

# EXEGETIS VII

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MEKLENBURG, LUZZATTO, HIRSCH, MALBIM, BERLIN

(1785-1865)

*HAK'TAV*  
*V'HAKABALAH*  
YAAKOV TZVI  
MEKLENBURG

Rabbi Yaakov Zvi Meklenburg (1785-1865) composed this commentary in defense of traditional exegesis against the incipient Reform tendency to regard rabbinic Midrash as inferior to historical-philology and to view its halakhic interpretations, in particular, as inadequate and invalid.

In an introduction to the commentary, Abraham Berliner, no stranger to the history of Biblical exegesis, wrote:

The revered author, ztz"l, who blazed a new trail sublime in sanctity, labored and exerted himself to provide an enlightened commentary on the text of the Torah, bringing the text pleasantly in line with homily (derash) and Halakha. The two [i.e., the text and the tradition] go together perfectly: harmonious and inseparable.

This commentary is held in special affection, and it spread rapidly amongst scholars and men of understanding who brought this book into their classrooms, rejoicing in it as in discovering a great treasure.<sup>5</sup>

• הכתב והקבלה, התורה והמסורה, הן תאומים.

ומה לו לגוף הכתב, בלא נשמת הקבלה?

Text and tradition, Torah and convention, are twins.

What purpose is served by the body of Scripture, without the soul [inspired by] tradition?

Preamble:

Said Yaakov Zvi ben Gamliel **Meklenburg**:

I have seen fit to place that which follows [i.e., the introduction] into this commentary on the Torah, in order to carry the word on its lips and give public voice to people [to understand] why the words [of Torah] are so sparse in its written form, inexplicable without the oral tradition preserved by the sages of each and every generation. Why was everything not written explicitly in the Torah, obviating the oral tradition of its interpretation? [This introduction] will also instruct them in its interpretation, plowing through the depths of the roots of its language and paying careful attention to its manner of figurative speech until, by these means, they will open the luminous gates of the oral Torah and the "*Text and Tradition*" [emphasis in the original] will be unified in the hands of those who have made a covenant with them.

Do you not know, Children of Israel, have you not heard, Community of Yeshurun; there is a great advantage to the spoken word over that which is only written. Orally, one may speak words of wisdom and communicate erudition, articulating his thoughts externally; speaking sometimes loudly, sometimes softly, sometimes whispering; sometimes hinting with his eyes, sometimes gesticulating with his fingers; moving his head to and fro; even scraping his feet. There is no limb from head to toe that cannot shed light on his unilluminated thoughts. Such movements as these are like a beacon to all who see them; the speaker's manner of discourse, his posture while speaking, the tensing and relaxing of his elocution; these all are keys in the listeners' hands to open the chambers in which the speaker's thoughts lie dormant. They are like a yardstick in the hands of the audience to penetrate and gauge the depths of his ideas; to ascend and evaluate the loftiness of his heart and the extent of his comprehension. He can look them over, one by one, measuring the length of the boughs of his wisdom and the breadth of his understanding; searching, probing, getting to his ultimate truth.

# SHMUEL DAVID LUZZATTO

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שד"ל (1800-1865)

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- The first principle of the exegesis of Holy Scripture is, without doubt, **tradition**. The Bible was written in a language that died many centuries ago and is no longer spoken by any known nation. Whatever we presume to know about it today relies upon the information provided orally by our ancestors, father to son. Without this information, the Bible would be sealed off to us; even the alphabetic characters are unknown to us through any medium other than tradition...
  - (Here, Shadal relates the story of Hillel and the prospective convert. )

- היסוד הראשון לפרשנות של כתבי הקודש הוא ללא ספק **המסורת**. התנ"ך נכתב בלשון שמתה לפני מאות רבות בשנים, ושאין מדבר בה אף אחד מן העמים הידועים לנו. לכן כל מה שאפשר לדעת היום עליו מסתמך על הידיעות שמסרו לנו קדמונינו בעל פה, מאב לבנו. בלי ידיעות אלו, יהיו לנו דברי התנ"ך כספר החתום; הלא אפילו הסימנים עצמם של האלפבית אינם ידועים לנו בדרך אחרת מאשר דרך המסורת...



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- It is true that the passage of many hundreds of years has dulled the traditional understanding of our language considerably, and this is acknowledged by our most renowned authors—including those of the Talmud... It is reasonable to assume that at least those words that occur in the context of the commandments that our nation fulfills ubiquitously can be regarded as understood and comprehended with absolute certainty.

- נכון הדבר שחליפת מאות השנים עימעמה בהרבה את הידיעה המסורתית של לשוננו, ובזה אמנם מודים המפורסמים ביותר שבין מחברינו, ואפילו בעלי התלמוד... ובאמת הדעת נותנת שלכל הפחות המלים השייכות למצוות, שאומתנו קיימה אותן בכל עת ובכל שעה, יש לראותן כידועות ומובנות אצלנו בוודאות גמורה.

- יסוד שלישי של הפרשנות הוא אותו היסוד של כל מעשי אנוש: השכל הישר.

The third rule of exegesis is the same principle that governs all human activity: **common sense** (*haseikhel hayashar*).

Among the “deviations” from common sense that he enumerated, is: מי שמסתפק במשמעות השטחית של המלים; i.e.,

Whoever is satisfied with the superficial meaning of the words, such as the Karaites. He then continued:

- כי אפילו אם נתעלם מחשיבות המסורת, קורא (!) פעמים רבות בכל ספר, ובייחוד בספרי הקודש, כי משמעות המלים הנראית והגלויה לעין לא תהא המשמעות של המשפט כולו... ובודאי יעשה עוול גדול לכתבי הקדש מי שיחשוב שלהבנתם הנכונה אינה דרושה אלא ידיעת המשמעות של כל מלה בודדת... אנו יכולים איפוא לקבוע שהמשמעות המקורית והאמיתית של הכתוב אינה תמיד זאת הנראית קרובה ביותר לפירוש המלים. ואדרבה, המשמעות המילולית היא לפעמים מוטעית וכוזבת... במקום זה וברבים הדומים לו, מתברר שיש משמעות כפולה: אחת מילולית, שהיא באמת שטחית ומדומה, ואחת ממשית ואמיתית. ברור, אמנם, שאלה אינן למעשה שתי משמעויות שונות, אלא משמעות אחת בלבד.

Even if we were to ignore the importance of the Tradition (*hamasoret*), it occurs frequently in every book—and Scripture in particular—that **the apparent meaning of [individual] words is not the meaning of the entire sentence**... Whoever thinks that to understand Scripture correctly requires only the understanding of the definition of each individual word commits a great travesty towards Scripture... We are able, then, to determine that the original and authentic meaning of a verse is not always that which appears closest to the definitions of its words. Au contraire, the literal sense (*hamashma`ut hamilulit*) is often misleading and inaccurate... In such a case, and in many others that resemble it, it appears that there is a double meaning: The literal one (*milulit*), which is truly superficial and contrived, and the substantial and authentic one. It is clear, however, that these are not two different meanings but one and the same.

(1808-1888)

SAMSON  
RAPHAEL  
HIRSCH

V. 27. וַיְגַדְלוּ וְגו'. Our sages, who never objected to draw attention to the small and great mistakes and weaknesses in the history of our great forefathers, and thereby make them just the more instructive for us (see remarks on Ch. XII,10), here, too, on וַיְגַדְלוּ make a remark which is indeed a "signpost" for all of us. They point out that the striking contrast in the grandchildren of Abraham may have been due, not so much to a difference in their temperaments as to mistakes in the way they were brought up. As long as they were little, no attention was paid to the slumbering differences in their natures (see on V.24), both had exactly the same teaching and educational treatment, and the great law of education חֲנוּךְ לְנֶעֱרַר עַל פִּי דַרְכוֹ וְגו' "bring up each child in accordance with its own way" was forgotten: — That each child must be treated differently, with an eye to the slumbering tendencies of his nature, and out of them, be educated to develop his special characteristics for the one pure human and Jewish life. The great Jewish task in life is basically simple, one and the same for all, but in its realisation is as complicated and varied as human natures and tendencies are varied, and the manifold varieties of life that result from them.

Had Isaac and Rebecca studied Esau's nature and character early enough, and asked themselves how can even an Esau, how can all the strength and energy, agility and courage that lies slumbering in this child, be won over to be used in the service of God, and the future גבר be trained to become, not a גבר ציד, but in truth a גבר לפני ה', then Jacob and Esau, with their totally different natures could still have remained twin-brothers in spirit and life; quite early in life Esau's "sword" and Jacob's "spirit" could have worked hand in hand, and who can say what a different aspect the whole history of the ages might have presented. But, as it was, ויגדלו הנערים, only when the boys had grown into men, one was surprised to see that, out of one and the selfsame womb, having had exactly the same care, training and schooling, two such contrasting persons emerge.

V. 28. A second factor, which could only have a pernicious effect was the difference of the feelings of the parents towards the children Unity and complete agreement of parents in the education, and the same feelings and love to all their children — even to those who are not so good, yea, just those require most of all, even more than those who are physically weak or ill, loving care and consideration and sacrifice — that is the first fundamental condition and the corner stone of every education — That Isaac's sympathies were more inclined toward's Esau, Rebecca's to Jacob can moreover easily be explained by the attraction of opposites.

(1809-1879)

**MALBIM  
MEIR LEIB BEN  
YEHIEL MICHEL  
(WISSER)**

עמודי התוך אשר הפירוש נשען עליהם, הם שלשה.  
[א] לא נמצא במליצות הנביאים כפל ענין במלות שונות לא כפל ענין, לא כפל  
מאמר, ולא כפל מליצה, לא שני משפטים שענינם אחד, לא שני משלים שהנמשל  
אחד, ואף לא שתי מלות כפולות.

This commentary rests upon three pillars:

**A.** We shall not encounter in prophetic lyricism (*melizot ha-nevi'im*) repetition of a matter through different words (*kefel 'inyan be-millim shonot*; i.e. parallelism)—not the repetition of an entire topic, a whole statement, or a lyric; not two sentences with the identical meaning; neither two parables (*mashal*) with the same intended subject (*nimshal*); nor even two repetitious (or: synonymous) words.<sup>45</sup>



**ב**] לא נמצאו במליצות הנביאים ובמאמריהם, הפשוטים או הכפולים, מלות או פעלים הונחו במקרה מבלתי כונה מיוחדת, עד שכל המלות והשמות והפעלים שמהם הורכב כל מאמר, לא לבד שהם מוכרחים לבא במאמר ההוא, כי גם לא היה אפשר להמליץ האלהי להניח תחתיה מלה אחרת, כי כל מלות המליצה האלהית שקולה במאזני החכמה והדעת, ערוכים ושמורים מנויים וספורים במדת החכמה העליונה אשר אך היא לבדה תשגיב בכחה לדבר כן.

**B.** The lyricisms and statements of the prophets—repetitive [or: synonymous] or otherwise—do not contain nouns or verbs that appear accidentally, without any specific intent. Not only are all the words—nouns and verbs—from which these statements are compounded *de rigueur* for those statements, but the Divine Lyricist could not have used substitutes. All the words in a divine lyric are weighed on the scales of wisdom and knowledge; set, preserved, counted out, and calculated by the attribute of sublime wisdom that has the exclusive ability to speak so exaltedly.

ג] לא נמצא במליצות הנביאים קליפה בלא תוך, גויה בלא נשמה, לבוש בלא מתלבש, מאמר ריק מרעיון נשגב, דבור לא תשכון תבונה בו, כי דברות אלהים חיים כולם אל חי בקרבם, רוח חיים באפם, רוח איום אביר אדיר ונורא.

C. Prophetic lyrics do not contain husks bereft of content, bodies without souls, garments not worn, an utterance devoid of an exalted idea, a thoughtless statement, for they are all the living words of God, suffused by the living God, inspired by a living breath; an awesome, majestic, grand, and inspiring spirit.

## ISAIAH 1:3

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”יָדַע שׁוֹר קִנְיָהּ וַחֲמֹר אֲבוּס בְּעֵלָיו; יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע, עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבוּנָן.”

“An ox knows its owner and a donkey [knows] its master's trough, yet my people knows not, Israel does not comprehend.”

**ידע.** הלא ראינו שני מיני ההכרות האלה נתונים נתונים הם גם בטבע הבע"ח הבלתי מדברים. כי השור יכיר את בעליו רק ע"י שקנה אותו בלבד, והחמור שאין לו הכרה כ"כ עכ"פ יכירהו ע"י שנותן לו באבוס לאכול. אבל ישראל לא ידע, ר"ל בעת שקראתי אותם בשם ישראל לאות שהם חלקי וקנייני ועבדי הם וזה נגד "בנים גדלתי". והיה להם להכיר בעליהם כשור, מ"מ לא רצה לידע. וגם עמי, בעת שרוממתי אותם מכל העמים במה שקראתי עמי ונחלתי, וזה נגד "בנים רוממתי" והיה להם להכיר עכ"פ הטובה הפרטית כחמור, מ"מ "לא התבונן" לא רצה להבין.

*Knows:* We have evidence of two kinds of recognition, even in the nature of dumb animals. An ox will recognize its master simply by his purchase of it, while a donkey—which has no recognition to that extent—will recognize him, nonetheless, by his placing fodder in the trough for it to eat.

*Israel does not know:* I.e. When I call them by the name "Israel," it is a sign that they are My lot, My acquisition, and My servants (this is parallel to "I raised children," verse 2), and they ought to recognize their master as an ox does. Nevertheless, they did not want to know.

*My people,* too, when I elevated them above all the other peoples by calling them My people, and My inheritance (parallel to "I raised children and elevated them," verse 2), they ought to have recognized this special favor as a donkey does. Nevertheless: *does not comprehend:* They declined to understand.

גם במראה הלטושה הזאת, נביט בה כמה דברים.  
[א] בטבע האדם ומדותיו, כי הגם שכל מוהר ומתן שיתן האב לבנו, כאין נחשב נגד הטובה העיקרית שסבב לו שהביאו אל המציאות, ואמנו וגדלו. מכל מקום, ראינו טבע האדם, כי יגדל אצלו אהבת הוריו, עת יוסיפו להעניקו רכוש ועושר, ורוממהו מכל אחיו, משאם לא יטיבו לו באלה, כמאמר רחל ולאה (בראשית לא:טו): "הלא נכריות נחשבנו לו."  
[ב] הציור הזה ימצא קן לו בקרב איש ולב עמוק, גם בהכרת הטובה וההודאה אשר חייב לבוראו, יוצרו, אביו, קונוהו.

In this polished mirror, we may see several things [reflected]:

**(a)** Man's nature and attributes: Even though every gift a father bestows upon a child is worthless in comparison to the fundamental favor of causality—that he brought him into existence, nurtured him, and raised him—in any event, we have seen that it is the nature of man that his love for his parents grows as they continually grant him property and wealth and elevate him above his siblings, more so than if they do not bestow these favors on him. As Rachel and Leah said: "He has treated us like strangers" (Genesis 31:15).

**(b)** This figure (*ẓiyur*) finds a nesting place within a person of deep feelings with regard as well to the debt of gratitude he owes to his Creator, his Initiator, his Father, his Owner.

- והנה באו הדברים בנבואה הזאת באותו לשון שנבא בהם עובדיה. ואמנם איך זה היה, והרי אמרו חז"ל: "שאינן סגנון אחד עולה לשני נביאים ולא יתנבאו שניהם בסגנון אחד"? הנה הוא שהנביאים לא היו מנבאים באותו אופן שהיה מנבא משה רבינו, ע"ה, כי הוא היה מנבא מאת ה' לא לבד העניינים אבל גם הדברים והמלות; כמו שהיה שומע אותם היה כותבם על ספר התורה, באותם המלות אשר שמע. אמנם, שאר הנביאים היו רואים בנבואותיהם כללות העניינים שיודיעם הקדוש ברוך הוא, והנביאים היו מספרים וכותבים אותם בלשון עצמם. ומפני זה, בראותם ענין אחד—יליצו אותו פעמים באותם המלות והדברים שראו וידעו שנבאו אותם נביאים אחרים.

Behold! The text of this prophecy is nearly identical to that of Obadiah. How can this be? Did not our Sages teach that "no two prophets use the same style"?<sup>339</sup>

Rather this means that the other prophets did not prophesy in the same manner as Moses. For Moses received, prophetically, from God, not the subjects alone but the actual words as well. Just as he heard them, so he wrote them, verbatim, in the Torah.<sup>340</sup>

Other prophets, however, in their prophecies, would see only the general outlines that God instructed them, and they would transmit and record them in their own words. Consequently, upon witnessing the same phenomenon they would often knowingly phrase it in the same words and style as had been employed by other prophets.

In his Introduction to Jeremiah, Malbim disagreed with Abrabanel, and maintained that God adapted His word to suit the abilities and personality of each prophet. That, he explained, is why the same measure of prophetic inspiration produced such disparate literary results as exist among the prophets. In so doing, he deliberately blurred some of the distinctions that others (particularly Maimonides) had held between all later prophets and Moses.

• ולא לבד שמשרשי הנבואה שהנביא השיג את דברי ה' על אמתתם מבלי יצוייר אצלו שום שגיאה או סכלות או ספק כלל, כי גם הלשון שבו דבר מלאכת הנבואה אל העם, ויופי השיר והמליצה, וגם פרטי המלות שבם כתב את הדברים על ספר, לא המציא משכלו וחכמתו, רק הושמו בפיו ובעטו ברוח ה' עליו...

Not only is the essence of prophecy that the prophet perceived the word of God truly without error or foolishness or doubt at all, but also that the language in which the prophetic matter was addressed to the people—the beauty of poetry and lyric—as well as the precise wording in which these matters were recorded in writing, were not invented by [the prophet] based on his intelligence and wisdom, but they were placed in his mouth and pen through divine inspiration.

## **Omnisignificance**

Elman assigned Malbim's "bold theological claim" an avowedly polemical purpose: Just as Se'adyah adopted his unique position on Psalms in response to the view of the Karaites, Malbim's singular position on the prophetic writings was a rejoinder to the increasingly critical attitude taken by the Reform movement and modern biblical scholarship.

Thus, in order to shore up the authority of the Bible, including the Prophets, Malbim "promoted" the prophetic authors to the grade Maimonides assigns—uniquely—to Moses, that is, the twelfth degree of prophecy, in which he receives God's revelation with marvelous exactitude and without any human admixture... Malbim, in his need to set the Prophets and Writings alongside the Pentateuch (at least for an Orthodox audience) ascribed to the prophets precisely those qualities that Maimonides ascribed to Moses alone.



# NAFTALI ZVI YEHUDAH BERLIN

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נצי"ב (1816-1893)



The Netziv, like Malbim, agreed to the proposition that *peshat* and *derash* are complementary rather than antagonistic. Regarding Deuteronomy 31:19 (ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת); “now, write down this poem,” he asked, rhetorically:

● היאך נקרא כל התורה שירה, והלא לא נכתבה בלשון של שירה?

How can the entire Torah be called a poem when it is not written in poetic form?<sup>104</sup>

His reply:

● אלא על כרחך, יש בה טבע וסגולת השירה, שהוא דבור בלשון מליצה, הידוע לכל מבין עם תלמוד דמשונה המליצה מספור פרוזי בשני עניינים בטבע ובסגולה. (א) דבשיר, אין הענין מבואר יפה כמו בספור פרוזי, וצריך לעשות הערות מו הצד דזה החרוז כוון לזה הספור, וזה החרוז כוון לזה. ולא מקרי דרוש אלא כך הוא טבע השיר, אפילו של הדיוט... כך הוא טבע כל התורה שאין הספור שבה מבואר יפה, אלא יש לעשות הערות ופירושים לדקדוקי הלשון. ולא נקרא דרוש, אלא כך הוא פשט המקרא.

Au contraire! [The entire Torah] possesses the essence and properties of poetry, which is lyrical speech. It is understood by all educated people that prosaic language differs from poetic narrative in two essential ways. One: In poetry, the subject is not as well defined as in prose and one needs to provide marginal notation indicating that this line alludes to this story and that line to another. This is not termed “homiletics” (*derash*); rather this is the nature of poetry, even that of an ordinary mortal... Such is the essence of the entire Torah,