MEGADIM

JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

This issue is dedicated to

Joel Salzman z"l
(Yeshiva College 1981)

Who embodied Torah, Avoda
and Gemilut Chassadim

His wisdom, integrity, warmth
and generosity endure

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INTRODUCTION

The duda'im ***yield their fragrance, at our doors are all*** Megadim***; Both freshly picked and long-stored have I kept, my beloved, for you*** (Shir HaShirim 7:14)

Thirty-five years ago, the first issue of a journal of biblical studies was published – the ***Megadim*** journal. The publication of this new journal was characterized by a modest, minimalist statement of intent: "This journal aims to offer a platform of expression for students of Tanakh, each according to their own approach and method. We hope that it will serve as a magnet for many, who will come to view it as a place for encouraging and refining Torah study while offering the opportunity for them to publish their thoughts."

With the advantage of a few decades of hindsight, it can be said that the establishment of the ***Megadim*** journal was a significant moment in the development of Herzog College in the field of Tanakh teaching and scholarship. Tanakh education offered at Herzog College, together with the articles that have been published in ***Megadim,*** have brought about real change in the way Tanakh is taught in higher education and in the Israeli school system. Herzog College and the authors whose work appeared in ***Megadim*** developed a unique teaching method that combines Torah, religious faith and academic scholarship. Some have even referred to it as a revolution in Torah study.

The introduction of the study of Tanakh into the Beit Midrash is rightly attributed to Yeshivat Har Etzion and to Herzog College that was established alongside it. The founding of Yeshivat Har Etzion following the Six-Day War near ***Derech HaAvot*** – the Path of the Patriarchs where kings and prophets walked – together with Israel's return to the biblical heartland of the Jewish people, helped influence the spirit of the yeshiva to include Tanakh study. The unique approach of Rosh Yeshiva Rav Yehuda Amital who gave Tanakh study a central place in the Beit Midrash, partnered with the leadership of teachers who acquired in-depth knowledge of ***peshuto shel mikra*** while engaged in lively discourse with the world of scholarship, paved the way for change. It was only natural that when Herzog College was established in the late 1970s, Tanakh study would occupy a central place in its curriculum. When Rav Yoel Ben-Nun founded the Higher Institute for Tanakh Study, yet another significant layer was added to this evolving trend. The ***Yemei Iyun b'Tanakh –*** Herzog College's annual Bible

study days – were established a few years later, becoming a regular tradition for thousands of men and women who come from all over the country to study the Tanakh in depth and to participate in tours of the country with Tanakh in hand.

Megadim set out to publish articles that present a new type of interpretive discourse that is fully committed to the sanctity of Tanakh and its traditional commentaries, while staying abreast of the world of scholarship and academic research.

Over the course of the first 60 issues of ***Megadim***, hundreds of articles have appeared covering many passages and chapters of Tanakh, together with articles on biblical commentators and varieties of interpretation, biblical language, translations, diacritics and ***mesorah***, literary approaches, history and ***realia***. Some articles offered penetrating analysis of biblical studies, including debate regarding ***shitat habehinot*** of the late Rabbi Breuer and discussion of how to fill in gaps in the biblical story. Some articles addressed tensions related to biblical chronology and others to values and spiritual questions arising from biblical stories.

Megadim opened the door to a wide range of scholarly writing emanating from Herzog College, including other journals that were launched in the fields of Jewish studies and Jewish thought. Many Tanakh teachers who first saw their ideas appear in ***Megadim*** have gone on to author books of commentary on Tanakh and publish biblical scholarship.

The past decade has seen an expansion of ***Megadim***'s audience by means of the ***Tevunot*** section of the Herzog College website, where the articles appear pre-publication, as well as on the hatanakh.com website, which has become the college's digital mouthpiece in the field of Tanakh study. The website offers connections through links and keywords that identify ***Megadim*** articles connected with biblical books and lectures that have been uploaded to the site.

This issue, ***Megadim*** No. 60, expands its reach in a new direction. For the past decade Herzog College has broadened its offerings in a number of different languages in order to reach a wider audience around the world. The ***Yemei Iyun*** include classes in English, French and Spanish, and Herzog College offers professional development to teachers in Jewish communities worldwide, in cooperation with academic and Torah institutions overseas.

Yeshiva University, the premier Jewish educational institution in America, was a natural partner in this endeavor. As a venerable, well-established institution

whose motto is Torah U'Maddah, one that views the combination of religious, Jewish values with scholarly, academic study as an ideal, it is logical for Herzog College to join forces with Yeshiva University in a collaborative scholarly and Torah-focused work.

We are therefore pleased that this issue of ***Megadim*** is appearing as a bilingual (Hebrew-English) issue, in partnership with Yeshiva University Press.

We would like to express our appreciation to the leadership of both institutions for their cooperation, and hope that ***Megadim*** continues to play a significant role in disseminating novel Torah ideas to a constituency that values Tanakh study, in Israel and around the world.

The ***Megadim*** Editors

[1]

Moshe Sokolow

ולא עלתה על לבי
How (not) to teach the Akeidah

The conventional understanding of the Akeidah is that God tested Abraham by seeing how close he would come to slaying Isaac before being ordered to stop. We prefer to view the impending slaughter as Abraham's erroneous interpretation of his ambiguous instructions, arrived at when his prior assumptions about his mission were challenged.

Preface

The conventional approach to the binding of Isaac is inadequate for the purposes of religious education. Transforming a father's willing compliance with an ostensible divine command to take his son's life into a meritorious act is pedagogically problematic (not to mention developmentally inappropriate for the young students to whom it is generally first taught). The many classical and medieval attempts to rescue God from inciting child sacrifice still presume that that is what He wanted Abraham to believe. Concomitantly, whatever attempts were made to free Abraham of the charge of filicide still presume that for the better part of the three-day journey to Mt. Moriah that is precisely what he intended. Both attempts, therefore, beg an alternative.

Early exegetical sources rejected the implication that God desired the slaughter of Isaac. However, in submitting His actual intentions, they remained steadfast to the essence of the conventional understanding, explaining that while God did not actually desire Isaac's death, He did, nonetheless, desire to see him brought as close as possible to that state. This is epitomized, for instance, in the commentary of Abrabanel: כי היתה הכוונה האלהית שיגיע יצחק עד שערי מות, ויחשב כאלו מת ובטל מן העולם; i.e., "the divine intention was for Isaac to reach 'the gates of death,' to be regarded as though he were dead and nullified from this world," and in the modern traditional ArtScroll commentary: "God did not say, 'Slaughter him,' because He did not intend for Isaac to be slaughtered, but only that he be brought up to the mountain and be prepared as an offering."

We submit that this interpretation, while ultimately sparing God from the calumny of child sacrifice, does nothing to relieve the tension created by the implication that He was unconcerned by the false impression that He had created with Abraham who had to abide for three days with the erroneous impression that he was going to part company from Isaac permanently. Our alternative, which we will elicit through close textual readings, is that Abraham misinterpreted his instructions and that God acted promptly to correct his misinterpretation and prevent its implementation.

The Problem with Convention

Discomfort with the conventional interpretation of the Akeidah can be said to begin in the Bible itself with the resolute rejection of child sacrifice. The Torah cautioned the Israelites against it as a particularly repugnant practice they would observe among the Canaanites, saying, "They perform for their deities all manner of things the Lord finds detestable; they even put their sons and daughters to the flame for the sake of their deities" (Deut. 12:31).[1] Elsewhere it advises, "Let there not be among you anyone who passes his son or daughter through the flames," placing it in the company of other such reprehensible deeds as magic and necromancy (Deut. 18:10).[2] The Book of Kings records as an historical fact that an act of child sacrifice perpetrated by Mesha King of Moab evoked a particularly vehement reaction among the Israelites who observed it (2 Kings 3:27).[3]

That middle and upper school students who encounter this explanation in a Bible class experience this very discomfort is illustrated by the following excerpt from the lesson transcript of a research project that employed this narrative and its accompanying midrashic interpretation, inter alia.

> Teacher: The *akeidah* is a complicated and difficult issue… what's difficult about the *akeidah*? Problematic?
> D.R.: Losing your son.
> Teacher: Stronger than that.
> S.B.: Killing your son.
> Teacher: … The Problem of…?

1 לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כֵּן לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי כָל תּוֹעֲבַת ה' אֲשֶׁר שָׂנֵא עָשׂוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי גַם אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת בְּנֹתֵיהֶם יִשְׂרְפוּ בָאֵשׁ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם.

2 לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְךָ מַעֲבִיר בְּנוֹ וּבִתּוֹ בָּאֵשׁ קֹסֵם קְסָמִים מְעוֹנֵן וּמְנַחֵשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף.

3 וַיִּקַּח אֶת בְּנוֹ הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ עֹלָה עַל הַחוֹמָה וַיְהִי קֶצֶף גָּדוֹל עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ מֵעָלָיו וַיָּשֻׁבוּ לָאָרֶץ.

> G.W.: We don't murder. The whole thing of Hashem is, like, there were people who were sacrificing their babies… was that He was a good God.[4]

Of particular significance for our present inquiry is that on three occasions the Prophet Jeremiah disparaged child sacrifice, referring to it as something that "never crossed God's mind."

- And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, *neither came it into My mind* (Jer. 7:31).[5]
- And have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire for burnt offerings unto Baal; which I commanded not, nor spoke it, *neither came it into My mind* (Jer. 19:5).[6]
- And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to set apart their sons and their daughters unto Molekh;[7] which I commanded them not, *neither came it into My mind*, that they should do this abomination; to cause Judah to sin (Jer. 32:35).[8]

Midrash Tanhuma elaborated on the tripartite form of God's negation in 19:5, associating each iteration with a specific recorded instance in which a human sacrifice appears to have been offered, thereby rejecting the concept and undermining its credibility.

> כך שנו רבותינו, "אשר לא צויתי ולא דברתי ולא עלתה על לבי" (ירמיה י"ט ה). "לא צויתי" ליפתח שיקריב את בתו, "ולא דברתי" למלך מואב שיקריב את בנו, "ולא עלתה על לבי" לומר לאברהם שישחט את בנו:

> So have our Sages taught…: "I have not commanded"—to Jephthah that he sacrifice his daughter (Judges 11:34 ff.); "I have not spoken"—to the King

4 Deena Sigel: "Was Isaac Sacrificed in the End? Reading Midrash in Elementary School," *Journal of Jewish Education* 75 (2009), 62.

5 וּבָנוּ בָּמוֹת הַתֹּפֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּגֵיא בֶן הִנֹּם לִשְׂרֹף אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת בְּנֹתֵיהֶם בָּאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִי וְלֹא עָלְתָה עַל לִבִּי. The association of Topheth with child sacrifice led 20th century archaeologists to adopt the term to describe evidence of the practice even in as faraway places as Carthage.

6 וּבָנוּ אֶת בָּמוֹת הַבַּעַל לִשְׂרֹף אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם בָּאֵשׁ עֹלוֹת לַבַּעַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִי וְלֹא דִבַּרְתִּי וְלֹא עָלְתָה עַל לִבִּי.

7 The service of Molekh is castigated by the Torah in Leviticus (18:21; 20:2-5) but without any accompanying description of what that service entailed. This reference to Molekh, along with that of 2 Kings 23:10, after which it appears to be patterned, are the only sources that indicate that it was a form of child sacrifice.

8 וַיִּבְנוּ אֶת בָּמוֹת הַבַּעַל אֲשֶׁר בְּגֵיא בֶן הִנֹּם לְהַעֲבִיר אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת בְּנוֹתֵיהֶם לַמֹּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִים וְלֹא עָלְתָה עַל לִבִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת הַתּוֹעֵבָה הַזֹּאת לְמַעַן הַחֲטִיא אֶת יְהוּדָה.

of Moab to sacrifice his son; "it never crossed My mind"—to tell Abraham to slaughter his son (Vayera 40).[9]

Two later midrashic anthologies, arguably, go even further. According to Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer (31) and Yalkut Shim`oni (Gen. 22):

> והקדוש ברוך הוא היה יושב ורואה לאב שעוקד, ולבן שהיה נעקד בכל לב, ושלח ידו לטל את המאכלת. ומלאכי השרת צועקים ובוכים, שנאמר [ישעיה ל"ג, ז] "הן אראלם צעקו חצה מלאכי שלום מר יבכיון". אמרו מלאכי השרת, רבונו של עולם נקראת רחום וחנון שרחמיך על כל מעשיך; רחם על יצחק שהוא אדם ובן אדם, ונעקד לפניך כבהמה. "אדם ובהמה תושיע ה'", שנאמר [תהלים ל"ו, ז] "צדקתך כהררי אל משפטיך תהום רבה אדם ובהמה תושיע ה'."
>
> The Holy One, blessed be He, observed the father doing the binding and the son being bound wholeheartedly; [the father] reaching out for the knife as the ministering angles screamed and cried… saying: Master of the Universe, You are known to be compassionate and merciful, extending compassion to all your creatures. Show compassion to Isaac who is a man and a human being, yet he is being bound before You like an animal and You are [expected] to save both man and beast…

The obvious contradiction between the talmudic-midrashic sources and the plain sense of the Torah text elicited the following comment from Don Isaac Abrabanel (Gen. 22), who, nevertheless, remained well within the perimeters of convention. We

9 The Talmud identifies the same three instances with different parts of the same verse:
Regarding the verse…: "I never commanded"—refers to the son of Mesha, King of Moab, of whom it states: "He took his eldest son who would have succeeded him, and raised him as a pyre offering." "I never mentioned"—refers to Jephthah [who "sacrificed" his daughter]. "It never crossed my mind"—refers to Isaac son of Abraham (Ta`anit 4a).
וכתיב "אשר לא צויתי ולא דברתי ולא עלתה על לבי". אשר לא צויתי - זה בנו של מישע מלך מואב, שנאמר "ויקח את בנו הבכור אשר ימלך תחתיו ויעלהו עלה". ולא דברתי - זה יפתח. ולא עלתה על לבי - זה יצחק בן אברהם.
And yet another tannaitic midrash (Sifrei Devarim, Shof'tim 148) preserves yet a third distribution:
R. Yosi said. My son Elazar spoke of three things. "I never commanded"—in the Torah; "I never spoke"—in the Decalogue; "It never crossed my mind"—that someone would sacrifice his child on the altar. Others maintain: "I never commanded"—Jephthah; "I never spoke"—to Mesha King of Moab; and "it never crossed my mind"—that Abraham would sacrifice his son on the altar.
רבי יוסי אומר אלעזר בני אומר בו שלשה דברים. "אשר לא צויתי" בתורה; (שם) "ולא דברתי" בעשרת הדברות; (שם) "ולא עלתה על לבי" שיקריב אדם את בנו על גב המזבח. אחרים אומרים: "אשר לא צויתי" על יפתח; "ולא דברתי" על מישע מלך מואב; "ולא עלתה על לבי," שיקריב אברהם בנו על גבי המזבח.

have chosen to highlight his commentary because it was composed in light, and in consideration, of his classical and medieval predecessors.

השאלה הו׳. אם היה שהשם צוה לאברהם בביאור ״קח נא את בנך את יחידך את יצחק והעלהו שם לעולה״, איך חז״ל מלאם לבם לדרוש, במסכת תענית, על ״אשר לא צויתי ולא עלתה על לבי״ אמרו: ולא עלתה על לבי, זה יצחק בן אברהם?

The sixth question is: If God clearly commanded Abraham to "take your son, your only one, Isaac, and raise him up there as a raised offering," how could the Sages, in Tractate *Ta`anit*, have presumed to offer the homily that "I did not command… it never crossed My mind," saying that "it never crossed my mind" refers to Isaac son of Abraham?

... ואמנם מה שדרשו במסכת תעניות ״ולא עלתה על לבי״ זה יצחק בן אברהם, הוא להגיד שלא היתה הכוונה האלהית להשחט יצחק, ושאחרי כן נתחרט הקב״ה ממנו וצוה שלא ישחטהו, כי הנה מתחלת הענין לא כיון ית׳ על שחיטת יצחק. וכן אמרו במדרש: כשאמר לו הקב״ה (שם פרשה נ״ג) ״כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע״, ״לא איש אל ויכזב״. כשאמר לו ״קח נא את בנך״, ״ההוא אמר ולא יעשה״. רצו בזה שאין המאמרים האלה סותרים, ובשניהם יתקיימו. כי היתה הכוונה האלהית שיגיע יצחק עד שערי מות, ויחשב כאלו מת ובטל מן העולם, כי בזה תשלם הכוונה כמו שביארתי. ואמנם מה היתה מחשבת אברהם בזה? אין ספק שהיתה כוונתו באמת ובתמים להעלותו עולה כליל לה׳. [אבל איך נשתנה המאמר האלהי וצוויו הנה יבא ביאורו אחר זה והותרה השאלה הה׳ והו׳ והז׳.]

The homily that they offered… informs us that God did not [initially] intend Isaac's slaughter and that the Holy One regretted it afterwards instructing [Abraham] not to slaughter him, because from the outset God did not intend Isaac's slaughter. So, it is reported in the Midrash: When the Lord told him "your seed shall be called from Isaac," "God is not a mortal who [experiences] regret." When He told him "Take your son," "Is He one who speaks without fulfillment?" By this [the Sages] intended [to say] that the two verses are not contradictory and both would be fulfilled, because the divine intention was for Isaac to reach "the gates of death," be regarded as though he were dead and nullified from this world, whereby the intent I have described would be complete. However, what Abraham's thoughts were in this matter? Undoubtedly, he thought that he was honestly and truly supposed to offer

him completely as a burnt offering to God. [How the divine utterance and command was altered will be explained subsequently. Here we have answered the fifth, sixth, and seventh questions.]

Rereading the Sources

Genesis 22:12 reads: "[God] said, 'Do not raise your hand against the lad, neither do anything to him. For now, I know that you are God-fearing, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from me.'" It is precisely at this point that the narrative unravels. We were given no prior explanation for God's outlandish request of Abraham and now we are given no rationale for its peremptory revocation. Such contradiction calls for explanation and, indeed, one is provided courtesy of the venerable Midrash *Bereishit Rabbah* and even interpolated into some versions—but not all—of Rashi's Torah commentary.

Here they appear—side by side and line by line—to ease comparison and contrast.

רש"י על התורה (מהדורת ברלינר)	בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק) פרשת וירא פרשה נו
(יב) אל תשלח - לשחוט, אמר לו אם כן לחנם באתי לכאן,	(יב) [ויאמר אל תשלח ידך אל הנער] וגו' וסכין איכן היא, נשלו דמעות ממלאכי שרת עליה ושחה,
	אמר לו אחנקנו, אמר לו אל תשלח ידך אל הנער,
אעשה בו חבלה ואוציא ממנו מעט דם, אמר לו אל תעש לו מאומה, אל תעש בו מום.	אמר לו נוציא ממנו טיפת דם, אמר לו אל תעש לו מאומה אל תעש לו מומה,
	כי עתה ידעתי עתה יידעתני לכל שאת אוהבני, ולא חשכת את בנך וגו' ולא תאמר כל חלאים שחוץ לגוף אינן חלאים אלא מעלה אני עליך כאילו שאמרתי לך שתקריב לי את עצמך ולא עיכבתה.

[כי עתה ידעתי - אמר רבי אבא אמר לו אברהם אפרש לפניך את שיחתי, אתמול אמרת לי (לעיל כא יב) כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, וחזרת ואמרת (שם כב ב) קח נא את בנך, עכשיו אתה אומר לי אל תשלח ידך אל הנער. אמר לו הקב"ה (תהלים פט לה) לא אחלל בריתי ומוצא שפתי לא אשנה, כשאמרתי לך קח מוצא שפתי לא אשנה, לא אמרתי לך שחטהו אלא העלהו, אסקתיה אחתיה].	אמר ר' אחא אף את לפניך שיחות, אתמול אמרת לי כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע וחזרתה ואמרת לי קח את בנך את יחידך ועכשיו את אומר לי אל תשלח ידך אל הנער, אמר לו הקב"ה אברהם לא אחלל בריתי ואת בריתי אקים את יצחק בשעה שאמרתי לך קח נא את בנך וגו' ומוצא שפתי לא אשנה כך אמרתי לך שחטהו, לא העלהו, אסיקתיניה אחתיה.

Analysis

According to the Midrash, Abraham apprised God of the contradiction inherent in His two sets of instructions. Either he is supposed to sacrifice Isaac, or not. Either his "seed" is intended to continue through Isaac, or not. Isaac's role as Abraham's heir, God's instruction to "raise him up there as an offering," and, lastly, the cautionary "do not raise your hand against the lad," cannot all be sustained. Translated into the pedagogy of religious instruction, either we posit a primitive and ferocious God who not only appreciates child sacrifice, but sadistically watches parents agonize as they contemplate the inevitable deaths of their children, or an enlightened and benevolent God who seeks to prevent Abraham from committing an ignominious atrocity. What seems inexplicable—and, hence, inadmissible—is that He is both, simultaneously or alternatingly, and that we mortals are essentially incapable of distinguishing when He is which.

The objective of the bipartite midrashic comment is to reconcile the dissonant texts (pedagogical translation: the conflicting images of God.) In the first part, Abraham suggests a form of compromise: by strangling Isaac or wounding him,[10] he

10 The latter distinction presumes that some shedding of blood was inherently necessary. On the notion that Abraham actually took Isaac's life requiring God to resurrect him, see Shalom Spiegel: *The Last Trial* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1967). His thesis, briefly, is that the persecution of Jews during the First Crusade, and the many acts of martyrdom that accompanied it, inspired a reinterpretation of the Akeidah in which Isaac was cast as a willing participant whose life was actually taken by Abraham

would maintain the integrity of the initial set of instructions thereby sparing God, as it were, from self-contradiction. In the latter, God defends His original directives, arguing that Abraham has misunderstood them. "I never told you to slaughter him," He says, "only to raise him up. Now that you have raised him up—bring him back down."[11]

That is precisely the heuristic opportunity we seek. If sacrificing Isaac was not God's intention but Abraham's misunderstanding, then we relieve ourselves of the burden of having to account for a near child sacrifice, although we do acquire an alternate challenge, namely what import to assign to a Torah narrative that is based on misinterpretation. We shall attempt to elaborate on both points.

Abraham's Misapprehension

If we read the text closely enough, we can see the inception of this misunderstanding, something that we may have previously overlooked.

When Isaac asked his father: "Here are the fire and the wood,[12] but where is the sacrificial lamb?" (v. 7), Abraham replied: "God will see to the sacrificial lamb, my son" (v. 8). Rather than parse it cynically (God will see to the sacrificial lamb, i.e. my son), let us take it at its face value: Abraham knew that a sacrifice was implied in his instructions, but he was, at this moment, still uncertain of its identity. He knew that he was to be accompanied by Isaac (קח-נא את-בנך את-יחידך... את-יצחק) and that,

and then restored, miraculously, by God. This is reflected in the many medieval Ashkenazic liturgical poems (*piyyutim*) that have become a fixture of the high holy days' penitential prayers (*selihot*). Similar reinterpretations (minus the ingredient of resurrection) were evoked in Israel by some modern crises—including the War of Independence in 1948, the Six-Day War of 1967, and the Yom Kippur War of 1973—as described by Avi Sagi: "The Meaning of the Akedah in Israeli Culture and Jewish Tradition," *Israel Studies* 3:1 (1998), pp. 45-60.

11 Up and down from where? Some medieval exegetes (in line with the declaration of Abrabanel with which we opened this chapter) assumed it was the altar. (Cf., e.g., Bekhor Shor: והוא לא צוה רק להעלותו על-גבי המזבח, ומשהעלהו גמר ועשה מצוותו של הקב"ה. [God] commanded him only to raise him upon the altar and, having raised him, he fulfilled God's instructions.) I am submitting an alternate interpretation: God commanded only that Isaac be brought atop the mountain and could now be brought back down.

12 I once heard Professor Uriel Simon explain that the absence of a reference to the carving knife in Isaac's question supports the assumption that we are dealing with a young Isaac—rather than the 37 year-old man of the Midrash—since a child or youngster would likely be so frightened at the sight of the knife that he would essentially deny its existence.

together, they were to travel to the land of Moriah (ולך-לך אל-ארץ המוריה) where, together,[13] they were to offer a sacrifice. (והעלהו שם לעלה)

The assumption that God used deliberately ambiguous language in addressing Abraham was anticipated by Gersonides (Ralbag; Provence, 1288-1344), who wrote:

> נסה הוא מעניין נסיון, ועניין זה הנסיון לפי דעתי היה שבאתהו הנבואה בלשון מסופק; והוא שאמר אליו ה' ית' על יצחק "והעלהו שם לעולה." וזה המאמ' יתכן שיובן שיזבח אותו ויעשהו עולה, או שיעלה אותו שם להעלות עולה, כדי שיתחנך יצחק בעבודת הש' ית'. ועשה אותו הש' ית' אם יקשה בעיניו לעשות שום דבר שיצוהו ה' עליו, עד שיהיה זה סבה אל שיבין מזה המאמר זולת מה שיובן ממנו בתחלת העיון. ר"ל שיובן ממנו שיעלה שם עולה אחרת לא שיזבח בנו.
>
> *Nissah* is related [philologically] to *nissayon* [a test]. The subject of this test, in my opinion, was that this prophecy came to [Abraham] in ambiguous terms. God told him, apropos of Isaac: "Take him up there for an offering," which can be understood as [either] to make him the offering, or to bring him up there to make an offering, in order that Isaac should be educated in the Lord's service. God did so [to determine] if he would find it difficult to do anything that God had commanded him to the extent that he would give it an interpretation other than the one [most readily] perceived at the outset; namely, that he was to raise up something else as an offering and not that he was to sacrifice his son.[14]

It is, arguably, at this moment that Abraham's mental construct began to unravel. Until now, he understood Isaac's company as the object of the exercise, not as its subject. God wanted him to instruct Isaac, who was nearing his majority (see notes 12 and 18), in the sacrificial order and that, of course, is why he outfitted himself with the wood, the fire, and the knife. When they arrived at the appointed place and, contrary to his expectation, no sacrifice presented itself, Abraham began to rethink his instructions.

> God told me to take my son. I replied: I have two sons. He said: The one who is an only child. I replied: Each is an only child to his mother. He said: The one you love. I replied: I love them both. He said—somewhat impatiently—I mean Isaac. So here I am with Isaac. Then he said: Take yourself to the Land

13 The repetition of "together" aims to replicate the Torah's repetition of יחדו, with its concomitant implication that Isaac, along with Abraham, is to perform the sacrifice—not to be it.

14 This is consistent with Gersonides's pronounced inclination towards rational analysis. He consistently maintained that if the literal sense of a verse defies reason, it simply cannot be thus understood.

> of Moriah… to one of the mountaintops I shall designate. Here we are on a mountaintop in Moriah-land, equipped with wood and fire to conduct a sacrifice.[15]

The only instruction that appeared, at that moment, to be either ambiguous[16] or ambivalent[17] was והעלהו שם לעלה. Whereas Abraham had previously understood it to mean "raise him [Isaac] up there *to make* an offering," implying that one would be provided providentially (as per Gersonides), in its absence, he now entertained the possibility that it was meant to signify "raise him [Isaac] up there *as* an offering." Whereupon, he bound him, raised him upon the altar (v. 9),[18] and seized the knife to slaughter him (v. 10), only to be constrained by God from carrying out his apparent intent.[19]

The Denouement[20]

God now intervened, cautioning Abraham neither to raise his hand against Isaac nor to do him any harm, "for *now* I know that you are God-fearing." The telltale *now* has sparked significant commentary, largely of the apologetic variety, as exegetes strove to explain how God's perception of Abraham could become different from what it had been previously, without negating His omniscient foreknowledge.

Sa`adyah translated the *kal* form ידעתי (I knew) as though it were the *hiph`il* הודעתי (I made known),[21] and it was treated similarly by Rashbam: ונתפרסם לכל העולם (it has received worldwide publicity) and Bekhor Shor: להודיע לכל (to

15 Based upon the Midrash and Rashi, ad loc.

16 I.e., of two uncertain meanings.

17 I.e., of two intentional meanings.

18 According to Professor Simon (n. 11), this, too, is more indicative of a younger, teen-aged Isaac than of a middle-aged man. It is difficult enough to imagine a 113-year-old Abraham lifting up a 13-year-old Isaac, let alone a 137-year-old lifting a 37-year old!

19 Whether Abraham was defaulting here to contemporary convention depends on whether the practice of child sacrifice was normative at that time. Scholars of the ancient Near East and archaeologists are divided in their assessments, as summarized by Heath D. Dewrell in *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2017), chapter 2: "Archaeological, Iconographic, and Epigraphic Evidence for Child Sacrifice in the Levant and Central Mediterranean," p. 37 ff.

20 Since it was only at the last moment—and only momentarily—that Abraham mistakenly assumed Isaac to be the sacrificial victim, we can dispense with the various speculations regarding his failure to protest his instructions here as opposed to his vigorous protestations of the fate of Sodom.

21 And he is so cited by Ibn Ezra (vs. 1): כטעם הודעתי גם מלת ידעתי והגאון אמר שמלת נסה הראות צדקתו לבני אדם.

publicize it to all). Ibn Ezra, citing anonymous "rationalists" (אנשי שיקול הדעת), offered the distinction between two types of knowledge: that which has yet to come to pass (דעת העתיד בטרם היותו) and that which is already in existence (דעת היש הנמצא), a distinction echoed by Ramban, who distinguished between knowledge in the potential (בכח) and the actual (במעשה).[22]

From our perspective, however, the use of *now* is transparent; there had been an innovation. Abraham, unable to come to terms with the nonappearance of the implicit sacrificial victim, had erroneously decided that it was to be Isaac and was consequently prepared to slaughter him. It was this decision that prompted God to call a halt to the exercise and to proclaim Abraham "God-fearing." According to the Midrash, God's singular affection for and relationship with him had been publicly justified by his singular act of devotion and that, implicitly, is why the Torah narrated the episode in the first place.

From our perspective, again, an alternate moral comes to the fore. The Torah elected to emphasize to us how God prevented Abraham from making his son the victim of his mistaken interpretation of his instructions; he had no right to make Isaac pay the price of his erroneous exegesis. If we are ever in a like situation, uncertain what God wants of us, however laudatory it might be to sacrifice ourselves on His behalf, we earn no encomia by offering to sacrifice others.

The Substitution

There is additional support for our interpretation from the continuation of the story. After God enjoined Abraham—in verse 12, on which we have been focused—from carrying out his intention, "Abraham looked up and saw a ram entangled by its horns

The Gaon [Sa`adya] said that *nissah* means to reveal his righteousness to mankind. Also "I knew" means "I made known."

This is, essentially, the opinion of *Bereishit Rabbah*, as well: יידעתני לכל; you have made me known to all.

22 A singular approach to the challenge of "now" was offered by R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz in the *K'li Yakar* (ad. loc.):

אין כל לשון עתה ממעט הזמן הקודם לו, שהרי מצינו (דברים י', יב) ועתה ישראל מה ה' שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה, וכי קודם זה לא שאל ממנו היראה אלא שהוא כאילו אמר והנה ישראל, כך עתה ידעתי כאילו אמר הנה ידעתי.

Not every use of "now" excludes the past tense, as we have found "Now Israel, what does the Lord expect of you but to fear [Him]" (Dt. 10:12). And was that not His expectation previously? Rather it is as though he had said "Behold, Israel." So it is with "Now I know;" it is as though he had said "Behold, I know."

on the far side of a bush. Abraham went and took the ram and raised it up as an `*olah* instead of his son" (v. 13).

Was the ram's proximate presence fortuitous? No; according to a striking rabbinic tradition, it was Providential. A Mishnah (no less) reports that "Ten things were created on the [original] Sabbath's eve at eventide" (Avot 5:6), one of which was "the patriarch Abraham's ram" **(ואילו של אברהם אבינו)**. Overlooking the hyperbole—by the time of the Akeidah, the ram would have had to be over 2,000 years old, not to mention able to breathe underwater if, indeed, Moriah-land was subjected to the flood—the least amount of time it needed to have been stationed there was just before Abraham's arrival. In other words, when Isaac asked, "Where is the sacrificial lamb?" the answer could have been: "Right over there," as Abraham had anticipated, according to our reconstruction. His inability to see it, however, was due to its having become entangled by its horns on *the far side* of a bush **(אחר נאחז בסבך)** rendering it invisible to Abraham. However, his subsequent ability to locate it argues that had he made even a slightly greater initial effort, he would have espied it right away, offered it as a sacrifice,[23] and who knows whether the entire episode would ever have come to our attention.

This yields yet another didactic moral: Do not give up on your intuitive sense of a verse's plain meaning before examining the problem from the other side as well.

A *Haskamah* from the Brisker Rav

Our stipulation, namely that God's instructions were ambiguous and Abraham misinterpreted them, finds additional support in a rather unlikely place: a characteristically hairsplitting homily—apropos of our verse and Rashi's commentary thereupon—by Rabbi Yitzhak Zev Halevi Soloveitchik (1886-1959) of Jerusalem, known as the Brisker Rav.

חידושי הגרי"ז סימן לז

> וירא (כ"ב, יב) כי עתה ידעתי וגו'. ופירש"י אמר ר"א א"ל אברהם אפרש לפניך את שיחתי, אתמול אמרת לי כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע וחזרת ואמרת קח נא את בנך ועכשיו אתה אומר לי אל תשלח ידך אל הנער, אמר לו הקב"ה לא אחלל

23 Bekhor Shor resolved another—albeit relatively minor—dilemma. He pointed out that, ordinarily, Abraham would have regarded the ram as someone else's misplaced property and declined to use it. However, אחר שנאחז בסבך בקרניו, ידע כי אות הוא שיקחנו ולצרכו נאחז שם. He took its entanglement as a [divine] sign that it was detained there for his use.

בריתי ומוצא שפתי לא אשנה, לא אמרתי לך שחטהו אלא העלהו, אסקתיה אחתי' עכ"ל.

"Now I know." Rashi explained: R. [Aba] said, Abraham said to Him, 'Let me set forth my case. Yesterday You said to me that "through Isaac shall your seed be called." Then you said, "Take your son." Now You say, "Do not raise your hand to the lad." God replied: I will not violate My covenant, neither shall I contradict Myself. I never told you to slaughter him, but to raise him up. Now that you have raised him up, take him down.

וצ"ב למה לא פירש שיחתו מיד כשאמר לו "קח נא את בנך"? ואמאי המתין עד שנאמר לו "אל תשלח ידך אל הנער"? ובפשטות צריך לומר דמיד כשנצטווה, הלך מיד לקיים המצוה, דזריזין מקדימים למצוות, ולא שאל וחקר איך זה. ואחרי ככלות הכל, נתפנה ופירש שיחתו. ועוד צ"ב דלפ"ז דלא נאמר לו רק להעלותו ולא לשחטו; וכי אברהם טעה בזה? הרי בנבואה נאמר זה, ונביא יודע ומבין מה שמדברים אליו.

This requires elaboration. Why did he not put his case forward as soon as He told him "Take your son"? Why did he wait until he was told "Do not raise your hand to the lad"? In all simplicity, we must say that the moment he was commanded he went to obey his orders since "the alert perform *mitzvot* expeditiously" without asking and examining it at all. Afterwards, he had the leisure to set forth his argument. Another clarification is needed that he was not told to slaughter him but to raise him up. Could Abraham have misunderstood this? It was told him prophetically and a prophet understands what he is being told.

והנראה דאברהם ידע שלא נצטוה רק להעלותו לעולה בלבד, אלא מכיון שנעשה לעולה ממילא מדין הקרבן להיקרב ע"ג המזבח, והנפ"מ בין אם נצטוה לשוחטו ובין אם חיובו לשחטו רק מחמת דין קרבן שעליו הוא, אם אח"כ מאיזה סיבה לא היה יכול להקריבו דאם היה מצווה לשחטו הרי לא קיים המצוה, דאונס רחמנא פטרא, אבל "קיום" לא הוי, אבל אם נצטווה רק לעשותו עולה בלבד וממילא הוא דמחוייב להקריבו, הרי שפיר קיים המצוה, דהמצוה (הציווי) לא היה רק לעשותו עולה, וזה עשה. וכאן אברהם היה אנוס בהקרבתו דהא נאמר לו: "אל תשלח ידך אל הנער" ושפיר קיים המצוה דהא העלהו. וזהו שהשיב הקב"ה קיימת המצוה "אסקתי' ואחתי'".

It appears, then, that Abraham understood that he was only commanded to raise him up him as an *`olah* sacrifice; however, [he assumed] since [Isaac] had been designated an *`olah,* he was automatically required to be sacrificed on the altar. The consequence of whether he was commanded to slaughter him, or whether the requirement for slaughter derived only from his legal status as a sacrifice, is if afterwards—for whatever reason—he was unable to sacrifice him. If he had been commanded to slaughter him, he would have failed in his observance of what he was commanded; but God overlooks accidents even though there would have been no "fulfillment" [of the command]. However, if he had only been commanded to designate him an *`olah*—and the requirement for slaughter would be only automatic—he would clearly have fulfilled his commandment which was only to designate him an *`olah,* and that he had accomplished. Here, Abraham was forcibly constrained from slaughtering him because he was told "Do not raise your hand against the lad," while he had clearly fulfilled his commandment by raising him up. Therefore, God replied, you have fulfilled the mitzvah; "you have raised him up, now take him down."

ויבואר ג"כ השאלה הראשונה. ונקדים פעם שאל חסיד אחד אותי, מה זה אתם המתנגדים מפלפלים תמיד בקושיות. בתורה כתוב כך יהי כך, ומה לכם להקשות? ובאמת במידה ידועה צדק, אלא שיש בזה גבולים ומבוארים בברייתא דרבי ישמעאל בב' כתובים המכחישים זה את זה. ומשום דכאן אמרה תורה כך, ושם אמרה אחרת. וגזירת הכתוב הוא. אבל כשמצינו כתוב שלישי, אזי אדרבה מצווים אנו מן התורה לחקור ולדרוש על ב' הכתובים ולהכריע. ולפ"ז מבואר שפיר, דכששמע אברהם ב' כתובים המכחישים, "כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע" ו"קח נא את בנך יחידך", לא שאל וחקר על זה, משום דקודם היה הציווי כך. אבל לאחר ששמע כתוב שלישי, מיד נתנה לו הרשות לחקור ולברר את ההכרעה בין ב' כתובים והמכחישים, והוא "אסקתי' אחתי'". (בשם הגר"ח).

The first question is thereby clarified as well. As a prologue [let me report] that I was once asked by a Hasid why we Mitnagdim constantly split hairs. If the Torah says so, let it be so; why do you keep raising questions? To a certain extent, he was correct, save that this matter has boundaries set out in the *baraita* of Rabbi Yishmael as "Two verses that contradict one another" because the Torah says this, while elsewhere it says that. This is Scripture's prerogative. However, when we find a third verse, we are obliged by the Torah to examine and investigate those two [contradictory] verses and decide. Thus, it becomes

clear: When Abraham heard the two contradictory verses: "through Isaac shall your seed be called" and "take your only son," he neither asked nor investigated this because the initial instruction still stood. However, once he heard the third verse, he was immediately entitled to investigate and clarify the determination between the two contradictory verses, which amounted to "you have raised him up, now take him down."

An Instructional Postscript: The Testing

The question of how this episode constituted a test of Abraham lies at the heart of the philosophical consternation we alluded to in regard of the telltale "*now* I know" of verse 12. Ordinarily, a test is administered to ascertain something not previously known. Given God's omniscience, however, that definition fails in this instance; hence, the speculation regarding the distinction between potential knowledge and actual knowledge drawn by Ibn Ezra and Ramban, cited above. Similar speculation accompanies the commentaries of these (and other) exegetes to the word *nissah* (נסה) in the opening verse.

Whereas many students (and even their teachers) may find the philosophical approach complicated and unproductive, I have found that the same results can be obtained by substituting a simple philological analysis of the usual English synonyms for "test." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the noun "test" derives from the Old French for an earthen vessel in which gold or silver was treated. This concrete meaning yielded the more abstract sense of the means or process by which the quality or genuineness of something could be determined. It is in this latter sense that it makes one of its earliest appearances in Hamlet: "Bring me to the test" (III: iv, 133). "Prove," another borrowing from Old French, is defined, primarily, as producing evidence or argument for determining the truth of anything. "Tempt," too, has the general meaning of to put to the test, and to "examine" is to judge or appraise according to a standard or criterion.

A cursory examination of several English translations of Genesis 22:1 is illuminating in this regard.

- 1382 Wycliffe Bible: Aftyr that thes thingis weren doon, God *temptide* Abraham
- 1611 King James: And it came to pass after these things, that God did *tempt* Abraham
- 1917 J.P.S.: And it came to pass after these things, that God did *prove* Abraham

- 1962 J.P.S.: some time afterward, God put Abraham to the *test*[24]
- 1983 Everett Fox: Now after these events it was that God *tested* Abraham
- 1996 ArtScroll: And it happened after these things that God *tested* Abraham
- 2004 Robert Alter: And it happened after these things that God *tested* Abraham

Clearly, the 1917 JPS translation—"prove"—stands out. I submit that it is also outstanding. A curious lexical property of "prove" is that it can mean both the process and the product, as in "the *proof* of the pudding is in its eating," "the exception that *proves* the rule," "*proving* grounds," where weapons are taken to be tested, or the "*proof*" of arithmetic calculations and alcoholic beverages.

The consequence is that "prove" is the ideal translation of *nissah*, since it conveys both the sense of God testing Abraham, and God displaying the results of that test—corresponding to both Sa`adyah's equation (in v. 12) of the *kal* ידעתי with the *hiph`il* הודעתי, as well as with the anonymous interpretation cited by Ibn Ezra (in v. 1) equating *nissah* (נִסָּה), to test, with *nissa'* (נִשָּׂא), to elevate. The ArtScroll translation (cited just above) even takes this duality into account in a note: "The Midrash derives נסה, tested, from נס, a *banner*, that flies high above an army or a ship. Hence the verse would be rendered: And God *elevated* Abraham…" The reference is to Midrash *Bereishit Rabbah* 55:1 "You have provided those who fear You a banner to unfurl" (Ps. 60:6; נתת ליריאיך נס להתנוסס), and constitutes yet another indication that the Sages were uncomfortable with what had already become the normative interpretation and were subtly providing hints at alternative explanations—such as our own.

That middle and upper school students are "able to reflect on its use of symbolism—in the guise of the metaphorical flag—and to consider its message regarding Abraham" is illustrated by the following excerpt from the aforementioned research project:

> G.M.: That Avraham could be a higher authority.
> B.T.: The flag symbolizes something very important. So does Avraham…
> A.P. We raise the flag.
> Teacher: … raising…he was put at higher heights.
> B.W.: Let's talk about greatness! [enthusiastic tone]
> E.L.: The flag, like, it's a whole different idea.[25]

24 In their explanatory notes, the Committee for the Translation of the Torah wrote: "Trad[itional] "prove" in the sense of test was already sufficiently obsolete in 1904 for Driver to explain it… "i.e., put to the test." Harry Orlinsky (ed.): *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1969), p. 97.

25 Sigel, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

In Conclusion

We began with the stipulation that the conventional understanding of the binding of Isaac; namely, that in order to determine the extent of Abraham's devotion God was intent upon testing how close he would come to taking Isaac's life, is incompatible with biblical law and lore and unsuitable for religious education. In its stead, we offered an interpretation grounded in both classical Midrash and medieval exegesis that, in combination, tell a very different story.

In order to demonstrate Abraham's meritorious character and, hence, his worthiness to be "the father of a multitude of nations" (Gen. 17:5), God gave him a deliberately ambiguous instruction: "and take him up there for an `*olah*" (22:2). Abraham's preparations and procedure indicated that he initially understood God to mean that he should ascend the mountain along with an adolescent Isaac in order to initiate him in the rite of sacrifice. Indeed, when questioned by Isaac about the arrangements, he replied, in all candor, "God Himself will choose the lamb for the `*olah*" (22:8). However, when they reached the summit and no lamb presented itself, Abraham revisited his instructions and arrived at the erroneous conclusion that Isaac was to be the sacrifice.

God called a halt to the proceedings[26] and, lo and behold, a ram appeared—horns entangled on the far side of the thicket—and "Plan A" worked out after all. Indeed, the rabbinic tradition that assigns the ram's creation to the primordial Friday at sunset can be interpreted as an indication that had Abraham but sought it a bit longer or more thoroughly, he might never have had to put Isaac at jeopardy. The didactic moral of our story: Do not make our children the victims of our mistaken exegesis. The insinuation of other, more morbid, motives may have been initiated due to certain historical circumstances (i.e., the First Crusade) and can be set aside without doing any exegetical damage to the narrative itself.

26 The fact that the divine angel had to call out to him twice to get his full attention suggests that Abraham was so intent upon implementing his ad hoc version of the binding that he dismissed the first call as wishful thinking.

Appendix: An Unorthodox View of Maimonides on the Akeidah

In the introduction to the Guide, Maimonides wrote:

> This work has also a second object in view. It seeks to explain certain obscure figures [parables] which occur in the Prophets and are not distinctly characterized as being figures. Ignorant and superficial readers take them in a literal, not in a figurative sense. Even well-informed persons are bewildered if they understand these passages in their literal signification, but they are entirely relieved of their perplexity when we explain the figure, or merely suggest that the terms are figurative. For this reason, I have called this book Guide for the Perplexed.[27]

In his commentary on Genesis 18:1, Nahmanides disputed Maimonides's view of Abraham's encounter with the three angels. While Maimonides, in the Guide (2:42), explained that the entire episode had transpired in a prophetic vision, Nahmanides argued that the amount of particular detail provided in the Torah narrative is indicative of a realistic occurrence more so than of a visionary one.[28] In passing, he made the same argument about Jacob's nighttime struggle with "a man" on his return from his Aramean sojourn (Genesis 32:25). Maimonides maintained that it was a vision (op. cit.), while Nahmanides argued that if that were the case, why would Jacob end up limping?

Maimonides's penchant for treating ostensible historical narratives as parables should not be misunderstood as dismissive of their religious significance. As Micah Goodman has observed:

> Maimonides determines that although many of the biblical stories did not actually take place in reality, they are all still true—because the lessons that emerge from their parables are true. If an event is historical, then it is something that happened in the past; if it is a parable, then it is a story that also "happens" in the present and the future. Turning story into allegory by placing it in the category of prophetic vision strengthens its meaning and transforms it from an isolated event into a universal truth.[29]

27 Ed. M. Friedländer, 2.

28 "כי מה תועלת להראות לו כל זה?"

29 Micah Goodman: *Maimonides and the Book that Changed Judaism* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2015), p. 33.

In that same introduction, Maimonides also suggested that there are more stories that are actually parables than those he dealt with explicitly.[30] This has led to considerable speculation among medieval interpreters of Maimonides and modern scholars. Most commonly, this speculation has been attached to the stories of Adam, Eve, and the Garden of Eden. Uncommonly, it has attempted to attach itself to the Akeidah.

Avraham Nuriel, in an essay entitled "Parables that are not identified as such in the Guide for the Perplexed,"[31] made three arguments for regarding the Akeidah as just such a parable.

1. In his discussion of tests (Guide 3:24, above), Maimonides made it clear that the importance of the Akeidah lies in its appearance in the Torah more so than its historicity, since at the ostensible time of its occurrence it was not witnessed by anyone other than the participants. That being the case, it would not matter whether it transpired in historical time or was only in a prophetic vision.
2. God's address to Abraham on the mountain, as well as those of the angel, qualify as prophecy according to Maimonides's definition of the same. Why not include the actions they accompanied?

> One individual may be taken as an illustration of the individuals of the whole species. From its properties we learn those of each individual of the species. I mean to say that the form of one account of a prophecy illustrates all accounts of the same class. After this remark you will understand that a person may sometimes dream that he has gone to a certain country, married there, stayed there for some time, and had a son, whom he gave a certain name, and who was in a certain condition [though nothing of all this has really taken place]; so also in prophetic allegories certain objects are seen, acts performed—if the style of the allegory demands it—things are done by the prophet, the intervals between one act and another determined, and journeys undertaken from one place to another; but all these things are only processes of a prophetic vision, and not real things that could be perceived by the senses of the body. Some of the accounts simply relate these incidents [without premising that they are part of a vision], because it is a well-known fact that all these accounts refer to prophetic

30 In 2:42, Maimonides explicitly named the episode involving Balaam's speaking donkey as a prophetic vision, and several of his interpreters (including Shem Tov Falqera and Ephodi) extended that to Jonah's whale as well.

31 "משלים ולא נתפרש שהם משל במורה הנבוכים", Da`at 25 (1990), pp. 85-91.

visions, and it was not necessary to repeat in each case a statement to this effect (Guide 2:46).[32]

3. Regarding other strange prophetic activities, Maimonides explicitly rejected the proposition that God could have commanded them to actually commit actions that were either dissolute (Isaiah going about naked) or in violation of Torah Law (Ezekiel shaving his beard). In fact, in his elaboration on this point, Maimonides invoked an episode involving Abraham himself.

   It was in a prophetic vision that he saw that he did all these actions which he was commanded to do. God forbid to assume that God would make his prophets appear an object of ridicule and sport in the eyes of the ignorant and order them to perform foolish acts. We must also bear in mind that the command given to Ezekiel implied disobedience to the Law, for he, being a priest, would, in causing the razor to pass over every corner of the beard and of the head, have been guilty of transgressing two prohibitions in each case. But it was only done in a prophetic vision. Again, when it is said, "As my servant Isaiah went naked and barefoot" (Isa. xx, 3), the prophet did so in a prophetic vision. Weak-minded persons believe that the prophet relates here what he was commanded to do, and what he actually did, and that he describes how he was commanded to dig in a wall on the Temple mount although he was in Babylon, and relates how he obeyed the command, for he says, "And I digged (sic) in the wall" But it is distinctly stated that all this took place in a vision.

   It is analogous to the description of the vision of Abraham which begins, "The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying" (Gen. xv, 1); and contains at the same time the passage, "He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now to the heaven and count the stars" (ibid. v. 6). It is evident that it was in a vision that Abraham saw himself brought forth from his place looking towards the heavens and being told to count the stars. This is related [without repeating the statement that it was in a vision] (Ibid).[33]

If Abraham's execution of the "covenant among the pieces" could be a parable—and it comprises his commission of acts that are, in and of themselves, just unusual—why not his performance of the Akeidah, whose literal understanding would involve express violations of Torah law, as we have indicated in our critique of the conventional interpretation.

32 Ed. Friedlander, p. 245.

33 *Op. cit.*, p. 246.

Chaya Stein-Weiss

R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Sojourn in Ashkenaz: Melting Pot or Multi-Cultural Experience?

A medieval itinerant scholar arrives in a foreign land, bereft of physical belongings but proudly bearing the rich cultural and religious traditions of the land he left behind. As his sojourns continue, he learns to communicate with the locals, sharing his unique knowledge with some in the process. This scholar is the illustrious Sephardic Rishon, R. Abraham b. Meir ibn Ezra, whose biblical commentaries are ubiquitous today and are studied alongside those of Rashi, Ramban, and other Torah giants. Ibn Ezra was born in Muslim Spain in 1089. In 1140 at the age of 50, he was forced to leave Spain – possibly due to the persecutions wrought by the radical Islamic Almohad invaders.[1] While the Almohad oppression also forced out other illustrious Jewish notables from Spain, (e.g., the Maimon family [Rambam], the Kimchis, and the ibn Tibbons), Ibn Ezra's trajectory was unique. After residing in Italy for several years, a perpetually impoverished Ibn Ezra wandered throughout Christian Europe for the last 25 years of his life, seeking the support of Ashkenazic patrons in Italy, Provence, Northern France, and England, where he died, presumably in London, in 1164.[2]

Ibn Ezra's extant exegetical and grammatical works contain an "encyclopedic wealth" of recognized literary resources available to Sephardic commentators of the Golden Age of Spain. His extensive erudition includes diverse sources "ranging from traditional rabbinic literature (Tannaitic through Geonic); Sephardic and Karaitic exegesis; polemical, philological, poetic and liturgical works; as well as works of historiography, philosophy, mathematics and astronomy, among others."[3] All of Ibn Ezra's surviving

1 J. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience.* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 80-89. Gerber's theory of Almohad invaders displacing Ibn Ezra from Spain in 1140, however, is debatable, as most historians posit that the Almohad persecutions did not begin until 1147-48.

2 Numerous scholarly studies have been devoted to Ibn Ezra's life and achievements. For a comprehensive listing of Ibn Ezra's works, and when and where they were written, see Gad Freudenthal and Shlomo Sela's "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings: A Chronological Listing," *Aleph* 6 (2006), pp. 13-47.

3 A. Mondschein, "'Only One in a Thousand of his Comments may be Called *Peshat*': Toward Ibn Ezra's View of Rashi's Commentary to the Torah" [Hebrew]. In *Iyunei Mikra U-Parshanut*, ed. M. Garsiel et al. Ramat Gan, 2000, pp. 223-224 [Translation mine].

literary works are in Hebrew – written in Christian Europe, with his earlier Arabic compositions having been lost or "relegate[ed]… to oblivion"[4] by the ravages of time and historical circumstances.

The question arises: was Ibn Ezra's biblical commentary – by virtue of his 25-year sojourn throughout Christendom – influenced by his Ashkenazic surroundings? This essay attempts to assess the extent to which various Ashkenazic cultural and literary traditions, as well as Ibn Ezra's personal experiences in Christian lands, may have influenced or factored into his biblical commentary. The methodology used herein examines Ibn Ezra's exegetical works, both in form and in content, for possible traces of Ashkenazic influence, through a two-way comparison: relative to those of Rashi (1040-1104), the emblematic Ashkenazic exegete of the time, and relative to his own works from another time and place.

The first method compares Ibn Ezra's commentaries with those of Rashi, his renowned Ashkenazic predecessor. "[O]ne of the most important Jewish Bible commentators of all time and the most famous and influential of all,"[5] Rashi selectively integrated rabbinic homiletics (*derash*) with the literal meaning (*peshat*) of the text, according to available rules of grammar and linguistics. Rashi states, "There are many *midreshe aggadah*… As for me, I am only concerned with the plain meaning of the Scriptures and with such *aggadah* as explain the biblical passages in a fitting manner."[6] Ibn Ezra, too, focused on the literal – grammatical and linguistic – textual meaning, but unlike Rashi, he bypassed *derash* interpretations, except for *halachic* matters.[7] He states, "Only regarding laws and statutes will I rely on our early Sages, according to whose words I will correct the grammar… Only … [where] there is no mitzvah will I state the correct interpretations."[8]

How familiar was Ibn Ezra with Rashi's biblical commentary? Several factors contribute to a reasonable expectation that he would have acquainted himself with

4 Uriel Simon, "Transplanting the Wisdom of Spain to Christian Lands: The Failed Efforts of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 8 (2009), 155. See also A. Mondschein, "Only One in a Thousand," pp. 225-226.

5 A. Grossman, "The school of literal Jewish exegesis in Northern France," *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament* [HBOT]. Volume 1, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), p. 332.

6 Rashi, Gen.3:8. Translation cited in Grossman, ibid., pp. 334-335.

7 For an analysis of the interplay between *peshat* and *derash* in Rashi's commentaries, see Grossman, "The school of literal Jewish exegesis in Northern France," HBOT, pp. 334-336.

8 Ibn Ezra, "Introduction to Commentary on Pentateuch II (long commentary), ('Fifth Way')," Genesis I, II, & III: M. Cohen, ed. *Miqra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter*, Genesis, (Ramat Gan, 1992), p. 29. [Translation is mine.]

Rashi's *perush* during his long residence in Christendom. First, Rashi's revered status among the Ashkenazic readers for whom Ibn Ezra now wrote his own *peshat*-based commentary would have demanded no less from a practical consideration. In addition, Ibn Ezra's total financial dependence on his Ashkenazic patrons, whom (or whose sons) he tutored in Bible studies and Hebrew grammar, should have necessitated an acquaintance with Rashi for practical, economic reasons. Finally, his near-encyclopedic and comprehensive knowledge of biblical exegesis, across ideological divides, would have called for familiarity with Rashi as an added venue for truth. Indeed, Ibn Ezra's uncompromising quest for intellectual honesty is underscored in his nearly identical statements in both of his Introductions to the Pentateuch: "It is God alone that I fear, and I will not show favoritism in [the realm] of Torah."[9]

Contrary to expectations, direct references to Rashi by Ibn Ezra are scant, with only fourteen or fifteen in his entire Torah commentary.[10] According to Ibn Ezra-scholar Aaron Mondschein, Ibn Ezra's only other direct reference to Rashi is found in his grammatical work, *Safah Berurah*, in which he scathingly attacks Rashi's biblical commentary and claims that "only one in a thousand of his comments may be called *peshat*."[11] In this work, Ibn Ezra explained that the Talmudic Sages had used *derash* as one of many exegetical approaches, never intending for it to negate or replace the text's true, literal meaning (אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו). He claimed that later Ashkenazic generations veered from the truth by using rabbinic homilies exclusively and mistaking them for the true, plain meaning, as did Rashi. Moreover, he contended that the current spiritual leadership that extolled Rashi as a literalist compounded the distortion.[12]

In light of these surprising facts, Ibn Ezra's level of familiarity with Rashi's biblical *perush* is speculative and the source of a scholarly dispute between Mondschein and historian and Ibn Ezra-scholar Uriel Simon. Though both scholars analyze Ibn Ezra's biblical and grammatical works for traces of Ashkenazic references in general, and Rashi

9 Ibid.

10 Yehuda L. Krinsky and Asher Weiser both list 14 Ibn Ezra references to Rashi in his Torah Commentaries.
Krinsky, *Mehokekei Yehuda*: Supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Pentateuch: vol. 1 (New York,1973), Introduction, (אות ש'), pp. 42-43; Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Pentateuch, A. Weiser, ed. vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1976), Introduction, p. 68. Mondschein cites 15 references, based on Krinsky and Weiser. Mondschein, "Only One in a Thousand," p. 226, n.16.

11 Mondschein, "Only One in a Thousand," p. 226.

12 Mondschein, "Only One in a Thousand," pp. 224-226.

references in particular, they arrive at opposite conclusions.[13] Simon contends that Ibn Ezra did not bother to fully or systematically acquaint himself with the exegetical *peshat* works of Ashkenazim overall, as he considered them to be culturally inferior. In his view, Ibn Ezra's scant references to Rashi indicate his superficial and sporadic approach to Rashi's *perush*. Accordingly, Simon argues Ibn Ezra remained a pure, Spanish-oriented exegete throughout his stay in Christendom, and was largely aloof and disengaged from the writings of Ashkenaz.[14] Mondschein, on the other hand, maintains that Ibn Ezra was well aware of his Ashkenazic environment to varying degrees, and particularly of Rashi's biblical commentary. He cites Ibn Ezra's noted "one in a thousand" condemnation in his *Safah Berurah* as proof of his intimate familiarity with Rashi's *perush*. Mondschein argues that Ibn Ezra's indictment was bold and justified; otherwise, making such a baseless claim in Ashkenazic lands would have constituted "professional suicide" on his part.[15] Moreover, Ibn Ezra's total reliance on the patronage of wealthy Ashkenazim precluded his direct criticism of their champion, as Rashi was emblematic of Ashkenazic biblical (and also Talmudic) *peshat*.[16] Thus, Mondschein posits that Ibn Ezra did, in fact, devote a sizeable part of his Torah commentary to a

13 This debate extends further to Rashi's eleventh-century, *peshat*-oriented successors, who were Ibn Ezra's contemporaries, namely, R. Shmuel b. Meir [Rashbam], and R. Joseph Kara. Though it is beyond the purview of this essay, this argument remains inconclusive.
Rashbam (1080-1160), acclaimed Tosafist and grandson and student of Rashi, was the brother of the renowned Tosafist, Rabbenu Tam, whom Ibn Ezra had befriended in Northern France.
Mondschein maintains that although Ibn Ezra was not familiar with Rashbam's biblical works until arriving in London at the end of his life, it was then that he wrote *'Iggeret ha-Shabbat* in response to Rashbam. See A. Mondschein, "Concerning the Inter-relationship of the Commentaries of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra and R. Samuel B. Meir to the Pentateuch: A New Appraisal," [in Hebrew], *Te'uda* (2001), especially pp. 40-45.
On the other hand, U. Simon claims that though initially unaware of Rashbam's writings while in Italy, Ibn Ezra largely ignored the local *peshat* school while in Northern France, due to the Rashbam's lack of knowledge of contemporary Hebrew grammar, which had originated in Arabic, in Spain. U. Simon, "Transplanting the Wisdom of Spain to Christian Lands," p. 170, and n.107.
Finally, for a comprehensive analysis of the *peshat* "revolution" in eleventh-century Northern France; its origins and participants, and its ultimate demise, see A. Grossman, "The school of literal Jewish exegesis in Northern France," HBOT, pp. 323-371.

14 U. Simon, "Transplanting the Wisdom of Spain to Christian Lands," p. 170; Mondschein, "Only One in a Thousand," pp. 226-227, p. 248, f.n.43.

15 Mondschein, "'Only One in a Thousand,'" p. 226.

16 Mondschein, "'Only One in a Thousand,'" pp. 226-246, esp. pp.226, 242-243.

negative critique of Rashi's interpretation. He did so, however, in an indirect, oblique manner, due to his extreme professional caution while in Rashi's home territory.[17]

The dispute appears unresolved, regarding "what" Ibn Ezra knew of the commentaries of Rashi and other Ashkenazic *pashtanim*. However, a closer look at their analyses shows that both Mondschein and Simon evaluated Ibn Ezra's works as one collective unit. Neither one considered the possibility that Ibn Ezra's views or tones might have changed or developed over time, during his quarter century residence in Christendom. Thus, a significant historiographical element appears absent from this debate – namely, the question of "when" Ibn Ezra knew what he knew. This time factor might account for Ibn Ezra's strangely contradictory tones toward Ashkenazic *pashtanim* generally and Rashi in particular, in his different works, as will be discussed herein. Some scholars have noted Ibn Ezra's often contrasting tones in his works, but they viewed them solely in relation to the different geographic locales in which he wrote,[18] rather than to any substantive changes on Ibn Ezra's part. To my knowledge, there has been no attempt to analyze these different tones contextually, from both geographical, as well as chronological points of view. Moreover, a linear comparison between Ibn Ezra's earlier and later works might also demonstrate a level of change or adaptability, which he may or may not have acquired during his stay in Christian Europe.

Due to several unique factors, the task of uncovering evidence of Ibn Ezra's acculturation in Ashkenaz (if any) is complex and multi-faceted. First, he wrote his scholarly works almost continuously throughout his twenty-five years in Ashkenaz, in different periods and in diverse geographic locations. Furthermore, he often wrote more than one version of his biblical commentaries and grammatical works.[19] Consequently, before comparing Ibn Ezra's views to those of Rashi, one would first have to compare his own positions to each other – namely, those in his earlier works to those in his later writings. While a systematic comparison of all of Ibn Ezra's extant,

17 Mondschein cites many compelling examples of what he claims are indirect references to *Peirush Rashi* on Torah by Ibn Ezra. This is based on similar language between the two commentaries, extraneous words in Ibn Ezra's *perush*, and the like. Mondschein, "'Only One in a Thousand,'" pp. 228-232. See Krinsky, who likewise maintains that Ibn Ezra often cited Rashi indirectly in his *perushim*. Krinsky, ibid., p. 43.

18 Examples by Friedlander and Simon are cited by Mondschein, "Only One in a Thousand, p. 242, n. 31. Mondschein also cites Friedlander's claims of cultural openness in medieval Italy, relative to Northern France. In Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary on Daniel: A. Mondschein, ed.; M.A. thesis, Bar-Ilan University; Ramat Gan 1977, Introduction, ch. 5, p. (כז).

19 Sh. Sela and G. Fruedenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings: A Chronological Listing," *Aleph* 6 (2006), pp. 13-47. See also U. Simon, "Abraham Ibn Ezra," HBOT, p. 378; Mondschein, ibid.

earlier and later, exegetical works is beyond the purview of this essay, several cases demonstrate a clear shift in his tone over time, as he reflected on Ashkenazic standards of exegesis and grammar. For example, according to historians Shlomo Sela and Gad Freudenthal, Ibn Ezra wrote his strongly-worded work, *Safah Berurah*, in Verona, Italy, in 1146,[20] merely six years after having left Spain and his native Sephardic culture, with which he associated on many levels.[21] Thus, the fact that he delivered his sarcastic "one-in-a-thousand" jibe at this early stage, rather than during his later residence in Northern France, is not surprising. Ibn Ezra might also have felt comfortable issuing his sharp satire of Rashi's commentary from his residence in Italy, as such comments – due to their distance from Rashi's home environment – would likely have been tolerated more by Italian Jews than by the local, Northern French Jews of Rashi's home territory. Furthermore, Italy's central location, viz. trade routes and exposure to various cultures, might have rendered its Jewish environment more culturally adaptable and open, thereby enabling Ibn Ezra to more freely voice such caustic comments without fear of ostracization.[22] Thus, factors of both time and place may have accounted for Ibn Ezra's caustic reference to Rashi in his *Safah Berurah*, during his early residence in Italy.

To summarize: this essay tests for indications of Ibn Ezra's possible acclimatization or acculturation in Ashkenaz. The methodology is a two-way comparison of his writings, where extant – i.e., to each other and to Rashi – in three of his different exegetical works:

1. Ibn Ezra's two Introductions to Pentateuch I, II (short and long);
2. His two extant Commentaries to Pentateuch I, II (short and fragmentary long);
3. His two Commentaries on the Book of Daniel I, II (short and long).

20 Sh. Sela and G. Fruedenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings," pp. 19, 21.

21 Indeed, Simon contends that "Ibn Ezra was perceived [in Christian Europe] – in his own eyes, as well as in the eyes of others – as a representative of Jewish culture in the realm of Islam." U. Simon, "Transplanting the Wisdom of Spain to Christian Lands," p. 167.

22 The suggestion of twelfth-century Italian Jewish cultural openness should be compared with A. Grossman's study of what he considered the openness of Northern French scholars. Grossman claims that Northern French scholars' "readiness… to draw on the cultural heritage of Spanish Jewry in biblical exegesis was consistent with [their] receptivity… in general to influence from other Jewish centers." Moreover, he contends that "French Jews were… more open in this respect than any other Jewish community in Europe…, borrow[ing] copiously from the Jewish cultures of Germany, Provence, Italy and Byzantium…" A. Grossman, "The school of literal Jewish exegesis in Northern France," HBOT, pp. 327-328. See also E. Kanarfogel, *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), for a comprehensive and compelling study of the cultural openness of rabbinic scholarship in medieval Ashkenaz.

Ibn Ezra's Introductions to Pentateuch

In his Introduction to his first Commentary on Pentateuch I (Short Commentary – *Sefer HaYashar*) which he wrote in Lucca, Italy, (ca. 1142-1145),[23] Ibn Ezra revealed his early condescension toward the exegetical and grammatical standards of Ashkenazic scholars. In this work he enumerates five methods of Bible study, the fifth one of which – namely, his own Sephardic, linguistic/rationalistic approach – he terms the "true" approach. His "fourth method," i.e., Midrashic hermeneutics, is "the way of the scholars in the lands of the Greeks and Romans [i.e., Christendom], who do not look at grammar or dictates of logic, but instead rely on Midrash, such as [the works] *Lekach Tov* and *Or Einayim*."[24] Throughout Ibn Ezra's early account of the various types of *midrashim* (allegorical, pedagogical, or inspirational) he intersperses numerous jibes toward those who understand them literally. For example, he argues that one who tries to explain the reason for Creation homiletically, by asserting God's show of strength to His creatures, provides a "pathetic answer" of "confusion and emptiness."[25] This barb appears to be directed at Rashi, whose opening statement on Bereishit asserts just that. Moreover, when explaining the irrationality of understanding a particular homily in its literal sense, Ibn Ezra adds cynically, that "there are absolute proofs to those with eyes and not for blindness."[26] After showing that *midrashim* may be produced by those "with limited intelligence" and learned scholars alike, Ibn Ezra concludes by stating that "there is no end to *derash*."[27] Once again, his derogatory comments were written shortly after his arrival in Italy and reflect his clear Sephardic chauvinism toward Ashkenazic, *derash*-based exegesis.

23 Sela and Fruedenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings," p. 18.

24 Ibn Ezra, "Introduction to Commentary on Pentateuch I (short commentary) (*Sefer HaYashar*), Genesis I, II, & III: M. Cohen, ed. *Miqra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter*, Genesis, 2 vols. (Ramat Gan, 1992), p. 25; also, in Weiser ed., vol. 1, pp. 6-10. Ibn Ezra might also have had another allusion by his choice of Midrashic works, whose titles translate literally as 'A Good Portion' and 'Light of the Eyes." Perhaps they hinted to being superficially attractive while lacking substance.

25 Ibn Ezra, Introduction to (Short) Commentary on Pentateuch, "Fourth Way," Weiser, ed., pp. 7-9. [Translation mine.]

26 Ibn Ezra's "Fourth Way," Weiser, ed., vol. 1, p. 6. [Translation mine.]

27 Ibn Ezra's Introduction to Commentary on Pentateuch I (short commentary): *Sefer HaYashar*, Genesis I, II, & III: M. Cohen, ed. *Miqra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter*, Genesis, 2 vols. (Ramat Gan, 1992), p. (כו); Weiser, ibid. [Translation mine.]

A comparison between Ibn Ezra's earlier and later works is particularly relevant here, as he wrote another introduction to Pentateuch, as well as a later Torah commentary.[28] A close reading of his later Long Introduction II reveals a noticeable change in Ibn Ezra's tone toward the exegetical standards of Ashkenaz since his early arrival in Italy. Ibn Ezra wrote his second introduction in Rouen, Northern France – Rashi's home territory – in 1155, fifteen years after arriving in Christian Europe, and about a decade or more after writing his Short Commentary I on Torah and his *Safah Berurah*.[29] Unlike Ibn Ezra's earlier references to Ashkenazic exegesis and its practitioners as misguided (in his first Introduction I), his later comments are respectful and tolerant. For example, Ibn Ezra legitimizes "the fourth method" of *derash*, by associating it with the ancient Talmudic sages, who knew and used both *peshat* and *derash*. This stands in contrast to his earlier association of *derash* with the mistaken exegetes of Ashkenaz, who used the latter method overwhelmingly.[30] Furthermore, before building his detailed case of the importance of examining *midrashim* critically – a position antithetical to the Ashkenazic, literal understanding of *derash* – Ibn Ezra prefaces his controversial stance with a cautionary but respectful note. He states, "[T]he method of *peshat* was not hidden from [*Hazal*]…, but [they] adopted the method of *derash*, because there are seventy facets to Torah."[31] Additionally, after clarifying his own (grammatical-literalist) "fifth method," Ibn Ezra provides the reader with his "abridged version of the laws of grammar," noting simply that "the [Ashkenazic] scholars of our generation did not engage in [the study of] grammar."[32] Thus, while Ibn Ezra continues to argue against understanding *midrashim* literally, his later style appears to be pedagogical and informative, rather than condescending and sarcastic. Despite his changes in tone and attitude over time and place, Ibn Ezra remains steadfast in his loyalty to God and in his commitment to the principles of biblical *peshat*, which he views as God's truth in Torah, (except for matters of *halakha*, in which literalism is displaced).[33] Perhaps Ibn Ezra's later comments demonstrate a new level of respect – if not "acculturation" per se,

28 Weiser, "Introduction: The Long Perush of Ibn Ezra to Sefer Shemot" [Hebrew], pp. 22-29; The Perush of R. Avraham Ibn Ezra on the Torah: Another Version: Weiser, ed., vol. 1, pp. 137-146.

29 Long Commentary on Genesis II, Rouen, Oct. 1155; Long Commentary on Exodus II, Rouen, 1155-1157. Sela and Fruedenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings," pp. 21-22, 45-46.

30 Ibn Ezra, "Introduction to Commentary on Pentateuch II (Long Commentary)," Genesis I, II, & III: M. Cohen, ed. *Miqra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter*, Genesis, (Ramat Gan, 1992), p. (כה).

31 Ibn Ezra, "Introduction to Commentary on Pentateuch II," M. Cohen ed., pp. (כח-כט).

32 Ibn Ezra, "Introduction to Commentary on Pentateuch II," M. Cohen ed., pp. 29-31; Weiser ed., p. 142.

33 As noted earlier, Ibn Ezra's near-identical statements in both versions of his "fifth method" – i.e., his fear of God alone and his quest for truth in Torah – remain constant. See "Introduction to Commentary on

due to his prolonged stay and contact with the methodology and scholars of Northern France.

Ibn Ezra's Commentaries on Torah:

Ibn Ezra's later, moderate stance toward Ashkenazic *parshanut* is evident in his Long Commentary on Pentateuch II, as well. In this *perush*, nearly all of his direct citations of Rashi are instructive and respectful (see Appendix). This again supports the idea of Ibn Ezra's newfound respect for Ashkenazic *parshanut*. Due to historical circumstances, however, a similar comparison between Ibn Ezra's earlier and later Torah commentaries is not possible, as was done with his Short and Long Introductions to Torah, I, II. Although he wrote numerous recensions of his Torah commentaries in different times and places, most of these other versions are no longer extant. Ibn Ezra's existing *perush* on Torah includes his Short Commentary I on the whole Pentateuch (Lucca, Italy, 1142-45); his Long Commentary II on a fragment of Bereishit (the first two and a half *parshiyot*) and on the entire Book of Shemot (Rouen, 1155-57).[34] Ibn Ezra's *perush* in standard Mikraot Gedolot editions is a combination of his earlier and later writings.[35] Since more than three-quarters of his Long Torah Commentary II do not exist, the only possible comparisons between both *perushim* (I and II) would be fragmentary at best. Thus, an attempt to evaluate Ibn Ezra's acculturation by such a comparison would be inconclusive.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, this essay's second method – i.e., comparing Ibn Ezra's references to Rashi – is more feasible, though still limited in scope. This approach provides a compelling alternative to the views of Ibn Ezra as remaining unchanged towards Rashi's commentary – either in cautionary opposition (per Mondschein), or indifference (per Simon). By cross-referencing Ibn Ezra's fifteen citations of Rashi,

Pentateuch II," pp. 26, 29; Weiser ed., pp. 10, 142. See also A. Mondschein, "'Only One in a Thousand,'" p. 244, n.33.

34 A paraphrase of Ibn Ezra's teachings on *Parashat Ve'yechi* exist as well, written by his student in London. Weiser, Introduction: "The Long *Perush* of Ibn Ezra on Sefer Shemot," [Hebrew], vol. 1, pp. 22-29. See also Mikraot Gedolot HaKeter. For chronologies of these writings, see Sela and Fruedenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings," pp. 18, 21.

35 Four of the Books in standard Mikraot Gedolot contain his Short Commentary I, (i.e., Bereishit, Vayikra, Bamidbar and Devarim), while the Book of Shemot contains his Long Commentary II. While Ibn Ezra's entire Short Commentary II on Shemot exists, as well, it is not included in most standard Mikraot Gedolot editions, but is classified separately as such. Weiser, vol. 2, pp. 239-355; See also Mikraot Gedolot HaKeter.

in his existing Torah Commentaries (I and II), one finds that thirteen out of fifteen come from his Long Commentary on Shemot II and the remaining two from his Short Commentary I. Statistically, this means that close to 90% of Ibn Ezra's citations of Rashi derive from less than 25% of his total (extant) Torah commentary. One could hypothesize that if the rest of his Long Commentary II were to have survived, it would most likely contain many more direct references to Rashi. The ramifications of this analysis are noteworthy. It explains the scarcity of direct references to Rashi in a new way, by attributing it to the historical loss of most of Ibn Ezra's Long Torah Commentary II, rather than to any intentional motive on his part. This is contrary to the perception of Ibn Ezra as having been continuously disengaged from Ashkenazic culture, due to his Sephardic aloofness throughout (per Simon). It also negates the premise of Ibn Ezra's self-censorship in masking his true negative views towards Rashi's commentary, due to professional and economic necessity (per Mondschein).

In this vein, while only two early references to Rashi remain from his Short Commentary I, a comparison of them to his thirteen later references, from his Long Commentary II, is relevant. In his first early citation (Short Commentary I, Ber. 32:9), Ibn Ezra dismisses Rashi's *perush* without any explanation, referring to it simply as *derash*.[36] In his second, early reference (Short Commentary II, Shemot 28:30), Ibn Ezra prefaces his rejection of Rashi's *derash*-based interpretation on this verse with a sarcastic directive: "Open your eyes."[37] This language is reminiscent of the similarly worded condescension in his Short Introduction to Pentateuch I (noted earlier) in which he claims, "[T]here are absolute proofs to those with eyes and not for blindness."[38]

In light of these findings, the study of the remaining thirteen Rashi references from his Long Commentary II on Shemot, is important. Indeed, in this later commentary, Ibn Ezra is consistently respectful towards Rashi, and his disagreements are straightforward and instructive, without any condescension. To the contrary, he often excuses what he perceives as Rashi's mistakes, by noting the latter's lack of access to Arabic or other (Sephardic-related) knowledge. For example, before elucidating a particular text, Ibn Ezra respectfully and matter-of-factly provides his readers with a basic lesson in philology. Regarding the pronunciation of a particular word, he states, "And he who

36 ...ומה שאמר רבינו שלמה שיהיה לפליטה בעל כרחו הוא דרך דרש. "Ibn Ezra's Other [Short] Version," in Weiser, ed. vol.1 p. 98. See also Mikraot Gedolot HaKeter.

37 ...ורב שלמה מפרש התורה מ"כ [מצאתי כתוב] כי האו"ת בשם המפורש... ועתה פקח עיניך. [Translation mine.] "Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary," in Weiser, ed., vol. 2, p. 323.

38 Ibn Ezra's "Fourth Way," Weiser, ed. vol.1, p.6. [Translation mine.]; Mikraot Gedolot HaKeter, p. (כה).

understands the Arabic language would know the difference there is between them."[39] In another verse, Ibn Ezra is prepared to defer to Rashi's view of a reportedly miraculous phenomenon in the Mishkan, even though it contradicts the literalist interpretation of the text. He states: "According to… Rabbenu Shlomo [the middle bar in the Mishkan] was standing by a miracle. If this is a rabbinically received interpretation (קבלה), we will hear and accept it."[40] Moreover, even when disagreeing with Rashi, he goes into lengthy explanations as to why he feels differently, citing other biblical verses and grammatical rules, when relevant (see Appendix). Thus, Ibn Ezra's two early references to Rashi (from his Short Commentary I) appear to reflect a mindset of Sephardic superiority, while his later references (in his Long Commentary II) reflect one of respect. This stands in contrast to an attitude of "restraint" or professional "caution." Ibn Ezra's newfound respect may have been attributed in part to his experiences and friendships formed in Northern France, as well as to his increased familiarity with Ashkenazic exegesis, as part of his education there.

Indeed, Ibn Ezra's residence in Northern France, during which time he wrote his second Introduction to Pentateuch II, and his Long Commentary on Pentateuch II, among others, coincided with his new, deep friendship with Rabbenu Tam – the leading contemporary Tosafist and grandson of Rashi. This unique relationship is documented in a moving literary exchange between the two, in which Rabbenu Tam humbly acknowledges Ibn Ezra's poetic superiority. Ibn Ezra responds with a striking poetic masterpiece, crafted in the form of a tree, in which he deferentially submits to Rabbenu Tam's preeminence.[41] The mutual respect between Rabbenu Tam and Ibn Ezra is not only poetic, it is also evidenced in Tosafist references to the latter in the Talmud. For example, the Tosafot commentary twice cites an exchange in which Rabbenu Tam

39 אמר רבינו שלמה ז"ל, כי יש הפרש בין עזי בקמץ חטף ובין עזי בקבוץ... ומי שיבין בלשון ישמעאל ידע ההפרש שיש ביניהם... [Translation mine.] Ibn Ezra's (Long) Perush on Pentateuch, Shemot 15:2. (Similarly in Shemot 23:19.) In Weiser ed., vol.2; Mikraot Gedolot ed. Though U. Simon perceives Ibn Ezra's scientific explanations negatively – as an indictment of Ashkenazic scholars for "their ignorance of the sciences" (Simon, p. 185) – it can instead be seen as a helpful, pedagogical aid to great Torah scholars who were deficient in this area.

40 Shemot 26:18. This interpretation is based on a Talmudic source (BT Shabb. 98b) and does not appear in the standard version of Rashi's Torah commentary. The miracle relates to the "middle bar" – הבריח התיכון. See Weiser; p. 180 n.37; Krinsky, *Mechokekei Yehuda*, Shemot, *Yahel Or*, p. 488 n. 69.

41 Weiser, intro, p. 10. Simon depicts the undated poetic correspondence between the two in U. Simon, "Transplanting the Wisdom of Spain to Christian Lands," pp. 185-189. Dr. Avigail Rock ob"m provides a detailed explanation of this moving poetic exchange, translated into English. https://www.etzion.org.il/en/lecture-13-r-avraham-ibn-ezra-part-i, nn. 18-20.

mentions Ibn Ezra by name and answers his question relating to the date of the bringing of the Omer, upon the Jews' entrance into Eretz Yisrael.[42] Ibn Ezra is mentioned in Tosafot again by name in another context, in which he is cited as an example of a family name, uncommon in medieval Christendom.[43] While this comment is brought anonymously, it suggests Ibn Ezra's noted recognition in general, among Tosafists of the day.[44] Thus, through his ties of mutual respect and friendship with Northern French Tosafists, Ibn Ezra likely developed a new respect and acceptance for their methods of exegesis. And while he did not adopt *derash* usage in his own commentaries, except in matters of *halakhah*, he may have come to see it as a different, but legitimate method of Torah study (שבעים פנים לתורה).

Ibn Ezra's Commentaries on Sefer Daniel

As was done with both of his Commentaries on Torah I, II, Ibn Ezra's two Commentaries on the Book of Daniel I, II (Short and Long) are examined herein for possible signs of his "acculturation" in Ashkenaz. This essay's two-way comparison of his commentaries (i.e., in relation to Rashi, where possible, and to each other) focuses on two primary themes in Sefer Daniel. The first subject deals with the possibility of deriving messianic calculations of the End of Days; the second topic focuses on the identities of the "Four Kingdoms" of the Jewish Exile, as represented in Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and Daniel's visions. These topics relate to Daniel's despondency following the destruction of the First Temple, and his longing for an end to the Exile and the rebuilding of the Second Temple. The devastation and spiritual crisis suffered by Jews who experienced the destruction of the First Temple and its initial aftermath was mitigated in part by the knowledge that the Second Temple would be rebuilt after seventy years (Daniel 9:2). This was not the case for the Jews who experienced the destruction of the Second Temple, or for the many succeeding generations of its nearly two-thousand-year Exile, for whom the final Messianic Redemption remains elusive and obscure.

From Tannaitic times following the failed Bar Kokhba revolt, until today's modern era, which witnessed the Holocaust, Jewish experiences of persecution and destruction have spurred concomitant speculations of Messianic predictions among Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews, on both Rabbinic and popular levels. The Talmudic position opposes the use of messianic speculations (BT San. 97b) in light of devastating

42 BT RH 13a, BT Kid. 37b. Cited in Weiser, Introduction, p. 10.

43 BT Taanit 20b. Cited in Weiser, ibid.

44 Weiser, Introduction, vol. 1, p. 10.

consequences wrought from their failures to materialize. Nevertheless, many great Rabbinic leaders (including R. Saadiah Gaon, Rashi and Rambam), engaged in End of Days predictions in order to comfort the suffering and despairing Jewish masses. Their speculations ranged from "activist" predictions of the imminent Messianic revelation, to distant forecasts of the Advent, based on the Talmudic interpretation of the biblical verse, "in its time… I will hasten it" (בְּעִתָּהּ אֲחִישֶׁנָּה) (Isa. 60:22).[45]

As noted, this essay will evaluate the messianic calculations of Ibn Ezra relative to Rashi when possible, in order to gauge his acculturation (or non-acculturation) in Christian Europe. Before doing so, it is necessary to contextualize Rashi's speculations within the greater medieval Ashkenazic framework in which he lived. In previous decades, historians Gerson Cohen and Yisrael Yuval classified the calculations of medieval Rabbanim (especially in the twelfth- and thirteenth-centuries), according to geographic regions – Ashkenazic or Sephardic. Though both scholars were diametrically opposed in their characterizations of "Ashekenazic" or "Sephardic" forms of messianism, their methodologies were the same, in that they both viewed their groups as entirely monolithic. Accordingly, Cohen regarded Ashkenazic messianism as entirely "restrained" and limited – i.e., being too far away from contemporary times to generate messianic excitement – while Yuval viewed it as being completely "activist" – i.e., eliciting messianic fervor with imminent dates.[46] Moreover, both historians

45 The Talmudic explanation on this verse reads: "If they are worthy, I will hasten [the Redemption]; if they are not deserving, in its appointed time" (BT San. 98a). See N. Scherman, Introduction, ch. VI, "The Scripture and the 'End'," in *Daniel: A New Translation*, trans. by H. Goldwurm, ArtScroll Tanach Series, 9th ed., N. Scherman and M. Zlotowitz, ed., (New York, 2014), pp. 47-56.

46 Cohen viewed "Ashkenazic" messianism as restrained, with far-away dates, and resulting from obscure, esoteric means. These methods include superstition, prophecies and dreams, as well as independent *gematriot* unrelated to the biblical context, as part of their approach. He contrasted this with what the "activist," i.e., nearby dates, and rationalistic speculations by Sephardic Jews. Thus, Cohen viewed Rashi's messianic interpretations in Daniel and the Talmud as "nothing more than an exegete's elucidation of texts," by being too far away from contemporary times to elicit messianic excitement. See G. Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," *Studies of the Leo Baeck Institute*, ed. M. Kreutzberger, New York, 1967, pp. 271-297, esp. 276-277, 278-279, 282.
In contrast, Yuval classifies the messianic calculations of Northern French *rabbanim* as vibrant and activist, especially prior to the fifth Jewish millennium, corresponding to the year 1240 CE, which he claims was a direct response to Christian influences. Yuval's theory does not address Rashi's messianic calculations, even though they correspond to much later dates. Yuval cites Ashkenazic *gematriyot* related to 1240 CE and the *aliyah* of Northern French rabbis to Eretz Yisrael ca. 1210 as examples of this millenarian fervor. He also notes *gematriyot* connected with contemporary events/dates in Christendom (e.g., 1096, whose messianic expectation culminated in tragedy, in the first Crusade), or

included Rashi within their own respective "Ashkenazic" settings, despite the fact that Rashi's more rationalistic tendencies did not comport with the "typical," *derash*-based approach of greater Northern France, either in form or in content.

Historian Ephraim Kanarfogel presents a third group – i.e., Rashi and his followers – whose speculations do not adhere to the extreme features of either category noted above.[47] According to Kanarfogel, Rashi's methodology was neither "distant" nor connected with independent *gematriyot* (per Cohen's view); nor was it "imminent," based on millenarian events (per Yuval). Rather, it contained overlapping features of both. Kanarfogel concludes that there was not a homogenous system of messianic calculations by Ashkenazic rabbis in the late eleventh- through thirteenth-centuries. Instead, a "two-tiered" system of dates – imminent and distant, and of multiple approaches – coexisted simultaneously, based on the above-noted rabbinic interpretation: "If they merit, 'I will hasten [the Redemption]; if they do not [merit], 'in its time" (BT San. 98a).[48] The comparisons between Rashi and Ibn Ezra discussed herein are based on Kanarfogel's view of Rashi's messianic calculations.

The Calculations in Sefer Daniel, According to Rashi and Ibn Ezra

The messianic calculations discussed herein are based primarily on three verses in Sefer Daniel:

1) the number of "days"– 1,290 and 1,335, "from the time the daily sacrifice was taken away"[49] (מעת הוסר התמיד), after which the Redemption is expected to come וּמֵעֵת הוּסַר הַתָּמִיד וְלָתֵת שִׁקּוּץ שֹׁמֵם יָמִים אֶלֶף מָאתַיִם וּתְשִׁעִים: אַשְׁרֵי הַמְחַכֶּה וְיַגִּיעַ לְיָמִים אֶלֶף שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שְׁלֹשִׁים וַחֲמִשָּׁה (Dan. 12:11-12).

related to Jesus' birth and crucifixion. In Yuval's view, the above examples attest to a vibrant culture of messianic speculation among Northern French (and secretly active, German Pietist) Jewish scholars, which was in direct response to Christian events and theology. Indeed, Jewish millenarianism in answer to Christian theology is part of Yuval's larger, controversial theory in his book.

See also E. Kanarfogel, "Ashkenazic Messianic Calculations from Rashi and his Generation through the Tosafist Period" [Hebrew], in *Rashi: Demuto vi-Yetsirato* vol. II, ed. by A. Grossman and S. Japhet. Jerusalem, 2008, pp. 381-401. Kanarfogel provides a summary of Cohen's and Yuval's views and illustrates how both utilized the same body of primary source material but arrived at opposite conclusions. He similarly notes A. Grossman's rejection of Yuval's stance on another messianic topic – the fate of Gentiles – to be discussed later (see n. 75).

47 Kanarfogel, "Ashkenazic Messianic Calculations," ibid.

48 Kanarfogel, ibid., pp. 384 (n. 5), 399-401.

49 Translations of Sefer Daniel herein are by Koren unless otherwise noted. Sefer Daniel, Koren Publishers Jerusalem, Translated by H. Fisch, (Jerusalem, 1982).

2) the cryptic phrase, "for a time, times, and a half" "לְמוֹעֵד מוֹעֲדִים וָחֵצִי" (Dan. 12:7) and its Aramaic equivalent "עַד עִדָּן וְעִדָּנִין וּפְלַג עִדָּן" (Dan. 7:25); "כִּי לְמוֹעֵד מוֹעֲדִים וָחֵצִי וּכְכַלּוֹת נַפֵּץ יַד עַם קֹדֶשׁ תִּכְלֶינָה כָּל אֵלֶּה"
3) the hint, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then shall the sanctuary be restored", (Dan. 8:14). "וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי עַד עֶרֶב בֹּקֶר אַלְפַּיִם וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וְנִצְדַּק קֹדֶשׁ".

Rashi's *Perush* on Calculations

Rashi's calculations are based on the methodology of his illustrious Geonic predecessor, R. Saadiah Gaon, whom he cites, although their final dates differ.[50] Rashi interprets the 1,290 "days" as the number of years "from the time the daily sacrifice was taken away" (i.e., six years before the destruction of the Second Temple – 62 CE), after which the messiah will arrive (Rashi 12:11). This corresponds to the date 1352 CE.[51] Rashi claims the difference between 1,290 and 1,335 represents the 45 years after the messiah's initial arrival, during which time he will be in hiding prior to his revelation, which will then complete the Redemption (Rashi 12:12). Second is the cryptic phrase, "for a time, times, and a half" – "לְמוֹעֵד מוֹעֲדִים וָחֵצִי" and its Aramaic equivalent "עַד עִדָּן וְעִדָּנִין וּפְלַג עִדָּן". Rashi claims these "times" represent two unequal periods in Jewish history which anticipate the Redemption (Rashi 7:25).[52] These periods begin with the Exodus from Egypt and end with the Messianic Advent, once again in 1352 CE.[53] Third is the verse, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then shall the sanctuary be restored" "עַד עֶרֶב בֹּקֶר אַלְפַּיִם וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וְנִצְדַּק קֹדֶשׁ". Rashi's *perush* here uses the addition of a hidden *gematriya* from the verse itself "עֶרֶב בֹּקֶר", which equals 574 (Rashi 8:14).

50 Rashi 8:14. Rashi is presumed to have used a Hebrew version of Rasag's work (אמונות ודעות), originally in Arabic, for his method of calculations in Daniel (see below, n. 53). Cited in Kanarfogel, ibid.

51 The adding of 1290 or 1335 years to 68 CE – for messianic dates of 1358 CE and 1403 CE respectively – was used by later exegetes (e.g., Ramban). It was a slight modification of Rashi, who used 62 CE as the starting date.

52 Description is per Kanarfogel, "Ashkenazic Messianic Calculations," p. 383.

53 Like Rasag, Rashi interprets *le-moed* as prefatory to two and a half (unequal) periods (מוֹעֲדִים וָחֵצִי) of Jewish dominion before the destruction of the First Temple. According to this calculation, the first period was 410 years (the duration of the First Temple); the second was 480 years (from the Egyptian Exodus until the building of the First Temple), totaling 890 years. When adding 445 (חֵצִי – half) to 890, the sum total is 1,335 years – the number mentioned by Daniel. Rashi's and Rasag's numbers differed slightly. Rasag added 1,335 years to the date of Daniel's prophecy (which he did not give), to calculate the Messianic arrival (ca. 965 CE – before Rashi's time). In contrast, Rashi's method added 1,290 to 62 CE (מעת הוסר התמיד), thereby arriving at 1352 CE for the messianic advent.

Rashi explains the sum of 2,300 and 574 (2,874) as representing the total number of years from the first Exile of Egypt to the Messianic Arrival. This sum 2,874 also accords internally with the earlier two messianic verses – i.e., 1290 "days," and "for a time, times, and a half" "לְמוֹעֵד מוֹעֲדִים וָחֵצִי". This is achieved by being the composite of two time periods which culminate in the Messianic Age: 1. the total number of years from the beginning of the Egyptian Exile until six years preceding the destruction of the Second Temple "וּמֵעֵת הוּסַר הַתָּמִיד", which equals 1,584 years; 2. the 1,290 "days" i.e., years, "from the time the daily sacrifice was taken away" until the arrival of the Messiah. Once again, the final date in this set of computations is 1352 CE.[54] Kanarfogel suggests that Rashi's later dates (i.e., 1352 CE, some two hundred fifty years after his death, in 1104 CE) might have contained an indirect polemical message of restraint and moderation, in the face of Jewish millenaristic fervor (and disappointment) happening in his day. The notorious *gematriya* of 1096, circulating as the year of the Messianic Redemption, culminated instead in catastrophe for the Jews of Ashknenaz in the wake of the First Crusade (1096 CE).[55]

In his interpretations of the above three messianic verses, Ibn Ezra does not make any reference to Rashi, although he refers to Rasag's speculations in both his Short and Long Commentaries I, II on Daniel (see below). Since Rashi's messianic calculations did not comport with the "typical" Ashkenazic mode of *derash* and deviated from his own usual *derash*-based exegesis, perhaps they were not well known or accessible to the general public, even in his home territory. Furthermore, even if Ibn Ezra *were* aware of Rashi's calculations, he consistently directs his comments at their originator, Rasag, whose *perush* he cites numerous times throughout his biblical commentaries.[56] Thus, a comparison to Rashi is not meaningful in this context.

Ibn Ezra's *Perush* on Calculations (Long and Short)

Ibn Ezra analyzes the above-mentioned messianic computations in a bold and unique fashion, in which he is consistent in both his Short and Long Commentaries I, II. First, contrary to the standard interpretation by medieval Jewish exegetes, in which

54 Kanarfogel claims that Rashi's use of *gematriya* here is both plausible and exegetically sound. Furthermore, as his interpretations in the above verses are all unified in one cohesive system, Rashi's approach should not be seen as purely "exegetical" and remote; rather it should also be considered as "actively" messianic. Kanarfogel, "Ashkenazic Messianic Calculations," pp. 383-384.

55 Kanarfogel, ibid., p. 401.

56 Indeed, in his commentaries on Torah and Megilot alone, Ibn Ezra cites Rasag's writings 284 times and refers to him reverentially. Krinsky, Introduction, (אות ס'), p. 41.

1,290/1,335 "days" refer to years, Ibn Ezra claims they are actual days. He maintains the word "days" may only be understood as "years" if it is mentioned on its own, but not if it's associated with a number, like "1,290 days" (Dan. 9:24).[57] Consequently, instead of spanning more than a millennium in time, they comprise merely some three and a half years. According to this interpretation, 1,290 days refers to the amount of time in which the Second Temple stood "without the daily sacrifice" "וּמֵעֵת הוּסַר הַתָּמִיד" before it was destroyed. Likewise, the 1,335 days correspond to a similar period of intense Jewish suffering before the Messianic advent.[58] In a unified fashion, Ibn Ezra shows that the three and a half years also defines the period of time in the second verse, "for a time, times, and a half" (Dan. 12:7) "לְמוֹעֵד מוֹעֲדִים וָחֵצִי". Ibn Ezra claims, (like Rasag, and Rashi), that the first reference to *moed* "לְמוֹעֵד" is prefatory. He then argues that the minimal number of a Hebrew plural form is *three* – not two, unless it is a dual-plural form – For example, שנתים are two years, while שָׁנִים are at least three years.[59] Ibn Ezra also claims that the Aramaic translation of *moed*, *idan*, refers to a single year; and *hetzi* refers to half a *mo'ed*, which is half a year. Thus, *moadim va-hetzi* "מוֹעֲדִים וָחֵצִי" totals three and a half years, which approximates the 1,335 days mentioned above. He concludes that this period will entail great Jewish suffering and will precede the futuristic war between "the king of the North" and "the king of the South," after which the messianic "Redeemer will come to Israel."[60] Finally, Ibn Ezra explains the third verse in a similar linguistic fashion. Thus, the "2,300 evenings and mornings" refer to 2,300 actual days (and not years, per Rasag and Rashi). Ibn Ezra claims that these approximately six years and three months refer to past years of intense Jewish suffering under the persecution of a Greek ruler.[61] In both his Short and Long commentaries,

57 Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, Daniel "The Fourth Prophecy," Mondschein ed., pp. 61-62; Long Commentary to Pentateuch II, Mikraot Gedolot, Dan. 9:24.

58 Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary II, Dan. 12:11; Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, Daniel, "The Fourth Vision," Mondschein ed., pp. 61, 62, 76.

59 For a similar analysis, see Ibn Ezra's elucidation on the term (בין הערבים) in Long Commentary to Pentateuch II, MG Shemot 12:6. Similarly, see Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, Daniel, "The Fourth Vision," Mondschein edition, p. 75, n. 82.

60 Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary II, Dan. 12:11; Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, Daniel, "The Fourth Vision," Mondschein edition, pp. 74-75. Ibn Ezra identifies the northern kingdom as Rome, and the southern one as Egypt. Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary II, Dan. 11:40.

61 While his exegetical position is the same, Ibn Ezra identifies the Greek king differently in his Short and Long Commentaries. In his Short Commentary, he refers to a Greek king, "Geskelgas." Short Commentary Daniel, Mondschein edition, "The Second Prophecy," (Ch. 8), pp. 28-29, n. 29. In his Long Commentary II (citing Josephus), he refers to "King Antiochus who fell off a roof and died" (Dan. 8:25-27).

therefore, Ibn Ezra's interpretations of these messianic verses show his exegetical consistency and his lack of ideological change (i.e., messianic "acculturation"), during his residence in Ashkenazic lands.

Ibn Ezra's Views on Speculation of the End of Days

How did Ibn Ezra regard the possibility of predicting the End of Days from Sefer Daniel? Ibn Ezra consistently rejects the practice of messianic speculation in both of his commentaries on Daniel. For example, in his Short Commentary I, he cites and dismisses the "rational," text-based calculations of Rasag.[62] Using arguments of grammar and logic, Ibn Ezra explains the implausibility of interpreting 1,290 "days" as years, and, hence, of calculating a messianic date. He states: "If the interpretation was as [Rasag] said, the simplest of simpletons would know this secret (הקל שבקלים ידע זה הסוד). And how would one explain [the angel's order of secrecy], 'Shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the end?'" (Dan. 12:4). Ibn Ezra further notes the absurdity of the angel's telling Daniel to wait for 1,335 "years" (Dan. 12:12), as people do not live that long.[63] Similarly, he refers to Rasag's calculations of "2,300 evenings and mornings" (8:14) as "all vanity" and no longer relevant, as "their time had already long passed." Accordingly, it is impossible to derive any messianic calculation from this verse.[64]

Perhaps Ibn Ezra's most scathing attack against such speculations can be seen in his Long Commentary II (Dan. 11:31). Here he explains the irrationality of deriving messianic calculations, particularly by *gematriyot*. He states: "All who interpret words or numbers by calculations of *gematriya*, it is all emptiness and evil spirit; because Daniel did not know the End, and [certainly, neither did] those who came after him…"[65] Mondschein notes that Ibn Ezra's strong opposition to messianic

62 Rasag's cohesive method of messianic calculations in Daniel was practiced in part by Rashi, although most likely, Ibn Ezra was not aware of that when he wrote his short *perush*, during his early time in Italy.

63 Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, "Fourth Prophecy," ibid. p. 62; also in Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary II, Dan. 9:24. See also A. Mondschein, "On the Attitude of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra to the Exegetical Usage of the Hermeneutic Norm *Gematria*" [in Hebrew], *Teudah* 8 (*Mechkarim bi-Yetsirato shel Avraham Ibn Ezra*), (1992), p. 145.

64 (הכל הבל, וכבר עבר זמנם משנים רבות). Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, Daniel, "Second Prophecy," p. 29, n. 39; see also Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary II on Daniel (8:14).

65 Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary II on Daniel (11:31) [translation mine]. Also cited in A. Mondschein, "*On the Attitude of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra to… Gematria*," p. 144. Similarly, on Daniel's statement, "And I heard, but I did not understand" (12:8), Ibn Ezra states: "And behold, it is clear that Daniel did not comprehend the End – the arrival of the Redeemer."

speculations and *gematriyot* was contrary to his usual method of indirect criticism of Ashkenazic exegetes or their methods while in France, even though in this case he was citing Sephardic exegetes. Accordingly, Mondschein suggests that Ibn Ezra's vehement opposition here may have stemmed from the fear of furthering messianic excitement – and thus, mass disillusionment – in the context of failed, twelfth-century Sephardic messianic movements and global turmoil spurred by the Crusades in both Muslim and Christian empires.[66] If that is true, then Ibn Ezra's polemical concerns precluded any acculturation on his part – either in substance or in tone in this area.

The Four Kingdoms in Daniel

Another theme in Sefer Daniel is that of the Four Kingdoms, which represent the four Jewish Exiles. They are symbolically prophesized in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:31-45) and in Daniel's first and second visions (chapters 7-8). Nebuchadnezzar's dream contained a personified "terrible" image, comprised of four, increasingly inferior metals, from its golden head down to its iron-clay feet. Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar, "You are this head of gold" (2:38) – i.e., the first kingdom is that of Bavel. After it, a second, "lesser," kingdom of silver would then rule; followed by a third, brass realm (2:39). The iron legs (with clay-iron feet) represent a fourth empire, which will "crush all others," before an eternal kingdom of G-d will "break… and consume all these [mortal] kingdoms" (2:40-45). Similarly, in Daniel's first, frightening vision (ch. 7), "four great beasts" were explained as symbolizing four successive empires. The fourth, exceedingly fierce and warmongering beast was "different" and enigmatic. With its ten horns and "blaspheming little horn," it was foretold to "devour the whole earth" until its eventual destruction and replacement by the eternal messianic kingdom. Daniel states, "I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast" (7:19). Although additional information was given about this kingdom (7:23-28), its identity remained elusive. Finally, in Daniel's second vision (ch. 8), animals once again symbolized the ruling empires which followed Bavel. In this vision, the second and third kingdoms are clearly identified by the angel Gabriel. He states: "The ram with two horns which you saw are the kings of Medea and Persia. And the he-goat is the King of Yavan (Greece)…" (8:21-22). While the identities of the first three kingdoms are revealed in Sefer Daniel, the fourth kingdom is not. It thus remains a source of debate between Ibn Ezra and the overwhelming majority of commentators.

66 A. Mondschein, "*On the Attitude of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra to… Gematria*," pp. 137-160, esp. p.144.

R. Saadiah Gaon's interpretation of the Four Kingdoms was based on the classic midrashic interpretation of Hazal. This view, to which Rashi ascribed, was nearly universally accepted by Sephardic and Ashkenazic commentators alike.[67] *Hazal* identified the four kingdoms as Babylonia (*Bavel*), Media-Persia, Greece (*Yavan*), and Rome (*Edom*).[68] According to this paradigm, the final pre-messianic battle in *Eretz Yisrael* would culminate in the total destruction of Edom (Rome) for its persecution of the Jews.[69] With the ascendancy of Islam, medieval Jewish exegetes living under its auspices began factoring *Yishmael* into the four kingdoms.[70] Thus, Ibn Ezra cites Rasag's understanding of the fourth kingdom as being a combination of Rome and Islam, who together will conquer *Eretz Yisrael* before the messianic redemption.[71] While Ibn Ezra also includes Islam in his own model of the four kingdoms, he does not categorize it as a subsidiary or hybrid of Rome. Instead, he combines the individual third and fourth kingdoms of Greece and Rome into one large "third kingdom" – i.e., *Yavan-Romi*,[72] and he classifies Islam as the fourth empire. Ibn Ezra concludes, "Thus,

67 Rashi clearly identifies the first three kingdoms in Nebuchadnezzar's vision according to the view of *Hazal* (Dan. 2:39). His commentary, however, does not identity the fourth kingdom (Rome) in this dream, simply calling it "difficult" (2:40). Rather, he identifies Rome only by allusion in later verses (e.g., in stating that the eternal heavenly kingdom would be established "while the reign of the Romans was still ongoing" [2:44].) This is likely due to medieval censorship. A. Grossman notes in the context of another messianic topic – the fate of the gentiles at the End of Days – that the printed edition of *perush* Rashi on Isaiah and Psalms frequently showed the more innocuous term "Amalek," instead of Rashi's term "Esav" (reference to Rome). See A. Grossman, "'Redemption by conversion' in the teachings of early Ashkenazi sages," Zion LIX-4 (1994), 336, n. 27.

68 H. Goldwurm, "Prefatory Note to v. 40," *Daniel: A New Translation*, trans. by H. Goldwurm, p. 104. See also Mondschein, ed., Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary on Daniel, "Nebuchadnezzar's Dream," p. 20, n. 15, (p. 109).

69 E.g., Ovadiah's prophecy of Edom's obliteration ("For your violence against your brother Yaakov, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever" [1:9]) is classically understood by *Hazal* and medieval exegetes – including Rashi and Radak (but not Ibn Ezra), as occurring at the End of Days.

70 Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, Daniel, Mondschein, ed., "First Prophecy," p. 20, n. 1-2, (p. 97).

71 Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary, Daniel, Mondschein, ed., "First Prophecy," p. 20, n. 15-16 (p. 109). Mondschein clarifies Rasag's interpretation of the fourth beast – Rome, working together with "the little horn," Ishmael.

72 Ibn Ezra maintains consistently that Rome and Greece are one kingdom. For example, his short *perush* on Daniel's First Vision reads: "The third kingdom [was] likened to a leopard, namely, Alexander. And its four wings (7:6) [represent] the four kings who reigned after him, as his empire was divided into four regions, one of them being the kingdom of Rome," ibid., p. 20, n.13. Similarly, in his Long Commentary II on Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Ibn Ezra claims Alexander of Greece is the king of "Aram." As Aram was referred to as "Kittim" and translated by the Targum as *Romai* (Rome)

the brass kingdom is the kingdom of Greece, and the kingdom of *Aram* (Rome) is [that] of Greece. Therefore, the iron [fourth] empire is the realm of Ishmael" (Dan. 2:40). Accordingly, Ibn Ezra's four realms are: *Bavel*, Persia-Media, Greece-Rome, and Islam, with the final battle resulting in the total destruction of Ishmael, contrary to Rashi's view.[73]

While Ibn Ezra's criticizes Rasag's fourth realm – Rome-Islam – for its lack of a common law/religion,[74] he maintains that his own hybrid, "third empire" (Rome-Greece) will be pitted against a singular Islam at the End of Days (Dan. 2:40). Referring to Daniel's "third" and "fourth" kingdoms as the existing realms of his day,[75] Ibn Ezra notes the wars being waged between them (Crusades), with neither side being fully victorious: "Indeed, until today, there are places in which Ishmael vanquishes the kingdom of Aram [Rome], and places in which it is defeated [by it]."[76] Accordingly, it seems clear that Ibn Ezra's view of the pre-Messianic battle between Rome-Greece and Islam (Dan. 7:14) is of a religious war between Christianity and Islam: Christianity being represented by "Greece" (i.e., Byzantium, the "Eastern Roman Empire") and its Western counterpart in Italy – "Rome."

The exegete's consistent and primary focus, in both his Short and Long Commentaries on Daniel I, II, is with the fourth kingdom – Islam, which will be totally eradicated at the End of Days. Commenting on its destruction, he states: "The fourth beast will lose its entire body, and there will not be any remnant or refugee for Ishmael… And one like the son of man (כבר אנוש), which is the Holy Nation, who are Yisrael, … [will] take vengeance on the fourth beast for all the evil it inflicted on

in Balak's prophecy, they are the same person (Num. 24:24). Ibn Ezra also comments on the biblical verse identifying *Kittim* as one of the sons of *Yavan*, "Therefore I said in… Daniel, that the kingdoms of *Yavan* and *Romi* (Rome) are one" (Gen. 10:4). Also referenced in Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary on Daniel, Mondschein ed., Appendix 1, p. 201.

73 Ibn Ezra consistently maintains throughout his biblical exegesis that the current (third) Exile is not that of Edom, but of Yavan, e.g., "*Yefet* is from the sons of *Yavan*; so… we are in the *Galut* of *B'nei Yefet* – not in *Galut* Edom" (Gen. 10:1). He further claims independently that Ovadiah's prophecy of Edom's destruction was not messianic, as Edom had already been decimated in the aftermath of the destruction of the First Temple and was no longer in existence (Ovadiah 1:10). (See above, n. 66.)

74 Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary on Dan. 2:40 (ואיך תתחבר מלכות ישמעאל עם מלכות ארם ... ואין תורתם אחת).

75 Dan. 2:40 שתי מלכויות, מלכות ארם שהוא מלכות יון ומלכות ישמעאל, ואלו השתים מלכויות ביום הזה

76 Ibid [Translation mine.]

Israel."[77] Ibn Ezra's preoccupation with the fate of Islam is noteworthy in light of his personal experiences of persecution in both realms: Ibn Ezra fled his native Spain during the violent, Almohad invasions, and he escaped to Christian Europe during the Second Crusade (1144-1155). Clearly, his continued stance on the Fourth Kingdom as representing Islam, despite his long residence in Christendom, shows his lack of acculturation in this area.[78]

A Comparison of Ibn Ezra's Commentaries to Each Other (Daniel I, II)

As previously noted, this essay's second method of testing for Ibn Ezra's exegetical adaptation is by comparing his earlier and later commentaries to each other. Ibn Ezra wrote his early, Short Commentary on Daniel I between 1140-1145,[79] shortly after his arrival in Italy; he composed his second, Long Commentary on Daniel II in Rouen, Northern France, in 1155. Despite stylistic differences between his Short and Long Commentaries on Daniel I, II, both are consistent in their exegetical orientation (viz. messianic speculations and the Four Kingdoms). This again points to Ibn Ezra's steadfast consistency in his messianic principles and methods in Sefer Daniel, throughout his time in Christendom.

77 Ibn Ezra's Long Commentary II Dan. 7:14 [Translation mine]. Ibn Ezra contrasts the fourth beast's obliteration with the fate of the three earlier beasts, "[whose] dominion was taken away, yet [whose] lives were prolonged for a season and a time" (Dan. 7:11-12).

78 Ibn Ezra's emphasis on futuristic Jewish vengeance against the Gentiles – Islam, in his paradigm – counters Yuval's claim of an absolute dichotomy between medieval Sephardic and Ashkenazic exegetes on this topic. Yuval posits Ashkenazim characteristically believed in a "vengeful Redemption" (i.e., exclusively Jewish), while Sephardim supported a "conversionary Redemption," i.e, a universalistic model (Yuval, *Sh'nei Goyim be-Vitnech*, pp. 109-131). He notes that Ibn Ezra interprets the term *Edom* in numerous biblical passages prophesying messianic vengeance as referring to "biblical Edom and not Rome," (ibid., p. 126). However, Yuval's conclusion that Ibn Ezra typified "the Sephardic view of conversionary Redemption, instead of [the Ashkenazic] stance of vengeful Redemption" is incorrect. Indeed, Ibn Ezra saw the theme of vengeance as an integral precursor of the Redemption; however, in his view, the vengeance was aimed at the religion of his native Spain (Islam), (e.g., Ibn Ezra on Dan. 12:1), rather than on the Christian world in which he ended up. See also A. Grossman, "Redemption by conversion," pp. 325-242, for his rejection of Yuval's monolithic stance viz. medieval Ashkenazic sages. Grossman illustrates that Ashkenazic rabbis, including Rabbenu Gershom and Rashi, supported a "two-tiered system," which incorporated the conversion of Gentiles after the period of vengeance. He further shows that the theme of pre-messianic vengeance had ancient Jewish origins (biblical, Talmudic and apocalyptic) and was not an exclusively Ashkenazic, anti-Christian notion.

79 Sela and Fruedenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings," p. 18. See also A. Mondschein, ed., *Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary on Daniel* (Ramat Gan, 1977), Introduction, (כ).

Aside from their literary style, the only notable difference between the two Daniel commentaries I, II[80] is Ibn Ezra's object of criticism. While openly critical of Ashkenazic practitioners of *derash* in his early, Short Commentary on Daniel I, he is circumspect in his later, Long Commentary II.[81] For example, in his early, Short Introduction to Daniel I, Ibn Ezra laments the contamination of "the pure spring of truth," whose water gets increasingly more contaminated as it moves further away from the source (מימי הנחל הנובע הקרובים ממנו תרמסם רגל, ויתערבו בם מים זרים...). His metaphor denounces the Ashkenazic practice of using *midrashim* literally and taking the biblical words out of context, contrary to the intent of Hazal. He sees this process as one which gets increasingly more corrupted and entrenched with each passing generation. In contrast, Ibn Ezra is more circumspect in his later, Long Commentary on Daniel II. Despite his biting attacks against *gematriyot* and midrashic explanations in both his commentaries I, II, Ibn Ezra does not attack its Ashkenazic practitioners directly in his later commentary. Instead, he directs his criticism against an anonymous "great commentator in Spain" (Dan. 1:1). He then states: "These [interpretations] are all full of air, since how is it possible that a person would speak a word, but his intent was another word? And one who says this is considered crazy (מהמשוגעים הוא נחשב) ... And it would be better for him to say, 'I don't know,' rather than to distort the words of ... God." Ibn Ezra's redirected tirade in this case is significant. Scholars like Mondschein would likely attribute this change to his professional caution in Ashkenaz. However, it is also possible that Ibn Ezra's change stems from a newfound sense of respect for the Ashkenazic practitioners of *derash*, which he developed during his time in Northern France.

This essay addressed the novel subject of Ibn Ezra's acculturation in Ashkenaz, by assessing his earlier and later exegetical works relative to each other and to Rashi, the representative Ashkenazic *pashtan*. The scope of this paper was narrowly focused on Ibn Ezra's Introductions to Pentateuch I, II, his Torah Commentaries I, II, and his Commentaries to Daniel I, II. Thus, a wide-ranging comparative analysis of all his early and later extant works would be needed to fully assess this issue. Notwithstanding these limitations, it seems clear that Ibn Ezra did not modify his ideological-exegetical views to conform with his fellow Ashkenazic exegetes. His principles remained consistent

80 Ibn Ezra's later *perush* is a running commentary on the entire book of Daniel, while his Short Commentary I is arranged topically and contains an introduction and five chapters: Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and Daniel's four prophecies. Mondschein, Ibn Ezra's Short Commentary on Daniel, Introduction, pp. (כ, י"ח, י"ז).

81 Mondschein, ibid., p. (כ"ח).

from his early years in Italy to his later years in Northern France. What did change over time, however, was his tone and manner of address to his Ashkenazic readers during his residence in Christendom, moving from sarcasm and condescension to intellectual respect. Indeed, Ibn Ezra's later respect for *derash*-exegesis is neither a form of "cultural tolerance" nor expedience; rather it is a recognition of the value of religious, exegetical diversity in Ashkenaz, under the rubric of *Shiv'im Panim le'Torah*.

APPENDIX

	Source	Long or Short version	דבור המתחיל	Ibn Ezra's Commentary and References to Rashi	Comments
1.	Bereishit 32:9	Short (Standard version M"G)	"וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לִפְלֵיטָה"	ומה שאמר רבינו שלמה שיהיה לפליטה בעל כרחו הוא דרך דרש...	IE dismisses Rashi's view as *derash*
2.	Shemot 28:30	Short (Non-standard version)	"וְנָתַתָּ אֶל חֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת הָאוּרִים וְאֶת הַתֻּמִּים"	ורב שלמה מפרש התורה מ"כ [מצאתי כתוב] כי האו"ת בשם המפורש... ועתה פקח עיניך...	"Open your eyes" appears sarcastic
3.	Shemot 9:30	Long (Standard Version M"G)	"וְאַתָּה"	אמר רבינו שלמה... וזו המלה איננה נמצאת כאשר חשב...	Respectful manner of disagreement
4.	Shemot 12:6	Long	"בֵּין הָעַרְבָּיִם"	מלה קשה. ורבינו שלמה אמר... ולא נתן טעם למה ערבים שנים...	IE respectfully prefaces his comment by noting it is a difficult word
5.	Shemot 15:2	Long	"עָזִּי"	אמר רבינו שלמה ז"ל, כי יש הפרש בין עזי בקמץ חטף ובין עזי בקבוץ... ומי שיבין בלשון ישמעאל ידע ההפרש שיש ביניהם...	Respectfully excuses Rashi's ignorance of the Hebrew grammatical rule, due to the inaccessibility of Arabic language to Ashkenazic Jews
6.*	Shemot 16:15	Long	"וַיִּרְאוּ [וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו מָן הוּא]"	אמר רבינו שלמה, כי בלשון ישמעאל תרגום מה הוא מן הוא. והמגיד לו ככה לא דבר נכון, כי איננו נופל מן בלשונם כי על אדם...	IE respectfully excuses Rashi for an alleged grammatical mistake due to his being misinformed about Arabic. However, IE appears to be mistaken: our version of Rashi's *perush* is exactly the opposite and it agrees with IE's view

	Source	Long or Short version	דבור המתחיל	Ibn Ezra's Commentary and References to Rashi	Comments
7.	Shemot 18:14	Long	"וַיַּרְא... אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָעָם"	ורבינו שלמה אמר, בעבור שמשה יושב [כמלך] לבדו וישראל נצבים... ואין זה דרך מוסר. ואין ספק כי מעלת משה גדולה... ומשה עשה הדרך הנכונה, כי השופט יושב ובעלי הריב עומדים...	After presenting Rashi's viewpoint, IE matter-of-factly offers his own, differing opinion, thereby legitimizing both stances.
8.	Shemot 18:26	Long	"יִשְׁפְּטוּ הֵם"	כי ישפוטו בשורוק תחת חולם, ור' שלמה רצה להפריש ביניהם... ונוכל לומר דרך דקדוק...	IE misquotes Rashi (or had another version), but he does so respectfully, by suggesting a grammatical approach (which Rashi, in fact, agrees with)
9.	Shemot 19:2	Long	"וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל"	... על כן הזכיר ויחן, כי מועטים הם... ורבינו שלמה אמר כי כנגד ההר מזרח...	After citing his own opinion, IE matter-of-factly cites Rashi's view.
10.	Shemot 23:19	Long	"רֵאשִׁית"	ורבי שלמה אמר כי גדי הוא הקטן הרך ...ואיננו כן, כי גדי... רק שהוא מהעזים. ובלשון ערבי... ואל תתמה, בעבור שלא נהגו אנשי אלה המקומות לאכול גדי עזים... וכן אוכלים אותו בספרד ואפריקא וא"י...	IE respectfully engages Rashi via Arabic linguistics and other "medical" facts unknown to Ashkenazim
11. ***	Shemot 26:18 (twice)	Long	"וְעָשִׂיתָ [אֶת הַקְּרָשִׁים]"	... ועל דעת רבינו שלמה כי במעשה נס היה עומד... ואם קבלה היא שהעובי היה כך, נשמע ונקבל...	Ibn Ezra's comments pertain to Rashi's interpretation, based on BT Shab. 98b. He is prepared to defer to Rashi's interpretation, if it is the proper tradition
12.	Shemot 26:31	Long	"וְעָשִׂיתָ פָּרֹכֶת"	ככה מצאנו שיעשה שלמה לפתח הדביר... ופירש רש"י ז"ל...	IE challenges Rashi indirectly with other biblical references
13.	Shemot 28:6	Long	"הָאֵפֹד"	ורבינו שלמה אמר כי האו"ת היו כתבי שם המפורש. ואילו ראה תשובת רבינו האי לא אמר ככה	IE respectfully disagrees with Rashi, while "excusing" Rashi's ignorance of Rav Hai Gaon's responsa.

	Source	Long or Short version	דבור המתחיל	Ibn Ezra's Commentary and References to Rashi	Comments
14.	Shemot 28:36	Long	"וְעָשִׂיתָ צִיץ"	... כי בארץ ישמעאל ובספרד ... והשרים עושים ציץ זהב... על מקום המצח... כי מנהג א"י ...אינו כמנהג אלה המקומות. והוצרך רבינו שלמה לתקן המקראות.	IE goes to great lengths to explain cultural Islamic and Sephardic practices unknown to Ashkenazic Jews, which affected the understanding of the verse.
15.	[Ber. 1:20]	Long/ Fragmentary שיטה האחרת	"יִשְׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם"	ורב יצחק בן שלמה אמר... [צ"ל ר' שלמה בן יצחק]...	[Mondschein adds this citation within the list of Rashi references.]

* 6. In his early Short Commentary I, Ibn Ezra explains this similarly, though indirectly – without referring to Rashi's name. (והמפרשים שהוא בלשון ישמעאל תעו...).

Chaya Sima Koenigsberg

Accounting for Tradition: Calculations in the Commentary of R. Eleazar of Worms to Esther

There is a wealth of rabbinic traditions surrounding *Megillat Esther* that provide added insight and background into the story and its characters, not found in the text itself. A unique approach to the rabbinic teachings on the Book of Esther is taken by R. Eleazar of Worms (c.1160-c.1230)[1]. Rather than viewing the rabbinic traditions as separate from the literal reading of the text, R. Eleazar seeks to demonstrate that the rabbinic teachings are hidden within the text itself and are perceptible using an esoteric system of hermeneutical tools known as the 50 *Sha'arei Binah.* By linking talmudic teachings to the text, these tools demonstrate the magnificent complexity of the Written Torah to encompass the Oral Torah, revealing there is more concealed in the text of the *Megillah* than meets the eye.

R. Eleazar of Worms, also known as Rokeaḥ, was one of the pillars of the *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz*[2] movement and the preeminent student of the movement's leader, R. Judah

1 The exact years of R. Eleazar's life are unknown. The approximation of his birth year is based on the known year of the attack on his family, which R. Eleazar reports occurred in November of 1196 (תתקמ"ז). At the time of the attack his eldest daughter was 13. To have a daughter that age it is assumed R. Eleazar was in his early 30's at the time of the attack. If R. Eleazar got married at 18 for example, he would have been around 32 at the time of the attack. Based on this reasoning, Y. Kamelhar places R. Eleazar's birth year between 1160-65, which assumes he was married between the ages of 18-23. See Yisrael Kamelhar, *Rabbenu Eleazar ben Yehudah mi-Germaiza ha-Rokeaḥ* (Rzeszow: Ateret, 1930), p. 9 n. 3. Of course, R. Eleazar could have been married earlier or later. Ephraim Urbach writes that the year of R. Eleazar's birth cannot be known, but estimates that he was around the same age as Rabiah (R. Eliezer b. Joel ha-Levi), as they both studied with R. Ephraim of Metz and R. Judah the Pious. See Ephraim Urbach, *The Tosaphists: Their History, Writings, and Methods* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1980), 388. R. Eleazar's year of death has been listed by scholars as 1238, however, Urbach has evidence that R. Eleazar likely passed away by 1232 and certainly by 1234. See Urbach, *The Tosaphists*, p. 411. See also, Ephraim Urbach, "Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem le-R. Abraham b. Azriel" in *Tarbiz* 10 (1939), p. 35.

2 *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz*, also known as the German Pietists, were active in the Rhineland in the 12th and 13th centuries where they studied and elaborated on earlier Jewish esoteric writings and adopted a religious lifestyle of stringencies and unusual practices in an effort to fulfill God's will to the maximum. For more information on this movement see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish*

the Pious (d.1217). As a prolific and multi-disciplinary writer, R. Eleazar of Worms is credited with compiling and proliferating many of his teacher's previously oral teachings. Among the most distinctive features of R. Eleazar's writings is his careful attention to the Hebrew letters that comprise a scriptural verse, a prayer, or even the names of angels.[3] For example in his scriptural commentaries, R. Eleazar dissects biblical verses, analyzing their individual words, reconfiguring their letters and tallying and calculating their numeric value using *gematria* and other hermeneutical tools. While the extensive use of *gematria* employed by *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz* has been noted by scholars, the function of the many letter exercises and number calculations R. Eleazar engages in has remained an open question.[4] In order to understand the function of R. Eleazar's letter and number studies we will examine selections of his commentary to the Book of Esther, *Sha'arei Binah,*[5] which, in addition to general

Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1954); Joseph Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968); Haym Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in Sefer Hasidim," *AJS Review* 1 (1976): pp. 311-357; Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 1981). While there seem to have been several schools of Jewish mystics in this area, R. Eleazar of Worms belonged to the Kalonymide school founded by R. Samuel the Pious and his son R. Judah the Pious.

3 Joseph Dan, "Language of the Mystics" in Medieval Germany in *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism: International Symposium held in Frankfurt a.M., 1991*, edited by Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan. (Berlin; New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 6-27.

4 Most studies have focused on R. Eleazar's commentary to the liturgy. See for example: Scholem, *Major Trends*, 100-101; Ephraim Urbach, "Perushei ha-Tefillah ve-ha-Piyyut shel Ḥasidei Ashkenaz," in *Arugat ha-Bosem* vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1939-1953); Israel Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefillah ha-Ashkenazit haKedumah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003), pp. 47-51. For a summary and explication of the scholarly positions regarding the numeric approach of *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz* to prayer see Chaya S. Koenigsberg. "Prayer as a Prism: The Interconnectivity between the Written and Oral Torah in the Thought of R. Eleazar of Worms." (PhD Diss., Yeshiva University, 2019), pp. 1-25.

5 See R. Eleazer b. Judah of Worms, *Perush Megillat Esther: Sha'arei Binah.* (New York: Keren Menasheh ve-Sarah Lehmann, 1980). While the manuscript used for the printed commentary does not explicitly cite R. Eleazar as the author and instead is titled *Perush Megillat Esther me-Ḥakhmei Ashkenaz*, the publisher cites a number of proofs that the material was personally authored by R. Eleazar. Firstly, there is parallel material present in R. Eleazar's *Sefer Rokeaḥ* in the section on the Laws of Purim; see R. Eleazar b. Judah of Worms, *Sefer haRokeaḥ [ha-Gadol]* (Jerusalem: Zichron Aharon, 2014). Additional parallel material is found in two other manuscripts with similar commentary material to Esther; MS Oxford 268, which is the Ashkenazic commentary to the Torah most likely authored by a student of R. Eleazar, and MS Oxford 1576. The material from those two manuscripts, plus additional material, is found in a third manuscript used by the publisher to print *Sha'arei Binah*. The publisher believes the additional two manuscripts are abridged versions, from R. Eleazar's *'bet*

contextual explanations of the verses, includes a significant amount of *gematria* and other letter and number studies.

At the very start of the commentary, R. Eleazar applies the tool of *gematria* and explains that the numeric value of the opening Hebrew phrase, "בִּימֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ" – "In the days of Ahasuerus, he was Ahasuerus" – equals the numeric value of the phrase found in Talmud Megillah 11a, "הוא ברשעו מתחילתו ועד סופו" – "He [Ahasuerus] was wicked from beginning to end" – the value of each equaling 1,716.[6] Why has R. Eleazar conveyed the talmudic teaching as a *gematria?*

The next *gematria* employed by R. Eleazar relates to the talmudic teaching that Ahasuerus held his grand banquet to celebrate the completion of the seventy years of the Jewish exile about which Jeremiah prophesied and how, having not been redeemed, the Jews would remain his subjects. The Talmud Megillah 11b develops a detailed calculation of the seventy years to show how Ahasuerus calculated the third year of his reign to be the 70th year of the Jewish exile. The talmudic discussion stems from a textual difficulty. The second verse of Esther states that the story took place, "When the king [Ahasuerus] sat on his throne," which implies the beginning of the king's reign. However, the following verse, which describes the banquet, states that the events occurred in the third year of the reign of Ahasuerus. The Talmud solves this difficulty by noting that the root "שב" can mean both to sit and to rest. Thus, the first verse does not mean to imply that the story is taking place immediately when Ahasuerus first assumed his throne, but at a time when he was able to rest his mind from worrying that the Jews would be redeemed from their exile and no longer under his dominion. R. Eleazar's explanation of these verses is based on the Talmud's calculation of the 70 years but again he curiously begins his explanation of the words, "When the king sat" with a *gematria* noting that the words "כְּשֶׁבֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ" is equivalent to "משבעים שנה" – "from seventy years," both equaling 817, conveying the talmudic teaching through *gematria*.

midrash' and students, while the third manuscript, which he used for his printed edition, originated from R. Eleazar himself. However, it should be noted that the style of this *Sha'arei Binah* commentary is generally more simplistic and straightforward than R. Eleazar's other commentaries. Specifically, it has many *peshat* explanations and basic *gematriot*. In contrast, the *Sefer Rokeaḥ*, contains more complex calculations and explanations in the section on Purim. We cannot know whether it was authored by R. Eleazar's own hand, but nonetheless, like the Ashkenazic commentary to the Torah, MS Oxford 268, this commentary certainly follows R. Eleazar's approach and teachings as evidenced by parallel material in the *Sefer Rokeaḥ.*

6 R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1.

In another study of the letters of the *Megillah*, R. Eleazar explains that the word "חור" – decorations[7] – which is traditionally written with an enlarged letter *Ḥet*, has the numeric value of eight. R. Eleazar notes that this letter hints to the eight garments of the High Priest that Ahasuerus wore to his banquet, a rabbinic tradition found in Megillah 12a. In addition to wearing the clothing of the High Priest, the Sages also teach that Ahasuerus used vessels from the Temple at his banquet. R. Eleazar again references this tradition by pointing out that the numeric value of – "וְהַשְּׁקוֹת בִּכְלֵי זָהָב" – "and the drinks were in golden goblets" is equal to the numeric value of the phrase "אל בית המקדש" – "to the Temple," explaining that Ahasuerus commanded his officers to bring vessels from the Temple for the banquet.[8]

The Talmud continues its discussion of the wine that was served and comments on the phrase "וְהַשְּׁתִיָּה כַּדָּת" – "the drinking was according to the law" – refers to Torah law.[9] The Talmud explains that Torah Law prescribes that one eat more than he drinks and there was a greater quantity of food than drink at the banquet of Ahasuerus. In his commentary, without directly referencing the Talmud, R. Eleazar again employs *gematria* and notes that the numeric value of the phrase "וְהַשְּׁתִיָּה כַּדָּת" equals the numeric value of "זה מנהג כדת התורה" – "This custom accords with Torah law," following the explanation of the Talmud, with both phrases equaling 1,150.

The use of *gematria* continues as we reach a dramatic moment early in the *Megillah* when Queen Vashti refuses the King's command to show off her beauty to the participants of his banquet. This refusal sets into motion the search for a new queen and the ultimate appointment of Esther, the heroine of the Book of Esther. The text of the *Megillah* provides no further information about Vashti, but the Talmud provides background to both the character and actions of Vashti that are not dealt with explicitly in the text. The Sages explain that Vashti was a wicked queen who mistreated her Jewish maidservants, forcing them to work on the Sabbath and degrading them by requiring them to do their work naked. The Sages teach that Vashti's punishment fit her crime because she was called to appear naked at Ahasuerus' party on the Sabbath.[10] R. Eleazar cites the backstory to Vashti's punishment as explained in the Talmud and

7 Esther 1:6.

8 In this case the two phrases are not exactly equal. The first phrase equals 893, while the second equals 892. There are many cases in the Commentary to Esther where the calculations of the rabbinic statements are one number different in value from the value in the verse. These two calculations are still considered equivalent according to R. Eleazar, so long as they are only one number off, and remain examples of the extreme accuracy of the Rabbis' formulation.

9 Megillah 12a.

10 Megillah 12b.

adds that the phrase at the beginning of the second chapter of the *Megillah*, "אֲשֶׁר נִגְזַר" – "what had been decreed [on Vashti]" is equivalent to the value of "ביום שבת" – "on the Sabbath".[11] There are many more examples of talmudic teachings taught through *gematria* in this commentary to Esther and their pervasive presence begs the question of what exegetical function they serve.

Because R. Eleazar draws heavily from rabbinic traditions throughout the commentary his ingenuity has been overlooked in scholarship. For example, Barry Walfish, writes regarding R. Eleazar's commentary to Esther, *Sha'arei Binah*:

> The commentaries of the German Pietists draw heavily upon rabbinic sources, both midrashim and targumim, and many could be called with some justification mere compilations of midrashic material. A brief survey of the notes in Lehmann's edition of the commentary of Eleazar of Worms would readily confirm this statement.[12]

While Walfish is correct that there are many rabbinic statements referenced by R. Eleazar, the Talmud does not base its explanations on *gematria*, or other textual calculations. To illustrate, in the first example we cited above, the Talmud bases its explanation on the repetitious language, "it was in the days of Ahasuerus, he was Ahasuerus", which it explains repeats to signify that Ahasuerus was wicked from the beginning to the end of the story. If R. Eleazar was truly employing no innovation one would expect R. Eleazar to simply cite the Talmud. Instead, R. Eleazar cites the Talmud, but adds his own substantiation, a *gematria*. What is the function of this *gematria*?

I believe the answer can be found in a short mystical work R. Eleazar titled *Sodei Razei Semukhim*,[13] in which he delineates the hermeneutical tools he employs in explaining Scripture and I believe, more importantly, outlines his overarching hermeneutical project.

Prior scholarly analysis of R. Eleazar of Worms' methodology of reading Scripture has traditionally focused on *Sefer ha-Ḥokhmah*, considered R. Eleazar's first work and one in which he outlines his hermeneutical principles of interpreting

11 The phrases equal 761 and 760 respectively.

12 Barry Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb* (Albany: SUNY, 1993), p. 31.

13 SRS is found in MSS Oxford Opp. 111 (Neubauer 1566) and Oxford Opp. 540 (Neubauer 1567) and was published by David Siegel along with an extensive comparative study between SRS and *Sefer haḤokhmah*. See David Siegel, *Sefer Sodei Razei Semukhim* (Jerusalem: Kolel Sha'arei Kedushah uTefillah she-'al Yad 'Amuttat Arba' Me'ot Shekel Kesef, 2001).

Scripture.[14] However, the authenticity of *Sefer ha-Ḥokhmah* has been called into question by David Siegel who argues that *Sefer haḤokhmah* is a misrepresentation and reworking of R. Eleazar's authentic work titled *Sodei Razei Semukhim.* The significant variations between *Sefer ha-Ḥokhmah* and *Sodei Razei Semukhim* have repercussions for scholarship and require a reevaluation of many accepted suppositions regarding R. Eleazar of Worms' exegetical methodology and the motivation and timing of its compilation that to this point have been primarily based on *Sefer ha-Ḥokhmah,* but are beyond the scope of this article.[15]
In his introduction to his *Sodei Razei Semukhim* R. Eleazar writes:

> ראיתי בלבי כי מעייני התורה רבו וחכמת התלמוד אין למעלה הימנה מפי"ו דע"ת ותבונה כמו תלמו"ד מפ"י עשות ספרים הרבה אין קץ **כי תוצאות התלמוד יותר מאלף ספרים, תורה שבעל פה פילפולי ודקדוקי המצות דינין איסור והיתר והכל יוצא מתורה שבכתב מי איכא מידי דלא רמזא משה** כי על כל קוץ וקוץ ותג תילי תילים של הלכות כלשכן אות עצמה ותיבה עצמה ופסוק עצמה אך לבות בני אדם לא יוכל הכל מפני הצרות והגלות וחסרון מזונות לבד מחמישים שערי בינה ועל כל בינה ובינה ארבעים ותשעה זהו וכמ"ט מונים תחפשנה והיה לי לכתוב ספר על כל בינה ובינה כמו שקבלנו השערים אך אין לי השגת יד לכתוב מפני לימוד התלמוד ולא זכיתי לבני יחיד אשר קבלם והלך בחצי ימיו נאמן הדיין יתברך שמו ויתעלה זכרו ולא זכיתי ללמד השערים לאחרים כי פסקו אנשי מעשה ונתמעטו הללבות. **וכל התלמוד יוצא מן ה' חומשי תורה** באר היטב אכתוב שמות השערים ואגלה טיפי טל מן הים ואכתוב סמוכים במקוצר כמלקט שיבולים ונקרא ספר סודי רזי סמוכים אתוה סימני הקבלה על פי השערים.[16]
>
> And I have seen (understood) in my heart that the springs of the Torah multiplied, and there is no greater wisdom than that of the Talmud, 'from his mouth is knowledge and understanding' just as (is numerically equivalent

14 See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), 98; Dan, *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 62, 68-71, 118-128; Joseph Dan, "Sefer ha-Ḥokhmah le-R. Eleazar mi-Worms Umashmaʿuto le-Toledot Torata ve-Safruta shel Ḥasidei Ashkenaz" in *ʿIyyunim be-Safrut Ḥasidei Ashkenaz* (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1975), pp. 44-57; Ivan Marcus, "Exegesis For the Few and For the Many," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 8 (1989), pp. 1-24; Daniel Abrams, "The Literary Emergence of Esotericism in the German Pietism," *Shofar,* 12 (1994), pp. 67-85.

15 See Koenigsberg, "Prayer as a Prism," pp. 26-59.

16 Siegel, *Sodei Razei Semukhim,* pp. 9-10.

> to) 'Talmud from my mouth' creates many books with no limit, **for the outgrowths of the Talmud number more than 1000 books, [including] the Oral Torah, studies of the commandments and their minutia, and the laws, and that which is allowed and forbidden. And it all emerges from the Written Torah. What is there that Moses did not hint at?** For on every tiny point and every crown [of the letters] hang (are derived) a myriad of laws. How much more so a [whole] letter itself, and a [complete] word and a [whole] verse itself. Alas, the hearts of men are not able to [grasp] it all due to the troubles, and the exile, and lack of sustenance, only the 50 "Gates of Understanding." And on every [Gate of] Understanding there are 49 [ways to understand], thus [the verse, "and like treasures you seek it" means] 49 times you should seek it.[17] And it would be incumbent upon me to write a book on each Gate of Understanding just as we received the "Gates," but I do not have the reach (ability) to write [it all] due to the study of Talmud. And I did not merit for my only son who received [the Gates of Understanding] (to pass them on because he) died with his life cut in half – loyal is the Judge whose name should be blessed and memory exalted. And I did not merit teaching the Gates to others, for men of merit ceased and the hearts have diminished. **And all of the Talmud emerges from the five books of the Torah,** explain it well. I will write the names of the "Gates" and will reveal droplets of dew from the sea and I will write the juxtapositions in short like one who gathers stalks. And I will call the book *Secrets of the Secrets of Juxtapositions* – the tradition according to the "Gates."

This passage holds the key to the motivation behind R. Eleazar's hermeneutical system. In this introduction, R. Eleazar conceptualizes the link between the Written Torah, the Pentateuch,[18] and the Oral Torah, the plethora of material found in the Talmud. In contrast to a conception whereby two separate independent bodies of tradition were received at Sinai and transmitted separately, R. Eleazar reveals that he is privy to a tradition that demonstrates that the Oral and Written Torah are inextricably linked. Indeed, R. Eleazar contends that the totality of the Oral Law, which he states numbers more than a thousand books of explanations of verses and laws, *all emerge* from the Written Torah. Moreover, the Oral Traditions found in the Talmud can be shown to be *embedded* in the Written Torah's very letters and are perceptible using the 50 *Sha'arei Binah* or 50 "Gates of Understanding," a hermeneutical tradition of

17 The word וכמטמונים (and like treasures) can be split into two - וכמ"ט מונים (and 49 times).

18 In practice R. Eleazar applies the "Gates" to all of *Tanakh,* not just the Pentateuch.

semantic and numeric manipulations of a verse to reveal the talmudic teachings buried within the scriptural text. What follows in *Sodei Razei Semukhim* is a list of the names of these hermeneutical tools, "Gates of Understanding," and explanations of the first three verses of Genesis employing a selection of the "Gates."

The 50 "Gates of Understanding" are a complex system that requires not only an understanding of the hermeneutic principles and the traditions of when they are applied, but also the breadth of fluency with all of Scripture and Talmud. Passing along this tradition proved to be difficult. In the heartbreaking account quoted above, R. Eleazar writes that he had already transmitted the tradition to his son, who subsequently predeceased him and R. Eleazar found no other able to absorb the totality of the system. Fearing he would be the end of the line for these traditions, R. Eleazar laid out his methodology for revealing the link between the Written Torah and the Oral Traditions albeit briefly and incompletely. In doing so, R. Eleazar can be seen as drawing on earlier examples in Jewish history where traditions that were transmitted orally were committed to writing to prevent their total loss.[19]

This principle of interconnectivity is the great secret that R. Eleazar felt he must protect and transmit and which I believe underlies his exegetical system that he extends to all of Tanakh. Certainly, many medieval commentators cited rabbinic traditions alongside more literal readings, such as Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides. What makes R. Eleazar's commentary unique is that in addition to citing rabbinic traditions he attempts to demonstrate how those traditions are not superimposed, but embedded within the language of the text. Unearthing the embedded message is accomplished using the tools outlined in *Sodei Razei Semukhim*.

Returning to Esther we can view this approach in action. A careful look at the commentary reveals the plethora of examples of R. Eleazar's "Gates of Understanding"[20] employed in the commentary including the "Gates" of: *Gematria*,[21] *Yater ve-Ḥaser*,[22]

19 See Gittin, 60a. The principle of הפרו תורתך – עת לעשות לה', is that oral material is permitted to be written under circumstances where it will otherwise be lost.

20 For a full list of the "Gates of Understanding" see Siegel, *Sodei Razei Semukhim*, p. 10.

21 For examples of *Gematria*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:1, 1:2, 1:7, 1:8, 1:12 (with n. 103), 1:13, 1:16, 2:1, 2:7, 2:9, 2:10, 2:11, 2:15, 2:16, 2:17, 2:19; 2:20, 2:22, 2:23, 3:4, 3:7, 3:9, 3:10, 3:11, 4:1, 4:4, 4:5, 4:14 4:7, 4:11, 4:12, 4:16, 5:1, 5:3, 5:5, 5:11, 5:13, 6:1, 6:2, 6:4, 6:12, 6:13, 7:5, 7:8, 7:10, 8:10, 9:10, 9:14, 9:24, 9:26, 9:28, 9:29, 9:31, 10:3.

22 For examples of *Yater ve-Ḥaser*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:4, 1:5, 1:14, 1:19, 2:2, 2:6, 4:8,4:14, 5:12, 6:9, 6:13, 6:14, 8:1, 8:3, 8:4, 8:16, 9:14, 9:18, 9:19, 9:20, 9:22.

Otiyyot Gedolot,[23] *Mispar,*[24] *Ne'elam,*[25] *Semukhim,*[26] *Krei u-Ketiv,*[27] *Roshei ve-Sofei Tevot,*[28] *Targum,*[29] *At Bash,*[30] *Te'amim/haMesorah,*[31] *Ḥilluk,*[32] *Ribbuy,*[33] *Sof-Rosh,*[34] *Meshulash,*[35] *Pasek,*[36] and *Hipukh*.[37]

More than a "mere compilation of midrashic material," R. Eleazar's commentary is innovative in its attempts to demonstrate that the text and the rabbinic teachings are interwoven. More than a loose connection, R. Eleazar's approach assumes the precision of the Rabbis' chosen words recorded in the Talmud. Their explanations are not to be viewed as haphazard musings, but authoritative explanations rooted in the text, demonstratively accurate to the letter (!) and numerically equivalent to the wording of the text.

Beyond calculating text, some of R. Eleazar's hermeneutical tools rearrange letters to expose hidden meaning. A noteworthy example of a rabbinic teaching that R. Eleazar anchors to the exact letters of the text involves the "Gate of *Roshei and Sofei Tevot*." This "Gate" applies when the first letter of each word in a sequence of words, or the final letter of each can be shown to spell something meaningful. At times, the isolated letters can also be read backwards or non-sequentially. R. Eleazar employs this tool when connecting to the text itself the talmudic tradition that every detail of the story of the book of Esther was orchestrated by the Hand of God. The Talmud teaches that even events that seemed unrelated to the Jewish people, like the proclamation sent out to Ahasuerus' kingdom following the incident with Vashti, served to benefit

23 For examples of *Otiyyot Gedolot*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:6, 9:28.

24 For examples of *Mispar*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:6, 1:16, 5:5, 7:10, 9:10, 9:17, 9:28, 10:3.

25 For an example of *Ne'elam*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:6.

26 For examples of *Semukhim*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:9, 6:13.

27 For examples of *Krei u-Ketiv*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:16, 3:4, 4:4, 9:26.

28 For examples of *Roshei ve-Sofei Tevot*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 1:20, 3:8, 3:9, 4:15, 5:4, 5:14, 6:1, 7:10, 9:10, 10:1.

29 For examples of *Targum*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 2:1, 2:9, 3:9, 4:5, 5:5, 5:11, 7:3, 9:6.

30 For an example of *At Bash*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 2:8.

31 For examples of *Te'amim/ha-Mesorah*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 2:21, 3:1 3:2,3:6, 4:3, 4:16, 5:8, 5:12, 6:13, 7:6, 7:7, 7:8, 8:15, 9:29, 9:31.

32 For examples of *Ḥilluk*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 5:6, 7:6, 8:15, 8:16.

33 For examples of *Ribbuy*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 5:11, 7:10.

34 For an example of *Sof-Rosh*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 6:5.

35 For an example of *Meshulash*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 6:13.

36 For an example of *Pasek*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 9:27.

37 For an example of *Hipukh*, see R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 9:29.

the Jewish people later on. In the case of the royal proclamations, when the first proclamation was sent out declaring every man to be the ruler of his household, Ahasuerus' subjects considered him so foolish that they did not pay attention to his subsequent letter, which decreed that all Jews were to be killed on the 13th day of Adar.[38] The Talmud's message is that each detail of the story was carefully orchestrated by God to provide salvation for the Jewish people. While the Talmud's explanation may seem like a nice homiletic idea with no direct source in the text, R. Eleazar employs the "Gate of *Roshei and Sofei Tevot*" and notes that within the verse that describes the widespread dissemination of the king's proclamation and the behavior of the wives that would follow, the words "הֵיא וְכָל הַנָּשִׁים יִתְּנוּ" contain the Tetragrammaton, the four letter name of God.[39] Thus, the lesson that the Sages of the Talmud gleaned from this incident is in fact hidden in the actual wording of the proclamation itself. God's name is literally embedded in the wording, further demonstrating that if one approaches the text with the proper eye, its secrets will be revealed.

It is perhaps surprising that R. Eleazar's application of the "Gates of Understanding" is also a recognizable feature of his legal work, *Sefer Rokeaḥ*. I say surprising, only because this sort of methodology would seemingly relate to a midrashic approach, which is often distinct from legal works. Still, the reader of *Sefer Rokeaḥ* will find word and number exercises throughout most sections of the work. Indeed, R. Eleazar begins his discussion of the Laws of Purim, with an entire section devoted to letter and word exercises, all supporting rabbinic traditions regarding the Book of Esther and the holiday of Purim as was seen in his commentary to Esther.[40]

R. Eleazar begins the section on the Laws of Purim addressing an unspoken, but basic issue discussed in the Talmud regarding the Book of Esther. That is, the dispute over whether the Book of Esther should be included in the scriptural canon. The same prooftext from Exodus[41] is cited in the Talmud both for and against inclusion and the reasoning surrounds a verse in Proverbs. R. Eleazar cites the rabbinic prooftext, but adds an entirely different reasoning based on the "Gates of Understanding." The verse from Exodus states:

38 Megillah 12b.

39 R. Eleazar, *Perush Megillat Esther*, 12.

40 For corresponding material from *Hilkhot Rokeaḥ*, Section 235 and the *Perush Megillat Esther*, see Lehmann note 1.

41 17:14.

"כְּתֹב זֹאת זִכָּרוֹן בַּסֵּפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי מָחֹה אֶמְחֶה אֶת זֵכֶר עֲמָלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם".[42]

> Write this as remembrance in the book and place it in the ears of Joshua for I will surely erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the heavens.

R. Eleazar employs the "Gate of *Mesorah*" and explains that the Rabbis relied on the aforementioned verse because the Book of Deuteronomy contains the root word "*Ketov*" – to write – 23 times, which corresponds to 23 books of *Tanakh.* This additional verse from Exodus that contains the word "*Ketov*," serves as the basis for incorporating Esther as the 24th Book of *Tanakh*. Additionally, R. Eleazar reinforces the authority of the verse from Exodus by employing the "Gate of *Otiyyot Gedolot*." There are six letters that are traditionally written larger or smaller than the others in the *Megillah*. The first is the "*Ḥet*" mentioned above, which R. Eleazar notes signifies the clothing of the High Priest. The remaining five, include the letters שתזו"ת which equal 1,113. This is equivalent to the numerical value of the words of the prooftext, "כְּתֹב זֹאת זִכָּרוֹן" (1,113). R. Eleazar further calculates[43] that from the time God spoke the biblical proof to Moses to the time Esther was taken to Ahasuerus' palace was 954 years. 954 is the numerical value of the continuation of the prooftext verse, "וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי מָחֹה אֶמְחֶה".

Not satisfied with these two substantiations, R. Eleazar further notes that the numerical value of "כְּתֹב זֹאת זִכָּרוֹן בַּסֵּפֶר וְשִׂים" (1,811) nearly equals that of the words from the *Megillah*, "וַתִּכְתֹּב אֶסְתֵּר... וּמָרְדֳּכַי הַיְהוּדִי"[44] (1,809), but equals two more because the first verse hints at the two individuals who would fulfill the command, Esther and Mordecai. Finally, "מָחֹה אֶמְחֶה" (107) equals the value of "זה המן" (107).

This whole passage, replete with textual hints and *gematria*, is a quintessential example of R. Eleazar's approach to the Rabbis' choice of words and prooftexts. R. Eleazar accepts the Rabbis' explanation and choice of prooftexts as so legitimate and true that it is possible to seek the hidden textual support for their views. Uncovering these textual hints of the Sages' explanations further substantiates their teachings and reinforces their authority. Our survey of examples of R. Eleazar's exegetical approach above also exemplifies his view that no textual element is random and there is a lesson to be learned from each letter. Again, it is worth noting that his complex web of numerical calculations is being presented unabashedly in the context

42 Exodus 17:14.

43 See R. Eleazar, *Sefer ha-Rokeaḥ*, Section 235 for the full calculation.

44 Esther 9:29.

of a serious legal work. Indeed, R. Eleazar proceeds to find additional hints at rabbinic teachings regarding Esther in his legal work.

The Talmud draws a connection between a phrase from Genesis and the *Megillah*. The Talmud[45] asks, "Where is Haman found in the Torah?" and the answer given is the phrase "הֵמִן הָעֵץ" found in Genesis 3:11. In this case, the letters of "from the tree" with different punctuation can be read as "Haman – the Tree" alluding to Haman's demise and death by hanging. R. Eleazar takes this hint of Haman further and strings a web of connections between the story of Adam, Eve, and the Snake in Genesis to the story of Haman. As we will see, the first parallel revolves around the number 70 and R. Eleazar then relates other items numbering 70 to Haman. What follows is found both in the *Sefer Rokeaḥ*, Laws of Purim, as well as in the *Sha'arei Binah* commentary to Esther. This is not surprising, assuming he authored the *Sha'arei Binah* commentary to Esther, as R. Eleazar was known to borrow his own material and incorporate it into his other writings.[46]

A further list of numerically connected verses is expounded by R. Eleazar based on the verse highlighted by the Talmud, "הֵמִן הָעֵץ". R. Eleazar points out that there are 70 verses from the beginning of Genesis until the curse of the snake, "וְאֵיבָה אָשִׁית" – "And I [God] will place hatred" (between Man and snakes). Likewise, there are 70 verses from the hanging of Bigtan and Teresh and the hanging of Haman. Both Haman's and the snake's doom were brought about by a tree. Through its actions, the snake brought death to the world and its 70 nations as mentioned by the Rabbis, and likewise the Rabbis say Haman brought death to the 70 nations. Furthermore, the commandment to destroy Amalek is the 70th commandment counted from the beginning of the portion שופטים ושוטרים (Deut. 16:18). Wine makes recurring appearances in the Purim story and יין is numerically equivalent to 70. Moreover, from the time Haman sent out his royal proclamation to destroy the Jews to the time that Mordecai's counter proclamation went out was 70 days. Haman was hanged during the *'Omer* period and there are 70 verses from the beginning of *Parshat Emor* until the verses regarding the *'Omer*. Within those verses there is a further hint at Haman, employing the "Gate of Ending Letters." "תִּהְיֶינָה", "מֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם", "הַהִין", the last letters of three consecutive verses,[47] read backwards spells המן. R. Eleazar notes that like Haman, who was punished during the *'Omer* period, the city of Sodom was also destroyed during the

45 Ḥullin 139b.

46 See Simcha Emanuel, "Serid mi-Perusho shel R. Eleazar mi-Vermaiza le-Sefer Tehillim," in *Koveẓ 'al Yad* 22 (2013), p. 118.

47 Leviticus 23:13-15.

'Omer. This leads R. Eleazar to examine the verses related to Sodom and to note that there too Haman is hinted at in the reverse ending letters of "יַיִן גַּם הַלַּיְלָה".[48]

R. Eleazar further explains that Haman is hinted at in the story of the fraught meeting between Esau and Jacob. In Genesis 32:12, Jacob fears that Esau will kill Jacob's family, including women and children, a foreshadowing of the murderous decree of Haman. Haman's downfall begins on the third night of the Jews' fasting. This is hinted at by three occurrences of the word "night" in Genesis, chapter 32, verses 14, 22, and 23. Furthermore, Haman is hinted at in the verse, "וַיָּלֶן שָׁם בַּלַּיְלָה", with the reverse ending letters spelling Haman. Finally, Jacob attempts to assuage Esau's anger with presents, as the verse states, "וַיִּקַּח מִן הַבָּא בְיָדוֹ" (Gen. 32:14), and this hints at a rabbinic teaching mentioned in the Talmud that Haman found Mordecai studying the laws of the *Minḥah* sacrifice.[49] R. Eleazar continues for four more paragraphs in his legal work demonstrating further hints at Haman found in Scripture through the application of various "Gates," but these examples suffice for our purpose of demonstrating the extensive application of the "Gates" to connect rabbinic traditions and related scriptural texts.

To conclude, we have demonstrated that the use of *gematria* and other letter and number studies in the commentary of R. Eleazar of Worms to the Book of Esther function to link talmudic teachings to the text of the *Megillah*. This methodology was part of R. Eleazar's broader project to preserve and perpetuate the tradition of how it is that the talmudic teachings are embedded in and emerge from the written text of Torah using a hermeneutical system known as the *Sha'arei Binah,* or 50 "Gates of Understanding." R. Eleazar's approach allows the reader to view the explanations of the Rabbis not as extra-textual, but intra-textual, drawn from a hyper-close reading of the text and intrinsic to the text itself. Rather than embroidery, talmudic teachings are part of the threads that make up the tapestry of the Written Torah. While the Written and Oral Laws would have survived separately, R. Eleazar feared the link between them would be lost had he not committed the methodology to writing.

Much has been discussed regarding the transition from oral transmission to written texts in mystical circles. R. Eleazar uses the phrase *received* in describing the way the material was passed to him and how he passed it on to his own son, but with no one to *receive* the secrets they had to be *written.* It is interesting that while the *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz* had many "secrets," related to topics such as anthropomorphic references to God, the *Merkavah*, angels, and the soul, all documented in R. Eleazar's other

48 Genesis 19:34.

49 Megillah 16a.

writings, when R. Eleazar decries the plight of those too occupied with simple survival to have the peace of mind to absorb the totality of his teachings, he is not referring to the secrets of the *Merkavah* or angelology, but to the intricate system that links the text of the Torah with the Talmud. It is this intricate hermeneutical system, which links the text of the Written Torah with the Oral Torah, that R. Eleazar considered primary and which he feared would be lost, and with it the secret of the unity of the Torah.

ABSTRACTS

English Articles

Moshe Sokolow

"ולא עלתה על לבי" – How (not) to teach the Akeidah

The conventional approach to the binding (`***akeidah***) of Isaac—namely, that God was testing Abraham's loyalty by ordering him to sacrifice his beloved son—is unsatisfactory and even disturbing especially when taught to children. Apart from leaving the troubling impression that Abraham was willing to take his child's life, it also accuses God, as it were, of placing Abraham in an excruciating moral quandary even if, ultimately, He relieved him of that burden.

We offer an alternate reading of the narrative, supported by the commentaries of Rashi and Ralbag (Gersonides) and enhanced by midrashic evidence, that posits that God's intention was that Abraham teach Isaac about sacrifices. Abraham's initial understanding of God's instructions was correct; however, when it appeared to be contradicted by the ostensible facts on the ground, he misinterpreted them, misconstrued their true objective, and needlessly placed Isaac's life in jeopardy forcing God to stay his hand. It was the many episodes of persecution and forced conversion—most outstandingly those of the First Crusade—that focused on the brief moment of indecision and thereby transformed Abraham and Isaac into the precursors of Jewish martyrdom.

Chaya Stein-Weiss

R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Sojourn in Ashkenaz: Melting Pot or Multi-Cultural Experience?

R. Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) was a unique cultural hybrid. The renowned Sephardic exegete and grammarian left his native Muslim Spain in 1140 at age 50 and traveled throughout Christian Europe for the remaining 25 years of his life (beginning in Italy, continuing to Provence, and Northern France, and ending in England in 1164). Ibn Ezra's only extant literary works were written in Hebrew in

Ashkenazic lands. Through a focused analysis of Ibn Ezra's exegetical positions on Pentateuch and on Sefer Daniel, this paper attempts to ascertain the extent (if any) of Ibn Ezra's literary acculturation in Ashkenaz – both in form (i.e., literary writing style) and in content, on two levels. The paper's first method compares the ***peshat*** exegesis of Ibn Ezra to that of Rashi, the emblematic Ashkenazic exegete of the time. (The comparison between exegetes has fostered a debate among scholars regarding Ibn Ezra's level of familiarity with Rashi's biblical commentary.) The second method attempts to address an apparent gap in Ibn Ezra historiographical scholarship, namely, the absence of a contextualization of both chronological and geographical points of view during Ibn Ezra's long stay in Christendom. This second analysis thus makes a linear comparison between Ibn Ezra's earlier and later writings, in order to assess possible changes in Ibn Ezra's tone and content over time and place. The paper's comparison of Ibn Ezra's works to each other includes his two Introductions to Pentateuch (Short and Long), in which he describes the exegetical and grammatical approach of Ashkenazic scholars among others; his two Commentaries on Pentateuch (Short and Long); as well as Ibn Ezra's messianic positions in his two Commentaries on Sefer Daniel (Short and Long). The paper concludes that while Ibn Ezra did not modify his ideological-exegetical views to conform with his fellow Ashkenazic exegetes, what did change over time was his tone and literary style in addressing his Ashkenazic readers during his time in Christendom, from early sarcasm and condescension to intellectual respect.

Chaya Sima Koenigsberg

Accounting for Tradition:
Calculations in the Commentary of R. Eleazar of Worms to Esther

This article examines the role of gematria in the commentary of R. Eleazar of Worms to the Book of Esther. Gematria is one of many hermeneutical tools, known as the "50 Gates of Understanding" that R. Eleazar applies to the biblical text to extract related rabbinic teachings taught in the Midrash and Talmud. Instead of viewing rabbinic traditions of the Oral Torah as extra-textual, R. Eleazar seeks to demonstrate that these traditions are intrinsic to the text itself, perceptible and present within its very letters. This approach, outlined in his mystical ***Sodei Razei***

Semukhim, reinforces the authority of the Oral Torah and the unified nature of the Written and Oral Torah.

Hebrew Articles

Aharon Beck

Parallel Verses in the Book of Genesis

The article reveals a biblical literary style of "parallel verses": sometimes the Torah repeats a description of the same occurrence or of a particular matter. While an initial reading suggests that there is a plot-chronological sequence here, the approach presented in the article claims that it is the same matter, presented twice in writing, in order to present two different perspectives of the same event (this phenomenon is a particular case of a more general phenomenon, called "parallel columns", and also has many biblical appearances). To illustrate this literary style, the article presents all of the "parallel verses" that appear in the book of Genesis, analyzing the verses in this light and examining the dual meaning that emerges from the "parallel verses."

Ori Samet

"...And With Awesome Power" (Deut. 26:8) -
The Element of Intimidation in the Plagues in Egypt

The story of the plagues in Egypt describes the calamities that came one after another upon the Egyptians. It is most common to focus on the plagues themselves and their physical effect on the Egyptian landscape. This article views the plagues as God's war against Egypt, which, beyond the physical damage that they caused, included psychological warfare as one of its war tactics.

Four aspects of psychological warfare are examined here. The first chapter describes how the build-up of the plagues produced a sense of fear of "what tomorrow will bring." The second chapter discusses the warnings that were given before the plagues, which led to the belief that the noose was tightening around Pharaoh's neck, even as he tried to evade them. The third chapter presents

the factor of delay between the warning and the actual arrival of the plagues, and explains how that led to a constant sense of foreboding. The fourth chapter explains that despite the seemingly accurate warnings given before each plague, certain details – those most critical to Pharaoh – were intentionally left unclear, adding the fear of the unknown to the plagues themselves. These elements of psychological warfare, combined with the practical effects of the plagues, eventually lead to Pharaoh's surrender and the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt.

Yosef Marcus

Revisions in the Ramban's Interpretation of the term "Drishat hashem"

Like many other commentators in the Middle Ages, the Ramban also revised his interpretations of the Torah over time. The revisions that the Ramban added reflect new aspects of interpretations that both reinforce his basic interpretative method and also represent a correction of the initial interpretation. In recent years, scholars have particularly emphasized the Ramban's re-interpretations that he revised in the Land of Israel, but in several places the Ramban also points to things that he reinterpreted in Spain.

There is, however, a different type of interpretive change that the Ramban does not directly indicate: there are cases where the Ramban interpreted some sentence or term in the early stages of his commentary on the Torah and at later stages changed his mind but did not bother to go back and the change his first interpretation. Consequently, a contradiction arose in the work as a whole. This article focuses on the Ramban's interpretation of the term "drishat hashem" in the Bible. A survey of the Ramban's various interpretations reveals changes that occurred in his understanding of this concept in his comments on the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy; however, as mentioned, the Ramban did not return and correct his writing in Genesis, and the contradictions among his different writings should be explained based on the assumption that over the years that he was formulating his interpretations, he changed his mind.

Amos Frisch

The "Leading Word" in the Writing of the Commentator: Uncovering a Literary Device in R. Joseph Hayyun's Commentary on the Book of Psalms

The article seeks to contribute to the study of the exegetical method of R. Joseph Hayyun (Lisbon, 15th century; hereafter: RJH) by pointing to a phenomenon in his exegetical writing (on Psalms) that has not been noted so far – his use of "leading words". Initially, the article discusses the phenomenon in his commentary to three representative psalms (3, 6, 51). Later in the article, findings arising from a systematic examination of his commentary to the Songs of Ascents (120-134) are surveyed and analyzed. Between these two parts of the article, the "formula for characterizing the psalm" (FCP) which appears at the beginning of his commentary to each psalm is discussed. The linkage between (some) of the "leading words" and the FCP, and the fact that about half of RJH's "leading words" do not appear in the psalms themselves, show that this is not a random repetition of words but a significant emphasis of the commentator. The "leading words" tighten the connection between the parts of the psalm and embody its contents according to the interpretation of RJH.

The article also aims to make an additional contribution to the study of "leading words" by demonstrating their use outside the Bible, in this case – in the writing of a biblical commentator. Finally, it contributes to the understanding of various psalms.