

“Did ArtScroll Censor Rashi?” **Response to R. Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg**

By: MARC B. SHAPIRO

In *Hakirah* 26 (Spring 2019), Rabbi Yisrael Herczeg, who is known as an expert translator and expositor of Rashi, and from whose work I routinely benefit, takes issue with my view that ArtScroll engaged in censorship regarding Rashi’s commentary to Genesis 18:22. I wish to thank R. Herczeg for taking the time to write his article challenging my conclusions. Although I am not convinced, I am honored to engage in scholarly debate with him.

In his commentary, Rashi deals with an example of *Tikkun Soferim*. He writes:

תיקון סופרים הוא זה אשר הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן.

This is a correction of the Scribes, in which those of blessed memory inverted the verse to write this way.

R. Herczeg deals with three issues, and I will respond to his points about all of them. The first issue is, what do the words הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן (other versions have רבוהינו or רז"ל) mean? The second is, are these words of Rashi authentic, as they do not appear in all manuscripts? Finally, did ArtScroll engage in censorship by not including these words in its various *humashim*?

Regarding the first issue, it must be pointed out that over hundreds of years much has been written about these controversial words. They have been regarded as problematic for they contradict Maimonides’ formulation that it is heresy to believe that the Torah was altered after having been written down by Moses. This itself does not make the words inauthentic, for as I showed in *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*, there are a number of rabbinic sources that understand *Tikkun Soferim* literally, and are thus at odds with Maimonides’ formulation.¹ Neverthe-

¹ In *Limits*, p. 26, I quoted the following from R. Bezalel Naor, who was repeating what he had heard from R. Shlomo Fisher: “The truth, known to Torah scholars, is that Maimonides’ formulation of the tenets of Jewish belief is far from universally accepted.” R. Naor informed me that R. Fisher made this

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less, it is understandable that if Rashi can be interpreted to be in accordance with Maimonides' view rather than adopting a more "radical" stance, this is what most would prefer.

It is also understandable that medieval copyists of manuscripts, seeing such an apparently radical statement in Rashi, would choose to omit copying it, viewing it as inauthentic. This can explain why some manuscripts have the words and others do not. I do not think there is any doubt that it is more likely that a copyist would delete a problematic passage such as this, than that such a passage would be inserted into the original text by a rogue copyist. Although in some circles it has become common in recent years to assume that there were a bunch of heretics in medieval times who inserted their heretical comments into standard rabbinic texts, this is in opposition to everything we know about medieval copyists. It is true that there are additions to the text of Rashi by later scholars. However, this is very different from positing the existence of copyists who were inserting heretical ideas into Rashi or any other medieval authority. Unfortunately, this mistaken assumption has become the standard apologetic explanation anytime one wants to discard a problematic text.

Differing with all the previous rabbinic scholars who regarded the words from Rashi as being at odds with Maimonides, R. Herczeg argues that these words need not be seen as radical:

The concluding words of the lengthier and more popular version are *אשר הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן* "in which those of blessed memory inverted the verse this way." This can be taken to mean that the Sages of blessed memory taught us to understand that out of respect for G-d, the verse was written in an inverted way so as to avoid stating outright that Hashem was yet standing before Avraham. From the point of view of conforming to conventional religious beliefs, then, the latter version of the text of Rashi is no more problematic than the former [i.e., the text that omits the controversial words].

The earlier sources that discuss Rashi's comment read *אשר הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן*, with the last words pronounced *likhtov ken*, "to write this way." R. Herczeg acknowledges that read in this fashion, "Rashi would unmistakably be saying that the Scribes' inversion of the verse involved

statement in explaining R. Judah he-Hasid's view about post-Mosaic additions to the Torah. In other words, R. Judah he-Hasid's view is not in line with Maimonides' principles of faith, but this is not the only such example of Torah sages diverging from these principles.

writing, not interpreting (p. 181). However, R. Herczeg claims that the words can be read *la-katuv ken*, “the verse this way.” In this case, he says, “[i]f people can accept that ‘correction of the scribes’ can be taken as a figure of speech, why is it any more difficult to take ‘inverting’ the verse as interpreting it in a reversed sense?” The problem with this suggestion is that *la-katuv kein* is not grammatical so it could not be what the text is saying. That is why prior to R. Herczeg, only one other person I am aware of offers this suggestion,² and it never occurred to all of the great commentators on Rashi who dealt with the text. There is a reason that the typical rabbinic response to this Rashi has been to view it as radical and problematic, with a number going so far as to claim that Rashi could have never said such a thing. That is because the words we have been discussing state very clearly that the Scribes inverted the verse, and they can be read only this way.

However, R. Herczeg also points out that the Munich manuscript of Rashi reads: אשר הפכוהו רבותינו לכתוב כאן. He notes that here לכתוב certainly has to be read *la-katuv*. According to R. Herczeg, these words should be understood figuratively, just as the words *tikkun soferim* are traditionally understood figuratively. I disagree with R. Herczeg and readers will have to judge which position is more reasonable. (I also do not think that whether כן or כאן is the correct word changes the meaning of Rashi.) When the original rabbinic passages speak of *tikkun soferim*, the problem that is presented is what is the meaning of these words. Are they to be understood literally or not? There are two approaches, one that understands them literally, and the other not. When Rashi says that the Sages reversed the passage, I understand him to be explaining what *tikkun soferim* means, not replacing the words “*tikkun soferim*” with another expression that is also to be understood figuratively.

It is precisely because people read Rashi’s comment the way I have that in recent years some printings have begun to delete the words we have been discussing. Yet I must point out that the “problematic” words of Rashi are in line with what Rashi writes elsewhere, and which is referred to by R. Herczeg himself. Rashi in Job 32:3 writes:

זה אחד מן המקומות שתקנו סופרים את לשון הכתוב וירשיעו כלפי המקום
בשתיקתם היה לו לכתוב אלא שכינה הכתוב.

“This is one of the places in which the Scribes corrected the language of the verse.” How much clearer can Rashi be that *tikkun soferim* is to be understood literally? Based on this passage in the commentary to

² See R. Hayyim Knoller, *Kevod Hakhamim* (Przemysl, 1898), p. 12b.

Job, the Rosenbaum-Silbermann edition of Rashi agrees that Rashi to Genesis 18:22 means “that the original text actually contained the words to which objection was taken and that the Scribes, the early authorities who settled the text of the Bible (one passage states it was Ezra who is responsible for these emendations) removed them, replacing them by others that could not be regarded as blasphemous.”³ R. Herczeg claims that the words שתקנו סופרים need not be taken literally but simply mean that the verse should be interpreted in a certain way. Yet Rashi is explaining here that *tikkun soferim* does not mean interpretation, but is to be understood literally, namely, that the Scribes really did correct the text.

R. Herczeg does not refer to Rashi’s comment to Numbers 11:15, where he states:

בדעתם היה לו לכתוב אלא שכינה הכתוב וזה אחד מתקוני סופרים בתורה
לכינוי ולתקון הלשון

In *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*, pp. 98-99 n. 52, I state that the three comments of Rashi we have just seen make clear what is implied elsewhere (see Rashi’s commentary to Hab. 1:11, Mal. 1:3,⁴ Job 7:20), that for Rashi there is no distinction between corrections of the Scribes and what is known as כינה הכתוב [“The text substitutes (one word for another).”] I would also add that in his earlier contribution to *Hakirah*,⁵ R. Avrohom Lieberman concludes that Rashi indeed believed that *tikkun soferim* means an actual correction of the original text, and that the words אשר הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן are original. This opinion is shared by R. Hayyim Zalman Dimitrovsky.⁶ (Even if Rashi’s words in Genesis 18:22 are shown to be inauthentic, it would seem that his words in Job 32:3 are enough to determine his view.)

R. Herczeg states that Mizrachi, *Gur Aryeh*, and some other supercommentaries understand Rashi to be agreeing with the approach that *tikkun soferim* is not to be taken literally, and the words in the Bible referred to as *tikkun soferim* were already found in the original biblical text. R. Herczeg is correct about *Gur Aryeh* and other supercommentaries, and precisely because this was their approach, they could not accept the words אשר הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן as authentic. However, I must also add

³ Bereshit, p. 266.

⁴ In his article, R. Herczeg shows that the version of Rashi in the standard texts might be mistaken, but this does not affect my basic point.

⁵ “Tikkunei Soferim, an Analysis of a Masoretic Phenomenon,” *Hakirah* 5 (Fall 2007), pp. 231-232.

⁶ *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (Mossad ha-Rav Kook ed.), vol. 1, p. 178.

that regarding Mizrachi, R. Herczeg is mistaken, as when it comes to Genesis 18:22 Mizrachi recognizes that Rashi means a real scribal correction. After offering the traditional view of what *tikkun soferim* is, as explained by the Rashba, Mizrachi adds:

אבל רש"י הוסיף ואמר תיקון סופרים הוא זה שהפכוהו רבותינו לכתוב כן

In other words, Mizrachi recognizes that Rashi's approach is at odds with what the Rashba states in that Rashi believes that in this case, there was a real scribal correction. As R. Meir Mazuz writes about Mizrachi's comment:⁷

ע' להרא"ם ז"ל שנראה מלשונו שהבין הכונה שחז"ל תיקנו את לשון התורה.

In his comment to Genesis 18:22, Mizrachi is only explaining Rashi's opinion, but in his comment to Numbers 11:15 we see that Mizrachi himself believes that while *tikkun soferim* generally is not to be understood literally, in the case of Genesis 18:22 he agrees with Rashi that it means an actual correction of the text. After mentioning the Rashba's view, he adds:

אבל בפסוק ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה' אמרו היה לו לכתוב וה' עומד על אברהם אלא תקון סופרים הוא זה שהפכוהו רז"ל לכתוב כן שזה מין אחד [צ"ל אחר] הוא שאין דרך הכתוב לכתוב כן בשום מקום אלא שרבותינו הפכו זה.

R. Issachar Ber Eylonburg strongly criticizes Mizrachi's suggestion, which he regards as nothing less than heretical. He also adds that the phenomenon Mizrachi refers to, literal emendation of the biblical text, should be called not *tikkun soferim* but rather *kilkul soferim* (corruption of the Scribes).⁸ R. Samuel Jaffe ben Isaac Ashkenazi had earlier criticized Mizrachi's view as follows:⁹

ואינו נכון שאם נודה שהסופרים שנו במקום א' מה המונע משנאמר כן בשאר המקומות.

R. Saul Cohen of Djerba criticized Mizrachi as well:¹⁰

וכבוד הרא"ם במקומו מונה דודאי אין לשון זה [אשר הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן] מרש"י ראש המאמינים אלא גליון מאיזה תלמיד טועה והכניסוהו המדפיסים בפנים.

⁷ *Bayit Ne'eman*, Gen. 18:22. Contrary to Mizrachi, R. Mazuz rejects the notion that Rashi understood *tikkun soferim* literally.

⁸ *Tzaidah la-Derekh* to Genesis 18:22.

⁹ *Yefeh Toar* to Genesis Rabbah 29:12 (p. 286a).

¹⁰ *Karnei Ramim* (Bnei Brak, 1981), p. 61.

R. Hayyim Hirschensohn is likewise shocked by Mizrachi's opinion and writes:¹¹

אך יותר ממה שמתמיה לנו על איש צדיק וחסיד וגאון ישראל כהרא"ם ז"ל שיחשוב דבר כזה שחז"ל שינו ח"ו בתורה שלנו, ומצינו שחז"ל שינו לתלמי המלך כזה אבל בספר תורה שלנו ח"ו שאפילו חסרה אות אחת פסולה ומכש"כ שנוי גדול בכונה.

While it is true that most modern commentators assume that the comment of Rashi is theologically problematic, and thus regard it as inauthentic, I was surprised to find that a ḥasidic author, R. Zvi Meir Fogel, has no difficulty with the comment. He sees it as testifying to the power of the Sages, that just as at times they can suspend biblical commandments, so too then can alter the text of the Torah if they think it is necessary. He writes:¹²

אלא תיקון סופרים הוא זה, אשר הפכוהו רז"ל לכתוב כן, ובאמת יש ספרים שמחקו זא"ת מרש"י ורק כתבו אלא תיקון סופרים הוא זה, ויש לומר עפ"י מה שאמרו חכז"ל עה"פ לא תסור מן הדבר אשר יגידו לך ימין ושמאל, ובחכז"ל אפילו אומרים לך על ימין שהוא שמאל ושמאל שהוא ימין ישמע בקולם וברמב"ם פ"ב מהל' ממרים ה"ד אם ראו בי"ד לפי שעה לבטל מ"ע או לעבור על מצות ל"ת, כדי להחזיר רבים לדת או להציל רבים מישראל מלהכשל בדברים אחרים עושין לפי מה שהצריכה השעה כשם שהרופא חותך ידו או רגלו של זה כדי שיחיה כולו כך בי"ד מורים בזמן מן הזמנים לעבור על קצת מצוות לפי שעה כדי שישמור שבתות הרבה עכ"ל, וזה הנרמז שגדול כח חכמינו ז"ל שאף שתיקון סופרים הוא זה ממה שהפכוהו רבותינו ז"ל, עשאוהו חזק ויציב כעצם התורה הקדושה, והוא גוף התורה הקדושה, ומסיני נתנה, וכן הוא בכל דבר ודבר שהנהיגו ותיקנו חכמינו ז"ל.

Another ḥasidic author, R. Hayyim Isaac Jostman, explains that Rashi's comment is not theologically problematic, as he is referring only to changing the order of words, not adding or replacing anything in the Torah.¹³

וי"ל דרש"י ז"ל דקדק בלשונו הקדוש ולא קאמר כאן ח"ו ייתור או חסרון אות רק הפיכה לחוד.

My contention is that ArtScroll did not include the words in Rashi that we are discussing because it viewed them as an inauthentic heretical interpolation. I questioned this by noting that the earliest dated manu-

¹¹ *Nimukei Rasbi*, Gen. 18:22.

¹² *Mar'ot ha-Tzov'ot* (n.p., 1999), Gen. 18:22 (p. 266).

¹³ *Hayei Yitzhak* (Warsaw, 1912), p. 29a. The book has an approbation from R. Meir Yehiel Halevi of Ostrowiec.

script of Rashi we have, one that was written by a known Torah scholar, includes the passage (with the word כאן instead of כן, which I do not see as a significant difference). This shows that the words in question were not regarded as heretical. It is true that other later manuscripts do not contain these words, and I assume that they were deleted by copyists who found them problematic, similar to what ArtScroll has done. ArtScroll may have been guided by the words of Abraham Berliner in his edition of Rashi on the Torah (Introduction, p. xv):

ומעולם לא עלה על דעת רש"י ז"ל להוציא דברים כאלה מפיו הטהור.

However, despite Berliner’s view that the words are not authentic, he kept them in the text of Rashi enclosed in brackets, which is the proper thing to do.

Can we determine if the words are original to Rashi or are a later insertion? In addition to what I have already written, Yeshayahu Maori has also argued that the words are original.¹⁴ On the other hand, R. Herczeg states that “the jury is still out on what the authentic text of Rashi is, but there is strong evidence in favor of the version without the extra words.” Although I assume that the words are authentic, I am prepared to acknowledge that as of yet there is no definitive proof. R. Herczeg’s points, from Professor Avraham Grossman, about the relative accuracy of the Munich manuscript vs. the Leipzig manuscript, are important and add complexity to the matter. Yet the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of manuscripts contain the words.¹⁵ That an early copyist (or a later printer) would delete a problematic comment is nothing to be surprised about, and some readers will be aware of my last book which focused on this very phenomenon of internal censorship. If indeed the words were inserted by someone other than Rashi, which itself is difficult to imagine, how does one explain that these words ended up in so many manuscripts?¹⁶

¹⁴ “‘Tikun Soferim’ ve-‘Kinah ha-Katuv’ be-Ferush Rashi la-Mikra,” in Yaakov Elman, et. al., *Netivot le-David* (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 99–108.

¹⁵ See Maori, *ibid.*, p. 102, that of 39 manuscripts examined by Elazar Touito, only 5 are missing the words. On p. 103 n. 19, he quotes Menachem Cohen, who has examined many Rashi manuscripts, that it is precisely in the Spanish and Italian manuscripts, which routinely include material not from Rashi, that the words we are discussing have been deleted. However, in Ashkenazic manuscripts that do not contain additions, the words generally appear. This would seem to be strong evidence that the passage is authentic.

¹⁶ See Maori, *ibid.*, p. 103.

As R. Herczeg notes, the publisher writes in the preface to the ArtScroll Sapirstein edition of Rashi that variant readings “are either enclosed in braces or appear in the footnotes.” R. Herczeg adds: “Of the six early editions mentioned by name, The Reggio di Calabria, Soncino, and Zamora editions include the words that do not appear in ArtScroll’s text. The Rome, Alkabetz, and Venice editions do not.” Actually, this is not correct, as the Venice 1517-1518 first edition of *Mikraot Gedolot*, which is the one mentioned by ArtScroll, also includes the words.¹⁷ Here is the text from this edition.

והיה לו לכתוב וה' עמדנו עומד על אברהם אלא תקון קופרים הוא זה שהפכוהו רבותינו לכתוב כן :

Venice 1517-1518 first edition of *Mikraot Gedolot*
 (See complete page at the end of the article.)

Thus, four of the six early printings that ArtScroll tells us it used as sources for textual variants include the words, so it is curious that the words we have been discussing were not included in the ArtScroll edition.¹⁸ I don’t understand how R. Herczeg can write: “So on that basis, it’s a tossup. ArtScroll could have included the additional words in brackets but chose to leave them out.” R. Herczeg is correct that ArtScroll chose to leave them out. But it is definitely not a tossup, which implies that the decision in this matter could have gone either way. The words were left out for clear ideological reasons, otherwise they would have been included as a variant or at least discussed in a footnote (as is done in the Ariel edition of Rashi and as R. Herczeg tells us he himself would have done had he been aware of the alternative text when working on the Sapirstein edition¹⁹). It is obvious that ArtScroll made a deci-

¹⁷ The words are missing from the Venice 1524 edition.

¹⁸ Contrary to what R. Herczeg writes, I do not leave “the impression that ArtScroll rejected the empirical evidence—the Munich MS—in favor of a text they favored for ideological reasons.” I never assumed that ArtScroll was aware of the Munich MS. My reason for citing this manuscript was simply to show that the earliest manuscript of Rashi we possess, which is the product of a known Torah scholar, includes the text we are talking about.

¹⁹ R. Herczeg writes (p. 183 n. 10): “Had I been aware of the alternative text when working on it, I would have discussed it in a footnote.” This sentence is very strange, as the alternative text was, until this generation, found in all the standard printings of Rashi in *Mikraot Gedolot*, Berliner, Malbim, *Ha’amek Davar*, *Torah Temimah*, etc., as well as in the published translations of Rashi, and is discussed at length in the Ariel edition. All of these works would have been used by any translator, so R. Herczeg must have been aware of the alternative text, even if today he has no memory of it. I can only assume that years ago,

sion that the words could not have been written by Rashi and thus were to be deleted. This is the same reason that in recent years other publishers have made the same decision.

R. Herczeg makes a further point:

Due to sincerely held religious beliefs, they [ArtScroll] may have tipped the scales in favor of the shorter version of the text because they thought it unlikely that Rashi wrote the longer version... [In this case] ArtScroll would not have been acting dishonestly. However, there could be room to criticize them for poor judgment, either for not mentioning a popular alternative text with considerable objective support, or for the way they evaluated the data.

Contrary to R. Herczeg, I believe that deleting a “popular alternative text,” especially one that has been the focus of so much discussion for hundreds of years, is not an honest approach.²⁰ If ArtScroll does not wish to include the text that is their prerogative, but they should at least have a note explaining why they removed the words. Jews growing up with ArtScroll and reviewing the *parashah* each week with Rashi are missing something that previous generations had. What we see in this example is only a shadow of what would come a few years later when ArtScroll deleted a number of Rashbam’s comments in their new *Mikraot Gedolot*, because they concluded (or so they would like us to believe) that Rashbam never could have authored these comments.²¹

when working on his translation, R. Herczeg did not see any significance to these words which were not in the text that he was given to translate, and thus chose not to mention anything in a footnote. As we saw in his article, R. Herczeg still does not see them as adding anything substantive to Rashi’s comment, so it makes sense that he would not have felt a need to comment on them.

²⁰ R. Herczeg writes (p. 184 n. 12):

If someone believes that it is literally impossible for Rashi to have written the words in question, it is not dishonest to delete them. An argument can be made for not even putting them in brackets. Doing so could be interpreted as investing the bracketed words with some authority.

This sort of attitude is precisely why we have so many different texts that have been censored. The better approach is to say that even though I may believe that Rashi (or another scholar) could never have written these words, since others disagree I do not have the right to simply delete the text without informing the reader.

²¹ I discuss this disgraceful episode in my Seforim Blog posts, Dec. 10, 2014, Jan. 15, 2015, and June 8, 2015. The meaning of my words “or so they would like us to believe” alludes to the fact that, as mentioned in the June 8, 2015 post,

R. Herczeg concludes his article as follows, to which I have added numbers:

In conclusion, [1] the jury is still out on what the authentic text of Rashi is, [2] but there is strong evidence in favor of the version without the extra words. [3] The two versions do not differ substantially in meaning. [4] And omission of the additional words is not *prima facie* evidence of censorship.

For the reasons I have spelled out in this article, my response to R. Herczeg's conclusion must be:

- 1) I agree.
- 2) Contrary to R. Herczeg, I believe that the evidence is in favor of the version with the extra words.
- 3) Contrary to R. Herczeg, I believe that the two versions (i.e., with the words and without) differ substantially in meaning.
- 4) If the standard printings for the last hundred years and more have included these words, then any current printing that leaves them out, and does not tell you that it is leaving them out—and ArtScroll is not the first to do so—is in my mind evidence of censorship.



there are those who think that the Rashbam censorship was only due to business considerations.

