**Completing Rashi’s Commentary into Double Glosses, Using the Midrashic Hermeneutics of Rabbi Moshe Gabbai, Author of “*Eved Shlomo*,” a Supercommentary on Rashi**

This paper presents the work of a relatively unknown supercommenter on Rashi, Rabbi Moshe Gabbai (RMG). Rabbi Moshe Gabbai, a 15th-century Sephardic scholar, authored the *Eved Shlomo*, a supercommentary on Rashi. This paper presents his biography, interpretive approach, and the ‘midrashic hermeneutics’ he employs in completing Rashi’s midrashic commentary into double glosses.

Kamin writes that “if we only had Rashi’s double glosses, we would not hesitate to say that Rashi distinguished between the hermeneutical categories of ‘*peshat*’ [a basic, literal reading of the text] and ‘*derash*’ [a non-literal explanation that takes the text out of its context, usually for ritual or moral purposes].…,” but since his double glosses are the minority, Rashi’s commentary exhibits a “methodological ambiguity” which blurs the distinction between *peshat* and *derash*.[[1]](#footnote-1) RMG approaches Rashi from the Sephardic hermeneutical tradition that emphasizes grammar, linguistic analyses, and clarifying the distinction between *peshat* and *derash*. He attributed this distinction to Rashi himself, noting that he added a *peshat* commentary to many of his midrashic commentaries thus completing the double-gloss format. Sometimes the *peshat* he added was his own, at other times he used Rashi’s *peshat* from a different source.[[2]](#footnote-2) In addition, RMG often exposed the rabbinic sources of many of Rashi’s *derash* glosses, for example, with comments like “This is a rabbinic *midrash*”; “This is a rabbinic aphorism from *Bava Metzia*”; “This is from the rabbinic commentary on *Bereishit Rabbah*”; “This is a rabbinic *midrash* from the *Sifri*”. In this way, he makes the commentary more transparent and clearer for the reader, even where Rashi does not bring the rabbinic source himself.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The main topic that RMG raises in his introduction is the distinction between glosses based on *peshat* and those based on rabbinic *midrash*. This distinction is sometimes found in Rashi’s commentary, but it is often missing. RMG wrote that he will use the opening formula “the rabbi commented” when Rashi brings a “*peshat* or the rabbi’s precise reading,” but in practice, he uses this formula also for glosses that include a *midrash*. In any case, his discussion in the introduction and his description of Rashi’s commentary show that he is primarily interested in questions such as, When does Rashi bring first a *derash* and then a *peshat*? or vice versa; and, When does Rashi view the *derash* as a reflection of the *peshat*? Indeed, in his explanation, RMG implements the strategy he sets out in the introduction. Furthermore, one of his main goals is to respond to exegetes who critiqued Rashi for using *midrash*:

And I saw people buried in their ignorance who came across the rabbi *z”l*‘s commentary and read it, glorifying themselves in the town and saying that it is full of *derashot* and fables, and they try to question it and doubt it and be as vexing as they please. Their toil is foreign, for they say, We will raise our voices, for who is our master? And after these come little foxes that spoil the vineyards, scoffing at an angel of God, saying that the *peshat* of the text is beyond him, they spoke ill of him. And they drank the evil waters, the spiteful waters that wash over those who learn secular studies, the earliest and the latest. And they did not remember what our Sages said: They had only barely allowed Rabban Gamliel to learn Greek wisdom, since he was of royal lineage and would respond to heretics and skeptics […] Here is the rule: Greek wisdom is only allowed for this purpose. For we have no need or desire for that wisdom to reach the truth of the true Torah wisdom.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Rashi’s use of *midrash*, and his distancing himself from the *peshat* of the text, generated a critical atmosphere toward his commentary; RMG expresses his commitment to defend Rashi’s commentary from this critique. In his introduction, RMG does not respond directly to the critique but merely expresses his negative opinion of the critique and the critics. However, his approach to Rashi’s use of *midrash* in his glosses can be viewed as a kind of response to the critics, even if he does not address them directly. In his commentary *Even Shlomo* RMG does not refute the critics’ claim, which he brings in his introduction, that “it is full of *derashot* and fables.” On the contrary: He emphasizes Rashi’s use of *midrash* and delves deep into them. His goal was to show that there is nothing wrong with using *midrash*. Quite the opposite: Rashi thus enriched our understanding and connected the text to the rabbinic traditions. RMG demonstrates that the use of *midrash* certainly does not justify the second claim, that “the *peshat* of the text is beyond him.” This RMG explicitly refutes by distinguishing between *peshat* and *derash*, and completing many glosses into double glosses.

In this paper, we will see how the technique of completing Rashi’s glosses into double glosses allows RMG to deal with the critique of Rashi’s extensive use of rabbinic *midrash* in his commentary on the Torah, by positioning the midrashic gloss as a layer that, in most cases, parallels that of the *peshat* and does not replace it.

**Biography**

1. Kamin (2007), 265; see also Viezel (2022), 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example: “From all that they chose: The Rabbi *z”l* wrote that even a married woman, even a male, and beasts.. And according to the *peshat*, because they had the choice to forcefully take women as they pleased, with no one to tell them to return them” (Gabbai [2006], 69). See Appendix A for a list of 31 examples where RMG completes Rashi’s single glosses into double glosses which include both *peshat* and *derash* commentaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Quotes are from Gabbai (2006), 60, 94, 143, 333. Also see Appendix A below, for a list of 31 examples of this sort. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gabbai (2006), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)