

# “יוצא לכמה טעמים”

## The multiple meanings of Psalm 62:12

### Jewish interpretation from the Geonim to the twentieth century

Joel Nothman

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## 1 Introduction: the origins of multiple meaning

אמר אביי: דאמר קרא: אחת דבר אלקים שתיים זו שמעתי כי עז לאלקים – מקרא אחד יוצא לכמה טעמים, ואין טעם אחד יוצא מכמה מקראות.

Abaye said: “Scripture says, ‘One thing spoke God, two I heard, because strength is unto God’ (Psa. 62:12) – one scripture derives multiple meanings, but one meaning does not derive from multiple scriptures.”<sup>1</sup>

The Babylonian Talmud makes reference to Psalms 62:12 to indicate that a multiplicity of meaning can be drawn from each verse of the Bible. The verse itself is certainly not deficient in this area. It is applied with entirely different meanings in numerous early midrashic texts,<sup>2</sup> and from the Geonim on is attributed with various readings, in accordance with the approach of each commentator, translator, bible scholar or lexicographer.

Nonetheless, methodology is only involved in part of the interpretative process; here, we find that the variety of interpretations is made possible because of the semantic ambiguity found in the verse’s language. Within its close context, the language of the verse is as follows:

יא אֶל־תִּבְטְחוּ בְעֵשֶׁק וּבְנִזְוָל אֶל־תִּהְבְּלוּ תִּיל | כִּי־יָנוּב אֶל־תִּשִׁיתוּ לֵב:  
 יב אַחַת | דְּבַר אֱלֹקִים שְׁתַּיִם־זו שְׁמַעְתִּי כִּי עֹז לְאֱלֹקִים:  
 יג וּלְךָ־אֲדַנִּי חֶסֶד כִּי־אַתָּה תִּשְׁלַם לְאִישׁ כְּמַעֲשָׂהוּ:<sup>3</sup>

Ambiguity could be derived from nearly each word within our verse:

- אחת – ‘one’ or ‘once’
- דבר אלקים – God spoke, directly or through an agency (prophecy, text, etc.)
- שתיים – ‘two’, ‘twice’, ‘many’, or part of an idiom involving אחת

<sup>1</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 34a.

<sup>2</sup> See section 2.

<sup>3</sup> Psalms 62:11-13.

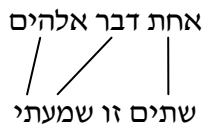
- זו – according to many a demonstrative, to others a relative pronoun, and still others an emphatic particle
- שמעתי – ‘I heard’ may alternatively mean ‘understood’ or ‘received by tradition’; whether ‘I’ refers only to the psalmist is also unclear
- כי – most often ‘that’ or ‘because’
- עז – ‘might’ or ‘power’, but to what purpose?
- לאלקים – ‘unto God’, but ל- is also understood as ‘has’, ‘alone has’, ‘for’, ‘with’, etc.

By the various permutations of these lexical ambiguities alone may numerous interpretations be produced.

Most central to the various understandings of the verse is the meaning of its first half, “ אחת  
 דבר אלקים שתיים זו שמעתי”<sup>4</sup> and the use of the numbers one and two has been variously taken as:

- One thing repeated on occasion
- One thing from which derive two manifestations
- One thing from which derive two other things
- One thing from which derive multiple (not necessarily two) things
- One thing and a second
- Two things (where “one” is only a matter of idiom)

The chosen reading of these first two clauses may further relate to their parallelism:




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<sup>4</sup> To the extent that most of the midrashim that quote our verse and a number of the later commentators seem to ignore its second half.

This poetic comparison between the clauses may further be taken by a reader to contrast them—highlighting a distinction between “speaking” and “hearing,” “God” and “me”—or to compare them, where speech and hearing form one act.

This focus on the first half of the verse also highlights the fact that our verse contains three clauses according to the Masoretic punctuation, while most in the psalm only include two. The end of the verse even seems to chiasmatically parallel the beginning of the following one:

כי עז לאלהים  
 ולך אדני חסד

Many commentators thus seem to treat the final clause of our verse as if it is attached to verse 13 of the psalm, or otherwise compare these contrasted clauses.

Alongside these many linguistic and poetic issues are those of context. Commentators differ in their approaches as to how much (if any) textual context bears upon the meaning of the verse. Some take the verse as a hint to some concept not plainly visible in the psalm. Many see its connection to the following verse; others link it to the previous verse in specific, or to the general message of the entire psalm. A few commentators also try to apply authorial context, to determine the meaning of the passage to the authoring psalmist. Hence there are numerous textual and contextual considerations that shape the possibilities for interpretation of Psalms 62:12.

And yet, certainly not least significant, the interpreter’s motivation plays a large role in deciding between the above implied choices when reading the text. This methodological intention biases their consideration of context and linguistic features, and is in turn itself influenced by historical movements in Judaism and the social history of each commentator.

As such, our method of presenting the various understandings of this verse from Psalms is firstly historical: treating each commentator within the context of his times and social influences, to the

extent that they are known.<sup>5</sup> The selection of individuals and works cited is not complete, but attempts to cover the most significant commentators, a selection from the different historical movements in Judaism, as well as some less known and rarer publications for contrast and comparison. Following this sequential analysis, we will be able to laterally explore some of the common threads weaved between one explanation and another, the common decisions they made in drawing meaning from our short text.

## 2 Ps. 62:12 in pre-Geonic rabbinic sources

As a preface to a discussion of a thousand years of commentary on our verse, it is worthwhile to briefly summarise earlier material, primarily the Midrash, as it is a common basis for many of the later commentators' discussions. Referring to our verse, these texts suggest from it:

- That a single passage from scripture can take upon multiple meanings.<sup>6</sup>
- That God has the ability to speak multiple things at once.<sup>7</sup> Some give the example of the Ten Commandments,<sup>8</sup> which were spoken at once according to a reading of Exod. 20:1.
- That זכור (“remember”) and שמור (“observe”) were spoken “בדיבור אחד” (“in one speech”), referring to the inconsistency in the commandment regarding Sabbath between Exod. 20:7 and Deut. 5:11.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The commentators and approaches here are by no means a complete listing. Although an attempt has been made to include as much of the material as is readily available, limitations of time, space and accessibility have constricted this to a broad survey of the commentaries, translations and anthologies available.

<sup>6</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 34a

<sup>7</sup> Mekhilta DeRabi Yishma'el, Beshalah Shira 8 (adding that God has this ability while idols cannot speak at all); Mekhilta DeRabi Shim'on Bar Yoḥai 20:1; Sifre Bamidbar 42; ibid. 102; ibid. 111; Bamidbar Raba 11.

<sup>8</sup> Mekhilta DeRabi Yishma'el, Beshalah Shira 8; Sifre Bamidbar 102; ibid. 111

<sup>9</sup> Palestinian Talmud Shevuot 3:8; Mekhilta DeRabi Yishma'el, Yitro Baḥodesh 7; Sifre Devarim 233; Mekhilta DeRabi Shim'on Bar Yoḥai 20:8.

- That as well as זכור and שמור, the Torah contains numerous contradictory statements that are nonetheless able to be stated “בדיבור אחד” by God.<sup>10</sup>
- That, according to the Targum, God spoke one Torah, which we have heard twice, the second heard from the mouth of Moses.<sup>11</sup>
- God’s ability to do these things is in contrast to the inability of man to do so.<sup>12</sup> Only the Targum explicitly connects this with “כי עז לאלקים” in our verse.
- That of all the mitzvot in the Torah (אחת) God only spoke the first two (שתיים) of the Ten Commandments.<sup>13</sup>

We note that most of these midrashim work by reading some external concept, largely related to the giving of the Law and its interpretation, into only the first part of our verse, which they understand as “God spoke one thing, from which we heard two.” Where the end of our verse is included in the midrash it is understood as “because only God has the strength to do so.” Not surprisingly, all of these explanations of Ps. 62:12 found in the Tanaitic and Amoraic midrash, Talmuds and Targum and are at some point taken up and expounded upon by later commentators.

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<sup>10</sup> Such as prohibiting Sabbath desecration (Exod. 31:14), but requiring sacrifice (Num. 28:9); forbidding relations with one’s sister-in-law (Lev. 18:16), but requiring levirate marriage with her (Deut. 25:5). Palestinian Talmud Shevuot 3:8; Mekhilta DeRabi Yishma’el, Yitro Baḥodesh 7; Sifre Devarim 233.

<sup>11</sup> Targum Psalms 62:12: “אוריתא חדא ממליל אלהא ותרתין זימנין דן שמעית ותנייתא דנא שמענא מן פום משה”.

<sup>12</sup> Targum Psalms 62:12; Mekhilta DeRabi Yishma’el, Beshalah Shira 8; ibid. Yitro 7; Sifre Devarim 233; Mekhilta DeRabi Shim’on Bar Yoḥai 20:1; ibid. 20:8; Sifre Bamidbar 42; ibid. 102; Bamidbar Raba 11.

<sup>13</sup> Pirḳe DeRabi Eli’ezer 41; Tanḥuma Vayelekh 2. As a result of this, the midrashim use gematria to derive the count 613 for the commandments in the Torah as being: תורה = 611 spoken by Moses + 2 spoken by God.

### 3 Tenth century: Gaon and Karaites

Some of the earliest works we know of that comment thoroughly on the Psalms along with other books in the bible are by the Geonim, the leaders of the Talmudic academies in Babylonia on one hand, and their regular opposition, the Karaites. Both had an interest in the text as a holy work, and it is generally understood that both had agendas related to their understanding of tradition that would become part of their interpretative process.

#### 3.1 Sa'adia ben Joseph (882-942)

Most prominent among the Geonim who headed the Babylonian academies of study from the 6<sup>th</sup> through to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, was Sa'adia ben Joseph. A prolific writer on many topics through linguistics, philosophy, and Halakha, Sa'adia distinguished himself from many of the other Geonim in writing extensively on the bible, including a translations and commentaries in Arabic on most of its books. His translation of our verse reads:

לאן אללה קד כ'אטבנא פי ד'לך מרה וסמענאהא ת'אניה, ואן אלעז לה.<sup>14</sup>

This approximately reads as: “Because God already spoke to us regarding this once, and we heard it a second time; and that strength is to Him.”<sup>15</sup> From this translation we can infer a number of paths Sa'adia has taken in reading the text: (a) he attaches it to the previous verse with “לאן” (“because”) (b) he seems to read וז as ‘this’, which he moves up in his translation as “פי ד'לך” (“regarding this”); (c) he

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<sup>14</sup> In ed. Ḳafih, p. 154.

<sup>15</sup> My translation, aided by Ḳafih's there: “כי ה' כבר צונו בכך פעם אחת ושמענוה שנית ושהעז לה'”. He translates כ'אטבנא as צונו, possibly noting that this is not the common word Sa'adia uses for speech (he more often uses the root כלם, eg. in Psa. 52:5, 59:13, 108:8, 116:10; or קאל eg. in 34:14, 66:14). Further, Ḳafih translates כ'אטב in 60:8 back to Hebrew as דבר, and where Sa'adia gives דבר as אמר in 50:1, Ḳafih correctly translates צוה.

changes ‘I heard’ to ‘we heard’;<sup>16</sup> (d) he detaches the end of the verse from its beginning through conjunction that is not in the Hebrew text.

All of these decisions in translation are made clearer within Sa’adia’s commentary.<sup>17</sup> Here he implies that *וַ* refers to the subject matter of the previous verse: robbery. As such, the one thing that God spoke and we heard twice is the commandment of “לא תגנב” (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:16). He particularly states “וכאלו אין מטרתו בכל עשרת הדברות כי אם זו האחת,”<sup>18</sup> implying that others, or possibly the midrashic sources in his understanding, apply this verse to the entire Ten Commandments which are stated twice in the Pentateuch, but in doing so ignore the topical context of our verse within the psalm. As had been reflected in his translation, Sa’adia makes no comment on “כי עז לאלקים,” following along with a number of the midrashim that also seem to ignore it. Sa’adia considers his understanding of the verse “פשט ענין שתיים זו שמעתי,” and so we see that although his understanding still has a midrashic quality in referring to the Ten Commandments, he requires that it be sensible contextually in order to consider it *peshat*.

### 3.2 Salmon ben Yeruḥam (10<sup>th</sup> century)

Salmon ben Yeruḥam holds his fame as the author of an anti-Rabbanite polemic, particularly directed at Sa’adia, in his *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*. Despite this, and Sa’adia’s equally harsh anti-Karaite

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<sup>16</sup> A number of commentators quote our verse with the word שמענו, such as Ḳimḥi (5.3), Maimonides (6.1), Naḥmanides (7.1), Sforno (8.3), Eliezer Ashkenazi (8.5), Landa (12.4). A number of others quote the verse as שמעתי but then write שמענו in their interpretation. It does not appear, nonetheless, that this is a variant in Psalms manuscripts. Rather, it seems that the commentators intentionally vary the quote to suit their commentary, or accidentally misquote corresponding with previous ideas regarding the verse that understood it as referring to plural hearers.

<sup>17</sup> Translated in ed. Ḳafih, p. 154.

<sup>18</sup> Ḳafih’s translation of the commentary.

activities, the two Judeo-Arabic commentaries are surprisingly similar in content and approach. Salmon's translation seems to be more literal (possibly super-literal<sup>19</sup>), with a one-to-one correspondence between the Hebrew text's words and his translation:

<sup>20</sup> ואחדה כיאטב אללה אתינתין הודיא סמעת אן עז ללה.

There is little to comment on this translation, except the use of הודיא ('this') for זו, and that Arabic אן maintains the ambiguity of meaning present in כי, but prefers the meaning "that".<sup>21</sup>

The parallels to Saadia are more prevalent in the commentary: Salmon also reads זו as referring to the content of the previous verse, and thus שתים שמעתי as referring to two commandments against stealing. In particular, he seems to say that consensus understands אחת דבר as God's commandment of לא תגנב which is heard a second time from Moses (presumably in Deuteronomy) in the Ten Commandments. This position seems to be the same as Sa'adia, but Salmon continues to list alternatives that have been proposed: one is "לא תגנב" (Ex. 20:12) said at Mount Sinai, two is "לא תגנבו" (Lev. 19:11) in the Sinai Desert; one is "לא תעשק את רעך ולא תגזל" (Lev. 19:13), two is "לא תעשק שכיר" (Deut. 24:14). The latter option could plausibly be preferred because it uses the same words as Ps. 62:11 where גנב is not directly mentioned, but עשק and גזל are. In all these cases, though, the reading of the verse is dependent on it referring to the previous verse.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Apart from the parallel word ordering, according to my very limited knowledge of Arabic, for example, it would probably be more appropriate to translate עז with the definite article as אלעז, as Sa'adia did. Salmon leaves the noun in its indefinite form. This may nonetheless be an incorrect assumption on my part.

<sup>20</sup> In ed. Marwick, p. 77.

<sup>21</sup> "Because" is more often לאן but also can be אן alone. Also notable is the use of כיאטב as Sa'adia did. See note 15 above.

<sup>22</sup> Salmon continues to bring other alternative interpretations, which also seem to be "midrashic" in the sense that they are referring to external concepts. Nonetheless, we were not able to fully translate and therefore understand the passage.

### 3.3 Yusuf ibn Nuḥ (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries)

A third Judeo-Arab author in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was Karaite grammarian Yusuf ibn Nuḥ. Although any commentary he may have written on the Psalms has not been maintained, he wrote an extensive Hebrew grammar, known as *al-Diḳḏuḳ*, with grammatical comments listed on verses in the Bible. In it, our verse is mentioned as follows:

שְׁתִּים זֶה שְׁמַעְתִּי : מכרת למא כאן אלסבב דכר בעדה כק' כי עז לאלה'.

שְׁתִּים זֶה שְׁמַעְתִּי: It has a disjoined form since the reason is mentioned after it, namely כי עז לאלה'.<sup>23</sup>

Ibn Nuḥ's grammar claims that in many cases a pausal form signals that the following words are a סבב: a 'reason', 'circumstance', or 'result' of the previous statement.<sup>24</sup> In a non-pausal form, "I heard" would regularly be שְׁמַעְתִּי, so Ibn Nuḥ claims that the pausal form in our verse is a result of its 'reason' following it. This would seem to imply that Ibn Nuḥ reads כי עז לאלקים as "because strength belongs to God."<sup>25</sup> This reading of the verse is interesting considering that both Sa'adia ben Joseph and Salmon ben Yeruḥam seem to have translated כי as 'that', while many of the Rabbinic midrashim surrounding our verse read כי as 'because'.<sup>26</sup>

## 4 The meaning of זֶה in Medieval lexicography

Corresponding to increased language studies in the Islamic world, a science of Hebrew linguistics formed in many Arab-influenced Jewish societies, both Rabbanite and Karaite, that focused on reading the bible text independent of earlier Rabbinic applications of it. Most of the literature in this field involved the writing of Hebrew grammars and lexicons, the latter of which we will explore a little.

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<sup>23</sup> Text and translation in Khan, p. 280-1.

<sup>24</sup> See Khan, pp. 112ff on pausal forms in general, and p. 119ff on סבב.

<sup>25</sup> As Khan suggests on p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> Ie., "Because God has the ability to do so unlike man," as with those texts in note 12.

The most significant lexical debate of interest to our verse is how the word זו is to be understood. The word occurs only fifteen times in the entire bible,<sup>27</sup> as and is a subject of debate even among modern lexicographers,<sup>28</sup> with confusion added by זו being a singular feminine demonstrative in Rabbinic Hebrew, an orthographical change from זֵה more common in Biblical Hebrew.<sup>29</sup> During the Middle Ages, we find that the lexicographers vary between reading זו as a form of זֵה and reading it as equivalent to אשר.

#### 4.1 Jonah ibn Janah (990-1050)

Spanish Hebrew grammarian Jonah ibn Janah is most well known for writing on a consistent tri-literal root system in Hebrew. In his *Sefer haShorashim* (in Arabic, *Kitab al-Usul*) he gives an entry for זו,<sup>30</sup> which cites three cases where he claims זו takes the meaning אשר ('which'). In another two it means זֵה, but he concludes with: “ויתכן באלה השנים 'אשר' גם כן,” that it would be possible to read אשר in these latter cases as well. Ibn Janah does not mention our verse in particular, but nonetheless struggles with two possible meanings for זו, possibly preferring אשר but challenged by a prejudice to treat the word as a demonstrative.

#### 4.2 Judah ibn Bal'am (11<sup>th</sup> century)

The later Judah ibn Bal'am, who lived in Spain during the 11<sup>th</sup> century, took a somewhat different approach regarding the word זו, when compared to his predecessor. In his lexicon, זו is included under

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<sup>27</sup> זו is found in: Exod. 15:13, 16; Isa. 42:24; 43:21; Hab. 1:11; Psa. 9:16; 10:2; 12:7; 17:9; 31:5; 32:8; 62:12; 68:29; 142:4; 143:8.

<sup>28</sup> See section 13.

<sup>29</sup> זו appears twice in the bible: Hos. 7:16; Psa. 132:12.

<sup>30</sup> In ed. Bacher, p. 128. Quoted translations are those of Yehuda ibn Tibon. The entry actually begins with three examples of זו (one of which in our texts is זֵה) of which he says “כולם זה והוסיפו עליו ויאמרו זאת.”

זה, implying a default meaning as a demonstrative. But זה he argues, may also be used as a relative pronoun:

ונמצא עם פועל עבר מקום אשר: שמע אביך זה ילדך, וזה אהבתי נהפכו לי, עם זו יצרתי לי.<sup>31</sup>

He argues that in past tense, זה can have the meaning ‘which’. But after listing other uses of זה, he makes some interesting statements about זו:

ויחליפו ההא בוו ללשון נקבה: ועדותי זו; גם זו רעה חולה. ונמצא בלשון זכר: תצרנו מן הדור זו. וענינו הפוך  
היה ראוי להיותו "מן זו הדור לעולם".<sup>32</sup>

Ibn Bal'am here suggests that the letter ה in זה may be replaced with ו for a feminine form, and proceeds to bring one example of זו and one of זו where this seems to be the case. Nonetheless, זו is also found many times with masculine referents, which Ibn Bal'am also notes, but points out that the words of one such verse seem out of order. Were this lexicographer not already prejudiced to consider זו a demonstrative, this curious observation might be an indication that the word meant something else.

### 4.3 David Ẕimḥi (1160-1235)

*Sefer Hashorashim* by linguistic commentator and grammarian David Ẕimḥi also reflects this tension between two possible meanings of זו. His entry for the word mostly consists of summarising Ibn Janah's opinion, before suggesting the contrary:

עם זו יצרתי לי. זו הטאנו לו. מפני רשעים זו שדוני פי ר' יונה בענין אשר ובן דרך זו אהלך: ויתכן לפרשם  
כולם בענין זה והווי בהם תמורת ההא כמשפט.<sup>33</sup>

Here Ẕimḥi is suggesting that all the examples cited by Ibn Janah as cases where זו is likely to mean ‘which’ are just as well supported if taken with זו meaning ‘this’. It is not entirely clear that Ẕimḥi here rejects the hypothesis that זו means אשר, but he seems to claim that such a suggestion is unsubstantiated.

<sup>31</sup> In ed. Kikovstov, p. 118f.

<sup>32</sup> In ed. Kikovstov, p. 119. Some punctuation and vowels added.

<sup>33</sup> *Sefer Hashorashim*, p. 32.

For many explanations of our verse in Psalms, the difference between these two suggested meanings of וַי is not significant. Nonetheless, because of Kimḥi's popularity as a commentator within the Jewish world, and as a linguist within both Jewish and Christian bible studies, it is possible that this view influenced later commentators and translators to understand וַי as 'this'.

## 5 *Peshat* approaches in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century

### 5.1 Solomon Yitzḥaḳi (Rashi; 1040-1105)

Likely unparalleled by any individual in his historical impact on Jewish bible study, the exegesis of French winemaker Rashi has been and often continues to be the only constant in printed editions of Bible text with commentary. Rashi is known to have concerned himself with what is considered the plain meaning of the text, but often chooses from among the midrashic corpus in order to give an appropriate explanation.

In the collection of Rashi's bible commentaries, he makes reference to Psa. 62:12 four times: on the verse itself; on Exod. 20:7; on Num. 15:22; and in his introduction to the Song of Songs. In each case, the verse takes on a different meaning, highlighting Rashi's agreement with the view that verses take on multiple meanings. But as we look at the content of these comments, we also gain some insight into Yitzḥaḳi's approach to the texts.

Rashi opens his *Haḳdama* to the Song of Songs by quoting Sanhedrin 34a, claiming by use of our verse that one verse can take upon multiple meanings. But, he claims, “סוף דבר אין לך מקרא יוצא “ מִיֵּדֵי פְּשׁוּטוֹ”.<sup>34</sup> Having set out with his contradiction, he explains his approach in explaining a book whose *peshat*, it seems, is metaphor.

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<sup>34</sup> Quotations from Rashi's commentary are all taken from the text on the *Bar Ilan University Responsa Project*.

At Exodus 20:7, Rashi notes on “זכור את יום השבת” that זכור and שמור were said in one speech, along with a list of other seemingly contradictory laws. This passage he likely excerpts directly from the Mekhilta.<sup>35</sup> In this he uses the midrash to address the issue of inconsistency between the Exodus and Deuteronomy accounts of the Ten Commandments, before looking at the linguistics and practical meaning of the verse.

On Numbers 15:22, Rashi again utilises the Midrash in making his exegesis: where the bible text refers to “all the commandments which the Lord spoke to Moses”, Rashi implies in his comment that all the commandments were spoken to Moses and not to Israel. Only two were spoken to Israel: “אנכי ולא יהיה לך מפי הגבורה שמענום”, citing our verse which would seem to imply this statement.<sup>36</sup> Although this understanding of Psa. 62:12 is not innovative, its application to the verse in Numbers is creative.

Despite these three citations of our verse out of its context all being based on midrashic material, Rashi’s comment on the verse itself is more original:

**אחת דבר אלקים, ששמעתי מתוכה שתיים**; ומה הן השתיים? **כי עז לך לשלם לאיש כמעשהו**, והשנית, **כי לך חסד**; ומאיזה דבור שמענום? – דבור שיני של עשרת הדברות (ראה שמי' כ,ד-ה); שמענו ממנו, שהקדוש ברוך הוא פוקד עונות ונוצר חסד, שנאמר בו “פוקד עון אבות” והגוי (שם); לכך בטוח אני שישלם שכר טוב לצדיקים ופורענות לרשעים; זו למדתי מיסודו של רבי משה הדרשן. ורבותינו דרשוהו (מכיל' יתרו בחדש ז' ב"זכור" (שם,ז) ו"שמור" (דבי' ה,יא) בדיבור אחד נאמרו.<sup>37</sup>

Here, Rashi suggests that two things were heard from one statement of God, but that these two things are those spoken of in the following two clauses of the psalm: that power and kindness are God’s. Unlike Sa’adia Gaon and Salmon ben Yeruham who see **זו** as referring to the previous concept within the psalm, Rashi either takes the word to mean ‘which’ or to refer to the following ideas. This approach is held by a large number of the commentators and translators from Rashi’s time onwards.

<sup>35</sup> See section 2 and note 10 above.

<sup>36</sup> See note 13 for midrashim that make this application, likely bases for Rashi’s comment.

<sup>37</sup> Punctuation and formatting according to *Mikra’ot Gedolot Haketer*, p. 188.

But Rashi despite identifying the שתיים within the psalm, Rashi needs to explain their derivation from אחת. For this, he identifies that the second of the Ten Commandments, although one commandment, contains in it both a threat of God's power (עז) and a promise of his kindness (חסד), the former to the wicked, and the latter to the righteous:

4 You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, **visiting the guilt** of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations **of those who reject Me**, 6 but **showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me** and keep My commandments.<sup>38</sup>

It may be worthwhile to note that the material Rashi considers hinted to by our verse comes from the Ten Commandments, as do three of the midrashic approaches to our verse, and one Geonic interpretation.<sup>39</sup> As such, Rashi may have been biased by the Midrash to connect his exegesis to Sinai.

Finally, at the conclusion of his comment on Psa. 62:12, Rashi also cites a more common reading of the “two” that were heard from one, stating the rabbinic position that the verse refers to שמור and זכור being stated “בדבור אחד”.

Despite these eventual uses of midrash, in comparing his commentary on Psalms to those listed above on the Mosaic text, “Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch is largely culled from rabbinic literature... The situation is different with regard to the Prophets and the Hagiographa, where Rashi’s original comments are more abundant and he deals more frequently with the context and with historical or literary issues.”<sup>40</sup> In our case it is not clear to what extent Rashi’s commentary is original: he cites in

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<sup>38</sup> Exodus 20:4-6, New JPS translation.

<sup>39</sup> See sections 2 and 3.1 respectively.

<sup>40</sup> Avraham Grossman, “The School of Literal Jewish Exegesis in Northern France,” in *HBOT 1/2*, p. 334f.

it “Moses the Interpreter,” who some claim to be a teacher of his. Nonetheless, it is less midrashic than those typically found in his commentary on the Torah.

At the same time, we also notice a separation of what might be construed as *peshat* and *derash* in Rashi’s commentary. He first interprets the verse in terms of its basic meaning (its *peshat*), then connects it to an external idea which has moral implications (one level of *derash*), and then brings a more traditional interpretation from the standard midrashic collection. We hence see through the form of his commentary an attempt to derive a literal meaning from our verse, despite its application elsewhere in his commentary to other meanings.

## 5.2 Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164)

Abraham Ibn Ezra was known for his role in the Spanish linguistic school, and for bringing a close attention to language into his commentaries. On our verse, he therefore takes a different approach to Rashi, one which focuses instead on the idiomatic language of the verse:

כבר הזהירנו השם פעם ושנים, כי העוז לשם הוא לבדו, והוא לבדו יתן עוז לנצח או להעשיר; כנגד "צור עוזי"  
(תה' סב: ח).<sup>41</sup>

Here Ibn Ezra understands אַחַת as “once”, unlike Rashi, Sa’adia and many of the midrashim which take it to mean “one thing”. Moreso, together with “twice”, אַחַת וּשְׁתַּיִם becomes an idiom of repetition: God has spoken one message many times. This message is also found within the verse itself: that strength is His.

But the meaning of עֹז as strength alone is not clear enough, so to determine its meaning Ibn Ezra seeks its earlier use within the psalm: in verse 8, God is described as “the rock of my strength.” In paralleling these two uses, the commentator seems to suggest that the עֹז mentioned here is one of victory and not one of punishment as Rashi had interpreted.

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<sup>41</sup> In *Mikra’ot Gedolot Haketer*, p. 189.

Both these aspects of Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the verse could be seen as a challenge against Rashi's: they highlight linguistic and contextual features, implying possibly a more "simple" (*peshat*) reading; they also do not follow Rashi's tendency to bring in material midrashically from outside texts. Following the rationalist tradition prominent in the twelfth century Arabic world that surrounded him, Ibn Ezra focuses on the text alone with outside scientific knowledge, thus giving what seems a simpler take on the verse to those preceding him.

### 5.3 David Ḳimḥi (1160-1235)

As well as his lexical work of relevance described above,<sup>42</sup> Ḳimḥi (also known as Radaḳ) was the author of a popular commentary on Psalms. As we will see from his words on our verse, his approach has features in common with both Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

אחת דבר אלקים – פעם, ושתים – כלומר: פעמים רבות דבר אלקים, ושמענו (בנוסחנו: שמעתי<sup>43</sup>) מפי נביאיו, כי העז לאלקים לבדו; לפיכך אין לו לאדם לבטוח, לבכחו ולא בממונו, כי הכל הבל. ואין בטחון אלא באלקים לבדו, כי לו העז ולא לזולתו.

ויש בו פירושי אחרים דרך דרש, ואינם מענין המזמור: יש מפרשים: אחת דבר אלקים – התורה, שתים – שתי פעמים שמענו אותה, מפי הגבורה ומפי משה. ורבותינו ז"ל פירושו (ראה מכיל' יתרו בחדש ז'): אחת דבר אלקים – זכור' ושמור' שנאמרו בדבור אחד, ושמענו שני דבורים.<sup>44</sup>

Here we see that Ḳimḥi agrees with Ibn Ezra's general understanding of the verse: אחת ושתים is an expression of repetition, referring to the statement that עז לאלקים. But Radaḳ expands upon this idea

<sup>42</sup> See section 4.3.

<sup>43</sup> *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer* remarks here that Kimḥi uses שמענו rather than שמעתי in quoting the verse, and he does so multiple times. It is nonetheless not clear that Kimḥi claims this is the text of the verse; he may use plural for the purpose of the commentary. See note 16.

<sup>44</sup> In *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer*, p. 189. Their publication includes a cross-reference to Rashi on Exod. 19:19 after the words "יש מפרשים". Although one of Rashi's comments on that verse refers to only the first two commandments being recited by God, which is elsewhere connected with Psa. 62:12 (see section 2), he makes no comment resembling that suggested here by Radaḳ.

more homiletically, more reminiscent of Rashi, explaining that man should thus not trust in his material possessions (possibly in reference to גזל of Psa. 62:11), but only in God who has might. This also seems to agree generally with the context of the psalm, whose topic is arguably trust in God alone.<sup>45</sup>

Also like Yitzḥaḳi, he follows his own literal approach with some more midrashic readings that “אינם מענין המזמור,” implying that they ignore the context. The first we have seen in the Targum (we have heard the Torah, God’s speech, twice—from God and from Moses), and the second in the midrash (which Rashi also brought). Neither of these interpretations pay attention to the end of the verse.

Some common features of these three medieval commentators are recognisable: whereas earlier midrash as well as Sa’adia tended to ignore the third clause in our verse, none of these three do. Indeed, all three claim that **כי עז לאלקים** is the subject matter that **אחת ... שמעתי** refers to. In doing so, they also all read the word **כי** as ‘that’, and not ‘because’. These are characteristics that, we will see, continue to be typical of *peshat* approaches, although others then extend these to other meanings as Rashi does.

## 6 Philosophy and midrash, 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries

### 6.1 Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides; 1135/8-1204)

Arguably the most famous Jewish philosopher, and one of the most famous halakhists, Maimonides (or Rambam)—a late contemporary of Ibn Ezra in Spain, Morocco and Egypt—did not write any commentaries on the bible. Nonetheless his Jewish-Aristotelean *Guide for the Perplexed* refers constantly to the bible, regularly allegorising the text to accord with his philosophic thesis. In this work,

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<sup>45</sup> It begins: “Only for God doth my soul wait in stillness; from Him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my high tower, I shall not be greatly moved.” (Psa. 62:2-3 according to JPS 1917 translation.)

Maimonides at length describes the nature of the Ten Commandments and how they were given, during which he states:

The Sages permit considering as admissible that all Israel only heard at the Gathering one voice one single time — the voice through which Moses and all Israel apprehended *I* and *Thou shalt not*, which commandments Moses made them hear again as spoken in his own speech with an articulation of the letters that were heard.<sup>46</sup>

The Sages supported this approach with our verse, as Maimonides claims, and as we have seen in the Midrash. Maimonides, by placing the midrash in the context of a larger explanation, clarifies the midrash and its application to our verse: the first two of the Ten Commandments alone were spoken by God (שתיים שמעתי), and even they were spoken together in one voice (אחת דבר). Ultimately though, Rambam does not introduce anything new in his interpretation of our verse, although it gives some indication of his understanding the midrash's application of Psa. 62:12 to the giving of these two commandments.

## 6.2 Isaiah ben Mali di Trani (c.1200-c.1280)

Although not as well known for his commentaries as others mentioned so far, Isaiah from Trani, Italy, wrote on Psalms with a very brief style, based on a *peshat* approach, and rarely quoting חז"ל,<sup>47</sup> but nonetheless drawing in philosophical ideas. He explains our verse as follows:

כלומר: אם הבורא יבטיחני מעט, הוא יעשה הרבה. שאם דיבר לי אחת טובה, אצפה ממנו שתיים טובות, שדרכו לכפול חסדיו עם הבריות כי יש לאלקים לעשותו.<sup>48</sup>

While Isaiah's commentary here is original, it seems to pay less attention to language and context factors than any of Rashi, Ibn Ezra or Radaḳ, instead drawing in a new idea independent of the psalm: אחת דבר is God's promise to man to do good, but one expects even greater (שתיים) goodness, because

<sup>46</sup> *Guide to the Perplexed* II, 35. In trans. Pines., p. 364f.

<sup>47</sup> See *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer* preface p. כד-ה.

<sup>48</sup> In *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer*, p. 189.

this is God's nature (presumably, this is his עז). Also to be noted here in contrast to the *pashtanim* is the understanding of כי as 'because'. While this interpretation fits somewhat into the general context of the psalm as talking of God being a shelter for the psalmist, the approach involves reading allegorically into the concepts of God's speech and man's perception.

### 6.3 Menahem Meiri (1249-1316)

Although Meiri of Provence is primarily known for his writings on the Talmud and Jewish law, he also authored commentaries on the biblical books of Proverbs and Psalms. His commentary is a fair illustration of the his style, and its reflections of his historical circumstance:

אחת דבר אלקים שתיים זו שמעתי וכי – פירושו: פעם ושתיים, כלומר: כמה פעמים נשמע דבר זה ממנו; רוצה לומר, שלא יהרהר אדם בראות העדר הסדור בין בני אדם למראה עיניו, כי עז לאלקים – רוצה לומר: לו העוז והגבורה להחליף הזמנים, "השפלה הגבה והגבורה השפיל" (יחי כא, לא). כי עז לאלקים – והכל במשפט; כי הצדיק יארעוהו לפעמים נזקים וצרות, לקצת עבירות שבידו, עד שינחל נחלה גמורה חיי העולם הבא; כמו שביארנו בכמה מקומות (תהי לו ועוד).<sup>49</sup>

The Meiri seems to understand the first half of our verse, in its plain sense like Ibn Ezra and Radaḳ as indicating repetition, but also reads it, it seems, as referring to the previous verse, where man might be tempted by the riches wrought by evil. The message has thus often been repeated that man should not be deceived by the good afforded to the wicked—the seeming lack of order—because God has the ability to change the times, and although the righteous receive punishment for their few wrongdoings, they will eventually be rewarded.

It seems that a number of Meiri's comments on Psalms are similar to this nature, and reflect on troublesome times that brought with them theological challenges. He is the first of the commentators to have lamented over the length of "זה גלות הארוך."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, here in our psalm, Meiri personally identifies with the injustice described within the psalm, and reflects his sense of persecution and suffering into his commentary, predicting ultimate resolve for the righteous as expounded from our

<sup>49</sup> In *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer*, p. 189.

<sup>50</sup> His commentary on Psa. 22:1, 80:1. See in *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer* preface p. כד.

verse. Although many others through the ages see in this verse the punishment of the wicked and redemption of the righteous, among them Joseph Albo, few express it with the pathos of Menaḥem Meiri.

#### 6.4 Joseph Albo (d. 1444)

Like Maimonides before him, Joseph Albo wrote on the bible only indirectly, through his philosophical writings on the essential Jewish principles of faith, his *Sefer Ha'ikarim* (completed 1425). He authored this Book of Principles in response to a volatile situation with numerous disputations between Christian and Jewish populations in Spain.<sup>51</sup> It therefore covers the nature and origin of divine law, and the nature of good and evil.

Correspondingly, in a discussion on divine judgement and punishment, Albo studies Psa. 62:12-13 at length. He begins:

יאמר כי ממה שזכר בתורה שהשם יתברך אינו מנקה לרשעים אבל משלם עונם אל חיקם, שמענו שתים, האחת כי עז לאלקים לעשות משפט ברשעים ולתת לאיש כדרכיו, כמה שאמר הכתוב ועוז מלך משפטם אהב (תהלים צ"ט ד'), ובוה המשפט בעצמו שהוא עושה ברשעים שמענו כי עם ה' החסד, וזהו שסמך לזה ולך ה' חסד...<sup>52</sup>

Here Albo's understanding of our verse reflects Rashi's: the two things heard are that God has strength and kindness. Unlike Rashi, though, he considers the 'one' that these two derive from to be God's message that he will punish the wicked, so עז becomes the strength to perform judgement, and חסד becomes kindness in judgment. He then continues to explain that our verse indicates that although God could seemingly give someone an eternal punishment for their evil acts, His judgement is moderated by

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<sup>51</sup> See Sirat, p. 374ff.

<sup>52</sup> "Sefer Ha'ikarim" IV, 38. In the *Bar Ilan University Responsa Project*. This passage is also included in *Sefer Tehilim: Miqdash Me'at*, p. 218, although there it is cited to מהר"י אלבי ז"ל, presumably a typographical error.

עונש זמניי כמעשה העבירה שהיה זמניי, וזה כדי " which demands only a temporary punishment, " שינצל מעונש נצחי בעולם הבא

Although Albo's reading of our verse's grammar differs from the Meiri, the message is similar: the good in this world only receive temporary punishment, such that they may receive eternal reward in the world to come. Both these interpretations may be reflections on the struggles of Jewish life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Together with Isaiah of Trani, all of these latter three speak of God's promise of reward being described in the verse, although the three come to their conclusions through different means.

## 7 The mystical school, 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries

A group of bible interpreters with a new mystical approach began to appear in the thirteenth century in Spain, in whose environment the Zohar was compiled. Those among the early kabbalistic school of thought who wrote commentary on the bible, though, tended only to write on the five books of Moses. As a result, our verse is only brought up in a few occasions as part of a commentary on another work, and so is not directly an explanation of Psa. 62:12. Nonetheless, the verse is given new applications as pertain to the similarly new school of thought.

### 7.1 Moses ben Naḥman Gerondi (Naḥmanides; 1194 - c.1270)

The Catalan thirteenth century rabbi Naḥmanides (also known as Ramban), often writes at length exploring a subject in his Torah commentary, reflecting critically on the works of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. He concludes one such explanation of Exod. 19:20, "And the Lord came down on Mount Sinai..." with our verse. Within his discussion, the commentator refers to a midrash that the Torah was given in seven voices,<sup>53</sup> alluded to in "וַיְהִי קֶלֶת וּבְרָקִים" (Exod. 19:16). He eventually suggests that Moses heard the Torah in seven voices which he could contemplate, but Israel heard it only one voice, as alluded to

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<sup>53</sup> Exodus Raba 28:4, cited in Chavel's edition of the commentary, p. 283 note 244.

midrashically by the defective spelling of קלת ('voices'<sup>54</sup>), “והוא מה שנאמר אחת דבר אלקים שתים זו”, “שמענו, על דרך האמת.”<sup>55</sup> that this is the true, but secret meaning of our verse.<sup>56</sup>

Nahmanides seems to be the first to ascribe a *secret* meaning to our verse. It is indeed hard to tell how exactly he is reading our verse. Were שתים to be understood as the seven Godly voices, then it would be difficult to relate to the idea of Israel only hearing one. Maybe what it is implying is: God spoke, and it was heard in two ways, one way by Moses, and one way by the remainder of Israel. Such an interpretation would not hold as well if Ramban had cited the verse with the word שמעתי, but instead he quoted שמענו.<sup>57</sup>

Here Nahmanides does not delve into all the implied mysteries of the text; it is not his style to do so, rather:

While it has been estimated that only about 8% of Nahmanides' comments include matters of kabbalistic exegesis, he undoubtedly intended the readers of his commentary to become aware of the mystical reading of the Pentateuch. The method he employed was symbolic: “Know that in the true sense Scripture speaks of lower matters and alludes to supernal matters.”<sup>58</sup>

To this extent, Ramban has succeeded in his interpretation of our verse, whose meaning according to him alludes to “supernal matters,” but how it does so is unclear.

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<sup>54</sup> This word could be written as קלות, and according to the midrash, the absence of this ו allows it to be read as a singular noun, in addition to its usual meaning.

<sup>55</sup> From his commentary on Exod 19:20 in the *Bar Ilan University Responsa Project*. This quotation uses שמענו instead of שמעתי in our verse, as do others. See note 16.

<sup>56</sup> Chavel, p. 284, translates this as “By the way of Truth, [the mystic lore of the Cabala], this is Scripture’s intent in saying, *G-d hath spoken once, twice we have heard this.*” While the expression “על דרך האמת” is certainly Ramban’s reference to the mystical, it is unlikely from the teachings of what is known as “Cabala”, which flourished after Nahmanides’ time.

<sup>57</sup> See note 16 on this phenomenon.

<sup>58</sup> Yaakov Elman, “Moses ben Nahman,” *HBOT I/2*, p. 432.

## 7.2 The Zohar

While the mystical content of the Zohar relates to that of a number of earlier texts and ideas, including some brought in Nahmanides' commentary, there is no evidence of its existence before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and it is generally considered the product of Spanish rabbi Moses de Leon (c.1250-1305). Like Ramban before it, the Zohar mentions our verse in the context of the giving of the Torah, which it expounds upon somewhat like a commentary.<sup>59</sup> Only even insofar as the former's understanding of the verse is unclear, the latter is even more opaque:

"ואת קול השופר", תאני רבי יצחק כתיב **אחת דבר אלקים שתיים זו שמעתי** כמה דאת אמר אנכי ולא יהיה לך.<sup>60</sup>

It writes that on the words "and the voice of the horn" (Exod. 20:14) Rabbi Yitzhak taught our verse, and that only the first two of the Ten Commandments were spoken by God. Possibly the simplest connection between the three texts paralleled here is to understand that "the horn" is God's speech: קול השופר is God's recitation of the first two commandments, being paralleled here either with **אחת דבר אלקים**, or with **שמעתי זו שתיים**.<sup>61</sup> Another reading of the Zohar attempts to parallel the words קול and

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<sup>59</sup> It would seem that the experience of communal revelation at Sinai is a central one for the discussion of the mystical; the graphic detail of lights and sounds in Exod. 19-20, and the Divine transcendence in the process of revelation, is prime material for the elucidation of mystical depths.

<sup>60</sup> Zohar Yitro 81b (Sulam Yitro 300), in the *Bar Ilan University Responsa Project*.

<sup>61</sup> Alternatively, the verse might just be brought in its midrashic sense (see citations in note 13), in reference to **אנכי** and **לא יהיה לך** alone being said by God, and there is no direct connection implied between קול השופר and our verse, but this would seem to contradict the order in which the ideas are brought in the text. These approaches are sensible in the context of Exod. 20, wherein the next verse (15) the people complain that Moses should speak to them and not God, implying that it is after these events that Moses spoke the remainder of the Ten Commandments.

שופר, as the ‘two’ that were heard, drawing some parallel to אנכי and לא יהיה לך.<sup>62</sup> Although seeming to add a mystical element to its interpretation, the Zohar ultimately seems to base its understanding of our verse on the midrashim that saw in our verse reference to the first two commandments which alone were heard by Israel.

### 7.3 Bahya ben Asher (d. 1340)

One of the two men to later acquire the moniker Rabbenu Bahya, Bahya ben Asher, also from Spain, is principally known for his mystical commentary on the Torah. In it he adopts ideas from Nahmanides and the Kabbalah, although rarely referring to the Zohar, and more often to the *Sefer Habahir*.<sup>63</sup>

In two of his comments, he mentions our verse to similar purpose. In the first case, on Exod. 13:1, “וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר,” he suggests that the word לאמר comes to teach that there is a second hidden layer to God’s speech; that there is a נגלה (‘revealed’ portion) and a נסתר (‘hidden’ portion).<sup>64</sup> To this he applies our verse, extending the idea from the Babylonian Talmud that scriptural passages have multiple meanings by specifying that they are two (שתיים זו שמעתי): revealed and hidden meanings. In his commentary on Exod. 32:15,<sup>65</sup> he adds to this idea by claiming that these ideas are also hinted at in the Tablets of the Law being “כתובים משני עבריהם” (“written on both sides”). While these

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<sup>62</sup> This makes some sense in the context of the passage in the Zohar which had immediately prior been reading the particle את as signification of plurality (also Zohar Yitro 81b; Sulam Yitro 298-9). For example, the Sulam on this passage, in light of Lurianic Kabbalah, suggests “שאנכי הסוד בינה, ולא יהיה לך, הסוד זעיר אנפין, ונשמעו שניהם בבת אחת. שניהם בבת אחד. אף כאן קול הוא זעיר אנפין, השופר, הוא בינה, ונשמעו שניהם בבת אחת.” (Sulam Yitro 300, in Ashlag, vol. 8, p. 472).

<sup>63</sup> Gottlieb, p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> Bahya ben Asher on Exod. 13:1, in *Midrash Rabenu Bahya*, vol. 1, p. 40. In his understanding, “הנגלה הוא פשטי המצות והנסתר הוא הפנימי שבתוכו שאין דעת ההמון ראוי לו”.

<sup>65</sup> *Midrash Rabenu Bahya*, vol. 1, p. 134.

comments from Rabbenu Bahya are not mystical in their manner of reading either our verse or the verses he is directly explaining—they are rather midrashic—they do seem to speak for a mystical mindset which sees in the Torah not just multiple readings, but secret meanings that the average reader does not usually need to understand.

#### 7.4 Menahem Recanati (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries)

Recanati, an Italian rabbi, also wrote a commentary on the Torah infused with mystical ideas. His bible commentary once refers to Psa. 62:12, but only through a quotation purportedly from Sa'adia Gaon's philosophical work, *Emunot Vede'ot*. At the end of his commentary on Exod. 21:24, where he discusses oral interpretations differing from the simple reading of the text, he writes:

גם רבינו סעדיה גאון ז"ל כתב בספר האמונות אילו דברה תורה כל ענינה בלשון כוללת ובכוונה אחת לא יכלנו לדעת כל סתרי החכמה והבינה, שהתורה כוונה בחכמה אף על פי שלא פירשה, כי דברי תורה יש להם פנימי וחיצוני גלוי ונסתר, שנאמר **אחת דבר אלקים וגו'**.<sup>66</sup>

This suggests in the name of Sa'adia Gaon that all the hidden secrets of knowledge could not be understood if the Bible were written in a more simple manner, because the Torah has a revealed meaning and a hidden meaning, as indicated by our verse. While this reading of our verse is close to that understood in the Talmud, and identical with that cited in Bahya's commentary, this choice of terminology seems unlike Sa'adia (although he wrote in Arabic), and modern editions of his book do not mention Psa. 62:12, nor do they tend to use גלוי or נסתר in the sense of contrasting revealed and hidden meanings.<sup>67</sup> So although Recanati's comment here is in accordance with his contemporary mystic, Bahya ben Asher, it does not seem to be fairly attributable to Sa'adia Gaon.

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<sup>66</sup> In the *Bar Ilan University Responsa Project*.

<sup>67</sup> This is according to editions of *Emunot Vede'ot* in the *Bar Ilan University Responsa Project*, that available online, edited by Yehuda Inzberg, <<http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/mahshevt/kapah/tohen-2.htm>>; and *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Ed. Samuel Rosenblatt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948. This quotation attributed to Sa'adia is also brought in the commentary of Moses Ḥagiz, see section 10.3 below.

## 8 The Sefaradi diaspora, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries

Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, the Sefaradi community spread to many locations across Europe, the Orient, and in particular Palestine. While on one hand tragic for the Spanish community, resulting in many conversions that would later be the subject of an Inquisition, it also encouraged a flowering of Sefaradi literature in exilic communities, as well as developments of anti-rationalist and further mystical trends.

### 8.1 Joseph ben Abraham Ḥayun (d. 1497)

A relatively unknown figure in and of his own, Ḥayun is best known as a leading rabbi of Lisbon and the teacher of Don Isaac Abarbanel and others in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Although he lived a generation before the Spanish expulsion, he is included here for comparison, while also failing to fit in the above categories. In contrast to the innovators above, Ḥayun's commentary primarily summarises David Ḳimḥi's commentary of the verse:<sup>68</sup>

לפי שיאמר שיבטחו בו ולא לזולתו אמר כי כבר דבר השם פעם ושתים רוצה לומר פעמים רבות ושמעתים מפיו ומה טעם כי עוז הוא לו לבדו ולכן בו ראוי לבטוח לא בזולתו.

או יאמר אחת דבר אלדים פעם אחת דבר, יתעלה התורה. אבל שתי פעמים שמעתי האחד מפיו ואחד במשה במשנה תורה ומשתייהן למדתי.<sup>69</sup>

Some of the subtle changes are interesting, such as first stating the aim of the psalmist in writing this verse; also, where Ḳimḥi wrote in both cases “שמענו” (“we heard”), Ḥayun writes the interpretation as it is in the psalm, in the first person, possibly as if from the perspective of the psalmist.

His second explanation—not marked as *derash* as it was for Radaḳ—which suggests that the Torah was heard twice, once from God and once Moses, adds upon Ḳimḥi and the Targum by detailing that the latter is משנה תורה, the book of Deuteronomy, and also glossing שמעתי as למדתי (“I learnt”).

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<sup>68</sup> See section 5.3 above.

<sup>69</sup> In his *Sefer Tehilim...* p. 87b.

Despite basically following Kimḥi to here, Ḥayun also does not follow Kimḥi in including the traditional explanation of זכור ושמור. Ḥayun's commentary at least suggests the impact of Kimḥi and his *peshat* approach on the interpretation of Psalms in Spain of this era.

## 8.2 Joseph ben Ḥayim Jabez (or Ya'avetz; d. 1507)

Joseph Jabez was one of Joseph Ḥayun's students in Portugal, although primarily based in Spain until expulsion sent him to Italy. His long commentary on our verse begins by discussing others that have interpreted the verse.<sup>70</sup> He begins:

פירשו בו: בני אדם אומרים הרבה ואפילו מעט אינם עושים, אבל הקב"ה אינו כן, כי אחת דבר, ושתיים זו שמעתי, הוסיף במעשה מבאמירה. ואלו היה אומר שתיים ראיתי, או עשה, היה נכון.<sup>71</sup>

Jabez cites an anonymous suggestion that man speaks much, but does little, while God speaks one thing, and does even more. We have no other source to hand that includes this idea, which assumes to differentiate between speech which can be entirely unproductive, and hearing or experiencing which represents action. Jabez argues against this interpretation on the basis that שמע does not express a tangible experience of God's action.

Like Rashi and Radaḳ, Jabez also brings the midrashic understanding from this verse that God said “זכור ושמור בדבור אחד”, unlike the ability of man. He says that this is a possible explanation, suggested by a *notariḳon*: the initials of זכור ושמור are ז"ו, so the passage may be read as “אחת דבר”. “אלקים, שתיים זכור ושמור שמעתי”.

Having rejected these two possibilities, the author gives an extensive preface to his own interpretation, on the nature of speculation about the world to come. He suggests that other religions (“הדתות המזויפות”) focus on afterlife and negate the physical world, while Judaism's Torah does not even explicitly mention the world to come. One should not be philosophical and speculatively expound

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<sup>70</sup> Unlike Rashi and Radaḳ who placed secondary commentaries after their own.

<sup>71</sup> In *Kol Sifre R. Yosef Ya'avetz*, p. 333.

upon the hidden, rather one needs to be practical in this world, and “מן הנגלות נעמוד על הנסתרות”.

Following this long polemic, Jabez finally concludes with his view on our verse:

**אחת דבר** ... שהוא יתברך ישגיח על יראיו בעולם הזה ... **כי אחת דבר אלקים** מפורשת בתורתו אם בחקתי גוי (וי' כו:ג), והיה אם שמע גוי (דב' יא:ג), אמנם הב' אינה מפורשת בכתוב אבל מפי השמועה למדתיה. **כי עז לאלקים**, להוריש להעשיר להשפיל אף לרומם, זו היא **האחת אשר דבר אלקים** בפיו מפורש, והב' אשר שמעתי היא, **כי לך ה' החסד**, כי **החסד** הצפון ליראיך לך הוא...<sup>72</sup>

God spoke in his Torah only of giving us reward in this world (**אחת דבר אלקים**), and of another world we only heard from tradition (**שתים זו שמעתי**). Additionally, these two are also hinted at in the following clauses of the psalm: God has the power to effect reward in this world (**עז**), and kindness still stored for the world to come (**חסד**).

Jabez thus uses our verse to explain a problematic concept in Jewish theology: the absence of afterlife in the Bible and the later prominence of it in some Jewish writings. But the length of his preface suggests that this is possibly the more important component in his commentary. His message is not just one about the world to come, but one against speculation regarding it; the message is anti-philosophical:

In asserting that philosophical rationalism was to blame for the choice by so many Spanish Jews of conversion rather than exile and suffering, he expressed the feeling of many of his contemporaries. Jabez – who hated philosophy – maintained that philosophical intellectuals did not consider the observance of the commandments as the most important aspect of religious life, and therefore were not prepared to sacrifice themselves for that observance.<sup>73</sup>

Not only is the anti-philosophical message read into our verse typical of Jabez, it also illustrates the manner in which individuals reflecting on the events in Spain responded in their understanding of Scripture.

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<sup>72</sup> In *Kol Sifre R. Yosef Ya'avetz*, p. 334.

<sup>73</sup> Dan, p. 7.

### 8.3 Ovadiah Sforno (c.1475-1550)

Italian bible exegete Ovadiah Sforno comments on our verse with more attention than others to the midrash surrounding it:

אחת דבר אלקים כל עשרת הדברות בדבור אחד נאמרו. מכל מקום שתים זו שמענו<sup>74</sup> שמענו מהם אז שתי אלה. ראשונה כי עז לאלקים כי עז המלכות עלינו הוא לאלקים לבדו לא לשום שר ומזל כאמרו (שמות כ) אנכי ה' אלהיך ואליו נתפלל כשנבקש להשיב איזה מבוקש. שנית שמענו כי לך ה' החסד כאמרו ועושה חסד לא פני באופן שאין לנו לעבוד זולתו כדי שיעזרנו להשיג חסד.<sup>75</sup>

In summary: from the Ten Commandments which were one speech two were heard: עז through the commandment of “I am the Lord”, and חסד through the second commandment where it God is called “נצר חסד”.<sup>76</sup> No commentator we have found until Sforno attempts through their commentary to unify those midrashim that read into our verse that all Ten Commandments were spoken by God at once, and those that claim the first two only were spoken by God.<sup>77</sup> Sforno, too, leaves the details of this seeming contradiction unanswered, but in a sense uses Psa. 62:12 to mediate between the former midrashim where the meaning שתים in the application of our verse was not clear, and the latter where the meaning of אחת was not clear. Finally he connects this to Rashi’s approach wherein שתים pertains to the following two clauses of עז and חסד.

In a way, Sforno’s exegesis is actually a commentary on the two midrashim whose content he refers to. Through it, he explains more clearly how the midrashim relate to the verse, an approach not significantly taken by earlier commentators. On the other hand, he also diverges from many of the exegetes preceding him by basing his primary interpretation around the Midrash at all.

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<sup>74</sup> Sforno is among those that quote שמענו instead of שמעתי. See note 16.

<sup>75</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim: Miqdash Me’at*, vol. 2, p. 217f.

<sup>76</sup> Considering that it is very likely for Sforno to be aware of Rashi’s commentary on the verse, he is taking a liberty to ignore the fact that Rashi recalls עז in the second of the Ten Commandments, as well as חסד.

<sup>77</sup> See notes 8 and 13 respectively for sources.

## 8.4 Moses ben Jacob Albelda (1500-c.1583)

Albelda was a Rabbi and philosopher who wandered through many countries of the Mediterranean throughout his life, thus experiencing the hardships of exile. The main aim of his commentary seems to be innovations regarding the statements of the Talmudic sages.<sup>78</sup>

As such, Albelda<sup>79</sup> considers our verse a hint to the words of the Gemara “אם לעוברי רצונו כך, “ לעושי רצונו על אחת כמה וכמה!<sup>80</sup> To Albelda, in God giving good fortune to the wicked He spoke one thing; and yet two were heard from it, corresponding to the following passages in the psalm: God has strength (עז) to give to the righteous despite giving a small amount to the wicked; and God has kindness (חסד) to give even to the wicked to this world, saving their punishment for the next.<sup>81</sup>

This approach is generally similar to many of the others we have seen, in taking an external idea with two expressions and comparing them to עז and חסד mentioned in the psalm. It is interesting to note that the idea which Albelda sees Psa. 62:12 as hinting to is essentially the converse of Albo's, although unlikely a direct reflection on it: to Albo, the little bad befalling good people is mediated by their reward in the next world; to Albelda, the little good bestowed upon bad people is mediated by their punishment in the next world. Albelda's remarks either way may be a reflection on life as a second-generation exile from Spain, struggling despite others more wicked existing peacefully.

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<sup>78</sup> See Regev. “עיקר מטרתו בדרושו היא חידושים ופירושים שהוא מחדש במאמרי חז"ל.”

<sup>79</sup> Commentary in *Sefer Tehilim: Miqdash Me'at*, p. 218.

<sup>80</sup> Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 50b. Translation: “If it is such for those who transgress His will, to those who perform His will, how much more so!”

<sup>81</sup> Albelda amusingly continues on Psa. 62:13 regarding the wicked: “כמעשהו רצוי לומר שכמו שהוא פעל: “ ועשה איזו מצוה במקרה באברים הגופניים ולא בשכלו ... כן השיית ישלם לו שכרו בעוה"ז החומרי כדי לשלם לו ענשו בעוה"ב.”

## 8.5 Eliezer Ashkenazi (1512-1585)

Although of a German family, and so not truly a Sefaradi, Ashkenazi studied in Salonica and later became a rabbi in Egypt. While primarily a Talmudist, his commentary *Ma'ase Hashem* on portions of the Torah includes in it an explanation of our verse:<sup>82</sup> while the words of prophets and sages have only one meaning, the narratives have both a revealed and a hidden understanding, as derived from our verse. Ashkenazi expands on the midrashic idea that God can speak multiple things at once, unlike man. Like for Recanati in his quotation of the passage attributed to Sa'adia, our verse signifies the revealed and secret understandings of the text.

He further interprets the end of our verse: Understanding כי as 'because', Ashkenazi extends the midrashic idea of man's inability to speak multiply as God can, claiming that:

אין ענין שמיעתנו והבנתנו במה שלא ידובר אלינו, מצד טוב שכלנו ורוחב ידיעתנו ... רק מצד כח המדבר. וזה אמר כי עז לאלקים. כלומר, שהתרות הנמוסיות המסודרות על ידי בשר ודם, אין בהם כח לעשות כן: לומר אחד ולרמוז על אחר נסתר עמוק ממנו. אבל התורה האלהית היא כן, לפי שיש עז לאלקים... וכבר ידעת שהתורה נקראת עז.<sup>83</sup>

Man as such is not able by his own ability to rationally extract ideas from God's language; only by God's gift to him because the strength is God's, or on the other hand Torah is God's, because the Torah is called עז.<sup>84</sup>

## 8.6 Moses Alshekh (1508-1593)

Despite being a student of Joseph Caro and a teacher of Ḥayim Vital, Moses Alshekh's commentaries on much of the bible tend not to include mystical concepts.<sup>85</sup> In the case of our verse, while it does not

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<sup>82</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim: Miqdash Me'at*, p. 218.

<sup>83</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim: Miqdash Me'at*, p. 218.

<sup>84</sup> This idea is expressed as "אין עז אלא תורה" in reading the words "ה' עז לעמו יתן" (Psa. 29:11) in the Midrash, such as Mekhilta DeRabi Shim'on Bar Yoḥai 19:16.

focus on the depths akin to Zoharic or Lurianic material, it does concern itself with the nature of God and his attributes in relation to the world; somewhat mystical but not exclusive to the Kabbalah.

Alshekh relates our verse to an earlier one in the psalm,<sup>86</sup> according to which he ascribed protection to God's attribute of justice (מדת הדין). This, he suggests would seem strange to the reader, because the name אלקים—and correspondingly this attribute—is not usually associated with God's beneficence to man. In his words:

ועל מה שאמרת, כי אלקים שהוא מדת הדין "מחסה לנו סלה" (תהי' סב: ט) שיראה כמו זר, נחשב שמדת הדין יהיה מחסה הפך ענינו: אל תתמהו על החפץ כי שתי הבחינות אחת, כי ה' הוא האלקים... ועם כל זה, שתיים זו שמעתי גם ענין רחמים כי אינך משולל מבחינת רחמים.<sup>87</sup>

He suggests that what our verse introduces is that indeed God's attribute of justice and that of mercy are one. It is not clear from his concluding statement whether he considers שתיים as referring to "a second attribute [of mercy]," or whether שתיים are the two: justice and mercy, which we have understood despite אלקים alone being mentioned in the psalm. His remark provides justification for this conclusion through analogy to the common midrashic use of our verse:

הלא אחת דבר אלקים בסיני שתיים זו שמעתי שהוא זכור ושמור שדבור אחד היה ושתיים שמענו כי בדבור אחד נאמרו. ונדע כי זכור ושמור שבדבור אחד נאמרו הם דין ורחמים כנודע.<sup>88</sup>

Just as "remember" and "observe" were spoken together at Sinai, and they are known to correspond to God's attributes of justice and mercy, so we understand through this verse that despite having these two attributes and notions ascribed to them, God is one. In a sense, he derives two meanings from the verse: one relating זכור and שמור, the other relating דין and רחמים, and shows that they are one.

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<sup>85</sup> Friedländer, p. 463. "Alshech[us] ... expositions are mostly of an allegorical character but very rarely approach mysticism."

<sup>86</sup> Psa. 62:9: "בְּטַחֲוֹ בְּיְהוָה כָּל־עַתָּה | עִם שִׁפְכוֹ־לִפְנֵי לַבְּכֵי־אֱלֹהִים מִחֲסֵה־לִנְוֹ סֶלָה:"

<sup>87</sup> In *Sefer Romemot-El*, vol. 1, p. 502.

<sup>88</sup> In *Sefer Romemot-El*, vol. 1, p. 502.

Typical of Alshekh is usually his insistence of significance for each word in the sentence: here we may see this, in that to him it is not arbitrary that one name of God is used in this psalm; indeed it is a defining factor in the verse according to his interpretation.<sup>89</sup>

## 8.7 Isaac Luria (Ari; 1534-1572)

Isaac Luria, a younger contemporary of Alshekh, is renowned as the centre of mystic thought in 16<sup>th</sup> century Tzfat. His ideas as transmitted by his student Ḥayim Vital have become central to Kabbalistic thought. Although he did not write a commentary—indeed he wrote very little but a few *piyutim*—later editors have compiled collections of his purported works discussing bible passages.<sup>90</sup>

Much of the commentary involves difficult Kabbalistic concepts, use of gematria and reference to interactions of *sefirot*. The first paragraph compiled upon Psa. 62:12 reads as follows:

אחת דבר גימטריא עם האותיות כתר [עם הכולל], סוד כתר רחל אשר נעשה משליש תחתון דתפארת, והיא אור אחד, כי כתר גימטריא ג' פעמים אור, וכתר שלה נעשה משליש תחתון, וזהו אחת דב"ר גימטריא עם הכולל אור, אחת דבר אלקים, מלכות, כי כתר רחל נעשה מאור אחת, ואחר כך שתים זו שמעתי, שתעלה עד שליש אמצעי, ויתוסף לה עוד אור אחד.<sup>91</sup>

To those not well-experienced in understanding Lurianic texts, this is nearly entirely opaque. A possible elucidation: the value in gematria of אחת דבר (617) plus the count of its letters (6) equates it to כתר plus one (621). This secretly signifies the crown of Rachel (a symbol of the disparate physical world), which is made from the lower third of the *sefirot* of *tif'eret*. Ultimately, this divine “crown of Rachel” (אחת דבר) is juxtaposed with the worldly *sefira* of *malkhut* as represented in the word אלקים. From

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<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, noticing of the distribution of the use of God's name is common to other kabbalistic authors.

<sup>90</sup> The work here in question is *Ken Tzipor* which subtitles itself as “ביאור עמוק... מכתבי קה"ק של רבינו של רבינו.” It is likely that the writings they refer to are the writings of Vital presumably according to the Ari's teachings.

<sup>91</sup> *Ken Tzippor*, p. 353.

here, the crown raises *malkhut* higher within the *sefirot* such that it can “hear” both the earthly reality and the divine reality (שתיים זו שמעתי).

For this first portion of the verse the text proposes an alternative explanation, in which שתיים is “כתי רחל, כתי אורות, כתי רחל ועקבי לאה שבתוך כתי רחל.” The second half of the verse seems to explain the message of the first: עו, representing Leah<sup>92</sup> and אלקים, representing Rachel join, “כי עו לאלקים”; a unity of different types of reality.

In each of these cases, some words of our verse are taken as symbols, while others, particularly function words, represent movements or comparisons. Together, these suggest a mixing of mystical elements, and thus different ideas relating to the physical and transcendent worlds. Those able to decode or read into these ideas may derive from it various notions regarding the nature of existence, the divine and the transcendent.

This form of interpretation of the bible is far from exegesis of the meaning of the text as we have otherwise generally seen. Symbols seem to be identified in the text through what seem to be arbitrary methods, in order that the verse may describe their interaction. As such, this type of interpretation may be better considered eisegesis (reading concept into the text) to an even greater extent than those who derive meaning by simpler allegory.

## 8.8 Samuel Laniado of Aleppo (d. 1605)

Samuel Laniado is known as being among the first generation of students of the kabbalists in Tzfat. As well as his works known as the *Kelim*, he wrote a work on psalms published under the name *Teru'at Melekh*. Like Alshekh above, he seems to note the particular use in our verse of the name אלקים and writes that:

מתחילה אחת דבר אלקים רוצה לומר מדה אחת נזכרה בשם אלקים באמרו בראשית ברא אלקים (בר' א: א).  
ואחר כך שתיים זו שמעתי שתי מדות באמרו ביום עשות ה' אלקים וגוי' (בר' ב: ד). ונתן טעם לדבר למה לא

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<sup>92</sup> She is known to be represented by 83 lights in Lurianic Kabbalah, equating to עוּו (written plene).

בראו בשם אלקים לבד **כי עוז לאלקים** לפי שכל העוז והתוקף מתיחס לשם **אלקים** ואין כח ביד נבראו מטה לקבל את כל מעשה תקפו וגבורתו יתברך כלל וכלל...<sup>93</sup>

Noting that the first chapter of Genesis does makes use of the name **אלקים** and only after creation of the world is complete does the Tetragrammaton appear alongside it, *Keli Yaḳar* applies our verse: one name or attribute was spoken at first, and then later a second was heard. Why? He suggests that our verse explains by stating that it was because strength belongs to ‘אלקים’, but the creations cannot relate to such strength alone.

Although this commentary is not deep within the material of kabbalistic secrets as was Luria’s, it reflects a similar focus on God’s names and His attributes of justice and mercy to be found often within the interpretations of the kabbalists and later many Hasidim.

Interestingly, a similar connection of our verse to the creation story is found in the writings of Christian commentator William Wisheart (1657-1727):

“*Twice have I heard this; that power,*” etc. How did he hear this “*twice?*” Once from the voice of *creation*, and again from the voice of *government*. *Mercy* was heard in government after man had sinned, not in creation...<sup>94</sup>

We see here that Wisheart similarly sees in our verse a reference to a change in attributes of God within the creation story. It is not clear here whether Wisheart, too, is understanding these attributes of God’s names, but the parallel is worthy of note nonetheless.

## 9 Ashkenazi Europe, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries

### 9.1 Judah Loew ben Bezalel (Maharal; 1525-1609)

The Maharal of Prague wrote extensively, including a super-commentary on Rashi’s exegesis of the Torah. Therefore, where Rashi claims on Num. 15:22 that only the first two commandments were heard

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<sup>93</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim: Miḳdash Me’at*, p. 218.

<sup>94</sup> In Spurgeon’s *Treasury of David*, Vol. 3, p. 129.

from the mouth of God, he explains Rashi's application of the verse.<sup>95</sup> In particular, he states that אחת in this interpretation refers to the Ten Commandments that God spoke in one speech. Sforno's commentary included this same solution to unify the midrashim and their application to our verse.

## 9.2 Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi (1550-1628)

Although more famous for his *Tseno Ureno*, a collection of midrash on the weekly reading from the Pentateuch and Prophets, Polish rabbi Jacob Ashkenazi also authored a Yiddish commentary on the remainder of the bible, entitled *Sefer Hamagid*, including the Book of Psalms. He begins his commentary on Psa. 62:12 with a translation of the verse:

איינר ציין האט גוט גירעט און דיא דאזיגן צווייא האב איך דרויס<sup>96</sup> גיהירט איינס איז שטרקייט איז צו גוט  
(און דאס אנדרי איז דו דער חסד איז צו דיר גוט...)<sup>97</sup>

Approximately, this translates as: "One thing spoke God; and these two have I heard out. One is: strength is to God (and the other is that kindness is to God)." The translation begins as direct and literal, noteworthy glossing וז as "דאזיגן", but for the conclusion, rather than translating directly, Ashkenazi here explains according to Rashi. It is then not surprising that he follows by translating Rashi's commentary on the verse, among other interpretations.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> In *Humash Gur Arye Hashalem*, vol. 7, p. 228. See section 5.1 for Rashi's commentary.

<sup>96</sup> Although the present copy of the text clearly has a ד, this should read ארויס.

<sup>97</sup> Translation of Psa. 62:12-3 in *Sefer Hamagid* on Psalms, p. 33.

<sup>98</sup> Due to the low quality of the microfiche text to hand, and the difficulty of the Yiddish, it was hard to ascertain the entire scope of Ashkenazi's commentary on the verse.

### 9.3 Moses Israel deMercado (17<sup>th</sup> century)

The little-known Moses deMercado who lived in Amsterdam, wrote extant commentaries on Ecclesiastes and Psalms.<sup>99</sup> He is particularly interesting in our study for his attention to the psalmist's perspective in writing the text. He writes:

ובדבריו **אחת דבר אלקים** עתה ידבר המשורר אל נפשו ויאמר **אחת דבר אלקים** לי על ידי שמואל הנביא שאמלך על ישראל. **שתיים זו שמעתי** פעמים הרבה הבנתי והשנתי והרגשתי כי הוא אמת **כי עז לאלקים**. ובעוז עמדתי נגד צוררי והיא ראייה גדולה שדברו לא ישוב אחור והבטחת המלכות תתקיים בראותי **כי עז לאלקים** שיכולתי עמוד נגד הקמים עלי ולא בדרך טבע אות היא שהי הצילני כי חפץ בי.<sup>100</sup>

Like Ḳimḥi and Ibn Ezra, deMercado sees in the verse a notion of repetition. But rather than identifying **אחת** and **שתיים** as idiom, he takes 'once' literally, but 'twice' as an indication of repetition. Also unlike the earlier commentators, he reads **שמעתי** as to understand or be aware.

More significantly, the entire verse is connected to the life of King David, understood to be the Psalm's author, and hence the perspective from which it was written. He had heard from God through Samuel that he would rule over Israel, and the statement's truth became apparent through realising God's strength, which would allow him to overcome his enemies. It is possible that this approach was influenced by the contemporary Spinoza whose critical approach to the bible works included understanding the mindset of its authors.

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<sup>99</sup> It is possible that, according to a family genealogy web site <<http://www.google.com/search?q=cache:www.demercado.com/jacob.htm>>, Moses DeMercado (משה ישראל דמירקדו) on his commentary's titlepage) was born c.1630 and a student of Saul Levi Mortera. His book was published posthumously in 1652/3 through the work of a Jacob DeMercado, so assuming this date of birth is generally correct, Moses was short-lived.

<sup>100</sup> DeMercado, p. 54.

## 10 Sefaradim in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

### 10.1 Menasseh ben Israel (1604-1657)

Menasseh ben Israel was born as a Marrano and baptised before escaping to Amsterdam. There he found fame and prestige in a number of activities, among which was founding the first Hebrew printing press in Amsterdam, where he had moved with his family had moved from Portugal. His *Conciliator* (*El Conciliador*), originally written in Spanish, likely in an effort to target Marranos, became popular largely among Christians and has since been printed in numerous languages. It proceeds through the bible resolving apparent discord between its verses.

In the case of Psa. 62:12, the apparent contradiction is between the verse's first clause and its second, implying an understanding that two things were heard although only one was spoken. In his words, "Una hablo el Dio ; dos, ohi."<sup>101</sup>

The "contradiction" is conciliated by explaining that to the Hebrews, "under the literal meaning lies the spiritual, which is its soul."<sup>102</sup> Menasseh discusses this idea at some length, bringing proofs of the suggestion, such as the idea that the Torah was written with black fire on white fire: black, the literal meaning admits no colour; white, the underlying spiritual, admits every colour. He further details application of this idea, suggesting four layers of interpretation of a text (פרד"ס), but that the literal meaning must be accepted before other meanings can be applied, "for if all were reduced to allegory and mystery, there would be nothing positive, as undoubtedly everyone might allegorize it in his own way."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *El Conciliador* Part 4, p. 72. Translation: "One spoke God, two I heard." Modern Spanish orthography would use "Una hablo habló el Dio; dos, oí."

<sup>102</sup> In trans. Landa, vol. 2, p. 267f.

<sup>103</sup> In trans. Landa, vol. 2, p. 269.

Menasseh ben Israel's interpretation of our verse is nothing new, except insofar as he considers it in its plain sense self-contradicting. The idea he expresses is generally that with which this paper began, and more specifically that of 'revealed' and 'hidden' layers expressed within the mystical school of thought, by Bahya ben Asher and Menaḥem Recanati. Possibly because Menasseh intended a large audience of his book to be Marranos, his discussion homiletically reveals to the uninitiated many Jewish concepts in bible interpretation and its elasticity.

## 10.2 Solomon ben Melekh

The commentary known as *Mikhlol Yofi* by Solomon ben Melekh is known to essentially restate the linguistic commentary of David Ḳimḥi. Hence on our verse he also proposes the meaning that Gods prophets spoke to us regarding God's strength many times and so we should trust in Him alone. Interestingly, though, the commentary adds on the word זו:

זו : בא הוּו בשורק והוא ללשון זכר ונקבה גם כן.<sup>104</sup>

This addendum is interesting not only because it is not found in Ḳimḥi's commentary, but because it is not necessarily warranted here: אחת and שתים are female forms of the numbers, and so could be referred to with a female demonstrative like זו. This statement also implies the assumption that זו is a form of זה, and no consideration of another meaning as the medieval linguists had considered.<sup>105</sup>

## 10.3 Moses Ḥagiz (1671-c.1750)

Moses Ḥagiz, a Talmudist and Kabbalist in Jerusalem, also did not write a commentary on Psalms, but an excerpt from his book *Eleh Hamitzvot* is included among other commentaries on one anthology on our verse.<sup>106</sup> This excerpt argues against "אפיקורסים" (heretics) who complain that how the Bible is

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<sup>104</sup> *Mikhlol Yofi*, vol. 2, p. 174b.

<sup>105</sup> See section 4.

<sup>106</sup> *Sefer Tehilim: Miḳdash Me'at*, p. 219.

read and understood is not how it is written. The response of the believers is that lessons can be learnt from even single letters, and that the entire Torah is in the first place a name of God with no earthly meaning. Finally, he quotes a passage given by David Ibn Zimra in his *Metzudot David*, which in turn quotes Sa'adia Gaon's *Emunot Vede'ot*, with the passage of unlikely-correct attribution also used in quotation by Recanati above.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, Recanati and Ḥagiz give the same impression: they are both arguing for the admissibility of oral tradition and secret meanings understood from the text. Whether or not suggested by Sa'adia, the interpretation that Psa. 62:12 refers to the גלוי and the נסתר from the bible text is a simple extension from its Talmudic use.

#### 10.4 Ḥayim Yosef David Azulai (Ḥida; 1724-1807)

Azulai, who lived in Jerusalem but spent much time travelling through Europe, brings three explanations of the verse in one of his commentaries on Psalms known as *Yosef Tehilot*. The first is based on the ideas of a R. Saul Halevi, author of *Sefer Binyan Ariel* writing on the reading of Ki Tavo.<sup>108</sup> Although only curses are listed in Deut. 27, according to the Rabbinic tradition, each curse was preceded by a blessing; first “blessed by the man who does not make a graven image” then “cursed be the man who makes an image” (Deut. 27:15).<sup>109</sup> Halevi asks why it was necessary to give a blessing as well as a curse? Because unlike evil thought, good thoughts are akin to action and so a positive injunction needed to be given separately. This idea Azulai found hinted (רמז) in our verse: from one curse, a second statement was heard (אחת דבר ... שתיים שמעתי), because God has strength to punish the wicked for their actions, and kindness to reward even the thoughts of good people.<sup>110</sup> In this

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<sup>107</sup> See section 7.4.

<sup>108</sup> The commentary is in *Otzrot Harehida*, p. 70a.

<sup>109</sup> See Rashi on Deut. 27:12, and Babylonian Talmud Sota 32a.

<sup>110</sup> Counter-intuitively, he reads Psa. 62:13 as rewarding for thought, despite the word מעשהו, by reading its prefix כ as “as if it were,” rather than “according to”: “כי אתה תשלם לאיש (על המחשבה) כמעשהו.”

interpretation, דבר is taken to indicate the text of the Torah, while שמע is taken literally, i.e. to hear the curses and blessings. In addition, כי is understood as ‘because’ and so the following clauses of the psalm explain, according to this commentary, why two were heard from one.

The second interpretation brought by the Hida in his commentary sees Psa. 62:12 a reference to a different concept from the oral law: the prohibition resulting from a positive commandment,<sup>111</sup> which has some characteristics of a positive commandment and a negative commandment. That is, אחת דבר is the written positive commandment, from which a second injunction is understood (שמע), regarding which “God has strength” because it is stronger than other prohibitions, but has kindness to treat one who keeps the positive and its implied prohibition is as if he has kept two positive commandments.<sup>112</sup> This approach not only applies the verse to a different subject matter, but also reads כי differently: there as “because”, here as “regarding which”.

The third explanation is much simpler, claiming that אחת דבר אלקים refers to the commandments given by God; the word שמע then implies learning Torah, inferred since עז is equated with Torah.<sup>113</sup>

Some characteristics are common to the three approaches brought by Azulai: in form they all seem to imply a first and a second related thing, rather than necessarily two things deriving from one, as seems to be the more common midrashic understanding of the verse. More significantly, all three are based around relating halakhic concepts to the verse, although the first two clearly do so more than the third.

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<sup>111</sup> “לאו הבא מכלל עשה”, see Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 41b; Yevamot 54b-56b; Makot 18b; Zevahim 34a; Hulin 81a.

<sup>112</sup> I.e., two characteristics of this prohibition: “אין עשה דוחהו” and “לאו הבא מכלל עשה”.

<sup>113</sup> See note 84. Considering his presumed reading of עז in the previous two explanations as ‘this’, referring to the thing that was heard once, here its referent is unclear, although it may be that instead עז is taken as referring to the following clause, where עז לאלקים, “Torah is God’s.”

## 11 Europe, 18<sup>th</sup> century

The eighteenth century in Europe saw the split of Judaism into a number of different philosophical approaches. Most notably, it saw the beginnings of the Hasidic and Enlightenment movements, and the reactions both saw from other sectors of the Jewish community. As each movement would relate differently to the scriptures and traditional ideas of Judaism, the nature of their commentaries would similarly vary.

### 11.1 Israel Hauptstein, the Magid of Koznitz (1737-1814)

This Ḥasidic rabbi from Poland, along with many others, relates our verse to the commandments of the Torah.<sup>114</sup> In his interpretation, God spoke the Torah (since “כל התורה כולה דבר אחד”), from which the positive and negative commandments were heard (שתים זו שמעתי). The first two commandments of the Ten Commandments, to which this verse is also applied, are said to include in them all positive and negative commandments. While others also note this correspondence,<sup>115</sup> the Magid’s innovation is to derive from our commentary that although the positive and negative commandments seem to be different, and opposite in their aim, their intent is ultimately one: creating a connection (התחברות) with God. These ideas relating our verse to the common purpose of the mitzvot are repeated later by other Hasidic writers.<sup>116</sup>

### 11.2 David Solomon Eibshitz (1755-1814)

David Solomon Eibshitz is known for his halakhic work *Levushei Serad*, and for his Ḥasidic commentary on the Torah, *Arvei Nahal*. He is quoted among a collection with a comment on our verse:

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<sup>114</sup> Commentary in Ed. Gilernter, p. 216.

<sup>115</sup> See for instance the Vilna Gaon, section 11.5.

<sup>116</sup> In the twentieth century such ideas are also expressed by Menachem Mendel Schneerson. See section 14.6.

אחת דבר אלקים שתים זו שמעתי, רוצה לומר השם יתברך לא דיבר רק דיבור אחד שיעבדוהו ויתן שכר.  
 ושתים שמעתי, רוצה לומר דכפליה למילתיה אם תלכו ואם תמאסו...<sup>117</sup>

Eibshitz's approach here is similar to many others in that he takes one idea expressed in the torah, and shows that it has two subsequent expressions, which parallel the following passages in the psalm: God at first spoke only regarding giving reward to those who serve him, but then promised reward to those who follow him (Lev. 26:3; compare חסד), and punishment to those who were contemptuous (Lev. 26:15; compare עו). In terms of its content, a contrast between punishment for the wicked and reward for the good, his commentary is similar to Rashi's. Nonetheless it differs not only in the hint it makes to the Torah, but in that for Rashi, the שתים are primarily עו and חסד, while here the two are initially אם תלכו and אם תמאסו which are additionally signified by עו and חסד; for Eibshitz, כי is 'because', while for Rashi it is 'that'; for Rashi exegesis is central, while it seems Eibshitz attempts to read his chosen concept into the verse.

### 11.3 Abraham David ben Asher Anshel Buczacz (1770-1840)

Abraham Buczacz was a Galician Talmudist who in the middle of his life was brought into the Hasidic movement and the study of the Kabbalah.<sup>118</sup> He gives a mystical reading of our verse:

אחת דבר אלקים. היינו שיהיה החומר נהפך לצורה, וצדקו יחדיו לאחדים, הגם שתים זו שמעתי שמתחלה חומר וצורה כמתנגדים, כי עו לאלקים כה הרוחני לו ניתן כה וגבורה, וכמו שכתוב בספרים הקדושים, מכח רוח המהפך הרים, וזה כה דבריא עקבי החיות נגד כולם, רכובי החיות כנגד כולם, בכח וגבורה גם כן.<sup>119</sup>

As with much of the mystical corpus, the commentary here is beyond simple understanding, considering its attempt to delve into an angelic world. It is clear at least that the two things being perceived (שמע) are the platonic concepts of matter and form, and that it is *because* of God's might that the world of form and the world of matter are not unifiable.

<sup>117</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim: Miqdash Me'at*, p. 219.

<sup>118</sup> See Ginzberg and Peiginsky, p. 415.

<sup>119</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim 'im Perush Tehila Ledavid*, p. 236.

## 11.4 David Altschuler (18<sup>th</sup> century)

*Metzudat David*, the well known commentary on the Prophets and Hagiographa was begun by David Altschuler of Galicia, although completed by his son. Altschuler's commentary on our verse is intricately connected to that on the following:

**אחת** - אמירה אחת דבר אלקים וממנה למדתי שתי דברים :

**כי עוז** - האחת למדתי אשר לאלקים הוא העוז וידו בכל משלה :

**ולך ה' חסד** - והשנית למדתי ממנה שה' עושה חסד עם בני אדם :

**כי אתה תשלם** – רוצה לומר מדבר הזה נשמע שני הדברים כי אתה ה' דברת אשר תשלם לאיש כמעשהו וכמו שנאמר ואם תלכו עמי קרי וגוי והלכתי אף אני עמכם בקרי (ויקרא כז) וכן על כל הדברים שהאדם חוטא אתה משלם לו מדה במדה...<sup>120</sup>

Like Rashi and many others, Altschuler understands **שתיים** as referring to **עוז** and **חסד**. Nonetheless, the **אחת** that they derive from is that found in verse 13 – that God rewards man according to his deeds. Somewhat like Sa'adia Gaon and Salmon ben Yeruham eight centuries earlier, Altschuler saw the referent of **אחת דבר** in the adjacent verses of the psalm, although they innovatively ascribed it to the following verse, with which our verse clearly forms a poetic unit within the psalm. God would show his strength or his kindness for each action of man, and these two attributes are of the single purpose of improving man.

Noteworthy in the commentary is also the use of **למדתי** ('I learnt') in explanation of **שמעתי** ('I heard').

## 11.5 Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman Kramer (Vilna Gaon; 1720-1797)

The Vilna Gaon, also known as the Gra, is known for his opposition to early Hasidism, in distinction to those 18<sup>th</sup> century writers discussed above. Given the title of Gaon for his renowned genius, Kramer wrote extensive commentaries on bible, Talmud, Zohar and other texts, but nonetheless, none is available dealing directly with our psalm. His indirect commentaries on the Book of Psalms have been

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<sup>120</sup> *Metzudat David* on Psa. 62:12-13, in the *Bar Ilan University Responsa Project* .

collected together to form a single work,<sup>121</sup> where we find a number of references to our verse. Of them, we will discuss only two, both primarily treating the midrashic material surrounding our verse.

The first<sup>122</sup> asks regarding the statement in Mekhilta that the Ten Commandments were spoken in one, and its apparent contradiction with a statement found in the Mekhilta that the first two commandments were also said in one speech,<sup>123</sup> both of which relate to applications of our verse. From this he suggests that God at first spoke them all together, then returned to detail each, and that even in this detail the first two were spoken together. The Gra expounds that it was necessary to speak all the commandments at first all together to illustrate that they all are one in their meaning. In writing this explanation, a number sources are referred to and brought together. To this extent, the aim of the author is primarily to unify texts on similar topics, resolving their apparent contradictions. This activity of fusing the content of different midrashim is not unlike what we saw in Ovadiah Sforno's commentary on our verse, although taken to a much greater degree.

In some ways, we see a similar activity in a longer passage taken from a commentary on Song of Songs Raba.<sup>124</sup> There it compares the two commandments spoken directly by God to the opening verse of the Song of Songs: “kiss me with the kisses of your mouth...” The Gaon explains that this was “one kiss that is two,”<sup>125</sup> in comparison with the midrash also cited in his first commentary that the first two commandments were spoken **בדבור אחד**, in reference to Psa. 62:12. The remainder of the commentary expands on the nature of these first two commandments, and how they are the two kisses that are one referred to in the Song of Songs:

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<sup>121</sup> *Sefer Toledot Eliyahu 'al Sefer Tehilim*, ed. Nehemiah Peper.

<sup>122</sup> A commentary on Tikkunei Hazohar 62b. In *Sefer Toledot Eliyahu*, vol. 2, p. 639.

<sup>123</sup> This is not among the midrashim listed in section 2, and I have been unable to locate the reference.

<sup>124</sup> On Songs R. 1:2. In *Sefer Toledot Eliyahu*, vol. 2, p. 639-41.

<sup>125</sup> Presumably from the singular kiss implied by “ישקני” but the plural “נשיקות” in the verse. According to many cultures, one greeting includes a kiss on each cheek.

ואלו השתי דברות הם שתי נשיקות, כמו שנושק הבעל לחשוקתו: אחת על מה שמתחברת עמו, והשניה על מה שאינה מתחברת באחר. וכן הוא אנכי ולא יהיה לך, כי שתי דברות הראשונות הם כלל כל התורה... אנכי כולל כל מצות עשה, ולא יהיה לך כולל כל מצות לא תעשה, ולכן מחמת אנכי נתקעה התורה בלבם, והוא חלק העשה, ומחמת לא יהיה לך פסק היצר הרע, והוא חלק הלא תעשה. והם נגד ו' ה': אנכי ו' ולא יהיה לך ה'. והנה כל מצות עשה כלילין בו'. וכן כל מצות לא תעשה כלילין בה'. ולכן ה' משמש לנקבה ו' משמש לזכר כמו לו לה אותו אותה, וכדומה. ולכן כל מצות לא תעשה נשים חייבות ולא מצות עשה.<sup>126</sup>

Once again, the main feature of the commentary is the merging of numerous ideas into one: there is a correspondence between two kisses that are one, between two commandments that are one, and between two categories of commandments that are the entirety of one Torah.

It may be worthwhile to note that, like most of the midrashim, neither of these commentaries take note of the end of our verse, as a commentary directly upon the verse may be expected to. The Gaon is more interested in the concepts related by the midrash through the utility of our verse and otherwise. While a reflection on his mastery of an enormous corpus of literature, this style of commentary may also relate to the quantity of material available in print that was not as accessible in earlier centuries.

## 11.6 Avraham ben Eliyahu Kramer (c.1750-1808)

The son of the Vilna Gaon was also a well known scholar and commentator, and wrote a work on the book of Psalms known as *Be'er Avraham*.<sup>127</sup> This provides a succinct comment on our verse:

**אחת, כי דבר אלקים בתורתו הקדושה שלא נבטח בזולתו. שתיים, זו שמעתי והבנתי בעצמי כי עוז לאלקים לבדו ולא לזולתו.**<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> On Songs R. 1:2. In *Sefèr Toledot Eliyahu*, vol. 2, p. 640. The commentary can be difficult to follow, as their style involves drawing in concepts not directly related to the issue being resolved and excursing upon them. For instance, here where the two first commandments of the Ten are considered the whole torah a discussion proceeds suggesting that all things that are 70 fall under two, just as here the Torah has 70 faces, included in the commandments of אנכי and לא יהיה לך.

<sup>127</sup> This title seems to me a play on words: “The well of Abraham [the patriarch]” or, “The clarification of Abraham [of Vilna]”.

Although the message of Avraham's commentary is not new, its manner of derivation is different to earlier commentators. A translation of the verse according to his commentary might read, "At first God told me, but then I understood for myself that strength is God's alone." Rather than *אחת* and *שתיים* referring to one thing deriving multiple, or two separate ideas, or an idiom of repetition, Avraham allows *אחת* and *שתיים* to refer to the *same* thing (that *עז לאלקים*), and instead highlights the contrast made evident in the parallel between these two first phrases: that between God's claiming and a man's understanding of the same idea. Also somewhat distinctive to his commentary is the clarity with which he expresses its derivation from the text of the verse itself,<sup>129</sup> appropriate to the title which implies clarification (*ביאור*) rather than interpretation (*פירוש*) or expounding (*מדרש*).

### 11.7 Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)

The third significant movement in 18<sup>th</sup> century European Judaism was that of the Enlightenment. At its forefront was Moses Mendelssohn, who produced a Jewish translation of the bible in German (although Hebrew letters), his *Targum Ashkenazi*. As compared to the Yiddish translations of Jacob Ashkenazi and Israel Levine<sup>130</sup> and the numerous English translations to be published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>131</sup> it gives us some insight into his approach to the language of our verse:

איין וָנָרַט האַט גאַטט געשפּראַכען; דאַז וואַרד, אַיך אָפֿט געוואַהר: "מאַכט שטעהט נור ביי גאַטט."<sup>132</sup>

Transcribed in Modern German characters:

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<sup>128</sup> In *Otzar Mefarshe Tehilim*, vol. 3, p. 1304.

<sup>129</sup> Although the understanding of *וַ* here is still uncertain. At least with the punctuated text used here 'which' reads more smoothly, but it is not certain that this was the understanding of the author.

<sup>130</sup> See sections 9.2 and 14.3, respectively.

<sup>131</sup> Section 16, below.

<sup>132</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim: 'im Perush Rashi Vetargum Ashkenazi Uviur*, p. 236. The two different spellings of "word" are presumably the result of a typographical error.

Ein Wort hat Gott gesprochen. Das Wort Ich oft gewahr: "Macht steht nur bei Gott".

The main features of interest in this translation are: (a) that **אחת** is understood as “one word” (or ‘thing’), and **וַז** is read as “this word”; (b) **שמתים שמעתי** is read as “I am often aware of”; (c) **כי** is not translated, but is implicit in the quotation of “power stands only with God”.

## 11.8 Joel Brill Löwe (1760-1802)

Joel Brill Löwe, a younger contemporary and disciple of Mendelssohn wrote his Hebrew *bi'ur* (clarification) to be published alongside Mendelssohn’s German translation. As such, it is very close in its understanding to the *Targum Ashkenazi*:

**אחת**, יש דבר אחת שדבר אלקים, ואותה **שמעתי שמים**, כלומר יותר מפעם אחד עמדתי עליו שהוא אמת. **שמעתי**, מטעם "אשר לא תשמע" (דב' כח: מט) כלומר הבנתי במה שאירע לי והוא הוא הדבור, ומהו הדבר ששמעתי? **כי עוז לאלקים**, לבדו ולא לזולתו.<sup>133</sup>

One interesting addition to his clarification is in translating **שמע** as ‘understand’ he validates this meaning by comparison to an unequivocal use in this manner in Deuteronomy. This explanation of the verse, that God spoke one thing, which I understood for myself again, is noticeably a recurring theme of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: it is read this way by deMercado, Avraham Kramer and Mendelssohn,<sup>134</sup> with the exception of Kramer, **שמים** is understood as signifying repetition. Interestingly, a number of Christian commentators also give this impression. For instance, Protestant leader John Calvin (1509-1564) offers as one reading:

"[David] considered the Word of God in the light of a decree, steadfast and irreversible, but that, as regarded his exercise in reference to it, he meditated upon it again and again, lest the lapse of time might obliterate it from his memory.<sup>135</sup>

A later commentator William Wisheart (1657-1727), similarly suggests:

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<sup>133</sup> In *Sefer Tehilim: 'im Perush Rashi Vetargum Ashkenazi Uviur*, p. 236f.

<sup>134</sup> Although deMercado, section 9.3, takes the experienter; Avraham ben Eliyahu Kramer, section 11.6.

<sup>135</sup> Trans. James Anderson, vol. 2, p. 429.

“... what God had once spoken, had often been repeated and inculcated, and often cleared and confirmed to him by repeated experimental evidence of the certainty thereof; and he had thereupon received the same more and more heartily, and had taken deeper impressions of it by repeated and inculcated thoughts.”<sup>136</sup>

Notably the Christian commentators here do not consider the one thing that God has spoken and the psalmist has heard to be **כי עז לאלקים**, but they do agree to take **שתים שמעתי** as a personal reflection on the one thing God had spoken. Nonetheless, it is possible that the “enlightened” Jews of Germany and the Netherlands had adopted some of the Christian ideas available in regards to understanding the language of the verse.

## 12 Europe, 19<sup>th</sup> century

### 12.1 Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888)

German rabbi S.R. Hirsch is well known for his role in the development of Modern Orthodox Judaism, as well as for long commentaries on the Torah and Psalms imbued with his creative philology. Not unlike Meiri, Albo and Albelda before him,<sup>137</sup> Hirsch sees our verse from Psalms as coming to an understanding of inconsistency and suffering in the world.<sup>138</sup> The one thing from which two are learnt is that man suffers. But **עז לאלקים**, God is immutable in his mighty will, and equally unalterable in his kindness, **חסד**, so even when the fate of man seems inconsistent, it is not so.

Divine mercy as demonstrated by the suffering decreed for man—this phase of God’s rule is the one which David experienced at the time he set down this psalm, and it is this experience which David now desires to make known to all of his people.

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<sup>136</sup> In Spurgeon’s *Treasury of David*, Vol. 3, p. 129.

<sup>137</sup> See sections 6.3, 6.4 and 8.4 respectively.

<sup>138</sup> Trans. Hirschler, vol. 1, p. 424-5.

By now we are familiar with this manner of reading the verse: the two things heard from one are two characteristics of God. In this case, Hirsch takes a particularly homiletical approach, consoling his readers that even David felt suffering and inconsistency in this world, but came to understand it through discovering God's ultimate consistency.

## 12.2 Israel Dov Ber Gilernter (19<sup>th</sup> century)

According to a collection of Hasidic commentaries on the book of Psalms, Gilernter in his commentary *Revid Hazahav*, explains our verse as follows:

לשון הנהגה. היינו: הנהגת העולם על-ידי השם יתברך היא אחת, דין או רחמים, אלא שתיים זו שמעתי: מפני קיום העולם, הקב"ה משתף מדת הרחמים עם הדין. ואפילו כאשר עוז לאלקים, היינו: התגברות הדינים. ולך ה' חסד גם אז זה חסד...<sup>139</sup>

Here Gilernter suggests that although God rules the world in only one way, in order to manage the world, He uses both attributes of justice and mercy. He then suggests, seemingly reading כִּי as 'because', when it seems that God's justice is stronger in the world, there is nonetheless kindness too. Although not as explicit as S.R. Hirsch, the message similarly implied here is one of trust in God despite suffering, and although times may be difficult, it is the one God who is responsible for justice and for mercy.

## 12.3 Meir Loeb ben Jehiel Michael Weiser (Malbim; 1809-1879)

The Malbim, originally from Volhynia and later the chief rabbi of Bucharest, Romania, is often compared to medieval exegetes because of his having written a commentary on the entire bible. Interestingly, his reading of our verse departs from nearly all of the commentaries we have seen, by linking it contextually to the previous verse (verse 11). Indeed, the likes of this we have only seen in the tenth century, but Weiser's approach resembles later commentators in other ways:

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<sup>139</sup> In *Bi'ure Hahasidut Lanakh*, vol. 2, p. 50.

אחת דבר אלקים, כן דבר אלקים, שלא נבטח בעושיק וגזל ובהצלחה שהעושיק מצליח, והגם שאלקים דבר אחת בכל זאת שתים זו שמעתי, שמעתי מדבריו שני דברים, כי עז לאלקים שלכן לא יצליח הגוזל והעושיק מפני שיש לאלקים עוז להעניש את העושה רשע, זאת שנית מפני כי. לך ה' חסד להציל את העשוק...<sup>140</sup>

Like Sa'adia Gaon and Salmon ben Yeruham, the Malbim considers אחת to refer to the previous verse, but unlike them, who see in שתים זו שמעתי reference to two commandments regarding theft, Malbim poses in following with Rashi and most others, that the “two” instead refer to the following parallel clauses in Psa. 62:12-13. God, thus, has strength (עז) to punish the thief, and the kindness (חסד) to save the thieved. Others (Rashi, Eibshitz, etc.) have given the same interpretation in a more general sense: referring to the wicked and the righteous. But instead of referring to outside ideas that are not clear from the text itself (as Rashi does in reading in the second of the Ten Commandments), Malbim sees this notion as sensible to the immediate context of the verse within the psalm only if referring to theft.

## 12.4 Yitzchak Eliyahu Landa of Dobno

Landa's work on the Psalms, published during his lifetime in 1865, includes three texts. The first and primary, is a commentary known as *Kefalim Letoshia*; the second, *Maṭa' Lashem* relates portions of the text to seventy-two three-letter divine names; the third, *Mashal Umelitza*, describes parables related to the psalm. The latter column does not comment on our verse, although the others do. *Kefalim Letoshia* suggests that although we see bad come from God, it is one with his good, and we should not withhold our faith from Him as a result:

אחת דבר אלקים. בו יתברך אין שום שינוי רק אחת דיבר. רק מצד המקבלים שתים זו שמענו. דאצלינו משתנה הענין לשנים. היינו כי עז לאלקים בבוא עוז הגבורה לעשות משפט אנו מתיחסים העוז לאלקים הוא מדת הדין, והיפך מזה כאשר אתה מטיב אנו מיחסים לך ה' חסד להיטיב. אבל באמת אין השינוי מצידך...<sup>141</sup>

He explains that indeed God is only one, but we perceive him as two, attributing bad befalling people to God's justice, and claiming God's kindness in better times, quite similar to that expressed by Gilernter

<sup>140</sup> “Bi'ur Milim” in *Mikraot Gedolot Hamale*, p. 359.

<sup>141</sup> *Kefalim Letoshia*, p. 74b.

above.<sup>142</sup> This explanation in particular bases itself on the contrast between the first two clauses of the verse: *one* is what *God* spoke, but *two* is what *we* perceive; the two we perceive are עז and חסד, but in truth they are one.

*Maṭa' Lashem* is far from a commentary in any ordinary sense, but it is interesting to view, in terms of understanding various readings and uses of our text:

שתיים זו שמעתי כי עוזי לאלקים. שם יי"ז מתיחס לעוז במאמר תדרכי נפשי עוזי (שוי ה: כא). יצילני מאויבי עזי (שמ"ב כב: יח). עורי לבשי עזי (יש' נא: ט). בטח לבני ונעזרתי ויעלוזי לבי (תהי כח: ז). תרהיבני בנפשי עזי (תהי קלח: ג).<sup>143</sup>

This asserts that the divine name יי is found associated with עז in five other places in the bible. That is, in six places in the bible three consecutive words end with the letters י, י and ז respectively, in verses that also contain reference to the word עז.<sup>144</sup> The application of such information, as given for applicable words of most verses, is purely mystical. They do not attempt to relate to content, but only collect patterns in the letters of the verse.<sup>145</sup>

## 12.5 Moses Isaac Ashkenazi (19<sup>th</sup> century)

One nineteenth-century commentary on Psalms was authored by Moses Ashkenazi of Trieste, Italy, a student of Samuel David Luzzatto (whose collection of bible commentaries did not include Psalms). On our verse, he writes:

אחת דבר אלקים לי שיבא יום ואמלוך, ומזה לעת עתה שמעתי והבנתי שתיים, כי עוז וגבורה לאלקים להכניע רשעים אף כי חזקו וכביר מצאה ידם, ולך אדני חסד כי תבא לשלם לצדיק.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>142</sup> See section 12.2.

<sup>143</sup> *Maṭa' Lashem*, p. 74b. Verse references not in original text.

<sup>144</sup> In most of the verses cited above, the third word in the triplet is עז; where it is יעלוזי, “עזי” is found earlier in the verse. Other similar entries in *Maṭa' Lashem* find patterns at the beginning of words, rather than at the ends, or some include examples of both.

<sup>145</sup> And then only when such a pattern signifies one in a limited set of three-letter names.

<sup>146</sup> “Sefer Tehilim Mevu'ar Ivrit” in *Ho'il Moshe*, p. 127.

In considering שתיים to refer to the עז and חסד of punishment for the wicked and reward for the righteous, Ashkenazi is far from original. Nonetheless, he takes the perspective of the psalmist and suggests, as did deMercado,<sup>147</sup> that the one thing King David heard from God was that he would come to rule over Israel. Since that time, then, David has understood God's hand in the world in dealing with the righteous and the wicked. Strangely, though, the commentary fails to connect these ideas: that of David being told he will become king, and that of God's providence. One could suggest that the connection is that God will vanquish David's enemies in preference for him, the צדיק who will receive reward, somewhat akin to deMercado; a similar alternative is also offered by Resnik, below.<sup>148</sup>

## 13 Modern lexicography

Alongside the traditional activity of biblical commentary and scholarship, indeed for some an intersection between these often disparate fields, was the activity of various Hebrew lexicographers from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until today. Both Jewish and non-Jewish lexicography of Biblical Hebrew has directly influenced many Jewish interpreters, although many in the rabbinic world choose to avoid what is mostly a product of university academics and not Orthodox rabbinic scholars. As with medieval philology, the word from our verse of primary interest is יָן, still a subject of debate.<sup>149</sup>

### 13.1 Brown Driver Briggs lexicon (1906)

The popular “BDB” lexicon, begun by Wilhelm Gesenius, lists יָן as a sub-entry under the word הָן. Although this only means that the authors consider the former to be derived from the latter, they give two definitions: (1) a demonstrative; (2) a relative.<sup>150</sup> The case of our verse is classified under the

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<sup>147</sup> See section 9.3.

<sup>148</sup> Section 14.4.

<sup>149</sup> See section 4 for medieval Jewish understandings of the word.

<sup>150</sup> *A Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 262.

former (“*these* two things...”), with a suggestion that it is better as a relative (“two things (are there) *which*”). In addition, it adds a note regarding a poetic sense of זה as a relative pronoun, which also applies to זה:

In some of the passages cited the punctuators, by coupling זה with the preceding subst., and separating it from what follows by a disjunctive accent (as הַר־זֶה), appear not to have recognised its relative sense, but to have construed, ‘*this* mountain, (which) the right hand,’ etc.<sup>151</sup>

Hence where the Masorete punctuators suggest close conjunction between the first words of שְׁתֵּים־זֶה שְׂמַעְתִּי, this is possibly to be understood as a mistaken reading of זה.

### 13.2 Koehler/Baumgartner lexicon (first 1953)

The lexicon produced by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner in competition with Brown Driver Briggs gives a similar picture of זה: a demonstrative or relative pronoun, deriving from זה.<sup>152</sup> As a demonstrative, the word is feminine or neuter. It lists Psa. 62:12 under this category—including that it is translated ‘this’ by the Septuagint, Peshitta and Vulgate—before suggesting as BDB did: that it is better relative.

### 13.3 Kena’ani’s *Otzar Halashon Ha’ivrit* (1960)

The Hebrew dictionary compiled by Ya’aqov Kena’ani attempts to comprehensively cover the Hebrew language from biblical to modern times. For זה as used in the bible, Kena’ani makes no mention of our verse, but allows it to be either a demonstrative or a relative.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *A Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 261.

<sup>152</sup> *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*, Study edition, vol. 1, p. 266.

<sup>153</sup> *Otzar Hamilim*, vol. 4, p. 1011.

### 13.4 Even Shoshan's *Hamilon Hehadash* (1966)

Abraham Even Shoshan's *milon* is a shorter but similar work to that of Kena'ani. In it, he only provides one unequivocal definition for ׀, a relative:

׀ : אָשֶׁר, -שׁ, זֶה אָשֶׁר<sup>154</sup>

### 13.5 Clines dictionary (1993)

A more recent non-Jewish scholarly lexicon of Classical Hebrew is that by Clines. His entry for ׀ is quite extensive, giving a primary definition of “part of a relation, which, that, who(m)”.<sup>155</sup> It splits this definition according to the type of antecedent, where our verse's case is classified as “with indefinite antecedent as object (including adverbial accusative) of verb following ׀... *Two things that I heard.*”

### 13.6 Karni dictionary (2002)

Shlomo Karni's concise learners dictionary follows the tendency we have already seen, away from any examples of ׀ being considered demonstrative pronouns. It translates: “which; that”.<sup>156</sup>

The trend in scholarship and lexicography seems to thus indicate that although the use of ׀ in Psa. 62:12 was once considered demonstrative, the idea that it should instead be universally translated ‘that’ or ‘which’ has become more prevalent. Nonetheless, the adoption of this idea by commentators and translators varies.

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<sup>154</sup> *Hamilon Hehadash*, vol. 2, p. 657.

<sup>155</sup> *The dictionary of classical Hebrew*, vol. 3, p. 94. Its secondary definition is “as combined relative pronoun and antecedent, that which”.

<sup>156</sup> *Dictionary of Basic Biblical Hebrew*.

### 13.7 Even Shoshan Concordance on כִּי (1985)

As well as the historically unclear definition of כִּי, Avraham Even Shoshan subtly also gives some insight into his interpretation of our verse, through his biblical concordance. An innovative and useful feature of his *New Concordance* is the distinguishing of different semantic classifications of words before listing the occasions they appear in the bible. Hence by placing Psa. 62:12 either under his first sense, “אשר, ש-”, or under the second, “מפני ש-, משום ש-”, he makes an interpretative decision. Unsurprisingly, he includes כִּי under the first sense;<sup>157</sup> the tendency we have seen is for only midrashic interpretations to read ‘because’, while simpler readings of the text tend identify the word as ‘that’.

## 14 Assorted twentieth century

Various miscellaneous material translating or discussing the Psalms and their features from the early twentieth century portray a vast variety of approaches to the text. While some were exploring modern scholarly approaches that implied exploring Near-Eastern context, other Rabbis would provide new midrashic interpretations, while popular commentaries and editions of the biblical book were printed with the classic interpretations repeated. While many of the popular publications of the middle and later twentieth century are listed below, other commentaries and sermons on the topic have appeared on occasion.

### 14.1 David Sperber (1875-1962)

A leader in Romania and later in Israel, David Sperber’s primary contribution was in the halakhic field, publishing a collection of responsa in 1940. Nonetheless, since his death numerous collections of his comments on the Jewish calendar, Pentateuch, Psalms, Avot and the Passover Hagadah have been

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<sup>157</sup> *Konkordantsia Hadasha*, vol. 2, p. 530. Senses of כִּי listed on p. 529.

published under the title *Mikhtam David*. On Psalms, he gives two comments, the first of which understands the verse through a concept brought by Judah Halevi in his *Kuzari*:

דמצות התורה הקדושה המעשיות יש בהם כפלים לתושיה, שהם נרצים בעצמותם וגם מגיעים לזוך הלב עיין  
שם נכבדות. וזה שכתוב **שתים**, רוצה לומר פעולת **שתים זו שמעתי** מכל אחת מהמצות.<sup>158</sup>

That is, for each of the commandments which God we have heard two rationales, implying a new reading of **אחת** otherwise not suggested: rather than referring to a single thing, it refers to *each* one of a collection of things, i.e. commandments. No explanation is made for the end of the verse. While other commentators have tended to not directly quote “**שתים זו שמעתי**” within their interpretation, in doing so it seems Sperber gives the meaning of ‘which’ to זו.

This may also be evidenced by his second interpretation. In this case, he reflects on a *piyut* which states:

ובשבעה קולות כנראו בנועם, שתים זו שמענו שמעם, ולשתי שמועות נחלק קול רעם, לגוים קול זעם, ולישראל  
קול נועם.<sup>159</sup>

From this, Sperber derives that in God’s speech, two types of voice were heard, a pleasant one for Israel, and an angry one directed at the nations. He also gives an interpretation for the end of the verse, as we have seen since the Midrash: such a phenomenon is only possible for God, who is boundless. Sperber then continues:

וזהו כענין העתיד, שהקב"ה מוציא חמה מנרתיקה, צדיקים מתרפאים בה ורשעים נדונים בה.<sup>160</sup>

Hence we see Sperber bringing the same idea of punishment for the wicked and reward for the righteous that many other commentators, from Rashi on, have taken from our verse. Only their cases tended to understand these as two attributes of God, paralleled with **עו** and **חסד** ascribed to Him in Psa.

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<sup>158</sup> In *Otzar Mefarshe Tehilim*, vol. 3, p. 1303.

<sup>159</sup> Cited in *Otzar Mefarshe Tehilim*, vol. 3, p. 1304. “**שתים זו שמענו שמעם**” here seems to be referring to the first two commandments of the Ten.

<sup>160</sup> In *Otzar Mefarshe Tehilim*, vol. 3, p. 1304.

62:12-3; here Sperber brings a similar idea but derives it not from the text, but by reading into the first portion of the verse an idea from the *piyut*, to which he added an interpretation of its end.

In both these interpretations, Sperber almost explicitly states that he is reading an idea into the text that is not native. His expressions are “יש לפרש על פי מה שכתב הכוזרי” and “הבנתי כונה במקרא זה” and “מתוך דברי הפייטן”, implying that there are numerous ideas that could be equally read into this verse. In both, nonetheless, he gives approximately the same reading of the verse: two things were heard from one speech of God.

## 14.2 Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto (1883-1951)

Cassuto is well known for spanning rabbinic and academic bible scholarship in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of his major fields in doing so was an exploration of Ancient Near-Eastern literature in comparison to the bible. In this matter, we find our verse mentioned through its use of a “stereotyped literary pattern.” Here he discusses a feature of “ascending numeration” in prophetic, poetic and wisdom literature in the bible:

That is to say, sayings in the first part of which mention is made of a certain number -x- of given things, and thereafter, in the second part, which parallels the first, this number is increased by one unit and is stated as  $x + 1$ .<sup>161</sup>

He cites a list of examples of this phenomenon in the bible, only some of which actually include a list of  $x + 1$  items detailed. This discussion continues, with the author stating that this literary pattern “in the earliest times, outside of Israel’s literature, only in Ugaritic; and in Ugaritic it is extremely common, being one of the features of the Canaanite literary tradition.”

Curiously, in the case of our verse, Cassuto does not mark it as if the שמעתי זו שתיים are listed, possibly implying that he understands the verse not as referring to the two expressions כי עז לאלקים and ולך אדני חסד, but to some other referent. This idea of “ascending enumeration” and its idiomatic

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<sup>161</sup> *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, vol. 2, p. 26-7.

approach to our verse repeats itself in many of the more *peshat* popular editions of the twentieth century, particularly a number of the Israeli commentaries, clearly a product of modern philological research.<sup>162</sup>

### 14.3 Israel Levine

Vastly differing from the previous author, a popular Yiddish translation by Israel Levine, published in Jerusalem, reads as follows for our verse:

גערעדט האט גאט איינס, האב איך אט די צווייעי זאכן געהערט: אז מאכט איז ביי גאט; (און ביי דיר גאט איז חסד פאראן...) <sup>163</sup>

This translation is relatively literal, and is only notable in reading the שתיים as referring to the following two clauses (and so reading כי as ‘that’).

### 14.4 Avraham Resnik

Find out who his father, Meir Shaul Resnik is... he is titled אמו"ר which might mean he was a rebbe.... No way to identify who he is...

Resnik at first brings the suggestions of a number of other commentators, many of which only comment on verse 13 and not our own, but each of which he disagrees with. His first quote is of the Malbim,<sup>164</sup> whose commentary he does not find rich, but nonetheless accepts because it maintains the psalmodic context. He continues by bringing the interpretation of Landa regarding God’s attributes,<sup>165</sup> but this along with many others are rejected:

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<sup>162</sup> See sections 15.2, 15.3, 15.5, 16.2 and 16.4 for such commentaries.

<sup>163</sup> In *Sefer Ne'im Zemirot Yisra'el: Tehilim*, 1934.

<sup>164</sup> See section 12.3. Brought in *Talelei Orot*, p. 194.

<sup>165</sup> See section 19.1. Brought in *Talelei Orot*, p. 194.

אבל כל אלה אינם שייכים להמשך פסוקי המזמור להענין שעליו כונן המזמור ... נראה על פי דרכנו לשלב את כל דברי המזמור למטרה האחת אשר אליה כונן המשורר הקדוש את כל מזמורו ונבלי לסלק דבריו לענין אחר כלל אף אם אותו הדבר שמן החוץ נעים נעלה ונשגב.<sup>166</sup>

Although he praises the other commentators for their pleasant words, their approach ignores the remainder of the psalm and its psalmist. Rather, according to Resnik's methodology, the psalm's single topic needs to be divulged: the promise of kingship to the psalmist. This same message we have seen in deMercado and Moses Isaac Ashkenazi, above.<sup>167</sup>

He therefore commences his interpretation of the verse:

**אחת דבר אלקים** "משחתיך לנגיד על עמי ישראל" (שמ"א ט: טז) וכתוב נמי "אחת נשבעתי בקדשי אם לדוד אכזב" (תה' פט: לו) כו' "וכסאו כשמש נגדי" (תה' פט: לו) ודוד היה תוהה על איזה אופן תבוא אליו המלוכה בשעה ששאלו הוא גבור בימי עלומיו. וזהו שאמר **אחת דבר אלקים** כנ"ל **שתים זו שמעתי** שמעתי פירושו הנני מבין כמו "כי שומע יוסף" (בר' מב: כג) כלומר על פי שתי אופנים הנני מבין את השגת עטרת המלוכה...<sup>168</sup>

The **אחת** that God spoke was his promise to David, also called **אחת** elsewhere in Psalms,<sup>169</sup> but David was unsure how he would gain the crown when it was held by David. But David understood (**שמעתי**) the answer in two ways. As Resnik continued, that **עון**, identified as kingship,<sup>170</sup> belongs to **אלקים**, that is, to His attribute of justice. As such, kingship would be acquired by battle.<sup>171</sup> The second thing heard, then was that God has **חסד**, both to David in fulfilling his promise, and to Saul who was twice captured by David, but not put to harm.

In his parsing of the verse, Resnik approximates Rashi's approach, finding that the two things heard are the two following statements of the psalm (although Resnik does not take **שמע** as literally as Rashi). Nonetheless, Resnik's approach to the context of authorship is prime to his hermeneutical

<sup>166</sup> *Talelei Orot*, p. 195.

<sup>167</sup> Sections 9.3 and 12.49.3 respectively.

<sup>168</sup> *Talelei Orot*, p. 195.

<sup>169</sup> Psa. 89:36f as quoted in the commentary.

<sup>170</sup> He makes this connection by reference to 1Sam. 2:10, "ויתן עז למלכו".

<sup>171</sup> Resnik supports this with 1Sam. 26:10, "כי אם ה' יגפנו או יומו יבוא או במלחמה ירד ונספה".

methodology. And unlike deMercado or Ashkenazi, understanding David through his words needs to be continually confirmed by other bible sources, primarily the narrative of Samuel 1. Hence, to an extent, Resnik takes the author-sensitive approach to an extreme by attempting to correspond the psalm to the author's extant biography.<sup>172</sup>

### 14.5 Meyer Moskowitz

This short commentary, named *Imrei Meyer* and published in New York, 1941, gives succinct comments on selected passages in the Book of Psalms. Correspondingly, its interpretation of our verse is only to the extent of providing its traditional interpretation:

<sup>173</sup> אחת דבר אלקים שתיים זו שמעתי – שמור וזכור בדבור אחד השמיענו.

Nicely, the choice of wording likely reminds the reader of the poem *Lekha Dodi* by Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz sung on Friday nights to welcome the Sabbath.<sup>174</sup> This nonetheless reflects an approach to interpret the bible according to the common midrash, rather than *peshat* or innovation.

### 14.6 Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994)

The last of the Lubavitcher Rebbes has been the centre of the teachings of the growing Chabad-Lubavitch movement. The majority of publications in his name were transcribed, translated and edited from his numerous discussions and sermons, primarily in Yiddish. One particular *hisvaadus* from 1991

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<sup>172</sup> It is possible, although far from certain, that Resnik's text-based tactic is a response to modern criticism: while others are preaching non-Davidic authorship of the psalms, Resnik insists on the opposite and the psalms' unity with the bible histories.

<sup>173</sup> *Sefer Imrei Meyer*, p. 37.

<sup>174</sup> It is possible, too that Alkabetz's *piyut* should be considered in a manner interpretation of our verse, except that its only hint to our verse is in its choice of the word השמיענו.

extensively discusses the midrash relating to our verse, an excerpt from which was later published with the title “במתן-תורה ניתן הכוח לכל אחד שעבודתו תהיה באופן ד”אחת דיבר אלוקים”<sup>175</sup>

In some ways, the discussion played out by Schneerson is much like the Vilna Gaon’s,<sup>176</sup> focusing on bringing together midrashim, and also concentrating on only the first portion of our verse, although here the style seems somewhat more homiletical. The discussion first sets out the main midrashim relating the Ten Commandments to our verse:<sup>177</sup> that all ten were spoken at once; that the first Two Commandments alone were heard from God; that “remember” and “observe” regarding the Sabbath were said together, along with other contradictory statements. Schneerson then notes the parallel between these last two midrashim: they both pertain to the positive and negative commandments of the torah.<sup>178</sup>

The remainder of the discussion focuses itself on the contrast between positive and negative commandments. Cited to Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (the Maharsha) is an idea that to the giver of the Law, the commandments are one, but to those who receive it, they are many. Like God alone having the ability to say them at once, man must receive multiple, “מצד שהוא מוטבע בחומר ובזמן.”<sup>179</sup> To God, the commandments are one, but to man, they split into the first two commandments of faith, representing the positive and negative commandments, which further need to be derived individually for the practicality of man’s existence in a physical world. For this reason, he asserts, they are derived from

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<sup>175</sup> “Devar Malkhut”, ed. in *Hatiksherut*. 18 Shevat 5765.

<sup>176</sup> See section 11.4.

<sup>177</sup> See section 2.

<sup>178</sup> The suggestion that ולא יהיה לך and אנכי contain in them all the commandments has been seen in the midrash and other commentaries. Similarly, according to their traditional interpretations, זכור is a positive commandment regarding the Sabbath, while שמור pertains to its negative injunctions.

<sup>179</sup> The Maharsha, cited p. 252 of Schneerson’s collected *Hisvaaduyos*.

אלקים,<sup>180</sup> a name of God that is a plural form in Hebrew. The central idea here, that what to God is one is to humankind perceived as multiple as a result of earthly existence, we have already seen understood from our verse by other Hasidic commentators, Landa and Gilernter.<sup>181</sup>

Ideally, Schneerson continues, all service of God might be directed through performance of positive commandments, whose purpose is to continue and heighten the constant revelation from God. Rather, negative commandments are necessitated by our world, and although practised through abstention of activity, ultimately have the same purpose, a similar idea to that brought by the Magid of Koznitz on our verse.<sup>182</sup>

While even this small summary of the discussion of the Rebbe is lengthy, the interpretation of Psa. 62:12 given through Schneerson's discussion is as follows: God spoke *only* one united Torah, above the division of our world, which is heard in the physical world of man as many commandments, positive and negative, because God (who is one but whose name is plural) is not constrained by the practicalities of this world.

This idea of a split between the divine world and the physical world we have seen expressed in Landa's *Kefalim Letoshia*,<sup>183</sup> indeed, both use similar terminology to refer to this differing perception within our world: "רק מצד המקבל" – it is only from the viewpoint of the receiver that one becomes two.

Nonetheless, the primary achievement within the discussion of our verse by the Lubavitcher Rebbe is its taking many interpretations of our verse from the history of its midrash and interpretation, and drawing them together into one philosophic and moral teaching.

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<sup>180</sup> Either in our verse, or in the giving of the commandments, Exod. 20:1.

<sup>181</sup> Sections 12.4 and 12.2 respectively.

<sup>182</sup> See section 11.1.

<sup>183</sup> See section 12.4.

## 15 Popular Israeli editions, 20<sup>th</sup> century

During the twentieth century, a number of commentaries on the entire bible have been published (or republished) for popular Israeli consumption, some sponsored by the Education Ministry. They interestingly reflect the expectations of bible commentary within Israeli society throughout the century.

### 15.1 *Me'am Lo'ez* – Shmuel Yerushalmi

The monumental collection of commentaries and midrashim on the bible that is *Me'am Lo'ez* was begun by Jacob Culi (18<sup>th</sup> century) in Ladino. Yerushalmi made the compilation more accessible by translating it into Hebrew, and completed the task by following Culi's example on the Prophets and Hagiographa. As such, Yerushalmi's work does not intend to be innovative, only to collect the insightful words of others on the bible text.

The first idea brought in *Me'am Lo'ez* is that of Radaḳ (and so Ḥayun, etc.), that one should trust in God alone as heard many times. But he continues to expand this according to other ideas, giving two interpretations to “כי עז לאלקים”:

ועוד, כיון שהעוז והממשלה לאלקים ואם לא יעשה אדם כפי המצווה, ייענש, אם כן זה שהקב"ה נותן לו שכר  
הרי זה חסד.<sup>184</sup>

By also giving the contrast between עז of punishment and חסד of reward that we have seen many times before, Yerushalmi brings one interpretation that reads כי עז לאלקים as part of that preceding it, and one that connects it to the beginning of the following verse.

A second interpretation is also suggested by Yerushalmi:<sup>185</sup> that if God does one good thing for evil people (אחת דבר), how much more so (שתים זו שמעתי) for the good? Although this comment is reminiscent of Albelda,<sup>186</sup> the manner in which it reads the text differs. Here the multiplicity of reward

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<sup>184</sup> *Me'am Lo'ez*, vol. 2, p. 73. Cited there to Yalḳuṭ Eliezer.

<sup>185</sup> Cited to Me'ir Tehilot.

<sup>186</sup> See section 8.4.

to the good is implied in שתיים being read as ‘multiple’. For Albelda the concept was understood from כי עז לאלקים; here that phrase is not interpreted at all.

All of these three interpretations, although somewhat midrashic, are not far from the text; they do not bring in distant concepts as did many other commentators we have encountered. In addition, they are all notably homiletical, suggesting faith in God and a pursuit of good deeds in His eyes.

## 15.2 *Mikra Meforash* – Abraham Kanaha (1874-1946)

Kahana’s commentary on the bible, known as *Mikra Meforash*, was actually first published in Zhytomir, Ukraine, from 1902, and later re-published in Israel. He provides a number of possible interpretations, all of which must be considered attempting to understand the literal meaning of the verse:

יש מפרש: מדברי ה' שמעתי שתיים (א) כי אך לאלקים עז ולא לבשר ודם, (ב) כי ה' הוא גבור, גם רחום ובעל חסד הנחו (י"ג). ולדעת אחרים שתיים לאו דוקא, אלא שהוא ציור פיוטי. ואם תסיר צורתו זאת, יהיה באורו: שמעתי דברי אלקים. עקילס מנסח: אחת דבר אלקים ושתיים (καί δεύτερον) וכן באיוב ל"ג י"ד כי באחת דבר אל ובשתיים לא ישורנה, ויהיה באורו: אחת ושתיים (פעמים אחדות) שמעתי כי אך לאלקים הממשלה.<sup>187</sup>

Unlike Yerushalmi, the first interpretation given here is that שתיים is referring to “כי עז לאלקים” (and him alone) and “ולך אדני חסד”. His second interpretation suggests that the reference to ‘one’ and ‘two’ is only a poetic device,<sup>188</sup> and therefore the statement reduces to “I heard the words of God.” Before introducing a third reading, Kahana notes that a Greek edition of the text seems to translate ושמעתי rather than שמעתי, so אחת ושתיים becomes an idiom of repetition, as it does in Job 33:14.<sup>189</sup> This last

<sup>187</sup> *Mikra Meforash*, vol. 6, p. 132.

<sup>188</sup> Possibly Kahana here is reflecting on the likes of Cassuto’s discussion of the  $x / x+1$  pattern. See section 14.2.

<sup>189</sup> He does not seem to be referring to standard versions of the Septuagint which read “ἄπαξ ἐλάλησεν ὁ θεὸς δύο ταῦτα ἤκουσα”. It is not clear whether Kahana requires this added ἓν in order for such an expression to be signified, or whether he wanted to give extra evidence that this might be possible.

reading is much like Kimḥi's, although more scientific in its approach, in accordance with the subtitle of the commentary, "פירוש מדעי."

This sample of Kahana's hermeneutic methodology seems to indicate that he focuses primarily on the manner of language in order to exact possible interpretations of the verse without reference to outside concepts. It is also reflective of the modern era in his reference to variant texts, the insertion of Greek into what is otherwise a Hebrew commentary, and his reference to scholarly opinions on linguistic idiom in the verse, in order to get at its simple meanings. In this way, his is very much a modernist commentary.

### 15.3 *Peshuṭo Shel Mikra* – N.Z. Tur-Sinai (1886-1973)

Tur-Sinai's main fame in Israeli society is in his capacity as the first president of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, having been a member of the *Va'ad Halashon* since 1911. As such, his commentary on the bible has a focus on language, and does not address rabbinic sources. As such, he begins his commentary on Psa. 62:12 saying that according to many, "אחת דבר אלקים שתים זו שמעתי" is a poetic whole and should be read alone as a sentence. And so, it should be literally understood as:

אחת ושתיים דיבר ה' (את) דברו ואשמע; ואין עניין "אחת ושתיים" משמש אלא כהתחלה למנייה של פעמים הרבה, כשימוש "תמול שלשום" במקום: תמיד, בכל העבר.<sup>190</sup>

Tur-Sinai's reading of this first part of the verse is then that "numerous times has God spoken and I have listened." He then argues that in his opinion, the verse is not referring to what follows it (although the Masoretic text might imply otherwise), but to what precedes it: that the wicked's fortunes are ultimately doomed. And, he concludes the paragraph, "שוב אפשר, שהוטו כאן משפטים," suggesting, presumably from a lack of flow in the passage, that verses had been left out from the psalm here.

As for the remainder of the verse, he suggests that it belongs with verse 13, and together they form a complete sentence; "כי עו לאלקים" and "ולך אדני חסד" stand as one poetic verse.

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<sup>190</sup> *Peshuṭo Shel Mikra*, vol. 4, pt. 1, p. 130.

This interpretation not only shows a strict focus on language and context of the psalm to determine its simple meaning (thus the title *Peshuṭo Shel Miḳra*), but also a critical approach to the Masoretic text. The latter is merely an expected approach of modernist bible scholarship; it might be surprising, though, that an interpretation so focused on language be popular. Nonetheless, the motivation for such an interpretative task is likely to have been related to Zionist ideology of reclaiming both the bible and the Hebrew language. As the president of the language-regulating body, Tur-Sinai was an ideal candidate to perform this task.

### 15.4 E.S. Artom (1887-1965)

One of the most popular translations in Israel during the twentieth century was that edited by Umberto Cassuto, but undertaken largely by Italian-born Elia Samuele Artom. To that extent, the covers of its volumes simply read “תורה נביאים כתובים” and do not give a name to the commentary; for ease-of-use, the entire commentary is written with vowels and punctuation.

Although Artom occasionally gives explanations for entire verses as a whole, his usual approach is to explain it in fragments, or word by word. And so we read regarding our verse:

אחת ... שמעתי / פעם אחת אמר ה' ופעמים שמעתי את הדבר, כלומר פעם ופעמים אמר ה'.  
זו / כאן לא בהוראת אשר, אלא בהוראת כנוי רומז: את הדבר הזה. כי עז לאלקים / כי הכח לה'.<sup>191</sup>

Artom takes the common position that אחת and שתיים express repetition, and in contrast to Tur-Sinai, he follows the majority of commentators that consider its referent to be the end of the verse (as suggested by the Masoretic verse divisions). It is also interesting to note that Artom specifies that despite זו having the meaning ‘that’, here it means ‘this thing’.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> *Torah Nevi'im Ketuvim*, vol. 11, p. 136. Copied without vowels.

<sup>192</sup> It seems that this may have been a common position, as suggested by the Brown lexicon considering it demonstrative for our verse, despite then suggesting it as better otherwise. See section 13.1.

In a sense, this commentary reads the verse as does David Kimḥi. It differs, though, by not expounding on the idea of strength being God's. Whereas for Kimḥi this was a matter of faith, for Artom, the basic sense of the verse alone needs to be explained, and its theological lesson for the reader is not discussed.

### 15.5 *Da'at Mikra* – 'Amos Ḥakham

The most recent commentary released on the entire bible for popular Israeli consumption is known as *Da'at Mikra*. Although it still tends to focus on basic readings of the text, its commentators were of a later generation than the other editions, more distant from the height of modern bible criticism and linguistic approaches. It also differs in being released by the Orthodox publishing house Mosad Harav Kook, and so tends to base its comments on a more rabbinic approach. Although its comments (and hence volumes) tend to be more lengthy, it seems to borrow from Artom's popularity in the design of its layout and in providing vowels for its comments.

In Ḥakham's interpretation of our verse for this commentary project, he suggests, like Tur-Sinai and Artom, that אחת and שנים in parallel imply repetition: "והיא שיטת המספרים המודרגים".<sup>193</sup> With this comment, Ḥakham points us to Job 33:14 where, as Kahana also explained, we also find this phenomenon. He continues:

והכונה: פעמים אחדות שמעתי אלקים דבר. וכונתו, ששמע את דברי אלקים מפי הנביאים ומפי החכמים מורי התורה. ואפשר שכונתו שהוא המשורר בעצמו נחה עליו פעמים אחדות רוח הקדש ושמע את דבר אלקים.<sup>194</sup>

Here two alternatives are offered as to how the psalmist heard God: either through the words of prophets, or perhaps directly. In giving this explanation, the commentary displays rabbinic assumptions and ideas not present in the earlier Israeli commentaries.

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<sup>193</sup> *Da'at Mikra* on Psalms vol. 1, p. 362. The term "מספרים המודרגים" may be Cassuto's "ascending numeration" (see section 14.2), but other scholarship had written on the idiom. It is not clear from Cassuto's essay that this pattern implies repetition.

<sup>194</sup> *Da'at Mikra* on Psalms vol. 1, p. 362.

Like Artom, Ḥakham gives a direct explanation of וַיִּזְכֹּר, but votes the opposite: וַיִּזְכֹּר should be read as אִשְׁרָא and the phrase as “two are the times that I heard”. Nonetheless, in a footnote he gives other explanations of the word:

זו' מלת נחץ: אכן שמעתי שתי פעמים. פירוש אחר: 'זו' כינוי הגוף, כמו 'זו' בחלום: שתי פעמים שמעתי את זאת – את אשר דבר אלקים.<sup>195</sup>

The first alternative suggestion is one we have not heard before: that וַיִּזְכֹּר provides emphasis, translated as ‘indeed’.<sup>196</sup> While the second suggestion that וַיִּזְכֹּר is demonstrative is certainly familiar, Ḥakham’s suggestion that it refers to the one thing God spoke is not the only possibility for a demonstrative וַיִּזְכֹּר; it instead could be referring to the content of what was heard, i.e. that God has strength.<sup>197</sup>

The final component of the verse, that which was heard by the psalmist a number of times, is also interpreted: might and the ability to defend are among God’s attributes. Unlike the very simple, succinct suggestions in Artom, Ḥakham’s commentary is a little more expansive of the ideas resulting from the text. Nonetheless, he is together with the other popular Israeli editions (with the exception of *Me’am Lo’ez*, if it is included among them, whose aim is to anthologise midrash) in being far from the midrashic ideas expressed in many commentaries from earlier centuries.

## 16 The English-speaking world, 20<sup>th</sup> century

Many editions of the Psalms composed in English for Jewish readers were published in the twentieth century. All but two of those discussed here innovated their own translation of the text, and as such, the approach of the editors tends to be evident in their translation as well as their commentary. Some of the

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<sup>195</sup> *Da’at Miqra* on Psalms vol. 1, p. 362, note 10א.

<sup>196</sup> But we see the idea expressed by Bittenweiser, below, section **Error! Reference source not found.**

<sup>197</sup> It is possible, but only a conjecture, that since Ḥakham did not list this latter option, he had misunderstood other commentators, and thus been biased against such an interpretation.

explanations of the text have been original commentaries, with more or less reference to earlier rabbinic writers, while others aim to merely be anthologies of selected commentaries.

## 16.1 A comparison of translations

Possibly due to dissatisfaction with earlier Jewish translations of psalms, or issues pertaining to Copyright, at least seven English translations of To ease the comparison, they are listed:<sup>198</sup>

- **JPS, 1917** — God hath spoken once, / twice have I heard this: / that strength belongeth unto God; (/ Also unto Thee...)
- **Rosenberg (Judaica Press), 1964** — God spoke one thing, I heard two, for God has strength.
- **Butzenweiser, 1969** — One thing God has said, / Two things indeed have I heard: / Power belongs to God, (/ And with thee, O Lord, is Love...)
- **New JPS, 1972** — One thing has God spoken; / two things have I heard: / that might belongs to God, (/ and faithfulness is Yours, O Lord...)
- **Feuer (Artscroll/Mesorah), 1977** — Once has God spoken; / twice have I heard this / that strength belongs to God. (/ And yours, my Lord, / is kindness...)
- **Danziger (Artscroll/Mesorah), 1988** — One thing has God spoken, these two have I heard: That strength belongs to God; (and Yours, my Lord, is kindness...)
- **Elman (*The Living Nach*), 1994** — Once and twice I have heard God say: Might belongs to God. (Lovingkindness, too...)
- **Rozenberg & Zlotowitz, 1999** — God has spoken once, / Twice have I heard this, / That strength belongs to God. (/ And to you...)

This collection can be split up by selecting from it those translations that read ‘once’ and ‘twice’ rather than ‘one’, ‘two’. In the former camp we find JPS (Jewish Publication Society) 1917 edition, Feuer,

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<sup>198</sup> Respectively quoted from: In Cohen, p. 196; Rosenberg online (see references); Buttenweiser, p. 491; Jewish Publication Society, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 61; Feuer, et al., vol. 3, p. 771-3; Danziger & Scherman, p. 129; Elman, vol. 3, p. 113; Rozenberg & Zlotowitz, p. 373.

Elman and Rozenberg. In all these cases, the punctuation and language suggests a separation from verse 13, and their overall message seems to be the idea of repetition of the message that God has strength. Rozenberg quite clearly is only an adaptation of JPS to remove its archaic usage of “belongeth unto”. Feuer, it seems, is also basing his translation off JPS 1917, although he reorders the first phrase to follow the literal order of words in the psalm. This is possibly ironic, because JPS’s word ordering in opposition to the source must have been intentional, and seems to have been done to place “once, twice” together to highlight the notion of repetition. In a similar manner has Elman (whose translation is distinctly not JPS-based) brought “once and twice” to the front in paraphrase.

From the remainder of the translations, Rosenberg (Judaica Press) needs to be separated. *All* the translations listed translate כִּי as ‘that’ (or a colon), with the exception of the Judaica Press translation. Instead, it seems to take the midrashic view of the verse, that the *reason* “I heard two” is that “God has strength.” Hence, with this exception, it seems all the translations follow *peshat* approaches.

The second group’s approach (Buttenweiser, New JPS, Danziger), then, seems to read the verse’s “two things” as referring to God’s strength and kindness, as is indicated by their punctuation, ending the verse with a comma or semi-colon, unlike those in the first group of translations which were more disjunctive from verse 13.

Contrasting the New JPS against the old edition, we see that not only did their general reading of the verse change, but that the later edition understands וְ as ‘which’ rather than ‘this’. Although Artscroll’s second edition also reconsiders the ‘once’/‘twice’ reading, it maintains that וְ is to be understood as ‘these’.<sup>199</sup> Buttenweiser takes a third approach and reads וְ as ‘indeed’.<sup>200</sup> Rosenberg and Elman, whose translations are less literal, do not indicate any clear translation of the word.

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<sup>199</sup> In doing so and inserting the word before “two things”, it also removes some of the sense of idiom present in Buttenweiser and New JPS, presumably appreciating more midrashic readings.

<sup>200</sup> See section 16.4, below.

## 16.2 U. of American Hebrew Congregations – Solomon B. Freehof (1938)

Freehof's commentary on the Psalms was commissioned among other "important" books of the bible, not to compete with publications "of a more scientific and scholarly nature for students. While the commentaries as the Committee conceives them are to be based upon sound learning, the main purpose is to reach the masses of the people."<sup>201</sup> The text, then, addressed to a Reform Jewish audience, explains words and language according to scholarship, but not in excessive scientific detail—as well as some rabbinic commentators—and at the same time incorporating passages from poetry and other references to literature.

Despite this publication incorporating the JPS 1917 translation, the two seem to disagree with the interpretation of the verse. Nonetheless, the commentary doesn't claim such, but merely states:

ONCE ... TWICE. It is a Hebrew idiom characteristic particularly of proverbial language to mention a number and then increase it by one. Thus in Proverbs 6:16, "There are six things which the Lord hateth, yea, seven which are an abomination unto Him." ... So here in the psalm: "God hath spoken once, twice I have heard this." The two things which the psalmist has heard are, first "strength belongeth unto God," and, "unto Thee belongeth mercy."<sup>202</sup>

This suggestion of idiom we have seen elsewhere (in earlier and later sources), although its meaning still remains undecided between bible scholars: whether indicating repetition, or indicating only "two things," as Freehof here suggests.<sup>203</sup> Stating, as Freehof does, that these two things referred to in the psalm are that God has **עו** and **חסד** is certainly not a new idea: what is new and the result of modern scholarship is that Rashi's question, "ומאיזה דבור שמענום?" no longer needs to be asked. Nonetheless,

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<sup>201</sup> In Freehof, p. vii-viii.

<sup>202</sup> Freehof, p. 166.

<sup>203</sup> While the idea that **אחת** and **שתיים** represents repetition is an old one, the translation of "one, even two things" seems to be a new product of scholarship, as also seems to be expressed in Cassuto, etc. Cohen, Tur-Sinai, Artom and others nonetheless prefer the more traditional reading.

because the translation Freehof uses reads the verse as repetition, his commentary fails to flow smoothly: he quotes “twice” and then refers to “two things.”

### 16.3 Soncino – Abraham Cohen (1945)

A commentary of similar purpose was then published by an Orthodox publishing house in the United Kingdom, similarly incorporating the JPS 1917 translation, and aiming for a popular audience. As such, to Cohen, “once, twice” is an idiom of repetition, and on “have I heard this,” writes:

The Psalmist claims that the doctrine he proclaims is not his own invention, but the teaching of God which has been communicated to him. He had even heard it more than once.<sup>204</sup>

This is a somewhat new comment, although since Radaḳ we have seen the likes of “שמענו מפי נביאיו”, and we have seen it again in Ḥakham.<sup>205</sup> Unlike Ḳimḥi, though, these newer commentaries tend to focus on the perspective of David as having heard these ideas from God, directly or otherwise. Indeed, otherwise Cohen’s commentary seems to generally follow that of Ḳimḥi, and he explains that the lesson the psalmist has learn is that God has strength, and his will cannot be overcome, and:

The fate which has overtaken his adversaries demonstrated how well-grounded such trust is.<sup>206</sup>

This is an interesting statement considering the historical context of the author; it may be a message to his readers of victory and faith following the Second World War, or it may simply be intended as a reflection of the psalmist.

### 16.4 Hebrew Union College – Moses Bottenweiser (1969)

Possibly intended as a more scholarly edition, the American Reform movement hosted in Cincinnati released a second commentary on the Psalms less than thirty years after their first attempt. Importantly,

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<sup>204</sup> Cohen, p. 196.

<sup>205</sup> Sections 5.3 and 15.5, respectively.

<sup>206</sup> Cohen, p. 196

this edition also includes a new translation. The approach of the book can be seen from its contents page: it does not include the psalms in their Masoretic order, but rather groups them under headings like “Psalms of Deutero-Isaiah Inspired by the Rebirth of the Nation”.<sup>207</sup> Psalm 62 is found in the primary heading “Psalms of the Persian Period from Damascus I to Artaxerxes II Mnemon” in its sub-grouping “The Use of the Term ‘The Wicked’ in Post-Exilic Psalms”. Hence, even before divulging the commentary, we see that the approach relies heavily on the ideas of modern scholarship and textual criticism.

Assuming the post-exilic context of the psalmist, the commentary occasionally gives general statements regarding the subject matter of the psalms in relation to its historical context. Regarding a group of psalms, including ours:

Seen in the light of the conditions in which they were written, they become more replete with meaning than ever. They show that the darker the world around became, the more desperate the situation grew, the firmer did Israel cling to God as its rock and its hope.<sup>208</sup>

As a result, regarding our own psalm he continues this theme, the psalmist’s response to suffering, persuading the population to altogether have faith in God who will be their safety:

In the second strophe he endeavors to deliver his people from their spiritual bondage and make them see life in the light that has come to him... All that is needed to know is that power is with God and that he is love, infinite love, and that he makes every man reap the fruit of his deeds—the good man, strength and peace of soul, and the wicked man, and unsatisfied, wretched self.<sup>209</sup>

Although for Buttenweiser, this psalmist is certainly not King David, the sentiment expressed here is very close to that of S.R. Hirsch, who saw in the psalm a promise of release from the pain which had been experienced. It also brings in ideas that have been understood from the Psalm since Rashi: the two

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<sup>207</sup> Buttenweiser, p. viii.

<sup>208</sup> Buttenweiser, p. 490.

<sup>209</sup> Buttenweiser, p. 492.

things the psalmist resolves are that God's עז will punish the wicked, and His חסד will reward the righteous.

Apart from the general commentary on the psalm, Buttenweiser adds notes on its language and his translation. In the first place, reminiscent of Cassuto's Ancient Near-Eastern studies:

We have here the same peculiarity of style, common to all Semitic languages... That is, the expression of a certain number by two numbers, the second of which is the number meant, while the first is in numerical value next to it.<sup>210</sup>

This seems to be a clearer explanation of the same idea brought by his predecessor, Freehof, above.<sup>211</sup> Finally, he also notes on his reading of וַ as 'indeed' that this is the most appropriate translation, and that Psa. 62:12 is a "nice case of interjectional or emphatic *zu*."<sup>212</sup> This is a position not described elsewhere among our commentaries, except as an alternative reading in *Da'at Mikra*.<sup>213</sup>

## 16.5 Artscroll/Mesorah *Tehillim* – Avrohom Feuer (1977)

The aims of Artscroll/Mesorah, on the other hand, are noticeably different to those of Buttenweiser and his HUC publishers: their intent is not to write a commentary, but to anthologise ideas taken on the passages from past rabbinic commentators. Their subtitle invites the reader to "a new translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic sources." Their audience and authors, significantly, are also Orthodox and, it seems, of a less modernist mindset than those for whom Cohen was writing. Artscroll/Mesorah's first attempt at a publication of Psalms was authored by Avrohom Feuer (with Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz) and released in five volume. The Psalms were published again in a single volume, with a different translation and commentary, the translation of

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<sup>210</sup> Buttenweiser, p. 493.

<sup>211</sup> Section 16.2.

<sup>212</sup> Buttenweiser, p. 493.

<sup>213</sup> See section 15.5.

which was then used in Artscroll's "Stone edition" Tanakh, with yet another commentary.<sup>214</sup> Of the three, therefore, Feuer's contains the largest quantity of content.

Before bringing the anthologised exegesis, the commentary repeats the portion subject to comment:

*Once [lit. one thing] has God spoken, twice [lit. two things] have I heard this.*<sup>215</sup>

Curiously, despite their "new translation" translating the verse with 'once' and 'twice', they insist that these are not the literal meanings of אחת and שתיים. Either this is an unconventional meaning of 'lit.', or this is further evidence that the translation was edited from JPS 1917, whose reasons for translating as they did have not been completely understood by the Artscroll editors.

The commentaries Feuer then paraphrases are Radaḳ (which corresponds to the translation), the Targum, Rabbenu Baḥya in his two comments on Exodus, and finally that from the Babylonian Talmud. Nonetheless, some of these commentaries are paraphrased in unusual ways that do not seem to fully understand their intent. Of Ḳimḥi it writes:

God has taught the truths of the Torah not only once but many times, through the prophets who speak in His Name.<sup>216</sup>

Indeed Ḳimḥi does write of hearing from God's prophets many times, but in his interpretation, it was not merely "the truths of the Torah" but the content with which the verse concludes that was heard many times. In writing such, Artscroll makes Radaḳ's commentary seem more midrashic than it is when seen in full. By writing "not only once" they also take away Radaḳ's reading of אחת and שתיים as idiom.

Similarly, for the Targum they write:

God proclaimed the laws of the one Torah, and Moses, the great teacher, repeated them twice.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> See sections 16.6 and 16.6.

<sup>215</sup> Feuer, et al, vol. 3, p. 771.

<sup>216</sup> Feuer, et al, vol. 3, p. 771. Compare with the original, section 5.3.

The actual text of the targum does not suggest that Moses repeated the laws twice; rather, we heard the one Torah twice, and “תנייתא דנא שמענא מן פום משה,” the second time was heard from Moses.

In contrast Bahya ben Asher’s ideas seem to be clearly brought out: there is a revealed and a hidden side to the Torah. The Talmud is then brought in as if it is making the same message as Rabenu Bahya, claiming that each verse has multiple interpretations. Nonetheless, this is not the same as what the mystic Bahya was implying: for him the second thing heard was mystical. By linking him to the Talmud’s interpretation, Artscroll implies that they are both only talking about a multiplicity of meanings; it seems they fail to recognise the innovation of Bahya’s interpretation in his time.

For the second portion of the verse, they provide explanations cited to Rashi and to Radaḳ. Considering that Rashi’s interpretation depends on the adjacency to “ולך אדני חסד”, they only bring half of his opinion:

From *one* of the Ten Commandments we heard and understood *two* Divine attributes. In the second commandment, God declared that פקד עון אבת על בנים – *He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children* (Exodus 20:5). This demonstrates God’s מדת הדין, *the Divine Attribute of Strict Justice*, from which we realize *that strength belongs to God*.<sup>218</sup>

By separating this from the second half of Rashi’s understanding, it does not seem completely sensible; they mention *two* but then list only one. Secondly, Rashi does not use the term מדת הדין yet one reading Feuer would assume he does. Thirdly, in Rashi’s own commentary, he first connects the שתים to עו and חסד from the psalm, and only then relates it to the second commandment. By presenting his commentary in the opposite manner, Feuer loses the sense of *peshat*, like he did when quoting Radaḳ above.

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<sup>217</sup> Feuer, et al, vol. 3, p. 771. Compare with the original, note 11. This is followed by an explanation, citing *Targum D’Matargum*, that the first proclamation are the first four books of the Torah and the second is the fifth book known as משנה תורה.

<sup>218</sup> Feuer, et al, vol. 3, p. 772. Compare with the original, section 5.1.

And in a similar vein, because the first half of K̄imḥi's commentary was cited on the first part of the verse, it seems as if here he is only commenting on **כִּי עַז לְאֱלֹקִים** and not the entire verse:

*Radak* stresses that once we realise that *strength belongs to God* alone, we must place faith in Him exclusively. Man must abandon his reliance on human power and wealth.<sup>219</sup>

Indeed, this *is* the comment Radaḳ makes, but only within the context of this being the repeated message the psalmist speaks of.

We see that in constantly splitting up and collecting together *parts* of the commentaries brought by various commentators, Feuer with Scherman and Zlotowitz fail to get the sense of the entire commentary and how it addresses the verse. They in effect take every portion of the verse out of context, such that although they tend to cite *peshat* sources, they tend to derive midrashic meaning, giving in all cases its application as a lesson to the reader.

## 16.6 *The Artscroll Tehillim* – Hillel Danziger (1988)

Possibly in response to criticism of their first attempts, or simply in order to create a shorter volume, the Artscroll released another edition of Psalms. It certainly modifies the approach of the Feuer commentary by explaining not *parts* of the verse, but rather listing commentaries on verses 12 and 13 together. It begins by bringing Rashi:

The second of the Ten Commandments declares two things: That God's strength punishes the wicked, and that He is kind to the righteous, each man according to his deeds.<sup>220</sup>

This corresponds to Danziger's translation of the verse, and for the limited space allowed for commenting, is quite an adequate and succinct summary of Rashi's comment. Nonetheless, without the reader being familiar with the text of the second of the Ten Commandments, it is unclear why this is

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<sup>219</sup> Feuer, et al, vol. 3, p. 772.

<sup>220</sup> Danziger, et al, p. 128.

expressed there. It also, like in Feuer, ignores that Rashi first understands the semantics of the verse, and only *then* reads into it midrashically, asking “מאיזה דבור שמענום?”

An additional commentary is provided enclosed in brackets, suggesting that God must have our faith because He alone is constant, even though we experience an apparent contradiction of His justice and His kindness. These both are manifestations of one purpose, to improve man. This idea is cited by reference to Alschuler’s *Metzudat David*,<sup>221</sup> who suggests to this single purpose, although Artscroll has also amalgamated other ideas, such as that of trust in God alone, possibly in order for the derivation of a clear moral lesson, or otherwise to relate the verse’s interpretation more clearly to the context of the psalm.

### 16.7 *The Artscroll Tanach* – Nosson Scherman, et al. (1996)

The third Artscroll publication of Psalms was in their “Stone edition” Tanakh, which only brings minimal commentary in a confined space at the bottom of the page. As such, the comment brought is succinct:

Although we experience “two” different things – the strictness of God’s “strength” and he bounty of His “kindness” – they are both manifestations of the “one thing that God has spoken,” to improve each man according to his needs.<sup>222</sup>

Not citing any particular commentator, this is extracted from the comment in brackets included in Danziger. It is not clear why this, only the secondary comment in the 1988 publication, should be primary here. It may be because it interprets both verses 12 and 13 succinctly, unlike Rashi’s comment cited above, or that it more succinctly teaches a clear lesson derivable from the text. Again, it would seem that the primary goal of the commentary is not merely to derive the meaning from the text, as was

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<sup>221</sup> See section 11.4.

<sup>222</sup> Scherman, et al, p. 1489.

much more present in the Israeli publications of the twentieth century, but to gain a moral teaching from it.

### 16.8 *The Living Nach* – Yaakov Elman (1994)

Yaakov Elman wrote *The Living Nach* (i.e. Prophets and Hagiographa) as a complement to *The Living Torah*, a translation and commentary on the Pentateuch and *haftarot* by Aryeh Kaplan. Among Kaplan's aims in producing his original work were to provide a text that was clear and readable, close to the basic meaning, but also in accord with Orthodox commentaries and law. Providing a translation of Psa. 62:12 that clearly agrees with David Kimḥi's reading of the text, it seems that Elman assumes this interpretation is understood and does not mention it in his commentary, which begins:

**Once and twice...Lovingkindness...** Rashi reads these two verses more literally and as a single thought: "God said one thing, from which I have heard two: that might belongs to God; and that lovingkindness is Yours, O God, to reward each man according to his deeds."<sup>223</sup>

He then proceeds to closely paraphrase Rashi's entire commentary. This methodology contrasts greatly with Artscroll, in that it clearly appreciates the manner in which the commentator has approached and understood the verse.

### 16.9 Martin Rozenberg and Bernard Zlotowitz (1999)

Although not officially published by Union of American Hebrew Congregations, or its college, this recent commentary includes yet another original translation by Rabbis Rozenberg and Zlotowitz, both associated with the American Reform movement. As noted above, they follow the JPS translation in asserting that the verse intends a meaning of repetition. They explain:

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<sup>223</sup> Elman, vol. 3, p. 113.

**Once ... Twice:** An idiomatic expression signifying that one has heard it repeatedly. Freehof suggests that the Psalmist actually heard two things: “strength belongs to God” and “mercy belongs to God.”<sup>224</sup>

The citation here of Freehof is unusual, for as they quoted him, this position has been held by numerous commentators at least since the time of Rashi. What Freehof actually suggests is that the *idiom* indicates hearing two things, rather than repetition; this is not clear from Rozenberg and Zlotowitz’s explanation.

The remainder of the verse, and indeed the psalm (verses 12 and 13), say they, “the Psalmist gives in essence a summation of all that he was trying to convey to his listeners.”<sup>225</sup> This message they understand as did *Ḳimḥi* (and in agreement with Bottenweiser): that trust should only be in God; more so (as Tur-Sinai also suggested), in connection to the previous verses, “The wicked may enjoy a temporary advantage, but in the end the righteous will receive their just reward.”<sup>226</sup>

In comparison with the earlier non-Orthodox commentaries of Freehof and Bottenweiser, this publication does not focus as extensively on a critical scholarly approach to the language, but rather on the message of the text for the reader.

Some trends are easily discerned within the English translations of the twentieth century. With the exception of Artscroll,<sup>227</sup> the texts tend to translate according to plain and literal readings of the psalm. The Artscroll publications and Elman refer to the meaning of the psalm, but do not refer to its author or such a person’s intents where do the Reform commentaries and the more modernist Cohen. This comparatively gives them a midrashic feeling, paying no attention to the context in which the text was written. On top of this, all but Freehof (and possibly Elman) seem to be largely deriving from the psalm a homiletical teaching for their readers.

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<sup>224</sup> Rozenberg and Zlotowitz, p. 374.

<sup>225</sup> Rozenberg and Zlotowitz, p. 374.

<sup>226</sup> Rozenberg and Zlotowitz, p. 374.

<sup>227</sup> And presumably Rosenberg (Judaica Press), although his commentary is not to hand.

## 17 Common threads in interpretation

Having given an overview of each of a large number of commentaries and other texts written over the course of the last millennium, we have seen a number of patterns emerging among the understandings and approaches to our verse.

### 17.1 Three primary readings

We have seen that most of the interpretations of our verse may be divided into one of three groups:

- (a) One thing becomes two things (because God has the power to do so).
- (b) There are two ideas from God (possibly derived from one): one pertaining to God's strength, and the other pertaining to His kindness.
- (c) The idea that God has strength has been heard or understood well by way of repetition.

From each of these general readings of the text numerous examples have been cited above, and even the simple interpretations of the twentieth century oscillate between reading the text as in (b) or (c). The first option is mostly taken up by the midrash and taken up by others on occasion, and distinguishes itself by reading **כי** as 'because'. By far the most popular of these readings is (b), taken first by Rashi among the commentators listed here, which curiously is also the only reading among the three that does not agree with the Masoretic verse divisions, preferring instead the poetic parallelism of **כי עז לאלקים** and **ולך אדני חסד**. The purpose of reading (c) is primarily to take advantage of the idiom implied by **אחת** and **שתים**.<sup>228</sup>

In each case, the variety of subsequent interpretations is made available by the question of referents, primarily: What does **אחת** refer (or hint) to? What does **עז** refer to? To answer this, the

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<sup>228</sup> Consequently, those who consider the idiom of ascending numbers to mean only "I heard two things," following model (b), seem to have a superior interpretation linguistically by understanding both idiom and the parallelism of **עז** and **חסד**. Only Freehof and Bottenweiser (sections 16.2 and 16.4) clearly take this view.

commentators are biased by their own intentions to read in certain material or points of view, by the other content of the psalm, and potentially by the presumed intentions of the psalmist. Once the general reading of the text is understood, the balance between these biases essentially reflects or defines the hermeneutical methodology of the commentator.

## 17.2 Reference and textual context

To the earlier midrashic sources, and many that follow their non-contextual approach, the remainder of the psalm does not bear upon its interpretation. Outside of this school, we have seen commentators varying in their approach to context. Because of context, some understand the verse as referring particularly to theft, the subject matter of the previous verse.<sup>229</sup> Others seem to take the previous verse more generally and so relate ours to God's treatment of the good and the wicked.<sup>230</sup> Still some consider our verse as referring to the statement that follows it, regarding God's rewarding men according to their actions.<sup>231</sup> Finally, others take a more general view on context and see our verse as relating only to the entire topic of the psalm: trust in God alone.<sup>232</sup> The extent to which meaning and reference is necessitated by a close or general context hence supplies a basis for the interpreter's understanding of our verse.

## 17.3 Reference and authorial context

The extent to which the commentator considers the author of the psalm is also a significant factor in the determination of the verse's referential meaning. A large number of the commentators see the psalm as hinting to matters concerning all people, or all nature, and so the author and his intent is completely

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<sup>229</sup> Such as Sa'adia (3.1), Salmon ben Yeruham (3.2) and Malbim (12.3).

<sup>230</sup> Rashi (5.1) and many others.

<sup>231</sup> Altschuler (11.4) in particular.

<sup>232</sup> Kimhi (5.3) and many others.

ignored. On the other extreme we have seen Resnik ascribe to the verse allusion to the biography of King David.<sup>233</sup> Buttenweiser also certainly reads the psalm from the perspective of the psalmist and his times, but his ascription is not to King David.<sup>234</sup> In all these cases, the life of psalmist is the starting point for understanding anything about the verse's content.

## 17.4 Other hermeneutical biases

Very significantly are the biases in approach brought to the exegetical (or eisegetical) process by the commentator. We have seen numerous cases where reactions to the commentator's worldly struggles defines their approach to the text.<sup>235</sup> Others have desired to read the verse through a midrashic perspective; to determine from it hints to Talmudic statements or halakhic ideas;<sup>236</sup> concepts from philosophy, kabbalah, or Hasidut; along with the midrash to relate the verse to Sinaitic revelation; or to understand it through the eyes of modernism. For those at least that are either not interested in deriving the simple sense of the verse, or that intend to derive a lesson from it not plainly there, their external biases take a more significant impact in comparison to context and language.

## 17.5 Originality, tradition and science

Another balance that plays itself out in the commentaries is that between: (a) the tradition: following what has previously said about the verse; (b) science: an attempt to understand the verse on a simple level through rational principles; (c) the desire to say something new. While many of the early *peshat* writers seem to have focussed on (a) and (b), a number of other commentators, particularly those that

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<sup>233</sup> See section 14.4. And to a lesser extent similar ideas brought by Moses deMercado (9.312.5) and Moses Isaac Ashkenazi (12.5).

<sup>234</sup> See section 16.4.

<sup>235</sup> For instance Meiri (6.3), Albo (6.4) and Jabez (6.36.48.2).

<sup>236</sup> Such as Albelda (10.48.4) or Azulai (10.4).

write of the verse being a hint to a completely different subject matter, seem to have as one of their aims to derive a *new* reading. Their aim is *חידוש* rather than *פירוש*, and yet their ideas are collected to form a commentary, thus creatively adding (or forcing) new meaning onto the text.

## 18 Conclusion

We have explored at some length the various approaches to Psa. 62:12, and have found numerous different approaches to its understanding. On one hand, according to the Talmudic comment regarding our verse, God's word is able to derive multiple meanings unlike that of man, but on the other hand we see that man's fascination with the divine Scripture causes it to be the subject of both a creative interpretative process.

Today, this process of interpretation still continues, and it would do so, even if the most literal meaning of the verse were certain and unanimous. The advent of the internet that welcomed the twenty-first century also has the potential to distribute the interpretative process greatly among new devotees and scholars of the bible text, although largely lay people. The extent to which modern technology's free-for-all attitude affects the future interpretation of the bible, and differs from that given in the past is yet to be seen.<sup>237</sup>

With or without technology, some people will continue to search in the text for its simplest meaning, through the lenses of linguistics, poetics and biblical anthropology. Others will proceed to

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<sup>237</sup> Although there are a handful of interesting interpretations of our verse available online as at 2007, they were difficult to approach within the scope of this paper. Most do not comment directly on Psa. 62:12, but bring it up in the context of another discussion. Nonetheless, among the texts available online are some interesting and innovative interpretations.

apply the Scripture to the patterns and events they see in the world around them. And so, we will surely find, one verse will continue to resonate in different ways, and further derive multiple meanings.<sup>238</sup>

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