

Rabbi Ya'kov Zvi Meklenburg.

Author of the Biblical Commentary - "Ha'ktav ve-ha-Kabbala" [Pub. 1,855]

Yahrzeit Date – 10th of Nissan, 1,865

If we wish to understand properly the wonderful words of the Torah, we must pay good attention to the deep and extensive commentaries of our ancient commentators. Not only did many of these have wonderful and keen intelligence; not only did they have lofty and noble personalities; but they were blessed by great "Siyato di'shmayah". That is to say, G-d radiated upon them brilliant and glorious "Ru'ach ha-kodesh". These are not empty words, used as a standard eulogy. These words of recommendation are to be tested and subsequently approved by a consistent and constant perusal of their writings.

Let us point this out better by a more particular approach to expressing the special distinction of this book "**Ha-Ktav ve-ha-Kabbalah**".

In the author's foreword, he says that one of his major goals is to make evident that the explanatory readings of our sages, of the Talmud and so too of the Midrash literature, are not superficial at all, are not "wishful thinking" but really the true and original explanation of G-d's words. Many people at the time, in the initial period of the Reform and Conservative Movements, rejected or scoffed at our Torah she-Ba'al Peh, considering it as a post dated addition to the Torah, and not delivered by Moshe Rabbenu at Mount Sinai. However, **Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch** (Commentary to Shmot 21, 2 and once again 34, 27) explains quite convincingly that just as when a University student hears a scholarly lecture, he only jots down the major points, so to be later on in the day to reconstruct that what he heard; so too the Torah only records the "stenography" of Moshe said, to be amplified and expanded by those who heard audibly the original lecture. Of course an outsider, who did not partipate at all at the lecture hall, hearing a student expounding points and insights not written expressly in that notebook, would shrug his shoulders and claim: "Imagination!" or "Fictitious additions". But the student would repel the criticism and say: "See this exclamation point so to express emphasis. See this dash .See these three dots to hint to us that there was something said there, here unrecorded".

How much Rabbi Mecklinburg aided us in unraveling the mysteries of our Sages interpretations, if we would count item by item in this book itself, we would actually reach over a thousand "Hidushim". This Rabbi was a student of **Rabbi Akiva Eiger**, as he cites in his commentary to VaYikra (pp. 32, 56, 67) and we readily recognize his expert mastery of any abstruse Talmudic discussion. In the Halachic sections of the Torah we see his power of analysis, his fine sense of the inner logic behind the Halachic decisions.

But his greatest contribution to the field of Torah study was his superb mastery of linguistic definitions. Rabbi Mecklingberg was of the opinion that there is just no such thing as "synonyms". There is always a definite difference between two words, although they appear to relate to the same and identical usage. Each and every time that the Torah utilizes a double term, there is always a specific reason for the additional term. (See Bereshis 13, 13 "Ra'im ve-chata'im").

At the very beginning of the book there is an alphabetical list of over **700 words**, where he clearly defines each and every meaning.

Beyond that, Rabbi Mecklingberg also paid close attention to any alteration of the vowels ("bin-Nun", and not "Ben nun"), so too he examined closely any change of the normal cantorial indications ("Ta'amei ha-Mikra"). See his commentary to Bereshis 39, 8. This Gaon constantly finds an important lesson to be culled.

One of the greatest values of these explanations is that they are based on the esoteric lore of the Zohar literature. Rabbi Mecklingberg had complete mastery of the subject, and many a time he reverts to the "Mechilta de-Rebbe Shim'on bar Yochai". He is extremely careful not to ever mention the term "Zohar". Apparently it was considered to be "taboo" in Maskilim circles, whilst it was one of his major objectives to reach (and influence) this audience. However, he used the "Mechilta" euphemism so that an Orthodox scholar would be able to search for and closely re-study the Kabbalistic source. Nevertheless, as a modern scholar, Rabbi Mecklingberg reveals great tolerance, even for those authors who are to be considered far off from Orthodoxy. He quotes commentaries by Moshe Mendelsohn, so too by Shmuel David Luzzato. Many a time he explains a term by giving its equivalent in German. (So too Rashi, many a time, explains a Biblical word by giving its equivalent in current French language.)

But his greatest contribution to Orthodoxy was his valiant defense of the Torah sheh-ba'al peh system, as indicated in the Torah sheh-biktav. In his introduction to the book, he dwelled at length on the great value of this knowledge. True to his goal, throughout the scholarly book he again and again proves this point. Therefore, in his day and age, he saved many of his co-religionists of North Germany (he was the officiating Rabbi of Koenigsberg, 1830-1865) from being swayed by Reform influences.

Another great book authored by our Title Personality was the "I'yun Te-Fillah" Siddur Commentary. Here he evinced great powers of emotion, great depths of Love of the Lord, Awe and devoted Dedication to the Divine Plan. Any devout person wishing to better his Prayer intents will find this book commendatory.

We shall now discuss briefly some of the great religious insights (upon which he dwells at length). He teaches that Love of the Lord and Awe of him, are two sides of the same coin (Bereshis 22, 12). It is improper to fulfill one approach without the other. A proper comprehension of their qualities perforce brings to the unity of the two.

So too he explains (Bamidbar 23, 19 and so too 31, 20) why is it that our Talmudic sages taught that a Gentile is called "Ish" but not "Adam".

The word "Adam" originates from the world for "earth" ("Adamah"). The value of earth is a growing spot for vegetation. The plant is placed in its underground location, so to sprout and develop and eventually to fulfill the hopes that the farmer placed upon the tiny kernel. If the germ imbedded in the soil remains as so, all is hopeless. The immense value of the Torah's way of life is that of constant self-improvement. If a person remains static and stationary, what is the use of continuing to live? This beam of light teaches us that even if a person remains to an extent unsuccessful in his attempts to conquer his evil inclination, nevertheless if he is of a valiant heart, constantly doing his best to ascend the steep hill, he is to be blessed, he is to be admired.

But if a person, let us say, is ready born with good traits (i. e. he is quiet and well mannered, or he is not envious or malicious) yet this is not due to personal effort, but due to hereditary

inborn approaches, or due to the mode of education to which he was exposed, or due to the mores of the environment in which he dwells; he is not to be complimented at all.

The final Mishna of chapter five of Avot teaches: "reward is rated according to the anguish and difficulties necessary to overcome so to better oneself". Am Yisrael who have constant inner conflicts so to better their characters (as Hazzal teach in Tractate Bezza 25b, so too Tractate Sukka 52a) these are similar to a treated plant growing from the soil. Not so the many Gentiles who are born with mild temperaments, who are morally stable, not due to inner heartfelt toil, but due to external circumstances, these are at most "Ish", important people, as written "Gam ha-Ish Moshe" (Shmot 11, 3). Actually this same idea (but not elaborated upon as thoroughly as by our author) is mentioned tersely by the Maharal ("Netivot O'lam", Torah, chapter 15, p. 63).

An interesting insight is the author's philological explanation to the word "religion" (commentary to Devarim 16, 9). It derives from the Latin for "regularity". It is a great aid for a person to have an established system of life; when to pray, when to stay a homebody (Shabbat). Life is too hectic as it is. To have an orderly and smooth regime (routine) helps a person a lot in his day to day life.

As aforementioned, there are at least a thousand Hidushim in this wonderful book. Our short review can only deliver a slight aroma of the original. Nothing can compete with reading the author's words, as they are.

May his merit stand to our stead.