

פשוטו של מקרא

Background





מורשה
MORASHA

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background



THE ISSUE:

A number of years ago, **Leshem publishing company** put out a *pirush* on Rashi called *Rashi Kipshuto*, which has the *haskamos* of the Badatz and a few other *choshuve* Rabbonim. A couple of years later, the same company came out with a *pirush* on Chumash called **Pshuto Shel Mikra**, which explains the *pesukim* very differently than Rashi. Their implication is that Rashi is saying the “*drash*” and they are saying the *pshat*- the “basic meaning” of the *pasuk*. They even put their explanation above that of Rashi. Officially, they state that they “made a *likut* of Rishonim to explain the simple meaning of the *pesukim*, according to those Rishonim.”

Sounds nice, many think. What could be wrong?

ONE: What have our Gedolim said about making our own commentary on Chumash?

There is a strongly worded letter on this subject from Rav Shach and Rav Elyashiv.

Rav Shach writes to this effect:

“I MUST WARN PUBLICLY ABOUT AUTHORS WHO ALLOW THEMSELVES TO PRINT COLLECTIONS OF COMMENTARIES ON CHUMASH AND SHAS, TO BE EQUIVALENT TO RASHI, USING THEIR OWN JUDGEMENT TO DECIDE BETWEEN OPINIONS OF RISHONIM. THIS IS SO, EVEN IF THEY NOTE WHICH RISHON THEY TOOK EACH PIECE FROM.

IN AN ORPHANED GENERATION SUCH AS OURS, FOR THE AUTHORS TO PICK A VIEW AMONG THE RISHONIM, USING THEIR OWN LOGIC, AND STAND THIS UP AS A PIRUSH ON PAR WITH RASHI — AND ACTUALLY CONTRADICTING RASHI — AND THAT THIS IS RECOMMENDED TO TEACH TALMIDIM — IS A TERRIBLE BREACH AND SHOULD PUT TREMBLING INTO THE HEART OF ANYONE WHO HEARS IT, FOR THE END RESULT IS UNFATHOMABLE.”

Rav Elyashiv added to the effect:

“IT IS BEYOND UNDERSTANDING THAT IN OUR DAYS, AN AUTHOR SHOULD ALLOW HIMSELF TO PRINT A SHAS, AND ALONG WITH THE WORDS OF THE ANGELS — RASHI AND THE RISHONIM — ALLOW HIMSELF TO PRINT HIS OWN COMMENTARY.”

Although the Chumash calling itself *Pshuto Shel Mikra* displays *haskamos* from the Badatz and other Gedolim, they are “borrowed” *haskamos*. Leshem Publishing took the *haskamos* given to their Rashi sefer and put them onto the Chumash without asking permission. Subsequently, the Badatz issued a letter stating that there are many problems with the Chumash.

It is clear that the underlying idea of presuming to make one’s own *pirush* by choosing views among Rishonim goes against our Gedolim. *But it gets much worse than this.*

TWO: There are many disturbing problems with this Chumash:

- There is a pattern that can be seen in their commentary, in which the authors consistently look for the most shallow explanation possible of each *pasuk*. If there is a lesson to be learned, a *neis*, or anything to do with *emuna* in Mashiach or in Techiyas Hameisim, they'll always find one Rishon who says a *different* *pshat* and explain it that way instead. They attempt to remove from the Torah, as much as they can, all mention of ***the importance of learning Torah, of Torah Sheba'al Peh, of miracles, of Techiyas Hameisim, of Olam Haba, of Ruach Hakodesh, and of the Midrashim that we were raised on and that our Emuna in Hashem and the foundations of our Yiddishkeit were nurtured on.*** The authors of *Pshuto shel Mikra* seek an ***alternate meaning*** of the *pasuk* even when the Emuna lesson from Chazal ***IS the most simple*** reading of the *pasuk*. If they cannot find a *pshat* in one of the *meforshim* which is "simple" enough for them, they'll make one up on their own. Other times, they quote a *pshat* as being from a Rishon, but when you check, you find there is no such source. And then there are instances where the authors will quote ***only a PART*** of the commentator's words, *leaving out* the part they don't want, thereby distorting the meaning – or they'll even ***CHANGE one of the Rishon's words***, giving a new meaning to the *pirush*.
- Another very concerning issue is that they downplay the *kedusha* and greatness of the *Avos* and the *Shevatim*, while minimizing the wickedness of the *Reshaim* that the Torah teaches about.
- Worst of all, when the *pesukim* discuss Inyanei Emuna, the authors veer into saying explanations – ***unsupported by any source*** – that are ***at least bordering on kefira***.

Here are just a few examples:

- When Yaakov Avinu sold the *bechora* to Eisav, the authors stress that Yaakov was "cooking the daytime meal", not the meal to comfort mourners, as Rashi says. Then Eisav came from the field "worn out and tired from a hard day" – not from murder, as Rashi says. The *bechora*, according to them, was "not a real *bechora*" – not like Rashi says, that the Bechor would serve in the Beis Hamikdash – but just "a more important position in the family" – like the one to serve lunch. So obviously it follows in their *pshat* that the sale was also not a real sale, just a foregoing of his "older brother role in the family." To support all the above, they quote an Acharon, cutting out the most important line he says, and quote from anonymous "*meforshim*". Among their sources is also a "*Bereishis Rabba*" – ***but when you check, there is no such Medrash in existence.***
- When the *pasuk* says "*V'ruach E-lokim m'rachefes al p'nei hamayim*", Rashi says that it means the *Kisei Hakavod*. The authors of *Pshuto Shel Mikra*, though, say that it means "*avir*" – the air or the wind. They then offer a second *pshat*: "some explain that it is something more spiritual, and a *hint* to the *Kisei Hakavod*." ***No sources necessary, none quoted.***
- There is ***no mention*** of the miracles of the well water rising for Rivka, the twelve stones around Yaakov becoming one, or the *kefitzas haderech* that Eliezer and Yaakov experienced.

- When Yehuda told Yosef “If I do not bring Binyamin back to my father”, then “*v’chatsi l’avi kol hayamim*,” Rashi says that it means both worlds, including Olam Haba. The *Pshuto Shel Mikra* says “all the days of his life” – removing Olam Haba. In the original edition, they falsely quoted the Abarbanel, and this caused a tumult among Rabbonim in Eretz Yisrael. So, in the next printing, they simply removed the citation of the Abarbanel, and kept their crooked p’shat.
- At least **four places** where Rashi explains *pesukim* containing words such as “My *chukim*” or “My Torah” as “Torah *sheba’al peh*” – *Pshuto Shel Mikra* *excludes this basic explanation* from their *pirush*.
- In the beginning of Parshas Vayeitzei, there are many Nissim mentioned and lessons to be learned, such as: Yaakov Avinu davening at Har Hamoriah, Yaakov Avinu learning Torah for 14 years at Yeshivas Shem V’Eiver, (***which Rashi mentions THREE TIMES***), etc, and they delete them all.

The above are just a few of the countless examples we found. They aren’t coincidental; it’s a pattern. If you check, you’ll find that *Pshuto Shel Mikra* consistently takes the opportunity to undermine the kedusha of the Torah and contradict the Mesora we received from Chazal.

THREE: We have a Mesora of how to learn Chumash, and leaving out Rashi and Divrei Chazal, as *Pshuto Shel Mikra* does, is *not* an option:

Torah is *meant* to be learned with the teachings of Chazal. They are Torah *Sheba’al Peh* and are an inseparable part of learning Chumash. They teach us how to understand the Torah *Sheb’ksav*. We cannot learn Chumash without them.

To understand this, we must understand what Torah IS.

The Maharal says that Torah is “*Morah*” – it is a teacher, teaching us halachos, mitzvos, derech eretz, etc.

This can be seen from the first Rashi in the Torah, where Rashi asks, why the Torah doesn’t start with “*Hachodesh Hazeh Lachem*”, the first mitzva that we were commanded? From Rashi’s question, it’s obvious that the Torah *isn’t* here to tell us stories. The Brisker Rav would frequently say that the Torah *isn’t* a storybook. Yet, by leaving out Rashi and the Divrei Chazal he brings in his *pirush*, that is what the *Pshuto Shel Mikra* aims to have the Torah learned as, *chas veshalom*.

The attempt to create a *Pshuto Shel Mikra* type of Chumash has been tried before, generation after generation, and the Gedolim consistently and strongly opposed it. It is significant that the Chumash of Moses Mendelsohn was of this same type, and slipped through the cracks, appearing benign. Mendelsohn’s Chumash was banned by the Vilna Gaon, who said it should be burned as *Sifrei Minim*. The Haflaah, the Chasam Sofer, and others wrote fiery words against it, and the Haflaah reports that the Chumash was indeed publicly burned in Vilna. Tragically, though, it was still used for 100 years in Germany, wreaking havoc on Klal Yisrael, until it was finally recognized by one and all as leading to *apikorsus*.

What have our Gedolim throughout the generations taught us about the absolute requirement of learning Chumash according to the *mesora* we received from Har Sinai, WITH THE DIVREI CHAZAL (as Rashi teaches it to us)?

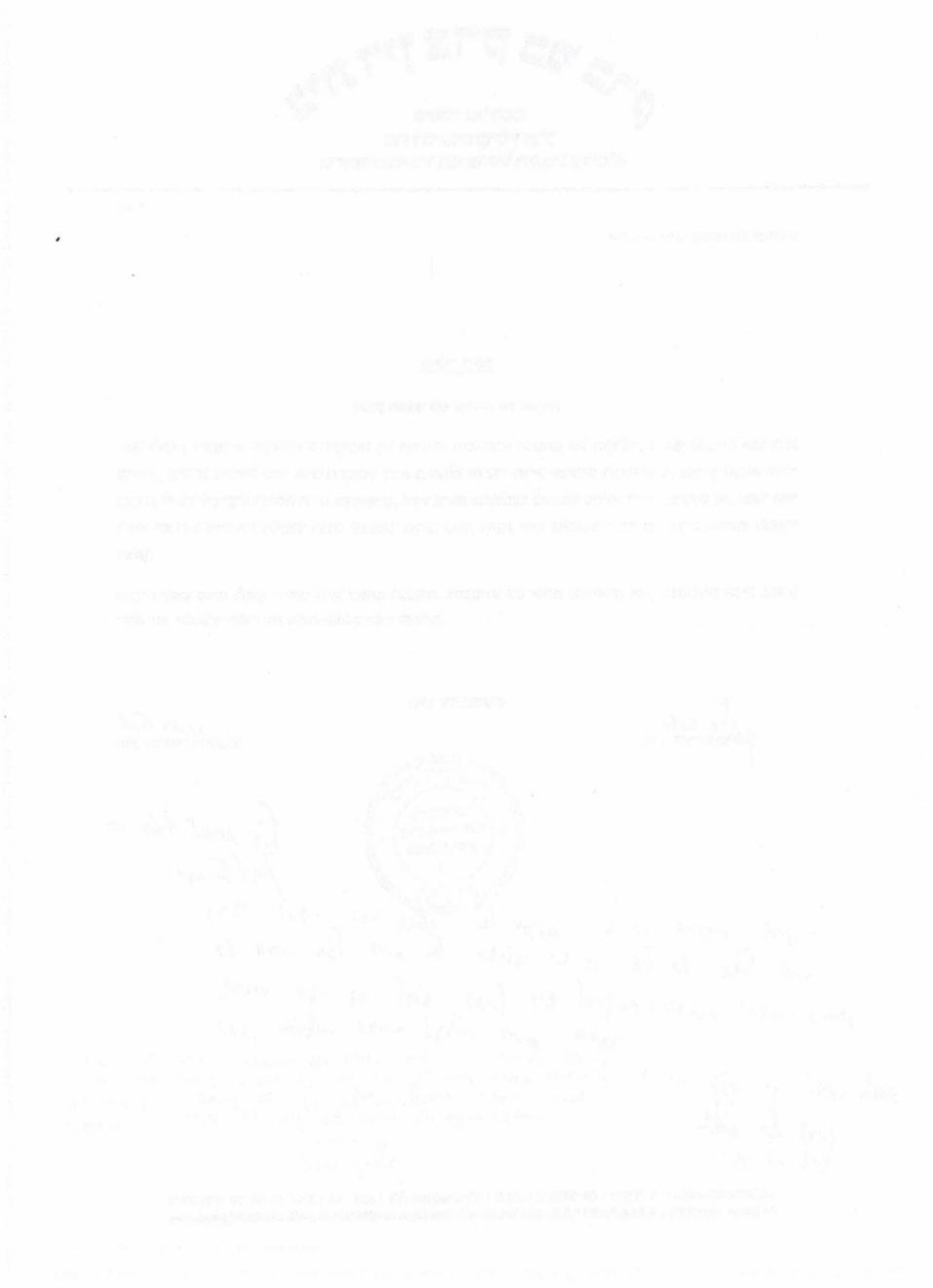
- The **Mabit** says that the *ikar pirush* of Torah Shbiksav **IS Torah Shebaal Peh**.
- The **Netziv** says to the effect: "Someone who tries to explain the *pesukim* of Tanach according to his own understanding, without having first studied how Chazal explain them, one must suspect that he is an *apikorus*."
- The **Chasam Sofer** says that what separates us from the non-Jews is that we have Torah *Shebaal Peh*, and **that we must not learn Chumash without the words of Chazal**. He says "We have seen in this terrible generation that in many countries they have switched the order that the earlier generations established, (by starting off with "*p'shat*" before Divrei Chazal), and they stumbled (becoming *kofrim* in Hashem and in the Torah.)
- The **Brisker Rav** said in the name of the **Chofetz Chaim** that (just like we have Gemara as the explanation of the Mishna), Rashi is the "*Gemara*", **the** explanation of the Chumash. There is a famous story, in which the Brisker Rav was told that a *melamed* translated a *pasuk* for the children according to the Rashbam. The Brisker Rav exclaimed that children should not be told "this is the *teitch* according to the Rashbam, or this is the *teitch* according to Rashi," rather, they should simply be taught the *teitch* according to Rashi as **the** *pshat* of the *pasuk*.
- The **Machaneh Levi**, who was the son of the **Haflaah**, said to the effect: "In previous generations, they learned Chumash every week with Rashi, and therefore it was obvious to them that one cannot understand even one *parsha* without the *drashos* of Chazal – that Torah *Shebiksav* and Torah *Shebaal Peh* are one. But since they stopped learning Rashi regularly, the results have been many sinners who are *kofer* in Torah *Shebaal Peh*."
- **Rabbi Yosef Yedid HaLevi, Rav of the Halabi community in Yerushalayim** about 100 years ago, said: "Anyone who teaches children Chumash NOT in accordance with the *shita* of the Rishonim, such as Rashi and the Ramban, and the other *meforshim* who followed the words of Chazal, is as if he taught them *minus* and *apikorsus*, and it would be better had he not taught them Chumash at all, for it is better to be an *Am Ha'aretz* than an *apikores*."
- In the sefer Aliyas Eliyahu about the **Vilna Gaon**, there is a very instructive story in which a maskil relates how he went to visit the Gaon. The maskil took pains to disguise his identity, but the Gaon realized who he was anyway, and refused to enter the same room as him. After brilliantly answering up all the maskil's questions, the Gaon asked the maskil how he explains the 10 *leshonos* of joy (as the maskil had written a "*Pshuto Shel Mikra*" type of work.) **When the maskil claimed that Rashi and the Medrash are not the pshat, the Vilna Gaon turned away and closed the door.** Later that day, the maskil received severe punishment and *bizyonos* in the main shul in Vilna, for having degraded the words of Rashi.

If all this was not enough to clarify why *Pshuto Shel Mikra* is *treif*, there is more.

FOUR: Eastern Publishing Company has been infiltrated by elements whose names have been
compromised.

One of the members of the on their left, heavily involved in the writing of State Street, whom
we'll call H, has Haskins and very, very good. He writes epigrams and is part of a large group of Kofin,
headed by someone who no longer is a Shomo Torah Unitarian, whom we'll call B. What is even more
dangerous is that the head of this organization, B, still dresses as a very religious Jew - while privately
denying Torah and Mizvo.

Eastern was asked by the Boia Din of Rav Nissan Karitz in Basel to stop printing certain State Street
and they make false promises to stop, and then keep putting out epigrams. (See attached letter.)





"פשוטו של מקרא"

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Booklet Two



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Blocked Text



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In this booklet, **Morasha** presents more background to the *issur* pronounced upon the “*Pshuto Shel Mikra*” chumash.

The booklet is introduced with a **new letter**: an up-to-date declaration of the age-old mesorah about teaching chumash to children from a godol of our time, **Rav Aharon Feldman**, shlit”a.

Next, in “**The Vilna Gaon and the Maskil**”, we take a trip back to the days of old: A fascinating window into how our *zeides* dealt with the first cracks to appear in the wall surrounding *yidishkeit* in modern times. We’ll get to see, up close, those purveyors of “*pshuto shel mikrah*” – *maskilzi Berlin* – and the reaction of Torah-true Jewry.

To be *mehazek* our appreciation of *Torah Shebal Peh* and how *Torah Shb’ksav* is wholly dependent upon it, we bring **Rav Avigdor Miller**, Zt”l’s explanation of “**Why Torah Shebal Peh wasn’t given in Writing**”; and *‘echad mibnei haachaburah*’s rendering of the **Chasam Sofer**: “**What was the tragedy of ה' טבת** – the day that the Torah was translated into Greek”.

Finally, as the last link connecting the *gedolei hadoros* of two hundred years ago with those אשר חיים אתנו היום לאוי”ט, we present “**The root of the pirtzah**” and “**Derzch Hamaskilim**” – unambiguous declarations of the **the gedolim of the generation immediately preceding ours**. We will be able to view their horror at the *hefkerus* displayed by modern-day *chumash-pirush* writers; and their diagnosis as what is the root of it all.

With hearts turned toward the **נותן התורה**, who guards it in our hands, and assures that the **תורה המצוי' עתה בידנו** is the very one **הנתונה למשה רבינו ע"ה**, we beg: “Let us be *zoche* to learn pure, unadulterated Torah, and to pass it on to the coming generations in the form our generation received it, **איש מפי איש, מפי מרע"ה, שקבל מפי הגבורה**.”

Morasha



Morasha Chinuch
Resources

אל כבוד הגאון הרב אהרן פלדמן שליט"א

In years gone by, the basic sefer used by rabbeim to prepare for chumash lessons was the *mikro'os gedolos* chumash. The rabbeim learned Rashi well, and glanced in the other meforshim as background to explaining the *psukim*.

Over the past few years, new chumashim keep on coming out, intent on offering a user-friendly option for chumash learning and lesson preparation. The modern-day authors give one the option of pleasurable reading; alongside the text of the Torah appears the text once more, but laced with words and phrases to make it more "readable."

In addition, a running commentary is printed alongside, containing every word, plus explanation.

One company even claims that their commentary is "the simplest" [פשוטו של מקרא]; they often explain the posuk not as Rashi does, boldly asserting that the pshat they chose is the "simplest" (sometimes they cite one of the meforshim as their source, and sometimes they don't).

Perhaps the Rosh Yeshiva would provide clear guidance on the proper manner of chumash preparation?

I have formulated the following questions:

1) Should Rabbeim endeavor to always teach Rashi's pshat as the basic one when explaining a posuk in chumash?

2) Is it proper for a Rebbe to use, for class preparation, a chumash with a modern-day commentary?

3) Is it proper for a Rebbe to use a modern-day commentary that integrates their own words into the flow of the posuk?

4) Can a Rebbe use a chumash that puts their own commentary before Rashi's on the page, and calls it "פשוטו של מקרא" [Leshem publishing]?

5) Should a child of elementary school age learn chumash from any modern-user friendly version, or should mechanchim insist that they learn (even out of school time) from a chumash *mikro'os gedolos*?

6) Is it our mesorah that the basic way of learning chumash is with Rashi's commentary, specifically? If it is, should mechanchim try to ensure that children learn chumash that way, even when learning on their own?

בכל הכבוד

In reply to your letter, our mesorah is to teach Chumash with Rashi. The modern day commentaries should be avoided. I have seen the commentary Peshuto shel Mikra and I think it should be banned from schools. It has no haskama (the haskama they print is for their commentary on Rashi which accompanies their perush on an opposite page). It seems to have an agenda to omit anything spiritual or supernatural from their perush, turning the Chumash into a story book. Rashi often uses midrashim to explain a pasuk even though he is interested in peshat because of extra words in the pasuk which indicate the midrashic perush. This commentary collects offbeat and individual opinions to accomplish its agenda and pays no attention to superfluous words. Explaining the extra words adds to a child's kevod hatorah by showing that there are inner layers of meaning in a pasuk.

Children should be taught to learn from a Chumash with Rashi (not necessarily Mikraos Gedolos).

I hope I have answered all your questions.

Aharon Feldman

Note [from Morasha]: This letter was written before Rav Feldman, Shlit"va signed the Kol Koreh

The Vilna Gaon and the Maskil

When our story took place, Jews were not allowed to settle in the city of Leipzig. However, when the season of the "Leipzig fair" began to be felt in the air, wagonloads of Jews could be seen flocking upon the North German city. From faraway Russia and Poland they would come, their wagons loaded with all types of merchandise to sell. Here you could see a yid with a beard and *peyos* carefully carrying a *sefer torah* wrapped up in a tallis. Another yid is turning a cabinet into an *aron hakodesh*, and, suddenly the basement that was rented for two weeks felt like a real shul. You could catch a glimpse of two Polish businessmen arguing about a *sugya*, as all around them everyone is focused on one thing: to bring back enough merchandise – at a good price – to be able to do business for the next few months.

On the route from Vilna to Leipzig stands the great city of Berlin. The famous Rav Tzvi Hersh, Zt"l, the Rov of the *kehila*, is learning in his home, when there is a knock on the door. Standing outside is the son of the *dayan*, holding a sealed letter in his hand. "I have a question for the Rov," he says.

"Speak," answers Rav Tzvi Hersh. "This letter was given to me from a traveler from Vilna. He was on his way to the fair in Leipzig, and he was asked to deliver the envelope to Rabbi Moshe Dessauer, who lives here in Berlin. It was sent from a German Jew who is now in Lithuania."

At the mention of the name "Dessauer," the Rov face darkened. "So, what is your question?" asked Rav Tzvi Hersh.

"Perhaps," said the young man; "we should open the letter. Maybe it contains information that will shed light on that man. We can never quite pin anything on him, but he seems up to no good."

Rav Tzvi Hersh put his hand on his forehead for a while. "Yes," he finally answered. "It would be proper to open the letter and check its contents."

The Rov called together other Rabbonim, and they were *matir* the *cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershom, in regards to this letter. They opened the letter, and sure enough, it was signed by the infamous Zalman Maimon, and here is how it read:

Its been three years since we last met in Berlin. In our last conversation, I was talking about how none of our rabbis are versed in the sciences. They spend all of their time and energy delving into the Talmud.

You should know that, in my travels, I heard people talking about a certain great man, a gaon, who lives in Vilna whose name is Rabbi Eliyahu. They were praising him to the sky, and they said that besides his endless greatness in Torah – both revealed and hidden – he also has wondrous knowledge in all of the sciences, metaphysical, physical, etc. He is thoroughly familiar with the *chochma* of music, and even that unfamiliar territory to rabbonim – *dikduk* – he knows all the hidden aspects.

At first, I did not pay attention to these stories, because I know that the people in that land exaggerate. But I kept on hearing more and more, and even

from intelligent and reliable people. I got excited, I thought, "maybe this is the man I've been looking for: Maybe there is really someone in our nation who is great in Torah, and also knows the other *chochmos* and sciences – like our greats in previous generations.

Even though I am old [and weak], I exerted myself to travel to this man to hear his wisdom and to tell him my doubts. I ignored all the toil involved, and I traveled. At every stop along the way, I endeavored to find more information about this man.

When I got within 15 *parsaos* of Vilna, I sat down at a gathering at an inn. There were many *lomdei Torah* there, and they were discussing riddles in Torah at the meal. In the course of their conversation, words of the Vilna Gaon came up many times. The things they said over from him were incredible למטרת האמת.

I told them that I was on my way to the Gaon, to meet and speak with him.

They laughed at me, 'You? With your razor-clean face with your peyos-less head, and with your *goyishe* clothing? Do you think you'll even get to cross the Gaon's threshold?'

Terribly upset by this, I couldn't sleep all that night. I finally devised a plan to present myself as a rabbi from Padua, Italy, whom all the rabbis of Italy had sent to the Gaon on a matter of *pikuach nefesh* for all the Jews there, figuring that he would feel compelled to receive me because of the mitzva involved. I prepared fifteen letters from fifteen different Italian rabbis - I styled all the handwritings and all the texts differently - in all of which I addressed myself as the Rabbi of Padua and in some as the author of a *sefer* on Hebrew synonyms (which led to my being discovered, as you will see).

The letters all told the same story: All the Jews were to be expelled from Italy if the rabbis would not be able to supply satisfactory answers to questions on religion for the Catholic hierarchy. To rescue Italian Jewry, the rabbis had set their eyes on the great and holy Gaon of Vilna about whom they had heard that he knew all of knowledge, and they were requesting the Polish-born Rabbi of Padua to bring the questions before the Gaon. With these fifteen letters I came to Vilna.

When I opened the door of his house, I was impressed by the immaculate cleanliness. To the man sitting there, his shamash, I said that I wished to speak to the Gaon. He told me to be seated while he went in to see if the Gaon would receive me. After a while, he returned and asked me in the Gaon's name what I wanted. I decided it was purposeless to discuss the matter with shamash so I simply handed him the package of letters to give to the Gaon.

Fifteen minutes later the door opened and I saw a man coming toward me. His appearance was awesome, crowned by tallis and tefillin, and he was holding my letters. He stopped at the threshold and did not step into the room I was in. He neither said 'Shalom' nor looked at me.

He spoke in Hebrew, and asked me what the questions were. I posed one of my *apikorsishe* questions and paused to hear his answer. He thought for a moment, then asked me, 'What else did they ask?'

I added more questions. When he thought for a moment, I thought ahead to what else I might ask, and threw in a mass of questions. When I saw that he hadn't answered even the first question, I said, 'These are all the questions.'

Believe me, my friend, I was shaken to hear him begin, 'All your seventy-three questions are really only fifteen, because the first and the seventh and the twenty-fifth and the forty-seventh are really only one question.' And he went on that way sorting all of them into categories, not missing a single one. What a fabulous feat of wisdom - almost beyond human conception - to take such penetrating matters and review them all at once, logically sorting them into groups! And then he proceeded to answer them with brilliant wisdom.

I said to the Gaon, 'Perhaps they will object as follows...'

He replied, 'You didn't understand. Listen again.'

Believe me, my friend, he didn't say a word more than he had the first time, and I realized that his short reply had covered all possible objections.

I again asked, 'Might they not try to reply...'

He repeated the same answer again, and I saw that his reply had precluded even those objections.

Seeing that he was unhappy with my presence, I began to leave. But I heard him ask, 'You are the one who wrote a book on synonyms?' (You will have to admit, my friend, that this was *min haShamayim* so that he could discover my real identity and uncover my lies.)

Happy to think that he wished to enjoy a discussion with me, I turned around and said, 'Yes, I am.'

'Explain the difference between the different terms for joy in Tanach.'

I told him what I thought.

'But you've left out *ditza*.'

'*Ditza* does not mean joy in the Holy Tongue,' I replied.

He quoted a *pasuk* in *Iyov*.

I said, 'The *Baalei hapshat* explain that the term *ditza* there is similar to the *loshon chachomim* "דָּץ בִּי מִיָּדִי" .

The Gaon replied: But our great rebbi, Rashi, z"l, explains there that *ditza* means joy.'

I answered: 'Rashi didn't explain the *pasuk* there according to the literal meaning.' (לא השכיל לפרש ע"ד פשוטו של מקרא).

At that moment, I could feel that he trembled from what I just said.

He retorted firmly, 'Our holy chachamim, the masters of the Midrash, in explaining simcha said there are ten terms used for joy, one of which is *ditza*.'

To this I replied, 'Everybody knows that the masters of the Midrash were not masters of the correct literal meaning.' (אינם מבעלי הפשט הנכון)

He turned his back to me and went back into his room. I returned to my inn. Soon two men came and led me before the communal leaders. I demanded, 'What do you want of me?'

They replied, 'Step before the beis din and you'll find out.'

You know me, my friend; I'm no coward. So, I went and stood before the beis din, seven elders crowned by tefillin and wrapped in taleisim. One of them rose and said to me, 'Are you the one who blasphemed the Sages of the Midrash, z"l, and the words of Rabbeinu z"l (i.e. Rashi -ed.)?'

'I neither blasphemed nor made fun of them.'

'What then did you say at the Gaon's?'

'I said they don't explain the literal meaning (אינם מפרשים ע"ד הפשט).'

The old man signaled to the two messengers, and they took me outside. A half-hour later, I was called back in, and the old man rose and read the beis din's decision that I was to be flogged 39 lashes as is the din of one who is disrespectful to a *talmid chacham*, which sentence the two messengers carried out.

But that wasn't enough. They led me to the shul, where they locked my head in an iron collar attached to the shul wall, facing the public. A sign was posted up above my head: 'This man is being punished for making fun of the words of our holy Sages.' Because every Jew who came to daven Mincha stopped to call me 'Posheya Yisrael' and to spit in my face, a puddle grew that threatened to turn into a stream. You know that Vilna is not like Berlin; Vilna has a tremendous population and they all come to daven.

After Mincha they led me out of the city and sent me on my way. Despite all that I suffered because of him; I want you to know the truth as I see it: Among all the scholars of all the nations there is absolutely no one who can compare with him."

Source: [בהערה] כ"ד ע"א (Some of the translation is based upon that found in the book titled "Avrohom ben Avrohom")

Why was Torah Sheb'al Peh not given in writing?

Excerpt from "Rejoice O' Youth" by Rav Avigdor Miller Zt"l
"The Third Day"

403. Y. "Good morning, Sir."

S. "Good morning. Have you given some thought to yesterday's discussion?"

404. Y. "Much. Yesterday (380) you demonstrated that the truth is unknown to those who merely know the Scriptures. The only way to know the truth of the Scriptures is through the tradition (71)."

S. "Not only is the truth of the Scriptures unknown, without the tradition, but the Scriptures can be so extremely distorted that they teach the opposite of what they really mean. Without the Oral Tradition, the righteous men may be viewed as villains (333-395) and the villains may be viewed as righteous (349). The righteous laws of the Torah are distorted (380-2) to those who do not possess the tradition. This distortion is one of the reasons why the Scriptures lost prestige (417-418) when they were preached by the gentiles."

405. Y. "But I also learned from yesterday's discussion that even the tradition, when it is written down, as it is today, is not understood except by those who are in contact with the Tradition from the mouths of *living* Sages. The statements of the Talmud in criticism of the sins which caused the First Destruction and the Second Destruction may be immensely distorted, without the insight which you have given me (386-399). This explains to me why the Oral Tradition was not written down."

S. "Yes, this is one of the reasons why the Oral Torah was not written. Even secular sciences need a living teacher to demonstrate that which the book cannot demonstrate. If this is true in secular studies, then how much more is personal instruction necessary in Torah learning."

406. Y. "Why is Torah learning so different?"

S. "It is imperative to attain the truth in Torah study, for this is the quest to discover what is G-d's will. No study or pursuit in the world can compare with this study and pursuit after the knowledge of G-d's will. An error in Torah-study is therefore a severe sin (Avos IV, 16). The fact that it was not possible to know the Torah except from the living Sages was a factor in avoiding errors, which are more frequent in Torah matters than in any other subject."

407. Y. "Why is there more possibility of error in Torah matters?"

S. "There is a secret herein which we shall yet discuss (635). But it is obvious that the teachings of the Torah are opposed by all the forces of materialism such as selfishness, lust, indolence, greed, vainglory and malice. In addition, the teachings of the Torah are opposed by the false doctrines of the nations and by their slanders against our tradition. Thus *a great pressure is constantly exerted against the observance of the Torah and adherence to its teachings*. The effect of this

pressure is that of the bribe (69-71), which blinds the eyes and causes one to yield to errors which favor materialism and non-Jewish influences. This, however, is possible only when one is ignorant and has an excuse to deceive himself. But men who know the doctrines of the Torah thoroughly and are fully informed concerning all the details of the laws, can only with the greatest difficulty be persuaded to transgress those laws. 'Rabban Gamaliel said: Acquire a master for yourself and put yourself out of doubt' (Avos I, 16). Only in the soil of ignorance was it possible that the schismatic groups could take root, such as Sadduicism, Karaism, Reform, Conservatism and Nationalism. The Evil Inclination loves men who have not labored in the Torah, for they are his prey."

408. Y. "You are indeed right that a thorough knowledge of the Torah teaching is imperative. But why do you speak of *laboring* in the Torah rather than knowing the Torah?"

S. "Without labor it is impossible to know the Torah (Megillah 6 B). It has been so planned. This is the bond between G-d and His Chosen Community."

409. Y. "Explain this, Sir."

S. "This statement comes from Rabbi Jochanan (Gittin 60B): 'G-d made a covenant with Israel *only because of the Oral Tradition*'. Upon this, our Sages commented (ibid.): '*Because it is difficult to learn*'. The learning of the Torah is our supreme virtue (151, 230-240), the most vital part of the Torah is the Oral Tradition (404), and the difficulty of learning the Oral Tradition is the factor which binds our nation to G-d."

410. Y. "And why is difficulty of learning so important?"

S. "G-d does not desire a man's achievements, but He desires his efforts. This we shall later discuss (622-3). If G-d wished achievement in Torah learning, He should have bestowed the Torah upon the angels (Shabbos 88 B); for an angel can achieve by his gigantic intellect in one moment that which a man cannot achieve in his whole lifetime. Since G-d values so highly men's labors, and since the Torah-study is the most important of all pursuits (406), it is understandable why one's chief effort should be devoted to Torah-study. This is one of the reasons why the Torah was made difficult to learn."

411. Y. "So I understand from you, Sir, that G-d chose the seed of Abraham, among other reasons, for the reason that they would labor in the study of the Torah (151)."

S. "Yes. That is the supreme reason. 'For I know him, for he will command his sons and his household after him to keep the way of G-d' (Breshis 18:19). The chief means of keeping is by studying (407). Abraham's seed could be entrusted with this task."

412. Y. "The labor in Torah-study has practical benefits, beside the intrinsic virtue to which you alluded (410). The toiling in the Torah causes one to forget to sin (Avos Ch. 2:2)."

S. "Yes. Idleness brings to immorality (Kesubos 59B) and to mental illness (ibid.). The Jew always had the Torah-study to fill in all his leisure time. Because the gentiles have no Torah, they are unable to utilise the Shabbos; and this leisure is harmful for them and for the world."

413. Y. "Then we may say that the Oral Tradition was not written down, beside the reason that the personal instruction prevented errors (405-6), but for the additional reason that it was thus made more difficult to learn?"

S. "Yes. There is difficulty in committing huge amounts of information to memory (520-521). In addition, the Torah was rendered more difficult by concealing it in hints of superfluous words or letters, by variations in style, and by other means. Any law which was derived from these hints was especially valued, because of the *effort* which had been expended on discovering it ('Because it is derived from a Drashah, it is more precious' - Nedarim 3A). But there is another great purpose in concealing the Oral Law. This is to make it difficult to be usurped by the imitators."

414. Y. "Explain, Sir."

S. "The imitators have been so bold as to claim that the Scriptures are theirs and that they are the chosen people instead of us (93-94). Had the entire Torah been put into writing, or had the Oral Tradition been easy to acquire, the imitators would have seized upon all that we possess and would have claimed that it is theirs. Said Rabbi Avin (Jerusalmi Peah, Ch. 2, Hal. 4): 'Had I written down for you the great matters of My Torah, would they not have been considered as estranged from you? What, then, would be the difference between you and the nations? These bring out their books, and these bring out their books.' And also: Said Rabbi Judah bar Shalom: 'Moses wished that the Mishnah should be in writing, but G-d foresaw that the gentiles would translate the Torah and read it in Greek and say that they, too, are Israel. G-d says to the gentiles: Why do you say that you are My children? I know only those as My children who possess My secrets. What are the secrets? The Mishnah' (Yalkut Shimeoni, Hosea 8:12)."

415. Y. "This is certainly an important reason for not writing the Oral Tradition. But now that it is in writing, as the Sages later permitted in order that the Torah should not be forgotten in the exile, the nations of the world can come and imitate our Oral Tradition, just as they imitate our synagogue and some of our doctrines and laws."

S. "It is too late. Although the Oral Tradition is now in writing and is accessible, it was not accessible in the time when the imitators founded their systems and wrote their books. In these systems and books the early errors were incorporated for perpetuity, and they cannot now be changed. These stand as permanent monuments to their inaccuracy. Even the ignorant among our people perceive the errors of the innovators. When our multitudes witness how the imitators observe their days of rest, for example, they see that the gentiles have no knowledge of the laws which Jews know from the Oral Tradition. The early innovators had no accurate knowledge of the relationship between the lunar and solar calendars which we always knew by our Oral Tradition; and we were witnesses of their repeated confusion when their holy days were slipping

back out of the proper seasons. Whenever our people discussed texts and laws of the Scriptures with the imitators, our people saw that the imitators were unfamiliar with the true meaning, which was found only in the Oral Law. 'And in the seventh month on the first day, you shall have a holy convocation; no work shall you do; a day of blowing it is for you' (Bamidbar 29:1). The gentile can explain nothing of this day: its name, its purpose or its laws. To him the Scriptures are a sealed book. Only by consulting the traditions of the Jews could the nations learn that this verse spoke of the first day of the new year when the world is being judged. This ignorance which the gentiles display has prevented them from having any influence upon even the most unlearned of our people."

416. Y. "Is this the sole reason for making the Oral Torah less accessible to the nations of the world?"

S. "Another reason why the Oral Torah was concealed was to prevent the nations from defiling it."

417. Y. "How could they defile the Torah?"

S. "Before the Scriptures fell into the hands of the nations, they were regarded with unblemished reverence. But the nations, when they began to use our Scriptures, committed upon them sacrilege after sacrilege. First they used them, through ignorance and through distortion, to corroborate their errors. Thus the Scriptures were interpreted in the opposite of what was really intended (82) and to teach doctrines which are really abhorred in the Scriptures. In addition, they explained them in a manner which belittled them, which belittled the forefathers and great men of our nation, and which made our laws appear crude and harsh. In their folly they invented a theory that these laws were made harsh for the purpose of being a yoke and a punishment for the wickedness of the Jews; and thus they prepared the way for their doctrine that they have received a new law which is more just and lenient as befits the 'more righteous' nations. Although professing to revere the Scriptures, they minimised their value in order to aggrandise their own writings. Thus the Mohamedans claim that we falsified our Scriptures (83). In the Nazarene's words the constant theme is: 'True, it is written so-and-so in the Scriptures, but I say unto you otherwise'. Thus their honoring the Torah was for the purpose of breaking it down; and the only real value they found in the Scriptures was for quotations to corroborate their doctrines. In addition, the laws and teachings of the Scriptures have been employed by the nations as excuses and justification for selfishness, cruelty and deceit. As a result, these laws and teachings acquired an unpleasant savor in the eyes of the world, and the Scriptures came into disfavor. When men are tortured to death for the 'glory of G-d', when helpless and lone old women were burned as 'witches', when unnatural practices and pessimistic doctrines are preached from Scriptural texts, then these leave an unpleasant connotation. The Jew, who knows the remarkably just laws of the Torah, has an entirely different feeling on the matter. The hypocrisy, greed and cruelty of the nations have robbed the Scriptures of their original grace which they had among Jews. The gentiles have so ridiculed the 'Puritan' Sabbath and the 'prudery' of decency, that now the

world has learned to despise the beautiful holiness of the day of rest and the pure excellence of decent chastity. Would that their profane lips had never learned to utter the sacred words! 'The day when they wrote the Torah in Greek for Ptolemy was as bitter for Israel as the day when the Golden Calf was made' (Soferim I,7)."

418. Y. "Even Jews have become poisoned by the nations' defilement of the Scriptures."

S. Esau bears the sins of Jacob (330-331). The stories and sayings of the holy Scriptures, which Israel had reverently handled like sacred gems, were debased by the brutal hands of Esau into pieces of clay. These stories and sayings were taken at their lowest possible evaluation. They also were used for rude jests and ribaldry. The great men were, for them, only names for ridicule: Adam, Methusaleh, Noah, and all who followed them. And finally, after debasing the Scriptures, the gentile world embarked on the most vicious and abandoned orgy of vandalism, by their virulent Bible criticism with which they sought to discredit entirely the Torah. Mountains of fanciful lies (109-118) were piled up against the Scriptures. They thereby caused immense injury to the reputation of the Torah, which would not have occurred had they never had access to it. The Bible critics of Jewish birth *were but the disciples of the gentiles*, who bear the responsibility for all the Jews who were thus led astray."

419. Y. "Then, by remaining unwritten, the Oral Tradition was spared the debasement of gentile handling and gentile vandalism."

S. "Yes. This task was left to Jewish-born vandals such as Graetz and his kind. But, at least, the gentiles have not spent very much time in attacking our Oral Tradition; for it was not easily accessible to them."

420. Y. "Is this the reason why it is not proper to teach the Torah to non-Jews (Sanhedrin 59 A)?"

S. "This should suffice. But beside the purpose of making it difficult for the imitators to usurp the Torah (413-415), and beside the purpose of preventing the nations from defiling the Torah (416-418), there is the third reason which is that Israel has been singled out as a kingdom of priests; and therefore they alone are worthy to possess the Torah."

421. Y. "You probably mean that by possession of the Oral Law we are the teachers of all Mankind. But this reason is not operative, for the nations do not learn from us."

S. "They do learn from us, in a confused and adulterated manner. Because of our teachings and the good example which our nation has shown, the world has progressed immensely. In addition, our imitators have spread some of our doctrines, which, although incorrectly and incompletely taken from our traditions, yet have brought some rays of righteousness to millions. For example, the murder of infants (312) and the murder of widows (313) has been discouraged where these systems have spread. True, these millions of men could have been taught the unadulterated truth were it not for the advent of these religions. Yet, as events have transpired,

our light has faintly pierced the thick mists of their errors. But this is not what is meant by a kingdom of priests. We are not commanded to teach our tradition to the nations."

422. Y. "Then what is meant by our being a kingdom of priests?"

S. "It means that the Torah was given to us alone as an especial honor and kindness. The Oral Law, together with the written Law, was given to us so that our people should spend their lives in its study. We have been chosen to be a nation of students, or philosophers, or priests; which means that our chief occupation is not in earning a livelihood or in seeking pleasure, but in the study of G-d's laws and teachings. This devotion to the pursuit of Torah knowledge is the happiness of our nation. Instead of gladiators, bullfights, boxing, hunting, flirtation, drunkenness, war, horse-racing, baseball games, theatres and war, our nation has always delighted in G-d's Torah (230-241). This happiness, and this grand opportunity for Achievement (894), are a unique blessing bestowed only upon our nation. Just as the Cohanim, the seed of Aaron, are privileged to eat the holy offerings and to perform the acts of the service in the Sanctuary, and anyone other than them who eats the sacred food or performs the sacred acts incurs great punishment: so has the Torah been given only to the seed of Abraham as the greatest reward and the greatest opportunity, and anyone not of the seed of Abraham who attempts to enjoy the privilege of the Torah-study thereby incurs great guilt. The meaning of a kingdom of priests is that we are a nation who, like the Cohanim, are singled out from the nations to be forever blessed with opportunity, honor and privilege."

ת"ח

בגד המדפיסים פירושהם וליקוייהם על דף החומש הש"ס,
כשהם בשוה לפירוש הראשונים, רש"י ותוס'

בס"ד, יום ב' נח ב"ו בתשרי תשנ"א

לחמדי מכשול

הנה, לא אוכל לעבוד על זה, שלא להתריע בשני כח רבים, על מה
שמרשים לעצמם מחברים בני זמננו, להדפיס ליקוט פירושים כפי הכרעת
שכלם, כמו פירושים על החומש הש"ס, בתוך החומש הש"ס, כמו רש"י,
ומציינים למטה שזה לקחו מפירוש ראשון זה, וזה לקחו מפירוש ראשון
אחר.

הנה, בודני חזר היתום, להכריע כפי קטנות רעתם בפירוש הראשונים
דלא כרש"י, כפי שכל המחבר, וגם מבגיסים שם מפירוש האחרונים כפי
הכרעת שכל המחבר מה ולקט, וקובעים שזהו פשוטו של דבר, ולא
כרש"י, חזו המוסלך ללמד לתלמידים. היא פרצה נוראה, אשר היתה
נריכה להחריד כל לב שומע, כי אחרונה מי ישרנו, וגם הפירושים עצמם
שתכינו, ראיתי שנשלו גם בזה.

זה נובע, ממה שהתחילו להרשים בזמן האחרון כעור לחקל, אבל
האמת היא לא כך, ואורכה תורה נקנית בעמל, וכל הרוצה להיות עמל
וינע, מוכסח שימצא, ובאתי בזה למחות, שח"ו לעשות כזאת, וקיומה
וחיזוקה של תורה, הוא למנוע הדבר.

וע"ז באתי על החתום בצער

אלעזר מנחם פן שך

הנני מצטרף להג"ל — כי לא יעלה על הדעת, שמחבר בן זמננו ירשה
לעצמו להדפיס את הש"ס, וליד רבי ראשונים כמלאכים רש"י ותוס',
לצרף פירושו וליקוטיו.

יוסף שלי אלישיב

Gedolim of the previous generation explain that switching Rashi for other midrashim is "the *derech hamaskilim*".

What would they say to a *chumash* that switches Rashi for their own *pshat*?

סו	לדרורות	חיזוקה וכבודה של תורה	כתבוני
<p>ובמה שכינו "החומש המדויק" הוסיפו עוד חדשות שעל מקומו הנצחי של פרש"י, קבעו פירוש בשם "פניני רש"י ומדרשים", השמיטו רובו של פרש"י, והחליפו מדרשי רש"י במדרשים אחרים שבחרו הם, והוא דרך המשכילים מאז. ואוי לדור שכך עלתה בימיו, שכל איש עושה הישר בעיניו. ויש לפרסם הדברים שלא יגדרו ח"ו בשיטתם.</p>			
<p>החותם מתוך כאב לב ועלבון התורה, מתוך תקוה שיתוקן העיוות הגדול מיכל יהודה ליפקוביץ</p>			
<p>הנני מצטרף להנ"ל יוסף שלו' אלישיב מ.ש. שפירא</p>			
<p>ג"א מצטרף א.ל. שטינמן שמואל אויערבאך חיים קניבסקי</p>			
<p>ג"א מצטרף נגד הפירצה נסים קרליץ יהודה שפירא</p>			

WHAT WAS THE TRAGEDY OF ח' טבת – THE DAY THAT THE TORAH WAS TRANSLATED INTO GREEK?

WHY DID THE FIRST MOVEMENTS TO DENY "פ תושבע" START JUST AFTER THE TRANSLATION?

אחד מבני החבורה
(based on 'ס"ח דרשות חת")

Torah *shebiksav* and Torah *shebe'al peh* were both presented together to *klal yisroel* in the *midbor*. The first generation who read Torah *shebiksav*, learned it as an inseparable part of "Torah", understanding every word according to the way it was explained to them by Moshe Rabbeinu.

Throughout the subsequent generations, the entire nation toiled to remember all that was handed down to them – both Toros together – to the exclusion of all else. There were no other books in homes of the Jewish people. The entire concept of secular reading was not part of the national culture.

Then, after the return from Bavel, the Greeks conquered Eretz Yisroel. The Greeks brought along with them their idolization of secular learning. The Greeks honored the person who read texts written by man, and toiled to acquire man-made wisdom.

King Talmai, a "lover of books" had a large library, a virtual temple to the ideal of secular knowledge. It bothered him that the Jews had a "Book" that was inaccessible to him – inaccessible because of its ethereal quality as much as because of the foreignness of its language.

The king forced the *chachomim* to translate this "Book" for him, and thus, darkness descended upon the world. At that moment, a "new book" was born. Stripped of its nuances in the Holy Tongue and placed side-by-side on the shelf with histories, comedies, tragedies, epics, novels and all other texts contrived by man, "the Bible" was now available to everyone to read the way its neighbors in the library were perused.

The Jews, who, until now, never entertained the thought of learning Torah *shebiksav* any other way than they had been doing for the previous millennium, were suddenly blinded by the great honor accorded "The Jewish National Book" in the library of their conqueror. And, as Jews became attracted to the Greek pastime – secular learning – and they, too, became "readers of literature"; they began to entertain the idea of reading the "Jewish Book" in the manner that their Greek neighbors "read" it.

To paraphrase Rav Shamshon R. Hirsh, Zt"l: Torah *shebiksav* is akin to the notes a student took by a lecture. How silly is the person who wasn't by the lecture, and tries to understand the shorthand of the listener! How much dumber (and haughtier) is he, who wasn't by the lecture, and argues with the writer of the notes, insisting that *he* understands them better! 'Can't you see?', he says. 'My *pshat* in your notes is the simplest. It must be true!'

The movements of Tzadok and Beisus were the natural progression of "reading the book". This, says the Chasam Sofer, was the source of *kefirah* in Torah *Shebe'al peh* the first time around, and this same *pirtzah* was the first step down the slippery slope to total *kefirah* taken by the *maskilim* in Germany.

¹ דרושים לח' טבת [דרוש א' (תקנ"ו), דרוש ט' (תק"פ), דרוש ט"ו (תק"צ)] (מהדורת מכון חת"ס [תשע"ה])
See Rav Shamshon Refael Hirsh's *pirush* at the beginning of *parshas mishpotim*