

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Ramban's Introduction to his Commentary on the Torah

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Moses our teacher wrote this book of Genesis together with the whole Torah from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He. It is likely that he wrote it on Mount Sinai for there it was said to him, *Come up to Me unto the mount, and be there; and I will give thee the tablets of stone and the Torah and the commandment which I have written, to teach them.* For “the tablets of stone” include the tablets and the writing that are the Ten Commandments. “The commandment” includes the number of all the commandments, positive and negative. If so, the expression “and the Torah” includes the stories from the beginning of Genesis [and is called *Torah - teaching*] because it teaches people the ways of faith.

Upon descending from the mount, he [Moses] wrote the Torah from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the account of the tabernacle. He wrote the conclusion of the Torah at the end of the fortieth year of wandering in the desert when he said [by command of G-d], *Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Eternal your G-d.* This view accords with the opinion of the Talmudic sage who says that the Torah was written in sections. However, according to the sage who says that the Torah was given in its entirety, everything was written in the fortieth year when he [Moses] was commanded, *Now write ye this song for you and teach it unto the children of Israel; put it in their mouths,* and, as he was further instructed, *Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Eternal your G-d.*

מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ כָּתַב הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה עִם הַתּוֹרָה
כְּלָה מִפִּי שֶׁל הַקֹּב"ה. וְהַקְּרוֹב
שֶׁכָּתְבוּ בְּהַר סִינַי, כִּי שָׁם נֶאֱמַר לוֹ: עֲלֵה
אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְהִיָּה שֵׁם וְאֶתְנֶנָּה לְךָ אֶת לַחַת
הָאֲבָן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי
לְהוֹרֹתָם. כִּי "לוֹחֹת הָאֲבָן" יְכַלֵּל הַלוֹחֹת
וְהַמְּכָתָב, כְּלוֹמַר עֲשֵׂת הַדְּבָרוֹת,
"וְהַמִּצְוָה" מִסֵּפֶר הַמִּצְוֹת כֻּלָּן עָשָׂה וְלֹא
תַעֲשֶׂה. אִם כֵּן "וְהַתּוֹרָה" יְכַלֵּל הַסְּפֹרִים
מִתְחִלַּת בְּרֵאשִׁית, כִּי הוּא מוֹרָה הָאֲנָשִׁים
בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱמוּנָה,

וּבְרִדְתוֹ מִן הַהָר
כָּתַב מִתְחִלַּת הַתּוֹרָה עַד סוֹף סְפֹר
הַמִּשְׁכָּן. וְגַמַּר הַתּוֹרָה כָּתַב בְּסוֹף שְׁנַת
הָאַרְבָּעִים, כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר: לָקַח אֶת סֵפֶר
הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה וְשָׂמְתָם אִתּוֹ מִצַּד אֲרוֹן בְּרִית
ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְגו'. וְזֶה כְּדַבְּרֵי הָאוֹמֵר: תּוֹרָה
מְגֵלָה מְגֵלָה נִתְּנָה, אֲבָל לְדַבְּרֵי הָאוֹמֵר:
תּוֹרָה חֲתוּמָה נִתְּנָה, נִכְתַּב הַפֶּל בְּשְׁנַת
הָאַרְבָּעִים, כְּשֶׁנֶּצְטָנָה: כָּתְבוּ לָכֶם אֶת
הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלָמְדָהּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
שִׁימָה בְּפִיהֶם. וְצִוָּה: לָקַח אֶת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה
הַזֶּה וְשָׂמְתָם אִתּוֹ מִצַּד אֲרוֹן בְּרִית ה'
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

In either case it would have been proper for him to write at the beginning of the book of Genesis: "And G-d spoke to Moses all these words, saying." The reason it was written anonymously [without the above introductory phrase] is that Moses our teacher did not write the Torah in the first person like the prophets who did mention themselves. For example, it is often said of Ezekiel, *And the word of the Eternal came unto me saying: 'Son of man,* and it is said of Jeremiah, *And the word of the Eternal came unto me.* Moses our teacher, however, wrote this history of all former generations and his own genealogy, history and experiences in the third person. Therefore he says *And G-d spoke to Moses, saying to him* as if he were speaking about another person. And because this is so, Moses is not mentioned in the Torah until his birth, and even at that time he is mentioned as if someone else was speaking about him.

Now do not find a difficulty in the matter of Deuteronomy wherein he [Moses] does speak about himself - [as he says] *And I besought the Eternal; And I prayed unto the Eternal,* for the beginning of that book reads: *These are the words which Moses spoke unto all Israel.* Thus throughout Deuteronomy he is like one who narrates things in the exact language in which they were spoken.

The reason for the Torah being written in this form [namely, the third person] is that it preceded the creation of the world, and, needless to say, it preceded the birth of Moses our teacher. It has been transmitted to us by tradition that it [the Torah] was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire. Thus Moses was like a scribe who copies from an ancient book, and therefore he wrote anonymously. However, it is true and clear that the entire Torah - from the beginning of Genesis to *in the sight of all Israel* [the last words in Deuteronomy] - reached the ear of Moses from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, just as it is said elsewhere, *He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book.*

וַעֲלֵ כָּל פָּנִים הָיָה נִכּוֹן שְׂיִכְתָּב בְּתַחֲלַת סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית "וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר". אָבֵל הָיָה הָעֲנִיָּן לְהַפְתֵּב סֵתָם, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹּא כָּתַב מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ הַתּוֹרָה כַּמְדַּבֵּר בְּעַד עֲצָמוֹ, כְּנֹבִיאִים שְׂמֻזְכִּירִים עֲצָמָם, כְּמוֹ שְׂנֹאֲמַר בִּיחֻזְקָאֵל תְּמִיד: וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר בֶּן אָדָם, וְכִמוֹ שְׂנֹאֲמַר בִּירְמִיָּה: הָיָה דְבַר ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר. אָבֵל מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ כָּתַב תּוֹלְדוֹת כָּל הַדְּוֹרוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים וַיְחֻס עֲצָמוֹ וְתוֹלְדוֹתָיו וּמִקְרָיו כְּשִׁלְיָשִׁי הַמְדַּבֵּר. וְלָכֵן יֹאמַר: וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, כַּמְדַּבֵּר בְּעַד שְׁנַיִם אַחֲרָיִם. וּמִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָעֲנִיָּן כֵּן, לֹא נִזְכָּר מֹשֶׁה בַּתּוֹרָה עַד שְׁנוּלָד, וְנִזְכָּר כְּאֵלוֹ אַחַר מִסְפַּר עָלְיוֹ.

וְאֵל יִקְשֶׁה עָלֶיךָ עֲנִיָּן מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרָה, שְׂמֻדַּבֵּר בְּעַד עֲצָמוֹ: וְאַתְחַנּוּן אֶל ה', וְאַתְפַּלֵּל אֶל ה' וַאֲמֹר, כִּי תַחֲלַת הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה: אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהִנֵּה הוּא כְּמִסְפַּר דְּבָרִים בְּלִשׁוֹן אוֹמְרָם.

וְהַפְּעַם לְכַתִּיבַת הַתּוֹרָה בְּלִשׁוֹן הַזֶּה, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁקִּדְמָה לְכְרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם, אֵין צְרִיף לֹאמַר לְלִידְתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁבֵּא לָנוּ בְּקַבְלָה שֶׁהִיְתָה כְּתוּבָה בְּאֵשׁ שְׁחוּרָה עַל גְּבֵי אֵשׁ לְבָנָה. וְהִנֵּה מֹשֶׁה כְּסוֹפֵר הַמַּעֲתִיק מִסְפַּר קְדָמוֹן וְכוּתָב, וְלָכֵן כָּתַב סֵתָם. אָבֵל זֶה אֲמַת וְכְרוּר הוּא, שֶׁכָּל הַתּוֹרָה מִתְחַלֵּת סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית עַד "לְעֵינַי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל" הַגִּיעַ מִפִּיו שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה לְאָזְנוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, כְּעֲנִיָּן שְׂנֹאֲמַר לְהֵלֵךְ: מִפִּיו יִקְרָא אֵלַי אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאֵנִי כוֹתֵב עַל הַסֵּפֶר בְּדִיוֹ.

G-d informed Moses first of the manner of the creation of heaven and earth and all their hosts, that is, the creation of all things, high and low. Likewise [He informed him of] everything that has been said by prophecy concerning the esoterics of the Divine Chariot [in the vision of Ezekiel] and the process of Creation, and what has been transmitted about them to the Sages. [Moses was informed about these] together with an account of the four forces in the lower world: the force of minerals, vegetation in the earth, living motion, and the rational soul. With regard to 'all of these matters - their creation, their essence, their powers and functions, and the disintegration of those of them that are destroyed' - Moses our teacher was apprised, and all of it was written in the Torah, explicitly or by implication.

Now our Sages have already said: "Fifty gates [degrees] of understanding were created in the world, and all were transmitted to Moses with one exception, as it is said, *Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels.*" [Concerning this statement of the Sages] that in the creation of the world there are fifty gates of understanding, it is as if it said that there is one gate of understanding pertaining to the creation of the minerals, their force and their effects, one gate of understanding pertaining to the creation of the vegetation in the earth, and similarly, as regards the creation of trees, beasts, fowl, creeping things and fish, that there pertains to each of these one gate of understanding. This series culminates in the creation of the rational soul [for the gate pertaining to this latter creation] enables man to contemplate the secret of the soul, to know its essence and its power in "its palace" [namely, the body] and to attain [that degree of understanding] which is alluded to in the saying of the Sages: "If a person stole, he [who has the aforesaid understanding] knows and recognizes it on him; if a person committed adultery, he knows and recognizes it on him; if one is suspected of having intercourse with a woman in her state of uncleanness, he knows and recognizes it on him.

הודיעו תחלה ענין בריאת השמים והארץ וכל צבאם, כלומר בריאת כל נברא העליונים והתחתונים, וגם כן כל הנאמר בנבואה ממצעשה מרפכה ומצעשה בראשית, והמקבל בהם לחכמים, עם תולדת ארבעה הכחות שבתחתונים, כח המחצבים, וכח צמחי האדמה, ונפש התנועה, ונפש המדבר, בכלם נאמר למשה רבינו בריאתם ומהותם וכחותם ומעשיהם ואפיסת הנפסדים מהם. והכל נכתב בתורה בפרוש או ברמז.

וכבר אמרו רבותינו: חמשים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם וכלן נמסרו למשה חוץ מאחד, שנאמר: ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים. יאמר כי בבריאת העולם חמשים שערים של בינה, כאלו נאמר שיהיה בבריאת המחצב שער בינה אחד בכחו ותולדותיו, ובבריאת צמח האדמה שער בינה אחד, ובבריאת האילנות שער אחד, ובבריאת החיות שער אחד, ובבריאת העופות שער אחד, וכן בבריאת השרצים ובבריאת הדגים, ויעלה אחר זה לבריאת בעלי הנפש המדברת, שיתבונן סוד הנפש וידע מהותה וכחה בהיכלה, ויגיע למה שאמרו: גנב אדם, יודע ומכיר בו, נואף אדם, יודע ומכיר בו, נחשד על הנדה, יודע ומכיר בו,

Greater than all is he who recognizes all masters of witchcraft." And from [that level of understanding] a man can ascend to the understanding of the spheres, the heavens and their hosts, for pertaining to each of these there is one gate of wisdom which is unlike the wisdom of the others. The total number of different gates as ascertained by tradition is fifty less one. It is possible that this fiftieth gate concerns a knowledge of the Creator, blessed be He, which is not transmittable to any created being. Pay no regard to the Sages' saying that ["Fifty gates of understanding] *were created* for that statement relates to the majority even though one gate was indeed not created. This number [49] is clearly alluded to in the Torah in the counting of the *Omer*, and in the counting of the Jubilee, the secrets of which I will disclose when I attain thereto by the Will of the Holy One, blessed be He.

גְּדוּלָה מִכֵּלֶן שְׁמֵכִיר
 בְּכָל בְּעָלֵי כְשָׁפִים, וּמִשֵּׁם יַעֲלֶה לְגַלְגָּלִים
 וְלִשְׂמִים וּצְבָאֵיהֶם, כִּי בְּכָל אֶחָד מֵהֶם
 שָׁעַר חֲכָמָה אַחֵר שְׁלֹא כְּחֻכְמָתוֹ שֶׁל חֲבֵרוֹ,
 וּמִסְפָּרָם מְקַבֵּל לָהֶם עַל הַקְּבִלָה שֶׁהֵם
 חֲמֻשִׁים חוּץ מֵאַחַד. וְאַפְשָׁר שִׁיְהִיָּה הַשָּׁעַר
 הַזֶּה בִּידִיעַת הַבוֹרָא יִתְעַלֶּה שְׁלֹא נִמְסַר
 לְנִבְרָא. וְאֵל תִּסְתַּכֵּל בְּאַמְרָם "נִבְרָאוּ
 בְּעוֹלָם", כִּי עַל הָרוֹב יִדְבַר, וְהַשָּׁעַר הָאֶחָד
 לֹא נִבְרָא. וְהַמְסָפֵר הַזֶּה רָמוּז בַּתּוֹרָה
 בְּפִרוּשׁ בְּסִפְרֵת הָעֶמֶר וּבְסִפְרֵת הַיָּבֵל
 כְּאֲשֶׁר אָגִיד בּוֹ סוּד, בְּהִגְיַעֵי שֵׁם בְּרִצּוֹן
 הַקַּב"ה.

Everything that was transmitted to Moses our teacher through the forty-nine gates of understanding was written in the Torah explicitly or by implication in words, in the numerical value of the letters or in the form of the letters, that is, whether written normally or with some change in form such as bent or crooked letters and other deviations, or in the tips of the letters and their crownlets, as the Sages have said: "When Moses ascended to heaven he found the Holy One, blessed be He, attaching crownlets to certain letters of the Torah. He [Moses] said to Him, 'What are these for?' He [G-d] said to him, 'One man is destined to interpret mountains of laws on their basis.' 'Whence dost thou know this?' He [Rabbi Akiba] answered them: 'This is a law given to Moses on Mount Sinai.' For these hints cannot be understood except from mouth to mouth [through an oral tradition which can be traced] to Moses, who received it on Sinai.

וְכִּי הִנְמָסַר לְמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵי הַבִּינָה
 הַכֹּל נִכְתָּב בַּתּוֹרָה בְּפִרוּשׁ, או
 בְּרִמְזָה בְּחִיבוֹת אוּ בְּגִימְטְרִיאוֹת, או
 בְּצוּרַת הָאוֹתִיּוֹת, בְּכַתּוּבוֹת כְּהִלְכָתָן או
 הַמְשַׁתַּנּוֹת בְּצוּרָתָן, כְּגוֹן הַלְּפוּפוֹת
 וְהַעֲקוּמוֹת וְזוּלָתָן, אוּ בְּקוּצֵי הָאוֹתִיּוֹת
 וּבְכַתְרֵיהֶן. כְּמוֹ שְׁאַמְרוּ: כְּשֶׁעָלָה מֹשֶׁה
 לְמָרוֹם מִצָּאוֹ לְהַקַּב"ה שָׁהִיָּה קוֹשֵׁר כְּתָרִים
 לְאוֹתִיּוֹת, אָמַר לוֹ אֱלוֹ לָמָּה, אָמַר לוֹ
 עֲתִיד אָדָם אֶחָד לְדַרֵּשׁ בָּהֶם תְּלֵי תְּלִים
 שֶׁל הִלְכוֹת, עַד זֶה מִנִּין לָךְ, אָמַר לָהֶם
 הַלֵּכָה לְמֹשֶׁה מִסִּינַי. כִּי הִרְמִזִים הָאֵלּוּ לֹא
 יִתְבוּנְנוּ אֶלָּא מִפֶּה אֶל פֶּה עַד מֹשֶׁה מִסִּינַי.

Based on this tradition, the Sages have said in Shir Hashirim Rabbah concerning King Hezekiah [when he was visited by a delegation from the king of Babylon] : "He showed them the Book of *Tagin* [crownlets]." This book is known and is available to everyone. In it is explained how many crownleted *alephs* there are in the Torah, how many *beths*, and the [frequency of the] rest of the letters and the number of crownlets on each one. The praise which the Sages bestowed on this book and the disclosure of Hezekiah's secret to the delegation were not for the crownlets themselves but rather for a knowledge of their essence and their meanings, which consist of many exceedingly profound secrets.

There, in the Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabbah, they [the Sages] have also said: "It is written, *And He declared unto you His covenant*, which means: *He declared unto you* the Book of Genesis, which relates the beginning of His creation; *which He commanded you to perform, even the ten words*, meaning the ten commandments, ten for Scripture and ten for Talmud. For from what source did Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite come and reveal to Israel the secrets of the behemoth and the leviathan? And from what source did Ezekiel come and reveal to them the mysteries of the Divine Chariot? It is this which Scripture says, *The king hath brought me into his chambers*," meaning that everything can be learned from the Torah.

King Solomon, peace be upon him, whom G-d had given wisdom and knowledge, derived it all from the Torah, and from it he studied until he knew the secret of all things created, even of the forces and characteristics of plants, so that he wrote about them even a Book of Medicine, as it is written, *And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall*

וּמִזֶּה אָמְרוּ בְּשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים רַבָּה, בְּחֻזְקֵיהוּ:
סֵפֶר תִּגִּי הָרָאָה לָהֶם. וְהַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה
יָדוּעַ וּמִצּוֹי אֶצֶל כָּל אָדָם, יִפְרֹשׁ בוֹ כַּמָּה
אַלְפִי"ן בַּתּוֹרָה בְּתַאגִּין, וְכַמָּה בֵּיתִי"ן,
וּשְׂאֵר הָאוֹתִיּוֹת, וּמִסֵּפֶר הַתַּאגִּין שֶׁבְכָל
אַחַת. וְאִין הַשְּׂבִיחַ שֶׁסָּפְרוּ עַל הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה,
וְגִלּוֹי הַסּוּד שֶׁהִיָּה לְחֻזְקֵיהוּ, מִפְּנֵי הַתַּאגִּין
עֲצָמָן, אֶלָּא בִּידְעָתָן, בְּפִירוּשֵׁיהֶן, סוּדוֹת
רַבִּים עֲמוּקִים מְאֹד.

וְשֵׁם בְּמִדְרַשׁ שִׁיר
הַשִּׁירִים רַבָּה אָמְרוּ: כְּתִיב וַיַּגֵּד לְכֶם אֶת
בְּרִיתוֹ. וַיַּגֵּד לְכֶם סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית שֶׁהוּא
תְּחִלַּת בְּרִיתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם. אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶתְכֶם
לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲשׂוֹת הַדְּבָרִים, אֱלוֹ עֲשׂוֹת
הַדְּבָרוֹת עֲשָׂרָה לְמַקְרָא וְעֲשָׂרָה לְתַלְמוּד.
וְכִי מִנֵּין יָבֵא אֱלִיהוּא בֵּין בְּרִכְאֵל הַבּוֹזֵי
וַיַּגִּלָּה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל חֲדָרֵי כְהֵמוֹת וְלוֹיָתָן, וּמִנֵּין
יָבֵא יְחֻזְקָאֵל וַיַּגִּלָּה לָהֶם סִתְרֵי הַמְּרַכְבָּה,
הַדָּא הוּא דְכְּתִיב, הִבִּיאֲנִי הַמְּלָךְ חֲדָרָיו.
כְּלוּמַר שֶׁהִפֵּל גִּלְמַד מֵהַתּוֹרָה.

וּשְׁלֵמָה הַמְּלָךְ ע"ה, שָׁנְתָן לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
הַחֲכָמָה וְהַמְּדַע, הַכֹּל מִן הַתּוֹרָה
הִזָּה לוֹ, וּמִמֶּנָּה לָמַד עַד שֶׁיָּדַע סוּד כָּל
הַתּוֹלְדוֹת, וְאֶפְלוּ כַחוֹת הָעֵשְׂבִים וּסְגֻלָּתָם,
עַד שֶׁכָּתַב בְּהֵן אֶפְלוּ סֵפֶר רְפוּאוֹת, וְכַעֲנִין
שֶׁכְּתוּב: וַיְדַבֵּר עַל הָעֲצִים מִן הָאֶרֶז אֲשֶׁר
בְּלִבְנוֹן וְעַד הָאֲזוּב אֲשֶׁר יוֹצֵא בְּקִיר.

Now I have seen the Aramaic translation of the book called *The Great Wisdom of Solomon*, and in it is written: "There is nothing new in the birth of a king or ruler; there is one entrance for all people into the world, and one exit alike. Therefore I have prayed, and the spirit of wisdom was given to me, and I have called out and the spirit of knowledge came to me; I chose it above scepter and throne."

And it is further said there: "It is G-d alone who gives knowledge that contains no falsehood, [enabling one] to know how the world arose, the composition of the constellations, the beginning, the end and middle of the times, the angles of the ends of the constellations, and how the seasons are produced by the movement of heavens and the fixed positions of the stars, the benign nature of cattle and the fierceness of beasts, the power of the wind and the thoughts of man, the relationship of trees and the forces of roots; everything hidden and everything revealed I know." All this Solomon knew from the Torah, and he found everything in it - in its simple meanings, in the subtleties of its expressions and its letters and its strokes, as I have mentioned.

וְרֵאִיתִי הַסֵּפֶר הַמְתַּרְגֵּם הַנִּקְרָא "חֻכְמַתָּא רַבְתָּא דְשְׁלֹמֹה", וְכַתּוּב בּוֹ: וְלֹא מִמָּתוּם הֵנּוּ תּוֹלְדֵתָא חֲדִיתָא לְמַלְךְ אוֹ לְשְׁלִיט, דְחֲדָיו מְעֻלְנָא דְכָל בְּרַ נֶשׁ לְעֻלְמָא, וּמִפְקָנָא שׁוּיָאֵת חֲדָיו, מִיטוּל כֵּן צִלִּית, וְאִיתִיְהִיבֵת לִי רוּחָא דְחֻכְמַתָּא, וְקָרִית, וְאַתְת לִי רוּחָא דְאִידְעָתָא, צְבִית בְּהַ יְתִיר מִן שְׂבִטָא וְכוּרְסוּתָא. יֵאמֶר כִּי לֹא מִדְּבַר תִּהְיֶה תּוֹלְדֵת מִיְחֻדָּת לְמַלְךְ אוֹ לְשְׁלִיט, אֶחָד הוּא בִּיאַת כָּל אִישׁ בְּעוֹלָם, וְיִצְיָאָה שְׁוֹה לְכָלָם יַחַד, וּבְעֵבֹר כֵּן הִתְפַּלְלֵתִי, וְנִתַּן לִי רוּחַ חֻכְמָה, וְקָרֵאתִי, וּבָאָה לִי רוּחַ דְעֵת, בְּחַרְתִּי בְּהַ יוֹתֵר מִן הַשְּׂבִט וְהַכֹּסֵא.

וְנֵאמַר שֵׁם: וְהוּא דִּיהַב אִידְעָתָא, דְלֹא דְגִלוּתָא לְמִידַע הֵיכֵן קָם עֻלְמָא, וְעוֹבְדֵיהוֹן דְמִזְלֹאתָא, שׁוּרְיָא וְשׁוּלְמִיָּא וּמְצַעְתֵּהוֹן דְזִמְנִי, שׁוּלְחַפִּי דְזִנְבוּתָא, וְדֵהֵיכֵן עֲבָדֵי זִמְנִי רִיִּהֲטִיהוֹן דְשְׁמִיָּא, וְקַבְעִיהוֹן דְכוּכְבֵי, מִתְנָא דְבַעֲיָרָא, וְחִימָתָא דְחִוּיָאֵתָא, עוֹזִיִּהוֹן דְרוּחֵי וּמַחְשַׁבְתֵּהוֹן דְבְנֵי נֶשׂא, גִּינְסֵי דְנִצְבָאֵתָא וְחִילִיִּהוֹן דְעִיקָרֵי, כָּל מִידָם דְכֹסֵי וְכָל מִידָם דְגְלִי יְדַעִית. יֵאמֶר, שְׁהֶאֱלֵהִים הוּא הַנּוֹתֵן דְעֵת, שְׂאִין בּוֹ שְׁקַר, לִידַע אִיךָ קָם הָעוֹלָם, וּמַעֲשֵׂה הַמְזוֹלוֹת, הַרְאֵשׁ וְהַסּוּף וְאִמְצָעוֹת הַזִּמְנִים, דְאֶלְכֶסוֹנוֹת הַזִּנְבוֹת, וְאִיךָ יַעֲשׂוּ הַזִּמְנִים מְרוּצַת הַשְּׁמַיִם, וְקַבִּיעוֹת הַפּוֹכְכִים, לַחֹת הַבְּהֵמוֹת וְחֻמַּת הַחַיּוֹת, תּוֹקֵף הַרוּחוֹת וּמַחְשָׁבוֹת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם, יְחֻסֵי הָאֵילָנוֹת וְכַחוֹת הַשְּׂרָשִׁים, כָּל דְבַר מְכַסֶּה וְכָל דְבַר מְגַלֶּה יְדַעִתִּי. כָּל זֶה יְדַע בְּתוֹרָה, וְהַכֹּל מְצָא בְּהַ, בְּפִירוּשֵׁיהָ, בְּדַקְדוּקֵיהָ, בְּאוֹתֵיהָ וּבְקוּצֵיהָ, כַּאֲשֶׁר הִזְכַּרְתִּי.

Scripture likewise relates concerning him, *And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east* 'That is to say, he was better versed than they in divination and enchanting, for this was their wisdom, as it is said, *For they are replenished from the east, and with soothsayers like the Philistines*. (The Sages similarly said: "What was the wisdom of the children of the east? They knew and were crafty in the divination of birds.") *And all the wisdom of Egypt* means that Solomon was better versed in sorcery, which is the wisdom of Egypt, and in the nature of growing things. As is known from the Book of Egyptian Agriculture, the Egyptians were very well versed in the matters of planting and grafting different species.

Thus the Sages have said: "Solomon even planted peppers in the Land of Israel. How was he able to plant them? Solomon was a wise man, and he knew the essence of the foundation of the world. Why was this? [It is written] *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, G-d hath shined forth*. Out of Zion the whole world was perfected. How is this known? Why was it called 'the Foundation Stone?' Because the world was founded from it. Now Solomon knew which of its arteries extends to Ethiopia, and upon it he planted peppers, and immediately it produced fruits, for so he says, *And I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit*.

We have yet another mystic tradition that the whole Torah is comprised of Names of the Holy One, blessed be He, and that the letters of the words separate themselves into Divine Names when divided in a different manner, as you may imagine by way of example that the verse of *Bereshith* divides itself into these other words: *berosh yithbareh Elokim*. This principle applies likewise to the entire Torah, aside from the combinations and the numerical equivalents of the Holy Names.

וְכֵן אָמַר בּוֹ הַפְּתוּב: וַתִּרְבַּח חֲכָמַת שְׁלֹמֹה
מִחֲכָמַת כָּל בְּנֵי קַדְשׁ. כְּלוּמַר, שְׁהָיָה
בְּקִי מֵהֵם בְּקִסְמִים וּבִנְחָשִׁים, שְׁזוֹ הָיָה
חֲכָמָתָם, שְׁנֹאמַר: כִּי מְלֹאוּ מִקְּדָם וְעוֹנְנִים
כַּפְּלִשְׁתִּים. וְכֵן אָמְרוּ: מָה הִיְתָה חֲכָמַתָּן
שֶׁל בְּנֵי קַדְשׁ, שְׁהָיוּ יוֹדְעִים וְעוֹרְוִים
בְּטִייר. וּמְכַל חֲכָמַת מִצְרַיִם, שְׁהָיָה בְּקִי
בְּכֻשָׁפִים שְׁהָיָה חֲכָמַת מִצְרַיִם, וּבְטַבְע
הַצּוּמַח, כִּידוּעַ מִסָּפֵר הָעֵבֹדָה הַמִּצְרִית
שְׁהָיוּ בְּקִיאִין מְאֹד בְּעִנְיַן הַזְרִיעוֹת
וְהַהֲרַפָּה בְּמִינֵין.

וְכֵן אָמְרוּ: אִפְלוּ
פְּלִפְלִין נָטַע שְׁלֹמֹה בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכִיצַד
הָיָה נוֹטָעוֹן, אֲלֹא שְׁלֹמֹה חָכֵם הָיָה וְהָיָה
יוֹדֵעַ עֵקֶר מִשְׁתִּיתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, לָמָּה, מִצִּיּוֹן
מְכַלֵּל יוֹפֵי אֱלֹהִים הוֹפִיעַ, מִצִּיּוֹן נִשְׁתַּכְּלַל
כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוֹ. כִּיצַד, לָמָּה נִקְרָאת אֶבֶן
שְׁתִּיָּה, שְׁמִמְנַה נִשְׁתַּת הָעוֹלָם. וְהָיָה שְׁלֹמֹה
יוֹדֵעַ אֵיזֶהוּ גִיד שֶׁהוּא הוֹלֵךְ לְכוּשׁ, וְנָטַע
עָלָיו פְּלִפְלִין, וּמִיָּד הָיוּ עוֹשִׂין פְּרוֹת, שֶׁכֵּן
הוּא אוֹמֵר: וְנָטַעְתִּי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל פְּרִי.

עוֹד יֵשׁ בְּיַדְנוֹ קַבְּלָה שֶׁל אָמֵת, כִּי כָּל
הַתּוֹרָה כְּלָה שְׁמוֹתָיו שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה.
שְׁהַתִּיבוֹת מִתְחַלְקוֹת לְשִׁמוֹת בְּעִנְיַן אַחֵר,
כְּאֵלוֹ תַחֲשֹׁב עַל דְּרָךְ מְשַׁל, כִּי פְּסוּק
בְּרֵאשִׁית יִתְחַלַּק לְתִיבוֹת אַחֲרוֹת, כְּגוֹן
"בְּרֵאשׁ יִתְבָּרַא אֱלֹהִים", וְכָל הַתּוֹרָה כֵּן,
מְלַבֵּד צְרוּפִיָּהֶם וְגִימְטְרִיאוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁל
שְׁמוֹת.

Our Rabbi Shlomo [Rashi] has already written in his commentaries on the Talmud concerning the manner in which the Great Divine Name of seventy-two letters is derived from the three verses: *And he went, And he came, And he stretched out*. It is for this reason that a Scroll of the Torah in which a mistake has been made in one letter's being added or subtracted is disqualified [even though the literal meaning remains unchanged], for this principle [that the whole Torah comprises Names of the Holy One, blessed be He], obligates us to disqualify a scroll of the Torah in which one letter *vav* is missing from the word *otham* - of which there are thirty-nine fully-spelled ones in the Torah - [despite the fact that the same word appears many times without a *vav*] or if he [the Scribe] were to add a *vav* to any of the other deficient ones. So it is in similar cases even though it matters not one way or another on cursory thought.

It is this principle which has caused the Biblical scholars to count every full and defective word in the Torah and Scripture and to compose books on the Masoretic text, going back as far as Ezra the Scribe and Prophet, so that we should be heedful of this, as the Sages derived it from the verse, *And they read in the book in the Law of G-d, distinctly; and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*.

It would appear that the Torah "written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire" was in this form we have mentioned, namely, that the writing was contiguous, without break of words, which made it possible for it to be read by way of Divine Names and also by way of our normal reading which makes explicit the Torah and the commandment. It was given to Moses our teacher using the division of words which expresses the commandment, and orally it was transmitted to him in the rendition which consists of the Divine Names. Thus masters of the Cabala write the letters of the Great Name I have mentioned [namely, the Name containing seventy-two letters] all close to each other, and then these are divided into words consisting of three letters and many other divisions, as is the practice among the masters of the Cabala.

וּכְבֹר כְּתָב רַבְּנוּ שְׁלֹמֹה בְּפִרְוֹשׁוֹ
 בְּתַלְמוּד עֲנִין הַשֵּׁם הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁל שִׁבְעִים
 וּשְׁתַּיִם, בְּאִיזָה עֲנִין הוּא יוֹצֵא מִשְׁלֹשָׁה
 פְּסוּקִים וַיֵּסַע, וַיָּבֵא, וַיֵּט. וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה סֵפֶר
 תּוֹרָה שֶׁטֵּעָה בּוֹ בְּאוֹת אַחַת בְּמֵלֵא אוֹ
 בְּחֶסֶר פְּסוּל, כִּי זֶה הָעֲנִין יַחִיב אוֹתָנוּ
 לְפַסֵּל סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה שֶׁיִּחְסֶר בּוֹ וַיִּוֹ אַחַד
 מִמֵּלֵת אוֹתָם, שֶׁבָּאוּ מֵהֶם ל"ט מְלֵאִים
 בְּתוֹרָה, אוֹ שֶׁיִּכְתֹּב הוֹי בְּאַחַד מִשְׁאָר
 הַחֲסוּרִים, וְכֵן כִּיּוֹצֵא בְּזֶה, אֵף עַל פִּי
 שְׂאִינוּ מַעֲלָה וְאִינוּ מוֹרִיד, כִּפִּי הָעוֹלָה
 בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה.

וְזֶהוּ הָעֲנִין שֶׁהֵבִיא גְדוּלֵי
 הַמִּקְרָא לְמִנּוֹת כֹּל מֵלֵא וְחֶסֶר בְּכֹל הַתּוֹרָה
 וְהַמִּקְרָא, וְלַחֲבֵר סֵפָרִים בְּמִסְוֶרֶת, עַד
 עוֹרָא הַסּוֹפֵר הַנְּבִיא שֶׁנִּשְׁתַּדֵּל בְּזֶה, כְּמוֹ
 שֶׁדָּרְשׁוּ מִפְּסוּק: וַיִּקְרָאוּ בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת
 הָאֱלֹהִים מִפְּרֹשׁ וְשׁוּם שְׁכָל וַיְבִינּוּ בְּמִקְרָא.

וְנִרְאָה שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה הַכְּתוּבָה בְּאֵשׁ שְׁחוֹרָה
 עַל גְּבִי אֵשׁ לְבָנָה, בְּעֲנִין הַזֶּה
 שֶׁהוֹפְרָנוּ הִיא, שֶׁהִיָּתָה הַכְּתִיבָה רְצוּפָה,
 בְּלֵי הַפֶּסֶק תִּיבּוֹת, וְהִיא אֶפְשָׁר קְרִיאָתָהּ
 שֶׁתִּקְרָא עַל דְּרָף הַשְּׁמוֹת, וְתִקְרָא עַל דְּרָף
 קְרִיאָתָנוּ, בְּעֲנִין הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמְצוּנָה, וְנִתְּנָה
 לְמִשָּׁה רַבִּינוּ עַל דְּרָף חֲלוּק קְרִיאַת
 הַמְצוּוֹת, וְנִמְסָר לוֹ עַל פֶּה קְרִיאָתָהּ
 בְּשְׁמוֹת. וְכֵן יִכְתְּבוּ הַשֵּׁם הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁהַזְּכָרְתִּי
 כֹּל רְצוּף, וְיִתְחַלֵּק לְתִיבּוֹת שֶׁל שְׁלֹשׁ
 שְׁלֹשׁ אוֹתִיּוֹת וְלַחֲלוּקִים אַחֲרֵים רַבִּים, כִּפִּי
 הַשְּׁמוּשׁ לְבַעֲלֵי הַקְּבֵלָה.

And now, know and see what I shall answer to those who question me concerning my writing a commentary of the Torah. I shall conduct myself in accordance with the custom of the early scholars to bring peace of mind to the students, tired of the exile and the afflictions, who read in the *Seder* on the Sabbaths and festivals, and to attract them with the plain meanings of Scripture and with some things that are pleasant to the listeners and which give grace to the scholars. And may the gracious G-d *be merciful unto us and bless us* so that we shall *find grace and good favor in the sight of G-d and man*.

Now behold I bring into a faithful covenant and give proper counsel to all who look into this book not to reason or entertain any thought concerning any of the mystic hints which I write regarding the hidden matters of the Torah, for I do hereby firmly make known to him [the reader] that my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise Cabalist speaking into the ear of an understanding recipient. Reasoning about them is foolishness; any unrelated thought brings much damage and withholds the benefit. *Let him not trust in vanity*, for these reasonings will bring him nothing but *deceiving himself* evil as if they spoke falsely against G-d, which cannot be forgiven, as it is said, *The man that strayeth out of understanding shall rest in the congregation of the shades. Let them not break through unto the Eternal to gaze, For the Eternal our G-d is a devouring fire, even a G-d of jealousies*. And He will show those who are pleasing to Him wonders from His Torah. Rather let such see in our commentaries novel interpretations of the plain meanings of Scripture and Midrashim, and let them take moral instruction from the mouths of our holy Rabbis: "Into that which is beyond you, do not seek; into that which is more powerful than you, do not inquire; about that which is concealed from you, do not desire to know; about that which is hidden from you, do not ask. Contemplate that which is permitted to you, and engage not yourself in hidden things."

וְעַתָּה דַע וּרְאֵה מָה אָשִׁיב שׁוֹאֲלֵי דְבָר
בְּכַתִּיבַת פְּרוּשׁ הַתּוֹרָה, אֲבָל
אֲתַנְהֵג כְּמִנְהַג הָרַאשׁוֹנִים, לְהַנִּיחַ דַּעַת
הַתַּלְמִידִים יְגִיעֵי הַגְּלוּת וְהַצָּרוֹת, הַקּוֹרְאִים
בְּסֹדֵר בְּשִׁבְתוֹת וּבְמוֹעֲדִים, וְלִמְשָׁךְ לִבָּם
בְּפִשְׁטִים, וּבִקְצַת דְּבָרִים נְעִימִים לְשׁוֹמְעִים
וְלִיּוֹדְעִים חֵן. וְאֵל חֲנוּן יִחַנְנוּ וַיְכַרְכְּנוּ,
וְנִמְצָא חֵן וְשִׁכָּל טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם.

וְאֲנִי הַנִּינִי מְבִיא בְּכַרִּית נְאֻמָּנָת, וְהִיא
הַנוֹחֲתָנָת עֲצָה הוֹגְנָת לְכָל מְסַתְּפָל
בְּסֹפֶר הַזֶּה, לְכָל יִסְבֹּר סְבָרָה, וְאֵל יַחֲשֹׁב
מַחֲשָׁבוֹת בְּדָבָר מִכָּל הַרְמְזִים אֲשֶׁר אָנִי
כּוֹתֵב בְּסִתְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה, כִּי אָנִי מוֹדִיעוּ
נְאֻמָּנָה שְׁלֵא יוֹשְׁגוּ דְבָרֵי, וְלֹא יוֹדְעוּ כָּל־
בְּשׂוּם שְׁכָל וּבִינָה, זוּלָתִי מִפִּי מְקַבֵּל חֶכֶם
לְאֶזֶן מְקַבֵּל מִבֵּין, וְהַסְּבָרָא בְּהֵן אֹרְלָת,
מַחֲשָׁבָה מוֹעֵלָת, רַבַּת הַנְּזַקִּין מְנוּעַת
הַתּוֹעֵלָת, אֵל יֵאֱמֹן בְּשׂוֹא נִתְעָה, כִּי לֹא
תְבוֹאֵהוּ בְּסִבְרוֹתָיו רַק רָעָה, כִּי יְדַבְּרוּ אֶל
ה' סָרָה, אֲשֶׁר לֹא יוֹכְלוּ כְּפָרָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
אָדָם תּוֹעָה מִדְּרֹךְ הַשְּׁכָל בְּקֵהֶל רְפָאִים
יְנוּחַ, אֵל יִהְרָסוּ אֶל ה' לְרֵאוֹת, כִּי ה'
אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֵשׁ אוֹכְלָה הוּא אֵל קְנָאוֹת, וְהוּא
יִרְאֶה אֶת רְצוֹנָיו מִתּוֹרָתוֹ נִפְלְאוֹת. אֲבָל
יִחַזוּ בְּפִרוּשֵׁינוּ חֲדוּשִׁים בְּפִשְׁטִים
וּבְמִדְרָשִׁים, וַיִּקְחוּ מוֹסֵר מִפִּי רְבוּתֵינוּ
הַקְּדוּשִׁים. בְּגִדּוֹל מִמֶּךָ אֵל תְּדַרְשׁ, בְּחִזֹּק
מִמֶּךָ אֵל תְּחַקֵּר, בְּמוֹפְלָא מִמֶּךָ בַּל תִּדְעַ,
בְּמַכְסָה מִמֶּךָ אֵל תִּשְׁאַל, בְּמָה שֶׁהֲרִשִׁית
הַתְּבוּנָה, אֵין לָךְ עֶסֶק בְּנִסְתָּרוֹת.