

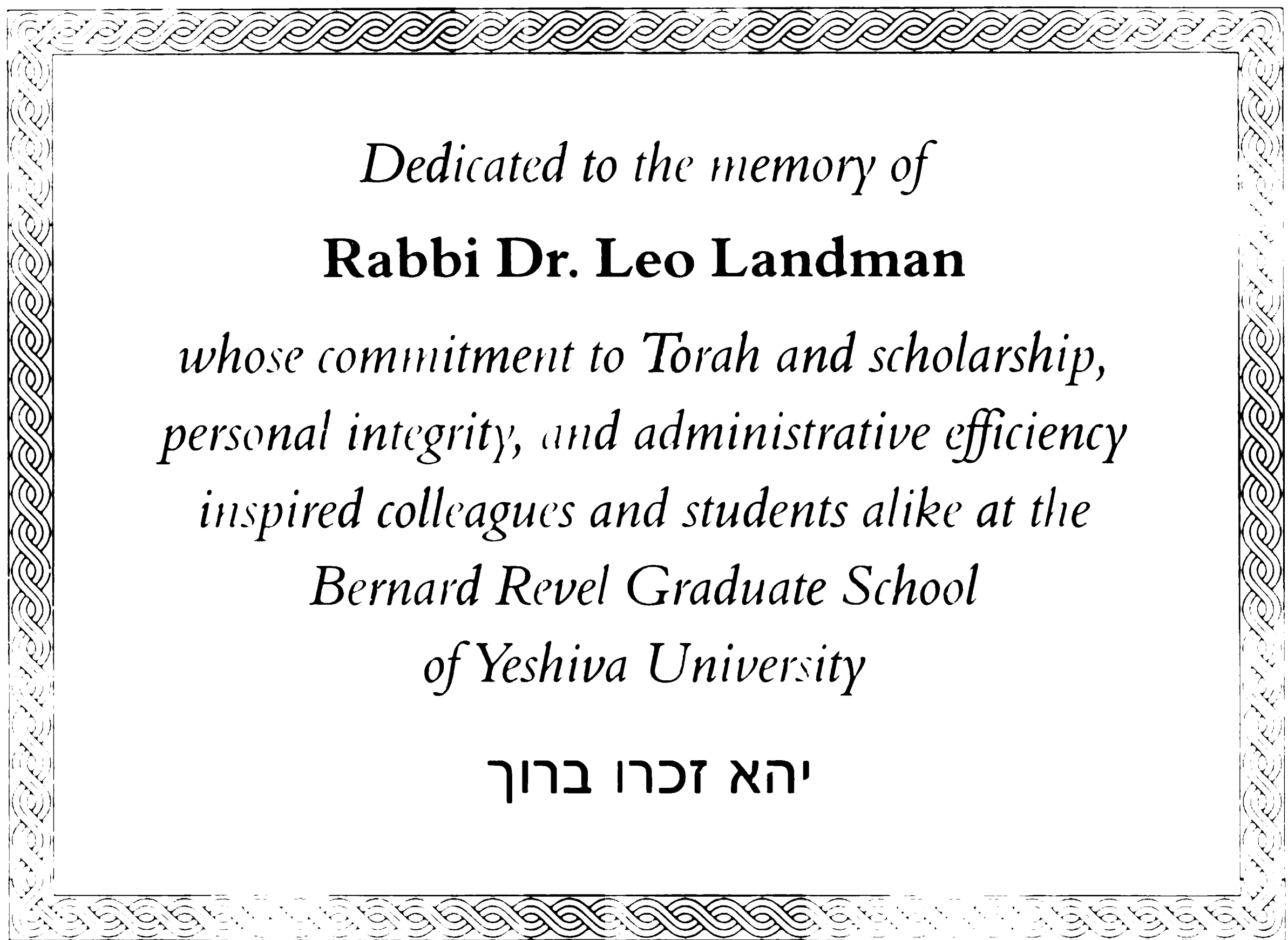
# Judaic Studies

*Shnayer Z. Leiman*

ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך

No. 2

Summer 2003



**Judaic Studies** is dedicated to the serious study of Jewish history, literature, and thought as they relate to traditional Judaism. It seeks to encourage the study and stimulate the discussion of the full spectrum of Jewish teaching, whether from the biblical, talmudic, medieval, or modern periods. Its only *a priori* commitment is to a teaching aptly expressed by the rabbis of yore: חותמו של הקב"ה אמת.

# Judaic Studies

Shnayer Z. Leiman

ואת כל  
אשר אצוה אותך:

Was Rashi's Torah Scroll Flawed?

Copyright © 2003, 2004

by

S.Z. Leiman

Kew Gardens Hills, New York

Second, revised edition

## 1. The Problem

Rashi at Exodus 25:22 reads:<sup>1</sup>

ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל: הרי ויו יתרה וטפלה, וכמוה הרבה  
במקרא, וכה תפתר: ואת אשר אדבר עמך שם את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני  
ישראל הוא.

**And all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people:** The *vav* [of the word ואת] is superfluous and meaningless. There are many other such instances in Scripture. Interpret the verse as follows:<sup>2</sup> That which I shall speak

---

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew text is taken from M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann, חמשה חומשי תורה, New York, n.d. The translation is my own.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew: וכה תפתר. In the light of some of the manuscript readings listed below (readings 15, 17, and 18), this is to be taken – as we have preferred – as a second person, masculine, singular *qal* form of פתר (literally: “and so you [the reader] shall interpret”). Other manuscript readings (e.g., reading 13) take this as a third person, feminine, singular *nif'al* form of פתר (literally: “and so it [the *vav*] shall be interpreted”). Either way, the phrase וכה תפתר complements – rather than contrasts with – the phrase הרי ויו זו יתרה וטפלה. Thus, Rosenbaum and Silbermann’s rendering of Rashi (“The *vav* of the word ואת is redundant and without import. . . However if you wish to explain this *vav* the verse must be interpreted as follows”) misconstrues what Rashi said.

Richard C. Steiner, in a personal communication, noted that at Exodus 25:12, the nearest case of meaningless *vav* in Rashi, the complementarity of the two phrases (in slightly different form) is presumed. Moreover, Rashi there explicitly states that the verse is interpreted, not the *vav*.

to you there [i.e., from above the cover of the Ark] is “all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people.”

Rashi, in effect, explains that the end of verse 22 “all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people” is the direct object of the verb in the phrase at the beginning of the verse “I shall speak to you from above the cover [of the Ark].” For this to be the case, there can be no *vav* attached to the word **אֵל**, i.e. to the particle that ordinarily introduces the direct object. Hence, for Rashi the *vav* here must be superfluous and meaningless. Rashi, of course, means that the *vav* is superfluous and meaningless semantically. Its presence in the biblical text, however, is established beyond cavil.

Rashi’s rather innocent exegetical comment led to an occasional raised eyebrow. In fact, all Torah scrolls and printed editions of Hebrew Scripture read **אֵל** at Exodus 25:22, not **וְאֵל**. Since the absence of a single letter — where it is required by the received text — renders a Torah scroll unfit (*pasul*),<sup>3</sup> it follows that if Rashi’s reading is correct, all our Torah scrolls are *pesulim*! If our Torah scrolls are correct, Rashi’s Torah scroll was *pasul*!<sup>4</sup> The problem

---

<sup>3</sup> See Maimonides, *Code*, הלכות ספר תורה 10:1. Cf. *Shulhan ’Arukh*, יורה דעה §275:6., where even the absence of a vowel letter (one of the *matres lectiones*) renders a Torah scroll unfit for use. The unsettled state of the text of biblical manuscripts and Torah scrolls, however, led to a partial relaxing of the rules governing the vowel letters in the medieval period. While an error in spelling (i.e., the insertion of a vowel letter when not warranted, or its absence when required) rendered a Torah scroll unfit for use *ab initio*, if the error was discovered during a public reading — and it did not affect the meaning or pronunciation of the word in question — the Torah scroll did not have to be replaced immediately and the reader could continue to read from the flawed Torah scroll. The error, however, would have to be corrected in due course by a scribe. See, e.g., *Shulhan ’Arukh*, אורח חיים §143:4 and commentaries. The *vav* of **וְאֵל**, of course, is a consonantal *vav*, and not a vowel letter.

<sup>4</sup> Assuming he owned one. More likely, Rashi was working with a codex

assumes prodigious proportions if it is rephrased in the following manner: If Rashi can present a different reading of the Torah than that which is found in our present day Torah scrolls, what then is the definition of תּוֹרַה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם?<sup>5</sup> Which Torah, Rashi's or ours, represents the Torah of Moses?

## 2. The Solution

In 1982, Mosad Harav Kook published a new edition of Rashi's commentary on the Torah.<sup>6</sup> The editor, Rabbi Charles B. Chavel, claimed that the Mosad Harav Kook edition improved upon the earlier efforts of Abraham Berliner,<sup>7</sup> in part because Chavel had access to the *editio princeps* of Rashi – Reggio di Calabria, 1475 – whereas Berliner did not. Indeed, Chavel notes that many a difficult Rashi has been resolved by examining the *editio princeps* in conjunction with other manuscript readings. He labels the *editio princeps* as “the most trustworthy member of Rashi's house.”<sup>8</sup>

Not surprisingly, Chavel turned to the *editio princeps* in order to solve our difficult Rashi at Exodus 25:22. Chavel correctly reports that our passage is not there! In its stead one finds: **אֶת כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אֲצוּה אוֹתָךְ אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: אֵל כָּתוּב בְּלֹא וַיֹּ**

Thus, Rashi did not preserve a reading **וַאֲת** and there is no superfluous and meaningless *vav* in our verse. What Rashi meant

---

which, in any event, may have reflected the reading of some Torah scrolls in Rashi's day.

<sup>5</sup> For the classic medieval formulation of the תּוֹרַה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם doctrine, see Maimonides, פִּירוּשׁ הַמִּשְׁנָה, M. Sanhedrin 10:1, principle 8 (ed. Kafih, Jerusalem, 1965, vol. 2, pp. 143–144). Cf. R. Joseph Albo, סֵפֶר הָעֵקָרִים, III:22 (ed. I. Husik, Philadelphia, 1946, vol. 3, pp. 195–201).

<sup>6</sup> פִּירוּשֵׁי רִשִׁי עַל הַתּוֹרָה, Jerusalem, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> A. Berliner, ed., רִשִׁי עַל הַתּוֹרָה, Berlin, 1866 (henceforth: Berliner<sup>1</sup>). A revised, second edition appeared in Frankfurt, 1905 (henceforth: Berliner<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>8</sup> פִּירוּשֵׁי רִשִׁי עַל הַתּוֹרָה, p. 15, n. 61.

by *אל כתוב בלא וי* is not immediately apparent. Chavel suggests that God delivered two kinds of messages to Moses. One appeared to pertain directly to Moses and was not conveyed to the Israelites ("*אצוה אותך*") and the other pertained directly to the Israelites and was conveyed to them ("*אל בני ישראל*"). A reader might have presumed that these are two separate categories and might have expected Scripture to read here "*אשר אצוה אותך ואל בני ישראל*," hence Rashi's stress on the lack of a *vav* attached to the *אל* in our verse. The import of Rashi's comment, Chavel explains, is that there was one category only. Whenever God spoke to Moses from above the cover of the Ark – even if it appeared to pertain to Moses only – it was about matters that pertained to the Israelites.<sup>9</sup>

In a recent essay on the significance of early printed editions of the Hebrew book, Zvi Ephraim Babad published a photograph of the page containing Rashi's comment to Exodus 25:22 as it appears in the *editio princeps*, Reggio di Calabria, 1475. He added:<sup>10</sup>

We see clearly on the third line [of the page] that Rashi wrote: *את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל: אל כתוב בלא וי*. Our texts of Rashi, however, read: *ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל: הרי וי יתירה וטפלה, וכמוה הרבה במקרא. . .* In our Torah scrolls and printed Bibles *ואת* does not appear at all, but rather *את*. The supercommentaries on Rashi – among them the Mizrahi<sup>11</sup> – addressed the issue, each according to his own way.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 272, n. 35. This suggestion was first put forward by Chavel in his *קונטרס לשונו רש"י*, Jerusalem, 1970, pp. 15–16. Cf. R. Isaac ha-Levi Zembrovksi's commentary on Rashi to Ex. 25:22 in *גרש כרמל*, Warsaw, 1886, vol. 2, p. 139.

<sup>10</sup> Z. E. Babad, "*געשיכטע פון שריפט, דרוק, ש"ס'ן און צענוזר*," *Der Yid*, February 25, 2000, section 2, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> R. Eliyahu Mizrahi, *חומש הרא"ם*, Petah Tikvah, 1993, vol. 2, p. 412. Mizrahi (d. circa 1526) was among the first commentators on Rashi to address this issue. The issue was addressed earlier by a fourteenth century Tosafist, R. Menahem of Troyes. See *רבותינו בעלי התוספות* in *תוספות ריב"א*.



This was especially the case since Ibn Ezra mentioned [the same reading as Rashi]. But in the light of the *editio princeps* of Rashi it emerges that Rashi, in effect, warned against the reading mentioned by Ibn Ezra. Needless to say, our understanding of Rashi assumes a printer's error – a typo – in the *editio princeps*. The text should read: **את כתוב בלא ו"ו**. Moreover, it is obvious – and logic dictates – that it is preferable to emend a word in the printed text of Rashi than [not to emend and] assume that either all our Torah scrolls, God forbid, are erroneous or that Rashi's Torah scroll was erroneous.

Babad's solution is similar to Chavel's. Both posit – in the light of the *editio princeps* – that Rashi never read **ואת**, hence Rashi's reading does not conflict with our Torah scrolls. Where Babad differs from Chavel is with regard to the meaning of **אל כתוב בלא ו"ו**. Babad's emendation is persuasive and surely captures what the *editio princeps* intended to say.

### 3. The Problem with the Solution

Methodologically, the solution proffered by Chavel and Babad is flawed. This is true for several reasons:

1. To begin with, we need to determine whether in principle it is possible for Rashi, or any rabbinic text for that matter, to present a legitimate reading that differs from that preserved in the masoretic text of our received Hebrew Bibles. If not, we would have to assume that all variant readings in Rashi and other rabbinic texts are either scribes' and printers' errors, or else due to a

---

תוספות השלם, Jerusalem, 1967, to Exodus 25:22. Cf. Y. Gellis, ed., Jerusalem, 1993, vol. 9, p. 54 and the references cited there. It was addressed again in the early sixteenth century by R. Abraham Bukarat (d. circa 1516), **ספר זכרון** (ed. by M. Philip), Petah Tivah, 1978, pp. 271–272.

temporary lapse of memory on the part of the author. Even a cursory reading of rabbinic literature, however, proves that variant readings of biblical texts, while mostly of minor significance, do appear throughout the talmudic and midrashic literature. Many of these can be discounted because they reflect scribal error or lapses of memory. One does discover, if only sporadically, texts which clearly reflect a variant reading of a biblical text.<sup>12</sup> Thus, we must not *a priori* assume that variant readings of a biblical text preserved in Rashi are to be attributed to the scribes who recorded Rashi's comments. Rashi's וַאֲת may well be a legitimate reading that differs from our Torah scrolls and printed Bibles. Lists of such variant readings preserved in Rashi have been compiled by Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman,<sup>13</sup> Henry Englander,<sup>14</sup> and others.<sup>15</sup>

2. Second, we need to examine the evidence regarding this particular reading at Exodus 25:22: וַאֲת.

a) Ibn Ezra reads: וַאֲת.<sup>16</sup>

b) Hizzequini reads: וַאֲת.<sup>17</sup>

c) There were extant at least 27 Bible manuscripts scattered in libraries throughout Europe that read: וַאֲת.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Tosafot to b. Shabbat 55b; R. Akiva Eger's comments in גליון הש"ס, *ad loc.*; and R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes' comments, *ad loc.* See the variant readings of biblical texts in rabbinic literature gathered in S. Rosenfeld, *משפחת סופרים*, Vilna, 1883, and in V. Aptowitzer, *Das Schriftwort in der Rabbinischen Literatur*, Vienna, 1906–15 (reissued: New York, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> K. Kahana, "גליון רש"י לרד"צ הופמן," in M. Auerbach, ed., *ספר הזכרון לרבי יצחק אייזיק הלוי* Bnei Brak, 1964, p. 165.

<sup>14</sup> H. Englander, "Grammatical Elements and Terminology in Rashi's Biblical Commentaries," *HUCA* 14(1939), pp. 426–429.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Y. Avineri, *היכל רש"י*, Jerusalem, 1979, vol. 1, p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Y.L. Krinsky, *תורה: מחוקקי יהודה*, Bnei Brak, 1961, vol. 2, p. 419, n. 41.

<sup>17</sup> C.D. Chavel, ed., *פירושי החוקוני על התורה*, Jerusalem, 1981, p. 291. Not all editions of *חוקוני* read: וַאֲת. See, e.g., M.M. Aharon, ed., *חוקוני עם אוצר החוקוני*, Jerusalem, 1993, vol. 1, p. 408.

<sup>18</sup> See Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi, *Variae Lectiones Veteris Testamenti*, Parma, 1784, vol. 1, p. 69. Cf. the attestations of וַאֲת at Exodus 25:22 listed

d) The rendering of the Septuagint suggests an original Hebrew reading of: ואת.<sup>19</sup>

3. We need to examine whether the general content of the Rashi in question is supported by Rashi's comments elsewhere on Scripture (or on the Talmud). A key phrase here is: הרי ויו יתרה וטפלה והרבה כמוה במקרא. Does Rashi indeed maintain that there are numerous *vavs* throughout Scripture whose import is superfluous and meaningless? A brief survey of Rashi's comments elsewhere in Scripture suffices to prove that for Rashi meaningless *vav* was commonplace. See, e.g., Rashi's comments to Gen. 36:24; Ex. 25:12; Lev. 7:16; Ezek. 47:11; and Dan. 8:13. Often in these comments, Rashi uses the very same terminology he uses here at Ex. 25:22.<sup>20</sup>

4. Having "solved" Rashi, one needs to account for the strange reading of ואת in Ibn Ezra and Hizzequni.<sup>21</sup> Neither Chavel nor

---

in Benjamin Kennicott, *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum cum Variis Lectionibus*, Oxford, 1776, vol. 1, p. 159; and in Christian David Ginsburg, ed., *חמשה חומשי תורה*, London, 1926, p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> See A. Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, Stuttgart, 1965, vol 1, p. 128. Cf. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart, 1977, to Exodus 25:22. Our verse is attested once (in Hebrew) in the Dead Sea scrolls but, unfortunately, it occurs in a fragment that is missing the portion of the verse that concerns us. See P.M. Skehan, E. Ulrich, and J.E. Sanderson, eds., *Qumran Cave 4: IV (= Discoveries in the Judaean Desert IX)*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 109–110.

<sup>20</sup> For a survey of medieval Jewish exegetical approaches to meaningless *vav*, including Rashi's, see Richard C. Steiner, "Meaninglessness, Meaningfulness, and Super-meaningfulness in Scripture: An Analysis of the Controversy Surrounding Dan. 2:12 in the Middle Ages," *JQR* 82(1992), pp. 431–447.

<sup>21</sup> It is reported that R. Hayyim Heller claimed that R. Saadia Gaon (d. 942) read: ואת. See H.M. Brecher, "הקדמת הרב המגיה" in *תנ"ך עם תרגום יהואש*, New York, 1941, vol. 1, Appendix, p. 1. But an examination of the תפסיר to Exodus 25:22 provides no compelling evidence in support of such a claim. See J. Derenbourg, *Version Arabe du Pentateuque de R. Saadia ben*

Babad makes any attempt to do so. Amazingly, Chavel makes no mention of the readings in Ibn Ezra and Hizzequni, despite the fact that Berliner carefully noted the two readings in the first and second editions of his *רש"י על התורה*.

5. More importantly, having “solved” Rashi, one needs to account for the *lectio difficilior*, i.e., for the difficult reading preserved in the present text of Rashi. If the original text of Rashi in fact read *א*, and specifically denied that the verse contained a meaningless *vav*, why would any scribe have created a reading *וא*, which not only renders the verse meaningless, but also flies in the face of the readings of most (perhaps: all) Torah scrolls? Until one accounts for the *lectio difficilior*, all solutions proffered for a specific textual problem remain tentative at best.

#### 4. The Printed Evidence

The single, most important methodological flaw in Chavel’s and Babad’s treatment of Rashi to Ex. 25:22 is the selective use of evidence. Both pounced upon the reading of the *editio princeps* largely — as they themselves tell us — because it solved a serious problem for them. Not the problem of what Rashi really said, but rather the problem of Rashi coming into conflict with the *textus receptus* of the Hebrew Bible. But in order to solve a difficult Rashi, intellectual honesty demands that a much broader swathe be cut.

Despite the best efforts of Berliner and Chavel, we do not have a critical edition of Rashi’s commentary on the Torah. Given the fact that Rashi constantly revised his commentaries, and that numerous glosses were added by others to all the extant manuscripts of Rashi’s commentary (a practice already initiated during

---

*Iosef Al-Fayyumi*, Paris, 1893, vol. 1, p. 117 (to Exodus 25:22). Nor is there anything in Y. Ratzaby, ed., *פירושי רב סעדיה גאון לספר שמות*, Jerusalem, 1998, that supports such a claim.





1. Reggio di Calabria, 1475:

את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל אל<sup>25</sup> כתוב בלא וי".

2. Guadalajara, 1476:

אשר אצוה אתך כתוב בלא ואו.<sup>26</sup>

3. Rome, 1480 or earlier:

ואת אשר אצוה אותך וגו'.

4. Bologna, 1482:

ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל הרי הוי"ו זו יתירה וטפלה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכה תפתר ואת אשר אדבר עמך שם את אשר אדבר<sup>27</sup> אותך אל בני ישראל הוא.

5. Soncino, 1487:

ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל הרי ויו זו יתירה וטפלה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכה תפתר ואת אשר אדבר עמך שם את אשר אדבר<sup>27</sup> אותך אל בני ישראל הוא.

6. Hajar, 1490:

את כל אשר אצוה אותך.

7. Lisbon, 1491:

lacks passage in its entirety

---

<sup>25</sup> אל is almost certainly a printer's error for את. See below, manuscript reading 19. Cf. R. Abraham Bukarat, ספר זכרון (above, note 11) *loc. cit.* and W. Heidenheim, "הבנת המקרא" to Exodus 25:22, printed in his מודע לבינה, Vilna, 1888. Bukarat and Heidenheim cite manuscripts that read: את [כתיב] בלא וי".

<sup>26</sup> Some suggest that the sense of this reading is that the word אתך is written without a *vav*. See M.M. Brachfeld, יוסף הלל, New York, 1987, vol. 1, p. 258. If so, this is surely an invented Rashi, for no such biblical reading is recorded in the literature. Moreover, it is hardly the practice of Rashi to record variant biblical spellings when they have no impact on biblical exegesis.

<sup>27</sup> This misreading [the correct reading is: אצוה] was also recorded in a manuscript of Rashi that was seen by R. Joseph b. Yissakhar, יוסף דעת, Prague, 1609, p. 57b. The manuscript seems to have contained the same text as printed readings 4 and 5, plus a marginal comment that read: בכל החומשים גם בכל ספרי התורות לא נמצא מלת ואת בוי".

8. Naples, 1491:

ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל הרי ויו זו יתירה וטפלה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכך פתרונה ואת אשר אדבר עמך שם היא את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל.

9. Zamora, 1492:

ואת כל אשר אצוה הרי וו זו יתירה וטפלה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכך תפתר ואשר אדבר עמך שם את אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל הוא.

Listed above are the readings from the first 9 printed editions of Rashi. It is interesting to note that no two editions print exactly the same text! Some, perhaps most of the variants are clearly based upon the different base manuscripts used by the printers; others are likely due to editorial activity based in part on a collation of readings from different manuscripts and printed editions. Clearly, three basic traditions are represented in these texts:

ואת: printed editions 3,4,5,8, and 9

אח: printed editions 1,2, and 6.

no comment by Rashi: printed edition 7.

The *ואת/אח* dichotomy may well reflect an Ashkenazic recension of Rashi (favoring *ואת*) vis-à-vis a Sephardic recension of Rashi (favoring *אח*). Such a dichotomy, supported by the place of printing and by the cultural hegemony of each place at the time of printing, was suggested long ago – without reference to our passage – by Isaiah Sonne.<sup>28</sup> About the third tradition we shall have more to say below, after we examine the manuscript evidence. Be that as it may, there is nothing about the *editio princeps* that makes it a more trustworthy witness than the other 8 editions listed here.<sup>29</sup> It is possible, even likely that all the witnesses were once manuscripts. They reflect three basic traditions that were

<sup>28</sup> See above, note 22.

<sup>29</sup> Moreover, it appears likely that the Reggio di Calabria, 1475 edition of Rashi – the first printed Hebrew book with a date of publication – was not the *editio princeps* of Rashi. Printed edition 3 (Rome, 1480 or earlier)

legitimized prior to the advent of printing. Further guidance, if it comes at all, will have to come from the manuscripts.

### 5. The Manuscript Evidence

Ideally, one should examine all the Rashi manuscripts to our passage. If this study will spur on a reader to do so **והיה זה שכרי**. I have examined a dozen or so Rashi manuscripts and list here 11 manuscript readings. The list includes all the manuscript readings (of our passage) – a total of 3 – specifically mentioned by Berliner and Chavel. I list 8 other manuscript readings that either reflect the range of the variants preserved in the manuscripts or are considered to be – by scholars – among the best of the extant Rashi manuscripts. The readings are listed more or less in chronological order and are identified by country of origin. Unless dated by a scribe (as in readings 12 and 20), one can never be certain about the date (and often, the specific place of origin) of a particular manuscript.

10. Oxford 2440 (12th-13th century, Germany):

**את אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישר'.**

11. Oxford 186 (13th century, Germany):

**ואת כל אשר אצוה הרי וי'ו זו יתירה וטפילה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכן תפתר ואשר אדבר עמך שם את אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל הוא.**

12. Munich 5 (13th century, Germany):

**ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך הרי ויו זו יתירה וטפילה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכן תפתר ואשר אדבר עמך שם את אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישר' הוא.**

13. Weimar Q165 (13th century, Germany):

**ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך את כת' בלא ויו הרי ויו זו יתירה וטפילה וכמוה הרבה במקרא' וכן תפתיר ואשר אדבר עמך שם את אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישר' הוא.**

---

was probably published sometime between 1469 and 1472. See A.K. Offenber, *op. cit.* (above, note 24), p. 134.



14. Leipzig 1 (13th-14th century, Germany):<sup>30</sup>

ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך הרי ו'ו' יתירה וטפלה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכה [תפתר]<sup>31</sup> ואשר אדבר עמך שם את אשר אצוה [אותך אל]<sup>31</sup> בני ישר' הוא.

15. Jewish Theological Seminary 745 (13th-14th century, Germany):

ואת כל אשר אותך הרי ו'ו' יתירה וטפילה וכמוה הרבה במקר' וכן תפתרנו ואשר אדבר שם את אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל.

16. Jewish Theological Seminary 747 (14th century, Italy):

את אשר אצוה אל בני ישראל על בני ישראל.

17. Vienna 23 (14th-15th century, Germany):

את<sup>32</sup> כל אשר אצוה אותך הרי ו'ו' יתירה וטפילה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכך תפתור אשר אדבר עמך שם את כל אשר אתך הוא.

18. Vienna 24 (14th-15th century, Germany):

ואת כל אשר אצוה אותך הרי ו'ו' זו יתירה וטפילה וכמוה הרבה במקרא וכך תפתור ואשר אדבר עמך שם את אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישר' הוא.

19. Jüdisch-Theologischen Seminar Breslau 103 (15th century or earlier, Germany):<sup>33</sup>

את כל אשר אצוה את כתיב בלא ו'ו' לומר ודברתי אתך מעל הכפרת ומהו את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל.

---

<sup>30</sup> On the significance (and date) of this manuscript, see the exchange between A. Grossman and E. Touitou in the following essays: A. Grossman, "הגהות ר' שמעיה ל'נוסח פירוש רש"י לתורה," *Tarbiz* 60(1990), pp. 67–98; E. Touitou, "האמנם משקף כתב-יד" לייפציג 1 את הנוסח המקורי של פירוש רש"י, "כתב-יד לייפציג 1 ופירושו," *Tarbiz* 61(1991), pp. 85–115; A. Grossman, "תרומתו האפשרית של," *Tarbiz* 61(1992), pp. 301–315; E. Touitou, "כ"י לייפציג 1 לשחזור הנוסח המקורי של פירוש רש"י" לתורה – תשובה לאברהם גרוסמן," *Tarbiz* 62(1993), pp. 298–303.

<sup>31</sup> Words in brackets were illegible, but easily reconstructed. Also illegible (to me) was a marginal comment to this line of Rashi in the Leipzig 1 manuscript.

<sup>32</sup> It's quite obvious that the scribe has lopped off the *vav* from ואת due to the reading of our Torah scrolls. This manuscript reading assumes an original ואת in Rashi and probably should count as evidence for such a reading.

<sup>33</sup> The present whereabouts of this manuscript is unknown. Until

20. Manuscript Regensburg (15th century, Germany):<sup>34</sup>  
lacks passage in its entirety

What needs to be noted first is that no two manuscripts read exactly alike! And just like the printed editions, the manuscripts reflect three basic reading traditions:

ואה: 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18

אה: 10, 16, 19

no comment by Rashi: 20

Moreover, the distribution of readings in each category is almost exactly the same as in the printed Bibles. A large majority favors ואה; followed by a smaller group that favors אה; and only one witness supports no comment by Rashi. At the very least, this is a clear vindication of the early printed editions. Apparently, they

---

World War II it was housed in the Hebrew manuscript collection at the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar in Breslau. See the brief listings in B. Zuckermann, *Catalog der Bibliothek des Breslauer jüdisch-theologischen Seminars*, Breslau, 1876, p. 12, and in D.S. Loewinger and B.D. Weinryb, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Library of the Juedisch-Theologisches Seminar in Breslau*, Wiesbaden, 1965, p.27. For fuller descriptions of, and citations from, this lost manuscript, see A. Berliner, "Eine wiedergefundene Handschrift," *MGWJ* 13(1864), pp. 217–224; and M. Landsberg, "Der Codex von Raschi's und Raschbam's Pentateuch-Commentarien auf der Breslauer Seminar-Bibliothek," *MGWJ* 14(1865), pp. 370–389 and 416–425.

The reading listed here is taken from Beliner<sup>1</sup>, p. 148, note 10. Others who saw this manuscript record a slightly different reading: ומה instead ומהו. See M. Mendelssohn, באור (to Exodus 25:22), Prague, 1860, vol. 2, p. 163; S. Dubno, תיקון סופרים, Amsterdam, 1803, part 2, p. 27b; and M. Landsberg (in the essay cited above), p. 379.

<sup>34</sup> Manuscript Regensburg is described in Berliner<sup>1</sup>, p. XII. It was written by Samuel Ashkenazi of Regensburg in the year 1439. The reading is cited in Berliner<sup>1</sup>, p. 148, note 10. Berliner cites there a second Rashi manuscript (from the Saraval library) that lacks our passage in its entirety. I do not know if either of the manuscripts is extant.

accurately reflect the state and range of the preserved manuscripts. Also noteworthy is the fact that the range of readings in the Ashkenazi manuscripts (listed here) anticipates the readings of the “Sephardic” recension identified by Sonne. One needn’t turn to Spain in order to account for the variant readings.

In terms of weighing the readings, deciding which is “original,” and accounting for the variants, probably no two minds will agree on how to proceed. And surely the wise will wait until all the evidence is in. Nonetheless, despite not having seen all the trees, the contour of the forest (it seems to me, at least) is clear as day. The key is provided by reading 13. But let me first present my accounting of the various readings, and then explain reading 13 in its proper setting.

The *lectio difficilior* is וַאֲת and, doubtless, it is the original reading. Rashi based his comment on a biblical manuscript (probably a codex) that read וַאֲת. In order to make sense out of the verse, Rashi wisely identified the *vav* of וַאֲת as belonging to the category of superfluous and meaningless *vavs*. Readings 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 18 all preserve (with slight variants) the original reading of Rashi.

Scribes very quickly ran up against a textual brick wall: their Bible manuscripts read אַת, with no *vav*. Indeed, so pervasive was this reading, that today all Torah scrolls and printed editions of the Hebrew Bible read אַת without a *vav*. It is remarkable that despite this pervasive reading, the majority of Rashi manuscripts and printed editions preserve what Rashi wrote, namely וַאֲת. The minority that attempted to come to grips with the problem applied different strategies in order to resolve it.

### *Strategy 1:*

**Excise from Rashi whatever conflicts with our biblical text.**

Reading 10 removes the *vav* from וַאֲת, and the phrase beginning הָרִי וַיּוֹז יִתְּרָה and all that follows it. Since there is no problem (with אַת), there is no need for a solution. What’s left is an emasculated biblical phrase with no comment! There can be no clearer

evidence of the secondary character of this reading.<sup>35</sup> Chavel, in an attempt to transform textual vice into virtue, claimed that reading 10 connects to the previous comment of Rashi, **ד"ה ודברתי**, **אתך מעל הכפרת**.<sup>36</sup> This is belied by Rashi's source for the previous comment, Sifre on Numbers, which does not (nor does it need to) cite the biblical phrase. Moreover, the scribe of reading 10 entered phrase dividers throughout the Rashi manuscript. Such dividers appear immediately before and after reading 10, setting it off from what comes before and after it.

Doubtless, strategy 1 led to another version of Rashi: reading 16. Since the hanging biblical phrase was without comment, it could be rescued (as a Rashi) only if a meaningful exegetical comment could be attached to it. Reading 16 suggests that the force of **אל** in our verse is: "concerning" [so: NJPS], rather than "unto" [so: KJV and OJPS] the Israelites.<sup>37</sup>

Strategy 1 is also responsible for the *vav* that has been lopped off from **ואת** in reading 17.<sup>38</sup>

### *Strategy 2:*

#### **Omit Rashi's comment in its entirety.**

So reading 20.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Note that manuscript reading 10 anticipates printed reading 6. A manuscript reading that is exactly the same as printed reading 6 is published in M.M. Brachfeld, *op. cit.* (above, note 26), vol. 1, p. 258. It reads: **את כל אשר אצוה אותך**. For a description of the manuscript, see Brachfeld, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 12–13.

<sup>36</sup> **פירושי רש"י על התורה**, p. 272, note 35, end.

<sup>37</sup> For **אל=על** in Rashi, see the samples adduced by Rashi in his comment to Gen. 37:35 **ד"ה ארר אל בני** and the additional references in H.C. Englander (above, note 14), p. 419. Cf. Rashi to Is. 23:11 (kindly called to my attention by Richard C. Steiner). For **צוה אל**, with **אל** usually understood as **על**, see 2 Sam. 17:23. But Rashi offers no comment on that verse.

<sup>38</sup> See above, note 32.

<sup>39</sup> Note that manuscript reading 20 anticipates printed reading 7.

*Strategy 3:*

**Add a marginal comment: אַת כְּתִיב בְּלֹא ו'.**

This allows Rashi's reading וַאֲת to be preserved in the text of Rashi, while alerting the reader to the fact that the biblical text reads: אַת. While none of the 11 readings presented here record this strategy, it seems clear that such a marginal comment is presupposed by readings 13 and 19.<sup>40</sup> Reading 13, as it stands, is self-contradictory and, therefore, impossible. Clearly, the scribe incorporated the marginal comment אַת כְּתִיב בְּלֹא ו' into the text of Rashi. This phenomenon is known to all readers of manuscripts and needs no further discussion.

In reading 19, the marginal comment has largely replaced Rashi. The reading incorporates Rashi's solution, but since there was no problem the solution is superfluous. The word לוֹמַר underscores the secondary character of this invented Rashi. The lack of the *vav* hardly dictates which part of the verse is the direct object.

Thus, we have accounted for all the readings listed here. No doubt some readers will turn all these arguments on their head and claim (together with Chavel) that Rashi's original read אַת, as in readings 10, 16, and 19. But reading 10 is meaningless, and there would be no reason for inventing it as an abridged version of 16 or 19. Moreover, if we assume that Rashi's original reading was אַת, the preponderance of readings such as 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17 (see note 32), and 18 (all: וַאֲת), makes little sense given the minuscule number of biblical manuscripts that actually read וַאֲת. The simplest way to account for all the evidence is to assume that Rashi's original read וַאֲת. Based upon such an assumption, all other readings in the manuscripts and the early printed editions can be accounted for without sophistry and hair-splitting.

---

<sup>40</sup> See above, printed reading 1 and the evidence adduced in note 25.



## 6. Conclusion

Rashi's Torah manuscript read  $\text{נא}$  at Exodus 25:22.<sup>41</sup> This was hardly a flawed reading. Rather, Rashi's Torah manuscript preserved a well-attested variant reading in the biblical manuscripts, especially in Ashkenaz. Rashi's comment provides a meaningful sense for the verse despite the disruptive *vav*. All the  $\text{נא}$  versions of Rashi to this verse are simply responses to the fact that their biblical texts did not have the *vav* that Rashi had to confront and explain away. The lack (or: inclusion) of the *vav* need not threaten

---

<sup>41</sup> In the light of our investigation, one can only admire the astuteness of R. Abraham Bukarat (15th-16th century; see above, note 11), one of the first commentators on Rashi to address our difficult passage. He concluded as follows:

After begging forgiveness for speaking out against the Book of the Anointed One of the Lord, I say that the Torah scroll that Rashi wrote his comments on read  $\text{נא}$  with a *vav*. That is why he found it necessary to comment on it, as in the first version [of Rashi] that I recorded. It is not possible to claim that this entire passage was added [to Rashi's text] by scribes. Moreover, the language is clearly that of Rashi. His graceful and fluent style is recognizable to all who are accustomed to it.

Yet another early commentator on Rashi, R. Dosa the Greek (late 14th- early 15th century) wrote:

The rabbinic scholars of Ashkenaz asked me: "How could Rashi write that this *vav* is superfluous and meaningless when in fact it does not appear at all in our texts?" I answered: Perhaps in Rashi's text of the Torah it was written with a *vav*, and it was the ancient practice to write  $\text{נא}$  with a *vav*. . . , but nowadays it is written without a *vav*. . . . When I was in Ashkenaz, in Vienna, I discovered a very old Torah manuscript at the home of R. Abraham b. Hayyim. It had  $\text{נא}$  with a *vav*! But when I searched the Torah manuscripts in the Greek Jewish communities, I found none with a *vav*.

See A. Neubauer, "Commentar zu Raschi's Pentateuch-Commentar von Dossa aus Widdin," *Israelitische Letterbode* 8(1882-83), p. 39. I am indebted to Professor Jordan S. Penkower of Bar-Ilan University for calling the R. Dosa passage to my attention.

the concept of *תורה מן השמים*. Once the Torah was given over to human hands, it became subject to all the vicissitudes of textual transmission.<sup>42</sup> No rabbinic scholar of stature ever denied this basic fact.<sup>43</sup> There are masoretic manuals and halakhic guidelines

---

<sup>42</sup> The formulation of R. Yaakov Weinberg (late Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Ner Israel in Baltimore, Maryland) in his *Fundamentals and Faith: Insights into the Rambam's 13 Principles*, Southfield, 1991, pp. 90–91, is instructive:

It is difficult to understand *Ani Ma'amin* literally, i.e., that the Torah we now possess is the same Torah given to Moshe Rabbeinu . . . We are told that after the destruction of the Temple, when Ezra returned to Israel, he found three Torah scrolls which were considered valid. Even so, there were minor discrepancies among them, which were maintained or discarded depending on whether they appeared in two of the three scrolls. Although the Torah itself instructs Jews to follow the majority in making a decision, one suspects that after many such occurrences, his decisions are not going to produce *absolutely* accurate reproductions of the original Sinai version. The Talmud, too, says that we are no longer experts in the exact spelling of many words. Consequently, the rabbis could not count the exact number of letters in the Torah. Certainly, these were very minor variances — such as spelling a word with a *hei* or an *alef*, or with or without a *vav* — changes which did not seem to affect the meaning significantly.

The Rambam knew very well that these variations existed when he defined his Principles. The words of *Ani Ma'amin* and the words of the Rambam, “the entire Torah in our possession today,” must not be taken literally, implying that all the letters of the present Torah are the exact letters given to Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, it should be understood in a general sense that the Torah we learn and live by is for all intents and purposes the same Torah that was given to Moshe Rabbeinu.

<sup>43</sup> Indeed, one who would deny this basic fact would also have to posit that Torah scrolls may never be corrected, a halakhic and practical *reductio ad absurdum*. This does not preclude a kind of determinist view held by some that the majority reading of our present biblical texts — however much they may differ from the readings of the originals in antiquity — must have been ordained by God. Such a view allows for the

for establishing an official text of the Torah, specifically for doubtful readings. Doubt may persist, but the wonder is that the Torah has been so well preserved. Some texts from Qumran (the Dead Sea scrolls) and many others from Wadi Murabaat, all close to 2000 years old, testify to the general accuracy of the masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible.

What is true for the Torah is true for the text of Rashi as well. The wonder is that its text has been so well preserved, despite the persecutions, expulsions, and peregrinations that have accompanied the Jewish people throughout the centuries. The preservation in print of Rashi's **וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אִצּוּהוּ אוֹתָךְ** is a sample of textual transmission at its best.<sup>44</sup>

---

correcting of errors that clearly represent minority readings. For Jewish perspectives on "textual determinism", whether relating to biblical or rabbinic texts, see the sources cited by Hayyim Bloch, **היכל לדברי חז"ל**, New York, 1948, p. 9; S. Rosenberg, **חוקר המקרא במחשבה היהודית**, in U. Simon, ed., **המקרא ואנחנו**, Tel-Aviv, 1979, p. 109, note 46; and Y.S. Spiegel, **עמודים בתולדות הספר העברי**, Ramat-Gan, 1996, p. 530.

<sup>44</sup> I am indebted to Richard C. Steiner for his careful reading of an earlier draft of this essay. The errors that remain are the ones I insisted upon despite his sound advice. After submitting the manuscript of this essay for publication, **רש"י השלם: שמות**, vol. 3, Jerusalem, 2003, appeared in print. Upon examining its treatment of Rashi to Exodus 25:22, I am pleased to report that its abbreviated analysis is right on target. Nonetheless, the very succinct treatment in **רש"י השלם** hardly renders this essay superfluous.







