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**Statement of Opinion**

In 5746 I was asked by Mr. Doron Witztum to prepare a list of the names and appellations of 34 Torah sages. The list of sages was presented to me by Mr. Witztum, and I was told that it was based on the Encyclopedia of **Great Men in Israel** (Hebrew; ed. Dr. M. Margalioth). The criteria for inclusion of a personality in the list was simply that his entry contains at least three columns of text and that a date of birth or death be specified (day and month). The list of names and appellations I prepared and forwarded to Mr. Witztum was later published by him (together with Professor A. Rips and Y. Rosenberg) in the article "Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis," in both the first version thereof (from early 5747), pp. 40-42, and the second version of the above-mentioned article (5748), pp. 16-17. I shall hereinafter refer to this list as "the first list." A year later, Mr. Witztum asked me to prepare a second list of names and appellations. This time, the criteria for inclusion of a personality in the list was that his entry contains between one and a half and three columns of text and that a date of birth or death be specified (day and month). I forwarded this additional list of names and appellations to Mr. Witztum, and it was subsequently published in the second version of the above-mentioned article (5748) on pp. 25-26. I shall hereinafter refer to this list as "the second list." At that time I confirmed that each of these lists of names and appellations "was

based on my own personal judgment and on the examinations I carried out with the assistance of the database in the Data Retrieval Institute at Bar Ilan University — the Responsa Project.”

At the time, I forwarded to Mr. Witztum only the results and conclusions of my examinations. I have now been asked by him to clarify my rationale, work method, examinations and conclusions with regard to the following questions:

1. Does the Responsa database include additional names and appellations relating to the 32 sages in the second group that were not included in the second list?
2. If so, what are these names and appellations?
3. And why were they not included in the list?

The following is my answer to these questions, which I have extended to include the principles I applied in my examination and in the conclusions I forwarded to you at that time:

Types of appellations: The great Torah sages were given affectionate appellations which are commonly used by those who study their writings, or which appear in the writings of their pupils, their pupils' pupils, and all those who discuss their writings. Some of the appellations, such as “Rambam” and “the Vilna Gaon,” are commonly known, while others are used mainly within the confines of the Beit Midrash (a Torah academy).

Database for determining the appellations: A researcher who wishes to prepare a list of these names and appellations must be thoroughly familiar with the different types of Torah literature, and with the customs used in quoting and referring to the Jewish sages. For **a certain portion** of the Torah literature, we

now have access to a new aid that may be of assistance in examining the data, namely the computerized database of the Responsa project. This database includes the names and appellations that appear in some 300 responsa works, and constitutes an important aid in searching this type of rabbinical literature.

*Use of the Responsa database in the computer of the Data Retrieval Institute at Bar Ilan University:* The Responsa database includes a considerable proportion of the responsa works (approximately 300), with cross-sections according to period and cultural region. The database also includes the basic works of Jewish literature (the Bible and commentaries, Mishna, the Talmuds, the Aggadic Midrashim, and so on). This database is an important aid in searches relating to the literature of the Poskim (legalists). However, the existing program does not enable a researcher to ask what are the names and appellations of a given sage. Consequently the researcher must determine *in advance* the appellations for which he wishes to search, and to use the database to clarify the distribution of particular appellations and their orthography. Personal judgment must be employed in evaluating the information in the pool per se, and in evaluating it relative to the information in the large number of important Halakhic (legal) works not included in the database, as well as customary practices in the broader literature.

It may certainly be anticipated that sages whose works do not relate primarily to the field of Halakhic rulings will not appear in the database. Accordingly, sages who were Biblical commentators, grammatical scholars (Medakdekim), poets, Hassidic Zaddikim, Kabbalists (Mekubalim) or philosophers will not appear in the Responsa database, or at best will appear a small number of times. Accordingly, this source does not provide a reliable picture of the different appellations, and the distribution of names and appellations does not reflect their actual place, importance and value. The Responsa database did not help us

in establishing the appellations of sages no. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15, 17, 27, 30 and 31 (in the second list).

Professional judgment: In addition to his expertise, the researcher must also exercise professional discretion in a number of areas, as follows:

(a) As is well known, Torah literature is rich in abbreviations and acronyms, which relate both to the Halakhic concepts under discussion and to the various sages. A distinction must be made between a simple abbreviation or acronym used only at one place or in a particular text, and an abbreviation or acronym that constitutes an appellation. The yardstick for determining this point is quite simple: if the abbreviation or acronym has become an appellation, it has a specific pronunciation. Accordingly, a distinction should be made between abbreviations and acronyms which are pronounced as words, such as: רמב"ם (Rambam), מהרש"ל (Maharshal), מהר"ל (Maharal), and those which are not pronounced as words and are merely an abbreviated written form, such as מהר"ר (Morenu HaRav Rabbi), מוהר"ר (Morenu Verabenu HaRav Rabbi), ב"י (Beit Yosef), תוי"ט (TOsefot Yom Tov), and נוב"י (NOda BeYehuda).

When I was asked to prepare the list of the names and appellations of the great Torah sages (the first list), I did not include abbreviations or acronyms that are not pronounced as a word, since these are not appellations. The list includes acronyms that are pronounced as a word, such as Rambam (Rabenu Moshe Ben Maimon), Maharshal (Morenu HaRav Rabbi Shlomo Lurie), and Maharal (Morenu HaRav Rabbi Liva). The list does not include acronyms not pronounced as a word, such as: ב"י, תוי"ט, נוב"י, מהר"ר, etc. Naturally I acted in the same manner when preparing the second list.

(b) A researcher concerned with the biography of a single person will also mention the appellations relating to the subject of his work. However, a researcher preparing a list of names and appellations of individuals and Torah sages must take account of the fact that some appellations were used over the generations to refer to several different individuals. A well-known example of this is the appellation “Maharsha” (“מַהַרְשָׁא”) referring to Rabbi Shemuel Eliezer Edels. This appellation is also found on occasions with reference to other sages, such as: Rabbi Shemuel Aboab, Rabbi Shlomoh Amarilio, Rabbi Shemuel Eliezer Alfandari and others. In an historical list of the appellations of Torah sages, Rabbi Shemuel Eliezer Edels will receive the appellation *Maharsha*, since he is the most famous of the sages referred to by this appellation, since his work is the most famous among all Talmud students in all the Diaspora communities, and since he is known by this appellation by them.

Another example is when one of the people bearing an appellation is from the Rishonim (early sages), while the other is from the Acharonim (later sages). Since in the world of Torah literature the Rishonim enjoy a special status vis-a-vis the Acharonim, the appellation will be identified with the Rishon rather than with the Acharon. Thus in the first list I did not mention the appellation הַרִיבָּשׁ (Harivash) as referring to Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov (the Besht), since this appellation is identified with Rabbi Yitzhak Bar-Sheshet, one of the Rishonim sages.

Sometimes several sages of equal status are referred to by the same appellation. Accordingly, those mentioning these sages must clarify to whom they are referring, by mentioning their books or their full name. In such cases I am unsure whether or not to take the position that this appellation is not unequivocally related to a certain sage, and that it constitutes a simple abbreviation not to be included in the list. In practice, I acted as follows: If, in

the above-mentioned encyclopedia, the appellation is included in the entry for that sage, I also included it in the list; if not, I did not include it.

Sometimes the common appellation of a number of sages is not an abbreviation, but a word or expression. For example, a number of sages were known as “Ashkenazi” (European). On its own, this appellation does not identify the sage. This appellation was used in the case of Ashkenazi sages who lived in Sephardi (Oriental) communities where the appellation was customarily added to their name. For example, Hakham Zvi (in the first list) was known as Zvi Ashkenazi, but the appellation “Ashkenazi” did not become his family name and his son was not called by this name. At most, the term “Ashkenazi” may be included as part of the full name. The same principle applies to the appellation “Mizrachi” as used for a Sephardi sage who lives in an Ashkenazi community. It is true that, over the years, these appellations became accepted family names (which is why we find Sephardi families with the family name Ashkenazi).

(c) Many sages are named after the titles of their books. Here, too, the researcher who encounters such references must discern whether the reference is to the **sage** or to his *book*. For example, one may encounter the expression הרב כסף משנה (“The Rabbi Kesef Mishneh wrote..”) This could refer to Rabbi Yosef Caro, in which case the appellation would be understood as הרב כסף משנה (HaRav Kesef Mishneh, i.e. HaRav Ba’al Kesef Mishneh--“the Rabbi who wrote “Kesef Mishneh”). It could, however, refer to a quotation from Rabbi Caro’s book Kesef Mishneh, in which case the reference would be understood as כתב בכסף משנה (“he wrote in Kesef Mishneh”). In general, it may be said that the sages were known by their main and most famous book. For example, Rabbi Azariah Figo (in the second list) wrote a well-known book entitled Giddulei Terumah, and another book which also became quite well known (though less important) entitled Bina Le-Ittim. Let us now see how he is referred to by the author of Sha’arei Teshuvah (a

collection of excerpts from responsa works on the Orah Haim section of Shulhan Arukh), Section 223: “**And Ba’al Giddulei Terumah...**wrote in his work *Bina Le-Ittim...*” A similar example is found regarding Rabbi Haim Benbenest (in the second list). While his most important work is **Keneset ha-Gedolah**, he also wrote other works. He is mentioned in the responsa work Yehaveh Da’at (Part 5, ref. 54) as follows+: “... **Ba’al Keneset ha-Gedolah** in his responsa *Ba’ei Hayei...*” and, op. cit. (Part 6, ref. 49): “... **Ba’al Keneset ha-Gedola** in his work *Dina de-Hayei...*”

Some sages composed a number of works but for various reasons are not known by these titles. This may be because they became known by another name or appellation, or because their compositions were not particularly famous or widely disseminated.

(d) When a sage has two Hebrew first names, such as Moshe Haim (Luzzato, in the first list), we have the appellation “Rabbi Moshe Haim”. When the second name is influenced by a foreign language, such as Yehoshua Hoeschel (in the first list), the customary form in writing is Yehoshua Hamekhuneh Hoeschel (“Yehoshua who is known as Hoeschel”), in other words “Hoeschel” is perceived as an appellation. Accordingly, I distinguished between these names. I consider his name to be Rabbi Yehoshua, while his appellation is Rabbi Hoeschel. (provided this appellation was well-known and unambiguous, as discussed above in section b).

(e) Use of the definite article (הַ). Many appellations in the Torah literature are referred to with the definite article (in fact, the use of the definite article sometimes proves that the expressions constitutes an appellation). Thus, for example, we often find the expressions המהרש"ל (HaMaharshal), המהרש"א (HaMaharsha, both in the first list), and so on. In general, I included the

appellation both with the definite article and without. However, there are exceptions. For example, Rashi (in the first list) is not known as הרש"י (with the definite article). The opposite also applies — some appellations never appear without the definite article, such as הגר"א (HaGra; in the first list). Appellations composed of two or more words do not take the definite article; thus one does not write הבית יוסף (HaBeit Yosef) or החמהר"י קארו (HaMahari Caro), since this does not conform to the rules of Hebrew grammar (though various sources may include examples of irregular expressions of this kind, which do not conform to the rules of Hebrew grammar).

(f) Sometimes appellations appear with minor variations, such as מהרש"ל (Maharshal) or מוהרש"ל (Moharshal), מהרש"א (Maharsha) or מוהרש"א (Moharsha) (according to the authors' style, period and location). A similar problem occurs for the same reasons with such variant forms as הרש"ל (Harashal) and מהרש"ל (Maharshal), מהר"י קארו (HaRi Caro) and מהר"י קארו (Mahari Caro). I proceeded as follows: (1) If one variant is much more common in the database, I adopted that form. (2) If the variations appear with similar frequency, I exercised my own professional judgment (based on my knowledge of other sources).

(g) It should be noted that new material is added to the Responsa project database from time to time, both from the basic literature and from responsa works. Accordingly, appellations from new works may have been added since the time I composed the two lists.

*In reply to your questions:* Based on the preceding remarks, my reply is as follows:

(1) There are additional appellations found in the Responsa database referring to the above-mentioned sages but not included in the second list.

(2-3) Details of the additional appellations not included, and the reason they were not included (the following numbers relate to the above-mentioned second list):

1. הרע אב"ד (HaRa Abad) — not pronounced (sounds like הרע אב"ד which means “the evil Abad”). ראב"י אב"ד, הראב"י אב"ד (Ra'avi Abad, HaRa'avi Abad) — not included. I do not remember now why not. For the appellation הרב אב"ד (HaRav Abad), I did not use the form without the definite article רב אב"ד (Rav Abad).

2. מהר"א יצחקי (Mahara Yitzhaki) — this seems to be a simple abbreviation, not an appellation.

6. מהר"א אשכנזי (Mahara Ashkenazi) — simple abbreviations, and Ashkenazi is a general appellation (see above, “Professional Judgment,” section b).

מעשי ד', מעשי ה' — simple abbreviations, which are accepted *references* for the name מעשי השם (Ma'asei HaShem) or מעשי יהוה (Ma'asei YHWH).

7. מהרד"א (Maharda). Appears only in the responsa Seridei Esh, and only when introduced previously as “הג' מהר"ד אופנהיים” (Hag[aon] Maharad Oppenheim), and subsequently as הג' מהרד"א (Hag' Maharda), thus proving that this is a simple abbreviation. By the way, with hindsight I would be inclined to reject the appellation “מהר"ד אופנהיים” (Maharad

Oppenheim). א"רד"א (HaRada), too, was included because it appears in the above-mentioned encyclopedia.

8. As I explained above in the section “Using the Responsa Database,” this is one of the sages whose appellations are not likely to appear in the responsa database. I did, however, wish to mention that he is referred to as “author of the composition Kuzari Sheni (=The Second Kuzari)” (responsa Hatam Sofer and responsa Melamed le-Ho’il), rather than by reference to the other name of his book, Match Dan. (The name Kuzari Sheni became popular because it was named after an earlier famous work, The Kuzari, by a different author).

10. א"רר"ח (Maharha) — this abbreviation is shared by several sages: Rabbi Haim Abulafia the First, Second and Third; Rabbi Haim Alfandari, etc. Some (cf. the Encyclopedia Hebraica) prefer to use this appellation for Rabbi Haim Abulafia the first, rather than the sage referred to here. In the responsa Mor ve-Ohalot, the author is obliged to refer to him as “Maharha the Latter”; others who mention him are obliged to identify him in some manner (by the titles of his compositions, etc.). א"רר"ח"א (Moharha)— rejected for the above-mentioned reasons (this form is also much less common).

אבולעפיה אבולעפיה (Abulafia) — this form of the family name is imprecise, since the Arabic form of the name is “Father of Health” (Abu el-Afia), which is how it should appear.

11. הרב חבי"ב (HaRav Haviv), or in a more abbreviated form החבי"ב (HaHaviv), or in a variant addition, חבי"ב אד"ם (Haviv Adam). These appellations are based on the acronym for בר' ישראל בנבנשת (=חבי"ב Haviv; Haim Bar Yisrael Benvenisti). This appellation overlooked while I was preparing the list.

מהרח"ב (Maharhab) — likewise. If it is to be included in the list, מהרח"ב (Moharhab) should be rejected according to section f(2) in the section “Professional Judgment.”

13. מהרח"ש (Moharhash) — rejected because מהרח"ש (Maharhash) is much more common, according to section f(1) above. מהר"ח שבתאי (Maharah Shabbetai) — a simple abbreviation.

18. רבי העשיל (Rabbi Hoeschel) — רבי העשיל מקראקא (Rabbi Hoeschel of Cracow; no. 14 in the first list) is much better known by this appellation.

רבי יושע (Rabbi Yosha) — an appellation shared by several sages; for example, Ba'al HaSema (no. 15 in the first list) is better known by this appellation. Moreover, I do not see this appellation as unambiguous even in the case of Ba'al HaSema.

19. הר"י מטראני (HaRi Mitrani) — usually refers to the well-known Rishonim הר"י (HaRid) and הר"י א"ז (HaRiaz).

מהר"י מטראני (Mahari Trani), מהר"י מטראני (Mahari Mitrani) — I do not recall why these were rejected. מהר"י מטראני (Mohari Trani), מהר"י מטראני (Mahari Mitrani) — less widespread than the above-mentioned appellations.

21. מהר"י"ב (Mahariv) — attributed to various sages, including Rabbi Yisrael Bassan and Rabbi Yisrael Binyamin, but most associated with the best-known among these sages — מהר"י ברונא (Mahari **Bruna**). מהר"י"ב (Mohariv) — likewise.

מהר"י בירב (Bei Rav) (Hari Beirav (Bei Rav)) — much less common than מהר"י בירב (Bei Rav) (Mahari Beirav (Bei Rav)). מהר"י בירב (Bei Rav) (Mohari Beirav (Bei Rav)) — much less common than Mahari Beirav (Bei Rav).

הריב"ר (Maharibar), מוהריב"ר (Moharibar) — minor variants on הריב"ר (Haribar), rejected according to section f(2) above.

22. חגיז (Hagiz) — rejected because it is clear from his son's introduction to his father's book *Halakhot Ketanot*, that the correct spelling is with an Aleph (חאגיז). מהר"י חאגיז (Mahari Hagiz) — I do not remember why this was omitted. מהר"ח (Maharih) — identified with a Rishon sage quoted frequently in *Hagahot Asheri* (Rabbi Yehezekiah of Magdeburg).

23. מהר"י סג"ל (Mahari Segal) — much less common than הר"י סג"ל (HaRi Segal). הר"י אבן (Hari Halevi) — this usually refers to a Rishon sage, מגאש (HaRi Ibn-Migash). הר"י מולין (HaRi Molin) — much less common than מהר"י מולין (Mahari Molin). מוהרי"ל (Moharil) — much less common than מהר"ל (Maharil).

24. A number of variants have developed from the basic form of יעב"ץ (Yaabez): ריעב"ץ (Riyaabez), מהריעב"ץ (Mahariyaabez), הריעב"ץ (HaRiyaabez). I chose מהריעב"ץ (Mahariyaabez) but rejected ריעב"ץ (Riyaabez), because I saw it as a simple abbreviation; this latter form occurs almost exclusively in *Iggerot Mosheh*. מהריעב"ץ (Mahariyaabez) — appears as often as הריעב"ץ (HaRiyaabez), but rejected according to section f(2) above. Another form מהר"י יעב"ץ (Mahari Yaabez) exists (it appears in the *Hatam Sofer*); this appellation also reflects the name Yisrael, which was associated with this sage. I overlooked this form.

27. As is clear from the list, the forms מהר"ם זכותא (Maharam Zacuta) and מהר"ם זכותו (Maharam Zacuto) were overlooked. See the comment above in the section "Use of the Responsa Database," to the effect that this database cannot

be used to determine the accepted appellation for רבי משה זכות (Rabbi Moshe Zacut).

30. The database includes the abbreviations מוהרע"ח ריקי (Moharah Ricchi) but this was rejected, because it is not pronounced. הר"ע ריקי (HaRa Ricchi) — rejected because it is not pronounced. See the comment above in the section “Use of the Responsa Database,” to the effect that this database cannot be used to determine the accepted appellation for the Kabbalist רבי עמנואל חי ריקי (Rabbi Immanuel Hai Ricchi).

31. מוהר"ש שרעבי (Maharash Shar'abi), מוהר"ש שרעבי (Moharash Shar'abi) — simple abbreviations. See the comment above in the section “Use of the Responsa Database,” to the effect that this database cannot be used to determine the accepted appellation for the Kabbalist רבי שלום שרעבי (Rabbi Shalom Shar'abi).

General comment: All the appellations of sages based on the names of their books are exactly as they appear in the list. If there are other appellations of this form that appear in the database but are not included in the list of appellations, they were rejected according to “Personal Judgment,” section C.

**S. Z. Havlin**