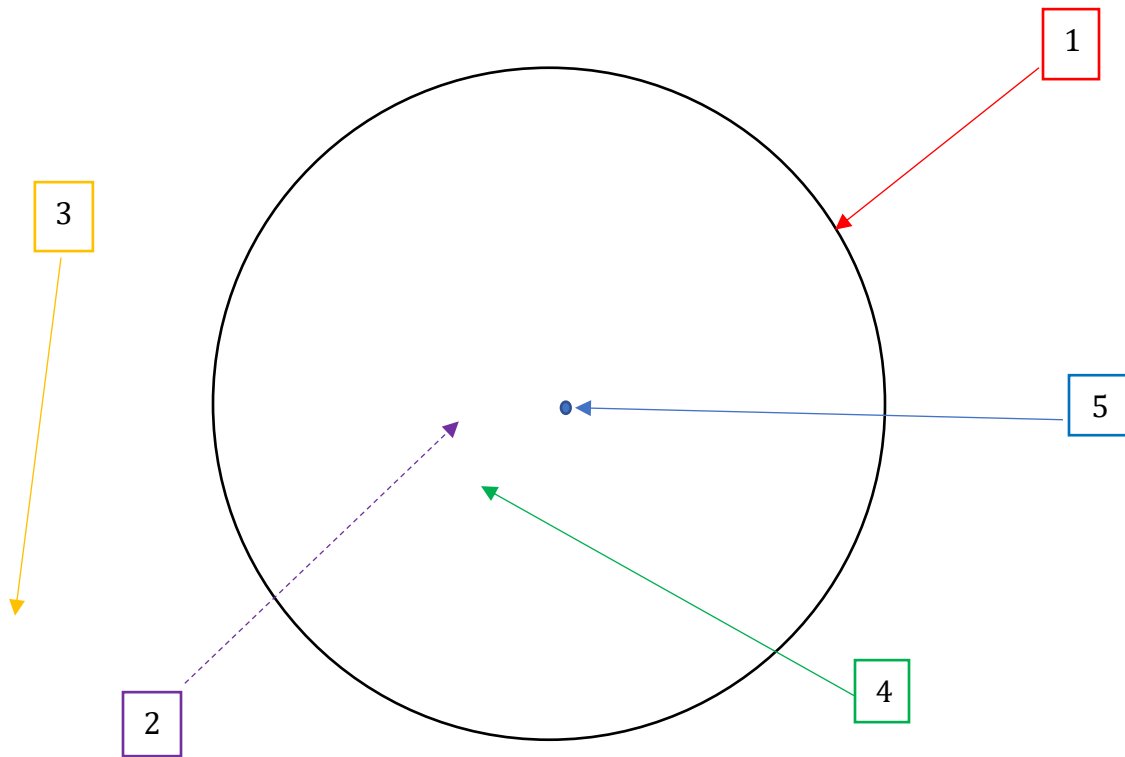


Ibn Ezra's Five Ways

In the general introduction to his Torah Commentary (standard/short), Ibn Ezra introduces five methodologies (דרכים) of scriptural exegesis, four of which he considers mistaken (to different degrees), and the fifth of which he describes as his own preferred method; these are expanded upon somewhat in his later Introduction to the Torah Commentary (alternate/long). Ibn Ezra uses the metaphor of a circle to describe the relative proximity of the five ways to the most correct understanding of the text. The center point of the circle represents the correct understanding.



1. דרך האחת ארוכה ורחבה...ובה דרכו גדולים, והמה חכמי הישיבות במלכות ישמעאלים

The way of the geonim – endlessly circling around the bounding line of the circle, as far from the center as possible while being part of the circle

2. הדרך הב'...דרך הצדוקים

The way of Karaites – they believe themselves to be at the center

3. הדרך הג' דרך חשך ואפלה...והם הבודאים מלבם לכל הדברים סודות, ואמונתם כי התורות והמשפטים חידות

The way of allegory and figurative language (as used by Christians) – these interpreters are outside of the circle

4. הדרך הרביעית...זאת דרך החכמים, בארצות יונים ואדומים

The way of midrash as used by exegetes in Christian Europe – they are close to the center, much closer than the first three;

5. הדרך החמישית...הישרה בעיני...אחפש היטב דקדוק כל מלה בכל מאד, ואחר כך אפרשנה כפי אשר תשיג ידי...רק קדמונינו...כל דבריהם אמת

The way of peshat – at the center point of the circle; the correct method of understanding Tanakh, without contradicting rabbinic tradition