Rules of Jewish Hermeneutics
By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)

The Torah is understood and interpreted according to the level being discussed. The Torah can be understood on four levels, while other writings may be confined to only one level. For example, Sefer Beresheet (the book of Genesis) can be understood on all four levels, while for example, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Sefer Matitiyahu (Matthew) are much better understood on the Drash level. Also, all of the Prophets are better understood as a minimum at the Remes level. The following chart details these four levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>פרדס</th>
<th>פשעת</th>
<th>רמס</th>
<th>דרש</th>
<th>סוד</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PaRDeS</td>
<td>P’shat</td>
<td>Remes</td>
<td>Drash</td>
<td>Sod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Hint</td>
<td>Explore - Ask</td>
<td>Secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary level</td>
<td>Grammatical Literal</td>
<td>Allegory (Rhetorical)</td>
<td>Parable Metaphor</td>
<td>Mystical Metaphysical Spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience level</td>
<td>Common People</td>
<td>Nobles (Lawyers, Judges, Scientists)</td>
<td>Kingly (Civil Servants, Political Scientists, Diplomatic Corps)</td>
<td>Mystics (Psychologists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutic level</td>
<td>7 Hillel Laws</td>
<td>13 Ishmael Laws</td>
<td>32 Ben Gallil Laws</td>
<td>42 Zohar Laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbinic level</td>
<td>Mishna</td>
<td>Gemara</td>
<td>Midrash</td>
<td>Zohar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel</td>
<td>Marqos (Mark), Jude 1 &amp; 2 Peter</td>
<td>I and II Luqas (Luke, Acts) Paul’s Epistles</td>
<td>Matityahu (Matthew)</td>
<td>Yochanan (John) 1, 2, 3, and Revelation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>HaShem’s Servant</td>
<td>Son of Man (Prophet)</td>
<td>The King (Messiah)</td>
<td>Son of G-D (Judge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P’shat –

The best Jewish commentator at this level is Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Itzchaqi), born in Troyes, France on February 22, 1040 and died on July 13, 1105, at age 65. His resting place is Troyes, France. Rashi was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the whole Tanakh. Acclaimed for his ability to present the basic meaning of the text in a concise and lucid fashion, Rashi appeals to both learned scholars and beginning students, and his works remain a centerpiece of contemporary Jewish study. The best place to get all of Rashi’s commentaries on the Tanakh and his own translation of the Hebrew text can be found at:

- Judaica Press Complete Tanakh with Rashi on CD-ROM
  By: Davka Corporation (http://davka.com/software/bible?product_id=75)
  Price: About $ 50.– (August 2014)
Other celebrated Rabbi’s who specialized on the P’shat level commentary on the Torah, and who at times contradicted Rashi or added to his comments can be found on:

• **Hachut HaMeshulash Torah Commentary (6 vols. Hardcover)**
  By Rabbi Chananel, Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam), Rabbi David Kimchi (R’dak), Rabbi Ovadia Seferno (S’forno)
  Translated by Rabbi Eliyahu Munk
  Price: About $ 150.– (August 2014)

• **Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit) Hardcover – May 1, 1988**
  by H. Norman Strickman (Author), Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra (Author), Arthur M. Silver (Author)
  Publisher: Menorah Pub Co; 1 ED edition (May 1988)
  ISBN–10: 0932232078
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 45.– (August 2014)

• **Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Exodus (Shemot) Hardcover – May 1, 1997**
  by Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra (Author), H. Norman Strickman (Author, Translator), Arthur M. Silver (Author, Translator)
  Publisher: Menorah Pub Co; 1 ED edition (May 1997)
  ISBN–10: 0932232086
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 65.– (August, 2014)

• **Ibn Ezra’s Commentary On The Pentateuch: Leviticus Hardcover – September 30, 2004**
  Publisher: Menorah Pub Co (September 30, 2004)
  ISBN–10: 0932232116
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 45.– (August 2014)

• **Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch:Numbers (Series 4) Hardcover – February 1, 1999**
  by Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra (Author), Arthur M. Silver (Author), H. Norman Strickman (Author, Silver (Author)
  Publisher: Bloch Pub Co; 1 edition (February 1, 1999)
  ISBN–10: 0932232094
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 40.– (August 2014)

• **Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Deuteronomy (Devarim) Hardcover – November 1, 2001**
  by Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra (Author), H. Norman Strickman (Author), Arthur M. Silver (Author)
  Publisher: Menorah Pub Co (November 2001)
  ISBN–10: 0932232108
A very instructive set on the whole Tanakh by the hand of a Spanish Sefardi Rabbi in Turkey is

- **Me’Am Lo’Ez – Torah Anthology : 45 Volumes**  
  By Rabbi Ya’aqob Culi  
  Moznaim Publishing Company  
  (volumes can be bought on this series one at a time from: http://www.mysefer.com/prodtype.asp?strPageHistory=cat&PT_ID=75

**Remes**

The best commentary on the Tanakh in Remes is the Talmud itself and the Rambam (only on the Torah). On the Talmudic commentary on the Torah see:

- **The Torah Revealed: Talmudic Masters Unveil the Secrets of the Bible**  
  by Avraham Yaakov Finkel (Jan 20, 2004)  
  Publisher: Jossey-Bass; 1 edition (January 20, 2004)  
  ISBN-10: 0787969206  
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 30.– (August 2014)

The most ancient and classical Commentary on Torah Interpretation from an allegorical point of view is that of Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – c. 50 CE).

- **The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Edition Hardcover**  
  by C. D. Yonge  
  Publisher: Hendrickson Publishers (August 1, 1993)  
  ISBN-10: 0943575931  
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 16.– (August 2014)

The so called King of Remes interpretation of the Torah is Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman (the Ramban) a Catalan (Spanish) Rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist and biblical commentator (1194 – 1270). There are two editions of his monumental commentary. Personally I prefer:

  Publisher: Judaica Pr (December 13, 2010)  
  ISBN-10: 1607630494  
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 90.– (August 2014)

Also in this vein:

- **Writings of the Ramban/Nachmanides:Translated and Annotated (2 Volume Set) Hardcover**  
  Publisher: Judaica Pr (March 4, 2010)  
  ISBN-10: 1607630206  
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 42.– (August, 2014)
Another great work on a Remes Commentary on the Torah comes by the pen of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (June 20, 1808 – December 31, 1888) was a German Rabbi best known as the intellectual founder of the Torah im Derech Eretz school of contemporary Orthodox Judaism. Occasionally termed neo-Orthodoxy, his philosophy, together with that of Azriel Hildesheimer, has had a considerable influence on the development of Orthodox Judaism.

- **The Hirsch Chumash: Complete Set (5 vols. Larger Format) Hardcover**
  by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Author)
  Publisher: Feldheim, Judaica Press (2014)
  ISBN-10: 159826110X
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 200.– (August 2014)

A smaller work by the pen of Rabbi Ya’aqov ben Rabbenu Asher (R’osh) the author of the Tur:

- **Tur on the Torah Hardcover – (4 vols.)**
  by Yaakov Ben Asher (Author)
  Translated by: Rabbi Eliyahu Munk
  Publisher: Urim Publications

Also very important dealing with allegory and Mussar:

- **Midrash of Rabbi Moshe Alshich on the Torah (English–3 vol.)**
  by Moshe Alshich (Author), Eliyahu Munk (translator)
  Publisher: Urim Publications; 2nd Rev edition (January 1, 2000)
  ISBN–10: 9657108136
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 71.– (August 2014)

**Laws of Peshat and Remes Hermeneutics**

The simplest yet in-depth treatment of these laws of Jewish hermeneutics are explained in the following book:

- **The Written and Oral Torah: A Comprehensive Introduction**
  by Nathan T. Lopes Cardozo
  Publisher: Jason Aronson, Inc. (March 31, 1998)
  ISBN–10: 0765759896
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 50.– (August 2014)

For a more Academic treatment see:

- **Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash Paperback – June 1, 1992**
  by Hermann L. Strack (Author), Gunter Stemberger (Author), Markus Bockmuehl (Translator)
  Publisher: Fortress Press; Reprint edition (June 1, 1992)
  ISBN–10: 0800625242
Available at Amazon.com for about $ 30.– (August 2014)

From a Christian Academic Perspective see:

- **The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 1: The Biblical Period** Paperback – February 11, 1998
  by Hughes Oliphant Old (Author)
  ISBN–10: 0802843565
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 25.– (August 2014)

And:

- **Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Church**
  by Mr. Richard N. Longenecker
  Publisher: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Revised edition (March 1, 1999) Paperback
  ISBN–10: 0802843018
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 25.– (August 2014)

**Midrash**

On the Torah and the 5 scrolls see:

- **Midrash Rabbah (10 Vol. Set)** Hardcover – December 1, 1992
  by Harry Freedman (Author), Maurice Simon (Editor)
  Publisher: Soncino Pr Ltd (December 1, 1992)
  ISBN–10: 0900689382
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 270.– (August 2014)

- **Midrash Tanhuma–Yelammedenu: An English Translation of Genesis and Exodus from the Printed Version of Tanhuma–Yelammedenu With an Introduction, Notes, and Indexes Hardcover**
  by Samuel A. Berman (Editor)
  Publisher: Ktav Pub Inc (March 1996)
  ISBN–10: 0881254002
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 86.– (August 2014)

- **Metsudah Midrash Tanchuma– 8 vol. Set Hardcover**
  by Rabbi Avraham Davis (Author)
  Publisher: Metsudah Publications (March 11, 2007)
  ISBN–10: 1600910297Rabbi Avraham Davis (Author)
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 127.– (August 2014)

A mixed bag commentary (P’shat,Remes, Drash and So’od), although tilting more usually to Drash but very precious:

- **Torah Commentary by Rabbi Bachya ben Asher (English–7 vol.)**
  Translated by Rabbi Eliyahu Munk
  Publisher: Urim Pubns; 2 edition (April 2003)
On the Psalms:

- **The Midrash on Psalms: Vol. 13 (vols. 1 & 2) (Yale Judaica Series) Hardcover**
  by Leon Nemoy (Ed.), Saul Lieberman (Ed.), Harry A. Wolfson (Editor), William G. Braude (Translator)
  Publisher: Yale University Press (September 10, 1959)
  ISBN–10: 0300003226
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 95.– (August 2014)

On Proverbs:

- **The Midrash on Proverbs (Yale Judaica Series) Hardcover**
  by Professor Burton L. Visotzky (Translator)
  Publisher: Yale University Press; annotated edition edition (February 26, 1992)
  ISBN–10: 0300051077
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 54.– (August 2014)

On the Festivals:

- **Pesikta Derab Kahana Hardcover**
  by William G Braude (Ed, Trans.), Israel J. Kapstein (Trans.), Yehiel E. Poupko (Foreword)
  Publisher: The Jewish Publication Society; 2 edition (March 1, 2002)
  ISBN–10: 0827606796
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 54.– (August 2014)

- **Pesikta Rabbati: Homiletical Discourses for Festal Days and Special Sabbaths 1 & 2 (Yale Judaica Series) Hardcover**
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  Publisher: Yale University Press (September 10, 1968)
  ISBN–10: 0300010710
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Halakhic Midrash on the Book of Exodus:

- **Mekhilta de–Rabbi Ishmael, 2 volume set Hardcover – September 1, 2004**
  by Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Translator), Dr. David M. Stern (Foreword)
  Publisher: Jewish Publication Society; 2 edition (September 2004)
  ISBN–10: 0827606788
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 90.– (August 2014)

- **Mekhilta de–Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai (Edward E. Elson Classic) Hardcover**
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  Publisher: The Jewish Publication Society (October 9, 2006)
  ISBN–10: 0827607997
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 68.– (August 2014)
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- **Sifra on Leviticus, according to Vatican Manuscript Assemani 66...Volume III : Variants from other Manuscripts, Early Printed Editions and Quotations by Medieval Authorities Hardcover** by Louis Finkelstein (Author)
  Publisher: Jewish Theological Seminary of America (1983)
  ASIN: B004X1TI4Q
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 30.– (August 2014)

Halakhic Midrash to the Book of Numbers:

- **Sifre Zutta to Numbers Paperback**
  by Jacob Neusner (Translator)
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  Language: English
  ISBN–10: 0761844031
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 40.– (August 2014)

Halakhic Midrash on the Book of Deuteronomy:

- **Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy (Yale Judaica Series)Hardcover**
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  Publisher: Jewish Lights (September 1, 2003)
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  ISBN–10: 0800625242
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 30.– (August 2014)

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  Publisher: The Jewish Publication Society; 1ST edition (July 1, 2002)
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  by David Stern  
  Publisher: Harvard University Press; Reprint edition (January 31, 1994)  
  ISBN-10: 067465448X  
  Available at Amazon.com for about $38.– (August 2014)

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  Publisher: Stanford University Press; 1 edition (December 31, 2003)  
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  Publisher: Stanford University Press; 1 edition (December 5, 2005)  
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  Publisher: Lambda Publishers, Inc. (November 1, 1998)
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  Publisher: Providence University (March 1, 2007)
  ISBN-10: 1897352093
  Available at Amazon.com for about $ 58.- (August 2014)

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  Publisher: KTAV Publishing House (March 8, 1994)
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   by Moshe Cordovero  
   Publisher: Providence University; Mul edition (March 1, 2007)  
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   Simcha H. Benyosef (Translator)  
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• Maimonides: The Commandments (Sefer Ha–Mitzvoth) The 613 Mitzvoth of the Torah elucidated in English (2 vol.) Paperback
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Publisher: Judaica Press (February 1, 2000)
ISBN–10: 0900689714
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