Chapter 19

Rabbi Joseph Karo, Author of the *Shulḥan Arukh*

1

The purpose of this article is to elucidate the personality of R. Joseph Karo, as inferred from a study of his *Shulḥan Arukh* (“Set Table”). It should be noted that the current state of scholarship on the *Shulḥan Arukh* specifically, and on R. Karo’s works in general, is significantly lacking. To the best of my knowledge, none of his works – neither the *Shulḥan Arukh*, the *Kessef Mishneh*, nor the *Beit Yosef* – has been subjected to systematic academic analysis. While these texts are frequently cited and occasionally quoted, they have not yet received a conceptual analysis from the standpoint of Jewish law, nor a comprehensive literary evaluation. These seminal works remain in need of scholarly attention. Furthermore, this issue is indicative of a broader neglect within the study of rabbinic literature, much of which has been overlooked and remains largely unexplored.

I must clarify that I do not intend to suggest that rabbinical literature, described as “the wisdom of the Talmud, a unique wisdom for the sacred people,”[[1]](#footnote-1) is neglected. Numerous students and scholars devote themselves to the study of texts such as Tractate Sanhedrin alongside volumes like *Ḥoshen Mishpat* with the *Shakh*, the *Urim VeTumim*, *Ketzot Haḥoshen*, *Netivot Hamishpat*, *Keren Ora*, and *Ohr Sameaḥ*. However, there is a noticeable lacuna in the historical and literary research of this vital and dynamic body of work. These fundamental texts have not been subjected to historical-biographical analysis or a systematic, objective approach that could clarify obscurities, situate these seminal essays within the continuum of rabbinic literature, and focus scholarly attention on central themes that require further exploration. Such themes include methods of study, methodological and theoretical assumptions, types of innovation, authority and independence, halachic meta-material, the integration of *aggada* into *halakha*, considerations of historical context and so forth.

The subject at hand is undoubtedly complex, and the material is both intricate and challenging, which makes it a daunting endeavor. The words of R. Zeraḥya Halevi, the *Ba’al HaMaor*, resonate in this context: “My heart melted and it became like water, because the waters rose up, a stream that I could not cross.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Not every historian is equipped to engage with rabbinic literature, yet no historian can approach their work with true fidelity and integrity without engaging with this rich and diverse material. Beyond the inherent difficulties that deter some academic scholars, it appears that modern historiography often harbors a hostile attitude toward *halakha*, leading to the neglect and even disparagement of halakhic literature.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is well-known that the Enlightenment period propagated a negative view of *halakha* and related Torah literature. The reasons for this were varied, often rooted in practical social concerns and claims: *Halakha* was seen as a barrier to assimilation, as it created a distinct separation between Jews, who shaped their behavior according to its commandments and instructions, and their non-Jewish neighbors. Spiritual critiques also emerged, suggesting that halakhic study is “barren,” devoid of intellectual stimulation or spiritual fulfillment. Solomon Maimon’s characterization of halakhic practice as *geistestötendes Geschäft* (“a practice that creates intellectual suffocation”) stands out and encapsulates this hostile and negative perception. Additionally, there were historical and theological critiques, claiming that *halakha* is an extraneous and unwelcome addition to pure, biblical Judaism. Some critics combined these arguments when condemning and attacking *halakha* and rabbinic literature. It is no surprise that the *Shulḥan Arukh*, whose authority gradually became accepted throughout the Jewish Diaspora, would come to symbolize these debates. Some writers extolled and elevated it, while others castigated and denigrated it. In any case, systematic scholarship that seeks to understand and present matters as they are is conspicuously absent.

Another reason for the current underdeveloped and inadequate state of research must be acknowledged, particularly considering how different elements contribute to this situation. It can be hypothesized that the recent rise in the prominence of Kabbalah – both in academic research and as an ideological force – has led to an unbalanced approach to the study of history and thought. This shift, whether consciously or unconsciously, has placed excessive emphasis on mystical phenomena, with even the most tenuous mystical elements receiving vigorous scholarly attention, often at the expense of *halakha* and its literature, much like the rivalry between a woman and her co-wife. In the context of our discussion, R. Joseph Karo is primarily known as the author of the *Beit Yosef* and *Shulḥan Arukh*, rather than as a *mekubal* (a term whose meaning and relevance to this discussion will be further addressed) or the author of the *Maggid*, a work attributed to him that describes his nightly encounters with a *maggid*, a spiritual guide who instructed, admonished, encouraged, and enlightened him. Of course, Karo is both – a master of *halakha* and a master of the *Maggid –* and I do not intend to support those who deny his authorship of *Maggid Mesharim* or who downplay its significance. My aim is simply to emphasize the necessity of maintaining balance, proportion, and moderation in our scholarship, striving to present a complete and accurate portrayal of the sage, rather than a fragmented image that distorts his true character.

As we know, there exists a thorough and well-crafted study on the *maggid* and the book *Maggid Mesharim* – R. J. Zwi Werblowsky’s work *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic*.[[4]](#footnote-4) However, anyone who reads the book will observe that it scarcely addresses R. Joseph Karo as the “Man of Law” or the “Man of *Halakha*” (aside from one chapter that provides a detailed analysis of the eight halakhic matters discussed in *Maggid Mesharim*). Consequently, it offers little insight into the primary works and significant achievements of R. Joseph Karo, the author of the *Shulḥan Arukh*. I must emphasize that my intention is not to diminish the value of *Maggid Mesharim* – it can undoubtedly coexist alongside the *Shulḥan Arukh* – but I wish to underscore that it is not the appropriate focus for a general and comprehensive discussion of R. Karo’s oeuvre. It is impossible to subordinate the *Beit Yosef* and the *Shulḥan Arukh* to *Maggid Mesharim*. In sum, there is no need to search far for evidence; this important book demonstrates that the “Man of *Halakha*” is entirely absent from scholarly discussion.

The relevance and appeal of *Maggid Mesharim* have certainly not diminished, and it continues to receive scholarly attention. For instance, Mordechai Pachter’s significant article, “Sefer Maggid Mesharim l’R. Yosef Karo kesefer mussar,”[[5]](#footnote-5) demonstrates convincingly that the book holds “general objective significance,” despite the personal nature of its moral teachings. Pachter argues that “the *maggid’s* instructions, warnings, and rebukes, scattered throughout the entire text, collectively form a complete moral framework that reflects a coherent doctrine.” The central theme of the book is repentance, which is built upon three pillars: devotion (*devekut*), prayer (*tefilla*), and asceticism (*sigufim*). In essence, it appears that *Maggid Mesharim* is more accurately characterized as a book of moral instruction rather than a purely Kabbalistic text.[[6]](#footnote-6) Regardless of how one categorizes the work, Pachter’s article makes a valuable contribution to its analysis and understanding. However, it also underscores that we should not be expected for it to lead into a discussion of *halakha*, which is the cornerstone of R. Karo’s work and teachings. The primary importance and historical significance of Karo’s halakhic contributions are overshadowed, and the scholarly focus is misplaced.

2

R. Joseph Karo’s works are of significant importance, all of which fall within the realm of rabbinical literature. In addition to his written contributions, he served as the head of a yeshiva in Safed and delivered public Torah lectures (as documented in R. Zechariah al-Dhahiri’s *Sefer HaMusar*[[7]](#footnote-7)and the lamentations of Italian sages who mourned his passing[[8]](#footnote-8)). His works include *Bedek HaBayit*, which offers corrections and additions to *Beit Yosef*; *Shu”t Maran Le’even Ha’ezer*; *Avkat Rokhel*, a collection of *responsa* on various topics; sermons and commentaries on biblical texts and rabbinic teachings in *Or Tzadikim*, which also contains certain kabbalistic material; novellae on Tractates Kiddushin and Gittin, included in his *responsa* to *Even Ha’ezer*; and *Kelalei HaGemara*, which comprises methodological inquiries and discussions reflecting a prevalent practice of the sixteenth century.[[9]](#footnote-9) Additionally, his *Kesef Mishneh*, a comprehensive commentary on the *Mishneh Torah*, was completed later in his life (though he had begun working on it decades earlier[[10]](#footnote-10)).

I would like to highlight a particular feature of the *Shuḥan Arukh*, which branches into several key aspects and ultimately leads to a discussion of R. Karo’s approach to the reasons behind the commandments (*ta’amei ha-mitzvot*). However, two preliminary observations are necessary: (a) The *Shuḥan Arukh* is a meticulously constructed and intentionally concise code of law, designed with the purpose of brevity and precision. It can be argued that it is the only work truly deserving of the title “legal codex,” unparalleled in this respect. (b) The author, R. Joseph Karo, had a profound affinity for Maimonides, as is evident throughout his life and works. A careful analysis of the sources reveals that Maimonides’ writings are central to Karo’s oeuvre, with his attention and efforts decisively influenced by them.

The *Shulḥan Arukh* is perhaps the work that most closely adheres to the standard of a law book, presenting the practical laws of Judaism in a manner that is both refined and distilled. It is not by chance that R. Joshua Falk, author of the *Sema*, emphasized the “sealed and authoritative glosses” of this work. Maimonides, as is well known, articulated his goal as presenting “things that become clear from all these works... in clear language and a concise manner, without and questions and answers.” R. Joseph Karo similarly described his objective in the *Shulḥan Arukh* as offering “all beloved, clear rulings, without excess speech or discussion.” In fact, Karo shortened and condensed his work even more than Maimonides and R. Jacob ben Asher, author of the *Turim*.

Regarding Maimonides, I have argued in various contexts that the *Mishneh Torah* encompasses much more than straightforward *halakha*. As both a jurist and a philosopher, Maimonides aimed not only to delineate legal actions and behavior but also to reflect spiritual and religious principles. He sought to integrate religio-moral conduct with intellectual and theoretical values, liberating himself from the rigid constraints of purely practical jurisprudence. A careful study of the *Mishneh Torah* reveals that Maimonides provided reasoned halakhic rulings, added explanations, established connections to the written Torah, and even embellished certain laws with philosophical insights, all while focusing on the religious motivations and spiritual conclusions derived from the commandments. Similarly, the *Tur* is characterized by interpretative expansions that accompany its halakhic rulings. This is evident not only in the plurality of opinions cited – a feature noted by R. Karo when justifying his decision to align his *Beit Yosef* with the *Turim* – but also in the interpretative breadth. In contrast, R. Karo did not expand upon the text in the same way. This restrained approach is evident from the very first *siman* in *Oraḥ Ḥayyim*. A comparison between the opening *siman* in *Shulḥan Arukh Ḥoshen Mishpat* and in the *Tur Ḥoshen Mishpat* reveals this difference: the former is modest and concise, while the latter is expansive and profound. The *Tur* frequently offers broader elaborations, including verses, commentaries, midrashic passages, and a multiplicity of opinions – all hallmarks of the classical Talmudic approach. In the *Shulḥan Arukh*, however, everything is characterized by economy of expression.

Therefore, when I refer to the brevity and economy of style in the *Shulḥan Arukh*, I am not merely pointing to the absence of halakhic sources – though this too characterizes the *Mishneh Torah*, much to the frustration of the Ra’avad, who criticized Maimonides for having “abandoned the way of all authors... by not providing evidence for his statements or attributing them to their original sources.” Rather, I refer to the deliberate omission of interpretative expansions that might otherwise refine and temper the text’s sharp formulations, as well as the exclusion of meta-halakhic considerations. The “search for brevity” – an expression Maimonides himself used in the preface to his *Sefer HaMitzvot* – guided R. Karo’s approach. This principle was the cornerstone of his comprehensive jurisprudential program. In crafting a concise, decisive, and authoritative law book, R. Karo went further than any of his predecessors.[[11]](#footnote-11) He created the codex in the history of rabbinic literature. From a purely legal perspective, it could be argued that most of the legal works typically classified within the corpus of jurisprudential literature do not meet the strict criteria of a codex. They often represent, to use the terminology of the *rishonim*, collections of material accompanied by legal rulings. In contrast, only the *Shulḥan Arukh* – along with its various abridged versions – satisfies the rigorous and narrow definition of a codex. The *Shulḥan Arukh* stands as a significant innovation in rabbinic literature, and its impact on Jewish history in the generations that followed merits careful consideration.

3

The interpretive and spiritual dimensions appearing in the *Shulḥan Arukh* are intentionally limited to an extreme degree by its author. There is minimal commentary, almost no explanation of the reasons behind the commandments and laws, and a deliberate avoidance of conceptual midrashic expansions or calculated “deviations” into the meta-halakhic realm. R. Mordecai Yoffe’s *Levush* can be seen as a critique of the extreme brevity of the *Shulḥan Arukh* and an attempt to address its limitations. It should be noted that the few interpretive elements present in the *Shulḥan Arukh* are largely derived from Maimonides, suggesting that R. Karo consistently aligned his approach with that of Maimonides, reflecting a deep Maimonidean influence in his work.

Before demonstrating this generalization, it is important to emphasize that Maimonides’ oeuvre occupies a central position in R. Karo’s work, permeating it from beginning to end. His work bears the unmistakable stamp of Maimonides’ influence. We will briefly highlight some aspects or expressions of this emphasis.

1. R. Karo’s reliance on Maimonides is well known, and halakhic sages from the generations close to him frequently commented on this. Although these observations typically focused on halakhic rulings and their phrasing, our interest extends to the interpretive foundation and theoretical expansion, as we will explore. For instance, in his *Ma’adanei Yom Tov,* R. Yom-Tov Lipman Heller remarks about R. Karo: “And regarding his language, it is always the language of Maimonides.” Similarly, R. Joel Sirkis in his *Shu’t HaBaḥ Haḥadashot* criticizes R. Karo’s complete reliance on Maimonides, perceiving it as a flaw. This comment of the Rema is also noteworthy:

This author omitted all the laws of the tithe for the poor (*ma’aser ani*) that the *Tur* included, from which many laws of charity applicable today can be derived. It is possible that he relied on what is explained in the Laws of Charity. However, even in the laws of *terumot* and tithes*,* he omitted some laws included by the *Tur* and substituted others. All of this occurred because he copied Maimonides’ words from *Hilkhot* *Terumot U’ma’asrot* verbatim, without paying attention to other relevant aspects.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In one of the lamentations in memory of R. Karo published by Meir Benayahu, we find the following definitive statement: “Maimon is hidden within me, scroll after scroll.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

A significant observation is made by R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in his *Derekh Ḥokhma*,[[14]](#footnote-14) where he outlines a comprehensive study program: “Then learn the *Shulḥan Arukh*, and any law that is found to differ from the words of Maimonides or adds to them, must seek its origin in *Beit Yosef* to understand the explanation and reasoning.” In other words, alignment or agreement between the author of the *Shulḥan Arukh* and Maimonides is the norm, while any divergence is the exception. The detailed interpretive commentary found in *Beit Yosef* serves to clarify and elucidate the reasons for these differences. It is fitting to observe that Ramchal’s instruction echoes Maimonides’ own guidance regarding the differences between his *Mishneh Torah* and the *Halakhot* of the Ri”f. In a letter to his student R. Joseph ben Judah, Maimonides advises: “If you wish to truly study Torah, devote yourself entirely to the *Halakhot* of the late Rabbi, and compare them with the *Ḥibbur* (i.e., the *Mishneh Torah*). Wherever you find a discrepancy, recognize that it arises from differing interpretations of the Talmud, and you will identify its source there.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

1. It can also be asserted that R. Karo lamented the neglect of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* and expressed concern that it was not being studied in its entirety, as Maimonides had envisioned for a comprehensive understanding of Torah. In one instance, at the beginning of *Beit Yosef* (*Oraḥ Ḥayyim, Siman* 3), he states: “Even though the world follows the words of the late Tosafot, it is because they do not study the words of Maimonides in *Hilkhot Beit Habeḥira* except for one or two in an entire generation.” Here, R. Karo not only emphasizes that Maimonides’ plan was not fully realized – most people continue to study only those laws relevant to their contemporary lives – but also acknowledges the jurisprudential consequences of neglecting parts of the *Mishneh Torah*. Despite the fact that the *Shulḥan Arukh* focuses on laws applicable in contemporary times, *halakha* as a whole is an indivisible unit that cannot be broken down or separated between its parts, and its all-encompassing scope contributes to precision in practical detail.
2. In his *Beit Yosef*, a commentary on the *Tur*, the interpretive engagement with Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* is both extensive and significant, in terms of both quality and quantity. R. Karo himself highlights this aspect:

I decided to compile a book that would include all the laws that apply today, explaining their roots and origins... and I did not want to make this book a stand-alone work... and it occurred to me to attach it to the late Maimonides’ work, given that he is the most famous decisor in the world, but I then changed my mind... because in many places his words are enigmatic and require clarification, which is provided in this book.[[16]](#footnote-16)

It is noteworthy how other halakhic scholars acknowledged this aspect and referenced it on various occasions. While they often highlight certain deficiencies in R. Karo’s interpretations, noting that some explanations are unsatisfactory, they all begin with the premise that the *Beit Yosef* is a rich repository of commentaries on Maimonides. For instance, the Radbaz, in his commentary on the *Mishneh Torah*,[[17]](#footnote-17) remarks: “And the author of the *Beit Yosef* did not grasp the Raavad’s intention in his gloss.” This statement reflects his recognition of the significant Maimonidean interpretation found within the *Beit Yosef*. The Rema writes: “And the explanation provided by the *Beit Yosef*, which sought to resolve Maimonides’ words with a weak argument, is nullified, and I saw no reason to record it.”[[18]](#footnote-18) This, too, acknowledges the unique dimension of the *Beit Yosef –* that the commentary on the *Tur* is heavily infused with interpretations of Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*. R. Joel Sirkis further justifies the creation of his monumental work, *Bayit Ḥadash*, by noting that the commentary on Maimonides is not always comprehensive, thus necessitating additional explanations. His work addresses “what is difficult in his commentary, whether in his interpretation of the words of the *Tur* itself, or in elucidating Maimonides’ words.”

1. Regarding the *Kesef Mishneh*, R. Karo’s significant treatise on the *Mishneh Torah*, it was written to clarify, source, and resolve ambiguities and confusions in Maimonides’ work. R. Karo explains his motivation:

He [Maimonides] authored the great compilation of the *Yad* on all the laws of the Torah as a whole – its general rules, particular rules, and minor details... yet the generations that followed struggled to grasp his words, often lost in the depth of his pure and refined statements, to the point that even the source of certain laws became obscure. This difficulty was exacerbated by the critiques of R. Abraham ben David, so that in some instances both a scholar and a scholar’s apprentice were required to elucidate his writings. R. Moshe Kohen of Lunel also critiqued him, leading to the perception of his words as a sealed book... My own soul longed to comprehend his words across all his works and to trace their origins... Therefore, I resolved, with the help of Heaven, to write on all of Maimonides’ works, identifying the source of each law, clarifying his words, and responding to the critiques.[[19]](#footnote-19)

A close examination of *Kesef Mishneh* reveals not only R. Karo’s deep familiarity with Maimonides’ works – his understanding of the sources and foundations of Maimonides’ rulings – but also his acute sensitivity to the novel interpretations embedded within the *Mishneh Torah*. R. Karo recognized that interpretation and halakhic ruling are intricately intertwined in Maimonides’ work. He consistently upheld Maimonides’ interpretations, preserved his innovations, and affirmed his emphases, ensuring they were integrated into the *Beit Midrash* with the simple yet profound endorsement: “The words of our Rabbi are worthy of him” or *zeh pashut* – “it is obvious.”

Many sections of the *Mishneh Torah* represent remarkably novel contributions to halakhic literature. While these ideas are now widely accepted as foundational elements of rabbinical literature, this was not always the case; Maimonides was the one who formulated, refined, and clarified these unique concepts and emphases, constructing a formidable and innovative legal structure. R. Karo was acutely aware of this and was able to properly recognize and evaluate this fundamental achievement with an honest and thorough assessment. His restrained statement, *zeh pashut*, reflects the profound breadth and depth of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*.

Before a comprehensive typology of *Kesef Mishneh*’s approach in his commentary can be developed, it is fitting to highlight some of the qualities and virtues that characterize R. Karo’s work.

4

R. Karo, with his keen clarity of mind, approached the *Mishneh Torah* with the conviction that every word carried significance. Even when he encountered passages that he could not fully explain, he nonetheless drew attention to them. His interpretative principle, which aligns with his assessment that “who is like him, offering rulings in short and clear language like the Mishna,” was that there are no unnecessary words in Maimonides’ work. Consequently, the learner is required to meticulously understand and interpret every detail. For instance, in *Hilkhot Beit Habeḥira* 1:17, Maimonides connects two laws: “We must not make steps for the Altar… Anyone who ascends the Altar with steps receives lashes. Similarly, anyone who demolishes a single stone from the Altar… with a destructive intent is worthy of lashes.” After citing sources for Maimonides’ words, R. Karo observes: “And the word ‘similarly’ that our Rabbi wrote is not precise.” The use of the connecting word “similarly” prompts the need for further explanation, yet R. Karo did not find a satisfactory interpretation. Nonetheless, his directive is unmistakable: the learner must be precise in every detail,[[20]](#footnote-20) as there is nothing superfluous or extraneous in Maimonides’ language. (It is interesting to compare this with his language in his *responsum*: “is the Mishna the scroll of the Temple courtyard that does not have a missing letter or an extra letter?).[[21]](#footnote-21)

R. Karo offers guiding principles for interpreting Maimonides’ language. For instance, in *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 5:11 (and it is notable that R. Karo’s interpretation works to narrow the gap between the letter of the law and what lies beyond it), he introduces his commentary by stating, “And a rule of his language is as follows.” In another instance, in *Hilkhot Ḥanukka* 3:7, he concludes his analysis by noting, “And since we find that in his *Sefer HaMitzvot* he wrote... his language here also proves that, so we have to interpret it this way, and the words of the Raavad and the *Maggid Mishneh* are difficult to understand.”

Another example illustrates how R. Karo safeguarded Maimonides’ prerogative to offer original interpretations, cautioning against imposing conventional or common explanations upon his work. Addressing the Raavad’s gloss on the meaning of the term *mukhni* in *Hilkhot Beit Habeḥira* 3:18, R. Karo cites Maimonides’ *Commentary on the Mishnah*, noting, “These are his words here, as well.” He concludes by writing:

The Raavad was accustomed to Rashi’s interpretation and, as a result, found Maimonides’ words perplexing, leading him to write peculiar comments in his glosses. However, it is necessary to question whether someone who favors Rashi’s interpretation should deem a different interpretation as strange. Moreover, one must consider that his interpretation in Yoma and Zevaḥim is not any clearer in the Gemara than Maimonides’ interpretation.

These are crucial considerations in the immense effort to understand Maimonides’ words and defend them against unwarranted criticism. We must acknowledge our responsibility to identify or attempt to reconstruct the interpretations that underlie his rulings. “The generations that followed him struggled to grasp his words and to fully plumb the depths of his pure and meticulously refined statements.” Significant effort is required to uncover the various elements of Maimonidean interpretation embedded in his work.

R. Karo was well aware, and indeed instructed us, that one must strive to faithfully reproduce the interpretations embedded in the *Mishneh Torah* with the utmost precision. There are halakhic rulings found in it that have eluded even the combined efforts of generations of scholars to fully comprehend or provide a plausible explanation for Maimonides’ reasoning. It is in this context that we should understand his remark regarding the Raavad’s gloss – “both a scholar and a scholar’s apprentice were required to elucidate his writings” (Avoda Zara 50b).

It is instructive to cite a brief passage from *Beit Yosef*, *Yoreh De’ah, Siman* 242, which clearly illustrates how R. Karo perceived the essential role of interpreting Maimonides’ words. In discussing the interpretation of the rabbinic statement concerning “disagreeing with one’s teacher” and the explanation given by the *Tur*, R. Karo writes: “I do not understand why our Rabbi did not attribute these words to [Maimonides].” It is evident that the *Tur* is quoting Maimonides’ language, and one would expect him to credit the source. R. Karo – as one who raised the objection and then resolved it – offers the following explanation: “Perhaps, because these words elucidate the rabbinic sages’ understanding of disagreeing with one’s teacher, he did not deem it necessary to ascribe them to Maimonides, as it appeared to him that this was the straightforward interpretation of the rabbinic statement.”

In other words, since the author of the *Tur* was elucidating a fundamental concept of the rabbinic sages, he could assume that Maimonides’ interpretation was intrinsically linked to the original rabbinic statement. Maimonides’ words are so straightforward and compelling that there was no need to attribute them explicitly to him. His interpretation seamlessly aligns with the words of the sages, and his words are included in their words. R. Karo continues: “And I found it written that R. Moshe Kohen of Lunel critiqued Maimonides when he ruled that it is forbidden to establish a study hall in the lifetime of one’s teacher. But this question is unnecessary since Maimonides’ words clearly convey his understanding that this is the meaning of ‘one who disagrees with one’s teacher.’” The rationale that justifies the Tur's omission of Maimonides’ name also nullifies R. Moshe Kohen’s objection. The matter is straightforward.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Due to his close alignment with Maimonides and his approach to interpreting the Talmud, R. Karo at times seems to accept Maimonides’ underlying premises, presuming that his rulings align precisely with the straightforward meaning of a Mishna or Gemara. However, the reality is more complex; Maimonides’ ruling does not reflect a universally accepted interpretation but rather embodies a distinct, novel approach.[[23]](#footnote-23)

If so, there is no doubt that R. Karo, as an exegete, is deeply committed to uncovering and elucidating the interpretive underpinnings of the *Mishneh Torah*, aiming to identify them and clarify them, to reconstruct and analyze them. This makes the following passage particularly intriguing. It is as if R. Karo is voicing a heartfelt grievance to Maimonides: I must express a concern, for in truth, you ought to have elucidated your words more clearly, rather than relying on commentators to labor and decipher what you left obscure. “And although Maimonides adheres to the order and language of the Mishna, we should not assume that just as the R”I labored to explain the Mishna, we too must labor to explain Maimonides, for he is a later authority. If he indeed held this view, then he should have provided the necessary clarification rather than leaving matters as obscure as the Mishna.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

5

We will now present several examples, in no particular order, that illustrate the generalization under discussion, that the limited instances of expansion, conceptualization, and interpretation found in the *Shulḥan Arukh* are either drawn directly from the works of Maimonides or extrapolated from them.

1. For example, in *Yoreh De’ah*, *Hilkhot Tzedaka, Siman* 248, *Se’if* 8, we find the following:

He who wishes to be deserving of divine reward shall conquer his evil inclinations and open wide his hand, and everything which is done for the sake of Heaven should be of the finest and the best. If one builds a house of prayer, it should be finer than his private dwelling. If he feeds the hungry, he should give him of the best and the sweetest of his table. If he clothes the naked, he should give him of the finest of his garments. If he consecrates something, he ought to give of the best of his possessions. Thus Scripture says: “All the fat is the Lord’s” (Lev. 3:16).

These sentences are taken verbatim from the *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Issurei Mizbe’aḥ* 7:11. This detail is particularly significant for our discussion, as it is not merely a case of copying in the same context – indeed, this section does not appear in the *Tur* – but rather a transfer from one halakhic context to another. R. Karo, who comments in his *Kesef Mishneh* on this passage, “These are the words of our rabbi and are worthy of him,” saw fit to incorporate these elevating words, by which Maimonides concluded *Hilkhot Issurei Mizbe’aḥ*, into the laws of charity. Additionally, he shortened the text to suit his needs within the laws of charity. Maimonides’ original words are as follows:

If all kinds (of oil) were valid for meal offerings, why did the Sages rank their quality? So that one would know which was the very best, which were equal in value, and which was the least valuable. Thus he who wished to earn merit for himself might bend his greedy inclination and make broad his generosity, and bring an offering from the finest, from the very best of the species that he was bringing. Behold, it is said in the Torah, “And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering” (Gen. 4:4). The same principle applies to everything which is done for the sake of the good God; namely, that it be of the finest and the best. If one builds a house of prayer, it should be finer than his private dwelling, etc.[[25]](#footnote-25)

1. *Yoreh De’ah, Hilkhot Nedarim, Siman* 203, *Se’if* 7:

Whosoever makes vows in order to discipline his moral disposition and to improve his conduct displays commendable zeal and is worthy of praise. How so? A glutton who forswore meat for a year or two; or a drunkard who forswore wine for a significant amount of time, or forswore drunkenness forever; or one who chased bribes and then felt regret, and forswore gifts or benefits from people of that land; or a person proud of their good looks who swore to be a Nazirite, all such vows are ways of serving God, and of them and their like the Sages have said, “Vows are a fence for self-restraint” (Avot 3:13). Nonetheless, even though these are service of God, one should not become accustomed to them, rather, one should abstain from what is worthy to be abstained from, without making a vow.

R. Karo is quoting from the conclusion of *Hilkhot Nedarim* (13:23-24) and places Maimonides’ closing remarks as an introduction at the end of the first *siman* of the Laws of Vows in the *Shulḥan Arukh*.[[26]](#footnote-26) It is worth noting that the passages in the *Mishneh Torah*, about which R. Karo commented, “Here he offers sound advice, and these words are worthy of him,” do not appear in the *Shulḥan Arukh*. In truth, the change in context in which these statements are presented somewhat diminishes their impact and blurs their significance.

(c) In *Yoreh De’ah*, *Siman* 394, *Se’if* 6, R. Karo rules:

Whosoever does not observe mourning rites as the Sages commanded is a cruel person, but one should fear and be troubled and examine his deeds and repent.

This ruling is a distilled version of Maimonides’ more detailed instruction found in *Hilkhot Avel* 13:2, where he writes:

Whoever does not observe mourning rites, etc. If one member of a group dies, the entire group should worry. For the first three days, one should see himself as if a sword is drawn over his neck. From the third day until the seventh, he should consider it as if it is in the corner. From that time onward, as if it is passing before him in the marketplace. All of this is so that a person should prepare himself and repent and awake from his sleep. Behold, it is written in Jeremiah 5:3: “You have stricken them, but they have not trembled.” This implies that one should awake and tremble.

Maimonides expanded, innovated, and sharpened while combining two distinct rabbinic teachings and incorporating a verse from the Book of Jeremiah (which he also cites in *Guide* 3:36), thereby enhancing and emphasizing the teaching. R. Karo, in his *Kesef Mishneh*, appropriately remarked, as is characteristic of him: “The words of our Rabbi are worthy of him.” However, in *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* (this time following the lead of the *Tur*), he minimized Maimonides’ language. This example demonstrates that even when R. Karo incorporates an interpretive expansion that includes impressive and significant words of encouragement, he tends to condense where Maimonides elaborates. The foundation remains Maimonidean, but the reduction curtails its full expression.

(d)

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| --- | --- |
| *Even Ha’ezer, Siman 23, Se’if* 7 | *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Isurei Bi’ah* 21:24 |
| Among the early pietists and great scholars was one that took pride that he had not looked at the place of his circumcision, and one that took pride in never having contemplated on his wife’s figure, as his mind would turn away from vain things to true matters which grasp the hearts of the holy ones. | Among the early pietists and great scholars was one that took pride in never having looked at the place of his circumcision, and one that took pride in never having contemplated on his wife’s figure, as his mind would turn away from vain things to true matters which grasp the hearts of the holy ones.  |

Here, it is important to note that by not preserving Maimonides’ stylistic approach and refraining from consolidating these elements at the conclusion of halakhic units, R. Karo somewhat diminishes their presence and impact, whether intentionally or not. One might say that while Maimonides articulates these points with clarity, R. Karo only alludes to them in passing.

In summing up this matter, it can be observed that when R. Karo, who typically employs concise and unembellished language, ventures beyond his usual brevity, he skillfully integrates Maimonides’ teachings into his rulings with discernment and wisdom. He demonstrates a deep knowledge of the *Mishneh Torah*, adeptly transferring laws from one context to another, expanding or condensing them as needed, showcasing a certain and impressive literary acumen. The lyrical passages that evoke religious experiences, expressions of spiritual fervor, or words of admonition that appear in the *Shulḥan Arukh* are predominantly Maimonidean in nature.

6

These instances of selective and deliberate addition or expansion confirm the impression that what often stands out are the omissions – specifically, the complete omission of essential and pivotal material. This characteristic is of fundamental significance. As will be shown, these omissions are particularly evident both in unique halachic formulations and in the realm of beliefs and opinions. For example, in *Laws of the Megillah* 2:17, after Maimonides has summarized all the commandments of Purim (such as the festive meal, presents to friends, and gifts to the poor), he adds his own original and profound words:

It is preferable to spend more on gifts to the poor than on the Purim meal or on presents to friends. For no joy is greater or more glorious than the joy of gladdening the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the strangers. Indeed, he who causes the hearts of these unfortunates to rejoice, emulates the Divine Presence, of whom Scripture says, “To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15).

A review of *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Oraḥ Ḥayim*, reveals that all corresponding sections presenting these laws are directly based on Maimonides. However, the passionate and enthusiastic passage about which the *Maggid Mishneh* states (and with which the *Kesef Mishneh* likely concurred) “our Rabbi’s words are worthy of him” is entirely omitted.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Another interesting and important example can be found in *Oraḥ Ḥayim*, *Siman* 574, *Se’if* 3, which states: “If one forgot and ate and drank on a day observed as a fast day in the place, he must not show himself before the public, nor indulge in delicacies, saying, ‘Since I ate a little, I'll eat a lot.’” This ruling, which reflects the Talmud’s teaching, also appears in the *Mishneh Torah*, but with an important addition: “Whenever a person is fasting… he should not indulge in delicacies.” This is a fundamental innovation, about which the *Maggid Mishneh* comments: “And it is certainly clear that this rule applies to every fast day, and it is an obvious matter.”

R. Karo was aware of these additions and, in most cases, explained and highlighted them, yet did not always incorporate them into the *Shulḥan Arukh*.

In other words, these examples represent Maimonides’ novel innovations, rooted in a particular religious sensibility that reflects his unique spiritual and conceptual approach. A primary research task would be to conduct a rigorous, systematic examination to determine when R. Karo includes such interpretive-spiritual material and when he omits it. It is essential to investigate whether there is an underlying rationale or a coherent framework guiding these individual cases.

It should be noted that R. Karo’s approach is not merely one of brevity and reduction in comparison to the *Mishneh Torah*, but also to the *Tur*. A comparison of specific laws in the *Tur* and the *Shulḥan Arukh* clearly reveals the secret of its conciseness and its exceptional precision. Indeed, brevity is the primary objective of his composition, and it is widely acknowledged that he achieved this with remarkable consistency, as though every word were carefully measured and weighed from a halakhic standpoint, without a single unnecessary word included.

7

It is important to note a significant observation with far-reaching implications: even in instances where R. Karo omitted Maimonides’ words and had the opportunity to substitute them with other perspectives – potentially Kabbalistic ones – he chose not to do so. This restraint appears to be a form of self-discipline. A clear example of this can be seen in Maimonides’ famous and innovative definition of Torah study, which skillfully integrates the study of philosophy (referred to as “Pardes”):

The time allotted to study should be divided into three parts. A third should be devoted to the Written Law; a third to the Oral Law; and the last third should be spent in reflection, deducing conclusions from premises, developing implications of statements…This is termed Talmud…The subjects styled “Pardes” (esoteric studies) are included in Talmud.[[28]](#footnote-28)

R. Karo indeed omits “Pardes” from the corresponding law in the *Shulḥan Arukh*. However, contrary to expectation, he does not replace it with a Kabbalistic definition. He had a prime opportunity to highlight and add prestige to a fundamental Kabbalistic concept by defining “Pardes” according to its basic tenets, yet he chose not to do so. Even in his *Kesef Mishneh* commentary on this section in *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, he remains silent – a silence that is particularly striking. We are therefore compelled to consider the significance of this silence or restraint.

Moreover, not only does R. Karo omit the term “Pardes” in the *Shulḥan Arukh Yoreh De’ah* without replacing it with the anticipated Kabbalistic definition, but in his *Kesef Mishneh* commentary on *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 4:13, (where Maimonides writes that “The topics connected with these five precepts, treated in the above five chapters, are what our wise men called ‘Pardes,’ that is, physics and metaphysics identified with the act of Creation and the design of the Divine Chariot), we encounter an approach that is notably measured and deliberate. At the outset of his interpretation, R. Karo cites Ran (“Maimonides wrote what he wanted, and I wish it had not been written”), and the Ritva (“And this interpretation is true and not as interpreted by others, and God will atone for them”), who staunchly reject Maimonides’ interpretation of the rabbinic statement that “the design of the Divine Chariot is ‘a great matter’; the disputes of Abaye and Rava are ‘a small matter’,” and sharply disapproves of the philosophical implications in Maimonides’ reading. R. Karo then presents significant and remarkable insights from R. Eliyahu Mizraḥi, who draws a parallel between philosophy and Kabbalah, and it is worth quoting his words:

It is evident that the term “great” can be applied in two ways: either in quantity or in quality. The “greatness” in quality can itself be divided into two categories: one is the greatness of the subject matter and its significance, which can further be divided into two aspects – either the greatness of the subject or the depth of its comprehension. The second category of greatness pertains to the greatness of the reward. Therefore, there is no argument against the term “great” as it is applied to *Ma’aseh Merkava* (the mystical account of the Divine Chariot). For if *Ma’aseh Merkava* is called “great” compared to Talmudic wisdom, it is because it is greater in terms of the subject matter and its significance in both respects – namely, the greatness of the subject and the depth of its comprehension. However, Talmudic wisdom, although it does not explore a subject as significant as *Ma’aseh Merkava* – where the subject of *Ma’aseh Merkava* is the Creator, whether according to the Kabbalists or the philosophers, while the subject of Talmudic wisdom is the performance of God's commandments – still, when the matter is not fully understood, from the perspective of the greatness of the reward, it is without a doubt that Talmudic wisdom is the foundation and the primary wisdom that enables us to attain eternal life, surpassing all other forms of wisdom.

R. Eliyahu Mizraḥi, who likely held a reserved attitude toward the Kabbalah prevalent in his time and place, though not toward Kabbalah as a whole (so Moshe Idel has informed me), did not consider himself obligated to distinguish between philosophy and Kabbalah, as both philosophers and Kabbalists, each according to their own approach, identify *Ma’aseh Merkava* with the knowledge of the Creator. From the context, it appears that R. Karo accepts R. Eliyahu Mizraḥi’s definition and premise, slightly expands upon it, and applies it to the interpretation of the Mishna in *Pirkei Avot*, which has implications for the matter at hand:

…and I suggest that, according to this approach, that the statement of the Mishna statement can be explained: “R. Eliezer ben Ḥisma said: the laws of mixed bird offerings and the key to the calculations of menstruation days, etc.” This means that even though astronomical calculations and *gematria* deal with lofty subjects, namely the heavenly bodies, while bird offerings are of lesser worth, and the subject ofmenstruation is unpleasant, nevertheless, these are the essential laws, meaning the core of the Torah, due to the great reward hidden for those who engage in them. Astronomical calculations and *gematria*, though dealing with very lofty subjects, are not fundamental but rather the embellishments of Talmudic wisdom, which is rightly called wisdom, since it concerns the interpretation of God’s commandments and the great reward given to those who engage in it and fulfill its commandments.[[29]](#footnote-29)

In other words, R. Karo shifts the focus towards the matter of reward and punishment, rather than engaging in refining the precise definition of *Ma’aseh Merkava*. His concluding remarks, which appear to affirm R. Eliyahu Mizraḥi’s premise, primarily function within the domain of positive law and do not engage with metaphysical concerns. Notably, Kabbalah is entirely absent from his discussion.

Relevant to the matter at hand, in *Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah* 1:10, Maimonides discusses the extent of Moses’ comprehension of God as follows:

What did Moses, our teacher, seek to understand when he requested, “Please show me Your glory” (Exod. 33:18)? He sought to grasp the true nature of the existence of the Holy One, blessed be He, to the extent that it could be internalized within his mind, as one recognizes a person whose face he has seen and whose image is engraved in his heart. In this way, the person’s identity is clearly distinguished in one’s mind from that of others. Similarly, Moses, our teacher, asked that the existence of the Holy One, blessed be He, be distinguished in his mind from the existence of other entities, so that he might know the truth of His existence as it is in its own right. The Holy One, blessed be He, responded that it is beyond the capacity of a living person… to comprehend this matter in its entirety… This is alluded to by the verse (Exod. 33:23): “You shall see My back, but you shall not see My face.”

In his *Kesef Mishneh*, R. Karo preserved the gloss of the Raavad, which begins with a detailed disclaimer: “I do not have a settled opinion on this...” and concludes with the cryptic remark: “The terms ‘face’ and ‘back’ contain great secrets, and it is not appropriate to reveal them to anyone. Perhaps the author of these words also does not know them.” R. Karo engages with the initial parts of the Raavad’s statement, where the Raavad expresses his view (and that of the Kabbalists) that Moses indeed attained a profound knowledge of God. R. Karo attempts to reconcile Maimonides’ interpretation and defend his position while seemingly disregarding the Raavad’s cryptic remark about the secrets contained in the terms ‘face’ and ‘back.’ It is difficult to imagine a Kabbalist restraining himself and proceeding with theoretical commentary when faced with the profound secret of ‘face’ and ‘back,’ as is evident from the writings of R. Moses Cordovero and R. Isaac Luria, contemporaries of R. Karo. Yet, R. Karo objectively and dispassionately discusses Maimonides’ view without addressing the underlying Kabbalistic secrets.

In fact, all *halakhot* that directly or indirectly reflect matters of religious beliefs and opinions need to be examined with particular rigor and sensitivity. Only on the basis of such an examination can we form a balanced assessment of R. Karo’s approach in this area and his worldview, which many assume – without solid foundation or conclusive evidence – to be Kabbalistic.

We can add another detail with far-reaching implications. In the *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah*, *Hilkhot Me’onen U’Mekhashef* (*Siman* 179, *Se'if* 8), the author formulated the *halakha* as follows: “One who recites an incantation over a wound or a sick person, spits, and then recites a verse from the Torah has no share in the World to Come.” In his *Mishneh Torah*,[[30]](#footnote-30) Maimonides omitted the word “spits,” thereby retracting what he wrote in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, where the reason for the prohibition was the desecration of God’s name. R. Karo reinstated the word – and its rationale (see the commentaries of the *Taz* and *Shakh*) – as well as the laws concerning amulets and the like. Seemingly, the selection and formulation of these *halakhot* reflect a clear and consistent anti-rationalist stance. However, before forming a final judgment, we must revisit what is written in that same *siman, se'if* 6: “If one was bitten by a scorpion, it is permissible to recite an incantation over him, even on the Sabbath, even though it is of no benefit whatsoever.” On this brief, sharp *halakha*, the Vilna Gaon (and before him the author of *Be'er HaGola*) commented that the source is Maimonides, and in the same breath, the Vilna Gaon expressed reservations about what is stated and what it implies:

But all who came after him disagreed with him, for many incantations are mentioned in the Talmud, and he was influenced by philosophy... Philosophy led him astray with its great persuasion to interpret the entire Talmud allegorically and to uproot its plain meaning. However, all these matters should be understood according to their plain meaning, although they also contain an inner dimension – not the inner dimension of the philosophers, which is external, but rather that of those who possess the truth.

This sharp remark against Maimonides has garnered significant attention. The Vilna Gaon acknowledges that there is a hidden dimension in the words of the Sages, but he outright rejects Maimonides’ allegorical interpretation, suggesting that it should be replaced by a Kabbalistic-allegorical interpretation, which alone can reveal the inner wisdom of the Torah. For our purposes, it is important to emphasize only that R. Karo follows in the footsteps of Maimonides, and whether knowingly or unknowingly, he, too, “is influenced by philosophy.” The Vilna Gaon dissents, while R. Karo aligns himself with it.

8

A notable, consistent and seemingly deliberate omission pertains to the reasons for the commandments (*ta’amei hamitzvot*), which raises important questions. It would be inaccurate to suggest that R. Karo opposed the concept of providing reasons for the commandments, either in general or in the specific context of Maimonides’ teachings. On the contrary, there is evidence that he valued and praised such explanations. A very important, central example can be found in *Hilkhot Me'ila* 8:8.

It is fitting for man to meditate upon the laws of the holy Torah and to comprehend their full meaning to the extent of his ability. Nevertheless, a law for which he finds no reason and understands no cause should not be trivial in his eyes. “Let him not break through (*haros*) to come up against the Lord, lest the Lord break forth upon him” (Exod. 19:24); nor should his thoughts concerning these things be like his thoughts concerning profane matters. Come and consider how strict the Torah was in the law of trespass! Now if sticks and stones and earth and ashes became hallowed by words alone, as soon as the name of the Master of the universe was invoked upon them, and anyone who comported with them as with a profane thing committed trespass and required atonement even if he had acted unwittingly, how much more should man be on guard not to rebel (*ba’ot*) against a commandment decreed for us by the Holy One, blessed be He, only because he does not understand its reason; or to heap words (*le-ḥappot devarim*) that are not right against the Lord; or to regard the commandments in the manner in which he regards ordinary affairs. Behold, it is said in Scripture: “Ye shall therefore keep all My statutes, and all Mine ordinances, and do them” (Lev. 20:22); whereupon our Sages have commented that “keeping” (*shemira*) and “doing” refer to the “statutes” as well as to the “ordinances.” “Doing” is well known; namely, performing the statutes. And “keeping” means that one should be careful concerning them and not imagine that they are less important than the ordinances. Now the “ordinances” are commandments whose reason is obvious, and the benefit derived in this world from doing them is well known; for example, the prohibition against robbery and murder, or the commandment of honoring one’s father and mother. The “statutes,” on the other hand, are commandments whose reason is not known. Our Sages have said: “My statutes are the decrees that I have decreed for you, and you are not permitted to question them.” A man’s impulse pricks him concerning them, and the Gentiles reprove us about them, such as the statutes concerning the prohibition against the flesh of the pig and that against meat seethed with milk, the law of the heifer whose neck is broken, of the Red Heifer, or of the scapegoat.

How much was King David distressed by heretics and pagans who disputed the statutes! Yet the more they pursued him with false questions, which they plied according to the narrowness of men’s minds, the more he increased his cleaving to the Torah; as it is said: “The proud have forged a lie against me; but I with my whole heart will keep Thy precepts” (Ps. 119:69). It is also said there concerning this: “All Thy commandments are faithful; they persecute me for nought; help Thou me” (Ps. 119:86)

All the (laws concerning the) offerings are in the category of statutes. The Sages (Avot 1:2) have said that the world stands because of the service of the offerings; for through the performance of the statutes and the ordinances the righteous merit life in the world to come. Indeed, the Torah puts the commandment concerning the statutes first; as it is said, “Ye shall therefore keep My statutes, and Mine ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them” (Lev. 18:5).[[31]](#footnote-31)

This passage holds a central place in Maimonides’ philosophical system and is of considerable significance. The individual is granted the freedom – or more precisely, the obligation – to delve deeply into this matter and to boldly and earnestly strive, without fatigue, to uncover the reasons behind the practical and moral commandments. Maimonides’ stance is explicit and decisive. He clearly and with rhetorical vigor delineates the boundaries of possible conceptual inquiry and does not ignore the dangers that await the one who delves into it; this passage includes a clear description of the concept of skeptical or agnostic antinomianism – that is, the rejection of religious law because it has been devalued in the eyes of a person who has failed to find within it a spiritual rationale. Maimonides also warns the student who seeks to contemplate the laws of the Torah not to attribute inappropriate reasons to the commandments out of excessive haste. Furthermore, one should not dismiss as valueless the commandments for which no reason is known. The laws of God are true and beneficial by their very nature. A person must be convinced that these laws are rooted in wisdom and are designed to advance humanity toward perfection. According to Maimonides’ interpretation, “observing” the laws involves a value judgment and obligates the individual not only to perform and uphold them but also to honor them.

R. Karo aptly remarks in his *Kesef Mishneh*, “Our master’s words and methods are faithful, and they are befitting of him.” It is worth noting, however, that this gracious compliment sidesteps deeper analysis and thus avoids engaging with the conceptual innovations and intellectual religious tendencies underlying the halacha in question. Agreement is expressed, but clarification is not to be found here.

One could argue that this remark should not be overemphasized, as the words in the *Kesef Mishneh* might be nothing more than a polite response from a commentator who holds the discussed source in high regard. It is possible that an incidental remark should not be transformed into a conceptual stance. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that R. Karo was well aware of this innovative passage, treated it with respect, and defended it vigorously. It can be demonstrated that at the outset of his literary endeavors, specifically in his *Beit Yosef*, an opportunity presented itself for him to refer to these words of Maimonides. In the *Tur*, *Yoreh De'ah*, *Siman* 181, R. Jacob ben Asher writes regarding rounding the head and shaving the beard as follows: “(a) In these, too, Maimonides wrote that the Torah prohibited these practices because they were performed by idolaters. (b) This is not explicitly stated. (c) We do not need to seek reasons for the commandments, as they are the King’s decrees upon us, even if we do not know their reasons.” The *Tur* succinctly emphasizes three points here: (a) Maimonides – the reference is to *Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim* 12:1 – opens with: “One should not shave the corners of the head as idolaters would do...” And in *Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim* 12:7: “It was the custom of the priests of idolaters to destroy their beards, and therefore the Torah prohibited destroying the beard.” He adheres to his method in this context as well, and in “these, too” he proposes a historical, rational explanation. (b) The reason he provides does not have explicit support – it is the product of Maimonides’ reasoning and perspective and is not definitive. (c) All of Maimonides’ exegetical and philosophical efforts are in vain, unnecessary, and unhelpful. We are commanded and obligated to observe the commandments, and the rational explanation neither adds nor detracts.

R. Karo strongly opposes these statements, disagreeing with each aspect of the *Tur*’s concise argument, supporting Maimonides’ position. He writes: “His words suggest an intention to challenge Maimonides, questioning why one should seek a reason from his own thinking for any commandment, implying that if the reason for the commandment were unknown, we would not be obligated to perform it.” Here, he addresses the potential danger of antinomianism that arises when attempting to find reasons for the commandments, particularly when those reasons are based on conjecture rather than explicit sources. He then continues to address and dispel this concern:

And it is not so. For the commandments are decrees of the King upon us, and even if we do not know their reasons, we are still commanded to perform them. And I say that Maimonides, Heaven forbid, would not hold such a view. Who would be more concerned for the honor of the Torah and its commandments than him? His words at the end of *Hilkhot Me'ila* bear witness to this. Similarly, he wrote at the end of *Hilkhot Temura* and *Hilkhot Mikva’ot*. From these, we understand that his view is that although all the laws of the Torah are royal decrees, nonetheless, wherever a reason can be found, we should ascribe one.

R. Karo first asserts that there is no danger of nullifying religious practice. Even Maimonides views the commandments as divine decrees whose validity is absolute. The intent of the statement “Who would be more concerned for the honor of the Torah…” is that the reasons for the commandments add honor, prestige, and meaning to them. The reason given honors the Torah; it does not detract from it. Conversely, leaving the commandments without reason and without justification could open the door to antinomianism that is rooted in ignorance and misunderstanding. It is well known in the history of religion that antinomianism arises from philosophical knowledge. The assumption is that a commandment serves a specific purpose, and if one succeeds in understanding its full intent, it might be possible to forgo the practice; knowledge supersedes the act. The nullification of a commandment’s practice can result from understanding its meaning and purpose. Maimonides offered a novel idea in *Hilkhot Me’ila* that not only can knowledge negate the performance of a commandment, but that ignorance and misunderstanding can do so, as well. Specifically, a person who fails to comprehend the full intent of the commandment will come to ignore its observance, for if there is no reason or justification for it, why should one perform these arbitrary actions? It is precisely the correct knowledge and effective explanation that enhance the value of the act. This is what R. Karo means when he writes “Who would be more concerned for the honor of the Torah…” Maimonides’ teleological interpretative approach to the reasons for the commandments aims to magnify and exalt the Torah.

R. Karo adeptly directs the learner to two additional laws that further elaborate on Maimonides’ framework for understanding the reasons behind commandments. In the conclusion of *Hilkhot Temura*, Maimonides reaffirms the validity of intellectual inquiry into the commandments, and, moving from the general to the specific, demonstrates his method by offering an explanation for the specific law in question. He underscores that the commandments serve to refine and purify the individual, both in a literal and conceptual sense. At the end of *Hilkhot Mikva’ot*, Maimonides attempts to elevate and deepen the spiritual significance of ritual purity and impurity. We can deduce that R. Karo used a cautious expression when he said “similarly.” In these laws, there is the application and expansion of the method, strengthening and enhancement.

Regarding the critique/accusation by the *Baal ha-Turim* that Maimonides offered reasons based on personal opinion, R. Karo emphasizes “he did not provide reasons of his own opinion, but based on the opinions found in the biblical text.” This restrained formulation serves as a robust defense and establishes a strong boundary around Maimonides’ method. R. Karo argues that Maimonides did not devise reasons capriciously but derived them from the biblical text with careful sensitivity, understanding, and insight. This response is crucial, given the recurring assertion that Maimonides, like other philosophers, fabricated reasons based on personal judgment rather than relying on established tradition. R. Joseph ibn Shoshan’s commentary illustrates this point: “These are allusions to erroneous opinions and weak beliefs, whose authors lack a solid foundation upon which to rely, as they were not transmitted by a single authority but emerged from individual thought and judgment.” [[32]](#footnote-32)

This argument is a central theme in R. Meir ibn Gabbai’s *Tola’at Ya'akov*.[[33]](#footnote-33) Philosophers invent reasons based on their own judgment.

Still, while he defends the system of reasons proposed by Maimonides, R. Karo exercises considerable restraint; he does not express his own unique beliefs or reasons that he attributes to the commandments.

9

Two key questions arise: (a) Are there traces of Kabbalah – specifically Kabbalistic positions or influences on halakhic discourse and rulings – evident in the halakhic works of R. Karo, particularly in the *Shulḥan Arukh*? (b) Perhaps we should revisit and ask – though it may seem bold – whether R. Karo should indeed be classified as a Kabbalist. Is this assumption open to challenge? For the sake of brevity, it is sufficient to note the position taken by Jacob Katz.[[34]](#footnote-34) He first emphasizes that there are indeed halakhot based on the *Zohar*. In the contemporary period this is not novel at all. This assertion counters the position of Zwi Werblowsky, the author of the book on R. Joseph Karo's *Maggid Mesharim*. Katz writes as follows:

Karo’s attitude has been misrepresented on two counts. Rationalistically minded scholars of the nineteenth century could not imagine that Karo the “lawyer” could, at the same time, have been the author of *Magid Mesharim*, the mystical diary dictated to its author in a semi-conscious state of mind. The historical as well as psychological misconceptions underlying this skepticism have been examined and the twofold mentality of Karo as “lawyer and mystic” convincingly established by Karo’s modern biographer, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky.[[35]](#footnote-35) In the same context Werblowsky spoke also of “Karo’s well-known unwillingness to allow kabbalistic considerations or mystical experiences to influence halakhic decisions.” The first half of this sentence is well taken. The half-conscious meditations of Karo’s mystical diary contain also reflections on halakhic matters, and these indeed left no trace in his halakhic writings. Kabbalistic considerations based on literary sources, primarily the Zohar, on the other hand, are part and parcel of his *Beyt Yosef* and *Shulḥan Arukh*, as was shown long ago by Moshe Kunitz in his *Ben-Yoḥai.*[[36]](#footnote-36)

In closing, Prof. Katz concludes: “Far from being free from kabbalistic influence, then, the author of the *Shulḥan Arukh*, as we have seen, yielded to it to the utmost extent possible for a halakhist of his stature.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

It appears necessary to distinguish between Kabbalistic considerations and Kabbalistic perspectives. While there are certainly numerous halakhic formulations reflecting Kabbalistic considerations, a Kabbalistic worldview does not distinctly emerge. In contrast, from the *Mishneh Torah*, one can discern Maimonides’ character and outline his philosophical-spiritual profile – *Mishneh Torah* serves as a sort of mirror reflecting the influence of his philosophical heritage and the ways in which he integrated it into his work. This is not the case with the *Shulḥan Arukh* and its author, R. Joseph Karo. The philosophical sensitivity in the *Mishneh Torah* is evident, whereas the Kabbalistic involvement in the *Shulḥan Arukh* remains concealed.

Therefore, it is difficult to reconcile Gershom Scholem’s statement: “R. Joseph Karo deliberately ignored kabbalism in his great rabbinic code *Shulḥan Arukh*, yet there is little doubt as to the secret eschatological motives of its composition.”[[38]](#footnote-38) This statement is vague and unexplained. What does it mean to say that he “deliberately ignored kabbalism”? He did not distance himself from Kabbalistic influences in matters of *halakha*; these influences had already been accepted and integrated into halakhic literature, losing their distinctiveness as markers of Kabbalists. The extent to which Kabbalistic works have permeated halakhic literature is primarily a question of the evolution of rabbinic literature. As a leading halakhic authority, R. Karo engaged with these influences, much like other great halakhic authorities who followed him.

Regarding the “the secret eschatological motives of its composition,” the nature of these motives is entirely unclear. To the extent that various scholars address this issue, it appears that they are all making conjectures, leaving the question open to speculation. Transitioning to a related matter, I would like to note that R. Karo’s introduction to the *Shulḥan Arukh* is not significantly different from R. Jacob ben Asher’s introduction to his work, the *Tur*. In the introduction to the *Tur*, he writes:

And since our days have been prolonged in exile, our strength has weakened, our hearts have grown desolate, our hands have slackened, our eyes have dimmed, our ears have become heavy, our tongues have been stilled, our speech has been taken away, the springs of wisdom have been sealed, our reasoning has become confused, and disputes have increased, there is no longer a single definitive law that does not have divergent opinions.

It seems that the prevailing literary tendency is asserting its dominance. In the introduction to *Beit Yosef,* R. Joseph Karo writes:

As the days have lengthened, we have been emptied from vessel to vessel, and we have gone into dispersion. Many calamities, severe and successive, one after the other, have befallen us until, due to our sins, the verse “the wisdom of its wise will perish” has been fulfilled in us. The strength of the Torah and its learners has weakened because the Torah has not become like two *Torot* but rather like countless *Torot*, due to the multitude of books that exist explaining its laws and rulings.

Here it appears that R. Karo shifts from a historical explanation (“the wisdom of its wise will perish” is a prominent aspect in Maimonides' introduction to the *Mishneh Torah* and in other contexts, where Maimonides felt the impact of his harsh temporal circumstances, the grim reality of decline and deterioration) to a literary-immanent explanation.[[39]](#footnote-39) R. David Halevi, author of the *Taz*, also perceived R. Karo’s statements in a literary rather than historical sense in his introduction to *Yoreh De'ah*:

After seeing the introduction to *Beit Yosef*, where he expresses concern that the Torah has become like multiple *Torot* due to the differences of opinion among the legal authorities, he weighed and explored the matter correctly. In our generation, this fear has returned to its place because after him great leaders of Israel arose, one particularly distinguished among us, the great scholar R. Shlomo Luria, may his memory be blessed,[[40]](#footnote-40) and my father-in-law the great scholar R. Yoel, each of whom wrote works according to their understanding.

Therefore, the literary reality justifies his own endeavor as well.

10

The conclusion from our discussion is that R. Joseph Karo frequently engaged with Maimonides’ writings, providing commentary on his novel ideas and deeply analyzing halakhic issues through the lens of Maimonides’ teachings. He carefully selected interpretative elements from the *Mishneh Torah* to incorporate into the *Shulḥan Arukh*. This raises important questions: Why did he hesitate to accord a significant place to Kabbalah? Why did he “suppress his prophecy” and refrain from imparting his knowledge of Kabbalah and his commitment to its fundamental positions and core beliefs to his readers and students?

One possible explanation that emerges is that R. Karo sought to emphasize rigorously the unity and centrality of *halakha*, distinguishing it from any meta-halakhic system. The spiritualization of *halakha*, which is indispensable, is multifaceted, yet it has no place in a legal code. Separate works will provide the necessary meta-halakhic dimension, while the *Shulḥan Arukh* is intended to present practical *halakha* in a concise and accessible form. The words of R. Jacob ibn Ḥabib in his introduction to *Ein Yaakov* actually align with this possible explanation. He sought to explain why the Rif and the Rosh, two leading *halakhic* authorities, omitted the homiletical parts of the Talmud from their works. In other words, he aimed to reconstruct the tendencies and motives of the Rif and the Rosh after he himself prefaces his question with a definition of *aggada* as a source from which to draw foundational beliefs, moral paths, and good counsel. He states: “From here on, anyone is permitted to complete his work and write in a separate book, in general and in detail, every path of *derash*. There is nothing new in this, for scholars and students, both earlier and later, have always been accustomed to making books based on the *midrashim* of the Sages.” These words propose a unique perspective on rabbinic literature compared to the literature of the Talmudic sages. While the Sages unified *halakha* and *aggada*, later *halakhic* scholars, both early and late, delineated the boundaries of each genre and dealt with *aggada* separately from their *halakhic* works.

Extending this analysis, it would be worthwhile to examine the halakhic monographs – those works focusing on specific topics, such as *Emek Berakha* by R. Abraham Horowitz or *Mateh Moshe* by R. Moshe Mat. These texts, similar to the works of the *ge’onim*, aim to provide comprehensive legal rulings on particular subjects in *halakha*. However, they also emphasize the meta-halakhic dimension, as if the authors recognized an opportunity to establish a unique position within the broader legal discourse. They seemed to feel an urgent need to address this gap, emphasizing the importance of the religious experience and meta-halakhic study. In the introduction to his *Emek Berakha*, R. Abraham Horowitz explicitly questions the need for a “*Shulḥan Arukh* on the Laws of Blessings” when the *Shulḥan Arukh* already encompasses all areas of Jewish law. He raises this question and then resolves it, offering multiple answers among them also highlighting the meta-halakhic aspects.[[41]](#footnote-41) This suggests an emerging awareness that the *Shulḥan Arukh* has significantly altered the landscape of rabbinic literature, restructuring its frameworks and increasing the emphasis on “Talmudism.”

In summary, we cannot avoid raising this question: perhaps R. Karo was not a Kabbalist at all, at least not in the conventional sense. It is not merely that the *Shulḥan Arukh* does not reveal his Kabbalistic consciousness, but it even raises doubts and challenges, for in cases where the Zoharic view was explicitly repudiated in the Talmud “the kabbalistic tradition would have to give way.”[[42]](#footnote-42) As we have seen, he refrains from rejecting the identification of the *Ma'aseh Merkava* with philosophy. His silence is telling and provocative. While Kabbalists did not hesitate to declare openly and with great conviction the supreme value of esoteric wisdom over the exoteric, R. Karo does not join their ranks. The gap between his words and those of R. Meir ibn Gabbai in *Avodat HaKodesh* or R. Moses Cordovero in *Or Ne'erav* is vast. Neither the mystical experiences described in *Maggid Mesharim*, nor the sermons in *Or Tzadikim* (which, while containing Kabbalistic material, are not particularly distinguished by their uniqueness, originality, or power), nor the halakhic content in *Beit Yosef*, and certainly not the *Shulḥan Arukh*, justify characterizing R. Karo as a Kabbalist. Under no circumstances can he be classified alongside figures like Naḥmanides, Rashba, or Radbaz, or other prominent halakhic authorities who were also ardent and enthusiastic Kabbalists. It is doubtful whether we are discussing a case of self-restraint on the part of R. Karo, who did not wish to reveal the secrets of the Torah, or whether he should not be considered among the great Kabbalists at all; this matter requires careful consideration.

1. In memory of the late Chief Rabbi Yitzḥak Nissim. The title of this article is drawn from the epitaph on R. Joseph Karo's tombstone, a text that, in its brevity, conveys profound meaning. It captures the essence of the subject with the conciseness characteristic of an epitaph, distilling the central idea into a few words and marking it with fundamental scrutiny. This article was inspired by reflections on the 500th anniversary of R. Karo’s birth. The thoughts presented here are preliminary, offering only fragments of insight and foundational ideas. With God’s help, I hope to delve deeper into these topics at a more appropriate time. The ideas expressed were originally delivered as a lecture at Institute for Research in Jewish Law at the Faculty of Law of the Hebrew University in December 1988. Due to time constraints, I was unable to include the comprehensive bibliographic notes I had promised the editor. While preparing this lecture for publication, my elder brother, R. Menachem Nachum, passed away on 22 Adar Sheni 5749. It is impossible to share these reflections without honoring his memory, and I pray that my words may serve as a light for his pure soul. May he rest in peace.

As described by R. Menaḥem HaMe’iri in his introduction to the *Beit Habeḥira*, Berakhot, Samuel Dickman edition, Jerusalem: Makhon Hatalmud Hayisraeli Hashalem, 1960, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R. Zeraḥya Halevi, *Sela Hamaḥloket*, in: R. Avraham ben David (Raavad), *Ba’alei Nefesh*, Yosef Qafiḥ edition, Jerusalem, Mossad HaRav Kook, 1997, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The words of Isaac Hirsch Weiss on R. Menaḥem HaMe’iri, author of the *Beit Habeḥira,* or Simon Dubnow on Nachmanides, demonstrate the imbalance and the distortion of the historical law. See Chapter 29, 656. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic,* London, Oxford University Press, 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Da’at*, 21 (1988), 57-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. No one can deny that *Maggid Mesharim* contains kabbalistic material, and in many instances, the *maggid* actively encourages the study of Kabbalah. However, it is equally clear that the book cannot be classified as a purely Kabbalistic work, like R. Moses Cordovero’s *Ohr Ne’erav*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Sefer Hamusar*, Yehuda Ratzaby edition, Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1965, 116-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Meir Benayahu, “Kinot Ḥakhmei Italia al Rabbi Yosef Karo,” *Kovetz R. Yosef Karo*, Yitzhak Rafael, ed. Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1969, 302-359. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. R. Samson of Chinon, *Sefer Keritot*; R. Yeshua HaLevi of Tlemcen, *Halikhot Olam*; R. Joseph ibn Virga, *She'erit Yosef*; R. Samuel Sirilio, *Kelalei Shmuel*; R. Bezalel Ashkenazi, *Kelalei Hatalmud*. Eliav Shochetman suggests (*Shenaton Hamishpat Ha’ivri*, 8 [1981], 16) that R. Bezalel Ashkenazi’s *Kelalei Hatalmud* was written as an addition and completion of *Sefer Keritot,* just as R. Karo wrote as a gloss on *Halikhot Olam.* In his introduction, R. Karo writes “What can be gained by rewriting what has already been written?” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example, *Avkat Rokhel, Siman* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In his “Codification of Jewish Law,” *On Jewish Law and Lore*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955, 18, Louis Ginzberg writes: “But Caro is much more independent than his predecessor in that he generally reduces the Halakhah to rules without giving every difference of opinion.” These words are puzzling in many respects, primarily because the issue at hand is not one of independence but rather of having a systematic plan and a coherent concept on legal rulings. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Yoreh De’ah, Hilkhot Terumot, Siman* 331, *Se’if* 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Kinnah leR. Yosef Sigri,” Meir Benayahu, *Yosef Beḥiri: Meḥkarim Betoldot Maran R. Yosef Karo*, Jerusalem: Yad HaRav Nissim, 1991, 572. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Derekh Ḥokhma,* Mordechai Shriki edition, Jerusalem 2009, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Iggerot Harambam*, Shilat edition, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Beit Yosef*, introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Hilkhot Shevu’ot* 4:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Darkei Moshe, Ḥoshen Mishpat, Siman* 307, *Se’if* 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Introduction to the *Kesef Mishneh*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Above, in chapter 9, n. 13, I offer an explanation for the juxtaposition of these two laws based on Maimonides’ words in his *Guide* III:45. It is worthwhile noting that R. Karo does admit to searching for a source without success. For example, in *Hilkhot Ta’anit* 4:1(“Ashes are placed … on the Torah scroll “) he comments: “I do not know his source for this.” See also the Meiri’s *Beit Habeḥira*, Ta’anit, Avraham Sofer edition, Jerusalem 1969, 57, in the editor’s note, n.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Teshuvot Harambam*, Blau edition, Siman 442, 721. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In the *Tur, Yoreh De’ah, Siman* 246, we find the following statement: “And Maimonides wrote: when does this apply? Only at the beginning of one’s study, but when he grows in wisdom…” In the parallel passage in the *Shulḥan Arukh*, R. Karo omits the phrase “and Maimonides wrote,” likely reflecting his position as established in the *Beit Yosef*. According to R. Karo, there is neither a need nor a reason to attribute this law explicitly to Maimonides since it represents the straightforward meaning of the Talmud. It is noteworthy that in the *Kesef Mishneh* on *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:12, the source of this law, R. Karo states simply: “and this is a straightforward matter...” (while the *Leḥem Mishneh* sharpens the point, emphasizing: “He said this based on his own reasoning”). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See, for example, *Hilkhot Tefilla* 13:17, regarding the Torah reading on Ḥanukka, where the *Kesef Mishneh* writes: “and this is straightforward.” However, upon examining Sukka 55a, one discovers that the order of the Torah reading on the intermediary days of Sukkot is a point of debate between Rashi and Tosafot. Maimonides’ application of Rashi’s understanding (which appears to be based on the question of the sanctity of the day) to Ḥanukka represents a novel approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Beit Yosef, Yoreh De’ah, Siman* 201. We frequently encounter the author of *Migdal Oz* defending Maimonides by asserting that the explanation we apply to the Gemara – no matter how much effort it requires – should equally be applied to Maimonides’ phrasing. Maimonides is using the language of the Gemara. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. An examination of every *siman* in the laws of charity clearly reveals that the author consistently shortened and omitted material found in the *Tur* (with the Rema sometimes finding it necessary to restore these omissions). In this process of abbreviation and reduction, he skillfully incorporated Maimonides’ words, in a discerning manner. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Maimonides’ definition of “vows involving prohibitions,” as opposed to “vows of sanctification,” is presented in *Hilkhot Nedarim* 1:1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Chapter 10, particularly p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:11-12. See Chapter 7, pp. 214-215. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Kesef Mishneh, Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah* 4:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Hilkhot Avoda Zara* 11:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See above, Ch. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Perush R. Yosef ben Shoshan al Massekhet Avot*, Moshe Shlomo Kasher and Yaakov Yehoshua Balkrovits edition, Jerusalem: Machon Torah Shelema, 1968, 19, Commentary to Mishna 1:11: “…and the disciples who follow you will drink of those waters and die.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See, for example, R. Meir ibn Gabbai, *Tola’at Ya'akov*, Jerusalem 1996, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Jacob Katz, “Post-Zoharic Relations between Halakhah and Kabbalah,” in Bernard Dov Cooperman, ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 301-302. See also Moshe Halamish, “Hakabbalah Bapesika shel R. Yosef Karo,” *Da’at*, 21 (1984), 85-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Werblowsky (above, n. 4), 15-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Moshe Kunitz, *Ben-Yoḥai*, Vienna 1915, 136-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Katz (above, n. 34), 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi, The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676,* Princeton University Press, 1973, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. From my perspective, the reality of the “multitude of books” referenced by the author remains somewhat ambiguous. R. Solomon Alami (late 14th century), in his *Iggeret Musar* (Abraham M. Habermann edition, Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1946, p. 40), laments: “And authors write various works that will neither help nor prevent changes in opinions and beliefs.” Despite this, it is essential to recognize that each generation perceives itself as enveloped by “the darkness of events and transformations,” which compels them to undertake corrective measures. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The *Maharshal*, in the introduction to his *Yam Shel Shlomo* states that “the Torah has become like 613 *Torot*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. R. Abraham Halevi Horowitz, *Emek Berakha,* Mosheh and Naḥman Ḳroizer edition, Jerusalem 1985, Introduction, 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Katz (see above n. 34), 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)