

Personal Items

Judah, upon marrying Tamar ([-Link](#); not knowing she was his widowed daughter-in-law), asks Tamar (-Genesis 38:18), "What is the pledge that I should give you?" to which Tamar responded, "Your signet, your cloak, and the staff that is in your hand." Upon the first two items Rashi comments, "[Onkelos ([-Link](#)) renders:] עֲדָתְךָ וְשֹׁשֶׁפֶךְ, Your ring, with which you seal, and your cloak, with which you cover yourself."

(a) Why does Rashi not define the word *choisomcho* in its literal meaning, "signet," rather than using Onkeles' definition *izkosoch*, which is Aramaic for, *ring*? (b) Why does Rashi not define the word *psilcho* as Onkeles' definition *shushpich*, which is Aramaic for, *a garment*, when throughout the Scriptures we find *psil* to mean a *thread* or a *rope*? (c) Rashi obviously doesn't feel that the word *psil* needs any definition for the student, as he doesn't define the word *psil* itself in the Scriptures, hence, why here does Rashi feel the need to define *psilcho*? (d) If Rashi feels that here we cannot define *psil* as a *thread* or *rope*, then why not define it as the RaSHBaM ([-Link](#); Rashi's grandson) does: *a belt*, which at least has a comparison to its usual definition of *thread* and *rope*? (e) Why does Rashi, after quoting Onkeles, go on and with, "Your ring, with which you seal, and your cloak, with which you cover yourself," which is not what Rashi usually does after directing the student to Onkeles' translation? Now, while commentaries answer this last question that Rashi needs to explain how Onkeles' translations are connected with the actual words: (i) *ring* = *signet* ("Your ring, with which you seal"), and (ii) *clothing* = *thread/rope* ("your cloak, with which you cover yourself," hinting to the verse (-Deuteronomy 22:12) concerning *Tzitzit* ([-Link](#)) in which the 'garment' includes the *fringes (threads/ropes)*), however, this does not answer (i) why would Rashi choose these translations as, "the simple meaning of the verse," and (ii) why wouldn't the Torah use the words it normally does for Onkeles' translations, "*simlah*," for clothing, and "*taba'at*," for ring?!

Rashi's drive to not explain *choisomcho*, in its simple translation of *signet*, is simply because the story itself makes it hard to translate them this way. The verse tells us that, "Judah... he went up [to watch] over his sheepshearers." Hence, (i) why would Judah have brought his *signet* with him?! (ii) And even if for whatever reason Judah did bring his *signet* with him, why would Tamar, who, "And it was told to Tamar, saying, 'Behold, your father in law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep,'" have thought that Judah brought his signet with him, and therefore ask Judah for it?! Hence, Rashi is forced to say that in this instance we have to accept Onkeles' translation that it is a *ring*, which is quite normal for Judah to have worn his *ring* when, "he went up [to watch] over his sheepshearers."

However, Rashi can't accept just Onkeles' translation as is, for Tamar was specifically requesting these pledges from Judah only in order to later save her life. Tamar had married Judah's oldest son, *Er*, who had died without any children. Therefore, in accordance with the commandment (-Deuteronomy 25:5-6), "If brothers reside together, and one of them dies childless, the dead man's wife shall not marry an outsider. Her husband's brother must come to her, taking her as his wife in a levirate marriage. The firstborn son whom she bears will then perpetuate the name of the dead brother, so that his name will not be obliterated from Israel," Tamar was then wed to Judah's second son, *Oinen*, who also then died without any children. At this point, Judah, instead of giving Tamar to his third and final son, *Shelah*, as a wife (-Genesis 37:11), "Then Judah said to his daughter in law Tamar, 'Remain as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up,' for he said (-Rashi: "Meaning that he dismissed her with a straw (with a lame excuse), for he did not intend to marry her to him (Shelah)"), 'Lest he too die, like his brothers (-Rashi: "This is a woman whose husbands presumably die young")." And it is only when, "for she saw that Shelah had grown up, but as for her she was not given to him for a wife (-Rashi: "Therefore, she made herself available to Judah, for she longed to bear sons from him")." However, Judah not knowing this, therefore, "Now it came about after nearly three months, that it was told to Judah, saying, 'Your daughter in law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is pregnant from harlotry.' So Judah said, 'Bring her out, and let her be burned (-Rashi: "She was the daughter of Shem, who was a priest. Therefore, they sentenced her to be burned")." At this point, Tamar executes her plan, and in order to save her life, "she sent to her father in law, saying, 'From the man to whom these belong I am pregnant,' and she said, 'Please recognize (-Rashi: "Please recognize your Creator and do not destroy three souls (that of Tamar, and of the twin fetuses within her)") whose signet ring, cloak, and staff are these?'"

Now, with this being the reason as to why Tamar was presently asking Judah for specifically for these pledges, hence, it is obvious that, (i) Tamar would ask for something that is precious to Judah (and not just something that she would need anyway) allowing of Judah to later realize why she is doing this, and (ii) something --not just *precious* to Judah, but-- that is intrinsically connected to who Judah is, as the verse itself states concerning the staff, "and the staff that is in your hand," clearly defining that Tamar was looking for something intrinsically connected to Judah, rather than something that would be of any usage for herself. Therefore, Rashi emphasizes concerning the *choisomcho*, that it be, "Your ring (precious), with which you seal (intrinsically personal)."

And so too, concerning the *psilcho*. For to have gone with the RaSHBaM's interpretation of a *belt*, would have been lacking in *psilcho* being *precious*. Hence, Rashi goes with Onkeles' interpretation that it is a *clothing*. However, Rashi cannot suffice with this, since *any plain clothing* would not be *intrinsically personal*, hence, Rashi adds on to Onkeles' translation that we are speaking of, "and your cloak (precious), with which you cover yourself (intrinsically personal)."

-To see the *mystical insight* and the *personal lesson* in our service to G-d, from this, see the next article: *Uniting the Infinite One with Mother Nature*.