YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**GREAT BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS**

**By Dr. Avigail Rock**

**Lecture #26:**

**Radatz Hoffmann**

**A. Biography**

R. David Tzvi Hoffmann (1843-1921), whom we will refer to as Radatz, was born and educated in the Hungarian city of Verbó(modern-day Vrbové, Slovakia). Afterwards, he studied in the yeshiva of Maharam Schick,[[1]](#footnote-1) near the city of Bratislava, until the year 1865.

From there, Radatz turned to academic studies at the University of Vienna and the University of Berlin, studying philosophy, history, and Oriental languages, ultimately receiving his doctorate in 1871 from the University of Tübingen. In the same year, he accepted a teaching position in Höchberg, allowing him to form connections with the leaders of Orthodox Judaism in 19th-century Germany. A short time afterwards, he started teaching in R. S. R. Hirsch’s *Realschule* in Frankfurt am Main, an experience which undoubtedly had a great influence upon Radatz.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In 1873, with the founding of the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin by R. Azriel Hildesheimer, Radatz joined the faculty, teaching there for close to three decades. Upon R. Hildesheimer’s death in 1899, Radatz became the rector of the Rabbinical Seminary, and he continued his educational work until shortly before his death. His commentaries to the Torah are based on the lectures that he gave over many years in the seminary.

Although he grew up in a traditional Hungarian community (studying under a disciple of the Chatam Sofer, originator of the phrase, “What is new is forbidden by the Torah”!), Radatz was influenced by the openness and the ways of critical teaching and study then in vogue in Germany. Radatz was part of the Judaic Studies (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*[[3]](#footnote-3)) movement, for which R. Hirsch criticized him. Taking the view of scientific criticism which started to develop as part of the Haskalah, Radatz applied it to his study of the Oral Torah and halakhic Midrash, an area of his expertise and a discipline to which he contributed significantly.[[4]](#footnote-4) Another area of his expertise was, of course, biblical exegesis.

**B. Background**

As we have mentioned, Radatz’s commentaries on the Torah began as a series of lectures which he gave in the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin. Afterwards, a number of lectures were collected and edited into a book of commentary on the Torah. The commentaries were written in German and were later translated into Hebrew.

Originally, commentaries on *Bereishit*, *Vayikra*, and *Devarim* were published; recently, his commentary on *Shemot* was published, based on his lectures, by Mosad Harav Kook. The commentaries on *Vayikra* and *Devarim* were written by Radatz himself, while the commentaries on *Bereishit* and *Shemot* were written by his students, based on the manuscripts of his lectures.

Radatz did not write his commentaries in a vacuum. He explains his motivations for writing his commentary in a clear way in his introduction to *Vayikra*: [[5]](#footnote-5)

In this commentary, we will grab with both hands the Masoretic version. We will do our utmost to repel the criticism based on texts opposed to the Masoretic grade, seeking to breaks down its walls…

We will throw off the yoke of high criticism,[[6]](#footnote-6) which appoints itself the lofty judge of our *Tanakh*. We will go in the light of the *mesora*, for we believe in its divinity. According to it and through it we will try to explain the words of the verses. Nevertheless, we will pay attention to explanations which have a point of view different from ours, and we will give them the benefit of the doubt as much as is possible.

So that we may understand these words, we will expand a bit on the topic of biblical criticism in Germany in the 19th century.[[7]](#footnote-7) The accepted view of biblical criticism in the 19th century was that of the German critic Julius Wellhausen. According to his view, which was based on the documentary hypothesis which predated his activity, the Torah was based on different documents from different times, composed by different people, so that wide swaths of the first four books of the Torah were actually composed later than *Devarim* (composed, according to his view, during the reign of Yoshiyahu[[8]](#footnote-8)), and they were completed after the Babylonian Exile.[[9]](#footnote-9) Wellhausen’s view was accepted among the Christians and Maskilim.

This view posed a two-fold challenge to tradition: first of all, it conflicted with basic belief in “Torah from heaven” — that is, the divine origin of the Torah. In addition, traditional faith was also challenged on account of its faithful adherence to the halakhic conventions of the Sages based on their exegesis of the verses through the Oral Torah; alternative interpretations of the halakhic sections of the Torah undermined this idea. This challenge also emerged from the battles that Orthodoxy waged against the Haskalah and the Reform movement, and it threatened to produce a practical result of abandoning Orthodox Halakha. Alongside this phenomenon, there were anti-Semitic (or anti-rabbinical) attacks launched directly against the alleged illogic of rabbinical Halakha.

As we saw in the previous lesson, the Jewish community in Germany willing exposed itself to these conceptions because of the inclination to assimilate in German society. R. S.R. Hirsch wrote in his commentary against these conceptions in his didactic way. R. S.R. Hirsch stressed[[10]](#footnote-10) the involvement of Moshe Rabbeinu in writing the Torah, as well as the antiquity of Halakha and the authority of the *mesora*. This was an emotional appeal; R. Hirsch turned to the “heart” of the nation, and in this lies the greatness of his commentary.

Radatz took a different tack, turning to the intellect and using scientific proofs. Radatz was aware of all the critical theories and intimately acquainted with the critical literature, and he competed directly with its claims, using the scientific tools he knew well — Oriental languages, linguistics, and history. Together with this, he was a sage, an authority in the halakhic sphere. Using his expertise and skills, he succeeded both in protecting the conceptions of the Torah’s antiquity and perfecting an approach respected by Jews who had been captured by the enchantment of criticism, anchoring the Oral Torah in the Written Torah.

Thus, the target audience of the commentary was those intellectual Jews who knew the claims of the bible critics, but as we have seen, Radatz’s commentary retains great value even outside of the polemical context.

**C. Basic Assumptions**

In his introduction to his commentary on *Vayikra* (p. 1) and in other places, Radatz makes clear his basic assumptions, which prevent him from reaching any conclusion which conflicts with one of the Thirteen Principles. These assumptions are for him prior principles; nevertheless, he tries not to rely on them in the interpretation. This is what he writes:

I willingly admit that because of my principles of faith, I have not been able to reach a conclusion that the Torah was not written by the hands of Moshe Rabbeinu or, all the more so, that it was written after Moshe’s time. In order not to leave a place for doubts of that issue, I have explained and clarified with prior notes the principle which has served me as the basis for my explanation in this respect. However, with the aspiration to rely on these “dogmatic principles” from a scientific aspect, I have tried constantly to rely on reasons which may be seen as justified even by those who have a worldview different from mine.

As we have said above, one of the important aims of Radatz was to prove the unity of the Torah — that it was all given by God — as well as its antiquity — that it was written by Moshe. In the continuation of our words, we will see how Radatz competes with a number of problems that proponents of biblical criticism have raised concerning the concepts of the unity and antiquity of *Tanakh*.

**D. Radatz’s Relationship to Stylistic Variations in the Torah**

**The Influence of Content on Style**

One of the claims of the biblical critics is that stylistic alterations attest to different sources. The fact that the Torah uses at times certain words or a certain style and sometimes uses others demonstrates that every one of the variations is a remainder of a “document” or different source. The answer of Radatz to this claim is that God writes in different styles, based on the content of the section. This is what he writes about the differences between *Bereishit* 1 and *Bereishit* 2-3:

We must still question whether the variation in language and in the forms of expression in the two descriptions justifies the assumption that there are two authors for these chapters, one for the first chapter, and one for the two chapters afterwards. Here we should note first of all, that even if the contention is correct and it is possible to find different styles in the Torah, this still does not prove that we should relate these styles to different authors…

Consider this: would a father write to his son in a standard missive about his welfare with the same language which he will use when he comes to lecture him about significant, sublime truths or when he comes to tell him about new scientific discoveries?(*Bereishit*, p. 91)

In a more succinct formulation, he writes:

There is naught but the content which determines the style. (*Bereishit* 3:22-24)

In other words, Radatz claims that the Torah uses different styles in keeping with the content of the passage.[[11]](#footnote-11) Now, we shall see how Radatz applies this principle to a number of problems.

**God’s Names at Creation**

One of the classic examples brought by the biblical critics as a basis for the claim that the *Tanakh* is composed of different sources is the multiplicity of names of God, e.g. *Hashem* (the Tetragrammaton) and *Elokim*. (They refer to these authors as J and E respectively.) The most famous example is the dual descriptions of creation in *Bereishit*, in chapter 1 and chapters 2-3.

We will not go into the details in this confined framework, but we will note the problematic nature of these chapters briefly. In the first chapter of *Bereishit*, we find a description of the creation of the universe and its relationship to God. For example, we have “In the beginning God created” (1:1); “and the spirit of God” (1:2); et cetera. Throughout the chapter, we have only the name “*Elokim*,” but beginning with 2:4, we find “*Hashem* *Elokim.*”

Moreover, the details of creation differ in the two accounts.[[12]](#footnote-12) Addressing this phenomenon, Radatz explains that God’s different names express different relationships of God to creation, not different authors:

Now in the first chapter, God is described in the glory of His sublime kingship, when, by His word, chaos and nothingness are banished, while days and continents, flora and fauna, sun and moon and stars are all created, culminating with man, made in His image…

Should we expect to that same style and those same forms of expression in the two following chapters, consisting as they do of a description of Him, Blessed be He, as a merciful father who creates the human being with unique love, worrying about him and nurturing him and dealing with his education? True, He chastises him for his sin, but at the same time, does He not direct him to the school of hard work and toil, by which he will continue to be educated?(*Bereishit*, p. 91)

In other words, the first chapter of *Bereishit* describes a relationship in which God is distant from creation and man, a relationship which is expressed by the harsh name *Elokim*,[[13]](#footnote-13) while the second and third chapters describe a close relationship of God with creation and man, a relationship which is expressed by the tender name *Hashem*.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**God’s Names at the Binding of Yitzchak**

An additional example in which Radatz applies this principle, the changing content dictating a different name of God, may be found in his commentary on the Binding of Yitzchak (*Bereishit* 22).

In the first section of this passage (up to v. 9), we find *Elokim*, while in the second part (v. 11 ff.), *Hashem* appears alone. According to the proponents of biblical criticism, the explanation of the fact is that the narrative of the Binding is composed of two documents.

Radatz, in his commentary on the Binding, notes the change in God’s names, but he argues that this reflects a change in Avraham’s consciousness. When God asks Avraham to offer his son, this is an act of *Elokim*, the God who commands and demands uncompromising obedience from His servants. However, when a substitute for his son is found, Avraham understands that God is actually *Hashem*, Who asks His worshippers to bring offers not as an expression of service and obedience, but to make man worthy. As a result of man’s dedication to his Creator, God will make His presence rest upon humanity.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**Yaakov/ Yisrael**

Similar to their distinction between the names of God, bible critics believe that the use of the names Yaakov and Yisrael for our third Patriarch reflect different authors.

Radatz explains that the different names reflects a difference in the perspective of the narrative. The name Yisrael appears when we are talking about something having significance for the history of the nation as a whole, while the name Yaakov relates to more personal and intimate issues.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**E. Different Contexts**

**The Sin of the Spies**

Radatz relates, of course, to redundancies and contradictions in the content of the Torah as well. We will bring two examples of these.

As is known, the Sin of the Spies as described by Moshe in the Plains of Moav (*Devarim* 1:22-46) differs from the description in *Parashat Shelach* (*Bamidbar* 13-14). The biblical exegetes[[17]](#footnote-17) already address this contradiction, but Radatz relates to this problem from a different direction. In his explanation of *Devarim* 1:22, Radatz determines and applies a consistent methodology which addresses the narrative variations in *Devarim* in a general way:

Moshe Rabbeinu does not mention all of these details in the Book of *Devarim*, because of the simple reason that they are not applicable to his words of rebuke…

In light of this, it is certainly understandable that there a number of facts that the historian will not mention; on the other hand, one who gives a speech will mention this specifically, since they add to his speech the power of persuasion…

In other words, the contradictions between *Devarim* and other books do not reflect different authors, but different themes.

**Slaughtering Outside the *Mishkan***

We will see here an additional and final example of Radatz’s method of resolving a contradiction, using his knowledge of Halakha and giving an elegant solution to one of the difficult problems raised by biblical critics. *Vayikra* forbids any slaughtering (mundane or holy) outside the *Mishkan*:

If anyone of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to God in front of the *Mishkan* of God, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people. Thus the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to God, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to God…

So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to the hircine, after whom they stray. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations. *(Vayikra* 17:3-7)

However, we find in *Devarim*:

Rather, you shall seek the place that Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices…

You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that Lord your God is giving you. *(Devarim* 12:5-9)

From these verses, it would appear that already in the desert, the Israelites were allowed to bring offerings outside of the *Mishkan*. When the Israelites inherit the land, they are told, it will be allowed to offer only in one place (vv. 9-11), but in the desert it is allowed to offer in any place, “according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eye” (v. 8).[[18]](#footnote-18)

A number of resolutions are cited by the exegetes for this contradiction. We will bring here the Rashbam’s answer:

In every place where we camp in the desert, we bring in the *Mishkan*, which is moved from one place to another. (Rashbam, *Devarim* 12:9, s.v. “*Ish*”)

This means that in the desert, the Israelites brought offerings in the *Mishkan* alone (as commanded in *Vayikra*). However, the *Mishkan* was portable; therefore, despite the fact that offering was allowed only upon its premises, in practice this was done in dozens of places in the wilderness, each time matching the current location of the *Mishkan*. The Book of *Devarim* addresses the situation when the Israelites will reach the land; at that point, the place of permitted offerings will be stationary. At that point, offerings may be brought there exclusively.[[19]](#footnote-19) The problem with this explanation is that the verse (9) says that in the desert, the situation is one of “everyone doing whatever is right in his own eye,” and this implies that one offers it in any place where he wants, not only upon the premises of the *Mishkan*.

Now, we will see the commentary of Radatz (*Devarim* 12:8) and his solution:

It appears to us that Scripture may be explained according to its simple meaning, based on the following assumption:

We have indeed learnt in the end of *Zevachim* (14:5) that only when they came to Gilgal were the private altars allowed, but the Rambam in *Peirush Ha-Mishna* ad loc. explains that the basis of this allowance is because the previous basis for the reason of the prohibition had been rendered null and void.

In *Vayikra* 17, it is stated only that it is forbidden to offer inside or outside the camp, “So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to the hircine, after whom they stray” (v. 7); in their mistaken view, these goat-demons were found in the desert.

However, once Israel entered a settled land and the concern of offering to the hircine is no longer significant, they were no longer bound by the prohibition of slaughtering outside.[[20]](#footnote-20)

According to this, it is self-evident that with the conquest of Transjordan, the prohibition stated in *Vayikra* 17 would be null and void…

In other words, when the Israelites were in the desert, it was allowed to bring in the *Mishkan* only, due to the concern that the Israelites would offer to these goat-demons whom they believed to be in the desert, as is stated explicitly in verses 5-7 of chapter 17: “Thus the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to Lord, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting… So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to the hircine, after whom they stray.” However, when the Israelites conquered the East Bank of the Jordan and entered the land, they abandoned the desert, the place in which, in their view, the goat-demons were found, and therefore there was no longer a danger of the Israelites sacrificing to them. The prohibition of bringing outside the *Mishkan* was therefore annulled.

Thus, at the time that *Vayikra*, which is stated in the desert, is taught, it is forbidden to bring outside the *Mishkan*, but at the time that *Devarim* is stated, on the East Bank, it is permitted to bring offerings outside of the *Mishkan*. Radatz, with great originality, uses a halakhic principle (private altars, i.e., offering outside of the *Mishkan*, being prohibited and permitted at different times) and he “stretches” it[[21]](#footnote-21) a bit in order to solve a critical problem of the *peshat* of the text.

**F. Proving the Torah’s Antiquity**

Aside from the question of the authorship of the Torah, biblical critics also challenged the Torah’s antiquity, claiming that parts of the Torah were written during the First Temple Era and other parts during Second Temple Era. In a number of places, Radatz brings proofs to the fact that the Torah was written and given over to the generation that left Egypt; in his view, the language of the Torah testifies to this. We will bring a number of examples:

1. In *Bereishit* 23:2, the verse states, “And Sara died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron, in the land of Canaan, and Avraham came to mourn Sara and to cry for her.” There, Radatz notes:

“In the land of Canaan” — this addition proves… that our chapter was written in particular on behalf of the Israelites in the desert. In front of them, he had to come back and stress that Chevron, the place of the burial of the Patriarchs, sits in the land of Canaan, in the land that they must conquer.

1. In *Devarim* 17:16, the Torah says concerning the king, “Only he may not increase horses for him, so that he will not return the people to Egypt…” There, Radatz writes:

They justifiably point this out, for a later legislator would not use this justification for the prohibition of increasing horses. The concern lest the king return the nation to Egypt was one which was relevant only in the days of Moshe and a short time afterwards…[[22]](#footnote-22)

1. In the commentary to *Bereishit* (p. 205), Radatz writes:

We may ask: how can it be that the Torah does not even allude to the reasons that Avraham is chosen by God? Instead, it immediately charges into the sequence of events, as God promises Avraham a great reputation and blessing…

We may answer… that the reputation and greatness of Avraham Avinu would have been exceedingly well-known to the generation which received the Torah. Thus, there would have been no need to acquaint them with the descriptions of the days of his youth…

**G. Juxtaposition, Structure and Meaning**

One of the prominent and significant characteristics of Radatz’s commentary is determining the sequence and structure of the Pentateuch, dividing the topics into narrative units and splitting the units into subunits. This classification, without a doubt, helps the student to grasp the meaning of the content.

In this way, Radatz adopts the accepted scientific view of dissecting narrative creations; similarly, he adopts the method of biblical critics for identifying different sources - a precise reading of the Torah while paying attention to expressions of language, structure, order, headings, and the like. The view of biblical teaching accepted today was recognizably influenced by his methodology. Specifically, one may take note of the *Da’at* *Mikra* project, in which the units are defined and demarcated clearly.

We will show how Radatz uses these techniques to frame the topics in *Devarim* 19-21. In these chapters, the following laws appear according to the order specified below:

1. Cities of refuge and manslaughter (19:1-10)
2. Murder (19:11-13)
3. Moving the boundary marker (19:14)
4. Witnesses and perjury (19:15-21)
5. War (20)
6. Unsolved killing (21:1-9)

What connects these topics? Radatz writes at the beginning of the unit:

After the commandments of national leadership — judges, king, priests and prophets — the verse continues with a number of commandments binding upon the leadership, delineating what the most important ones for the existence of the country are. In other words, how will the people who are under the threat of death protect their lives? How may one prevent the spilling of innocent blood?

When we look at the previously mentioned topics, it is immediately prominent to the eye that the prohibition of moving the boundary marker does not seem to fit with the group of commandments binding on the leadership or the commandments which prevent bloodshed. Radatz explains the relevance of the prohibition; using his explanation, we learn the severity of the prohibition of moving the boundary marker, and we understand how it relates to theft or robbery, which the Torah has already discussed previously:

Just as bloodshed desecrates the sanctity of the land, so the same is true of moving the boundary marker…

This sin is more serious than the prohibition of “You shall not steal;” in fact, it is close to “You shall not murder.” Thus, we have found that the inheritance of the Patriarchs was dear to every man of Israel like his life, and he did not want to sell it.

This is the continuation of the verses:[[23]](#footnote-23) an accidental killer is sent into to exile because this expiates his sin, but it is forbidden to steal the territory and birthright of any other person in Israel, because this defiles the holiness of the land as much as bloodshed.(*Devarim*, p. 376)

**H. The Superiority of the Land of Israel**

I will conclude this lesson with Radatz’s fine words about the superiority of the land of Israel:

The clime of the Holy Land constantly reminds the inhabitants of the presence of the Creator and His Providence, and it protects them for corruption of traits. For in this land, blessing and curse are so close to each other, without any boundary, until the words of the Torah are, “Behold, I put before you today, blessing and curse.” This dictum always hovers before the eyes of each and every one. The nature, climate and territory of the Holy Land are most suitable to accept the flow of blessing like the bitter curse.

When God’s eyes are in it, this land is a paradise, but when He withholds his blessing from it or stretches out his hand to punish it, there will be famine, illness, and plagues to make it desolate. Moreover, the wealth of the land and its pleasant geographic situation draw after them often foreign conquerors who were ready to serve as the staff of His Blessed anger, should the people every stray from His path. This indicates that the land is capable, in all of its aspects, to nurture the religion of the Unique One and to direct one towards it and to educate its residents towards a sanctified way of life.(*Bereishit* 12:7)

According to these words, the superiority of Israel is not only in its blessings, but in its curses as well; both blessings and curses are a spiritual-educational tool.

One may apply this approach also to biblical criticism. This phenomenon brought about religious destruction among many Jews, but one must recognize that thanks to the development of the discipline of biblical criticism, the great minds of Israel, led by Radatz, managed to see the verses in a new light, expounding them and investigating them innovatively. Specifically, it was biblical criticism which brought new impetus and new methods to the study of the Torah, which continue to influence and nurture us until this very day.

1. R. Moshe Schick was one of the great rabbis of 19th-century Hungary. He was one of the Chatam Sofer’s most prominent disciples. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In fact, R. S.R. Hirsch is quoted by Radatz dozens of times. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This movement began in the 19th century, influenced by the Haskala. It began with a group of Jewish critics, led by Leopold Zunz, Abraham Geiger, Heinrich Hirsch Graetz, et al. Members of this movement claimed that the historical analysis of Jewish culture, which they saw as part of human culture, would help Jews to become acquainted with their past, define the characteristics of Judaism in the modern era, and investigate their identity. Beyond this, the critical analysis and the innovative definition of the religion would help in reducing anti-Semitism and restoring the pride of Judaism, since the Christian environment would recognize Judaism and Jews “scientifically,” consequently raising their esteem. Consequently, they believed, the movement would contribute to advancing the Emancipation in Germany and to the deepening of the Jews’ integration within their environment. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In fact, Radatz discovered the distinction between R. Yishmael’s academy and R. Akiva’s academy in the development of halakhic Midrash. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Radatz starts his commentary to the Torah with his commentary on the Book of *Vayikra*. In his introduction that book, he explains why he commences his biblical commentary with the third book of the Pentateuch (p. 9):

   In the eyes of the Jew, it has always been more important to know what he is obligated to do and to fulfill and what not to do; this is more important than the critical analysis of the creation of the universe and the subsequent generations of creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Biblical criticism distinguishes between the terms “high criticism” and “low criticism.” High criticism tries to identify the author of the text, the historical-cultural background of the text, its varying levels and its literary forms. Low criticism deals with the biblical text with the aim of restoring the original form of the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. We will expand here on what was said in the previous lesson. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The claim was first mentioned by the researcher Wilhelm de Wette. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Biblical criticism generally, as a branch of study, maintains that the Torah (indeed, all of *Tanakh*) was written first as different documents by different authors, at least some of which were written long after the events described in them, and afterwards they were edited repeatedly until they became the modern Scripture. This claim is accepted by all the biblical critics, but they argue over the question of which books were written first and which books were written afterwards, what the aims of different documents were, how the editing took place, etc. The view of Wellhausen, presented above, is one of the most prominent discussing this question. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Thus, for example, R. Hirsch writes the following, commenting on *Shemot* 20:16, in which the nation turns to Moshe after the Convocation at Sinai with the request, “You speak with us”:

    With this statement, they declare that God spoke with them the way a person speaks with his friend. Their personal experience of this phenomenon was the main aim of God’s making this event happen. The experience of the entire people made God’s speaking to the people a real fact. In this, the truth of the “revelation” was proved, beyond any deceitful attempt to cast doubt, by which some attempt to turn the revelation of God to man into the revelation of God from within man, the revelation of God to Moshe into the revelation of God from within the heart of Moshe, and by this they would turn revelation into non-revelation. The matter of revelation is written clearly and truly on each and every passage of the words of this Torah: “And God spoke to Moshe, saying.”

    These words are directed against the biblical critics, but in his words, as pleasant as they are, there is no “scientific” proof of the Torah’s antiquity. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Radatz concedes that one may not always explain stylistic variances according to the content:

    We do not claim that it we are capable of explaining each and every verse in the Scripture, why this name is used specifically or another. However, the truth of the matter is that this is not compelling at all, because it is sufficient if we will prove in a number of prominent places throughout a given narrative that the names *Elokim* and *Hashem* are used together deliberately in order to demonstrate that, in any case, the difference of names is no proof of different authors, Heaven forbid. (*Bereishit*, p. 57)

    In this context, see his instructive words (*loc. cit.*) concerning the names of God in the verse, “Those who come male and female from all flesh came when *Elokim* commanded him, and *Hashem* sealed on his behalf” (*Bereishit* 7:16). Additional examples are cited there. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For example, in the first chapter, the grass is created on the third day before man created on the sixth day, while in the second chapter, it is written that before the creation of man, God had not yet caused the vegetation to sprout. There are additional distinctions, but we will not get into them here. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Explaining “*Elokim*”, Radatz writes:

    This comes from the term “mighty one,” a reference to strength… Thus, this describes God as all-powerful. The plural suffix shows that this name demonstrates the unification a number of powers, indicating that this One rules over all powers of nature and directs them in accordance with His will. Because of this, our Sages of blessed memory described “*Elokim*” as the Attribute of Justice, for indeed He is strong, omnipotent, ruling over nature. He is the One Who demarcates boundaries for all of His creations, preventing one from attacking the other, determining what is right for each one.*(Bereishit*, p. 55) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. As for the name “*Hashem*”, Radatz writes:

    This is the personal name of the Unique God. The accepted explanation of the verse “I will be what I will be” (*Shemot* 3:14), i.e., I am what I am, does not dovetail with the context in which this name appears. The concept of absolute existence will not plant the hope of redemption in the heart of the audience.

    However, if we understand this name as referring to “the One Who accompanies man,” then we may say that this name complements exactly what was said before this to Moshe from the mouth of God, “For I will be with you” (*ibid*. 12). *Hashem* is with man, and this is the Attribute of Mercy, the nexus of all the terms of love and kindness. Similar to “I will be what I will be,” we find in another place, “And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy” (*Shemot* 33:19). In other words: I will be with whom I will be, in order to help him…

    Thus, it comes out that the Tetragrammaton is a Jewish concept, the unique aspect of divinity, divinity which is not distant from the world but residing amongst its creatures. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. These are his words:

    It appears that the motivation for using different holy names is this: it is God Who tests Avraham. Therefore, God, Blessed be He, does not appear as a merciful father Who assists man, but He appears like a powerful lord and commander Who demands unconditional obedience… and the command has been given. Avraham knows and recognizes *Elokim*, and therefore he is identified as being *Elokim*-fearing. He knows very well that he is only the creation of this God and a tool in His hand, and that there is no place for opposition to or rebellion against Him, for only obedience will bring one to happiness…

    And as one so God-fearing, he executes His command, Blessed be He, without thinking about it, and he obeys Him as a soldier obeys his commander, with blind obedience. Therefore, he says, “*Elokim* will see to the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.” *Elokim* will choose the offering which He desires, and whatever He will choose of him, one is obligated to draw close to it without any rebellion…

    Immediately afterward, the unanticipated salvation comes, and the ram is discovered to be an offering in place of the son given to Avraham anew. Then Avraham names the place using *Hashem*, “*Hashem* will see,” when he is convinced that not to *Elokim* do we bring offerings, but to *Hashem*. We are not doing a service for the Blessed God by bringing Him offerings; rather, He commands us to bring offerings so that we may be educated and elevated, so that He may reside among us, in our midst, as a father among His children. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. These are his words:

    The use of the name Yisrael demonstrates that the event being related holds great significance in the history of the nation; indeed, this is the reason for the rejection of the tribe of Reuven and the promotion of the tribes of Yosef and Yehuda… (*Bereishit* 35:22)

    It is not frivolously that the verse here and below v. 13 uses the name Yisrael, for indeed what is told here is of great significance for the history of the nation in its entirety, because as a result of this, the slavery of Israel in Egypt came about…

    As opposed to this, we find the name Yaakov — “And Yaakov tore his garment” (v. 34) — for his act was his personal issue, and there were no ramifications for the descendants.(*Bereishit* 37:3) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, Rashi and Ramban, *Bamidbar* 13:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This contradiction stands at the heart of Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis. This view believes that the Book of *Devarim* (authored by D before the destruction of the First Temple) preceded the Book of *Vayikra*, because the author of *Vayikra*, P, writing, according to them, during the Second Temple Era, had the aim of centralizing the sacrificial service at one site.

    According to biblical critics, *Vayikra* expresses the religion that the priests gave to the people after the Babylonian exile. Its author had the ritual view, according to which the essential religious obligation is the sacrificial service in the Temple. Thus, *Vayikra* encompasses mainly the sacrificial rites and the specifics of the commandments. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The final sentence does not appear in the Rashbam’s commentary, but it is the conclusion of his words based on the verses in *Devarim* 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Up to this point is a summary of the Rambam’s words; from here on is Radatz’s explanation. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The problem with this approach, and Radatz alludes to it, is that the Mishna in *Zevachim* (14:4-8) describes the stages of prohibited and permitted private altars, but it does not mention a period of the private altars being allowed after the construction of the *Mishkan* and before entering the land:

    Before the *Mishkan* was set up, the private altars were allowed…

    Once the *Mishkan* was set up, the private altars were forbidden…

    They came to Gilgal, the private altars were allowed…

    They came to Shilo, the private altars were forbidden…

    They came to Nov and Givon, the private altars were allowed…

    They came to Jerusalem, and they did not have any further allowance…

    From the great detail in this chapter, the clear implication is that the *mishna* is detailing every stage of the private altars being forbidden and allowed, and the era which Radatz speaks of does not appear there. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This justification is relevant only for a generation about which there is a concern that it might return to Egypt. In the era of the First or Second Temple, no such concern would exist. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In other words, this is the lesson to be learnt from the sequence of the topics within this unit. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)