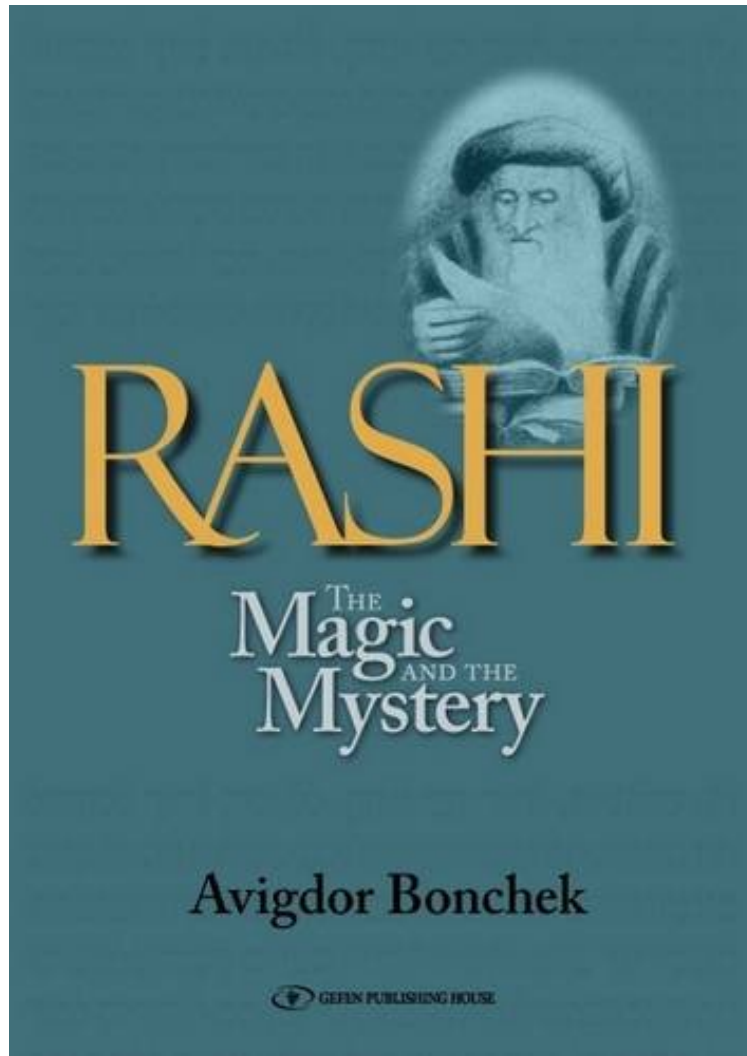


Rashi: The Magic and the Mystery - Keys to Unlocking Rashi's Unique Torah Commentary

Dr. Avigdor Bonchek

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Dr. Avigdor Bonchek : Rashi: The Magic and the Mystery - Keys to Unlocking Rashi's Unique Torah Commentary before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rashi: The Magic and the Mystery - Keys to Unlocking Rashi's Unique Torah Commentary:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Jonathan Joseph A fascinating revelation of how Rashi answers difficulties in the Biblical text. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An excellent introduction to the understanding of Rashi By Israel Drazin Many individuals of all faiths use the famed biblical and talmudic French rabbi Rashi (1040-1105) to help them understand the Bible. Rashi is a master writer. His commentaries are short, to

the point, clarifying, and interesting. People enjoyed his explanations so much that the first Hebrew book printed after the invention of the printing press around 1450 was Rashis Torah commentary in 1475. This book was printed before the printing of the Torah in Hebrew. But, as we will see, the love that most Jews had for Rashi was somewhat like an uneducated peasant who is in love with a princess. Users of Rashis interpretations lose much by not understanding what the authors goal is and how what he says implements his goal. In fact, unless a person understands Rashis methodology, he or she will get the wrong idea what the sage is saying and why he made his comment. There are many scholarly books that address this problem such as Sarah Kumins Rashis Exegetical Categorization: In Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash, and Avraham Grossmans Rashi. Following his five volume Whats Bothering Rashi, composed in English, Rabbi Dr. Avigdor Bonchek has written a short 136 page book, Rashi: The Magic and the Mystery, that addresses what Rashi students need to know. He writes in very readable English, with many examples for everything he explains. He addresses Rashis history, his style, why his explanations are unique, his use of Midrash, what he means when he states he will only address the plain meaning of the text, why his grandson Rashbam disagreed with his methodology, how everyone should question what Rashi is saying, and much more. Bonchek points out that readers should not be fooled by the seemingly simple style of Rashis comments. Rashi was an extremely careful writer. Rashis primary goal was to address a problem he sees in the Torah text and he used a Midrash in seventy percent of his commentaries only when what the Midrash states fits in with what he considers the plain meaning of the text. Bonchek states that Rashi does many things. Among much else, Rashi explain difficult passages and seeming contradictions, he helps folks avoid misunderstandings, he sometimes does so by translating familiar words in ways that enhance their meaning, he selects one of the many Midrashim that he feels answers a difficulty that he sees in the text although he does not reveal what difficulty he sees. When using a Midrash, he may select one that is commenting on another verse and may change the Midrashes wording and he may combine two separate Midrashim, if doing so helps him clarify a passage for the goal of the Midrash is to teach a moral lesson, while Rashi uses the Midrash to explain a verse. Sometimes he even invents his own Midrash to meet his clarification goal. Sometimes Rashi has two comments one derash and the other peshat, usually because neither one by itself satisfied him in explaining the passage or word. Besides not recognizing what and why Rashi comments as he does, not knowing Rashis style could mislead users of his commentary. For example, Rashi starts every parasha (weekly Torah reading) with lead words containing the name of the parasha for no other reason than to indicate where the parasha begins. Many do not know that he is doing so, and mistakenly seek a textual difficulty that Rashi is addressing. He also begins each of the five books of the Torah with a comment showing Gods love of Israel and their land. He apparently did so to inspire Jews and teach Torah values. Failure to recognize this, led many individuals to misread what Rashi is doing. In short, Rashi devotees miss what he is doing unless they understand that something is bothering Rashi and that Rashi does not reveal what this is, and fail to discover what that something is, and how Rashi resolves the problem he sees. This book is an excellent clear introduction to Rashis unique interpretative methodology. I had only two problems with it, one minor and one major. The minor one is that Rabbi Dr. Bonchek decided to use the current practice of calling most sages, except Rashi, using the word the, as in the Rashbam, the Ramban, etc. I found this annoying. The other issue is that he did not identify that Rashi is following the methodology of Rabbi Akiva. Two talmudic sages of the second century, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael, disagreed on how to interpret the Bible. Rabbi Akiva, unfortunately in my opinion, won out, and Rashi and most ancient Bible commentators as well as most Midrashim follow his view. He felt that since the Torah is divine, and since God makes no mistakes, and is able to make an idea clear without any repetition, whenever the Bible repeats itself, the seeming repetition must be understood as Scripture making a new statement, and one needs to ask what is the Torah saying with this seeming repetition? This explains many Rashi comments. Rashi is saying that the seeming repetition or seeming unnecessary extra word, a practice that occurs very frequently in the Torah, is revealing something new. Rashi quotes many Midrashim because they are reflecting the Akiva methodology. In contrast, Rabbi Ishmael taught that the Torah [that was given to humans in a manner that they can understand and therefore] speaks in human language. The frequent repetitions or extra words are used for emphasis and to enhance the beauty of what is said, sometimes giving the statement a near poetic nuance. Maimonides accepted Rabbi Ishmaels method of understanding the Torah, as did Rashis grandson Rashbam, and as do most modern Bible commentators. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Respected rabbi By B. J. Taylor If you are a fan of Rashis commentaries, this is the book for you. I have always respected Rashis commentaries and this book made me truly respect him as a rabbi and a man. I found it really interesting that Rashis Torah commentary was the first Hebrew book printed after the invention of the printing press. This phenomenal as it was printed before the Torah was! Rashi was the rare leader that publicly admitted his mistakes. He didnt try to bluster his way out of them. He treated his students with respect. When Dr. Bonchek was detailing Rashis children and grandchildren it brought back what I read of the Rashis Daughters series by Maggie Anton. (Excellent series!) Rashi had a sensitivity to the subtleties of the language in the Torah. How he used midrash is explained. I liked the question Dr. Bonchek said we should ask What about this Torah passage bothered Rashi? This book is readable by the layperson.

The magic spell cast by Rashi on the Jewish nation over eight centuries ago continues to enlighten and enchant us.

What is the secret of Rashi's commentary? How can we comprehend Rashi's greatness? The renowned author of *What's Bothering Rashi?* now presents clear methodological principles for unlocking Rashi's commentary. *Rashi: The Magic and the Mystery* explicates the analytical tools necessary for probing Rashi's Torah commentary in depth. The reader will find answers to such questions as: Why does Rashi define simple words? Why does Rashi change the wording of midrashim that he quotes? Given that both Rashi and his grandson Rashbam were committed to pshat interpretation, how can we understand the disparities in their commentaries? How do Rashi's goals for his commentary differ from the goals of the Midrash? The student will find here rules never-before elucidated, complete with numerous examples. In addition, the book contains a brief biography of Rashi, illustrating how Rashi's character influenced his commentary. After reading the book the reader will see Rashi's commentary in a brighter light and gain a clearer appreciation of Rashi's genius.

What makes Rabbi Dr. Bonchek's efforts stand out is that he has written in English and has done so for a general readership that unlike previous efforts was not necessarily geared to just fellow Torah scholars or academicians. Rabbi Dr. Bonchek's new contribution to understanding the legacy of Rashi is geared to helping the general student of Chumash get a working grasp of both the magic and the mystery of what the great commentator is trying to teach. *Rashi: The Magic and the Mystery* begins with a chapter geared to making the classical commentator more real as we read his words with the author's explanations on Rashi's life, personality and unique contributions. Other chapters by the author focus on Rashi's devotion to Pshat Interpretation (simple understanding of the words in the Chumash), Rabbi Dr. Bonchek also emphasizes the importance of the reader learning how to question Rashi's commentary as a vital aide to better understanding all that Rashi is trying to explain. Definitely one will see Rashi's commentary on the Chumash in a different light after reading *Rashi: The Magic and the Mystery*. --Daniel Keren, *The Jewish Connection*

About the Author Dr. Avigdor Bonchek, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist with over forty years of experience. He is also an ordained rabbi. He studied at Ner Israel Rabbinical College, Johns Hopkins University and NYU. He has taught in the City University of New York (CUNY) and Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He and his family have lived in Jerusalem for the past forty years. Dr. Bonchek has published ten books, in English and in Hebrew, on psychology and on Torah. He has published a five-volume series on Rashi's Torah commentary entitled *What's Bothering Rashi?* Dr. Bonchek's books have been translated into several languages. They are geared to teaching the reader an original approach to text analysis.