shemos 10:29, Rashi notes this phenomenon of attributing secondary meaning to people's statements in the verses to convey more deeply hidden personal truths about them.

bound up with Binyamin's in his fiduciary capacity as an *areiv*, which Rashi expresses by using the phrase "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*" in his comment two verses later. Rashi's weaving the prior verse's phrase into his own language conveys this meaning, adding to the main theme of Yehuda's petition regarding their father's feelings about Binyamin by simultaneously developing a second dimension of Yehuda's speech regarding his own kinship and fidelity toward Binyamin.

The development of this second theme in Yehuda's petition to Yosef is highlighted by the Vilna Gaon's comment in *Kol Eliyahu* about the *trop* on the first verse in Parashas Vayigash. The names of the notes over the first six words of the Parasha are as follows: *kadma ve-azla revi'i zarka munach segol*. These are the proper names of the cantillations, but, in this context, they also have secondary meaning. *Kadma ve-azla* means to get up and go. *Revi'i* means the fourth. *Zarka* means to throw. And *munach segol* means to be placed among the *segula*, which is the term given to Keneses Yisrael as the "*Am Segula*." The GRA cites Rashi's comment in Parashas Mikeitz that, by making himself Binyamin's guarantor, Yehuda placed his *Olam HaBa* at stake. Based on this, the GRA states that the *trop* explains that the reason Yehuda stepped forward ahead of his three older brothers was because his own connection with the *Am Segula*, and his eternal life, now had been placed at risk. The *trop* conveys the subtext because the names of the notes in the first verse of Yehuda's petition are *kadma ve-azla revi'i zarka munach segol*, which also translate as "the fourth son, *i.e.*, Yehuda, got up and went because he had cast his place among the *Am Segula*, and his *Olam HaBa*, into jeopardy."

This same dual message is present within Rashi's comment that the phrase "*ki avdecha arav es ha-na'ar*" (Bereishis 44:32) should be understood as "*niskasharti be-kesher chazak*." By hearkening back to the phrase two verses earlier, "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*" (Bereishis 44:30), Rashi conveys that, not only was Yaakov's soul, as father, bound up with Binyamin's, but Yehuda was simultaneously expressing that – somewhat surprisingly – his own soul was also bound up with Binyamin's to the core of his being.

This Bond Between Yehuda and Binyamin Persists and Unfolds Through History

This connection between Yehuda and Binyamin endured and developed throughout history. Indeed, in applying the phrase "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*" to the relationship between Yehuda and Binyamin, Rashi might have been sensitive to the fact that the only other time in Tanach where this formulation is used to describe the relationship

between people is in Shmuel I 18:1, which describes the relationship between two great descendants of Yehuda and Binyamin. The verse there states:

ויהי ככלתו לדבר אל שאול ונפש יהונתן נקשרה בנפש דוד ויאהבו יהונתן כנפשו.

And it was when he concluded speaking to Sha'ul, and the soul of Yehonasan was bound up with the soul of Dovid, and Yehonasan loved him as his own soul.

Dovid descends from Yehuda; Yehonasan, from Binyamin. This formulation in Shmuel I, directly mirroring the language in Parashas Vayigash, further points to the fact that Yehuda's statement in Bereishis 44:30 "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*" tacitly alludes to his own strong bond with Binyamin which, Rashi emphasizes, resulted from Yehuda making himself a guarantor for the well-being of Binyamin.

This bond did not abate, which also potentially explains the choice of words of Chazal that "*kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba-zeh*," "all of Israel is a guarantor for one another."⁴ By assuming a fiduciary relationship toward Binyamin, making himself Binyamin's guarantor and rendering his own spiritual wholesomeness the collateral for Binyamin's welfare, Yehuda innovated something important and enduring in the spiritual structure of Keneses Yisrael.

Indeed, the Makom HaMikdash was at the point of the intersection between the land of Shevet Yehuda and of Shevet Binyamin.⁵ One could add, as a result of this, that it is founded upon the indelible relationship – the "*keshet chazak*," in Rashi's language – between Yehuda and Binyamin, which grew from Yehuda's statement to "*Yisrael aviv*" (Bereishis 43:8) that "*anochi e'ervenu mi-yadi tevakshenu*" (Bereishis 43:9). Yehuda's act of fiduciary kinship toward his brother Binyamin acted as a complete turnabout from Kayin's rhetorical question at the beginning of Sefer Bereishis ("am I my brother's keeper?"), forging Keneses Yisrael and unfolding throughout history to eventually define the point of intersection for the "*ir shechubra lah yachdav*" (Tehillim 122:3).

Yehuda's First Involvement with an *Eiravon*

Another aspect also emerges from Rashi's comment that the use of the word "*areiv*" in Bereishis 44:32 hearkens back to the Yehuda making himself the *areiv* (guarantor) – and assigning his own spiritual well-being as the *eiravon* (collateral) – for Binyamin's

⁴ See, e.g., Shavuot 39(a).

⁵ Yoma 12a; Rashi, Zevachim 53(b); Rashi, Megilla 26(a); Yehoshua 15:8 & 18:16, 28; Shoftim 1:8, 21.

welfare in Bereishis 43:9. Namely, Yehuda's first "eiravon," perhaps the place where he learned the force of the concept that informed his second "eiravon," was when Tamar stated to him that he would need to secure his pledge with some collateral of value (Bereishis 38:17): "*va-yomer anochi eshlach gedi izim min ha-tzon va-tomer im titen eiravon ad shilachecha*," "he said, 'I will send you a kid of the goats from the flock,' and she said, 'provided you leave an eiravon until you send it.'"⁶ Rashi there explains the term "eiravon" to mean a "*mashkon*," "collateral."

This was when Yehuda first experienced the notion of a strong personal guaranty. He took this difficult moment in his life and transformed it into something more elevated when he made himself the guarantor for his brother's well-being and placed his own *Olam HaBa* at stake, which motivated him to step up ahead of his other brothers and to redeem his pledge by offering to substitute himself as Yosef's servant in Binyamin's place. This great act concretized his enduring fraternal kinship with, and fiduciary responsibility toward, Binyamin.

Thus, Rashi indicates that there is a non-linear process, a creative alchemy, whereby: (1) the concept of *eiravon*, which Yehuda profoundly experienced with regard to Tamar, in a moment that was not his finest, becomes sublimated and transformed into (2) the convincing and uplifting statement of Yehuda to Yaakov: "*anochi e'ervenu mi-yadi tevakshenu*," acting as a pivot point of all of Sefer Bereishis (which started with the statement of Kayin "*ha-shomer achi anochi*"), and then gets concretized into (3) an enduring and impactful fiduciary bond: "*ve-nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*," which Rashi accentuates as Yehuda's under-the-surface motivating force: "*va-ani niskasharti be-kesher chazak*," that becomes (4) the cornerstone of Keneses Yisrael: "*kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba-zeh*," reflected by the fact that the Makom HaMikdash stands where Shevet Yehuda and Shevet Binyamin meet one another.

⁶ See Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 602-603.

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