LIBRARY COPYRIGHT NOTICE

www.huc.edu/libraries

Regulated Warning

See Code of Federal Regulations, Title 37, Volume 1, Section 201.14:

The copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

אלו דברים שאין להם שיעור

These Words Are Limitless

A Text Immersion into Wordplay in Rabbinic Literature

Gabriel Matthew Miner

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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

March 4, 2024 – כ״ד באדר א׳ תשפ״ד
Advisor: AJ Berkovitz, Ph.D.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

I. If You Need to Explain It, It's Not Funny: Translating Wordplay in Rabbinic Literature 6

II. Reading Between the Lines: Creative Philology and Narrative Expansion 21

III. Law *Tiqre*: Aggadic Hermeneutics in Halakhic Literature 34

Conclusion 45

Appendix: Rabbinic Sources Studied 48

Bibliography 49

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

Thank you to my *ḥevrutah* Rabbi Benjamin Resnick for studying with me and for helping me fulfill R' Yehoshua ben Praḥya's words in *Pirqei Avot*: עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר.

Thank you to Dr. AJ Berkovitz for being a generative thought partner and guide through this project. I am grateful to have worked with an advisor with shared proclivities and sensibilities.

Thank you to Sammy, who models a playful approach to the whole world.

And thank you Rachelle for your support, encouragement, and help throughout this process, and for your confidence and belief in the rabbi I can be. Your intelligence, sense of humor, and *yidishkayt* make you an ideal audience for this project and the ideal partner for this (soon-to-be) rabbi.

Introduction

תלמוד לומר כולם נתנו מרועה אחד אל אחד נתנן פרנס אחד אמרן מפי אדון כל המעשים ברוך הוא דכתיב וידבר אלהים את כל הדברים האלה. (בבלי חגיגה ג:)

"The verse teaches [all the words of the wise] are 'given from one shepherd.' One God gave them; one leader [Moses] said them from the mouth of the Master of all creation, Blessed be He, as it is written: 'And God spoke all these words.' (b. Ḥagiga 3b)

When the Talmud interprets Ecclesiastes 12:11 in conjunction with Exodus 20:1 in *b. Ḥagiga* 3b, it means that God spoke all the phonemic and phonetic possibilities of the Tanakh. God wants the readers of the text to read beyond the simple, denotative meaning. Rabbinic interpretation allowed the rabbis to clarify and expand the biblical narrative and to infer moral and halakhic teachings. Hebrew's polyvalence as a consonantal text made it particularly well-suited to exegesis through linguistic creativity, and the rabbis frequently engage in this sort of creative reading to derive and support their interpretations. Geoffery Hartman describes this revocalization and division of words and verses as being a "combinatory art that questions the canonized letters before us."[1] While this mode of interpretation is an art, it does not attempt to question the canonized letters, rather *midrash* seeks to strengthen the text by better understanding its possibilities and dimensions.

Inspired by my own love of wordplay and a desire to study more rabbinic literature, I chose to do a text immersion into wordplay in rabbinic literature in my final year of rabbinical school. Over the course of this academic year, I have studied a selection of rabbinic texts that employ wordplay as means of interpretation and clarification (a list of these texts can be found in the Appendix). The following papers present some of themes and ideas that have come up in my learning.

1. Geoffery Hartman, "Midrash as Law and Literature" in *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 3 (1994): 345.

Making My Language Less Ambiguous

What do I mean when I say that this is a text immersion into wordplay in rabbinic literature? In literary terms, it means that I have been concerned with rabbinic texts where an interpretation is built on paronomasia or polysemy. Paronomasia is a play on words that "combines a similarity of sound with a dissimilarity of meaning…[It applies to] the repetition of same or similar consonants a) regardless of where they appear in the relevant words, and b) irrespective of whether the words are etymologically related."[2] Polysemy, meanwhile, is the "the capacity for a sign, word, phrase, or sentence to bear multiple meanings in a single context."[3] This sort of wordplay may include homonymy and double entendre.

Rabbinically speaking, wordplay can be understood as two of the hermeneutic principles, or *middot*, of rabbinic interpretation: *lashon nofel al lashon* and *notariqon*. The rabbinic tradition records three sets of interpretive principles: the seven *middot* of Hillel, the thirteen *middot* of Ishmael, and thirty-two *middot* of R. Eliezer (ben Yose ha-Gelili). The *middot* of Hillel and Ishmael are used for halakhic interpretation, while the 32 *middot* are used for aggadic interpretation.[4] The twenty-eighth of the thirty-two *middot*, *lashon nofel al lashon*, is defined as a play on homonymous roots, e.g. reading the word צור (rock) as צייר (artist) or rendering בית עבדים (house of slavery) as house of idolatry since worship and work share the root עבד.[5] *Notariqon* is taking a word and either dividing it into multiple words (e.g. interpreting the placename Carmel

2. *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffery Khan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), s.v. "paronomasia."
3. *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, s.v. "polysemy."
4. See Strack and Stemberger, "Rabbinical Hermeneutics," chap. 3 in Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 15–30.
5. *b. Megillah* 14a; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *par. Baḥodesh* 5; This *middah* is either the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth *middah*, depending on the edition. Different editions also refer to this *middah* as מעל and רמז as well as לשון נופל על לשון. I have opted for *lashon nofel al lashon* because I believe it better captures the linguistic play of the hermeneutic. Additionally, the term comes directly from *Bereshit Rabbah* (18:4 and 31:8), and it is used by Rashi in his comments to describe this kind of linguistic interpretation.

[כרמל] as *kar male'*, "full kernel") or understanding each letter as the initial letter of another word (e.g. interpreting the word *naḥita* [נחית] as an abbreviation for *nisim*, *ḥayyim*, *yam suf*, and *torah*).[6] This sort of wordplay enabled rabbis "to clarify terms which they deemed worthy of attention. Punning and word association germinated new perspectives and based on these insights the *darshanim* developed their comments."[7]

And, of course, wordplay is not limited to rabbinic literature. *Ḥazal* took their cue from the Tanakh, where names based on wordplay abound.[8] This tradition was continued in the *piyutim* of *Eretz Yisrael* and Medieval Spain, as masters of the Hebrew language and canon wove together poetry of intricate textual apprehension and allusion.[9] It also continued in Jewish mystical literature, where wordplay revealed esoteric secrets and pointed to theurgic potential,[10] to say nothing of the way authors of modern Jewish literature and popular culture employ wordplay and use the language of scripture to make linguistic allusions and connections.[11]

מה אעשה? מעשי

The first paper, "If You Need to Explain It, It's Not Funny: Translating Wordplay in Rabbinic Literature," addresses the challenges of presenting rabbinic wordplay in translation by looking at four case-studies of wordplay translation from three English-language editions of the

6. *b. Shabbat* 105a and *b. Menachot* 66b; *Midrash Tanḥuma*, *Masei* 2:1.
7. Brown, "Enjoyment of Midrash," 10.
8. See Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991); See also Gary A. Rendsburg, "Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection" in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2000), 137-162 and Schorch, "Between Science and Magic".
9. See Laura Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2010) and Tzvi Novick, Piyyut and Midrash: Form, Genre, and History (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).
10. The idea of textual polysemy is articulated in the concept שבעים פנים לתורה (seventy facets to the Torah), a phrase that appears frequently in mystical texts such as the *Zohar*, *Shaarei Orah*, and *Maggid Meisharim*, and Hasidic works such as *Likutei Moharan*, *Degel Makhaneh Efraim*, and *Peri Tzadik*.
11. See David Roskies, "Sholem Aleichem and Others: Laughing Off the Trauma of History" in *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (1982): 53–77 and Josh Kun, "The Yiddish Are Coming: Mickey Katz, Antic-Semitism, and the Sound of Jewish Difference" in *American Jewish History*, Vol. 87, No. 4, (December 1999), pp. 343–74.

Talmud against the backdrop of Translation theory and historical reluctance in certain Jewish circles to translate sacred writings. The second paper, "Reading Between the Lines: Creative Philology and Narrative Expansion," attempts to understand the creative and exegetical interplay of wordplay and narrative in midrash by presenting a selection of aggadic texts that I studied over the course of my text immersion. The final paper, "Law *Tiqre*: Aggadic Hermeneutics in Halakhic Literature," investigates whether there are practical halakhic implications to wordplay by surveying the use of the aggadic hermeneutic אל תקרי…אלא in the halakhic codes *Arba'ah Turim* and *Bet Yosef*. In the conclusion, I reflect on larger ideological and pedagogic themes that I have considered during this text immersion and over my entire course of study in rabbinical school. It and moves this project beyond learning *lishmah* to a broader statement of purpose and direction for the work I hope to engage in as a rabbi.

<u>*Midrash*: A Note on Usage</u>

The following is excerpted from Benjamin Sommer's "Concepts of Scriptural Language in Midrash" and is useful in clarifying the ways the term *midrash* is used throughout these papers.[12]

> Properly used, midrash refers to interpretations of scripture found in classical rabbinic texts — that is, the texts that were produced in the first millennium of the Common Era or shortly thereafter. More specifically, the term midrash is used in several ways:
>
> - Midrash can refer to the methods of reading that produce these interpretations. (Thus, a person might speak of midrash in contrast with some other mode of reading, such as the interpretive method of medieval or modern biblical exegetes.)
> - A midrash (plural, midrashim) can be a particular interpretation of a passage or verse that uses one or more of these methods. ("Let me share with you a wonderful midrash on a verse from the Psalms that I just heard.")
> - A midrash can refer to an anthology that collects these interpretations. ("I just bought a nice edition of a midrash on Exodus.")

12. Benjamin D. Sommer, "Concepts of Scriptural Language in Midrash" in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture* (New York: New York University Press), 64–5.

A Note on Textual Sources and Transliteration

All Hebrew and Aramaic texts used in these papers are sourced from alhatorah.org. The only changes that have been made were removing *nequdot* and inserting or moving textual citations for the sake of clarity and uniformity throughout the paper.

All translations, unless stated otherwise, are the author's.

Transliteration generally follows Brill's "Hebrew: a simple transliteration system" (version 0.3, 27 January 2011) except for biblical transliteration, which follow Brill's "Scholarly transliteration of biblical Hebrew" (version 0.4, 9 July 2015).

I. If You Need to Explain It, It's Not Funny: Translating Wordplay in Rabbinic Literature

"Everything is untranslatable. Once having established this unholy principle, we plunge ahead and translate." (Willis Barnstone, The Poetics of Translation*)*

Introduction

In *The Essential Talmud*, Adin Steinsaltz writes that "in many ways, the Talmud is the most important book in Jewish culture, the backbone of creativity and of national life. No other work had a comparable influence on the theory and practice of Jewish life, shaping spiritual content and serving as a guide to conduct."[1] Indeed, the Talmud has been a central pillar of Jewish life for nearly two millennia. Whether it is believed to be revealed at Sinai or seen as a model for interpretation and innovation of Judaism, it is difficult to argue against the Talmud's primacy in the intellectual and practical history of Judaism even to this day.

In addition to being a central text, the Talmud is a difficult text. The standard printed edition contains neither vowels nor punctuation, and, diacritics and punctuation notwithstanding, the language is a laconic diglossia of Hebrew and Aramaic. Despite its linguistic difficulty, though, Jews did not compose complete translations of the Talmud in the vernacular to help them understand the Talmud or learn it until the nineteenth century, relying instead on commentaries and supercommentaries.[2]

1. Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, trans. Chaya Galai (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 3.
2. The first full translation into a European language was by A. Goldshmit into German (Leipzig, 1899-1935), with translations of other individual tractates published earlier in the nineteenth century. See *Ha-entziqlopediyah ha-'ivrit* (Jerusalem: Ḥevrah le-hotsa'at entziḳlopedyot, 1980) s.v. תלמוד.

There is a long-standing suspicion around translation of sacred texts in Judaism, evidence of which can be seen already in the Amoraic era continuing into the Tannaitic the Geonic eras.[3] This concern is partially motivated by a fear common in translation theory as to whether a translation is able to capture the full essence of the original. In "The Translator's Task," Walter Benjamin wrote that "fidelity in translating the individual word can almost never fully render the sense it has in the original, because the poetic significance of this sense is not exhausted by what the word means, but is rather achieved precisely through the way in which what is meant is bound up with the mode of meaning in the particular word."[4] This is all the more true when the source-text in question is not merely considered a work of artistic or creative merit, but understood as being holy, as shall be discussed later.

This same concern about translation was applied to the Talmud as it came to be a sacred text, an expression of which we find in the *haskamah* for an 1816 Yiddish translation of *Pirqe ʾavot:* "Indeed, in accordance with our religion the language of the Gemara and of the Mishnah must not be translated, because the translator [is bound to change] the meaning [of the original]. Even Moses ben Maimon, the great teacher, wrote only a commentary on the Mishnah in Arabic."[5] And yet, despite an attitude towards translation that can be called at best cautious and at worst skeptical, translations of these texts have nevertheless been written and disseminated.[6]

---

3. See *b. Megillah* 3a and 9a; *Masekhet Soferim* 1:7; and *Megilat Taʿanit, Adar* 20. A note on *Megilat Taʿanit*: *Megilat Taʿanit* is often quoted as the source for the account that the translation of the Torah into Greek caused three days of darkness. However, this text it is not included in Vered Noam's edition, *Megilat Taʿanit: ha-nusaḥim, parasham, toldotehem: be-tzeruf mahadurah biḳortit* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2003). In *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Willem Smelik places the text in Megilat Taanit and in his footnote (page 303, note 89) he cites Noam's edition, but he does not provide a location. Smelik also points to a parallel text found in *Seder Rav Amron Gaon*, *Taanit* 4.5. The account can be found in the section *Maʾamar haʾaḥaron* (page 38) in the Warsaw edition (Warsaw: Yitzhak Goldman, 1874).
4. Walter Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," trans. by Steven Rendall in *The Translation Studies Reader,* ed. Lawrence Venutti, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 94.
5. Quoted in Adam Mintz, "Words, Meaning and Spirit: The Talmud in Translation" in *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 5 (1994), 130.
6. For more on the history of the Talmud in translation and the associated religious critiques and concerns, see Mintz, "Words, Meaning and Spirit," 115–55.

There are many challenges to translating any work from another language and socio-historical context. This paper will focus on the challenges of translating wordplay found in the Talmud. Wordplay is a frequently-used hermeneutic in rabbinic literature, at times functioning as an interpretive logic or rationale, and at times simply functioning humorously within a narrative context.[7] I will look at examples of wordplay in three English-language translations of the Talmud: Soncino (1935-1952), ArtScroll (1990-2005) and Koren (2012-2019).[8] My hope in looking at these examples is to assess what the optimal mode of translation might be and how the different editions navigate translating and transposing the linguistic creativity of a text marked by the orality and aurality of its source-text.

In considering the skopos, or aim, of these translations, an important question is who is the target audience of these translations?[9] On the one hand, they are clearly intended for a group of people whose level of Aramaic (and, likely, their level of Hebrew) makes approaching a traditional *shas* impossible, many of whom we may presume to be non-Orthodox. In his epilogue to the Soncino edition of the Talmud, then-Chief Rabbi of England Rabbi Israel Brodie wrote,

> English is now the vernacular of more than half of the Jewish population of the world. Not everyone, not even one in a thousand, has access to the original, sometimes difficult and intractable, texts of our sources. Nor can a translation however perfect replace the original. Nevertheless, the earnest Jewish cultured reader who is unfamiliar with the original can read and study a translation which introduces him to the world of thought, feeling and content which will repay the painstaking efforts and concentration demanded.[10]

7. See Wilhelm Bacher and Jacob Zallel Lauterbach, "Talmud Hermeneutics." In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Isidore Singer et al. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906. Accessed May 2, 2023, https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14215-talmud-hermeneutics.
8. I have made the choice to refer to the translations by their publisher. Although the Koren is sometimes referred to as the Steinsaltz (the intellectual force behind this edition) and the ArtScroll is sometimes referred to as the Schottenstein (the financial force behind this edition), using the names of the publisher is the most consistent way to refer to all three translations.
9. For more on Skopos theory, see Hans J. Vermeer, "Skopos And Commission In Translational Action," trans. by Andrew Chesterman in *The Translation Studies Reader,* ed. Lawrence Venutti, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 219–230.
10. *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Kodashim*, trans. and ed. by Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1948), xv.

Brodie specifies that the translation is not meant to replace the original, but rather to give a broad readership entrée into a work of religious and intellectual significance. Even Brodie, though, does not expect people to open these volumes with no prior introduction to Jewish thought, describing the ideal reader as "the earnest Jewish cultured reader." The reader, for Brodie, must come to the text with a genuine willingness to learn, a basic foundation on which to build, and a sense of religious identity, perhaps even religious commitment if not religious obligation.

Similarly, the editors of the ArtScroll Talmud wrote in the introduction to their first published tractate, "It is not the purpose of this edition of the Talmud to provide a substitute for the original text or a detour around the classic manner of study. Its purpose is to help the student understand the Gemara itself and improve his ability to learn from the original…The Talmud must be *learned* and not merely read."[11] The editors, at once proud of their immense accomplishment and cautious that it not be misused, instruct the reader how *not* to use their edition in order to emphasize the importance of the goal of reading the Talmud in its original language. Koren, meanwhile, writes that two of their three intentions in publishing their English edition are "to fully clarify the talmudic page to the reader," and "to help readers advance their process of Talmud study."[12] Thus, all of these editions seem to express a hope in their commission to assist the reader and elevate their knowledge of the subject to the point that these translations might no longer be necessary for them. The answer, then, to Walter Benjamin's question "is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original?"[13] is no, it is meant for readers who do not understand the original *yet*.

11. *Talmud Bavli: The Schottenstein Talmud, vol. 1*, ed. Gedaliah Zlotowitz et al. (Brooklyn: ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications, 1990), xxv-xxvi.
12. Matthew Miller, "Introduction by the Publisher" in *The Noé Edition Koren Talmud Bavli, Volume 1: Tractate Berakhot*, ed. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb et al. (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2012), xxiii.
13. Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 89.

We should also note the awareness of the publishers of the inherent shortcomings and potential religious criticisms of a translation of the Talmud. As such, both Koren and Artscroll avoid using the word "translation" in describing their editions of the Talmud. The Koren instead includes a "commentary by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz," while the ArtScroll includes an "elucidation." This allows the publishers to eschew drawing an equivalence between their publication and the Talmud's original text, as well as appeasing an ultra-Orthodox audience that would be highly critical of, perhaps even hostile to, a work claiming to be a translation. In the commission for translation, then, publishers are concerned with what Jeremy Stolow has called the challenge to "to present simultaneously 'authoritative' and 'accessible' Jewish books."[14]

Before examining the texts, it is worth mentioning one other significant modern translation of the Talmud which is not included in this discussion, namely that of Jacob Neusner (Chico, California: 1984; Revised 2011). The primary feature of Neusner's translation is its outline form, which is intended to help the reader visualize and understand the order of logic and argumentation in the Talmud. Because Neusner is concerned first and foremost with articulating the composition and structure of the Talmud–both in discrete sections of argument and as a unified (if not univocal) text–he rarely concerns himself with clarifications or elucidations of the text. Neusner's focus is not on linguistic nuance, explanation, or contextualization. His translation happens to be in English because that is the audience for whom he is writing, but his main interest is the outline form, not in crafting a readable translation.[15] Thus I have chosen not to include Neusner because although he shares the goal of supporting study and understanding,

14. Jeremy Stolow, *Orthodox by Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 31.
15. For more on Neusner's approach, see Jacob Neusner, "Preface" in *The Talmud of Babylonia: An Academic Commentary, I, Bavli Tractate Berakhot* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), v-xiv.

the other editions are also concerned with presenting a readable and comprehensive English text in a way that Neusner is not.

What's in a Word: Translation with Transliteration

In my treatment of the first two translations, I will look at how different versions incorporate transliteration into their translations. These interpretive passages rely heavily on "playing" within the Hebrew language. The Hebrew language was understood by the rabbis not only to precede creation, but to be one of the very tools with which God created.[16] It was seen as a holy language with great power and great depth of meaning. A given word is a vessel that holds both the simple communicative meaning of that word as well as other meanings that may shed light on how or why the word is being used at that moment, particularly with regards to the sacred texts where no word or letter was considered superfluous or without meaning.[17] Many interpretations found in the Talmud rely on a creative reading (or re-reading) of a word, and the interpretation cannot be wholly translated out of the source-language. In attempting to make the text available to a broad readership, including those who may not have a working knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet, these three translations of the Talmud utilize transliteration when the aurality of the interpretation is important or when the very building blocks of the word, i.e. the letters, are expounded on.

16. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 18:4, 31:8. See also David Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism Volume 16*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Tampa: The University of South Florida, 1999), 49–107; Willem F. Smelik, "Holy Tongue," chap. 2 in *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
17. See Proverbs 30:5, *b. Menaḥot* 29b. See also "The Four Assumptions" in James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 14–17.

At the end of *b. Berakhot*, Rabbi Eleazar quotes Rabbi Ḥanina's interpretation of Isaiah 54:13, וכל־בניך למודי ה׳ ורב שלום בניך ("All your children shall be disciples of God and your children's peace shall be great"):[18]

	אל תקרי בניך אלא בוניך.
Soncino	Read not *banayik* [thy children] but *bonayik* [thy builders].
Koren	**Do not read your children [*banayikh*], but your builders [*bonayikh*].**
ArtScroll	**Do not read "your sons"** (*banayich*)**, but "your builders"** (*bonayich*).[19]

The phrase אל תקרי…אלא ("don't read X, rather Y") is a frequently used means of interpretation in the Talmud and relies either on changing a word's vocalization or a minor change to the spelling based on an aural similarity. Thus, the challenge for the translator is to create a readable sentence while somehow indicating the wordplay from the source-language.

The above translations are generally presented in the same way. Each uses bracketed words within the sentence to explain the wordplay, and each offers the source language transliterated so that the reader ostensibly does not need a working knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet. The difference is whether the primary text, i.e. the unbracketed words, includes the source language or if it stays in the target language. Soncino uses the transliterated words *banayik* and *bonayik* as the primary text, using brackets to translate those words, whereas Koren and ArtScroll translate the sentence completely and include the transliterated source-language in brackets after the word translated into the target-language. Koren and ArtScoll, domesticize the translation by keeping all of the primary text in the target language, using brackets to provide the

18. *b. Berakhot* 64a.
19. Both ArtScroll and Koren use the typographical convention of using bold typeface for words that are translated from the original text of the Talmud and using unbolded typeface for words that are included in the translation for elucidation or to make the English version more readable.

reader with the transliterated source language. This seems to be the preferable approach, as the source-language in the Soncino's primary text interrupts the conversation in its target-language.

The next example similarly presents the challenge of translating wordplay within a text in a way that is visible to a target-language reader. In *b. Shabbat* 105a, the Talmud offers several uses of *notariqon* to interpret the first word of the Ten Commandments:

	ר' יוחנן דידיה אמר אנכי נוטריקון אנא נפשי כתיבת יהבית רבנן אמרי אמירה נעימה כתיבה יהיבה איכא דאמרי אנכי למפרע יהיבה כתיבה נאמנין אמריה.
Soncino	R. Joḥanan on his own authority quote, *aNoKY* [*I - am the Lord thy God*, etc.]. I [*ana*] Myself [*Nafshi*] have written the Script [*Kethibah Yehabith*]. The Rabbis interpreted: Sweet speech [*amirah Ne'imah*], a writing, a gift [*Kethibah Yehibah*]. Others state, *aNoKY* [interpreted] reversed is: Scripture was given [to man] [*Yahibah Kethibah*], faithful are its words [*Ne'emanim amerehah*].
Koren	**Rabbi Yoḥanan himself said** that the word ***anokhi*** that begins the Ten Commandments is an **abbreviation** for: **I myself wrote** and **gave [*ana nafshi ketivat yehavit*]**. **The Rabbis said** it is an abbreviation for: **A pleasant statement was written** and **given [*amira ne'ima ketiva yehiva*]**. **Some say** the word ***anokhi*** can be interpreted **backwards**: **It was written, it was given, its statements are faithful** [***yehiva ketiva ne'emanim amareha***].
ArtScroll	**R' Yochanan said his own** example: The first word of the Ten Commandments, אנכי (*I*, i.e. God), spelled *aleph, nun, chaf, yud,* **is an acronym** for the following: ***Ana Nafshi Kesivat Yehavis*** (*I myself wrote [and] gave*) the Torah. The Gemara cites an alternative exposition of this word: **The Rabbis said**: it is an acronym for: ***Amirah Neimah Kesivah Yehivah*** (*A pleasant statement was written [and] given*). A third version: **Some say** that the word אנכי should be expounded **backwards** (*yud, chaf, nun, aleph*) as an acronym for: ***Yehivah Kesivah Ne'emanim Amareha*** (*It was given in writing; reliable are its statements*).

What is particularly challenging about translating passages like these is that the wordplay is not incidental. It is not a feature of a character or dialogue, rather it functions as a kind of logic without which the passage does not make sense. Thus, it is not enough to translate with an eye towards general meaning, the reader must understand the mechanics and logic of the interpretive turn. For a hermeneutic like *notariqon*, it is nearly impossible to present the text in a manner

where the translation is transparent, but there are certainly choices that allow for a greater degree of intertextual coherence.

Soncino provides the clunkiest of the translations. It intersperses the transliterated Hebrew words in brackets after each word or phrase. Because the abbreviation is being clarified with each word, this makes the text difficult to read, and even more so since brackets are also used to indicate words that have been included to make the translation readable. Although the translation succeeds in communicating the acrostic interpretation, the switching back and forth between source- and target-language and the use of brackets for different purposes within the same text (why not use parentheses as well?) makes reading it more of a slog than anything else. The clumsiness of this translation recalls an anecdotal reaction to Soncino's initial publication: "Prior to its publication many talmudic scholars worried that the 'mystery' of Israel…would soon be revealed and available for appropriation by all. No sooner had the translation appeared when the anxiety abated. It became obvious that the translation was no less 'esoteric.'"[20]

Koren, meanwhile, translates the phrase into a full English phrase, followed by the transliterated Hebrew in brackets. ArtScroll prints the transliterated Hebrew first followed by the English translation in brackets. ArtScroll's order of transliteration and translation is not consistent. As we saw above in *b. Berakhot* 64a, sometimes ArtScroll brackets the transliteration, and other times the translation. Koren, on the other hand, is consistent in the choice to use English as the primary text and include transliterations as an explanation in brackets.

Because this sort of interpretive logic is based on the multivocality of a word, it is worth noting an ideological subtlety in the Koren translation. The Koren's choice to translate איכא דאמרי

20. Harry Fox, *Jaffee's "The Talmud of Babylonia: Horayot"*, review of *The Talmud of Babylonia, an American Translation, Volume 26: Tractate Horayot* by Martin S. Jaffee. The Jewish Quarterly Review 79, no. 2/3 (October 1988 - January 1989): 235. See also *Ha-entziqlopediyah ha-'ivrit* s.v. תלמוד, which describes the Soncino translation as "worthless" (חסר־ערך).

אנכי למפרע as "Some say the word '*anokhi* can be interpreted backwards" underscores an ideology of multivocality; this sentence could easily be rendered "Some say it *should* be translated in reverse," as ArtScroll does. Presenting a statement as a way that the word *can* be interpreted implies that even though the unnamed sages are offering the reading that they think is correct, it is but one of several legitimate possibilities. This is what I would call the rabbinic version of simultaneous translation; it *can* be read this way, and, significantly, at the same time it *can* be read another way.

The challenge with transliteration in the Talmudic context is that "[transliteration] represents the confrontation of orality with literacy."[21] This feature is noteworthy because although the Talmud as we have it is written down, the Talmud remains a highly oral and aural text.[22] Recall the introduction to the ArtScroll Talmud which implores the reader that the Talmud must not be "merely read," but rather learned, i.e. heard out loud and discussed. Transliteration, though, allows the non-Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking reader to step into the original language and see how it is being used by the rabbis for interpretive ends. Ultimately, though, "although it can be used to represent speech, [transliteration] gives prominence to the practice of writing."[23]

We can understand the reader's experience of transliteration, then, not in terms of domesticating or foreignizing, but as imitating or limitating. When a reader experiences the use of transliteration as imitating, they get a sense of the rhythm, timbre, and mechanics of the source-language that is contrasted against the target-language. When a reader experiences the use of transliteration as limitating, they read the transliteration and recognize that they are limited by

21. Karen Van Dyck, "Migration, Translingualism, Translation" in *The Translation Studies Reader,* ed. Lawrence Venutti, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 474.
22. For more on the orality of the Talmud, see Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38–57; Martin S. Jaffe, "Oral Tradition in the Writings of Rabbinic Oral Torah: On Theorizing Rabbinic Orality," *Oral Tradition*, 14/1 (1999): 3–32.
23. Van Dyck, "Migration, Translingualism, Translation," 474.

their lack of knowledge of the source-language, hearing the sounds and understanding what is happening in function if not in practice. In both experiences, the reader recognizes the artifice of translation and both imitating and limitating have the potential (as the editors of these Talmud translations seem to hope for) for signaling to the reader what is available to them if they push themselves to work in the original.

Use Your Allusion: How Can We Get the Joke?

The next examples examine wordplay used outside of an interpretive structure and how a translation indicates the wordplay, if the translator even deems it worthy of translation. In *b.* Pesaḥim 9b, we are in the middle of a discussion around whether one needs to be concerned about the possibility of a weasel dragging *ḥametz* into their house after cleaning for Passover:

	אמר רבא וכי חולדה נביאה היא דידעא דהאידנא ארביסר ולא אפי עד לאורתא ומשיירא ומטמרא.
Soncino	Said Raba: Is then a weasel a prophet to know that it is the fourteenth now and people will not bake until the evening, so that it should leave [some] over and hide [it]?
Koren	**Rava said** in surprise: **And is the marten a prophetess**[N] **that knows that now** is **the fourteenth** of Nisan **and no** one will **bake until the evening, and it leaves** over bread **and conceals** it in its hole? [N] Rava's statement is a play on words, as *ḥulda*, marten, was indeed the name of a prophetess, Ḥulda (II Kings 22:14, II Chronicles 34:22).
ArtScroll	**Rava said: But is a weasel a prophetess that it knows that today is the fourteenth and** that **they will not bake** anymore **until the night and it** therefore **leaves over** some *chametz* **and hides it** for later use?[18] [18] Does a weasel have the intelligence to realize that a shortage of bread at this time indicates that no more will be baked today and that it must therefore save some for later? (*Rashi*; see *Hagahos Yavetz*). [Rava depicts the intelligence attributed by Abaye to the weasel as "prophecy" as a play on words, for there was indeed a prophetess by the name of חולדה; see II Kings 22:14.]

In the Soncino translation, no attempt at all is made to let the reader in on the joke. Rava's question of whether a weasel is a prophet seems to be nothing more than a statement of incredulity on his part, and the joke is quite literally lost in translation. Both Koren and ArtScroll explain the wordplay in a note, though ArtScroll presents Rashi's explanation before explaining the joke. The use of a note to explain the joke seems to be the best possible option. Explaining the joke within the text itself would render the translation unwieldy and unnatural. Furthermore, although it is a decent joke, it is not serving any interpretive, argumentative, or mechanical purpose as far as the text is concerned.

There is also the question of note placement. In Koren, the superscript N that points the reader to an explanatory note comes right after the joke, so that even in the middle of reading the sentence the reader knows that there is something noteworthy about this clause of Rava's statement. In ArtScroll, the note comes at the end of the sentence, implying that the note may be about the statement as a whole, not specifically about a particular phrase. This is further shown by the fact that ArtScroll places Rashi's explanation of the sentence before the note drawing attention to the wordplay. Although ArtScroll often prioritizes Rashi's commentary over other explanatory notes, this is not always the case, and even on this same page other notes include an editorial explanation before Rashi's comment (cf. 9b[2], notes 11 and 12).

The next wordplay reveals another difficulty in translating wordplay in rabbinic literature, namely the challenge that arises when there are different ways to understand the joke. In *b. Qiddushin* 25a, the elders of the city of Nezonya raise a halakhic dilemma before Rav Hamnuna in order to call into question his abilities as a legal arbiter. When Rav Hamnuna is indeed unable to provide an answer, they taunt him, saying:

	אמרו לו מה שמך אמר להו המנונא אמרו ליה לאו המנונא אלא קרנונא.
Soncino	…[T]hey said to him, 'What is your name?' 'Hamnuna,'he replied. 'You are not Hamnuna, but Karnuna,' jeered they.[7] [7]Rashi connects Karnuna with *karona*, the market: 'you have frittered your time away in the market place, gossiping, otherwise you could have answered us.' Tosaf. *Ham-nuna* = a hot fish; *Kar-nuna* = a cold fish. 'you are a cold fish, not hot' — your knowledge is lifeless.
Koren	**They said to him: What is your name? He said to them: Hamnuna. They said to him** in jest: You should **not** be called **Hamnuna,** a good hot fish; **rather,** your name should be **Karnuna,**[N] a cold fish that is no longer tasty. [N] According to Rashi this is alluding to *keren*, corners, in reference to those who sit on the corner rather than in the house of study. Some early commentaries are surprised that these sages would insult Rav Hamnuna and call him a loiterer simply because he could not answer their question. Consequently, most accept the interpretation that Rav Hamnuna was no longer a hot and tasty fish, but a cold and tasteless one (Rabbeinu Ḥananel).
ArtScroll	**They said to him, "What is your name?" He answered them,** "My name is **Hamnuna." They** then **said to him,** "Your name is **not Hamnuna** but **rather Karnuna**," i.e. you are not a scholar, but an unlettered person.[4] [4]Karnuna means "one who loiters at corners," from the word קרנות, corners (Rashi; cf. Tosafos). [Educated people would not be found loitering in the streets exchanging gossip.]

The difficulty with this joke is that although commentators agree that Hamnuna is being insulted, there is a disagreement as to what the insult is. Are the Nezonyans calling Rav Hamnuna an uneducated and frivolous person, or are they calling him a cold fish—someone they no longer found appealing (i.e. relevant)? Each of the three translations attempts to help the reader understand the Nezonyan's insult, but Koren and ArtScroll both decide how to explain the joke, with Koren favoring the Tosafot and ArtScroll (not surprisingly) favoring Rashi. Although the joke is not clarified immediately in Soncino, the reader is drawn to the footnote which offers two interpretations of the joke without commentary. The two possible puns are included in

transliteration, so that presumably the reader can decide for themself which joke is more compelling.

Curiously, though, the explanation of Rashi in ArtScroll and Koren is different from the explanation provided by Soncino. Just like the text on which he is commenting, Rashi's explanation lacks *nequdot*, and therefore his explanation, that Karnuna means a person who is sits at the *qrnot* (יושב קרנות), can be read both as one who sits in markets or one who sits at the corner (market: קרונה, corner: קרן). We see here the way that the unvocalized Hebrew not only allows for the interpretive linguistic creativity that the rabbis practice, but also allows for a multivocality that may be onerous. The translator must make a choice, though, and in so doing circumscribes not only the potential readings of the joke, but also the potential explanation of the joke. As Benjamin points out, "thus translation transplants the original into an–ironically–more definitive linguistic domain."[24] Ironically, one could argue that making such a choice stands in conflict with the very nature of the Talmud's proclivity towards polysemy and lack of resolution.

Conclusion

To what extent can these works be considered a translation? The regular interjection and explanation that is required to make the source-text legible often impacts the English text's readability. Whereas translation frequently attempts to make itself invisible, translations of the Talmud are constantly aware of their own artifice and of its shortcomings.[25] In his speech-turned-essay "What is Relevant Translation," Derrida argues against calling such a complicated compendium a translation:

24. Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 93
25. Cf. Lawrence Venutti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008).

> If you give someone who is competent an entire book, filled with translator's notes, in order to explain everything that a phrase of two or three words can mean in its particular form…there is really no reason, in principle, for him to fail to render–without any remainder–the intentions, meaning, denotations, connotations and semantic overdeterminations, the formal effects of what is called the original. Of course, this operation, which occurs daily in the university and in literary criticism, is not what is called a translation, a translation worthy of the name, translation in the strict sense, the translation of a work. To make legitimate use of the word 'translation'...the translation must be quantitatively equivalent to the original, apart from any paraphrase, explication, explicitation, analysis, and the like."[26]

And herein lies the challenge with calling any of these "translations" of the Talmud. No translation of the Talmud claims to be "quantitatively equivalent" to the original. In the desire to capture the fullness and breadth of the social, historical, intellectual, geographic, and linguistic reality of the Talmud and its creators, the vernacular version must use as many linguistic tools and notes as possible to try and make the text understandable, but also to emphasize the breadth and complexity of the task of understanding.

And yet, the goal of these translations is not to be an equivalent or a stand-in. The goal of the translation is to be a ladder to climb to reach the ideas of the original, to be a light to illuminate the path to this great masterpiece of Jewish spiritual and intellectual creativity, and, importantly, to be a sign that points the reader back to the original. Benjamin wrote that "True translation is transparent: it does not obscure the original, does not stand in its light, but rather allows pure language, as if strengthened by its own medium, to shine even more fully on the original."[27] As the translators and editors have described, this is their very goal in presenting their translations: to allow the light of the translation (even if they feel uncomfortable with that nomenclature) to shine even more fully on the original.

---

26. Jacques Derrida, "What is 'Relevant' Translation?" trans. by Lawrence Venutti in *The Translation Studies Reader,* ed. Lawrence Venutti, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 377.
27. Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 95.

II. Reading Between the Lines: Creative Philology and Narrative Expansion

> *"'That's a great deal to make one word mean,' Alice said in a thoughtful tone."* (*Lewis Carrol*, Through the Looking-Glass)

During the creation narrative in Genesis, the Torah explains how the word for woman (אישה) is derived from the word for man (איש). Although grammatically this seems to be simply a case of masculine and feminine forms, *Bereshit Rabbah* comments that it is this malleability of the Hebrew language that teaches us the Torah was given בלשון הקודש, in the holy language.[1] This assertion that Hebrew is the holy language is an assumption that underpins all of rabbinic literature, and especially midrashic exegesis.[2] "Indeed," writes Benjamin Sommer, "the midrashic conception of scriptural language is the most important engine that drives midrashic interpretation forward."[3] What does it mean, though, that the language is holy? More than just a statement of importance or significance, the holiness of the scriptural language is also a statement of linguistic potential.

As Eilberg-Schwartz has suggested, "the assumption that God created Hebrew means that the composition of and interconnections among words are necessarily significant."[4] For the rabbis, the Hebrew composition of the Bible was not incidental as a result of the time and place of its authorship. Hebrew was inextricably linked to the sanctity of the text, and it offered a key to unlocking additional meanings inherent in the text. To the midrashic interpreter, "words share the same consonants because God intended for humans to understand a connection between the

1. *Bereshit Rabbah* 18:4. This tradition is also found in *Bereshit Rabbah* 31:8.
2. For more on Hebrew as a holy language, see David H. Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1999) 49–107; and Willem F. Smelik, *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
3. Benjamin D. Sommer, "Concepts of Scriptural Language in Midrash" in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture*, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer, (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 66.
4. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "Who's Kidding Whom?: A Serious Reading Of Rabbinic Word Plays," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987), 769.

concepts those words signify. Indeed, in some cases God fashioned a single word so that it would simultaneously allude to several other concepts."[5] While this body of rabbinic literature is part of the Oral Torah, I hesitate to describe these insights as "unwritten." Because, as we shall see, as far as the rabbis were concerned, the *midrashim* they were transmitting were not unwritten, they were in fact inscribed in the text by virtue of the language itself.

For the rabbis, it is not just that the individual words of *Tanakh* can be polysemous, rather the text itself is by its nature hyper-polysemous.

> When a human being says something, she generally means one thing. Perhaps she is punning or telling a joke, in which case she means two different things in this one utterance; or perhaps she is a poet or a particularly fine novelist, in which case she might mean three or four things in a single utterance…But God's language is different. God can pack huge amounts of meaning into an utterance. Scriptural language…is supercharged with meaning.[6]

Midrash attempts to uncover that meaning, to elucidate sacred text by means of expounding and expanding. I see *midrash* as being a linguistic project of narrative expansion. Anyone can create narrative elaboration through their own empathy or compositional creativity, and certainly there are *midrashim* that are not built from wordplay or linguistic connections. I am interested, though, in examining the ways that rabbinic exegetes creatively used their language skills and textual acumen to open up, stretch, and uncover words to offer insight to the biblical narrative.[7]

The narrative expansion afforded by *midrash* is not simply functioning as a form of entertainment.[8] Rather, it reflects an attempt on the rabbis' part to better understand the sacred

5. Eilberg-Schwartz, "Rabbinic Word Plays," 770.
6. Sommer, "Concepts of Scriptural Language," 66.
7. For more on *midrash* and literary theory, see Susan A. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); and David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996). See also the exchange between Handelman and Stern in *Prooftexts* Vol. 4, No. 2 (May 1984) and Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 1985).
8. This is not to say that there is no aspect of *midrash* that is entertaining. For more on entertainment and enjoyment in *midrash*, see Ronald N. Brown, "The Enjoyment of Midrash" (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute

stories of *Tanakh* using the tools at their disposal to learn out the details subtly encoded in the text. Moralistic, theological and homiletical material often results from this sort of narrative expansion; indeed these aims may even be the seed from which the *midrash* initially grows. At the core of the midrashic project, though, is an attention to words. In *Darkhei ha'aggadah*, Yitzḥak Heinemann coined the phrase "creative philology" to describe an aspect of the Rabbi's approach to exegesis in aggadic literature.[9] I favor this term in describing *midrash* because of of its emphasis on language and, appropriately, because of the polysemy of the word creative—that it can mean both imaginative or innovative and generative.

Ben Bag Bag teaches הפך בה והפך בה, דכלא בה, that one should turn [the Torah] again and again, for it contains everything.[10] We can understand this *mishnah* as a watchword of midrashic exegesis. That is to say, biblical interpreters can find motivations and narrative expansions quite literally *in* the text. This guiding principle imposes a limit on how *Tanakh* can be interpreted, but it adds a level to the way in which the *midrash* is in conversation with scripture: just as one notes the resemblance between parent and child, a *midrash* rooted in linguistic creativity is necessarily recognizable as deriving from or growing out of the biblical text. This approach is similar to the oft-cited but unattributed quote about acting that "everything you need is in the script." The biblical text is at the center of the interpretive project, where the atomized words of a verse and even the atomized letters of a word offer opportunity for greater understanding. In this paper, I will explore a number of the *midrashim* I encountered during this project and consider how they

of Religion, 1980); and Eliezer Diamond, "But Is it Funny? Identifying Humor, Satire, and Parody in Rabbinic Literature" in *Jews and Humor*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspon (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press), 33–53.
9. Isaac Heinemann, *Darkhei Ha'aggadah* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1949). Creative Philology (פילולוגיה יוצרת) is the section title of Part II in the book.
10. *m. Avot* 5:22.

play with language to arrive at the exegesis, and how they expand our understanding of the biblical narrative.[11]

The Text as Problem and Solution

A common springboard for midrashic inquiry is a textual incongruity. By offering a *midrash* on the *pasuq* that troubled them, the rabbis use the instrument of their confusion to clarify the text. In so doing, the narrative is not merely clarified, it is often widened and deepened.

One kind of textual incongruity could be a seemingly superfluous word. In Joshua 2:1, for example, Joshua sends two spies to scout the land of Canaan before their conquest. וישלח יהושע־בן־נון מן־השטים שנים־אנשים מרגלים חרש לאמר לכו ראו את־הארץ ואת־יריחו (Joshua son of Nun sent two men from Shittim to spy secretly, saying "Go and see the land and Jericho"). It seems obvious that spying would be done secretly, so *Midrash Tanḥuma* explains the word חרש:[12]

מהו חרש לאמר מלמד, שעשו עצמן קדרין, והיו צווחין ואומרים: הרי קדרות, כל מי שרוצה יבא ויקנה. כל כך למה. שלא ירגיש בהן אדם. לכך כתיב חרש, קרי ביה חרס, כדי שלא יאמרו בני אדם מרגלים.

What is [the meaning] of חרש? It says this to teach that they made themselves [look like] potters, and they would shout and say, "Whoever who wants [pottery], come and buy." But why? So that people wouldn't notice them. Thus, חרש is written, [but] read it חרס (clay), in order that people wouldn't say they were spies."

Rut Rabbah builds on this midrashic elaboration of how the spies disguised themselves, offering two more possibilities based on the word חרש, that the spies disguised themselves as craftsmen

11. One common use of wordplay in *midrash* that is not being addressed in this paper is what Scott. B. Noegel calls the "appellative" use; paronomasic interpretations of names of people or places that signify a past, make a statement of character, or prophesy the future (*"Wordplay" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts* [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021], 99). For a thorough treatment of this genre of wordplay, see Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991).
12. *Midrash Tanḥuma Šelaḥ* 1.

(חָרָשׁ) and that the spies pretended to be deaf-mutes (חֵרֵשׁ).[13] All of these *midrashim* erase the redundancy by including details for the story, functionally eliminating the problem of the text by adding more narrative. The textual challenge is obscured by the clarity the *midrash* provides, although midrashic clarity is itself often equivocal given the coexistence of multiple explanations.[14]

Another cause for *midrash* may be a narrative inconsistency. Genesis 37 marks the beginning of the three-*parsha* Joseph narrative, and quickly establishes the family dynamics that set the action into motion. The text tells us that וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן זקנים הוא (Israel loved Joseph more than all of his sons, because he was a son of his old age).[15] The phrase "son of his old age" (בן זקנים) raises a question, though, because Joseph was the twelfth of thirteen children. Jacob was even older when Joseph's brother Benjamin was born, so why does Joseph get this epithet and not Benjamin, the son of Israel's oldest age? *Bereshit Rabbah* answers this question with a bilingual interpretation:[16]

Rabbi Yehudah says that the likeness of [Joseph's] face was the same as [Jacob's].	רבי יהודה אומר שהיה זיו איקונין שלו דומה לו.

Rabbi Yehudah plays on the Hebrew word for old, *zaqen* (זקן) with the Greek word for likeness, *eikoncon* (εἰκόνιον). This explains the reason for Jacob's favoritism is rooted in the way that Joseph reminds him of himself and eliminates the textual discrepancy.[17] This section of *Bereshit*

13. *Rut Rabbah* 2:1.
14. For more on textual polysemy, see David Stern, "Anthology and Polysemy in Classical Midrash" in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, ed. David Stern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108–39 and Azzan Yadin, "The Hammer on the Rock: Polysemy and the School of Rabbi Ishmael," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Volume 9 (2002) 1–17.
15. Genesis 37:3.
16. *Bereshit Rabbah* 84:8.
17. Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903) s.v. איקונין; For more on bilingual wordplay in rabbinic literature, see Steven D. Fraade, "Language Mix and Multilingualism in Ancient Palestine: Literary And Inscriptional Evidence," in Jewish Studies 48 (2012), 1–40; Eilberg-Schwartz, "Rabbinic Word Plays," 783–84; Smelik, " *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Daniel Boyarin, "Bilingualism

Rabbah also includes an elucidation of a word with an uncertain meaning, another generative space for *midrash*. Because of Jacob's love for Joseph, he sets Joseph above his other children with a gift of a כתנת פסים, some kind of special coat. *Bereshit Rabbah* presents a variety of explanations of the word פסים, which appears only one other time in the *Tanakh* outside of the Joseph narrative.[18]

פסים – שהיתה מגעת עד פס ידו. דבר אחר: פסים – שהיתה דקה וקלה ביותר ונטמנת בפס יד. פסים, שהפיסו עליה איזה מהם יוליכה לאביו, ועלת ליהודה. פסים, על שם צרות שהגיעוהו, פ"א פוטיפר, סמ"ך סוחרים, יו"ד ישמעאלים, מ"ם מדינים. דבר אחר: פסים – רבי שמעון בן לקיש בשם רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: לכו וראו מפעלות אלהים (תהלים סו, ה), וכתיב בתריה: הפך ים ליבשה (תהלים סו, ו), למה וישנאו אתו, בשביל שיקרע הים לפניהם, פסים, פסים.

פסים: since it reached the palm of his hand (פס ידו). Alternatively, פסים: since it was exceedingly fine and light, and [could be] hidden in the palm of [his] hand [פס יד]. פסים: since [the other brothers] had a lottery [הפיסו]over it [to decide] which of them would bring it to his father, and it fell to Judah. פסים: in reference to the troubles that befell [Joseph]: *peh,* Potifar; *samekh*, merchants [סוחרים]; *yod*, Ishmaelites [ישמעאלים]; *mem*, Midianites [מדינים]. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish [said] in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah: "Come and see the works of God" (Psalms 66:5), and it is written after "[God] turned the sea into dry land" (Psalms 66:6). Why did [the brothers] hate [Joseph]? So that the sea would be split before [the Israelites, thus interpret] פסים, [as] strips in the sea [פס ים].

This passage offers five interpretations of the word פסים, all of which use some form of wordplay.[19] The first two *midrashim* play on the meaning of פס, hand or palm, as the defining characteristic of the coat. The first understands פסים to be a descriptor of the coat's dimensions, and the second understands it to explain the fineness of the coat.[20] The third and fourth

and Meaning in Rabbinic Literature: An Example," in *Fucus: A Semitic/Afrasian Gathering in Remembrance of Albert Ehrman*, ed. Yoel L. Arbeitman (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988), 141–52; and Galit Hasan-Rokem, "An Almost Invisible Presence - Multilingual Puns in Rabbinic Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 222–39.

18. *Bershit Rabbah* 84:8; The phrase כתנת פסים appears in the story of Tamar and Amnon in II Samuel 13.

19. Notably, none of these interpretations are the now-popular "multicolored," a translation that comes from the Septuagint's translation of פסים as ποικίλος (*poikilos*).

20. These interpretations could read as wordplay, or they could be understood as a name for style of coat, similar to the way a waistcoat was so called because it reached only the waist (in contrast to a longer formal jacket worn over it). Tangentially, but relevant to this project of wordplay, there is also a false-etymology for waistcoat that suggests the name is derived from it being made of leftover fabric that would have otherwise gone to waste.

midrashim interpret the word to be an intra-narrative prophecy of sorts, with the third interpretation elaborating on the brothers' betrayal of Joseph and the fourth interpretation, an instance of *notariqon*, anticipating the challenges Joseph will face. The fifth interpretation is also prophetic, but it makes a broader connection to the Exodus narrative, at once foreshadowing the redemption of the Israelites (and, by association, of Joseph) and justifying the calamities that will befall Joseph. This set of *midrashim* parses one word with a series of interpretations that add narrative detail—i.e. a clearer description of the coat—and narrative shading—i.e. foreshadowing and connection to other parts of the story and the Torah as a whole. Moreover, the different interpretations can exist concomitantly. The reader does not have to make a choice of one interpretation over another, though they may certainly find some *midrashim* more or less compelling.

שהכל נהיה בדברו - Everything Will be in the Word

Not all midrashic interpretation stems from a textual challenge, though. Some simply expand the biblical narrative. When Joseph is brought to Egypt by the Midianites, he is sold to Potiphar, who is described as סריס פרעה (an officer of Pharaoh). The *midrash* seizes on the polysemy of the word סריס to clarify both what happened to Joseph and what happened to Potiphar:[21]

סריס פרעה, שנסתרס בגופו, מלמד שלא לקחו אלא לתשמיש וסרסו הקדוש ברוך הוא בגופו... הדא הוא דכתיב: כי ה׳ אהב משפט וגו חסידיו (תהלים לז:כח). חסידו כתיב, ואיזה זה, יוסף: לעולם נשמרו וזרע רשעים נכרת (תהלים לז:כח),

"An officer (סריס) of Pharaoh," [means] that he was castrated. This teaches that he only bought Joseph for sexual intercourse, and the Holy Blessed One castrated him…thus it is written, "For God loves justice [and does not abandon] His faithful" (Psalms 37:28). "His faithful" is written, and who is that? Joseph. "They will be forever protected and the seed of the wicked will be cut off" (Psalms 37:28).

21. *Bereshit Rabbah* 86:3.

This teaches that [Potiphar] only bought [Joseph] for sexual intercourse, and the Holy Blessed One castrated him.	מלמד שלא לקחו אלא לתשמיש, וסרסו הקדוש ברוך הוא.

This *midrash* builds on one wordplay to create a second, thereby creating a chain of interpretive wordplay that serves to further support the interpretation. The word סריס can mean both a court official and a eunuch. Although the description of Potiphar's wealth and station in Egypt make it clear that he is the former, the *midrash* employs the other meaning to diminish Potiphar, both in stature and in anatomy. From this idea, the *midrash* looks to Psalm 37, which contrasts the punishment God metes out to the wicked with the protection and reward God gives the righteous. Verse 28 says that the children (זרע) of the wicked will be cut off (נכרת). In the original context of the Psalm, נכרת could mean the familial line of the wicked will be cut off, i.e. ended, or it could mean that the children of the wicked will endure the punishment כרת, often understood to be spiritually cut off.[22] The *midrash*, though, literalizes נכרת to be an actual physical cutting (castration) while simultaneously reading the word זרע metonymically, understanding it not to mean lineage, but rather the anatomic source of potential progeny. In this double interpretation, the *midrash* begins with wordplay within the narrative and then brings textual support by virtue of a double-entendre that links the Psalm to the narrative expansion suggested by the *midrash*, creating a reciprocal interpretation in which the *pasuq* from Genesis and the *pasuq* from Psalms each serve as a prooftext for the other.

This *midrash* also offers a deeper dimension to the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife. In addition to whatever attraction Potiphar's wife feels towards Joseph, if we accept the interpretation of סריס as eunuch, Potiphar's wife may also be sexually unsatisfied

22. For more on כרת as punishment, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), s.v. "karet."

because of her husband's castration. Frustrated and lonely, she reaches out to the handsome and successful new manservant. Then, when Potiphar hears his wife's allegation against Joseph, his fury is stoked by this second emasculation by Joseph, and he sends Joseph to jail.

Another example of narrative expansion from a creative reading of unproblematic *pasuq* is found early in Exodus. The Torah describes Pharaoh's enslavement of the Israelites and the Egyptians' reaction to the Israelites' perseverance: וכאשר יענו אתו כן ירבה וכן יפרץ ויקצו מפני בני ישראל (Yet when [the Egyptians] oppressed [Israel], they multiplied and spread out more and more, and so the Egyptians dreaded the Children of Israel).[23] A *midrash* in the Talmud explains what is meant by "dread:"[24]

ויקוצו מפני בני ישראל מלמד שהיו דומין בעיניהם כקוצים.

"And they dreaded [ויקוצו] the Children of Israel" teaches that [the Egyptians] considered [the Israelites] like thorns [כקוצים].

With the simple change of a *qibuts* to a *ḥolam*, from קוּץ to קוֹץ, the Gemara adds a psychosocial dimension to the disdain the Egyptians feel for the Israelites. It is not merely that the Egyptians are scared by the Israelites' tenacity, the Egyptian perception is one of threat of violence. Although it is Pharaoh who does the enslaving, this *midrash* underscores the Egyptians' eagerness to see the Jewish problem dealt with. The Talmud continues to expand the narrative scope of Exodus by explaining the way that the Israelites were enslaved:[25]

ויעבידו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך (שמות א, יג): רבי אלעזר אמר בפה רך רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר בפריכה.

"And the Egyptians enslaved the Children of Israel with rigor [*befarekh*]" (Exodus 1:13). Rabbi Elazar says [the word בפרך should be be read] "with a soft mouth" [בְּפֶה רַךְ]. Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani says [it should be read] "with crushing" [בִּפְרִיכָה].

23. Exodus 1:12.
24. *b. Sotah* 11a.
25. *b. Sotah* 11b.

Here the *midrash* presents two opposing interpretations. Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani's interpretation that the enslavement was done with פריכה (crushing), i.e. back-breaking labor, is contrasted with Rabbi Elazar's reading of בפרך as a conjunction of the words בפה רך (with a gentle mouth), i.e. the Israelites were coaxed or eased into their position of slavery.[26] Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani describes a sudden and violent shift in the Israelite life in Egypt, perhaps a reminder of the swift power a sovereign wields over his subjects. Rabbi Eleazar, meanwhile, describes a more gradual change, perhaps a caveat against complacency or trust in a foreign government. Both rabbis lived in Roman-ruled Palestine and were aware of the dangers that a foreign ruler might impose on a minority population.

My final example is found in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the rabbinic imagination, Sodom's wickedness is characterized by their greed, licentiousness, and the way they mistreat the poor and the stranger.[27] *b. Sanhedrin* 109b describes how far the townsfolk of Sodom went to discourage people from helping others:

> There was a young woman who would take out bread to the poor in a pitcher. The matter was revealed, and [the people of Sodom] smeared her with honey and set her atop the [city] wall. Hornets came and devoured her. And this is [what is meant by] that which is written, "And God said: Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great [*rabbah*]" (Gen. 18:20). Rav Yehudah said that Rav said [the word רבה / *rabah* is used to connect it to] the matter of the ריבה / *rivah* [young woman].
>
> הויא ההיא רביתא דהות קא מפקא ריפתא לעניא בחצבא איגלאי מלתא שפיוה דובשא ואוקמוה על איגר שורא אתא זיבורי ואכלוה והיינו דכתיב ויאמר ה׳ זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב על עיסקי ריבה.

Bereshit Rabbah 49:6 tells a similar story that is also derived from a creative reading of the next *pasuq*. Genesis 18:21 refers to the cry that comes up from the city of Sodom because they are so

26. *Midrash Tanḥuma* elaborates further on this interpretation, see *Midrash Tanḥuma*, *Behaʿalotekha* 13.
27. See *Pirqei DeRabbi Eliezer* 25, *b. Sanhedrin* 109a-b, and *Bereshit Rabbah* 49.

wicked. Because in Hebrew cities are grammatically feminine, the word צעקתה ("its cry") could also be read as "her cry." From this reading, the *midrash* describes who the ambiguous "her" is:[28]

אמר רבי לוי אפלו אני מבקש לשתק, דינה של ריבה אינו מניח אותי לשתק. מעשה בשתי נערות שירדו לשתות ולמלאת מים, אמרה אחת לחברתה למה פניך חולניות, אמרה לה כלו מזונותיה וכבר היא נטויה למות, מה עשתה מלאה את הכד קמח והחליפו נטלה זו מה שביד זו, וכיון שהרגישו בה נטלוה ושרפו אותה, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אפלו אני מבקש לשתק, דינה של נערה אינו מניח אותי לשתק, הדא הוא דכתיב: הכצעקתה, הכצעקתם אינו אומר אלא הכצעקתה, ואיזו זו דינה של נערה.	Rabbi Levi said: [God said,] "Even if I wanted to keep silent, the punishment of a young woman [ריבה] will not let me remain silent." It happened that there were two girls that went down to drink and to fill their water skins. One said to her friend, "What is your face so sickly?" [The second] said to her "[My] food is finished, and [I] am approaching death." What did [the first girl] do? She filled her jug with flour and exchanged that container for the container in [her friend's] hand. When [the people of Sodom] noticed this, they seized her and burned her. The Holy Blessed One said, "Even if I wanted to keep silent, the punishment of the girl does not let me remain silent." That is what is written: "In accordance with her outcry." It does not say "their outcry," rather "her outcry," and which is that? The cause of the girl.

These two *midrashim* expound on different words, but it seems that the second *midrash* is aware of the first. Rabbi Levi opens by describing the punishment of a ריבה (young woman), the same word that Rav uses in *b. Sanhedrin*. As the *midrash* progresses, though, it switches to the word נערה (girl), to the point that the second exclamation of God's sense of obligation is identical to the first, with only the word ריבה exchanged for נערה. What is most fascinating about these *midrashim* is that they are not simply elaborating on characters we have in the text, they are introducing wholly new characters into the world of the biblical narrative.

28. *Bereshit Rabbah* 49:6.

Conclusion

Let us return to the *midrash* in *Bereshit Rabbah* that opened this paper about the creation of the world and the holiness of the Hebrew language. After pointing to linguistic plasticity as proof of Hebrew's holiness, the *midrash* continues to say:[29]

רבי פינחס ורבי חלקיה בשם רבי סימון אמרי כשם שנתנה תורה בלשון הקדש כך נברא העולם בלשון הקדש	Rabbi Pinḥas and Rabbi Ḥilkiya say in the name of Rabbi Simon: Just as the Torah was given in the sacred language, so too the world was created in the sacred language.

For the rabbis, Hebrew is more than just a language of composition. It is a language of creation.

Another way to illustrate this approach to *midrash* is to explain it with a *midrash* that employs wordplay. The *petiḥta* that opens *Bereshit Rabbah* begins with the verse from Proverbs, ואהיה אצלו אמון ואהיה שעשועים יום יום (I was with Him as an '*amon*, I was a delight every day).[30] The word אמון is a hapax legomenon in the *Tanakh*, and the *midrash* interprets the word through a variety of wordplays which variously understand it to mean caretaker, hidden, covered, and greatness. The interpretation the *midrash* sets apart from the others, though, is an artisan:[31]

דבר אחר אמון, אמן. התורה אומרת אני הייתי כלי אמנותו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, בנהג שבעולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין, אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אמן, והאמן אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו אלא דפתראות ופנקסאות יש לו, לדעת היאך הוא עושה חדרים, היאך הוא עושה פשפשין. כך היה הקדוש ברוך הוא מביט בתורה ובורא את העולם.	Another interpretation: אמון is an artisan (*uman*). The Torah is saying, "I was the instrument of craft of the Holy Blessed One." In the way of the world, [when] a king of flesh and blood builds a palace, he does not build it using his own knowledge, rather he uses the knowledge of an artisan. And the artisan does not build it using his own knowledge, rather he uses plans and notebooks that he has in order to know how he makes rooms, how he makes doors. So too, the Holy Blessed One looked in the Torah and created the world.

29. *Bereshit Rabbah* 18:4.
30. Proverbs 8:30.
31. *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1.

The Torah, in this interpretation, is the set of instructions for world creation. There are particular ways to fit pieces together in order to build things, and they require an artisan to understand both the tools of their craft and the larger project they will ultimately become. Just as God used words to create our world, the rabbis used the same building blocks—words—to create the literary worlds of midrashic interpretation. At its best, the creative philology of *midrash* fills in the details of the story by re-fashioning the very words it seeks to understand. And, in so doing, *midrash* does not merely create a narrative that is separate or derivative, it is created within the biblical world and word.

III. Law *Tiqre*: Aggadic Hermeneutics in Halakhic Literature

אמר רבי אלעזר מניין שהדיבור כמעשה שנאמר בדבר ה׳ שמים נעשו. (בבלי שבת קיט:)

Rabbi Elazar said: From where do we know that speech is like action? As it says: "By the word of God the heavens were made." (b. Shabbat 119b)

Introduction

As we have seen, the Rabbinic inclination to interpret sacred texts through wordplay allows for expanding a narrative as well as offering theological and moralistic teachings. Rabbinic literature, though, and the Talmud in particular, is a collection of both lore and law. The Talmud represents the process of rabbinic debate, and much has been written about the Talmud's legal multivocality.[1] Yet, Halakhic codes, based on the legal argumentation of the Talmud, attempt to delineate a clear, fixed answer. *Ḥazal*'s creative approach to the Hebrew language is fertile ground for aggadic production, but can this textual polysemy influence the legal interpretive tradition?

One common aggadic hermeneutic is אל תקרי…אלא (don't read X, rather Y), which is an interpretive method that gives new meaning to a verse based on a creative re-reading of one word. It may include changing punctuation, transposing or changing letters, or presenting a paronomasic reading of a word or phrase.[2] The formula אל תקרי...אלא (hereafter אל תקרי) appears over a hundred times in the Babylonian Talmud, and is used to various ends, including moralistic

1. See Richard Hidary, *Dispute for the Sake of Heaven: Legal Pluralism in the Talmud* (Brown University Press, 2010); Steven Fraade, "Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization," in *AJS Review* 31, no. 1 (2007) 1–40; Fraade, "Response to Azzan Yadin-Israel on Rabbinic Polysemy: Do They 'Preach' What They Practice?" in *AJS Review* 38 (2014) 339–61; Fraade, "'A Heart of Many Chambers': The Theological Hermeneutics of Legal Multivocality." *Harvard Theological Review* 108 (2015): 113–28; and Daniel Boyarin, "Shattering the Logos - or, The Talmuds and the Genealogy of Indeterminacy," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).
2. Yitzḥak Heinemann, *Darkhei ha-Aggadah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1949), 127–9.

(*b. Niddah* 13a, *b. Ta'anit* 7b), aggadic (*b. Berakhot* 32a, *b. Ta'anit* 9a), theological (*b. Megillah* 28b, *b.* '*Avodah zarah* 3b), and pedagogic (*b. Qiddushin* 30a, *b. Sanhedrin* 99b).[3]

Although אל תקרי functions primarily as a tool of aggadic interpretation, it can also be found in debates in the Talmud that have halakhic implications. In this paper, I will explore אל תקרי as it appears in halakhic literature, specifically R. Jacob ben Asher's '*Arba'ah Turim* (hereafter the *Tur*) and R. Josef Karo's *Bet Yosef*. I will examine each inclusion of אל תקרי in the *Tur* and compare it to its rabbinic source and its use in (or exclusion from) the *Bet Yosef*, with attention to whether the hermeneutic is simply being transmitted as it was used in its original context, or if the interpretation is changed, adapted, or used in an original way.[4]

All of the *Tur*'s uses of אל תקרי appear in the section *Oraḥ Ḥayyim* (hereafter *OḤ*), which is the section dealing with worship and ritual observance in daily life that offers practical instruction for how to pray or make certain blessings. Already in the Talmud, we see אל תקרי being employed to practical ends in order to instruct people in how to behave with regard to prayer (e.g. *b. Berakhot* 14a, 15b, and 30b). But from the myriad ways that the Talmud uses אל תקרי, the *Tur* only uses five.

Part I: Waiting for Sating

The first instance of אל תקרי in the *Tur* appears in relation to the prohibition against eating or drinking before reciting the morning prayers.

It is prohibited to occupy oneself with one's needs or to get on the road before praying [the *Amidah*], nor may one eat or drink, and if one did so, about them the verse states: "And Me you have cast behind your back" (I Kings 14:9) Do not read "your back	ואסור לו להתעסק בצרכיו או לילך לדרך עד שיתפלל ולא לאכול ולא לשתות ואם עשה כן עליו הכתוב אומר ואותי השלכת אחרי גויך (א מלכים

3. The hermeneutic is even more common in works of *midrash*, where it appears more than 250 times.
4. I thank Professor Alyssa Gray for her guidance in articulating this goal.

יד, ט) אל תקרי גויך אלא גאיך לאחר שנתגאה זה קבל עליו מלכות שמים

[*gavekha*]"; rather, "your pride [*ge'ekha*]." After such a person becomes arrogant [i.e. satisfies their own needs], [only then] do they accept the yoke of heaven upon themself.[5]

In reading this wordplay as it is found in the Talmud (*b. Berakhot* 10b), the prohibition against food and drink before prayer seems to be total, applying anyone who eats and drinks and afterwards prays (כל האוכל ושותה ואח"כ מתפלל). The *Tur*, however, allows for leniency in understanding this *halakhah*. Citing the *'Avi ha'ezri*, the *Tur* explains that drinking water is permissible, since drinking water is not considered an act of arrogance (לא שייך בהו גאוה), i.e. it is a simple drink, and not something one is ingesting for pleasure. The *Bet Yosef* expands on the *Tur*'s citation, likewise quoting the *sugya* and further explaining the logic of the rabbis in bringing the prooftext.

ונ"ל שהטעם שהיה כח ביד חכמים לשנות הפסוק ממשמעותו היינו מפני שזה שאסור לאכול ולשתות קודם שיתפלל אינו מדאורייתא אלא חכמים אסרוהו ולא נראה להם לגזור אלא במידי דהוי דרך גאוה דוקא וכי בעי לאסמוכי אקרא ראו שלפי פשוטו משמע לאסור אף במים ולכך הוצרכו לומר אל תקרא גויך אלא גאיך

And it seems to me that the reason the rabbis were able to change the verse from its meaning is because this prohibition against eating and drinking before prayer is not from the Torah, rather the rabbis prohibited it, it only seemed [appropriate] to them to delineate between genuine acts of arrogance. When they wanted [to use] the text [for] support, they saw that according to its simple reading it indicates prohibiting even water, and therefore they needed to say "don't read *gavekha*, rather, *ge'ekh*a."[6]

Thus, we see how halakhic works can make use of a rabbinic interpretation for their own ends. The *halakhah* as it is understood from a straightforward reading of the Talmud says that one cannot eat or drink anything before prayer. The *Tur* and the *Bet Yosef*, though, bringing the interpretation of the *'Avi ha'ezri*, loosen the rabbinic prohibition by allowing water, and they do

5. *Tur OḤ* 89:1.
6. *Bet Yosef OḤ* 89:7.

so by looking to the very interpretive turn the rabbis used to create the limitation in the first place.[7] Whereas the rabbis understand גאה (arrogance) in terms of a person tending to their own needs prior to thanking their Creator, the *'Avi ha'ezri*—and the halakhists who hold by him—accept not eating and drinking as their starting point, and from there understand גאה to mean an act that is indulgent or excessive.[8]

Part II: What's Fermata With You?

The second אל תקרי in the *Tur* appears in the treatment of a congregation responding *'amen* to the service leader during the repetition of the *'amidah*.

> אבל אם כלה מפי רוב העונין אפילו יש עדיין מיעוט ומאריכין אינו צריך להמתין להם כיון שמאריכין בו יותר מדאי אמר רבי שמעון כל העונה אמן בכל כחו פי' בכל כוונתו פותחין לו שערי גן עדן שנאמר פתחו שערים ויבא גוי צדיק שומר אמונים (ישעיה כו, ב) אל תקרי אמונים אלא אמנים אלו שאומרים אמן.
>
> However, if most of the congregation has finished [saying *'amen*], even if there are a few who are stretching out [their *'amen*], there is no need to wait for them since they are stretching it more than necessary. Rabbi Simeon says: all who respond *'amen* with all their strength—which means with full intention—open for themselves the gates of heaven, as it is said, "Open the gates and a righteous nation shall come that keeps faith" (Isaiah 26:2). Do not read *'emunim*, rather read *'amenim*, those people that say *'amen*.

In describing the *halakhot* of saying *'amen*, the *Tur* is drawing on a discussion about the *halakhot* of meals on *b. Berakhot* 47a.[9] The אל תקרי that he invokes, though, is found in a different source, *b. Shabbat* 119b, and in a slightly different form. The interpretation in the Talmud reads אל תיקרי שומר אמונים אלא שאומרים אמן (Do not read *shomer 'emunim*, [those who

7. It is reasonable to say that the interpretation of I Kings 14:9 did not create *halakhah*, rather, as the *Bet Yosef* suggests, the ruling was made and the verse was brought to support it.
8. Later *poskim* extended this leniency to drinking coffee and tea before prayer, when these drinks were considered more common and less luxurious. Some differ as to whether to allow milk and sugar (cf. the Maharsham's *D'at torah* 89:3, *Mishneh brurah* 89:22, *Be'er heteiv* 89:14, and *Arukh hashulkhan* 89:23, among others).
9. See Rashi's comment on *b. Shabbat* 47a, s.v. קדים.

keep the faith], rather read *she'omrim 'amen* [those who say amen]).[10] Although the essence of the interpretation is the same, the interpretation the *Tur* quotes revocalizes the word אמונים instead of making a paronomasic contraction of the words שומר and אמונים. The version the *Tur* quotes is also found in *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* and Rabbi Baḥya ben Asher's commentary on the Torah.[11]

In the Talmudic context where the interpretation is found, the rabbis are not discussing prayer etiquette, rather they are referring to the power of responding *'amen* and the reward one can receive from this response.[12] The attachment of this interpretation of the potency of the word *'amen* seems superfluous to the *Tur*'s discussion of proper enunciation. However, in focusing on a phrase in the amoraic interpretation, the *Tur* not only offers further instruction in how to say *'amen*, he also offers balance to the prescriptive laws of *'amen*.

On Shabbat 119b, describing the power of *'amen*, the Talmud relates that punishments can be annulled and the very gates of *gan 'eden* can be opened to one who says *'amen* בכל כחו, with all one's strength. The phrase בכל כחו appears both in the teaching from Reish Lakish that the *Tur* cites and in a similar teaching preceding it. It is this phrase that the *Tur* utilizes to marshal this interpretation for his needs. The *Tur*, using Rashi's commentary but not citing him, explains the phrase as meaning בכל כוונתו, with one's full intention or concentration. This is important, as a reasonable reading of בכל כחו could be "with all one's might," i.e. precisely the overwrought *'amen* the *Tur* wants to avoid. Moreover, this interpretation concludes the *Tur*'s description of how one should say *'amen* (e.g. making sure the *'amen* is not too short, not too

10. This אל תקרי is also found in *b. Sanhedrin* 110b in discussing when a minor merits *olam hab'ah*.
11. See *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* 11 and Rabbi Baḥya ben Asher on Exodus 14:31.
12. There is an ambiguity as to whether the rabbis are discussing simply to responding אמן or to the response אמן יהא שמיה רבא מברך, i.e. the congregational response in the *qaddish*. The discussion begins with אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי כל העונה "אמן יהא שמיה רבא מברך" בכל כחו קורעין לו גזר דינו and from there. This is worth noting because depending on how the *Tur* understood the *sugya*, it may be another reframing of the Talmudic source on his part.

long, clearly enunciated, etc.). Given these guidelines, a person could easily find their focus during prayer turning to the parameters when they respond *'amen*. Yet, by placing interpretation of *b. Shabbat* 119b in conversation with *b. Berakhot* 47a, The *Tur* makes a statement of priority in prayer: while there is a proper way to respond *'amen*, more important is a person's concentration and intention in saying it. The *Tur* maintains the אל תקרי to direct the receipt of the reward to those who say *'amen*, but in offering this interpretation of the phrase בכל כחו, the *Tur* lets the final word be a subtle enjoinder to prioritize intention and concentration in prayer.

The *Bet Yosef* offers a similar ruling about not needing to wait for a few histrionic congregants to finish their *amen*, but he does not bring in this particular wordplay. He does, however, invoke the wordplay of Rabbi Ḥanina that follows Reish Lakish on *b. Shabbat* 119b:[13]

> What is the [proper] duration [of an *'amen*]? [Long enough] that one could say "*el melekh ne'eman*." — כמה שיעורה כדי שיכול לומר אל מלך נאמן.

In *b. Shabbat* 119b, Rabbi Ḥanina uses *notariqon* to explain the meaning of *'amen* as an acronym for the words *el melekh ne'eman* (God is a faithful King). Notably, the *Bet Yosef* does not say directly that this is the meaning of *'amen*, rather that this interpretation can serve as a model for the proper duration of one's response. Yet in choosing this phrase as the metric, the *Bet Yosef* keeps his *halakhah* in conversation with both the *Tur* and its source text.

Part III: An Honor Guard

The next אל תקרי is found at the end of *hilkhot s'eudah* in discussing who receives the honor of blessing (i.e. leading) *birkat hamazon*.[14]

13. *Bet Yosef OḤ* 124:12.
14. *Tur OḤ* 201:2.

גרסי׳ בפ׳ בני העיר אמר רבה בב״ח א״ר יוחנן כל ת״ח שמברך לפניו אפילו כהן גדול עם הארץ אותו ת״ח חייב מיתה בידי שמים שנאמר משנאי אהבו מות (משלי ח, לו) אל תקרי משנאי אלא משניאי.

We read in *pereq bene ha'ir* [chapter four of *b. Megillah*]: Rabbah bar bar Ḥanah says Rabbi Yoḥanan says any torah scholar who [let someone else] bless in their presence, even a High Priest who is illiterate, that torah scholar is liable for the death penalty at the hands heaven, as it says "All those who hate me, love death" (Proverbs 8:36). Do not read "those who hate Me [*mesan'ai*]," rather read "those who make Me hated [*masni'ai*]."

Once again, the *Tur* uses an אל תקרי from a different part of the Talmud than where we find the *halakhot* he is discussing. Most of the *halakhot* of the hierarchy of who gets to bless is found in *b. Berakhot* 46a-47a, but the *Tur* brings a statement from Rabbi Yoḥanan in *b. Megillah* 28a. The *Tur*, like the Talmudic source, uses the אל תקרי to underscore the importance of respect due to torah scholars. Although the *Tur* does not make and changes or innovations on the interpretation, he adds the words בידי שמים (at the hands of heaven) after חייב מיתה (liable for the death penalty), thereby deescalating the punishment in a practical sense.

The *Bet Yosef* does not use this אל תקרי in his treatment of *OḤ*, but he does use it in *Yoreh De'ah*, in the section *hilkhot kavod rabo v'talmid ḥakham*.[15] While it is the same wordplay being used, it is sourced from a different part of the Talmud. This particular אל תקרי appears three times in the Bavli: *b. Megillah* 28a, as we have seen, *b. Eruvin* 99a, which the *Bet Yosef* references, and *b. Shabbat* 114a.[16] In *b. Eruvin* 99a, Reish Lakish uses the verse to support his statement that one should not expectorate in front of their teacher, or they are liable for the death penalty (אמר ריש לקיש כיח בפני רבו חייב מיתה שנאמר…). Although this is not the אל תקרי that the *Tur* uses, it may be his source for adding the words בידי שמים אם to mitigate the punishment, as this is precisely

15. *Bet Yosef Yoreh De'ah* 242:35.
16. *b. Shabbat* 114a will not be explored here, since it is not referenced in the *Tur* or the *Bet Yosef*, but in a discussion about honor with regard to clothing, Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba says that Rabbi Yoḥanan said a Torah scholar with a fat stain on their clothes is liable for the death penalty (ואמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר ר׳ יוחנן בכל תלמיד חכם שנמצא רבב על בגדו חייב מיתה שנאמר…).

Rashi's comment on חייב מיתה.[17] It is curious that the *Bet Yosef* chooses not to include *b. Megillah* 28a, both because it deals with honor due to a *talmid ḥakham*, and because it seems obvious that coughing up phlegm in front of one's teacher is gauche. All three instances of this אל תקרי, though, interpret the verse from Proverbs—declaring value to cleaving to God in its original context—as being related to honor and respect.

Part IV: A Creative Halakhah

The next אל תקרי the *Tur* uses is in *hilkhot shabbat* in the enumeration of blessings for the Friday night *'amidah*. The *Tur* explains that although there are some *siddurim* that use Genesis 2:3 in Friday night's fourth blessing (ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אותו) it is more proper to use Genesis 2:1-2 (ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל־צבאם ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי מכל־מלאכתו אשר עשה).[18]

ויותר נכון לאומרו דגרסינן בפרק כל כתבי (שבת קיט:) אמר רב ואיתימא רבי יהושע בן לוי אפילו יחיד המתפלל צריך לומר ויכולו ואמר רב המנונא כל המתפלל ואומר ויכולו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו נעשה שותף להקב״ה במעשה בראשית שנאמר ויכולו אל תקרי ויכולו אלא ויכלו פירוש הקב״ה והוא.

But it is more correct to say that which we read in *pereq kol kitve* (*b. Shabbat* 119b): Rav[19] said, and some say it was Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: Even one who prays individually [on Shabbat evening] must recite "*vayekhulu*." Rav Hamnuna said: Anyone who prays and recites "*vayekhulu*," the verse merits him as if he became a partner with the Holy Blessed One in the act of creation, as it says: "And the heavens and the earth were finished [*vayekhulu*]." Do not read *vayekhulu* [were finished], rather *vayekhalu* [they finished], meaning the Holy Blessed One and the one [who recited this verse].

It seems that in this instance, the אל תקרי is incidental to the *Tur*'s goal of arguing for a particular version of the Friday night *'amidah*. What is important for the *Tur* is the fact that Genesis 2:1-2

17. Rashi on *b. Eruvin* 99a, s.v. חייב מיתה
18. *Tur OḤ* 268:1
19. Some versions ascribe this to Rava, not Rav (cf. Soncino Print Family [1489 or later] and Vilna).

has an amoraic endorsement that Genesis 2:3 does not. Nevertheless, the *Tur* includes it in his ruling. He even reiterates it, explaining:

> אלמא שהעיקר לומר ויכולו שמורה כאילו נעשה שותף.
>
> Why is the essential thing to say ויכולו? That it teaches [that one] becomes like a partner [with God].

This אל תקרי is not included at all in the *Bet Yosef*, though given the fact that the *Bet Yosef* spends hardly any time elaborating on the content of the Friday night *'amidah*, perhaps this is indicative of a more fixed liturgical rite by the time the *Bet Yosef* is writing. The *Tur*'s inclusion of this aggadic interpretation, though, seems to function pedagogically, not polemically. Instead of buttressing his argument, it serves to offer an intention for the one praying.

Part V: Taking a Stand

The final instance of אל תקרי in the *Tur* is found in *hilkhot r'osh hashanah*:[20]

> ועומד התוקע לתקוע שצריך שיתקע מעומד דכתיב יום תרועה יהיה לכם וילפינן מלכם דכתיב גבי עומר וספירת העומר מעומד דכתיב מהחל חרמש בקמה אל תקרי בקמה אלא בקומה.
>
> The one who blows [the shofar] stands to blow, for one needs to blow [the shofar while] standing, as it is written: "It shall be a day of blasts for you [לכם]" (Nubmers 29:1). And we learn this from לכם, as it is written regarding the *'omer* and counting the *'omer* [which must be done while] standing, as it is written: "[begin counting the *'omer*] from the time you put the sickle to the grain" (Deuteronomy 16:9). Do not read *baqamah* [to the grain], rather *baqomah* [standing].

Here the *Tur* presents a complicated interpretive chain to support this *halakhah*. He uses the אל תקרי interpretation of the Deuteronomy verse commanding the counting of the *'omer* to show that one must stand while counting the *'omer*. From there, he concludes that this does not apply just to the *omer*, but also to similarly worded commandments, i.e. commandments that include the word לכם. This requires an interpretive leap, though, because Deuteronomy 16:9 does not use

20. *Tur OḤ* 585:1.

the word לכם, it says מהחל חרמש בקמה שבעה שבעת תספר־לך. To understand to connection, we must look to Leviticus 23:15, where the commandment for the *ʻomer* is written in the plural (וספרתם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את־עמר התנופה שבע שבתות לכם).

Interestingly, the source of this אל תקרי is not entirely clear, but it does not seem to be an ancient source. It is widely quoted by *poskim*, some of whom attribute the interpretation to the Yerushalmi, but it is not found in any of the editions of the Yerushalmi presently known. The earliest evidence of this interpretation appears in *Midrash lekaḥ tov*, a late 11th-century midrash on the Torah and the Five Scrolls by R. Tobiah ben Eliezer:[21]

ומצות מילה לברך מעומד דילפינן ברכת העומר מן בקמה. וכתיב בעומר וספרתם לכם (ויקרא כג, טו). למדנו כל מצוה שנאמר בה לכם. מצותה בקומה. דומיא דברכת העומר. וכתיב במילה המול לכם. וכן בציצית והיו לכם לציצית. וכן בלולב ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון.

> The *mitzvah* of circumcision is blessed while standing. We learn this from the blessing of the *ʻomer*, from [the word] בקמה. And it is written regarding the *ʻomer* "And you shall count for yourselves [לכם]" (Leviticus 23:15). This teaches us that any *mitzvot* which says לכם in it is performed while standing, the same as the counting of the *ʻomer*. With regard to circumcision, "you shall circumcise yourselves (לכם)" is written. Also for *tzitzit*, "you (לכם) shall have *tzitzit*." Also for the lulav, "and you shall take for yourselves (לכם) on the first day…".

This source links the commandment of circumcision with the *ʻomer*, and then expands it to other *mitzvot* that use the word לכם, notably, though, not the commandment blowing the shofar. The *Tur* does not mention this אל תקרי in discussing the other לכם *mitzvot*, not even the actual *mitzvah* of counting of the *ʻomer*.[22] While the *Bet Yosef* does not include this interpretation in his treatment of blowing the shofar, he does include it when discussing counting the *ʻomer*, citing the Rosh who gives a vague ת״ר (our rabbis taught) as attribution for the teaching.[23]

21. *Midrash Lekach Tov*, Genesis 17:13; Matanya Yadid, "*Midrash 'al tiqre: darkho hametodologit ḥinukhit shel hadarshan*." *Drishah* 4 (2019), 160–61, accessed August 22, 2023, https://asif.co.il/wpfb-file/1-4-pdf-122/.
22. *Tur OḤ* 489:1
23. *Bet Yosef OḤ* 489:4

Conclusion

The *Tur* only uses אל תקרי five times to support liturgical and ritual halakhot. Yet we have seen the variety of his interpretive method even within these instances, whether by bringing the simple meaning of the interpretations as part of a larger textual support or by using the אל תקרי method to modify the original source. As we have seen, though, the appearance of these sources across multiple Talmudic sources and the *Tur*'s attachment of interpretations from different parts of the Talmud, as well as the *Bet Yosef*'s use of the *Tur*'s sources to support different *halakhot*, create a system of *halakhot* and interpretations that are in conversation with each other.

There has yet to be an in-depth study of the use of the אל תקרי hermeneutic in halakhic literature, although my research has shown that it is used both in halakhic literature that predates the *Tur* (e.g. *Sheiltot de-Rav Aḥai*, *Sefer Yere'im*, and the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*) and it is used even more expansively in later halakhic commentaries and codes, significantly in R. Yaakov Chaim Sofer's *Kaf hachayim* the '*Arukh hashulchan*. This paper begins to show, however, that although the hermeneutic *lashon nofel al lashon* was primarily a tool of aggadic explication, the philologic creativity of the rabbis has practical implications in Jewish ritual and practice.

Conclusion

מה פטיש זה מתחלק לכמה ניצוצות אף מקרא אחד יוצא לכמה טעמים. (בבלי סנהדרין ל״ד.)

"Just as this hammer breaks a stone into several fragments, so too, one verse is stated by God and from it emerge several explanations." (b. Sanhedrin 34a)

This text immersion was not just an opportunity to deepen my learning or improve my textual skills, but a way to use rabbinic study and interpretation to express my hopes for my rabbinate and for Jewish life more broadly; it represents my commitment to learning, creativity, and pluralism.

Learning - The experience of studying these sources is an act of learning, and the texts themselves model a mode of learning that moves beyond simple comprehension. The mastery of material and language that is required to put an entire corpus of sacred literature in conversation with itself is significant. It is an inspiring model to emulate. The dialogic nature of rabbinic texts reminds us that learning is collaborative, and that learning in community allows us to hear voices other than our own.

Moreover, these teachings have been transmitted, interpreted, and built upon throughout Jewish history. In studying these texts, we participate in what I call *diyun dorot*, the dialogue that spans generations. We experience the principle of *'ayn muqdam v'ayn me'uchar*, that there is no earlier or later; there is only the moment in which we find ourselves in conversation with our tradition. The power to collapse time in this way allows for a different sanctification of time; here we make time holy not by putting up boundaries, but by removing them. In this way, we put ourselves in conversation with our tradition and understand the words of our tradition anew.

Creativity - "The pun," writes Stefan Schorsch, "discovers the internal possibilities for linking the word with new contexts on account of its phonetic shape or its semantic complexity. With the help of the pun, the audience may understand the word in new ways."[1] Similarly, it is the task of the rabbi to help people discover internal possibilities for connection and new context. Through creativity, a rabbi brings about greater understanding and appreciation of the complexity and depth of the Jewish tradition. And, although *midrash* is a text that is thoroughly rooted in tradition, ultimately it only succeeds through innovation. Though the framework of tradition can appear limiting, it is this container that creates the resonance of the *midrash*.

Regarding creativity, I must say a few words about humor and enjoyment. Part of what drew me to this project was my own love of wordplay. I have always been intrigued and amused by the way words can be (mis)heard and how homonymous hearings might lead to a polysem-misstep. As far as rabbinic literature is concerned, scholars have disagreed about the extent to which wordplay in rabbinic texts is intended to be humorous or entertaining.[2] Personally, I am of the mind that the rabbis must have enjoyed both the interpretive project of *midrash* and the intellectual satisfaction that comes when a pun clicks into place. I do not believe that *midrash* was only–or even mostly–created for amusement and entertainment, but I feel convinced that the element of play was present in midrashic exegesis.

---

1. Stefan Schorsch, "Between Science and Magic: The Function and Roots of Paronomasia in the Prophetic Books of the Hebrew Bible" in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2000), 212.
2. For arguments that see humor as a trait of rabbinic literature, see Ronald N. Brown, "The Enjoyment of Midrash" (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1980); Eliezer Diamond, "But Is it Funny? Identifying Humor, Satire, and Parody in Rabbinic Literature" in *Jews and Humor*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspon (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press), 33–53; and James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash" in *Prooftexts* 3, no. 2 (1983): 131–55. For arguments dismissing this, see Schorsch, "Between Science and Magic"; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz "Who's Kidding Whom?: A Serious Reading Of Rabbinic Word Plays" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 765–88; and Jacob Neusner, *Midrash as Literature: The Primacy of Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987).

Pluralism - Wordplay works because of the way words are able to hold multiple, and even sometimes divergent meanings. The skilled *darshan* is successful because of an openness to see or hear the myriad possibilities that a word or phrase offers. These may even be counter-intuitive or surprising. The *midrash* is a text that values polysemy and multivocality both in form and in content.[3] Jewish life and the expressions thereof, similarly, must value multivocality and see other interpretations as having the potential for meaning and truth.

Chaim Milikowsky describes midrashic exegesis as the rabbis' "concern for discerning the manifold voices of God concealed in the biblical text."[4] The openness of the *midrash* to read sacred text in a variety of ways is a model not just for how one reads scripture, but how one makes those teachings manifest in this world. Although it can be difficult to hold differing, sometimes opposing understandings at once, we need only to look to our tradition of interpretation to remember that אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים, these and these are the words of the living God.[5]

Rabbinic wordplay, then, offers a model for a way of living Jewish life that demands scholarly engagement, privileges intellectual creativity, and delights in the holiness and validity of different interpretations of the Jewish tradition.

3. See David Stern, "Anthology and Polysemy in Classical Midrash;" Steven D. Fraade, "Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization." *AJS Review* 31, no. 1 (2007): 1–40; and Richard Hidary, *Dispute for the Sake of Heaven: Legal Pluralism in the Talmud* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2010).
4. Chaim Milikowsky, "Rabbinic Interpretation of the Bible in the Light of Ancient Hermeneutical Practice: The Question of the Literal Meaning," in *"The Words of a Wise Man's Mouth are Gracious" (Qoh 10,12): Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Mauro Perani (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 14.
5. *b. Eruvin* 13b.

Appendix: Rabbinic Sources Studied

b. Avodah Zarah	3b-4b (מיד הקב״ה יושב ומשחק…וכתיב התם ותהי לו סוכנת)
b. Bava Batra	12a-12b (אמר רבי אבדימי…שנאמר ותירוש ינובב בתלות)
b. Berakhot	10a-b (הנהו בריוני דהוו בשבבותיה…מכלל דקורא בעונתה עדיף) 56b-57a (אמר ליה בר קפרא לרבי…נעשה ראש לבני כלה) 61a (דרש רב נחמן בר רב חסדא…לפתח חטאת רובץ) 63b-64a (נו רבנן כשנכנסו רבותינו לכרם ביבנה…יברך את עמו בשלום)
b. Ḥagigah	2a-3b (הכל חייבין בראייה…עיני יוסי למקומן וחזרו)
b. Eruvin	18b-19a (ואמר ר׳ ירמיה בן אלעזר כל אותן השנים…הכי נמי דפשעי הוא) 54a-b (אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: המהלך …אנא עבדתה ואיקיים בידאי)
b. Megillah	12a-14a (אמר רבא אף דניאל טעה…נתבצר להם בגיהנם ועמדו עליו) 27b-29a (זלפ״ן סימן…אלא אריאשא)
b. Nidah	31a-b (תנו רבנן שלשה שותפין יש...כי קולך ערב ומראך נאוה)
b. Nedarim	31b-32b (וקונם שאני נהנה לערלים מותר…ואין זרעו כהן)
b. Pesaḥim	9a-b (אין חוששין…רב מרי אמר: גזירה שמא יניח עשר וימצא תשע) 114a (אמר רבא בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן…אקיקלי דמתא שכיב)
b. Rosh Hashanah	10b-12a (מכלל דתרוייהו סבירא…מונין אף למבול כר׳ יהושע)
b. Sanhedrin	18a-b (כהן גדול דן ודנין אותו…איסתיועי הוא דאיסתייעא מילתייהו) 107b-111a (דור המבול אין להם חלק…א״ר חנינא אל מלך נאמן)
b. Shabbat	62b-63b (דרש רבא בריה דרב עילאי…אמר להו יישר וכן א״ר יוחנן) 77b (אמר רב יהודה אמר רב…דג, ונחש, וחזיר) 87a (שבר את הלוחות מאי…דברים שקשין לאדם כגידין) 88b (היינו דאמר רבא…אל תיקרי ידודון אלא ידדון) 118b-119b (ר״נ בר יצחק אמר…אל מלך נאמן)
b. Sotah	10b-11b (ויראה יהודה ויחשבה לזונה…הכא ודאי בפריכה)
b. Sukkah	49a-b (אמר רבה בר בר חנה א״ר יוחנן... רבא אכסא דברכתא אגמע גמועי) 52a-b (דרש ר׳ עוירא ואיתימא ר׳ יהושע בן לוי…צדקיה ומשיח ואליהו)
b. Yoma	76a-b (אסור באכילה הני חמשה ענויין כנגד מי…חמרא וריחני פקחין)
Bereshit Rabbah	84-88
Midrash Tanḥuma	*Beha'alotcha* 12-15 *Shlach* 1-6

Bibliography

Aaron, David. “Judaism’s Holy Language.” In *Approaches to Ancient Judaism Volume 16*, ed. Jacob Neusner, 49–107. Tampa: The University of South Florida, 1999.

Attardo, Salvatore. “Universals in Puns and Humorous Wordplay.” In Winter-Froemel and Thaler, *Cultures and Traditions of Wordplay and Wordplay Research*, 89–110.

———. “Verbal Humor.” In *The Linguistics of Humor: An Introduction*, 176–198. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Benjamin, Walter. “The Translator’s Task.” Translated by Steven Rendall. In Venutti, *The Translation Studies Reader*.

Boyarin, Daniel. "Bilingualism and meaning in rabbinic literature: an example." In *Fucus: A Semitic/Afrasian Gathering in Remembrance of Albert Ehrman,* ed. Yoel L. Arbeitman, 141–52. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988

———. “Shattering the Logos - or, The Talmuds and the Genealogy of Indeterminacy.” In *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III*, ed. Peter Schäfer, 273–302. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002.

Brown, James. “Eight Types of Puns.” *PMLA* 71, no. 1 (1956): 14–26.

Brown, Ronald N. “The Enjoyment of Midrash: The Use of the Pun in Genesis Rabba.” PhD diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1980.

Derrida, Jacques. “What is ‘Relevant’ Translation?” trans. by Lawrence Venutti. In Venutti, *The Translation Studies Reader*.

Diamond, Eliezer. “But Is it Funny? Identifying Humor, Satire, and Parody in Rabbinic Literature.” In *Jews and Humor*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspon, 33–53. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard. “Who's Kidding Whom?: A Serious Reading Of Rabbinic Word Plays.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 765–88.

Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics, ed. Geoffery Khan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), s.vv. “paronomasia,” “polysemy.”

Engleman, Binyamin. “Humor mutzhar, galuy vi-samuy bi-talmud bavli” in *Be-khol derakhekha da‘ehu: ketav-‘et le-‘inyene torah u-mada‘*, Volume VIII, (winter 5759): 5–28.

Fraade, Steven D. “‘A Heart of Many Chambers’: The Theological Hermeneutics of Legal Multivocality.” Harvard Theological Review 108.1 (January 2015): 113–28.

———. “Language Mix and Multilingualism in Ancient Palestine: Literary and Inscriptional Evidence.” *Jewish Studies* 48 (2012): 1–40.

———. “Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization.” *AJS Review* 31, no. 1 (2007): 1–40.

———. “Response to Azzan Yadin-Israel on Rabbinic Polysemy: Do They ‘Preach’ What They Practice?” *AJS Review* 38, no. 2 (2014): 339–61.

Fraenkel, Jonah. “Paronomasia in Aggadic Narratives.” In *Studies in Hebrew Narrative Art Throughout the Ages*, 27–35. Scripta Hierosolymitana vol. 27. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978.

Gottlieb, Isaac B. “Midrash as Biblical Philology.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, October, 1984, New Series, Vol. 75, No. 2 (October, 1984): 134–61.

Hartman, Geoffrey H. “Midrash as Law and Literature.” *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 3 (1994): 338–55.

Hasan-Rokem, Galit. “An Almost Invisible Presence - Multilingual Puns in Rabbinic Literature.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, 222–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Heinemann, Yitzḥak. *Darkhe ha-’aggadah*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1949.

Hempelmann, Christian F. and Tristan Miller. “Puns: Taxonomy and phonology” in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor*, ed. Salvatore Attardo, 95–108. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2017.

Hidary, Richard. *Dispute for the Sake of Heaven: Legal Pluralism in the Talmud*. Providence: Brown University Press, 2010.

———. “Talmudic Topoi: Rhetoric and the Hermeneutical Methods of Midrash.” In *Rabbis and Classical Rhetoric: Sophistic Education and Oratory in the Talmud and Midrash*, 174–215. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Kugel, James. *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*. New York: Free Press, 2007.

———. “Two Introductions to Midrash.” *Prooftexts* 3, no. 2 (1983): 131–55.

Malachi, Zvi. “‘Creative Philology’ as a System of Biblical and Talmudic Exegesis: Creating Midrashic Interpretations from Multi-meaning Words in the Midrash and the Zohar.” In Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*.

Milikowsky, Chaim. “Rabbinic Interpretation of the Bible in the Light of Ancient Hermeneutical Practice.” In *“The Words of a Wise Man's Mouth are Gracious” (Qoh 10,12): Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* ed. Mauro Perani, 7–28. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005.

Mintz, Adam. “Words, Meaning and Spirit: The Talmud in Translation.” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 5 (1994): 115–55.

Mishnat rabbi eliezer ’o midrash sheloshim ushtayim midot. Ed. Hyman Gerson Enelow. New York: Bloch, 1933.

Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991)

Noegel, Scott B., ed. *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*. Bethesda: CDL Press, 2000.

———, ed. *“Wordplay” In Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021.

Rendsburg, Gary A. “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection.” In Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 137–62.

Sarason, Richard. “Interpreting Rabbinic Biblical Interpretation: The Problem of Midrash, Again.” In *Hesed ve-emet*: *Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, ed. Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin, 133–54. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.

Schorch, Stefan. “Between Science and Magic: The Function and Roots of Paronomasia in the Prophetic Books of the Hebrew Bible.” In Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 205–22.

Smelik, Willem F. *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Sommer, Benjamin D., ed. *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Essential Talmud*. Translated by Chaya Galai. New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

Stern, David. “Anthology and Polysemy in Classical Midrash.” In *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, ed. David Stern, 108–39. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

———. *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996.

Stolow, Jeremy. *Orthodox by Design*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Van Dyck, Karen. “Migration, Translingualism, Translation” In Venutti, *The Translation Studies Reader*.

Winter-Froemel, Esme, and Verena Thaler, eds. *Cultures and Traditions of Wordplay and Wordplay Research*. De Gruyter, 2018.

Yadid, Matanya. “Midrash ’al tikre: darkho hametodologit ḥinukhit shel hadarshan.” *Drishah* 4 (5779), 151–64, accessed August 22, 2023, https://asif.co.il/wpfb-file/1-4-pdf-122/.

Yadin-Israel, Azzan. “Rabbinic Polysemy: A Response to Steven Fraade.” *AJS Review* 38, no. 1 (2014): 129–41.

———. “The Hammer on the Rock: Polysemy and the School of Rabbi Ishmael.” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2003): 1–17.

Yona, Shamir. “Rhetorical Features in Talmudic Literature.” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 2006, Vol. 77 (2006): 67-101.