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An Analysis of Matan Torah and the
Ten Commandments

in

Pesikta Rabbati

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Digest

Chapters 20 through 24 of the homiletical midrash Pesikta Rabbati comprise two units deal specifically with the significance of the Revelation at Sinai and the Ten Commandments. Chapter 20, entitled Matan Torah, describes Moses' ascent through the heavens to bring the Torah down to earth. Chapter 21 is by far the longest chapter expounding upon the First Commandment and the meaning of Revelation. Chapter 22 deals with the next two commandments; chapter 23 deals with the Commandment concerning the Sabbath. The last chapter concentrates on the Fifth Commandment, and then briefly deals with the final five commandments. Each chapter is called a Piska. Following the introduction of this thesis is a detailed translation and analysis of piskaot 20-21. The following chapter includes a summary of the rhetorical structure and thematic content for the remaining three piskaot (22-24). A catalogue of various themes and rhetorical devices follows. The final chapter summarizes the major points the Rabbis make in this midrash.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the methods the Rabbis used in teaching Scripture and the ideas and values they wished to impart.

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Translation and Commentary Piska 20	4
Translation and Commentary Piska 21	33
Summary and Analysis Piskaot 22-24	112
Catalogue of Themes and Rhetorical Devices	145
Conclusions	176
Bibliography	181

Introduction

The title of the work *Pesikta Rabbati* could be understood as a “great collection of homilies.”¹ *Pesikta Rabbati* is a collection of midrashic homilies consisting of “fairly long and closely knit discourses upon themes suggested by, or relevant to such days,”² as the New Moon, festivals, feasts, fasts, and special Sabbaths in the Jewish year. The vast majority of scholars agree that this midrash is a composite work comprised of segments with very different forms and characteristics.³ The root פ-ק-ט means “to cut into sections” and by extension “piska” came to mean a section of Scripture read liturgically. “Pesikta” came to mean discourses on the piskaot of the year. Rashi provides us with the first known reference to the title of this midrash: *Pesikta Rabbati*. “Rabbati” means greater and probably refers to the greater length or more comprehensive aspect of *Pesikta Rabbati* as compared to *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*.

Scholars have debated the time and place of the setting for *Pesikta Rabbati*. Nineteenth and twentieth century scholars accepted the internal dating as authentic and dated the text as a ninth century work.⁴ William Braude is convinced that the work is of Palestinian origin with the final redaction completed in the sixth or seventh century.⁵ Rivka Ulmer dates the compilation even slightly earlier, in the fifth or sixth century. She argues that each piska needs to be analyzed for its more specific dating.

I will concentrate my attention on chapters 20-24 which Braude argues constitutes one distinct section that, for the most part, is “given over to interpretation of the Ten

¹ Ulmer, Rivka. *Pesikta Rabbati: A Synoptic Edition of Pesikta Rabbati Based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps* (1997), p. XVII.

² Braude, William, G., *Pesikta Rabbati, Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths* (1968), p. 3.

³ Cohen, Norman. “The Manuscripts and Editions of the Midrash Pesikta Rabbati: A Prolegomenon to a Scientific Edition”, Ph. D. Thesis (1977), XIV.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. XVI.

⁵ Braude, section 9 (pp. 20-6).

Commandments.”⁶ There is still some controversy concerning the origins of piska 20.⁷ It may have been a separate chapter specifically for Shavuot for its content is related to Enoch and the mystical tradition. This would correspond nicely with Ezekiel, Chapter One which is the Haftarah read on Shavuot. Zunz even argued that chapters 20-24 consist of a separate rabbinic work, midrash “Aseret ha-Dibrot,” that was subsequently inserted into *Pesikta Rabbati*. Piskaot 21-24 could also be related to the reading for Shavuot and the readings for the following week.

Meir Friedmann’s nineteenth century edition remains the most important printed text and will serve as my primary text. I will check Friedmann’s text with the extant sources. I feel most fortunate to have easy access to these documents through Rivka Ulmer’s recent work in which she most clearly provides the text of the various manuscripts placed side by side on the page.

The most extensive manuscript of *Pesikta Rabbati* is the Parma manuscript, MS Parma 3122 (formerly 1240), and is located at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, Italy. The manuscript was copied in the thirteenth century. The manuscript contains many scribal errors that are usually encountered in hand copied texts, most of them were corrected by the scribe himself. Other corrections were added later to the MS Parma in a different hand, probably in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. This “editor” claimed to have corrected the manuscript based on readings in the printed edition, that most likely was the *editio princeps*.⁸

The Casanata manuscript (MS Casanata 3324) is found in the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome and is in all likelihood of French/Spanish provenance. There is a dispute as to whether this document was copied in the fourteenth century or in the sixteenth/seventeenth century. Rabbi Norman Cohen argues for the latter date. Ulmer

⁶ idid. p. 13.

⁷ Ulmer, p. XX.

⁸ The material in this paragraph is based entirely on Ulmer, pp. XXVIII - XXIX.

indicates that the text of Pesikta Rabbati included in MS Casanata is often at variance with MS Parma.⁹

The Dropsie manuscript is now in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the Library of the Center for Judaic Studies (the former Dropsie College), University of Pennsylvania. There is strong evidence that this manuscript is the lost, so-called "London-manuscript." It was transcribed in the sixteenth century in Italy. It seems that the Dropsie manuscript is a slightly emended and altered version of the Casanata manuscript.¹⁰

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York has a manuscript of Pesikta Rabbati (MS JTS 8195) which has not received as much attention as the other manuscripts. This manuscript is closely related to the *editio princeps*. Ulmer argues that the JTS manuscript and the *editio princeps* were both based on an earlier manuscript no longer extant.¹¹

Rabbi Norman Cohen argues that the Parma and Casanata manuscripts are better than any of the printed editions. They preserve material that is deleted and lacking in later additions. Both of these manuscripts lack later additions, superfluous words, sentences, and passages.¹²

⁹ The material in this paragraph is based entirely on Ulmer, pp. XXX - XXXI.

¹⁰ The material in this paragraph is based entirely on Ulmer, p. XXXI.

¹¹ The material in this paragraph is based entirely on Ulmer, pp. XXXIV - XXXV.

¹² Norman Cohen, Ph. D. Thesis (1977), pp. 213-214.

Translation and Commentary Piska 20

Section 1a

The Holy Spirit said through Solomon, King of Israel, **“His cheeks are like beds of spices, banks of perfume. His lips are like lilies, dripping with myrrh”** (Song of Songs 5:13).

Commentary Section 1a

The chapter begins with the rabbis relating a verse from the *Song of Songs* to the moment that the Torah was revealed to Israel on Mount Sinai. The Midrash introduces the verse as having been uttered by Solomon through the Holy Spirit. This citation formula is typical of Tanhuma literature. רוח הקודש entered Solomon and enabled him to utter such magnificent words; in other words, Solomon was inspired by God when he wrote the biblical books attributed to him. This is how the rabbis, in a sense, transform the third section of *Tanakh* into prophetic literature.

Since the rabbis normally interpret the entire book of *Song of Songs* as an allegory, with the two lovers representing the relationship between God and Israel, the verse here is understood to depict Israel as it receives Revelation from God. In its original context the verse depicts a male who is beaming as he anxiously awaits the moment of commingling with his beloved. The act of commingling then represents that moment when Israel received the word of God, when Israel was most intimate with God. At the beginning of this homily, the rabbis allude to an already developed aggadah, without specifically citing the original sources.¹³ We can conclude that the intended audience would recognize this aggadah.

¹³ Mekhilta Amalek 3 (ed. Lauterbach, vol. 2, pp 162-63).

Section 1b

About whom was Solomon speaking in this biblical passage? He said it only in connection with that moment when the Torah was given to Israel - all [inhabitants of] the world trembled and were gathered unto (or, "flocked to") the wicked Balaam. They said to him, "Perhaps [God] is [again] bringing a flood upon the world¹⁴ or the world is being judged like it was at the beginning."

The wicked Balaam spoke (expounded) before the sons of Belial,¹⁵ replying: "Kings of the earth, do not be afraid. Princes of the land, do not be anxious. The Glorious One who dwells on high (in glory) is revealing Himself to his children in mercy and He is appearing, (or, "shines forth") to give to His people¹⁶ Torah; wisdom and admonition to his dear (beloved) ones."

Commentary Section 1b

No explicit transition is used as the rabbis move to their next point. The rabbis shift their attention to a sidebar - a description of what the rest of the world felt and thought when Israel received Revelation from God. The rabbis allude to another aggadic motif in which Balaam and the leaders of the world discuss from the outside this tremendous moment when God reveals Himself to the Israelites. The rabbis use this story to dramatize the giving of the Torah to Israel. The rabbis draw the character Balaam as parallel to Moses. Moses is an Israelite prophet for the Israelites, whereas Balaam is the gentile prophet for the gentiles. He reports to the leaders of the nations what is happening on the mountain for they do not know what is going on. The great leaders of the world, in other words, are left on the outside. The rabbis use the story to demonstrate the intimacy

¹⁴ variant: Dropsie 80a, Casanata 66a עלינו "upon us," while JTS 8195 and ed. pr. 34c agree with Friedmann's version.

¹⁵ variant: Friedmann includes the phrase לפני בליעל which is in agreement with the JTS 8195 and ed. pr. 34c variants. The Casanata 66a and Dropsie 80a variants include the word בוני before בליעל.

between God and Israel compared to the way in which the other nations are completely left out of what is going on.

It is possible that in the Mekhilta version¹⁷ the rabbis use the phrase **כל ההר** as a jumping off point for the story of Balaam. One explanation the rabbis give there is that the mountain represents the entire earth which was afraid that God was going to destroy the whole world again. Even the earth sensed the significance of the moment (see below in PR, Ch. 21). The compilers of Pesikta Rabbati also use the Balaam story to demonstrate the significance of the moment, but they are not as worried about providing the midrashic link. Just by juxtapositioning the Song of Songs verse with the Balaam story, the rabbis let the reader infer that the Balaam story took place at that moment when Israel experienced revelation. The rabbis of the Pesikta use the story to stress the isolation of the rest of the world versus the intimacy that Israel experiences.

The rabbis therefore have recast or remolded an earlier literary motif to teach a new lesson or place new emphasis on the characters in the story of revelation. This manipulation of rabbinic material for a different purpose is a homiletical expression. They are self-consciously telescoping the tradition.

¹⁶ Braude's translation reads, "He who in His glory inhabits the skies is revealing Himself in mercy to His children."

¹⁷ This same story with Balaam appears twice in the Mekhilta - once in Tractate Bahodesh 5, Lauterbach, vol. 2, pp. 233-34), and the same story appears practically word for word in Tractate Amalek 3 (Lauterbach, vol. 2 pp. 162-163). One difference between the Mekhilta and Pesikta Rabbati text: The Mekhilta refers to Balaam just as **בלעם בן בעור** and not **בלעם הרשע**. The Pesikta in referring to **בלעם הרשע** is more in line with later rabbinic thought which demonizes Balaam. The unusual phrase **לפני בליעל** is not included in the Mekhilta. In the Mekhilta Balaam refers directly to the story of Noah and even quotes Isaiah 54:9. The rulers also offer the possibility that the flood will be of fire and not water. The Mekhilta also quotes Psalm 29:11 and ends with the rulers of the nations of the world turning and going back home (from their turning away we can infer that they were uninterested in God's revelation). Psalm 29 is not quoted in connection with the Balaam story in Pesikta Rabbati. The version in the Mekhilta is longer and more complete.

Section 2

And why was the Torah given in [the month of] *Sivan* and not [in any of the] other months?

To what may this matter be compared?

The matter is similar to a king who makes a *chupah* (wedding feast for the occasion of the marriage) for his daughter. One of the king's nobles says, "It is becoming for the daughter of the king to be placed upon an elephant, seated in a litter, to show her off among all the nobles of the kingdom."¹⁸

Another one responded and said, "An elephant is exalted (due to its great stature), but it has no adornments or beauty, so it would be more fitting to put her on a horse to show off her beauty among all the nobles of the kingdom."

Another man responded: "An elephant is exalted and a horse is suitable, but [neither] has a mouth with which to speak, nor hands with which to clap, nor feet with which to dance. Therefore she should be carried on¹⁹ shoulders of [human beings]²⁰ to show off her beauty.

Thus (introduction of *nimshal*) the Holy One, blessed be He, did not give the Torah in (the month of) *Nisan* and not in (the month of) *Iyar* because the zodiac sign for *Nisan* is a lamb (Aries or Ram), and the zodiac sign of *Iyar* is an ox (Taurus or bull). It would not be proper for them (either month) to extol and praise [the Torah]. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah in (the month of) *Sivan* because the zodiac sign for *Sivan* is twins (Gemini), and twins are human and a human has a mouth with which to speak and hands with which to clap and feet with which to dance.

¹⁸ See Jastrow entry on סלסל.

¹⁹ Variant: Friedmann emends his text to read ונאה להרכיבה. JTS 8195, Casanata 66a-b, Dropsie 80a-b, and Parma 170a use the word להרכיבה, but not the word ונאה.

²⁰ variant, in Casanata 66a-b, Dropsie 80a-b, and Parma 170a: כתפי, "on my shoulders." JTS 8195 agrees with Friedmann's text.

Commentary Section 2

The rhetorical question why the Torah was given in the month of *Sivan* as opposed to any other month serves as a transition. So in the big picture of the narrative as a whole, the rabbis move the reader from a description of the Israelites as they received the Torah to a depiction of the other nations on the outside, to a discussion of the temporal setting of revelation. The rabbis thus bring three discrete traditions together to form a new synthesis of the material.

Torah is a most treasured object, so just as a king would do all that he could to show off his beautiful daughter on her most happy day, so too God would want to show off the Torah. For the rabbis, human beings are far superior to any other animal. Only human beings can give adequate praise to God for the Torah. The zodiac sign of the month of *Sivan* is Twins. Twins are human; therefore according to the rabbis, the month of *Sivan* is an appropriate time for God to bestow the Torah to His people.

Section 3a

When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, [the] earth was joyous and [the] heavens were crying. And why was [the] earth joyous and [the] heavens crying? This is analogous to a king (introduction of a *mashal*) who planned a wedding feast for his daughter. The city dwellers did not enter (come to the party) and give praise [to the king and princess]. (But) villagers did come and gave praise to the king with harps, fiddles, and all types of music. A proclamation went out from before the king which said: It is customary throughout the world that for city dwellers who [already] know [close-up] of the honor (due) [the] king it is proper (or, "appropriate") for them²¹ to praise the daughter of the king.

²¹ Variant: Friedmann and Parma 170a substitutes להם for לא. JTS and ed. pr. 34c-d keep the לא. Dropsie and Casanata keep the לא but also add היה להם following the לא.

Thus (introduction of *nimshal*) when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave [the] Torah to Israel [the] earth gave praise but [the] heavens did not give praise. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to [the] heavens, "You who dwell on high (or, "in the heavens") you, even more than the earth, should give praise in honor of Me and My daughter."

They (the heavens) say before Him (God): "Master of the universe, [the] earth should give praise because the Torah was given to it, but we from whom it (Torah) is departing²², should we give²³ praise and not be sad?" As it is written: **Adonai, in Your coming forth from Seir, in Your marching from the Steppes of Edom, earth trembled; the heavens dripped** (Judges 5:4).²⁴

Commentary Section 3

The *darshan* addresses the impact in the celestial realm of God's giving the Torah to Israel. The heaven and the earth are personifications of the celestial and terrestrial inhabitants. This section is dominated by the rhetorical structure of the *mashal-nimshal*. In the *mashal* a king plans a wedding feast for his daughter, the princess. The city dwellers are sad about losing the princess from their midst. Currently they have access to the king's attendants, but when the princess leaves, they no longer will have the same access to her, thus they do not give praise or joyful expressions. The villagers, on the other hand, are excited by the prospect of a wedding in which they will be able to participate. At the wedding feast they will have the opportunity to come into contact with the princess. Therefore they are happy and eagerly await the wedding feast. In the *nimshal* the *darshan*

²² Variants: Parma 170a, Casanata 66b-67a, and Dropsie 80b-81a instead of stating that the Torah was taken from us, they state the Torah was taken from our daughters.

²³ Variants: Friedmann's text reads **בִּיתָן**, JTS and ed. pr. 34d read **בִּיתָן**, Casanata and Dropsie read **בִּיתָן**, Parma reads **בִּיתָנָה**.

²⁴ Braude notes that this verse is generally understood as referring to God's attempt to give the Torah to Edom (Sif. Deut. 343 and see ahead, Piska 21.3) Braude then infers from the position of the verse that Israel might not take the Torah, which is the reason the midrash states that the earth trembled. According to Braude then the earth trembles as it anticipates the destruction of either Israel or the earth (See Piska 5.9 and 25.3). The heavens, on the other hand, weep as they anticipate the Torah's departure to earth. The latter interpretation is relevant here; the former is not necessary.

compares the earth with the villagers in that the earth welcomes the Torah coming into its midst just as the villagers welcome the princess. The heavens are compared to the city dwellers in that, just as the city dwellers are saddened by the departure of their friend, the princess, the heavens are saddened by losing their hold on the Torah.

The *darshan* uses the verse from Judges as his prooftext that the earth was happy and the heavens sad. He interprets the biblical phrase, the "earth trembled" to mean the earth trembled in excitement and joy. He interprets the phrase, "the heavens dripped," as the heavens dripped water tears, in other words, cried out of sadness. Notice that when the *darshan* uses Judges 5:4 as a prooftext, he may also be alluding to the opening verse of the chapter, Song of Songs 5:13, in that both verses include forms of the root נתפ. In the Song of Songs verse it is the lilies which drip sweet myrrh, whereas in Judges it is the heavens which drip. The phrase from the Book of Judges, ארץ רעשה alludes to the same image of the sound of the shofar issuing forth from the mountain. Furthermore, the *darshan* could be building on his earlier interpretation that the mountain was shaking.

It is difficult to ascertain why section 3 in its current form is found in between sections two and four. It is possible that sections 2-3 were already one literary unit. Another possibility is that sections 4-5 are parallel to sections 2-3. What each section has in common is their settings - conversations taking place as God reveals the Torah to Israel in the wilderness.

Section 4a

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world in [the month of] *Nisan* and not create it in [the month of] *Iyar*? For at the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, created His world, He said to the Prince of Darkness, "Turn away from Me, because I wish to create the world in light."

And the Prince of Darkness was similar to a bull.²⁵ (There is an additional text here in MSS Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie which makes sense of the repetition in Friedmann: At that time the Prince of Darkness said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Master of the world, what do you wish to create before me?"

Then the Holy One, blessed be He, [said], "O Prince of Darkness turn away²⁶ from Me, and if you do not turn from Me, **I will rebuke you** (cf. Zechariah 3:2) since I wish to create²⁷ My world in light."

"And after the light (Aries), what will You create?"

He said to him, "Darkness." (Taurus)²⁸

"And after darkness, what will You create?"

He said to him, "twins." (Gemini)

"So why will You create twins?"

"Because in the future humans will be seen (or possibly, "humans will see") in [both] light and darkness, for the zodiac sign 'twins' is human."

"And after it (twins), what will You create?"

"Cancer (Crab),²⁹ for a human being scrapes by from holes and cracks [like a crab."

"And after it (Cancer) what will You create?"

"A Lion (Leo). For when a human being scrapes by out of the holes and cracks (of life)]³⁰ returns³¹ and grows strong like a lion."

²⁵ Friedmann corrects the text, so that it reads the Prince of Darkness is like a שור, an ox (=Taurus, "the bull") - the zodiac sign for *Sivan*. A bull is a dark and stubborn animal. All the other manuscripts use the word שד, except for the Parma 170a-b document which reads שר.

²⁶ There also is a word play with the word סור to turn.

²⁷ Braude's translation reads "begin creating."

²⁸ Braude indicates that the Zodiac sign for *Nisan* is a white lamb which could represent light and for *Iyar* it is a black ox or bull which could represent darkness (See Ginsburg, Legends 1, 12, 5, 16).

²⁹ סרטן is a crab or Cancer which is the zodiac sign for the month of *Tammuz*.

³⁰ This material is not found in any of the textual witnesses of Pesikta Rabbati - it is added by Friedmann on the basis of Yalkut Reuveni, a medieval midrashic anthology - but the addition makes sense, since PR otherwise omits a Zodiac sign and the omission is easy to explain - scribal heptography (judging from one occurrence of a phrase to another).

And after it (lion), what will You create?

"Virgo, (a virgin). For a man will be made happy with a virgin."

"And after it (a virgin), what will You create?"

"Libra, (a scale/balance), for his deeds are weighed in the balance."

"And after it (a balance), what will You create?"

"Scorpio, (a scorpion). When he is weighed (an inner examination) and sins are (found) within him, they will bring him down into the netherworld." (The scorpion symbolizes the 'sting' (sin) which brings a human being down).

"And after it (a scorpion), what will You create?"

"Sagittarius, (a bow). Lest you say, when one has gone down to the netherworld, there is no coming up for him. As soon as mercy is requested for him, he will be thrust out of the netherworld like an arrow (is thrust) out of the bow."

"And after it (a bow), what will You create?"

"Capricorn, (a kid). Lest you say, when he comes up from the netherworld, his face is blackened (i.e. his reputation is tarnished), he will dance and ascend like a kid (i.e. he will be happy and his good name will be returned to him)."

"And after it (a kid), what will You create?"

["Aquarius, (a well of water). For if he is full of sins, we shall sprinkle pure water upon him to purify him from his sin."]³²

"And after it (a well of water), what will You create?"

"Pisces, (fish).³³ For when Israel [comes] upon the world no (evil) eye will have dominion over them - nor will any constellation (Zodiac sign) or fateful hour.³⁴

³¹ Friedmann uses the word **זוֹרֵר** instead of the word **אוֹמֵר**. The other textual witnesses do not have such an emendation. The MSS Parma 170a-b, Casanata 67a, and Dropsie 81a-b lack the word **ואוֹמֵר** and this may be correct.

³² lacking in ed. pr. and JTS, found in Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata.

³³ Fish are "free" animals - they can swim away at any point. Israel are like fish in that they can move away or they are not governed by the astrological signs, rather they have free choice.

³⁴ See Jastrow P. 1071b for definition. Braude lists the following texts which contain analogies comparing Israel with the fish of the sea: B. Ber 20a and Gen. Rabbah 97.2.

Commentary Section 4a

The *darshan* continues to employ a rhetorical question as the transition, "Why did the Holy One Blessed be He create His world in the month of Nisan and not in the month of *Iyar*?" In Section 2, the midrash already has addressed why the theophany occurred in the month of *Sivan*. It would appear that the *darshan* of this section seizes upon the discussion of months in section 2 to insert here a discussion of the formation of the calendar. The primary message is that God had a specific plan when God created the calendar. In other words, the calendar as we have it today was not made haphazardly, but there is a meaning behind the ordering.

In the first part of this section the *darshan* addresses the issue of cosmic dualism. God and the Prince of Darkness are at odds with one another. In some ways the Prince of Darkness may represent primal darkness which God must remove in order to be able to create the world. The *darshan* then implicitly addresses the story of the creation of the world as reported in the Book of Genesis.

The order of the months demonstrates the logical plan of God. Each month is represented in this midrash by its astrological sign. The *darshan* uses each month's astrological symbol to demonstrate that God had a plan in creating the world: a plan in which God showed concern for human beings. God creates light and darkness, but God gave the Torah in *Sivan* the month whose Zodiac sign is **twins**³⁵, so that human beings will be able to see (or, "be seen") in both light and darkness. The **crab** represents our capacity to get by. Just as the crab does not glide across life, but must scrape by, so too are we human beings forced to and endowed with the ability to scrape by in life's difficulties. We may not glide through life, but we will have to work hard for sustenance. But as we scrape by, God strengthens us and we become as strong as **lions**. In other words, we have the ability to thrive on adversity. God made sure that **virgins** were

³⁵ I have placed the zodiac symbols for each month in bold print. Notice the rabbis not only analyze each symbol but also their sequence.

created who would make men happy. After all, God provided a female for Adam, so too God provides for every man a partner. God provides a **scale** indicating our deeds will be weighed. God also created a **scorpion** which symbolizes destruction. The scorpion serves as a warning to us. It reminds us that when we sin, we will be punished. The scorpion represents that which will bring us down, be the source of our punishment when we sin. In some ways the scorpion is a positive symbol in that its presence will help deter us from sinning. But when we do sin, God created a **bow** which will thrust us out of the netherworld. So, yes, God does provide punishment with the **scorpion**, but God does not desire that we be permanently punished. God provides us with a way out of our sins. The **scorpion** and **bow** then represent sin and redemption, respectively. When we are propelled out of the netherworld we are as happy as a **kid**, who jumps around in great joy. God also provides a **well of water** so that we can be purified from our sins. Finally **fish** represent Israel, in that just as fish have freedom to swim wherever they please, so too Israel is not constrained by the zodiac signs, the constellations, bad luck, or fateful destiny.

Section 4b

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, create the sun first (before any of the other astrospheres)?³⁶ To ensure that the entire world would be created under the auspices of a single brilliance. (Here the rabbis place emphasis on the unity and goodness of the world.)³⁷

“And afterwards what will You create?”³⁸

³⁶Friedmann emends the printed text by adding the word **לֹא** - **בְּרָא הַקֹּב"ה אֶת הָאָדָם** - **מִפְּנֵי**. In 3 MSS the word **חַמָּה** appears (correctly) in place of the word **אָדָם** (Parma 170, Casanata 67b, and Dropsie 81b-82a). **חַמָּה** is surely correct, since the text goes on to enumerate the (other) stars and planets visible in the sky.

³⁷Braude's translation reads, "Because the world, all of it, was intended to be lighted by one luminary, the same by night as by day." (His footnote refers back to Piska 15:1).

³⁸Braude is right when he claims the dialogue is between the Prince of Darkness and God. This continues the dialogue between God and the Prince of Darkness - the formal rhetoric is identical with that in 4a.

"Mercury and Venus" (literally, "a brilliant star"). For the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the future and foresaw that the generation of the flood would go whoring about (would practice sexual immortality). When He foresaw this in them, He separated the two planets this one by itself and that one by itself.³⁹ He (God) then went on and mixed them (or, "confounded them") this with that: Mercury (literally, "a star") represents man and Venus represents woman.

"And afterwards what will you create?"⁴⁰

(The sun -) This is Abraham who lights up the whole world like the sun.

"And afterwards, what will You create?"

"The moon, for in the future each of the tribes of Jacob/Israel, each and everyone, will reflect his (Jacob's) light as the moon does (the light of the sun).⁴¹

"And afterwards, what will You create?"

"Saturn. (Shabtai) To signify that in the future the nations of the world will rule over Israel."⁴²

"And what will You create after that?"

"Jupiter." (Tzedek),⁴³ for in the future the Holy One, blessed be He, will justify the sentence (or, "the ruling"). Lest you say, that they (the gentiles) will be saved/exempted from judgment, therefore God created Mars (literally, "the red one") - to signify that they

³⁹ Friedmann emends the text by repeating the phrase **וְזֶה כַּפְּנֵי עֲצָמוֹ** (see also variants: Casanata 67b and Dropsie 81b-82a).

⁴⁰ as found in MSS Parma, Casanata; MSS ed. pr. and JTS: "Why did He create the sun?"

⁴¹ Variants add this sentence which Friedmann does not include (Parma 170, Casanata 67b, Dropsie 82b-82a) Since the text is arguing for the order of the creation of the astrospheres, it would seem only natural that the moon was included as well.

⁴² Braude comments that the word **שַׁבְּתַי** can also refer to Sabbath or rest, but is apparently used as a euphemism for the slavery and unrest to be imposed on Israel; probably he is referring to a word play with the word, **שְׁבוּת**. Then again, **שַׁבְּתַי** may, by a play on words, be read as though it were spelled **שַׁבְּתִי**, enslaver or enslavement.

⁴³ **צֶדֶק** is the Hebrew word for righteous and is the name of the planet Jupiter. The great planet that rules just as the God Jupiter rules over the other gods in Greek literature.

(the gentiles) will fall into *Gehennom* which is (as hot as) the sun, (thus they will turn as red as Mars).⁴⁴

Commentary Section 4b

This midrash then serves as a polemic against determinism and the use of horoscopes and astrology. The *darshan* does not deny the existence of astrology, rather he masterfully uses the calendar and its astrological signs to demonstrate God's logical plan for human beings and the unique role the Jews play in their ability to move away from the pull of destiny. Along the way the *darshan* reiterates God's mercy in providing a way of redemption for sin.

Section 5

At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, the angels were happy, but God was grieving, as it is written, **When you heard the voice out of the darkness.** (Deut. 5:20)⁴⁵ But is it possible to say that the Holy One, blessed be He, was dwelling in the darkness, for isn't it already written, **And the light dwells with Him** (Daniel 2:22)?⁴⁶

This is analogous (introduction to a *mashal*) to a human king who has given his daughter (in marriage) to one of the king's nobles. He stipulated with him: saying, "You know that I am the king and my daughter is the princess. And you know that my daughter is sensitive and tender and that she is unable to withstand harshness/coarseness. Don't take her out at night, [MSS: ed. pr., JTS: "but stay with her"] [MSS: and don't provoke her with anything at all (literally, "anything in the world" i.e. don't commit adultery] lest something might fall on her clothing (presumably something defiling), and don't busy

⁴⁴ variants: add the word **יה** or **יהו** which refers to the gentiles.

⁴⁵ Context: The giving of the Ten Commandments at Horeb. This verse appears immediately after the text of the Ten Commandments.

yourself with sinful things that she hates." He took upon himself all these obligations. He (the king) sent his daughter to the bridegroom's friends (the chaperones). And when they brought her to the king's house and set her up in the outer courtyard, they saw the king's son-in-law with a prostitute sitting on his lap. And everyone said to one another, "What are we going to do?" If we send her back she will talk with her father (let him know what is going on) and he will kill us (presumably as punishment for what their relative, the bridegroom of the princess, had done to her). What shall we do? Let us abandon her (let her slip away), and so at once they abandoned her.

In a similar way (introduction of *nimshal*), when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave [the] Torah to Israel, all the hosts on high were happy, but the Holy One, blessed be He, was sad (or grieving). They said before him, Oh Master of the universe, the happiness You created in Your world, does it not belong to you (i.e. shouldn't you be experiencing it, too)? He (God) said to them, "You do not know how the matter will end." When the Torah was given on the first tablets [it included the following commandment] **You shall have no other gods** (Exod. 20:3). (But) when Moses and Joshua brought them (the tablets) and saw the calf and that they (the Israelites) were bowing down to it, they said, "What shall we do? [If] we return before the Holy One, blessed be He, he will immediately destroy Israel (for breaking one of the Ten Commandments). What shall we do? Let us break them." And they broke them, as it is written, **And he broke them under the mountain** (Exod. 32:19).

Commentary Section 5

Section 5 is structured similarly to section 3. Each begins with virtually the same words and setting, "When the Holy One Blessed be He gave the Torah to Israel." The opening statement then in each case is followed by a *mashal-nimshal* structure (compare sections 3a and 5b). The primary difference is how the *darshan* of section 3 portrays the

⁴⁶ This is a comment on the verse from Deut. - the statement that God is in the darkness.

reaction of the main characters as compared to the *darshan* of section 5. In section 3 the earth was joyous while the heavens were crying. In Section 5 the angels, who are heavenly dwellers, are happy, but the other character, God is sad. The *darshan* cites Deuteronomy 5:20 as his prooftext that God was sad. He equates darkness with sadness. Daniel 2:22 is used as a prooftext that God does not dwell in physical darkness. The writer wants his audience to understand that God's darkness is not a physical one, rather a psychological darkness or sadness.

The rabbis compose a *mashal* making the following analogies: the relatives of the groom are analogous to Moses and Joshua, in that the relatives try to shield the princess and avoid the king's punishment by preventing her from seeing her fiancé sin just like Moses and Joshua attempt to protect the Israelites by smashing the tablets so the Israelites would have an excuse for worshipping an idol - for they had not yet received the Ten Commandments. Just as the nobles try to forestall the king's wrath by chasing away the princess, Moses and Joshua break the tablets to forestall God's wrath upon the people. The son-in-law in the *mashal* corresponds with Israel, both the son-in-law and Israel committed wrong doing. The princess is like the tablets or Torah, in that both were put aside to prevent the culprits from being punished. The human king is analogous to God. In the *nimshal* the Rabbis write that just as the king is fearful of giving his daughter into the hands of the nobles for her keeping, so too is God worried about placing the Torah in human hands. The reason God is described as being sad is that God understands human nature, that human beings often succumb to sin. God foresaw what will happen if He gave the Torah to Israel - they would incur death and/or punishment by violating it.

The *nimshal* provides the gist for a most interesting explanation of why Moses shattered the sacred tablets he had just received from God. Moses wishes to protect the people. Usually the rabbis attribute Moses' anger at his people as the reason for his breaking the tablets, but here this *darshan* ascribes Moses' actions as springing forth out of his love and desire to protect the Israelites.

Section 6

⁴⁷**His lips are like lilies; They drip flowing myrrh** (Song of Songs 5:13).⁴⁸

It would have been appropriate for Scripture to say **מֵר קבוע**⁴⁹ - "permanent myrrh." When Solomon built the Temple it caused the whole world to be filled with the [good] smell of spices. But he saw in the end it would be destroyed. Solomon wept. He said, "This smell is all for naught (it will be wasted)."

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Don't be saddened, for I will build (rebuild) it permanently: Between my breasts" (**שָׁדַי** =) it will lodge" (or, **בֵּין שָׁדַי** "with God it will lodge"), therefore it is written, **His cheeks are like beds of spices,**" (Song of Songs 5:13).

Commentary Section 6

The midrash then quotes again from the opening verse of the entire Piska, but the following **דָּרַשׁ** itself bears little (if any) thematic corrections to the foregoing - its as if we have here a **דָּבָר אַחֵר** - another interpretation of the Song of Songs verse. This interpretation has nothing to do with Revelation at Sinai or the giving of Torah. This is a **נַחֲמָתָא** a consolation: God ultimately will comfort us - it provides a rhetorically fitting conclusion thereby - but with no thematic or rhetorical connection to the preceding materials.

⁴⁷ Friedmann inserts into his text, "Therefore it is written."

⁴⁸ This is an inclusion comment (goes back to the beginning verse). Whereas Friedmann makes a division here, I have opted to keep the following paragraph in section 6 since it explicates the Song of Song verse above.

⁴⁹ **מֵר עובר** = transient, passing myrrh = sweet fragrance.

Section 7

Our rabbis taught (in a *baraita* concerning the section of Scripture beginning), **I am Adonai your God**, (Exodus 20:2). ⁵⁰When Moses ascended on high above, a cloud came and crouched opposite him (Moses). Moses did not know whether to get onto (i.e. mount) it (the cloud) or to grasp hold of it. Immediately it⁵¹ opened and he entered into it as it is written, **Then Moses came into the cloud** (Exodus 24:18), **and the cloud covered [him]**, (Exodus 24:15)⁵² Then the cloud bore him up (or, carried him) through the firmament until he encountered Kemuel the angel,⁵³ who ruled over 12,000 angels of destruction (or, demons) who reside at the gate to the firmament. He rebuked⁵⁴ Moses and said to him: "What have you to do with the holy things of the upper world? (In other words, what do you think you are doing up here amidst the holy ones?) You came from a place of impurity⁵⁵, yet you are traveling in a place of purity. You who are born of a woman (a mortal) travel in a place of fire."⁵⁶

Moses said to him, "I am the son of Amram, and I have come to fetch (or, receive) [the] Torah for Israel." When he (the angel) would not let him (Moses) go, Moses struck him a blow and destroyed him.

Moses was traveling in the firmament just as one travels on earth. He arrived at the place of Hadraniel, the angel, who was bigger than any of his peers by a measure of 60,000 parasangs, and every word that went forth from his mouth came out with two lightening bolts. He encountered Moses, and said to him, "What are you doing here (or, What business have you) in this place where (dwell) the holy beings of the upper world?"

⁵⁰ Beginning here and continuing through the end of this section a parallel text can be found in Bet Ha-Midrash, in a text entitled "מעין חכמה," *Bet ha-Midrash Sammlung : kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der altern jüdischen Literatur* by Adolph Jellinek, Wahrmann Books, Jerusalem 1967 (BM 510 J4 1967 v. 1-3).

⁵¹ some variants, "its mouth opened."

⁵² Notice that the rabbis deliberately leave out the object of the verb in Ex. 24:15, namely "the mountain." The rabbis use this verse as a proof-text that the cloud covered or engulfed Moses and not the mountain.

⁵³ Jastrow cites this chapter of Pesikta Rabbati in his citation concerning this angel.

⁵⁴ Same verb Bible uses when God rebukes Satan.

⁵⁵ Rashi notes that the word is the opposite of *Kadosh*.

When Moses heard his voice, he shrunk back from him, and his eyes shed tears, and he wanted to get off from the cloud. At that very moment the mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He, overflowed and a *Bat Kol*⁵⁷ came forth and said to Hadraniel. "Know that you (angels) have always been quarrelsome beings. When I wanted to create the first person, you took an adversarial role before me (or, complained to me), and you said, "**What is man that You are mindful of him?**" (Psalms 8:5), and you would not let up before me until I had burned up a number of your bands. And now you stand arguing and you do not leave Him alone that He might give [the] Torah to Israel. If Israel were not to receive the Torah, then there would be no residing place for Me nor for you (i.e. the world would revert to primal chaos).

When Hadraniel heard this, he said before Him, "It is well known to You that I did not know that he (Moses) came (here) with Your permission. Now I shall be an agent/guide for him and I shall go before him as a student (goes) before his teacher."⁵⁸ And so he went before him until they arrived at the fire of Sandalphon. Hadraniel said to Moses, "Up until here I had permission to go, but from here onward, I no longer can go lest the fire of Sandalphon burn me up."

When Moses⁵⁹ saw Sandalphon he became frightened of him and his eyes shed tears and he wanted to fall from the cloud, and he sought mercy from the Holy One, blessed be He, and He (God) answered him. Come and see just how dear Israel is to God: At that moment, God, Himself, came down from His throne and stood before Sandalphon until he (Moses) had passed.⁶⁰ About that moment it was written, **Adonai passed**

⁵⁶ Note the word play of **אֵשׁ** and **אִשָּׁה**.

⁵⁷ *Ma'ayan Hochmah* does not include the *Bat Kol*, but has God speak directly.

⁵⁸ Notice how this heavenly creature is now portrayed by the rabbis as subservient to Moses, a mere mortal.

⁵⁹ variants: Friedmann, ed. pr. 35c, and JTS 8195 explicitly state Moses as the subject while the other variants do not.

⁶⁰ The *Ma'ayan Hochmah* text contains a longer narrative at this point.

before him, (Exodus 34:6).⁶¹ It is said about Sandalphon that he is bigger than any of his peers by a distance that it would take 500 years to cross. He serves behind the chariot, and makes⁶² crowns for his Maker.

⁶³Lest you think that the ministering angels know where He (God) is, it is already written, **Blessed is the presence of Adonai in His place**, (Ezekiel 3:12).⁶⁴ but these (angels) never saw His place (the implied question is, if no angel has ever seen where God is, how can Sandalphon make the crown that sits upon God's head?) Rather he adjoins the crown, and it goes up (on its own) and sits upon the head of its master. At the time when a crown arrives (on God's head) all the heavenly beings shake (uncontrollably) - the heavenly animals are silent (רוממות; MS Parma: רוממות, "arise") and (Friedmann adds: the holy seraphs) roar like a lion. At that moment they all answer and say, "**Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts**," (Isaiah 6:2).

When it (the crown) arrives at God's throne, the wheels of His throne go around and the supports of the footstool quakes, and the entire firmament is seized with trembling. And when He passes by all the heavenly creatures with His crown they all open their mouths and say, "**Blessed is the presence of Adonai in His place**," (Ezekiel 3:12). Come and see the praise and greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He: When a crown arrives (lands) on His head, He positions Himself/stands firm to accept the crown from His servants. And all the heavenly creatures and the Seraphim, the *ophanayim*, the wheels of the chariot, and the glorious throne in one voice (literally one mouth) say "**Adonai shall**

⁶¹ This is how God is described just before He reveals His identity to Moses. Notice how the rabbis jump on the opportunity to describe what it means that God passed before him, to magnify God's greatness and tenderness at the same time. God so cared about Moses and the Israelites that He did not leave the task of protecting Moses to anyone but Himself.

⁶² The verb כשר can mean strengthen, join, fold, tie. If the crown were a wreath, then he could be tying together the leaves to make the wreath. Jastrow cites Sabb. 104a as using this verb to state and he will wreath a crown for them in the world to come.

⁶³ The next section is a description of what is happening in heaven. The rabbis begin by making us aware that even the angels do not know the exact whereabouts of God.

⁶⁴ It appears that the Rabbis use this preposition (. . . מן = from . . .) to indicate the vagueness of the statement. Blessed is the presence of God in God's place, wherever that might be.

reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. **Hallelujah,**" (Psalms 146:10).

When he had passed⁶⁵ along, he was met by Rigyon, a river of fire, whose burning coals burn angels as well as human beings. The Holy One, blessed be He, took him (Moses) and moved him away from it (Rigyon).⁶⁶

He was met by Gallizur, about whom it is written, **Is it not from the mouth of a higher being that evil and good issue forth?** (Lamentations 3:38).⁶⁷ He reveals the mysterious ways of the Rock. His wings spread out to receive the breath of the creatures,⁶⁸ for if he did not receive it, the ministering angels would be consumed by the breath of the creatures. And another angel - Gallizur - stands and proclaims, "This year wheat will succeed (sell well) but wine will be cheap (due to its poor taste)." Another angel repeatedly takes fire brands of iron and (places) upon them the coals of Rigyon and places them opposite the kings⁶⁹ and princes⁷⁰ "so that [in the braziers' reflected fires] fear of them will strike the world."⁷¹ God took him (Moses) and moved him away from it.

He (Moses) encountered a troop of angels of destruction who encircled the throne of (God's) presence; they were strong and mighty. When Moses arrived before them, they wanted to consume him with the (fiery) breath from their mouths. So what did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? God spread over him a part of His splendid glory and placed him (Moses) before His throne and said, "Moses, Give a reply to the ministering angels, and speak up to them. (In other words, don't back down from these angels.)" **He caused (Moses) to seize the faces of the throne and spread His cloud over him**

⁶⁵ Variant: In *Ma'ayan Hochmah* the text includes the phrase "from the Sandalphon" after the word **שעבר**.

⁶⁶ Notice that God once again acts on His own, with no intermediary, in protecting Moses.

⁶⁷ JPS translation: Is it not at the word of the Most High, that weal and woe befall?

⁶⁸ Braude adds the word "fiery" to describe the breath and he adds that the creatures refer to creatures of the chariot.

⁶⁹ Note: Friedmann substitutes the Hebrew word "kings" for "angels."

⁷⁰ Could this be translated as "frail animals" or as something to do with a necromancer? See Jastrow.

⁷¹ This is a direct quote from Braude's translation.

(Moses) (Job 26:9).⁷² Rabbi Nahum says that this teaches that Shaddai (God) took a part of the splendor of His Presence and spread it over him (Moses) like a cloud.⁷³

He (Moses) said before God, "Master of the World, I fear that they will consume me with the breath from their mouths." God said to him, "Grab hold of My throne of Glory and respond to them."⁷⁴ Immediately he (Moses) was strengthened (became more confident in himself) and uttered this reply to the ministering angels: "It is written in the Torah, **I am Adonai, Your God**, (Exodus 20:2). Do you have gods? It is written in the Torah **You shall have no other gods**, (Exodus 20:3). Is your (allegiance) divided? Do you have two conflicting authorities? It is written in the Torah, **Honor your father and your mother** (Exodus 20:12). Do you have a mother or father? It is written in the Torah, **You shall not covet!** (Exodus 20:4). Do you have lust/desire?"⁷⁵ They responded and said, "**Adonai, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth,**" (Psalms 8:10).⁷⁶ Moreover, the Angel of Death transmitted to him (Moses) a (secret) word [an incantation to recite to ward off death], as it says, **You have gone up into the heavens, you have taken captives, and you have received gifts for human beings, etc.** (Psalms 68:19).⁷⁷ And it is written, **Then Moses said to Aaron, take the fire pan and put on it (fire from the altar)** (verse 11), and it is written, **So Aaron took [it] just as Moses had spoken** (verse 12), and it is written,

⁷² "He shuts off the view of His throne, Spreading His cloud over it." JPS translation This quotation is a line spoken by Job as he enumerates some of God's powers. The rabbis, however, use this verse as a proof text to demonstrate that words do emanate from God's throne and that God is capable of and sometimes actually does intervene in human affairs.

⁷³ Notice the interjection by Rabbi Nahum to provide a commentary or explanation of what precedes it. It is almost like Rabbi Nahum is giving an explanation of the use of the particular proof text.

⁷⁴ Notice that the rabbis place in God's mouth the advice to Moses - the word is greater than physical force.

⁷⁵ Moses asks rhetorical questions to demonstrate that human beings have a need for the commandments contained within the Torah which the heavenly creatures don't.

⁷⁶ It would seem that the rabbis put this proof text in the mouths of the angels to indicate that they understand that God's name must be made known not just in the heavens, but throughout the earth as well.

⁷⁷ God is the intended subject, described mythically as a warrior, is the intended subject in the Psalm. Here, the Rabbis understand the verse as referring to Moses, who scaled the heights of heaven, neutralized the angels, and brought back their gifts for human beings.

and he stood between life and death (verse 13)⁷⁸ Had he (the Angel of Death) not taught him, how would Moses have known what he needed to do?⁷⁹

Commentary Section 7

This text serves as a mythic model for the mystical experience of astral ascent to behold the image of God enthroned on the chariot. In this section the rabbis describe a tumultuous journey that Moses takes through the heavens in order to bring down the Torah from heaven. Moses encounters and struggles with numerous monstrous and angelic beings. Each time, God is portrayed as coming to Moses' aid, defending him from the various angels who do not want Moses to take the Torah out of heaven. The Rabbis selectively read two phrases in Exodus, **and the cloud covered [him]**, (Exodus 24:15). Notice that the rabbis deliberately leave out the object of the verb, **וַיִּכֶס** "**and it covered,**" namely "**the mountain.**" The rabbis use this verse as a proof-text that the cloud covered or engulfed Moses and not the mountain. The Rabbis then portray Moses as trying to decide if he should mount the cloud, when suddenly the cloud opens up and **then Moses came into the cloud** (Exodus 24:18) which served as the vehicle which brought Moses up to the heavens. Notice that the Rabbis have no problem with changing the order of the biblical sequence which first has the cloud covering the mountain and then Moses walking into the cloud. The midrash reads, in contrast to the Bible, that **Moses came into the cloud** (Exodus 24:18), **and the cloud covered [him]**, (Exodus 24:15).

The first character that Moses encounters is Kemuel, the angel who resided at the gate to the heavens. Kemuel, like the other angelic beings who are portrayed in this midrash, is antagonistic to Moses. According to Kemuel, human beings have no right to

⁷⁸ Toraitic context: Moses directs Aaron how to act in order to stave off destruction of Israel following the uprising by Korakh. It is Aaron who stands between the living and the dead. Here the rabbis use the verse to place Moses as standing between the living and the dead. Note that the verse as quoted in Friedmann's text has the order reversed "the living" before "the dead," but the different manuscripts differ here.

be in the heavens. Moses seems to know that his mission is to take the Torah and resorts to force to gain entrance into heaven.

Each of the angelic creatures is described with enormous features and magnitude. For example, Hadraniel, the angel, is bigger than any of his peers by a measure of 60,000 *parasangs*, and every word that goes forth from his mouth comes out with two lightening bolts. Sandalphon is said to be so much bigger than any of his peers that it would take an additional 500 years to travel across him.

It is clear in the Rabbis' description of the events and interactions in heaven that it is God who is ultimately in control. For instance, as soon as Hadraniel learns that Moses comes with God's permission, Hadarniel completely reverses his stance.

One of the aspects that makes this particular midrash so fascinating is how it draws upon and reworks already developed midrashic ideas and themes. The midrash of the angels arguing in heaven while God goes forward with creation is cited and thrown back in the faces of the angelic beings. The angelic praise of God that Isaiah and Ezekiel hear are contextualized. The angels do not know specifically where God dwells, so they must "adjure the crown, and it goes up (on its own) and sits upon the head of its master. At the time when a crown arrives (on God's head) all the heavenly beings shake (uncontrollably) - they who were silent (now) roar like a lion and . . . say, '**Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts,**' (Isaiah 6:2)."

This midrash is emphatic in its insistence that Torah belongs with Israel, and it should not remain in heaven. As the midrash states specifically that if Israel were not to receive the Torah, then there would be no resting place for either God or the angels.

Each time Moses is placed in a compromising position, some manifestation of God comes to Moses' rescue. In the case of Hadraniel, the midrash states, "the mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He, overflowed and a *Bat Kol* came forth." When Moses saw Sandalphon, he was so frightened that he cried out to God who answered him directly,

⁷⁹ The rabbis try to demonstrate how Moses learned this valuable lesson from the Angel of Death while he

which the Rabbis take as an illustration of just how beloved and important Israel is to God. Later the midrash records that God takes Moses and moves him away from Rigyon and Gallizur. When Moses is in trouble again, God is described as spreading over Moses a part of His splendid glory and placing Moses before His throne.

Finally God requests that Moses reply and defend himself before the angels. Encouraged by God, Moses orally defends his taking the Torah out of the heavens and bringing it down to earth. He demonstrates how each of the Ten Commandments is intended for human beings and not for heavenly creatures.

Only four of the Ten Commandments receive comments here. But another textual witness, the so-called *Ma'ayan Hochmah*, published by A. Jellenek in *Beit HaMidrash* is a fuller and richer version. All of the commandments are commented upon in order. The reasons that Moses gives to the heavenly creatures are different in each version with the exception of the fifth commandment. The reason the first commandment does not apply to the heavenly creatures, according to the Pesikta version, is that they do not have (other) gods in heaven, whereas the *Ma'ayan Hochmah* version has Moses exclaim to the heavenly creatures that they were never enslaved in Egypt, so naturally, the first commandment cannot apply to them. In the Pesikta version a lack of divided allegiance is the reason given that the second commandment does not apply to the heavenly creatures, whereas, in the *Ma'ayan Hochmah* version, the stated reason is the absence of idol worship in heaven. In the Pesikta version, the Tenth Commandment does not apply in heaven because the heavenly creatures do not have feelings like desire and lust, while the *Ma'ayan Hochmah* version takes a more subtle approach; the reason the heavenly creatures do not need to be concerned with coveting is that no real material possessions exist in heaven.

In addition to the fewer number of commandments that the Pesikta version comments upon, the end of the story is much shorter there. For instance, the *Ma'ayan Hochmah* version explicitly states that the angels change their stance and end up praising

God for His wisdom, whereas in the Pesikta version the angels' praise of God is not motivated. In the Pesikta version, the statement "moreover, the Angel of Death transmitted . . ." seems unconnected to what precedes it. The *Ma'ayan Hochmah* version includes an additional section in which God teaches Moses the entire Torah in the 40 days, but due to the fear that troops upon troops of angels engendered in Moses, he forgot everything. The angels then take turns transmitting to Moses the various secrets and cures contained within the Torah. The *Ma'ayan Hochmah* version belongs to the genre of Hekhalot literature, so it would be natural for the writers to include Moses receiving all the things the mystics hoped to get (spells, cures, secret names of God), when they ascended to heaven. The Pesikta version, however, does not develop this theme.

The fuller Version in *Ma'ayan Hochmah*

Moses, our teacher, said to them, it is written in the Torah, **I am Adonai your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage.**⁸⁰ Now, were you ever enslaved in Egypt, and did you go forth a free people, that you have no need for the Torah?⁸¹

It is written, **You shall not have any other gods.**⁸² Now, is there idol worship among you, so that you would need the Torah (after all, idol worship does not exist in the heavens)?

It is written, **You shall not take [swear falsely by the name of Adonai, Your God].**⁸³ Now, do trading (or, business practices) occur among you, so that you would need the Torah in order to (know how to) make proper oaths?⁸⁴

⁸⁰ The First Commandment

⁸¹ Implication: this commandment is written specifically for us, human beings, whom God freed; the angels have no need for such a document.

⁸² The Second Commandment

⁸³ The Third Commandment

⁸⁴ The implication is that no business transactions take place in heaven.

It is written, **Remember the Sabbath to sanctify it.**⁸⁵ Now, do you work so that you would need the Torah (to teach you the rules of Shabbat, so that you do not profane the Sabbath by working)?

It is written, **Honor your father and your mother.**⁸⁶ Now, do you have a father and a mother so that you need the Torah (to teach you how to treat them)?

It is written, **You shall not murder.**⁸⁷ Now, does bloodshed exist among you so that you would need the Torah (to teach you not to commit murder)?

It is written, **You shall not commit adultery.**⁸⁸ Now are there women among you so that you would need the Torah (to teach you how to treat them)?

It is written, **You shall not steal.**⁸⁹ Now is there money (or property) in the heavens, so that you would need the Torah (to teach you not to steal)?

It is written, **You shall not bear [false witness].**⁹⁰ Now does false testimony ever take place among you so that you would need the Torah?

It is written, **You shall not covet.**⁹¹ Now are there houses, fields, and vineyards in heaven so that would need the Torah?

Immediately all the ministering angels changed their stance and praised the words of God saying, "**Adonai, our master, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth, You have covered the heavens with Your splendor**" (Psalm 8:3).

The Holy One Blessed be He taught him (Moses) the entire Torah in 40 days. When he started to descend and beheld the fearsome aspect of troops upon troops of angels, angels that evoke fear, angels that evoke trembling, angels that evoke shaking, angels that evoke awe, he was immediately seized by fear and trembling and all at once forgot all that had been taught to him.

⁸⁵ The Fourth Commandment

⁸⁶ The Fifth Commandment

⁸⁷ The Sixth Commandment

⁸⁸ The Seventh Commandment

⁸⁹ The Eighth Commandment

⁹⁰ The Ninth Commandment

⁹¹ The Tenth Commandment

Immediately The Blessed One called to Yofiah, the minister of Torah, who transmitted to him (Moses) the Torah, in well-laid out fashion, so that it could be remembered. And all the ministering angels became his friends, and each one transmitted to him (Moses), cures (or, spells, incantations) and God's secret names which emerge out of each and every paragraph [of Torah], together with all their uses. For Scripture says, **You have gone up into the heavens, you have taken captives, and you have received gifts for human beings**, (Psalm 68:19). And even the Angel of Death transmitted to him a (secret) word, about which it is written in Scriptures, **And he put on the incense, and effected/made expiation for the people**, (Numbers 17:12).

And this is the exalted use of the Divine names that the angels transmitted to him (Moses) through (at the behest of) Yofiah, the minister of Torah, and through (at the behest of) Metatron, the chief of staff, (the interior minister). And Moses transmitted it to Eleazar and Eleazar to Pinhas his son, that is Eliyahu, the beloved High Priest, may he be remembered for good, Amen.

Section 8

Immediately after Moses went up on high, the Holy One, blessed be He, opened the seven firmaments (of heaven) and showed him the Temple on High, and showed him the four colors from which He had built the Tabernacle, as it is written, **And you shall build the Tabernacle according to the instructions I showed you on the mountain** (Exodus 26:30). He (Moses) said before Him (God): "Master of the universe, I do not know the likeness of the four colors (I do not know what the four colors should look like)."

God said to him, "Turn to your right."

He turned and saw a troop of angels dressed in clothes similar (in color) to the sea.

God said to him, "This is *Techelet*." (That is what the blue should look like.) God said to him, "Turn to your left,"

He turned and saw people wearing red clothes.

God said to him, "What do you see?"

Moses said to God, "People wearing red clothes."

God said to him, "This is (the color) *Argaman*"

He turned around and saw a troop [of angels] wearing clothes that were neither red nor green.

God said to him, "This is [the color] *Tola-at Shani*."

He turned back to the front and saw before him troops (of angels) who were wearing white clothing.

"This is *Shash Mashezar*."

Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, opened [the] seven firmaments and revealed Himself to them (the Israelites) face to face in all His beauty, His glory, and His good looks, and His crown, and the throne of His glory. When they (Israelites) heard "**I am Adonai, your God!**" immediately the souls of the righteous departed (i.e., they fainted or died) and God revived them as it is written, **You released a bountiful rain, O God. When your land languished you sustained it** (Psalms 68:10).⁹²

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? God lowered upon them 1, 200,000 ministering angels. Each and every Israelite was attached to two ministering angels: One would place his hand on an Israelite's heart⁹³ and one would elevate his (the Israelite's)

⁹² There are variants in this text. In three of the manuscripts an extra phrase was added, possibly to give an explanation or make the connection between the Psalm verse and what immediately preceded it more understandable. The extra phrase can be translated as "The Holy One, blessed be He, sent down dew which revived the *Tzadikim*." The Psalm verse then would function as a proof-text for the explanation which immediately preceded it. One variant changes *Tzadikim* to *Yisrael*. This makes sense in that all of Israel was standing at the foot of the mountain when God revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses, but all six manuscripts use the word *Tzadikim*, which would have us believe that the original version used the word "*Tzadikim*" instead of "*Yisrael*."

⁹³ Three of the manuscripts add the following phrase to explain the actions of this angel when the angel would put his hand on the Israelite's heart, "in order that his soul would not depart." It seems like a later redactor wished to explain the actions of the angel which no longer were clear.

neck in order that he (the Israelite) would be able to see the Holy One, blessed be He, face to face.

And why did God reveal (Himself) face to face? God said to them, "See that I have revealed Myself to you in all My Glory and beauty, so that if one generation were to try to deceive you by saying, "Let us go and worship other gods,"⁹⁴ you can say to it (the generation), "We have a God whom we worship, and when we do not worship Him, we will be sent down to *Gehenna*." And the Holy One, blessed be He, in the future will establish His sovereignty over all Israel.

⁹⁴ Friedmann does not indicate that this phrase comes from Deuteronomy. Other manuscripts do give the reference as Deut. 13:7 or 13:14. The Toraitic phrase has a letter ׀ at the end of the first two words, while the text before us does not.

Piska 21 Translation and Commentary

Section 1a

⁹⁵10 Utterances of God

I am Adonai your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from out of the place of slavery (Ex. 20:2).

With a ten-stringed harp, ⁹⁶with voice and lyre together (Ps 92:4). It is taught according to Rabbi Judah that a lyre today has seven strings as (it is written) **I will praise you seven times each day** (Ps. 119:164). In the days of the Messiah they [will be] eight [strings, for it is written] **for the leader; on the *sheminith*** (Ps. 12:1); [*Sheminith*] refers to the eighth string. In the time to come they [will be] ten [strings] since [it is written] **Praise Adonai with the lyre; with the ten-stringed harp sing to Him** (Psalm 33:2).

Commentary Section 1a

Piska 21 is entitled the Ten Utterances. The entire piska is comprised of various *petikhtot* for the opening verse of the Ten Commandments. The first *petikhta* verse is from Psalms, **With a ten-stringed harp, with voice and lyre together** (Ps 92:4). Psalm 92 is a psalm recited on Shabbat which mentions the instruments used to praise God. The Rabbis associate this verse with the Ten Commandments, since both verses

⁹⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 1 begins here.

⁹⁶ The text is missing the letter **ל** which appears in the Tanakh.

include the number ten. Rabbi Judah points out the significance of the **ten stringed harp**. First he shows that today we use a seven-stringed lyre, and in the days of the Messiah, an eight-stringed instrument will be played. This procession then must indicate that the **ten-stringed harp** points to the time to come. The way in which verse 4 of Psalm 92 is worded is confusing. The **עשור** and **נבל** seem to be two different instruments, but are usually translated as one instrument - a ten-string harp. The Rabbis use Psalm 33:2 as a proof-text for the existence of a ten-stringed harp. Here the **עשור** and **נבל** are not separated and so appear as one instrument with the word **עשור** acting as an adjective.

Section 1b

⁹⁷Hadrian, may his bones be ground up,⁹⁸ inquired of Rabbi Joshua son of Hananiah: "It is a great privilege that the Holy One, Praised be He, bestowed upon the nations of the world, since (or, "because")⁹⁹ in the first five commandments which the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to Israel, His name is bound up with them. This is as if to say, that were Israel to sin - God would reproach them (the Israelites even more than the others) for their violation. (But regarding) the last five commandments that He gave to the other nations, God's name is not bound up with them. This is as if to say, were the nations of the world to sin, He would not reproach them (as harshly).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰¹He (R. Joshua) said to him, "Come and walk about with me¹⁰² through the provinces."

⁹⁷ Ulmer's paragraph 2 begins here.

⁹⁸ See Jastrow **טבניא**.

⁹⁹ Friedmann substitutes the word **שאותן** for the word **שנתן**. None of the other variants make this change. They each contain the word **שנתן**.

¹⁰⁰ variants Casanata 71a and Dropsie 86b do not include the following statement concerning the last five commandments.

¹⁰¹ Ulmer's paragraph 3 begins here.

And in each and every place in which he brought him, he would see a standing statue of himself.

He (R. Joshua) said to him, "What is this?"

He said to him, "My statues."

So they went on until R. Joshua brought him to the bathroom. He said to him, "My master, the king, I see that throughout this entire province you rule, for in each and every place there are fixed statues of you¹⁰³, except in this place (the bathroom) there are no standing statues of you."

He said to him, "And you are a sage of the Jews? Thus should be the honor due to the king to have standing statues of him in a place that is vile, repulsive, and filthy?"

¹⁰⁴He said to him, "Didn't your ears hear what your mouth just said? Thus should be the praise of God to have his name mixed with murderers, adulterers, thieves?"

He (Hadrian) dismissed him, and he went on his way.

When he (Hadrian) had gone, R. Joshua's students said to him, "Rabbi, this one you dismissed with a vague reply, but what response will you give us?"

He said to them, "This is what God thought: At first, God went to (the descendants of Esau) the Edomites and said to them, "Will you receive the Torah?"

They said before Him, "Master of the universe, what is written in it?"

"You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13)."

They replied that their very nature, which their ancestor had guaranteed/determined for them, was that they should live by the sword, as it is written, "(Yet) by your sword you shall live,"¹⁰⁵ (Genesis 27:40)." "We are unable to receive the Torah."

¹⁰⁶Afterwards He went to the Ammonites and Moabites¹⁰⁷. He asked them, "Would you accept the Torah?"

¹⁰² Variants: ed. pr. and JTS, **וְנָח** while the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts, **עָמַר**.

¹⁰³ Friedmann adds this phrase to his text.

¹⁰⁴ Ulmer's paragraph 4 begins here.

¹⁰⁵ biblical context: Isaac's blessing to Esau.

They said before him, "Master of the universe, what is written in it?"

He said to them, "**You shall not commit adultery.**"

They said to Him that their very origin was in unchastity, as it is written, **Thus the two daughters came to be with child by their father** (Genesis 19:31).¹⁰⁸ "We are unable to accept the Torah."

Afterwards God went to the Ishmaelites. He asked them, "Would you accept the Torah?"

They replied before him, "Master of the Universe, what is written in it?"

God said, "**You shall not steal.**"

They said to him that by their very nature, their livelihood depended upon stealing and robbing, as it is written, **He shall be a wild ass of a man; His hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him** (Genesis 16:12).¹⁰⁹ "We are unable to accept the Torah."

¹¹⁰And afterwards God came to Israel. They said to Him, "**We will do and we will obey,**" as it is written, **Adonai came from Sinai; He shone upon them from Seir; He appeared from Mount Paran, And approached from Ribebeth-Kodesh, lightning flashing** (read midrashically as **לֹא יִשְׁרָא** "a fiery law") **at them from His right hand** (Deuteronomy 33:2).

Commentary 1b

The midrash continues with a dialogue between Hadrian and Rabbi Joshua, the son of Hananiah. This is a common midrashic technique. Notice that for the Rabbis it is not a problem for the Roman Emperor, Hadrian, to speak Hebrew and to take the time to speak

¹⁰⁶ Ulmer's paragraph 5 begins here.

¹⁰⁷ Variants: Friedmann adds Moabites to his text. This agrees with Parma 171b.

¹⁰⁸ biblical context: Lot's daughters get him drunk and sleep with him.

¹⁰⁹ Note: the use of the hand for stealing.

¹¹⁰ Ulmer's paragraph 6 begins here.

with Rabbi Joshua. Hadrian was the emperor under whom the Bar Kokhba insurrection occurred. Hadrian, in this midrash, represents the leaders of the nations. He argues that the other nations got a better deal than Israel; for God does not punish them for infractions as diligently as He punishes Israel. It appears that the Rabbis indicate that a greater onus or sense of obligation is placed upon the Israelites than the other nations of the world.

Rabbi Joshua's retort is indirect and analogical. He points out that there are statues of Hadrian everywhere except in the bathrooms, which is to Hadrian's liking. But this is exactly how God views the gentiles - and this is why He does not associate His name with the five commandments addressed also to them. Rabbi Joshua's students want to know what his more sophisticated answer would be to Hadrian. He presents the aggadah that when God wished to reveal the Torah, He approached a number of nations who rejected the Torah for one reason or another. The Edomites could not accept the Torah because they could not keep the prohibition against murder. The Ammonites and the Moabites refused to accept the Torah because they could not keep the prohibition against adultery. The Ishmaelites could not keep the prohibition against stealing. Deut. 33:2 is used as the proof-text that God approached each of these nations before coming to Israel. Israel's special status thus is not arbitrary; the other nations had their chance but declined to take it.

Section 1c

Israel said before the Holy One Blessed be He, "Master of the universe, **Hurry, my beloved, Swift as a gazelle or a young stag, To the hills of spices!**" (Song of Songs 8:14).

Hurry, my beloved

(From what is he asking his beloved to run?) Flee from the bad odor (of the idolaters) and come to the pleasant scents (of Israel) - **to the hills of spices.**

Upon a ten-stringed harp (Ps. 92) (read midrashically as: "Upon me are the ten (commandments)"). We must accept upon ourselves the Mitzvot and the Ten Commandments.

Upon the lyre (Ps. 92) We must suffer disgrace for it (the Torah) in the days of persecution (such as the Hadrianic persecution).

Rabbi Shimon the son of Levi said, "[We must suffer] with happiness." And our Rabbis said, "But not as a forced labor, (under duress)."

When the Holy One Blessed be He saw that Israel knowingly wished to accept the Torah with love and fondness and in fear and trembling, God began and said, "**I am Adonai, your God.**"

Commentary 1c

A second *petikhta* verse, **Hurry, my beloved, Swift as a gazelle or a young stag, To the hills of spices!** (Song of Songs 8:14) is introduced. The verse is atomized as each phrase is analyzed. **Hurry, my beloved** this is Israel addressing God, asking Him to flee to them from the gentiles **to the hills of spices**. The hills of spices are read as "Mount Sinai." The original *petikhta* verse then is used as a proof-text that Israel willingly and gladly accepted revelation. The Shir HaShirim verse is followed by Ps. 92 - **עלי עשור ועלי נבל**. It is not clear whether the association is thematic

עלי עשור ועלי נבל - על הרי בשמים (מעמד הר סיני) or hermeneutical

(My guess is that the connection is more likely thematic than hermeneutical.) The section concludes, that when God saw that Israel knowingly wished to accept the Torah with love and fondness and in fear and trembling, God began and said, "**I am Adonai, your God.**"

Section 2a

[Another statement concerning: **I am Adonai your God . . .**"]¹¹¹

¹¹²Rabbi Levi taught in the name of Rabbi Yohanan:

From heaven You cause judgments to be heard, [the] earth to be fearful¹¹³ and still¹¹⁴ (Ps. 76:9).

If the earth is **fearful**, then why would it **be still**; and if the earth **is still** why would it be **fearful** (trembling out of fear)? This is what the earth said, "The first man was commanded with one commandment which he transgressed, and I was cursed for his transgression, as it is written: **Cursed be the ground because of you** (Gen. 3:17). Here (in the Torah) there are 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments, all the more so (will be my punishment, if Israel should transgress them)!

Rabbi Joshua of Sikhnin [teaches] in the name of Rabbi Levi: Nevertheless, God subsequently appeased it (the earth) as it is written, "**O land, land, land,**¹¹⁵ **Hear the word of the Lord!** (Jer. 22:29). You did hear that I said, **Cursed be the ground because of you, (in toil you shall eat from it)** (Gen. 3:17), but you did not hear that I said, **Never again will I doom the earth because of man** (Gen. 8:21)."

As soon as it (the earth) heard this, it immediately was **calmed** (Ps. 76:9).

Commentary Section 2a

In this section the Rabbis use the *petikhta* verse as a jumping off point to demonstrate what the earth was feeling at the time of revelation. In doing so the Rabbis

¹¹¹ Friedmann adds this to the text.

¹¹² Ulmer's paragraph 7 begins here.

¹¹³ Often associated with the word **יִרְאָה** are movements or tremblings "out of fear."

¹¹⁴ **שְׁקֵטָה** connotes stillness, or quietness as a result of being "at peace."

¹¹⁵ The biblical text contains the word **אָרֶץ** three times which is quoted as is in variants: Casanata 72a, Dropsie 87b-88a.

impart their view of how we human beings should approach revelation and God: with fear and trembling which God will later replace with a peaceful feeling.

The *petikhta* verse is actually two consecutive verses from Psalms.¹¹⁶ Part A is introduced first and analyzed in its entirety, and only much later is Part B of the *petikhta* verse introduced and analyzed.

Part A of the *petikhta* verse is Psalm 76:9 (JPS translation):

In heaven You pronounced sentence; the earth was numbed with fright.

Psalm 76 praises God and views God as a powerful warrior - **When You pronounce a sentence in the heavens, even the earth is numbed with fright.**

The Rabbis of this midrash, however, do not read the words **יִרְאָה וְשָׁקֵטָה** as “numbed with fright” a hendiadys, rather they read the words as antonyms, which if read sequentially tell a narrative. First the earth is **fearful**, and then it is **calmed**.¹¹⁷ A series of different accounts are presented to elucidate why the earth would be fearful, and how God then calmed the earth’s fears.

The earth has already experienced the repercussions of Adam and Eve’s violation of one commandment - eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which was forbidden to them. The prooftext Rabbi Levi brings is the verse, **Cursed be the ground because of you** (Gen. 3:17). He reads the word **הָאֲדָמָה** as referring to the earth. The earth extrapolates - and becomes **fearful** about the tremendous repercussions it will experience when the Israelites might transgress the numerous commandments they are about to receive from God.

¹¹⁶ Even though the *petikhta* verse is comprised of two biblical verses, I will refer to the unit as the *petikhta* verse with part a and part b.

¹¹⁷ In both the biblical and Rabbinic context the word **שָׁקֵטָה** as read as is calmed, relaxed, or, is in a peaceful state.

Rabbi Joshua then pieces together three seemingly unrelated verses to form the thrust of a monologue that God would have said to calm the earth. In the biblical context of Jeremiah 22, God promises to destroy the Israelites and deliver them to their enemies. In its biblical context the verse, **O land, land, land, Hear the word of the Lord!** (Jer. 22:29) is meant as a vocative to the land to serve as a witness to God's promise. Rabbi Joshua also reads this verse as God's call to the land, but as a vocative to the land to calm itself. Maybe Rabbi Joshua reads the repetition of the word "land" three times as a way of God calming the earth as a parent might recite a child's name three times before assuring him that everything will be okay. The verse, **Never again will I doom the earth because of man** (Gen. 8:21) is God's way of assuaging the earth's fears, which enables the earth to become **calm**.

Section 2b

[Another interpretation:]¹¹⁸

¹¹⁹Rabbi Hiya, the son of Rabbi Aba, taught in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: If [the earth] is **fearful**, then why is it so **calm**, and if [the earth] is so **calm**, then why is it **fearful**? Rather this is what the earth said, "Perhaps Israel will not accept the Torah, and (as a consequence) I will revert to water as I was (before God created the earth). In accordance with what Rabbi taught in the name of Rabbi Aha: **Earth and all its inhabitants dissolve; it is I who keep its pillars firm. Selah** (Psalm 75:4). The world would have already dissolved were it not for Israel's standing before Mt. Sinai and saying, **All which God has pronounced, we will do and obey** (Exodus 24:7). The world would have already reverted to chaos, and who firmly established¹²⁰ the world?

¹¹⁸ Friedmann inserts this into the text.

¹¹⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 8 begins here.

¹²⁰ Friedmann emends his text to say **בִּישָׁם** instead of **בִּישָׁם**. This is in agreement with variants: Parma 172a, ed. pr. 36c, Casanata 72a-72b, and Dropsie 88a.

It is I¹²¹ (i.e., Israel's acceptance of the Ten Commandments, which begin with "I")
who keep its pillars firm. *Selah.*¹²²

Commentary 2b

Rabbi Hiya, in the name of Rabbi Yohanan, presents a different narrative to demonstrate how the earth could at first be fearful and then become quieted. The earth is **fearful** that Israel will not accept the Torah. For the Rabbis, the Torah is what preserves the world, so the consequences of Israel not accepting the Torah could be that the world would revert to the chaos that existed before the earth was formed. Rabbi Aha uses the first half of Psalms 75:4 to indicate that the fear the earth experiences is not artificial, **Earth and all its inhabitants will dissolve.** The ante is high for the earth. If Israel does not accept the Torah, the earth will revert to water and chaos. The verse **All which God has pronounced, we will do and obey** (Exodus 24:7) is then cited to indicate that Israel did accept the Torah, which thus enabled the earth's fears to be **quieted**. In a sense, Israel's accepting the Torah saved the world. Finally the second half of the verse, **It is "I" who keep its pillars firm.** *Selah* (Psalm 75:4) demonstrates that ultimately it is God who maintains the earth's foundation. For the Rabbis, Torah is the expression of divine order, so they read the "I" in the Psalm verse as referring to both God and Israel's acceptance of the Torah. This midrash draws on already developed material which teaches that Torah is the source of the earth's stability. Finally, the word **אֲנֹכִי** connects this verse back to the opening of the Ten Commandments. **אֲנֹכִי** is a metonym for "God revealing the Torah to Israel and Israel's accepting the Torah."

¹²¹ Just as in the opening line of the Ten Commandments, the word **אֲנֹכִי** is used.

¹²² Variant: Casanata 72a-72b, and Dropsie 88a include the phrase **בְּזִכּוֹת אֲבוֹת** (Parma 172a includes just the word **בְּזִכּוֹת**) as the reason God set the pillars firm, but that is not the emphasis of this particular midrash.

Section 2c

¹²³ Another interpretation:

Rabbi Pinhas taught in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: If the earth was **fearful**, why was it so **calm**, and if the earth was so **calm**, why was it **fearful**? Rather this is what the earth said, "Perhaps the time of the resurrection of the dead has arrived and the Holy One Blessed be He is summoning from me what He deposited with, me as it is written, **And the earth shall disclose its bloodshed and shall no longer conceal its slain** (Isaiah 26:21).

When it (the earth) heard [(the word) "I", immediately the earth was calmed.]¹²⁴ (The earth realized that God was not about to announce the end of time, but was addressing the Israelites. Also, the world order was further established or fixed).

Section 2d

[From heaven You cause judgments to be heard, [the] earth was fearful and still as God rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the lowly of the earth. Selah (Ps. 76:10).]¹²⁵

¹²⁶[Rav Abahu taught in the name of Rav Yohanan,]¹²⁷ This is analogous (introduction of *mashal*) to a king who goes out to the training ground with swords on this side and that side and with spears on this side and that side, and everyone says, "If this is what it is like when he goes out for sport, imagine all the more so what it will be like were he to go out to battle."

Thus (introduction of the *nimshal*) if the Holy One Blessed be He uttered just one utterance on Sinai and caused the entire world to tremble (and shake), so much the moreso

¹²³ Ulmer's paragraph 9 begins here.

¹²⁴ Variants: Friedmann inserts this into his text. This is also included in the Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma manuscripts.

¹²⁵ I inserted the Petikhta verse here.

¹²⁶ Friedmann inserts the second half of the petikhta verse here. The other manuscripts do not support this insertion.

will this happen when God in the future gets up to reprove His world and give rewards to the righteous, as it is written: **as God rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the lowly of the earth.** *Selah* (Ps. 76:10).

Commentary 2c & 2d

Rabbi Pinhas in the name of Rabbi Yohanan depicts one more way in which the earth was fearful and then calmed. The earth is **fearful** that something "big" is about to happen. It recognizes that at the end of time, God has promised to resurrect the dead. It can only imagine the tremendous impact that this will have on the earth itself. (Imagine what forcing all the dead bodies out of the ground, would do to the earth's surface)! Rabbi Yohanan uses the verse, **And the earth shall disclose its bloodshed and shall no longer conceal its slain** (Isaiah 26:21), as a prooftext for the earth's fear that God is about to resurrect the dead. But as soon as God spoke the first word of revelation, **אֵלֹהִים**, the earth realized that it was not yet the end of the world (which would include the resurrection of the dead); rather God was revealing the Torah to Israel. Thus the earth's fear was calmed. Also, not only would there be no destruction, but the earth and its foundation would be strengthened as a result of God revealing the Torah.

It appears that Rabbi Abahu in the name of Rabbi Yohanan reads verses nine and ten as a progressive comparative. **From heaven You cause judgments to be heard, [the] earth to be fearful and still** (Ps. 76:9) **as God rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the lowly of the earth.** *Selah* (Ps. 76:10). It has already been established that Psalm 76:9 is associated with the Revelation at Sinai. So if the earth is so fearful upon hearing just one word of God, **אֵלֹהִים**, imagine just how much bigger an event it will be when God executes Judgment on the world and its inhabitants (God will speak in full sentences, of course). Rabbi Abahu, in the name of Rabbi Yohanan employs the

¹²⁷ Variant: This is included in the Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma manuscripts.

rhetoical device *-mashal-nimshal* - to explicate this point. Just as a commander-general only uses a fraction of his arsenal in a simulated war game compared to what he would use in a real war, so too does God only muster up a fraction of the divine force when revealing the Torah to the Israelites. Ps. 76:9 is then read as referring to the Revelation at Sinai and Ps. 76:10 is read as the end of days when God will mete out justice. The Revelation at Sinai is parallel to the end of the world; only the end of the world would be a so much more powerful happening.

Section 2e

¹²⁸Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan, this is similar to a king standing and gathering a circle around him at the entrance of his palace.¹²⁹ When a duke saw him thus occupied, he thought, "The king is preoccupied with me." When a strategist saw him, the strategist thought, "He (the king) is preoccupied with me." When they saw him (the king) grab hold of his son's hand, they thought, "He (the king) is preoccupied with his son."

Thus (introducing the *nimshal*) it was when the Holy One Blessed be He stood to address a meeting on Mount Sinai, as it is written, **Then God revealed all these words as follows** (Ex. 20:1). Michael thought, "He is preoccupied with me," and Gabriel thought, "He is preoccupied with me". But when He said **"אֲנֹכִי I** (the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt)," they knew that God was preoccupied with His son, and was giving the Torah to His children.

Commentary Section 2e

Another *mashal* of a human king appears here in the text which further shows how the earth could have thought that God was about to destroy it, when God all along intended

¹²⁸ Ulmer's paragraph 10 begins here.

to reveal the Torah to Israel. In the *mashal*, the human king appears with different dukes, and army strategists. Each thinks that God is about to promote him, until they see the king grabbing hold of his son's hand, then they know that it is the king's son who will be promoted. Just before God revealed the Torah to Israel, the angels thought that God might address them. But when they heard the first words of the Ten Commandments, they knew that God was revealing the Torah to Israel instead.

Editorial Placement

In some ways it appears that section 2e is out of place; it does not explicitly address the *petikhta* verse.¹³⁰ The redactor might have placed it where it is for a few formal reasons. Section 2e continues the attribution begun in the previous paragraph; both paragraphs begin, "Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan." The redactor might have wanted to group the two *mashalim* together. They both relate to the beginning of the Revelation at Sinai. In some ways it would have made more sense for it to have followed immediately after the earth is calmed when it hears the word, **אָנֹכִי**. Just as the earth realized that God was not rebuking it, so too did the angels realize that God was not rebuking them. The content of this paragraph certainly belongs in Piska 21. Not only was the earth most concerned, even fearful at the time of revelation, even the angels gathered in anticipation.

One unifying theme then of Section 2 (a-e) of Piska 21 is the incredible anticipation surrounding the Revelation at Sinai. The Rabbis address the anticipation of both the earth and the heavens about the giving of the Torah. The earth for a number of reasons is terrified. It is worried about what it will endure when Israel breaks the law which is being given to them; it is afraid that if Israel will not accept the Torah, then the earth will revert to water like it was before God created the world; or it is afraid that God is about to bring about the end of time. The heavens pay attention to the noise and rustlings going on Mount

¹²⁹ See Jastrow entry **כִּרְכַּר**.

Sinai. Just like the earthly duke and military strategist who think that the king is about to promote them, the angels may have anticipated that God was about to address them. They realize, though, that God is addressing Israel and not them. The Rabbis further build up the suspense to that great moment when God revealed the Torah to Israel.

Section 3a

[Another interpretation of,]¹³¹ ¹³²**I am Adonai, your God.**

Face to face God spoke with you (Deut. 5:4).

Rabbi Yohanan taught: A thousand people look at an icon; each and every one says, "It is looking at me." Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, was able to look at each and everyone of Israel and say, **I am Adonai, your God.**

Rabbi Levi taught: It is possible to learn¹³³ this from common practice (the way of the world), and it is possible to learn this from statues. [It is possible to learn this from statues as we just taught.]¹³⁴ It is possible to learn this from normal behavior for¹³⁵ a sound can enter ten ears (at the same moment). But can ten sounds enter into one ear at the same time? Now if, regarding the prayers of all His creatures, God can hear all of them at once (since it does not say that God hears prayers (in the plural), rather it is written, **You who hear prayer, all mankind comes to You**, (Psalm 65:3)), then so much the moreso can God look at each and every one of Israel, and say to each one, **I am Adonai, your God.**¹³⁶ (In other words, if God can hear everyone's prayers at the same time, then

¹³⁰ One could argue that the paragraph addresses the phrase, **as God rose to execute judgment**, (the first part of Ps. 76:10), but I don't think this would be a strong argument.

¹³¹ Friedmann adds this to the text.

¹³² Ulmer's paragraph 11 begins here.

¹³³ Variants: Friedmann consistently uses the word ללמוד "to learn," but the Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata variants consistently use the word ללמד which in rabbinic Hebrew can also mean "to learn." The ed. pr. and JTS variants use the word ללמד followed by the ללמוד.

¹³⁴ Friedmann emends the text to include this phrase in place of the word כמעשה which he removes.

¹³⁵ Variants: I agree with Friedmann's emendation מדרך הארץ which agrees with the Casanata, Dropsie variants. The Parma variant reads מדרך האיש, and the ed. pr. and JTS variants read דרך ארץ.

¹³⁶ Variants: I agree with Friedmann who removes the sentence

certainly God can look everyone in the eye, so to speak, and say to each one, **I am Adonai, your God.**)

Commentary Section 3a

The anticipation developed at the end of Section 2e provides a good transition to the next section. The reader is finally prepared to hear exactly how God revealed the words of Torah to Israel. The third section is comprised of different interpretations of what is meant by the Deut. verse, **Face to face God spoke with you.** Through a number of different parables and lessons from everyday life, various Rabbis attempt to explain how God could speak face to face with each and every Israelite. The Rabbis also offer other explanations as to what **face to face** could mean, such as God appeared in many different guises, with different emotions. Other Rabbis interpret פנים as “sides (aspects),” which could indicate just how multifaceted God is, as well as His Torah. In each of these many interpretations of Deut. 5:4, the Rabbis view God as speaking face to face with all the Israelites. Nowhere do they compare the Deuteronomic version with the version of Revelation in Exodus in which God spoke with Moses alone. We might then conclude that for these Rabbis, all of Israel participated in some way in the process of revelation. **Face to face God spoke with you on the mountain in the midst of the fire** (Deut. 5:4),¹³⁷ whether explicitly stated or not, serves as the *petikhta* verse for each paragraph of this section. The Rabbis concretize the experience of Revelation at Sinai. All the descriptions of God and His actions are read metaphorically. The governing metaphor is that God acts like human beings do, but in a nuanced way.

אמר רבי יוסי אנכי ה' אלהיך על אחת כמה וכמה. This is in agreement with the Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata variants.

¹³⁷ This is from the chapter in which Moses recalls to the Israelites how God revealed the Ten Commandments to Israel.

The first few paragraphs of section 3a address how is it possible for anyone to speak face to face with so many people simultaneously. Rabbi Yohanan comments that many people can look at an icon at the very same moment, and feel as if the icon were staring at them. By implication, we can deduce that if an icon can make many people feel as though it is staring at all of them at the same time, then certainly God is capable of the same effect. Rabbi Levi teaches that we can learn the same lesson from the way of the world. We know from nature that one sound can be heard by numerous people at the same time. A human being can only hear so many sounds at one time and decipher their meaning. Rabbi Levi uses the verse, **You who hear prayer, all mankind comes to You** (Psalm 65:3) as a proof-text that God can hear all of our prayers and understand each and every one. So, Rabbi Levi argues, if God can hear everyone's prayers at the same time, then certainly God can look everyone in the eye, so to speak, and say to each one, **I am Adonai, your God.**

Section 3b

[Another interpretation of, **Face to face** (Deut. 5:4).]¹³⁸

¹³⁹Rabbi Pinhas taught in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua, the son of Levi:¹⁴⁰ This (God speaking to Israel face to face) can be compared to a warrior who whirls his sword and shows its face to all sides (the sword is moving so fast with the light dancing off its face that it looks like it has many faces - even though we know it only has two). This is what is meant by, **Adonai spoke face to face with you.**

¹³⁸ Friedmann adds this to his text.

¹³⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 12 begins here.

¹⁴⁰ So MSS Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie. Variants: ed. pr. and JTS attribute this teaching to Rav Yossi, son of Rabbi Avin, taught that Rabbi Menahem in the name of Rav Yehoshua, the son of Levi.

Rabbi Yossi, the son of Abun, taught: This can be compared to the lathe¹⁴¹ which shows a front whenever you turn it,¹⁴² and this is what is meant by, **Adonai spoke face to face with you.**¹⁴³

Commentary Section 3b

Rabbi Pinhas, in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua, the son of Levi and Rabbi Yossi, the son of Abun, draw another example from everyday experience to indicate how one object can show a face in more than one direction at the same time. When light reflects off a whirling sword or lathe, it appears that the face of the sword or lathe is in more than one place at the same time. The reflection emitting from God's face could have appeared to every Israelite at virtually the same time. Thus God can enter into intimate contact with many individuals simultaneously.

Section 3c

[Another interpretation of, **Face to face God spoke with you** (Deut. 5:4).]¹⁴⁴

Rav Levi taught that God appeared to them in many different guises: to this one God would be standing, to this one God would be sitting, to this one God would be a young man, to this one God would be an old man. How so? When the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared at the Sea of Reeds to do battle on behalf of His children and exact

¹⁴¹ Variant: Friedmann's text reads **למורנס הזה**, but none of the other variants support this change.

¹⁴² MSS: **טורנוס**. See Jastrow, **טורנוס** who cites Friedmann.

¹⁴³ Variants: Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma each contain the same additional piece of narrative:

אמר ריש לקיש לחתיכה של פסיפס שהוא מראה פנים בכל צד כך פנים בפנים. Said R. Lakish: This is like a mosaic tile that reflects a facet in every direction who shows a face to each side (simultaneously), and this is what is meant by "Adonai spoke face to face with you."

Casanata and Dropsie then add one more additional part to the narrative:

ורבנין אמרין לבית שהוא מחופה במראות פנים מכל צד כך פנים בפנים Our Rabbis teach, This is comparable to a house which is covered with mirrors and shows a facet to each side, and this is what is meant by face to face.

¹⁴⁴ Friedmann inserts this into the text.

punishment¹⁴⁵ from the Egyptians, He appeared to them only as a young man, for it is only fitting for a young man to fight in a war. As it is written, **Adonai is a man of war, Adonai is His name** (Exodus 15:3).

And when the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared on Mount Sinai to give the Torah to Israel, He appeared to them only as an old man, for it is only fitting for Torah to come forth from the mouth of a wise elder. What is the proof for this statement? It is written, **At sixty comes wisdom, and with length of days comes understanding** (Job 12:12). And thus Daniel said (as further proof that with age comes wisdom), **As I looked on, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat** (Dan. 7:9).

¹⁴⁶Rav Hiya, the son of Aba, taught: If a heretic (**ברא דזניתא**, “the son of a whore” is a euphemism for “heretic”) says to you, “There are two (different) gods,” reply, “(God says) [I am the Lord your God:]”¹⁴⁷ “I am the one at the sea; I am the one at Sinai” (the same God).

Commentary Section 3c

In the next two paragraphs, **פנים בפנים** is interpreted as “with different faces” or “with different aspects.” Many actions in the Bible are attributed to God, and with each action, it can be assumed, we envision God in a different way. Rav Levi reminds us that sometimes God is viewed as a warrior, as the verse, **Adonai is a man of war** (Exod. 15:3) clearly demonstrates. For the Rabbis the best human warrior is a young strong man. If God is a warrior, then naturally God must be the best warrior, so naturally God takes on the appearance or imagery of a young, strong, smart, vibrant youth. God also is viewed as the ultimate sage, for, after all, in the rabbinic mindset God wrote the Torah. For the

¹⁴⁵ variants: Casanata, Dropsie, and the Parma variants read **להפרע** while the ed. pr. and JTS read **להיפרע**. Either way the verb is a pi-el with a *niphal* form.

¹⁴⁶ Ulmer's paragraph 13 begins here.

Rabbis a sage is certainly wise and full of wisdom, and wisdom comes with old age, as the proof-text, **At sixty comes wisdom** (Job 12:12) states. In the biblical context Job questions sarcastically whether wisdom indeed comes with age. The Rabbis, however, read Job's statement as a straightforward one: at the age of sixty comes wisdom. The Book of Daniel offers further proof that God has the appearance of an old age, when the text states, **And the Ancient of Days took His seat** (Dan. 7:9).¹⁴⁸

Rabbi Hiya addresses the possibility that a heretic might view the different guises of God in the biblical narrative as proof of the existence of more than one God - for two aspects could indicate two individual deities. He instructs one to reply to the heretic that the same God appears in many guises - (Thus **I am Adonai your God**).¹⁴⁹

Section 3d

[Another interpretation:]¹⁵⁰

Rav Levi taught that the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared before them (the Israelites) at Sinai in many guises: with an angry face, a severe face, a gloomy face, and a happy face, a playful face, a kind face. How is this so? When He was showing them divine retribution for the wicked (the punishment people will receive if they are wicked), He would show them with a serious face, a severe face, a gloomy face. And when He was showing them the giving of reward to the righteous (that they would receive) in a time to come (in the future, probably after their death), He would show them with a happy face, a playful face, a kind face.

¹⁴⁷ So in the Mikhilta.

¹⁴⁸ The image that many children, and for that matter, many adults as well, have of God as old man with a white beard sitting in heaven, is not far from one of the images our rabbinic ancestors had of God.

¹⁴⁹ The same tradition appears in the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, specifically as a comment on Ex. 20:2 - Mekhilta, Bahodesh, Ch. 5, ed. Lauterbach, pp. 231-232.

¹⁵⁰ Friedmann inserts this into his text.

Commentary Section 3d

Rabbi Levi explained that the appearance of God's face changed depending on what God's mission was. When God gives divine retribution for the wicked, God appears with a serious, severe, or gloomy face. Maybe implicit in Rabbi Levi's statement is that God does not "like" to give out divine retribution and thus the expression on His face. God, however, is pleased to give rewards to the righteous, thus His face expresses happiness, playfulness, and kindness.

Section 3e

(In regard to God's many faces) Rabbi Hiya, the son of Aba, taught, If a heretic (ברא דזניתא, "the son of a whore" is a euphemism for "heretic") says to you, "There are two (different) gods", say to him, "it is not written 'gods spoke (the verb for speak דברו in the plural) face after face', rather it is written here 'Adonai spoke (the verb דבר in the singular) with you face after face'" (in other words, one God with different faces of expression and not many different gods).

Commentary Section 3e

Section 3f returns to the discussion of what to say to the heretic. Emphasize to the heretic, says Rabbi Hiya, the son of Aba, that פנים בפנים does not indicate that more than one God spoke, rather the One God spoke with different expressions. Rabbi Hiya points out that the verb דבר "speak" is in the singular. It would seem to make more sense had section 3f followed section 3d.

Section 3f

[Another interpretation of **face to face**]¹⁵¹

¹⁵²Rabbi Zakai of Shaab taught in the name of Rabbi Shmuel, the son of Nahman:

When Israel stood at Mount Sinai and said, **We will do and we will obey**, a (bit of brilliance) from the brilliance of the Shekhena above was given to them. What is the proof? It is written, **Your beauty won you fame among the nations, for it was perfected through the splendor which I set upon you - declares Adonai, God** (Ezekiel 16:14).

Commentary Section 3f

Rabbi Zakai of Shaab, in the name of Rabbi Shmuel, the son of Nahman, interprets the phrase פנים בפנים as "From God's **face**" - or "from God's presence shone a brilliant light upon the **face** of each and every Israelite." In the biblical context: **Your beauty won you fame among the nations, for it was perfected through the splendor which I set upon you - declares Adonai, God** (Ezekiel 16:14) is part of a vision from God which Ezekiel experiences and interprets as referring to the birth of Israel. According to the vision God evidently saved Israel when it was a baby, and later God clothed Israel in fine clothes. Israel's beauty was what won for it favor from the nations. Israel in the next paragraph is chastised for playing the harlot. Rabbi Zakai in the name of Rabbi Shmuel, however, reads the phrase **through the splendor which I set upon you**, completely out of context and uses it as a prooftext that a brilliant light shone upon Israel at Sinai. When else did God literally "set something upon Israel" other than at the Revelation at Sinai? The splendor must have accompanied the Revelation and, as read by Rabbi Zakai in the name of Rabbi Shmuel, is what the phrase פנים בפנים indicates.

¹⁵¹ Friedmann adds this phrase.

¹⁵² Ulmer's paragraph 14 begins here.

Section 3g

[Another interpretation of **face to face** (here פנים is translated as "facets"):]¹⁵³

Rav Tanhum b. Rabbi Hanilai taught: Had the Torah been given in a clear-cut form (in which all the rulings were clear-cut), no teacher would have a footing with which to teach (his opinion). For if (the Torah been given with only one facet, and he (a sage) were to declare that something is) unclean, then everyone would agree with him; if (he were to declare that something is) pure, then everyone would agree with him.¹⁵⁴ ¹⁵⁵Rabbi Yanai taught, The Torah that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to Moses, had 49 facets (arguments) by which one can prove that something is ritually clean and 49 facets (arguments) by which one can prove that something is ritually impure. From where in Scripture do we know this? **And his banner of love was over me** (Song of Songs 2:4).

Moses asked God, "How shall I proceed to (determine the right answer to such questions as whether something is clean or impure)?"

God said to Moses, "When they who pronounce it impure are in the majority, then it is impure; and when they who pronounce it clean are in the majority, then it is clean."

Rabbi Abahu taught in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: Rabbi Akiba had a student who was a distinguished scholar who knew how to expound the Torah with 49 arguments that something was ritually clean, and all the reasons were distinct. It was said that that student was a chip from (the rock of) Mount Sinai.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Friedmann adds this to his text.

¹⁵⁴ cf Commentary. Nemoy comments that a better translation might be "similar objects are accordingly pronounced unclean . . . similar objects are pronounced clean"; i.e. the Torah's variegation makes it possible to recognize the teacher's authority and use it as a basis for decision in analogous cases. Footnote 27, page 423.

¹⁵⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 15 begins here.

¹⁵⁶ Braude provides both a positive and negative interpretation of this sentence describing the pupil: positive: he is "an able exponent of the variegation of Torah," negative - "This disciple was cut off from Mount Sinai" that is, he had not stood at Mount Sinai, because he was over-subtle," footnote 31, p. 423. The positive interpretation is correct here; the rhetorical thrust is praiseworthy - not negative.

Commentary Section 3g

In the following paragraphs פנים בפנים is interpreted as "**facets upon facets**" as in the idea that there are many **facets** to an argument. Rabbi Tanhum and Rabbi Yohanan make complimentary statements in this unit.

שם טמא יש מטמאין כיוצא בו ואם טיהר יש מטהרין כיוצא בו

Braude translates this clause as, "when he pronounces an object unclean, there are others like him who pronounce it unclean, and when he pronounces it clean, there are others like him who pronounce it clean." Leon Nemoy comments "the Torah's variegation makes it possible to recognize the teacher's authority and use it as a basis for decision in analogous

cases."¹⁵⁷ In our discussions, Dr. Sarason and I concluded that the clause is illustrative not of the answer, but the problem that would have occurred if the Torah were not multifaceted. If a great sage made a ruling, no one would challenge him. While Friedmann, Braude, and Nemoy see the clause as representing an ellipsis in the text, Dr. Sarason and I see it as an introduction to Rabbi Yanai's teaching (see below). It is primarily, however, a comment on Tanhum's statement that spells out the problem, i.e. why no teacher would have a leg to stand on in expressing an independent opinion - namely, everyone else would reach the same conclusion because there would be no ambiguity in the text by which to call forth a different explanation. Rabbi Yanai quotes, **And his banner of love was over me** (Song of Songs 2:4), as a proof-text that alludes to an already established midrashic exegesis of this verse in which the number 49 is derived by use of *gematriya* from the word **וּדְגִלּוֹ**. Therefore **פָּנִים בְּפָנִים** should be read not as two or even four facets upon facets, but as "**many** (specifically 49) **facets upon many** (specifically 49) **facets**." This paragraph concludes with Moses learning from God that in issues of disputes between sages, the ruling is decided by the majority. It is rather incredible that at the point when the Torah is given, the Rabbis of this midrash argue that contained within the Torah are the rules of a democracy - at least as far as judicial decisions are made - namely, go with the majority decision. The Torah has many "facets" so that it can be used successfully as proof for both sides of a debate. A great compliment to give a distinguished sage is to call him "a chip from Mount Sinai."

Section 3h

[Another Interpretation of **פָּנִים בְּפָנִים** (translated here as **faces upon faces**)]:¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Braude (p. 423, footnote 27).

¹⁵⁸ Friedmann adds this to the text.

Rabbi Hanina, the son of Papa, taught concerning **face to face**: (the phrase) indicates a minimum of four faces: (**פנים**) **faces** (two) to **faces** (two): a formidable face for Scripture, a fairly good face for Mishna, a kind face for Talmud, a playful face for Aggada.

Commentary Section 3h

Rabbi Hanina, the son of Papa seems to build on an earlier-mentioned tradition about the different faces. Notice that he interprets **פנים בפנים** as two faces upon two faces for a total of four faces (since **פנים** is a grammatical plural - and the minimum plural is two) which he now he applies to the different sources of our written and oral tradition. Implicit in Rabbi Hanina's words is that not only did God reveal the written Torah on Sinai, but the oral tradition as well.

Section 3i

Another interpretation (the phrase **פנים בפנים** "as faces reflected in water"):

Rabbi Menaheman in the name of Rabbi Jabob, the son of Tardai, taught: **As face answers to face in water, so does one man's heart to another** (Prov. 27:19). You have a situation in which the Rav wishes to teach, but the student does not want to learn; the student wants to learn, but the Rav does not wish to teach. Here (at Mount Sinai), however, the master wishes to teach and the student (Israel) wants to learn (as it should be).

Commentary Section 3i

For Rabbi Menaheman, who teaches in the name of Rabbi Jabob, the son of Tardai, the image **פנים בפנים** presents is of a face reflected in a body of water. He reads the

verse, **As face answers to face in water, so does one man's heart to another** (Prov. 27:19) as meaning "just as a face that is reflected in water gives a mirror image, so is the heart of one man reflected or in tune with the other." Therefore when God speaks **פנים בפנים** the text indicates that God's heart (that is speaking metaphorically, of course) is in tune with human beings' hearts, that is God is speaking heart to heart. In other words, when He revealed Himself at Sinai, God and human beings were on the same wavelength, just like a teacher who wishes to teach just what a pupil wants to learn are on the same wavelength. God and the Israelites were present to one another. What a powerful image this rabbi uses to portray the connection between God and the Israelites at the time of Revelation!

Section 3j

Another interpretation:

¹⁵⁹Rabbi Yehoshua, the son of Levi, taught, the phrase **פנים בפנים** should be read as "one face was opposite the other face." This could teach one of two things: the One on high descended [to face the one below], or that the one below lifted himself up [to the face the One on high]. But according to Rabbi Yehoshua, the son of Levi, we know from the verse, **Then God descended upon Mount Sinai** (Exodus 19:20) that the One above lowered himself down. Thus you find that when the Holy One, blessed be He, gives [eternal rest] to the righteous, He does not take it [the soul] away, until He goes down into the grave with him. So Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Yohai, taught that if an opening were to be made in the grave of Moses, the entire world could not endure the light. And if true of the opening, how much more so of the grave! And if true of the grave, how much more so of Moses.

¹⁵⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 16 begins here.

Commentary Section 3j

Rabbi Yehoshua, the son of Levi teaches that פנים בפנים indicates either that God descended so that God would be face to face with Moses, or that Moses went up to God so that Moses and God would be able to speak **face to face** with each other. Exod. 19:20 is quoted as the prooftext that God descended upon the mountain so as to speak **face to face** with Moses. Notice that this part of the midrash is in direct contrast to Piska 20 where Moses had to go up into the heavens and snatch the Torah away from the heavenly creatures to bring it down to the earth. A parenthetical comment follows which discusses other moments when God descends upon the earth. God descends upon the earth to give the kiss of death to the righteous, in which God, in a sense, buries the righteous and with God's kiss the righteous receive eternal rest. Rabbi Shimeon ben Yohai taught that we know that God buries the righteous, as the light of the righteous would be so bright that only God is capable of enduring its brightness, and this brightness goes into the grave with them.

Section 3k

[Another interpretation of **face to face**:]¹⁶⁰

Rav Berechiya taught, Moses said to Israel, "My children, when you were in the land of Egypt I used to say to you, **Adonai, the God of your fathers sent me to you** (Exod. 3:13). And you would say to me, "**what is His name?**" At that time I would say to you, **אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה I am what I am** (Ex. 3:14). Now, however, here is the buyer and here is the seller, here are the wares and here the merchant - face to face you hear from Him, **I am Adonai, your God**.

¹⁶⁰ Friedmann adds this to the text.

Commentary Section 3k

Finally Rav Berechiya interprets the phrase **פנים בפנים** as indicating - you are hearing it right from the source - no intermediary, that **I am Adonai, your God**. In Egypt, the Israelites were not prepared to encounter God face to face, so they had to settle for Moses who explained to them second hand that God is **אֶהיָה אֲשֶׁר אֶהיָה** **I am what I am** (Ex. 3:14). Now at Sinai the Israelites were ready to hear directly - **face to face** with God. This is the typical way a *petikhta* ends, by leading up to the first verse of the Torah portion.

The Rabbis in giving a series of different interpretations on what is meant when God spoke **face to face** to the Israelites concretize how God revealed Himself to the Israelites at Sinai. God communicated on an intimate level by speaking to each Israelite on a personal level, heart to heart, through a brilliant light. Also God appeared differently to different people depending on their context. God revealed not only the written Torah, but also the oral tradition, and contained within Revelation are many different facets and arguments.

Section 4a

[Another interpretation of **I am Adonai, your God**.]¹⁶¹

¹⁶²**God's chariots are myriads upon myriads,**

thousands upon thousands;

the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness (Psalm

68:18).

¹⁶¹ Friedmann adds this to the text.

¹⁶² Ulmer's paragraph 17 begins here.

Rabbi Abudimi of Haifa said, I learned (recited) in the tradition that I possess, twenty-two thousand ministering angels came down with the Holy One, blessed be He, on Mount Sinai, and in the hand of each and every one was a crown with which to crown each and everyone from the tribe of Levi.

Rabbi Levi taught, It is well known to Him who spoke and the world came into being that none of the tribes (of Israel) remained completely faithful to their vows [during the frenzy aroused by the golden calf]¹⁶³, but the tribe of Levi remained completely faithful.¹⁶⁴ Therefore they (the ministering angels) came down with the Holy One, blessed be He, on Mount Sinai, and in the hand of each [and everyone was a crown with which to crown each and everyone]¹⁶⁵ from the tribe of Levi.

Rav Yanai, the son of Rabbi Shimeon ben Yokhai, said to him, ¹⁶⁶ "If this is so, then you have underestimated [מִיעֲטָתָהּ] (the number of angels for each member of the tribe of Levi).¹⁶⁷ Instead, (the meaning of the text is that) when the Holy One, blessed be He, came down on Mount Sinai twenty-two thousand chariots, and each chariot was like the chariot which Ezekiel saw (large and containing a myriad of living forms)."¹⁶⁸

[Another interpretation of **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness** (Psalm 68:18).]¹⁶⁹

¹⁷⁰ Rabbi Yohanan taught, On the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself¹⁷¹ on Mount Sinai in order to give the Torah to Israel, sixty myriads of angels

¹⁶³ See Braude p. 425.

¹⁶⁴ variant: Parma reads **במימיו** while ed. pr. and JTS read **בתומיא** while Friedmann emends his text to read **בתומיו**.

¹⁶⁵ variant: Friedmann adds this phrase to his text which makes the JTS, ed. pr. 37b Dropsie and Casanata variants make more sense and is in agreement with the Parma reading.

¹⁶⁶ variant: Friedmann's text is in agreement with the variants ed. pr. and JTS which read **יָנֵא דַרְבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יִנְאִי**, while I follow the Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata variants which read **דַּרְבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יִנְאִי**.

¹⁶⁷ according to Braude, the problem the midrash addresses here is making God's retinue appear to be a small thing, when it should be bigger than anything that we as human beings can truly imagine.

¹⁶⁸ See Braude, footnote 39.

descended with Him and in the hand of each and every one was a crown with which to crown each and every one from Israel.

Rav Aba, the son of Kahana, taught in the name of Rav Yohanan that there were one hundred and twenty myriads¹⁷² - one sets a crown on him (an Israelite) and one girds him¹⁷³ with a belt of armor (**אָנַח**).

Rav Huna the Great of Tzifrin taught, [It should not read **אָנַח**, rather it should read] **אָנַח** ("girds him with a girdle"), as it is written, **He undoes the belts of kings, And fastens loincloths on them** (Job 12:18).

[Another interpretation of **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness** (Psalm 68:18).]¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁵Rabbi teaches in the name of Aba, the son of Yosef, One verse says, **Can His troops be numbered?** (Job 25:3) while another verse says, **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands**, (Psalm 68:18). This, however, is the number within a single troop (which is fixed), but the number of troops is numberless.

Our Rabbis teach otherwise: One verse says, **Can His troops be numbered?** while another verse says, **Thousands upon thousands served Him; Myriads upon myriads attended Him** (Dan. 97:10). Up until the Temple was destroyed, the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, was complete, but ever since the Temple was destroyed, it

¹⁶⁹ Friedmann adds this to his text.

¹⁷⁰ Ulmer's paragraph 18 begins here.

¹⁷¹ variants: Friedmann's emendation is in agreement with the Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata variants which read **שִׁנְגִּלָּה**.

¹⁷² this would be twice the number of Israel, says Braude, p. 427, footnote 41.

¹⁷³ variants: Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata read **אָוֶסֶרָו** instead of **מָוֶסֶרָו**.

¹⁷⁴ Friedmann adds this.

¹⁷⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 19 begins here.

could almost be said that the Holy One, blessed be He, reduced His heavenly retinue [פמיליין].

Why is this so? God said, "My house is destroyed - how then can My praise be perfect?"

[Another interpretation of **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness** (Psalm 68:18).]¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁷Rav Tanhum, the son of Hanilai, taught: The multiplication of¹⁷⁸ (the number of God's) chariots: thousands of myriads equal millions, doubling them up to where no mathematician can count.¹⁷⁹

Rabbi Azarya and Rabbi Judah, the son of Rabbi Simon in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi say, **רִיבוּתֵי** - *myriads* (means that they are so many) that they can not be counted and the word **אלפי** - *thousands* (means that they are so many) that they do not have a number.

Our Rabbis taught: They (the angels) descended upon the world fully armed (**שְׁנוּנִין**) to destroy it (wordplay on **שְׁנֵאן**).

Rav Azarya said, "They were the ones (i.e. the demons who Solomon controlled) from [the time of] King Solomon. In a tradition that came up with them from the Diaspora

¹⁷⁶ Friedmann adds this to his text.

¹⁷⁷ Ulmer's paragraph 20 begins here.

¹⁷⁸ Variants: Friedmann replaces **אדם** **כי לי** with **כיליארם**

Jastrow **מילירדים** should be read as **כיליארדין** thousands or **מיריארדין** ten thousand times ten thousand

Alcalay lists **מילירדים** as millions.

¹⁷⁹ Variants: Casanata and Dropsie variants read: **מראי מרייכים** - **כלאי כיליארם** Jastrow: Should read: **מיריארדין מירי כילי** a thousand times a thousand, a myriad of myriads.

a verse was found (that states), two myriads of the thousands¹⁸⁰ of angels came down with the Holy One, blessed be He, on Mount Sinai to give the Torah to Israel.

¹⁸¹Rabbi Elazar taught, the word **שְׁנַאֲן** should be read as **הַנְּאִיִּן** they were "the most beautiful and choicest."

Rabbi Yossi, the son of Rabbi Halafta, taught, They were the ministers of the nations of the world.¹⁸² So, why did they come down?

Rav Hiya, the son of Rabba, said: (They came down) for the sake of Torah.

Rav Hiya, the son of Yossi, taught, (They came down) for the sake of Israel.

Rabbi Elazar taught, in every place where you find a large number of people, you find crowdedness, uncomfortableness; here, however, **שְׁנַאֲן** means (there was enough space/room, comfort).

¹⁸³Rav Elazar, the son of Azariya, and Rav Elazar¹⁸⁴, the Modiite, [were engaged in the study of this verse, **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands** (Ps. 68:18). Rabbi Elazar, the son of Azariya, asked Rabbi Elazar, the Modiite,]¹⁸⁵ Could Mount Sinai support (hold them) all? (Note that Scripture says that they came down on the mountain.)

His colleague replied, Behold, it is written, **At that time, they shall call Jerusalem the "Throne of Adonai," and all the nations shall assemble there** (Jer. 3:17).

Is it possible to say that Jerusalem could hold (all of them)?

¹⁸⁰ Friedmann's text includes the word **שְׁנַאֲן** here, but it is not found in the Parma, Casanata, Dropsie variants.

¹⁸¹ Ulmer's paragraph 21 begins here.

¹⁸² Braude comments that Rabbi Yossi, the son of Rabbi Halafta probably read the verse from Psalms not as **שְׁנַאֲן** (*shin*) but as **שְׁנַאֲיִן**, (*sin*) those who are hated.

¹⁸³ Ulmer's paragraph 22 begins here.

¹⁸⁴ Variants: The Casanata, Dropsie, Parma, and ed. pr. variants read **ר. אלעזר המודעי**.

¹⁸⁵ This part of the text is found in the ed. pr. and JTS variants, but is not found in the Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma variants, which just state that "one spoke to the other."

He said to him,¹⁸⁶ The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to her (Jerusalem):
 'Enlarge and widen yourself, receive your population, as He had just said to Sinai, Enlarge
 (your) widths, receive my angels.'¹⁸⁷

Commentary Section 4a

In section 4 the Rabbis analyze the *petikhta* verse, **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness** (Psalm 68:18) to describe the impressive scene at Sinai when God descended upon Mount Sinai with all of the hosts of heaven (i.e. God and His imperial retinue). The Rabbis examine God's relation to the angels, the size of God's retinue, the order and rank of the celestial beings, and the power of God's name. The mention of Sinai in the verse makes the verse a natural choice to serve as a *petikhta* verse for the Ten Commandments. Braude (p. 425, footnote 36) notes a problem that Psalm 68 raises when juxtaposed with the account in Exodus. In Exodus it would appear that God descends upon Mount Sinai alone, while the Psalm indicates that thousands of angels accompanied God. The vague description of the chariots and their size give the Rabbis cited in this section much fodder to use to address the purpose of the angels.

In the first few paragraphs of this section, the Rabbis address the nonspecific numbers as presented in the first two stichs of the *petikhta* verse, **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands** (Ps. 68:18), to emphasize the greatness of God's retinue. The numbers are even larger than one might think. Rabbi Levi posits that the angels accompanied God in order to crown the members of the tribe of Levi for their faithful commitment to God demonstrated by their non-compliance in the Golden Calf affair. Rabbi Yohanan, however, argues that the angels came to crown each Israelite. Rabbi Elazar, comments on the miraculous nature of the occasion: usually a large number

¹⁸⁶ Variants: Friedmann and JTS read $\aleph \daleth \aleph$ while the Casanata, Dropsie, Parma, and ed. pr. read $\daleth$ " $\aleph$.

of people together feel crowded, but here everyone felt comfortable and spacious, in spite of the large numbers gathered. Rav Elazar, the Modiite, uses Jer. 3:17 as a proof-text to connect Jerusalem in the messianic age with Sinai.

Section 4b

[Another interpretation of, **God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands** (Ps. 68:18).]¹⁸⁸

Rabbi Berechia taught in the name of Rabbi Abba, the son of Kahana, It is written, **Thus said Adonai, the God of armies (צבאות), Lord** (Amos 5:16). The name (of) the Holy One, blessed be He, is **צבאות**.

Rabbi Judah, the son of Simon, taught: His whole name is not the end of the matter, rather even one letter of His name can make an army like His whole name can (reading **צבא את**).

¹⁸⁹Our Rabbis taught, The Holy One, blessed be He, said **אני ה' הוא שמי** [I am Adonai]¹⁹⁰ **this is My name** (Isaiah 42:8). (They read this verse as saying,) just as I create worlds and destroy worlds, so too My name (in and of itself) creates and destroys worlds.

Said Rabbi Yudan, This is comparable to a king (introduction to a *mashal*) whose son was captured. The king, dressed with revenge,¹⁹¹ went to go redeem him. His Neighbors and his kinsmen, some with swords and some with spears, came to help him. He (the king) said to them, "Go away from here, for I do not need you!"

¹⁸⁷ Variants: Casanata Dropsie variants read **קבל מלאכי** in place of what is written in the JTS and ed. pr. variants **קבלי מלאכי**.

¹⁸⁸ Friedmann adds this to his text.

¹⁸⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 23 begins here.

¹⁹⁰ Variants: The Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata variants agree with Friedmann's emendation.

¹⁹¹ Variants: The Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata variants read **המלך נקמה את המלך** in place of **המלך נקמת**. Braude's translation reads, "clothed in vengeance"

Likewise (introduction of the *nimshal*) when the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared to fight the wars of His children, and to punish the Egyptians,¹⁹² the ministering angels came to help Him, some with hail stones and some with burning coals. God said to them, "Go away from here, for I do not need you!" It is not written in Scriptures,¹⁹³ out of the brilliance that was before Him His clouds carried (the hail and burning coals)¹⁹⁴, but rather it is written, **out of the brilliance that was before Him, His clouds, [as did the] hail and burning coals, passed by** (Psalms 18:13). (In the first instance which the Rabbis reject, the cloud is doing the carrying or helping God, while in the second instance, it is God who is the primary agent.)

¹⁹⁵Rabbi Yudan, the prince,¹⁹⁶ taught: A king of flesh and blood (a human king as opposed to God) when he goes out to celebrate his May-day (mayuma)¹⁹⁷, ¹⁹⁸ he goes out with five men, when he goes out for war, he goes out with columns and legions (of troops). But the Holy One, blessed be He, is not like this. When he appeared to do battle for His children at the Red Sea, God appeared to them alone as, **Adonai, man of war** (Exodus 15:3)¹⁹⁹. But when the Holy One, blessed be He, came down on to Mount Sinai to give the Torah to Israel, He was accompanied by Michael and his banner and Gabriel and his banner, **and Adonai, God, with all His holy beings came with Him**

¹⁹² Variants: Friedmann removes the word **המצריים**, but this is not supported by any of the variants. Braude probably removes the word **האומות** a move which is supported by the Casanata, Parma, and Dropsie variants, so his translation reads "to requite the Egyptians."

¹⁹³ Ps. 18:13 **מגה נגדו עביו עברו ברד וגחלי-אש** "Out of the brilliance before Him, hail and fiery coals passed (JPS "pierced") His clouds." In II Sam. 22:13 **עביו עברו** is translated as "blazed."

¹⁹⁴ Variants: The Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata variants agree with Friedmann's emendation.

¹⁹⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 24 begins here.

¹⁹⁶ Variants: Friedmann's emends his text to read **נשיין** which is similar to the Dropsie and Casanata variants which read **נשיאה**. The ed. pr. JTS, and Parma variants include the root **נסן** instead.

¹⁹⁷ see Jastrow, p. 771 s.v. root **מיומס**.

¹⁹⁸ Variants: Friedmann emends text to read **למיומס יוצא בעשרה**, while Parma, Casanata and Dropsie variants read **למיומס יוצא בחמשה**, and ed. pr. reads **לפיומס בעשרה**, and JTS reads **לפיוס בעשרה**. Braude's translation reads, "to a May festival he goes with some ten men."

¹⁹⁹ JPS translation reads, "The LORD, the Warrior- LORD is His name!"

(Zachariah 14:5).²⁰⁰ (God does the opposite of man, when man does something for fun, he goes alone or takes only a few people with him, but when man goes to war, he takes as many people as possible. God, on the other hand, fights His battles on His own, but likes to include as many beings as possible when God has a positive task to do.)

Commentary 4b

At the outset God is accompanied only by His Name, which is **צבאות** - not by any legions. With the second mashal Rabbi Yudan makes a different point. He argues that even though God has a large retinue, God came alone. Through the use of two parables (the *mashal-nimshal* structure) he demonstrates how God acts like and unlike human beings. Just like a king, who would prefer to redeem his son alone, so too does God wish to speak to the Israelites on His own. Unlike human beings, however, who come together in bad situations, but remain alone in doing good things, God does the opposite; God fights His battles alone, but includes many beings when He does a good thing, like revealing the Torah at Sinai. Rabbi Yudan helps make sense of how in Exodus, God is presented as coming alone, while in Psalms God is joined with a tremendously large retinue. In each case we can learn a lesson about God's character. Rabbi Pinhas, in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son Levi, in the next section, concedes that God was accompanied by angels, but God controlled these angels.

Section 4c

²⁰¹ **Adonai is with them** (the continuation of Ps. 68:18).

Rabbi Pinhas, in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son Levi, (taught), (We can infer from the pronunciation of God's name as "Adonai" that the verse means) His Lordship is

²⁰⁰ The biblical text reads, **וּבֹא ה' אֱלֹהֵי בָל-קְדוּשִׁים עִמָּךְ** "And Adonai, my God, with all the holy beings, will come to you. Friedmann, as well as each manuscript quotes the verse as, **וּבֹא ה' אֱלֹהִים וְכָל קְדוּשָׁיו עִמּוֹ** "And Adonai, God and all His holy beings will come with Him."

upon them (the angels). Michael trembled (under God's sovereignty) and Gabriel trembled (under God's sovereignty).

Rav Pinhas, in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi taught, (The names,) Michael and Gabriel, (which include the word **אל** a name for God, indicate that) God's name is associated with them (Michael and Gabriel).

Rav Levi said, His name is engraved upon their hearts like a seal"²⁰²

In regards to **שִׁינִי בְקֹדֶשׁ Sinai in holiness** (continuation of Psalm 68:18) we do not know whether Sinai is secondary to the holiness (Sinai is only important because it just happens to be a place where something holy takes place), or whether the holiness is secondary to Sinai (Sinai is a holy place, so since the Israelites are at this holy site, something holy will happen). But the verse in its entirety reads, "Adonai [is with them],²⁰³ Sinai [is] in holiness, we know that Sinai (the place) is secondary to the holiness (Sinai, the place is holy due to God's descending upon it and the Revelation that occurs there, otherwise, Sinai is just another mountain).

²⁰⁴Rabbi Huna in the name of Rabbi Ammi taught: Why do we use an epithet for the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and call Him, **מְקוֹם** - Place? For He is the place of His world. And we do not know whether "He is the place of the world", or whether "His world is His place." But from the verse,

²⁰¹ Ulmer's paragraph 25 begins here.

²⁰² Variant: The Parma manuscript the following description of the seal, **בְּהַדִּין טְרַאטִיגָה**, which Braude translates as, "in the form of a quadrate seal." The Casanata and Dropsie manuscripts read, **בְּהַדִּין סִירָא טִיגָא**.

Jastrow, see **טַבְלָר**.

²⁰³ Variants: Friedmann makes this emendation which is in agreement with the Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma variants.

²⁰⁴ Ulmer's paragraph 26 begins here.

מקום Then Adonai said, **ויאמר ה' הנה מקום אתי ונצבת על הצור** is with Me, where you shall stand firm on the rock," (Exod. 33: 21)²⁰⁵ we know that "He (God) is the place of the world," and not "His world is His place."²⁰⁶

Rabbi Isaac taught, It is written, **מענה אלהי קדם** (JPS.) The ancient God is a refuge²⁰⁷ (or Braude) The skies, the dwelling place of the eternal God (Deut. 33: 27). We do not know whether He is **מעונה** the dwelling place of the world, [or whether His world is His dwelling place. But since it is written, **Adonai, You have been the dwelling place for us in every generation** (Psalms 90:1) we know that God is the dwelling place of the world,]²⁰⁸ and that His world is not His dwelling place.

Commentary Section 4c

The midrash reads the last part of the *petikhta* verse, **the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness** (Psalm 68:18) as indicating that Sinai is holy due to God's presence there. Were God not present at Sinai, there is nothing inherent in the place that makes it holy. Rabbi Huna in the name of Rabbi Ammi continues the theme of not limiting the size of God's presence (potentially problematic verses that would relativize God to His world) when he interprets, **Then Adonai said, "מקום is with Me, you shall stand firm on the rock,"** (Exod. 33: 21). He reads **מקום is with Me**, as God's way of saying that He is the place of the world, and that the world does not fully contain Him. Rabbi Isaac turns to a second proof-text, **מענה אלהי קדם** (Deut. 33: 27). This

²⁰⁵ In the biblical context, the text has the meaning of "See that place over there, go plant yourself firm on that rock, so that I let my presence pass before you. The writers of this midrash, however, read the word **מקום** as a euphemism for God, so the text read in this read indicates that God's place is with Him.

²⁰⁶ See Braude, p. 431 footnote 58.

²⁰⁷ JPS notes, "meaning of Heb. uncertain."

phrase read in the biblical context probably teaches that, **God is a refuge** (for people), but Rabbi Isaac reads the word **מְעוֹנָה** as “the dwelling place (of the world).” Rabbi Isaac probably also reads the phrase from Deut. in a temporal sense, with **קֵדָם** modifying “dwelling place.” He then juxtaposes the Deut. phrase with **אֲדֹנָי מְעוֹן אַתָּה הֵייתָ לָנוּ בְּדֹר וּדֹר** (Psalms 90:1), which he now reads as, “Adonai, you are the dwelling place of the world in this generation and every future generation.” So when he reads the two verses together, Rabbi Isaac teaches that God was, is, and will in the future (always was and always will be) the dwelling place of the earth, rather than the other way around.

Section 4d

²⁰⁹Rabbi Yudan taught: This can be compared to (introduction of *mashal*) a warrior who would ride a horse,²¹⁰ his reins resting [first] on one side then the other. The horse was of secondary importance to the rider, but the rider was not of secondary importance to the horse.²¹¹ Similarly (introduction of the *nimshal*) in Scripture it says,

כִּי תִרְבֵּב עַל-סוּסֶיךָ רֹכֵבֶתִּיךָ יִשׁוּעָה **That You are riding Your horses,**
Your chariot will save (Habakkuk 3:8).²¹² (Just like a warrior who controls his horse when he rides it, so too God is in charge of the celestial beings, not the reverse.)²¹³

²⁰⁸ Variants: Friedmann adds this to his text which is substantiated by the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie variants.

²⁰⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 27 begins here.

²¹⁰ Friedmann emends his text to read, **וּכְלִיּוֹ** instead of **כְּלִיּוֹ**, but none of the variant manuscripts support this change.

²¹¹ Braude's translation, “the horse does the bidding of the rider, but the rider does not do the bidding of the horse.”

²¹² JPS, “That You are driving Your steeds, Your victorious chariot?” Braude's translation, “When Thou ridest upon Thy horses, it is Thine acts of riding which give deliverance.”

²¹³ See Braude, p. 431, footnote 59.

Commentary 4d

In some respects it appears that the final redactor misplaced the parable attributed to Rabbi Yudan, or the intervening materials are parenthetical - similar cases. It seems to make more sense to follow the discussion of whether Sinai is secondary to the holiness of God's presence or action or the holiness is intrinsically a part of Sinai. A horse is merely a horse, but becomes a vehicle by which a warrior fights battles only when the rider takes hold of the reins.

Section 4e

Rabbi Pinhas in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi, taught: This is comparable to a king (introduction of a *mashal*) who left his wife pregnant²¹⁴ and went far away and remains there for many²¹⁵ years. (In the meantime) she gave birth to a son and raised him. When the king came back she brought out his son to the reception²¹⁶ of his father, the king.

He saw the commander and stared at him. He saw the lieutenant and stared at him, saying "This is he! This is he!"²¹⁷

The king observed/took note of this. He said to him, "My son, Why do you look to these people? There is no benefit (you can get) from them - for you are my son, and I (the king) am your father."

²¹⁸Thus (introduction of the *nimshal*) when the Holy One Blessed be He came down on Mount Sinai, and with Him (came) Michael and his retinue and Gabriel and his retinue. Israel was looking at each and every one and about them they were saying, "This

²¹⁴ Variants: The Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts read עבר instead of עברה.

²¹⁵ Variants: The ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts read, שנים הרבות. Friedmann emends his text to read שנים מרובות, while the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts read שנים הרבה.

²¹⁶ Variants: the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts read, לאנפטי instead of לאנפטי.

²¹⁷ Variants: Friedmann emends his text from זה הדא זה הוא to read זה הוא זה הוא which is in agreement with the Casanata manuscript.

²¹⁸ Ulmer's paragraph 28 begins here.

is he! This is he!" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, "My child, why are you looking at these beings - you will not get any benefit from them, rather you are My children, and I am your Father."

[“You are my children”]²¹⁹ (how do we know this?) As it is written,

אלהיכם אתם לה' You are children of Adonai, your God (Deut.

14:1). (And how do we know,) I am your father? as it is written,

הייתי לישראל לאב I am to Israel, like a father (Jeremiah 31:9).²²⁰ (And

how do we know, You are my people, **והייתם לי לעם You shall be to me a**

people (Jer. 11:4 or 30:22)²²¹,²²² and (how do we know,) I am your God,

ואני אהיה לכם לאלהים I shall be your God (Jer. 11:4 or 30:22)

אנכי ה' אלהיך I am Adonai, your God (Ex. 20:2)].²²⁴

Commentary Section 4e

The thrust of final parable in this section attributed to Rabbi Pinhas who taught in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi, addresses why God descends with His retinue (as above) but needs to be distinguished from them - so that Israel would not be confused about who is God. This section ends with a listing of various prooftexts to indicate that the Israelites truly are God's children, that God is Israel's father, that Israel is God's people and that God is Israel's God. This section ends in typical fashion, with **I am Adonai, your God**, the opening words of Scriptural reading.

The last parable and the remainder of the section that follows seems to be out of place. The attribution to Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi, which is the same attribution given

²¹⁹ Variants: Friedmann emends his text and is in agreement with the Casanata and Dropsie manuscripts

²²⁰ JPS translation, "For I am ever a Father to Israel."

²²¹ JPS translation, "that you may be My people."

²²² Variants: This is included in the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts.

²²³ The biblical text reads **ואנכי**.

to the beginning of the exegesis of Psalm 68:18 and the mentioning of Michael and Gabriel in the *nimshal* lead me to conclude that this parable would make more sense if it followed immediately after the exegesis of the end of Psalm 68:18. Thus, it seems quite plausible that the discussion of the holiness of Sinai, the discussion of God as the dwelling place of the world, and Rabbi Yudan's parable were inserted and break the flow of the midrash. It can be argued that the two parables should be placed next to each other, in that both indicate that ultimately it is God who is the most powerful and controlling force in the heavens. The discussion of the holiness of Sinai, however, continues the exegesis of Psalm 68:18. The discussion of God as the dwelling place of the world thus seems to be a digression. On strictly exegetical grounds, this discussion is not necessary for the *petikhta*'s unfolding. But just as the discussion of Sinai speaks of the place versus what happens there, it seems appropriate to include a discussion of whether God is the dwelling place of the world or whether the world is God's dwelling place. Also the conclusion the midrash reaches adds to the earlier discussion about not limiting the size or scope of God and God's retinue.

Section 5

²²⁵ **אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ** I am Adonai, your God (Ex. 20:2).

Rabbi taught,²²⁶ the word **אֲנִי** is an acrostic.

א stands for **אֲנִי** "I,"

נ stands for **נַפְשִׁי** "Myself,"

כ stands for **כָּתַבְתִּי** "wrote it,"

י stands for **יָהִבְתִּי** "gave it."²²⁷

²²⁴ Variants: This is included in the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts.

²²⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 29 begins here.

²²⁶ Variants: The ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts read, **רַב**. Friedmann emends his text to read, **יוֹחֲנָן אָמַר**, **רַב אָמַר**, while the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts read, **רַב אָמַר**.

(So **אנכי** is an acrostic for "**I Myself Wrote and Gave the Torah.**")

Rabbi Yudan in the name of Rabbi Simon²²⁸ teaches: **אנכי** -

א stands for **אנא** "I,"

נ stands for **נתתי** "I gave,"

כ stands for **כתבתי** "I wrote it,"

י stands for "י" (specifically) "**The Ten Commandments.**"

(So **אנכי** is an acrostic for "**I Gave and Wrote the Ten Commandments.**")

Rabbi Brechiya taught: **אנכי** -

א stands for **אנא** "I,"

נ stands for **נהורריך** "your light,"

כ stands for **כלילריך** "your crown,"

י stands for **יונתי** "my dove,"²²⁹

(So **אנכי** is an acrostic for "**I am your Light, your Crown, O my Dove.**")²³⁰

[Therefore] accept the Ten Commandments.²³¹

²²⁷ Variants: The ed. pr. manuscript reads, **אנא נפשי כתבנית יהבית** and the JTS manuscript is the same, but **כתבנית** is replaced with **כתבית**. The Parma manuscript reads, **אנכי נזמיקו כתבית יהבית**, while the Casanata and Dropsie manuscripts read, **אנכי נוטריקא אנא כתבית יהבית**.

²²⁸ Variants: The ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts read, **רבי יודן בי רבי סימון**. The Parma manuscript reads,

יודא בר' יהודה בר' סימון. The Casanata and Dropsie manuscripts each refer to **יודה**.

²²⁹ Braude's translation, "thy grace," see p. 433, footnote 67.

²³⁰ Variants: The ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts include the phrase, **תקבלון עדרת דברייא** "if you receive the Ten Commandments," but is not included in the Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts.

²³¹ M.S. Parma: "if you accept the Ten Commandments . . ."

א stands for the Holy One, blessed be He, as in **Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one** (Deut. 6:4).

א stands for “one.”

ל stands for “fifty,”

כ stands for “twenty,” which are the “seventy (50+20=70) original peoples”²³²

which the Holy One, blessed be He, created in the world.

י stands for “ten,” which are “the Ten generations” (from the beginning of time: Noah through Abraham).²³³ And from all of them, God chose only Israel (Israel can be a referent to Abraham).²³⁴

²³⁵ **א** stands for “Abraham, our father” (as it is written), **one was Abraham** (Ezekiel 33:24).²³⁶

ל stands for “fifty” - the age at which Abraham was when he acknowledged/recognized his Maker.

(An Aside:) Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Yohanan, the two of them taught: Abraham was 48 years old when he recognized his Maker. Resh Lakish taught: he was three years old (when it is said of him,) **עקב** from

²³² Variants: Ed. pr. reads, **איותנטיות**, the JTS manuscript reads, **איתנטיות**, the Parma manuscript reads, **אומות ואחת אותנטיות**, the Dropsie manuscript reads, **אומות אוותנטיות**, the Casanata manuscript reads, **אומות אירותנטיות**,

²³³ Variants: The ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts do not say what the number 10 represents. Friedmann emends his text to read, **אלו עשרה [דורות]** “the ten generations.” The Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie manuscripts read, **עשרה אלו ישראל**.

²³⁴ See Braude, p. 433, footnote 68.

²³⁵ Ulmer’s paragraph 30 begins here.

²³⁶ JPS translation, “Abraham was but one man”

the time Abraham heard my voice (Genesis 26:5).²³⁷ How do we know this? From the numerical value of the word **עקב**.

(**ע**=70 + **ק**=100 + **ב**=2 = 172 which is three years less than the total number of years Abraham lived. Therefore the Rabbis read Gen. 26:15 as, in effect, **"Ever since Abraham was three years old, he heard God."**)

כ stands for **"twenty"** (as) in **"the twentieth generation,"** (10 generations from Adam to Noah + 10 generations from Noah to Abraham) Abraham inaugurated the tradition of circumcision in the twentieth generation.

י stands for **"ten"** (as in) the **"ten trials"** which our father, Abraham, was tested and which he survived as well."

(So **אנכי** stands for Abraham and important numbers in his life: 50 = the age when Abraham encountered God, 20 = the number of generations between the first human being and Abraham, 10 = the ten trials rabbinic tradition indicates that Abraham endured to prove his righteousness.)

²³⁸ **אנכי א** represents **"one"** (and **"one"** stands for) **Israel**, (as we can infer from juxtaposing the following verses) **אחת היא יונתי תמתי** one is my dove, **ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ** **My perfect one** (Song of Songs 6:9), **Who is like Your people Israel, a unique nation on earth** (II Sam. 7:23). (The Rabbis employ the rhetorical device of *Gezera Shava*. In the II Sam. verse the word **"Israel"** is read as meaning, **"My people, Israel"** which is **"unique."** Therefore the word **אחת** can be a euphemism for Israel.)

²³⁷ JPS translation, "inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me."

(ל represents the number) “fifty” which (allude to) “the fifty days between Pesach and Shavuot.”

(כ represents the number) “twenty” which (allude to) “the ten plagues” which the Holy One, blessed be He, brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt and the additional “ten (plagues” God brought upon them at) the sea.

(י represents the number) “ten” which (allude to) “the Ten Commandments.”²³⁹ (In other words each letter in the word represents an important number in Judaism: 1 = Israel, 50 = the days between Pesach and Shavuot, 20 = the ten plagues in Egypt + the ten plagues at the sea, 10 = The Ten Commandments.)

Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Yohai, taught אֹנֶכִי (should be read as) אֵינֶךָ (an Onyx agate stone used to make a kettle water-tight). When you stand in your tears, I shall make you durable again, (like a blacksmith who pours this onyx agate into a kettle to make it water-tight).²⁴⁰

Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah (each have something to say about this).

Rabbi Judah teaches: The word אֹנֶכִי only denotes a tone of love and affection. This is comparable to a king (introduction of a *mashal*) who sends his son to a land far away. He (the king) learns the language of (that is spoken where) his son (went). When he (the son returned) from the distant land, he (the king) began speaking with him (his son) in his (newly acquired language).

In a similar way (introduction of the *nimshal*) when Israel was in the land of Egypt, they learned their (Egyptian) language. When they came before Mount Sinai, the Holy

²³⁸ Ulmer's paragraph 31 begins here.

²³⁹ In addition to the normal variant manuscripts, one more exists for this paragraph which Ulmer lists as Budapest 1a.

²⁴⁰ Variants: The ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts read, אֵינֶךָ אֵין אַתָּה עֹמֵד בִּימִינִי. The Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata manuscripts read, אֵינֶךָ אַתָּה עֹמֵד בְּמִימִינִי. Friedmann emends his text to read, אֵינֶךָ אֵין אַתָּה עֹמֵד בְּטִימִינִי. See Braude, p. 434, footnote 74.

One, blessed be He, began to speak with them using the word **אֲנֹכִי** (which sounds like the Egyptian²⁴¹ word) **אֲנוֹךְ** "I."

²⁴²Rabbi Nehemiah teaches: The word **אֲנֹכִי** only denotes a tone of fear and awe.²⁴³ This is comparable to (introduction of a *mashal*) a dear friend of the king who knew his (the king's) secrets. Once he was near death. He said to him, "My son, come and I will tell you the king's secrets." He lifted his eyes and saw the king (standing above him). He said to him, "My son, be careful about heeding the honor due to the king."

Thus (introduction of the *nimshal*, it is written), **And Jacob called to his sons and said, "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come"** (Genesis 49:1). He lifted his eyes and saw the Holy One, blessed be He, (standing before him). He said to them, "My sons, be careful about heeding the honor due to the Holy One, blessed be He."

How did they respond to him? (By saying), **Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one!** (Deut. 6:4). He said to them, "My sons, this is the sign I give to you, with the word **אֲנֹכִי** did God speak to my grandfather (= Abraham), (as it is written) **אֲנֹכִי מִגֵּן לְךָ** "I am a shield to you (Gen. 15:1). And with the word **אֲנֹכִי** God spoke to my father (as it is written) **I am the God of Abraham, your father** (Gen. 26:24). And with the word **אֲנֹכִי** God spoke to me, (as it is written) **I am the God of Beth El** (Gen. 31:13). **I will go down with you to Egypt** (Gen. 46:4). And (the same can be true of) you. If God comes and (begins) speaking to you with the word **אֲנֹכִי**, know that He is your God. If not, (if one could say such a thing), He is not your God. When they (the Israelites) came before Mount Sinai, and God began to speak to them (with the word) **אֲנֹכִי**, they knew that He was their God.

²⁴¹ Actually in the Coptic language, late Egyptian. See Braude, p. 435, footnote 75.

²⁴² Ulmer's paragraph 32 begins here.

Commentary Section 5

In section 5 the Rabbis read the first word of the Ten Commandments, **אֲנֹכִי**, as an acronym. In two instances the acronym indicates that it is God, and no one else, who wrote and gave the Ten Commandments. The Rabbis also indicate the importance of the letters from the word **אֲנֹכִי**. They use the *gematriya* of the word **אֲנֹכִי** to connect Abraham to the Revelation at Sinai. Finally the י which has the numerical value of 10, points directly to the Ten Commandments which will follow. In the second half of section 5 the Rabbis indicate that the word **אֲנֹכִי** is a metonym for the compassion God shows to Israel. The word **אֲנֹכִי**, for instance, alludes to an Onyx agate stone used to make a kettle water-tight and indicates that when we human beings stand in our tears, God shall make us durable again. It also is close to the Egyptian word for "I," which indicates that God knew what language the Israelites spoke, and by beginning with an "Egyptian word" God indicates that He wished to communicate with all those who were present. Finally God addressed the Patriarchs with the word, **אֲנֹכִי**, so when Israel heard at Mount Sinai the word, **אֲנֹכִי**, they knew God was about to address them.

Section 6a

אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ

²⁴⁴Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi, in the name of Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Yohai, taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel the opportunity to attainment (be vindicated); when they stood and said, "**All that Adonai has spoken (revealed to us), we shall do and obey,**" (Ex. 24:7). And when they said [before the golden calf

²⁴³ See Braude p. 435, footnote 76 for the prooftext for Rabbi Nehemiah.

²⁴⁴ Ulmer's paragraph 33 begins here.

(lit.: that thing that they made),]²⁴⁵ **"this is your God, Israel,"** (Ex. 32:4), God (then) demanded to destroy them, as it is written, **He would have destroyed them had not Moses His chosen one confronted Him in the breach to avert His destructive wrath** (Psalm 106:23). Moses said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Master of the universe, wasn't it just to me that you said, **אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ** I am Adonai, your²⁴⁶ God. Had You meant to address all of Israel, You would have said, **אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** I am Adonai, your²⁴⁷ God."

Commentary Section 6a

The first part of this section addresses why God begins the Ten Commandments in the singular as it is written, **אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ** I am Adonai, your God (the word "your" is in the singular). According to the Book of Exodus, Moses intervened on Israel's behalf before God, so that God would not destroy Israel for its sin of building and worshipping the Golden Calf. Moses argues that it is possible that the Israelites did not realize that the Ten Commandments were intended for all of them to obey, since this phrase at the beginning of the Ten Commandments is in the singular.

Section 6b

Rabbi Joshua of Siknin (taught) in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Moses, you have well pleaded the cause of (or, "spoke in defense of")²⁴⁸ my child. In the past I would speak with you in the singular as

²⁴⁵ Variant: The Dropsie and Casanata manuscripts include the phrase, **לפני אותו המעשה**.

²⁴⁶ **אֲנֹכִיךָ** is in the second person singular.

²⁴⁷ **אֲנֹכִיכֶם** is in the second person plural.

²⁴⁸ See Alcalay, **סנגוריה**.

Variants: JTS, **למדת סניגוריה על בני**. Ed. pr., **למדת סניגוריה על בני**. Casanata and Dropsie, **למדת סניגוריה על בני**. Parma, **למדת סניגוריה על בני**.

in, **I am Adonai, your God**. But from now on I will speak to you in the plural as in, **I am Adonai, your God** (Lev. 19:4). The plural is to warn all of you to pay heed."²⁴⁹

Commentary Section 6b

Rabbi Joshua of Siknin in the name of Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi, added that God acquiesced to Moses' plea, but decided that in the future He would speak in the plural when He wished to address Israel. We learn this from Leviticus (which, of course, follows Exodus) when the text says, **I am Adonai, your God** (Lev. 19:4 "your" is in the plural).

Section 6c

²⁵⁰Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Yohai, taught, The word **אֲנֹכִי** denotes a tone of comforting. The same **אֲנֹכִי** that is written in the verse, **I am Adonai, your God** is (also found) in the verse, **אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי הוּא מְנַחֵמְכֶם** I, I am He who comforts you! (Isaiah 51:12). (This Isaiah verse links the word **אֲנֹכִי** with comfort).

Rabbi Menahem taught in the name of Rabbi Avin: The word **אֲנֹכִי** denotes a tone of consolation, as it is written, **תְּנַחֲמֵךְ יְשַׁעְשְׁעוּ נַפְשִׁי** Your assurance fills my soul (Psalm 94:19).

Commentary Section 6c

Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Yohai, argued on the basis of Isaiah (51:12) that **אֲנֹכִי** is a term of comfort, while Rabbi Menahem in the name of Rabbi Avin, argued on the basis of Psalm 94:19 that **אֲנֹכִי** is a term of consolation.

²⁴⁹ Variants: ed. pr., **לְהַזְהִיר**. JTS, **לְהַזְהִיר**. Parma, **וְהַזְהִיר**. Dropsie and Casanata, **וּמַזְהִיר**.

Section 6d

Rav Abba, the son of Kahana, (taught) in the name of Rabbi Yohanan:²⁵¹ This can be compared to (introduction of *mashal*) a king who marries an upper class woman and writes her a substantial *ketubah*: This many storehouses (or, "treasures") I give to you, this many²⁵² ships for the sea I give to you, this many towns on the mainland I give to you, this much gold and silver I give to you.²⁵³ He left her and went on his way to a distant land. Her friends would mock her and say to her, Seek for yourself a husband while you are still young²⁵⁴ and while you still have your strength. She would enter into her bedroom, open her *ketubah*, and read it. And she would find a substantial settlement which would comfort her.

²⁵⁵Eventually the king came back from the distant land. He asked her, "My darling, I wonder (or, "marvel at")²⁵⁶ how you were able to wait for me all these years?" She said before him, "My lord, the king, had the *Ketubah* that you wrote for me not been so substantial, my peers would have caused me to abandon you."

Thus (introduction of *nimshal*) the nations of the world ridicule Israel and say to them, "How long will you die for your God and be killed for Him, and give up your lives for Him? How much suffering does He bring upon you! How many²⁵⁷ plunderers has He brought upon you!²⁵⁸ How many Rulers has He brought upon you! Come join us, and we will make of you dukes, governors, and army generals. And Israel goes into their synagogues and houses of study, and opens the Torah scroll and read in it, **I will look**

²⁵⁰ Ulmer's paragraph 34 begins here.

²⁵¹ Variants: ed. pr. and JTS, רבי אבין בשם רבי יוחנן. Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie, ר' אבא בר כהנא בשם ר' יוחנן. זזהב וכסף, כר וכר כסף וזהב אני נותן לך.

²⁵² Variant: Dropsie and Casanata have the following words here, טלייא, טלייא, טלייא. Dropsie, טלייא.

²⁵³ Variants: Parma, תמיה אני. Casanata and Dropsie, תמיה אני. Ulmer's paragraph 35 begins here.

²⁵⁴ Variants: ed. pr. and JTS, תמיה אני. Casanata and Dropsie, תמיה אני.

²⁵⁵ Variants: Parma includes the following phrase, כמה. Casanata and Dropsie, כמה. Ulmer's paragraph 35 begins here.

²⁵⁶ Variants: Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie have עליכם in place of מכם.

²⁵⁷ Variants: Parma, Casanata, and Dropsie have עליכם in place of מכם.

with favor upon you, and make you fertile and multiply you; and I will maintain My covenant with you. . . . I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you (Lev. 26:9&11). And they are comforted.

²⁵⁹In the future when the end of days comes, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to Israel, "My children, I wonder (or, "marvel at") how you were able to wait for me all these years!" And Israel will say before Him, "Were it not for the Torah You wrote for us, the nations of the world would have pushed us away from you." As it is written here, **But this²⁶⁰ do I call to mind, Therefore I have hope, to Him²⁶¹** (Lamentations 3:21). And in a similar way, David said, "**Were not Your teaching my delight, I would have perished in my affliction,**" (Psalm 119:92).

Commentary 6d

Rabbi Abba, the son of Kahana, in the name of Rabbi Yohanan, presents a beautiful parable to demonstrate how God provides comfort to Israel. Just as a *ketubah* provides comfort for a woman when her husband is gone for a long period of time, the Torah, which God gave to Israel, provides comfort for Israel.

Section 6e

Rabbi Avin in the name of Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Lakish,²⁶² (taught): It is comparable to (introduction of a *mashal*) a king who becomes angry at a lady (his wife) and drove her out of his palace. Much later he requested for her to return. She said, "Let him double for me my *ketubah*, and I shall return to him." In a similar way (introduction of the *nimshal*), the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "My children, at (Mount) Sinai I said to you (the word) **אֶכֶּל** once, but in the future, in Jerusalem, I will say to you twice (the word)

²⁵⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 36 begins here.

²⁶⁰ Braude demonstrates that the word **זֶה** here denotes "Torah." See p. 438, footnote 85.

²⁶¹ Variants: The Bible does include the last word, **לִי**.

אֲנִי (as it is written), **אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא מְנַחֲמְכֶם** **I, I am He who comforts you!** (Isaiah 51:12).

Commentary Section 6e

Rabbi Avin in the name of Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Lakish, presents a parable to demonstrate how God provides consolation to Israel. Just as a king who pushes his wife away, but later requests that she return, must re-establish the trust between them that was lost by doubling the amount of her ketubah, so too God may have pushed Israel away, but God welcomes Israel back as indicated by Isaiah (51:12) in which God repeats the word **אֲנִי**.

Section 6f

Rabbi Menahemen teaches in the name of Rabbi Avin: For the sake of that love to which you gave expression²⁶³ before Me at Mount Sinai, when you said, "**all that Adonai has spoken, we will do and obey**," (Exod. 24:7) (I say to you) **אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא מְנַחֲמְכֶם** **I, I am He who speaks lovingly of you!** (Isaiah 51:12).²⁶⁴

Commentary 6f

Rabbi Menahem in the name of Rabbi Avin adds that it was due the exuberance that Israel received the Torah, that God later consoled Israel.

²⁶² Variants: JTS, ed. pr. and Friedmann have **לְקִישׁ רִישׁ** instead of **לְקִישׁ בֶּן**.

²⁶³ Variant: Parma reads, **הַנְּחִימָה שְׁנִתְּמַתָּם** while all the other variants read, **הַנְּחִימָה שְׁנִתְּמַתָּם**.

See also Jastrów, **נְחִימָה** for translation.

²⁶⁴ See Braude p, 438, footnote 86 for an explanation of the pun between **מְנַחֲמְכֶם** and **מְנַחֲמְכֶם** that the Rabbis employ here. "That is, because you accepted lovingly the Ten Commandments which begin with the word **אֲנִי** I shall proclaim you redemption with the same word, with **אֲנִי** said twice." P. 438, footnote 86.

Section 6g

²⁶⁵Why are the Ten Commandments written in the singular? Because specific individuals neglected (each) of them (the Ten Commandments). Micah (Jud. 17) neglected, **I am Adonai your God**. Jereboam neglected, **You shall not have any other gods before Me**. The one who blasphemed (in the camp) neglected, **You shall not take the name of Adonai your God in vain**. The one who gathered wood (on Shabbat) neglected, **Remember the Sabbath day**. Absalom neglected, **Honor your father and mother**. Joab neglected, **You shall not murder**. Zimri neglected, **You shall not commit adultery**. אֶחָד Ahen neglected, **You shall not steal**. צִיבָא - Ziba neglected, **You shall not bear false witness**. Ahab neglected, **You shall not covet**. Ahab, about whom it is said, **Have you killed, and also taken possession?** (I Kings 21:19).

Commentary 6g

In Section 6g a different reason is given for why God uses the singular at the beginning of the Ten Commandments. According to this midrash, אֱלֹהֶיךָ "your (second person singular) **God**" points to specific characters in the Bible who transgress one of the Ten Commandments. This section lists each character and the commandment that he transgressed.

²⁶⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 37 begins here.

Section 7

²⁶⁶פְּתִיתֵנִי ה' וְאַפְתַּחֲזַקְתֵּנִי וְתוֹכַל **You enticed me, Adonai, and I was enticed; You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail** (Jeremiah 20:7). The congregation of Israel spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Master of the Universe, You have enticed me to the extent/degree that You gave me the Torah and set the yoke of the commandments around my neck, and I have been done in by (punished for) them. Had I not received the Torah, I would have been just like the (other) nations of the world without reward (for keeping the commandments) or punishment (for breaking the commandments)."

The congregation of Israel spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Master of the Universe, You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **I am Adonai, your God.**" I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **for I am Adonai, your God, an impassioned God** (Ex. 20:5).

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **You shall have no other gods.**" I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **Whoever sacrifices to (other) gods, shall be proscribed** (Ex. 22:19).

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **You shall not take the Lord's name in vain,**" and I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), ²⁶⁷**You overpowered me** [with the verse] **for Adonai will not clear one** (Ex. 20:7).

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **Remember the Sabbath day.** I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **Everyone that profanes it shall be put to death** (Ex. 31:14).

²⁶⁶ Ulmer's paragraph 38 begins here.

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **Honor your Father**. I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **And he that curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death** (Ex. 21:17).

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **You shall not murder**. I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **Whoever sheds a man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed** (Gen. 9:6).

²⁶⁸{ "You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **You shall not commit adultery**." I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **Both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death** (Lev. 20:10).

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **You shall not steal**." I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **He that steals a man . . . shall surely be put to death** (Ex. 21:16).²⁶⁹

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **You shall not bear false witness**." {I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep),}²⁷⁰ **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **Then shall you do unto him as he had wished to do unto his brother** (Deut. 19:19).

"You enticed me at Sinai when You said to me, **You shall not covet**."²⁷¹ I had thought that it (the obligation) is weak (not so hard to keep), **You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail**, [with the verse] **Lust not after her beauty in**

²⁶⁷ Ulmer's paragraph 39 begins here.

²⁶⁸ Ulmer's paragraph 40 begins here.

²⁶⁹ Variants: This is not found in the ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts.

²⁷⁰ Variants: This is not found in the ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts.

²⁷¹ Variants: ed. pr., 'לא תחטור' JTS, 'לא תחטור' Casanata and Dropsie, 'לא תחמוד'.

your heart . . . So that he that goes in to his neighbor's wife . . . shall not go unpunished (Prov. 6:24-29)."

Commentary Section 7

The *Petikhta* verse, **פתייתני ה' ואפת חזקתני ותוכל** **You enticed me, Adonai, and I was enticed; You overpowered me so that Your will would prevail** (Jeremiah 20:7), introduces each of the Ten Commandments and indicates a corresponding biblical verse for each commandment. The Rabbis re-read the verse as if it were to say, "**You enticed me** (with your commandment), **and I was enticed** (I was lead to believe that this obligation will not be hard to keep), **but then you overpowered me** (with another biblical verse), **so that** (Your will) **shall prevail**. For instance, You enticed me at Sinai (to follow the Second Commandment) when You said to me, **You shall have no other gods.**" I was deceived and thought that the prohibition not to have any other gods is weak - it can't be that hard to keep, **You overpowered me** with the words, **Whoever sacrifices to (other) gods, shall be proscribed** (Ex. 22:19) **and** (thus) (Your will) **prevailed**. The Exodus 22:19 verse packs a whallop, it lays it the severity of the consequences of not keeping the prohibition.

The verse from Jeremiah is overlaid with sexual imagery. God entices or seduces Jeremiah, but once the vision Jeremiah experiences begins, it is like he is invaded, or raped; no longer is Jeremiah in control but the vision takes hold of him and prevails. The Rabbis re-read the verse so that the stiches no longer are merely parallel but consecutive. God entices the Israelites with the Ten Commandments which do not seem so difficult to keep. Israel is seduced and agrees to enter into the covenant with God. Afterwards, God overpowers or runs Israel over with much harsher and more severe obligations and restrictions as indicated later in Torah.

Section 8

Rabbi Yakom and Rabbi Judah (disagree over how the Tenth Commandment relates to the rest of the Commandments):

²⁷²Rabbi Yakom teaches: One who transgresses (the commandment) **You shall not covet**, it is as if he has transgressed all the Ten Commandments.

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the First Commandment) **I am Adonai, your God**? Rabbi Avin cited the following verse additionally, **Who forsakes the companion of her youth And disregards the covenant of her God** (Prov. 2:17).

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Second Commandment) **You shall have no other gods**? Hizkiah taught: **And it came to pass before Me through the lightness of her harlotry, that the Land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with stocks** (Jer. 3:9).

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) ²⁷³**You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Third Commandment) **You shall not take the name of Adonai, your God, in vain**? Scripture prescribes for such a covetous woman, **Then the priest shall cause the woman to swear with the oath of cursing** (Num. 5:21).

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Fourth Commandment) **Remember the Sabbath day**? As R. Tanhuma explained: Consider the instance when the daughter of a High Priest committed adultery, gave birth to a son, and brought him up. Presently the son brought an offering upon the altar (in the course of regular priestly service), with the result that he violated the Sabbath, for such a one may not bring an offering.

²⁷² Ulmer's paragraph 41 begins here.

²⁷³ Ulmer's paragraph 42 begins here.

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Fifth Commandment) **Honor your father and your mother?** [Clans such as] Gaius of Gadara and Lucius of Susitha, would sneak into each other's homes and cohabit with the wives of the others, the others with wives of these. In time a quarrel fell out between them, and a man killed his father unaware that it was his father.

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Sixth Commandment) **You shall not murder?** [For **Because of the multitude of harlotries, the well-flavored [wife] makes herself into a mistress of witchcrafts** (Nahum 3:4)]²⁷⁴ that is, his wife, finally resorting to witchcraft against her whoring husband, murders him.

(How does one who transgresses the commandment)²⁷⁵ **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Seventh Commandment) **You shall not commit adultery?** Hizkiah cited the verse, **Through the lightness of her [coveting] harlotry . . . the land was polluted, and she committed adultery** (Jer. 3:9).

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Eighth Commandment) **You shall not steal?** Scripture says of him, [**The thought of] stolen waters is sweet** (Prov. 9:17).

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgress the Ninth Commandment) **You shall not bear false witness?** For example, evidence may be required of a person concerning the man who is his real father. Yet thinking that the man is not his father, though actually the man is his father, the person ends up by giving evidence about the identity of his father which is false evidence.

(How does one who transgresses the commandment) **You shall not covet**, (also transgresses the Tenth Commandment) **You shall not covet?** R. Judah said: He who violates the commandment, **You shall not covet**, is violating (at one and the same time) seven negative commandments: **You shall have no other gods; You shall not take**

²⁷⁴ Variant: Budapest manuscript, but not found in any of the other extant manuscripts.

the name of the Lord, your God, in vain; You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; you shall not covet.²⁷⁶

Commentary 8

Rabbi Yakom and Rabbi Judah disagree over how the Tenth Commandment, **You shall not covet**, relates to the other Commandments. Rabbi Yakom argues that when one covets, he transgresses all nine of the other Commandments. He presents either a Scriptural verse or an example as a proof-text for how coveting leads to transgressing the other Commandments. Rabbi Judah argues that when one covets, he transgresses all seven negative commandments. In other words, the only difference to each Rabbi's position is that Rabbi Judah does not argue that coveting breaks the First Commandment, **I am Adonai, your God** and the Fourth commandment, **Remember the Sabbath day**. Rabbi Judah, however, does not provide any proof-texts.

Rabbi Yakom and Rabbi Judah probably represent two different traditions. A subsequent arranger or redactor juxtaposed the two traditions here.

Section 9

²⁷⁷The last five commandments were uttered to correspond to the first five commandments.

(The Sixth Commandment) **You shall not murder** corresponds to (the First Commandment) **I am Adonai, your God**. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "If you commit murder, I consider it as if you diminished the image of God."

(The Seventh Commandment) **You shall not commit adultery** corresponds to (the Second Commandment) **You shall not have any other gods**. The Holy One,

²⁷⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 43 begins here.

²⁷⁶ See Braude, p. 443, footnote 95

blessed be He, said, "If you commit adultery, I consider it as if you worshipped idols" (or, "bowed down before another god").

(The Eighth Commandment) **You shall not steal** corresponds to (the Third Commandment) **You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.** ²⁷⁸Rabbi Hiya taught in a beraita: **You shall not steal. You shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God** (Lev. 19:11-12).²⁷⁹ For if you **steal**, you will end up **dealing deceitfully**, you will end up **swearing falsely**, you will end up **profaning My name**.

(The Ninth Commandment) **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor** corresponds to (The Fourth Commandment) **Remember the Sabbath day.** The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "If you give false testimony against your peer, I consider it as if you had testified against Me that I did not create My world in six days and I did not rest on the seventh day."

(The Tenth Commandment) **You shall not covet** corresponds to (The Fifth Commandment) **Honor your father and your mother.** [Clans like] Gaius of Gadara and Lucius of Susitha²⁸⁰ would sneak into each other's homes and cohabit with the wives of the others, the others with the wives of these. Eventually a quarrel broke out between them, and a man killed his father, unaware that it was his father.

Commentary 9

In section 9 the first five commandments are compared with the second five commandments. In other midrashim it is explicitly stated that the first tablet corresponds to

²⁷⁷ Ulmer's paragraph 44 begins here.

²⁷⁸ Ulmer's paragraph 45 begins here.

²⁷⁹ Rabbi Hiya points out that The Eighth Commandment comes immediately before The Third Commandment in these verses in Leviticus 19 (The Holiness Code).

²⁸⁰ Variants: ed. pr. and JTS, גי'ים מן הגדר אלקים מן סוסיתא. Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata, הא דאמרן, גי'ים מן גדר ולוקים מן סוסיתא. Budapest, גי'ים מן גדר ולוקים מן סוסיתא.

the second tablet. Here the tablets are not mentioned at all. The transition seems to be one of correspondence. In section 8 it is shown how the Tenth Commandment corresponds to the other nine commandments. Here the rabbis demonstrate how the first five commandments correspond to commandments six through ten. For instance, the First Commandment which would be the first commandment listed on the first tablet is compared with the Sixth Commandment which would be the first commandment listed on the second tablet. So when one murders, he also diminishes the image of God which is in a way transgression the First Commandment, I am Adonai, your God. (Or one could argue in the opposite direction, how could one murder if that person truly understood that Adonai is God.)

Often in biblical and rabbinic literature, the imagery of an Israelite whoring after another woman (adultery) is used as a metaphor for Israel worshipping other gods. In comparing the Eighth Commandment, **You shall not steal**, with the Third Commandment, **You shall not take the Lord's name in vain**, Rabbi Hiya reads the two verses, **You shall not steal. You shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God** (Lev. 19:11-12), as conditional clauses. If you (are willing and able to) steal, then you will also deal deceitfully with one another, swear falsely, thereby profaning God's name.

The comparison of the Ninth Commandment and the Fourth Commandment seems the most dubious to me. It seems to say that if you do not remember to keep the Sabbath, you are denying that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, thereby bearing false witness against God. In comparing the Tenth Commandment with the Fifth Commandment, we can infer from the midrash that acting on our covetous feelings can lead to a complete loss of all our senses and even enable us to murder our own parent. With the exception of the comparison of the Eighth and Third Commandments, no biblical verse are cited as prooftexts. The rationale is placed in the mouth of God, but without actually citing

any text. One potential reason is that the people were already familiar with these rabbinic traditions, so the redactor did not find a need to quote the traditions in their entirety.

Section 10

²⁸¹It is said that the Ten Commandments were uttered to correspond to the ten sayings by which the world was created.

(The First Commandment) **I am Adonai, your God** corresponds to (God's words) **Then God said, let there be light** (Gen. 1:3) and **And God will be to you an eternal light** (Isaiah 60:19). (From Isaiah we learn that God is light, so when God says **let there be light** in Genesis, the Rabbis read the verse as if God were saying, "**Let I be God**" which sounds a lot like the First Commandment, **I am Adonai, your God**).

(The Second Commandment) **You shall have no other gods** corresponds to (the biblical verses) **The God said, let there be an expanse between the water, so there will be a separation between the water above and the water below** (Gen. 1:6). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Let there be a separation between Me and idol worship which is called 'hewed out cisterns of water,' as it is written, **They (Israel) have forsaken Me, the source of living waters** (Jeremiah 2:13)." (In other words, Israel worshipping idols is like Israel trying to gain life from stagnant water which is full of disease and lacks life.)

(The Third Commandment)²⁸² **You shall not swear falsely by God's name** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **God gathered the waters** (Gen. 1:9). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "They (the waters) honored Me by removing themselves (or, clearing themselves away). Will you not then honor Me by not swearing falsely by My name?"

²⁸¹ Ulmer's paragraph 46 begins here.

²⁸² Ulmer's paragraph 47 begins here.

(The Fourth Commandment) **Remember the Sabbath day** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **And God said, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation,"** (Gen. 1:11). The Holy One, blessed be He, said,²⁸³ "Of (however little) you eat on the Sabbath."²⁸⁴ (Since man was meant to be a vegetarian, don't worry if you haven't got any meat for the Sabbath meal!)

(The Fifth Commandment) **Honor your father and mother** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky"** (Gen. 1:13). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "For you I created two lights, your father and mother. Take care in the honor due to them."

(The Sixth Commandment) **You shall not murder** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **Then God said, "Let the waters bring forth"** (or, "swarm") (Gen. 1:20).²⁸⁵ The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Do not be like those fish among which the bigger ones swallow the smaller ones, as it is written, **You have made man like the fish of the sea,**" (Habakkuk 1:14).²⁸⁶

(The Seventh Commandment) **You shall not commit adultery** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **God said, "Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature of its kind,"** (Gen. 1:24). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Behold I have created a mate for you. Each and everyone should stick to his mate." (In other words, God has created mates - everyone has one and only one mate to be with. Therefore committing adultery is as if one were rejecting God's work.)

(The Eighth Commandment) **You shall not steal** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **God said, "Behold I have given you every seed-bearing plant . . ."**

²⁸³ Variant: The Budapest manuscript reads, **הא בראתי לך בחולא מה תאכל בשבתא**.

²⁸⁴ Variants: The ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts also include,

מוקיר שלא נברא העולם שלא ידו חוטאים וידו חיים לעולם ואוכלים גידולי הארץ "you will be regarded as one who honors it. Remember that the world was created in the hope that man would not sin and would live forever, subsisting (only) on grasses and herbs that the earth puts forth."

²⁸⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 48 begins here.

²⁸⁶ Braude quotes more of the verse.

(Gen. 1:29). {[The Holy One, blessed be He,]}²⁸⁷ said, "Not one of you shall stretch forth his hand in theft of the property or the money of his peer; (you many only take) from ownerless property, like these grasses."}²⁸⁸ ²⁸⁹Rabbi Hiya taught in a beraita: that which is guarded in the garden is forbidden as robbery, but that which is not guarded in the garden is allowed (to be taken), since (that is not) robbery.

(The Ninth Commandment) **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **God said, 'Let us make man . . .'**

(Gen. 1:26). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Here, I have created for you a peer in my image; do not testify against your peer with false testimony."²⁹⁰ (The relation of the Ninth Commandment to Gen. 1:26 is that we should not give false testimony, because when we do we harm a creature created in God's image.)

(The Tenth Commandment) **You shall not covet** corresponds to (the biblical verse) **God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate,"** (Gen. 2:18). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I created a mate for you. Let each and every one of you cling to his mate. Let none of you"²⁹¹ covet the wife of his peer."

²⁸⁷ Variant: Friedmann emends the text and adds this.

²⁸⁸ Variant: This is only included in the ed. pr. and JTS variants.

²⁸⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 49 begins here.

²⁹⁰ Variants: JTS,

בריייתא לך חבריתך כדמותי ואת חבית ודמית לבי למי לא תשה יד על חברך
סהדי דשקר.

ed. pr.,

בריייתא לך חבריתך כדמותי ואת חבית ודמות לבי למי לא תסהיר על חברך
סהדו דשקר.

Casanata, Dropsie, . סהדו דשקר. בריית לך חבר לא תסהד על חברך סהדו דשקר.

Parma, . סהדו דשקר. ברייתך חבר ליה תסהד על חברך סהדו דשקר.

Budapest 1b, . בראתך בדמותי הא תסחיד סהדותא דשיקרא ותבטל דמותי.

²⁹¹ Variants: ed. pr., לא יחמוד חד מנכון Dropsie, לא תחמוד מנכון, and Parma, לא (תחמוד) [יחמוד גבר] מנכון, Friedmann, לא תחמוד חד מנכון.

Commentary 10

In relating each of the Ten Commandments to an early statement that God made in creating the world, we can infer from the text that for the Rabbis the Ten Commandments are so integral a part of the fabric of the world, that they were interwoven in the very first acts of creation. The originators of this midrash connect a commandment with a creative statement of God by means of quoting a prophet, placing words in God's mouth, and quoting a *beraita*.

For instance in this midrash the Tenth Commandment, **You shall not covet**, was anticipated by the verse, **God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate,"** (Gen. 2:18). The midrash makes the connection by placing the words of the following prohibition in God's mouth, "I created a mate for you. Let each and every one of you cling to his mate. Let not one of you covet the wife of his peer."

This midrash connects the Sixth Commandment, **You shall not murder**, with the verse, **Then God said, "Let the waters bring forth"** (Gen. 1:20) by quoting the verse, **You have made man like the fish of the sea,** (Habakkuk 1:14) which uses fish as a metaphor for human beings. The midrash places the following words into God's mouth, "Do not be like those fish among which the bigger ones swallow the smaller ones." So when God said, **"Let the waters bring forth,"** hidden behind that verse is the commandment, **You shall not murder**. We learn this from juxtaposing a verse from Habakkuk with the verse from Genesis.

Various images are implicit in this midrash. For instance, the Rabbis view God as light, as matchmaker, as the source of living waters, while idols are the equivalent of empty cisterns (useless, if one is dying of thirst). The midrash demonstrates that water honored God, so certainly if water is capable of honoring God, we human beings are capable and thus should honor God as well. However little one has to eat on the Sabbath, it will suffice if eaten with the right intention. Parents are just as important to a person as the sun and

moon are to the earth. We are different from the other animals in that unlike animals we do not need to murder each other in order to live. Unprotected natural resources may be shared by all, but those protected are not to be taken without permission. When one gives false testimony against his neighbor, not only does he harm the neighbor, but he also offends God, for every human being bears the image of God.

Section 11

²⁹²The Ten Commandments correspond to (the lessons taught by) the Ten Plagues which the Holy One, blessed be He, brought against the Egyptians in Egypt.

(The First Commandment) **I am Adonai, your God** is paired with (the lesson of the first) plague: **Blood. He . . . turned their rivers into blood** (Psalm 78:44). Do not talk like Pharaoh who said, **My river is mine own, and I have made myself** (Ezek. 29:3). Say not: I have made myself.

(The Second Commandment) **You shall have no other gods** is paired with (the lesson of the second) plague:²⁹³ **Frogs**, who went into the ovens at their hottest²⁹⁴ The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "The frogs accorded me Honor, but you do not accord Me honor.

(The Third Commandment) **You shall not take the name of Adonai, your God, in vain** is paired with (the third) plague: **Lice**. For the Holy One, blessed be He, caused them (the lice) to take an oath that they would not come up (upon the earth, when the Egyptian magicians commanded them to).²⁹⁵

²⁹² Ulmer's paragraph 50 begins here.

²⁹³ Variants: Friedmann emends text to read, **כנגד [מכת] צפרדעים** This emendation is supported by the Budapest variant.

²⁹⁴ Variants: the ed. pr. and JTS variants include, **עלו בתנורים חומם** "who went into the ovens at their hottest." The Budapest variant:

שמסרן את עצמן לכיבשן של אש על קדושת שמו של הקבה "who submitted themselves to the burning of the fire for the sake of the sanctity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He."

²⁹⁵ Variants: All the manuscripts begin, **לא תשא מכת כינים**, but then explanation of the connection between the Third Commandment and the third plague varies. Friedmann, **שהשביעם הקב"ה עלו**.

(The Fourth Commandment) **Remember the Sabbath day** is paired with (the fourth) plague: **swarming insects**. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Do not mix or treat a weekday and the Sabbath day as though they were the same."

(The Fifth Commandment) **Honor your father and your mother** is paired with (the fifth) plague: **דבר כבד מאד A Severe pestilence** (a disease that killed the livestock). As it is written, **that your days may be long** (Exod. 20:12).

(The Sixth Commandment) **You shall not murder** is paired with (the sixth) plague: **Boils**. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Be not a murderer - the blood shed by the victim will break out on the body of the murderer."²⁹⁶

(The Seventh Commandment)²⁹⁷ **You shall not commit adultery** is paired with (the seventh) plague: **Hail**. **So there was hail and fire flashing up amidst the hail** (Exod. 9:24). Scripture says, **Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? . . . It is the same with one who sleeps with his fellow's wife** (Prov. 6:27-29).

(The Eighth Commandment) **You shall not steal** is paired with (the eighth) plague: **ארבה Locusts**. (Of locusts) it is written, **They enter in at the windows as a thief** (Joel 2:9).

(The Ninth Commandment) **You shall not bear false witness** is paired with (the ninth) plague: **Darkness**. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "If your testimony is not as clear to you as the light, do not give it."

(The Tenth Commandment) **You shall not covet** is paired with (the tenth) plague: **the Killing of the First Born**. For the Egyptians were so steeped in harlotry

Ed. pr., **שהשביעים הקב"ה יעלו**. JTS, **שהשביעים הקב"ה יעלו**.

Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata read, **שהשביעין הקב"ה יעלו**. The Budapest manuscript is in agreement with Parma, Dropsie, and Casanata, but Budapest adds the following explanation,

שנ' ויעשו כן וחרטומים גר' ואתה איך תישבע בשמי לשקר. See commentary below.

²⁹⁶ See Braude, p. 447, footnote 110 "That is, the murderer will be stricken with boils. According to R. Nehemiah, the mark of Cain was boils or leprosy. See Gen. Rabbah 22:12.

²⁹⁷ Ulmer's paragraph 51 begins here.

that all of them were found to be first-born, (that is, the several sons of one mother had different fathers).²⁹⁸

Commentary 11

In this section, the Rabbis teach that inherent in each of the ten plagues is a lesson associated with one of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments correspond numerically with the ten plagues, so that the First Commandment corresponds with the first plague, the Second Commandment corresponds with the second plague, etc.

The first plague, **blood**, was intended, according to this midrash, as a rebuke toward Pharaoh who considered himself like a God as the following verse teaches, **My river is mine own, and I have made myself** (Ezek. 29:3). The First Commandment then serves as reminder to us, that as great as we feel we are, God is Supreme.

According to an earlier rabbinic tradition, the **frogs** honored God by submitting themselves to the heat of the ovens. This tradition is cited explicitly in the Budapest manuscript which states, **עצמן לכיבשן של אש על קדושת שמו של הקבה** שמסרן את "who submitted themselves to the burning of the fire for the sake of the sanctity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He." So if lowly frogs can show honor to God, then certainly we human beings can as well. What is implicit in this midrash is that one can not honor God if he displays any form of idolatry.

According to the biblical text (Exod. 8:13-15) God brought the third plague, **lice**, upon the Egyptians by turning the dust into **lice**. In the Friedmann, JTS documents, and the first printed edition the **lice** are praised for keeping God's oath - that is God commanded them to appear on the earth and they did. In the Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma

²⁹⁸ Note: The Ten Commandments correspond their respective numbered plague, so that the First Commandment corresponds to the first plague, the Second Commandment corresponds to the second plague, etc.

manuscripts, the lice are praised for not disobeying God, even when the Egyptian magicians tried to make the lice appear, they did not. Thus the role of the lice is parallel to the role of the frogs; in each case the lowly frogs and lowly lice abided by God's oath, certainly then the Israelites should be able to keep God's oath as well. This is an example of an a priori argument. It is also possible that we can infer from the text that even the Egyptian magicians were forced to acknowledge God's sovereignty, so certainly the Israelites should be able to recognize God's sovereignty as well. The text has become corrupted; it is difficult to determine which came first - the version with לא עלו or the version with עלו.

The Rabbis make a word play with the Hebrew word ערב which in the biblical context refers to swarming insects or beasts, or also meaning, "confusion." The Rabbis read the word which describes the fourth plague as meaning mixture. Thus the fourth plague as read by these Rabbis, implicitly refers to the Fourth Commandment, **Remember the Sabbath** (in order for one to keep the Fourth Commandment, one must not mix-up the Sabbath with the rest of the days of the week).

It appears that the Rabbis consider the fifth plague, a severe pestilence which ultimately causes death, as the opposite or inverse of the reward, **that your days may be long** (Exod. 20:12) for keeping the Fifth Commandment, **Honor your father and your mother**. Thus implicit in the fifth plague is a reminder of what will happen when one does not honor his parents.

It appears that organizer of this midrash connected the Sixth Commandment, **You shall not murder**, with the sixth plague, boils, through an already established midrashic tradition which attempts to establish that the mark of Cain (the first murderer in the Bible) was boils. Thus if this rabbinic tradition was known by the audience for whom this midrash was intended, they would understand that implicit in the sixth plague is a reminder of the prohibition of murder. It is also possible that the Rabbis view the boils as poetic

justice for murder, tit for tat. It appears that the Rabbis appear to read the phrase, **fire in his bosom** (Prov. 6:27) as a reference to the **fire flashing in it** from the account in Exodus of the seventh plague. The proximity of the reference to **one who sleeps with his fellow's wife** and **the fire in his bosom**, which as the Rabbis have already pointed out is a referent to the fiery **hail**, enables the Rabbis to make the connection between the Seventh Commandment and the seventh plague. The Rabbis do not explicitly state how **They enter in at the windows of a thief** (Joel 2:9) connects **locusts** with the Eighth Commandment, **You shall not steal**. Chapter 2 of Joel is a depiction of a plague of locusts as representing God's judgment. "They" of Joel 2:9 are the locusts. The Rabbis connect the eighth commandment with the eighth plague by the use of metaphor. With the Ninth Commandment and plague the Rabbis make an analogy comparing "light" to "enlightenment" and "darkness" to "ignorance" or "concealment." They argue that implicit in the ninth plague, **darkness** is a reference to the Ninth Commandment. One should make sure his testimony is as clear as light, otherwise he will be breaking the Ninth Commandment, **You shall not bear false witness**. Again the Rabbis seem to draw on an already established midrashic tradition in associating the Tenth Commandment, **You shall not covet** with the tenth plague, **the Killing of the First Born**.

Section 12a

[אנכי ה']²⁹⁹

³⁰⁰Rabbi Jonah (taught) in the name of Rav Levi: The world was created with the letter כ. Just as the letter כ is closed on every (other) side open on one side only (the forward side, pointing to what comes after it), just so we are not permitted to (attempt) to find an explanation for what is above (i.e. what happens in the heavens), what is below

²⁹⁹ Friedmann inserted this into his translation.

³⁰⁰ Ulmer's paragraph 52 begins here.

(i.e. what happens in Gehenna), what came before, only what comes later (Friedmann: and what comes afterwards).

Bar Kapara learned this lesson from the following verse: **You have but to inquire about bygone ages that came before you, ever since God created man on earth** (Deut. 4:32). Does this mean only from the sixth day of creation (the day humans were created) onwards (we can inquire into origins but not before them)? Scripture says, "From the first days." After Scripture makes a general inclusive statement, it then limits what we may investigate from the sixth day onwards. Just as the sixth day is special because it is part of the six days of creation, so you may only investigate what comes out of the sixth day. That is to say, you are not allowed to investigate anything beyond (i.e., before) the sixth day. Is it possible to know what is above the sky and what is below the depths of the earth? No, Scripture says, **from one end of heaven to the other** (Deut. 4:32).³⁰¹ (You are confined to the empirical world.) You can only investigate this world in which you stand.

³⁰²Rabbi Yudan, the son of Pazi, expounded the creation (of the world) in accordance with that which Bar Kapara taught: Just as the **ב** has an extension above it and an extension behind it, so when one asks the **ב**, "Who is your maker?", it indicates with the extension above, "He who is above us made me." And what is His name (your maker's name)? It indicates them with the extension behind it, "Adonai is His name." (**א** is the letter behind **ב** and **א** is the first letter of Adonai.)

³⁰³Another interpretation: Why was the world created with the letter **ב**? Because it is the language of blessing (**ב** is the first letter of the word **ברכה**), while **א** is the language of curse (**א** is the first letter in the word **ארירה**). The Holy One, blessed be

³⁰¹ This is the continuation of the verse quoted above.

³⁰² Ulmer's paragraph 53 begins here.

He, said, "Let there be no pretext for anyone to say, 'How can the world stand when it was created with the language of a curse?' Rather I will create it with the letter ב, with the language of blessing, and hope that it will endure!" Oh that it will remain in blessing!"

Rabbi Abahu (taught) in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: With two letters the two worlds were created: this world and the world to come - with a י and a ה. What is the scriptural proof for this? כִּי בִיהַ יְהוָה צוּר עוֹלָמִים **For in Yah Adonai you have an everlasting Rock** (Isaiah 26:4 read midrashically as, "for with Y.H. did God fashion (צִיר) worlds"). We still do not know which world was created with the letter י and which world was created with the letter ה. But from the verse, **Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created** (Gen. 2:4), when we separate the last word, בְּהִבְרָא into two words it reads) בְּרָאָה, "with the letter ה He created them, [so we learn that] ³⁰⁴This world was created with the letter ה. And thus the world to come was created with the letter י. The י has an extension from the bottom which hints that all who die go toward Gehenom and the extension above hints that in the future they will arise (again): **Adonai deals death and gives life, Casts down into Sheol and raises up** (I Sam. 2:6). Just as the letter ה is open to all sides, it hints that those who return in repentance have an open entrance (back to God). The bent י hints that all the people who inhabit the world will be bent³⁰⁵ as it is written, **Why have all faces turned pale** (Jer. 30:6) (Note the Hebrew word וְנִהְפְּכוּ which in the biblical context means turned pale, can also mean "to be bent"). When David perceived this, he began to praise the Holy One, blessed be He, with these two letters, the letter י and the letter ה, as it is

³⁰³ Ulmer's paragraph 54 begins here.

³⁰⁴ Ulmer's paragraph 55 begins here.

written, **Hallelu-yah. Praise God in His Holiness . . . Let all that breathes praise Adonai. Hallelu-yah** (Psalm 150:1-6).

³⁰⁶Rav Eliezer, the son of Abinah (taught) in the name of Rabbi Aha: During all those twenty-six generations (between the creation of the world and the giving of the Torah) (the letter) **א** called out in complaint before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying before Him, "Master of the universe, I am the first of all the letters, yet You did not create your world with me, but with (the letter) **ב**. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Go out (from here)! All of the world (will be) yours. For all of the world and its fullness were created only for the sake of Torah, as it is written, **As surely as I have established My covenant with day and night - the laws of heaven and earth** (Jer. 33:25). ³⁰⁷In the near future I will give Torah to My children, and I will begin (My address to them) with you, (**א**) - **אֲנֹכִי I am Adonai, your God.**"

Commentary 12a

In many ways most of this section does not add to the flow of the entire piska. It begins with a compilation of various *midrashim* about the significance of the letter **ב** which is the first letter of the Torah. The reason this material is found here is to explain why the whole Torah begins with a **ב**, while the Ten Commandments begins with the letter **א**. At the end of Section 12a we are given the reason that the Ten Commandments begins with the letter **א**, "in the near future I will give Torah to My children, and I will begin (My address to them) with you, (**א**) - **אֲנֹכִי I am Adonai, your God.**"

³⁰⁵ Variants: Friedmann emends text from **להיכנף** to **להיכפף** which is substantiated by the Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma variants.

³⁰⁶ Ulmer's paragraph 56 begins here.

³⁰⁷ Ulmer's paragraph 57 begins here.

Section 12b

[Another interpretation:]

Why (do the Ten Commandments begin) with the (letter) א?

Bar Husa taught: Because "Aleph" (the word) represents the number 1000 ("Elef"),
in³⁰⁸ דבר צוה לאלף דור **He commanded the word** (i.e., the Ten
Commandments) **to a thousand generations,**) (Psalm 105:8). (In the biblical context
the word אלף means one thousand, but the same letters also spell the name of letter א.)

³⁰⁹Rabbi Simlai taught: The world was (viewed) with great honor until the Torah
was given. (But) from the time when the Torah was given, it was as if, the world was
deemed worthless. How so? If you acquire a balance and place six (units of) weights on
one side and forty on the other side, which side would outweigh (the other)? Wouldn't the
(side with) forty outweigh (the side with) six? All the world was created in six days, as it
is written, **For in six days God made the heavens and the earth** (Exod. 20:11),
but the Torah was given in forty days (it took forty days to give the Torah), **And he**
(Moses) was there with Adonai for forty days and forty nights (Exod. 34:28).
And I stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights (Deut. 9:9).
Surely then forty (the number of days it took to give the Torah) outweighs six (the number
of days it took to create the earth).

³¹⁰Rabbi Eliezer taught in the name of Rav Berechiya: (Were it not for Torah) it (the
world) would become water³¹¹ as it is written,³¹² **Does one abandon cool water**

³⁰⁸ Variants: JTS, סימן ed. pr. סומך Parma and Vienna, סמור Casanata and Dropsie, סמך.

³⁰⁹ Ulmer's paragraph 58 begins here.

³¹⁰ Ulmer's paragraph 59 begins here.

³¹¹ Braude's translation reads, "[If it were not for Torah] the earth would turn into water: Should [the words of Torah] be abandoned by Israel, then [dissolution of the world into] strange, cold, flowing waters (Jer. 18:14)."

³¹² Variants: The Casanata, Dropsie, Parma, and Vienna manuscripts include the word or the abbreviation for, שנאמר.

flowing from afar? (Jer. 18:14 read midrashically as, If they (Israel) abandon it (Torah), (then the world will become) strange, cold, flowing water).

Rabbi Huna teaches in the name of Rabbi Aha: **Earth and all its inhabitants dissolve; it is I who keep the pillars firm** (Psalm 75:4). The earth would have melted away (or, “dissolved”) had Israel not stood before Mount Sinai and said, “**All that Adonai has said, we will do and obey**” (Exod. 24:7). The earth would have returned to chaos³¹³, and who establishes (is the foundation of) the world? **I keep the pillars firm** because of the mentioning of the word “**Anochi**,” (which begins the Ten Commandments and signifies Israel’s acceptance of them) “**I am the Lord your God**.”³¹⁴

Commentary 12b

The Ten Commandments begin with an “**א**” to signify that, **צוה לאלף דור** as **דבר** as “**He commanded the word to a thousand generations**” - (i.e., forever) (Psalm 105:8). So according to Bar Husa, Scriptures mandates that the Ten Commandments begin with the letter **א**. Rabbi Simlai provides an interesting comparison of the world and Revelation. The world took only seven days to make, but it took God forty days to reveal the Torah to Moses. Rabbi Simlai thus remarks just how incredible Revelation was.

“**Anochi**” - is a metonym for the Ten Commandments and Israel’s acceptance of them which thereby saved the world.

³¹³ Variants: The Casanata, Dropsie, Parma, and Vienna manuscripts include the word, **ובוהו**.

³¹⁴ Variants: The Casanata, Dropsie, Parma, and Vienna manuscripts all read,

בזכות אנכי תיכנתי עמודיה סלה in place of what is written in the ed. pr. and JTS manuscripts, **בזכות אנכי ה' אלקיך**.

Section 13

³¹⁵**Who brought you forth from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage**

Hananiah, the nephew of Rav Joshua, teaches: **וְהוֹצֵאתִיךָ**: it is written like this as if to say, you and I together went out from Egypt. (If we read the verb in the *hoofal* it could be translated, "who was taken out with you." Thus God, too, was redeemed.)

From the house of Bondage:

Rav Tanhum, the son of Hanilai, (taught) in the name of Rav Berechiya: Only Canaan (and not Israel) was cursed to be a slave, **And He said, "Cursed be Canaan; A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers,"** (Gen. 9:25). And from where in Scriptures do we know that all the family of Ham [besides Canaan] will also be called slaves? From here (in Scriptures it is deduced)³¹⁶, **from the land of Egypt from the house of slaves** (Exod. 20: 2).

³¹⁷His pupils asked Rabbi Yohanan, the son of Zakai, "And why does the slave pierce, out of all his organs, his ear?"

He answered them, "The ear which heard on Mount Sinai, **I am Adonai, your God, who brought you forth from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage**, yet he took upon himself the yoke of a human being; the ear that heard on Mount Sinai, **You shall have no other gods before Me**, yet he went and acquired another master! Therefore, let the ear come forward and be pierced, for it did not keep, observe, hold onto what it heard. In the past Israel were slaves to slaves. From now on and ever more they are slaves only to the Holy One, blessed be He. "For it is to Me that

³¹⁵ Ulmer's paragraph 60 begins here.

³¹⁶ Variants: Vienna 1a, Dropsie, Casanata, **בְּמִן הָאֶרֶץ**, whereas in the ed. pr. and JTS, **שְׁוֹאֲמֵר**.

³¹⁷ Ulmer's paragraph 61 begins here.

the Israelites are servants: they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt, **I am Adonai, your God.**"

Commentary 13

The final section of Piska 21 finishes the exegesis of the opening verse of the Ten Commandments. Hananiah teaches that the word, **הוֹצֵאתִיךָ** may emphasize that, you (the Israelites) and I (God) went out from Egypt, that God also was redeemed!

Rav Tanhum, the son of Hanilai, argues that Israelites are not meant to be enslaved to one another, which enables the redactor to insert here a midrash explaining why a slave has his ear pierced as a sign of his servitude. Rabbi Yohanan ben Zachai taught that it was the ear that heard at Sinai, **I am Adonai, your God, who brought you forth from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.** Nevertheless, the slave disregards the commandment, so the ear is the body part which is marked. The midrash thus teaches that one of the meanings of the First Commandments is that we serve no one other than God.

Summary and Analysis of Piska 22

Piska 22 is entitled, **תנינא**.³¹⁸ The Second Portion

Section 1a

(On the Third Commandment, **Do not talk up God's name idly**)

Petikhta verse, **I do! "Obey the king's orders - and don't rush into uttering an oath by God."** (JPS) (Eccl. 8:2)

אני פי-מלך שמר ועל דברת שבועת אלהים.

Rav Levi explains that **מלך** is God (the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He). For it is the mouth of God that said to us, **I am Adonai, your God**, and that is what I will observe/obey.³¹⁹ **ועל דברת** refers to the Commandment, **You shall have no other gods before Me**. **שבועת אלהים** refers to the Third Commandment, **You shall not take the name of Adonai, your God in vain**. The expression, **פי-מלך**, serves as a metonym for God and God's commandments.

Piska 22 Section 1b

"Should you not revere Me," says Adonai, "Should you not tremble before Me, Who set the sand as a boundary to the sea, As a limit for all time not to be transgressed?" (Jer. 5:22).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I have decreed a decree upon the sea, lest it should transgress My decree, and say, 'Behold, I shall rise up and flood the entire world, all of it.'"

³¹⁸ Variants: the manuscripts each have the same title, but the spellings vary.

³¹⁹ When Rav Levi says, **אשמור אותו** he means, "I will guard it (God's commandments)."

“God forbid it should do that, rather it kept My decree as it is written, **When I made breakers My limit for it, And set up its bar and doors, And said, ‘You may come so far and no farther; Here your surging waves will stop’**” (Job 38:10-11). And this is a matter of *Kal V'khomer*: Now if about the sea, (which) was created by itself, it is written, **Be ashamed, O Sidon! For the sea - this stronghold of the sea - declares, “I am as one who has never labored, never given birth, never raised youths or reared maidens!”** (Isaiah 23:4), observed My decree, cannot you (Israel) keep My decree?!³²⁰

Piska 22 Section 2a

The Third Commandment: **You shall not take the name of Adonai, your God, in vain.**

Rav Judah in the name of Rav Shimon looks at the letters that make up the word **לל**, the first word of the Second Commandment. He says the **ל** stands for **למד** “study” - and the **ל** stands for **אלף** “instruct” - that is study the words of Torah with the belief that you will teach what you study to others.

In another discussion about the word “**לא**” we learn that the letter **ל** signifies **אלף** thousands or 2000 words of Torah. Rabbi Simeon in the name of Rav Joshua, the son of Levi, says the letter **ל** (**ל-מ-ד**) stands next to the letter **נ**. A Roman matron asked Rav Yossi, the son of Hilfatah: Why does the letter **ל** stand taller than all the other letters teach? He said to her, the letter **ל** acts like a public crier - for a crier often stands on a high place and cries out so all can hear him. The letter **נ** stands for water. Thus with the letter **ל** the text warns, be careful in your studies and acquire for yourself life; the letter **נ**

³²⁰ Braude translates the last clause as a question, “you, will you not keep My decree?”

teaches do not cause the primal waters³²¹ that will flood the world to return which will ultimately cause death to you.³²² Ultimately this midrash teaches that teaching and studying have the potential to bring life to the world. Be careful, however, that you do not lead people astray by what you teach or what you forget to teach, for you have the powerful through teaching and studying to destroy the world as well.

Piska 22 Section 2b

The next paragraph begins with a question:

How many of the **דברות** utterances, did Israel hear from the mouth of God?

Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi, taught -- two utterances, but our Rabbis taught -- all the utterances.

After all the utterances it is written, **"You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."** (Exod. 20:16).³²³

How does Rabbi Joshua respond to this argument? He says, there is no earlier or later in the Bible (the sequence of the verses in the Torah does not necessarily indicate a temporal relationship).³²⁴

R. Azariah and R. Judah, the son of R. Simeon and R. Simeon, the son of R. Joshua ben Levi, cite the verse, **Moses commanded us Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob** (Deut. 33:4) as a proof-text that God spoke the first two commandments directly to the people. The numerical value of the letters of the Torah are 611. Thus the verse from Deut. indicates that Moses imparted 611 commandments to the

³²¹ Braude suggests that the water to which the midrash refers is contaminated or poisonous water. This reading does not go against the meaning of the text, but equally valid is the idea that the water refers to the water of primordial days which flooded the entire earth.

³²² Variants: This translation is according to the Dropsie manuscript. See also Braude p. 455-6.

³²³ Variant: ed. pr.. Or perhaps it says this after two commandments?

³²⁴ Friedmann asks the following question: Furthermore, why should we conclude that the above verse was spoken after the first two commandments were given and not after the third?

people of Israel. The total number of commandments is 613. So, who spoke the other two commandments? Who else but God?

Piska 22 Section 2c

Rabbi Ze'era compares the two verses,

לא תשא את-שם-ה' אלהיך לשוא

You shall not take the name of Adonai, your God in vain with

ולא-תשבעו בשמי לשקר **You shall not swear falsely by My name** (Lev.

19:12). He argues that the Leviticus verse prohibits people from swearing falsely by God's name. A fundamental rule for the Rabbis is that there are no redundancies in Torah, so Rabbi Ze'era concludes that the Third Commandment must teach something other than the prohibition of swearing falsely by God's name.

לא תשא את-שם-ה' אלהיך לשוא **You shall not bear** (take upon yourself) **the name** (or, authority) **of Adonai, your God in vain**, teaches that you should not take upon yourself **שררה**, "God's authority" as voiced in the Torah if you are not worthy of such authority. In other words, the Rabbis read the commandment as if it says, you should not "bear" the burden of God's name if you are not worthy.³²⁵ Rabbi Ze'era bases his interpretation on the words **לא תשא**, one should not bear God's authority in vain.

Rabbi Menaheman, taught that Rabbi Jacob in the name of R. Mani, cited the verse,

אל-תצא לרב מזהר **Be not vented rashly in a quarrel**, to teach the same

lesson. He points out that it is written in Scriptures, **לרב** but it should be written **לריב**.

The spelling of the word **לרב** can thus be read as "to authority," thus the entire phrase

³²⁵ Variants: Casanata, Dropsie, and Parma read, **סררה** instead of **שררה**.

can be read as **"do not rush to claim Torah's authority"** or **"do not be so quick to run after the authority a position bestows upon you."** Why not? Because as the verse concludes, **Think of what it will effect in the end, when your fellow puts you to shame** (Prov. 25:8). Later when your neighbors come and ask you questions, what answers would you have for them? If you pursue a position of authority, yet are not able to answer the questions asked of you, then how much shame will you bring upon yourself and the position.

Rabbi Menaheman in the name of Rabbi Tanhum the son of Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Mani in the name of Rabbi Yossi bar Zebida learns the same lesson as Rabbi Ze'era from a different verse, **He who commits adultery is devoid of sense** (Prov. 6:32). That is, anyone who takes upon himself authority in order to obtain benefit or enjoyment, is like an adulterer who enjoys a woman's body (uses a woman) that is not his own. **Only one who would destroy himself does such a thing** (Prov. 6:32). In the biblical context the two phrases are parallel to one another: One who commits adultery is devoid of sense and is on the same level as one who would kill himself. The Rabbis, however, read the phrase, **Only one who would destroy himself** in a much more positive light - only one who is prepared to die for the cause. One who is prepared to die like Moses who said to God, **"Erase me from the record which You have written,"** (Exod. 32:32) or like Joshua who said before God, **"against me,"** (Josh 7:8) or like David, who said, **"I alone am guilty . . . let Your hand fall upon me and my father's house, and let not Your people be plagued!"** (I Chronicles 21:17).

Thus in three different ways, the Rabbis understand the Third Commandment as warning people from running after positions of authority. A leader must be worthy, must not run after power but earn it, and must be ready to give up his life for the cause or people he represents. In summarizing the above argument, Rabbi Abahu taught: God said, **"I am called holy, and (when you take on Torah's authority) you too may be called holy. (But take care) for if you do not have all the attributes, qualities that I have, you may not take on**

such authority. Rabbi Abahu emphasizes the power of the authority of the Torah, but also warns to be careful with how you wield such power.

Piska 22 Section 3a

Rabbi Bebai compares the two verses,

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹא You shall not take the name of

Adonai, your God in vain with **וְלֹא־תִשְׁבַּעוּ בִשְׁמִי לְשָׁקֶר** You shall not swear falsely by My name (Lev. 19:12). Like Rabbi Ze'era he understands the Leviticus verse as prohibiting people from swearing falsely by God's name. Therefore Rabbi Bebai teaches that the Third Commandment must teach something other than the prohibition of swearing falsely by God's name.

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹא You shall not take the name of **Adonai, your God in vain**, teaches that you should not lay *t'fillin* and wrap yourself in a *tallit* and then go off and commit a transgression. Rabbi Bebai emphasizes the verb **לֹא תִשָּׂא**, you shall not bare that which contains God's name (like *t'fillin* or a *tallit*) in such a manner that would cause people to think that you are taking God's name in vain.

Rabbi Yanai taught: wearing *t'fillin* requires a clean body. Why didn't the Israelites keep them on all the time? Because of the swindlers as is evident from the experience of a certain man who was carrying his money on a Friday evening. He happened upon a synagogue. He found there a man who was still wearing *t'fillin* on his head (some say this was a proselyte). The man carrying the money said to himself: should I not feel free to leave my money with this person who wears upon himself the proof of his fear of God? Thereupon he left his money in trust with the person wearing the *t'fillin*. But at the end of the Sabbath, when he came for his money, the other denied the transaction. The first man said: "It was not you that I believed, but the holy Name that was on your head."

The parable continues with the man putting on his *tallit* and praying to God. When he fell asleep, Elijah appeared to him in a dream. Elijah tells the man to go the wife of the man who wore his *t'fillin* all day and tell her the secret password - "on Passover we eat leaven, and on the Yom Kippur, you know what³²⁶." The wife recognized the password, so she complied with his request and brought him the money that her husband had stolen from the man. When the husband returned and he found out what happened, he began beating her. When she asked him why he was beating her, since she only gave away the money when she heard the agreed-upon password, he exclaimed, "Since we have been unmasked, let us go back to the ways of our ancestors." (In other words, since people know that we are unethical, is it worth while pretending to be pious. The parable ends with the line, "Hence there is good reason for saying: Do not trust a proselyte³²⁷ for twenty-two generations."

Commentary Piska 22 Section 3a

This parable seems to teach a number of lessons. One should not trust a person solely by what he wears. Just because someone lays *t'fillin* and wears a *tallit* does not make that person trustworthy. Furthermore, hyper piety can mask perversity. On one level the parable warns us from swindlers who hide behind the garb of religion and piety. On another level the parable warns specifically against the false proselyte. The Rabbis seem to say here, be suspicious of one who converts for the money or prestige. The last line of the midrash, "Do not trust a proselyte for twenty-two generations," blatantly attacks the false proselyte, but even if it could be shown that this line was inserted later, there are other subtle attacks on the proselyte in the text of the midrash, for example, in the password that the man and his wife had agreed upon.

³²⁶ probably a euphemism for pork.

³²⁷ The Hebrew word is גֵּר, which can be translated as either "sojourner" or "proselyte."

Modern Application

On a side note, this parable has great potential to be used in combating the efforts of so-called “Jews for Jesus” groups.

Piska 22 Section 3b

An anecdote about the use of *t'fillin* appears. It was said about Rabbi Yannai that he would wear his *t'fillin* for three straight days upon recovering from illness. He argued that illness washes away all impurities. He cites as his proof-text the verse, **He who forgives all your sins, heals all your diseases** (Ps. 103:3).

Commentary Piska 22 Section 3b

Braude suggests that Rabbi Yannai interprets the word תחלוּאִיכִי to mean iniquities from the root “hl'h” instead of “disease,” from the root חלה.³²⁸ I rather suggest that Rabbi Yannai just reads the verse in reverse order. **“He who heals your diseases, forgives your sins.”** The fact that he has recovered from sickness, means that God healed him and thus forgave his sins. This is how Rabbi Yannai can justify that he is pure enough to wear *t'fillin* all day.

Piska 22 Section 3c

Another personal anecdote regarding the use of *t'fillin* is given - this time it involves Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and his disciple Rabbi Eliezer. Evidently Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai never removed his *t'fillin* in winter or summer, and his disciple Rabbi Eliezer conducted himself in the same way. In the winter Rabbi Yohanan would wear the *t'fillin* both on his arm and head all day, but in the summer he would wear only the *t'fillin* on his

³²⁸ Braude p. 460, footnote 23.

arm.³²⁹ When Rabbi Yohanan would bathe, as soon as he got to the keeper of the clothes at the bathhouse, he would remove his *t'fillin*; and according to Rabbi Isaac, by the time he had reached the change-house, he would have put them on again. As he went up from the bath, his disciples would at once give him his *t'fillin*. How could this be, for wasn't he forbidden to take the *t'fillin* since he was naked? Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba explained that before leaving the bath chamber, Rabbi Yohanan used to put on an undergarment, hence he was not really naked. Whenever his disciples delayed giving him his *t'fillin*, he would give the following tale:

As the Israelites traveled through the wilderness they took with them two arks. In one ark was housed the One who lives forever and in the other were Joseph's bones. The nations of the world would ask Israel about the significance of these arks. Israel would answer that in one ark are the remains of a dead person and in the other is the One who lives forever. The nations of the world did not understand why the ark with the dead person should accompany the ark with the One who lives forever. The answer was that the dead man in the ark was the one who observed all the commandments that are written and kept in the other ark.

Rabbi Hiyya explained that Rabbi Yohanan told this tale to impart a bit of Torah, and the reason he told this same story over and over was that he used it as a reprimand to his disciples. "Joseph merited kingship only because he observed the commandments of the Holy One, blessed be He, and you would have me dispense with His commandments!"³³⁰

Piska 22 Section 3d

³²⁹ Braude gives two historical reasons why this might have been the case. See p. 460, footnote 24.

³³⁰ Variant: Casanata reads, יוסף לא זכה למלוכה אלא על שקיים מצותיו של הבה ואתון בעיין מי בטלא מצותי מיני
Friedmann's text reads, בעיין בעייה instead of בעיין.

A whole discussion about the purpose and the rituals of wearing *t'fillin* follow. The blessings recited when laying and taking off *t'fillin* are given. A discussion continues about whether Exod. 13:10 can be used as the proof-text for the blessings. Some say the verse is the proof-text for the statute which ordains the celebration of Passover.

Rabbi Abbahu taught in the name of Rabbi Yohanan that wearing *t'fillin* at night violates a positive commandment. He cites Exod. 13:10 as his proof-text, emphasizing the day after day of the verse. A debate ensues whether or not Rabbi Abbahu actually wore *t'fillin* at night. Some say he was not really wearing them; others say that he meant that one could not put them on at night, but if he were already wearing them that would be okay. Others say the obligation does not take hold until the evening has passed into darkness.

Exod. 13:9 then is cited as the reason one should not wear *t'fillin* on the Sabbath and festivals. The discussion ends with the premise that it is possible to expound more than one verse in order to show the scriptural basis for a law.

Piska 22 Section 3e

A discussion follows about why women are exempt from the obligation of wearing *t'fillin*: **And you shall teach them to your sons** (Deut 11:19) with the emphasis on **"your sons."** Those who are obligated to study Torah are required to put on *t'fillin*, but those who are not required to study Torah are not required to wear *t'fillin*. Michal (the wife of Jonah) is mentioned as an example of women who did put on *t'fillin* without being rebuked. This objection is brushed aside.

All of the above material from 3b to 3e on *t'fillin* is an aside. *T'fillin* is mentioned in the context of the discussion of the meaning of **לֹא תִשָּׂא**.

Piska 22 Section 4a

A different interpretation of the Third Commandment is presented: Taking an oath even when affirming something which is true is taking God's name in vain. The twenty-four councils in the south were supposedly destroyed because they affirmed by oath things that were true. Claiming by oath that an olive tree is an olive tree is given as an example of taking God's name in vain by affirming by oath something that is true. If, upon seeing it raining, one says, "Bring down, O God, much rain" he is also guilty of breaking the Third Commandment. A side comment is offered that "an oath is not administered to one who is suspected of swearing dishonest oaths, nor is an oath given to one who is eager to swear oaths."

A story about the life of Bar Telamyon is presented to affirm the idea that taking an oath which affirms the truth, even if said only in jest, is an example of taking God's name in vain. A man who had given Bar Telamyon one hundred denars came back to take the money back. Bar Telamyon claimed that he had already returned to the man what the man had deposited with him. The man asked Bar Telamyon to take an oath affirming that he had returned the money. Bar Telamyon took a cane, hollowed it out, put the hundred denar in it, and then used the cane as a walking stick. When he returned to the man, he handed to the man the cane and then pronounced the oath that he had returned the money to the man. The man, in his anger, threw the cane down. It broke, and the money spilt on to the floor.

Piska 22 Section 4b

The oath of Adonai shall be between them (Exod. 22:10) is cited in interpreting the Third Commandment. One should not make another swear an oath in denial of a false claim. When an oath is administered to a man, hides are brought before him and horns are sounded. The horns tell him that yesterday the hides were filled with bones and sinews, and now they are empty of everything; thus also when a man swears falsely to his neighbor, he will in the end go forth emptied of all his possessions. This

happens when a man swears falsely or when he swears in all sincerity to something which is true.

A story is told of a woman who went to knead dough at a neighbor's house. She had two denar with her which she set aside. Inadvertently the two denar were kneaded into the dough without her knowing it. When she returned home and could not find the money, she inquired of her neighbor about the money. The neighbor swore, "May I bury my son if I know anything about it." Her sins brought it about that she did indeed eventually bury her son. The woman returned to her neighbor with the assumption that had her neighbor really not known about the money that she would not have had to bury her son. The neighbor swore again, "May I bury my other son if I know anything about it." Later she buried her other son as well. The first woman returned to her neighbor to comfort her and brought over the same two loaves of bread. When they cut into the bread, the two denar fell out. The story ends with the following teaching, "Accordingly, it is said: Right or Wrong, do not enter [thoughtlessly] into an oath."

Piska 22 Section 5

I cause the oath to go forth, says the Lord of the hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that swears falsely by My name; and it shall abide in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof (Zech. 5:4). Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman taught that curse-carrying angels have no joints (hence they can not sit and abide anywhere) as indicated by the verse, **From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it (Job 1:7).** It is said of the curse which follows upon a false oath, **and it shall abide in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof (Zech. 5:4).** Rabbi Abba bar Kahana taught: Things which fire cannot destroy, a false oath can destroy. It is

in the power of fire to destroy timber, but surely not stones. Yet Scripture says, **shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof** (Zech. 5:4).

Piska 22 Section 6

Translation

It is taught: one who transgresses a negative commandment, the transgression not being an overt act, there is no punishment by flogging, with the exception of the following list: the substituting of another animal for the one already designated as a sacrifice, taking an oath by the word of God and not abiding by it, and cursing one's peer using the Divine name (Tosefta Makkor 4:). Rabbi Yohanan teaches in the name of Rabbi Yanai that here, **מימר**, substituting another animal for one already designated as a sacrifice, is not to be included among the exceptions, for his words (stating his intention to make the substitution) are an overt act.³³¹

And how do we know that anyone who makes an oath by God's name and does not abide by it is to be flogged? Rabbi Yohanan in the name of Rabbi Meir taught: The verse [that speaks of a man's taking God's name in vain] concludes, **that Adonai will not clear one** (Ex. 20:7). That is, it is the responsibility of the Beit Din below (on earth as opposed to a heavenly court) which sets punishment and thereby clears the innocent.

How do we know that if in cursing one's peer one uses the Divine name, he should be flogged? Rav Shimeon, the son of Lakish, [taught] in the name of Rav Joshua: **If you fail to observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching . . . to reverence this honored and awesome Name . . . then Adonai will inflict extraordinary plagues (or, "flogging")³³² upon you and your offspring** (Deut. 28:58-9).

The teaching of Rabbi Yohanan requires the deduction from the above verse in Deuteronomy made by Rav Shimeon, the son of Lakish. But the teaching of Rabbi

³³¹ See Braude, p. 468, footnote 51.

Shimeon, the son of Lakish, does not require that which is established by Rabbi Yohanan's expounding of the Exodus verse. In regard to the teaching about one who, despite warning, swears falsely and curses another using the Divine Name, according to Rabbi Yohanan, he is guilty of violating two commandments, but according to the teachings of Rabbi Shimeon, he is guilty of violating one and the same commandment.³³³

Why does Israel pray, but their prayers are not answered? R. Joshua, the son of Levi, teaches in the name of R. Phinehas, the son of Yair: because they did not know the secret of pronouncing the name of God. There are several verses to support his reply, **Assuredly, My people shall learn My name, assuredly [they shall learn] on that day, that I, the one who promised, am now at hand** (Isaiah 52:6). **And I will espouse you with faithfulness; then you shall be devoted to Adonai** (Hosea 2:22). **I will keep him safe, for he knows My name. When he calls on Me, I will answer him** (Psalm 91:14-15). For in this world Israel makes oaths and lies about them, but in the time to come, they will make oaths and keep them as it is written, **And swear, "As Adonai lives," in sincerity, justice and righteousness - nations shall bless themselves by you And praise themselves by you** (Jeremiah 4:2).

This a formulaire - a **בְּזֵמַתָּא** an eschalogical conclusion typical of Pesikta Rabbati: "in this world x but in the world to come, y."

³³² See Braude, p. 468, footnote 52.

³³³ See Braude, p. 469, footnote 54.

Summary and Analysis of Piska 23

Section 1

Structure

This section opens with an interpretation of the petikhta verse, **Your eyes saw my unformed limbs; they were all recorded in Your book; in due time they were formed to the very last one of them** (JPS) (Ps. 139:16). The verse is interpreted in a number of ways. **ימים יוצרו ולא אחד בהם** is read midrashically as meaning, "The deep were created; but one (special day = the Sabbath) was not among them i.e. the Sabbath day is distinctive. The word, **גלמי** which in its biblical context is usually translated as, "**My unformed limbs**" or "**My unformed substance**" here the Rabbis read as "**Adam's state of existence as a golem.**" The analysis then compares the **קריא** versus the **כתיב** reading. The analysis moves to the end of the verse with a debate over its meaning. The distinctive day dedicated to God is held by R. Levi to be Yom Kippur. Rabbi Yitzhak holds that it refers to the Sabbath day, which leads into a discussion of the Fourth Commandment, **Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy**. Jeremiah 10:8 is used as a proof-text to show the difference between how the nations of the world count the days of the week, compared to the Jews who center the calendar around the Sabbath and thus **Remember the Sabbath day**. Four different interpretations of the difference between **Remember the Sabbath day** as recorded in Exodus versus **Keep the Sabbath day** as recorded in Deuteronomy follow. In the first interpretation, a *mashal-nimshal* structure is used. In the second interpretation, one version of the commandments is addressed to the nations of the world, while the other is addressed solely to Israel. In the third interpretation, the two versions are also considered as

addressing two different audiences, but one audience are people at sea and the other is addressed to people on dry land. In the fourth interpretation the two commandments are read consecutively. One should remember that is keep the Sabbath in mind, during the week, and then take care to observe the Sabbath once the time has arrived. Two different personal anecdotes are given to demonstrate how one both remembers during the week and the observes the Sabbath fully once its proper time has arrived. An interpretation of the phrase, **Keep it holy**, is given. A verse in Ruth, **Wash yourself therefore, and anoint her, and put your clothes upon her**, is interpreted as indicating that Ruth needed to put on clean clothes for the Sabbath. This is not the *pashat* of the verse, nor does it go against the *pashat*.

Thematic content

We learn from the petikhta that the Sabbath is God's day and that it was ordained thus even before God created the world. Israel then is applauded for correctly keeping the calendar with Shabbat as the last day of the week. The other nations of the world are wrong when they do not consider the last day of the week as the Sabbath. In each of the four interpretations of the difference in wording of the commandment regarding Shabbat, the importance of the Sabbath is emphasized. The *mashal-nimshal* structure in which the king gives his son a flask and coin to take to the store is quite poignant. The boy loses the coin and breaks the flask, but the king gives the boy another chance. This time, however, the king pulled his son's ear and plucked his hair and reminded him, "Take care that you do not lose these as you lost the others." In a similar way, God gives the commandments again to Israel, but this time the wording is harsher, when God says, "**Keep.**" God's ability to forgive and give Israel a second chance is quite moving. Also this entire section emphasizes the importance or centrality that the Sabbath should have in our lives. When it is not the Sabbath we should **remember** and reflect upon it, and when it is the Sabbath we should take care to **keep the Sabbath**. As Rabbi Abbahu teaches, if in the middle of the

week one who is eating inferior dates is given superior ones, then he should set them aside for the Sabbath.

The Rabbis define the phrase, "keep it holy," as meaning, keep the Sabbath distinct from the other days. One should have separate clothes reserved for the Sabbath. At the very least, if you cannot afford a different set of clothes, then some change in your attire is mandated.

Piska 23 Section 2

Structure

With their exegesis of the verse, **Six days shall you labor and do all your work and the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord your God**, the Rabbis define that part of the week that is reserved for God and that part which can be used for themselves. Normally, a king demands that his servants devote most days of the week to his work - but God only asks Israel to devote one day of the week to Him. Added emphasis is placed on the letter ׀ which connects the two phrases.³³⁴ The ׀ alludes to the additional hour at the end of the sixth day that one adds to the Sabbath. Various accounts of the activities of different Rabbis are given as to whether or not the time of the beginning and ending of the Sabbath may be altered. It is interesting to note that neither biblical verses or baraitot are cited on either side of the arguments; only accounts of different rabbis are cited. The section concludes with an aside which seems to flow naturally out of the previous argument about whether or not one must say the evening prayers at night.

Thematic Content

Israel's special relationship with God is emphasized. God only requires that one of seven days be devoted to Him. The second point can be summed up with the statement, "time can be added to the sacred by taking it away from the secular." Thus different Rabbis

³³⁴ JPS translates the letter ׀ here as "but."

found it possible in their own practice to recite the Sabbath prayers an hour earlier than the established time.

Modern Applications

The following statement attributed to Rabbi Judah gives justification for reciting havdallah even before three stars appear. "Whoever wishes to recite the post-Sabbath evening prayer may do so while it is yet day."

Piska 23 Section 3

Structure

The phrase, "a Sabbath to Adonai your God," is interpreted in this section. The word שבת is read as "**a rest**," and the rest of the section attempts to define what it means to rest. The prefix ל is also examined and given a meaning different from the normal biblical context. For instance, Rabbi Eliezer in the name of Rabbi Meir rereads the phrase as, "**Rest like your God.**" Again stories about the personal lives and practices of different rabbis serve as the only prooftexts for the Rabbis. The final account is more of a fairy tale which describes the reward a pious man receives for proper rest on the Sabbath.

Thematic Content

The phrase teaches that just as God rested, we should rest on the Sabbath. One way God rested was by not speaking, so we should abstain from unnecessary speech or speech about every day kinds of matters. Another way to rest is to rest even from the thought of labor.

Modern Applications

Certainly many people work hard and take their work home with them. This section can be cited as suggesting possible ways of fully observing and getting the most out of Shabbat.

Piska 23 Section 4

Structure

In expounding upon the verse, **you shall not do any work - you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements**, the Rabbis concentrate on the reference to **לגר** the **stranger who is within your settlements**. Here the Rabbis read the word **לגר** with the rabbinical meaning of "proselyte." They use the word as a jumping off point to a discussion of circumcision. Their reasoning may have been that they inferred that a proselyte who is within their midst must have been circumcised. Later in the midrash, Rabbi Eliezer reads the phrase, **and keep My covenant**, (Exod. 19:5) which appears in the text before the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20) as referring specifically to Shabbat and circumcision both of which are later associated as "signs of the covenant." The body of this section contains the interchange of three non-Jewish characters who ask questions or engage different Rabbis in debate over circumcision. A non-Jewish sage engages Rabbi Judah in a debate over circumcision, Aquilas, the Proselyte, presents Rabbi Eliezer with a question, and a Roman lady asks Rabbi Yossi, the son of Rabbi Halafta a different question.

Thematic Content

The Rabbis address why something as important as circumcision is not explicitly mentioned in the Ten Commandments. A non-Jewish sage inquires if circumcision were so important, why did God not create Adam already circumcised. Rabbi Judah responds to the question (in good Jewish fashion) with another question. Why should a man cut the hair from his head (which he had at birth) but later let the hair of his beard (which develops not until the boy reaches adolescence) grow? Rabbi Judah responds to the non-Jewish sage's remarks with sarcasm. He also gives a serious answer, when he points out that everything created during the six days of creation needs finishing. We can infer from

Rabbi Judah's response that to him, circumcision is one way in which we help complete a male. In other words, when a father circumcises his son, he acts as God's partner in the process of creation.

The Rabbis teach that even though circumcision is not specifically mentioned in the Ten Commandments it was included implicitly within the Fourth Commandment with the reference to the "proselyte." The fact that the proselyte has been circumcised is the reason he too must keep the Sabbath. Additionally just prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments as the Israelites stood at Sinai, God said, **and keep My covenant** (Exod. 19:5) which included the commandment of circumcision.

Modern Application

Any of the vignettes can be used in discussions of circumcision. Rabbi Judah's statement that everything that was created during the six days of creation, needs finishing - mustard seeds need sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and even man needs finishing - is just as powerful a statement in our day as it was 2000 years ago in Rabbi Judah's day.

Piska 23 Section 5

Structure

The Rabbis divide the verse, **For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day**, into three parts which they expound separately. In all three parts a scriptural verse from Prophets or Writings is cited to help explain the meaning of above verse from the Fourth Commandment. **For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth**, is contrasted with Psalm 33:6 which indicates that with only one word did God create the heavens. The reason it is stated in the text that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, is to teach the wicked what they will endure later for working six days of the week to destroy the earth

that took God six days to create, and to teach the righteous of the reward they will received for working six days to maintain the world which it took six days to create.

Next the Rabbis point out what may appear as a redundancy, when the text states, **heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them**. The earth, after all, includes the sea. From the word "sea" the rabbis infer the lesson that all the creatures of the sea correspond to the creatures of the dry land. Isaiah 40:28 teaches that God does not get weary, nevertheless, the Fourth Commandment says that God rested on the Seventh day. We know that man does get weary, so all the more important our resting on Shabbat. So the Rabbis teach by analogy that if God rests on the Sabbath, even though God never gets tired, then all the more reason that we frail and fragile people who certainly toil, need a day of rest.

Thematic Content

God's greatness is indicated by how easily He created the world. The Rabbis infer that if God, who does not get tired, rests on the Sabbath, then all the more reason that we frail human beings who do tire, need to rest on the Sabbath.

Piska 23 Section 6

Structure

The Rabbis read the word **וַיְקַדְּשׁוּ** in the phrase, **therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it**, as "**and He set it apart**." They list two ways that the Sabbath is set apart from the other days. Next the Rabbis read **וַיְקַדְּשׁוּ** as referring to kiddushin, marriage. Next the Rabbis address what it means that **God blessed the Sabbath day**. The Rabbis also read the two verbs "**ble**ss" and "**sanctify**" as defining the other. How does God sanctify the Sabbath? By giving it a blessing. The Rabbis also suggest that God sanctified the Sabbath through light. Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Rabbi Yossi, shares a personal miraculous experience. Midrashic material about how

God on the Sabbath lit up the darkness for Adam and Eve is cited. Additional interpretations are offered about how God blesses or hallows the Sabbath day. A mythical story appears in which a pious Jew is rewarded for his efforts at keeping the Sabbath. Another mythical story follows which describes just how a particular butcher acquired his wealth. A long confrontation between Tinneus Rufus and Rabbi Akiba over the merits of the Sabbath comes next. The confrontation includes a discussion about what it means that God works on the Sabbath. Remarkably, the father of Tinneus Rufus appears and explains that since he did not observe the Sabbath in this world, he is punished in heaven. A final parable, describing the actions of Rabbi Judah, demonstrates how the Sabbath adds a special taste to foods served on the Sabbath.

Piska 23 Section 7

Structure

The biblical character Abraham is compared with Jacob. Abraham is depicted as not observing the Sabbath, while Jacob does. Then what appears to be a disagreement between Rabbi Berekhiya in the name of Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba and Rabbi Haggai who spoke in the name of Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman is resolved by showing their different statements are directed at two different audiences. The section ends with a peroration of blessing - God grants the petitions of those who observe the Sabbath. This ending fits the pattern of concluding a chapter of Pesikta Rabbati with a messianic peroration and proof texts from Proverbs, Prophets and Psalms. Thus this particular midrash moves from a Toraitic text and ends with a psalm text.

Thematic Content

Shabbat is given for enjoyment by those who study or labor all week.

Piska 23/24

Section 1

Structure

Section 1 serves as a *petikhta* which leads to the text of the Fifth Commandment, **Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.** This section, like a *petikhta*, moves from a biblical verse to eventually ending up at the Scriptural verse that will be read in synagogues. One way this section does not mirror a classic *petikhta* is that it does not end with the Scriptural verse, but one more line follows the Scriptural verse. The *petikhta* verse, **All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, for they have heard the words You spoke** (Psalm 138:4) sets up the structure which follows. **The words You spoke**, are interpreted to be a verse from Leviticus and the Fifth Commandment. The *petikhta* then visits each of the first Four Commandments, ending with the Fifth Commandment.

Thematic Content

In this section the Rabbis elevate God by juxtaposing God with how an earthly king would act. God is praised for His mercy, the relatively small demands He places on his charges. If someone ate even a forkful of that which belonged to the king, he would be killed, argue the Rabbis, but when someone breaks a law of holiness, he can, according to Leviticus make restitution and not be killed. Furthermore, an offense against a mortal is considered more serious than one against God.

The midrash then walks us through each of the first Four Commandments demonstrating that what God commands is reasonable compared to what a mortal king

could demand from his charges. The Fifth Commandment, however, distinguishes God from a mortal king. A mortal king can require someone to renounce his relationship with his parents, but not God, who demands allegiance and honor be given to parents. In other words, the *petikhta* distinguishes God from any other mortal king.

Piska 23/24 Section 2

Structure

A two-part analysis of Proverbs 5:6 is given to explain the reward mentioned in the Fifth Commandment. **She does not chart a path of life; her course meanders for lack of knowledge (JPS). Lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life, her ways are moved that thou canst not know them (Braude). Lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life,** is interpreted by the Rabbis in this midrash as referring to “the precepts of the Torah.” Thus the Rabbis infer from the verse that one should not sit down and carefully ponder the precepts of the Torah, in order to pick out the one precept whose reward is most abundant, and then heed it alone. The second half of the verse is read as conditional on the first half of the verse. Should one ponder the precepts of Torah (with the intention of picking out the precepts of the Torah) then the ways of Torah are moved that you will not be able to know them (thus you will not be able to pick out the one precept whose reward is most abundant and heed it alone). A king *mashal-nimshal* structure is used to further explain the phrase, **her ways are moved that thou canst not know them.** There are, however, two commandments for which God did reveal their reward.

Deuteronomy 22:7 is cited as the least onerous commandment in the Torah, and is juxtaposed with the Fifth Commandment which the Rabbis here view as the most onerous commandment. Proverbs 30:17 is cited as providing the severe punishment of breaking the commandment. Proverbs 4:23 is cited as further evidence that in observing any of the commandments one has the potential of gaining eternal life.

Thematic Content

The Rabbis walk a fine line in their explanation of the reward mentioned specifically in relation to the Fifth Commandment. On one hand, the Rabbis emphasize the importance of the Fifth Commandment, as was the case in section 1. On the other hand, the rabbis do not want to emphasize the Fifth Commandment or the Ten Commandments as a whole to the exclusion of the other commandments contained in the Torah. The Rabbis thus give several different interpretations of the specific reward mentioned in the Fifth Commandment as one example of the numerous rewards people will gain from studying Torah and following its precepts.

Piska 23/24 Section 3

Structure

The wording of the Fifth Commandment, **Honor your father and your mother**, is compared to the wording of a similar commandment, **You shall each revere his mother and his father**, found within the Holiness Code. The Fifth Commandment commands that you must “**honor**” your parents, while the Leviticus text commands that you must “**revere**” your parents. In Exodus “father” is written before “mother,” while in Leviticus “mother” is written before “father.” One reason for the difference in the two texts according to the midrash, is the location of its oratory. The Leviticus text was originally spoken in the Tent of Meeting, where the other nations of the world could not hear its transmission.

The midrash defines what it means to **fear** and **honor** a parent. In an aside, the Rabbis discuss to what extent a son must obey his father. One account seems to contradict the teaching of the Rabbis. This is resolved by attaching special conditions to the situation as reported. The Rabbis also address whether the obligation to honor and revere one’s parents rests equally upon the daughter and the son. One more rabbinic exchange concludes the section.

Thematic Content

Fearing one's father includes not doing the following activities: sit or stand in one's father's place, or contradict one's father. Honoring one's father includes providing food and drink for one's father, bathing and anointing one's father, putting his sandals on for him, and escorting him in all his comings and goings. The Rabbis disagree with Huna bar Hiyya when they pronounce that one must honor one's father with one's own money and not with the father's money. The same obligation rests on a daughter as on a son in honoring and fearing one's parents. The only difference is that a married woman may not have the means with which to honor her father, but if she is a widow or has been divorced, then the obligation is completely the same for the son and daughter.

Editorial Placement

It would seem that the last exchange between Rabbi Yannai and Rabbi Jonathan would make more sense had it come immediately after Rabbi Abbahu's and Rabbi Yohanan's exchange. None of the variant manuscripts, however, support this change. The subject of the first exchange is about how far a father can obligate his son in matters of money. At one point Huna bar Hiyya is cited. In the second exchange Rabbi Jonathan explains how he shamed a son into providing for his father. At the conclusion of this paragraph, the midrash states that Rabbi Jonathan reversed himself; he used to say that the law was according to Huna bar Hiyya's interpretation, but now he agrees with the Amoraic Rabbis's interpretation. The paragraph explaining that the obligation to honor and revere one's parents rests equally on a son and a daughter, then would appear to be misplaced. It would make more sense for it to follow the two exchanges listed above.

Modern Application

Here is an example of equality of the sexes. Also the midrash helps define what it means to honor and fear one's parents.

Piska 23/24 Section 4

Structure

Rabbi Simeon ben Yokhai equates the duty of honoring and fearing one's parents to honoring and fearing God. Cursing one's parents is equally as bad as cursing God. With all three cases biblical verses are cited as prooftexts. Through logic the Rabbis also deduce that were it possible to strike a blow against God, it would be equally as repugnant as striking a blow at one's parents. Rabbi Judah bar Dudati, in analyzing Rabbi Simeon ben Yokhai's statement, concludes that the honor due to one's parents is not equal to but surpasses the honor due to God. He concentrates on the words **Honor the Lord with your wealth** (Prov. 3:9), in the first prooftext that Rabbi Simeon ben Yokhai chose. He specifies what it entails to honor the Lord with your wealth, and points out that these obligations apply only if you have possessions. Then he points out that concerning parents it is written, **Honor your father and your mother**. He infers from the lack of the phrase "**with your wealth**," that you must honor your parents even if that means begging at doorways. A number of accounts of how specific Rabbis honored their parents are given.

The rhetorical question, "How far is one to go in honoring one's father and mother," is a the transition into a series of vignettes which attempt to draw a line at just how far one must go to honor one's parents.

Thematic Content

In this section the Rabbis emphasize the importance of honoring parents. Honoring parents is as important, if not more important, than honoring even God. Honoring parents includes honoring them with your wealth, but is not limited by wealth. Two stories demonstrate that providing a parent with the best food will not ensure that a son or daughter has adequately observed the commandment to honor your father and your mother. How one treats his or her parents is equally if not more important than what he or she provides for them. In a series of vignettes various Rabbis are portrayed as honoring their mothers.

Rabbi Tarfon, for instance, stretches forth his hands upon which his mother walks because her shoe split apart. Despite the incredible outpourings of respect for their mothers, the various Rabbis are described as not yet coming halfway to showing the honor a son owes a parent. This leads two Rabbis to declare how grateful they are that their parents are no longer living, for if they were, they confess they do not know how they could possibly show enough honor due to their parents. Another story illustrates that even when one is berated by his parents in public, he must still show the honor due to his parents. Another story shows that even a heathen who honors his parents is rewarded by God. Contained within the magical story of the heathen who is rewarded by God is the lesson that one should not profit monetarily from honoring one's parents. The section concludes with the more general lesson, that even the heathen are rewarded for the deeds of mercy they perform.

Piska 23/24 Section 5

Structure

Rabbi Judah ben Betara reads **You guided me by Your counsel and led me toward honor** (Psalm 73:24) as referring to the honor with which Esau showed his father, Isaac. First, he reads **by Your counsel** as "with Your Torah." Then he reverses syntactical order of the second half of the verse to read, "**honor led me upward.**" Which honor? The honor that Esau showed Isaac by waiting on him in "the choicest garments," (Gen. 27:15).

Thematic Content

As great as Jacob was, and without question he was great, his rewards are delayed so God could reward Esau for the honor Esau displayed before his father, Isaac.

Editorial Placement

Three different rabbis are cited in different parts of this short section. It would appear that the writer of this section combined a few different rabbinic traditions regarding

Esau's honoring Isaac to form a new midrash. This also could be placed here as an illustration of the comment immediately preceding it, God "does not delay in this world the reward of those among the heathen who do deeds of mercy." In the biblical context, Esau is not such a bad guy, but the Rabbis portray him as a rogue. Nevertheless, they who have taught us to despise Esau, compliment him for honoring his father. In a way, this underscores the utmost importance the rabbis give to the duty of honoring your father and mother.

Piska 24

Section 1: The Sixth Commandment

Translation

You shall not murder (Ex. 20:13). (This means that) You shall not murder yourself. Make no blood cry out against thee.^{335 336}

A story about a woman who had two sons. One of them arose and killed his brother. What did she do? She lifted up his blood and put it in a flask. So long as the blood would bubble, she would know that he (the murderer) was alive. But when it would come to a rest, she would know he had died.³³⁷

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said, there are two gates to Sheol: one interior and one external. Anyone who has been killed without permission comes and spends (the rest of) his years in the external (part of Sheol). It is known from Scriptures,

³³⁵ See Jastrow רצח hithpa.

³³⁶ Variants: ed. pr.. צורח should be slightly emended to conform with MSS that read צורח cry out (the pun on צרה and רצח is surely intended).

³³⁷ Braude suggests that the purpose of this tale is to demonstrate why suicide is so bad; a suicide's blood can never be stilled, because a suicide is both victim and murderer. This is one possible meaning of תתרחצ as "don't commit suicide." Another preferable one, though is, "Don't murder because it is the equivalent of killing yourself, since the victim's blood will cry out against you until it is avenged."

I had thought:

I must depart in the middle of my days;

I have been consigned to the gates of Sheol

For the rest of my years.

(Isaiah 38:10).

The Holy One Blessed be He said, "Whoever kills one wrongs Me (or, withholds what is due Me) and makes me out (to be) a cruel being." Hence, (the commandment)

You shall not murder.

Commentary Piska 24 Section 1

The Rabbis interpret the words, **You shall not murder** (Ex. 20:13), to mean, "You shall not murder yourself," or "Make no blood cry out against you." This is an argument against suicide or more likely an injunction against murder, since the murderer in effect also murders himself, because he incurs blood guilt. This interpretation is explained through a story.

Even though there is not an explicit transition, it would appear that a second interpretation of the Sixth Commandment follows. "**Murder**" is defined as "killing without permission." Isaiah 38:10 is cited as the prooftext. In the biblical context this verse is introduced as the beginning of a poem that King Hezekiah recited after he recovered from the illness he had suffered. The rabbis, however, read the verse in the following way: when someone has been murdered, his soul, "departs in the middle of his days, for he has been consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of his years."

Again no explicit transition is made, yet it appears that a third interpretation of the Sixth Commandment is offered. The Rabbis argue that not only does a murderer harm another human being and that human being's family, but the murderer wrongs God as well. It is not explicitly stated here in this midrash, but what seems to be implicit in the words of the Rabbis is that when one murders, he murders someone who was made in the

image of God. A second point that the Rabbis do point out is that a murderer makes God appear cruel, since it appears as if God had countenanced this act of killing.

Piska 24 Section 2

The Seventh Commandment, **You shall not commit adultery.**

Structure

The Rabbis expound upon the meaning of this commandment by making two puns on the word, tin'af, "to commit adultery." Then they infer from a verse in Job that even one who visualizes himself in the act of adultery is guilty of committing adultery. Proverbs 7:9 is cited to demonstrate that an adulterer will be exposed because his features will appear clearly in the embryo which he has sired. Deuteronomy 32:18 is cited to demonstrate that adulterers weaken the power of the creator, God. The small size of the letter ך in the word תשי, which is also the first letter in God's name, comes to teach this lesson. Finally Isaiah 33 is cited as the prooftext for the great reward given to one who sees a naked woman, yet refrains from staring.

Piska 24 Section 3

The Eighth Commandment, **You shall not steal.**

Structure

The Rabbis cite Proverbs 30:7-9 to introduce a discussion about wealth and poverty, specifically whether wealth or poverty leads to a greater sin. The Proverbs verse on the surface implies that riches can lead one to be so full of himself that he denies God's existence, and poverty can lead one to steal and thus profane the name of God. A verse from Ezekiel is presented to teach that when two evils are presented, the second one is considered more worse than the other, which would seem to indicate that poverty compared

to wealth leads to greater sins. It then appears that the midrash moves to a sidebar in discussing the ban on high places to which the Ezekiel verse also alludes.

Thematic Content

A theme already discussed in Piska 21 is revisited here, that stealing leads to profaning God's name. One subject this passage addresses is how one reads text, with the specific case here being how one determines whether one sin is worse than another.

Piska 24 Section 4

The Ninth Commandment, You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Structure

The Rabbis use Isaiah 59:13, **Conceiving lies and uttering them from the heart**, as a prooftext that God did not create falsehood or lies. Humans conceive lies from their own hearts - i.e., the verse is deemed to place the origin of lies directly in the human heart. Thus lies and falsehoods originate with human beings and not with God.

Thematic Content

The Rabbis emphasize that falsehoods and lies are the result of human beings' actions and words; we cannot blame God for our lies.

Piska 24 Section 5

You shall not covet.

Structure

The Rabbis cite, **They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away. They defraud men of their homes, and people of their land** (Micah 2:2) as a prooftext that when Israel transgressed the commandment, **You shall not covet**, they brought about their exile. The Rabbis employ the hermeneutic principle,

מִידָה כְּנֹגֵד מִידָה, (tit for tat): Just as they took homes and land that didn't belong to them, so in punishment, were their homes and land taken by others. It is possible that the Rabbis read the two sentences as causative clauses. When they coveted fields - they seized them, when they coveted houses, they seized them. As a result of their actions of defrauding (innocent) men of their homes, they caused their people to lose their land.

Thematic Content

The Rabbis evoke deuteronomistic theology by accusing the Israelites of bringing about their own exile when they were covetous and acted upon their feelings. It is possible that this is just hyperbole - the Rabbis wish to emphasize the coveting can lead to serious consequences.

Piska 24 Section 6

One concluding sentence citation appears at the very end of the piska. **And all the people perceived the thunderings** (Exod. 20:15). Braude suggests that this verse is included here in order to conclude the chapter on a joyous note. It also brings the reader back to the Torah text. It also may be a way of reminding the reader that all of Israel perceived what happened on Sinai and thereby entered into the covenant with God. With this verse as the very concluding verse for this entire unit on *matan Torah*, the Rabbis could be elevating their own text. When Israel perceived all the thunderings at Sinai, they partook in Revelation, they received the Ten Commandments and all the oral traditions, some of which are contained within the words of Pesikta Rabbati.

Conclusions and Findings from Piskaot 20-24

Topics

Describing the scene of Revelation (Paints a Picture)

Mount Sinai

- (piska 21 section 1c) is described as the hills of spices (Song of Songs 8:14).
- (piska 21 section 4c) is not inherently holy but becomes holy due to God's presence there.

Where God was

(piska 21 section 4e) God descended alone

God descended upon the mountain so as to be able to speak face to face.

What was going on in heaven

Moses ascended to the heavens and had to physically bring the Torah down from the heavens.

While other beings exist in heaven, clearly **God is in control**, runs the place.

(piska 20 section 6a) Hadarniel backs off when he learns that Moses had God's permission to be in heaven.

(piska 20 section 6a) the angels do not know precisely where God dwells,
so the crowns they make go up on their own accord to God.

(piska 20 section 6a) the angels praise God.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) they transmitted to Moses cures, spells, or incantations

How did the Israelites appear at the time of Revelation?

(piska 21 section 6f) They received the Torah with exuberance.

(piska 20 section 7) Caused the righteous to faint, but God revived them.

(piska 21 section 7) The Commandments enticed the Israelites because they
did not seem so difficult to keep, but once Israel was enticed, God
provided harsher language.

What the Israelites actually heard

(piska 22 section 2b) discussion whether Israel heard all Ten

Commandments directly or just the first two commandments. It is
taught in the Torah that **Moses commanded us Torah, an
inheritance of the congregation of Jacob** (Deut. 33:4). The
numerical value for the word Torah is 611. We know that there are
613 total commandments in the Torah. Who else but God taught the
other two commandments?

How the earth reacted to Revelation

It was scared.

(piska 21 section 2a) The earth feared its own destruction

(piska 21 section 2d) When earth heard these words, the earth was calmed -
knew that the end of time had not arrived.

How the other nations of the world might have reacted to Revelation

Revelation is viewed as an awesome event. The nations of the world are depicted as worried and left out of the whole process. The best they can do is inquire of the gentile prophet Balaam, who is on the outside, trying his best to describe what is happening between the Israelites and God.

Moses must bring Torah out of heaven and down to earth

Kemuel, Hadarniel, Sandalphon, Rigyon, Gallizur

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) Yofiah - minister of Torah re-teaches Moses the Torah.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) God taught Moses the entire Torah in 40 days.

(piska 20 section 7) two ministering angels were assigned to each Israelite -
one to hold the heart and one to elevate the Israelite's neck so he can see God face to face.

Reason Torah belongs on earth and not in the heavens

Other Issues Revelation brings up

Why Moses destroyed the Ten Commandments

(piska 20 section 5b) The *nimshal* provides the gist for a most interesting explanation of why Moses shattered the sacred tablets he had just received from God. Moses wishes to protect the people. Usually the rabbis attribute Moses' anger at his people as the reason for his breaking the tablets, but here this *darshan* ascribes Moses' actions as springing forth out of his love and desire to protect the Israelites.

(piska 20 section 5c) The midrash then quotes again from the opening verse of the entire Piska. This could be another attempt at explaining why Moses destroyed the tablets. The rabbis teach that our actions are not wasted even if what we create is ultimately destroyed.

Why other nations did not accept the Torah

They don't want to be involved with all the nitty gritty details

(piska 21 section 1b inferred from discussion between Hadrian and Rabbi Joshua bar Hananiah).

Edomites - could not keep the Sixth Commandment

Ammonites or Moabites - could not keep the Eighth Commandment

Ishmaelites - The Seventh Commandment

Why God does not destroy Israel after they made the Golden Calf

singular vs. plural language (see piska 21 section 6a)

Types of Imagery

Sexual

The very first image of these materials is sexual. A verse from Song of Songs is read metaphorically; Israel is depicted as the lover who awaits the moment of commingling with her beloved, God. That most intimate moment is when God reveals the Torah to Israel. (piska 20 section 1a)

Underlying Issues the Rabbis address

The Importance and the Impact of **Revelation**

Revelation is compared to:

(piska 21 section 2b) the flood which destroyed the world

(piska 21 section 2c) End of the world and the resurrection of the dead

(piska 21 sections 2c and 2d) Torah part of the foundation of the world.

Without Torah the earth would revert to total chaos. Torah strengthens the foundation of the earth

(piska 21 section 2e) The Revelation at Sinai is parallel to the end of the world; only the end of the world would be a so much more powerful happening.

(piska 21 section 12b) The Torah is so great: it only took God six days to create the world, but forty days it took God to transmit the Torah to Moses.

(piska 21 section 12b) God and Torah are the foundations of the earth.

Why the Torah was given when it was further elevates Revelation.

Sivan would best honor the Torah for its Zodiac sign is twins - for who but human beings could best pay homage before the Torah?

Torah

is a supernal being - belongs to the divine fixture of the upper world.

(piska 21 section 3h) is multifaceted; it can support opposing ideas.

(piska 21 section 6d) analogous to a ketubah for a woman whose husband is temporarily away. Thus Torah is a source of hope, it reminds us of God.

(piska 21 section 12b) The Torah is so great. It only took God six days to create the world, but forty days it took God to transmit the Torah to Moses.

(piska 21 section 12b) God and Torah are the foundations of the earth.

both the written and oral Torah were revealed on Sinai.

(piska 20 section 7) God reveals what the Tabernacle should look like.

Reasons for keeping the Commandments

(piska 22 section 3c) In one ark was housed the one who lived forever and in the other were Joseph's bones. Israel would answer that in one ark are the remains of a dead person and in the other is the One who lives forever. The nations of the world did not understand why the ark with the dead person should accompany the ark with the One who lives forever. The answer was that the dead man in the ark was the one who observed all the commandments that are written and kept in the other ark. "Joseph merited kingship only because he observed the commandments of the Holy One, blessed be He, and you would have me dispense with His commandments!"

(piska 23/24 section 2) A king *mashal-nimshal* structure is used to further explain the phrase, **her (the Torah's) ways are moved that thou canst not know them**. When a king wishes to have an orchard planted, he does not reveal to gardeners which type of tree will receive the biggest reward, otherwise that is the only type of tree they would plant. Similarly, God does not reveal in the Torah for doing each and every mitzvah.

(piska 23/24 section 2) Proverbs 4:23 is cited as further evidence that in observing any of the commandments one has the potential of gaining eternal life.

(piska 23/24 section 2) The Rabbis thus give several different interpretations of the specific reward mentioned in the Fifth Commandment as one example of the numerous rewards people will gain from studying Torah and following its precepts.

God

God's relationship with Moses and Israel

Protector

(piska 20 section 6a) mercy of God overflowed, so that a Bat Kol saved Moses from Hadarniel.

(piska 20 section 6a) God came down from His throne and stationed Himself before Sandalphon until Moses had passed by.

(piska 20 section 6a) So what did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? God spread over him a part of His splendid glory and placed him (Moses) before His throne.

God cares for the Israelites

Descriptions of God

(piska 21 section 2a) God is so powerful that even the earth was numbed with fright.

(piska 21 section 2d) With just one word, God can cause the entire world to tremble.

(piska 21 section 4b) God fights alone but shares His joys (opposite of human beings)

(piska 21 section 4c) that "He (God) is the place of the world," and not "His world is His place." God is the dwelling place of the world, and that His world is not His dwelling place.

(piska 21 section 4e) God's relationship to Israel is analogous to a father's relationship with his son.

(piska 21 section 5) God speaks in a tone of love and affection, while at other times God speaks in a tone of fear and awe.

(piska 21 section 6c) God speaks in a tone of comfort or a tone of consolation. (see also piska 21 section 6e)

(piska 21 section 10) the Rabbis view God as light, as match maker, as the source of living waters.

(piska 21 section 13) God went out of Egypt with Israel during the Exodus.

(piska 23 section 1) forgiving and admonishing - The king gives his son a flask and coin to take to the store. The boy loses the coin and breaks the flask, but the king gives the boy another chance, but this time the king pulled his son's ear and plucked his hair and reminded him, "Take care that you do not lose these as you lost the others." In a similar way, God gives the

commandments again to Israel, but this time the wording is harsher, when God says, “**Keep.**” God’s ability to forgive and give Israel a second chance is quite moving.

(piska 23/24 section 1) God is praised for His mercy, the relatively small demands He places on his charges. If someone ate even a forkful of that which belonged to the king, he would be killed, argue the Rabbis, but when someone breaks a law of holiness, he can, according to Leviticus make restitution and not be killed. Furthermore, an offense against a mortal is considered more serious than one against God.

(piska 23/24 section 1) The Fifth Commandment distinguishes God from a mortal king. A mortal king can require someone to renounce his relationship with his parents, but not God, who demands allegiance and honor be given to parents. In other words, the *petikhta* distinguishes God from any other mortal king.

(piska 24 section 4) The Rabbis use Isaiah 59:13 as a proof-text that God did not create falsehood or lies.

The World Order

Theophany

(piska 22 section 5) Why does Israel pray, but their prayers are not answered?

R. Joshua, the son of Levi, teaches in the name of R. Phinehas, the son of Yair: because they did not know the secret of pronouncing the name of God.

Dualism

(piska 20 section 4a) God and Prince of Darkness discussion See commentary section 4a.

The Universe is ordered

(piska 20 section 4a) God organized the calendar in a specific way such that God provided for the well being of human beings.

(piska 20 section 4b) Reason God created the celestial bodies in the order that He did.

(piska 23 section 5) From the word "sea" the rabbis infer the lesson that all the creatures of the sea correspond to the creatures of the dry land.

Astrology

(piska 20 section 4b) acknowledge it exists - but show why its use as a predictor of the future is not needed by Israel.

How the Rabbis viewed the Ten Commandments as a whole

(piska 21 section 6g) written in singular to indicate that specific characters in the Bible broke specific commandments.

(piska 21 section 7) The Commandments enticed the Israelites because they did not seem so difficult to keep, but once Israel was enticed, God provided harsher language.

(piska 23 section 4) include the most important aspects of Judaism, so the Rabbis indicate how circumcision is implicitly referred to here.

(piska 23 section 4) Rabbi Judah points out that everything created during the six days of creation needs finishing.

(piska 23/24 section 2) The rabbis do not want to emphasize the Fifth Commandment or the Ten Commandments as a whole to the exclusion of the other commandments contained in the Torah.

(piska 23/24 section 4) Even the heathen are rewarded for the deeds of mercy they perform.

Meanings of the opening phrase: I am Adonai, your God

(piska 21 section 1c) When God saw that Israel knowingly wished to accept the Torah with love and fondness and in fear and trembling, God said, I am Adonai, your God.

(piska 21 section 5) acrostic, "**I Myself Wrote and Gave the Torah."**

or "**I Gave and Wrote the Ten
Commandments."**

or "**I am your Light, Crown, Dove."**

אֹכִי indicates that "God chose Abraham over everyone
else."

So **אֹכִי** stands for Abraham and important numbers in his life: 50
= the age when Abraham encountered God, 20 = the number
of generations between the first human being and Abraham,
10 = the ten trials rabbinic tradition indicates that Abraham
endured to prove his righteousness.

In other words each letter in the word represents an important
number in Judaism: 1 = Israel, 50 = the days between
Pesach and Shavuot, 20 = the ten plagues + the ten signs at
the sea, 10 = The Ten Commandments.

the word **אֹכִי** denotes a tone of love and affection.

the word **אֹכִי** denotes a tone of fear and awe.

אֲנֹכִי indicated to Israel that God was indeed their God.

(piska 21 section 6c) אֲנֹכִי denotes a tone of comfort or a tone of consolation.

Meanings of the Deuteronomic expression **Face to Face**

God spoke face to face with the Israelites - an expression of intimacy.

(piska 20 section 7) The angels lifted each Israelite's face, so that each Israelite could see God face to face.

(piska 21 section 3a) God spoke looking into the face of each and every Israelite, in a similar way that to an observer it may appear that an icon is looking at numerous people at the same time.

(piska 21 section 3b) It is possible for God to appear in more than one place at the same time, just as the face of a sword can appear to be in more than one place at one time.

(piska 21 section 3c) God appeared with different faces or aspects at different times: young as a warrior, or as old as a wise sage when giving the Torah.

(piska 21 section 3d) would be wrong to infer from the verse that two faces indicate two deities.

(piska 21 section 3e) different faces or with different emotions.

(piska 21 section 3g) "from God's presence shone a brilliant light upon the **face** of each and every Israelite."

(piska 21 section 3h) different facets - God and the Torah display different facets.

(piska 21 section 3i) different faces - a different face for Tanakh, Mishna, Talmud, and Aggada.

(piska 21 section 3j) “present to one another” or “heart to heart”

(piska 21 section 3k) God descended upon the mountain so that God could be on the same level with Moses “eye to eye.”

(piska section 3l) without intermediary

The different ways the Rabbis interpreted each of the Ten Commandments

1) I am Adonai, your God

(piska 20 section 6b) (In arguing why the angels do not need the Ten Commandments but human beings do) specifies who our God is.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) The second part, “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, t he house of bondage” indicates that the Ten Commandments were intended for us.

(piska 21 section 2e) language indicates that God is addressing Israel specifically over all the other nations.

(piska 21 section 10)) is as if it is written, **And God will be to you an eternal light.**

(piska 21 section 11) The First Commandment then serves as reminder to us, that
as great as we feel we are, God is Supreme.

(piska 21 section 13) Reason that an Israelite slave must have his ear pierced.

2) You shall have no other gods besides Me.

(piska 20 section 6b) Our allegiance is to God and none else.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) prohibition against idol worship.

(piska 21 section 10) Israel worshipping idols is like Israel trying to gain life from
stagnant water which is full of disease and lacks life.

(piska 21 section 11) So if lowly frogs can show honor to God, then certainly we
human beings can as well. What is implicit in this midrash is that one
cannot honor God if he displays any form of idolatry.

3) You shall not swear falsely by the name of Adonai, your God.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) Prohibition against bad trading and business practices.

(piska 21 section 10) when one swears falsely by the name of Adonai, one does not
honor God.

(piska 21 section 11) going against God's word, which in a way is taking God's
name in vain.

(piska 22 section 2a) Teaching and studying have the potential to bring life to the
world. Be careful, however, that you do not lead people astray by what
you teach or what you forget to teach, for you have the powerful through
teaching and studying to destroy the world as well.

(piska 22 section 2c) warns people from running after positions of authority. A leader must be worthy, must not run after power but earn it, and must be ready to give up his life for the cause or people he represents.

(piska 22 section 3a) you shall not bear that which contains God's name (like *t'fillin* or a *tallit*) in such a manner that would cause people to think that you are taking God's name in vain.

(piska 22 section 4a) Taking an oath even when affirming something which is true is taking God's name in vain.

(piska 22 section 4b) One should not make another swear an oath in denial of a false claim.

(piska 22 section 5) repercussions of not following the commandment.

4) Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) prohibits certain types of work on Shabbat.

(piska 21 section 9) When one does not keep the Sabbath, it is as if he bears false witness against God. By not observing the Sabbath it is as if one testifies that God did not create the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

(piska 21 section 10) So long as one does even something little to observe the Sabbath, he shall be rewarded.

(piska 23 section 1) The Sabbath is God's day, and it was ordained thus even before God created the world.

(piska 23 section 1) When it is not the Sabbath we should **remember** and reflect upon it, and when it is the Sabbath we should take care to **keep the Sabbath**. The Rabbis define the phrase, **keep it holy**, as meaning keep the Sabbath distinct from the other days. One should have separate clothes reserved for the Sabbath. At the very least, if you can not afford a different set of clothes, then some change in your attire is mandated.

(piska 23 section 2) God only requires that one of seven days be devoted to Him.

(piska 23 section 3) Just as God rested, we should rest on the Sabbath. One way God rested was by not speaking, so we should abstain from unnecessary speech or speech about everyday kinds of matters. Another way to rest is to rest even from the thought of labor.

(piska 23 section 5) If God rests on the Sabbath, even though God never gets tired, then all the more reason that we frail and fragile people who certainly toil, need a day of rest.

5) Honor your father and your mother.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) contains rules for treating parents.

(piska 21 section 10) The sun and moon are reminders to one to honor both his mother and his father.

(piska 23/24 section 2) Fifth Commandment which the Rabbis here view as the most onerous commandment. Proverbs 30:17 is cited as providing the severe punishment of breaking the commandment.

(piska 23/24 section 3) Fearing one's father includes not doing the following activities: sit or stand in one's father's place, or contradict one's father. Honoring one's father includes providing food and drink for one's father, bathing and anointing one's father, putting his sandals on for him, and escort him in all his comings and goings.

(piska 23/24 section 4) Rabbi Simeon ben Yokhai equates the duty of honoring and fearing one's parents to honoring and fearing God. Cursing one's parents is equally as bad as cursing God. Rabbi Judah bar Dudai in analyzing Rabbi Simeon ben Yokhai's statement, concludes that the honor due to one's parents is not equal to but surpasses the honor due to God.

(piska 23/24 section 4) Honoring parents includes honoring them with your wealth, but is not limited by wealth. Two stories demonstrate that providing a parent with the best food will not ensure that a son or daughter has adequately observed the commandment to honor your father and your mother. How one treats his or her parents is equally, if not more, important to what he or she provides for them.

(piska 23/24 section 4) the lesson that one should not profit monetarily from honoring one's parents.

6) You shall not commit murder.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) prohibition against spilling blood (murder)

(piska 21 section 9) when one murders one also diminishes the image of God.

(piska 21 section 10) when one murders one acts as lowly as the fish who eat each other.

(piska 24 section 1) You shall not murder yourself. Make no blood cry out against thee.

(piska 24 section 1) "**Murder**" is defined as "killing without permission." The soul thus murdered spends the rest of his life in the outer gates of Sheol.

(piska 24 section 1) The Rabbis argue that not only does a murderer harm another human being and that human being's family; the murderer wrongs God as well. It is not explicitly stated here in this midrash, but what seems to be implicit in the words of the Rabbis is that when one murders, he murders someone who was made in the image of God. A second point that the Rabbis do point out is that a murderer makes God appear cruel.

7) You shall not commit adultery.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) includes rules for treating women.

(piska 21 section 9) Adultery is on par with idolatry.

(piska 21 section 10) God creates couples. When one commits adultery it is as if he as rejected God's work.

(piska 24 section 2) infer from a verse in Job that even one who visualizes himself in the act of adultery is guilty of committing adultery.

(piska 24 section 2) Deuteronomy 32:18 is cited to demonstrate that adulterers weaken the power of the creator, God. The small size of the letter ך in the word תשי comes to teach this lesson. Finally Isaiah 33 is cited as the proof-text for the high reward given to one who sees a naked woman, yet refrains from staring.

8) You shall not steal.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) Prohibition against stealing money.

(piska 21 section 9) Stealing leads to dealing deceitfully which leads to swearing falsely which leads to profaning God's name.

(piska 21 section 10) There is no reason to steal, for God has given us every seed bearing plant - that which exists in nature is to be shared by all.

(piska 24 section 3) Stealing leads to profaning God's name.

9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) not something that would take place in heaven

(piska 21 section 9) is testifying that something is not true, just as one who does not keep the Sabbath testifies that God did not create the world in six days and rested on the Seventh.

(piska 21 section 10) God created people to help one another. When one testifies falsely against a peer, one harms the one whom God intended to help us.

(piska 21 section 11) one should make sure his testimony is as clear as light, otherwise he will be breaking the Ninth Commandment, **You shall not bear false witness.**

10) You shall not covet.

(piska 20 section 6b) control our desires and lusts

(*Ma'ayan Hochmah*) don't covet other people's homes, fields, and vineyards

(piska 21 section 8) When one covets he has the potential to break the other nine commandments as well. When one covets one breaks the First Commandment as well by disregarding the covenant of her God. When one covets one breaks the Second Commandment in that coveting leads to adultery which is analogous to idolatry. When one covets one breaks the Third Commandment since she causes the priest to administer an oath to her. Coveting leads to adultery, and the son of an adulterous relationship

breaks the observance of the Sabbath if he brings an offering before God.
Coveting leads to adultery which could lead a wife to murder her husband.

(piska 21 section 9) Coveting can lead to adultery which can cause such intense feelings of outrage that one could unknowingly kill one's father.

(piska 21 section 10) The person to whom you are married was chosen by God - thus he or she is right for you, so there is no need to covet someone else's husband or wife who certainly was not intended for you.

(piska 24 section 5) When Israel transgressed the commandment, **You shall not covet**, they brought about their exile. The Rabbis evoke deuteronomistic theology by accusing the Israelites of bringing about their own exile when they were covetous and acted upon their feelings. It is possible that this is just hyperbole - the Rabbis wish to emphasize the coveting can lead to serious consequences.

Missing

Holding Mount Sinai above Israel so that they had to accept the Torah.

Rhetorical Devices

Dialogue between Non-Jewish leaders and Rabbis

- 1) (piska 20 section 1b) Ask Balaam what is going on.
- 2) (piska 21 section 1b) Hadrian and Rav Joshua bar Hananiah
walk through the provinces together
- 3) (piska 23 section 4) Interchange of three non-Jewish characters who ask questions or engage different Rabbis in debate over circumcision. A non-Jewish sage engages Rabbi Judah in a debate over circumcision, Aquilas the Proselyte presents Rabbi Eliezer with a question, and a Roman lady asks Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Halapta a different question.
- 4) (piska 23 section 6) A long confrontation between Tinneus Rufus and Rabbi Akiba over the merits of the Sabbath includes a discussion of what it means that God works on the Sabbath. Remarkably, the father of Tinneus Rufus appears and explains that since he did not observe the Sabbath in this world, he is punished in the next.

Mashal - King

- (piska 20 section 2) King makes a wedding feast - how best to treat the daughter -she should be carried on the shoulders of human beings // Torah was given in Sivan - Zodiac sign is twins - humans (way of elevating the event of Revelation)

(piska 20 section 3a) King makes a wedding feast for his daughter. City Dwellers = Heavenly creatures and villagers = human beings The heavens are sad about losing Torah while human beings celebrate her arrival.

(piska 20 section 5b) King marries his daughter to a noble. The rabbis compose a *mashal* making the following analogies: the relatives represent Moses and Joshua, in that the relatives try to shield the princess by preventing her from seeing her fiancé sin just like Moses and Joshua attempt to protect the Israelites by smashing the tablets so the Israelites would have an excuse for worshipping an idol - for they had not yet received the Ten Commandments. The son-in-law in the *mashal* represents Israel, both the son-in-law and Israel committed wrongdoing. The princess is like the tablets or Torah, in that both were put aside to prevent the culprits from being punished. The king represents God.

(piska 21 section 2d) King who goes out to training grounds flanked on either side with swordsmen and spear throwers: imagine how much more powerful the king would appear if he actually was going to war. So too is the power of God. If only one word spoken by God, imagine the power of God's speech when He pronounces judgment.

(piska 21 section 2e) A king who speaks with someone seems to be ready to promote that person. It was unclear just who God was going to

address, but the First Commandment indicates clearly that God spoke to the Israelites.

(piska 21 section 4b) King whose son was captured wishes to redeem his son on his own, without help. Likewise God fights for His children alone.

(piska 21 section 4e) King who leaves his pregnant wife. Returns after son is born. Son does not recognize his father.

(piska 21 section 5) King who sends his son to a land far away. Upon his return the king spoke in the new language the son had acquired.

(piska 21 section 5) A friend of king knows secrets about king, but out of fear and respect does not share them. God is always present.

(piska 21 section 6d) King marries an upper-class woman and gives her a large ketuba. God leaves Israel with the Torah.

(piska 21 section 6e) King who kicks out his wife and then wants her back. God will doubly comfort Israel in the future.

(piska 23 section 1) The king gives his son a flask and coin to take to the store. The boy loses the coin and breaks the flask, but the king gives the boy another chance, but this time the king pulled his son's ear and plucked his hair and reminded him, "Take care that you do not lose these as you lost the others." In a similar way, God gives

the commandments again to Israel, but this time the wording is harsher, when God says, “**Keep.**” God’s ability to forgive and give Israel a second chance is quite moving.

(piska 23/24 section 2) A king *mashal-nimshal* structure is used to further explain the phrase, **her** (the Torah’s) **ways are moved that thou canst not know them.** When a king wishes to have an orchard planted, he does not reveal to gardeners which type of tree will receive the biggest reward, otherwise that is the only type of tree they would plant. Similarly, God does not reveal in the Torah for doing each and every mitzvah.

mashal-warrior

(piska 21 section 4d) Warrior who rides a horse, horse is of secondary importance to the rider.

mashal-general

(piska 22 section 3a) A man assumes that a person wearing *t’fillin* late in the day, must be pious, so he deposits his money with the “pious man.” Later when he came to claim his money, the “pious” man denied that any transaction had ever occurred. Later the “pious” man is deceived in his own right, so that the money returns to the rightful owner.

(piska section 4a) The twenty-four councils in the south were supposedly destroyed because they affirmed by oath things that were true.

(piska 22 section 4b) A story is told of a woman who went to knead dough at a neighbor's house.

(piska 23 section 6) A mythical story appears in which a pious Jew is rewarded for his efforts at keeping the Sabbath. Another mythical story follows which describes just how a particular butcher acquired his wealth.

(piska 23/24 section 5) A story about a woman who had two sons. One of them got up and killed his brother. What did she do? She lifted up his blood and put it in a flask. So long as the blood would bubble, she would know that he (the murderer) was alive. But when it would come to a rest, she would know he had died.

Dialogue with God

(piska 20 section 4a) God and the Prince of Darkness - God demands that the prince of darkness depart so God can create the world.

(piska 20 section 5c) God comforts Solomon.

(piska 20 section 6a) God and the angels. God reminds the angels just how quarrelsome they can be.

(piska 20 section 6a) God and Moses - God tells Moses to defend himself with words against the angels as to why he is entitled to take the Torah down to earth.

(piska 20 section 7) God speaks with Moses - shows him what the Tabernacle should look like.

(piska 21 section 3h) God tells Moses how to use the Torah to make legal rulings.

(piska 22 section 1b) God speaks to the sea; how the sea kept God's command.

(piska 23/24 section 5) The Holy One Blessed be He said, "Whoever kills one wrongs Me (or, withholds what is due Me) and makes me out (to be) a cruel being." Hence, "You shall not murder."

Exempla - narratives about the activities of individual rabbis

(piska 22 section 3b) Rabbi Yannai evidently would wear his *t'fillin* for three straight days upon recovering from illness. He argued that illness washes away all impurities. He cites as his prooftext the verse, **He who forgives all your sins, heals all your diseases** (Ps. 103:3).

(piska 22 section 3c) Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and his disciple Rabbi Eliezer: Evidently they never removed their *t'fillin* in winter or summer. There is some discussion to indicate that they would not wear these ritual objects when then bathed, but immediately afterwards.

(piska 22 section 3d) A debate ensues whether or not Rabbi Abbahu actually wore *t'fillin* at night. Some say he were not really wearing them; others say that he meant that one could not put them on at night, but if he were already wearing them that would be okay. Others say the obligation does not take hold until the evening has passed into darkness.

(piska 22 section 4a) A story about the life of Bar Telamyon is presented to affirm the idea that taking an oath which affirms the truth.

(piska 23 section 1) As Rabbi Abbahu teaches, if in the middle of the week one who is eating inferior dates is given superior ones, then he should set them aside for the Sabbath.

(piska 23 section 2) Various accounts of the activities of different Rabbis are given as to whether or not the time of the beginning and ending of the Sabbath may be altered.

(piska 23 section 6) Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Rabbi Yossi, shares a
personal miraculous experience.

(piska 23/24 section 4) A number of accounts of how specific Rabbis honored their parents are given. The rhetorical question, "How far is one to go in honoring one's father and mother," is a the transition into a serious of vignettes which attempt to draw a line at just how far one must go to honor one's parents.

Disagreement between Rabbis

(piska 23 section 7) a disagreement between Rabbi Berekhiya in the name of Rabbi Hiya bar Abba and Rabbi Haggai who spoke in the name of Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman is resolved by showing their different statements are directed at two different audiences.

Dialogue between Rabbi and pupils

(piska 22 section 3c) Rabbi Yokhanan would teach his pupils a lesson through a parable about the two arks in the wilderness. He told the same parable over and over as a rebuke to them.

Kol V'khomer argument

(piska 22 section 1b) If the sea, the frogs, the lice, etc. can keep God's commandment, then surely the Jews can as well.

Dissecting words and finding meaning in each individual letter

(piska 22 section 2a) he says the ל stands for למד "study" - and the א stands for אלף "instruct" - that is study the words of Torah with the belief that you will teach what you study to others. Another interpretation: in the name of the letter ל (ל-מ-ד) the letter ל is stands next to the letter מ. A lady asked Rav Yossi, the son of Hilfatah: What does the fact that the letter ל stands taller than all the other letters teach? It teaches that the letter ל acts like a public crier - for a crier often stands on a high place and cries out so all can hear

him. The letter ׀ stands for water. Thus with the letter ׀ the text warns, be careful in acquiring for yourself life, the letter ׀ teaches do not cause the primal waters that will flood the world to return which will ultimately cause death to you.

Conclusions

The Rabbis devote much time and energy to painting a picture of the event of Matan Torah - Revelation at Sinai, an awesome and spectacular event. A positive comparison is made between Mount Sinai and a hill of spices to which people flock. The mountain is not described in much detail. For the Rabbis the mountain itself is not inherently holy but becomes holy as a result of the actions that take place there.³³⁸ Careful attention therefore is paid to the relationships of the different characters to one another. The moment in time that Revelation took place was literally earth shattering. Everyone noticed and felt its effects. It was so monumental that when the earth felt its impending force, it expected that it would literally break up.³³⁹ Even the angels took notice. The nations of the world are depicted on the periphery of the scene.³⁴⁰ They sense the importance of the event, but they are not privy to the intimacy that is established between God and Israel.

The Rabbis portray both God as coming down to the mountain with the Ten Commandments and Moses going up to the heavens and literally wrestling the Torah away from the angels. The Rabbis portray the heavenly bodies as more than reluctant to let the Torah out of their grasp. Moses encounters a whole slew of Heavenly creatures including Kemuel, Hadarniel, Sandalphon, Rigyon, and Gallizur who seek to destroy Moses or, at least send him back to earth empty-handed. Moses, upon God's request, debates the merits of bringing the Torah to Earth. He points out how the Ten Commandments address human and not angelic problems. On the other hand, God is portrayed as coming down to the Mountain to reveal Himself face to face to Moses and the Israelites. God is portrayed as coming down with a whole retinue of angels. One narrative depicts two ministering angels as being assigned to each Israelite - one to hold the heart and one to elevate the

³³⁸ cf piska 21, section 4c.

³³⁹ cf piska 21, section 2a.

³⁴⁰ cf piska 20, section 1b.

Israelite's neck so that he could see God face to face.³⁴¹ In a different account, God is depicted as coming down alone³⁴², so that no one would be confused about the original source of Revelation.

The Rabbis take a phrase from Deuteronomy, God spoke face to face with the people, and use it as a description of how God addressed the Israelites. The phrase is an expression of intimacy. Even though the text in Exodus seems to indicate that God spoke directly to Moses, the Rabbis by utilizing the phrase, "God spoke face to face with the Israelites," to indicate that God in some way or another has an intimate connection with each Israelite.

The Rabbis portray the Israelites as receiving the Torah with exuberance.³⁴³ The event was so traumatic, that it caused the righteous to faint, but they were quickly revived by God.³⁴⁴ The Rabbis argue that the Israelites heard the first two commandments directly from God.³⁴⁵ The rest of the Revelation is transmitted to Moses. In the Ma'ayan Hochmah textual witness, Moses learns the contents of the Torah directly from God during the forty days that they are on Mount Sinai together. Moses is so frightened by one of the heavenly creatures that he forgets all that he was taught, but Yofiah - the minister of Torah - teaches Moses the contents of the Torah.

Much of piskaot 20 - 21 is devoted to depicting the importance and impact of Revelation. The power of the moment is compared to the time when the flood destroyed the world,³⁴⁶ and to the end of time when the dead will rise from their graves.³⁴⁷ The contents of Revelation - Torah - is so essential that without Torah, the earth would revert back to total chaos. Torah strengthens the foundation of the earth.³⁴⁸ Both the written and oral Torah were revealed on Sinai to Moses. God also paints a picture for Moses when

³⁴¹ cf piska 20, section 7.

³⁴² cf piska 21, section 4e.

³⁴³ cf piska 21, section 6f.

³⁴⁴ cf piska 20, section 7.

³⁴⁵ cf piska 22, section 2b.

³⁴⁶ cf piska 21, section 2b.

³⁴⁷ cf piska 21, section 2c and 2e.

God reveals to him what the Tabernacle will look like.³⁴⁹ Revelation took place in the month of *Sivan*, according to the Rabbis, as a way of elevating the importance and status of Torah; the Zodiac sign for the month is Gemini - human twins - and who better than human beings pay homage to the Torah? The Rabbis further elevate the importance of Torah by indicating that it took God only six days to create the world, but forty days to transmit the contents of Torah to Moses.³⁵⁰

The Torah is described as a supernal being; it belongs to the divine fixture of the upper world, while it is also directed to human beings. It is multifaceted and can thus support opposing ideas.³⁵¹ One of the most cogent and lasting images of this collection of midrashim is the analogy made between the Torah and a ketubah for a woman whose husband is temporarily away.³⁵² Thus the Torah is source of hope and a reminder of God's imminent return.

In various ways the Rabbis demonstrate that the benefit we derive from keeping the commandments is life. The rewards are not specifically laid out, so that people will only keep those commandments with the biggest rewards.³⁵³

The Rabbis depict God in various ways. God is the dwelling place of the world.³⁵⁴ God is powerful - so powerful the even the earth becomes numb with fright at the sound of just one word by God.³⁵⁵ While God is so powerful that He fights his battle on his own without any help, when it comes to sharing His joy, He includes as many people as possible.³⁵⁶ God appears as a bright light, serves as match maker and is the source of living waters.³⁵⁷ God's relationship with Israel is analogous to a father's relationship with

³⁴⁸ cf piska 21, sections 2c, 2d, and 12b.

³⁴⁹ piska 20, section 7.

³⁵⁰ cf piska 21, section 12b.

³⁵¹ cf piska 21, section 3h.

³⁵² cf piska 21, section 6d.

³⁵³ cf piska 23/24, section 2.

³⁵⁴ cf piska 21, section 4c.

³⁵⁵ cf piska 21, sections 2a and 2d.

³⁵⁶ cf piska 21, section 4b.

³⁵⁷ cf piska 21, section 10.

his son.³⁵⁸ In one poignant *mashal* the king gives his son a flask and coin to take to the store. When the boy loses the coin and breaks the flask, but the king gives him another chance, but this time the king pulls his son's ear and plucks his hair and reminds him, "Take care that you do not lose these as you lost the others." In a similar way, God gives the commandments again to Israel, but this time the wording is harsher, when God says, "**Keep.**" God's ability to forgive and give Israel a second chance is quite moving.³⁵⁹ Sometimes the Rabbis portray God as speaking in a tone of love and affection, while at other times they depict God as invoking fear and awe in His subjects.³⁶⁰ The image of God these Rabbis portray most often is one of protector. Over and over God directly intercedes to save Moses from his travails in heaven.³⁶¹ God speaks in a tone of comfort or consolation.³⁶² The Rabbis even portray God as going out of Egypt with Israel during the Exodus.³⁶³ God is praised for His mercy, the relatively small demands He places on his charges. If someone ate even a forkful of that which belonged to the king, he would be killed, argue the Rabbis, but when someone breaks a law of holiness, he can, according to Leviticus, make restitution and not be killed. Furthermore, an offense against a mortal is considered more serious than one against God.³⁶⁴ A mortal king can require someone to renounce his relationship with his parents, but not God, who demands that allegiance and honor be given to parents.³⁶⁵

The Rabbis depict the universe as being ordered by God. God, for instance, organized the calendar in a specific way such that He provided for the well being of human beings.³⁶⁶ God is depicted as having a plan and rationale for creating the celestial bodies in

³⁵⁸ cf piska 21, section 4e.

³⁵⁹ cf piska 23, section 1.

³⁶⁰ cf piska 21, section 5.

³⁶¹ cf piska 20, section 6a.

³⁶² cf piska 21, sections 6c and 6e.

³⁶³ cf piska 21 section 13.

³⁶⁴ cf piska 23/24 section 1.

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶⁶ cf piska 20 section 4a.

the order that He did.³⁶⁷ The rabbis teach that all the creatures of the sea correspond to the creatures of the dry land.³⁶⁸

The Rabbis offer many different interpretations of the first words of the Decalogue. In their treatment of the opening phrase, **I am Adonai, your God**, the Rabbis also address the meaning of the Decalogue as a whole. This phrase is placed at the heart of a dramatic narrative. When God saw that Israel knowingly wished to accept the Torah with love and fondness and in fear and trembling, God said, **I am Adonai, your God**.³⁶⁹ The word **אֲנִי** is an acrostic for, **I Myself Wrote and Gave the Torah**.³⁷⁰ Thus with the very first recorded word of Revelation, God, according to the Rabbis, reminds the reader, that it is He who wrote and gave the Torah to the people. **אֲנִי** also points to Abraham.

³⁶⁷ cf piska 20 section 4b.

³⁶⁸ cf piska 23 section 5.

³⁶⁹ cf piska 21 section 1c.

³⁷⁰ cf piska 21 section 5.

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