

Torah Focus

יום חמישי, ד' בחשוון, תש"ע

Mesorah of Mark

UNDERSTANDING P'SHAT

In order to understand the finished work of the P'shat mode of interpretation of the Torah, one needs to take into account that the P'shat is intended to produce a catechetical output, whereby a question/s is/are raised and an answer/s is/are given using the seven Hermeneutic Laws of R. Hillel and as well as the laws of Hebrew Grammar and Hebrew expression. Rabbi Yoseph ben Haggi

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דרך לפניך : קול קורא
במדבר

P'SHAT MADE SIMPLE

This level is based on the 7 Rules of Hermeneutic by Rabbi Hillel. This seven basic rules for the foundation for all hermeneutics. While this level relates to the Mishnah it always asks a question.

Chochma– the power of *mah* (what). To advance to a new level we must understand the appropriate questions to ask. Rabbi Dr. Yoseph ben Haggai suggest the following idea with regards to understanding P'shat and the Mishnaic level of interpretation.

“What do I need to know and do?”

Each of the levels is also permeated with questions. These questions are appropriate to the level being worked on.

P'SHAT DEFINED

Peshat - This method assumes that all text has literal meaning, as we have discussed. There are those who suggest that the meaning of P'shat is “to strip.” This indicates that the text is laid bare and the truth is accessed through interrogatory

dialogue.

Along with the question of what do I need to know and do, we must also ask another question.

What did the author intend or mean In His discussion?

We must seek the author's original meaning and intent. This means asking the right question. For example, Rashi ask a question when he opens his commentary on the Torah. His question is why the text begins with the

creation of the earth rather than the pasuk of Shemot 12:2. Rashi begins his commentary with an question not a comment. The entire premise of his commentary is based on the appropriate question.

RASHI AND PSHAT

For the most part it is understood that Rashi employs the P'shat level of interpretation in his commentary. There are two things to be noted in this observation.

1. P'shat is by no means simple.
2. P'shat is often mistaken for Midrash at times because of its genuine complexity.

There are times when Rashi does tell us that he adopted a different interpretation. This interpretation must be from the Midrashic level. However, it must be noted that Rashi's use of P'shat demonstrates the complexity of the level of p'shat.

Likewise Rashi will from time to time tell us that a particular verse should be interpreted from a Middrashic style or method.



RASHI AND BERESHIT

Rashi makes the comments noted in the middle text box. His comments demonstrate the complexity of

1. Biblical Interpretation
2. The complexity of trying to interpret the Biblical text in a literal sense in every case.

P'shat demands interpretation from the language and style of the author. Therefore, if the writer or author intended a Midrashic interpretation the lines between 'p'shat and midrash must be abandoned.

It has been noted that when a Midrashic interpretation is applied to the text a more stringent interpretation is used. What this means is that when Midrashic interpretation is applied to vocabulary the interpretation of a single word is often stricter than its p'shat interpretation. P'shat allows a more flexible interpretation of the word in order to make a more stringent (literal)

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THE TARGUMIM

In the beginning, etc. Bereshit bara]. This verse should be interpreted according to the Midrash, and it is in this way that our rabbis apply it to the Torah as having existed "before His works of old," or to Israel, called "the first-fruits of His increase." But if one wishes to explain these words in their natural meaning, it is necessary to observe the following method. In the beginning of the creation of the heaven and the earth, when the earth was confusion and chaos, God said: "Let there be light." This verse does not set forth the order of the creation. If it did, the word בראשונה would have been necessary, whereas the word ראשית is always in the construct, as in Jer. xxvii. 1, Gen. x. 10, Deut. xviii. 4; likewise ברא must here be taken as an infinitive ברא: the same construction occurs in Hosea i. 2.

There are a number of Targumim available from antiquity. Many Jewish Bibles also include some of these targumim. The Targum Onkelos fits the p'shat level of interpretation.

NOTES:

interpretation of the text. When the Midrashic approach is applied to the text the interpretation of words is stricter so that the interpretation can be broader.

Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: the history of its interpretation, Volume 1 by Mange Saebø, Christianus Breekelmans Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pg 400