

EXEGETICAL USES OF MAXIMS IN MIDRASH RABBAH

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Of the variety of illustrations used by the Rabbis to expound and clarify their lessons, the proverb is one of the more popular. Some 1700 maxims, pithy sayings of folk wisdom, have been culled from the literature. Surprisingly, this potential key to the folk mind of the rabbinic period has been largely neglected by scholars. (There is, to my knowledge, only one brief comparative study of rabbinic and Greek and Roman proverbs by Lieberman in his Greek in Jewish Palestine.)

Mr. Waldorf, on the basis of an analysis of the proverbs in the Midrash Rabbah introduced by matl'a and of a number of talmudic sayings introduced by the technical formula 'amrei 'inshei, attempts to determine when and why proverbs are used, what is their precise function within a passage, and whether they are part of the original stratum or later additions. His research also suggested the possibility that certain Rabbis were "proverbial personalities," teachers whose "particular frame of mind has led them to describe situations and formulate opinions in proverbial forms."

Mr. Waldorf has written a fine, well-organized essay. He has worked with admirable diligence and devotion. By carefully and conscientiously tracing every parallel and variant of each proverb, Mr. Waldorf entered the total range of rabbinic literature, a process which served as a significant learning experience. The translations, the analysis of the context and the delineation of the function of the proverb within each passage are excellently done.

Due to the fact, however, that only a small portion of the available material was analyzed (some 50 proverbs), Mr. Waldorf's overall conclusions must be viewed as tentative -- hypotheses which require further verification. The attempt to determine whether the proverb is a later addition or whether it is part of the original exegesis is also somewhat misdirected since it does not take into account the nature of the literature and the central place of the illustration in the rabbinic homily. The very imaginative and appealing suggestion concerning the "proverbial personality" opens a potentially fruitful area for study and should be pursued.

Mr. Waldorf, with admirable modesty, describes his thesis "as a preliminary investigation into the place of maxims in the rabbinic literature." I believe that the thesis is more than preliminary. Due to the scope of the literature, surely not to the lack of ability or effort on Mr. Waldorf's part, only a comparatively small number of proverbs are treated. However, the considerable work done is of superior quality and measures up to Mr. Waldorf's high scholastic standards. It is my hope that Mr. Waldorf will pursue his studies in this area and bring this project to completion.

It is with much pleasure that I recommend the acceptance of this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters degree and Ordination.

Eugene Mihaly
Referee

DIGEST

Scholarly work on maxims has been limited to collecting them and analyzing their grammar, content, and form. The study described in this paper sought to view maxims in their context in the rabbinic literature; but because of the great number of maxims to be found, this study was limited almost exclusively to maxims in Midrash Rabbah. The study began to answer: When and Why do the rabbis use a maxim as illustrative material? Another question was raised by the reading: Who uses maxims?

Maxims seem to serve three main functions: (1) They are used to explain why a particular action is taken, why a Biblical verse is phrased the way it is, or why events took the course they did. (2) The most frequent function a maxim has in a summary is to draw a moral from the situation or story. Sometimes, the maxim acts as the prosaic repetition of a point already adequately expressed. (3) Maxims have their most cutting effect as editorial comments. In two cases, gross insults are conveyed through maxims.

Through reading, this author began to feel that, while some maxims are an integral part of the section in which

they are found, many others have a tenuous connection with the remainder of the exegesis. The scope of this study did not allow detailed investigation of each passage; but the author's observations are noted.

The intuition that many maxims are secondary led the author to search for evidence that a limited number of proverbial personalities are responsible for a major proportion of the maxims now found in rabbinic literature. A prime candidate for this designation is Rav Papa, a fourth century Babylonian Amora, to whom the Talmud attributes many maxims. Another candidate is Rabba, a fourth generation Babylonian Amora, who lists a number of popular maxims with Biblical verses from which they are "derived."

This study can best be described as a preliminary investigation into the place of maxims in the rabbinic literature.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Mostly Biblical books and Talmudic tractates

Avod Zar	'Avodah Zarah	Lam R	'Akhah Rabbah
B Bat	Bava Bathra	Lev	Leviticus
B Qam	Bava Qamma	Lev R	Wayiqra Rabbah
B Metz	Bava Mezi'a'	Num	Numbers
Ber	Berakhoth	Num R	Bamidbar Rabbah
Dan	Daniel	Pes	Pesahim
Deut	Deuteronomy	Prov	Proverbs
Deut R	Devorim Rabbah	Ps	Psalms
Ecc	Ecclesiastes	Ruth R	Ruth Rabbah
Ecc R	Qoheleth Rabbah	Sanh	Sanhedrin
Ex	Exodus	Shab	Shabbath
Ex R	Shimoth Rabbah	Sonc	Soncino translation
Gen	Genesis	Tanq	Tanpuma
Gen R	Bereshith Rabbah	v.	verse
Is	Isaiah	Yalq	Yalqut Shim'oni
Jer	Jeremiah	1 Ki	First Kings
Josh	Joshua	1 Sam	First Samuel
Lam	Lamentations	2 Ch	Second Chronicles

NOTE: In this paper, transliteration is generally according to the system of the Hebrew Union College Annual. Names may be transliterations or Anglicized forms from the Jewish Publication Society Bible, Strack, or the Soncino translations.

1. INTRODUCTORY

Common to the folk culture of every nation are pithy sayings which seek to distill the wisdom of the group into compact packages, easily remembered, and conveniently taught to the young. Generally these sayings have been called "proverbs"; but for purposes of this paper they are called "maxims," to prevent confusion with the proverbs par excellence, those from the Biblical Book of Proverbs. Although the lexicographer might object, "maxim" and "proverb" are used synonymously in this paper.

Generally, the scholarly work that has been done in modern times with respect to maxims has been along the lines of collecting and listing. There are collections of maxims in most modern and classical languages. A few attempts have been made to discuss the origins and grammatical forms of maxims and the dependence of maxims in one language on similar maxims in another language. In general, the ancient and obscure origin of these sayings has prevented anything more than the most primitive speculation.

In the area of Hebrew maxims, the work has been exclusively in the area of collecting and explaining the meaning of the proverb. As examples, we might take the following volumes: In 1900 I. I. Weissberg published a pamphlet of some three hundred maxims which were of popular origin and

not the work of a particular rabbi. His notes and explanations deal with the meaning of the maxim. In footnotes he cites similar Russian proverbs.¹ In 1911, Rawnitzki and Bialik published a list of some 1700 proverbs taken from the Talmuds and the midrash with rather limited philological notes.² That same year, in the United States, one M. Goldman published a glossy little collection of 400 "Proverbs of the Sages ... gathered from the inexhaustible treasures of the fathomless 'Sea of the Talmud.'" The stated purpose of the volume was teaching of the young, but the style of translation and arrangement may indicate that the book was meant for Gentile eyes as well.³ More modern collections are abridged, being intended as readers for children.⁴ Saul Lieberman goes beyond mere collecting when he seeks to show that certain proverbs in rabbinic literature are dependent on Greek or Latin models. On this basis, he is able to provide explanations for several difficult proverbial expressions.⁵

The intention of the present study is to examine the context of maxims as they are used in rabbinic literature for and understanding of when and why maxims are used as illustrative material by the rabbis. Preliminary work indicated that it would be impossible to survey more than a small fraction of the collected material.

1. I. J. Weissberg, ספר משלי קדמוני. Ni'zin, 1900.

2. J. H. Rawnitzki and H. N. Bialik, ספר משלי קדמוני. Odessa, 1911.

3. M. Goldman, Proverbs of the Sages. New York, 1911.

4. E. Keren, ספר משלי קדמוני. Jerusalem, 1954.

5. Saul Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine. New York, 1942.

The passages actually examined were taken from Listings by Gross and Hyman. From Gross, all passages listed under matla'⁶ for Midrash Rabbah were examined with parallel versions from the Babylonian Talmud, Tanhuma, Sifra, Eifre, Mekhiltha, and Yalqut Shim'oni. From Hyman, a small number of Talmudic maxims listed under 'amray 'inshe'⁷ were noted with their Talmudic parallels. The Jerusalem Talmud and midrash collections omitted above were not consulted. In a number of cases, citations were so general that a search for the maxim was not possible. The use of Gross was hampered by the fact that almost half of his citations were incorrect. If he used unusual editions, he makes no mention of them.

While reading some fifty maxims in their contexts, with parallels, this author began to organize his thinking into two general areas. There arose the literary question of why a maxim was chosen and what its function was in the exegesis. And also there is the structural question of where the maxim appeared in the exegesis. In addition, it became increasingly clear that while proverbs are public property, so to speak, it takes a particular frame of mind to describe situations and formulate opinions in proverbial form. There is indication that certain "proverbial personalities" are responsible for a major proportion of the maxims now to be found in rabbinic literature.

6. M. D. Gross, אוצר חכמה. Jerusalem, 1954. Vol. 2, pp. 760f.

7. Aaron Hyman, אוצר דברי חכמים ופסוקים. Tel Aviv, 1933. p. 92.

2. LITERARY USE OF MAXIMS

In the contexts examined, maxims seem to have two major functions. Either they act as the vehicle of explanation or they are the means of repeating a major point, either for emphasis or for summary.

FOR EXPLANATION

In several cases, the maxim is the only means of explanation. The best example is the oft repeated proverb לך לך אמרין לנזירא סחור סחור לכרמא לא תקרב (GO, GO, THEY SAY TO THE NAZIRITE, GO ALL AROUND SO YOU MAY NOT COME CLOSE TO THE VINEYARD.) A number of prohibitions are made with this maxim as the only reason. We are told¹ that a man with seminal issue (zav) is not to dine with a woman with an issue (zavah); that a menstruating woman (niddah) may not go to bed fully clothed with her husband; and that one should not kiss the hand of one's sister -- all because of this maxim. Mention of this maxim about the Nazirite recalls a whole constellation of thought about rabbinic enactments to prevent transgression of the law (siyagim). In a parallel use² it is said that one should stay at least four cubits from a harlot. There is a legend that Rabbi Ulla used to greet his sisters by kissing them on the breast (some say the hand). But there is also a tradition that this same teacher prohibited any kind of intimacy because of this maxim. In a

1. Shab Z

2. Avod Zar 17a

section relating to wine, there are several occasions when rabbis prohibit Jews from using wine which has been diluted by gentiles. This maxim is used as an explanation for their decision. For similar reason heathens are prohibited from bringing grapes to a wine press.³ Likewise, there is a prohibition against mixing vinegar and flour during Passover⁴ and another against a Nazirite taking home to his family grapes he would have eaten on the job had he not been a Nazirite⁵ -- all based on this maxim, which seems to have become a shorthand way of saying, "The reason for this decision is that one is obliged to make a fence around the law.

The maxim seems to get its meaning from the exegesis on the verse, "(The Nazirite) shall abstain from wine ... neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried."⁶ The rabbi begins by outlining the evils that wine can lead to. Wine separates men from Torah, from intelligence and from the ability to dispense justice. Drinking disqualifies a judge or a priest. Wine also gets people into trouble. Once men who participated in a drinking party were hauled off by the government. Similarly, wine was used by the serpent to entice Eve. Ham was cursed by Noah only after he had taken too much to drink. The other thread of the argument is that one is to stay away from even a semblance of a semblance of unseemliness, as the men of the Great Synagogue said, "... make a fence around the Torah."⁷ Even the wording of the Torah makes a fence around some of the commandments. Thus is

3. Avod Zar 58b to 59a

4. Pes 40b

5. B Metz 92a

6. Num 6.3

7. Avoth 1.1

intercourse with a menstruating woman (niddah) prevented by the words "do not approach her." In like manner, the rabbis prohibit licentiousness by saying that one should not be alone with a woman or converse with one. Finally, the Torah prohibits wine to the Nazirite by saying that "anything made of the grape vine" is prohibited to him. The seal, the hatimah, of this section is the maxim about the Nazirite going around the vineyard.⁸ Thus, this maxim becomes synonymous with the principle, "Make a fence around the Torah." And thus it is used in many places to recall the whole exegesis of Numbers Rabbah just mentioned. In that sense, the maxim becomes a principle of explaining why a particular decision is made. It is interesting to note parenthetically that no parallel was uncovered in which the maxim was used to illustrate any other point.

Another maxim which constitutes the total exegesis for a verse is אִם אֵלֶּךָ בְּאֲרָזִים אִם בְּאֲרָזִים (OF ACACIAS THERE IS NO PROFIT EXCEPT YOU CUT THEM DOWN.⁹). The verse commented on is, "Come, רַב־פָּרָחֹה, king of Egypt."¹⁰ The maxim is the only explanation which is offered. Jastrow's interpretation makes good sense: "a wicked man can be converted only by suffering." However, this author would prefer to interpret that the only way you will derive benefit from some people is to threaten them with destruction. Either interpretation seems to fit the context.¹¹

In a third case, a maxim along with another Bible verse

8. Num R 10.8

9. Jastrow, p. 358b under אִם אֵלֶּךָ .

10. Ex 6.11

11. Ex R 6.5

provides the only explanation for the verse, "Why do you cry to me?"¹² Partial explanation is provided by another verse: "Did you arrange your cry for help without being in straits?"¹³ Why is it so? כבוד אדם ורופאך עד שלא תצטרך לו (HONOR YOUR PHYSICIAN UNTIL YOU HAVE NOT NEED OF HIM.) The implication becomes clear: since you never know when you may need to call upon God, you must continually arrange your prayers before him.¹⁴ This same maxim is used as the summary for a longer discussion of the necessity for prayer in the Yalqut.¹⁵

In the cases mentioned above, the maxim plays a major role in the exegesis or explanation simply because there is no other material present. The more usual occurrence is that the maxim is presented in a much larger context than in the cases previously cited.

Sometimes the maxim is used to explain an action that would otherwise be difficult to explain. For instance, there is a very long story to illustrate observance of the law implied in the verse: "If a woman has an issue of blood many days ... she is unclean."¹⁶ It is asserted that Jehoiashin, the son of Jehoiakim, observed this law while he was imprisoned by Nebuchadnezzar. The story begins with Nebuchadnezzar coming to capture Jehoiakim. To avoid the destruction of the Temple, the Sanhedrin turns over the king to the conqueror, who slays him and installs his son, Jehoiachin, as king.

12. Ex 14.15

14. Ex R 21.7

16. Lev 25.25

13. Job 36.19, as translated by Soncian.

15. See p. 19f below.

However, when Nebuchadnezzar returns to Babylon and reports to the people what he had done, they reply, גור טב מכלל ב"ש

גור ב"ש מכלל ב"ש דאכ"ו (DO NOT RAISE A GENTLE CUB OF A VICIOUS DOG, MUCH LESS A VICIOUS CUB OF A VICIOUS DOG.¹⁷)

Nebuchadnezzar heeds the advice of his people and returns to Palestine to imprison Jehoiachim. The rest of the story is inconsequential to understanding the use of the maxim.¹⁸

From the story, it is hard to see why the Babylonian monarch changed his mind and returned to remove his appointee. But by putting the maxim into the mouth of the Babylonian throng, the storyteller is able to provide a rationale for Nebuchadnezzar's action.

In commenting on the verse, "Jacob called Rachel and Leah to the field, to the flock,"¹⁹ Shim'on ben Gamli'el²⁰ says that there are three things he likes about Easterners: they cut off their food instead of chewing it off; they kiss on the hand instead of the mouth; and they hold council in open fields. As if to answer the implied question What is so good about holding council in open fields? the rabbi adds the maxim, בחקל דאית בה איוורין לא תיסר מלה דמסתירין (IN A FIELD WHICH HAS MOUNDS, SPEAK NO SECRETS.).²¹

In expounding the section about the plagues, the rabbis ask why God smote the waters with blood as the first of the plagues. The answer is that Pharaoh and his people worshiped the Nile. The Holy One reasoned, "I will strike the god first

17. Jastrow, p. 226b under גור.

18. Lev R 19.6

19. Gen 31.4

20. Theodor, p. 858, asserts that it was another sage.

21. Gen R 74.2

and then his people." As if in answer to the hypothetical question What good would it do to strike the god? the rabbi inserts the maxim, מִי אֵלֹהִים וַיִּבְעֲתוּן כּוֹסֵרֵי (STRIKE THE GODS AND THE PRIESTS WILL BE FRIGHTENED.). Without the maxim, we could well be in doubt as to the unique efficacy of striking the Nile as the first of the plagues. In this case, the proverb is the sole vehicle of explanation.²²

When Israel conducted its war against Sihon, God fought on their side by signaling the mountains to crush those who were waiting in ambush. "Thou didst shatter the heads of the sea-monsters in the waters. Thou didst crush the heads of leviathan."²³ Then God asked, How will Israel know what good I did for them? But why did God ask the question? This teacher explains God's actions in terms of the popular maxim, וְנָתַתָּ פֶתַח לַחַיִּיל וְחִידָה לְאִמּוֹ; (IF YOU GIVE BREAD TO A CHILD, INFORM ITS MOTHER.). God had the mountains move apart so that the rivers could sweep the bodies away. When Israel passed by and saw, "then Israel sang this song."²⁴ Thus the proper division of labor was learned: God had the duty of performing miracles and Israel was to praise God. The same idea is learned from a proper interpretation of a Psalm verse:²⁵ "Salvation is God's (job); praising him is incumbent on his people."²⁶

It is said that Rav Shila once murdered a man. A legal

22. Ex R 9.9

23. Ps 74.13f

24. Num 21.17

25. Ps 3.9

26. Num R 19.33

maxim is used to justify, or explain away, his action. It seems that Shila administered lashes to this man for having had intercourse with an Egyptian woman. The man turned the rabbi over to the civil authorities. By judicious use of double talk, Shila was able to free himself from their hands. On the way out of court, the rabbi indicated to the man who had thurned him in that he was rather proud of the way he fooled the oppressive foreigners. The man was ready to turn him in all over again; so Shila killed him. In answer to the implicit question How could he do such a thing? the story concludes וְהַחֲזִיק אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּחָה בְּיָדוֹ לְהַגִּיד

וְהַחֲזִיק אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּחָה בְּיָדוֹ לְהַגִּיד (THE TORAH SAYS, IF SOMEONE COMES TO KILL YOU, HASTEN TO KILL HIM.). It is interesting that in this context this maxim is used to explain away the rabbi's action.²⁷

Later, we shall see how this proverb is used in two other contexts as a summary, thus giving a tone of legal force to a bit of sage advice. As maxim alone, the meaning would seem to be "It is wise to defend yourself." In the context above, it seems to take on legal force with the additional meaning, "One who acts in self defense is justified."²⁸

Throughout the rabbinic literature, a major concern of the rabbis is the phrasing of the Biblical text. They are alert for unusual words or seemingly unnecessary repetitions. In a number of cases, a maxim is the vehicle used to explain an unusual phrasing.

27. Ber 58a

28. See pp. 21f below.

For instance, when Jacob calls Joseph to his deathbed and requests that his body be returned to Palestine for burial, he prefaces his words with the phrase, "deal kindly and truly with me."²⁹ The midrash asks Is there such a thing as false kindness, that one need say both hesed and emes? The maxim provides the answer: מִיִּת בְּרִיָּה וְרַחֲמָן מַעֲוִן (IF YOUR FRIEND'S SON IS DEAD, HELP CARRYING; IF YOUR FRIEND IS DEAD, THROW OFF.³⁰). The maxim implies that Joseph might be inclined to do favors only when a favor could be expected in return. Since a dead man cannot reciprocate, why do hesed for him? Therefore, Jacob implies that "If you do hesed after my death, when I can do nothing for you, then you shall have performed the hesed shel emes."³¹

In a number of places³² Euphrates is referred to as "the great river." But the Tigris is also called "the great river."³³ Surely there can be only one great river.³⁴ The rabbis explain that whatever river is associated with Israel is to be considered great because the Bible refers to Israel as great,³⁵ as the proverb says, עֲנֵה לְמַלְכָּא מַלְכָּא חַדְוֵךְ לְשַׁחֲוִי לְשַׁחֲוִי (A KING'S SERVANT IS A KING; ATTACH YOURSELF TO THE CAPTAIN AND THEY WILL BOW DOWN BEFORE YOU.³⁶). The

29. Gen 47.29

30. Jastrow, p. 544b under מַעֲוִן.

31. Gen R 96.5 with parallels in Tanḥ Wayiḥi 5 and Yalqut 154.

32. Gen 15.18; Deut 1.7; Josh 1.4.

33. Dan 10.4

34. There are deep textual problems with this passage in Gen R 16.3 and its abbreviated parallels in Sifre Deut 6 and Yalqut 801; but the intention of the passage is clear.

35. Deut 4.7

maxim says that anything may obtain praise by association with something praiseworthy, and thus explains why Euphrates got the name great.

When Hagar flees from Sarai's harsh treatment and the angel asks her where she came from and where she is going, she replies, "I flee from the face of my mistress, Sarai."³⁷ We would not expect an escaped slave to admit her previous state. Why does Hagar admit that Sarai was her mistress? One rabbi explains by means of the maxim,

אם אמר לך חד דאזוניך דחמר לא תיחוש; חרין עבד לך פרובי
(IF ONE TELLS YOU THAT YOU HAVE THE EARS OF AN ASS, MIND IT NOT; IF TWO, ORDER A HALTER FOR YOURSELF.³⁸).³⁹ In the parallel⁴⁰ two maxims are used. The first is the same as the one above, except for the ending: עבד לך פרובי

(... ORDER BANDAGES FOR YOUR EYES as for an ass on a treadmill⁴¹). But, in addition, the Yalqut uses another version of the maxim: חברך קריך חסרה מוכפא מוש לגביך
(IF YOUR NEIGHBOR CALLS YOU AN ASS, PUT A SADDLE ON.⁴²).⁴³

In all cases, the intention is the same: if enough people call you something, believe them. Thus the maxim is used to explain Hagar's strange admission, in light of two verses:

Abram had said to Sarai: "Behold, your maid is in your hand"

36. Jastrow, p. 1545b under חָמַח. The Soncino translation to Gen R 16.3 treats the second clause differently: "cleave to heat and it will warm you."

37. Gen 16.8

38. Jastrow, p. 1146b under עֲבָדָה

39. Gen R 45.7

40. Yalqut 79

41. Jastrow, p. 1147a under מַכְרִים

42. Jastrow, p. 25b under מַכְרִים

(v. 6) and the messenger of God had addressed her as "Hagar, Sarai's handmaid" (v. 8).

One final example of how a maxim is used as a medium of explanation can be given from the familiar legend of Honi the Circle-Drawer. After awakening from a seventy year sleep and finding that he was unknown to the people and scholars of the day, he dies. But why should he die so soon? An answer is provided by the maxim אָנײַנצן יאָר
אָנײַנצן יאָר (EITHER FRIENDSHIP OR DEATH!).⁴⁴

Thus we have seen that the maxim can be used as a medium of explanation for action taken or of the phrasing of a Biblical verse or of the way things turned out.

FOR SUMMARY

Maxims are commonly used to restate in concise, forceful manner, a point which has already been made clear. Frequently the maxim is used to characterize the situation or draw from it a moral.

The Moral

Because of the pithy, folksy way that maxims are phrased, they are particularly apt vehicles for drawing the moral from a story or situation and expressing it in a way that is easy for the listener to remember. The other advantage accruing to the preacher who uses current maxims to express his lesson is that people may assent to the maxim in a way

⁴³. See p. 46 below.

⁴⁴. Ta'anith 23a

that they might not assent to an original formulation of the same idea.

A series of stories about how seemingly insignificant objects became important occurs a number of times as the exegesis to the verse, "The superfluities of the earth are included."⁴⁵ The final story in this group of seven is about a man who observed two birds fighting. One killed his opponent, but immediately brought an herb to revive him. The man took some of the herb to revive the dead of Israel. On the way, he revived a fox. Pleased with his success, he revived a dead lion, who promptly ate him. This event bears out the popular proverb, מִבְּלִישׁ עֵבִירָה בִּישָׁא עֵבִירָה (IF YOU HAVE DONE GOOD TO SOMEONE BAD, YOU HAVE DONE BAD; DO NOT DO GOOD FOR SOMEONE BAD AND EVIL WILL NOT OVERTAKE YOU.)⁴⁶ It should be noted that the moral brought out by the maxim is not the same lesson which is to be learned from the whole series of stories, i.e., that everything has its place and purpose in creation.

A much more clever exegesis uses the same maxim to teach the same moral. The verb "rose" in the verse, "And it came to pass ... that Cain rose up against Abel ... and slew him,"⁴⁷ is interpreted to mean that Abel was actually stronger than Cain. The preacher explains that Abel had practically overcome his attacker when Cain stopped him by

45. Ecc 5.8 as rendered by the Soncino translation to Lev R 22.4.

46. Lev R 22.4 with parallels in Gen R 10.7; Num R 18.22; Ecc R 5.8; Tanḥ Hūqath 1; and Yalqut to Ecc 5.8.

saying, "The two of us are the only ones in the world; what will you say to our father?" Abel was filled with mercy; but as soon as he let Cain up, Cain attacked him fatally. The rabbi then draws the moral from the situation with the maxim, טב לביש לא חנניד וביש לא יכמי לך (DO NOT DO GOOD FOR SOMEONE BAD AND EVIL WILL NOT OVERTAKE YOU.).⁴⁸

Elsewhere there is a fascinating bit of exegesis on Eliezer's prayer at the well of Aram-naharaim⁴⁹ We are told that four Biblical characters offered improper prayers. Eliezer asked that the girl who offered him water would be the proper wife for Isaac. Caleb and Saul promised to marry their daughters to the winners of particular battles. Jephthah promised to sacrifice the first creature that came to greet him if he won the battle. In three cases, the Holy One made things come out properly, but in the case of Jephthah, the improper prayer led to tragic results. Why did Pinhas the priest not stop the awful sacrifice? He said in his heart, "He needs me and I must go with him." Jephthah rebelled against the idea of the sacrifice; but because Pinhas was going along with it, he felt obligated, as the leader of Israel, to keep his dreadful promise. Between the two of them, the girl lost her life, as the proverb says,

בין חיה למתלתא אזיל ברא דעלובתא (BETWEEN THE MIDWIFE

47. Gen 4.8

48. Gen R 22.8

49. Gen 24.13f

AND THE TRAVAILING WOMAN, THE CHILD OF THE POOR WOMAN DIES.)

The popular maxim is an effective way of emphasizing that when responsible leaders "pass the buck," tragedy can occur.⁵⁰ In a parallel version,⁵¹ the same story is told in Hebrew. Instead of a proverb, the following sentence is written in Aramaic: כְּבִינִי תַרְיִיחַ סַפַּת חַיָּא עָלֻבְתָּא וְתַרְוִיחִין (AND THE END RESULT WAS THAT BETWEEN THE TWO, THE UNFORTUNATE ONE PERISHED AND THE TWO OF THEM ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HER BLOOD.). In comparing the two versions, one can see that, particularly if the maxim about childbirth was current, the maxim makes the more forceful statement of the moral.⁵²

Once Israel was saved when an angel slew the Assyrian army.⁵³ The rabbis speculate on the means by which death was administered. One suggestion is that it is the hand of God; another, the finger of God. The final suggestion is that Gabri'al used his sickle while he was on the way to ripen the fruits, as the proverb says, אַגַּב אֶרְחוֹךְ לְבַעַל (AND THE END RESULT WAS THAT BETWEEN THE TWO, THE UNFORTUNATE ONE PERISHED AND THE TWO OF THEM ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HER BLOOD.). The Aramaic of the proverbial moral can be translated two ways: (a) INCIDENTALLY (while doing something else), LET YOUR ENEMY HEAR FROM YOU. or (b) ON THE WAY (while you are traveling), LET YOUR ENEMY HEAR FROM YOU. In any case, the intention is clearly that one should follow the example of Gabri'al by inspiring fear in his enemies through action.⁵⁴

50. The section concludes with some clever interpretations to show how both Jephthah and Pinhas were duly punished.

51. Ecc R 10.15

52. See pp. 38f below.

In discussing leprosy, Rabbi Levi suggests that it was a matter of distress to Moses that Aaron was forced to inspect leprosy. "It is not in keeping with the dignity of my brother." The Holy One replied, "Does he not derive benefit from the twenty-four presents of the priesthood? דאכיל בחרי קולא ילקי בחרי קילא (HE WHO EATS THE PALM'S HEART WILL BE SMITTEN WITH THE STICK [of dried palm].⁵⁵). The commentator "חרי בחרי" suggests that around the palm tree there are prickly branches and thorns that one must withstand if he wishes to enjoy the fruit. The lesson seems to be that one cannot expect advantages without accepting some obligation.⁵⁶

The traveling Jew is warned to tell strangers on the road that he is going farther than his actual destination because thieves frequently wait until the end of a journey before they strike. When a Babylonian teacher followed this advice, the frustrated thieves called him a deceiver. The rabbi placed them under a ban so that for twenty-two years "crime did not pay." Finally, all but one weaver in the band apologized to the rabbi so that they could have their ban lifted. The stubborn weaver was eaten by a lion. The moral is that גרינא דלא ט"ן שחא בצרא כשנ"ח (A YEAR OF SCARCE EARNING WILL CHANGE (for the better) A WEAVER IF HE BE NO PROUD FOOL.⁵⁷). The warning to see one's mistakes

53. 2 Ch 32.21

54. Sanh 95b

55. Jastrow, p. 1341a under קורא II.

56. Lev R 15.8

57. Jastrow, p. 531a under ט"ן

and to bend to circumstances comes across very clearly.⁵⁸

In a number of places, there is a long sermon based on the verse, "Better is one handful, with peace, than two hands full with trouble and striving after wind."⁵⁹ It is the latter phrase, *וְשָׁלוֹם רֵוַח*, which becomes the refrain throughout the sermon. Among the parallels, there are marked differences, but these differences do not affect the use of the maxims, which are used in each case to emphasize the moral of the section in which they are employed. (a) It is better to know two orders of Mishna well than to study all of the Halakhah poorly so that one can claim the title of Master of Halakhah. *טַבָּא חֲדָא צִיפְרָא כְּפוּתָא בִּן סַמָּא פְּרַחִי*

(BETTER IS ONE TIED BIRD THAN A HUNDRED FLYING.) (b) Better is he who has ten pieces of gold and uses them to trade and make a living than he who borrows on interest so that he can be called an Entrepreneur. *דִּיזִיף בְּרִיבִיחָא סַמָּךְ*

דִּילִיָּה וְלֹא דִּילִיָּה (HE WHO BORROWS ON INTEREST DESTROYS HIS AND WHAT IS NOT HIS.⁶⁰). (c) Better is he who does charity with his own money than he who does robbery and violence in order to do charity with the resources of others so that he may be called a Doer of Mitzvahs. *גִּיפְרָא בְּחִזְזוּרִי*

וְסַפְלָגָא לְבִישָׁא (SHE WHORES FOR APPLES AND GIVES THEM TO THE SICK.⁶¹). (d) Better is he who has a garden and fertilizes and hoes it to support himself than he who takes many

58. Avod Zar 25b with parallel in Yalqut 133.

59. Ecc 4.6

60. Jastrow, p. 572b under *דִּילִיָּה*.

61. Jastrow, p. 225a under *דִּילִיָּה*.

fields on halves⁶² in order to be called a Master of Estates. דאָר גײַנט אַלץ צפּרײַן דאָר גײַנט צפּרײַן אַלץ לײַה (HE WHO RENTS ONE GARDEN WILL EAT BIRDS; HE WHO RENTS GARDENS, THE BIRDS WILL EAT HIM.) All of these maxims point out the folly of seeking good ends through poor means. The fellow who chases a hundred birds or farms several gardens or borrows extensively, ends up losing his substance; and the poor girl who whores for apples ends up looking pathetic. The folly of wanting to be what one is not is made very clear in this sermon through the repetition of key phrases and the clever use of maxims.⁶³

We noted above,⁶⁴ that the maxim כבוד ארץ רופאך עד שלא תצטרך לו (HONOR YOUR PHYSICIAN UNTIL YOU HAVE NO NEED OF HIM.) was used once as the sole means of explaining Job 36.19. Elsewhere, a fuller explanation of the Job verse is given in Hebrew and the maxim is quoted at the end in Aramaic to punctuate the moral: Rabbi Elazar said that a man should offer prayer prior to trouble. Had Abraham not prayed at Beth El and Ai, Israel would not have been able to survive its enemies. Resh Lakish said that anyone who strengthened himself on earth with prayer would have no angels against him on high. Johanan added that when a man seeks mercy, he should do so with the support of all the heavenly beings. By prayer, man brings them to be supporters of his supplications instead of troublers.

62. A note on p. 35 of the Soncino Lev R suggests that he rents many gardens but gives up half the produce as rent.

63. Lev R 3.1 with parallels in Ecc R 4.6 and Yalqut 971.

64. See pp. 6f above.

יִקְרֶה לְאִשָּׁא עַד דְּלֹא תִצְטָרֵךְ לֵיהּ (DECLARE YOUR PHYSICIAN PRECIOUS UNTIL YOU HAVE NO NEED OF HIM.). In this context, one is encouraged to curry the favor of heavenly hosts for a time when one needs them. The popular maxim reinforces the moral already taught in the less familiar words of the rabbis.⁶⁵

Emphasis

Almost imperceptibly we have moved from examples where the maxim is a means of extracting the moral from a situation to examples where the maxim acts as a forceful repetition of a point already made.

In response to the verse, "My soul has them still in remembrance and is bowed down within me,"⁶⁶ Rabbi Judan is moved to exclaim, "Yes, I know you remember the nations of the world (for punishment); but what shall I do (seeing that) my soul is bowed within me? יְדַשְׁנוּ אֶת הַיָּד הַזֹּאת בְּיָד הַזֹּאת (BY THE TIME THE STOUT BECOME THIN, THE LIFE OF THE THIN IS GONE OUT.⁶⁷). In his own statement, the rabbi expresses his feeling of desolation and frustration. The maxim is an emphatic restatement of the feeling that overwhelms him.⁶⁸

In a similar context, a different maxim serves as the same kind of emotional expression. Moses complained before the Holy One, "I served You faithfully as a shepherd in the desert. But when Your people were about to enter the prom-

65. Yalqut 920

66. Lam 3.20

67. Jastrow, p. 1348a under יָד .

68. Lam R on Lam 3.20 with parallel in Yalqut, p. 1051a.

ised land, You decreed that my bones should fall in the desert. Later, during the exile, You assigned me to lament and cry over them. כְּסוּב אֶרְוָה לֹא שׁוֹב לִי ; וּמִרְעוּי רָע לִי (I DERIVE NO BENEFIT FROM MY MASTER'S GOOD FORTUNE; BUT I SUFFER FROM HIS BAD FORTUNE.⁶⁹).⁷⁰

We have previously noted⁷¹ how a maxim is used to explain the action of a rabbi. In the present case, we shall note how the same maxim acts as the summary statement for a principle which is derived in another way. There is a statement that Moses ruled that "if a thief be found breaking in and be smitten and die, no blood guilt" falls upon the householder.⁷² David speaks to Saul, "You found me in a cave."⁷³ You and your blood were permitted by the Torah and by Moses. When Moses said, לֹא תַעֲמִיד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ, he meant that if a man comes to kill you and has the ability, 'do not stand still' by saying to yourself that you will be guilty ffor his blood.' Do not rule over your heart but kill him immediately. The intent of the maxim is the same: קָדִים קָטְלֵה עַד לֹא יִקְטֹלךָ (KILL HIM BEFORE, SO THAT HE WILL NOT KILL YOU.).⁷⁴

The same maxim is used as Raba explains the reasoning behind the law of the housebreaker.⁷⁵ No man is inactive where his property is concerned. Therefore the thief reasoned, 'If the owner tries to prevent me, I will kill him.' Therefore,

69. Soncino translation to Lam R, p. 47.

70. Lam R, Pethqta' 24.

71. See p. 10 above.

72. Ex 22.1

73. 1 Sam 24.11

the Torah says, אם בא להורגך השכם להורגו (IF SOMEONE COMES TO KILL YOU, BE FIRST AND KILL HIM.). Here, the law is stated and explained and finally reiterated in the form of a legal maxim which is much more easily remembered than the law itself.⁷⁵

When we discussed how the maxim about the Nazirite going around the vineyard came to stand for the principle of making a fence around the Torah,⁷⁶ we noted in effect that the maxim was used as a summary for the section and as a restatement of the principle of the siyag (fence around the Torah).

On a very different subject, a maxim is used to restate an attitude toward knowledge: Reaching on the verse, "This is the statute of the Torah,"⁷⁷ Rabbi Isaac uses as his pethhta', "All this have I tested with wisdom. I said, I shall become wise; but it is distant from me."⁷⁸ This leads to "God gave wisdom to Solomon ... like sand on the sea-shore."⁷⁹ What is the meaning of "like sand"? The second reply to this question is, "Just as sand is a wall to the sea, so wisdom was a wall to Solomon."⁸⁰ As the proverb says, דעה חסרה מה קני'ת; דעה קני'ת מה חסרה (IF YOU

74. Midrash Tehilim to Ps 56 with similar uses of the maxim in Ber 62b and Yalqut Samuel 134.

75. Sanh 72a

76. Num R 10.8; see also pp. 4ff above.

77. Num 19.2

78. Ecc 7.23

79. 1 Ki 5.9

80. "Acting to check passion," suggests a footnote in the Soncino translation to Num R 19.3.

LACK KNOWLEDGE, WHAT HAVE YOU ACQUIRED? IF YOU HAVE ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, WHAT DO YOU LACK?). "Like a city broken down and without a wall; so is he whose spirit is without restraint."⁸¹ The maxim, much like the proof text which follows, is used to emphasize the desirability and necessity of wisdom.⁸²

The same maxim, with clauses reversed, is used in a more compact exegesis which highlights the same principle. Rabbi Tanhuma uses as his pethihta', "There is gold and many rubies; but lips of knowledge are a precious jewel."⁸³ Often men have gold, silver, precious stones, pearls -- all the lovely things of the world -- but they lack knowledge. Already the point is made, but now it is emphasized and repeated by the maxim. After stating the maxim, the preacher goes on to make the text more explicit. The gold refers to the freewill offerings the Israelites brought to the tabernacle; rubies refer to the gifts of the rulers. Moses became depressed that he had nothing valuable to offer for the tabernacle. God assured him that his "lips of knowledge" and the words he spoke were more acceptable than material gifts.⁸⁴

FOR STATEMENT OF ATTITUDE

When a proverbial expression is used to express the attitude of the user, it is usually to express a negative

81. Prov 25.28

82. Num R 19.3 with parallels in Ecc R 7.32, Tanh Hupath 10, and Yalqut Mishle 959.

83. Prov 20.15

84. Lev R 1.6

feeling. Perhaps it is safer to couch uncomplimentary or unkind feelings through a maxim than to express them in one's own words.

One exception to this generalization is found in a line by line commentary on Job. It is said that "when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they ... made an appointment together to bemoan him and to comfort him." ⁸⁵ What is the meaning of "they made an appointment"? After all, each lived at least three hundred parsangs from the other. How did they know? There are two opinions: (a) Each had crowns (or wreaths). Rashi explains that on each crown was the face of one friend. If a face changed, suffering had come to that friend and appropriate action could be taken. (b) Each had a tree representing each friend. If the tree withered, they knew to whom trouble had come. Rabbah added, "Thus the popular saying, *אם חלה כהן' דא'יו בן ס'חיה* (GIVE ME EITHER FRIENDS LIKE JOB'S FRIENDS OR GIVE ME DEATH!). In this way, the rabbi expresses his deep approbation for the concern exhibited by Job's friends. ⁸⁶

Far more common is the use of a maxim to express negative feelings. An interchange is said to have taken place between Rab and Rav Shela in which the most bitter kind of insult is conveyed through maxims. Strack gives us the background that "Rab Shela had been head of the school at

85. Job 2.11

86. B Bat 15b

Nehardea when Rab returned from Palestine."⁸⁷ He lists both men as first generation Babylonian Amoraim. Rab comes to the place of Shela and stands next to him as translator. For the phrase קר'א חגבר, Rab says "the call of the man." Shela corrects him, saying that it should be interpreted, "cry of the rooster." Rav replies with the maxim, אגוב לחרי זמר לגרמי לא מקבלות מיניה (A FLUTE IS MUSICAL TO NOBLES: GIVE IT TO WEAVERS AND THEY WILL NOT ACCEPT IT [Fools criticize what sages admire]⁸⁸). Before Rab Hiyai made the interpretation "man" and was not corrected." Shela asks Rab to sit down, but Rab replies, אי תגרת ליה פומ עמר' (IF YOU WORK AS A LABORER, HACKLE HIS WOOL [If you make the mistake of hiring yourself out, you must nonetheless do your master's most unpleasant work]⁸⁹). Others say that he replied, "One may not be demoted in matters of holiness." The bad blood between these two men is amply illustrated by Rab's use of maxims.⁹⁰

A similar insulting use of a maxim is found in a rather strange story told about Eleazar ben Shimon and his wife. The rabbi, fearing that his colleagues might mistreat his body, requested that his wife keep it in the upper chamber of their home. This she did for eighteen (or twenty-two) years. People would come to ask questions and a voice

87. Hermann L. Strack, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, p. 120.

88. Jastrow, p. 3b under זמר 2128

89. Jastrow, p. 14a under גרמי 7121.

90. Yoma' 20b

issued forth giving decisions. Eventually the body was buried and Rabbi sent a proposal of marriage to Eleazar's widow. Her reply was twofold: "A vessel that has been used for holy purposes should now be used for profane!" Or, as the proverb says, בְּמֶתֶר דְּסִרִּי בִּיתָא חֲלָא וְיִנְיָה כּוֹלְבָא רַעִיָא קוֹלְחִיָּה חֲלָא (WHERE THE WARRIOR HUNG UP HIS BATTLE AXE, THE SHEPHERD HANGS UP HIS WALLET.⁹¹). The insult is very clear: Would you have someone as unworthy as yourself try to replace someone as worthy as my late husband?⁹²

The same maxim is used as an expression of contempt. The exegesis is on the verse, "And further, I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, evil; in the place of righteousness, wickedness."⁹³ In the place where the Great Sanhedrin sat and judged the law of Israel sit "all the princes of the King of Babylonia."⁹⁴ As the proverb says, "WHERE THE WARRIOR" The play is clearly on תִּנְחַן in the Jeremiah verse as compared to תִּנְחַן, which was the activity of the Sanhedrin. The rabbi uses the maxim to express his disdain for Babylonian (or perhaps any foreign) rule.⁹⁵

A maxim is the vehicle for an editorial comment following the exegesis on the verse, "And there was a

91. There is some problem as to the correct spelling of the text. It may be בִּלְיָא (bag or wallet, Jastrow, p. 620a) or it could be כַּלְיָא (jar or pitcher, Jastrow, p. 1330a).

92. B Metz 84b

93. Ecc 3.16

94. Jer 39.3

95. Ecc R 3.16 with parallels in Yalqut Kohemoth 969, Lev R 4.1 and Sanh 103a.

famine in the land."⁹⁶ There were ten famines that came into the world. (Each is listed with an appropriate proof text.) Huna said in the name of Samuel that a famine really should have come in the days of Saul and not in the days of David. Since Saul was the stump of a sycamore and David the shoot of an olive tree, God delayed the famine so that it would fall on someone who could withstand its effects; as the maxim says, שְׁלָה חָטְאָה (SHELA HAS SINNED; BUT JOHANAN MUST PAY.) One draws the impression that the writer uses the maxim to complain about the structure of events. Yes, it is fine to say that God tests those who can withstand it; but why must I suffer while others do the sinning? The maxim becomes a harmless way for the author to protest about the order of things.⁹⁷

In this chapter, we have discussed the exegetical uses of maxims in the literature examined. The maxim seems to be used under three general categories: (a) a vehicle of explanation; (b) a device by which the teacher summarizes a main point or draws a moral from a longer exegesis; and (c) a means of expressing an emotion (generally negative in character) by the user of the maxim.

96. Ruth 1.1

97. Ruth R 1.4 with almost exact parallels in Gen R 25.3, 40.3, and 64.2, since Noah, Abraham, and Isaac each endured a famine.

3. STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

We turn now to touch only briefly on a rather puzzling textual problem which arises in the mind of a reader of even a few maxims in the rabbinic literature. As often as not, maxims seem to be superfluous to the exegesis. The beginning student of this literature is impressed with the compactness and economy of expression with which an idea is developed. In many cases where maxims are used, however, it appears that the maxim does not add a new step in the argument but repeats a step already expressed in another manner. It would be interesting to conduct a study to examine the hypothesis that in many cases maxims constitute an addition by some later hand. However, the complexities of such textual study are so great that such an analysis would be beyond the scope of this paper. We shall have to confine ourselves to observing a number of cases where the maxim is unquestionably a part of the exegesis and a number of other cases where the "fit" of the maxim into the exegesis is less than convincing and the case could be argued either way.

MAXIM IS INTEGRAL

Whenever the maxim makes a point that is essential to the flow of ideas, whenever its omission destroys the sense of the passage, it seems reasonable to conclude that the maxim is an integral part of the passage.

In the story about Jehoiachin being carted off to exile in Babylon,¹ it is necessary for the storyteller to bridge the gap between Nebuchadnezzar placing Jehoiachin on the throne and returning to jail him. An answer must be given to the question What made the Babylonian monarch change his mind? This storyteller puts into the mouths of the Babylonian *qāḥān* advice which ran counter to the king's action. Thus the rabbi is able to reconcile otherwise contradictory actions. It is difficult to imagine the story as complete without the use of the maxim.

Similarly, the battle of insults waged between Rab and Shela² could not have been related without the maxims because without them the high emotional pitch of the interchange would be lost. Were one to read the section omitting the maxims, the total sense would be destroyed.

In cases where a maxim is the sole means of explanation it is surely an integral part of the passage. A number of prohibitions (any kind of intimacy where licentiousness might be suspected; wine mixed by or processed by gentiles; mixing flour with vinegar on Passover) are made solely on the basis of GO, GO, THEY SAY TO THE NAZIRITE, GO ALL AROUND SO YOU MAY NOT COME CLOSE TO THE VINEYARD.³ One can hardly say that these uses of the maxim are later additions.

Where the maxim provides the reader with a vital bit

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1. See pp. 7f above.
 2. See pp. 24f above.
 3. See pp. 4ff above.

of information, it cannot be said that the maxim is a later addition. The maxim, OF ACACIAS THERE IS NO PROFIT EXCEPT YOU CUT THEM DOWN, acts as the only clue that, as the commentator י"ן suggests, the reader might read נר instead of נר in Ex 6.11.⁴ Even with the maxim, the interpretation is puzzling.

In the same way, the very unusual maxim, IF YOUR FRIEND'S SON IS DEAD, HELP CARRYING; IF YOUR FRIEND IS DEAD, THROW OFF, becomes the vehicle to explain the unusual repetition of "do נדן and נדן with me."⁵ The maxim alerts the reader to the fact that the preacher was reacting to the behavior of some circles which failed to honor the dead. The maxim is essential to our understanding.

In the story of Rab Shila murdering the informer,⁶ the maxim, IF SOMEONE COMES TO KILL YOU, HASTEN TO KILL HIM, is the only attempt to explain or give halakhic justification for the rabbi's action. Its place within the story seems certain.

The same maxim serves as the conclusion of Raba's syllogism to prove that the law of the housebreaker is valid.⁷ As such, it cannot be dispensed with.

So far, we have examined cases where the maxims seem to be integral parts of the original exegeses.

4. Ex R 6.5. See p. 6 above.

5. Geh 47.29. See p. 11 above.

6. See pp. 9f above.

7. See pp. 21f above.

MAXIM COULD BE AN APPENDAGE

For every case where the maxim is unquestionably a part of the original exposition, there is another case where one might be inclined to question the necessity of the maxim for a clear, well-illustrated exegesis. In each of the cases cited below, one can read the section omitting the proverb without feeling that he is missing any part of the sense or vividness of the passage.

A number of maxims either come at the end of the passage or are in a language other than the rest of the exegesis. Take as an example the use of the maxim, HE WHO EATS THE PALM'S HEART WILL BE SMITTEN WITH THE STICK.⁸ It comes at the end of the section and is in Aramaic while the rest of the section is in Hebrew. The same can be said of the use of IN A FIELD WHICH HAS MOUNDS, SPEAK NO SECRETS,⁹ EITHER FRIENDSHIP OR DEATH!¹⁰ comes at the end of the passage, but the section is entirely in one language, Aramaic. I DERIVE NO BENEFIT FROM MY MASTER'S GOOD FORTUNE, BUT SUFFER FROM HIS BAD FORTUNE¹¹ is in Hebrew and comes at the end of a passage which is in Hebrew.

In the long section from Leviticus Rabbah 3.1 which contains four maxims,¹² a regular switch between Hebrew and Aramaic draws attention to itself. In each of the four

8. See p. 17 above.

9. See p. 8 above.

10. See p. 13 above.

11. See pp. 20f above.

12. See pp. 18f above.

parts lettered from (a) through (d), two patterns are employed. The first part is in Hebrew and follows the formula: "It is better to be A than to be B because B is 'a striving after wind.'" There follows a formula in Aramaic: "And 'his striving' is to be called C, as the proverb says, ...", where C is an honorific title. Since the Hebrew section alone makes for a very complete sermon with good illustrative material and strong impact, it is possible to conclude that the final preacher of this sermon may have used the Hebrew section as a starting point for his sermon, which contained both the Hebrew exposition and the Aramaic titles and popular maxims. The Hebrew section makes a fine sermon by itself; but without the Hebrew, the Aramaic cannot stand.

There are times when the maxim seems to interrupt the flow of ideas within a section. If one lists the elements of the exegesis in Numbers Rabbah 19.33,¹³ one may wish to conclude that the proverb acts as such an interruption: (a) God smote Sihon.¹⁴ (b) He had the mountains crush those who hid in caves to ambush Israel.¹⁵ (c) IF YOU GIVE BREAD TO A CHILD, INFORM ITS MOTHER. (d) God asked, How will Israel know what good I did for them? (e) What did he do? He had the mountains move apart and the rivers flush out the bodies.¹⁶ The question in (d) serves the same function as

13. See p. 9 above.

14. Deut 2.33

15. Ps 74.13 f

16. Num 21.15

the maxim in (c): introducing element (e). If element (c) or (d) were omitted, the exegesis would flow just as smoothly and clearly. Is the question an addition or is the maxim an addition or are both original?

The uses of the maxim, IF YOU LACK KNOWLEDGE, WHAT HAVE YOU ACQUIRED? IF YOU HAVE ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, WHAT DO YOU LACK?¹⁷ seems to separate the first parts of the exegeses from proof texts. In Numbers Rabbah 19.3, we are told that just as sand is a wall to the sea, so wisdom was a wall to Solomon. At this point in the sermon, the maxim is inserted, and then the proof text for the statement about wisdom being a wall is quoted: "Like a city broken down and without a wall; so is he whose spirit is without restraint."¹⁸ Ordinarily we would expect the proof text to follow immediately after the statement. Similarly, in the Leviticus Rabbah 1.6 passage, there are verses to explain to whom "gold," "rubies," and "lips of knowledge" refer; but before these verses are quoted, the maxim is mentioned. Does the maxim impair the flow of these sections? One might argue either way.

There are a number of cases where the connection between the maxim and the rest of the exegesis is difficult to understand. Such incongruities may indicate that the maxim was not an original part of the exegesis.

For example, there is a passage containing four expositions about Kings of Israel introduced by Rabbi

17. See pp. 22f above.

18. Prov 25.28

Johanan in the name of Shimon ben Johai. The third section tries to explain the meaning of the verse, "If a wise man contend with a foolish man, whether he laugh or rage, there is no rest."¹⁹ God was wrathful to Ahaz, who burnt incense to Syrian gods.²⁰ But he smiled on Amaziah, who ultimately bowed before Edomite gods.²¹ The intention of the section seems to be that when God dealt with those foolish kings of Israel, whether he was kind or unkind, apostasy was inevitable because of their foolish nature. But what is the meaning in this context of the maxim which Rav Papa introduces?

נב"י ליה למר דלא ידע ח"כ"י למר דלא ידע ו"י ליה למר דלא ידע
 (WEEP FOR HIM WHO KNOWS NOT HIS FORTUNE. LAUGH
 FOR HIM WHO DOES NOT KNOW HIS FORTUNE. WOE TO HIM WHO KNOWS
 NOT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD.²²). Except for
 the relation of the word "weep" to "rage" and the word
 "laugh" to "laugh," there seems to be little that connects
 the maxim to the rest of the exegesis.²³

Another difficult-to-understand use of a maxim concerns the ten names for prayer. Moses uses the term wa'ethhanan when he approaches the Holy One to plead for the privilege of entering the promised land.²⁴ Rabbi Levi asks why Moses chose this particular term. The answer is the maxim, 'לן
זחיר שלא תתפס מקום דבורך (TAKE CARE THAT YOU ARE NOT TAKEN

19. Prov 29.9

20. 2 Ch 28.23

21. 2 Ch 25.14

22. Soncino translation to Sanh, p. 700.

23. Sanh 103a

24. Deut 3.23

AT YOUR WORD.²⁵). How? God had told Moses, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious."²⁶ With him who has a claim, I shall be merciful. With him who has no claim, I will deal graciously (בְּחַסְדִּי חִנּוּם, which is related to the words חִנּוּם and חִנּוּם). Since Moses knew that he had no claim, he was asking to be dealt with according to matanath hinom. The exegesis is quite clear, but what does the maxim mean in this context?²⁷

In another case, even the authorities cannot agree on an interpretation. The maxim occurs in one of several interpretations of "You have granted me life and hesed and your providence has preserved my spirit."²⁸ The general tenor of the section is that human birth is a much greater miracle than animal birth. In this context, Rabbi Shimon says: The abdomen of a woman is made of chambers and chambers (כַּיִן or קַיִן); coils and coils (סִיָּה); bands and bands (חֲבִיל). In the hour that she sits on the birthstool, she does not cast forth at once, as the saying goes, אֶשְׁתֵּר וְיִלְדָּה (WHEN ONE BAND IS LOOSENEED, TWO BANDS ARE presumed to be loosened).²⁹ It is difficult to understand what is intended. The maxim seems to say the opposite of the exegesis. The exegesis says that it is a great wonder that the baby is not born all at once. The

25. Soncino translation of Deut R, p. 30. Also see Jastrow, p. 1668a under דָּבָר.

26. Ex 33.19

27. Deut R 2.1

28. Job 10.12

29. Soncino translation of Lev R 14.3. Jastrow, p. 419a under מִלֵּלָהּ makes less sense: IF ONE ROPE IS UNTIED, TWO BUNDLES ARE LOOSENEED.

maxim seems to imply that all the bands are so closely related that they become loosened at once and birth should take place immediately. Even if the meaning can ultimately be explained, it is apparent that with the present text, maxim and text do not fit together well.³⁰

A final difficult case says that Aaron was very happy on the day that the covenant enumerating the twenty-four perquisites of the priesthood was made. Rabbi Ishmael says that it is a common expression that לְטוֹבַתִּי נִשְׁבְּרָה (FOR MY GOOD IS THE LEG OF MY COW BROKEN.) For the good of Aaron, Korah came and protested concerning the priesthood in his presence. The analogy between Korah and the cow seems to be intended. But in the maxim, the point seems to be that for my well-being, my cow broke her foot; i.e., I derived benefit from her injury. The text seems to say that because of Aaron's good; i.e., because God made it too good for Aaron, Korah came and protested, and as a result, Korah was injured. Can the meaning of the maxim and the text be resolved so that they complement one another?³¹

How are we to account for these passages where the maxim seems unrelated to the exegesis? One might suggest that the text is corrupt and the original form of the maxim did make sense in the context; but this author would prefer a more difficult text over a simpler one. Another suggestion could be that we lack the historical knowledge or homiletical

30. Lev R 14.3

31. Sifre Korah, middle of p. 39 in the Friedmann edition.

insight to understand what the preacher intended. This possibility is readily admitted. But it is also reasonable to postulate that the maxim was added by someone who did not fully understand the exegesis. Thinking that the maxim was appropriate, he added it with confidence that the maxim made the passage clearer.

The foregoing cases illustrate a situation where the relation of maxim to text is quite unclear. In other cases, the maxim fits into the general meaning of the text, but varies in thought or tone enough to attract the reader's attention. We have already mentioned the section of Ruth Rabbah that uses the maxim, SHELA SINNED; BUT JOHANAN MUST PAY.³² The mood of the text is to praise those good people who have suffered although others were more deserving to suffer. The text is intended to strengthen those who must endure pain while observing the wicked free from pain. Quite opposite is the mood of the maxim, for it is an expression of frustration and complaint. It protests the unfairness of the world as it is. There is a real contrast in moods between text and maxim.

In Midrash Tehilim,³³ there is a very clever exegesis to glorify David's virtue in not killing Saul in the cave.³⁴ David would have been fully justified by an unusual interpretation of *לֹא תִּבְּרָךְ עַל דָּם רֵעִי* : "'Do not stand' idly when someone comes to kill you because you are worried 'about'

32. See pp. 26f above.

33. See p. 21 above.

guilt over the spilt 'blood of your neighbor'; kill your potential attacker immediately." With such a clever interpretation of the verse, the proverbial hathimah appears quite prosaic to this reader. Would a man clever enough to create such an interpretation resort to the use of such a prosaic maxim as his conclusion?

We discussed how the widow of Eleazar ben Shimon turned down the marriage proposal of Rabbi.³⁵ Actually, she gave two replies: (a) A vessel used for holy purposes should not be used for profane. and (b) WHERE THE WARRIOR HUNG UP HIS BATTLE AXE, THE SHEPHERD HANGS UP HIS WALLET. The second reply has a more cutting effect, but the first seems a more appropriate refusal to a proposal of marriage. The image of a woman as "vessel" is reasonable and the wording of the statement implies a negative reply. The second reply seems to accept the proposal with an air of disdain. The question of which reply is original is not likely to be resolved. The present wording of the text at least opens the possibility that the maxim is a later addition.

We have already discussed the tale of how Jephthah and Pinhas each relied on the judgement of the other with the result that Jephthah's daughter was slaughtered.³⁶ The tale ends with a dual conclusion: (a) Between the two of them, the girl lost her life. and (b) BETWEEN MIDWIFE AND

34. 1 Sam 24.11

35. See pp. 25f above.

36. Gen R 60.3; also see pp. 15f above.

TRAVAILING WOMAN, THE CHILD OF THE POOR WOMAN DIES. Ending (a) is merely a summary of the specific situation while (b) is a maxim which might apply to a number of varying situations. Again, one might argue as to whether (a) or (b) or both were originally part of the story. In this case, the parallel version³⁷ offers some assistance. The story in Hebrew is essentially the same except that where the maxim is in the Genesis Rabbah version there is an Aramaic line, כב'נ' תרי"ח ספח חמ"א עלובתא וחרו"חון איתח"בין על דסח ("Between the two, the unfortunate one died and the two of them are guilty for her blood."). It seems reasonable to conclude that the maxim may not have been originally associated with this text.

As was mentioned at the outset of this section, the difficulties of proving that maxims are later additions to the exegeses discussed make such proof a task beyond the scope of this paper. In each of the cases we have discussed, it is equally possible to argue that the maxim fits very well into the context. The only conclusion that this author wishes to draw from the presentation of this section is that one could well be on the alert for evidence that maxims are not the stock-in-trade of most rabbinic exegetes.

37. Ecc R 10.15

4. EVIDENCE TOWARD SOLUTION OF THE STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

An hypothesis which was developed toward the end of the reading that preceded the writing of this paper was that many maxims constitute a later addition to an already complete exegetical treatment. A thorough testing of this hypothesis would require examination of the some 1700 maxims listed by Bialik and Rawnitzki.¹ In addition, it would be necessary to distinguish between midrashic passages, where the exposition was developed for the pulpit, and talmudic passages, where the give and take of the academy was responsible for the development. Presented here are shreds of evidence that might be of use to one who would carry out the extensive study alluded to above. First we shall enunciate the concept of the "proverbial personality" and then present several other bits of evidence that could be pursued and developed.

THE PROVERBIAL PERSONALITY

The concept of the "proverbial personality" arises out of an intuitive feeling on the part of this author that maxims are not used in literary works with great frequency. It is true that maxims are available in every culture and that most people could recite five or six popular maxims with ease. Occasionally a writer will use a maxim where its content is particularly appropriate to the context. But

1. See p. 2 above.

generally, in our own times, educated people look for more original ways of stating ideas. Modern speakers and writers look for illustrative or summarizing material that has the vividness and assent-producing features of the proverb without its familiarity. It is significant to note that very little in the way of modern scholarship has been done in the area of proverbs. Yet there are some individuals interested enough in maxims to collect and analyze them.

When we turn to more ancient times, we realize that practices may have been different. Dr. Blank remarks, "Doubtless many sayings were adapted from their present context out of a fund of folk wisdom and seemed the more effective by very reason of their familiarity -- cliches have not always been disreputable."² But even in a milieu where the maxim is acceptable in literature, it still takes a certain bent of mind to think of a situation in terms of a maxim which typifies it or draws a lesson from it or offers satisfying explanation of it.

Alerted by the observation that maxims are not always an integral part of the exegesis with which they are presently found³ and by the feeling that it takes a special kind of personality to be interested in maxims and their literary use, one can search for specific evidence to support an hypothesis that a limited number of "proverbial personalities" were responsible for the presence of many of the maxims to be found in the Talmud and Midrash.

2. S. H. Blank. "Proverbs" in Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville, 1962), vol. 3, p. 934b.

3. See Chapter 3, pp. 28ff above.

Although they lived several centuries before the rabbinic period, the compilers and editors of the Biblical Book of Proverbs were of this breed. Perhaps they were teachers in the academies of upper-class adolescents and sought to give their charges down-to-earth, easy-to-remember advice about life.⁴ Whatever their purpose, their method was clear. They collected and catalogued a large number of proverbial statements regarding all areas of life. No doubt, they could easily recall a maxim in order to give advice to a student with a particular problem.

There was at least one pair of rabbis of a much later generation (fourth generation Babylonian Amoraim, according to Strack's index) who had the same kind of interest in collecting and understanding maxims. (Maybe they wrote their rabbinic theses on the "Biblical Origins of Maxims.") We find a series of sixteen sections beginning: "Rabba said to Rabbah bar Mari, 'From whence is derived the proverb which people say'" In some cases, two Biblical verses are suggested; in others, only one.⁵ There is one other bit of evidence that Rabba had a particular interest in maxims. One index which Weissberg provides in his compendium is an index of the rabbis in whose names the maxims are quoted. Two rabbis have much longer listings than the others: one is Rabban⁶ and the other is Rav Papa (whom we shall discuss

4. S. H. Blank. "Proverbs, Book of" in Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville, 1962), vol. 3, p. 939.

5. B Qam 92a and following.

6. Weissberg, op. cit., p. 22.

next).⁷ It seems at least conceivable that Rabba is one of those individuals responsible for many of the maxims now in the literature.

But even more of a "maxim addiot" seems to be the fourth century Babylonian Amora, Rav Papa. He has the longest list of passages in Weissberg's index. In addition, three of the forty-five maxims examined for this paper were introduced by Rav Papa.

We have already discussed the maxim, WHERE THE WARRIOR HUNG UP HIS BATTLE AXE, THE SHEPHERD HANGS UP HIS WALLET.⁸ In the version found in Sanhedrin 103a, Rav Papa introduces only the maxim.

Also in Sanhedrin 103a, there is an explanation of Proverbs 29.9 which we have mentioned.⁹ The main part of the exegesis is attributed to Johanan in the name of Shimon ben Johai, while the maxim (which seems to be out of place) is introduced by Rav Papa.

The exegesis of Second Chronicles 32.21 mentioned previously¹⁰ is the work of second and third generation Tanaim, but the maxim, INCIDENTALLY, LET YOUR ENEMY HEAR FROM YOU, is the sole contribution of Rav Papa, a fifth generation Babylonian Amora.

Seeking confirmation that Rav Papa had a particular interest in maxims, this author examined the ninety-two

7. Weissberg, op. cit., pp. 22,68.

8. See p. 26 above.

9. See pp. 33f above.

10. See p. 16 above.

references to Rav Papa in the Soncino index to Berakhoth and Shabbath. Fortunately, Rav Papa had interests other than maxims, but four of these references did produce maxims. In each case, Rav Papa's contribution comes toward the end of a passage contributed to by rabbis who are contemporaneous with or earlier than Papa.¹¹

Proving that maxims in the Midrash are later additions is an extremely difficult task because most maxims are quoted without mention of the teacher who introduced them. The only place one can find firm proof that a maxim is a later addition is in a Talmudic passage where the contribution of each teacher is clearly labeled. If one could show that a significant number of midrashic passages had Talmudic parallels in which the maxim was the contribution of a later teacher, it would be reasonable to conclude that for many other midrashic maxims, the talmudic parallels were lost or never recorded. In the course of this study, two cases were found where the midrashic use of the maxim is without attribution while the talmudic use of the maxim is attributed to a later teacher.

We have already discussed the use of the maxim, IF YOUR NEIGHBOR CALLS YOU AN ASS, PUT ON A SADDLE, as it relates to the story of Hagar fleeing from Sarai. In Bava Qamma 92b, Rabbah bar Mari suggests that the maxim is derived from the situation in Genesis 16.8. When the same

11. Ber 43b, 59a; Shab 32a, 53a.

maxim appears in the same context in Genesis Rabbah 45.7 and in Yalqut 79, it is used without attribution at all.¹²

We have mentioned that in Sanhedrin 103a, Rav Papa introduces the maxim, WHERE THE WARRIOR HUNG UP HIS BATTLE AXE, THE SHEPHERD HANGS UP HIS WALLET.¹³ In the parallel versions in Leviticus Rabbah 4.1 and Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3.16, the maxim is not specifically attributed to one teacher but is part of a whole section attributed to Rabbi Eliezer (a Tanna).

Is it possible to say that many of the maxims which now appear to be anonymous or the work of some other teacher were originally associated with a particular exegesis or Biblical verse by a "proverbial personality" but that at some later time, the originator was forgotten? Final proof for or against this proposition would require a study of all maxims and their parallels. If a substantial number of maxims appear both with and without attribution, it is reasonable to conclude that many of those maxims which appear only without specific attribution were originally the work of a "proverb addict" now forgotten. For an exhaustive study, this author would suggest the working hypothesis that maxims were frequently added to an existing exegesis by an individual who had a particular zeal for using proverbial expressions.

OTHER EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT HYPOTHESIS

Several other scraps of evidence seem to point to

12. See pp. 12f above.

13. See pp. 26 and 43 above.

many maxims being later additions, both logically and temporally,

There are a number of passages where the rabbi who introduces the maxim is later than the rabbi to whom the major exegesis is attributed.

Raba (fourth century Babylonian Amora) adds EITHER FRIENDSHIP OR DEATH! to Rabbi Johanan's (second century Palestinian Amora) tale about Honi the Circle-Drawer.¹⁴

Rabbah (BA 3 = third generation Babylonian Amora, after the notation of Strack¹⁵) adds GIVE ME EITHER FRIENDS LIKE JOB'S OR DEATH! to an explanation authored by Rav Judah (BA 1).¹⁶

We have already dealt with Elazar ben Pedat's (A 3) use of HONOR YOU PHYSICIAN UNTIL YOU HAVE NO NEED OF HIM.¹⁷ In the same section Resh Lakish (A 2) offers another interpretation of the same verse that Elazar plays upon.¹⁸

Rabina (BA 6) associates the maxim, א"י בר אחתיך
ד"ל לא חזי חזי בשוקא קמיה לא תחליף (IF YOUR NEPHEW IS MADE CONSTABLE, DO NOT PASS BEFORE HIM IN THE STREET.), with a complicated Tanaitic passage referring to the procedure of the high priest on Yom Kippur.¹⁹

If, in the few maxims examined for this study we find

14. See p. 13 above.

15. Strack, op. cit., p. 357.

16. See p. 24 above.

17. See pp. 6f, 19f above.

18. Job 36.19

19. Yoma 18a

these four as later additions, is it not possible that in cases where the attributions have been forgotten there are at least a few other maxims that are additions?

In two cases, the authors of scientific editions omit a maxim which is included in the printed version of the Hebrew passage. The Theodor edition omits the maxim, IN A FIELD WHICH HAS MOUNDS, SPEAK NO SECRETS.²⁰ The Soncino translation omits the maxim, WHERE THE WARRIOR HUNG UP HIS BATTLE AXE, THE SHEPHERD HANGS UP HIS WALLET.²¹

Finally, in the exegesis about Hagar, one version contains two variations of the the same maxim: IF ONE SAYS TO YOU THAT YOU HAVE EARS OF AN ASS, DO NOT BELIEVE HIM; IF TWO SAY IT, GET BANDAGES FOR YOUR EYES. and IF YOUR FRIEND CALLS YOU AN ASS, PUT ON A SADDLE.²² If the exegesis plus one maxim attracted the second maxim, perhaps the exegesis alone attracted the first maxim!

Individually, these instances prove little; but taken together, they offer some indication that the hypothesis of the "proverbial personality" may be fruitfully pursued.

20. Gen R 74.2. The Soncino translation, which generally follows Theodor's edition also omits the maxim, p. 677. See p. 8 above.

21. Lev R 4.1. See p. 26 above.

22. Yalqut 79. See pp. 12f and 44f.

5. MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS

Much of this paper has been composed out of a feeling that the maxim as used in the Midrash Rabbah and related rabbinic literature is a secondary element. It is only honest to note that in two cases, it seems that the maxim has inspired the exegesis rather than that the exegesis has attracted the maxim.

In two passages, we are told that the Euphrates got the designation "great" because it became associated with the children of Israel and their land.¹ The "proof text" for this assertion is the maxim, A KING'S SERVANT IS A KING; CLEAVE TO HEAT AND IT WILL WARM YOU. For the maxim to have been used this way, it must have inspired the explanation that association of river and land led to the description "great."

The second case where the maxim seems to inspire the exegesis is the clever twist given to the story of Cain and Abel.² There is nothing in the word עָבֵד to indicate that Abel must have been stronger than Cain. Only by having in mind the maxim, DO NOT DO GOOD TO AN EVIL ONE AND EVIL WILL NOT BEFALL YOU, could the author have made such a clever interpretation. The contrast between this use of the proverb and its prosaïd use in Leviticus Rabbah 22.4 makes the point even clearer. In this latter case, a story is

1. See pp. 11f above.

2. Gen R 22.8. See pp. 14f above.

told of a man who revived a lion and got eaten as a result. The maxim becomes an obvious moral to be drawn from the story. In the former case, the story seems to be directly inspired by the maxim.

In one case, the wording of a maxim is changed by a preacher to give an entirely different tone to a section. We discussed the passage in Leviticus Rabbah 311 that makes use of four different maxims. The third sub-division reads, "He who has ten gold pieces and uses them to trade and make a living is better than he who borrows on interest, as the proverb says, HE WHO BORROWS ON INTEREST DESTROYS HIS AND WHAT IS NOT HIS. His 'striving after wind' is that he wants to be called a Businessman."³ It would seem that this preacher tries to draw a lesson from the experience of this luckless fellow to instruct his flock in the wiser way to conduct business. How different is the tone of the preacher in the parallel of Ecclesiastes Rabba 4.6! "He who has ten gold pieces and uses them to trade and make a living is better than he who takes money of others to lose and destroy it, as the proverb says, לֹא כִסְפוֹ הָאֵל (IT IS NOT ENOUGH THAT HIS OWN SHOULD BE LOST; RATHER ULTIMATELY HIS AND THAT WHICH IS NOT HIS IS DESTROYED.) And all this because he wants to be called a Businessman." This preacher seems to be carrying on a personal vendetta against

3. See p. 18 above.

someone to whom he lent and at whose hand he lost. Throughout the rest of the sermon he is content to draw morals from the unwise acts of others. In this one instance, he changes the "maxim" slightly to give this part of his sermon a tone which contrasts with the remainder of the sermon. Even a maxim can be twisted to reflect the personal interests of the preacher.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The major defect of this paper is that the reading behind it is insufficient to allow the author to draw firm conclusions. This study has allowed the author to become aware of the problems that would be encountered in an exhaustive examination of the maxims in rabbinic literature, and it has given him an opportunity to make a number of observations that could become working hypotheses to be tested in such an extensive study:

(a) Maxims frequently become the bathimah of an exegesis.

(b) A majority of the maxims preserved in the rabbinic literature are in Aramaic.

(c) In a majority of cases, once a maxim has become associated with a particular Biblical verse or exegetical development, it is not used in some other appropriate context.

(d) Maxims frequently serve the function of inviting the hearer to assent to whatever proposition is explained or summarized by the maxim. In this sense, the maxim gives authority to what the preacher or teacher is saying, very much in the way that a scriptural proof-text gives added weight to a pronouncement.

In addition to providing hypotheses to be tested,

this study raises questions that could be answered only by the extensive study mentioned above:

(a) Is there a special significance to a maxim when it is quoted in a language different from the rest of the exegesis? In the cases examined here, the major part of the exposition is frequently in Hebrew with the maxim in Aramaic. And it is not infrequent that a legend is told in Aramaic with the maxim in Hebrew.

(b) Can a correlation be made between the way that a maxim is used and the firmness with which it seems to fit into the total exegesis? It is reasonable to say that when a maxim provides an essential bit of explanation, it is an integral and original part of the passage. On the other hand, when a maxim acts as a prosaic summary to a clever exegesis, one is inclined to ask if the maxim is not a later addition. It would be interesting to be able to work out a correlation between function and originality. This study produced no clear-cut indication that such a correlation exists.

(c) Is there some significance to the absence of maxims in Song of Songs Rabbah? (Though a preliminary question should be Can one find a maxim in the book?)

In a very real sense, this paper should be called a preliminary study into the exegetical uses of maxims in the rabbinic literature. It can serve only as the starting point for deeper, more extensive investigation.

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INDEX OF MAXIMS

NOTE 1: This index does not include the sixteen maxims found in Bava Qamma 92a and following since they are discussed as a group and not individually. See page 42.

NOTE 2: Citations are generally listed with the first mention of a maxim.

PAGES

MAXIM

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 44 | <p>אבב חנוואתא ופישא אחי ומרחמי;
אבב בזיוני לא אחי ולא מרחמי.
At the gate of the shop, there
are many brothers and friends;
at the gate of loss (or prison
or toll-gate) there are neither
brothers nor friends.</p> |
| 24f, 29 | <p>אבוב לחרי זמר לגרדאי לא סקבלוח מיניה.
A flute is musical to nobles;
give it to weavers and they
will not accept it.</p> |
| 16, 43 | <p>אגב ארחך לבעל דבנך אישחמק.
Incidentally (or On your way),
let your enemy hear from you.</p> |
| 24, 46 | <p>אוחברא כחברי דאיוב או מיתותא.
Give me either friends like
Job's or give me death!</p> |
| 13, 31, 46 | <p>או חברותא או מיתותא.
Either friendship or death!</p> |
| 19f | <p>אוקיר לאסיא עד דלא תצטרך ליה.
Declare your physician precious
until you have no need of him.</p> |
| 46 | <p>אי בר אחתיך די"לא חזי חזי בשוקא קמיה
לא תחליף.
If your nephew is made constable,
do not pass before him in the
street (because he knows your
crimes).</p> |

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- 24f, 29 אי תגרת ליה פון עמריה.
If you work as his laborer,
hackle his wool.
- 12f, 44f, 47 אם אמר לך חד אוזניך דחמר לא תיחוש;
חרין עביד לך פורבי.
If one tells you that you have
the ears of an ass, mind it
not. If two, order a halter
for yourself.
- 9f, 21f, 30, 37f אם בא לחורגך חשכס לחורגו.
If someone comes to kill you,
hasten to kill him.
- 35f אשתרי חד חבל אשתרי חרין חבלון.
When one band is loosened, two
bands are (presumed to be
loosened).
- 25f, 38, 43, 45, 47 באחר דמרי ביתא חלא זייניח כולבא
רעיא קולתיה חלא.
Where the warrior hung up his
battle axe, the shepherd hangs
up his wallet (or pitcher).
- 8, 31, 47 בחקל דאית בה איוגריין לא תימר מלה דמסטיירין.
In a field which has mounds,
speak no secrets.
- 15f, 38f בין חייתא למחבלתא אזיל ברא דעלובתא.
Between the midwife and the
travailing woman, the child of
the poor woman dies.
- 33f, 43 נבי ליה למר דלא ידע חייכי למר דלא ידע
חי ליה למר דלא ידע בין טוב לביש.
Weep for him who knows not his
fortune. Laugh for him who
knows not his fortune. Woe to
him who knows not the difference
between good and bad.
- 7f, 29 גור טב מכלב ביש חרבי;
גור ביש מכלב ביש עאכ"ו.
Do not raise the gentle cub of a
vicious dog, much less a vicious
cub from a vicious dog.

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- 18, 31f ג'יפא בחזורין ומפלוגא לבישא.
She whores for apples
and gives them to the sick.
- 17f גרדנא דלא טיזן שתא בצרא טשויה.
A year of scarce earning will
change (for the better) a
weaver if he be no proud fool.
- 19, 31f דאגד גינח אכל צפרין
דאגד גינח צפרין אכלין ליה.
He who rents one garden will eat
birds. He who rents gardens,
the birds will eat him.
- 17, 31 דאכל בחדר קולא ילקי בחדר קילא.
He who eats of the palm's
heart will be smitten with
the stick (of dried palm).
- 18, 31f,
49f דיוזיף בריביתא מאבד דיליה ולא דיליה.
He who borrows on interest
destroys his and what is not
his.
- 22f, 33 דעה חסרה מה קניה; דעה קניה מה חסרה.
If you lack knowledge, what
have you acquired?
If you have acquired knowledge,
what do you lack?
- 34f חוי זחיר שלא חתפס מקום דבורך.
Take care that you are not
taken at your word.
(literally, caught on the
spot where you speak.)
- 12f, 44f,
47 חברך קריך חמרא אונפא מוש לגביך.
If your neighbor calls you an
ass, put on a saddle (or
order bandages for your eyes).
- 44 חמרא אפילו בחקופת חמוז קרירא לה.
An ass feels cold even in the
summer.

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- טבא חדא ציפרא כפוחא מן מאח פרח"ן.
 18, 31f Better is one bird tied
 than one hundred flying.
- טב לביש עבירה נישא עבירה;
 טב לביש לא העביר וביש לא מטי לך.
 14f, 48f If you have done good for
 someone bad, you have
 done bad. Do not do good
 for someone bad and evil
 will not overtake you.
- כבד רופאך עד שלא חצטרך לו.
 6f, 19f, Honor your physician until
 46 you have no need of him.
- כד מפתח בבי מיטרא בר חמרא מוך שקיך וגו'.
 44 When, on opening the door, you
 find rain, ass-driver, put down
 your sack and go to sleep
 (because corn will be cheap on
 account of abundant rain).
- לשובתי נשברה רגל פרחי.
 36 For my good is the leg of my
 cow broken.
- לך לך אמרין לנזירא
 סחור סחור לכרמא לא חקרב.
 4ff, 22, Go, go, they say to the Nazirite
 29 go all around so you may not
 come close to the vineyard.
- מחי אלחיא ויבעתון כומריא.
 8f Strike the gods, and the priests
 will be frightened.
- משוב אדוני לא טוב לי; ומרעחו רע לי.
 20f, 31 I derive no benefit from my
 master's good fortune; but
 suffer from his bad fortune.
- מיח בריה דרחמך טעון; מח רחמך פרוק.
 11, 30 If your friend's son is dead,
 help carrying. If your friend
 is dead, throw off.

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- 6, 30 כן שטיא לית חו"א אלא כן קצ"א.
Of acacias there is no profit
except you cut them down.
- 9, 32f נחת פה לחינוק חודיע לאמו.
If you give bread to a child,
inform its mother.
- 11f, 48 עבדא למלכא מלכא הדבק לשחון וישחון לך.
A king's servant is a king;
attach yourself to the captain
and they will bow to you (or
cleave to heat and it will
warm you).
- 20 עד דשמינא עביר קטין נפשיה דקטיןא נפקת.
By the time the stout become
thin, the life of the thin
is gone out.
- 26f, 37 שילח חסא ויחזא משחלמא.
Shela has sinned, but
Johanan must pay.
- 44 חלא ליה קורא לדבר אחר וחזא דידיה עביר.
Hang the heart of a palm tree
(something fine) on a pig and
it will do the usual thing with
it (drag it into the dung heap).