An Analysis of Isaac Heinemann's Darkhe Ha-Aggadah, Chapters Two and Three

By

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INTRODUCTION

In 1949, Isaac Heinemann published, what has since become a classic in its field, Darkhe Ha-Aggadah. This study, the only one of its kind ever undertalen, is a highly analytic explication (rich in aggadik references) of the mechanisms and purposes at work in the creation of midrashim.

Unfortunately, Heinemann's profound undertaking remains largely unknown, even among students of the midrash. This is only partially explained by the absence of translations of this work. For even to those who are knowledgeable in Hebrew, Darkhe Ha-Aggadah presents a challenge which is formidable. It is frankly an effort to make one's way through Heinemann's cumbersome Hebrew which reads, at times, like a translation of thoughts, conceived and formulated in the German language. Because there is such a wealth of insight here, it is hoped that this entire work will, one day, be rendered into intelligible English. My effort is but a modest beginning in this direction.

I have selected two of the earlier chapters of Darkhe Ha-Aggadah, with the purpose of conveying, in my own words, the sum and substance of Heinemann's thought in these chapters. I am gratefully indebted to Dr. Liebreich for suggesting this project to me, and for his kindly and helpful aid along the way as my advisor.

PART I

CONCRETIZATION

Rather than being abstract, methodical, schematic, philosophic, systematic, the thinking of the authentic Jew and the oriental is concrete, illustrative, folksy, animated, lively. It makes use of detail in its expression. And by way of detail and the concrete, it points toward the general, which it is neither willing nor able to reveal directly by word and theory. (1)

The above characterization is descriptive of the thinking of our rabbis. And this "organic" characteristic of their thinking led to various concretizations of the non-concrete. Consider how our rabbis dealt with certain questions which could have been formulated in a general, abstract way. It is true that occasionally they posed a question abstractly, as for example: Were it better for man not to have been created? (2) Or: Why is it that there are righteous men who suffer adversity, while some wicked men prosper? (3) But nowhere in rabbinic Judaism do we find a book like Philo's "Concerning Providence", or theoretical inquiry such as that typically Greek question: How does man arrive at a concept of Divinity?

Rather did our rabbis prefer to reveal their questions, and their doubts, by way of concrete illustrative situations. For example, our rabbis raised the question of God's Justice by way of a statement within an actual dialogue they imagined between God and Job. Job speaks: Can it be that God has confused איוב (Job) with אויב

(Enemy)? The answer to this question which they placed in the mouth of God was equally concrete, and highly illustrative:

> Most foolish creature, I created many hairs on the head of man. And for each and every hair I created a separate follicle, in order that no two hairs would have to be nourished from the same follicle, thereby impairing the sight of man. I did not confuse one follicle with another. Would I confuse פוּךְ with פוּךְ ? (4)

Or consider how our rabbis, in their interpretations of the Akedah never come right out and ask: Can a God who puts man to such a test be a just God? Rather is their question both implied in, and answered by way of that illustrative image of R. Jonathan:

> A potter does not test defective vessels, because all it takes is one tap, and they break. What then does he test? Only excellent vessels which, no matter how many times they are tapped, do not break. So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, tests not the wicked, but the righteous. As it says - The Lord trieth the righteous. (5)

Nor do our rabbis directly verbalize such an abstract problem as: How can an Omniscient God NOT know whether man will obey Him? Again, their question is implicit in their commentary upon the biblical verse: For now I know that you fear God. (6), which they interpreted to mean: For now I have made it known to all that you love Me... (7). Which is to say that God really did know all along how Abraham would respond to this test.

Interpretations such as these, which are a part of Israel's common heritage, justify the trials and tribulations of specific righteous men, and even of the people as a whole, as when the rabbis tell us that it is not to prove their righteousness that the Holy One, blessed be He, afflicts Israel - though this is the understanding of Christians and

others. But Israel is tried precisely because God is sure of Israel's steadfastness. And he wants to make it known to all that Israel serves her Master out of loyalty, rather than for the sake of a reward. Through such teachings, an event, such as the Akedah, takes on a more exalted meaning.

Abstract theological questions as: How can an infinite God dwell within a finite early sanctuary? Or: Why should a God who has everything, receive with favor the meager sacrificial offerings of man? - were not posed outrightly in such an abstract fashion. Instead , such questions are implicit within a concrete dialogue, rich in striking imagery, which our rabbis imagined between God and Moses:

> When God said to Moses: Make Me a Temple - Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He, Master of the Universe, look how the heavens, and the heaven of heavens, are not able to contain You, and You say - Make Me a Temple! The Holy One, blessed be He said to him: Moses, it is not as you imagine. No, make it 20 boards by 20 by 8, and I will come down and squeeze myself in beneath them.
>
> At the time when God said to Moses: My sacrifices, my sustenance...to the fire - Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe, if I were to bring all the animals in the world, would they suffice to constitute even one offering? Or all the wood in the world, would that be sufficient to kindle one offering (worthy of You)? The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Moses, it is not as you imagine. No, you shall say to them - This is the fire offering. Bring me one sheep in the morning and another in the evening. (8)

In such a concrete fashion, our rabbis refuted that unsophisticated understanding which imagines that God's presence can be conjured by means of Temple ritual. God "compresses himself" - that is to say, He graces our sanctuary with His presence out of His love, rather than because he is coerced by magic. And He accepts our sacrifices and

offerings, not because it is in our power to benefit Him, but because He desires our obedience, and is satisfied with small token gifts which demonstrate our loyalty to Him. We might add that our rabbis alluded to such theological problems, not solely to show how such difficulties can be overcome, but also to better understand and to clarify the heresies which give rise to such questions.

The general, abstract question: Can man be held responsible for his deeds? - is not posed by our rabbis. But this question is implied in their interpretation of a concrete situation, the confrontation of Cain by God immediately following the slaying of Abel. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (9) Cain's reply - I DO NOT KNOW - was taken to mean that either he had never before seen a murder, or the Holy One, blessed be He, had created the evil inclination. And we should not condemn a man for sins committed out of ignorance. As for Cain's words - AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER? - our rabbis' interpretation was either that God who watches and sees all, must have allowed Cain to slay Abel. Or God himself, in effect, killed Abel by arousing Cain's jealousy of his brother. (10)

An interpretation such as this embodies all that contemporary moralists have said, both by way of limiting the responsibility of those who have done wrong, and by way of arguing that advocates of stern justice have overlooked an important injunction: You shall not place a stumbling block before the blind. Even as God's rejection of Cain's offering, albeit a just act on the part of God, failed to take into account Cain's capacity for being blinded by jealousy, so too, (the argument goes)

harsh punishment, even when it is justly commensurate with the deed, may give rise to additional wrong doings.

Again, without abstractly formulating the question of human responsibility, our rabbis came to grips with this problem in their interpretation of another concrete situation - Esau's seemingly irresponsible disposal of his birth-right in order to gratify his immediate appetite for food: Once when Jacob was boiling pottage, Esau came in from the field and he was famished. (11) "What is the purpose of this pottage?", Esau asked. "I made it because that old man (Abraham) has died", Jacob replied. "God's judgment has struck that righteous man!, Esau exclaimed, then there is neither reward nor resurrection!" (12) In effect our rabbis say here, that it is those experiences which teach that God destroys innocent and guilty alike, which cause men to deny God, and to pursue the pleasures of this world - whether good or evil.

Two more instances may be mentioned which reveal how our rabbis approached the problem of man's responsibility by way of real life situations, within which this question is imbedded. To what extent is Job's wife to be held accountable for her notorious advice to Job: Curse God and die! (13) This question is implied in the rabbinic interpretation of this situation. Our rabbis said that the wife of Job was none other than Dinah! Thereby, they softened the rebelliousness of her bitter words, which now appear to be a pathetic reflection of her own tragic experience as a child. (14)

And the question as to whether a Jew was, under all circumstances, to be held accountable for failing to perform the mitzvoth is implied in a concrete, illustrative situation which our rabbis described through the

mouth of Korah:

> There was a widow, and living with her were her two fatherless daughters. The widow had only one field, and when she was about to plow, Moses said to her: Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. When she was about to sow, Moses said to her: Thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed. When she was about to reap the harvest and to stack the sheaves, Moses said to her: Thou shalt not harvest the gleanings, the overlooked sheaves, and the corners of the field. When she was about to bring the harvest into the granary, Moses said to her: Give me the heave offering, the first tithe, and the second tithe. She submitted to God's decree and gave them to him.
>
> What did the poor woman do then? She sold the field and bought two sheep, so that she might clothe herself in the wool shorn from them, and so that she might profit out of the lambs. As soon as the sheep brought forth their young, Aaron came and said to the widow: Give me the firstling males...again she submitted to God's decree, and gave the young of her sheep to Aaron. When the time for shearing arrived...
>
> Is such a thing right? Moses and Aaron have done all these things to her, but hang the blame on the Holy One, blessed be He! (15)

Thus, our rabbis emphasized that there are people who would like to fulfill the Law, but God has made its yoke too heavy for them.

The perenial metaphysical question: What is the ultimate meaning of Israel's suffering? - is not posed by our rabbis in such an abstract way. As is the case with the questions we have mentioned, this question too lurks within the heart of the concrete - for example, within a particular conversation which our rabbis imagined to have taken place between R. Jochanan ben Zakkai and Hadrian, just after Hadrian had taken (!) Jerusalem. Hadrian speaks: By force have I taken Jerusalem! R. Jochanan: Do not glorify yourself. Had not heaven ordained it, you would not have conquered. (He took him and brought him into a cave

where he showed Hadrian the burial place of Amorites - one of which was 18 cubits in length!)...when we merited it, all these men were given over into our power. And now it is on account of our sinfulness that you rule over us. (16)

Another concrete event - the miraculous survival of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - is utilized by our rabbis to shed light upon the meaning of Israel's afflictions. They imagined this great vindication of God's power to have been witnessed by the nations of the world, who take this event as a sign that there is no salvation which is too difficult for Israel's God to perform:

> When they came out from the furnace, all the nations of the earth assembled. They stood up and spat in their faces and said to them: You knew that your God is able to perform miracles and wonders such as this. You yourselves caused the destruction of his house! They spat at their faces, until their bodies dripped with spittle. (17)

If the ultimate meaning of Israel's affliction is that a just God brought such punishment upon Israel, what are those sins which merited such retribution? In confronting this problem, and responding to it, our rabbis could easily have theorized about sin, possibly formulating a systematic, conceptualized scheme which described the various types of sins and classified these according to the degree of their seriousness. But no such theory of sin is to be found in rabbinic thinking. Here again, the rabbinic mentality preferred the concrete. "The land was filled with them!" (18) Our rabbis wonder about this verse, and they conclude that Egypt was filled with theatres and circuses. (19) It was the custom of the Israelites to mix with non-Jews, and even to frequent their houses of entertainment - possibly in order to ingratiate

themselves with their foreign neighbors. But this behavior had precisely the opposite effect. And even more disastrous, it was just this particular sin - attending the circuses - along with "tale bearing" which caused the postponement of God's redeeming acts.

> Moses was meditating in his heart, "wherein has Israel sinned that they should be enslaved more than all the nations?" When he heard these words, ("Who made thee a ruler and judge over us?" (20) You seek to become a ruler and judge over us. Very well, we will divulge what you have done to the Egyptian) Moses said: Tale bearing is rife among them. How can they be ripe for salvation? (21)

Those of Ahab's generation were said to have been deserving of vindication, in spite of their having worshipped idols because their redemption was not delayed in this way: The generation of Ahab were all worshippers of idols. Yet owing to the fact that there were no informers among them, they used to go out to war and be victorious! (22)

Even such an occurrence as the destruction of the 2nd Temple - a complex historical event worthy of methodical thought, if one is to conceptualize a theory which adequately accounts for it, was explained by our rabbis in terms of a single, concrete incident, rich in illustrative details:

> A certain man had a friend called Kamza, and an enemy named Bar Kamza. Once he made a banquet and said to his servant - Go and bring Kamza. The man went and brought Bar Kamza. When this man found his enemy at his party he said to him - What are you doing here? Get out! Said Bar Kamza - Since I am already here, let me stay and I will pay you for what I eat and drink. He said - I won't. Then let me give you half the cost of the party. He still said No, and he took him by the hand and showed him the way out. Said Bar Kamza - Since the rabbis were sitting there and did not stop him, this means that they agreed with him. I will go and inform against them to the Government.

> He went and said to the Emperor - The Jews are rebelling against you! He said - How can I tell? He said to him - Send them an offering and see whether they will offer it up. So he sent Bar Kamza with a fine calf. While on the way, he made a blemish on its upper lip, or, as some say, on the white of its eye, in a place where Jews count it a blemish...
>
> (R. Zechariah b. Abbculas opposed both offering the sacrifice, and doing away with Bar Kamza) ...Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death? Whereupon R. Jochanan remarked: Through the humility of R. Zechariah, our House has been destroyed, our Temple burnt, and we ourselves exiled from our land! (23)

Likewise the question: What makes a people worthy of redemption? - was not posed by our rabbis in such abstract terms. Rather did they focus their attention upon the concrete - i.e. upon the particular event of the exodus from Egypt. And they accounted for this specific event in terms of peculiarly unique deeds around which one could hardly build an all encompassing theory of redemption:

> R. Akiba said in a discourse - Israel was redeemed from Egypt on account of the righteous women of that generation. What did they do? When they went to draw water, God deposited small fish in their pitchers, with the result that they found them filled - half with water, and half with fish. They brought these fish to their husbands whom they would feed, wash, anoint with oil, and give to drink. And they cohabited with them between the mounds in the fields. (In spite of Pharoh's decrees) Because they lay between the mounds, Israel merited the plunder of Egypt. (24)

In addition, our rabbis taught that not a single Hebrew changed his name or his language (in marked contrast to the majority of Egyptian Jews during the rabbinic period). And they refrained from acts of incest and slander. (25)

We have spoken thus far of how theoretical questions which could have been posed outrightly by our rabbis, and answered in an abstract, systematic way, were instead permitted to remain submerged within the

context of concrete illustrative situations, and were answered in a most non-systematic, unmistakably concrete way. We could sum up this characteristic of rabbinic thought by saying that organic thinking, unlike scientific thinking, does not subordinate the concrete to the conceptual. This principle points toward the differing ways in which the scientist and our rabbis account for observed peculiarities in the world. While science postulates abstract, universal laws which account for all that occurs, our rabbis preferred concrete aetiological stories, some of them etymological, which evoke an emotional response in the listener. For example, there was nothing un-scientific in the observation of our rabbis that the serpent may be found slipping through the grass along fences. But their aetiological explanation for this "peculiarity" was not in keeping with the method of science. The serpent, they said, is found among fences because a serpent once caused Eve to sin, thereby making a breach in the "moral fence" of the world. Why does the serpent kill with a poisonous bite? Since he was the first to make a breach in the world's fence, he has become the executioner of all who make breaches in fences - i.e. who violate rabbinical law which is a "fence" around the Torah. (26)

The ugliness of the sons of Ham is accounted for by the incident where Ham views the nakedness of his father, and tells of what he has seen. As a punishment for this, God decreed that his children were to be disfigured. (27) Here we see an unmistakable moralistic intention, over and above our rabbis' interest in accounting for the peculiar appearance of Ham's descendents. Why is it that fingers have such an unusual peg-like shape? The reason is so that if a man hears an unseemly

remark, he can plug up his ears with his fingers! (28) The strange effect of wine upon men is accounted for by an invented tale which tells how Satan irrigated Noah's vineyard with the blood of a sheep, a lion, a pig, and a monkey. And that is why before a man drinks, he is as harmless as a lamb. A little wine, and he becomes strong as a lion. A little more and he wallows in his own mess like a pig. Finally, he makes a complete monkey of himself! (29)

Why was Nimrod a rebellious person? Our rabbis point to the etymology of his name - Nimrod = מרד . Other strange and unique names were accounted for in terms of specific, concrete events which were said to have occurred in the lives of these people. Once, the Holy One, blessed be He, RESCUED הציל מדוד (מדוד הציל) from transgression by setting a sword between him and Michal - who had not yet been properly divorced from David. (30) Nahum of Gamzu was so named because what ever befell him, he would declare this also (גם זו) is for the best. (31) As for Ben Torto (son of the cow), he had converted to Judaism when he noticed that a cow which he had purchased from a Jew refused to work on the Sabbath. (32) Why is Elisha called "the man of wings"? Because the Roman government once proclaimed a decree against Israel that whosoever put on tefillin would have his brains pierced through. Still Elisha put on tefillin and went out into the streets. When a Roman official saw him, Elisha fled and was pursued. As he was overtaken, Elisha removed the tefillin from his head, and held them in his hand. What is that in your hand? - the officer demanded. The wings of a dove, Elisha replied. He stretched out his hand and indeed they were the wings of a dove. Therefore, he is called Elisha,

the man of wings. (33)

Aetiological explanations appear to be more common in the later midrashim. There we learn that the name Ur (fire) was derived from a miraculous incident which occurred there. Abraham was hurled (actually catapulted!) into a fire by Nimrod. And that fire turned into a beautiful garden. As for one of Haman's ten sons, אדרזתא (interpreter of the law), he was so named because Ahasuerus commanded him to read from the book of Chronicles, but he preferred to recount the deeds of Mordecai. (35) Our rabbis accounted for the name of Joshua ben Nun (son of a fish) by telling of a particular event in his life which calls to mind both the Oedipus and the Jonah stories. It seems that Joshua's father dreamed that Joshua would cut off his father's head, and marry his mother. Subsequently, the father sent his boy packing. But a fish came to Joshua's rescue, and he did survive to murder his father. And he almost married his mother! (36)

The phenomenon of personification reveals another form which was taken by the rabbinic tendency toward concretization. While personifications are not characteristic of organic thinking, they are especially abundant in Greek philosophy. And as a result of Greek influence, personifications are found throughout the rabbinic writings of the Hellenistic period. For instance, in the book of Esdras, the abstract idea of Galut is made concrete (visible) by the personification of Zion as a childlike widow. Such abstractions as "the wisdom of God" and "the word of God" are personified in the book of The Wisdom of Solomon, and thereby given a concrete dimension. (37) In the logos of Philo, and in his two attributes of justice and mercy, we have further instances of personifications

influenced by Greek philosophy. (38)

Lastly, we mention those midrashim which personify (and thereby to a limited extent concretize) such abstractions as government (personified as "Prince of the world" and "Princes of the nations") (39), Torah (40), Repentance (41), Love, Truth, Righteousness and Peace (42), Justice and Mercy (43), and the Evil Inclination (personified as Satan) (44). In a sense, all such personifications may be understood as plain and simple metaphor. But there is more involved here. For if it is difficult to determine the degree of personification in Philo's logos, how much the more so with respect to the two Divine attributes, and Satan or the rabbis!

Another form in which personifications appear in the aggadah is in the identification (an age old tendency) of parts of the human body with non-human elements in nature. In this second form of personification, we recognize an unmistakable hovering between serious belief and playful metaphoric expression.

Mediaeval thinkers, among them Saadia Gaon, called attention to such obvious figures of speech as "eye of the earth" and "mouth of the earth", in order to demonstrate that when it uses such expressions, the Torah speaks in the language of men. Which is to say - the Torah speaks in metaphors. It was obvious to them that such references to parts of the earth in terms of the human body were not to be taken literally. Nor do we find in the whole of the Apycrypha and, needless to say, in the ancient philosophic writings, anyone who interpreted these expressions literally. But such is not the case with the aggadah. Here such expressions are taken literally:

> R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish - To whatever the Holy One, blessed be He, created in man, He created a parallel in the earth. Man has a head and so has the earth. As it says - Nor the head of the dust of the world. Man has eyes and so has the earth. As it says - And they shall cover the eye of the earth. Man has ears and so has the earth. As it says - Give ear, O earth. Man has a mouth and so has the earth. As it says - And the earth opened her mouth. (45)

Responding to the biblical expression - Give ear, ye heavens (46), our rabbis said:

> From here you learn that the heavens have mouth, heart, and ear. A mouth from whence? It is written - The heavens declare the glory of God. A heart from whence? It is written - And the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven. And an ear from whence? It is written - Give ear, ye heavens. (47)

In a similar fashion, our rabbis likened not only one part of creation to another, but also creation to its Creator:

> R. Abin said - We gather from Scripture that there are wings to the earth. As it says - From the uttermost wings of the earth are heard songs; wings to the sun. As it says - But unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings; wings to the chayyoth, and wings to the cherubim. As it says - For the cherubim spread forth their wings; wings to the seraphim. As it says - Above Him stood the seraphim, each one with six wings;
>
> Come and consider how great is the power of righteousness, and how great the power of those who do kindly deeds. For they shelter neither in the shadow of the morning, nor in the shadow of the wings of the earth, nor in the shadow of the sun, nor in the shadow of the wings of the chayyoth, or the cherubim, or the seraphim. Under whose wings, then, do they shelter? Under the shadow of Him at whose word the world was created. As it says - How precious is Thy lovingkindness, O God, the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings. (48)

Although this second form of personification sheds no further light upon our theme - the tendency of our rabbis toward concretization - we mention this phenomenon because precisely here, the distinction between organic and conceptual thinking is most fully revealed. For while the

philosopher subordinated his thinking to the LAW OF CONTRADICTION (absolutely refusing to consider the possibility of truth which contradicted experience), our rabbis gave full expression to the anthropocentric impulse - finding "our brothers" everywhere in non-human nature, thereby drawing the non-human world closer to themselves, empathizing with and comprehending this world.

FOOTNOTES

Part I

1. See Heinemann - note 1 to chapter 2.
2. Erubin 13b
3. Berakoth 7a
4. Niddah 52b
5. Genesis Rabba 55:2
6. Genesis 22:12
7. Genesis Rabba 56:7
8. Pesikta De-Rav Kehana - כי תשא -10
9. Genesis 4:9
10. Tanhuma - בראשית -9
11. Genesis 25:29
12. Genesis Rabba 63:11
13. Job 2:9
14. Genesis 34:2
15. Midrash Tehillim 1:15
16. Tanhuma Buber - דברים -7
17. Tanchuma - כי תשא -14
18. Exodus 1:7
19. Tanchuma Buber - שמות -6
20. Exodus 2:14
21. Exodus Rabba 1:30
22. Leviticus Rabba 26:2
23. Gittin 55b

24. Exodus Rabba 1:12
25. Mekilta - ICכ - 5:14
26. Leviticus Rabba 26:2
27. Tanhuma - hJ -13
28. Kethuboth 5b
29. Tanhuma - hJ -13
30. Sanhedrin 19b
31. Taanith 21a
32. Pesikta Rabbati 14:56a
33. Shabbath 49a
34. See Hein. - note 29 to chapter 2.
35. Midrash Abba Gurion 1:15
36. See Hein. - note 30 to chapter 2
37. See Hein. - note 35 to chapter 2
38. See Hein. - note 36 to chapter 2
39. See Hein. - note 37 to chapter 2
40. See Hein. - note 38 to chapter 2
41. See Hein. - note 39 to chapter 2
42. See Hein. - note 40 to chapter 2
43. See Hein. - note 41 to chapter 2
44. See Hein. - note 42 to chapter 2
45. Ecclesiastes Rabba 1:4
46. Deuteronomy 32:1
47. Deuteronomy Rabba 10:4
48. Ruth Rabba 5:4

PART II

THE FILLING IN OF DETAILS

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Both our rabbis, and modern biblical scholars fill in details concerning which Scripture is silent. Both are interested in determining the authors of the various biblical documents, in identifying anonymous persons in the text, and in shedding light upon certain incidents in the Bible which seem to require elaboration. However, there are two distinct differences between the method employed by the contemporary biblical scholar and the method of our rabbis. (1) While our rabbis did not question information already contained in Scripture, the biblical scholar does not hesitate to cast doubt upon names, dates, and details which are found in the biblical text. (2) And while our rabbis provide additional information without necessarily justifying their contributions to the tradition, the biblical scholar does feel obligated to substantiate his findings - albeit with proofs which are frequently rather tenuous.

The discussion which follows will reveal the imaginative way in which our rabbis added (a) names, (b) times, (c) and events to the biblical tradition - thereby giving answers to obvious questions raised by the text, and, at the same time, creating emotionally moving images of biblical personalities and events.

THE FILLING IN OF NAMES

The ability of the folk to tolerate anonymity is reflected in the failure of the Bible to reveal the name of the servant whom Abraham sent to fetch a wife for Isaac, (1) or the name of the Shunammite woman whose son was miraculously revived by Elisha. (2) Never-the-less, there is a certain folk curiosity, and it is in response to this that Josephus reveals names of people and places, apparently drawing upon extra-biblical literature and translations of Scripture for his information. (3) Further revelations of a similar nature are found in the Pirke de-rabbi Eliezer (4) and the Antiquities attributed to Philo. (5)

However, curiosity in itself led to quite limited results. In the whole of the Gemara, the only names revealed are those of Abraham's mother (Amathlai), Haman's mother (also Amathlai), David's mother (Nizbeth), and the mother of Samson (Zlelponith), and his sister (Nashyan). And even here, the reason for this additional information was not that it was given to satisfy the people's curiosity - but in case a heretic should inquire! (6)

Those midrashim which originated within the context of synagogue sermons reveal names with the intent of arousing the "human interest" of congregants - i.e. involving them emotionally in the text. For example, Lot's wife who turned into a pillar of salt is given the name - Edith. (7)

THE FIXING OF TIME

Our rabbis exhibit a wide-spread tendency to fix the period of biblical events, and even the occasion of the composing of isolated verses in the text. By filling in temporal details, our rabbis were able to interpret and to clarify stories in the Bible. Some of their additions appear to be simply an extension of the biblical narrative style. Just as the Bible tells us that "Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah" (8); so our rabbis added the ages of Rebekah (she was 14 years old), (9) Jacob (he was 84) (10), and Ruth (she was forty, though she didn't look a day over 14!) (11) at the time of their marriages. The Bible mentions the age of Moses (he was 80 years old) (12) when he confronted Pharaoh. So our rabbis concerned themselves with how old Moses was when "he went out to his people":

> R. Judah said - Moses was twenty years old then. They (the two Hebrews who were struggling together) said to him - You are not yet fit to be a judge and ruler over us, for only a man of forty possesses full understanding. R. Nehemiah says - Moses was forty years old, and they said to him - You are certainly a man, but not fit to be a ruler and judge over us. (13)

Further examples of our rabbis' interest in the ages of biblical personalities with reference to certain events in their lives include the filling in of Abraham's age at the time when he first acknowledged his creator:

> R. Atta said in the name of R. Hanina - Abraham was three years old when he acknowledged his Creator. From whence do we know this? As it says in the text - EKEV ASHER SHAMA AVRAHAM BEKOLI. Now if we consider EKEV from the point of view of its numerical equivalent, we get the number 172 (ק"ע). Since all the days of Abraham were 175 years, we know that

> Abraham was three years old when he acknowledged (SHANA AVRAHAM BEKOLI) his Creator! (14)

And we are even told the exact number of years that Rahab lived a life of sin:

> Rahab was ten years old when Israel went out from Egypt. And during all the forty years that Israel was in the wilderness, she practiced harlotry. At the end of her 50th year she became a proselyte, saying before the Holy One, blessed be He, - I have sinned. (15)

Like the modern biblical scholar, our rabbis recognized, and were interested in shedding light upon, the relationship between historical events and the particular time of their occurrence. But unlike the scholar of the Bible, our rabbis did not base their conclusions on what PROBABLY might have been the case. With unabashed dis-interest in the probability of their conjectures, they proceeded to fill in details concerning the temporal aspect of biblical events in such a way as to direct our attention toward truths which are timeless.

Even though it is highly improbable that a mature man would meekly follow his father to his own sacrifice, nevertheless Isaac was said to be 37 years old when his father took him to Moriah. (16) Now Sarah was 90 at the time of Isaac's birth, (17) and "a hundred and twenty-seven were the years of the life of Sarah", (18) so that by assigning Isaac an age of 37 at Moriah, our rabbis establish a tradition that Sarah's death occurred in close temporal proximity to the event of the Akedah. The timeless truth to which they pointed is that it is not the nature of a mother to endure even the thought of her son being sacrificed by his father.

Even though it is improbable that King Ahasuerus would have cast his vote for an old woman, in preference to all the young ladies who entered his beauty contest, still our rabbis fixed the years of Esther, at the time of this event, at a ripe old figure indeed!

> R. Berekiah observed in the name of the rabbis - The Holy One, blessed be He, assured Abraham: "Thou didst leave thy father's house when 75 years old; by thy life, the redeemer whom I will raise up from thee shall be 75 years old." And this is the numerical value of Hadassah - adding "one" for the word itself. (19)

Thus our rabbis intended to preclude the possibility that Esther was the type of girl who would immodestly compete with other contestants for the king's favor, willingly "losing her virtue" in the process. Rather do they prefer to emphasize a perennial truth - that everything is determined by heaven. And the Holy One, blessed be He, if He so wills it, can incline the heart of a king even toward a woman who has left the bloom of her youth far behind her.

Just as the editors of the book of Psalms fixed the occasion upon which certain Psalms were composed, so our sages asked when was it that David uttered the verse in Psalm 119 "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (20) Their answer was that David composed this verse when he prepared to enter the valley of Rephaim to do battle with the Philistines, and he would not embark upon this venture until he had consulted the Urim and the Thummim. (21) In confronting such an ungrounded conjecture, we see once again that probability played no part in the conclusions which our rabbis reached concerning this particular biblical verse. In keeping with their tendency toward concretization, they were primarily motivated by a desire to find in Scripture a suitable occasion for instruction - the occasion in

this case being the moment when Israel's king prepares for battle. A concrete situation such as this is used by our rabbis to reveal a perennial truth in Israel - that if the people want to prosper in their undertakings, they must not lose touch with God, i.e. with the Torah which is the word of God.

Given the intention of our rabbis to make use of biblical verses in this way, we shouldn't be surprised to find that, on occasion, their fixing of times and conditions actually contradicts Scripture. The verse: "Thine O Lord is the vindication, ours is the humility!" (22) (which in the Bible is found in the context of a prayer uttered by Daniel) was said to have been spoken by persons other than Daniel on a quite different occasion:

> R. Tanhum b. Hanilai said - When Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah emerged unscathed from the fiery furnace, all the nations of the world came and smote them upon their faces saying: "You have a God such as this, and yet you worship an image!" Immediately the three of them confessed - Thine O Lord is vindication, our lot this day is shamefacedness. (23)

The universal reluctance of people to be loyal to a god who has not yet demonstrated his power to them is a theme which repeats itself throughout every generation in Israel. Here our rabbis have fixed the occasion of a particular verse in Scripture in such a way as to reveal this perennial aspect of human nature - even going so far as to ignore the biblical context of the verse in their zeal to shed light upon a theme which is timeless. Thus, while the biblical scholar is concerned with discovering a necessary connection between a particular passage in Scripture and the unique circumstances under which that passage was composed, our rabbis make use of the biblical text to focus our attention,

not upon the unique situation which actually inspired that text, but upon a situation which repeats itself in each and every historical period.

Their ultimate purpose is to demonstrate the Bible's usefulness in helping us to come to terms with perennial situations and questions which confront us in our daily lives.

ELABORATION OF EVENTS

By way of its tendency to interpret even single words in Scripture, the midrash elaborates upon certain biblical events concerning which the Apocryphal and Helenistic literature is silent. For example, the Aggadic midrash fills in such details of Sodom's destruction as the sins which brought about this catastrophe:

> NOW THE MEN OF SODOM WERE WICKED AND SINNERS AGAINST THE LORD - EXCEEDINGLY. They were WICKED to each other. SINNERS in adultery. AGAINST THE LORD refers to idolatry. While EXCEEDINGLY refers to bloodshed. (24)

While the biblical text informs us that Pharaoh's butler and baker offended their master, (25) it is only in the midrash that the precise nature of their offense is revealed:

> The Rabbis said - A fly was found in the goblet prepared by the butler, and a pebble in the baker's confection. Hence it states that THE BUTLER OF THE KING AND HIS BAKER SINNED AGAINST THEIR LORD. Which is to say - they transgressed in their duties to their lord. R. Abiathar said: They wished to seduce the king's daughter. (26)

In the Bible we read that an earlier Pharaph had taken Abraham's wife into his house, and was afflicted with great plagues because of this deed. (27) For an elaboration of Pharaoh's punishment, we have

to turn to the midrash:

> R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said - An old man suffering with boils met me in Sepphoris. Said he to me: "There are 24 varieties of boils, and, out of all these, the only one upon which a woman has an injurious effect is lupus". And therewith was the wicked Pharaoh smitten. (28)

Concerning Sarah's treatment of Hagar, the Bible reveals only that "Sarah dealt harshly with her". (29) Just what was the precise nature of this "treatment", that Hagar was forced to flee from Sarah as a result of it? Here again the midrash fills in the details of this event:

> R. Abba said - Sarah restrained her from cohabitation. R. Berekiah said - She slapped her face with a slipper. R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Abba - She bade her carry her water buckets and bath towels to the baths. (such labor was the work of slaves and beneath the dignity of Hagar) (30)

Our sages did not base conclusions such as these upon actual data which they discovered, or even upon reasonable conjecture based upon the scant information given in the text. Rather did they tend to rely upon their creative imaginations. At times, their imagination led them to attribute behavior to a biblical personality which seemed to them characteristic of that particular kind of person. Thus the midrash elaborates upon the attempt of Potiphar's wife to seduce Joseph, revealing that this fiasco took place upon a public holiday - such licentious behavior on festivals being typical of this sort of woman during the Greco-Roman period.

The Bible informs us that Boaz was attracted by Ruth's presence in his fields, leaving it for our rabbis to imagine what it was about Ruth which attracted him:

> All the other women bend down to gather ears of corn, but she sits and gathers. All the other women hitch up their skirts, and she keeps hers down. All the

> other women jest with the reapers, while she is reserved. When Boaz saw how attractive Ruth was, and how modest her attitude, he began to inquire concerning her - WHOSE DAMSEL IS THIS? (31)

A Roman poet was exhibiting this very same imaginative sensitivity to acts which characterize particular types of people when he described how Lucretia took special care not to fall in an unseemly position when she stabbed herself. (32) Just as this writer wished to reveal that here was the type of woman who could not be unvirtuous except under duress, so too did our rabbis wish to bear witness to the integrity of Ruth - that she was an aysbet choyeel, and that her intentions toward Boaz were wholly honorable.

There are instances in the aggadah where "characteristic acts" are transferred from one biblical hero to another. The refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down before a golden image is an act which our rabbis transferred to Abraham. Like these three, Abraham is condemned to burning on account of his loyalty to God, and characteristically he is miraculously saved. (33) The midrash describes the falling out of Jacob and Esau in a way which parallels the biblical description of the rupture between Cain and Abel. (34) That merit by virtue of which God parted the Jordan before Israel is transferred to Jacob:

> When Jacob fled from his father's house, he carried with him only his walking stick. Come then and see what Esau, the wicked, did to Jacob. Even though he saw that Jacob was empty handed, he took no pity upon him. Rather did he say - Here I am ahead of him on the road and there is no way for him to get by me, so I will kill him. Jacob was aware of his plan, and he turned to the Holy One, blessed be He, for help. Then God performed a miracle for him. He handed Jacob the staff, and with it he divided the Jordan before him and he crossed over - leaving Esau waiting on the road. (35)

In the charge which our rabbis imagined Reuben giving to his sons before he died, we hear echoes of David's affair with Bathsheba:

> And now...hear ye the words of Reuben your father - Pay no heed to the face of a woman, nor associate with another man's wife, nor meddle with affairs of woman kind. For had I not seen Bilhah bathing in a covered place, I would not have fallen into this great iniquity. For my mind, taking in the thought of the woman's nakedness, suffered me not to sleep, until I had wrought the abominable thing. (36)

It was characteristic of Daniel's "prophetic powers" that he had knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams BEFORE the king recounted them to him. Our rabbis transferred this phenomenal power to Joseph:

> Pharaoh said - I dreamed a dream...Seven cows came up out of the river. Joseph said to him - That is not what you saw. Rather were they seven sleek and fat cows. Pharaoh said to him - Then came seven cows, weak and sickly. Joseph said to him - That is not what you saw. Rather were they gaunt and thin. Pharaoh said to him - Behold, seven stacks of corn, full and of good quality. Joseph said to him - That is not what you saw... (37)

In addition to transferring characteristic acts from one biblical personality to another, our rabbis tended to elaborate upon biblical events by providing information concerning the size of things. Our rabbis were aware that exaggerations of size were to be found in Scripture:

> R. Ammi said - The Torah, the prophets, and the sages sometimes spoke in exaggerated terms, The Torah spoke in exaggerated terms, as in the verse: "The cities are great and fortified up to heaven!" The prophets spoke in exaggerated terms, as in the verse: "So that the earth split open on account of the sound of them." (the masses of people who rejoiced at the anointing of Solomon) (38)

And it was within the tradition of such exaggerations that our rabbis vied with each other in filling in the number of Haman's children:

> AND HAMAN RECOUNTED UNTO THEM THE GLORY OF HIS RICHES AND THE MULTITUDE OF HIS CHILDREN. How many are indicated by "the multitude of his children"? Rab said - Thirty. Ten died, ten were hung, and ten were reduced to utter poverty. But the rabbis said - Those who were reduced to poverty numbered 70. While Rami b. Abba said - In all there were two hundred and eight! (39)

...and in filling in the number of children to which a Hebrew mother in Egypt gave birth at a single delivery:

> You find that when Israel was enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt, Pharaoh decreed that Israelites must not sleep in their homes, in order to keep them from cohabiting with each other. What did the daughters of Israel do? They went to the fields and fed their spouses there. After they had eaten and drank, wives took mirrors and looked into them along with their husbands. One wife said - I am more beautiful than you. Her spouse replied - I am more desirable than you. And in this way they would arouse each other's desire. And so they were fruitful and multiplied, the Holy One, blessed be He, blessing them with children right there and then! Our rabbis say that some of them gave birth to two at a time. And there are those who say there were 6 born at one time. And there are those who say 60! (40)

Using similarly exaggerated figures, our rabbis filled in the amount of manna which fell to the Israelites:

> R. Judah Halevi said in the name of R. Shalom - It is reckoned that a sufficient amount of manna fell to the Israelites each day to feed them for a period of two thousand years! And the height of this manna was 60 cubits. (41)

In what manner did Cain meet his death? Our rabbis filled in the details of this event in accordance with the halakah. A rabbi who believed that the Noachite Laws demand that a murderer's punishment be the shedding of his blood, taught that Cain met his death at the hands of Lemech. While the rabbi who understood the halakah to be death by strangulation for a murderer, claimed that Cain met his death by drowning in

the great flood. (42) It appears that the influence of the halakah is more pronounced in the aggadah of our rabbis than in the Apocrypha or Helenistic writings. (43)

We have thus far spoken of how our rabbis imaginatively filled in details of events in the Bible. We also find that occasionally they imagined scenes, speeches, and whole conversations which have absolutely no basis in Scripture. For example, they invented conversations between the angels, Moses, and the Holy One, blessed be He; between Satan, and Abraham and Isaac on their way to Mt. Moriah; and between Haman and Ahasuerus. An incodent at Sodom involving Abraham's servant, Eliezer, represents an imaginative filling in of details concerning this city - having no basis in Scripture:

> There were four judges in Sodom named "Liar", "Awful Liar", "Forger", and "Perverter of Justice". If a man assaulted his neighbor's wife and bruised her, they would say to the husband: "Give her to him that she may become pregnant for you." Now Eliezer happened to be there, and he was attacked. When he went before the judge, the latter said: "Give your attackers a fee for bleeding you." Whereupon Eliezer took a stone and smote the judge. What is the meaning of this? - the judge exclaimed. Eliezer replied: "The fee that you owe me, you may give to this man who attacked me." (44)

Instances may be mentioned in which our rabbis make use of a slight hint in Scripture in order to fabricate detailed homolies. The Bible says concerning Phineas that "aforetime God was with him". (45) Our rabbis concluded, solely on the basis of the word - "aforetime", that God must have abandoned Phineas. And they inquired concerning the reason for this. They answered their question by way of a homily in which Phineas is too proud to go to Jephthah, (an am haaretz) to absolve him of his foolhardy vow. While Jephthah, on his part, refrained from going

to the priest. (46) Thus our rabbis teach how great is the harm which may be caused by over-concern for prestige.

Jacob's parting words to Judah - "Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies", (47) were used as the basis for an imaginary story in which Judah kills Esau - this murder being a fulfillment of the promise that Judah (the lion) would triumph over Edom (the eternal enemy of Israel):

> When our father Isaac died, Esau, Jacob, and all the tribes went to bury Isaac. And they were all in the cave of Machpelah sitting and weeping. At last the tribes stood up and paid their respects to Jacob, and all of them left the cave - lest Jacob should weep and be humbled before them. But Esau squirmed back into the cave saying - Now that my father is dead, I shall slay Jacob. However, Judah observed Esau returning to the cave, and he quickly slipped into the cave after him, where he found Esau about to slay Jacob. Judah, without a moment's hesitation, rose up and slew Esau from behind. Why did he not slay him from in front? Because Esau's face resembled the face of Judah's father. And, out of respect for his father, Judah slew Esau from behind. (48)

An involved, and even somewhat suspense filled, aggadic tale was woven by our rabbis around the Scriptural verse - "I Kohelet was king in Jerusalem". (49) A single word in this verse ("was") inspired our rabbis to create an intricate legend in which Solomon goes into exile:

> Ashmedai (king of the demons who was forced to tell Solomon where the Shamir was to be found so that Solomon could use its miraculous powers in building his Temple) stayed with Solomon while the Temple was being built. One day as Ashmedai sat alone, Solomon said to him: "Show me in what way you are superior to us mortals". Ashmedai answered: "Remove my chains and give me your ring". Solomon removed the chains and gave him the ring. Ashmedai swallowed it, and, setting one wing down upon the earth and the other in the sky, he hurled Solomon a distance of four hundred parasangs. Then he went and sat himself down on the throne in the guise of the king. In the meantime, wherever Solomon went he would declare: I, Ecclesiastes, was king over Israel in Jerusalem". (50)

If we turn to legendary literature of the Church Fathers, we find there a fascination with torment and acts of cruelty. For example, we read of a certain Thyestus who devoured his son; or of a man called Aytzel, who is served dinner by his wife consisting of the hearts of their children; or of Albonin, who forced his wife to drink wine from the skull of her father. (51) Indeed, the Church Fathers saw a danger that such stories would be read purely for the purpose of titillating the senses, such morbid delights suppressing higher spiritual sensitivities. Although macabre stories like these are lacking in the aggadic literature of Israel, we do find instances of human torture and cruelty - such as the tale of the Ten Martyrs who were put to death by the Romans. (52) But, for the most part, gruesome descriptions are rare in the aggadah, as over and against the Helenistic literature where we find, for example, a detailed account of Antiochus's merciless mutilation of seven brothers - the entire bloody demonstration taking place in the presence of their mother! (53) While it is true that our rabbis depict Joseph thrown by his brothers into a pit filled with snakes and serpents, (54) their intention here is certainly not a titillation of the senses. Their aim was to intensify our tender feelings of concern for Joseph and our participation in his affliction.

On the one hand, it was possible for our rabbis to imagine a daughter of the high priest being humbled and abused before the face of a God who does nothing to deliver her:

> It is related of a certain woman named Zafenath bath Peniel...that a brigand abused her a

> whole night. In the morning he put seven wraps around her and took her out to sell her. A certain man who was exceptionally ugly came and said - Show me her beauty. He said - Fool, if you want to buy her, buy her, for there is no other so beautiful in all the world. He said to him - All the same, show her to me. He began to take the seven wraps off her, and she herself tore off the 7th and rolled in the dust, saying: "Sovereign of the universe, if Thou has not pity on us, why hast Thou not at least pity on the sanctity of Thy Name?" (55)

And, on the other hand, they could create a legend in which the Holy One, blessed be He, goes to drastic lengths in order to protect the daughters of Jerusalem from being defiled:

> R. Eleazar asked - What is the meaning of the verse: "The Lord will smite with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion"? When they would sit beside them, they would notice row upon row of lice crawling from their hair down their forehead. So they became abominable and unbearable in their sight. And forthwith they pushed them away (אפליכים אורלה). This is what Israel meant when she said: " דלקני ה׳ " - The Lord has caused me to be left alone. (56)

Which then is the world of our rabbis - a world in which evil runs rampant, or a world in which God acts to shield the righteous from catastrophe? Is it possible that these differing aggadoth reflect conflicting perspectives, or perhaps even differing schools of thought? There is no reason for reaching such a conclusion, for the confidence of the Jew never did have anything in common with that sort of optimism which grows out of closing ones eyes to reality, and pretending that because God is in His heaven, all is right with the world. Jewish trust could best be described in this way: IN SPITE OF a world in which the righteous have to endure unreasonable suffering, we need not despair either of divine retribution for the wicked, or of ultimate triumph for the just. Indeed, an aggadic tradition which is able to include BOTH of the

above legends, is a tradition admirably suited for pointing toward this steadfast faith, universally shared among people who are truly religious.

In examining the inventive way in which our rabbis filled in names, times, and details of biblical events - in particular their lack of hesitation in creating entire legends which have either no basis at all in Scripture, or, at best, a tenuous connection with words and phrases in the text - one might conclude that the aggadah is grounded entirely in the imaginative act. There will even be those who find in Israel's legendary tradition, confirming proof for the view of the Rambam, who saw the aggadah purely as poetry - devoid of serious intent.

Actually, however, it is possible to detect a measure of seriousness even in those midrashim which are unattached to a text, such as the Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer. For even here, our rabbis, in drawing out that which was concealed, were not merely indulging in exercises of the imagination. Rather was their intention a further concretization, and, if one might say so, a further "activation" of the Scriptural stories. And an even more serious intent pervades the homiletic midrash. For, with all of the imaginative inventiveness which typifies these homilies, it is no exaggeration to say that basically our sages tried to find, to clarify, and to teach the perennial truth which is embedded in Scripture.

FOOTNOTES

PART II

1. Genesis 24:2
2. Kings II 4:8
3. Hein. note 7 to chapter 3
4. Hein. note 8 to chapter 3
5. Hein. note 9 to chapter 3
6. Baba Bathra 91a
7. Tanhuma Buber - וירא 8-
8. Genesis 25:20
9. Seder Olam Rabba - פרק יב
10. Genesis Rabba 68:5
11. Ruth Rabba 4:4
12. Exodus 7:7
13. Exodus Rabba 1:30
14. Tanhuma Buber - שלח 4-
15. Mekilta - בשלח -3:23 (Vol. II p. 163 - Ed. Lauterbach)
16. Hein. note 20 to chapter 3
17. Genesis 17:17
18. Genesis 23:1
19. Genesis Rabba 39:13
20. Psalm 119:105
21. Midrash Tehillim 27:2
22. Daniel 9:7
23. Sanhedrin 92a

24. Genesis Rabba 41:7
25. Genesis 40:1
26. Genesis Rabba 88:2
27. Genesis 12:17
28. Genesis Rabba 41:2
29. Genesis 16:6
30. Genesis Rabba 45:6
31. Ruth Rabba 4:9
32. Hein. note 39 to chapter 3
33. Hein. note 41 to chapter 3
34. Hein. note 42 to chapter 3
35. Tanhuma Buber - וישלח -3
36. The Testament of Reuben 3:9-15
37. Tanhuma - קדושים -3
38. Hullin 90b
39. Megillah 15b
40. Tanhuma - בראשית -9
41. Tanhuma Buber - נשא -21
42. Hein. note 49 to chapter 3
43. Hein. note 50 to chapter 3
44. Sanhedrin 109b
45. I Chronicles 9:20
46. Hein. note 56 to chapter 3
47. Genesis 49:8
48. Midrash Tehillim 18:31
49. Ecclesiastes 1:12

50. Midrash Tehillim 78:12

51. Hein. note 59 to chapter 3

52. Hein. note 61 to chapter 3

53. Second Book of Maccabees 7:1

54. Genesis Rabba 84:16

55. Gittin 58a

56. Pesikta Rabbati 31:145b