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The Interplay of Exegesis and Ideology in the Jewish Medieval Interpretations of Exodus 33:12-23

DAN RAND
JEWISH STUDIES
MCGILL UNIVERSITY , MONTREAL

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the interplay of exegesis and ideology in the variety of Jewish medieval interpretation to Exodus 33:12-23. This thesis examines the intersection of ideology at three stages of the exegetical process. In the first stage, the commentator singles out “difficulties” in the biblical text. In the second stage, the commentator proposes formal solutions to these textual problems which provide a conceptual framework in which to introduce exegetical content. Finally, there are the actual comments themselves which provide the reservoir of exegetical content from which to glean the ideological tendencies of a particular commentator. The term “interplay” indicates the dynamic aspect of the relationship between exegesis and ideology and refers to the manner in which a commentator’s ideological views influence his exegetical considerations and vice-versa. Contrasting various schools of exegesis to the biblical unit will sharpen the distinctive ideological positions of each author.

Resumé

Le but de cette thèse est d'étudier l'effet réciproque entre l'exégèse et l'idéologie dans la grande variété des interprétations juives à l'époque médiévale de l'Exode 33:12-23. Cette thèse recherche l'influence de l'idéologie à trois étapes du processus de l'exégèse. A la première étape l'exégète s'adresse surtout aux "difficultés" du texte biblique. Deuxièmement l'exégète propose des résolutions formelles aux problèmes du texte. Ces résolutions donnent forme au contenu de l'exégèse. Finalement, un regroupement de commentaires offre un contenu d'où l'on relève des tendances idéologiques des exégètes particuliers. Le "jeu" entre l'exégèse et l'idéologie illumine l'aspect dynamique de la relation entre les deux. De plus, l'influence de l'idéologie sur l'exégèse et vice-versa se révèle clairement. Comparer des écoles diverses de l'exégèse sert à souligner les différentes positions idéologiques de chaque auteur.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Rationale And Objectives:

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the interplay of exegesis and ideology in the variety of Jewish medieval interpretation on Exodus 33:12-23. There are three stages to the exegetical process that we will examine. In the first stage, the commentator singles out “difficulties” that he chooses to examine in the biblical text. These difficulties may be of a philological, lexicographic, literary or conceptual nature. In the second stage, the author proposes formal solutions to these textual problems which provide the conceptual framework in which to fill in the exegetical content. Finally, there are the actual comments themselves which provide the reservoir of exegetical content from which to examine the ideological tendencies of a particular commentator. By “ideology,” we refer to the broader philosophical approach of the commentator to the pericope. The commentator’s approach will, of course, reflect many of his own ideological predilections, as well. The term “interplay” indicates the dynamic aspect of the relationship between exegesis and ideology and refers to the manner in which an author’s ideological views influence his exegetical considerations and vice-versa. A secondary purpose of this thesis is to contrast various schools of exegesis to our pericope. This will further elucidate the distinctive ideological positions of each author.

Methodology:

There are a number of ways to organise the thesis according to the stated purpose. One possibility is to organise it by verse. The advantage of this approach (followed, for example, by Menachem Kasher in his *Torah Shlema*) is that it enables one to note textual

problems and readily compare and contrast different exegetical approaches to those problems. This is particularly valuable if one's primary orientation is the biblical text and one only utilises exegetical material as a means towards exploring that text.

When, however, there is an interest in viewing the exegetical text as a primary document in its own right- as in our case- this advantage falls away. The appropriate organising principle becomes the medieval author himself. This will enable us to piece together a picture of his total exegetical interests, not just a fragmented sense of his work on any one particular verse. In order to maintain a sense of the textual flow that the author himself engages in his commentary, it is still necessary, however, to include a verse by verse breakdown of the author's treatment of the pericope.

In order to facilitate a comparison of the different medieval exegetical approaches, each author will be grouped under one of three chapter headings- each belonging to a particular exegetical trend: The literalists (*pashtanim*), the kabbalists (*Ha-mekubalim*) and the philosophers. Each chapter will begin with an introductory essay outlining in broad terms the general exegetical tendencies of its trend and illustrating these tendencies with examples from the commentator's treatment of the pericope.

Of central importance to any inquiry into medieval exegesis is the manner in which the commentator at hand relates to the rabbinical tradition. Does he follow the traditional interpretation, attempt to reinterpret it in a new guise, or choose to ignore it and follow his own autonomous line of interpretation? These are questions that deal, of course, with the basic tension of tradition and innovation. In addition, they put into perspective the hermeneutical approach of any given commentator. There is no question, for example, that Samuel ben Meir's (Rashbam) configuration of *peshat* as distinct to rabbinic *derash* on the basis of the dictum of *ein mikra yotze mee-day peshuto* gives him the leeway to ignore the rabbinic tradition in many of his comments. Although a thorough study of this issue goes beyond the limits of this thesis, we will nevertheless point out, wherever relevant, significant departures or reinterpretations of rabbinic statements that pertain to our pericope. The central talmudic sources to our pericope can be found in Tractate *Berakhot* 7a,

Sanhedrin 38b, *Yevamot* 49b, *Rosh Hashana* 17b and *Megillah* 19b. The reader is urged to review these and other midrashic sources¹ before examining the medieval commentaries.

The Text:

The text we have chosen to explore is Exodus 33:12-23. The subject of the pericope is the intercession of Moses on behalf of the Israelites and the ensuing dialogue between God and Moses. The immediate background of this unit begins after the incident of the golden calf (32:1-6), at which time God threatens to destroy the Israelites and to rebuild a “Holy nation” through the seed of Moses (32:10). Moses entreats God to relent from His anger and accomplishes his task (32:11-14). Later, he entreats God with the purpose of securing atonement for the nation (32:30-32), but his effort is without definitive results. God only charges Moses with the task of leading the nation and promises that He will send His angel before him (32:33,34). Chapter 33 begins with a repetition of God’s charge to Moses to “take up the nation up from this [*mizeh*]” (33:1), and a repetition of his promise to send an angel (33:2). This time, God explains the rationale for His sending an angel- “I will not go up in your midst for you are a stiff-necked people and perhaps I will destroy you on the way”(33:3). Immediately preceding our pericope, there is a startling description of the nature of Moses’ relationship to God as that of speaking “face [*panim*] to face” just as a person speaks to a close friend (33:11).

We must consider our pericope both in its context and independently. In its context, verses 12-23 clearly advance two important themes: a) Moses’ series of intercessory prayers on behalf of the Israelites (e.g. 32:11-14, 32:30-32) and b) Moses’ intimate relationship with God (33:6-11). Verses 12-17, roughly correspond to the first theme while verses 18-23 correspond to the latter. As distinct themes, the two units contrast with each other. Moses as intercessor pleads the case of a nation that does not warrant divine favour while

¹ In particular see *Shemot Rabbah* #45, *Midrash Ha-gadol*, *Tanhuma* and *Lekakh Tov*. For a complete listing of rabbinic and midrashic sources see Menahem Kasher’s *Torah Shlema* to Exodus 33:12-23.

Moses as the prophetic person seeks to commune directly with God precisely because he merits divine favour. In the first role, Moses is the leader par excellence putting his perfection aside to uplift the nation. In the latter role, Moses is the prophet par excellence, looking to come closer to God in a more sublime perfection. The juxtaposition of these themes leads to the inevitable conclusion, though, that they are not as distinct as one might think. Moses' personal merit and perfection do not simply oppose the nation; they are precisely the keys to Moses' success as intercessor. As such, one of the central exegetical issues of the pericope is at which points in the text does Moses function primarily as a public personality- interested in the good of the nation, and at which point does he function as a private individual seeking self-perfection.

As an independent unit, the biblical text presents to us a dialogue between Moses and God involving specific questions and answers. The two pivotal questions are undoubtedly "Let me know Your ways"(v.13), and "Let me see Your Glory"(v.18)– both mirroring the same rhythm and literary style.

From an exegetical point of view, it is necessary to ask, what is the issue at hand in the dialogue. What does Moses request of God? Does God answer these requests or not? Which statements answer which questions? These are exegetical issues of the most crucial kind and will delineate for us distinct ideas about the nature of the God-Moses relationship.

Finally, we must consider some linguistic and structural aspects of our text². As Nahum Waldman notes, certain themes in the pericope are "emphasised by repetition and chiastic arrangement". For example, the motifs of "knowledge" [*da'at*] and "finding favour" [*khen*] form chiastic chains of the following pattern: A:A:B::B:A:A-B-A:B::B:A³.

² For a contemporary discussion of this topic see Martin Buber's *Darkho shel Mikra* Mosad Bialik; Jerusalem (1964), pp.300-307.

³ That is: v.12: a) *ata lo hodatani*, b) *y'datikha bashem*, c) *matzata khen b'aynai*. v.13: a) *eem na matzati khen b'aynai* b) *hodi'aynee na* c) *va'eda'ekha* d) *l'maan emtzah khen b'aynekha* v.16: a) *ubameh yeevadakh* b) *kee matzati khen b'aynekha* v.17: a) *kee matzati khen b'aynai* b) *vaeda'ekha bashem*.- Waldman p.67,68 n.2

The chains follow an alternating pattern of first and second person forms except for *yeevadah* (v.16) which “neatly divides the two chiastic chains.” Waldman’s list of repeating words includes *shem* [name] in verses 12,17,19, various forms of *halakh* [go] in verses 14,15,16 and *am* [nation] in verses 12,13,16. Another leading pair of motifs, not mentioned by Waldman, is that of *ra’ah* [see] and *panim* [face] which both appear seven times in the pericope. The root *ra’ah* neatly forms the opening and closing words of the pericope as well. These two word pairs (*da’at- hen*; *ra’ah- panim*) present two distinct yet related themes. The first brings into relief the relationship between knowledge and favour. Knowledge leads to favour which, in turn, spurs one on to greater knowledge. The second word pair, expresses the great longing of Man for the divine “face”. Here the stress is one-directional. The climactic expression of these two themes once again coincides with the two requests “Let me know Your ways” and “Let me see Your Glory”. Another extraordinary characteristic of the pericope is its spoken dialogical quality⁴. The speech *ata* [you] occurs three times in verse 12 and then, at the turning point of the plea in v.13, the adverbial *v’ata* [and now] appears. The assonance is striking and brings home the crucial nature of Moses’ request⁵. Moses often patterns his requests after divine speech. The dual repetition of *ani v’amkha* [I and Your people] in v.16 is meant to contrast the divine command in v.1: “Go up from this- you and the nation” [*ata v’ha-am*]. The same technique appears in verse 13: “If I have found favour in Your eyes.” This patterns the divine promise mentioned by Moses in v.12: “You said: “I have known you by name and you have found favour in My eyes””. Similarly, the conditional statement in v.15 (“If Your face does not go with us”) mirrors the divine promise in v.14-- (“My face will go with you”). The divine response in v.17 clearly addresses the speech of Moses, not just the content of his request: “This very word [*gam et hadavar hazeh*] that you have spoken I will do.” Finally, notes Waldman, the

⁴ James Muilenberg “Intercession of the Covenant Mediator” pp. 159-181 in Words and Meanings: Essays presented to David Winston Thomas. Edited by Peter Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars, Cambridge University Press, (1968), 168,169.

⁵ Muilenberg, p.171

multitude of particles in the text “serve to articulate the interior sequences of the successive lines and to reveal the texture of the linguistic fabric”⁶. The repetition of key-words and key phrases thus produce a rhythm of speech and sound that is integral to the dialogic nature of the pericope. Interestingly, it is not the increase of words but their economy and brevity that bring to the fore the power of speech in the pericope.

From an exegetical point of view, the abundance of word patterns and repetitions raises difficulties on the conceptual level. For one thing, repeated word roots do not necessarily carry the same meaning in each context. For example, can the word *panim* [face] in v.20 carry the same meaning as *panim* in v.14? Why would Moses continue to demand for the *panim* if that is precisely what God promised to provide?

Besides the linguistic features of the text that lead to exegetical remarks based on philology and lexicography, another aspect of the text leads to an entirely different array of exegetical problems. God’s reply to Moses in verses 19-23, particularly 21-23, can be read either literally or metaphorically. To what do words such as *kapi*, *panim*, *akhor* - clearly anthropomorphic terms - refer to exactly? In some cases, entire phrases may be read as metaphors. - “I will place My hand over you” (v.22) or “you will stand on the rock”(v.21). How much of the text must be read metaphorically, if at all, and what is the metaphorical meaning of those sections that are read as such? This is another compelling exegetical issue in the pericope.

⁶ Muilenberg, p.169. These particles include: v.12) v’gam v.13) kee, l’ma’an, na, eem-na, v’ata v.15) eem-ayn v.16) haloh, kee eyfoh, bameh v.17) gam v.18) na v.20) kee

Chapter One: The Pashtanim

Searching For The Plain Meaning Of The Text

Characterising the trend of exegesis of the *pashtanim* is, primarily, its devotion to the plain meaning of the text. The principal interest of the *pashtan* is to uncover the intended meaning or meanings of the author rather than to apply meanings to the text based on apparently external systems of thought whether they are midrashic, philosophic or kabbalistic. This commitment finds expression in a deep sensitivity for context, underlying motive, structure, philology, and lexicography⁷.

Rashi (1040-1105), the seminal figure in this movement, still stood on the threshold between *midrash* and *peshat*. Rashi's stated exegetical aim is to present to the reader a coherent interpretation of the text that "explains the verses in a manner fitting to them and in their context (comment to Ex.33:13). To this end, Rashi pursues two distinct but parallel tracks: *Peshuto Shel Mikra* and, more abundantly, *aggadah hameyushevet divrei Hamikra*.

The former achieves his stated purpose by utilising data intrinsic to the text. The latter settles textual problems by appealing to midrashic sources for the exegetical "data" needed to supply a solution⁸.

⁷ On the topic of Peshat and Derash see David Weiss Halivni's Peshat and Derash: plain and applied meaning in Rabbinic exegesis. New York, Oxford University Press, 1991.

⁸ For intensive studies on Rashi's conception of Peshat and Derash see Gelles, Benjamin J. Peshat and Derash in the exegesis of Rashi. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1981; Kamin, Sarah. Rashi: Peshuto shel Mikra u-midrasho shel Mikra. Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1986;; Leibowitz, Nehama. Perush Rashi la-Torah. Ramat Aviv, ha-Universitah ha-petuhah, 1990.

In his exegetical approach to our pericope there are a number of interesting examples that put into full relief Rashi's concern in reconciling the often conflicting exegetical priorities of *peshuto shel mikra* and the earlier rabbinic tradition. On the one hand, Rashi is careful to follow the rabbinic tradition in Tractate *Berakhot* 7a that Moses made three requests (according to the Talmud they were: a) that the *Shekhina* dwell within Israel ("Is it not in Your going with us?"..[v.16]), b) that God remove prophecy from the nations of the world ("...Let I and my nation be distinguished from all the nations of the world" [v.16]), and c) that God show Moses His ways of bestowing reward and punishment ("...Let me know of Your ways..."[v.13]). On the other hand, he recasts the talmudic exposition of the third request to mesh with the broader context of the verse (see v.13 s.v. "v'ata'"). Similarly, in his comment to v.19 (s.v. "vayomer ani aavir") Rashi cites the Tradition of R' Yohanan in tractate *Rosh Hashana* 17b, but utilizes it, in his exegesis, as a partial response to Moses' request to 'see the divine Glory' in v.18. (see v.19).

As the foremost representative of eleventh century Franco-German culture, Rashi typically refrains from introducing philosophical and mystical elements in his commentary. He does not, for example, find it necessary to explicate with any profundity the nature of Moses' second request or to provide a coherent exegesis to the final difficult three verses of the pericope. On the other hand, there is a greater focus, in his exegesis, towards developing a distinct portrayal of the character of Moses. Rashi depicts Moses as a tenacious leader willing to dispute God's word (see v.12 s.v. "*Re'eh ata omer elay*"). At the same time, he is absolute in his commitment to Israel, making it clear in unmistakable terms that his greatness results only from his relation to the nation and rejecting any reward that excludes them (see V.12 s.v. "*ur'eh ki amkha hagoy hazeh*").

In the commentary of Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam [1080-85-1174]), grandson of Rashi, the delineation of *peshat* and *derash* as two distinct modes of exegesis becomes fully evident⁹. The Rashbam develops his *peshat* exegesis without any attempt to integrate the

⁹ On Rashbam see Martin I. Lockshin's notes in his translation of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's commentary on Genesis: Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1989.

rabbinical tradition into its parameters; he does not, for example, refer explicitly to any midrashic or talmudic sources in our pericope. A spirit of critical independence marks his conceptual inquiry. In his comment to v.18, for example, the Rashbam insists that Moses would never be so brazen as to request to see the divine Glory. After all, the Torah itself venerates his act of modesty in Ex.3:6 when Moses concealed his face from looking upon God. This position differs with the opinions of R'Yehoshua ben Karkha and R'Yohanan in *Berakhot* 7a (see V.18).

The Rashbam shows a great sensitivity to intratextual comparisons as well. By contrasting the covenantal rite between God and Abraham in Gen.16:8 with v.18 and 19 in our pericope, the Rashbam arrives at the highly innovative interpretation that Moses requested a covenantal validation of God's earlier two promises rather than a revelation of mystical or rational knowledge. It is interesting to note, however, that despite his exegetical and conceptual independence, the Rashbam accepts Rashi's presentation of the dialogic structure of the pericope. Like Rashi, Rashbam takes v.14 as a response to the request in v.13, v.17 as a response to v.16 and v.19 as a response to v.18.

And yet, despite his fine textual analysis, Rashbam's ideological interests are still clear. In his comment to V.13, he steers away from mystical and rational exegesis by concretizing Moses' request to know God's ways into an appeal to God to "show the way" to best travel in the desert. The same anti-speculative, realist thrust emerges in his comment to v.18 in which Moses asks for covenantal validation rather than mystical knowledge. It is quite possible that at the root of the Rashbam's systematic de-spiritualization of the text, is a polemical reaction to over-spiritualization and allegorization of the bible, prevalent in Christian exegetical trends in twelfth century Europe¹⁰.

¹⁰ For a comparison and contrast of Jewish and Christian exegetical approaches see Kamin, Sarah. Ben Yehudim le-Notrim be-farshanut ha-Mikra. Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1991.

Bekhor Shor (twelfth century) continues the trend towards critical independence in *peshat* interpretation. In his commentary, he not only departs from introducing rabbinic content, but he also rejects the traditional structure of the dialogue between God and Moses.

For Rashi and Rashbam, the give and take is the same. Moses' request "Show me your ways" is answered with "I alone will lead you"; Moses presents a new request at the end of v.16 [ie. "Let me and my nation be distinguished"] which is answered affirmatively in v. 17 and Moses' final request "Show me Your glory" is answered in v.19,20,23. According to Bekhor Shor, the petition to See God's ways is accepted in v.17 and answered only in v.19 thereby forging an exegetical "bridge" between 33:12-17 and 33:17-34:11¹¹; The words "And see that this nation is Yours" configure a new request which is answered in v.14 and the bid to see the divine glory is answered only in v.20 and v.23. This departure from the traditional structure of the dialogue represents a new avenue of exegetical independence that is yet undetected in the writings of Rashbam to this pericope.

Bekhor Shor also integrates a deepening concern for psychological issues into his exegetical approach¹². In verse 13, for example, Bekhor Shor distinguishes two requests of Moses. From both requests Moses ultimately wishes to find out the same information, namely, who will lead the nation. The only difference is the psychological satisfaction that Moses stands to gain through each channel. If Moses is granted the right to contemplate God's attributes and thereby judge for himself who is to lead the nation his sense of psychological peace would be much greater than if he were just given the answer. The psychological tenor of Bekhor Shor's approach is so strong that in verse 14 he explains that

¹¹ See also Maimonides. According to Rashi and the Rashbam, verses 33:12-17, although in many respects similar to 18-23, comprise a separate textual unit.

¹² On Bekhor Shor's conception of *Peshat* and *Derash* see Yehoshafat Nevo's introduction to his annotated edition of the commentary of Bekhor Shor to the Pentateuch (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Mossak Harav Kook, 1994.

the intent of the words “v’hanikhoti lakh” is God trying to put Moses at ease from his anxiety-ridden state.

In two aspects, Bekhor Shor does display greater affinity with the philosophical trend than with the literal trend of interpretation. For one, he establishes a speculative component to Moses’ request (see v.13). In addition, he shows an antipathy to any anthropomorphic overtones in the text (See verses 18,22,23). While gaps in the transition from literal to philosophical exposition are still noticeable in his exegesis, by mixing the two trends, the Bekhor Shor points to the possibility of a more synthetic interpretation such as can be found in Seforno and Nahmanides.

I. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (RASHI)

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY TO RASHI'S EXEGESIS¹³:

V.12. s.v. “R’eh ata omer elay.” – “Look” here means Focus your eyes and your heart upon your words.

In the opening comment to the pericope, Rashi notes that the imperative *r’eh* [look] takes as its object, the words directly following it in the verse [i.e. “You say to Me”]: “Focus Your eyes and heart to Your own words” [Focus upon **what** you say to me]¹⁴. Moses beseeches God to consider the difficult situation that He has put Moses in. On the

¹³ Because of the textual and conceptual complexity of Rashi’s commentary to this unit, I have translated all his comments before analyzing them. I have done the same for the commentary of the Rashbam.

¹⁴ See *Exodus Rabbah* 32:8 and Onkelos [*Chazi d’at*]. Contrast to Ibn Ezra and Seforno who do not find the object of the imperative directly in the verse. According to them, Moses asks that God ‘See’ ie. Consider his own predicament. The words “You say to me” begin a new phrase describing the predicament Moses finds himself in.

one hand, God commands Moses to guide the nation. On the other hand, God does not provide him with the proper support to do so. Only God can provide the requisite support, not an angel. Rashi's comment portrays Moses as bearing a sense of confidence in both his own merit and God's capacity for forgiveness rather than a sense of humble compliance to the divine word (as in Bekhor Shor, Ibn Ezra and Seforno).

S.v. "v'ata lo hodatani." [...And You have not informed me who You will send with me.] --And as for what you told me [earlier] "Behold! I will send an angel before you" (Ex.23:20)¹⁵ -- This is not considered informing for I do not desire it.

In his comment to the phrase "You have not informed me who You will send with me", Rashi tackles a glaring textual contradiction. Why does Moses state, in this verse, that God did not inform him, when, God did just that in Ex.23:20 and again in Ex.33:2? To appreciate Rashi's resolution to this problem, it is worthwhile to contrast his answer to that of Ibn Ezra.

Ibn Ezra distinguishes God's statement in Ex.23:20 from that of Ex.33:2. The latter statement [I will send an angel before you], spoken after the sin of the calf, clearly indicates that God wishes to send an angel of a lower rank than He originally planned in 23:20,21. In 23:21, God warns the Israelites not to rebel against their guardian angel for "My name is within him." After the sin of the golden calf, however, God informs Moses that He is "sending an angel before you" to help conquer the Land of Israel. In this announcement, God does not mention anything about His name being within the angel. To the contrary, in 33:3, God justifies His decision to send an angelic proxy with the words "because I shall not

¹⁵ There is a dispute between Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrakhi and the Gur Aryeh whether or not this is the correct quote of Rashi. Mizrakhi argues that the present text is corrupted and the correct citation is to Ex. 33:2 ["I will send an angel before you"]. The Gur Aryeh argues in support of the accuracy of the present text of Rashi.

ascend among you, for you are a stiff-necked people. If I ascend among you, I may annihilate you in an instant.” Clearly, the association of God’s name to the angel after the sin of the calf would provoke destruction rather than promote closeness with God. Considering these textual observations, Ibn Ezra concludes, in our verse, that Moses’ confusion as to the identity of the angelic proxy is justifiable. He interprets Moses’ statement as follows: “You have not informed me whom You intend to send with me”-- **Who the identity of the angel is-- for clearly it is not Michael who has “God within him.”**

Rashi departs from this path of interpretation for three reasons: a) Rashi does not distinguish the angel in 23:20 from that of 33:2 as does Ibn Ezra. In his comment to 23:20, Rashi says: **“Here it was revealed [to Moses] that [the Israelites] would sin (i.e. with the golden calf) and that the Shekhina will say to them ‘I will not go up in your midst’.**” b) If the statement of Moses concerned the identity of the angel God plans to send to the Israelites, why would God respond in 33:14 with the promise that He alone will guide the nation¹⁶. c) Rashi disagrees fundamentally with Ibn Ezra because the implication of his exegesis is that Moses accepts, on principle, the guidance of an angel.

Rashi’s approach is that even though Moses knew very well whom God planned to send, since he, on principle, does not desire angelic guidance- he refuses to recognise the legitimacy of the divine announcement. The phrase “You have not informed Me...” is not a statement implying a sincere wish to “know,” but a rhetoric declaring the unacceptability of the divine plan.

S.v. “v’ata amarta y’datikha bashem.” – I have given you distinction beyond the rest of mankind through a rank of importance. For you have said to me “Behold! I come

¹⁶ The exegetical difficulty of *panai yelaykhu* (v.14) could be resolved to conform with Ibn Ezra’s line of interpretation by translating *panai* as “He who serves before Me” [*Sar Ha-panim*- see Ibn Ezra, Short Commentary]. Note, for example, Onkelos’ translation of *Upanai lo ye’ra’u* (v.23) [My face will not be seen]-*U’d’kadmai lo Yeeikhazoon* [those before Me cannot be seen].

to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.”(Ex:19:9)

Rashi departs from the simple translation of the words *y'datikha bashem* [You said “I have known you by name”] and interprets the phrase as “You said “I have given you¹⁷ distinction through a rank of importance” [i.e. within the community]. According to the *siftei chachamim* the reason for Rashi’s departure from the literal translation is to avoid the implication that God knew Moses providentially more than any other person¹⁸. It is doubtful that this is motivating Rashi. It is quite clear, rather, that what troubles Rashi is an exegetical difficulty. Moses claims that “God said” but Where did God ever say this to Moses?¹⁹ Rashi maintains that Moses’ reference is to Ex.19:9 where God informs Moses that He will come to him in the thickness of the cloud in order that the nation shall listen as God speaks to Moses. This will bring the nation to an everlasting belief in the singularity of Moses’ prophetic capabilities. This, in turn, will confirm for the entire nation the veracity of the revelation that came about through the agency of Moses. According to Rashi’s interpretation, Moses hints to God that if He does not give him the proper support by leading the people into Israel, then God’s earlier attempt at securing the nation’s confidence and trust in Moses will break down. Ultimately, it is the nation’s certitude in the revelation that will suffer.

Verse 13. s.v. “v’ata” – “And now if [it is true that] I have found favour in your eyes, make your way known to me.”– What is the reward due to one who finds favour in your eyes.

¹⁷ Rashi takes *y'datikha* in the causative construct- “I have made your name known”- rather than in the simple construct- “I have known you”. See also Bekhor Shor.

¹⁸ As in Ibn Ezra and the Ralbag.

¹⁹ c.f. Rashi to Ex. 32:27.

Rashi's ever so slight interpolation of the words *emet she* [it is true that] after the word *v'ata eem* [and now if...] resolves a bothersome knot in Moses' speech to God. After stating so resolutely in v.12 that God Himself had told him that he had found favour in God's eyes, why does Moses seem to question the authenticity of this statement in v.13? The effect of Rashi's gloss is to shift Moses' doubt from the authenticity of the statement to its sincerity. For Rashi, this preamble will reveal the motive for Moses' request "Let me know your ways" in the second stitch of the verse.

In his interpretation of Moses' request, Rashi departs from the talmudic tradition, quoted in the name of R'Yose²⁰, that Moses beseeched God for a comprehensive knowledge of His ways of reward and punishment. According to Rashi, Moses wished to know the nature of the special, personal, reward awaiting those who "find favour in God's eyes."²¹ Rashi's exegesis ties the request of "knowing God's ways" to Moses' conditional statement in the beginning of the verse. Since Moses was uncertain if to take the divine statement of his finding favour sincerely, he implored God to show him the special reward in store for him. This knowledge would thus lend credence to God's pronouncement of affection. As we shall see in Rashi's exegesis of the final phrase of this verse ("and see that this nation is you people"), the strategy of Moses in requesting this knowledge is to set the stage for his ultimate request that God grant the return of direct divine guidance to the nation. When viewed in the context of the entire verse, Moses' hint to God, at this point, is that the only reward he regards as special is the return of direct divine guidance to the nation. Moses' apparently personal request is, in truth, a front for his plea on behalf of the nation. Expressed differently, we may say that Moses' personal requests are none other than requests for the good of the nation because the good of Moses is inextricably bound up with the good of the nation.

²⁰ B.T. Berakhot 7a.

²¹ Rashi thus transfers the exegetical content of Ex. Rabbah 45:5 on the phrase "Let me see your Glory" ["Moses desired to see the reward awaiting the righteous"] to the request "Let me know your ways".

S.v. “v’eda’akha l’ma’an emtza khi b’aynekha”—And I will comprehend, thereby, your way of bestowing reward so that I will know what You have in store when You tell me “you have found favour in My eyes”. The correct formulation of “l’ma’an emtza khi b’aynekha” is “so that I may comprehend how great the reward is due to one who finds favour in Your eyes.”

Rashi is bothered by three conceptual difficulties in the phrase “and I will know you [eda’akha] in order that I shall find [emtza] favour in your eyes”: A) Why should the immediate object of Moses’ petition in “knowing God’s way” be knowledge of God Himself, if all he was asking for was knowledge of his reward? B) Why should this knowledge lead to the result of God favouring him more? C) Why should Moses ask to find favour in God’s eyes if he already stated that he had found favour?

Rashi removes these major difficulties by transposing the two stitches in the phrase [a] va’eda’akha b) l’ma’an emtza khi b’aynekha] and by interpreting the word *emtza* as ‘find out’ rather than ‘find’. In accordance with these adjustments the verse reads²²: “Let me know Your way [of rewarding those who find favour in Your eyes] in order that I may find out [emtza] how great is the reward due to those people who find favour in your eyes and thereby know your manner of bestowing reward [va’eda’akha] [and consequently how to measure the quality of this finding of favour]. It is not new favour that Moses seeks to attain as a result of his knowing God’s ways²³ but a full recognition of the favour that he already possesses. Again, Moses’ request for knowledge of God’s way of bestowing reward is preliminary to the final phrase of the verse in which Moses discloses the true intent of his requests, namely, that God should personally guide the nation.

²² Note that Rashi himself is bothered by the linguistic and structural complexity of this verse. He uses the term *pitaron* [solution] to describe the proper interpretation of the phrase “in order that I may find favor in your eyes”.

²³ Contrast, for example, Maimonides Nahmanides, Ibn Ezra, Seforno and Ralbag.

S.v. “Ur’eh ki amkha hagoy hazeh” [“But see that this nation is your people”]--You should not say “I shall make you into a great nation” [Ex.32:10] and these [Israel] you shall abandon. See that they are your people of old and if You reject them, I do not trust that my descendants will last. Let me realise the payment of my reward through this people.

In his interpretation of the phrase “But see that this nation is your people,” Rashi reveals what he understands to be the underlying motivation to Moses’ request. According to Rashi, this phrase relates back to Moses’ request to gain knowledge of the reward attendant upon those whom God favours. On the explicit level, Moses expresses his uncertainty that any reward that comes at the expense of the nation, such as building a new lineage from Moses and destroying the nation will have no lasting significance. After all, if God’s nation of old cannot endure His wrath, how can Moses trust that his seed should fare any better? According to this interpretation, the verse reads: See that this nation is your people [and even they cannot endure Your wrath, all the more so, will my seed not endure it].

The implied message in Moses’ statement, states Rashi, is that Moses wishes to comprehend his reward “within the nation” [*ba'am hazeh*]. The intent of Rashi is not clear in these words. Mizrakhi and Gur Aryeh suggest two basic approaches. Mizrakhi explains that Moses expresses a desire to gain knowledge of the reward due to him for leading the nation besides his previous request for knowledge concerning the reward due to him for having found favour in God’s eyes. The obvious difficulty with this explanation is that Mizrakhi invents a second request to solve an interpretative ambiguity in Rashi. Gur Aryeh offers a tighter explanation. Moses’ implicit request is that he wishes to know the reward due to him for finding favour in God’s eyes through God’s heeding his request concerning the nation. By heeding Moses’ request for direct divine guidance, Moses will then know that a great reward awaits him. According to this interpretation, Rashi’s words read: “and

the reward due to me, inform me through the **medium** of the nation". The advantage of Gur Aryeh's approach is that he sustains the build-up of Moses' underlying request throughout verses 12 and 13 in which Moses repeatedly hints that God should guide the nation directly.

It is clear at this point why Rashi felt the need to depart from the talmudic version of Moses' request in Berakhot 7a. Although the word "your ways" [drakhekha] and the wider context of the entire pericope [34:6,7], provide support for the rabbinical exegesis, Rashi felt that the rabbinical explanation could not fit into the local context of the verse itself and the one preceding. If Moses was indeed asking for a comprehensive knowledge of God's ways in reward and punishment then three questions arise; A) Why does Moses make a request that apparently has nothing to do with his appeal for direct divine guidance in v.12?

B) How does the final statement of the verse ["and see that this nation is Your people"] relate to this request? C) What does God's response in v.14 have to do with Moses' request? It is these central questions that persuade Rashi to steer away from the classical talmudic exegesis to one more tapered to the contours of the local textual "terrain." As Rashi himself puts it: "Our Rabbis have expounded this verse in tractate Berakhot 7a, but I have come to explain the verses in their proper setting and order".

Verse 14. S.v. "Vayomar Panai Yelekhu v'hanikhoti lakh" --

[The interpretation of this phrase] follows the Targum. I will not send an angel anymore. Rather, I Myself [*panai*] will go. This [usage of *Panim*] is similar to "And you [*u'panekha*] shall go into battle" [Sam.II 17:11].

According to Rashi, God informs Moses that He Himself will lead the nation. He thus responds positively to Moses' intimated question in v.12 and preempts the need to

answer Moses' petition to "know God's ways" in v.13 (as this was the true intent of Moses' request)²⁴.

Verse 15. s.v. "Vayomer aylav." – This is what I desire! Do not take us up from here through the agency of an angel.

According to Rashi, Moses does not continue to beseech God in this verse since God has complied to his requests in v.14. By interpolating an unspoken preamble, Rashi transforms the verse from a petition to an affirmation: **"This [i.e. your going among us] is what I desire for if You do not go with us [but instead send an angel to lead us] do not take us up from here."** According to Mizrahi, Rashi's interpretation stresses Moses' love for Israel- for by re-emphasising the importance of God's direct guidance despite God's compliance in v.14, Moses demonstrates the extent of his devotion and allegiance to the nation.²⁵

Verse 16. s.v. "Uvameh Yeevadah Efoh." -- How will the finding of favour be known? "Is it not through Your going with us"? And I ask yet another thing from You - that you should no longer cause Your Shekhina to rest upon the [other] nations of the world. "And I and Your people should be set apart." - And we will be separate in this matter from all the people... The word *v'neefleenu* here has the same meaning as *v'hifla* in "And God will separate between the livestock of Israel, etc." [Ex.9:4]

²⁴ Note that Rashi interprets the word *panai* as 'My Self' against the talmudic tradition cited in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yokhai in *Berakhot* 7b: "From where is it known that a person should not appease another person in the time of his anger? As it says "My anger [*panai*] will leave and I shall then deal pleasantly with you"". See also Ibn Ezra and Rashbam. Maimonides follows the talmudic tradition in his exegesis.

²⁵ According to the Taz, on the other hand, Moses wanted to emphasize a specific point. In his response to Moses in v.14, God implies that the reason for his compliance is to put Moses at ease [*v'hanikhoti lakh*] but not for the good of Israel. Moses replies that this is not a matter of putting one at ease but a matter that is crucial to the very existence of Israel: "I desire this because it is necessary not because it puts me at ease."

Rashi interprets this verse as presenting two disconnected sections. The first - "How will the finding of favour be known? Is it not through Your going with us?" - continues the rhetorical tone of Moses in v.15. Although God had complied with Moses' request for divine guidance, Moses still continues to affirm the importance of the divine decision. Rashi reads the second part of the verse - "And I and Your people should be set apart from all the people who are on the face of the earth"- as a second request. His interpretation is in agreement with the Talmudic tradition "that God not let his Shekhina rest upon the other nations of the world." Rashi "spliced" the verse because of the next verse which states: "This matter, as well [*gam*], of which you spoke I will do." The word *gam* implies that God's compliance is to an additional request that Moses made. Rashi understood that this second request must lay in the second part of our verse. In verse 17, Moses receives a positive answer to this request. By integrating the Talmudic tradition into his exegesis without distorting the plain meaning of the text, Rashi displays his finesse in balancing the competing claims of tradition and *peshat* interpretation.

Verse 18. s.v. "Vayomer har'aynee na et kvodekha." -- Moses saw that it was a time of favourable dispensation, and that his words were being accepted, so he went on to explain that the vision of His glory be shown to him.

According to Rashi, Moses' request "Let me see Your Glory" is apparently unrelated to the previous requests. While the first two petitions essentially concern the well-being of the nation, this request seems to relate principally to Moses as an individual. Rashi expresses this exegetical truth by noting that Moses advances this request only because he "saw that it was an hour of favourable dispensation."²⁶ In his first request, though, Moses

²⁶ Note that Rashi's comment also serves as a rationale for why Moses could think that he could apprehend the divine Glory in the first place. This question is one of the fundamental conceptual problems in the entire pericope and serves as a major touchstone to medieval conceptions on epistemology.

did not wait for a propitious hour. In petitioning for direct divine guidance, Moses solicited on behalf of the nation. As such, the nature of his task was too crucial to delay the request.

Verse 19. s.v. "Vayomer ani a'avir." -- The time has arrived when you shall see of My Glory so much as I will allow you to see since [in any event] I want and need to teach you the order of prayer.²⁷ For when you needed to seek mercy for Israel, you mentioned to me the merit of the forefathers. You are of the opinion that if the merit of the forefathers were to be exhausted, there would no longer be hope. I shall cause all of My trait of goodness to pass before you on the rock while you are situated in the cave, and I shall call out with the Name of Hashem before you, to teach you the procedure of requesting mercy even if the merit of the forefathers were to be exhausted. In accordance with this procedure in which you see Me, enwrapped [in a tallit], and reciting the Thirteen attributes, you should teach Israel to do so. Through their mentioning "Merciful and Gracious" [Ex: 34:6] before Me, they will be answered, for My mercy is inexhaustible.

Rashi points out through his exegesis that God partially responds to Moses' request of verse 18 in this verse. As both the *Mizrakhi* and the *Taz* note, the implication of Rashi is that even without Moses' request, the "time had arrived" for Moses to apprehend an aspect of the divine Glory. According to the *Taz*, it is the language of the verse that brought Rashi to this understanding. God's response to Moses is *ani a'avir* [I shall cause to pass] - words which do not indicate either compliance or non-compliance to Moses' request but rather an expression of God's independent will. The fact that God chooses to fulfil Moses' request partially is a function of His own reasons not a result of Moses' merit. Rashi follows the

²⁷ Silberman translates: "...and therefore I find it necessary to teach you a set form of prayer." According to his reading of Rashi, God's decision to teach Moses the thirteen attributes results from Moses' request and is not independent to it. My translation reflects both the nuance of the Hebrew "*l'fi she'ani rozeh v'zarikh l'lamedkha seder tefillah*" and the opinions of *Mizrakhi* and the *Taz*.

talmudic tradition of R'Yokhanan by interpreting the divine intention, in this verse, as that of teaching Moses how to petition God on the basis of the thirteen attributes²⁸. The “goodness” which God passes over Moses are God’s attributes of mercy (34:6) “which are inexhaustible”. According to Rashi, the words *b'shem hashem* are in the construct state and thus suggest the act of praying as in Gen. 4:26 and 12:8²⁹. The meaning of the verse is that God will pass His attributes of mercy over Moses and then teach Moses how to order them liturgically in order that he properly invoke them when the time comes. Rashi, again following the tradition of R' Yokhanan, indicates, by interpreting the words *al panekha* as *l'fanekha*, that it is in Moses’ actual **presence** that God displays His goodness³⁰.

S.v. “V’khanoti et asher akhon.” – at those times when I shall wish to show favour.

Rashi reads the final phrase of the verse - “and I will be gracious” - as a non-committal pledge of God to respond with favour and mercy to those who invoke His attributes before Him. Rashi thereby steers away from explaining the phrase in its simple sense [i.e. I will act graciously to those who I choose to favour³¹]. He does so for two reasons: A) According to its simple translation, there is no apparent link between the idea expressed in these words and the divine plan to teach Moses the attributes of mercy. B) The phrase in its simple sense is obvious. Why does the verse need to stress that God will fulfil

²⁸ Moses had thought that he could only petition God by appealing to the merit of the Patriarchs and that if their merit were to end there would be no hope left.

²⁹ Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, points out that according to the masoretic tradition, the words *b'shem hashem* are not in the construct state and therefore do not imply prayer as they do in Gen. 12:8 where Abraham calls out in worship to God.

³⁰ The talmudic expression of this idea is that God appears to Moses “cloaked like the reader during prayer”- a bold figure of speech of which R' Yokhanan says: “unless Scripture had itself stated this it would be impossible to say so of God”. Rosh Hashana 17b.

³¹ This is the talmudic understanding of this passage in Berakhot 7a. The Talmud states that the novel idea that these words present is that God will act mercifully toward someone even if he is undeserving of divine favour.

that which He deems is forthcoming? If God chooses to act graciously or mercifully to someone, certainly He will do it.

Verse 20. s.v. “Lo Tukhal.” – Even when I will pass all of My goodness before you, I do not give you permission to see My face.

In this verse, the flipside to God’s partial response to Moses in verse 19 emerges in the dialogue. Even though God will openly display His goodness, He does not permit³² Moses to view His “Face”.

II. Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (RASHBAM)

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY TO RASHBAM'S EXEGESIS:

Verse 12. s.v. “R’eh ata omer elay.” --“See, You say to me, “Take this people onward”...”- As it is written “Lekh n’khe et ha’am...” (Ex. 32:34) [Now, go and lead the people]. Yet, all that you have informed me is “Behold! My angel shall go before you...” (Ibid). I only desire that You alone go with us.

Rashbam arrives at the same ideological position as Rashi with regard to angelic guidance but derives his views through a different exegetical reading. The phrase “You have not informed me” is not a rhetorical expression meaning “I consider it as if you have

³² Rashi interprets the word *lo tukhal* as an expression of the divine will rather than as a result of the physical impossibility of this apprehension. According to Kasher, he follows the opinion of R’ Yehoshua ben Karkha in B.T Berakhot 7a. See the gloss of the *Maharsha* on this point in his *Hiddushei Aggadot*. See also Kasher note 128.

not informed me” but elliptical: “All that You have informed me is that “My angel shall go before you”. [And all I really want is that You walk with us by Yourself]. Rashbam’s insertion of the word *elah* into the text transforms the negative *ata lo hodatani* into a positive, declarative statement. On this point, Rashbam agrees fundamentally with Rashi’s conceptual interpretation but not with his philological derivation.

Verse 13.s.v. “Hodi’aynee et d’rakhekha.” -- You alone should inform us of the way. Show us your way and I will follow.

Rashbam departs from Rashi’s reading of the phrase “Let me know Your ways” as Moses requesting knowledge of his reward -presumably for both philological and conceptual reasons. He interprets *derekh* literally and thus reads Moses’ request as a logical continuation of his remark in v.12³³. Rashbam’s exegesis consciously avoids any implication in the verse that Moses might ask for esoteric knowledge. Moses is not interested in speculation but in direction. That a realistic ideology guides the Rashbam here, rather than textual considerations is indicated by the fact that Rashbam chooses not to comment on any other part of the verse. By ignoring the rest of the verse, Rashbam is able to consider Moses’ question in an exegetical vacuum and thereby apply his ideological interests to the text quite freely. Rashi, on the other hand, who carefully considers each phrase in the verse felt compelled to provide an interpretation that takes both the immediate context of the verse and the larger context of the pericope into consideration. The realistic thrust of the Rashbam to this verse is further supported by the fact that on verse 13 he also dismisses any mystical or esoteric connotations in his comment on “Let me see Your Glory”.

³³ The source of Rashbam’s comment is Midrash Tehillim 90:9.

Verse 14. s.v. “Panai Yelekhu” --I alone will go as you requested as it is written “...and you shall go to battle in your own person” [u’panekha holkhim bakrav] (Sam II. 17:11).

S.v. “v’hanikhoti lakh” --I will go with you to conquer the land until I secure you from all of your enemies around you, as it is written “Until God shall give rest [ad asher yaniakh Hashem] to your brethren like yourselves...”(Deut. 3:20)...The explanation of “v’hanikhoti lakh” as ‘I shall put you at ease [nakhat ruakh] by fulfilling your request’ is nonsensical! In every instance in which God complies with Moses’ request does He say to him “v’hanikhoti lakh”!? Is it not true that superfluous language is a sign of a lack of wisdom?

Rashbam concurs with Rashi’s conceptual reading of verse 14 as a divine compliance to lead the nation directly and with verse 15 as Moses’ re-emphasis of the importance of God’s direct guidance. In his interpretation of the phrase “vehanikhoti lakh”, Rashbam furthers his realistic elucidation of the pericope. While the Rashbam understands these words as an assurance that God will, indeed, lead the nation into the Land of Israel, the word “vehanikhoti” implies that God will continue only until He has secured the people from their enemies (cf. Deut. 3:20, 25:19). The Rashbam does not seem to view this assurance as only a partial fulfilment of Moses’ request, as all that Moses requested for, in the first place, was that God show Israel the physical path to follow in the desert. For the Rashbam, direct divine guidance is necessary as a means towards reaching and settling the Land of Israel safely, not necessarily as an expression of God’s intimate relationship with Israel, as in Rashi. Rashbam caustically dismisses the Bekhor Shor’s interpretation of “vehanikhoti lakh” as ‘settling Moses from his anxiety’; his pejorative judgement of this interpretation as nonsense brings into relief the extent to which Rashbam prefers a realist approach to a psychological one.

Verse 16. s.v. "v'neefleenu ani v'amekha" -- His first request [in this phrase] is new. I also request of you that I alone shall be distinguished and separated from the entire nation so that they will know that I am trustworthy as a prophet and statesman and they will thereby listen to me. Furthermore, Your nation should be distinguished from all the nations on the earth by Your going with them.

As in Rashi, Rashbam reads the second section of v.16 as a new request. But, in contrast to Rashi, Rashbam, who is consistent with his reliance on a *peshat* reading that is independent of rabbinic tradition, desists from interpolating the Talmudic tradition that Moses asked God to refrain from letting His *Shekhina* rest upon the other nations of the world. According to the Rashbam, Moses' second desire is indicated by the redundancy of his language. Though it would have sufficed linguistically to include himself and the nation under the general pronoun "we", Moses still refers to himself separately: "Let **I** and **Your nation** be distinguished". The reason, notes Rashbam, is that Moses requested that just as the nation as a whole should be distinguished from the nations of the world in God's walking directly with them, so too should he be distinguished as a trustworthy prophet and statesman from all the individuals in the nation of Israel³⁴. In this way, the nation will be willing to accept his words. In this interpretation, the Rashbam, once again, despiritualizes the flow of the pericope. Just as the matter of God's guiding the nation directly is a

³⁴ R' Yosef Albo uses this interpretation to make an interesting philosophical point: He states in The Book of Roots vol. III. Ch.20, that the "conviction concerning the superiority of Moses as a prophet" derives exegetically from the redundancy of the phrase "Let I and My nation be distinguished" and not only from Num.12:6 ("...My servant Moses is not so, mouth to mouth do I speak to him"): "He [Moses] asked of God two things, first that no nation should be equal to Israel (ie. that the *Shekhina* should not rest upon the idolatrous nations and give them prophetic inspiration)...second, he asked that no man should be equal to him in prophetic power." While Albo also concurs with the Rashbam in pointing out that in v.17 God complies to Moses' demand he goes on to infer from the fact of God's compliance two other philosophical axioms: A) "that prophecy does not come to a man by nature, but by the will of God. This is why God granted Moses' request that the prophetic gift should not be given to the heathen, for if prophetic inspiration came by nature, God would not deprive mankind of their natural good..." B) "that Moses' own prophetic gift would be something miraculous, transcending the power of the human mind, which the latter could not grasp by means of prophetic inspiration even through the Torah and even though he was prepared for it"(otherwise he would not have to request it).

practical issue and unrelated to the spiritual notion of “dwelling” within the nation, so too Moses’ personal request hinges on the practical issue of authority rather than spiritual perfection.

Verse 17.s.v. “Gam et hadavar hazeh asher deebarta” -- “Even this thing of which you spoke to Me to become distinguished and renown as a judge and statesman I shall do... This refers to the radiance of [Moses’] face of which it states later “Before your entire people, I shall make you distinguished” (Ex.34:10).

God complies with Moses’ request to be distinguished within the nation. The fulfilment of God’s promise, notes Rashbam, occurs in 34:10 when God confers the ray of light upon the face of Moses.

Verse 18.s.v. “Har’aynee na et kvodekha” -- Ask yourself. How could Moses have thought to take enjoyment from the splendour of the *Shekhina* when the Torah itself praises him [for his reverence]: “Moses covered his face for he was afraid to look upon the Lord” (Ex.3:6). Heaven forbid! [Moses] only intended [to request] God to make a covenant on the two matters that God had complied with: The radiance of “Let me and my nation be distinguished” (v.16) and “I alone will go with you”(v.14)- to secure you from all of your enemies...

Rashbam differs on principle from Rashi’s reading of the phrase “Let me see Your Glory”. While for Rashi, Moses boldly asks for a vision of the Divine Glory, Rashbam rejects this possibility on ethical and exegetical grounds: “Ask yourself. How could Moses have thought to take enjoyment from the splendour of the *Shekhina* when the Torah itself praises him: “Moses covered his face for he was afraid to look upon the Lord”

(Ex.3:6)?!"³⁵. According to the Rashbam the entire issue at hand is a practical one. Moses desired to bind God to the two promises that He had made (v.14,17) through a covenantal agreement in the same way that Abraham requested God to validate the divine promise of his inheriting the land of Israel (Gen.16:8). Just as God caused the smoky furnace and torch of fire to pass between the sections of the animals (Gen.16:17) and pronounced thereafter the consummation of the covenant (Gen.16:18), so too in our case, Rashbam points out, does God Himself pass over Moses' face (Ex. 34:6) and pronounce thereafter the consummation of the covenant (Ex. 34:10). Rashbam thus interprets the phrase "I shall pass all My goodness before you"(v.19) as a formalistic act of covenant-making rather than as a divine initiative of bestowing liturgical or any other type of knowledge upon Moses. Here again, one can detect the impact of a realist ideology on Rashbam's exegesis. Firstly, his comparison with the Abrahamic covenant is dubious. While the covenantal symbolism of passing an object through another one is clear in the case of Abraham, it is unclear why it is the covenantal partners themselves who undergo the ritual in the case of Moses³⁶. Furthermore, Rashbam chooses not to comment on vv.20,21,22 thereby indicating the non-compatibility of these passages to his exegesis. Although every commentator is and must be selective in his choice of what to remark upon, in this case, Rashbam ignores three complex verses -each of which call out for interpretation³⁷.

³⁵ Note that in the aggadic tradition in Berakhot 7a, recorded in the name of R' Yehoshua ben Karkha, Moses is not allowed to attain secret knowledge because of his reticence to look upon God at the bush. According to the Rashbam, Moses does not seek mystical knowledge in the first place. Interestingly, the other aggadic tradition, quoted in the name of R' Yokhanan, records that Moses was given mystical knowledge precisely because of his praiseworthy reticence at the bush. This tradition is also at variance with the interpretation of the Rashbam who stresses that Moses' actions in our pericope must be consistent with his earlier act of intellectual humility.

³⁶ The one possible explanation is that since the very rite is meant to bind God to his decision to lead the nation directly and to confer distinction upon Moses it is only proper that God Himself should pass directly over Moses rather than assign a symbolic agent.

³⁷ While Rashbam does differ fundamentally with Rashi in his realistic approach to the pericope, it is interesting to note that the literary structure of the dialogue is the same in both commentaries. For both Rashi

III. Rabbi Yosef Bekhor Shor

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY TO BEKHOR SHOR'S EXEGESIS:

Verse 12. s.v. "V'ata lo hodatani" --In his comment to v.12, Bekhor Shor addresses the central exegetical difficulty of the opening passage. Why would Moses remark that God has yet to inform him who he plans to send when in Ex.33:2 God explicitly stated that He will send an angel before Moses? Bekhor Shor points out that after God had informed Israel that because of their stiff-necked character it would be safer if an angel would lead them to the Land of Israel lest He "consume them on the way", the nation "mourned" their loss of direct divine guidance(v.4). To give them a second chance to repent, God told the nation in verse 5 that they must fully remove all the symbols of their spiritual elevation in order to demonstrate their great degree of remorse for the sin of the golden calf. God concludes his instruction with a promise to reconsider His decree - "and I shall inform you [v'ed'a] what I shall do to you". In verse 6, Israel thoroughly complies with God's instruction by undergoing a process of mourning and repentance. In our verse, Moses declares that since Israel has met God's demands, God has yet to inform him as to whom He plans to send -an angel or God Himself.

It is interesting to note that ,unlike Rashi and the Rashbam, Bekhor Shor does not present Moses as objecting to the divine will but as **probing** the divine will. Moses does not have a prior conception of who should lead the nation. He does not make it clear that it is direct divine guidance alone that he desires. He wants to provide his nation with the best option that is available to them and feels that after they have demonstrated their heartfelt repentance, God may consider His direct guidance as appropriate and beneficial to Israel.

and Rashbam, v.14 is a response to requests made in v.12 and 13; v.17 is a response to a new request put forth at the end of v.16.

Bekhor Shor directly relates to this point at the end of his comment to v.12.: “Moses was afraid to appeal to God or to pray to Him for direct divine guidance because God had said “Lest I consume them on the way.” Moses thought: “If I appeal to God to go with us, I may bring about adverse results [towards Israel].” In this comment, Bekhor Shor rejects Rashi’s approach on conceptual grounds. With the threat of destruction hovering over the heads of Israel, how could Moses so unabashedly demand direct divine guidance? Perhaps the nation is not ethically worthy of such an honour? Rather than elevate them spiritually, such direct guidance would only put Israel under greater moral scrutiny and only increase the likelihood of punishment. Bekhor Shor thus rejects Rashi’s approach and introduces an element of cautious diplomacy into the manner of Moses’ speech.

S.v. “v’ata amarta y’datikha bashem” –Bekhor Shor’s comment to “*y’datikha bashem*” continues his line of interpretation. Unlike Rashi, who explains the verb *y’datikha* in the simple construct [ie. I have known you], Bekhor Shor interprets the verb in the future causative [ie. I will make known to you]. In the first part of verse 12, Moses requests God to inform him as to who will lead the nation in the desert. Moses then appeals to God to keep His word to inform Moses **by name** [*bashem*] whom He plans to send with the nation.

Verse 13. s.v. “hodi’ayni et drakhekha” -- According to Bekhor Shor, Moses makes two requests in v.13. With the words “Let me know your ways” Moses requests that God reveal to him His attributes. Moses hopes to judge for himself through reflection upon those attributes³⁸ if it is best or not for God to accompany Israel. If God is unwilling to grant Moses’ request, Moses entreats God, in the last stitch of the verse, to “consider that this nation is His people and **therefore** to choose the best option for them. It is important to note that, according to Bekhor Shor, Moses would clearly prefer to arrive at the divine will

³⁸ According to Maimonides, Moses intends to imitate God’s ways of governance by reflecting upon God’s attributes. Guide I:54.

through his own reflection of the divine attributes than through prophecy. This preference is based, as we shall soon see, on the understanding that only through reflection upon the divine attributes can Moses truly ascertain the divine will. Prophetic knowledge can only communicate divine compliance to provide direct guidance but not an apprehension of the divine will to do so.

Verse 14. s.v. “Panai Yelekhu” – The best choice for them, informs God, is that “I shall go” [and lead the nation directly]. As such, I shall put you at ease [*hanikhoti lakh*] from your anxiety as to which choice to make³⁹. God does not answer Moses’ request to know His attributes but attempts to reassure him that this is the best option for Israel. Moses is not entirely reassured though. He still fears that while God is conceding to direct guidance, the danger of punishment may still be rife. Nevertheless in recognising the “great honour” [*kavod gadol*] of direct divine guidance, Moses thanks God in verse 15 and 16 for agreeing to accompany Israel. The Bekhor Shor thus follows both Rashi and Rashbam’s reading of these two verses as Moses’ verbal support of the divine announcement in v.14. Unlike Rashi and Rashbam, however, Bekhor Shor does not read the phrase “*v’neefleenu ani v’amkha*” as a second request but as a continuation of Moses’ confirmation: “How will it be known that I have found favour in Your eyes I and Your nation? Is it not through Your walking with us so that I and Your nation will be distinguished from all the nations on the face of the earth. For every nation that You [plan to] save, You send before them an angel to [actually] save them. If You send an angel before us, we will be just like them. Therefore, if you do not walk with us, do not take us up from here.”

³⁹ Note that Rashbam rejects the interpretation that *v’hanikhoti* derives from the root *nakhat ruakh* [satisfaction] as “mere stupidity” (“for every time that God complies to Moses’ request does He tell him that He will satisfy his request?!”) and suggests that the word derives from the root *nuakh* [to give rest] as in “when God will put you at rest [*b’haniakh hashem*] from all the surrounding enemies” (Deut. 25:19).

Verse 17. s.v. “Gam et hadavar hazeh ahser deebarta a’aseh” -- While Bekhor Shor eliminates an actual second request of Moses in v.16, thereby raising the conceptual difficulty in this verse as to what God complies to, his supposition that Moses still remained fearful of incurring divine wrath leads him to an interesting exegetical solution to this problem. Since Moses was still unsettled about God’s earlier warning “Lest I destroy you on the way”, God complies with his earlier request to reveal His attributes (in order to finally put him at ease). According to Bekhor Shor, verse 17 thus responds to v.13 whereas for Rashi and Rashbam it is a response to v.16. By revealing His attributes, Moses will then understand that it is God’s **will** to lead the people directly and not just a request to which He complies.

Verse 18. s.v. “Har’aynee et kvodekha” -- As in Rashi, Bekhor Shor justifies the boldness of Moses’ request to see the divine Glory by noting that Moses “saw that it was a propitious time”. The nature of the request implied by the word *har’aynee* is not only to visualise the divine Glory visually but to apprehend it through a complete sensory experience.

Verse 19. s.v. “Ani A’avir kol Tuvi” -- Bekhor Shor remarks that the meaning of God “passing over His goodness” is that God intends to **inform** Moses of his “good” attributes⁴⁰

S.v. “V’karati b’shem hashem” --Bekhor Shor interprets the phrase “and I will call out the name God” as an action independent of God’s “passing over”. In addition to His informing Moses of His attributes, God also pledges to fulfil His promise of informing Moses **by name** who He plans to send⁴¹: “I will call out the name “God” [in order to inform you by

⁴⁰ not like the Rashbam who interprets the action of “passing over” as a rite of covenant-making.

⁴¹ This refers to Bekhor Shor’s comment in v.12 “You have said: “I will inform you by name [who I plan to send]”

name that I plan to go with you]”. By indicating the linguistic similarity of the two clauses in v.12 and v.19, based on the word *shem*, Bekhor Shor is able to establish an exegetical link between the two clauses as well. The result is a sub-dialogue between God and Moses consisting of a claim (v.12) and a response (v.19). In this way, Bekhor Shor circumvents the Rabbinic exegesis to this text cited by Rashi.

Bekhor Shor views the last phrase of the verse (ie. “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful”) as an explication of the first clause (i.e. “I will pass over My goodness”): “I will inform you about My attributes, namely, **how** I bestow favour and mercy”.

Verse 20. s.v. “Lo tuchal lirot et panai” -- As in Rashi, this verse serves as a direct answer to Moses’ request to see the divine Glory: “You cannot see My face...”. Bekhor Shor borrows the talmudic distinction of *aspaklariya hameira* (transparent speculum) and *aspaklariya she’eyna meira* (opaque speculum) to qualify the divine response to Moses⁴². Moses may not obtain a transparent vision of the divine glory because “no person can see me and live”- not even the angels.

Verse 22. s.v. “v’sakoti et kapi” -- Steering away from Rashi’s anthropomorphic translation of *kapi* as “hand”, Bekhor Shor offers a variant translation of the word as “cloud”⁴³ as in “Let us raise our hearts to the clouds (*kapayim*), to the Lord in heaven” (Lam. 3:41)⁴⁴. This translation fits well with Bekhor Shor’s comment to v.20 in which God refuses to let Moses attain a transparent apprehension of the divine glory. The purpose of

⁴² *Yevamot* 49b

⁴³ His interpretation is not allegorical but philological.

⁴⁴ see also Saadya and Ibn Ezra.

the “cloud covering”(v.23) is thus to inhibit Moses from gazing directly on the divine Glory⁴⁵.

Verse 23. s.v. “v’hasiroti et kapi” -- Bekhor Shor proposes two interpretations for the words *panim* and *akhor*. The first is figurative, the second philological. According to the former interpretation, the words literally refer to “face” and “back” but since neither the angels or God have a “face” or a “back”⁴⁶, one must uncover the intended meaning in order to fully appreciate the impact of the expression. Bekhor Shor suggests a parable to convey this meaning: ““You shall see My back”; This is like the case of a person who views another person’s back and cannot [therefore] gaze upon his [face]. “But my face shall not be seen”; This is like the case of a person who looks at his friends face and gazes upon it”⁴⁷. Consistent to his exegesis, Bekhor Shor comments that the meaning of the phrase [v’haya ba’avor kvodi]⁴⁸, is that God informs Moses that only after He **distances** Himself will he be able to look upon God. According to this interpretation, Moses actually gazes upon an aspect of the *Shekhina*- though his apprehension is unclear. According to the alternative philological interpretation, the terms *panim* and *akhor* mean “that which is before Me” and “that which is behind Me” respectively. This translation avoids any anthropomorphic references. The resulting conceptual point is that Moses does not apprehend any aspect of the divinity but only the imprint of divine light that follows in the wake of a divine revelation. Bekhor Shor suggests a parable corresponding to this exegesis, as well:

Moses saw the rays of light that He illumines in the place that He has passed from. This is similar to the example of a sun when it sets below the horizon and

⁴⁵ Note that, like Rashi, Bekhor Shor understands God’s response in v.20 as withholding permission to view the Glory rather than a statement about the inherent incapacity of Man to see God.

⁴⁶ As can be implied from Ezekiel 1:6.

⁴⁷ See Maimonides M.T. hilkhot yesodot Torah 1:10 for a similar allegorical interpretation.

⁴⁸ Bekhor Shor interprets *ba’avor* as “pass away” rather than “pass over”.

the body of the sun cannot be seen anymore. And yet flashes of light can still be seen going away as the sun sets. "...And that which is before Me [upanai] cannot be seen"; [This refers] to, the rays of light increasing in luminescence as the sun comes closer to rising in the morning but has not yet risen.⁴⁹

Bekhor Shor states that he prefers the philological rather than the figurative interpretation: "This [approach] is preferable, for [according to it] Moses did not gaze upon the *Shekhina* at all." Interestingly, it is the ideological position that results from that approach rather than the more precise philological treatment that guides him to this preference.

⁴⁹ In this exegesis, Moses apprehends an aspect of the a created light not the divine Glory itself. See also Onkelos, Saadya and Maimonides Guide I:38 who advance similar interpretations.

Chapter Two: The Kabbalists

Exploring The Mystical Depth Of The Plain Meaning Of Scripture.

Within the framework of kabbalistic interpretation, there are two distinct hermeneutic schools. The first approach views the scriptural text as bearing distinct and exclusive levels of interpretation and clearly values the “interior” kabbalistic core of textual exposition over the “exterior” literal level. This hermeneutic is most poignantly articulated in the zoharic literature. As Scholem writes,

The kabbalistic attitude to the Pentateuch, and in a somewhat lesser degree to the Bible as a whole, was a natural corollary of the overall kabbalistic belief in the symbolic character of all earthly phenomenon. There was literally nothing, the kabbalists held, which in addition to its exterior aspect did not also possess an interior aspect in which there existed a hidden, inner reality on various levels⁵⁰.

To reflect upon the exterior aspect of Torah was thus simply trivial in comparison to the profound interior with its infinite meanings that lay under the surface- this sentiment is boldly expressed in the introduction of the *Zohar*: “Woe is he who looks only upon the garments”. In time, the conventional division of the Torah into the four categories- *peshat*, *derash*, *remez*, *sod*- was established as a way of formally distinguishing the path from literal to mystical interpretation. On the level of *sod* interpretation, the words of the Torah were interpreted as references to events in the world of the *sefirot*⁵¹.

⁵⁰ E.J. “Kabbalah”, p.619

⁵¹ On Kabbalistic Hermeneutics see Moshe Idel’s essay “Kabbalistic Hermeneutics” (Chapter 9) in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988 and Elliot Wolfson’s recent book titled: *Along the Path: studies in Kabbalistic myth, symbolism, and Hermeneutics*. Albany, State University of New York Press: 1995.

In the second hermeneutic school, represented by the Ramban, the recognition of two parallel worlds, a divine and mundane, also translates into a hermeneutic dualism⁵². The main difference is that there is no devaluation of kabbalistic exposition over literal exposition. Rather, both levels of interpretation interact in the biblical text. At times they are parallel to each other and at other times, they converge so that, in effect, *sod* can become *peshat*. The former typology is best conveyed in the Ramban's first comment on Genesis. In it, he explains that, although the creation story can only be truly understood on the kabbalistic level, it does bear **ethical value** even on the worldly level. This position radically differs from the zoharic devaluation of *peshat*. The second typology of the Ramban is apparent in at least 13 instances according to Bernard Septimus in his article "Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition."⁵³ One of the most compelling examples of this typology is in our pericope. The Ramban relays this in his rejection of Rashi and Ibn Ezra's approaches: "It is impossible to fit the text [i.e. resolve the various textual difficulties] for someone who is not versed in the secrets of Torah." This statement clearly conveys the Ramban's hermeneutic. He does not proceed to interpret the text on the mystical level because the literal level is unsatisfactory from a religious point of view but rather because of "textual difficulties". This is to say, that without resorting to kabbalah, one cannot obtain a literal reading of the text. Kabbalah thus salvages the *peshat* rather than overrides it.

The belief that the bible, in its esoteric guise, refers to the *sefirotic* world, leads to a number of significant exegetical results in Nahmanides' commentary to the pericope. In v.12, for example, Nahmanides interprets the word *shem* as referring to the divine name [corresponding to the *sefirah* of *tiferet*] enabling him to interpret Moses' statement "You

⁵² On this issue see Elliot Wolfson's excellent essay titled "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides Kabbalistic Hermeneutic" AJS Review 14 (1989)

⁵³ See note 41 to the article which appears on p.22 of Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity. ed. Isadore Twersky; Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1983.

have said: "I have known you by name"" as a petition that God not deprive him of his ability to prophesy through the medium of the *sefirah* of *tiferet* [*bashem*] (see v.12) because of the sin of the golden calf. Nahmanides' interpretation to v.13 clearly reflects his conception of a dynamic world of divine emanation which if operating dysfunctionally, (as in times of exile) results in the pre-dominance of 'strict justice'.⁵⁴ Moses' request is that God reveal to him the "paths of the ways through which God is known by His name" - a veiled reference to the *sefirotic* world- so that he can unify God's name [*va'eda'ekha*] in mystical contemplation and thereby stimulate divine favour [*lma'an emtzah khen b'aynaykha*] in order to finally bring about the reunification of 'Father and son'. From this interpretation it is also apparent how kabbalistic interpretation leads to a more dynamic philological orientation as well. The word *da'at*, in Nahmanides' kabbalistic lexicography, is much closer to the nuance of 'intimate knowing' than 'cognition'. The world *khen* does not simply mean 'favour' but denotes the abundant overflow of favour and blessing that results from the harmonious structuring of the *sefirotic* world.

Word symbolism also plays an important role in Nahmanides' exegesis. The words *kol* (v.19), *v'neefleenu* (v.16), *panim* (v.14 and 15), for example, all represent different symbolic expressions of the *sefirah* of *shekhina*.

Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (RAMBAN)

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY TO RAMBAN'S EXEGESIS:

The Ramban begins his analysis of our pericope by first presenting the "simple meaning" of the text according to the interpretations of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. Difficulty with

⁵⁴ See E.J. "Kabbalah", pp.617,618

various conceptual problems in both of their interpretations leads him to advance to the kabbalistic level where he claims to resolve all textual difficulty. In this, pericope, claims the Ramban, the simple meaning is identical to the esoteric meaning. On the conceptual level, Ramban criticises Rashi's bold presentation of Moses who, in Rashi's opinion, explicitly rejects the divine announcement of sending an angel to lead the nation⁵⁵: "Why would he [Moses] say something now, while at the time when God initially informed him [Ex.23:20], he remained silent? Did he think that he could gain because of the incident of the golden calf?" Ramban also attacks Rashi's philological treatment of this text. He remarks that Rashi's comment is simply "not correct according to the language of Scripture" [*Lashon Hakatoov*]. On Rashi's treatment of v.15, Ramban similarly critiques his interpretation for misconstruing Scriptural language. While Rashi reads the verse as a re-assertion of Moses' love for Israel rather than as a truly conditional statement, Ramban declares: "Heaven forbid that he [Moses] would say 'If Your Presence does not go...' (v.15) after God promised 'My Presence will go...' (v.14)". Although it would appear that Ramban misses the point of Rashi's exegesis, (for Rashi addresses this very problem), by reiterating the very problem that Rashi attempts to resolve, Ramban makes it clear that he rejects Rashi's exegetical improvement and considers the textual question as glaring as ever. Ramban's attitude to Ibn Ezra's exegesis, on the other hand, is somewhat more positive. Although he criticises Ibn Ezra's exegetical treatment of the narrative flow from v.14 to v.15 as inconsistent⁵⁶, and points out a conceptual difficulty resulting from his interpretation of

⁵⁵ This remark is directed at Rashi's reading of the clause "You have not informed me as to who You [plan] to send with me" (v.12). Rashi reads Moses' remark as a rejection of the divine plan to send an angel rather than, as the verse seems to suggest, a sincere question asking for clarification as to whom God plans to send.

⁵⁶ Ibn Ezra settles the apparent non-sequiter of v.14 and v.15 by limiting the scope of the divine compliance in v.14. According to his interpretation, God agrees to go directly but only with Moses [*v'hanikhoti lakh*-"... and I will lead you"]. Moses, un-accepting of such a compromise continues: "If You Yourself do not go [with the entire nation] do not take us up from here. The Ramban points out that if Moses was entreating God on behalf of the entire nation, why did he state: "You have not let me know..." (v.12) in the singular? Similarly, before the incident of the calf, God informed Moses: "I will send an angel before you to guard you and bring you"- again in the singular. If Moses wanted the divine Presence to guide the entire nation, why did he not retort then?

"*panai yelaykhu*" as "I Myself will go"⁵⁷, he applauds Ibn Ezra for honing in on the correct interpretation of the phrase "You have not informed me as to who You [plan] to send with me"(v.12)⁵⁸ -and this despite the fact that he is not a Kabbalist⁵⁹. For the Ramban, Ibn Ezra presents the best interpretation of the simple meaning of verse 12. Nevertheless, his interpretation is not satisfactory for the entire pericope because without kabbalah he cannot resolve the other textual difficulties that arise from his approach⁶⁰.

verse 12: The Ramban supports the interpretation of Ibn Ezra that Moses sincerely wishes to know **who** the angel is that God plans to send. To fully understand why the Ramban considers this interpretation as coinciding with **the** Kabbalistic explanation of the text, it is necessary to examine Ramban's comment to Ex.23:20.

The fundamental question that emerges from the divine announcement in Ex.23:20 ("I will send an angel before you to safeguard you on the way...") is one of identity. According to Rashi, God informs Moses, in this verse, that **in the future**, as a result of the sin of the golden calf, He will pronounce a decree to send an angel before the people rather than lead the nation himself. Rashi thus identifies this angel with the angel mentioned in Ex.33:2 ("I will send before you an angel..."). As a result of this identification, Rashi cannot read the phrase *Ki shmee b'kirbo* (Ex.23:21) literally [i.e."for My name is **in him**"] but must take a non-literal approach: "Do not rebel against the angel because he cannot bear

⁵⁷ The Ramban notes that, according to this interpretation, a problematic connection in the flow of the narrative emerges. All Moses requested was that God should send the "first angel"(v.12). But God promises to lead the nation Himself (v.14). If so, "God answered him with a double and redoubled beneficence, over and above that which he asked for!"

⁵⁸ Namely, that Moses wished to clarify which angel God plans to send- The "first angel" [ie. Michael] hinted to in Ex. 23:23 or an angel of a lower status (Ex.33:3).

⁵⁹ "He could not know the truth, since he never heard it, nor did he prophecy it!"

⁶⁰ "It is impossible to fit the text [ie. resolve the various textual difficulties] for someone who is not versed in the secrets of Torah"

your iniquities, [and be careful of him] for My name is **associated** with him.” Ramban, on the other hand, suggests that on the Kabbalistic level, the angel of Ex.23:20 is not really an “angel” in the proper sense of the word at all, but an allusion to the *Shekhina* or the “redeeming angel” [*hamal'akh hagoel*]. The reason why the Torah calls this aspect of divinity “angel”, he notes, is because the “governance of the world” operates through the attribute of *Shekhina*. Among other reasons, the Ramban prefers the kabbalistic explanation rather than Rashi’s peshat because it can accommodate a literal reading of the words *Ki shmee b'kirbo*. His interpretation of the verse leads to the following reading: “Fear Him and listen to His voice because My name is in His voice”, that is to say, His voice is the supernal voice of God. According to the Ramban, Ex.23:20 is a presentation of an ideal model of governance about to take effect in the present rather than an announcement clarifying the state of affairs in the future after the downfall of the people.

After the sin of the golden calf, however, God desired to remove His *Shekhina* from the people and appoint “one angel from among his many agents” to guide the nation. Moses, hoping to reinstate the former model of governance, entreats God to let His *Shekhina* dwell once again with the people. Since the Ramban assumes two distinct angels in the text, one ideal the other not, it is clear why Moses would want to know **who** God plans to send. For if the matter remained undecided, as Moses suggests by asking for clarification, then he can still make it clear that he desires only the “angel” [ie.*Shekhina*] mentioned in Ex.23:20.

The Ramban suggests a novel interpretation of the phrase “You have said: “I have known you by name and also you have found favour in My eyes””. While for Rashi, Moses recalls God’s beneficent promises to him in order to point out their inconsistency with the decree of sending an angel, for the Ramban, Moses appeals to God to **continue to fulfil** two promises which He made before the incident of the calf. These two appeals emerge as the fundamental issues upon which the ensuing dialogue centres.

The first promise was that “I know you by name”. This means, according to the Ramban, that God had said to Moses that “I will be known by My [Great] name⁶¹, for your sake”. Moses' request was that God not divest him of this degree of prophecy on account of the incident of the calf. Ramban links this promise, of which Moses attests [“You have said”], with God's remark to Moses in Egypt (Ex.6:3): “I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Ya'akov as -L Sha-i, but by the name Hashem[ie. the tetragramaton] I was not known to them”⁶².(Ex.6:3) This verse implies that God **would** reveal Himself to Moses through the level of prophetic apprehension known as “Hashem”.

In his exegesis to Ex.6:3, Ramban distinguishes the level of apprehension reached by Moses and the patriarchs. The patriarchs only knew God's proper name through “an ameliorated attribute of justice”⁶³. Moses knew it directly through prophecy- “face to face”.

Thus when Abraham spoke with God, he mentioned the proper name in **conjunction** with the name ‘Aleph Dalet’(Gen.15:2) or ‘Aleph Dalet’ alone (Gen.18:30)- a name which designates God's **mastery** over the world. Moses, on the other hand, apprehended how God governed the world through His attribute of Mercy (which is associated with the name ‘Hashem’). In Kabbalistic terms, Ramban alludes to the fact that the prophecy of the patriarchs derived from the attribute of *Shekhina* while that of Moses derived from the attribute of Tiferet⁶⁴.

God's second promise to Moses was “you have also found favour in My eyes”. This means, that “Moses was able to find favour, which is the cleaving of knowledge [*d'vekut*

⁶¹ Ramban interprets the word *shem* as referring to the divine name and takes the word *y'datikha* as a composite verb a) “I will be known” [*y'dati*] b) “for your sake” [*ba'avurkha*].

⁶² implying that He would make it known to Moses.

⁶³ This is the meaning of the phrase “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as ‘-l Shakai’.

⁶⁴ As Recanati remarks (54a): “You already know that the [nature of the] prophecy of Moses is hinted to in the statement “Face to Face”. The first ‘face’ refers to the illuminated face [ie. *Tiferet*], the second face refers to the non-illuminated face [ie. *Shekhina*].

ha'da'at].” What the Ramban refers to by this highly obscure term is difficult to ascertain. Although he speaks of cleaving to God's name on a number of occasions⁶⁵, this is the only instance in which he specifically refers to an intellectual communion of this sort. R' Meir Abusuala in his explanation to our verse cites this expression and explains it as follows: “Intellectual Cleaving is the virtue of Moses, for the Holy One allowed him to bind himself completely to Him. He found ‘favour’ **because** his thoughts cleaved continually with the Supernal thought⁶⁶”. According to this explanation, divine favour **results** from the act of intellectual communion. Meir Ibn Gabai, in ch.35 of *Avodat Ha-kodesh* suggests an alternative explanation, based on an apparent variant in Ramban's commentary. He identifies the finding of Favour with the act of unification [*yikhud*]. Through the unification of *Shekhina* and *Tiferet*, or the cleaving of intelligences [*devekut hadeot*], supernal favour is extended ‘below’. In recalling this favour, Moses requests that God to continue to extend favour to the nation, to be with them face to face, despite the sin of the golden calf.

Moses thus makes two requests: a) that God continue to communicate with Moses through the attribute of *tiferet*. b) that God continue to favour the nation by allowing Moses to cleave to Him.

verse 13: Moses advances a third request: “If I have found favour in your eyes, even in the attribute of justice, reveal to me the paths of Your ways through which you are known by your name, so that I may know you [*va'edaekha*] to unify You so that I may find the ultimate ‘favour’”⁶⁷. According to Ibn Gabai's analysis of this passage, the request of Moses

⁶⁵ see Chaim Chone “*Sod ha-Devekut etzel ha-Ramban*”. *Sinai* 11 (1942-43): 86-94 and Gershom Scholem's *Ha-kabbalah b'geronah* pp.340-345.

⁶⁶ Chone understands Abusuala's remark to imply that Moses penetrated the sefirotic world until reaching the *sefirah* of *Da'at*.

⁶⁷ The Ramban's implication is that mystical unification and devotion leads to divine favour. Note the sharp contrast of this conception with Maimonides' position in the *Guide* I:54 where he asserts that philosophical insight alone leads to divine favour.

is that God make known to him the “secret of unification”. The “paths of God's ways” refers to the sefirotic world. Presumably, Moses is interested in knowing the various combinations of the sefirotic world in order to learn how to unify its different components in all circumstances. As Ibn Gabai notes:

He asked Him to reveal the secret of unification, namely, how He is unified in His name in propitious moments and how He removes Himself [ie. the *Shekhina*] in times of anger, in order that he might know how to unify Him in His name- a truthful desirous unification. In this way Moses will find favour in God's eyes, for in this [ie. unification], he does His will. The supernal will is unification. The one who unifies the Great name in its Glory finds favour in His eyes and does His will.

The concern of Moses for the people finds ultimate expression in the final phrase of the verse: “See that this nation is Your people”. As the Ramban comments: “You are their father and they are your children”. The final objective in knowing the secret of unification is to arouse the ‘great favour’. Moses’ mystical praxis will stimulate divine forgiveness and re-establish the unity of God [*Tiferet*] and the community of Israel [*Shekhina*].

Verse 14 and 15: God informs Moses that He will comply to his request and send the desired “angel of the covenant” (ie. *Shekhina*) to lead the nation. In the clause “*v’hanikhoti lakh*”, Ramban suggests a novel interpretation. God informs Moses that the “*Shekhina*” [mal’akh] will not guide the nation with the strict attribute of justice but with the attribute of justice mixed with mercy⁶⁸. The meaning of “*v’hanikhoti lakh*” in the Ramban’s view means: “I will temper the [the angel] for your sake so that he does not govern you harshly.” Moses does not accept the divine compliance since God still plans to lead the nation with the attribute of justice.

⁶⁸ Ibn Gabai explains why God could not comply fully to Moses’ request: “Since they [ie. Israel] isolated [an aspect of the deity] in their unifying contemplation and she [ie. *Shekhina*] was angry with them, He had to tell them that she would guide them with pleasantness and not with strict justice alone. Nevertheless, the “face to face” that you requested is impossible.” (ch.35 p.106a)

In v.15, Ramban attempts to deal with a complexity in the text. What is Moses asking for when he says “If you do not go with us do not take us up from this [place]” if God has just agreed to reinstate the governance of the *Shekhina* in verse 14? Rashi, as well, addresses this issue but, in a sense, backs out of it. Moses, says Rashi, does not ask for anything new but rather sets down an ultimatum- “If You don’t go with us, as You say You will, don’t take us up from this place”. Ramban, however, is able to see in Moses’ words a new request. This is because the kabbalistically oriented approach of the Ramban conceives of a dynamic relationship between God and Israel. There are, according to this kabbalistic approach, different modes in which the *Shekhina* can lead the nation. As such, we find, in verse 15, that Moses pushes for a mode of governance based on mercy rather than justice: “If you do not go with us in Your essence and in Your Glory do not take us up from here.” According to Rabbeinu Bachya’s explanation of this passage, Moses insists that God should lead the nation with the attribute of *Tiferet* in *Shekhina*. That is, *Shekhina* should channel the attribute of *Tiferet* without any admixture of strict justice. Moses asks God, in this passage, to restore His relationship with Israel the golden days of the Exodus, when God, in his full glory and splendour, lead the nation out of Egypt “with great strength and a mighty arm” (Ex. 32:11). Here again, we see how the Ramban is able to use kabbalistic ideology in order to resolve very basic textual difficulties.

Verse 16: Ramban interprets the word *v’neefleenu* from the root *peleh* [concealed]. He comments that the meaning of the clause is “so that our portion shall be with that which is concealed [ie.*Shekhina*]”⁶⁹ The clause is not a separate request but a positive re-assertion of Moses’ negative conditional in v.15.

⁶⁹ “That is to say that the concealed and hidden should be revealed...for its revelation is contingent upon the unification of the great name in its Glory” (Ibn Gabai p.106b).

Verse 17: God fully complies with Moses' second request that He lead the nation "face to face" ["Also this very thing I shall do, for you have found favour in My eyes"] and also complies with Moses' first request asking that he should not be deprived of his rank in prophecy ["...and I shall be known to you by My name"]⁷⁰.

Verse 18: Ramban suggests two interpretations of Moses' request that God "show him His Glory": In the first explanation, Moses requests a vision of the divine Glory [ie. *Shekhina*]. This request thus follows upon the divine compliance in the previous verse to send the *Shekhina* with the nation. It is possible that the intent of Moses is to validate the divine promise through experience.⁷¹ In the second explanation, Moses requests a vision of the Great Glory or the "transparent speculum" [i.e. *Tiferet*]. As the Recanati notes⁷², Moses wished to "comprehend the inner characteristic of this Glory and the difference between it and the one below it". Although Moses prophesied through the attribute of *Tiferet*, he only felt that his prophecy derived from there. His intent was to comprehend both intellectually and visually the attribute from which his prophecy derived. As such, Moses' request relates back to his original petition regarding the maintenance of his prophetic status rather than the previous verse⁷³.

⁷⁰ According to Ibn Gabai, God even agrees to grant Moses' request to know the "Paths of God's ways", namely, the secret of unification. His compliance is "included" in God's statement: "*va'edaekha ba'shem*".

⁷¹ As such, the Ramban's interpretation of the motive in Moses' request would coincide with the position of Rashbam. For both, Moses desires to confirm the divine promise. The difference emerges in the manner of confirmation; According to Rashbam, it is contractual. According to Ramban it is through mystical experience.

⁷² Recanati p.121c

⁷³ According to R' Bachya, however, Moses' request was to apprehend the source of all *sefirotic* emanation, namely, *keter*. *Keter* is called *panai* [My face] because "the beginning of all things" is called its "face".

Verse 19 and 20: Ramban, like Rashi, understands this verse to be a partial answer to Moses' request. God announces that He will pass His attribute of *kol* [all] which is His goodness over [literally 'on'] Moses' face⁷⁴ so that he can apprehend it more than any other man. Nevertheless, he cannot apprehend it in a vision(v.20). Although the attribute of *kol* typically refers to the *sefirah* of *yesod*⁷⁵, in this context it would appear that Ramban identifies it with *Shekhina*⁷⁶. As God passes over the attribute of *kol*, Ramban continues, He calls out before Moses the great name ["I will call out the name 'God' before you]. Ramban identifies the final phrase of the verse ["I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful"] as the content of this declaration: "Through this proclamation you will know the attributes of Favour and Mercy by which people are shown favour and mercy **through My name and My goodness.**" In the last part of his comment, Ramban subtly distinguishes the two clauses in the final phrase of the verse. The first refers to God's attribute of favour operating primarily through the medium of the divine 'goodness' [ie.*Shekhina*]. The second refers to the attribute of Mercy operating primarily through the medium of the 'Great name' [i.e. *tiferet*]⁷⁷. God thus tells Moses that He will grant him comprehensive **knowledge** concerning the attributes of *Shekhina* and *Tiferet* but cannot permit him to apprehend them in a vision.

⁷⁴ Recanati points out that the correct explanation of Ramban's comment is that God passes over the attribute of 'all' which is His goodness and not that God passes over all His goodness. The reason, notes Recanati, is that Moses did not attain a vision of the divine 'face' but only an intellectual apprehension of the attribute.

⁷⁵ See for example, Ramban's comment to Gen.24:1

⁷⁶ This point is apparent in Ibn Gabai's synopsis of Ramban's commentary as well (p.106b): "It is 'all- for all is in it. He [God] states that He will pass it over with it including the Great Name". The *sefirah* of *Shekhina* is an admixture of all the *sefirot*.

⁷⁷ Recanati: "The text mentioned Favour and Mercy to hint to *tiferet yisrael* [lit. beauty of Israel] and to the *Shekhina* of His strength."

Chapter Three:

The Philosophers

Reconciling Science With Scripture.

While the early French tradition of exegesis sought out the plain meaning of scripture with marginal concern for philosophy and mysticism, the opposite is true of the Andalusian tradition. Beginning with Saadya Gaon, the attempt to reconcile the mythic, literal conception of the universe presented in Scripture with the philosophic, scientific conception of the world presented by contemporary science became the fundamental objective of Jewish Medieval philosophy. A secondary objective for rationalist interpreters was to find ‘support’ in Scripture for their own philosophic sensibilities.

The central philosophical difficulty in the pericope belongs to the field of epistemology. How could Moses request in v.18 to have a vision of God's glory if philosophy has demonstrated that an intellectual apprehension of the divine essence, much less a visual apprehension, is simply an impossibility? The difficulty is two-fold: Why should Moses ask for this impossible apprehension knowing that it is an impossibility? On the other hand, to say that Moses does not know that this is an impossible apprehension is just as problematic. After all, notes Hasdai Crescas, even a philosophic novice knows this fact.

Saadya Gaon resolves the difficulty by suggesting that Moses never requested to see the divine essence in the first place. His request was that God show him the “created light” that He reveals to His prophets in order to validate their prophetic messages. Saadya thus

changes the object of Moses' request in order to obviate a philosophic difficulty. It is confirmation that Moses requests rather than specific knowledge. Ibn Ezra⁷⁸ resolves the difficulty by disassociating the meaning of *kavod* with God's 'essence', as well. He interprets the word *kavod* as referring to 'incorporeal forms' (see also note 85 in which Yehudah Ha-levi offers a similar interpretation). Moses' request is to 'unite' intellectually with the incorporeal forms in order to 'ascend' to the 'Elevated One'. In his interpretation, the intent of Moses is a mystical/intellectual one. Not only does he seek knowledge of these forms but he also desires to cleave to them.

It is interesting that Maimonides does not address the difficulty at all in his discussion of the pericope. In the Guide I:54, he asserts that Moses' request in v.18 was to apprehend the divine essence. Abarbanel, in his discussion of Maimonides' treatment of the pericope in his own commentary, hypothesises two possible reasons why Maimonides avoids the issue. The first is that Maimonides may hold that Moses himself comes to the realisation of the philosophical impossibility of his request when God answers him in v.20 that His face cannot be seen. The second is that Moses may have asked what he knew to be an impossibility with the hope that by asking for so much God would, at least, provide him with a perfect answer for his first request in v.13.

One of the consistent themes, introduced, by the philosophic commentators, in their readings of the pericope, is that of divine providence. Both Ibn Ezra and the Rambam⁷⁹ interpret Moses' statement in v.12 "You have said: "I have known You by name"" as a reference to the fact that God has known Moses as a particular [*bashem*], that is, providentially. It is interesting to note how the introduction of this theme into the pericope

⁷⁸ For discussion of the interplay of exegesis and philosophy in the writings of Ibn Ezra see David Biale's article "Exegesis and Philosophy in the Writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra" *Comitatus* 5 (1974) PP. 43-62.

⁷⁹ For a recent study on Rambam see Eisen, Robert. Gersonides on providence, covenant, and the chosen people: a study in medieval Jewish philosophy and biblical commentary. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

leads to a radical shift in the give and take of the entire dialogue. According to Nahmanides, Moses makes two requests in v.12, the first regarding the maintenance of his previous rank in prophecy, the second regarding the good of the nation. In Verse 14, God complies partially to the petition on behalf of the nation and after Moses beseeches him further in v.15 and 16, He capitulates completely both to the personal and communal request. In Ibn Ezra's commentary, Moses also asks two principal requests- one relating to him personally and the other to the nation: In v.12. he petitions God that He send "Michael" the angel to guide the nation and in v.13 he asks that God provide him with knowledge of the ways in order that he, personally, can come under greater providential care than he had received previously (as he notes in the end of v.12). In verse 14, God responds that He will answer Moses' personal request but not the request of the nation. In v.15 and 16, Moses beseeches God on behalf of the nation a second time and is finally answered positively in V.17. The significant conceptual point is that God answers Moses' personal request first (v.14) without Moses having to beseech God a second time as he must do for the nation, while in Nahmanides' view, God capitulates to both the personal and communal request only after Moses beseeches a second time in v.15 and 16. For Ibn Ezra, the fact that Moses has received providential care in the past means, *ipso facto*, that his requests will be answered more quickly than will the request for someone who has never merited such a level of providence. The Ralbag makes the same point but goes even further. In his view, Moses' request on behalf of the nation is only fulfilled when the nation becomes worthy to receive it and not as a "favour" to Moses. If a person (or nation in our case) does not merit providential guidance he cannot attain providential guidance- not even prayer helps. The philosophic reorientation of this text to the theme of providence thus puts Moses in a preferred position above the nation. The merit of the individual outweighs the merit of community.

Another exegetical device born from the conflict between philosophy and biblical text is that of philosophical allegory. Because both philosophy and the literal text of the bible describe reality, often in exclusive ways, allegory enables a text to sustain two levels

of meaning- the surface meaning of the text and the hidden, true meaning of the text. It is the latter that coincides with the philosophic teaching. In Ibn Ezra's treatment of the pericope, allegory does not yet appear in its most brilliant form, as it does in Maimonides, but his interpretation does distinguish two levels of meaning in the text. On the surface level, Moses asserts, in v.12, that God has known him as a particular, and in v.13 he requests knowledge of God's ways so that he can receive greater providential care from God. Both of these statements imply that God bestows knowledge and providence to the individual who requests these gifts. On the true, scientific level, which Ibn Ezra elucidates in his theoretical expositions, it becomes clear that it is not God who through an act of selection, **knows** Man by drawing him forth from the collective singularity of the material world into the universal world of eternal form, but Man himself, who must perfect himself and earn providential guidance through his own efforts. According to the surface meaning, prayer is an efficacious method of acquiring spiritual gifts. On the philosophic level, however, it is intellectual effort alone that leads to that boon.

In Maimonides treatment of the pericope, the use of allegory plays a central role in his exegesis of the final three verses of the pericope, particularly v.21. In his allegorical exposition of that verse, Maimonides transforms what, on the surface, appears to be a directive to Moses to occupy a particular geographic location into a divine initiative to introduce Moses to the esoteric study of God as the First Principle- [*ma'aseh merkavah*]. In Maimonides' case, particularly, it is through the use of allegory, that he is able to extend, into the pericope, esoteric philosophical interpretations.

The Italian commentator Ovadya ben Yaakov Seforno (1470-1550) represents a thoroughly rationalist approach to literal exposition. Strictly speaking, Seforno does not fall under the classification of philosophical exegesis because his interest is to exposit the text rather than derive philosophical principles or axioms from it. Nevertheless, he comes so close to the boundary of philosophic exposition that his commentary serves as a solid example in which to explore the blending of literal and philosophic exegesis.

One exegetical method in which Seforno 'rationalises' the text is by introducing 'argument' into the dialogue between God and Moses. In v.12, for example, Moses sets forth the facts which brought him to the reasoned conclusion that he was to lead the nation in the desert by himself. On the basis of this conclusion, suggests Moses, in v.13, it becomes reasonable to request knowledge of God's ways. Similarly, Seforno reads verse 16 as a philosophic defence of Moses' request in v.15 that God lead the nation directly even in the land of Israel. As a result of this exegetical method, Seforno's depiction of the character of Moses differs from that of Rashi. According to Rashi, Moses does not defend himself; he challenges and disputes God. According to Seforno, however, Moses lays before God his reasoned case. He does not confront; he persuades through argument.

Seforno does not always integrate his rationalist approach so gracefully into the textual fabric. In his exposition of Moses' requests in v.13 and 18, Seforno clearly implants his own philosophic interests into the mouth of Moses. What else would Moses be interested in resolving at this precarious time when forgiveness lies in the balance, but the issue of divine omniscience and free will?

In his interpretation of v.19 and 20, a subtle polemic seems to be at work against the unbridled humanist spirit of Renaissance Italy. Seforno stresses in both these verses the tragic condition of human speculation. On the one hand, Man (Moses) wants to plumb the depths of knowledge, especially questions of metaphysics and epistemology. On the other hand, he is incapable of grasping all there is to know- not because God withholds knowledge (for God wishes Man to know all)- but because of the limits placed on him by his material composition.

I. Saadya Gaon

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY OF SAADYA'S COMMENTS IN HIS TAFSIR AND IN THE BOOK OF BELIEFS AND OPINIONS:

Verse 12: Saadya de-anthropomorphises the word *r'eh* [See] by translating: “**It is known before you** that you said to me...”. It is interesting to note that while Saadya borrows *Onkelos*’ exegesis, *Onkelos* himself only applies it to the second instance of the word in verse 13 [ie.”...**It is known before you** that this nation is your people”] and maintains the anthropomorphic sense of the case at hand: “**See** that you say to me...”. Saadya, on the other hand, applies it in the first instance but preserves the anthropomorphism in his translation of the second instance: “**Look** to Your people- this nation.” The underlying reason for these divergent applications lay in the different exegetical perspectives of each author. *Onkelos*, in the first instance, wishes to indicate that Moses is not merely bringing to God's attention a matter which is known and always has been known to Him but questioning the consistency of God's statements. Moses asks God to note- **See**- that, on the one hand He asks him to lead the nation (thereby indicating His concern for the nation) and, on the other hand, He refuses to accompany the nation directly (thereby showing His lack of concern). The tone of Moses' address is one of challenge rather than humble petition⁸⁰. In the second instance, though, Moses wants God to **consider** the fact that the nation is His people- a fact which He knows and cares about. According to Saadya, however, Moses does not approach God with the purpose of challenging Him but with the objective of interceding on behalf of the nation. Rather than challenge, he lays before God the facts relating to his petition. It is for God to surmise whether they are worth responding to. In the final clause of the verse, however, Moses actively prays to God on behalf of the nation that He **look after** their welfare.

⁸⁰ This is the perspective of Rashi as well.

Verse 14 and 15: There are two versions of Saadya's interpretation to these verses. Both of them resolve the conceptual difficulty of why Moses continues entreating God to lead the people -as if the matter were still in doubt- when God definitively states that He will lead the nation in v.14. A) According to the current version of Saadya's translation, God's response to Moses is that He will lead the nation but only after settling them in another place [*v'hanikhoti lakh*]⁸¹. Moses retorts that "if Your Presence does not dwell with us **now** do not take us up from this place". B) In the version cited by Ibn Ezra in his long commentary, God responds that when His anger goes away He will then satisfy Moses' request⁸². Moses retorts: "If Your anger does not leave now do not take us up from here."

Verse 18: Saadya discusses verses 18-23 in his Book of Beliefs and Opinions 2:12 and interprets these passages in the light of a philosophical axiom: "It is impossible that any person should see the Creator"⁸³. Moses' request was, therefore, not to see God but that God show him⁸⁴ the "created light" that He reveals to the prophets in order to "prove" the divine origin of their prophetic messages⁸⁵. Since the prophets who behold this light cannot

⁸¹ The clause *v'hanikhoti lakh* thus qualifies and limits the scope of God's compliance in the beginning of the verse. The interpretation follows the translation of *Onkelos*.

⁸² In this exegesis, *v'hanikhoti lakh* qualifies the phrase *panai ye'lekhu* by introducing the possibility of divine compliance. This interpretation follows the translation of *Yonatan ben Uziel*.

⁸³ It is interesting to note that according to Maimonides, who writes in the Guide I:54 that Moses asked to see the essence of God, Moses himself comes to a realization of this axiom when God responds: "You cannot see My essence [*panim*]". Saadya, however, chooses not to integrate the question of the possibility or impossibility of seeing God's essence into the fabric of his exegesis by making it the subject of the dialogue between Moses and God. His ideological assumption is that Moses is well versed enough in basic philosophy to know not to ask such a question.

⁸⁴ Saadya shifts the motive of Moses' request from that of seeking knowledge to that of seeking confirmation. See the Rashbam who does the same.

⁸⁵ Yehuda Ha-levi also dismisses the possibility that *kavod* means 'the divine essence' (as in Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, Ralbag) but still differs with Saadya as to which created entity it refers to. In 4:3 of the Kuzari, Ha-levi suggests that the term *Kavod* refers to the entirety of the spiritual world: the angels, spiritual vessels (e.g. the chair, chariot, sky, *ofanim*, *galgalim* etc...) in the same way as the servants of the King are called *kvoodah*

continue to look upon it because of its overwhelming strength and brightness, Moses asked that God strengthen him so that he could look directly into the brightness. Saadya thus interprets the word *har'aynee* as an emphatic: "Let me have a **sustained** vision of Your Glory" and stresses that it is not knowledge, per se, that Moses requests but validation⁸⁶.

It is interesting to contrast Saadya's approach to that of the Rashbam: Although Rashbam dismisses the possibility that Moses would seek the spiritual pleasure of gazing upon the divine splendour [*lahanot miziv ha'shekhina*] on ethical grounds [i.e. because of his modest character] rather than on Saadya's philosophical grounds [i.e. because of the intrinsic impossibility of knowing God's essence], he does arrive at a similar exegetical alternative to that of Saadya in which Moses' request is for covenantal validation of God's two promises in vv.14 and 17⁸⁷.

Verse 20-23: God responds that the beginning [*panim*] of the brightness is so powerful that if Moses were to look into it directly, he would perish. Nevertheless, God informs Moses that He will cover him with a cloud [*sakoti kapi aleykha*] until the strongest part of the light

(Judges 18:21). He thus maintains the implication in the text that Moses seeks knowledge of some sort rather than validation alone (as in Saadya and Rashbam). It is interesting to note that Ha-levi does take *panim* in v.20 ["you cannot see My 'face', *panai*] as referring to the divine essence (as in Maimonides) but must, consequently, interpret the verse as a warning rather than as a response to Moses: "You may look upon the *kavod* as long as you do not look upon My essence".

⁸⁶ Professor Lawrence Kaplan of McGill University raises a difficulty with Saadya's interpretation that I have left unanswered. If all Moses desires is "validation" of the divine authority of his prophecy why does he then need a "sustained vision"? Surely a normal validation such as given to the other prophets should suffice.

⁸⁷ Note, as well, that the Rashbam defends his interpretation by referring to a proof-text in Genesis while Saadya does not. Although the two resolve the textual difficulties with similar conceptual approaches, the content of their interpretations depends on ideological and methodological interests.

[i.e. the beginning of the light] passes away⁸⁸ [*ad ovri*]. The major exegetical difficulty that Saadya must resolve in this verse is why the final clause relates that God passes over “*ad ovri*” [“...until I have passed”] when the initial clause in the verse states that the Glory passes over [“And when the glory passes over...”]. In order to maintain the consistency of his interpretation, Saadya indicates that the true subject of the final clause is “the beginning of the light” and not God Himself.⁸⁹

After the “beginning of the light” passes away, God removes the “covering” [“*v'hasiroti et kapi...*”] so that Moses can look upon the end of the [created] light [“*...v'ra'ita et akhorai*”].

II. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY OF IBN EZRA'S SHORT AND LONG COMMENTARIES:

Verse 12: While Rashi reads the phrase “You say to me” as the object of the imperative “See” [*r'eh*], Ibn Ezra notes that the object is left unstated. Moses “speaks in the language of man”, (S.C) as if to say: “consider **the sorrow within which I find myself**”(L.C)⁹⁰. The tone with which Moses addresses God, according to Ibn Ezra, sharply contrasts Rashi's portrayal. In Rashi, Moses challenges God, questioning the consistency of His statements and boldly rejecting the decree of sending an angel. In Ibn Ezra, Moses pleads with God,

⁸⁸ Note that Saadya takes the word *avor* in the sense of “passing away” rather than “passing before”. According to the latter translation, the meaning is that God either communicates or reveals to Moses the array of His goodness.

⁸⁹ Rashi, on the other hand, who holds that the subject of the verse is God Himself, takes the first clause out of its literal sense [“When the Glory passes over...”] and translates: “When I will pass before you...”

⁹⁰ The source of Ibn Ezra's comment is in the *Lekakh Tov*. See *Torah Shlema* n. 69. See also *Seforno* for a similar exegesis.

asking Him to consider the anguish of his servant and softly suggesting that He reconsider the wisdom of His decree.

Ibn Ezra translates the subordinate preposition "*et asher*" as "who": "You have not told me who You plan to send with me". Because of the fear of divine punishment after the incident of the calf, Moses is uncertain whether the identity of the angel referred to in Ex.32:34 is the same as the one God promises to send with the nation in Ex.23:21⁹¹ ("first angel" within whom "rests the name of God"- Michael⁹²) or of a lower rank⁹³.

Ibn Ezra draws on the linguistic repetition of *daat* and *chen* in v.12 and 13 to read Moses' remark, "You have said: "I have known you by name", as a preface for his later statement "...and I shall know you..." (v.13) and his second remark "...and also you have found favour in My eyes" as an opening for the later statement "...in order that I find favour in Your eyes"(S.C) Moses thus appeals to God not to deprive him in the future of the very gifts that He has bestowed upon him in the past despite the sin of the calf⁹⁴.

Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the phrase "I have known you by name" both develops and draws directly on his basic approach to issues such as providence, cosmology and the nature of the divine name⁹⁵. In both his short and long commentary, he prefaces his interpretation with a highly elliptical, theoretical exposition of these issues. In his short commentary, he writes:

Now, pay close attention to my opinion and know that the hosts of heaven and earth [exist] by virtue of divine thought...[So too do the] universal forms [exist]

⁹¹ See Ibn Ezra's comment to 32:34 (S.C).

⁹² Ibn Ezra identifies the angel as Michael in his comment to Ex.23:21 (L.C)

⁹³ The Ramban remarks that, according to Ibn Ezra, it is unclear why God would comply to leading the nation Himself in v.14 when all Moses implied by his question in v.12 was that God send the "first angel". See note 92.

⁹⁴ See the Ramban, as well, who reads the two final phrases of v.12 as prefatory remarks for Moses' petitions in v.13.

⁹⁵ See the article of Asher Weissner "*Ha-shem ha-nikhsad b'perushei Avraham Ibn Ezra l'torah*". Sinai 70 (1972), 1-9, for a semi-comprehensive list of sources in which Ibn Ezra discusses these issues.

by virtue of the divine thought. The knower unites with the known. Therefore, they [i.e. the philosophers] have said regarding divine knowledge that He is both knower and known. [With regard] to the created beings this is not the case. The knower cannot be the known because each [being] is a separate substance. The meaning of "I have known you by name" is that Moses reached the level of cleaving to "all" [ie. God who is the source of 'all']. God, therefore, performed miracles through his agency in the world.

In his comment to Ex.3:13, Ibn Ezra clarifies this point:

Moses now requested [to know as to] which of His [God's] names he should inform Israel of. For through the name -L Sha-ai he could not perform miracles. Only through the Great name.

By cleaving to the divine name, Moses elevates himself beyond the world of the particular and into the class of the 'universal forms' -the level at which knower and known unite. The powers he receives by virtue of this attachment enable him to "perform miracles"- acts that suspend the natural laws of the subsidiary world [*olam ha-shefel*]⁹⁶.

In his long commentary, Ibn Ezra discusses the other outcome resulting from the attachment to 'all', namely, providential guidance:

Moses became a universal. Therefore, God said "I have known you by name". For He only knows the particular and its attributes as universals..

Only the one who cleaves to God, is "known" by God. Only he who cleaves to universals eludes the decree of the stars:

...The one who prostrates to the hosts of heavens will not benefit in any way, for what ever has been decreed upon him by the constellation of his birth-stars will occur. Only if a force superior to the powers of stars to which he cleaves -only then will he be saved from the [astrological] decree...Therefore, "one who keeps the Torah is praiseworthy" (Prov.29:18)...The meaning of "I have known you by name" is thus similar to "God knows the ways of the righteous" (Psalms 1:6)[L.C].

⁹⁶ "Know that when a particular [i.e. man] knows 'all' [i.e. God], he will then cleave to 'all' and perform through 'all' miracles.(comment to Num.20:8).

For Ibn Ezra, God does not know Man through an act of selection or distinction. He does not draw individuals from out of their world of particularity to grant them spiritual and physical protection. It is the individual who must, through his own efforts, cleave to God. God's knowledge follows necessarily from this act of self-distinction. Moses, therefore, does not appeal to God's favour, per se, but to his own spiritual accomplishments.

Verse 13: --Ibn Ezra does not elaborate on the nature of Moses' request ("Show me Your ways") in his commentary. Instead, he establishes a conceptual link from the request to Moses' stated intention- "...that I may know You...":

It is impossible for any creature to know the Creator of the universe but through His ways. And the one who knows His ways will then know Him- for then he will become a form⁹⁷.

In *Yesod Morah* ch.1, however, Ibn Ezra elicits a general injunction from the text:

A man is obligated to perfect himself and recognise the commandments of God, his Creator, in order to understand His works. Then, he will know his Creator. So too did Moses say: "Let me please know of your ways and I will know you".

The inner contradiction of this remark puts into relief the conflict of ideology and exegesis in Ibn Ezra's commentary. If a person is obligated to perfect **himself**, why then does Moses ask God for knowledge and -even more perplexing - why does Ibn Ezra cite this passage as a proof-text for his own position? One is forced to conclude that he interprets the text on two levels: On the external, literal level, Moses asks for knowledge of God's ways, **falsely** implying that God provides knowledge only to the one who petitions for it. On the true, scientific level, though, the text is really an injunction imploring the reader to seek divine knowledge through his own efforts. Ibn Ezra cannot blend his ideological position into the textual flow because it contradicts the whole thrust of the narrative. He must, therefore,

⁹⁷ See Maimonides Guide I:54 and Seforno.

assume that the author of the text intends to impart a meaning related to but not conveyed by the words of the text.

Ibn Ezra, following Saadya, reads the final phrase of the verse "...and see that this nation is your people" as a separate prayer on behalf of the people. He thus links this clause conceptually to Moses' statement in v.12 ("You have not told me who you plan to send) rather than to Moses' request in this verse⁹⁸.

Verse 14 and 15: God accedes to Moses' personal request "that the *Shekhina* be on his tent"(S.C)⁹⁹ but not to his petition on behalf of the community: "My Glory will go **with you** [but not them](S.C & L.C)¹⁰⁰. Moses responds: "If you do not go [with all of Israel] do not take us up from here". According to Ibn Ezra the pivotal issue at play in the dialogue of Moses and God is thus whether the *Shekhina* will dwell only over the "tent of Moses" or over the tabernacle which is in the midst of the community of Israel.

Verse 16: Ibn Ezra faces a difficulty in this verse emerging from his own interpretation of the pericope. In verse 12, he notes that Moses' request is to know **which** of the angels God plans to send- This implies that Moses accepts, on principle, the guidance of an angel. Ibn Ezra even criticises Saadya's interpretation of "...Let I and Your nation be distinguished from all the nation..." on the basis of this assumption. According to Saadya, Moses asks that God distinguish the nation by governing them directly and not placing them under the guidance of an angelic "officer". Ibn Ezra curtly retorts: "He has forgotten [the verse] "Michael is your officer"(Dan.10:21). On the other hand, based on his lexicographical

⁹⁸ According to Rashi, Moses continues his petition in this phrase by further stipulating that he wants to know the reward due to him as one among the community. For Maimonides, Moses states, in this phrase, that the objective of his request to know God's ways of governance is so that he can apply them in his leadership of the community.

⁹⁹ This refers back to Moses request "Let me know of Your ways".

¹⁰⁰ Note that Ibn Ezra collapses the second clause of the verse into a preposition, thus reading *v'hanikhoti lakh* as "with you".

interpretation of *panai* as “I Myself”, it follows that in verse 15, Moses must be entreating God to lead the nation Himself. Ibn Ezra resolves this inconsistency in his interpretation of “Let us be distinguished...”:

[This means] -through the [presence] of the *Shekhina* which [dwells] between the Cherubs [through whose guidance] Israel travels and encamps “by the word of God”. He did not do this for any other nation.”

While the governance of the nation is entrusted to an angelic “officer”, Ibn Ezra still maintains that it is “the word of God” that guides the nation in its travels. Moses’ request in v.12 was that Michael, the “first angel”, **govern** the nation; his request in v.15 and 16 was that the *Shekhina* **guide** the nation in its travels¹⁰¹.

Verse 17: God complies to Moses’ petition on behalf of the nation but only for Moses’ sake: “All that you have said I will do for you alone because you have found favour in My eyes and I have known you as a particular”. God thus reiterates His unique relationship to Moses in order to point to the reason for his acquiescence. This comment boldly contrasts the commentary of Ralbag who states emphatically that “providence will only adhere to the

¹⁰¹ The critique of Ramban stems from the fact that Ibn Ezra did not know the kabbalistic truth, namely, that Michael is the *Shekhina*. The author of the medieval kabbalistic work *Emunah U'bitachon* (traditionally ascribed to Nahmanides and available in Rabbi Dov Chavel’s edition of *Kitzei Haramban* vol.2; Mossad Harav Kook; Jerusalem, 1964) poses this very question in his own exegetical presentation. He sides with an interpretation in which he clearly intends to justify Ibn Ezra’s approach:

Since, He [ie. God] did not specify the name of the angel, he, therefore, stated: “You have not informed me...”. That is, since You have not yet specified the name of the angel that You said You would send with me, the matter is not yet given for him to discharge and I, consequently, have the right to request someone greater than him [ie. *Shekhina*]...Because the actual task of the agent is not given to him to discharge until the moment that the executor tells him “do this and this”... as long as the agent is not yet designated, I can still nullify the pronouncement as if it were never decreed [and request that the *Shekhina* go with us instead].

According to the author of *Emunah U'bitachon*, Moses preambles his petition to ask God to let His *Shekhina* go directly with the people with a statement setting forth a **legal rationale** explaining why he can actually petition God and why God ought to listen to his petition: “You have not informed me [the name of] whom You plan to send with me [and therefore, I have the right to ask You to nullify your plan].

person [or nation] worthy of it, as it says “I will be gracious only in the manner I have been gracious [i.e. to one who is worthy]” (see v.19). Consequently, Ralbag cannot agree to any acquiescence on the side of God until Israel is deserving of divine providence through their own merit.

Verse 18: Ibn Ezra rejects Saadya’s literal interpretation of *har’aynee* suggesting that Moses requested a sustained **vision** of the “created light”. Ibn Ezra remarks that the verse “speaks according to its customary language [i.e. in an anthropomorphic manner]”. It is true that Moses asks for a vision of the divine essence but The word *har-eynee* is an idiom conveying the notion of spiritual or intellectual sight rather than physical sight just as God’s speech to Moses throughout scripture is not physical speech but the “true” spiritual speech (S.C).¹⁰² The actual request of Moses is to “unite” [intellectually] with the forms that have no substance [ie. the angels] in order to ascend [through them] unto the Elevated One”(S.C).

There is a noteworthy contrast in Ibn Ezra’s description of the nature of Moses’ present request with that of Moses’ request in v.13. In v.13, Ibn Ezra speaks of intellectual contemplation alone. Through study of God’s works, Man develops an understanding of God Himself. Here, however, Ibn Ezra adds a mystical, unifying component. Moses seeks to **unite** with the substanceless forms in order to **ascend** to the Elevated One.

Verse 20: God answers Moses that to “see” His face [ie. His essence] is impossible in his bodily form “for Man cannot see **that which is mine**”¹⁰³ while he is still attached to his body.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Note the platonic overtones in the phrase “true” speech.

¹⁰³ In my opinion, Ibn Ezra translates *lo yir’anee* as Man cannot see **that which is mine**, [ie. the angels] while he is alive because Moses’ request, after all, was to unite with the incorporeal forms not with God. God’s response then is that You cannot see [ie. unite intellectually with] Me [ie. *panai*] because you cannot even unite with the incorporeal forms.

¹⁰⁴ Although Ibn Ezra does comment on parts of v,19,21-23, his interpretations sometimes differ in his short and long commentaries and are so obscure and atomistic that it is extremely difficult to trace a particular

III. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (RAMBAM)

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY OF MAIMONIDES' COMMENTARY ON THE PERICOPE IN THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED, MISHNE TORAH AND INTRODUCTION TO AVOT COMMENTARY:

Verse 12: Maimonides does not comment on this verse in any of his writings. Abarbanel, in his Torah commentary, hypothesises¹⁰⁵ that Maimonides would explain the phrase “You have not informed me...” rhetorically: “Have you not informed me as to whom you are sending with me? [Certainly you have- it is a stiff-necked nation! I therefore, need to know Your ways of governance so that I can govern them accordingly.]

Verse 13: In the Guide I:54, Maimonides explains that Moses, made two requests: “One request consisted in his asking Him, may He be exalted, to let him know His essence and true reality. The second request, which he put first, was that He should let him know His attributes of action”. In this preamble, Maimonides indicates that while Moses' request in v.13 appears first in the pericope it ranks second with regard to the **scope** of knowledge requested. Maimonides elucidates the nature of the request later in the chapter:

...It is clear then that the ‘ways’- for a knowledge of which he had asked and which, in consequence, were made known to him- are the actions proceeding from God, may He be exalted. The sages call them ‘characteristics’ [meedot]. This term as they use it, is applied to moral qualities...The meaning here is not that He possesses moral qualities, but that he performs actions resembling the actions that in us proceed from moral qualities (Ibid).

exegetical approach. Nevertheless, wherever possible, I have contrasted some of these comments with other medieval interpretations.

¹⁰⁵ For the purpose of maintaining the continuity of Maimonides' exegesis we shall cite Abarbanel's 'reconstructive' exegesis.

Moses' request was, then, for a knowledge of God's actions in the world, namely, His ways of governance. Maimonides identifies these actions with the thirteen attributes displayed to Moses in 34:6,7. He justifies this identification by explaining that since the actions of God "resemble moral actions", they are therefore described by the same moral attributes.

While for Maimonides, the clauses "...That I may know you so that I may find favour in Your sight" teach the "wondrous notion" that "God is known through His attributive qualifications" and that "He who knows God finds favour in His sight and **not** he who merely fasts and prays"¹⁰⁶, -his thoroughly rationalistic exegesis still differs in a fundamental respect with that of Ibn Ezra and the Ralbag, who suggest identical interpretations. According to the latter two commentators, this phrase represents the final objective of Moses' request. Through knowledge of God's ways, Moses wishes to attain greater proximity to God's providential guidance. For Maimonides, though, this phrase is parenthetical to Moses' request. It is in the final phrase of the verse that Moses gives full expression to his purpose. As Maimonides notes:

This [ie. governance of the nation] was [Moses'] ultimate object in his demand, the conclusion of what he says being: "That I may know You, to the end that I may find favour in Your sight and consider that this is **Your people**"- that is, a people for the government of which I need to perform actions that I must seek to make similar to Your actions in governing them.

According to Maimonides, Moses stresses the fact that the nation is God's people in order to indicate that it is only in his **governing** the nation in imitation of God's laws of governance that they can achieve this rank. Moses' aim is to duplicate, on the political level, God's governance of the world. As in Rashi and the Ramban, Moses' request is oriented to the community as well as to his own perfection¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁶ Guide I:54.

¹⁰⁷ It is somewhat ironic that Maimonides' interpretation is conceptually closer to the Ramban's kabbalistic interpretation than it is to the Ralbag or Ibn Ezra's rationalist approach.

Verse 14: In chapter I:37 of the Guide, Maimonides writes that the correct explanation of the term *panim* for this verse is 'anger': "My anger will leave and I will give you rest". Abarbanel suggests that the connection of this verse with the preceding one is as follows: "What need do you have in knowing My ways? Is it in order to appease Me so that My anger should leave Israel? I am, therefore, informing you that My anger will leave and I will thus satisfy [the intent of] your request."

Verses 15-17: Maimonides, again, does not comment on any of these verses. Abarbanel surmises from this silence that, for Maimonides, the dialogue between God and Moses in verses 14-17 does not relate to Moses' two fundamental questions but serves as a parenthetical sub-dialogue pertaining to the theme of divine forgiveness¹⁰⁸.

Verse 18: In I:64 of the Guide, Maimonides explains that the expression *kavod* in this verse is a figurative term signifying God's essence and true reality¹⁰⁹. Moses' use of the figurative term, he adds, is a way of honouring Him. In I:4, Maimonides notes, that Moses'

¹⁰⁸ Abarbanel composes a fabricated version of 'Maimonides' exegesis to these verse: In verse 15, Moses responds: "I never thought for a moment that Your anger would persist against Your flock- for You only desire kindness. Therefore, I, in my ignorance, asked you for knowledge of the ways [rather than for You to forgive the nation] in order to govern Israel by them so that they can fulfill Your will and [You, in turn] can provide for them beneficently. [I did not ask this request of You with the purpose of appeasing Your anger]. But, since You say that the anger has not yet passed, [i.e. *eem ayn paneykha holkhim*] I now ask of You another request: Not to take us up from here as long as the anger continues. In v.17 God consents to Moses' wish not to travel from Sinai at that time.

¹⁰⁹ Many critics of Maimonides take him to task for suggesting that Moses would actually request to apprehend the divine essence. Hasdai Crescas, for example, writes in Or Hashem I:3;1: "Moses could not have requested to apprehend the divine essence. The Torah would never attribute to Moses such a stupid request...especially since even the most amateur of philosophers knows the impossibility of apprehending the essence". Abarbanel, reiterates the same point in his commentary: "It is very difficult for me [to accept] that Moses would, at any point, request from God, may He be blessed, that He inform Him and display to Him, His essence and nature. The most amateur of philosophers knows that the mind is anchored to the senses and that if it were possible for him to know God's essence, he would then become God. That is why the sage said "all that we can know of Him is that we cannot know Him". He, then, had no need for this knowledge and certainly not after the incident of the calf at which time he was asking for forgiveness for the nation and their atonement. How can it be that at this time he would ask God to show him His essence?

mention of 'seeing' the divine essence is also a figurative term referring to 'intellectual apprehension'. In the Mishneh Torah¹¹⁰ he explains why Moses uses the figurative term rather than the word "Let me know...":

What was it that Moses, our Master, sought to apprehend when he said "Let me see Your Glory"? He sought to know the truth of the existence of the Holy One, Blessed be He, such that it would be known in his heart like the knowledge a [person] has of another person when he looks in his face and his image becomes engraved in his heart. That person becomes distinct in his knowledge from all other people. So too, did Moses, our Master, request that the existence of God be distinct in his heart from all other forms of existence until he could fully know the truth of His existence.

The term *har'aynee* thus denotes the idea of knowing something distinctly¹¹¹.

Verse 19: In I:54 of the Guide, Maimonides explains that God's statement in this verse is a response to Moses' request in v.13. God informs Moses that He will display to him *kol tuvi* [all My goodness]. The term 'goodness' alludes to Gen.1:31 ["God saw everything that He made and behold it was very good"] thereby indicating that God's display to him was of "all existing things". According to Maimonidean hermeneutics, this "display", is clearly a metaphor indicating that Moses reaches a level of understanding in which he apprehends the interconnectedness of the different components of creation¹¹² and so arrives at an understanding of how God governs creation "in general and in detail". Maimonides adds that although Scripture recounts that God displayed to Moses all of his creations, it restricts itself to mentioning only those thirteen attributes "because these are the actions proceeding from Him, may He be exalted, in respect of giving existence to the Adamites and governing

¹¹⁰ Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah I:10

¹¹¹ see Bekhor Shor for a similar thesis.

¹¹² By this term [in Hebrew- *hitkashrut*] Maimonides hints at the rabbinic dictum that Moses saw the "knot [*kesher*] of God's tefillin"

them". It is significant that, according to Maimonides' exegesis, God does not inform Moses directly of the knowledge that he seeks, but supplies him with the 'data' to derive the knowledge through speculation. This conceptual point nicely coincides with his ideological view that true knowledge is attained through natural achievement rather than miraculously.

Verse.20: In answer to Moses' second request, God informs him that "the true reality of My existence as it veritably is cannot be grasped"¹¹³ Note that, according to this exegesis, Maimonides suggests a different definition for the term *panim* than in v.14.

Verses 21-23: Maimonides' refrains from systematising his exegesis of these three passages into one unit but rather disperses comments relating to these verses in a number of the chapters in the Guide. His intention to conceal an esoteric interpretation to these verses is substantiated by two reasons: a) Maimonides' himself instructs the reader of the Guide to "connect its chapters one with another" in order to "grasp the totality of what this Treatise contains".¹¹⁴ b) Maimonides strangely interrupts his discussion of the terms 'standing' (I:15) and 'rock' (I:16)- two terms appearing in v.21 of the pericope- and turns to an explanation of the prohibition against the public teaching of natural science (I:17). Abarbanel hints to the esoteric intent of Maimonides' interpretation to these verses, as well:

In my opinion, according to Maimonides, this verse intends to reveal a very profound idea [eenyan yakar me'od]- one that none of the commentators to Maimonides has mentioned or noticed. Maimonides explains that Moses made only two requests and that God answered one positively and the other negatively. But He, may He be exalted, informed him after responding to his questions that He has more words to say and that Moses should stand next to Him in order that He can inform him of another level of contemplation, that he did not ask for or refer to.

¹¹³ Guide I:37

¹¹⁴ In the Instruction with Respect to this Treatise.

In his comment, Abarbanel clearly alludes to the introductory paragraph of I:54 in which after delineating the two requests of Moses, Maimonides continues:

Yet He drew his attention to a subject of speculation through which he can apprehend to the furthest extent that is possible for man. For what has been apprehended by [Moses], peace be on him, has not been apprehended by anyone before him nor will it be apprehended by anyone after him.

Maimonides links this thought to our verse in ch.I:9 of the Guide:

In this verse, the term [*makom*] signifies a **rank in theoretical speculation and the contemplation of the intellect**- not that of the eye; this being in addition to the meaning alluding to a local place that was to be found on that mountain on which the separation and the achievement of perfection came to pass.

Maimonides thus reads the phrase "*hineh makom eetee*" as a philosophical allegory signifying a third, distinct, rank or subject of speculation- not of God's essence (for this was denied to Moses)- and not of God's works (for this request of Moses was granted).

In I:15, Maimonides defines the meaning of "*v'nitzavta*" in our verse as "to be stable and permanent". In I:16, he expounds on the meaning of the term "*tzur*":

Rock [*tzur*] is an equivocal term...It is, further, a term denoting the quarry from which quarry-stones are hewn...Subsequently, in derivation from the last meaning, the term was used figuratively to designate **the root and principle of everything**...on account of the last meaning, God, may He be exalted, is designated as the Rock, as He is the principle and efficient cause of all things other than Himself...the verse "And You shall stand erect upon the Rock" means: Rely upon and be firm in considering¹¹⁵ God, may He be exalted, as the first principle. **This is the entryway through which you shall come to Him, as**

¹¹⁵ Abarbanel suggests a radically anti-rationalistic explanation for Maimonides comment to this word. In his opinion, most commentators have erred in their understanding of Maimonides intent in thinking that Maimonides wishes to instruct the one who speculates to stand firmly **in the contemplation** of how He is the rock of the world. Abarbanel retorts that this "is an explicit error" for none of the meanings that Maimonides proposes for the root *natzav* or *yatzav* denote the idea of "fixed meditation". The true intent of Maimonides, writes Abarbanel, "is that when he attains that level of speculation to which he hinted in his saying "*hineh makom eetee*"...then Moses should remember not to go further in inquiring into the essence of the divinity. Rather, he should **fix himself and stand before that boundary** and not pass over from his position and level...For that level alone the human mind can attain and no more: This is the meaning of "*v'nitzavta al ha-tzur*"- Until that point you shall go and no further.

we have made clear when speaking of His saying to [Moses]. “Behold, there is a Place by Me”.

By opening I:17, which follows directly after this passage, with an explicit reference to the natural sciences it would appear that Maimonides hints to the identification of this third “subject of speculation”. Do not think, he writes, “that only the divine science should be withheld from the multitude. This holds good also for the greater part of natural science”. A few sentences later, Maimonides explicitly identifies “knowledge of the first principles” (note the plural) with the natural sciences when he notes that even the non-Jewish philosophers “concealed what they said about the first principle and presented it in riddles”. It is significant that Maimonides shifts his reference from that of The First Principle to that of the first principles - defining them as matter, form and the particularised privation. Through this subtle alteration, Maimonides suggests that the true subject of speculation to which God draws Moses in v.21 pertains to the nature of matter and form rather than God Himself. This leads to a striking conclusion. For on the exterior level of philosophical interpretation, God seems to draw Moses to the divine sciences by leading him to the contemplation of Him as the First Principle. On the esoteric level of interpretation, however, presented by Maimonides in I:17, God draws Moses to contemplating the first principles- an aspect of the natural sciences alone.

Verse 22: Maimonides defines the term “*avor*” in I:21 as ‘overpassing a boundary’ as in the case of “a man who, in accomplishing a certain action, has followed into excess and overpassed the bounds”. According to Abarbanel, Maimonides interprets the word *hatzur* in this verse, from the root *tzarah* [privation]. He bases his argument on the fact that Maimonides discusses the philosophical term “particularised privation” in I:17 directly after his lexicographical analysis of the term *tzur* in I:16 thereby suggesting an alternative philosophical meaning for the term. Maimonides' allegorical reading of the first part of the verse [“*v'haya ba-avor kvodi v'samtikha b'nikrat ha-tzur...*”] is, thus, according to Abarbanel's interpretation: If you do not content yourself with contemplation of the First

Principle and overpass [that boundary] to speculate on My essence, I will make you subject [v'samtikha] to the accidents [b'nikrat- from mikreh] of matter [ha-tzur]. The entire phrase serves to qualify v.21 by warning Moses not to overstep the boundary of speculation established in v.21.

In the Guide I:21, Maimonides interprets the phrase “I will cover you with My hand until I have passed” as a metaphor for the concept of divine assistance which in turn is a metaphor for avoiding the danger of over-stepping the boundaries of speculation:

Moreover every perfect man- after his intellect has attained the cognition of whatever in its nature can be grasped- when longing for another apprehension beyond that which he has achieved, cannot but have his faculty of apprehension deceived or destroyed...unless divine help attends him- as Scripture says: “I will cover you with My hand until I have passed”.

This “other apprehension” clearly alludes to the third rank in speculation mentioned in v.21.

Maimonides, here, indicates that without divine assistance, which, in turn, means that without avoiding the danger of overstepping one's intellectual boundaries, Moses would lead himself to intellectual destruction¹¹⁶.

Verse 23: In I:38, Maimonides suggests that the term *akhor* in this verse takes on the meaning of “following and imitating the conduct of some individual with respect to the conduct of life”. The application of this definition to our verse yields the following interpretation: “You shall apprehend what follows Me, has come to be like Me and follows necessarily from My will- that is, all the things created by Me...”. Maimonides' philological interpretation of the term *akhor* is thus identical to his metaphoric interpretation of *tuvi*; both refer to the creation. In the Mishneh Torah, however, Maimonides suggests an alternative, allegorical interpretation for the term *akhor*:

God, [nevertheless] granted him [with a knowledge] that no man before him ever knew and no man after him will ever know- until he apprehended an aspect of His existence that became distinct in his mind from all other existences just as

¹¹⁶ Clearly a reference to the aggadic account of the “four sages who entered into paradise” (Hagigah 14b).

the recognition of an individual person becomes distinct in the mind of a person who sees that person's back and thereby recognises his entire body and clothing.

In this comment, Maimonides makes a peculiar statement. He suggests that through apprehending *akhor*, Moses arrived at an intellectual pinnacle that no man before or after him has or will ever reach. Yet, if *akhor* is synonymous with *kol tuvi*, it would seem that anyone with the same depth of understanding and greatness of intellect could also apprehend the mechanics of creation. The answer to this question is that, here, Maimonides suggests a different interpretation of *akhor*. While in the Guide, the term refers to Moses' first question in v.13, in the Mishneh Torah it refers to the level of apprehension Moses acquires through divine assistance- the third "rank in speculation" hinted at in v.21. Since this level is acquired only through divine assistance, Maimonides can truthfully remark that no one aside from Moses will ever arrive at this level of understanding.

The final phrase of v.22 and all of v.23 thus recapitulate the three subjects of speculation outlined over the course of the dialogue. The final phrase of v.22 ["I will cover you with My hand..."] corresponds to v.21, the second clause of v.22 ["you will see My back"] corresponds (in the Guide) to v.21 and the final clause ["But My face cannot be seen"] corresponds to v.20.

IV. Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (RALBAG)

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY TO RALBAG'S COMMENTARY:

Verse 12: The Ralbag follows Ibn Ezra and Ramban in his interpretation of this verse. Moses requests the knowledge of which "angel" is to go and, as the Ralbag adds: "He said this because if the angel [to be sent] were the active intellect, he would be satisfied". The Ralbag does differ from Ibn Ezra and Ramban in one respect. For Ibn Ezra and the Ramban,

the issue at hand is rooted in the exegetical question of whether the angel of Ex.32:2 is the same as the angel of Ex.23:20,21. For Ralbag, however, the “angel” in 23:20 refers to a prophet.

Moses, then, prefaces his request in v.13 [knowledge of the ways] by an appeal to the fact that God has, in the past, known him as a particular [*ba-shem*] thus making him worthy of divine favour which, in turn, leads to providence.

Verse 13: The Ralbag maintains the theme of providence by building the entire dialogue around it. Moses now entreats: Since I have found favour in Your eyes, provide me with the knowledge of Your providential ways. Through knowledge of Your providential ways, I will then arrive at a knowledge of Your essence. Through knowledge of Your essence, I will then find More favour in Your eyes “for divine providence adheres to a greater extent on the one who has more perfect knowledge”¹¹⁷ Moses thus seeks a greater intensity of favour through acquiring knowledge of God's ways¹¹⁸. Conceptually, Ralbag differs with Maimonides insofar as he considers partial knowledge of God's essence a possibility. From an exegetical standpoint, Ralbag reads the two phrases following the request as natural outcomes of the request itself.

In the final phrase, however, Moses adds a separate petition - also continuing the theme of providence: “I also ask of You that You consider that this nation alone is your people and therefore it is fitting for You to pity them and favour them with Your providence as well”¹¹⁹. Here again, there is a noteworthy comparison with Maimonides' reading of the same phrase. While, for the Rambam, Moses petitions God to give him knowledge so that

¹¹⁷ See Maimonides *Guide* I:54. Ralbag, however, disagrees fundamentally with Maimonides reading of this text.

¹¹⁸ Rashi, on the other hand, interprets the text to mean that Moses seeks an appreciation of the measure of favour that he has already merited.

¹¹⁹ Again, this follows the approach of Ibn Ezra.

he can properly govern the nation, Ralbag depoliticizes Moses' petition into one for providential rather than political supervision.

Verse 14,15: God responds that He will favour Moses alone with providence [*panai yelekhu*] but not the entire nation. and that He will thereby protect him [*v'hanikhoti lakh*] from all evil. Note that this is not a response to Moses' personal request either. Moses asked to **know** God's providential ways and through that knowledge to become the recipient of more providence. Moses retorts: "If your providential care does not go with the entire nation do not take us up from here **lest it [i.e. the nation] fall prey to the vicissitudes of chance.** The Ralbag follows Ibn Ezra in his exegetical approach to this exchange between Moses and God. For both commentators, God first promises Moses spiritual privileges to the exclusion of the nation, and then Moses replies by appealing to God to extend those privileges onto the nation as a whole. The difference is that Ralbag tapers this dialogue to his own philosophy sensibilities. While for Ibn Ezra, the question is whether God will dwell with Moses or with Israel the issue with Ralbag becomes whether God will extend providential guidance over the entire nation or only over Moses.

Verse 16: Ralbag, like the Bekhor Shor, reads the phrase "and I and Your nation will be distinguished" as the outcome of God's going with the nation ["...is it not in Your going with us **that** we will be distinguished..."] rather than as a separate request.

Verse 17: As a continuation of verse 13 ["See that this nation is Yours"], Ralbag reveals his radical ideological views regarding providence in his interpretation of this passage. He notes that God **still** does not answer Moses' plea on behalf of the nation but only complies to Moses' personal request in v.13. He draws on the linguistic parallel of the two verses to join this response to the request in v.13: "I will do this very thing that you said [i.e. to give you knowledge of the ways] because you have found favour in My eyes and I have known you by name **just as you noted when you asked of Me this request.**" On the other hand,

God does not comply to the plea on behalf of the community because they are not worthy of this degree of providence. Ralbag verifies this truth by quoting the end of v.19: “Providence will only adhere to the person worthy of it, as it says “I will be gracious to those whom I am gracious” [and not to those whom I do not favour]¹²⁰. Through this exegesis, Ralbag limits the scope of God’s compliance to Moses alone. Significantly, Moses’ request for the nation is never granted as a mysterious act of favour. Ralbag notes, that not until God “straightens out” Israel later (in chapter 34) so that they become worthy of it, do they receive providential guidance.

Verse 18: Because of God’s compliance, Moses now adds a further request- to see the divine Glory in its essence. In v.20, God responds to Moses in the negative.

Verse 19: Like the Rambam, God informs Moses, in this verse, how he will grant Moses’ plea of v.13 to know God’s providential ways. He will provide Moses with the knowledge of His ‘goodness’ or providential ways in a prophetic vision. The Ralbag interprets the final phrase of the verse [“I will be gracious...”] as an epitome of God’s revelation to Moses:

From this [ie. the passing over] you will gain an understanding of My providential ways and you will understand that I will be gracious **in the future** only in the manner in which I have been gracious **in the past**...

The content of the revelation will thus correct Moses’ erroneous thinking that a person or nation can receive the gift of providential guidance without becoming worthy of it through his own efforts.

Verses 21-23: In his exegesis to v.21, the Ralbag offers a philosophical reformulation of the midrashic reading of *makom* as *Shekhina*: “And God said: “There is an aspect of Me [*makom eetee*] [which you can apprehend] by standing on the rock (this being a place

¹²⁰ The source of this comment is R’ Yose in Berakhot 7a. Note how the Ralbag uses this exegesis for his own purposes.

amenable to prophetic inspiration).” It is interesting to note that While Maimonides also takes the word *makom* metaphorically, he interprets the meaning as a “rank in theoretical speculation”¹²¹ rather than, as Ralbag remarks, an “aspect of divinity”. For the Ralbag, although man cannot know God’s essence [You cannot see My ‘face’], he can still know something positive about God. For Maimonides, on the other hand, God does not comply to Moses’ request in v.18- even partially. Instead, he introduces Moses to a new manner of speculation through which to contemplate the divinity.

God thus tells Moses that despite the negative response in v.20, He will still permit Moses to apprehend an “aspect of the divinity” [*nimoos hamooskal asher etzel hashem*] via an apprehension of *akhor*, which the Ralbag defines in v.23 as “the tangible creation that derives from God”. God thus directly reveals to Moses knowledge of two phenomenon: a) providence (v.19) and b) creation (vv. 21-23). Accordingly, Ralbag distinguishes the meanings of *tuvi* (God’s manner of providential guidance) and *akhor* (Tangible creation). For Maimonides, God reveals to Moses knowledge of the creation alone; He therefore equates the meaning of the two terms. In order to indicate the transition from the first to the second revelations, the Ralbag offers an interesting, although forced, interpretation of v.22: “And when **you have fully comprehended Me** [*v’haya ba’avor kvodi*] in your prophetic vision, you will then see Me only through the medium of the intervening cloud [*v’sakoti kapi aleykha*]. The final revelation occurs in v.23 when God finally withdraws this “barrier” and displays to Moses His creation. In philosophic terms, this means, that when Moses ceases to prophecy, he will then have achieved a state in which he will be able to fully comprehend creation. From this comprehensive knowledge of creation, he will be able to arrive at an understanding of *nimoos hamooskal*, an enigmatic term, which would seem to refer to a spiritual existence responsible for the concatenation of creation. By way of his novel comment to *V’haya ba’avor kvodi* as “when the prophetic state will end”, Ralbag is thus able to interpolate into the text a transition from prophetic communication to one of

¹²¹ See Guide I:8

human cognition. The exegetical result of this reading is that after fully comprehending God's providential ways, Moses still achieves a second, post-prophetic insight into creation and its organising principle. This is metaphorically conveyed through the image of the cloud which is "removed from before Moses" directly after the prophetic experience. From a philosophic standpoint, it is also interesting to note that, Moses' apprehension of the divine structure of providence is transmitted prophetically whereas his apprehension of creation is by way of speculation.

V. Rabbi Ovadya Seforno

ANALYTIC COMMENTARY OF SEFORNO'S COMMENTARY:

Verse 12: Seforno remarks that the object of Moses' imperative is unstated in the text. Moses asks that God 'See'-his [trying] situation and not 'hide His face' from him¹²². Moses sets forth the condition for his request in v.13 in the next three clauses of the verse—each of which begins with the word *ata* [You]:

A) "You say: "Take up this nation"...": Seforno identifies the verse in which God charges Moses with this responsibility as 33:1. B) "...And You have not informed me who You will send with me...": According to Seforno, a final preposition to this phrase ["in the desert"] is understood without having to be stated. Moses did know who God planned to send, as He had informed him in 33:2 that it would be an angel. Nevertheless, from the end of that verse [and I will banish the Canaanites...], Moses inferred that the guidance of this angel would only begin in the Land of Israel. His remark is that he still does not know who

¹²² Compare with Ibn Ezra. Contrast to Rashi.

will accompany the nation in the desert. In this way, Seforno resolves the popular difficulty raised by the earlier medieval commentators, namely, why Moses claims that God has not informed him who will guide the nation when numerous verses (23:20, 33:2) indicate that He did just that.

C) "...And You said: "I have known you by name": In his comment on this phrase, Seforno addresses the issue of locating this intratextual reference. Where did God tell Moses this information? Seforno offers a bold interpretation. In point of fact, God never did tell Moses any such thing. Rather, Moses inferred this truth from the fact that God appointed Moses as leader in the desert preferring him over angelic leadership. Seforno proves that Moses' inference is correct because if God had desired to abandon the nation and leave it in the hands of Moses He never would have **appointed** Moses as leader but would have stated his intention of removing His guardianship altogether as in Zecharia 11:9 "Then I said, I will not be your shepherd: that which dies, let it die; and that which is to be cut off, let it be cut off."

Moses is subtly putting forth two points. The first is that since being appointed leader is a sign of divine favour- Moses wishes to obtain special knowledge [Let me know Your ways]. The second is that, in point of fact, Moses would prefer angelic or divine guidance for Israel in the desert and is quite willing to forfeit his privileged position.

Verse 13: Moses finally leads to his request in this verse. Now [*v'ata*] that You have chosen me as leader "let me know of Your ways". As to which 'ways' Moses refers to, Seforno, noting the plural, comments that they are the two 'wondrous' ways of divine knowledge: A) How through His knowledge alone, God brings about existence. B) How, despite God's perfect knowledge of the future, He is still able to allow for the possibility of free will. Seforno's comment, although compatible with the philosophical interests of Renaissance Italy, is somewhat obscure in the context of the pericope. What is the connection between these questions and the fact of Moses' leadership? How does the knowledge of these issues lead to the fulfilment of his political 'program' or the perfection

of his leadership capabilities? Seforno's comment is less an exegetical note than a clear ideological statement reflecting a Renaissance vision of ideal leadership in which political leader ought to demonstrate philosophical proficiency.

Seforno develops the next two clauses along Maimonidean lines. Knowledge of God's ways leads to knowledge of God's essence which in turn stimulates God's favour. In the final phrase of the verse ["See that this nation is Your people"], Moses presents an argument in favour of a positive reply from God: See that this nation is Your people **because through them Your name is known in the world**. It is therefore unfitting- is the implication- that you deprive me of my request on account of their sin. According to Seforno, Moses mentions the nation in order to insure a positive response to his own request¹²³. One central problem in Seforno's exegetical outline of the dialogue is that God does not reply to this request.

Verses 14 and 15: Seforno remarks that, in verse 14, God responds positively to Moses' request to lead the nation in the desert. God promises, however, to go before them [*Panai yelaykhu*] but not among them and only to secure them from all the enemies around [*v'hanikhoti lakh*]. In v.15 Moses retorts that "if You do not go **to the nation to dwell within us even while we are still encamped here** then do not take us up from here" [for it is better for us to stay in the desert than to enter the land without Your *Shekhina* for in such manner, we will, without doubt, be exiled from it]. Moses implies that not only should the divine presence dwell within the nation in the desert but even in the Land of Israel.

Verse 16: The exegesis of Seforno to this verse hinges on his interpretation to the word *Yeevadah* which he understands to mean 'publicly'. Based on this philological note, Seforno weaves a philosophic argument into the fabric of the verse thereby transforming the verse into a reasoned defence rather than a simple reassertion:

¹²³ Contrast Rashi, Ramban, Maimonides.

Even though the angel will banish the [Canannite] nations when we enter the land, how will it be known to the nations of the world¹²⁴ that this is a supernatural event? Is it not commonplace in all wars that one nation overpowers another and then forces them into exile? Is it not in Your walking with us that the nations will perceive the fact that we are distinct from all the nations of the world and therefore refrain from fighting us?

Two issues are at stake, according to Seforno: The perceptions of the nations of the world¹²⁵ and the safety of Israel. Seforno does not comment on v.17, but presumably he would hold that God agrees to Moses' request. Note that for Seforno, as for Maimonides, vv.14-17 function as a sub-dialogue to the two principal requests of Moses in v.13 and 18, centring on the theme of direct divine guidance.

Verse 18: Moses' second request, states Seforno, is to gain a philosophic understanding of how the existence of creation derives from God's existence despite the vast ontological distance between the two. Moses' interest now is metaphysics rather than epistemology.

Verse 19: Seforno contrasts the two first clauses of this verse. On the one hand, God promises to pass before Moses **all** of his goodness- This demonstrates that God does not wish to withhold any knowledge from Moses but will reveal to him everything [*kol*] "in such manner that if you were capable of grasping all of this you would satisfy your request"- even though Moses cannot grasp everything for that matter. On the other hand, God will call out the name 'God' before Moses. This means that he will still teach¹²⁶ Moses a little bit about His existence and ways of goodness. That is, He will limit the abundance of knowledge to make it accessible to Moses. The final two phrases of the verse

¹²⁴ Rashi, on the other hand, reads the word *yeevadah* as 'realized': How else might this finding of favor be realized but through Your going with us...?

¹²⁵ Seforno extends to this pericope the theme of 'non-Israelite perception' - a theme commonly drawn upon by Moses in other instances in which he intercedes on behalf of the nation. See, for example, Ex.32:12.

¹²⁶ Seforno translates v '*karati* as 'I will inform'.

recapitulate the same contrast. On the one hand, God will bestow upon Moses that amount of favour that He gives to those who find favour in His eyes- an amount which is limitless. On the other hand, He will have mercy on Moses- so that he should not die from the brightness of His Glory- just as it is His custom to have mercy upon all those worthy of it. He will protect Moses by placing His hand over him at the time of the revelation.

Verse 20: God responds explicitly to Moses' request stating that the only reason that he will not be able to comprehend [God's ways fully] is because of his limited faculties - and not because of any limits in the divine overflow¹²⁷. For Seforno, as for Rashi, (but contra to Rambam), verses 19 and 20 are responses to the same question, namely that of Verse 18.

Verse 23: According to Seforno, the seeing of *akhor* is the apprehension of all existence 'under' God's existence. This, Moses may apprehend. But the apprehension of *panim*, that is, how all that is apart from God derives its existence **from** God (as Moses requested to know in v.18) - Moses may not see.

¹²⁷ Contrast to Rashi and Rashbam

CONCLUSION

The exegetical process moves through three distinct stages: Identification of a textual difficulty, the formal resolution of that difficulty (i.e. the strategy utilised to answer the difficulty) and the exegetical content. As an example of this process, let us turn to one of the exegetical knots in our pericope. In chapter 33 verse 12, Moses says to God “You have not told me whom you wish to send with me”. In this case, the textual difficulty is posed by the commentators in a unanimous fashion. How can Moses claim that God did not inform him when, in 33:2 of the same chapter, God specifically said “I shall send before you an angel...”. The formal resolution of this difficulty differs among the commentators. Rashi, perhaps in the most far-reaching of approaches, states that Moses’ statement is not one of fact but of opinion. Indeed, God **did** inform Moses- but Moses considers it **as if** God has not informed him. The exegetical content of this comment is that Moses is dissatisfied with the divine plan to send angelic guidance and this brings him to dismiss the plan on behalf of the nation. At what points do ideological interests intersect in this process? Let us bring into focus each of the three stages in order to help clarify this point.

In the first stage, the commentator identifies a textual difficulty. The source of his difficulty may be philological, contextual, inter-textual or ideological in nature. For example, when Rashi comments that the meaning of *v'neefleenu* in v.16 is “Let us be separate...as in “and God separated [*v'heeflah*] the Israelite cattle from the Egyptian cattle””, he is addressing a philological difficulty in the text, namely, what the meaning of *V'neefleenu* is. A contextual difficulty arises when a text which is coherent unto itself either contradicts or does not coherently precede or follow another text. Moses’ statement “And now, if I have found favour in Your eyes” [v.13] poses a contextual problem; While

the statement is internally consistent and coherent, it does not make sense in the light of v.12. In v.12, Moses states unambiguously that God had said to him that he had found favour in the eyes of the Almighty. What then is the doubt that has arisen in v.13, such that Moses finds it necessary to verify the truth of this statement? It is this contextual issue that Rashi resolves when he interpolates the words *emet she* [it is true that] after the word *v'ata eem* [and now if]. The effect of Rashi's gloss is to shift Moses' doubt from the veracity of the statement to its sincerity.

An inter-textual question emerges when a discrete textual unit contradicts a textual unit in another pericope or refers to another textual unit which apparently does not exist. When Moses says to God: "and You said: I have known you by name", the inter-textual issue becomes that of identifying the source of Moses' claim. When Moses says that God has not informed him who He plans to send with him, the commentator must grapple with the dilemma of resolving an inter-textual contradiction with Ex. 33:2.

Ideological difficulties emerge on the exegetical level when a unit of text does not cohere with the commentators' ideological sensibilities. Saadya Gaon's philosophical axiom that it is impossible that any person should see the Creator leads him to reinterpret Moses' request to gaze upon the divine glory as a request that God show him the "created light" that He reveals when He wishes to "verify" the divine origin of prophetic messages. It should be noted that there is a degree of ambiguity when 'classifying' an exegetical difficulty as ideologically grounded. Bekhor Shor's remark to verse 22, for example, appears to resolve an inter-textual difficulty rather than a purely ideological one:

Know that this [i.e. the reference to God's 'back' in v.22] is a metaphor- for there is no 'back' on High even among the angels, as it is written: "There are four faces to each one" [Ezekial 1:6]. This means that in every direction they have a face (and therefore no back).

To clarify this ambiguity we would need to know if Bekhor Shor would be bothered by the glaring anthropomorphism if the text in Ezekial did not exist. In this case, Bekhor Shor shows his true colours. In his comment to verse 23, Bekhor Shor expresses a preference for

his philological interpretation to *Panim* and *Akhor* on the basis that “this [approach] is preferable, for [according to it] Moses did not gaze upon the *Shekhina* at all.”

It would be neat and easy to theorise that ideology only plays a role in determining exegetical difficulties when it is purely the ideological interests of the commentator that force a question from the text. This, however, would be an oversimplification. Very often, ideology is at the root of contextual or inter-textual difficulties as well. Rashbam raises an inter-textual objection to the request of Moses to gaze upon the *Shekhina* in v.18.

Ask yourself! How could Moses have thought to take enjoyment from the splendour of the *Shekhina* when the Torah itself praises him [for his reverence]: “Moses covered his face for he was afraid to look upon the Lord” (Ex. 3:6).

On the face of it, Rashbam appears to ask a very obvious question based on an earlier text in Exodus. But looks can be deceiving. How does Rashbam know that the Torah intends to praise Moses by recounting that he turned away from the burning bush? In fact, one opinion in the Talmud criticises Moses for turning away from looking upon the burning bush. Rashbam is thus not quoting a textual fact but rather his interpretation of that textual fact. His question in our pericope only emerges because of this prior judgement of Moses’ character. In discerning the impact of ideology on exegesis it is thus important not only to identify exegetical difficulties which are clearly raised because of ideological objections but also exegetical difficulties which are raised on the basis or presumption of imbedded ideological readings.

In the second stage of the exegetical process, the commentator must formally solve the difficulty that he has raised by assigning a function to the text in question. The commentator may employ tradition in assigning a function to the text or he may construct an original function. The decision to follow the traditional or innovative approach usually mirrors an allegiance of the commentator towards tradition or innovation in his hermeneutic. An illustrative example to this aspect of the exegetical process is evident in the commentators solutions to a difficulty that arises with v.17. In that verse, God pronounces to Moses that He will grant “even that thing that Moses has said”. To what new

request is God acceding to that Moses has not yet made? On the basis of this question, Rashi maintains that the preceding phrase in v.16 [*V'neefleenu ani v'amkha...*] is a request unto itself and not just the continuation Moses' speech in the first part of the verse. Not coincidentally, his interpretation is in agreement with the talmudic tradition that Moses made a further request beginning with the words *v'neefleenu* that God not let his *Shekhina* rest upon the other nations of the world. In Bekhor Shor's resolution to this same exegetical difficulty, he provides an alternative approach that does not concur with the talmudic reading. Bekhor Shor asserts that in v.17, God complies to Moses' request of v.13 ["Let me know Your ways"] to know the divine attributes. He, thereby, leaves the phrase beginning with *v'neefleenu* un-transformed as a new request. Bekhor Shor's resistance to the traditional reading of the phrase reveals a spirit of critical independence in his exegetical approach. Although his decision to innovate rather than follow traditional structures does not introduce us to his particular philosophical or ideological orientation it does bespeak a readiness on his part to embed his ideological approach into his commentary.

In the final and most apparent stage of the exegetical process, the commentator must infuse the formal structure of his resolution with an exegetical content. As in the second stage, the commentator may either resort to traditional sources or innovate new approaches.

In resolving the contextual difficulty as to what earlier request of Moses the divine compliance in v.17 refers to, Rashi and Rashbam select the end of v.16 as a "new request". In this sense, both commentators formally answer the difficulty in congruence with the talmudic position. However, when turning to the exegetical content of each scholar, their differences become clear. Rashi practically quotes the Talmud when he remarks that Moses' second request was that God rest His *Shekhina* only upon Israel and not upon the other nations of the world. In contrast to Rashi, Rashbam, who is consistent with his reliance on a *peshat* reading that is independent of rabbinic tradition, desists from interpolating the talmudic version of Moses' request. According to Rashbam, basing his comment on a linguistic redundancy, Moses requested that just as the nation as a whole should be distinguished from the nations of the world in God's walking directly with them,

so too should he be distinguished as a trustworthy prophet and statesman from all other individuals in the nation of Israel.

While it is at this stage in the exegetical process that the ideological sensibilities of the commentator come to the fore in the most obvious way, it would be a mistake to limit the contribution of ideology to cases of exegetical innovation. Even when resorting to rabbinical sources, a commentator may change or shape them according to his own exegetical or ideological preferences. In Rashi's explanation of Moses' request to know God's ways (v.13), he departs from the Talmudic tradition, quoted in the name of R'Yose, that Moses beseeched God for a comprehensive knowledge of His ways of reward and punishment. According to Rashi, Moses wished to know the nature of the special, personal, reward awaiting him for "finding favour in God's eyes". Although, Rashi sustains the talmudic theme of Moses' request (i.e. knowledge of reward), he blends the particular content to fit with the immediate context of the verse.

From these examples, it should be evident that to measure the extent to which ideology impacts on exegesis is a very complex task. From the very selection of the text that the commentator chooses to deliberate upon, to his articulation of the difficulties in that text he may already steer his exegesis along ideological lines. Upon formally resolving the textual difficulty and bringing to it an exegetical content, the commentator will almost certainly bring to play over-arching ideological interests in his interpretation of text. In order to meet the demands of exegetical honesty and philosophical integrity, every good commentator must face the text with creativity and originality. This is exactly what we find when we explore the variety of exegetical approaches to Exodus 33:12-23.

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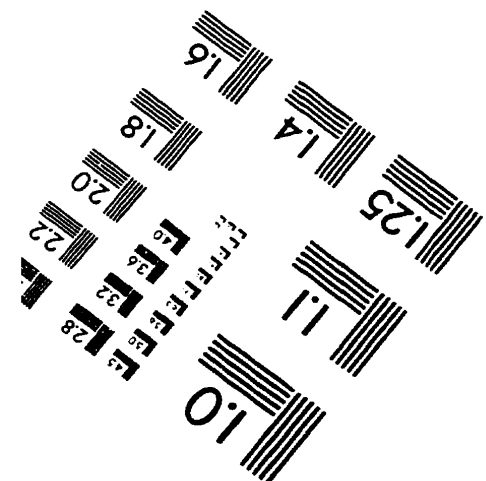
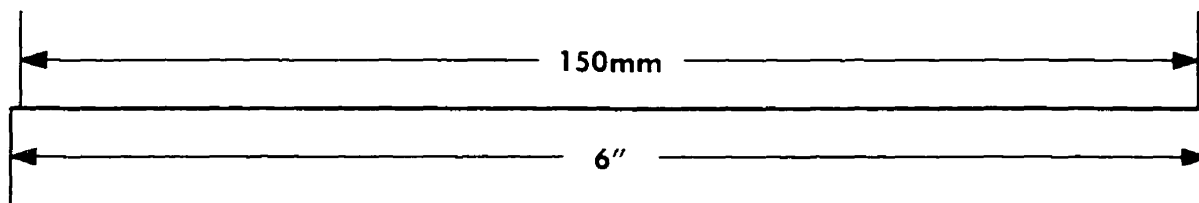
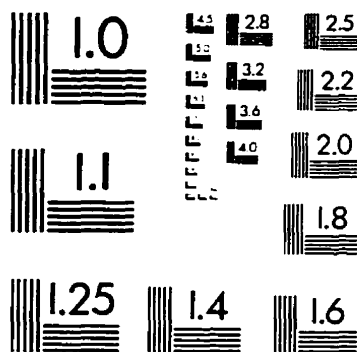
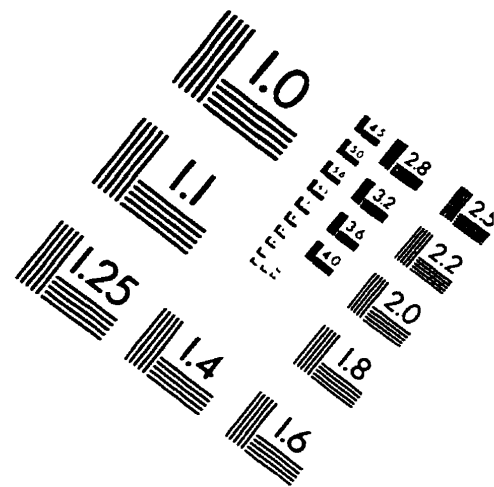
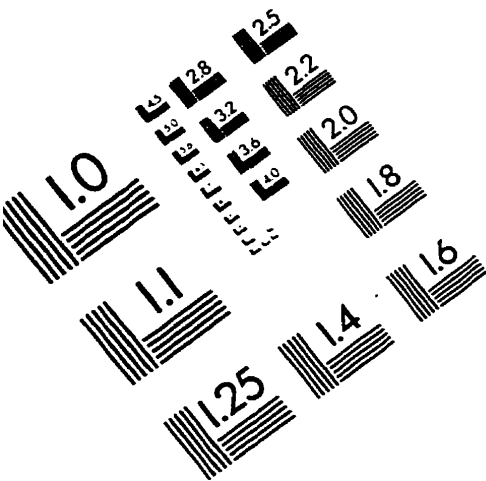
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