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THE VERSATILE INVENTIVENESS OF BIBLICAL IMAGERY IN RAMBAN'S TORAH COMMENTARY

THE biblical commentary of the preeminent Andalusian exegete, R. Moses ben Nahman (Ramban), offers a notable and incisive contribution to the elucidation of the literary roles and dynamic inventiveness of biblical imagery, particularly expressed through metaphor and simile. The distinctive feature of metaphor, and its more explicit form, simile, is that it presents a comparative analogy between two apparently dissimilar components, the image and the subject,¹ that are adjoined in an incongruous manner, stimulating the question of how to ascertain the relationship between them.² What is the role and relevance of the image to which the subject is being compared? Two primary literary models have been delineated that grapple with the relational correspondence between these components. The substitution view simply substitutes a literal paraphrase for the figurative expression. This literary approach assigns figurative language an ornamental and aesthetic role without providing additional cognitive and contextual meaning. It delimits the specific importance of the choice of image and its

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¹ The components of metaphor and simile have been variously defined, as will be discussed in the ensuing notes, but in this study, I have chosen to classify them with broad terms, which provide the flexibility to adapt the discussion to variegated categories and examples.

² See Andrea L. Weiss, *Figurative Language in Biblical Prose Narrative: Metaphor in the Book of Samuel*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 107 (Brill, 2006), 1–47, on the history of scholarship on the definition of metaphor and its significance as a literary device, and idem, "Biblical Poetry: Imagery, Metaphor, and Simile," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed, 16:259–261.

details, shifting the focus to the general message communicated by the image.³ In contrast, the interaction view presumes that there is an active comparative interfacing between the image and the subject.⁴ The interactive shared features, coined by Max Black as a “system of associated commonplaces,” elicit how the conceptual aspects of the subject are illuminated and filtered through the lens of particular qualities of the associated image, deciphering the basis for the comparative analogy.⁵ This approach exposes various points of intersection between the image and its correlating topic, resulting in assigning the image a more essential, integral role to understanding the subject being described.

In order to delineate Ramban’s literary approach to the poetic efficacy of biblical metaphor and simile, his readings must be analyzed in relation to the influences of his exegetical predecessors.⁶ In his formative study, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor*, Mordechai Z. Cohen established that one may classify how medieval Jewish exegetes approach the relationship between form and meaning in biblical imagery by applying the substitution and interaction models.⁷ Illustrative of these commentators’ literary approach, Cohen demarcates how Abraham Ibn Ezra primarily subscribes to the substitution view, often using the formula, “x by way of *mashal*, and the meaning (*ta’am* or *nimshal*) is y,” which demonstrates

³ This view is discussed by Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, 1962), 31–34.

⁴ The interaction view is discussed by Black, *ibid.*, 38–42, 44–47, who delineates the two components of metaphor as the subsidiary subject (the image) and the principal subject (the idea of the metaphor). Cf. the distinctions made by I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford University Press, 1936), 96–100, who coined the terms, *tenor*, to refer to the subject of the comparison, and *vehicle*, the image to which the subject is being compared.

⁵ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 40–41.

⁶ In his introductory poem to his biblical commentary, Ramban makes note of the direct influences of Rashi and Abraham Ibn Ezra. But, as has been noted by Hillel Novetsky, “The Influence of Rabbi Bekhor Shor and Radak on Ramban’s Commentary on the Torah,” M.A. thesis (Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University, 1992), while Ramban only mentions Radak once in his biblical commentary (to Gen. 35:16) and never cites Bekhor Shor by name, noted parallels in content and language between the commentators demonstrate their marked influence on Ramban’s methods of interpretation.

⁷ Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi* (Brill, 2003). Cohen demarcates the components of metaphor and simile as image and topic in his study. See also *idem*, “Radak vs. Ibn Ezra and Maimonides—A New Approach to *Derekh Mashal* in the Bible” [Hebrew] in *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Jerusalem, July 29–August 5, 1997, Division A: The Bible and Its World*, ed. Ron Margolin (World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999), 27–41.

that his main focus is on the subject of this figurative expression without a concerted interest in dwelling on the particular choice of image.⁸ For example, when God commands Isaiah, “Take for yourself a large sheet and write on it in common script, ‘Spoils hurry, plundering hastens,’” (Isa. 8:1), Ibn Ezra summarily explains: “And the meaning (*veha-ta’am*) [is] that he prophesies about the future of the Samaritan exile,” without delving into the image of the *large* sheet for writing four words.⁹

Diverging from this mode of exegesis, the Provençal exegete, David Kimhi (Radak), primarily employs the interaction view, which scrutinizes common features between the literal image, often labeled *melitza*, and the related subject, labeled *mashal*. Applying the formula, “By way of *mashal*, just as x [that is, the image] . . . so too y [that is, the subject] (*kemo* x . . . *ken* y), Radak decodes interactively the similarities between these elements of the figurative expression in order to elicit how the choice of image sharpens and demarcates the intended subject.¹⁰ For example, on Isa. 12:3, “For you shall draw water with joy from the springs of salvation,” Radak interprets, “By way of *mashal*, just as (*kemo*) the one who draws from the spring whose waters never cease, for at all times there is available within it [waters] to draw, for it is a constant source, *so too* (*ken*) will the blessing and salvation never cease from them [Israel], and they will be in a state of joy all of their days.” Seizing upon the specific feature of the image of the constant source of waters from a thriving spring, Radak markedly associates this quality with the related idea of Isaiah’s foretelling of the eventual redemption, which will be qualified by Israel’s perpetual state of blessing, salvation, and joy.¹¹

In this study, I aim to investigate Ramban’s literary approach to biblical metaphor and simile in his Torah commentary, where he also references other parts of the Tanakh, which has not been sufficiently

⁸ On Abraham Ibn Ezra’s application of the substitution method, see Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 228–271. On this formula in Ibn Ezra to mark his substitution method for interpreting biblical imagery, see Cohen, *ibid.*, 43, 70, 146, 254, 280, and *idem*, “Radak vs. Ibn Ezra and Maimonides,” 28–30, 33, 36.

⁹ Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 146–147, cites this example as illustrative of Ibn Ezra’s substitution mode of analysis.

¹⁰ On Radak’s interaction method, see Cohen, *ibid.*, 272–322. For this formula as applied by Radak in his interaction method to decode biblical imagery, see *ibid.*, 146, 155, 156, 173, 280–281, 293, 302. Cohen, 165 n. 104, observes that one can also identify Radak’s *mashal* exegesis by comparative terms in his commentary such as *ke’illu*, *dimma*. On Radak’s interaction method, see also Cohen, “Radak vs. Ibn Ezra and Maimonides,” 28–30, 34–39.

¹¹ Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 282, cites this example to contrast Ibn Ezra’s substitution method with Radak’s interactive analysis of biblical metaphor.

studied.¹² I suggest that Ramban tends to uphold the interaction view, eliciting the essential interrelationship between the chosen image and its intended subject within the domain of his *peshat* exegesis. Ramban ascertains the shared features between the image and its subject by focusing on the immediate context and by employing intertextual readings that produce richer, comparative analyses, with the goal of eliciting the purposefulness for the Bible's choice of a selected metaphor or simile to convey its message. Ramban's approach is exemplified in his use of technical terminology to qualify his literary readings and through inferential close study of his specific interpretations. Nevertheless, sometimes Ramban will apply the substitution method to decode the significance of biblical imagery within its context, particularly in the case of a dead metaphor. Furthermore, in contrast to his predecessors, he sometimes reads a text literally, insisting that it is not to be interpreted figuratively. Ramban's multifaceted interpretative method often gives rise to innovative readings, demonstrating the creative effort he exerts in his analysis of biblical imagery.¹³

Interactive Analysis of Biblical Imagery

In the following illustrative examples, Ramban displays his literary acuity to decode interactively the dynamic relationship between the image and its subject in a biblical metaphor.

Ramban scrutinizes two metaphors in Jacob's blessing to Judah (Gen. 49:12), which evoke the images of the eyes and teeth as part of his blessing of prosperity to his son.

Here, Ramban seemingly applies a comparative formula similar to that of Radak's expression, and he uses the term *mashal* to signify the

¹² While Cohen, *ibid.*, 330–331 n. 17, observes that Ramban “did not focus much of his interpretive energy on biblical metaphor,” I will illustrate Ramban's attentive and creative study of a number of examples of biblical imagery in his commentary, demonstrating an innovative outlook and developing unique readings in relation to his predecessors' analyses. See also Sivan Nir and Meira Polliack, “‘Many Beautiful Meanings Can Be Drawn from Such a Comparison’: On the Medieval Interaction View of Biblical Metaphor,” in *Exegesis and Poetry in Medieval Karaite and Rabbanite Texts*, eds. Joachim Yeshaya and Elisabeth Hollender (Brill, 2017), 40–79, who illustrate how the tenth-century Karaite, Yefet ben Eli, applies the interaction method to his study of biblical imagery. In this study, I intend to further this avenue of research by examining Ramban's variegated approach to biblical metaphor and simile.

¹³ Where available, biblical commentaries cited in this study have been accessed from the online *Mikra'ot Gedolot Ha-Keter*, head ed. Menachem Cohen, Bar-Ilan University (<https://www.mgketer.org>). Translations of biblical verses and commentaries are my own.

subject of the metaphor. Yet, his technical presentation modifies the application of Radak's interactive formula, and significantly, on this text, Radak adopts a different mode of analysis. Through his interpretation, Ramban, therefore, presents his innovative perspective on the roles of these metaphors within their contexts.

For the first metaphor, "*bakhlili enayim mi-yayin*," Ramban uniquely interprets the literal image as painted eye makeup, rendering *bakhlili enayim* to read, by inversion of the letters, *kehol enayim*.¹⁴ He then delineates the associated commonplace between the specific quality of this image and its subject, the abundance of wine in Judah's territory, through the following comparative statement:

[The text] states, that [Judah] will have his eyes "colored" from the wine. For *just as* (*ka'asher*) the others paint them [their eyes] (*kohalim otam*) with eye makeup (*ba-pukh she-hu al-kebul*), *so too* (*ken*), [Judah] will color his eyes with wine (*yikhehol otam hu ba-yayin*). . . . And the subject (*veha-mashal*) is about the abundance of wine . . . in his land.

In this metaphor, wine becomes like eye makeup, so that its image sharply conveys the intended subject (labeled as *veha-mashal*) of Judah's prosperity with large quantities of wine. Ramban explains that wine will be so plentiful, it will be *as if* Judah has tinted his eyes with wine.¹⁵ In this manner, Ramban focuses on the specific image of the eyes as compared to other parts of the body to convey the effects of the wine's abundance,

¹⁴ Ramban disagrees with Rashi, Bekhor Shor, Ibn Ezra, and Radak, Gen. 49:12, that the term, *bakhlili*, refers to redness, in line with its only linguistic parallel, *bakhlilit enayim* (Prov. 23:29). Ramban interprets this term as eye makeup by inverting the letters, *kehol enayim*, as in Ezek. 23:40. Ramban resolves the doubling of the *lamed* by noting this is common in Hebrew roots. He also supports his understanding of this term through cognate terms in both rabbinic literature, which refers to an eye-shadow brush as *mikh'hol* (see *Kelim* 13:2; *Makkot* 7a), and in Arabic, where eye shadow is *al kebul*.

¹⁵ It would seem, by implication, that the eyes would acquire the hue of redness, which is how, as noted in the previous note, Ramban's predecessors understand this description. Nevertheless, Ramban singularly insists that the phrase, *bakhlili enayim*, does not merely refer to the eyes becoming red from wine, but it suggests a more elaborate and dynamic metaphoric image that conjures the action of coloring one's eyes with eye shadow, the makeup then serving as the specific means to convey the topic of prosperity evidenced by plentiful wine. Ramban does not, therefore, presume that the wine is being drunk to excess to cause literal redness of the eyes, but it is a figurative image to convey the subject of abundance within Judah's territory, due to their plentiful grape vines, mentioned in the previous verse.

in contrast to the presumption by some commentators that the eyes are a synecdoche for the whole face and appearance.¹⁶

Referencing the only other biblical parallel, *bakhlilut enayim* (Prov. 23:29), which he also reads by inversion, in the context of reproaching the behavior of a drunkard, Ramban adds another quality to this choice of “painted makeup” as an image representing the subject of copious wine. As he explains, it imparts the visibility of drunkenness in the eyes of those who overindulge in wine, just as eye shadow makeup is visible on one’s face. In this manner, Ramban clarifies how the image is deliberately chosen to communicate the subject that is fitting for the context in Proverbs.¹⁷

Consistent with the first metaphor, Ramban interprets the second metaphor, “*u-leven shinnayim me-halav*,” interactively, through reading *u-leven* as a causative verb and relating it analogously to the subject of Judah’s abundant prosperity, in the following comparative statement:

And *just as* (*kemo*) the others whiten (*melabenin*) their teeth with polishing ointments, *so too* (*ken*), [Judah] will whiten them [his teeth] with milk (*yelaben otam be-halav*). And the subject (*veha-mashal*) is about the abundance of . . . the milk in his land.

Aligning his readings of the two metaphors through parallel repetitive phrasing, Ramban associates the images of “coloring” one’s eyes with “wine” with “polishing” one’s teeth with “milk,” relating it to the implied subject of plentiful sources of milk in Judah’s fertile territory. Through this reading, Ramban accentuates how each image is integral for understanding the particular message of the metaphor.

Examining Ramban’s analysis more intently, it becomes evident that he modifies Radak’s comparative *kemo* . . . *ken* formula. Radak consistently introduces the metaphor’s image with the marker, *kemo*, and its subject with *ken*. Ramban uses the comparable markers, *ka’asher* and *kemo*, to introduce the image generally, but he then applies the *ken* . . . phrase

¹⁶ For this latter reading, see Bekhor Shor and Radak, Gen. 49:12.

¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that Ramban, Gen. 49:12, also posits a literal reading of Prov. 23:29, which he ultimately prefers, suggesting that excessive wine causes the eyes to become darkened and teary, necessitating the *literal* use of eye makeup to cover up the effects of the drunken stupor or to be used as a salve for healing. Perhaps Ramban inclines to this literal reading because it is consistent with the progressive physical descriptions of the damaging effects of inebriation on the body. Yet, in the context of Judah’s blessing in Gen. 49, Ramban prefers the metaphoric reading, conceivably because this is consistent with other metaphoric images describing the prosperity in Judah’s territory, as evident in the images of v. 11 (even though Radak reads these latter images as hyperbole, and not as metaphoric analogies).

in both metaphors to the image of Judah's eyes, as if, painted with wine, and Judah's teeth, as if, whitened with milk. While this relates to Judah (and his tribal inheritance) as the subject of the metaphor, it is nevertheless a continuation of the image. With this adjusted formulation, Ramban hones the force of the image, integrating it even more so in relation to its subject. Only with the literary marker, *veha-mashal*, does he proceed to focus on the aligned idea of the metaphor, the plentifulness of wine and milk in Judah's land.

Interestingly, in this context, Radak does not apply his interactive formula, but he maintains that the force of these images should be rendered as "*derekh haflaga*," simply as hyperbole.¹⁸ Grammatically, Radak presumes that the term, *bakhlili*, in relation to its parallel form in Prov. 23:29, is the adjective *red*, and *u-leven* is the adjective *white*. He thus interprets that the context of Judah's blessing depicts vividly the idea of this tribe's prosperity only by visualizing with exaggerated mental images how its inhabitants will literally have red eyes or a ruddy appearance¹⁹ and white teeth from the abundant drinking of wine and milk—as he specifies, "*merov shetot ha-yayin, merov shetot halav*." But, in his view, this depiction does not evoke a metaphor, which requires a comparative analogy between an image and its subject. In his ensuing lengthy discussion of this verse, Radak does consider whether these images should be understood as a metaphoric comparison, as he notes, *derekh mashal*, to the subject of the Messiah's distinctive qualities.²⁰ But, his first reading presumes this text is not a metaphor.

One might speculate that Ramban reinterprets this context because the idea of excessive wine consumption, possibly to the point of being

¹⁸ See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 137 n. 1, 278–279, who stipulates that the term *mashal* should be differentiated from the literary strategy of hyperbole. Radak maintains that this reading is consistent with the hyperbolic mental images conjured in the previous verse, with reference to the phrase, "his robe is awash in the blood of grapes."

¹⁹ As noted, Radak suggests that eyes can be understood as a synecdoche for the entire face, while Ramban disagrees and maintains that the reference to eyes is deliberate because it is an essential part of the metaphor. While Saadya Gaon, cited by Ibn Ezra, and Bekhor Shor, in one reading on this verse, explain the *mem* of *mi-yayin* (and *me-halav*) as a comparison, redder than wine, Radak reads it as a cause-effect—their eyes will be red because of the abundance of wine they will drink.

²⁰ In this reading, Radak interprets metaphorically how wine's lush, red appearance and the whiteness of teeth represent the most beautiful of appearances such that this alludes to the Messiah's superior and pure spiritual qualities. Radak also notes how the fragrance of wine represents the best of smells, alluding to the Messiah's ability to perceptively sense the people's stance, thus enabling him to justly judge them effortlessly, as noted in Isa. 11:2–4.

drunk, has negative implications, which seems at odds with the blessing that Jacob is bestowing on his son. Once Ramban interprets the image of wine through his unique presumption of metaphor, he applies it consistently to the image of milk as well.

Ramban's interactive approach to biblical metaphor is also evident in his employment of the literary term, *melitza*, in the following demonstrative examples, which is particularly enlightening in view of its usage by Radak to label the literal, image component, as distinct from the term, *mashal*, which Radak applies to the underlying idea of this figurative expression.²¹ Indeed, when Radak employs these terms, there is a general consistency to separate them distinctively, as, for example, when he stipulates his exegetical plan to analyze figuratively Isa. 28:24–28: “And we will first explain the *melitza*, and afterward, we will explain the *mashal*.”²²

When Ramban arrives in the Land of Israel towards the end of his life, he realizes the need to correct earlier analyses which had been based on his erroneous presumption that the matriarch Rachel was buried in Ramah, in the land of Benjamin. Seeing with his own eyes that Rachel's Tomb is further south on the roadside outside of Bethlehem, Ramban revises his interpretation of Jer. 31:14: “Thus says God: A voice is heard *in Ramah*. Wailing, bitter weeping. Rachel is crying over her children, refusing to be comforted about her children, for they are not.” Instead of interpreting that her voice emanates from her burial place in Ramah, he now deduces, “Therefore I say, that the text which states, ‘a voice is heard in Ramah,’ is *melitza ke-derekh mashal*, saying that Rachel was crying with a loud voice and bitter grieving, that her voice was heard as far as Ramah, which is [in the region of] her son, Benjamin, for ‘they are not’ there and it [Ramah] is desolate from them.”²³ Ramban supports this

²¹ On these definitions of *melitza* in relation to *mashal* in Radak's biblical commentary, see Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 147–160, 293. Cohen notes the precedent in Rashi's commentary regarding the usage of the term, *melitza*, as well as Andalusian influences, which apply this term more generally to eloquent, finessed language, particularly in poetry (and Radak does use this term as such in some of his commentaries; Cohen, 158 nn. 74–76). Thus, as Cohen, 158, infers, “In transplanting Rashi's usage into his vocabulary, Radak lends it an Andalusian coloration: the literal sense of a *mashal* passage is called ‘*melisab*’ because it has greater poetic elegance than a simple literal formulation.” See idem, “Radak vs. Ibn Ezra and Maimonides,” 38–39.

²² Compare, for example, Radak's formulation of his exegetical intent to analyze the two components, *melitza* and *mashal*, in his commentaries to Ezek. 16:4, 6, 16, 25, 41; Ezek. 23:3; Hab. 2:6, 3:8.

²³ Ramban, Gen. 35:16, on Jer. 31:14, in his addendum to his original commentary. On the changes Ramban makes to his commentaries of various biblical texts in light of this discovery, see Yosef Ofer and Jonathan Jacobs, *Nahmanides' Torah*

reading by noting that Jeremiah does not state that Rachel is crying over her children in Ramah, but that her voice is heard there.

Applying the term *melitza*, Ramban focuses on the image of Rachel's crying, loud voice. With the adjoining phrase, *ke-derekh mashal*, he directs one to interpret this scene metaphorically. The idea of the intensity of the tragedy of Israel's exile is portrayed by the image of Rachel's piercing, mournful, and bitter cries from her grave, near Bethlehem, that reach as if, as far as Ramah, the territory of her son, Benjamin, which is now desolate of its descendants.

As compared to Radak, here Ramban combines the two technical terms into one literary expression, *melitza ke-derekh mashal*, illustrating well his interactive view of biblical metaphor. Ramban articulates that a sound interpretation of biblical metaphor decodes the interactive, integrated relationship between the specific features of the image, *melitza*, and its intended subject, *mashal*.²⁴

In his commentary to Num. 11:11–12, Ramban also marks his intent to analyze the image in relation to the subject within the figurative expression by applying the literary term *melitza*. Moses laments to God that he can no longer bear the burden of leading his people, applying a visual comparison to the image of parenting. “Moses said to God: Why have You brought ill on Your servant and why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that You have placed the burden of this whole nation on me? *Have I conceived* this whole nation, *did I give birth to it*, that You tell me, ‘Carry them in your bosom *as a nursemaid carries a suckling infant*,’ to the land that You promised by oath to their forefathers?” Ramban acknowledges his predecessors who differentiate the roles of both parents in the images evoked by Moses, some assigning conception with the father's contribution in relation to the mother giving birth,²⁵ with others

Commentary Addenda: Written in the Land of Israel [Hebrew] (Herzog Academic College/World Union of Jewish Studies, 2013), 229–233, on Ramban, Gen. 35:16; 233–237, on Ramban's addenda to Gen. 35:18; and 287–292, on Ramban's addenda to Gen. 48:7.

²⁴ Admittedly, this is the only time Ramban uses this technical phrase; nevertheless, it is illustrative of his creative thinking about biblical imagery. Cf. Radak, Jer. 31:14, who, although he does not employ the term *melitza*, also reads this text figuratively, explaining, “[Jeremiah] stated by way of *mashal* . . . as though (*ke'illu*) she is crying by way of *mashal* over her children.” Notably, however, Radak broadens the symbolic meaning of the image by presuming that its topic is the oblivion of *all* of the ten tribes, Rachel being their representative matriarch from the head tribe of Ephraim. Radak thus interprets that Ramah does not refer to a specific locale but only a distant hilltop where her cries are, as if, heard from a distance.

²⁵ This is Onkelos' reading, as elaborated upon by Ramban, Num. 11:12.

claiming contrarily that the mother's role is assigned to conception while the father is associated with the begetting of the child.²⁶ Yet, Ramban resolves that the force of this image derives from applying it exclusively to the mother; as he stipulates, "And in my view, this is all the image (*melitza*) about the mother."²⁷ Ramban explains that Moses is asking God to relieve him from his caretaking responsibilities toward the Israelite nation by figuratively negating that he should be compared to the mother nursemaid. Elaborating on the image component of this metaphoric description, Ramban clarifies that this comparison is especially fitting, for the mother in particular conceives and gives birth and is thus so invested in her child that she also accepts upon herself the great effort needed to raise them. By denying that he is like this mother figure, Moses is graphically seeking to hone the message that he is not qualified to carry out his leadership role as God has expected of him.²⁸

In a further demonstration of his intent to interactively investigate the underlying metaphoric analogy, Ramban qualifies a textual statement as being "by way of *mashal*," and he applies the verb "that it compares – *she-yamshil*," in the course of his analysis.

Knowing that the literal meaning of the verb "to anoint – *m.sh.h.*" denotes pouring with oil, Ramban queries how to interpret this verb in Isa. 61:1: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, *since God has anointed me (mashah oti)*, to herald good tidings to the humble."²⁹ Radak infers

²⁶ This is Ibn Ezra's reading, and see Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, eds. Jo. H.R. Biesenthal and F. Lebrecht (Impensis G. Bethge, 1847), 83, s.v. *h.r.h.*, who cites this opinion, as well as that of Judah ibn Balaam, who reads like Onkelos. Ramban refers to this reading as originating from "the masters of the *peshat*," and he cites additional textual support for their reading as well.

²⁷ Ramban, Num. 11:12.

²⁸ Yet, Ramban acknowledges that Moses refers to himself with the masculine, *omen* (nurse), and not the feminine form, *omenet*. For another example in which Ramban classifies, with the term *melitza*, a verb usually reserved for animals applied to humans as a figure of speech that conjures an image, see his commentary to Deut. 12:21, on Num. 14:16. Ramban uses *melitza* infrequently in his biblical commentary, and sometimes he applies it to mean generally a figure of speech, as in his interpretations of Gen. 25:28, 37:20.

²⁹ Ramban, Exod. 29:29, analyzes Isa. 61:1, while deliberating whether the verb "anoint" should be understood literally or in an applied sense in the Exodus context, which refers to the "anointing" of Aaron's clothes when they are passed down to future sons who will be appointed High Priests. Disagreeing with Rashi, Exod. 29:9, who reads this verb generally to mean being appointed to authority and greatness, Ramban renders this verb literally, interpreting that after the priests don their sacred garments, they are then anointed with oil to ordain them for their holy functions. Similarly, Ramban, Exod. 29:29, renders this verb literally in I Kgs. 19:15, 16; Isa. 45:1. On these latter verses, Radak associates this verb connotatively as the appointment to

that since Jewish kings are appointed through anointing with oil, God's "anointing" of Isaiah refers connotatively to the prophet's leadership appointment, as no oil is actually used to bestow the divine spirit upon the prophet.³⁰ Here, Radak is more focused on the main idea imparted by this verb, on par with the substitution method; as he comments, "And the idea (*ta'am*) of *mashah*: God enhanced and raised up and appointed me to be the messenger with these comforts." Ramban agrees that the verb "anoint" in this context is a figure of speech. But, his analysis, which is marked by his use of technical phrases describing a metaphoric expression, reflects a concerted effort to develop a creative, interactive reading between the choice of a verb that conjures the image of oil with the idea of God bestowing His spirit on the prophet.

Citing the intertext from Ecc. 7:1, "A good name is better than good oil," Ramban explicates Isa. 61:1, "by way of metaphor (*mashal*), for [the text] compares (*she-yamshil*) the Holy Spirit that rests upon him [Isaiah] to good oil." The associated commonplace from the intertext, as implied by Ramban, is that a good name and oil share the feature that they are both bestowed upon a person. Thus, the metaphoric usage of "anoint," with the image of oil, implies the idea that the divine spirit, which is compared to a good name, rested upon Isaiah, especially like *good* oil is placed upon a person. But, the intertext suggests that the bestowal of the prophetic spirit is comparable to a good name that is better than good oil, for indeed Isaiah is charged with bringing comfort to his people.³¹

Ramban also exhibits his inclination to adopt an interactive view of biblical metaphor, applying the literary verb "to compare – *yamshil*" in his creative analysis of the star image and its analogous subject in Balaam's fourth prophecy (Num. 24:15–24). Balaam prophesies, "I shall see him, but not yet. I shall behold him, but it will not be soon. *A star shall tread from Jacob* and a rod shall rise from Israel, and he will smash through the peripheries of Moab and break down all the sons of Seth" (Num. 24:17). Presuming that the language of this prophecy refers to a far distant future (in relation to Balaam's declaration to Balak that he will reveal events of

leadership, and similarly, Rashi, Isa. 45:1. Therefore, Ramban must now explain how to render this verb in Isa. 61:1, as here, it cannot be understood literally.

³⁰ Radak, Isa. 61:1, and compare *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 202, s.v. *m.sh.h*. This is also Rashi's reading, Isa. 61:1, according to some manuscripts, and Ibn Ezra on this verse.

³¹ As noted by Menachem Mendel Pomerantz, *Perush ha-Ramban la-Torah* (Makhon Oz ve-Hadar, 2012), *Shemot*, 2:290 n. 84, in relation to Ramban, Exod. 31:2, the idea of "name" in Ecc. 7:1 can be applied to refer to a higher spirit of wisdom, as the "name" bestowed by God on Bezalel (Exod. 31:2–3), and this spirit is compared to good oil.

“the end of days” [v. 14]), Ramban identifies the “star” that will emerge from Jacob as the Messiah.³² Unique among his predecessors, Ramban notes how the star image filters the associated commonplace that sheds light on the subject by aligning the star’s characteristic movements in relation to the first messianic action that will herald this new period of history. Demonstrating the close similitude between the subject and image, Ramban applies corresponding language to both: “Since the Messiah will gather Israel’s dispersed from the ends of the earth, [Balaam] compares him (*yamshilennu*) to a star that treads in the firmament from the ends of the heavens. . . . And he said that he envisions a distant time when the star will tread from the ends of the heavens and the rod, a ruler [the Messiah], will arise from him [Jacob].”³³ Just as the star travels from one end of the heavens to the other, the Messiah’s first action will be to implement the ingathering of the exiles from the ends of the earth.

The interrelationship evoked between an image and its subject in simile is more apparently pronounced; yet Ramban is keenly aware that one must employ interactive exegesis in order to elicit how the image directs the way in which the subject should be understood.

A demonstrative example is Ramban’s creative analysis of the simile invoked by Jacob in his deathbed rebuke of Reuben (Gen. 49:3–4).³⁴ The patriarch laments that he cannot bless his firstborn because of Reuben’s deliberate defilement of Bilhah’s bed (noted in Gen. 35:22). Pinpointing the catalyst for his son’s deplorable actions, Jacob asserts that Reuben acted with *pahaz*, a noun denoting reckless and rash behavior.³⁵ This demeanor is correlated by Ramban with the consequences that as

³² Ramban reads Balaam’s prophecies as a progressive prediction of Israel’s history. Ramban, Num. 24:7, 14, insists that Balaam’s third prophecy should be assigned to monarchical times, while this last prophecy predicts a distant future period. Cf. Ramban, *Book of Redemption* [Hebrew], in Ch. D. Chavel, *Kitvei Rabbenu Mosheh ben Nahman* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1963), 1:265–266. Ramban disagrees with Ibn Ezra, Num. 24:17–19, that Balaam is prophesying about the more immediate future period of David’s monarchy and his conquest of Israel’s enemies.

³³ Ramban, Num. 24:17, cites Dan. 7:13, which describes that the Messiah will arrive “with the clouds of heaven,” as though traveling across the skies. Ramban continues to apply this star metaphor to the Messiah in his commentary to Num. 24:18, interpreting that Edom (identified as the current Roman exile) will not fall “until the time of the end in the hand of the star that will tread.”

³⁴ For the ensuing discussion and citations, see Ramban, Gen. 49:4, focusing on his *peshat* reading.

³⁵ Ramban renders *pahaz* like Rashi as a noun (contrary to Bekhor Shor, Gen. 49:4, who renders it as a verb), citing Judg. 9:4 and rabbinic references. He also posits that perhaps this term is the inversion of *hafaz*, meaning haste (which is Bekhor Shor’s reading, albeit in the verbal form).

opposed to gaining in his firstborn inheritance by preventing Jacob from having more children, Reuben will now forfeit his firstborn rights (as Jacob declares, *al totar*—that is, he will not have any benefit [*yitron*] but only loss).³⁶ To hone his censure, Jacob associates Reuben’s mindset with a visual image through simile: “Acting with impetuosity *like water – pahaz ka-mayim*.”

In order to decode the common feature that underlies the apparently incongruous analogy between the trait of impulsiveness and water, Ramban detects that Jacob is not referring to calm, flowing waters, but to mighty waters, “that are rising (*olim*) and flooding.” Ramban aligns the image with its idea by presuming, in his *peshat* reading, that the subject of the verb, “go up (*ala*),” in Jacob’s reproach is Reuben’s impulsiveness. Thus, Ramban renders “*ki alita mishkevei avikha, az billalta yetzu’i ala*” to mean that Reuben’s unthinking hastiness (*pahaz*) rose up over (*ala*) Jacob’s couch, resulting in the defilement of his father’s bed.³⁷

In order to illuminate the appropriate interaction between the qualities of the water image and its subject, Ramban introduces a parallel intertext from Isaiah. The prophet evokes two images of water in metaphoric mode: the gentle, flowing waters of the Shiloah (8:6) are associated with the Davidic monarchy, whom the people have rejected in the time of Ahaz, in favor of the rule of Aram and the Israelite monarchy, and the mighty, massive waters of the Euphrates (8:7–8) are compared to the enemy Assyria that will overpower and almost destroy the kingdom of Judah.³⁸ In the latter context, the verb “rise up (*ala*)” appears as part of the metaphor: “Now therefore, behold, God raises up against them the mighty, massive waters of the Euphrates, the king of Assyria and all his multitude. It shall rise up (*ve-ala*) over all its channels and overflow all its banks and it will sweep through Judah.” Ramban applies this metaphoric description to support how the image of water is adjoined to the expression “rising up” as a means of buttressing his reading that it is Reuben’s

³⁶ Ramban’s juxtaposition of the incident in Gen. 35:22 with Jacob’s rebuke here about Reuben’s motivations and mindset (focusing on what Reuben “intended”) is an addendum to his original commentary to Gen. 49:4; cf. Ofer and Jacobs, *Nahmanides’ Torah Commentary Addenda*, 294–295. Regarding Reuben’s intent, see as well Ramban’s original commentary to Gen. 35:22, which aligns with his analysis here.

³⁷ See the explanations of Ramban’s reading by Ofer and Jacobs, *ibid.*, 294.

³⁸ See Radak’s interactive explanations of these metaphoric water images, marking them with the verb, *himshil*, in his commentaries to Isa. 8:6–8. Note that Radak interprets that the Davidic monarchy is compared to calm waters because of its weakness in the face of the enemy at the time.

impulsiveness, compared to water, that “rose up” over his father’s bed.³⁹ Further, the action of “rising up” with waters appears particularly with destructive, flooding waters, not placid, flowing waters. Accordingly, Ramban hones his perception that Jacob has in mind a distinctive quality of water in order to concretely convey his perspective on the topic of Reuben’s rash mindset, which was evident when he ascended Jacob’s bed.

Yet, with this intertextual juxtaposition, Ramban indirectly associates Reuben quite jarringly in the minds of his readers with the later violent Assyrian enemy. Should one infer that Ramban is also suggesting that Reuben’s spontaneous actions have made him, as if, the enemy of Jacob’s lineage and dynasty, for his reckless actions have upended the hierarchy of Jacob’s dynasty by losing his firstborn privileges?

Ramban’s interactive reading is sharpened against the backdrop of his predecessors’ readings. Radak interprets, “You had recklessness and haste just as (*kemo*) water spilled on the ground (*mayim ha-niggarim*), so too (*ken*) you hurried to act upon your impulse and your inclination dominated over you.” While Radak also associates the water image with the subject of Reuben’s impetuosity, using the formula of the interaction view, just as . . . so too (*kemo . . . ken*), he obliquely references the intertext from II Sam. 14:14, which depicts the image of water that is spilled and cannot be gathered up.⁴⁰ Radak is apparently aligning the spilled water image with Reuben’s lack of restraint, in which he did not prevent his desires from pouring out uncontrollably, with no means to rein them in subsequently.⁴¹ Ramban, however, opts to associate Reuben’s impulsiveness with the intertext from Isa. 8:7–8. Identifying the simile’s image as surging waters, Ramban, in my opinion, presents his readers with a sharper visual picture that elicits the intensity and severe, destructive ramifications that resulted from Reuben’s impulsive motivations.⁴²

³⁹ As Ramban, Gen. 49:4, indicates in relation to his citation from Isa. 8:7–8 juxtaposed to Jacob’s rebuke: “Your impulsiveness, which is like rising and flooding waters, rose up over my couch, and this is like the language of the text about water (*kilshon ha-katuv be-mayim*).”

⁴⁰ Cf. Radak regarding the simile with water in that context, which “has been spilled on the ground that cannot be collected after it is poured at the place that it was spilled.”

⁴¹ Additionally, Radak, Gen. 49:3–4, is not reading the subject of the verb, *ala*, as Reuben’s impulsiveness. Cf. Bekhor Shor, Gen. 49:4, who associates the spilled water image explicitly with the idea of forfeiting his preeminence, which he can never regain.

⁴² Here, the influence of Rashi, Gen. 49:4, on Ramban’s reading may be detected. Even though Rashi assigns a different subject to the verb *ala* based on his midrashic reading, he interprets the relationship between the image and its subject in the simile in a parallel fashion: “The impulsiveness and rush with which you hurried to show

Ascertaining Cultural Context to Decode Interaction in Biblical Imagery

A unique example of Ramban's attunement to the innovative underpinnings of a biblical metaphor is his analysis of Jacob's deathbed blessing of Naftali, who is identified figuratively with the *ayyala* animal. In an unprecedented interpretation, Ramban's interactive reading is predicated on his decoding of the cultural context that prompts Jacob to fittingly associate his son with this particular animal image. In this example, therefore, Ramban demonstrates that not only is metaphor a linguistic device, but its experiential backdrop is the key to determining its meaningfulness and relevance to the audience that is addressed.

As interpretations, and hence, translations, of Jacob's blessing to Naftali vary, I will first cite it in Hebrew transliteration: "*Naftali, ayyala sheluha ha-noten imrei shafer*" (Gen. 49:21).⁴³ Acknowledging that this sentence is metaphoric with the stipulation that Naftali is described in the "image (*demut*)" of an *ayyala sheluha*, Ibn Ezra nevertheless adopts a substitution view, which does not assign a particular deliberateness to this choice of animal in relation to Naftali. Thus, he analyzes generally that Naftali (or his land)⁴⁴ is compared to the hind that is sent (*sheluha*) as a gift, whose recipient responds with good words (*imrei shafer*).⁴⁵ In contrast, Rashi and Bekhor Shor read interactively, isolating the feature of the hind's speed, which is then associated metaphorically with the land of Naftali's quick ripening of its fruit; notably, these commentators display their interactive, close readings of this metaphor by presenting the subject in alignment with this animal image with the linking *kaf*—"like

your anger [are] like those waters that rush headlong on their course." Through intertextual associations, Ramban sharpens this reading and broadens the impact of the image choice to convey its message. For another example of Ramban's interactive analysis of simile, see his commentary to Num. 22:3, on v. 4.

⁴³ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (Norton, 2004), 288, translates, "Naphtali, a hind let loose who brings forth lovely fawns," applying the Aramaic, *imeir*, meaning, lamb, for his translation of the latter phrase. As will be discussed, medieval Jewish commentators read differently.

⁴⁴ Ibn Ezra's succinct language leaves open the possibility that the comparison to the hind is meant to relate directly to Naftali or to his land. Cf. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)* (Menorah Pub., 1988), 440 n. 142, citing the respective readings of Asher Weiser and Yonah Filwarg.

⁴⁵ As Strickman and Silver, *ibid.*, n.143, point out, the masculine verb, *ha-noten*, cannot refer to the feminine *ayyala* animal but to the recipient of this gift who acknowledges with good words.

this hind that is swift to run.”⁴⁶ This prosperity results in Naftali’s praise of his land⁴⁷ and the dissemination of good news about the land by those who visit and witness its extraordinary fertility.⁴⁸ Additionally, Bekhor Shor posits that the comparison to the *ayyala* refers to the members of Naftali’s tribe who would speedily spread the good news (*ha-noten imrei shafer*) of an Israelite military victory. In a parallel interpretation, Rashi and Radak focus on the choice of this *ayyala* image to allude to the Israelites’ salvation from the Canaanite enemies, Sisera and Yavin, because of Deborah’s swiftness, together with Barak, who hails from the tribe of Naftali, culminating in the recitation of good words, the song of praise that proceeded from their victory (Judg. 4–5). Indeed, Radak observes that the feminine *ayyala* is cited, not the male, *ayal*, since, as prophetess, Deborah plays the key role in this battle.⁴⁹

Ramban’s commentary stands out in its detailed analysis of the image choice that forms the basis for deciphering the subject of this metaphor in the way that his interactive reading draws exceptionally from real life scenarios. Ramban examines the cultural context of the “norm of rulers of lands (*minhag be-moshelei eretz*),” which he indicates is a practice that is well known. Ramban’s creativity in decoding the associated commonplace between the image and its topic is in his search to retrieve the cultural sources that are the basis for the effective relevance of this metaphor. Here, Ramban resorts to extra-biblical texts, which describe this common custom among rulers. But these sources do not reference Jacob’s blessing to Naftali. This correlation is Ramban’s novel reading.

Elaborating on the image of the metaphor, Ramban, presumably influenced by his predecessors, also highlights the quality of the hind’s swiftness. Distinctively, however, he integrally connects this feature to the linking phrase, *ha-noten imrei shafer*, presuming that this phrase is

⁴⁶ Rashi, based in part on Gen. Rabba 99:12, references specifically the valley of Ginnosar of Naftali’s land where the fruit would ripen quickly; cf. *Berakhot* 44a, *Megilla* 6a. Rashi also hones this reading by interpreting *sheluha* to mean that Naftali is compared to a hind that is “let loose” to run, without any hindrances.

⁴⁷ This is Rashi’s reading of *ha-noten imrei shafer*.

⁴⁸ This is Bekhor Shor’s reading of the aforementioned phrase in the previous note.

⁴⁹ Therefore, Radak stipulates that the metaphor expresses “she was sent” (*sheluha*), to indicate “as if she were sent to speed up the action.” Radak, however, also relates this verb to Barak, as noted in the song of praise (Judg. 5:15), as does Rashi. Cf. Ibn Ezra who also cites that the hind is an allusive reference (*remez*) to Deborah, while the one giving words of praise is a hint to Barak from Naftali (hence, the masculine, *ha-noten*) who joins in her song. On this, compare Gen. Rabba 98:17, in the name of R. Yehuda Bar Simon.

still part of the depicted image. Accordingly, he will provide the key to the intended subject by correlating Jacob's blessing to Naftali with that of Moses' blessing to this tribe in his farewell address.⁵⁰

As Ramban explains, in the scenario embedded in the animal image, rulers customarily send the *ayyala* animals from one land to another. Hinds born in the north are raised in palaces of the south.⁵¹ When a letter with good news is tied to their horns, they run swiftly back to their original habitat in the north; thus, *ayyala sheluha* refers to the hind being sent to fulfill its mission to reveal the tidings from the south. As Ramban explains, "And this is the meaning of *imrei shafer*, that is: a hind sent, which bears good tidings." Factually supporting the veracity of this practice, Ramban cites from *Talmud Yerushalmi* that describes the parallel scenario of such animals that were sent to Africa, and after thirteen years, when they were released, they swiftly returned to their original habitat.⁵²

The subject to which the image is aligned is marked by Ramban with the literary term, *ha-mashal*, and is elucidated by his oblique reference to Moses' later blessing of fertility to Naftali: "And to Naftali, he said, Naftali is satiated with favor and filled with the blessing of God" (Deut. 33:23). Thus, Ramban surmises that Naftali's abundant produce is a source of good news for all of the tribes who benefit from it. As he explains, "And the *mashal* [that is, the subject] is that Naftali is satiated with favor and filled with all goodness, and from him will emerge good tidings for all of Israel, for his land produces fruits to satiety."⁵³ Accordingly, Ramban correlates the latter part of Jacob's metaphoric blessing of Naftali, the spreading of good news, from the situation set up by the animal image, to the corresponding subject of the

⁵⁰ Cf. Ramban, Deut. 33:6, 18, where he notes explicitly that there is a direct correlation between the tribal blessings of Jacob and of Moses. See as well Ramban, Gen. 49:19, in an addendum to his original commentary (Ofar and Jacobs, *Nahmanides' Torah Commentary Addenda*, 301–302), in which he correlates Jacob's blessing to Gad with Moses' blessing that employs the lion image in Deut. 33:20.

⁵¹ While the references to northern and southern kings have an allusive echo from Dan. 11, which describes a future conflict between these kings, the animal hind image is not invoked in that context.

⁵² Ramban is citing from *Yerushalmi Shevi'it* 9:2, and the above analysis is based on how he understands the context there.

⁵³ However, in his commentary to Deut. 33:23, Ramban presumes that Naftali is being blessed by Moses that he is replete with the favor of God and His blessing, thereby connecting both phrases, being satiated with favor and filled with all good, to God. In that context, he disagrees with Rashi who applies the first phrase to the land being sated with all good fruit to fill the will of the inhabitants.

metaphor.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Ramban does not interpret the topic of the metaphor to refer to the quick ripening of the fruit in Naftali's land (as analyzed by his predecessors), but he relates it to the abundance of fruit to satiety.⁵⁵

One may question whether Ramban's interactive reading is wholly successful. When one tries to recreate a direct parallel between the two comparative components of the metaphor as interpreted by Ramban, they do not wholly align. Many of the details of the elaborate image scenario—where the animals are raised, their return to their original habitat, their swiftness—are not reflected in the aligning subject, as understood by Ramban. In order to elicit the analogical relationship in this metaphor, Ramban subordinates these details to what he views as their primary shared feature, or associated commonplace, the dispatch of good news, which he supports by aligning Jacob's animal *ayyala* image with Moses' *mashal* message of Naftali's prosperity.

Interestingly, as well, in this example Ramban avoids narrowing Jacob's blessing to later biblical figures, as he does with the serpent images in Dan's blessing that are aligned to the persona of Samson, as will be discussed.⁵⁶ Perhaps because he perceives that the main idea of the metaphor is the deliverance of good news about the land's fertility, he interprets the blessing in relation to the entire tribe. Then again, one might surmise that since more than one tribe was involved in the war against Sisera and Yavin, Ramban does not deem it appropriate to reduce the subject of the metaphor on Naftali to that one event.

Ramban's interpretation of the metaphor for Naftali's blessing brings to the fore an important facet in the process of decoding biblical imagery. Katheryn Pfisterer Darr has called attention to the challenge of assigning proper associated commonplaces to the components of a biblical metaphor because this requires detailed knowledge of the biblical milieu, which serves as the key to ascertaining the relevance of the metaphor to its contemporary Israelite audience. As she observes, "Knowledge of culturally-defined associated commonplaces is essential for construing

⁵⁴ On this point in Ramban's analysis, see Yehudah Meir Devir, *Perush ha-Ramban al ha-Torah im Be'ur Beit ha-Yayin* (Makhon Megillat Sefer, 2000), 1:580–581 nn. 1, 3, where he also contrasts Ramban's reading with that of Rashi, who applies the reference to good news only to the subject of the metaphor, in which Naftali praises God for his good fortune.

⁵⁵ For this insight, see Devir, *ibid.*, 1:581 n. 1. While Ramban cites the rabbinic tradition about the high quality of the fruits of Ginnosar in Naftali's domain, he is not focused necessarily on their quick ripening.

⁵⁶ Ramban, Gen. 49:17.

figurative language . . . biblical scholars cannot ask ancient Israelites to explain their figurative uses of language. We have only texts, biblical and extra-biblical, to assist us.”⁵⁷ Yet, in order to decode biblical imagery, the task demands “recovering, as best as we can, ancient Israel’s complex webs of socially-and culturally-conditioned associations with a particular trope’s terms.”⁵⁸

Correspondingly, in their important work on figurative language, *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson developed the theory of conceptual metaphor, which presumes that metaphor can be fully understood only against the backdrop of the experiences of everyday life and in relation to a certain cultural context.⁵⁹ As they argue, these realities form the “experiential basis” for the conceptual framework that establishes the metaphoric relationship between the image and subject, which they prefer to demarcate in terms of conceptual domains, marked as the “source domain” in relation to the “target domain.”⁶⁰ Metaphors are home-grown, and as one scholar explains this approach, “Metaphors belong to a certain cultural context and metaphors are understood only if their readers or hearers share the same context.”⁶¹

While Ramban’s analysis of the metaphor used by Jacob in Naftali’s blessing is unique within his biblical commentary, to my mind, it displays incisively the analytical thought processes of this medieval exegete in grappling with deciphering the imagery of a biblical metaphor. In this

⁵⁷ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision and the Family of God* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 41.

⁵⁸ Darr, *ibid.*, 42. I became aware of Darr’s insightful study of biblical metaphor through the work of Weiss, *Figurative Language*, 25, 95.

⁵⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980). As they stipulate, 19, “In actuality we feel that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis.”

⁶⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *ibid.*, 230, “We understand experience metaphorically when we use a gestalt from one domain of experience to structure experience in another domain.” Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77:8 (1980), 461–462, and their full discussion, *ibid.*, 453–486.

⁶¹ Antje Labahn, “Heart as a Conceptual Metaphor in Chronicles. Metaphors as Representations of Concepts of Reality: Conceptual Metaphors—A New Paradigm in Metaphor Research” in *Conceptual Metaphors in Poetic Texts: Proceedings of the Metaphor Research Group of the European Association of Biblical Studies in Lincoln 2009*, ed. Antje Labahn and Pierre Van Hecke (Gorgias Press, 2013), 6; see also 7–12. Lakoff and Johnson have been critiqued for adopting a cognitive approach to metaphor that focuses on the mental processes that occur in decoding a metaphor, and not focusing on metaphor as a linguistic means of expression; see Weiss, *Figurative Language*, 16–20. Nevertheless, their perspective, in my view, has significance to the study of biblical metaphor.

example, Ramban understands that he needs to examine the cultural context, beyond the immediate textual context, in order to determine the profound, complex nuances of the metaphor's expressiveness and rhetorical effect.

Multiple Imagery

Ramban's investigation of the literary roles of biblical imagery is also exemplified when he considers contexts in which two separate images are presented from the same source domain to convey a cohesive, general idea.

In the illustrative example of Jacob's blessing to Dan, Ramban applies an interactive approach, eliciting how each separate, related image contributes to the subject of the metaphor. "Dan will be a serpent (*nahash*) on the road (*alei derekh*), a viper (*shefifon*) on the path (*alei orah*), that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backwards" (Gen. 49:17). Radak and Ibn Ezra mark this context as metaphor with the verb, "compared – *dimma*," inferring there is an analogy between the subject—which, for Radak, is the warrior-*shofet* Samson of the Dan tribe, but for Ibn Ezra, is that entire tribe—and the snake image. Ibn Ezra qualifies that Dan is like a snake because of "his strength," but as Mordechai Cohen has noted, this reflects his substitution view of metaphor, as he ascribes the same quality of strength to other animal images (such as the wolf in Jacob's blessing of Benjamin [Gen. 49:27], and the lion in Moses' blessing of Gad [Deut. 33:20]), thus collapsing the diverse images to one general shared idea. About the double snake images, *nahash* and *shefifon*, Ibn Ezra surmises, "And the meaning is doubled."⁶² Adapting from midrashic readings for his *peshat* analysis, Radak interprets this metaphor interactively, specifying that the snake image distinctively depicts multiple qualities—its unaccompanied way of moving (as contrasted to animals that travel in packs) and its lethal nature. Radak then applies this to the subject Samson, with the linking marker, "and so too – *ve-khen*," noting how these qualities exemplify his uniqueness as a warrior—his solitary mode of attack and his destruction of many from

⁶² Ibn Ezra, Gen. 49:17, on Dan, in comparison to his substitution metaphoric reading on Benjamin, Gen. 49:27, and with relation to Gad, Deut. 33:20. See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 249–251, 296, 312–313.

Israel's enemy, the Philistines.⁶³ Nevertheless, Radak does not discriminate between the two serpent images.⁶⁴

Ramban also identifies the snake image as metaphoric, stipulating, "And [Jacob] compared (*dimma*) Samson to a snake," and he prefers to apply an interactive analysis like that of Radak, in relation to the specific subject of Samson, linking this subject to its image with the comparative marker, "like – *kemo*."⁶⁵ However, Ramban goes further than Radak in his creative analysis of this metaphor, particularly in his discrimination between the double serpent images. Like Radak, Ramban delineates the snake's solitary behavior; yet, with the text's focus on the geographic orientation, "on the road," he sharpens the image by noting how the snake emerges from its lair alone against wayfarers.⁶⁶ He then aligns this expanded image with the topic, noting Samson's unique unaccompanied mode of attack, which stands out in contrast to the other *shofetim*

⁶³ Radak, Gen. 49:17–18. On these exceptional qualities of Samson and that Jacob's blessing is prophetically referencing this *shofet*, cf. Gen. Rabba 98:13, 99:11, and *Tanhuma, Vayehi*, 12. Cohen, *ibid.*, 250 n. 78, 296, notes Radak's adaptation of midrashic sources for his *mashal* interactive readings.

⁶⁴ However, as noted by Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 306–316, there are numerous times that Radak (who is influenced by his father, Joseph Kimhi) adopts a more interactive approach in presuming conceptual significance to double, parallel images in a metaphoric context, in contrast to Ibn Ezra's more reductionist readings. In this regard, Cohen, 312–313, observes how Radak differentiates between the animal images representing the different tribes. As will be discussed, Radak, however, apparently presumes there is only one snake being referenced in Jacob's blessing to Dan, not two different species, which is the basis for Ramban's more distinctive analysis.

⁶⁵ For the ensuing analysis and citations, see Ramban, Gen. 49:16–17. While Ramban, Deut. 8:18, seems to integrate the diverse animal images associated with the tribes to one general quality of strength, paralleling that of Ibn Ezra, by stating, "It is known that the Israelites are warriors and valiant men for war because they are compared to lions and the preying wolf and they have been victorious over the Canaanite kings in war," the following example, along with the previous example on Naftali's blessing, and, as will be discussed, Moses' blessing of Joseph in Deut. 33, demonstrate his interaction method in distinguishing the different animal images in relation to each tribe's blessing. Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 331 n. 17, notes briefly that Ramban is influenced by Radak's reading of the metaphor on Dan and Samson. My discussion will demonstrate not only Ramban's reliance on Radak but his own innovative, elaborate reading of metaphor in this context beyond that of his predecessor.

⁶⁶ Ramban uses another term for a snake, *tzif'oni*, in his explanation of this first aspect of the image, noted only in Isa. 11:8, 49:5. Rashi, Gen. 49:17, observes this is how Onkelos renders the meaning of *nahash* in this verse, with Onkelos elaborating that this snake's bite is incurable. Onkelos renders *shefifon* as a *peten* snake, which, interestingly, is mentioned in the parallel phrase in Isa. 11:8. Cf. Rashi, Isa. 11:8, who suggests that an old snake is called a *peten*.

leaders and the kings. Comparing the doubled parallel phrasing describing the metaphoric image, Ramban prefers not to read this alignment as wholly synonymous parallelism, but he distinguishes a second, small species of snake, *shefifon*, mentioned in the *Yerushalmi* as being thin as a hair, whose quality is its being invisible to those who are walking “on the path.”⁶⁷ This added aspect of the image reflects on Samson’s additional quality of his stealthy manner of attack against the enemy.⁶⁸

While Radak associates the *single* snake image (presuming that *nahash* and *shefifon* are the same) with more than one quality that applies to the subject of Samson, Ramban focuses first on the double aspects of Samson’s means of attack, in relation to the double imagery of two snakes on the road. Accordingly, Ramban separates out the idea of Samson’s massive killing of the enemy by assigning this aspect interactively to the rest of the metaphoric image of the snake described by Jacob—“that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider falls backwards”—which he notes should be read as an “allusion – *remez*.”⁶⁹

Here, Ramban is influenced by Rashi, who also notes, with the verb, *dimma*, how Samson is compared to a snake. Yet, Rashi, aside from not distinguishing between two snake images, also does not assign a separate quality to the snake image in relation to Samson’s *modus operandi*. Noting the linking phrase, “that (*ha-*) bites the horse’s heels,” Rashi only focuses on the aspect of the image of the snake’s biting action, in which the snake kills the horse’s rider without directly touching him. This relates to how Samson kills the Philistines indirectly by toppling the pillars of the house of Dagon, in which they were assembled, also causing the thousands gathered on the roof to be killed (Judg. 16:27, 29–30). Ramban sharpens this reading and clarifies that in response to the snake’s bite, the horse lifts up its head and forelegs, throwing off its

⁶⁷ Ramban cites *Yerushalmi Terumot* 8:3. Ramban clearly differentiates between the two types of snakes, separating his discussion of the second one from the first with the qualifier “or.”

⁶⁸ Ramban does not clearly stipulate the subject of this image of the second small species of snake, that, as he notes, “is not recognizable to those walking on the path.” Nevertheless, it is logical that he is referring to the idea of Samson attacking his enemy with stealth and suddenness. On this insight, see Devir, *Beit ha-Yayin*, 1:578 nn. 3–4, on Gen. 49:17. Cf. Seforno, Gen. 49:17, who, apparently influenced by Ramban’s analysis, distinguishes the first serpent (*nahash*) as the venomous *tzif’oni* that can kill many at once singlehandedly, parallel to Samson who killed numerous people on his own in one act, and the second serpent being the *shefifon*, the slim, invisible snake, parallel to Samson “who, when he fought alone, was unseen by the army of those whom he killed.”

⁶⁹ On this insight regarding Ramban’s creative reading see Devir, *ibid.*, 1:578 n. 5.

rider. Similarly, when Samson toppled the pillars of the building in which the Philistines were assembled, the thousands of Philistines on the roof were killed as well.⁷⁰ Integrating his predecessors' readings with his own innovative contribution, Ramban engages to actively decode the extensive, multi-layered images of Jacob's blessing to Dan that relates to the subject of Samson's extraordinary heroism against the Philistine enemy.

Ramban expands on the significance of the snake image in relation to the subject of Samson in yet another direction. Seeking to decipher why Jacob unusually calls out to God at the conclusion of this blessing, declaring, "For Your salvation, I yearn, God" (Gen. 49:18), Ramban interprets that Jacob offers up a prayer when he sees prophetically that Samson will be the last of the *shofetim* leaders, the only one killed by the enemy. As Ramban paraphrases, "For Your salvation, *God*, I yearn, *not for the salvation of the nahash and shefifon* [that is, Samson], for through You, I will be saved, not through a *shofet*, for Your salvation is an eternal salvation." Here, Ramban understands that Jacob is praying that salvation be in God's hands, not in the hands of human leaders.⁷¹

In a related manner, Ramban's interaction method is evident when he analyzes biblical texts that present a series of parallel images, which build on each other to create a complex metaphoric expression comprising multiple, interrelated messages.

In his commentary to Moses' farewell song, *Ha'azinu* (Deut. 32), Ramban develops a sequential metaphoric reading of vv. 32–33, which depict three successive plant-related images: the vine, the grapes, and their product, wine. These images are correlated to the topic of the nations of the world, who are described as a "nation devoid of counsel, and they have no perception among them" (Deut. 32:28).⁷² As Moses declares, "For from the vine of Sodom is their vine and from the vineyards of

⁷⁰ In relation to this aspect of the image, Ramban interprets Gen. 49:16 (influenced by Onkelos and Rashi on this verse) to mean that Jacob blesses that a descendant of Dan, Samson, will avenge his nation from the Philistines—*Dan yadin ammo*—saving all of the tribes of Israel as one—*ke-ahad shivtei Yisrael*.

⁷¹ In this context, Ramban explicitly notes, "Samson, that he is this snake." Cf. Rashi, Gen. 49:18, who relates this declaration to Samson's future prayer to God to strengthen him that he may have one last vengeance against the Philistine enemy (Judg. 16:28). Interestingly, Ibn Ezra cites an opinion that when Jacob saw prophetically Dan represented in the form of a snake, "Jacob was immediately afraid and he said, 'Save me, God!'"

⁷² Ramban, Deut. 32:28, follows the opinion of R. Nehemia in *Sifri Devarim* 322, that the "nation devoid of counsel and perception" refers to the nations of the world and not Israel; this logically follows the description of the enemy of Israel in the previous verse.

Gomorrah. Their grapes are the grapes of poison, their clusters are bitter. The venom of vipers is their wine and the cruel poison of asps. Indeed, it is all stored with Me, sealed among My storehouses. To be My vengeance and compensation, at the time when their foot will stumble, for close is their day of calamity” (Deut. 32:32–35). Explaining the metaphoric imagery, Ramban decodes that the nations of the world have no understanding, but “they think only evil persistently [lit. all day], for they are from evil roots and do not produce except bad and bitter fruit; anyone who consumes it will die.”⁷³ Analyzing the idea associated with the progressive succession of the vine and fruit images, Ramban elaborates that the nations of the world lack proper counsel because they “have inherited from their ancestors” the ways of idolatry and perpetual denial of God’s existence. This “root sprouting poison weed and wormwood” results in there being “no expectation from them ever.”⁷⁴ To complete this metaphoric mini-narrative, Ramban explains how God remembers their evil deeds, represented pictorially as wine that is like the poison of snakes, storing them in His treasures (vv. 33–34), “in order to feed them from the fruit of their deeds,” for He will eventually avenge Israel’s enemies and pay them back for having denied His existence.⁷⁵

Exceptionally, Ramban offers an additional unique reading in which he capitalizes on the forcefulness of this complex metaphoric expression and extends it by implication to apply contrastively to Israel.⁷⁶ In doing so, Ramban demonstrates how the song of *Ha’azinu* justifies why Israel will eventually be redeemed from its punishment of exile.⁷⁷ As Ramban

⁷³ Ramban, Deut. 32:32.

⁷⁴ The description of the bitter root is an oblique citation from Deut. 29:17. Ironically, that context describes an Israelite who professes allegiance to other gods. There, as well, Ramban associates the metaphoric image of the poisonous root with its main idea of betraying God through idolatry, using the qualifier, “to hint – *lirmoz*.” Merging the metaphoric image with its idea, Ramban explains that if there is an Israelite ancestor who was not wholly loyal to the one God, even in thought only, he will most likely beget idolatrous descendants. Linking the metaphoric image with its subject, Ramban notes, “For the father is the root, and the son is the sprout that blossoms from the root.”

⁷⁵ Ramban, Deut. 32:34–35. Ramban supplies the subject of the verb, “It is stored with me” (v. 34), as the nations’ evil deeds that are as poisonous wine, linking this text to the previous verse. Ramban elaborates that they will receive their just desserts when their sins have reached their limit (parallel to Gen. 15:16). Admittedly, here Ramban does not distinguish between the double images of the serpents noted in v. 33. Nevertheless, his interactive reading of the mini-narrative embodied in the plant metaphor is noteworthy.

⁷⁶ Ramban, Deut. 32:32.

⁷⁷ Cf. Ramban, Deut. 32:40–41, in which he emphatically insists that this song presents an unconditional promise that Israel will eventually be redeemed, “against

explains through the plant images, as opposed to the nations that forever betray God with their idolatrous ways, Israel has “good roots; if it is cut down, it will yet renew itself and it will produce good fruit.” Elaborating on the topic embodied in the successive images, Ramban explains, “The idea is that Israel will acknowledge [God] and confess and repent in their time of suffering.” While it may stray and be punished, Israel, having good roots reaching back to righteous forefathers, will eventually produce good fruit, demonstrating its loyalty to God, which will merit its redemption.⁷⁸

Similarly, in his analysis of the lion images in Balaam’s second prophecy in Num. 23, Ramban shows how in two associated similes, one image builds on the other to create a complex figurative expression. Prophesying to Balak that Israel will eventually rise up and conquer its enemies, Balaam declares, “Behold, a people like a *lavi* will rise, and like an *ari* will raise itself up. It will not lie down until it has consumed its prey and the blood of the slain it shall drink” (Num. 23:24). Ramban’s predecessor, Bekhor Shor, decodes a single idea for the double imagery: “That is to say: You [Balak] thought to lower them [Israel]. This is not so, but they will raise themselves up and dominate as a *lavi* and as an *aryeh*.”⁷⁹ In contrast, Ramban detects a sequential parallelism by distinguishing between the two lion images, which are cited in a particular order, in relation to their subject. As Ramban explains, Israel is depicted first as a young lion cub (*lavi*) that will rise up, “and afterward” it will raise itself up to dominance as a grown lion (*ari*).⁸⁰ This reflects the progressive fierceness of Israel as a warrior nation, whose battles will culminate with the consumption of its prey and destruction of the Canaanite kings.

Yet, Ramban does not differentiate between the lion images of *lavi* and *ari* when Balaam declares in his next prophecy about Israel’s

[the views of] the heretics.” Uniquely, Ramban classifies this song as a “document of testimony,” in a legal sense, noting, “This song is a clear guarantee of the future redemption.”

⁷⁸ On this point, that Israel will show it is worthy of redemption by demonstrating its loyalty to God as “His servants” (Deut. 32:36) in its suffering in exile, see as well Ramban, Deut. 32:26–27.

⁷⁹ Bekhor Shor, Num. 23:24, who discusses the verse’s second verb, “raise itself up” first and then provides his own synonym, “dominate,” thus showing how, in his view, the similes are merged into one main idea. Cf. Ibn Ezra, Num. 23:24, for a similar general reading without distinguishing between the two lion images.

⁸⁰ Ramban, Num. 23:24. Ramban, however, does not provide textual support for his presumption that the *lavi* is the younger lion cub as compared to the *ari*. Radak, Judg. 14:5, claims that the order of age development among lions in Hebrew lexicography is: *gur*, *kefir*, *aryeh*, *lavi*, *layish*.

dominance over its enemies: “It crouches, lies down, like an *ari* and like a *lavi*. Who can rouse him?” (Num. 24:9). In contrast to Ibn Ezra, who focuses solely on the main idea of these similes, Israel’s conquest of the Land of Canaan, without addressing the lion images, Ramban is attentive to the lion figures but only in a collective sense. “And [Balaam] stated that they [Israel] will dwell in it [the Land] securely; they will not fear any nation, as an *ari* and as a *lavi* that does not fear even ferocious beasts.”⁸¹ Perhaps, knowing that he distinguished between these lion images in Balaam’s earlier prophecy, Ramban presumes his readers will apply these distinctions to this later text as well. On the other hand, it is possible he adopts this general reading of the double imagery because the synonymous verbs, “crouch, lie down,” are applied to both lion figures simultaneously, with the contrary order of the older lion (*ari*) being mentioned before the younger *lavi* cub. Apparently, Ramban determines that the contiguity of both combined similes is intended to signify Israel’s living fearlessly like the fiercest of animals. In the previous context, Ramban may have seen a justification to separate the lion similes and develop a narrative progression since each lion image was attributed a different action—the *lavi* rising up and the *ari* raising itself up—even though, admittedly, the actions are closely aligned, and they are presented in the correct developmental order with *lavi* preceding *ari*.⁸²

Ramban also demonstrates his discriminating eye in determining the contributions of multiple images regarding a similar subject in his analysis of the similes in the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15).⁸³ Ramban detects the conceptual link between the parallel similes depicting God’s decisive blow against the Egyptian enemy—the Egyptian army’s drowning “like stone” (v. 5) and “like lead” (v. 10), with the common verbal root describing sinking into the depths, *tz.l.l.* Rashi’s midrashic reading infers that the three simile images in the song portraying the Egyptians’ destruction, adding in the image of straw (v. 7), impart different ideas, each relating to a form of death—from the least severe (immediate, sinking like lead) to the most extreme (delayed, floating like straw).⁸⁴ Ramban

⁸¹ Ramban, Num. 24:7, on v. 9.

⁸² Cf. *Tur ha-Katzar*, Num. 24:9, who, following Ramban’s readings, notes the reversal between *lavi* and *ari*, with the insight that Israel was like an adult lion in the days of Moses and like a lion cub in the days of Joshua.

⁸³ For this example, see my study, “Form and Rhetoric in Biblical Song: Nahmanides’ Commentary on the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1–18),” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 18 (2020–2021), 147–148, 160–161.

⁸⁴ Rashi, Exod. 15:5, based on *Mekhilta Shirata*, *parasha* 5.

focuses on the doubled simile images of the stone and lead,⁸⁵ deducing that these two visuals together coalesce to convey the one idea of the totality of the Egyptian defeat; while logically, some of the army should have been saved by swimming or riding on their horses or grabbing on to their shields, God made sure that no one survived. As Ramban observes, “And he [Moses] noted this twice in the song, ‘like stone, like lead,’ for this also came to them from the hand of God . . . here not one of them escaped.”⁸⁶ Presumably, here, Ramban maintains that separating the different images and focusing on their individual contributions loses sight of the main force of the topic of God’s providential powers. By integrating these images, Ramban also amalgamates the different stanzas in which each parallel simile appears, demonstrating the song’s cohesive message that is reiterated as the song progresses, and that is the lesson of God’s intervention to bring about the enemy’s total defeat.

Dead Metaphors

In light of Ramban’s presumption that some images are not meant to have a singular contributory role within their literary context, I would like to focus on the specialized classification of “dead metaphor” and whether Ramban perceives this literary phenomenon in biblical texts. This is a metaphor that has lost its active analogous component, and the force of this expression no longer depends on its original image. For example, regarding the expressions “*body* of an essay” and “*hands* of a clock,” we do not conjure the images of the human anatomy in order to make sense of the meaning of these metaphoric figures of speech. As this metaphor has become stock, conventional usage, there is no need perform the interactive analysis that is required of a “live” metaphor. Therefore, the substitution method becomes a predominant exegetical tool, substituting the idea itself for its literal sense, without embarking on a comparative analysis between the image and its subject.⁸⁷ As Mordechai

⁸⁵ Ramban does not address the image of the straw in his analysis. Perhaps he views this simile separately, in relation to God’s fury in v. 7. Furthermore, the two similes using the lead and stone images are linked by focusing on the Egyptians drowning in the depths of the sea.

⁸⁶ Ramban, Exod. 15:10.

⁸⁷ See Cohen’s definition of dead metaphor, in light of modern scholarship, *Three Approaches*, 24–25. Cf. Weiss, *Figurative Language*, 183–193, on the debate how to view dead metaphors, as poetic and narrative texts often refresh seemingly stock, overused dead metaphors such that the original image acquires significance to the metaphoric expression.

Cohen has astutely observed, Radak applies the term *hash'ala* to refer to dead metaphor in the Bible.⁸⁸

In the following example, Ramban marks a text as being *derekh hash'ala*, the only such time he uses this phrase in his biblical commentary. Interestingly, it is in the context of a legal text about the sacrifice of the fat (*helev*) of peace offerings (Lev. 3:9) that he digresses to comment on other passages, pondering their figurative possibilities.⁸⁹

Differentiating between two kinds of animal fat—*helev*, fat in its own membrane, which is separate from meat, and *shuman*, fat that is mixed with the meat⁹⁰—Ramban acknowledges that in certain contexts, the term *helev* cannot be understood literally. Noting that it is referenced in relation to the gifts from produce offered by the Levites to the priests—as God commands, “When you have raised up *helbo* from it.” (Num. 18:30)—Ramban concludes that this is “stated by way of *hash'ala*.” Ramban elaborates, “For the good [portion] that is raised up from the wheat (to give to the priests) is described metaphorically (*yekhaneh oto*) as fat – *helev*, just as the *helev* is raised up (set apart for consecration) with [animal] offerings.” Ramban recognizes that his technical, literal definition of *helev* does not apply here, since grain—not animal fat, and a specific kind of animal fat—is being described. Hence, he renders this term figuratively with a generalized, broad meaning referring to choice produce.

Here, Ramban adopts Radak's terminology to label this text as a dead metaphor.⁹¹ Yet, while Ramban admits that the specific image of “fat” conjured by the term, *helev*, cannot be adapted to the topic of this context, he still attempts to establish a conceptual analogy between an aspect of this image with the Levites' donations of wheat. Ramban accomplishes this by noting reiteratively, with the linking term “just as” (*ka'asher*), that both are “raised up,” that is, set aside to be consecrated, either by being burned on the altar or given to the priests. What is implied is that

⁸⁸ Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 160–173; idem, “Radak vs. Ibn Ezra and Maimonides,” 39–40.

⁸⁹ For the following discussion of Num. 18:30, Deut. 32:14, see Ramban, Lev. 3:9.

⁹⁰ Cf. Ramban, Lev. 1:8, for the definition of *helev*. In relation to his discussion, Ramban, Lev. 3:9, observes how Israel's traitorous behavior is depicted with the idea of fatness: “So Jeshurun grew fat (*va-yishman*)” (Deut. 32:15). While Ramban does not specify, it seems he reads literally that Israel “grew fat” from its indulgent prosperity. Nevertheless, he elicits its linguistic appropriateness for this poetic context, intimating that Israel's opulence is depicted with a verb (*shamen*) that fittingly describes their collective demeanor.

⁹¹ Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 161 n. 90, notes that Ramban is relying on Radak's terminology in respect to dead metaphor in this commentary on Lev. 3:9.

this comparison lends itself to applying the term, “fat – *helev*,” expansively to refer to the best of something.

Comparatively, Ramban notes the additional example of Deut. 32:14, in which the Land of Israel’s prosperity is described in terms of its wheat with the visual image, “the kidney fat of wheat (*helev kilyot hitta*).” Ramban comments, “[Moses] is comparing the wheat to kidneys (*kelayot*) and to the fat that is within them.” Ramban does not expound on the comparison that justifies why the kidneys and their fat are being associated with wheat, and he understands the term *helev* more generally. In light of his analysis of Num. 18:30, however, one may presume that Ramban is interpreting that the best grains are being associated metaphorically with the kidneys that have fat on them.⁹²

Additionally, Ramban associates the above description with Moses’ depiction of Israel’s fertility with the metaphoric expression, “the blood of grapes” (Deut. 32:14), commenting briefly, “For wine is not blood.”⁹³ This observation, however, indicates that there are two anomalous entities being compared, which is the essential basis for defining a metaphoric expression. While Ramban does not explicate, one could continue his line of thinking and perhaps conclude that he is making the implied analogy between the choicest of wines that are made from deep-colored grapes, akin to the coloring of blood.⁹⁴

That Ramban includes this latter example, which, in my view, embodies a more active metaphoric comparison between wine and blood, in the midst of his discussion of the expansive implications of the image of *helev*, seems to point to this exegete’s deliberations about the expressive facets of these metaphoric contexts. While Ramban has applied the terminology that echoes Radak’s categorization of dead metaphor, it appears to me that Ramban is not wholly convinced these visual images no longer have an integral connection with their associated subject.

Comparatively, when Radak considers some of these parallel texts, he clearly marks them as dead metaphor. In his *Book of Roots*, Radak

⁹² Ramban. Lev. 3:9, also infers that when Pharaoh tells Joseph his family “shall eat of the fat (*helev*) of the land” (Gen. 45:18), this is stated “by way of *mashal*,” that is, figuratively. But, here, the image of animal fat is invoked, albeit more generically, to convey Pharaoh’s intent that they enjoy the best of the land; as Ramban explains, “that they should eat all of the fat of the oxen and sheep and goats and all the animals.” Cf. Rashi, Gen. 45:18, who observes generally, “All [uses of the term] *helev* is the language of the best of something.”

⁹³ Ramban, Lev. 3:9, stipulates, “He compares the wheat to the kidneys and the fat that is within them, just as he [Moses] states, ‘And of the blood of grapes you shall drink fermented wine’ (Deut. 32:14).”

⁹⁴ For this comparative analysis, see *Da’at Zekenim*, Deut. 32:14.

stipulates on the phrase, “the kidney fat of wheat” (Deut. 32:14), “And by way of *hash’ala*, just like the fat is the choice portion of the meat, they called the best of everything, ‘fat – *helev*.”⁹⁵ In contrast to Ramban, Radak observes here that this idiom has become the norm of spoken language, and hence, it has lost its active comparative features. Similarly, Radak indicates that the kidney image is also “by way of *hash’ala* . . . for seeds of wheat are similar to kidneys.”⁹⁶ Yet, interestingly, with regard to the metaphoric analogy of wine to blood, Radak indicates more interactively with a comparative reading, “Because of the abundant redness of the wine, he compared it to blood.”⁹⁷

In the following illustrative examples, it becomes more apparent that Ramban does not engage in the interaction method but simply substitutes a literal paraphrase for the image. One might surmise that in these examples, Ramban has presumably detected a dead metaphor.

In response to the Israelites’ adamant request for sustenance, God declares in Num. 11:20 that He will provide them a month’s supply of meat in the wilderness, “*until it will come out of your nostrils* and it will be repulsive to you.” Ramban, who is apparently applying Onkelos’ translation, replaces the italicized phrase with the paraphrase, “until they will become disgusted by it,” without explaining the specific relevance of the nose image. In contrast, after Rashi cites the main idea as rendered by Onkelos, he interprets interactively, “It will seem to you *as if* you have eaten more than enough until [the food] will exit and be ejected loathsome to the outside by way of the nose.” Ramban, nevertheless, adopts a substitution method and foregoes a creative reading of the nose image in relation to its meaning. As such, one could classify that Ramban has opted to view this figure of speech as a dead metaphor.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 104, s.v. *helev*, noted by Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 161 n. 90, 170–171. Radak also cites the parallel examples of Num. 18:12 and Gen. 45:18.

⁹⁶ Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 164, s.v. *k.l.y.* Cohen, *ibid.*, 170–171, notes the influence of Ibn Ezra, Deut. 32:14, on Radak’s reading, with Radak introducing the term, *hash’ala*, to qualify it as dead metaphor.

⁹⁷ Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 72, s.v. *dam*, who does not mark this phrase as a *hash’ala*. Cf. Bekhor Shor, Deut. 32:14, who notes that red wine is better than white wine, and therefore the analogy is made that the wine should be as red as blood. Contrast Ibn Ezra, Deut. 32:14, who merely remarks, “And the blood of grapes—the wine,” without addressing the image here.

⁹⁸ Cf. Ramban, Exod. 15:9, on v. 8, where he also adopts a substitution method for the image of God’s “nostrils,” in contrast to Rashi, Exod. 15:8, who applies an interactive reading. Perhaps here, Ramban precludes the poetic role of this image because it involves anthropomorphism. See, however, Ramban, Num. 23:21, on v. 22, where he does develop a measured creative reading of an anthropomorphic metaphor.

Similarly, in defining the noun, *rehem*, as the female's womb, Ramban asserts that its application to the sea in Job 38:8—"Who sealed the sea with doors, when it surged forth and emerged from the womb"—is a metaphoric expression, using the technical term, *kinnuy*.⁹⁹ Yet, while acknowledging the mode of personification in this verse, he does not expand on the creative potential of the juxtaposition between the human form in relation to the inanimate sea. Comparatively, in his *Book of Roots*, Radak qualifies this term as a dead metaphor, *derekh hash'ala*.¹⁰⁰

Is It a Metaphor? Ascertaining Literal vs. Figurative Expressions

I would like to explore another angle of Ramban's literary focus on biblical texts in relation to his analysis of imagery. After careful consideration, sometimes Ramban is prompted to read words and phrases literally within their context, contrary to his predecessors who assign them figurative, metaphoric connotations.¹⁰¹

A case in point is Ramban's reading of Jacob's deathbed rebuke to Simeon and Levi for their rampage against Shekhem: "For in their anger, they murdered men, and by their will, they maimed oxen" (49:6). In *The Book of Roots*, Radak cites an opinion that ascribes the ox, on account of its size, as a "metaphoric expression (*kinnuy*) for a ruler, just as the biblical text ascribes figuratively the great princes to rams and he-goats"

⁹⁹ Ramban, Gen. 20:17–18, comments on Job 38:8, in the course of disagreeing with Rashi, Gen. 20:17–18, that this term can refer to any opening in the body. Cf. Ramban, Job 38:8. On the usage of *kinnuy* as a metaphoric expression, loaned from Arabic, see Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 69 n. 149.

¹⁰⁰ Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 351, s.v. *rehem*. Ramban, Gen. 20:17–18, also cites the additional example of dead metaphor, "the belly (*beten*) of the earth," although his biblical reference is unclear. *Mikra'ot Gedolot Ha-Keter* suggests Jonah 2:3, "from the belly of Sheol." However, perhaps this applies to Job 38:29, "From whose belly emerges the ice?" Cf. Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 39, s.v. *beten* on I Kgs. 7:20, where he labels this term as a dead metaphor, simply stating that this refers to the middle; on this example, see Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 164 n. 101, and idem, "Radak vs. Ibn Ezra and Maimonides," 40. For other examples of dead metaphor, see Ramban, Deut. 1:4, on Gen. 14:5, Isa. 5:1, in which high, rocky hills are likened to animal horns; on Job 39:28, where these hills are compared to teeth (on this verse, cf. Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 396, s.v. *shen*); and on Exod. 29:12, where protrusions of an altar are described as horns (cf. Radak, *ibid.*, 336, s.v. *keren*).

¹⁰¹ In addition to the examples discussed in this section, see also Ramban, Exod. 3:8, for his literal reading of the description of Canaan as "a land flowing with milk and honey," in contrast to Radak, Amos 9:13, s.v. *ve-hittifu*, who reads this expression "by way of *mashal*." Cf. Ramban, Exod. 20:15–16, on the literal meaning of the visual descriptions of Mt. Sinai trembling at the giving of the Torah, Exod. 19:18, and comparatively Ps. 114:4, and in relation to the imagery of the splitting of the sea, Ps. 114:3, noting briefly on these verses, "And this is not a metaphor."

(cf. Isa. 14:9, Exod. 15:15). He cites the additional parallel of the figurative comparison of Joseph to an ox in Moses' blessing, "The firstborn of his ox, majesty is his" (Deut. 33:17), a fitting animal image because of Joseph's "greatness."¹⁰² In his biblical commentary, Radak associates this opinion of the ox image figuratively with the prince of the land, Hamor, whose son, Shekhem, rapes Dina (Gen. 34:2).¹⁰³

While Ramban makes note of this opinion in the name of "others,"¹⁰⁴ and he agrees that Moses is comparing Joseph metaphorically to an ox,¹⁰⁵ here, in Gen. 49, Ramban determines, "But it is correct in my eyes that the text is [to be interpreted] literally (*ke-mashma'o*)."¹⁰⁶ Relying on the immediate context, Ramban maintains that Jacob describes progressively the alarming extent of Simeon and Levi's actions—first wreaking destruction on the city's innocent populace with rage and then continuing in their willful rampage against the animals, maiming them,¹⁰⁷ even after their vengeful anger had abated. Ramban posits, however, that the "ox" is a synecdoche, alluding to the wholesale destruction and plundering of "their cattle and possessions, all that was in their households and all that was in the field," noted in Gen. 34:28.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 378, s.v. *shor*, citing the opinion of R. Jacob b. Elazar. This opinion is also cited in Radak's biblical commentary, Gen. 49:6, in the Paris 193 ms, as noted at alhatorah.org, n. 5, on Radak's commentary to this verse.

¹⁰³ Radak, Gen. 49:6.

¹⁰⁴ Ramban, Gen. 49:5–7, specifies, according to this view, the appropriateness of this ox image to allude (*remez*) to great rulers, particularly in this context, to Hamor and his son, Shekhem (Gen. 34:2), because "it is the largest among the animals." Ramban adds on Amos 4:1, where the wives of the elite are compared to the cows of Bashan, and he notes generally that "Scripture ascribes the great princes as rams and male goats"; cf. Ps. 22:13, Ezek. 39:18.

¹⁰⁵ Ramban, Deut. 33:17.

¹⁰⁶ Ramban, Gen. 49:5–7. While Ramban discusses Onkelos' re-vocalized reading of *shor* as *shur*, a walled city, he favors the meaning of *shor* in its usual sense as an ox.

¹⁰⁷ Ramban cites Josh. 11:6 to support his reading of the verb, *akkar*, to mean maiming of animals. Cf. Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *shor*, and Gen. 49:6, who also cites the view of rendering the "ox" literally in this context. Apparently aware, however, that this narrative does not mention maiming of animals, Radak surmises that while some of the animals were taken, others were maimed since they could not take all the livestock in their hurried fleeing.

¹⁰⁸ Ramban assigns the two phrases of the latter part of v. 6 to two stages in the vengeful actions of Simeon and Levi: "their rage" refers to their act of slaughter, and "their will" refers to the later phase, when they calmed down, and yet now plundered the city of its livestock and possessions. Ramban associates both actions by adding in that they killed "all" men, and then they maimed and destroyed "all" of the "oxen," representing all the animals and possessions.

Clarifying his reading of the ox figure literally and not figuratively, Ramban deduces that its literal meaning has greater expressive force and correlates well with articulating the extent of Jacob's desire to distance himself from all of his sons' crimes. As Ramban explains, Jacob defensively insists he had no part in nor did he consent to their violent, deceptive plan to slaughter the entire city of Shekhem. Furthermore, Jacob speaks out that even with regard to their plundering of Shekhem's animals and possessions, he never endorsed nor was he complicit in their conspiratorial acts. As Ramban paraphrases Jacob's emphatic declaration, "In their counsel, my soul did not enter, and in their company, I did not participate" (Gen. 49:6): "That he was not part of their conspiratorial counsel when they answered deceptively (Gen. 34:13), and he did not join in their company when they came upon the city and killed them . . . his soul did not join in any of their conspiratorial counsels, [not] even to maim their livestock or [take] their possessions nor to plunder their spoils."¹⁰⁹

An unusual example that exemplifies Ramban's concerted effort to ascertain whether words should be read literally or figuratively is his varied approach to Jacob's blessing of Joseph: "*Ben porat Yosef, ben porat alei ayin, banot tza'ada alei shur*" (Gen. 49:22). Ramban cites the grammarians, mentioned in Radak's *Book of Roots*, who render Joseph being described figuratively as a "son," which is understood in an applied sense as a sapling that has many branches (*porat*). Thus, Ramban clarifies the metaphor's image, "as if it stated, 'a sapling with many branches is

¹⁰⁹ While Jacob speaks in the future tense in v. 6, Ramban interprets this to refer to the past event of Gen. 34. Ramban qualifies the tone of Jacob's stance against Simeon and Levi's actions as "an excuse," whereby Jacob adopts an innocent posture on his deathbed from any involvement in the Shekhem debacle. However, Ramban, Gen. 34:13, maintains that Jacob was aware of the brothers' deceptive plan against Shekhem and that they had acted "by the permission of their father." Nevertheless, he explains there that Jacob did not anticipate Simeon and Levi would kill the whole populace, who, in his eyes, were innocent of any wrongdoing, but only to take out Dina on the third day after their circumcision or, at most, to kill the perpetrator, Shekhem himself. As such, on his deathbed, he categorically denies any involvement with the cunning plan and its subsequent unanticipated implementation. On this aspect of Ramban's analysis, see Devir, *Beit ha-Yayin*, 1:565 nn. 10–11, on Gen. 49:5–7.

Joseph.”¹¹⁰ As will be discussed, the subject of the metaphor is the two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim, that emerge from Joseph.¹¹¹

Ramban, however, prefers to discriminate between the literal and figurative terms in this context. Ramban insists that *ben*, son, should be rendered literally, “as it sounds (*ke-mashma’o*),”¹¹² and the metaphor only begins with Joseph being described figuratively as *porat*, many branches. Reading the doubled phrases in Joseph’s blessing as synonymous parallelism, Ramban decodes how the image interrelates with its subject, paraphrasing: “Joseph who is a son, that he is like (*kemo*) the branches of a tree that is planted by a spring whose waters do not fail.” Thus, fertility is the common feature that generates the analogy between the image and subject, for, as Ramban further observes, Joseph, unique among Jacob’s sons, has two tribes emerge from him.

Ramban, therefore, posits that *ben porat* is not to be read as one phrase, but paralleling other tribal blessings, the subject is separated from the image; similarly, “Naftali is a hind” (Gen. 49:21) and “Benjamin is a wolf” (Gen. 49:27).¹¹³ Noting, however, that the blessing should then have stated, “Joseph is a branch,” and not “Son is a branch,” Ramban surmises that Jacob chooses this epithet “by way of endearment.”¹¹⁴ While Ramban does not expound further, his insight into Jacob’s expansion on

¹¹⁰ For this reading, cf. Radak, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, 43, s.v. *banah*, in the names of R. Yonah Ibn Janah and R. Yehuda Hayyuj. As Radak clarifies, according to this reading, “that is to say, even though he is a ‘sapling’ (*ben*), he has many branches.” These grammarians support their reading of *ben* as a sapling with Ps. 80:16, and *porat* to mean branches with Ezek. 31:5. In his commentary to Gen. 49:22, Radak renders “son” figuratively as a branch (*se’if*), as though it is the “progeny of the tree (*toledot ha-ilan*),” but he renders *porat* separately to indicate that this branch is fruitful, the latter meaning also referenced in his discussion in *Sefer ha-Shorashim*. Similarly, Ibn Ezra, Gen. 49:22, citing as well Ps. 128:3, to support the reading of *porat* as fertility.

¹¹¹ This is how Radak interprets the subject of this metaphor in his commentary to Gen. 49:22, applying it as well to explain the doubling of the phrase, *ben porat Yosef*, in Jacob’s blessing.

¹¹² And this is also how Onkelos, Gen. 49:22, renders “son.” But, Onkelos translates *porat* to mean fruitful.

¹¹³ Ramban also cites Ezek. 31:3, where Assyria is referenced and then compared to the cedar of Lebanon.

¹¹⁴ Ramban correlates this observation to the way Jacob also endearingly refers to Judah as “my son” in Gen. 49:9. Ramban here also makes the grammatical observation that if “son” was meant to be read figuratively, attached to “branch (*porat*),” then *ben* should have been vocalized with a *segol*, and not a *tzere*. This is Radak’s critique of the grammarians’ reading in *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, s.v. *banah*. Therefore, while Radak reads *ben* and *porat* figuratively, he separates the two ideas, as I have noted previously.

the subject through this complimentary epithet sharpens the interactive interfacing between the metaphor's topic and its associated image.

In a novel reading, Ramban maintains, however, that since Joseph, the literal "son – *ben*," is compared to tree branches, once this metaphor is invoked, it adapts from the subject and is applied to the image, to continue its metaphoric description. Thus, Jacob elaborates figuratively, in Gen. 49:22, describing the extended branches as "daughters – *banot*," which the main branch sent forth (*tza'ada*) over the high wall (*alei shur*), images that are chosen specifically to allude that Joseph's progeny branches off into multiple tribes. However, that two tribes emerge from him is not specified, but only alluded to. As Ramban clarifies, the number of tribes is consistently enumerated as twelve (as stipulated at the blessings' conclusion, Gen. 49:28: "All these are the tribes of Israel, twelve"), and since Levi has been blessed by Jacob, Joseph is only counted generally as one tribe in this context.¹¹⁵

Regarding the tree metaphor in relation to Joseph, Ramban articulates an insightful literary observation: "And [Jacob] metaphorically described (*ve-khinna*) the branches which emerge from the bough (*po'ra*) as 'daughters,' for they are 'daughters (*banot*)' to the large boughs, and this is by way of eloquent expression (*derekh tzahut*) to *ben porat*." While Ramban adapts the poetic term, *tzahut*, from his predecessors, Ibn Ezra and Radak, his limited usage of this term in his biblical commentary is applied to his observations of the linguistic phenomenon of homonyms. Here, he is uniquely understanding the play on words of *ben*, *banot*, in the sense, that while they read the same phonetically, each term implies a different connotation—*ben* is understood literally, while *banot* is interpreted figuratively.¹¹⁶

Mixed Metaphor: Seeking Its Coherence

Continuing the discussion on the blessing to Joseph, I would like to illustrate Ramban's intuitive perception of the dynamic workings of a dis-

¹¹⁵ On the number of the tribes as maximally twelve, see also Ramban, Num. 17:17–18; Deut. 33:6.

¹¹⁶ For the other places that Ramban applies the phrase, *derekh tzahut*, regarding homonyms, see Ramban, Exod. 3:2, on the meaning of *ba'er* in that verse, correlating to Deut. 17:7 and Isa. 44:15, and the meaning of *ayarim* in Judg. 10:4; Ramban, Lev. 23:11, on Judg. 10:4, and also on Lev. 23:15, relating to Onkelos' understanding of Shabbat. Cf. Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 238–240, 238 n. 37, 277, who notes that *tzahut*, a cognate Hebrew term innovated by Sa'adia Gaon from the Arabic, refers to literary elegance and poetic embellishment. Here, Ramban applies this poetic conception as part of his interactive metaphoric reading of this context.

tinctive category of metaphor, mixed metaphor, whose validity as a metaphor has often been called into question, since it evokes two or more seemingly incompatible images about the same subject, which originate from different source domains. As Andrea Weiss points out, as early as the first century CE, the rhetorician Quintilian warned, “For it is all-important . . . never to mix your metaphors . . . they produce a hideously incongruous effect.”¹¹⁷ Yet, as she further observes, scholars have begun to appreciate the subtle ingenuity of combining diverse metaphors to describe the same topic, noting that while they may be contradictory, they can be aligned in a way that reveals their soundness. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, mixed metaphors can be quite effective in communicating their message if there is an “overlap of entailments” between them, shared features that point to an interfacing between them with the recognition of the contribution of each metaphor to the subject being described.¹¹⁸

In light of this premise, it is possible to highlight how Ramban elicits the appropriateness of the different types of metaphors employed to bless Joseph and his progeny, each within their relevant context, and in combination. In his comparative analysis of Jacob’s and Moses’ blessings to Joseph, Ramban observes how this tribe is likened figuratively to the disparate source domains—plants (Gen. 49) and animals (Deut. 33). The coherent message of these two metaphors is elicited by focusing on what they have in common in relation to the topic imparted by the diverse images.

In his commentary on Jacob’s blessing, Ramban, using the verbal marker, “compared – *dimma*,” juxtaposes the tree metaphor employed by Jacob to Moses’ metaphoric comparison of Joseph to the goring bull whose two horns are like that of the *re’em* animal (Deut. 33:17).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Andrea L. Weiss, “From ‘Mixed Metaphors’ to ‘Adjacent Analogies’: An Analysis of the Poetry of Hosea” in *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin*, ed. Maxine L. Grossman (University Press of Maryland, 2013), 110 and n. 3, citing from Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.6.16.

¹¹⁸ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 94–95. Cf. Weiss, *ibid.*, 109–127. Weiss, 113–114, also references Cornelia Müller, *Metaphors Dead and Alive, Sleeping and Waking: A Dynamic View* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 134–177, who observes that in producing mixed metaphors, one tends to highlight those aspects that the metaphors have in common while overlooking their inconsistencies. See also Andrea L. Weiss, “Motives Behind Biblical Mixed Metaphors,” in *Making a Difference: Essays on the Bible and Judaism in Honor of Tamara Cohn Eskenazi*, ed. David J.A. Clines, Kent Harold Richards, and Jacob L. Wright (Phoenix Press, 2012), 317–328.

¹¹⁹ Ramban, Gen. 49:22.

Focusing on the correlated idea of fecundity between the two metaphors, Ramban observes, however, that the animal image of the two horns in Moses' blessing more specifically connotes Joseph's two tribes; as Moses stipulates, "And they are the myriads of Ephraim and those are the thousands of Manasseh" (Deut. 33:17). Ramban elaborates that the right horn is Ephraim, the younger son accorded more privilege by Jacob (Gen. 48:14, 19), and the left horn is Manasseh.¹²⁰ Since Moses does not bless Simeon, he can specify the two tribes which emerge from Joseph, retaining the total number of tribes as twelve.¹²¹ Linking the tree and animal metaphors, Ramban shows how they consistently refer to the subject of Joseph and his tribal progeny, and yet, they build on each other with the animal image eliciting a specificity regarding the two tribes that was only suggested by the tree image.

Influenced by Ibn Ezra, Ramban clarifies further why the horned ox metaphor is particularly appropriate for Moses' blessing. "And the contextual meaning of the text (*peshuto shel mikra*) is that since [Moses] blessed Joseph with many crops, he compared him to an ox, for 'many crops come through the strength of the ox' (Prov. 14:4)."¹²² Aligning Jacob's and Moses' blessings of Joseph's land with abundant fertility, which have linguistic parallels between them (Deut. 33:13–16 in relation to Gen. 49:25–26),¹²³ Ramban observes that Moses uniquely references the crop produce (Deut. 33:14—*tevu'ot shamesh*). Since the ox that plows the field facilitates an abundant harvest, the metaphoric image of Joseph as an ox is appropriately invoked. Here, interestingly, the subject of fertility in Joseph's territory serves as the catalyst for the image that compares his two tribes to the horned ox figure.

¹²⁰ Ramban, *ibid.*, in relation to his commentary to Deut. 33:17. In the latter comment, Ramban cites Num. 10:36 to indicate that the numbers, "tens of thousands, thousands," in Moses' blessing, refer to the two tribes' fertility.

¹²¹ On this point, see Ramban, Gen. 49:22, and compare his commentary to Deut. 33:6, in which he clarifies that Moses deems it important to bless Ephraim and Manasseh separately, particularly since God has assigned them as two tribes in relation to the dedication of the altar (Num. 7), the banners by which they encamped (Num. 2), and the inheritance of the land (Num. 26, 34). Additionally, since Ramban associates the ox image to Joshua, who descends from the younger brother, Ephraim, it was necessary to mention the elder brother, Manasseh, as well. To maintain the total number of tribes as twelve, Moses omits Simeon, because his tribe was small in number and Jacob had not blessed him except to declare that he would be scattered among the tribes (Gen. 49:7); therefore, Simeon is blessed generally through the other tribal blessings.

¹²² Ramban, Deut. 33:17; cf. Ibn Ezra, Deut. 33:17, who does not, however, cite the supporting text from Prov. 14:4.

¹²³ See as well Ramban's observations, Deut. 33:13–14.

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But then, the ox image, together with its horns, serves to connote the additional idea of the power of Joseph's tribe. Therefore, Ramban explains that when Moses blesses, "The firstborn of his ox, majesty is his" (Deut. 33:17), he is figuratively aligning the strong image of the ox to the "house of Joseph," from whom, it is alluded, will emerge Joshua, who is described as the "firstborn" since he is the first from this tribe to acquire "preeminence and kingship." Together, with the "horns" of the two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim, the house of Joseph will succeed in defeating its enemies; as Moses states, applying the ox imagery, "And with them [that is, as Ramban interprets, with the horns], he will gore the peoples" (Deut. 33:17).

IN THIS STUDY, I have sought to demonstrate that in his *pesbat* readings of biblical metaphor and simile, Ramban, who has taken his predecessors' views into consideration, tends to prefer the interaction method, which he deems to be most effective in eliciting the versatile inventiveness of these figurative expressions. By presuming a dynamic correlation between the biblical text's form and meaning, Ramban assigns a creative role to the specific images in biblical metaphor and simile, resulting in a more complex and nuanced reading of the biblical text. Yet, Ramban's close reading of the Bible also persuades him to consider other interpretative approaches to elicit the finessed meaning of the text in its particular context. This literary approach is consistent with Ramban's multifaceted analytical approach in other aspects of his biblical commentary and reflects his incisive perceptions of the depth and multilayered facets of the biblical text.