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

This paper presents the interpretive approach of the nearly unknown Rabbi Moshe Gabbai (RMG), the 15th-century Sephardic author of *Eved Shlomo*, a supercommentary on Rashi. It focuses on his ‘midrashic hermeneutics’ wherein he supplements Rashi’s midrashic glosses, thus generating double glosses.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Kamin writes that “if we had only 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*.[[2]](#footnote-2) RMG approaches Rashi’s interpretation 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 by adding a *peshat* commentary to many of Rashi’s midrashic commentaries, thus creating a double gloss. Sometimes, the *peshat* RMG added was his own; at other times, he used Rashi’s *peshat* from a different source.[[3]](#footnote-3) In addition, RMG often revealed the Rabbinic sources of many of Rashi’s *derash* glosses, 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*.” This makes the commentary clearer and more transparent for the reader, even where Rashi does not cite the Rabbinic source himself.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In his introduction, RMG distinguishes between glosses based on *peshat* and those based on Rabbinic midrash, a distinction often lacking in Rashi’s commentary. RMG writes that he would use the opening formula “the rabbi explained” when Rashi offers 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*? In his commentary, RMG implements the strategy he lays out in the introduction.

RMG also endeavored to respond to exegetes who critiqued Rashi for using midrashim:

I saw people buried in their ignorance who pounced on the master’s commentary and read it, saying that it is full of midrashic interpretations and legends. They question and doubt it and are as vexing as they please while receiving public praise for this. Their toil is misguided, 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 it is they who imbibed the bitter waters, the spiteful waters that wash over those who learn secular studies, ancient and modern. They did not remember what our Sages said: They barely allowed Rabban Gamliel to study Greek wisdom since he was from the royal house 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.[[5]](#footnote-5)

RMG describes a critical attitude towards Rashi’s use of midrashim and his distancing himself from the *peshat* of the text and expresses his commitment to defend Rashi’s commentary from this critique. While RMG does not respond directly to the critique in his introduction, merely expressing his negative opinion of both the critique and the critics, his approach to Rashi’s use of midrash in his glosses can be viewed as a kind of response to the critics, even though he does not address them directly. In his commentary, *Even Shlomo*, RMG does not refute the critics’ claim, which he quotes in his introduction, that “it is full of *derashot* and legends.”[[6]](#footnote-6) On the contrary, he emphasizes Rashi’s use of midrash and delves deep into the midrashim cited by Rashi. 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 midrashim certainly does not justify the second claim, that “the *peshat* of the text is beyond him.”[[7]](#footnote-7) He explicitly refutes this by distinguishing between *peshat* and *derash* and expanding many glosses into double glosses.

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

# Biography

RMG completed his commentary on Rashi’s commentary on the Torah in 1421[[8]](#footnote-8) and is thought to have died in 1443.[[9]](#footnote-9) His commentary is called “*Eved Shlomo*” and is found in a single manuscript in the Oxford Library.[[10]](#footnote-10) It was first printed in 2006 by Rabbi Moshe Phillip, and afterward in Rabbi Moshe Phillip’s (2019) edition of *Hummash rishonei parshanei Rashi* [*The Five Books of the Torah with the Earliest of Rashi’s Commentators*].[[11]](#footnote-11)

RMG was born in Aragon and spent much of his life in Majorca. He was forced to flee Spain during the 1391 riots and reached the city of Honaine in Algiers, where he served as the rabbi and dayan (religious court judge). There, he also completed his supercommentary on Rashi, *Eved Shlomo*. RMG maintained friendly relations with Rabbi Yitzchak Bar-Sheshet Perfet (known by his acronym, Rivash) and Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (the Ravshatz), [[12]](#footnote-12) two prominent rabbis and halakhic decisors who had likewise fled from their native Spain to Algiers in 1391. These two rabbis refer to RMG with respect and admiration in some of their responsa. [[13]](#footnote-13)

The *Eved Shlomo* commentary is a broad and in-depth commentary on Rashi’s commentary on the Torah, written by a Sephardic scholar who was an esteemed halakhic decisor[[14]](#footnote-14) active at the beginning of the 15th century. His commentary is characterized by the great detail in which he describes the different types of midrashim and the different ways in which Rashi used them, classifying them into forms and categories; he also offers an explanation of the essence of each midrash and of Rashi’s “exegetical methodology.” It is possible that RMG found structure in places where it does not exist. Thanks to his close attention to the question of Rashi’s use of midrashim, the *Eved Shlomo* commentary forms an important link in the history of the study of the questions that arise about Rashi’s commentary on the Torah. Furthermore, RMG’s *Eved Shlomo* commentary embodies the tension between the Sephardic and French-Ashkenazic approaches to midrash; he expresses a unique blend of conservatism and open-mindedness; and conducts an in-depth conversation about Rashi and the Sages’ assumptions and exegetical practices. His precise, detailed, and explanatory writings on midrash, which he divides into eight categories while formulating rules for relating to the various categories, form an additional level in the long history of pre-modern Judaic approaches to midrash.

# The *Eved Shlomo* commentary – A broad approach to Rashi’s use of midrash

Rabbi Moshe Gabbai was part of a surprising phenomenon. A number of late-medieval Sephardic scholars invested time and energy in resolving differences between Rashi, the leading spokesperson of Ashkenazic exegesis, and traditional Sephardic hermeneutics on the Torah. This was accomplished with the help of a new literary genre: the supercommentary. RMG belonged to a group of supercommentators whose primary goals included resolving “the issue of Rashi’s midrashim.” Mordechai Cohen describes this group as follows: “The question of how to explain Rashi’s practice of midrash exegesis given his declared policy of using *peshat*, is ancient. A respectable tradition of supercommentaries on Rashi’s glosses on the Torah devotedly tried to show how every one of the midrashim presented by the rabbinic wizard of Troyes stemmed from convincing philological-literary considerations and was not a midrashic development with no basis.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Cohen mentions R. Eliyahu Mizrahi (1455-1526), the best-known of Rashi’s supercommentators, and shows how he used this method of establishing the “exegetical necessity” in Rashi’s use of midrash. Below, we will show that RMG’s method was far more complex than the somewhat forced apologetics that Cohen attributes to R. Eliyahu Mizrahi. RMG does not avoid questioning the midrashim that Rashi brings. As Eric Lawee writes: “Despite his genuine reverence for Rashi, Gabbai’s interactions with Rashi’s exegesis, especially in its midrashic dimensions, frequently reveal a more complex texture than his work’s highly subservient-sounding title [the *Slave of Solomon*] suggests.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

In his commentary on Rashi, the author of *Eved Shlomo* discloses his understanding of Rashi’s system of considerations. He refers to all types of Rashi’s glosses, both *peshat* and *derash*, repeatedly emphasizing that these are two separate exegetical levels with different characteristics: “And the way of the *derash* stands on its own and the way of *peshat* stands on its own.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Throughout his commentary, RMG also attends to and explains Rashi’s *peshat* glosses. However, his main focus was undoubtedly Rashi’s *derash* glosses, which he clarifies by asking questions and offering resolutions.

# RMG’s midrashic hermeneutics

The term ‘midrashic hermeneutics’ requires explanation, since it uses the word ‘midrashic’ as an adjective for hermeneutics, like ‘post-modern hermeneutics’ or ‘Gadamerian hermeneutics’. This term assumes that the authors of midrash (the Rabbinic Sages) had a unique concept of biblical exegesis and finding meaning in biblical verses, even if they did not explicitly formulate it; Rashi may have based most of his glosses on the Torah on this concept. This issue is important because RMG deals intensively with questions, difficulties, reservations, and solutions regarding Rashi’s use of midrash, as well as with the validity of the midrashim*,* their exegetical character, and their authors’ attitude toward *peshat* explanations. Based on a meticulous analysis of RMG’s supercommentary on Rashi’s midrashic glosses, we can form an interesting (though not always consistent) picture of the midrashic hermeneutics that he believed guided Rashi.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Use of the term ‘hermeneutics’ within the context of a supercommentator’s work is justified, since the supercommentator examines the commentary of the commentator he studies, and tries to explain what that commentator did, what were his motives, what was his method, and how he understood the exegetical process. In many cases, the supercommentator deals with meta-exegesis on a specific commentator, as hermeneutics does in a broader perspective.

# Rashi’s commentary through the eyes of Sephardic scholars

Any discussion of Rashi’s commentary, its acceptance during the Middle Ages, and a supercommentary on Rashi must account for the varied exegetical Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions, and, more specifically, the way these scholars regard the Rabbinic *aggadot*[[19]](#footnote-19) that form a central layer of Rashi’s exegesis. While we need to avoid oversimplifying when presenting the different exegetical orientations, we can generally say that the Sephardic tradition absorbed its basic perceptions regarding the proper attitude toward *aggadah* from the Geonim (who also said, in this context, that “one should not rely on the words of *aggadah*”) and from Islamic rationalist philosophy, at a time when many Ashkenazic scholars viewed critical attitudes to Rabbinic material as bordering on heresy.[[20]](#footnote-20) Despite this difference, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic scholars display a wide variety of attitudes toward midrash. For example, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam), who lived in northern France, zealously insisted in his commentary on explaining the Torah through *peshat*, yet declared that the Sages dealt with derashot “which are the essence.”[[21]](#footnote-21) The approach of many Sephardic scholars was also complex, with the most prominent proponent Sephardic exegete being Nahmanides, who will be discussed below.

Supercommentators who belong to the Sephardic tradition were part of the process that led to the acceptance of Rashi’s commentary in the Sephardic community, a process that was at first characterized by rejection and reservations but later by acceptance and approval.[[22]](#footnote-22) As far as we know, R. Abraham ibn Ezra was the first Sephardic scholar to refer to Rashi’s commentary on the Torah. His critical comment, “...R. Shlomo (of blessed memory), who explained the Bible according to *derash* and thinks that he does so according to *peshat*, and his books contain less than one in a thousand of *peshat*...”[[23]](#footnote-23) set off similar comments by other scholars and exegetes whose exegetical orientation was similar to that of Ibn Ezra. Characteristically, the Sephardic scholars reject the validity of aggadic midrashim in the explanation of verses. In his commentary on the Torah, Ibn Ezra often criticizes interpretations based on the aggadot that Rashi cites in his commentary, usually without explicitly mentioning Rashi.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Alongside the rational-philosophical critique (and its influence) of Rashi during the 14th century, such as that of Ibn Ezra, the opposite process of Rashi rising to the status of classical exegete among Sephardic Jews took place as well. One proof of this is R. Yaakov ben Rabbenu Asher’s ruling that Rashi’s commentary may be used instead of Targum Onkelos (the ancient Aramaic translation of the Torah) when fulfilling the requirement of “*shnayim mikra ve-ehad targum*,”reading the weekly biblical portion twice and the Amaraic translation once.[[25]](#footnote-25) Regarding the situation during the 14th century, Gross writes: “There is a disconnect between the narrow elitist groups of those who continue the ‘*peshat*’ tradition according to Ibn Ezra’s method, and the majority of the Jewish Sephardic community who were well represented by the halakhic ruling in the ‘*Tur*’ [R. Yaakov ben Rabbenu Asher’s halakhic work where the ruling appears]. This general state was perhaps the basis for the callous attitude of those literati, who expressed their frustration through literary insults and contempt against Rashi.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Gross depicts a reality in which the “simple” people in 14th-century Spain became increasingly attracted to Rashi’s commentary, which is based on midrashim that they found engaging, while some of the literati remained steadfast in their opposition to Rashi because of his use of midrashim that lack exegetical validity. Gross does not cite findings to support this theory, and it is difficult to estimate the extent to which the broader Sephardic community accepted Rashi’s commentary once they were introduced to it in the 14th century. Lawee points out that Nahmanides, who often refers to Rashi and Ibn Ezra in his commentary, played a crucial role in bringing Rashi to the forefront in Spain. He describes how Nahmanides’ commentary created a classical triumvirate that would dominate the world of Torah exegesis for hundreds of years.[[27]](#footnote-27)

RMG was, a conservative Sephardic intellectual, but he viewed Rashi as a classical commentator and was aware of the critique; he believed that protecting Rashi and responding to the critique was part of the purpose of his commentary. While he does not explicitly mention Rashi’s critics, his consistent and detailed attention to these issues shows that responding to them was one of the primary goals of his work.

# RMG’s attitude toward midrashim cited in Rashi’s commentary, and the movements that preceded him and influenced his stance

## Midrashic methodology according to the Eved Shlomo

RMG creates a clear distinction between the *peshat* and *derash* glosses in Rashi and raises difficulties and offers resolutions regarding the midrashim. What Miriam Sklarz wrote about Nahmanides is true of RMG as well: “On the one hand, he contended with the Andalusian exegetical school which is characterized by strict rational philology that threatens the validity of the midrash which is not bound by these demands of *peshat* exegesis, while on the other hand, he dealt with Rashi’s commentary which was mainly based on Rabbinic midrashic literature.”[[28]](#footnote-28) RMG, like other Sephardic scholars of his time, was influenced by Andalusian exegesis, yet his commentary clearly shows that he read Nahmanides’ commentary carefully and shared the latter’s attitude toward aggadic midrash. This stands in contrast to Ibn Ezra who allowed himself to explicitly critique midrashim in his commentary. RMG was even more committed to Rashi’s commentary than Nahmanides, who in many cases ignores Rashi or rejects his midrashic glosses, offering *peshat* glosses in their stead. RMG, however, given his self-appointed role as Rashi’s supercommentator, does not do so except in rare cases as will be discussed below. Instead, he defines the *derash* method as having a different character that is not subject to exegetical logic and is therefore not really a commentary in the usual sense of the word.

We can formulate RMG’s stance toward midrash as follows: A midrash does not need to follow the rules of exegesis that apply to *peshat* commentary, and usually does not replace or cancel the “primary” meaning of the verse, which is the *peshat*.[[29]](#footnote-29) Instead, the midrash creates an additional level of meaning that can be discussed, compared to other midrashim, and even questioned.

Regarding the essence of midrash, RMG often focuses his explanations on the Sages, who penned the midrashim, and not on Rashi, who only cited them. In the following examples, RMG highlights the hermeneutic difficulty related to the midrashic glosses and uses the peculiar nature of midrash to resolve this problem. The midrash is not subject to the same exegetical logic as the *peshat* and does not aspire to replace the *peshat* explanation of the verse.

Gabbai frames the midrashic glosses as additions to the *peshat*, meaning, glosses that do not intend to replace the *peshat* but to provide an additional meaning or to connect the verse to an important idea. This enables certain readers to overcome their distaste for midrashim that pose as explanations for a verse, perhaps even presuming to replace the *peshat*. In the following examples, RMG stresses that the authors of the midrash (the Sages and Rashi) knew the *peshat* and did not intend to replace it with *derash*. On several occasions, Ibn Ezra also stressed that the Sages knew the *peshat* “more than all the generations that followed them”; “They knew the *peshat* because they had all knowledge.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Sometimes, Ibn Ezra notes that not only the Sages, but everyone knew the *peshat*: “For all of Israel know the meaning of the verse which is literal and simple [*peshuto*].”[[31]](#footnote-31) In some of the following examples, RMG emphasizes that the *peshat* is “known” and the midrash is but an ideological addition that does not intend to replace it. In all the examples RMG turns Rashi’s commentary into double glosses by adding a *peshat* explanation to Rashi’s *derash* one, in one of two ways: by adding an original *peshat* gloss, or by adding a *peshat* gloss that Rashi offers elsewhere.

***“Phineas the son of Eleazar” (Num 25:11)***

After Phineas took a spear and killed the Israelite man and Midianite woman who sinned in public, God turned to Moses, praised Phineas’ deed, and declared this merit earned him a covenant of peace:

Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My zeal. Say, therefore, ‘I grant him My covenant of peace’ (Num 25:11-12).

Rashi explains:

**“Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest”** – Since the tribes would scorn him, [saying] ‘Have you seen this son of *Put* whose mother’s father fattened [*pitem*] calves for idol worship and killed a leader [*nasi*] of Israel?’ Therefore, the text attributes him [genealogically] to Aaron.

RMG explains:

“Phinehas son of Eleazar” – The rabbi (of blessed memory) wrote that because the tribes had scorned him – have you seen this son of *Put*, a son who fattened calves for idol worship? We should wonder about this midrash… For why would he have to thus attribute him [genealogically], since all Israel knew that Phinehas was the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron, and also knew that his mother’s father was Jethro…? We should say that according to the *peshat,* the text undoubtedly did not come to state Phinehas’ genealogy, but to give him a covenant of peace for eternal service in the priesthood. And the *peshat* reading of the verse would not be withheld from the Sages more than from those who came after them, and since they (may their memory be for a blessing) knew that the text spoke of Phinehas to give him an eternal covenant of priesthood, as I wrote. Indeed, after they understood the *peshat* meaning, they would interpret the text homiletically [through *derash*] in any way that it would be understood, and that is their way in most of the midrashim… And that is what they explained here… And now that his genealogy was detailed... They indicated that they used to scorn him [saying that] his mother’s father fattened calves for idol worship, and in doing so they add [another] sin to their crime, for they would worship it and scorn Jethro his mother’s father… And this is what the Sages said in the portion of *Vaera* (Rashi on Ex 6:9): “Therefore I say: Let Scripture be explained in its literal sense so that each statement fits into its proper setting, but the midrashic exposition may also be given, if you like, as it says (Jeremiah 23:29) ‘Is not my word like as fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer which, by the force of its own blow, the rock at which it strikes shatters in pieces.’”[[32]](#footnote-32)

In this gloss, RMG sets forth a general rule for midrashim. He notes that even the Sages agreed that the explanation that fits the context is that God gave him a covenant of peace and eternal priesthood and not that the tribes scorned him: “They knew that the text states Phinehas’s genealogy to give him a covenant of eternal priesthood, as I wrote.” According to RMG, the Sages were aware of the *peshat* explanation and appear to claim that they admit that this is the simple explanation that embodies the meaning of the text. Based on this example, RMG formulates a general conclusion: “And the Sages have better access to the simple explanation of the text than all those who followed them.”[[33]](#footnote-33) After RMG demonstrates the Sages’ approval for laying an agreed-upon foundation of *peshat*, he describes how they erect a “second floor” on top of it, from *derash*: “After understanding the *peshat* meaning, their custom was to interpret [with *derash*] the verse in any way that it could be understood, and this is their way in most of the midrashim.” RMG uses the word *hevinu* [‘they understood’] because the Sages never expressed the *peshat* explanation of which he speaks.

What about a contradiction between two different explanations of the same verse? If the Sages truly admit that the verse means that Phineas received a covenant of peace, but they also offer the homiletical explanation of the tribes scorning him, then the verse has two contradicting meanings. To answer this question, RMG quotes Rashi on Ex 6:9: “Therefore I say: Let Scripture be explained in its literal sense so that each statement fits into its proper setting, but the midrashic exposition may also be given, if you like, as it says, ‘Is not my word like as fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer which, by the force of its own blow, the rock at which it strikes shatters in pieces.” God’s word shatters into several pieces at once, meaning that a verse can simultaneously hold different interpretations. This quote from Rashi assumes a certain order: First, “Let Scripture be explained in its literal sense” – first we must find the meaning of a verse according to the laws of language and human rationale. Only at the second stage can we add *derashot* that do not accord with the text. Elboim writes: “We can say that merely placing a partition between *peshat* and *derash* and rejecting the *derash* as an explanation of the text does not dull the difficulty of *derash*... Since the essence and truth of the *derash* itself must be clarified, as it is sealed with the Sages’ approval.”[[34]](#footnote-34) We would formulate this a bit differently: Even though placing that partition between the *peshat* and the *derash* softensthe difficulty of *derash*, we still must clarify the meaning of the *derash* itself, though it is not the primary meaning of the verse. And that is what RMG did. First, he places the partition to neutralize the critique of the interpretation based on *derash* which is not properly anchored in the language and context of the verse. RMG argues that *derash* works only after we know the *peshat* meaning of the verse, and therefore the midrash is ‘allowed’ to veer from the literal meaning of the text and does not ‘need’ to conform to it since this coherence is supplied by the *peshat*. Now, we “interpret the text homiletically [through *derash*] in any way that it would be understood,” and RMG need only focus on the content of the midrash and explain it such that it does not contradict any known laws of nature. He also explains the idea behind the Sages’ midrash: The Israelites sinned by idol worship and therefore they tried to include Phineas in their culpability by noting that his mother’s father was an idol worshiper. By mentioning the *peshat* explanation of this verse that he claims was known to the Sages, RMG turns Rashi’s gloss on the verse into a double gloss that includes both a *derash* and a *peshat* explanation, presenting the reader with a clear distinction between these two layers of commentary.

## “And for all the mighty hand” (Deut 34:12)

The final verses of the Torah summarize Moses’ life, ending with:

And for all the mighty hand and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Deut 34:12)

Rashi explains:

**“And for all the mighty hand”** – that he received the tablets of the Torah in his hand;

**“And for all the great terror”** – miracles and mighty deeds in the great and terrible desert;

**“In the sight of all Israel”** – that his heart led him to break the tablets in their sight, as it says, “And I broke them in your sight” (Deut 9:17), and God concurred, as it says, “That you have broken” (Deut 10:2) – I commend you for breaking them.

In his commentary on Rashi’s commentary on the final verse of the Torah, RMG characteristically distinguished between the level of *derash* and the level of *peshat*, determining that Rashi explicated the verse using *derash*. He begins by explaining the gloss (“he meant to say”), according to which the words “And for all the mighty hand” refer to actual hands, Moses’ hands:

The rabbi (of blessed memory) explained that he received the tablets of the Torah in his hands. What he meant to say was that Moses’ hands were strong enough to receive the tablets of the Torah, or he meant to say that each of Moses’ two hands was strong enough to receive the Torah.[[35]](#footnote-35)

RMG wonders, and questions (“one should wonder”), why Rashi does not explain this verse according to its context, and why he contradicts his gloss in Exodus, where he wrote that “the mighty hand” refers to God’s signs. A similar explanation would work well with the rest of our verse, “and for all the great terror,” which Rashi explains refers to the miracles and wonders that Moses performed for the Israelites in the desert; it also works better with the end of the verse, “in the sight of all Israel.”

One should wonder why he did not interpret “the mighty hand” as he did in the Torah portion of *Ve-eleh shemot* (Ex 6:1): “‘For he will expel them with a mighty hand’ – [because of my mighty hand which will overcome him, he will expel them”], etc. And he (of blessed memory) also interpreted “‘And for all the great terror’ – miracles and mighty deeds in the desert,” therefore he should have interpreted “And for all the mighty hand” – the great strength, meaning the great wonders that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. We should also say [and question] from what he interpreted “In the sight of all Israel” that his heart led him to break the tablets in their sight, since “In the sight of all Israel” refers to “And for all the mighty hand and for all the great terror which Moses performed.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

RMG also points out a difficulty in Rashi’s following gloss (which he does not quote), on the words “In the sight of all Israel”: “That his heart led him to break the tablets in their sight, as it says, ‘and I broke them in your sight’, and God concurred, as it says, ‘that you have broken’ – I commend you for breaking them.” It seems that Rashi explains the words “in the sight of all Israel” in a way that RMG deems incompatible with the context of the verse since RMG thinks that “in the sight of all Israel” refers to “And to all the mighty hand and to all the great terror,” which describes the signs and miracles and mighty deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. Therefore, RMG questions Rashi’s gloss that explains the words as referring to the tablets of the Torah: “And for all the mighty hand” – that received the tablets, and “In the sight of all Israel” – that he broke the tablets in the sight of all Israel.[[37]](#footnote-37)

RMG resolves these difficulties by stating that Rashi’s gloss is ‘according to the way of *derash*’. Or, more precisely, since ‘the way of *derash*’ is not committed to the context, the questions disappear on their own, and there is no need to deal with them:

And we should say that the *peshat* meaning of these verses is known, as I have said, but the rabbi (of blessed memory) wished to interpret them according to the way of *derash*.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Here too the *derash* does not replace the *peshat*. RMG does not claim that Rashi was forced to interpret according to the *derash* because of some problem with the *peshat*; rather, he thinks that Rashi wanted to interpret the verses according to the *derash* to express a particular idea. The expression *“*the peshat meaning of these verses is known*”* underscores the fact that the authors of the midrash already know the primary sense of the verse, the *peshat*.

Later on in his gloss on this verse, RMG brings two more examples where the Sages homiletically explained a verse contrary to its context. The first:

As the Sages homiletically explained (*Mekhilta,* *Massekta de-Amalek*, 1) the verse (Ex 18:1) “‘And Jethro heard’ – What rumor did he hear? He heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and the war against Amalek.” And it is known that according to the *peshat,* he heard “All that God had done for Moses and for Israel,” but the Sages derived this *derash* from the proximity of the Jethro [narrative] to the splitting of the Red Sea and the war against Amalek.[[39]](#footnote-39)

RMG believes that the contradiction between the *peshat* and the *derash* in Deut 34:12 echoes the contradiction between the *peshat* and the *derash* in Ex 18:1. The verse at the end of Deuteronomy says, “And for all the mighty hand and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.” The reader might ask: What did Moses perform in the sight of all Israel? According to the *peshat*, the answer is found in the verse itself: “And for all the mighty hand and for all the great terror.” According to RMG, Rashi’s gloss on the verse that refers to Moses breaking the tablets is not the *peshat*. A similar phenomenon appears in Rashi’s reading of the verse in Exodus 18:1, “And Jethro the priest of Midian heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his nation, that God took Israel out of Egypt.” The reader might ask: What did Jethro hear? According to RMG, here too the *peshat* answer is found in the verse itself: Jethro heard “All that God had done for Moses and for Israel his nation.” In both verses, Deut 34:12 and the one about Jethro in Exod 18:1, RMG maintains that the *peshat* is “known,” i.e., familiar to the Sages as well. He similarly explains the example discussed above about Phineas: “And the *peshat* reading of the verse would not be withheld from the Sages more than from those who came after them […] However, after they understood the *peshat* meaning, they would interpret the text homiletically [through *derash*] in any way that it would be understood, and that is their way in most of the midrashim…”[[40]](#footnote-40) Here, too, the Sages knew the *peshat*, but they added the layer of *derash* and taught us, based on the proximity of the narratives, that Jethro had heard about the splitting of the Reed Sea and the war against Amalek. Likewise, in the next example:

And so they homiletically explained (BT *Rosh Hashanah* 3a on Num 21:1): “‘And the Canaanite heard’ – heard that Aaron died and the clouds of glory had departed.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

Numbers 21:1 says: “When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel and took some of them captive.” Here too, the reader might ask: What did the Canaanite hear? The answer is in the verse: “That Israel was coming by the way of Atharim.” That is the known *peshat*. However, the Sages chose to add the homiletical interpretation that the Canaanite head that Aaron had died, and the clouds of glory departed.

RMG says that if we return to Rashi, we can understand that he wishes to teach us something about Moses’ hands – that they were important and valuable, for he had held the tablets in them. Rashi also wishes to emphasize that God praised Moses for breaking the tablets, which he did “in the sight of all Israel,” even though the contextual meaning of the verse does not include any reference to Moses’ hands.

Here too he wished to teach us that “And for all the mighty hand” that Moses received the tablets of the Torah in his hand, for they were very valuable, and his heart led him to break them in the sight of all Israel, **and even though the *peshat* meaning is as I wrote above**.[[42]](#footnote-42)

RMG reiterates that the *peshat* of the verse is different than what Rashi wrote in his gloss. This does not attest to a rejection of the *peshat*, which RMG brings up again at the end of his discussion on the verse, thus enabling the clarity given in Rashi’s double glosses.

## “His brother is dead” (Gen 44:20)

After the cup is found in Benjamin’s sack, and it seems like he is doomed to remain in Egypt as a slave, the brothers return to Pharaoh’s palace. Judah stands before Joseph, whose true identity has not yet been revealed, and tries to overturn the evil decree. Judah’s speech to the king’s viceroy opens with the following words:

Then Judah went up to him and said, “Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not be impatient with your servant, for you are like Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, ‘Have you a father or another brother?’ We told my lord, ‘We have an old father, and there is a child of his old age, the youngest; his full brother is dead, so that he alone is left of his mother, and his father dotes on him’” (Gen 44:18-20).

Here are some of Rashi’s glosses on these verses:

**“For you are like Pharaoh”** – you are important in the eyes of the king, this is the *peshat*. And the *derash* is that you are destined to suffer from *tzaraat* [biblical leprosy] just as Pharaoh suffered on account of my grandmother Sarah for the one night he detained her (*Bereishit Rabbah*). Another option: Just as Pharaoh decrees and does not fulfill his decree, and promises and does not keep his promise, you act thus as well. And is this the “I will set my eyes on him” that you said you would do? Another option: ‘For you are like Pharaoh’ – if you anger me, I will kill you and your master.

**“And his brother is dead”** – Because of his fear, he uttered a lie. He [thought to himself]: If I tell him that he lives, he will demand that I bring him.

RMG discusses these two contradicting glosses that describe Judah’s speech to Joseph:

“And his brother is dead” – the rabbi (of blessed memory) explained: Because of his fear, he uttered a lie. This is odd: If he was fearful, how did he say “If you anger me, I will kill you and your master” as he said above (v. 18)? And he also told him: “You are destined to suffer from *tzaraat*.” And we should say, that “If you anger me” etc. is a midrash, and “Because of his fear, he uttered a lie” is the *peshat*, and we do not question a *peshat* on account of a *derash*.[[43]](#footnote-43)

We have here two parallel, yet contradicting, narratives about Judah’s speech. According to the first, which is closer to the *peshat*, Judah speaks to Joseph as an ordinary person would speak to a king. Therefore, he lies and says “And his brother is dead” – for he fears Joseph. According to the second, which is difficult to derive from the verses, Judah threatens Joseph and tells him, in a more genteel way: “If you anger me I will kill you and your master” (meaning, you and Pharaoh). According to the rule that guides RMG, that “we do not question a *peshat* on account of a *derash*,” the two contradicting narratives can coexist because one is *peshat* and the other *derash*, so the contradiction does not pose a problem. Here, RMG cites two different glosses from Rashi on the same issue, one *peshat* and one *derash*, and creates a clear double-gloss format.

## “And he heard our voice” (Num 20:17)

At one point during the Israelites’ journey in the desert, they reach the border of Edom. Moses sends an emissary to the Edomite king requesting permission to pass through his land:

From Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom: “Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the hardships that have befallen us. Our ancestors went down to Egypt, we dwelt in Egypt for a long time, and the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and our ancestors. We cried out to God who heard our voice and sent a messenger who freed us from Egypt. Now we are in Kadesh, the town on the border of your territory” (Num 20:14-16).

Rashi cites a midrash on the expression “And he heard our voice”:

**“And he heard our voice”** – In the blessing that our father had blessed us: “The voice is the voice of Jacob” (Gen 27:22), when we cry out, we were answered.

The midrash that Rashi cites describes how Moses reminded Edom of their common history, and of the blessing that the father of the founders of the two nations, Jacob and Esau, blessed Jacob. The midrash understands the word “our voice” as alluding to the blessing given through the words “The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands the hands of Esau.” Isaac blessed Jacob with a “voice,” meaning, he blessed him in that God would respond to the voice of his prayer, while he blessed Esau to live by his sword, alluded to in the word “hands.” Here RMG implements the distinction between *peshat* and *derash* to explain the contradiction between the midrash and the biblical story of Isaac blessing his sons:

“And he heard” – the rabbi (of blessed memory) wrote: In the blessing that our father blessed us, “The voice is the voice of Jacob.” One should wonder, saying, when Isaac said “The voice is the voice of Jacob,” he had not yet blessed Jacob, and was still uncertain whether it was Jacob or Esau. We should say that this is according to the *peshat*. But our Sages homiletically explained that he blessed Jacob with a voice – with the prayer that when he prays to God he will be answered, and he gave Esau the hands, meaning, that he should live by his sword. The Sages learned this from the word “our voice” [*kolenu*] – the voice of Jacob, and since it is written without the letter *yod*, it is to be understood in the singular.[[44]](#footnote-44)

RMG comments that the content of the midrash is unreasonable: When Isaac said “The voice is the voice of Jacob” he did not yet know that he was speaking with Jacob, therefore, how can one claim that at the same time, he blessed Jacob? The answer is that the *derash*, as opposed to the *peshat*, does not need to be bound to the same standards of logical compatibility with the reality described in the verses. Once again, RMG emphasizes the differences between two coexisting levels of meaning. He presents two explanations for the words “The voice is the voice of Jacob,” a *peshat* explanation and a *derash* explanation, which can both be attributed to Rashi (the *peshat* is taken from Gen 27, and the *derash* from our verse in Numbers). This leads him, once again, to the format of a double gloss on the verse “The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau,” by connecting Rashi’s midrashic gloss on this verse to Rashi’s *peshat* gloss in Genesis.

## “And they brought the tabernacle” (Ex 39:33)

After describing the construction of the tabernacle, the Torah records:

And they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its furnishings: its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets (Ex 39:33).

Rashi explains:

**“And they brought the tabernacle”** – For they were unable to erect it. Since Moses had done no work in the Mishkan, the Holy One, blessed is He, left for him the task of erecting it, for nobody was able to set it up because of the weight of the boards which no human strength was capable of setting up. Moses, however, placed it in position. Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He, “How is its erection possible by human beings?” God answered him: “You be busy with your hand!” He appeared to be erecting it, but in fact, it set itself up and rose of its own accord. That is why Scripture says, (Ex 40:17) “The tabernacle was erected (הוקם)” — was erected by itself. This is a Midrash of Rabbi Tanchuma.

RMG found two very different stories in Rashi about the erection of the tabernacle. According to the midrash that Rashi cites, the tabernacle miraculously erected itself, since no person was capable of setting it up because of the weight of its boards. RMG points out that this midrash contradicts a different gloss that Rashi offers on a verse in Numbers, and suggests:

The rabbi (of blessed memory) wrote, in the name of the *Tanhuma*, that they could not erect it… I find this *derash* very difficult… If it was not Moses who erected it but it rather erected itself, how can he say “And Moses placed it into position” – the boards, for if Moses erected the boards, then it did not erect itself. This is also difficult because the sons of Merari would transport the boards on wagons… And further, in that same pericope (Num 7:1) it says, “And on the day that Moses finished erecting the tabernacle.” The rabbi (of blessed memory) explained… This teaches that throughout the seven days of consecration, Moses would erect it and dismantle it… And we can say that it is improper to question a *derash* on account of a *peshat*, for what it says in the *Tanhuma* is a *derash*, as it says “the tabernacle was erected” meaning that it erected itself… And what the rabbi (of blessed memory) explained regarding the verse “On the day that Moses finished erecting the tabernacle” is a *peshat*, also the sons of Merari who carried the boards is by way of *peshat*. And the way of *derash* is separate from the way of *peshat*.[[45]](#footnote-45)

In his commentary on Numbers, Rashi explained that Moses was the one who erected and dismantled the tabernacle, contra what the midrash on Exodus claims. Also, says RMG, the verses themselves attest that the sons of Merari would carry the boards, showing that the boards were not heavier than what people could carry.

We can liken RMG to a surgeon, who uses a delicate scalpel to perform complex surgery on Rashi’s words, separating the *peshat* from the *derash* and constructing two parallel narratives that do not clash. Sometimes, this separation exists within the words of Rashi themselves, when he brings a double gloss on a verse, its *peshat* alongside its *derash*.[[46]](#footnote-46) However, in most cases, Rashi only brings one explanation. In cases where this single gloss is midrashic, RMG often feels the need to add the *peshat* on his own, thus supplementing Rashi’s glosses and generating a double gloss, to emphasize that the *peshat* exists parallel to the *derash*.[[47]](#footnote-47)Sometimes Rashi refers to the same story in two different, and even contradicting, glosses. RMG frames cases like this as two parallel narratives, one according to the *derash* and one according to the *peshat*, as is the case in the story of the tabernacle’s construction.[[48]](#footnote-48) According to the exegetical approach of the *Eved Shlomo*, the tabernacle could erect itself within the reality created by the *derash*, and be constructed by Moses and the Levites within the reality that arises from the *peshat*: “And the way of *derash* is separate from the way of *peshat*.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

## “Of hammered work” (Ex 25:31) – Hammered with a mallet, or made on its own?

The Torah details God’s instructions to Moses for creating the vessels of the tabernacle, with the golden lampstand among them:

You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be of one piece (Ex 25:31).

Rashi writes:

**“The lampstand should be of hammered work”** – One should not make it of separate pieces nor shall one make its branches or its lamps as separate limbs — a kind of work called *souder* in old French, but it was to be made in its entirety of a single mass of gold and beat with a mallet and cut away with the implements of his craft thus making the branches spread out in this direction and in that.

**“Of hammered work”** - his word is translated in the Targum as נגיד, an expression for “drawing out;” that he draws out the parts of the lampstand from the lump in this direction and in that by the blow of the mallet. The term מקשה denotes knocking with the mallet — *batediz* in old French — as in “and his knees knocked (נקשן) one against another.”

**“Shall be of one piece”** – On its own, because Moses was puzzled by [the work of the lampstand], the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, “Cast the talent of gold into fire and it will be made of itself.” For this reason, it does not say here תַּעֲשֶׂה [“thou shalt make”].

We can identify two contradicting trends in Rashi’s description of the way the lampstand was to be crafted. According to the first glosses, it was created by hammering a lump of gold with a mallet, while according to the last gloss, it was miraculously formed on its own. RMG questions the contradiction, which he resolves using the rule he attributes to Rashi:

And we should say, that when he (of blessed memory) wrote that “One should not make it of separate pieces... but is to be... beat with a mallet” etc., he was speaking of *peshat*; when he wrote “And it will be made of itself” he was speaking of *derash*. *The midrashic exposition may also be given, and a verse does not depart from its literal meaning*.[[50]](#footnote-50)

RMG posits that the verse does not depart from its literal meaning to justify two parallel contradicting glosses, both from Rashi’s commentary on this same verse. In addition, he hints at a different gloss where Rashi, through the words “but the midrashic exposition may also be given” (commentary on Ex 6:9), where Rashi defends multiple meanings, especially that which is based on the *peshat* alongside the *derash*: “Therefore I say: Let Scripture be explained in its literal sense so that each statement fits into its proper setting, *but the midrashic exposition may also be given,* if you like, as it says, ‘Is not my word like as fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer which, by the force of its own blow, the rock at which it strikes shatters in pieces.’”

We note that RMG does not only resolve the contradiction in Rashi by determining that parallel contradicting glosses of *peshat* and *derash* are ‘allowed’; he also offers another option that integrates the *peshat* and the *derash*: God commanded Moses to strike with the mallet, with no thought or plan, and this will cause the lampstand to be formed on its own.[[51]](#footnote-51)

## “A half-shekel” (Ex 30:13) – A fiery coin, or a defined shekel?

Exodus 30 relates how God commanded Moses to count the Israelites in the desert, using a half-shekel that each would give:

This is what everyone who is entered in the records shall pay: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight—twenty *gerahs* to the shekel—a half-shekel as an offering to God (Ex 30:13).

As in the previous example, here too Rashi offers contradicting explanations for the same verse. Here are some of them:

**“This shall they give”** — He [God] showed him [Moses] a kind of fiery coin the weight of which was half a shekel and said to him, “Like this shall they give.”

**“The half of a shekel according to the shekel of holiness”** – according to the weight of the shekel which I have appointed for you as the standard by which to weigh the shekels used for sacred purposes, such as the shekels mentioned in the [Torah portion] dealing with estimating things [dedicated to the Sanctuary] and with “fields of possession.”

Rashi offers two different versions of the way God explained the half-shekel to Moses. According to the first explanation, he showed him a fiery coin. This is based on *Midrash Tanhuma* and anchored in the word “this” [*zeh*], which supposedly implies God pointing at something that Moses could see. According to the second version, God refers Moses to the section of Leviticus that discusses shekels given in exchange for something dedicated to the Sanctuary, rendering them holy shekels. Here, the emphasis is on the word “holy.” RMG notes the contradiction, and resolves it:

We should say that when he wrote, regarding “This they shall give,” that “He showed him a kind of fiery coin” – this is a *derash* on the word “this” [*zeh*]; and when he wrote “According to the weight of the shekel which I have appointed for you as the standard by which to weigh the shekels used for sacred purposes,” this is *peshat*. As the midrash says: “‘This [*zeh*] month’ – he showed him the moon in its renewal,” which is *derash*; and after that, he wrote “And the verse does not depart from its literal meaning, about the month of Nissan, he was told: ‘This [*zeh*] will be the first in the counting order of the months.’”[[52]](#footnote-52)

Here RMG cites the maxim that “The verse does not depart from its literal meaning” as a quote from Rashi’s commentary on Ex 12:2. A similar contradiction is found there, which Rashi addresses. This is how Rashi explains the verse “This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you”:

**“This month”** - He showed him the moon in the first stage of its renewal, and He said to him, “The time when the moon renews itself thus, shall be unto you the beginning of the month.” But a verse does not depart from its literal meaning, so He said this regarding the month of Nissan: This month shall be the beginning in the order of counting the months, so that Iyyar shall be called the second, Sivan the third.

This is the double-gloss format wherein Rashi starts with a *derash* and continues with a *peshat* explanation. In this gloss, Rashi quotes the maxim that enables him to use a *derash* without discarding the *peshat* meaning of the verse, which he also supplies. Here the *derash* is ‘activated’ by the word *zeh* in the phrase “This [*zeh*]month,” similar to “This [*zeh*] they shall give” in Ex 30. The *derash* is that the word *zeh* refers to the moon in its initial stage of renewal, as God supposedly points to the moon and teaches Moses that this is what a new month looks like. The *peshat* is that *zeh* refers to the month of Nissan, and God commands Moses to count it as the first month. In Ex 30, RMG compares the gloss to the format found in Ex 12, explicitly points out the contradiction, and uses the maxim “A verse does not depart from its literal meaning” to explain Rashi’s midrashic hermeneutics.

**Concluding Remarks**

In the introductory paragraph to *Eved Shlomo*, RMG describes his generation’s critique of Rashi (“I saw people buried in their ignorance who opposed the rabbi’s commentary”). People believed that Rashi’s commentary was primarily based on midrashim (“for it is full of midrashim and legends”), though the extent to which this belief was widespread or dominant among his contemporary Sephardic scholars is hard to determine. RMG does not challenge this belief.[[53]](#footnote-53) In his introduction and the body of his work, RMG does not deny the midrashic content of Rashi’s commentary. Quite the opposite; he emphasizes it, contends with it, and discusses the characteristics of the “way of the *derash*” to give a deeper explanation for Rashi’s midrash-based glosses.

RMG thinks that a midrash cannot replace the *peshat*, but is rather a unique exegetical methodology that is not bound to the rules of *peshat*. As he explains in his introduction and implements in his commentary, the distinction between Rashi’s *peshat* and *derash* glosses form an important foundation of his writing. According to RMG, the Sages who created the midrashim were well aware of the *peshat*, yet added midrashim on various topics, for various reasons. For this reason, explains RMG, we cannot question a *peshat* on account of a *derash*, and vice versa.

The best demonstration of this aspect of RMG’s method is the mechanism he created, in which he supplements Rashi’s commentary to generate double glosses.

Medieval exegetes and supercommentators on Rashi’s commentary approached his midrashic glosses on a continuum that ranged from almost-complete acceptance, with minor discussion of the challenges that the midrashim pose in light of the exegetical boundaries dictated by grammar and context, to complete rejection, given their incongruity within the sphere of common sense. RMG takes a differential approach within this continuum by defining a “midrashic hermeneutic” which is found throughout his work. Gabbai’s questions on the midrashim come from a *peshat* perspective, yet his resolutions are based on a hermeneutical perception that enables the “way of the *derash*” when it is accompanied by a goal and ideological depth. The way of the *derash*, according to RMG, is not bound by the rules of rational thinking or coherence with the rules that govern language or context, as is the way of the *peshat*. The *derash* also does not aspire to replace the *peshat* (barring certain cases that he underscores). The Sages and Rashi when he cites a midrash know the *peshat*; they choose to cite a midrash to introduce an idea or for some other reason, for example, to exonerate hero figures or to condemn villains such as Esau and Balaam.

Let us once again quote Cohen’s description, so characteristic of Rashi’s supercommentators:

A respectable tradition of supercommentaries on Rashi’s glosses on the Torah devotedly tried to show how each and every one of the midrashim presented by the Rabbinic wizard of Troyes stemmed from a convincing philological-literary consideration and was not only a baseless midrashic development. Eliyahu Mizrahi, author of the most renowned work of this genre, implements this strategy.[[54]](#footnote-54)

This description may suffer from an over-generalization of the supercommentators’ approaches, even that of Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi. However, we can still say that as opposed to the above description, we can understand that RMG’s unique contribution was in the way he naturally accepted Rashi’s decision to incorporate glosses “in the way of the *derash* as he received from the Talmud and from his teachers,” obviating the need for any other justification.[[55]](#footnote-55) Nevertheless, RMG differs from *peshat* exegetes (such as Ibn Ezra) who question, and usually reject, the midrashic glosses.

The motif throughout the *Eved Shlomo* commentary is that when Rashi brings a midrashic explanation for a verse, this explanation usually does not replace the *peshat* one. The *peshat* meaning remains, with RMG often citing it as a supplement to Rashi’s midrashic one. The maxim “a verse does not depart from its literal meaning,” which the Talmud employs in several contexts,[[56]](#footnote-56) accurately reflects this principle. Many exegetes and philosophers, including Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Nahmanides, and the Rashbam, quote this maxim in different contexts.[[57]](#footnote-57) For RMG, it means that even when there is a midrash on a verse, the *peshat* meaning is not discarded. The maxim does not determine the hierarchy between the meanings and does not doubt the importance of the midrash, but establishes that the midrash does not “erase” the *peshat*. RMG repeatedly emphasizes this principle in his commentary. As he writes in his gloss on the final verse in the Torah, regarding Rashi’s exegetical choice: “We can say that the *peshat* explanation of these verses is well known, as I have stated, yet the rabbi (of blessed memory) wished to expound these verses according to the way of the *derash*.”[[58]](#footnote-58) The *peshat* remains even when Rashi chooses to cite a midrashic explanation.

The *Eved Shlomo* commentary includes an oblique response to the foxes that RMG describes and critiques in his introduction. There, he describes Rashi’s critics who scorn the latter’s prolific use of midrashim: “I saw people buried in their ignorance who came across the rabbi’s commentary… saying that it is full of midrashic interpretations and legends, and they try to question it and doubt it and be as vexing as they please… And after these come little foxes... scoffing at an angel of God, saying that the *peshat* of the text is beyond him...”[[59]](#footnote-59) In the body of his commentary, RMG invests in an extensive discussion to justify Rashi’s midrash-based glosses. Despite the difficulties that arise from an initial reading of the midrashic interpretation, it remains valuable, even if it does not replace the *peshat*. *Eved Shlomo* is thus a detailed discussion of Rashi’s midrashic glosses and their defense.

RMG employs several “defense mechanisms” in his commentary, including reading the midrash in a non-literal manner when the content of the midrash is especially bizarre or contradicts what RMG believes about nature or the principles of faith. This paper presented a particularly effective mechanism, namely, supplementing many of Rashi’s glosses into a format of double glosses, with the *derash* explanation alongside the *peshat* one. This helps blunt the force of some of Rashi’s critics’ objections to these kinds of midrashic glosses.

1. \* This paper is based on my PhD dissertation, “‘Eved Shlomo’ (Servant of Solomon), a Supercommentary on Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah by Moses Gabbai, and His Approach to Rashi’s Midrashic Hermeneutics”, written under the supervision of Prof. Eric Lawee, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan (INSERT YEAR)

   ‘Midrash’ (pl., ‘midrashim’), in this sense, refers to a form of literature that interprets and elaborates upon biblical texts, mostly compiled from the 5th century CE through the medieval period. ‘Midrash’ is sometimes also referred to as ‘*derash*’ (pl., ‘*derashot*’). Definition taken from the Sefaria website, <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Midrash>, accessed 31 July, 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. S. Kamin, *Rashi – Peshuto Shel Mikra Umidrasho Shel Mikra*, Jerusalem: 2006, 265; see also E. Viezel, *Kavanat Hatorah Vekavanat Hakore Bah: Pirkei Hitmodedut*, Jerusalem: 2022, 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example: “From all that they chose: The Rabbi (of blessed memory) 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. M. Gabbai, *Eved Shlomo al Perush Rashi* (ed. M. Phillip), Petah Tikva: 2006, 60, 94, 143, 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gabbai (2006), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I. M. Ta-Shma, “Gabbai, Moses ben Shem-Tov.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (eds. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik), 2nd ed., vol. 7, New York: 2007, p. 319.  [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Hunt. Don. 78 (Cat. Neubauer 202). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rabbi Moshe Phillip, *Hummash rishonei parshanei Rashi* [*The Five Books of the Torah with the Earliest of Rashi’s Commentators*], 7 volumes. Bnei Berak: 2019. For this study, I primarily use the first edition, which is more convenient and includes more or the editor’s comments. I use the second edition mainly for comparison with other supercommentaries and in cases where errors were corrected in the first edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Y. Marciano, *Hakhmei Sefarad Be’ein Hase’arah – Torah Vehanhagah Bemotzaei Yimei Habeinayim*, Jerusalem: 1989, 37, n. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A. Gross, “Rashi Umesoret Limud Hatorah Shebikhtav Besefarad,” in: *Rashi: Iyyunim Beyetzirato* (ed. A Shteinfeld), Ramat Gan: 1993, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gross (1993), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. M.Z. Cohen, *The Rule of Peshat: Jewish Constructions of the Plain Sense of Scripture and Their Christian and Muslim Context,* Philadelphia: 2020, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. E. Lawee, “‘Servant of Solomon’: Sensitivity to Language and Context in Moses Gabbai’s Supercommentary on Rashi's Commentary on the Torah,” in: *Ve-’Ed Ya‘aleh (Gen 2:6): Essays in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Edward L. Greenstein*, vol. 2 (ed. P. Machinist, R. A. Harris, J. A. Berman, N. Samet, and N. Ayali-Darshan), Atlanta: 2021, 1047-1064, here quoted from 1049. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gabbai (2006), 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See also A. and Y. Rosen-Zvi, “Parshanut hamikra bedivei rabbi Yishmael: Bein halakhah le-aggadah,” *Tarbiz* 86 (2019), 203-232 (esp. 205) for an example of the use of ‘midrashic hermeneutics’ as the full range of the Sages’ general assumptions when applying a midrashic explanation to a verse. In this paper, we are interested in midrashic hermeneutics as Rashi understood it, and as Rabbi Moshe Gabbai attributed it to Rashi. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Aggadah* (pl., *aggadot*) refers to stories and commentary that expand upon non-legal biblical texts. Some works strictly interpret the text, while others use the text as a springboard for ethical or theological sermons. Definition taken from the Sefaria website, <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Midrash/Aggadah>, accessed July 31, 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Gross (1993), 30. I expand on this point below. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In his commentary on Gen 37:2. For a broader discussion on Rashbam’s exegetical method see M.Y. Lokshin, *Perush Hatorah Verabbeinu Shmuel ben Meir*, Jerusalem: 2014, introduction (1-35), especially his approach to midrash and his obligation to *peshat* (5-11). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. E. Lawee, *Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah: Canonization and Resistance in the Reception of a Jewish Classic*, New York: 2019, 33-62; Gross (1993), 27-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibn Ezra (2020), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Mondschein (A. Mondschein, “‘Ve-ein besfarav peshat rak ehad mini elef’: Lederekh hahityahasut shel Raba leperush Rashi Latorah,” *Iyyunei Miqra Ufarshanut* 5 [2000], 221-248) establishes this.. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Quoted in *Rashi, Iyyunim Beyetzirato*, ed. Z.A. Steinfeld (Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan: 1993)., 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Lawee (2019), 48, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. M. Sklarz, “Ramban kefarshan haaggadah bemahalakh perushu latorah,” *Shenaton Leheqer Hamiqra Vehamizrah Haqadum* 23 (2004), 243-262, here quoted from 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. A rare counterexample in which, according to RMG, the *derash* clearly replaces the *peshat* is found in *Eved Shlomo* on Num 13:20: “And our Sages (of blessed memory) explained ‘Are there trees in it?’ according to the *derash*, and they are correct in doing so” (Gabbai [2006], 338). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibn Ezra’s introduction to his commentary on the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibn Ezra, (short) commentary on Ex 21:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Gabbai (2006), 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This claim echoes Ibn Ezra’s statement about the Sages: “And they undoubtedly know the straight path as it is, therefore they formulated the maxim that ‘a verse does not depart from its literal meaning,’ and the *derash* gives it extra appeal” (R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Safa Berurah* [ed. M.S Goodman], Jerusalem: 2020, 15). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Y. Elboim, *Lehavin Divrei Hakhamim – Mivhar Divrei Mavo Leaggadah Ulemidrash Mishel Hakhmei Yimei Habeinayim*, Jerusalem: 2001, 24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Gabbai (2006), 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., 357. Rashi only quotes the first part of the midrash that relates only to Jacob’s voice without relating to Esau. RMG refers to the original midrash as it appears in *Tanhuma*: “… ‘And we cried out to God and he heard our voice.’ He said to them: You complain about what your forefathers have bequeathed you, ‘The voice is the voice of Jacob’ (Gen 27:22), ‘And God heard our voice’ (Deut 26:7), and we about what our father bequeathed us, ‘And you will live by your sword’ (Gen 27:40)” (*Tanhuma, Beshalah* 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Gabbai (2006), 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Kamin presents a broad discussion on Rashi’s double glosses (Kamin [2006], 158-208), which shows that the double glosses express two principles. The first principle is the attribution of “simultaneous multiple senses” to the text (ibid., 181). Kamin refers the reader to two methodological comments written by Rashi on this issue of multiple senses. The first appears in his introduction to The Song of Songs: “‘God has spoken once, and I have heard these two things’ (Ps 62:12) – one verse can be understood in several ways.” The second comment is: “Torah is like a hammer which, by the force of its own blow, the rock at which it strikes shatters in pieces, separates into different meanings” (Rashi on Ex 6:9), a methodological comment to which RMG explicitly refers. Kamin’s second principle is Rashi’s dictum that “a verse does not depart from its literal meaning,” regarding which she claims that the main consideration that led Rashi to add a *peshat* gloss to the *derash* one (and thus create a double gloss) was the danger of discarding the *peshat* meaning (ibid., 193). See also E. Touitou, “Ma heni‘a et Rashi likhtov perush laTorah,” in A. Grossman and S. Japhet (eds.), *Rashi, Demuto Ve-Yetzirato*, Jerusalem: 2009, 53, n. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. In this way, he supplements these glosses and creates double glosses. This was due to the same fear of discarding the *peshat* meaning of the verse, which Kamin understood to be the reason for Rashi’s double glosses (see the previous footnote). RMG does this explicitly at least 22 times throughout his commentary. For example: “And when Scripture said ‘Let there be light’ (Gen 1:6) – According to the *peshat*: A weak light” (Gabbai [2006], 52); “And it seems, from this verse, that it should be understood according to the *peshat* and that is that anyone who kills Cain will be avenged sevenfold...” (Commentary on Gen 4:15; ibid., 65); “And this is the way of *derash*, for according to the *peshat* she was already pregnant” (commentary on Gen 16:11; ibid., 88); “This is a Rabbinic midrash, where ‘For our forefathers’ refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but according to the *peshat* ‘forefathers’ refers to when they lived in Egypt” (commentary on Num 20:15; ibid., 357). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Cohen, following Kamin, stresses Rashi’s principles: “In the center of Rashi’s words in all these places [of double glosses] we find both of the Sages’ principles, ‘A verse does not depart from its literal meaning’ and ‘One verse can be understood in several ways’… Rashi diverts these to the level of meaning, such there are two parallel ways of explaining the text, one according to its *peshat* and one according to its *derash*” ([2020], 361). He deems the decision of whether it is exegetically possible to allow both levels of exegesis in tandem a test case that distinguishes the exegetical school of northern France from that of Spain-Andalusia. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The principle of “And the way of *derash* is separate from the way of *peshat*” is another way in which RMG protects midrashim from criticism. An example of such a potential critique is found in the mockery of the midrash about the tabernacle that erected itself, found in the 14th-century composition “The Book of Critique on Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah, Attributed to the Raavad” (for a description of the book and its author, called pseudo-Raavad, see Lawee [2019], 150-95). Pseudo-Raavad writes: “They said that the tabernacle erected itself. And was the city also breached on its own? I believe that it was breached by the Chaldeans. And that the tabernacle was erected by people” (*Book of Critique* [2018], 49). Pseudo-Raavad is referring to Jer 39:2: “On the ninth day of the fourth month, in the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah, the city was breached.” Here, too, the verse uses the passive form “was breached,” but it would be absurd to claim that the city breached itself, just as it is absurd to claim that the formulation “the tabernacle was erected” teaches us that the tabernacle erected itself. RMG’s framing of the *derash* as an independent method that parallels, but does not replace, the *peshat* enables him to protect this type of gloss. This is indeed absurd when presented as the only interpretation of the verse, but is legitimate as an additional sense of the text, maintaining *peshat* as its primary meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Gabbai (2006), 258, emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Gabbai (2006), 267. The quote he brings at the end is from Rashi’s commentary on Ex 12:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. An example of this belief was voiced by Profiat Duran (Hebrew name: Isaac b. Moses Halevi), called ‘the Ephodi’, a late-14th-century Spanish scholar who complained that his generation had no quality commentary on the Torah: “There was naught but the little that the great rabbi, Rashi (of blessed memory), wrote, *and [his commentary] is mostly taken from the Sages’ midrashim according to the way of derash”* (*Maaseh Ephod* [1965], <https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A2%D7%A9%D7%94_%D7%90%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%93_(%D7%93%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9F)>, accessed 31 July, 2024, 17, emphasis mine). Also see Gross (1993), 43-35; and Lawee (2019), 55-56, for a description of Duran’s approach to Rashi’s commentary on the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cohen (2020), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Gabbai (2006), 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Loewe “The ‘Plain’ Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis,” in: *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London* (ed. J. G. Weiss), Jerusalem: 1964, 141-185, for a survey of the source and use of this rule in the Talmud (167). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See the discussion above. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Gabbai (2006), 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)