

Educational values in R. Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg's commentary on the  
Torah, *Haketav Vehakabbalah*

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*Haketav Vehakabbalah* by R. Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) is the first comprehensive commentary on the Torah written with the purpose of contending with cultural tensions currently gaining force in nineteenth century Europe with the advent of the Haskalah and the developing Reform movement, both of which offered a progressive, new approach to Jewish tradition. This paper considers *Haketav Vehakabbalah* against the background of its historical period, and highlights the importance of that context toward understanding the commentary and the worldview it expresses. In addition to R. Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg's overtly stated ideological purpose, this discussion demonstrates that a second important purpose informs his commentary as well: to impart educational values he considered essential to contemporary Jewish readers. Five passages from the commentary are analyzed, with attention to this second, implicit orientation. The close reading offered here makes evident that while the declared goal of *Haketav Vehakabbalah* was to prove the eternal truth of the traditional religious belief in the unity of the Written and Oral Torah – against the contentions of the Reformers – its second goal was to encourage Jews who had remained loyal to tradition by emphasizing the educational values implicit in the Torah, thus guiding them as well in the effort to resist the secularizing spirit of the times.