

THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY AND KABBALAH  
IN THE WORKS OF RASHBA

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## ABSTRACT

Rashba, in the course of his discussions of the theological problems entailed in the phrases 'olam ke-minhago noheg and ein mazzal le-yisrael, was consistently sensitive to philosophic problems, and took pains to show that Jewish beliefs did not contravene the Law of Contradiction. On the other hand, he vigorously maintained the superiority of tradition over speculative reasoning, and he could not tolerate the fact that contemporary allegorists gave axiological supremacy to speculative studies.

Rashba's attempt to justify segulot within a natural framework demonstrates his sensitivity to the demands of the contemporary natural philosophy. He refused, however, to countenance the thought that the Rabbis of the Talmud would be mistaken concerning a scientific issue that possessed halakhic ramifications. Although Rashba possessed a good deal of scientific knowledge, we do not find him to be an advocate of the pursuit of the sciences in non-halakhic contexts.

Rashba's rejection of the supremacy of philosophic categories was not supplemented by a full-fledged kabbalistic interpretation of Judaism. The content of his Kabbalah was that of the Gerona school at a time when other forms were developing, and he chose not to expand its contours. The form of his writing was characterized by

extreme esotericism. His Commentary On Aggadah contains both philosophic-allegorical interpretations and kabbalistic hints to the same passage; this feature of his work demonstrates that he must be classified as neither a kabbalist nor a philosopher, if either of these two terms designates an exclusive system of categories through which one views reality.

In a letter where Rashba declared that Kabbalah, and not physics and metaphysics, is the substance of ma'aseh bereshit and ma'aseh merkavah, he nonetheless suggested that Jews would be better served if they studied the exoteric Torah. By doing so, they would be able to perform the mitzvot in a more perfect manner and be protected by G-d.

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## Introduction

The aim of this study is to depict the personal posture of Rabbi Solomon ben ibn Adret (Rashba) of Barcelona (ca. 1235-1310) with respect to the philosophic and kabbalistic issues that the Jews of his day faced. Rashba himself nowhere presented a systematic exposition of his view; one who attempts to formulate what Rashba's precise positions were must collate the various statements scattered throughout his works.

In 1863, Joseph Perles published R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth: Sein Leben und seine Schriften. He mentioned Rashba's opposition to R. Abraham Abulafia and described in detail the exchange of letters in Minhat Kenaot, but did not discuss the kabbalistic element of his thought. In this century, much has been written on the last stage of the Maimonidean controversy and the ban on studying physics and metaphysics that Rashba signed; these studies, however, have not analyzed Rashba's personal integration of philosophical propositions. One study which attempted to analyze his personal posture was published by J. L. Teicher. Entitled "The Mediaeval Mind,"<sup>1</sup> it tried to explain why the appearance of the "prophet of Avila" caused an intellectual crisis for Rashba.<sup>2</sup> Our study will attempt to delineate the contours of Rashba's thought in both the philosophic and

kabbalistic fields.

The primary sources we will use are the texts of Rashba himself. Not everything he wrote, however is germane to this study. The student of Rashba's talmudic works knows that he generally skips any discussion of extrahalakhic issues. (The few comments he makes in his commentary to Berakhot in the name of the Geonim are the exceptions that prove the rule.) There are a number of responsa, however, where he expresses his opinion on a variety of philosophic and kabbalistic issues. The polemics that Perles published provide additional information, and the material found in Minhat Kenaot is important as well.

Rashba utilized both philosophic and kabbalistic categories in his commentary to Aggadah; Hiddushei Ha-Rashba 'al Aggadot Ha-Shas, ed. S. M. Weinberger<sup>3</sup> provides material that scholars have not previously utilized. (L. A. Feldman has published critical editions of Rashba's comments on the aggadic passages in four tractates.) Several of his kabbalistic interpretations of biblical verses have been recorded by the kabbalists who "explained the secrets of Ramban."

Rashba, of course, was the student of Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Ramban) in both halakhah and kabbalah. Much work has been done on Ramban's philosophic and kabbalistic thought, and the recent conference on Ramban at Harvard

emphasized the diversity of his thought. Four of the essays (Berger, Idel, Safran, Septimus) all contained a common denominator: Scholem's contention that Ramban exclusively followed kabbalistic categories must be modified. Our methodology in studying Rashba<sup>4</sup> will entail an analysis of the question of whether or not he diverged from Ramban's positions.<sup>5</sup>

Our findings will not be revolutionary; they will, however, allow us to pinpoint Rashba's place more clearly on the philosophic and kabbalistic maps.

## Chapter One

Rashba's Affirmation and Critique  
of Philosophic Principles

The Law of Contradiction and Prophecy

In a famous responsum, Rashba described his reaction to the "prophet of Avila" who appeared in 1295. He expressed incredulity at the thought that an ignorant man could write voluminous works under angelic inspiration over a period of four years.<sup>1</sup>

J. L. Teicher, in an article entitled "The Mediaeval Mind," viewed Rashba's dilemma as the result of his (ultimately futile) attempt to reconcile Rambam's view that only one who possessed certain moral and intellectual attributes could achieve prophecy with the biblical verses that ascribe prophecy to simple men such as Manoah, father of Samson.<sup>2</sup> Actually, one can raise the dilemma even if one is unaware of the philosophical backdrop. The Talmud states (Nedarim 38a):

אין הקדוש מטהב עמואל אלא עם אלוהים ואין אלוהים מטהב עמואל אלא עם אלוהים.

"The Holy One, blessed be He, causes His Divine Presence to rest only upon him who is strong, wealthy, wise and meek."

The medieval Talmudic commentators noticed the obvious discrepancy between this condition and the biblical

accounts. The solution, positing the category of transient prophecy which need not meet the requirements of tractate Nedarim and which describes the nature of many biblical prophets, easily harmonizes the biblical and Talmudic texts.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, with Rambam's explanation of the requirements needed for prophecy, "strong, wealthy, wise and meek" take on an entirely new meaning. What would otherwise be the arbitrary requirements of law, conventions that G-d imposed, are instead classified with the other immutable laws of nature.

The nature of the universal Jewish prophetic experience at the Revelation at Mount Sinai is an issue that many medieval Jewish thinkers dealt with.<sup>4</sup> According to Rambam's prerequisites for prophecy, it seems impossible that six hundred thousand men, not to mention women and children, could fulfill the requirements necessary. Rashba, in his responsum on the matter,<sup>5</sup> argued that all human beings are by nature prophets in potentia. Hence G-d could perform one of his miracles and turn any person into one that possessed the attributes needed for prophecy. As animals, however, do not possess the attributes needed for prophecy even in potentia, for G-d to bestow prophecy upon a donkey would violate the Law of Contradiction and is impossible.

As Harry Wolfson has shown,<sup>6</sup> most medieval thinkers accepted the Law of Contradiction in some respects. The disagreements between them concerned the scope of this law, a matter that itself was based upon the axioms that the different philosophers maintained. The mutakallimun held that G-d could produce anything that the intellect can imagine; only such unimaginable phenomena as a square with three sides would be impossible. At the other end of the spectrum, orthodox Aristotelians claimed that every violation of nature was itself a logical impossibility, and hence G-d could not perform such a feat. Al Ghazali, who denied the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of matter, distinguished between logical impossibilities and natural impossibilities; the possibility of changes in nature was itself validated by the act of creation, and was not illogical. A recent article has pointed out that the categories in which al-Ghazali framed this distinction were themselves Aristotelian ones. Thus, he fully accepted the assumption of the continuity of matter and the theory of identity and change.<sup>7</sup> Rambam also distinguished between natural and logical impossibilities within Aristotelian categories.<sup>8</sup> Rashba's use of the principle here shows that he did not limit its application to logical contradictions based upon categories of apprehension. One could not be an animal and a prophet at the same time.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the

philosophers maintained that one could not be an ignorant person and a prophet at the same time. Rashba's defense of the Sinaiatic experience of prophecy necessitated the erection of a two-tiered structure within a person. Thus the ignorant man could retain his identity and at the same time receive prophetic inspiration.

As a miraculous phenomenon, the bestowal of prophecy upon ignorant humans was, according to Rashba, necessarily temporary. Hence he was bewildered at the alleged activities of the prophet of Avila. The length of time during which this prophet conducted his activities made it difficult to classify his supposed prophetic behavior as temporary. Rashba did not resolve the issue, and demonstrated his skepticism toward reports of miraculous activities.

Teicher emphasized that Rashba's predicament was the result of his reconciliation of the biblical and Maimonidean outlooks concerning prophecy, which did not solve the problem at hand. We wish to point out, however, that his skepticism as to the veracity of the incident is consistent with the position he maintained in his responsum to R. David ben Zakhri and dovetailed with his antipathy towards R. Abraham Abulafia and his "ecstatic Kabbalah."<sup>10</sup> As a conservative both in the fields of philosophy and Kabbalah, he sought to prevent excesses that could be wrought from the

abuse of either field. One with such opinions could be expected to cast doubt upon the veracity of stories concerning one who purported to engage in miraculous activities. Moreover, Rashba was not the first medieval figure to display such a cautious attitude. Gerson Cohen has shown that although the Andalusian tradition included messianic calculations by the rabbinic elite, the messianic movements of Spain were strictly popular uprisings.<sup>11</sup> Thus Rashba was, in a sense, simply following the response of men like Rambam, who, on the practical level, charted a course of "elitist-rabbinic-quietist-millennarism."<sup>12</sup>

#### Speculative Reasoning and Tradition

In one responsum, Rashba set forth his position concerning the proper method with which a Jew should resolve contradictions between the results of philosophical speculation and traditional explanations of biblical and rabbinic texts. Although his point of departure was the specific issue of whether the world will end after six thousand years, he seized the opportunity to give a coherent presentation of his general world view. His letter to R. David ben Zakhri<sup>13</sup> of Fez is found in many manuscripts of Rashba's commentary to Aggadah, as well as in the manuscripts of his collected responsa. It is a clear example of his affirmation and critique of philosophic



principles, as well as an example of his kabbalistic thought.

Averroes had distinguished between demonstrative arguments that are fit for philosophers, dialectical arguments fit for theologians, and rhetorical arguments meant for the masses.<sup>14</sup> Rambam attacked the Mutakallimun because he felt that they employed arguments that were not demonstrative.<sup>15</sup> His own attempt to show that Aristotle had not demonstrated the eternity of the world supplemented his wish to show that the doctrines of Judaism were philosophically defensible, and he admitted that he would have accepted a demonstrative proof of the world's eternity.<sup>16</sup>

R. Abba Mari of Lunel had attested that Averroes' commentaries to Aristotle and his summaries of Aristotle's works were the primary texts that contemporary students of philosophy studied, and that Averroes had presented several demonstrations of the Aristotelian position concerning the eternity of the world.<sup>17</sup> This doctrine entailed that nature's laws were immutable, and miracles, including the Divine Revelation of the Torah that took place at Mount Sinai, were deemed philosophically impossible. No contemporary Jewish thinker, it seems was able to refute the Averroists on a point by point basis. Traditionally accepted and well-known beliefs were perceived as an

epistemologically sound source of knowledge by medieval philosophers only within a system that allegorized sacred texts in order to eliminate apparent impossibilities;<sup>18</sup> the defense of classical Judaism, however, rested upon attempts to maintain the validity of traditions based upon the literal interpretations of Jewish texts. At issue was not just the relationship between faith and reason, but the very definition of the Jewish faith itself.

In his discussion of the sixteenth century figure Elijah del Medigo, Alfred Ivry has written: "While rhetorical and dialectical arguments lack the analytical necessity of demonstrative propositions and are therefore probabilistic by nature, the unassailability of their premises grants them a status akin to certain truth."<sup>19</sup> Thus in his book Behinat Ha-Dat, del Medigo said, in effect, "The truths of Judaism are not demonstrative ones, but it doesn't matter." Although the "double truth" theory could theoretically solve the problem, historians have shown that medieval thinkers did not, on the whole, adopt that approach.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, this position would not be a convincing argument in the eyes of a rationalist-allegorist who possessed a unified world view. Why adopt a position of intellectual schizophrenia?

Rashba's frequent references to impossibilities that cannot be contravened forces us to believe that he took the

idea of an ordered universe just as seriously as he accepted the doctrines of creation ex nihilo and miracles. Although he knew he could not defeat the Averroistic system by demonstrative arguments, he did "poke holes" in that system and with rhetorical arguments pointed the way to a structure that would validate the traditional truths of Judaism.

Rashba started his responsum by quoting R. David's comment that his position that the world will end contradicted Rambam's position in Moreh Nevukhim.<sup>21</sup> He then launched into an analysis of the different modes of knowledge that philosophy and religion draw upon.

אינו בי"ו דא"י לזון עמיהו מצד התורה האנושית ולפסוק אורג' מן  
הסדרה, דאמת התורה גמלה שאין קצב עמוק, ע"י שאין התורה עקומה אלא  
מן החושש והנהגה הטהרה, וא"א כדא"י השלשים דלמי מטמין כלם חיים הדין  
וכן הא"י דכלם בוסתן זה מנהג אמת ומידי, אדם אמת, ע"י ש"י  
כן אינו אלא מצד הקדשה המסורה דין של ישאל מפי חכמים ע"י הוראה  
בתקלות, וכ"י שחקים או הנמצא בתמונה (כ"י-הנחמה) ע"י גמולת התורה,  
כ"י התורה עמיהו מן הנמצא; נב צד דבור ע"י יוסף, ד"א אצ"י חז"ל הנבט  
ע"י ע"י ד"י הנבט האמת, כמו שלפי יוסף, אצ"י חז"ל הנבט הנבט

. . . If we would come to judge these [matters] with the method of human inquiry and decide them by speculation, in truth, inquiry would successfully prove that the world exists in perpetuity. For inquiry is based upon the senses and the custom of nature, and we see that the spheres have not changed at all from the day of their creation, and the earth as well goes according to constant custom. But, in truth, he who claims such [that the world will end after six

thousand years] does so only because of the tradition in the hands of the Jews that has been received from their teachers and that has accompanied the teachings of biblical verses. And any [point] that has been ascertained by tradition or prophecy cannot be defeated by inquiry, for inquiry is lower than prophecy; this is a clear point that not one of the believers in religion, and certainly the believers in the Jewish religion, doubt, just as no one doubts the miracles that occurred to our forefathers in contravention of the laws of nature.<sup>22</sup>

The terms kabbalah (tradition) and sevarah (speculation) are pregnant with meaning, as Rashba's students warned other kabbalists not to engage in sevarah.<sup>23</sup> Here Rashba as well combined two different modes of knowledge: nevuah (prophecy) and kabbalah. Even if one grants that nevuah possesses higher epistemological value than sevarah, kabbalah does not necessarily stand on firmer ground than sevarah does. By equating the axioms of philosophy with sevarah while simultaneously equating prophecy with traditions concerning the content of prophecy and then with tradition in general, he "proved" that philosophy should be relegated to a position beneath tradition.

Rashba proceeded to undercut the primacy of speculative thought in another fashion.

וְכִי אֵלֵךְ וְכִי אֶזְכֹּר שֶׁאֵין מִקִּוּי דִּי צִדְקָה וְיִשְׁרָאוֹת רַק מִן  
 לְבַח וְיִשְׁרָאוֹת דְּלִילָה כִּי מִהֵנָּה שֶׁאֵין כֶּסֶף וְכִי מִן מִצְרַיִם  
 קְאָמְרוּת לְמַעַן מִצְרַיִם מִקִּיּוּמָא דְּיִשְׁרָאוֹת שֶׁלֹּא יִגְדֹק וְכִי מִצְרַיִם  
 וְכִי מִן מִצְרַיִם שֶׁאֵין מִן מִצְרַיִם וְכִי מִן מִצְרַיִם וְכִי מִן מִצְרַיִם  
 אֵלֵךְ וְכִי אֶזְכֹּר שֶׁאֵין מִן מִצְרַיִם וְכִי מִן מִצְרַיִם וְכִי מִן מִצְרַיִם

In truth, no one will deny anything which is a tradition among our people except one who has become convinced of the impossibility of anything that is against nature. . . . Such [people] insist that there can be no level of truth higher than that of their inquiry, though they believe that G-d, may His Name be blessed, and His Wisdom are one, and they believe as well that no man can understand His Essence: since He and His Wisdom are One, and He can be comprehended only by Himself, His Wisdom cannot be comprehended [by man].<sup>24</sup>

Rashba presented the philosophers' assumptions of an immutable order in the universe as a presumption to know G-d's Wisdom as it manifests itself in the world, and as G-d's Wisdom is equated with His Essence, this amounts to the impossible claim of knowing His Essence. This argument as well combined logically distinct issues; namely, the rationality of the laws of nature and their inscrutability. Rambam in his introduction to Perush Ha-Mishnah (Seder Zeraim) stated that no man that possessed speculative gifts but was not a prophet could discern the full measure of the teleological benefits that G-d implanted in all His creatures.<sup>25</sup> Yet, although the plan of nature may be ultimately inscrutable, it may still be rational and follow certain laws (in this case, those of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics). Thus, one who affirms that the universe is bound by these laws does not have to deny their inscrutability, and is not necessarily purporting to know G-d's Wisdom.

For his next argument, Rashba raised the anomaly of magnetism within the Aristotelian system. Like the

Ptolemaic planetary cosmology, magnetism was a phenomenon that did not fit the Aristotelian framework. In a short article on Rashba's position toward philosophy, Lawrence Kaplan noted the difference between this argument of Rashba and the preceding ones. Here he did not denigrate philosophy per se, only the particular structure of current thought.<sup>26</sup> He implied that the truths of Judaism were in consonance with some natural philosophy, if not the Aristotelian one.

A close look at this argument reveals that Rashba used rhetorical argumentation here too. Concerning Aristotle's (grudging) acceptance of the reality of magnetism he wrote: "In truth, had this been related to Aristotle, he would have certainly denied it, if the matter had not been publicized [shenitparsem]."<sup>27</sup> The word shenitparsem reminds one of the term min ha-mefursamot (from those facts which are well-known) which is the medieval Hebrew phrase that describes tradition as a source of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Yet a distinction exists between magnetism and tradition. The former exists as a fact of nature; what has not been demonstrated is that a single coherent structure of thought can integrate this phenomenon with the other laws of nature.<sup>29</sup> Facts based upon tradition depend upon the literal interpretation of texts for their validity, a premise which the allegorists challenged. By his use of the

term shenitparsem Rashba attempted to increase the soundness of tradition as a source of knowledge.

The argument from magnetism itself should be seen against two other backdrops: the medieval Jewish position concerning magnetism, and other anomalies that the Aristotelian system faced. Harry Wolfson traced the sources of four distinct positions that medieval thinkers took in explaining magnetism. Magnets contradicted the Aristotelian law that every efficient cause of motion must itself be moved while producing motion in something else. The various explanations suggested either a special property in the iron (itself formulated in two ways), corporeal particles emanating from the magnet (a view which Wolfson traced to the Atomists), or a special property in the magnet.<sup>30</sup> Wolfson saw Crescas' view as part of his general tendency to take the first steps toward constructing a natural system that eliminated heterogeneity and propounded homogeneity within all the forms of nature.<sup>31</sup> Our point here is that Rashba used a theme that many Jewish thinkers were aware of to defend Judaism from philosophical doctrines.

Rambam himself attacked Aristotle on the incompatibility of his metaphysics with Ptolemy's cosmological scheme for interpreting the motions of the planets. Leo Strauss<sup>32</sup> and Shlomo Pines<sup>33</sup> noted Rambam's use of this argument as a means of impugning Aristotle's

authority in general, and consequently, allowing for the possibility of a system that included the doctrine of creation ex nihilo.<sup>34</sup> Some Christian scholars brought proof from magnets for the existence of demons, and in Minhat Kenaot, Rashba utilized the fact that certain segulot have medicinal properties as an argument for allowing for the use of amulets.<sup>35</sup>

Although Rashba showed the insufficiency of the existing Aristotelian framework, he did not claim that nature does not possess a system of laws. "Their wisdom does not apprehend the true nature of existence" implies that segulot presents a problem only according to Aristotelian physics. In the (true) system that allows for miracles, segulot also have their proper place.<sup>36</sup> Rashba added a flourish to his remarks with his quote from Psalms 19:8: "The testimony of the L-rd is sure, making wise the simple."<sup>37</sup> "Knowledge" that philosophers possess is necessarily incomplete. The perfect knowledge is based upon the tradition of the Torah.

In analyzing the assumptions that lay behind Rashba's approach, we should examine the options open to him. What were the solutions available to one who confronted the seeming irreconcilability of philosophical axioms and religious beliefs? Stuart MacClintock<sup>38</sup> has shown that Western medieval thinkers adopted three distinct



approaches with regard to this question. Some philosophers maintained that reason is not apodictic, and that reason necessarily yields to faith as a source of knowledge.<sup>39</sup> Such a position could be framed by the statement that a philosophical doctrine is not "truth," but the opinion of a philosopher. Jewish medieval thinkers had frequently resorted to this line of reasoning, using the fact that philosophers possessed divergent opinions on a host of issues as a proof for their claim that "philosophy" is merely the conclusions of the philosophers.<sup>40</sup>

Another solution was to revert to the Augustinian approach and maintain that a hierarchical ordering of the disciplines of philosophy and theology existed. In other words, the truths of natural philosophy were necessarily of a lower order than those of revealed religion. This rejection of a "horizontal" ordering of the two disciplines in favor of a "vertical" structure facilitated the assimilation of a qualified natural philosophy into religious doctrine. Man's attempts to lend coherence to the natural order are essentially incomplete, for they are the products of his finite wisdom, not of Divine Revelation. The advantage of such an approach is that its adherents could maintain their belief in natural philosophy as such; they would simultaneously claim that certain contradictions with theological doctrines arrived only as a result of their

flawed intellects.<sup>41</sup>

A third approach entailed the maintenance of the "vertical" relationship between philosophy and theology, as Saint Thomas Aquinas held.<sup>42</sup> The truths of natural philosophy are of the same order as the truths of revealed theology, and one does not need theological categories to arrive at correct conclusions concerning natural philosophy. As the degree of truth that philosophy yields is of the same order with that of faith, the fact that they do not contradict each other is not due to any necessary inferiority that philosophic truths possess. It is due, rather, to the fact that both systems are complementary parts of one ultimate Truth.<sup>43</sup> This approach, however, can easily lead to the "double truth" position.<sup>44</sup>

In light of these categories, we can now adequately classify Rashba's comments. His phrase, "any [proposition] that tradition or prophecy has maintained cannot be defeated by inquiry"<sup>45</sup> established the "Augustinian hierarchy of disciplines." Hence he emphasized as well that "His wisdom cannot be discerned."<sup>46</sup> Humans possessing finite intellects and using the tools of human speculation can never discern the full measure of the Law of G-d. Although Rashba also pointed out that the Aristotelian physics could not adequately explain the phenomena of magnetism and of segulot, this line of reasoning did not form the main core

of his argument. Rashba was intent on affirming that the disciplines of natural philosophy and theology (which necessarily included traditional interpretation of religious texts) should not be classified taxonomically but cumulatively. That is, Jewish traditions possessed higher epistemological value than results of speculation. With this structure he attempted to defeat the challenge that philosophy posed to Judaism without having to mandate the abandonment of philosophic principles per se.

The various problems that Aristotelian philosophy faced were, of course, raised in purely philosophical contexts as well as in the midst of the struggle to harmonize faith and reason. The attacks upon Aristotle paved the way for what Alexandre Koyré called "the mathematization of nature"<sup>47</sup> and the eventual overthrow of Aristotle by Galileo and Newton.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, one opinion holds that precisely in Italy, where the universities did not have chairs in theology, did the conditions most propitious for this revolution arise.<sup>49</sup> Yet Rashba did not consider the pursuit of scientific issues to be of any value per se, and did not even care for discovering the reasons for mitzvot.<sup>50</sup> His purpose in marshaling the arguments from magnetism and segulot was to bolster the validity of traditional beliefs in the face of philosophical challenges. As the ways of G-d are necessarily inscrutable, human effort

would be better spent on a subject that one could master, and in a letter to the Jews of Provence he advised them to utilize their time studying Torah.<sup>51</sup>

After he established the supremacy of tradition, Rashba proceeded to draw guidelines resolving the crucial issue: when does one reinterpret a text to conform with philosophic doctrine, and when does one maintain a text's literal meaning? Rashba adopted a moderate stance, one quite similar to that advocated by R. Yediah Ha-Penini in his Ketav Hitnatzlut and one that he himself followed in his Perush La-Aggadot.<sup>52</sup> A proven logical impossibility would mandate reinterpretation of the text, though Rashba indicated his dread of such situations by employing the Hebrew idiom halilah ( חלילה ).<sup>53</sup> The possibility of miracles as proclaimed by the tradition, however, allows one to proudly maintain the traditional interpretations in the face of the laws of natural philosophy. He cautioned, on the other hand, against believing any miraculous report not fortified by tradition. Sensitive to exegetical issues, he pointed out that oftentimes, prooftexts to traditions such as resurrection can quite easily be allegorized away. The basis of belief in resurrection (and other beliefs as well), he maintained, lay not in the prooftexts themselves, but in the tradition that lay behind them. As if to stress his moderate position, he reiterated that he did not blame

philosophers themselves for their conclusions, a theme echoed by R. Abba Mari in his introduction to Minhat Kenaot.<sup>54</sup> He repeated his argument that philosophy is a lower mode of knowledge than tradition, and then used the famous argument that as philosophers contradict each other anyway, the shifting sands of speculative thought cannot match the eternal verities of tradition. He finally returned to the raison d'etre of the letter: whether the world will exist forever. As the Jewish tradition that the world will end after six thousand years is stated unequivocally in the Talmud, he wrote, there is no compelling reason why this tradition should not be accepted.<sup>55</sup>

Had the letter ended at this point, although it would have revealed Rashba's attempt to justify traditional Jewish premises in the face of the challenge of philosophy, it would not have shown the aspect of his thought which he did choose to reveal at the close of his responsum: his Kabbalah.

יְדָעוּ כִּי יֵשׁ אֵיזוֹ עֲצָמָה בְּיָדֵינוּ מִן הַתּוֹרָה  
 וְהֵיאֵךְ אֵיזוֹ עֲצָמָה בְּיָדֵינוּ מִן הַתּוֹרָה  
 וְהֵיאֵךְ אֵיזוֹ עֲצָמָה בְּיָדֵינוּ מִן הַתּוֹרָה

Know that there is also a secret, a matter handed down to a few of the scholars of the Torah: they possess subtle allusions with regard to the matters of the Torah, and I will alert you to them. . . . And so too regarding the

days of the world: six thousand are the days of work [years] of this world in which the custom of the world continues, and the seventh thousand is [the millennium] of rest. . . .<sup>55a</sup>

Below in our study we mention Rashba's belief in the doctrine of the shemittot and show that he engaged in a bit of original kabbalistic exegesis on this score. This doctrine was used to explain a large variety of mitzvot, and occupied a central place in the theology of the students of Ramban.<sup>56</sup> Rashba's mention of this doctrine raises an important question: Did he believe that a tradition's validity was necessarily increased by the fact that it was not merely tradition, but Kabbalah as well?

Although Kabbalah as referring to a small body of esoteric theosophic doctrines connoted something different from "tradition," that conceptual difference with regard to content did not mean that its authoritativeness was greater. Rashba did not exempt kabbalistic doctrines per se from interpretations in light of philosophical premises.<sup>57</sup> In another context, Moshe Idel has shown that the term kabbalah nevu'it (prophetic tradition) that Abraham Abulafia employed had its roots in the Milot Ha-Higayon of Rambam, and used by figures far removed from kabbalistic thought.<sup>58</sup> It refers to established traditions as a valid epistemological source.<sup>59</sup> In any event, in a case where a tradition that was not logically impossible coincided with a kabbalistic doctrine, its soundness could not be arbitrarily impugned.

In his concluding remarks Rashba again displayed his rationalistic side. He argued that the termination of the world did not contradict 'olam ke-minhago noheg, and he displayed a desire to keep the principle and its philosophical implications intact. His disclaimer of the verses cited in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer as the actual source of the doctrine indicated that he did not let his acceptance of tradition stand in the way of his view that literary considerations should be included in exegetical analysis.<sup>60</sup> In sum, he revealed himself to be a man who sought to integrate traditional, philosophical and kabbalistic views into a holistic unit, while maintaining the supremacy of the Jewish traditions.<sup>61</sup>

#### Rashba's Use of 'olam Ke-minhago noheg and ein mazzal le-yisrael

The distinctive characteristic of Aristotelian philosophy, as far as Jewish medieval theologians were concerned, was its claim that the world was eternal and followed immutable laws of nature. Rambam in Moreh Nevukhim endeavored to show that creation ex nihilo and miracles<sup>62</sup> were possible, not impossible as the philosophers claimed. At the same time, he affirmed that certain classes of actions were impossible even for G-d. Rambam accepted the proposition that G-d could not create a being equal to

Himself, that He could not annihilate Himself, that He could not become a body and that He could not change. Rambam fully accepted the idea that G-d could not violate the Law of Contradiction with respect to any object; thus, for example, He could not produce a square whose diagonal is equal to one of its sides.<sup>63</sup> In sum, Rambam agreed that the categories of possible and impossible applied to G-d's actions; he differed from other philosophers when he maintained that creation ex nihilo and miracles should be subsumed under the rubric of possible actions.

Isaak Heinemann, in his book Darkhei Ha-Aggadah,<sup>64</sup> showed that the Rabbis of Talmudic times evinced two different tendencies concerning miracles; one was to expand their role, the other to minimize their importance. Rambam seized one of the Rabbinic statements minimizing the role of miracles and adopted its formulation to bolster his view. The Mishnah in Avot listed ten miracles that G-d created on the "twilight of the sixth day."<sup>65</sup> Rambam in his Perush Ha-Mishnah explained that G-d had all future miracles "built in" at creation into the natural order. Although G-d could have caused a miracle at any particular time and place, he chose to set the miracles at the close of creation. Moreover, as aberrations from the natural order, miracles can endure only temporarily.<sup>66</sup>

Scholars have debated what the correct



interpretation of Rambam's position concerning miracles is. The conservative view claims that he held that at the moment of the miracle, the natural law of the universe was suspended.<sup>67</sup> The more naturalistic view holds that according to Rambam, miracles themselves become part of nature. G-d at the moment of creation ordained that physical phenomena should behave one way under most conditions, and in certain situations should behave differently. Although in reference to the usual course of events these phenomena are "unnatural," in reality they are to be subsumed under a larger rubric of "Nature."<sup>68</sup> In any event, Rambam claimed that the phrase 'olam ke-minhago noheg (the world pursues its natural course ['Avoda Zara 54b]) indicated that subsequent to creation, nature follows a consistent law, and he even maintained that the world will never be destroyed.

Ramban's approach towards miracles contrasted dramatically with Rambam's view. He did not de-emphasize the role they played in Jewish history, and declared that G-d produces two types of miracles. Overt miracles involve a suspension of the natural order, as phenomena behave in a manner not possible under normal circumstances. Hidden miracles suspend the laws of nature in ways that are not obvious by replacing the usual causal nexus by G-d's direct action. Ramban made the following remark in Torat Hashem

Temimah:

No one can share in the Torah of [Moses] our teacher, peace be upon him, unless he believes that all our words and deeds [as dictated by the Torah], are miraculous in scope there [simply] is no natural or customary way of the world.<sup>69</sup>

Many scholars, including Gershom Scholem, took Ramban's remarks to deny the existence of "nature" at all. Scholem in particular connected his opinion of Ramban's view with kabbalistic doctrines.<sup>70</sup> David Berger has demonstrated, however, that Ramban was no occasionalist; even with respect to the Jewish collective he assumed the infrastructure of nature with its (astrologically connected) laws.<sup>71</sup>

Ramban pointed out that Rambam himself, in his Ma'amar Teḥiyat Ha-Metim<sup>72</sup> accepted the existence of hidden miracles as well. In fact, Rambam employed the Talmudic phrase ein mazzal le-yisrael (Israel is immune from planetary influence [Shabbat 156a]), a citation Ramban, who used biblical quotations to prove his position, did not use.<sup>73</sup>

In Rashba's writings the two phrases 'olam ke-minhago noheg and 'ein mazzal le-yisrael are charged with meaning, and his use of these terms indicates how he confronted the relationship between the philosophic doctrine of nature and traditional Jewish theology. We will now see how he utilized the phrases and approached the underlying

issues.

The idea that G-d, via direct Providence, can overturn the decrees of the mazzalot, was formulated by medieval Jewish thinkers in two contexts. Kabbalists asserted this doctrine within their theosophical scheme; for example, R. Jacob ben Sheshet explained G-d's removal of the letter he from Sarai's name and her subsequent ability to conceive in terms of the abrogation of the power of the mazzalot.<sup>74</sup> The anonymous fourteenth century kabbalistic work Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut subsumed mazzal, nissim nistarim (hidden miracles) and nissim niglim (overt miracles) under the rubric of particular sefirot.<sup>75</sup> Rambam, on the other hand, utilized the phrase ein mazzal le-yisrael to counter philosophically inspired doctrines that denied the possibility of G-d's interference in the world.<sup>76</sup> In Ramban's remarks concerning the Jews' freedom from the power of the mazzalot, one can discern both the philosophical and kabbalistic points of departure.<sup>77</sup> Rashba's treatments of the issue, both in several responsa and in his commentary on Aggadah, were explicitly written in response to philosophical denials of the possibility of Providence.

Even one who possessed no philosophic (or for that matter, kabbalistic) training would, in the course of studying Jewish texts, confront the seeming irreconcilability of the numerous biblical passages that

assume human free will and responsibility with the Talmudic statement (Moed Qatan 28a) that certain key events in one's life are dependent only upon the stars.<sup>78</sup> The Tosafists, for example, dealt with the discrepancy between the texts without dealing with the extrahalakhic overtones of the matter. What the inclusion of extrahalakhic issues and concerns did do, however, was to raise the issue from one of mere text-harmonization to one of singular import.<sup>79</sup>

Two distinct positions were open to medieval religious thinkers who wished to deny the irreversible power of the stars. One approach was to deny totally that the stars possessed any influence. This was the position of Rambam, as expressed in his Letter On Astrology.<sup>80</sup> Yet, in the face of alleged evidence that the stars did influence human behavior, a second resolution of the dilemma, one that admitted that stars establish personal proclivities, but these propensities could be changed by human behavior, seemed to be more appealing. In a number of responsa, Rashba adopted the second approach. He wrote:

. . . and that which is written [Jeremiah 10:20], "Man's way is not his own" [refers to those times] when he does not perform the will of G-d, for then he is delivered unto the constellations, for his sins have caused a separation between him and between G-d. . . . This is [the meaning of] what He [G-d] wrote [Deut. 32:20], "I will hide My face from them" . . . I will leave them in the hands of the constellations and the other servants of the sky which they have chosen [to follow] like the other nations. . . ."81

In this responsum, Rashba admitted that G-d may

remove His personal Providence even from the Jewish collective. In other responsa, however, he distinguished between the Jewish nation as a whole and between individuals. In She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:418 he remarked that the Talmudic discussion (Shabbat 156a and elsewhere) whether or not ein mazzal le-yisrael only concerned individuals; everyone agreed, however, that with regard to the Jewish collective, a metaphysical entity above and beyond the sum of its individual parts, ein mazzal le-yisrael. As the actions of the Jewish collective are not astrologically determined, it possesses full control over and responsibility for its actions.<sup>81a</sup> He suggested that the verses concerning Hezekiah (Isaiah 38) which assume that an individual can change his "fated" span of years does not necessarily imply ein mazzal; the halakhic principles of melekh ke-tzibbur (a king is as the whole community) can serve to distinguish Hezekiah from other individuals.<sup>82</sup> Rashba concluded this responsum with the affirmation that ein mazzal in fact refers to individuals as well, and quoted the practice of praying for the welfare of individuals as proof.<sup>83</sup> In another responsum he explained a whole slew of biblical verses which imply ein mazzal as referring to the Jewish nation as a whole.<sup>84</sup>

Even his conclusion that the truth is ein mazzal le-yisrael did not mean, in this view, that people are free

from the influence of the stars. His remark that shinui ha-shem (change of name), shinui ha-maqom (change of place) and shinui ma'asav (change of actions; e.g., repentance) work to free one from the chains of the stars assumes the potency of the astrological forces.<sup>85</sup>

The distinction between the Jewish nation and individuals is in certain respects structurally similar to Aristotle's admission that Divine Providence extends to the human species as a whole. There is, however, an obvious and important distinction. Aristotle would not recognize the category of "nation" as possessing any validity with regard to Providence. Moreover, even if "nation" would have significance in a naturalistic system, all nations would be treated to the same degree of Providence. Jewish thought, on the other hand, was unanimous in positing a special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people.

In only one responsum, (She'elot u'Teshuvot 5:48) did Rashba hint at any kabbalistic connection with the issues that ein mazzal raised: theodicy and reward and punishment. One explanation of tzaddik ve-ra was to assume yesh mazzal le-yisrael. According to the consensus that ein mazzal, how was such a phenomenon explained? Rashba hinted at the doctrine of metempsychosis that explained the case of Job, of R. Akiba, and other examples.<sup>86</sup> Chayim Henoch took this explanation as contradicting Rashba's other treatments

of the issue.<sup>87</sup> This need not be the case. Rashba here did not deny his standard explanation that although the stars do naturally influence a person's life (and even a tzaddik could be hurt by the decrees of the stars), one who acts in a thoroughly righteous manner will receive direct protection from G-d and the stars will not affect him. Metempsychosis was not presented as the only solution, but as one that would cover various contingencies of tzaddik ve-ra lo.<sup>88</sup>

Expanding on themes and references cited by Ramban, Rashba interpreted quite a few historical aggadot as revolving around the influence of mazzalot. Thus, Terah and the surrounding society,<sup>89</sup> Pharaoh and the Egyptians<sup>90</sup> and the prophets of Ba'al<sup>91</sup> were all portrayed as believers in the incontrovertible power of the mazzalot. The victories won by the Jews in the battles with these figures were victories for the world view that G-d, through his direct Providence, can override the decrees of the stars. Although the stars may declare that a person will suffer an evil fate, G-d can reward one who deserves to be rewarded for his good deeds. Rashba even explained a conversation between Moses and G-d along these lines.

. . . and now the remark of Moses in his prayer was that if their [the Jews'] punishment will reach this level, there will be an opening for the other nations to deny that this nation [the Jews] is the special portion of the Cause of Causes; rather, they will say that its leader does not have the power of "G-d" but merely the power of one of the weak leaders who cannot stand in the face of the [celestial] officers who lead the

nations . . . .<sup>92</sup>

In his comments to Ta'anit 10a, Rashba used a passage that described the uniqueness of Eretz Israel as a point of departure for the idea that G-d does not delegate his Providential powers to any other agent with regard to this land.<sup>93</sup> The tenor of this passage stands in contrast to his responsa that deal with ein mazzal le-yisrael. The kabbalistic conception of the doctrine portrays the universe as containing different mazzalot who, respectively, control the fates of the seventy nations. The Jewish nation, in contradistinction to the rest of humanity, possesses no celestial officer to begin with, and G-d himself oversees and determines its destiny. As mazzalot define the natural mechanism of the world, the fact that the Jews possess no mazzal should rule out the possibility of being left to the decrees of the stars. Yet in the responsa that we have quoted, Rashba claimed that, at times, this is exactly what happened!<sup>94</sup> One might propose that there is no contradiction here. The superstructure of mazzalot that, in a general manner, affects the Jews as well as the other nations can be distinguished from the particular mazzalot that are assigned to the nations of the world but not to the Jews. Nature, according to this view, includes this general system of mazzalot.<sup>95</sup> Yet, the tenor of some of the passages in Rashba's Commentary on Aggadah seems to be one



that does not assign a role to mazzalot, as far as the Jews are concerned, at all. We recall that the passages that demonstrate that Ramban was not an occasionalist even with regard to the Jewish collective are those that do not employ kabbalistic terminology. If one would analyze the passages in Ramban that approach ein mazal le-yisrael from a kabbalistic perspective and draw the logical conclusions inherent therein, he would arrive at a different conclusions than that which he would obtain from analysis of the non-kabbalistic passages, and this is true with regard to the various passages in Rashba as well.<sup>96</sup>

The early kabbalists strongly rejected any doctrine that assumed the immutability of nature. R. Jacob b. Sheshet, in his work Meshiv Devarim Nekhohim, attacked R. Shmuel ibn Tibbon for adopting naturalistic interpretations of events.<sup>97</sup> One figure, Joseph Gikatilla, posited that G-d could violate the Law of Contradiction and effect what humans would consider logical impossibilities.<sup>98</sup> (Gikatilla did, at the same time, quote Rambam's adaptation of the Mishnah in Avot that all miracles were decreed by G-d at the time of creation.)<sup>99</sup> For him, olam ke-minhago noheg was philosophically meaningless. Rashba, as we have seen, accepted the Law of Contradiction and applied it even to propositions that were contradictions only on the basis of the laws of natural philosophy (e.g., the inability of an

animal to become a prophet). This position led him to deny the simple meaning of several aggadot in the Talmud. One passage in tractate Nedarim concerned a threat by the sun and moon to stop shining if G-d would not help Moses overcome Korah and his followers. Rashba reinterpreted the passage to mean that the telos of the world, i.e. the fulfillment of the laws of the Torah by the Jews, would be thwarted if Moses would be defeated, and hence the ultimate purpose of the sun and moon would be for nought.<sup>100</sup> Rashba interpreted G-d's response as an affirmation that 'olam ke-minhago noheg mandates that the universe and its phenomena must nonetheless continue to exist.

. . . because of these fools that caused ruin, it is [nonetheless] impossible to obliterate the world. For they worship the moon and sun as well, and yet the world does not cease to exist ['Avoda Zara 54b]; rather 'olam ke-minhago noheg, for thus has the King, blessed be He, established . . . .<sup>101</sup>

Rashba in these remarks distinguished his doctrine from that of the philosophers. 'Olam ke-minhago noheg is the result of a fiat by G-d; not an immutable law of nature. Hence, miracles and other interferences with the laws of nature can occur. Rashba emphasized the role of the Will of G-d in his passage to the Aggadah in Hullin concerning the original sizes of the sun and the moon. Avicenna and Rambam<sup>102</sup> had both written that only G-d was a Necessary Being; the cosmos and its existence were all contingent. Averroes, however, had claimed that all being was necessary,

and such Jewish philosophers as R. Shmuel ibn Tibbon followed this view.<sup>103</sup> Rashba strongly opposed this view, as he felt that such a position was but a step away from the denial of creation ex nihilo. He emphasized that as the world was created through the Will of G-d, and not by necessity, its teleological purposefulness was not predetermined. G-d had a choice to create the world in any manner that He pleased. In this vein he interpreted the passage concerning the relative sizes of the sun and moon. Just as G-d created a world where the sun is larger than the moon, His Will might have created a universe where those two spheres were of equal size.<sup>104</sup>

Subsequent to creation, however, G-d has chosen never to create any new phenomena. Thus Rashba reinterpreted an Aggadah that ostensibly stated that G-d created thunder and lightning as a result of the Jews' misdeeds. He also claimed that the rainbow was not created only after the Flood. Although he was here following the position of Ramban, we note that his espousal of the "well-known fact" concerning the scientific occurrence of the rainbow seems to place more authority with the philosophic basis of the phenomenon of the rainbow than Ramban's remarks do.<sup>105</sup>

'Olam ke-minhago noheg did not just imply that the laws of nature would not change. In the realm of law, a

Divine ordinance would naturally be eternal, not fleeting and transient. Jewish polemicists often had to defend their religion against the charge that Jewish sources themselves indicated that the Rabbis abrogated certain laws. Such arguments were often used by Christians who wished to lend legitimacy to the Pauline abrogation of the Torah,<sup>106</sup> and by Muslims as well. A latent philosophical criticism of Judaism could also be hinted at with these arguments. Since what is divine should necessarily be eternal, how could any change in law be the result of G-d's Will? This argument was not an accusation of capriciousness against G-d;<sup>107</sup> on the contrary it could establish that the law must necessarily be recognized as man-made, not eternal. Rashba dealt with these arguments several times in his polemic.<sup>108</sup>

"The "Yishmael ehad she-ḥibber 'al ha-datot" (almost certainly ibn Hazm) claimed that the Jews maintain that G-d never changed his mind concerning any law,<sup>109</sup> in spite of the fact that the laws given at Sinai differ from the Noahide laws, and the Jews themselves have replaced many Sinaitic laws (e.g., sacrifices) with new laws that they originally did not observe (e.g., prayer).<sup>110</sup> Rashba responded that the laws of the Torah are eternal; their observance, however, is contingent upon the particulars of time space and kelim (instruments).<sup>111</sup> The laws of the Torah were eternally destined for the Jews; the Noahide law

that dictated that one be killed as punishment for smiting one's fellow man (Exodus 2:12)<sup>112</sup> was the law fit for the nations of the world. The law destined for the Jewish people, however, contained different parameters. The same principle held for the prohibition or permission to eat meat. Due to his status as master of the earthly world, Adam was permitted to eat flesh. After his sin, his status was necessarily diminished, and he could no longer eat meat. The Flood absolved mankind from this punishment, and the Divine command to Noah after the Flood was indicative of man's return to his former status. The Jews, after having sinned with the Golden Calf, were once again spiritually debased. Hence, they could not eat meat during the forty years that they sojourned in the desert. (This, Rashba noted, is in accordance with one of the two opinions expressed in Hullin 16b.) After the Jews entered Israel, they could eat meat again, following the necessary halakhic procedure.<sup>113</sup> Thus, the shifts in the law were not arbitrary changes of G-d's Mind, but were the result of the increase or decrease of the level of man's spirituality. Rashba also emphasized that laws such as sacrifices were eternal laws; the fact that they were bounded by exigencies such as the existence of a Temple in no way diminished that fact. Thus, just as the natural order is constant, the ideal law that G-d gave also stands eternally.<sup>114</sup>

Rashba and the Last Stage of the Maimonidean Controversy

Jewish historians have studied and analyzed the conflict that raged in Provence and northern Spain during the years 1303-1306 over the study of philosophy, and the impact of the edict that Rashba and other Rabbis issued in 1305 that prohibited one who had not reached the age of twenty-five from studying philosophy. They have reached vastly different conclusions, however, on quite a few points. Joseph Sarachek<sup>115</sup> and Abraham Neuman<sup>116</sup> took Rashba's comments in Minhat Kenaot at face value and declared that the Provencal R. Abba Mari dragged the Catalonian Rashba into a fray which the latter wished to have no part in and agreed to join only when he became convinced that a firm stand might very well be the only way to successfully avert a religious catastrophe. Yitzhak Baer,<sup>117</sup> on the other hand, advanced the thesis that Rashba wished to create the appearance that R. Abba Mari was leading him; in reality, he was concerned about the Jewish allegorists in northern Spain, and felt that his strategy would provide the best chances of victory against his opponents. Charles Touati,<sup>118</sup> opposing Baer, returned to the position that Rashba did not covertly engineer the ban but reluctantly agreed to participate. The nature of Rashba's role is related to a historical question: How much philosophical speculation was in fact taking place in

northern Spain at the beginning of the fourteenth century? Baer's thesis remains plausible only if one also accepts the existence of a movement in Spain comparable to that in Provence, a proposition that Touati contested.<sup>119</sup>

Scholars have also disagreed as to who, in the final analysis, "won" the conflict. In his numerous articles concerning the controversy, A. S. Halkin has argued that the ban represented the waning of independent philosophical thought and the rise of "reactionary" forces that had already begun to appear in the thirteenth century and grew stronger in the fourteenth. He drew parallels with similar phenomena in the worlds of Christianity and Islam to prove his point. He saw the study of Kabbalah as the pursuit that gained appeal as interest in speculative philosophy decreased, and as the rationalist tide that men such as Rambam represented ebbed.<sup>120</sup> In his studies on this issue, Charles Touati took issue with Halkin and maintained that the adversaries of philosophical inquiry suffered a setback as well, as the Jews in Provence continued to study philosophic texts just as vigorously as they previously had been doing.<sup>121</sup> H. H. Ben-Sasson, in his A History of the Jewish People, adopted what essentially was Halkin's position.<sup>122</sup>

The participation of Rashba in the ban raises an important question: Was his role consistent with his

personal intellectual posture? Halkin's assertions that the speculation going on was not much more radical than the norm<sup>123</sup> imply that the theological gap between Rashba and R. Abba Mari and the likes of Levi ben Abraham ben Hayyim was not that large. The exchange of letters in Minhat Kenaot, however, provides evidence that demonstrates Rashba's refusal to give axiological superiority to speculative studies, a position consistent with his claim that the results of philosophical speculation are not as valid as established Jewish traditions, and one which dovetailed with his regard for Kabbalah. In one of his first letters, R. Abba Mari had commented that the allegorists were guilty of revealing the hidden secrets of the Torah.<sup>124</sup> Rashba, in his response, commented:

. . . that you have blamed them for revealing what "the Ancient One of the world" [G-d] had hidden, my heart tells me that they have not revealed anything from that which was hidden, and they do not have the sin of revealing on their hands, and their foolishness has saved them . . . .<sup>125</sup>

One who accepted Kabbalah as the key that could unlock the secrets of the Torah could not possibly accuse philosophically-minded allegorists of revealing secrets. Their crime of substituting a secular discipline for kabbalistic tradition as representing ma'aseh bereshit was, in the eyes of kabbalists, more heinous.

Gershom Scholem refuted the thesis that Kabbalah arose as a reaction to extreme rationalism of men like



Rambam, yet he also demonstrated how kabbalists perceived themselves as traditional conservative figures.<sup>126</sup> In the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230's the kabbalists positioned themselves firmly on the anti-Maimonidean side of the dispute.<sup>127</sup> The list of the signatures to the 1305 ban included R. Isaac ben Todros, a colleague of Rashba and fellow student of Ramban's kabbalistic doctrine.<sup>128</sup> The question arises: Was there a connection between Rashba's kabbalistic tendencies and his ban on philosophic speculation?

As we have seen, Rashba accepted many rationalistic propositions and certainly cannot be called an anti-rationalist. Moreover, R. Abba Mari was also a "moderate rationalist" who quoted Rambam's Moreh Nevukhim approvingly. The conservative party in this stage of the debate over "faith and reason" was opposed to radical allegorization of texts, but accepted the "heroic image of Rambam."<sup>129</sup> To my mind, any question of a connection between kabbalistic inclinations and opposition to philosophy should be phrased as follows: If one was not a kabbalist, could he still oppose the trends taking place at the beginning of the fourteenth century with the same vigor? The response of R. Abba Mari, who, as far as we know, was not a kabbalist, shows us that the answer is most definitely yes.

Nevertheless, if one was a kabbalist, his belief

that Kabbalah was the proper means to spirituality could add depth to opposition to doctrines that assumed that speculation was the proper road to the "king's chambers."<sup>130</sup> Rashba's avowal of Kabbalah as the ultimate path toward understanding G-d fit in with his opposition to the likes of Levi ben Abraham ben Ḥayyim, even if on the practical level, the gap between their respective use of allegory was not quite as enormous as one might expect. Georges Vajda pointed out that although Kabbalah did not rise in opposition to philosophic rationalism, those who adopted kabbalistic categories had an easier time preserving the particularistic element in Judaism in the face of encroachments by universalistic elements that could destroy Judaism altogether.<sup>131</sup> In Minḥat Kenaot Rashba did not proclaim the axiological superiority of Kabbalah. His silence on this matter corresponds with his extreme esotericism concerning dissemination of kabbalistic doctrine. Yet we may suggest that his kabbalistic tendencies gave his opposition to philosophically-based heterodox doctrines a sharper focus. Thus his participation in the ban, was, in the final analysis, fully consistent with this personal world view.

## Chapter Two

### Rashba's Attitude Towards Science and Its Limits

#### Rashba's Attitude Towards Occult Virtue

Galen, the celebrated physician and philosopher of antiquity, made contradictory pronouncements concerning the efficacy of cures not scientifically proven. On the one hand, he declared, "Physician, how can you cure, if you are ignorant of the cause?"<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he described instances where occult virtues effected cures, even though they did not involve any "natural principles."<sup>2</sup> The tension between medicine as natural science and medicine as empirically proven cures continued into the medieval period and still continues today in areas such as acupuncture.<sup>3</sup> Before we analyze Rashba's position as recorded in Minhat Kenaot we must first describe the attitude of the medieval world toward the issues of astrology and occult virtue in the context of "science." We must also discuss the halakhic issues entailed, and how the medieval halakhists viewed the relationship between the imperative of healing and any prohibited practices.

Rambam, in his famous Letter on Astrology,<sup>4</sup> vigorously denounced belief in astrological influence over human life. He described the philosophical belief as a

thoroughly naturalistic one, and presented the Jewish belief in G-d's Providence as opposed to this latter view. He declared that he had read all the extant astrological books, and he decried the fact that people naturally give credence to any doctrine that is recorded in a text, even if it is nonsense.<sup>5</sup> A number of Church Fathers also attacked belief in astrology as contradicting the theological doctrine of free will.<sup>6</sup> Yet most medieval philosophers (including Jewish thinkers of note)<sup>7</sup> believed in astrological influences, and assumed that empirical evidence supported this belief. No less a radical thinker than R. Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag), who had no qualms about deviating from the normative Jewish theological position on a number of issues, was a firm believer in the effects that the stars had upon human life, and based his position on empirical evidence.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas Rambam superimposed his view of Divine Providence upon a naturalistic order that excluded any possibility of astrological influences, Ramban built his doctrine of "hidden miracles" upon an infrastructure of a world governed by the stars. "Nature," according to this view, included the astrological order.<sup>9</sup> Ramban utilized the idea that the Jews are directly under G-d's Providence, and not subject to the celestial constellations as other nations are, to explain a large variety of biblical verses and laws, yet this idea as well assumed an astrologically determined

universe.<sup>10</sup>

We should not see the position of Jewish thinkers who maintained the existence of astrological forces as a restatement of the Talmudic position on the matter in the face of philosophically-minded assertions to the contrary. Lynn Thorndike, in his History of Magic and Experimental Science,<sup>11</sup> conclusively demonstrated the extent that learned men of the Christian world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries perceived astrology as a noble science. The twelfth century witnessed the translation of many Arabic astronomical and astrological works into Latin and the rise of Marseilles as a center of astrological activity.<sup>12</sup> (Rambam addressed his Letter on Astrology to the Jews of that city.) The thirteenth century work Speculum Astronomiae, "one of the most important single treatises in the history of medieval astronomy," delineated the four subdivisions of judicial astrology (revolutions, nativities, interrogations and elections), and attempted to reconcile the theological issue of free will with the fact of celestial influence.<sup>13</sup> The book's considered resolution of the issue, that "the celestial influences make impressions according to the fitness of matter to receive them and that man by using his intellect can to a considerable degree be master of his fate,"<sup>14</sup> underscored the basic infrastructure of a star-ordered universe. Thus the Jewish thinkers who

believed in astrology were in the company of those who were in the forefront of contemporary scientific thought.

Although astrology and occult virtue are distinct categories,<sup>15</sup> in many (though not all) instances, belief in astrology was a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for belief in occult virtue. Specific talismans corresponded to each sign of the zodiac, and these talismans were alleged to cure illnesses only at the specific times when the particular zodiacal sign was in ascendancy.<sup>16</sup> Thorndike documented as well the extent that medieval scientists and physicians pursued the study and practice of occult virtue. The thirteenth century scholar Michael Scot gave a historical description of the development of astronomy and the invention of such instruments as the astrolabe, yet his Introduction to Astrology combined such information with detailed discussions of the occult powers of words, herbs and stones.<sup>16</sup> The Picatrix was a widely influential text that dealt at length with magic and gave explicit directions for the applications of astrologically-based cures. Even Peter Abano, whom some historians have seen as a comparatively "modern" figure, presented in his work Conciliator a summary of occult science.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the pursuit of alchemy and magic was associated with Platonic and Hermetic philosophical beliefs such as the existence of hidden powers (affinities and antipathies) that objects

possessed. Thus, from a broader "history of ideas" perspective, belief in occult virtue was but one manifestation of the neoplatonic tradition that pervaded the philosophic thought of the Middle Ages.<sup>18</sup>

In his letter to Rashba that opens Minḥat Kenaot, R. Abba Mari of Lunel posed his query concerning the halakhic validity of using an image of a lion without a tongue as a cure for a kidney ailment.<sup>19</sup> It should come as no surprise that both R. Abba Mari and Rashba assumed the efficacy of this example of an occult cure based upon astrological influences. The controversy concerned the relationship of this cure to various halakhic prohibitions, whose contours we will investigate before we discuss the relevant responsa themselves.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 65b) quotes the biblical prohibition of divination ( /JHN) (Deut. 18:10) and states:

אֶלֶּזֶר דְּדַלְּוּתָא דְּרַבִּי אֶלֶּזֶר דְּרַבִּי אֶלֶּזֶר דְּרַבִּי אֶלֶּזֶר

"This (a diviner) is one who calculates times and hours and says, 'Today is a good day to leave' . . . ." Did this prohibition assume the efficacy of astrological predictions, or did it deny the validity of such a procedure from a scientific point of view as well? Rambam adopted the second view, and in his Mishneh Torah insisted that repudiation of all magical practices be motivated by the rational conviction that such practices are worthless.

Whoever believes in these and similar things and in his heart holds them to be true and scientific and only forbidden by the Torah, is nothing but a fool, deficient in understanding, who belongs in the same class with women and children whose intellects are immature. Sensible people, however, who possess sound mental faculties, know by clear proofs that all these practices which the Torah has prohibited have no scientific basis but are chimerical and inane, and that only those deficient in knowledge are attracted by these follies and for their sake leave the ways of truth. The Torah, therefore, in forbidding all these follies, exhorts us, Thou shalt be wholehearted [tamim] with the L-rd they G-d (Deut. 18:13).<sup>20</sup>

Isadore Twersky has shown the symmetry between Rambam's "unconditionally negative attitude to assorted magical practices" and his "uncompromisingly positive attitude toward medical practice."<sup>21</sup> The Mishnah in Pesahim mentions a "book of cures" that King Hezekiah hid. Some commentators interpreted the Mishnah to mean that Hezekiah hid this medical book because he wanted the Israelites to put their faith in G-d as the ultimate Healer. Rambam polemicized strongly against this view, and maintained that the book contained magical cures based upon the use of amulets. The author intended only to study the phenomena described in the text, not to apply the procedures suggested therein. When people began to make practical use of the text, Hezekiah hid it.<sup>22</sup> Rambam's refusal to countenance the thought that the Rabbis would delimit the scope of beneficial remedies and his declaration that the Torah is interested in the well-being of the human body supplemented his disavowal of sham magical cures.<sup>23</sup>



Rambam did concede the validity of empirical medicine, i.e., cures that "worked" even though their causes remained unknown, and did not advocate the position of the Dogmatic physicians of antiquity who based their cures upon principles alone.<sup>24</sup> In Moreh Nevukhim he stated:

You must not consider as a difficulty certain things that they [the Rabbis] have permitted, as for instance the nail of one who is crucified and a fox's tooth. For in those times these things were considered to derive from experience and accordingly pertained to medicine<sup>25</sup> and entered into the same class as the hanging of a peony upon an epileptic and the giving of a dog's excrements in cases of the swelling of the throat and fumigation with vinegar and marcasite in cases of hard swelling of the tendons. For it is allowed to use all remedies similar to these that experience has shown to be valid even if reasoning does not require them. For they pertain to medicine<sup>25</sup> and their efficacy may be ranged together with the purgative action of aperient medicines.<sup>26</sup>

Three classes of cures existed according to Rambam: those based upon natural science, them sham cures of occult virtue and the nebulous category of "empirical medicine." Anything which truly "works" is permitted, and ultimately, with advancement of scientific thought will also be classified with cures of natural science.<sup>27</sup> If a supposed cure was shown in reality not to work, it would immediately fall into the prohibited category of Darkhei 'Emori (Amorite usages). Thus the rule (Shabbat 67a) that ד/כ/י/ג פ/י/נ/י/ר ע.ר. ע.ו י/ז/י/כ/י/ג פ/י/נ/י/ר פ/י/כ/י/ג (anything that pertains to medicine does not pertain to Amorite usages) remains constant, even as the class of specific cures may not. Hence Rambam could state

that the fox's tooth, which the Talmudic Rabbis assumed "worked," in fact did not.<sup>28</sup>

In light of Rambam's categories of cures and in view of his attack in Moreh Nevukhim against the use of amulets<sup>29</sup> his codification in Mishneh Torah of the law that permits one to wear an amulet on Shabbat poses a difficult problem.<sup>30</sup> One may wear an amulet according to the Mishnah only because it has been proven effective, and as it has a legitimate purpose the wearer would not violate the prohibition of carrying on Shabbat. In this sense an amulet may be compared to apparel. Yet Rambam himself forcefully delegitimized all use of amulets!

R. Menahem Ha-Meiri formulated the doctrine that amulets "work," not because of any intrinsic property they possess, but because people believe that they can cure. Amulets are, in effect, placebos effecting psychosomatic cures.<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, one may propose that actual efficacy is not the issue with regard to the law of carrying on Shabbat. If one's subjective point of view is that he is wearing a "tried and true" amulet, this fact suffices to place the amulet with apparel and other legitimate objects that may be worn on Shabbat. Rambam himself, however, offers neither explanation. At any rate, this problem does not alter Rambam's general perspective on the matter.<sup>32</sup>

Ramban's view of the halakhic position vis-a-vis

occult virtue was diametrically opposed to that of Rambam. He believed in the power of demons, and claimed that the passage in Deuteronomy that prohibited various forms of divination was promulgated in spite of its usefulness. Thou shalt be wholehearted with the L-rd thy G-d (Deut. 18:13) was, in his view, an exhortation not to bother with astrologers or necromancers, for ultimately G-d can override their decrees.<sup>33</sup>

In his comments to Leviticus 26:11 and in his Torat Ha-Adam, Rambam discussed the halakhic imperative for a physician to heal. He understood the Talmudic statement (Berakhot 60a) הילכתא פסקי דרבי יוחנן (it is not in the manner of people to use medicines) to mean that the pursuit of medicinal aids was once a deviation from the norm. The ideal procedure, one that was followed during prophetic times, was for a sick man to realize that his illness was a punishment from G-d (one of His manifold "hidden miracles") and to respond by consulting a prophet. Eventually, however, the deviation became the norm, and the populace in general began to consult doctors. G-d, responding in kind, left people to the vicissitudes of the elements. The responsibility of a doctor to heal came only as a result of the inability of the ill to possess the faith to seek prophets.<sup>34</sup>

When Ramban discussed whether or not one could

receive medical assistance from demons, he operated with assumptions that were vastly different from those that Rambam held. Can a potent supernatural agent with whom the Torah has forbidden consultation be used in the context of medicine, a pursuit itself advocated only as a concession to human nature? In Torat Ha-Adam he permitted such activity, as long as the sorcerer did not invoke the names of other gods.<sup>35</sup>

Rashba recorded (She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:167) that Ramban personally used the lion-amulet, an example of an astrologically based talisman. Ramban's action dovetailed with his position that as long as no idolatrous practice takes place, one may use employ means of divination or sorcery to effect a cure, even in a case where one's life is not threatened.<sup>36</sup>

Rashba first defended the use of the lion-amulet in the face of two halakhic issues: the prohibition of making forms similar to those that Ezekiel beheld in his Vision of the Chariot<sup>37</sup> and the prohibition of darkhei 'Emori, which encompassed numerous types of amulets. He maintained that the prohibition of making forms applies only if one makes images of all four figures of the Chariot, and since the amulet cures, the Talmudic principle that "anything which pertains to medicine does not pertain to Amorite usages" (Shabbat 67a) applies. R. Abba Mari received word of

Rashba's responsum, and in the letter that opens Minhat Kenaot posed his queries concerning Rashba's ruling.

R. Abba Mari wholeheartedly accepted the efficacy of the lion-amulet. He quoted a hibbur meyuhad (unique compilation) which in a subsequent letter he identified as Sefer Ha-Zurot, a text that gave instructions as to the proper use of the amulets. (Joseph Shatzmiller has proposed in a recent study that this text is related to the Picatrix.<sup>38</sup>) He opposed use of the amulet, however, because its connection with the zodiac placed it among the acts prohibited by the biblical injunction against divination and by the Talmudic laws against darkhei 'Emori. He suggested that the amulets that the Rabbis permitted one to wear on Shabbat operated on a special principle ( גזירות: segulah), as did the nail of one who was crucified. These cures, however, were not associated with astrology. R. Abba Mari concluded his letter with the assertion that as sick people turn to amulets in time of illness, they will no longer turn to G-d, and stated that as some of the practices mentioned in the occult book included the idolatrous act of burning incense, all the cures in the book, which are based upon the same astrological principles, should be prohibited.<sup>39</sup>

Rashba, in his reply, admitted that idolatrous activities such as burning of incense cannot be permitted in the context of a cure, but declared that Jewish law permits

anything not idolatrous that is effective. He then launched into a discussion of Rambam's position. (R. Abba Mari had praised Rambam's treatment of the amulet issue in Moreh Nevukhim.) Rambam's sweeping declaration in Hilkhot 'Avoda Zara<sup>40</sup> clearly assumed that the Torah did not prohibit actions in spite of their effectiveness, as R. Abba Mari (and Ramban) held. Yet even Rambam did not limit the scope of permissible cures to those based upon scientific principles alone, as the passage in Moreh Nevukhim that allowed for empirical medicine showed.<sup>41</sup> By the same token one would be allowed to use any contemporary cure proven to be effective. Yet Rambam had declared in a subsequent passage in the Moreh that cures not based upon scientific causality only appear to work according to the (wrong) opinions of those who engage in such activities, and are prohibited.<sup>42</sup> Rashba suggested that Rambam distinguished between segulot mentioned in the Talmud, which would be permitted, and those in foreign books, which would remain prohibited.<sup>43</sup>

Rashba proceeded to confront the essential issue that separated Rambam from the other Jewish authorities: the plain fact that the Talmud consistently assumed the power of occult incantations, amulets and demons.<sup>44</sup> Amoraim apparently had no qualms about engaging in these activities in certain situations. Rashba's hypothesis of the place of

such forces in the cosmos was as follows: קרי הכוחות האלה  
קצת מהצדדים הנמצאים בקרבן האדם, כגון רוח הדם, כחמים, וכו', ומהצדדים הנמצאים  
במקום אחר, כגון רוח הקודש, וכו'.

And He [G-d] placed these forces in the essences of the existence of nature [which can be] discerned by enquiry, such as drugs and herbs which are known to learned doctors, or in particular natures [teva' hamesuggal], which enquiry cannot discern . . . And it is not impossible that such should be the case with incantations such as there are in matters of amulets and the like . . . .<sup>45</sup>

Although from a practical perspective, Rashba arrived at the same result as Ramban, we can discern from his remarks a different approach to the issues. Ramban did not divest the acts of divination recorded in Deuteronomy 10:11-12 of their supernatural character. Although Rashba accepted the reality of these practices, he attempted to integrate segulot into the larger order. Hence his term teva' hamesuggal. His phrase ve-ein min hanimna (it is not impossible) also shows a sensitivity to philosophically untenable positions.<sup>46</sup>

Rashba's theoretical underpinning made his defense of the use of amulets easier.<sup>47</sup> Although Ramban had also allowed sorcery in the context of a cure, we note that an "uncompromisingly positive attitude" was not expressed. Even though the Torah stated that a physician may heal, there remains an underlying uneasiness about using an unnatural agent whose use would otherwise be prohibited. We suggest that according to Rashba's structure, as acts of divination are subsumed under the larger category of

"particular nature," the problem is, to an extent, mitigated.

According to Rashba, why did the Torah forbid divination at all? He addressed this issue as well and wrote:

וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עִלְמוֹת עִלְמוֹת וְהִלְלָה לְהִלְלֵי עִלְמוֹת  
וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עִלְמוֹת עִלְמוֹת וְהִלְלָה לְהִלְלֵי עִלְמוֹת  
וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עִלְמוֹת עִלְמוֹת וְהִלְלָה לְהִלְלֵי עִלְמוֹת

'Thou shalt be whole(hearted) with the L-rd thy G-d' means, to me, both an injunction and a promise. He has warned us not to err and divine with the vanities of the nations who practice divination and observe signs . . . but rather to be wholehearted with the L-rd . . . , and He has also promised that one who pursues His commandments and His service will be whole, i.e., no evil will befall him . . . .

Rashba's remarks were similar in tone to Ramban's comments to Deuteronomy 18:13. He emphasized that Jews are commanded to engage in a special relationship with G-d, and this precludes activities associated with divination. Of course, if a person "slipped" from G-d's special gaze and became sick, any means of cure that would restore him to health would be permitted.

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח אִישׁ אֶת הַיְיָ אֱלֹהָיו וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת הַיְיָ אֱלֹהָיו  
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח אִישׁ אֶת הַיְיָ אֱלֹהָיו וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת הַיְיָ אֱלֹהָיו

And he who has contracted a sickness (should) not rely upon a miracle, desisting from calling upon doctors, but should engage in constructive remedies, whether they are natural items or segulot, and this is the meaning of rapo yerape (he [the doctor] shall surely heal -- Exodus 21:19).<sup>48</sup>



Rashba concluded his letter with his quotation from Ramban's responsum concerning interrogations of demons. Before he signed the letter, he confessed his lack of certainty in analyzing these matters.

In R. Abba Mari's second letter, he provided Rashba with more information concerning Sefer Ha-Zurot. He claimed that one who used astrologically-minded amulets was, in effect, according recognition to the power of the star referred to in the specific amulet and giving it thanks.<sup>49</sup> The fact that the stars receive their power from G-d is no defense, he declared, for such a rationale could be advanced for actual worship of the stars as well. Just as Jewish law prohibits worship of the stars in any event, it does not allow for acts that give any recognition of their power. He divided cures into three classes, scientific cures, amulets and occult incantations, and segulot. Concerning this latter category Abaye and Rava declared, "Anything which pertains to medicine does not pertain to Amorite usages." They never, however, included cures based upon the zodiac. R. Abba Mari concluded with a query concerning Rambam's remarks in Perush Ha-Mishnah in Pesachim.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that R. Abba Mari advocated an arbitrary limit to medicinal practices proved to be the Achilles' heel of his argument. Rashba had already mentioned the imperative of seeking any possible means of cure. Whereas

the thrust of R. Abba Mari's remarks centered around the definition of prohibited practices, the upshot of Rashba's remarks was an affirmation of the halakhic commitment that Jews have to maintain their health.<sup>51</sup>

In his second letter to R. Abba Mari, Rashba merely reiterated the fact that the Talmud had recognized that certain times are more propitious than others, and had advised people to act in accordance with their favored hour. Rashba closed his second response with the pointed comment that R. Abba Mari was picking and choosing among the doctrines of Rambam, and that he himself was surprised by some of Rambam's statements. Yet the lenient decision, based upon the imperative to heal the sick, remained.<sup>52</sup>

Why did R. Abba Mari choose to include the debate concerning amulets in the collection of letters concerning the ban on philosophy? In his article concerning Sefer Ha-Zurot, Joseph Shatzmiller suggests that his purpose was a strategic one designed to undercut philosophical studies in general. If one studied contemporary scientific texts, he would be led to practices of divination that the Torah has forbidden. In effect, R. Abba Mari was saying, "Look what such studies lead to!"<sup>53</sup>

Although this might have been R. Abba Mari's personal position, it is not necessarily the reason for his inclusion of this debate in the collection of letters. He

also included his query to Rashba concerning admixtures of permissible and prohibited foods, a question surely unrelated to the larger theme of philosophical studies. The inquiries concerning the lion-amulet were part of letters that dealt with the philosophical studies issue as well, and R. Abba Mari included the entire text of the letters in his collection.<sup>54</sup>

Yet the discussion concerning amulets contains a passage by Rashba that sheds light upon his personal integration of philosophical principles into his world view, as distinct from his ban on its study before one reached the age of twenty-five. He stated:

וכן אורז עמו דמברי הפילוסופים... ומנה וזא וזא עמ דעו  
 האורג בקיודג יסו... ומנה האורג...  
 דכיון שכן ואמר שם מה שדמבריהם שקה, ואמר עכאין ואמר עמ  
 דבר שאמרוהו ושכלם דמבריהם, אלא כל הסבריהם אק וי עמ דבריהם  
 שקה וי עמ דבר אמר דבריהם, אפני שיש דבר דבר וזא מכלם, והני  
 סבריהם ככחונם שזוקין הקיסובת ואורגים האורגים הויבוס...

. . . and such occurs to us with regard to books of philosophy . . . and from this (premise of the immutability of nature) they (philosophers) reached the conclusion of the impossibility of miracles such as the splitting of the Red Sea . . . and of the creation of the world . . . should we say because of this that all that is in their books is false and it is forbidden to believe and to follow anything that they have said or have written in their books? Rather, if all books contain some falsity and if most contain a prohibited belief, perhaps they contain matters that are exceptions to this rule (of falsity) and these books are as

pomegranates, that people throw away the shells and eat the beautiful seeds.<sup>55</sup>

Rashba declared that contemporary medical and philosophical texts contain potentially harmful material, but both can deliver valuable and useful information. With regard to philosophy, he could not himself construct a model that would be able to supersede the contemporary Aristotelian one, and recognized that the existing foundations negated the foundations of Jewish theology, but he accepted the premise of an ordered world and used philosophical categories to interpret phenomena. By the same token, he advocated use of contemporary medicinal knowledge to maintain and preserve his co-religionists' health.

In concluding this section we note that the ban on philosophical studies that Rashba signed did not include the study of medicine. As one of the positive results of scientific inquiry, medicine, presumably with all the concomitant astrological studies, should be studied in earnest. The irony of such a position, as seen from Rambam's perspective, is manifest. Yet from the perspective of one who knew the Talmud's position on the issue and knew as well what contemporary scholars thought, such a conclusion was eminently logical.

We can draw a clear analogy between Rashba's approach to occult virtue and his position vis a vis the

efficacy of human blessings and curses. Rambam had stated that there is no tangible result of a blessing or curse that a man utters; the reason why the Torah forbids one to engage in such activities is to instill proper modes of behavior and discipline in people.<sup>56</sup> He explained that the punishment for cursing one's fellow man (with use of the Name of G-d) was the receipt of lashes because according to the opinion of the multitude, such curses have a deleterious effect.<sup>57</sup> Rationalists such as Joseph ibn Kaspi and R. Yedaiah Ha-Penini adopted this view, and expanded the concept that the Torah formulated the language of certain doctrines according to the erroneous beliefs of the masses to other instances as well.<sup>58</sup>

Kabbalists, on the other hand, not only assumed the actual ontological results of human speech, but taught that manipulation of the "Names of G-d" could cause magical effects.<sup>59</sup> They were not the only group, however, that maintained that speech could cause an external reality to occur. The philosopher Avicenna had formulated an "anthropological theory of miracles" which posited man's ability to perform wonders in conjunction with the Active Intellect.<sup>60</sup> This idea was adopted by R. Abraham ibn Ezra, and a recent article has shown how quite a number of other Jewish thinkers utilized this doctrine.<sup>61</sup> Rashba was one of them, and his formulation of this idea showed a desire to

subsume "unnatural" phenomena such as "the evil eye" under a natural rubric.<sup>62</sup>

In a responsum that dealt with the Talmudic remark that Bar Hedyah, through his formulation of the meaning of a dream, caused precisely the result he had forecast, Rashba claimed that the Bible and Jewish tradition assert that "this is (the reason for) the prohibition of cursing and the blessings and curses do have tangible effects. His remark that desire for blessing"<sup>63</sup> set him squarely against Rambam. He repeated the fact that natural philosophers possessed no explanation for the anomaly of magnetism, and suggested that the factor which caused interpretation of dreams to cause effects may be a segulah or a hidden matter.<sup>64</sup>

Jewish philosophers construed the anthropological theory of miracles in two ways. One approach (the more prevalent one) postulated that only one with the requisite intellectual traits could cause external phenomena to change.<sup>65</sup> Rashba, and subsequently, R. Isaac Pulgar, on the other hand, stated that (only) the pious individual possessed the ability to produce such wonders.<sup>66</sup> Rashba's shift in terminology is fully in line with his view that the pious individual, as distinct from the intellectually able, is the one for whom the world was created.<sup>67</sup> Even with this caveat, however, the fact remained that such miracles were part of a pre-ordained structure of causality, and not ad

hoc actions that contradicted the very notion of nature.

In Minhat Kenaot, Rashba addressed this issue in the course of formulating his doctrine of segulot.<sup>68</sup> Along with actions that work even though there is no apparent scientific principle involved, words also seem, at times, to work wonders. Indeed, the question formulated by Rashba in another responsum on the matter<sup>69</sup> was not how blessings can work in principle, but how a hedyot (commoner) can give a blessing of any import. Before referring to the kabbalistic idea of blessings in general, Rashba explained that the term hedyot is a relative term comparing the status of the party who gives the blessing with that of the recipient; it is not an absolute term denoting ignorance.<sup>70</sup>

#### Rashba's Position Concerning the Pursuit of Knowledge

Aristotle had distinguished between theoretical and practical sciences, and this division was recognized by Jewish medieval thinkers as well. The exact classification of the sciences that different Jewish philosophers employed is a fascinating topic in its own right, and Harry Wolfson wrote a seminal essay on the matter.<sup>71</sup> R. Abba Mari of Lunel mentioned three out of the four subjects of the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy) and emphasized that these subjects were preparatory disciplines that were prerequisites for the understanding of physics and

metaphysics.<sup>72</sup> Jewish thinkers maintained that these disciplines possessed value inasmuch as they could be utilized for the goal of knowing G-d and obeying His laws and commandments.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, as preparatory disciplines, these subjects did not pose the threat to traditional Jewish beliefs that physics and metaphysics did. Thus, in the ban on philosophy that was promulgated in 1305, astronomical works and other related books were excluded.<sup>74</sup> Although Rashba did not himself write any scientific works, he possessed a good deal of scientific knowledge. We will now cite several instances where he demonstrated an awareness of such concepts.

In his commentary to 'Avoda Zara 75b,<sup>75</sup> Rashba dealt with the issue of noten ta'am lifegam (a foreign taste which, when introduced, spoils the quality of the original substrate). The specific circumstance involved utensils that had absorbed yein nesekh (Gentile wine). According to the standard law of noten ta'am lifegam, if a utensil absorbed a prohibited substance, once a certain amount of time had elapsed, the remaining taste of that substance would automatically become lifegam, and would not, upon its emission, halakhically invalidate any other substance. Medieval halakhic authorities differed as to whether the time needed to establish the taste of yein nesekh as lifegam was the same as that of other prohibited foods. Rashba felt



that logic dictated that a longer time was needed before the wine could be considered lifegam. He asked:

איך יבא שיהיה פסול ויהיה מצוי?

"How can it be that the cause is spoiled and its effect excellent?"<sup>76</sup> As A. Rosenthal noted, although spoiled

( פסול ) and excellent ( מצוי ) are terms derived from the Talmudic discussion, cause ( גורם ) and effect ( תוצאה ) are familiar philosophic terms, and Rosenthal pointed to a relevant passage in the works of Aquinas.<sup>77</sup>

Rosenthal deduces that since Rashba wrote his commentary to 'Avoda Zara when he was twenty-two years old, he must have already studied philosophy by then. To my mind, one should not make too much of this passage. One need not have studied a discipline rigorously in order to achieve a certain familiarity with phrases associated with that discipline.<sup>78</sup> What can be maintained, however, is that Rashba was part of a culture whose ambiance included free and early discussion and use of such terminology.

In his Commentary on Aggadah,<sup>79</sup> he analyzed a passage dealing with the phenomena of thunder and lightning, and wrote:

כי נראה שיש קשר בין המעשה והמקור  
הוא שיש קשר בין המעשה והמקור

It is known that the rainbow in a cloud is a natural phenomenon that is formed by moist air due to the light of the sun.

Here Rashba followed Ramban, who, in his commentary to Genesis 9:12, quoted the same explanation.<sup>80</sup> Yet whereas Ramban wrote "and whether the rainbow was (created) now or whether it was always in nature,"<sup>81</sup> Rashba simply presented the view of the Greeks. He proceeded to apply the theological principle indicated by the appearance or absence of the rainbow to the issue of thunder and lightning. Refusing to accept the simple meaning of the Talmudic passage that G-d instituted thunder and lightning for the first time after the destruction of the Temple, he pointed out that not only did biblical verses mention these phenomena, but as 'olam keminhago noheg, G-d would not create any new scientific phenomena after he created the world. G-d had ordained that whenever the Jews followed his will, rain would fall without thunder and lightning. When they disobeyed Him, however, thunder and lightning would accompany the rain. The situation that has prevailed since the destruction of the Temple was, according to this view, a specific instance of an eternal law that G-d had implanted in the world.<sup>82</sup> Rashba's comments here not only underscore his affirmation (post-creation) of 'olam keminhago noheg, but demonstrate his acceptance of a scientific explanation for a phenomenon as a "known fact" and his consequent reinterpretation of an Aggadah related to that phenomenon.<sup>83</sup>

In his Commentary On Aggadah, tractate Megillah,<sup>84</sup>

he advanced the interpretation that the statement that Korah's sons were "set aside in Gehinnom" meant they survived the earthquake (Gehinnom meaning, allegorically, pain and punishment). He wrote: פ'נטוב יתכי זכר

פ'עלע 12 18311 חתא' הכי פ'נן זכר יתכי פ'נטוב זכר  
 As sometimes happens in places that are split (by earthquakes), that some ground that was not split remains and people (in these areas) are saved.

This passage demonstrates an awareness of the practical effects of earthquakes, a subject treated in many contemporary scientific tracts.<sup>85</sup>

Rashba himself did not write any scientific tracts; as he was first and foremost a Talmudist, he did not compose, for example, astronomical tracts. Yet we have noted that this discipline was not included in the ban on philosophy. At the turn of the fourteenth century, all parties in the dispute over the study of philosophy agreed that the scientific disciplines (albeit, in their proper form) were once Jewish disciplines. The knowledge that the Jews once possessed was lost, however, and had to be retrieved by reading Gentile books.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Rambam was seen as the greatest scientist and philosopher who had ever lived.<sup>87</sup> As one could use these originally Jewish disciplines to get a better understanding of biblical and rabbinic teachings, Rashba felt that the scientific disciplines would be of invaluable aid.

The litmus test which distinguished those who pursued the sciences, or advocated their pursuit, as a means of understanding biblical and rabbinic laws better, from those who studied the sciences in order to obtain the truth about nature and the universe, was a case where the results of inquiry flatly contradicted a rabbinic remark concerning a scientific fact. Such a case was the controversy concerning terefah. This issue had manifold halakhic ramifications, and Rashba clearly demonstrated his attitude towards the limits of scientific inquiry by the way he approached the matter. Although Rashba's halakhic posture in general is not under the purview of this study, we must analyze his responsum on this issue in order to understand the depth of his conviction on this score.

The Talmud, in the third chapter of tractate Hullin, discusses the categories of certain specific sicknesses that animals and birds can contract. According to the Talmud, a creature that contracts one of the sicknesses and is classified as terefah,<sup>88</sup> can not live longer than twelve months.<sup>89</sup> The implication that siman li-terefah yod-bet hodesh and het minei terefot nimseru le-Moshe be-Sinai were coterminous statements was challenged in the medieval period by reports that creatures with the sicknesses that the Talmud had specified had nonetheless lived longer than twelve months. Rambam, in his treatment of the issue, proclaimed that the halakhically binding factor is the

category of sickness; even if a creature lived longer than twelve months it would still be classified as terefah. Hence the prohibition for Jews to eat the creature would take effect immediately with the recognition that the creature had contracted the illness, and to wait and see whether it would live longer than twelve months would be a halakhically irrelevant procedure. In sum, even if the medical opinion of siman le-terefah yod-bet hodesh would not always be correct, the halakhic fact that the animal is prohibited would still remain.<sup>90</sup>

From the question addressed to Rashba on this score, it is apparent that some Jews decided to take the principle of siman li-terefah yod-bet hodesh as the exclusive factor in determining whether one was permitted to eat a particular animal. Any creature that would live more than twelve months was ruled to be permissible food.<sup>91</sup> The negation of the principle of terefot, whose categories the Talmud maintained were halakha le-Moshe mi-Sinai, carried with it far-reaching ramifications concerning the practical observance of Jewish law. Rashba's response was, in a certain sense, far more urgent than his rejoinder to those who questioned Rabbinic pronouncements on certain theoretical issues.<sup>92</sup>

As Rabbinic authority was being challenged, not on the basis of a philosophical doctrine, but on the basis of

empirical observation. Rashba's first line of defense was to challenge the observation itself. He claimed that the observer was either lying or mistaken.

. . . and he who so testifies errs, for never in history was it so . . . and hence even if many would come and say, 'Such have we seen,' we will contradict them in order tht the words of the Rabbis may stand, for we will not slander the words of the Rabbis and (instead) uphold the words of these. . . .<sup>93</sup>

Rashba tried to turn the empiricist argument to his own advantage. How could the observer be sure that this animal lived twelve months?

. . . from whence do you know tht this animal tarried (twelve months), perhaps you forgot or erred, or perhaps you mixed up the time or perhaps you mixed this animal up with another, for it is impossible to testify that this animal was in front of your eyes the entire twelve months. . . .<sup>94</sup>

Rashba also suggested the possibility of a miracle.<sup>95</sup> This argument could suffice by itself, and by definition cannot be disproven. Indeed, one may wonder why Rashba did not simply use this line of reasoning and conclude his responsum.<sup>96</sup> In light of Rashba's extreme caution concerning miracles, as is evident from his responsa to the "prophet of Avila" and his remarks to R. David ben Zakhri, we may suggest that his unwillingness to base his opposition upon this argument is consistent with his general position. Another reason might be his wish to defeat his opponent on his own terms. One could plead "miracle," but such a claim would not convince the skeptic that Hazal were

not mistaken. Rashba chose a more aggressive standpoint from which to argue the merits of his case.

His third explanation of the apparent phenomenon of an animal classified as terefah and yet living more than twelve months was one contingent upon the specifics of the case. The category of terefah at hand was yoteret, an extra limb. The Talmud adduced the principle that an animal with an extra limb is terefah from the rule (Hullin 58b) "Every extra (limb) is as a missing (limb)." Rashba suggested that this law only classifies those creatures with extra limbs as terefot; it does not, however, place these animals among those terefot that the Rabbis declared are unable to live twelve months. This solution resolves the specific case discussed here; it offers no help, however, if another category of terefah would live for twelve months.

In the midst of his remarks, Rashba utilized a phrase that he also used in one of his letters to R. Abba Mari.

. . . and he who testified and a thousand like him can pass away, but not one iota from that upon which the holy sages of Israel, the prophets and the sons of prophets, have agreed, and the matters that were told to Moses at Sinai, will be abolished. . . .<sup>97</sup>

The source of this statement is the Midrash Rabbah,<sup>98</sup> but Rashba here extended its scope. A remark that the Rabbis of the Talmud made possesses the same validity as the words of the Torah, even if it is an opinion concerning

medicine. Of course, once Rashba decided not to divorce the statement siman li-terefah yod-bet hodesh from het minei terefot nimseru le-Moshe be-Sinai, the force of his response was understandable. As the issue possessed halakhic ramifications that reached to the fundamentals of Torah she-ba'al peh, he refused to allow the normal methods of scientific observation to apply. Pursuit of biological facts was condoned only in the context of assisting Torah; never would it be allowed to play a meaningful adversarial role.



## CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLE OF KABBALAH IN RASHBA'S THOUGHT

## INTRODUCTION

More than two hundred years ago, R. Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (Hida) wrote that Rashba possessed a "hand in Kabbalah."<sup>1</sup> Our knowledge of the history and development of Kabbalah, the various kabbalistic personalities that flourished in Spain in the thirteenth century, and the numerous currents of ideas prevalent at the close of that century has dramatically increased since Hida's time. Yet Rashba's precise position on the map remains to be pinpointed. In this chapter of our study we hope to begin to draw the contours of Rashba's kabbalistic thought, both vis a vis the earlier Gerona kabbalists and in contradistinction to the other kabbalists of his day.

## KABBALAH IN RASHBA'S COMMENTARY ON AGGADAH

In many of his works, Gershom Scholem described the kabbalistic center of Gerona that flourished during the 1200's, and investigated the lives of the figures that lived there and the nature of the Gerona school's theosophic doctrine.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Tishby devoted the focus of several of his articles to two figures of the center, R. Ezra ben Solomon and R. Azriel.<sup>3</sup> The two men, who at one point were identified with one another by historians, each produced a

multifaceted oeuvre that included commentaries on Aggadah, and Tishby published R. Azriel's commentary.<sup>4</sup> Both men represented a mixture of medieval neoplatonic thought with earlier elements of Kabbalah as expressed in Sefer Ha-Bahir. They also continued the tradition of Provencal Kabbalah as received from R. Isaac the Blind, son of the celebrated Rabad, who wrote a letter to Ramban and R. Jonah Gerondi expressing dismay at the openness with which Kabbalah was being spread in Spain.<sup>5</sup> R. Azriel was a greater innovator than R. Ezra, absorbing neoplatonic elements to a greater extent, quoting "hakhmei ha-mehqar" such as R. Abraham bar Hiyya freely, and at one point claiming that the truths of his kabbalistic school and those of the philosophers are the same ones merely expressed in different forms.<sup>6</sup> Both R. Ezra and R. Azriel dealt with the same issues in their respective commentaries on Aggadah, using the same texts as points of departure for exposition of their themes, but R. Azriel represented a further developmental step within the context of the Gerona school.

Other members of the Gerona center, such as R. Abraham ben Isaac the Hazzan, R. Jacob ben Sheshet, R. Asher ben David, and Ramban, the man whose fame as a halakhist gave pursuit of kabbalistic themes added legitimacy, did not write commentaries on the Aggadah.<sup>7</sup> We do find such a commentary from a member of the Castillian center that stood

in contrast to the extreme neoplatonism of the Catalonian Gerona school.<sup>8</sup> R. Todros Ha-Levi Abulafia, nephew of the halakhist and Maimonidean controversialist Ramah, wrote a commentary on the Aggadah entitled Otzar Ha-Kavod, in which he combined elements of the thought of R. Ezra and R. Azriel with the ideas of the Castillian kabbalists R. Mosheh of Burgos and the brothers R. Yitzhak ben Ya'aqov and R. Ya'aqov Ha-Kohen.<sup>9</sup> Otzar Ha-Kavod not only commented on the same Talmudic texts that R. Ezra and R. Azriel dealt with, but contained numerous formulations that the two Gerona figures used. R. Todros' innovation was his integration of that material with what Scholem called the "gnostic reaction" that exemplified the Kabbalah of Castille.<sup>10</sup>

By the last quarter of the thirteenth century, numerous strands of kabbalistic thought existed. Besides the aforementioned Castillian and Geronese variants, an extreme mystical tendency, expressed in philosophical terms and creating a symbolism not based upon the sefirot began to develop. Its most important exponent was R. Isaac ibn Latif.<sup>11</sup> Another figure distinct from the Gerona school was R. Abraham Abulafia, who proclaimed prophetic inspiration, wrote numerous prophetic books, and maintained that certain techniques such as hokhmat ha-tzeruf could lead one to prophetic mystical experience.<sup>12</sup> Ramban, on the other hand, taught his kabbalistic traditions to his students Rashba and

R. Isaac ben Todros.<sup>13</sup> They in turn passed on the Gerona kabbalah to pupils such as R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon, R. Joshua ibn Shu'aib, R. Meir ben Solomon ibn Sahula and R. Isaac of Acre. These men all quoted Rashba on kabbalistic matters in their respective commentaries on the Torah. An analysis of the interpretations advanced in the name of Rashba confirms that the content of his Kabbalah was that of the Gerona school and not of other innovative forms of Kabbalah.<sup>14</sup>

Scholem has shown that a tension has always existed between those kabbalists who wished to maintain total secrecy with respect to their doctrines and those who wanted to disseminate Kabbalah openly. Ramban's esotericism was, according to one view, a result of R. Isaac the Blind's reprimand of R. Ezra and R. Azriel.<sup>15</sup> Rashba, in his Commentary On Aggadah, explicitly stated that he would only hint at the kabbalistic meanings inherent in certain passages.<sup>16</sup> R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon characterized the form of Rashba's commentary as more esoteric than those of R. Ezra or R. Azriel.

My teacher Rashba, of blessed memory, also composed a particular prayer for himself in which he hinted correctly at the chapter headings, and he composed a commentary to some of the aggadot of the Talmud according to the way of peshat and for the purpose of refuting the heretic; except that he hinted therein a word or two to open the ear of one who has received [instruction] in the secret doctrine from his mouth. But he did not explain all (the aggadot), and he did not hint as much as was needed, for he was already preceded by the wise and pious R. Ezra and R. Azriel from Gerona, of blessed memory, who composed commentaries on the

aggadot, and R. Azriel further composed a commentary on the prayers; in these (works) they hinted as much as necessary. They also explained there ma'aseh bereshit and ma'aseh merkavah in the manner that they received from the Rabbi, the pious blind one, of blessed memory.<sup>17</sup>

This contemporary characterization of Rashba's commentary is borne out by analysis of the texts themselves. Rashba often noted that a particular Talmudic passage upon which he commented contains a sod. Almost invariably, a corresponding passage in the commentary of R. Azriel (and often, R. Ezra as well) in fact contains such an explanation.<sup>18</sup>

We wish to emphasize that to understand Rashba's commentary correctly, we should view it (though by no means exclusively so) within the context of a tradition of composing kabbalistic commentaries on Aggadah. That this perception was held by at least one medieval scribe is evident from a manuscript<sup>19</sup> that interpolates R. Todros Abulafia's exclusively kabbalistic commentary on several tractates into the text of Rashba's commentary. Although it would not make much sense to combine a rationalist-minded and a kabbalistic commentary, it would be fitting to supplement one kabbalistic commentary with another. As we shall see, the content and form of Rashba's kabbalistic writings can serve as useful guidelines to ascertain which parts of manuscripts that have been ascribed to Rashba are authentic.

There are numerous sources relevant to a determination of the proper text of Rashba's commentary on Aggadah. The book 'Ein Ya'agov, which is a collection of all the aggadic portions of the Talmud and contains various commentaries to them, includes excerpts from Rashba's commentary on Aggadah.<sup>20</sup> In 1863, Joseph Perles published a study on Rashba, and printed along with it a commentary on aggadic passages by Rashba. The nature of that work, however, was different from that of the commentary that we are discussing.<sup>21</sup> Aron Freimann's Union Catalog of Hebrew Manuscripts and their Location lists numerous manuscripts of Rashba's commentary extant in various libraries.<sup>22</sup> In 1966, Rabbi S. M. Weinberger printed Hiddushei Ha-Rashba 'al Aggadot Ha-Shas, but did not indicate which manuscript he used. An examination of microfilms of various manuscripts reveals that he used Vatican Ebr. #295.<sup>23</sup>

Weinberger's edition, however, contains non-authentic passages which can mislead us about the nature of Rashba's esotericism. In Assemani's citation of the various writings that make up Vat. Ebr. #295, he indicated that an excerpt from Rambam's preface to his Perush Ha-Mishnah and an anonymous kabbalistic commentary follow Rashba's commentary.<sup>24</sup> Yet an analysis of Weinberger's edition and the manuscript reveals that he incorporated sections of this anonymous commentary into his edition of Rashba! In

Weinberger's edition there are six instances where the text contains an explicit kabbalistic discussion. In each case, the passage matches R. Azriel's explicit explanation of the passage in his commentary on Aggadah that Tishby published.<sup>25</sup> In fact, all six of these comments can be found only in the anonymous commentary found in Vat. Ebr. #295, following the part ascribed to Rashba. Two other paragraphs from that commentary were also inserted by Weinberger into his text.<sup>26</sup> This anonymous commentary is simply a collection of verbatim excerpts from R. Azriel's commentary. Although I have not viewed microfilms of all the extant manuscripts of Rashba's commentary, the manuscripts that I have viewed do not contain these passages, and conform to a pattern where Rashba referred to a sod (secret) but did not explicitly mention what it is. Almost invariably, the commentary of R. Azriel to the same Talmudic passages will contain an explicit discussion of the matter.<sup>27</sup> Thus, our exclusion of these passages from the authorship of Rashba removes a deviation from his pattern of Aggadic commentary.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the extant manuscripts contain Rashba's comments to the seven tractates Berakhot, Bava Batra, Ta'anit, Megillah, Hullin, 'Avoda Zara and Nedarim.<sup>29</sup> In these tractates, Rashba alluded to the Gerona kabbalistic doctrine with words such as sod, sod ne'elam, sod nistar and

sod nisgav. MS. Bodley, Michael #265, contains a commentary to the tractates Kiddushin, Ketubot and Gittin as part of what purports to be Rashba's commentary, which discusses kabbalistic doctrines openly. The commentary to these tractates, however, turns out to be part of R. Todros Abulafia's Otzar Ha-Kavod, as a comparison of the microfilm of the manuscript with the complete printed edition of Otzar Ha-Kavod shows.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, although MS. Bodley, Michael #295 ostensibly contains Rashba's commentary to the tractate Hagigah, a careful reading indicates that this material constitutes a separate unit which is not necessarily part of the collection of Rashba's commentaries.<sup>31</sup> Dr. L. A. Feldman has published critical editions of Rashba's commentary on Megillah,<sup>32</sup> Nedarim,<sup>33</sup> Bava Batra,<sup>34</sup> and Hullin.<sup>35</sup> The commentary to Hullin contains a passage that has a parallel in Vat. Ebr. #441, which is a manuscript of R. Ezra's commentary on Aggadah.<sup>36</sup> This text comes from the same manuscript that contains the interpolations from R. Todros Abulafia's commentary, is the second of two commentaries on Hullin in the MS., and, according to our analysis, that passage does not form part of Rashba's corpus.

The concerns of this essay are not those that are involved in preparing a critical edition of a text. Yet the foregoing remarks are nonetheless crucial in the context of



ascertaining the personal kabbalistic posture of Rashba. We wish to reiterate in light of the preponderance of evidence that the content of Rashba's Kabbalah was that of the Gerona school at a time when different forms were developing and the form of his remarks was strictly esoteric at a time when kabbalists were openly revealing their doctrines. Statements in what purports to be a manuscript of Rashba's commentary on Aggadah that seem to contradict these principles are probably not authentic. Just as we should not ignore the role of Kabbalah in Rashba's world view, we should be careful not to give it a higher place than the results of a rigorous analysis would warrant.

#### KABBALAH IN RASHBA'S OTHER WORKS

Besides his Commentary on Aggadah, Rashba also wrote a kabbalistic prayer.<sup>37</sup> This activity, however, should not be seen as an innovative kabbalistic exercise. R. Azriel of Gerona composed a kabbalistic prayer as well,<sup>38</sup> and Rashba's continuation of that tradition merely indicates his allegiance to that kabbalistic school.

The responsa of Rashba contain hints to several kabbalistic themes, but do not explicitly explain kabbalistic doctrine. Rashba's students, however, quote several explanations to various matters in his name. In one instance, he even gave his own exegesis to the verse that

was the basis of the doctrine of the shemittot.<sup>39</sup> From analysis of his responsa and his students' works we can glean a greater knowledge not only of Rashba's Kabbalah but of two other points: his self-perception as one who possessed kabbalistic secrets but had not obtained a thorough understanding of them, and the conscious focus of his creative energies toward non-kabbalistic exegesis.

Rashba's words are present, as we have mentioned, in the works of R. Joshua ibn Shu'aib,<sup>40</sup> R. Meir ibn Sahula,<sup>41</sup> R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon,<sup>42</sup> and R. Isaac of Acre,<sup>43</sup> the writers who explained the "secrets of Ramban." After Rashba's death (ca. 1310) these authors markedly increased their creative activity; while he was alive, they all exhibited the conservative, cautious approach that distinguished Catalonian Kabbalah from its Castillian counterpart.<sup>44</sup> They stressed that Kabbalah had to be received from a master; concepts could not be originated from sevarah. Ramban, of course, had also stressed these ideas.

R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon recorded<sup>45</sup> that he asked Rashba and R. Yitzhak ben Todros why certain people have to undergo gilgul (metempsychosis). Whereas R. Yitzhak replied that it was a punishment for some sin committed either by word or by thought, Rashba answered that a second factor, if a soul had not "completed its time" on earth, could cause it to undergo gilgul. These remarks were also quoted by R. Isaac of Acre

in Sefer Me'irat Enayim.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, many of the statements attributed to Rashba in the works of his students concern the various biblical personalities who had undergone gilgul.<sup>47</sup>

The doctrine of shemittot, i.e., the idea that the world will go through seven periods each of six thousand years of existence followed by one thousand years of destruction, was another topic on which Rashba's students quoted him. R. Menahem Recanati<sup>48</sup> quoted two interpretations concerning the difference between the cosmos at the time of the shemittah and at the time of the final yovel (after 49,000 years). One opinion held that during shemittah life will cease and composite elements will decompose into the four basic elements; the heavens and earth, however, will remain. Only in the final yovel will the cosmos itself cease to exist. The second opinion held that the destruction during shemittah will be of the same magnitude as that which will take place at yovel; the difference between them lies only in that after shemittah G-d will re-create the universe.<sup>49</sup> R. Meir Ibn Sahula and the anonymous author of Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut quoted Rashba as interpreting the different language used in Leviticus 25:5 (concerning shemittah, where the second person possessive "thy harvest" is used) and Leviticus 25:11 (where the third person possessive "which groweth of itself in it"

is used) as indicating that during the cosmic shemittah the universe will still be "ours" when G-d will re-create it. During yovel, however, it will belong to "itself."<sup>50</sup>

In Chapter One, we analyzed the various places where Rashba emphasized the idea that G-d's direct involvement with the Jews meant that the decrees of the mazzalot were not necessarily binding. Here we wish to point out that Rashba's students quoted his formulation that G-d causes nissim nistarim to occur (and thereby protects the righteous) in kabbalistic terms. Nissim nistarim emanate from one sefirah; nissim niglim from another.<sup>51</sup>

R. Bahye ben Asher quoted Rashba many times in his popular Commentary on the Torah, but not for kabbalistic doctrine. Efraim Gottlieb concluded that R. Bahye was not Rashba's student in Kabbalah.<sup>52</sup> Another work that helped popularize and spread kabbalistic ideas was the Derashot of R. Joshua ibn Shu'aib.<sup>53</sup> He quoted Rashba several times, but the thrust of the remarks is not kabbalistic. In contrast to the conservative image that Rashba maintained with regard to the Gerona kabbalistic doctrine, he utilized his creative energies in other forms of exegesis, a position consistent with his approach in his own Commentary on Aggadah. Ibn Shu'aib<sup>54</sup> quoted his exoteric explanation of aggadot concerning the fire upon which the Torah was written and the items created prior to the creation of the world, matters

Rashba had dealt with in his polemic<sup>55</sup> and in his Commentary on Aggadah. He also advanced Rashba's distinction between an individual and the community regarding ein mazzal le-yisrael and set it in contradistinction to Ramban's distinction between Eretz Yisrael and the rest of the world.<sup>56</sup>

The Bible (Deuteronomy 21:23) records the prohibition to leave a hanged man overnight without burial, and uses the enigmatic phrase ki gilelat elo-him talui.<sup>57</sup> The Rabbis commented that as man and G-d are compared to twins, the embarrassment of one will necessarily cause shame to the other.<sup>58</sup> Ramban rejected Rashi's figurative explanation of this passage and maintained that the parable as is contains a sod.<sup>59</sup> Ibn Shu'aib, on the other hand, presented Rashba's explanation of peshuto shel mashal (the plain meaning of the parable).<sup>60</sup> Rashba explained the referents of the term "twins" not as man and G-d but as the individual soul and the angelic intellects. This instance is a paradigmatic illustration of his efforts to explain statements that were points of departure for kabbalistic explanations in mundane (i.e., philosophically based) terms.<sup>61</sup>

It seems that many of the kabbalistic statements that R. Isaac of Acre quoted in the name of Rashba were actually authored by earlier members of the Gerona school.

R. Menahem Recanati already recorded the sod of the four minim that one takes on not in the name of Rashba, but in the name of R. Azriel.<sup>62</sup> Gottlieb has shown that two other statements are actually the words of R. Ezra.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the scope of Rashba's originality was exaggerated even by one who was contemporaneous with him and with his students.

Rashba's student R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon provides us with information concerning his attitude toward the meaning of the aggadot regarding Leviathan.<sup>64</sup> In his Commentary on Aggadah, Rashba not only interpreted the entire Leviathan passage in a thoroughly allegorical manner, but did not even hint at a kabbalistic interpretation. Here, however,<sup>65</sup> he was reported as hinting at the doctrine of du partzufim, which is also the doctrine hinted at by Ramban's remarks on the passage that man and G-d are "twins."<sup>66</sup> Rashba's refusal in his Commentary On Aggadah to even hint at a kabbalistic explanation cannot be used as evidence that he did not accept the interpretation he had received. It is, however, indicative of his extreme esotericism.

Below we demonstrate areas in which Rashba's esotericism exceeds even that of Ramban. We wish now to demonstrate examples of a perception that may help explain why he chose to be so reticent. By its very nature, Kabbalah was a secret doctrine. Moreover, Rashba perceived himself as ignorant of the full scope of the doctrine. This

theme runs across his many responsa that deal with matters related to Kabbalah.

Rashba perceived ma'asseh merkavah as the theosophic doctrine that explains the true meaning inherent in mitzvot.<sup>67</sup> In his view, however, after the destruction of the Temple the sins of the people caused the "waters of wisdom" to stop flowing. In his own generation, Rashba doubted whether there was anyone who could understand the "grandeur of these matters."<sup>68</sup> Several times he admitted that he himself had received only a "point" from the great "wheel" of a particular kabbalistic secret.<sup>69</sup> He stressed that any knowledge of these matters could not come from individual effort, but only from the grace of G-d.<sup>70</sup>

Concerning zaddik ve-ra'lo he wrote:

and I have not received from my teachers (even) a drop from the ocean, and I am unable to explain.<sup>71</sup>

This last clause can be interpreted in two ways. It may simply refer to the man's unwillingness to disclose the secret of gilgul. Yet, in light of his self-perception as one who has received only fragments of a tradition, it may simply be a declaration that he cannot, even had he wished to, explain the matter adequately.<sup>71a</sup>

In at least three separate places in his responsa, Rashba wrote that the Torah is 'omeret ve-romezet (speaking and hinting).<sup>72</sup> He declared that one can use his creative intellect only to discover what the Torah has spoken. In

this regard, he used the canons of exegesis bequeathed to him by the Andalusian tradition. He applied this "two-tiered system" to the Aggadah as well. In this context we wish to refocus upon his remarks made at the conclusion of his responsum that dealt with the issue of whether the world will end after six thousand years. The Rabbinic book Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer adduced several verses in Isaiah to prove that G-d will destroy and then renew the world.<sup>73</sup> Now, in spite of Rashba's belief in the doctrine of shemittot, he agreed with Rambam that the plain meaning of the verses cited in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer did not refer to G-d's destruction and re-creation of the world, but to the renewal of the Jewish people.<sup>74</sup> In fact, he remarked:

How is it possible for wonderful wise men as these to agree on a matter whose refutation is apparent to children at their teacher's house, who see with their eyes that these verses were not said about such a matter. . . .<sup>75</sup>

His conclusion, that the verses "speak and hint," meant that the Rabbis as well were talking on two levels. Thus, although

we have permission to look into the plain meaning of the matters,<sup>76</sup>

the hints form a separate entity whose ultimate comprehension is beyond the comprehension of man. Silence regarding content of kabbalistic doctrine, hence, is not just an arbitrary esotericism; it is also a consequence of an inability to comprehend the full measure of the doctrine.



this regard, he used the canons of exegesis bequeathed to him by the Andalusian tradition. He applied this "two-tiered system" to the Aggadah as well. In this context we wish to refocus upon his remarks made at the conclusion of his responsum that dealt with the issue of whether the world will end after six thousand years. The Rabbinic book Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer adduced several verses in Isaiah to prove that G-d will destroy and then renew the world.<sup>73</sup> Now, in spite of Rashba's belief in the doctrine of shemittot, he agreed with Rambam that the plain meaning of the verses cited in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer did not refer to G-d's destruction and re-creation of the world, but to the renewal of the Jewish people.<sup>74</sup> In fact, he remarked:

How is it possible for wonderful wise men as these to agree on a matter whose refutation is apparent to children at their teacher's house, who see with their eyes that these verses were not said about such a matter. . . .<sup>75</sup>

His conclusion, that the verses "speak and hint," meant that the Rabbis as well were talking on two levels. Thus, although

we have permission to look into the plain meaning of the matters,<sup>76</sup>

the hints form a separate entity whose ultimate comprehension is beyond the comprehension of man. Silence regarding content of kabbalistic doctrine, hence, is not just an arbitrary esotericism; it is also a consequence of an inability to comprehend the full measure of the doctrine.

## THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF RASHBA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS AGGADAH

The first point to emphasize concerning Rashba's multifaceted approach to Aggadah is that he conceived of it as a corpus totally separate from the halakhic portions of the Talmud. Hence, he felt that one need not pose halakhic questions regarding aggadic statements.<sup>77</sup> In this sense he followed the geonic and Andalusian traditions, as opposed to that of the Tosafists, who employed the same standards of analysis to Aggadah as to Halakhah. Rashba did quote several comments to aggadic passages in the name of R. Hai Gaon in his halakhic commentary to Berakhot;<sup>78</sup> these remarks, however, only underscore the fact that generally speaking, he restricted his novellae to strictly halakhic matters. In several scattered places, he did make comments to halakhic points that can be more clearly understood in light of his positions concerning related extrahalakhic matters, which include his interpretations of various aggadot. Thus, his reminder that when one writes the letter samekh and the final letter mem he should fully enclose them, for such was the miraculous suspension at Sinai of the stone around which they were chiseled, gains significance when we realize that this issue was a bone of contention between the allegorists and the traditionalists in the controversy leading to the 1305 ban on philosophy.<sup>79</sup> His position that the passage "mitzvot will be annulled in the

future," refers to the periods after one's personal death, and not to any eschatological period, dovetails with the position that he expressed in polemical battles.<sup>80</sup> His sanction of amulets, a halakhic decision whose ramifications encompassed the medieval Jewish attitude towards medicine, astrology and magic, corresponded with his remarks in Minhat Kenaot, where he stressed the fact that Talmudic passages that attested to their efficacy should not simply be dismissed.<sup>81</sup> His interpretation of a passage in tractate Rosh Ha-Shanah (guaranteeing that the righteous would, at the New Year, receive life) as referring to the World to Come followed Ramban's eschatology.<sup>82</sup> In Gittin, he made the interesting comment that the story of Titus and the gnat proves that a man can be a Terefah and live more than twelve months, although in his responsa to vehemently attacked those who claimed that they saw animals who were Terefah living longer than twelve months.<sup>83</sup> Yet all these remarks were mentioned en passant. Moreover, they were not the result of a special mode of interpretation; they were merely the extrahalakhic consequences of halakhic analysis.

In his commentary to tractate Megillah, Rashba cited the aggadic view that Esther was married to Mordecai. Hence, after she willingly consented to sleep with Ahaserus, she would, according to Jewish law, be forbidden to resume relations with her lawful husband (Mordecai). The Tosafists

raised a number of questions based on this Aggadah, including the query as to why Mordecai did not write Esther a divorce previously. (As the relationship with Ahaserus was not a legal marriage, she would be permitted to subsequently return to Mordecai even though she willingly submitted to Ahaserus.)<sup>84</sup> Rashba was unsatisfied with the Tosafists' answer, and simply remarked, "These are matters of Aggadah and one does not answer them."<sup>85</sup> He used the same expression in one of his responsa as well.<sup>86</sup> Whether or not he felt that all aggadot express truth on some (allegorical or metaphorical) level is irrelevant here. He did feel that one did not have to assume the literal meaning of an aggadic passage (in this case, that Esther was married to Mordecai) while elucidating halakhic passages.

Aggadah, then, was to be interpreted on its own terms. But what were they? It is clear that Rashba would not accept the literal meaning of a text if it contradicted his fundamental convictions, as in the case of anthropomorphic representations of G-d. He was certainly aware of the Spanish tradition of exegesis, which strove to interpret texts "grammatically and sensibly."<sup>87</sup> Indeed, in several of his responsa, his comments concerning exegesis of the Old Testament were quite in line with such figures as R. Abraham ibn Ezra.<sup>88</sup> One particular passage, in which he stated that contradictions between the biblical books of

Samuel and Chronicles were of no import because "the Writings do not preserve the words, only the meanings. . . ." <sup>89</sup> prompted one twentieth century scholar to suspect at first that this responsum was not written by Rashba. <sup>90</sup>

In his book Decoding the Rabbis, Marc Saperstein pointed out how certain phrases in the Aggadah were employed by rationalists as "code words" for allegorical interpretations. <sup>91</sup> Some of these phrases were employed in just the same manner by Rashba. <sup>92</sup> We will now focus on a particularly striking example, the Aggadah about the Leviathan.

The Talmud, in the fifth chapter of Bava Batra, described the male and female Leviathans that G-d created. If such enormous creatures would produce offspring, they would destroy the world. Hence, G-d castrated the male, killed the female and salted it; preserving it for the righteous to eat in the future world ('olam ha-ba). <sup>93</sup> This Aggadah carried with it several difficulties. First, according to Rambam's conception of 'olam ha-ba (and the passage in Berakhot 17a), mundane acts such as eating were impossible, as only one's soul achieved immortality. Moreover, the idea of a feast seemed to contradict the sublime notions of 'olam ha-ba and what would take place there. Rashba explained <sup>94</sup> that the purpose of a "meal" in

'olam ha-ba is certainly not physical pleasure. It is, rather, to inspire the forces in one's soul, which need contentment as a prerequisite. Bringing examples from biblical accounts of prophets who needed to achieve physical peace of mind before they could attain prophetic inspiration, he remarked that food prepared during the six days of creation would certainly possess the elements needed to enlighten the soul, and drew an analogy to the fruit in Gan Eden. Responding to the Maimonidean interpretation of 'olam ha-ba, he stated:

. . . for we believe that the righteous will enter 'olam ha-ba with their bodies, and they shall be there in the manner of Moses at Sinai, or, if you will, in the manner of Elijah or Enoch, of whom they of blessed memory (the Rabbis) said that their flesh became a flame of fire. And whenever the functions of the body change from one matter to another, (namely,) to its opposite, in any event, one moment will separate between the first function and the second, and if so, there will be in any event one moment for the first function to complete its course, and then the second course will begin. And perhaps this future meal for the righteous will be (at) the end of the time when the first functions of eating and drinking will complete their course. . . ."<sup>95</sup>

Rashba here followed the interpretation of Ramban in his Sha'ar Ha-Gemul, who also mandated that 'olam ha-ba, as distinct from 'olam ha-neshamot, is a place where one enters with his body.<sup>96</sup> He did not conclude with this, however, but proceeded to give an allegorical interpretation to the Aggadah. First, he remarked that just as Gan Eden is a physical place whose purpose is to cause spiritual comprehension, the constituent parts of the mundane

Tabernacle served the same purpose as well. Perhaps, he continued, this is also true for the Leviathan. It exists in reality, but its purpose is to hint at a profound spiritual truth. In fact, he continued, the Rabbis themselves hinted at these matters in their Aggadah. He then provided allegorical meanings for six terms:

1. eating and drinking: spiritual bliss.
2. death: privation.
3. salting: preservation.
4. freezing, castration: removal.
5. male: cause (formal).
6. female: recipient of cause.<sup>97</sup>

He interpreted the word Leviathan to mean conjunction (hibbur) and adduced biblical parallels to this usage.<sup>98</sup> In brief, he interpreted the Aggadah as follows: G-d created man for the purpose of serving and intellectually cognizing Him. This would be achieved by the conjunction of the soul and the intellect. If the (male) intellect and the (female) soul would constantly unite, however, the world would be destroyed, for those who possess apprehension of G-d lose their interest in mundane matters such as reproduction. The human race would, consequently, die out. Hence, G-d created man with an appetitive soul as well, and "castrated the male," i.e., He created man so that the intellect would not naturally cleave to the soul. The

souls of the righteous, however, are "preserved" for the future. As they have realized their Creator, their souls attain everlasting life.<sup>99</sup>

The designation of matter as male and form as female was quoted by Rambam in the name of Plato,<sup>100</sup> and many medieval Jewish allegorists used this idea. R. Yitzhak ben Yedaiah as well understood "Leviathan" as designating conjunction, although he also stressed the inherent corruptibility that results from the joining of the four elements.<sup>101</sup> The ideas that Rashba expressed demonstrate his thoroughly sophisticated understanding of medieval conceptions of the soul and its immortality (although his emphasis that righteous souls will attain immortality markedly differed from the philosophical position that stressed intellectual achievement).<sup>102</sup>

Had we possessed only the Commentary On Aggadah, we would have thought that this was Rashba's final word on the meaning of the Leviathan Aggadah. Yet R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon records that Rashba explained the kabbalistic meaning of Leviathan.<sup>103</sup> Rashba referred to du-partzufim, and to the primal light that was hidden (this was the meaning of the "castration of the male"), and he interpreted the "cooling" of the female that the Talmud records as referring to the middah (sefirah) of shekhinah. The book Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut contains a long discussion of these issues.<sup>104</sup> The



kabbalistic explanation was cited in the Zohar and was quoted in Menahem Recanati's Perush 'al Ha-Torah.<sup>105</sup>

An examination of the eighth chapter of Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut reveals that many of the themes that Rashba did allude to in his Commentary On Aggadah are present in that kabbalistic book. The theme that existents on earth have an analogue in the heavens,<sup>106</sup> the idea that the world was created so that man may worship his Creator,<sup>107</sup> and the notion that G-d had to create the world in the manner that he did in order that man have a desire to reproduce<sup>108</sup> are all mentioned. What is present in Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut but is conspicuously missing in Rashba's remarks is the interweaving of all these themes into the sefirotic framework.<sup>109</sup> These passages in Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut serve to underscore an important point. The language in which Rashba wrote his exoteric remarks was one fully in line with the Jewish philosophical tradition. The content of his statements, however, was one that expressed ideas that often were but a step away from a fully worked out kabbalistic doctrine.<sup>110</sup>

Gershom Scholem employed the distinction that exists in literary criticism between allegory and metaphor to characterize the difference between philosophically-minded explanations of texts (biblical or rabbinic) and kabbalistic

interpretations.<sup>111</sup> As allegory, philosophical explanations disclose the ethical intent underlying the surface text, and particulars, be they parts of a ritual or components of a text, may frequently not be inherently significant.<sup>112</sup> As metaphor, kabbalistic interpretations give a symbolic significance not only to the text or the ritual as a whole, but to all the constituent parts as well.<sup>113</sup> Many Jewish thinkers found the historically-minded explanations used by Rambam in Moreh Nevukhim offensive. For example, his explanation of the commandments regarding sacrifices as being a result of the condition of the Jews at the time of the Revelation divested the rituals of the inherently significant meanings that they would possess as symbolic representations.<sup>114</sup> Even if one explained a mitzvah with a "positive" reason (in the sense of representing an ethical ideal), one could often not give intrinsic meaning to its various facets. Kabbalistic imagery could perform a function that was necessarily lacking in philosophical allegory.<sup>115</sup>

When one uses a metaphor, he employs a word as a symbol for another specific object. The specific correspondence rules out the possibility of using that word at the same time as a metaphor for something else. When one uses an allegory, on the other hand, he does not need to maintain any connection between a specific word and the

allegory that is presented. Thus, one's use of an allegorical explanation does not necessarily preclude one's use of a metaphorical interpretation of the same passage.<sup>116</sup> Rashba explained many aggadot in a rationalistic-allegorical fashion. Yet we find him hinting as well to kabbalistic (metaphorical) interpretations. Although the Torah was recognized as possessing multiple layers of meaning, Rashba, it seems, was the first one to systematically assign two modes of non-literal interpretation to the same rabbinic passages.<sup>117</sup> This was the innovation that characterized Rashba's multifaceted commentary on Aggadah. We have already seen this in his discussion of the Leviathan Aggadot. As another example we will now analyze his interpretation of the Aggadah that G-d dons phylacteries (Berakhot 6a).

R. Azriel symbolically connected the four compartments of the phylacteries with the first four sefirot. The fifth sefirah, gevurah (strength), is the referent of the phrase "left hand of G-d." R. Azriel explained the Aggadah that Moses saw the knot of tefillin (phylacteries) that G-d wore as meaning that he apprehended the lower five sefirot. According to this interpretation, G-d did not actually wear tefillin of parchment. When the Talmud described the tefillin that G-d wore it was describing the sefirot.<sup>118</sup>

Rashba, in his commentary, hinted at the kabbalistic explanation.<sup>119</sup> (Some relevant passages that Weinberger quoted in his edition are verbatim quotations of R. Azriel.<sup>120</sup> We have already shown that these passages were not authored by Rashba, but by a scribe who copied verbatim passages from R. Azriel's commentary.) He also gave a philosophically-minded interpretation. According to this latter view, the Rabbis wished to portray G-d's concern and involvement with the Jews.

Rashba emphasized that G-d singled out the Jews as His only nation, just as He is the Jews' only G-d. When the Jews cleave to Him, the purpose of the world is realized. When a Jew wears tefillin, they are placed upon his heart, in order to impress upon him the love for G-d that he should experience. Pictorially representing the fact that in a corresponding fashion G-d thinks of the Jews, the Rabbis wrote that G-d, responding in kind, wears tefillin too.<sup>121</sup>

Scholars have shown that two distinct motivations lay behind commentaries to Aggadah. One was apologetic: commentaries adopting a non-literal mode of interpretation could ward off the ridicule that people who scoffed at the literal meaning, and consequently, at the Rabbis as well, would otherwise express. Another incentive was the realization that Aggadah, if interpreted through the categories of a specific world view, could be a powerful

proof of the validity of that world view. Statements by the Rabbis that ostensibly meant something else were, in reality, hidden and profound expressions of a weltanschauung. As Isadore Twersky, among others, has noted, this use of Aggadah was a common denominator of the approach of the kabbalists and that of the philosophers.<sup>122</sup>

Scholars have also investigated the self-perception of the interpreters. Did they conceive of themselves as originating interpretations, or as just disclosing what was already present in the tradition? Tishby quoted R. Ezra's comment, regarding the sod of sacrifices:

. . . this rationale is known in the words of our Sages, dispersed amidst the words of the Talmud, and I shall sow them here.<sup>123</sup>

Once one had found the key, however, it was easy to expand the contours of interpretation beyond that which one had received. Thus, for example, R. Todros Ha-Levi Abulafia wrote that the learned extrapolated complete interpretations from "chapter headings."<sup>124</sup> This activity is not found in Rashba, even with regard to matters that were components of the Gerona tradition. A passage from his first comment in the Commentary On Aggadah is significant in this regard.

And some of them (the aggadot) are written in a hidden idiom, but there is nothing in them except for plain matters. . . .<sup>125</sup>

We have already mentioned that the word sod according to Rashba (as according to Ramban) had a specific

connotation: the sefirotic doctrine of the Gerona school. Rashba, moreover, would not expand the prooftexts upon which these doctrines were built. Any original explanations that he adduced in his Commentary On Aggadah were written to refute criticisms of Aggadah as not making sense,<sup>126</sup> and were in the mode of philosophical allegory.<sup>127</sup> His extreme conservatism in Kabbalah virtually forced his creativity to express itself in the rationalistic mode of thought.

POINTS OF CONTACT BETWEEN KABBALAH AND PHILOSOPHY:  
SOME ILLUSTRATIONS

A detailed analysis of the entire corpus of Rashba's remarks on kabbalistic issues is beyond the scope of this thesis. What we do wish to show in this section of our study is the manner in which he approached issues that were of import both to kabbalists and philosophers. We will examine four issues, bound together by a common leitmotif: the soul. Rashba's view of neshamah yeterah, Gehinnom, gilgul (metempsychosis) and the Aggadah that Jacob did not die is illustrative of how he dealt with the issues that involved points of contact between philosophy and Kabbalah.

The Talmud, in tractates Betzah and Ta'anit, remarked that G-d gives a neshamah yeterah (henceforth ny) to man before Shabbat and takes it away at the close of Shabbat.<sup>128</sup> This aggadic statement carried with it halakhic ramifications: according to most medieval halakhists, the spices that accompanied the havdalah service at the conclusion of Shabbat were instituted to compensate for the loss of ny.<sup>129</sup> What exactly ny meant was not exclusively an academic exercise either; halakhists offered various explanations for the prevalent custom not to use spices at the conclusion of yom tov or when yom tov followed Shabbat, and these were contingent upon specific interpretations of ny.<sup>130</sup> Three primary explanations of ny were given; Rashba's handling of the issue offers a glimpse of how he

used both the philosophically-minded and kabbalistically-tinged reasons.

One interpretation divested the term neshamah of any meaning and maintained that ny merely indicated serenity and peace of mind. As allegory, ny did not possess any reality.<sup>131</sup> Another interpretation was based upon the theory that certain cycles are built into nature. At specific times that regularly recur, man becomes more vigorous. According to this view, every Shabbat is a day when man possesses greater faculties. Although this view was promulgated by R. Abraham ibn Ezra, it could be adopted by the kabbalistically-inclined.<sup>132</sup>

A third explanation took ny literally. Ramban, in his Commentary On the Torah hinted at this view.<sup>133</sup> In kabbalistic works, ny referred to the bat zug of Shabbat, which itself represented one of the sefirot.<sup>134</sup>

Rashba discussed this issue both in his responsa<sup>135</sup> and in his commentary. In the former his point of departure was the omission of the spice-blessing after yom tov. The questioner assumed that ny exists on yom tov as well as on Shabbat, and, consequently, spices are not used when yom tov follows Shabbat. When, then, are they not used after yom tov either?

In his response, Rashba initially interpreted ny along the lines of ibn Ezra's explanation.<sup>136</sup> As a cyclical



event occurring every seven days, ny necessarily is limited to Shabbat, and is not present on yom tov. Why, if this is the case, is there no spice-blessing when yom tov follows Shabbat? He gave the answer of the Tosafists: the yom tov festivities compensate for the loss of ny just as well as spices do.<sup>137</sup> He then gave another reason for ny: the allegorical representation of peace and harmony. On yom tov, Rashba added, as acts of labor connected with preparing food are permitted, one will not attain the same level of peace as on Shabbat. Hence, this explanation also limits ny to Shabbat. He did not hint at the kabbalistic explanation given by Ramban.

Another responsum in which he referred to ibn Ezra's idea of cyclical patterns inherent in the particular days of the week was one that dealt with the practice of saying during the Shabbat minhah prayer a verse that characterized the time as et ratzon (a time of [G-d's] goodwill). He adopted this idea to explain why this verse is recited only on Shabbat, not on yom tov.<sup>138</sup>

In his Commentary On Aggadah, tractate Ta'anit, he also quoted ibn Ezra's explanation.<sup>139</sup> At the beginning of his comment, he remarked: "This (passage) contains a hidden and a revealed part." Was he alluding to the explanation of Ramban? The Aggadah that served as the point of departure contained other elements besides that of the ny. In any

event, he added a point concerning the spice-blessing:

. . . and when one inhales because of a mitzvah and blessing, then the act will be strong and truly worthy of strengthening the soul.<sup>140</sup>

According to those who believed that ny and the subsequent spices served only to produce a level of serenity, the fact that one would fulfill a mitzvah by inhaling spices at the end of Shabbat was not itself essential. To a kabbalist, however, the metaphysical substitute for the loss of ny could only be attained through the performance of a mitzvah.

Rambam, in his introduction to Perush Ha-Mishnah to Sanhedrin, Chapter 10, maintained that the ultimate punishment that will be meted out to evildoers will be the fact that their souls will not attain immortality. Gehinnom, according to this view, is an allegory representing the punishment that the wicked will receive. Although he did concede the possibility that G-d would punish the wicked by causing intense heat, either from an internal or external source, to burn them, he denied any reality to a place called Gehinnom.<sup>141</sup>

Ramban, on the other hand, in Sha'ar Ha-Gemul, maintained the ontological reality of a place called Gehinnom where the wicked will be punished. He argued that if one believed that eternal punishment meant only that

one's soul would not achieve immortality, there would be no difference between one who sinned egregiously his entire life and one who was essentially righteous but committed one sin that caused him to suffer excision (karet).<sup>142</sup> Ramban pointed out that a halakhic passage in tractate Shabbat assumed the reality of Gehinnom<sup>143</sup> and the Talmudic aggadot were replete with references to its existence. Although he claimed that the fire of Gehinnom was not a physical fire, i.e., it was not one of the four elements, he insisted that it was a "fire" that indeed "burned" those who were evil in this world.<sup>144</sup>

Among Ramban's prooftexts for the existence of Gehinnom was the biblical story of Korah and his party. Drawing upon a rabbinic source that one of the openings to Gehinnom was under the surface of the desert, he claimed that Korah and his party descended directly to Gehinnom.

The Bible states that the sons of Korah "did not die" and the Talmud commented that they sat upon a high place in Gehinnom.<sup>145</sup> Ramban, of course, would have to interpret this passage allegorically in light of his position concerning Gehinnom. Although Ramban in Sha'ar Ha-Gemul did not address this particular passage, in light of his literal interpretation of Gehinnom and his interpretation of the descent of Korah's party there, there is every reason to believe that he interpreted this passage

literally as well.

In his Commentary On Aggadah, Rashba analyzed the passage that the sons of Korah sat on a "high place in Gehinnom."<sup>146</sup> On the one hand, he accepted the ontological reality of Gehinnom. Yet, he also made the following comment:

Know, that because Gehinnom is a place known for the administration of punishment and pain, they (the Rabbis) of blessed memory gave that name to all matters of pain such as sicknesses, plagues, exile and similar matters. . . .

. . . and when the ground beneath them (the sons of Korah) split, and this was their "Gehinnom," a place was set aside upon which they sat and were not swallowed, as sometimes happens in places that are split (by earthquakes). . . .<sup>147</sup>

Rashba's position here is in between that of Rambam and that of Ramban. Although he conceded the reality of Gehinnom, he refused to explain an aggadic passage in this sense. What were the factors motivating Rashba here? He certainly felt that one should interpret the passage that stated that the sons of Korah "did not die" literally. Perhaps he did not accept the idea that in punishing Korah and his party, G-d opened up a physical passageway from the earth down to Gehinnom. (Ramban, in his Commentary On the Torah, wrote that the opening of this passageway was a special phenomenon that did not occur during natural earthquakes.)<sup>148</sup> Rashba did not wish to preclude the possibility that G-d caused a "standard" earthquake, not

some unique phenomenon, to occur.<sup>149</sup> Hence, he reinterpreted the aggadic comment regarding the sons of Korah.

The major medieval Jewish philosophers rejected the doctrine of gilgul. Some authorities presented arguments showing the foolishness of the doctrine; others, such as Rambam, did not mention the doctrine at all.<sup>150</sup> In stark contrast with the opposition from Jewish philosophy, gilgul is taken for granted in the Kabbalah from the time when Sefer Ha-Bahir appeared (twelfth century). Scholem stressed that the absence of any special apology for this doctrine proves that the idea grew in the circles of the early kabbalists without any affinity to philosophic discussions of transmigration of souls.<sup>151</sup> Ramban interpreted the book of Job in light of this doctrine, and this exegesis was expanded for other biblical figures in subsequent kabbalistic literature.

Rashba not only subscribed to the doctrine of gilgul, using it to solve the problem of tzaddik ve-ra' lo, he also, as we have seen, gave his own explanation as to why a soul needs to undergo gilgul.<sup>152</sup> According to Rashba's explanation, gilgul was not necessarily a punishment; on the contrary, it was a chance for the soul to "complete" the time allotted to it.<sup>153</sup>

Efraim Gottlieb, in his article concerning the controversy over gilgul that took place in Candia, Italy, in the fifteenth century, pointed out that most of the arguments raised against gilgul did not concern its admissibility from a philosophic point of view. Rather, gilgul was considered to be a foolish doctrine. Only one argument, based upon the idea that the soul is necessarily connected to the body which it inhabits (and by definition, cannot be transferred to another body), maintained the impossibility of gilgul.<sup>154</sup> We note that R. Yedaiah Ha-Penini, in his Ketav Hitnatzlut,<sup>155</sup> claimed that one of the benefits of the study of natural philosophy was the realization of the foolishness of the doctrine of gilgul. He did not claim that the doctrine was logically absurd; hence, Rashba's affirmation of this doctrine was not anti-rationalistic in the strictest sense of the term.<sup>156</sup>

As a fourth and final illustration of how Rashba dealt with an issue that was of import both to philosophers and kabbalists, we examine his exegesis of the Talmudic Aggadah that "Jacob our Father did not die" (Ta'anit 5a). This issue was discussed by R. Azriel in his Perush la-Aggadot,<sup>157</sup> and a comparison of Rashba's remarks with those of R. Azriel reveals how the multiple strands of Rashba's thought converged on this issue.

R. Azriel explained that although one could explain the "life" that the Talmud ascribed to Jacob as 'olam ha-ba, one should not reinterpret the plain sense of the statement, which assumed that Jacob was still living in this world. Drawing upon a statement in the Sifre that no pesolet (blemish) issued from Jacob, and hence the strength of Jacob was still extant, he added the remark, found in Sefer Ha-Bahir, that Jacob cleaved to the middah (sefirah) of emet, which itself is represented by hayye 'olam ha-ba.<sup>158</sup> He further explained that as Jacob's children followed in his path, he and his children were entitled to endure, for "all who walk in truth (emet) are entitled to eternal life."<sup>159</sup>

Rashba did hint at a sod in the words of the Talmud, but he stressed that the fact that Jacob physically died was not debated. He wrote:

And how is it possible that R. Yohanan or R. Yitzhak relied on the hint hidden in one biblical verse, instead of relying on open and clear verses that he (Jacob) died and was mourned and embalmed and buried; this (possibility) is of those matters that the intellect certainly rejects and casts away. Rather, R. Yitzhak answered him thus: I am not speaking about his body, but am (kabbalistically) interpreting a verse; "just as his (Jacob's) seed is alive, he too is alive." Then R. Nahman understood his secret hint and received it from him and was silent.<sup>160</sup>

Rashba then referred to the open meaning of this passage. He cited the idea that only the seed of Jacob was free of descendants who were not worthy of receiving the Torah. Although he mentioned that Jacob and his descendants

were men of truth, and hence deserved to receive the Torah of truth, he did not refer to the sefirotic symbol of emet.<sup>161</sup>

Ramban, in his Commentary On the Torah, Genesis 49:33, explained the idea that Jacob did not die in terms of the idea of the "garment of souls"; the concept that his soul was constantly connected to tzeror ha-hayyim (literally, "bundle of life," a hint to one of the sefirot). R. Isaac of Acre quoted an explanation of this "secret of Ramban" in the name of one with the acronym RSNR.<sup>162</sup> NR stands for natreh rahmana (may G-d watch him; a phrase used with reference to someone still living). who had R. Isaac designated by RS? In his article on the concept of the "garment of souls," Scholem suggested that Rashba was referred to, although he admitted that this was only a conjecture.<sup>163</sup> In a recently published dissertation on R. Isaac of Acre, Amos Goldreich argued that RS did not refer to Rashba; he demonstrated that the content of the Kabbalah of RS was of a different variety than that of Rashba.<sup>164</sup>

The sod Rashba hinted at, then, may be only the equation of Jacob with the sefirah of emet, and not the doctrine of the "garment of souls." At any rate, he differed with his contemporary R. Samuel ben Reuven, who is recorded in Minhat Kenaot as explaining that the world in which Jacob did not die was indeed the world of souls.<sup>165</sup> In



sum, Rashba's acceptance of the kabbalistic equation of Jacob with emet is fully in line with his continuation of the Gerona kabbalistic tradition. His explicit remark concerning the "open and clear verses," however, demonstrates his refusal to violate logical exegetical norms, and this emphasis is not found in the remarks of R. Azriel.

RAMBAN AND RASHBA CONCERNING KABBALAH'S PLACE  
IN ONE'S WORLD VIEW

Joseph Dan has pointed out that one may be a kabbalist and yet display absolutely no overt sign of kabbalistic ideas or terminology. (His point of departure was R. Jonah of Gerona.)<sup>166</sup> Thus, although Rashba clearly did not openly write about kabbalistic matters, and his hints pertaining to aspects of the doctrine are largely confined to the mere mention that an Aggadah contains a sod, the fact that he was even more reticent than Ramban does not in itself prove that Kabbalah played any less of a role in his world view than it did in Ramban's. Yet we believe that certain facts, which we shall now examine, can legitimately lead one to the conclusion that Rashba perceived his kabbalistic tradition to be in a state of even further decline.

In Ramban's polemic with Pablo Christiani, he suggested that the Midrash which maintained that the Messiah was born on the day that the Temple was destroyed had a secret (kabbalistic) meaning and was not meant literally.<sup>167</sup> Rashba, on the other hand, in his tract against Raymond Martini,<sup>168</sup> made absolutely no mention of kabbalistic doctrines hidden in Aggadah.<sup>169</sup> Whereas Ramban had no qualms about introducing kabbalistic categories with reference to the Midrash in dispute, Rashba did not mention the kabbalistic meaning of several aggadot (e.g., that the

Torah was given as black fire on top of white fire)<sup>170</sup> that were recognized as fundamental kabbalistic motifs;<sup>171</sup> he only mentioned allegorical explanations. Indeed, his opponent criticized him for arguing in an excessively philosophic manner. His approach can be viewed in light of the rationalistic bent pursued by Jews in polemic with Christians.<sup>172</sup> Although he may have made a tactical decision to pursue his polemic in this manner, he indicated his wariness of the utility of kabbalistic categories in debate, something Ramban did not do.

We have already pointed out how Rashba's interpretation of the rabbinic statement that man and G-d are compared to twins can serve as paradigmatic illustration of his focusing of his creative energies to explication of peshuto shel mashal. His approach can be set against that of Ramban, who in his commentary emphasized that the parable should not be allegorized away.<sup>173</sup> Ramban often emphasized that kabbalistic interpretations provide the true answer to questions that arise in the course of the search for peshat.<sup>174</sup> This emphasis seems to be lacking in the various responsa of Rashba that hint at kabbalistic matters. If he mentioned a sod, it was not as a deciding factor in interpreting what the Torah said; it was part of a conceptually separate book of "hints."<sup>175</sup>

Besides the various introductions to his works,<sup>176</sup> Ramban introduced kabbalistic remarks twice into his Talmud commentary. One comment concerned the difference between the terms neder and shevu'ah; the kabbalistic explanation used referents utterly alien to the Talmudic discussion ad loc.<sup>177</sup> The other comment concerned aspaklariah ha-meirah and its meaning.<sup>178</sup> Rashba, in his commentary, remained silent in both places. Although the preponderance of material in Ramban's novellae on the Talmud is, of course, not kabbalistic, his inclusion of kabbalistic material into his substance of his remarks shows that he conceived of Kabbalah as a discipline that must be utilized in order to truly understand the underpinnings of certain laws.

Scholem, in several of his works, wrote how Ramban, in his Commentary On the Torah, in effect invited his readers to engage in kabbalistic study, telling them, "Come, get yourself a qualified teacher and learn what you can of this discipline!"<sup>179</sup> Even with the qualification that Ramban did not present Kabbalah as the solution to every problem that Judaism faced,<sup>180</sup> there can be no stronger indication of his regard for Kabbalah than his inclusion of kabbalistic remarks in the midst of a commentary dedicated to the technical interpretation of law. Rashba's silence, on the other hand, bespeaks a clear demarcation of Halakhah and kabbalah; just as he desisted from explaining Aggadot in his halakhic commentaries, he did not see the need to

introduce kabbalistic hints to the halakhic portions themselves.<sup>181</sup>

The order in which one presents his arguments can often be indicative of the relative strengths which he assigns them. Ramban consistently gave the final word to kabbalistic hints in his Commentary On the Torah. Rashba, on the other hand, in his Commentary On Aggadah, started with the sod that was present in the words of R. Azriel; he then proceeded with a rationalist-allegorical explanation. Whereas one gets the impression from Ramban that Kabbalah offered the quintessential categories of reference,<sup>182</sup> from Rashba one does not glean more than the fact that multiple categories of interpretation exist.<sup>183</sup>

Moshe Idel has pointed out that Ramban confessed to ignorance of the real kabbalistic meaning of ma'aseh bereshit (which, in his terminology, is connected with sod ha-yetzirah: speculation about creation).<sup>184</sup> Moreover, where Ramban did not receive a kabbalistic tradition, he refused to supply any interpretation of his own.<sup>185</sup> We have seen that Rashba as well confessed his ignorance of the full extent of certain doctrines several times.<sup>186</sup> An inherently conservative tradition that allows for no innovation can go nowhere but down; Rashba's remarks can be seen as indicative of the further decline of the tradition. Hence, his feelings of inadequacy with regard to communicating

pertinent hints would be the natural result of that decline.<sup>187</sup>

We conclude our comparison of Ramban and Rashba by pointing out both contemporary and subsequent appraisals by figures who were notable men in their own right. R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon's remarks concerning Rashba characterized him as a transmitter of doctrine, but not as a megubbal in his own right.<sup>188</sup> Abraham Abulafia's characterization of "Talmudists" who had no true knowledge of Kabbalah, a charge directed against Rashba, is demonstrative of the fact that the latter was perceived as one who would not devote creative energy to that study. Although it has been demonstrated that Ramban's Kabbalah was also of this conservative nature,<sup>189</sup> his perception by others as a great "Kabbalist" demonstrates at the very least that he was viewed as one who stressed Kabbalah's quintessential importance. Rabbenu Nissim ben Reuven (14th c.) remarked that Ramban went "overboard" in his adoption of Kabbalah;<sup>190</sup> we know, of course, that he did not need to make that comment about Rashba. In later generations, Rashba was seen as one who advanced the allegorical interpretation of Aggadah; Don Isaac Abravanel, in this vein,<sup>191</sup> mentioned him together with his opponent in the controversy of 1303-06, R. Yedaiah Ha-Penini. Ramban's works led some to claim that passages in his Commentary On the Torah that did not conform

with kabbalistic views did not reflect his true beliefs.<sup>192</sup> Rashba's belief in a corpus of kabbalistic secrets, on the other hand, was never seen as the definitive expression of his categories of thought.

CHAPTER FOUR: RASHBA AND THE PURPOSE OF THE  
STUDY AND PRACTICE OF MITZVOT

Historians have noted that all the parties to the dispute that raged at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Provence and northern Spain over the study of philosophy maintained a reverential attitude toward Rambam.<sup>1</sup> Rashba fully accepted the "heroic image" of Rambam; in his attacks upon the allegorists he distinguished between the author of Moreh Nevukhim and the contemporary Jewish philosophers.<sup>2</sup> In his halakhic responsa, he never dismissed outright any statement made by the author of the Mishneh Torah, no matter how difficult; the strongest language he used was when he remarked that Rambam's words were "like an error which proceeds from the ruler."<sup>3</sup>

Rambam's approach towards ta'amei ha-mitzvot (reasons for the commandments of the Torah), however, was poles removed from the attitude of the kabbalists, who viewed them in the context of their theosophic doctrine.<sup>4</sup> Although Rashba did not attack Rambam with the vituperation that some kabbalists did, this issue signified his only departure from his acceptance of Rambam's "heroic image." Rashba's responsum on this issue signified his rejection of the philosophic mode of speculation concerning ta'amei ha-mitzvot.



You have asked: Rambam, of blessed memory, maintained that the reason for the prohibition of oto ve-et beno (slaughtering an animal and its child on the same day-Leviticus 22:28); is that the animals naturally worry about their children when they see them slaughtered, but this reason does not account for (the instance) in which the child is slaughtered away from the parent's presence.

Answer: Do not pay attention to the reasons for the commandments that the Rabbi, of blessed memory, wrote, for there are many great difficulties with almost all of them. With this one there is a difficulty as well: if this (interpretation) were correct, we would have to say that animals are as people, recognizing their children, and that this is so even after the children have grown up and are no longer attached to their parents, and that the father does not worry, only the mother . . . Except for the honor of the Rabbi, of blessed memory, we do not pay attention to these reasons, and Blessed is He who knows the reasons for His decrees.<sup>5</sup>

Rashba pointed out that the halakhic parameters of oto ve-et beno and of shilluah ha-gen did not easily fit the conditions which, according to Rambam, motivated the commandment in the first place. This criticism was already voiced by Ramban, in his commentary to Deuteronomy 22:6, who also referred to the kabbalistic explanation found in Sefer Ha-Bahir. This explanation symbolically connected the "mother" that one sends away with the eighth sefirah (binah) and the "children" that one keeps with the seven lower sefirot.<sup>6</sup> This idea is itself representative of the doctrine of the shmittot and yovel.<sup>7</sup>

Although Rashba singled out Rambam's explanation of shilluah ha-gen for criticism, he did not even hint at the existence of a kabbalistic interpretation. Rashba's warning

against philosophically-minded explanations was not supplemented by a rousing call to delve into the secrets of Kabbalah. In light of his polemic against figures such as Abraham Abulafia, and his insistence against unwarranted kabbalistic speculation, his silence here is consistent with his convictions.<sup>8</sup> Rashba felt that one should not engage in unbridled speculation concerning ta'amei ha-mitzvot, whether with philosophic or theosophic categories, even if this meant not understanding the meaning of the laws.<sup>9</sup> This conservative posture manifested itself in his attitude toward davar gadol and davar gatan, which we shall now analyze.

Rashba sent to the Jews of Provence a letter<sup>10</sup> in which he took the Talmudic statement that R. Johanan ben Zakkai "did not leave (unstudied) . . . great matters or small matters. 'Great matters' mean the ma'aseh merkavah; 'small matters' the discussions of Abbaye and Rava" (Sukkah 28a; Bava Batra 134a) as his point of departure. His comments were cited by R. Ya'aqov ibn Ḥabib in his compendium Ein Ya'aqov (Sukkah 28a), and one manuscript of the letter was published several times.<sup>11</sup>

Rambam, of course, had designated physics and metaphysics to be the subjects indicated by ma'aseh bereshit (henceforth MB) and ma'aseh merkavah (henceforth MM).<sup>12</sup> The kabbalists rejected any identification of esoteric

disciplines mentioned in the Talmud with secular disciplines that the Gentiles studied; the remarks of R. Todros Ha-Levi Abulafia, who vigorously asserted that sod ha-ibbur referred to kabbalistic doctrine and not to astronomical knowledge, was typical.<sup>13</sup> With regard to MM, Ramban, in his introduction to his Commentary On the Torah, hinted that it referred to kabbalistic doctrines.<sup>14</sup> Even Spanish Talmudists of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century who were not kabbalists, such as R. Aaron Ha-Levi of Barcelona (Ra'ah), R. Yom Tob ben Abraham Ishbili (Ritba), and R. Nissim ben Reuben (Ran), rejected the idea that a non-Jewish discipline was the referent of MB and MM and claimed instead that Kabbalah was the study meant by these terms.<sup>15</sup> Although Rashba did not comment on this passage in his halakhic commentry to Sukkah or Bava Batra, the position he expressed in his letter; namely, that MB and MM refer to kabbalistic explanations of mitzvot, dovetailed fully with this view.<sup>16</sup>

Rashba began by noting that certain people claimed that the subject matter that Abbaye and Rava studied (i.e., proper performance of mitzvot) was itself a "small matter."<sup>17</sup> They based this opinion on the Rabbinic comment that G-d gave the mitzvot in order to mold (le-tzaref) people.<sup>18</sup> Interpreting this remark to mean that mitzvot had no intrinsic value, they claimed that they were used only as a means of discipline by G-d. Rashba rejected this

a means of discipline by G-d.<sup>19</sup> Rashba rejected this doctrine on two accounts. He first pointed out that such opinions necessarily led to antinomian attitudes and practices by those people who believed that the study of philosophy was a more meaningful act than performance of mitzvot. G-d's wish, Rashba claimed, is that Jews should perform mitzvot not out of a sense of burden (which would necessarily result from the belief that they lacked intrinsic value), but from a sense of commitment to a meaningful set of laws.<sup>20</sup>

He further stated that mitzvot do have deep, profound, and in fact inscrutable meanings, and those whom G-d graced with the prerequisite wisdom can investigate these profundities. He stated, however, that proper performance of mitzvot is a sine qua non for G-d's grace to assist one to discover these meanings.

Rashba wrote:

Those matters hinted at by the mitzvot are themselves the merkavah.<sup>21</sup>

By ascertaining that MM is an esoteric system that explains mitzvot, he rejected the philosophic position, and pointed to kabbalistic doctrine.<sup>22</sup> Using the imagery of a doctor who prescribes medicines to patients who do not understand why they work,<sup>23</sup> he remarked that just as a patient will nonetheless follow the prescribed rule for the application of the medicine, Jews should likewise study the Law in order

Kabbalistic ideas. Sensing the possible antinomianism to properly achieve the benefits obtained from performance of the mitzvot.

We have already mentioned that many contemporaries and compatriots of Rashba who were strictly Talmudists claimed that MM referred to Kabbalah. This point, we believe, is crucial if we are to understand why Rashba did not urge his respondents to engage in a program of kabbalistic study. Instead, he distinguished between the absolute value of Kabbalah and the functional utility of the study of Talmud, and proceeded to praise the "small matter" of the discussions of Abbaye and Rava.<sup>24</sup>

Rashba quoted a well-known Rabbinic homily<sup>25</sup> that the angels could not receive the Torah because they do not possess bodies. He switched the emphasis, however, to stress that it would not make sense for angels to study laws that pertain only to those with bodily needs. The angels, he wrote, knew that these laws were not relevant to them, but desired the Torah in order to apprehend the secrets of MM. G-d's response, in his view, was an affirmation of the supremacy of acts of service to sublime thoughts.<sup>26</sup>

Rashba had already pointed out that the discussions of Abbaye and Rava were the necessary teachings needed for understanding how the mitzvot should be performed. He now reminded his respondents that the penalty for transgressing

prohibited laws would not be mitigated by the pursuit of kabbalistic ideas. Sensing the possible antinomianism latent in a radical kabbalistic scheme, he reiterated that pursuit of davar qatan promised far more utility than a davar gadol that might lead one to forget his station and duties.<sup>27</sup> The word le-tzoref, he concluded, means to strengthen and regulate, and is for the benefit of man. Thus, in the final analysis, the argument between the philosophers and kabbalists concerning MB and MM is left behind by the Jew who instead pursues the knowledge necessary to follow G-d's Word.<sup>28</sup>

Rashba's advice to his respondents gives us a crucial insight that helps us to define the contours of his Weltanschauung. Possessing firm belief in the limits of human knowledge, he affirmed that performance of acts of service to G-d represented the proper goal of a Jew, and intellectual pursuits should be utilized as a means to that end.

## Notes: Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Journal of Jewish Studies VI (1955), pp. 1-13.

<sup>2</sup>She'elot v'Teshuvot I:548.

<sup>3</sup>Benai Berak, 1966.

<sup>4</sup>We wish to emphasize that we will not focus upon the substance of Rashba's kabbalistic doctrine per se. We will, however, attempt to analyze the role of Kabbalah in Rashba's thought. To what extent did he propound kabbalistic solutions to questions of textual exegesis and theodicy? How did he value the study of kabbalistic doctrine in comparison to the study of the exoteric Torah?

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Dan, "Gershom Scholem's Reconstruction of Early Kabbalah," Modern Judaism V:1 (1985), pp. 39-36, has pointed out that one may be a kabbalist and yet display absolutely no traces of kabbalistic ideas or terminology. (His point of departure was R. Jonah of Gerona.) Thus, one must be extremely careful before one declares that Kabbalah did not play as great a role in Rashba's system as it did in Ramban's. Yet certain facts, which will be analyzed in our study, might legitimately lead one to that conclusion.

## Notes: Chapter One

<sup>1</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:548. Moshe Idel has written that he plans to publish an article concerning this responsum.

<sup>2</sup>Journal of Jewish Studies VI (1955), pp. 1-13.

<sup>3</sup>See Rosh (Rabbenu Asher) and other commentaries ad loc.

<sup>4</sup>Rabbi M. M. Kasher, Torah Shelemah (New York, 1955), Vol. XVI, pp. 216ff. discusses the opinions of medieval Jewish authorities on the matter. Rambam in Moreh Nevukhim claimed that the prophetic experience of the Israelites at Sinai was necessarily lower than that of Moses when he received the Word of G-d. Ramban attacked this view, and Ritba (R. Yom Tob ben Ashvili) in Sefer Ha-Zikkaron defended it.

<sup>5</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 4:234.

<sup>6</sup>The Philosophy of the Kalam (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 578-589; Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 192-199.

<sup>7</sup>L. E. Goodman, "Did al-Ghazali Deny Causality?"



Studia Islamica 47 (1978), pp. 117-119. Wolfson discussed al-Ghazali in Kalam, p. 589.

<sup>8</sup>Moreh Nevukhim, 1:73.

<sup>9</sup>In his discussion of miracles, al-Ghazali placed the turning of a staff into a serpent (Exodus 4:3) and revival of the dead in the same category: G-d's imparting of life to non-living matter. He rejected, however, the idea that G-d could impart knowledge to a lifeless being, "because by lifeless we understand what lacks apprehension. So the creation of apprehension in it while it is designated as lifeless in the sense we have understood is impossible for that very reason." Rashba's rejection of an animal who could prophesy is consistent with these statements of al-Ghazali. (See Goodman, pp. 112-114, 118.)

<sup>10</sup>Rashba attacked the content of Abulafia's Kabbalah as well. See "ve-Zot le-Yehuda," in A. Jellinek, Ginze Hokmat Ha-Kabbalah (repr. Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 13-28. See M. Idel, Kitvei R. Abraham Abulafia u'Mishnato (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1976), p. 27, and below in our study.

<sup>11</sup>See "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sefaradim," Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture IX (New York, 1967).

<sup>12</sup>Rashba concluded his responsum concerning the "prophet of Avila" with the following remarks:



<sup>18</sup>See I. Twersky's comments on this score in his Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (New Haven, 1980), p. 505, n. 384.

<sup>19</sup>See "Remnants of Jewish Averroism in the Renaissance," in Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 243-265. The remark I have cited is on p. 253. Del Medigo posited as well that the Jewish religion could not accept a logical contradiction or any other doctrine that the intellect rejects. See p. 254.

<sup>20</sup>Averroes himself was certainly not an advocate of that theory, as Fakhry (History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 276-277) and others point out. As far as the so-called Latin Averroists are concerned, Etienne Gilson in Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York, 1938) wrote, ". . . the doctrine of the twofold truth . . . is not an historically correct one. . . . Were we (the Christian philosophers) living in a non-Christian world, such conclusions (the philosophical ones) would not be merely necessary, they would also be truth. But G-d has spoken. . . ." (pp. 58-59). Faith overruled the conclusions of reason.

<sup>21</sup>Feldman, Shnaton Bar-Ilan 7-8 (1970), p. 154. Elsewhere in this study we will compare Rashba's approach

toward Rambam's position with Ramban's rebuttal of Rambam in his Derashah 'al Divrei Kohelet (Kitvei Ramban I, pp. 188-190).

<sup>22</sup>Feldman, p. 154.

<sup>23</sup>See e.g., R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon, Maor va-Shemesh (Leorno, 1839), p. 46a, who writes הוא פסוק דבר אל ה' אל  
שמעו קול דבר אל ה', אל שמוע

Cf. Ramban in his introduction to his Commentary on the Torah: אלהינו נקראו בלשון אלהים  
אלהינו נקראו בלשון אלהים... and cf. S. Abramson's remarks in his Kelale Ha-Talmud be-Divrei Ha-Ramban (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 16.

<sup>24</sup>Feldman, p. 154.

<sup>25</sup>See J. Kafih, Perush Ha-Mishnah la-Rambam (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 21 and the text printed with standard editions of tractate Berakhot.

<sup>26</sup>Yavneh Review (1967), pp. 27-40.

<sup>27</sup>Feldman, p. 154.

<sup>28</sup>See Ivry, "Remnants," p. 253.

<sup>29</sup>Although contemporary physics has unified the equations governing the laws of electromagnetism with those governing the weak force and strong force, it still has not been able to include the equations governing gravitation into this system.

<sup>30</sup>Wolfson, Crescas, pp. 252-257 and 562-568.

Crescas himself rejected two explanations and offered a third, and Wolfson showed that a fourth explanation existed.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 125-127.

<sup>32</sup>Leo Strauss, "How to Begin to Study the Guide of the Perplexed," in The Guide of the Perplexed, tr. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), pp. LV-LVI.

<sup>33</sup>Shlomo Pines, "Translator's Introduction, The Philosophic Sources of The Guide of the Perplexed," pp. LXIII, LXXI, CVII, CX-CXII, CXXVIII, CXXX.

<sup>34</sup>See their remarks cited in nn. 19 and 20. One could theoretically maintain that a metaphysics that would succeed where Aristotle had failed and satisfactorily explain astronomical phenomena would still possess its own eternal immutable laws. Negation of Aristotle's metaphysics does not ipso facto prove the possibility of creation ex nihilo. Rambam's point, however, is valid as a reminder that Aristotle's word was not necessarily apodictic. See also S. Pines, "What Was Original in Arabic Science," in Scientific Change, ed. A C. Crombie (New York, 1963), pp. 187-188.

<sup>35</sup>Minhat Kenaot, p. 27. See, below, Chapter Two, Section One, "Rashba's Attitude Towards Occult Virtue."

<sup>36</sup>Wolfson (Crescas, p. 567) defined the term

אריסטו as peculiarity. See J. Sermoneta, ed., Sefer Tagmulei Ha-Nefesh le-Hillel ben Shmuel mi-Verona

(Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 262, 264, where the editor shows that the Latin word proprium was the translation of both <sup>אריסטו</sup> and

אריסטו. Rashba's use in Minhat Kenaot of the term אריסטו showed his wish to justify אריסטו within a natural, if not Aristotelian framework.

37 אריסטו איז אריסטו

<sup>38</sup>See his article "Averroism" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. I (New York, 1967), pp. 223-226.

<sup>39</sup>The Islamic theologian al-Ghazali argued that physics and metaphysics do not possess the same degree of certainty that mathematics and logic have. See Philosophy in the Middle Ages, ed. A. Hyman and J. Walsh (Indianapolis, 1973), p. 271, where his work Deliverance From Error is quoted on this score. R. Yehuda Halevi also used this argument (see Kuzari IV, 25) and it seems reasonable that he took al-Ghazali's argument as his own. D. Beneth, "Rabbi Yehuda Halevi ve-al-Ghazali," Knesset (1942), pp. 311-329, claims that scholars have exaggerated his dependence on al-Ghazali, but see pp. 316-317 concerning this specific argument against the validity of metaphysics. William of Ockham also argued that metaphysical propositions are not invested with the validity of logical or mathematical ones.

<sup>40</sup>Besides R. Yehuda Halevi (see n. 25 above), Ramban adopted this approach (see Kitvei Ramban I, pp. 155-156). Rashba, in his remarks, did not distinguish between different secular disciplines. Saint Augustine in The City of G-d, Book 18, Chapter 40, 41, also pointed out that the very fact of divergent opinions among secular historians and philosophers weakens their validity.

<sup>41</sup>F. von Steenberghen, Aristotle in the West (repr. New York, 1970), pp. 147-162, esp. pp. 161-162, portrayed Saint Bonaventure as exemplifying this approach.

<sup>42</sup>J. A. Weisheipl, "Classification of the Sciences in Medieval Thought," Mediaeval Studies, XXVII (1965), pp. 54-90, showed that Albertus Magnus was the first medieval scholastic to formulate the idea that in the investigation of physical problems, the natural sciences have no need of metaphysics. This doctrine applied as well to the relationship between mathematics and physics, and Saint Thomas stressed that "mathematical principles can demonstrate quantitative characteristics measured, but they can only describe, and not demonstrate propter quid, the production of natural effects" (p. 88).

<sup>43</sup>Of course, theology differs from any of the sciences in that it consists of facts that were revealed by G-d, not deduced from reason. Saint Thomas' position was

that the philosophical elements included in theology can be extracted from it and considered apart without undergoing modification. The unity of theology, according to him, includes both what G-d has revealed and the content of the sciences of nature and metaphysics. See Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), pp. 366-368.

<sup>44</sup> Isaac Abalag was one Jewish thinker who may have actually adopted the "double truth" theory.

45

הגהות רש"י על משנה זו מביא ראיה לכאורה על כך שיש להבין את המשנה כפי שהיא.

<sup>46</sup> רש"י על משנה זו. Rashba also utilized this idea to combat Christian polemicists who maintained that the apparent irrationality of an Old Testament law forces one to reinterpret it allegorically. See David Berger, The Jewish Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 357.

<sup>47</sup> See "Galileo and Plato," in Journal of the History of Ideas 4 (1943), pp. 400-428, reprinted in Metaphysics and Measurement (London, 1968), pp. 16-43.

<sup>48</sup> See A. C. Crombie, Mediaeval and Modern Science (Garden City, 1959), esp. pp. 121-166 ("The Application of Mathematical Methods to Mechanics") for the revolution in physics.



<sup>49</sup>The universities of Padua and Bologna did not have faculties of theology until 1363 and 1364 respectively, although by the early fourteenth century, Averroism in Italian universities was entrenched. See Guy Beaujouan, "Motives and Opportunities for Science in the Medieval Universities," in Scientific Change, ed. A. C. Crombie, pp. 232-234 (concerning the situation in Italy); P. O. Kristeller, Renaissance Thought (New York, 1961), pp. 35-37; C. J. Ermatinger, "Averroism in Early Fourteenth Century Bologna," Mediaeval Studies, XVI (1954), pp. 35-56.

<sup>50</sup>For Rambam's "mandate for inquiry" into the reasons for mitzvot see Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Me'ilah 8:8 and Hilkhoh Temurah 4:13. See Twersky's comments in his Introduction, pp. 407-418. In She'elot u'Teshuvot 4:253, Rashba expressed his disapproval of Rambam's efforts in the third book of Moreh Nevukhim to explain the commandments of the Torah. See below in our study.

<sup>51</sup>See Chapter Four ("Rashba and the Purpose of the Study and Practice of Mitvot"), where we analyze this important letter.

<sup>52</sup>See She'elot u'Teshuvot Ha-Rashba 1:418. A. S. Halkin, "Yedaiah Berdesi's Apology," in Jewish Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 165-184, analyzed R. Yedaiah's position.

53 לפי שם קדש קדש אל תהיה כאלו שיש להם

(Feldman, p. 155).

<sup>54</sup>p. 15. See his comments in #58 (Sefer Ha-Yareah), p. 127.

55 אין זה נראה שיש להבחין בין שמיטה לבין שמיטה  
אחרת, שכן שמיטה היא שמיטה אחת

See Feldman, pp. 159-160.

<sup>55a</sup>Feldman, *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>Efraim Gottlieb, Mehqarim be-Sifrut Ha-Qabbalah (Tel-Aviv, 1976), quoted two interpretations that existed concerning Rashba's original distinction between the state of the cosmos during "shemittah" and its state during "yovel." From the context of this responsum Rashba would appear to hold that during "shemittah," time goes on even as the world is destroyed.

<sup>57</sup>See e.g., Hiddushei Ha-Rashba 'al Aggadot Ha-Shas, commentary to Ta'anit 5a (אין זה נראה שיש להבחין בין שמיטה לבין שמיטה אחרת). In our section "Points of Contact between Kabbalah and Philosophy," we analyze his remarks more extensively.

<sup>58</sup>Idel, Kitvei R. Abraham Abulafia u'Mishnato (PhD. thesis, Hebrew University, 1976), p. 439, mentions that R. Menahem Ha-Meiri and R. Yedaiah Berdeshi used that phrase.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>60</sup>In this respect, Rashba continued the Spanish rationalist exegetical tradition. For Ramban on this score, see Bernard Septimus, "Open Rebuke and Concealed Love, Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in Twersky ed., Rabbi Moses Nahmanides, pp. 11-34. Rashba's interpretation of Exodus 21:6 corresponds to that of Rashbam. In She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:10 he does not automatically accept the Rabbinic explanation of the verses concerning David and Michal the daughter of Saul, and see 1:12 for another "liberal" exegetical response.

<sup>61</sup>We deal with Rashba's approach as compared to Ramban's in another section. We wish to note here that Rashba's acceptance of the kabbalistic doctrine of "shemittot" did not mean that he felt that this doctrine represented the plain meaning of the verse. Ramban, on the other hand, in his comments to Exodus 21:6, gives that impression! For sod ha-shemittot in writings of other kabbalists, see Gottlieb, Mehqarim, p. 335.

<sup>62</sup>Rambam did admit that miracles would be possible according to the Platonic view that G-d created the world out of pre-existing matter (Moreh Nevukhim, II:25). For our purposes, it is not necessary to address the question of Rambam's sincerity regarding his affirmation of creation ex nihilo.

<sup>63</sup>Moreh Nevukhim, II:15. For an overview of the Law of Contradiction, see Harry Wolfson, Religious Philosophy (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 17-21; idem., The Philosophy of the Kalam (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 578-589; idem., Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 192-199.

<sup>64</sup>Repr. Jerusalem, 1970, pp. 80-82.

<sup>65</sup>Chapter 5, Mishnah 6.

<sup>66</sup>See Moreh Nevukhim, II:29.

<sup>67</sup>See J. Heller, "Maimonides' Theory of Miracles," Between East and West, ed. A. Altmann (London, 1958), pp. 112-127.

<sup>68</sup>See A. Reines, "Maimonides' Concept of Miracles," HUCA XLV (1974), pp. 243-286. B. Herring, Joseph ibn Kaspi's Gevia Kesef (New York, 1982), pp. 99-122 ("The Naturalistic Interpretation of Supernatural Events") shows that medieval commentators of the Moreh also differed on this issue.

<sup>69</sup>C. Chavel, Ramban (Nahmanides): Writings and Discourses, Vol. I (New York, 1978), p. 69. The Hebrew original is in Kitvei Ramban (henceforth KR) I, p. 153.

<sup>70</sup>Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona, pp. 309ff.

<sup>71</sup>See "Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," in Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban):

Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 108-128.

<sup>72</sup>Ed. J. Finkel (New York, 1939), p. 34.

<sup>73</sup>As Ramban extended the role that miracles play, he disagreed with some of Rambam's uses of 'olam ke-minhago noheg; for example, he strongly opposed Rambam's view that the world will last forever (KR I, pp. 188-190).

<sup>74</sup>Meshiv Devarim Nekhohim (henceforth MDN), ed. G. Vajda, p. 111; Ha-Emunah ve-ha-Bittahon (henceforth EB), in KR II, pp. 390-391. (Gottlieb's lists of parallels between MDN and EB (see MDN, pp. 18-20), prove Scholem's contention that the work was not written by Ramban, but by R. Jacob b. Sheshet. R. Jacob took pains to show that even when the mazzalot operate, they are only messengers of G-d (MDN, p. 143), and that man accepted their decrees before he was created (MDN, p. 142.)

<sup>75</sup>Mantua, 1558; repr. Jerusalem, 1963, p. 58b (mazzal as part of the [third] sefirah of binah); p. 65a (nissim nistarim as part of the [tenth] sefirah of malkhut). Cf. p. 81b.

<sup>76</sup>Ma'amar Tehiyvat Ha-Metim, ed. Finkel, p. 34. The kabbalist R. Todros Ha-Levi Abulafia, in Otzar Ha-Kavod, Shabbat 156a, s.v. ein mazzal le-yisrael, emphatically rejected the astrological scheme of the philosophers and

proclaimed that G-d is directly involved in the affairs of the Jews.

<sup>77</sup>In his commentary to Lev. 18:25 repeated, with slight variations, in his Sermon on Qohelet (KR I, pp. 200-201), and in his Sermon on Rosh Ha-Shanah (KR I, p. 250), he connected the idea that the mazzalot do not possess power over the Jews with the recurring kabbalistic theme that Eretz Yisrael is the center of the universe and the exclusive estate of G-d. See also his remarks on Deut. 32:8. In his responsum concerning necromancy (KR I, p. 379), his tune was slightly different. See below.

<sup>78</sup>See Tos. ad loc., s.v. Ellah; Tos. Shabbat 156a, s.v. Ein. R. Jacob b. Sheshet (MDN, pp. 88-89) reinterpreted this passage to mean that although a righteous man can overturn the decrees of the stars in other circumstances merely by his will ( אלוהי ייבן ), with regard to לשון הרע he must engage in the act of prayer to achieve his aims. R. Bahye b. Asher adopted this explanation of R. Jacob; see MDN, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup>Note H. Davidson's remarks, written with reference to R. Moses Isserles and R. Judah Loeb of Prague, but relevant, mutatis mutandis, here as well. "(They) plainly treat the topic . . . less as a scientific problem in fathoming natural phenomena than as a problem in

accommodating authoritative bodies of knowledge." (Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century," Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century, ed. Cooperman, p. 138).

<sup>80</sup>Ed. A. Marx, HUCA III (1926), pp. 349-358.

<sup>81</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:19:

ישוה נהיה מילתו, וזה פירוש לוי (מנין) א"ת וכו' וכו'  
 וזהו ש"ת וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו'  
 וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו'  
 וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו'

<sup>81a</sup>These remarks raise the intriguing question of how Rashba viewed G-d's relationship to the Gentile nations. How would he reconcile the biblical passages that assume the responsibility of the nations of the world for their evil deeds with the conclusion that yesh mazzal for the gentiles? Perhaps he would fall back on the standard distinction between the proclivities that the stars caused and the free will that men nonetheless possess to override these propensities.

<sup>82</sup>See Horayot 8a for halakhic application of this principle.

<sup>83</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:148.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid. 1:409.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid. 5:48. וזהו ש"ת וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו' וכו'

אֲנִי מֵבִינֵי אֵלֶיךָ אֲנִי מֵבִינֵי אֵלֶיךָ  
 אֲנִי מֵבִינֵי אֵלֶיךָ אֲנִי מֵבִינֵי אֵלֶיךָ  
 אֲנִי מֵבִינֵי אֵלֶיךָ אֲנִי מֵבִינֵי אֵלֶיךָ

<sup>86</sup>Here he followed in Ramban's footsteps. See the latter's Commentary to Job, KR I, pp. 101, 176-179, as well as Sha'ar Ha-Gemul, KR II, p. 281.

<sup>87</sup>Ha-Ramban ke-Hozer ve-khi-Megubbal, p. 57, n. 171.

<sup>88</sup>From the perspective of Rashba's oeuvre as a whole, this grafting of solutions from different disciplines fits quite well with his policy of offering multifaceted interpretations of aggadic texts.

<sup>89</sup>Commentary to Aggadah, Berakhot 7b, Weinberger ed., pp. 21-24.

<sup>90</sup>Berakhot 32a, Weinberger ed., pp. 44-45. (The "preface" of Rashba, pp. 1-4, discusses this idea, but I have not found this text in any of the microfilms that I have consulted.)

<sup>91</sup>Berakhot 6b, Weinberger ed., pp. 10-14.

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל



...הן וכל אלה הם המזלות  
 ...הם המזלות והם המזלות

Berakhot 32a, Weinberger ed., pp. 10-14.

Note that the fate of the other nations is assumed to rest solely with the decrees of the mazzalot.

<sup>93</sup>Weinberger ed., pp. 66-67.

<sup>94</sup>See nn. 81, 83-85 above.

<sup>95</sup>See Joseph Strayer, ed., Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Vol. I (New York, 1982), p. 618, for citation of the 9th century Islamic theologian Abu-Ma'ashar, who defended astrology against those who believed that the planets influence only general events, but not specific ones. A limited view of ein mazzal le-yisrael might, accordingly, exclude the Jews from the specific influences of a patron star, but would not exclude the forces of "nature", which would include the general astrological pattern, from operating upon the Jews.

Note Ramban's formulation in his Commentary on the Torah, Exodus 6:2 (Chavel ed., p. 303):

...הם המזלות והם המזלות  
 ...הם המזלות והם המזלות

This formulation might have been interpreted as positing

nature as distinct from that which is governed by the stars. One might have then stated that even if the Jews possess no mazzal, at the moments when G-d's Providence leaves them they would be left to the vicissitudes of "nature," as opposed to the decrees of the stars. Since, as David Berger reminds us, "nature and the astrological order are pretty much synonymous" ("Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," p. 122, n. 43) we cannot posit this answer to the contradiction that exists here. I do not think that a distinction between Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish people can answer the problem either, as the kabbalistic idea that a mazzal was never assigned to Israel was expressed with regard to the Jewish people as well as to the land of Israel. (See Ramban to Deut. 32:12, a passage which seems to indicate the total exclusion of the Jews from any astrological influence.) Perhaps the מַזָּל mentioned by Ramban in Exodus 6:2 refers to a nature governed by the general astrological patterns.

<sup>96</sup>The passage from Ramban which conclusively shows that he was no occasionalist (Commentary to Job 36:7, KR I, pp. 108-109) does not contain any kabbalistic terminology. Cf. the passages cited by Berger ("Miracles, p. 122) that convinced many scholars that Ramban denied the natural order (at least with regard to the Jews) entirely. They all employ kabbalistic themes.

<sup>97</sup>Vajda's ed., pp. 16-17, lists all the references to ibn Tibbon's Ma'amar Yiqqavu Ha-Mayim, with which R. Jacob ben Sheshet took strong issue. He accused ibn Tibbon not only of believing in 'olam ke-minhago noheg forever (the doctrine of the eternity of the world) and exclusively (to the exclusion of miracles), but of purporting to hint that Rambam himself espoused these doctrines. See Vajda ed., pp. 144-145 (the point of departure was the life span of the antedeluvians).

<sup>98</sup>See E. Gottlieb, Ha-Kabbalah be-Sof Ha-Meah Ha-Yod-Gimel (Jerusalem, 1969), p. 12.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>100</sup>Rashba also interpreted the Aggadah that G-d created seven objects (including the Torah) before the creation of the world in this vein; here he followed a tradition that included such figures as R. Yehuda Ha-Levi. See his comments to Nedarim 39b, s.v. shiv'ah (Weinberger ed., pp. 83-84, Feldman ed., pp. 421-423).

101

מנא עילויא דאורייתא דאורייתא דאורייתא  
 דאורייתא דאורייתא דאורייתא  
 דאורייתא דאורייתא דאורייתא

Nedarim 39b, s.v. Darash (Weinberger ed., p. 86, Feldman ed., p. 425).

<sup>102</sup>See S. Pines, "The Philosophic Sources of the Guide of the Perplexed," p. XCIV; Moreh Nevukhim I:57. Rambam's belief that the world, once created, will last forever, was not based on the impossibility of its destruction. See Moreh, 2:28.

<sup>103</sup>Ma'amar Yiqqavu Ha-Mayim (Pressburg, 1837), p. 8. Averroes claimed that it would be impossible for water to encase the entire earth, for then the human species would become extinct, a possibility which to Averroes was non-existent. Since Avicenna did not posit the impossibility of the extinction of man, he did not have to posit the impossibility of the sphere of water entirely encasing the sphere of earth.

<sup>104</sup>Hullin 60b, Weinberger ed., pp. 111-112.

A similar point was expressed by R. Jacob b. Sheshet concerning the creation of the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day (after the creation of plant life). According to natural philosophy, the sun was a necessary prerequisite for the existence of plant life. Hence, ibn Tibbon claimed that the order of creation set forth in Genesis I was, like that described in Psalms 104 (where the celestial bodies are listed after the animals), not chronologically exact. R. Jacob's response stressed that the underlying theme of ibn Tibbon's remarks was the conviction that plant life was

created not by G-d's Word, but by natural necessity. R. Bahye b. Asher amplified R. Jacob's remarks in his Commentary on the Torah, Genesis 1:18, and claimed that the order of creation itself was רצו ויצורו מים ויבשה.

<sup>105</sup>See Ramban to Genesis 9:12, and in KR I, p. 174. Rashba, in his commentary to Berakhot 59a, Weinberger ed., pp. 61-63, wrote:

וְעַתָּה דְעִינֵיךְ אֲמַר שֶׁהָיָה אֶרֶץ חֲדָשָׁה וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה  
 שֶׁקִּדְּשָׁה אֶרֶץ חֲדָשָׁה וְקִדְּשָׁה אֶרֶץ חֲדָשָׁה לֵאמֹר אֵלֶיךָ אֲמַר וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה  
 (שֶׁאֵלֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל) וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה לֵאמֹר אֵלֶיךָ אֲמַר וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה  
 כִּי הָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה  
 וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה  
 וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה וְהָיָה מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה

<sup>106</sup>See Perles, Heb. sec., pp. 35-41, for Rashba's response to the charge that according to the Jews as well, מֵי הַיָּם מְלֵאִים מֵעַתָּה. See also his comments to Berakhot 12b, Weinberger ed., pp., 30-36, and his comments (printed in standard editions of Hiddushei Ha-Rashba) to Niddah 61b.

<sup>107</sup>Cf. the comment quoted by Rashi on Genesis 6:6.

<sup>108</sup>This topic was dealt with by many other Jewish polemicists. Sa'd ibn Mansur ibn Kammuna defended Judaism

against the attacks of Samau'al al-Maghribi, whose arguments against Judaism included that of abrogation. See, M. Perlmann, ibn Kammuna's Examination of the Three Faiths (Berkeley, 1971).

<sup>109</sup>Perles, Heb. sec., p. 22. See also Encyclopedia of Islam, Vol. III (Leiden, 1971), p. 796, for ibn Hazm's attack upon the Jews for their opinions on abrogation.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>111</sup>See also She'elot u'Teshuvot Ha'Rashba 1:94, where this idea is reiterated.

<sup>112</sup>Perles, Heb. sec., p. 23. Rashba viewed Moses' act as a judgement according to Noahide law; not as a vigilante's strike on behalf of his brethren.

<sup>113</sup>The ideas expressed here are, of course, diametrically opposed to those of R. Abraham Isaac Kook, who took the opposite view of the relationship between man's spiritual level and his partaking of animal flesh. See "Hazon Ha-Tzimhonut ve-Ha-Shalom," Lahai Ro'ii (Jerusalem, 1961), pp. 205-241.

<sup>114</sup>As both the Christian and Muslim position necessarily maintained that G-d abrogated the Sinaitic law, Rashba's representation of Judaism made it more philosophically palatable than Christianity. Indeed, at one point in his anti-Christian polemic, his adversary

maintained, היה נהוג לומר כי כל אדם חכם היה צריך להבין את דברי התנאים  
והאבות והאמוראים והסבורים כי כל אדם חכם היה צריך להבין את דברי התנאים

(Perles, Heb. sec., p. 45). In general, see D. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages," Speculum 55:2 (1980), pp. 294-304.

<sup>115</sup>Faith and Reason (Williamsport, 1935), pp. 167-264.

<sup>116</sup>The Jews in Spain, Vol. II (Philadelphia, 1942), pp. 123-145.

<sup>117</sup>A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, Vol. I (Philadelphia, 1961), pp. 190-305.

<sup>118</sup>"La Controverse de 1303-1306 Autour des Études Philosophiques et Scientifiques," Revue des Études Juives CXXVII (1968), pp. 21-37.

<sup>119</sup>Touati, *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>120</sup>"Ha-Ḥerem 'al Limud Ha-Pilosophiyah," Perakim I (1967), pp. 65-77; "Yedaiah Berdesi's Apology," Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 165-184; "Why Was Levi ben Ḥayyim Hounded?" Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research XXXIV (1966), pp. 65-77.

<sup>121</sup>See "La Controverse," pp. 36-37. See also La

Pensee Theologique et Philosophique de Gersonide (Paris, 1973), p. 27, where Touati makes the same point.

<sup>122</sup>A History of the Jewish People (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 543-545.

<sup>123</sup>Halkin, "Levi ben Ḥayyim," p. 70, stresses that Levi ben Ḥayyim maintained that biblical texts retain their literal meaning in addition to their allegorical meaning.

<sup>124</sup>Minḥat Kenaot, p. 32.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 41. Halkin, "Levi ben Ḥayyim," p. 65, noted Rashba's disagreement with R. Abba Mari on this point.

<sup>126</sup>Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 92ff.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-106; idem, Reshit Ha-Kabbalah (Jerusalem, 1948), pp. 133-137.

<sup>128</sup>Baer (History I, p. 443, n. 61) identified this man, whose signature appears on the list of names at the end of She'elot u'Teshuvot Ha-Rashba 1:415, as the well-known kabbalist.

<sup>129</sup>See Marc Saperstein, Decoding the Rabbis (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 206-207, who emphasizes that the terms of the 1303-1306 dispute were not those of the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230's. All protagonists in this dispute accepted certain rationalistic propositions,



with the exception of R. Asher ben Yehiel (Rosh), whom Saperstein in this context calls a "cultural alien." Even the proponents of the ban invoked Rambam's Moreh Nevukhim, as Baer (History I, p. 303), points out.

<sup>130</sup>The question of the proper road to spirituality is also reflected in the interpretation of the Talmudic statement that לפי שכל האדם הוא נברא are לפי שכל האדם הוא נברא but לפי שכל האדם הוא נברא are לפי שכל האדם הוא נברא. Rambam defined לפי שכל האדם הוא נברא as physics and metaphysics (Hilkhot Yesode Ha-Torah 2:11, 4:10 and 4:13. Rashba, on the other hand, gave a kabbalistic meaning to these two terms. See Chapter Four below.

<sup>131</sup>The Dialectics of the Talmud and the Kabbalah, tr. A. Ferace and N. Cantarella (no date), p. 72. (Translated from Georges Vajda, "La Dialectique du Talmud et de la Kabbale," Diogene 59 (1967), pp. 69-87.)

## Notes: Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Lynn Thorndike, History of Magic and Experimental Science (New York, 1929), Vol. II, p. 769. Nicholas of Poland, a Dominican friar who studied at Montpellier and composed a Book of Empirical Remedies, assailed these remarks of Galen and listed a host of ligatures, suspensions, amulets and other occult virtues that he employed to effect cures. His proof of the existence of occult virtue from the properties of magnets is paralleled by the manner in which Rashba treated the issue. See She'elot u'Teshuvot Ha-Rashba I:9, and above in our study.

<sup>2</sup>Thorndike, History (Vol. I, pp. 117-181), discusses Galen and his works at length. On pp. 165-181 he specifically describes his attitude toward magic. Galen's ambivalent position can be seen in the following remark by Thorndike: "While Galen thus employs ligatures and suspensions and sanctions magic logic, he draws the line at use of images, characters and incantations" (p. 181). In general, see Oswei Temkin, Galenism, Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy (Ithaca, 1973). Many of the cures that Rambam accepted can be found in Galen's work. Thorndike's treatment of Rambam (though somewhat dated) is in Vol. II,

pp. 205-213.

<sup>3</sup>Thorndike, History, Vol. II, surveys the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the scholars who grappled with this issue. For acupuncture as modern empirical medicine, see Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, Vol. XI, p. 825.

<sup>4</sup>The letter was published (in Hebrew with variant readings) by Alexander Marx in Hebrew Union College Annual III (1926), pp. 349-358. Ralph Lerner translated it into English in Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York, 1963), pp. 227-236.

<sup>5</sup>Letter on Astrology (ed. Lerner), p. 229.

<sup>6</sup>Thorndike devotes a chapter (Vol. I, pp. 504-522) to Augustine's position on magic and astrology. Like most early Christian writers, he attributed both the origin and apparent success of magic to demons. He was hostile to astrologers and maintained that their predictions come true either due to chance or because of demons who wish to confirm mankind in its error, but not due to their (false) doctrines. His position on astrology led him to downgrade astronomical observations as well.

<sup>7</sup>The most prominent example is R. Abraham ibn Ezra.

<sup>8</sup>See, e.g., Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. XI, pp. 95-96 for Ralbag's belief in celestial determinism. Ralbag discussed the issue in Milhamot Hashem, Book II, Chapter

two.

<sup>9</sup>See his comments in She'elot u'Teshuvot Ha-Rashba Ha-meyuhasot la-Ramban, #293 (one of two responsa recorded therein that are actually a product of Ramban), printed in Kitvei Ramban, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1963), Vol. I, p. 379. On Ramban's view of hidden miracles in general, see David Berger, "Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," in Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 107-128.

<sup>10</sup>Actually, in the numerous places where Ramban expressed the idea, he never once (as far as I can tell) expressly used the statement in the Talmud (Shabbat 156a) הוהו'ם וסנ'ה as a proof. (See above in our study for Rashba's use of this phrase.) Ramban used exclusively biblical verses to illustrate the issue. Chayim Henoch's point that Ramban decided in favor of the opinion that הוהו'ם וסנ'ה (Ha-Ramban ke-Hoger ve-khi-Mekubbal (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 57) is correct, but the only place Ramban says so explicitly is in the responsum concerning demons cited above (n. 9).

<sup>11</sup>Op. cit. n. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Thorndike, History II, pp. 66-93, especially pp. 91-93 (on Marseilles).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 699-701.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 699.

<sup>15</sup>Magic in ancient Greece was not connected with astrology, and the inclusion or exclusion of magic for medicinal purposes was not at all related to belief in celestial determinism. Ludwig Edelstein, "Greek Medicine in its Relation to Religion and Magic," Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine V (1937) pp. 201-246, demonstrated that the Greek physicians generally rejected magical cures. They did, however, accept the notion of sympathetic medicine, which they viewed as a natural phenomenon, and many doctors used amulets on this basis. See pp. 230-234.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Shatzmiller, "In Search of the 'Book of Figures': Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," AJS Review 7-8 (1983), pp. 383-407, quotes examples of medieval scholars who created talismans designed specifically for use in conjunction with certain astrological configurations.

<sup>17</sup>For Michael Scot, see Thorndike, History II, pp. 331-337; for the Picatrix, see *ibid.*, pp. 813-821 (and pp. 822-824 regarding the various MSS.), and for Peter Abano, see *ibid.*, pp. 875-911, especially pp. 890-895.

<sup>18</sup>Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought and Its

Sources (New York, 1979), p. 54.

<sup>19</sup>Minhat Kenaot, pp. 20-21. Shatzmiller, underscoring the connection between the amulet and the astrological principles upon which its efficacy was based, refers to the matter as the "figures of Leo controversy." See "In Search of the 'Book of Figures,'" p. 384, n. 2.

<sup>20</sup>Mishneh Torah: The Book of Knowledge, tr. M. Hyamson (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 80a. The passage is from Hilkhot 'Avoda Zara 11:16. In the preceding halakhah (11:15), Rambam distinguished between פְּסִיעַ אֲוִיָּה and פְּסִיעַ אֲוִיָּה, a passage which would seem to concede the reality of some kinds of sorcery. See Jacob Levinger, Darkhei Ha-Maḥshavah Ha-Hilkhaitit shel Ha-Rambam (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 130-131, n. 128. To my mind, פְּסִיעַ אֲוִיָּה refers to a phenomenon which in reality was not produced. In פְּסִיעַ אֲוִיָּה a phenomenon is produced; its causes, however, are natural and not supernatural. See the comments of R. Joshua the Nagid quoted in Kesef Mishnah ad loc. and in Hiddushei Ha-Rambam la-Talmud, ed. J. L. Sacks (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 109.

<sup>21</sup>Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (New Haven, 1980), pp. 482-483.

<sup>22</sup>The translation from the Arabic into Hebrew that R. Abba Mari and Rashba had in front of them included such

phrases as

פירוש רמב"ם על המשנה

which clearly imply that the cures did work, but were nonetheless forbidden. Indeed, in Minhat Kenaot (p. 42) Rashba exclaimed that he did not understand these strange comments of Rambam. Even J. Kafih's translation presents us with some difficulties. He writes:

... ומחזירי אדם חזרו אלם הם צדק בלשון רמב"ם המצאיות, ולא כפי  
 אכסמא דמחזירי אדם שכלם קו, וצד מחזיר, כמו שכתב רמב"ם שצדק  
 שכתב רמב"ם המצאיות מחזירי אדם, כי רמב"ם לא אמר  
 מצד, וקרא קדשה' אדם אדם רמב"ם רמב"ם, וכפי דעתו ק"ל ומעלה קדשה.

Rambam admitted that such books are not sheer nonsense, as one can learn information concerning natural phenomena from them (even though the cures themselves are false). If so, he extended the principle

אדם אדם רמב"ם רמב"ם to a

discipline different from the study of idolatry, which he, of course, did classify as utter nonsense.

<sup>23</sup>Twersky, Introduction, p. 483. Franz Rosenthal, "The Defense of Medicine in the Medieval Muslim World," Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine, XLIII (1969), pp. 519-532, shows that many of the same arguments that Rambam used to defend the use of medicine (e.g., the analogy from food) were used by Islamic thinkers in response to their co-religionists who wished to ban its use.

<sup>24</sup>See Thorndike, History I, p. 155.

<sup>25</sup>This corresponds to the Hebrew phrase

שְׁלֵמָה פִּלְגָמִי לְרֵעִי .

<sup>26</sup>The Guide of the Perplexed, tr. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), III:37 (p. 544). Rambam's analysis of the historical development of amulets and his polemic against their use can be found in I:61-2 (Pines, pp. 149, 152) and III:37 (Pines, pp. 540-550).

<sup>27</sup>Rambam agreed to the principle that scientific development had advanced since Aristotle's time (though he did not enunciate the view of linear scientific progress through history that Ralbag proposed). See Moreh Nevukhim 2:4, 2:19 (Pines, pp. 257, 308). Cf. Rambam's critique of Ptolemaic astronomy (II:24, Pines, pp. 322-327).

<sup>28</sup>In Perush Ha-Mishnah (Shabbat 6:10) he also stressed that the guiding principle is שְׁלֵמָה פִּלְגָמִי לְרֵעִי . The difference between his comments in Moreh Nevukhim and in his other works is that in the Moreh he described the fact that physicians have come to know the fact that certain "cures" no longer "pertain to medicine."

<sup>29</sup>Op. cit. n. 26.

<sup>30</sup>Hilkhot Shabbat, 19:13.

<sup>31</sup>See Bet Ha-Behirah, ed. I. Lange (Jerusalem,



1976), to Shabbat 53b (p. 196), 61b (pp. 225-227). Cf. his comments (concerning empirical medicine) to Shabbat 66b (Mishnah, p. 249) and 67a (p. 250).

<sup>32</sup>In Hilkhot Shabbat 19:13, Rambam codified the cure of the fox's tooth, and ruled that one may wear it on Shabbat, his position concerning its efficacy notwithstanding. Perhaps as he mandated that doctors decide if a cure is truly effective, he felt that they will inform the potential user which suspensions truly "pertain to medicine."

The issue of "who decides" is crucial in ascertaining the boundaries of halakhically legitimate empirical medicine. In his first treatment of the issue, Rashba (She'elot u'Teshuvot I:167) also stated that doctors decide if an amulet (in that particular case, a miniature form of a lion without a tongue) is effective. In Minhat Kenaot, however, he declared that the reliability of Jewish traditions (even medicinal ones) can be based even upon the old women of Israel.

<sup>33</sup>See Ramban to Deuteronomy 18:9 and 18:13.

<sup>34</sup>See Ramban to Leviticus 26:11, and in Torat Ha-Adam, printed in Kitvei Ramban II, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 42.

<sup>35</sup>Torat Ha-Adam (Chavel, Kitvei II), pp. 40-41.

<sup>36</sup>Ramban did accept the principle that certain medicines, even though they are not strictly defined as idolatrous, may not be taken, for they may lead one to believe in the potency of idols. Hence |יקראן |יק

גזעק ברך . See Torat Ha-Adam, p. 35 and cf. Tosafot Pesahim 25a, s.v. hutz. R. Abba Mari attempted to prohibit all amulets by this reasoning. See below in our study.

<sup>37</sup>See Rosh Ha-Shanah 24b and 'Avoda Zara 43a-b.

<sup>38</sup>Op. cit. n. 16. See esp. pp. 402-404.

<sup>39</sup>Minhat Kenaot, p. 21.

<sup>40</sup>Op. cit. n. 20, and cf. Perush Ha-Mishnah to Yoma 8:4, a reference never cited.

<sup>41</sup>Op. cit. n. 26

<sup>42</sup>Pines' translation of the Guide on this point is as follows: (p. 543)

This is the meaning of ". . . And ye shall not walk in the customs (huggoth) of the nations" (Lev. 20:23) these being those that are called by (the Sages), may their memory be blessed, Amorite usages. For they are branches of magical practices, inasmuch as they are things not required by reasoning concerning nature and lead to magical practices that of necessity seek support in astrological notions. Accordingly the matter is turned into a glorification of the stars. They say explicitly: "All that pertains to medicine does not pertain to the Amorite usages." They mean by this that all that is required by speculation concerning nature is permitted whereas other practices are forbidden.

Rambam would have argued that the "evidence" that

purported to show that the amulet "works" was false, even though "old books" attested its efficacy.

<sup>43</sup>Rambam himself, however, would have eschewed this arbitrary distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish sources. Rashba's suggestion was an attempt to integrate Rambam's views into a framework that entailed opinions that Rambam was opposed to. Cf. J. L. Teicher, "The Mediaeval Mind," Journal of Jewish Studies VI (1955), pp. 1-13 and in our section concerning Rashba and contemporary "prophets."

<sup>44</sup>This was Ramban's point. Note his formulation in his comments to Deut. 18:9:

הוא לא יראה אדם או אשה או יתום או אלמנה או אפיקורוס או שומר שבת או עובד עבודה זרה או אהוב צדקה או עובד אלהים ישרים  
... אלא דברים אלו הם המצוות והעוונות והעוונות הם המצוות והמצוות הם העוונות...

Compare his responsum cited in n. 9 above. In Deuteronomy 18:9, he gave his view of the role demons play in the world

order: הוא לא יראה אדם או אשה או יתום או אלמנה או אפיקורוס או שומר שבת או עובד עבודה זרה או אהוב צדקה או עובד אלהים ישרים  
... אלא דברים אלו הם המצוות והעוונות והעוונות הם המצוות והמצוות הם העוונות...

Even Ramban saw demons, then, as occupying a specific place and exercising specific powers within the cosmic framework.

Yet they retain their character as "unnatural" beings. He did not seem to be bothered by the questions that forced

Rashba to make the formulation of הוא לא יראה אדם או אשה או יתום או אלמנה או אפיקורוס או שומר שבת או עובד עבודה זרה או אהוב צדקה או עובד אלהים ישרים

<sup>45</sup>Minhat Kenaot, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup>Rashba himself believed in demons just as Ramban

did, and quoted Ramban's remarks concerning interrogations, as we have mentioned. He may not have perceived himself as maintaining a position different than Ramban on these matters. What we are suggesting here is that Rashba's formulations were a conscious effort to make such positions philosophically palatable. In his Ma'amar 'al Yishmael she-hibber 'al ha-datot, printed in J. Perles, Rabbi Salomon b. Abraham b. Adereth (Hebrew section), p. 11, Rashba stated:

וְכַל כֵּן הַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם, וְהַדְּבָרִים  
 הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם, וְהַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם  
 וְהַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם, וְהַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם

Although here דָּת is set in contradistinction to טוֹב, it is still not classified as a דָּת, for only G-d can contravene the laws of "Nature" in its broadest sense.

<sup>47</sup>At this point we should recall Rambam's critique of the Ptolemaic cosmology and its impossibility according to the laws of Aristotle (Guide II, 24; Pines ed., pp. 322-327). Rashba's inference from certain inconsistencies of the Aristotelian system that there must be a different order entirely (here, one that includes effective amulets) is, to a certain extent, an extension of Rambam's reasoning.

<sup>48</sup>Minhat Kenaot, pp. 27-28.

<sup>49</sup>וְהַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם, וְהַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם, וְהַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם, וְהַדְּבָרִים הַנִּכְאִים מֵעֵינֵי הַדָּת הַקִּיּוּם

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-37.

<sup>51</sup> וּפְתָא אֲמַרְוּ וּפְתָא וּפְתָא, וְאֲמַרְוּ כִּי יֵשׁ מִן / שְׂמֵחַ  
כִּי שֵׂמֵחַ לְפָנָיו לְפָנָיו, וְאֲמַרְוּ "לֹאֵם שֶׁאֵין צֶה הַבֶּקֶר מִכֵּה  
שֶׁהַצִּיּוֹר הַגֵּוֹחַ קִדְּשָׁה, וְקָדְשָׁה צֶה לְבָנָיו בֵּין הַרְבֵּאִית  
אֲפִילָּא הַדְּבָר הַמְּחַיֵּים דְּסִיּוֹר מִן הַסִּיּוֹר, וְ/ קִדְּשָׁה לְ/  
קִדְּשָׁה, וְצֶה צֶקֶק הַקְּמִיּוֹר, וְ/ קִדְּשָׁה לְ/ קִדְּשָׁה לְ/ קִדְּשָׁה.

Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>"In Search of the 'Book of Figures,'" pp. 406-407.

<sup>54</sup>In the exchange of letters between Rashba and Rosh (Rabbenu Asher), there is a halakhic exchange concerning 'orlah (Minhat Kenaot, pp. 108ff).

<sup>55</sup>Minhat Kenaot, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup>Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, negative commandment 317.

<sup>57</sup>Moreh, III:41 (Pines ed., p. 561).

<sup>58</sup>See I. Twersky, "Joseph ibn Kaspi: Portrait d'un Intellectuel Juif Medieval," Juifs et Judaisme de Languedoc (Toulouse, 1977), pp. 185-204.

idem, "Yedaiah Ha-Penini u'Ferusho la-Aggadah," Alexander Altmann Jubilee Volume, ed. R. Loewe and S. Stein (University, Alabama, 1979), Hebrew section, pp. 63-82. See also his Introduction to . . . Maimonides, pp. 440-441.

Basil Herring, Joseph ibn Kaspi's Gevia Kesef (New York, 1982), pp. 119-122, traces ibn Kaspi's psychological theory of miracles to his view of the imaginative faculty of the masses. According to him, the imaginative faculty is itself an essential cause of reactions in people who behave "miraculously."

<sup>59</sup>See Scholem, Kabbalah, pp. 182-189 ("Practical Kabbalah").

<sup>60</sup>Christian scholastics also utilized this doctrine to explain apparently miraculous acts. See A. Maurer, "Between Reason and Faith: Siger of Brabant and Pomponazzi on the Magic Arts," Medieval Studies XVIII (1956), pp. 1-18. Siger quoted Averroes' criticism of Avicenna's doctrine, but admitted that here, human reason leads to conclusions which must be denied in the light of faith.

<sup>61</sup>A. Ravitsky, "The Anthropological Theory of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature II, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 231-272.

<sup>62</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:408. See also Sefer Ha-Hinukh 231.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ravitsky, "Anthropological Theory," p. 247, n. 44.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 248, n. 49, translates a passage from Weinberger ed., p. 107 (commentary to Hullin 7a, s.v. R. Pinehas):

They wanted to reveal to us the soul's spiritual degree, for saintly men, while their soul cleaves to its root, have the power to transcend the workings of the lower world and change the course of nature. In spite of their (the workings of the lower world) being guided by the power of the celestial spheres, they will be removed entirely from the confines of nature, as the splitting of the Red Sea by Moses. Most certainly this applies to what does not exceed the boundaries of nature altogether, such as stopping the flow of rivers that dry up at times. This happens only because they (the Saints) have dominion over the powers above, and the upper acts upon the lower.

For R. Isaac Pulgar, see p. 247, n. 46, and see J. Levinger's annotated edition of Ezer Ha-Dat (Tel-Aviv, 1984), p. 46.

<sup>67</sup>See Commentary to Aggadah, Nedarim 39b, s.v. Darash (Weinberger ed., pp. 84-85, Feldman ed., p. 424.

Ravitsky notes ("Anthropological Theory," p. 249) that one of the criticisms of this theory of miracles was the impossibility of attaining the perfect intellectual apprehension that was requisite. If one shifted the focus to a man of piety, this objection would be deflected.

<sup>68</sup>Rashba writes:

הנה יש דבאן מנהג וצדוק מנהג שאין כוונתו לומר "א"ן"

(p. 25) and:

כי דבאן מנהג וצדוק מנהג, דין דבאן מנהג וצדוק מנהג

(p. 28).

<sup>69</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 5:51.

<sup>70</sup>See 5:50-52, which deal with certain respects of the kabbalistic interpretation of blessings.

<sup>71</sup>"Classification of the Sciences in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," Hebrew Union College Jubilee Volume (Cincinnati, 1925), pp. 263-315.

<sup>72</sup>Sefer Ha-Yareah, Chapter 1 (Minhat Kenaot, p.

125):

... מניין המצוות שנים, (הוא) חמשה עשר, היא חמשה עשר דברים, (והיא)  
 חמשה עשר הא-פסוקים (הוא) חמשה עשר חכמים, ויש עוד חמשה ע' שהיא כחמשה ע  
 עשרה ח' וקטל חמשה עשר חכמים, חמשה עשר חכמים חכמים (חמשה ע  
 אור חכמים חכמים, ויש חמשה עשר חכמים חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים  
 עקרין אור חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים, חכמים  
 ויש חמשה עשר חכמים חכמים חכמים חכמים חכמים חכמים חכמים חכמים חכמים חכמים

See Wolfson, "Classification," p. 268, n. 22.

The hierarchical order of the sciences themselves fits well with the conception that they themselves were beneath the highest discipline of all: theology. See J. A. Weisheipl, "Medieval Classification of the Sciences," Mediaeval Studies XXVII (1965), pp. 56-57, who discusses the position of St. Augustine and Clement of Alexandria. Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, insisted that the various sciences should not even be classified in an hierarchical order with respect to one



another, let alone in relation to religion (Weisheipl, pp. 81-90).

<sup>73</sup>In this respect the Jewish thinkers distanced themselves from Aristotle, who valued knowledge for its own sake, not as a means to know G-d (Wolfson, pp. 312-313).

<sup>74</sup>See A. Hyman, "The Liberal Arts and Jewish Philosophy," Arts Liberaux et Philosophie au Moyen Age (Montreal, 1969), p. 109. The exemption was not explicit in the texts of the ban, but was mentioned in the book Hoshen Mishpat by Simon ben Joseph.

<sup>75</sup>Hiddushei Ha-Rashba 'al Massekhet 'Avoda Zara, ed. J. L. Sacks (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 217. In his review of this edition (Kiryat Sefer XXXVIII (1967), pp. 132-139), A. Rosenthal shows that parts of this edition were written not by Rashba, but by R. Asher ben Yehiel (Rosh).

<sup>76</sup>Ritba (cited by Sacks, ad loc., n. 499), quoted Rashba's query but used different terminology:

ומה שכתב רמב"ם, שכל מה שיש בו חכמה, אינו  
 חלק מן התורה, אלא הוא חכמה שנתנה לנו  
 הבורא, וזהו חכמה שנתנה לנו הבורא?  
 תפארת ישראל

Rashba's remarks here lead one to raise an important question: To what extent did he use categories from other disciplines in deciding halakhic issues? See, most recently, I Ta-Shema, "Philosophical Considerations for

Halakhic Decision-Making in Spain," Sefunot 18 (1985), pp. 99-110.

<sup>77</sup>The relationship between scholastic thought and the late medieval Jewish philosophers has been explored by S. Pines in "Scholasticism After Thomas Aquinas in the Works of Hasdai Crescas and his Predecessors," Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities I (Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 1-73. Pines contends that one must probe the implicit influence on non-Jewish contemporary thought in order to understand the principles of the Jewish philosophy which, ostensibly, was simply a reponse (either affirmative or negative) to that of Rambam. I. Twersky has taken issue with Pines ("R. Yedaiah Ha-Penini u'Ferusho la-Aggadah," Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History, ed. S. Stern and R. Loewe (University, Alabama, 1979), Heb. sec., p. 76, n. 11) and remarked that when Jews did borrow from Gentile scholastic thought, they explicitly admitted that fact.

<sup>78</sup>A contemporary analogy would be the high school student who engages in the use of terms such as "ego," "unconscious," etc. without having studied psychoanalytic thought.

<sup>79</sup>Berakhot 59a, s.v. Mai (Weinberger ed., pp. 61-63).

80 אמרו רבנן כחשמי ברקא דקדושין הוא שמים  
דאורייתא והוא הקדוש

In Torat Hashem Temimah, p. 174, he said that Aristotle had explained the cause of the rainbow in גור האור (D. Berger has pointed out that this should read גור אור), referring to the Meteorologica that Shmuel ibn Tibbon translated in 1210. See his master's essay, "Nahmanides' Attitude Toward Secular Learning and its Bearing upon his Stance in the Maimonidean Controversy" (Columbia University, 1965), p. 100, n. 19.

81 והוא שמים דאורייתא

<sup>82</sup>In his polemic, Rashba explained several apparent "innovations" by G-d as based in actuality upon eternal principles. See above in our study.

<sup>83</sup>Another difference between Ramban's presentation and Rashba's is that although Ramban hinted at a kabbalistic explanation for the appearance of the rainbow, Rashba made no reference to such a doctrine. See below in our study.

<sup>84</sup>S.v. Ha-Ramatayim (Weinberger ed., pp. 79-80; Feldman ed., p. 124. Rashba's exegesis reinterpreted the phrase מקום שמים).

<sup>85</sup>Gershon ben Shlomo, The Gate of Heaven (trans. F. S. Bodenheimer, Jerusalem, 1953), Treatise I, Seventh Gate,

paragraphs 155-169, explained the cause of earthquakes (wind confined inside the earth) and phenomena that precede their arrival. His discussion of earthquakes immediately follows that of rainbows (paragraphs 138-154), where he adopts the explanation found in the Meteorologica.

<sup>86</sup>See Rambam, Moreh Nevukhim I:71; Ramban, Kitvei Ramban I, p. 339. The discovery in 1862 of the 2nd century book Mishnat Ha-Middot lent some factual credence to these assertions. See H. Maccoby, "Maimonides Then and Now," Commentary LXXI (1981), p. 55.

<sup>87</sup>See R. Yedaiah Ha-Penini's comments in Ketav Hitnatzlut (She'elot u'Teshuvot Ha-Rashba 1:418):

ובוא תבין דאם דפלוסופא האמורא האמורא, כי מה שהיה  
 זה אמרו (כי אמר סבין, והיה דגשקורג והססר והמבנה אלה  
 כי מה שהיה אלהים נחמין, וידע דגבול כי מה שהיה נחמין  
 דהתלמודים דהתלמודים, ויסע... [דכפוא, כי מה שהיה דהתלמודים...]

<sup>88</sup>Hullin 42a (with regard to animals); ibid. 56a (with regard to birds). See Rambam, Hilkhot Ma'akhalot 'Asurot 4:6-9 and Hilkhot Shehitah 5:1-2 for the principle that terefah is a creature that has a 'einah and is

אין עין.

<sup>89</sup>Hullin 57b. The Talmud (Hullin 42a and elsewhere) records a dispute whether terefah hayah or not. The assumption that terefah 'einah hayah (i.e., that an animal

designated as such will invariably die) is the axiom upon which the statement siman li-terefah yod-bet hodesh is based.

<sup>90</sup>Rambam, Hilkhoh Shehitah 10-13. Rambam's formulation contrasted with his opinion (expressed in Hilkhoh Rozeah 2:8) that if doctors determine that a man with a sickness that would ordinarily designate him as a terefah (and exonerate one who would otherwise be liable for murdering him) can indeed live, he is not to be classified as terefah. His distinction between humans and animals on this score has been a favorite topic of discussion for classical Talmudic and Maimonidean commentators (e.g., R. Joseph Babad, Minhat Hinukh 34, s.v. lo tirzah; R. Hayyim Ozer Grodziensky, Abiezer, Even Ha-Ezer 12:5).

<sup>91</sup>The assumption that siman li-terefah yod bet hodesh was an absolute principle was challenged by R. Solomon Luria, Yam Shel Shlomo, Hullin 80, who claimed that the Talmud merely meant that a majority of animals classified as terefah will not live more than twelve months. Rashba opened his responsum by declaring that the principle could only be utilized in cases where one was unsure whether an animal was terefah, but if a creature clearly had contracted one of the sicknesses, there would be no point in "waiting it out." R. Luria took this as an admission that a terefah could in fact live longer than

twelve months. The thrust of the remainder of Rashba's remarks, however (see below), was that such a possibility was not to be entertained.

<sup>92</sup>Cf. Rashba's letters to R. Abba Mari in Minhat Kenaot.

93 ואי אפשר לומר שכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין  
הוא רק כדעתנו בלבד וכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין  
הוא רק כדעתנו בלבד וכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין

She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:98.

94 ואי אפשר לומר שכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין  
הוא רק כדעתנו בלבד וכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין  
הוא רק כדעתנו בלבד וכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין

Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>He quoted the Talmudic statement (Hullin 43a) that although Job was a terefah and yet lived, this was due to a miracle.

<sup>96</sup>Subsequent authorities, in fact, presented a bowdlerized version of the responsum, stressing only this specific answer. See Shabbetai Ha-Cohen Rappaport (Shakh), Yoreh Deah 57:48.

97 ואי אפשר לומר שכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין  
הוא רק כדעתנו בלבד וכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין  
הוא רק כדעתנו בלבד וכל מה שכתבנו לך בזה הענין

Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Yitzhak Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 442, n. 38, already noticed the parallel. In his Hebrew version, Toledot Ha-Yehudim be-Sefarad Ha-Notzerit (Tel Aviv, 1965), p. 512, n. 94. He quoted the Midrash in Vayiqra Rabba as the source.

## Notes: Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup>Shem Ha-Gedolim (Warsaw, 1876), Ma'arekhet Ha-Gedolim, 'ot shin, s.v. R. Shlomo ben Avraham ben Adret.

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Reshit Ha-Kabbalah (Jerusalem, 1948), pp. 127-161; Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona (Jerusalem, 1964), passim; Kabbalah (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 48-51, 391-393.

<sup>3</sup>"Ha-Mequbbalim R. Ezra ve-R. Azriel u-Meqomam be-Hug Gerona," Zion 9 (1944), pp. 178-185; "Kitvei Ha-Mequbbalim R. Ezra ve-R. Azriel mi-Gerona," Sinai 16 (1945), pp. 159-178. (Both articles were reprinted in I. Tishby, Higrei Kabbalah u-Sheluhoteha (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 3-30.) G. Sed-Rajna, Azriel de Gerone: Commentaire sur la Liturgie Quotidienne (Leiden, 1974), pp. 2-3, provides a complete "Bibliographie Azrieliene."

<sup>4</sup>Perush Ha-Aggadot le-Rabbi Azriel, ed. I. Tishby (Jerusalem, 1945).

<sup>5</sup>Scholem published the letter in Sefer Bialik, ed. J. Fichman (Tel-Aviv, 1934), pp. 143-144. He wrote (ibid., p. 146) that we must conclude that R. Isaac the Blind was referring to R. Ezra and R. Azriel.

<sup>6</sup>Perush Ha-Aggadot le-Rabbi Azriel, p. 83.

<sup>7</sup>For these figures, see Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona, pp.



34-35 and 55-69. Whether the mode of their writing was a letter, polemic or commentary to a text, the theosophic nature of their doctrine and the manner in which they connected various mitzvot with various sefirot was common to all the Gerona kabbalists.

<sup>8</sup>See Scholem, Kabbalah, pp. 55-56.

<sup>9</sup>Scholem in Madda'ei Ha-Yahadut 2 (1927), pp. 162-290, published several texts of R. Yitzhak and R. Ya'aqov Ha-Kohen. For R. Todros, see M. Oron, "R. Todros Abulafia, Ketavav u'Meqorotav," (M.A. thesis, Tel-Aviv University, 1972). The complete edition of Otzar Ha-Kavod is the Warsaw, 1879 edition.

<sup>10</sup>Oron, "R. Todros," pp. 37-59, draws parallels not only between Otzar Ha-Kavod and the commentaries to Aggadah by R. Ezra and R. Azriel, but between another one of R. Todros' works (Sha'ar Ha-Razim) and various works by the two figures. For Castilian Kabbalah, see Kabbalah, pp. 55-56.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>12</sup>Another example of this form of Kabbalah can be found in the writings of R. Joseph Gikatilla. See E. Gottlieb, Ha-Kabbalah be-Sof Ha-Meah Ha-Yod Gimel (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 6-43.

<sup>13</sup>Scholem (Kabbalah, p. 63) cites a kabbalistic

commentary to the mabzor that R. Isaac authored.

<sup>14</sup>M. Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in Ramban, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 51-73, discusses how Ramban's Kabbalah, a limited corpus of secrets, was doomed to collapse when faced with the creative religious imagination expressed in the Kabbalah of such figures as R. Moshe de Leon, R. Abraham Abulafia (on him, see Idel, Kitvei R. Abraham Abulafia u'Mishnato (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1976)) and R. Joseph Gikatilla. The students of Rashba who explained the secrets of Ramban were part of a waning structure of thought that could not compete with the emerging forces.

<sup>15</sup>Idel, "No Kabbalistic Tradition," p. 58.

<sup>16</sup>See Hiddushei Ha-Rashba 'al Aggadot Ha-shas, ed. S. M. Weinberger (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 4. Whereas in Weinberger's edition this passage forms a preface to the work as a whole, in the manuscripts of Rashba's commentary that I have viewed on microfilm, this remark is subsequent to his quotation of the Aggadah that G-d dons tefillin (his first comment on tractate Berakhot), but prior to the actual explanation that he gives.

<sup>17</sup>D. S. Loewinger, "R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon," Sefunot VII (1963), p. 28, cites this passage in full.

ע"מ מוכי ה"שגא ז"ל אכר ג"ס"כ מוחזק ע"ש  
 גאט נ"מ דמ"כ כא"י פ"ק"ו ע"ס ה"ב"ו, מ"ד"ר כ"ו  
 מ"ק"ב הפ"צ"ו ש"מ"ח"ו ע"ס ז"כ ה"פ"ו ע"ש  
 א"ל פ"א"ק"ו, א"ל ש"מ"ז ד"ה א"ל א"ל ע"ש  
 א"ל ה"מ"ד"ו ד"מ"ו מ"ו, א"ל פ"ו ע"ס א"ל כ"מ  
 ה"כ"כ ע"י ש"כ"ר ה"מ"ח"ו ה"מ"ח"ו ה"מ"ח"ו  
 ע"ש א"ל מ"ו ע"י ש"מ"ח"ו ע"ש א"ל ע"ש  
 א"ל ע"ש ה"מ"ח"ו מ"ח"ו ע"ש א"ל ע"ש  
 ע"ש א"ל מ"ח"ו ע"ש א"ל ע"ש א"ל ע"ש

<sup>18</sup>In Weinberger's edition, tractate Berakhot contains eight references to a sod that are explained in R. Azriel's commentary that Tishby published. The Talmudic points of departure are:

Berakhot 6a: שקד'ה מנא גבלין

Ibid. 7a: שקד'ה מנא גבלין

Ibid.: שקד'ה מנא גבלין דהוה דהוה דהוה

Ibid. 8a: אנא פליגי עליה

Ibid. 33a: אנא פליגי עליה דהוה דהוה

Ibid. 34b: אנא פליגי עליה דהוה דהוה

Ibid. 35b: אנא פליגי עליה דהוה דהוה

Ibid. 40b: אנא פליגי עליה דהוה דהוה

In Berakhot 7a: s.v. שקד'ה מנא גבלין

Rashba wrote: אנא פליגי עליה דהוה דהוה


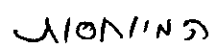
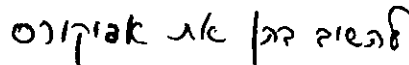
Here I have not found a parallel in Tishby's edition of R.

Azriel. In Berakhot 16b, he wrote: אנא פליגי עליה דהוה דהוה

This seems to be the only instance where he gives an original explanation, although even here it is not overtly kabbalistic. For a parallel explanation, see R. Bahya ben Asher, Kad Ha-Qemah, found in Kitvei R. Bahya, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 201-202.

<sup>19</sup>The MS is Bodley, Michael #265, which we will discuss below.

<sup>20</sup>R. Ya'aqov ibn Ḥabib (Ha-Kotev) first printed it in Salonika, 1516-1526.

<sup>21</sup>See Perles, R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth (Breslau, 1863), Hebrew section, pp. 24-56. There is no hint of any Kabbalah in this "outer directed" work, which used the philosophical referents common to Jews and Christians. Saul Lieberman in Shki'in (repr., Jerusalem, 1970), p. 81, quoted the work as . Dr. David Berger informed me that he had asked Professor Lieberman why he had written , and Professor Lieberman replied that he did not recall what his reservations were. A comparison of the text with parts of the Commentary On Aggadah that were written  reveals the identity of the text as one written by Rashba.

<sup>22</sup>Jerusalem, 1964, Vol. II, p. 114 (#2980) and p. 298 (#7653, 7655).

<sup>23</sup>Dr. L. A. Feldman's contention in Shnaton bar-Ilan 7-8 (1970), p. 139 that MS. VAT. #293 was the source is incorrect. S. Abramson, in Inyanut be-Sifrut Ha-Geonim (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 391, correctly noted that Vat. #295 was the source, and Feldman in his edition of Rashba's commentary on tractate Megillah (op. cit. n.32) corrected his previous remarks.

<sup>24</sup>Rashba's commentary ends on fol. 99b. On that

page, the excerpt from Rambam's Perush Ha-Mishnah (which, incidentally, does not conform with Judah al-Harizi's translation printed in the standard editions of tractate Berakhot) begins and continues until fol. 105. The anonymous kabbalistic commentary runs from fol. 105b until fol. 110a.

<sup>25</sup>For each of the six references, I will first cite the page of tractate Berakhot, the Talmudic point of departure (in Hebrew), the fol. number of MS Vat. #295, and the corresponding page number in Tishby's edition of R. Azriel.

- A. Berakhot 4b, אמרו חכמים ז"ל  
fol. 107a-107b, Tishby p. 2.
- B. Ibid. 7a, אמר ר' יוחנן ב"ר חנניאל  
אמר ר' יוחנן ב"ר חנניאל  
fol. 108a, Tishby pp. 10-11.
- C. Ibid. 17a, אמר ר' יוחנן ב"ר חנניאל  
אמר ר' יוחנן ב"ר חנניאל  
fol. 108a-109b, Tishby pp. 11-15. Here Tishby has a few more sentences.
- D. Ibid. 53b, אמר ר' יוחנן ב"ר חנניאל  
fol. 106a (the lemma is not in the MS, Tishby p. 26 (first part), p. 20 (second part, according to the variant referred to in n. 22. ad loc.)).
- E. Hagigah 13a, אמר ר' יוחנן ב"ר חנניאל  
fol. 106b-107a, Tishby p. 40 (as part of R. Azriel's commentary on Ta'anit. The six words אמר ר' יוחנן ב"ר חנניאל

התקראו עמו are in the MS. but not in Tishby.)

F. Menahot 35b, התקראו עמו התקראו עמו התקראו עמו  
fol. 107b-108a (the lemma is not in the MS), Tishby pp. 4-5.

In Tishby's edition, this passage forms part of R. Azriel's commentary to Berakhot. See n. 120 below.

S. Abramson, "Iggeret Ha-Kodesh Ha-Meyuheset le-Ramban," Sinai 90 (1982), p. 239, n. 58, quoted the passage from Hagigah that Weinberger ascribed to Rashba. That passage should be seen as another parallel between the Iggeret Ha-Kodesh and R. Azriel's works.

<sup>26</sup>These passages are:

A. Berakhot 15a, התקראו עמו  
fol. 107b (without the lemma) in the MS.

B. Sanhedrin 107a, התקראו עמו  
fol. 105b in the MS.

<sup>27</sup>I have viewed microfilms of the following MSS of Rashba's commentary:

- A. Bodley, Michael #190 (Neubauer (henceforth N) #914
- B. Mich. #265 (N #385), the MS with interpolations from Otzar Ha-Kavod;
- C. Mich. #280 (N #346);
- D. Mich. #294 (N #1586);
- E. Mich. #295 (N #1587);
- F. Bodley, Oppenheimer #389 (N #915);
- G. Oppenheimer #572 (N 2282),

- H. Paris, Alliance #230;  
 I. Budapest, MSS D. Kaufmann, #168;  
 J. Vatican, Ebraica #293,  
 K. Vat. Ebr. #295.

Vat. Ebr. #92, which Feldman refers to (Shnaton bar-Ilan 7-8, p. 139) is a commentary on the Book of Proverbs. I have also seen MS Adler #2506; the MS is preserved at the Jewish Theological Seminary Library (JTS Rabbinica #212).

<sup>28</sup>See n. 18 above for instances of Rashba's esotericism.

<sup>29</sup>Of the microfilms cited in n. 27 above, these include A,B (excluding the part which is interpolated from Otzar Ha-Kavod), G,H,I,J, and K.

<sup>30</sup>Op. cit. n.9. The other printed editions of Otzar Ha-Kavod (Nowy Dwor, 1808; repr. Satu Mare, 1926) do not contain the commentary to any of the tractates in Seder Nashim. Pp. 52-55 (tractates Ketubot and Gittin) and pp. 59-60 (tractate Kiddushin) correspond to MS Bodley, Mich. #265 (N #385), fol. 106b-111a.

<sup>31</sup>Neubauer assumed that the Hagigah commentary, the first text contained in N #1587 and a continuation of a MS (N #1586) that contains Rashba's commentary to the Aggadah of several tractates, is part of the authentic corpus of Rashba's commentary (A. Neubauer, Catalogue of the Hebrew



content of the doctrine from the "chapter headings."

125 Weinberger ed., p. 4: פירי ימיני רצאנן פריה ק"ל  
. י"ח פירי [ק"ל] י"ג פירי פירי י"ח.

126 For Ramban on this score, see n. 87 above.

127 Weinberger ed., p. 4: פירי ימיני רצאנן  
פירי ימיני רצאנן

128 Betzah 16a; Ta'anit 27b.

129 This reason is not stated explicitly in the Talmud. Another reason offered was the fact that the fires of Gehinnom cease to burn on Shabbat. See R. Joel Sirkes, Bayit Hadash to Tur Orach Hayyim 297, and R. Yehiel M. Epstein (Arukh Ha-Shulhan) ad loc., who utilized both reasons.

130 See Rashbam (R. Samuel ben Meir) to Pesahim 102b; Tosafot: Betzah 33b, s.v. ki, Pesahim 102b, s.v. rav. The Bayit Hadash and Arukh Ha-Shulhan (op. cit. n. 131) suggested that NY existed only on Shabbat. The fires of Gehinnom, however, did not blaze on Shabbat or on yom tov. The Rabbis, according to this view, instituted the blessing over the spices at havdalah only when it would mark a transition between a day when one possessed NY to a day where





(Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 215-233, points out that R. Shem Tob ibn Gaon and R. Bahye quoted this exegesis without mentioning Rashba's name. See below.

<sup>40</sup>Derashot (Repr. Jerusalem, 1969 with introduction by S. Abramson).

<sup>41</sup>Beur le-Ferush Ha-Ramban (Warsaw, 1875). Scholem, Kabbalah, p. 61, cited his contention that ibn Shu'aib actually authored this work, but Gottlieb (R. Bahye, p. 214, and elsewhere) pointed out several difficulties with this hypothesis.

<sup>42</sup>His work Keter Shem Tob was printed in Maor va-Shemesh (Leopold, 1839). His testimony concerning Rashba's Commentary On Aggadah has been cited above.

<sup>43</sup>Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim, Jerusalem, 1975. A critical edition was recently published by A. Goldreich (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1981).

<sup>44</sup>See Idel, "No Kabbalistic Tradition," p. 64, and Goldreich, "R. Isaac of Acre," p. 429, who pointed to the difference in content between ibn Gaon's Keter Shem Tob, written during Rashba's lifetime, which is a "conservative" book, and Baddei Ha-Aron, written after Rashba's death, which was influenced by Castillian trends. See most recently, J. Dan, "The Kabbalistic Book Baddei Ha-Aron and Kabbalistic Pseudopigraphy in the Thirteenth Century,"

Mehqere Yerushalayyim be-Mahshevet Yisrael 3:1-2 (1984), pp. 111-138.

<sup>45</sup>Maor va-Shemesh, p. 29a.

<sup>46</sup>Goldreich ed., p. 30.

<sup>47</sup>Maor va-Shemesh, p. 32b (regarding the sod of yibbum). Rashba's comment that the "knowledgeable" act even today upon this sod gains added meaning when we note his responsum ;(1:1161) that the mitzvah of yibbum precedes that of halitzah. On p. 52a, R. Shem Tob quotes Rashba on the sod of ibbur. R. Meir ibn Sahula, Beur le-Ferush Ha-Ramban, quotes Rashba's use of gilgul in explaining the secret behind the stories of Cain and Abel, the sons of Judah, and Ruth and Naomi, among others.

<sup>48</sup>Commentary On the Torah (repr. with commentary of Levush, Jerusalem, 1961), Leviticus 25:8, s.v. ve-safarta.

<sup>49</sup>Gottlieb, R. Bahye, p. 233, gives a detailed presentation of the issue (as well as an analysis of R. Bahye's position) on pp. 234-237.

<sup>50</sup>Gottlieb (ibid.) viewed Rashba's explanation as following the second possibility raised by Recanati: that only the re-creation of the universe distinguishes the periods of shemittah and yovel.

<sup>51</sup>See Maor va-Shemesh, pp. 30a, 33b, 34b. On p. 35a





<sup>67</sup>In his letter to the Jews of Provence, first printed in Ein Ya'agov to Sukkah 28a, a document which we analyze fully in Chapter Four, he writes:

... וְזוֹ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ וְנִשְׁמַע מִפִּי הַשָּׁמַיִם  
 הַמְּכֻבָּד, שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ הַזֶּה הַזֶּה מִצֵּד מְכֻבָּד

<sup>68</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:94.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 1:423, 5:48.

<sup>70</sup>In his letter (Op. cit n. 67) he writes: וְזוֹ הַדָּבָר  
 וְזוֹ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ וְנִשְׁמַע מִפִּי הַשָּׁמַיִם  
 הַמְּכֻבָּד, שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ הַזֶּה הַזֶּה מִצֵּד מְכֻבָּד  
 וְזוֹ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ וְנִשְׁמַע מִפִּי הַשָּׁמַיִם

Cf. She'elot u'Teshuvot 5:50, 51, 52.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 5:48.

<sup>71a</sup>Cf. 4:48 (concerning the monthly blessing over the moon) and note these passages from his kabbalistic prayer, cited in n. 37:

וְזוֹ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ וְנִשְׁמַע מִפִּי הַשָּׁמַיִם  
 הַמְּכֻבָּד, שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ הַזֶּה הַזֶּה מִצֵּד מְכֻבָּד  
 (fol. 17a): וְזוֹ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ וְנִשְׁמַע מִפִּי הַשָּׁמַיִם  
 הַמְּכֻבָּד, שֶׁנֶּחְדָּשׁ לְפָנֵינוּ הַזֶּה הַזֶּה מִצֵּד מְכֻבָּד  
 (fol. 18a).

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 1:9, 1:423, 5:55. Rashba also wrote that one must first comprehend the sod of G-d's 42 letter Name before he could dare to use it for theurgic purposes. See



ibid., 1:220.

<sup>73</sup>Chapter 51.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Moreh Nevukhim, 2:29, concerning the verses in Isaiah 34.

<sup>75</sup>Another place where he uses similaar language is when he discusses the Aggadah that Jacob did not die. See our section, "Points of Contact Between Philosophy and Kabbalah," below.

<sup>76</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 5:55: אין לנו ספק דבריו  
ואין לנו ספק דבריו  
 Cf. his introduction to his halakhic work 'Avodat Ha-Kodesh  
 (Warsaw, 1876): והנה תבין מה שכתבתי  
בפתיח ספרו, וזו היא חשיבותו  
באורח חיים, ואלו הם

<sup>77</sup>See Chapter One above.

<sup>78</sup>E.g., 3b, s.v. ha-kinnor; 6a, s.v. u-le'inyan  
 (concerning the statement that G-d wears tefillin). At the  
 cose of his remarks there he wrote: והנה תבין מה שכתבתי  
בפתיח ספרו, וזו היא חשיבותו  
 The word תבין refers to kabbalistic doctrine. In our  
 section below on Ramban and Rashba, we point out that the

two places in the Talmud where Ramban in his halakhic commentary quotes a kabbalistic explanation, Rashba, in his commentary, is silent, and we deduce from this added evidence for Rashba's greater hesitancy in promoting kabbalistic solutions for problems. Here Rashba used the phrase *וּבְאֵלֵינוּ יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ*, asserting that only G-d

can provide man with the proper categories of knowledge to understand the passage correctly and refusing to claim that kabbalistic categories can provide the correct interpretation to such passages.

<sup>79</sup>Hiddushim, Shabbat 103b, s.v. she-lo. Cf. She'elot u'Teshuvot 7:352.

<sup>80</sup>Hiddushim, Niddah 61b, s.v. zot.

<sup>81</sup> Hiddushim, Shabbat 67a., s.v. kol; Shebu'ot 15b, s.v. amar. Although Rashba's discussion of the issue is per se no proof of its applicability to contemporary situations, his language (e.g., use of *נִסְתָּר* in the last reference cited) does betray a practical willingness to use amulets. See also She'elot u'Teshuvot 2:281, 5:119, and our discussion in Chapter Two.

<sup>82</sup>Hiddushim, Rosh Ha-Shanah 16b, s.v. shel. Cf. Ramban, Sha'ar Ha-Gemul, Kitvei Ramban II, pp. 265ff.

<sup>83</sup>Hiddushim, Gittin 70a, s.v. ha. In She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:98, however, he quoted the Talmudic statement that although Job was a terefah, and still lived more than twelve months, this was due to a miracle. Rashba's distinction between humans and animals here corresponded to Rambam's position on the matter. See Chapter Two, above.

<sup>84</sup>Tosafot to Megillah 15a, s.v. Keshem: Sanhedrin 74b, s.v. Veha.

<sup>85</sup>See H. Dimitrovsky ed., Hiddushei Ha-Rashba 'al Massekhet Megillah (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 96. The lemma, וְיִשְׁרָאֵל אֵלֶיךָ דָּן, is itself significant. These comments by Rashba were already noted by R. Ezekiel Landau in Noda be-Yehudah II, Yoreh Deah 161, who contrasted these words with Rashba's own attempts to explain Aggadah. We can suggest that what Rashba objected to was the halakhic analysis of non-halakhic material. He did, however, attempt to give coherent meaning, albeit with other categories of reference, to aggadic statements.

<sup>86</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:50.

<sup>87</sup>This phrase is taken from B. Septimus, "Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in Ramban, ed. Twersky, p. 17. See p. 19, n. 32, where Septimus remarks, "Whatever the original function of these kabbalistic interpretations, Nahmanides makes it clear that their function in his

commentary is to serve as a response to rationalist critique. . . ." These comments are just as true when

applied to Rashba. Cf. Weinberger ed., p. 4:

לִּישׁוּבֵי רַשְׁבַּאי וְדַבְרֵי רַשְׁבַּאי כִּי הָיוּ מְבִינִים וְעוֹשִׂים  
 לְפָנָיו וְלֹא כִּי הָיוּ מְבִינִים וְעוֹשִׂים לְפָנָיו  
 ... מִיָּדוֹת פְּנֵי מִיָּדוֹת ...

Thus, kabbalistic hints are adduced to forestall the criticisms of those who claimed that the plain meaning of aggadot did not make sense.

<sup>88</sup>E.g., She'elot u'Tehuvot 1:9, (concerning Exodus 21:6); 1:10 (concerning Michal the wife of David), 1:60 (concerning the biblical account of the creation of Adam and Eve). In 1:523, he made the following comment:

שֶׁהַמַּלְאָכִים אֵינָם כֵּן  
 בְּדַבַּר מִלֵּךְ קִנְיָן וְאֵינָם כֵּן מִלֵּךְ קִנְיָן  
 אֲמַר ... וְהַמַּלְאָכִים אֵינָם כֵּן מִלֵּךְ קִנְיָן ...

In Chapter One we have mentioned Rashba's quotation (with approval) of ibn Ezra's view of mazzalot.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 1:12: מִיָּדוֹת פְּנֵי מִיָּדוֹת  
 וְעוֹשִׂים לְפָנָיו וְלֹא כִּי הָיוּ מְבִינִים וְעוֹשִׂים לְפָנָיו  
 ... מִיָּדוֹת פְּנֵי מִיָּדוֹת ...

<sup>90</sup>R. Hayyim Heller, in his introduction to his

edition of Rambam, Sefer Ha-Mitzvot (Jerusalem, 1946), p.

11. He did find precedents to Rashba's words in various



attacked in Minhat Kenaot maintained that Isaac and Rebecca signified, respectively, the intellect and the soul which receives intellection.

<sup>98</sup>See Genesis 30:34.

<sup>99</sup>Feldman ed., pp. 147-148.

<sup>100</sup>Moreh Nevukhim I:17, cited by Saperstein, Decoding, p. 60.

<sup>101</sup>Decoding, pp. 58-59, and see p. 77.

<sup>102</sup>Cf. Ramban's formulation in his Commentary to Job (Kitvei Ramban II, pp. 58-59), noted by Berger in "Miracles," p. 120.

<sup>103</sup>Gottlieb, R. Bahye, p. 250 (see n. 66).

<sup>104</sup>Chapter 8, pp. 101b ff. Gottlieb (*ibid.*, n. 30) did note that some particulars there differ with the remarks of Rashba.

<sup>105</sup>Genesis 1:22.

<sup>106</sup>Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut, p. 90b: כי כאשר הצדקו  
למטה, כן יש למעלה, פירוש

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., pp. 94b-95a: כי גבול הטוב וגבול העוון  
אשר מקוים לו הכנה כאשר זמם גמול המעשה  
במאמץ אשר עקב הוא אין האדם כאשר וגבול קומו  
גמול המעשה... היותו יש למטה אל קומו

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., pp. 88b, 92a.

<sup>109</sup>Feldman ed., pp. 147-148.

<sup>110</sup>Another example of this may be She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:60. We have already cited this responsum (in n. 88) as an example of Rashba's exegetical position. We should also note his quotation of the introduction of Rabad (R. Abraham ben David) to his work Ba'alei Ha-Nefesh, regarding the creation of Adam and Eve. Joseph Dan, "Haqdamat Ha-Ra'avad le-Sefer Ba'alei Ha-Nefesh," Sinai 77 (1975), pp. 143-145, has pointed out the numerous statements contained therein that are directed against the philosophic world view, and in this context quoted Isadore Twersky's remark that kabbalists often quoted Rabad's Ba'alei Ha-Nefesh. In his paper "Maimonides and Kabbalah," (paper read at the Harvard conference on Maimonides, Dec. 1984, currently in press), Dr. M. Idel pointed out that there are numerous kabbalistic motifs present in this introduction that have not been sufficiently explored. (I wish to thank Dr. Idel for showing me a copy of his paper.) We would like to point out that many of the themes that Rabad alluded to are discussed fully in the eighth chapter of Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut. In view of this, Rashba's citation of Rabad takes on new meaning.

<sup>111</sup>Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona, pp. 17-24. See also J. Dan, "Gershom Scholem's Reconstruction of Early Kabbalah,"

Modern Judaism V:1 (1985), pp. 49-50.

<sup>112</sup>The Rabbinic statement לפי מלכותו לא לפי  
מלכותו (Bereshit Rabbah 44:1 and  
elsewhere) was the point of departure for Rambam's  
discussion of this issue (Moreh Nevukhim 3:26). This  
statement seemingly contradicted Rambam's assertion that  
mitzvot are not arbitrary decrees that G-d instituted but  
inherently rational and purposeful laws designed to instill  
correct opinions among the people. Rambam resolved the  
contradiction by distinguishing between the inherently  
rational general contours of mitzvot, and the arbitrary  
particular aspects.

A diametrically opposed viewpoint was advanced by  
Yosef Ha-Meganne, who insisted on the arbitrariness of  
mitzvot as a test by G-d of the Jews' obedience. See D.  
Berger, The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages  
(Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 356-357.

<sup>113</sup>Scholem pointed out that symbolic representation  
also removed the danger of antinomianism latent in  
allegorization, for often "the symbol became meaningful only  
through the actual enactment of the commandment." See On  
the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, tr. R. Mannheim (New York,  
1965), pp. 52-53. Cf. Dan, "Scholem's Reconstruction," pp.  
52-53.

<sup>114</sup>See Ramban to Leviticus 1:9, and Ritba (R. Yom



Tov ben Ashvili) in Sefer Ha-Zikkaron, ed. Kahana, pp. 73-78.

<sup>115</sup>See e.g., Ramban to Leviticus 19:19.

<sup>116</sup>Saperstein, Decoding, pp. 219-220, n. 62, quotes the classical definitions of allegory and metaphor.

<sup>117</sup>Jacob Elbaum, in Scripta Hierosolymitana 22 (1971), pp. 28-47, maintained that Maharal (R. Judah Loeb of Prague) was the first one to apply the exoteric/esoteric model of interpretation to aggadic texts in the same manner as he did to biblical texts. Saperstein (Decoding, p. 222, n. 12), countered that although Rambam did not generally use allegory to explain Aggadah, "the assumption of two levels of meaning, with the more valuable meaning concealed, is formulated by Maimonides." (See Elbaum's review of Saperstein's book in Tarbiz, 52:4 (1982), pp. 669-679.) Rashba's extension of the notion that biblical passages have multifaceted explanations to rabbinic remarks as well is germane to this discussion, although we note that he does not extend this principle to every Aggadah, as he himself stated in his preface.

<sup>118</sup>Tishby ed., pp. 4-5, and see Decoding, pp. 16-17.

<sup>119</sup>Weinberger ed., pp. 4-6.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 104. Feldman's inclusion (op. cit. n. 34, p. 138) of Menahot among the tractates of Rashba's

commentary is based upon Weinberger's insertion of a lemma from Menahot (35b) before this passage, which was not authored by Rashba but was part of R. Azriel's commentary on Berakhot. This passage is one of the several non-authentic passages in Weinberger's edition of Rashba (see Section One above).

<sup>121</sup>In a different context, R. Yitzhak ben Yedaiah wrote that the pylactery of the head represents the cosmos. See Decoding, p. 220, n. 67.

<sup>122</sup>See "R. Yedaiah Ha-Penini," (Heb.), pp. 73-75.

<sup>123</sup> וְטַעַם זֶה יוֹצֵר דְּדַרְדְּרֵי רַצִּים, מְשׁוֹכֵי הַיָּם דְּדַרְדְּרֵי  
הַיָּם, אֵלֶּיָּהּ מְשׁוֹכֵי הַיָּם

See I. Tishby, "Aggadah ve-Kabbalah be-Ferushei Ha-Aggadot shel R. Ezra ve-R. Azriel mi-Gerona," Minḥah le-Yehudah (Jerusalem, 1950), p. 170.

<sup>124</sup>Idel, in his paper "Maimonides and Kabbalah," quoted the following passage from Otzar Ha-Kavod (Warsaw 1879), p. 25d:

וְטַעַם זֶה יוֹצֵר דְּדַרְדְּרֵי רַצִּים, מְשׁוֹכֵי הַיָּם דְּדַרְדְּרֵי  
הַיָּם, אֵלֶּיָּהּ מְשׁוֹכֵי הַיָּם

Note these words from R. Todros' commentary to Pesahim 119a:

וְטַעַם זֶה יוֹצֵר דְּדַרְדְּרֵי רַצִּים, מְשׁוֹכֵי הַיָּם דְּדַרְדְּרֵי  
הַיָּם, אֵלֶּיָּהּ מְשׁוֹכֵי הַיָּם

According to this conception, the kabbalist deduces the full

content of the doctrine from the "chapter headings."

<sup>125</sup>Weinberger ed., p. 4: פירוש הרמב"ם לראשון פסוק ע"א  
. שם פירוש [הוא] כן שם פירוש פירוש פירוש.

<sup>126</sup>For Ramban on this score, see n. 87 above.

<sup>127</sup>Weinberger ed., p. 4: פירוש הרמב"ם לראשון פסוק ע"א  
. שם פירוש [הוא] כן שם פירוש פירוש פירוש.

<sup>128</sup>Betzah 16a; Ta'anit 27b.

<sup>129</sup>This reason is not stated explicitly in the Talmud. Another reason offered was the fact that the fires of Gehinnom cease to burn on Shabbat. See R. Joel Sirkes, Bayit Hadash to Tur Orach Hayyim 297, and R. Yehiel M. Epstein (Arukh Ha-Shulhan) ad loc., who utilized both reasons.

<sup>130</sup>See Rashbam (R. Samuel ben Meir) to Pesahim 102b; Tosafot: Betzah 33b, s.v. ki, Pesahim 102b, s.v. rav. The Bayit Hadash and Arukh Ha-Shulhan (op. cit. n. 131) suggested that NY existed only on Shabbat. The fires of Gehinnom, however, did not blaze on Shabbat or on yom tov. The Rabbis, according to this view, instituted the blessing over the spices at havdalah only when it would mark a transition between a day when one possessed NY to a day where

the fires of Gehinnom would blaze. Medieval halakhic authorities, however, did not operate with more than one reason for the blessing over the spices in attempting to solve this conundrum.

<sup>131</sup> See Rambam, Hilkhhot Shabbat 29:29, who does not use the term NY.

<sup>132</sup> Commentary On the Torah, Genesis 2:3. Cf. his remarks to Exodus 20:8.

In the fourteenth century, an "ibn Ezra Renaissance" of sorts took place. Quite a few of his doctrines were taken as their own by the mystically inclined who saw in ibn Ezra a kindred spirit. See A. Altmann, "Moses Narboni's Epistle on Shi'ur Komah," Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ed. A. Altmann, p. 241.

<sup>133</sup> Op. cit. n. 132: אשר הוא פירש וזו היתה אמת...  
אשר הוא פירש וזו היתה אמת...

<sup>134</sup> Ma'arekhet Ha-Elo-hut, p. 73a. See also p. 80b.

<sup>135</sup> She'elot u'Teshuvot 3:290, repeated in 7:349.

<sup>136</sup> Here Rashba did not quote ibn Ezra himself (as opposed to She'elot u'Teshuvot 5:48, where he advised his respondent to see ibn Ezra's commentary to the beginning of Parshat Va-Era; see Chapter One above.). It seems certain, however, that he consciously used the latter's explanation.

See R. David Abudraham's Siddur, s.v. Seder Motzaei Shabbat, who quoted Rashba's responsum concerning the omission of the spice blessing, and followed immediately with a quotation from ibn Ezra's Commentary On the Torah.

<sup>137</sup>Rashba (as well as the Tosafists) was not bothered by the objection that one could enjoy good foods on a weekday as well. See Bayit Hadash, cited above (n. 131).

<sup>138</sup>Other authorities gave a different answer to this question: on yom tov, there is no reading of the Torah at the minhah service, and hence the verse is not said. See R. Joseph Caro, Bet Yosef to Tur Oraḥ Hayyim #293. Rashba's comment is in She'elot u'Teshuvot 5:1, where he remarks: שא"כ... פ"ב  
והוא שיש להקדים לה קריאת התורה ויש להקדים לה קריאת התורה  
והוא שיש להקדים לה קריאת התורה ויש להקדים לה קריאת התורה  
והוא שיש להקדים לה קריאת התורה ויש להקדים לה קריאת התורה  
והוא שיש להקדים לה קריאת התורה ויש להקדים לה קריאת התורה  
 ושא"כ, presumably, distinguishes this reason from any kabbalistic doctrine. With these words, a reason not mentioned at all in the Torah is adduced for the observance of Shabbat. According to this view, man needs to be exceptionally vigilant on Shabbat, for on that day there is more potential for harm. These remarks of ibn Ezra are not in the same vein as his remarks in Genesis 2:3, but they are based as well on a cyclical view of nature and its consequent effects upon man.

Rashba referred his respondent to his Commentary On

Aggadah (Weinberger ed., pp.9-14), where he dealt with the fact that this verse is said specifically at the minḥah service.

<sup>139</sup>Weinberger ed., pp. 73-75.

<sup>140</sup>Weinberger ed., p. 75.

<sup>141</sup>Meshullam ben Shlomo Dapiera, in his attack (written in the form of a poem) against Rambam, stressed the fact that Talmudic sources attested that Gehinnom was not merely an allegorical image but a real place of punishment. See H. Brody, "Poems of Meshullam ben Shlomo Dapiera," Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry in Jerusalem, Vol. IV (Jerusalem, 1938), p. 17.

<sup>142</sup>Kitvei Ramban II, p. 283.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid. The question arises: Had this passage not existed, would Ramban have maintained the existence of Gehinnom with the same tenacity? Although he wrote (ibid., p. 285) אין עולם הזה נקרא גהנום אלא שם נקרא

in the same passage, he also mentioned that תצטרכו מקומו מן הנקרא גהנום which was not said in a halakhic context, and pointed out (ibid., p. 283) that כי תאמרו ומה נקרא גהנום

His inclination may have been to accept it even without the "smoking gun" from tractate Shabbat. As Rashba, as we will



A compromise between Rambam and Ramban on the issue of Gehinnom itself was attempted by R. Hillel of Verona, who denied that Gehinnom is a place, yet maintained that a "fire," albeit not a physical one, consumes the souls of the wicked. See Sefer Tagmulei Ha-Nefesh, ed. J. Sermoneta (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 191-233, and note Sermoneta's comment on p. 217, n. 437.

<sup>150</sup> Scholem, Kabbalah, p. 344, gives a synopsis of the Jewish philosophers' view of gilgul.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 3345.

<sup>152</sup> Sefer Me'irat Einayim, ed. Goldreich, p. 30.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> E. Gottlieb, "Viqquah Ha-Gilgul be-Kandia," Sefunot 11 (1969), pp. 43-66.

<sup>155</sup> She'elot u'Teshuvot Ha-Rashba 1:418:

וְכַיִן הָיָה שֶׁבְּפִי שְׂרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת  
 וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת  
 וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת  
 וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת וְעַל מַדְבָּרֵי אֲרָצוֹת

This is the same objection that R. Isaac of Acre (op. cit. n. 43) raised against Rashba. Theodicy formed the basis of one of R. Yedaiah's arguments against gilgul, and he included the argument that regardless of the objective merit of the doctrine, it should be discarded because of the



feeling of hopelessness that foreknowledge concerning gilgul may cause. With the argument: (פונדא אונדא) אונדא קודם אצל

פארבער די פונדא ווי א פיל, אונדא דאס און אונדא קודם אונדא אונדא אונדא  
אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא

he stressed not the impossibility of a soul existing in any body besides that one in which it originally existed, but the impossibility of one soul simultaneously coexisting in two bodies.

<sup>156</sup>In contrast with his affirmations of gilgul, Rashba rejected out of hand a literal interpretation of the Aggadah (Rosh Ha-Shanah 11a) that G-d created all the objects of creation "according to their will," even though an idea based upon its literal meaning was utilized by R. Azriel (Tishby ed., p. 47: אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא  
אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא אונדא and see Tishby's note ad loc. A similar idea, related to the Platonic idea of the Forms, was mentioned by the Geonim (Otzar Ha-Geonim, Rosh Ha-Shanah, p. 22). As Rashba felt it was impossible for something not created to have a will (Weinberger ed., p. 106), he did not hesitate to dismiss this idea, and he interpreted the aggadot in Hullin 60a regarding the creation of the world as formulating the idea that G-d created the world by an act of Will.

<sup>157</sup>Tishby ed., pp. 30-31.



phrase in this vein here.

<sup>166</sup>"Scholem's Reconstruction," p. 42, and p. 62, n. 12.

<sup>167</sup>Kitvei Ramban I, p. 306. The Midrash is Eikhah Rabbati, 1:57.

<sup>168</sup>Rashba did not mention the name of his Christian opponent. Perles (German sec., p. 65) suggested that Martini was his adversary. Although S. Lieberman in Shki'in (op. cit. n. 15 above), noted that an Aggadah (Niddah 61b) that Rashba is forced to defend is not mentioned in Martini's works, J. Cohen, in JQR 71 (1980), pp. 48-55, wrote that examination of non-Jewish sources confirms that Martini was indeed Rashba's opponent.

<sup>169</sup>See B. Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1941), pp. 199-218 ("The Spiritual Exposition"), for a discussion of medieval Christian metaphorical interpretations. Thus, Martini would have understood the claim that a doctrine should be interpreted kabbalistically just as Ramban assumed that Pablo would.

<sup>170</sup>Perles, Heb. sec., pp. 48-49: על פי דברי רש"י  
בפירוש נדרים, דף ק"א, שם רש"י קובע, וז"ל, וכן נראה  
בפירוש נדרים, דף ק"א, שם רש"י קובע, וז"ל, וכן נראה

Rashba defended this Aggadah immediately after defending the Aggadah that "seven items were created before the creation of the world" (Nedarim 39b). R. Joshua ibn Shu'aib (Derashot, p. 59b) claimed that these Aggadot possess hidden meanings, but their "open" meanings refer to the idea of the telos. Op. cit. n. 92, for Rashba's comments on this Aggadah from tractate Nedarim, and op. cit. n. 55 above.

<sup>171</sup>See M. Idel, "Tefisat Ha-Torah be-Hekhalot u-va-Kabbalah," Mehqere Yerushalayyim be-Mahshevet Yisrael 1 (1981), pp. 50-51; G. Scholem, Ha-Kabbalah bi-Provence, pp. 243-247.

<sup>172</sup>Cf. D. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages," Speculum 55:2 (1980), pp. 294-304.

<sup>173</sup>See Section Two above.

<sup>174</sup>This point was emphasized both by Septimus in "Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 21, n. 37, and by Berger in "Miracles and the Natural Order," p. 112, n. 19.

<sup>175</sup>This is not to maintain that Rashba necessarily denied that e.g., gilgul was the peshat underlying the

verses in the Book of Job. We wish to stress, however, that he chose not to hint that kabbalistic exegesis could provide answers to questions of peshat.

<sup>176</sup>Scholem, Reshit Ha-Kabbalah, pp. 160-161.

<sup>177</sup>Hiddushei Ha-Rashba (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 131, s.v. u'ferush. J. Katz, "Halakhah ve-Kabbalah; Maga'im Rishonim," Sefer Zikkaron le-Yitzhak Baer (Jerusalem, 1979), p. 165, n. 72, expressed amazement at Ramban's inclusion of these remarks in his commentary, a reaction which underscores our point.

<sup>178</sup>Yevamot, 49b, s.v. kol. Ramban presented his explanation of the "true" meaning of aspaklariah ha-meirah after quoting explanations given by R. Hananel and Rashi.

<sup>179</sup>Reshit Ha-Kabbalah, pp. 150-151; Kabbalah, p. 51.

<sup>180</sup>See Idel, "No Kabbalistic Tradition," p. 69.

<sup>181</sup>See n. 78 above, where we noted Rashba's comments in his halakhic commentary to Berakhot 6a. The manner in which he presented the fact that a kabbalistic explanation exists certainly contrasts with Ramban's confident presentation of kabbalistic ideas. That passage confirms that Rashba did not stress the kabbalistic approach to the exclusion of others.

<sup>182</sup>Scholem, Reshit Ha-Kabbalah, p. 151.

<sup>183</sup>This conclusion comes from analysis of his responsa as well. Compare e.g., Ramban to Exodus 21:6 with Rashba, She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:9, which we discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>184</sup>Idel, "No Kabbalistic Tradition," p. 51, n. 3, and p. 58

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., pp. 52-63.

<sup>186</sup>Cf. Section Two above.

<sup>187</sup>See Sefer Ha-Zikkaron, p. 50, for Ritba's perception of himself vis a vis Ramban.

<sup>188</sup>Op. cit. n. 17 above. R. Shem Tob's remarks were most recently quoted by J. Dan, "Baddei Ha-Aron" (Op. cit. n. 44), p. 119, n. 28.

<sup>189</sup>Idel, "No Kabbalistic Tradition," passim, but esp. p. 70.

<sup>190</sup>She'elot u'Teshuvot Ribash 157.

<sup>191</sup>Abravanel's remarks were cited by I. Twersky, "R. Yedaiah Ha-Penini," p. 75, n. 3, and by E. I. J. Rosenthal, Studia Semitica (London, 1971), p. 42, n. 2. See also Shem Tob ibn Shaprut, Sefer Pardes Rimonim (repr., Jerusalem, 1968), who praises Rashba as

אִשְׁרֵי הַדָּבָר וְהַמַּעֲשֵׂה  
 אִשְׁרֵי הַדָּבָר וְהַמַּעֲשֵׂה (quoted by Twersky ad loc.). The introduction to a MS of Rashba's Commentary On Aggadah that

is located at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America  
(viz. Catalog Kabbalistica, Reel #43, n. 2011) reads:

פירוש רמב"ם על ספר שמות פרק י"ג  
פירוש רמב"ם על ספר שמות פרק י"ג  
פירוש רמב"ם על ספר שמות פרק י"ג

<sup>192</sup>R. Isaiah Horowitz, Shenei Luhot Ha-Berit

(Josewow, 1878), pp. 9b-10a, confronted the disparity  
between Ramban's declaration in his Commentary On the Torah  
that Divine reward and punishment for mitzvot and 'averot  
are miraculous occurrences. This contrasted with the  
kabbalistic position, expressed by the students of Ramban in  
his name, that the Divine flow "naturally" comes as a  
consequence of human actions. He wrote: ואין כוונתו

הוא שיהיה המצוה והעוון כוונתו  
לעולם ולעולמי עולמים  
לעולם ולעולמי עולמים

In other words, Ramban's exoteric comments did not reflect  
his true beliefs. See also Berger, "Miracles and the  
Natural Order," p. 121, n. 39, for a similar claim in R.  
Meir ibn Gabbai's 'Avodat Ha-Kodesh.

## Notes: Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup>Baer, Christian Spain, p. 303, noted that the authors of the 1305 herem quoted from the Moreh to emphasize this respect.

<sup>2</sup>R. Jacob ben Sheshet already had made a sharp distinction between Rambam and R. Shmuel ibn Tibbon; see MDN, pp. 144-146, and see G. Vajda, Recherches sur la Philosophie et la Kabbale dans la Pensee Juive du Moyen Age (Paris, 1962), pp. 69-74. See also Minhat Kenaot, p. 65, for praise of Rambam by the anti-allegorists.

3. וידעו 'אנ (כס"ו) דקלד

See M. Shmidman, "On Maimonides' Conversion to Kabbalah," Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature II, ed. I. Twersky, p. 380, n. 26. In fact, the issues upon which Rashba made that remark involve questions of identification (of animal parts), not questions of interpretation.

<sup>4</sup>M. Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," demonstrated how Rambam's concept of sitrei Torah was a new and revolutionary position. The kabbalists who claimed that ta'amei ha-mitzvot were not to be found via philosophic speculation were asserting the established position on the matter. Idel noted Y. Baer, "The Service of Sacrifice in Second Temple Times," Zion XL (1975), p. 150, n. 141, who



noted the affinity between the sod ha-qorban as formulated by the kabbalists and the rituals as expressed in the Talmud.

5. אמרו שבמקדש צ"ל נא טעם עאיסור אמו ואם קמ'אפי  
דקדמיה קטני צמחיה ד' דנוה, פסוקיה רעיוניא דנוה,  
ו'טו צ' אמו מסוד' ע'מ רעיוני צ' רע' דנו צ'  
מקדש - א' מ' ע'ק' ע'מיה קמ'יה מ'ג' ד' צ"ס, כ'י  
י' ו'י' קו'יה מ' צ'מ'יה כ'מ'יה קמ'יה, ו'מ' ד'ו' קו'יה צ'א' צ'א' צ'מ'יה  
ד' ד'מ'יה כ'נ'א מ'מ'יה א' ד'נוה, וא'פ' ע'מ'יה ע'צ'יה, א'מ'יה  
כ'מ'יה א'מ'יה, וא'מ'יה פ'א' צ'א' א'מ'יה פ'א' מ'מ'יה מ'מ'יה צ'מ'יה צ"ס  
א'ן מ'מ'יה ק'מ'יה פ'א' מ'מ'יה, ו'ק'מ'יה פ'ו'צ'יה ט'מ'יה מ'מ'יה.

She'elot u'Teshuvot 4:253. Although the question concerned only oto ve'et beno, Rashba also mentioned difficulties inherent in Rambam's analogous explanation of shilluah ha-gen. The phrase points to the further step that Ritba took in his Sefer Ha-Zikkaron; Ritba apologetically defended Rambam's explanation of sacrifices, for example, although personally he wholeheartedly accepted the kabbalistic interpretation (and even suggested at one point that Rambam himself wrote only to "answer the heretic"). See Kahana ed., pp. 73-78, and see n. 22 below.

<sup>6</sup>See Recanati to Deut. 22:6.

<sup>7</sup>See R. Mordecai Jaffe, Levush Even Yegarrah, to Recanati's remarks cited in the previous note. According to the kabbalistic explanation, the reward that the Torah promises for observance of shilluah ha-gen is not because

of the act itself, but because of its cosmic significance.

<sup>8</sup>See Chapter 3 of our study.

<sup>9</sup>In one sense, the allegorical interpretations of the philosophers and the writings of those kabbalists who adopted novel interpretations and techniques were two sides of the same coin: sevarah, as opposed to kabbalah; received tradition. See Chapter 3 of our study.

<sup>10</sup>See Aron Freimann, Union Catalog of Hebrew Manuscripts and Their Location (Jerusalem, 1964), Vol. II, #4049, #10946, for a listing of various MSS of this letter. Upon examination of the matter, it becomes apparent that Freimann combined two different letters that Rashba wrote under one listing. One letter, entitled tokhahat mussar (admonition), is the letter extant in She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:416 and was identified as such by Steinschneider. (See Catalogus Liborum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana, Vol. II [repr., Berlin, 1931], #6891, Col. 2273, #26. The MS is Reggio #24 [Neubauer cat. #2221J.]) The other letter is part of the Reggio collection in the Bodleian library (Reggio #52 [N. #22501] and of the Kaufmann collection in the Budapest library (Kaufman #298). (See M. Weisz, Katalog der Hebraischen Handschriften und Bicher in der Bibliothek des Professors Dr. David Kaufmann [Frankfurt, 1906], p. 106.) In both of these instances the letter follows a portion of

Ramban's Torat Hashem Temimah that is not in Chavel's edition but which was published by E. Kupfer in Tarbiz 40 (1970), pp. 64-80. This letter is the one we are concerned with here.

<sup>11</sup>A. L. Frumkin published the Bodleian library manuscript in Seder Rav Amram Ha-Shalem (Jerusalem, 1912), pp. 78-81. Rashba's comments were known already by Rabbinic scholars (presumably from the quotation in 'Ein Ya'agov). See, e.g., Toledot Adam (first published 1801; repr. Jerusalem, 1984). E. Dvoratz reprinted this text in his edition of Hiddushei Ha-Rashba 'al Bava Batra (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 120.

<sup>12</sup>Perush Ha-Mishnah, Hagigah 2:1; Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesode Ha-Torah 2:11, 4:10.

<sup>13</sup>See Otzar Ha-Kavod, Ketubot 11a (Feldman ed. [op. cit. Chapter 3, n. 35], pp. 309-311.

<sup>14</sup>הוא לא ידע כלל מהו מ"מ ומהו מ"מ  
ועל כן לא ידע לומר שיש בו מ"מ

Cf. Ramban's comments to Genesis 1:6, and in Torat Hashem Temimah, p. 158, where he confessed that he did not possess full knowledge of MM.

<sup>15</sup>For Ra'ah, see Ginze Rishonim, ed. M. Hershler (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 95 (Sukkah 28a). For Ritba, see Hiddushim to Sukkah 28a (erroneously ascribed to Rashba) and

Ein Ya'aqov ad loc. See Kesef Mishnah to Rambam, Hilkhot Yesode Ha-Torah 4:13, who quoted Ran and R. Eliyahu Mizrahi.

J. Katz, "Halakhah ve-Kabbalah ke-Nos'ei Limud Mitharim," Da'at 7 (1981), pp. 40-43, discussed Rashba's letter. He stressed Rashba's emphasis upon the fundamental importance of Talmud study in spite of its designation as davar gatan, but did not stress that his definition of davar gadol was Kabbalah, not metaphysics. Rashba's anger at the beginning of the letter is in large measure due to his belief that the mistaken designation of philosophical studies as davar gadol led to the lack of observance of mitzvot.

<sup>16</sup>Both Ra'ah and Ritba, in contradistinction with Rashba, displayed a certain affinity towards a rationalistic approach towards ta'amei ha-mitzvot in general. Notwithstanding Ritba's personal convictions, he nonetheless defended Rambam's positions as expressed in Moreh Nevukhim. Although scholars have long arrived at a consensus that Ra'ah did not write the traditional yet rationalist-minded Sefer Ha-Hinukh, in his Talmudic commentary, Ra'ah quoted several explanations of his brother R. Pinehas that placed mitzvot in a rational, as opposed to mystical, framework. (I. Ta-Shema has argued in Kiryat Sefer LV [1979-1980], pp. 787-790, that R. Pinehas is indeed the author of Sefer Ha-Hinukh.)

<sup>17</sup>Of course, one could claim that the study of law is a "small matter" whereas the performance of the commandments is what is truly important. The consensus shared by all sides here, however, is that gatan and gadol refer not only to study of the respective disciplines, but to the practical results obtained from reaping the fruits of study.

<sup>18</sup>See Chapter 3, n. 112, above, and Moreh Nevukhim 3:26, Ramban to Deut. 22:6, and ibn Kaspi's commentary to the Moreh ad loc. In Chapter Three we pointed out that whereas Rambam himself distinguished between particular parts of mitzvot and the inherently rational general contours of mitzvot, the kabbalistic symbolic scheme gave "meaning" (albeit, in a sense different than that employed by the rationalists) even to particulars.

<sup>19</sup>Rashba's presentation of this position is one that went even further than that of Rambam. Here, mitzvot in their totality were deemed to be only for the purpose of discipline.

<sup>20</sup>This argument is not unimpeachable. One may claim that the wish to fulfill the "Word of G-d" would itself be a powerful incentive to perform mitzvot. See Chapter Three, n. 112, where we quote Yosef Ha-Meganne's insistence on the arbitrariness of mitzvot as a test by G-d.

21

שְׁמֵי שָׁמַיִם הַמְּחִיבִים לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָהֶם בְּכָל אֵיכוֹן הַמְּחִיבִים

<sup>22</sup>Rashba's position here should be viewed in light of his frequent assertions that the full measure of G-d's Wisdom is inscrutable. Some levels of meaning inherent in mitzvot are discernible by man, and these insights are obtained with use of rational categories. The higher levels of meaning, however, remain beyond the ken of man.

Cf. Rashba's poem in his introduction to 'Avodat Ha-Kodesh. He was aware of the fact that he could not grasp the infinite mysteries of G-d, and remarked that he would rather devote himself to study of what was openly revealed

by G-d (halakhah):

וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר  
 וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר, וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר  
 וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר, וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר  
 וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר, וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר  
 וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר, וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר  
 וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר, וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר  
 וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר, וְלֹא לְאִישׁ אֶתְּחַבֵּר

<sup>23</sup>Katz, "Nos'ei Limud Mitharim," p. 41, n. 20, quoted Alexander Altmann as pointing out the source for the parable of the doctor is Judah Ha-Levi in Kuzari 1:79.

<sup>24</sup>See Toledot Adam, p. 34, for a similar distinction

between necessary knowledge available to all and unnecessary knowledge of a higher order that only a select few can apprehend.

כחייב זכא"ו והיא שכן קטנים ומעטים ללמוד כל אדם, וכן מצינו  
... ח"י הובא, ומצא מרכבה בצדדים ואין מושגים ללמוד כל אדם...  
... שאין מצינו שום דבר כן דין החיים שנקראו צדדים אצלו וכו'.

<sup>25</sup>Yalkut Shim'oni #639, and parallels. (See Midrash Tehillim to Psalms 12; the corresponding passage in Shabbat 88b is incomplete and is not the source).

<sup>26</sup>When Rashba wrote התאוו שגמל עתה הטובה והאמה פא  
עמנו בלמוד שיעור וחיובו, כן בצדדים הנבדלים הכוללים

he shifted the emphasis to study of halakhah.

<sup>27</sup> ואם אולם דווקא"א אולם חסאם ואם דמרכבה  
אין ניצם חכמה.

<sup>28</sup>Note these comments of R. Eliyahu Mizrahi (quoted in Kesef Mishneh to Mishneh Torah: Hilkhot Yesode Ha-Torah

4:13: ואולם החטא הגלויים אצלם שאין מקנה עם נשא  
צדדים כצדדים חסאם מרכבה, שהיו הצדדים עם חסאם מרכבה  
בטל הקווא ובעל, בין עמנו חסאם הקדמה, בין עמנו חסאם  
החכמה, וללא החטא הגלויים הם חסאם מצינו ובעל חסאם  
הוא ספק בחטא הגלויים היא חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם  
הצדדים חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם  
הצדדים חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם חסאם

We wish to point out that Rashba's glorification of Talmud study was consistently connected with proper performance of

mitzvot. In this sense, his position differed from that of the school of R. Hayyim of Volozhin, whose doctrine of Torah li-Shmah (study for its own sake) gave a value to study of law without taking into account performance of mitzvot. Rashba's system stressed the interrelationship of the heart, mouth and body, as mitzvot are performed with all three components. See She'elot u'Teshuvot 1:94.



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