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New York School

Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

Jordan Millstein

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael: A Literary Commentary

This thesis involves a close literary and thematic analysis of six (6) sections of material drawn from five different tractates of the Mekhilta. The pieces chosen are taken from Pisha, Parashah I and Parashah II, Beshallah, Parashah VII, Shirta, Parashah I, Vayasssa, Parashah I, and Shabbta, Parashah I.

Since almost all of the scholarly studies to date have only examined small portions of the Mekhilta, it has been difficult to come up with general conclusions about the nature of the compilation. Only Jacob Neusner has examined the entire document, but his broad analysis did not allow for a close reading of the text. In an effort to analyze a chunk of the Mekhilta text in depth with an eye to drawing conclusions about its nature as a compilation, our author has studied some 70 pages of textual material. This material, taken from diverse tractates, represents a cross section of the Mekhilta text.

In his analysis of the six midrashic pieces, the author had four specific goals in mind: (a) to analyze the text phrase by phrase, line by line, paying close attention to its meaning, how technical terms function, and the themes shaped in the textual material; (b) to explain the connection between the midrash as it develops and the biblical material upon which it is based; (c) to gain an overview of the possible theme or themes, emphasized in the particular piece; (d) to determine if the chunks of midrash show any evidence of thematic shaping by the redactor(s) and how that is achieved. Finally, the author wanted to compare the results of his analysis of each individual piece in order to see if the Mekhilta text as a whole shows any evidence of redactorial shaping of any kind.

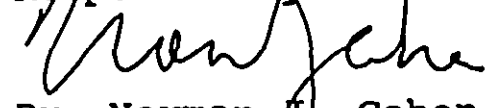
With these goals in mind, the author turned to the six pieces and analyzed them in depth, presenting his analysis in six individual chapters. In each chapter, the author presents the reader with the text divided into small thematic units, each one of which is followed by analytic comments explicating the meaning, structure and hermeneutical devices present. Each text segment is numbered by lines, and the author's commentary below is referenced by the line numbers. Notes are found at the bottom of each page and often cite relevant comments of other scholars who have worked on the material.

Although it is difficult at times to gain a very clear understanding of the meaning and purpose of pieces of text, the author has handled the selected material in a most intelligent and often insightful manner. He frequently has a creative way of raising from the text the poignant and substantive messages present; since he has an excellent feel for the style and nature of exegetic midrash. However, he not only presents the reader with many such textual, analytic gems as he analyzes individual passages and terms, but he is most creative in seeing the forest and is not bogged down by the trees. At the end of each chapter, he provides us with a thematic/structural overview of the material which succeeds for the most part in demonstrating the degree to which the material holds together and flows.

The author has clearly demonstrated that at least some thematic shaping exists in each piece; and that the reader can sense some degree of unity. Yet, each of the six pieces is shaped in a different manner, with the midrash standing in a different relationship to its focussed biblical text. For example, Pisha, Parashah I develops a clear thematic treatment of the nature of revelation and rabbinic leadership which has little to do with Exodus 12:1. Contrastingly, in Vayassa, Parashah I, we find three different exegetic threads placed in tension with one another which also hold the midrash together from beginning to end. These differences in style and shaping leads the author to conclude that the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael is a kind of anthology of pieces of traditions which were edited by different individual, perhaps even in different locales. To be sure, the pieces have certain themes in common, but much more work must be done to see the extent to which the Mekhilta as a whole has a unified thematic agenda, if any.

Mr. Millstein is to be highly commended for his insightful textual analysis and the sense he has gained of the nature of the Mekhilta as a compilation. His wonderful feel for how the midrash works illuminates the textual material for the reader. To be sure, much more could have been done; the author only analyzed six pieces of text and it remains to be seen how his conclusions would hold up as more of the compilation is closely studied. Nevertheless, this thesis provides us with an excellent prism through which to view one early exegetic midrash and to better understand its nature and purpose. Even if the reader could argue with particular points of the author's analysis, the overview that he has given to the reader is invaluable.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Dr. Norman J. Cohen  
Professor of Midrash

March 29, 1993

**MEKHILTA D'RABBI ISHMAEL: A LITERARY COMMENTARY**

**JORDAN MILLSTEIN**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Graduate Rabbinic Program  
New York, New York**

**1993**

**Referee: Dr. Norman Cohen**

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There are several people whom I would like to thank for the help that they have rendered me in developing the ideas expressed here. First of all, my fellow students at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York who have been my teachers as well as students at the seminary. I would especially like to thank my classmates. I appreciate the growth I have shared with those who have been with me for three years in Israel and New York and, especially, those who have been with me the entire five years. In terms of this paper I owe a debt of gratitude to those who studied with me in Dr. Norman Cohen's class on "Mekhilta Midrashim." Many of the ideas expressed in this paper are theirs, but I regret being unable to quote them "*b'shem omro*" because I did not record their names in my notebook along with their insights.

I would like to thank all of the professors who have taught me during my years at the college. My greatest source of ideas and inspiration, however, has been Dr. Cohen. It is through him that I have been fortunate enough to fulfill Rabban Gamliel's famous dictum from Pirke Avot (1:16), "*aseh l'kha rav*," "find yourself a teacher." Not only has Dr. Cohen been my teacher, but he has also gone out of his way to be a *chaver*, a friend. There are few ideas in this paper that I can claim to be my own, for Dr. Cohen has, almost singlehandedly, shaped my view of midrash as well as the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael. It has all been to my benefit.

Last and most important, I owe my deepest debt of gratitude to my wife, my friend, my classmate and teacher, Paula Feldstein. Not only did she tolerate my obsessiveness throughout the months that I worked on this thesis (and the years before

that), but she assisted with much of the typing and processing of this document. Without her this thesis would not have been submitted. Paula has been by my side through all my journeys into exile and back, all the while teaching me to sing the song of redemption. This thesis is dedicated to her.

## INTRODUCTION

There is midrash and there is midrash. On the one hand, there is the midrash that rabbis and scholars have pondered and pored over in the *beis midrash* for centuries. This midrash is the genre of rabbinic literature which includes anthologies or compilations of biblical exegesis, homilies, *aggadah* and *halakhah*, and constituting running commentaries on specific books of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> This paper, a commentary on and literary analysis of six pieces of midrashic text from the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, is about this kind of midrash.

But, there is the other kind of midrash, the more generic sense of midrash as an activity or process. This type of midrash has been defined by the great scholar of the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Jacob Z. Lauterbach as:

a study of the Torah, requiring a thorough investigation of its contents, a correct interpretation of the meaning of its words and deeper penetration into the spirit and sense of its dicta with all their implications....<sup>2</sup>

This midrash goes back to the moment of the giving of the Torah or, as modern scholars understand it, since the canonization of the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>3</sup> For, as soon as there is an authoritative text there is a need to apply and interpret that text. The Bible itself indicates that Ezra and others engaged in "midrash." Ezra 7:10 states that Ezra "had set

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Midrash," by Moshe D. Herr.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob Z. Lauterbach, Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1949), vol. 1, p. xv.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. xiii. Some scholars would argue that midrash goes back further than that, defining midrash to include material from the Bible itself. See, e.g., R. Bloch, "Midrash," Dictionnaire de la Bible, Suppl., Fasc. XXIX (Paris, 1957).



his heart to seek (*li'drosh*) the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances."<sup>4</sup> The root of the word for Ezra's activity [דרש], is the same as the root for "midrash." Ezra's act of "seeking" out the meaning of the text is the fundamental act of midrash. This paper is also about this kind of midrash, for in the analysis of midrashic texts of the past one gains new access to and finds new meaning in the Torah. It is my hope that this commentary will help others, like myself, who are "seeking" Torah.

Interestingly, it this second definition of midrash which has most attracted contemporary scholars. Starting with Renee Bloch, scholars in the post-World War II era turned away from the philological and anthological approach of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and began to look at midrash in terms of its contemporizing function. That is, midrash was looked at as any literature whose purpose was to interpret or reformulate past oral or written traditions so they would be meaningful for the current believing community. This change in approach led to an interest in synchronic studies of midrash which traced traditions through time in order to elucidate the meanings given to a piece of scripture during different historical periods.<sup>5</sup> Since then, many studies have examined vertical slices of successive strata of rabbinic literature focusing on particular biblical texts, characters or (rabbinic) concepts. But, much less has been done on the horizontal

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<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Lauterbach, *ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup>Jack N. Lightstone, "Form as Meaning in Halakhic Midrash," *Semeia* 28 (1983), p. 25.

or synchronic plane. There are few systematic studies of individual rabbinic documents that focus on their particular traits, that try to elucidate their message and approach to scripture.<sup>6</sup> The primary purpose of this study is to examine one document, the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, along this synchronic plane. The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael is considered an exegetical midrash, being a verse by verse (even word by word) interpretation of the Book of Exodus. It explicates all of the text from Exod. 12:1 through Exod. 23:19. It also contains expositions on Exod. 31:12-17 and 35:1-3. It excludes everything having to do with the Tabernacle.<sup>7</sup>

The Mekhilta is considered one of the tannaitic midrashim. It is so-called because the tradents which are cited in the text are rabbis from the tannaitic period, the time of the Mishna. However, estimates of the Mekhilta's actual dating vary widely. Some argue that the material was developed as early as the second century C.E. One study claims it is a pseudopigraphic work from the eighth century.<sup>8</sup> Most recent scholars have tended to regard the Mekhilta as a third or fourth century document.<sup>9</sup> The Mekhilta is

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<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 27.

<sup>7</sup>Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Mekhilta of R. Ishmael," by Moshe D. Herr.

<sup>8</sup>See Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Date of the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael," HUCA 39 (1968), 117-144. Wacholder notes that it is the consensus of scholars (e.g., Zunz, Friedmann, Hoffman, Bacher, Lauterbach, Ginzburg, J.N. Epstein, Finkelstein) that the Mekhilta reflects second century tannaitic *halakhah* (p. 117).

<sup>9</sup>See, e.g., Jacob Neusner, The Canonical History of Ideas (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 4.

placed among the *halakhic midrashim*, though, in fact, it contains more *aggadic* than *halakhic* material.<sup>10</sup>

To date, there have been several studies which have examined the Mekhilta. However, most only analyze small sections of it, often for the purpose of developing a general theory of midrash. Gary Porton in Understanding Midrash, looks at one chapter of Tractate Shabbta.<sup>11</sup> Judah Goldin examines the entirety of Tractate Shirta in his The Song at the Sea.<sup>12</sup> Max Kadushin in A Conceptual Approach to the Mekilta presents a commentary to portions of Tractate Pischa and Tractate Beshallah.<sup>13</sup> Even Daniel Boyarin's extensive and insightful analysis in Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash is taken largely from Tractate Va'yassa.<sup>14</sup>

Only Jacob Neusner's Mekhilta According to Rabbi Ishmael examines the entire document.<sup>15</sup> Neusner analyzes the Mekhilta in terms of its rhetorical forms, its logic

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<sup>10</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, p. xviii-xix.

<sup>11</sup>Gary G. Porton, Understanding Midrash (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1985).

<sup>12</sup>Judah Goldin, The Song at the Sea (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990).

<sup>13</sup>Max Kadushin, A Conceptual Approach to the Mekilta (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969).

<sup>14</sup>Daniel Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>15</sup>Jacob Neusner, Mekhilta According to Rabbi Ishmael (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar's Press, 1990).

and its topical program. He concludes that the Mekhilta is akin to a "scriptural encyclopedia" of rabbinic Judaism. That is, the Mekhilta does not present any particular proposition or argument. It has no program. Moreover, it is primarily exegetical in nature and the composite of exegetical materials find cogency primarily through their connection to a given verse of scripture. "Intelligibility begins - and ends - in that verse and is accomplished by the amplification of the verse's contents."<sup>16</sup> While the Mekhilta expresses many of the ideas of rabbinic Judaism, the various ideas are not organized in a way that amounts to a coherent, cogent whole.

Neusner's approach is helpful and I have adopted some of his analytical categories here. This paper also examines the midrashic material for rhetorical forms and logic, as well as theme and argument. Moreover, my questions are similar to his. I, too, am interested in finding out "does the document hand deliver a particular message and viewpoint or does it serve merely as a repository for diverse, received materials?"<sup>17</sup> Is it one, coherent work or is it a hodgepodge of exegetical materials collected around consecutive verses of scripture? What themes does the Mekhilta address? Is there one, overriding theme? What logic and rhetorical forms does it employ? What is the approach of this midrash to the biblical text?

However, Neusner's analysis is almost too broad. By trying to encompass all of

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<sup>16</sup>Neusner, Mekhilta, pp. 234-235.

<sup>17</sup>Neusner, Mekhilta, p. 231.

the Mekhilta, the subtlety of midrashic expression is lost. Unlike Boyarin, Neusner does not probe to find the deeper level of commonality in the material. In order to avoid this problem, I have limited my commentary and analysis to six pieces of midrashic text. However, those six pieces are taken from six different *parashiyot* and five different tractates. Four of the pieces represent entire *parashiyot*, while the other two contain substantial material for analysis. One is an *halakhic* piece from Tractate Shabbta. Another is taken from Shirta, a midrash on the poetic Song of the Sea. Some of the pieces represent commentary on but one verse; others comment on several verses. Thus, there is some breadth to the analysis.

I have also adopted some of Boyarin's "intertextual" approach to the midrash. That is, I pay special attention in my commentary to the prooftexts that are cited. For the midrashist(s) of the Mekhilta the primary source for understanding the Exodus text was the Bible itself. However, Boyarin is not particularly interested in understanding the Mekhilta as a document. His goal is to use materials from the Mekhilta in order to demonstrate an overall approach to midrash.

In combining the approaches of Neusner and Boyarin I hope to achieve the following:

1. To provide a line by line modern literary commentary to aid the educated lay person or rabbi who is interested in studying the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael.
2. To systematically describe each piece of midrashic material in an overview at the end of each chapter.
3. To explain how the midrash is connected to the biblical text upon which it is based.

4. To determine if each individual piece shows evidence of shaping by a redactor or redactors. If so, to further determine if there is a unity to the text and how it is achieved.
5. To determine if the Mekhilta, as a whole, shows evidence of redactorial shaping and/or unity. If so, to explain how this achieved.

CHAPTER ONE

TRACTATE PISCHA  
PARASHAH ONE  
(EXODUS 12:1)

ויאמר יי אל משה ואל אתרן בארץ מצרים לאמר. שומע אני שהיה הריבור למשה ולאחר. כשהוא אומר ויהי ביום דבר יי אל משה בארץ מצרים (שמות ו: כח) למשה היה הריבור ולא היה הריבור לאתרן. אם כן מה תלמוד לומר אל משה ואל אתרן. אלא מלמד שכשם שהיה משה כלול לדברות כך היה אתרן כלול לדברות. ומפני מה לא נדבר עמו. מפני כבודו של משה. נמצאת ממעט את אתרן מכל הדברות שבתורה חוץ משלשה מקומות מפני שאי אפשר.

1-2. ויאמר יי אל משה ואל אתרן בארץ מצרים לאמר.

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt." The entirety of *Pischa*, *parashah* 1, is a commentary on this one verse, Exodus 12:1. On a *p'shat* level this verse is quite straightforward, a mere prelude to the substantive information to come.<sup>1</sup> However, from a midrashic perspective the verse raises certain questions that this *parashah* addresses. For example, the verse states that God spoke to Moses and Aaron. Why does God speak to both of them? Isn't Moses the prophet and Aaron the spokesman for Moses? Secondly, the text says that God spoke to them in the land of Egypt. Isn't that obvious from the context of the material? This information seems unnecessary. Thirdly, the verse begins *va'yomer Adonai*, "Adonai spoke," and ends *leimor*, "saying." The word *leimor* seems redundant. Why does the Torah put in this additional word?

#### 1. שומע אני

"I hear." This is the beginning of a midrashic form that structures the material from line two through the first word on line five. The *Shomei'a Ani* form appears frequently in the *Mekhilta* and can be outlined as follows:

- a) Citation of biblical verse, usually the base-text.
- b) *Shomei'a ani* - "From the preceding verse one might think that..."
- c) *K'she hu omer* - "However, from the following verse (from elsewhere in the Pentateuch) one draws a different (correct) conclusion...which is...."
- d) *Im ken mah talmud lomar* - If this is true, why does the biblical text say...[the first verse]?
- e) *Eilah m'lamed* - Rather, it is to teach....

In the *Shomei'a Ani* form a verse from elsewhere in the Pentateuch, in this case Exodus 6:28, is brought to correct a misconception that could arise from the application of reason to the base text, Exodus 12:1. In order to derive the true, deeper meaning of the base text, one must read the two verses together. There is an implicit message in the use of this form. It says that the Bible must be read as one, integrated document, where verses from any book or biblical context may be relevant to the understanding of a given text.

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<sup>1</sup>"*P'shat*" refers to the plain sense meaning of a biblical text. In contrast, "*d'rash*" refers to the more interpretive, "midrashic" meanings that are implied in or imputed to a biblical text.



# 1. דיבור

"Divine word." This word and others based on the root [דבר], appear frequently in this *parashah*. They refer to revelation by God to human beings in the form of spoken words. Later in the *parashah* the midrash uses *gillu'i Shekhinah* (lines 53, 59, 62), a related term that refers not only to *dibbur*, but to any sensory experience of God. Thus, *dibbur* can be said to be a subset of *gillu'i Shekhinah*.<sup>2</sup>

Thematically, the midrash is using the base-text as a jumping-off point for a discussion about revelation. In this particular section we find tension over who is eligible to receive revelation, and who, in fact, receives it.

## 4-5. שכשם שהיה משה כלול לדברות כך היה אהרן כלול לדברות

"Just as Moses was fit to receive God's words, so, too, was Aaron fit to receive God's words." The midrash goes out of its way to show, on the one hand, that Aaron was as equally fit as Moses to receive revelation but, on the other hand, actually received it on only rare occasions. It is possible that in analyzing the situation of Moses and Aaron, the midrashist was reflecting a tension felt by the rabbis in their own day. As latter day spokesmen for Moses' prophecy who did not receive divine revelation, it is not far fetched to posit that the rabbis may have identified with Aaron. If this analogy is intended, then this midrash comes to explain why the rabbis did not receive revelation. It also comforts them with the notion that this lack of direct communication from God does not mean that they were not worthy of it.

## 5. מפני כבודו של משה

"For the sake of Moses' honor." If the rabbis identified themselves with Aaron, then perhaps, the midrash is saying that they, too, are not receiving revelation because God wants to protect the honor of Moses. That is, the revelation given to Moses (the Torah) was not to be superseded, but honored. This gives a positive spin to the fact that God does not speak to them directly. Later in the midrash, this dearth of revelation will be given a more negative connotation.

Regardless of the applicability of this particular reading of the midrash, it is clear that the effect of this midrash is to restrict the number of recipients of true revelation. This midrash was created and redacted during a period of great religious upheaval in the Roman Empire, a time when others, including the growing Christian sects, were proclaiming the revelation of new prophets. This midrash's conservative impulse can be understood as a reaction to these assertions.

## 5. נמצאת

"You find." This one of several midrashic technical terms built on the root [מצא]; it introduces a conclusion or summary.

<sup>2</sup>Max Kadushin, *A Conceptual Approach to the Mekilta* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), p. 36.

דבר אחר. אל משה ואל אהרן למה נאמר. לפי שהוא אומר ויאמר יי אל משה  
 ראה נתתיך אלהים לפרעה (שמות ז:א). אין לי אלא משה דיין לפרעה. אהרן  
 מגין. תלמוד לומר אל משה ואל אהרן הקיש אהרן למשה. מה משה דיין לפרעה  
 10 אף אהרן דיין לפרעה. מה משה אומר דבריו ולא ירא אף אהרן אומר דבריו  
 ולא ירא.

### 7. דבר אחר

"Another thing." This technical term introduces another, additional interpretation of the base-text. It may indicate that the material that follows was inserted by a redactor at a later date than the prior material. Thematically, it is closely related to the first section in that both assert Aaron's equality to Moses. This section expands on that proposition, saying that Aaron was just as much Pharaoh's "judge" and just as fearless in his willingness to speak out against oppression. But, this section does not say that Aaron received revelation. Thus, the fact that one does not receive revelation does not take away from one's ability to lead. From the perspective of the rabbis one would say that, like Aaron, they were privy to Moses' revelation and, like Aaron, they themselves did not receive revelation directly. But, also like Aaron, they were fit to be leaders of the people.

### 7. למה נאמר

"Why is it said?" The midrashic form that begins with these words structures the material in the passage above. The *Lamah Ne'emar* form is similar to *Shomei'a Ani* in that it introduces a verse from elsewhere in the Bible to help interpret the base text. But, instead of establishing the outside text as a corrective for a misconception arising from the base text, it interprets the base-text as a corrective for a misconception arising from the outside text! Literally and literarily *Lamah Ne'emar* and *Shomei'a Ani* are mirror images of one and other. Their implicit message, however, is the same. One will be misled if one reads any given passage in isolation; the Bible must be read intertextually. The *Lamah Ne'emar* form can be outlined as follows:

- a) Citation of biblical verse, usually the base-text.
- b) *lamah ne'emar* - "Why is this text written?"
- c) *l'fi she hu omer* - "Because when one reads the following text taken from elsewhere in the Bible...."
- d) *eyn li elah* - "One would conclude that...."
- e) *...minayin* - "...What text leads one to conclude that what has just been stated is correct?"
- f) *talmud lomar* - "The Bible says...[the base-text]."

### 9. הקיש

"Makes equal." This technical term establishes that two subjects, which are in the same verse, are of equal value or importance.

### 9-10. מה...אף...

"Just as...so, too...." This technical term is used to describe the analogy between two

points or subjects.

רבי אומר אל משה ואל אהרן שומע אני כל הקודם במקרא הוא קודם במעשה.  
 תלמוד לומר הוא אהרן ומשה (שמות ו:כז). מגיד ששניהם שקולין זה כזה.  
 כיוצא בו אתה אומר בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ (בראשית א:א).  
 15 שומע אני כל הקודם במקרא קודם במעשה. תלמוד לומר ביום עשות יי אלהים  
 ארץ ושמים (בראשית ב:ד). מגיד ששניהם שקולין זה כזה. כיוצא בו אתה אומר  
 אנכי אלהי אביך אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב (שמות נ:ו). שומע אני  
 כל הקודם במקרא הוא חשוב מחבירו. תלמוד לומר וזכרתי את בריתי יעקב ואף  
 בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם (ויקרא ק:מב). מגיד ששלושתן שקולין.  
 20 כיוצא בו אתה אומר כבר את אביך ואת אמך (שמות כ:יב). שומע אני כל הקודם  
 במקרא הוא קודם במעשה. תלמוד לומר איש אמו ואביו חידאו (ויקרא יט:ג).  
 מגיד ששניהם שקולין זה כזה. כיוצא בו אתה אומר ויהושע בן נון וכלב בן  
 יפונה וגו' (במדבר יד:ו). שומע אני כל הקודם במקרא הוא קודם במעשה.  
 תלמוד לומר בלתי כלב בן יפונה הקנזי יהושע בן נון וגו' (במדבר לב:יב).  
 25 מגיד ששניהם שקולין.

## 12. רבי אומר אל משה ואל אהרן

"Rabbi says, 'to Moses and Aaron'." A new tradent is cited and the base-text is quoted again. This indicates that a third interpretation of the verse is introduced here. The above segment should be seen as one literary unit. The unit includes a series of verse pairs, each introduced by the term, *k'yotzeh bo* (see comment on this term, line 14, below). Each verse within a given verse pair contains two things which also appear in the other. However, the order in which these items appear in the second verse is the opposite of how it appears in the first. Juxtaposed, the verses serve to refute the proposition that whatever appears first in scripture is of greater importance. (Implicitly, this midrash also reinforces the point made by the *Shomei'a Ani* and *Lamah Ne'emar* forms: no verse can be read in isolation; texts must be read in the contexts of other, related biblical texts.) This type of series, where many similar examples are brought to prove one proposition, is typical of the Mekhilta.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of the topical theme of the prior two sections, the main proposition of this section represents a digression. The only part that is related to the prior sections is the first example of the series, which states that Moses and Aaron are equal. It is reasonable to posit, then, that the rest of the examples that follow that of Moses and Aaron represent *greirah*. That is, material that is "dragged" into the text by a redactor because it is

<sup>3</sup>Jacob Neusner calls this a "propositional form" or "the propositional form and its syllogistic argument." In such a form, "a verse is cited, and then a question addressed to that verse, followed by an answer, which bears in its wake secondary expansion. The whole composition in each case in the composite rests upon the intersection of two verses." Jacob Neusner, *Mekhilta According to Rabbi Ishmael* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 57, 65.

already literarily connected to (part of the same textual unit as) material relevant to the larger piece. The existence of such *greirah*, as well as the tightly structured nature of this section, indicate that this might well be a later redactorial interpolation.

12. שומע אני

"I hear." See note on line 1, above.

12. כל הקורם במקרא הוא קורם במעשה

"That which is first in scripture is first in actuality." That which appears first in the order of a verse is more important, or of greater value. The way that this concept is worded, it seems to apply most exactly to the example of heaven and earth, taken from the two verses from the first two chapters of Genesis. The word, *ma'aseh*, often means "creation" in rabbinic texts. Thus, the statement could read, "That which appears first in scripture was created first." This may have been the original meaning of this statement, whose meaning was later altered when the other examples were attached to it.

14. כיוצא בו אתה אומר

"In like manner one interprets." This is a midrashic technical term used to introduce another case making the same general point. The word, *omer*, specifically indicates that a verse from scripture is about to be cited.

18. כל הקורם במקרא חשוב מחברו

"That which is first in scripture is more important than its companion." There does not appear to be any difference in meaning between this phrase and the parallel one stated in the other examples. The word, *ma'aseh*, can also mean, "deeds." Perhaps, the midrash makes this change because the forefathers are being discussed and the midrashist doesn't want to imply that Abraham is not the most meritorious.

בארץ מצרים. חוץ לכרך. אתה אומר חוץ לכרך או אינו אלא בתוך הכרך. כשהוא  
אומר ויאמר אליו משה כצאתי את העיר ונ' (שמות ט:כט). והלא דברים קל וחמר.  
ומה אם תפלה הקלה לא תתפלל משה אלא חוץ לכרך רבור החמור רין הוא שלא  
נרבר עמו אלא חוץ לכרך. ומפני מה לא נרבר עמו בתוך הכרך. לפי שהיתה  
30 מלאה שיקוצים ונילולים.

26. בארץ מצרים

"In the land of Egypt." This phrase from the base-text is repeated, perhaps to signal that a change in topic occurs at this point. We move from a discussion of who is fit for and who receives revelation, to where is it fit and where does revelation occur. Thus, the location of the revelation in this verse - Egypt - is cited.

Interestingly, the section of the midrash quoted above is really a *d'rash* on the first word of the phrase *eretz mitzraim* and the following few lines (31-32), quoted below, is a *d'rash* on the second word. The section above discusses where in the land (of Egypt)

revelation occurred, inside or outside the city. The section below begins with the question of revelation occurring in Egypt, as opposed to Israel. The transition between the two sections is very smooth, testimony to a strong redactorial hand at work.

## 26. חוץ לדרך

"Outside the City." The stress of the midrash here on revelation occurring outside the city, because the city is full of "abominations" and "idols," could be related to the historical situation after 70 C.E. At that time, many Gentiles were brought by the Romans into Judean cities to live. At points, Jews were kept out of Jerusalem. The population of the areas "outside the city" and "in the valley" was, relatively speaking, more Jewish. Another possibility is that the midrash is elevating the Torah, received in the wilderness by Moses, over competing revelations (e.g., Christian) received in urban environs.

## 27. קל וחומר

"A fortiori." If "x," the more difficult case, is true, then all the more so must "y" be true. This extremely common rabbinic technical term has also been called "a minore ad majus" or "a majore ad minus."<sup>4</sup> It is one of the 13 rabbinic *middot*, rules of *halakhic* interpretation attributed to Rabbi Ishmael.<sup>5</sup>

In order to get the cited verse (Exod. 9:29), which discusses prayer not revelation, to apply to the case of revelation, a *kal va'chomer* logic is employed. Prayer, from the rabbinic perspective, is very common. Revelation is very uncommon. Therefore, something which is a prerequisite for prayer - the *kalah* - must be a prerequisite for revelation - the *chamur*.

## 28. דין הוא

"It is a rule." "It must be concluded logically that...."

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<sup>4</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, v. 1, p. 4, n. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Kadushin, *Conceptual*, p. 22.

וער שלא ונבחרה ארץ ישראל היו כל הארצות כשרות לדברות. משנבחרה ארץ ישראל יצאו כל הארצות. ער שלא נבחרה ירושלים היתה כל ארץ ישראל כשרה למזבחות. משנבחרה ירושלים יצאה כל ארץ ישראל שנאמר השמר לך פן תעלה עולותיך ונ' כי אם במקום אשר יבחר (רברים יב:יג-יד). ער שלא נבחר בית 35 עולמים היתה ירושלים ראויה לשכינה.

משנבחר בית עולמים יצאת ירושלים שנאמר כי בחר י' בציון ונ' זאת מנוחתי ערי ער ונ' (תהלים קלב:יג-יד). ער שלא נבחר אהרן היו כל ישראל ראויים לכהונה. משנבחר אהרן יצאו כל ישראל שנאמר ברית מלח עולם היא לפני י' ונ' (במדרב יח:ט). ואומר והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהונה עולם 40 (במדרב כה:יג). ער שלא נבחר דוד היו כל ישראל ראויים למלכות. משנבחר דוד יצאו כל ישראל שנאמר הלא לכם לרעת כי י' אלהי ישראל נתן הממלכה לדוד על ישראל (רה"ב יג:ה).

### 31. וער שלא נבחרה ארץ ישראל

"Until the Land of Israel was chosen." In terms of the redaction of this *parashah*, the above section presents a parallel situation to the *kodem b'mikra hu kodem b'ma'aseh* section above (lines 12-25). Both sections are unified literary pieces, with their own dynamic and theme. In both cases, the only part of the piece truly relevant to the theme of the broader piece is the first few lines. Here, these lines focus on the tension between revelation inside and outside of the land of Israel, and employ the key word, *dibrot*. The rest, it seems, is *greirah*.

Another observation about this section: the first and essential example has not proof-text, while the others do. It could be that the first example was added by our redactor to an existing piece and then the whole thing included so that it would buttress the first line.

### 32. יצא

"Were excluded." Much of rabbinic logic involves including things into a category or excluding things from a category. The dynamic of the first few sections above, which discuss who is eligible for revelation, is one of including things into a category. For example, Aaron is made equal to Moses; he is put in the category of Moses as a potential recipient of revelation. The sections that follow, which discuss where revelation can be received and under what moral conditions, aim to exclude items from a category. In placing these two dynamics back to back, the midrashist is saying that there is no quality intrinsic to a person which makes him/her eligible to receive revelation. But, the Land of Israel is intrinsically more fit for the receipt of revelation.

### 32. יצאו כל הארצות

"All the other lands were excluded." Another contextual issue that may inform this section of the midrash is that by the third-fourth centuries, Jews were leaving *Eretz Yisrael* for Babylonia and elsewhere. The religious significance of living in the land is reflected in this debate about revelation in and out of the land.

### 34-35. בית עולמים

"Eternal House." This term refers both to the Temple in Jerusalem.

ואם תאמר רן אני את הנביאים שנרבר עמהם בחוצה לארץ. אף על פי שנרבר עמהם בחוצה לארץ לא נרבר עמהם אלא בזכות אבות שנאמר קול ברמה נשמע ונ' 45 כה אמר יי מנעי קולך מבכי ונ' ויש תקוה לאחריתך ונ' (ירמיה לא: יד-טז). ויש אומרים אף על פי שנרבר עמהם בחוצה לארץ ובזכות אבות לא נרבר עמהם אלא במקום שהיה של מים שנאמר ואני הייתי על אוכל אולי (דניאל ח: ב). ואומר ואני הייתי על יד הנהר הנרול הוא חרקל (שם י: ד). ואומר היה היה רבר יי אל יחזקאל בן בוזי הכהן בארץ כשרים על נהר כבר (יחזקאל א: ג). ויש 50 אומרים נרבר עמו בארץ ונרבר עמו חוצה לארץ שנאמר היה היה רבר יי. היה שנרבר עמו בארץ. היה שנרבר עמו חוצה לארץ. ר' אלעזר בן צדוק אומר הרי הוא אומר קום צא אל הבקעה ונ' (יחזקאל נ: כב). מניר שהבקעה כשרה.

### 43. ואם תאמר רן אני

"If you say I'll give you the case of...(I can bring the contrary argument that...)." The above text is clearly one literary unit up until the statement attributed to R. Elazar ben Zaddok. It all deals with situations where revelation can occur outside of the Land. The topical progression is:

- a) If *chutz la'aretz*, then also *z'khut avot*.
- b) If *chutz la'aretz*, and *z'khut avot* then also *makom taharah shel mayim*.
- c) If *chutz la'aretz*, first *ba'aretz*.

Language and terminology also serve to unify this section. The key word *nidbar* appears numerous times here. *Yesh omrim* is used to introduce the latter two points. A smooth transition between the latter two points makes this an even tighter section. The first one ends with the quotation of Ezekiel 1:3, using it to prove that revelation occurs near water. The second uses the same verse, focusing on the infinitive absolute *היה היה*, to indicate that God spoke twice - once in Israel and then outside.

### 44. קול ברמה נשמע ונ'

"A voice is heard in Ramah, etc." (Jeremiah 31:15-17).

This text is cited to support the notion that revelation was given because of *z'chut avot* (merit of the ancestors). Here we have Rachel, one of the ancestral mothers, crying about her children, for they are gone.<sup>6</sup> God immediately responds that she, Rachel should stop crying because "there is a reward for your labor", that is, "they [her children] shall return from the enemy's land...the children shall return to their borders." (Jer. 31:16-17). Rachel suffers on account of her children and is rewarded with a spoken promise that the children shall return from exile. That promise is prefaced with "Thus said the Lord" and constitutes revelation of major import. The midrash is saying that the revelation to Jeremiah is due to Rachel.

<sup>6</sup>Later in this *parashah*, God speaks of Ephraim as the child. I'm not sure if the reference is to the exile of the Northern Kingdom or to Israel and Judah.

This passage is a wonderful example of how the midrash creates new meaning by juxtaposing texts from different places. The Jeremiah text establishes *z'khut avot* as a basis for the revelation that the Israelites would return. It is then assumed that for the Daniel and Ezekiel texts that follow, that *z'khut avot* also applies. Yet, these texts add support for the additional notion that the revelation must occur "in a place of pure water." The three texts, from three different books, are connected thematically, referring to the return from exile and to revelation. Jeremiah witnessed the destruction and prophesied redemption while in Israel. Ezekiel witnessed the (results of) destruction and prophesied redemption to the exiles. Daniel also prophesied in the diaspora. But, here, the texts become interdependent. One implies the other; without one, one cannot have the other. Jeremiah leads to Daniel and to Ezekiel.

But, it is deeper, still, than that. In creating this intertextual piece, the midrashist draws on an already extant intertextual piece, the Jeremiah text. How can Rachel weep for her children, if not by leaping over time? Jeremiah recontextualizes Rachel and the midrashist here recontextualizes Jeremiah. The result is a collapse of time, where the actions of the patriarchs directly bear on the exilic prophets and people, and, by implication, on the writers' time, too. This collapse of time is implicitly recognized where Ezekiel's *haya haya d'var Adonai* becomes proof that revelation in Israel proper establishes the basis for revelation outside the land.

The intertextuality works on still another level. The passage in *Parashat Bo*, upon which this is a comment, discusses the Israelite exodus from Egypt and journey towards the Land of Israel. These passages from the prophets discuss the return of Israel from exile to the Land. The two redemptions are parallel events for the rabbis, a demonstration by God of God's love for Israel. Moreover, the particular verse being commented on refers to God speaking to a prophet (Moses) outside of the Land. Thus, the issue raised in Exodus is dealt with by comparing it to verses from the prophets which depict the same situation: God speaking to a prophet outside the land. Moreover, by using these particular intertexts, the midrash places the stress on god's continuing relationship with Israel under the conditions of exile.

#### 46. יש אומרים

"There are those that say." *Yesh omrim* introduces an alternative viewpoint to those already expressed. That viewpoint is stated and followed by *shene'emar* which introduces a proof-text.

#### 51. רבי אלעזר בן צדוק אומר

"Rabbi Elazar ben Zaddok says." The statement attributed to R. Elazar ben Zaddok seems like it would have fit better in the discussion about revelation inside and outside the city. It is out of place here in that the material preceding it is about revelation inside and outside the Land and this theme continues right after R. Elazar's statement.



חרע שאין השכינה נגלית בחוצה לארץ שנאמר ויקם יונה לברוח תרשישה מלפני  
 יי (יונה א:ג). וכי מלפני יי הוא בורח. והלא כבר נאמר אנא אלך מרוחק וגי'  
 55 אם אסק שמים וגי' אשא כנפי שחר וגי' גם שם ירך תנחני וגי' (תהלים קל"ט:ז-י).  
 וכתיב עיני יי המה משוטטים בכל הארץ (זכריה ד:י). וכתיב בכל מקום עיני יי  
 וגי' (משלי טו:ג). אם יחתרו בשאול וגי' אם יצבאו בראש הכרמל וגי' אם ילכו  
 בשבי וגי' (עמוס ט:ב-ד). ואומר אין חשך ואין צלמות וגי' (איוב לד:כב).  
 אלא אמר יונה אלך לי חוצה לארץ מקום שאין השכינה נגלית שהגנים קרובים  
 60 לתשובה הן שלא לחייב את ישראל. משלו משל לעבר שהיה לכהן. אמר אברהם לי  
 לבית הקברות מקום שאין רבי יכול לבא אחרי. אמר לו רבי יש לי עבדים כנענים  
 כמותך. כך אמר יונה אלך לי לחוצה לארץ מקום שאין השכינה נגלית שהגנים  
 קרובים לתשובה הן שלא לחייב את ישראל. אמר לו הקב"ה: יש לי שלוחין כיוצא  
 כך שנאמר ויי הטיל רוח נרולה אל הים (יונה א:ד).

### 53. חרע שאין השכינה נגלית

"You know that the Shekhinah is not revealed." Two indicators that this begins a new redactional unit are the use of *ha'Shekhina nigleit*, instead of *nidbar* to refer to revelation and the use of *u'khtiv* to introduce prooftexts, the first time this term is used in the piece.<sup>7</sup>

### 54. והלא כבר נאמר

"Hasn't it already been stated (in the Bible)?" This statement introduces a quote which challenges a prior point. It is typical of exegetic midrashim in that it sets up a dialectical tension between two poles. Jonah is depicted fleeing from the Land so that God cannot speak to him. On the other hand, we have all of these verses which refer to God being able to see or reach people wherever they go. This is the dynamic tension.

In this chunk of material, the pendulum has swung away from revelation being possible outside of the land. It is striking that the midrash cites five texts in support of the notion that God is present outside the Land. It is as if the author (or redactor) is anxious that the point about revelation being impossible outside the Land not be misconstrued. God is present and can act outside the Land of Israel. It is just that God does not give revelation outside of God's chosen place.

### 56. וכתיב

"It is written." Technical term used to introduce a passage from scripture.

### 59. אלך לי חוצה לארץ מקום שאין השכינה נגלית

"I will go outside the Land, where the Shekhinah is not revealed." The midrash here follows the same interpretation as Targum Jonathan, which says that Jonah fled from prophesying in the name of God (בשמה ריי מוקרם ראחנבי). Jonah was aware that God could find him outside of Israel. But, he was also aware that God does not speak to human beings there. In fleeing from the Land, Jonah took a bold action in defense

<sup>7</sup>See comment on *dibbur*, line 1 for discussion of *gilu'i Sh'khinah*.

of Israel. He feared that if the gentiles repented, God would find Israel guilty, for they had not responded to message of God's prophets. In defense of Israel, he risked bringing the wrath of god on himself. (See comment on line 60, below, for further explication of Jonah's actions.)

59-60. שהגנים קרובים לחשובה הם שלא לחייב את ישראל.

"For the gentiles are close to repentance, and not to make Israel guilty." This midrash may come out of a second or third century context, a period when the gentiles (the Romans) were indeed flourishing and the Jews, post-Bar Kochba, were downtrodden. Early Christians and Gnostics were busy converting the gentiles and claiming that the Jews had betrayed God and had thus been defeated. The lionizing of Jonah in this midrash seems to reflect the feeling of the midrashist - and, perhaps, the rabbis in general - that 1) the detractors of the Jews were right about Israel's sinfulness and their defeat, but 2) nevertheless Israel must not be abandoned. Jonah's helping the Ninevites repent is analogous to a Jew abandoning Rabbinic Judaism and going to help the Christians or Gnostics.

60. משלו משל לעבר.

"They compared this in a mashal to a slave..." The mashal form is common in aggadic literature, and is used occasionally in the Mekhilta. While it often sounds like a fairy tale, it is really not a tale at all, but an analysis of a tale told in the Bible. The mashal assigns a deep-structural description to the ambiguous or gapped narrative of the Bible and, in so doing, gives the biblical narrative a clean ideological value.<sup>8</sup>

This mashal comes to resolve some problems in the Jonah narrative. How is it possible that a human being who is a servant of God could imagine escaping from God? In the mashal God is compared to a master who is a *kohen*, or priest, and Jonah to his servant. The servant escapes his duties by going to a cemetery - compared to being outside the Land - a place where a priest is not allowed to go.

What makes this mashal work is that it gives a concrete image of a human situation where the master can see the servant, know where he is, yet not be able to command him effectively. Similarly, Jonah has not escaped from God, only from his duty as a prophet.

The interesting upshot of the mashal however, is that the master threatens the Jewish slave that he can be replaced by a Canaanite slave! The mashal ties this notion of God replacing the messenger to the verse about God casting a great wind on the ocean (Jonah 1:4), a clever, psychological reading of the threat of the storm on Jonah's boat. Thus, it is an interpretation of the Jonah text. But, by introducing the Canaanite into the mashal, it also becomes an interpretation of the prior midrashic text. The threat implicit in the *t'shuvah* of the non-Jews is made manifest. It means that the Jews will be replaced as God's special servants.

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<sup>8</sup>Daniel Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990). pp. 84-85.

64. (Jonah 1:4) וי הטיל רוח גדולה...

"But the Lord cast a mighty wind." It's possible that *ruach* (wind) is understood here by the midrash as a hint or reference to prophecy.

65 נמצאת אומר שלשה נביאים הם. אחד חבע כבוד האב וכבוד הבן. ואחר חבע כבוד האב ולא כבוד הבן ולא כבוד האב. ידמיה חבע כבוד האב וכבוד הבן שנאמר נחנו פשענו ומרינו אתה לא סלחת (איכה ג:מב). לפיכך נכפלה נבואתו שנאמר ועוד נוסף עליהם רבים כהמה (ירמיה לו:לב). אליהו חבע כבוד האב ולא חבע כבוד הבן שנאמר קנא קנאתי ליי אלהי צבאות 70 ונ' (מלאכים א. יט:י). ומה נאמר שם. ויאמר יי אליו לך שוב לדרכך ונ' ואת יהוא בן נמשי תמשח למלך על ישראל ואת אלישע בן שפט מאכל מחולה תמשח לנביא תחתך (שם יט:טו-טז). שאין תלמוד לומר תחתך אלא שאי אפשר בנבואתך. יונה חבע כבוד הבן ולא חבע כבוד האב שנאמר ויקם יונה לברוח ונ' (יונה א:ג). מה כתיב ויהי רבר יי אל יונה שנית לאמר (שם ג:א). שנית נרבר 75 עמו ולא נרבר עמו שלישי.

65. נמצאת אומר

"You find it said." Jonah's behavior is used as a transition and the focus is shifted from Jonah as an example in the discussion of revelation inside and outside the Land to Jonah as an example of one of three types of prophets and the impact of their actions upon their receipt of revelation. Now, it's his behavior as a defender of the people of Israel (as opposed to God) that is the focus, juxtaposed to Elijah (defender of God) and Jeremiah (defender of both God and Israel). Specifically, it is the *mashal*, above, which effected the transition by shifting the focus to the reasons for Jonah's actions. It's a subtle, but compelling transition that helps make this a relatively tight, fluid piece.

65. שלשה נביאים הם...

"There are three types of prophets..." The above piece constitutes a single unit held together by a paradigmatic structure. "There are three types of prophets" the midrash tells us. The three types are delineated up front and then one example of each is given.

65. כבוד האב וכבוד הבן

"Honor of the father and honor of the son." The relationship of God and Israel is often compared to father and son in rabbinic literature. What is interesting here is that the prophet is seen as standing astride this adversarial relationship and having to choose which side to take. It seems to me that the characterization of the prophets in this way is quite true to the Bible itself. The intertextual perspective of the midrashist allows him to bring these texts together to sharpen the picture and highlight this element of the prophet's role. In contrast to the section right before it, this unit sees revelation as very much dependent upon the behavior of the prophet as opposed to location of the prophet or his stature. The tension in this piece over the causes of revelation and prophecy is quite apparent.

Intuitively one would have expected the prophet who insists upon the honor of both

father and son (Jeremiah) to be put last in the paradigm. Afterall, he is the ideal, fulfilling both obligations and receiving additional revelation as a reward. It is possible that this was originally the case and the piece was reworked by the redactor to fit into the larger midrash.

While the midrash strives to bring out the tension between supporting the honor of father and son its deepest empathy lies with the son. Loyalty to Israel, dying for Israel, and Israel's importance to the process of revelation are all elevated in this parashah. Thus, Jonah is the crucial character, the one who exemplifies the values expressed later in the midrash. By placing Jonah last in the order presented, a transition can be made - via Rabbi Nathan's comment about Jonah's suicidal tendencies - to the discussion about the willingness of our patriarchs and prophets to put their lives on the line for Israel.

It is worth noting that the rabbis of the Mekhilta offer very different views of Jonah and Elijah than is traditional nowadays. For Jews today, Jonah is a lesser prophet, even a fool. His childish behavior is a foil for the Ninevites and on Yom Kippur, for us, too. For the rabbis of the Mekhilta (and of the rabbinic period, generally) Jonah is a noble prophet who sought to protect Israel from embarrassment or worse. On the other hand, Elijah is viewed in this text as a failure as a prophet. His zealousness for God and anger at Israel lead God to "decommission" him. The rabbis may have seen in Elijah an analogue to those in their day who, in their self-righteousness, abandoned Israel by separating themselves from the community through sectarian or ascetic behavior. For Jews today, Elijah is a noble, mystical figure - defender of the poor and harbinger of the messiah.

רבי נתן אומר לא הלך יונה אלא לאבר את עצמו בים שנאמר ויאמר אליהם שאוני והטילוני אל הים (יונה א:יב). וכן אתה מוצא שהאבות והנביאים נתנו נפשם על ישראל. במשה מה הוא אומר. ועתה אם תשא חטאתם ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת (שמות לב:לב). ואם ככה אתה עושה לי הרעני נא הרונ ונ' (במדבר יא:טו). 80 ברור מהו אומר. ויאמר רור אל האלהים הנה אנכי חטאתי ואנכי העויתי ואלה הצאן מה עשו תהי נא ירך בי וגו' (שמואל ב. כד:יז). הא בכל מקום אתה מוצא האבות והנביאים נתנו נפשם על ישראל.

#### 76. לא הלך יונה אלא לאבר עצמו

"Jonah went in order to kill himself." The focus on Jonah's actions allows the midrash to make a smooth, momentary transition away from the revelation theme to focus solely on the obligations of the Jewish leader. Jonah's willingness to die for Israel is presented as model behavior. Yet, one cannot ignore that, as we saw in the last section, his loyalty to Israel costs him God's revelation. In order to protect Israel, he must ignore the command of God, and fall out of God's favor.

Could it be that the rabbis of the second and third century - those who composed the Mekhilta or shaped its traditions - saw themselves as latter day Jonahs? Many offered themselves for the sake of Israel, yet, they did not receive revelation.

76-77. ויאמר אליהם שאוני והטילוני אל הים (Jonah 1:12)

"He said to them, 'Pick me up and cast me into the sea.'" (my translation). This verse is brought as proof of Jonah's desire to kill himself rather than complete the task God has set out for him, one which would endanger Israel. The key word in the verse is *sa'uni*, which means "raise me up." Through his willingness to martyr himself for Israel, Jonah is spiritually elevated.

77. וכן אתה מוצא

"And thus you find." Introduces a case or series of cases demonstrating the same proposition. This section is organized as a propositional form.<sup>9</sup>

77. שהאבות והנביאים נחטו נפשם על ישראל

"That the ancestors and prophets gave their lives for Israel." By grouping the *avor* and *ne'vi'im* together, the midrash is making a statement about Jewish leadership in general. Like Jonah, Moses and David, Jewish leaders must be willing to put their lives on the line for Israel, even if Israel is sinful and deserving of punishment. Through martyrdom the leader is spiritually elevated.<sup>10</sup> Coming out of the milieu of the Hadrianic persecutions or reflecting upon them as part of the corporate memory of the rabbis, this text eulogizes the martyrs while advocating martyrdom as a model of leadership.

78. מה הוא אומר

"...what does the text say about it?" This introduces a proof-text that ties something into the general principle stated prior to it.

78-79. ...ועתה אם תשא חטאתם (Exodus 32:32)

"Now if you will forgive their sin..." This proof-text cites Moses' plea with God on behalf of Israel after the incident of the golden calf. Moses asks God to take his life if God cannot forgive Israel. The word, *tissa*, "forgive" based on the same root as *sa'uni* in the Jonah text. In essence, Moses is saying to God, "either lift their sin from them or raise me up in martyrdom."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>However, this is not the same as Neusner's "propositional form and its syllogistic argument." (Neusner, *Mekhila*, p. 65.) See note 3, above.

<sup>10</sup>Interestingly, in other tractates of the Mekhila, the term *natan nefesh al*, "gave one's life for," does not specifically refer to martyrdom but, rather, total commitment to something (see *Shabbta* 1).

<sup>11</sup>It is not a long jump from the idea expressed here to the Christian notion that Jesus died for the sins of humankind. Indeed, both ideas probably developed in Jewish circles around the same time.

## 81. הא בכל מקום אתה מוצא

"Thus you find everywhere." This introduces a general principle or a conclusion.

לאמר צא ואמר אליהם מיר רבי רבי ישמעאל שנאמר ויצא ורבר (שמות לר:לר).  
 רבי אליעזר אומר צא ואמר אליהם והשיבני רבר שנאמר וישב משה את רבי העם  
 85 אל יי (שמות יט:ט). ואומר והנה האיש לבוש הברים אשר הקסת במתניו משיב רבר  
 (יחזקאל ט:יא). ואומר התשלח ברכים וילכו ונ'. שלוחיך לא כשלוחי בשר ודם.  
 ששלוחי בשר ודם צריכין לחזור אצל שולחיהם אבל שלוחיך אינו כן. אלא התשלח  
 ברכים וילכו ונ' (איוב לח:לה). וישבו לא נאמר אלא וילכו ויאמרו. הא  
 בכל מקום שהן הולכין נמצאים לפניך ואומרים עשינו שליחך. לקיים מה שנאמר  
 90 הלא את השמים ואת הארץ אני מלא נאום יי (ירמיה כג:כר). רבי יאשיה אומר  
 כשהמקום נזר גזירות טובות ורעות על ישראל על הטובה מחזירים לפניו ועל  
 הרעה אין מחזירים לפניו שנאמר והנה ששה אנשים באים ונ' וכבוד אלהי ישראל  
 נעלה מעל הכרוב וכתיב ויאמר יי אליו עבור בתוך העיר ונ' ולא לה אמר באוני  
 ונ' זקן בחור ובתולה וטף ונשים ונ' ויאמר אליהם טמאו את הבית ומלאו ונ'  
 95 (יחזקאל ט:ב-ז). יצאו אלו ועשו שליחותן. אלו שנצטוו על הרעה לא למרנו  
 שתחזירו שליחותן וזה שנצטווה על הטובה למרנו שתחזירו שליחותן שנאמר והנה  
 האיש לבוש הברים משיב ונ'.

## 83. לאמר צא ואמר ...

"Saying. Go and tell..." The material that begins here and ends with the proof-text from Jeremiah 23:24 (line 90) represents a neat, coherent midrashic unit developed in a fashion typical of the Mekhilta. The response to the redundant word *leimor* is framed as a debate between two tradents.<sup>12</sup> R. Ishmael says that the repetition of the root [אמר] is intended to lend urgency or immediacy to God's request. R. Eliezer says that the word based on the root [אמר] is there to give an additional message to Moses, i.e., bring back word to me. Neither of these responses is a *p'shat* answer, though in typical midrashic style, the simpler ("do it now") response is given first.

Despite the fact that our midrash is explicating a different word - *leimor*, the primary thematic line of the larger piece is continued. Another piece of the revelation puzzle is being filled in: Are God's messengers like human messengers? Do they need to return to the sender with word of their actions? The answer is: sometimes they return and sometimes they don't, but God does not need them to return to know what they've done.

## 84. רבי אליעזר אומר

"Rabbi Eliezer says." R. Eliezer's comment is placed after R. Ishmael's because it is really the "topic sentence" for this mini-unit and the larger unit, which includes all the material above. The issue for the second section is the necessity and significance of a messenger returning to God with word of his mission. Three proof-texts are used to support R. Eliezer's point. It seems that one, and certainly two, would have been

<sup>12</sup>This form has been called a "dispute form." (Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 104.)

enough. The piling on of the third, "...*ha'tashlech b'rakim*" is clearly a device to raise a different point and develop the argument further. Indeed, the third prooftext is the "weakest" of the three, since it doesn't contain the word for "return." Yet, it is precisely because it doesn't contain this word that it is used to prove that the messenger can report back to God anywhere in the universe, as God is everywhere.

A similar midrashic technique was used in the section above about the prerequisites for prophecy occurring outside the Land (lines 43-52). There, too, three prooftexts are piled on in a row and the third is used as a springboard/prooftext for an additional point. Ezekiel 1:3 is used first to support the notion that revelation outside the Land needs to be "in a pure place of water," and then to support the notion that revelation needs to be given first in the Land and then outside.<sup>13</sup> In both these circumstances, the prooftexts themselves are used as devices to effect a transition from one point to the next.

#### 86. שלוחך לא כשלוחי בשר ודם

"Your messengers are not like human messengers." Here we have a repetition of the theme raised in the material about Jonah. There the issue was where one can receive God's message (inside and/or outside the Land). Here the question is whether the messenger needs to return to God with a response and whether God can hear the response no matter where the messenger is. While the Jonah material indicated that revelation is received inside the Land the text here is emphatic that God can hear the messengers response anywhere. The key root in this section is [שלח] - to send; messenger.

#### 87-88. אלא חשלח בריקים וילכו ונ (Job 38:35)

"Can you dispatch the lightning on a mission?" Again, imagery of nature is used to demonstrate that the elements can be God's messengers. In the Jonah section it was wind. The point here, however, is different. As the midrash points out, the lightning, God's messenger, need not return to God to respond to God that it has done God's bidding. Anywhere that a messenger of God goes, it/he/she is in God's presence.

#### 90. רבי יאשיה אומר

"Rabbi Yoshiah says." The material attributed to R. Yoshiah, while a continuation of the prior material, constitutes a separate literary unit. It is held together with a fairly typical midrashic form. A proposition is laid out. Here, it is the statement of R. Yoshiah that those messengers who deliver good news to Israel return to God with a report, while those whose message is bad do not. Then, an example is given of each type, with one or more prooftexts to back up the examples. We saw a similar exegetic structure used in the section about the three types of prophets. What makes the two distinct is that here there is one large prooftext to support the two categories delineated and that prooftext is quoted before it is explained. In the section about the three types of prophets the prooftexts come after the role of each character in the paradigm is

<sup>13</sup>The section about Elijah being dismissed as prophet also employs this technique.

explained.

92-95. והנה ששה אנשים באים ונו' (Ezekiel 9:2-7)

"And six men entered, etc." It is hard to ignore the fact that such a strikingly large section from Ezekiel 9 is quoted in the midrash. Moreover, the Ezekiel text is itself striking. The scene is Jerusalem right before the destruction of the First Temple. God speaks to a group of men in the Temple, ordering one man clothed in linen to, literally, mark a righteous remnant of Jerusalem's population for salvation. God orders the other men to kill all the rest of the people. Our midrash points out that the linen clothed man - the one executing the good decree - returns to report to God. Those who are commanded to slay the sinful Israelites do not.

This midrashic section takes us back to the themes expressed earlier in the discussion of Jonah and his defense of Israel, and the connection of Jewish leadership to the willingness to die for Israel. Both Ezekiel and Jonah (as well as the other prophets/leaders mentioned) faced a crisis situation in Israel. This Ezekiel text epitomizes that crisis: The people are sinful and God is about to execute severe judgement upon Israel. The situation is dire. What are the leaders to do? There is no doubt that the rabbis creating this midrash in the second - third century saw themselves in Jonah and the other leaders who were God's messengers at a time when Israel was sinful and faced judgement. Like Ezekiel witnessing this nightmare they wanted to cry out, "Ah, Lord God, are you going to annihilate all that is left in Israel, pouring out Your fury upon Jerusalem?" (Ezekiel 9:8). Perhaps this is why the midrashist was drawn to this biblical text.

In drawing the distinction that those who execute the evil decree on Israel do not return to God and those that execute the salvific decree do, the midrashist echoes the "defense of Israel" message given earlier, but takes it a bit further. Here, we find God preferring the messenger who seeks to save a remnant of Israel, despite the fact that God is simultaneously executing judgment against Israel through other messengers. The midrash is subtly working through the deep, theological conflicts of the Jewish leader in the rabbinic period.



שמעון בן עזאי אומר לאמר בקול שאתה שומע בו למר. רבי עקיבא אומר לאמר  
 צא ואמור להם שבזכותם היה מדבר עמו. שכל שלשים ושמונה שנה שהיה כועס  
 100 על ישראל לא היה מדבר עם משה שנאמר ויהי כאשר תמו כל אנשי המלחמה ונ' וי  
 וירבר יי אלי לאמור (דברים ב:טז-יז). אמר רבי שמעון בן עזאי איני כמשיב  
 על דברי רבי אלא כמוסיף על דבריו. ולא עם משה בלבד נדבר עמו בזכותן של  
 ישראל אלא עם שאר כל הנביאים לא נדבר עמם אלא בזכותן של ישראל. שנאמר  
 ואשב שם שבעת ימים משמים בתוכם. וכתוב ויהי מקצה שבעת ימים ויהי דבר יי  
 105 ונ' (יחזקאל נ:טז-יז). וכתוב ויהי מקץ עשרת ימים ויהי דבר יי אל ירמיהו  
 (ירמיה מב:ז). וכן אתה מוצא בברוך בן נריה שהיה מתרעם לפני המקום. אמרת  
 אוי נא לי כי יסף יי ינון על מכאובי ונ' (ירמיה מה:ג). נשתנית אני  
 מתלמידי הנביאים. יהושע שמש את משה ושרתה עליו רוח הקדש. אלישע שמש את  
 אליהו ושרתה עליו רוח הקדש. ואני מה נשתנתי מתלמידי הנביאים. ינעתי  
 110 באנחתי ומנחתי לא מצאתי (שם). ואין מנחה אלא נבואה שנאמר ותנח עליהם הרוח  
 (במדבר יא:כו). ואומר נחח רוח אליהו על אלישע (מלכים ב. ב:טו). ואומר ונחח  
 עליו רוח יי (ישעיה יא:ב). בא וראה מה המקום משיבו. כה תאמר אליו כה אמר  
 יי הנה אשר בניתי אני הורס ונ' ואתה תבקש לך נדולות אל תבקש ונ' (ירמיה  
 מה:ד-ה). ואין נדולות אלא נבואה שנאמר ספרה נא לי את כל הנדולות אשר עשה  
 115 אלישע (מלכים ב. ח:ד). ואומר קרא אלי ואענך ואנידה לך נדולות ובצורות ולא  
 ירעתם (ירמיה לז:ג). ברוך בן נריה כרם אין כן סייג למה. צאן אין כן רועה  
 למה. מפני מה. כי הנני מביא רעה אל כל בשר ונ' ונתתי לך את נפשך לשלל  
 על כל המקומות אשר תלך שם (ירמיה מה:ה). הא בכל מקום אתה מוצא שאין  
 הנביאים מתנבאים אלא בזכותן של ישראל.

98. שמעון בן עזאי אומר... רבי עקיבא אומר...

"Shimon ben Azzai says... Rabbi Akiva says..." This last unit begins as a debate between R. Shimon b. Azzai and R. Akiva, who were colleagues.<sup>14</sup> The initial statement (Ben Azzai's) does not become the main subject of the unit. Rather, the second statement of Akiva acts as a topic statement for the material in the rest of the *parashah*. The same stylistic device is used above where R. Ishmael's opener is ignored and R. Eliezer's follow-up statement becomes the topic sentence of the midrashic unit. Unlike that unit, however, in this unit the rabbi making the initial statement - B. Azzai - later returns to the debate to expand on the other's point.

100-101. (Deut. 2:16) ויהי כאשר תמו כל אנשי המלחמה ונ'.

"When all the warriors among the people had died off." Akiva's assertion is that God spoke to Moses only when Israel had merit. In the proof-text given here, Moses, recounting the Israelite journey through the wilderness, notes that it was 38 years until the whole generation of warriors had died off. They were characterized as sinful, unfit to enter the Land, so "the hand of the Lord struck them" (v. 15). Verses 16-17 continue: "When all the warriors had died off, the Lord spoke to me, saying..."

<sup>14</sup>This is another example of the dispute form.

According to the midrash this meant that for the 38 years that these sinful warriors lived God did not speak to Moses.<sup>15</sup> When they died, God once again did so. Thus, the merit of Israel determined whether God gave revelation to Moses.

101-102. איני כמשיב על דברי רבי אלא כמוסיף על דבריו

"I am not arguing against the words of my teacher but merely adding to his words." This kind of introduction to a response is typical of Ben Azzai in the midrash and no one else. Perhaps this phrase is rooted in an actual conflict between the sages.

102-103. ולא עם משה בלבד...אלא עם שאר כל הנביאים

"And it was not only with Moses...rather, it was with all the rest of the prophets." Ben Azzai adds that the principle that God only spoke to Moses when Israel merited it held for the rest of Israel's prophets, too. Two texts are brought to support this notion. The first pictures Ezekiel (3:15-16) in the exile community in Babylonia, where he dwelt in silence for seven days before the word of God came to him. The key word here is, *b'tokham*, "among them" - the prophet needed to be among the people to receive revelation. The second text, Jeremiah 42:7 also notes a wait - here, ten days - before God speaks to the prophet. But, in this case we have an additional factor. Immediately prior to this verse we find the army officers and people of Israel approaching Jeremiah to intercede on their behalf, "for all this remnant." They are very humble and swear to do exactly as God instructs. In other words, they are meritorious and God speaks to Jeremiah because of the people's merit. Both of these are effective prooftexts, combining the notions of exile, merit of the people, the prophets presence among the people and God's willingness to give revelation.

106. וכן אתה מוצא בברוך בן נריה

"So, too, you find with Barukh ben Neriah." To cinch the argument that a prophet's revelation is dependent upon the merit of Israel, the midrash moves neatly from the case of Jeremiah to his disciple/scribe, Baruch ben Neriah. The *p'shat* of Jeremiah 45:2-3 is that Baruch is pained by the suffering of the exile. However, there is a tone of self-pity in his "*oy na li*," as he complains against God for heaping distress on him. With a small twist of language, the midrashist turns Baruch's groaning into a complaint about not receiving prophecy. Afterall, the midrash says, putting words in his mouth, "Why should I be treated differently from other disciples of prophets," like Elisha and Joshua, who became prophets? Baruch's complaining, "*u'mnuchah lo matzati*," "and I have not found rest," is actually about his not receiving prophecy. For the midrash says, "*eyn menucha elah nevuah*," "rest means none other than prophecy."

113. הנה אשר בניתי אני הורס וני' (Jeremiah 45:4-5)

"I am going to overthrow what I have built." After a few simple prooftexts connecting *menuchah* (rest) and *nevuah* (prophecy), the midrash takes us right back to

<sup>15</sup>Their sin is noted in Deut. 1:34-36.

the Jeremiah text for the powerful end of this entire piece. The text expresses God's response, "I am going to overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted - this applies to the whole land. And do you expect great things for yourself? Don't expect them. For I am going to bring disaster upon all flesh - declares the Lord - but I will at least grant you your life in all the places where you may go." (Jer. 45:4-5).

The midrashist exploits the word for "great things" - *gedolot* - using the same twist as above to make the subject prophecy: "*eyn gedolot elah n'vuah*," "Great things means none other than prophecy." The prooftext is so fitting that this is the only midrashic play necessary to make the message come through clearly. God rebukes Baruch for expecting prophecy (certainly a "great thing") when God is bringing disaster on the people, which is itself punishment for Israel's sinfulness. If Israel does not have merit, there can be no prophecy for the prophet. Israel must be what its supposed to be for the prophet to do what he/she is supposed to do. Two sterling analogies express this: "*Kerem eyn ken siyyag lamah? Tzon eyn ken ro'eh lamah?*" "There is no vineyard; why should there be a fence? There are no sheep, why should there be a shepherd?" There can be no leaders without followers; no prophecy without the Jewish community.

#### 117. נחמי לך אח נפשך לשלל

"But, I will at least grant you your life as booty." Following the text out to its end, Baruch is told that he should feel fortunate to have his life, given the situation in which Israel finds itself. His life is *sh'lal*, booty from a war, (i.e., that which is left over from disaster). In the case of Baruch, he lived at the time of the destruction of the First Temple when so many died or were enslaved.

One can imagine that the rabbis of the second and third centuries living in the wake of the Bar Kochba rebellion and Hadrianic persecutions identified strongly with Baruch ben Neriah. The message that the midrashist was giving to the rabbis of his own time hardly needs to be magnified, since the midrash was so well developed: there are many obstacles to our receipt of revelation, but fundamental is the condition of the people we are leading. They are sinful, exiled, punished, without merit. Though we must defend their honor and even risk our lives to save a remnant of the people (against the onslaught of competing religions; against God), we cannot expect to receive revelation - a gift that comes to the prophet because of the merit of his people.

## OVERVIEW

Chapter one of Massekhta d'Pischa can be characterized as a tightly edited, midrashic essay on the themes of revelation and Jewish leadership. While employing various rhetorical forms and methods of logical reasoning, the redactor(s) manages to weave together a continuous, coherent argument which responds to some of the troubling questions that the rabbis faced in their struggle to make sense out of their situation as Jewish leaders. What are the implications of the fact that they did not receive revelation directly from God? What does it say about them as leaders and about Israel as a people? Why is the Jewish people in exile, in a downtrodden state? How should we respond to them? What does God want from us as leaders of this people? In responding to these issues, the midrash develops its own internal dynamic which moves beyond the exegetical mode of midrashic analysis. However, in going beyond the immediate base-text, Exodus 12:1, this *parashah* addresses some of the broader issues inherent in the biblical narrative.

### Forms and Technical Terms

Over the 119 lines of text in this piece, many different rhetorical forms and technical terms are used, but no particular one stands out. In the first part of the piece, two sections - lines 2-5 and 12-25 - rely on the *Shomei'a Ani* form, the second section using a more truncated version than the first. In between, lines 7-11 are structured by the *Lamah Ne'emar* form. As noted below, these two forms are, in a sense, mirror images of one and other. Interestingly, neither appear in the rest of the chapter.

Perhaps, this is because both *Shomei'a Ani* and *Lamah Ne'emar* are used to juxtapose verses from scripture, which here serve to include Moses and Aaron in the same category. In fact, the technical term, *hekeshe*, is used in line 9 to buttress the equality of Moses and Aaron.

Beginning with line 26 and extending to line 52, the midrash seeks to exclude various locales from the category of places suitable for revelation. It makes sense that this change in dynamic within the midrash would lead to a change in the forms used. For example, lines 31-42 are organized around the repeated use of *ad she'lo (nivch'rah)...ha'ya...k'sherah. Mi'she'(nivch'rah)...yatz'ah....* "Until (the following was chosen)...this was included....When (the following was chosen)...this was excluded...." This is a particular type of propositional form. We also find other examples of propositional forms in the piece, including lines 12-25, 65-75, 76-82 and 90-97. Two of these are also paradigmatic structures, including the piece about the three types of prophets (lines 65-75) and the two types of messengers (lines 90-97). There are also a couple of examples of dispute forms, where the piece is built around a debate between tradents (lines 83-90 and 102-105). To top it off, in lines 60-64 there is a wonderful example of a *mashal*. In brief, this chapter sports a potpourri of midrashic rhetoric.

Similarly, we find an assortment of technical terms. In addition to *shomei'a ani*, *hekeshe* and *lamah ne'emar*, there is *kal va'chomer* (lines 27-29), *k'yotzeh bo atah omer* and *magid* (both appear 4x, lines 12-25), *v'khen atah motzeh* (lines 77 and 106), *ma hu omer* (lines 76-82), *davar acher* (line 7), etc. There does not appear to be any pattern in the use of technical terms in this chapter.

### Thematic Flow and Development

This piece is held together by the artful weaving of themes and texts into a progressive argument. The themes of revelation and Jewish leadership, while distinct, are developed by-and-large through the same material. This is done by drawing out tensions within the material that address the two themes. A schematic summary of the flow of the piece will help illuminate how this works and how the chapter coheres:

Lines 1-6: The piece begins with tension over whether Aaron, as well as Moses, was fit to receive revelation. While he was fit, God rarely spoke to him, in order to respect the honor of Moses. The point is that if one does not receive revelation, it doesn't mean one is personally unfit to receive it. In terms of Jewish leadership, the leader is obligated to "defend the honor of Moses," perhaps by defending the Torah, his revelation. There is also a sense that the top leader must be accorded great respect.

Lines 7-11: Tension over who is fit for revelation continues with the striking assertion that Aaron was Moses' equal with regard to other leadership skills and activities, including his standing as "judge" of Pharaoh and his fearlessness. This supports the position that Aaron was as fit as Moses to receive revelation. In terms of leadership, we learn that the fact that one does not receive revelation does not take anything away from one's ability to lead. This is a crucial statement for the rabbis, who claimed to have inherited the mantle of Jewish leadership from the prophets, but did not themselves receive revelation.

Lines 12-25: A challenge to Moses and Aaron's equality is presented and refuted here, using a rhetorical formula which deduces textual evidence of their equality. Lines

14-25 are *greirah*, and do not advance the argument of the larger piece. However, these lines do buttress the logic used within this section.

Lines 26-30: The topic shifts from who can receive revelation to where revelation can be received. The tension is between revelation occurring inside a city or outside. But this, in turn, reflects a tension over revelation occurring in a place where idolatry is rampant (the cities, where most Romans lived), and the more Jewish countryside. The midrash asserts that the "religious environment" of the countryside is more conducive to revelation.

Lines 31-42: Continuing the tension over the proper religious environment for revelation (a smooth thematic transition occurs here), the argument moves to the question of whether revelation can occur outside of the Land of Israel. The assertion is that in the past (e.g., in the time of Moses) it could happen outside the Land, but once the Land of Israel was chosen, that became the sole place of revelation. Lines 32-42 are *greirah*. It is worth noting that the same redactorial pattern is followed here as in lines 12-25. The redactor brought these developed literary units into the larger piece without jettisoning the less relevant parts. It is possible that in order to make these units tie in to the larger piece, the relevant material was moved to the beginning of the unit.

Lines 43-52: Continuing the tension over whether revelation can occur outside the Land, a challenge is brought that the prophets Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel all prophesied outside of Israel. This challenge is undercut by explaining that there were mitigating circumstances in each case which allowed this to happen.

Lines 53-64: The example of Jonah is discussed. His actions demonstrate that

revelation does not occur outside the Land. The tension between the absence of revelation outside of Israel and the presence of God outside of Israel is developed here. This tension is explicated through a *mashal*, lines 60-64. In addition, the *mashal* effects a transition from Jonah as an example that revelation does not occur outside the Land to Jonah as a model of Jewish leadership. Jonah flees from receiving God's revelation so that he would not have to assist in the repentance of the non-Jews, letting Israel stand condemned. The *mashal* adds that Jonah risked losing his standing as a prophet and could be replaced by a non-Jew.

Lines 65-75: The revelation and leadership themes are brought together powerfully here. Jonah continues to be a focus, but is now one of three types of prophets. Through the examples of Jeremiah, Elijah and Jonah, the tension for the Jewish leader between protecting the honor of God (who is Israel's Judge) and protecting the honor of Israel (who is sinful) is delineated. In terms of revelation, the role that the action of the prophet himself plays in his receipt of revelation is brought out.

Lines 76-82: The focus on Jonah continues, allowing a smooth transition, momentarily, away from the revelation theme to focus on the model leader's willingness to martyr himself for Israel. Those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for Israel, despite Israel's sinfulness, are lauded here.

Lines 83-97: The midrash returns to the thematic tension introduced in lines 53-64, where a person can hear God and where God can be heard. Specifically, the midrash points out that a messenger of God has no need to return to God to deliver a report of his/her actions, since God is aware of the messenger anywhere that the messenger



happens to be. Lines 90-97 use the same messenger motif to address the obligations of Jewish leadership. God wants the messenger with good news for Israel to return, while God does not want the messenger with the bad news for Israel to return. In essence, God welcomes the messenger (read: rabbi, leader) whose purpose is to save a remnant of Israel, despite the fact that God is executing judgement against Israel. The deep tension for the leader between loyalty to Israel and God's justice is brought out again, as it was in lines 65-75. However, here we find that God actually loves the messenger who is loyal to Israel more than the one who executes God's judgement against her.

Lines 98-119: The final piece of the *parashah* brings together the leader's role as defender of Israel with the leader's loss of revelation. Ultimately, the merit of the people determines whether a prophet receives revelation. If the people are sinful, God will not give their leader revelation.

The following propositions are expressed in this piece in order of development:

- a) There is no relationship between the leader's ability to lead and his/her receipt of revelation.
- b) Revelation occurs amongst Jews, in Israel, not outside; nevertheless, God is everywhere.
- c) The Jewish leader must live with the tension between God's just judgement against sinful Israel and faithfulness to Israel.
- d) Receipt of revelation depends upon the leader's ability to honor both sides of the tension.
- e) The Jewish leader must remain loyal to Israel, even to the extent of risking his/her

life for the people; God actually prefers those who work for the salvation of the remnant of Israel.

f) Such loyalty, however, means that the leader will not receive revelation, since revelation is dependent on the merit of the people.

While this is not a modern-style essay, one can see that the flow of ideas in this piece is fairly linear. Where they don't exactly flow one to the next (e.g., from "b" to "c"), the literary skill of the redactor helps to sew the pieces together. It is noteworthy that at two different points some of the words from the base-text are reintroduced and commented on exegetically, yet this does not break the flow of the piece or the focus on the primary themes. In fact, these citations of the base-text (at lines 26 and 83) seem to be used by the redactor to advance the argument of the piece. In line 26 it facilitates a shift to the issue of where revelation may be received and in line 83 precipitates the discussion about the return of the messenger.

#### Relationship to the Biblical Text

The biblical text does not dictate the themes and flow of this midrashic piece, except in the sense that it serves as a jumping-off point for the discussion of the topic of revelation. While questions arise from the midrashic reading of Exodus 12:1 which are addressed in the essay, it cannot be said that this is primarily an exegetical piece.<sup>16</sup> Of the eleven sections of midrashic material above, only three can be said to be substantially

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<sup>16</sup>See p. 1, comments on lines 1-2 for questions arising from a midrashic reading of the base-text.

exegetic in nature. Four contain no exegesis at all, while four others contain a minimal amount of such commentary.

Not only is the exegetical content of this piece relatively minimal, but the exegetical material that is included is less significant to the piece than the propositional, topical material. Thus, for example, in the last two sections of the piece, *leimor* is commented on only in a formal sense, as a jumping-off point for a topical discussion. One might argue that the double use of the root [אמר] sets the agenda for the piece, which is about revelation. However, there are many verses which are written this way. It is not unusual. In truth, this midrashic essay could have been linked to another biblical text and worked just as effectively. Exod. 12:1 introduces a discussion of the new year and the paschal sacrifice. These topics are not discussed in this piece of midrash. Thus, the broader base-text seems to have no influence on the midrash.

However, it cannot be said that this midrash is completely unrelated to the base-text. In a much broader, non-exegetical sense, this midrash addresses some of the issues contained in the larger Exodus narrative. The Book of Exodus spends much time discussing the role of Moses as a leader, his authority, his relationship to others and, especially, the revelations he receives from God. Throughout the book God's voice thunders and Moses to God's direct address. As leaders of Israel who did not receive direct revelation, yet were protectors and interpreters of the revelation to Moses, they must have felt a need to explain their status and the causes behind the lack of direct communication from God. This need was particularly acute given the rise of competing religions with claims to more current revelations. Similarly, the balancing act that Moses

plays between a disobedient, sinful people and God must have resonated for the rabbis.

A simple verse, Exod. 12:1, serves as a prick which brings forth torrents of material on these subjects.

CHAPTER TWO

TRACTATE PISCHA  
PARASHAH TWO  
EXODUS 12:37-42

ויסעו בני ישראל מרעמסס סכתה. מרעמסס לסוכות מאה וששים מיל מהלך ארבעים פרסה. הלך קילו של משה מהלך ארבעים יום. ואל תחמה הרי הוא אומר ויאמר יי אל משה ואל אהרן קחו לכם מלא חפניכם ונ' והיה לאבק על כל ארץ מצרים ונ' (שמות ט:ח-ט). וחרי הרברים קל וחמר. ומה אם אבק שאין ררכו להלוך והלך 5 מהלך ארבעים יום קל וחמר לקול שררכו להלוך. כהרף עין נסעו בני ישראל מרעמסס לסוכות לקיים מה שנאמר ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ונ' (שמות יט:ד).

### 1. סכתה

"To Succoth." Succoth was the second station that the Israelites reached during their exodus journey. In addition to our base-text, Exodus 12:37, Succoth is mentioned in this context again in Exodus 13:20, where the Torah says that Israel went from Succoth to Etham which was on the edge of the wilderness. (The same Raamses to Succoth to Etham trip is mentioned in Numbers 33:5-6.) All this occurs before Israel reaches the Reed Sea.

### 1. מאה וששים מיל

"One hundred sixty miles." A mile is the equivalent of 2000 cubits.<sup>1</sup> Text witnesses disagree over the number of miles indicated by the midrash here.

### 1-2. מהלך ארבעים פרסה

"A journey of 40 parasangs." A parasang is a Persian mile.<sup>2</sup> An average traveler on foot covers about 10 parasangs a day.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the midrash is indicating it would normally be a four day journey.

### 2. הלך קילו של משה מהלך ארבעים יום

"Moses' voice carried the distance of a forty day journey." According to the rabbis, Egypt covered an area of 400 parasangs, a forty-day journey. Moses' voice is pictured going throughout the land of Egypt.<sup>4</sup> The midrash clearly sees this as a miracle, as the next line says, "This need not surprise you." However, the purpose of this miracle is obscure. This same statement, including the reference to the small dust, is in the Talmud Yerushalmi.<sup>5</sup> There it is indicated that this miracle enabled Moses to instruct the Israelites (who were living all over Egypt), regarding the slaughtering of the paschal

<sup>1</sup>Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targum, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature. (New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1950), p. 773.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 1233.

<sup>3</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, vol. 1, p. 107, n. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>See Pesachim 5.5, 32c.

lamb.<sup>6</sup>

The midrashic material about Moses' voice, which begins here and ends with "*l'kol she'darko la'halokh*," seems to be an interpolation. Not only does it exist separately in the Yerushalmi, but it is inserted between the statement about the distance of the Israelites journey and the explanation of the miraculous speed of that journey.

As a result, the line of argument in this passage is confusing. The text moves without transition from the distance the Israelites travelled to the distance Moses' voice travelled and back again. This should not be viewed as poor editing, however, but as the deliberate juxtaposition of two traditions. Both discuss miracles which occurred around the same time and which involved overcoming great distances. Both involve the number forty. The redactor(s) is making the point that these traditions should not be seen as isolated instances, but as part of a pattern of miracles occurring at the time of the exodus.

### 3. והיה לאבק על כל הארץ מצרים (Exodus 9:9)

"It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt." This biblical text describes how Moses initiated the plague of *shekhin* among the Egyptians. He threw the dust from a kiln into the air, it spread over all Egypt and caused boils on people and cattle throughout the land.

### 4. קל וחומר

"A fortiori." The reason for the *kal va'chomer* argument is that there is no proof-text for the miracle cited that Moses' voice carried 400 parasangs, across the land of Egypt. Instead, the midrash finds a textual basis for saying that the dust carried that distance. If dust, which doesn't normally carry far, carried across Egypt, certainly a voice - which carries easier than dust - could carry that far.

### 6. לקיים מה שנאמר

"to fulfill what was written in the following text:..."

### 6. ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים (Exodus 19:4)

"I bore you on eagles' wings." It seems that the entire passage above reflects the viewpoint that the Exodus was even more "miraculous" than the biblical text itself states. God is present for the rabbis in every piece of this event, even the banal statement that the Israelites went from Raamses to Succoth. This journey, discussed in the base-text, Exod. 12:37-42, reflects the "floating on air" feeling expressed in Exodus 19:4: "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me." The rabbis use the poetic imagery of this additional text to elevate the ordinary statement in Exodus 12 to the height that they felt was inherent in the base-text. This midrash is an excellent example of an "intertextual" reading, whereby one biblical text is read through another.

One can also read "*v'esah etkhem al kanfei nesharim*" (Exodus 19:4) as a messianic

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<sup>6</sup>Kadushin, *Conceptual*, p. 155.

reference to the future. It contains two future tense verbs. Perhaps the midrashist is deliberately picking up on the future tense in the base text "וּסַעוּ", "and you will travel."

סוכותה. סוכות ממש היו שנאמר ויעקב נסע סוכותה ויבן לו בית ולמקנהו עשה סכת  
(בראשית ל:יז). דברי רבי אליעזר. וחכמים אומרים אין סוכות אלא מקום שנאמר  
ויסעו מסוכות ויחנו באיתם (במדבר ל:ו). מה איתם מקום אף סוכות מקום. רבי  
10 עקיבא אומר אין סוכות אלא ענני כבוד שנאמר וברא יי על כל מכוני הר ציון  
ועל מקראיה ענני יומם ונונה אש להבה לילה כי על כבוד חופה וסכה תהיה לצל  
יומם (ישעיה ד:ו). אין לי אלא לשעבר. לעתיד לבא מניין. תלמוד לומר וסוכה  
תהיה לצל (ישעיה שם). ואומר ופרויי יי ישובון ונ' ושמחת עולם על ראשם  
(ישעיה לה:י). רבי נחמיה אומר סוכותה לפי שצריך למד מתחלתו ונתן לו הא  
15 בסופו.

7-8. סוכותה. סוכות ממש היו...דברי רבי אליעזר.

"'To Succoth.' They were actually booths...the words of Rabbi Eliezer." The above piece is a debate over how literally one should read "*Sukkota*." Rabbi Eliezer's involvement in such debates is typical of the Mekhilta.<sup>7</sup>

Here, various tradent's opinions are presented consecutively in a dispute form.<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Eliezer, reading "over-literally" says this means they actually came to booths. The sages give the *p'shat* proving that Succoth was a place. R. Akiva gives a dramatic midrashic reading, moving away from the literal reading of the verse. He finds in Isaiah 4:5-6 a usage of *sukkah* where it refers to the protection of a cloud and smoke by day and a flaming fire by night. Then he extends this by bringing out its messianic implication (see comment below on line 10.) Finally, R. Nechemiah makes a grammatical comment about the "*heh*" at the end of the word being like a "*lamed*" at the beginning. It means "to."

7-8. (Gen. 33:17) ויעקב נסע סוכותה.

"Jacob journeyed on to Succoth." Jacob went with his family to Succoth and built *succoth*. Thus, there were actual *succoth* at Succoth.

8. אין...אלא...

"There is no...except..." Specifically, this piece is characterized by the use of the term "*eyn...elah...*" ("...can only mean...") in all of the comments except the last one, attributed to R. Nechemiah.

<sup>7</sup>See below, *Massekhta d'Va'yassa*, ch. 5.

<sup>8</sup>See p. 16, note 12.



10. וברא יי על כל מכון הר ציין (Isaiah 4:5-6)

"The Lord will create over the whole shrine and meeting place of Mt. Zion." In its biblical context, this quote is a clear reference to the time of the messianic restoration of Zion. The *sukkah* referred to here is a future one which will protect Zion in the messianic times. However, it seems that the Isaiah text is itself a reference to the *anan* (cloud) and *esh* (fire) that guided and protected Israel on their exodus journey. That journey begins here, in the base-text. R. Akiva's comment is thus an intertextual reading of the base-text in light of Isaiah 4:5-6, which itself is an intertextual reading of the text of Exodus!

13. ופרויי יי ישובו (Isaiah 35:10)

"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return." This text refers to the exiles returning to Zion, underscoring the verse above. The midrash is drawing out the parallel between the Exodus march of the Israelites from slavery to freedom from outside Israel to the Land, with the return of the exiles to the Land and its restoration.

Both levels of this comment - the *sukkah* of God's protection in the desert and the *sukkah* of the future elevate this ordinary verse and make God's presence more powerful. Though it is a product of a *d'rash*, the feeling of God's miraculous intervention is very much part of the biblical fabric itself.

כשש מאות אלף רגלי הגברים ששים ריבוא רברי רבי ישמעאל שנאמר הנה משתו שלשלמה ששים גבורים סביב וגי' (שה"ש נז:ח). הנה משתו של מי שהשלוש שלו ששים ריבוא גבורים מגבורי ישראל כולם אחוזי חרב מלומרי מלחמה וגי' (שה"ש שם). על כן יאמר בספר מלחמות יי (במדרב כא:יר). וכתיב יעלוזו חסידים וגי' 20 רוממות אל וגי' לעשות נקמה וגי' לאסור מלכיהם וגי' לעשות בהם משפט כתוב וגי' (תהלים קמט:ה-ט). לבר משף. לבר מנשים שף וקטנים. רבי יונתן אומר לבר מנשים שף וקטנים. וגם ערב רב. וגי' מאה ועשרים ריבוא רברי רבי ישמעאל. רבי עקיבא אומר מאתים וארבעים ריבוא. רבי יונתן אומר שלש מאות וששים ריבוא. וצאן ובקר מקנה כבד מאד. עליהם אמר המקום לאברהם אבינו ואחרי כן יצאו 25 ברכוש גדול (בראשית טו:יר). עם יציאתו ממצרים אני ממלאן כסף וזהב.

16. כשש מאות אלף רגלי הגברים

"About 600,000 men on foot." The midrash is highlighting the military motif implied in the biblical base-text. The proof texts quoted - Song of Songs 3:7-8, Numbers 21:14 and Psalms 149:5-9 all contain war imagery. Within the biblical text, generally, there is a sense of the moment of the Exodus as a wondrous victory brought by God the warrior over Israel's enemies, the Egyptians.

16-17. הנה משתו שלשלמה ששים גבורים סביב

"There is Solomon's couch, encircled by sixty warriors." A numerical connection leads the author to use this verse. The Hebrews leaving Egypt are like Solomon's retinue of 60 soldiers, only Israel - God's army - is 60 myriads (600,000). The King of Kings has an army ten thousand times that of the temporal king. Numerical links were also

emphasized in the first section of this piece.

In addition to the midrashic play on numbers there are also two plays on words that should be noted. The base-text from Exodus speaks of 600,000 men, (by the masoretic text) *gevarim*. In Hebrew it is spelled גברים. The Song of Songs speaks of Solomon's sixty (by the Masoretic text) *gibborim*, "mighty men" or "soldiers." But, it, too is spelled גברים. Thus, the midrash justifies its reading of גברים in Exodus 12:37 as *gibborim*. Similarly, Song of Songs 3:7 refers to Solomon's bier as מִטָּתוֹ, *mitato*. The midrash uses this to support its reading that the 600,000 soldiers were מִטָּתָו, *matotav*, i.e., [God's] tribes.<sup>9</sup>

#### 17. מי שחשלוֹם שלו

"The One who possesses peace." That is, God. This is an exegesis of the Hebrew of Solomon, "Shlomo," which is read midrashically as "*shalom shelo*" ("his peace".) In fact, "*shlomo*," spelled שלומו, does mean "his peace." This *d'rash* is thus playing on the sound of the name. Meanwhile, both Solomon and God are actually in charge of a cadre of military men. The midrashist is employing irony by using the euphemism "One who possesses peace."

#### 19. על כן יאמר בספר מלחמות יי (Numbers 21:14)

"Therefore the Book of the Wars of the Lord." This Numbers passage is part of a description of the Israelites itinerary as they marched and encamped at various sites. The reference to "*sefer milchamot Adonai*" ("the Book of the Wars of the Lord") underscores that these travels (including the initial one taking place in our base-text) were part of God's war, with Israel as God's foot soldiers.

#### 19. יעלוֹזו חסידים וגו' (Psalm 149:5-9)

"The righteous shall exult, etc." The Psalms text is a full scale exhortation of Israel as God's army, urging them on to exult in the glory of their victory and retribution upon the nations. As we have seen with other texts in this *parashah*, many of the verbs are in the future tense, lending them a messianic ring: "*Ya'lozu chasidim b'khvod, y'ran'nu al mishkevotam*," "the righteous shall exult in glory, they will shout for joy on their couches." For the rabbinic contemporaries of the midrashist, this would hint at Israel's impending messianic victory over their Roman oppressors. The redemption from Egypt was, for the rabbis, a paradigm for the redemption from Rome.<sup>10</sup>

#### 21. רבי יונתן אומר

"Rabbi Yonatan says." Rabbi Yonatan seems to have on his agenda to increase the total size of the group leaving Egypt, saying the 600,000 did not include women, children and old people. In his second statement he also offers the maximum number

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 159.

<sup>10</sup>Kadushin, *Conceptual*, p. 157.

of non-Israelites - 360,000.

## 22. וְגַם עַרְבֵי רֶב

"Moreover, a mixed multitude." While the number of Israelite men is specified in the verse, the number of the mixed multitude is not. The midrash feels compelled to fill in that gap. To do so, the dispute form is used. Three tradents cite three different numbers, but all are multiples of the key number, six. There were 60 in Solomon's retinue, 600,000 Israelite men leaving Egypt and 1,200,000, 2,400,000 or 3,600,000 non-Israelites in that group.

It is possible that this high number of non-Israelites reflects a positive attitude towards non-Jews joining the community of Israel among the creator(s)/redactor(s) of this midrash. On the other hand, the large numbers may reflect the rabbinic view that the "mixed multitude" was responsible for causing Israel to sin in the wilderness.<sup>11</sup> If the prostetites outnumbered the original Israelites, then this argument holds more weight.

## 24. וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכּוּשׁ גָּדוֹל (Genesis 15:14)

"In the end they shall go free with great wealth." This is a reference back to the Covenant Between the Pieces, where God tells Abram that his descendants will be slaves for 400 years and then God will execute judgement on their oppressors. Abram is told that when his descendants leave this foreign land they will leave with much wealth. Our base text, Exodus 12:38, represents the fulfillment of that prophecy to Abram. One would expect the midrash to bring in the Covenant Between the Pieces in discussing the moment of Israel's departure from Egypt. God's plan announced in Genesis 15 has been fulfilled and this meaning is brought out by the midrash.

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<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. 161.

ויאפו את הבצק ונ'. מגיר שלשו את העיסה ולא הספיקו לחומצה עד שנגאלו.  
 וכן אתה מוצא לעתיד לבא. מה הוא אומר ישובת מעיר ונ' יום מלכנו ונ'  
 (הושע ז:ד-ה). עונות. אין עונות אלא חררה שנאמר ועונת שעורים תאכלנה  
 (יחזקאל ד:יב). ואומר אך עשי לי משם עונה קטנה בראשונה (מלכים א. יז:יג).  
 30 נס גדול נעשה להם בחררה שאכלו ממנה שלשים יום עד שירד להם המן.  
 כי נדרשו ממצרים. שומע אני מאליהם. תלמוד לומר ולא יכלו להתמהמה עד שנגאלו.  
 וגם צדה לא עשו להם. להודיע שבחן של ישראל. שלא אמרו למשה היאך אתה  
 יוצאין למדבר ואין בידנו צדה לדרך אלא האמינו בו והלכנו אחרי משה. ועליהם  
 מפורש בקבלה הלוח וקראת באזני ירושלם לאמר ונ' (ירמיה ב:ב). ומה שכתב נטלו  
 35 על כך. קדש ישראל ליי ונ' (שם ב:ג).

## 26. ויאפו את הבצק ונ'.

"They baked the dough, etc." The exodus, for the rabbis, is so redolent of the messianic redemption that references to it are read in the text at every turn. Here, as in other cases, it seems that they see verbs that use *vav hahipukh* - whose *pshat* meaning is past tense - as if they don't have the *vav*, making them future tense verbs. *Va'yofu* - they baked - becomes *yofu* - they will bake. In the prooftext, *yishbot* is already a future tense verb, and a natural hook for a *d'rash* about the time of the messiah.

## 26. מגיר

"This tells." In the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon, the equivalent term is *melamed*, "this teaches."

## 27. לעתיד לבא

"The future to come." Standard rabbinic term for the time of the messiah. In other contexts it may refer to the afterlife.

## 27. ישובת מעיר ונ' יום מלכנו ונ' (Hosea 7:4-5)

"Who ceases from stoking [the fire], the day of our King, etc." This prooftext is difficult to understand. The references to baking in the future and leavening are apparent. The midrashic reading seems to be, "They will stop the fire (of the oven) from the making of the dough until leavening." That is, the dough won't leaven, on "the Day of our King," i.e., the time of the messiah. The events of the exodus will occur once again in the future.

## 29-30. (I Kings 17:13) אך עשי לי משם עונה ונ'...נס גדול נעשה להם.

"Make me a cake from it, etc...A great miracle was done for them." I Kings 17 is the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarithath. The widow bakes Elijah a cake from the last flour and oil that she has. God performs a miracle and the flour and oil do not give out until the drought has ended. The widow, her son and Elijah survive on this miraculous food, just as the Israelites are depicted in this midrash surviving for 30 days on the bread baked during their flight.

It is worth noting that this segment fits the pattern established at the beginning of the

*parashah*: The flight from Egypt was a wondrous journey filled with miracles. Even the seemingly banal or unmiraculous aspects are made into miracles by the midrash.

### 30. ער שירר להם המן

"Until the manna fell for them." By indicating that the matzah lasted until the manna began to fall, the midrash links one miracle to the next, creating a "miracle upon miracle" effect. It also shows how God was constantly watching out for Israel.

### 31. כי נורשו ממצרים שומע אני מאליהם

"They had been driven out of Egypt. I might have thought by them." There are two different ways of understanding this depending on how one understands the word, *mei'aleihem*. It may mean, "I might have thought the hurried nature of their exit from Egypt was of their own accord. [But] the text says 'and they couldn't delay,' [as they were] being redeemed." Though this is a bit obscure, it seems that the midrash is saying the rush is tied implicitly to the Divine who was redeeming them. From a second-third century mindset, after Bar Kokhba, there may be an implicit message that Israel should not take redemption into their own hands.

The second reading of the midrash is: "They had been driven out of Egypt. I might have thought that they [the Egyptians] did it of their own accord. But, the text says, 'they could not tarry' [until] they were redeemed [by God]." Still, the end of this reading is awkward. The awkwardness is removed if one reads *al* instead of *ad* as the Midrash Chakhamin manuscript does.<sup>12</sup> Then the text reads, "'They could not tarry because they were being redeemed [by God].'"<sup>13</sup>

### 32. להודיע

"To announce." The implicit question here is: why did God let Israel leave without provisions? In order to demonstrate to the world the praiseworthiness of Israel. The rabbis viewed some of the events of our sacred history as God's way of proving certain things to the world. In this case, Israel demonstrates her worthiness to be redeemed.

### 32-33. שלא אמרו למשה היאך אנן יוצאין למדבר...

"That they didn't say to Moses, 'How can we go out into the desert...'" The midrash takes it as being to Israel's credit that they were willing to leave without provisions. It demonstrates their faith in Moses (and God) that they would go into the desert under these conditions. This piece must be seen in light of later tractates, where Israel's faith in Moses and God are discussed: in Massekhta d'B'shallah (ch. 3), where the nature of Jewish faith is explored; Massekhta d'Shirta (ch. 4), where it reaches its height; and in Massekhta d'Va'yassa (ch. 5), where Israel's faith is tested. In fact, most of this comment from "*l'hodiah shivchan*" through the first proof-text from Jeremiah 2 is found

<sup>12</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, v.1, p. 110, apparatus.

<sup>13</sup>Kadushin, Conceptual, pp. 164-165.

in Massekhta d'Va'yassah, *parashah* one, almost word for word.<sup>14</sup>

### 33. האמינו בו

"They believed in him." This should really be translated, "they trusted him." The object of their trust could be Moses, but must also mean God, for Moses' ability to provide for Israel in the desert came from God. The root [אמן] refers to trust that God will fulfill God's end of the covenant.<sup>15</sup>

### 34. הלוך וקראת באזני ירמשלים (Jer. 2:2-3)

"Go and proclaim to Jerusalem." This proof-text is a very important text for the rabbis and they use it as a basis for understanding Israel's journey from Egypt to Sinai.<sup>16</sup> "Go proclaim to Jerusalem: Thus said the Lord: I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride - how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. [Thus] Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His harvest." The "[thus]" here is added to give the midrashic reading: Because of Israel's faithfulness in the wilderness God took them as God's special people. Israel's faithfulness/faith in God (see ch. 3 on B'Shalach, *parashah* 7) is a condition for the establishment of the covenant, as well as a condition of the covenant. The tension the rabbis felt about whether or not Israel was devoted to God (reflecting their profound ambivalence about Israel's faith in God in their own time) is in evidence in the very next section.

ומושב בני ישראל ונ'. כתוב אחר אומר שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה. וכתוב  
אחר אומר ועברום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה (בראשית טו:יר). כיצר יתקיימו  
שני כתובים הללו. שלשים שנה ער שלא נולד יצחק נזרה גזרה בין הבתרים.  
רבי אומר כתוב אחר אומר ועברום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה וכתוב אחר אומר  
40 ודור רביעי ישובו הנה (בראשית טו:ז). כיצר יתקיימו שני כתובים הללו. אומר  
הקדוש ברוך הוא אם עושין תשובה אני נואלם לרדודות ואם לאו אני נואלם לשנים.

### 36. כתוב אחר אומר

"One text says..." This is a special midrashic form used when two verses contradict. They must be harmonized because the rabbinic mindset sees the Torah as God's word and thus, every word as absolutely true. The form works as follows:

1. *Katuv echad omer* - "One text says..."
2. *V'katuv echad omer* - "Another text says..."

<sup>14</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, pp. 84-85.

<sup>15</sup>This idea developed in depth in the chapter on Mesekhta d'B'shallach 7.

<sup>16</sup>But, it is only one of the intertextual readings of the Exodus and God's relationship to Israel during this period. There is a completely contrary reading that Israel lacked faith at that time. This tension is developed in chapter five below on Massekhta d'Vayassa.

3. *Keytzad yit'kaimu shnei ketubim halalu?* - "How can both these texts be correct?" In this case there are actually three contradictory verses. The first verse (Exodus 12:40, the base text) is harmonized with the second (Genesis 15:13) and then the second with the third (Genesis 15:16).

36-37. שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה...ועבדום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה (Gen. 15:13)

"Four hundred thirty years...They shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." The harmonizing of Genesis 15:13 with Exodus 12:40 is accomplished by making the Covenant Between the Pieces the beginning of the 430 year period and Isaac's birth the beginning of the 400 year period. It is possible that the Covenant Between the Pieces occurred 30 years before Isaac was born. Of course, this completely twists the *p'shat* of both verses. The verses refer to years enslaved, not the number of years from the time of Abraham and Isaac.

The point of the midrash, however, is not simply to resolve the contradiction in the Torah. This midrash is delivering a message as to how time should be counted - not in years of physical servitude - but in years of spiritual servitude, the time from promise to redemption.

37. ועבדום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה...ורור רביעי ישובו הנה (Gen. 15:13, 15:16)

"They shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years....And the fourth generation shall return here." The harmonizing of Genesis 15:13 with Genesis 15:16 is different than the prior harmonization in that it represents the juxtaposition of two contradictory promises, as opposed to the above where the conflict is between promise and fulfillment of promise. Thus, 15:13 and 15:16 can be construed as two possible outcomes, two options that God is proffering. If the Israelites repent they will be brought out sooner, if not, then later. The implication is that the extent, if not the existence of Israel's slavery itself depended upon their actions. It seems that the rabbis were making a point about their own situation as well. Their continued exile or redemption was contingent on their actions. Only through repentance they can earn a speedy redemption. This section can be contrasted with the prior section where Israel's trust in God and loyalty to the covenant was sure and where their exodus from slavery occurred with no relation to their actions, only God's.

ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובארץ כנען ובארץ נגשן שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה. זה אחר מן הרברים שכתבו לתלמי המלך. כיוצא בו כתבו לו אלהים בראשית. (בראשית א:א). אעשה אדם בצלם וברמות (שם א:כו). זכר ונקביו 45 בראו (שם ה:ב). וכל ביום הששי וישבות ביום השביעי (בראשית ב:ב). הבה ארדה ואבלה שם שפתם (בראשית יא:ז). ותצחק שרה בקרוביה (בראשית יח:יב). כי באפם הרגו שור וברצונם עקרו אבוס (בראשית מט:ו). ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על נשא אדם (שמות ר:כ). לא חמור אחר מהם נשאתי (במדבר טז:טו). אשר חלק יי אלהיך אותם להאיר לכל העמים (דברים ר:יט). אשר לא צויתי 50 לאומות לעברם (דברים יז:ג). ואת צעירת הרגלים (ויקרא יא:ו). וכן כתבו לו ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים ובארץ כנען ובארץ נגשן שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה.

#### 43. הרברים שכתבו לתלמי המלך

"The passages that were written for King Ptolemy." This refers to the Septuagint, the translation of the Bible into Greek by the rabbis. The reason passages were changed is that the rabbis felt the Bible would be misunderstood and lead to polemical charges against Judaism unless emended. In effect, what the rabbis did was emend the text so as to conform to their reading.

#### 43. ובארץ כנען ובארץ נגשן

"In the land of Canaan and the land of Goshen." The base text is one of the verses emended in the Septuagint. Instead of the Israelites spending 430 years "in Egypt," "in Canaan" and "in Goshen" are added. This conforms to the rabbis reading that the 430 years refers to the time from the Covenant Between the Pieces to the Exodus. Still, it is unclear why "the land of Goshen" was added, since "in Egypt" was already in the verse. It is possible that in the Septuagint the rabbis intended "in Egypt" to refer to Abraham's sojourn in Egypt, while "in Goshen" refers to the Israelite's period of slavery. In any event, the Septuagint, like the midrash, identifies the period of the patriarchs with the period of slavery. It is as if the entire time that the promise is unfulfilled is a time of servitude.

There is a version of this text in B.T. Megillah 9A-B.<sup>17</sup> There, our base-text is in the middle of the unit, following this verse's order of appearance in the Bible. It is clear that this section was woven in by the redactor(s) of this *parashah* because the relevant text is moved to the beginning of the piece. The rest of the references to the Septuagint emendations are undoubtedly *greirah*, left in when this point was inserted.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, v.1, p. 111, apparatus. See also, Kadushin, Conceptual, p. 170.

<sup>18</sup>See comment on line 12, p. 4-5, below for definition of *greirah*.



ויהי מקץ שלשים שנה ונ'. מגיר שמכיון שהגיע הקץ לא עכבן המקום כהרף עין.  
 בחמשה עשר בניסן נידבר עם אברהם אבינו בין הבתרים. בחמשה עשר בניסן  
 55 באו מלאכי השרת אצל אברהם אבינו לבשרו. בחמשה עשר בניסן נולד יצחק.  
 בחמשה עשר בניסן נגזרה גזרה בין הבתרים שנאמר ויהי מקץ. קץ אחר לכולם.

### 53. ויהי מקץ שלשים שנה ונ'.

"At the end of the four hundred and thirtieth year." The midrash picks up on the repetition in the biblical text about the 430 year stay and the statement that it was 430 years to the day: "And it was that very day." (Exodus 12:41.) Once again we see here the term "*k'heref ayin*," "a blink of an eye" used to describe God's actions surrounding the Exodus. The underlying point seems to be that God had a plan, God announced the plan (to Abraham) and God executed the plan exactly. The midrash thus moves away from the notion expressed in the "*katurv echad omer*" section that much of the control over redemption lies in human hands.

### 54. בחמשה עשר בניסן

"On the 15th of Nisan." This piece employs a typical midrashic method in attributing a bunch of major events to a single date. In other midrashim, several places or several character are identified as one. Here, the 15th of Nisan, the date of the Exodus becomes the date of the Covenant Between the Pieces (because it was the moment from which 430 years was counted); the date when Abraham and Sarah received the good news that they would have a child together; and the date of Isaac's birth (the moment from which 400 years was counted - see above.)

### 55. באו מלאכי השרת אצל אברהם אבינו לבשרו

"The ministering angels came to Abraham, our father, to give him the good news." The midrashic text does not explain the attribution of the angels delivering the good news to Abraham and Sarah to the 15th of Nissan. However, it seems to be based on Genesis 18:10 where the angels say that Sarah shall have a son when "I will return to you next year."

It is interesting how, in this way, the midrash ties together God's personal promise of redemption to Abraham (that he will have a son) to the promise made to Abraham about the future redemption of his descendants, the Jewish people (at the Covenant of the Pieces) and its fulfillment (at the exodus). God, people and individual are all tied together.

### 56. נגזרה גזרה בין הבתרים

"The decree at the covenant between the pieces was decreed." This line seems awkward for two reasons. First, it repeats what was just stated and seems unnecessary. Second, the prooftext "*va'yih miketz*" is from Exodus 12:41, not Genesis 15. It seems like there is an error in some of the manuscripts and Lauterbach followed that corruption. Midrash Tanchuma and Midrash Seikhel Toy share an appealing reading in which this redundant line is removed and replaced with, "*b'chamishah asar b'nisan nig'alu*," "on

the 15th of Nisan they were redeemed."<sup>19</sup> This simple statement closes the syllogism and fits the proof-text.

ויהי בעצם היום הזה יצאו כל צבאות יי וני'. אלו מלאכי השרת. וכן אתה מוצא שכל זמן שישראל משועברין כביכול שכינה משועברת עמהם שנאמר ויראו את אלהי ישראל ותחת רגליו וני'. וכשנאלו מה הוא אומר וכעצם השמים לטוהר (שמות כר:י) 60 ואומר בכל צרתם לו צר (ישעיה סג:ט). אין לי אלא צרת ציבור. צרת יחיד מניין. תלמוד לומר יקראני ואענהו עמו אנכי בצרה (תהלים צא:טו). ואומר ויקח ארני יוסף וני'. ומה הוא אומר ויהי יי את יוסף (בראשית לט:כא). וכן הוא אומר מפני עמך אשר פדית לך ממצרים נים ואלהיו (שמואל ב:ז:כג). רבי אליעזר אומר עבודה זרה עברה עם ישראל בים שנאמר ועבר בים צרה (זכריה י:יא). ואיזה זה. 65 זה צלמו של מיכה. רבי עקיבא אומר אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומרו. כביכול אמרו ישראל לפני המקום עצמך פדית. וכן את מוצא שבכל מקום שגלו ישראל כביכול שכינה גלתה עמהם. גלו למצרים גלתה שכינה עמהם שנאמר הנגלה נגליתי אל בית אביך בהיותם במצרים (שמואל א. ב:כז). גלו לבבל גלתה שכינה עמהם שנאמר למענכם שלחתי בבלה (ישעיה מג:יד). גלו לעולם גלתה שכינה 70 עמהם שנאמר ושמתי כסאי בעולם (ירמיה מט:לח). גלו לארם גלתה שכינה עמהם שנאמר מי זה בא מארם וני' (ישעיה סג:א). וכשעתידין לחזור כביכול שכינה חוזרת עמהם שנאמר ושב יי אלהיך את שבותך וני' (דברים לג:ג). וחשיב יי אלהיך את שבותך אינו אומר כן אלא ושב. ואומר אתי מלבנון כלה (שה"ש ד:ז). וכי מלבנון היא באה. והלא ללבנון היא עולה. מה תלמוד לומר אתי מלבנון אלא 75 כביכול אני ואת מלבנון גלינו אני ואת ללבנון עולים.

57. יצאו כל צבאות יי וני' אלו מלאכי השרת.

"All the ranks of the Lord departed, etc. These are the ministering angels." The midrash is responding to the Bible's use of this unusual term to describe the Israelites leaving Egypt: *"tzivaot Adonai,"* "Hosts of the Lord." While in a biblical context the term "hosts" may simply reflect the military imagery discussed above,<sup>20</sup> to the rabbis the term suggests more than people. Following the usual rabbinic understanding, the "Hosts of God" are interpreted to be the ministering angels.

58. וכן אתה מוצא שכל זמן

"And thus you find that every time." The comments on, *"va'y'hi b'etzem ha'yom hazeh"* (Ex. 12:41) begin with an exegetic statement about ministering angels leaving Egypt with Israel. But, then the midrash shifts to a long developed piece about the Shekhinah accompanying Israel during its travails. As a unit, this section coheres quite nicely and should be viewed as one, structured piece. In fact, this passage is also found

<sup>19</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, p. 113, apparatus.

<sup>20</sup>See pp. 35-36.

as a unit in Sifre Bamidbar, piska 84.<sup>21</sup>

The piece is built around three statements, which introduce the three main sections that make up the piece:

1. (line 58) *V'khen atah motzeh she'kol z'man she'Yisrael m'shuabadim kivyakhol Shekhinah m'shuabedet imahem...u'kh'she'nig'alu...*

And thus you find that all the time that Israel is enslaved it is as if the Shekhinah is enslaved with them...and when they were redeemed [from Egypt]...."

2. (line 66) *V'khen atah motzeh she'bekhol makom she'galu Yisrael kivyakhol Shekhinah*  
And thus you find that in all places that Israel was exiled it is as if the Shekhinah was exiled with them."

3. (line 71) *U'kh'she'atidin lach'zor kivyakhol Shekhinah chozeret imahem*

"And when in the future they will return it is as if the Shekhinah returns with them."

The three statements are written with similar language in order to create a recognizable pattern for the piece. Seen together, the three cases amount to a very carefully formulated syllogism or propositional form that makes one overarching point.<sup>22</sup> That point is that God shares Israel's troubles and is there with Israel at all times, good and bad.

Moreover, these three statements can be identified as the key building blocks of a somewhat smaller piece that may represent an earlier layer of redaction.

1. *V'khen atah motzeh she'khol zeman* (line 58) through the end of the proof-text from Exodus 24:10, *U'k'etzem ha'shamayim l'tohar* (line 59).

2. *V'khen atah motzeh she'bekhol makom* (line 66) through *Eino omer khen elah shav* (line 73).

#### 58. כביכול שכינה משועבדת

"It is as if the Shekhinah is enslaved." If God's angels left Egypt with the Israelites, they must have been with them while they were enslaved. Hence, the inference that the Shekhinah was enslaved with Israel, too. Of course, the ministering angels and the Shekhinah are different entities, thus the connection here is not ideal. It seems that the redactor wanted to include the long piece about the Shekhinah and this was the best exegetic comment in the piece to which to attach it.

<sup>21</sup>Kadushin, Conceptual, p. 185. Kadushin indicates that the Mekhilta borrowed this piece from the Sifre. As evidence, he notes that in the Sifre, the term "*v'khen atah motzeh*" works as it should, connecting this piece to prior material. Here, "these words are superfluous."

<sup>22</sup>Jacob Neusner calls this the "propositional form." (See above, p. 5, n. 3.) A similarly structured piece can be found in Massekhta d'Beshallah lines 11-13, 24-25 above. Neusner's definition of this form is somewhat unclear. I use the term to describe any non-exegetical piece which includes several examples all pointing to the same proposition or point.

58-59. ויראו את אלהי ישראל וגו' (Exodus 24:10)

"And they saw the God of Israel." Finding textual proof for the Shekhinah's enslavement with Israel is difficult. Here, the midrash pulls an enigmatic verse from the scene at Sinai where Moses, Aaron and the 70 elders ascend the mountain to see the God of Israel. This verse tells what they saw: "...under [God's] feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire (*k'ma'aseh livnat ha'sappir*)..." *K'ma'aseh liv'nat* is taken as a reference to the Israelites' making (*ma'aseh*) of bricks (*leveinim*) in Egypt.<sup>23</sup> *Livnat ha'sappir* translates as "the sapphire brick," which is still enigmatic. Nevertheless, the midrash seems to be picking up on Israel's making bricks in Egypt and picturing God doing the same labor along side them. There is a comment by R. Berechiah in the Yerushalmi that along with the sapphire brick the elders saw implements of brick making in their vision of God.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, the rabbinic association with Ex. 24:10 connects God with the making of bricks in Egypt.<sup>25</sup>

59. וכשנאלו...וכעצם השמים לטוהר (Exod. 24:10)

"And when they were redeemed... 'Like the very sky for purity.'" In addition to the Shekhinah being present with Israel in slavery, She was present with them at the redemption from Egypt. The prooftext makes no direct reference to redemption or the Exodus. The tie in seems to be the word *etzem*, which is found in the base-text (Exod. 12:41). The Israelites were redeemed on the "*etzem*" of that day and on the "*etzem*" the sky was clear.<sup>26</sup>

60. בכל צרתם לו צר (Isaiah 63:9)

"In all their troubles [God] was troubled." Isaiah 63:7 states "I will recount the kind acts of the Lord" on behalf of Israel. This includes, "In all their troubles He was troubled, and the angel of His presence delivered them...(63:9)." This text ties together both the Shekhinah's enslavement with Israel and the presence of angels at the Exodus, when they were redeemed.

The root [צרה] is a key word in this midrashic piece. Here, the midrash plays on its most common meaning, "affliction" or "trouble;" God shares in Israel's affliction. Later, it plays on its other meaning, "rival" (see below, comment on line 63).

60. צרת יחיד מנין

"Whence [from what text] do we know of the trouble of the individual." Having established God's presence with the People of Israel in slavery/affliction and in their redemption from slavery, the midrash turns to establishing the same pattern for the

<sup>23</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, p. 113, n. 4.

<sup>24</sup>*Succoth* 4.4 (54C).

<sup>25</sup>Lev. Rab. 23:8.

<sup>26</sup>Kadushin, *Conceptual* pp. 186-187.

enslaved/afflicted individual. The prooftexts are Ps. 91:15 and Gen. 39:20-21. The Psalms text speaks of God being with an individual in distress and rescuing him. Joseph, in

Genesis 39 is imprisoned by Potiphar. But, God is with him, and causes the prison warden to treat him well. This second prooftext may have been brought in because the Psalms text does not depict the context of slavery/imprisonment directly.

## 62. וכן הוא אומר

"And so [the text] says." This term signals the reader that a text is coming which will serve as an additional example of the same point.

## 63. מפי עמך...גוים ואלהיו (II Sam. 7:23)

"For Your people...the nation and its God." This text is taken from a biblical passage where King David is speaking to God, extolling God for redeeming Israel and doing wonders for the people. The key to this prooftext is *goyim v'elohav*, which, in order to understand the midrash, must be translated here as "the nation and its God." (This translation is based on other manuscripts of the Masoretic Text.)<sup>27</sup> Thus, *goyim* becomes Israel and the text is read by the midrash as a reference to God being redeemed with Israel from Egypt. Moreover, it is God who redeems God - a bit of a conundrum that requires explanation by the midrash.

## 63. רבי אליעזר ור'...

"Rabbi Eliezer, etc." The midrash uses Rabbi Eliezer's statement to make sense of the notion that God redeemed Godself. *Avodah zarah* - more "alien god" than "idol worship" - crossed the sea with Israel. The prooftext, from Zech. 10:11, is taken out of its biblical context and read midrashically as, "a rival passed through the sea," i.e., an idol or divine force opposing God. The implication seems to be that God redeemed Godself by overcoming this rival.

## 67. שכינה גלתה עמם

"The Shekhinah went into exile with them." The argument moves from God redeeming Godself from Egypt along with the Israelites, to God accompanying Israel into exile when they are exiled. This is a concept known in rabbinic literature as "*Sh'khinta ba'galuta*," "the Shekhinah in exile." Prooftexts are given for God in exile with Israel in Egypt, Babylonia, Elam and Edom. In and of itself, this section on the Shekhinah going into exile (lines 64-71) can stand as a propositional form, making its own point with its own examples. As noted above, the larger literary unit, too, is a propositional form.

## 67-68. הנגלה נגליתי...במצרים (I Sam. 2:27)

"I revealed myself...in Egypt." The prooftext for Egypt is a deliberate misreading

<sup>27</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, vol. 1, p. 114, n. 4a.

of the *p'shat*. A man of God comes to the priest, Eli, and tells him that God revealed Himself to his father's house in Egypt. "*Ha'niglah nigleit*" is read by the midrash not as "I revealed myself," but as "I was exiled." The roots for both are identical [גלה].

#### 69. למענכם שלחתי בבלה

"For your sake I sent to Babylon." The prooftext for God's exile in Babylonia hinges on a change of one vowel from the Masoretic text. Instead of "*shilachti*," "I sent," the midrash reads "*shulachti*," "I was sent." Thus, we have "For your sake I [God] was sent to Babylon."

#### 71. וכשעתידין לחזור

"And when in the future [they] return." This is the beginning of the third and final section of the piece, in which we are told that the Shekhinah will return with Israel to Zion at the time of the messiah. This last section is the *nechemta*, the words of hope and comfort traditionally put at the end of a midrash.

#### 73. אחי מלבנון כלה (Song of Songs 4:8)

"Come with me, from Lebanon, my bride." This prooftext is popular with the rabbis and appears again in this paper in *Beshalach*, *parashah* 7, lines 24-25. The reading in that case is that God is beckoning Israel, the bride, to come with God, and return from Lebanon to the Land of Israel. Lebanon, in the *Beshalach* midrash, is symbolic of exile. In this midrash the verse is also a metaphor for the return from exile. However, it is not clear if the bride here is Israel or the Shekhinah, whose feminine gender fits the role (and grammar) of a bride. Also, Lebanon here is the place from which the two were exiled and to whence they are returning together. In both tractates, this prooftext is a powerful statement of the nature of the relationship between God and Israel, and the promise of the future.

ליל שמורים הוא ליי וני. בו נאלו ובו עתידין להגאל רבי רבי יהושע שנאמר  
הוא הלילה הזה ליי שמורים. רבי אליעזר אומר בו נאלו אבל לעתיד לבא אינם  
נאלים אלא בתשרי שנאמר תקעו בחרש שופר וני. מפני מה. כי חק לישראל הוא  
וני (תהלים פא: ד-ה). ומה תלמוד לומר הוא הלילה הזה ליי. אלא הוא הלילה  
80 שאמר המקום לאברהם אבינו אברהם בלילה הזה אני נואל את בניך. וכשהגיע הקץ  
לא עיכבן המקום אפילו כהרף עין. שמורים לכל בני ישראל. מעיר שכל ישראל  
צריכין להשתמר בו.

#### 76. ליל שמורים הוא ליי (Exodus 12:42)

"That was a night of vigil for the Lord." This last verse of the biblical narrative section, seems to cry out for a messianic interpretation; it is perfect for a *nechemta* for this *parashah*. The midrash delivers it, but in an unexpected way. In the first part of the verse we have: *Leyl shimurim hu l'Adonai*, "it was a night of watching for God." In the second part, *Hu ha'layla ha'zeh l'Adonai shimorim*, "this night was one of

watching for God." This is redundant, except the verse ends *L'khol b'nai Yisrael l'dorotam*, "for all of Israel throughout the generations."

Rabbi Joshua gives the expected messianic interpretation, "On [that night] they were redeemed, and on [that night] in the future they will be redeemed." He cites the second half of the verse as his prooftext. Rabbi Eliezer counters that they were indeed redeemed from Egypt on that night (15 Nissan), but the future redemption will come in the month of Tishrei. His proof from Ps. 81:42 is a play on the words *shofar* and *chodesh*. The *pshat* of the text is simply "blow the shofar for (any) new moon." But, the shofar is particularly associated with Tishrei and Rosh Hashanah. More importantly, [חֹדֶשׁ] can be read *chadesh* or *chadash* - renewal - and is a word associated with redemption. According to tradition, the shofar will be sounded to herald the coming of the messiah.

Given R. Eliezer's interpretation, there remains the question of how to understand the redundancy in Ex. 12:42. This is resolved by bringing us back to Abraham and the Covenant Between the Pieces - the first significant event on 15 Nissan. Thus this segment ties back into earlier sections of this *parashah*.<sup>28</sup>

מגיד שכל ישראל צריכים להשתמר בו. 81-82.

"This tells us that all Israel must be watchful on it." Exodus 12:42 ends in an elliptical manner. The prior section took this to refer to a night of watching for God; but, the verse also can be read as a night of watching for Israel. This last midrashic statement is also elliptical. It could refer to Israel needing to watch out, watch themselves or be watched. Perhaps it is meant as a night of watching for the Messiah.

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<sup>28</sup>See above lines 24-25, 36-41, 42-43, 53-56.

## OVERVIEW

Unlike the first chapter of Massekhta d'Pischa, Chapter fourteen is largely exegetic in nature. Yet, the biblical base-text analyzed by the midrash is far more substantive and compelling than the base-text in Chapter One. Exodus 12:37-42 describes the dramatic moment when Israel leaves Egypt and begins its exodus journey. All of the events to this point in the Book of Exodus build up to this moment in the narrative, giving it a heady, almost magical feeling. At the same time, this text takes a step back from the scene, looking at the broad sweep of the entire period of slavery and capturing the meaning of the moment for future generations of Israel.

Given such a powerful base-text, the purpose of the midrash in this chapter seems to be twofold. First, it attempts to define and elevate the miraculous motif and euphoric mood of the text. In other words, it responds to the moment in the narrative. Second, it goes beyond the text, extending the Exodus moment in two directions in time: towards the past, to the promise made to Abraham and towards the future, to the messianic redemption. Thus, this *parashah* is held together by the flow of the biblical narrative (what Neusner has called "the logic of fixed association"<sup>29</sup>), as well as by the themes and motifs provided by the midrashic reading of the redactor(s) himself. Another way of saying this is that the midrashist reads the base-text and provides the biblical intertext through which the base-text is read.

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<sup>29</sup>Neusner, Mekhilta, pp. 13-18.



### Forms and Technical Terms

Like the first chapter of this tractate, this *parashah* contains an assortment of rhetorical forms and analytical terms. One of the rhetorical forms found frequently here is the dispute form. Lines 7-15 contain the statements of four sages on the meaning of the word *sukkota* in the base-text. Lines 22-23 has three sages' estimations of the number of (non-Jewish) people included in the 'erev rav, "the mixed multitude." Lines 76-82 feature a debate between two rabbis over the meaning of "That was a night vigil for the Lord" (Exod. 12:42). While a few of the tradents are cited in more than one of these disputes, there does not seem to be any pattern in the way that the attributions are made. Propositional forms structure the material in lines 52-56 and 57-75. The *Shomei'a Ani* form appears once (line 31) and there is one occurrence of the special form that resolves conflicts between verses, *katuv echad omer...katuv echad omer....* In brief, there does not appear to be any particular pattern to the forms employed in this tractate.

The same can be said of the technical terms used. We find examples of *kal vachomer* (line 4), *mah...af...*(line 9), *magid* (lines 26, 53), *mah hu omer* (line 26), *v'khen atah motzeh* (lines 27, 57, 66), *k'yotzeh bo* (line 43), etc. The terms and forms are, by and large, similar to those found in the first chapter of this tractate.

### Relationship to the Biblical Text

The relationship between the midrashic and biblical material has been discussed above. It was noted that this chapter is largely exegetical in nature. In fact, of the nine sections of this *parashah* delineated above, six are heavily, if not entirely exegesis. The

other three contain at least some exegesis. This can be compared to *parashah* one of this tractate where only three of eleven sections were significantly exegetical in nature, while four were partly exegesis. The impact of the biblical base-text is even greater in *parashah* fourteen is even greater than these numbers indicate. The midrashic material in the commentary above is broken up, as best as possible, into literary units based on form and topical content. A glance at the various pieces reveals that each one begins with a citation from the biblical base-text. In other words, transitions from one literary unit to another occur only where there is a change in the base-text. Putting this and the information in the chart together, it is reasonable to conclude that the biblical text has a determinative impact on the shaping of the midrash in this *parashah*.

#### Topical Flow and Thematic Development

Perhaps, because of the important role that the base-text plays in the topical flow of this midrash, the piece is not as tightly woven as the one at the beginning of the tractate nor is its argument as linear. Nevertheless, the redactor does display a coherent approach to the text and develops certain overarching themes and motifs which build and resonate from one literary unit to the next. For one, the midrash envisions the miraculous workings of God in every detail of the Exodus drama. At the same time, this miraculous redemption is cast in a religio-historical context. On the one hand, it is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham at the Covenant Between the Pieces in Genesis 15. On the other, it is the paradigm for the messianic redemption to come. Certain motifs also resonate throughout the piece. For example, the concern and play

with numbers, and the key terms, *k'heref ayin* ("In the blink of an eye"), *atid lavo* ("messianic future") and *ketz* ("end [of time]"). Finally, it should be noted that a tension exists in the piece between the role of human beings and the role of God in the redemption. A brief look at the flow of the piece will demonstrate how these themes and tensions are developed:

Lines 1-6: A pattern of miracles is revealed going beyond those overtly stated in the text. Two miracles are woven together here: the swiftness with which Israel got to Succoth (*k'heref ayin*) and the distance that Moses' voice traveled (across all of Egypt). The weave is effected through a play on the numbers 40 and 400. The magical, euphoric feeling of the moment is expressed through the intertext, "I bore you on eagles wings...(Exod. 19:4)."

Lines 7-15: In this exegetical dispute over the meaning of *Succoth*, Rabbi Eliezer ties this journey to the one made by the patriarch Jacob, lending some historical perspective. Rabbi Akiva looks in the opposite direction, towards the future, seeing *Succoth* as the marvelous protection (again, the miracle theme) of the clouds of glory over Mt. Zion during the time of the messiah (*atid lavo*). Through Isaiah 35:10 the Exodus is compared to the messianic march of the exiles back to the Land of Israel.

Lines 16-25: The motif of Israel as God's army, inherent in the base text, is highlighted. Numerous plays on numbers accompany an exaggeration of the numbers involved in the Exodus, all of which add to the grand, magical nature of the event. The wealth that Israel carries out with them is contextualized as the fulfillment of the Covenant Between the Pieces. Citation of Psalm 149 ties the military motif to the

messianic redemption, perhaps a hint at the hoped for military victory over the Romans. Thus we have both the fulfillment of the promise of the past in the redemption from Egypt linked to the hoped for redemption of the future.

Lines 25-35: The base-text's discussion of the baking of unleavened cakes is turned into a messianic projection of such baking in the future. Moreover, miracle is added to miracle, as it is revealed that these matzahs lasted the Israelites a month, until the manna began to fall. The Israelites' escape is pictured as God's action, as opposed to the result of an expulsion by the Egyptians or the will of Israel itself. Thus, God is very much at the center of the redemption. Israel, for its part, is shown as a devoted, trusting, youthful lover, faithfully following God into the desert (Jerem. 2:2-3).

Lines 36-41: A verse discussing the length of Israel's slavery is juxtaposed with verses containing contradictory information. This juxtaposition leads to the recontextualization of this time within the framework of the Covenant Between the Pieces. Instead of slavery, the key unit of time is from promise to redemption - from the Covenant Between the Pieces to the Exodus. In contrast to the prior section, Israel's role in their own redemption is brought out. It is Israel's behavior - sin or repentance - which determines the length of servitude. Thus, while Israel cannot take redemption into its own hands, they can influence God to make it come sooner.

Lines 42-53: Through a discussion of changes in the biblical text made in the writing of the Septuagint, the connection between the covenant with Abraham and the time of redemption from slavery is reenforced. Most of this section is *greirah*.

Lines 52-56: The Covenant Between the Pieces, the announcement of Isaac's

birth, the birth of Isaac, and the moment of the exodus are all depicted as having happened on the 15th of Nisan. Abraham's individual redemption - the birth of his son - is linked to the redemption of his later descendants, the people Israel. At the exact moment when God promised that the slavery would end - the *ketz* - redemption came immediately - *k'heref ayin*. In the tension between divine and human control of the exodus, God's control is emphasized here, as the Exodus is pictured as the exact execution of God's plan from the time of Abraham.

Lines 57-75: The depth of God's involvement with Israel is brought out in a discussion of how the Shekhinah accompanies Israel wherever they may be. The Shekhinah was with them in slavery and at the exodus, and later in exile (*Shekhinta ba'galuta*) and will return with Israel to the Land at the time of the messiah. Thus, the messianic theme is once again emphasized, along with the motif of the mutual love of God and Israel. Song of Songs 4:8 is quoted, "Come with Me from Lebanon, My bride," echoing the imagery of Jeremiah 2:2-3.

Lines 76-82: Through a dispute between Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer - two sages often matched in the Mekhilta - various thematic elements are tied together. The time of the future redemption is debated and tied to the time of the exodus by Rabbi Yehoshua and to the Covenant Between the pieces by Rabbi Eliezer. The key words, *ketz* and *k'heref ayin*, are used again to point out that when the time comes, God does not delay redemption.

CHAPTER THREE

TRACTATE BESHALLACH  
PARASHAH SEVEN  
EXODUS 14:31

ויאמינו ביי ובמשה עברו. אם במשה האמינו קל וחומר ביי. אלא ללמדך שכל המאמין ברועה ישראל כאלו מאמין במי שאמר והיה העולם. כיוצא בו אתה אומר וידבר העם באלהים ובמשה (במדבר כא:ה). אם באלהים דברו קל וחומר במשה. אלא זה בא ללמדך שכל המדבר ברועה ישראל כאלו מדבר במי שאמר והיה העולם

#### 1. ויאמינו ביי ובמשה עברו.

"They had faith in the Lord and [the Lord's] servant, Moses." The material in this chapter represents all of the Mekhilta's commentary on this one bit of text, the second half of Exodus 14:31. This verse is the last verse in Exodus 14, which describes the dramatic salvation of Israel by God at the Reed Sea. As such, the faith of Israel described in this verse is a response to those events. At the same time, the verse is immediately followed by the Song at the Sea at the beginning of chapter 15. Thus, the biblical base-text for the material below stands at a dramatic juncture in the biblical narrative, the moment when Israel recognizes the miraculous salvation it has experienced and is about to burst into song. This midrash is a response by the rabbis to that ecstatic moment of faith.

#### 1. אם במשה האמינו...

"If they believed in Moses..." The above passage is clearly one, neat literary unit. It is composed of a pair of exegetical comments, one on the base text and the other on a related text brought in by the redactor. Each comment is structured identically, employing the same technical terms in the same order. The only distinction is that God and Moses are reversed in the first part of each comment. Thus, the two appear as literary mirror images, making the entire point seem more convincing. This is an excellent example of the Mekhilta's ability to bring literary art and propositional logic together, elevating them both.

#### 1. קל וחומר

"A fortiori." Reasoning from the lesser case to the greater case or reasoning from the more difficult to the simpler case. (See Ch.1, p. 7, comment 27 above.) The term is used twice in this section. First in line 1: If the people believed in Moses, *kal va'chomer* they believed in God. (It's easier to believe in God than Moses). Then in line 3: If the people spoke against God, *kal va'chomer*, they spoke against Moses (since Moses was God's earthly representative).

#### 1. אלא ללמדך

"Rather, it comes to teach you." Since it was unnecessary to mention both God and Moses, the simple meaning cannot be the whole point. Thus, the biblical verse is actually there to make a different point.

#### 2. כיוצא בו אתה אומר

"Similarly, you interpret..." The term *k'yotzeh bo* is commonly used in the Mekhilta to introduce another example that makes a parallel point to the one already asserted. Here, it makes clear what is apparent from reading the midrash: the two verses come

to support the same proposition.<sup>1</sup> That is, whatever attitude the people take towards Moses, it is as if they are taking that attitude towards God. The leader of the people is appointed by God and has God's authority. The two cannot be separated.

In the context of the rabbinic period, it would be fair to say that the writer/redactor was making a point about the nature of rabbinic authority using the textual example of *Moshe Rabbeynu*. One cannot separate belief in and respect for God from belief in and respect for the rabbis. This text may have come from the second or third century when concern for unity and the need to justify rabbinic authority was crucial.

5 נרולה האמנה לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שבשכר אמנה שהאמינו ישראל ביי שרתה עליהם רוח הקדש ואמרו שירה שנאמר ויאמינו ביי ונ' אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל ונ'.

#### 5. נרולה האמנה

"Great is the faith." Beginning here and extending to the end of the tractate is one, integrated piece of midrashic material, distinct from the material that precedes it in both style and content. From a small exegetic piece on the divine authority of Jewish leadership, we now move to a larger, topical essay on the nature of Israel's faith and its rewards. While the rest of the material in this chapter should be viewed as one literary unit, I have divided it into sub-units along what I perceive to be redactorial seams. I have done this both for the purpose of analysis and convenience.

The section of midrash delineated above serves as an introduction for the entire piece and is mirrored at the end by a concluding section which repeats much of what is above verbatim. These two segments frame the piece and at the same time introduce/underscore words based on the key roots [שר] and [אמן], including שכר אמנה שרתה על ("reward for faith") ("rest upon") and שירה "song."<sup>2</sup> I identify the introductory and concluding segments as stemming from the same redactorial layer because of the parallel language and the use of the term *g'dolah ha'emunah/g'dolah amanah*, which does not occur elsewhere in the piece. Moreover, I separate this segment from the next chunk of material because the section that follows is a larger, more developed one.

#### 6. ויאמינו ביי שני' אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל (Exodus 14:31-15:1).

"They had faith in the Lord...Then Moses and the Israelites sang."

<sup>1</sup>Neusner refers to this as an "exegetical form with an implicit proposition." (Neusner, *Mekhilta*, pp. 58, 66.)

<sup>2</sup>The same framing occurs in a parallel piece in the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*, the only difference being that the Shimon piece does not include the *v'chen atah motzeh* statement about Abraham in its introduction.



The midrash reads Exodus 14:31 and 15:1 as one, continuous thought. Since the verses are juxtaposed, midrashic reasoning allows that they must be connected. Moreover, there is the obvious, intuitive connection between the euphoric faith that Israel felt at that moment and the song into which they burst immediately thereafter. Using the root for *shir* as the key to unlock the deeper meaning, the midrash asserts that, as a reward for their faith, the spirit of God came to rest (*shartah*) upon Israel. This is what caused or allowed them to sing the song (*shir*). Thus, this section establishes the connection between Israel's faith and their closeness to God, on the one hand, and the Song at the Sea or singing in general, on the other.

רבי נחמיה אומר מנין אתה אומר שכל המקבל עליו מצוה אחת באמנה כראי הוא  
שתשרה עליו רוח הקדש שכן מצינו באבותינו שבשכר האמנה שהאמינו זכו ושרתה  
10 עליהם רוח הקדש ואמרו שירה שנאמר ויאמינו ביי ונ' אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל

#### 8. רבי נחמיה אומר...

"Rabbi Nechemiah says..." The statement attributed to Rabbi Nechemiah represents a second redactional layer. It is possible to lump this segment together with the prior section for it is similar in language and rhetorical form. Both layers use *b'skhar ha'amanah she'he'eminu...sharta aleihem ruach ha'kodesh v'amru shirah*," and cite the same proof-text (the base text) in the same way. However, since the first and last sections of the piece are so clearly parallel, it is more likely that these two pieces were tacked onto the rest of the material by a later redactor who copied the language of the section above.

As the piece comes down to us, this section serves as a fine link between the introductory section, with its general statement about the reward for faith, and the next section, which contains specific examples of the reward our ancestors earned for their faith. In this section, we have a general statement about our ancestor's faith.

#### 8. כל המקבל עליו מצוה אחת באמנה

"Anyone who takes upon him/herself one commandment with faith." The notion of faith expressed in the first section is undefined. The impression given is that it is Israel's faith alone which merits God's presence. This is akin to the Christian idea that faith alone leads to salvation. Here, R. Nechemiah's statement defines faith in a very different way. It introduces the notion that taking an action, doing a mitzvah, "with faith" is crucial. It is this kind of "action-based" faith that leads God to reward our ancestors with God's presence among them at the Sea. The Christian view that faith alone leads to salvation is opposed by Rabbi Nechemiah. Thus, a tension is brought out here between faith as the belief in Adonai and Adonai's powers (*emunah*) and faith as manifested in deeds (*amanah*).

Indeed, the spelling of this word without the "vav" אמנה allows one to read it either way. Jastrow indicates that *amanah* means "trust" as well as "faith." Specifically, it means "trust in the matter of contracts." That is, one trusts that the other party will follow through on his end of the contract. Interestingly, Jastrow notes that the *Bayli* uses

*amanah* to discuss the trust one has that a marriage (contract) will be consummated (B.T. Ketubot 19B).<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that the midrash refers not to doing commandments generally with faith, but to doing one commandment. Echoes of the same thought may be found in Tractate *Shabbta*, where it is stated in the name of Rabbi that one who observes a single Sabbath correctly is credited with having observed all the Sabbaths since the time of creation.<sup>4</sup> This may reflect a rabbinic response to the Hadrianic or other persecutions during Roman times which made it difficult for Jews to observe the commandments of Torah fully. On the other hand, it may also represent a mystical notion of the power of doing mitzvot with true faith. To do a commandment with true faith is so difficult that if one ever does even one correctly, it can change one's universe.

וכן אתה מוצא שלא ירש אברהם אבינו את העולם הזה והעולם הבא אלא בשכר  
אמנה שהאמין שנאמר והאמין ביי וטי' (בראשית ט:ו). וכן אתה מוצא שלא נגאלו  
ישראל ממצרים אלא בשכר אמנה שהאמינו שנאמר ויאמן העם (שמות ד:לא).

#### 11. וכן אתה מוצא

"Similarly, you find." This section is characterized by the use of this technical term to introduce two examples of the principle delineated in the prior section. *V'chen atah motzeh* is typically used in the Mekhilta to introduce case examples of a principle or to introduce a principle derived from case examples. In this section, the two examples are developed using the same pattern:

1. *V'chen atah motzeh she'lo*
2. Case (Abraham inherits the world to come; Israel is redeemed from Egypt.)
3. *Elah b'schar amanah she'he'emin*
4. Proof-text

Therefore, I group them together as one redactional layer. In fact, however, the same exact form using the same terminology is found again later in the piece.<sup>5</sup> There, the case is the messianic return of the exiles being the reward for faith. At some point, prior to the redaction of the current piece, this example was probably part of the same midrashic piece, the same redactional layer. Seen together, the three cases amount to a very carefully formulated syllogism that makes one point.<sup>6</sup> That is, redemption comes to the Jewish people - both personally and corporately - as a result of faith in God.

<sup>3</sup>M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>4</sup>See *Massekhta d'Shabbta*, *parashah* 1, lines 72-73, below.

<sup>5</sup>See below lines 24-25.

<sup>6</sup>Under Neusner's categorization this is a "propositional form." (Neusner, *Mekhilta*, pp. 57-58. See Chapter 1, p. 5, n.3 above.)

## 11. ירש

"Inherit." This word has the same letters as שיר. It is probably a word play.

## 12. והאמין ביי וגי

"And he believed in the Lord, etc." Historically and literarily the first example of *emunah/amanah* is Abraham, whose faith in God at the Covenant between the Pieces (Gen. 15) is accounted to him as *tzedakah* (righteousness). Much of Christian tradition holds that Abraham had faith in God before he ever did any mitzvot; the basis of his reward was his faith in God.<sup>7</sup> However, it should be noted that the interpretation on Genesis 15:6 for the rabbis is that it refers to the faith that Abraham demonstrated by doing God's commandments. The text states: "*v'he'emin ba'Adonai va'yach'sh'veha lo tz'dakah*," "He believed in Adonai and it was accounted him as righteousness." The rabbis don't read "it" as referring to Abraham's faith, but to his deeds, going to Canaan, circumcision, etc.

The last example in the *v'khen atah motzeh* redactorial layer states that it is the *emunah/amanah* of the exiles which will lead God to bring about the final redemption and gather them back into the Land. What happened to Abraham, happened at the Exodus, happened at the Reed Sea and ultimately will happen again when God brings about the messianic redemption. In terms of our larger analysis, this redactorial layer hearkens back to earlier sections of the Mekhilta where the same three central events are linked in a chain (see *Massekhta d'Pischa, parashah* 14, lines 53-56, pp. 42-43 below.)

וכן הוא אומר אמונים נוצר יי (תהלים לא:כד) מזכיר אמונת אבות ואומר  
15 ואחרון וחור תמכו וגי (שמות יז:יב). זה השער ליי צדיקים יבאו בו (תהלים קיח:כ)  
בבעלי אמנה מהו אומר פתחו שערים ויבא גי צדיק שומר אמונים (ישעיה כו:ב).  
השער הזה כל בעלי אמנה נכנסין בו וכן הוא אומר טוב להודות ליי ולומר לשמך  
עליון להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות וגי כי שמחתני וגי (תהלים צב:א-ג).  
מי גרם לנו לבא לידי שמחה זו אלא בשכר אמנה שהאמינו אבותינו בעולם הזה  
20 שכולו לילות לכך נאמר להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות וכן יהושפט אומר  
לעם האמינו ביי אלהיכם ותאמנו האמינו בנביאיו והצליחו (דהי"ב כ:כ).

## 14. וכן הוא אומר...ואומר

"And so [the Bible] also says...and it says..." This section is distinguished by the use of the term *v'chen hu omer* or simply, *v'omer*, to introduce textual material. In its pure form, one would find this term used to introduce a series of verses without any explication inserted between the verses. Here, there is some rabbinic explication woven into the section. In any event, the use of *v'chen hu omer* and *v'omer* indicates that this is a distinct unit from the material that proceeds it, which is characterized by the use of

<sup>7</sup>Romans 4:2-3; Galations 3:6-11.

*v'chen atah motzeh*, as well as from the material that follows, which is characterized by the use of *u'ch'tiv* to introduce textual material. Moreover, it is apparent from the fact that this section departs from the clear historical paradigm of the prior piece and comes in between two sections of that redactorial layer that this is a later redactorial insertion.

Given the tightness and power of the *v'khen atah motzeh* segment, it is natural to ask why this material is inserted into it. My impression is that, while this material interrupts the literary flow of the other section, it adds much to it in terms of theme and motif. I would go so far as to posit that the web of verses which characterize this section weave together the two parts of the piece that it interrupts: the Exodus from Egypt and the ingathering of the exiles.

14. אמונים נוצר יי (Psalms 31:24)

"The Lord guards the loyal." This verse is a wonderful transition from the prior section, which ended with the notion that Israel's faith in God's promise of redemption (Exodus 4) led to the redemption from Egypt. It expresses the notion that God protects those who are *emunim* (have faith/are faithful, in this context, the Israelites), and God punishes those who act arrogantly, namely, the Egyptians.

15. ואהרן וחור תמכו (Exodus 17:12)

"Aaron and Hur supported." Perhaps, in order to echo the importance of the faith of the ancestors expressed in the prior section of the midrash, the author frames this verse about Aaron and Hur with *mazkir emunat avot*, "[God] remembering the faith of the ancestors." The verse itself begins to define the *emunah* of our ancestors more clearly in terms of action than did the earlier verse about Abraham (Genesis 15:6). It states that Moses' "hands" (drash: Aaron and Hur's hands) were *emunah*. Of all the possible verses in the Tanach that describe the *emunah* of our ancestors, the midrashist chose this action-centered verse! In light of this verse, one may read "*mazkir emunat avot*" as meaning "God remembers the faith expressed through action of the ancestors". The particular action in this verse is Aaron and Hur supporting Moses' hands. It is this action which, midrashically, represents faith - their faith that their support of Moses would lead to God's intervention to save the Israelites. We find here an echo of the primary verse *va'yaaminu ba'Adonai u'b'Moshe avdo*: Aaron and Hur believed in and supported Moses as well as God. Finally, one cannot ignore the phrase "*ad bo ha'shemesh*". According to this phrase, the *p'shat* probably means "until dusk." But the midrash sees Aaron and Hur's actions as "*emunah*" through the night, which led to Israel's survival until the morning. This redemptive motif is developed by the verses that follow.

15. זה השער ליי צריקים יבאו בו (Psalm 118:20)

"This is the gateway to the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it." Psalm 118 is the last psalm recited in the Hallel. It praises God for delivering us, who are lowly and downtrodden. It also asks God for another (future) deliverance. This interpretation allows it to serve wonderfully as connective tissue between the notion of redemption from Egypt and the messianic redemption to come.

But, even without the baggage of Psalm 118, this verse resonates deeply with the burgeoning themes of this midrash. The gate to Adonai are the gates of *tzeddek*, the gates of righteous action. The *tzaddikim* will enter the gates. The use of this root [צדק] leads us to recall the faith of Abraham, which was accounted to him as *tzeddakah*. After the speaker in this verse enters the gates, he will *odeh Ya*, he will thank or confess [to] God. This notion will become more prominent in the verses that follow. Meanwhile, the messianic implications of this verse are manifest. *Pitchu li* is a jussive form, while the other key verbs are in the imperfect tense. The verse looks towards the future with messianic expectations that the righteous will enter the gates of Adonai. The exact nature of these gates, and their connection to *emunah* are clarified in the verses that follow.

16. פתחו שערים ויבא ונ' צדיק אמונים (Isaiah 26:2)

"Open the gates, and let a righteous nation enter, that keeps the faith." As if to reflect the fact that the word *emunah/amanah* is missing from the prior verse, the author asks, "*bi'vaalei emunah/amanah ma'hu omer?*" The question is answered with the quoting of Isaiah 26:2, which uses virtually the same words as Psalms 118:20. However, it adds that the *tzaddikim* who will enter the gates of Adonai are *shomer emunim*, those who keep *emunah*. Moreover, they are specifically defined in this verse as a nation, i.e., Israel. Thus, we have moved in this section from the notion of God generally guarding those with *emunah* (*emunim notzer Adonai*), to the particular notion of Israel's action-based faith leading to its messianic redemption by God. What has been lost, momentarily, is the *shir*. This is brought back in through the preceding verse, Isaiah 26:1, which clearly states that "On that day this song (*shir*) will be sung in the Land of Judah...." Consequently, "*Pitchu Shaarim...*" is the song and the gates of Adonai are, in fact, the gates of Jerusalem. In the messianic future, *bayom hahu*, the *baalei emunah/amanah* (the *goy tzaddik*, Israel) will enter the gates of Jerusalem singing of God's *y'shuah* (salvation) because (26:3) *b'cha batuach*, they trusted in you (i.e., they were *emunim*). In case you missed this point, the author notes after this verse, "Through this gate all '*baalei emunah*' enter."

17-18. טוב להודות ל' ולזמר ונ' (Psalms 92:2-6)

"It is good to praise the Lord, to sing hymns, etc." With this text we have reached the climax of this section of the midrash. Here, not only do we have hints of the messianic song to come, but the entire orchestra is playing! Virtually all of the key words and motifs of this midrash are in this text: singing, thanking God (*hoda'a*), *chesed*, *emunah*, morning and night, deeds and the work of one's hands.

The *p'shat* here is a celebration of God's *emunah* in the night and *chesed* in the morning, of God making us happy with God's deeds, the work of God's hands. But, by this point in midrash we know that we must read it also as our faith, our trust, our deeds, the work of our hands in the night. This is what will bring God's Presence to us and lead us to sing the messianic song in the morning. God's *emunah/amanah* and our *emunah/amanah* go hand in hand. One cannot work without the other. This is the very essence of our covenant.

Once again, the redactor spells this out for us in his own words: "What causes us to arrive at this joy?...only the reward for the faith our ancestors had in this world, which is completely night." This world is the night, while the next world is the morning. Is the next world the individual *olam habah* or the collective messianic salvation? Perhaps, for the author, it is both. Moreover, it is the *emunah/amanah* of our ancestors that lets us merit the *olam habah*, not our own *emunah/amanah*. Indeed, this represents the classical rabbinic theology that we have no merit and deserve the *olam habah* on the basis of the merit of our ancestors.

21. **וְהָאֱלֹהִים וְהָאֱמוּנָה בִּי** (II Chronicles 20:20).

"Trust firmly in the Lord your God and you will stand firm." All the themes and motifs having blossomed in the above text from Psalms, this text comes to hammer home the point. In this verse, the word *emunah/amanah* is front and center. The *emunah/amanah* of the Israelites in God will lead God to reciprocate by giving Israel the power to stand firm (*emunah*) and be victorious. If we have *emunah/amanah* with God, God will have *emunah/amanah* with us. Moreover, this text clearly echoes the primary text by including "faith" in God's prophets alongside "faith" in God. Finally, we have here singers extolling God in song, exclaiming "*hodu la'Adonai*," echoing the motif expressed earlier in this section.<sup>8</sup>

וְכָחִיב יִי עֵינֶיךָ הָלֹא לְאִמּוּנָה וְנִי (יִרְמְיָה ה:ג). וְכָחִיב וְצָדִיק בְּאִמּוּנָתוֹ יָחִיה  
(חֲבִיקוֹק ב:ד). וְכָחִיב חֲרָשִׁים לְבָקָרִים רַבָּה אִמּוּנָתָךְ (אִיכָה נ:כב).

22-23. **וְכָחִיב...וְכָחִיב...וְכָחִיב**

"It is written...and it is written...and it is written." This section includes three verses, all of which are introduced with the term *u'chtiv*. However, there is a fourth verse that begins *u'khtiv*, which comes after the next section, the last *v'khen atah motzeh* example. It seems likely that these four verses introduced by *u'khtiv* were originally one piece and represent the same redactorial layer. In the parallel section in the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon, this piece contains four verses, though there they are introduced by the term *v'omer*. Moreover, in the M'khilta d'Rabbi Shimon the four verses are grouped together following (not before) the last *v'chen atah motzeh*. One could explain the rearranging of the verses in the Ishmael piece, perhaps, as an attempt to increase the power of the *ein ha'galuyot mitkansot* line, by placing it closer to the end of the overall piece.

22. **יִי עֵינֶיךָ הָלֹא לְאִמּוּנָה וְנִי** (Jeremiah 5:3).

"O Lord, don't your eyes look for faith." This text notes that God wants our *emunah*. It fits in quite nicely after the quote from II Chronicles about Yehoshafat,

<sup>8</sup>Interestingly, this text plays a prominent role in the Massekhta d'Shirta text examined in the next chapter.

almost as a proof-text for the paradigm outlined there.

22. וצדיק באמונתו יחיה (Habbakuk 2:4)

"The righteous man is rewarded with life for his fidelity." This text resonates with the messianic notions discussed in the prior sections. The *tzaddik* will live through (because of) his *emunah*.<sup>9</sup> This may be taken to mean that God will help the *tzaddik* survive the night because of his *emunah*, or more concretely, the *tzaddik* will be resurrected because of his *emunah*. This second interpretation should be given great weight in light of the beginning of the verse which can be read as saying that the arrogant will not stand upright (*yashra*) with their souls in them. If we understand this verse to be discussing the resurrection of the *tzaddikim* at the time of the messiah, then it is the perfect introduction to the last *v'chen atah motzeh* about the ingathering of exiles. For, the final redemption and ingathering will include the resurrected dead as well as the ingathering of the living.

23. חרשים לבקרים רבה אמונתך (Lamentations 3:23)

"They are renewed every morning; great is Your faith." (my translation). After the verse from Habbakuk, the verse from Lamentations refocuses the key motifs and expectations on God. Indeed, we read, God's *chesed* and *rachamim* have not ended. In the morning it will be renewed because of God's great *emunah*. That is, God will keep up God's side of the covenant if we keep ours.

וכן אתה מוצא שאין הנליות עתירות מתכנסות אלא בשכר אמונה שנאמר אחי מלבנון  
25 כלה אחי מלבנון תבואי תשורי מראש אמונה (שה"ש ד:ח).

24. וכן אתה מוצא

"Similarly, you find." This chunk of material was most likely originally part of the section discussed earlier (lines 11-13), where it formed the third of three examples introduced by *v'khen atah motzeh*. (see comment on *v'khen atah motzeh*, line 11). It may have been moved later in the piece because its particular theme - the ingathering of the exiles - fits better after all of the redemption related texts in the prior two sections. Moreover, the proof-text from Song of Songs and the text from Hosea that follows it both employ wedding imagery, making the end of the piece more coherent and powerful.

24-25. אחי מלבנון כלה...תשורי מראש אמונה (Song of Songs 4:8).

"From Lebanon come with me; from Lebanon, my bride, with me! Trip down from Amana's peak." One could not find a more fitting proof-text for this piece than this text from Song of Songs. The rabbis understood Song of Songs as a poem about the love between God and Israel. Here, God, the groom, is calling to Israel, the bride to come from Lebanon's peaks. That is, return from exile. The ingathering of the exiles is

<sup>9</sup>The key verbs in this verse are, of course, in the imperfect tense.

depicted as a reconciliation between bride and groom.

But, the reference runs deeper, extending to the individual words of the verse. The word *tashuri* comes from [שור], meaning "look" or "gaze." Specifically, to look into the future. Of course the Amana in this reading is not a mountain, but faith. Thus, God is telling Israel, "Look from the height of faith." What can be seen from such heights? The return of the exiles, the final redemption. Even this, though, has several layers of meaning. For, this "vision of faith" also describes the scene at the Reed Sea where Israel has reached the peak of faith and is about to sing their vision. And what can be closer to vision [שור] than song [שיר]?

וכתיב וארשתיך לי לעולם ונ' וארשתיך לי באמונה (הושע ב:כא-כב).

26. וכתוב וארשתיך לי לעולם ונ' וארשתיך לי באמונה (Hosea 2:21-22).

"It is written, 'I will espouse you forever... And I will espouse you with faithfulness.'" This verse has been separated from its original chunk by the redactor. As mentioned above, it was in all likelihood, part of the series of quotes introduced by *u'ktiv*. It is placed after the last *v'ken atah motzeh* case in order to tie it directly to the verse from Song of Songs (above). Both employ wedding imagery, but in contrast to the Song of Song verse, where Israel is looking with faith, here God is acting with faith. The two verses, like the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of Israel, must go together. In addition to this powerful imagery, this verse adds another word play on the root [שיר]. That is *arastikh* [ארש], which also picks up on *tasuri* [שור] and ראש.

הא גרולה האמנה לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שבשכר אמונה שהאמינו שרתה עליהם רוח הקדש ואמרו שירה שנאמר ויאמינו ביי ובמשה עברו אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת ליי. וכן הוא אומר ויאמינו ברבריו ישירו תהלתו (תהלים קי:ב).

27. הא גרולה האמנה

"Great indeed, is faith." The word *ha* essentially means, "here comes a conclusion." It is a shortened form of *ha lamadnu*. The only significant distinction between the introduction and conclusion of the piece is the last line, which is a quote from Psalm 106. This verse is a perfect ending to the midrash, directly linking *emunah/amanah* to the future, messianic *shir*.

In order to see just how fitting it is, one must understand the content of Psalm 106. This psalm contains a review of Israel's history or, more specifically, Israel's sins through history: the rebellion at the Sea of Reeds, the worship of the calf at Horeb, Israel's complaining, its worship of Baal Peor and idol worship in the Land. Each time God punishes them by bringing enemies upon them, and then hearkens to their cry of



anguish and delivers them. The psalm ends with a plea for deliverance from exile: *v'kabtzeinu min ha'goyim*. Thus, this psalm spans the same historical time as our midrash. Moreover, verse 12, which is quoted in the midrash, specifically refers to the very moment at the Sea of Reeds where Israel saw God's deeds and had *emunah*! *Va'yaaminu bi'devarav, yashiru t'hilato* (Psalm 106:12) refers to "*va'yaaminu ba'Adonai u'b'Moshe avdo, az yashir Moshe u'vnei Yisrael*" (Exodus 14:31-15:1). In Exodus, Israel had *emunah* in God, but in the psalm they had *emunah* in his *devarim*, that is, God's commandments. In sum, it is the *emunah* demonstrated by doing God's commandments which will bring about the messianic *shir*.

## OVERVIEW

The midrashic material in this chapter represents all of the commentary in the Mekhilta on the second half of Exodus 14:31, *va-ya'aminu ba'Adonai u'v'Moshe avdo*. Consequently, it is presented together in the midrash, despite the fact that it contains two distinct pieces. First, we have a brief, four line exegetical comment that artfully presents the proposition that in his relationship with the people, Moses must be identified with God. Whatever attitude the people have towards Moses, it is tantamount to the attitude they must have towards God. This is followed by an extensive midrashic essay - 25 lines in all - on the nature of faith, its impact on the relationship between God and Israel, and on Israel's experience. This section bears the mark of a strong redactorial hand. It is tightly woven and well conceived from beginning to end, both in terms of form and content. Before shifting focus to the dynamics of this wonderfully woven, intensely interconnected essay, it is important to note that there is no significant interaction or relationship between the two pieces. They are placed side by side, as far as I can tell, solely by the "logic of fixed association."<sup>10</sup> That is, they are both comments on the same text, so they are "naturally" grouped together. But, the redactor does not appear to integrate them on any other level.<sup>11</sup> (The remainder of this discussion focuses on the *emunah/amanah* piece.)

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<sup>10</sup>Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>It is possible, though, that an examination of the entirety of *parashah* 14 would reveal a line of argument in which both of these segments are linked.

### Rhetorical Forms, Technical Terms and Redaction

Unlike the other pieces analyzed in this paper, it is possible to posit a theory of the redactorial development of the essay. In the *emunah/amanah* piece the redactor has sewn together a number of different layers of material, each of which is unique in form and style. Lines 5-7 and 26-29 are parallel units that act as introduction and conclusion, respectively. In terms of form, they are exegetical comments on the base-text that present a proposition, which serves as the general proposition for the entire piece (*she'b'skhar amanah she'he'eminu Yisrael ba'Adonai shartah aleihem ruach ha'kodesh v'amru shirah*). They bracket the essay and serve as an exegetical link to the text of exodus. In all likelihood they were the last sections included by a redactor because there would be no reason for such bracketing to be used unless the other material already formed a coherent piece.

Lines 8-10 contain the only statement in this piece attributed to a sage. It, too, is an exegetical comment on the base-text offering a more focused variation on the same proposition. Outside of its current setting in this midrash, this segment could easily stand alone as a comment on the verse at hand. In fact, this kind of exegetical comment attributed to a sage is quite typical of the Mekhilta. For these reasons, it is likely that this was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, section of the midrashic piece.

This is followed by what Jacob Neusner has termed a "propositional form," a series of cases that amount to a "very carefully formalized syllogism."<sup>12</sup> This syllogism makes one overarching point, historicizing the proposition in the prior section. Each

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<sup>12</sup>Neusner, *Mekhilta*, pp. 57-58.

case in the syllogism is introduced by the term, *v'khen atah motzeh*. As noted above, this redactorial layer originally contained three examples, which taken as a whole could easily stand alone as a small piece on the role of faith in attaining redemption. The third was moved by the redactor to lines 24-25. It seems that this section was also one of the first to be included by a redactor. The fact that the third example is split off may well be evidence that the material inserted between the first two and the third examples represent later interpolation. I would posit, further, that it follows so well on the prior section, expanding and developing the proposition about our ancestor's faith, that it was probably the second section to be included. Lines 14-21 contain a tightly woven series of verses, all but one of which include the key word, *emunah/amanah*. Each verse is introduced with the term, *v'khen hu omer, ma hu omer*, or simply, *v'omer*. A few words of commentary connect these verses to one another. This is followed by a second series of verses (lines 22-23) that contain the word *emunah/amanah*, all of which are introduced by the word, *u'khtiv*. No other words come between the verses here. However, one of the verses originally included in this set is split off and moved below to line 26. These two redactorial layers were probably later interpolations, as they don't include the base-text or any exegetical comment that link them directly to the base-text. Moreover, I would suggest that the *u'khtiv* section was included first because of the close association of the fourth verse in this series to the proof-text in third *v'khen atah motzeh* example and because the piece as a whole would still be quite effective even if the *v'khen hu omer* section were removed.

### Key Words and Phrases

This midrash is unusual in the number of words and phrases repeated throughout the piece and the degree to which they are repeated. In reading this midrash it seems that virtually every word and phrase in the piece repeats an earlier word or phrase. In fact, an analysis of the language of this piece reveals that this perception accurately reflects the content of it:

Number of times repeated	Key phrase, word or root
2	גרולה האמנה
7	שבשכר אמנה שהאמינו
4	שרתה עליהם רוח הקודש ואמרו שירה
12	אמנה
15	[ש"ד]
31	[אמנ]
3	[צדק]
3	[שער]
2	[חסד]

This data is striking, particularly when one considers that the piece only contains 29 lines of text! None of the other pieces examined in this paper employ word repetition as stylistic and thematic device to anywhere near the degree that it is used here. This data reveals the extent of the interconnectedness of the various elements of the piece, not just within, but between the various sections and layers. The redactor(s) could hardly have been more skillful in choosing his midrashic sections in order to create the effect of a

unified, flowing whole. Moreover, one can see what this midrash is about merely by looking at this list. Fundamentally it is about *emunah/amanah*, faith, and its expression/source in *shir*, song.

### Thematic Flow and Style

The connections in theme and motif across the several sections are prevalent and powerful, forming an integrated whole. At the same time, the style and ordering of the material create a flow so compelling that this midrashic essay resembles a musical sonata. The pun here, of course, is intended. Responding to a moment of song, writing about song, the midrashist uses his literary skills to develop a piece that resembles song. The material in the midrash having already been analyzed thematically in detail above, a brief look at the flow of material will suffice in making this clear.

The opening of the piece is grand, *g'dolah ha'amanah!*, "so great is faith before the One who Spoke and the World Came to Be that the spirit of holiness descended upon them and they sang a song." This theme is repeated in many guises throughout the piece, like variations on a theme in a symphony. We move from this general notion to the more specific notion of our ancestors receiving a reward for faith demonstrated through mitzvah. From there, the theme is broken down further into specific examples of our ancestor's receiving redemption/the world to come as a reward for their faith in act. The parallel between singing and redemption is thus drawn out. From there we move to the two consecutive series of verses, all based on the root of *emunah/amanah*. These sections develop the themes of faith, song and redemption (the messianic *shir*).

However, the impact is as much affective as cognitive. With each new verse piled on the last, the messianic imagery grows and grows. Fewer and fewer words come between verses as the pace quickens to a breathless intensity. By the time we reach the *u'khtiv* section, all of the instruments of the messianic orchestra are playing, reaching a crescendo. The feeling is euphoric. Then, the last *v'khen atah motzeh* example is reached and the pace is deliberately slowed so that the reader can focus on the content of the midrash, on the messianic return of the exiles. The wedding imagery, the analogy of God and Israel to bride and groom returning to each other, is brought out. A passionate tone of longing is reflected in these verses, as the reader looks with the eyes of the midrash from the peak of *amanah*, the height of faith, towards the messianic time. This is the climax of the piece. From there the midrash moves to the last section, the denouement, which offers a repetition of the introductory section with the addition of the historical lesson of Psalm 106, a summation of the piece.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRACTATE SHIRTA  
PARASHAH ONE  
EXODUS 15:1



אז ישיר משה. יש אז לשעבר ויש אז לעתיד לבא. אז תוחל לקרוא בשם  
 (בר' ר:כו). אז אמרה חתן רמים (שמות ר:כו). אז ישיר משה (שמות טו:א).  
 אז ישיר ישראל (במדבר כא:יז). אז ידבר יהושע (יהושע י:יב). אז אמר דוד  
 (דה"א טו:ב). אז אמר שלמה (מלכים א' ח:יב). הרי אלו לשעבר. יש אז לעתיד  
 5 לבא אז תיראי ונתרת (ישעיה ס:ה). אז יבקע כשר אורך (שם נח:ח). אז ירלג  
 כאיל פסח (שם לה:ו). אז תפקחנה (שם לה:ה). אז תשמח בתולה (ירמיה לא:יב).  
 אז ימלא שחוק פיט... אז יאמרו בנים הגריל יי (תהלים קכו:ב). הרי אלו  
 לעתיד לבא. רבי אומר אז שר משה אין כתיב אלא אז ישיר משה. נמצינו למדין  
 תחיית המתים מן התורה.

#### 1. יש אז לשעבר ויש אז לעתיד לבא

"There are times that the word, *az*, refers to the past and there are times that it refers to the future to come." The simple (*pshar*) reading of the Song at the Sea<sup>1</sup> is that it refers to an event that occurred in the past, namely, the miracle at the Reed Sea. However, certain elements in the Biblical text of the Song at the Sea point to a song that will occur in the future. For example, many verbs in this passage are in the imperfect tense, including the verb, *yashir*, above. Thus, one reading of *az yashir Moshe* is "then Moses will sing." The Biblical text under consideration is ambiguous; from a midrashic perspective it can refer to the past or the future. The word *az*, meaning "then," contains a similar ambiguity. It is sometimes used in verses that discuss past events and sometimes it indicates that an event is to occur in the future. This tension, or ambiguity, is developed in the midrash above.

#### 1. לעתיד לבא

"In the future to come." This phrase refers to the time of the messiah.

#### 1-4. יש אז לשעבר... הרי אלו לשעבר

"There are times when the word *az* refers to the past.... These texts [just cited] refer to the past." The first set of texts cited in the midrash serve as prooftexts for the use of *az* in the context of past events.

At the same time, these texts resonate thematically with the Song at the Sea. Genesis 4:26 speaks of the first time people began to address God by name. A significant portion of the Song at the Sea is also addressed directly to *Adonai*. Exodus 4:26 is the mysterious scene where Tziporah circumcizes either her husband or her son in order to save them from death. Like the parting of the Reed Sea, this scene is a moment of salvation at the beginning of a perilous journey. In Numbers 21:17 Israel sings to the well in the desert in order to get water. This text echoes the water and song motifs of

<sup>1</sup>See Judah Goldin, *The Song at the Sea* (New York, NY: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 2 for an explanation of the translation of שירת הים as the "Song at the Sea" and not the "Song of the Sea."

the Song at the Sea, as well as the salvation theme. Indeed, the language of the first part of this verse closely resembles that of Exod. 15:1. Numbers 21:17 says, "*az yashir Yisrael et ha'shirah ha'zot....*" Moreover, the verse continues, "*...ali v'er enu lah.*" The word *enu* is based on the same root [ענר] as *ta'an* in Exod. 15:21, "*Va'taan la'hem Miryam....*" Joshua 10:12-13 contains Joshua's "song" asking God to make the sun to stand still so Israel can complete a victory over the Amorites. The text indicates that this is recorded in the "Book of Yashar," which is taken by the midrash to mean the "Book of Song." *Yashar* and *shir* (song) are seen as linguistically related. I Chron. 15:2 and I Kings 8:12 refer to separate instances in which the ark of the covenant is transported, accompanied by a ceremonial march and song. Marching and singing are part of the incident at the Reed Sea.

#### יש אז לעחיד לבא...אלו לעחיד לבא 1-5.

"There are times when *az* refers to the future to come....These texts [just cited] refer to the future to come." The second set of texts serve as proof texts for the use of *az* in contexts where a future time, namely, the messianic age, is described. But, at the same time, these texts like those before them, resonate with the Song at the Sea. One can say that this midrash expresses the notion that the Song at the Sea was an event in the past which also is a model for the song that will be sung at the time of the final redemption.

Texts from Isaiah are quite prominent in the redactor's vision of the "messianic shir." Four texts from Isaiah are cited consecutively, moving backwards through the book. Isaiah 60:5 discusses the future messianic time. However, it reads like a description of the events at the Reed Sea! "The hordes of the sea will be overturned on you. The soldiers of the nations will come to you" (my translation). Similarly, Isaiah 58:8 could be part of the messianic song: "Then shall your light burst forth like the dawn and your healing spring up quickly. Your Vindicator shall march before you. The presence of the Lord shall be your rear guard." Here, too, we have a clear echo of the events at the Reed Sea, where God's presence in the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire lead Israel forward and then stand as a rear guard between them and the Egyptians. Like Isaiah 58:8, Isaiah 35:6 is bursting with messianic imagery: "Then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the dumb shall shout aloud; for waters shall burst forth in the desert, streams in the wilderness." Once again we have the water motif, so much a symbol of redemption. The "shouting" here can be seen (in this context as a proof text) as a reference to the singing at the sea. This prophecy of redemption continues in 35:8-9: "And a highway shall appear there which shall be called the Sacred Way. No one unclean shall pass along it but it shall be for them [for his people]....But the redeemed shall walk it and the ransomed of the Lord shall return..." One feels an echo here of the fantastic march through the Sea of Reeds on the magic highway that appeared between the walls of water. In the future a similar march will occur, where God's people shall return to Israel.

After the Isaiah texts, the redactor adds in Jeremiah 31:13. This text, too, refers to the messianic age. At the same time, the line, "then the maidens dance gaily," is a reference to the dance of Miriam and the women at the Sea (Exod. 15:21-22). Psalm 126 is practically a summary of the Song of the sea experience, projected into the future.

It includes direct references to songs of joy in response to God's redemption and the response of the nations: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion - we were like dreamers - Our mouths shall be filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then shall they say among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord will do great things for us and we shall rejoice.'" (Psalm 126:2ff).

#### 8. רבי

Rabbi Judah the Prince. B.T. Sanhedrin 91b attributes the same statement to Rabbi Meir.<sup>2</sup>

#### 8. נמצית למרין

"We find that the (Torah) text teaches." This is a technical term introducing a conclusion.

#### 9. תחיית המתים מן התורה

"The resurrection of the dead is from the Torah." Historically speaking, the resurrection at the time of the messiah is a rabbinic notion. That is, it is part of the oral Torah. Here, Rabbi is arguing that it is actually indicated in the written Torah (the Bible). Rabbi reasons that the verb *shir* is deliberately put in the future tense in order to tell us about the resurrection. Reading literally, the phrase, *az yashir Moshe*, says, "Moses will sing," in the future. Since he is dead, he will have to be resurrected in order to do so.

It is possible that Rabbi has tapped into a deeper meaning in the biblical story of the Reed Sea. On a metaphorical level one can say that the Israelites' walk down into the sea and their emergence from the deep is symbolic of death and resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

10 משה ובני ישראל. משה שקול כִּי־יִשְׂרָאֵל ויִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁקוּלִין כַּמֶּשֶׁה בַּשָּׁעָה שֶׁאָמְרוּ שִׁירָה.  
דבר אחר משה ובני ישראל. מגיד שאמר משה שירה כְּעַר כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

#### 10. משה ובני ישראל (Exod. 15:1)

"Moses and the Children of Israel." The midrash is responding to the unnecessary use of Moses' name here. After all, isn't Moses one of the Children of Israel? This midrash wants to know what the inclusion of Moses' name means with regard to the way the song was sung and the nature of the relationship between Moses and Israel at that moment.

#### 10. משה שקול כִּי־יִשְׂרָאֵל ויִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁקוּלִין כַּמֶּשֶׁה

"Moses is equal to Israel and Israel equal to Moses." At that moment of song Moses

<sup>2</sup>Goldin, Song, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Dr. Norman Cohen, lecture, 11/91.

and Israel were equal. This can be taken as a description of the actual singing - neither was louder than the other and/or they harmonized together as one. Extending this to a social level, the midrash may be saying that at that "high" moment of song the division between leader and follower was blurred. To use current parlance, the people were empowered and it wasn't clear who was leading whom. On a religious level, Moses' relationship with God was usually closer than that of *amcha*, the ordinary people. During the Song at the Sea each was equally close to the Holy One.

#### 11. רבר אחר

"Another thing." The use of this term sometimes indicates that the material that follows is an addition by a later redactor. Here, the point that follows contrasts with the one preceding it and seems to bring out the tension in the verse rather than go off in a different direction. Thus, it is not clear that a later redactor is involved.

#### 11. מגיר

"Tells." This is a technical term meaning that the preceding text/point indicates the following....

#### 11. אמר משה שירה כנגד כל ישראל

"Moses sang a song before all of Israel." Instead of indicating that Moses and Israel were equal at the time of singing, the midrash is suggesting that Moses is mentioned specifically by the Torah because his singing stood out from Israel's. Maybe Moses and Israel were singing "against" (*neged*) each other, i.e., there was tension between the leader and community over who should lead. Or, perhaps, he sang it "before" them and Israel followed. Another possibility is that this phrase means that the singing was antiphonal. First Moses sang and then Israel responded. "*K'neged*" could mean any of these things.

את השירה הזאת. וכי שירה אחת היא. והלא עשר שירות הן. הראשונה שנאמרה במצרים שנאמר השיר יהיה לכם כליל התקדש חג וגי' (ישעיה ל:כט). השנייה שנאמרה על הים שנאמר אז ישיר משה. 15 השלישית שנאמרה על הבאר שנאמר אז ישיר ישראל (במרבב כא:יז). הרביעית שנאמר משה שנאמר ויהי ככלות משה לכתוב וגי' (רברים לא:כר). החמישית שנאמר יהושע שנאמר אז ידבר יהושע ליי וגי' (יהושע י:יב). הששית שנאמר רבדה וברק שנאמר ותשר רבדה וברק בן אבינעם (שופטים ה:א). השביעית שנאמר רור שנאמר וידבר רור ליי את רברי השירה הזאת (שמואל ב. 20 כב:א). השמינית שנאמר שלמה שנאמר מזמור שיר חנוכת הבית לרור (תהלים ל:א).

#### 12. את השירה הזאת (Exod. 15:1)

"This song." By isolating this phrase the midrash is pointing to the fact that the Torah says that Israel sang "this song" and not another song. (The Torah could simply have said that Israel sang "a song"). The implication is that there are other songs that Israel has sung. This is the lacuna upon which the midrashist hangs his list of Israel's

ten "greatest hits."<sup>4</sup> The songs are listed in chronological order. This type of enumeration list is typical of midrashic texts.

12-13. הראשונה שנאמרה במצרים

"The first which was said in Egypt." Many other sources mention a song that was sung by Adam<sup>5</sup> However, Adam was not part of Israel and to have included his song would have given the piece a universalistic tone that is not intended by the redactor.

13. השיר יהיה לכם כליל החקרש תג ונ' (Isa. 30:29)

"For you there shall be singing as on a night when a festival is hallowed." In its biblical context, this verse refers to a song that will be sung in the messianic future. At the same time, the description of the singing in this verse is reminiscent of the biblical celebration of Sukkot. The verse continues, "...there shall be rejoicing as when they march with flute, with timbrels, and with lyres to the rock of Israel on the Mount of the Lord." Mishnah Sukkah 5:4 describes the scene on the Temple Mount during the celebration of Sukkot in the Second Temple period. It featured a march with singing, dancing and the playing of musical instruments - including the sounding of the shofar, a messianic symbol.

However, the rabbis did not understand Isaiah 30:29 to be referring to a Sukkot celebration. Rather, they saw it as a reference to "Pesach Mizraim," the (Passover) festival observed by the Israelites on the night preceding their deliverance from Egypt.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the midrashic text uses this as a proof-text for the Israelite song sung in Egypt. Thinking diachronically, it makes sense that the rabbis would associate the singing in Isa. 30:29 with Pesach rather than Sukkot, since both singing (in the form of Hallel) and messianic deliverance (the story of the exodus) were associated in their minds with Pesach and not Sukkot.<sup>7</sup>

In any event, it should be noted that Isa. 30:29 is an ideal verse for bringing out the tension in the Torah text between the Song at the Sea in the past and the messianic song of the future. It clearly employs a future tense verb to describe the song, *ha'shir y'hiyeh* (will be) *lakhem*.<sup>8</sup> One can say that this first song in Egypt will be, one day, the last.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The "ten songs" is a tradition often found in aggadic literature. See Targum Song of Songs 1:1; Aggadat Shir 1:10 and 2:29 on the Song of Abraham; Makiri Is. 5:37 and Ps. 96, 111 (Ginsburg, Legends, vol. VI, p. 11, n. 59).

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., Bereshit Rabba 18:4; Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 4, 34a; Pesikta Rabati 14, 59b.

<sup>6</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, p. 2, n. 1. See B.T. Pesachim 95b and Bereshit Rabba 6:3.

<sup>7</sup>Dr. Norman Cohen, lecture, 11/20/91

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

18. וחַשֵּׁר רְבוּרָה וּבָרַק בֶּן אֲבִינוֹעַם (Judg. 5:1 ff.)

"Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang." This is the beginning of the Song of Deborah. The themes of victory and God's redemption are very much integral to this song as they are to the Song at the Sea. Moreover, note the future tense form of *shir*, חַשֵּׁר.

19. וַיַּדְבֵּר דָּוִד לַיהוָה אֶת רַבֵּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת (II Sam. 22:1 ff.)

"David addressed the words of this song to the Lord." Again, we have the theme of salvation. David is described in this text composing a song to Adonai after God saved him from his enemies and Saul.

וכי דוד בנאו והלא שלמה בנאו שנאמר ויבן שלמה את הבית ויכלהו (מלכים א' ו:יז). ומה חלמוד לומר מזמור שיר חנוכה הבית לרוד (תהלים ל:א). אלא לפי שנתן דוד נפשו עליו לבנותו נקרא על שמו. וכן הוא אומר זכור יי לרוד את כל ענותו אשר נשבע ליי נדר לאביר חקב אם אבא באהל ביתי ונ' עד אמצא 25 מקום ליי ונ' הנה שמענות באפרתה ונ' (תהלים קלב א-ג). מה הוא אומר עתה ראה ביתך דוד (מלכים א' יב:טז). הא לפי שנתן דוד נפשו עליו נקרא על שמו.

21. וכי דוד בנאו

"Was it David who built it?" At this juncture we find a long interpolation into the midrash about the ten songs. The theme of this redactorial insertion is that those who give their life (*nefesh*) for something find it named for them. The first figure discussed is King David, for whom (according to this midrash) the Temple is named.

The preceding text, Psalm 30:1, serves as the jumping off point for the interpolation. The Psalm states that it is a song for the dedication of the House (i.e. the Temple). The rabbis reason that it must have been composed by Solomon, since he is the king who dedicated the Temple. However, the verse says, "a song of the dedication of the House to David." The verse is syntactically awkward and David's place in it unclear. The midrashic section which begins here understands the text as saying that it is David's House. This ambiguity in the biblical text is developed in this section. The other aspect of the verse which is ambiguous is the word, *bayit*, house. *Bayit*, can refer to the Temple, but as with "house," it can refer to the royal dynasty, the "House of David." This ambiguity is also developed.<sup>9</sup>

22-23. לפי שנתן דוד נפשו עליו

"Since he was willing to give his soul for it." The phrase "*natan nefesh al*" also appears in Tractate *Pischa*, *parashah* one. There, it seems to mean "willing to give your

<sup>9</sup>See comment on line 25-26 below for further explication.

life for."<sup>10</sup> However, the prooftext given in this piece, Psalm 132:1-6, does not characterize David as dying for Israel. Rather, it discusses David's vow, his "undying" commitment to building the Temple. This is an important distinction. Thus, we must understand this term as embracing both elements: a total commitment to a cause and/or a willingness to be martyred for it. From the passage here and the passage in *Pischa* it is clear that this willingness to give all is very important to the redactor(s) of the *Mekhilta*. It entitles one to leadership in the community and to having one's name attached to central fixtures in it.

23-24. 'זכור יי לידור את כל ענותו וכו' (Psalm 132:1-6)

"O Lord, remember in David's favor his extreme self-denial...." The first part of this psalm urges God to remember David's extreme dedication and sacrifice for the purpose of finding an abode for God. It serves as a clear prooftext for the notion that the Temple is named for David because of his willingness to give his soul for it.

The second part of the psalm, however, reflects the other notion of *bayit*, i.e., royal "house." The psalm seems to be written from the perspective of Solomon: "Your priests are clothed in triumph; Your loyal ones sing for joy. For the sake of Your servant David do not reject your anointed one. The Lord swore to David a firm oath that He will not renounce, 'One of your own issue I will set upon your throne.'

(Ps. 132:9-10)." Here, the *bayit* that is named for David is the Davidic monarchical house. According to the psalm, the reward for David's commitment to building a house for God is that God will, in turn, maintain his royal house. From the rabbinic perspective, this psalm carries a messianic subtext, since the messiah will be an issue of the house of David. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons that the redactor chose to include this piece in the larger midrash.

25-26. עתה ראה ביתך דוד (I Kings 12:16)

"Now, look to your own House, O David!" The dual meaning of *bayit* is manifest here. In the *pshat* of this verse it refers to David's monarchical house, specifically to Rehoboam, David's grandson. But, midrashically, it refers to both meanings of *bayit*. There is also an irony in the use of this text on the heels of Psalm 132. The psalm refers to an oath that God made to put David's issue on the throne "to the end of time" (132:12), while in this text from Kings most of Israel is repudiating the Davidic House.

<sup>10</sup>See p. 14, line 78, and comment on the same, p. 15. The same phrase can also be found in Tractate *Shabbta*, lines 77-80.

וכן אתה מוצא שכל רבר שאדם נותן נפשו עליו נקרא על שמו. שלשה רברים  
 נתן משה נפשו עליהם ונקראו על שמו. נתן נפשו על התורה ונקראת על שמו  
 שנאמר זכרו תורת משה עברי (מלאכי ג:כב). והלא תורת אלהים היא שנאמר  
 30 תורת יי תמימה משיבת נפש (תהלים יט:ח). הא מה תלמוד לומר תורת משה  
 עברי (מלאכי ג:כב). אלא לפי שנתן נפשו עליה נקראת על שמו. וכי היכן  
 מצינו שנתן נפשו על התורה. שנאמר ויהי שם עם יי וגו' (שמות לר:כח).  
 ואומר ואשב בהר ארבעים יום וגו' (רברים ט:ט). הא לפי שנתן נפשו על  
 התורה נקראת על שמו. נתן נפשו על ישראל ונקראו על שמו שנאמר לך  
 35 רר כי שחת עמך. (שמות לב:ז). והלא עם יי הם שנאמר והם עמך ונחלתך  
 (רברים ט:כט). ואומר באמור להם עם יי אלה וגו' (יחזקאל לו:כ). ומה  
 תלמוד לומר לך רר כי שחת עמך (שמות לב:ז). אלא לפי שנתן נפשו על ישראל  
 נקראו על שמו. וכי היכן מצינו שנתן נפשו על ישראל. שנאמר ויהי בימים ההם  
 וינרל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם וכתוב ויפן כה וכה וגו' (שמות ב:יא-יב).  
 40 הא לפי שנתן נפשו על ישראל נקראו על שמו. נתן נפשו על הרינין ונקראו  
 הרינין על שמו שנאמר שופטים ושופטים תתן לך וגו' (רברים טז:יח). והלא  
 המשפט לאלהים הוא שנאמר כי המשפט לאלהים הוא (שם א:יז). ומה תלמוד לומר  
 תתן לך. אלא לפי שנתן נפשו על הרינין נקראו הרינין על שמו. וכי היכן  
 מצינו שנתן נפשו על הרינין. שנאמר ויצא ביום השני וגו'. ואומר ויאמר  
 45 מי שמך לאיש שר ושופט עלינו. וכתוב וישמע פרעה וגו'. וכתוב ולכהן מרין  
 שבע בנות וגו'. וכתוב ויבאו הרועים ויגרשום. (שמות ב:יז-יז). מרינין  
 ברח ולרינין חזר. צרקה יי עשה ומשפטיו עם ישראל (רברים לז:כא). הא  
 לפי שנתן נפשו על הרינין נקראו הרינין על שמו.

## 27. וכן אתה מוצא

"And thus you find." This is a fairly typical use of this technical term. Here it introduces a general principle related to the case preceding it which, in turn, is to be followed by additional cases that address the same principle.

The theme of the section that begins here is similar to that of the David piece. Both discuss the question of giving your soul for something and having it named for you. Here, the subject is Moses, as opposed to David. While, both are clearly redactional insertions into the 10 songs midrash, it seems that this piece about Moses is an even later interpolation than the David section. The David piece is directly linked to a proof-text cited in the 10 songs midrash. The Moses piece does not contain such link. Rather, it ties in quite nicely with the David segment.

The insertion of the Moses material by the Mekhilta's redactor may be due to the fact that it addresses the tension in the Song of the Sea - and the rest of this midrashic *parashah* - about Moses as a leader and the leader/community relationship generally. This interpolation grants Moses the right to the mantle of leadership on the grounds of his commitment to Torah, Israel and justice. "Moshe Rabbeinu" earns his stripes for the same commitments that the rabbis felt they earned theirs.

The Moses piece is quite extensive, but retains a tight structure. "V'khen atah motzeh" introduces the principle that anything for which a person gives his soul is called by his name, which is followed by a statement that in the case of Moses there were three such things. Each of the three examples are developed in the exact same way, using the



following rhetorical structure:

- a) Introductory statement/proposition  
נחן נפשו על "x" ונקראת על שמו
- b) *שנאמר* followed by a text indicating that "x" was called by Moses' name.
- c) Objection is raised saying "x" belongs to God and is called by God's name.
- d) *שנאמר* followed by prooftext for objection in "c".
- e) Counter-objection, in the form of a question about why the text in "b" is written:  
הא מה חלמור לאמר "ב"?
- f) Answer given confirming proposition "a."
- g) Question demanding a prooftext to support proposition "a," phrased as:  
וכי היכן מצינו שנחן נפשו על "x".
- h) *שנאמר* followed by two or three prooftexts for proposition "a".
- i) Concluding statement confirming "a:"  
הא לפי שנחן נפשו על "x" נקראו על שמו

32. ויהי שם עם יי וני' (Ex. 34:28)

"And he was there with God...." The text states that Moses was on the mountain with God forty days and nights without drinking or eating while he wrote down the ten commandments. The sense of "*natan nafsho*" here seems to be both physical and emotional. Moses' ascetic behavior may well have been seen as a great virtue by the rabbis who engaged in forms of physical self-denial (e.g. fasting) themselves. At the same time, spending forty days on the mountain showed tremendous emotional commitment.

38-39. ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם (Ex. 2:11)

"It happened when Moses grew up that he went out to his brethren and saw them in their chains" (my translation). The sense of *natan nafsho* in this text is twofold. In a literal, physical sense Moses risked his life by going out and killing the Egyptian taskmaster. But, the midrash begins its quote one verse before that action, where Moses is depicted seeing his brothers in their chains. The sense of *natan nafsho* there is that his heart went out to his people. He identified with their pain and responded to it.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that both from the biblical and rabbinic perspective, Moses' response to Israel is one of the reasons that God chooses him to be the leader of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Shemot Rabba 1:32 elaborates on Moses' emotional response in Ex 2:11: "What is the meaning of 'and he saw'? He looked upon their burdens and wept, saying, 'Woe is me for you; would that I could die for you, for there is no labor more strenuous than handling clay.'"

<sup>12</sup>As Shemot Rabba 1:32 continues, "...The Holy One of Blessing said to him, 'You have put aside your own work and gone to share the troubles of Israel, behaving like a brother toward them. So, too, will I leave those on high and speak only to you.'"

## 40. הריינין/הרינים/הרינין

"Justice/the judges." Lauterbach translates הרינין as "justice," and הרינין as "judges." However, in order to make sense out of the midrashic text, he translates הרינים first as "judges" and later as "justice."<sup>13</sup> The Munich manuscript uses הריין instead of הרינים in the later case, so the meaning, "justice," is clear.<sup>14</sup> Vatican 299 manuscript reads only הריינין for "judges."<sup>15</sup> Whatever the original words were, I think the point is clear. Moses gave his soul for the sake of justice and therefore judges or judicial institutions are named for him.

## 41. שופטים ושומרים תתן לך ונ' (Deut. 16:18)

"You shall appoint magistrates and officials...." The midrash is reading the word *l'cha* in an overly literal way. It is as if God is telling Moses personally, "You shall give yourself (*l'cha*) judges and officials...."

## 44. ויצא ביום השני ונ' (Ex. 2:13-17)

"He went out the next day...." This is the second of three incidents that occurred while Moses was a young man which the Torah recounts in Exodus, chapter two. All three incidents show Moses' concern for justice. In the first incident he comes to the defense of a fellow Hebrew who was being unjustly beaten by an Egyptian. In the text cited here, he sees two Israelites fighting, determines which one is in the wrong and tries to intervene on behalf of the victim. He discovers that his killing of the taskmaster is known and he is forced to flee for his life. The third incident occurs after he has fled to Midian. There he comes to the aid of Jethro's daughters who have unjustly been denied access to a watering hole by some Midianite shepherds. In sum, Moses demonstrates that he is willing to act for the sake of justice, regardless of the identity of the victim, even to the extent of risking his life. Through his deep, abiding commitment and willingness to put his life on the line, Moses gave his soul for justice.

## 46-47. מריינין ברח ולריינין חזר

This is a wonderful double entendre. מריינין ברח refers both to Moses having "fled" (*barakh*) "from [Pharaoh's] judges" (*me'dayanin*) and to the "Midianite" (*midyanim*) shepherds whom he caused to "flee" from the well. ולריינין חזר means he "returned" (*chazar*) to Israel to be a judge or leader of "judges" (*dayanim*).

## 47. צרקת יי עשה ומשפתיו עם ישראל (Deut. 33:21)

"He executed the Lord's judgements and His decisions for Israel." On the *pshat* level this is part of Moses' blessing of the tribe of Gad. However, this is an ambiguous text. In fact, the New JPS translation notes that the meaning of the Hebrew here is

<sup>13</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekhilta*, v. 2, p. 4-5.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>Goldin, *Song*, p. 72.

uncertain.<sup>16</sup> Midrashically, it can be translated as, "[Moses] did the Lord's justice [therefore] his judges/law are with (*im*) Israel." Thus, Israel's law/judges are considered as Moses' because Moses did according to God's justice.

החשיעית שאמר יהושפט שנאמר ויועץ על העם ויעמר משוררים ליי ומהללים  
50 בהדרת קרש ונ' ואומר הורו ליי כי לעולם חסרו (דהי"ב כ:כא). ומה  
נשתנית תוריה זו מכל התודיות שבתורה. שבכל תודיות שבתורה נאמר הורו  
ליי כי טוב כי לעולם חסרו וכאן הוא אומר הורו ליי כי לעולם חסרו.  
אלא כביכול לא היתה שמתה לפניו במרום על אברן של רשעים. אם על מיתחן  
של רשעים לא היתה שמתה במרום קל וחומר על הצדיקים שאחר שקול ככל העולם  
55 כולו שנאמר וצדיק יסור עולם (משלי י:כה).

#### 49. יהושפט

"Jehoshaphat." He was the fourth King of Judah (873 - 849 BCE). His father was Asa, who put an end to the strife between the northern and southern kingdoms. Jehoshaphat's reign roughly coincided with that of Ahab in Israel.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Ahab, however, the Bible regards him as having been a righteous king, one of the best of Judah.

#### 49. 'יהושפט על העם ונ' (II Chron. 20:21)

"After taking counsel with the people...." The verse continues, "...he stationed singers to the Lord extolling the One majestic in holiness as they went forth ahead of the vanguard, saying 'Praise the Lord, for His steadfast love is eternal'." This is the "Song of Jehoshaphat," which takes place in the context of a march into battle of Judah's troops. However, this is no ordinary battle. Judah is beleaguered, facing an attack by a large force of Moabites, Ammonites and others. Jehoshaphat turns to God for help, addressing a long public prayer to God in the Temple (19:5-13). He also declares a public fast. In the midst of the crowd in the Temple, the spirit of the Lord falls on one Jahaziel, son of Zechariah, who prophesies to the people to march down into the wadi to meet the enemy, but not to be afraid, "for the battle is God's, not yours." (20:15). Following these directions, Jehoshaphat leads the people forth the next morning. While they are marching and singing, God causes Israel's enemies to turn against each other. By the time the people of Judah arrive, the enemy is already dead. God has wrought a miracle, defeating Israel's enemies for them. Then "the terror of God seized all the kingdoms of the lands" (20:29) and the kingdom of Jehoshaphat lived in peace.

There are significant parallels here to the Song at the Sea. In both cases Israel was

<sup>16</sup>Tanakh, p. 332.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Calvocoressi, Who's Who In The Bible, (Middlesex England: Viking, 1987) p. 98.

in dire straits, facing an enemy much more powerful than she. Israel looked to God for help and received it in a miraculous form. The enemy was wiped out by God and Israel saved without a battle. Surrounding peoples are filled with a dread of Israel and her God. Moreover, song plays a prominent role in both events.

49-50. ויועץ על העם (II Chron. 20:21)

"After taking counsel with the people...." The masoretic text says "ויועץ אל העם" instead of, "על העם." The midrash here (both Lauterbach and Horowitz/Rabin) also has "ואומר הורו ליי" where the masoretic text has "ואמרים." This distinction amounts to the distinction between Jehoshaphat singing alone/leading (ואומר) or the singers singing as a group (ואמרים). Once again, the midrash, using ואומר, is expressing tension between leader and group in the context of song.

50-51. מה נשתניח

"Why is this different..." A technical term, similar to what we find in the the four questions in the Passover Haggadah. This is early midrashic language.<sup>18</sup>

51-52. הורו ליי כי לעולם חסרו

In most of the songs of praise that begin "הורו ליי" in the Bible continue with the words "כי טוב." This common form was undoubtedly sung by the rabbis whenever they recited Hallel. The absence of "כי טוב" is, thus, jarring. It seems to imply an absence of goodness in God. In this midrash it is taken to indicate a lack of שמחה, happiness, before God in heaven because of the death that has fallen upon Israel's enemies. This midrash is similar in theme to the one where God rebukes Israel for celebrating at the Song at the Sea saying, "My creatures are dying and you sing praises?"

54-55. על הצדיקים שאחר שקול ככל העולם כולו

"One righteous person is as important as the entire world." See above, "שקלים כמשה" "משה שקול כישראל וישראל". It is not clear to me if the midrashist has in mind a particular person who is righteous or is simply bringing this in as *greirah*.<sup>19</sup> In the context of Hadrianic persecutions (if this is the context of this midrash) the statement that God cares for the wicked, oppressor of Israel is quite a statement. Perhaps, there was a need to add something to give comfort to the righteous who were suffering.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>N. Cohen, lecture, November 25, 1991.

<sup>19</sup>See ch. 1, p. 5-6 for definition of "*greirah*."

<sup>20</sup>N. Cohen, lecture, November 25, 1991.

העשירית לעתיד לבא שנאמר שירו ליי שיר חדש תהלתו מקצה הארץ (ישעיה מבי:).  
 ואומר שירו ליי שיר חדש תהלתו בקהל חסידים (תהלים קמט:א). כל השירות  
 שעברו קרואות בלשון נקבה. כשם שהנקבה יולדת כך התשועות שעברו היו אתריהן  
 שעבור. אבל התשועה העתידה להיות אין אתריה שעבור. לכך קרואה בלשון זכר  
 60 שנאמר שאלו נא וראו אם יולד זכר (ירמיה לו:ו). כשם שאין הזכר יולד כך  
 התשועה העתידה לבא לא יהא אתריה שעבור שנאמר ישראל נושע ביי תשועת  
 עולמים (ישעיה מה:יז).

#### 57-58. כל השירות שעברו קרואות בלשון נקבה

"All of the songs of the past were written using the feminine form."  
 That is, they were called "שירה", while the messianic song will be in the masculine,  
 "שיר." (It should be noted that this is not completely accurate. If one glances at the 10  
 songs listed here, some are called "שיר".)

#### 58-59. כשם שהנקבה יולדת...שעבור

"Just as the female gives birth, so the salvations of the past were followed by  
 enslavement." The midrash is comparing birth to a moment of salvation or redemption,  
 an apt comparison. Birth is one of those moments of song. But, after birth there is a  
 return to subjugation (*shiabud*). Is it that the midrashist is calling a woman's daily life  
 "subjugation"? Maybe. Certainly, the rabbis recognized childbirth as something painful.  
 On the other hand, it may simply be the imagery of giving birth to something. An  
 "ordinary salvation" gives birth to another period of subjugation for the people. This is  
 the view of Jewish history presented by this midrash. Similarly, in ordinary  
 circumstances poetry must give way to prose.<sup>21</sup> The song of the future redemption,  
 however, will be male because it won't give birth to anything but itself. It will be  
 permanent. Another way of looking at it is to say that implicit in the birthing process,  
 as glorious as it is, is labor. In the moment of *shirah*, there is still the seed of the  
 ordinary, the *shiabud*.

#### 60. שאלו נא וראו אם יולד זכר (Jer. 30:6)

"Ask and see: Surely males do not bear young..." In addition to acting as a  
 proof-text, this verse from Jeremiah 30 injects the messianic energy contained in this  
 prophetic text: "For the days are coming - declares the Lord - when I will restore the  
 fortunes of My people Israel and Judah, said the Lord; and I will bring them back to the  
 land that I gave their fathers..." (Jerem. 30:3). The image in Jeremiah 30:6 is that of  
 men reacting to the terror preceding the redemption by putting their hands on their loins  
 "like a woman in labor."

<sup>21</sup>The movement in this *parasha* from prose to poetry and back to prose is discussed  
 in the "overview" section at the end of this chapter.

לִי. לִי אִמְרוּהָ וְלֹא אִמְרוּהָ לְבָשָׁר וָדָם. כִּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לְהֵלֵךְ וּתְצַאנָה הַנָּשִׁים מִכָּל  
עַרְיֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְשִׁיר וְהַמְחִילוּת לְקִרְאָתָא שְׁאוּל וְנָוִי וְאֹמֵר וּתְעִינָה הַנָּשִׁים הַמְשַׁחֲקוֹת  
65 וְנָוִי (שְׁמוּאֵל א. יח:ו-ז). אֲבָל כֵּאֵן לִי אִמְרוּהָ וְלֹא אִמְרוּהָ לְבָשָׁר וָדָם.

63. לִי אִמְרוּהָ וְלֹא אִמְרוּהָ לְבָשָׁר וָדָם.

"They said it (i.e., the song) to God and they did not say it to flesh and blood." There is no doubt that a major theme of Shirta and the Song at the Sea is that all victory, all salvation comes from God. God is the Warrior responsible for the victory at the sea and all others. Therefore, all praise must go to God. Throughout history men have boasted of their power and glory; from Pharaoh to Saddam Hussein. Near Eastern history is riddled with windbags. Praise of such "flesh and blood" is unwarranted.<sup>22</sup>

63-65. (I Sam. 18:6-7) וּתְצַאנָה הַנָּשִׁים...וּתְעִינָה הַנָּשִׁים וְנָוִי.

"...the women of all the towns of Israel came out singing and dancing with timbrels, shouting and sistrums. And the women who were dancing responded and sang...." This proof-text depicts the women of Israel singing praises to David and Saul when the two return from battle. Again, we have a parallel to the Song at the Sea. Here, Israel has just won a victory and the women are dancing and singing in celebration. Even the word used to describe the women's actions, *va'taaneinah* ("they responded"), comes from the same root as *va'taan* in Exod 15:21 ("Miriam responded"). However, here a negative twist is given to the women's singing in I Sam. 18. They sang their praises to David and Saul, who are flesh and blood. In the Song at the Sea the praises are sung to God, who truly deserves them.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר. רַבִּי נַחֲמִיָּה אֹמֵר רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שָׁרָת עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיוּ אֹמְרִים שִׁירָה כִּבְנֵי  
אָרֶם שֶׁהֵן קוֹרִין אֶת שְׁמֵעַ. רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אֹמֵר רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שָׁרָת עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָיוּ אֹמְרִים  
שִׁירָה כִּבְנֵי אָרֶם שֶׁהֵן קוֹרִאִין אֶת הַהֵלֶל. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בֶּן תְּרָאִי אֹמֵר מֹשֶׁה הָיָה  
פּוֹתֵחַ בְּרַבְרִים תַּחֲלָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲנִין אַחֲרָיו וְנִמְרִין עִמּוֹ. מֹשֶׁה הָיָה פּוֹתֵחַ וְאֹמֵר  
70 אֲשִׁירָה לִי כִּי גָאָה גָאָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲנִין אַחֲרָיו וְנִמְרִין עִמּוֹ אֲשִׁירָה לִי כִּי גָאָה  
גָאָה סוֹס וְרוֹכְבּוֹ רִמָּה בִּים. מֹשֶׁה הָיָה פּוֹתֵחַ וְאֹמֵר עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲנִין  
אַחֲרָיו וְנִמְרִין עִמּוֹ עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה לִי לִישׁוּעָה. מֹשֶׁה הָיָה פּוֹתֵחַ וְאֹמֵר  
יְיָ אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲנִין אַחֲרָיו וְנִמְרִין עִמּוֹ יְיָ אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְיָ שְׁמוֹ.

66. וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר.

"And they said saying." (Exod. 15:1, my trans.) The redundancy here is what sparks the rabbis' responses. Specifically, the doubling of [אָמַר] suggests to the rabbis a doubling of speech in the song.

Rabbi Nehemiah suggests that the song was sung like the "Sh'ma." Scholars today believe that in the rabbinic period the Sh'ma was declared antiphonally, like a modern

<sup>22</sup>Goldin, *Song*, pp. 31-32.

"responsive reading." The shaliach tzibbur (service leader) would say or chant "Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one." The kahal (congregation) would respond, "Blessed is [God's] glorious kingdom forever and ever."<sup>23</sup>

Rabbi Eliezer suggests a form of antiphonal singing whereby Moses would sing half of a verse and Israel would respond by repeating the half-verse Moses said and then completing the verse with him. This is also a type of doubling, suggested by the text.

Rabbi Akiva suggests that the song was sung like the Hallel. Perhaps this seemed fitting because Hallel is a song of praise to God, celebrating God's actions in history on behalf of Israel - a rabbinic liturgical version of the Song at the Sea. It has been suggested that during the rabbinic period the Hallel was sung much like it often is today. The leader would sing the verses of the song and the group would sing a refrain. Here *אשירה ליי כי נאה נאה* would likely be the refrain.<sup>24</sup>

It should be noted that this section picks up the theme of the nature of leadership and the relationship of leader and community. In the Hallel described above, the leader has much more power and the community's response is less creative and important. In R. Nehemiah's song the people have much more independence, singing their own words - they are equals (*shakul*) to the leader.

#### 66. רוח הקודש שרתה על ישראל

"The holy spirit rested on Israel." This wording is quite similar to what we found in the piece from B'shalach analyzed in the last chapter. There we found, "*sharta aleihem ruach ha'kodesh v'amru shirah*," which also referred to the holy spirit resting on Israel when they sang the Song at the Sea. The similarity suggests that some of the same redactors were involved in both pieces.

#### 68-69. משה היה פותח...וישראל עונים...

"Moses would begin...and Israel would respond...." Three examples are used to demonstrate R. Eliezer's idea of how the song was sung. However, it seems that more is going on here than the making of an intellectual point. In reading this passage one gets an inkling of the repetition and rhythm of the song as R. Eliezer understood it. The message of this section, then, is delivered affectively through the "feel" of the words, as well as cognitively. The musicality of the material in this parashah intensifies from here through the next few chunks of text.

אשירה ליי כי נאה. ליי נאה נרולה ליי נאה נבורה ליי נאה התפארת והנצח  
75 ויהוד. וכן דור אומר לך יי הנרולה והתפארת והנצח ויהוד.

#### 74. ליי נאה נרולה נאה נבורה...

<sup>23</sup>Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, lecture, 2/22/90.

<sup>24</sup>N. Cohen, lecture, Nov. 27, 1991.

"It is proper to [ascribe] greatness to Adonai, to [ascribe] mightiness...." The verse states, "I will sing to Adonai, for [Adonai] is highly exalted" (Exod. 15:1). In terms of cognitive content, this midrashic comment brings out the causal connection implicit in the verse between God's greatness and our praise of God. That is, the verse is teaching us that since God is exalted, it is proper that we should respond by declaring and expounding on this exaltedness. It is no accident, then, that this piece sounds like a prayer and that the proof-text is part of our Torah service. Indeed, much of the Jewish worship service - particularly the prayers or praise - was developed during the period when the Mekhilta was redacted.<sup>25</sup>

This comment is, in effect, a poetic doxology - a prayer, if you will - based on the words of I Chronicles 29:11. Judah Goldin has versified it in translation:

I will sing unto the Lord, for He is exalted:

In-the-Lord greatness is-comely

In-the-Lord power is-comely

In-the-Lord glory, victory and majesty are comely<sup>26</sup>

The flow of verse is even more rhythmic in the original Hebrew:

לִי נָא גְדוּלָּה  
לִי נָא נִכְרָה  
לִי נָא הַתְּפָאֶרֶת, וְהַנְּצַח וְהַהוֹר

In this one line there is a rhythm fostered by the repetition of descriptive nouns and the word *na'eh*. There may also be visual poetic game being played out with the word "נָאֵה," which looks like "נֶאֱהָ." However, the proof-text here is so well known that it is unnecessary. It is an indication that the redactor has not completely left the intellectual, exegetical mode of writing.

<sup>25</sup>Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, lecture, 2/22/90. Current theories about the development of much of our worship service - the Amidah and the Shma and its blessings - may actually be helpful in understanding how the Mekhilta was composed. Dr. Hoffman, among others, argues that during the Tannaitic period the basic themes and order of the service were developed, but the specific words were not concretized at that time. We can posit, similarly, that traditions surrounding the text of Exodus were repeated and taught in various forms before they were written down and finally redacted in the Amoraic period. Furthermore, comments in the Mekhilta comparing the singing of the Song at the Sea to the Shma and Hallel, and the doxological style suggested by Rabbi Eliezer, invite a comparison between the poetic writing in Shirta and the more ancient prayers in our worship service (e.g. Bar'chu, Shma, K'dusha etc.). In this study we can only make note of the connection.

<sup>26</sup>Goldin, *The Song*, p. 80.



אשירה ליי כי נאה נאה. מלך בשר ודם שנכנס למדינה והיו הכל מקלסין לפניו  
 שהוא נכור ואינו אלא חלש שהוא עשיר ואינו אלא עני שהוא חכם ואינו אלא טפש  
 שהוא רחמני ואינו אלא אכזרי שהוא ריין שהוא נאמן ואין בו אתה מכל המדות  
 הללו. אלא הכל מחניפין לו. אבל מי שאמר והיה העולם אינו כן. אלא  
 80 אשירה ליי שהוא נכור שנאמר האל הגדול הגבור והנורא ונ' (רברים י:ז).  
 ואומר יי עוזו ונכור יי נכור מלחמה (תהלים כד:ח). ואומר יי כנבור יצא  
 ונ' (ישעיה מב:יג). ואומר מאין כבוד יי גדול אתה וגדול שמך בגבורה  
 (ירמיה י:ו). אשירה ליי שהוא עשיר שנאמר הן ליי אלהיך השמים ונ'  
 (רברים י:ד). ואומר ליי הארץ ומלואה ונ' (תהלים כד:א). ואומר אשר לו הים  
 85 ונ' (שם צה:ה). ואומר לי הכסף ולי הזהב ונ' (תהלים כד:ח). ואומר הן כל  
 הנפשות לי הנה ונ' (יחזקאל יח:ד). אשירה ליי שהוא חכם שנאמר יי בחכמה יסד  
 ארץ (משלי ג:יט). ואומר עמו חכמה וגבורה ונ' (איוב יג:יג). ואומר כי  
 יי יתן חכמה ונ' (משלי ב:ו). ואומר יהיב חכמתא לחכימין ונ' (רניאל  
 ב:כא). מי לא ייראך מלך הגוים ונ' כי בכל חכמי הגוים ובכל מלכותם מאין  
 90 כבוד (ירמיה י:ז). אשירה ליי שהוא רחמן שנאמר יי אל רחום וחנון ונ'  
 (שמות לד:ו). ואומר כי אל רחום יי ונ' (רברים ד:לא). ואומר זכור רחמך יי  
 ונ' (תהלים כה:ו). ואומר טוב יי לכל ורחמיו ונ' (שם קמה:ט). ואומר ליי  
 אלהינו הרחמים והסליחות (רניאל ט:ט). אשירה ליי שהוא ריין שנאמר כי  
 המשפט לאלהים הוא (רברים א:יז). ואומר עלהים נצב בערת אל ונ' (תהלים  
 95 פב:א). ואומר הצור נמים פעלו ונ' (רברים לב:ד). אשירה ליי שהוא  
 נאמן שנאמר האל הנאמן ונ' (שם ז:ט). ואומר אל אמונה ונ' (שם לב:ד).  
 הא ליי נאה הגבורה והתפארת והנצח וההוד.

#### 76. מלך בשר ודם

"A king of flesh and blood." The use of this phrase in a midrash is typical of a *mashal*. That is, we expect to find here a schematic story which explicates the Biblical text by "assigning a deep-structural description to the elliptic narrative of the Torah..."<sup>27</sup> However, this comment is missing the usual introduction of a *mashal* form, "*mashal l'*." It seems that the redactor realized that this schematic story is not an ordinary *mashal*. Instead of the usual direct analogy between the "king of flesh and blood" and God, we have a deliberate contrast established. All of the praises given to the human king are false flattery. However, the praises given to God in the Song at the Sea are true. In effect, we have here a "negative *mashal*."

It is helpful to try and look at this diachronically. By the time the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael was redacted the Jews had long lived under Roman rule. The scene described here of a king entering a province and all who approach him heap flattering phrases upon him was all too familiar to them. To those oppressed by this human ruler, this must have been grating and degrading. Surely, these tyrannical, pompous emperors did not deserve

<sup>27</sup>Boyarin, p. 85. For a fascinating analysis of the nature and function of *mashal* in the midrash, see Boyarin, pp. 80-92.

this praise. Meanwhile, the rabbis spent much time in worship of the King of Kings, where similar words were uttered in praise of Adonai, their "Lord." It is not hard to imagine that on some level they felt a tension or anxiety regarding their own words of prayer. Were their words praise false flattery like those uttered to the emperor? Is it possible that outsiders, who didn't believe in their God, construed them as such? It is natural that the Song of the Sea, a Biblical hymn in praise of God, would arouse this tension in the writer(s)/redactor(s), leading to the creation of this "negative mashal."

77. שהוא נבור ואינו חלש

"That he is mighty, while he is in fact weak." In keeping with the biblical text, "I will sing unto God...", the poetic, rhythmic quality of this midrash is evident. Here we have a litty of oppositional meanings that can be versified in the following manner:

"that-he-is mighty but-he-is only (a) weakling

that-he-is rich but-he-is only (a) pauper...

that-he-is just

that-he-is trustworthy...<sup>28</sup>

79. אבל מי שאמר והיה העולם...

"But, the One Who Spoke and the World Came Into Being...." What we have here is clearly a shaped piece. The "king of flesh and blood" section preceding this statement lists 6 flattering characteristics, which are rejected for the mortal king. What follows is a litty of the exact same attributes which, when applied to God, are enthusiastically embraced. Each of the attributes are supported by a number of proof texts. The first four attributes are supported by either four or five (or six) proof texts, while the last two attributes are followed by three and two proof texts, respectively.<sup>29</sup> It has been argued that the first 4 attributes should have 5 proof texts each.<sup>30</sup> For the sake of poetic symmetry it would be nice if this were true. However, I cannot draw such a conclusion from the printed editions that I looked at:

	<u>Lauterbach</u>	<u>Hor/Rab</u>	<u>Goldin</u>
נבור	4	4	4
עשיר	5	5	5
חכם	4	5	5
רחמן	5	6	5
דיין	3	3	3
נאמן	2	2	2

<sup>28</sup>Goldin, The Song, pp. 81-82.

<sup>29</sup>Different manuscript traditions beneath the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael have differing numbers of proof texts for each of the first 4 attributes, ranging from 4 to 6.

<sup>30</sup>Dr. Norman Cohen, lecture, 11/27/91.

Interestingly, the pattern shown here mirrors the pattern established in the "king of flesh and blood" section above. There we have four consecutive longer statements and then two shorter statements after them. Thus, there is a clear, rhythmic pattern established, which is then repeated in a different form (using prooftexts) when the pattern is applied to God. It is worth noting, too, that a similar pattern is employed in the prior comment on "*Ashirah l'Adonai ki ga'oh*." In that comment there are three (not four) longer phrases followed by two shorter ones. This gives the midrash almost a breathless quality associated with an up-tempo song.<sup>31</sup>

But, the pattern runs even deeper, embracing the sources of the prooftexts as well as their number. An analysis of the prooftexts for the first four attributes reveals that verses are cited in the order: 1, Torah; 2, Ketuvim, then 3, Neviim.<sup>32</sup>

T=Torah K=Ketuvim N=Neviim

#### Lauterbach

גבור	עשיר	חכם	רחמן
T Deut	T Deut	K Proverbs	T Exodus
K Psalms	K Psalms	K Job	T Deut.
N Isaiah	K Psalms	K Proverbs	K Psalms
N Jer.	N Hagai	K Daniel	K Psalms
	N Ezek.		K Daniel

#### Horowitz/Rabin

גבור	עשיר	חכם	רחמן
T Deut.	T Deut.	K Proverbs	T Exodus
K Psalms	K Psalms	K Job	K Psalms (an insert)
N Isaiah	K Psalms	K Proverbs	T Deut.
N Jer.	N Hagai	K Daniel	K Psalms
	N Ezek.		K Psalms
			K Daniel

One can see that each attribute does not have prooftexts from all 3 sections of Tanach,

<sup>31</sup>N. Cohen, lecture, December 2, 1991.

<sup>32</sup>This analysis was suggested by Dr. Norman Cohen, lecture, 11/27/91. The only exception can be found in the Horowitz/Rabin edition where under רחמן a Psalms text precedes one from Deuteronomy. However, this verse has been inserted by Horowitz/Rabin in this position and their apparatus indicates that the verse is missing from several manuscripts.

but the order is maintained in each case.<sup>33</sup> Beyond that, it is hard to find particular significance in these texts, either in the books or content of the particular verses cited. Rather, what is important is the rhythmic pattern which gives the feel of a song. Each statement of praise to God is punctuated with the base text, "*Ashirah l'Adonai*." Not only does this come across as a musical refrain, but the refrain, "I will sing unto God," telegraphs the message to the reader that this is meant to be a song. One can go so far as to say that what we have here follows the "Hallel" pattern described above.<sup>34</sup>

97. **הא ליי נאה הגבורה והתפארת והנצח והדור**

"Thus, it is proper to [ascribe] to Adonai might, glory, victory and majesty." The word "הא" is used to introduce a conclusive statement. The statement itself, however, reaches back to the comment before the "king of flesh and blood" parable. In essence, it summarizes that midrashic comment and not the one to which it is appended here. The attributes of God in the two pieces are completely different. While we might assume that this is a redactorial blunder, it would be fair to give the redactor - who organized this ingenious "musical" piece - the benefit of the doubt. I would argue that the redactor recognized the rhythmic and thematic similarity between the two pieces and placed this conclusion here deliberately to tie the two sections together into a musical whole.

אשירה ליי שהוא נאה שהוא הדור שהוא משובח ועין כערכו שנאמר כי מי בשחק  
יערך ליי ונ' ואומר אל נערץ בסוד קדושים רבה ואומר יי אלהי צבאות כי כמוך  
100 חסין יה (תהלים פט:זט). מהו צבאות. אות הוא בתוך צבא שלו. וכן הוא אומר  
ואתא מרבבות קדש (רברים לג:ב). אות הוא בתוך רבבות קדש שלו. וכן דור הוא  
אומר אין כמוך באלהים יי ונ' (תהלים פו:ח). וכן הוא אומר דודי צח וארום  
ונ' ואומר ראשו כתרם פז ונ' ואומר עיניו כיונים ונ' ואומר לחיי כערונת  
הבושם ונ' ואומר ירי גלילי זהב ונ' ואומר שוקיו עמודי שש ונ' (שה'ש ה:יא-טו).

98. **אשירה ליי שהוא נאה...ואין כערכו**

"I will sing to Adonai' for [Adonai] is beautiful...and there are none comparable to [Adonai]." This section seems to be addressing the tension between God who is beyond compare, beyond the hosts of heaven and God who is as close to us as a lover. The phrase, "*ashira l'Adonai ki ga'oh ga'ah*," itself raises this tension. For, how can I sing to one who is so transcendent, so exalted? Psalm 89:7-9 and Deut. 33:2 both place God

<sup>33</sup>The 4 prooftexts for חכם are from Ketuvim; three of the four are from the "wisdom literature" of the Bible.

<sup>34</sup>See comment on **ויאמרו לאמר**, line 66.

among the heavenly hosts, but elevate God above the others. (Like "*mi khamokhah*" in the Song at the Sea itself). This elevation is read and extended by the midrash through micro analysis of the words "צבאות" and "אתא." "צבאות," "myriads," is understood as "אות' הוא בתוך 'צבא' שלו." "God is the ensign among His host." "אתא" is read as its Aramaic meaning, "sign." Thus, God is a sign, "מרכבות קדש," "apart from the holy myriads." Not only is God among the hosts of heaven; God is above even these hosts.

The text from Song of Songs creates the opposite effect from the Psalms and Deuteronomy texts. God is so close as to be Israel's lover. God's physical attributes can be described in detail. Or perhaps, like the medieval mystics the point is that God is described as so physically astounding that God is indescribable.

In terms of theme, it should be noted that the leader-follower tension is brought up again in terms of God's relationship to the hosts of heaven. This tension parallels the tension in this parshah about Moses' leadership role and his relationship to the people. However, this theme is secondary in this section to the relationship between God and people and our ability to effectively praise a God who is both so far and so near.

In terms of form, the musical flow is broken in the middle of the section as the midrash returns to a cognitive, analytical mode of explication. Still, the musicality remains in the first line and in the beauty of the texts chosen. Also, it is important to note the texts here taken from Psalms and Song of Songs. These intertexts are themselves "songs." Thus the song theme is maintained, with one song commenting on the other.

105 רבי יוסי הנלילי אומר הרי הוא אומר מפי עוללים ויונקים יסרת עוז (תהלים ח:נ). עוללים אלו שבמעי אמן שנאמר או כנפל פמון לא אהיה כעוללים לא ראו אור (איוב נ:טז). יונקים אלו שיונקים משרי אמן שנאמר אספו עוללים ויונקי שרים (יואל ב:טז). רבי אומר עוללים אלו שבחזן שנאמר להכרית עולל מחזן (ירמיה ט:כ). ואומר עוללים שאלו לחם (איכה ד:ד). יונקים אלו שעל שרי אמן 110 שנאמר אספו עוללים ויונקי שרים (יואל שם). אלו ואלו פתחו פיהם ואמרו שירה לפי המקום שנאמר אשירה ליי וגי'. רבי מאיר אומר אף עוברין שבמעי אמן פתחו פיהם ואמרו שירה לפני המקום שנאמר במקלות ברכו אלהים וגי' (תהלים סח:כו). ולא ישראל בלבד אמרו שירה לפני המקום אלא אף מלאכי השרת שנאמר יי ארוננו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ אשר תנה הורך על השמים (שם ח:ב).

105. רבי יוסי הנלילי אומר ...

"Rabbi Yossi the Galilean says...." In terms of form, the midrash continues to move away from the poetic/song style and move back towards the more typically cognitive exegetical style. A verse is presented containing two words that need definition. The opinions of two rabbis are cited regarding these words and a proof-text is quoted in support of each definition. A third rabbi is cited who makes a similar point to the first, then a final "cap" statement is made, extending the point even further. We could be reading a beraita from the Talmud!

In terms of content, the midrash has now moved completely away from the question

of how the song was sung.<sup>35</sup> The question here seems to be: who sang the Song at the Sea? The simple answer is that the Torah says "*Az yashir Moshe u'Vnei Yisrael*," so it was Moses and Israel who sang the song.<sup>36</sup> But, what are the parameters of "Israel?" An intertext from Psalms is brought (8:3), "From the mouths of infants (*ol'lim*) and sucklings (*yonkim*) You have founded strength on account of your foes, to put an end to enemy and be avenged." The redactor(s) has interpreted the vengeance here to refer to the events at the Reed Sea and that which comes out of the mouths of *ol'lim* and *yonkim* to be the Song at the Sea.<sup>37</sup>

The statements by R. Yossi and Rabbi differ only on who are *ol'lim*? R. Yossi says they are fetuses and Rabbi says they are children old enough to be out on the street. It seems to be R. Yossi's opinion which most interests the redactor, for he cites R. Meir as saying *ubarim* (embryos) in their mothers' wombs opened their mouths and sang the song to God.

Why make the argument that fetuses sang the Song at the Sea? It goes beyond the point that an additional miracle occurred. For one, it ties the crossing of the Reed Sea in with the notion of actual birth. This was the birth of Israel. More importantly, it makes the statement that future generations sang the Song - future generations of Israel. Thus, time boundaries are broken and we once again look towards the singing of the future - the messianic shir. As if to emphasize this timelessness and breaking of typical human boundaries, the parashah concludes with the statement that the ministering angels also sang the song. Thus, the redactor, in saving this section to the end of the parashah, gives us a *nechemta*.

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<sup>35</sup>Indeed, it is no accident that at the point when the content of the midrash moves away from the form of the Song at the Sea the midrash itself moves away from the form of song.

<sup>36</sup>One could argue that this passage should have been tied to that text and not לִי אֲשִׁירָה. My own sense is that this would have created a problem for the flow of the piece as a whole, since it would have meant injecting a new theme in the middle of a different section. Thematically, this section fits better here, at the end of the parasha. (see below)

<sup>37</sup>I say this was the redactor's interpretation, because it is not clear from R. Yossi's statement alone that it refers to the Song at the Sea. That tie-in is made below. ("Elu v'elu patchu pihem v'amru shirah," "Both of these opened their mouths and sang a song.")

## OVERVIEW

Massekhta d'Shirta is the Mekhilta's midrash on the Song at the Sea, perhaps the greatest of the biblical songs or poems. The midrash responds to this biblical text with its own unique blend of thematic commentary and evocative poetry. Like the first chapter of Massekhta d'Pischa, the first chapter of Shirta is couched as a midrash on but one verse from the Torah: "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. They said: I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously...(Exodus 15:1)." However, the midrash in this chapter responds to the moment in the text much more so than the midrash from Chapter One of Pischa. This chapter is largely concerned with the Song itself: how was it sung; who sang it; what historical, biblical context should we place it in; what is its content; how should it be understood. At the same time, the midrash demonstrates a concern over the relationship between leader and followers, which amounts to a secondary, though related, theme. But, most importantly, this chapter of Shirta is about the tension between prose and poetry; between analysis and song; between the prosaic parts of life and those rare moments of exaltation; between oppression and redemption.

Form and Style

In other tractates of the Mekhilta the forms and style employed by the midrash play a role in expressing the message of the piece. We saw in Massekhta d'Beshallah, in the midrashic piece immediately preceding this piece

from Shirta, how the use of rhythm and repetition brought out the moment of euphoric faith that the Israelites felt right before they sang at the sea. We shall see below, that the dispute form is used in Chapter One of Va'yassa to help express the different readings of the text inherent in the midrash. However, nowhere is the medium the message more than in Shirta. It has already been suggested that this midrash explicates song with song and a detailed analysis of the rhythm and poetry of that midrashic song is given in the commentary above. In order to understand the full message implicit in the style of this piece, however, it is helpful to take a broader look at its dynamic:

<u>Lines</u>	<u>Base-text</u>	<u>Form and Style</u>
1-9	<i>az yashir moshe</i> "Then sang Moses"	Propositional form based on exegetic comment;  Prosaic style but with  rhythmic citation of verses
10-11	<i>moshe u'v'nei Yisrael</i> "Moses and Israel"	Propositional form based on exegetic comment;  Prosaic style
12-20	<i>et ha'shirah ha'zot</i>	Enumeration list;  Prosaic style
21-26		Propositional form;  Prosaic style
27-48		Propositional form



		with syllogistic argument;
		Prosaic style
49-55		Propositional form;
		Prosaic style
56-62		Propositional form;
		Prosaic style
63-65	<i>l'Adonai</i>	Proposition based on
	"to the Lord"	exegetic comment;
		Prosaic style
66-73	<i>va'yomru leimor</i>	Dispute form;
	"They said"	Prosaic style
74-75	<i>ashira l'Adonai ki ga'oh</i>	Poetic verse;
	"I will sing to the	Rhythmic repetition of God's
	Lord, for He has	name and adjectives of praise
	triumphed"	
76-97	<i>ashira l'Adonai ki</i>	mashal as' cognitive spring-
	<i>ga'oh ga'ah</i>	board for poetic verse, then
	"I will sing to the	rhythmic series of verses in
	Lord, for He has	set pattern; Poetic style
	triumphed gloriously"	
98-104	<i>ashira l'Adonai</i>	Poetic verse and propositional
	"I will sing to the	form; rhythmic poetry breaks

Lord"	down into prose
105-114	Dispute form;
	Prosaic style

A quick glance down the "form and style" column reveals that the material in the first half to two-thirds of the piece is prosaic and largely propositional in form. In other words, it resembles what we find in much of the Mekhilta, including the sections below from Massekhta d'Pischa. Following this material there are several sections written in a markedly poetic style, more rhythmic and patterned even than the material in the piece below from B'shallach. This, in turn, is followed by a section that begins poetically and then shifts into a more prosaic mode. The last section is thoroughly prosaic, resembling a talmudic debate in form and style. The flow, then, is from a series of prosaic pieces, to a burst of poetic material, and then, more slowly, back down to prose.

It is not far fetched to say that the flow of this *parashah* mimics the flow of events during the latter stages of the crossing of the Reed Sea. The Israelites spend many hours trudging through the mud in the midst of the sea, worried about their survival. They finally reach the other side, the sea closes on the Egyptians, and they suddenly realize the true extent of the miracle wrought by God. Overcome with a euphoric, passionate faith in God and Moses, they burst into song. After a period of singing, in different forms, they grow tired and begin to look forward, towards the difficult journey into the desert that awaits

them. The song and poetry dissolve back into prose.

The placement of the citations from the base-text support the assertion that the redactor was following a deliberate plan in developing this piece. *"Az yashir moshe u'v'nei yisrael et ha'shirah ha'zot l'Adonai"* ("Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. They said...") is not actually part of the song, but merely the introduction to it. It is not poetry, but prose. The poetry or song begins with *"ashira l'Adonai ki ga'oh ga'ah"* ("I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously.") Looking down the "base-text" and "form and style" columns it is apparent that the sections of midrashic poetry only begin at the exact point at which the biblical poetry begins. This cannot be an accident. Moreover, the final section, which returns to prose, is not directly linked to a particular phrase of the base-text, thus its prosaic style does not violate this pattern.

There is a more particular pattern within the midrashic poetic material itself, which seems to follow the same structure as the piece as a whole. We saw above that the rhythmic pattern of all three poetic-style midrashic pieces involved several long phrases or long series of verses, followed by a few words uttered in a staccato fashion or a few shorter series of verses.<sup>38</sup> In essence, each is characterized by a powerful burst of poetry, which is sustained for a while, and then breaks down into smaller units of expression before disappearing altogether. Interestingly, the biblical base-text is cited in a way that matches this pattern.

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<sup>38</sup>See comment on line 79.

The first poetic burst of midrashic material comes after the citation *ashira l'Adonai ki ga'oh*. The second and largest of the pieces of poetic material follows *ashira l'Adonai ki ga'oh ga'ah*. The last section which contains a bit of poetry then fades into prose follows a short repetition of *ashira l'Adonai*. It seems unlikely that this pattern was followed by chance. In fact, I would venture to say that the integration of form and style in this piece so as to express the emotional essence of the biblical moment can only be the work of a single, brilliant redactor.

#### Topical Flow and Thematic Development

This is the only piece of the six analyzed in this paper in which the topical flow or argument is less important than the dynamics of form and style. Still, it is worth a brief look at the development of themes in the material:

Lines 1-9: This section functions as an introduction. Stylistically, it is almost a combination of prose and poetry. Thematically, it defines how one should read the Song at the Sea. It should be understood simultaneously as an event of the past and a paradigm for the messianic song of the future.

Lines 10-11: These lines discuss the relationship of leader and follower within the singing of the song. The tension is between whether the song made them equal or whether Moses remained the leader during this ecstatic moment of song.

Lines 12-20: The Song at the Sea is placed in the context of the Ten

Songs of Jewish history. The tension is whether there were ten songs or one song. Are these various moments of salvation the same or different? Past, present and future are all united in the Song.

Lines 21-26: An interpolation into the 10 songs midrash discusses the Temple being named for King David because he gave his soul for it. Thus, the leadership theme is addressed from a different angle. Still, we have lost the focus on song and this comes across as a digression.

Lines 27-48: The digression continues with another (or, possibly, the same) interpolation. The focus now is on Moses and the several things for which he gave his soul that are called by his name.

Lines 49-55: The midrash returns to the 10 songs tradition with a discussion of the 9th song, the Song of Jehoshaphat. The value of life is asserted here, that of those who are wicked and, even more, the life of the righteous who are the "foundation of the world." Again, this is a bit of a digression.

Lines 56-62: The theme of the messianic *shir*, first expressed in lines 1-9, is developed here. This last song will be different from all the others because it will not be followed by a period of oppression. It is "male," in that it does not give birth to something else, while the other songs were "female."

Lines 63-65: The midrash shifts from the 10 songs tradition to the Song at the Sea itself. Here, the focus is on to whom the song was sung, namely, to God and not to any human being.

Lines 66-73: Here, the question is how the Song was sung. Was it done

like the Shma? the Hallel? Was there a leader or not? Was it sung antiphonally? As in lines 10-11, the issue of the relationship between leader and followers is prominent.

Lines 74-75: In this first poetic section, God's greatness and majesty is celebrated.

Lines 76-97: It is asserted that Adonai is the only one worthy of such praise; other kings are pompous imposters. A long poetic piece develops six of God's attributes through supporting verses: might, wealth, wisdom, mercy, justice, and loyalty.

Lines 98-104: No one can be compared to God. Adonai is far above the others in the array of heaven.

Lines 105-114: The question of who sang the song is addressed with the assertion that children and those yet to be born sang the Song at the Sea. In other words, future generations of Israel participate in the Song.

Looking at this summary it is apparent that the redactor of the first chapter of Shirta was more concerned with the clarity and tightness of form than with weaving the material into a logical argument. The particular foci - the characteristics of the Song at the Sea, the messianic *shir*, the exigencies of leadership and the leader-follower relationship - are not blended together into a coherent whole. Rather, each theme seems to emerge, then disappear, only to reemerge later. Particularly problematic in terms of flow is the extensive

interpolation on the topic of things being named for a someone who gives their soul for them. It does not seem to be related in any significant way to the Song at the Sea or the other topics raised in the midrash.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRACTATE VA'YASSA  
PARASHAH ONE  
EXODUS 15:22-25



וילכו שלשת ימים במדבר ולא מצאו מים. רבי יהושע אומר: כשמועו. רבי אליעזר אומר: והלא המים תחת רגלי ישראל היו. והארץ אינה צפה אלא על המים שנאמר לרוקע הארץ על המים (תהלים קלו:ו). הא מה ח"ל ולא מצאו מים. אלא כדי ליגען.

#### 1. וילכו שלשת ימים וכו'

"They traveled three days, etc." Tractate VaYassa begins at the point right after the Song of the Sea. Moses leads Israel away from the Reed Sea into the desert of Shur. The first half of Exodus 15:20, which describes this, elicits several pages of comments in the Mekhilta. The second half of the verse is quoted and commented upon here. The Israelites went three days in the desert and did not find water.

#### 1-2. רבי יהושע אומר... רבי אליעזר אומר...

"Rabbi Yehoshua says... Rabbi Eliezer says..." Tractate VaYassa is characterized by a series of contrasting statements in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah and Rabbi Eliezer Ha'Modai.<sup>1</sup> This is the second pair of comments by these tradents in the tractate. Rabbi Yehoshua says the Torah text should be understood at face value. The Israelites have walked 3 days in the desert and it is not unusual that one would not find water in the desert. Rabbi Eliezer counters rhetorically, "Wasn't there water beneath the feet of the Israelites? The land is but floating on top of the water." In other words, the situation is not so straightforward as R. Yehoshua reads it. Perhaps Israel could have found water had they looked. It seems that R. Eliezer is implying a failure here on Israel's part. Note that Eliezer responds to the text on a *drash* level in contrast to R. Yehoshua's *p'shat*. This is typical of the two tradents in the Mekhilta.

#### 3-4. כדי ליגען

"In order to tire them [Israel] out." The infinitive, *l'yag'an*, implies a subject causing Israel to be in this situation, i.e., God. R. Eliezer reads that God created this initial difficulty for Israel deliberately while, as noted above, Israel fails to respond (by looking at their feet). The other Mekhilta on Exodus, Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, contains a parallel to this VaYassa piece. There, instead of R. Eliezer saying *k'dei l'yag'an*, he says *k'dei l'nasotan*, "in order to test them." Indeed, this is R. Eliezer's reading in the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, too, as is apparent at the end of the piece. The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon version makes clear right away what becomes apparent later in the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael.

<sup>1</sup>As noted in prior chapters, scholars call the rhetorical form used here, the "dispute form." It consists of "The statement of a question or problem, followed by opinions of two or more authorities..." (Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 104.)

5 אחרים אומרים: מים שנטלו ישראל מבין הנזרים שלמו מהן באותה שעה. הא מה ת"ל ולא מצאו מים. שאף בכליהם לא מצאו כענין שנאמר ואריריהם שלחו צעיריהם למים באו על גבים לא מצאו מים שבו כליהם ריקם (ירמיה יד:ג).

#### 5. אחרים אומרים: מים שנטלו ישראל מבין הנזרים

"Others say: water which Israel took from between the clefts." Other rabbis are cited here, who give a third reading of the text. They say Israel had collected water between the clefts of the rocks at the Red Sea. But, after three days in the desert it ran out. It is worth noting that this reading is linked to a midrash quoted earlier in the Mekhilta (Beshalach 5), regarding God's actions at the Reed Sea, "He extracted for them sweet water from the salt water, as it is said: 'He brought streams also out of the rock and caused waters to run down like rivers'. (Psalm 78:16)."<sup>2</sup> This verse from Psalm 78 does indeed refer to the Reed Sea. Thus, there is a basis in the Bible for the view that Israel could have taken fresh water with them into the desert. This midrash may also be read as a metaphor for the change in Israel's emotional and spiritual state. The experience at the Sea was a euphoric one, a "spiritual high." After three days walking in the desert the high had worn off. The spiritual "water" which they took from the sea ran out.

#### 6. ואריריהם שלחו...כליהם ריקם

"Their nobles sent their servants for water; they came to the cisterns and they found no water. They returned, their vessels empty." This proof-text refers to a time of drought in Judah. It is used here, most likely, because it contains the Hebrew, *lo matzu mayim*, and a reference to vessels empty of water.

רורשי רשומות אמרו: לא מצאו דברי תורה שנמשלו למים. ומנין לדברי תורה שהן משולים במים. שנאמר הוי כל צמא לכו למים (ישעיה נה:א). לפי שפרשו 10 מרבי תורה שלשת ימים לכך מררו. לפיכך תחקינו הזקנים והנביאים שיהיו קורין בתורה בשבת בשני ובחמישי. הא כיצד. קורין בשבת ומפסיקין לאחר שבת וקורין בשני ומפסיקין בשלישי וברביעי וקורין בחמישי ומפסיקין בערב שבת.

#### 8. רורשי רשומות

"Interpreters of *r'shumot*." Lauterbach calls these midrashists, "allegorists."<sup>3</sup> Boyarin argues that there is no evidence that the term *rashum* means allegory and that "most of the interpretations cited in the name of this group have no allegorical elements whatsoever." He claims that the term means "the interpreters of sealed texts," i.e.

<sup>2</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekhilta* v.1, p. 224, lines 11-13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., vol. 2, p. 89, line 73.

cruces or obscurities.<sup>4</sup> Boyarin is correct in that the interpretation given by the *dorshei r'shumot* here is not purely allegorical. In fact, there are textual bases for reading the Marah incident as a story about Israel learning Torah.<sup>5</sup>

Rather, what we have here is *mashal*. In contrast to an allegory, a *mashal* form "is created...out of other scriptural materials having a more or less explicit reference to the narrative at hand."<sup>6</sup> That is to say that the midrashic reading of the water here as Torah is a "legitimate" midrashic reading, no more far-fetched than the readings of R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua. It is not a "symbolic" reading.

#### 9. שְׁנֵאמַר: הוּא כֵל צִמָּא לְכֹ לַמִּים (Isaiah 51:1)

"As it is said, 'All who are thirst come for water...'" Isaiah 51:2-3 continues, "Give heed to Me, and you shall enjoy choice food and enjoy the richest viands. Incline your ear and come to Me; Hearken and you shall be revived." In essence, this text compares people in need of water to people in need of God's commandments, i.e., Torah. It is really Torah of which this verse speaks when it says, "water."

Both the comparison (*mashal*) of water to Torah and the disastrous results of Israel being separated from water/Torah occur elsewhere in the Mekhilta. At the beginning of tractate Amalek we have: "Then came Amalek: R. Joshua and R. Eleazer Hisma say: This verse is to be taken in an allegorical sense and explained in connection with the passage in Job where it is said: 'Can the rush shoot up without mire? Can the reed grass grow without water?' (Job 8:11). Is it possible for the rush to grow without mire and without water, or is it possible for the reed grass to exist without water? So also is it impossible for Israel to exist unless they busy themselves with the words of the Torah. And because they separated themselves from the Torah the enemy came upon them."<sup>7</sup> This comment in the Mekhilta comes as a way of explaining the connection between Amalek's attack and the incident that precedes it - Israel's near rebellion against Moses for the lack of water at Refidim. The parallels to Mara are clear. The comment of *dorshei r'shumot* on the lack of water must read as a dearth of Torah. When Israel separates themselves from the study of Torah they complain and rebel against God and Moses. The parallel can be extended further if we include the thread of this midrash on the Marah incident which says that God punished Israel there.

#### 10. לִכְךָ מָרָו

"Therefore they rebelled." Possible reference or play on *marah*, one meaning of which is "to rebel." In terms of the flow of the midrash, this comment bridges the gap

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990), p. 143, n. 7.

<sup>5</sup>See below comments on Va'yoreihu and *sham sam lo chok u'mishpat*.

<sup>6</sup>Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekhilta*, v. 2, p. 135.

between R. Eliezer's comment that water was right beneath the feet of Israel and the verbalization of their lack of faith in the form of complaints against Moses and God. Having been away from water, i.e. Torah, for three days, Israel lost their faith in God and Moses. Hence, they rebelled in the form of complaining to Moses.

ויבאו מרתה. רבי יהושע אומר: לשלשה מקומות באו ישראל באותה שעה שנאמר ויבאו מרתה. רבי אלעזר המורעי אומר: לא באו אלא למקום אחד בלבד.  
15 וילוו העם על משה ונ'. רבי יהושע אומר: היה להם לישראל להמלך בנרול שבהם תחלה לאמר מה נשתה. אלא עמדו ואמרו רבי תרעומת על משה. רבי אלעזר המורעי אומר: למדין היו ישראל היות אומרים רבי תרעומת על משה. ולא על משה בלבד אמרו אלא כלפי הגבורה. לכך נאמר לאמר מה נשתה.

13. ויבאו מרתה. רבי יהושע אומר...רבי אלעזר המורעי אומר...

"'They came to Marah.' Rabbi Yehoshua says...Rabbi Eliezer says..." Rabbi Yehoshua indicates that Israel actually went to three places at that time, while R. Elazar Ha'Moda'i says that it was only one place. One could conclude from this pairing of statements that R. Yehoshua and R. Elazar Ha'Moda'i have reversed roles here, with R. Elazar giving a *p'shat* comment and R. Yehoshua the *drash*. Indeed, R. Yehoshua's comment seems to be a *drash* on the fact that the place Marah appears three times in this verse.

The fact that R. Yehoshua has gone beyond the *p'shat* in this comment gives us an indication that he has another agenda here. That is, he has a particular reading of the Marah story. R. Yehoshua reads the wilderness period as the one of God's honeymoon with the Jewish people. When the biblical text seems to contradict this view, he interprets this contradiction away. Here, R. Yehoshua is saying that Israel was disappointed three times in their search for water, coming three times to Bitter Springs. In so doing, R. Yehoshua is minimizing, if not justifying, their complaint, what shall we drink? Boyarin rejects the division of readings into *p'shat* and *drash*, seeing both as rooted in the Torah. The text is ambivalent about Israel during this period; the midrash brings this out by giving it two distinct voices, Yehoshua and Eliezer.<sup>8</sup> For R. Yehoshua Israel's complaints at Marah were merely a natural response to a difficult situation, the lack of water. R. Eliezer, on the other hand, reads Israel's complaints as indicative of a deep character flaw in Israel. They fundamentally lacked faith in God's ability to provide. As soon as a problem appeared on the horizon, Israel began to doubt God's power and Moses' leadership. The *p'shat* in this verse - that they came to one place and were disappointed but once - supports R. Eliezer's view. Thus, he emphasizes the *p'shat*.

15. וילוו העם על משה ונ' רבי יהושע אומר...רבי אלעזר המורעי אומר...

"And the people grumbled against Moses...Rabbi Yehoshua says...Rabbi Eliezer

<sup>8</sup>Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, p. 61.

Ha'Modai says..." The term that the Torah uses to describe Israel's response, *va'yilonu* ("they grumbled") is a negative way of describing their question - *ma nishteh?* ("what shall we drink?"). This naturally follows R. Eliezer's reading and he amplifies the negative nature of Israel's behavior by saying that they were accustomed to complaining against Moses. It is as if the lack of water wasn't the real reason for the complaint. Rather, Israel was looking for a reason to complain - and not just against Moses, but against God. R. Eliezer hangs his interpretation on the word *leimor* ("saying"). There is no need for this word in the text. R. Eliezer takes *leimor* to mean that the Israelites told Moses to go "tell" God their complaint. For R. Eliezer this is but more evidence of Israel's rebellious, fundamentally unfaithful nature.

In contrast, R. Yehoshua minimizes the negative implied by the word *va'yilonu*. It is true Israel did wrong, but their sin was not fundamental to their nature. Their error was that they should have voiced their complaint to their immediate leaders (i.e. go through the system) instead of going directly to Moses and God in an angry manner.

ויצעק אל יי וני. מכאן שאין הצדיקים קשין לקבל. לפי דרכך אתה למר  
20 שחפלת הצדיקים קצרה. מעשה בתלמיד אחר שעבר לפני רבי אליעזר וקיצר  
בברכותיו. והיו אומרים עליו תלמיד חכם קצין הוא זה. אמר להם לא קיצר  
זה יותר ממשה שנאמר אל נא רפא נא לה (במדבר יב:יג). שוב מעשה בתלמיד  
אחר שעבר לפני רבי אליעזר והאריך בברכותיו. אמרו לו תלמידיו רבינו ראית  
פלוני שהאריך בברכותיו. והיו אומרים עליו תלמיד חכם מארכך הוא זה. אמר  
25 להם לא האריך זה יותר ממשה שנאמר ואתנפל לעני יי את ארבעים היום וני  
(דברים ט:כה). שהיה אומר יש שעה לקצר ויש שעה להאריך.

#### 19. מכאן שאין הצדיקים קשין לקבל

"From this [verse we learn that] the righteous do not have difficulty receiving..." This statement is somewhat difficult to decipher. The word לקבל can be read *l'kabel* ("to receive") or *likbol* ("to complain"). Moreover, *tzadikim* ("righteous ones") can refer to Israel, Moses or God. It would go against the grain of the Midrash to read Israel as the *tzadikim*, since even R. Yehoshua sees them as having committed a sin in this case. God could be the *tzadik* who doesn't have difficulty receiving Israel's complaints or Moses' prayers. But, the following states, "the prayers of the righteous are short." This indicates that the *tzadik* is the one praying, i.e. Moses. Of the remaining possibilities - 1) It isn't difficult for Moses to complain or 2) It isn't difficult for Moses to receive - the latter is the better reading. It seems that, in light of Israel's cantankerous behavior the question is: Why does Moses respond by praying to God on their behalf? One might have expected him to get angry with them. But, as a *tzadik* he is more tolerant and is able to receive Israel's message without being reactive and lashing out.

#### 19. לפי דרכך

"Accordingly." Lauterbach translates this as "by the way," which is indicative of the

fact that the material which follows appears to be a digression from the mainline of the argument.<sup>9</sup> That is, it adds nothing to our understanding of the nature of the incident at Marah, nor does it address the major themes and tension of the piece.

## 20. מעשה בתלמיד ...

"There once was a disciple..." It's possible that this material is included here because of its association with R. Eliezer and the base text's reference to Moses crying out to God (the prooftexts here involve Moses). The theme addressed in this piece is the relationship between the length of prayer and its efficacy. The lesson is that both long and short prayers can be effective and appropriate, depending upon the situation. The form used in this section - one can call it the "ma'aseh form" - is common in aggadic midrash. However, it is not so commonly found in the Mekhilta. Typically, the *ma'aseh* or "incident" related, concerns something that happened to a sage. A moral is usually drawn from the story.

ויוורו יי עץ. רבי יהושע אומר: זה עץ של ערבה. רבי אלעזר המורעי אומר:  
זה עץ של זית שאין לך מר יותר מזית. רבי יהושע בן קרחה אומר: זה עץ של  
הדרופני. רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר דבר מן התורה הראהו שנאמר ויוורו יי  
30 עץ. ויראהו אין כתיב כאן אלא ויוורו. כענין שנאמר ויוורני ויאמר לי וגו'  
(משלי ר:ד). רבי נתן אומר זה עץ של קתרוס. ויש אומרים עיקר תאנה ועיקר  
רמון. רורשי רשומות אמרו הראהו דברי תורה שנמשלו כעץ שנאמר עץ חיים היא  
למחזיקים בה (שם ג:יח).

## 27. ויוורו יי עץ

"The Lord showed him a piece of wood." Two textual problems jump out at the reader of this verse, both of which are tackled in the material that follows. The use of the word *ויוורו* here to mean "he showed him" is quite surprising in this context. Typically, while this word means "show," it refers to verbal instruction and not the kind of pointing out that seems to be going on in the biblical story.<sup>10</sup> It comes from the root [י.ו.ר], meaning "to teach" or "instruct", as well as "to show." From this root we get, for example, "מורה" and, not inconsequentially "תורה." The more appropriate word for this particular context would have been "ויראהו", which comes from [ר.א.ה], "to see." Thus, it would mean "He caused him to see." The Torah's use of *ויוורו* indicates that more than a *pshat* reading may have been intended by the biblical author(s) himself.

The second problem is the *etz*, the tree or wood. What kind of wood could turn bitter waters into sweet? What is it about this tree that facilitated the miracle at Marah? Moreover, God can work a miracle through any means. Why a tree and at bitter waters?

<sup>9</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, vol. 2, p.91.

<sup>10</sup>Boyarín, *Intertextuality*, p. 59.

In terms of form, we have in this section (and continuing into the next) a more extensive version of the "dispute form" that has dominated the material presented from this *parashah*.<sup>11</sup> A series of statements by tradents are cited, all addressing the same question. Many different answers are given which cannot be added together to make one coherent view. Rather, some of the statements can be grouped together to form one proposition or reading of the biblical text, while others can be understood as supporting a contrasting proposition. In this section three readings of the biblical text emerge: R. Yehoshua's, R. Eliezer's and the "Torah" reading of R. Shimon ben Yochai and the *Dorshei R'shumot*. These are explicated below.

## 27. רבי יהושע...רבי אליעזר

These two tradents respond to the second question noted above. As usual, they give contrasting interpretations. Yehoshua says it was a willow branch. This makes some logical sense, since a willow grows by the water and is a "sweet" tree. Something sweet might reasonably be used to neutralize something bitter. R. Eliezar gives what seems to be a less than reasonable answer. He says that the branch was from an olive tree because "there is not tree more bitter than the olive tree." How can a bitter branch make bitter waters sweet? This is discussed in the next chunk of midrashic material.

It is apparent from R. Eliezer's statement alone, however, that he is thinking on a level far beyond the *p'shat*. We already know that R. Eliezer sees the Israelites as a thoroughly sinful group, lacking in faith. It is not too far of a leap to see the bitter, undrinkable waters as a metaphor for the People themselves. Indeed, although this text does not directly refer to it, there is a reading of verse 23, "*ki marim hem*," which says that this refers to the People. This interpretation is buttressed by the fact that *מר* can also mean "rebellious," based on the root [מר]. Indeed, this is R. Eliezer's reading of Israel in this story.<sup>12</sup> The Israelites were made "bitter" by sin and lack of faith and rebelled, just as the waters were bitter. This seems to be the reading which informs R. Eliezer's suggestion of the olive tree. A chronically sinful people is in need of punishment by God: bitter medicine for a bitter illness.<sup>13</sup>

R. Yehoshua, if we wish to read his statement on the same level, does not see any need for bitter medicine. On the contrary, if Israel's sin was a minor one related to their desperate situation, a salve would be most appropriate. God should help them through their difficulties.

## 28. רבי יהושע בן קרח...

<sup>11</sup>See note 1.

<sup>12</sup>See comment above on *l'khakh mar'du*.

<sup>13</sup>see comment on *noten davar ha'm'chabel*, below.

"Rabbi Joshua the Bald." Lauterbach calls "הרופני", "ivy", which is bitter.<sup>14</sup> Boyarin calls it "oleander," which is both bitter and a deadly poison.<sup>15</sup> The "other" rabbis (אחרים אומרים) mention roots of a fig or pomegranate tree. These are also, in all likelihood, bitter. The particular symbolism involved with these trees is unknown. In general, though, all these other readings which concretize the tree seem to follow R. Eliezer, rather than R. Yehoshua.

## 29. רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר דבר מן התורה...רורשי רשומות אומר...

"Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: a word from the Torah...Dorshei R'shumot say...." As noted above, the awkwardness of the Torah's use of ויורהו raises a flag which points towards a double meaning. For the rabbis of the midrash this other meaning is to be found in other parts of the Bible.

In this case the intertext is brought to light in the comment attributed to R. Shimon ben Yochai. He cites Proverbs 4:4: "He instructed me (וירני) and said to me, 'Let your mind hold onto my words; keep my commandments and you will live.'" It is then developed further in the comment by the Dorshei R'shumot, who tie the tree to Torah with the verse, "*Eitz chayim hi la'machazikim bah*" (Prov 3:8). Later, in a comment on the last verse of the Marah story, *ani Adonai rofekhah*, Proverbs 3:8 is cited ("It will be a cure for your body, a tonic for your bones.") The fact that several verses from the same section of Proverbs are cited in this midrash cannot be viewed as happenstance. Rather, they amount to a tradition of interpreting the Marah story - resolving its difficulties and ungrammaticalities - in light of Proverbs. This is the intertextual basis for Shimon ben Yochai's and Dorshei R'shumot's reading of Marah as being about the teaching of Torah to Israel.<sup>16</sup>

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר: בא וראה כמה מפורשין דרכין של מקום מדרכי  
35 בשר ודם. בשר ודם במחוק מרפא את המר אבל מי שאמר והיה העולם אינו כן  
אלא במר הוא מרפא את המר. הא כיצד. נותן דבר המחבל לתוך דבר שנתחבל  
כרי לעשות בו נס. כיוצא בו אתה אומר ויאמר ישעיהו ישאו רבלת תאנים  
ונ' (ישעיה לח:כא). והלא בשר חי כשאתה נותן עליו רבלת תאנים מיר הוא  
נסרח. הא כיצד. נותן דבר המחבל לתוך דבר שנתחבל כרי לעשות בו נס. כיוצא  
40 בו אתה אומר ויצא אל מוצא המים וישלך שם מלח ויאמר כה אמר יי רפאתי למים  
האלה (מלכים ב. כ:כא). והרי המים היפים כיון שאתה נותן בהן מלח מיר הם  
נסרחין. הא כיצד. נותן דבר המחבל לתוך דבר שנתחבל כרי לעשות בו נס.

## 34. רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר

<sup>14</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, v.2, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup>Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, p. 62.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.



"Rabban Shimon b. Gamliel says." R. Shimon b. Gamliel's comment employs what has been called "a classic formula of paradigmatic midrash."<sup>17</sup> A series of cases or incidents are listed which have similar features and are linked by **כיוצא בו** or another term meaning "similarly." These cases are brought for the purpose of proving a theological or philosophical truth.<sup>18</sup> This may also be classified as a "propositional" form with a syllogistic argument.<sup>19</sup>

In any event, this difference in form from the material that precedes it makes it likely that this piece is a later redactional insertion. While Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel's name makes the piece appear part of the list of tradents statements in the above "dispute form", it is appended at the end of the list after "Dorshei R'shumot." In the list of comments on *va'yelkhu shloshet yamim ba'midbar* (above), Dorshei R'shumot appeared last. Moreover, it may be noted that R. Gamliel's comment makes no direct reference to the base-text, nor to *eitz or yoreihu*. Thus, it is not exegetical like the other comments. Rather, it is an extension of R. Eliezer's reading.

### נחן דבר המחבל...כדי לעשות בו נס 36-37.

Three times this statement is repeated, "He puts a thing that spoils into a thing that has been spoiled, so as to perform a miracle [nes]." We can say that the spoiled thing is a metaphor both for the water and for Israel. "Bitter medicine" something that spoils (i.e. the olive or other bitter tree) is applied to that which is spoiled and a miracle occurs. It becomes sweet; it is healed.

### 37. ויאמר ישעיהו ישאו רבלת תאנים וגי' (Isaiah 38:21)

"Isaiah said, 'Let them take a cake of figs.'" This text refers to Isaiah's advice to King Hezekiah to apply a cake of figs to his (Hezekiah's) rash in order to heal it. Our midrash notes, "Doesn't a cake of figs cause living flesh to rot?" Apparently, this was a notion held in rabbinic times. In any event, Hezekiah's flesh does not rot; rather, it heals. Thus, it proves the proposition that God heals the bitter with the bitter, the thing that is spoiled with the thing that spoils.

But, if we go further behind the scenes we find that something else has occurred. Hezekiah had fallen ill and was told by Isaiah that God said he would die. Hezekiah responds by praying to God with all his heart, and God agrees to let him live another 15 years and "I will also rescue you and this city from the hands of the king of Assyria." In other words, Jerusalem and the people of Judah will be saved because of Hezekiah's prayer. What had caused Hezekiah's prayer was his intense illness and suffering, the *michabel*. This overcame his (presumed) sinfulness as well as that of his people. It resulted in a *nes*, a miraculous recovery for him and a miraculous redemption for his people from the Assyrians.

<sup>17</sup>ibid. p. 63.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p. 63.

<sup>19</sup>Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 65.

40. ... ויצא אל מוצא המים וישלח שם מלח. (II Kings 2:21)

"He went to the spring and threw salt into it..." In this case the paradoxical cure of the spoiled by the thing that spoils is explicit. The prophet Elisha is in Jericho and the men of the town come to him because the water in the town's spring is bad. Elisha responds by asking them for a dish of salt. He throws the salt in the spring and the water becomes drinkable or "healed."

Interestingly, there are verbal echoes in the Elisha story which indicate it is an imitation of the Marah incident. In both cases we find *va'yashlekh* ("and he threw") and the word built on the root for healing [רפא]. This midrashic reading may, in fact, be a wonderfully subtle reading of the Biblical intertext between II Kings 2 and Exodus 15.<sup>20</sup>

וישלך אל המים. אחרים אומרים היו ישראל מתחננין ומתגדרין לפני אביהן שבשמים  
כבן שהוא מתחנן לפני אביו וכתלמיד שהוא מתגדר לפני רבו. ואומרים לפניו  
45 רבונו של עולם חטאנו לפניך שנתרעמנו על המים.

43. וישלך אל המים.

"He threw it into the water." The midrash comments on this that the people of Israel prayed and pleaded with God, as a child would with a parent, to forgive their sin of complaining about the lack of water. Consequently, this is followed by *va'yimt'ku ha'mayim*, "the water became sweet." How is this a comment on *va'yishlach el ha'mayim*? The midrashic reading here seems to be based on the lack of explicit subject and object in this phrase, allowing one to read, "And [Israel] threw [itself] down [in the matter of] the water."<sup>21</sup> That is, Israel prayed for forgiveness, leading God to perform a miracle. Within the midrash Israel's prayer echoes Hezekiah's prayer and Moses' prayer. The midrash may also be drawing on the rabbinic sense of water as a mechanism of t'shuvah, repentance. Water as spiritual purifying agent was a basic element of culture in the rabbinic period. Thus, water here may be a symbol of repentance.

<sup>20</sup>Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, p. 63. Boyarin argues that the key case for understanding this paradigmatic midrash is not the text about King Hezekiah, but Elisha's "healing" of the water at Jericho. However, Boyarin misses the role that Hezekiah's prayer plays in his healing and, consequently, misses the crucial role of this text in developing the argument of the larger midrash. The Hezekiah case must be seen in light of the midrashic comment on *va'yashlekh el ha'mayim*.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 144, n.15.

וימתקו המים. רבי יהושע אומר: מרים נהיו לפי שעה ונמתקו. רבי אלעזר המודעי אומר מרים היו מתחלתם שנאמר המים המים שני פעמים. שם שם לו חק ומשפט. חק זה השבת ומשפט זה כיבוד אב ואם דברי רבי יהושע. רבי אלעזר המודעי אומר: חק אלו עריות שנאמר לבלתי עשות מתוקות התועבות (ויקרא יח:ל). ומשפט אלו 50 דיני אונסין ודיני קנסות ודיני חבלות.

#### 46. וימתקו המים

"The water became sweet." R. Yehoshua says that the waters were bitter only momentarily and then became sweet. R. Eliezer states that the waters were bitter from their beginning. This further develops the metaphor of Israel being compared to the bitter waters. Indeed, Israel complained (was bitter) and then repented (became sweet). For R. Yehoshua, Israel's sin was a single incident; they are fundamentally good or sweet. For R. Eliezer, Israel has been sinful from their beginning; they are basically bitter.

#### 47. שם שם לו חוק ומשפט

"There he made for them a law and an ordinance." (my translation). What kind of laws are appropriate for a fundamentally sinful people? R. Eliezer indicates that God gave them the laws regarding sexual offenses, robbery, fines and injuries. These are the kinds of laws needed to control sinners. They are, in essence, a form of punishment. R. Yehoshua says that he gave them the laws regarding Shabbat and honoring parents. These are laws appropriate for people who are essentially good, to help them live a better, more ethical life.

There are traditions in the Talmud that the two items mentioned by R. Yehoshua were given at Marah.<sup>22</sup> There is also a tradition that civil laws were given at Marah<sup>23</sup> and this verse is given as a proof-text.<sup>24</sup>

ושם נסהו. שם נשא לו נדולה דברי רבי יהושע שנאמר נשא אויל מרורך וגו' את ראש יהויכין (מלכים ב. כה:כו). ואומר נשא את ראש בני גרשון (במדבר ד:כב). אמר לו רבי אלעזר המודעי והלא נדולה אינה תלויה אלא בשין וכאן לא כתיב אלא בסמך. הא מה ת"ל ושם נסהו. שם נסה המקום את ישראל.

#### 51. ושם נסהו

"There [God] put them to the test." There are numerous meanings to the root [נסה]. It can mean miracle, flag or experience. Here the tradents play on two other meanings:

<sup>22</sup>B.T. Sanhedrin 66b, B.T. Shabbat 87b.

<sup>23</sup>B.T. Sanhedrin 66b.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, p. 145, n. 17.

to test, and to raise up. R. Yehoshua uses a homonym נשא ("nasah") to say that this means, "there He raised them up greatly [or, for greatness]." Elezar Ha'Modai' counters that the interpretation of "nasah" as "raising up to greatness" depends on a 'sin' in "nasah", but here we have 'samech'. Thus, the phrase means that "ha'makom" (the place, Marah, and God) tested Israel. Marah was a place of testing for Israel, a trial created by God.<sup>25</sup> What was this test? According to what we have described above, it is apparent that it was a test of Israel's faith. After not having water for three days, would Israel forget what God had done for them at the Reed Sea? Or would they have faith that God would provide? It seems that they failed the test, and consequently, they are sinful and must be given "bitter medicine."

51-52. נשא איל מרודך וגו' את ראש יהויכין (II Kings 25:27)

"King Evil-Merodach lifted...the head of Jehoiachin." This prooftext taken from the very end of II Kings, refers to the freeing of the imprisoned (and exiled) King Jehoiachin of Judah by King Evil-Merodach of Babylon. According to II Kings 28-30, Evil-Merodach released Jehoiachin from prison, spoke kindly to him, gave him a throne above those of other kinds in (captivity) in Babylon, removed his prison garments and gave him a regular allotment of food for the rest of his life.

This fits what we have said thus far about R. Yehoshua's understanding of God's actions at Marah. God freed them from a desperate situation, provided for their physical needs (here, water), and treated them well by giving them the laws of Shabbat and honoring one's parents. Those who are suffering should not be punished, but treated mercifully and raised up out of their downtrodden state. For R. Yehoshua Marah is a continuation of the miraculous providence shown Israel at the sea, a continuation of the honeymoon that was the period after the exodus.

52. נשא את ראש בני גרשון (Numbers 4:22).

"Take the census of the Gershonites." The second prooftext refers to the census taken of the Gershonite clan at the beginning of Parashat Naso. The purpose of this census is to prepare this clan for special service to the Tabernacle. This, too, can be understood as a "raising up." It is a raising up into God's service, an honor. One could say then that R. Yehoshua saw this event at Marah as one that helped raise Israel up to the level of being God's special servant. In this sense, it is a step forward on the road to Sinai, where Israel will officially receive the Torah and become God's servant.

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<sup>25</sup>In Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon a statement attributed to R. Eliezer which makes this point about testing is placed at the outset of the piece. The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael places it only at the end, allowing the tension in the piece to build to this point.

## OVERVIEW

Redaction

Our midrashic essay from Va'Yassa is built upon the dialogue between R. Yehoshua and R. Eliezer Ha'Moda'i, like a car is built upon its chassis. Almost all of the Biblical texts explicated in the piece, with two exceptions, are commented on both by Yehoshua and Eliezer. Moreover, the comments of these rabbis are framed so that each time they are quoted, they are quoted consecutively, with Yehoshua quoted first, followed by Eliezer Ha'Modai. Sometimes, the statements of these rabbis are left as the only exegesis of a given phrase. At other points substantial material is inserted after them. A telltale sign that this other material more than likely represents later redactional accretion is the use of the phrase "*acherim omrim* or "*yesh omrim*" to introduce it. In other cases, the additions seem to be small pieces in and of themselves, such as the "*ma'aseh b'talmid*" segment and the "*davar ha'michabel*" segment (comment by R. Gamliel). This latter section stands out because of its unique propositional form, rhythmic style and its introduction by the term "*k'yotzeh bo.*"

Some of the redactional accretions do not truly add much to the piece and, one may argue, make this piece less tight than the "*emunah/amanah*" piece from Beshalach. For example, the pair of "*ma'aseh b'talmid*" anecdotes seem to have their own message and constitute a digression from the larger text. The comment attributed to R. Shimon ben Yochai while quite important to the larger piece, seems out of place and undermines the flow of the argument. It would fit much better immediately before the comment made by the Dorshei R'shumot as they are part of the same approach to the text. There

is a parallel piece in the Mekilta de Rabbi Shimon which leaves out R. Shimon's statement and, consequently, is much tighter.

In any event, the large section of text commenting on "*va'yorehu etz*" seems to consist of at least three, possibly four layers. The first is the R. Yehoshua and R. Eliezer statements. The second includes the comments of the rabbis that follow about the nature of the tree, ending with the Dorshei R'shumot. I include this as a separate section for two reasons. First, this is the pattern followed in the comments on "*va'yelchu shloshet yamim...*" where they build from the two rabbis and end with the Dorshei R'shumot. Secondly, the section that follows the Dorshei R'shumot (beginning with R. Shimon ben Gamliel) is stylistically unique, repeating the same statement three times, sandwiched around two prooftexts. Thirdly, the third subsection returns in theme to the comment of R. Eliezar Ha'Moda'i. The olive tree, the bitter tree, is the "*m'chabel*", the thing that spoils or ruins. The *mitchabel* is the water which is already spoiled. One might consider breaking the second section into two sub-layers, based on the distinct midrashic reading of R. Shimon b. Yochai and the Dorshei R'shumot. They alone among the rabbis cited here embrace the interpretation that the Marah incident is about the impact of Torah on Israel. Moreover, of the tradents cited in this middle section, they are the only two who employ prooftexts in their exegesis.

#### Themes, Tensions and Relationship to the Biblical Text

One can look at this midrashic piece as a collage of independently coherent readings of the Marah incident, pulled together by a final redactor who, through some

skillful adding and editing, produced a distinct reading of his won. The differing distinct readings make this piece unique among the six in this paper. In order to discuss these readings, a different analytical approach is taken in this overview than the others.

One can identify three midrashic readings within the piece: R. Yehoshua's, R. Eliezer Ha'Moda'i's/R. Gamliel's and that of the Dorshei R'shumot/R. Shimon b. Yochai. Each of these readings of the Marah incident employ and/or are generated by biblical intertexts distinct from the others. They bring out different themes, with differing implications for life in the rabbinic period and beyond. Thus, there is a constant, discernable tension within the piece. Nevertheless, the vision and skill of the final redactor brings these competing readings together so that the end result is a harmonious, albeit anxious, whole with an overriding point.

What allows for these differing readings is the fact that the Biblical text of the Marah incident (Exodus 15:22-26) is often ambiguous, with many gaps and inconsistencies. It has already been discussed in the commentary that certain key words which stand out in the text have dual meanings. The word root [מר] stands out due to its ponderous multiple usage in Exodus 15:23.<sup>26</sup> It means "bitter," but can also mean "rebellious." The word "וירר" stands out because of its unusual usage in Exodus 15:25. It means "he showed him," but usually in the context of giving instructions or commandments, not, in the context of pointing out an object. It is based on the same root as the word תורה.

Beyond the specific words used, there are unexplained oddities. Why throw a

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<sup>26</sup>Boyarin p. 60.

tree branch in the water to make it sweet? What is it about that tree that made this miracle? Also in verse 25, what law is the text talking about? The giving of a law here seems like a non-sequitur. What is the meaning of "וַיִּסְתָּנוּ" (vayis'tanu)? If it means God tested Israel, what was the test? Each of the three midrashic readings in the Mekhilta piece provide strong solutions to these textual problems. R. Yehoshua saw the wilderness period as one of God's honeymoon with Israel, a time when Israel was faithful to God and God's acts of love for Israel were unbounded. We can say that R. Yehoshua reads Marah as part of a progressive development from the exodus to Sinai, where the betrothed couple move closer to each other as they get closer to marriage. Israel's complaints to Moses and God during this period are not to be viewed as a pattern, but as specific, understandable responses to specific situations. Thus, for example, when the Torah says that Israel complained (*va'yilonu*), R. Yehoshua diverges from the pshat in order to undermine any indication that this complaint was evidence of Israel's rebelliousness or lack of faith. In saying that the problem with Israel's complaint is that it was made to the wrong people, R. Yehoshua implies that the complaint itself was justified.

It is important to note that this "honeymoon" reading has support in the Biblical intertext; Hosea 2:16 ("Assuredly, I will speak coaxingly to her and lead her through the wilderness and speak to her tenderly.") and Jeremiah 2:2 ("Thus said the Lord 'I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride - How you followed me in the wilderness, in a land now sown.'") Given the elliptical ambiguous nature of the Marah text R. Yehoshua finds ample intertextual basis for reading the story



as he does.

The ambiguity of the Biblical text also allows R. Eliezer to give a strong reading, one which is antithetical to R. Yehoshua's. Wherever R. Yehoshua accentuates the positive, R. Eliezer accentuates the negative. Israel's 3 days without finding water should not be seen as a period of helpless suffering, but one of laziness, of failure to search adequately and provide for themselves. Instead of mitigating Israel's complaint, R. Eliezer underscores and expands it. It wasn't just a single response to a given situation but a chronic carping, which is evidence of a lack of faith in God. Israel's bitter attitude begets a bitter response from God. God points to the bitter olive tree as medicine for the bitter waters. R. Gamliel develops R. Eliezer's reading further. He brings in the intertexts upon which this reading is based, the Elisha and Hezekiah stories.

In developing this reading, R. Eliezer places Marah in a different context from R. Yehoshua. For R. Eliezer it must be seen as one of a series of rebellious actions by Israel in the desert. Similar scenes happen with the manah, with the quail, and with water again in Numbers 20 and 21. There are numerous other intertexts that support this view of the desert period (indeed, this is the more common view), such as Deuteronomy 9:24 "You have been rebellious against the Lord since the day I knew you."<sup>27</sup>

The third, distinct reading of the Marah text is supplied together by the Dorshei R'shumot and R. Shimon b. Yochai. The key word in the biblical text that triggers this reading is *vayoreihu* which, as stated above is usually used in relation to Torah instruction. But, if that is not the only basis for this reading, as noted above the midrash

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<sup>27</sup>Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, p. 76.

cites several verses from Proverbs in this piece, making clear that there is significant intertextual support for it. Daniel Boyarin has summarized this reading as follows:

"They went three days in the desert and they did not find water=Torah (as in the Isaiah verse), and they came to Marah, but they could not drink water (study Torah) in Mara, because they were rebellious,. Moses prayed and God taught him a word of Torah, which is a "tree of life," and the bitter waters (rebellious, Torah-less people) became sweet. There, indeed, He gave them law and ordinance, and there He tested them, saying 'If you keep the Torah which I have, this day, given you, then I will not place upon you any more plagues like the plagues of Egypt, for the words of Torah that I give you are healing for you and prevent you from being rebellious and requiring chastisement.'" <sup>28</sup>

Boyarin's isolation of the "Torah reading" embedded in this midrash is quite insightful. Moreover, his argument that the midrash as a whole brings out various readings already extant in the text and intertext is very much on target. However, he doesn't go far enough past these individual readings to see the shaping and message of the final redactor. Specifically, he does not discuss the crucial midrashic comment on *va'yashekh el ha'mayim*, in which "others say" (perhaps the redactor himself), that Israel was at that moment admitting their sin of complaining about the water. That is, Israel was repenting. This comment, seems to be linked thematically to the prior section, Rabbi Gamliel's finely honed "*davar hamechabel*" piece. In fact, it underscores a crucial element of the intertext Gamliel brings from Isaiah 38. In this intertext Isaiah "treats" King Hezekiah's illness with a cake of figs, interpreted by the midrash as something that spoil which miraculously heals something spoiled. Hezekiah, is cured. But, earlier, in Isaiah 38:2-6

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid, p. 66.

we find that it is not the figs which heal Hezekiah. Rather, it is God. moreover, God's healing comes as a response to Hezekiah's prayer. Isaiah delivers God's message to Hezekiah that he was going to die, "Thereupon Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord." (Isaiah 38:2) God hears his prayer and adds 15 years to Hezekiah's life.

The parallel to Israel's prayer and God's response at Marah is clear. However, the relationship of Isaiah 38 to the Marah incident, goes further. After he is healed, Hezekiah writes a poem in which he says,

"What can I say? He promised me, and it is He who has wrought it. All my sleep has fled because of the bitterness of my soul (על מר נפשי). My Lord, for all that and despite it my life breath is revived. You have restored me to health and revived me. Truly, it was for my own good that I had such great bitterness (הנה לשלום מר לי מר): You save my life from the pit of destruction, for You have cast behind Your back all my offenses." (Isaiah 38:15-17).

This intertext sets the dynamic of the final version of the midrash in order. God brings about the lack of water (Torah at Marah, "He it is who has wrought it"). This causes (R. Yehoshua's view) or brings out of Israel (R. Eliezer's view) their bitter soul. Because of Israel's bitterness (R. Yehoshua) or despite it (R. Eliezer) God gives them water/Torah. This revives them and restores them to health. The crucial element is that the bitterness is for their own good because it causes them to repent and then their offense is forgiven. Without the mechanism of repentance the healing cannot take place.

This must have been a very powerful message for those living at the time the Mekhilta was redacted. The rabbis interpreted the destruction of the Temple and the suffering of exile as evidence of Israel's sinfulness. Was this sinfulness a fundamental

character flaw or was it merely a temporary phase in the history of the people? This is the subject of the tension between R. Yehoshua and R. Eliezer. Perhaps, it was the result of not studying and following Torah, as R. Shimon and the Dorshei Rishumot believe. Roman rule was often harsh. Can we look to God to sweeten our lot (R. Yehoshua) or is this bitter medicine that we must suffer as the result of our sinfulness (R. Eliezer)? Perhaps we should look to Torah as the source of sweetness in our lives (R. Shimon/Dorshei R'shumot). In any event, this bitterness must spur us to repent, for it is repentance that will lead God to forgive us and heal us. This is the position of R. Gamliel and the final redactor. In truth, it is a timeless message about dealing with the bitterness that is part of the human condition, we all must face. We must look at how we are contributing to our bitterness (R. Eliezer), but maintain faith and hope in God's providence to heal us. We must look to the Torah as our guide and turn towards God in repentance and prayer. Then, we may be healed.

CHAPTER SIX

TRACTATE SHABBTA  
PARASHAH ONE  
EXODUS 31:12-17

1 ויאמר יי אל משה. לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי השליח.  
אך את שבתותי תשמורו. למה נאמר. לפי שהוא אומר לא תעשה כל מלאכה  
(שמות כ:י). אין לי אלא דברים שהם משום מלאכה. דברים שהן משום  
שבות מניין. ת"ל אך את שבתותי תשמורו להביא דברים שהן משום שבות.

### 1. ויאמר יי אל משה

"Adonai spoke to Moses." The verse continues, "*v'atah daber el B'nei Yisrael leimor.*" There is no need for the Torah to specify that God said to Moses, "*atah,*" ("you"). The midrash takes this redundancy as a special indication that God is addressing Moses directly here, with no intermediary.<sup>1</sup> In this way the midrash draws attention to the Source of the laws that are to be discussed in this tractate: Adonai and no other. In terms of form, this is a simple, exegetical comment, fairly typical of the Mekhilta.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. אך את שבתותי תשמורו

"Nevertheless, you must keep my Sabbaths." The major point of the biblical text is stated here at the outset: "Keep My Sabbaths." The midrash, however, assumes that nothing in the Torah is redundant. Thus, it must face the issue of what makes this statement different from the one already made on the subject earlier in the Book of Exodus. The method of midrashic analysis employed here is explained below. In terms of content, the midrash establishes two fundamentals of what it means to "Keep My Sabbaths." God wants us to avoid *m'lakhah* (work) and activities that interfere with *sh'vut* (rest), which are not covered by the prohibition on *m'lakhah*.

### 2. למה נאמר. לפי שהוא אומר...

"Why is this [text] stated? Because [the Bible in another place] says." This is the beginning of a rhetorical formula which I will refer to as the "*lamah ne'emar*" form.<sup>3</sup> In the *lamah ne'emar* form the base text is read as the solution to or clarification of a misconception that could arise from a reading of a related text from elsewhere in the Bible. It can be outlined as follows:

#### 1. "x" *lamah ne'emar*? (Why is "x" said)

<sup>1</sup>At the beginning of Pischa, parsha 1, there was an extensive discussion of the relationship of the prophet to the Divine. See p. , above.

<sup>2</sup>Here, I follow Jacob Neusner who states, "The simple commentary form is familiar in Mekhilta Attributed to Rabbi Ishmael, in which a verse, or an element of a verse, is cited, and then a very few words explain the meaning of that verse." (*Mekhilta*, p. 30.)

<sup>3</sup>This seems to be what Neusner labels the "redactional-harmonistic form." He identifies this form as follows: "why is this passage needed? followed by another verse or treatment of the same subject, ending with a proposition that distinguishes one case from the other and shows that the Torah had to cover both." (*Mekhilta*, p. 112.)

2. *l'fi she'hu omer* "y." (Because the Torah text says "y.")
3. *Eyn li elah* "A." ([From which] I know only "A.")
4. "B" *minayin?* (From which [verse] does one know "B?")
5. *Talmud lomar* "x." ([That's why] the Torah says "x.")

x = base text y = related text from elsewhere in Bible

A = halakhic statement B = complementary halakhic statement to A

A + B = correct halakhic notion

In this case the midrash asks, "Why does the Torah state, 'Nevertheless, you must keep my Sabbaths,?'?" The answer is that in another place (Exod. 20:10) the Torah states, "You shall not do any work (*m'lakhah*)." This second verse only specifies not doing work on Shabbat. It does not indicate that one should also refrain from any activity which might take away from the restfulness of the day (*sh'vut*).<sup>4</sup> We only learn this second point from the base text, Exod. 31:12.

The use of the *lamah ne'emar* form here may be a response to the word, *akh*, in the base text. There is a school of rabbinic exegesis which focuses on particles, conjunctions and other easily glossed over words as a primary basis for interpreting biblical texts. The word, *akh*, in this view is seen as a "limiting" particle. That is, it limits the phrase it introduces to only certain cases.<sup>5</sup> Following this line of reasoning, *akh et Shabtotai tishmoru*, does not mean, "Nevertheless, you must keep my Sabbaths." Rather, it means to prescribe certain limited types of Sabbath observance. The midrashist defines those as activities that must be avoided because they would detract from the restfulness of the day. Since this verse only covers a limited part of Shabbat observance, and not the injunction against work, there must be another verse which makes that point and to which the base text is complimentary. Exodus 20:10, since it points specifically to *m'lakhah*, fits the bill.

It is interesting to note that this midrashic comment on *akh et Shabtotai tishmoru* is contained word for word in tractate Kaspa, parsha four as a comment on Exod. 23:13.<sup>6</sup> The only difference is that Exod. 23:13 replaces Exod. 31:12 in the midrashic text. This raises two possible conclusions about the relationship between the two tractates. Either one borrowed from the other or they both took material from the same source. Neither rules out that the possibility that the same redactor inserted the comment in both places.

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<sup>4</sup>According to M. Jastrow's Dictionary of the Talmud, *sh'vut* refers to, "an occupation on the Sabbath and Festivals, forbidden by the rabbis as being out of harmony with the celebration of the day." These are activities not covered by the injunction against *m'lakhah*.

<sup>5</sup>Gary G. Porton, Understanding Rabbinic Midrash: Text and Commentary (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1985), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, v. 3, p. 180, lines 9-13.

5 כבר היה רבי ישמעאל ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא מהלכין בדרך ולוי הסדר וישמעאל בנו של רבי אלעזר בן עזריה מהלכין אחריהם ונשאלה שאלה זו לפניהם. מנין לפיקוח נפש שירחה את השבת. וענה רבי ישמעאל ואמר הרי הוא אומר אם במתרת ימצא הנגב וכו' (שמות כב:א). ומה זה. ספק שהוא בא לנזק ספק שהוא בא להרוג. והרי רברים קל וחומר. ומה אם שפיכות דמים שמתמא את הארץ ומסלקת את השכינה הרי היא רוחה את השבת קל וחומר לפיקוח נפש שירחה את השבת. נענה רבי אלעזר בן עזריה ואמר ומה אם מילה שאינה אלא אחר מאיבריו של אדם רוחה את השבת קל וחומר לשאר כל הנזף. אמרו לו ממקום שבאת מה להלן בוראי אני כאן בוראי. רבי עקיבא אומר אם רוחה רציתה את העבודה שהיא רוחה שבת קל וחומר לפיקוח נפש שירחה את השבת. רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר כשהוא אומר אני את שבתותי תשמרו אך חלק. יש שבתות שאינה שוכת ויש שבתות שאין אתה שוכת. רבי שמעון בן מנסיא אומר הרי הוא אומר ושמרתם את השבת כי קדש היא לכם. לכם שבת מסורה ואין אתם מסורין לשבת. רבי נתן אומר הרי הוא אומר ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת לרדודתם 20 חלל עליו שבת אחת וישמור שבתות הרבה.

#### 5. כבר היה רבי ישמעאל ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה...

"Once, Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah...." This is the beginning of a separate interpolation into the midrashic text. The interpolation takes the form of a list of statements by sages on a single proposition.<sup>7</sup> The proposition, in this case, is not proven by the sages' statements, but assumed by them to be true. They take for granted that the duty to save a life overrides restrictions on work and other activities on Shabbat. The point of each rabbi's statement is to derive a basis for this exception. They employ various hermeneutic methods to arrive at the same point, including *kal va'chomer* and *chelek*, and employ a number of verses from other parts of the Torah.

Interestingly, one verse that is not cited in the pericope is the base-text itself, *akh et shabtotai tishmoru*.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this midrashic interpolation is not clearly linked to the base-text at all. Its insertion here by the redactor is most likely based on its topical connection to the prior midrashic material. That piece discusses restrictions on work and activities that take away from rest on Shabbat. Here, a crucial exception to these restrictions is discussed, i.e. violating Shabbat in order to save a life. If there were any question about this being a separate, distinct piece inserted by a redactor, one need only note that the Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 85a-b, contains the same material, albeit with

<sup>7</sup>This is Neusner's terminology. According to Neusner, a "composite of sayings by sages on a single proposition" is "made up of sayings - X says, or Said X - followed by diverse ways of saying the same thing or of developing the same point. What joins the whole are [1] shared theme focused upon [2] a single proposition, resting on the authority of not Scripture but [3] named sages." (Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 66.)

<sup>8</sup>Porton, *Understanding*, p. 61.



some differences in the statements and the order of the sages included.<sup>9</sup>

8. אם במתרת ימצא הגנב

"If the thief is found while tunneling." This biblical law, taken from Exod. 22:1, does not make any reference to Shabbat. The midrash presumes that this law, which allows one to strike and kill an intruder without guilt, applies on Shabbat as well as weekdays.<sup>10</sup>

9. ספק שהוא בא לנזק ספק שהוא בא להרוג

"Where it is unclear whether he came to steal or whether he came to kill." One may strike and kill an intruder even though one is unsure whether his intent is to kill or merely to steal. If the intruder's intent is to kill, then this is a clear case of self-defense. An act of self-defense against murder is *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life), and clearly allowable on Shabbat. But, if the intruder's intent is to steal and one kills him, this act goes beyond *pikuach nefesh*. One might assume that killing would not be allowed on Shabbat, but the Torah (in Exod. 22:1) says that in this case it is allowed.

9-11. ומה אם שפיכות דמים... קל וחומר לפיקוח נפש שירתה את השבת

"If shedding blood, which defiles the land and causes the Shekhinah to leave, overrides the laws of Shabbat, how much more so should [an act done in order] to save a life override [the laws of] Shabbat." Rabbi Ishmael uses *kal va'chomer* reasoning in order to draw this conclusion.

12. ומה אם מילה...

"If circumcision...." A bris is done on the eighth day even if that day is Shabbat, despite the fact that cutting violates Shabbat. R. Eleazar reasons that if doing a bris, which involves [saving] only one part of the body, is allowed on Shabbat, how much more so *pikuach nefesh*, which involves the entire body. This, too, is *kal va'chomer* reasoning.

13. אמרו לו ממקום שבאת מה להלן בוראי אף כאן בוראי

"They said to him: following the logic you used, just as in that situation [it only applies in the case of] certainty, so here, too, [it applies only in the case of] certainty." It is not altogether clear who "they" are making this statement. But, one can suppose

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<sup>9</sup>While Ben Zion Wacholder might argue that the Mekhilta borrowed this material from the Bavli, there is no evidence that this is the case. In fact, Wacholder would have to account for the movement of the material from Babylonia to Palestine and the willingness of the Mekhilta's redactors to alter the Bavli text. See Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Date of the Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael," Hebrew Union College Annual 39 (1968), 117-144.

<sup>10</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, v. 3, p. 198, note 2.

it refers to the other rabbis in the narrative. These other rabbis criticize Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah's logical reasoning in support of *pikuach nefesh* overriding Shabbat. They say that the bris is a bad case upon which to hinge the argument. For, in the case of a bris one can only perform it on Shabbat if one is totally certain that the birth occurred eight days before. If the child was born at twilight on Friday or Saturday evening - that is, one is not certain that it is actually Shabbat - then the circumcision may not be performed on Shabbat.<sup>11</sup> Arguing *a fortiori* (*kal va'chomer*) one ends up with the position that one can only violate Shabbat to save a life if one is certain that the life would be saved. This places undo limitations on the obligation of *pikuach nefesh*.

14. רבי עקיבא אומר אם רוחה רציתה....

"Rabbi Akiva says: if [punishment for] murder overrides...." Rabbi Akiva's statement employs a more complex variation on the *kal va'chomer* reasoning that we saw above. According to Exodus 21:14, if someone who schemes treacherously to murder another seeks haven at God's altar, one may take him from the altar (a place of shelter for one who kills by accident) and put him to death. The midrash here extends this to mean that one may even interrupt the cultic service in the Temple in Jerusalem to bring a murderer to justice. Thus, punishment for murder (*r'tzichah*) overrides the Temple service (*avodah*). At the same time, Rabbi Akiva notes, the Temple service overrides Shabbat. That is, the offerings in the Temple are done on Shabbat as well as weekdays, even though offering sacrifices requires activity which breaks the Sabbath laws. By the "transitive property," Rabbi Akiva concludes that punishment for murder overrides Shabbat. Now, if one can punish a murderer on Shabbat, how much more so (*kal va'chomer*) can one save a life on Shabbat.

Interestingly, in Tractate Nezikin, parsha 4, there is an extended debate on whether punishing a murderer sets aside Shabbat that runs along the same lines.<sup>12</sup> However, in this parsha Rabbi Akiva is not mentioned and his logic is rejected. This difference may indicate that different redactors, with different approaches to similar material, worked on the two tractates.

15. רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר...אך חלק יש שבתות שאתה שוכת ויש שבתות שאין...

"Rabbi Yossi the Galilean says: When the text says *akh et shabtotai tishmoru* the word *akh* implies a distinction. There are those Sabbaths when you rest and there are those on which you don't rest." In the comment on line 2 above the role of *akh* as a limiting or exclusionary particle was discussed. The *halakhic* technical term for the principle operating in these cases is *chelek*. While the same verse is explicated here as above, the result is different and somewhat ambiguous. Rabbi Yossi's statement, taken at face value, means that there are some Sabbaths where the injunction against work is not observed. For obvious reasons, this understanding is problematic. The printed

<sup>11</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, v. 3, p. 198, note 3.

<sup>12</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, v. 3, p. 38, lines 74 ff.

editions of the Mekhilta substitute the following for R. Yossi's comment: *yesh shabatot she'atah docheh v'yesh shabatot she'atah shovet*, (emphasis added) "there are those Sabbaths that one overrides and those Sabbaths when one rests." This turns R. Yossi's statement into one which is more restrictive about *pikuach nefesh* than those attributed to the other sages. There are certain Sabbaths when one disregards Sabbath laws to save a life and some when one does not. Which ones? This is not clarified.

#### 18. לכם שבת מסורה ואין אתם מסורין לשבת

"The Sabbath is delivered over to you; you are not delivered over to the Sabbath." In this context, this means that one should not sacrifice people's lives because of the Sabbath. Rather one should set aside the laws of Shabbat to save a life. This point is derived from the Toraitic phrase, *ki kodesh hi lakhem*, ("for it is holy to you"), which is understood here as, "for it is holy for you."<sup>13</sup>

A tension about the purpose and nature of Shabbat, which has been lurking behind this interpolation about *pikuach nefesh*, is brought out into the open with this statement. God has commanded Israel to keep God's Sabbaths. No work may be done, nor anything that interferes with rest. This focus on God's demands seems to create some anxiety for the redactor(s), who quickly shift the discussion to the question of overriding God's commandments in order to save human life. Here, Rabbi Shimon ben Menassiah's statement goes so far as to assert that the Sabbath is for "you," that is, for people, and not only for God. People should not be harmed because of the requirements of Shabbat, established by God.

#### 20. חלל עליו שבת אחת וישמור שבתות הרבה

"One should profane one Sabbath so that [another person] may observe many Sabbaths." The key word in the verse is *l'dorotam*, "for generations." According to this interpretation, Exod. 31:16 means "the Children of Israel must keep the Sabbath and make it possible for generations to keep the Sabbath" by preserving a life who will continue to keep the Sabbaths.

The human side of the God-human tension within the Shabbat laws is again asserted here. Rabbi Natan's statement goes so far as to openly claim that the Sabbath may be profaned in order to save a human being. However, the argument is utilitarian in nature: a person may be saved so that more Sabbaths may be observed, i.e. the goal of saving the life is to increase total Sabbath observance in the world. Thus, God's desire for more observance of "My" Shabbat is brought back into the midrash through the back door. This last of the tradents' statements can be seen as an attempt to harmonize the God-human tension within Shabbat.

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<sup>13</sup>Rabbi Shimon's statement is very similar to one attributed to Jesus in Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." However, there is no reason to believe either comment is dependent upon the other. (Porton, *Understanding*, p. 63). Rather, it implies that this was a relatively common idea in certain circles in the early centuries of the first millennium, C.E.

כי אות היא ביני וביניכם. ולא ביני ובין אומות העולם.  
 לדרווחיכם. שינהו הרבר לדרווח.  
 לרעת. למה נאמר. לפי שהוא אומר ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת שומע אני  
 25 אפילו חרש שומע וקטן במשמע. ח"ל לרעת. לא אמרתי אלא במי שיש בו רעת.

## 22. כי אות היא ביני וביניכם....

"For it is a sign between Me and you...." The chunk of text above is characterized by two consecutive simple exegetical comments followed by a *lamah ne'emar* form. I have lumped them together because they are all concerned with the question, "for whom is the Shabbat intended?" Who needs to observe the Sabbath laws discussed above in the midrash? The answer is: Israel, throughout all her generations, excluding those who don't have the capacity to understand the observances. Thus, these three comments are not disconnected exegetical remarks, but amount to what Neusner calls, an "exegetical form with an implicit proposition."<sup>14</sup> At the same time, this chunk of text bears a topical relation to the material that precedes it. The prior material focused on the fundamentals of Shabbat observance and the God-human tension behind it. Here the midrash addresses which human beings need to observe Shabbat - those who are included and those who are excluded.

## 24. לרעת. למה נאמר...

"To know.' Why is this said?..." This is the second of five examples of the *lamah ne'emar* form in this parsha. (See comment #2 for how this form works). The *cheresh* (deaf person), *shoteh* (mentally deficient person), and *katan* (minor) are excluded from the requirement to observe the Sabbath because they cannot be expected to understand the laws.

כי אני יי מקדשכם. לעולם הבא כגון קדושת שבת בעולם הזה. נמצינו למדין  
 שהוא מעין קדושת העולם הבא. וכן הוא אומר מזמור שיר ליום השבת  
 (תהלים צב:א). לעולם שכולו שבת.  
 ושמרתם את השבת כי קדש היא לכם. זה הוא שהיה רבי שמעון בן מנסיא אומר  
 30 שבת מסורה לכם ואין אתם מסורין לשבת. כי קדש היא לכם. מגיד שהשבת  
 מוספת קדושה על ישראל. מה לפלוני חנותו נעולה שהוא משמר את השבת.  
 מה לפלוני בטל ממלאכתו. שהוא משמר את השבת. מעיר למי שאמר והיה העולם  
 שברא עולמו בששה ימים ונח בשביעי וכן הוא אומר ואתם ערי נאם יי ואני  
 אל. (ישעיה מג:יב).

## 26. כי אני יי מקדשכם. לעולם הבא....

"That I the Lord have consecrated you' for the world to come...."  
 The midrash wants to know what it means that God makes Israel holy. Moreover, why

<sup>14</sup>Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 66.

state it here? The word *kodesh* is understood in the sense of "setting aside" or "elevating." Israel is set aside/elevated for the world to come, just as Shabbat is set aside/elevated in this world. Israel and shabbat are linked in their special relationship to God.

## 26. נמצית למרין

"We have found this teaches." This is a midrashic technical term along the lines of *v'khen atah motzeh*, introducing a conclusion from the prior statement or a related case.

## 27. מעין קדושת העולם הבא

"A reflection of the holiness of the world to come." Assuming an early date for Mekhilta we have here an early statement of the now long-standing tradition that Shabbat is a fraction or glimpse of the world to come. Note the subtle flow in the midrashic material. First, Shabbat was depicted as existing for Israel's sake (in contrast to being for God or for the other nations). Then, Israel is declared set aside for the world to come. Now, the Sabbath is pictured as a piece of the world to come. Thus, the Sabbath is set aside for Israel and Israel for the Sabbath. The *k'dushah* of the Sabbath and Israel are inextricably intertwined.

## 27. מזמור שיר ליום השבת לעולם שכולו שבת (Psalm 92:1)

"A psalm. A song; for the sabbath day.' For the world that is entirely Shabbat." The rabbinic baggage on this psalm, which is traditionally sung during *kabbalat shabbat*, is that it speaks of the world to come.<sup>15</sup> The psalm is quoted extensively in the piece from Tractate B'shalach, parsha 7, analyzed earlier in this paper. There, I explicated the psalm's references to the world to come in detail. The associations here are so powerful that this line in the midrash should be seen as the climax of the parsha to this point.

## 29. ושמרתם את השבת...זה הוא שהיה רבי שמעון בן מנסיא אומר....

"You shall keep the Sabbath'...This is [the text] about which Rabbi Shimon ben Menassiah said...." This type of cross-referencing and repetition occurs several times in this parsha. However, it should not be seen solely as a cross-reference. In this context the comment has a somewhat different meaning than when it was cited earlier. As part of the composite of sages' sayings above, Rabbi Menassiah's statement meant that a person should not be allowed to die in order to avoid violating the Sabbath or, on a deeper level, the Sabbath is for people, not simply for God. Sandwiched here between two comments about the holiness of Shabbat and what it means for Israel, R. Menassiah's statement refers to what Shabbat adds to Israel.

## 30. כי קדש היא לכם

<sup>15</sup>Rashi's comment on this verse is, "It [psalm 92] is said on the Sabbaths and it speaks about the world to come, which is entirely Shabbat."

"For it is holy for you." The exegetical comment on this verse yields a proposition that follows closely on the heels of R. Menassiah's comment, namely, "the Sabbath adds holiness to Israel." In a colorful, mini-homily the midrash explains that the way that Shabbat adds holiness to Israel is that it makes Israel God's witnesses. By not working on Shabbat, Israel proclaims that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. This midrash sheds light on Israel's relationship to the Holy One and the Shabbat's role in that relationship. At the same time, it once again brings out the subtle tension between Shabbat being for Israel (adding to Israel's holiness) or for God (bearing witness to God's creation).

### 30. מעיד

"Tells." This is a midrashic technical term typical of the Mekhilta.

35 מחלליה מות יומת. למה נאמר. לפי שהוא אומר כל העושה מלאכה ביום השבת מות יומת עונש שמענו אזהרה לא שמענו. ת"ל ויום השביעי שבת ליי אלהיך לא תעשה כל מלאכה (שמות כ:). אין לי אלא עונש ואזהרה על מלאכת היום. עונש ואזהרה על מלאכת הלילה מניין. ת"ל מחלליה מות יומת. עונש שמענו אזהרה לא שמענו. ת"ל ויום השביעי שבת ליי אלהיך 40 שאין תלמוד לומר שבת אלא להביא את הלילה בכלל אזהרה רברי רבי אחי רברי יאשיה. רבי יהודה בן בתירה אומר: והרי הנשים שהקיפו את ערי ישראל וחללו ישראל את השבת. שלא יהו ישראל אומדין הואיל וחללו מקצתה נחלל את כולה ת"ל מחלליה מות יומת. אפילו כהרף עין מחלליה מות יומת.

### 35. מחלליה מות יומת

"One who profanes it shall be put to death." This section contains two distinct comments, one attributed to Rabbi Achi and the other to Rabbi Yehudah ben Bathyrah. Literarily, the two comments are linked by the redactor by placing the two tradents' names back to back, as well as by the fact that they are comments on the same verse.<sup>16</sup> Thematically, both are concerned with the time encompassed by Shabbat, the time necessary for a violation to occur, and the fairness of the law requiring punishment. Together they make the statement: day and night, every moment, Shabbat must be observed. Those who violate this injunction have been duly warned and will be properly punished.

In terms of the flow of the parsha, this section moves us from the earlier discussion

<sup>16</sup>Neusner calls the linking of comments based solely on the fact that they are responses to the same text, "the logical cogency of fixed association." Under the logic of fixed association, "distinct facts or sentences or thoughts are held together without actually joining into sequential and coherent propositions of any kind." While modern Westerners might reject this as a form of logic at all, Neusner asserts that the rabbis accepted it and used it frequently in putting documents together. (Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 13.)

of who needs to observe Shabbat (including the legal limitations and theological implications of who is to observe) to when Shabbat needs to be observed. It moves us from the *kedushah* that Shabbat observance adds to Israel, to the punishment that must be exacted from Israel for *chilul shabbat* (profaning of Shabbat). On the up side, keeping Shabbat leads to the world to come. But on the down side, violating the Shabbat leads to death. This is another tension raised by this parsha.

### 35. ...למה נאמר. לפי שרוא אימר.

Rabbi Achi's comment is one, continuous, tightly edited piece. It is a more complex version of the *lamah ne'emar* form we saw above.<sup>17</sup> The verse in need of correction is introduced after the base text, followed by the problem it raises that needs correction (*onesh shmanu azharah lo shamanu*). However, instead of bringing the base text to resolve the problem, the redactor introduces a third verse from elsewhere in scripture. This resolves the initial problem but, simultaneously raises another (*onesh v'azhara al m'lekhet ha'lailah minayin*). The base text is then brought to resolve that problem, but the initial problem is then applied to the base text. That, in turn, is resolved by the introduction of a fourth text. The result is four text to prove four points: one verse to indicate punishment for violation of the Sabbath in the daytime, and another to do so for the nighttime; one verse to warn a potential perpetrator of a violation during the daytime, and another to indicate a warning for the nighttime.

While the structure works, it would have been literarily more appealing had the redactor brought the base-text in last in the sequence of verses. It seems that the reason that the midrash was formulated in this way is that it was borrowed from Tractate Ba'chodesh, parasha 7.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the pericope is laid out identically in both tractates. However, it works better in Ba'chodesh because there it is a comment on Exod. 20:10. This verse appears second and fourth in the pericope (the only one to appear twice), filling the role usually filled by the base-text in a *lamah ne'emar* formula. That is, it resolves the problem raised by the verse introduced from elsewhere in the Bible. In its setting in Ba'chodesh 7, the piece is, in effect, a "double" *lamah ne'emar* form. If the pericope wasn't borrowed outright from Ba'chodesh, then it undoubtably came the same source.

### 35-36. כל העושה מלאכה ביום השבת מות יומת. עונש שמענו אזהרה לא שמענו.

"Whoever does work on the sabbath day shall be put to death.' We have heard the punishment; we have not heard the warning." The *lamah ne'emar* form that introduces this verse tells us that there will be something with this verse that will be incomplete or need correction. The midrash picks out the fact that it speaks of punishment for working on the Sabbath (death), but it does not give a warning. That is, it does not state the

<sup>17</sup>Neusner would call this a full scale "propositional form." (Neusner, Mekilta, p. 57.)

<sup>18</sup>Lauterbach, Mekilta, v. 2, p. 254, lines 80-89.

prohibition. The text introduced, Exodus 20:10, does state the prohibition, in effect, standing as a warning flag earlier in the Torah. Interestingly, the base-text could not have been brought here to resolve this problem because it does not contain such a warning. This may be why the redactor did not use an ordinary *lamah ne'emar* form nor altered the midrashic text found in Ba'chodesh 7.

#### אין לי אלא עונש ואזהרה על מלאכת היום (37-38)

"I have only punishment and warning on work during the day." The verses cited, Exod. 31:15 and 20:10 contain the word, *yom*, which is read by the midrash exclusively, indicating "day" and not "night."

#### שאין תלמוד לומר שבת אלא להביא את הלילה. 40.

The verse cited, Exod. 20:10, says *v'yom ha'shvi'i shabbat* ("the seventh day [is the] Sabbath"). The midrash sees this as a potential redundancy and says that the word "shabbat" is there to add the night to the "seventh day."

45 כי כל העושה בה מלאכה. ער שיעשה בה מלאכה נמורה. הרי שכתב אות אחת בשחרית ואות אחת בין הערבים או שארנו חוט אחר בשחרית וחוט אחר בין הערבים שומע אני יהא חייב. ת"ל כי כל העושה בה מלאכה ער שיעשה מלאכה נמורה.

ונכרתה הנפש ההיא מקרב עמיה. למה נאמר. לפי שהוא מחלליה מות יומת 50 אין לי אלא המזיר בהתראת ערים. המזיר בינו לבין עצמו מניין. ת"ל ונכרתה להביא את המזיר בינו לבין עצמו. ונכרתה. אין הכרתה אלא הפסקה. הנפש ההיא. מזירה רבי רבי עקיבא. מקרב עמה ועמה שלום.

#### 45. כי כל העושה בה מלאכה

"Whoever does work on it." The midrash has already discussed who must observe Shabbat and when it must be observed. Now, we have section that describes some of the details concerning what must be observed. Specifically, we have two comments on the question of what constitutes *m'lakhah* (work) and what punishments are applied to one who engages in it on Shabbat. The comments respond to two consecutive phrases in the second half of verse 31:14.

The first comment defines *m'lakhah* as a complete act of work done at one time. If part of it is done in the morning and part of the evening, it doesn't count as work. The lacuna that this comment hangs on is the word *bah* ("on it"), which seems to add nothing to the verse. The *pshat* on the word *bah* is that "on it" means "on Shabbat." However, if this were the case, then the word would be unnecessary. We already know that the verse is about Shabbat. Therefore, "on it" is taken to mean "on the moment that the work is initiated," i.e. at one time.



#### 49. נכרתה הנפש והיא

"That person shall be cut off." Here, the midrash is compelled to resolve a very clear contradiction in the biblical text. The very same verse says, "He who profanes it shall be put to death" and "whoever does work on it that person shall be cut off." In order to explicate the resolution, the *lamah ne'emar* form is employed. This is somewhat unusual in that this form is usually used in situations where there is a related verse elsewhere in the Bible. Here the related phrase is part of the same verse!

The comment differentiates between one who "profanes" the Sabbath and one who "does work on it." The person who profanes is one who flagrantly violates the Sabbath before (two) witnesses. This person gets the death penalty. The person who "does work" on Shabbat is defined as someone who flagrantly violates the law but does so in private. That person is subject to punishment of *karet* ("cutting off"). Some scholars have understood this punishment to refer to a person's life being cut short through divine intervention.<sup>19</sup> However, it more likely means divine excision of the soul.

#### 50. מזיר

"Flagrantly violates." This refers to acting in a premeditated fashion to 'do evil.'<sup>20</sup>

#### 50. התראת עדים

"The presence of witnesses." This refers to the legal warning, by witnesses, given to the offender immediately before committing the offense.<sup>21</sup> Thus, to receive the death penalty, one must not only violate the Sabbath in the presence of two witnesses, one must do so despite their warning against it beforehand.

#### 52. הנפש והיא. מזירה רברי רבי עקיבא

"That soul." One who flagrantly violates - the words of Rabbi Akiva." The word *ha'hi* in the biblical text is unnecessary. This statement attributed to R. Akiva seems to be responding to the definitiveness of the language by saying that the soul must be definitively *meizidah*, wilfully evil.

#### 52. מקרב עמיה. ועמה שלום

The midrash is noting that Israel will be more at peace, more whole, when the perpetrator is removed from among her.<sup>22</sup> This could apply whether the punishment is physical death or excision of the soul from that of the people. In case of the latter, it would mean that the person would not be resurrected at the end of time.

<sup>19</sup>Porton, Understanding, p. 66.

<sup>20</sup>Jastrow, Dictionary, p. 391.

<sup>21</sup>ibid. p. 371.

<sup>22</sup>Porton, Understanding, p. 66.

ששת ימים יעשה מלאכה. כתוב אחר אומר ששת ימים יעשה מלאכה וכתוב  
 55 אחר אומר ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית כל מלאכתך (שמות כ:ט). כיצד יתקיימו  
 שני כתובים הללו. כשישראל עושין רצונו של מקום ששת ימים יעשה מלאכה.  
 מלאכתן נעשית על ידי אחרים וכן הוא אומר ועמדו זרים ורעו צאנכם ובני  
 נכר אכריכם וכרמיכם (ישעיה סא:ה). וכשישראל אין עושין רצונו של מקום  
 ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית כל מלאכתך. מלאכתן נעשית על ידי עצמן. ולא  
 60 עוד אלא אפילו מלאכת אחרים נעשית על ידן שנאמר ועברת את ארביך וט'  
 (דברים כח:מח).

#### 54. ששת ימים יעשה מלאכה

"Six days may work be done." The prior section discussed what constitutes an act of work which violates the Sabbath and the punishments that befall those individuals who commit such violations. Here, we move from individual reward and punishment to the reward and punishment of Israel as a whole for Shabbat observance or lack thereof. This is a natural transition, one which is abetted by the last word of the prior verse, *ameiha* ("its people," [i.e., Israel]).

The following proposition is outlined in this pericope: If Israel follows God's will, they will prosper and be the ruling class; others will do their work for them. If they fail to do God's will, not only will they have to do their own work, they will have to do the work of their enemies. This can be read against the backdrop of the Exodus, whereby Israel was freed because of their faith in God, demonstrated through mitzvot.<sup>23</sup> The burden of doing the work of their enemies was lifted from them. It can also be read against the backdrop of 2nd-4th century Palestine, when the Mekhilta was probably composed. The rabbis would have understood their suffering under the burdens imposed upon them by Rome as doing the work of their enemies as well as their own. Moreover, they understood their suffering to be the result of having disobeyed God's will.

#### 54-56. כתוב אחר אומר... וכתוב אחר אומר... כיצד יתקיימו שני כתובים...

This form appears in other places in the Mekhilta, including the passage on *u'moshav B'nai Yisrael* in Pischa 14, which was discussed above. This form is used to introduce two verses on the same subject that seem to contradict. It asks the question, how can they both be maintained as true (since the Torah cannot contradict itself)? Here, the contradiction between the verses is not so easily discerned. The base-text says that in six days all work will be done (*yei'aseh*). The verb is in a passive voice; the subject doing the work is undefined. In the verse brought in by the redactor, Exod. 20:9, it says that you shall do all your work.

There is a message implicit in this form: no two verses contradict. Rather, seemingly contradictory verses need to be juxtaposed so that the deeper, intertextual meaning can be derived. When this is done it is clear that the verses actually complement each other. (In the present case, they are revealed to be flip sides of the

<sup>23</sup>See chapter three on *Massekhta d'Beshallah*.

same coin.) The Torah is, in fact, an integrated whole.

וביום השביעי שבת שבתון קדש ליי. למה נאמר. לפי שהוא אומר אלה מערי  
 "מקראי קדש אשר תקראו אותם במועדם (ויקרא כג:ד). יכול כשם שקדושת  
 מועדות מסורה לבית דין כך תדא קדושת שבת מסורה לבית דין. ת"ל וביום  
 65 השביעי שבת שבתון קדש ליי לשם שבת מסורה ואינה מסורה לבית דין. וכן  
 הוא אומר ושמרתם את השבת וכו'.

## 62. וביום השביעי שבת שבתון קדש ליי

"But on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord." This section returns to the theme discussed earlier, the tension between the role of God and the role of human beings vis-a-vis Shabbat. Earlier we read, *lakhem shabbat m'surah* ("Shabbat is given over to you"). Here we read, *la'shem shabbat m'surah* ("Shabbat is given over to God"). The fact that the focus has shifted back to God can be attributed to the base-text, which refers to Shabbat as "holy to the Lord." That shift is played out through the setting up of a contrast between the *beit din* establishing the dates of festivals and God establishing the days of Shabbat.

## 62. למה נאמר... יכול... ת"ל

This piece represents another example of the *lamah ne'emar* paradigm. One small difference from what we saw earlier is that instead of *ein li elah* or *shomei'ah ani* following the verse introduced by *lamah ne'emar*, the term *yachol* is used. *Yachol* functions here very much the same way as *shomeah ani*, introducing an incorrect conclusion which requires correction by the base text.

## 63-64. כשם ש... כך...

"Just as...so too..." Functions the same way as *ma...af...*

## 63-64. קדושת מועדות מסורה לבית דין

"The sanctification of the festivals is handed over to the *beit din*." The human *beit din* determines the dates of *rosh chodesh* which, in turn, fixes the dates of the festivals. In this sense, human beings control the festivals, as Lev 23:4 states: *asher tikr'u otam b'moadam*, "which you shall proclaim them in their set times."<sup>24</sup> In contrast, according to this midrash, the dates of Shabbat are in God's hands; Shabbat is not under the

<sup>24</sup>The authority of the *beit din* is derived from the text of Lev. 23:4. The word *otam* ("them," i.e. the festivals) is read midrashically as *atem* ("you"). Thus, the rabbis read *asher tikr'u atem* - [These are the festivals of the Lord, the holy convocations] "which you will proclaim." The human *beit din* proclaims the dates of the festivals.

authority of the *beit din*. Rather, it falls when God dictates, at sunset every seventh day.<sup>25</sup> As the base-text says, *u'vayom hashvi'i...kodesh l'Adonai*. The power to sanctify (*k'd'sh*) the Sabbath belongs to God (*l'Adonai*).

66. ושמרתם את השבת ונ'.

"You shall keep the Sabbath, etc." Above (line 17), this verse (Exod. 31:14), is used as a basis for saying that the Shabbat is given over to human beings. Indeed, the verse continues *ki kodesh hi lakhem*, "for it is holy for you." In a clever and subtle manner, this verse is brought back here to support the exact opposite point! The fact that both sections use the term *m'surah* ("given over" or "under the control") in the same manner indicates that this is the work of the redactor who has intentionally recontextualized the verse to emphasize the God-human tension in the midrash. Part of this play is that the redactor leaves out the end of the verse in the midrashic text so that the opposing meaning won't be undermined.

ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת. זה הוא שהיה רבי נתן אומר:  
חלל עליו שבת אחת כרי שישמור שבתות הרבה. רבי אליעזר אומר לעשות את  
השבת לרדוותם ברית עולם רב שהברית כרותה לו. ואיוו זו. מילה.  
70 רבי אלעזר בן פרטא אומר מגין אתה אומר כל מי שהוא שומר את השבת  
מעלים עליו כאלו עשה השבת. שנאמר ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את  
השבת. רבי אומר מגין אתה אומר שכל מי שהוא משמר שבת אחת כחקנה מעלים  
עליו כאלו שימר כל השבתות מיום שברא הקב"ה עולמו עד שיחיו המתים.  
שנאמר ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת לרדוותם.

67. ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת.

"The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath...." The dialectic once again shifts back towards the human influence over Shabbat. The trigger for the shift is the verse itself, which juxtaposes Israel keeping the Sabbath with making (*la'asot*) the Sabbath. Rabbi Elazar ben Peruta's comment addresses this shift most directly: "Anyone who keeps the Sabbath is given the credit as if he made the Sabbath." But, other comments here have the same orientation. Rabbi Natan's statement allows a person to violate the Sabbath in order to save a life. Rabbi's comment asserts that if a person observes one Shabbat correctly he/she is given the credit as if he/she observed all of the Sabbaths from the time of creation until the resurrection. All of these comments place a tremendous amount of power over Shabbat and its meaning in human hands.

The related theme of the above material is only one of the reasons that I identified it as one literary unit. The piece is characterized by a series of statements which are

<sup>25</sup>This issue is discussed in the *B.T. Baba Batra* 121a.

attributed to various tradents, which distinguished it from the material around it.<sup>26</sup> The base-verse is repeated at the very end of the section, creating a "book-end effect." Finally, Rabbi Elazar's and Rabbi's comments employ the same form back to back.

67. ... זה הוא שהיה רבי נתן אומר.

"This is what Rabbi Natan used to say." Another cross-reference/ repetition. Both of the statements attributed to rabbis which are quoted twice in this parsha are introduced with the words *zeh hu she'hayah...omer*, "this what...used to say," the second time they are quoted.<sup>27</sup>

69. רבר שהברית כרותה לו.

"The thing through which the covenant is made." The midrash is reading the base text *la'asot et ha'shabbat* as *la'asot al haShabbat*, "to do on Shabbat." The midrash is playing here on the literal meaning of *lichrot brit*, "to cut a covenant.," It says that what can be done on Shabbat is "the thing through which the covenant is cut," i.e. circumcision.

70. רבי אלעזר בן פרטא...רבי אומר.

"Rabbi Elazar b. Peruta...Rabbi says...." These two comments use parallel forms:

רבי "X" אומר

מנין אתה אומר "A" מעלים עליו כאלו "B"

שנאמר "base text"

Thematically, the comment by R. Elazar b. Peruta can be contrasted to the comment above on *u'vayom ha'shvi'i shabbat shabbaton kodesh l'Adonai*. R. Elazar credits Israel with "making" the Sabbath, while the earlier comment saw the Sabbath as purely of God's making.

71. מעלים עליו כאלו.

"It is accredited to him as if."

<sup>26</sup>This seems to be a reasonably good example of what Neusner calls "a composite of sayings of sages on a single proposition." (Neusner, *Mekhila*, p. 59.) Dr. Neusner, however, might object that these statements do not really have a single proposition. While they are more diverse than the examples he gives, these statements are held together by more than just "the logic of fixed association."

<sup>27</sup>Porton, *Understanding*, p. 67. Porton claims that this phrase may indicate that these are well-known sayings. It seems to me that the usage of the phrase in such a particular manner is more than enough evidence to argue that this a midrashic term indicating that the saying was quoted earlier.

75 ביני ובין בני ישראל. ולא ביני ובין אומות העולם.  
 אות היא לעולם. מניד שאין השבת בשלה מ'ישראל לעולם. וכן את מוצא שכל  
 דבר ודבר שנתנו ישראל נפשן עליהן נתקיימו בידן וכל דבר ודבר שלא נתנו  
 ישראל נפשן עליהן לא נתקיימו בידן. כגון שבת והמילה ותלמוד תורה ושבילה  
 שנתנו נפשן עליהן נתקיימו בידן. וכגון בית המקדש והדין והשמיטין  
 80 ויובלות שלא נתנו ישראל נפשן עליהן לא נתקיימו בידן.

# 75. ביני ובין בני ישראל. ולא ביני ובין אומות העולם.

"Between Me and the Children of Israel." And not between Me and the nations of the earth." The same comment is made above on *ki ot he beynei u'b'neychem*. However, the comment serves a different purpose in this context. Here, it can be seen as an introduction to this section of text, which focuses on why Israel has the Sabbath. The first answer, given here, is that God gave it to Israel as part of the covenant that God made with Israel and not with the rest of the nations.

# 77. נתנו ישראל נפשן עליהן.

"Israel gave their souls for them." In other places in the Mekhilta this phrase means "willing to give their lives for."<sup>28</sup> Here, I believe it means, "were totally devoted to." For, it is hard to argue that Israel did not give it's life for the Temple. Yet, this midrash says *lo natnu Yisrael nafshan aleyhen* in reference to it.

This phrase reverberates through both poles of the God-human tension within Shabbat. On the one hand, this piece is saying that anything that Israel was really devoted to remained among them (lit: was kept in their hands). Control of Shabbat has been in Israel's hands all along. On the other hand, this piece could be saying that anything that Israel was willing to die for was kept among them. Once again, we have Israel *m'surah l'shabbat*, given over to - willing to sacrifice themselves for - Shabbat. There is also the question of who is causing the Sabbath to remain among Israel. Is it Israel's devotion alone, or is it God rewarding Israel for her devotion? Ultimately, the message must be that it is both. Power over Shabbat must be shared between God and Israel just as the covenant is shared between them. Afterall, as the base-text says, Shabbat is the sign of the covenant (*ot hi l'olam*).

<sup>28</sup>See above, Pischa 1.

כי ששת ימים ונ' וביום השביעי שבת וינפש. שבת ממחשבת עבודה. או  
אף מן הדין. ת"ל וינפש מגיד שאין הדין בטל מלפניו לעולם. וכן הוא  
אומר צדק ומשפט מכון כסאך ונ' (תהלים פט:טו). ענן וערפל סביבין צדק  
ומשפט ונ' (שם צז:ב). הצור תמים פעלו כי כל דרכיו משפט ונ' (רברים לב:ד).

#### 81. כי ששת ימים ונ'.

"For in six days, etc." This last section is clearly designed as a *nechemta*. The parsha ends with a flourish which is both comforting and uplifting. God's administration of justice never stops. Note the subtle switch played by the redactor. To this point all of the extensive discussion of rest on Shabbat has focused on Israel's rest. Here, the focus shifts to God's rest.

#### 81. שבת ממחשבת עבודה.

"[God] ceased from the thought of work." This may be a response to the rabbinic aversion to seeing God act as human beings do. However, it may also be teaching a lesson that people, like God, should not even think about work on Shabbat. This idea is raised in the BaChodesh 7 in a comment on "Six days shall you labor and do all you work": *davar acher: shavat memachshevav avodah*, "Another interpretation: Rest even from the thought of labor." Here, the reference is to people not thinking about work.

#### 81-82. או אף מן הדין ת"ל וינפש.

*Vayinafash* refers to resting from the work of creation, but not from administering justice.<sup>29</sup> This notion can be found in Bereshit Rabba, *parashah* 11, paragraph 10:

כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו (ברא' ב:ג) ממלאכת עולמו שבת.  
ולא שבת לא ממלאכת הרשעים ולא ממלאכת הצדיקים...

"For on it [God] rested from all [God's] labors (Gen. 2:3)"

[God] rested from the work of [creating God's] world. [God] didn't rest from the work of the wicked, nor from the work of the righteous.

<sup>29</sup>Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, v. 3, p. 205, note 9.

## OVERVIEW

At first glance this parsha from tractate Shabbta appears to be a collection of random comments about Shabbat, a hodgepodge of rhetorical forms and propositions which respond to the biblical text but have little to do with one and other. In fact, there is subtle, but definite coherence to this parsha. The consistency of form, thematic tension and topical flow all bear witness to a skillful redactorial hand.

Rhetorical Forms, Technical Term, and Relationship to the Biblical Text

Part of the reason why the material in this parsha appears choppy is that a number of different rhetorical forms and technical terms are used in the piece. There are numerous examples of simple exegetical comments spread throughout the piece, as well as few more elaborate exegetical comments that contain propositions and/or prooftexts.<sup>30</sup> There are a few other more particular propositional forms, including *katuv echad omer...katuv echad omer...* (lines 54-62) and a *v'khen atah motzeh* elaboration on an exegetical comment (lines 74-80). *Kal va'chomer* logic is employed frequently early in the parsha, particularly in the composite of sages' sayings on *pikuach nefesh*. However, it is not used much later in the piece. The term, *magid*, typical of the Mekhilta, is used twice. A new term, *chelek*, is also found here.

However, one particular form appears so many times throughout the piece that it can be considered characteristic of it. That is, the *lamah ne'emar* form, or as Neusner

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<sup>30</sup>Simple exegetical comments are found on lines 1, 22, 23, 52, 53, 75, and 76. More complex exegetical comments are found on lines 26-28, 45-48 and 74-80.



calls it, the "redactional/harmonistic form."<sup>31</sup> This form is employed on five separate occasions in the course of the parsha, from beginning to end, and accounts for more than twenty percent of the midrashic text. It is not found nearly as often in any of the other *parshiyot* that I have examined. Even if it is common in other *halakhic* portions of the Mekhilta, the extent to which it is employed here indicates the selective activity of one redactor or a discipleship circle.

Moreover, the heavy use of *lamah ne'emar* is indicative of a particular vision of the biblical text. This form asserts that in order to understand one text on a given point, another text from elsewhere in the canon must be juxtaposed with it. Together the texts are explicated so that each text tells only part of the story, or gives part of the law on the issue at hand. For example, in Exod. 31:13, the word, *la'da'at*, must be understood in the context of Exod. 31:15, *v'shamru b'nei yisrael et ha'shabbat* (lines 24-25). The latter verse could be misconstrued to the effect that every single individual in Israel must observe the Sabbath. The word *la'da'at* comes to tell us that the deaf person, the mentally incompetent and minors are excluded from this obligation. Of course, this rule could have been derived from scripture in a different fashion. That this form was chosen shows that the redactor of Shabbta was intent on teaching that the Torah must be seen as an integrated whole.

#### Thematic Tension and Topical Coherence

Shabbta breaks the biblical text of Exod. 31:12-17 into many small fragments and

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<sup>31</sup>Neusner, *Mekhilta*, p. 112.

few fragments receive the kind of extensive commentary that we have seen in the other *parshiot*. Add to that the fact that the midrashic material is quite prosaic in style and it is clear why the flow of this piece is nowhere near as smooth as Va'yassa 1, let alone B'shalach 7. Nevertheless, there is a discernable, organized flow of topics in this piece, as well as one overriding thematic tension which virtually every chunk of text addresses in what amounts to a dialectical progression. In order to visualize this flow it is helpful to review the piece in a schematic fashion, presenting the chunks of text as units. The topical coherence of each unit will not be discussed here as, I believe, they were established in the commentary.

a) Lines 1-4:

- Identifies God as authority for the text
- Establishes purpose of the section: "Keep My Shabbat;" focus is on God's demands
- Defines keeping Shabbat in terms of restrictions on *m'lachah* and activities that interfere with *sh'vut*.

b) Lines 5-20

- Moves from restrictions on Shabbat activities to exception to those restrictions, i.e., *pikuach nefesh*.
- Reacts to God's restrictions by carving out human space; assertion that the Sabbath is for "you," i.e., people

c) Lines 22-25

- Moves from Shabbat restrictions to who needs to observe them

- Defines focus on human beings in terms of Israel and covenant

d) Lines 26-34

- Explains in what way Shabbat is for Israel's sake
- Shabbat helps elevate Israel to the world to come
- Identifies what Israel gets from Shabbat as *k'dushah*
- But, Shabbat makes Israel witness for God; hence, Shabbat is for God

e) Lines 35-44

- Moves from who to when Shabbat needs to be observed: day and night, every moment
- Moves from focus on *kedushah* to focus on *chilul*, from what is added to Israel to what can be exacted from them as punishment

f) Lines 45-54

- Moves from when to what specifically is *m'lakhah* for which one is punished (complete activity at one time)
- Discusses nature and requisites for punishment of violators
- God reenters as punisher of one who violates privately

g) Lines 54-61

- Extension of reward/punishment theme from individuals to Israel as a group, from specific situations to cosmic, historical ramifications

h) Lines 62-66

- Tension over Shabbat for God or human beings swings back to God; *la'Shem*,

*shabbat m'surah*

## i) Lines 67-74

- God-human tension swings back to control of people over Shabbat "Anyone who keeps the Sabbath is given credit as if he/she made the Sabbath."

## j) Lines 75-80

- God-human tension brought to its climactic extreme; human beings have control if we are willing to give our souls for Shabbat; but, is it God who has control as the one rewarding us?

## k) Lines 81-84

- Nechemta saying that God will not rest from maintaining justice; also a response to Israel's sacrifice, i.e., it will be worth it.

One can see in the above summary that there are three thematic lines of argument that hold this Shabbta piece together. One is the topical flow from what the section is about - what needs to be observed on Shabbat - to who needs to observe it, to when and then back to more detail on what. Within that discussion are the ramifications of observing or not observing the strictures. Here, the text flows from rewards to punishments, to an historical principle of reward and punishment for Israel as a whole. Thirdly, there is the tension over the control and purpose of Shabbat. Is Shabbat for God's sake or for the sake of human beings? In order to reveal this tension, the redactor has spun a spiralling dialectic that rises in intensity through the piece, ending in a climax about Israel giving its soul for the Sabbath. This is by far the most compelling of the

themes in the piece and the one that holds it together from beginning to end.

Neusner asserts that the only thing holding this piece together is the "logic of fixed association."<sup>32</sup> That is, the comments in the midrash relate to the biblical base-text but not to each other in any significant way. As we have seen, this analysis is incorrect. It is true that, in large measure, the comments in this piece are linked to the base text. The order of the arguments presented may even have been suggested by the verses in that text. However, Shabbta, at least the longer of its two *parshiot*, presents a coherent, well-constructed topical essay on the law and spiritual meaning of Shabbat.

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<sup>32</sup>Neusner, *Mekhila*, pp. 173-174. Neusner describes Shabbta as follows, "This melange of materials exhibits no clear order or program, being not an essay or an exposition but an assembly of materials on a given topic, set forth in accord with Scripture's statements concerning that topic." (*Mekhila*, p. 173.)

## CONCLUSION

Having examined midrashic pieces from six chapters and five different tractates of the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael it is now possible to return to the original questions posited in the introduction to this paper: Does this midrashic work show evidence of shaping by one or more redactorial hands? Does the material appear to be deliberately compiled with a particular purpose in mind or is it merely, as Neusner argues, a "scriptural encyclopedia of Judaism,"<sup>1</sup> collecting midrashic material on particular verses with literal regard for creating a coherent whole? On the other hand, if there is evidence of coherence, is it a result of a particular reading of the text of Exodus? In order to answer these questions for the Mekhilta as a whole, one must first answer them for the smaller pieces that make up this compilation. For, if there is no significant evidence of shaping within the individual units, it is unlikely that there was a redactorial attempt to create a coherent work out of the whole.

It is apparent from the overview of each chapter that the six pieces demonstrate at least some shaping by a redactorial hand and a certain degree of internal unity. Clearly, some are more tightly woven than others. For example, the various chunks of midrashic material in Chapter Fourteen of Massekhta d'Pischa do not come together as a coherent whole to the

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<sup>1</sup>Neusner, Mekhilta, p. xi.

degree that one finds in Chapter One of the same tractate. Nevertheless, as argued above, Chapter Fourteen does demonstrate a certain amount internal interconnection and thematic cogency.

At the same time, each of the pieces from the various tractates is shaped differently and bears a somewhat different relationship to the biblical base-text from the others. Chapter One of Massekhta d'Pischa develops a number of clear propositions surrounding the themes of revelation and the exigencies of Jewish leadership. Smooth transitions connect one section of this piece to the next, creating a topical flow that is almost essay-like in character. Few, if any, digressions interrupt this flow. The tight coherence of this parashah is particularly striking given its length; it is the longest of the pieces analyzed in this paper. Moreover, this piece delivers one, cogent message: Revelation only comes to a leader of Israel in the Land of Israel and by the merit of the People of Israel. Since the people are sinful, there can be no prophecy for the leader. Nevertheless, the leader must stand by his people and not abandon them in the face of God's terrible judgement against them.

This message cannot be said to be a reading of the base-text for this piece, Exod. 12:1, and the material is largely non-exegetic in nature. Still, the issues of leadership and revelation are part and parcel of the Book of Exodus and, on that broader level, one can say that there is some connection

between the themes of Exodus and the midrash in this *parashah*.

The tie to Exodus and the biblical base-text (12:37-42) is much more intimate in Chapter Fourteen of Pischa. In fact, the primary purposes of the piece seems to be 1) to capture the magical feeling of the moment of departure from Egypt, the subject of the base-text; and 2) to collapse that moment in time through intertextual reading, linking it to the moment when Abraham is told of his and his people's future and to the moment of the future redemption. This strong reading of the base-text appears repeatedly throughout the chapter and serves as the main link holding this piece together. Thus, although it is largely exegetical, the chapter obtains a modicum of unity beyond the logic of fixed association, beyond the mere tie to verses that happen to appear consecutively. Moreover, since there are cogent themes uniting the piece, it is possible for certain key words (*k'heref ayin, atid lavo, ketz*) and tensions (between the role of God and human beings in bringing on redemption) to resonate through it. This, too, is evidence of redactorial shaping.

There is little doubt about the presence of a redactorial hand behind the material from Massekhta d'Beshallah. The discussion about *amana/emunah* is an exquisite example of the bringing together of form and content to address one, compelling theme: So powerful is faith rooted in deeds that through its merit the spirit of God descends upon Israel and they sing a song - the Song at the Sea and the song of the



messianic redemption. This piece is very much an exegetical response to Exod. 14:31-15:1. ("They had faith in the Lord and His servant Moses. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.") It is also an intertextual reading of that verse. The midrash cites moments in other biblical texts - from Genesis to Isaiah to Song of Songs - where faith leads to the reward of redemption.

However, like the piece from Chapter One of Pischa its cohesiveness does not derive solely from the verse cited. Though it is clearly a reading of the dramatic moment right before Israel sings the Song of the Sea, it could stand as a self-contained piece even outside of this midrashic compilation. It presents a cogent argument, beginning with an introduction that lays out the proposition stated above, moving to how this proposition was fulfilled for Israel's ancestors and then to how it will be fulfilled in the future. The piece culminates with a vision of the return of the exiles to the Land and Israel to her marriage to God. Then, a conclusion is added for good measure. The form and style of the piece also contribute greatly to its message. It has the texture of a musical piece, including the rhythmic repetition of key words and phrases, and the rapid citation of verses, which build to a crescendo at the key moment of messianic fulfillment.

This piece from Beshallah may be the most skillfully redacted of the six discussed in the paper. However, it is

also the shortest. Moreover, I deliberately included a snippet of material before the *emunah/amanah* piece which explicates the same biblical verse. There was no apparent connection between this exegetical comment and the longer piece that follows. Thus, had the *parashah* been analyzed in its entirety, it is quite possible that it would have been far less coherent than the *emunah/amanah* piece alone.

Like the *emunah/amanah* piece, style and structure play a large role in the cohesiveness and impact of Chapter One of Massekhta d'Shirta. However, as I noted above (p. 99), for Shirta even more than Beshallah, the medium is the message. The first half to two thirds of the *parashah* is written in a prosaic style, much like the sections we saw from Pischa, though not nearly as well-argued or well-edited as Chapter One of that tractate. This is followed by a few tightly-structured sections written in a poetic style. In his book on Shirta, Judah Goldin casts these sections in the form of verse and it seems entirely appropriate.<sup>2</sup> After these sections, the poetry of the piece breaks down until the last section is, once again, entirely prosaic in style.

As I noted in the overview to this *parashah* it seems that this pattern expresses a sense of the moment of the Song at the Sea, including the "prosaic" period leading up to it, the song itself and the prosaic period that, by necessity,

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<sup>2</sup>Goldin, Song, pp. 80-84.

followed as Israel turned to the desert.<sup>3</sup> In fact, this is the universal pattern for all moments of "song" in a person's or peoples' life - long periods of ordinary, work-a-day experience, punctuated by rare, powerful moments of redemptive celebration.

Interestingly, the pattern within the individual poetic sections of the midrash and - more striking - in the way that the base-text is cited within the piece fits the overall pattern of the piece. Words from the base-text are repeated, the longest phrase introducing the largest chunk of poetry and the shortest phrase at the point where the poetry dissipates into prose. We can say that the redactor of Chapter One of Shirta shaped the base-text so that he could shape the chapter to capture the dynamic of the moment of song. It seems that the relationship between the biblical text and the midrash is far more complex than the question of whether the material is exegetic or if intertexts are cited. Through form and content the redactor(s) of this piece in Shirta and the piece that proceeds it in Beshallah both shape and express the biblical moment of song.

It is not the moment of harmony, but the moment of cacophony that is expressed in Massekhta d'Vayassa. Appropriately, in this tractate we find three different, dissonant voices, each with its own, unique reading of the incident at Marah. Equally appropriate, the rhetorical

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<sup>3</sup>See p. 101.

dispute form is used in order to present these differing readings. The comprehensiveness of each of the readings, the fitting use of the dispute form, and the way in which the readings are pulled together, indicate a significant degree of redactorial shaping.

Two of the readings are diametrically opposed to one another, those of Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Yehoshua sees Israel in an essentially positive light, a group whose faith in God and Moses was essentially intact. Therefore, he is sympathetic to their waterless plight in the desert and sees their complaint as a reasonable reaction to an unreasonable situation. A forthcoming response from God, "sweet medicine," i.e., a willow tree, was appropriate to neutralize the bitterness. God gave Israel "sweet" laws, like "keep the Sabbath," at that time. In other words, God gave Israel a lift when they were down ("nisahu" with a "sin").

Rabbi Eliezer sees Israel as having been essentially unfaithful to God and rebellious towards Moses. They could have found water had they made a real effort to look, but they preferred to complain. Israel's complaining was evidence of their essentially bitter nature and bitter people need "bitter medicine." Thus, God used an olive tree and gave Israel laws such as the laws against incest, appropriate for hard core sinners.

I referred to the third reading, that of the Dorshei R'shumot and Rabbi Shimon, as the "Torah reading." Israel

went three days in the desert and couldn't find water, which really means Torah. Without Torah they came to Marah and became rebellious (based on the same root as Marah). Moses prayed to God, who did not literally show him a tree, but taught (a proper reading of the word for "show") him Torah, which is the "tree of life." The bitter waters, i.e., the bitter people who lacked Torah, became sweet. Thus, as is evident, God gave Israel laws (Torah) at Marah and tested them by saying, "If you keep the Torah which I have given you this day...(Exod. 15:26)."

Each of these readings is coherent in and of itself; each resolves the gaps in the text; and each is based on intertexts from other parts of the Bible. In constant tension throughout the piece, these three readings, nevertheless, hold the piece together.

Moreover, these three readings are themselves united into a whole by a fourth reading, which appears near the end of the piece. The crux of this reading is an interpretation of "va'yashlech el ha'mayim" ("[He] threw [it] into the water") which says that Israel threw themselves down at the water, i.e., they repented. Having represented actual water, faith, and Torah, "water" now becomes a metaphor for t'shuvah. It is Israel's turning to God which causes God to turn to them and provide sweet water to drink. This fourth reading can be understood as an intertextual reading of the Marah incident through Isaiah 38. Thus, this reading, too, has an

intertextual basis. The repentance-forgiveness paradigm works for all three of the other readings and, hence, acts as a cap on the incident which binds all of them together into a whole. But, even without this neat wrapping, the piece is entirely coherent as three readings of the Marah incident.

Like Massekhta d'Va'yassa Chapter One of Masekhta d'Shabbta exhibits a dynamic of internal tension. However, it is shaped quite differently from the full-scale dispute form of Va'Yassah. In fact, on the surface, this chapter does not appear to be cohesive on any level. Like Chapter Fourteen of Pischa the text of this midrash is marked by numerous citations of the base-text and its comments are even briefer on the whole than that chapter. Thus, there is a choppiness throughout the piece which makes it resemble a medieval commentary on the Bible.

However, this surface appearance is deceiving. In fact, there is a well-developed topical flow that lends structure to the various exegetic comments and gives the piece an essay-like quality. On the one hand, the piece moves logically from what needs to be observed on Shabbat, to who needs to observe it, to when, and then back to more detail on what needs to be observed. There is also a topical flow from rewards for proper observance to punishments for violators, then to an historical principle for the people as a whole regarding the greater punishments and rewards for Sabbath observance. Finally, the tension over the control and purpose of Shabbat,

whether it is God or human beings, pervades the entire piece. This tension develops in a dialectical fashion which gives the overall piece a particular dynamic. Thus, while this chapter of Shabbta is largely exegetical, it demonstrates a reading of the base-text and a redactorial shaping of that reading that goes far beyond the logic of fixed association.

In addition, the repeated use of the *lamah ne'emar* form in the piece is testimony to the existence of a particular redactorial approach and attitude towards the base-text. This form delivers a clear methodological message: the base-text must not be looked at in isolation; the Bible must be read as an integrated whole.

#### The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael: An Overview

Given the unity evident in each of the six midrashic pieces analyzed in this paper, the possibility that a similar coherence exists in the Mekhilta as a whole must be considered. In order to investigate this last question, material from the various tractates will be compared within categories that have been established and used throughout the paper. However, one need recognize that these are not the only possible categories for analysis. More creative and rigorous work needs to be done in order to facilitate a more effective approach to this question.

### Rhetorical Forms and Technical Terms

Is there any significant commonality in logic or rhetoric among the various tractates? It seems that this is, in fact, the case. Throughout the Mekhilta we find certain terms appearing over and over again: *kal va'chomer*, *lamah ne'emar*, *shomei'ah ani*, *v'khen atah motzeh*, *v'khen hu omer*, *k'yotzeh bo* (*atah omer*), *magid*, *ma...af...*, *eyn...elah...*, *v'omer*, *u'khtiv*, *davar acher* and a few others. Granted, not all of the terms appear in all of the pieces that have been examined. However, the fact that the various tractates seem to share a significant amount of rhetoric and logic cannot be ignored. It indicates that the redactor or redactors of the various tractates were close enough culturally to share the same language of argumentation.

In order to know how significant this shared language is in terms of the redaction of the Mekhilta, one would need to 1) conduct a more exacting and exhaustive survey of all of the rhetorical forms and technical terms in the Mekhilta, using a larger sampling of text than was used in this paper and 2) compare the results of that analysis to similar analyses of other midrashim, particularly the other halakhic midrashim considered to have come from the same milieu. Without this information one cannot claim that the commonality observed in the material analyzed here demonstrates that there was a particular redactor or discipleship circle behind the entire Mekhilta.



### Key Words and Word Plays

Several of the pieces contain particular words or word roots which appear in a number of places within the piece, helping to bring out the themes and unify the material. Often, these words are subject to particular word plays. In the first chapter of Pischa the word *dibbur* and the root [dbr] serve as a thread throughout the material. In chapter fourteen of that tractate, *brit beyn ha'b'tarim*, *ketz* and *atid lavo* are present in different portions of the midrash, though not to the same degree as *dibbur* in the first chapter. The most extensive use of key words and word plays is found in the *emunah/amanah* piece in Beshallah. There, many phrases and words are repeated, but the most important roots are [amn] and [s'r]. They are subject to numerous word plays which unite the themes of faith, trust, song, vision and God's presence. Similarly, word plays are crucial in the piece from Va'yassa. There we find plays on [yrh], which points to "Torah" as well as "showing," and [mr'] which unites people, place and attitude with a single word.

While these key words and word plays are significant within their respective pieces, not all the tractates examined used this device. More importantly, no particular key word or word play is used in more than one of the tractates. Thus, no evidence of a single redactorial hand arises out of this category of analysis.

### Structure and Style

In all of the pieces examined structure and/or style play a crucial role in making them a coherent whole. Chapter One of Pischa exhibits a clear topical flow with tight transitions, which makes it essay-like in character. The emunah/amanah piece is even tighter in this regard. It also demonstrates a song-like dynamic, with verses piled on verses, key words upon key words, in a directed, rhythmic flow. Song-like style is, of course, characteristic of Shirta. Essay-like style is, to a significant extent, characteristic of chapter one of Shabbta. The dispute form is characteristic of parts of Shabbta, but is fundamental to the piece from Chapter One of Va'yassa. In brief, similarities exist in structure and style between some of the pieces. However, there is no one form, style or structure characteristic of all the pieces. One can conclude that whatever unity may exist within the Mekhilta as a whole does not derive from a commonality of style and structure, at least as I have used these terms in this paper.

### Relationship to the Biblical Text

This is a difficult category to assess given the subtleties and particularities of the relationship in each piece. Nevertheless, certain generalizations can be made. Most of the pieces, with the exception of Chapter One of Pischa, can be described as readings of the base-text. These

pieces give expression to the particular moments in the Exodus narrative to which they are attached. Thus, on a certain level, it can be said that the biblical base-text determines the themes of the midrashic material.

However, even Chapter Fourteen of Pischa and Chapter One of Shabbta, the pieces with the greatest preponderance of exegetical material, present very strong readings of the base-text. These readings do not merely comment on the biblical text, but define its meaning in a way that cannot be predicted based solely on the base-text itself. In what way, for example, does Exodus 31:13-17 express the notion that the Sabbath is a glimpse or piece of the world to come? It does not, except with the vision of the midrashist who provides that notion out of his own thinking and world-view. Moreover, we saw above that the redactor of Shirta, for example, clearly determined the way that the base-text was cited in that midrash. The redactor fixed the base-text to fit the schema of the midrash, the exact opposite of the "logic of fixed association," which Neusner claims is the primary adhesive in the Mekhilta.

Another factor is that almost all of these readings are intertextual in nature. It is hard to say in a particular instance whether the author(s)/redactor(s) are reading the base-text or are more concerned with the intertext! The readings of texts with messianic themes are particularly powerful and, in certain cases, tend to overwhelm the base-

text. For example, the traveling to Succoth and the baking of matzahs in Exodus 12 become forecasts of the messianic redemption in Pischa Chapter Fourteen. In projecting the moment of redemption at the Exodus into the future, the writer(s)/redactor(s) introduces new texts that he has selected to give the base-text a particular meaning. To say that the messianic meaning is inherent in the passage from Exodus 12 is to separate reader from text in a way that is impossible. Are the midrashic pieces on the Song at the Sea about the messianic *shir* or about the historical event? The truth of the matter is that the two cannot be separated. This is one of the main points of these *midrashim*. In brief, one cannot deny the role of the midrashic reader by claiming, as Neusner does, that the Mekhilta "appeals to scripture for information and relies on scripture to organize that information."<sup>4</sup> Rather, the midrashist, through his strong reading of the biblical text and intertext, shapes both the information and organization of the midrash as much or more than does the text itself.

### Themes

"Theme" is a very broad word. For the purpose of this analysis it is helpful to distinguish a theme which is a particular argument or proposition and a theme that is a broader topic or reading of the text. For example, in

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<sup>4</sup>Neusner, Mekhilta, p. 235.

Chapter One of Pischa two broad topics are addressed, revelation and Jewish leadership. Revelation is not discussed in any significant sense in other tractates. However, there are a number other places where leadership is discussed. Chapter One of Pischa posits several propositions regarding leadership, including: one does not need to receive revelation to be a good Jewish leader; the Jewish leader will not receive revelation as long as the people are sinful and do not merit it; but, the Jewish leader must stand by Israel despite its sinfulness. It is a sub-topic of this third point, that a Jewish leader must be willing to give his/her life for the people, which is related to points in other tractates. In Shirta we find, that for which a Jewish leader is willing to give his/her life is named after him/her. In Shabbta we find that whenever Israel was willing to give its life for something it continued to exist in her midst, including Shabbat. Thus, there is a commonality of proposition between these pieces based on the particular notion of *natan nefesh al* (despite the differences in angle evident here). Willingness to give one's life for the people, for Shabbat, for whatever is important is an imperative for the Jewish leader.

Shirta also deals with the relationship between leader and followers, as does Chapter one of Pischa. However, they address the topic in different ways. In Shirta the issue is the dissolution of boundaries between leader and follower

during the moment of redemption. In Pischa the issue is the dependence of the leader on the merit of the followers in order to get revelation. While there is a broad commonality in topic, there is no common proposition posed by the two pieces.

Perhaps, the most powerful theme held in common by some of the pieces is the midrashic reading of the Exodus experience as a paradigm for the redemption to come. In Pischa Chapter Fourteen the moment of leaving Egypt is also the moment of the future redemption. In Beshallah faith through deeds leads to the Exodus and to the future time of the messiah. Both are moments of song. The beginning of Shirta clearly defines the Song at the Sea as simultaneously an event of the past and future. Still, even this powerful reading is part and parcel of only three of the six pieces examined here. (If we broaden the theme further to include any discussion of the world to come, Shabbta would also be included.)

Given the limitations inherent in an examination of only six pieces of text, it seems that no overall theme unites the six pieces. Rather, several themes seem to reverberate through two or three of the pieces. Song is a central theme in B'Shallach and Shirta. Faith, or the lack of it, is addressed by B'Shallach and Va'yassa. Israel's sinfulness is crucial in Pischa 1 and Va'yassa. Thus, there are times when one can discern a broad theme that may have been woven by a

redactorial hand into the various tractates and there are times when a more specific theme or motif appears in more than one tractate. But, there is also enough difference in the ways in which these themes are presented in the various tractates to leave doubt as to whether the interconnections represent a deliberate shaping.

In sum, we have seen a significant degree of shaping within the individual pieces examined in this paper. There is little doubt, based on the analyses of each piece or *parashah*, that they were consciously shaped by a redactor(s) or series of redactors. At the same time, the differences in the method of shaping and thematic development lead one to believe that the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* is an anthology of edited pieces. These pieces seem to have been sewn together by a redactor or group of redactors who exercised some degree of selectivity in choosing the material for the compilation. Whether the final redactor(s) wanted to make a particular point or set of points, or whether the choices for the anthology were merely made out of a particular world view cannot be determined from the amount of material analyzed in this paper. Further in-depth analysis must be done in order to determine what other commonalities, if any, exist within and between tractates.

Moreover, comparative work needs to be done. Using this kind of in-depth analysis, would we find a similar kind of shaping in *Sifre Bamidbar*, seen by scholars as coming out of a similar milieu as the *Mekhilta*? What kind of relationship

exists among the nine tractates of Sifra? To what degree is Akivaite material shaped in the same ways as the Mekhilta and other Ishmaelite material? Studies need to be done which both examine the full breadth of midrashic compilations while, at the same time, conduct the kind of detailed, intertextual analysis necessary to understand the dynamics of individual passages.



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