

The Meeting of Horizons
in the Tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah:
An Examination of the Aggadah in
Bavli Bava Batra 73a – 74a

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Note on Texts and Translations

Texts, unless otherwise noted, from Talmud are from the The Judaica Classics published by Davka Corporation.¹ These texts follow the Soncino Hebrew-English Talmud publication of 1976. Tanakh texts, unless otherwise noted, are from Accordance software published by Oak Tree Software, Inc.² Hebrew Tanakh texts from Accordance are according to the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, 1983. English Tanakh texts from Accordance are according to the Jewish Publication Society, TANAKH: A new translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the traditional Hebrew text, 1985. English texts of Tanakh quotations within a Talmud English translation that are indicated with a “ ° ” are utilizing the JPS 1985 English translation rather than the Soncino translation embedded in The Judaica Classics Talmud text.

1 *Soncino Classics Collection* (Institute for Computers in Jewish Life : Davka Corp., 1996).

2 *Accordance 10: Bible Software* (OakTree Software Inc., 2008).

Introduction

I came to discover the Tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah while exploring the Babylonian Talmud looking for references to Lilith. At the time, I was taking a course entitled, “Return to Paradise” at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio. The class explored the Jewish response to exile from, and the longing for return to, the Garden of Eden. Students in the class were encouraged to pursue their own interests in the many facets of this broad topic. I became interested in the extra-biblical figure of Lilith. In Jewish tradition, she is the first wife of Adam and the first human expelled from the Garden of Eden for her refusal to lay under Adam and submit to him. Lilith is referenced three times in the Talmud Bavli.³ None of the references say much about Lilith. But her presence indicates that, at the very least, the rabbis of the Talmud were familiar with the legendary Lilith and perhaps found her image terrifying.

The tale that drew me to the focus of this thesis is the third of fifteen tales in an aggadic portion of Bava Batra. In this tale it says that Lilith’s son, Hormin, performed acrobatic antics upon the ramparts of the ancient city of Mehoza.⁴ At my first reading, this seemed to be a cryptic tale with some hidden meaning. Reading around this tale, I found that it does not stand alone but rather is part of an extended aggadic passage comprising the corpus of what are known as the

3 In addition to the tale at Bava Batra 73a, Lilith is also found elsewhere in the Talmud Bavli at Shabbat 151b - R. Chanina said it is not permissible to sleep in a house alone, anyone who sleeps in a house alone is seized by Lilith; and Nidah 24b - this is a longer discussion of the uncleanness of the mother who aborts a fetus that has the likeness of Lilith, the sole indicated attribute that this likeness has wings.

4 See Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, ed., *Koren Talmud Bavli*, vol. *Berakhhot* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2012), 383. Mehoza מְהוּזָא, is located on the Tigris River and had a large Jewish community that mostly engaged in commerce. The beit midrash at Nehardea moved to Mehoza after the former's destruction in 259 CE. The beit midrash at Pumbedita also moved to Mehoza for a period of time after the death of Abaye. Scholars including Rav Nahman, Rav Sheshet, Rava, Ameimar, and Rav Kahana were all active in Mehoza.

tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah in Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 73a-75b. After some brief investigation and consultation with colleagues, it seemed that I had happened upon a somewhat unique and special chapter of Talmud where these tales appear related to the surrounding halakha only by their reference to the sea.⁵ The halakhic discussion in this chapter begins on folio 73a with the situation of buying and selling ships and their related accoutrements. The aggadic tales seem to add nothing to the nature of the discussion in the Mishna or Gemara. Directly following the aggadic text on folio 75b, the discussion abruptly shifts back to the halakha. As Avraham Weiss has suggested, this section appears to be a mini-tractate by itself, what he referred to as a “tractate of visions and wonders.”⁶

My investigation for the “Return to Paradise” class did not yield much in the way of information about Lilith but it did land me on the shore of a new investigation. Much like the seafarers and travelers of the tales, I had set out to look for one thing and found something else that was even more wondrous than I could have imagined when I set out. It was not by chance that I found these tales. For when one willingly goes down to the sea or out into the desert, it must be accepted that with a voyage over the horizon, one will encounter something that cannot be anticipated or seen from the shore. The tales that I encountered were on the other side of my horizon. I went searching, not knowing what I would find, but found a treasure indeed. The most difficult part of my work has been that, at every turn, I have found more research concerning these stories. I have reluctantly stopped my research in order to complete this project but am eager to return to the sea and to the desert with Rabbah bar bar Hannah again in the future.

5 Reuven Kiperwasser, “Rabba bar bar Hana’s Voyages,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature, Literature and Revolt* (Jerusalem: Mandel Institute for Jewish Studies, n.d.), 215–41; Cited is the work of Abraham Weiss, *Al ha-yetsirah ha-sifrutit shel ha-Amora'im* (New York: Horeb Yeshivah University, 1961).

6 Kiperwasser, “Rabba bar bar Hana’s Voyages,” 10.

The tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah in Bava Batra Chapter 5 are well known. Many approaches have been used to characterize these stories. My approach to reading the tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah is not simply to repeat the work of commentators and scholars, but rather to build upon them. Early commentators attempted to deal with the tension between the fantastical information conveyed in the tales and their perception of reality. The tales are explicated in Jacob ben Solomon ibn Habib's 15th century aggadic compendium, *Ein Yaakov*.⁷ In this work ibn Habib attempted to offer direct and rational explanations of the tales as allegory. Others have approached the stories through linking their imagery to biblical passages or mystical forms. Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam, b. 1083 – d. 1174) explained the tales by relating them generally to the works of God as described in Tanakh, particularly in the Psalms and the Book of Job, and Rabbi Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli (Ritba, b. c.1260 – d. c.1314) resolved the tension by suggesting that the tales were not fantastical at all but that their apparent fantastical nature was only due to the lack of knowledge of the reader in understanding the hints the stories present. The Ritba understood that the traveling sage was able to understand and see through visions what the average reader could not understand, imagine, or see.⁸ Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman (HaGra or the Vilna Gaon, b. 1720 - 1797) related the mystical content of the tales.⁹ He wrote a commentary on and translated into rabbinic Hebrew these tales and others in tractate Bechorot.¹⁰ This was translated into English and commented upon by Aharon Feldman.¹¹

In the modern era the tales have also received much attention. Rabbi Hayim Hirshenzon

7 Jacob ben Solomon Ibn Habib and Avraham Yaakov. Finkel, *Ein Yaakov: The Ethical and Inspirational Teachings of the Talmud* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1999).

8 Tziona Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature: Voyages to Imaginary Realms* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

9 Aharon. Feldman, *The Juggler and the King: The Jew and the Conquest of Evil : An Elaboration of the Vilna Gaon's Insights into the Hidden Wisdom of the Sages* (Spring Valley, N.Y.; Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1990).

10 Elijah ben Solomon, *Perush 'al Kamah Agadot* (Yerushalayim: Keren hokhmah ya-da'at, 1996).

11 Feldman, *The Juggler and the King*.

wrote a lengthy commentary published in 1924, only available today in Hebrew.¹² He characterized his approach as scientific as he employed historical, philological and theological perspectives in his analysis. An artistic and playful approach to the tales can be found in the storybook of Meir ben Uri printed in Tel Aviv in 1936. This volume is a picture book for children with Hebrew text based upon the tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah.¹³ Its popularity is attested to in that I have found it both in a hardback format and in a pocket-size accordion format, both with playful pictures of Rabbah bar bar Hannah and the places he visited. Judah David Eisenstein brought together many of the previous interpretations in his volume on the tales. Published in 1937, it contains the Aramaic Talmud text, the Hebrew translation of the Vilna Gaon, and Eisenstein's digest of previous commentary and scholarship.¹⁴ Modern interpreters have taken a comparative approach, placing these stories in company with other ancient travel narratives or cross-cultural folklore. In these later readings, the tales clearly have a message that transcends Judaism. Some have noted that the tales resemble and share in a folklore tradition outside of the Talmud stretching both backward in time to Ancient Near Eastern myth and forward in time to European folktales.¹⁵ Modern exegetical approaches have been employed by Michael Fishbane and others.¹⁶ Modern scholars have approached the tales through literary analysis: Dan Ben-Amos places them in the genre of tall tales,¹⁷ Eli Yassif

12 Chaim Hirschensohn, *Motsa'e Mayim: Perush Mada'i Ba-Derekh Ha-Peshaṭ yeha-Remez* (Budapest: bi-defus Aḥim Katzburg, 1924).

13 Meir Ben Uri and Makhon le-omanut datit (Haifa, Israel), *Rabbah Bar Bar Hannah* (Haifa: Ben Ari -Makhon le-omanut datit, 1978).

14 Judah David Eisenstein, *The Tales of Rabbah Bar-Bar Hannah: The Aramaic Text with Hebrew Translation* (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1937).

15 Cornelia Catlin Coulter, "The 'Great Fish' in Ancient and Medieval Story," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 57 (1926): 32–50.

16 Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998); Dan Ben-Amos, "Talmudic Tall Tales," in *Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson* (Bloomington: Indiana University, Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies, 1976).

17 Ben-Amos, "Talmudic Tall Tales."

approaches them as comedy,¹⁸ Tziona Grossmark as travel narratives.¹⁹ Rueven Kipperwasser and Dan Shapira show the relationship between these tales and other tales found in Zoroastrian Iranian culture and sacred texts.²⁰ Throughout this paper, I will refer when necessary to the work of these individuals.

It is my intent to show that the nature of these tales goes beyond folklore, allegory, and standard literary genre types. The tales are intended take readers on their own metaphysical journey. They take the reader from the known, over a horizon, to the unknown. The stories appear therefore to be fiction. They are filled with fantastical images of huge waves, mythological beasts or animals of impossible scale. Yet they also carry introductory words, *לִי אָשַׁתְעוּ*, *they told me*, *לִי רָאִיתִי חֹזִי*, *I saw it myself*, or *זִמְנָא חֲדָא הָוָה קָא אֹלִינָן*, *once we were traveling*, each signaling that the text is a report of events or is a testimony of personal experiences. Each introductory phrase is signaling a verisimilitude to follow, the appearance of something real. This should not be interpreted in the modern sense of fiction. Readers should remember that our modern sense of history that focuses on facts, on accuracy of events, and understanding bias is not the way Babylonian readers understood history. As Jeffrey Rubenstein reminds us, the authors and redactors of the tales examined here were not interested in reporting history as we understand it. In their “historical accounts”, the lines between truth and fiction were blurred. The truth that they wished to convey was not a truth of facts as they happened but rather an eternal truth aimed at the meaning of life as they saw it.²¹ Because their truth was not

18 Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, Folklore Studies in Translation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

19 Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature*.

20 Reuven Kipperwasser and Dan D. Y. Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica II: Leviathan, Behemoth and the ‘Domestication’ of Iranian Mythological Creatures in Eschatological Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud,” in *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman*, vol. 35, Brill Reference Library of Judaism (Boston: Brill, 2012).

21 Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

bound in fact as we understand fact, truth is communicated in the form of myth.

As exaggerated and fantastical as some of these stories may be, the stories are not mere entertainment but rather are attempting to point to some truth. The tales describe the intersection of that which can be seen, felt and experienced with that which is known to be true through the rabbinic cultural experience. Mythic stories attempt to capture that which lies beyond the human ability, within the walls of the beit midrash, to directly perceive a truth of what could be in the world-to-come. This mythic truth can only be acquired by experiencing a horizon, the intersection of what is “real” or historical and what can be imagined. The fourteenth of the tales pinpoints one such intersection. In this tale, an Arab guide shows Rabbah bar bar Hannah the place where the heavens and the earth meet:

אמר לי: תא אחוי לך היכא דנשקי ארעא ורקיעא אהדדי.

He (an Arab) said to me: Come, I will show you where the earth and the heavens touch one another.

b.Bava Batra 74a

The focal point of this tale is explicitly located at a particular meeting point, the horizon. The horizon is the place where the furthest extent of the land that can be seen meets the furthest extent of the sky. In a metaphysical sense, it is the place where what can be known through human sensual perception meets what can only be known through intellectual perception, that is, through reasoning and creative powers of imagination or through religious conviction. Everything beyond the horizon of the senses cannot be known in concrete ways. What lies beyond the horizon must be reasoned and imagined. This entails not creating a fiction, but rather imaging a reality through constructing an environment in the mind; creating an image of what is

University Press, 1999), 6–9.

beyond the horizon that is pieced together from reports of those who have travelled over the horizon or from information that is within a collection of cultural knowledge.

For someone like Rabbah bar bar Hannah, cultural knowledge comes from at least two sources, the beit midrash and contact with people outside the beit midrash, particularly travelers. His exegetical imagination combines with the stories of seafarers and caravaners. As I will show in this project, the intent of the corpus of Rabbah bar bar Hannah tales, is to cross the horizon from the physical, human world to the divine world. Rabbah bar bar Hannah pushes toward the physical horizon in order to gain knowledge of what is over the horizon in the metaphysical world. Over the horizon lies a greater understanding of the divine world, the mysteries of creation and the world-to-come.

Rabbah bar bar Hannah

Rebecca Rose Glueck in her Master of Arts Thesis at Ben Gurion University of the Negev constructs a portrait of Rabbah bar bar Hannah from many available sources.²² As well as providing the genealogy and major mileposts in the life of Rabbah bar bar Hannah as these are depicted in rabbinic literature, Glueck attempts to piece together the persona of Rabbah bar bar Hannah. I will present some of her main points here that are important for my discussion of the meaning of the corpus of tales.

In Sanhedrin 5a it is stated that the patriarch of the family is Abba bar Aha Karsela from the Babylonian town of Kafri. His son, Rabbi Hiyya went to Palestine to study with Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi and eventually set up a beit midrash in Tiberias. It was there that his two nephews, Abba bar Aivu and Abba bar Hannah came from Babylonia to study with him. Rabbi

22 Rebecca Rose Glueck, "Nature, Society and Self: A New Perspective on the Rabbah Bar Bar Hannah Tales" (Master of Arts Thesis, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2007), 55–69.

Hiyya was obviously invested in the importance of Palestine as the Jewish center of learning. However, he was skeptical of Palestine's future under Roman rule. Therefore, he prepared his students to travel to Babylonia where they would carry on the Palestinian rabbinic tradition. Sanhedrin 5a also gives an important account of the ordination of Rabbi Hiyya's two nephews before their travel back to Babylonia. It is related that Rabbi Hiyyah inquires of Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, known simply as Rabbi, what types of judgements his nephews are qualified to decide. Abba bar Hannah is given a full ordination, allowed to decide matters of ritual, monetary, and sacrificial law. However, Abba bar Aivu is not able to decide matters of sacrificial law. Interestingly, in b.Sanhedrin 5b we are also told that Abba bar Aivu actually had great knowledge of sacrificial matters because he had spent eighteen months with a shepherd learning the anatomy of animals and what their internal organs should look like. Glueck refers us to the explanation of Avraham Moshe Naftal for his understanding that this decision is a compensation for the charisma of Abba bar Aivu. Rabbi sees that Abba bar Aivu possesses great charisma that Abba bar Hannah does not. To balance the situation that might have developed after the two cousins return to Babylonia, Rabbi gives full ordination to Abba bar Hannah to counterbalance the charisma of his cousin, Abba bar Aivu.²³

In Babylonia, Rabbi's concern was realized. Abba bar Hannah comes to be known as Rabbah bar Hannah. He lives in the shadow of his cousin, Abba bar Aivu, who becomes known simply as Rav. He carries this moniker of Rav due to the respect that is granted to him both in Babylonia and Palestine because of his great knowledge. When Rav first returned to Babylonia, he settled in Nehardea and then later set up the great beit midrash in Sura. He was so greatly

23 Ibid., 57. Glueck provides a text selection from Naftal in her endnotes from: Naftal, Avraham Moshe. "Rav." *HaTalmud VeYozrav: Dorot Ha'amoraim 1*. (Tel Aviv: Yavne P, 1976), 42.

respected that his opinion was considered equal with the Tannaim.²⁴ In the meantime, Rabbah bar Hannah slips into relative obscurity. Where he is mentioned, he was either passing on the teaching of his cousin Rav, or deferring to Rav when their opinions conflict.

Glueck attaches importance to Rabbah bar bar Hannah's family history by suggesting that the marginalization of Rabbah bar Hannah, the father, was related to the personality that developed in Rabbah bar bar Hannah, the son. The psychological effect of marginalization was a catalyst for developing a tendency in Rabbah bar bar Hannah to see himself as an outsider with respect to the rabbinic culture of the beit midrash. In addition to this, Rabbah bar bar Hannah's time in Palestine probably compounded the feeling of marginalization due to the general attitude of Palestinian rabbis toward Babylonians living in their community. An example of the negative attitude involves Rabbah bar bar Hannah himself.

ריש לקיש הוי סחי בירדנא, אתא רבה בר בר חנה יהב ליה ידא. אמר ליה: אלהא
סנינא לכו, דכתיב (שיר השירים ח) אם חומה היא נבנה עליה טירת כסף ואם דלת
היא נצור עליה לוח ארז, אם עשיתם עצמכם כחומה ועליתם כולכם בימי עזרא -
נמשלתם ככסף, שאין רקב שולט בו, עכשיו שעליתם כדלתות נמשלתם כארז
שהרקב שולט בו.

Resh Lakish was swimming in the Jordan. Thereupon Rabbah b.
Bar Hana came and gave him the hand: Said [Resh Lakish] to him:
By God! I hate you. For it is written: If she be a wall, we will build
upon her a turret of silver; if she be a door, we will enclose her
with boards of cedar. Had you made yourself like a wall and had
all come up in the days of Ezra, you would have been compared to
silver, which no rottenness can ever affect. Now that you have
come up like doors, you are like cedarwood, which rottenness
prevails over.

b.Yoma 9b

Resh Lakish rejected the hand of Rabbah bar bar Hannah precisely because his is a Babylonian.

He equated the Babylonians with rot, suggesting that those who did not return from exile and

24 Shulamis Frieman, *Who's Who in the Talmud* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1995), 253.

elected to stay in Babylonia were like festering rot for the Jewish people. If the exiles had returned, all together at the same time, they would be like silver that cannot rot. The rejection of the father along with animosity of Palestinian rabbis like Reish Lakish became the basis for the wandering nature of the son, Rabbah bar bar Hannah.²⁵ The wandering of Rabbah bar bar Hannah provides him a unique vantage point to observe the scenes of the tales and he is therefore able to apply nonconventional wisdom. His otherness is his advantage.

The Tales and Their Interpretation

The entire corpus of tales from 73a to 75b take readers on multiple journeys but in four distinct directions: to the sea, to the desert, to primordial creatures which will be on the table set for the feast of the righteous in the world-to-come, and to Jerusalem Shel Ma'alah. Each set is an attempt to take the reader on a journey from the known physical world to a metaphysical world just over the horizon. The reader in the beit midrash would have known that a world exists over the horizon. He can see things disappearing over it and other things rising from it. As he can imagine himself as one who goes down to the sea, the horizon lies before him. As ships travel out of the port, they disappeared over the horizon as if sinking down into the water. He knows that this isn't actually so, for at the same time, he can see returning ships rising out of the same horizon only to grow larger in his field of view, eventually arriving at the port to unload their goods and relay the news of adventures in distant lands. The lands are not known to the receiver of the goods or the hearer of news; they can only be imagined, yet the reports are understood to be trustworthy. The stories took the listener over the horizon, across the divide between sensuous reality and an imagined reality. The tales that Rabbah bar bar Hannah related are tales

²⁵ Glueck, "Nature, Society and Self: A New Perspective on the Rabbah Bar Bar Hannah Tales," 64.

of men going out over the horizon. This thesis is an exploration of three horizons and how they illuminate what might lie beyond, the metaphysical world, constantly out of physical sight but within the grasp of the imagination. The three areas of focus are the sea tales, the desert tales, and tales of strange creatures. These are addressed in the first fifteen tales of the corpus in b.Bava Batra 73a-75b. As explained below, the later tales that appear after the first fifteen have a different quality. They appear as testimonies of other rabbis and have a much more directly eschatological function. I will not discuss these tales here.

My reading strategy draws upon the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer.²⁶ seeing the tales as embodying a horizon of meaning. How these tales are encountered by the reader is necessarily informed by the reader's own experience. These tales are not trapped in time. Once they left the mouth of the narrator and the hands of editors, they ceased to be governed and mediated by them. Instead, the stories are mediated through the encounter of the reader and the text. The corpus of stories occurs within a background of meaning situated in the Talmud, informed by the Jewish literary and historical tradition in which the Talmud itself is situated. The stories draw upon biblical tradition, in the Psalms primarily. This is part of the repertoire that the text of the corpus utilizes as a strategy for telling the tales. This is the text's horizon. However, the reader can only understand the text from a perspective of present experience and knowledge. As Wolfgang Iser notes, the strategies of the text only trigger acts of comprehension in the reader.²⁷ The conventions used by the text in order to facilitate comprehension is its repertoire. Iser states, "The repertoire consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and

26 Jeff Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," March 3, 2003, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/gadamer/>.

27 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 86.

historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged.”²⁸ A reader's contemporary ability to understand the tales comes through the facts and details of action, place and time, historical and social cues, and the reader's perspective. This is the reader's horizon which the reader approaches from a definite perspective. The corpus of Rabbah bar bar Hannah tales alters the perspective of the reader with each tale, providing different character, textual, and geographic cues. It is the concept of the meeting of horizons that intrigued me in trying to understand these stories. It is impossible to place one's self historically in the place of Rabbah bar bar Hannah or any of the other figures in the stories. We cannot know precisely what each symbol and word evoked for the ancient listener or reader. We can try to understand why we imagine, how we imagine and what we imagine about a world beyond our own immediate physical presence. My approach is to bring these understandings together to take these tales beyond meaning defined by parable, travel narrative, or exegetical explanations to that of the meeting of the human experience with human imagination.

I view the tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah as a conceptual attempt to imagine how to break through the barriers of the physical world to a metaphysical divine world. Yet, in which direction is the path to the metaphysical? The tales are like emissaries sent in many directions, each sent over the horizon to see with what they might return. The tales are meant to poke holes between the known world and the world that can only be imagined. The first group sets off into the domain of the sea. The next sets off into the domain of Sassanian Babylonian culture. And the last sets off into the domain of the desert. Each group of emissaries explores a domain and returns, bringing back stories laced with imagery that helps to inform a notion of what lies over the horizon. In this sense, the domains within the stories come to parallel the idea of horizon in

²⁸ Ibid., 69.

the strategy of reading. Each domain and each story within each domain provides a different perspective, fusing into the meaning horizon of the tales.

The first direction in which Rabbah bar bar Hannah takes the reader is out to sea on ships. Travel of great distances was known to the Jews of Babylonia and Palestine but the preferred method of travel between the two locales was overland. The sea route was much less traveled and known to be even more perilous.²⁹ The sea would have been outside the experience of the Jew studying in the beit midrash of Babylonia. The water they knew of flowed in the Euphrates, Tigris and canals. Although the river could be treacherous while flooding, the waves of these stories were beyond that experience. In order to even imagine the sea, the reader would need a guide. The guide provides the knowledge and expertise used to sail out from land. This guide, the נְחוֹתַי יָמָא, *nichotai yama*, the seafarers, is found in the first two stories of the corpus.

The second direction I will discuss takes the reader through the desert. Although the route would have been well known to a traveller such as Rabbah bar bar Hannah, so too would be its hazards. Just as the sea had its great waves that could drown a ship, the desert had dry winds, sands, tribes of robbers and thieves. The desert could not be traversed without a competent guide, the טַיִיעָא, *tei'a*, the one who could navigate the land space between Palestine and Babylonia. The one who knew the secrets of the מַתֵּי מִדְבָּר, *matei midbar*, the dead of the desert, the way to הַר סִינַי, Mt. Sinai, the place to find בְּנֵי קֹרַח, the tribe of Korach, and the place הֵיכָא דְנִשְׁקִי אַרְעָא וְרִקְיעָא אַהֲדָדִי, where heaven and earth touch one another.

A third horizon is encountered by the reader in the myths of the strange creatures and people. In the text, they are sandwiched in between the sea and desert tales. As I will discuss

29 Ellen Churchill Semple, *The Ancient Piedmont Route of Northern Mesopotamia*, vol. 8, *Geographical Review* 3 ([New York]: [American Geographical Society.], 1919).

below, these creatures and scenes were held in the common collective consciousness of Sassanian Babylonia, for both Jew and non-Jew. These tales represent a kind of travel as well. The travel takes place in the realm of culture. Rabbah bar bar Hannah travels outside the walls of the beit midrash and brings back to it legends and references to strange creatures that are also found in Zoroastrian Avesta literature.

Structure of the Corpus

Chapter Five of Bava Batra begins with a halakhic discussion about buying and selling of a ship. It discusses what specifically is sold along with the ship, understanding that a shell of wood is of little use to the traveller or merchant without sails, masts, and oars. But the discussion is abruptly interrupted with the corpus of tales which seem unrelated to the halakhah except for the basic theme of seafaring, as mentioned above. Kiperwasser and Shapira point out that Abraham Weiss proposed that the corpus of tales found in Bava Batra 73a-75b constitutes an independent block of narrative. He described them as a small “tractate” unto themselves, calling them the “tractate of wonders and visions.”³⁰ He proposed that the tales ought to be considered as divided up into 5 groups.

1. Two stories about the force of sea waves (73a–b);
2. Rabbah bar Bar Ḥanah’s journeys (73b);
3. Sea voyages of the sages (74a);
4. Stories on Behemoth and Leviathan at the eschatological feast (74b);
5. The preparation of an eschatological feast (74b–75a);
6. An epilogue comprising of eschatological stories (75b).

³⁰ Kiperwasser and Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica II,” 206.

Only the first two divisions concern the travels of Rabbah bar bar Hannah, which are the focus here. The introductory attribution of the tales in Weiss' first two divisions indicate that they are distinctly the corpus of Rabbah bar bar Hannah. They begin with either, *amar Rabbah* or *amar Rabbah bar bar Hannah*. The difference between these two attributions will be discussed below. After Weiss' first two divisions, there are many attributes to other rabbis with no consistency, repetition or pattern.

Dan Ben-Amos noted that the tall tales of the Talmud have a distinctive structure.³¹ The tale is set off by an opening formula. This is not necessarily the first words of the story but a distinctive phrase which sets it apart from the surrounding text or other stories. In the case of the Rabbah bar bar Hannah corpus, the function of the opening formula has a dual purpose. It both signals the beginning of a new tale and also serves to group the tales into subdivisions. The repetition of opening phrases of stories is not unique to the corpus of Rabbah bar bar Hannah tales but rather to tales throughout the Talmud. Each tale usually has its own structure of opening formulary phrase, followed by two, three parts, or a chiasmic structure. Repetitive wording, signal phrases, or shifts in content set off the different parts of the story.³² I note here the tales as they appear in the order in the Vilna edition with divisions based upon the opening formula.

1. אשתעו לי נחותי ימא – *Those who go down to the sea told me...*

a) The wave that sinks a ship

b) The two waves

31 Ben-Amos, "Talmudic Tall Tales," 35.

32 Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 9.

2. לדידי חזי לי – *I saw for myself that...*
 - a) The juggler
 - b) The antelope
 - c) The frog
3. זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן בספינתא – *Once we were traveling on a ship...*
 - a) The big fish who destroys a town
 - b) The big fish island
 - c) The fish with two fins
 - d) The bird
4. זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן במדברא – *Once we were traveling in the desert*
 - a) The geese
 - b) The Arab Guide
5. תא אחוי לך – *Come I will show you...*
 - a) The dead of the desert
 - b) Mt. Sinai
 - c) The followers of Korach
6. Where heaven and earth touch³³

Kiperwasser agrees with Weiss that the first two tales serve as an introduction to the entire corpus but further suggests that it sets the stage for the theme of the entire corpus, a struggle between two polar opposites. This struggle is a conflict between worlds of chaos and worlds of

³³ Note that this final tale also has the opening formula of תא אחוי לך but I have set it apart because it is the climax of the corpus of tales.

structure.³⁴ In his model, the first two tales introduce the tension between chaos and cosmos, the primordial chaos that becomes contained in order for the cosmos, the world of people to exist. The following tales provide different settings where chaos and order appear, culminating in a final tale where the cosmic implications of the introduction are revisited.

It should be noted that Gunter Stemberger divided the tales on the basis of language differences. He notes that the opening tales are in Aramaic with sporadic usage of Hebrew words and phrases. The later tales are told in Hebrew with sporadic usage of Aramaic words and phrases. The division occurs on 74b with the second story attributed to Rav Yehuda. Each section, Aramaic and Hebrew, seems to be a self-contained, stand alone unit. The Aramaic section has a sandwich like structure consisting of sea – desert – sea – desert tales. The Hebrew section primarily has two parts, the first dominated by the Leviathan and the second dominated by Jerusalem of the world-to-come. The two sections are bound together by the repetition of the themes of the sea and the great fish, and also the allusion or direct reference to the end of days. Stemberger suggests that the entire corpus is a stand-alone unit, unrelated to the halakha of the chapter that was probably edited together rather late in the redaction of the Talmud. It is important to note that the aggadic material could be removed and never missed in the reading of the halakhic material.³⁵

I would like to suggest that there are three groupings of stories within the corpus. These groupings represent different directions in which the narrator, Rabbah bar bar Hannah, takes the reader while traveling outside the beit midrash. The first two directions are geographically distinct and easily identifiable, the sea and the desert. The third direction is not represented by

34 Kiperwasser, “Rabba bar bar Hana’s Voyages,” 228.

35 G Stemberger, “Münchhausen und die Apokalyptik,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism*. 20, no. 1 (1989): 61–83.

geography but rather culture. This direction is represented by the tale of the juggler and the following tales about strange creatures, including a huge frog, a mammoth newborn antelope, and a gigantic bird. These creatures, as we shall see, take the reader in the direction of the surrounding Sassanian culture of the Babylonian beit midrash. They have their analogs in Zoroastrian Avesta texts.³⁶ I will attempt to show that traveling with Rabbah bar bar Hannah in each of these three directions - the sea, the desert, and the culture direction - is to take a journey looking for the deeper meaning of life and perhaps a window into the divine purpose and order of the universe.

Rabbah, Rabbah bar Hannah and Rabbah bar bar Hannah

Although the corpus is referred to as the tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah, the first four tales are attributed not to Rabbah bar bar Hannah but Rabbah. This does not appear to be a textual variant as many manuscripts (Hamburg Codex 165³⁷, printed Vilna Edition, Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.1.8-9, Paris, Bibliothque Nationale, Suppl. Heb. 1337, Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica, Ebr. 115³⁸) agree in this respect. One exception is the Hamburg manuscript which names the narrator as Rabbah bar bar Hannah for the fourth tale. None of the commentators, medieval to modern, make any distinction between “Rabbah” in the opening tales and “Rabbah bar bar Hannah” in the later tales. Rebecca Gleuck Rose stands alone in her

36 Reuven Kiperwasser and Dan D. Y. Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica III: Giant Mythological Creatures in Transition from the Avesta to the Babylonian Talmud,” in *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World: Patterns of Interaction across the Centuries*, vol. 19, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2015).

37 Lazarus Goldschmidt, ed., *Talmud Bavli seder Neziḳin: Ketav-yad Hamburg 165 (19); tsilum faḳsimili shel ketav ha-yad ha-meḳori bi-tseruf tsilum mahadurat L. Goldshmidt (Berlin 1914) ha-kolelet shihzur metsuyar, mavo ye-he'arot me-et ha-mahadir = The Babylonian Talmud Seder nezikin, Codex Hambourg 165 (19) ; a facsimile of the original manuscript and a reprint of the Goldschmidt ed. (Berlin, 1914) including a handdrawn reconstruction, introduction and notes by the editor*. (Jerusalem: Makor, 1969), <http://www.otzar.org/wotzar/book.aspx?16666>.

38 “Online Treasury of Talmudic Manuscripts,” *Jewish National and University Library*, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/talmud/> Firenze, Paris and Vatican manuscripts are accessible through this website.

assertion that “Rabbah” of the first two tales may be Rabbah bar Hannah, the father of Rabbah bar bar Hannah. Her argument relies upon separating the narrator of the tales into two, one for the introductory water tales and one for later water tales and the desert tales. She notes small variations in text, primarily the use of *hey* rather than *aleph* in the name Rabbah, and the use or omission of a connective *vav hachibur* meaning “and”. She also points to a mnemonic device that is present in the Vatican Codex but not in others. She states that the mnemonics are attributed to the earlier or later tales' narrator. However, the mnemonic devices are not attributed to authors, but rather are inserted in between textual units with no attribution. It seems a stretch to attribute mnemonic devices to the narrators of the stories when they are most likely later additions by redactors as aides for remembering the order of elements of sugyot. Further, although this is an interesting analysis, it is a clear departure from the way these tales have been read in the history of Jewish interpretation. Avraham Weiss and Gunter Stemberger both conclude that the aggadah here is a complete unit, thus it seems to be reasonable to side with the tradition of interpretation and not make an overt distinction between Rabbah and Rabbah bar bar Hannah.

Tales of the Sea

The sea tales within the Rabbah bar bar Hannah corpus describe one horizon at which the physical and metaphysical worlds meet. The metaphysical world is related through symbols in the physical world that direct the imagination toward a primordial creation. In Genesis and in Psalms, the known world was created, formed, and separated from the sea. Therefore, travel out to sea is possibly an attempt to find is a portal to the world of the Creator. But travel upon the sea is dangerous. It contains giant waves that threaten to sink ships and assault its shores. It

contains fish so large that they are mistaken for islands, and waters of infinite depth. It requires a guide who can navigate between the two worlds. The נחותי ימא, *nichutei yama* are the guides, able to subdue waves and navigate across the sea, able to cross the liminal space between two worlds, the world of man and the world of God.

The Seafarers

The first tale begins with the phrase, אמר רבה, אשתעו לי נחותי ימא, translated quite literally as “Rabba said, it was told to me by those who go down to the sea”. *Nichutei yama* has been rendered by some as “seafarers”³⁹ This sets the scene for Rabba bar bar Hannah telling the tale that he heard from men who make their living traveling upon the water. This is focal shift. The focus of the discussion of Chapter Five thus far is the conversation concerning halakha.

Although the conversation is about about ships, it must be remembered that this conversation happens in the beit midrash. The focus of the members of the Babylonian rabbinic world is inward. Even when the rabbis go outside the beit midrash, as we saw above with Rav studying with the shepherd in Sanhedrin 5b, the purpose is to bring necessary information into the beit midrash for understanding Torah. Study of Torah for Torah's sake alone is the route to bridging between the world of the beit midrash and the divine world.

In contrast, the introduction of the seafarers shifts the perspective. The perspective shifts from being bound by the culture and rules of the beit midrash to being unbound by the expanse of the sea. By retelling the tale in their name, the narrator puts the reader in the place of the *nichutei yama*. Understanding the content of the stories requires understanding the qualities of

³⁹ Eisenstein, *The Tales of Rabbah Bar-Bar Hannah*.

the *nichutei yama*. This is not a simple phrase but a complex one operating on two levels. In the beit midrash of Rabba bar bar Hannah's time, around the turn of the fourth century CE, the *nichutei* were the travelers between Palestine and Bavli, bringing the teachings of Palestine to the diaspora.⁴⁰ Sages were known to have travelled from Palestine to Babylonia as early as the second century CE. Mishna Eduyot 8:5 and Yevamot 17:7 mention a Tanna Nehemia ish beit Deli. Jacob Neusner asserted that evidence showed that Nehemia had studied in Jerusalem, and was a student of Gamliel I. At some time he must have traveled and established residence in Nehardea in Babylonia.⁴¹ Many others would follow Nehemia's path. In the third and fourth century some of them were referred to as *nichutei*, or those who descended. Rabbah bar bar Hannah was one of many *nichutei*. Others included Rabbi Dimi, Samuel ben Yehuda, Rabin, and Rabbi Yitzhak ben Joseph.⁴²

In the Rabbah bar bar Hannah tales, the *nichutei* are not sages, but rather are *nichutei yama*, seafarers. However, the seafarer should not be mistaken for a simple man going to sea for his livelihood. Rather, the seafarer, like the sage from Palestine, is a respected person who has specialized knowledge. The special knowledge of the *nichutei yama* is only attainable by going to sea. The rabbis recognize this knowledge and consult with the *nichutei yama* in order to access knowledge that they themselves did not possess.⁴³ The intent of the rabbis of the beit midrash was to forward the proper interpretation of Torah and halakha. However, as we will see below, Rabbah bar bar Hannah was a conduit of a different type of knowledge than the rabbis of

40 See Sukkah 43b, Chullin 101b and 124a for examples of נחורי referring to rabbis or groups of rabbis ferrying between Palestine and Bavel.

41 Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 53.

42 Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature*, 43.

43 See for example Bavli Shabbat 20b and 21a where seafarers are consulted as to items prohibited to be used for lighting Shabbat lights. and Nidah 10b and 39b where seafarers who accompany Rabin and as a group attest to the correct interpretation of halakha.

the beit midrash sought. He brought the experiential knowledge of the *nichutei yama* into the beit midrash. Rabbah bar bar Hannah was a bridge between two spheres, the sphere in which the rabbis operate and another sphere in which *nichutei yama* operate. This presented an opportunity to those in the beit midrash to envision another route for understanding God and traversing the space between the physical world and the metaphysical world. But, as we will see, the rabbis are not particularly interested in the bridge that Rabbah bar bar Hannah was building.

Yassif and Ben-Amos note that another important feature of the tales is their setting of remoteness.⁴⁴ Remoteness conjures a sense of the unknown. The setting of the tales removes the reader from a place of certainty, a place where knowledge is grounded in what can be experienced by the senses. Remoteness takes the student or the sage out of the beit midrash. It places them in an alternate space where what is known must be grounded in imagination. Remoteness in the physical world is used as a parallel for the intellectual remoteness of the divine world. The reader cannot see the remote landscape but must depend upon the report of others with knowledge. The same is true of intellectual remoteness. No person can imagine the world of the divine with any degree of certainty similar to the way in which the physical world can be known and imagined. But, moving the setting of the stories to a remote physical place increases the dependence of the reader upon imagination. It primes the reader's creative sense to imagine something beyond the physical world.

The mention of the occupation of the seafarer must have conjured anxiety of the unknown. Expanding the phrase, *nichutei yama*, to mean not just a seafarer, but those who chose to engage the sea, confront the unknown, abandon the safety of land to go out upon the sea, brings a different perspective to the tale. By this shift in perspective, the corpus begins not with

44 Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale*.

a tall tale which is a fanciful vision or a simple hyperbolic story, but rather a serious undertaking by men setting out to navigate over a horizon, beyond sight, beyond the safety of land, to somewhere that can only be imagined by those not on the journey. Tale 1b takes the reader to such a place: זימנא חדא הוה אזלינן באורחא, ודלינן גלא עד דחוינן בי מרבעתיה דכוכבא זוטא. Once, [they related], we were on a voyage, and the wave lifted us up so high that we saw the resting place of the smallest star.⁴⁵ Only the *nichutei yama* have access to the place to which they have travelled. The reports of the *nichutei yama* must, by necessity, be trusted.

The *nichutei yama* become the eyewitnesses to another world. They travel to a theoretical place at the intersection of two worlds. The imaginative world inside the beit midrash that is woven from the fabric of Torah and midrash suggests the existence of the second world, the world of the divine. This is not unfamiliar territory for the rabbis of the beit midrash. One of the most well known examples of this is found at b. Chagiga 14b.

תנו רבנן: ארבעה נכנסו בפרדס, ואלו הן: בן עזאי, ובן זומא, אהר, ורבי עקיבא. אמר להם רבי עקיבא: כשאתם מגיעין אצל אבני שיש טהור אל תאמרו מים מים משום שנאמר (תהלים ק"א) דובר שקרים לא יכון לנגד עיני. בן עזאי הציץ ומת, עליו הכתוב אומר (תהלים קט"ז) יקר בעיני ה' המוטה לחסידיו. בן זומא הציץ ונפגע, ועליו הכתוב אומר (משלי כ"ה) דבש מצאת אכל דרך פן תשבענו והקאתו. אהר קיצץ בנטיעות. רבי עקיבא יצא בשלום.

Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the Garden, namely, Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher, and R. Akiba. R. Akiba said to them: When ye arrive at the stones of pure marble, say not, water, water! For it is said: *he who speaks untruth shall not stand before my eyes.* ° (Ps. 101:7) Ben Azzai cast a look and died. Of him Scripture says: *The death of His faithful ones is grievous in the Lord's sight.* ° (Ps. 116:15) Ben Zoma looked and became demented. Of him Scripture says: *If you find honey, eat only what you need, Lest, surfeiting yourself, you throw it up.* ° (Prov. 25:16) Aher mutilated the shoots. R. Akiba departed unhurt.

b. Chagiga 14b

45 b. Bava Batra 73a.

Here four attempt to enter the *pardes*, is often interpreted as a heavenly ascent into paradise. Paradise can be interpreted as a return to the Garden of Eden, the original perfect place which humankind was not able to master. Lawrence Hoffman offers an interpretation that identifies the soul as the most perfect part of a human being and thus the most divine. The purpose of entry into the *pardes*, was to cleave the soul to God. Only Rabbi Akiva approaches the perfection required to enter *pardes* and return unharmed.⁴⁶ Even without this interpretation, the *pardes* story is an indication that the rabbis contemplated a divine world beyond their own physical world.

The opening of the first tale of Rabbah bar bar Hannah signals that it is a report that opens a door to a different world for the receiver of the tale. אמר רבה, אשתעו לי נחותי ימא signifies that a report is being given by Rabbah bar bar Hannah but the eyewitnesses are the *nichutei yama*. Rabbah bar bar Hannah represents an extension from the beit Midrash. The beit midrash represents the whole of rabbinic knowledge of the written law and the oral law. Rabbah bar bar Hannah's travels bring him to a place where he can meet the *nichutei yama* who represent the outside world and are an extension from the divine world through their report.

The setting of the sea places the sage, Rabbah bar bar Hannah in a place where his knowledge, which is grounded in the beit midrash, is not entirely useful. Rather, he must depend upon the expertise of the *nichutei yama*. The dependence of sages is encountered elsewhere in Babylonian Talmud, outside these tales. In Shabbat 20b, the sages of Babylon depend upon the נחותי ימא to explain terms they do not understand,

ולא בכלך: אמר שמואל שאלתינהו לכל נחותי ימא ואמרי (לה) כולכא שמיא

46 Lawrence A Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries: Vol. 7 ; Shabbat at Home* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub, 2002), 16–18.

And we also learned in the mishna that one may not light with kalakh. Shmuel said: I asked all seafarers, and they said to me that the present-day name of kalakh mentioned in the mishna is kulka.

b.Shabbat 20b

Here the sages depend upon the knowledge of the seafarer to explain the meaning of כלך with which it is forbidden to kindle the shabbat lights. Shmuel brings this knowledge by way of inquiry of the *nichutei yama*. He brings their knowledge to the table again in Shabbat 21a,

ולא בשמן קיק וכו': מאי שמן קיק אמר שמואל שאילתינהו לכל נחותי
ימא ואמר לי עוף אחד יש בכרכי הים וקיק שמו

And we learned in the mishna that one may not light the Shabbat lamp with kik oil. The Gemara asks: What is kik oil? Shmuel said: I asked all the seafarers, and they said to me that there is a bird in the cities on the sea coast, and kik is its name. Kik oil is produced from that bird.

b.Shabbat 21a

It should be noted that in both cases, other rabbis offer alternative meanings for these words and the meaning known by the *nichutei yama* as relayed through Shmuel is not accepted. Nonetheless, Shmuel is a respected figure in the Talmud, the head of the academy at Nehardea. The rejection his meaning by the other rabbis seems to say clearly that they do not regard the report by Shmuel as reliable. Yet, the report is preserved in the text. It seems that the text could be focusing not on the specific information but the source. It is showing the reader that it is not unusual that those outside of the beit midrash community would be trusted for specialized knowledge. Note that, like Shmuel's reports, Rabbah bar bar Hannah's reports are also not looked upon favorably. In two places within the corpus is the following text found,

כי אתאי לקמיה דרבנן, אמרו לי: כל אבא - חמרא, וכל בר בר חנה - סיכסא

When I came before the Rabbis they said unto me: Every Abba is an ass and every Bar Bar Hana is a fool.

b.Bava Batra 74a

The rabbis here have commented negatively upon what Rabbah bar bar Hannah reported to have done while on his travels. They object not to the tales he told, but to his behavior in the tales. Their response is elevated to the level of rebuke. Every “Abba” here elevates the rebuke by a patrilineal reference to Rabbah bar bar Hannah's lesser known father Abbah bar Hannah. He, as discussed above, is the lesser known and consistently deferential cousin of Rav. By this rebuke, they say that his lack of understanding of what happened in the story has labeled him a fool. The specific reasons for their objection to his behavior will be discussed in more detail later but in short, their objection is not that he went outside the beit midrash for information but rather what he did not do when he was in the places he reported to have been. Rabbah bar bar Hannah appears to believe that this knowledge is only attainable by experiential knowledge. He goes to great lengths to get the information, either by report, or by his own experience.

God and the Sea

There is ample reason for Rabbah bar bar Hannah to turn to the sea in search of the domain of God. The biblical references are many that delineate the relationship between God and the sea. Avraham Weiss asserted that the tales are a detailed commentary upon Psalms, particularly Psalms 104 and 107.⁴⁷ The introduction of the *nichutaie yama* indicates that Rabbah bar bar Hannah is looking for first hand accounts of the mysteries of creation and the world-to-

47 Kiperwasser and Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica II.”

come. The images reported in the tales of what lay over the physical horizon were clues to what lay beyond the metaphysical horizon, beyond the limits of understanding attainable by study alone of those *beit midrash*. Recall that Rav himself was a model for this type of behavior when he studied animals with a shepherd for eighteen months as noted above in *Sanhedrin* 5b.

The first tale reports the encounter of the seafarers with a rogue wave that is capable of sinking a ship. The scene is a parallel to Psalm 107,

יורדי הים באניות עשי מלאכה במים רבים: הִמָּה רָאוּ מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה וּנְפִלְאוֹתָיו
בְּמִצְלָה: וַיֹּאמֶר וַיַּעֲמֵד רוּחַ סְעָרָה וַתִּרְוּמִם גְּלִיוֹ: יַעֲלוּ שָׁמַיִם יִרְדּוּ תְהוֹמוֹת
נַפְשָׁם בְּרָעָה תִתְמוֹגֵג: יִחוּגּוּ וַיִּנּוּעוּ כְּשֹׁכֵר וְכָל־חֲכָמָתָם תִּתְבַּלֵּעַ: וַיִּצְעֲקוּ
אֶל־יְהוָה בַּצָּר לָהֶם וּמִמִּצְוִקוֹתֵיהֶם יוֹצִיאֵם: יָקָם סְעָרָה לְדַמְמָה וַיַּחֲשׂוּ גְלִיָּהֶם:

Others go down to the sea in ships, ply their trade in the mighty waters;
they have seen the works of the LORD and His wonders in the deep. By
His word He raised a storm wind that made the waves surge. Mounting up
to the heaven, plunging down to the depths, disgorging in their misery,
they reeled and staggered like a drunken man, all their skill to no avail. In
their adversity they cried to the LORD, and He saved them from their
troubles. He reduced the storm to a whisper; the waves were stilled.

Ps. 107:23-29

The scenes in the tale and the psalm are strikingly similar. In the psalm, the seafarers, here the Hebrew *yordei hayam*, *yordei hayam*, which parallels to the tale's Aramaic *nichutei yama*, have gone down to the sea in ships but they are tossed about and are powerless against the sea. The Vilna Gaon sees this parallel as well and interprets the life of man as like a ship traversing seas. He equates the waves of the tale and the Psalm with the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination of man. The ship represents a person traveling along the path of their life. The *yetzer hara* is the wave that can sink the ship of a man's life.⁴⁸ In the Psalm, the prayers of the seafarers are heard

⁴⁸ Elijah ben Solomon, *Perush 'al Kamah Agadot*.

by God and He saves them by calming the seas Himself. In the tale however, the *nichutei yama* are not powerless. Rather, they possess special knowledge which allows them to invoke the name of God,

...ומחינן ליה באלוותא דחקיק עליה: אהיה אשר אהיה יה ד' צבאות אמן אמן סלה,
ונייד.

...and when stricken with clubs on which is engraven, I am that I am, Yah, the Lord of Hosts, Amen, Amen, Selah, it subsides.

Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 73a

It can be inferred from the text that the seafarers are the bearers of a club engraved with an invocation of God's name with which they strike the wave in order to calm it. It is by their action, not their calling out for the action of God, that they are saved from the rogue wave. As Grossmark indicates, it is their knowledge of the divine name that invests them with magical powers. She notes that the club is an amulet and that the use of such a tool is well documented in rabbinic literature.⁴⁹ For the purposes of this tale, the appearance of a similar amulet in Deuteronomy Rabbah is illustrative of such use,

וכשיצאו ישראל ממצרים לא עשה להם נסים אלא על המים מנין
שנאמר (תהלים קיד) הים ראה וינוס מה ראה רבי נהוראי אמר שם
המפורש ראה חקוק על המטה ונקרע

And when Israel came out of Egypt He did miracles for them only through water. From where do we know this? As it is said (Psalm 114:3), *the sea saw and fled*. What did it see? Rabbi Nehoria said: it saw the Tetragrammaton engraved upon the staff (of Moses) and it was parted.

Midrash Rabbah Deut. 3:8

49 Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature*, 72–73.

Note that here, similar to the first tale, the sea responds to the staff in the hands of a person, Moses. The sea was not commanded or controlled by God, rather it was the action of Moses wielding the amulet. In the biblical account, God reminds Moses that *he* possesses the power that is in the amulet. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִה־תִּצָּעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיֹסֵעוּ: וְאַתָּה הָרַם אֶת־מִטְךָ. וַיִּנָּטֶה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וּבָקְעָהּוּ Israelites to go forward. And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it."⁵⁰ That the reader is informed of the engraved staff of Moses makes clear that the staff engraved with the name of God is the critical element. Moses was the possessor of the necessary implement, the power was not in Moses himself. This is made clear earlier in the biblical text as well when Moses is first given and taught the power of the staff.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִזֶּה [מה]־[זֶה] בְּיָדְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה: וַיֹּאמֶר הִשְׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנָחָשׁ וַיִּנָּס מִפְּנֵי: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה שְׁלַח יָדְךָ וְאַחֲזֵהוּ בְּזַנְבוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּחְזַק בּוֹ וַיְהִי לְמִטָּה בְּכַפּוֹ: לְמַעַן יֵאֱמִינוּ כִּי־נִרְאָה אֵלָיְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב:

The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he replied, “A rod.” He said, “Cast it on the ground.” He cast it on the ground and it became a snake; and Moses recoiled from it. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail” — he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand — “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you.”

Ex. 4:2-5

God further tells Moses in 4:17 to take the staff with him when he goes back to Egypt. God had not taught Moses how to exercise certain divine powers. He had showed him the power of the amulet that he was to use. The possession of the amulet provided powers to the person possessing it, whether Moses or a seafarer, to subdue overwhelming forces which otherwise

⁵⁰ Ex. 14:15-16.

would have caused destruction.

In the second tale, the narrator relayed a conversation overheard by the *nichutei yama*. He told of their terrifying experience of being lifted up by waves, seemingly into the heavens. They had been lifted to such a height that they were close to a small star, and supposed that they could have been burned by the heat from that star. But this incredible journey is overshadowed by what is relayed next. They have been elevated to such a level that they are able to overhear a conversation which they otherwise could not have heard. The conversation is between the two giant waves.

ורמי לה גלא קלא לחברתה: חבירתי, שבקת מידי בעלמא דלא
שטפתיה, דניתי אנא ונאבדיה? א"ל: פוק חזי גבורתא דמריך, מלא
חוטא חלא ולא עברי, שנאמר: (ירמיהו ה') האותי לא תיראו נאם ה' אם
מפני לא תחילו אשר שמתי חול גבול לים חוק עולם ולא יעברנהו.

And one wave called to the other: "My friend, have you left anything in the world that you did not wash away? Shall I go and destroy it?" The other replied: "Go and see the power of your Master [by whose command] I must not pass the sand [of the shore even as much as] the breadth of a thread"; as it is written: *Should you not revere Me — says the LORD — Should you not tremble before Me, Who set the sand as a boundary to the sea, As a limit for all time, not to be transgressed? Though its waves toss, they cannot prevail; Though they roar, they cannot pass it* (Jer 5:22).

b.Bava Batra 73a

This story seems on the surface to be a fanciful tall tale, but its hyperbole and exaggeration disguise deeper meaning. The seafarers have been lifted to the heavens and are privy to the anthropomorphic conversation of the waves. The conversation between the two waves is a device to take the reader into another domain, not in order to hear waves speak, but rather to understand the workings of one of nature's most awe-inspiring phenomena. The *nichutei yama* crossed over the horizon that separates the physical world from the world in which

they were able to hear the primordial waters of creation speaking to one another. Rashi relates the conversation between the waves to another Psalm,

אֱלֹהֵי עָלִי נִפְשִׁי תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה עַל־כֵּן אֶזְכְּרֶךָ מֵאֶרֶץ יַרְדֵּן וְחַרְמוֹנִים מִהָר
מִצְעָר: תְּהוֹם־אֶל־תְּהוֹם קוֹרֵא לְקוֹל צְנוּרֶיךָ כָּל־מִשְׁבְּרֶיךָ וְגִלְיֶךָ עָלַי
עָבְרוּ:

My God, my being is bent for my plight. Therefore do I recall You from Jordan land, from the Hermons and Mount Mizar. Deep unto deep calls out at the sound of Your channels; all Your breakers and waves have surged over me.

Psalm 42:7-8⁵¹

Here the psalmist invoked the grand majesty of nature as the place to search for and beseech God. The scene transformed from the grand heights in the North of Eretz Yisrael to the depths of the sea. But note the word usage, תְּהוֹם־אֶל־תְּהוֹם קוֹרֵא, referring not to waves but rather the depths from which creation begins. By reference this leads the reader to Genesis.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֶּהוֹ וּבְהוּ
וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם:

When God began to create heaven and earth — the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water.

Genesis 1:1-2

The reader is taken by Rabbah bar bar Hannah, with the assistance of the seafarers, to a place and time before the earth's grandeur was as they saw it in their present day. The reader is taken to a place when there was nothing but God ruling over the chaotic primordial waters. The place that would become the physical world through the act of God's creation is at that point תֶּהוּ וּבְהוּ, an amorphous nothingness. At this point, prior to the first matter separated out of the chaos,

⁵¹ Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

the *tohu va'vohu* is referred to as תהום, the infinite deep, and המים, the waters, all synonymous with *tohu va'vohu*.⁵² The *nichutei yama* have provided the path to such a place before anything existed, matter as we know it or even time. They have provided the path to a place where there was nothing at all formed.

Tales of the Desert

The desert tales within the Rabbah bar bar Hannah corpus describe a second horizon where cultural experience meets an imagined metaphysical world. The desert is well known to readers of Tanakh. Abram comes up through the desert from Ur of the Chaldeans to the place where he was promised land, not for himself but for all his descendants as a covenant.⁵³ The promise was repeated to Isaac and Jacob.⁵⁴ The descendants of Jacob flourished in Egypt but the land of their refuge from famine became a place of oppression under the rule of Pharaoh. Their presence in Egypt become an exile. The end of this exile only comes through God's redemption. The Israelites set out to cross the desert, led by God's prophet Moses, in order to return to the Promised Land. But, by divine decree, they were forced to leave an unredeemed generation in the desert, the מתי מדבר, *matei midbar*. After the Israelites did cross over into the Promised Land, they lost their inheritance with the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the Babylonian exile; and then again in 70 CE at the hands of the Romans, initiating the exile of the Diaspora. As Zvi Ben-Dor notes in his article regarding the peculiar dilemma of Iraqi Jews in

52 Jack Sasson, "Time to Begin," in *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane, Emanuel Tov, and Weston Fields (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 183–94. Sasson suggests, like many scholars of the biblical text in its ancient near eastern context, that the second verse of Genesis ought to be read as a parenthetical statement of the first verse. It is stating the situation prior to creation. Since everything at that point is in the state *tohu va'vohu*, there is no differentiation between any of the elements mentioned, the water, the earth, or the deeps.

53 To Abraham the promise of land is made multiple times: Gen. 12:7, Gen. 13:17, Gen. 15:18, Gen. 17:8.

54 To Isaac, Gen. 26:3; to Jacob, Gen. 28:13, 35:12

modern Israel, that conceptions of the Babylonian exile has shaped all Jewish thought of the concept since.⁵⁵ In many ways, exile defined Jews and Judaism from the time of this exile until the enlightenment when Jews began to have opportunities to integrate their Jewish identity into their diaspora communities. However, even considering the affluence and high stature of modern Jews throughout the world, making a return to Israel as a homeland still carries a redemptive quality, that of making *aliyah*.⁵⁶ *Aliyah* is unlike any other movement of a diaspora people. It is a movement with the theological significance of returning to a biblically promised land. Although communities did and do flourish in the Diaspora, a longing for Eretz Yisrael is ever-present. The *matei midbar* are a representation of the perpetual state of exile of the Jewish people.

Rabbah bar bar Hannah's travels established the perspective of the reader in Sassanian Babylonia. Whether the exile was in Babylon or any place in the modern Diaspora, exile can be understood as delayed fulfillment of the covenant of the Promised Land to the Patriarchs. The travels of Rabbah bar bar Hannah in the desert represent the desire to cross a horizon where exile meets redemption. Just as coming up out of Egypt required the guidance of Moses, traversing the desert of exile also requires a guide, here in the form of *הדורא טייעא*, *hahu tei'a*, the Arab traveler. He possesses the knowledge and powers to provide safe passage. The route revealed travelled by Rabbah bar bar Hannah and his companions, lead by the *tei'a* passed several points conjured from Israelite biblical history: *מתי מדבר*, the dead of the desert; the heights of *הר סיני*, Mt. Sinai, the place where the band of Korah swallowed up by the earth. All of these return the reader to the scenes of the initial redemption of the Israelites out of Egypt during their trek across

55 Zvi Ben-Dor, "Invisible Exile: Iraqi Jews in Israel," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 3, no. 1 (2006): 141.

56 Ibid., 143.

the desert. This route alludes to not just one generation cut off from redemption but every generation in exile. The Jew in Babylonia, or any other place in the Diaspora throughout Jewish history may have been wherever they were by their own choice. But at the same time, at least until the 20th century, there was little hope of a return to in Palestine. A return from exile, to a vibrant, Jewish Palestine was just not possible. There are certainly cases where Jews denied that a return to a physical Zion was desired. This is most notable in the American Jewish experience. The American Jewish experience transformed Zion from a place in Eretz Yisrael to the place where one resided in tranquility, freedom and security, thus negating the sense of exile. This experience is unique. In most other cases, diaspora, even in its most affluent and comfortable iterations throughout the centuries, had at the least, a tinge of the exilic. The Jewish collective consciousness of exile carries with it a desire for redemption. Jews pray and express a desire for a return to Zion, to be redeemed. Some may envision this redemption to come by the God given strength of their own minds and bodies while others as an act of God. Some desire for an actual, physical return; others for a conceptual return. A return to Zion, actual or conceptual, represents redemption from exile. The last of the fifteen tales points to redemption. Rabbah bar bar Hannah travels the route of the generation permanently exiled in the desert. The *tei'a* directs Rabbah bar bar Hannah to a place where the heavens and earth meet. The *tei'a* offers a glimpse through a window in the horizon of the desert, a glimpse into the divine world, a glimpse of redemption.

The Geese

The first tale of the desert, the tale of the geese, has a similar purpose as the first two stories of the sea. The tale seems to serve as an introduction to the desert tales. By its symbolic

reference, it provides not only a setting for the tales but also a worldview through which to read the remainder of the desert tales. Its symbols provide further reference to the world-to-come, specifically the feast awaiting the righteous. The tale begins by describing a scene that Rabbah bar bar Hannah and his fellow travelers came upon in the desert. Unlike the introductory sea stories, this tale was told from the point of view of Rabbah bar bar Hannah as an eyewitness. And, just as in the later sea stories, he was not alone. He was part of a group who witnessed the scene, אולינן במדברא וחזינן...*we were traveling in the desert and we saw*. But his companions were not identified as they were in the sea tales. In the sea tales, his companions were the *nichutei yama*. Here, his companions are anonymous. The *nichutei yama* were the reliable witnesses. It could be that the symbols to follow are so strong that they do not need the reliable expert witness. Rather, the *tei'a* leads Rabbah bar bar Hannah to the scenes where he alone was the witness. When he returns to the beit midrash, the scenes he reported were familiar and inherently accepted as reliable report by his rabbinic audience. No expert was required.

Several commentators offer allegorical interpretations of the tale of the geese. The scene witnessed by Rabbah bar bar Hannah was of geese whose feathers had dropped due to their fatness. They had become so fat that they could not even move. From underneath the geese, rivers of fat were flowing. The Ritba suggests that there are two geese involved in this story, one that represents Edom and the other Ishmael.⁵⁷ The Ritba suggested by this reference that the slaughter of Edom in Isaiah should be contrasted with the bliss of a Jerusalem that stands with the Lord. The Ritba's reference to Ishmael is found in Jeremiah. In Jeremiah, the assassination of Gedaliah by a zealous Ishmael caused the flight of the Judeans, Jeremiah included, to Egypt.

57 Adin Steinsaltz, ed., *The Steinsaltz Talmud Bavli, Small Tractate Bava Batra*. (Koren Pub, 2011), 317 see עיונים for explanation of the views of the Ritba and Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, the Maharsha.

The two geese represent Edom and Ishmael as they become God fearing in the end of days. Israel will be held responsible for their lack of repentance and thus not bringing about the repentance of Edom and Ishmael sooner.⁵⁸

A few commentators interpreted the geese in more auspicious terms. Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, the Maharsha, suggests that the fat running from the geese represented attainment of spirituality.⁵⁹ He suggests that Rabbah bar bar Hannah goes into the desert seeking solitude in order to increase his spirituality. The *tei'a* represents someone who has gained a level of spirituality equivalent to a *moshiach* as indicated by his ability to smell the truth. The *tei'a* is able to tell the level of spiritual ascent of a man by smelling the earth. The earth representing man.

Rabbah bar bar Hannah asked them, presumably the geese, if he would have a part of them in the world-to-come. Here he was referring to the feast set at the table of the righteous in the end of days. One such description of the feast follows here,

לע"ל עתיד הקב"ה לעשות סעודה לצדיקים בג"ע ואין צריכין לא בפלסמון ולא
ראשי בשמים אלא רוח צפון ורוח דרום מכבדות וזוחלות כל ביסמני ג"ע
ונותנים ריחם הה"ד הפיחי גני זה כיבוד הגן יזלו בשמיו זה זילוף

In the hereafter the Holy One, blessed be He, will prepare a feast for the righteous in the Garden of Eden, and there will be no need either of balsam or of choice spices, for the north wind and the south wind will sweep through and sprinkle about all the perfumes of the Garden of Eden,

58 Edom is in reference to Isaiah 34:6: "The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood, It is gorged with fat — The blood of lambs and he-goats, the kidney fat of rams. For the LORD holds a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom." This is an oracle of divine wrath where Edom is likened to fatted animals for slaughter on the altar. Ishmael is a reference to Jeremiah 41:8: "But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, 'Don't kill us! We have stores hidden in a field — wheat, barley, oil, and honey.' " In chapter 41 of Jeremiah, Ishmael assassinates Gedaliah, the governor appointed over Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. This act is in opposition to the pleadings of Jeremiah to King Zedekiah to submit to the King of Babylon. Fear of retribution for Ishmael's act brings the flight to Egypt by the Judeans.

59 Nachman Cohen, *Tractate Bava Basra: Commentary and Study Guide* (Yonkers, N.Y.; Spring Valley, NY: Torah Lishmah Institute ; Distributed by P. Feldheim, 1994), 709.

and they will exhale their fragrance. Hence it is written, Blow upon my garden (S.S. IV, 16); this refers to the sweeping of the garden; That the spices thereof may flow out (ib.) refers to the sprinkling.

Midrash Rabbah Numbers, XIII, 2.⁶⁰

This writer was not able to find specific reference to a goose to be on the table at the feast of the righteous even though Kiperwasser suggests that the goose is part of the feast.⁶¹ The righteous at the banquet are served portions of the Leviathan, Behemoth, and the Ziz.⁶² Perhaps the connection to the table set for the righteous was that geese were connected with wisdom. In Berakhot 57a, it is related that one who sees a goose in a dream should anticipate wisdom. Rav Ashi confirms this by saying that he saw a goose in his dream and that he had ascended to greatness. How the geese connect with the eschatological feast is not completely understood, except that Maharsha relates that the geese lifting their legs is a sign that in order to reap reward in the world-to-come, one must perform acts of righteousness in this world.

The tale of the geese related that one of the geese lifted its wing and the other lifted its thigh. The tale then abruptly changes venue back to the beit midrash where Rabbah bar bar Hannah inquired of Rabbi Eleazar as to the meaning of the geese.⁶³ R. Eleazar responds that Israel in the future will be called to account, presumably for the suffering of the geese. Israel was the cause of the continued suffering of the geese by delaying their repentance. According to both Rashbam and Rabbi Gershom ben Judah (Rabbeinu Gershom, c. 960 – 1040) the

60 "The Judaic classics" (Davka Corp., 1995). N.B. that the English and Hebrew numbering differs. The Hebrew is cited by Davka as the Vilna edition while the English text is from the printed Soncino Press edition of The Midrash Rabbah, V.3, 1977.

61 Kiperwasser, "Rabba bar bar Hana's Voyages," 237.

62 Howard Schwartz and Caren Loebel-Fried, *Tree of Souls the Mythology of Judaism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 508, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10180670>.

63 Shmuel Safrai, "ELEAZAR," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Gale Virtual Reference Library (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2587505760&v=2.1&u=hebrewuc11&it=r&p=GVR&sw=w&asid=7c99b3b6bcd2b0659f3e836725da4565>. Rabbi Eleazar was presumably Eleazar ben Pedat, a Palestinian Amora often consulted by scholars of Babylonia.

implication here is that Israel needs to make *tshuvah* for its actions in order to gain favor for the sake of the geese and presumably the world, as Israel's failure to do so causes strife in the world.⁶⁴ In any of the above interpretations or connections, the geese are symbolic of the situation of Israel in the time of Rabbah bar bar Hannah. Israel's lack of righteous action and making of *tshuvah* prevents the redemption of the world and will result in Israel's inability to reap reward in the world-to-come.

All of the above interpretations seem obscure and in some cases overly complicated. In modern interpretation, Chaim Hirschensohn relates the geese to the situation of the diaspora Jews in Babylon. He draws upon Ezekiel, chapter 34, in part:

...וַאֲמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם לְרֹעִים כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הוּא רֹעֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ
רֹעִים אוֹתָם הֲלוֹא הֵצֵאֵן יִרְעוּ הָרֹעִים: 3 אֶת־הַחֶלֶב תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶת־הַצֶּמֶר
תִּלְבָּשׁוּ הַבְּרִיאָה תִּזְבְּחוּ הֵצֵאֵן לֹא תִרְעוּ:

...and say to them: To the shepherds: Thus said the Lord GOD: Ah, you shepherds of Israel, who have been tending yourselves! Is it not the flock that the shepherds ought to tend? You partake of the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, and you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not tend the flock.

Ezekiel 34:2-3

Ezekiel provides evidence of the situation of the Jews in Babylonia. Hirschensohn sees the fatted geese as an allegory for the wealthy who have forgotten the common people and their homeland. He asserts that the wealthy of Babylonia gave up their Jewish practices, began eating pork, and themselves became fat like the geese. They forgot about their Jewish traditions and forgot about their responsibility to their own people. They forgot about suffering Jews who remained in Palestine and about the poor Jews in their own communities. Hirschensohn also

64 Steinsaltz, *The Steinsaltz Talmud Bavli, Small Tractate Bava Batra*, 317 See עיונים: ליתן עליהם את הדין; Cohen, *Tractate Bava Basra*, 709.

suggests that the Jews longing for return to Zion has dissipated. In his analysis, Ezekiel's prophecy indicates that the suffering soul of Judaism, represented by the geese, was due to the generations in Babylonia that gradually assimilated and forgot their holy city and their sanctifying practices.⁶⁵

However, a cultural shift such as the attitude toward pork consumption is not as straightforward as it might appear. Although the testimony of Ezekiel seems to indicate that the Jewish people had a long standing abhorrence to consumption of pork, in reality, the experience of exile may have actually elevated the level of abhorrence as a means to increase a feeling of Jewish identity. Sarah Nelson indicates that the pork restriction encountered in the early text of Isaiah 65:3-4 and 66:17 depict a situation where pig consumption is private and only witnessed by God. Whereas post-exilic texts such as 2 Maccabees 6:18-20 or 7:1 present public situations where pork consumption was refused even to the risk of one's life. Further there is a paucity of pre-exilic pork restrictive texts while there are many post-exilic.⁶⁶ Both the increase in number of texts and the change in the type of texts indicates that the experience of exile changed Jewish thought concerning pork consumption and perhaps about other characteristics of Jewish identity. From Hirschensohn's perspective, the geese and the Jews of Babylonia have lost the very things that helped them soar; the geese lost their feathers and the Jews lost their connection to their holy city. But, through Nelson's approach, perhaps the exile, rather than being destructive to Jewish identity, may have actually strengthened it. The tale of the geese remains somewhat of a mystery.

⁶⁵ Hirschensohn, *Motsa'e Mayim*, 173–174.

⁶⁶ Sarah M Nelson, ed., *Ancestors for the Pigs: Pigs in Prehistory* (Philadelphia, Pa: MASCA, University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, 1998), 130–131.

The Arab Guide

In the second tale of the desert, the reader is introduced to the *ההוא טייעא*, *hahu tei'a*, or as referred to henceforth, *tei'a*. Rashi indicated that this term referred to an Ishmaelite merchant. Thus the Soncino Talmud Bavli translated this term into English as the “Arab merchant”. The medieval commentators did not vary from this general understanding. The *tei'a* was a desert traveler, probably a merchant, operating in an environment parallel to that of the *nichutei yama*. As a merchant, he brokered goods from all over the world, buying from one and selling to another as they wanted and needed.⁶⁷

Like the sea, the desert is also a place of chaos. The seafarer gave up the structure and order found in the cities and towns to go out to sea where the waves and wind toss him about. The Arab gave up the structure, safety and plentiful resources of towns or oases to go out into the desert heat, wind and paucity of resources. The wilderness of the desert is a place of extreme conditions. Ellen Semple, in her detailed description of the various east-west trade routes of the ancient near east, described these conditions. The route preferred by merchants and armies to travel between the West and the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was along a wide arc to the north. For the merchant sage traveling along this route from Palestine to Babylonia, points on the northward track included Tyre and Sidon. He would have continued further north to the shores of the Gulf of Alexandretta, there turning eastward at Seleucia toward Antioch and the Beilan Pass. The objective was likely to continue east to the Euphrates and then, use either this waterway to carry him south or caravanning along the eastern banks, down to his destination in Sura, Mehoza, Pembudita or other cities of interest. Semple notes however that there was probably always maintained an alternative direct route across the Syrian desert. This trade route

⁶⁷ Steinsaltz, *The Steinsaltz Talmud Bavli, Small Tractate Bava Batra.*, 317. See עיונים: ליתן עליהם את הדין.

was mediated by the desert nomads who moved with the seasons, southeastward to the marshes of the lower Euphrates in the heat of the summer and then northwest again in the winter toward Damascus and Bosra. The nomad of the Syrian desert knew the extreme conditions, knew both how to navigate through the dangers of nature and steer clear of or negotiate with bandits.⁶⁸ I suggest that this desert nomad was probably the same character as the *tei'a*, the Arab, of the tales.

Like the seafarers of the first tale, the Arab has special powers. Tale 4a describes the Arab as having a special sense that allows him to take up dirt and smell it to tell the direction from one place to another. Some commentators suggest that his special powers are hints to other qualities that the Arab possesses that make him an able guide. The Maharal suggests that he has a strong wit or great intelligence. His wandering was a matter of continuous testing of the limits of reality. The Ritba suggested that he had exceptional powers of perception that allowed him to judge the advantages and disadvantages of paths which he confronted.⁶⁹ Grossmark notes that there are many places in the Babylonian Talmud where the *tei'a* is associated with special powers and extraordinary knowledge of the desert.⁷⁰ Grossmark remarkably notes that *tei'a's* power of smell has a messianic parallel.

משיח דכתיב ונחה עליו רוח ה' רוח חכמה ובינה רוח עצה וגבורה רוח דעת ויראת ה' וגו'
וכתיב והריחו ביראת ה' אמר... רבא אמר דמורה ודאין דכתיב ולא למראה עיניו ישפוט
ושפט בצדק דלים והוכיח במישור לענוי ארץ

The Messiah-as it is written, And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge of the fear of the Lord. And shall make him of
quick understanding [wa-hariho] in the fear of the Lord...Rabba said, He
smells (a man) and judges, as it is written 'and he shall not judge after the
sight of his eyes [reprove after the hearing of his ears] Thus he shall judge

68 Semple, *The Ancient Piedmont Route of Northern Mesopotamia*, 8:161.

69 Steinsaltz, *The Steinsaltz Talmud Bavli, Small Tractate Bava Batra*, 317. See עיונים: ההוא טיעא.

70 Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature*, 144. For example in Avoda Zarah 28a and 29a - associated with curing illness.

the poor with equity And decide with justice for the lowly of the land.⁷¹

Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 93b.

Grossmark called our attention to the verb הריחו, (*hifil 3ms*) understood and translated to mean “perceived” but its literal sense is to smell as noted by Rabba. The Messiah shall not use senses of hearing or seeing, but rather smelling. The Sanhedrin text leads up to a test of the veracity of Bar Kohkba as the messiah, and his slaying because he was not able to judge by scent. The Rabba here is most likely Rabba bar Nahmani, a 4th CE *amora* of Babylonia. Grossmark asserted that traditions associated with an extraordinary sense of smell probably originated in the 3rd-4th century Babylonian Jewish communities.⁷²

Although it will be shown later that Rabbah bar bar Hannah seems to have made error after error while in the desert without hardly a thought, in this tale he attempted to test the Arab as to whether he really had special powers of perception. He asked the Arab how far the travelers were from water. The Arab responded but then Rabbah bar bar Hannah attempted to test the Arab by giving him dirt a second time, presumably from another source. However, Rabbah bar bar Hannah is not able to fool the Arab. A superficial examination of the situation might presume that Rabbah bar bar Hannah asked a simple question one might expect in the desert about the life-sustaining resource of water. I would like to suggest that perhaps there is more to this question. Certainly Rabbah bar bar Hannah wanted to test the powers of the Arab, but what were the waters that he was asking about? Certainly, being in a desert, he asked about either a well, or perhaps an oasis. In biblical and rabbinic literature, wells and springs are often identified as sources of wisdom or as a fountain of life. Michael Fishbane gave many examples

71 Note that the first part of this translation up to the end of Isaiah 11:3 is from the Soncino translation of the BT. I have for clarity bracketed text that the is not in the VE but clearly is referenced. The remainder is from the JPS, 1985 English translation of the Tanakh as the translation of Soncino is not altogether reflective of the text.

72 Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature*, 148.

of these in Tanakh and the Dead Sea Scrolls. He asserts, “The symbolic identification of the Torah and its interpretation with a desert well presumably derive from the experience of the Torah as a source of living instructions, and desert springs as the sources of natural life. Both provide sustenance from from mysterious depths.”⁷³ The wise drank wisdom and established a divine connection through the flowing waters of desert wells. I suggest there is a possibility that Rabbah bar bar Hannah and his companions were not asking about just any drinking water but rather a mystical divine connecting point, a fount of divine wisdom. This is possibly confirmed by the fact that although the Arab showed Rabbah bar bar Hannah's group several things, a well was not one of them. However, the Arab does lead them to places that could be equated with wisdom, particularly Mt. Sinai, where Israel received the revelation.

The Dead of the Desert

Kiperwasser noted that the tale of the dead of the desert is the longest and most developed of the corpus and therefore deserves special attention.⁷⁴ It is a tale told in two parts. The first part references the generation of the Israelites that was denied entrance into the Promised Land.⁷⁵ The second part relates the response of the rabbis of the beit midrash to Rabbah bar bar Hannah's encounter in the desert. In the first part, the *tei'a* is the mediator between the Israelite historical past and Rabbah bar bar Hannah's present. Only the *tei'a* knew where to find the dead of the desert. Without the *tei'a*, Rabbah bar bar Hannah could not have encountered the dead of the desert or been able to understand their secrets. In the second part, there is no mediator, only the pronouncement of judgement of the rabbis upon Rabbah bar bar Hannah. They rebuked him for

73 Michael A Fishbane, “The Well of Living Water,” in *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 8.

74 Kiperwasser, “Rabba bar bar Hana's Voyages,” 237.

75 Numbers 14:29.

his lack of insight into his own experience. By their measure, he missed an opportunity to settle a talmudic debate between beit Shammai and beit Hillel as recorded in b. Menachot 41b as to how many threads are used in making *tzitzit*.

The pattern of dual scenes, the first set in the desert followed by a second set in the beit midrash, repeats twice more. Three mythological sites were visited, as stated above. The first was the burial place of the generation of Israelites left in the desert. The second was Mount Sinai. The third place visited was where the earth had opened up and swallowed Korach and his followers.⁷⁶ These could all be termed mythological places for their locations are not known. The physical places themselves are dwarfed by the importance of the events that happened in each. As Gershon Shaked notes in his analysis of Bialik's poem, "The Dead of the Desert", the world of myth "represents the projection of man's needs and his emotional aspirations...a world of felt truths, unverifiable but nonetheless absolute."⁷⁷ Rabbah bar bar Hannah had reached into the world of historical myth. Even the rabbis of the beit midrash assigned some importance to the report of Rabbah bar bar Hannah because they do not question that the events took place. This is evident from the rabbis rebuke of Rabbah bar bar Hannah. They rebuke him for having missed opportunities to hasten the coming of the messiah. They also rebuked him after the tale of the dead of the desert for not unequivocally settling the debate between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. They rebuked him yet again for not releasing the vow of the *bat kol* against the generation of the Israelites that they must remain in the desert and, by extension, that the Jews must remain in exile.

As Dina Stein noted, the rabbis of the beit midrash did not dispute Rabbah bar bar

⁷⁶ Numbers 16:32.

⁷⁷ Gershon Shaked, "The Myth of Rebellion: An Interpretation of Bialik's 'The Dead of the Desert,'" in *The New Tradition: Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature* (Cincinnati; Detroit, Mich.: Hebrew Union College Press ; Distributed by Wayne State University Press, 2006), 103.

Hannah's reports, rather their rebukes were directed to their colleague's reaction to the situations he encountered.⁷⁸ As she noted, the rebukes point to a wide rift between the geographies of the intellectual world of the beit midrash and the experiential world of the traveller. The reader does not receive insight into the thinking of Rabbah bar bar Hannah regarding removing the tzitzit from the tallit of one of the giants. But, in the Sinai tale, דלמא שבועתא דמבול הוא. *But he thought that the vow was concerning the flood (of Noah).*⁷⁹ The rabbi recognized the opportunity to free the generation denied entry into the Promised Land. Rabbah bar bar Hannah however, linked the chaotic and threatening environment of the desert to the chaos and destruction of the flood waters. Perhaps this is why there was no recorded response of Rabbah bar bar Hannah to his audience in the beit midrash. He realized that the matter at hand was a one of existential frame of reference. The rabbis heard him describe the scene but they did not feel the desert all around them as he had during his travels. They could not relate to his experience and he could not ever have explained it to them. Rabbah bar bar Hannah was indelibly changed by his experience. This is similar to how Rav Papa expressed the situation in the frog tale, tale 2c, אי לא הוואי היתם לא הימני *Had I not been there, I would not have believed it.*⁸⁰

Kiperwasser suggested that the common theme among the desert tales was the failure of Rabbah bar bar Hannah to understand what he saw. He asserted that Rabbah bar bar Hannah failed at generating excitement among the rabbis for the prospect of an imminent end of days by relating the scene of the fatted geese. He failed again when he was not able to properly inspect the tzitzit and clearly resolve the Hillel-Shammai dispute. He failed a third time in recognizing

78 Dina Stein, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self*, 1st ed, Divinations : Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 65.

79 BT Bava Batra 74a

80 BT Bava Batra 73b

the vow of the *bat kol*. However, as I have suggested above, the reason for these failures was the rift between the world of experience of Rabbah bar bar Hannah and the rabbis world of the beit midrash. It is possible to see this not as a failure but rather as a recognition of the wide gulf between knowledge based upon intellectual learning and knowledge based upon experiential learning.

I would like to suggest further that the common theme of the desert tales is exile. Each of the places that Rabbah bar bar Hannah visited contained symbolic elements that are in suspended animation. The geese were so fat that they could not move. The dead of the desert were in an eternal sleep. The *bat kol* was weeping over its eternal vow. The followers of Korach churned as if in a boiling cauldron, cyclically bubbling to the surface to deliver once again their plea. Each should have been somewhere else. The geese should have been at the eschatological feast. The dead of the desert and Korach's band should have entered the Promised Land. The *bat kol* should have been released from its vow. They were all in a state of exile.

As Miron Izakson notes, the dead of the desert are a constant element in Jewish tradition.⁸¹ The generation left in the desert is the theme of Psalm 95, which is part of the weekly Kabbalat Shabbat liturgy. They are a constant reminder of those left behind throughout Jewish history, whether they are those who could not enter the Promised Land or those who could not enter Palestine or Israel in modernity. This theme is so powerful that it reached out and was taken up by Hayim Nahman Bialik in his epic poem, "The Dead of the Desert". It is the dead of the desert that energizes Jewish creativity.

81 Miron Izakson, "Portion of the Week The Dead of the Desert," *Haaretz*, June 16, 2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/portion-of-the-week-the-dead-of-the-desert-1.190545>.

The Tales of Strange Creatures

The opening and later tales of the corpus are in many ways more easily understood than the middle tales that related visions of mythical creatures and scenes. These are the tales set off by the opening formula לִידִי חֲזִי לִי, which I understand to mean, *I myself saw*. As Kiperwasser and Shapira note, this is a recurring oath formula in the Babylonian Talmud.⁸² It is most often used by Rabbah bar bar Hannah. Of the twenty-seven times that it occurs in the Babylonian Talmud, it is associated with him seventeen times. Here in Bava Batra, it appears to be used in order to promote the acceptance of Rabbah bar bar Hannah's reports upon his return to the beit midrash.

The first of these stories has a setting that is recognizable by the reader. The story of the juggler is set on the ramparts of the city of Mehoza. The location of Mehoza is well known today. It was along the Royal Canal that linked the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Mehoza was a great center of Jewish and non-Jewish life in Sassanian Babylonia. It is one of the two possible locations of the Exilarchate, the other being Nehardea. After the destruction of Nehardea in 259 CE, its beit midrash moved to Mehoza. The beit midrash in Pumbedita also moved to Mehoza for a period of time after the death of Abaye.⁸³ It was also the winter home of the Sassanian king.⁸⁴ Although the precise location of Nehardea is not known, it is probable that the two were located along, and thus linked by, the Royal Canal. Unlike Nehardea, Mehoza was a new city. Archeological evidence suggests that prior to the building of the city, there was no urban center

82 Kiperwasser and Shapira, "Irano-Talmudica III," 72.

83 Adin Steinsaltz et al., eds., *Koren Talmud Bavli*, vol. Berakhot, 1 (Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation : Koren Publishers, 2012), 383. See background note.

84 Geoffrey Herman, *A Prince Without a Kingdom: The Exilarch in the Sasanian Era* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 154–155.

there, only the prior burial sites related to the Greek city of Seleucia.⁸⁵ It was a regional and international center, a hub of commerce. It may be the greatness of this city, linking the Jewish and Sassanian leadership, that drew the eye of the narrator of this tale. Secunda points to the cosmopolitan nature of Sassanian Babylonian culture in his explanation of the juggler הורמין, *Hormin*.⁸⁶

Secunda asserts that it is well established that even though the texts of the Babylonian rabbis and Zoroastrian priests were focused inward, reflecting and commenting on their own religious and cultural traditions, the rabbis and priests lived and participated in a complex Sassanian culture.⁸⁷ The example Secunda uses to elucidate his thesis is the character *Hormin*. Rashbam, Ritba and Maharsha offer various interpretations of *Hormin* and his antics but all hint that he is a demonic figure.⁸⁸ Secunda and others point to variants found in manuscripts as the key to one possible identity of this figure. All of these manuscripts identify the character not as *Hormin* as found in the printed Vilna edition but as *Hormiz*.⁸⁹ This name is also found in the printed Vilna edition at Gittin, 11a. Secunda notes the similarity between this name and *Hormizd*, a common name in Sassanian Babylonia. It is also related to the Zoroastrian spiritual power, *Ohrmazd*. *Ohrmazd* is linked to its spiritual opposite, *Ahriman*. The former is the good god associated with light and associated with the upper body, while the latter is a demon, associated with the lower half of the body, filth, and foulness.⁹⁰

85 Ibid., 156. note 121.

86 Shai Secunda, "Reading the Bavli in Iran," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, no. 2 (2010): 310–42.

87 Ibid., 317.

88 Steinsaltz, *The Steinsaltz Talmud Bavli, Small Tractate Bava Batra*, 315–316. See עיונים: הורמין בר לילת; תרי מזגי חמרא.

89 Secunda, "Reading the Bavli in Iran," 319: SS St. Petersburg, Vatican 127, and Vatican 130. Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature*, 89: MSS Escorial I-G-3, Hamburg 165, and Paris 1337.

90 Secunda, "Reading the Bavli in Iran," 315. See also BT Sanhedrin 39a for the rabbinic anecdote referring to the Zoroastrian concepts of the divided body referenced here.

Kiperwasser notes the problem with the association of the tale's *Hormin ben Lilit* with *Ohrmazd*. The problem is that the character that appears to be a demon performing antics upon the ramparts of Mehoza is associated with Zoroastrian god associated with goodness and light. Kiperwasser solved the problem by labeling it as a satirical belittling of Sassanian culture and values.⁹¹ Grossmark did not see that Kiperwasser's association of *Hormin* with *Ohrmazd* contributed to the explanation of the story. She believed that neither his modern interpretation, nor the interpretation of Rashbam that the half-demon, half-man was killed for revealing himself in front of humans, explained the strange action of the royal court. However, it seems that Grossmark misses a key point in Kiperwasser's explanation. Kiperwasser noted that in some manuscripts, *Hormin* is not carrying two cups of wine, but rather water.⁹² The understanding is that the cups of water that *Hormin* was juggling represented a contempt for water, akin to a sin in Zoroastrianism.⁹³ It is for this reason that *Hormin* was put to death. He has aroused the wrath of the king through his sacrilegious acts.⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that the Sassanian King Hormuzd IV (reigned from 579 to 590 CE), who was known for his harsh treatment of his own nobles and antagonism of Zoroastrian priests, was assassinated in his own court by his brother-in-law with the apparent consent of his successor, his son. Although this is not mentioned by Secunda or Kiperwasser as a possibility, certainly this was a cultural landmark event and was probably in the cultural collective consciousness of the Sassanian community. As the closing of the Talmud was not until approximately 770 CE, and the reign of Hormozd IV would have been in the heart of the Stammaitic period when this material likely entered into the Talmud, it seems at least a

91 Kiperwasser, "Rabba bar bar Hana's Voyages," 230.

92 Ibid., 229. See for example the Hamburg Codex 165 where the VE תרי מזגי דהמרא is rendered as תרי מזגי מיא.

93 Mary Boyce, "ĀB I. The Concept of Water in Ancient Iranian Culture," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1982, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ab-i-the-concept-of-water-in-ancient-iranian-culture>.

94 Kiperwasser, "Rabba bar bar Hana's Voyages," 231.

possible connection.⁹⁵ It seems that, even if the exact mechanism of the relationship between this tale and the Zoroastrian parallels is not entirely clear, there is a connection. This is made more clear by the connections evident in the other tales of strange creatures.

As Secunda predicted in his 2010 article, the interest in Iranian cultural connections in the Babylonian Talmud did lead to an increase in scholars capable and knowledgeable regarding Sassanian languages and texts. He felt that in the coming years, many more points of connection would be found. Kiperwasser and Shapira have suggested such connections in the לִידֵי חַיִּי לִי tales and a few of the later tales in the corpus by way of the mythical creatures found in them: the antelope, the frog, the big fish, the snake, the Leviathan and the Behemoth.⁹⁶ Parallels to these creatures are found in the Bundahišn.⁹⁷ The Bundahišn is a Pahlavi compilation of cosmography and cosmogony based upon the Zoroastrian holy book, Avesta.⁹⁸ Like the Talmud, the origins of the Avesta and Bundahišn are oral. Kiperwasser and Shapira were careful not to say that there is a direct tie between the Bundahišn and the Rabbah bar bar Hannah corpus. However, the similarity of the creatures and the order that they are introduced in each makes the parallel unmistakable. In addition, the first two tales, which are an exegesis of Psalms 104 and 107, compare directly to Bundahišn eschatological verses.⁹⁹ Further, the parallels to the Rabbah bar bar Hannah tales that are found in the Bundahišn occur in one concentrated section of text.

In addition to the links between the creatures, there are also two tales that bear a striking

95 David Weiss Halivni and Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud* (Oxford University Press, 2013), xxix, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199739882.001.0001/acprof-9780199739882>.

96 Kiperwasser and Shapira, "Irano-Talmudica III," 73.

97 Ibid., 65–67. Kiperwasser and Shapira label the corpus of strange beasts in Iranian and Rabbinic texts as Bestiarium Bundahisn and Bestiarium Rabbinicum respectively.

98 D. MacKenzie, "BUNDAHIŠN," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1989, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bundahisn-primal-creation>.

99 Kiperwasser and Shapira, "Irano-Talmudica III," 76–81. This relationship is laid out in a clear manner in a table on these pages comparing the transliterated and translated text of the Bundahisn to the Hebrew and English translation of the Psalms.

similarity to stories that appear in the Avesta. One Bundahišn tale is similar to tale 3b, the big fish island. In this tale, Rabbah bar bar Hannah and the *nichutei yama* made land on a grassy island and then prepared to cook a meal. Because of the heat of the fire, the big fish awakened and turned over, nearly drowning the travelers. The parallel Avesta story recounts the dragon-slaying hero Kərəsāspa, who decided one day to cook his meal on what he thought to be a hill, but which, in fact, was the back of the dragon, Aži Sruvara. The dragon woke up from the heat of Kərəsāspa's kettle and overturned it.¹⁰⁰ Further, the dragon, Aži Sruvara, was so long that Kərəsāspa could run along its back for half a day before he reached its head, prior to killing it. The similarity can be seen to tale 3c, the fish with two fins:

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: זימנא חדא הוה אולינן בספינתא, וסגאי ספינתא בין שיצא לשיצא
דבוארא תלתא יומי ותלתא לילותא...

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: We travelled once on board a ship and the ship sailed between one fin of the fish and the other for three days and three nights...

Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 73b

The quantitative details are different but the nature of how the tales are told is similar. The size of the fish is measured in exaggerated terms expressed as a function of how fast the human characters can move along the length of the beast.

Although Kiperwasser and Shapira are hesitant to say that the talmudic narrator drew directly from the Avesta or Bundahišn, it seems that, at the least, the talmudic narrator was aware of the Zoroastrian tales. It seems that if there is not a direct link, the alternative is that the beastly figures that appear in both corpora must have been deeply engrained in the cultural repertoire of both narrators.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 82.

The theme of an island turning out to be a fish and the theme of a big fish able to sink a ship occur repeatedly in Persian and European myth as well as in Jewish texts. Cornelia Coulter brought together many of the Persian, Greek, and Western European sources. In one Persian example, the tales of Sindbad the Sailor, incorporated into *The Thousand and One Nights*, told of encounters with both a fish island and a fish intent upon sinking ships. In the Greek sphere, Lucian in his *True History* recounts a tale of a fish 170 miles in length, adding the detail of it swallowing a ship. Coulter points out that readers should notice the swallowing as a separate theme, present also in the book of Jonah. In a Western European example, the heroic traveler St. Brendan also encounters a fish island in his endeavors to attempt travel beyond the sea into a divine domain. Similar themes also are recorded in Scandinavian tales.¹⁰¹ The importance of Coulter's work is that she notes that many cultures are drawing upon the same repertoire, possibly rooted in some unknown *Ur tradition*. What Kiperwasser and Shapira's work seems to show is that the Bundahišn and Talmudic narrators were working synchronously, that is to say, that they repeat the same symbols within their stories, in roughly the same order, because of their common awareness of an earlier tradition. The tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah thereby have become a meeting place, a horizon, where rabbinic and Bundahišn literary traditions meet.

¹⁰¹ Coulter, "The 'Great Fish' in Ancient and Medieval Story."

Where Heaven and Earth Touch

The tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah reach their zenith in the final tale of the corpus, tale

6. In this tale, the Arab guide has one final thing to show Rabbah bar bar Hannah.

אמר לי: תא אחוי לך היכא דנשקי ארעא ורקיעא אהדדי. שקלתא לסילתאי
אתנחתא בכוותא דרקיעא.

He said to me, “Come and I will show you where heaven and earth
touch one another. I took up my [bread] basket and placed it in a
window of heaven.

b. Bava Batra 74a

Here again there is double meaning in what is said in the text. On one level, the *tei'a* is directing Rabbah bar bar Hannah to the horizon where the sky and the earth meet. Medieval commentators identify this as a place from which Rabbah bar bar Hannah can gaze upon the great wheel of the zodiac.¹⁰² However, it appears that Rabbah bar bar Hannah did not realize what he was looking at. Although he placed his basket in the window of the heavens, he did not understand why it disappeared, wondering if thieves had taken it. He had not realized that the great wheel that guides the celestial cycles would bring the basket back to him. Again, the *tei'a* must step in to advise Rabbah bar bar Hannah to wait for the basket to reappear in the window. The story seems to reinforce the themes of the geese in story 4a which emphasize that righteous action in the present will ensure one's part in the world-to-come.

The story can be interpreted in other ways. The word רקיעא, *raki'a*, reveals deeper meaning. This word returns the reader again to biblical creation, this time Genesis 1:6, ויאמר

אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מְבָדֵּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם, God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of

¹⁰² Adin Steinsaltz, ed., *The Steinsaltz Talmud Bavli, Small Tractate Bava Batra*. (Koren Pub, 2011), 319. See *עיונים: היכא דנשקי אריא ורקיעא* - referenced are the commentaries of Joseph ibn Migash (d. 1141 Spain; a student of Alfasi) and Isaiah diTrani (d. 1250, Italy).

the water, that it may separate water from water.” The expanse, *ra'kea*, is not the earth that Rabbah bar bar Hannah is standing upon. Rather, it is the first organizing element that God called into being. It was this *raki'a* that God used to split the primordial waters. *Raki'a* is not earth at all, but rather the structure upon which the world will rest. It is the framework of the universe. The *tei'a* was not pointing Rabbah bar bar Hannah to the horizon that can be seen as one looks out into the distance of the desert. Rather it is what one could see if one could look at the underpinnings of the universe.

In the time of Rabbah bar bar Hannah, there were many rabbis who traveled just as he did. It seems from both literary and archaeological evidence that although there was some travel for purely commercial purposes, most of the travel by sages was for forwarding intellectual pursuits in the beit midrash.¹⁰³ I suggest that this was not Rabbah bar Hannah's purpose. We know, as much as any history can be known from the Talmud, that he did travel to Palestine and then back to Babylonia. The tales imagine that he made other trips as well. Some he made upon the sea and others he made into the desert. From the language of the stories above, it can be imagined that Rabbah bar bar Hannah was an explorer seeking portals to a divine world. He took evidence from generations of Jewish tradition that was taught to him in the beit midrash. This evidence came from the psalms which spoke of the creation of the world, a world born of the seas. The evidence also came from stories of Israelites in the desert where they received the revelation, both the written Torah and the oral tradition transmitted in all the forms of Jewish creativity. This is the foundation of the world of the beit midrash. But even with this evidence, Rabbah bar bar Hannah did not always know the form of what he was seeking, only the direction

103 Ze'Ev Safrai and Aren M Maeir, “אתא אגרתא ממערבא” (‘An Epistle Came from the West’): Historical and Archaeological Evidence for the Ties between the Jewish Communities in the Land of Israel and Babylonia during the Talmudic Period,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 93, no. 3 (2003): 529.

to begin his search. Thus he needed the guidance of the *nichutei yama*, with their expert knowledge of the sea, and the *tei'a*, with his expert knowledge of the desert.

I suggest that his seeking divine connections outside the beit midrash should not be taken as a rejection of the rabbinic world but rather as seeking affirmation of it. There is no other way to explain tales that are so very rich in biblical language. He sought to connect the intellectual evidence of the beit midrash with experience on the sea and in the desert. As Weiss and others have noted, the opening tales are an exegesis of selected psalms. Exegesis is not just retelling, but reworking. Rabbah bar bar Hannah brought new meaning to them. The sea becomes a portal, a way of reaching out, reaching into a divine world that could not have been accessed by study in the beit midrash alone. It required exploration. It required taking a risk: the risk of traveling out to sea, out into the very waters written about in the psalter. It required a witness of what transpired in the desert. Perhaps Rabbah bar bar Hannah took the words of Isaiah with great seriousness...

אַל־תִּפְתָּדוּ וְאַל־תִּרְהוּ הֲלֹא מֵאִזְ הַשְּׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְהַגַּדְתִּי וְאַתֶּם עֵדֵי הָיִשׁ אֱלֹהִים מִבְּלַעַדִּי
וְאֵין צוּר בְּלִידְעָתִי:

Do not be frightened, do not be shaken! Have I not from of old
predicted to you? I foretold, and you are My witnesses. Is there any
God, then, but Me? “There is no other rock; I know none!”

Isaiah 44:8

The Israelites are God's witnesses. Rabbah bar bar Hannah pushed the boundary of what it meant to be a witness. It was not enough for Rabbah bar bar Hannah Israelites people were a historical witness. The divine court would require him to be a first-hand witness. It required him to seek the knowledge of the *nichutei yama* in the first stories. It required him to go into the

desert, led by the *tei'a*. It required him to be led through the biblical history of Israel, to see for himself first-hand the accounts of the desert: the generation that was left, the site of the revelation, the fate of the band of Korach. Rabbah bar bar Hannah was not complacent, satisfied with the Israelite history as recorded in Tanakh. He went beyond and sought out Zoroastrian experience. That the strange creatures with parallels in Zoroastrian tradition are sandwiched in between the sea stories and the desert is an important detail. Perhaps, as Kiperwasser suggested, it was meant as a warning, in the form of a satirical look at foreign culture. But perhaps it was the opposite, an admonition to the reader that exploration cannot be left only to the comfortable places of what is thought to be true, but rather must be expanded. A search for the divine world requires pushing oneself toward the horizon. What is known by one's senses is only so important as to allow one to move closer toward what is not known in one's own culture or history.

Final Thoughts

b. Berakhot 17a ascribes the following words to Rav in reference to the reason for Torah study. Rav references Psalm 111...

שנאמר: ראשית חכמה יראת ה' שכל טוב לכל עושיהם.

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD. All who practice it gain sound understanding.

b.Berakhot 17a

It seems likely that Rabbah bar bar Hannah would have been well acquainted with the words of his uncle, Rav. I mean to suggest that Rabbah bar bar Hannah was in search of wisdom. This search began in the texts encountered in the beit midrash and then led him out into the real world

in order to encounter the real things that might lead him to a wisdom that he could not attain in any other way. Only by being a brave explorer, either out at sea or in the desert, could he find the wisdom he was seeking.

One of the most recognizable modern explorers of the sea, Jacques Cousteau described a boyhood experience in the following way. He often played on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea where trains often chugged smoke rings as they travelled down the tracks which paralleled the shore.

One day, the riddles of this magical smoke ring proved too much for me...I headed for the tracks. I stepped between the rails and began to run, following the gleaming parallel lines that pointed to my dreams...I could not stop; I could not turn back. Panting, tumbling on the ballast pebbles, I pressed on and on, interrupting my steps only when the ground shook as the fearsome convoys approached from behind and I had to scurry out of the way. I had never seen the tremendous engines so close. I could feel my heart pound with the beat of the rails...Confused, exhausted, I lay down to rest for a minute on the gravel. I was drifting off to sleep when some policemen found me and, despite my furious protests, took me all the way back home...I knew from the tears in [my parent's] eyes that they would not understand how I had ached to reach that horizon, why I had been unable to resist running after it. I did not understand myself.¹⁰⁴

Cousteau goes on to explain that an inexplicable drive to explore was at the heart of not only his voyages but those of his colleagues on both land and sea. “Perhaps some common trait links the world's explorers and at least partially explains why certain men cannot resist the lure of knowing the unknown....I cannot dissect the drive to explore; I can only describe it, by telling my own tale.”¹⁰⁵ This same drive was at the heart of Rabbah bar bar Hannah's travels, the lure of knowing the unknown. Cousteau would go on in his book to describe his drive to explore, in

104 Jacques Cousteau and Susan Schiefelbein, *The Human, the Orchid, and the Octopus: Exploring and Conserving Our Natural World* (New York; [Place of publication not identified]: Bloomsbury USA ; Distributed to the trade by Holtzbrinck Publishers, 2007), 27–28.

105 Ibid., 29.

part, motivated by seeking the divine underpinnings of the world we can only look at with wonder. “The glory of nature provides evidence that God exists.”¹⁰⁶ Just as Rabbah bar bar Hannah did not limit himself to the world and teachings of the beit midrash, Cousteau pointed to the universal divinity of nature, “Faith after faith exhorts its followers to open their eyes to nature as a reflection of God's grandeur.”¹⁰⁷ The grandeur of nature is a window into a divine world, a portal to what is unknown.

At the time of the writing of this thesis, it has been recently proposed by two scientists, Konstantin Batygin and Mike Brown of Caltech, that there is a ninth planet in our solar system far outside the orbit of the other planets.¹⁰⁸ Depending upon your age, you may have thought this always to be true, only to be disappointed by the demotion of Pluto in 2006 to the status of dwarf planet by the International Astronomical Union.¹⁰⁹ The size of the ninth planet, sometimes called Planet X, is predicted to be of a size on the order of Neptune. They predict that Planet X travels in a highly elliptical orbit some 200 Astronomical Units from the sun (earth being 1 AU from the sun). Some have been skeptical of their proposal, saying that such proposals by others have come before, only to be disproven each time. I suggest that the search for the ninth planet has some relationship to how the explorer, Rabbah bar bar Hannah, can be understood as important in modern terms.

The search for Planet X has been going on for a long time. The method of Batygin and Brown is based upon looking at secondary evidence. They have proposed that six other positively known objects beyond that Kuiper Belt are grouped in orbits that are too predictable.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Eric Hand, “Number 9,” *Science* 351, no. 6271 (January 22, 2016): 330–33, doi:10.1126/science.351.6271.330.

¹⁰⁹ “International Astronomical Union | IAU,” accessed January 23, 2016, <http://www.iau.org/news/pressreleases/detail/iau0603/>.

Their orbits suggest that they have been shepherded into their orbits by another larger object. This object is Planet X. This method has been used before, most notable to discover the existence of Neptune. As of this date, no one has yet laid eyes upon Planet X. If its position were known definitively, it would be dim and hard to detect. The search for hard evidence could take five years of scanning the sky where Planet X is predicted to be. Science writer Eric Hand compares the search to looking for a needle in a haystack with a drinking straw.

Although they may sit in offices, analyze data and build mathematical models, Brown and Batygin are true explorers no less than Christopher Columbus. They imagined that something lay out beyond what they could see. They took hints from what they knew to be true in order to look for what they could not see. They imagined and constructed to be a true model of what they believed the unknown to look like. This was also the case for Rabbah bar bar Hannah. Rabbah bar bar Hannah looked at the evidence he had before him in Torah, in midrash, and even in foreign culture that surrounded the beit midrash of Sassanian Babylonia. He looked at the evidence of a primordial creation in Psalm 105 and 107 and plotted a course to find a window into the divine world. Just as Columbus encountered new seas, Rabbah bar bar Hannah encountered the frightening enormity of the sea, or at the least, heard of it from the *nichutei yama*. He listened to the tales of Zoroastrian Avesta, searching for hints of the divine world in mythic creatures. He reimagined them in rabbinic terms and brought them into the world of the beit midrash. That the rabbis commented and preserved the tales and did not reject them entirely is itself evidence of their importance. After he explored the prehistory of Israel with the *tei'a*, he arrived at the celestial window into the divine world.

Like Brown and Batygin, the reader leaves Rabbah bar bar Hannah while he is still

searching. He is at the horizon, looking at the window into the divine world. He has relayed much evidence through the accounts of his travels but he has not yet arrived at his destination. It is possible to see this final tale as an expression of failure, falling short of where he set out to go. It is also possible to see it in the light of possibility, the idea that something can be known tomorrow which is not known, or even imagined, today. This is the power of the tales of Rabbah bar bar Hannah. I prefer to see them as a great expectation that is expressed through a reimagining of a known world: a great expectation that the divine world can be known in the same way as the world that can be seen, heard, touched and smelled, a conviction that searching for an understanding of the nature of God and a divine world behind our physical world has inherent meaning. Rabbah bar bar Hannah represents a human desire to search and explore this world in order to reveal the nature of God.

Appendix A: Rabbah bar bar Hannah Tales

Bava Batra 73a - 74a

Tale 1a:

Rabbah said: Seafarers told me: The wave that sinks a ship appears with a white fringe of fire at its crest, and when stricken with clubs on which is engraven. I am that I am, Yah, the Lord of Hosts, Amen, Amen, Selah, it subsides.

אמר רבה, אשתעו לי נחותי ימא: האי גלא דמטבע לספינה, מיתחזי כי צוציתא דנורא חיזורתא ברישא, ומחנין ליה באלוותא דחקיק עליה: אדהיה אשר אדהיה יה ה' צבאות אמן אמן סלה, ונייה.

Tale 1b:

Rabbah said: Seafarers told me: There is a distance of three hundred parasangs between one wave and the other, and the height of the wave is [also] three hundred parasangs. Once, [they related], we were on a voyage, and the wave lifted us up so high that we saw the resting place of the smallest star, and there was a flash as if one shot forty arrows of iron; and if it had lifted us up still higher, we would have been burned by its heat. And one wave called to the other: "My friend, have you left anything in the world that you did not wash away? I will go and destroy it." The other replied: "Go and see the power of the master [by whose command] I must not pass the sand[of the shore even as much as] the breadth of a thread"; as it is written: Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence? who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, an everlasting ordinance, which it cannot pass. (Jer. 5:22)

אמר רבה, אשתעו לי נחותי ימא: בין גלא לגלא תלת מאה פרסי, ורומא דגלא תלת מאה פרסי. זימנא חדא הוה אזלינן באורחא, ודלינן גלא עד דחזינן בי מרבעתיה דכוכבא זוטא, והויה לי כמבזר ארבעין גריוי בזרא דחרדלא, ואי דלינן טפי - הוה מקלינן מהבליה. ורמי לה גלא קלא לחברתה: חבירתי, שבקת מידי בעלמא דלא שטפתיה, דניתי אנא ונאבדיה? א"ל: פוק חזי גבורתא דמריך, מלא חוטא חלא ולא עברי, שנאמר: (ירמיהו ה') האותי לא תיראו נאם ה' אם מפני לא תחילו אשר שמתי חול גבול לים חוק עולם ולא יעברנהו.

Tale 2a:

Rabbah said: I saw how Hormin the son of Lilith was running on the parapet of the wall of Mahuza, and a rider, galloping below on horseback could not overtake him. Once they saddled for him two mules which stood on two bridges of the Rognag; and he jumped from one to the other, backward and forward, holding in his hands two cups of wine, pouring alternately from one to the other, and not a drop fell to the ground. [Furthermore]. it was [a stormy] day [such as that on which] they [that go down to the sea in ships] mounted up to the heaven; they went down to the deeps. When the government heard [of this] they put him to death.

אמר רבה: לדידי חזי לי הורמין בר לילית כי קא רהיט אקופיא דשורא דמחוזא, ורהיט פרשא כי רכיב חיותא מתתאיה ולא יכיל ליה. זמנא חדא הוה מסרגאן ליה תרתני כודנייתי וקיימן אתרי גישרי דרוגנג, ושואר מהאי להאי ומהאי להאי, ונקיט תרי מזגי דחמרא בידיה, ומוריק מהאי להאי ומהאי להאי ולא נטפא ניטופתא לארעא, ואותו היום (תהלים ק"ז) יעלו שמים ירדו תהומות הוה, עד דשמעו בי מלכותא וקטלוהו.

Tale 2b:

Rabbah said: I saw an antelope. one day old, that was as big as Mount Tabor. How big is Mount Tabor? Four parasangs. The length of its neck was three parasangs and the resting place of its head was one parasang and a half. It cast a ball of excrement and blocked up the Jordan.

אמר רבה: לדידי חזי לי אורזילא בר יומיה דהוה כהר תבור, והר תבור כמה הוי? ארבע פרסי, ומשאבא דצואריה תלתא פרסי, ובי מרבעתא דרישיה פרסא ופלגא, רמא כופתא וסכר ליה לירדנא.

Tale 2c:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: I saw a frog the size of the Fort of Hagronia. What is the size of the Fort of Hagronia? Sixty houses. There came a snake and swallowed the frog. Then came a raven and swallowed the snake, and perched on a tree. Imagine how strong was the tree. R. Papa b. Samuel said: Had I not been there I would not have believed it.

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: לדידי חזיא לי ההיא אקרוקתא דהויה כי אקרא דהגרוניא, ואקרא דהגרוניא כמה הויה? שתין בתי, אתא תנינא בלעה, אתא פושקנצא ובלעה לתנינא וסליק יתיב באילנא. תא חזי כמה נפיש חיליה דאילנא. אמר רב פפא: אי לא הווי התם לא הימני.

Tale 3a:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: Once we were traveling on board a ship and saw a fish in whose nostrils a parasite had entered. Thereupon, the water cast up the fish and threw it upon the shore. Sixty towns were destroyed thereby, sixty towns ate therefrom, and sixty towns salted [the remnants] thereof, and from one of its eyeballs three hundred kegs of oil were filled. On returning after twelve calendar months we saw that they were cutting rafters from its skeleton and proceeding to rebuild those towns.

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן בספינתא, וחזינן ההוא כוורא דיתבא ליה אכלא טינא באוסיי, ואדחווהו מיהא ושדיוהו לגודא וחרוב מיניה שתין מחוזי, ואכול מיניה שתין מחוזי, ומלחו מיניה שתין מחוזי, ומלאו מחד גלגלא דעיניה תלת מאה גרבי משחא, וכי הדרן לבתר תריסר ירחי שתא, חזינן דהוה קא מנסרי מגרמי מטללתא, ויתבי למבנינהו הנך מחוזי.

Tale 3b:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: Once we were traveling on board a ship and saw a fish whose back was covered with sand out of which grew grass. Thinking it was dry land we went up and baked, and cooked, upon its back. When, however, its back was heated it turned, and had not the ship been nearby we should have been drowned.

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן בספינתא, וחזינן ההוא כוורא דיתבא ליה חלתא, אגביה וקדח אגמא עילויה, סברין יבשתא היא, וסלקין ואפינן ובשלינן אגביה, וכד חם גביה אתהפיק, ואי לא דהוה מקרבא ספינתא הוה טבעין.

Tale 3c:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: We travelled once on board a ship. and the ship sailed between one fin of the fish and the other for three days and three nights; it [swimming] upwards and we [floating] downwards. And if you think the ship did not sail fast enough, R. Dimi, when he came, stated that it covered sixty parasangs in the time it takes to warm a kettle of water. When a horseman shot an arrow [the ship] outstripped it. And R. Ashi said: That was one of the small sea monsters which have [only] two fins.

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: זימנא חדא הוה אזלינן בספינתא, וסגאי ספינתא בין שיצא לשיצא דכוורא תלתא יומי ותלתא לילוותא, איהו בזקיפא ואנן בשיפולא. וכי תימא, לא מסגיא ספינתא טובא, כי אתא רב דימי אמר: כמיחם קומקומא דמיא מסגיא שתין פרסי, ושאדי פרשא גירא וקדמה ליה. ואמר רב אשי: ההוא גילדנא דימא הוא, דאית ליה תרי שייצי.

Tale 3d:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further related: Once we travelled on board a ship and we saw a bird standing up to its ankles in the water while its head reached the sky. We thought the water was not deep and wished to go down to cool ourselves, but a Bath Kol called out: Do not go down here for a carpenter's axe was dropped [into this water] seven years ago and it has not [yet] reached the bottom. And this, not [only] because the water is deep but [also] because it is rapid. R. Ashi said: That [bird] was Ziz-Sadai for it is written: And Ziz-Sadai is with me.

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: זימנא חדא הוה אזלינן בספינתא, וחזינן ההוא ציפרא דקאים עד קרצוליה במיא ורישיה ברקיע, ואמרינן: ליכא מיא, ובעינן לחות לאקורי נפשין, ונפק בת קלא ואמר לן: לא תיחותו הכא, דנפלת ליה חציצא לבר נגרא הא שב שני ולא קא מטיא אארעא, ולא משום דנפשי מיא אלא משום דרדפי מיא. אמר רב אשי: ההוא זיז שדי הוא, דכתיב: (תהלים נ') וזיז שדי עמדי.

Tale 4a:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana further related: We were once travelling in the desert and saw geese whose feathers fell out on account of their fatness, and streams of fat flowed under them. I said to them: Shall we have a share of your flesh in the world-to-come? One lifted up [its] wing, the other lifted up [its] leg. When I came before R. Eleazar he said unto me: Israel will be called to account for [the sufferings of] these [geese].

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן במדברא, וחזינן הנהו אווזי דשמטי גדפייהו משמנייהו וקא נגדי נחלי דמשחא מתותייהו, אמינא להו: אית לך בגוייכו חלקא לעלמא דאתי? חדא דלי גרפא, וחדא דלי אטמא. כי אתאי לקמיה דרבי אלעזר, אמר לי: עתידין ישראל ליתן עליהן את הדין.

Mnemonic: Like the sand of the purple blue scorpion stirred his basket.

סימן: כעפרא דתכילתא טרקתיה עקרבא לסלתיה

Tale 4b:

Rabbah b. Bar Hana related: We were once travelling in a desert and there joined us an Arab merchant who, [by] taking up sand and smelling it [could] tell which was the way to one place and which was the way to another. We said unto him: How far are we from water? He replied: Give me [some] sand. We gave him, and he said unto us: Eight parasangs. When we gave him again [later], he told us that we were three parasangs off. I changed it; but was unable [to nonplus] him.

ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן במדברא, ואיתלוי בהדן ההוא טייעא, דהוה שקיל עפרא ומורח ליה ואמר: הא אורחא לדוכתא פלן, וזה אורחא לדוכתא פלן. אמרי ליה: כמה מרחקין ממיא? ואמר לן: הבו לי עפרא, יהיבנן ליה, ואמר לן: תמני פרסי. תנינן ויהיבנן ליה, אמר לן: דמרחקין תלתא פרסי, אפכית ליה ולא יכילית ליה.

Tale 5a:

He said unto me: Come and I will show you the Dead of the Wilderness. I went [with him] and saw them; and they looked as if in a state of exhilaration. They slept on their backs; and the knee of one of them was raised, and the Arab merchant passed under the knee, riding on a camel with spear erect, and did not touch it. I cut off one corner of the purple-blue shawl of one of them; and we could not move away. He said unto me: [If] you have, peradventure, taken something from them, return it; for we have a tradition that he who takes anything from them cannot move away. I went and returned it; and then we were able to move away. When I came before the Rabbis they said unto me: Every Abba is an ass and every Bar Bar Hana is a fool. For what purpose did you do that? Was it in order to ascertain whether [the Law] is in accordance with the [decision of] Beth Shammai or Beth Hillel? You should have counted the threads and counted the joints.

אמר לי: תא אחוי לך מתי מדבר. אולי, חזיתנהו ודמו כמאן דמיבסמי וגנו אפרקיד, והוה זקיפא ברכיה דחד מינייהו, ועייל טייעא תותי ברכיה כי רכיב גמלא וזקיפא רומחיה ולא נגע ביה. פסקי חדא קרנא דתכלתא דחד מינייהו, ולא הוה מסתגי לן. אמר לי: דלמא שקלת מידי מינייהו? אהדריה, דגמירי, דמאן דשקיל מידי מינייהו לא מסתגי ליה. אולי אהדרתיה, והדר מסתגי לן. כי אתאי לקמיה דרבנן, אמרו לי: כל אבא - חמרא, וכל בר בר חנה - סיכסא למאי הלכתא עבדת הכי? למידע אי בבית שמאי אי בבית הלל, איבעי לך למימני חוטין ולמימני חוליות.

Tale 5b:

He said unto me: Come and I will show you Mount Sinai. [When] I arrived I saw that scorpions surrounded it and they stood like white asses. I heard a Bath Kol saying: Woe is me that I have made an oath and now that I have made the oath, who will release me? When I came before the Rabbis, they said unto me: Every Abba is an ass and every Bar Bar Hana is a fool. You should have said, Mufar lak. He, however, thought that perhaps it was the oath in connection with the Flood. And the Rabbis? If so; why, woe is me?

א"ל: תא אחוי לך הר סיני. אולי, חזאי דהדרא ליה עקרבא וקיימא כי חמרי חוורת. שמעתי בת קול שאומרת: אוי לי שנשבעתי, ועכשיו שנשבעתי מי מפר לי? כי אתאי לקמיה דרבנן, אמרו לי: כל אבא - חמרא, כל בר בר חנה - סיכסא היה לך לומר: מופר לך. והוא סבר: דלמא שבועתא דמבול הוא. ורבנן? א"כ, אוי לי למיה.

Tale 5c:

He said unto me: Come, I will show you the men of Korah that were swallowed up. I saw two cracks that emitted smoke. I took a piece of clipped wool, dipped it in water, attached it to the point of a spear and let it in there. And when I took it out it was singed. [Thereupon] he said unto me: Listen attentively [to] what you [are about to] hear. And I heard them say: Moses and his Torah are truth and we are liars. He said unto me: Every thirty days Gehenna causes them to turn back here as [one turns] flesh in a pot, and they say thus: "Moses and his law are truth and we are liars"

א"ל: תא אחוי לך בלועי דקרח. חזאי תרי ביזעי והוו קא מפקי קוטר, שקל גבבא דעמרא ואמשינה במיא ודעציתה בראשה דרומחא ועייליה התם, וכי אפיק הוה איחרך איחרוכי. אמר לי: אצית מאי שמעת, ושמעית דהוו אמרין: משה ותורתו אמת והן בדאין.

Tale 6:

He said unto me: Come, I will show you where heaven and earth touch one another. I took up my [bread] basket and placed it in a window of heaven. When I concluded my prayers I looked for it but did not find it. I said unto him: Are there thieves here? He replied to me: It is the heavenly wheel revolving. Wait here until tomorrow and you will find it.

אמר לי: תא אחוי לך היכא דנשקי ארעא ורקיעא אהדדי. שקלתא לסילתאי אתנחתא בכוותא דרקיעא, אדמצלינא בעיתיה ולא אשכחיתה, אמינא ליה: איכא גנבי הכא? אמר לי: האי גלגלא דרקיעא הוה דהדר, נטר עד למחר הכא ומשכחת לה.

Appendix B: The Tales after Rabbah bar bar Hannah

Bava Batra 74a - 75b

Tale 15:

R. Johanan related: Once we were travelling on board a ship and we saw a fish that raised its head out of the sea. Its eyes were like two moons, and water streamed from its two nostrils as [from] the two rivers of Sura.

רבי יוחנן משתעי: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן בספינתא, וחזינן ההוא כוורא דאפקיה לרישיה מימא, ודמיין עייניה כתרי סיהרי, ונפוץ מיא מתרתי זימיה כתרי מברי דסורא.

Tale 16:

R. Safra related: Once we travelled on board a ship and we saw a fish that raised its head out of the sea. It had horns on which was engraved: I am a minor creature of the sea, I am three hundred parasangs [in length] and I am [now] going into the mouth of Leviathan. R. Ashi said: It was a sea-goat which searches [for its food] and [for that purpose] has horns.

רב ספרא משתעי: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן בספינתא, וחזינן ההוא כוורא דאפקיה לרישיה מימא, והוה ליה קרני וחקיק עליה: אנא בריה קלה שבים והוינא תלת מאה פרסי, ואזילנא לפומא דליתן. אמר רב אשי: ההוא עיזא דימא הוא, דבחישא ואית לה קרני.

Tale 17:

R. Johanan related: Once we were travelling on board a ship and we saw a chest in which were set precious stones and pearls and it was surrounded by a species of fish called Karisa. There went down a diver to bring [the chest], but [a fish] noticed [him] and was about to wrench his thigh. Thereupon he poured upon it a skin bottle of vinegar and it sank. A Bath Kol came forth, saying unto us: What have you to do with the chest of the wife of R. Hanina b. Dosa who is to store in it purple-blue for the righteous in the world-to-come.

רבי יוחנן משתעי: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן בספינתא, וחזינן ההיא קרטליתא דהו קא מקבעי בה אבנים טובות ומרגליות, והדרי לה מיני דכוורי דמקרי כרשא, נחית בר אמוראי לאתויה, ורגש ובעי לשמטיה לאטמיה, ושדא זיקא דחלא ונחת. נפק בת קלא אמר לן: מאי אית לכו בהדי קרטליתא דדביתו דר"ח בן דוסא? דעתידה דשדיא תכלתא בה לצדיקי לעלמא דאתי.

Tale 18:

Rab Judah, the Indian, related: Once we were travelling on board a ship when we saw a precious stone that was surrounded by a snake. A diver descended to bring it up. [Thereupon] the snake approached with the purpose of swallowing the ship, [when] a raven came and bit off its head and the waters were turned into blood. A second snake came, took [the head of the decapitated snake]⁴ and attached it [to the body], and it revived. Again [the snake] approached intent on swallowing the ship. Again a bird came and severed its head. [Thereupon the diver] seized the precious stone and threw it into the ship. We had with us salted birds. [As soon as] we put [the stone] upon them, they took it up and flew away with it.

רב יהודה הינדוא משתעי: זימנא חדא הוה אזלינן בספינתא, וחזינן ההוא אבן טבא דהוה הדיר לה תנינא, נחית בר אמוראי לאתויה, אתא תנינא קא בעי למבלע לה לספינתא, אתא פישקנצא פסקיה לרישיה אתהפיכו מיא והוו דמא, אתא תנינא חבריה שקליה ותליה ליה וחיה. הדר אתא קא בעי בלעא לספינתא, הדר אתא ציפרא פסקיה לרישיה, שקלוה לההיא אבן טבא שדויה לספינתא, הוה הני ציפרי מליחי בהדן, אותבינהו עלייהו, שקלוה ופרחו להו בהדה.

Tale 19:

Our Rabbis taught: It happened that R. Eliezer and R. Joshua were travelling on board a ship. R. Eliezer was sleeping and R. Joshua was awake. R. Joshua shuddered and R. Eliezer awoke. He said unto him: What is the matter, Joshua? What has caused you to tremble? He said unto him: I have seen a great light in the sea. He said unto him: You may have seen the eyes of Leviathan, for it is written: His eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.

ת"ר: מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע שהיו באין בספינה, והיה ר"א ישן ור' יהושע נעור, נודעזע ר' יהושע וננער ר"א. א"ל: מה זה יהושע, מפני מה נודעזעת? א"ל: מאור גדול ראיתי בים. אמר לו: שמא עיניו של לויתן ראית, דכתיב: (איוב מא) עיניו כעפעפי שחר.

Tale 20:

R. Ashi said: R. Huna b. Nathan related to me [the following]: Once we were walking in the desert and we had with us a leg of meat. We cut it open and picked out [the forbidden fat and the nervus ischiadicus] and put it on the grass. While we were fetching wood, the leg regained its original form and we roasted it. When we returned after twelve calendar months we saw those coals still glowing. When I came before Ammemar, he said unto me: That grass was samtre . Those glowing coals were of broom.

אמר רב אשי, אמר לי הונא בר נתן: זימנא חדא הוה קא אזלינן במדברא, והואי אטמא דבשרא בהדן, פתחנא ונקרינא ואנחנא אעשבי, אדמייתין ציבי חלם אטמא וטוינן. כי הדרן לבתר תריסר ירחי שתא, חזינהו להנהו גומרי דהוו קא מלחשי. כי אתאי לקמיה דאמימר, אמר לי: ההוא עישבא - סמתרי הוה, הנהו גומרי דריתמא הוו.

Tale 21:

[It is written]: And God created the great sea-monsters. Here they explained: The sea-gazelles. R. Johanan said: This refers to Leviathan the slant serpent, and to Leviathan the tortuous serpent, for it is written: In that day the Lord with his sore [and great and strong] sword will punish [Leviathan the slant serpent, and Leviathan the tortuous serpent].

(בראשית א) ויברא אלהים את התנינים הגדולים - הכא תרגימו: ארזילי דימא. ר' יוחנן אמר: זה לויתן נחש בריח ולויתן נחש עקלתון, שנאמר: (ישעיהו כז) ביום ההוא יפקוד ה' בחרבו הקשה וגו'.

Mnemonic: All time Jordan.

סימן: כל שעה ירדן

Tale 22:

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: All that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in his world he created male and female. Likewise, Leviathan the slant serpent and Leviathan the tortuous serpent he created male and female; and had they mated with one another they would have destroyed the whole world. What [then] did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He castrated the male and killed the female preserving it in salt for the righteous in the world-to-come; for it is written: And he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. And also Behemoth on a thousand hills were created male and female, and had they mated with one another they would have destroyed the whole world. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He castrated the male and cooled the female and preserved it for the righteous for the world-to-come; for it is written: Lo now his strength is in his loins this refers to the male; and his force is in the stays of his body, this refers to the female. There also, [in the case of Leviathan], he should have castrated the male and cooled the female [why then did he kill the female]? Fishes are dissolute. Why did he not reverse the process? If you wish, say: [It is because a] female [fish] preserved in salt is tastier. If you prefer, say: Because it is written: There is Leviathan whom Thou hast formed to sport with, and with a female this is not proper. Then here also [in the case of Behemoth] he should have preserved the female in salt? Salted fish is palatable, salted flesh is not.

Rab Judah in the name of Rab further said: At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to create the world, he said to the angel of the sea: Open thy mouth and swallow all the waters of the world. He said unto him: Lord of the Universe, it is enough that I remain with my own. Thereupon, He struck him with His foot and killed him; for it is written: He stirreth up the sea with his power and by his understanding he smiteth through Rahab. R. Isaac said: From this it may be inferred that the name of the angel of the sea was Rahab. And had not the waters covered him no creature could have stood his [foul] odour; for it is written: They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My Holy mountain etc. as the waters cover the sea. Do not read: They cover the sea, but [in the sense]: They cover the angel of the sea.

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: כל מה שברא הקב"ה בעולמו - זכר ונקבה בראם, אף לויתן נחש בריח ולויתן נחש עקלתון - זכר ונקבה בראם, ואלמלי נזקקין זה לזה - מחריבין כל העולם כולו, מה עשה הקב"ה? סירס את הזכר, והרג הנקבה ומלחה לצדיקים לעתיד לבא, שנאמר: (ישעיהו כ"ז) והרג את התנין אשר בים. ואף בהמות בהררי אלף - זכר ונקבה בראם, ואלמלי נזקקין זה לזה - מחריבין כל העולם כולו, מה עשה הקב"ה? סירס הזכר, וצינן הנקבה ושמרה לצדיקים לעתיד לבא, שנאמר: (איוב מ') הנה נא כחו במתניו - זה זכר, ואונו בשרירי בטנו - זו נקבה. התם נמי ליסרסיה לזכר וליצננה לנקבה דגים פריצי. וליעביד איפכא איבעית אימא: נקבה מליחא מעלי איבעית אימא, כיון דכתיב: (תהלים ק"ד) לויתן זה יצרת לשחק בו, בהדי נקבה לאו אורח ארעא. הכא נמי לימלחה לנקבה כוורא מליחא מעלי, בשרא מליחא לא מעלי. ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בשעה שביקש הקב"ה לבראות את העולם, אמר לו לשר של ים: פתח פין ובלע כל מימות שבעולם. אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, די שאעמוד בשלי. מיד בעט בו והרגו, שנאמר: (איוב כ"ז) בכחו רגע הים ובתבונתו מוחץ רהב. אמר ר' יצחק, ש"מ: שרו של ים רהב שמו, ואלמלא מים מכסין אותו - אין כל בריה יכולה לעמוד בריחו, שנאמר: (ישעיהו י"א) לא ירעו ולא ישחיתו בכל הר קדשי וגו' כמים לים מכסים, אל תקרי לים מכסים אלא לשרה של ים מכסים.

Tale 23:

Rab Judah further stated in the name of Rab: The Jordan issues from the cavern of Paneas. It has been taught likewise: The Jordan issues from the cavern of Paneas and passes through the Lake of Sibkay and the Lake of Tiberias and rolls down into the great sea from whence it rolls on until it rushes into the mouth of Leviathan; for it is said: He is confident because the Jordan rushes forth to his mouth. Raba b. Ulla objected: This [verse] is written of Behemoth on a thousand hills! But, said R. Abba b. Ulla: When is Behemoth on a thousand hills confident? When the Jordan rushes into the mouth of Leviathan.

ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: ירדן יוצא ממערת פמייס. תניא נמי הכי: ירדן יוצא ממערת פמייס, ומהלך בימה של סיבכי ובימה של טבריא, ומתגלגל ויורד לים הגדול, ומתגלגל ויורד עד שמגיע לפיו של לויתן, שנאמר: (איוב מ') יבטח כי יגיה ירדן אל פיהו. מתקיף לה רבא בר עולא: האי בבהמות בהררי אלף כתיב אלא אמר רבא בר עולא: אימתי בהמות בהררי אלף בטוחות? בזמן שמגיה ירדן בפיו של לויתן.

Mnemonic: Seas, Gabriel, Hungry.
סימן: ימים גבראל רעב

Tale 24

When R. Dimi came he stated in the name of R. Johanan: The verse, For he hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods speaks of the seven seas and four rivers which surround the land of Israel. And these are the seven seas: The sea of Tiberias, the Sea of Sodom, the Sea of Helath, the Sea of Hiltha, the Sea of Sibkay, the Sea of Aspamia and the Great Sea. The following are the four rivers: The Jordan, the Jarmuk, the Keramyon and Pigah.

כי אתא רב דימי א"ר יוחנן, מאי דכתיב: (תהלים כ"ד) כי הוא על ימים יסדה ועל נהרות יכוננה? אלו שבעה ימים וארבעה נהרות שמקיפין את ארץ ישראל, ואלו הן שבעה ימים: ימה של טבריא, וימה של סדום, וימה של חילת, וימה של חילתא, וימה של סיבכי, וים אספמיא, וים הגדול ואלו הן ארבעה נהרות: ירדן, וירמוך, וקירומיון, ופיגה.

Tale 25

When R. Dimi came, he said in the name of R. Jonathan: Gabriel is to arrange in the future a chase of Leviathan; for it is said: Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a fish hook? Or press down his tongue with a cord? And if the Holy One, blessed be He, will not help him, he will be unable to prevail over him; for it is said: He only that made him can make His sword to approach unto him.

כי אתא רב דימי א"ר יונתן: עתיד גבריאל לעשות קניגיא עם לויתן, שנאמר: (איוב מ') התמשוך לויתן בחכה ובחבל תשקיע לשונו, ואלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אין יכול לו, שנאמר: (איוב מ') העושו יגש חרבו.

Tale 26

When R. Dimi came he said in the name of R. Johanan: When Leviathan is hungry he emits [fiery] breath from his mouth and causes all the waters of the deep to boil; for it is said: He maketh the deep to boil like a pot. And if he were not to put his head into the Garden of Eden, no creature could stand his [foul] odour for it is said: He maketh the sea like a spiced broth. When he is thirsty he makes numerous furrows in the sea; for it is said: He maketh a path to shine after him. R. Aha b. Jacob said; The deep does not return to its strength until [after] seventy years; for it is said: One thinks the deep to be hoary, and hoary age is not [attained at] less than seventy [years].

כי אתא רב דימי אמר רבי יוחנן: בשעה שלויתן רעב - מוציא הבל מפיו ומרתיח כל מימות שבמצולה, שנאמר: (איוב מ"א) ירתיח כסיר מצולה ואלמלא מכניס ראשו לגן עדן - אין כל בריה יכולה לעמוד בריחו, שנאמר: (איוב מ"א) ים ישים כמרקחה ובשעה שצמא - עושה תלמים תלמים בים, שנאמר: (איוב מ"א) אחריו יאיר נתיב. אמר רב אחא בר יעקב: אין תהום חוזר לאיתנו עד שבעים שנה, שנאמר: (איוב מ"א) יחשוב תהום לשיבה, ואין שיבה פחותה משבעים.

Tale 27

Rabbah said in the name of R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a banquet for the righteous from the flesh of Leviathan; for it is said: Companions will make a banquet of it. Kerah must mean a banquet; for it is said: And he prepared for them a great banquet and they ate and drank. Companions must mean scholars; for it is said: Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken for thy voice; cause me to hear it. The rest [of

Leviathan] will be distributed and sold out in the markets of Jerusalem; for it is said: They will part him among the Kena'anim, and Kena'anim must mean merchants, for it is said: As for kena'an the balances of deceit are in his hand, he loveth to oppress. And if you wish you may infer it from the following: Whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth.

אמר רבה א"ר יוחנן: עתיד הקב"ה לעשות סעודה לצדיקים מבשרו של לויתן, שנאמר: (איוב מ') יכרו עליו חברים, ואין כרה אלא סעודה, שנאמר: (מלכים ב' ו') ויכרה להם כרה גדולה ויאכלו וישתו, ואין חברים אלא תלמידי חכמים, שנאמר: (שיר השירים ח') היושבת בגנים חברים מקשיבים לקולך השמיעני והשאר מחלקין אותו ועושין בו סחורה בשוקי ירושלים, שנאמר: (איוב מ') יחצוהו בין כנענים, ואין כנענים אלא תגרים, שנאמר: (הושע י"ב) כנען בידו מאזני מרמה לעשק אהב. ואי בעית אימא, מהכא: (ישעיהו כ"ג) אשר סחריה שרים כנעניה נכבדי ארץ.

Tale 28

Rabbah in the name of R. Johanan further stated: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a tabernacle for the righteous from the skin of Leviathan; for it is said: Canst thou fill tabernacles with his skin. If a man is worthy, a tabernacle is made for him; if he is not worthy [of this] a [mere] covering is made for him, for it is said: And his head with a fish covering. If a man is [sufficiently] worthy a covering is made for him; if he is not worthy [even of this], a necklace is made for him, for it is said: And necklaces about thy neck. If he is worthy [of it] a necklace is made for him; if he is not worthy [even of this] an amulet is made for him; as it is said: And thou wilt bind him for thy maidens. The rest [of Leviathan] will be spread by the Holy One, blessed be He, upon the walls of Jerusalem, and its splendour will shine from one end of the world to the other; as it is said: And nations shall walk at thy light, and kings at the brightness of thy rising.

ואמר רבה א"ר יוחנן: עתיד הקב"ה לעשות סוכה לצדיקים מעורו של לויתן, שנא': (איוב מ') התמלא בסוכות עורו זכה - עושין לו סוכה, לא זכה - עושין לו צלצל, שנאמר: (איוב מ') ובצלצל דגים ראשו זכה - עושין לו צלצל, לא זכה - עושין לו ענק, שנאמר: (משלי א') וענקים לגרורותיך זכה - עושין לו ענק, לא זכה - עושין לו קמיע, שנאמר: (איוב מ') ותקשרנו לנערותיך והשאר פורסו הקב"ה על חומות ירושלים וזיוו מבהיק מסוף העולם ועד סופו, שנאמר: (ישעיהו ס') והלכו גוים לאורך ומלכים לנוגה זרחך.

Tale 29

[It is written]: And I will make thy pinnacles of kadmah. R. Samuel b. Nahmani said: There is a dispute [as to the meaning of kadmah] between two angels in heaven, Gabriel and Michael. Others say: [The dispute is between] two Amoraim in the West. And who are they? Judah and Hezekiah the sons of R. Hiyya. One says: [Kadmah means] onyx; and the other says: Jasper. The Holy One, blessed be He, said unto them: Let it be as this one [says] and as that one.

And thy gates of carbuncles [is to be understood] as R. Johanan [explained] when he

[once] sat and gave an exposition: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come bring precious stones and pearls which are thirty [cubits] by thirty and will cut out from them [openings] ten [cubits] by twenty, and will set them up in the gates of Jerusalem. A certain student sneered at him: [Jewels] of the size of a dove's egg are not to be found; are [jewels] of such a size to be found? After a time, his ship sailed out to sea [where] he saw ministering angels engaged in cutting precious stones and pearls which were thirty [cubits] by thirty and on which were engravings of ten [cubits] by twenty. He said unto them: For whom are these? They replied that the Holy One, blessed be He, would in time to come set them up in the gates of Jerusalem. [When] he came [again] before R. Johanan he said unto him: Expound, O my master; it is becoming for you to expound; as you said, so have I seen. He replied unto him: Raca, had you not seen, would not you have believed? You are [then] sneering at the words of the Sages! He set his eyes on him and [the student] turned into a heap of bones.

An objection was raised: And I will lead you komamiyuth, R. Meir says: [it means] two hundred cubits; twice the height of Adam. R. Judah says: A hundred cubits; corresponding to the [height of the] temple and its walls. For it is said: We whose sons are as plants grown up in their youth; whose daughters are as corner-pillars carved after the fashion of the Temple. R. Johanan speaks only of the ventilation windows.

(ישעיהו נד) ושמתי כדכד שמשותיך - א"ר שמואל בר נחמני: פליגי תרי מלאכי ברקיעא, גבריאלי ומיכאל, ואמרי לה: תרי אמוראי במערבא, ומאן אינון? יהודה וחזקיה בני רבי חייא, חד אמר: שוהם, וחד אמר: ישפה, אמר להו הקב"ה: להוי כדין וכדין. (ישעיהו נח) ושעריך לאבני אקדח - כי הא דיתיב רבי יוחנן וקא דריש: עתיד הקב"ה להביא אבנים טובות ומרגליות שהם שלשים על שלשים, וחוקק בהן עשר על עשרים ומעמידן בשערי ירושלים. לגלג עליו אותו תלמיד, השתא כביעתא דציצלא לא משכחינן, כולי האי משכחינן? לימים הפליגה ספינתו בים, חזא מלאכי השרת דיתבי וקא מינסרי אבנים טובות ומרגליות שהם ל' על ל' וחוקק בהן עשר ברום עשרים, אמר להו: הני למאן? אמרו ליה: שעתידי הקב"ה להעמידן בשערי ירושלים. אתא לקמיה דרבי יוחנן, אמר ליה: דרוש, רבי, לך נאה לדרוש, כאשר אמרת כן ראיתי. אמר לו: ריקא אלמלא (לא) ראית לא האמנת, מלגלג על דברי חכמים אתה, נתן עיניו בו ונעשה גל של עצמות. מיתיבי: (ויקרא כ"ז) ואולך אתכם קוממיות - רבי מאיר אומר: מאתים אמה, כשתי קומות של אדם הראשון רבי יהודה אומר: מאה אמה, כנגד היכל וכתליו, שנאמר: (תהלים קמ"ד) אשר בנינו כנטיעים מגודלים בנעוריהם בנותינו כזויות מחוטבות תבנית היכל כי קאמר ר' יוחנן - לכווי דבי זיקא.

Tale 30

Rabbah in the name of R. Johanan further stated: The Holy One, blessed be He, will make seven canopies for every righteous man; for it is said: And the Lord will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud of smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory shall be a canopy. This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, will make for everyone a canopy corresponding to his rank. Why is smoke required in a canopy? R. Hanina said: Because who so ever is niggardly towards the scholars in

this world will have his eyes filled with smoke in the world-to-come. Why is fire required in a canopy? R. Hanina said: This teaches that each one will be burned by reason of [his envy of the superior] canopy of his friend. Alas, for such shame! Alas, for such reproach!

In a similar category is the following: And thou shalt put of thy honour upon him,³⁹ but not all thy honour. The elders of that generation said: The countenance of Moses was like that of the sun; the countenance of Joshua was like that of the moon. Alas, for such shame! Alas for such reproach!

R. Hama b. Hanina said: The Holy One, blessed be He, made ten canopies for Adam in the garden of Eden; for it is said: Thou wast in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone [was thy covering, the cornelian, the topaz and the emerald, the beryl, the onyx and the jasper, the sapphire, the carbuncle and the emerald and gold] etc. Mar Zutra says: Eleven; for it is said: Every precious stone. R. Johanan said: The least of all [these] was gold, since it is mentioned last. What is [implied] by the work of thy timbrels and holes? Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Hiram, the King of Tyre. [At the creation] I looked upon thee, [observing thy future arrogance] and created [therefore] the excretory organs of man. Others say: Thus said [the Holy One, blessed be He]. I looked upon thee and decreed the penalty of death over Adam. What is implied by, and over her assemblies? Rabbah said in the name of R. Johanan: Jerusalem of the world-to-come will not be like Jerusalem of the present world. [To] Jerusalem of the present world, anyone who wishes goes up, but to that of the world-to-come only those invited will go.

ואמר רבה א"ר יוחנן: עתיד הקב"ה לעשות שבע חופות לכל צדיק וצדיק, שנאמר: (ישעיהו ד) וברא ה' על כל מכון הר ציון ועל מקראיה ענן יומם ועשן ונוגה אש להבה לילה כי על כל כבוד חופה, מלמד שכל אחד ואחד עושה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא חופה לפי כבודו. עשן בחופה למה? אמר רבי חנינא: שכל מי שעניו צרות בתלמידי חכמים בעולם הזה, מתמלאות עיניו עשן לעולם הבא. ואש בחופה למה? אמר רבי חנינא: מלמד שכל אחד ואחד נכזה מחופתו של חבירו, אוי לה לאותה בושה, אוי לה לאותה כלימה. כיוצא בדבר אתה אומר: (במדבר כ"ז) ונתתה מהודך עליו - ולא כל הודך, זקנים שבאותו הדור אמרו: פני משה כפני חמה, פני יהושע כפני לבנה, אוי לה לאותה בושה, אוי לה לאותה כלימה. אמר רבי חמא (בר) (מסורת הש"ס: ברבי) חנינא: עשר חופות עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא לאדם הראשון בגן עדן, שנאמר: (יחזקאל כ"ח) בעדן גן אלהים היית כל אבן יקרה וגו'. מר זוטרא אמר: אחת עשרה, שנאמר: כל אבן יקרה. אמר רבי יוחנן: וגרוע שבכולן זהב, דקא חשיב ליה לבסוף. מאי (יחזקאל כ"ח) מלאכת תופיך ונקביך כך? אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לחירם מלך צור: כך נסתכלתי, ובראתי נקבים נקבים באדם. ואיכא דאמרי, הכי קאמר: כך נסתכלתי, וקנסתי מיתה על אדם הראשון. מאי (ישעיהו ד') ועל מקראיה? אמר רבה א"ר יוחנן: לא כירושלים של עולם הזה ירושלים של עולם הבא, ירושלים של עולם הזה - כל הרוצה לעלות עולה, של עולם הבא - אין עולין אלא המזומנין לה.

Rabbah in the name of R. Johanan further stated: The righteous will in time to come be called by the name of the Holy One, blessed be He; for it is said: Every one that is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory. I have formed him, yea, I have made him.

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Johanan: Three were called by the name of the Holy One; blessed be He, and they are the following: The righteous, the Messiah and Jerusalem. [This may be inferred as regards] the righteous [from] what has just been said. [As regards] the Messiah it is written: And this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness. [As regards] Jerusalem it is written: It shall be eighteen thousand reeds round about; and the name of the city from that day shall be the Lord is there. Do not read, there but its name.

R. Eleazar said: There will come a time when Holy will be said before the righteous as it is said before the Holy One, blessed be He; for it is said: And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called Holy.

Rabbah in the name of R. Johanan further stated: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come lift up Jerusalem three parasangs high; for it is said: And she shall be lifted up, and be settled in her place. In her place means like her place. Whence is it proved that the space it occupied was three parasangs in extent? Rabbah said: A certain old man told me, I saw ancient Jerusalem and it occupied [an area of] three parasangs. And lest you should think the ascent will be painful, it is expressly stated: Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their cotes. R. Papa said: Hence it may be inferred that a cloud rises three parasangs. R. Hanina b. papa said: The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to give to Jerusalem a [definite] size; for it is said: Then said I Whither goest thou? And he said unto me: To measure Jerusalem. to see what is the breadth thereof and what is the length thereof. The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He, Lord of the Universe, many towns for the nations of the earth hast thou created in thy world, and thou didst not fix the measurement of their length or the measurement of their breadth, wilt thou fix a measurement for Jerusalem in the midst of which is Thy Name, Thy sanctuary and the righteous? Thereupon, [an angel] said unto him: Run speak to this young man, saying: Jerusalem shall be inhabited without walls, for the multitude of men and cattle therein.

Resh Lakish said: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come add to Jerusalem a thousand gardens, a thousand towers, a thousand palaces and a thousand mansions; and each [of these] will be as big as Sepphoris in its prosperity. It has been taught: R. Jose said: I saw Sepphoris in its prosperity, and it contained a hundred and eighty thousand markets for pudding dealers.

[It is written]: And the side chambers were one over another, three and thirty times. What is meant by three and thirty times? R. Levi in the name of R. Papi in the name of R. Joshua of Siknin said: If [in time to come] there will be three Jerusalems, each [building] will contain thirty dwellings one over the other; if there will be thirty Jerusalems, each [building] will contain three dwellings one over the other.

ואמר רבה א"ר יוחנן: עתידין צדיקים שנקראין על שמו של הקב"ה, שנאמר: (ישעיהו מ"ג) כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו יצרתיו אף עשיתיו. וא"ר שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יוחנן מסורת הש"ס: א"ר שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יונתן: ג' נקראו על שמו של הקב"ה, ואלו הן: צדיקים, ומשיח, וירושלים.

צדיקים, הא דאמרן. משיח, דכתיב: (ירמיהו כ"ג) וזה שמו אשר יקראו ה' צדקנו. ירושלים, דכתיב: (יחזקאל מ"ח) סביב שמונה עשר אלף ושם העיר מיום ה' שמה אל תקרי שמה אלא שמה. א"ר אלעזר: עתידין צדיקים שאומרים לפניו קדוש, בדרך שאומרים לפני הקב"ה, שנאמר: (ישעיהו ד') והיה הנשאר בציון והנותר בירושלים קדוש יאמר לו. ואמר רבה א"ר יוחנן: עתיד הקב"ה להגביה את ירושלים ג' פרסאות למעלה, שנאמר: (זכריה י"ד) וראמה וישבה תחתיה, מאי תחתיה? כתחתיה. וממאי דהאי תחתיה תלתא פרסי הויא? אמר רבה, אמר לי ההוא סבא: לדידי חזי לי ירושלים קמייתא, ותלתא פרסי הויא. ושמא תאמר: יש צער לעלות? ת"ל: (ישעיהו ס') מי אלה כעב תעופינה וכיונים אל ארובותיהם. אמר רב פפא, ש"מ: האי עיבא - תלתא פרסי מידלי. אמר רבי חנינא בר פפא: בקש הקדוש ברוך הוא לתת את ירושלים במדה, שנאמר: (זכריה ב') ואומר אנה אתה הולך ויאמר אלי למוד את ירושלים לראות כמה רחבה וכמה ארכה, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבש"ע, הרבה כרכים בראת בעולמך של אומות העולם - ולא נתת מדת ארכן ומדת רחבן, ירושלים ששמך בתוכה ומקדשך בתוכה וצדיקים בתוכה - אתה נותן בה מדה מיד: (זכריה ב') ויאמר אליו רוח דבר אל הנער הלז לאמר פרזות תשב ירושלם מרוב אדם ובהמה בתוכה. אמר ריש לקיש: עתיד הקב"ה להוסיף על ירושלם אלף טפף גינאות, אלף קפל מגדלים, אלף ליצוי בירניות, אלף ושני שילה טוטפראות, וכל אחת ואחת הויא כצפורי בשלוותה. תניא, א"ר יוסי: אני ראיתי צפורי בשלוותה, והיו בה מאה ושמונים אלף שווקים של מוכרי ציקי קדירה. (יחזקאל מ"א) והצלעות צלע אל צלע שלש ושלשים פעמים - מאי שלש ושלשים פעמים? א"ר לוי, אמר רב פפי משום ר' יהושע דסכני: אם ג' ירושלים הן - כל אחת ואחת יש בה שלשים מדורין למעלה, אם שלשים ירושלים הן - כל אחת ואחת יש בה שלשה מדורין למעלה.

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