SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT OF CLASS OF 2008
COMPLETED RABBINIC THESIS

I, Devorah Marcus, hereby submit two (2) copies of my/our
(Please print)
completed ~~thesis~~ text immersion in final form, entitled

Midrash, A Study.

Devorah Marcus 2.28.08
Student Signature / Date:

Additional Students, if applicable (please print, sign, and date)

"The author has my permission to submit this thesis in partial fulfillment for requirement for ordination."

Name of Advisor:

Signature of Advisor:

RECEIPT BY REGISTRAR

The above named thesis was received by the Registrar's Office

2/28/08
Date

Carol Loefler
Registrar

by

Midrash, A Study

Devorah Marcus
Capstone Project: A Text Immersion In Midrash Rabbah
Advisor: Dr. Joel Gereboff
February 26, 2008

CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION

Without question, the rape of Dinah is one of Torah's darker stories. Generations of Rabbis have struggled to interpret and understand the account. Dinah's narrative has been used as a warning to women on the dangers of violating social custom and has also been used as a prime example of a text which cries out for feminist interpretation. Examining the midrashic and medieval commentaries on the rape of Dinah provides an opportunity to understand how the rabbis work with the biblical text to draw out and impose meaning and value. Comparing the two types of literature allows us to see how they relate to each other and how the Meforshim both react to and contribute to the contributions of the Midrashists. Finally, by incorporating the perspective of modern critical scholarship, we are able to better understand the story itself as well as the concerns and motivations of the rabbis who created the Midrashim and the medieval commentaries.

In order to better understand how and why the rabbis have responded to Dinah as they have, this study begins by looking at the midrashic enterprise – what it was and who created it. By having a deeper understanding of the midrash itself as well as the people who created the midrashic interpretations we will be better equipped to understand and respond to the midrashic commentaries on Dinah – commentaries that our modern sensibilities might see as insensitive and inappropriate. Only after we have examined the

midrashic rabbis and their project will we look at the Midrashim on Dinah. We will examine the trends and tendencies extant in the Midrashim. By focusing on these trends and tendencies, it will be possible to observe the socio-political concerns of the midrashic rabbis and how those concerns work their way into the texts they sought to interpret by their very interpretations. Only after this will we examine how these concerns and reactions are evidenced in the work of the Meforshim and how the Meforshim react to some of the various midrashim.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Outside the biblical text itself, some of our earliest commentaries can be found in the form of midrashim. Literally, the Hebrew verb *lidrosh* means to investigate or to seek out. Understanding this term leads us to consider the option that midrashim are investigations into the text and its difficulties as well as its unanswered questions in order to better understand the biblical narrative, our sacred history, and God's intentions. While this is certainly a valid answer, Daniel Boyarin challenges that we must first define Midrash's genre. Only then can we hope to understand its goals and purpose.[1]

To better understand the midrashic enterprise, Boyarin turns to Maimonides and his commentary on Midrash in the Guide for the Perplexed. In short, Rambam conveys an understanding that midrash is *not* commentary, nor is it for the sake of clarifying the biblical text. According to Rambam, the midrash is a form of poetry; it is didactic fiction.[2] Boyarin goes on to cite the work of Isaak Heinemann, who he identifies as the author of "the only serious full-scale attempt to describe midrash theoretically." Challenging Rambam, Heinemann asserts that to understand the midrashim as poetry and fiction is to underestimate their intent and gravity. He observes, "midrash is encoded as biblical interpretation and not mainly as poetry or homiletic – on its textual

[1] Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash. P. 2
[2] Ibid

surface."[3] While Boyarin questions the legitimacy of Heinemann's challenge, he acknowledges there is legitimacy in both of the arguments. Heinemann is correct in his assertion that the rabbis ground their interpretations in logical analysis and intertextual proofs. Yet, Boyarin acknowledges other modern scholarship which points to the allegorical and homiletic nature of much of this body of work.

Synthesizing this scholarship and combining modern theories, Boyarin proposes that we can understand midrash best by acknowledging "that all interpretation and historiography is *representation* of the past by the present, that is, that there is no such thing as value-free, true and objective rendering of documents. They are always filtered through the cultural, socio-ideological matrix of their readers."[4] Boyarin also points to the inherently intertextual nature of the midrashic enterprise. He defines intertextuality as the understanding "that every text is constrained by the literary system of which it is a part and that every text is ultimately dialogical in that it cannot but record the traces of its contentions and doubling of earlier discourses."[5] In other words, the cultural context and experiences of the rabbis, whether they are creating Midrashim or writing medieval commentaries, are evident in their works and how they interpret the texts they are working with. Additionally, we must consider the dual literary systems at play in any given text and its

[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid, p. 12
[5] Ibid, p. 14

interpretations. There is the literary system out of which the text is taken, and there is the literary system of the reader. Sometimes these systems are harmonious and sometimes they are discordant. Modern readers cannot hope to sit down, open a page of Midrash, read it *and* understand it without proper contextualization and training. Indeed, even with such preparation, ancient texts can seem enigmatic and incomprehensible. No text exists in a vacuum. All texts are both responsive and proactive. The same is true for commentaries. They respond to difficulties in the text, but these responses are written within the framework of current situations. Such careful investigations and interpretations were no small feat. The work of the Midrashist is involved, disciplined and simultaneously creative.

For the Midrashic rabbis, the investigative process often meant delving into the canonical texts, phrase by phrase to understand and clarify God's intentions in the world. Stephen Fraade explains "all commentaries so defined can be said to exhibit the following structural traits: they begin with an extended base-text, of which they designate successive subunits for exegetical attention, to each of which they attach a comment or chain of comments, which nevertheless remain distinct from the base text, to which the commentary sooner or later returns (that is, advances) to take up the next selected subunit in sequence."[6] Additionally, they sought to clarify law, history, theology, and to

[6] Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy, p. 1-2

reinforce social norms. Of course, not all of these concerns are equally addressed in every Midrash. Different Midrashim address different aspects. Michael Fishbane observes that the result of the midrashic enterprise is "a rich harvest of interpretations that virtually transform the Bible into a rabbinic work, so profoundly and vigorously do the sages project their own theological and legal agenda into Scripture."[7] Fishbane also highlights the rich and varied nature of the midrashic imagination and interpretation. He notes that Midrash is at once subtle and serious and at times, even playful. All in all, the contribution of Midrash to the rabbinic project as a whole cannot be understated. As Fishbane states, "across the breadth of Judaism, it is not only the insistent recourse to the Bible that marks its creativity, but the very midrashic mode of correlating Scriptures among themselves and with new values, virtues or events."[8] Thus, he sees the midrashic enterprise as having formed the very earliest foundations for rabbinic scriptural interpretation and that those foundations are very much present in every generation's rabbinic projects.

---

[7] Fishbane, The Midrashic Imagination, Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History, p. 1
[8] ibid.

WHEN WAS MIDRASH CREATED?

Attempting to reconstruct the historical context in which Midrash evolved ultimately is an exercise in educated speculation. No documents exist which bear the history of the genre's development. Conventional speculation dates the Midrash (broadly) from 200 C.E. to 800 C.E.[9] For the sake of this study, we will accept the common, conventional dating (placing the midrashic development alongside that of the Mishnah and even the Gemara) will be used. However, it is important to note that unlike the Talmudic texts, Midrash does not appear to be a bi-cultural phenomenon. The primary authors of midrashic material are the rabbis who remained in ha'aretz and *not* the rabbis from Babylonia. Evidence of this is witnessed in how Midrashim are incorporated into the Talmud Yerushalmi versus the Talmud Bavli. The Yerushalmi contains very few midrashic stories and interpretations while the Bavli incorporates them with fair frequency.

---

[9] Much discussion surrounding the issue of dating Midrashim is concerned with how and when Midrash began and evolved into what the rabbis eventually termed "midrash." Much of the arguments are speculative. While studying the arguments concerning the antecedents of Midrash are interesting, they ultimately do not bear on the conversation of this midrashic study. Regardless of how midrash as a genre evolved and how the rabbis developed it, this study is primarily concerned with addressing and assessing the midrashic rabbinic responses to the rape of Dinah and how those responses are picked up or ignored by the medieval commentators.

THE MIDRASHIC PROJECT

With regard to the understanding the exact nature of the midrashic project, it is safe to say that speculation abounds. Nearly every scholar has his or her own unique perspective and answer. Jacob Neusner stresses that Midrash is a type of literature. He explains that "The method of rabbinic Midrash therefore involves seeing things as other than they seem."[10] Neusner then asserts the theory that much of Midrash is an allegorical response to the text and that this allegorical response is actually a response to Christianity. He explains,

> "Christians pointed to the political revolution effected by Constantine as evidence of Christ's kingship. Then in 360, the last pagan emperor's project of rebuilding Israel's Temple in Jerusalem failed. From that event Christians found still further proof from history and politics for the Jews' error in rejecting Jesus as the Christ. Under stuch conditions, Scripture would itself serve to confirm the Christians' interpretation fo history and politics. Form the sages' viewpoint, the crisis of the fourth century found its final solution in the established approach to Scripture: 'things are not what they seem.'"[11]

Representing one of the more traditional understandings of rabbinic Midrash, Neusner sees the literature as a response to the potential theological crisis that the ascent of Christianity posed. This need to convey an understanding of things in an allegorical way is, according to Neusner, the very nature of the formal body of Midrashim. Essentially, the rabbis created a system whereby "others" who attempted to interpret the text were inherently unable due to the

[10] Jacob Neusner, What is Midrash?, p. 44
[11] ibid, p. 45

reality that only the rabbis themselves are able to properly explain the Torah's hidden meanings. Therefore, according to the rabbis, their interpretations are the only correct interpretations and all other (Christian) interpretations are false.

As previously mentioned, Maimonides understands Midrash to be a form of poetry, or as Boyarin states it, didactic fiction. Boyarin himself offers a multivalent understanding of the nature of the midrashic process. He identifies three key aspects that, together, are the midrashic project. Initially, Midrash is a reading of the biblical text which seeks to draw out meaning while being "sensitive to literary values, echoes, contradictions, [and] intertextuality in all of its senses within the Bible."[12] Boyarin notes that while Midrash attempts to understand the simple meaning within the text, that entity – the simple meaning – changes in each generation and from place to place. Accordingly, even the meaning drawn out of the text is an ever-evolving thing. Second in his list, Boyarin understands Midrash as the product of a "disturbed exegetical sense."[13] Again, he tempers this somewhat inflammatory definition with the caveat that all exegetical senses are "disturbed." This is to say that they are not simple and unilateral. Instead, exegetical senses are as complex as the people who employ them, "filtered through consciousness, tradition, ideology, and the intertext..." Employment of the adjective "disturbed" emphasizes the often

[12] Boyarin, p. 18
[13] ibid

dissonant facets "all interpretation is filtered through..." Lastly, he defines Midrash as literature. As he understands it, all literature exists as a "revision and interpretation of a cannon and the traditions and is a dialogue with the past and with the authority which determines the shape of human lives in the present and future."[14] Most eloquently Boyarin summarizes the midrashic tradition stating, "The rabbis were concerned with the burning issues of their day, but their approach to that concern was through the clarification of difficult passages of Scripture."[15] Though this statement may seem innocuous, it is actually a radical observation. Boyarin's observation is that the rabbis are largely, if not primarily, more concerned with their own issues than with Torah, and that Torah, for them, is the tool by which the world can be decoded, deciphered and understood.

Other scholars such as Moshe Idel understand Midrash to be "a generic mode of interpretation, rather than a specific attitude restricted to the texts written during a certain limited period of time by Jewish authors."[16] A strong case can be made to support this argument. Threads of midrashic exegesis are already evident in early translations of Tanakh as well as within Tanakh itself. One example will be discussed later in this study. Indeed, this trend is part of what Boyarin refers to with his employment of the term, "intertextuality." It is

---

[14] ibid, p. 19
[15] ibid
[16] Moshe Idel, "Midrash vs. Other Jewish Hermeneuties". The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History, p. 45 - 46

possible to say that Idel asserts that there is virtually no distinction between the work of the midrashists and Meforshim. As will be observed later in this study, the pattern of text study employed by the Meforshim are similar to that of the midrashic rabbis – each verse of Torah is parsed, sometimes word by word and sometimes, phrase by phrase in order to draw out (or impose) as much meaning as is possible or as is desired.[17] Idel's assertion is that this pattern of interpretation is just that – a pattern; it is a way of delving into the text that is not limited to midrashic material itself, but is witnessed in the Midrashim, in Talmud, in Medieval commentaries and so on until the present day.

For the purposes of this examination, Idel and Boyarin's definitions are most appreciated. Boyarin's multifaceted approach allows for the numerous variations found within Midrash itself. Idel's understanding that Midrash is a generic form of interpretation is also helpful. Part of this study will examine midrash from this perspective, understanding that midrashic exegesis was initially created within the biblical text itself and continues on to this very day as a means of understanding Torah and making it relevant in each generation[18]; it is how we address the issues that confront and concern us today while standing rooted in our tradition.

---

[17] Not all words and phrases are parsed. The rabbis select which words and phrases to focus on and emphasize in their work.

[18] It is important to distinguish between midrashic exegesis and the formal body of literature known as "Midrash." The process of reading the text closely, interpreting it, imposing meaning and drawing meaning out are evidenced in the Biblical text itself. One Midrash explored later highlights a point of intertextual reading and interpretation. This process expresses the features of Midrash, but is not itself a part of the formal body of Midrashic literature.

That said, as we begin to examine Midrash – what it is and how it functions, we cannot ignore the need to recognize and acknowledge the socio-political realities in which the rabbis found themselves. Boyarin reminds us, the rabbis are not merely responding to their sacred texts, they are also responding to their current experiences. The texts themselves are being analyzed within a framework of the authors' contemporary reality.

If we accept the theory that Midrash and Talmud evolved simultaneously, and that its creators and authors were the rabbis of Eretz Yisrael, we can ascertain some basic information about their socio-political realities. At the very least, these are people who are living in their own land under foreign rule. Their Temple has been destroyed for some time, and they are working to adapt to a life in which their most basic theological assumptions have been challenged in the most devastating ways possible. Critical scholarship would encourage us to consider how and when these issues play out in the text. To fully understand the midrashic enterprise, students of Midrash need to be sensitive to these issues of contextual reality.

Here we have a body of interpretive literature being developed by deeply devout and faithful men who are still struggling with a hermeneutic crisis – a crisis which still impacts the Jewish community to this day. If the Temple, which is God's dwelling place, is destroyed, there can only be two logical conclusions. One answer is that God is not as powerful as the Jews had

thought. By this reasoning, Jews can no longer assert God's unique dominion over earth, nor God's supreme authority as sole Divine in existence. To acknowledge that this is the answer is tantamount to abandoning their understanding of God, and thereby abandoning God altogether. Obviously, this response was not acceptable to the Jews who knew themselves to be a people living in covenant with the singular deity of all existence, indeed with the God who brought existence into existence. The other possible answer becomes, for the Jews, the only possible answer.

God has turned away from God's people. This turning away is not a sign that God has stopped loving the people, but rather it is a sign that the people have stopped loving and obeying God. According to this theology, the people have shunned God long before God has shunned the people, and God's turning away is a result of profound sadness, understandable anger. Upon destruction of the First Temple, the Jews come to the understanding that the destruction is a result, not of some foreign power that rivals God, but of God's own will. The destruction is a punishment to the Jews for abandoning God, for chasing after foreign gods and false idols, for abandoning their sacred obligations and for neglecting key aspects of their covenant with God. So ingrained is this understanding, that the Jews undergo a radical transformations in response to this interpretation. As James L. Kugel explains, upon their exile to Babylonia, the Jews concluded that Nebuchadnezzar's

destruction of Jerusalem could only have occurred as a result of God's wishes[19]. For the Jews, this meant that their oppressor was merely a tool, an instrument being used by God to convey God's extreme dissatisfaction with the Israelites and their wayward paths. Their suspicions are confirmed when, in just two generations later, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians are overturned and replaced by Cyrus who leads a much more tolerant, Persian empire. Under the leadership of Cyrus and Darius I, the Jews are given permission to return to their land and rebuild their Temple. Hebrew scripture itself tells of this return and restoration in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. As Kugel observes, one of the primary concerns of the returning community is not to make the same mistakes their ancestors have made which resulted in God's wrath and destruction. They face additional challenges. No one alive has direct experience with the running of the Temple or with making animal sacrifices therein. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews look to their ancient texts for guidance, instruction and clue. Thus, a radical transformation takes place. The Jews turn away from prophecy as a means of understanding God's will in the universe, and instead turn to their sacred scriptures, which are now believed to contain hidden prophetic messages. The texts are collected and organized. A process of canonization begins. Proper interpretation of these texts becomes essential. Proper interpretation of these texts means the

[19] James L. Kugel, The Bible As It Was, pgs. 4 - 5

community's continued survival in the good graces of a pleased and content God. Nehemiah Chapter 8 records what is possibly the first public reading of Torah as well as interpretation and explanation of Torah for the people by scribes, priests and teachers. Nehemiah 8:8 specifically states, "They recited in the book of the Teaching of the God, explaining [it] and putting it [with] sensibility, so they understood the recitation." We see here that Torah is not merely to be read. As exemplified by Ezra, it is to be read and *understood* by way of explanation and interpretation. From this time forward all decisions, whether religious, political or social must now have foundation in the biblical texts. Kugel notes, "It is significant that the Jews of this period turned to their own ancient writings to legitimate their political views."[20]

Upon the final destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews turn again, with renewed vigor, to this established method of scriptural interpretation. Midrash then, reflects one significant school in this approach. The midrashic rabbis work with painstaking care to interpret every sentence, phrase by phrase, leaving no word un-searched and no sentence unexplored. Through their careful and creative examinations, they address their own angst and social concerns through their text studies. All of this is done with the belief that God has provided answers for these questions and concerns within

[20] Ibid, p. 6

the revealed texts and that finding the answers is a matter of careful and clever interpretation.

To better understand this phenomenon in action, we will now examine the biblical story of the rape of Dinah and study how the rabbis respond through the Midrashim. Quite apparent in the midrashic responses is the trend that the rabbis are not merely attempting to analyze a story. They are examining the story for clues that will instruct them about how to prevent such a similar and terrible situation in their own communities.

THE RAPE OF DINAH

Genesis 34 records the rape of Dinah with chillingly terse language and uncomfortable brevity. In one sentence, in four words, this young daughter of Jacob is seen, seized, raped and tormented. This incident occurs at an innocuous moment. Immediately prior to this scene, Jacob has finally come face to face with his brother Esau after years of estrangement. The text builds with tension as Jacob prepares to deal with Esau's wrath. He splits the camp in two hoping that, should Esau attack, at least half of them might successfully escape. Rather than the violent scene the text sets readers up for, we read of a peaceful reconciliation. The brothers meet in the middle of a field, they see each other, they embrace each other and weep on each other's necks. It is a beautiful moment of love and forgiveness. Following this reunion, Jacob purchases land from the Shechemites and settles outside their city. All seems well.

Even the beginning of Dinah's story is unsuspecting. We read in the first verse of Chapter 34, "Then Dinah, daughter of Leah who she bore to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land."[21] It is not difficult to imagine that this girl, the only daughter amongst twelve brothers, would have been eager to meet other young women her own age. Looking at this text through a feminist lens, we become aware of the power structures. We can imagine that

[21] All biblical translation in this study has been self-done unless otherwise indicated.

in all likelihood, Dinah and her family felt a fair amount of security having legally purchased the right to sojourn outside of Shechem. Genesis 33:18 goes so far as to inform us that Jacob has come in peace to the town indicating that there was no strong-arming involved in the purchase deal. Thus, from the auspicious verses at the end of Chapter 33 indicating good relations and peaceful times, readers are jarred as the situation rapidly unravels:

> Then Dinah, daughter of Leah whom she bore to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And he saw her - Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the land – and he seized her, and he had sex with her and he violated her. He became attached to Dinah, daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young girl, and he spoke to the heart of the young girl. So Shechem spoke to Hamor, his father saying, "Take this girl for me as a wife." Jacob heard that he defiled his daughter, Dinah, and his sons were with the cattle in the field so Jacob was silent until they came.
>
> So Hamor, father of Shechem, went to Jacob to speak with him. Now Jacob's sons came from the field when they heard. The men were grieved and they were greatly angered for he (Shechem) had committed a disgrace amongst the Israelites – to sleep with Jacob's daughter – for such was not to be done. Hamor spoke with them saying, "Shechem, my son – he is attached to you daughter. Please, give her to him as a wife. Let us marry ourselves [together]! Your daughters – give them to us, and our daughters – we will give to you. Settle amongst us and the land will be before you: settle, travel about in it, and acquire holdings in it!"
>
> Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "May I find favor in your eyes. Whatever you demand of me – I will give it. Increase the bride price and the [required] gifts and I will give that which you demand of me, only give me the girl as a wife!"
>
> The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor, his father, with deceit, which they spoke because he had defiled their sister Dinah. They said to them, "It is not possible to do this thing – to give our sister to a man who is not circumcised for that would bring disgrace upon us. Only by this can we consent to

you[r requst] – if you will become like us – for you to circumcise every male. Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters for ourselves; then we will settle amongst you and become a single people. And if you do not listen to us about the circumcision, we will take our daughter and go."

Their words were good in the eyes of Hamor and Shechem, son of Hamor – so the young man did not hesitate to do the thing for he took pleasure in the daughter of Jacob. He was honored most out of everyone in his father's house.

Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and they spoke to the men of their city saying, "These men, they are peaceable with us. May they dwell in the land and travel about the land. Behold – it is wide-reaching before them. Their daughters, we may take for wives, and our daughters we will give to them. However, only by this [condition] will they consent to us, to settle with us, to become one people – by us circumcising every male just as they are circumcised. Their cattle, and their possessions, and all their animals – should they not be ours?! Only if we consent [to this] for them will they settle with us.

They listened to Hamor and to Shechem, his son, all of them who go out the gates of his city. So all the males were circumcised, all of them who go out the gates of his.

It was the third day with them in their pain. Then two sons of Jacob, Shimon and Levi, brothers of Dinah – each man took his sword and they came upon the city with confidence. They killed every man, and Hamor, and Shechem his son – they killed by way of the sword. Then they took Dinah from the house of Shechem and went out. Jacob's sons came upon the slain and they plundered the city [of those] who had defiled their sister. Their sheep, and their cattle, and their donkeys and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, they took for themselves; all their wealth, all their children and all their wives, they captured and they plundered and all that was in the houses.

Jacob said to Shimon and to Levi, you have [made] trouble for me, making me noxious among those who dwell in the land – with the Canaanites and the Perezites! I am few in number, they will gather against me, they will smite me and they will destroy me, and my house!

They said, "And our sister should be made into a whore?!"[22]

---

[22] Genesis 34:1 – 31

Numerous questions stem from this text. Most central to them all are questions of responsibility and fault. Whose fault was it that Dinah was raped? How are we to contextualize and understand this story? How are we to understand the extreme violence – not just that of Shechem against Dinah – but also that of Shimon and Levi in their bloody response. By examining the Midrashim in detail, we will be able to see how the rabbis identify and deal with these questions. We will also be able to gain perspective on the unfolding patterns of Midrashic response. These responses, as we will see, will reflect the concerns listed above. Central to the case of Dinah are concerns pertaining to the character of individuals and how an individual's character may impact an entire community. Also central to the issue of Dinah and her plight are concerns over borders between public and private domains. Underlying all of these responses we will observe a hyper concern for identifying what is and what is not proper conduct of a young woman. While we could easily reduce this concern to one of patriarchy, considering the socio-political reality discussed above, we can understand this concern in its broader application – that the rabbis are concerned with ensuring proper behavior as a way to protect the Jewish community as a whole and to keep the Jews acting in a way that will curry God's favor, rather than God's wrath.

SEVERAL MIDRASHIM ON THE RAPE OF DINAH

What follows will be a Midrash by Midrash examination of the Midrashim on the rape of Dinah. These Midrashim are all from Bereishit Rabbah, a collection of largely aggadic midrashim[23], which address the text of Genesis. Traditionally, the text has been dated to the Amora, Oshayah. While some collections are homiletic in nature, Bereishit Rabbah is largely the type of midrashim described above. They address every verse of the text, often phrase by phrase – simultaneously pulling out meaning and reading meaning into the text. Selected Midrashim will be analyzed to highlight trends and tendencies as explained above. The Midrashim selected for examination in this study have been chosen because they feature characteristics and trends representative of repeating themes and sentiments or because they offer a unique insight into the rabbinic midrashic project. Repeating themes and techniques will be evidenced as well as the creative techniques employed by the rabbis to simultaneously explain the text and to use it as a way to underscore and reinforce social expectations for their own time. Thus, the ancient becomes new; the problematic becomes resolved; the potentially irrelevant becomes prophetic and essential.

---

[23] Although I have here identified the midrashim as "largely aggadic" I feel it necessary to confess my dislike for the bifurcation of midrashim into "aggadic" and "halakhic." While it is true that some are clearly one or the other, I believe that most midrashim lie between the two definitions. Many midrashim classified as "aggadic" contain strong elements of instruction be they halakhic, ethical, moral or any combination thereof. Additionally, many "halakhic" midrashim find their grounding in midrashic stories.

Midrash Bet

(Hosea 6:9) *And as a band of robbers waits for a man, so the association of priests murder on the path to Shechem, for they commit wickedness.* Just as robbers who sit on the road and murder people and take their wealth, such were the doings of Shimon and Levi towards Shechem, so too [were they] as the association of priests! Just as when a band of priests gather on the threshing floor to receive their portion, such were the doings of Shimon and Levi towards Shechem, as it is said, *murder on the path to Shechem*, Shimon and Levi, from the path to Shechem they murdered, *for they commit wickedness*. They said, "What is their custom of treating us as the sons of public property?!" And who caused [all of this]? **And Dinah, daughter of Leah, went out.**

Evident in this Midrash is the intertextuality mentioned by Boyarin. Not only are the rabbis responding to the text at hand, but they themselves seem to recognize that the biblical text is inter-related. Regardless of whether or not this was the intentional design of the biblical redactors, this is how the rabbis who created the Midrash understand the text. Aspects of one text can elucidate and inform aspects of a different, seemingly unrelated text. Here, the rabbis are quoting an admonishment of the priests by Hosea. Despite the context in Hosea of condemnation of various priests and their evil ways, the rabbis take the excerpt out of context and transform it.

Responding to potential questions about whether or not the brother's were justified in their bloody response, the rabbi's turn to the text from Hosea. They use it as an intertextual prophetic moment alluding to the actions of Shimon and Levi, which they understand to be bloody but justified. As their interpretation of the text above explains, the brothers are murderous towards

Shechem because the deeds of the Shechemites are wicked. Thus, according to the rabbis, the brothers' response is appropriate. In a secondary response, the rabbis express a concern over proper conduct. At the end of the Midrash they ask a fundamental question – whose fault is it that Shimon and Levi are driven to such potentially reprehensible behavior? They lay ultimate blame at Dinah's feet because "she went out." As modern readers, our initial reaction is likely to be one of revulsion at this idea. Most sensitive and rational thinkers today do not blame a person for their rape but rather, they blame the person who has committed the rape. Certainly then it shocking to see this sentiment – that the person who has been raped is at fault. While our modern sensibilities condemn this interpretation, we are nonetheless obligated to consider the text in its context, that is, to consider the text from the point of view of the men who were writing it.

Before we assume that the rabbis were misogynists who took for granted that women were the root of all evils including rape and its "necessary" and "justified" bloody response, we should consider what social realities might have motivated them to make such a statement. We begin with the awareness that the rabbis are not living under their own autonomy. They are living under the imperial rule of a foreign empire. Though they have rights under this empire, their region is known for rebellion, and accordingly their governance by their Roman rulers is strict. Within this context, it is easy to imagine that there

would be a high level of anxiety regarding issues of public space and private space. How is a community to keep its women and daughters safe when a foreign imperial power may be abusive towards them? The rabbis are aware that they have no control over foreign powers. It is therefore not surprising that this moment in Torah strikes deep in their hearts.

They can project their situation onto that of their ancestors camped next to the city of Shechem. There too, Israelites are living with some guarantees of security and protection, but in truth, the protections and securities are only as good as their issuing authority. If the Shechemites are evil in their actions as a general rule, then what hopes for hospitality and safety do the Israelites actually have? Similarly, if the Romans are immoral people, what real guarantees of safety do the Jews have while under their rule? Facing reality, the rabbis are painfully aware that they have no real power over the actions of the dominant forces that are unavoidably a part of their social landscape. Therefore, they can only control what occurs within their community; they can only hope to affect the sphere of private domain. It is therefore possible to read their condemnation of Dinah's actions not as a condemnation of a girl for being raped, but rather a condemnation of a girl for unnecessarily exposing herself to a dangerous and abusive people. Dinah then, according to the rabbis, is guilty of unnecessarily exposing herself to danger at the hands of evil men who are known to commit acts of wickedness. Thus, the rabbis transform Dinah's

experience into a warning for their own communities of the dangers of young girls having too much freedom which might lead them into direct contact with evil men who are not to be trusted. Their own socio-political reality is reflected in their interpretation of the text.

> **Midrash Gimmel**
> (II Kings 14:9) *The thistle that was in Lebanon sent [this message] to the cedar.* "*The thistle that was in Lebanon*" this is Hamor, father of Shechem. "*... sent [this message] to the cedar*" This is Jacob. (Genesis 34:8) *Give your daughter to my son for a wife. Shechem – my son, his soul is in love with your daughter.*[24] (II Kings 14:9) *However, a beast of the field that was in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thistle.* And this is Hamor and Shechem that were killed. And who caused [all of this]? **And Dinah, daughter of Leah, went out.**

As in the Midrash discussed above, this text demonstrates the intertextual nature of the biblical text as well as the Midrashic project. The Midrash above opens with an excerpt taken from II Kings 14:9. Interestingly enough, whereas most biblical passages are taken out of context, this passage is actually a reference to the story being interpreted and discussed – that of Dinah, her father, her brothers and Hamor. In its context, the biblical passage quoted here is said by King Jehoash as a parable to describe what occurred between Hamor, Jacob and by extension, Shimon and Levi. Not only is the biblical text a reference to and interpretive summary of an earlier text, it is being used again as yet another commentary on the retaliation and how that

[24] The rabbis have taken a fair amount of liberty with the text here. They have actually reversed the order of the two sentences as they appear in the biblical text in Genesis 34:8. Additionally, the first sentence in the quote that is footnoted, (which comes after the second sentence in the biblical text) is paraphrased and is not an exact quote.

retaliation should be understood. In short, the rabbis are drashing on a drash. Of course, the rabbi's add their own hermeneutic to the discussion. As above, Dinah is identified as the ultimate source of suffering and carnage. In the previous Midrash, her actions led her brothers to a necessary and violent path (according to the Midrashic rabbis). In this Midrash, Dinah is identified as the source of the death and "trampling" suffered by Hamor, Shechem and, by extension, the people of their city. Again, the rabbis are giving a strong warning, using Dinah as an unfortunate example. Young women who unnecessarily expose themselves to dangerous people and situations bring disaster not only on themselves, but also on other innocent bystanders who may suffer as a result of the consequences of their irresponsible behavior.

As before, our modern sensitivities cringe at such accusations and warnings. If ever there seemed to be a case of power-holders blaming the powerless for violence perpetrated against them by power-holders, this is it. However, we are obliged once again to remind ourselves not to judge these texts by our modern standards, but to try and look at them in their own unique socio-political context. As previously discussed, it is easy to imagine the cultural pressures, fears and insecurities that would have informed such a strong statement of blame. When individuals, communities and cultures cannot control the outside, they can at least attempt to control the inside. Thus, Dinah again is used as warning of the dangers of exposing oneself

unnecessarily to foreign masters who are not to be trusted. Simultaneously, this Midrash has provided an excellent example of biblical intertextuality.

Not all Midrashim are easy to unpack and understand. Many Midrashim, which have survived to our present day, are copies from incomplete copies. Because Midrashim were seen as a secondary and less important literature for nearly two millennia, their manuscripts were not as carefully preserved as were manuscripts of Talmud and Torah. Sometimes, as is the case with the Midrash below, it is necessary to consult multiple manuscript editions in order to root out a likely "original" text, or at least one that is coherent and comprehensible. Despite these difficulties, even the most confusing Midrashim (such as the one below) have nuggets of insights, teachings and profound interpretations.

> **Midrash Hey (A)**
> R. Tanchumah opened: (Ecclesiastes 7:28) *One [worthy] man of a thousand I found and a [single worthy] woman in all of these I did not find.* R. Y'hoshua in the name of R. Levi opened: (Proverbs 1:25) *You have neglected all of my counsel*, as it is written (Genesis 2:22) *Eternal God built the rib…* "*Vayiven (he built)*" signifies that God considered seriously from what part to create her (woman). One might want to say this results from here (Genesis 33:20) *and he built there an alter.*[25] R. Berechyah in the name of R. Levi said: This is like one who has in his hand a pound of meat and because he reveals it, a bird [of prey] comes down and snatches it from him, such is **and Dinah, daughter of Leah went out** from her [Leah's] hand. (Genesis 34:2) *And he saw her - Shechem, son of Hamor…* R. Shmuel bar Nachman said that her shoulder was

[25] It is important to note that this is a paraphrasing of the biblical reference and not a direct quote. It refers to the end of Genesis 33 when Jacob has successfully and peacefully set up his camp outside of Shechem. The rabbis are playing with the word root בנה to mean both "build" and "considered". The actual quote from Genesis 33:20 does not contain the word בנה, but rather ויקם meaning "erected" in reference to Jacob's construction of an alter with which to worship God.

exposed. *And he had sex with her and he violated her. And he had sex with her* – this is in her natural way. *And he violated her* – this is not in her natural way.[26]

This Midrash can be said to contain three separate midrashim in one. It is likely that this either represents a very early manuscript or an extremely corrupted one. In and of itself, this corrupted version represents a major challenge facing those who study midrashim today. Many of those that have survived are not in good condition, and many surviving manuscripts are missing large segments of their content. Regardless, it is still possible to piece together a more complete picture by pulling in other manuscripts. For the sake of brevity, we will refer to the manuscript translation used in Midrash Rabbah, Genesis as translated by Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, published by The Soncino Press[27]. In the Soncino edition, an alternative manuscript is translated which fills in the text missing from the manuscript edition used for this study.[28] Addressing the first part of this Midrash, the version contained in the Soncino edition is provided here.

---

[26] The expressions, "in a natural way" and "in an unnatural way" are rabbinic euphemisms for vaginal sex and anal sex, respectively.

[27] Midrash Rabbah, Genesis. Translated by Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman. The Soncino Press, New York: 1983.

[28] While some may question why another manuscript was not used for this study, this is moment offers an important lesson in Midrash. There is no such thing as a "perfect" manuscript edition. The best option is to use a critical scholarly edition that combines as many manuscripts (and their variations) as possible. While this type of manuscript is excellent for a purely academic endeavor, it makes the study of Midrash a slow and difficult prospect. Instead, many students (including myself) find it easier and more pleasurable to study from a single manuscript and consult others when and where appropriate.

Midrash Hey (B)

R. Joshua of Siknin commenced in R. Levi's name: *But ye have set at naught all My counsel* (Proverbs 1:25). Thus it is written, *And the Lord built the rib* (Genesis 2:22). This is written *wayyiben*, signifying that He considered well *(hithbonnen)* from what part to create her. Said he: "I will not create her from [Adam's] head, lest she be light-headed [frivolous]; nor from the eye, lest she be a coquette; nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth, lest she be a gossip; nor from the heart, lest she be prone to jealousy; nor from the hand, lest she be light-fingered; nor from the foot, lest she be a gadabout. But [I will create her] from the modest part of man, for even when he stands naked, that part is covered." And as He created each limb, He ordered her, "Be a modest woman, be a modest woman." Yet in spite of all this, "*But ye have set at naught all My counsel,' and would non of my My reproof.* I did not create her from the head, yet she is frivolous: *They walk with stretched-forth necks* (Isaiah 3:16); nor from the eye, yet she is a coquette: *And wanton eyes* (ib.); nor from the ear, yet she is an eavesdropper: *Now Sarah listened in the tent door* (Genesis 18:10); nor from the heart, yet she is prone to jealousy: *Rachel envied her sister* (ib. 30:1); nor form the hand, yet she is light-fingered: *And Rachel stole the teraphim* (ib. 31:19); nor from the foot, yet she is a gadabout: AND DINAH WENT OUT.[29]

Regardless of the generosity of earlier interpretations of the rabbis' work put forward in this study, the clear disdain for women extant in this Midrash cannot be dismissed. While the above excerpt is lengthy, it clearly reveals a more complete sentiment than that of the seemingly unassociated sentences that begin this Midrash in the manuscript translated earlier (Midrash Hey). In this case, the conversation has been enlarged to include multiple examples of the misconduct of Biblical women. Unlike the earlier midrashim cited, this text seems to indicate a different type of socio-political concern. Here, the rabbi(s)

[29] Ibid, Freedman, p. 738

who wrote this appear to be contemplating perceived innate natures of women. It would not take much time to find an equally long (if not longer) list of biblical men who have engaged in behavior and actions that are immoral, illegal and unethical. Yet, the rabbis here have taken then opportunity to include a tangential piece that, I propose, explores the rabbinic frustration – "Why Are Women So Difficult to Manage?" One could easily argue that this Midrash puts forward a *nechemtah*, a solace for men. It comforts men implying, "women defy even God's efforts to make them appropriately modest and invisible." In truth, modernists, post-modernists, feminists and post-feminists are all capable of writing large volumes addressing attitudes such as this. Including this aspect of this Midrash in this study is, in part, to balance the seemingly apologist rationalizations given above to explain the rabbis' reactions to Dinah. Not all of these texts are able to be explained away by sensitive readings and interpretations. Many midrashim, such as the one above, are problematic and defy attempts to contextualize them in an appropriate modern setting. Returning to Midrash Hey (A), we find the perfect transition to discuss how various midrashim are absorbed, built on and responded to within the commentaries of the Meforshim.

In what could be described as the third internal midrash within Midrash Hey (A), the rabbis address an apparent repetition in the biblical text. Genesis 34:2 describes, "And he saw her - Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of

the land – and he seized her, and he had sex with her and he violated her." It is the last part of the sentence that is potentially problematic. Two verbs are used to describe Shechem's final actions towards Dinah. They are שכב and ענה respectively. שכב is commonly used as a verb meaning *to lie with/to copulate with*. Its range of usage varies from innocuous to violent. In this context, it is clear that the text is conveying that Shechem had sex with Dinah. Considering its context, it might be more appropriate to translate the verb in a more crass and violent manner. To say that Shechem "had sex" with her seems grossly understated. It also gives a veiled appearance that Dinah might have been a willing partner in the activity. Though better definitions are available, they are largely in the realm of profanity and are therefore, not used here. The second verb, ענה, is more difficult to translate. Often it is rendered as *to oppress*, or *to afflict*. Based on its usage in other biblical passage, I challenge that a better definition would be *to violate* or *to abuse*.[30] In the midrashic response, the rabbis struggle with the same question.

Why are these two verbs used to describe Shechem's actions, and what do they really mean? The Midrash tells us, "*And he had sex with her and he violated her. And he had sex with her* – this is in her natural way. *And he violated her* – this is not in her natural way." As discussed in footnote 26, these

[30] The biblical comparison and analysis are too numerous to explore in this study. I have completed an exhaustive study on the verb and its usage throughout the biblical text which will hopefully be published in the coming year. (ב"ה)

expressions, "in her natural way" and "not in her natural way" are euphemisms for sex. The first refers to vaginal sex and the latter refers to anal sex. It appears that this is the earliest statement of these definitions. Here then is the second reason Midrash Hey was chosen for this study. This last part of the Midrash provides a wonderful example of the relationship between the work of the Midrashic rabbis and the work of the Meforshim. In this final section, we will see that although the formal body of literature known as "Midrash" was contained to one specific region for several centuries, the midrashic process itself has continued in every generation of rabbis and scholars from then until now.

THE MEFORSHIM

Before addressing the relationship between the Meforshim and the Midrashists, it is first necessary to briefly explain who the Meforshim are and the nature of their work. Encyclopedia Judaica defines the Meforshim as "commentators who applied themselves to study for its own sake, and in order to facilitate the understanding of the subject under discussion..."[31] The Meforshim are defined in contrast to the Poskim, "scholars whose intellectual efforts were concentrated on determining the halakhah in practice (for whom the word "decisors" is sometimes used)..."[32] Broadly speaking, the Meforshim are medieval commentators. Their goal, like the Midrashic rabbis, is to study the text and parse its words and phrases to come to greater levels of understanding. As each generation of commentators contributed its thoughts and commentaries, they continued the act begun in the Bible itself and formalized with the Midrashim.

Of course, each generation of Meforshim stands on the shoulders (and commentaries) of previous generations. They built on the ideas already offered and added their own thoughts. In some cases, they acknowledge the sources they are quoting and responding to. In other cases, as we will see, they do not.

The most classic example of one of the Meforshim is Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, known commonly as Rashi (an acronym for his full name). Universally,

---

[31] Encyclopedia Judaic, Vol. 13, p. 927
[32] Ibid

he is considered the foremost medieval commentator. Living and working in France from his birth in 1040 until his death in 1105, Rashi is also one of the earliest Medieval commentators. His commentary on the Genesis 34 is illuminating when considering the relationship between the Midrashists and Meforshim.

In his commentary to Genesis 34:2, Rashi offers an interpretation of שכב and ענה. He explains that שכב means, "in her natural way," and that ענה means, "not in her natural way." Considering that Rashi lived at least five to six centuries after the earliest dating of the creation of rabbinic Midrash, it is safe to say that these ideas are not his own. While it is obvious that Rashi studied the same Midrash (or one very similar) as Midrash Hey (A), which we have studied here, we can see that he does not cite the work or identify his source. Students learning Torah in conjunction with Rashi might be led to think that Rashi himself created this midrash. Challenging both the Midrash and Rashi, Rava (Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra)[33] offers the interpretation that the verb ענה is used because Dinah was a virgin and so Shechem's actions towards her are particularly bad, warranting their own verb. What is particularly interesting here is that often we would expect that both Rashi and ibn Ezra would use other linguistic instances to support their interpretations, especially when they

[33] Rava, commonly called "ibn Ezra," lived from 1092 to 1167. His life carried him around the Mediterranean and he lived in multiple countries and regions such as southern Spain, Italy and Provence.

are original contributions. Indeed, there are several other places in Tanakh in which the verb ענה is used in a manner that might support an interpretation that it means either anal sex or violating a virgin. Most notable is the case of Tamar and her half-brother Ammon found in 2 Samuel 13. In the story, Ammon lusts after his sister and rapes her. Again, the verb ענה is used. Yet, despite this obvious invitation for textual comparison, both of the rabbis seem to be responding only to the Midrash at hand. Rashi accepts it, while ibn Ezra challenges it. Regardless, neither author cites his usage of (or rejection of) the Midrash.

Reacting strongly to both of these interpretations is Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman).[34] Ramban asserts the following:

> **And he had sex with her and he violated her.** He had sex with her, in her natural way, and he violated her, not in her natural way – this is the language of Rashi. However, Rabbi Abraham (ibn Ezra) says, **and he violated her** – this is because she was a virgin. This isn't [a] necessary [statement], because anyone who has sex under duress, it is said [of them] that they are ענוי (violated), and thus [a proof text], "you will not mistreat her because you have עניתה (violated) her." (Deuteronomy 21:14). And thus, [another proof text], "and they violated my concubine and she died." (Judges 20:5) It is told in the text that she was under duress and that she was not wanting [to be with] the prince of the land, [this was written] to speak of her with praise!

Ramban's reaction towards Rashi's and ibn Ezra's commentaries, as well as to the text itself, is quite strong. True, neither of them are particularly

[34] Ramban was born in Spain in 1194 and died in Ha'aretz in 1270 making him the latest of the three Meforshim studied in this study.

sensitive to Dinah and her plight, but neither are the Midrashim we have examined. Initially, ibn Ezra's commentary seems somewhat empathetic. At the very least it seems to recognize that, in addition to be raped, there is the added component of never having been with a man sexually. Though he makes no comment as to the significance of Dinah's virginity, it seems possible that ibn Ezra is aware that the rape of a virgin makes a heinous act even more vile, so much so, that the extreme violation warrants its own verb. Despite this apparent sensitivity, Ramban reacts with an attitude that could best be described as righteous indignation or at least as moral outrage. Could it really be that these few comments by Rashi and ibn Ezra have warranted such a strong reply? In truth, his reaction seems disproportionate to what the two rabbis have said. In this case then, we are compelled to ask ourselves who (or what) Ramban is really reacting to. I challenge that he is, in fact, reacting to the whole of the Midrashim on Dinah as they are generally of a condemnatory nature, blaming Dinah for the woes that befall her. Expressing a unique sympathy, Ramban retorts that regardless of how the rape was executed and regardless of her sexual status, she was under duress when the act occurred. That fact alone warrants empathy and explains the extra verb. He insists that it is not an unusual verb that needs extra explanation; it is a verb often used to refer to situations when a woman is forced into sexual acts under a state of duress. To underscore his argument, he cites two biblical proof texts. Further

supporting Dinah (and further rejecting the general trope of the Midrashim) Ramban asserts that the text is quite clear that she was not a willing participant, that she did desire the prince. He therefore asserts that the entire story actually speaks praise of her. By Ramban's interpretation, this is a young girl who is not to be condemned. She is a praiseworthy person who has suffered unjustly at the hands of a man who acted upon her as an object, rather than as a person. In short, Ramban redeems the Midrashists reading of this text while simultaneously chastising both Rashi and ibn Ezra for not recognizing her plight and doing the same. Here then we witness a remarkable model that demonstrates the various ways in which the Meforshim have reacted to the body of literature known formally as Midrash.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Undertaking the study of Midrash is no small feat. Because Talmud became the primary locus for Jewish study throughout the centuries, and because many Midrashim are included in Talmud, the preservation of Midrash manuscripts was not of high priority to many Jews. The manuscripts that have survived to our modern era are largely incomplete and many of them are corrupted. Students who wish to study the formal body of literature known as Midrash must rely on editors to provide editions that are (hopefully) as coherent and academically sound as possible. Of course, all acts of redaction are subjective so one must engage in Midrash study with the awareness that later, they may come upon various versions of the texts they have studied and that those alternative version may be just as, if not more, valid as other versions.

Yet another challenge is dealing with the various definitions of "midrash." Using the definition that midrash is an inquiry into a biblical text, we must recognize that the midrashic process is as old as the Bible itself. Within the canonized Tanakh, later texts interpret and comment on earlier texts. One example has been cited in this study – that of King Jehoash from 2 Kings 14. By identifying Hamor as a thistle and Jacob as a cedar he is engaging in an act of interpretation. He interprets the account of Genesis 34 subjectively identifying Hamor as the villainous character while extolling Jacob as the righteous figure. Considering the full extent of actions each party takes

towards the other, some modern critics might question this black and white interpretation, but nonetheless, it is an example of inner-biblical interpretation.

It is also important not to be confused between the midrashic process and the formal body of literature known as Midrash. As discussed in the beginning of this study, Idel asserts that the formal body of literature known as Midrash is not really a special or unique enterprise. With good reason, he insists that Midrash is no different from midrashic interpretation and that *all* interpretation is a form of midrash. Thus, he sees midrashic interpretation as its own unique genre and not as a type of literature that can be interpreted using other genre standards as Neusner would like to do. Boyarin helps to clarify the midrashic process by pointing to the inherent intertextual nature of biblical works and their subsequent literatures.

In light of this modern scholarship, we have been able to gain a better understanding as to who the Midrashic rabbis are and what their enterprise has been. Formally, the Midrashic rabbis likely lived in ha'aretz. They are likely to have developed the Midrashic literature as the Talmudic literature is being developed in Babylonia. Although the formal body of literature known as Midrash is finite, the midrashic process itself is unending as we have seen by examining just a few of the comments by the Meforshim, Rashi, Rava and Ramban. In truth, the midrashic process has continued to this day as Jews study the biblical text and search out its words and verses to find new meaning

and new relevance. The recent publication of the Women of Reform Judaism Torah Commentary is proof that the midrashic process is alive and well in our own time.

For their part, the Midrashic rabbis approached the text with the understanding that it contained prophetic messages and examples, which could be interpreted in order to help them resolve the dilemmas they faced in their own time. As we have seen in the three examples explored here, much of the angst of the rabbis who wrote the Midrashim are present in their interpretations. Studying their contributions to biblical interpretation is an essential component for a biblical scholar who is interested in seeing the breadth and depth of the Jewish interpretive process. We have also seen how the Midrashic rabbis formalized an investigative process by their work, Midrash. Just as the halakhic codes grew out of Talmud, so too has the modern interpretive process grown out of Midrash. Continued throughout the medieval period by the Meforshim and the modern period by today's rabbis and scholars, the midrashic process is an essential component of the inheritance of Israel. In truth, studying the Meforshim without studying the Midrashim is to only learn half the material. Without learning the Midrashim along with the Meforshim, it is impossible to understand the full spectrum of the conversation in which they are engaged because the Midrashim, as we have seen above, often form the very foundation for the commentaries and interpretations of the Meforshim.

Whether by their sermonic, aggadic or halakhic examples, the Midrashic rabbis created and passed down a formal process of biblical interpretation, a means of investigating the text to make it relevant and applicable in every generation. Their project and their example is a gift to be treasured, to be studied and to be emulated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Boyarin, Daniel. Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

2. Editorial Staff. "Poskim." Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 13. Jersualem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1972.

3. Fishbane, Michael. "Introduction." The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History. Ed. Michael Fishbane. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

4. Fraade, Steven D. From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

5. Freedman, H. Midrash Rabbah, Genesis Volume Two. London: The Soncino Press, 1983.

6. Idel, Moshe. "Midrahsic versus Other Forms of Jewish Hermeneutics: Some Comparative Reflections." The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History. Ed. Michael Fishbane. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

7. Kugel, James L. The Bible As It Was. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997.

8. Neusner, Jacob. What is Midrash?. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

ORIGINAL TEXTS

1. Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit. Jerusalem: Vagshal Publishing Ltd., 2001.

2. Torat Chayim. CITY: PUBLISHER, YEAR