

## HOMILIST AND LITERALIST: RABBI MOSES HADARSHAN HERALDS A LITERAL EXPOSITION OF THE BIBLE

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In my book *The Mystery of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan* (Mosad Bialik, 2010), I present what is known of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan's life, family, spiritual ambience, works and the sources for these works, and I maintain that he wrote a homiletical commentary on Genesis and Numbers and other books of the Bible. In this book I note the small number of written sources in which passages from his works have been preserved, and I offer an explanation for the fact that most of these extant passages appear in Christian anti-Jewish polemical literature as well as for the fact that beginning with the twelfth century, Jewish sages almost completely ignored the man and his works. An examination of all the extant passages from Rabbi Moshe's works prove that while most are homiletical in nature and justify his appellation *Darshan* (=homilist / preacher), they also include expositions that are completely literal – a form of commentary unknown in Europe until the eleventh century. Rabbi Moshe passed this literal method on to his son, Rabbi Yehudah, who passed it on to his disciple Rabbi Menahem b. Rabbi Halbo and others – all from Provence. Rabbi Menahem's commentaries [פירוני] reached Northern France through Rabbi Yosef Kara and relatives and other disciples of Rabbi Menahem, and formed the basis for literal exegesis in France. Scholars of biblical hermeneutics list several reasons for the appearance and rapid spread of this method of interpretation, but they do not pay sufficient attention to the role of Rabbi Moshe in its development. This paper puts forth the argument that Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan should be credited with founding and establishing the two types of exegesis that were prevalent in medieval Northern Europe – both homily and literal interpretation.