YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**GREAT BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS**

**By Dr. Avigail Rock**

**Lecture #21:**

**R. Yosef Ibn Caspi**

1. **Introduction**

**A. Origins**[[1]](#footnote-1)

R. Yosef ibn Caspi was born in 1279 in Largentière, Provence, and died sometime after 1340. His last name comes from the name of his city.[[2]](#footnote-2) He dealt extensively with grammar, philosophy and biblical exegesis, and he composed a number of works on these topics. Ibn Caspi began writing at age seventeen, and throughout the remaining years of his life, he wrote close to thirty volumes.

**B. Personality**

What sets Ibn Caspi apart from his contemporaries is his extensive use of the first person. The way he speaks of himself and his stylistic choices may tell us something about Ibn Caspi’s personality. His excessively sardonic words indicate that he sees himself as a lone wolf, bereft of friends and intellectual equals, and the more he seeks out such colleagues, the more disappointed he becomes by his inability to find them.

In the following paragraph, Ibn Caspi describes the phenomenon of his distance from other people. According to Ibn Caspi, he avoids intimacy with others because he has “no desire to juxtapose two opposites,” namely the intelligent person (himself) and the fools (other people). He even goes further, describing the masses as animals, “horses and mules”:

My neighbors and acquaintances know that I have never in my life desired to show myself to all people, because I have no desire to juxtapose two opposites, and I know that this is the general rule — there are intelligent people and fools, and the fools are the majority… Therefore, my custom has been to minimize communication with other people, for I am very careful to avoid acting or speaking haughtily… Nevertheless, I do not regret at all my superiority over horses and mules…[[3]](#footnote-3) (*Tirat Kesef*, p. 8)

From the contents of his statements and from the nature of their formulation, it appears that Ibn Caspi sees himself as championing the truth at all costs, and he does not care at all about negativity expressed towards him or towards his works. It may be that he even believes and hopes that his style will deny those who are “unfit” the appreciation of his words on an intellectual level.

When Ibn Caspi boasts, his words do not only express derision for the hoi polloi, but also for all women, whom Ibn Caspi regularly insults.[[4]](#footnote-4) The following lines are prime examples:

There is no doubt that the counsel of women is categorically bad, whether inferior or shameful… or fatal, as with the counsel of Chava, who gave to her husband from the tree, and the counsel of Iyov’s wife [see *Iyov* 2:9]. Fortunate is he who escapes their clutches! (*Tirat Kesef*, p. 95)

Behold, our patriarch Yaakov… surpassed him by his superior perception, just as we surpass our wives by superior perception. (Ibid., p. 118)

In other words, just as Yaakov had an intellectual advantage over other people, men have an intellectual advantage over women.

Ibn Caspi also has very few complimentary things to say about non-Jews. An example of his relationship to non-Jews may be found in his comment regarding the issue of Yaakov’s sons killing the men of Shekhem. How, a number of exegetes ask, could such righteous men slaughter the male citizenry of an entire town? Ibn Caspi responds dismissively:

Why should our commentators complain about this? I would complain only about who is left.[[5]](#footnote-5) (*Matzref La-Kesef*, p. 81)

Ibn Caspi takes a great deal of pride in his words, and he repeatedly describes his exegetical abilities, which surpass the skills of his predecessors. Thus, for example, we find:

My son, take out the silver and gold from your treasuries and put this in them, for this is the royal treasure of the “kingdom of priests and holy nation.” (*Tirat Kesef*, p. 64)

Together with his sharply critical tone, Ibn Caspi is blessed with an excellent sense of humor. For example, in *Matzref La-Kesef*, in the end of his words regarding *Bereishit* 11:10, he remarks about the phenomenon of factionalism in the Jewish nation:

We are witnesses today to the honor of our ancestress, the wife of Peleg, that she was righteous and did not stray.

In other words, we Hebrews may be certain that our divisive and contentious activity testifies that we are truly descended from Peleg (whose name means “division”), son of Ever.

**C. Ibn Caspi’s Exegesis**

**The Audience for Ibn Caspi’s Commentary**

Ibn Caspi composed two commentaries on the Torah, *Tirat Kesef* (“silver battlement,” *Shir Ha-shirim* 8:9) and *Matzref La-kesef* (“silver crucible,” *Mishlei* 17:3, 27:21). The first commentary explains different issues in the Torah, while the second commentary is a running commentary on the Torah. The target audience for these exegetical compositions is clearly the intelligent, educated reader, who knows philosophy and biblical exegesis. Throughout their pages, the reader finds profound concepts interwoven, requiring prior knowledge of philosophy; deep thought is necessary in order to understand his words. Exegetes and exegetical works are used without attribution, with the basic assumption that the reader is familiar with the major works of biblical exegesis. Ibn Caspi even relates to this explicitly in *Matzref La-kesef* (*Shemot* 23:30):

I will not elaborate, for this is well-explained to those who are intelligent and knowledgeable, who are superior among everyone, even if the fools find it too complex and convoluted. I have no truck with fools [cf. *Kohelet* 5:3]. Now, if I were to elaborate in my commentary, the fools would still not understand, while I have no need to explain it all to the intelligent. Therefore, I will set aside this explanation, and blessed is the one who gives wisdom to the wise [cf. *Daniel* 2:21].

**Ibn Caspi’s Style**

Ibn Caspi writes in a challenging, enigmatic style; it may be that the succinct and mysterious style in his writings is designed specifically in such a way as to dissuade the hoi polloi from perusing his commentaries. Logical and linguistic concepts are employed frequently, making matters difficult for the reader; however, it appears that for Ibn Caspi, it is not important to explain matters to the reader completely; he suffices with allusions, and sometimes even less than that.

Undoubtedly, this phenomenon exists in the works of other medieval exegetes, such as Ibn Ezra and the Ramban, but Ibn Caspi far surpasses them in the frequency with which he reveals a bit while concealing the greater part.[[6]](#footnote-6) This style gives his commentary a mysterious and enigmatic character; sometimes one may divine his intent from his words in other places, and sometimes this is insufficient. Many times, Ibn Caspi does not explain anything; instead, he uses the term “*ke-taam*” (“akin to”) and then quotes a verse. The onus is upon the reader to understand the connection between the quoted verse and the commentary.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**D. Exegetical Principles**

**The Aims of Scripture and its Target Audience**

Despite his own aims and predilections in his commentary, according to Ibn Caspi’s philosophy, the main target audience of the Torah is not the intelligentsia and the elite, but rather specifically the masses, and only in a number of places are there high-minded concepts designated for educated philosophers. Consequently, in the view of Ibn Caspi, the main use of the Torah is as a partial and relative corrective for the masses; providing informed transcendence for the intellectual elites is a secondary objective. This is what Ibn Caspi determines in *Matzref La-Kesef*, in his introduction to *Parashat Bechukkotai* (*Vayikra* 26):

Thus, it is self-explanatory that this Torah has been given to the masses in its entirety to meditate on it constantly, and the masses do not understand transcendence, that Moshe would compose for them a book for the soul, or what is behind nature, that they would meditate on it constantly. In order to repair the masses, it is necessary that they have a book that they will study at all times; therefore, he composed this book for them. So that this book would not be devoid of transcendence, he puts in it in separate places wondrous statements of the wisdom of nature and divine insights, so that it would be a complete book…

Thus, it is clear that it is necessary for the public matters[[8]](#footnote-8) to outnumber the transcendent matters, just as those who use the public matters are much more numerous than those who use the transcendent…

The fact that the Torah addresses the masses is not only relevant for grasping the meaning of the verses, but also for understanding the editorial choices of the Torah: which narrative elements are included, and which are omitted?[[9]](#footnote-9)

Despite this, Ibn Caspi claims that sometimes the Torah turns both to the masses and to the intelligentsia, in a stratified manner; in these case, the two groups are supposed to understand the same verse in different ways.[[10]](#footnote-10) In other cases, the Torah even prefers to turn to the intelligentsia, at the cost of the masses’ interests.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In the view of the Ibn Caspi, a central aim of the books of the Prophets is to explain the Torah, so that if we understand properly the prophetic books, the biblical commentators are superfluous:

This honored issue was explained to us by the Prophets — not only this, but all the Torah. Indeed, if we understand them adequately, we will have no need of Ibn Ezra and his ilk. (*Matzref La-Kesef*, *Bereishit* 1:2)

**Ibn Caspi’s *Peshat***

Ibn Caspi’s exegetical methodology in *Matzref La-Kesef* is to explain the verses by way of the *peshat*. Many contemporary philosophers embraced very extreme allegorical approaches, but Ibn Caspi stresses the need to explain verses according to their *peshat* and to avoid allegorical exegesis.

Sometimes, Ibn Caspi rejects very sharply explanations that do not fit in with the *peshat*, even if they had been previously accepted by the classical exegetes. The most famous example of this is Ibn Caspi’s commentary on the words of Miriam and Aharon against Moshe (*Bamidbar* 12:1), in which he accuses the biblical exegetes who preceded him of explaining the verse in an arbitrary manner, in explicit opposition to the intent of the Giver of the Torah. In his blistering diatribe, he even alludes to the fact that some of these explanations verge on Christian exegesis.

The verse states that Miriam and Aharon are speaking “about Moshe, concerning the Cushite woman whom he had taken, for a Cushite woman he had taken.” Onkelos, following Midrashic sources, translates “Cushite” as “strikingly beautiful” and renders the final clause: “for he had divorced the strikingly beautiful woman whom he had taken.”

“Concerning the Cushite woman whom he had taken” — Yosef says: I am astounded at my predecessors, though they be more perfect than I, and I cannot reach the soles of their feet.[[12]](#footnote-12) How in the world did it enter their imagination to do this? How can they explain something from the Torah as the reverse of what is written, either by changing a word to its opposite, or adding words which invert its meaning?

Now, it is well known what Onkelos says, and Rabbeinu Moshe[[13]](#footnote-13) says that Onkelos the convert is a great sage, but how can he explain that “Cushite” means “beautiful” when they are antonyms, like “black” and “white”? Indeed, how does he know to add other words which invert the meaning of “for he had taken a Cushite woman,” as if it is written in the Torah, rendering it: for he had abandoned or distanced “the Cushite woman whom he had taken”? And if this is the intent of the Giver of the Torah, why was it not written thusly? Why does it write the opposite?

Furthermore, who allows us to do this? Why does Onkelos have the authority to do this? What of the Talmudic sages or the Ibn Ezra, all of whom follow this? Why should we not do so ourselves, each man according to what is right in his eyes? Should we say, instead of “And you shall love Lord your God” (*Devarim* 6:5), God forbid: And you shall hate Lord your God? Alternatively, should we hate whatever is beloved by God?

And if you will say that [Moshe] received the Torah from Sinai and gave it to Yehoshua, telling him orally that this is the explanation of this verse, my answer is that we return to the first claim: why is it not written explicitly according to the facts, instead of using a word that describes the opposite? Can we call it “commentary” if one exchanges a word for the opposite? It can only be called “commentary” when the explanation of the words is according to their meaning, however they may be explained. “You shall not kindle a fire” (*Shemot* 35:3) and “You shall not eat upon the blood” (*Vayikra* 19:26) have profound explanations, but the verses tolerate it; certainly, they are not explained in a contrary way. Anything else may be called “conversion” and “opposition” and “erasing” and “uprooting” and “destroying”.

We may say this in every language which one may hear — why should we not say that when it says, “And you God took” (*Devarim* 4:20), it actually means: And you God abandoned? Similarly, “And he and his neighbor shall take” (*Shemot* 12:4) — why is this one better than the other?

As God loves, this approach is beyond me, though it is the consensus of all my predecessors, the pillars of the world in the faith and strength of Moshe’s Torah. I cannot bear it. God forbid that I should do such a thing, either that I should totally abandon Moshe’s Torah and believe in a new Torah, God forbid, as has already been done, or that I should do as these do, Heaven forfend…*(Matzref La-Kesef*, *Bamidbar* 12:1)

**Egyptian Reality and Contemporary Reality**

Ibn Caspi drew great inspiration from his visit to Egypt, in which he recognized the customs that, according to his view, persisted from the biblical era, and he explains the verses according to them. For example, this is what he writes about the verse (*Bereishit* 41:40): “And by your mouth, my entire nation will be provided for” (literally: “will be kissed”):

The custom of the land is not to kiss on the mouth literally. Rather, the custom is known for all who come here, so that this language is very appropriate. *(Matzref La-Kesef*, *Shemot* 7:15) [[14]](#footnote-14)

The custom helps Ibn Caspi not just in understanding the narrative itself, but the linguistic issues as well.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**E. Exegesis and Polemics of Philosophy**

In all of his writings, Ibn Caspi displays a remarkable philosophical worldview, profoundly influenced by the Rambam, as indicated by the many citations of the Rambam’s writings in his compositions. Ibn Caspi even composed two commentaries on the Rambam’s *Moreh Nevukhim*, and his great interest in the Rambam’s views brought him, at the age of 35, to wander to Egypt, with the aim of learning from the descendants of the Rambam.[[16]](#footnote-16)

We may find references to contemporary anti-philosophical polemics in Ibn Caspi’s many compositions and his exegetical view. From the 13th century until the beginning of the 14th century, a controversy raged in Provence concerning the study of philosophy.[[17]](#footnote-17) Those who opposed studying philosophy issued a ban against all those who studied the discipline, particularly the philosophical writings of the Rambam. Provencal Jewry was not receptive to this ban, and those who studied philosophy continued to do so. The struggle reached its height in the year 1305 with the imposition of the excommunicative bans in Barcelona, [[18]](#footnote-18)which was essentially directed towards the Jews of Provence, [[19]](#footnote-19)where rationalism was influential and where Ibn Caspi lived. One of these bans was issued against extreme allegorical exegesis.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Both Christians and Jews in Provence used allegorization, even though they naturally reached different results. The Rambam teaches that a literal understanding of the sources may bring one to make far-reaching errors of faith, and because of this, sometimes one needs to explain the sources in an allegorical way. This view of allegorical exegesis continued to expand in far-flung directions, with the aim of finding philosophical contents in Jewish sources. The use of allegorization by Jews stood at the center of the polemics about philosophy in 13th and 14th centuries.

Allegorization was attacked for a number of reasons. First, it appeared to contradict the historicity of the Jewish tradition. Second, the similarity to Christian methodology raised the concern of ratifying and confirming the elements of Christian interpretation, which obviously included statements of the Christian faith. To an extent, there was also concern that allegorization of the *mitzvot* would lead to the result that they would cease to be viewed as binding on the practical level.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Ibn Caspi, as a philosophical exegete, is compelled against his will to deal with these questions. More than once, we find in his commentaries exegetical apologetics, defending the Jewish sages of philosophy from claims raised against them. In this way, Ibn Caspi is consistent in that he identifies with rationalists, praises them, and sees philosophy a compelling tool for understanding the Torah.[[22]](#footnote-22) On the other hand, as a *pashtan* and grammarian, one may see in his writings a certain opposition to allegorization that is not necessary in order to understand the verse and does not arise from *peshat*-oriented methodology.[[23]](#footnote-23) It appears that in the view of Ibn Caspi in a number of places, the essential meaning of the verse is the deeper level, which alludes to the wisdoms of nature and divinity.[[24]](#footnote-24) At the same time, the presumption of the biblical narrative is that of a realistic narrative; only when there is a pressing need may one explain it in an allegoristic way.

**F. Connection to the Biblical Yosef**

In Ibn Caspi’s commentary on the narrative of Yosef and his brothers (*Bereishit* 37-50), there is a clear tendency to elaborate. Ibn Caspi spends more time on these chapters than any other narratives in the Torah, analyzing and evaluating the characters, their motivations, and the nature of their morality. It appears that Yosef’s character has special meaning for Ibn Caspi, and for this reason he goes on at length in Yosef’s narratives.[[25]](#footnote-25) Ibn Caspi sees Yosef as one of the patriarchs, unlike what the Sages propound,[[26]](#footnote-26) and even surpassing them in his estimation.

According to Ibn Caspi, we may gauge the qualitative importance of an issue in the Torah by quantitative measures.[[27]](#footnote-27) Thus, one may learn the regard of the Torah for a certain person or issue from the quantity of the verses dealing with that person or issue. The fact is that Yosef has four weekly portions dedicated to his story (more than any other Patriarch). This testifies to Yosef’s importance, and only Moshe Rabbeinu’s importance is greater.

Indeed, Ibn Caspi gives Yosef a number of positive titles. In his preface to Chapter 37 of *Bereishit* alone, Yosef is called “our premier patriarch, called ‘*Tzafenat Pane’ach’*… Moreover, this worthy was a great sage.” Yosef’s sagacity is mentioned explicitly by Ibn Caspi dozens of times, to the point that we may say that Yosef earns the definite article in Ibn Caspi’s terminology: “Yosef the sage.” Ibn Caspi praises not only the attributes and spiritual level of Yosef, but even his abilities.[[28]](#footnote-28) In addition, according to Ibn Caspi, Yosef is not only an intellectual, but a righteous and sensitive person.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Ibn Caspi also goes on to compare Yosef and his brothers,[[30]](#footnote-30) which results in Yosef’s preference, and in any place in which there exists a possibility to level criticism at Yosef’s actions, Ibn Caspi always comes to his defense. Thus, for example, while some biblical exegetes criticize Yosef’s actions towards his brothers, Ibn Caspi explains them as reflecting a desire to educate them and to actualize his dreams (see *Tirat Kesef*, *Bereishit* 42:9).

From Ibn Caspi’s words, it seems that he identifies with Yosef. First, given the many accolades showered on Yosef by Ibn Caspi, it appears that his great regard for Yosef is what brings Ibn Caspi to identify with him. Second, it appears that the fact that they share a name constitutes a basis for identification. A third factor is that apparently Ibn Caspi sees Yosef as his comrade: both are isolated from their environment, and both of them are sages among the foolish masses.

Translated by Rav Yoseif Bloch

1. For his biography, see I. Twersky, "Joseph ibn Kaspi – Portrait of a Medieval Jewish Intellectual," in I. Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (1979), 231–257; *Shulchan Kesef*, five exegetical and theological essays, ed. H. Kasher (Jerusalem, 1996); Hacohen, *Sugyot*, pp. 99-102; *Gevi'a ha-Kesef*, Introduction, pp. 11-13, ed. B.E. Herring (New York, 1982). The alert reader will note that spellings of his name vary in academic literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “*Argentum”* in Latin and “*kesef*” in Hebrew both mean “silver”. This is what Ibn Caspi himself writes in *Kevutzat Kesef* (Version A), in *Asarah Kelei Kesef*, ed. I.H. Last, Vol. I (Presburg, 1903), p. XXII. See also Barry Mesch, *Studies in Joseph ibn Caspi: Fourteenth-Century Philosopher and Exegete* (Leiden, 1975), p. 1, n. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Kalonymus, *Teshuva She-Heshiv*, p. 24, where one may find the sharp criticism Kalonymus b. R. Kalonymus levels against this statement. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See *Tirat Kesef*, p. 84, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See also *Tirat Kesef*, pp. 119-120. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Similarly, when Ibn Ezra and the Ramban use allusions, they generally do not do so in order to explain the simple meaning of the verses. Instead, they primarily delve into issues of *sod* (mainly the Ramban) and linguistic matters (mainly Ibn Ezra). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Thus, for example, in *Matzref La-Kesef* to *Bereishit* 27:45, we find:

“Why should I be bereaved also of both of you on one day” — this is akin to: “And I will also be built from her” (*Bereishit* 30:3).

The explanation is that the word “why” in the verse means “perhaps”; Rivka’s intent in saying, “Why should I be bereaved also of both of you on one day” is, “Perhaps I will be bereaved of both of you,” just as Rachel’s intent with her words, “And I will also be built from her” is, “Perhaps I will be built also from her.” See also *Shulchan Kesef*, ch. 65 (p. 122), and Kasher’s notes there. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This refers to those things which are simple and understood by everyone. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See, e.g., *Matzref La-Kesef,* *Shemot* 24:12:

There is no need to mention everything which Moshe did with God during this forty-day meeting — what did God say to him, and what did he respond? — for who can know this? Nevertheless, it will mention what is necessary for the masses… [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example, *Matzref La-Kesef,* *Bereishit* 1:2:

We will do all of this to hide it from the masses, so that the masses will take them according to their degree, while some individuals will understand in all of this honored matter two facets, the metaphorical “apples of gold in settings of silver” (*Mishlei* 25:11).

See also Rambam’s introduction to *Moreh Nevukhim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This is what Ibn Caspi writes in the continuation to his commentary on *Vayikra* 26:30:

“I will cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you…” Now, what would it help the masses — all the more so this thick-headed generation — if he were to say to them: “If you follow my rules,” you will merit the life of the World to Come, and if you do not listen, you will not merit it? This is only like yelling at statutes or playing music among the dead.

Similar things may be found in *Shulchan Kesef*, ch. 64, p. 120:

For our holy books have been composed to be handed over to the entire masses, children and women. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. It is not clear to me whether this is a true expression of Ibn Caspi’ regard for the Sages, or a certain lip service because he is about to attack their commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Rambam, *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:27: “Onkelos the convert is very complete in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See also *Matzref La-kesef*, *Bereishit* 41:40. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thus, for example, he distinguishes between two biblical verbs for removing shoes, “*shal*” and “*chalatz*”:

The people of the land do not understand what it says of Moshe: “Remove (*shal*) your shoes” (*Shemot* 3:5), as it compares to the issue of Boaz, “A man would remove (*shalaf*) his shoe” (*Ruth* 4:7) and the topic of levirate marriage, “And she shall remove (*chaletza*) his shoe” (*Devarim* 25:9). The matter is as follows: The custom of the land is to wear on one’s feet shoes of hard leather, and the shoes are not tied to anything, and therefore when one wants to remove this shoe, one merely shakes his foot, and the shoe falls off. This is “*shal*,” equivalent to “*nashal*” in *Devarim* 19:1, “And the iron will slip off.” This is why it says, “A man would remove (*shalaf*) his shoe and give it to his fellow.” However, if the shoe is tied and attached to the foot with the straps, then we use the term *chalitza*, similarly to “And they will remove (*chaletzu*) the stones” (*Vayikra* 14:40)… (*Tirat Kesef*, p. 19) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is what Ibn Caspi writes in *Tirat Kesef*, pp. 18-19; see ibid.,p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For more on the background of these polemics, see Halbertal, *Bein Torah Le-Chokhma,* pp. 11-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. One ban decreed that no one under the age of 25 could study philosophy; the second ban will be discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For the background of polemics in Provence, see Benedict, *Ha-Torah Be-Provence;* Lasker*, Natzrut*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See *Minchat Kena’ot* in *Teshuvot Ha-Rashba*, p. 724. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. #  The view of the Rambam, claiming that biblical anthropomorphization should be seen as an allegory for deeper content, ultimately led to an even more extreme view among radical groups in Spain. While the Rambam utilizes the allegorical approach for issues of anthropomorphizing God alone, there are those who utilize for interpreting practical *mitzvot*. In other words, a school arose which claimed that the intelligent person, who knows the intentions of the *mitzvot*, is not required to fulfill the *mitzvot* practically, and his understanding is enough. See Shalom, *Zeramim Be-Mystica*, p. 391, quoting R. Moshe de León from a manuscript. The Rambam’s adherents rejected, of course, the indictment of the Rambam and his philosophy for exegesis of the *mitzvot* along these lines, but the dispute was focused on the essential view leading to these extreme opinions. See Ben Sasson, *Toledot Yisrael*, pp. 220-226.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Tirat Kesef*, pp. 10-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For example, this is what he writes in *Tirat Kesef* (p. 20):

Now listen, my son, to what I say, and it is this: for it is not appropriate in my view to remove a narrative from its simple meaning, unless one is compelled to do so. Therefore, when a narrative appears in Scripture, either a statement said or an action done, it is appropriate that we should follow the presumption and explain it thus: it was a conscious event, employing the senses in their normal way…

See also *Peirush Le-Mishlei,* I, p. 19; *Sefer Ha-Musar*, p. 67; see also Rambam, *Moreh Nevukhim,* I, 8, and *Maskiyot Kesef,* ad loc*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See, for example, *Gevia Kesef*, ch. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Already in the preface to *Bereishit* 37 in *Matzref La-Kesef*, Ibn Caspi dedicates a lengthy, detailed analysis to the ranking of the Patriarchs. We shall bring here part of his words:

Says Yosef ibn Caspi: My intent is to elaborate on the issue of Yosef, for he dominates from here until the end of the Book of *Bereishit*; indeed, he is our premier patriarch, called “*Tzafenat Pane’ach*” (41:45), which means “He reveals the hidden secrets.” Moreover, this worthy man was a great sage, as we shall explain, and also Aristotle mentioned him when it comes to interpreting dreams. Indeed, he was the man who ruled longer than all of the rulers who have led our nation, for he stood in his greatness for eighty years. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The Sages declare (*Berakhot* 16b): “Our rabbis taught: Only three may be referred to as Patriarchs, and only four may be referred to as Matriarchs.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibn Caspi explains that the length of Yosef’s narrative is proportional to the significance of the main character in it, conforming to that which is accepted in the rest of the Torah: Moshe gets an entire book, Yosef gets four Torah portions, Avraham three, Yaakov two, Yitzchak one, and Adam and Noach one each:

See how this part of the Pentateuch, i.e. the Book of *Bereishit*, is the most honored. Now, this book is itself divided into a dozen portions: the first tells the story of Creation, from Adam until Noach; the second, from Noach until Avraham; the third, fourth and fifth deal with Avraham, the pioneer. The sixth concerns Yitzchak, whose quality was weaker than the quality of his father and of his son. The seventh and eighth deal with the honored Yaakov. The ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth deal with the wise Yosef. Afterwards, Moshe flourished, master of all, and to him is dedicated the entire book of *Shemot*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For example, this is what he writes in *Tirat Kesef* (p. 125):

Interpreting dreams is for the masters of the power of inference, for this is the power which the prophets have in great measure, and therefore Yosef thought and inferred in his mind: how might these dreams come into reality? [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See *Tirat Kesef*, p. 127; *Matzref La-Kesef*, *Bereishit* 44:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See for example, the following citation:

Even though his brothers were wise and clever, he was more wise and clever than they… Then the mentally deficient responded…

The “mentally deficient” are the brothers, as compared to Yosef. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)