YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**GREAT BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS**

**By Dr. Avigail Rock**

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In memory of our beloved father and grandfather,
Fred Stone, Ya'acov Ben Yitzchak,
whose yahrzeit is Sunday 25 Tammuz, July 15th.
Ellen, Stanley, Jacob Chaya, Zack, Yael, Ezra, Yoni, Eliana, and Gabi Stone.

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**Lecture #29:**

**Shadal**

**A. Biography**

R. Shemuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865) — hereinafter, Shadal — was born and lived in Italy. His father, R. Chizkiya, was a carpenter and Torah scholar.[[1]](#footnote-1) When he was four, Shadal began studying the Pentateuch with his father,[[2]](#footnote-2) while paying special attention to the *peshat* of the verse, without relying on previous exegetes. His father saw to Shadal’s academic and Torah studies.

Shadal was sent to a modern Talmud Torah, in which, in addition to religious subjects, they studied sciences and languages, including German, Italian, French and Latin, languages which in the future would prove very influential upon Shadal’s commentary.

In the year 1821, Shadal wrote an Italian translation of the *Siddur*. With the publication of this translation, Shadal became well-known among the Jews of Italy. Afterwards, Shadal published his poems[[3]](#footnote-3) and his essays on biblical philology. In the year 1826, he married the daughter of his teacher, R. Raphael Baruch Segré. In the year 1829, when the Rabbinic Seminary of Padua was opened, he was appointed as one of the first two instructors upon the recommendation of Yashar,[[4]](#footnote-4) and this began a new period of his life.

Shadal became one the dominant figures among Italian Jewry and one of the founders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement. Even though he was an observant Jew, his critical method had a great influence upon the Haskalah movement. Shadal was known as a linguist, a Hebraist, an exegete, a researcher of medieval literature, and a poet. Dozens of his essays were published in various periodicals in his time. In the year 1831, he finished writing his book *Ohev Ger* (Lover of the Sojourner) about Targum Onkelos, and he even named his firstborn son Ohev-Ger.

Though he enjoyed great success in academic research and his impressive intellectual achievements, Shadal’s personal life was full of pain. In the year 1841, his wife, Bilha Bat-Sheva, died after long years of mental illness, during which Shadal tended to her.

Shadal then married his wife’s sister, and she bore him two sons and one daughter; one of the sons died at age seven. Some years after this, in 1851, his daughter Malka passed away as well, at the age of eighteen. In the year 1854, his firstborn son Ohev-Ger, who was also his favorite student, died at the age of 24. The death of his firstborn son shattered his spirit, and over the next few years, his body deteriorated. He suffered from poverty[[5]](#footnote-5) and blindness, and he died in the year 1865.

**B. The Commentary**

**Source and Scope**

Shadal comments mainly on the Torah and the books of *Yeshayahu*, *Yirmeyahu, Yechezkel, Mishlei*,and *Iyov*. The first edition of his commentary on the Torah was published in the year 1847, as an addendum to the commentary of the Rambemam (R. Moshe ben Menachem Mendelssohn) on the Torah, called *Ha-Mishtadel*. (The verb “*shadal*” in Aramaic means “to swing”, and the reflexive, “*mishtadel*,*”* means “to struggle” or “to insinuate oneself”).

Shadal himself did not write a complete commentary on the Torah; the *Peirush Shadal La-Torah*, as it appears in print today, was the product of the editing of Shadal’s students, around five years after his death.[[6]](#footnote-6) The commentary was edited according to his printed commentary, *Ha-Mishtadel*, his different essays, and the notes of his lectures in the Rabbinic Seminary. On some issues, Shadal changed his view from that which was published in *Ha-Mishtadel*. He stated in his lectures, in these cases, that “this annuls what was said in *Ha-Mishtadel*.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Characteristics**

Shadal’s comments point to his thorough knowledge of all of the twisting paths of Jewish exegesis preceding him. Sometimes he quotes the commentaries of his predecessors to agree with them, and sometimes to argue with them.[[8]](#footnote-8) Shadal’s knowledge was not limited to traditional Jewish exegesis; he was quite familiar with both Christian exegesis and biblical criticism, and he quotes widely from them, sometimes to support them and sometimes to express reservations. In his introduction to the Book of *Yeshayahu*, Shadal justifies the use of Christian commentators, writing:

If sometimes I find in them… a new interpretation which is justified on all sides, I do not reject it; I accept it, and I write it in the name of its masters, because my only aim is truth, and our faith, thank God, does not fear the truth.[[9]](#footnote-9)

One of the unique qualities of Shadal’s commentary is the exegetical give-and-take between him and his students quoted by him in his commentaries.[[10]](#footnote-10) These debates reveal a modest teacher, who shows love and regard for his students and their views; he is even ready to reject his own view and accept the views of his students. See, for example, his words at the end of his introduction to the Book of *Yeshayahu*:

Praise and glory also go to all of the beloved and pleasant students, who inclined their ears attentively to the sound of my words. They came along with me into the thick of it to seek the truth, and they helped me by their diligent study to bring the truth out to the light and to devise innovations…

An example of the debate among the students may be found in Shadal’s comments on (*Bereishit* 13:16), “I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring will also be counted,” in which he cites an exegetical debate between three of his students in explaining the verse:

David Chazak said that it should be read as if was written in the simple conjugation: “one will count your offspring.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Eliezer Avraham Fava responded to him responded that “if one can count the dust of the earth” should be understand as “just as one cannot count,” and this will justify saying “your offspring will also be counted” — in other words, “your offspring also cannot be counted.” And Shabbetai Ancuna says “if one can count” is an infinitive: “Were it possible to count the dust of the earth, it would be possible to count your offspring as well.”

**Interpretive Approach**

In his introduction to his commentary of the Torah, Shadal lays out three principles of biblical exegesis, and in his introduction to his commentary on the Book of *Yeshayahu*, he determines additional rules. In this framework, we will bring some of his most prominent rules for interpreting the Torah.

1. **Grammar and linguistics** — this principle holds an important place in Shadal’s commentary. Aside from his startling command of language in his commentary on *Tanakh*, Shadal uses his wide control of Semitic languages (Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic). This knowledge helped him a great deal in his commentary on the Torah and *Nevi’im*. Thus, for example, in his commentary on the changing of Sarai’s name to Sara (*Bereishit* 17:15), he writes that “In Arabic, ‘*sara’* means to have many offspring.” In other words, there is significance to the fact of adding the letter *heh* to our matriarch’s name, in keeping with the event which it alludes to - that she will have biological offspring.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Another example of the use of Semitic languages is to explain the difficult word “*nedari*” in the Song of the Sea — “Your right hand, God, *nedari* in strength” (*Shemot* 15:6). Shadal writes:

It appears that root “*adar”* is cognate to “*azar*” in Hebrew and “*chadar*” in Syriac (which means to surround and encircle), and thus it is similar to “*nezar* in might” (*Tehillim* 65:7), and this is the source of the term “*adderet,”* a type of garb which encircles the body, as well as “*addir*.” Ultimately it comes from “*nezar*”, and it is a metaphor for strength, as in (*Yeshayahu* 45:5), “I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, *a’azerkha.*”

1. **Explaining the verses according to the reality in which they were written**[[13]](#footnote-13) — An example of applying this principle may be found in the commentary upon the reward of the midwives, “And he made houses for them” (*Shemot* 1:21). Shadal explains that midwives in the biblical era were generally women not blessed with their own families, and for this reason they could work, which required leaving the house frequently. On the basis of this, it is understood that the reward for the midwives is having families of their own.

Another example may be seen in his commentary about the meaning of the coat of many colors which Yaakov gave to Yosef (*Bereishit* 37:3). He explains (according to *Bereishit* *Rabba* 84:5) that the intent is for a garment which covers the entire body, even hands and feet. The workers in the field wore short clothing, because it would be easier to work in them; a long garment was the dress for men who did not work in the fields. Thus, it became a status symbol. In other words, receiving the coat of many colors from Yaakov symbolizes the fact that Yosef is emancipated from the family chores.

1. **Literary sensitivity** — according to Shadal, in order to understand the holy poetry and the parables of the Torah and *Nevi’im*, the commentator must develop sensitivity to poetry, and in his language, he must “have a poetic soul.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Indeed, Shadal has an incomparably poetic soul. This sensitivity is expressed in the commentary on the Torah and the commentary on *Nevi’im*.

For example, he explains the psychological complexity of Yaakov’s lengthy response to seeing his son’s coat, “It is my son’s coat. A fierce animal has devoured him. Yosef is certainly torn to pieces” (*Bereishit* 37:33). Shadal explains that the statement, “Yosef is certainly torn to pieces” is not a pointless repetition of the statement, “A fierce animal has devoured him.” They express the different stages of Yaakov’s perception of the event:

At first, when he saw the coat, he said, “It is my son’s coat;” afterwards, when he contemplated the blood upon it and what they said about finding the coat, along with the fact that Yosef still had not returned to his house, he considered in his heart, “A fierce animal has devoured him.” When this last idea occurred to him, immediately his mercies were aroused for his son, and he pictured in his imagination as if he saw Yosef in the jaws of the animal, and then he called out bitterly, “Yosef is certainly torn to pieces!” — in other words: An unspeakably cruel fate has befallen my beloved son, Yosef!

Many examples of his poetic soul may be found in his commentary on the Song of the Sea (*Shemot* 15:1-19), and we will cite a number of them. The Torah uses the singular in “Horse and its rider” (*ibid*. v. 1), which Shadal explains in this way:

In the poetic parable, singular is better than plural, for the feeling is much stronger because the reader’s thoughts flit among many topics. Consider, for example, “Bring justice to the orphan, plead the widow’s cause” (*Yeshayahu* 1:17). Were it said to bring justice to the orphans and to plead the cause of widows, the parable would lose a great deal of its power, as the reader’s thoughts would flit among many orphans and widows. Now, all of them are gathered together into one orphan and one widow…

Another example is the use of Aramaic words in the Song of the Sea — e.g., “*rama*” in the above-mentioned verse, “Horse and its rider He cast (*rama*) into the sea. Shadal explains the use of Aramaic words in the Song of the Sea in the following way:

Similarly, many unique Aramaic words are used for poetic analogies, such as “*enosh*” instead of “*adam*” [for “human being”]…

This is because the poetic form loves to use words unfamiliar to the masses, as well as ancient and bizarre words. (Similarly, in the Italian language, the poets choose for themselves Latin words or words from Old Italian.) The very unfamiliarity with them will add to them felicity and grace.

This literary sensitivity is displayed also in the legal sections of the Torah, not only in its poetic sections. For example, in *Parashat Mishpatim*, Shadal identifies more than a few instances of wordplay designed, in his view, as mnemonic devices. Thus, for example, we have the following verse (*Shemot* 22:4), which uses the root of *bet/vet-ayin-reish* three times:

If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over (*yaver*), or lets his beast (*be’iro*) loose and it feeds (*u*-*vi’er*) in another man’s field, he must pay the best of his field or the best of his vineyard.

Shadal explains the verse using the concept of “*lashon nofel al lashon,*”alliteration and paronomasia.

It uses “*be’iro*”[[15]](#footnote-15) for *lashon ha-nofel al lashon*… and the sentences are stated in this poetic way, so that it will make an impression in the masses’ memory.

An additional example of this may be found in the Shadal’s comments (ibid. 23:5) on the prohibition of abandoning the fallen donkey of one’s enemy, “Forestall leaving (*mei-azov*) him; you shall certainly help (*azov ta’azov*) him with it:” “This is *lashon ha-nofel al lashon* with oppositional meanings.”

In other words, the meaning of “*mei-azov*” in the first part of the verse is to abandon, while “*azov ta’azov*” means to help him to unload the burden.

1. **The significance of the cantillation marks** — Shadal attributes great significance to the cantillation marks, and he stresses their role as reflecting interpretive tradition; aside from this, he stresses that the tradition of cantillation marks dates from the first days of the Second Temple, and therefore it is not binding.[[16]](#footnote-16) Indeed, Shadal does not hesitate to argue with the cantillation marks.

Thus, for example, the verse (*Bereishit* 8:11) tells us, “And behold an olive leaf torn off in its mouth.” Should we read this: “And behold a torn-off olive leaf was in its mouth” or “And behold, an olive leaf was torn off in its mouth”? Shadal chooses the first option, indicating that the olive leaf was fresh and moist; however, he admits that this stands in opposition to the cantillation marks, which put a pause in between “olive leaf” and “torn off”.

**Original Interpretations of Shadal**

Shadal’s commentary contains a wealth of original interpretations which point to his straightforward intellect and clear thinking.

One example of this may be found in the verse, “And she saw that he was good, and she hid him for three months” (*Shemot* 2:2). Biblical exegetes attempt to understand what “good” refers to and to explain the link between the two hemistiches, “And she saw that he was good/ And she hid him.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Shadal explains in the following way:

To me, it appears to be simple, for we call an infant “good” when he is not crying and bawling; if he had been bawling, it would not have been possible to hide him, for his voice would have been heard from far off, but because he was good, she was able to hide him.

**C. Textual Considerations**

In his relationship to the issue of biblical text, Shadal writes this:

The tenth principle is that the books of the Holy Writ were kept constantly in the midst of Israel as a precious, beloved treasure, and no one ever set a hand against them to falsify them, to add to them or to take away from them.

Despite this, it would have been impossible, after so many transmissions and so much copying, not to have alternate versions, one of which is correct, emerging from the hands of the author, and the other only the mistake of the copyist scribe. This was more common in previous generations, when books were not bound together in individual volumes…

However, once they were written in Assyrian script, supreme caution and alacrity was exercised by the sages and the entire nation in keeping the holy books. Thus, there were only very few errors or alternative versions.

In other words, Shadal does not reject totally the possibility of textual errors. We find this explicitly in his commentaries, particular in *Nevi’im*, but also in the Torah.

Thus, for example, we find some interesting comments on Yosef’s interpretation of the dreams of his fellow prisoners. The verse (*Bereishit* 40:19) states:

Yet within three days, Pharaoh shall lift up your head from off you and shall hang you on a tree, and the birds shall eat your flesh from off you.

The difficulty in the verse is that it is not clear why after the killing of the chief baker by decapitation there would be a reason to hang him. Shadal notes that “There are those who say” that the word “from off you” is a scribal error, which comes from the end of the verse, and in the original version, it said, “Pharaoh shall lift up your head,” similar to what Yosef says about the chief butler (v. 13).[[18]](#footnote-18) This interpretation engendered opposition from Orthodox Jews on the one hand; on the other hand, low biblical critics saw it as a proof to buttress to their positions. Therefore, it appears to me that despite the fact that Shadal sets out this interpretation in the name of “those who say,” there is room to speculate that he is talking about his own view, but in order to avoid conflict, Shadal attributes this to “those who say.”

**D. View of Halakhic Midrash**

Shadal’s straightforward mind compels him to sometimes explain the halakhic verses in opposition to the Sages’ hermeneutics, which often do not fit with the *peshat* of the verse. Naturally, like the Rashbam, Shadal does not intend to reject the halakhic authority of the Sages and to determine that one should follow Halakha according to his commentaries and to deviate from the Sages; according to him, halakha remains on one side and *peshat* on the other. As to his approach to interpreting passages of biblical law, Shadal himself testifies:

I have not moved from explaining the verses according to the depth of their simple meaning… and many times against the ruled and accepted law… and I have also explained the reason for their *takkana*.

In other words, in his view, the Sages knew full well that halakhic midrash does not follow the *peshat* of the verse; with this awareness, they used their legislative prerogative to expound the verse as a *takkana*, an institution necessary for the proper order of society. Therefore, Shadal is allowed to explain the verse according to the *peshat*, which is in fact the original meaning of the verse.

An example of this may be found in his interpretation of the law of assault (*Shemot* 21:18-19):

If men quarrel, and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to bed, the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff; however, he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is certainly healed.

The verse talks about bodily injury caused during a dispute between two men. One of the combatants hits the other with a stone or fist, but the blow is not fatal, merely one which requires recuperation. R. Yishmael explains in the Mekhilta that the phrase “with his staff” is metaphorical:

“With his staff” — in full health; this is one of the three matters that R. Yishmael expounded in the Torah as an metaphor. (*Mekhilta, Mishpatim, Nezikin* 6)

Shadal, on the other hand explains “with his staff” following the *peshat*: if the injured party is able to walk with the aid of a cane (“with his staff”) and afterwards dies, the attacker is liable only for payments, for one may say that his death was the result of his negligence, because he was not careful to refrain from exertion during his recuperation. Of the Sages’ halakha, he writes, “And this is stringency.” Shadal apparently sees in the words of the Sages a *takkana*, according to which the attacker will be cleared only if the victim will return to his original strength and power. Shadal tries to explain the role of the Sages as institutors of *takkana*, not as explicators of *peshat*.

Another example of Shadal’s view of explaining halakhic verses in opposition to the Sages is his commentary on the law of the owner of the killer ox (*Shemot* 21:29-30):

If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.

The halakhic ruling is that the owner of the ox is not to be put to death by the court; he is only liable to make restitution as the court will determine:

“And the owner also must be put to death” — by the hands of heaven. You say by the hands of the heaven, or perhaps it is by the hands of man? When it says, **“**However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life,” it mandates redemption for those put to death by the hands of heaven.[[19]](#footnote-19) (*Mekhilta*,ibid*.* 10)

Shadal, on the other hand, explains these verses following the *peshat*:

“And the owner also must be put to death” — According to the *peshat*, he will be put to death by the court, but the Torah allows taking payment, since he did not kill with his hands; it left it in the hands of the judges to adjudicate based on the issue of the person and the issue of the occurrence, whether it is most appropriate to execute him or to allow him to save himself by payment, and how much the payment should be…

In other words, the word “if,” according to Shadal, is explained in its regular meaning, as giving a number of options to choose from: indeed, the basic law suggests putting the owner to death, but sometimes, according to the judgment call of the court, it may rule that a ransom payment is sufficient. Shadal apparently would explain that the fact that the normative Halakha precludes putting the owner of the killer ox to death in a case such as this and instead requires that he make restitution is yet another example of the Sages’ power and prerogative of *takkana*.

**E. The Humane Aspect**

Together with the intellectual aspect, Shadal’s commentaries are suffused with a humane aspect. Thus, for example, in his commentary to *Shemot* 12:44, “But every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him,” Shadal explains the requirement of circumcising a slave:

Circumcision of servants is the obligation of the master from Avraham and on…

Thereby, the level of the servant, which is a bit lower than that of his master, is raised. Therefore, immediately after he is circumcised, he may eat of the paschal offering like his master.

Now, towards the end of the Second Temple era, our traits were ruined by the Herodian kings and Israel learned the ways of the non-Jews, and particularly those of the aristocrats and patricians. They yearned to emulate the Romans, and as we know, the Romans were cruel to their slaves. Thus, a situation was created in Israel that masters did not want to circumcise their servants so that [the servants] would not think of themselves as Israelites and as human beings.

Then the Sages of Israel arose and decreed that whoever failed to circumcise his servants could not partake of the paschal offering. Their intent was, in my view, this: anyone who cannot regard his slaves as human beings is not fit to be among those who celebrate the holiday of liberation.

According to Shadal, the Torah is not a book of information and laws; the essential aim of the Torah is the development of the empathy and ethics, and the aim of many commandments is the development of the emotion of compassion. For example, this is what he writes in his commentary on *Vayikra* 22:28, “Do not slaughter a cow or a sheep and its young on the same day”:

The aim here is not to show actual compassion to the animals, but to strengthen in in our hearts the attribute of mercy and to distance us from cruelty.[[20]](#footnote-20)

This thought is mentioned in his famous poem, “*Chelek Ke-Chelek Yokhelu*” (Portion by Portion They Shall Eat):

Curse wisdom if slyness and plotting it inspires,

Teaching us guile and not letting righteousness soar!

I hope intelligence is lost forever and sagacity expires

If kindness and compassion be their casualties of war…

No, for this reason intelligence and thought were granted

To see peace sown and kindness planted.

1. In Shadal’s introduction to the Book of *Yeshayahu*, he describes his father:

My master father, of blessed memory, who was a carpenter, never read Homer… but he read *Tanakh* every day…

In a number of places, Shadal quotes his father’s interpretations. For example, in his commentary on *Bereishit* 27:18, Shadal brings in the name of his father an interesting interpretation, in which Shadal’s father distinguishes between Yaakov’s words to Yitzchak and Esav’s words to Yitzchak in the episode of the blessings:

My master father, of righteous blessed memory, says that Yaakov when he came to his father only said “My father,” and he waited to be asked who he was. Esav, on the other hand, immediately when he came before him he explained to him why he came and he did not wait for him to ask him who he was, for he immediately said, “May my father rise and eat…” (*ibid*. v. 31)

The reasoning of the matter is that Yaakov was afraid that Yitzchak would recognize his voice, and in order to test the matter, he only said first, “My father,” and it was in his mind that he might recognize his voice and would say to him: What is it, Yaakov my son? Then he would have spoken to him of other matters and would not at all have mentioned the matter of the blessings. This was not the case with Esav, who was not afraid lest he be found to be a liar; he had no need for this, so he revealed his desire immediately. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shadal began writing his innovative Torah interpretations at a young age. Indeed, in his comments on the phrase, “brother of Rivka, mother of Yaakov and Esav” (*Bereishit* 28:5), he notes that already in the year 5573, namely when he was thirteen, he was already writing commentaries on the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In the year 1825, he published a collection of poetry titled *Kinnor Naim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. Yitzchak Shemuel Reggio (1784-1855) was a rabbi, philosopher, academic researcher of Jewish studies, biblical exegete and writer. He was one of the leaders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement and one of the founders of the Rabbinic Seminary of Padua. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Most of his money was spent on books. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Indeed, Shadal writes in his introduction to the Book of *Yeshayahu* about economic difficulties which delayed printing his commentaries:

Behold, my soul has pined greatly throughout these years to see my work publicized in the world. Nevertheless, I will not be pained about the gates of its printing being sealed before me. For I have seen that in my passing over it every three years with new students, I am constantly correcting my mistakes and filling in the lacunae found in my work, and in my mouth and my heart I would say: whatever is done from the heavens is for the good. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, for example, his commentary on *Bereishit* 18:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In a certain way, Shadal’s commentary is similar to Abarbanel’s commentary in that the two of them are accustomed to quote different interpretations in a critical way, in order to arrive at the most correct interpretation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Shadal attributes great significance to the truth in a general manner. Among other things, he composed the poem “*Ha-Emet Nissi*” (Truth Is My Banner), in which he describes his readiness to seek the truth despite the insults and indignities he suffers. The sonnet goes as follows:

Verity and straightness, heaven’s true word

To you, from youth until now, my troth I plight

I have set you up a stronghold from every fright

Drawing the bow, my loins I gird.

Against those who bend the knees, to falsehood deferred,

I have seen many, but I fought your fight.

I have despised deceit, I have loathed plots outright

On those who are clean of hand, I have honor conferred.

Therefore, hatred and burden began to sever

Between me and my dear ones; they thought me senseless and neurotic

They imagined me crazy and quixotic.

Black and beautiful, my mistress, until the grave

For you, the shame of man I brave

To be an adornment for verity, forever. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In this way, there is a certain similarity to Tosafot’s commentary on the Talmud. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. One who can count the dust of the land can also count your seed. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Shadal also suggest an additional explanation for adding the “*heh”*:

Perhaps the “*heh*”, an indication of the feminine, is added to “Avraham” and “Sara” as a sign of fecundity. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shadal puts it this way:

The fifth principle is to leaver our own place and time and to bring ourselves into the time of the writers and their place. This certainly is not feasible for us to do completely, but a bit of this is possible and achievable. Above all, the exegete must not intend to find favor in the eyes of his contemporaries, to acquire for himself praise and honor, to find many buyers for his books, for this will bring him (even though he has no intention of doing so and never stops loving truth) to subvert the words of the ancients and to bring them closer to the customs of the latter ones.(Introduction to the Book of *Yeshayahu*) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. These are his words:

The eighth principle in holy poetry and prophetic analogies requires, aside from this, that the exegete have a poetic soul, in a way that he will be prepared to go into the internal workings of the thoughts of poets and prophets, to understand the things which were not written but were in the thought of the poet. (Introduction to the Book of *Yeshayahu*) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This is a rarely-used term for one’s livestock. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. So he says in his introduction to the Torah:

Indubitably, the notes and tones have exceedingly great significance at the time that we come to explain the Holy Writ. Indeed, we see that the greats among the exegetes oftentimes have relied on the view of the cantillation, and some of them have even warned us explicitly not to veer from it…

In truth, the view of the cantillation deserves our respect as well as our attention. However, this does not make them infallible, and the biblical exegetes have not forbidden us absolutely the option of taking issue with it. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, the interpretations of the Ramban and Rashbam ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. An additional example of his textual approach appears in the commentary to *Bereishit* 27:46, on the verse, “And Rivka said to Yitzchak, ‘I am disgusted (*katzti*) with my life…’” Shadal relates to the small letter *kuf* of the word “*katzti”*:

It appears to me that the custom of writers in days of yore, when a word would begin with the same letter which appeared at the end of the previous word, they would leave out one of these letters, and perhaps they would note that letter with some sign to know that it stands in the place of two. After some time, they began to add in between the two words the missing letter, and because it was narrow, they wrote it small. Similarly, we find: “*Va-yikra* *el Moshe*” (*Vayikra* 1:1).

“*Vayikra*” ends with the letter *alef* (written small), and the next word, “*el*” begins with an *alef*. Similarly, “*katzti*” which begins with a *kuf*, follows “Yitzchak”, which ends with a *kuf*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The ransom payment is not an acceptable solution for those who are to be put to death by human hands, i.e., the court. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Similarly, see his words to *Devarim* 20:19, relating to the prohibition of destroying trees:

But I command you that you shall not cut it down, so that you shall make your soul accustomed to the good trait, not to forget what was good to you. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)