

### 1. Introduction of Rambam to Perek Chelek, Translation based on I. Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, pp. 407-409

You must know that the words of the Sages are interpreted differently by three groups of people.

**The first group** is the largest one. I have watched them, read their books, and heard about them. They accept the teachings of the Sages in their simple literal sense and do not think that these teachings contain any hidden meaning at all. They hold these opinions because they do not understand science and are far from having acquired any knowledge. They possess no perfection which would give them their own insights, nor have they found anyone else who would provide them with a similar understanding. Therefore, they believe that the Sages intended no more with their deliberate and straightforward utterances than what they understand based on their own inadequate knowledge. They understand the teachings of the Sages only in the literal sense, even though some of these teachings, when taken literally, would make even the uneducated (let alone sophisticated scholars) ask how anyone in the world could believe such things are true, let alone edifying.

The members of this group are ignorant, and one can only regret their folly. Their very effort to honor and exalt the Sages using their own meager understanding actually humiliates them...

**The second group** is also large. When the people in this group read or hear the words of the Sages, they too understand them according to their simple literal sense and believe that the Sages intended nothing other than what may be learned from their literal interpretation. Inevitably, they ultimately declare the Sages to be fools, hold them in contempt, and slander that which does not deserve to be slandered. They imagine that they are more intelligent than the Sages, that the Sages were simpletons who suffered from inferior intelligence. The members of this group are so pretentious and stupid that they can never attain genuine wisdom. Most of those who have stumbled into this error are involved with medicine or astrology. How remote they are from true philosophy compared to real philosophers! They are more stupid than the first group; many of them are simply fools.

**There is a third group.** Its members are so few in number that it is hardly appropriate to call them a group, except in the sense that one speaks of the sun as a group (or species) of which it is the only member. This group consists of men to whom the greatness of the Sages is clear. They recognize the superiority of their intelligence from their words, which point to exceedingly profound truths. Even though this third group is few and scattered, their books teach the perfection which was achieved by the authors and the high level of truth which they had attained. The members of this group understand that the Sages knew as clearly as we do that difference between the impossibility of the impossible and the existence of that which must exist. They know that the Sages did not speak nonsense, and it is clear to them that the words of the Sages contain both an obvious and hidden meaning. Thus, whenever the Sages spoke of things that seem impossible, they were employing the style of riddle and parable, which is the method of truly great thinkers. For example the greatest of our wise men (Shlomo) began his book by saying, "To understand an analogy and a metaphor, the words of the wise and their riddles" ([Mishlei 1:6](#)).

All students of rhetoric know the real concern of a riddle is with its hidden meaning, and not with its obvious meaning, as: "Let me now put forth a riddle to you" ([Shofim 14:12](#)). Since the words of the Sages all deal with supernatural matters which are ultimate, they must be expressed in riddles and analogies.

### 2. Rambam, Introduction to Mishna

And [about] this fourth matter – I mean to say the homily that is found in the Talmud – it is not fitting to think its value to be little and its purpose to be lacking. Rather there is great understanding in it, as it contains amazing riddles and beautiful wonders.

As when one observes these homilies with intellectual observation, [matters] of the true good – about which there is nothing higher – are understood from them. And from them are revealed theological matters and true things that the men of wisdom would keep away and did not want to reveal, and all that the philosophers attained over the generations. And if you glance at it according to its simple meaning, you will see matters about which nothing is farther from the intellect than them.

And they did this thing for wondrous ends: One of them it to sharpen the ideas of their students and to draw their hearts. And also to blind the eyes of fools who will never illuminate their hearts. And if they had shown them the illumination of truths, they would have turned their faces [away] from them, according to the shortcomings of their natures. As it is stated about them and those similar to them, "We do not reveal the secret to them" – because their intellect is not complete in order to accept the truths with according clarity.

And likewise, some of the sages did not want to reveal the secrets of wisdom to some [other sages]. And they already mentioned (Chagigah 13a) that an honored man of the sages initiated with men who were experts in the wisdom of the Story of Creation (maaseh bereishit) whereas he was an expert in the Story of the Chariot (maaseh merkavah): He said to them,

"Teach me the Story of Creation and I will teach you the Story of the Chariot"; and they said to him, "The matter is good." And when they taught him the Story of Creation, he abstained from teaching them the Story of the Chariot. And God forbid that he did this because of an evil heart to prevent [them from] wisdom or to have an advantage over them; as these traits are ugly in one of the silly ones – all the more so, with these honored pious ones. Rather, he did this thing because he saw himself to be fitting to receive that which was with them and that they were not fitting to receive that which was with him.

And he brought the words of Shlomo about this matter (Song of Songs 4:11), "honey and milk under your tongue." And they, peace be upon them, explained and said that the sweet wisdoms that a soul finds pleasant – just like the palate finds honey and milk pleasant – must be hidden; and they should not be spoken about and they should not be raised to the lips or tongue in any fashion. And this is [the meaning of] what he said, "under your tongue" – that these matters are not from what is fitting to teach and to analyze in the gatherings of wisdom.

And nonetheless, they should hint hidden hints in writing. And when the Holy One, blessed be He, removes the mask of foolishness from the heart of the one that He wants – after he has exerted himself and accustomed himself to wisdoms – then he will understand [something] of them, according to his wisdom.

And a person has no [access] to wisdom and its pursuit and its efforts, but rather [must] leave its realm to the Creator and pray to Him and supplicate that He make him understand it and teach him and reveal to him the hidden secrets of Scripture; as we found with David, peace be upon him, who did this when he said (Psalms 119:18), "Open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your Torah." And when the Holy One, blessed be He, opens the eyes of a person and shows him what He shows him, it is fitting for him to conceal it, as we have said.

And if he hints to them, he should hint [only] slightly to one who has a complete intellect and is known [as a man of] truth, as they elucidated and revealed in many episodes in the Talmud. And hence, it is not fitting for a wise man to reveal that which he has known from the secrets, except to someone who is greater than him or like him. As if he reveals it to a fool, even if [the latter] will not disdain it, it will not find favor in his eyes. And hence the sage said (Proverbs 23:9), "Do not speak to a fool, for he will disdain your sensible words."

### 3. Introduction to the Talmud of R. Shmuel b. Hofni Gaon

והגדה – כל פירוש, שיבוא בתלמוד על שום עניין, שלא יהיה מצוה, זו היא הגדה, ואין לך לתלמוד ממנה אלא מה שיעלה על הדעת. ויש לך לדעת, שכל מה שקיימו חז"ל הלכה בעניין מצוה, שהיא מפי משה רבנו ע"ה, שקיבל מפי הגבורה – אין לך להוסיף עליו ולא לגרוע ממנו. אבל מה שפירשו בפסוקים כל אחד כפי מה שנזדמן לו ומה שראה בדעתו, ולפי מה שיעלה על הדעת מן הפירושים האלו – לומדים אותם, והשאר – אין סומכים עליהם

Aggada is any interpretation brought in the Talmud that does not explain a commandment. This is Aggada, and one should only rely on it within reason. You should know that all laws that the rabbis [of the Talmud] enacted on the basis of a commandment come directly from Moshe our Teacher, may he rest in peace, who received them from the Almighty. One may neither add nor detract from them. But when [the rabbis] interpreted [non-legal] verses, they were expressing their own opinions and what happened to occur to them. We rely on these interpretations only when they are reasonable.

### 4. R. Shereira Gaon, cited in Eshkol (Albeck, Sefer Torah p. 60)

ואמר ר' [רב] שרירא הני מילי דנפקי מפסוקי ומקרי מדרש ואגדה אומדנא נינהו, ויש מהן שהוא כך, כגון דברי [ר'] יהודה בענין וזאת ליהודה שאמר ששמעון מוכלל עם יהודה, שהי' מצינו חלקו ביהושע בתוך נחלת יהודה, והרבה יש שאינו כן, כגון מה שאמר ר' עקיבא דמקושש היינו צלפחד, וכגון שאמר ר' שמעון שצום העשירי זה עשרה בטבת, והם הזכירו דעתו של כל אחד ואחד, ואנו לפי שכלו יהולל איש. וכן אגדות שאמרו תלמידי התלמידים, כגון רבי תנחומא ורבי אושעיא וזולתם, רובם אינו כן, ולכך אין אנו סומכין על דברי אגדה. והנכון מהם מה שמתחזק מן השכל ומן המקרא מדבריהם, ואין סוף ותכלה לאגדות.

All Midrash and Aggada which we derive from verses are mere approximations... They represent the opinions of individuals. But for us, "a man is praised according to his reason" (*Mishlei 18:12*). So, too, the Aggada transmitted by the (students of) students, like R. Tanchuma and R. Oshiah and others, are mostly not reasonable, so **we do not rely on words of Aggada.**

### 5. Ramban's Disputation

יט: חזר פראי פול וטען כי בתלמוד3 אמרו שכבר בא המשיח, והביא אותה הגדה שבמדרש איכה בהווא גברא דהוה (רדי) וגעת תורתיה עבר חד ערבי ואמר ליה, בר יהודאי בר יהודאי שרי תורתך שרי פדנך שרי קנקנך, דאיתחבר בית המקדש. שרא תורתיה שרא פדניה שרא קנקניה. געת זמן תנינית. אמר ליה, אסור תורתך אסור פדנך אסור קנקנך, דאיתליד משיחון .

כ: ואען ואומר: איני מאמין בהגדה זו [כלל] אבל ראייה היא לדברי .

כא: אז זעק אותו האיש (ואמר): ראו שהוא מכחיש בספרים שלהם !

כב: אמרתי: באמת שאיני מאמין שנוולד המשיח ביום החורבן, וההגדה הזאת או שאינה אמת או שיש לה פירוש אחר מסתרי החכמים. אבל אקבל אותה כפשוטה כאשר אמרת, כי ראייה היא לי. הנה היא אומרת כי ביום החורבן אחרי שנחרב (הבית) בו ביום נולד המשיח. אם כן אין ישו משיח כאשר אמרתם, שהוא קודם החורבן נולד ונהרג, ולידתו קרוב למאתיים שנה קודם החורבן לפי האמת, ולפי חשבונכם ע"ג שנה. אז נשתתק האיש .

כט: חזר אותו האיש ואמר כי בתלמוד מפורש שרבי יהושע בן לוי שאל לאלהיו מתי יבא המשיח, והוא ענה אותו: שאל למשיח עצמו. (אמר) והיכן הוא. (אמר) בפתח דרומה בין החולים. הלך שם ומצאו. ושאל לו וכו' אם כן כבר בא, והוא ברומה, (והוא ישו המושל ברומה) .

ל: עניתי לו: והלא מפורש מכאן שלא בא, שהרי שאל לאלוהו מתי יבא... אבל נולד כפי פשוטי אלו ההגדות, ואיני מאמין בכך.

- <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/mahshevt/vikuah/tokpam-2.htm> - What does Ramban mean?

#### 6. Rabbi Dr. Moshe Shoshan: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/lecture-2-what-aggada-part-iiaggada-medieval-thought> **The Ashkenazic Approach: Rashi and the Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot**

A very different approach to the relationship between Halakha and Aggada has been attributed to Rashi and the Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot, the leading rabbinic figures of medieval Ashkenaz, the geographic area roughly equivalent to modern France and Germany. In their commentaries on the Talmud, Rashi and Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot do not appear to make any qualitative or methodological distinctions between halakhic and aggadic passages. They go straight through the Talmudic text, seeking to clarify its meaning and reconcile it with other rabbinic sources. Thus they seem to recognize the aggadic sections of the Talmud as no less authoritative than the halakhic ones. Indeed, many scholars believe that at least some medieval French authorities, including perhaps Rashi himself, accepted at face value even those *aggadot* that describe God as having a physical body.

The strength of this approach is that it meets the Talmudic text on its own terms. It does not seek to impose an artificial or overly rigid distinction between halakhic and aggadic passages that are right next to each other on a page of Talmud. Neither does it seek to interpret Aggada through the prism of a systematic rational theology that would have been quite foreign to the authors of the Talmud.

On the other hand, Rashi and the Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot appear to demand that we accept every aggadic statement, at least from the Talmud, as true and normative, just like the halakhic statements of the Talmud. This is indeed a tall order. In its most radical formulation, such an approach would demand that we check our rational faculties at the door of the *beit midrash* before endeavoring to study Aggada. All we can do is read the Aggada and accept its simple meaning as the truth, regardless of the challenges that might be raised against it.

[R]JZ: R. Moshe Taku and his belief in the corporeality of God is an extreme expression of this position.]

Regarding the question of the authority of Aggada, the Ashkenazic rabbis' position is the opposite of the *Geonim*. While the *Geonim* rejected the Aggada's authority, the Ashkenazic rabbis upheld its authority. Nevertheless, the *Geonim* and the *Ashkenazim* actually share a common hermeneutic approach. They both insist on a literal reading of Aggada. It does not occur to either group that the true meaning of Aggada differs radically from the simple meaning of its words. There is no room for maneuvering, reinterpretation or equivocation. According to both schools, one either accepts or rejects the simple meaning of Aggada.

- See also <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/mahanaim/yahas-2.htm>

#### 7. ר"ש משאנ"ץ מצוטט ברמ"ה

ואיך יעלה על לב [איש] לומר שלא ניקח דברי האגדה כפשוטה. א"כ ב' המוכר את הספינה (ב"ב דף עה ע"א) שדרש ר' יוחנן עתיד הקב"ה להביא אבנים טובות ומרגליות של ל' על ל' ומעמידן בשערי ירושלים ולא האמין אותו תלמיד ולגלג, מה לגלג שמא מרגליות דאמר ר' יוחנן גוזמא...ועוד בפרק גיד הנשה דאמר ר"ש בר נחמני בשלשה מקומות דברי חכמים לשון הבאי, מה שייך למנות ג' מקומות אי אמרת דאיכא טובא. אלא ודאי על דברי חכמים אין להוסיף ומהם אין לגרוע וכו'.

#### 8. תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף עה עמוד א

כי הא דיתיב רבי יוחנן וקא דריש: עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא להביא אבנים טובות ומרגליות שהם שלשים על שלשים, וחוקק בהן עשר על עשרים ומעמידן בשערי ירושלים. לגלג עליו אותו תלמיד, השתא כביעתא דציצלא לא משכחין, כולי האי משכחין? לימים הפליגה ספינתו בים, חזא מלאכי השרת דיתבי וקא מינסרי אבנים טובות ומרגליות שהם ל' על ל' וחוקק בהן עשר ברום עשרים, אמר להו: הני למאן? אמרו ליה: שעתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא להעמידן בשערי ירושלים. אתא לקמיה דרבי יוחנן, אמר ליה: דרוש, רבי, לך נאה לדרוש, כאשר אמרת כן ראיתי. אמר לו: ריקא! אלמלא (לא) ראית לא האמנת, מלגלג על דברי חכמים אתה, נתן עיניו בו ונעשה גל של עצמות.

The Gemara analyzes the rest of that verse: "And your gates of precious stones" ([Isaiah 54:12](#)). This should be understood in light of that incident where Rabbi Yoḥanan sat and taught: In the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will bring precious stones and pearls that are thirty by thirty cubits, and He will hollow out in them a hole of ten by twenty cubits and set them in the gates of Jerusalem. A certain unnamed student sneered at him, saying: Now we do not find precious stones even of the size of an egg of a dove, and yet all of this we will find?

After a period of time that student's ship went to sea, where he saw ministering angels sitting and sawing precious stones and pearls that were thirty by thirty cubits, and hollowed out in them were holes of ten by twenty cubits. He said to the angels: For whom are these? They said to him that in the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will place them in the gates of Jerusalem. Later, the student came before Rabbi Yoḥanan and said to him: Continue to interpret, my teacher, it is fitting for you to interpret, as I saw just as you said. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: Worthless man, if you had not seen, you would not have believed; clearly, you are mocking the statement of the Sages. Rabbi Yoḥanan set his eyes upon him, and the student was instantly killed and turned into a pile of bones.

### 9. תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף לא עמוד א

אמר עולא ביראה אמר רבי אלעזר: עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא לעשות מחול לצדיקים, והוא יושב ביניהם בגן עדן, וכל אחד ואחד מראה באצבעו, שנאמר ואמר ביום ההוא הנה אלהינו זה קוינו לו ויושיענו זה ה' קוינו לו נגילה ונשמחה בישועתו

The tractate concludes with a statement related to the topic of dancing. Ulla of the city of Bira'a said that Rabbi Elazar said: In the future, in the end of days, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will arrange a dance of the righteous, and He will be sitting among them in the Garden of Eden, and each and every one of the righteous will point to God with his finger, as it is stated: "And it shall be said on that day: Behold, this is our God, for whom we waited, that He might save us. This is the Lord; for whom we waited. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9). God will be revealed, so that every righteous individual will be able to say: This is our God, as though they were pointing at Him with a finger.

### 10. תוספות מסכת תענית דף לא עמוד א

כל אחד ואחד מראה - הקדוש ברוך הוא באצבעו שנאמר הנה אלהינו זה קוינו לו וגו' נגילה ונשמחה בישועתו.

### 11. רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג הלכה ז

חמשה הן הנקראים ה' מינים: האומר שאין שם אלוה ואין לעולם מנהיג, והאומר שיש שם מנהיג אבל הן שנים או יותר, והאומר שיש שם רבון אחד אבל שהוא גוף ובעל תמונה, וכן האומר שאינו לבדו הראשון וצור לכל, וכן העובד כוכב או מזל וזולתו כדי להיות מליץ בינו ובין רבון העולמים כל אחד מחמשה אלו הוא מין. +/השגת הראב"ד/ והאומר שיש שם רבון אחד אלא שהוא גוף ובעל תמונה. א"א ולמה קרא לזה מין וכמה גדולים וטובים ממנו הלכו בזו המחשבה לפי מה שראו במקראות ויותר ממה שראו בדברי האגדות המשבשות את הדעות. /השגת הראב"ד/ וכן האומר שאינו לבדו הראשון. א"א כאותו שאמר אלהיכם צייר גדול היה אלא שמצא לו סמנים גדולים תהו ובהו חושך ומים ורוח ובהם עשה מה שעשה+.

### 12. תוספות מסכת עבודה זרה דף יז עמוד א

עד שאנו מבקשים עליך רחמים - לא השיבו לו כך אלא היה אומר בלבו שכך יוכלו להשיב א"נ שר של הרים היה משיב כן.

### 13. Shoshan, continued

While Kabbala is often seen as the opposite of Maimonides' rationalist approach, these schools have certain key points in common, some of which shape their approaches to Aggada. Like Rambam, the Kabbalists see aggadic texts as potentially containing divine secrets, accessible only to the most advanced students. The key difference is the nature of these secrets. For Maimonides they are philosophical truths, while for the Kabbalists they are mystical truths.

### 14. What do the Geonim actually mean? <http://app.shaanan.ac.il/shnaton/13/7.pdf> (Yehoshafat Nevo)

- a. Chaim Tzernowitz – the Geonim meant it
  - i. Not legal
  - ii. External philosophical influences
  - iii. Anti-Karaites Polemics
- b. Maharal
  - i. Either they are saying the same as Rambam, or close to it
  - ii. They are limited to the halachic realm – Aggada was not subject to the same rigour and therefore cannot be relied upon for legal purposes.

15. Chaim Eisen (<http://www.hakirah.org/Vol%204%20Eisen.pdf>) argues that Maharal is the continuation of Rambam. RJZ: This points out, what Shoshan notes, that the question of what allegorical meanings should be given is a secondary question, after that of approach.

### 16. Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim, Introduction to First Part

We had promised in the Commentary on the Mishnah that we would explain strange subjects in the "Book of Prophecy" and in the "Book of Correspondence" — the latter being a book in which we promised to explain all the difficult passages in the Midrashim where the external sense manifestly contradicts the truth and departs from the intelligible. They are all parables. However, when, many years ago, we began these books and composed a part of them, our beginning to explain matters in this way did not commend itself to us. For we saw that if we should adhere to parables and to concealment of what ought to be concealed, we would not be deviating from the primary purpose. We would, as it were, have replaced one individual by another of the same species. If, on the other hand, we explained what ought to be explained, it would be unsuitable for the vulgar among the people. Now it was to the vulgar that we wanted to explain the import of the Midrashim and the external meanings of prophecy.... In view of these considerations, we have given up composing these two books in the way in which they were begun.