

"Hyperliteral Midrash: the theological

and rhetorical functions

of kivyakhol "

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“Hyperliteral Midrash: The Theological And Rhetorical Functions Of *Kivyakhol*”

Ariel Edery - Rabbinic Thesis

In current scholarship, Rabbinic theology is usually presented as having at its core several beliefs about God and His attributes. God's existence, unity, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, incorporeality, goodness, are presented by scholars as the fundamental notions about God expressed in Rabbinic literature. However, in this study, eighty passages from the earlier Midrashic works have been compiled and studied: these are the '*kivyakhol* passages' –pericopes containing the idiom *kivyakhol*. The following analysis of these passages shows that in them, images and notions of God are presented which are at odds with the ideas of Rabbinic theology as generally defined by modern scholars.

The meaning of the expression *kivyakhol* is uncertain, and is often taken by scholars as a formula to either soften the idea presented, or to indicate –quite ambiguously– that what it is said it is not really meant. But through several different ways of textual analysis undertaken here, this can be refuted, and some very specific functions of the idiom can be identified. It is used to emphasize an idea, not to soften it; it is used to introduce statements of fact, and not figurative phrases; it is used to introduce a literal reading of a scriptural verse, to the exclusion of metaphorical and other non-literal readings; it is used to present an idea about God, or related to God in almost all cases; it is used to introduce an idea that is 'problematic'.

By 'problematic' it is meant that the ideas introduced by *kivyakhol* directly challenge or oppose dominant ideas in Rabbinic literature, at times even reflecting

concepts deemed heretical or typically Pagan (and not-Jewish) by Rabbinic literature. The 'problematic' character of the idea expressed using *kivyachol* was evident to the authors of the passages, and it is this awareness what motivated the use of the idiom.

Evidence supporting this understanding of the expression is found among the Rabbinic traditions concerning the scribal emendations of Scripture. In passages relating to expressions that were amended due to their 'theologically objectionable' character, the offensive ideas are presented by *kivyakhol*.

Further evidence in support of those conclusions is derived from an analysis of other Rabbinic idioms. Some expressions—which are associated with the use of *kivyakhol*—are meant to emphasize the problematic aspect of an idea, while other idioms—which are clearly differentiated here from *kivyakhol* and its usage—are specifically used for non-literal readings of verses, and to introduce figurative speech.

From this study we learn that within Rabbinic literature we may find a significant degree of theological divergence, and that many different and even opposed conceptions of God coexist in the texts.

We also noted how current scholarship often fails to recognize this, and presents an unbalanced view of Rabbinic theology, which does not include the problematic, divergent, and at times radical views which—though not dominant—are significantly spread and present in Rabbinic literature.

Concluding this study, a Thematic Summary of the *kivyakhol* Passages is provided, citing the eighty passages studied and detailing the ideas presented in them.

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Introduction

As a student of Rabbinic literature, I found a particular idiom often used in the texts quite intriguing: the expression כביכול — *kivyakhol*. As I read it in the texts, almost every aspect of it seemed uncertain: what is its precise meaning? why is it being used? what effect does it have on the meaning of the sentence it modifies? The expression became puzzling to me as I became aware that quite often it introduces ideas atypical in Rabbinic literature –surprising and challenging– which almost invariably involved God.

As I read traditional and modern scholarly commentaries on the passages containing the idiom –the ‘כביכול passages’– I noted that they differed not only in their understanding of the idiom, but also in their general appreciation of the ideas expressed in the passages. Since these passages conveyed ideas about God, I found that the differences in the understanding of the idiom involved and implied theological differences. And so, in their commentaries and analysis, scholars actually presented differing accounts of the theological views found in Rabbinic literature.

So I decided to study the ‘כביכול passages’ having a double goal: to determine the precise meaning of the idiom, and to explore the imagery of God these passages convey. Regarding the imagery of the divine, I was particularly interested in finding out whether כביכול is associated with particular theological views, and in how the passages as a whole relate to the notions of God found in the general Rabbinic literature. After reading several modern presentations of Rabbinic theology, I noted that the imagery of God contained in כביכול passages was usually not reflected in these works. Moreover, I found that ideas of God which most modern scholars define as fundamental in Rabbinic theology diverge

significantly from those presented in כביכול passages. So I set yet another goal for this study: to compare the modern understanding of Rabbinic theology with 'כביכול theology'—the notions of God emerging from כביכול passages—in order to assess the accuracy of current scholarly accounts of Rabbinic ideas of God.

The textual corpus for this study is composed of eighty pericopes—כביכול passages—including all the uses of the idiom in the earlier Midrashic works. Since the meaning and usage of the expression shifted and changed in the literature in the course of the centuries—as I will note in section 2.4—I collected texts from works dated up to the eighth century: Mekhilta deRabbi Ishma'el, Sifra, Sifre Numbers, Sifre Deuteronomy, Midrash Rabbah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs), and Pesikta deRav Kahana.

All translations are mine, except when quoted from a secondary source—to present a scholar's view of the literature. The editions quoted are specified in the Thematic Summary of כביכול Passages.

The two main questions in this study—what is the meaning and function of the idiom, and what ideas about God the passages convey—cannot be answered independently. The answer to one informs and allows the resolution of the other. So in Part 1, chapter 1 offers an overview of Rabbinic theology as seen by modern scholars, while chapter 2 presents the different scholarly understandings of the idiom כביכול. In each of these chapters I also offer a critique of scholarly views in the light of the כביכול passages studied.

Part 2 contains four chapters, in which I define the different functions of the expression. In chapter 3 the Rabbinic traditions of scribal emendations of Scripture are

studied, since they contain the idiom, and allow us –for several reasons discussed in detail– to establish a few basic facts regarding its use. Chapter 4 is dedicated to demonstrate a specific function of כביכול : the introduction of literal readings of Scripture. This section includes analysis of other Rabbinic idioms as well. In chapter 5 the function of כביכול is further defined by clearly distinguishing it from the idiom כאלו . The contrasting functions and usages of the idioms are studied in detail, and lead to a more precise definition of the functions of כביכול . In chapter 6 the discussion turns to the ideological content of the כביכול passages, in order to understand the reasons and the motivation for the use of the expression. In this chapter we observe and establish the ‘problematic nature’ of the כביכול passages, as they oppose beliefs about God considered to be fundamental to the theology presented in Rabbinic literature.

In Part 3, in chapter 7, I present the ideas contained in the כביכול passages, showing how they diverge and oppose each of the beliefs about God which modern scholars considered fundamental in Rabbinic theology.

Finally, I provide a thematic summary of all the כביכול passages studied.

PART 1

1 Overview Of Rabbinic Theology

It is universally recognized that Rabbinic theology emerges from Rabbinic texts “without system and order...[thus] it is by no means easy to achieve a coherent presentation of a doctrine”.¹ Nevertheless, modern scholars have usually followed one approach in their systematization of Rabbinic theology: they have arranged texts on the basis of divine attributes.² Throughout this study, we will review the works of a small set of writers that present Rabbinic theology in this manner, portraying a substantially uniform image of Rabbinic ideas on God. These scholars, Claude Montefiore, Ephraim Urbach, Abraham Cohen, Louis Jacobs, Jacob Neusner, David Stern, and David Kraemer, were chosen as exemplary of the general scholarship on Rabbinic theology. Though the lists of God’s attributes are not necessarily the same in the various works that present Rabbinic theology, most include the following: unity, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, incorporeality, justice, goodness and holiness. To these we add some general principles regarding God’s nature: His active role in history, and as giver of Torah.

I will briefly present the Rabbinic views on God according to each of these categories.³

1) Existence

As Ephraim Urbach writes, “the belief in One God is the principle creed

1. Cohen 1949. See Jacobs 1973, 10-11.

2. See Montefiore and Loewe 1960; Marmorstein 1927, part B; Cohen 1949, ch. 1; Urbach 1975; Jacobs 1973; and Neusner 1998, the chapter on God.

3. For the general description of Rabbinic theology, I will draw not only from the Midrashic corpus from which the “כביכול passages” to be studied are taken, but from the Talmud as well. I follow here the approach of the scholars whose works constitute the basis for this overview.

[of Judaism], and whoever negates it is called כופר בעיקר (one who denies the primary principle of faith).⁴ Belief in God according to the Rabbis involves more than a simple acknowledgement of God's existence: an atheist is not just one who does not believe God exists, but one who, while accepting God's existence, still denies that God is involved in the world in an active way. Though to deny God, in modern times means negating his existence, for the Rabbis, denial of His active role as ruler of the world—His involvement and concern for the universe—also amounted to a denial of God. As such, the statement “there is neither Justice nor Judge” (Gen. R. 26, 6) constitutes the equivalent of atheism.⁵ So we find that the belief—held by Epicureans—in a God (or Gods) who is indifferent to what happens in the world, constituted heresy according to the Rabbis. Consequently, the name “Epicurus” became an epithet for heretic in Rabbinic texts.⁶ In a similar way, the Rabbis considered belief in divine Creation and Revelation to be a necessary part of the belief in God: “‘He who denies the Root’ is not therefore just one who denies God generally, but one who disavows God, the Creator of the universe, the God who gave the Torah and the commandments.”⁷

2) Unity

The existence of other divine powers in the world is denied by Rabbinic Judaism. The Rabbis strongly emphasized this in many polemical passages rejecting what they saw as heretical ideas. Pagan, Gnostic, and Christian notions of God were seen as opposing or compromising the notion of God's unity.

4. Urbach 1975, 26. He suggests that כופר בעיקר literally means ‘He who denies the Root’.

5. Quoted in Cohen 1949, 3.

6. See Urbach 1975, 26-30.

7. Urbach 1975, 27

"I am one and alone in the Universe" (Deut. 2, 31); "The Holy One Blessed be he said *'I am the first and I am the last and beside me there is no God'* (Is. 44:6). *'I am the first'*, for I have no father, *'and I am the last'*, for I have no brother, *'and beside me there is no God'*, for I have no son." (Ex. R. 29, 5).

While other minor powers and beings, such as angels, are recognized by the Rabbis, they make a clear distinction between these creatures' nature role and power, and God's: "All agree that nothing was created on the first day, so that people should not say that the archangel Michael stretched the south end of the firmament and Gabriel the north end; for *'I am the lord that stretched forth the heavens alone'* (Is. 14:24)" (Gen. R. 1, 3).

3) Omnipotence

God is conceived as an all-mighty power, and often referred to as הגבורה (the might, the Almighty).⁸ This includes "absolute dominion over nature [and] history", as well as power over life and death, even if God's power may occasionally not be seen.⁹ Throughout Rabbinic literature "no limit was set upon the divine power."¹⁰ This belief in an omnipotent God is confidently ascribed not just to the Rabbis, but to all Jews in the classical period:

"There can be no doubt that people and scribes, educated and uneducated, priests and laymen, consented to the belief and thought that 'God's strength and might fill the earth' (Ps. 106:2). When the teachers and preachers in the schools and in the houses of worship spoke of גבורה 'Might', all the hearers

8. As translated by many, see Urbach 1975, ch.5.

9. Urbach 1975, 83; 86-92.

10. Cohen 1949, 11.

knew without any need of further information that the all-powerful God, the Almighty Father in heaven was meant.”¹¹

4) Omniscience

The notion that God knows everything is plainly stated in many Rabbinic dicta, such as: “All is revealed and known before Him, as it is said: ‘*He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him*’ (Dan. 2, 22)” (Mekh. to Ex. 12:23). God’s absolute knowledge includes all future events and human thoughts: “Before even a thought is created in a man’s heart it is already revealed to God” (Gen. R. 9, 3). God’s foresight is repeatedly asserted in Rabbinic texts.¹² We read in Genesis Rabbah “From the beginning of Creation, the Holy One blessed be He, foresaw the deeds of the righteous and the wicked” (Gen. R. 2, 5). In a passage in which it is said that the Torah was created before the creation of the world, R. Huna and R. Yirmiah explain that God already then included in it commandments for Israel since “he foresaw that after 26 generations Israel would accept the Torah.”¹³ In Rabbinic literature, those who typically reject the belief in God’s omniscience are “Romans” and “heathen”.¹⁴

5) Omnipresence

God is present everywhere at all times, and there is no place in the universe where God is not: “The Holy One, blessed be He, is the place of His Universe,

11. Marmorstein 1927, 160-161.

12. Marmostein provides a list of fifteen passages on God’s foresight (1927, 157)

13. Gen. R. 1, 5 (Marmorstein 1927, 157).

14. See TB Sanhedrin 90b, Gen. R. 27, 7, and Marmorstein’s comments on this attitude being typical of Gnostics (1927, 154-55 especially n.13)

but His Universe is not His place” (Gen. R. 68, 9). In Exodus Rabbah God is said to have revealed himself to Moses in a bush “to teach that there is no place void of the Divine Presence, not even so lowly a thing as a bush” (Ex. R. 2, 5).

Although God is everywhere, He goes with Israel wherever she is, even into exile.¹⁵ And though He is everywhere, “it is the Torah and those who study it that bring God’s presence into the world and to the heart of Israel in particular”.¹⁶ The Rabbis are confronted with a problem: how can God be (as depicted in Scripture) present at limited places at specific times, when He is conceived as being in all places at all times? The resolution to this paradox is presented through various metaphors.¹⁷ For example, the sea and the cave: “It may be likened to a cave situated by the seashore. The sea rages and the cave is filled with water, but the waters of the sea are not diminished. Similarly, the Tent of Meeting was filled with the lustre of the Shechinah, which was not diminished in the Universe.” (Num. R. 12, 4). Thus, to say that God’s presence is in a specific place (the cave, the Tent of Meeting) does not mean that God’s presence in other places (the sea, the Universe) is reduced.

This paradox pervades Rabbinic literature, which contains many passages that are inconsistent with a conception of an omnipresent God.¹⁸ Passages in which God is said to come to a specific place—as the Temple— or to leave a place—as when departing from the Temple—are clearly opposed to the notion of an omnipresent God. The contradiction here is this: if God’s presence moved from place A to place B, this means that God’s presence is no longer in A, and also that before God’s presence went to B, it was not there. Neither

15. See various texts quoted in Neusner 1998a, 116-17.

16. Neusner 1998a, 117.

17. See some of these Rabbinic solutions in Cohen 1949, 9.

18. See a review of some of this passages in Neusner 1998a, 114-18.

of these scenarios make sense if God is omnipresent, *always* at A and at B. The Rabbinic metaphor of the sea and the cave fails to solve the latter problem, for it concedes that, before filling the cave, the sea was not in it.

Montefiore and Loewe's analysis of this issue shows both the dilemmas faced by the Rabbis regarding God's omnipresence, and also those faced by modern scholars confronting the Rabbinic responses.¹⁹ They trace the origin of this paradox to the Bible itself, where many conceptualizations of God exist side by side, and among those, some that "indubitably" reject the notion of God's omnipresence.²⁰ In these scholars' views, the conflict was between a superior conception of God (omnipresent) held by the Rabbis, and an inferior one (God limited in space) from the Bible. The Rabbis –according to this analysis– tried to harmonize both possibilities. Though Montefiore and Loewe say that the Rabbis had to accept both as equally true, they affirm that both views were not equally appreciated by the Rabbis, who are presumed to have completely adopted the idea of an omnipresent God, while making the explicitly "non-omnipresent" Biblical passages conform to their idea of omnipresence:

"The Rabbis, who believed every story about God in the Hebrew Bible, but whose deepest convictions about God were often in conflict with, and far superior to, those stories, were hard put to it to reconcile the omnipresence of God with the stories of His manifestation within limited space."²¹

And so, they bring many examples of Rabbinic material to support the claim that Rabbinic Judaism rejected the idea of a limited God. However, they concede that among

19. Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 15-19.

20. Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 15.

21. Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 15.

the Rabbis there were “simple believers” who held on to the ideas of a limited God.²² One such idea of a limited God is the belief that He is in Heaven, and not on earth, understood quite literally. Montefiore and Loewe emphasize the absence of any metaphoric intention to the words of these simple believers, who literally meant what they said:

“It is obvious that the familiar phrase ‘Our Father who art in heaven’, would never have been coined had not there been a rather general belief that God *did* dwell (with His angelic court) in heaven. The phrase is not a mere metaphor.”²³

Neusner dismisses these conflicts regarding omnipresence by stating that though God “may best be found in synagogues and study halls” “God is everywhere.”²⁴ On their part Montefiore and Loewe –while acknowledging the dissenting voices of the more “simple” Rabbis– portray the belief in an omnipresent God as the principal trend in Rabbinic literature.

6) Incorporeality

Throughout the Bible God is often described as being physically present in specific places, and is depicted as having eyes, hands, and being similar to man in physical appearance.²⁵ How did the Rabbis understand the Biblical passages that imply divine corporeality and God’s anthropomorphic nature?

Many Rabbinic texts deny the existence of corporeal traits in God. When

22. Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 23, introduction to paragraph #49.

23. Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 23, introduction to paragraph #49 (original emphasis).

24. Neusner 1998, 118.

25. An example of God’s physical presence is found in Ex. 33:18-34:8. Examples of texts on God’s human-like form are found in Ez. 1:26, and Dan. 7:9.

confronted with scriptural passages that refer explicitly to God's corporeality (God's eyes, hand, or limbs) the Rabbis understand them as metaphors: "We depict Him in terms of His creatures in order to assist the understanding" (Mekh. to Ex. 19:18). There are many Rabbinic passages like this one that read the Biblical corporeal and anthropomorphic images of God as allegorical. Arguing that "the Torah uses the language of humans," they deny the literalness of any depiction of God as corporeal.²⁶ Yet, there are also many Rabbinic passages that refer to God in strong and unqualified anthropomorphic terms: God is said to wear Tefillin (TB Ber. 6a), and a Talit (TB R.H. 17b), and is described in a variety of corporeal images.²⁷

Scholars have approached this issue in a variety of ways. Some find no belief in God's corporeality among Rabbinic texts. Abraham Cohen asserted regarding passages that refer to God in anthropomorphic terms that "it is *impossible* to maintain that their authors believed in a corporeal God who actually performed the actions ascribed to Him."²⁸

Among a few others, A. Marmorstein²⁹ argued—contrary to the more dominant scholarly trends—that Rabbinic Literature includes texts from two different ideological sources: the school of R. Akiva and the school of R. Ishmael. According to Marmorstein, one of the differences between these schools was their understanding of anthropomorphism in Scripture. The school of R. Akiva would read them literally, while the school of R. Ishmael would read them allegorically. In Marmorstein's view, both

26. See Marmorstein 1927, 113-26 for a survey of the Rabbinic passages and formulae used to introduce allegoric understanding of anthropomorphic depictions of God in the Bible.

27. See Neusner 1988, which will be discussed later in this section, for an extensive account of such images in the Babylonian Talmud.

28. Cohen 1949, 7 (My emphasis).

29. So Hoffman, and to some extent Albeck. See Marmorstein 1927, particularly ch. 5.

attitudes are strongly represented in Rabbinic texts: “A number of sages and scholars could be registered with the former, and *an equally strong* set represents the other group.”³⁰ These two different understandings and uses of anthropomorphism exist side-by-side in Rabbinic literature, and their oppositional character did not prevent them from being redacted into single documents.

A third approach to the issue of God’s corporeality is adopted by Jacob Neusner. He unambiguously asserts: “God bears corporeal traits.”³¹ Quoting—among other sources—the *Mekhilta* (29: I.2), he concludes that Israel perceives God in many ways, and that “God took on many forms”, that is, physical forms (an old man, a young man, a warrior, and other).³² In his book *The Incarnation of God*, he cites a passage from *Genesis Rabbah* according to which the angels, seeing the first man—created in God’s image—thought he was God.

“Said R. Hoshaiiah, ‘When the Holy One, blessed be he, came to create the first man, the ministering angels mistook him [for God, since man was in God’s image,] and wanted to say before him, ‘Holy’, [holy, holy is the Lord of hosts]’.”³³

Neusner then concludes: “when God and a human being—the first man—are indistinguishable, then God looks like man, walks, talks, acts, engages with others like man, and therefore, in context, is man: divinity in the form of humanity.”³⁴

In this scholar’s view, the Rabbis did believe God had the capacity to take on

30. 1937, 146 (My emphasis)

31. Neusner 1998a, 111

32. Neusner 1998a, 112

33. GnR 8, 10 (Vilna edition) Neusner 1988, 15 (Neusner’s translation). See parallel in Qohelet R 6, 1 (Vilna edition)

34. Neusner 1988, 15.

human forms and traits when He so desired, and they also believed He had indeed on occasions assumed corporeal forms. Biblical depictions of God as a man of war, or as an old sage –among others– constitute instances of God taking on corporeal –and specifically human– form, according to the Rabbis.³⁵

7) Justice

God is held to be the judge of all earth and always dispensing justice:

“With Him there is no unrighteousness, no unfaithfulness, nor special consideration for persons, nor taking of bribes” (Avot 4, 29).

The doctrine of Divine Reward and Retribution [שָׂכָר וְעוֹשָׁה] is essential to the Rabbinic understanding of God’s justice. Following biblical texts –particularly the Deuteronomistic texts, and especially Lamentations– the Rabbis affirmed that God’s justice is applied in this world ‘measure for measure’ [מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה] with each person receiving from God a reward or a punishment in accordance to his or her deeds.

However, the Rabbis concluded that the imperfect nature of humanity makes it impossible for us to endure God’s strict application of justice and punishments.

Consequently, He mitigates His attribute of strict Justice [מִדַּת הַדִּין] with His attribute of Mercy [מִדַּת הַרַחֲמִים]. In *Genesis Rabbah* God says: “I will create it [the world] with both attributes, would that it might endure.” (Gen. R. 12, 15). The Rabbis recognized that at times, the wicked would go unpunished in this world, but they maintained their conception of absolute Divine Justice by arguing that in order for humanity to survive, God’s Mercy needed to bring about a delay in the execution of punishments. Thus, the

35. See Neusner 1988, 17.

wicked do not go unpunished indefinitely.

A consequence of the doctrine of divine Reward and Punishment is that human events are seen as the outcome of a divine decision. Thus, human suffering is conceptualized as punishment resulting from sins. But since it is divinely ordained by God, who is also as benevolent and loving as He is insistent upon justice, suffering is actually good.³⁶ The Rabbis state that suffering is a gift received by the patriarchs, and is precious: it is beneficial to the sufferer as it leads to learning and to the correction of wrong behavior, it is the main mode of atonement for sins, and it leads to reconciliation with God. Rabbinic texts point out that suffering is a mark of God's love, for by suffering now, a person exhausts the amount of punishment he deserved entirely in this world, and thus in the next world there will be no suffering at all for him or her. The greater the amount of suffering in this world, the lesser in the next world.³⁷ Suffering is also seen as a mark of divine love because in Israel's history great things were achieved through suffering.³⁸

Yet, none of these Rabbinic ideas on suffering are intended to be alternatives to, nor rejections of the fundamental notion of divine Reward and Punishment. This point is made clear in a midrashic passage referring to king Manasseh's repentance (Mekh. 56,1). There we learn that Manasseh's suffering is precious, for only after God punished him—by having him captured and exiled by the Assyrians—did he repent his many sins, and find his way back to Jerusalem and to his monarchy. The Rabbis point out how good

36. See a review of Rabbinic sources on suffering, in Neusner 1998, 319-23; Urbach 1975, 436-44; and Kraemer 1995.

37. This same principle—applied inversely—serves to explain how it is that the wicked enjoy themselves in this world; they are exhausting the few rewards they deserve now, and in the next world they will receive all the punishment stored for them.

38. From Gen.R. 92, 1, quoted by Neusner 1998, 320-21.

suffering is, and how it ultimately reflects God's love for the sufferer, yet they still affirm that it is brought about by sin and constitutes a deserved punishment decreed by God.

The Rabbis applied this same principle to Israel's sufferings as a nation. In his analysis of Rabbinic responses to suffering, David Kraemer observes that Rabbinic literature defends the biblical doctrine of Reward and Punishment.³⁹ Kraemer notes the "profound conservatism of Rabbinic documents" on this issue, which are "apologetic" and consistently "defend the system [of divine Reward and punishment]".⁴⁰ *Lamentations Rabbah* – which deals extensively with the issues of Israel's suffering, destruction and exile– reflects the same attitude, according to Jacob Neusner. It exclusively conveys "only one message, and it is reworked in only a few ways: Israel suffers because of sin."⁴¹ But Kraemer qualifies somewhat Neusner's conclusion that the Rabbis did not depart at all from this "very old and deeply rooted theology".⁴²

While conceding that in the Mishnah and in the Halakhic midrashim there is "no revision of Reward and Punishment", Kraemer points to a few Aggadic passages in which the Rabbis qualify that doctrine, however slightly.⁴³ These apparent alternative Rabbinic attitudes are observed in texts presenting suffering as part of the experience of being tested by God, and also in passages that protest suffering.⁴⁴

Some Rabbinic passages –elaborating on the Biblical עקדה narrative– regard instances of suffering as tests conducted by God for the good of the tested.⁴⁵ These may

39. Kraemer 1995.

40. Kraemer 1995, 141; 90-92.

41. Neusner 1995, 104-5.

42. Neusner 1995, 106.

43. Kraemer 1995, 236 n.28

44. Kraemer 1995, 134. See also Marmorstein 1927, 188 for Rabbinic protests against suffering.

45. In Gen. R., discussed in Kraemer 1995, 129-31.

be regarded as explaining suffering in a manner different from that just discussed, where suffering is the result of punishment. In those passages that reflect divine tests, nothing perpetrated by the individual tested by God required a punishment. The test, which brings on the suffering, is solely on God's initiative and does not imply any fault on the part of the person tested.

However, since God knows everything—including how the people tested will react—divine tests cannot be considered as a means for God to know more about those He tests.

Thus, an explanation of divine tests is given in which they are considered to be devices for God to reward those who pass them, and to punish those who fail them. In the case of Abraham for example, God did not test him in order to know what the patriarch would do, but rather He tested him *because He knew* that Abraham would pass the test, and so God created an opportunity for rewarding Abraham for passing the test.⁴⁶

The problem we confront here is that, if God knows that those He tests will pass or fail the test, and people are rewarded or punished for their reaction to the test, then divine tests are elements of divine justice, and not—as Kraemer and others suggest—an alternative explanation to suffering.

Due to all these nuances and possible interpretations of divine tests, Kraemer calls the Rabbinic passages referring to suffering as an element or a consequence of divine tests “ambivalent” in the way they relate to God's justice.⁴⁷

Clearer instances of departure from the Reward and Punishment doctrine are said to be found throughout the Aggadic Midrashim in several parables which David Stern

46. See Tanh. B. 1, 91; GenR 55, 1 9, cited in Marmorstein 1927, 182 for passages on how God favored Abraham for passing His test.

47. Kraemer 1995, 127.

has called “Protest Parables”.⁴⁸ The dominant theme in these passages is a protest of Israel’s unfair suffering inflicted by God. The notion of a God that remains silent and uninvolved in the face of His people’s suffering portrayed in these passages, is construed by Stern and Kraemer as an implied Rabbinic criticism on God and His administration of justice.

There is one particular passage, much commented upon by Stern and Kraemer, containing three parables which say that, Israel’s sins are God’s responsibility, for He failed to raise them to become righteous. In these pericopes God punishes Israel in anger, and then He Himself suffers inconsolably.⁴⁹ This passage presents striking and uncommon Rabbinic images of God, that are significantly different in tone and content from the large bodies of texts analyzed by both Stern and Kraemer, and it appears to offer views alternative to the Reward and Punishment doctrine. But this is a כביכול passage, and so I will discuss it in detail later.

On the basis mostly of the “Protest Parables” and the כביכול passage, Kraemer concludes that by the time of the redaction of the Aggadic Midrashim the Rabbis began to abandon the principle of divine Reward and Punishment. The “old explanations break down” when the Rabbis, and their doctrines, “succumb to the historical reality of Israel’s excessive sufferings.”⁵⁰

8) Goodness and Holiness

God is wholly good. God’s goodness is not limited and

48. Kraemer 1995, 141-43. See Stern 1991, 130-45.

49. Found in a Proem Petihta in Lam.R. Discussed in Stern 1991, 160-66.

50. Kraemer 1995, 148-49.

extends to all living creatures, even to the wicked.⁵¹ Rabbinic belief in God's goodness was absolute, leading R. Akiva to say: "Whatever God does He does for a good purpose".⁵² Moreover, since "the slightest doubt as to God's mercy and love was considered heretical," already in the Mishnah we find rules that prescribe that a שליח ציבור—a liturgical reader in a service—be stopped and removed if he suggests—through the recitation of specific Biblical verses—that God's caring and goodness are limited in any way.⁵³

God is not only absolutely good, He is holy, and is generally referred to as "The Holy One". Lev. R. states it simply: "The Holy One, blessed be He, says to man, 'Behold, I am pure, My abode is pure'".⁵⁴ Holiness mainly implies, as Cohen explains, His "apartness from everything that defiles, as well as actual perfection."⁵⁵ God's perfection means that He never loses control, and that neither emotions such as jealousy nor the (limiting) sensation of sleep can overcome Him.⁵⁶ Thus the Midrash comments on God's words in Exodus 20:5 "*I am a jealous God*": I rule over jealousy, but jealousy does not rule over me. I rule over slumber, but slumber does not rule over me."⁵⁷ Since He is perfect, "God controls His anger—He is master of His wrath."⁵⁸ God is master over all emotions, and is then a perfect judge. Thus in Sifre Deut. Ha'azinu, 331 we read: "Punishments go forth from God swift as lightning, but His hand has hold of justice."

This passage is paraphrased by Montefiore and Loewe to mean that "He is never carried

51. See the many Rabbinic sources quoted on this topic in Marmorstein 1927, 197-204.

52. TB Berakhot 60b, quoted by Marmorstein 1927, 203.

53. Marmorstein 1927, 205-6.

54. Lev. R. 18, 1.

55. 1949, 22.

56. See Marmorstein 1937, 24-29.

57. Mekh., Bahodesh, Yitro, 6.

58. Midrash Psalms on 94, 1, quoted in Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 54, where additional similar passages are quoted.

away by punishment: He remains cool; He is always just.”⁵⁹

1.1 Observations On The Scholarly Presentation Of Rabbinic Theology

I have summarized the Rabbinic notions of God as presented by modern scholarship. As we have seen, scholars often disagreed and had opposing views regarding specific Rabbinic beliefs, often understanding the same textual evidence to mean very different things. I shall make now some critical comments on the scholarly presentation of Rabbinic beliefs about God, drawing from the scholars’ positions and views within each of the categories presented in the previous section.

1) Divine omnipresence

The scholars whose work I have reviewed present Rabbinic texts as manifesting a belief in an omnipresent God. Yet, a review of the textual evidence makes it necessary to make a few qualifying observations. Rather than claiming that God *is* everywhere at any given moment (omnipresence), many Rabbinic passages –as the one about God’s presence in the bush– say just that God *can be* anywhere whenever He wants. God can be in a bush, and there is no place where God’s presence cannot be. Still, God may have been present in the bush only after having come down from heaven, after having moved there from His place. Accordingly, God’s presence was in the bush only when He decided to reveal Himself there, but was not there at other moments. Thus, many Rabbinic texts do not say that God is omnipresent, but only that God has the power or capacity to be anywhere He wants to be.

⁵⁹ 1960, 55.

2) Divine incorporeality

The scholarly presentation of Rabbinic ideas on the incorporeality of God requires more extensive comments, as scholars differed significantly in their understanding of the textual evidence. First, Cohen affirmed the impossibility of a Rabbinic corporeal notion of God, and quoted some passages that show Rabbinic rejection of corporeal traits in God. Yet, we have seen many passages from a variety of Rabbinic documents that contain blatant anthropomorphic expressions, and seem to “mean precisely what they say,” presenting a corporeal God.⁶⁰ Cohen does not adequately explain how he accounts in his conclusion for those Rabbinic conceptions of God’s corporeality, but he still maintains that such conceptions were impossible for the Rabbis. I would contend that the *impossibility* of a Rabbinic belief in a corporeal God does not *emerge from* the textual evidence, but is rather *imposed upon* the textual evidence.

The rejection of God’s corporeality, to be sure, became a core tenet of Jewish faith in the late Medieval period with the development of Jewish philosophy.⁶¹ Maimonides held that one who believes in God’s corporeality is a heretic and has no share in the world to come.⁶² There were, however, voices who disagreed with Maimonides’ rejection of corporeality. Based on the many anthropomorphic passages about God in both Biblical and Rabbinic literature, Moses of Taku and Abraham Ben

60. Neusner 1988, 171. Whether these passages suggest that God has one definite physical form, or that God may assume (and has in the past assumed) many different forms, would not alter the fundamental fact that there was a Rabbinic belief in a God with corporeal traits.

61. A discussion of Jewish Medieval philosophical views on God’s incorporeality is found in Jacobs 1973, 46-52.

62. Yad, Teshuvah, 3:7, quoted in Jacobs 1973, 50.

David of Posquieres, among others, opposed Maimonides on this issue. According to Jacobs (1973, 50) Ben David himself rejected the notion of a corporeal deity, but disagreed with Maimonides' condemnation of those who were confused and led by the anthropomorphic Rabbinic passages to ascribe corporeality to God. But in contrast to Jacobs' understanding of his argument, I believe Ben David did more than just protest Maimonides' condemnation of believers in divine corporeality. He emphasized that belief in God's corporeality does emerge from a simple reading of Scripture and of Rabbinic texts, and that many "greater and better" than Maimonides have in the past held such a belief. Thus, Ben David is saying that despite the fact that philosophically minded late Medieval Jews (as himself) reject it, the idea of God's corporeality is not a mistake, nor a misunderstanding of Biblical and Rabbinic sources, but *is expressed* in Jewish sacred texts, and derivable from them. Of course, the rejection of God's corporeality became a fundamental Jewish principle, shared by all Jews during the Medieval era. This led some to present even the earlier Jewish texts as though *they all* denied God's corporeality, despite the often blatant anthropomorphic images contained in them.⁶³ We may still encounter this attitude in modern scholars who, like Cohen, read classical Rabbinic Literature through the ideas and theology that became dominant with the later Medieval philosophers.⁶⁴ And we may see in Jacobs' exposition of the Maimonides – Ben David controversy the same attitude, for he presents it as revolving just on whether the belief in God's corporeality should be condemned as heretical or not. Yet Ben David's assertion that, even though he rejects it, such a belief is in fact supported by Biblical and Rabbinic sources, is either dismissed or misunderstood by Jacobs, due to his own rejection of

63. This is Maimonides' own approach.

64. This argument is made also by Neusner (1988, 5).

God's corporeality.⁶⁵

David Stern's approach to the issue is noteworthy in this context. He suggests that anthropomorphism does not necessarily imply corporeality, and that the Rabbis thought of "incorporeal anthropomorphism".⁶⁶ In this harmonizing attempt, by putting two opposing independent Rabbinic views—God's incorporeality, and God's human-like form—together, Stern has created and ascribed to the Rabbis a contradiction—a logical flaw—out of a simple divergence of opinions (each one logically consistent by itself).⁶⁷ Since Stern recognizes that the understanding of Rabbinic views on divine corporeality he proposes "involves contradiction and leaves much unanswered,"⁶⁸ one wonders for what reasons he maintains it. Perhaps he shares some of Cohen and Jacobs' theological concerns and attitudes.

We should also recall that in the Modern western world anthropomorphism came to be regarded as a primitive theological principle. This led many modern Jewish scholars, with the high theology of Christian scholasticism in mind, to depict Jewish beliefs according to only the 'highest and most spiritual' of terms.⁶⁹ This made it extremely hard for them to consider—let alone accept—that a Rabbi might have attributed to God corporeal traits, even when the texts appear to indicate so.

Thirdly, Marmorstein's approach to the issue of God's corporeality in Rabbinic literature is problematic as well. His distinction among schools is not consistently

65. As a corollary to his exposition of Ben David's words, Jacobs calls such notion "untenable" and emphasizes its "total inadequacy" (1973, 50).

66. 1992, 156.

67. Stern justifies this by quoting from Veyne, "The co-existence of contradictory truths in the same mind is nonetheless a universal fact" (1992, 170).

68. Stern 1992, 171.

69. See Prolegomenon to Marmorstein 1920, VII; and Neusner's commentaries (1988, 5) in which he refers mostly to the European Jewish reformers.

manifest throughout the literature, as he himself admits: "In some cases this rule does not seem to work, as was the case with the controversies between R. Ishmael and R.

Akiva."⁷⁰

Moreover, the whole issue of the distinction between two classical schools has been revised by current scholars. The dominant perspective is that it is not possible to make a clear differentiation between the two.⁷¹ This problem of differentiation is most sharply manifest in passages which, even though clearly reflecting one school's theological views, are actually attributed in the sources to the sages of the opposing school. Thus, Gary Porton writes: "...our standard division of the Tannaitic texts into 'Aqiban and Ishmaelean is at least oversimplified, and it may be incorrect.'⁷² Moreover, Marmorstein's classification of individual Rabbis as "literalists" or "allegorists" is problematic, and cannot be considered as an established fact. Here too we find that some of those identified by him as "allegorists" are often attributed "literalist" sayings, and that a single teaching is attributed both to "allegorist" and "literalist" sages. Even more importantly, Marmorstein assumes that the attributions of specific sayings in Rabbinic texts to individual rabbis mean that those individuals were in fact the originators of the teachings. However, current scholarship strongly challenges this assumption. There is growing and compelling evidence showing that Rabbinic attributions are often not historically valid, as the result of different and numerous problems (such as mistakes in the transmission of texts, the existence of several rabbis with the same name, contradictory Rabbinic traditions, and others).⁷³ But even though the division between

70. Neusner 1988, 142-3.

71. See the discussion in Strack and Stemberger 1996, 57-59; 247-51.

72. Strack and Stemberger 1996, 249.

73. For a review of this and other problems concerning attributions in Rabbinic Literature see Strack and

schools of thought may have fallen, there remains much to be learned from Marmorstein's studies, primarily, that Rabbinic literature contains multiple and often divergent theological perspectives. Due to this fundamental conclusion, Marmorstein's works are sharply at odds with other scholars' approaches, which dismiss, deny or distort some Rabbinic texts in their attempts to harmonize the differing Rabbinic ideas, or to give prominence to those Rabbinic ideas they favor.⁷⁴

Finally, there are also problematic points in Neusner's presentation of the Rabbinic views on God's corporeality. First, he maintains the claim of a Rabbinic corporeal notion of God even though he has pointed out that Rabbinic texts also hold that God is an abstract being, that could *not* be seen by humans.⁷⁵ Second, Neusner argues that God is said to be seen by the Rabbis as a man in the guise of a Sage, but he also asserts that God is seen by the Rabbis as "truly wholly other: alike, but essentially unlike [man]."⁷⁶ Neusner's presentation of Rabbinic texts supporting the notion that there existed a Rabbinic belief in a God with corporeal traits is comprehensive, and his argument compelling.⁷⁷ What is problematic in his work is the way he deals with all texts found in the same compilations and from the same periods of those he quoted in support of God's incarnation – the texts that Marmorstein identified as of the "allegorists" – that clearly reject God's corporeality. To say that God is "alike, but essentially unlike [man]" for the Rabbis does not resolve the paradox, but highlights it. Although Neusner is

Stemberger 1996, 57-59.

74. An extreme example of Rabbinic ideas being dismissed by scholars because they oppose other Rabbinic views they themselves favor is found in Montefiore and Loewe (1960, 31), where they call the Rabbinic views they object to "weeds", and those which they consider of higher quality "flowers".

75. See also Neusner 1998, God.

76. Neusner (1988) p. 227

77. For a qualification and a critique of Neusner's conclusions see David Stern 1992, 156.

cognizant of the conflicting and divergent Rabbinic images of God, he does not acknowledge that a conflict exists, that the Rabbis held (at least) two different views on God's corporeality. Neusner also overlooks conflictive views in another work, in which he quotes different Rabbinic texts about God that are in many instances at odds with each other.⁷⁸ The sources quoted there say both that God is seen by Israel while taking many forms, and that God is an abstract God that cannot be seen by humans;⁷⁹ they say God is Omnipresent and His presence is everywhere, and yet they say God's presence moves in and out of different places (ascends and descends, goes into the House of Study, and out to the exile)⁸⁰. Neusner still denies any conflicts here, and sees a perfect harmony throughout the texts. Referring to the passages that contain the opposing views we just noted, he writes: "The various principles set forth in the successive paragraphs cohere and at no point contain disharmonies or inconsistencies."⁸¹ However, Neusner's claim of total consistency in Rabbinic images about God is not supported by the evidence of Rabbinic sources, even that which he himself provides. Nevertheless, his argument for the existence of Rabbinic corporeal notions of God is well supported by many, yet not all, of the Rabbinic texts.

It should be noted that thus far in our study, particularly in our review of scholarly literature on God's incorporeality, we see that modern scholars often fail to fully appreciate the divergence within Rabbinic views for both methodological and ideological reasons, some of which we described, such as reading Rabbinic texts through the lens of

78. Neusner 1998, 107-27. For a critique on Neusner's arguments see David Kraemer 1995, 116, particularly David Stern's views quoted in n. 4).

79. Neusner 1998, 112.

80. Neusner 1998, 114-18. We have pointed out the contradiction between these different passages in our discussion of God's omnipresence.

81. Neusner 1998, 125

modern Christian theological categories.⁸² To these we may add 'programmatic' reasons: Neusner's attempts to prove that each Rabbinic corpus is the work of one single editor with a consistent ideological program appears to have led him to ignore what are obvious contradictions between different Rabbinic sayings. And we have also noted how, in their analysis of Rabbinic texts, scholars often incorporate their own theological values. We have seen Montefiore and Loewe doing that openly, by calling some Biblical and Rabbinic views on God "superior" and others "inferior", and indicating their own preference for the first kind.⁸³ We can assume that these biases still exist as well in other scholarly textual analyses, where their presence is not made so obvious.

3) Divine justice

In his analysis of divine Justice and human suffering, Kraemer quotes a few "Protest Parables", and argues on their basis that the Rabbis moved away from the idea of Reward and Punishment. But, as we have seen before, these passages may have never been intended to deny that God justly punished Israel, but just to make the limited point that the punishment received, though deserved, exceeded the proportional measure [מדה] in response to Israel's sin. And this limited point –while not often stressed in Rabbinic literature– is already explicitly made in the Bible concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (Is. 40:2). In other words, these "protest" passages do exactly what their name implies: they protest Israel's terrible suffering. But they neither reject nor present an alternative to the principle of Reward and Punishment. Moreover, they are consistent with the basic notion of suffering being brought about by God as

82. See earlier in this section, p 20, n 69.

83. See our discussion on divine omnipresence, section 1.1. 5).

response to human sin. Our understanding of these protest parables as *not* constituting a challenge to the Rabbinic notions of Reward and Punishment even though they constitute a real protest, is expressed by Urbach:

“Just as the Halakhah, which ordained that ‘an eye for an eye connotes monetary damages’, did not diminish the sense of justice informing the earthly court’s ruling, so the Sages were not concerned with the extent to which human actions and Heaven’s punishment truly correspond, but with the actual presence of ‘reward and punishment’ in the Divine administration of the world.”⁸⁴

Urbach notes here that the Rabbis—who by their Midrashic understanding replaced the Biblical Lex Talionis with the principle of monetary compensation—would acknowledge that their justice and ‘Heaven’s punishment’ somehow differed as a result of their interpretation, but would not however consider that the principle of divine reward and punishment was altered nor affected by this. Just as a significant modification in the application of a divine law—the Rabbi’s introduction of compensatory penalties in place of Lex Talionis—was not considered by them to be a rejection of the divine law, so the Rabbinic protest of specific elements in the application of divine retribution does not constitute a rejection of that principle by the Rabbis. As we would not consider Isaiah’s lament (40:2) on the lack of exact proportionality between the divine punishment and Jerusalem’s sin to be a rejection of divine retribution, nor should we equate Rabbinic protests of aspects of Israel’s suffering with an outright rejection of the very principle of divine retribution.

Kraemer has also shown a few texts that seem to depart from the Reward and

84. 1975, 439.

Punishment doctrine, by portraying God as silent or uninvolved while Israel suffers. We must note that his conclusions are based here just on a handful of passages within the extensive Rabbinic texts he surveys, as he concedes by saying that his remarks are true “at least for some bold authors”, indicating that for the majority of the other Rabbis the conclusions do not apply.⁸⁵ And so we find that the vast majority of the texts reaffirm the “old explanations” for Israel’s suffering – as Kraemer himself initially noted. Thus we see that his conclusions of a changing attitude among the Rabbis is based only on a very small section of the evidence he reviewed, while opposed by the majority of it.

Commenting on the same textual evidence –*Lamentations Rabbah*– Jacob Neusner says: “there are no varieties of messages but only one message, and it is reworked in only a few ways: Israel suffers because of sin.”⁸⁶ Though Neusner’s conclusion is unbalanced, and completely ignores the Rabbinic protests, it underscores the fact that the dominant message in the text is not the rejection of divine retribution.

If the evidence provided by Kraemer was problematic in terms of quantity – he provided a small number of passages in his support while there is a great number opposing his conclusions – we must comment also on the quality of his evidence. In the passages he quotes, Kraemer finds only an *implied* criticism of God and His actions.⁸⁷ This presents us with two main problems: establishing that the implied meaning we get is the one meant by the Rabbinic author, and explaining why the meaning was implied rather than made explicit. The first problem arises from the fact that –in contrast with texts with an explicit meaning– the question of which specific meanings are implied by a

85. Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 146.

86. Neusner 1995, 104.

87. 1995, 143.

text can often be debatable, and involve subjective interpretations which may not be conclusively ascribed to the author of the text. Kraemer does not convincingly show that the implications he sees are meant by the author, and are not only his own interpretation of the texts.⁸⁸ Kraemer's conclusions on Rabbinic ideology based on *implied* meanings of some Rabbinic texts can be further questioned considering that there are plenty of Rabbinic passages *explicitly* expressing Rabbinic views that oppose them, and adhere to the "old explanations". I am not claiming that there aren't Rabbinic passages that imply a criticism and pose an alternative to the notion of divine retribution. In fact, I believe there are many such passages. But the fact that certain views abound and are made explicit, while others are scarce and left for the reader to fully formulate requires an explanation, which I think Kraemer does not provide.

The only evidence that adequately supports Kraemer's conclusions, and conveys alternatives to Reward and Punishment, is the כביכול passage he cites. This cannot be taken to represent the attitude of *the* Rabbis at any given time nor in any given document, but rather constitutes the exceptional view. Thus, we find that the evidence he provides does not adequately carry the weight of his conclusions. In this study I will provide a larger number of כביכול passages that—both in their quality and quantity— will convincingly show the existence of Rabbinic views departing from the more common understanding of human suffering and the divine role in it.

1.2 A Few Exceptional Voices

88. In fact, this is my own subjective opinion: Kraemer did not convince me, but may convince others. This underscores how the evidence from implied meanings can at times be problematic.

As we have seen, even when the texts show diversity within Rabbinic ideas about God—as on His corporeality, and His omnipresence—many modern scholars still claim they are fully consistent with the mainstream of ideas, and often deny, soften, or ignore the opposing views they acknowledge. Also, we have noted that this variety of Rabbinic notions of God is considered by most scholars to be contained within certain clear boundaries. Jacobs exemplifies this view when he emphatically rejects the notion of a limited God, and affirms that we have only two alternatives: “...belief in God, *as traditionally conceived*, that is the God who is omnipotent, or out and out atheism.”⁸⁹ Jacobs is not only rejecting the belief in a limited God for Jews in the present, but is also denying that such a belief was ever a part of *traditional* Judaism. Jacobs’ complete rejection of ideas of a limited God in Jewish tradition is particularly striking since he himself notes elsewhere that several well respected medieval Rabbis (as Gersonides, and Moses of Taku) held such notions and derived them from Biblical and Rabbinic sources.⁹⁰ Arthur Cohen also rejects ideas of a limited God, and claims that the Rabbis consistently spoke of God as possessing “boundless might” while being “immeasurably removed from the limitations of the finite world”.⁹¹

And yet, some notions of a limited God exist within Rabbinic literature. Marmorstein notes that, perhaps as a reaction to the catastrophic events of 68 C.E. and 135 C.E., many Jews doubted God’s omnipotence and omniscience.⁹² This attitude—Marmorstein notes—affected some Rabbis as well:

89. Jacobs 1973, 77 (Emphasis added). For a criticism of Jacobs’ views on the history and plausibility of Jewish ideas of a limited God, see Rosenthal 1990, 69-70.

90. Jacobs 1973, 49; 76.

91. Cohen 1949, 40.

92. 1927, 171-72.

“We read in many Midrashim the teaching that as long as Edom, or Amalek, rules in this world, the Kingdom of Heaven, the name of God, or His throne is not complete, firm, or absolute. Here, again, the tendency of the finite power, which God seems to have, ruled in the theology of the third century.”⁹³ Marmorstein also identifies some specific Rabbis, R. Johanan and R. Jeremiah b. Eliezer, as “inclining to a conception of a finite power of God”.⁹⁴ It is important to note at this point, that these views are expressed within “כביכול” passages.”

Gilbert S. Rosenthal notes that, “the seeds of the notion of a finite deity have always been present” even though Rabbinic literature does more generally affirm God’s omnipotence and omniscience.⁹⁵ Specifically, he identifies a Rabbinic “tradition” in which God is limited vis-a-vis certain humans (such as Moses, Abraham, and some Rabbis) who “win” over Him in arguments.⁹⁶ This, according to Rosenthal, is due to God’s self-limitation in those specific cases. As we shall see, several passages within this “tradition” are found among the “כביכול” passages” as well.

Montefiore and Loewe –as we have noted– struggled to harmonize some Rabbinic passages with their own conception of an unlimited God.⁹⁷ Yet, after affirming the Rabbinic belief in God’s unlimited power, they quote seven passages that present a different picture.⁹⁸ In them, God’s power is said to be weakened and limited by Israel’s actions, God’s name profaned by their deeds, and even God’s very existence is said to be

93. 1927, 174.

94. 1927, 175.

95. Rosenthal 1990, 72.

96. Rosenthal 1990, 61-65.

97. See section on omnipresence.

98. Montefiore and Loewe 1960, 34-35.

affected by and dependent on human actions. All these “dissenting” and hard⁹⁹ passages are “כביכול passages”.

Having presented in general lines the Rabbinic ideas of God, and having begun to note some connection between certain views on God and the use of the expression כביכול, we will proceed to study the “כביכול passages”.

99. These are “hard” in Montefiore and Loewe’s own opinion, for they say of two subsequent passages (#84 and # 85) that they “soften down” what was previously said in these.

2 The Meaning Of כביכול

A clear understanding of the term כביכול has proven difficult to achieve. As we will now see, this term is understood in varying ways by scholars, who disagree not only on the literal meaning of the word, but also on its function in the texts. Resulting from this, disagreement over the meaning of the word itself are disagreements over the meaning of entire כביכול passages. Moreover, we often find a lack of consistent understanding of כביכול among individual scholars, who translate it in differing ways in their own works.

The term כביכול has been said to mean “as it were”, “so to speak”, and “if one may say so” by Montefiore and Loewe.¹⁰⁰ Cohen has it as “if we may so express ourselves.”¹⁰¹ Urbach’s treatment of the word is quite interesting: he renders it as “as it were” or “so to speak” in the body of the text, even though in a note he says that “the correct interpretation [of כביכול] is that given by W. Bacher... ‘as though it were of one of whom you could say this’”.¹⁰² Braude translated it “if one dare say such a thing”, and “if one dare ascribe such feeling to Him”¹⁰³. Neusner understood כביכול to mean “as it were”,¹⁰⁴ and “if one could say it”,¹⁰⁵ and “it is as though.”¹⁰⁶ Marmorstein reviews and rejects many other scholars’ understandings of the term, including that found in *חליקת עולם* suggesting that כביכול means “the Torah which is written in 22 [כב] letters can say thus [יכול], but we human beings could not utter such a word”.¹⁰⁷ In Marmorstein’s view,

100.1960, 34-35

101.1949, 39.

102. 1975, 63 & 709 n.1.

103. Bialik and Ravnitzky 1992, 514 and 382 respectively.

104.1998c, 180.

105.1995, 96.

106.1995, 69

107.1937, 126.

כביכול is an acronym standing for *כיוצא בדבר יש כח ואפשר לומר* (“what emerges from this is valid and it may be said”).¹⁰⁸

If so many scholars give so many different answers to it, how might we resolve this question? I will proceed in this study without translating the term, understanding that the study of the theological content of the passages can be done even without having arrived with absolute certainty at the precise meaning of the term.

It seems that most scholars have followed in some manner this approach. The fact that כביכול is translated inconsistently by most of them shows that they did not have a definitive understanding of the expression. However it seems clear, and quite evident from many of those translations, that all scholars were aware of the theological importance of the expression.¹⁰⁹ In other words, even when not sure of what it means, they are sure of what כביכול does. Thus Marmorstein, and more recently Michael Fishbane, analyze the Rabbinic use of כביכול without even translating the word, but focusing on what it accomplishes.¹¹⁰ Similarly, in an English translation and commentary of the Talmud, the expression is rendered “as it were”, but in a note it is stated that this is not what the expression “means literally”. And yet, the commentator is certain about it having a definite theological function: [the expression means that] “Scripture speaks of God in physical terms, though such terms are, strictly speaking, inapplicable to God, Who is incorporeal.”¹¹¹

108. 1937, 131.

109. Braude’s translation “if one dare say such a thing” is a clear example of an attempt to convey the ideological message concerning the theological impropriety of the Rabbinic view introduced, at the expense of straying from an accurate literal translation of the word כביכול (“to dare” goes quite beyond “to be able”, which is the general meaning of the root יכל).

110. See Marmorstein 1937, 126-32; and Fishbane 1989, 19-32.

111. *Babylonian Talmud*, Ed. Schottenstein, Tr. Megillah 21, particularly n. 23. Such unqualified assertion of God’s incorporeality reflects the modern commentator’s perspective, and not necessarily the

In the next section I will try to determine what the term does, without attempting to give a translation for it. We will find that as scholars differed in their translations, so do they differ in their understanding of what the expression means and how it functions in a passage. I will present now these scholarly views on כביכול, which I grouped into four broad categories.

2.1 כביכול (Mis)Understood As A Formula To Avoid The Literal Sense Of An Expression

The expression כביכול is said to be a formula that mitigates or qualifies the expression it precedes, which is generally referring to God in a theologically unusual and even offensive way, by means of anthropomorphism or anthropopathism. Thus, translated by expressions such as “as it were”, “it is as if”, “it is as though”, כביכול means that whatever is said next is not to be considered literally true, but only as a figure of speech, a simile, or a metaphor. So, in a phrase such as “When the Israelites do not do God’s will they כביכול weaken the great power of God” (Lam. R. 1, 33), כביכול signifies that despite the literal sense of the phrase, God’s power is not actually affected by the Israelites. Similarly, when the Rabbis say that “In every place in which the Israelites went into exile, כביכול God’s presence went in exile with them” (Mekh. Bo, Pisha, 14, ד”ה ויהי, מקץ), they do not mean that God’s presence actually moved with them from one place to another. In the Talmud (TB Meg. 21a), when commenting on the verse in which God says to Moses “Now you, stand here with Me” (Deut 5:28), R. Abahu says: “were this not

Rabbinic view, as we noted in the previous chapter. In fact, the Talmudic text here suggests that God was conceived corporeally by the author of the phrase, R. Abahu.

written in Scripture, one could not say it, כביכול the Holy One, blessed be He, was standing too". This framing of the idiom would allow us to say that R. Abahu is *not* saying that God was actually standing.

These examples are sufficient to show some basic characteristics and problems of this approach. First, this understanding of כביכול does not emerge from anything contained in the phrases themselves. Second, the notion that כביכול mitigates or qualifies the ideas it precedes is only plausible under the assumption that the Rabbis held certain beliefs: only if God is believed to be omnipotent by the Rabbis would the idea of Israel weakening His power *have to* be qualified by them; only if God is omnipresent does the idea of God's presence going to exile require mitigation; and only if God is believed to be incorporeal does the image of God standing by Moses become impossible, and necessarily non-literal. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are many Rabbinic texts, and several scholarly analysis of them, that show Rabbis not holding those beliefs.¹¹² Third, in some cases the text explicitly notes the improper, shocking, and even heretical nature of the statement following כביכול. When R. Abahu says that it would not be possible to say that God was standing were it not written in Scripture, he is stating that the idea is improper by usual standards and not permitted to be uttered, but since it is explicitly stated in the Bible, it can be said. Thus, the idea, however shocking or problematic, is legitimized and reasserted, rather than qualified.

112. Assuming that the dominant trend in Rabbinic literature is to hold such beliefs regarding God does not solve the problem. For once we know that there are Rabbis not holding those beliefs, in order for the 'mitigating' reading of כביכול to be applied to a given text we would have to prove that the specific passage containing the idiom is not produced by one of the 'minority' Rabbis, but by one who does hold to the dominant beliefs. This may be not just a difficult task, but perhaps an impossible one (consider our criticism of Marmorstein's attempts to identify theological schools within Rabbinic sources, in section 1.2. 2) and n 71).

There are additional problems with this approach. A fundamental one is, that certain כביכול phrases do not make much sense unless understood literally to mean what they say. For instance, what is the “qualified/ non-literal” meaning of the phrase “God was standing too”? Similarly, if God is present in all places at all times, what does the phrase about His presence going along with the Israelites into exile to Babylon and to Egypt mean? It is important here to note, that even if we may adduce some “qualified” sense to these phrases, it will not be what these texts intended. That is, such qualified meaning would not be obvious nor even detected at all by an average reader of the text. On the other hand, when the phrases are not read as qualified, these כביכול phrases can be easily understood, and their author’s message clearly grasped (even if objected on ideological or theological grounds). Since the Rabbis were effective in communicating their thoughts, we must assume that they intended the obvious and explicit sense of the texts, rather than highly personal and complex elaborations that might be construed upon them.

Another problem of considering כביכול as qualifying and mitigating Rabbinic phrases, arises when we find that the term is often used not to introduce a Rabbinic statement, but to introduce a scriptural prooftext. When a Rabbi cites a prooftext, he does it to support his idea. It doesn’t make much sense to suggest that a Rabbi would quote a verse that read literally strongly supports his view, and then he himself would undermine this scriptural support to his idea by qualifying that verse. To illustrate this, we will quote from Ex. R. 42, 5 ד”ה קד רד:

“R. Abin said: God said to Moses, do not feel bad because I said to you

‘go, descend from here’, for in three occasions כביכול I descended from

heaven to the earth to see the corruption of humans, for it is written (Gen.

11) 'Then God descended to see the city and the tower', 'let us descend',

'I will descend and see', so you too go and descend, it is enough for a

servant to be equal to his master."

R. Abin's point is that Moses should not be sad he was told to descend, since God himself descended several times. If R. Abin's statement is understood with a "qualifying כביכול", that is, saying that God did not actually descend as said in Genesis, then his whole message falls, and the whole paragraph becomes meaningless. For Moses' consolation, to be equal to his master, can only emerge from an unqualified understanding of God's descent, emerging only from a literal reading of both Genesis' and R. Abin's statements.

Another significant problem of this "qualifying" approach emerges from the uses of כביכול in phrases that do not contain any "difficult" statement requiring qualification. Though a very small group, I found at last six passages that do not seem to be offensive. Moreover, four passages do not refer to God at all.¹¹³ We find that כביכול is used on statements that do not refer to God at all, and do not seem to require softening. In Pesikta deRav Kahanah 23,2 ד"ה רבי נחמן we read:

"Rabbi Nahman expounded: 'Now you do not fear, my servant Jacob, nor be afraid' (Jer. 30:10), this refers to Jacob, of whom it is written 'then he dreamt and behold a ladder' (Gen. 28:12). Said R. Samuel bar Nahman, these are the tutelary angels of the nations; what R. Samuel bar Nahman said teaches that God showed our father Jacob the tutelary angel of

113. See Thematic Summary of כביכול Passages.

Babylon go up seventy runnels of a ladder and come down, and the one of Media fifty-two, and of Greece a hundred and eighty, and the one of Edom went up and went up and he did not know how much. At that moment our father Jacob was afraid and said, 'you might say that this one does not descended said to him, *'do not be afraid Israel (Jer. 30:10)*, כביכול even if you see him seating by me, from here I will take him down, as it is written *'though you soar like the eagle, and set your nest among the stars, from there I bring him down'* (Ovadiah 1:4)."

This passage does not justify the use of כביכול as a mitigating formula. In fact, with the term understood that way the whole paragraph loses its meaning, and God's assurance concerning His eventual removal of Edom from a position power is totally undermined.

Finally, this approach stems from, and is based on, the idea that the Rabbis found anthropomorphic characterizations of God objectionable, and sought to limit and reduce them. But many scholars have convincingly shown quite the contrary.¹¹⁴ The following passage illustrates both that the Rabbis used strong anthropomorphic imagery, and that כביכול was not used to mitigate such expressions. "Precious is the Temple for the Holy One blessed be He, since when the Holy One created His world He created it only with one of his hands, for it is said 'My hand founded the earth' (Is. 48:13), but when He came to build the Temple, כביכול with His two hands, for it is said 'the sanctuary, Adonai, which your hands established' (Ex. 15:17)."¹¹⁵ This passage shows strong Rabbinic

114. See particularly Marmorstein 1937; Neusner 1988; Stern 1992; and Aaron 1997.

115. Mek. Shirata, Beshallah, 10, ד"ה פעלת, 10.

anthropomorphism, and their hyper-literal reading of Scripture. This passage is particularly instructive because it shows Rabbinic use of two anthropomorphic expressions that are equivalent in character and strength (God's hands), but כביכול is only used to introduce the second one. Were כביכול meant to qualify anthropomorphism, it would have been used in the first case as well.¹¹⁶

2.2 כביכול As An Ambiguous Expression

כביכול is often seen as reflecting some ambiguity on part of the Rabbis regarding the ideas they express. On one hand, כביכול qualifies and softens the ideas it introduces, by stressing that what is put forward is said "as it were" true, which means that it is not considered to be "actually" true. On the other hand, what is said must have some degree of truth in it, must convey a meaningful and valid idea, or otherwise it would not be said at all. Thus, כביכול is definitely not a rejection of the idea presented, but a special way of introducing it. Some modern scholars reflect this ambiguity in their works. Montefiore and Loewe affirm a Rabbinic belief in God's unlimited power, and at the same time note the כביכול passages that state God's power is affected and weakened by human actions. Then, rather than pointing to the existence of conflicting views within Rabbinic texts, these scholars still present Rabbinic theology as consistent, but ambiguous concerning God's omnipotence.

We find that most scholars of Rabbinic literature, particularly due to the way they have dealt with כביכול passages, have presented the Rabbis as ambiguous. By rendering

116. Later in our analysis, we will point to many instances where only the second of two similar expressions is preceded by כביכול, and we will present an explanation for this usage.

כביכול as “if one could say so” and similar expressions, they present the Rabbis as both affirming and rejecting the same idea. Almost all translations of כביכול¹¹⁷ portray the Rabbis as saying: “One may not say this (of God), but if one could, this is what we would say”. The Rabbis, seen this way, first acknowledge the forbidden and improper character of the idea, and then go on and openly say it.

Often, after presenting these alleged ambiguities, efforts are made to soften or solve the problems they present. Urbach’s introduction to R. Akiva’s statement on the Shekhina having been exiled with Israel exemplifies this attitude: “the paradoxical concept...[of] the specific presence of the Deity in a particular place not only does not contradict His presence throughout the world, but actually makes it possible.”¹¹⁸ Even though the very problematic character of the statement is explicitly noted by Akiva himself—conceding that were it not written in scripture it would be *forbidden* to say it—¹¹⁹ Urbach first prefers the softer term “paradoxical”, and then declares the problematic statement to be actually supporting the very principle it opposes. From Akiva’s own recognition that his statement would normally qualify to be prohibited by the Rabbis, and from his bold affirmation of it, we can observe two opposing views: Akiva’s own, and the Rabbis’. This opposition does not constitute a paradox until these divergent opinions from two different sources are portrayed by Urbach as being simultaneously held by one given individual or group. In other words, Urbach created a paradox by denying the opposition between Akiva’s views and the more general Rabbinic view.¹²⁰

117. With the exception of those places where Marmorstein suggest כביכול is an acronym, with a different, affirmative meaning.

118. 1975, 54.

119. Akiva uses the formula “were this not written in Scripture it wouldn’t be permitted to be said..”
כביכול.

120. See Urbach’s general treatment of the Shekhinah, which is often portrayed (particularly in כביכול

Sometimes these ‘false ambiguities’ are presented, but later altogether dismissed and ignored. Though quoting Rabbinic (כביכול) passages that explicitly challenge the Rabbinic notions of God’s omnipotence and omnipresence –and translating כביכול as the ambiguous “if one could say so”– Neusner concludes that the Rabbis did not have any doubts nor entertained differing ideas regarding these matters.¹²¹ Neusner thus ignores the occasional divergences of opinions within Rabbinic texts in two ways: he first presents different opposing opinions as a single yet ‘ambiguous’ or ‘paradoxical’ view, and then he claims that there is absolute consistence within Rabbinic sources.¹²²

But this scholarly characterization of Rabbinic views in כביכול passages as ambiguous is flawed. Ambiguity and divergence of opinions are two very different things. We may say that we find ambiguity among the Rabbis only if we hear from *any given individual source* an ambiguous statement, that is one that contains several meanings or is by itself uncertain. But if within Rabbinic texts we find some views opposing others, even if a minority of views opposes a majority of others, then we have diversity and divergence of opinions. So if we find in a כביכול passage that a Rabbi argues for a notion of a corporeal God, and in *other* texts *other* Rabbis present a notion of an incorporeal deity (as it happens to be the case with the כביכול passages quoted so far

passages) as a divine presence limited in space. Rather than conceding that in some Rabbinic views the Shekhinah was conceived as physically limited and in opposition to the notion of an omnipresent God, he presents *one* harmonized encompassing Rabbinic view, but now necessarily ambiguous and paradoxical: God is present in the world and is near man, yet He is completely distant (1975, 63-65).

121. See passages quoted in Neusner 1995, 35; 96-97; 55, which contain (כביכול) passages opposing the notions of God’s omnipotence and perfection, and of God’s omnipresence respectively. Compare with Neusner’s summary and conclusions on p. 106.

122. See Neusner 1998a, 116-19. There, opposing views –some affirming God’s omnipresence, and others saying that God’s presence goes from one place to another and can be brought in or kept out from specific places– are all presented as always coherent and harmonious. Some of these views are taken from כביכול passages, and are themselves presented as ambiguous (using expressions such as ‘as it were’).

in this chapter), then we are encountering divergence and diversity of opinions among Rabbis, not ambiguity. To present this as an instance of Rabbinic paradox amounts to *create* one out of distinct logically sound independent opinions.

Certainly, it may be possible to find real ambiguities within Rabbinic texts, and there might be obscure texts which would allow for many interpretations. However, the *כביכול* passages do not seem to be among them.

2.3 *כביכול* As A marker of Hypothetical Midrashic Readings

Michael Fishbane has analyzed the Midrashic use of *כביכול* at some length.¹²³ He understands the expression as an element sometimes used in the Rabbinic exegetical move *al tigre*-אל תקרא. Fishbane explains that this Midrashic instruction to read Scripture in an alternative way, after a slight modification of the letters of a Biblical word, does not attempt to replace the traditional reading, but merely “suspends it playfully for the sake of the exposition” [of the idea introduced by the Rabbi based on this new reading].¹²⁴ Fishbane considers that there exists also an “implicit *al tigre*” by which the Rabbis, without modifying the written verse, read it in a new and alternative way, exploiting the versatility of some words. For example, when God says “ישועתי”-My salvation” (Isa. 56:1), what was traditionally understood as God being the author of the salvation, is in a Midrash understood as God being the object of it.¹²⁵ This is but one of many instances in which this procedure is used to articulate “some relatively radical rabbinic theology”.¹²⁶ Fishbane explains that, by means of implicit *al tigre* and using the

123. 1989, 19-32.

124. 1989, 22.

125. Exodus Rabbah 30, 24; Fishbane 1989, 27-28.

126. 1989, 23.

כביכול formula, the Midrashim 'reinfect' Scriptural verses in anthropomorphic and anthropopathic ways, and so "the Bible is troped against itself to produce a myth of divine pathos."¹²⁷ Thus, the כביכול formula signals both the introduction of blatant anthropomorphism, and the use of an implicit *al tigre* hermeneutic.

This also applies to the use of כביכול in the Midrashim dealing with the scribal corrections of the Biblical text.¹²⁸ In those passages, the Rabbis quote several verses, and then point to the corrections effected on them, at times restating the "original" text. In such passages, the כביכול formula introduces the original reading of the verse. Referring to the passage in which the Rabbis give the original reading of Zech 2:12, Fishbane states: "It is only the mythopoetic theology of the midrash which produces a hypothetical reconstruction of an assumed uncorrected text...The midrashist in fact acknowledges this rabbinic reconstruction, for he invokes the word *kivyakhol* - his index of a hypothetical reading - before citing the proof-text from Zechariah."¹²⁹

Fishbane then formulates two conclusions on the significance and usage of כביכול: -First, the formula always introduces a Midrashic construction, consisting of a hermeneutical manipulation of Biblical text, which is effected in order to produce out of it a new Rabbinic theological idea not previously found in Scripture (not in its traditional sense, nor in anyone's reading of it preceding this Midrashic "reading"). Indeed, "the markings of *kivyakhol* are nothing if they are not also the signs of hermeneutical desire: the imaginative shaping of the letters of Scripture in accordance with theological will."¹³⁰

127. 1989, 29.

128. These are the תיקוני סופרים, which will be discussed in detail in the next section of this study. The earliest passages containing the lists of corrections are found in Sifre Num. on Num. 10:35, and Mekhila on Ex. 15:7.

129. 1989, 30-31.

130. 1989, 31.

-Second, the Rabbis mark their own “hypothetical readings” of Scripture by means of this formula, and thus they recognize (actually emphasize) that their reading of Scripture *is not* what Scripture actually means. Fishbane emphasizes this is the case even when the Rabbis claim to be providing not just their “constructed” reading, but what is presented as Scripture’s “original” text. Lest we be confused, and think that the Rabbis “dare to assert an original Scripture” that is different than the one we know, “we are duly warned: *kivyakhol*.”¹³¹ The formula serves then to emphasize that the Rabbis’ interpretative act is not asserting their authority over Scripture: the traditional (previous) understanding of Scripture is not challenged nor replaced by the new כביכול interpretation. The formula indicates that “*if one reads the Biblical passage midrashically, such and so is the sense which can be construed.*”¹³²

Fishbane’s analysis must be carefully reviewed to point out some of its problems. First, Fishbane only referred in his analysis to the use of כביכול in association with *al tiqre* hermeneutical moves. However, we find that many כביכול passages do not involve *al tiqre* moves at all, neither explicit nor implicit (this category being Fishbane’s own questionable creation). In *Mekhilta* Pisha, Bo, 14 ד”ה ויהי מקץ, we read that the Shekhinah has כביכול gone into exile with Israel. This is then supported by several prooftexts without resorting to *al tiqre* moves. Supporting the idea that God’s presence went to Egypt, 1 Sam. 2:27 is quoted: “I have certainly reveled myself to your father’s house when they were in Egypt”. For God’s presence in Elam, Jer. 49:38 “I set my throne in Elam”. For God’s presence in Edom, Isa. 63:1 “Who is this coming from Edom, his garments stained

131. 1989, 31.

132. 1989, 27.

red, coming from Bozrah?”. Many other כביכול passages in which prooftexts are taken for their “plain” meaning could be added to these examples.¹³³ As such Fishbane analysis does not apply to, nor accounts for, all such כביכול passages.

A second problem in Fishbane’s analysis is that he ignores the fact that many כביכול passages not only are not of the *al tigre* type, but actually are of another type which is diametrically opposed to *al tigre*. Passages in which the formula ‘...אלא...אין’ is used, are emphasizing the literal reading of the text exactly as it is, and expressly rejecting other readings that involve *al tigre* moves. In Ex. R. 30, 24 – a כביכול passage commented upon by Fishbane – one of the prooftexts quoted to support the idea of God not as author, but as the object of salvation, is Zech. 9:9, where it is said about God “He is righteous and victorious [נשע]”. The Midrashist notes: “Scripture does not write ‘saving’ [נשיע] but ‘saved’ [נשע]”. In this case, the reading introduced by כביכול, though presenting a radical and new Rabbinic idea, is the one retaining the exact wording of Scripture, while the “traditional” reading is the one involving the *al tigre* reconstruction of the words. Thus, we find that there is no necessary correspondence between the use of *al tigre*, כביכול, and the introduction of a new theologically radical Rabbinic reading of Scripture.¹³⁴

A third problematic point in Fishbane’s analysis is his analysis of the use of כביכול in the passages concerning the scribal corrections. In his analysis, Fishbane chose to focus his comments on the corrected verse in Zech. 2:12.¹³⁵ He concludes that the alleged

133. We will study those passages in detail later in this study.

134. It might be argued that even the more common passages containing the shorter expression אלא constitute a rejection of non-literal readings of Scripture, such as done through *al tigre*.

135. 1989, 30-31.

correction the Midrash assumes never took place, and that the alleged “uncorrected text” is just a hypothetical product of Midrashic mythopoetic theology. All this is admitted by the Rabbis – Fishbane says – who tell us so by using כביכול, the formula intended to indicate the aforementioned nature of the passage. Fishbane categorically denies that there ever existed a correction or an uncorrected text, and denies also that the Rabbis who mention it actually believe there was such a correction.¹³⁶ However, in a separate study of the subject of scribal corrections, Fishbane himself acknowledges that these Rabbinic lists of corrections have a real historical basis and “preserve considerable older biblical traditions of scribal corrections.”¹³⁷ Regarding Zech. 2:12, we learn from several other studies on this particular correction that it *did* take place, and that the uncorrected text presented by the Rabbis is well attested in ancient and in pre-Rabbinic sources, from Qumran, the Septuagint, and even the Vulgate and Geniza fragments.¹³⁸ This evidence invalidates a great part of Fishbane’s analysis and conclusions. Since the correction did happen, the reading that the Rabbis are presenting for the verse is definitely not a product of Midrashic mythopoetics, is not offered as an hypothetical reading, and the word כביכול obviously is not a mark for any of that. The Rabbis’ use of Scripture in support of a radical idea by reference to the original text is a bold, yet quite simple hermeneutic move.

Finally, the notion that כביכול is used to indicate that the Biblical passage is going to be read “midrashically” seems immensely problematic.¹³⁹ Do the Rabbis ever distinguish between “midrashic” reading of the Bible and other readings? Is an *al tigre* reading any more midrashic than a reading by means of other Rabbinic hermeneutical

136. 1989, 31.

137. 1988, 67.

138. See the detailed study by McCarthy 1981, 61-70; and Tov 1989, 209-212.

139. 1989, 27.

moves (as the 7, 13, or 32 *middot*) for which we do not get the 'כביכול warning'? If this is what Fishbane is suggesting –this is implied by his analysis– it would be contrary to the general understanding of Midrash, and it would require demonstration. Even more fundamentally, isn't Midrashic reading of Scripture by definition conveying a true meaning (as opposed to a hypothetical meaning) of the text? The whole enterprise of Midrash is based on the principle that through a variety of hermeneutic moves –as manipulative as *al tigre*– true meanings can be derived from the text.¹⁴⁰ In sum, Fishbane's assertion that the ideas expressed in כביכול passages are meant just to be playfully entertained rather than be considered as true notions derived from Scripture, must be rejected.

2.4 כביכול As An Affirmative Emphatic Formula

Several scholars have noted that though כביכול has been typically understood as a qualifier of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic statements about God, "it's actual effect, however, is not to diminish but to intensify the antropomorphic exegesis."¹⁴¹

This understanding of the formula was already presented by Rashi in his commentary on R. Abahu's exegesis portraying God standing beside Moses.¹⁴² On the כביכול expression used by R. Abahu, Rashi says: "it is said about God as about a man about whom this can be said." That is, as it can be said about a man that he is standing, so it can be said about God that He is standing. Rashi comments on the formula a second

140. See Strack and Stemberger's presentation of Midrashic hermeneutics (1996, 237-39), where it is emphasized that the many seemingly arbitrary uses of Scripture constitute the essence of Midrashic hermeneutics, and are conceived as tools to uncover the many truths contained in Scriptural text.

141. Stern 1991, 165.

142. TB Meg. 21a. We have discussed this passage in section 2.1.

time, there acknowledging how difficult it is to accept the ideas introduced by כביכול for those within the Rabbinic tradition, as himself. On TB Yoma 3b, commenting on a כביכול phrase saying that God does not want Israel's offerings, he states: "since it is a hard thing to say that God cut off Israel, it says כביכול, that is to say, against our will that shall be said."

Urbach finds W. Bacher's translation "as though it were of one of whom you could say this" to be correct, and in accordance with Rashi's words.¹⁴³ He does not consider כביכול to be qualifying anthropomorphic images of God, but rather affirming them. Commenting on the concept of Shekhinah, he says: "it is not used to weaken the anthropomorphic character of scriptural verses. On the contrary, we find that the designation Shekhinah itself is accompanied by the expression *ki-ve-yakhol* [as it were, so to speak] in passages that appear unduly daring."¹⁴⁴

Marmorstein has studied in considerable detail the expression כביכול.¹⁴⁵ He rejects the views of those who see it as a qualifier of anthropomorphism, quoting a variety of texts supporting his refutations, which are along the lines of the refutation of those views presented earlier in our study. Mainly, he points that often a Rabbinic passage includes several anthropomorphic images, yet only one is preceded by the formula, which proves that anthropomorphism is not what calls for its use. He also quotes several passages in which the expression actually emphasizes the anthropomorphism, particularly when כביכול is used in conjunction with the formula *אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומר* - 'were this not written in Scripture it would not be possible to say it'. In Mekhilta we read a

143. 1975, 709 n.1.

144. 1975, 63.

145. 1937, 126-32.

commentary on 2 Sam. 6:23 “before your people which You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, a nation¹⁴⁶ and it’s God”. “R. Akiva says: were this not written in Scripture it would not be possible to say it, כביכול the Israelites said before God ‘You have redeemed Yourself’.”¹⁴⁷ Marmorstein observes that since the long formula is unambiguously emphasizing the problematic-yet-permitted anthropomorphic reading of the verse, the כביכול formula can not be attached to it unless it functions in a manner consistent with the affirmation of the emphasized statement.

Noting that כביכול is always preceded or followed by a Scriptural reference, Marmorstein concludes: “The meaning of the term כביכול rests therefore on the fact that the Scriptures or some parallel support convey the same thought. I would, therefore, suggest that the word is an abbreviation of the following sentence כִּי כִּחַ וְאִפְשָׁר לומר - ‘what emerges from this is valid and it may be said’.”¹⁴⁸

Marmorstein studies help us recreate the ‘genealogy of כביכול’—how the expression came to be used to convey different meanings as time passed. We noted that initially the expression was used as a bold emphasis of ideas that would appear unusual, questionable, or even offensive within the Rabbinic community, and was associated with literal understandings of Scripture supporting that unusual Rabbinic view. Marmorstein observes that in later Rabbinic sources the expression is used “promiscuously”, and in a manner opposed to its early original meaning, “as a warning against coarse anthropomorphism or anthropopathism.”¹⁴⁹ Gradually, the expression came to be used as

146. MSS reads גוים, but Mekhilta reads גוי. See our comments on the existence of variant scriptural texts among the Rabbis, in section 3.3.1.iii.

147. Mekh. Bo, Pisha 14, ד"ה ויהי מקץ.

148. 1937, 131.

149. 1937, 131.

an equivalent of כאלו – ‘it is as if’ – as we note by the evidence of manuscript variance.

Finally, the expression is now used in modern Hebrew to mean moreless ‘not in reality’.

Many modern scholars are oblivious to these developments, and simply retroject the later sense of the expression to the early texts which used it to convey a different meaning. All this will be discussed at greater length later in this study.

Overall, Marmorstein’s analysis is important not just for his conclusions on what כביכול does, but also for his description of what it does not do. His refutation of other views on the term is quite compelling and strongly based on textual evidence. However, his claim that the expression is an acronym does not seem well supported, nor very plausible.¹⁵⁰ Though he points to a general understanding of the term that seems correct, he nevertheless does not provide a systematic and detailed analysis of the usage of the formula. He has also left many questions unanswered, most importantly what motivates the use of the formula, why is there a need for it, and what can we learn about the content of the כביכול passages when analyzed together, in terms of Rabbinic ideology and theology. We will address and attempt to answer all these questions in our next section.

150. See Urbach’s comments on it (1975, 709 n.1).

PART 2

3. The Usage And Meaning Of כביכול In The Rabbinic Traditions Concerning תיקוני סופרים

תיקוני סופרים - The Scribal Emendations

One of the early Midrashic passages containing the expression כביכול includes a list of תיקוני סופרים—scribal emendations—which according to the Rabbinic tradition, were effected by scribes on the scriptural text. Though for some time these lists were regarded as Rabbinic hermeneutical creations rather than accounts of historical facts, recent studies by several scholars have shed a new light on this tradition.¹⁵¹ As a result of our increased knowledge on the nature and scope of scribal activity in antiquity in general, and concerning Scripture in particular, our understanding of Rabbinic passages referring to such activity has consequently increased.

The analysis of these passages is quite important for the understanding of כביכול for several reasons:

- 1) They constitute some of the earlier uses of the expression, what allows us to avoid the problems we might face analyzing it in other texts due to the shift in the use of the idiom in the later medieval period.¹⁵²

- 2) The claim made in these passages—that the text of the Bible was emended by the early scribes for ideological reasons—can be corroborated by external evidence, such as the non-Massoretic Biblical texts (the LXX, and Qumran scrolls). This will allow us—by establishing a connection between the idiom and historically proven facts—to determine with greater certainty and with a measure of objectivity the function of כביכול

151. See Fishbane 1988, 66-67

152. We discussed this in our concluding remarks to the previous section.

within these texts.

3) Specifically, in the light of this newly found textual and historical evidence on the scribal corrections traditions, which are associated with hyper-literal readings of Scripture, we may determine the function of כביכול particularly in relation to that type of reading of Scripture.

4) Finally, since the passages listing the emendations introduce and actually endorse images of God that are seen by the Rabbis as offensive and highly problematic –so much as to justify and call for the alteration of the scriptural text– we may establish an explicit connection between the use of כביכול and the introduction of such problematic imagery.

I shall then present in this section the newer understanding of the scribal emendations in scholarship, and proceed to analyze the Rabbinic traditions about them under this new light. I will discuss at some length the historicity of the corrective activity cited by the Rabbis, since the claim that corrected verses were read literally by the Rabbis depends in part on the corrections being historically true. Finally, I shall present the implications of this analysis on our understanding of the meaning and the function of the כביכול idiom, as found in the passages reviewed in this section.

3.1 Scribal Activity On Scripture

One of the most important conclusions derived from recent studies on scribal activity is that scribes did not merely copy and preserve texts, but they also were involved in shaping the content of the texts. Commenting on scribal activity on Scripture, Fishbane writes: "The boundary-line between scribes and authors is often quite difficult

to draw in Biblical literature". Scribal effect on the final shape of the Biblical text is such that we have reasons "to consider the demarcation between scribe and author somewhat artificial."¹⁵³ After carefully studying the texts, comparing duplicate passages within the Biblical corpus, and comparing the different variant texts, scholars have observed that scribes altered the texts they dealt with in two fundamental ways.¹⁵⁴ First, by committing several types of mistakes, typical of the copying process, they produced "unintentional variants".¹⁵⁵ Also, they made deliberate changes as they wrote, referred to by scholars as "intentional variants".

Among these deliberate changes, we find three fundamental types: first, the technical correction of errors, which does not attempt to introduce a significant change in the text; second, explicating comments, by means of deictic elements and other formulae, which clarify or interpret obscure terms in the text; and third, changes motivated by theological considerations.¹⁵⁶ It is a study of this third type that will inform our discussion of the scribal emendations referred to by the Rabbis.

3.2 Theological Emendations

As we proceed to present the different types of theological emendations, we must establish whether we are actually dealing with emendations by the scribes, as distinct from comments or phrases written by Biblical authors or redactors. Among the first type of emendations we shall mention a few which can clearly be shown to be of scribal

153. Fishbane 1988, 85.

154. For a presentation of the process of Scribal transmission and copying of Scripture, see Tov 1989, ch.4.

155. These mistakes include involuntary omissions or additions, repetitions, changes or misplacement of letters, among others. See Tov 1989, 189-206.

156. This distinction is made following Fishbane (1988, 23-88).

origin. Emendations were made to eliminate references to paganism in Israel. The theophoric בעל (the Canaanite God) element in personal names became at some point problematic or unwanted, and was replaced with the epithet בִּשְׁת - shame. In 1 Chronicles we read that Saul had a son named אֲשָׁבֶל (8:33; 9:39), and Jonathan had a son named מְרִיבֶל (8:34; 9:40). But in 2 Samuel these names are changed to אִישׁ בִּשְׁת and מִפִּיבִשְׁת respectively (2:8; 3:8; and 4:4; 9:6). Many other names have similarly been changed in 2 Samuel, while in other books their earlier form was preserved (the Septuagint usually preserves them as well).¹⁵⁷ Since 1 Chronicles is a later text than 2 Samuel, but 2 Samuel has the newer version of the names, we must conclude that these were included in 2 Samuel by a later scribe, and not by the original author. Similar concerns motivated another –well known– emendation (to Deut. 32:8), which eliminated the reference to many deities in the text referring how עֶלְיוֹן –the most High– divided the nations on earth according to the number of בְּנֵי אֵל –divine beings.¹⁵⁸ This was accomplished by substituting the original reading בְּנֵי אֵל –attested by Septuagint and Outran manuscripts– with בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, yielding the obscure but theologically correct phrase בְּחֶזֶק עֶלְיוֹן גּוֹיִם.¹⁵⁹

Other emendations were made to eliminate expressions considered offensive to God. In 1 Samuel 3:13 the sons of Eli the priest are condemned for “cursing themselves”. However, based on the context and readings preserved in the Septuagint, we can determine that this is an emendation of the original phrase “cursing God”,

157. See Tov 1989, 210 for many examples of similar name changes, and the preservation of the original readings in the variants.

158. This idea—that each nation has a tutelary divine being—is found also within Rabbinic literature. See, among others, Pesikta de Rav Kahana 23,2 ד"ה רבי טומך –which is quoted in section 2.1.

159. For a discussion of this emendation see Fishbane 1988, 69; Tov 1989, 210.

accomplished by changing אלהים into להם.¹⁶⁰

Modern scholars have identified numerous instances of scribal emendations made for theological reasons.¹⁶¹ The few examples we have presented are enough to establish the fact that such activity did take place. Summarizing the scholarship, we see these are the main theological concerns that led to this extensive corrective activity: avoidance of expressions deemed offensive to God; avoidance of expressions deemed offensive to God's chosen individuals, or that portray them negatively; avoidance of references to pagan gods in terms of Deities;¹⁶² avoidance of phrases inconsistent with the Aaronite lineage of the priesthood; avoidance of phrases that may portray cultic centers other than the Temple in Jerusalem as having some legitimization.

Having shown that extensive corrections were made on Scripture by scribes, we may complete this description of the theologically motivated emendations with a few general remarks on the scope and dating of such activity. Emanuel Tov states that scribal practices of changing texts were the accepted norm in antiquity, and so examples of scribal changes can be found in the Massoretic text, in Qumran texts, Samaritan texts, and in the Targumim.¹⁶³ Similar scribal emendations were effected by scribes in the Hellenistic world, particularly those eliminating expressions considered offensive to God(s).¹⁶⁴ Scholars also point to the fact that many more emendations may yet be found within Scripture, and many might never be identified at all. From the unsystematic and inconsistent way in which these emendations were made throughout Scripture, scholars

160. This is one of the Corrections mentioned in Rabbinic lists. See Fishbane 1988, 67-68.

161. See Tov 1989, 209-212; Fishbane 1988, 66-77; McCarthy 1981, 197-244.

162. See Tov 1989, 211 on the variation between 2Sam 5:21 and 1Chron. 14:12.

163. Tov 1989, 209.

164. Tov 1989, 52 n45.

conclude that these textual changes typically reflect scribal activity: they are done *ad hoc*, are limited to the specific books on which particular scribes worked on (rather than involving an overarching review of all Scripture), and seem to have been done by different groups or schools of scribes.¹⁶⁵

The timeframe for this corrective activity seems hard to determine. McCarthy suggest that, since many Septuagint traditions reflect emendations while others do not, the corrective activity can be dated "as coinciding approximately with the last two hundred and fifty years , B.C., onwards."¹⁶⁶ Yet, he still allows for some corrective activity to have taken place before the composition of the Septuagint. Fishbane believes there is a direct connection between scribal activity and the intertextuality and interbiblical exegesis. He seems to be suggesting that some of the scribal corrective activity (at least that which is exegetical) may have originated in pre-exilic times.¹⁶⁷

None of the scholars seems to have determined the time in which such corrective activity stopped. This is a very problematic issue, for as the existence of the corrections in MSS was proven by the existence of variant readings, the absence of further corrections should be proven by the absence of subsequent variant readings. So in order to prove that in a certain community (say, among the Rabbinic communities of the Tannaitic period) corrections are no longer made, one would have to show that the texts quoted never differ. For if two Rabbis quote a verse differently, it could be claimed that the difference shows that the first Rabbi's text was emended yielding the second Rabbi's text. But, as Tov explains, the Rabbis never had one unique text which all shared, and

165.Fishbane 1988, 84-85.

166.McCarthy 1981, 241; 242.

167.Fishbane 1988, 83-84.

was considered authoritative. In fact, there existed several different versions of proto-Massoretic texts, originating at least as early as the third century BCE.¹⁶⁸ And though there were at some point efforts made to stop introducing changes to the text in order to achieve textual uniformity, "this intention could not alter the reality of the existence of differences among the texts. The desire to insist on a uniform text was therefore a kind of an abstract ideal that could not be actualized in reality."¹⁶⁹ Thus, if two Rabbis quote different texts, we may never be sure of what is the exact reason for such difference, whether it is caused by a difference in ancient textual sources, or by a scribal mistake, a slip of memory, a correction, or a theological emendation.

3.3 The Scribal Corrections In Rabbinic Tradition

The lists of corrections appearing in *Mekhilta* and in *Sifre* are not identical: to the eight corrections mentioned in *Sifre*, *Mekhilta* adds another three. I will quote the passage containing the longer list.

"In the greatness of Your majesty you threw down those who rose up against You (Ex. 15:7), you greatly exalted yourself against those who rose up against you. And who are those who rose up against you? They are those who rose up against your children. It is not written here[in Scripture] 'You threw down those who rose up against us', but rather 'You threw down those who rose up against You'. So Scripture is saying that all who rise up against Israel it is as if they rise up against He who spoke and the world came into being. And so it says: 'Do not forget the voice of those who assail You, the continuously rising clamor of those who rise up

168. Tov 1989, 22.

169. Tov 1989, 21.

against You' (Ps. 74:23), 'for Your enemies are in an uproar', why so? 'they devise schemes against Your people,' etc. (Ps. 83:3-4). And it is written 'Do I not hate those who hate You God?' Why so? 'I hate them with utmost hatred, they became My enemies' (Ps. 129:21-22).

And so it says: 'He who touches you touches the apple of his eye' (Zech. 2:12). Rabbi Judah says: it is not said here 'the apple of the eye' but rather 'the apple of His eye', כביכול referring to [God] above, but Scripture modified the expression. You

similarly say: 'So you said: what a weariness is it, and then snuffed at it' (Mal. 1:13)

etc., but Scripture modified the expression. You similarly say: 'on account of the iniquity, for he knew that his sons were cursing themselves' (1 Sam. 3:13), but

Scripture modified the expression. You similarly say: 'Why have You made me a mark for You, so that I became a burden on myself' (Job 7:20) Scripture modified the

expression. You similarly say: 'Are you not from aforetime, Adonai, my God, holy One? We will not die' (Hab. 1:12) Scripture modified the expression. You similarly

say: 'Has any nation changed Gods? And those are not Gods. But My people changed its glory' (Jer. 2:11) Scripture modified the expression. Similarly: 'So they

exchanged their glory for the likeness of an ox' (Ps. 106:20) Scripture modified the expression. Similarly: 'And if thus you do to me...and let me not see my

wretchedness' (Num. 11:15) Scripture modified the expression. Similarly: 'We do not have a portion in David... every man to his tents, Israel' (2 Sam. 20:1) Scripture

modified the expression. Similarly: 'And they extend the branch towards their

nose' (Ezek. 8:17) Scripture modified the expression. Similarly: 'when he came out of his mother's womb' (Num. 12:12) 'from our mother's womb he came out' it should

have said, but Scripture modified the expression. And so also here you say '*He who touches you touches the apple of his eye*' (Zech. 2:12); Rabbi Judah says: it is not said here '*the apple of the eye*' but rather '*the apple of His eye*', כביכול referring to [God] above, but Scripture modified the expression."¹⁷⁰

3.3.1 The Authenticity Of The Corrections In The Rabbinic Lists

Though the changes made to Scriptural texts are called in this passage כיוונים—substitute expressions—in contrast to the later Rabbinic and Massoretic lists which referred to them as תיקונים—emendations or corrections—it is widely recognized by scholars that both terms have equal meaning in the context of these traditions and lists.¹⁷¹ As we mentioned before, these lists of emendations from the Rabbis were considered by most scholars to be unreliable and essentially Midrashic, that is, they were seen as mere exegetical devices not reflecting any historical truth. But recently some scholars have moved towards accepting a few of these corrections as historically true or “authentic”.¹⁷² We shall now briefly present and assess the different views on this issue.

1) Tov concisely expresses the opinion of those denying the historicity of the Rabbinic traditions: “The scribal corrections [in Rabbinic lists] refer to *fictitious changes* reflecting an exegetical wordplay.” He argues that despite the fact that scribal corrections were common in the hellenistic world, and were in fact made on Biblical text, the cases mentioned by the Rabbis are not convincing enough to prove their veracity. Scholars explain the Midrashic nature of these alleged corrections, pointing to the *al tigre*

170. Mekhilta to Ex. 15:7, Shirata 6, ד"ה וברוב גאונך.

171. See McCarthy 1981, ch.5; 195.

172. So have McCarthy, Fishbane, and in some degree also Tov.

hermeneutic move, in which the Rabbis give a new meaning to a verse by proposing a new reading for purposes of exegesis.¹⁷³ It is argued that when by means of *al tigre* a new reading was created that referred to God in a problematic or improper way, later Rabbis saw this newer Midrashic reading as the “original” one, and assumed it was corrected leaving the text as we now have it. Thus, the truly original reading came to be seen as the correction, and the newer Midrashic variation as the oldest but improper text that was changed.¹⁷⁴

2) But no matter how close the connections between *al tigre* and Rabbinic traditions of scribal corrections may appear, the whole notion of these corrections being unhistoric Midrashic creations would fall if convincing evidence of their historicity could be found. For several of the corrections, such evidence was indeed found. The Rabbinic claims that Zechariah 2:12, Job 7:20, and 1 Samuel 3:13 originally had different readings is well attested by the evidence of the variant texts, particularly the Septuagint and the scrolls found at Qumran.¹⁷⁵ In the light of this evidence, but in the absence of equivalent evidence for other corrections, McCarthy arrives at a mixed conclusion:

In three of the nineteen cases examined above it has been possible to identify a genuine emendation on the basis of textual evidence as well as arguments based on an analysis of the context, etc. The remaining greater number of *tiqqunim* have been shown to be unauthentic as ‘emendations’. In most cases, it has been possible to identify the origin of the *tiqqun* status as having been in some way related to typical

173. This is done by slightly modifying words in the text through revocalization, or by changing the consonantal text. See McCarthy 1981, ch. 4.

174. McCarthy applies this to the “alleged” correction on 2 Samuel 20:1 (1981, 164); and Fishbane applies it to the correction of Zechariah 2:12 (1989, 30-31).

175. See McCarthy’s (1981) analysis of each correction.

midrashic traditions of interpretation, in particular to the many types of exegesis founded on the *al tigre* exegetical device.¹⁷⁶

3) We should note some methodological difficulties and limitations in our study of the veracity of the corrections. Many scholars consider a correction as authentic only if evidence of the original reading is found among the variants, particularly the Septuagint and the Qumran scrolls.¹⁷⁷ However, this is only correct under the assumption that no corrections were done prior to the redaction of these documents. But if we believe that corrections were made already before the Septuagint was composed—as Fishbane suggests is the case—¹⁷⁸ then the Septuagint would also contain the already amended text. Since we do not have older variants, it is simply impossible to find external evidence to prove or refute the authenticity of such earlier corrections.

Another important issue is how do we understand the Rabbinic texts that present readings differing from our MSS. This is crucial for our understanding of the *al tigre* move, which is claimed to be what accounts for the “fictitious” emendations. The question is how do we understand that a Rabbi elaborates on a verse read slightly different from MSS or from other Rabbinic quotes of the verse. We may easily consider this to be a case of *al tigre*, when a Rabbi playfully changes the actual reading of the verse as appears in his text. Yet it is possible, and indeed quite probable, that the different reading is not evidence of Midrashic wordplay but rather of Rabbinic textual variance. For we know that as early as before the destruction of the Second Temple there existed several different versions of Biblical text. Tov explains that this was the case even among

176. 1981, 246-7.

177. See McCarthy (1981) on Mal. 1:13, and in his general conclusions.

178. See particularly the conclusions in 1988, 83-86.

those who had proto-Massoretic texts: "There never was one version that could be called 'the Massoretic Version', but rather only a group of 'Massoretic Versions'."¹⁷⁹ Moreover, we know of specific Rabbinic passages which explicitly introduce *al tigre* interpretations, that are not just wordplay but are actually referring to such variant texts. For instance—as Tov argues—the well known dictum in TB Berachot 64a אל תקרי בנך אלא בנך is actually a direct quote from a Scriptural text, which is also attested in the Qumran scrolls.¹⁸⁰ In sum, it is quite difficult to determine with any certainty whether a Rabbi is 'midrashically' creating a new reading, or whether he is elaborating upon an actual variant reading from the text he possesses.

3.3.2 The Meaning Of The Lists Of Corrections

Let us summarize what the Rabbis say and imply as they mention the scribal corrections. By listing the corrections or substitutions, and giving the original reading of the emended verses—in this passage and in its parallels—the Rabbis are making several basic affirmations:

- the Biblical text as we (they) have it is not exactly in its original or earlier form;
- scribes modified expressions considered by them to be offensive to God or to prominent Biblical characters (e.g., Moses),¹⁸¹ as well as expressions they considered should not be written in reference to God, for unspecified reasons,¹⁸²

179. 1989, 21

180. Tov 1989, 46 n.40.

181. That the scribes must have felt themselves these expressions were inappropriate follows from our analysis at 3.1 and 3.2. It seems reasonable to assume that their sensibilities reflected the beliefs and thought of at least part of the larger community of which they were a part.

182. When Rabbinic traditions do not specify what was seen as problematic in the corrected expression, we may suggest that they saw it as offensive but did not challenge its veracity (as the mention of people cursing God), or we could alternatively suggest that they corrected what they considered was not true. Though scholars follow the first alternative, we must bear in mind that the determination of the

- scribal corrective activity was applied to all sections of the Bible;
- the original reading is the true meaning of Scripture, and can still be quoted and used as an authoritative Scriptural proof-text.

We must here note that all these asseverations are fully consistent with, and quite similar to the conclusions on scribal corrections arrived at by current scholarship. The question remains, whether the emendations on the Rabbinic lists are or are not actual instances of such corrective activity. The evidence appears to indicate that some of the corrections are historically true, while others are 'false'. Since we cannot answer this in a definitive way, we will consider both a positive and a negative answer, and proceed to formulate some conclusions on the meaning and implications of the Rabbinic lists in either case.

We actually have three possible scenarios: 1) the Rabbis are referring to true scribal emendations, 2) the Rabbis believe they are referring to true scribal emendations though they are not, 3) the Rabbis are consciously (midrashically) creating emendations –that McCarthy calls 'false emendations'.¹⁸³ We will first present the conclusions that apply to all three scenarios, and then see the implications of each specific case.

In all cases: a) the Rabbis are introducing a new reading of a verse, which is *admittedly problematic* or deemed improper (this follows from the Rabbinic *claim* that it was modified for that reason, regardless of whether that is a fact or it is not);

b) the problematic meaning derived from the verse is used as a

motivation behind the correction is highly subjective. See Tov1989, 209.

183. When considering each individual "correction", only one of these three scenarios is possible. However, we may find that different scenarios apply to different corrections. For example, we may find that the Rabbis cite a true correction in the case of Zechariah 2:12, while they cite a "false" one in Malachi 1:13.

central element of the idea put forward by the Rabbi quoting it. That is, *the problematic idea is presented and maintained* by the Rabbi, and the “uncorrected” verse is used as a valid supporting prooftext;

c) the idea put forward is derived from a *literal understanding of the problematic reading*. Were the problematic expressions to be read allegorically or figuratively, their problematic character would disappear, no longer requiring nor justifying any emendation (neither real nor alleged);

d) a specific literal reading is emphasized as the *only* correct reading by rejecting alternative interpretations (בבת עייני cannot be read as the general and unproblematic בבת עין).

In no case is an attempt made to soften the problematic phrase; on the contrary, the whole list is presented to support the introduction of an “original” uncorrected reading, however problematic, by showing that many such “original” readings exist throughout the Bible.

Let us now see how כביכול functions in each of the three possible scenarios.

1) If the Rabbis are referring to true scribal emendations, this means that even when earlier scribes considered certain expressions and ideas to be problematic and needed to be removed from Scripture, some Rabbis disagreed with them, and reclaimed those ideas or images. What the scribal emendation eliminated, the Rabbinic list recovered. What the scribe considered improper for Scripture and deleted, the Rabbinic list regards as legitimate, and reinstates it. The Rabbinic list is emphasizing the legitimacy of both the original readings of Scripture and the Rabbinic ideas elaborated upon them. The ideological sensibilities –the *traditio*– of the amending scribe and of the

listing Rabbi are in direct opposition, and both seek the support of Scripture (the scribe went further and adjusted Scripture to fit his *traditio*). Furthermore, if the emendation actually took place, then the Rabbinic paraphrase of the original reading, which is introduced by כביכול, is not a midrashic interpretation of the text, but rather a factual statement: 'kivyakhol the verse refers to God' is a simple true statement resulting from a literal and historical understanding of the verse (historical, in that the scribes who corrected the text did so only because they too understood the verse to literally refer to God). Thus, if the correction is a historical fact, then כביכול functions introducing a statement of factual truth.¹⁸⁴

2) If the Rabbis believe they are referring to true scribal emendations but they are not, this may be a result of a knowledge or a memory of a corrective activity in the Bible, which they mistakenly claim to have found in specific texts. In other words, knowing that expressions offensive to God were at some point extant and later corrected, the Rabbis reconstructed (wrongly) such instances. The fact that they reconstructed them suggests that the problematic ideas originated in the Rabbis minds rather than in the texts, and were projected into Scripture. It may also be possible that *al tigre* traditions, or variant textual traditions, presented the Rabbis with two alternative readings which they then understood as consisting of an original expression and its emendation. Anyway, if the Rabbis truly believed they were listing real emendations, their motivations and concerns for listing them and elaborate on the "original" problematic readings are the same as in the previous scenario (1).

3) If the Rabbis are consciously (midrashically) creating false emendations, this

184. We will discuss this in detail in section 5.2.2.

means that—seeking Scriptural support for their “problematic” ideas— they resorted to a device that allowed them to make Scripture say what it does not. One may speculate about why they chose to present their readings as ‘original but corrected’ texts, rather than presenting their readings by other midrashic ways, such as *al tigre*. From McCarthy’s analysis we may suggest some answers. He points that there are almost no *al tigre* phrases referring to God.¹⁸⁵ Perhaps when an early *al tigre* move led to the emergence of a theologically problematic idea, later it came to be seen as a correction, and listed as such.¹⁸⁶ Or perhaps in order to assert a problematic idea the Rabbis felt that they needed to present a stronger and more direct support from actual scriptural words, than that obtained through the mediating and tampering move of *al tigre*.¹⁸⁷

3.4 The Meaning And Function Of כביכול As Used In Rabbinic Lists Of Scribal Emendations

The fundamental conclusion we consistently derived from the different analyses in this section is that, no matter what the historical basis for the lists is, and regardless of what the Rabbis’ understanding of them was, in all possible scenarios these list-passages function in one clear and definite way: they assert and emphasize the “problematic” ideas and expressions as they emerge from a very literal reading of the text. What all the “original” readings quoted point to is that ideas and expressions concerning God that are offensive or problematic *are* in fact expressed in Scripture, are valid, and can actually be sustained and elaborated upon. In the Mekhilta passage, the list seems to be given to

185. 1981, 162.

186. McCarthy found one scribal correction that is presented in other texts as an *al tigre* move, suggesting that what originated as the latter, in time became the former (1981, 164).

187. See McCarthy 1981, 164-65.

confirm the fact that scribal emendations did take place, and to reinforce (qualitatively and quantitatively) the legitimacy of ideas considered by some to be offensive to God and improper.

Since—as we just established—this passage containing the list of emendations relates to the prooftexts in their hyper-literal—and thus offensive—meanings, and in it the main idea put forward results from a prooftext preceded by the expression *כביכול*, we must conclude that the idiom's function is to introduce such a hyper-literal reading of scripture. The central idea put forward in the passage is that humans, the enemies of Israel and by extension of God, *can actually negatively affect God*, can touch the apple of His eye. The greatest novelty presented in the passage is that the reference to touching the apple of the eye in *Zechariah 2:12* *actually refers to God's eye*. These two, the main idea and the novelty put forward in this passage, are expressed by the verse quotation followed by the remark '*כביכול* referring to [God] above' [*כביכול כלפי מעלה*]. Since the whole passage is emphasizing the (admittedly problematic) idea that God can be affected and disturbed, the only possible meaning and function of *כביכול* must be along this line. *כביכול כלפי מעלה* must mean that what is said in the verse does apply to God. And it must apply in an unqualified and not-softened way, for the qualifying and softening of the idea were done by the scribal correction, which this passage and this phrase are rejecting and reversing.

We may thus summarize our conclusions on the function of *כביכול* in the passage studied:

- it introduces a literal reading of a verse;
- it functions in opposition to the softening or qualifying readings of Scripture;

- it introduces a problematic idea concerning God;
- it affirms and emphasizes the problematic idea it introduces.

We shall now explore other כביכול passages to analyze at greater detail the functions of the expression.

4.1 The Combination Of Two Formulas: כביכול And ואלו

In the passage on the serial corruption we saw that ואלו was used in conjunction with another formula: "Scripture does not write, but" (אלו כתיבין, ואלו כתיבין) which served to emphasize the literal reading of the verse to the exclusion of others. There are many other passages in which this or another similar formula is used. We will study a few of them to see what we can learn from them regarding the function of ואלו.

Leviticus Rabbah 20, 2 contains a story on the death of the sons of Aaron. The passage suggests that the pain and sadness Aaron felt for their death is an unavoidable reality characteristic of this world. The death and pain of others are mentioned in order to illustrate and support the idea. So the pain of Sarah after the beheading of Isaac and her subsequent death are mentioned, and the passage concludes with the pain and longing of Elimelech for his daughter-in-law, mother of Aaron's sons. But before the conclusion two strong and fundamental statements, supported by proverbs, are made: sadness is such an unavoidable reality, that neither Israel nor even God experience happiness in this world.

4 כביכול As A Mark Of Literal Reading Of Scripture

In our previous section we noted that כביכול introduced a literal reading of a Biblical verse. Yet, we find at times that an argument for a literal and an argument for an allegorical understanding of an expression both appear plausible. Often, the matter cannot be conclusively decided. So we will try, in this section, to provide unambiguous textual evidence to support the contention that כביכול calls for a literal understanding of the verse it introduces, excluding any other possibility.

4.1 The Combination Of Two Formulae: כביכול And 'אין כתיב כאן...אלא'

In the passage on the scribal corrections we saw that כביכול was used in conjunction with another formula, 'אין כתיב כאן...אלא' [Scripture does not write...but] which served to emphasize the literal reading of the verse to the exclusion of others. There are many כביכול passages in which this or another similar formula is used. We will study a few of them to see what we can learn from them regarding the function of כביכול.

Leviticus Rabbah 20, 2 comments on the death of the sons of Aaron. The passage suggests that the pain and sadness Aaron felt for their death is an unavoidable reality characteristic of this world. The death and pain of others are mentioned in order to illustrate and support the idea. So the pain of Sarah after the binding of Isaac and her subsequent death are mentioned, and the passage concludes with the pain and losses of Elisheva bat Aminadav, mother of Aaron's sons. But before the conclusion, two strong and fundamental statements, supported by prooftexts, are made: sadness is such an unavoidable reality, that neither Israel nor even God experience happiness in this world.

We read:

“Israel has not rejoiced over My world: it does not say (Ps. 149:2) ‘*Israel has rejoiced* [שמח] *over his maker*’ but rather ‘*will rejoice*’ [ישמח], at a future time they will rejoice over the deeds of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the Messianic days [lit. *future to come*]. Kivvakhol the Holy One, blessed be He, has not rejoiced over His world: it does not say ‘*God has rejoiced over His creatures*’ [שמח במעשיו] but rather ‘*He will rejoice*’ [ישמח], at a future time God will rejoice over the deeds of the righteous in the Messianic days [lit. *future to come*].”

That the verses are read literally by the author of the passage is evidenced primarily by two elements. First, by the formula emphasizing that the verb must only be read as indicating a future tense (as is typical for the imperfect in Rabbinic Hebrew) and rejecting a more “general” reading that would leave the tense indefinite. Second, and most important, the structure of the passage requires a literal reading. It successively mentions characters who did not rejoice, each case with its scriptural support. The passage functions by making all these equivalent and parallel examples of the same experience. And since regarding Sarah and Elisheva, the first and last link in the chain of cases, their sadness is an actual fact, it follows that the sadness of the characters between them in the chain are also factually true. That is, Israel and God, join the list of all other characters who, literally, have not rejoiced over this world.

4.2 The Combination Of Three Formulae: כביכול , And אלא... , אין כתיב כאן ,

אלולא שהדבר כתוב אי אפשר לאמרו

Sometimes, to the previous two formulae (כביכול and 'אלא... אין כתיב כאן) a third one is added, which further adds to the emphasis on the literalism of the reading.

"Another matter: *'For My salvation is close to come'* (Isa. 56:1), it does not say *'for your salvation'* but *'My salvation'* may His name be blessed, were this not written it would be impossible to say it [אלולא שהדבר כתוב אי אפשר], God said to Israel 'if you do not have enough merits, I am doing it for myself, *kivyakhol* whenever you are there in trouble I am with you', as it is written *'I am with him in trouble'* (Ps. 91:15) and I am redeeming for myself, as it is written *'So He saw that there was no man and was astonished that there was no intercessor: then His arm brought salvation to Him'* (Isa. 59:16), and so it says *'Rejoice greatly daughter of Zion, shout daughter of Jerusalem, your king comes to you, he is righteous and saved'* (Zech. 9:9), it is not written here *'and saviour'* but *'saved'*, meaning, even if you do not have deeds in your merit God does for himself, as it is said: *'for My salvation is close to come'.*" (Ex. R. 30, 24).

This passage conveys one simple message: God will bring salvation because He needs it, regardless of what Israel does. Since the prooftexts are many and work very well in support of that idea, and since the formula אין כתיב כאן is used twice, we must ask what does the longer formula 'were this not written it would be impossible to say it' contribute to the passage? It seems that the formula explicitly makes two points: the idea being presented is a forbidden idea which cannot be espoused; but since it is written in Scripture it must be allowed. In this passage we can be absolutely certain the verses are read literally, for they are paraphrased in unambiguous terms: God will redeem himself.

That this formula emphasizes the literal meaning of Scripture was already noted by scholars, who also noted how it is at times used in conjunction with כביכול.¹⁸⁸ It seems clear that in this passage, in which the idea that God will be redeemed is repeated five times, כביכול is emphasizing and affirming the idea. Needless to say, it is impossible to maintain that כביכול is here used to qualify a statement, for that same statement is made in the passage four more times, and is emphasized by other formulae. We must conclude that כביכול functions confirming and supporting the literal reading, and the 'problematic' idea.

We find another passage combining the three formulae in *Song of Songs Rabbah* 2, 3 ד"ה ר' יודן. There we read:

"Said R. Eleazar Hamoda'i : the rulers of the nations will come in the future to denounce Israel before God, saying: 'Master of the world, these ones worshipped idols and these ones worshipped idols, these ones engaged in forbidden sexual relationships and these ones engaged in forbidden sexual relationships, these ones shed blood and these ones shed blood; why do these go down to hell but these do not?' And the Holy One blessed be He will answer them saying 'then let all the peoples with their gods go down to hell', as it is written '*for all the nations shall go each by the name of its god [while we shall go by the name of Adonai our God for ever and ever]*' (Micah 4:5). R. Reuven said: were this not written it would be impossible to say so, *kivyachol* 'For God is judged by fire' (Isa. 66:16),

188. Marmorstein 1937, 109; Stern 1992, 170. The formula appears in slightly variant ways, such as אלמלא מקרא שכתוב אי אפשר לאומר

'God judges' is not written here, but rather 'is judged', as David said by the Spirit of Holiness 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me' (Ps. 23:4)."

There can be no question that the idea that God goes to hell to be judged as everyone else is quite bold, and uncommon in Rabbinic literature. But this should not direct the way we read the passage, that is, we should not have decided *a priori* nor based on our readings in *other* Rabbinic passages what the Rabbis may or may not be saying in *this* passage. Rather, we must understand the passage as it is, and if we find that the idea presented in it differs from our *a priori* views of Rabbinic thought or the views we formed on Rabbinic theology from our reading of the general Rabbinic literature, we should then question not our understanding of the passage but the accuracy and completeness of our account of Rabbinic ideology. In other words, if this passage does not fit within what we consider are the limits of Rabbinic ideology, then it is our definition of those limits that needs adjustment on the basis of the passage, rather than the text needing to be adjusted to our notion of the boundaries of Rabbinic notions of God.

The formulae in this instance function just as in the previous example. The passage involves not just a literal reading of 'is judged' [נשפט], but also of the verse in Psalms, in which God is said to be *there* with the poet in גיא צלמות (understood to be the same as גיהנום). The special introduction of the proof-text as 'inspired by רוח הקודש' is meant to further reinforce the validity of this literal reading of Isaiah and legitimize it, recognizing that the audience may not easily accept it.¹⁸⁹

189. We will discuss later in our study the suggestion that these formulaic expressions, and particularly כביכול, are used following the author's assumption that the idea introduced will be somewhat resisted.

4.3 An Explicitly Literal Reading Introduced Just By כביכול

Often a clearly literal reading is introduced solely by כביכול. We will again quote from *Exodus Rabbah* (42, 5 ד"ה לך רד), to illustrate this point:

"R. Abin said: God said to Moses, do not feel bad because I said to you 'go, descend from here', for in three occasions *kivyakhol* I descended from heaven to the earth to see the corruption of humans, for it is written (Gen. 11) 'Then God descended to see the city and the tower', 'let us descend', 'I will descend and see', so you too go and descend, it is enough for a servant to be equal to his master."¹⁹⁰

It is evident here, that only with a literal understanding of God's descent does this passage make sense. Since Moses descent is a fact which literally happened for the Rabbis, and it is presented as exactly equal to God's descent, then God's descent is a fact too, which emerges from a literal reading of Scripture. To claim otherwise, would be to say that the author of the passage did not believe Moses actually descended from the mountain!

4.4 The כביכול Reading Contrasted With A Non-Literal Reading

We learn that כביכול introduces a literal reading from an exchange between R. Akiva and Pappus:

"Pappus expounded 'I compare you to My mare among the chariots of Pharaoh' (Song. 1:9), as Pharaoh rode on a male horse כביכול the Blessed One revealed himself before him on a male horse, for it is written 'You

190. We dealt with this passage in section 2.1.

have trodden through the sea with your horses' (Hab. 3:15), as Pharaoh rode on a female horse כביכול the Holy One blessed be He revealed himself before him on a female horse, for it is written '*I compare you to My mare among the chariots of Pharaoh*'. R. Akiva said to him 'Enough Pappus!', so he responded 'so what then do you make of '*My mare* [לסוסתי] *among the chariots of Pharaoh*'?' He said to him 'to My mare' [לססתי] it is written, the Holy One blessed be He said 'as I was quick [ששתי] to destroy the Egyptians so I was almost ready to destroy Israel.'¹⁹¹

Pappus' very literal reading suggesting God rode on a female horse is strongly rejected by R. Akiva whom, when asked to give his understanding of the verse, presents an interpretation based on a wordplay (between the words ססתי and ששתי) which yields an interpretation having nothing to do with the literal sense of the verse, the rest of its words, nor its context. That Pappus' reading is extremely literal is made clear by his detailed observation that God at times rides on male horses, and at times on female horses, and by the fact that all he is trying to do with his comment is to establish this factual distinction rather than to ascribe an allegorical meaning to the gender of God's horses. We further confirm the literalism of Pappus' words, by Akiva's response: he rebukes Pappus, and then offers a completely non-literal interpretation as a preferred alternative. The contrast between the two interpretations is sharply marked in this passage, and is highlighted by Akiva's rebuke. From Akiva's avoidance of literalism in his alternative reading, we confirm the literalism of Pappus' previous reading. Finally, there is evidence from other Rabbinic passages to confirm that the idea that God rode a

¹⁹¹. Mekhilta Beshalah, 6, ד"ה ובני ישראל

mare at the Sea of Reeds was meant to be taken literally. In one such passage R. Joshua ben Korhah said: "God rode on a mare. Yet, how can one say such a thing, was He not riding a Cherub? This is true, but the Cherub had the likeness of one of Pharaoh's mares, so that all the horses of Pharaoh were swiftly running after it into the sea."¹⁹² Though Rabbi Joshua concludes that God did not ride on a mare, but on a Cherub that looked just like one, this fine distinction underscores the notion that God actually rode on some creature, and one that looked so much like a mare it attracted Pharaoh's horses! (which are only attracted to visible literal mares).

We must be aware that, as Marmorstein has noted, the attributions here are problematic, and appear to be reversed, since Akiva is often reading Scripture literally, and thus is not likely to be rejecting so vehemently Pappus' reading.¹⁹³ In *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1, 4, this discussion is in fact presented with the attributions reversed, with Akiva rebuking Pappus for having suggested a wordplay that ignores the differences in the spelling of the words used to derive the non-literal interpretation. Akiva then goes on and specifies that God rode both on a horse and a mare, he details the colors of the horses God rode on, and then provides a long list of war implements used by God (such as a helmet and an armor). No matter how the attribution problem should be resolved, it does not affect the validity of the point made here. On the contrary, the passage in *Song of Songs Rabbah* provides an even stronger evidence supporting the claim that some Rabbis understood God's riding on a mare and other creatures in a literal way. Akiva quotes three verses – two of them introduced by כביכול – that are read literally to prove that God

192. Avot DeRabbi Natan, ed. Schechter 83a, [Marmorstein's translation (1937, 45)].

193. Marmorstein (1937, 44-45)

rode male, female and colored horses. And then Akiva uses כביכול twelve times, each introducing a literal reading of a verse, to prove what God wore and what He did in His battle against Pharaoh. We could not conceive of a stronger nor clearer example of the connection between כביכול and literal readings of Scripture.

4.5 Are Non-Literal Readings Ever Introduced By כביכול ?

We have seen several examples of passages in which כביכול can only be understood as introducing a literal reading of a verse. These are just a few exemplary passages among many in which such usage is clear. However, we might find passages in which a non-literal allegorical understanding of the verse introduced by כביכול could still be presented as a plausible option as well. It is necessary then to establish a clear distinction between a function which the expression has already been shown to serve, and one which has not. I established in four different types of passages and previously in the lists of scribal corrections that כביכול is used for introducing literal readings of the text. I did this by showing both that the literal reading is required and fundamental for the sense, structure, and meaning of the passages reviewed. I also showed that a non-literal reading is contradictory or inconsistent with the inner logic and meaning of the passages. Thus, I have demonstrated that כביכול introduces literal reading of verses, and that allegorical renderings are not plausible when this rhetorical device is employed. Now, these conclusions are not refuted by the existence of passages that seem to allow both the literal and the allegoric readings of verses. A refutation would only be valid if the claim that כביכול serves to introduce non-literal readings is argued for in a manner

equivalent to our demonstration of its relation to literal readings. That is, it is not enough to suggest that some figurative meaning can be derived from a verse to prove that it is quoted and meant to be read non-literally. What must be shown is that the non-literal reading of the verse quoted by the Rabbis is *the only* possible understanding of it in terms of the passage's logic, structure, and meaning. Yet, in this study, I have not found any passages that may demonstrate in this way such usage of כביכול, nor any that would exclude the possibility of a literal reading of the verses.

We must be reminded again the fact that in later usage the word was indeed used to exclude the literal reading of the verses, and became eventually a way of indicating that what it is said it is not really meant, as the expression is currently used in Hebrew language.¹⁹⁴ This would account for a few exceptional instances in which כביכול is used in this sense—perhaps due to later editing or copying of manuscripts by scribes or copyists who modified (knowingly or not) earlier texts, introducing the word in *their*—later—understanding of it. We will note that a main feature, and perhaps also cause, of such ‘transformed’ texts is the confusion and equation of the essentially different expressions כביכול and כאילו, which apparently led on occasions to the replacement of one for the other, or to their juxtaposition. It is to the examination of the different usages and functions of these two formulae that we now turn.

194. As Marmorstein explains (1937, 131-32). We commented on the genealogy of the expression in section 2.4.

5 A Comparison Between The Formulae כאילו And כביכול

The expression כאילו is widely used in Rabbinic literature. Just within the limited corpus we reviewed in this study we found more than 120 passages containing it. The expression literally means “as if”, and it is generally used to introduce a simile, to equate and compare one thing or situation with another. Thus we read: “he who feeds a righteous man with a piece of bread is as if [כאילו] he fulfilled all the Torah” (Gen.R. Noah, 18); “Pharaoh’s daughter kissed and embraced him [Moses] as if [כאילו] he were her son” (Ex. R. on Ex. 1:26).

By noting in detail the differences between these two rhetorical devices, we will be able to arrive at a more precise understanding of כביכול. But before we point out what distinguishes one expression from the other, we must note and comment on three problems that arise when attempting to draw such a clear distinction. First, these expressions are often regarded by scholars and students of Rabbinic literature as equivalent, as having both the meaning we indicated for כאילו. Second, we find occasionally that when one of the expressions appears in a given text, the other appears replacing it in variant manuscript readings. And third, we find an instance in which both expressions are combined and used together in a single pericope.

We will examine in detail in this section how each expression functions, and we will point out the many ways in which they differ.

5.1 Problematic Usages Of כאילו And כביכול

1) At times these two expressions are read as having exactly the same literal meaning. Neusner’s treatment of the passage in *Sifre* Numbers 84 best exemplifies this.

There we find both expressions used, and in his translation he rendered both "as if", with no distinction whatsoever made between the two.¹⁹⁵

2) Reading the various manuscripts of Rabbinic texts, we find a few occasions of differences relating to כביכול. Some of these constituted of the word being altogether absent from a manuscript, while appearing in a parallel text. These instances do not appear to be very significant, as they are not more than a few, and this type of variance is quite common among manuscripts. However, there are a couple instances in which a variant for כביכול is כאילו, as in *Sifre* Deuteronomy 326. Since this happens only in a couple of places among the scores of uses of both expressions, not much can be learned from it. But it might be taken as an illustration of an early confusion between these two.

3) There are three instances of combinations of these expressions. In *Pesikta DeRav Kahana* (3, ד"ה מדור דור, 3), one is immediately following the other. This might suggest that the expressions are compatible, and can be used together. Yet, noting that there are variant readings that do not have this combination, that it does not yield any clear meaning, that close to parallel passages have just כביכול,¹⁹⁶ and that this only occurs three times in the almost two hundred uses of both expressions in the corpus reviewed, we will consider this to be an instance of a corrupted text. The second instance of combined expressions is *Mekhilta*, Amalek, Beshalah 2, ד"ה ויבן משה. Noting differences between this passage and several other parallel texts, the מאיר עין commentary suggests this passage presents several textual corruptions, and perhaps even changes introduced intentionally to alter its general meaning.¹⁹⁷ We will consequently consider this also a

195. 1988, 78-79.

196. Lev. R. 23, 6; Cant. R. 2, 6.

197. Meir Ish Shalom 1948, 56.

corrupted text, which is probably amended as well. The last instance of this combined usage of the formulae is *Mekhilta*, *Nezikin*, 15, ד"ה אם ימצא הגנב. We find here a passage stating that a thief who fears more being seen stealing by other people than being seen by God "כביכול" made the eye of Above [God] כאילו it does not see." This passage was subject to much tampering, as emerges from a look at some manuscripts and at its parallel in TB Bava Kama 79b, which have "the eye of Above" changed to (the euphemistic) "eye of below".¹⁹⁸ Since this alteration was intended to soften the expression referring to God, we might suppose that the text was further softened by inserting in it כאילו. This of course cannot be proven, but since it is clear from the evidence that this passage was modified at least once in this manner, I will consider the presence of a textual emendation here highly probable.

5.2 The Different Functions Of כאילו And כביכול

5.2.1 Simile Vs. Factual Statement

1) The expression כאילו is mostly used to introduce a simile, in which a person, an action, or an attitude in a first proposition (we will call it A) is likened to a person, an action, or an attitude in a second proposition (B). Thus we read: "Pharaoh's daughter kissed and embraced him [Moses] - כאילו - as if he were her son" (Ex. R. on Ex. 1:26). The embrace and kiss Pharaoh's daughter gave Moses (proposition A) are likened (כאילו) to the embrace and kiss she would give him were he her son (proposition B). We must note that though proposition A contains a factual statement, proposition B does not. That is, the *real event* in the first proposition is compared to a fictitious or hypothetical

198. See the מאיר עין commentary, in Meir Ish Shalom 1948, 91b.

situation on the second. So the Rabbis affirm that the princess actually embraced Moses, but they do not affirm that he was actually her son, which is obviously not the case. Yet, the fictitious image introduced by כאילו clearly characterizes the action and attitude of Pharaoh's daughter. So a comparison is being made in which, through reference to a hypothetical image, a characterization of an actual event is made. Similarly we read: "when Moses saw the anointing oil coming down on Aaron's beard he was as happy as if it was coming down on his own beard" (Lev.R. 3, 6). The fact that Moses was happy when the oil came down on Aaron's beard (proposition A) is likened to the hypothetical situation of Moses taking joy in the oil coming down his own beard. In both of these passages—which are typical of כאילו usage—there is a clear distinction between the actual event and the non-actual image to which it is compared. And the term כאילו is consistently used to introduce the non-factual situation.¹⁹⁹

On the other hand, the expression כביכול is typically used to introduce a statement about some actual thing in the real world. Let us demonstrate this usage of כביכול by referring to several passages.

In the passage containing the list of scribal corrections which I have analyzed above, we read:

"And so also here you say 'He who touches you touches the apple of his eye' (Zech. 2:12); Rabbi Judah says: it is not said here 'the apple of the eye' but rather 'the apple of His eye', כביכול referring to [God] above, but

199. Rosenthal (1986) emphasizes that the ideas expressed in כאילו passages are important statements of Rabbinic values, even though they are presented by means of "fictive inventions" of Rabbinic "Hyperbolic technique" (see particularly pp. 35, 43).

Scripture modified the expression.²⁰⁰

We have seen that the proposition introduced by כביכול was meant by its author as a fact. It is only because the verse *actually* referred to God's eye that it had to be modified. The whole claim of an early emendation of this verse rests on the truth that the verse refers "to the One above". And as we noted before, we have evidence to confirm that this claim is actually true. Thus, both the inner logic of the passage and the external evidence prove that כביכול is here affirming something about reality.

2) Even without corroborative evidence to prove what the expression does—as we had in our previous case—an analysis of the text can be enough to see how כביכול functions.

We read in Mekhilta Beshalah 10, ד"ה תביאמו :

"The Temple is precious to Him who spoke and the world came to being, for when the Holy One blessed be He created the world He did so just by word of mouth, as it is written '*by God's word the heavens were made*' (Ps. 33:6); when He came to the Temple כביכול it was work for Him, as it is written '*you have worked, oh God*' (Ex. 15:17). Woe unto them, the nations of the world, for they hear with their own ears that the Temple is called work for Him, [yet] they stood up and destroyed it."

This passage particularly shows כביכול as introducing a statement of fact, since the same statement it introduces here is expressed later quite simply, without using כביכול nor any special idiom to introduce it. That the Temple involved work for God is stated without any special qualifying formula, and thus not quoted as part of a simile, but rather as an established fact. By contrast, among the uses of כאילו I have found no instance in

200. Mekhilta to Ex. 15:7, Shirt 6, ד"ה וברוב גאוןך

which the non-factual statement is made on its own, without it being preceded by the qualifying כאלו .

3) That כביכול presents a statement that is meant to be understood as factually true emerges clearly from another Mekhilta passage:

“R. Simeon ben El’azar says: when Israel do according to the will of God then His name is exalted in the world, as it is written ‘*Then it came to pass when all the Emorite kings heard*’ etc. (Josh. 5:1), and so said Rahab to Joshua’s envoys ‘*we have heard that God dried up*’ and it says ‘*then we heard and our heart melted and no courage arose in any man anymore, for Adonai is God on the heavens above*’ (Josh. 2:10-11), and when they do not do according to His will כביכול His name is profaned in the world, as it is written ‘*then he came to the nations where they went and they profaned My holy name*’ and it says ‘*then I will consecrate my great name which is profaned among the nations*’ (Ezek. 37:20-23).”²⁰¹

Here כביכול introduces a phrase that restates an idea found repeatedly in the plain sense of several Biblical verses. That is, that as a consequence of Israel’s disobedience of divine will, God’s name is profaned among the nations of the world. We must note that in this passage there is no simile, no likening of two ideas. Rather, the propositions connected through כביכול are consequential. Proposition A, Israel’s disobedience, כביכול , leads to/causes proposition B, the profanation of God’s name. The prooftexts given are examples of such sequence of events having taken place in the past, as recorded in

201. Mekhilta Beshalah 3, ד”ה זה אלי

Scripture.²⁰² Many כביכול passages function in this sequential way, but no כאילו passage does.

4) There is also in this passage a typical use of כביכול which we should note.

Though in this passage two situations are presented, both illustrate the same idea. The situations are: Israel does God's will leading to His exaltation; and Israel does not do God's will, leading to the profanation of His name. These are two illustrations of the same idea, namely, that the attitudes of the nations towards God depend on the actions of Israel (or, the status of God in the world depends on human actions, specifically Israel's). But only one of the illustrations, the second one, is introduced by כביכול. Thus, the idea presented by כביכול was already presented before, in the previous illustration, without the expression. Since there, it was presented simply as a fact, we cannot claim now that when the same idea is preceded by כביכול it is meant as non-factual, in opposition to the previous statement. The passage is presenting two sides of the coin, so to speak, and just for one side it used כביכול. I will suggest that this is so because this second illustration refers to the negative implications for God of the idea presented. But the question why כביכול is only used in one of two statements conveying the same idea will be answered later. Now we must conclude our analysis of this passage just noting that כביכול is at times introducing a literal reading of a verse which constitutes just one illustration among others of a general idea presented in a passage. As an illustration of an idea previously introduced, כביכול is meant to support and affirm the validity of that idea, and not to counter it.

202. We have here no reason why to believe that the Rabbis read these Ezekiel verses metaphorically rather than as historically true.

5.2.2 Value Judgement Vs. Factual Statement

1) Another distinction can be made between the functions of כביכול and כאילו .

While כביכול typically introduces statements of factual truth, כאילו typically introduces value judgements, subjective appreciations of events and attitudes. Thus says *Genesis Rabbah*: "he who brings near a proselyte is as if [כאילו] he created him." (ד"ה וישב, 84) (עקב) The second proposition is obviously not meant as a fact, but rather as an image given to emphasize the importance of the (factual) action of him who reaches out to proselytes. Often we find that to condemn an action or an attitude, the Rabbis compare it to the worse kind of deeds, such as apostasy and worship of idols: "He who neglects the commandment concerning the priest's share of the dough, is as if [כאילו] he worshipped idols"; "he who rejects acts of kindness is as if [כאילו] he denies the Root [denies the fundamental principle of belief in God]."²⁰³

2) This function of כאילו is sometimes made explicit in the text by using it in conjunction with another formula: מעלה עליו הכתוב – 'Scripture considers it/him', or 'Scripture attributes to it/him' – and its variants: מעלין אותו, רואים אותו, and similar expressions. This is a typical example of such passages: "he who delays the payment of the hired man's wages is considered by Scripture as if he takes his life." (Sifre Num. 279, 15) By this use of the formulae and כאילו, the Rabbis are saying that withholding payment is very bad, but are obviously not saying that he who delayed payment has in fact committed a murder. Within the textual corpus reviewed in this study, we find 30 passages in which some of the formulae just quoted are used in combination with כאילו .

203. Lev. R. 15, 6; Eccles. Rabbah 7, 4.

Since these formulae introduce value judgements and refer to hypothetical situations, but never precede statements of factual truth, we are not surprised to find that there is not one single instance of a combination of them with כביכול, the marker of factual statements.

3) As we have seen, כאילו is always used to compare two different propositions. But כביכול can be used to introduce just one proposition, with no simile nor comparison made at all: *"then God will pass over the entrance, and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you"* (Ex. 12:23), at that time כביכול He stood up at the entrance." The formula is used here just to emphasize a factual statement.

4) Finally, the sharp distinction between כביכול and כאילו is evidenced by the fact that the formulae associated with literal readings – 'אין כתיב כאן...אלא', and אלולא שחזר – are used only combined with כביכול, while the formulae associated with value judgements – מעלה עליו הכתוב, מעלין עליו, רואים אותו – are used only with כאילו without exception.

Having noted the functions and uses of כביכול, how it functions in combination with other formulae, and how it differs from other expressions, we are now ready to consider the purpose and function of כביכול.

6 The Problematic Character Of כביכול Passages

So far in our study, we have shown that כביכול introduces –and emphasizes– a literal understanding of a Scriptural verse, and precedes statements meant to convey factual truth. But we still do not know what motivates the use of the expression, since literal readings and factual statements can be and are made without including כביכול. In other words, why are only a small number of Rabbinic factual statements and literal readings introduced by כביכול? In this section we will answer this question, by reviewing in detail the ideas that are presented in the כביכול passages.

6.1 Criteria For Defining Passages As ‘Problematic’

We have already noted that כביכול appears in passages involving ideas that are explicitly said to be problematic for the Rabbis: it is used to introduce the improper references to God made in Scripture that were amended by the Scribes, and it is used to introduce those ideas that ‘would not be allowed to be expressed were it not for the fact that they were written in Scripture’. We have also noted that the כביכול passages include many ideas that are considered by modern scholars to be problematic, uncommon, and too daring when compared to the vast majority of Rabbinic ideas. In section 1.3 we noted how Marmorstein identified passages and particular Rabbis echoing notions of a finite God, specifically quoting כביכול passages. We also noted that Rosenthal likewise found the “seeds” of the notion of a finite God in passages depicting how some humans (Moses, Daniel) occasionally “won” over God, and that these depictions involved כביכול. And we

saw how Montefiore and Loewe identified several hard and uncommon Rabbinic passages that challenge the widely held notions of an all-powerful God and claim that God is affected by human actions; these too are כביכול passages.

Before I continue to list more problematic כביכול passages, I must establish more clearly what is the basis for defining them as “problematic”. I followed three criteria for defining passages in such way.

- a. The first criterion by which a passage may be considered problematic is the Rabbis’ own explicit characterization of ideas or expressions as problematic. Clear instances of Rabbinic acknowledgments of problematic character of ideas are found in Rabbinic passages stating that an expression needed to be emended in Scripture, in passages saying that an idea would not be possible to be expressed without direct Scriptural support, and in passages saying that an expression causes its listeners/readers to be puzzled.
- b. A second criterion, emerges from the relation between a given idea to the views and ideas that are at the core of Rabbinic theology—as found in Rabbinic literature, and as understood by current scholarship. We have presented the fundamental Rabbinic beliefs and ideas about God as modern scholars systematically present it. Thus, we may now call ‘problematic’ any Rabbinic passage which contains ideas or notions relating to God that oppose, deny, or challenge any of those ideas considered to be at the basis of Rabbinic theology.
- c. The third criterion is derived from the relation between an idea expressed by the Rabbis to the views and ideas that are explicitly rejected throughout Rabbinic literature, or that are characterized in it as heretical, or typical of non-Jews and heathen

—and thus inappropriate for Jews. Should a specific idea or expression rejected or condemned by the Rabbis in the literature —labeled as heresy, as typically heathen, Pagan, or sectarian—be reflected, echoed or supported in a given Rabbinic passage, we may call it a problematic one.

6.2 Textual Evidence Of Problematic כביכול Passages

We will now provide some textual evidence illustrating how כביכול passages fit within each of these criteria.

1) Regarding the first criterion, we have already dealt extensively with passages in which the Rabbis recognize the problematic nature of the ideas and expressions they contain, when we discussed the scribal corrections, and when we analyzed the use of the formula *אלולא שהדבר כותב אי אפשר לאמרו*. We will add to these some כביכול passages in which the Rabbis acknowledge their problematic character through the use of other formulae and idioms.

We read in *Exodus Rabbah* 43, 1:

“Moses is one of two advocates which stood up to advocate on behalf of Israel, and stood up כביכול confronting the Holy One blessed be He: [they are] Moses and Daniel. From where in Scripture do we learn about Moses? It is written ‘*had not Moses His chosen one stood up before Him in the breach*’ (Ps. 106:23)....

Re. Samuel ben Nahman says: ‘*stood up before Him in the breach*’ is a difficult matter [דבר קשה]. There is the parable of a King that got angry at his son and he sat at the court’s platform and condemned him. As he took

the writing pen to sign his verdict, what did his associate regent do? He snatched the pen from the king's hand in order to appease him. Similarly, when Israel did that thing [the Golden Calf] the Holy One blessed be He sat to judge them and to condemn them, as it is said '*let go of me, and I will destroy them*' (Deut. 9:14), yet he did not [destroyed them yet] but rather came to sign the verdict, as it is written '*he who sacrifices to the gods shall be utterly destroyed*' (Ex. 22:19). What did Moses do? He took the tablets from God's hand in order to appease Him."

This passage states that on different occasions, certain men have confronted God when He decided to act against Israel in punishment, and eventually succeeded in making God change His mind. The idea that a man can confront God, and prevent him from executing His verdict is a serious challenge to the idea of God's omnipotence. The general understanding of the Rabbis is that no one can prevent God from doing what He wants.²⁰⁴ But there were a few exceptional times in which humans did confront God and 'win' Him over. These must be accepted though they certainly constitute what the Rabbis called a "difficult matter" [דבר קשה]. Passages like this one similarly compromise God's omniscience, by presenting a human being as capable of making God take a better decision, after arguing for it and convincing Him to accept it.

Next we will see another example of a כביכול passage that is acknowledged as problematic through a known formula.

"Another matter: '*He dwells on high*' (Isa. 33:16), it is written '*For Adonai*

204. This is actually stated in the passage immediately preceding ours: "Was Moses restraining God, that He says 'Now let go of me'?" The answer is that God, who cannot be restrained, said that in order to invite Moses to plea for Israel. (Ex.R. 42, 9)

your God brings you into a good [and wide]²⁰⁵ land (Deut 8:7) to see a table that is set in Paradise, as it is written *'I will walk before Adonai in the land of the living'* (Ps. 116:9) כביכול He sits on a divan above the Patriarchs, and the Patriarchs and all the righteous are there, as it is written *'and they sit down at Your feet'* (Deut. 33:3), and He distributes to them portions; now if you are astonished by this [וְאִם תִּמְאָה אֶתְּךָ בְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה], did He not, in this world, recline for them over the two Cherubim, as it is written *'he lies between my breasts'* (Song 1:13) ? how much more so in Paradise." (Ex. R. 25, 8)

What is problematic or 'astonishing' in this passage is the extreme corporeality of the images of God used in this scene, which depicts God sitting and serving at a banquet with the righteous. For our purposes here—to exemplify the use of Rabbinic formulae to characterize problematic passages—we must note how the formulae are used: a reading of a verse introduced by כביכול leads to a caution not to be astonished by its implications. More specifically, an image of God is introduced by כביכול, and is followed by a call to accept it even though it is recognized that it sounds astonishing, for reasons not specified—but which we may infer.²⁰⁶

2) It is a main claim of this study that the most כביכול passages—if not all—convey ideas about God that diverge from those at the core of Rabbinic theology—as I presented it in

205. This is not in MSS, but it is 'quoted' in the Midrash.

206. What motivates the use of the formula might be that the passage involves an ideologically difficult idea—as I suggested here—or it may be that—as Marmorstein suggests is often the case—it contains an idea that the listeners simply found hard to believe. We will discuss later at greater length the second possibility, suggested by Marmorstein (see his comments on the formula אֵל תִּתְּמָה in Fischel 1977, 64). In any case, Marmorstein too considers the formula as indicative of a problematic passage, even though he considers the problem not to be ideological.

the first chapter. Thus, most of these passages would fit within the parameters of the second criterion—divergence from fundamental Rabbinic beliefs. Here we will just cite a few passages in order to illustrate their problematic nature, on the basis of the second of our criteria.

“Our ancestors, when they stood at Mount Sinai, they intended to deceive God, as it is written ‘*all that God has said we will do and obey*’ (Ex. 24:7), כביכול and they deceived the court, as it is said ‘*would that they always have such a heart*’; and if you say that all is not open and known before Him, Scripture says ‘*they deceived Him with their mouths [and they lied to him with their tongues] and their hearts were not steadfast with Him*’ and despite that ‘*but he is compassionate and forgives iniquity*’ (Ps. 78:36-38), and it says ‘*burning lips and a wicked heart are like an earthenware dish covered with silver dross*’ (Prov. 26:23).” (Mekhilta, Mishpatim, 13, ד”ה שנים, יושלם).

great knowledge, He would believe liars, and thus complete knowledge escapes Him. Finally, the deceiving power of wicked hearted people and their lies is emphasized through a prooftext (Prov. 26), as a way of underscoring that even God's knowledge can be affected by them. The image given in the prooftext illustrates the conclusion: as we cannot see the earthenware dish when it is covered with silver, neither could God see the true inner intentions of the deceitful Israelites. This denial of God's omniscience, which is one of the core Rabbinic beliefs, is what makes this כביכול passage problematic.

In the next passage we find a view directly opposed to the notion of an omnipresent God.

"Then he came to the nations into which they came and they profaned My holy name" (Ezek. 36:20), Scripture should have said *'then they came'*

[ויבוא] yet it says *'then he came'* [ויבוא], rather כביכול He Himself, as it is said *'Then He came to the nations'*." (Lam. R. Proems 15, ד"ה רבי חנינא)

The passage is quite clear: God was in Israel, and with the exile He went out to the nations himself. According to this, God was not in the nations before, and He is no longer in Israel after the exile. This is a problematic passage since it stands in opposition to the notion of an omnipresent God.

Similarly, God's omnipotence is challenged in the following כביכול passage:

"Another matter: 'your right hand, God, is glorious in power' (Ex. 15:6), when the Israelites do the will of God they make the left hand a right hand, as it is said *'your right hand' 'your right hand'*, twice. And when the Israelites do not do God's will כביכול they make the right hand a left one, as it is said *'He has drawn back His right hand [from before the enemy]'* (Lam. 2:3)." (Mekhilta, Beshalah, 5, ד"ה תרומות)

The passage is maintaining the Biblical use of 'right hand' to mean might or power, and reading the Exodus verse to mean that God had increased power—two right hands—when he fought against Egypt. This is explained by suggesting that the Israelites generated this increment in God's power, by doing His will. The passage then follows the idea in the opposite direction, saying that Israel can also detract from God's power—turn His strong right arm into a weak left one. Though the Lamentations verse suggests God did not have a right hand to fight the Babylonians because He held it back by His own will, the passage goes further and suggests that God's power is a direct function of Israel's actions. The deeds of the Israelites increase or decrease the power of God. Consequently, in this passage God is not conceived as being omnipotent. This leads us to consider this passage to be 'problematic'.

3) As for the third criterion—heretical (or quasi-heretical) statements—we will consider three passages as illustrative. The benevolence of God is a fundamental belief of the Rabbis. As we have noted, "the slightest doubt as to God's mercy and love was considered heretical."²⁰⁷ We know from passages in Rabbinic literature that refer to some of the ideas of the heretics, that they claimed that God deals with His creation cruelly.²⁰⁸ A particularly valuable source of information on ideas considered heretical and rejected by the Rabbis is the cluster of passages in which a Matrona (a Roman noble woman) debated with Rabbi Yosi ben Halaftah.²⁰⁹ Regardless of whether these debates ever took place or are just literary creations, the ideas expressed by the Matrona are presented in opposition to Rabbinic ideas, and are consequently refuted or rejected by R. Yosi.

207. Marmorstein, 1927, 205.

208. Marmorstein 1927, 206.

209. Gershenzon and Slomovic (1985) identify 18 passages, and review the main themes discussed in them.

Scholars have noted that the ideas of the Matrona challenge most of what we identified as fundamental Rabbinic beliefs about God, and reflect the basic notions of Gnostic theology.²¹⁰ It is particularly important for us to note that in these passages Gnostic theological ideas—such as the cruelty of the Demiurge, who is the Jewish God—are presented provided *with Scriptural support*. In their study of the Matrona passages, Gershenzon and Slomovic note the closeness of some Gnostic readings and analysis of Scriptural verses to certain Rabbinic readings found in midrashic passages. According to these authors, those Scriptural verses—with the aforementioned Gnostic/midrashic interpretations—used to support Gnostic ideas—as the Matrona does—“were invariably seen as *problematical* by Jewish exegetes.”²¹¹

Thus, we will quote again, at greater length, from the כביכול passage in *Mekhilta*, Beshalah, 5, ד"ה תרומות, to observe the presence of the Gnostic notion of a cruel God in a Rabbinic text.

“When the Israelites do the the will of God they make the left hand a right hand, as it is said ‘*your right hand*’ ‘*your right hand*’ twice. And when the Israelites do not do God’s will כביכול they make the right hand a left one, as it is said ‘*He has drawn back His right hand [from before the enemy]*’(Lam. 2:3)’...

When the Israelites do the will of God He fights for them, as it is written ‘*God will fight for you*’, but when they do not do God’s will He fights against them, as it is written ‘*then He turned into an enemy for them and He fought against them*’ (Isa.

210. See the conclusions on the Matrona passages, in Gershenzon and Slomovich 1985, 38-39.

211. Gershenzon and Slomovich 1985, 39 (my emphasis).

63:10); and not only that, but they make a merciful One cruel.”

This notion is also found in *Sifre* Deuteronomy:

“Before our Father Abraham came כביכול the Holy One blessed be He

judged the world by a measure of cruelty.” (*Sifre* Deut. 311, ד”ה בהחל

עלין)

Since these paragraphs echo and repeat ideas defined elsewhere by the Rabbis as heretical, we must consider them –following our third criterion– problematic.

In typical Pagan views God was seen after the exile as defeated and weak, the destruction of His house seen as a mark of his limited power.²¹² This is how God is depicted after the destruction of the Temple in *Lamentations Rabbah* (Proems, 2)

“R. Simeon ben Lakish said: is like a king who had two sons, he got angry at the first one and took a rod and hit him, so he moved convulsively and died. He started to wail for him; he got angry at the second son, and took a rod and hit him, so he moved convulsively and died. He said: from now, I do not have the strength to wail over them, so call the wailing women to wail over them. Similarly, when the ten tribes were exiled He started to wail over them ‘*Hear the word which I take up against you, a lamentation, House of Israel*’ (Amos 5:1), and when Judah and Benjamin were exiled כביכול said the Holy One blessed be He ‘from now I do not have the strength to wail over them, as it is written ‘*call the wailing women...and let them make haste and take up a wailing over us*’, it is not written here ‘*over them*’ but ‘*over us*’, mine and theirs; it is not written here ‘*that their*

212. See Marmorstein’s comments in Fischel 1977, 63.

eyes may run down with tears' but rather '*our eyes*', mine and theirs; it is not written here '*and their eyelids gush out with waters*' but rather '*our eyelids*', mine and theirs."

This passage has many implications for the understanding of the theological meaning of the destruction of the Temple and the exile, on which we will comment elsewhere. Here we will note this image of a powerless God after the exile, who is not just identifying with Israel's pain and defeat, but is feeling *his own* pain and defeat: the repetition of the phrase 'mine and theirs' is a way of emphasizing 'mine', God's own pain. So God does not merely join Israel in mourning and wailing over Israel's suffering, but rather He calls for wailing women so that they cry and lament for what happened to Israel and to Him.²¹³ The women are called to cry 'עלינו', which means 'about us'; that is, God is not calling the women to be His agents in crying for Israel, but rather He is calling them to cry having both Israel and Himself as the objects of the lamentations. This idea, that the destruction and exile represent a problem of God himself separate from Israel's problems, is explicitly stated in other כביכול passages—particularly in *Exodus Rabbah* 30, 24. There it is made clear that redemption will be brought about by God regardless of Israel's actions, since it is *His* problem and thus it is *His* salvation that He must bring about. This Rabbinic view of God after the destruction and exile, is quite close to the Pagan views of God we described.²¹⁴ This is then a reason to call this passage problematic.

213. This understanding of the text is particularly called for by the previous section of the passage, in which God himself admits *his* failure in teaching Israel to be righteous. Our discussion of the complete passage belongs in another context, later in this study.

214. In order to realize just how close these views are we could compare these Rabbinic images with those of the Bible, which depict God as controlling and responsible for the events of the destruction and the exile, never mentioning any mistake or fault on His part. The Rabbinic images in this passage are much closer to the Pagan views than to the Biblical views.

6.3 Varying Notions Of What Is Problematic

Though we have established criteria for defining passages as problematic, and we showed how they apply to כביכול passages, a few potential difficulties in our analysis of some of the passages must now be raised, and answered. First, there are passages which conflict with fundamental Rabbinic beliefs, and yet do not use כביכול. For instance, considering the extensive evidence of corporeal images of God in Rabbinic literature – presented by Neusner (1988) – what is particularly problematic about the corporeal images of God in the כביכול passages to have required the use of the expression? Second, in our review of the fundamental Rabbinic beliefs about God we saw that some of these are not consistently held throughout Rabbinic literature, and often two opposing views are maintained, as is the case regarding the incorporeality of God. This presents a difficulty for our use of the first criterion: if there is no consensus on Rabbinic texts regarding God's incorporeality, how then can we call a כביכול passage problematic for opposing one particular view, which is often opposed elsewhere in the literature? And third, not all of the כביכול passages can be considered problematic by our three criteria. We will address these problems now, by comparing and contrasting כביכול passages with others that seem to be equivalent, and by commenting further on the Rabbis' motives for using the formula when they did.

6.3.1 The Use Of כביכול As It Emerges From A Comparison With Parallel Texts Which Do Not Include The Formula

Some of the ideas introduced by כביכול in the passages we reviewed are also

expressed in other Rabbinic texts without using that formula. The existence of a parallel text without the idiom must be explained. Let us closely examine two passages, one without the formula and the other with it, from the same Midrashic work, and both saying that God went into exile with Israel.²¹⁵

a. Lam. R. 1, 33 ד"ה כי יחזה : “*God has affected her for the multitude of her transgressions*’ (Lam. 1:5), was this for no reason? Scripture says ‘*for the multitude of her transgressions.*’ ‘*Her infants are gone into captivity before the enemy*’, R. Isaac said: come and see how precious infants are for God, the Sanhedrin went into exile but the Shekhinah did not go with them; the divisions of priests went into exile but the Shekhinah did not go with them; but when the infants went into exile the Shekhinah went into exile with them, as it is written ‘*her infants are gone into captivity before the enemy*’ and immediately ‘*then departed from the daughter of Zion* [מבת ציון] *all her splendor*’ (Lam. 5:6). It is written ‘*from the daughter of Zion*’ — מן בת ציון —²¹⁶ thus said R. Aha: we have a fine portion [מנה] that is the Holy One blessed be He, of whom it is written ‘*God is the portion of my inheritance* [מנת חלקי] *and of my cup*’ (Ps. 16:5). ‘*All her splendor*’, this is the Holy One blessed be He, as it is written ‘*You are clothed with glory and splendor*’ (Ps. 104:1).”

215. We will discuss the passages containing notions of a corporeal God —such as those cited by Neusner— later in this chapter, since the issue of divine corporeality involves usages of כביכול I have not yet presented.

216. This interpretation is based on a consonantal text for Lam. 5:6 — מן בת ציון — which differs from MSS —מבת ציון—.

b. Lam. R. Proems 15, ד"ה רבי חנינא : "He who corrects a scorner brings shame on himself" (Prov. 9:7), R. Isaac said: all who raise up a wicked disciple will eventually be despised because of him, as it is written 'He who corrects a scorner brings shame on himself'. That is the opinion of R. Isaac, for he said that all who raise a wicked disciple in the land of Israel is as if he raises up thieves, and outside the land of Israel raises a slave. Simeon ben Lakish said: it is written 'it is an honor for a man to cease from strife' (Prov. 20:3), God said 'I would have honor have I not attached myself to this nation', you find that at the time when Israel were exiled into the idolatrous nations God went around the idolaters' gates to hear what they were saying. And what were they saying? 'This nation's God punished Pharaoh, and Sisera, and Senacherib, and so forth', and they go on to say 'but can He be forever young?' כביכול 'things' have grown old. As it is written 'Then he came to the nations into which they came and they profaned My holy name' (Ezek. 36:20), Scripture should have said 'then they came' [ויבאו] yet it says 'then he came' [ויבא], rather כביכול He Himself, as it is said 'Then He came to the nations'."

Both passages state that God went into exile. But even when they contain the same idea concerning God, these are different and even contrasting passages, conveying different messages. In the first passage the main idea put forward is God's great love of (Israelite) infants, which are said to be more precious in God's eyes than the Sanhedrin and the priests. God did indeed go into exile, but He did it *only* to accompany His beloved infants, and because of his attachment to them. This is an image of a loving, caring,

compassionate God; and the action depicted here underscores God's greatness and virtue. This very positive image of God leads us to conclude that God is 'the splendor' of Israel.

In the second passage, the situation is different, almost the opposite. God is complaining about the fact that He attached himself to Israel. In fact, it is stated that His closeness to Israel brought Him nothing but dishonor and shame. God goes into exile just to hear for himself how He is despised by the nations, who say He has now become too old and weak to fight for His people as He did in the past. This is such an offensive and negative image of God, that it had to be said euphemistically: 'things' have grown old, rather than 'God has grown old'.²¹⁷ The final proof-text here also refers to God, but—in sharp contrast with the positive image in the previous passage—it emphasizes that God went into the exile to see and hear His name being profaned among the nations.

After a closer reading of the passages, we see that they are not completely equivalent. Though both contain the same main idea—God goes into exile—they convey different and opposite messages, and in fact they portray God in different ways and in different tones. The second passage is clearly the one and the only one presenting an offensive, negative, and demeaning image of God. This is what makes it an especially problematic passage, and so it includes כביכול.

Throughout Rabbinic literature we find that an idea concerning God is preceded by כביכול when the context yields a 'problematic' notion of the deity, while the idiom is not used when a *similar* idea—presented in a different tone and context—is conveying a positive image of God. So we often find descriptions of the *shekhinah* in compromised

217. This euphemistic language is clear, and is noted by the מנחת כהונה commentary *ad locum*: "דרך כינוי היא".

and demeaning situations—displaced, exiled, defiled, made impure—mentioned as proofs of God's love for Israel, and thus without use of *כביכול*. A typical instance of this is found in *Sifre Num* (161 וְלֹא תִטְמָא) where we read “beloved are Israel, for even though they are impure the *shekhinah* is among them,” and also “beloved are Israel for wherever they went into exile the *shekhinah* is with them.” There seems to be no problem in associating the *shekhinah* with impurity, displacement nor exile, when these images serve to emphasize the intensity of God's love for Israel. However, in a passage in which the main theme is the vulnerability of God—how He can be negatively affected by humans—we find that the displacement and compromised situation of the *shekhinah* is indeed preceded by *כביכול*: “as long as Israel are subjugated *כביכול* the *shekhinah* is subjugated with them.”²¹⁸

Based on these examples and this analysis, I will argue that the first problem raised—the existence of parallels to the *כביכול* passages without the expression—is not a real problem. The seemingly parallel texts are not in fact parallel, and I have not found actual parallels to any *כביכול* passage—conveying the same message and with similar tone—that does not include the idiom.

Let us analyze more in detail the function of *כביכול* in the light of the differentiation we just made between parallel texts, and those containing a same idea, but conveying significantly different messages.

218. This is the well known passage containing the list of scribal emendations. Its negative tone—in the Rabbis own conception—is clearly marked by its reference to phrases concerning God that *had to be* amended, and by the use of the formula *אלמלא מקרא שכתוב אי אפשר לאומרו*.

6.3.2 כביכול Introducing The Specifically Problematic Aspects Of An Idea

We have just seen that a same idea might be presented as part of a problematic message, or can actually be presented as part of a very positive non-conflictive one. In a review of our corpus of sources for this study, I found close to forty passages containing the notion of God or God's-presence going into exile, without the expression כביכול. In all these cases except one, a positive message is conveyed (God loves Israel very much, God will come back with the exiles to Zion soon), or a positive image of God is presented (He marches majestically leading His people among the Nations).²¹⁹ This leads us to conclude that כביכול is often used to introduce not just a generally problematic idea, but specifically the most negative, offensive or problematic aspect of such an idea. Let us further illustrate this point by noting the following usage of כביכול

We read in Mekhilta Beshalah 3, ד"ה זה אלי :

"R. Simeon ben El'azar says: when Israel do according to the will of God then His name is exalted in the world, as it is written '*Then it came to pass when all the Amorite kings heard*' etc. (Josh. 5:1), and so said Rahab to Joshua's envoys '*we have heard that God dried up*' and it says '*then we heard and our heart melted and no courage arose in any man anymore, for Adonai is God on the heavens above*' (Josh. 2:10-11), and when they do not do according to His will כביכול His name is profaned in the world, as it is written '*then he came to the nations where they went and they profaned My holy name*' and it says '*then I will consecrate my great name which is profaned among the nations*' (Ezek. 37:20-23)."

219. See Ex. R. 23, 5; Lev. R. 32, 8; Lam. R. 1, 54; Sifre Num 161.

When we previously referred to this paragraph²²⁰ we pointed out that it does not contain two different ideas, but just one, of which two illustrations are given. The main idea presented in this passage is that God's name is affected by Israel's actions. The first illustration is of a positive character: Israel's obedient behavior leads to the exaltation of God's name in the world. But the second illustration refers to the negative consequences of the idea: Israel's disobedient behavior leads to the profanation of God's name among the nations. In accordance with our previous conclusions, כביכול is only used to introduce the second illustration, the one detailing the negative implications of the idea on God.

This structure is also used in other כביכול passages, in which the formula introduces a variety of problematic notions: God's power can be affected, eroded, and diminished by Israel. And it is in this type of passage that we find the Rabbis' most radical suggestions, that without Israel's support, belief, or testimony, God cannot stay in the heavens nor be God.²²¹

From the analysis of this usage of כביכול, and of the difference between the כביכול passages and its apparent parallels, we can derive the following conclusion on the problematic character of כביכול passages. We found that כביכול is used only to introduce the most offensive or shocking images resulting from certain ideas about God. But we found that these ideas about God, even when diverging from what seem to be fundamental Rabbinic beliefs, are themselves often presented without any special introduction, with no use of כביכול.²²² From passages with this structure, we see that

220. Section 5.2.1

221. PRK 25, 1 and Sifre Deut 346, 5 respectively. See next section for a quote of the full texts.

222. For instance, the idea of God's limited power is introduced without any special formula. When the Rabbis say - without כביכול - that Israel can add to God's power, they are saying that it has limits, which humans can extend. This opposes the notion of an omnipotent God.

כביכול is used to not just to introduce a 'problematic' idea, but more specifically to introduce the statements which present that idea's more limiting and demeaning implications on God.

We have now resolved one of the difficulties we raised at the beginning of this section. We explained how sometimes an image that seems to be parallel to another introduced by כביכול is not really its parallel when used in a positive context and conveying a different message, and thus does not require the use of כביכול. This may explain why many passages portraying God as corporeal—as those compiled by Neusner (1988)—do not contain כביכול: there, potentially problematic notions of God are presented as part of positive messages, without emphasizing any of their offensive or negative implications on God.

But the question of why notions of God's corporeality appear both in כביכול passages and in others, requires further comments. And we still have to explain why כביכול is used in passages that are non-problematic according to our criteria. Let us now address these issues.

6.3.3 The Non-Problematic Uses Of כביכול

We will refer first to the כביכול passages presenting images of God that oppose the Rabbinic belief in God's incorporeality. Our comments on this issue will lead us to the issue of the non-problematic כביכול passages.

6.3.3.1 כביכול And Notions Of A Corporeal God

In our presentation of Rabbinic beliefs, we noted that scholars approach the issue of God's incorporeality in Rabbinic literature in three different ways. Many scholars, as Cohen, claim the Rabbis absolutely rejected ideas of a corporeal God, and they cite Rabbinic passages that indeed show a rejection of such notions. Yet Neusner claims the Rabbis do present images of God in which He has corporeal traits, and he quotes numerous passages that support his position. A third approach is taken by Marmorstein, who accepts the validity of the evidence in support both of Rabbinic notions of a corporeal and of an incorporeal God. Marmorstein argues that there were two opposing views among the Rabbis, each one held by a specific 'school'. Marmorstein goes on to claim that each school produced the passages reflecting its own views, and that these were later put together in single compilations of Midrashim, despite their oppositional character. Commenting on these three approaches, we noted that Marmorstein correctly acknowledges the coexistence of two different views within the Rabbinic literature, even though his notion of distinct 'schools' –each the source of each type of passage– is now rejected by scholars. We also consider adequate –in the light of the evidence provided– Marmorstein's suggestion that those Rabbis presenting one type of view were aware of the other, and usually presented their view in a polemical way. We noted that Marmorstein identified several Rabbinic formulae serving rhetorical and polemical functions, associated with either allegorical or literal readings of verses portraying God in anthropomorphic and corporeal ways –כביכול being among the latter– and this was confirmed in our study.²²³

223. Marmorstein 1937. See section 4 in this study.

Marmorstein's observations are particularly important to understand why the author of a כביכול passage chose to use the idiom, because they highlight the role of the reader in the composition of the text. By this I mean to say –drawing from Umberto Eco's theoretical work– that when the author of a Rabbinic passage concerning divine corporeality composed it, he chose the words and rhetorical devices he thought were needed to best reach the reader he assumes will be reading his text.²²⁴ Thus, the composition –including the specific wording of the passage– is done by the author having in mind a specific reader – whom Eco calls 'model reader' – including this readers' assumed interpretive abilities and inclinations. In this way, the author develops a strategy of 'collaboration' with the reader, which allows him to communicate better with his audience, and transmit precisely to his reader the ideas he wants to convey by his expressions. This involves the author's 'coding' of the text, that is the use of a series of codes meant to lead the reader "to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them."²²⁵ Thus, when the author foresees –it doesn't matter here whether he is actually correct about this or not– that the idea he is about to introduce will probably surprise, confuse, or disorient his reader, he includes some rhetorical devices – 'codes' – designed to ensure that the reader interprets the text yielding the meaning he intended to convey, and avoiding 'aberrant' interpretations. I will argue that כביכול –and other Rabbinic idioms and rhetorical formulae– constitute 'codes' used by Rabbinic authors to communicate to the readers the particular character of the text, and to call them to apply a specific kind of interpretation to it.

224. Eco points out that in most texts –'open texts'– the reader influences the author and his composition.

In such a text, the reader's "foreseen interpretation is a part of its generative process." (Eco 1979, 3)

225. Eco 1979, 7.

Considering the Rabbinic passages relating to the corporeality of God, we have observed that—as Marmorstein already noted—each Rabbinic view concerning the subject was often presented in contradistinction from the opposing view, and in an attempt to prove it legitimate, correct, and convincing to the readers, who were assumed to be inclined to reject it.²²⁶ This rhetorical function of Rabbinic formulae is evidenced by the simple fact that many of them explicitly address a listener and his assumed views—the presupposed ‘model reader’—at times even instruct him not to read the passage as he usually does, but only as suggested by the new interpretation. A clear example of a formula used in this way is ‘אל תקרי...אלא’, which commands the reader to abandon the interpretation he is assumed to be ‘naturally’ inclined to adopt, and establishes a specific alternative interpretation as the one that should be entertained.²²⁷

We must recall now the passages we presented in section 6.2.1 which are examples of formulae addressing the listener, in passages involving corporeal images of God. Of particular importance is the use there of the idiom ואם תמה אתה, for it shows that the speaker is presupposing the listener’s negative/troubled reaction to the interpretation, and addresses it in his argumentation. In his study on the relationship between Aggadah and Diatribe, Marmorstein points out that a feature of the Diatribe preserved by the Aggadists is the inclusion in their discourse of “an alleged or a real objection to their theme or the Bible by some opponent.”²²⁸ A series of formulae were typically used in the passages in which the Rabbis ‘react’ to a real or construed opposition to the view they present.²²⁹

226. See Marmorstein 1937, ch. IV.

227. See Fishbane 1989, 82.

228. Fischel 1977, 56.

229. Fischel 1977, 57-69.

I here suggest a similar usage for כביכול. That is, I see כביכול as a formula used specifically when the speaker presuppose a negative reaction to the idea he is introducing. David Stern already noted that the particular formulae used to introduce the strongest anthropomorphic images of God on the basis of literal readings of verses—אלמלא מקרא כתוב and כביכול—are meant as “an appeal to authority in order to gain credibility”, and to emphasize the idea presented, even though it seems shocking.²³⁰ Such usages of the formulae show an awareness on part of the speaker of the opposition his idea might or will encounter, and his efforts to defend his idea through his Midrashic interpretation of Scripture. כביכול then serves two main functions: to acknowledge and address the listener’s objection to the idea it introduces, and to emphasize its validity and legitimacy.

The use of כביכול in passages presenting images clearly conveying a notion of a corporeal God is thus explained as reflecting the author’s awareness of – or presumption of – his readers’ negative reaction and objection to his view. This is supported by the evidence showing that there were Rabbis who held notions of a corporeal God and there were those who did not, and that they argued against each other’s position. In fact, we have already seen—in the exchanges between Akiva and Pappus—one explicit instance of such an argument, in which a notion of a corporeal God presented by a Rabbi following a literal reading of Scripture is rejected by another Rabbi, who presents an alternative allegorical interpretation of the same verse.²³¹ This does not mean, however,

230. Stern 1992, 170; see also Stern 1991, 165.

231. Mekhilta Beshalah, 6, ד"ה ובני ישראל, and Cant. R. 1, 4. See section 4.4. of this study. Though we saw that the same discussion is portrayed with different attributions and other variations in a parallel text, in both cases the literal interpretation is the one presenting the image of a corporeal God, and is introduced by כביכול.

that every depiction of God in corporeal terms was meant to be polemical, as is shown by the abundance of such images (cf. Neusner 1988).

From this analysis we conclude that even when containing ideas found elsewhere in Rabbinic literature, the כביכול passages are indeed problematic for they oppose fundamental beliefs of many of the Rabbis. And their problematic character is accentuated by the fact that they are specifically crafted to argue for the problematic ideas, and to polemicize against the Rabbinic objections to them.

Now that we identified this usage of כביכול, and saw how it was part of Rabbinic discussions on fundamental notions of God, we can solve the second difficulty posed in this section: we maintain our definition of כביכול passages as problematic because they oppose basic ideas of God held throughout Rabbinic literature, even though at times the ideas presented in כביכול passages are also expressed in many other Rabbinic texts.

Following the analysis in this section, we may refine or complement our definition of what constitutes a 'problematic' passage. The criteria we have established to judge the problematic character of a passage relate to the *content* of the passages, and how these relate to the dominant *ideology* pervading Rabbinic literature. Yet we have just seen that some passages can be identified as 'problematic' *in its author's consciousness* simply on the basis of the use of certain idioms in them, even before we examine their content. Thus, we have now two categories of problematic passages: the ones in which we encountered an ideological 'problem', and the ones in which we identified the author's own perception of it as problematic. Since כביכול is one of the idioms indicating that the author saw the passage as problematic, and most passages are ideologically problematic, we find that most of them fall within both categories. But we must study in

more detail the implications of this distinction between passages that are ideologically problematic and other which are problematic but do not conform with the ideological criteria we established.

Let us now address this problem, and answer the question why is כביכול used in the passages which are non-problematic according to our ideological criteria.

6.3.3.2 The Problems In The Non-Problematic Passages

Earlier in our study we characterized the כביכול passages as 'problematic'. Our determination of passages as 'problematic' was based on three criteria that enabled us to identify the *ideologically* problematic nature of the passages. Specifically, we considered them problematic since they are at odds with beliefs about God that are fundamental in Rabbinic literature and theology. However, reviewing all the כביכול passages, we found some that do not contain any such 'problematic' idea about God. Among the eighty כביכול passages we reviewed in this study (not counting parallels) we found that sixty-two (about three quarters) are 'problematic' according to our criteria, twelve are not (about one eighth), and six could be read both ways.

I wish to pose here two questions: why did the Rabbis use כביכול in passages that do not contain problematic ideas, and how does the existence of these passages affect the conclusions from this study regarding the function of the idiom?

To the first question, I will suggest a few possible solutions, though I cannot *prove* any of them to be correct. Let me first briefly summarize what we have learned thus far. The following uses and functions of כביכול are standard:

- a. it introduces a literal reading of Scripture;

- b. it introduces a statement meant as factual truth;
- c. it introduces a statement that is known to its author (or presumed by him) to be doubted or rejected by his audience;
- d. it is meant to emphasize the statement it introduces, in order to persuade the audience of its validity (in its truth and in its legitimacy).

Since these conclusions emerge from the vast majority of the evidence (the problematic passages), we will consider them generally valid for all uses of the formula, and thus we will try to see if it is possible and reasonable to hold that כביכול functions in the same way in the non-problematic passages. The key to our answer lies in distinguishing the functions of כביכול, which are the same and do not change from passage to passage, from the content of the passages, which does indeed change.

After reviewing the non-problematic passages we noted that though they are not problematic according to *our definition* of the term for this study, they mostly present ideas that were problematic to their listeners. By this we mean that in these passages we find ideas that, without having to do with fundamental Rabbinic notions of God, were very likely to have been received by the intended audiences with great reservations, if not simply rejected. If the ideas in these passages were indeed met with resistance—for whatever non-ideological reasons—then the use of כביכול to introduce them would be in accordance to the rhetorical uses of the expression as we identified them for the rest of the passages.

What kind of ideas then might have been likely to be rejected by the audiences that do not bear on fundamental Rabbinic beliefs about God? In some of these 'non-problematic' כביכול passages the ideas put forward seem to be quite contrary to the

historical experiences of the Jews at any time between the third and eighth century, when these Midrashim were composed. In *Mekhilta* (Bahodesh, Yitro, לי) it is stated that כביכול God does not establish anyone else to rule over Israel but Himself. To many of the Jews facing Roman persecution and tough rule, this idea surely appeared problematic. Similarly, the claim –in Lam.R. 3, 27– that God does not abandon the righteous, was very likely to be objected by many Jews who saw righteous comrades killed and suffering for being Jewish in their own lifetime and in the previous few centuries of the history of their people. We can infer that such was the case from that same passage, from R. Simeon ben Lakish's comment following the 'historically problematic' statement. The passage reads:

"For God will not cast off for ever" (Lam. 3:31) כביכול He did not and will not abandon. 'for though He causes grief, he will have compassion by the abundance of his steadfast love' (Lam. 3:32) R. Simeon ben Lakish said: when the Holy One blessed be He abandons the righteous in this world, He has compassion on them again, as it is written 'for though He causes grief, he will have compassion by the abundance of his steadfast love'."

The words of R. Simeon ben Lakish seem to be an acknowledgment that God does abandon the righteous at times, though he is confident God will not do that for ever. For those not sharing this Rabbi's optimism, the first statement must have appeared –at least– doubtful, and contradicted by contemporary and historical events.

Another reason why some of these passages might have been considered problematic by their intended audiences was perhaps that the images portrayed in them were simply too hard to believe. For example, the depiction of God, the Patriarchs and

the righteous all seating on divans having a banquet in Paradise, with God distributing the food (Ex. R. 25, 8), or of God seating in Paradise engaging in a study session with other people in the Rabbinic style (Ex. 21, 3) probably met some incredulity among the audience.²³²

The resistance these passages were likely to arise justifies and probably motivated the use of כביכול, to emphasize and support the idea, with a proof-text read literally. After reviewing these 'non-problematic' passages, the scenario I present seems plausible: more often than not, we find that there were other elements that made them 'problematic' to the listeners.²³³

Other passages seem to require more speculation on our part to identify why they might have been rejected or seen as problematic. In Lev. R. 23, 6 and its parallels, we read that as long as the shadow of Esau exists כביכול Israel are withered. This seems to suggest a total opposition and unavoidable conflict between Jews and Romans, with no hope for any accommodation for the Jews living under the strong and long established Roman domination. It seems plausible to imagine that many Jews, particularly those who sought or found ways of accommodating to Roman society, rejected or questioned the validity of such sharp dichotomy.

Finally, some of these passages might have been problematic for their audiences for reasons we now do not understand. Since there is only a handful of passages for which we do not find their 'problematic nature'—the reason why they contain כביכול—

232. Fischel 1977, 69.

233. On the last two passages we mentioned, one wonders if it was the difficulty in believing such Paradise scenes what called for כביכול, or if it was the corporeal depiction of God that made this passage 'problematic' (in this latter case, problematic also by our criteria).

and more than seventy for which we do—combining those containing an ideologically or otherwise difficult notion for the reader—it seems reasonable to assume that all function in the same way.

But however we may understand (or fail to understand) these few non-problematic passages, in light of all the observations in this section, the following might be concluded: the use of כביכול in the 'non-problematic' passages is consistent—regarding the four functions of the term we identified—with its usage in all other passages; the rhetoric function of the formula—to emphasize an idea in light of a presumed objection to it—seems also to be maintained in most of the non-problematic passages; concerning the content of the passages, though these passages do not present ideas at odds with the fundamental Rabbinic beliefs about God that we identified, it is significant that only five of all eighty instances of כביכול are not referring to God; thus we may say that כביכול is used almost in all cases—'problematic' and 'non-problematic'—to talk about God; in a vast majority of the cases it is used to present ideas of God at odds with fundamental Rabbinic beliefs, and in others it is used to present ideas that are problematic for other reasons; there remains a handful of passages (about 6%) in which I did not identify any problematic aspect to the idea being presented.

PART 3

7. The Problematic Images Of God Presented In The כביכול Passages

In this, the last section of our study, we will see how the ideas contained in the כביכול passages relate to those beliefs and notions about God which we identified—in the first chapter—as fundamental within Rabbinic literature and theology. Specifically, I will present כביכול passages that challenge, oppose or are at odds with each one of those beliefs. The goal of this presentation is to illustrate the contrast between the ideological and theological content of the כביכול passages with that of the rest of the literature. This will be a detailed yet not exhaustive presentation of such contrasting notions.²³⁴

7.1 כביכול Ideas On God's Existence And Active Involvement In The World

In *Sifre* Deuteronomy 346, 5—perhaps the most radical כביכול passage—a striking idea is put forward: God's excellence, greatness, His capacity to reside in the heavens, and even His divinity itself, are all dependent on Israel, and are functions of the Israelites actions, attitudes and beliefs.

"It says: '*this is my God and I will praise Him*' (Ex. 15:2) when I acknowledge Him he is excellent, but when I do not acknowledge Him כביכול He is excellent in His name. Similarly, '*Because I will call on the name of God, ascribe greatness to our God*' (Deut. 32:3) when I call on His name He is great, but if not כביכול etc... Similarly, '*Now you are my*

234. I provide in this study a Thematic Summary of the כביכול Passages, which allows for further identification of ideas within כביכול passages that oppose core beliefs of the Rabbinic literature.

witnesses, says God, and I am God' (Isa 43:12) when you are my witnesses

I am God, but when you are not my witnesses כביכול I am not God.

Similarly, 'towards you I lift my eyes, you who dwell on the heavens' (Ps.

123:1) were it not for me כביכול you would not be dwelling in the heavens."

In another passage in this same compilation (313,10) it is stated that before the advent of Abraham, God only ruled on the heavens but not on earth; but the patriarch 'crowned God' and thus His rule extended to the earth as well.

In *Mekhilta Shirata*, Beshalah, 5, ד"ה תרומות it is said that the Israelites' sins kept God 'asleep' in the face of their suffering. This image—of God sleeping—seems to go beyond the notion of God as unwilling to respond, to suggest He became undisturbed and unaware of His peoples troubles.

7.2 כביכול Ideas On God's Power

כביכול passages in which the notion of divine omnipotence is challenged abound.

These passages contain images related to the following five main themes:

- a. God's power is limited by the actions of individual men;
- b. God's power is limited by the actions of Israel (the Israelites' sins);
- c. God's power is limited as a result of the destruction of the Temple and the exile;
- d. general depictions of God's powerlessness;
- e. the vulnerability of God.

Let us cite some examples.

- a. Moses is said to have overpowered God on several occasions: he did not allow

the Shekhinah to dwell in Israel until she increased their numbers (SifreNum 84, ד"ה ובנחה); God was commanded by Moses (Ex.R. 21, 2); Moses forcefully took the tablets with the commandments from God's hands (Ex.R. 28, 1); and Moses confronted God and made Him change His decision (Ex.R. 43, 1). This last situation also occurred with Daniel, who confronted God and made Him change a decision as well (Ex.R. 43, 1).

b. God's power is said to be limited by Israel in many passages. It is said that: Israel's disobedience erodes God's power (SifreDeut 355, 26); God's palace (kingdom) collapses if Israel stops supporting it (SifreDeut 346, 5); God's power (His capacity to protect Jerusalem and Israel) was diminished by the sins of Israel (Lam.R. 1, 35; Mek. Shirata 5, ד"ה תרומות); when the righteous do God's will they add power to God, but when they do not they detract from it (PRK 25, 1, ד"ה ויחזק צדיק).

c. The notion that as a result of the destruction of the Temple and exile God's power was limited is expressed in several passages, through a variety of images: God's entourage was reduced due to the destruction (SifreNum Naso, 42); God lacked the strength to wail for Judah (Proems Lam. R. 2); God was taken to Babylonian exile in chains (defeated) (Proems Lam. R. 31); God's throne is upside down following the destruction (Lam.R. 1,1); the Shechinah is enslaved following the destruction (Mek. Pisha, Bo, 14); as long as Jerusalem is in the dust, so is God (Cant. R 4, 8, ד"ה אתי); following the destruction of the Temple, God speaks from among the thorns (Ex.R. 2, 5); God needs salvation and redemption following the destruction (Ex.R. 30, 24).

d. In different passages, and through various images, God's lack of power is mentioned:

God cannot punish the wicked when they have peace among them (Gen.R. 38, 6); God

could not raise righteous Israelites (Proems Lam.R. 2); (Proems Lam.R. 2) God lacks the strength to wail in mourning for Judah; God has grown older and weaker, and cannot fight as in his youth (Proems Lam.R. 15). As we have seen in section c., following the exile God is depicted as powerless: God was taken in chains into exile (Proems Lam.R. 34), the Shechinah is enslaved—as is Israel in the exile (Mek., Pisha, Bo, 14).

e. In some passages, it is not God's omnipotence but rather His vulnerability what is noted: God is in distress when Israel is in distress (Ex.R. 2, 5); (SifreNum Beha'alotchah, 84, ד"ה וינסו משנאך) when someone hurts Israel, she or he hurts God; God is affected by human actions in many ways, which are recorded in the biblical text, but corrected by the scribes to preserve God's honor (Mek. Shirata, Beshalah, 6, ד"ה וברב, גאון).

7.3 כביכול Ideas On God's (Fore)Knowledge

The notion that God could not foresee future events is introduced in two different ways.

In SifreDeut 326, 36 it is said that God regrets punishing Israel, which is understood as a lament over a situation with an outcome not expected by God—reference is made here to the Biblical texts in which God says He regrets having crowned saul, and having made humanity. The clear implication of this is that God didn't know in advance—before he chose Saul, or created humans—that the result would be bad.

In Mek. Nezikin, Mishpatim, 13, ד"ה שנים ישלם it is stated that God was deceived by the Israelites at Sinai when they said they would always obey God. An omniscient being, of course, cannot be deceived.

7.4 כביכול Ideas On The Divine Presence

In more than a score כביכול passages, God is described as being present in a specific limited place, while leaving others. In other words, God is not conceived as being always at all places. These images are found in *Exodus Rabbah*: God entered Pharaoh's palace (18, 1); God entered Egypt (15, 15); God went of Israel into exile (15, 16); God stood at the doors of the houses of the Israelites in Egypt (18, 7); God "came down himself" to nurse Israelite babies in Egypt (23, 8); God comes down to earth to be with the judge until justice is done, and then he goes back up to heaven (30, 24); God comes down from heaven with the Shekhinah, and then he goes up back to heaven (30, 24); God came down to earth three times (as depicted in Genesis) (42, 5). In other Midrashim we find similar imagery: God limits his presence to just above the Tabernacle's curtain (Sifra 2, 12); Israel took God into the Tabernacle (Lev.R.30, 13); God rode a horse (Mek. Beshallah, 6, ד"ה ובני ישראל); God went [from Israel] to Lebanon with the Israelites (Mek. Beshallah, 6, ד"ה ויהי מקץ); God revealed himself riding on a horse (Mek., Shirata, 1, ד"ה אז ישיר); God went out of the land of Israel unto the nations (Proems Lam. R. 15); God is in the exile (Proems Lam. R. 34).

7.5 כביכול Ideas On Divine Corporeality

Though we have already noted that God was conceived both as incorporeal and as corporeal in many Rabbinic passages –and corporeal images abound without the idiom כביכול – it is worth noting that within the כביכול passages we do not find any that present God as incorporeal. The idea of divine corporeality however is stressed in several

places:

God sat down to eat with the Patriarchs (Ex.R. 25, 8); Moses forcefully took the tablets

God was holding in his two hands (Ex.R. 28, 1); God was taken in chains into exile

(Proems Lam. R. 34);

God revealed himself riding on a horse (Mek. Shirata, 1, ד"ה אז ישיר);

God physically –and not by words– built the Temple (Mek. Beshallah, 6, ד"ה פעלת); God

built the world with one hand, but used his two hands to build the Temple (Mek.

Beshallah, 6, ד"ה פעלת); God rode a horse, and went to battle wearing an armor just like

Pharaoh's in all its details, and waged battle against him using just the same weapons

and moves Pharaoh did (Cant. R. 1, 4, ד"ה דרש רבי).

7.6 כביכול Ideas On Divine Justice

A fundamental idea expressed in Rabbinic literature is that God is absolutely just, and that rules the world by the principle of divine retribution or reward and punishment.

Consequently, the destruction of the temple and the exile are understood as divine

punishment, brought about by Israel's sins. In the כביכול passages however, we find

–explicitly and by implication– that the principle of reward and punishment is challenged or rejected, by arguing that the destruction occurred for reasons other than Israel's sins.

This is done through different ideas and images of God, such as God acting out of anger rather than executing justice, God lacking the power –but not the will!– to fight in

Israel's defense, being unconcerned about the righteous people, and other failures on His part rather than on Israel's.

It is argued in Lev.R. 31, 6 that the destruction implies a failure in God, for which he

doesn't deserve anymore a full entourage and full praise; in Ex.R. 15, 12, that God needs redemption following the destruction –implying a failure or shortcoming of God; in Proems Lam. R. 2 God is held responsible for Israel's sins and exile, since he failed in raising the Israelites to be righteous; in Proems Lam. R. 2 it is stated that God destroyed Israel out of anger and uncontrolled fury rather than as an act of justice, and so He then felt sorry for himself; in Proems Lam. R., 15 it is said that God has grown older and cannot fight (in defense of Israel) as he did in his youth—against Egypt; in Proems Lam. R., 31: it is said that God was taken to the Babylonian exile in chains, implying that He was defeated rather than controlling the events and exacting judgement on Israel; according to Lam.R. 3, 20 rather than do justice and defend them, God abandoned the righteous in this world.

We must also cite those passages which provide explanations for suffering and which do not see it as a result of a previous sin –and are thus alternative to the principle of reward and punishment, which poses sin as the cause of suffering. According to Lev.R. 20, 2 suffering is a given in this world, unavoidable also for the righteous Israelite ancestors, and thus not even God is satisfied with this world; we have already quoted several passages that suggest God lacks the power to prevent suffering –either as result of Israel's sins or disbelief, or of his own old age; sometimes suffering exists because justice cannot be done, as implied by Gen.R. 38, 6 , where it is stated that God cannot punish the wicked if they have peace among them.

7.7 כביכול Ideas On God's Holiness

A fundamental characteristic of the כביכול passages –the idiom's *raison d'être*– is the daring imagery and tone when referring to God. Specifically, I will cite some passages which contain images of God that not just do not exalt God, but are in fact demeaning God:

- Ex.R. 2, 5: God speaks from among the thorns following the destruction of the Temple
- Ex.R. 20, 11: God dips his weapons in the blood of Ephraim as He refuses consolation
- Ex.R. 29, 9: God yells and roars in pain and anger following the destruction of the Temple
- Ex.R. 43, 1: Moses, and Daniel confront God and make him change his decisions
- Gen.R. 75, 1: the destruction brought God down to the dust
- Lev.R. 31, 6: God does not receive full praise, but only limited, following the destruction of the Temple
- Lev.R. 34, 2: God becomes the servant of one who is gracious to the poor
- SifreNum Naso, 42, ד"ה וישם לך שלום : God's entourage was reduced following the destruction of the Temple
- SifreNum, Beha'alotchah 84, ד"ה ונסו משנאך : God is offended and negatively affected by different human actions portrayed in the Bible – altered by the Scribes precisely because they offend God's honor (paralleled by Mek., Beshalah, 86, ד"ה וברב גאון)
- Proems Lam. R., 2: God failed in his parental efforts to raise Israel to be righteous
- Proems Lam. R., 2: God cries, inconsolable, and calls for wailing women to cry for *his* misfortune
- Proems Lam. R. 15: God has grown older and weaker, and cannot fight as in his youth
- Proems Lam. R. 15: God mourns, cries, stays silent, in the dust, and rent his clothes,

following the destruction of the Temple

- Proems Lam. R. 34: God was taken in chains into exile
- Lam.R. 1, 1: God's throne is upside down
- Mek., Pisha, Bo, 14: the Shechinah is enslaved (as is Israel in exile)
- Cant. R. 2, 3, ד"ה רבי יודן : God goes to Hell with Israel, to be judged
- Cant. R. 4, 8, ד"ה אתי : as long as Jerusalem is in the dust, so is God; He will arise as a rooster rising His wings from the dust.

7.8 כביכול Ideas On God's Status

Finally, I will cite a few passages which present images of God that oppose a fundamental conception found throughout Rabbinic literature: passages that depict God not as savior, but as needing salvation, and rather than a redeemer, one who awaits his own redemption.

- Ex.R. 15, 12: God needs redemption
- Mek., Pisha, Bo, 14: God redeemed himself in Egypt
- Ex.R. 30, 24: God needs salvation and redemption following the destruction of the Temple
- PRK 17, 5, ד"ה אם אשכחך , and Lam. R. 2, 6: God's right hand was subjugated after the destruction, but will be redeemed as Israel are redeemed.

This last section does not require elaborate conclusions. We have seen that each one of the beliefs considered to be at the basis of Rabbinic theology are qualified, challenged, rejected, and opposed in כביכול passages. The imagery and notions of God,

the theology reflected in the כביכול passages is certainly –and dramatically– at odds with the theology which we presented at the beginning of this study as *the* Rabbinic views on God.

The textual evidence presented throughout this study, both in its quantity and its quality –its content– calls for a more careful, precise and balanced characterization of Rabbinic theology than the current scholarship provides. We found that the scholarly presentations of Rabbinic notions of God reviewed in this study mostly ignored the texts we studied, and the issues raised in and by them. For even though the כביכול passages constitute a very small part of the vast Rabbinic literature, they allow us –and force us– to appreciate the range of the divergence of opinions within Rabbinic circles. More importantly perhaps, their very existence within that literature –the fact that, though radically divergent, these views were edited and kept in the Midrashic compilations– shows that Rabbinic tradition was indeed pluralistic, and permitted a great degree of dissent even concerning fundamental ideas and beliefs, such as –no less– the nature of God.

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Thematic Summary Of כביכול Passages

Mekhilta deRabbi Ishma'el (Horovitz-Rabin ed.)

Pisha, Bo, 14, ד"ה ויהי מקץ

- the Shechinah is enslaved following the destruction
- in Egypt, God redeemed himself
- Shekhina went into exile wherever Israel went
- Shekhina will return to Israel with the exiles when they return
- Shekhina goes to Lebanon with the exiles of Israel

Vayehi Beshallah, Beshallah, 6, ד"ה ובני ישראל

- God rode a horse and a mare

Shirata, Beshallah, 1, ד"ה אז ישיר

- God did not rejoice over the destruction of the wicked Egyptians

Shirata, Beshallah, 3, ד"ה זה אלי

- When Israel do God's will his name is exalted in the world, but when they do not His name is profaned

Shirata, Beshallah, 4, ד"ה יצוה איש

- When Israel disobey God a decree is actually issued by God against them; if they repent, then He turns it against Israel's enemies

Shirata, Beshallah, 5, ד"ה תרומות

- Israel's sins turned God's right hand into a left hand [debilitated God's power]
- Israel's sins kept God asleep (unaware, undisturbed, unresponsive) in the

face of Israel's suffering

Shirata, Beshalah, 6, ד"ה וברב גאון

-God is affected by human actions in many ways (described or implied here) according to biblical texts [which were corrected by the scribes, and listed here]

Shirata, Beshallah, 10, ד"ה פעלת

-God physically –and not by words– built the Temple

-God built the world with one hand, but used his two hands to build the Temple

Vayasa', Beshalah, 3, ד"ה ובבקר

-God stretched His hand and grabbed the prayers of the Patriarchs and brought down the manna

Amalek, Beshalah, 2, ד"ה ויבן משה

-The miracles God performs for Israel are miracles performed also for God

Bahodesh, Itro, ד"ה ואתם תהיו

-God does not establish anyone else to rule over Israel but Himself

Bahodesh, Itro, ד"ה כי ששת

-God dictated that it be written about Himself that he rested on the seventh day

Nezikin, Mishpatim, 13, ד"ה שנים ישלם

-God was deceived by the Israelites at Sinai when they said they would always obey God.

Nezikin, Mishpatim, 15, ד"ה וגונב

-The thief acted as if the Eye above does not see [כאילו combined]

Sifra

Vayikra, 2, 12

-God confined/compressed His presence between the two Cherubim

Sifre Numbers (Horovitz ed.)

Naso, 42, ד"ה וישם לך שלום

-God's entourage was reduced following the exile

-If Israel have peace among them, even if they worship idols Satan can not affect them.

Beha'alotchah, 84, ד"ה וינסו משנאך

-when someone hurts Israel, s/he hurts God

-God is offended and negatively affected by different human actions portrayed in the Bible, and altered by the Scribes to safeguard God's honor [list of scribal corrections]

-When Israel are subjugated so is the Shekhinah

Beha'alotchah, 84, ד"ה ובנחה

-Moses does not allow the Shechinah to dwell in Israel until it multiplies them

Beha'alotchah, 92, ד"ה מזקני ישראל

-God suffers for one elder as much as for all Israel.

Mattot, 157, ד"ה הן חנה

-when Israel do not do God's will He fights against them, and they turn

The merciful cruel

Sifre Deuteronomy (Finkelstein ed.)

40, 12

-God watches over and cares for the land of Israel and the people of Israel only,
and so that He may do that, He watches over and cares for all

311, 8

-Before the advent of Abraham, God judged the earth with a measure of cruelty

313, 10

-God had no sovereignty on Earth until Abraham crowned him

326, 36

-God regrets punishing Israel

346, 5

-God is not God when Israel doesn't acknowledge him as such

-God is great only when Israel call His name

-were it not for Israel God would not be seating in heaven

-God's palace (kingdom) collapses if Israel stops supporting it

355, 26

-When the Israelites do God's will they help God ride the heavens, but when they
do not do God's will they erode God's power

Midrash Rabbah

Genesis (Theodor-Albeck ed.)

ד"ה אלה 2, 12

-Man was created by God and his Court, not by God alone

ד"ה ודבק באשתו 18,

-God's name takes effect only on a divorce among Israel, but not if
gentiles get divorced

ד"ה ויהי כל הארץ 38,

-God cannot punish idolatrous sinners when they have peace among them

ד"ה וישלח יעקב 32, 75,

-the destruction brought God down to the dust; he will wake up and rise
again, like a rooster does

Exodus

2, 5:

-God feels in distress when Israel is in distress

-God is in distress just as Israel

-following the destruction of the Temple, God speaks from among the thorns

15, 1

-God is called/named 'First' [ראשון]

15, 12

-God himself was redeemed in Egypt

15, 15

-God entered Egypt to smite their firstborns and their gods

15, 16

-God goes out of Israel into the different places of exile

18, 1

-God entered Pharaoh's palace to help Moses

18, 7

-God stood at the doors of the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, and pushed the
destroyer away

20, 11

-God took the blood of the slain Ephraimites and dipped his weapons in it,
refusing to be consoled before avenging their deaths

21, 2

-God was commanded by Moses

21, 3

-God seats and studies in Paradise with others

23, 1

-God only "sat in his throne" after He created the world; before that He was
merely 'standing' (allegedly, images of status of Roman Imperial rulers)

23, 8

-God "came down himself" to nurse Israelite babies

25, 8

-God seats at a banquet with the patriarchs and the righteous in Paradise

28, 1

-Moses forcefully stole tablets from God's hands

29, 9

- God came down on Sinai, scaring people away with his might
- when God sees that the Pagan shrines are safe and peaceful but His Temple is destroyed and in hands of idolaters he becomes furious and roars making the earth tremble, but he then protects Israel.

30, 24

- God comes down to earth to be with the judge
- God comes down from heaven with the Shekhinah, and then he goes up back to heaven when an injustice is done by the judge
- God needs salvation and redemption following the destruction, which will come with no connection to Israel's actions

33, 1

- By acquiring the Torah Israel acquired God

33, 6

- Israel acquired God by acquiring the Torah

42, 5

- God came down to earth three times (as written in Genesis)

43, 1

- Moses and Daniel confronted God and made him change his decision

Leviticus (Margulies ed.)

20, 2

- suffering is a given in this world, unavoidable even for the righteous Israelite

ancestors

-God is not satisfied with (this) his world

23, 6

-As long as the shadow of Esau exists Israel are withered

23, 8

-So long as the Israelites were not redeemed from Egypt, the sapphire brick

(Shekhinah?) was placed as a mark in heaven, but after the redemption it

was not seen in the heavens

23, 9

-If Israel do the abominations of Egypt and Canaan then God is not their God

23, 12

-In a case of an adulterous pregnant woman, God is the only party that actually is
negatively affected

24, 2

-Whenever Scripture mentions 'יחור...ויחור' it means 'God and His Court'

- 30, 13

-Israel took God into the Tabernacle

31, 6

-The destruction of the Temple implies a failure of God, after which he doesn't
anymore have a full entourage nor receive full praise

34, 2 [Vilna ed.]

-God becomes the servant of one who is gracious to the poor

Lamentations

Lam. Proems, 2

-God is responsible for Israel's sins and exile, since he failed in raising

them to be righteous

-God cries, inconsolable, and calls for wailing women to cry for his

misfortune

-God lacks the strength to wail for Judah

-God destroyed Israel out of anger, unrestrained fury rather than as an act

of justice, and then felt sorry for himself

Lam. Proems, 15

-God has grown older and weaker and cannot fight (in defense of Israel) as

he did in his youth (in Egypt)

-God went out into exile himself

Lam. Proems, 34

-God was taken to Babylonian exile in chains (defeated)

-God is in the exile

1, 1

-God's throne is upside down following the destruction of the Temple

-God mourns, cries, stays silent, in the dust, and rends his clothes, following the

destruction of the Temple

1, 35

-God's power (his capacity to protect Jerusalem and Israel) was diminished by

the sins of Israel

1, 56

-God cries for Israel

2, 6(=)

-God limited and diminished his power in order to share Israel's suffering

-God's right hand was subjugated after the destruction, but will be redeemed as

Israel are redeemed

3, 27

-God does not abandon the righteous, but rather He is merciful

-God abandons the righteous in this world, but has compassion on them in the

world to come

Song of Songs

ד"ה משכני, 1, 1

-when Israel forget about God, He forgets about them

ד"ה דרש רבי, 1, 4

-God rode a horse, and went to battle wearing the same armor and

equipment as Pharaoh (detailed here), and waged battle against

Pharaoh with similar arms and moves

ד"ה רבי יודן, 2, 3

-God goes to Hell with Israel, to be judged

ד"ה אמר רבי, 2, 6

-as long as the shadow of Esau exists the Israelites look withered in this

world

ד"ה כחוט, 4, 6

-when the Temple was destroyed Israel's neck was bent

ד"ה אתי, 4, 8

-as long as Jerusalem is in the dust, so is God; in the future He will arise
as a rooster rising His wings from the dust

ד"ה קול דודי, 5, 2

-God and Israel are twins, no one is bigger than the other, and God feels
Israel's pain

Pesikta DeRav Kahanah (Mendelbaum ed.)

ד"ה ה כת, 2, 7

-Moses asked God to loan merits to Israel before he judges them

ד"ה מדור דור, 3, 16

-as long as the seed of Amalek exists it is as if a wing covers God's face
[combined use of כביכול and כאילו]

ד"ה החדש הזה, 5, 13

-God consults with and then follows the decisions of the earthly
(Rabbinic) court

ד"ה אנכי הגדתי, 12, 6

-God is only God if Israel are His witnesses

ד"ה ירמיה, 13, 9

-God was brought in chains into exile

ד"ה כה אמר, 15, 4

- God is responsible for Israel's sins and exile, since he failed –as the Israelites 'father'– in raising the Israelites to be righteous
- God cries, inconsolable, and calls for wailing women to cry for his misfortune
- God lacks the strength to wail for Judah
- God destroyed Israel out of anger, unrestrained fury rather than as an act of justice, and then felt sorry for himself

ד"ה אם אשכחך, 17, 5

- God limited and diminished his power in order to share Israel's suffering
- God's right hand was subjugated after the destruction, but will be redeemed as Israel are redeemed

ד"ה רבי נחמן, 23, 2

- when Jacob saw Edom's angel going up the ladder without coming down, God told him that even though he is high He will bring him down

ד"ה דרש ר', 24, 13

- people usually commit several sins without repenting

ד"ה ויאחז צדיק, 25, 1

- when the righteous do God's will they add power to God, when they do not they detract from it

ד"ה ורב חסד, 25, 2

- though God does not forget, he becomes forgetful for Israel's sake

ד"ה ר' לוי, 3, 26

-suffering is a given in this world, unavoidable even for the righteous

Israelite ancestors

-God is not satisfied with, nor has He rejoiced over (this) His world

ד"ה והקרבתם, 28

-when the Israelites went up to Jerusalem to sacrifice God welcomed
them.



