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**MEDIEVAL ASHKENAZI BIBLE INTERPRETATION:
A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF RABBI JOSEPH BEKHOR
SHOR'S TORAH COMMENTARY**

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ABSTRACT

Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor is a Torah commentator and a Tosafist from the twelfth century. Only a single copy of his commentary exists. This might suggest that it was not much in demand, and is confirmed by the fact that it was not published until the modern era. Nonetheless, his commentary attracted later commentators among the Tosafists in the field of Torah exegesis.

Bekhor Shor's commentary demonstrates various types of linguistic features of Bible interpretation, such as, grammar, etymology, semantics, and syntax. It also deals with the style and some literary features of the Bible. Each feature presented in this study, includes extensive examples that demonstrate Bekhor Shor's use of them. Some similarities are found between the commentaries of the Tosafists and that of Bekhor Shor, considering his specific linguistic-literary features of exegesis.

Possible influences on Bekhor Shor's trend of linguistic and literary exegesis of the Torah-Pentateuch text is the intellectual atmosphere of Peshat and linguistic activity in Ashkenaz in his generation, and the teachings of Ibn Ezra, Rabbenu Tam, and Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir.

This study indicates, different from the generally accepted view, that Bekhor Shor dealt with various kinds of linguistic and literary exegesis in the course of his elucidation and explanation of the Torah.

RÉSUMÉ

Le Rabin Joseph Bekhor Shor est un commentateur de la Torah et un tosafiste du douzième siècle. Son commentaire n'existe qu'en un seul exemplaire. Ceci suggère que cet ouvrage n'était pas populaire, un fait confirmé par sa publication uniquement au vingtième siècle. Toutefois, ce commentaire a par la suite suscité plusieurs commentaires parmi les tosafistes dans le champ de l'exégèse de la Torah.

Le commentaire de Bekhor Shor démontre plusieurs genres de caractéristiques linguistiques de l'interprétation biblique notamment la grammaire, l'étymologie, la sémantique et la syntaxe. Il porte également sur le style et certains aspects littéraires de la Bible. Chaque aspect présenté dans cette étude est illustré en détail afin de démontrer l'usage que Bekhor Shor en fait. Des similitudes sont reportées entre les commentaires des Tosafistes et celui de Bekhor Shor, notamment quant aux aspects linguistiques et littéraires de son exégèse.

Le style littéraire et linguistique de l'exégèse du texte de la Torah-Pentateuque selon Bekhor Shor est probablement influencé par l'atmosphère intellectuelle de Peshat, par l'activité linguistique des Achkenazes de sa génération, ainsi que par les enseignements de Ibn Ezra, Rabbenu Tam, et du Rabin Samuel Ben Meir.

Cette étude démontre que, contrairement à l'opinion en cours. Bekhor Shor s'est effectivement penché sur plusieurs genres d'exégèses linguistiques et littéraires au cours de son explication et commentaire de la Torah.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Our knowledge of the history of early Ashkenazi Jewry in Northern and Southern France and western Germany is scant in the extreme. Only at the end of the tenth century does the name of Rabbenu Gershom 'the Light of the Exile' appear. We know little about him and his students in the eleventh century, who began blazing the trail of Peshat interpretation before the time of Rashi. [The noun Peshat is translated as: literal, simple, plain, natural and strait forward sense of the text]. In the wake of Rashi's massive activity, there began a great period of literary creativity that lasted throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹

In the first half of the twelfth century the Jews in France were relatively well situated. They possessed fields and vineyards and could earn a livelihood. The Jewish communities had internal autonomy for running their own affairs. In this period - before the Second Crusade - they were able to devote long portions of their time to the study of Torah.

The first Jew of Northern France known to us as a Bible commentator is Rabbi Menahem bar Helbo, a contemporary of Rashi. His commentaries, *Pitronim*, are quoted by Rashi and by his nephew Rabbi Joseph Qara in their own glosses.²

Rashi, the first person known to have written a commentary in Hebrew on the Torah, was one of the most outstanding exegetes of medieval times. He was not acquainted with the works of the Spanish grammarians, who wrote in Arabic, but he did know the books of Menahem Ben Saruq and Dunash Ben Labrat, which were written in Hebrew.

Rashi's disciples, who continued his precise method of study and modes of analysis, were principally members of his own family: his two sons-in-law, Rabbi Meir Ben Samuel and Rabbi Judah Ben Nathan, and his three grandsons, Rabbi Isaac, Rabbi Samuel and Rabbi Jacob Tam, the sons of Rabbi Meir, all who became classical commentators.

For the sages of Northern France, the exegesis of the Torah went hand in hand with the study of the Talmud.³ For reasons of humility and piety and through the style of their writings - glosses to Rashi - they regarded themselves as *Tosafists*, this is to say, as 'adders to' the commentary of Rashi, the great teacher under whose spiritual influence they lived. Several stand out in particular as authors of independent Bible commentaries: Rabbi Joseph Kara, Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam), Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor and Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency. They all utilized a Peshat mode of exegesis.

1. Peshat Exegesis in Northern France

Two legitimate modes of interpretation coexisted from the earliest days of Bible study: Peshat and Derash. [The verb Derash means 'to seek, ask' and Midrash means 'research, study'. In medieval exegesis, Peshat implies a particular method of Bible interpretation, the literal meaning, while Derash is in effect, any interpretation that

extends beyond what the text seems to say]. This duality can already be found in the sages of the Talmud, who in addition to their written derashot also stated, perhaps paradoxically, that “the Torah does not depart from its literal sense.”⁴ Moreover, in the Talmud itself rules are to be found which indicate the possibility of studying biblical verses in the “way of Peshat.”⁵

The explanations for the appearance of Peshat as a mode of study are various. In Grintz’s opinion,⁶ there are two. First, the progenitors of the Massoretic tradition, which began at the time of the Scribes and continued to the ninth century, led to the establishment of the Peshat as a mode of Bible interpretation. The Masoretes dealt with the transmission of textual readings and traditional corrections (the *Qeri* and *Ketiv*), vowel pointing, accents and other grammatical forms. Ahron Ben Asher of Tiberias’ famous “*Diqduq HaTe’amim*” contains all sorts of grammatical rules and masoretic data.⁷ Ben Asher is sometimes regarded as the definite authority on the reading of the biblical text. It may be said that with him, the creative period of the Massora had reached its close and that he founded the study of Hebrew grammar which was to rise to a high level of perfection. Thus, the Massora became an essential auxiliary science for the study of grammar as well as exegesis. The Masoretic activity, which seeks to expose the meaning of the words of Scripture, contributed to the development of Peshat exegesis.⁸ A second impetus for Peshat analysis was the development of Islam and of Karaism, which compelled the commentators to grapple with new viewpoints. They explained the biblical text on a literal level, thereby forcing the rabbinites to do the same.

By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Peshat exegesis flowered in Northern France, where commentators sought to control Midrashic thought or to shake free from its bonds. Whence did the impulse arise among the French commentators to give Peshat interpretations, explain Scripture from within itself, and consider the requirements of language and of the text? M. Z. Segal argues that it derived from the study of the Talmud.⁹ Whereas due to their philosophical training, some of the Spanish commentators were disinclined to penetrate into the spirit of the Bible, the Talmudic education of the French commentators exerted a more positive influence,¹⁰ inasmuch as the Talmud comes closest to the world of the Bible. The Sages of the Talmud had to study the Bible in a literal manner, in order to derive concrete halakhic rules from the text. Since the written Scriptures and the Talmud form two sides of a single Torah, the Sages transferred a Talmudic approach to the Bible, using methods such as interpreting words and topics in accordance with common sense.¹¹

It is also possible that certain religious debates contributed to the spread of the Peshat approach and to its development among the commentators of Northern France. In this period the Christians, as a way of fencing off the Jewish interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures, tended to emphasize their traditional allegorical interpretations of the Bible text. Peshat exegesis served as a barrier against such 'Derash', for while the Christians might hang their own 'Derash' interpretations upon Scripture, the literal explanation of the Jewish interpreters could counteract Christian allegory.¹²

The attitude to the Midrash of the Northern French commentators may be deduced from various remarks scattered in their writings. In discussing Gen. 3:8, Rashi says:

“There are many Midrashic explanations, and our Rabbis have already collected them in their appropriate places in *Bereshit Rabba* and in other Midrashim. I, however, am only concerned with the plain sense of the Scripture, and with such Agadoth that explain the words of Scripture in a matter that fits in with them.”¹³ Rashi’s intention was therefore not to anthologize Midrashim; these might be found in rabbinical literature. He felt the need for a commentary that should add to what was already available, and this he chose to present by searching for the Peshat. Rashbam’s well known statement about Rashi in his commentary on Gen. 37:2 furthers this impression by reporting that Rashi admitted to him that, had time allowed, he would have set down the literal interpretations according to Peshat, as they became known from day to day. A more extreme formulation of the aspiration towards Peshat is to be found in Rabbi Joseph Qara in his commentary on I Sam. 1:17, “And he said to me: go in peace, and God of Israel will give you *sh-l-t-kh*,” meaning, *she’elatekh* - your question rather your prayer as the Midrash suggests.¹⁴ When the prophecy was written down, he says, it was written in complete comprehensive form, with nothing missing from it. The Midrashim are designed to show forth the magnificence of the Torah, but they are not necessary for understanding the text itself. He even compares one whose predilection is for Midrashim to a drowning man, who clutches at a straw; however, “Were he to attend to the word of the Lord, he would seek after its literal sense - *'ilu sam libo 'el devar ha-shem, hayah hoqer 'ahar pesher davar u-peshuto we-motze'.*”

Accepted scholarly opinion on Torah exegesis holds that the school of Northern France tends to shake free of the bonds of Derash and to concentrate as much as possible

upon a Peshat approach.¹⁵ Touitou thinks this propensity is emphasized to the point of negation of Derash.¹⁶ This was certainly not their intention. Rashbam did not reject Derash. He merely wished to draw a firm distinction between it and Peshat. Just as Rashi saw his function as compensating for that which was not found in the Sages, Rashbam's was to add to Rashi's work grammatical and linguistic Peshat, and to introduce his own Peshatot.

2. Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor

Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor, a Torah commentator and a Tosafist, was a pupil of Rabbenu Tam. He lived in Northern France in the twelfth century.¹⁷ We do not have his precise dates, nor do we possess any details of his life. It has been conjectured that he was born around 1140. The nickname 'Bekhor Shor' derives from Deut. 33:17, which contains an image of the biblical Joseph: "His first born bullock (*bekhor shoro*) is glory to him."¹⁸ Biblical epithets were commonly added to personal names in the twelfth century; Rabbi Jacob Ben Meir, for example, was called *Rabbenu Tam* (the biblical Jacob was called *'ish tam* in Gen. 25:27). Our exegete's father's name is not known for certain, but it may have been Isaac.¹⁹ He mentions his father once in his commentary (Lev. 23:16), although not by name; this allows us to suppose that he received his first education from his father.

Rabbenu Tam, his teacher, is not mentioned anywhere in his commentary on the Torah. A query Bekhor Shor addressed to him begins with, "The least of his attendants and pupils, I beseech the Rabbi my teacher..."²⁰ Rabbenu Tam esteemed him and called

him “Wise above his years, my colleague, Rabbi Joseph.”²¹ Bekhor Shor was also an important Tosafist and is mentioned in the Tosafot to the Talmud.²²

Scholars are divided as to his identity. Is he in fact the Rabbi Joseph of Orleans who is mentioned in a number of Tosafot to the Talmud, or were these two separate persons? Those who hold the latter opinion point out that medieval commentaries like *Pa'aneah Raza*, quoted glosses from Rabbi Joseph of Orleans side by side with glosses from Bekhor Shor, which suggests they must be different individuals. For example, in discussing Gen. 24:7, *Pa'aneah Raza* cites one interpretation in the name of Rabbi Joseph of Orleans and after it another one in the name of Bekhor Shor. This tends to strengthen the hypothesis that they are two separate individuals.²³

There is, however, another opinion, which holds that Rabbi Joseph of Orleans is to be identified with Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor. Gross adduces several points in support of this notion.²⁴ The Tosafot to *Sabbath* 12a, starting with the word *Shemah*, contains an interpretation cited in the name of Joseph of Orleans that also appears in Bekhor Shor's commentary on Ex. 8:12, s.v., “that it may become gnats”; suggesting, a single commentator may be involved. Poznanski also endeavored to prove the identity of the two men.²⁵ He pointed to the fact that in his note on, “For it repenteth Me that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7), Bekhor Shor explains that there are three sorts of repentance. This interpretation is cited in his name by *Hadar Zeqenim* (on Num. 23:19, s.v., “not a man, that He should lie”); by *Minhat Yehudah* (on Ex. 32:14, s.v., “and the Lord repented of the evil”); and by *Pa'aneah Raza* (on Gen. 6:6, s.v., “and it repented the Lord”). But in the commentary on the Torah attributed to Rabbenu Asher on Gen. 6:6 the same

interpretation is quoted in the name of Rabbi Joseph of Orleans, suggesting that the two are a single individual.

Grappling with the fact that several comments ascribed to Rabbi Joseph of Orleans are not to be found in Bekhor Shor, Poznanski says that the notation *Ri me-Orleans* refers not to Rabbi Joseph but to Rabbi Jacob of Orleans²⁶ who was also a pupil of Rabbenu Tam.²⁷ This is why the interpretations of *Ri me-Orleans* do not appear in Bekhor Shor.

Urbach states that Rabbi Joseph of Orleans is also known as Bekhor Shor²⁸ and that the doubts raised by several scholars as to the identification cannot withstand the facts. Interpretations cited in the name of Rabbi Joseph of Orleans in the Tosafot, he says, are in parallel places, ascribed to Bekhor Shor. In the Tosafot to *Yebamot* 25b, s.v., *Hu*, for example, a quotation in the name of Rabbi Joseph of Orleans is identical with one in Tosafot *Makkot* 6a, s.v., *Nirvah*, in Bekhor Shor's name.

I am inclined to accept the arguments of those who equate the two men. That interpretations ascribed to *Ri of Orleans* are not to be found in Bekhor Shor does not prove that they were two separate individuals. In addition to Poznanski's points, it should be noted that the Munich manuscript is the sole extant copy of Bekhor Shor's commentary. Thus, it is impossible to say if it is complete or not, and consequently it cannot be used as conclusive evidence. In view of this, it seems to me that the identification of the two figures, accepted by most scholars, cannot reasonably be questioned.

Now we must ask, how the Ashkenazi Peshat commentators developed a high regard for linguistic aspects of Scripture and incorporated them in their exegesis.

3. Linguistic Activity in Early Ashkenaz

In Europe of the Middle Ages two linguistic schools of thought existed, Sefaradi and Ashkenazi.²⁹ The Sefaradi grammatical school of thought sprang up in the mid tenth century in Moslem Spain (Andalusia), and its development peaked during the first half of the eleventh century with the grammatical and lexical works of Rabbi Judah Hayuj, Rabbi Jonah Ibn Janah, and Rabbi Samuel Ha-Nagid.

The Ashkenazi approach to grammar was formed and crystallized in the main centers of the early Ashkenazi Jewry of western Europe: North France, Germany and England. This grammatical growth began during the generation after Rashi and peaked in the second half of the thirteenth century. The end of that century and the beginning of the next mark the end of this school of thought. In these centuries, especially since the middle of the fourteenth century, a new era in the history of the spiritual life and Torah study among Ashkenazi Jewry began, as its center moved East.

Only a few scholars have paid attention to the Ashkenazi linguistic school, in contrast to the Sefaradi one, probably because of the most accepted notion that during this period Ashkenazi Jewry was engaged mainly in halakha and Talmud investigations, not linguistic ones.

In general, it might be said that the early rabbis of Ashkenaz did not develop the same attitude of preference to grammatical tasks as their Sefaradi brothers. Most were less knowledgeable in the rules of the Hebrew language, and did not know Arabic.

Therefore, they were less eager and less able to pursue independent philological investigations. Apart from a few original contributions (found especially in the writings of the Rashbam), Ashkenazi grammarians did not create any essential innovations, nor did they introduce any major changes in the grammatical thinking about the Hebrew language. Nonetheless, one must not overlook the value of Ashkenazi compositions and their important contribution to the study of language at their time. Though they include very little theoretical expression of grammatical principles and methodological assumptions, some present a comprehensive description of the rules of the Hebrew language, inherent in the biblical text.

Only eight complete compositions from the Ashkenazi grammatical school remain: *Dayyaqot* of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam), *Hakhra'ot* of Rabbenu Jacob Tam, *'Ein Ha-Qore* of Rabbi Yequiel Ben Judah Ha-Naqdan, *Darkhei Ha-Niqud* of Rabbi Moshe Ha-Naqdan, *Hibur Ha-Qonim* of Rabbi Shimshon Ha-Nakdan, *Sefer Ha-Shoham* of Rabbi Moses Ben Isaac, *Mafte'ah shel Diqduq* of Rabbi Mordekhai Yair, *Hibur Alum Shem* (the untitled work) of Rabbi Shne'or. In addition, several Ashkenazi grammatical compositions have been lost.

Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor might have had access to the grammatical works of his teacher, Rabbenu Tam, and his colleague Rashbam; the other six compositions were written after his life time. They therefore contribute little to this study, but hint to an era of grammatical activity in Ashkenaz around or following Bekhor Shor's time.

The grammatical activity in Ashkenazi centers had several channels of creativity, each aimed at fulfilling a specific need, achieving a definite goal, and contributing to its

unique characteristics. An important aim of the grammatical activity among the early Ashkenazi Jewry was to create a grammatical or philological base for Peshat investigation of the Bible. As mentioned above, the method of Peshat exegesis that sprang up in North France at the end of the tenth century and continued throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries brought about a shift from Derash to Peshat that deals with the realistic meaning that goes far beyond the words themselves. This new mode of exegesis focused on interpretations based on the grammar of words, the syntax of the sentence, the texts' rhetorical and literary elements and their linguistic context.

The effort of the Ashkenazi Peshat exegetes to identify and analyze the principles of sentence structuring, grammatical rules, and linguistic patterns evident in the biblical text reflects a methodological approach that originated in the writings of the first Spanish grammarians, Menahem Ben Saruq and Dunash Ben Labarat, who wrote in Hebrew during the tenth century.

Some of Bekhor Shor's grammatical notes are similar to those of known Spanish grammarians, which suggests that he had access to their works. Such similarities are found to Ben Saruq's grammar book (e.g., Gen. 32:25) as well as to the works of Ibn Hayuj (e.g., Deut. 11:26), and Ibn Janah (e.g., Gen. 30:8, 49:4, Ex. 14:20). In Bekhor Shor's commentaries to Gen. 33:6, Ex. 14:20, and Deut. 11:26, the above grammarians are mentioned by name. The linguistic compositions of Rashi's grandsons, Rashbam and Rabbenu Tam, aimed for the most part to determine the grammatical norm in regards to identification of root letters and morphology. Bekhor Shor quotes in his commentary two

linguistic exegetes by name, from whom he derived linguistic interpretations: Ibn Ezra (Gen. 49:4, Ex. 24:11) and Rashbam (Ex. 3:14, 6:13, 14:25).

4. Characteristic Features of Bekhor Shor's Exegesis

Bekhor Shor ranks among scholars as a Bible commentator that stands between Rashi and the Tosafists. Several unique traits can be discerned in his work, which present him as an attractive commentator.³⁰ He is faithful to the French exegetical traditions and to its simplicity in matters of belief and opinion. A prominent quality of his exegesis is his opposition to allegorical interpretations. He is opposed to those who explain the *Mitzvot* in symbolic, or esoteric ways, which tend to nullify their practical, concrete meaning. He speaks with the utmost bitterness of those who improperly read things into the Torah - who, for example, explain "And you shall write them upon the door-posts of your house" (Deut. 6:9) as if it were a parable and not a commandment to attach *Mezuzot*; or who do not consider the covering up of the blood of a slaughtered animal to be a *Mitzvah*, but explain Lev. 17:11 as if its purpose was simply to secure clean courtyards. Such suggestions, he pronounces angrily, ought not to be made, and the books of such commentators deserve to be burnt. There is some basis for arguing that this opposition is directed principally against the Christians, who favored this mode of approach.³¹

Bekhor Shor was blessed with a fine psychological sense. He endeavored to understand the personalities of the Bible and to lay bare their motives. Why and how, for example, did Cain kill Abel? Bekhor Shor explains that Cain, distressed by the preference for Abel, wanted revenge and used his cunning to obtain it. He related to Abel his conversation with God, claiming that God had placated him and that they were now in

peace. Hence Abel supposed that the quarrel was over, and Cain exploited his ensuing unawareness and fell upon him, when they were out in the field. Why does Eliezer choose to test Rebecca by the well and not in her own home? For, says Bekhor Shor, had he tested her in her parents' house, she might have passed the test through their command, and therefore he decided to test her outside the city, where she was not under supervision, so that the test might be reliable. The psychological explanations which he offers are particularly striking in comparison with the approach of the other commentators of Northern France, whose discussions revolve mainly around textual and exegetical problems.

His work does not normally contain geographical or historical explanations or descriptions from daily life. In this he differs from some of the other Northern French commentators, who scatter throughout their work historical or contemporary remarks which illuminate their period.³² However, a few short notes relating to contemporary customs can be found in Bekhor Shor as well. For example, the verse in Gen. 27:40, "You shall shake his yoke from off your neck" arouses in Bekhor Shor an association with an aspect of feudal tyranny. He explains that Esau will leave the land to Jacob and depart, for "to this day it is a custom among lords that when the overlord presses too heavily on them, they say: 'Take back that land of yours which I hold, and I shall not serve you any more.'" His comment on Ex. 3:5 expresses his awareness of contemporary aristocratic custom. He says of "Put off your shoes from your feet" (Ex. 3:5) that "the hand (i.e., glove) is also called 'shoe' (Ruth 4:8)." To this day, he adds, princes seal agreements with their gauntlet (i.e., glove). "Sealskins" (Ex. 25:5): A very fine skin, says

Bekhor Shor, and lords and ladies use it for their elegant shoes, as in “And shod you with sealskin” (Ez. 16:10). In Lev. 18:21, “And you shall not give any of your seed, to set them apart to Molech,” Bekhor Shor explains that Molech worshipers killed some but not all of their sons as sacrifices. Similarly, he says, the Christians make some of their sons into priests, while others are taught a trade and raise a family. Further reflections of contemporary life in Bekhor Shor’s commentary include Gen. 14:23, Ex. 7:15 and Deut. 19:26, but they are rare, and do not add up to a general picture of it.

A number of critical remarks in Bekhor Shor anticipate Bible criticism of a later period.³³ He considers that the story of the quail in Ex. 16:13 is identical with that in Num. 11:31; he similarly equates the two accounts of the staff and the rock in Num. 20:8 and Ex. 17:6-7.

Explanations for the *Mitzvot* received attention in Bekhor Shor’s work, something which is generally not characteristic of French exegesis. Thus he proposes reasons for the prohibitions of certain foods (Ex. 15:26); rounding the corners of the head (Lev. 19:27), and mixing of wool and linen (Ex. 30:38, Lev. 19:19); for the obligation to bring sacrifices (Lev. 2:17, 17:7); for the commandments concerning *Tzitzit* (Num. 15:39), and the finding of the corpse (Deut. 21:8); and for other matters.

In this study I endeavor to demonstrate some textual characteristics perceived in Bekhor Shor’s exegesis: grammatical, etymological, semantic, syntactic and literary features of exegesis. This shall be accomplished by analyzing passages from his commentaries themselves and comparing them with the work of Bekhor Shor’s contemporaries. These topics have not been considered important by scholars, who

conclude that Bekhor Shor's grammatical work was relatively minor and far less important than his predecessors. Geiger holds that he did not in fact intend to explain either the rules of grammar or the use of words.³⁴ Urbach agrees that, apart from a few linguistic notes, Bekhor Shor says nothing about grammar.³⁵ Perhaps an analysis of the textual aspects of Bekhor Shor's Bible commentary will secure him a significant place among other exegetes whose aim was to interpret the biblical text by means of linguistic methods (such as Rabbenu Tam, Ibn Ezra, and Rashbam).

5. Bekhor Shor as a Commentator of Peshat

During a discussion of Bekhor Shor's exegesis, Geiger says of the French sages that "their whole aim and delight consisted in determining the Peshat of the biblical text and in clarifying the writer's intention...without making use of the Midrashim, for they held that Peshat is one thing and Derash another. Each follows its own line according to its own rules, neither controverts the other and both are legitimate."³⁶

These remarks are not wholly accurate with regard to Bekhor Shor, whose approach to the literal meaning is not (as one would suppose from Geiger's account) homogeneous. Nonetheless, in numerous places Bekhor Shor presents a Peshat, straightforward exegesis or quotations from the Sages and then explains his own opinion, labeling it as "according to the Peshat." Examples for Bekhor Shor's use of this phrase are found in his commentaries on Ex. 25:12, s.v., "And you shall cast...for it"; on 38:25, s.v., "And the silver of them that was numbered of the congregation"; on Deut. 23:18, s.v., "There shall be no harlot"; and on 30:19, s.v., "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day." The principal point is that in Bekhor Shor's exegetical work, Peshat

means that an interpretation corresponds to the actual wording of the verse and arise out of the text itself.

Bekhor Shor hints to this exegetical method of his when he remarks: “The Torah may be approached in seventy ways, and I have interpreted it in accordance with the Hebrew language” (Ex. 25:29), or “My function is to explain the language of the text” (Lev. 6:2). Nonetheless, no methodological statements occur in his commentary, leaving us with no clear definition of Peshat exegesis.

Peshat exegesis is the interpretation of the language of the text. Therefore Bekhor Shor’s approach to the Bible stems in part from his inclination to Peshat exegesis of the Hebrew wording of the Bible. However, in addition to that, it will be shown that he might have been influenced by contemporary grammarians, as Ibn Ezra, Rabbenu Tam, and Rashbam.

CHAPTER TWO

GRAMMAR

Bekhor Shor was an exegete, not a grammarian or a philologist, but he deals with both matters as required by his exegetical agenda. His grammatical comments are incorporated in his Torah commentary; as far as we know, Bekhor Shor did not compose any independent grammar book.

1. Distinction Between Different Tenses

Biblical Hebrew distinguishes between two main tenses: A “perfect” to indicate completed action, corresponding formally to the modern Hebrew “past,” and an “imperfect,” to indicate incomplete action, corresponding formally to the Hebrew “future.” It further has a participle, which may serve as a present tense. In some instances, Bekhor Shor points to the tense of a biblical verb when it cannot be easily understood from its context.

A. “The water decreased - *wa-yehaseru ha-mayyim*” (Gen. 8:3). The verb *wa-yehaseru* is in the imperfect form, but Bekhor Shor specifies that the Bible is using it here in a present sense, indicating that, by that time, it was evident that the level of water decreased.

B. Further examples where Bekhor Shor indicates the tense of biblical verbs: Ex. 13:33, “We are all dying.” Bekhor Shor: in the process of dying - present; 18:22, “And

they shall bear the burden” - imperative; Lev. 14:34, “And I put” - future; Deut. 12:1, “You shall observe in the land” - present; 13:7, “*Ba-seter*” - present; 24:17, “You shall not prevent” - present; 32:29, “They will understand” means, according to Bekhor Shor, ‘they should have understood’ - past; 32:29, “That they would consider,” Bekhor Shor: should have considered - past.

2. Attention to Different Conjugations

The Hebrew verb can be used in seven different conjugational patterns, each with its own distinctive meaning. Some of Bekhor Shor’s grammatical interpretations direct the reader to pay attention to, and to identify different conjugations of the Hebrew verb.

A. “Wrestling of God I have wrestled - *naftuley Elohim niftalti*” (Gen. 30:8).

Bekhor Shor notes that the letter *nun* of *naftuley* and *niftalti* is from the *Nif'al* form, not a root letter. This knowledge of course affects the way he understand these words.

B. “And Mount Sinai was all smoked - ‘*ashan kulo*’ (Ex. 19:1). Bekhor Shor comments that the word “smoke” in our verse is a *Pa'al* form. Here it does not serve, in his opinion, as a noun, though it may in other instances.

C. Further examples where Bekhor Shor notes the conjugation of biblical verbs: Gen. 49:4, “*Pahaz* as water” - *Pa'al*; Ex. 15:1, “Then sang Moses (*yashir*),” as in the word *Yaf'il*. The fact Bekhor Shor express the mode of action in our verse with a word in the pattern of the conjugations (root *pa'al*) suggests that he regards *Yaf'il* as a conjugation; Num. 7:18, “Gave an offer (*hiqriv*)” - *Hif'il*; 27:7, “So do the daughters of Zelofehad speak (*dovrot*)” - *Pa'al*; Deut. 32:6, “Unwise (*lo hakham*)” - *Pa'al*.

3. Morphological Homonyms

Homonyms are words that are equal in the way they are written or pronounced, yet differ in their meaning. Some biblical homonyms are pointed out by Bekhor Shor.

A. *Ki*: In Lev. 11:4-7 and Deut. 15:7, 21:9, *ki* means “if.” In Lev. 21:18 and Num. 20:29 *ki* means “because,” while in Deut. 15:11 it means “perhaps.” These commentaries are based on *Gittin* 90 a-b: “It is indicated in the dictum of Resh Lakish, who said that *ki* has four meanings: if, perhaps, but, and because.”

B. *Elohim*: In Ex. 12:12, 18:19, 21:6, 22:27, 32:1, Num. 33:4 and Deut. 32:15 *Elohim* means according to Bekhor Shor, “Judge.” In the rest of the Bible, *Elohim* means “God.”

4. Gender

Hebrew has two genders, masculine and feminine. Theoretically, adjectives must agree in gender with the nouns they modify. Bekhor Shor emphasizes biblical verses in which this rule seems to be validated.

A. “Then the handmaids came near” (Gen. 33:6). In his commentary, Bekhor Shor declares as a grammatical rule that wherever males and females are mentioned together, if the females come first the whole is stated in the feminine as in “Then the handmaids came near (*wa-tigashna*), they and their children, and they bowed down (*wa-tishtahawena*).” He appends several examples, such as “And Ester’s maiden and her chamberlains came (*wa-tavona*)” (Est. 4:4). He further explains that when a text begins in the masculine, it continues in the same form, as in, “And after came (*nigash*) Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed down (*wa-yishtahawu*)” (Gen. 33:7). In *Mahberet Ha-Arukh*,

Rabbi Shelomo Ibn Parhon says, however, that in all instances where male and female are mentioned together, masculine forms are used, as in “And after came (*nigash*) Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed down (*wa-yishtahawu*).”³⁷ Here Bekhor Shor is clearly proposing his own grammatical rule. Moreover, he notes that he disagrees with Ibn Parhon, who explains this in accordance to the common grammarian rule. The fact Bekhor Shor mentions him suggests he had access to his grammatical work.

B. “Thirty nursing camels - *gemalim meniqa*” (Gen. 32:16). Here Bekhor Shor says that Hebrew does not distinguish between male and female camels, as it distinguishes between “he” “goats” and “she” “goats” (*tayish* and *‘ez* respectively), and the noun therefore remains masculine despite the feminine adjective.³⁸

C. “And let it come to pass that the dames to whom I shall say - *we-haya* (masculine) *ha-ne‘arah* (feminine)” (Gen. 24:14), should be, according to Bekhor Shor - *we-hayta* (feminine).

D. “They became heated - *wa-yahamnah*” (Gen. 30:38). This is a combination of masculine and feminine. Should be *wa-yahamu* (masculine) or *wa-tehamnah* (feminine).

E. “The one camp - *ha-mahane ha-‘ahat* (feminine)...then the remaining camp - *ha-mahane ha-nish‘ar* (masculine)” (Gen. 32:9). (In modern Hebrew “camp” is masculine thus referred to as *ha-‘ehad*).

F. “And there shall be a great cry - *tze‘aqah gedolah*” (Ex. 11:6). The word *tze‘aqah* is in the feminine form. Bekhor Shor states that *Tze‘aqah* may be used in the masculine or feminine form.

G. "And you - 'at [Moses] shall speak" (Deut. 5:24). Moses is addressed in the feminine form - 'at rather than 'atah - masculine.

H. "Which are written in this book of the law" (Deut. 30:10). "Written" and "law" are feminine, "book" and "this" are masculine, though Hebrew demands an accordance in gender between nouns and their adjectives or adverbs.

5. Number

Hebrew words are either in the singular or in the plural. Adjectives should agree in number with the nouns they modify. Bekhor Shor points out in his commentary two instances in which this grammatical rule seems to be violated.

A. "And God said: we will make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26). Bekhor Shor notes that it is common for Scripture to use the plural for a singular adjective and vice versa, and to use masculine for a feminine and vice versa. Thus the word "our" in the above verse appears in the plural form, though it refers to God alone.

B. "A hundred year - *me'ah shanah*" (Gen. 23:1). The noun "year" (*shanah*) may appear in either singular (as in our verse) or plural form (for example: "*me'ah shanim*");

C. "And I have an ox and an ass" (Gen. 32:5) should be written, according to Bekhor Shor, in the plural, as 'oxes' and 'asses.'

D. "Your Gods" (Ex. 32:4) should be in the singular - "God."

E. In discussing Num. 5:3, "Their camps," Bekhor Shor notes the significance of using the plural form of the word "camp."

F. "Great terrors" (Deut. 4:34) should be written "terror," in the singular form.

G. “God gives you - *le-kha*” (Deut. 15:4). *Le-kha* is in the singular form. It should be written as *la-khem*, in the plural.

H. “That you should pass - *le-‘ovrekha*” (Deut. 29:11). *Le-‘ovrekha* is in the singular form. It should be written as *le-‘ovrekhem* in the plural.

I. “All the day” (Deut. 33:12) means: days, in the plural form.

J. “Those dwelt in the bush” (Deut. 33:16), should be written as, “that who dwelt in the bush,” in the singular form.

6. Dagesh

All Hebrew letters except *‘alef*, *hey*, *het*, *‘ayin* and *resh*, may contain a dot called *dagesh*. Bekhor Shor notes the appearance of a *dagesh* in one place, in the letter *samekh* in the word *yanusu* (Num. 14:22). He believes that this *dagesh* indicates that the word *yanusu* has an unusual meaning in our verse, namely “anger” rather than “to try.” The word *matzati* (“I found”) attached to Bekhor Shor’s comment might suggest that this was an addition of the copyist. In Ex. 2:5 Bekhor Shor notes the absence of a *dagesh* in the word *‘amata*, thus interpreting it to mean “her maid” rather than “her arm.”

7. Guttural Replacement

Bekhor Shor says of “*‘Iyei ha-‘avarim*” (Num. 21:11) that *‘Iyei* spelled with the letter *‘ayin* is the same when spelled with an *‘alef*, adding the rule that the letters *‘alef*, *hey*, *het*, and *‘ayin* are interchangeable. In his commentary on Deut. 2:23 he similarly notes that “*ha-‘ivim*” is really “*ha-hivim*,” because gutturals can be substituted for one another.³⁹

Other grammatical remarks regarding guttural replacements and other letter replacement are to be found in his comments on: Gen. 20:2, 37:35: "To" - 'el means according to Bekhor Shor "On" - 'al; Ex. 3:14: 'Ehaye - "I shall be" means 'ehewe - "God."

CHAPTER THREE

ETYMOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

It is an important principle of exegesis that a verse is to be construed with punctilious attention to its general structure, syntax, stylistic points, word order, imagery and choice of language.⁴⁰ This rule assumes that the basic meaning of the words is clear. Etymological analysis, however, constitutes one of the foundation stones of exegesis, and it is to be found in all commentators, early and late. Mediaeval etymology clarified the meaning of a given word by setting it against another word or words, hoping to arrive at the true sense through comparison. It was not concerned with a word's development but with the revelation of its permanent kernel of meaning.⁴¹ Like his contemporaries, Bekhor Shor employed etymological interpretation when he based a point on similarity of sound or on comparison with other usage in the Bible. As a Talmudist, he also offered etymological interpretations that rest on the language of the Sages.

1. Etymology Based upon Similarity of Sound

Nowadays there is a universal agreement that Hebrew derives from roots that contain three consonants. This is considered a central theme of all word building in Hebrew, it is the central rhythm of the Hebrew language. Like the other mediaeval commentators, Bekhor Shor sometimes explains a word in a way which does not

precisely determine its root, but which places it in relation to some biblical word with a similar sound. In these cases, the identity of the root cannot be overlooked.

The fact that Bekhor Shor attempts to explain biblical words by comparing them to others that are similar in sound and meaning places him among the early grammarians who came close to the conviction that words similar in sound and meaning come from the same root letters.

A. "Some way (*kivrat ha-'aretz*)" (Gen. 35:16). There is disagreement as to the interpretation of "*kivrat*." The Sages explain it in terms of *kivrah* - "sieve": The land had hollows where crops grew.⁴² Rashi, however, understands it as a certain measure of land. Jonah Ibn Janah in *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*⁴³ compares it with "Behold, God is mighty (*kabir*)" (Job. 36:5), and accordingly explains the subject of the verse as the stretch of land between two places.⁴⁴ Bekhor Shor also takes the word to denote "mighty," for he says, it was a great distance to Efrat. Hence his interpretation rests on the similarity of sound between two words (*kivrat* and *kabir*), and on the same root.

B. "And put on the two side posts (*mezuzot*)" (Ex. 12:7). Rashi explains that these are the uprights (*zequfot*) on either side of the door. Bekhor Shor adopts the same view and explains that *mezuzot* are so called because they can "move" (*zazot*) from their positions when a bulky object has to be brought into the house. Thus he apparently derives the word from the root z-w-z.

C. "Thus shall you separate (*we-hizartem*) the children of Israel" (Lev. 15:31). Most commentators agree with Onkelos and Rashi that the verb here denotes "separate"; Ibn Ezra thinks it means "keep at a distance," that is, he derives it from *nazar* - "separate

oneself.”⁴⁵ Bekhor Shor takes a somewhat different path in explaining it in terms of *zarut* - strangeness - from the word *zar*, as does Menahem Ben Saruq.⁴⁶ Thus, he agrees with others as to the general sense of the verse as indicating separation or keeping at a distance, but differs from them as to the exact derivation.

D. “The *nefilim* (*ha-nefilim*)” (Gen. 6:4). Most of the commentators offer similar explanations of this term. Onkelos translates it here and in Num. 13:33 as “mighty ones.” The Sages relate it to *nafal* - the *nefilim* were those who “brought down (*hepilu*) the world.”⁴⁷ So also Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Qimhi who explain *nefilim* as “giants.” As against this interpretation, which reflects the tradition of the existence of a race of giants, Bekhor Shor relates the word to the similar sounding *mufla'im* - “astonishing ones,” all who saw them “wondered at” them. Hence he takes the root to be *p-l-'*.

E. Further examples of Bekhor Shor’s etymological exegesis based on similarity of sound include: Gen. 3:6, “*Nehmad*,” Bekhor Shor: “*Homedet*”; Ex. 10:21, “*Yimash*,” Bekhor Shor: “‘*emesh*” (night); Num. 6:25, “*Wa-yehonekhah*,” Bekhor Shor: “*Hen*”; 21:18, “*Mehoqeq*,” Bekhor Shor: “*Haquq*” (engraved); 24:11, “*Kaved*,” Bekhor Shor: “*Koved*” (heavy); Deut. 1:16, “*Geiro*,” Bekhor Shor: “*Gar 'imo*” (lives with him); 4:35, “*La-da'at*,” Bekhor Shor: “*Le-hodi'ah*.”

2. Etymologies Based on Other Scriptural Examples

Bekhor Shor’s exegesis sometimes depends on similarity of sound, so, on some occasions, his interpretations are based on seemingly related instances from elsewhere in the Bible where a comparison of sounds forms the basis. But for the purposes of our discussion we can distinguish between the places where Bekhor Shor notes that he is

relying upon another verse and those where he notes only the resemblance in sound (as in the examples discussed above).

A. “Ten times (*monim*)” (Gen. 31:7). Onkelos translates *pe’amim* - “times.” Rashi, Rashbam, and Qimhi all similarly gloss as *minyanim* - “sums” (the total of enumeration). Bekhor Shor concurs, but adds that *monim* connotes “deceit” (*hona’ah*), as in “And I will feed them that oppress you (*‘onekha*) with their own flesh” (Is. 49:26). This explanation fits the general sense of the verse, which deals with Laban’s trickery, but it is rather strained in relation to the actual words used.

B. “Thus God has taken away (*wa-yatzel*) the cattle of your father” (Gen. 31:9). Targum Jonathan translates *wa-yatzel* as *we-roqen* - “emptied” - and Onkelos as “separated.” Bekhor Shor similarly says: “He has separated your father’s cattle from him and given to me,” basing himself on “And I will take (*we-’atzalti*) of the spirit which is upon you and will put it upon them” (Num. 11:17). The sense of removing something from one person and giving it to another, in the latter verse, is obviously appropriate to the former (Ibn Ezra: *wa-yatzel* - “to save”).

C. “And according to your word shall all my people be ruled (*yishaq*)” (Gen. 41:40). The root *n-sh-q* here is explained in terms of *neshiqah* - “kiss” - the lips of two persons come into contact, and also in terms of *kelei nesheq* - “weapons” (see Rashi). Onkelos translates “shall be fed (*yishaq*),” and Rashi explains “their needs shall be provided.” Rashbam and Ibn Ezra consider that the reference is to weapons. Ibn Janah (root *n-sh-q*) thinks that the verse bears both senses: “touching” - for the Egyptians will “cleave” to Joseph’s commandments and obey him, and “weapons” - for at his word they

will take up arms against the enemy.⁴⁸ This seems to be Bekhor Shor's opinion also. He connects the verse with "He that shall be possessor (*ben mesheq*) of my house" (Gen. 15:2), thus implying the sense of "touch," and "kiss (*nashaqo*) in purity, lest He be angry" (Ps. 2:12). He thus interprets our verse in the sense of "touching" but he explicitly adds that there is also a reference to weapons.

D. "And Aaron your brother shall be your prophet (*nevi'ekha*)" (Ex. 7:1). Bekhor Shor considers that *nevi'ekha* here means "speech," as in "Create the fruit (*niv*) of the lips" (Is. 57:19) and "Corn shall make the young men flourish (*yenovev*)" (Zech. 9:17). Aaron, in other words, will be the one to speak to Pharaoh (c.f. Rashi).

E. "And the magicians did so with their secret arts (*be-lahatehem*)" (Ex. 8:14). The expression used here is taken to mean something secret and covered. Qimhi says in *Sefer Ha-Shorashim* root *l-'a-t*, that the letter *hey* in *be-lahatehem* has actually been changed from *'alef*, so that the root is *l-'-t* and the sense "witchcraft practiced in secret."⁴⁹ Onkelos translates "*be-lahasheihon*," and in his note on Ex. 7:22, Rashi says: "Magic formulas which they utter secretly (*balat*) and in a whisper." Bekhor Shor similarly explains that it means "in secret," as in "And went softly (*balat*) to him" (Jud. 4:21).⁵⁰

F. "The Lord is my strength and song (*we-zimrat*)" (Ex. 15:2). Onkelos and Rashbam both understand this term as indicating "song and praise," but Rashi connects it with "Prune (*tizmor*) your vineyard" (Lev. 25:4) in the sense of "cutting down." Bekhor Shor refers to the same verse, and explains that "The Lord is my strength, and the cutter-down of my foes."

G. “If he came in by himself (*be-gappo*)” (Ex. 21:3). Commentators early and recent agree that the verse means “alone without a wife,” but they differ as to the exact sense of *be-gappo*. Rashi thinks it is the same as *be-knafo*; the slave came just with the clothes he was wearing (*be-knaf bigdo*). Under the root *g-f*, Ibn Janah explains it as “edge” or “*kanaf*.”⁵¹ Ibn Ezra considers that it is equivalent to *be-gufo*, giving “The body of (*gufat*) Saul” (I Cron. 10:12) as an example. Bekhor Shor says the same: “*Be-gufo* - alone without a wife,” and refers to the same illustration.⁵²

H. “The free will offering (*masat nidvat*) of your hand” (Deut. 16: 10). In an entry under the word *mas* Ben Saruq explains this as a free “gift” (*matanah*).⁵³ Rashi and Rashbam explains it as “according to the capacity of your hand.” Ibn Ezra derives *masot* from *nes* - “miracle.” Bekhor Shor compares the verse to, “And the king Ahashwerosh laid a tribute (*mas*)” (Est. 10:1), thus apparently concurring with Ben Saruq. He concludes with the remark that according to the Peshat the meaning is “what you can afford.”

3. Etymologies Based upon Rabbinical Language

Rabbinical language is also to be found in Bekhor Shor’s etymological exegesis, which is somewhat influenced by it.

A. “And they called before him (Joseph), ‘*avrekh*’” (Gen. 41:43). Bekhor Shor sees the word ‘*avrekh*’ as a verb conjugated from the noun *berekh* - “knee.” Thus our verse says that the Egyptians bowed down to Joseph (Menahem Ben Saruq explained it this way also). The Sages hold a different opinion:⁵⁴ “Joseph was called ‘*avrekh*’ because he was an ‘*av*’ - ‘father’ in wisdom and *rekh* - ‘young’ in years,” meaning, he was a brilliant young scholar. The word *rekh* appears in Tractate *Babba Batra* 4a as “king,” probably

based on the Latin word “rex” that means “king” (c.f. Latin rex).⁵⁵ Rashi follows Onkelos’ claims that *rakh* in our verse means “king.” Bekhor Shor adds this rabbinical notion, that *’avrekha* means *’av* - father to a *rekha* - king.

B. “*Sofnat Pa’aneah*” (Gen. 41:45). Bekhor Shor holds that this phrase, which describes Joseph, means “*mefa’aneah sefunot*” - “interpreter of secrets.” The same interpretation appears in Onkelos, Rashi, and Rashbam. They all seem to follow the Midrash,⁵⁶ which regards our phrase as an abbreviation. Rabbi Johanan divides *Pa’aneah* into two words: *pah* and *nah*, thus interpreting it to mean: “*Sefunot mof(p)iah we-nohoot lo le-’omerah*.” The Sages saw in this obscure phrase a full abbreviation: “*Sofeh, P(f)odeh, Navi, Tomekh; Peter, ’Arum, Navon, Hozeh*.”

The starting point for their exegesis must have been the word *Safnat* - “hide” and *Sefunot* - “hidden.” Scripture describes Joseph as the dream interpreter. Thus it makes sense that *Pa’aneah* should be understood as an “interpreter” - *mefa’aneah* and *sofnat* as “secrets” - *sefunot*. It was common in the Middle Ages to employ *Pa’aneah* as a verb which means “to uncover” (a secret) and was already used by Rabbi Sa’adyah Ga’on in his works. For example, in Siddur Rasag: “*Ta’amey sefunot mefa’anho*.”⁵⁷

C. “It is perversion (*tevel*)” (Lev. 18:23). Rashi explains this in terms of “incest and adultery” as in “*We-’api ’al tavlitam*” - “My anger because of their depravity” (Is. 10:25), or in terms of “mingling” and sexual relation with animals. Bekhor Shor, by contrast, makes use of the rabbinical term *tavlin* - “spice”: “What spice, that is, what flavor - is there in this sin?”⁵⁸ He also notes that, in the same place, the Sages gloss

to *'evah* - "horrible deed" - as "you are mistaken in it," and *zimah* - "lechery" as *zo mah* - "what is this?"

The young of the flock (*'ashtarot tzonekha*)" (Deut. 7:13). Onkelos translates *'ashtarot* as *'adarim* - "flocks" (same in Ibn Ezra). Ben Saruq explains that it means "the best of the sheep."⁵⁹ Rashi quotes both interpretations and adds that the Sages say that they were called *'ashtarot* because they "make rich (*ma'ashiro*) their owners."⁶⁰ Bekhor Shor takes the same point from the Sages.

It is interesting to note that in all three categories of etymological exegesis, Bekhor Shor consistently explains words that sound like *hol* (*hilel*, *te-halel*, *wa-yahel*, *heylo*, *tehalenena* etc.) as having a meaning related to "profane" (*hol*), thus deriving from the root letters *h-w-l*. (In contrast to such meanings as: *hayal* - "soldier" or *hehel* - "begun").

4. Exegesis Based upon Metathesis

Bekhor Shor also establishes etymologies by metathesis, a phenomenon common in Scripture: *keves* for example, appears interchangeable with *kesev*, and so on.⁶¹

A. "And for the precious thing of the yield (*geresh*) of the moons" (Deut. 33:14). In Rashi's opinion, this means the fruits which the earth "puts forth" (*magreshet*) from month to month.⁶² Bekhor Shor explains the term by a transposition: "*Geresh* is the same thing in relation to fruit," he says, "as *shagar* (offspring) is to cattle." Thus *geresh* means "sending out"; each month his land will put forth the appropriate fruits.

B. Further examples of Bekhor Shor's exegesis based on metathesis are found in Deut. 7:20, "*Sir'ah*" - "*Se'irah*," and 25:18, "*Nehshalim*" - "*Nehlashim*."

CHAPTER FOUR

SEMANTIC EXEGESIS

Language exists to be meaningful. The study of meaning, both in general theoretical terms and in reference to a specific language, is known as semantics. It embraces the meaningful functions of phonologic features, such as intonation, of grammatical structures, and the meaning of individual words.

In this study I attempt to investigate the meanings Bekhor Shor chose to attach to biblical words, which may be regarded as his semantic exegesis. Moreover, I sometimes trace the origin and trail of thought that may have led Bekhor Shor to his conclusion. Many of his explanations are evidently based on biblical verses, sayings of the Sages or, Bible commentaries. My purpose in this section is to understand the sources of those interpretations not specified by Bekhor Shor as based on biblical or rabbinical sources, and to examine some of Bekhor Shor's semantic exegesis.

This is not to say that the commentaries under discussion necessarily originated with Bekhor Shor, but rather to offer some hypothetical semantic developments that might have led him to such unique interpretations. Some of them seem to depend on the Bible, or on biblical commentators and grammarians. But the way the material is presented, Bekhor Shor does not always mention his source. Section one of this chapter discusses Bekhor Shor's interpretations that may be related to biblical verses, or similar to

those of biblical commentators or grammarians, but their source is not noted. Section two discusses those interpretations specified by Bekhor Shor as based on biblical verses.

Nonetheless, my governing principal in this section is that there is no proof that the Bible and commentators were Bekhor Shor's direct sources; he may have arrived at his interpretations independently. Though Bekhor Shor seems to have been influenced by Targum Onkelos and Rashi, his lack of knowledge of Arabic negates any possible direct borrowing from the work of Spanish grammarians upon his commentaries.

1. Bekhor Shor's Semantic Exegesis

A. "*Sanwerim*" (Gen. 19:11). The verse indicates that the Sodomites were stricken with *sanwerim*. The result was that "they were helpless in finding the entrance." Therefore Bekhor Shor assumes as Rashi, that *sanwerim* means "blinding light." They must have been in a state of actual blindness, in which they could not see where they were going, and thus failed to find the entrance.

B. "*Mi millel le-Avraham*" (Gen. 21:7). The word *millel* is related to *milah*, which means "word." Bekhor Shor so concludes, and therefore claims that *millel* means "to say." *Millel* is a common Aramaic form of the word "say" and is translated by Onkelos as such. Bekhor Shor, who was a Talmudist, knew Aramaic, and might have employed this knowledge in his Bible exegesis, by regarding the biblical word *millel* as "to say."

C. " *'Im*" (Gen. 24:19). The straightforward meaning of *'im* is "if." In our verse, however, such an interpretation would be illogical. Rebecca could not have said to Eliezer in our verse: "I will draw water **if** (*'im*) your camels have finished drinking." If

they finished drinking there is no need for additional water. Therefore Bekhor Shor explains that *'im* serves in this context as the connecting word *'asher* (c.f. Onkelos).

D. “*Nihashti*” (Gen. 30:27). Laban claims: “*Nihashti*, by deviousness that the Lord has blessed me on your [Jacob’s] account.” Thus explains Bekhor Shor, *Nihashti* means “I understood” or “I have learned.” Laban understood that God blessed him thanks to Jacob.

E. “*Ketonet pasim*” (Gen. 37:3). Bekhor Shor explains these words as the Rashbam does, to mean an “ornamented tunic.” Scripture tells us that Jacob gave his son Joseph something out of love and that “something” caused jealousy on the part of his brothers. It is reasonable that the father gave his son a practical gift such as a clothing item, at a time in which clothing was scarce, valuable and wanted by all.

F. “*'Al tirgazu*” (Gen. 45:24). *Tirgazu* is usually translated as “grow angry.” Bekhor Shor claims it means “agitation,” “fear.” Our commentator holds that Joseph’s brothers did good by selling him to the Ishmaelites, since later this act of the brothers enabled Joseph to save many lives from hunger in the country of his master. Thus, there is no reason for them to be angry, but rather to fear that their brother will take revenge for their act of selling.⁶³

G. “*'Ahim*”- “brothers” (Gen. 49:5). Bekhor Shor holds that our verse explains why Shimon and Levi did not receive the power of government. Stating that they are brothers (*'ahim*) is not a logical answer to the above question. Therefore Bekhor Shor interprets *'ahim* as “equal in thought and anger,” rather than “brothers” who have the same mother (c.f. Rashi).

H. “*Shevet*” (Gen. 49:10). In accordance with Bekhor Shor’s prior exegesis, in which he claims that Scripture attempts to determine who shall be the ruler of Israel, he interprets *shevet* - rod as “rule” or “government” that will be given to the tribe of Judah (c.f. Onkelos).

I. “*Yagud ‘aqev*” (Gen. 49:19). ‘*Aqev* means “heel,” so the phrase “*yagud ‘aqev*” must relate to the foot. Bekhor Shor connects it to the act of “walking” done by the feet. From the biblical context it may be concluded that “*yagud ‘aqev*” means “walk (or ‘go’) back,” since the tribe of Gad, the subject of the verse, went back East after the Israelites conquered the land of Israel.

The phrase “*yahzor ‘al ‘aqevo*” means “to return,” thus *yagud ‘aqev* in our verse might also mean “to return.” This exegesis fits our context which talks about the tribe of Gad, whom is known to have returned East after the capture of Israel.

J. “*Banot*” (Gen. 49:22). Scripture equates Joseph to a fruitful vine with *banot* - “daughters.” According to Bekhor Shor the “daughters” of the tree are its “branches” which tree on the wall as human daughters spring from their parents.

K. “*Nitehakemah*” (Ex. 1:10). *Hakham* means “smart,” and appears in this verse in the form of conjugation *hitpa’el* as *Nitehakemah*. *Hitpa’el* can be used to mean intensification of an activity. This suggests according to Bekhor Shor that *nithakhmah* does not simply mean “smart” but rather “extra smart,” “shrewd.”

L. “*Hayyot*” (Ex. 1:19). Bekhor Shor interprets *hayyot* - “alive,” as “healthy.” This interpretation appears in the Rashbam and seems to be based on Is. 38:21, “For Isaiah had said: Let them take a lump of figs...and he shall heal - *w-yehi*.” In addition to the biblical

support, our commentators might have concluded that in our verse *hayot* cannot mean any of its two common meanings “alive” or “animals,” since it serves as an adjective describing the Hebrew women giving birth. Therefore Bekhor Shor claims that these women were “healthy” and able to give birth on their own.

M. “*’amatah*” (Ex. 2:5). Following Rashi, Bekhor Shor claims that *’amah* cannot have its usual meaning “hand,” since *’amatah* - “her hand” is spelled with a *hataf patah* and with a *dagesh* in the *mem*.

N. “*’Akhen*” (Ex. 2:14). Bekhor Shor’s interpretation of *’akhen* which is found in the Rashbam as well, derives from splitting the word into two: *’akh* - “but” and *ken* - “yes,” thus meaning “yes it is true.”

O. “*Hiv’ashtem*” (Ex. 5:21). The literal translation of *hiv’ashtem* is “making a substance loathsome.” The word *hiv’ashtem* comes from the word *le-have’ish*, which means “turn rotten.” In our context the people are presented as being rotten, meaning according to Bekhor Shor “bad,” in the eyes of Pharaoh.

P. “*’Ot al yadekha*” (Ex. 13:16). *’Ot* is translated as “sign,” and the Sages specify that this sign is the Phylacteries.⁶⁴ Signs are designed to help remember things and thus interpreted by Bekhor Shor to mean “memory” (c.f. Ibn Ezra). Bekhor Shor divides *yadekha* into two words: *yad* - “hand” and *kehah* - “weak.” The Phylacteries are tied on the *kehah* hand, meaning the dull and weaker hand which is, for most people, the left one.

Q. “*Taharishu*” (Ex. 14:14). The word *taharishu* comes from *heresh* - “deaf.” According to Bekhor Shor, *heresh* means, “be silent.” This fits our context, which

describes God as the savior of the Israelites, thus they will not scream out of pain or agony to God. On the contrary, He shall provide them with peace and they will be silent (c.f. Onkelos).⁶⁵

R. "*Qadesh*" (Ex. 19:10). *Qadesh* - "sanctify" means to dedicate a gift for someone. Such voluntary offers are gathered prior to their transference to the receiver of the gift. Bekhor Shor claims that in this verse God is commanding Moses with the expression *qadesh* to "summoned" the Israelites, rather than "sanctify" them for the purpose of transferring to them God's commandments (c.f. Onkelos).

S. "*Yovel*" (Ex. 19:13). *Yovel* is commonly translated as "the year of the Jubilee," customarily announced through the blowing of a horn - *Shofar*. Bekhor Shor explains that the word *yovel* means "horn." In our context, a horn is blown to mark the time since ascending Mount Sinai (c.f. Onkelos and Rashi).

T. "*Kohanim*" (Ex. 19:22). Following Rashi and Rashbam, Bekhor Shor interprets *Kohanim*, the name given to those who serve God in the Temple, as *bekhorim* - "first born."

U. "*Kofer*" (Ex. 21:30). *Kofer* is related to *kapparah* - "forgiveness." It is customary to give money in exchange for forgiveness. Thus Bekhor Shor explains *kofer* in terms of "money."

V. "*Elohim*" (Ex. 22:27). It does not seem reasonable to Bekhor Shor that Scripture here is saying that it is forbidden to curse *Elohim* - God, since that is obvious. Therefore Bekhor Shor interprets *Elohim* as "judge." It is customary, says Bekhor Shor, to

curse judges because they inflict suffering and anguish upon humans, thus the Bible must specify that it is forbidden to curse them.

W. "*Dime'atekha*" (Ex. 22:28). Bekhor Shor explains *dime'atekha* - "your tears" metaphorically, as meaning what drops from the grapes - wine, rather than what drops from the eye, namely "liquor" (Ibn Ezra says in the name of Rabbi Sa'adyah Ga'on that *dim'ah* means oil, which comes out of crushed olives like tears).

X. "*Shema' shaw*" (Ex. 23:1). *Shaw* means "nothingness," and *shema'* means "to hear." Therefore *shemah' shaw*, "sound of nothingness," is explained by Bekhor Shor to mean "a lie" (c.f. Onkelos and Rashi).

Y. "*Mal'akh*" (Ex. 23:20). In our context, claims Bekhor Shor, *mal'akh* cannot receive its usual meaning "angel," since the angel was sent only later in the biblical story after the 'sin of the golden calf'. Therefore, contrary to Ibn Ezra and Rashi, he explains that *mal'akh* means "messenger."

Z. "*Mar'eh*" - "show" (Ex. 25:9). According to Bekhor Shor, *mar'eh* means "say" (make it be heard). In Ex. 33:18, Moses is quoted as asking God: "*Har'eni* your glory - show me your glory." Bekhor Shor claims that Moses' request includes both "seeing" and "hearing" God's glory.⁶⁶

AA. "*Nabuv*" - "hollow" (Ex. 27:8). The word *nabuv* contains the indirect object *bo* - "in it." Perhaps this is why Bekhor Shor claims that the command in this verse refers to the inside of the altar's poles (c.f. Onkelos and Rashi). It is reasonable to believe, says Bekhor Shor, that the poles should be hollow so they will be lighter and easier to carry.

BB. "*Tumim*" (Ex. 28:30). Bekhor Shor explains that *tumim* comes from the word *tam* which means "finish." Its preceding word, *urim*, means countries (as used in Gen. 11:31 and Is. 24:15). Thus Bekhor Shor says *urim* refers to where countries end, i.e., their borders.

CC. "*Tahor*" (Lev. 6:4). This verse describes the place in which sacrifices are offered to God as being *tahor*, "pure." Bekhor Shor holds *tahor* to mean "clean." (A similar interpretation is found in Num. 8:6).

DD. "*Tame'*" (Lev. 14:40). A person who has a plague is cast outside the city into a place described by the Torah as *tame'*. This word is understood by Bekhor Shor to mean an "abominable" place, where no holy thing exists. Thereby the sick person will not defile it (c.f. Onkelos).

EE. "*Yir'ah*" (Lev. 19:3). Contrary to the Sages' notion that *yir'ah* means "fear" while *kavod* means "respect,"⁶⁷ Bekhor Shor claims that they are synonyms. These two emotions, "fear" and "respect" towards parents, seem to approximate each other, since one may invoke the other.

FF. "*Ya'arokh* [the candles]" (Lev. 24:4). *Ya'arokh* means "set in order." Bekhor Shor states that in this verse it might mean "fix" rather than "set in order." When something is fixed it is naturally in its right order.

GG. "*Qomemiyut*" (Lev. 26:13). *Qomemiyut* comes from the verb *la-qum* - "to rise." Bekhor Shor explains: "God promises to make his people *qomemiyut*, meaning 'stand upright' " (c.f. Rashi).

HH. "*Qetzuf*" (Num. 1:53) is translated by Onkelos as "anger." Bekhor Shor identifies *qetzuf* as describing the form in which God expresses his anger towards the children of Israel meaning, in our context, inflicting them with a plague. Thus *qetzuf* is understood as meaning the same as "plague."

II. "*Le-shareto*" (Num. 3:6). The Levites are commanded *le-sharet*, meaning to "minister" to the priests. Bekhor Shor points out the fact that the Levites did not perform any sort of work, as expressed in Num. 8:26, "And [the Levites] shall do no service." Thus, concludes Bekhor Shor, the word "minister" (*le-sharet*) here means "observe," rather than to serve the priests (c.f. Rashi).

JJ. "*He'emid*" - "present," "set up" (Num. 5:18). *He'emid* comes from the verb '*amad* - "stand." When one chooses to stand, he consequently holds up the proceedings which he was formally involved. Thus *he'emid* is understood by Bekhor Shor to mean "delay".⁶⁸

KK. "*Hagavim*" (Num. 13:33). Bekhor Shor rejects the common translation of *hagavim* as "grasshoppers" and claims that, in this verse, it means "midgets." The first part of our verse describes the mighty giants in Canaan. Thus, assumes Bekhor Shor, the latter part is describing the Israelites who were seen as midgets, not grasshoppers, in the eyes of the great Canaanites

LL. " '*Erek* '*apayim*" (Num. 14:18). '*Erek* comes from the adjective '*arokh* - "long." God is described as lengthening His '*af*. According to Bekhor Shor, this means that God gives the sinner a long period of time to repent. God has no need to fear that later he might soften his anger and thus not punish, since all is in His Hands (c.f. Rashi).

MM. “*Terumah*” - “gift” (Num. 15:20). The Bible does not give us the quantity of this *terumah* (*‘ein lo shi‘ur ba-Torah*),⁶⁹ but equates it to the *terumah* from the threshing floor (*terumat ha-goren*). Thus Bekhor Shor assumes this immeasurable *terumah* refers to *terumah gedolah*, which is given to the priests and is limitless.

NN. “*Yihiyeh*” (Num. 17:5). Our verse states that the Israelites must remember Qorah’s sin and its consequence, so they shall not be - *yihiyeh* like him, meaning, shall not repeat his sin. Bekhor Shor goes one step further in stating that behaving like Qorah not only results in being like him, but also in receiving his punishment. Bekhor Shor believes that this notion is stressed in the verb *yihiyeh*.

OO. “*Male‘ah*” - “full” (Num. 18:27). Wine and oil are materials which can maximally fill up a utensil, but never over fill it (or the extra will spill). Thus Bekhor Shor considers the adjective *male‘ah* - “full” to mean “oil and wine” (c.f. Rashi).

PP. “*‘Atarim*” (Num. 21:1). The verse says the following: “Israel came by the way of *‘atarim*.” Bekhor Shor notes, as does Ibn Ezra, that the *‘alef* of *‘atarim* is extra and the word should be spelled *tarim* which means “to tour.” According to Bekhor Shor, “The way of *‘atarim*” does not refer to a geographical place, but rather to the twelve spies who toured the country of Canaan prior to the arrival of the Israelites, so they can prepare for the war in which they will conquer Canaan.

QQ. “*‘Iyei ha-‘avarim*” (Num. 21:11). Bekhor Shor explains based on his linguistic knowledge that the guttural letters (*‘alef*, *het*, *hey*, *‘ayin*) are interchangeable. Thus the letter *‘ayin* of *‘iyei* can be replaced with an *‘alef*. The word *‘iyei* spelled with an *‘alef* means - “Islands.” He finds support for his grammatical rule from the saying of

Rabbi Hiya in Tractate *Berakhot* 32a: "In the school of Rabbi Eliezer '*alefs* were pronounced like '*ayins*, and '*ayins* like '*alefs*."⁷⁰

RR. " '*Oseh hayil*" (Num. 24:18). *Hayil* is similar to the word *hayal* - "soldier."

This association might have inspired Bekhor Shor to interpret the word *hayil* as "strength" and "control," nouns often attached to soldiers.

SS. "*Sela*" (Num. 24:21). *Sela* - "cliff" or "rock" is a strong article, thus representing for Bekhor Shor, "strength" (c.f. Onkelos).

TT. "*Mi-yom 'el yom*" (Num. 30:15). Bekhor Shor and Rashi suggest that the word *yom* - "day" should not be understood literally, but rather as an indication to any time period. *Mi-yom 'el yom*- "from day to day" means "from time to time."

UU. "*Tishberu*" - "break" (Deut. 2:6). The verse states: "*tishberu* with money." Money is a means for purchasing things, so in this context, "*tishberu*" must mean "buy" (with money) rather than "break" (c.f. Onkelos).⁷¹

VV. "*We-Hefitz*" (Deut. 4:27). God in our verse is involved in the act of *hafatzah* - scattering his nation among other nations. Bekhor Shor explains this as "He will cause them to mix among one another."

WW. "*Yamim rishonim*" (Deut. 4:32). Our verse says, "Ask the first days." The word "day" is an inanimate noun and obviously cannot be approached with a question. Bekhor Shor explains "days" as "generation," meaning the people of the first generations who will be asked.

XX. "*Batzqah*" (Deut. 8:4). Bekhor Shor indicates that *batzqah* comes from *batzeq* - "dough." Just as dough rises, so can feet swell from walking a long time. In this

verse God tells the Israelites that their feet did not become like dough, meaning swell during their long journey in the desert, thanks to God's goodness (c.f. Rashi).

YY. "*Meqomot*" - "places" (Deut. 12:2). God commands the Israelites to destroy all the *meqomot*. Bekhor Shor justly claims that it is not possible to destroy *meqomot* - "places" because land exists forever. Thus he suggests that Scripture is commanding to destroy the "utensils" of idol worshipping.

ZZ. "*Sharet*" - "do service" (Deut. 18:7). The word *sharet* mentioned in our verse is an act done by the Levites, which, as mentioned earlier, do not perform any physical work in the Temple, but sing. Thus Bekhor Shor concludes that the verb *le-sharet* does not refer to any regular service done in the Temple, but to the Levite's act of singing.

AAA. "*Nashal*" (Deut. 19:5). *Nashal* incorporates the biblical word *shal* which means "remove" (Ex. 3:5: "*Shal na'alekha* - remove your shoes"). Therefore Bekhor Shor explains *nashal* to mean something which is removed. Our verse conveys that the handle of the ax came out of its place.

BBB. "*Devash*" (Deut. 26:9). *Devash* in Hebrew means "honey" and is one of many words employed by Scripture to describe the "Holy Land." Bekhor Shor claims that this word should not be read literally, but metaphorically as connoting that the land of Israel is a sweet and pleasant place.

CCC. "*Ba'er heitev*" (Deut. 27:8). *Ba'er* means "to explain." The wording of the Torah can be understood only if its physical letters are spelled clearly. According to Bekhor Shor, this is what Scripture means by stating that the Torah must be written *ba'er heitev* - "be seen clearly" in order for it to be understood. This commentary might have

been inspired by Ibn Ezra's short explanation to the phrase *ba'er heitev* in our verse:
"what is written."

DDD. "*Teneh, mash'eret*" (Deut. 28:5). *Mash'eret* sounds like *nish'ar* - "remain."
Perhaps Bekhor Shor connected the word "remain" to "utensils" which contain what remains. The word *tene* prior to *mash'eret* means "utensil," thus says Bekhor Shor, *mash'eret* is a sort of utensil as well.⁷²

EEE. "*Horvei 'etzim*" - "sewers of the wood," "*sho'avei mayim*" - "drawers of the water" (Deut. 29:10). Cutting wood demands greater physical effort than drawing water, and therefore is considered to be a man's job. Thus Bekhor Shor interprets *horvei 'etzim* as literally meaning "male slaves." Same regarding drawers of the water - "female slaves". This interpretation is based on Gen. 24:11 where drawers of the water are mentioned as females.

FFF. "*Ha'azinu*" (Deut. 32:1). *Ha'azinu* comes from the word "*'ozen*" and means "to give ear," thus refers obviously to an act done by the ear (*'ozen*). Bekhor Shor considers *ha'azinu* to mean "hear." This exegesis follows the course of our verse which describes God's speech which must be "heard" (c.f. Ibn Ezra).

GGG. "*Ha-tzur*" (Deut. 32:4). *Tzur* means a strong rock, but in this verse it is used as one of God's descriptions. It represents according to Bekhor Shor, God's strength and assertiveness as a strong rock (c.f. Ibn Ezra).

HHH. "*Tohu*" (Deut. 32:10). The word *tohu* is similar to *toheh* - "wonder." When a place is empty and deserted nothing is clear and such a situation may lead one to a state of wonder. Thus Bekhor Shor translates *tohu* as "emptiness," "howling waste" (c.f.

Rashi).⁷³ It seems that Bekhor Shor bore in mind the verse, “And the earth was without form - *tohu* and void” (Gen. 1:2), when composing this interpretation.

III. “*Kamus*” (Deut. 32:34). Following the word *kamus* in our verse, is the word “sealed.” It seems likely that they have similar meaning. Bekhor Shor explains *kamus* as “close up,” “concealed” like a secret.⁷⁴ (c.f. Onkelos and Rashi).

III. “*Min’alekhah*” (Deut. 33:25). *Min’alekha* comes from *man’ul* - “door lock.” Bekhor Shor does not explain *min’alekha* as being a door lock on the country of Israel, that is made of iron and copper in order to prevent the enemy from entering. He interprets it metaphorically as the guides or holders of the body, meaning the “bones” and “sinew” (contrary to Rashi and Menahem Ben Saruq).⁷⁵

2. Semantic Exegesis Based on the Bible

Often Bekhor Shor presents semantic word exegeses which he specifically bases on other biblical sources.

A. “*Toledot Noah*” (Gen. 6:9). The word *toledot* comes from the root *y-l-d*, which means “to give birth.” Following the key word *toledot* it is expected to find a list of the generations of Noah. Nonetheless, a description of Noah’s character rather than children is presented. Therefore Bekhor Shor concludes that *toledot* means “events” as in Prov. 27:1, “You do not know what a day may bring (*yulad*) forth.” *Toledot* is what comes out of a day or event, not what comes out of a woman’s womb.

B. “*Tamim*” (Gen. 17:1). One meaning of the word *tam* is “innocent.” Regarding a person as “innocent” means that no wrong has been done by him, so *tamim* means according to Bekhor Shor “complete,” “whole.” Bekhor Shor claims that this is the

meaning of *tamim* in all its appearances in the Bible. This exegesis is based on Gen. 6:9, "Noah was a *tamim* (complete) man," and Ex. 12:5, "The lamb shall be *tamim* (whole)."

C. "*Mal'akhim*" - "angels" (Gen. 19:1). Bekhor Shor interprets *mal'akhim* as "messengers" based on Gen. 32:4, "And Jacob sent *mal'akhim*," meaning, "Jacob sent messengers."

D. "*Hayah*" (Gen. 20:7). *Hay* means "alive." The word *hayah* is employed in this verse is the result of a prayer. Bekhor Shor cites another verse in which "health" is considered to be the result of a prayer: "Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Avimelekh, his wife and maids" (Gen. 20:17). Bekhor Shor believes that *hayah* - "live" in our verse, which is stated as the aftermath of Abraham's prayer, means *tirapeh* - "heal."

E. "*Wa-yaqom*" (Gen. 23: 17). The literal meaning of *wa-yaqom* is "rise up." Efron's field is described as 'rising up' meaning according to Bekhor Shor, passing over from the ownership of Efron, to that of Abraham threw the act of buying (Abraham bought *Me'arat ha-Makhpelah* from Efron). In I Sam. 24:21, *yaqam* is used in the sense of ownership as well, "And the kingdom of Israel shall be (*we-qamah*) in your hand."

F. "*Naftulei Elohim niftalti*" (Gen. 30:8). Bekhor Shor offers an etymological interpretation rejected by Ibn Janah. Then he says: "*Naftulei* should be interpreted as 'bonding.' " This interpretation follows the biblical story in which Rachel tells Jacob to bare a child from her servant Bilhah, thus necessarily having contact, bonding with the servant. Menahem Ben Saruq and Rashi both note this exegesis.⁷⁶ Bekhor Shor chose to

base his exegesis on the biblical verse, “No covering bond - *ḥ(p)etil* upon him” (Num. 19:15).

G. “*Sadeh*” - “field” (Gen. 32:4). In Ruth 1:22 the word *sadeh* means “country,” “Returned from *sadeh Moav*.” Bekhor Shor derives from this verse that *sadeh* which appears in Gen. 32:4 means “country” as well.

H. “*Shever*” (Gen. 42:2). Bekhor Shor says in the name of Rashi that *shever* (literally meaning “to brake”) is used in this verse to describe the act of “selling” and “buying.” This meaning is used in Gen. 41:56 as well, “And sold (*wa-yishbor*) to the Egyptians.”

I. The following verses all share a word coming from the Hebrew root *n-z-r*: Gen. 49:26, *Nazir*, Lev. 15:31, *We-hizartem*, 25:5, *Nezirim*, Num. 6:2, *Nezirut*, Deut. 33:16, *Nazir*. Bekhor Shor explains them in terms of “separation” (*mufrash*). The word *nazar* incorporates the word *zar* which means “stranger.” Strangers are naturally separated from the common group due to their recent arrival. A *Nazir* - “monk” must keep away from certain things: wine, hair cutting and dead people. Perhaps this led Bekhor Shor to interpret *nazar* as “separated.”

Nonetheless, Bekhor Shor finds support for this exegesis in biblical verses; In Gen. 49:26, Lev. 25:5 and Deut. 33:16 he bases his exegesis to the word from the root *n-z-r*, on a verse from Lev. 22:2, “That they separate (*wa-yinazeru*) themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel.” In Num. 6:2 he finds support from the verse “*Mi-yayin we-shehar yazir*” (Num. 6:3). In his note on Num. 6:2 Bekhor Shor adds a second exegesis to *nazar*: “crown” based on Num 6:7, “A crown (*nezer*) of God on his head.”

J. “*U-fasahti*” (Ex. 12:13). Bekhor Shor holds that the guttural letters may interchange, therefore the letter *het* in *pasahti* can be replaced by an ‘*ayin* as in the word *pasa*’ - “take a step.” The act of “taking steps” creates a movement from one place to another. This is equated by Bekhor Shor with “skipping” which too involves movement. He bases his view on I Kings 18:21, “Until when do you skip (*poshim*) from one opinion to the other.”

K. “*Wa-ya’er*” (Ex. 14:20). ‘*Or* means “light.” Nonetheless, according to Menahem Ben Saruq, quoted by Bekhor Shor, *wa-ya’er* in this verse means “darken” since it is related to *laylah* - “night.” Bekhor Shor cites from Job. 37:11, “He scattered the clouds of his light.” Clouds which are associated with darkness are mentioned in connection to light, thus “light” - ‘*or* may mean “dark.”⁷⁷

L. “*Nahitah* with your mercy” (Ex. 15:13), “So the Lord alone *yanhenu*” (Deut. 32:12). *Le-hanhot* means “to guide” or “direct.” In both verses Bekhor Shor understands *le-hanhot* as *le-hanhig* which means “lead,” God directed - *hinhah* his people. In his exegesis on Deut. 32:12 he bases his opinion on Ex. 32:34, “Go lead - *nehe* the people.”

M. “*Yad ‘al kes Yah*” (Ex. 17:16). Bekhor Shor is of the opinion that *yad* in this verse should not receive its literal translation - “hand” but indicates God’s great “kingdom” as in Is. 56:5, “And I gave them in my house *yad wa-shem*” meaning God gave his nation greatness and kingdom. Bekhor Shor further explains that the word *kes* (*kiseh* - chair) in this verse is often used in the meaning of “kingdom.” Examples: “Jerusalem was called kingdom (*kiseh*) of God” (Jer. 3:17), “Solomon sat on the throne (*kiseh*) of God” (I Chron. 29:23).

N. “‘*azov*” (Ex. 23:5). The verb ‘*azov* means “let go.” Onkelos and other commentators explain that one must ‘let go’ of his hatred, so he will be willing to help a friend in need. Bekhor Shor rejects this exegesis on the ground that ‘*azov* in our context means “to help” and “strengthen,” an act done when another is in a troubled situation. This exegesis is derived from Neh. 3:8, “And they fortified (*ya’azvu*) Jerusalem unto the broad wall.”

O. “*Lo tevashel*” - “do not cook” (Ex. 23:19, 34:26). Bekhor Shor: “*Tevashel* means ‘growth’ and ‘ending’ as in Gen. 40:10, ‘Brought forth ripe (*hivshilu*) grapes,’ grapes that completed their growth period.” Bekhor Shor holds that the verse conveys the notion that it is forbidden to allow a goat reach adulthood (grow up to be an adult) while under his mother’s supervision, but be sacrificed to God while still young.

P. “*Qeren*” (Ex. 34:4). The ray of the sun is called in Hebrew *qeren*. Scripture says that when Moses delivered the Tablets, his face *qaran* meaning, according to Bekhor Shor, “shone.” Perhaps, in Bekhor Shor’s opinion, Moses’s face looked as if rays of light were coming out of it. This interpretation is derived from Hab. 3:4, “He had rays (*qarnayim*) coming out at his side.”

Q. “*Sapahat*” (Lev. 13:2). *Saff(p)iah* is an “aftergrowth,” something which grows late and is considered extra. Thus *sapahat* may be considered a “parasite” an unimportant addition. Bekhor Shor bases his opinion on I Sam. 2:36, “I pray to you: put me (*sapheni*) in one of the priest’s offices” meaning add me to one of the priest’s offices.

R. “*Mi-neged*”- “against” (Num. 2:2). In Gen. 21:16 *mi-neged* is used while describing something which is far, “And sat her down against (him) a good way off (*mi-*

neged)." Thus the word *mi-neged* in our verse in Num. means according to Bekhor Shor "far from" rather than "against."

S. " 'Eglot *tzav*" (Num. 7:3). *Tzav* is a "turtle," a relatively slow moving animal, perhaps due to the fact that he carries his home on his back. In this verse *tzav* - "turtle" is used as the adjective of 'eglot - "chariots." Thus claims Bekhor Shor, the word *tzav* indicate chariots that move slowly because they are heavy. Bekhor Shor quotes from Is. 66:20, which employs *tsav* to describe heavy loaded slow chariots, "And they shall bring all your brothers... upon horses and chariots and *tzavim*."

T. "*Sheqedim*" (Num. 17: 23). *Sheqedim* is the plural of *shaqed* - "almond." Since the Bible was originally written without its vowels, *shaqed* may be read as *shaqad* - "be vigilant." When one is described as vigilant it means, he has a high level of commitment to fulfill tasks and is expected to complete them quick. Thus *sheqedim* means, according to Bekhor Shor, "quickens," "hastiness," as in Jer. 1:12, "I *shoqed* on my words to fulfill them."

U. "*Nahash*" (Num. 23:23). The word *nahash* is incorporated, according to Bekhor Shor, in another biblical word - *nahshavtani*, found in Gen. 30:27, "*Nahshavtani wa-yevarkheni Hashem*," in which it means "to try" "to experiment" someone (*le-nasot*). Bekhor Shor concludes that *nahash* alone means, "to try." The *nahash* - "snake" in the garden of Eden is presented as the symbol of seduction trying out the first human's obedience to their creator. Perhaps the cunning biblical snake inspired Bekhor Shor to interpret the word *nahash* as "to try" rather than "snake."

V. “*Nifqad*” (Num. 31:49). *Nifqad* means “numbered.” Counting provides knowledge regarding quantity and therefore gives information of who or what is missing. Bekhor Shor holds that the phrase *lo nifqad* in this verse means “no one was missing,” as in I Sam. 20:25, “David’s place was empty (*yippaqed*)” (c.f. Rashi).

W. “*Elohehiem*” (Num. 33:4). The common meaning of *Elohim* as “God,” the determiner in all matters of creation, is changed in this verse by Bekhor Shor to mean, “judges” or any “important figure” that possesses the power of determining important issues. This exegesis is based on Ex. 22:8, “Both parties shall come before the *Elohim*,” meaning, “before the judges.” (Bekhor Shor uses this exegesis in his commentary on Ex. 12:12, 18:19, and 32:1, based on the above verse from Ex. and on Ex. 7:1, “I [God] have made you *Elohim* to Pharaoh”).

X. “*Mol suf*” (Deut. 1:1). This verse describes the location of the place in which Moses spoke to the Israelites, so it seems reasonable to believe that *mol* should be read as *mool* meaning, he spoke to them *mol* - “against,” “across from” the sea of *Suf*. *Mol* is the act of circumcision, which involves “cutting,” as written in Josh. 5:2, “God said to Joshua: ‘circumcise (*mol*) the children of Israel...’ ” Bekhor Shor says that *mol* means “to cut.” Our verse tells us that, after God had split (cut) apart the sea of *Suf*, He reviewed for the Israelites the Torah and commandments (contrary to Menahem Ben Saruq).

Y. “*Eres*” - “cradle” (Deut. 3:11). Bekhor Shor is of the opinion that *eres* in this verse should be understood as a “fortress city,” in which people are protected from their enemies, like a cradle is a safe place for a baby. He derives this notion from Amos 3:12, “In the corner of a bed, and in the fortress of Damascus (*Damascus eres*).”

Z. “*Hevel*”- “rope” (Deut. 3:13). In ancient times a rope was used as a means of measurement. Thus, according to Bekhor Shor, *hevel* in this verse means, “a part” which was traditionally measured and divided by rope. This same meaning of *hevel* is found in Josh. 17:5, “And there fell ten portions (*havalim*) of Menashe.”

AA. “*Reshit*” (Deut. 26:2). The Israelites are commanded to donate the *reshit* of their fruit to God. *Reshit* comes from *rosh* - “head,” and means “first,” “beginning” which often is considered the first in importance as well. According to Bekhor Shor, *reshit* in our context refers to *shiv'at ha-minim* - the seven specific kinds of fruit with which the land of Israel is blessed, that are more important than other fruit. This meaning of *reshit* is used, according to Bekhor Shor, in Amos 6:6, “And *reshit* ointments.” Bekhor Shor then quotes the opinion of the Sages, namely that *reshit* refers to the fruit that ripen first.”⁷⁸

BB. “*Badad*” (Deut. 32:12). Our verse described God as leading his people solemnly. When one feels safe and confident he has no need for an assistant or other kind of support. Thus, according to Bekhor Shor, the word *badad* indicates that God will lead his people in “safety” as in Deut. 33:28, “In safety (*badad*) Jacob shall dwell.”

To conclude, as expressed in the opening of this chapter, Bekhor Shor endeavored to analyze and understand the precise nature of many biblical words, thus presenting semantic forms of exegesis. What is striking to the modern reader are his explanations which do not seem to derive from the Bible, rabbinical sources or medieval grammarians. They expose Bekhor Shor’s unique and deep understanding of the Hebrew language, especially that of the biblical text, and his implementation of this knowledge to explain in his own way difficult biblical words phrases and verses.

CHAPTER FIVE

SYNTAX

The term syntax refers to the construction of the sentence. It defines the rules according to which the language links words and builds sentences. Since the meaning of a verse is affected by its syntactic construction, Bekhor Shor deals with syntactic issues throughout his Torah commentary.

1. Agreement Between Parts of Speech

The Hebrew language demands syntactic harmony between nouns and their adjectives in both gender and number. Similar agreement is required between the subject, its predicate, and pronominal suffix. This rule is so basic, that there is no need to point it out unless it seems to be broken. Bekhor Shor clarifies in his commentary that, whenever there seems to be a syntactic disharmony, one must observe the structure and language of the verse in order to discover its real harmony and meaning. The following are examples of this process performed by Bekhor Shor in the course of his Torah commentary.

A. "Keeping His commandments and laws that are recorded in this book of the teaching - *ha-ketuva be-sefer ha-Torah ha-zeh*" (Deut. 30:10). The verb "recorded" (*ketuva*) appears in feminine and the pronominal suffix "this" (*zeh*), which refers to the subject (Torah - feminine), is in masculine. The commentaries discuss whether "this" should be spelled *zeh*, in masculine or *zot* in feminine. Bekhor Shor explains that

“recorded” (*ketuva* - feminine) refers to the Torah (the type of book discussed -feminine) while the word “this” (masculine) refers to the main component of the subject - book (*sefer*), which too is in masculine form. Bekhor Shor’s exegesis creates harmony between the various parts of the sentence, by connecting the word “recorded” to “Torah” and “this” to “book.” This verse appears earlier in Deut. 29:20, where Bekhor Shor does not treat it.

Further examples where Bekhor Shor discusses agreement between parts of speech include:

B. “Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children (masculine), and they bowed themselves - *wa-tishtahawena* (feminine form)” (Gen. 33:6).

C. “These are your Gods (plural) O Israel” (Ex. 32:4). Bekhor Shor: The verse is speaking of the one God.

D. “God gives you [Israel] - *le-kha*” (Deut. 15:4). *le-kha* is in singular. It should be *la-khem* - “you” in the plural, since Israel refers to the Israelites

E. “And for the will of **them** [God] that dwelt in the bush” (Deut. 33:16). It should be written “him” in singular, since the subject is The one God.

2. Syntactic Disclarity

Most times, a situation should be understood from its literary context; there is no need to investigate the various subjects or issues described in the sentence. But sometimes, the contextual situation does not clarify the events adequately. Some sentences lack essential parts, which creates syntactical disclarity. Bekhor Shor refers to three problems of this type:

1. Ambiguous Subject

Bekhor Shor notes in his commentary some lexical ambiguities in which the word used to describe the subject cannot be easily identified.

A. “And Timna was a concubine [of Esau]” (Gen. 36:12). Bekhor Shor notes that, in I Chron. 1:36, Scripture enumerates Timna among the children of Elifaz, thus she is both Elifaz’s daughter and Esau’s wife. Therefore she should be mentioned at the end of verse 11, which presents the children of Elifaz. Yet, Scripture uses in verse 11 an economy of words and does not mention her among Elifaz’s children (as a subject of that verse), but only in the following verse (12) as the concubine of Esau (the subject of verse 12).

B. “So when ‘*Elohim* made me [Jacob] wander from my father’s house - *hit’u ‘oti Elohim mi-beit ‘avi*” (Gen. 20:13). It is unclear who is actually causing the wandering - *hit’u*, “God,” “gods,” or members of Jacob’s “father’s house.” Rashi claims that God is active in our verse; He made Jacob wander from his father’s house. In accordance with Onkelos, Bekhor Shor presents a different explanation: “My father’s house [the people] wandered after other gods.” This exegesis makes sense in our context, since the verb “made me wander - *hit’u*” is in the plural, denoting many people wandering after other gods rather than The one God.

C. A further example where the subject is ambiguous and Bekhor Shor attempts to clarify it is, Deut. 26:5, “An Aramean destroyed my father - ‘*arami ‘oved ‘avi*.” Who is the ‘*arami*? Bekhor Shor claims that the subject of this verse is the father Abraham, who was not an Aramean.

2. Ambiguous Pronominal Suffixes

In this section we will discuss the syntactical ‘dimness’ concerning the pronominal suffix, which serves a certain function in the sentence.

A. “And if the plague be dim in his eyes - *be-’enaw*” (Lev. 13:5). The ending of the Hebrew word *be-’enaw* is the letter *waw*, which serves as a pronominal suffix meaning “his.” It may refer to the sick person described in the above verse or to the priest. Rashi follows the former option, while Bekhor Shor follows the latter. For Bekhor Shor, the words “in his eyes” should not be interpreted literally, as Rashi believes, but rather be regarded as an expression which means “according to his opinion” (which is nonetheless based on eye sight).

B. Further examples where Bekhor Shor notes to whom the pronominal suffix of a biblical word refers to (the translation of the suffixes are in bold, and Bekhor Shor’s comments regarding their meaning are in brackets): Lev. 24:5, “And bake **her**” (the fine flour); Num. 6:27, “I will bless **them**” (the priests); 19:3, “Slaughter her before **his** face” (Eleazar’s face); 23:20, “I cannot reverse **it**” (the blessing); Deut. 15:4, “God gives **you**” (each one); 16:18, “Judges and bailiffs you shall make **you**” (all of Israel); 19:6, “He hated **him** not” (the murderer); 33:25, “**Your** door locks” (the locks of your body, meaning the bones and sinews).

3. Verses in Scripture Where the Syntactical Construction is Undecided

Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Yoma* 52a-b: “Issi Ben Judah says: There are five verses in the Torah [the grammatical construction of] which is undecided: ‘Lifted up’

(Gen. 4:7), 'Cursed' (Gen. 49:6, 7), 'Tomorrow' (Ex. 17:9), 'Like almonds' (Ex. 25:34) and 'You are soon to lie with your fathers, and the people will rise up' (Deut. 31:16)".⁷⁹

"Undecided" means that it is not clear whether these words are joined to their former part of the verse or to their latter part, where the verse should be divided, or where should we put a comma to indicate it is time to pause. Bekhor Shor attempts to arrive at such a decision regarding these verses, except in Ex. 17:9, where he declares that the uncertainty is unresolved. Following is an example of the way in which Bekhor Shor chose to solve these syntactic difficulties:

"And on the lamp stand there shall be four cups shaped like almonds, their knobs and their flowers - '*arba'ah gevi'im meshuqadim kaftoreyha u-ferahehah*'" (Ex. 25:34).

What has the shape of almonds - the four cups or their knobs and flowers? Bekhor Shor claims that the word "almonds" (*meshuqadim*) being separated from the preceding by an '*emahta* (pause sign), seems to belong to the following words "their knobs and flowers." This exegesis is in accordance with the Cantillation marks (see Rashi).

This sort of syntactic problem is pointed out by Bekhor Shor in three other verses mentioned in the Talmudic passage:

1. "If you repent, there is forgiveness (*se'et*), and if you do not repent, sin crouches at the entrance" (Gen. 4:7). *Se'et* may appear as the consequence of its former word "repent," and therefore means "forgiveness" ('lifting up' the sin). On the other hand, "*Se'et*" might be joined to the next part of the sentence: "if you don't mend," thereby meaning a negative consequence of not repenting.

2. "For they angrily slew a man and will fully lame an ox. Cursed be their wrath" (Gen. 49: 6-7). The verb "cursed" may be connected to its continuation "their [the brothers'] wrath," meaning, the "wrath" is cursed, or to its former words "the ox," meaning, the ox is cursed. Bekhor Shor concludes, that the brother's wrath and anger will be cursed because it will prevent them from governing their brothers.

3. "God said to Moses: you are soon to lie with your fathers and will rise up, these people, and go whoring after the gods of the aliens" (Deut. 31:16). Bekhor Shor mentions here the syntactic problem noted in *Yoma* 52, regarding the interpretation of this verse: Will the people rise up and go astray after other gods or will Moses rise up, thereby alluding to resurrection from the dead? He states that, according to the Peshat, the verse means that the Israelites will rise and go astray. Thus connecting the verb "rise" to the continuation of the verse, rather than to Moses referred to at its opening.

3. Defective Sentences

Some verses lack an essential component of their sentences. Bekhor Shor is concerned with this syntactic defect and offers ways to complete the text and clarify it.

1. Defective Subject

"And he believed in the Lord, and he accounted it unto him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Who is the subject in the second clause, in this sentence? Who accounted the behavior as righteousness? Bekhor Shor, like Nahmanides, claims that Abraham accounted to God His promise that Abraham's sons will inherit the land, as an act of righteousness. Then Bekhor Shor cites another opinion "in the name of others" (found in Rashi), that God accounted to Abraham his belief in Him as righteousness. Bekhor Shor

rejects this exegesis on rational grounds, explaining that the belief in God is an obvious act, not to be considered unique and righteous. This is an example in which the subject is explicit in the biblical narrative, and therefore the text does not find it necessary to repeat it later in the verse.

A. "And it came to pass...that one said to Joseph" (Gen. 48:1). Who is the subject speaking to Joseph? Bekhor Shor claims this is an example in which the Torah is employing a short form of writing. It is not clear who talked to Joseph. Bekhor Shor applies the same exegesis for the following verse, "And one told Jacob." In accordance with Rashi, Bekhor Shor also believes that the subject is indefinite and is probably not important enough to mention. Scripture simply means that someone said it; Rashi suggests that it might have been said by anyone of the messengers.

B. Further examples where Bekhor Shor specifies the subjects of biblical sentences include the following (the subjects suggested by Bekhor Shor are in brackets): Gen. 39:14, "He has brought in" (my husband); Ex. 8:7, "They shall remain in the river only" (those who are in the river); 13:22, "He shall not depart" (God); 18:6, "And he said to Moses" (a messenger); Lev. 16:32, "And the priest whom they shall anoint" (who will appoint?); 24:23, "They shall overwhelm him with stones" (those who heard him); 25:8, "And you shall number" (*Beyt Din*); Num. 19:12, "**He** shall purify" (that who touched the dead); 26:59, "Whom she bare her to Levi" (his wife); Deut. 24:11, "Stand abroad" (you); 32:28, "For they are a nation" (who is referred to by "they"? - those who concurred Israel); 32:30, "How should one pursue a thousand" (who is the "one"? - one of those mentioned earlier).

2. Defective Object

Bekhor Shor indicates in his commentary the places in which an object referred to by a sentence or verse is missing (the missing objects, according to Bekhor Shor, are in brackets):

Num. 14:24 “And had followed me” (my commands had followed me); 16:15, “I have not taken” (my load); 31:53, “For the men of the war had plundered” (the plunder); Deut. 7:10, “And he pays them” (the good); 9:14, “Let me alone” (from your prayer); 15:2, “It is proclaimed the remission” (of his fields).

3. Defective Verb

The verb expresses an action taking place. Bekhor Shor notes biblical clauses that lack the appropriate verb.⁸⁰

A. “And the wind of God was hovering” (Gen. 1:2). Rashi is of the opinion that these words mean, “The Throne of the Divine Glory was standing in space hovering over the face of the waters by the breath of the mouth of the Holy One.” Bekhor Shor, on the other hand, claims that between the words ‘wind’ and ‘God’ must come the verb “created” i.e., Scripture indicates in this verse that God created the wind, which subsequently came to hover over the face of the water.

B. “And for incense of the aromatic spices” (Ex. 25:6). Bekhor Shor states that this verse is missing the verb “to take,” which should be placed instead of the connecting word “of,” “And for incense to take [for] the aromatic spices.” This means that the incense is not composed of aromatic spices but the spices are taken for the purpose of the incense.

C. Further examples where Bekhor Shor adds missing verbs to biblical sentences (Bekhor Shor's suggested verbs are in brackets): Ex. 20:10, "The seventh day is Sabbath [in the honor] of God"; 21:26, "Let him [be] free"; 22:27, "Nor curse a prince [who does so] among your people"; Deut 16:1, "Keep the month [which is] the Spring"; 32:2, "His right hand [gave] fire of the law for them"; 32:5, "The corruption is that [caused by] his children"; 32:26, "I said: '*af'ehem* - I will [destroy those] scattered into corners"; 32:35, "To me belongs [to do] vengeance."

4. Defective Nouns

Nouns are words used as the name of a person, place, thing, event, quality, etc. Bekhor Shor tries in his Torah commentary to fill in some verses in which the noun is missing.

A. "Days - *yamim*, or ten - '*asor*' (Gen. 24:55) . The number ten ('*asor*) is an adjective. Which noun does it describe? According to Bekhor Shor and Rashi, the noun "days" at the opening of this verse means "one year." If the noun connected to the adjective "ten" is "days," Scripture would mean to say that Rebecca's family asked for two totally different time periods to be given to Rebecca: "days" - a year, or "ten" - ten days. Since "days" (*yamim*) means a full year, according to our commentators, "ten" refers to the number of months rather than days requested by Rebecca's family. Thus the adjective "ten" describes the number of "months" rather than "days." Bekhor Shor quotes a verse from Ester to support his claim that Rebecca, like all virgins, must receive a period of one year prior to her marriage, "After that she [the maid] had been twelve months [of putting on perfumes] according to the manner of the woman" (Est. 2:12).

B. "*Le-ma'an* - in order that / for this" (Deut. 11:8, 9, 21; 12:28; 13:18; 16:13; 24:15; 29:8). Following this expression Scripture describes a reward such as "be strong," "prolong your days," "go well with you." In Rashi's opinion, *le-ma'an* is connected to the reward. It comes to teach the Israelites that if they follow God's commands, they will be rewarded. If not, they will receive a negative consequence. Thus, in order to (*le-ma'an*) be rewarded, one must follow the commandments. On the other hand, Bekhor Shor holds that *le-ma'an* stands on its own. It is not connected to what follows but to its prior context. Scripture employs *le-ma'an* to convey the notion that for this thing, which is indicated following the commandment, one will be rewarded. A man must not worship God in order to receive the reward (as said in *Mishnah Avot* 1:3).

C. Further examples where Bekhor Shor adds missing nouns to biblical sentences (Bekhor Shor's suggested nouns are in brackets): Ex. 19:13, "Whilst the sound of [the horn of] the jubilant"; Deut. 6:5, "You shall love God with all [the thoughts] of your heart."

5. Other Missing Parts of the Sentence

Bekhor Shor points out to some other apparent defects found in biblical verses, thereby emphasizing their importance to understand the text.

- Missing a Conjunction

"And this land [which - '*asher*'] we possessed at that time" (Deut. 3:12). Bekhor Shor states: "This is a short form of speech which leaves out the pronoun 'which' (*'asher*)." The word "land" is thus connected to the continuation of the verse. Rashi's exegesis conveys a similar message.

- Defective Preposition

A. “Out of that land went forth Assyria - *yatze’ah ‘ashur*” (Gen. 10:11). In Bekhor Shor’s opinion this means the same as “*yatze’ah le-‘ashur*,” meaning he left his country to go to and rule in Assyria (*‘ashur*), as in “*wa-yavo Yerushalayim*” (I Kings 3:15), which means “to Jerusalem.” Apparently he takes Nimrod, who is mentioned in the previous verse, to be the subject, as do Targum Jonathan and Nahmanides. Rashi, however, follows the Sages who regard “Assyria” as the subject of our verse, meaning Assyria went out, not Nimrod.⁸¹

B. “*U-le-Levi* - and to Levi said” (Deut. 33:8). Bekhor Shor takes the *Lamed* of *le-Levi*, which means “to” (*‘el*) as “on” (*‘al*), therefore reading the verse as, “And on (or about) Levi said” (c.f. Rashi). Bekhor Shor applies this interpretation in the following verse as well. “To his father” (Deut. 33:9) means “on (or about) his father.” Interchange between *le* and *‘al* is common in Aramaic.

C. “*Hermesh*” (Deut. 23:26). *Hermesh* can mean a “stick” or the action of “cutting wheat.” Bekhor Shor prefers the latter interpretation, indicating the need of the preposition letter *bet* attached to the time adjective “at the time of”, to convey the meaning of “at the time of *Hermesh* - the cutting of wheat.”

D. Further examples where Bekhor Shor adds missing prepositions (Bekhor Shor’s suggested prepositions are in brackets): Gen. 3:21, “And to Adam and his wife did God make garments [for - *le*-] their skin”; Ex. 9:6, “And all died [from - *me*-] the cattle of Egypt”; 13:22, “He did not cause the column of cloud to depart...[from - *me*-] before the people”; Lev. 13:10, “And it had turned the hair [into - *le*-] white”; 21:4, “But he shall not

defile himself [to - *le-*] a chief man among his people”; Num. 24:41, “And he saw from their, [from - *me-*] the edge.”

6. Regarding the Function of Other Parts of the Sentence

- Interrogative *Hey*

In biblical Hebrew the letter-prefix “*hey*,” vocalized with *hataf patah*, introduces a question. Bekhor Shor interprets some biblical sentences that begin with such a *hey* as questions.

Gen. 16:13, “*Ha-gam* - did I see a vestige here too?”; 18:25, “*Ha-shofet* - shall the judge of the earth not do judgment?”; 50:19, “*Ha-tahat* - for am I instead of God?”; Num. 20:10, “*Ha-min* - must we bring you forth water out of this rock?”; Deut. 4:32, “*Ha-nihyah* - has there been any such thing as this great thing?”; 4:33, “*Ha-nishmah* - did ever people hear the voice of God?”; 4:34, “*Ha-nisah* - do you thus try the Eternal?”

- Interrogative Words

Gen. 19:20, “*Ha-lo’* - indeed it is little?”; Lev. 10:19, “*Hen* - behold, this day have they offered?”; Num. 12:14, “*Ha-lo* - should she be ashamed seven days?”; 23:10, “*Mi* - who has counted the dust of Jacob?”; Deut. 32:6, “*Ha-lo* - is not he your father?”

- *Hey* as a Definite Article

The definite article is expressed in Hebrew by the prefix-letter “*Hey*.” Bekhor Shor noticed its appearance in Gen. 1:31, “The sixth day - *yom ha-shishi*.” Bekhor Shor explains that by employing a *hey* before *shishi* the Torah wants to emphasize, that it is **the** sixth day in which God gave his people *lehem mishne* - a double portion of bread.

- Amplification Words

A. "And he also (*gam*) loved Rachel more than Leah" (Gen. 29:30). According to Bekhor Shor, Scripture inserts the word "also" (*gam*) to indicate that Jacob loved them both, yet his love for Rachel was greater.

B. "And he wept on his neck a good while more - '*od*'" (Gen. 46:29). Bekhor Shor claims that '*od*' means "a lot," as a man who weeps constantly (c.f. Rashi).

C. "You also shall heave" (Num. 18:28). Bekhor Shor cites two interpretations for the amplification word "also." First he brings Rashi's opinion that "also" is added to include those to whom Moses is speaking, the Levites. Bekhor Shor then cites the exegesis of the Sages, "The word 'also' came to include the messenger who brings the offering."⁸²

D. Further examples where Bekhor Shor attempts to explain the meaning of amplification words (the amplification words are in bold): Gen. 27:33, "And he shall **also** be blessed"; Lev. 12:4, "**All** holiness you shall not touch"; Num. 9:12, "According to **all** the ordinances of the Passover"; 22:33, "I have slain you **too**, and kept her alive"; Deut. 25:16, "**All** that do unrighteousness are an abomination."

- Causative Waw

The letter *Waw* indicates that the following words describe the reason for what was said prior to that *Waw*.

"That the land shall not vomit you out also - *we-lo taqi ha-'aretz 'etekhem*" (Lev. 18:28). Bekhor Shor interprets the *Waw* of the word *we-lo* (it shall not), as "in order that

it shall not." He regards the *Waw* as an indicator that the following is the reason (cause) for God's earlier commandments to the Israelites to keep His laws.

The Bible is a single unit, conceptually and linguistically, built of meaningful sentences. Biblical commentary is largely affected by the exegete's understanding of the syntax of the language of the Bible. This section examines Bekhor Shor's exegesis in light of his careful observation and consideration of the requirements of language and syntax of biblical Hebrew. His clarifications of obscure sentences or verses in the Bible are not simply based on common sense. They expose his knowledge of syntactic phenomena of the language of the Bible and his usage of it to make the text more comprehensive.

CHAPTER SIX

STYLE

Every historical periods of every language are represented by distinctive styles and modes of expression, and the language of the Bible constitutes no exception. It is sometimes difficult for people of one generation to understand the idiom of earlier generations and certainly the language of the Bible is often problematic for medieval writers, particularly Bekhor Shor.⁸³

In order to comprehend biblical verbal and stylistic phenomena, Bekhor Shor put together a number of rules designed to clarify obscurities and uncertain points.⁸⁴

1. On the statement “And darkness was on the face of the deep” (Gen. 1:2), Bekhor Shor comments: “It is customary for a verse to interrupt itself and then return to its subject as in ‘and these are the children of Zibeon: Aliah and Anah’ (Gen. 36:24), which then interrupts itself with ‘this is Anah who...,’ and afterwards goes back to the topic of genealogy and continues ‘and these are the children of Dishon.’ ” Thus, our verse which starts with the subject of creation, pauses to state that ‘the earth was unformed and void,’ and returns to creation, ‘and darkness was on the face of the deep.’ ”

2. “And he said: ‘appoint me the wages’ ...and he said to him: ‘you know’ ” (Gen. 30:28, 29). “And Laban said to him: ‘if now...’ and he said: ‘appoint me the wages’ ” (Gen. 30: 27, 28). It is customary, says Bekhor Shor, for a verse to repeat “and he said” when the speech is a long one, even when the speaker has not changed.

3. In his commentary on “Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain” (Gen. 49:22), he says: “It is customary for a verse to begin a statement and not to complete it, and afterwards to start again and complete it, as in ‘the floods have lifted up’ (Ps. 93:3), where it does not explain what they have lifted up, until afterwards, ‘the floods have lifted up their voice.’ ”

Further examples where Bekhor Shor points to an incomplete biblical statement, which is later repeated and expanded include Ex. 12:7, “And on the lintel”; 15:6, “Your right hand O Eternal”; Num. 16:1, “Datan and Aviran and ‘Onn”; 17:28, “Whosoever approacheth unto the dwelling of the Eternal”; Deut. 10:7, “From there they journeyed to Godgodah.”

4. Bekhor Shor often applies the stylistic rule, “Abridged Text” - *Miqra’ Qatzar*, the ninth of the thirty two rules of Rabbi Eliezer Ben Rabbi Jose Ha-Galilee, to seemingly defective verses. Discussing “And he said to Joseph” (Gen. 48:1), Bekhor Shor explains that the verse is elliptical, for it does not say who the speaker was. Similarly, his comment on “And will certainly requite (*hashev yashiv*) us all the evil” (Gen. 50:15). Scripture does not specify the details of the evil, thus, Bekhor Shor regards this verse as an abridged form of expression. On “And he drove them out” (Ex. 10:11), Bekhor Shor states: “That is an ‘Abridged Text’ because it does not explain who drove them out.”

He applies this same rule of “Abridged Text” to Ex. 10:15, “For they covered the face of the whole earth”; 18:6, “I, the Father-in-law, Jethro”; 22:22, “If you afflict them in any wise”; Lev. 16:32, “And whom they shall consecrate”; Deut. 3:12, “And this land we possessed at that time”; 9:14, “Let me alone.”

5. In his remarks on “Because there were no graves in Egypt have you taken us away...to carry us forth out of Egypt” (Ex. 14:11), he argues that, “It is customary for a verse to double an expression as in ‘The land shall yield her harvest...and the trees shall yield their fruit’ ”(Lev. 26:4). This general point is applied by him to, “And you shall wave them (*we-henafu*) for a wave offering (*tenufah*)” (Ex. 29:24), where he explains that *tenufah* is identical with *terumah*, but Scripture uses this form for the beauty of the language. So also in his comments on Num. 12:2, “Because of the Kushite woman,” and Deut. 14:8, “Of their flesh you shall not eat and their carcasses you shall not touch (meaning “eat”).” On Gen. 36:1, 9, “These are the generations of Esau,” he notes that the repetition teaches that Esau had children in two main locations, Canaan and Se’ir.⁸⁵

6. The phenomenon of words based on similarity of sounds is called “Paronomasia.” Bekhor Shor points out in his biblical commentary to some occurrences of two words which sound and are spelled similarly, but differ in meaning.

“That the flocks are a care to me - ‘*alot* ‘*alai*” (Gen. 33:13). Bekhor Shor remarks: “It is the beauty of the Holy Tongue to employ a play on words. Because it says ‘*alot* it then says ‘*alay*.” Another example where Bekhor Shor notes that the Bible utilizes the sound of a word for different purposes: Gen. 31:47, “Therefore was the name of it [the heap] called Gal’ed.” The heap was named Gal’ed because it sounds similar to Gil’ad, the place where the Gal’ed was built, though these two words refer to different things. The name Gil’ad for the heap also comes to indicate “evidence” - ‘*edut* that their agreement shall be kept.

Further examples include Gen. 12:1, "Go out - *Lekh lekchah* and 49:16, "Dan shall judge - *Dan yadin* his people."

7. In his commentary on "But Noah found beauty" (Gen. 6:8), he remarks that one aspect of the expressiveness of the Hebrew language is the way in which the names of good men can be rearranged into good qualities and of bad men into bad qualities as in, "And Er was *ra'* (bad) in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 38:7), and in the way that Noah can become *hen* (beauty). As the Sages say: "*ki-shemo ken hu* - he is as his name indicates."

8. In his comment on "Ascending and descending" (Gen. 28:12), he makes the point that it is routine for spoken Hebrew to place ascent first, as in the Talmudic expression "Ascends and descends with the knife" (*Hullin* 17b), meaning at times Scripture uses a human mode of expression rather than a precise description of events. Similarly, in Gen. 11:5, "And the Lord came down to see," Bekhor Shor comments that Scripture employs a human way of speech so it will be easily understood by the human reader. No doubt, God did not need to descend in order to see the Sodomites' behavior.

Further examples in which Scripture implies a human way of speech when referring to God include: Gen. 19:22, "For I cannot"; 22:12, "For now I know"; Ex. 25:9, "I show you"; Num. 33:56, "As I thought to do."

9. "In our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Here Bekhor Shor makes the point that "it is customary for a verse to apply plurals to singulars and vice versa, the feminine form to masculine terms and vice versa, just as, in our verse, God uses the plural ("our image") for describing the singular (God's image). Bekhor Shor then gives a number of examples of grammatical incongruities: Num. 26:8, "And the sons of Palew",

Elihav; Josh. 2:4, "And the woman took the two people and hid him"; Judg. 4:20, "Again he said to her (feminine), stand - '*amod* (masculine) in the door of the tent."

10. "Then the Lord caused to rain upon Sodom and upon Gemorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord" (Gen. 19:24). Here Bekhor Shor remarks upon the change in grammatical function from nominative (third person) to dative (belonging - first person), noting that "it is customary for a verse to speak in this way, as in 'and Lemekh said to his wives...you wives of Lemekh' " (Gen. 4:23).

CHAPTER SEVEN

LITERARY FEATURES

Besides the general points relating to Scriptural language, style, and modes of expression, we also find in Bekhor Shor notes that cast light on the literary structure of the Bible, which he relates to such questions about when and why the narrative recurs or how it relates to a specific subject or detail.

1. Seemingly Unnecessary Topic

A. "And the life of Sara was..." (Gen. 23:1). Here Bekhor Shor points out that it is not customary to write about the death even of a righteous woman other than by reference to some specific action. In this way he explains why the Torah saw fit to mention Sarah's death, which is not its usual practice for woman. It is connected to the act of buying her a place of burial.

B. In his comment on "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron," (Ex. 15:20), he remarks that, when a verse mentions a woman, it customarily also mentions her eldest brother, as in Gen. 36:3, 'Sister of Nebaiot,' " thus explaining the seemingly peculiar mentioning of Miriam's brother.

C. Further examples where Bekhor Shor explains a seemingly unnecessary biblical topic: Gen. 1:2, "And the earth was without form and void"; 18:24, "And Abraham was ninety years old"; 36:1, "These are the generations of Esau"; Deut. 14:9,

10, "These you shall eat...all that have fins and scales...and whatever has not fins and scales you may not eat."

2. Repeated Topic

Bekhor Shor draws our attention to repetitions and duplications of some scriptural passages. This biblical feature serves an exegetical purpose.

A. "These are the names of the children of Israel" (Ex. 1:1). Bekhor Shor points out that the children of Israel are counted here at the opening of the book of Exodus (after having been listed in Gen. 46:8-27), because they are the principal subjects of the book.

B. In Num. 33:51, Bekhor Shor says, regarding God's commandment to the Israelites before crossing the Jordan river: "Though He warned them so in several instances, He wished to repeat it prior to their entrance to the land of Israel."

C. Further examples where Bekhor Shor notes the repetition of a biblical topic: Ex. 13:5, "And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you into the land"; Lev. 3:12, "And if his offering be a goat"; 19:3, "Fear your mother and father"; Num. 5:6, "When a man or woman shall commit any sin"; 36:9, "Never shall the inheritance remove from one"; Deut. 9:25, "Thus I fell down before the Lord"; 9:29, "They are your people and your inheritance."

3. Use of the Thirteen Hermeneutic Rules For Literal Exegesis

1. Abridged Text

Traces of the 32 Hermeneutic Rules of Rabbi Eliezer Ben Rabbi Jose Ha-Galilee can be found in Bekhor Shor's exegesis, although without formal acknowledgment. We have already seen that the rule of the "Abridged Text" is one of them.

Bekhor Shor notes that the Torah is using an abbreviated expression in Ex. 18:6, "And he said to Moses, I, your father-in-law, Jethro." In this verse, the Torah notes that Jethro spoke to Moses, while the following verse (7) describes Moses welcoming Jethro. Bekhor Shor deduces from this seeming inconsistency, that Jethro's statement in our verse was said by a messenger, but the text ellipses this detail (c.f. Rashi).

2. *Kelal She-'Aharaw Ma'ase*

Bekhor Shor employs the thirteenth rule as well: "A rule that is followed by a deed - *kelal she-'aharaw ma'ase*, the latter is only a detail of the first." Thus, the scriptural description of the action, further explains the rule rather than merely repeats its topic.

In his comment on "Male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27), he notes that as a general rule Scripture abridges what it has to say, explaining and expanding it elsewhere in the form of an act in Gen. 2:7, "And God the Lord formed man from the earth," and Gen. 2:21, "Then he [God] took one of his ribs." So also, on "The Lord said to Jacob" (Gen. 31:3), he states that this refers to the dream which Jacob relates to Rebecca and Leah, but that here Jacob spoke briefly while later on (verses 11-13) he explained it to them in full.

As already remarked, Bekhor Shor does not call this rule by its name, but has a way of his own to express it. Thus he comments on Num. 16:1: "When the same thing occurs in two different sections, Scripture is accustomed to treat it in brief the first time (as a general rule or statement), because it relies on the second mention (in an action form), as in 'Caleb stilled the people toward Moses and said' (Num. 13:30), where it does not explain what he said, because it relies upon the explanation in Deuteronomy, 'Then I said to you: Dread not, either be afraid of them' (Deut. 1:29)." The passage in question, he says, similarly cuts the first verse short because the second enlarges it.

Further examples of Bekhor Shor's use of this principle, are found in his comment on Gen. 1:31, "This sixth day"; Ex. 4:20, "And he returned to the land of Egypt"; 12:7, "And on the lintel."

3. *Davar Ha-Lamed Me-'Inyano*

Bekhor Shor makes direct use of the hermeneutic principal "*Davar ha-Lamed me-'Inyano* - the meaning of a passage may be deduced from its context." It provides a tool for interpreting the Bible from the text itself. For example, he says on the verse "Lord had endowed me with a good dowry" (Gen. 30:20) that: "I did not know what this is like, but the solution is in the context."

The principal is also employed in his remarks on Gen. 33:19, "Pieces of money"; Ex. 15:5, "The deeps covered them"; 16:14, "Scale-like"; Lev. 16:8, "For 'azazel"; 14:37, "Hollow streaks"; Deut. 28:22, "With drought."

4. Identification of Topics

One aspect of Bekhor Shor's literary exegesis is his inclination to identify related topics. Various events described in Scripture resemble one another in some detail, and for this reason, he is prepared to declare that they are, in fact, a single incident. For example, he conflates the account of the quails in Ex. 16:13 with that in Num. 11:31-32, explaining that the earlier mention comes about incidentally because of the real subject, the manna, but that it actually belongs in Numbers. This is proved, he says, by Moses asking: "If flocks and herds be slain for them, will they suffice them" (Num. 11:22), for the question implies that previously they had not had any meat.

In his comment on "Speak you to the rock" (Num. 20:8), he remarks that this is apparently the same incident as that related in Ex. 17:6, where "And you shall smite the rock" was said to Moses. He shows this by a kind of *Gezera Shawa* - analogy: "The similarity between Ex. 17:7, 'And the name of the place was called Massa and Merivah,' and Deut. 33:8, 'Whom was tried at Massa, you shall strive at the water of Merivah' (God's rebuke for the sin of Moses), indicates that the two are one." He then adds that what is not explained here is explained there, appending the general principle that "many portions of the Bible deal with a matter in one place and elucidate it in another." It is likely that we find here the traces of the 17th rule of Rabbi Eliezer: "A matter that is not explained in its proper place, will be explained in another."

A similar identification of topics is to be found in his comment on Num. 21:3, "And the name of the place was Hormah," which he identifies with the place to which the children of Israel were pursued by the Canaanites in Num. 14:45, "And smote them and

beat them down unto Hormah.” Bekhor Shor holds that the reference to “the way of ‘*atarim*” in Num. 21:1 concerns the place of this Canaanite war against.

5. Order of Biblical Topics

Bekhor Shor pays attention to the order of the portions or topics of the Bible, and attempts to solve some inconsistencies that arise from their current sequence in the Bible text, by suggesting the virtual rearrangement of passages.⁸⁶

A. regarding “And to the man He said” (Gen. 3:17), Bekhor Shor states that, in this instance, after man and woman sinned and were no longer in the garden of Eden, God blessed them, saying, “You shall be fruitful and multiply and fill the land,” though this is mentioned earlier at the time of their creation (Gen. 1:28). Only then was such a blessing needed, and only then would it refer to man and woman filling the land, rather than the garden, where they dwelt earlier in the biblical story in Gen. 1:28.

B. In Lev. 25:1, Bekhor Shor considers the relevance of the portion of *Be-har* and *Be-huqotai* to the book of Leviticus: “All the portions from the beginning of the book until now were said in The Tent of Meeting...but these two portions (*Be-har*, *Be-huqotai*) were said on Mount Sinai.” Why therefore are they written in the book of Leviticus and not earlier in Exodus? In Bekhor Shor’s opinion, they belong to this context because they speak of the ‘seventh year’ (*shevi’it*), the ‘fiftieth year’ (*yovel*), and ‘assessments’ (*‘arakhim*, sums which must be paid for a vow), issues related to the priests mentioned in great detail in Leviticus.

C. “Count the heads of the sons of Qehat” (Num. 4:1). Bekhor Shor asks: why Scripture mentions the sons of Qehat first in the counting of the Levites. Gershon was the

first born, as seen in Gen. 46:11, "Gershon, Qehat and Merari." He explains that Qehat is mentioned first, because he was first in importance in the context of carrying the *Mishkan*.

D. Further examples where Bekhor Shor examines the order of biblical topics: Gen. 18:1, "Then the Lord appeared to him"; 28:6, "When he had blessed him [Esau]"; 31:33, "He came to Rachel's tent"; Ex. 2:1, "And there went a man from the house of Levi"; 6:13, "And [God] gave them a charge to the people of Israel"; 24:1, "And to Moses He said"; 24:12, "And God said to Moses"; Num. 9:1, "And God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai"; 13:16, "And Moses called Hoshe'a son of Nun: Yehoshu'a"; Deut. 16:21, "You shall not plant a grove of any trees"; 17:1, "You shall not sacrifice"; 21:15, "One beloved and another hated"; 25:5, "If brothers dwell together."

6. Connection between Portions and Topics

Bekhor Shor makes note of the connections between biblical portions or topics, claiming that there is a reason for such an adjointment. This seems to derive from the Sages' form of studying called *semukhin* which assumes a reason for the juxtaposition of passages. For example, "Rabbi says in *Berakhot* 63a:⁸⁷ why does the section about the Nazirite follow immediately on that of the unfaithful wife? To teach us that any one who sees an unfaithful wife in her evil ways should obtain from wine." Other Bible commentaries try to give reason for connecting matters in the biblical text. Examples: Ibn Ezra on Ex. 21:2, 27:20 and Rashi on Deut. 21:11.

A. "And it came to pass after these things" (Gen. 39:7). Bekhor Shor believes that there is a connection between the former events of Joseph's appointment as master of

Potiphar's household and the story we are about to read in the subsequent verses. After Joseph became a master, his beauty returned, and Potiphar's wife lay eyes on him, which led to her attempt to seduce him.

B. According to Bekhor Shor the commandment regarding the way a Jewish slave must be treated (Ex. 21:2) is connected to the statement mentioned earlier in the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 20:2). God, continues Bekhor Shor, took his people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom, thus does not want them to be the slaves of any man but His alone.

C. "You shall keep My Sabbath and revere My sanctuary" (Lev. 19:30). The Sages attempted to connect these two commandments regarding Sabbath and the sanctuary by saying: "The erection of the Holy Temple does not override keeping the Sabbath."⁸⁸ Nonetheless, Bekhor Shor believes that, according to the Peshat, the proximity of these two themes teaches us that if the sacrifices will be sacrificed at the sanctuary according to God's law, then there will be no desecration of the Sabbath, since sacrifices are sacrificed on Sabbath.

Further examples where Bekhor Shor attempt to explain the connection between biblical portions or topics: Gen. 22:1, "After these things"; 38:1, "And Judah went down from his brothers"; Ex. 18:1, "Jethro the priest of Midyan heard"; 21:1, "These are the judgments"; 22:18, "All who lie with an animal"; Lev. 19:12, "You shall not swear by My name falsely"; 19:16, "You shall not go up and down as a talebearer"; 24:2, "Take olive oil"; Num. 1:1, "On the first day of the second month"; 9:1, "In the wilderness of

Sinai”; 15:2, “Speak to the Israelites”; 16:1, “And Qorah took”; 27:12, “Go up to the mountain of ‘avarim”; Deut. 15:4, “There shall be no poor among you.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

BEKHOR SHOR AND IBN EZRA

Abraham Ibn Ezra was born in Toledo in 1090. Though he belonged to the Spanish exegetical school, in later life he made contact with the commentators of Northern France. He traveled widely, moving in 1148 to Province in Southern France, and later to the town of Dreux in the North.⁸⁹ France initially seemed too talmudic for him to develop there his literal exegesis and concern with grammar, but in time this apprehension disappeared and a close connection sprang up between him and the Tosafists. He is even mentioned in the Tosafot commentary on the Talmud as asking a question of Rabbenu Tam and receiving an answer;⁹⁰ and the Tosafists provide us with a biographical mention of him as "Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, all of whose family have had the same name."⁹¹ He gained great esteem from the sages of Northern France when he visited their communities,⁹² and indeed it is natural that warm relations should have grown up between him and the contemporary French commentators.

The connections between the Bible interpretations of Ibn Ezra and Rashbam have already been noted by scholars.⁹³ Eliezer Margaliyot establishes as a rule in the question of relationships between commentators, that anyone who ignores the Midrashim and deals simply with the Peshat will of necessity arrive at interpretations already offered by other Peshat commentators.⁹⁴ Hence finding the same explanations in Ibn Ezra and Rashbam is no proof that one was acquainted with the other or his work, and after an extensive discussion, Margaliyot concludes that Ibn Ezra did not know Rashbam when he

wrote his short commentary on the Torah, but became acquainted with him only later, when he composed his long commentary on Exodus.

Another opinion, that of Rosin, is that there is no sign of any connection or personal knowledge between the two men.⁹⁵ Since they both desired to find the Peshat of the biblical text, it is not surprising that they should independently arrive at the same interpretation. Even where one apparently quotes the other, it is not impossible that the reference is in fact to a commentator whose works have been lost. Rosin adds that where the connection between the two seems really striking, it can be explained by each having received the other's interpretations by the oral transmission of travelers.

A range of opinions also exists as to the connections between Ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor. Nevo cites Nutt's view that, apart from the lexicon of Shelomo Parhon, Bekhor Shor knew nothing of the Spanish writers, not even the work of Ibn Ezra, who wrote in Hebrew and visited France.⁹⁶ Zweig (quoted by Nevo) thinks that his acquaintance with Ibn Ezra's commentaries on the Torah was indisputable, in view of both the specific influence in many places and of Ibn Ezra's stay in Northern France.

Between these extreme views lies the middle conception of Walter who remarks that Ibn Ezra's work includes comments which are in harmony with those of Bekhor Shor, and that it is possible that the likeness between them is not accidental.⁹⁷ Ibn Ezra certainly did not know Bekhor Shor's writings, but since the latter probably developed his interpretations mentally for a long time before setting them down, it is possible that Ibn Ezra heard of them through the travelers passing between Northern France and the south. Poznanski makes a similar suggestion.⁹⁸

Ibn Ezra is twice mentioned by name in Bekhor Shor's work - in his commentaries on Gen. 49:4 and Ex. 24:11 - but each time the note *haggah* appears, which apparently signals the addition of a later copyist.⁹⁹ In order to take a position on the question of the influence of each on the other, we must now examine some specific examples. We will see that some contain a similarity of linguistic forms in their exegeses. This might suggest either mutual influence or the influence of Ibn Ezra upon Bekhor Shor.

1. Identical Interpretations in Ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor

Many affinities can be found between the comments of Bekhor Shor and those of Ibn Ezra.

A. "These are the generations (*toldot*) of Noah" (Gen. 6:9). Ibn Ezra: "Like 'the events,' in the sense of 'You know not what a day may bring forth (*yalad yom*)' (Prov. 27:1), and like 'These are the generations (*toledot*) of Jacob' (Gen. 37:2)." Bekhor Shor: "His generations and events, for events can also include generations, as in 'You know not what a day may bring forth.' "

In a verse like this one from Genesis one must clearly ask what is meant by "generations" (*toledot*). Rashi twice deals with the problem. The difficulty is not felt nowadays because everyone is used to the interpretation "events and happenings" (the opinion of Ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor). But Rashi takes the sense to be "descendants." This is less than fully satisfactory because what follows, "these are the generations of Noah," is not a list of his sons but a description of his character as "righteous and wholehearted," while "these are the generations of Jacob" does not go on to enumerate all

of Jacob's sons, but only Joseph. For this reason, Bekhor Shor and Ibn Ezra gloss "generations" as "events," and it is interesting that both should cite the verse from Proverbs as support. This shared exegesis is based on a linguistic focus on the meaning of the Hebrew word *toledot*, and might have been adopted by one from the other.

B. "Unto the place of Shekhem" (Gen. 12:6). Ibn Ezra: Moses so called it for Shekhem did not as yet exist in the time of Abraham. Bekhor Shor: Shekhem did not yet exist, but in later time Shekhem was built in that place.

The problem is whether "the place of Shekhem" means Shekhem itself, or whether it means the site of the city, as Bekhor Shor and Ibn Ezra both think; Abraham came to the spot where later the city of Shekhem was built. At any rate, the word "place" must arouse discussion, and it is suggested that Bekhor Shor and Ibn Ezra adopt the same critical approach. Once again our commentators choose to present a similar linguistic exegesis of the wording of the verse.

C. In addition, both commentators pay attention to matters of word repetition in the biblical text, and aim at explaining this biblical style. An example of this is found in their commentary to Num. 12:13, "Heal her now (*na'*), O God, I beseech you (*na'*)."¹ The repetition of the word *na'* in this verse seems unnecessary, but not to Ibn Ezra, who gives the following gloss, based on Onkelos, "You who are powerful, *na'* heal her '*ata* (now). Bekhor Shor's approach is similar, "I request you, heal her please (*na'*), heal her now ('*ata*)," and it shows more clearly that the first *na* indicates "request," and the second means "now" rather than merely having the exact same meaning. It seems logical that Moses would request a quick healing.

D. In Deut. 10:20 we again witness their alertness to the language of Scripture. "You shall fear the Lord your God; Him shall you serve." Two commandments are given in this verse, and Ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor both stress the difference between the words "fear" and "serve," the first meaning to refrain from transgressions against the Negative Commandments, and the latter meaning to observe the Positive Commandments.

E. Commenting on Deut. 28:22, "With consumption, and with fever...and with fiery heat (*herev*)," Bekhor Shor and Ibn Ezra both explain the wording of the verse contrary to the way of Rashi and Onkelos. Onkelos translated the last word simply as "sword," and Rashi similarly understands "He will bring troops upon you," as "sword." But Ibn Ezra interprets it as "dryness" (*yavesh*), and Bekhor Shor also comments that it is not a real sword but a reference to dryness and disease. As usual, he bases his interpretation on another verse, adding that it resembles "And my bones are burned with heat (*horev*)" (Job. 30:30) and that his method is that of the rule *Davar ha-lamed me-'inyano* - a passage that is understood from its context. Since *herev* appears in a list of diseases, it is more fittingly understood as "dryness"; and in any case, he remarks, the sword is mentioned later in verse 25.

F. Further examples of Bekhor Shor's interpretations that are identical to Ibn Ezra's include: Lev. 20:17, "And see her nakedness" - discover; Num 19:5, "And the heifer shall be burnt" - by the burner (subject); 27:11, "And he shall possess it" - the property (object); Deut. 20:19, "For is the tree of the field [like] man." Both comment that Scripture uses a short form of speech by omitting the preposition "like." Similarly, in Deut. 21:23, "For he that is hanged is [like] a reproach unto God," both add the

preposition *'al* (because of) following the word “hanged,” meaning, the man must be hanged because he reproached God. Also in 27:26, “Cursed be he that confirmeth (*yaqim*) not,” both explain that *yaqim* means *yeqayem* - will fulfill.

The striking similarity between Ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor in all these interpretations does not, in itself, prove influence. Most of the interpretations arise straight out of the words of the text or solve a problem in a way natural to the text. They do not provide new insights or exhibit unique exegetical brilliance, suggesting the assumption that one commentator received the inspiration from the other. While influence cannot be disproved, these examples do not prove the case, and it may readily be supposed that, working as Peshat commentators, Ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor arrived separately at similar readings. They do confirm that Bekhor Shor engaged in linguistic exegesis, whether through the influence of Ibn Ezra, some other source, or due to his own inclination.

2. Interpretations Ascribed by Bekhor Shor to “Others” that are Found in Ibn Ezra

In several places Bekhor Shor cites interpretations with the introduction “some interpret” or “some say.” Occasionally these interpretations are to be found in Ibn Ezra, as well.

A. “You shall not go over (*tefa'er*) the bough again” (Deut. 24:20). This verse, which deals with gifts to be left for the poor is glossed by Rashi as, “Do not take its beauty (*tif'arto*) from it,” that is, the fruit is the tree’s “beauty.” Ibn Ezra says: “Do not look for the beauties - the branches - as in ‘and brought forth branches, and shot forth spring (*pe'erot*)’ “ (Ez. 17:6). Both the interpretation of “branches” and the reference to

Ezekiel. appear in Bekhor Shor: “And there are those who interpret it as *pe'erot*, as in ‘and shot forth springs and the branches.’ ”

B. “You had avouched the Lord this day” (Deut. 26:17). The word “avouched” (*he'emarta*) is explained by Rashi as “separation and division - you have singled him out from all strange gods.” Rashbam comments: “He has stirred you up so that you said and desired that you should become his people.” But Ibn Ezra explained: “It is an expression of greatness, as in ‘In the top of the uppermost bough (*'amir*)’ ” (Is. 17:6). Both the explanation and the verse on which it rests are thus explained by Bekhor Shor: “And there are some who interpret it in terms of *'amir* and branch as an expression of height, as in ‘two or three berries in the top of the uppermost tree’ ” (Is. 17:6). Once again we see that these two commentators present a similar linguistic exegesis of the biblical wording.

3. Interpretation Ascribed by Ibn Ezra to “Others” that are Found in Bekhor Shor.

Some interpretations ascribed to “others” by Ibn Ezra find their parallel in Bekhor Shor.

A. “If he came in by himself (*be-gapo*)” (Ex. 21.3). Following Onkelos, Rashi explains this as “alone,” and so does Rashbam. Bekhor Shor interprets: “With his body (*be-gufo*), alone, without a wife, as in ‘the body of Saul (*gufat*)’ ” (I Chron. 10:12). The same approach is to be found in Ibn Ezra: “There are those who say that *be-gapo* is *be-gufo* - with his body - as we find in ‘the body of Saul.’ ”

The fact that Bekhor Shor quotes an interpretation also found in Ibn Ezra under the rubric “some interpret,” while Ibn Ezra does the same with interpretations to be found in Bekhor Shor, prefacing them with “some interpret,” evokes a great temptation to claim

mutual influence. But it must be recognized that the interpretations cited here, and in the previous section, while undoubtedly very similar, arise naturally from the verse, from a rational solution to a problem, or rest on a verse from elsewhere in the Bible. In other words, they are Peshat explanations that do not incorporate any special new insight. We may reasonably suppose that such glosses were common property in the exegetical world, passed on from one person to another orally or in writing. In the period in question, Bible commentary was a flourishing Jewish enterprise in both Northern France and Spain, but over the centuries a great many interpretations have been lost.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, we cannot know for certain what is meant by "some interpret." That one commentator should offer a particular explanation and the other present it with "some interpret" certainly offers the possibility of acquaintance and mutual influence, but does not necessitate it, as they might be drawing on a third source.

It has already been remarked that the period in question was one of great exegetical activity, and that Ibn Ezra was widely known among commentators. On the basis of the material available to us, it seems impossible to pronounce with certainty whether Ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor had a direct influence upon each other or not. I am inclined to accept the theory that they became personally acquainted when Ibn Ezra was in Northern France, or that they at least heard of each other through other people, but firm evidence is lacking. Ibn Ezra is considered the main channel of linguistic information to Ashkenaz.¹⁰¹ However, if a connection between them existed, it included an interest in language.

CHAPTER NINE

BEKHOR SHOR AND RABBENU TAM

Rabbenu Tam (1100-1171) is considered one of the greatest rabbis of Northern France, and like his grandfather (Rashi) and brother (Rashbam), he too was interested in linguistic research.¹⁰² His grammatical composition, known by the name *Hakhra'ot* (though some early rabbis called it *Mahberet*), aimed to solve the linguistic debate between the two first Spanish language scholars, Menahem Ben Saruq and Dunash Ben Labarat, on whom French Bible commentators strongly relied on.¹⁰³ Rabbenu Tam also tried to find a middle way between their contradictory notions. As a rule, he agreed with Menahem Ben Saruq, though at times he followed Dunash, or neither of them. Naturally, a vast part of his composition contains Bible interpretations, since *Mahberet Menahem* was devoted by and large to determining the instruction of the Hebrew roots and explaining words and verses from the Bible.

The commentaries of Rabbenu Tam follow the rule of Peshat exegesis, as the French Bible exegetes were accustomed to at that time. In addition, Rabbenu Tam devotes some of his composition to matters of Massorah, punctuation, and grammar. His meager grammatical discussion is that of the conjugation of verbs (*gezarot*), which indicates that his understanding of the Hebrew root system was close to that of his brother, the Rashbam. Both acknowledge the fact that most Hebrew verbs are composed

of three root letters. Nevertheless, they did not discover this pattern in verbs where a letter is omitted in some tenses.

We shall recall two interpretations of Rabbenu Tam that also appear in Bekhor Shor's Torah commentary:

A. "*Beloti*" (Gen. 18:12). Bekhor Shor explains *beloti* as "gotten old" based on Ez. 23:43, "*Lavela ni'ufim*." In his *Hakhra'ot*, Dunash holds that this verse should be spelled "*Lavelah ba-ni'ufim*" and Rabbenu Tam disagrees. It seems that Bekhor Shor follows his Rabbi when explaining the biblical term "*beloti*."

B. "*'Ein Ya'aqov*" (Deut. 33:28). Rabbenu Tam in *Hakhra'ot* agrees with Dunash's explanation that *'ein* means "like." Thus *'ein Ya'aqov* refers to those who came out of Jacob. Bekhor Shor interprets this phrase in a similar manner.

As said earlier, Bekhor Shor was a pupil of Rabbenu Tam,¹⁰⁴ though he does not mention Rabbenu Tam in his Torah commentary. Urbach quotes a question addressed by Bekhor Shor to Rabbenu Tam: "The least of his attendants and pupils, I beseech the Rabbi my teacher....," and Rabbenu Tam called him: "Wise above his years, my colleague, Rabbi Joseph." Perhaps Rabbenu Tam influenced his student Bekhor Shor to pay attention to the language of the Bible in his commentary.

Sefer Ha-Yashar Heleq Ha-She'elot We-Ha-Teshuvot, #55, contains four Responsa of Rabbi Joseph of Orleans and Rabbenu Tam, but they do not deal with Bible interpretation or linguistics, and thus do not supply information regarding any possible influence of Rabbenu Tam on his student in these fields.

CHAPTER TEN

BEKHOR SHOR AND RABBI SAMUEL BEN MEIR

In several places in his commentary, Rashbam offers methodological notes that bear upon his exegetical approach as, for example, in his comments on Gen. 37:2, Deut. 10, and his introductory remarks to the portion *Mishpatim*. It emerges from these that Rashbam is of the opinion that while the Sages derived *halakha*, *derashot*, and *dinim* from the fact that a given expression was either unusually lengthy, or seemingly superfluous, and from the hermeneutic rules, they were aware that such derivations did not constitute the Peshat.¹⁰⁵ While he states explicitly that *halakha* is primary, he regards his own function as that of explicating the Peshat of the text, independently of the exegetical methods of the Sages, and without their scope Derash approach. He was particularly concerned with the literal way of interpretation, moreover, because anyone interested in Derash could find it in the work of his grandfather, Rashi. Another benefit offered by his commentary was that it rendered the scriptures accessible to those for whom Hebrew had become a foreign language.

Many scholars believe that Bekhor Shor used Rashbam's commentary.¹⁰⁶ Bekhor Shor mentions Rashbam by name several times, in his comments on Ex. 3:14, 6:13, 14:25, and frequently suggests unattributed interpretations that are found in Rashbam. We shall see that many of these similar interpretations found in Bekhor Shor and Rashbam employ general linguistic exegetical tools, and both men seem to have liked explanations

that rely on linguistic analysis. Hence, we might assume that if Rashbam in fact had influenced Bekhor Shor's work, it was in the field of language and textual analysis.

Although Bekhor Shor's comments are often very close to Rashbam's, care must be exercised in establishing influence as such. Bekhor Shor was acquainted with the work of his predecessors and contemporaries in Northern France, but it is not certain whether when he composed his commentary, he actually had his predecessors' works in writing before him. Books were then very expensive, and Rashbam's writings were perhaps not yet widely disseminated. In his commentary on Ex. 14:25, Bekhor Shor remarks that he heard a particular interpretation from Rabbenu Shemuel, which would seem to indicate personal familiarity or transmission through a third person, not acquaintance with Rashbam's written work.¹⁰⁷

Bekhor Shor's relationship to interpretations found in Rashbam can be understood in several different ways. Only on one occasion does he cite him by name and adopt his explanation. He also expresses a number of general exegetical points that can be found in Rashbam as well, though with a striking change in style. He offers a great many interpretations that make no mention of Rashbam but are similar to his in content and general presentation. Although, in such cases, one is inclined to assume that Rashbam influenced Bekhor Shor, the difference in style of handling the material makes it impossible to judge whether there was direct influence or not. On several occasions Bekhor Shor attributes a comment to "some interpreters," and the comment is closely related to something in Rashbam. The rubric "some interpret," however, may simply indicate an accepted exegetical approach and not a specific commentator. We shall also

find an isolated instance in which Bekhor Shor explicitly mentions Rashbam and dissents from him.

It seems that we must conclude that, while Rashbam's influence on Bekhor Shor is both marked and demonstrable in certain isolated instances where he is mentioned by name, in other places we can only indicate a connection. We may suppose influence, but have no means of proving it. We must hold by the rule that when two commentators make a similar point it is not necessarily because one has borrowed from the other, since they may both be drawing upon a common source or have arrived at the same idea independently.

1. Mention of Rashbam by Name

A. "And he took off (*wa-yasar*) their chariot wheels" (Ex. 14:25). Rabbi Judah explained that the wheels were burnt off by fire,¹⁰⁸ and Rashi concurs with Onkelos who translates in terms of *hasara*, a "removing" of the wheels. But Bekhor Shor's interpretation is in accordance with what he says he heard from Rashbam, that *wa-yasar* is like "and he turned in (*wa-yasar*) unto her into the tent" (Jud. 4:18). That is, they wanted to turn back to the road and bring the chariots about, but the place was narrow and so they were jammed together and kept calling out to one another: "*sura mi-panay* - get away from me!"

This linguistic interpretation is indeed to be found in Rashbam, but with a striking difference. He makes no mention of the verse from Judges and employs the verb *le-hakot* not *la-sur*. What makes Bekhor Shor prefer Rashbam's interpretation to those of the Sages and Onkelos? As usual, he seeks support from the biblical text, and he finds it

there. Furthermore, in the interpretations of the Sages and Onkelos the subject of *wa-yasar* is God, while in Bekhor Shor's it has the same subject as '*anusa* in the second part of the verse - the Egyptians, who retreated and turned back - and so the two phrases are brought into harmony.

2. Interpretations in Accord with Rashbam Without Quotation

1. Verbal similarities between Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, but such instances are few. Following is an example in which both commentators pay attention to the Hebrew vowels and interpret the word in accordance to them.

A. "Was altogether in smoke ('*ashan*)" (Ex. 19:18). Rashbam: "This is half with a *qamatz* and half with a *patah*, for it is a verbal expression - he made it all smoke." Bekhor Shor: " '*ashan*: this is half with a *qamatz* and half with a *patah* and it is a verb."

2. General exegetical points found in Bekhor Shor and in Rashbam

Bekhor Shor is fond of making points of general exegetical rules, and some of these may be paralleled in Rashbam. We will analyze examples in which both commentators regard the style and modes of expression of the Bible.

A. "And the life of Sarah was..." (Gen. 23:1). Bekhor Shor: "It is not customary to write about the death even of righteous women other than in reference to some action. Rashbam also states that the death of Sarah had to be mentioned because of the purchase of the cave of *Makhpelah*, but, in general, Scripture does not speak of the deaths of women, unless it is important for understanding the subject. Bekhor Shor's comments on the verse formulate this as a general rule.

B. "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain" (Gen. 49:22). Bekhor Shor: "Scripture often gives a phrase twice, completing it only the second time. For example, in 'The floods have lifted up, O Lord' (Ps. 93:3), it does not explain what they have lifted until the repetition, 'The floods have lifted up their voice.' " Bekhor Shor repeats this general point, which Rashbam also stresses in his explanation of Gen. 49:22 and in his remarks on Ex. 15:6 (where Rashbam and Rashi do the same thing), Num. 17:28 and Deut. 17:5.

C. "Speak you unto Pharaoh" (Ex. 6:29). Bekhor Shor: "He relates it briefly now, in order to set forth the whole affair concerning Pharaoh in a single sequence." Rashbam makes the same point in different wording.

D. "The sister of Aaron" (Ex. 15:20). Bekhor Shor: "When a verse mentions a woman it customarily mentions her elder brother, as in 'sister of Nebaioth' " (Gen. 36:3). Rashbam similarly notes on this verse that she is called "sister of Aaron" in reference to the first-born son, but unlike Bekhor Shor, does not formulate it as a general principle.

There is a recognizable resemblance between Bekhor Shor and Rashbam in these instances, but it must be noted that they express themselves differently. Bekhor Shor likes to cast his remarks in the form of a general exegetical principle, while Rashbam confines himself to the verse in hand. This fact is in itself sufficient to render direct influence in this matter doubtful. Thus, while we may certainly point to a similarity between the two commentators, it is impossible, on this issue, to establish influence

3. Exegetical relations to Rashbam's work

In several places Bekhor Shor gives linguistic interpretations that are in accordance with Rashbam's exegesis without quoting him.

A. "A wandering Aramean was my father ('*arami 'oved 'avi*)" (Deut. 26:5).

Bekhor Shor and Rashbam both explain that Abraham was an Aramean, a wanderer and exile who left his native country, "Get you out of the country, and from the kindred" (Gen. 12:1), and journeyed about, as it is said: "And it came to pass, when God cursed me to wander from my father's house" (Gen. 20:13). The problem as to the verse quoted relates to its subject and object, i.e., whether '*oved*' is taken as a transitive or intransitive verb. There is a well known gloss which sees the "Aramean" as Laban, with "My father" (Jacob) as its direct object. Ibn Ezra objects to this on two grounds. He takes '*oved*' to be grammatically an intransitive verb, so that if Laban were the subject the form would have to be the transitive *ma'avid* or *me'abed*. Secondly, he makes the practical point that Laban sought *le-ha'avid* - "to destroy" Jacob so that he went down to Egypt. He therefore regards the "Aramean" as Jacob, and thus explicates the verse: "When my father Jacob was in Aram, he was a wanderer." This example exposes Bekhor Shor's and Rashbam's syntactic method of exegesis. They both define the parts of the biblical sentence and thus explain its meaning accordingly.

B. Further examples of Bekhor Shor's interpretations that are related to those of Rashbam: Gen. 21:20, "became an archer"; 37:3, "and he made him an ornament tunic"; 46:4, "Joseph shall put his hand upon your eyes"; Ex., 14:3: "they are entangled"; 16:14, "fine as the hoar-frost"; 16:15, "what is it?"; 25:6, "and for the sweet incense"; Lev.

20:17, "it is a shameful thing"; Num. 14:17, "and now, I pray to you, let the power of the Lord be great"; Deut. 15:19, "you shall sanctify unto the Lord your God."

As seen above, here too we encounter difficulty in tracing direct and indisputable influence from Rashbam on Bekhor Shor. The examples display an exegetical relationship in the field of language, but are too limited in scope and too different in detail to prove borrowing. Even if, as investigators have held, Bekhor Shor uses ideas found in Rashbam, he reworked them for his own purposes in a way which renders it impossible to show a clear-cut influence. The evidence available to us suggests that a connection exists between the two, but we should make no claims for direct influence. The interpretations cited here do not incorporate anything especially novel, while the method of reliance upon verses from other places in the Torah is one that might readily have occurred to two exegetes independently. This is particularly probable for the period of exegetical flowering which is now under discussion. Thus while it is certainly possible, even probable, that Rashbam has a direct influence upon Bekhor Shor, it cannot be demonstrated beyond doubt.

4. Interpretations in accord with Rashbam ascribed to "Some Interpreters"

Bekhor Shor does not always use Rashbam's interpretations without annotation, but sometimes introduces them with the rubric "some interpret."

A. "And her conjugal rights (*'onata*) shall he not diminish" (Ex. 21:10). Bekhor Shor states that "some interpret" *'onata* in terms of *ma'on*, *mador* - "lodging," as in Is. 13:22: "And jackals shall dwell in their castles." This is Rashbam's interpretation. He says that *'onata* means a "dwelling house" and that the initial *mem* of *ma'on*, like that of

malon, is not part of the root. Rashi gives here a quite different interpretation, holding the word, contrary to *Mekhilta Mishpatim* and *Ketubot* 47b,¹⁰⁹ to indicate cohabitation.

Bekhor Shor follows Rashbam, adding himself the proof from Isaiah. Why does he reject Rashi in favor of Rashbam? The former explanation involves using *'onah* in an applied sense, the basic meaning being “season,” while in the later’ the simple sense of the associated word suggested (*ma'on*) is appropriate to the context. It is possible that Bekhor Shor inclined more to Rashbam on that account. Moreover, the other terms in the verse, “her food” and “her raiment,” relate to property, and *'onata* meaning *ma'on* therefore fits in, while Rashi’s gloss does not.

B. “*Ha-Migra'at*” (Deut. 28:20). According to Bekhor Shor, “some interpret” this word to mean, “defect”, based on “Behold, I will corrupt - *go'er* your seed” (Mal. 2:3). Bekhor Shor translates *migra'at* as “rebuke.”

The phrase “some interpret” need not refer to a specific commentator. It may indicate a particular exegetical approach or to an idea discussed orally. Hence there is no obligation to assume that Rashbam is necessarily the source. The example given could have been derived from many commentators, especially when their starting point is a verse from elsewhere in the Bible. In this section also, then, we can note a resemblance between Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, but cannot establish direct influence.

3. An Interpretation that Mentions Rashbam with Dissent

A. “I am (*'ehye*) that sent me to you” (Ex. 3:14). This verse, which contains the name of the Lord, has exercised many commentators. In the opinion of the Sages it means, “The Holy One said to Moses: ‘say to them, I who was and I who am now, and I

shall be in time to come'."¹¹⁰ Rashi explains: "I am with them in their present sufferings and I will be with them in the oppression they will suffer at the hands of other kingdoms," meaning God will always be present.

But Bekhor Shor and Rashbam do not discuss the philosophical problem as to the actual content of the name of God, but deal only with the word '*ehey*'. Bekhor Shor thinks that it refers to the Tetragrammaton, and that the form '*ehey*' is used here to allow it to be read and understood. He also quotes Rashbam by name, but dissents from him. "Rabbi Samuel" he says, "explained that '*ehey*' is the essence of the Name and that it is used by God speaking in the first person, but that others must use the third person form *yihyeh*." To this he objects, that if '*ehey*' is the essence of the Name, how is it that we may pronounce it as it is, without any changes? He adds that if we follow Rashbam, in every place where the phrase '*ani Ha-Shem*' occurs, the name '*ehey*' should have been substituted. In his opinion then, '*ehey*' is a term for the Tetragrammaton and not its essence, thus explaining the biblical word differently.

Just as we know nothing of the events of Bekhor Shor's life, so are we in general ignorant of his teachers. He was not given to specifying his sources,¹¹¹ although he does mention a few people from whom he derived interpretations. Apart from Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, whom I discussed earlier, Bekhor Shor frequently names Rashi - both in agreement and in dissent. Joseph Qara is cited by name in his comments on Gen. 4:23, 34:25, 49:9; Ex. 4:13, 20:1; Deut. 14:1, 28:68, 32:17 and 33:1. Rabbi Ovadiyah (Ben Rabbi Samuel Ha-Sefaradi) is mentioned in Bekhor Shor's comments on Gen. 2:2, 18:5, 39:2; Ex. 4:13, 10:2, 15:26, 22:19, 23:25; and Deut. 31:18.

Bekhor Shor mentions the linguist Solomon Parhon in Gen. 33:6 and Rabbi Isaac Ha-Ger in Ex. 4:13 (with the note *haggah*). Ibn Hayuj appears in Deut. 11:26; Menahem Ben Saruq in Ex. 14:20; Rabbi Abraham Ben Rabbi Hiyya of Barcelona in Deut. 28:63, and Rabbi Eliezer of Mainz in Lev. 2:25. Onkelos is also cited, both in approval and in dissent but not always by name. A note on Num. 12:7 quotes from the Jerusalem Talmud. It goes without saying that phrases from the Sages are scattered throughout Bekhor Shor's work, whether in concurrence or dissent.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BEKHOR SHOR AND THE TOSAFISTS - COMPARISON AND CONCLUSIONS

This textual analysis of Bekhor Shor's commentary reveals a need to reconsider the distinction between the Ashkenazi and Sefaradi linguistic scholarship of medieval times. A comprehensive study of the sages of Ashkenaz may reveal them as knowledgeable linguists who like their Sefaradi brothers, engaged to a certain extent in Hebrew philology. This notion might have been overlooked by scholars due to the great endeavors and achievements of Ashkenazi sages in the field of Torah and Talmud studies, which assured them a high position among rabbinical sages and eclipsed their linguistic achievements, and due to the even greater accomplishment of the Sefaradi linguists, whose writings on language still hold much value to modern semanticists. This study reveals Bekhor Shor's personal involvement in linguistic-literary modes of interpreting the language and structure of the biblical text. This material which I have collected and investigated does not enable us to declare Bekhor Shor a major philologist of the Hebrew language.

The commentators who arose for the most part in the wake of Rashi are called Tosafists. A number of the Tosafists' compendia are available in print, like *Da'at Zeqenim* (later referred to as DZ), *Hadar Zeqenim* (HZ), *Moshav Zeqenim* (MZ), *Pa'aneah Raza* (PR), *Minhat Yehuda* (MY) and *Hizequni* (HZQ). Many works produced

by the Tosafist school are anonymous. They take the form of collections of interpretations whose authors, far more often than not, came from Northern France. Most date from the 13th century and a few from the 14th, which marks the end of Jewish settlement in France.¹¹²

Tosafist compositions often take the form of anthologies or compilations,¹¹³ in to compiled comments that were read and heard from their predecessors, and present them in the order of the biblical text. Thus, they form a new exegetical continuum, as coherent as possible, but not necessarily a consistent verse by verse exposition. These compilations, are not based on a large number of works, but rather on a small number of selected authors who employ the same literal methods of interpretation. They combine passages chosen from a limited number of sources and assemble them into a commentary. These compilatory commentaries express the Tosafist's desire to create a literary canon of the literal exegesis of their great teachers. Poznanski claimed they lean much on Rashi, the first of the Northern French commentators, and on Bekhor Shor, who was one of the last.¹¹⁴

It is in no way surprising to find traces of Bekhor Shor's commentary scattered throughout these collections. Since his work constitutes a principal element in the Tosafists' works, he is much quoted, sometimes by name and sometimes anonymously. No guiding principle for the mention or omission of his name in connection with his glosses can readily be found. It is possible that his commentaries were so widely disseminated and so popular among the Northern French commentators of that period, that the source of any given insight was not always recognized. The interpretation itself

was passed on, but its author was forgotten. In addition, it should be noted that the Tosafists had a tendency to substitute one name for another.¹¹⁵ Sometimes the Tosafists quote in Bekhor Shor's name an interpretation found in his commentary. Poznanski suggests that the reason may be that some material is lacking from the Munich manuscript (which contains Bekhor Shor's commentary), or that the Tosafists were themselves mistaken. The fact that the Tosafist's draw largely upon Bekhor Shor's teachings, may explain why we have only a single manuscript of his commentary. There was no need to copy his commentary, because it was incorporated in the compositions of the Tosafists. Moreover, the Munich manuscript might be lacking because the copyist did not feel the need to engage in precise word-by-word copying of material that existed elsewhere.

Bekhor Shor is an original commentator whose ideas are novel, and who displays certain unique exegetical characteristics. He has a healthy sense of reality, and his commentaries solve, in a realistic manner, the perplexities arising from the text. He was blessed with a good psychological sense and with the ability to comprehend biblical personalities. But beyond all this, like his Ashkenazi and Sefaradi predecessors, he employed linguistic modes of Bible exegesis. This analysis of the text of Bekhor Shor's exegesis reveals his etymological and semantic exegesis, his grammatical remarks and attention to the style as well as the literary structure of the biblical text.

Careful collection of the linguistic-literary commentaries of Bekhor Shor presented in this paper has identified 51 linguistic-literary interpretations of the Bible text, that are identical in Bekhor Shor and in the Tosafists. We now examine some of

these passages in which the Tosafists were influenced by Bekhor Shor's linguistic-literary approach and mode of exegesis, in the specific categories discussed above. The following table presents Bekhor Shor's interpretations on the left, and marks those accepted by the Tosafists on the right.

Grammar	DZ	HZ	MZ	PR	MY	HZQ
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"Then the handmaids came near" (Gen. 33:7). The handmaids bowed down but their sons did not. They said: "Our mothers are handmaids and therefore they bow down, but we are not like that, for we are sons of Jacob." This explains why Scripture notes the act of bowing down in the feminine form alone (*wa-tishtahavenah*). But when the sons of Leah saw their mother bow down, they too did so, as it is said, "Leah also and her children...bowed down (*wa-yishtahavu*)."

X	X	X		X
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Etymological exegesis

"'even maskit" (Lev. 26:1). *Maskit* comes from *sokhah* which means "to see," as Rashi notes in his commentary to Gen. 11:29, "Yiskah is Sarah, that whom all *sokhin* - view her beauty." 'Even *maskit* means, a rock that people view and look at, due to its shape, as well as prostrate themselves in front of it. These acts are considered idol worshipping.

X	X		
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"Motot 'ulkhem" (Lev. 26:13). The word 'ol literally meaning "yoke" is used in this verse as a symbol of the 'yoke' of God's commandments imposed on the Israelites.

X

"The *nefilim*" (Num. 13:33). *Nefilim* means *mufla'im* - "amazing." People were amazed by the Canaanite giants because of their extreme height.

Second exegesis: *Nefilim* comes from the verb *nafal* - "to fall." The people in Canaan feared that the high giants will fall on them. In Gen. 6:4 Hizequni's comment is similar to Bekhor Shor's first comment on *nefilim*. X X

"*Mehoqeq*" (Num. 21:18). *Mehoqeq* comes from *haqaq* - "to engrave," thus our commentators explain that the well in this verse was not dug in a normal fashion, but was *haquq* - "ingraived" out of the ground. X X

"*U-mispar 'et rova' Yisra'el*" (Num. 23:10). *Rova'* means *revi'it* - "quarter." The Israelites were divided into four camps and blessed, that it will be impossible to count even a fourth of them because they shall be so numerous. X X

"*Nitayu*" (Num. 24:6). The word *nitayu* comes from *netiyah* - "turning." Rivers turn aside, spread out and expand their surface. So will the tents of the Israelites turn aside from their current boundaries and grow in number due to a rapid birth rate of the Jews. X X

"*Wa-yahel*" (Num. 25:1). *Yahel* is understood as a form of the root letters *h-w-l* which mean "secular," "profane" rather than "begun" (root *h-h-l*). Thus the children of Israel are accused in this verse of becoming profane and committing adultery. X X

Semantic Exegesis

"*Hut*" - "string" (Gen. 14:23). Our commentaries believe that the word *hut* refers to the area of the loins, to which a man ties his weapon belt. X

"*Wa-yaqom*" - "got up" (Gen. 23:17). When getting up one moves from one position to another. According to Bekhor Shor, *wa-yaqom* means the transforming of ownership

	DZ	HZ	MZ	PR	MY	HZQ
through the means of money, namely - "to buy."			X		X	
"Nitzav" (Gen. 24: 13) - "to stand" in our context means, "to hold up" since the act of standing holds one from continuing his performance.					X	X
"And the thin ears swallowed up" (Gen. 41:7). They grew and covered over the first ones until they could not be seen, as in "as they are being covered" (literally meaning 'swallowed' in Num. 4:20). It should not be explained in terms of actual swallowing, for man is not shown things which could not really happen.	X	X	X	X	X	X
"Tirgazu" (Gen. 45:24) means in this verse "fear" rather than "anger," based on Deut. 28:65, " <i>Lev</i> (heart) <i>ragaz</i> " which is understood as "the heart is filled with fear." Thus in our Genesis context <i>tirgazu</i> means "fear" as well.	X					X
" <i>'ahim</i> " - "brothers" (Gen. 49:5). In this verse ' <i>ahim</i> means, similarity in the personal characteristic of anger.		X				
"And he took off (<i>wa-yasar</i>) their chariot wheels" (Ex. 14: 25). The same term as in "And he turned (<i>wa-yasar</i>) in unto her into the tent" (Jud. 4:18). The Egyptians "brought their vehicles around - <i>yasar</i> " in order to flee - <i>la-sur le-'ahor</i> , but it was too difficult for them because the chariots in front of them blocked their way, as it is said, "And made them drive heavily."		X				X
"The hand (<i>yad</i>) upon the throne of the Lord" (Ex. 17:16). "Hand" means "greatness and kingship," as in "Even unto them will I give My house and within My walls a monument (<i>yad</i>) and a memorial" (Is. 56:5). When there is a hand and kingship upon the						

	DZ	HZ	MZ	PR	MY	HZQ
throne of the Holy One: that is to say, when a king arises from Israel who will sit on the throne of the Lord, as it is said, "Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as King" (I Chron. 29:23).		X	X	X		X
" <i>Ta'aneh</i> " (Ex. 20:4). <i>Ta'aneh</i> comes from <i>la-'anot</i> - "to answer." One of the Ten Commandments prohibits acting as a falls witness. In this verse Bekhor Shor believes that the implication of <i>ta'aneh</i> is "to cause." One must be cautious not to cause any negative consequence to another.		X				
" <i>Urim</i> " (Ex. 28:30). ' <i>Urim</i> means "countries" as in Is. 24:15, " <i>Ba-'urim</i> praise God" and in Gen. 11:31, " <i>Ur Kasdim</i> ."		X				
"The <i>rosh</i> spices" (Ex. 30:23). <i>Rosh</i> is used in the sense of "counting," as in "When you take the sum (<i>rosh</i>) of the children of Israel" (Ex. 30:12), which is translated by Onkelos as " <i>'ari teqabel yat hoshvin</i> ."	X	X		X	X	
" <i>Elohim</i> " (Ex. 32:1). In this verse the implication of <i>Elohim</i> is "judges" rather than "God." The Israelites asked Aaron to appoint a new leader in replacement of Moses who was late coming down from Mount Sinai. Thus Bekhor Shor prevents an exegesis that might reveal the Israelites as demanding another god.		X	X			X
"And the Priest shall make atonement for her" (Lev. 12:8). This expression means "cleansing." Since the diseases themselves make atonement for the transgressions, we find that "And he shall make atonement," which is said of the bringing of the sacrifice, means cleansing and taking away [of the sin].	X					

	DZ	HZ	MZ	PR	MY	HZQ
<p>“Thus he shall make expiation - <i>we-khipper</i> for the house” (Lev. 14:53). <i>We-khipper</i> means, “to clean” any defilement.</p>	X					
<p>“<i>Moledet hutz</i>” (Lev. 18:9) literally means “born out of the house.” This refers, according to Bekhor Shor, to a child who is the result of rape, an act done out of the safety of the home.</p>						X
<p>“He shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people - <i>ba'al be-'amaw</i>” (Lev. 21:4). Some commentators explain <i>ba'al</i> as the husband of a wife. Rashi explains that <i>ba'al</i> should be understood as a prohibition of the chief to defile himself for an unfit wife, who in any case leads to his being profaned; that is, in the event of her death he may not defile himself on her account. Onkelos translates the phrase as <i>rabbah be-'amehah</i>, not “husband of a wife” but “Lord.” Bekhor Shor gives a different sense to the verse: “That he shall not defile himself for a chief man among his people, not even for a dead high priest,” glossing <i>ba'al be-'amaw</i> as “high priest.” Hence Onkelos takes the phrase as the subject, Bekhor Shor as the indirect object.</p>	X	X		X		X
<p>The word <i>'akh</i> in Lev. 23:39, comes to command additional happiness on the Holiday spoken of in our context.</p>	X	X				
<p>“I [God] will wreak fear - <i>behalah</i> on you” (Lev. 26:16). Bekhor Shor believes that <i>behalah</i> in this verse is not the feeling of fear, but physical “illness,” which God will smite the people who violate the covenant.</p>						X
<p>“<i>Hagavim</i>” - “grasshoppers” (Num. 13:33). In this verse <i>hagavim</i> means “small.” Hizequni adds that such is the speech of the Bible.</p>						X

	DZ	HZ	MZ	PR	MY	HZQ
" <i>Mele'ah</i> " (Num. 18:27). <i>Mele'ah</i> in this verse is understood as "oil" and "wine" which may fill up a utensil, but never over fill it (lest the extra will pour out).						X
" <i>Nahash</i> " - "snake" (Num. 23:23) means, according to Bekhor Shor, "to try out," based on Gen. 30:27, "[God] <i>nihashitani</i> - tried me."	X	X				
" <i>Barah</i> " - "to run away" (Num. 24:11) is used in this verse as an expression of hastiness which is obviously connected to the act of running away.						X
" <i>Metaw</i> " (Deut. 33:6) implies that the same number of soldiers crossing the Jordan river will return East, meaning, no one will die in the war.	X	X				X

Syntax

" <i>Ki 'ishah yefat mar'eh 'at</i> - that you are a pretty woman" (Gen. 12:11). Our commentators add the preposition ' <i>al</i> to the beginning of the sentence, thereby understanding the word <i>ki</i> as "because." Thus our verse says that, because of Sarah's beauty Abraham feared that the Egyptians will take her.						X
" <i>Wa-yamot kol miqneh Mitzrayim</i> - all the livestock of the Egyptians died" (Ex. 9:6). Bekhor Shor adds the <i>bakhlam</i> letter <i>mem</i> prior to <i>miqneh</i> , thus understanding the verse as "All the livestock that died was Egyptian."	X				X	
" <i>Panay</i> - my face will go" (Ex. 33:14). Who is the subject that will go in this verse? "God."	X					
"And the Lord called Moses and spoke to him - ' <i>elaw</i> " (Lev. 1:1). Bekhor Shor						

	DZ	HZ	MZ	PR	MY	HZQ
(following Rashi) holds that the pronominal suffix refers to Moses alone. The phrasing of the verse intends to convey that God spoke to Moses and Moses was to repeat it to Aaron.		X		X		
Similar syntactic exegesis employed in Lev. 13:5: " <i>Be'eynaw</i> ," and Num. 23:20: " <i>'ashivenah</i> ."	X					
" <i>Kol ezrah me-Yisrael</i> " (Lev. 23:42). <i>Kol</i> means "all." According to our commentators the word <i>kol</i> in this context indicates multiplicity. All the Israelites, including those dwelling in comfort in Israel must sit in booths on the Holiday of <i>Sukot</i> .						X
" <i>Qesamim</i> " - "magic" or "witchcraft" (Num. 22:7). It seems that our verse omitted the noun "wages" or "book" prior to <i>qesamim</i> which is understood as the adjective, not the noun in this verse. Thus the Bible conveys that the elders brought Bil'am "wages" or "books" of witchcraft.	X	X				X
"And he saw from there the end of the people - <i>qtzeh ha-'am</i> " (Num. 22:41). The <i>bakhlam</i> letter <i>mem</i> , translated as "from," should be placed before <i>qatze</i> changing the meaning of the verse to "He saw from there, all the people from the far end of the camp - <i>meqetzeh ha-'am</i> ."	X	X				
Style						
"Such is the story of heaven and earth" (Gen. 2:4). The Bible repeats this sentence in order to further explain the manner in which they were created.						X
"Of every man for that of his fellow man" (Gen. 9:5). The word "man" repeated twice in this verse refers to one's self and to another person respectively. Therefore, it is						

	DZ	HZ	MZ	PR	MY	HZQ
forbidden for a man to kill himself or any other man.				X		
<p>"<i>Hohakhtah</i>" - "you proved" (Gen. 24:14). In this verse Scripture is using an abridged form of speech, stating that Eliezer <i>hokhiah</i> -</p> <p>"proved" that Rebecca is a proper match for Isaac.</p>	X					
<p>"And the Lord said to Jacob" (Gen. 31:3). Bekhor Shor says, that this was a dream that Jacob related to Rachel and Leah when he called them out to the field (verse 11). Bekhor Shor (but not Hizequni) adds in clarification that this is an example of literary rule found in the Torah, that what is stated briefly in one place may be expanded elsewhere. Verse 3 relates who had caused him to go out of Laban's house, but in speaking of this to Rachel and Leah he expatiates upon it.</p>						X
<p>"Heal her now (<i>na</i>) O God (<i>na</i>)" (Num. 12:13). The first <i>na</i> is a term for "request" and the second means "now."</p>	X					X
<p>"I shall see - '<i>er'enu</i> ... '<i>ashurenu</i>" (Num. 24:17). Our commentators point out that '<i>ashurenu</i> is a double expression, meaning "to sing" and "to see." Thus Scripture repeats the verb "see" in this verse.</p>	X	X				X
<p>"God - <i>u-ve-'elohehem</i> executed judgment" (Num. 33:4). Scripture is employing a play on words (<i>lashon nofel 'al lashon</i>). '<i>Elohim</i> in this verse is understood as "judges" meaning, "the judges executed judgment."</p>	X	X				
<p>"Caleb hushed the people" (Num. 13:30). Bekhor Shor is of the opinion that Scripture is employing in this verse an abridged form of speech by not specifying Caleb's reason</p>						

for hushing the people. This is further explained in Deut. 1:29.

Literary features

"On mount Sinai" (Lev. 25:11). Every section of Leviticus up to *Be-har* [of which this is the opening verse] speaks of the Tent of Meeting. Hence they all belong to the Tent of Meeting, for they deal with sacrifices and the laws of purity and impurity, etc. But *Be-har* and *Be-huqotai* speak of Mount

Sinai. Nevertheless they too belong to Leviticus, for they deal with the priesthood, the *Shemita* year (the 'seventh' year), the *Yovel* - Jubilee (the 'fiftieth' year), '*arakhin* (assessments of sums which must be paid for a vow), and excommunication. The priests have the duty of sanctifying the years and blowing the Shofar for the Jubilee.

X X X

"Take the sum of the sons of Gershon" (Num. 4:22). Gershon is the first born of the sons of Levi, but in enumeration here (Num. 4:2) Qehat appears before him. This is because they are being appointed here to the work of the sanctuary. Since most of the work is assigned to the sons of Qehat, of whom it is said "Because the service belonged to them," they are placed here the first

X X X X

"And brought across quails from the sea" (Num. 11:31). Bekhor Shor identifies the narrative of the quails in the portion *Be-shalah* with the narrative in *Be-ha'alotkha*.

X

"Take the rod" (Num. 20:8). Bekhor Shor identifies the narrative of the striking of the rock in *Be-shalah* with the one in *Huqat*.

X X X

Conclusions

Of the 51 interpretations that are found in Bekhor Shor and the Tosafists, *Da'at Zeqenim* concurs with Bekhor Shor 26 times, *Hadar Zeqenim* 31 times, *Moshav Zeqenim* 4 times, *Pa'aneah Raza* 8, *Minhat Yehudah* 2, and *Hizequni* 24 times. Based on this sample we conclude that *Da'at Zeqenim*, *Hadar Zeqenim*, and *Hizequni* were the commentators most thoroughly influenced by Bekhor Shor. It is the eclectic *Moshav Zeqenim* and *Pa'aneah Raza* that show little of Bekhor Shor's influence. *Minhat Yehudah* is also at a distance from him, for its principal sources are Rashi, Rabbi Moses of Coucy, and Rabbi Elyaqim Ben Menahem.

To what extent do the Tosafists deal with Bekhor Shor's other approaches to the Bible. The only grammatical exegesis is accepted by *Da'at Zeqenim*, *Hadar Zeqenim*, *Moshav Zeqenim*, *Pa'aneah Raza*, and *Hizequni*. Of 7 etymological comments dealt with by both the Tosafists and Bekhor Shor, *Da'at Zeqenim* and *Hadar Zeqenim* agrees with Bekhor Shor in 6 instances, and *Hizequni* in 1. As for the 23 Semantic comments, *Da'at Zeqenim* cites Bekhor Shor 10 times, *Hadar Zeqenim* and *Hizequni* 15 times each, *Moshav Zeqenim* and *Pa'aneah Raza* twice and *Minhat Yehudah* once. *Hadar Zeqenim* quotes 5 of the 7 syntactic notes, *Da'at Zeqenim* 3, *Hizequni* 4, *Pa'aneah Raza* 1, and *Moshav Zeqenim* and *Minhat Yehudah* none. Identification of stylistic features of the Bible supply 8 instances, of which *Da'at Zeqenim* and *Hadar Zeqenim* cite 3 each, *Moshav Zeqenim* none, *Pa'aneah Raza* 1, and *Hizequni* 4. Out of 5 literary interpretations quoted in the above table, 4 were mentioned by *Pa'aneah Raza*, *Da'at Zeqenim* and *Hadar Zeqenim*, while one is found in *Moshav Zeqenim*.

It appears that it is precisely the area of Bekhor Shor's semantic exegesis, his major occupation in the field of Bible exegesis, that influenced the Tosafists most. Grammatical remarks do not seem to have made much of an impression on the Tosafists. We should now examine which particular interpretations had the greatest influence upon the Tosafists. On which is there general agreement?

Of these examples, all six commentators agree with Bekhor Shor on one, "And the thin ears swallowed up" (Gen. 41:7). Five agree with him on, "Then the handmaids came near" (Gen. 33:7). Four follow him on 4 points, "The hand upon the throne of the Lord" (Ex. 17:16); "The chief spices" (Ex. 30:23); "He shall not defile himself" (Lev. 21:4); and "Take the sum of the sons of Gershon." Three commentators agree with him on 7 interpretations, "And he took off their chariot wheels" (Ex. 14:25); "*Elohim*" (Ex. 32:1); "*Metav*" (Ex. 33:6); "On Mount Sinai" (Lev. 25:11); "Take the rod" (Num. 20:8); "*Qesamim*" (Num. 22:7); and "*'ashurenu*" (Num. 24:17).

It is evident that there are some linguistic-literary interpretations that most of the Tosafists liked and adopted for themselves. One of these is that on "Then the handmaids came near" (Gen. 33:7), whose basis is to be found in Shelomo Parhon.¹¹⁶ It gives close attention to the language of the verse, distinguishing between the style appropriate to the maidservants and their children, and that reserved for the Matriarchs and their children. It is a novel and interesting interpretation, and its popularity is not surprising. The same is true of the comment on "And the thin ears swallowed up" (Gen. 41:7), which is explained in terms of 'covering up' rather than 'swallowing'. The latter is something far from ordinary reality, the former is not. There is almost unanimous agreement as to these two

linguistic interpretations, which all take into consideration style, precision of language and gender of the characters under discussion.

The distribution of most of the interpretations is arbitrary. The various commentators make their selections according to their own tastes. The common denominator is simply the fact that the same interpretation constantly appears in Tosafist works and witness to the extent of Bekhor Shor's influence on those who came after him.

In this connection, it should be remembered that Bekhor Shor is considered by scholars to have been one of the last Peshat commentators of Northern France.¹¹⁷ What succeeded him was the Tosafist collections, commentaries that are less than fully original, but rely upon the compositions of previous generations, as the names given to them indicate.¹¹⁸ From a consideration of the list before us, just as from an examination of the Tosafists overall, we should be able to learn much about the nature of the Tosafists and of Bekhor Shor's position among them.

The fact that Bekhor Shor appears so frequently and in so many of the Tosafist compositions, indicates the important place which his work held in their consciousness. That those of his own and following generations held him in such esteem is a sign of his greatness as a commentator.

In considering the nature of his influence on them we are brought back to the familiar question. What guarantee is there that he did in fact influence them, and that they were not simply making use of other collections of interpretations whose compilers were not aware of his work? We can never know for certain if a commentator took his interpretation from a specific person or from another source, particularly in view of the

fact that many medieval commentaries are no longer extant. But in Bekhor Shor's case the question loses some of its force. Many commentators mention him by name as one of their sources, and this constitutes proof of direct influence. Furthermore, in many instances where his name is not mentioned, the Tosafists quote his actual words. Hence even if there was another source as well, there are substantial grounds for claiming that Bekhor Shor was the channel through which the Tosafists received the ideas in question.

It is generally accepted that Rashi's commentaries marginalized and overshadowed many of the Northern French commentators, including Bekhor Shor's commentary, which was never greatly disseminated and remained in manuscript for centuries. The fact that Bekhor Shor nevertheless won such an honored position among the Tosafists tell us much about his natural place among the commentators of the Middle Ages.

Despite their minor impact on the history of Bible interpretation, Ashkenazi commentators of the early Middle Ages, such as Bekhor Shor and some of the Tosafists, were in fact familiar with and engaged by Hebrew linguistic and literary matters. Explanations in terms of general grammar and literary style are part of their exegesis, as they delve into the biblical language and ways in which it is used. Such endeavors to elucidate the Scripture decreases the large gap assumed by scholars between linguistic activity of the Sefaradi and Ashkenazi Jewry of that period.

ENDNOTES

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- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 134.
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- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
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- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. lvii, n. 4.
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- ⁶² Ibn Janah, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, root *g-r-sh*, p. 101.
David Qimhi, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, s.v., *g-r-sh*, p. 65.
- ⁶³ David Qimhi, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, root *r-g-z*: "Trembling out of fear or anger," p. 343.
- ⁶⁴ *Sifri Devarim*, p. 103.
- ⁶⁵ Ibn Janah, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, root *h-r-sh*.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, s.v., *r-'-h*, pp. 462-463.
- ⁶⁷ *Talmud Bavli, Qidushin* 31b.
- ⁶⁸ David Qimhi, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, root *'-m-d*, pp. 269-270.
- ⁶⁹ *Talmud Bavli, Pe'ah* 2.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *Berakhot* 32a, *Megilah* 24b.
- ⁷¹ Ibn Janah, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, s.v., *sh-v-r*, pp. 495-496.
David Qimhi, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, s.v., *sh-v-r*, p.369.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, s.v., *sh-'-r*, pp. 491-492.
- ⁷³ David Qimhi, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, s.v., *t-h-h*, p. 409.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v., *k-m-s*, p.165.
Ibn Janah, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, s.v., *k-m-s*.
Mahberet Menahem, p.106.
- ⁷⁵ Some final examples of Bekhor Shor's semantic exegesis, stated briefly, are as follows:
Gen. 19:20, "*Mitz'ar*," Bekhor Shor (later referred to as BS): "Little place"; 37:35, "*She'ol*," BS: "Grave"; 40:14, "*Ki*" - "because," BS: "Lest"; 41:51, "*Nashani*," BS: "Made me forget"; 43:11, "*Mezimrat*," BS: "Praise"; 49:6, "*'apam*," BS: "Anger"; 49:24, "*'eytan*," BS: "Strength"; Ex. 2:3, "*Soof*" - "wicker," BS: "*Gomeh*" - "reed"; 9:8, "*Pi-ah*"

- "soot," BS: "Embers"; 12:9, "*Nah...Nah...*," BS: "Now...please"; 9:8, "*Tzli 'esh*" - "roasted with fire," BS: "Prepared quickly"; 12:19, "*Mahmetzet*," BS: "Leaven"; 19:4, "*'esah*," BS: "Put high"; 20:13, "*Ni'uf*," BS: "Adultery"; 30:12, "*Tisah*" - "carry," BS: "Take the sum"; 30:34, "*Bud*," BS: A sort of measurement; 34:10, "*'imchah*" - "with you," BS: "For you"; Lev. 1:16, "*Mor'ato*," BS: "*Zefeq*" - "crop"; 11:32, "*Homer*," BS: "*Kur*" (kind of measurement); 15:12, "*Yishatef*" - "rinsed in water," BS: "Dipped"; 21:11, "*Tig'al*," BS: "*Tiflot*" - "spit out"; 23:18, "*'al ha-lehem*" - "on the bread," BS: "For the bread"; Num. 5:13, "*Nitpesah*" - "caught," BS: "Raped"; 11:2, "*Tishqah*" - "sank," BS: "Went out"; 13:2, "*Nassi*" - "Priest," BS: "Any important person"; 14:9, "*Silam*" - "their shadow," BS: "God"; 17:27, "*Gavanu*" - "we perish," BS: Die in a plague; 18:29, "*Terumat Hashem*" - "heave offering to God," BS: "*Terumah gedolah*" - "large heave offering" given to the priest (c.f. Rashi); 21:1, "*Shevi*" - "prisoners," "captives," BS: "Animal captives" alone; 21:28, "*'esh*" - "fire," BS: "Strength," "power"; 21:29, "*'im*" - "with," BS: "To"; 22:33, "*'ulay*" - "perhaps," BS: "Unless" (c.f. Rashi); 23:19, "*Wa-yekhazev*," BS: *Wa-yekhazev* comes from the word *kazav* - "lie," and refers to a person who does not keep his word; 24:8, "*Yegarem*," BS: "Crush" (c.f. Menahem, Ibn Ezra and Rashi); 24:17, "*'ashurenu*," BS: "*Shar*" - "sing"; 24:22, "*Mah*" - "what," BS: "When"; Deut. 1:1, "*Tofel*," BS: "*Marah*" - "bitterness." "*Paran*" - "mount Sinai"; 1:17, "*Qatan*" - "small," "*Gadol*" - "great," BS: "Poor," "Rich" accordingly; 4:24, "*Noshantem*" - "long established," BS: "Be in despair"; 4:37, "*Hosi*" - "took out," BS: "Govern"; 5:24, "*'at*" ("you" in female form), BS: Sign of weakness; 10:21, "*'elohekhah*" - "God," BS: "Judge"; 15:7, "*Ki*" - "because," BS: "*'im*" - "if"; 15:11, "*Ki*" - "because," BS: "*Shemah*" - "lest"; 18:4, "*Reshit degankhah*" - "the first fruit," BS: "*Teruma gedolah*" - Offering given to the Priests and *terumat ma'aser* (c.f. Rashi); 20:9, "*Ki*" - "because," BS: "If"; 21:2, "*Zezenekhah*" - "your elders," BS: "Great Sanhedrin"; 28:9, "*Ki*" - "because," BS: "*'im*" - "if"; 31:7, "*'et*" (indicating a direct object), BS: "With"; 32:14, "*Dam 'anavim*" - "blood of the grape," BS: "Red wine"; 32:19, "*Wa-yena'etz*" - "scorned them," BS: "*Qatz*" - "detested them"; 32:39, "*'imi*" - "with me," BS: "But me"; 33:6, "*Metav*." The word *metav* sounds like *met* - "dead." All humans eventually die, therefore, Bekhor Shor interprets *metav* as "people."

⁷⁶ *Mahberet Menahem*, p. 147.

Chumash with Rashi's Commentary, p. 140.

⁷⁷ Ibn Janah, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, s.v., '-w-r.

⁷⁸ S. Goldman (ed.), *Talmud Yerushalmi, Bikurim 3:1*, N.Y.: Otzar Ha-Sefarim, 1968.

⁷⁹ *Talmud Bavli, Yoma 52a, b.*

⁸⁰ F. I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch*, N.Y.: Abingdon, 1970.

⁸¹ *Bereshit Rabba 37:6.*

⁸² *Baba Metziah 22:1, Qidushin 41:2.*

⁸³ *Ha-Miqra' Ki-Dmuto*, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁴ The Sages also formulated literary rules for Scriptural analysis, the thirteen rules of Rabbi Ishmael or the "Thirty-two Hermeneutical Rules of Rabbi Eliezer ben R. Jose ha-Galilee," being one well known. See, H. L. Strack, G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 25-34.

⁸⁵ Other instances in which Bekhor Shor points to a repetition of a word or phrase which aims at providing additional information include: Gen. 2:17, "You shall surly die (*mot tamut*)," meaning you shall die in this world and in the world to come (c.f. Midrashim and targumim); 9:25, "A servant of servants"; 31:30, "Now you shall go"; 40:23, "He did not remember...but forgot him"; 41:1, "At the end of two full days"; 49:3, "My vigor and the beginning of my strength"; Ex. 19:3, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob (Israel), and tell the children of Israel"; 22:4, "If a man will cause a field to be eaten [by an animal] and shall put in [the field] his beast"; 22:22, "If you afflict them in any way - '*ane ta'aneh*'"; 34:6, "The Lord, the Lord"; Lev. 11:3, "Whatsoever part the hoof - *mafreset parsah*"; 15:2, "When any man - '*ish 'ish*'"; 21:5, "They shall not make baldness upon their head - *yiqrehu qorhah*"; 25:43, "You shall not rule one over another with rigor - *lo tirdeh bo be-farekh*"; Num. 5:22, " '*amen, 'amen*," 5:24, "And he shall cause the woman to drink"; 5:27, "And he shall make her drink"; 7:18, "Netan'el...did offer"; 7:9, "He offered"; 10:5, "*Teru'ah*"; 7:6, "*Teru'ah*"; 12:13, "O God - *na' heal her now - na' "*"; 14:7, "Very very good land"; 15:41, "God your God"; 28:14, "Every month - *hodesh behodsho*," 30:3, "Vow a vow," "To bind his soul with a bind"; 32:30, "But if they will not pass over with you armed"; 36:7, 9, "From tribe to tribe"; Deut. 9:29, "They are your people and your inheritance"; 10:17, "God of gods, Lord of lords"; 15:9, "Take heed to yourself lest - *hishamer...pen*"; 13:16, "You shall surely smite - *hake takeh*"; 14:8, "You shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch... (in the meaning of 'eat')"; 14:2, "You shall truly tithe - '*aser te'aser*'"; 16:20, "Justice justice"; 17:8, "Between blood and blood"; 22:8, "That who shall fall will fall"; 22:7, "Send you send"; 25:3, "And he shall not exceed, lest he shall exceed"; 30:18, "You shall surly perish - '*avod to'vdun*'; 32:9, "Jacob is the lot of his inheritance - *hevel nahalato*."

⁸⁶ The thirty-second rule of Rabbi Eliezer discusses this matter, also called " '*eruv parshiyot*" (mixing of Bible passages), when a biblical passage pertains to a later time than a preceding text, and vice versa. See, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 34.

⁸⁷ *Talmud Bavli, Berakhot* 63a.

⁸⁸ *Sifra De Ve Rav Ve-Hu Sefer Torat Qohanim*, edited by Y. A. Boymil, 7:7, Jerusalem: Sifra, 1959.
Talmud Bavli, Yebamot 6a.

⁸⁹ E. Z. Melamed, *Mefarshei Ha-Miqra' II*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975, p. 520.

⁹⁰ *Talmud Bavli, Tosafot Rosh Ha-Shana* 13a, *Qidushin* 37b.

⁹¹ *Talmud Bavli*, Tosafot *Ta'anit* 20a.

⁹² Abraham Ibn Ezra, edited by, S. Assaf, N. Ben Menahem, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 8, col. 1164.

⁹³ Y. Nevo, "*Ha-Yahas Bein Parshanut Ha-Torah Shel Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor We-Ibn Ezra*," *Tarbitz* Vol. 51, (1982), pp. 503-507.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Perusho Shel Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor La-Torah, Introduction, p. 13, taken from *Sefer Assaf*, Jerusalem, 1953, pp. 357, 366.

⁹⁵ "*Ha-Yahas Beyn Parshanut Ha-Torah shel Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor We-Ibn Ezra*." Taken from: D. Rosin, *Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir als Schrifterklärer*, Breslau, 1880, p.74.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, taken from, Eleazar of Beaugency, *Commentaries on the Later Prophets: Isaiah*, edited by Nutt, London 1879, p. xxvii, and Zweig, "Der Pentateuch Kommentar des Joseph Bechor Shor zum funten Buche Moses," *MGWJ* 57 (1913), p. 549.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, taken from Walter, *Joseph Bechor Schor, der Letzte Nordfranzösischer Biblelexeget*, Breslau 1890, pp. 7, 20.

⁹⁸ *Mavo Le-Hakhmei Sarfat Mefarshei Ha-Miqra'*, p. lix.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. lix, n. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. x.

¹⁰¹ I. Twersky, J. Harris (eds.), *Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth Century Jewish Polymath*, Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰² *Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot*, pp. 55-62.

¹⁰³ Dunash Ben Labarat, *Teshuvot Dunash 'im Hakhraot Rabbenu Tam*, edited by Z. Filipowski, London: Me'orei Yeshenim, 1854.

¹⁰⁴ *Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot*, pp. 132-139, taken from S. Assaf, *Sefer Ha-Pesakim Le-R"Y Ha-Zaqen, Rabbenu Tam We-She'ar Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot*, Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume, N.Y., 1950.

¹⁰⁵ *Mavo Le-Hakhmei Sarfat Mefarshei Ha-Miqra'*, pp. xli-xliii.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot, p. 134.

¹⁰⁷ *Sefer Parshandata*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁸ Y. A. Rabin, *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael, Beshalah*, Jerusalem: Bamberg & Waherman, 1960, p. 108.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., *Mishpatim*, p. 259.
Talmud Bavli, Khetubot 47b.

¹¹⁰ M. A. Mirkin, *Midrash Rabba, Bereshit Rabba, Shemot Rabba* 3:6, Tel-Aviv: Yavne, 1968.

¹¹¹ *Sefer Parshandata*, p. 40.

¹¹² *Mavo Le-Hakhmei Sarfat Mefarshei Ha-Miqra'*, pp. xcii-xciv.

¹¹³ S. Japhet, "The Nature and Distribution of Medieval Compilatory Commentaries in the Light of Rabbi Joseph Qara's Commentary on the Book of Job", in M. Fishbane, *The Midrashic Imagination*, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1993, pp. 98-122.

¹¹⁴ *Mavo Le-Hakhmei Sarfat Mefarshei Ha-Miqra'*, p. cxiv.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., lxxiii.

¹¹⁶ *Mahberet Ha-Arukh*, s.v., *n-g-sh*, p. 208.

¹¹⁷ *Rashi*, p. 192.
Parshanut Ha-Miqra', pp. 77-78.
Mavo Le-Hakhmei Sarfat Mefarshei Ha-Miqra', p. cxiv.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. xciii.

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