



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.**

Series IV: Writings and Publications, 1952-1992, undated.

Sub-series A: Books, 1961-1990, undated.

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The Story of Scripture, draft, chapters 5 and 6, 1989.

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By the third century, the Mikra, the twenty-two books which constitute the Hebrew Bible, had become the Hebrew Scripture, a collection of works deemed holy, unique in content and different from all other literature. The rabbis said that these works render the hands of those who touch them unclean, a term understood to mean that a man who touched any of these holy scrolls must wash away the last vestiges of their holiness before resuming his normal routines. No other Hebrew scrolls were holy to the touch. The scrolls of the Mikra, particularly the first five, the Sefer Torah, had achieved a special sanctity in the popular imagination. They had become Scripture.

The magisterial A History of the Jewish People (ed. H. H. Ben Sasson, Harvard, 1976) typically labels the period between the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and the beginning of the Arab conquests around 640 C.E. as the era of the Mishnah and the Talmud, and there can be no gainsaying the significance of the period and its achievement for the future development of Judaism. This new text, the Talmud (comprising Mishnah and Gemara, the commentaries on Mishnah), defined the way of life held sacred by the rabbis and set out a core curriculum for the Jewish school and for continuing Jewish education. Over the subsequent centuries, the Jew knew his everyday Judaism through the Talmud, and the Talmud would vie with the Sefer Torah for scriptural pride of place.

The Mishnah-Talmud culture remained for a long time largely



ORAL. WHAT WAS TRUE OF THE TORAH PROVED TO BE TRUE OF THE TALMUD: THE ABSENCE OF AN AUTHORIZED WRITTEN TEXT DID NOT PREVENT A TRADITION FROM ACQUIRING A SHAPE THAT WAS GENERALLY AGREED ON OR A POWER THAT WAS BROADLY ACCEPTED. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT MOST THIRD-CENTURY JEWS KNEW OF THE MISHNAH. ONLY LATER WOULD MOST JEWS CONSCIOUSLY THINK OF IT AS AN AUTHORITATIVE BODY OF TRADITION. YET, WITHIN THE SPAN OF A CENTURY OR SO AFTER THE MISHNAH'S VIEWS WERE COLLECTED, THEY HELD SWAY OVER LARGE PORTIONS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

WHILE THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT THE PATRIARCH JUDAH HA NASI (LATE 2ND CENTURY) AUTHORIZED A PARTICULAR MISHNAH COLLECTION AMONG SEVERAL THAT WERE BEING DEVELOPED, IT IS NOT CLEAR WHEN OR UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS WRITTEN COPIES OF THIS AUTHORIZED MISHNAH BEGAN TO CIRCULATE AND EVEN LESS CLEAR UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS HIS VERSION OF THE MISHNAH DEVELOPED COMMENTARY, GEMARA. GEMARA SHOWS A REAL INTEREST IN ESTABLISHING AN AGREED-ON TEXT. MANY STATEMENTS BEGIN: "THIS IS NOT THE MISHNAH. . . THIS IS THE WAY IT SHOULD READ. . ." THE GEMARA ON OCCASION SUGGESTS THAT A PARTICULAR RABBI TAUGHT TWO TEXTS THAT CONTRADICT EACH OTHER AND THEN PONDERES WHICH STATEMENT TRULY REFLECTS HIS VIEW OR WHETHER, UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS, BOTH STATEMENTS COULD. THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMENTARY WAS NOT A NEAT PROCESS, AS EVIDENCED BY THE FREQUENT APPEARANCE OF VARIANT READINGS IN THE GEMARA AND IN THE TOSEFTA, AN ENLARGED VERSION OF THE MISHNAH PROBABLY DATING TO THE 4TH CENTURY.

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EACH MISHNAH TRACTATE, A DISCUSSION OF A SINGLE TOPIC, WAS TREATED AS A SEPARATE UNIT. THE EARLIEST STRATA OF THE GEMARA TEND TO BE EXPLANATORY, CLARIFYING AND ELABORATING ON MISHNAH TEXTS. TOGETHER THEY CONSTITUTE THE TALMUD, WHICH CONSISTS OF LAYERS OF BRIEFLY STATED DEBATES, DECISIONS, CASE LAW, AND COMMENTS ON VARIOUS TYPES OF LAW AS THESE HAD ACCUMULATED IN THE ACADEMIES WHERE TALMUD WAS REVIEWED AND STUDIED. THE TALMUD EMERGES IN AND FROM THE MAJOR YESHIVOT. IT IS THE CREATION OF AN INTELLECTUAL CASTE, PRIMARILY THE RESULT AND RECORD OF THE DISCUSSIONS THEY HELD IN A FEW CENTRAL ACADEMIES IN PALESTINE AND IN BABYLONIA. THESE ARE LONG AND COMPLICATED TEXTS, THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD ALMOST TWICE THE LENGTH OF THE PALESTINEAN. THEY WERE EDITED IN EACH GENERATION AND RE-EDITED BY THE SAVORAIM, SIXTH- AND SEVENTH-CENTURY SCHOLARS WHO APPARENTLY WORKED ON THE VARIOUS PARTS PIECEMEAL. CERTAINLY EDITORIAL EFFORTS BY MANY HANDS ARE APPARENT. THE TWO TALMUDS--THE BABYLONIAN AND THE PALESTINEAN--REFLECT SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT TENDENCIES. THERE IS MORE EVIDENCE OF LATER EDITING IN THE BABYLONIAN THAN IN THE PALESTINEAN TALMUD. AS EACH GENERATION OF SAGES DEBATED THE POSITIONS TAKEN BY THEIR PREDECESSORS AND LOOKED FOR GENERAL PRINCIPLES WHICH WOULD EXPLAIN WHY EARLIER SAGES RULED AS THEY HAD OR WHY THEY HAD DISAGREED, THEY DISCUSSED RELEVANT CASES AND LEGAL PROCEDURES AND SOMETIMES BROUGHT INTO THE DISCUSSIONS TANNAITIC TRADITIONS WHICH HAD NOT HERETOFORE BEEN INCLUDED.

JUST AS MOST JUDEANS DURING TEMPLE DAYS NEVER SAW A TORAH SCROLL,

SO MOST JEWS DURING THE TALMUDIC PERIOD NEVER SAW A TALMUD SCROLL. ~~DURING~~ THE THIRD AND FOURTH CENTURIES, THERE WAS LITTLE NEED TO PUBLISH THIS MATERIAL. THE SAGES REPRESENTED A SMALL, THOUGH SLOWLY ENLARGING, GROUP WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, BUT UNTIL THEY BECAME PART OF THE OFFICIAL ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS--AS THEY FINALLY SUCCEEDED IN DOING IN PALESTINE IN THE THIRD CENTURY AND IN BABYLONIA A BIT LATER--THEY HAD NO AUTHORITY TO IMPOSE THEIR WAY. MANY JEWS WERE SIMPLY NOT INTERESTED IN THE SAGES' COMPLICATED AND OFTEN ESOTERIC ACADEMIC DISCUSSIONS. EVEN IF INTERESTED, ORDINARY FOLK COULD NOT MASTER THE DETAILS. MANY ACKNOWLEDGED THE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY OF INDIVIDUAL MASTERS, SEEING THEM AS HOLY MEN WHO COULD HEAL THE SICK AND EXORCISE EVIL SPIRITS. MANY ACCEPTED THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE RABBIS' TORAH, THE TALMUD, INsofar AS IT AFFECTED DAILY LIVING. BUT THEY WERE FAR FROM ACCEPTING THE IDEA THAT TALMUD TORAH--THE READING OF SCRIPTURES--REQUIRED OF ALL JEWS A DISCIPLINE OF LIFELONG STUDY OF MISHNAH AND GEMARA TEXTS; THAT VIEW LAY WELL IN THE FUTURE. FIRST THERE HAD TO BE TEXTS; THEN THERE HAD TO BE A REASON TO MASTER THESE TEXTS. FOR MOST JEWS THE ABILITY TO READ A FEW LINES OF TORAH WAS HARD ENOUGH.

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TALMUD SCROLLS WERE NOT AS READILY AVAILABLE AS TORAH SCROLLS WERE. COPIES OF THE MISHNAH DID NOT BEGIN TO CIRCULATE BEFORE THE FOURTH CENTURY AND NONE BUT THE MAJOR COMMUNITIES BEFORE THE EIGHTH OR NINTH CENTURIES HAD A COPY OF EVEN ONE OF THE TALMUDIC TRACTATES. SOME TEACHERS HAD NOTES ON ONE OR ANCTHER OF THE EMERGING BLOCKS

PECTS, LEFT BAGHDAD FOR SPAIN. WHEN HE LANDED IN HIS NEW HOME, HE



OF TALMUDIC COMMENTARY, BUT THESE PINKASIM WERE RESERVED FOR THE USE OF A FEW FAVORED STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES. MEGILLAT SETARIM-- LITERALLY, SECRET SCROLLS, BUT IN ALL PROBABILITY SIMPLY A STUDENT'S PRIVATE NOTES--ARE KNOWN TO HAVE EXISTED IN EARLY AMORAIC TIMES (THIRD CENTURY). THERE IS EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE THAT SOME STUDENTS MADE UNAUTHORIZED RECORDS OF SOME PORTION OF THE TEXTS THEY MEMORIZED. BUT THE ORAL LAW WAS INTENDED TO BE ORAL. MOST MASTERS KNEW MOST OF THE TALMUD OF THEIR DAY BY HEART, YET THEY HAD AS A MEMBER OF THEIR SCHOOL STAFF A "LIVING BOOK," A METURGEMAN, WHO COULD FILL IN ANY OF THEIR LAPSES. THE REASON THEY NEEDED HIM WAS SIMPLE ENOUGH: THE TALMUD DID NOT ACHIEVE ITS FINAL FORM UNTIL AFTER THE WORK OF THE SAVORAIM IN THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES. TALMUD SCROLLS WERE NOT YET READILY AVAILABLE IN THE DIASPORA DURING THE EARLY GAONIC YEARS (SEVENTH-EIGHTH CENTURIES). SURVIVING CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES AND THE ACADEMIC CENTERS INCLUDES PETITIONS FROM THE COMMUNITIES ASKING THAT THE ACADEMIES SEND THEM, THROUGH THE MERCHANT-MESSENGER WHO PRESENTS THEIR PETITION, A COPY OF THE TALMUD BECAUSE NONE WAS LOCALLY AVAILABLE. A RESPONSE-- THAT IS, A LETTER ANSWERING SUCH A PETITION OR AN INQUIRY FROM A DIASPORA COMMUNITY--OF PALTIEL (NINTH CENTURY) MAKES SPECIAL MENTION THAT THE GAON HAD HAD A COPY OF THE TALMUD WRITTEN AT THE REQUEST OF SPANISH JEWS. THE DIASPORA'S LACK OF AND LONGING FOR A TALMUD IS PERSONIFIED IN AN EIGHTH-CENTURY LEGEND WHOSE HERO, ASPIRING TO BECOME THE HEAD OF ONE OF THE ACADEMIES AND DESPAIRING OF HIS PROSPECTS, LEFT BAGHDAD FOR SPAIN. WHEN HE LANDED IN HIS NEW HOME, HE

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FOUND THERE WAS NO COPY OF THE TALMUD, AND HE PROCEEDED TO REMEDY THE SITUATION, AS ONLY A MASTER OF THE ORAL LAW COULD, BY WRITING OUT A TALMUD FROM MEMORY. IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE ELEVENTH CENTURY THAT COPIES OF THE TALMUD WERE SUFFICIENTLY WIDELY DISTRIBUTED THAT THE DIASPORA COMMUNITIES--AND THE SCHOLARS WHO LIVED IN THEM--WERE NO LONGER COMPLETELY DEPENDENT FOR COPIES ON THE ACADEMIES OR ON THE REMARKABLE MEMORIES OF PROFESSIONAL MEMORIZERS AND SCHOLARS. DESPITE ITS MANIFEST CENTRALITY IN JEWISH LIFE AND DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT BECAME THE PEOPLE'S SECOND SCRIPTURE, THE TALMUD WAS NEVER TREATED WITH THE SAME FORMAL CARE AS THE TORAH. EFFORTS OF EDITORS SUCH AS THE SAVORAIM NOTWITHSTANDING, THE TALMUD--OR RATHER, THE TWO TALMUDS--WERE NEVER SUBJECTED TO THE RIGOROUS EDITORIAL PROCESS THAT WOULD HAVE PRODUCED A SINGLE ACCEPTED TEXT. LITTLE EFFORT WAS MADE TO CREATE A CLEAN TEXT. INDEED, THERE PROBABLY NEVER EXISTED A UNIFORMLY RECOGNIZED TEXT. THERE WAS NO FORMAL ORDER FOR THE PRESENTATION OF MISHNAH. VARIOUS VERSIONS CIRCULATED, GENERALLY ALIKE IN SHAPE AND CONTENT BUT FULL OF VARIANT READINGS AND INCONSISTENT SELECTIONS.

THE TALMUD WAS IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING BUT ALMOST CERTAINLY FEW EARLY WRITTEN VERSIONS CIRCULATED. THE TALMUD DID NOT REACH CLOSURE--THAT IS, ACHIEVE ITS FINAL FORM--UNTIL AFTER THE LABORS OF THE SAVORAIM, IN THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES, AND THE WORK OF COPYING OUT THESE LONG AND COMPLICATED TEXTS DID NOT BEGIN TO BE SERIOUSLY UNDERTAKEN UNTIL THE EMERGENCE OF THE GREAT CENTRALIZED



ACADEMIES IN THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURY<sup>ies</sup>. THE EXPENSE AND EFFORT INVOLVED IN WRITING SUCH EXTENDED MANUSCRIPTS SUGGESTS THAT COPIES WERE AVAILABLE ONLY IN THE CENTERS WHERE PATRONAGE WAS AVAILABLE, IN SUCH GREAT ADMINISTRATIVE ACADEMIES AS SURA, POMPIDITA, AND MAHOZA, WHICH FLOURISHED UNDER THE UMMAYAD AND ABASSID CALIPHATES IN THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES. THERE FOR THE FIRST TIME WAS THE WILL AND THE MEANS, IN A PROSPEROUS JEWISH COMMUNITY THAT HAD GROWN UP AROUND THE POWERFUL MUSLIM COURTS, TO CARRY OUT THE EXPENSIVE TASK OF SETTING SCRIBES TO MAKE COPIES OF THIS VOLUMINOUS TEXT.

THE TALMUD'S AUTHORITY WAS ESTABLISHED NOT BY A TEXT BUT BY AND THROUGH THE AUTHORITY OF RABBIS, BY THEIR REPUTATIONS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES AS ADMINISTRATIVE AND JUDICIAL OFFICERS IN THE COMMUNITY. WHAT WAS UNIQUE ABOUT THE TALMUDIC PERIOD WAS THAT IT SAW THE SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE OF THE RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR AUTHORITIES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. THE ROMAN AND SASSANIAN EMPERORS WERE EAGER TO HAVE SOMEONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DOMESTIC PEACE OF THE MANY MINORITY COMMUNITIES WHICH MADE UP THEIR EMPIRES. THEY ASSIGNED THIS ROLE AMONG THE JEWS--THE PATRIARCH OR NASI IN PALESTINE AND THE EXILARCH, RESH GALUTHA, IN THE EAST--TO CERTAIN MEN OF NOBLE BIRTH AND WEALTH, GENERALLY TO THOSE WHO CLAIMED DESCENT FROM THE DAVIDIC DYNASTY. THESE MEN PAID FOR THE OFFICE, WHICH INCLUDED CERTAIN TAX FARMING RIGHTS THROUGH WHICH THEY GENERALLY RECOUPED THEIR INVESTMENT.

TO MAINTAIN DOMESTIC PEACE, WHICH WAS AMONG THE REQUIREMENTS OF THEIR COMMISSION, THESE OFFICIALS NEEDED A COMMITTED ADMINISTRATION: THEY FOUND A READY-MADE ONE IN THE RABBIS. THE RABBIS HAD

THE NECESSARY SKILLS AND INTEREST AND GENERAL RECOGNITION OF THEIR AUTHORITY, AS WELL AS THEIR OWN RABBINIC-JURIDIC AGENDA. THEY SEIZED THIS ADMINISTRATIVE OPENING WITH THE STIPULATION THAT THE SECULAR AUTHORITIES, IF WE CAN CALL THEM THAT, GRANT THE RABBIS THE RIGHT TO ADMINISTER THE LAWS OF PERSONAL STATUS AND OF JUSTICE ACCORDING TO THE TENETS THEY HELD TO BE SACRED. IN THIS WAY RABBINIC LAW BECAME SLOWLY, BUT SURELY, THE NORM IN JEWISH LIFE. IT WAS AN INSTANCE OF LEGAL PRACTICE PRECEDING ITS FORMULATION IN A LEGAL CODE. THE CODE, THE WRITTEN TALMUD, APPEARED CENTURIES AFTER TALMUDIC LAW HAD BECOME WIDELY ACCEPTED.

RABBINIC LAW BECAME THE ALMOST UNIVERSAL NORM IN THE COMMUNITIES OF THE DIASPORA UNDER THE STRONG CENTRALIZED AUTHORITY OF THE ACADEMIES, WHICH WERE EMPOWERED AS AGENTS OF LAW AND JUSTICE BY THE ABBASID CALIPHATE. AFTER 750 C.E. IT WAS THE CALIPH WHO DEVOLVED POWER ON THE LEADERS OF THE TOLERATED AUTHORITIES (DHIMMIS) TO GOVERN THEMSELVES AND THE ACADEMIES WHO ENTHUSIASTICALLY TOOK ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING THE EXILARCH'S AGENTS.

THE EFFECTIVE SPREAD OF RABBINIC AUTHORITY CAN BE TRACED TO THE MILITARY CONQUESTS OF ISLAM AND THE CENTRALIZATION OF CALIPHATE AUTHORITY OVER THE AREAS WHERE JEWS LIVED. IN ORDER TO ORGANIZE THE PROPER GOVERNANCE OF THE DHIMMI, THE TOLERATED NON-MUSLIMS, THE CALIPHATE EMPOWERED OVER EACH COMMUNITY ONE OF ITS OWN AUTHORITY TO KEEP THE PEACE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO COLLECT TAXES. IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY A RESH GALUTHA, AN EXILARCH, WAS APPOINTED.

Referred  
to p. 314  
and p. 315

THIS NOBLE HAD HIS OFFICES AT THE CALIPH'S COURT IN BAGHDAD AND TURNED TO THE BAGHDADI ACADEMIES TO PROVIDE HIM WITH A CADRE OF LEGAL OFFICERS AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ADMINISTRATORS.

THEIR FUNCTIONS AS OFFICIALS HELP TO EXPLAIN THE THEORETICAL BENT OF MUCH OF THE GEMARA, WHICH, AS THE YEARS PASS, MOVES INCREASINGLY AWAY FROM DESCRIPTIONS OF PROPER PRACTICE TOWARD A SEARCH FOR THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES BEHIND DISCRETE AND SEPARATE PRACTICES. THE MISHNAH HAD SAID MOST OF WHAT NEEDED TO BE SAID ABOUT PRACTICE. THE RABBIS OF THE THIRD THROUGH SIXTH CENTURIES, THE AMORAIM, TRIED TO UNDERSTAND THE SPIRIT BEHIND THE MISHNAIC IDEAL OF PRACTICE, THE NATURE OF GOD'S WILL, AND TO WORK OUT HOW THEY AND THEIR COLLEAGUES COULD USE THE COURTS TO BRING COMMUNITY PRACTICE UP TO THAT IDEAL; THUS, THE GEMARA'S USE OF DETAILS OF SPECIFIC CASES AND CITATIONS OF PRECEDENT.

THE EMPHASIS ON THE MISHNAH AND THE GEMARA AS THE KEY DOCUMENTS OF THIS PERIOD LEAVES THE UNFORTUNATE IMPRESSION THAT THE PALESTINEAN AND BABYLONIAN TALMUDS ARE IN MANY WAYS PROOF OF THE INTELLECTUAL ELITE'S INDIFFERENCE TO SCRIPTURE. NOT SO. ISRAEL NOW HAS A SCRIPTURE. WHILE THE SAGES OF THE MISHNAIC AND TALMUDIC PERIOD RULED ON THEIR OWN AUTHORITY, THEY AND THOSE FOR WHOM THEY RULED BELIEVED THAT ALL THAT THE RABBIS SPOKE AND WROTE GREW OUT OF AND DEPENDED UPON THE WRITTEN TORAH AS INTERPRETED BY THEIR PREDECESSORS. THE MISHNAH AND THE BLOCKS OF COMMENTARY ON IT, THE GEMARA, REPRESENT THE THOUGHTS AND CONVICTIONS OF THE RABBIS. MUCH OF THE MATERIAL IS



PRESENTED ON RABBINIC AUTHORITY AND MUCH OF IT RESHAPES OR TRANSCENDS THE SCRIPTURE. BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT WHEN WE EXPLORE ONE OR ANOTHER TALMUDIC TRACTATE, WE FIND IT REplete WITH SCRIPTURAL PROOF TEXTS. IF THE RABBIS MADE THE ORAL LAW IN A SENSE THEIR LAW, TOOK IT AS THE FINAL WORD, THEY DID NOT DIMINISH IN ANY WAY THE AUTHORITY OR THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF THE WRITTEN TORAH TEXT.

QUITE THE CONTRARY. THE WRITTEN LAW WAS OFTEN CITED AS A PROOF TEXT. ALL TALMUDIC CITATIONS, SIGNIFICANT OR INSIGNIFICANT, SHOW A CLOSE READING OF THE TORAH TEXT. THE GEMARA OF BERACHOT, THE OPENING TRACTATE IN THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD, CONTAINS QUOTATIONS FROM EVERY VOLUME OF THE WRITTEN SCRIPTURE EXCEPT FOUR OF THE MINOR PROPHETS, EZRA AND CHRONICLES. AT THE BEGINNING OF BERACHOT, WHERE THE ISSUE AROSE OF ESTABLISHING THE PROPER TIME FOR THE PUBLIC RECITATION OF THE SHEMA, THE MISHNAH SETS OUT TO ESTABLISH THE EVENING HOUR BEFORE THE MORNING HOUR. WHY? BECAUSE OF THE SEQUENCE EXPLICIT IN A TORAH TEXT: "AND THOU SHALT RECITE THEM, . . . WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU RISE UP" (DEUT. 6:7). AND IF ONE TEXT WERE NOT ENOUGH, ANOTHER SAGE OFFERS A TEXT FROM GENESIS: "AND THERE WAS EVENING AND THERE WAS MORNING, ONE DAY" (GEN. 1:5).

AN ILLUSTRATION FROM THE END OF BERACHOT DEMONSTRATES ANOTHER HABIT OF THE GEMARA, THAT OF ENDING A TRACTATE WITH AN ENCOURAGING MIDRASH. A CERTAIN R. ELEAZAR SAYS, "THE DISCIPLES OF THE WISE INCREASE PEACE IN THE WORLD, AS IT IS SAID: 'AND ALL YOUR CHILDREN SHALL BE  $\sqrt{8}$  LORD, AND GREAT SHALL BE THE PEACE OF YOUR CHILDREN'"

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Berachot

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(Is. 54:13). READ NOT YOUR CHILDREN (BANAYAK), ADVISES R. ELEAZAR, BUT YOUR BUILDERS (BONAYK). THERE THEN FOLLOW LINES FROM THE PSALMS: "GREAT PEACE HAVE THEY THAT LOVE YOUR LAW AND THERE IS NO STUMBLING FOR THEM." "PEACE BE WITHIN YOUR WALLS, PROSPERITY WITHIN YOUR PALACES." <sup>FOR</sup> "MY BRETHREN AND COMPANION'S SAKE I WILL ~~NOT~~ SAY, PEACE BE WITHIN YOU." "FOR THE SAKE OF THE HOUSE <sup>of the</sup> ~~of the~~ LORD OUR GOD, I WILL SEEK ~~THE~~ <sup>thy</sup> GOOD." "THE LORD WILL GIVE STRENGTH UNTO HIS PEOPLE, THE LORD WILL BLESS HIS PEOPLE WITH PEACE."

ONE OF THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF EARLY RABBINIC JUDAISM, AS WE HAVE NOTED, WAS ITS LACK OF INTEREST IN ANY BOOKS OTHER THAN THOSE IT ACCEPTED AS SCRIPTURES. BY THE FOURTH CENTURY C.E. THE PATTERN OF JEWISH EDUCATION WAS LARGELY FIXED. THE SEFER TORAH HAD BECOME AND REMAINED THE BASIC TEXT FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, NOW REQUIRED FOR ALL JEWISH MALES FIVE YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER. EVERYONE, EVERY MALE AT LEAST, KNEW SOME SCRIPTURE. THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SYSTEM WHICH HAD BEEN SPREADING ACROSS THE WHOLE JEWISH LANDSCAPE DURING THE PREVIOUS SEVERAL CENTURIES ASSURED BY ITS CONCENTRATION ON THE LAW AND, TO SOME DEGREE, THE PROPHETS, THAT THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE WOULD BE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE COMMUNITY'S EVERYDAY IDIOM. MOST JEWS NEVER WENT BEYOND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLING. ONE SAGE ESTIMATED THAT FOR EVERY ONE HUNDRED BOYS WHO STARTED THEIR EDUCATION AT THE AGE OF FIVE, ONLY TEN PROCEEDED TO STUDY THE MISHNAH AT ABOUT THE AGE OF TEN, AND FAR FEWER, PERHAPS ONLY ONE, WENT ON TO STUDY WITH A TALMUD MASTER. "AT FIVE ONE STUDIES THE

*this reference is to Mishnah tractate Sanhedrin 10:1*

*Learn in 60.  
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MOST SYNAGOGUES PROBABLY ALSO OWNED SCROLLS OF THE PROPHETS AND WRITINGS. DURING THE EARLY RABBINIC PERIOD, THE PRACTICE BECAME COMMON OF ADDING TO THE TORAH READINGS AN ADDITION<sup>al</sup> THEMATICALLY RELATED PORTION (HAFTARAH) FROM THE LATTER SECTIONS OF SCRIPTURE. SO THE JEW WAS CONDITIONED TO THE BIBLE. IT WAS THE BIBLE TO WHICH HE RETURNED DURING WORSHIP WEEK IN AND WEEK OUT. IN SCHOOL HE HAD MEMORIZED MANY BIBLICAL PHRASES, AND HE SPRINKLED THEM THROUGH HIS DAILY SPEECH, WHETHER HE SPOKE GREEK, ARAMAIC, LATIN, OR ARABIC. MOST KNEW THE TALMUD ONLY AS THEY HEARD A PREACHER OR TEACHER SPEAK OF IT OR, MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, AS ITS TEACHINGS AFFECTED THEIR DAILY LIVES. IT WAS THE TALMUD WHICH CODIFIED WHAT THEY COULD AND COULD NOT EAT, WHEN THEY SHOULD WORSHIP, HOW THEY WERE TO REGULATE MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND ADOPTION, HOW CRIMINAL AND CIVIL COURT CASES WERE TO BE MANAGED, AND LIKE MATTERS.

FOR ALL JEWS, THE LEARNED AND THE HALF-LITERATE, THE BIBLE WAS THE BASIC TEXT. KERAT HA-TORAH, THE READING OF TORAH, WAS A BASIC REDEMPTIVE RITE. MISHNAH AND TALMUD, AS ELEMENTS IN AN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM, WERE TREATED WITH UTMOST SERIOUSNESS. THEY WERE THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION, IF YOU WILL, OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. THE WAY A JEW MASTERED THE RABBINIC WAY OF THINKING AND LIVING. TALMUD EDUCATION WAS TREATED WITH GREAT GRAVITY, BUT IT WAS THE ASSUMPTIONS AND TEACHINGS OF THE BASIC TEXT, THE BIBLE WHICH GAVE THE JEW HIS TIE WITH GOD AND WITH HIS PEOPLE. TO NINETY-FIVE OUT OF ONE HUNDRED JEWS, THE TALMUD WAS UNEXPLORED TERRITORY. ONLY ADVANCED LEARNING, RESERVED TO AN ELITE, WAS TALMUDIC.

CLEARLY, THE EMERGENCE OF RABBINIC JUDAISM SHOULD NOT BLIND US TO THE STEADILY GROWING IMPORTANCE OF MIKRA DURING THESE FIRST SEVEN CENTURIES AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE. THE SAGES WHO WORKED ON TALMUD WERE STEEPED IN BIBLICAL STUDY, QUOTING FROM THE BIBLE REPEATEDLY AND EXTENSIVELY IN THEIR DISCUSSIONS OF HALACHA, THE LAW, AND AGGADAH, THE STORIES. THEY APPROACHED ALL BIBLICAL TEXTS AS EQUALLY SACRED AND IMPORTANT, SINCE ALL WERE PART OF GOD'S MESSAGE. THEIR CONCEPTION <sup>of</sup> AND BIBLICAL UNITY PREPARED JEWS TO ACCEPT THE EXEGESIS THEY HEARD IN SERMONS WHICH BOUND TOGETHER IDEAS AND SENTENCES WITHOUT ~~what~~ WE WOULD CALL ANY SELF-EVIDENT LOGICAL OR TEMPORAL CONNECTION; THE CONVENTIONAL EXEGESIS SOMETIMES LINKED UNRELATED BIBLICAL VERSES OR SENTENCES ON THE BASIS OF AN IDENTICAL WORD OR SIMILAR SOUNDING WORDS. THE SAGES INSISTED THAT "A SENTENCE NEVER LOSES ITS PLAIN MEANING" (PESHAT), BUT THEY READ THE BIBLE SO THAT EACH SENTENCE HAD BOTH ITS PLAIN MEANING AND AN ALMOST INFINITE NUMBER OF POSSIBLE MEANINGS. JEWS WERE CONDITIONED BY SUCH READINGS TO A DIFFERENT PERCEPTION OF CONTEXT THAN WE HAVE. <sup>of</sup> TORAH, AS THEY KNEW IT, CONSISTED OF GOD'S SPEECH, WAS OF GOD'S DEVISING, A MIRACLE. THOUGH THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE PHRASED IT THIS WAY, THEY BELIEVED THAT GOD'S WORDS WERE NOT CONFINED BY THE FAMILIAR CANONS OF COMMON SENSE AND CONTEXT OR BY THE LAWS OF LOGIC. THESE WERE CATEGORIES APPLICABLE TO HUMAN COMPOSITIONS, NOT TO GOD'S. GOD'S SPEECH HAD ITS OWN LAWS. EVERYTHING THEY EVER HEARD ABOUT THE TORAH EMPHASIZED ITS DIVINITY, ITS DEPTHS, AND ITS MYSTERIES.

APPARENTLY DEVISED TO INCREASE THE RESPECT IN WHICH THE SPEAKER WAS HELD. SERMONS WERE NOT FREE-WHEELING AFFAIRS BUT FOLLOWED

*Revised*

*Sabbat  
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THE SAGES SAW THE WRITTEN AND ORAL LAWS AS IN SPIRIT ONE AND THE SAME. MUCH OF THEIR EFFORT WAS DIRECTED AT MAKING EXPLICIT THE UNDERLYING UNITY THEY ASSUMED. HAVING SATISFIED THEMSELVES THROUGH THEIR INVESTIGATIONS OF THE LAW, MIDRASH HALACHA, THAT THE ORAL LAW WAS IMPLICIT IN THE WRITTEN, THE SAGES DEVELOPED A NEW DIMENSION OF MEANING FOR THE TERM, TORAH. TORAH WAS NOT ONLY THE WRITTEN TEXT BUT ALL THAT COULD "LEGITIMATELY"--THAT IS, WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THEIR EXEGETIC POINT OF VIEW--BE DEDUCED FROM IT. SCRIPTURE BECAME THE SUM AND SUBSTANCE OF WHAT THE RABBIS KNEW IT TO BE. THUS, WE HEAR SAGES SPEAK OF USING TORAH TO ESTABLISH TORAH: MEI TORAH? WHAT IS TORAH? MIDRASH TORAH. TORAH IS WHAT HAS BEEN SEARCHED OUT AND FOUND THROUGH RABBINIC EXEGESIS TO BE TORAH.

*I can find source about Kolbow*

THERE WAS CONCERN, PARTICULARLY IN TALMUDIC TIMES WHEN RABBINIC AUTHORITY DID NOT YET REACH THROUGHOUT THE DIASPORA, THAT THE COMMUNITY UNDERSTAND THAT THE WHOLE SCRIPTURE WAS IN FACT THIS LARGER ENTITY.

POPULAR SERMONS SERVED AS ONE EFFECTIVE WAY TO MAKE THE POINT. OFTEN ON THE SABBATH AND FESTIVALS, A HOMILY OR SERMON WOULD BE GIVEN. ALTHOUGH SERMONS SOMETIMES, AS IN THE EXAMPLES TO BE CITED HERE, INTRODUCED THE SCRIPTURAL PORTION, THEY WERE GENERALLY OFFERED AFTER THE SCRIPTURAL READING. THE PREACHER GENERALLY SAT DURING HIS DELIVERY. NOTED SPEAKERS USED A METURGEMAN (LITERALLY, TRANSLATOR)

AS A HUMAN MEGAPHONE. THE SPEAKER SPOKE HIS THOUGHTS TO THE METURGEMAN, WHO CRIED THEM OUT TO THE CONGREGATION, A CONVENTION APPARENTLY DEVISED TO INCREASE THE RESPECT IN WHICH THE SPEAKER WAS HELD. SERMONS WERE NOT FREE-WHEELING AFFAIRS BUT FOLLOWED

*or perhaps bar. of recognition that good scholarship does not need necessarily formal grant teaching ability...*

STRICT CONVENTIONS THAT TESTED THE SPEAKER'S ORIGINALITY AND PLUCK. TYPICALLY, THE SPEAKER WOULD TAKE A SENTENCE OR THEME FROM THE PROPHETS OR WRITINGS--AT FIRST GLANCE THEMATICALLY UNRELATED TO THAT DAY'S SEFER TORAH PORTION--AND BY STRINGING TOGETHER A NUMBER OF TEXTS, PASS FROM TEXT TO TEXT, FROM IDEA TO IDEA, UNTIL HE CAME, MIRABILE DICTU, TO THE TEXT WHICH BEGAN THE WEEK'S TORAH PORTION.

ONE EXAMPLE CAN STAND FOR MANY. A PREACHER BEGAN WITH A LINE FROM ECCLESIASTES (12:11). "THE WORDS TO THE WISE ARE AS GOADS, AND AS NAILS WELL PLANTED ARE THOSE THAT ARE COMPOSED IN COLLECTIONS; THEY ARE GIVEN FROM ONE SHEPHERD." WHY, HE ASKED RHETORICALLY, ARE THE WORDS OF THE TORAH LIKENED TO A GOAD? HIS ANSWER WAS THAT JUST AS THE GOAD DIRECTS THE HEIFER ALONG THE FURROWS IN ORDER TO BRING FORTH LIFE FROM THE EARTH, SO THE WORDS OF THE TORAH DIRECT THOSE WHO STUDY THEM AWAY FROM THE PATHS OF DEATH TO THE PATHS OF LIFE. THEN HE NOTED A PROBLEM WITH THE ANALOGY. A GOAD IS MOVABLE. ARE THE WORDS OF THE TORAH MOVABLE, TRANSIENT? OBVIOUSLY NOT. THEREFORE, THE TEXT SAYS "NAILS." HE NOTED ANOTHER PROBLEM WITH THIS ANALOGY: A NAIL DOES NOT GROW, DO THE WORDS OF THE TORAH NOT GROW? THEREFORE, THE TEXT ADDS: "WELL PLANTED;" JUST AS THE PLANT GROWS AND INCREASES SO THE WORDS OF THE TORAH GROW AND INCREASE. HE CONTINUES THEN WITH THE ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT'S IMPLICATION. WHEN THOSE WHO OCCUPY THEMSELVES WITH THE TORAH DISAGREE, SOME PRONOUNCING UNCLEAN AND OTHERS PRONOUNCING CLEAN, SOME PROHIBITING



AND OTHERS PERMITTING, A MAN SEEING THIS DIVISION OF OPINION MIGHT SAY: "HOW SHALL I LEARN TORAH FROM MEN OF SUCH DIVERGENT VIEWS?" THEREFORE, THE TEXT SAYS: "THEY ARE GIVEN FROM ONE SHEPHERD." ONE GOD GAVE THEM; THEY WERE SPOKEN BY THE MOUTH OF THE LORD OF ALL CREATION, BLESSED BE HE FOR IT IS WRITTEN: "AND GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS" (EXODUS 20:1)--WHICH BRINGS US TO THE OPENING LINE OF THAT WEEK'S TORAH PORTION, WHICH PRESENTS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

? → (B. 3A/B).

MIDRASH WAS THE GREAT EXEGETICAL ENTERPRISE OF THE COMMUNITY, AN APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE BASED ON A PIECE-BY-PIECE ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT. ASSUMING THE UNITY OF THE SCRIPTURE AS THEY DID, THE SAGES WENT ABOUT THE BUSINESS OF INTERPRETATION USING AN UNSYSTEMATIC AND ATOMISTIC APPROACH; THEY HAD NO NEED OF A SEQUENTIAL AND SYSTEMATIC ONE. ANY TEXT THEY REACHED FOR WAS RELATED TO EVERY OTHER. THE TORAH BECAME TEXT, CONTEXT, AND PRETEXT. MIDRASH EXAMINED IT ALL DOWN TO THE MOST MINUTE DETAIL. EVEN THE SHAPE OF A LETTER OR THE UNUSUAL SPELLING OF A WORD MIGHT REVEAL GOD'S TEACHING. THROUGH MIDRASH PREACHERS AND SAGES DEVELOPED THE MYRIAD IDEAS THEY FOUND IN SCRIPTURE AND IN EXPERIENCE, AND THEY BOUND DISPARATE TEXTS INTO WHAT WAS TO THEM A SINGLE, UNIFIED WHOLE--GOD'S WORDS. MIDRASH IN ITS CLASSIC FORM IS BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AS IT WAS PRACTICED DURING THE FORMATIVE PERIOD OF RABBINIC JUDAISM. THE GREAT COLLECTIONS WERE BEGUN IN THE THIRD CENTURY AND WERE

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cf. p. 341

PARADOXICALLY, THIS ASSUMPTION OF UNITY ALLOWED THE SERMONIZER A GREAT DEAL OF FREEDOM. SINCE HE BEGAN WITH GOD'S WORD, THE

SOURCE GUARANTEED THE VALUE OF HIS OBSERVATION. IF HE TOOK A POSITION WHICH CONTRADICTED THAT TAKEN BY ANOTHER SAGE, HE DID NOT HAVE TO WORRY THAT HIS POINT OF VIEW BE IN ALL RESPECTS DOGMATICALLY CORRECT. THE HEARER COULD ASSUME EITHER THAT HE WAS MISTAKEN-- WHICH, BEING HUMAN, HE COULD, OF COURSE, BE--OR THAT TWO SAGES HAD DERIVED DIFFERENT INSIGHTS FROM THE SAME PHRASE OR TEXT. JEWISH LIFE NEVER IMPOSED AGGADIC UNIFORMITY. "BOTH THIS VIEW AND ANOTHER ARE THE WORDS OF THE LIVING GOD" (Eruvin 13b).

SUBJECTS WERE CHOSEN FROM THEMES AS WIDE AS LIFE'S EXPERIENCES. SOME TIED TOGETHER WHAT WE MIGHT DESCRIBE AS LOOSE TEXTUAL ENDS. SOME UNITED POPULAR FOLK TRADITIONS WITH MORE OFFICIAL TRADITIONS. SOME SIMPLY MADE OBSERVATIONS ON AGING, ON MEN AND WOMEN, OR THE MEANING OF LIFE. SOME REFLECTED ON CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONDITIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, NO FULL TEXT OF A SERMON FROM THE TALMUDIC PERIOD SURVIVES. WITHOUT THE TECHNIQUES FOR INSTANT STENOGRAPHY OR THE MEANS OF STORING SUCH MATERIALS, THEY COULD NOT BE COMPLETELY RECORDED OR PRESERVED. WHAT WE HAVE ARE THE BARE BONES. AN OUTLINE OR PRECIS OF THE POINTS MADE AND THE TEXTS USED. ONE ELEMENT IS CERTAIN: THESE TALKS FREQUENTLY ENDED WITH AN ENCOURAGING REAFFIRMATION OF THE MESSIANIC HOPE, A CONFIDENT RESTATEMENT OF GOD'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE OR A PRAYER FOR REDEMPTION. THE RABBIS WERE WELL AWARE THAT THE PEOPLE'S LONGING FOR REDEMPTION WAS EVIDENCE OF DIFFICULT TIMES, EVEN FOR A COMMUNITY STEEPED IN

SURVIVE IN COLLECTIONS OF MIDRASHIM ARE USUALLY ARRANGED AS IF



FAITH. "IN FORMER TIMES, WHEN COINS WERE EASY TO COME BY, THE COMMUNITY WANTED TO HEAR WORDS OF MISHNAH AND TALMUD. NOW THAT COINS ARE NO LONGER READILY AVAILABLE, AND WE SUFFER FROM FOREIGN DOMINATION, PEOPLE WANT TO HEAR WORDS OF SCRIPTURE AND AGGADAH" (P. R. KEH. 101B). *✓ Soferim ch XVI*

\*  
? SPEAKERS IN ALL AGES HAVE FOUND THAT A LIGHT TOUCH WILL DRAW A FAR LARGER AUDIENCE THAN A DRY AND AUSTERE MESSAGE; YOU CAN INSTRUCT PEOPLE ONLY IF THEY WILL LISTEN. SINCE THE SERMON WAS A SIGNIFICANT FEATURE OF JEWISH LIFE IN TALMUDIC TIMES, THE PREACHER HAD TO LEARN THE ART OF ENTERTAINING. WOMEN AND CHILDREN AS WELL AS MEN CAME TO THE SERMON, THE ILLITERATE AS WELL AS THE LITERATE. THE SERMON'S POPULARITY TESTIFIES TO THE SKILLS OF THOSE WHO SPOKE AND TO THE AUDIENCE'S THIRST FOR AN ENCOURAGING WORD AND FOR THE PLEASURE OF BEING CAJOLED BY ONE WHO KNEW HOW. EVEN LISTENERS WHO REALLY DID NOT KNOW THE SOURCES WERE EAGER TO BE ENTERTAINED AND ENTICED. THERE WAS A RABBINIC SAYING THAT WHAT IS DONE FOR A LESS THAN HIGH-MINDED REASON OFTEN COMES TO BE DONE FOR THE BEST OF REASONS. THOSE WHO CAME TO BE ENTERTAINED OFTEN LEFT INSPIRED.

J. Chagel  
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EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF COMPLETE SERMONS, THE SERMON MORE THAN ANY OTHER FEATURE OF TALMUDIC TIMES ILLUSTRATES THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE JEWISH COMMUNITY'S SPEECH WAS IMPREGNATED WITH THE LANGUAGE OF SCRIPTURE. BIBLICAL PHRASES WERE ON EVERY TONGUE, AND THESE PHRASES KEPT HEBREW ALIVE. THE OUTLINES OF SERMONS WHICH SURVIVE IN COLLECTIONS OF MIDRASHIM ARE USUALLY ARRANGED AS IF

THEY PROVIDE A RUNNING COMMENTARY ON A BIBLICAL BOOK. AS AGGADIC MIDRASH TRULY BEGAN TO FLOURISH IN THE TALMUDIC AGE, A NUMBER OF MIDRASHIC COLLECTIONS BEGAN TO TAKE SHAPE, PARTICULARLY GENESIS AND LEVITICUS RABBAH AND PESIKTA DE RAV KAHANA. THE OPENING CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS RABBAH, USUALLY ASSIGNED TO THE FIFTH CENTURY C.E., IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE MIDRASHIC METHOD. THE SAGE PICKS A TEXT, IN THIS CASE FROM THE PSALMS. THOUGH THERE IS NO APPARENT CONNECTION BETWEEN IT AND THE OTHER MATERIALS HE CHOOSES, HE MOVES THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES AND MANAGES TO SUGGEST A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PSALM AND THE OPENING OF LEVITICUS, "AND THE LORD CALLED UNTO MOSES."

"BLESS THE LORD, YE MESSENGERS (MALACHIM) OF HIS, YOU MIGHTY IN STRENGTH WHO FULFILL HIS WORD, HEARKENING UNTO THE VOICE OF HIS WORD" (Ps. 103:20). THE MIDRASHIST ASKS, OF WHOM DOES THE TEXT SPEAK? HE ANSWERS, ON THE BASIS OF ETYMOLOGY, THAT MALACHIM (THE PLURAL OF MALACH, MESSENGER) DESIGNATES BOTH HUMAN MESSENGERS AND ANGELS. HE REASONS THAT HUMAN MESSENGERS ARE INTENDED HERE, FOR OTHERWISE THE SENTENCE WOULD BE MORE INCLUSIVE, 'ALL YOU HIS MESSENGERS.' HE THEN EQUATES MESSENGERS AND PROPHETS, ON THE BASIS OF A SECOND TEXT THAT INCLUDES A REFERENCE TO A PROPHET, "THEN SPOKE HAGGAI, THE LORD'S MESSENGER (MALACH)." IN A SHORT BUT INTERESTING DIGRESSION, SOMEONE ASKS "WHO ARE THE MIGHTY IN STRENGTH WHO FULFILL HIS WORD," AND PROMPTLY ANSWERS: "THOSE WHO OBSERVE THE SABBATICAL YEAR." WHY THESE PARTICULARLY? BECAUSE UNLIKE ALL OTHERS WHO OBSERVE A COMMANDMENT FOR A DAY OR A WEEK, THE ONE WHO OBSERVES THE



SABBATICAL YEAR MUST SEE HIS FIELD REMAIN UNTILLED FOR A YEAR AND STILL PAY HIS TAXES. WHEN HE DOES THIS IN AN UNCOMPLAINING MANNER, HE FULFILLS GOD'S COMMAND. IS THERE ANYONE WHO WITH GREATER MIGHT OR STRENGTH FULFILLS A GREATER OBLIGATION THAN THIS?

NOW THE MIDRASH TURNS TO THE TASK OF RELATING THE PSALM TEXT TO <sup>LEV.</sup> ~~LEV.~~ 1:1. QUOTING A RABBI AS SAYING THAT A TASK TOO DIFFICULT FOR ONE MAN CAN EASILY BE DONE BY TWO, THE MIDRASHIST OBSERVES THAT THE REVERSE IS IMPOSSIBLE, THAT A BURDEN TOO GREAT FOR SIXTY MYRIADS, THE NUMBER OF ISRAELITES AT SINAI, CANNOT BE DONE BY ONE MAN. YET, THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT MOSES DID. THE ISRAELITES AT SINAI WERE AFRAID TO HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD ~~LEST~~ <sup>LEST</sup> THEY DIE (DEUT. 5: ~~22~~ <sup>24</sup>). MOSES HEARD IT AND LIVED. SO "THE LORD CALLED UNTO MOSES" (LEV. 1:1) AND NO ONE ELSE.

MIDRASH COMES FROM THE ROOT DARASH, WHICH MEANS TO INVESTIGATE, TO SEARCH OUT AND EXPOUND. THE ROOTS OF MIDRASH GO BACK TO THE IMAGINATIVE EMBROIDERY OF OLD NARRATIVES AND TRADITIONS OF ISRAEL'S EARLY STORYTELLERS AND RHAPSODISTS. MANY OF THE SUGGESTED ETYMOLOGIES OF PROPER NAMES IN SCRIPTURE ARE A PRIMITIVE FORM OF MIDRASH. AN INSTANCE OF TWO PLACE NAMES THAT HAVE GENERALLY THE SAME SOUND AND MEANING: "ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE ADONAI-JIREH, AS IT IS SAID TO THIS DAY: 'IN THE MOUNT WHERE THE LORD IS SEEN'" (BE-HAE ADONAI-YE'RAEH) (GEN. ~~22~~ <sup>14</sup>). BIBLICAL EDITORS USED MIDRASH TO ADJUST TEXTS TO CORRESPOND TO THE PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS OF A STORY LINE, A HERO'S BEHAVIOR, OR THE UNITY OF THE BIBLICAL TRADITION.

Handwritten notes:  
 ✓  
 22:14

IN THE BOOK OF KINGS, DAVID TELLS HIS COURT HE WILL GIVE SOLOMON THE PLANS GOD HAD GIVEN HIM FOR THE TEMPLE, BUT THE TEXT NEGLECTS TO SAY THAT HE DID SO. THE PRIEST-EDITORS OF CHRONICLES MADE UP FOR THIS UNFORTUNATE LAPSE: "AND DAVID GAVE TO SOLOMON THE SON THE ✓ PATTERN OF THE PORCH" (1 Ch. 28:11ff). THE PRIESTLY EDITOR OF EZRA REPORTED THAT HIS HERO "SET HIS MIND TO INVESTIGATE (LI'DEROSH) THE ✓ LAW OF THE LORD IN ORDER TO TEACH EFFECTIVELY ITS STATUTES AND ✓ ORDINANCES" (Ezra 7:10).

THE MIDRASHIST APPROACHED THE TEXT WITH THE PSALMIST'S PRAYER: ✓ "HIDE NOT YOUR COMMANDMENTS FROM ME" (119:19) AND WHEN HE ACHIEVES HIS ENDS, HE REPEATS THE PSALMIST'S CONTENTED SIGH: "THE OPENING ✓ OF YOUR WORDS GIVE LIGHT" (119:130). IN MANY WAYS IT IS BEST TO LOOK ON MIDRASH NOT AS A LOGICAL SEARCH FOR WHAT CAN BE DEDUCED FROM A TEXT BUT THE OTHER WAY ROUND, AS AN IMAGINATIVE SEARCH FOR WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TORAH. THE RABBIS APPROACHED THE ACCEPTED TEXT MUCH AS GREEK INTERPRETERS APPROACHED HOMER, QUITE PREPARED TO USE ELEGANT EXEGETICAL TECHNIQUES TO ENABLE THEM TO FIND IN AN ANCIENT AND REVERED DOCUMENT THE CHERISHED VALUES OF THEIR DAY. WE SUPPOSE THEY HAD LITTLE SENSE THAT THEY WERE IMPOSING THEIR IDEAS ON THE TEXT. SINCE THE TEXT WAS A UNIQUE LITERATURE, GOD'S OWN WORDS, AND AS SUCH OF INFINITE DEPTH AND BREADTH, IT ALREADY HAD ALL IDEAS IN IT. THE MIDRASHIST BELIEVES HE IS SIMPLY UNCOVERING THE FULL MEANING OF A TEXT, ALTHOUGH HE INEVITABLY MOVES WELL AWAY FROM WHAT JOHN CALVIN MUCH LATER CALLED 'THE PLAIN SENSE OF A TEXT.'

SPELLING. WHEN THESE ARE REPORTED IN GOD'S OWN SPEECH, THEY MUST

MIDRASH IS A RESPONSE TO AN AGE-OLD PROBLEM COMMON TO ALL SCRIPTURAL RELIGIONS. AFFIRMING THE SCRIPTURE AS SACRED, AS A REFLECTION OF GOD'S OMNISCIENCE, LEADS TO THE AFFIRMATION THAT IT CONTAINS ALL THAT NEEDS TO BE KNOWN AND CAN BE KNOWN. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE RELIGION MUST ALWAYS DEVELOP NEW IDEAS TO MEET NEW PROBLEMS--THAT IS, IDEAS WHICH ARE NOT READILY PERCEPTIBLE FROM ITS SCRIPTURE'S TEXT. IN A SCRIPTURE-BASED TRADITION, THE NEW MUST BE DERIVED FROM THE OLD AND MUST SEEM OLD.

INTERPRETATION DEVELOPS FAR MORE NATURALLY AND EXUBERANTLY WHEN THE SCRIPTURE IS IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE ASSUMED TO BE GOD'S OWN, THAN WHEN, AS IN CHRISTIANITY, THE SCRIPTURE IS A TRANSLATION. WHEN THE HOLY BOOK IS A TRANSLATION--THE NEW TESTAMENT IS IN GREEK, NOT IN ARAMAIC, WHICH WAS JESUS' TONGUE--INTERPRETATION AND COMMENTARY CAN DEAL WITH IDEAS, THEMES, AND TYPOLOGIES BUT NOT WITH IDEAS WHICH DERIVE FROM THE TEXT'S WORDS, PHRASES, SYNTAX, AND SPELLING. WHEN THESE ARE REPORTED IN GOD'S OWN SPEECH, THEY MUST



BE ASSUMED TO HAVE MEANING. FOR THE MUSLIM, GOD SPOKE ARABIC AND THE KORAN IS HIS SPEECH. FOR THE JEW, GOD SPOKE HEBREW AND THE TORAH IS IN HIS NATIVE TONGUE. IN ISLAM AND JUDAISM, INTERPRETATION CAN BE CONTEXTUAL AND CAN GO BEYOND THE WORLD OF CONCEPTS AND DOCTRINE TO A WORLD OF LANGUAGE WHERE EVERY DETAIL AND NUANCE CAN BE ASSUMED TO HAVE MEANING. JEWS DEVELOPED BOTH THE PESHAT, THE PLAIN SENSE MEANING OF SENTENCE AND PARAGRAPH, AND MIDRASH, THE MEANING OF THE WAY A WORD WAS SPELLED, A LETTER SHAPED, OF A PARTICULAR VOCALIZATION, THE ABSENCE OR PRESENCE OF AN UNEXPECTED LETTER, THE NUMERICAL VALUE OF THE LETTERS OR OF A WORD, EVEN OF THE WAY BLANK SPACES OCCUR IN THE TEXT.

OBVIOUSLY, TO GO SO FAR BEYOND THE CONTEXTUAL MEANING OF PHRASES AND SENTENCES IS TO OPEN THE TEXT UP TO AN INFINITE RANGE OF POSSIBLE MEANINGS. MIDRASH IS AN ASSEMBLAGE OF DISCRETE AND VARIED STATEMENTS, SOME OF WHICH STAND IN DIRECT CONTRADICTION TO OTHERS. FLATOUT CONTRADICTION WAS IMPOSSIBLE IN HALACHA--THE LAW AS GOD MEANT IT TO BE--FOR IN MATTERS OF LAW CONTRADICTIONS ARE UNTHINKABLE. THE TEXT WAS ASSUMED TO BE TRUTH AWAITING DISCOVERY.

THE COMMON PRACTICE OF THE RABBIS CREATED A UNITY OF HALACHIC MIDRASH, AS THEY AGREED, FOR EXAMPLES ON THE WAY AN ERUY WAS TO BE DEVELOPED OR THE DIETARY RULES TO BE MANAGED. THE LEGAL CONSENSUS WAS LARGELY COMPLETED BY THE END OF THE TANNAITIC PERIOD, ABOUT THE FIRST HALF OF THE THIRD CENTURY. LATER HALACHIC DISCUSSION IN THE GEMARA TENDS TO DEAL LESS WITH PRACTICAL ISSUES, AS WE HAVE NOTED, AND MORE WITH UNDERSTANDING THE BASIS AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE LAWS.

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SUCH THE GEMARA TREATS HALACHA, THE LAW AND LEGAL IDEAS, WITH GREAT CIRCUMSPECTION. THE BULK OF A STUDENT'S EFFORT WAS INVESTED IN LEGAL STUDIES. THESE WERE THE STAFF OF LIFE, THE BREAD THAT HELD THE JEWISH BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER. THE INTERPRETIVE, AGGADIC TRADITIONS PROVIDED THE WINE AND THE JOY OF LIFE. THEY OCCUPIED A MINOR PLACE IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND WERE TREATED WITH LESS CIRCUMSPECTION THAN HALACHA.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT AGGADAH WAS NOT SEEN AS A USEFUL STUDY. IT WAS. IT SUGGESTED THE VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH MAN APPROACHED GOD, CAME TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE SPIRITUAL, TO APPRECIATE HIS HOPES AND THE MESSIANIC VISION OF HIS PEOPLE. BUT IT WAS NOT HALACHA, NOT THE BASIC STRUCTURE AND SUBSTANCE OF JEWISH LIFE. THE GACNIC PERIOD (9TH-10TH CENTURIES), THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE WAS "ONE DOES NOT DEPEND UPON AGGADAH." WHAT, THEN, WAS THE VALUE OF AGGADIC STUDY OF THE TEXT? "IF YOU WISH TO KNOW <sup>the One</sup> GOD WHO SPOKE AND

THE WORLD CAME INTO BEING, STUDY AGGADAH, <sup>By means of the Torah</sup> ~~THE MORE~~ YOU WILL RECOGNIZE HIM AND CLEAVE TO HIS WAYS" (Sifrei (Deut) Aykev #49)

FOR AGGADAH--TALES, INCIDENTS, STORIES WITHOUT THE FORCE OF LAW--UNIFORMITY WAS NEVER REQUIRED AND GREAT FLEXIBILITY WAS ALLOWED. IF SAGES DISAGREE ON A POINT OF ETIQUETTE OR ETHICS, THIS SIMPLY REVEALS THEIR FALLIBILITY AS HUMANS. AGGADAH IS NOT AUTHORITATIVE. A SAGE MIGHT BE EXCOMMUNICATED FOR TEACHING AGAINST THE HALACHIC CONSENSUS. HE WOULD NOT BE SO IF HE QUESTIONED AN AGGADIC MIDRASH--EVEN ON SUCH ELEMENTS OF FAITH AS FREE WILL OR A PARTICULAR SCENARIO OF END TIME AND EVEN IN A WAY WHICH VIOLATED THE CURRENT CONSENSUS.

SUCH VARIETY COULD BE TOLERATED BECAUSE OF THE CONVENTIONAL ASSUMPTION THAT THIS WHOLE WONDROUS BODY OF SCRIPTURE WAS, IN ALL ITS PARTS, FROM GOD. GOD IS ONE; ULTIMATELY, GOD'S TRUTH IS SINGULAR, IN THE END THE TRUTH WOULD OUT.

RABBINIC DOCTRINE INSISTED THAT TORAH HAD NOT CHANGED SINCE SINAI. BUT MUCH HAD CHANGED, INCLUDING THE TORAH AND MOST ESPECIALLY THE WAYS IT WAS UNDERSTOOD AND WHAT IT WAS UNDERSTOOD TO MEAN. RELIGIONS ARE NOT FREE-FLOATING SETS OF UNCHANGING IDEAS, BUT IDEAS TIED IN WITH THE LIVES OF PEOPLE. AS CHANGE TAKES PLACE IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT, AS PEOPLE ADJUST TO THE EVER-CHANGING CULTURE AND POLITICAL FACTS OF THEIR TIMES, THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF THEIR SCRIPTURE CHANGES. HOW TO MAKE THE NEW SEEM OLD AND FAMILIAR IS ONE OF THE ARTS OF MIDRASH. THE RABBIS LOOKED ON MIDRASH AS AN INSPIRED RATHER THAN A CRITICAL DISCIPLINE. THEY DEVISED CRITICAL RULES OF INTERPRETATION, BUT ULTIMATELY THE TRUTH OF MIDRASH DEPENDED LESS ON THE CANONS OF LOGIC AND ANALYSIS WHICH GOVERNED ITS USE THAN ON IMAGINATION, INSPIRED STUDY, AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF ONE'S INTERPRETATIONS BY ONE'S PEERS. MIDRASH COMMENTS, BUT IT IS NOT A COMMENTARY WHICH SEEKS TO PROVIDE AN EXTENDED INTERPRETATION OF A GIVEN CHAPTER OR SECTION; IT IS AN INDIVIDUAL STATEMENT, PHRASE OR WORD WHICH IS ANALYZED FOR ITS UNIQUE MEANING. BECAUSE THE MIDRASHIST KNEW HE WAS DEALING WITH A SACRED, NOT AN ORDINARY, TEXT, HE COULD BELIEVE THAT EVEN THE TRIVIAL--AN UNUSUAL SPELLING OR PLACE NAME--COULD BE TURNED INTO A MEANINGFUL TERM, THAT THE USE OF ONE ENIGMATIC EXPRESSION RATHER THAN ANOTHER HAD MEANING. JAMES



KUGEL IS USEFUL HERE: "MIDRASH MIGHT BEST BE TRANSLATED AS 'RESEARCH', A TRANSLATION THAT INCORPORATES THE WORD'S ROOT MEANING OF "SEARCH OUT, INQUIRE" AND PERHAPS AS WELL SUGGESTS THAT THE RESULTS OF THAT RESEARCH ARE ALMOST BY DEFINITION RECHERCHE, THAT IS, NOT OBVIOUS, OUT OF THE WAY, SOMETIMES FAR FETCHED" (KUGEL, J. TWO INTRODUCTIONS TO MIDRASH, PROOF TEXTS (VOL. 1, (1987) P. 146). THE RABBIS ACCEPTED AS SELF-EVIDENT THE THESIS "THAT EVERY READING HAS A MOTHER," WHICH IS TO SAY THAT EVERY BIBLICAL SENTENCE HAS A HISTORY THAT TIES IT TO ALL THAT WAS REVEALED AT SINAI, AND IN SUM MAKES EACH WORD PREGNANT WITH POTENTIAL MEANING, GOD'S (SIFRA 2 LEV. 12:5). *-cant find*

BECAUSE RABBINIC JUDAISM APPROACHES THE SACRED TEXT ARMED WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT EVERYTHING IN THE TEXT RELATES TO ALL ITS PARTS, THE MIDRASHIST HAS NO QUALMS ABOUT TAKING A PHRASE OR A WORD OUT OF WHAT WE WOULD CALL ITS CONTEXT OR OF GIVING THE TEXT A READING THAT COMMON SENSE DOES NOT PERMIT. HE IS NOT LIMITED TO THE IDEA THAT A STRAIGHTFORWARD SEQUENTIAL READING MIGHT SUGGEST. EVERY WORD, EVERY ANOMALY, SPELLING, OR SYNTAX, EVERY TURN OF PHRASE IS SUGGESTIVE FOR HIM. MIDRASH DECONSTRUCTS SCRIPTURE TO EXPLORE ITS DEPTHS AND DETAILS, BUT WITH FAR DIFFERENT METHODS AND PURPOSE AND IN A WAY THAT SETS ITS METHODS APART FROM THE TECHNIQUES OF THOSE MODERN LITERARY CRITICS WHO ASSUME A SERIES OF PERHAPS UNRELATED MEANINGS IN THE VARIOUS PARTS OF A WORK. MIDRASH ASSUMES THAT BEHIND THE WORLD OF DETAIL AND MEANINGS LIES AN ABSOLUTE AND ETERNAL TRUTH, AN UNYIELDING AND UNBENDING TORAH TEXT, AND WITHOUT EVER ESCAPING FROM THE CONTROL OF RELIABLE TRANSMITTERS.

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DESPITE APPEARANCES, MIDRASH IS UNCONGENIAL TO WORD PLAY OR INTERPRETIVE GAMES WHEN THESE ARE EMPLOYED ONLY FOR THEIR OWN SAKE. THE SAGES WERE BELIEVERS. THEY HELD A COHERENT FAITH. GOD DOES NOT SPEAK TO CONTRADICTORY PURPOSES. THEY WERE OBSERVANT. THEY WERE DEALING WITH A TEXT THEY ACCEPTED AS DIVINE WHOSE TEACHINGS THEY ACCEPTED AS BINDING. GOD HAD PLACED MUCH WISDOM IN THE TEXT: ONE SOURCE, ONE TRUTH. THEIR CHALLENGE WAS TO DRAW THAT WISDOM OUT, TO EXPLORE ITS DEPTHS.

ONLY IN THESE TALMUDIC CENTURIES, IN AN AGE WHEN THE TORAH WAS ACCEPTED FULLY AS SCRIPTURE, DID TORAH DEVELOP A FULL-BLOWN MIDRASH. THE MIDRASHIC COMMENTS, ORIGINALLY DISCRETE STATEMENTS, WERE ULTIMATELY DRAWN TOGETHER BY SAGES AND EDITORS INTO PRESENTATIONS, SERMONS OR SERMON OUTLINES WHICH FOLLOWED, MORE OR LESS SEQUENTIALLY, THE TEXTS OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE OR WERE RELATED TO THE THEMES OF A READING RESERVED FOR SOME SPECIAL OCCASION.

OVER TIME THE RABBINIC, HALACHIC, AND AGGADIC AGENDA ACQUIRED A NAME WHICH EMPHASIZED ITS AUTHORITY, THE TORAH SHE-BE'AL PEH, THE ORAL, MEMORIZED TORAH. THE TALMUD ASCRIBES THE TERMS TO HILLEL AND SHAMMAI, THE FIRST-CENTURY PHARISEES (B. SAB. 31A), BUT IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT THE PHRASE DID NOT BECOME CONVENTIONAL UNTIL THE THIRD OR FOURTH CENTURY. IN ITS FINAL FORM THE FULL-BLOWN MYTH HELD THAT GOD HAD REVEALED THROUGH MOSES ALL OF SEFER TORAH, THE TORAH, AND THE TORAH SHE-BE'AL PEH, A COMPLEMENTARY ORAL REVELATION WHICH HAD PASSED DOWN TO THE PRESENT GENERATIONS WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AND WITHOUT EVER ESCAPING FROM THE CONTROL OF RELIABLE TRANSMITTERS.

*Deuteronomy 5:28  
Footnote 5:28  
22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100*

THE TWO TORAHS HAD BEEN INTERPRETED BY GENERATIONS OF RESPONSIBLE LEADERS WHO THROUGH MIDRASH HAD WOVEN THEM TOGETHER INTO THE SINGLE ENTITY THEY, IN FACT, WERE.

AS A TECHNIQUE FOR WEAVING A TWO-FOLD TORAH INTO ONE, MIDRASH HAD ONE STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE. IT WAS WITHOUT SELF-EVIDENT LIMITS. SINCE THE SAGES' TECHNIQUES OF INTERPRETATION WERE ARTIFICIAL, IN THE SENSE THAT THEY TRANSCENDED LOGIC, THERE WAS NO OBVIOUS LIMIT TO WHAT COULD BE CLAIMED AS TORAH. ELEGANT INTERPRETATION CAN MAKE BLACK WHITE AND PERMIT THE FORBIDDEN. THE RABBIS LIMITED THE AUTHORITY TO DO MIDRASH ONLY TO QUALIFIED SAGES BY SETTING ASIDE MIDRASH OF WHICH THEY DISAPPROVED, BY <sup>REINING</sup> IN THE IMAGINATION OF THE YOUNG, BY LIMITING DISCUSSION TO THOSE FEW EDUCATED AND ALREADY DEEPLY COMMITTED, AND BY CONFINING TO THESE CIRCLES THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTED BLOCS OF MIDRASHIM. THIS CONCERN FOR CONTROL, FOR PROTECTING THE RABBINIC AUTHORITY OVER THE DEVELOPING TRADITION, WAS ALSO AN ORIGINAL MOTIVE FOR DRAWING TOGETHER AND EDITING MIDRASHIC COLLECTIONS. IN SO DOING, THE RABBIS IMPOSED STANDARDS. SINCE WRITING WAS NOT PARTICULARLY ENCOURAGED, MIDRASH, LIKE SO MUCH ELSE, WAS MOSTLY MEMORIZED; THAT WHICH A SAGE DID NOT DEEM WORTHY OF BEING ENSHRINED IN MEMORY GENERALLY DISAPPEARED.

MOST OF THE MIDRASH WHICH HAS COME DOWN TO US IS PRESENTED ATOM-ISTICALLY, AS TERSE, SINGLE-SENTENCE COMMENT. MANY SUCH COMMENTS UNDOUBTEDLY FLOATED ABOUT THE SCHOOLS AND WERE ULTIMATELY LOST.

Reference to  
Ervin 13b  
54 20CN  
112  
p. 100  
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OTHERS, FOR VARIOUS REASONS, BECAME PART OF A BLOC OF TRADITION WHICH A TEACHER HAD HIS STUDENTS MEMORIZE. SOME TRADITIONS MELDED BECAUSE THEY SHARED A STYLISTIC ELEMENT. OTHERS WERE HUNG ONTO THE OPENING SENTENCE OF A TORAH SECTION OR SOME OTHER BIBLICAL PORTION. SINCE MIDRASH WAS STILL AT THIS TIME A CENTRAL PART OF THE RABBI'S ORAL CULTURE, IN MOST CASES ITS ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE WAS SIMPLY TO MAKE MEMORIZING EASIER AND SURER.

MIDRASH RESTS ON PARADOX. ON THE ONE HAND, IT IS BASED ON THE PREMISE THAT ALL IDEAS ARE ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE AND IT ENCOURAGES BELIEF IN THE COHERENCE OF THE WHOLE TRADITION. ON THE OTHER HAND, MIDRASH REFLECTS NOT A SINGLE POINT OF VIEW, BUT RATHER DIVERSITY OF INSIGHTS AND DOCTRINES. THIS GREAT EFFORT OF SYNTHESIS IS FULL OF CONTRADICTION AND IS NOT FRIGHTENED BY THIS FACT. AN IDENTICAL FORMULAIC STATEMENT CAN BE GIVEN VARIOUS READINGS. WITHOUT CONTEXT, IT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WAS INTENDED BY THE MIDRASHIST. OFTEN THE ONLY CONNECTION BETWEEN MIDRASHIM IS THAT THEY CIRCULATED IN A PARTICULAR SCHOOL OR WERE OF INTEREST TO A PARTICULAR COMPILER.

MIDRASH TESTIFIES, ABOVE ALL, TO THE CONTINUING DEEP INTEREST IN THE WRITTEN SCRIPTURE. IT IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE THAT WITH THE RISE OF THE TALMUD, THE FOCUS OF JEWISH INTEREST SWITCHED FROM THE WRITTEN TO THE ORAL LAW. THAT ASSUMPTION IS BASED ON LITTLE ELSE BUT THE VERY LATE MEDIEVAL PRACTICE BY EUROPEAN JEWS OF SETTING TALMUDIC STUDIES ABOVE ALL ELSE. IT IS TRUE THAT IN THE YESHIVOT OF

THAT FAR-FLUNG COMMUNITIES AND THEIR JUDGES COULD OPERATE WITHOUT THE

SLOBODKA OR VOLOZIN THE TANAKH WAS NOT SYSTEMATICALLY STUDIED AND THAT IN EVERY POLISH AND LITHUANIAN TOWN THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS CONTINUING EDUCATION CIRCLES STUDIED TALMUDIC TRADITION RATHER THAN THE BIBLE. BUT, EVEN THEN, WHEN THE BIBLE WAS NOT STUDIED SYSTEMATICALLY, KNOWLEDGE OF ITS TEACHINGS WAS ASSUMED AND FAIRLY CORRECTLY SO: IT REMAINED THE CURRICULUM OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, THE TEXT OF WEEKLY SYNAGOGUE RITUAL, THE SUBJECT OF OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND ITS LANGUAGE REMAINED BASIC TO THE PEOPLE'S SPEECH.

ASHKENAZIC EUROPEAN SOCIETY WAS A BIT UNUSUAL IN ITS HEAVY EMPHASIS ON TALMUD. IN TALMUDIC TIMES, AND LATER IN THE ARAB WORLD, KNOWLEDGE OF THE WRITTEN TORAH PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN ALL THAT CONSTITUTED JEWISH STUDIES. INDEED, IN THE ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENT THERE WERE THOSE EAGER TO STUDY THE WRITTEN TORAH AND WILLING TO DO SO EVEN THOUGH IT REQUIRED THAT THEY SIMPLIFY THE ORAL TRADITION TO DO SO. IN ANY ARABIC COMMUNITY, TALMUD REMAINED THE CODE OF JEWISH LIFE WITHOUT IMPOSING ON THE COMMUNITY, IN THE NAME OF TALMUD TORAH, THE MONUMENTAL TASK OF MASTERING ITS INTRICACIES OR COMMENTARIES. IN THE EARLY CENTURIES OF MUSLIM DOMINANCE, MANY JEWS WERE UNABLE AND UNWILLING TO DEVOTE THE TIME AND EFFORT SUCH MASTERY REQUIRED; THEY WERE HEIRS OF TRADITION WHICH REQUIRED ONLY THE MORE ACTIVE RELIGIOUS RITUALS. IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE NINTH THROUGH TWELFTH CENTURIES THE CUSTOM DEVELOPED OF PREPARING PRECIS OF TALMUDIC LAW, CODES OF PRACTICE, ARRANGED TOPICALLY BUT WITHOUT METHODOLOGY. MOSES MAIMONIDES' MISHNAH TORAH WAS SIMPLY THE MOST FAMOUS OF THE CODES PREPARED SO THAT FAR-FLUNG COMMUNITIES AND THEIR JUDGES COULD OPERATE WITHOUT THE

PRESENCE OF A FULLY QUALIFIED TALMUDIST. HIGHER RABBINIC EDUCATION WAS PRESUMEDLY TO BE LEFT TO THE GREAT ACADEMIES OF BABYLONIA AND PALESTINE. THIS SIMPLIFIED CODIFICATION WAS AN ATTEMPT TO REFORM RABBINIC JUDAISM WITHOUT CHALLENGING ANY OF ITS MAJOR AFFIRMATIONS. THE CODIFIERS WERE GOOD SCHOLARS, BUT THEY KNEW THAT TALMUDIC ERUDITION WAS BEYOND THE AVERAGE JEW. WHENEVER JEWISH LIFE HAS BEEN ABLE TO GAIN A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF ACCESS TO THE LARGER BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WORLD, AS WAS TRUE OF JEWS IN MANY PARTS OF THE ARAB WORLD DURING THE 8TH AND 9TH CENTURIES, JEWS HAVE TRIED TO MOVE AWAY FROM A LEARNING WHICH IS PAROCHIAL AND ALL-ABSORBING SO THAT THEY HAVE THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE LARGER WORLD.

DURING TALMUDIC TIMES AN EXTENSIVE LITERATURE OF HEBREW POETRY, BASED ON THEMES AND IDIOMS TAKEN PRIMARILY FROM THE TANAKH AND DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO FILL OUT THE STILL SPARE WORSHIP SERVICE, BEGAN TO BE EXTENSIVELY DEVELOPED. THESE POEMS GENERALLY DEALT WITH BIBLICAL THEMES AND DELIBERATELY USED BIBLICAL HEBREW AND BIBLICAL IDIOMS. THEY KEPT ALIVE THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE AS WELL AS BIBLICAL AND FOLK STORIES ABOUT BIBLICAL HEROES. THIS LITERATURE, THE PIYYUT, APPARENTLY A HEBREW FORM OF THE GREEK 'POIETES', POET, BEGAN TO APPEAR IN THE THIRD CENTURY C.E., PARTICULARLY IN PALESTINE, AND WAS DESTINED TO HAVE A CREATIVE RUN OF OVER A THOUSAND YEARS.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PALESTINE RATHER THAN THE DIASPORA AS THE CENTER OF SCRIPTURE-BASED INTEREST NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD AND EMPHASIZED. BABYLON, IN THE PARTHIAN EMPIRE, HAD RABBINIC ACADEMIES AND PRODUCED THE BETTER OF THE TWO TALMUDS, BUT PRIDE OF RANK IN



EXEGESIS AND AGGADAH GOES TO THE PALESTINIAN SAGES. ALMOST ALL THE MIDRASH COLLECTIONS COME FROM PALESTINE. THE PIYYUT EMERGES IN PALESTINE AND FLOURISHES ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY THERE RIGHT DOWN THROUGH THE EARLY CENTURIES OF THE MUSLIM PERIOD. IN THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES KARAITE MASORETIC STUDIES WILL FLOURISH IN THE GALILEE, STIMULATE RABBINIC INTEREST IN SUCH STUDIES, AND BRING THAT THOUSAND-YEAR OLD DISCIPLINE TO A TRIUMPHAL CONCLUSION. ONE SUSPECTS THAT THE FACT OF PALESTINE AS A CENTER OF AGGADAH HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE NATURALNESS OF HEBREW IN THAT ENVIRONMENT. HEBREW, AFTER ALL, WAS THE LANGUAGE OF THE JEWISH STORY. TANNAITIC MATERIALS DRAWN UP IN PALESTINE WERE IN HEBREW. WHEN THE CENTER MOVED EAST, THE BABYLONIAN GEMARA WAS WRITTEN IN ARAMAIC.

THEN, TOO, THE PALESTINIAN SCHOOLS HAD A HEAD START OF A CENTURY OR TWO ON THOSE OF THE DIASPORA. PALESTINIAN EMINENCE MAY ALSO HAVE ACQUIRED SOME OF ITS FORCE FROM THE PREFERENCE OF THE PALESTINIAN SYNAGOGUES FOR A THREE OR THREE AND A HALF-YEAR CYCLE OF TORAH READINGS--A PRACTICE MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM--WHOSE SHORTER PORTIONS INSPIRED GREATER INTENSITY IN STUDY AND DISCUSSION. FINALLY, THE HISTORY OF THE TWO COMMUNITIES IS INSTRUCTIVE. THE PALESTINIAN HISTORY IS ONE OF UNINTERRUPTED CREATIVITY. THE EAST WAS AN ANCIENT CENTER, BUT WE HEAR OF LITTLE THAT IS CREATIVE AFTER EZRA IN THE 4TH CENTURY B.C.E. AND BEFORE THE RABBINIC REVIVAL OF LEARNING THERE IN THE THIRD CENTURY C.E.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS IS A RECOGNIZED CLASSIC OF LITURGICAL POETRY, A FEATURE AS OLD AS THE HEBREW TRADITION. WHILE THE PSALMS STAND

ON THEIR OWN, THE PIYYUT DIFFER IN DEPENDING HEAVILY ON THE BIBLE, THE TARGUM AND MIDRASHIC EXPLANATIONS. POEMS WERE COMPOSED FOR EACH OF THE SABBATHS OF A THREE-YEAR CYCLE; AS INSERTIONS OR SUBSTITUTIONS FOR PORTIONS OF THE AMIDAH, THE TRADITIONAL HEART OF THE SERVICE; AS ADDITIONS TO THE BLESSINGS WHICH PRECEDE THE SAYING OF THE SHEMA; AND FOR A VARIETY OF OTHER LITURGICAL PURPOSES, INCLUDING, SOME BELIEVE, AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE AMIDAH DURING PERIODS OF PERSECUTION WHEN THE BYZANTINE AUTHORITIES ORDERED THAT THE AMIDAH NOT BE RECITED PUBLICLY.

WE KNOW LITTLE ABOUT THE PERSONALITIES OF THE EARLY PAYYETANIM, THE AUTHORS OF THE LITURGICAL POEMS, SOMETIMES NOT EVEN THEIR NAMES. THEY WERE GENERALLY THE MEN WHO CHANTED THE SERVICE. AT A LATER PERIOD THESE POET-SINGERS WERE ALSO CALLED HAZZANIM, THOSE WHOM WE WOULD TODAY CALL CANTORS. DURING THE TALMUDIC CENTURIES THE SYNAGOGUE SERVICE HAD DEVELOPED A SET FORM THOUGH ITS CONTENTS WERE NOT COMPLETELY FIXED. PARTICULARLY THE SABBATH AND FESTIVAL SERVICES NEEDED MUCH MORE STRUCTURE. AT FIRST THE PAYYETANIM SOUGHT TO PROVIDE COMPOSITIONS WHICH COULD SUPPLEMENT OR SUPPLANT THE STILL UNDEVELOPED AND UNSTANDARDIZED PORTIONS OF THE SERVICE. WRITING FOR THEIR OWN CONGREGATIONS, PAYYETANIM PROVIDED VERSES WHICH ADDED SUBSTANCE AND FRESHNESS TO THE SERVICE AND ALLOWED THE PAYETON<sup>A</sup> TO DISPLAY HIS SKILLS. SOME POEMS WERE LIKE THE SERMONS OF THE DAY, RECAPITULATIONS OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION. SOME SELECTED A FESTIVAL THEME, LIKE THAT OF THE AWESOME PRIESTLY CONFESSION ON YOM KIPPUR, AND ENLARGED ON IT FOR THE FAST DAY'S ADDITIONAL SERVICE (MUSAF). POEMS INCLUDED

THE PSALMS. TENDS TO AVOID RHYME. IT WAS TOO EASY TO RHYME A

BOTH AGGADAH AND LEGAL MATERIALS. SOME ALLUDE TO DISPUTATION WITH OTHER FAITHS, SUCH AS THE GROWING FRICTION WITH THE NEWLY CHRISTIANIZED ROMAN EMPIRE AND LATER TO THE EXTORTIONS OF THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS AND OF ISLAM. SOME ARE FULL OF MYSTICAL THOUGHTS. ALMOST ALL, LIKE THE POPULAR SERMONS, CONCLUDE WITH SOME EXPRESSION OF ISRAEL'S MESSIANIC HOPE. SOME COMMUNITIES, LIKE TIBERIUS, ULTIMATELY PRODUCED MANUSCRIPT ANTHOLOGIES OF POEMS BY LOCAL WRITERS. WHATEVER THEIR CONTENT OR QUALITY, THESE POEMS--AND THEIR NUMBER RUNS INTO THE THOUSANDS--REFLECT THE IMPORTANCE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF TORAH EDUCATION. SOME WERE WRITTEN FOR ORDINARY FOLK. MOST WERE FULL OF LITERARY ALLUSIONS AND WERE OBVIOUSLY INTENDED FOR CONGREGATIONS OF THE INTELLECTUALLY ELITE. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE GENERAL AUDIENCE WAS EXPECTED TO UNDERSTAND BASIC BIBLICAL CITATIONS AND THAT THE ELITE WERE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO DECODE A SURPRISING NUMBER OF RECONDITE REFERENCES.

FORTUNATELY, WE KNOW THE NAMES OF A FEW OF THE IMPORTANT POETS OF THIS LATE TALMUDIC PERIOD: YOSE B. YOSE (4-5TH CENTURY), YANNAI, AND ELEAZAR B. KALLIR (6TH CENTURY) ARE THE BEST KNOWN. THEIR POEMS ARE MOSTLY ON BIBLICAL THEMES, EACH A TESTAMENT TO THE DEPTH OF BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE COMMUNITY. THESE MEN AND THEIR PREDECESSORS AND SUCCESSORS WERE, OF COURSE, HEIRS OF A LONG TRADITION OF POETRY AND THEIR WORK REFLECTS STYLISTIC PATTERNS OF BOTH BIBLICAL AND MIDRASHIC TRADITIONS; EXAMPLES INCLUDE PARALLELISM, ALPHABETIC ACROSTICS, AND A FOUR-FOLD DIVISION OF VERSE IN WHICH EACH DIVISION HAS TWO ACCENTED TERMS. EARLY HEBREW POETRY, LIKE THE PSALMS, TENDS TO AVOID RHYME. IT WAS TOO EASY TO RHYME A



LANGUAGE IN WHICH CASE ENDINGS ARE COMMON.

A TYPICAL EARLY PIYYUT WRITTEN BY AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR IS A COMPLEMENT TO THE PRAYER FOR RAIN WHICH IS INTRODUCED INTO THE SERVICE FROM FALL TO SPRING.

"I SHALL SEND PRAISES NOW THAT THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF THE BIRDS HAS COME, I SHALL ANSWER IN SONG: GO IN PEACE, RAIN."

I SHALL LOOK AT THE DEEDS OF MY GOD, SO PLEASANT IN THEIR SEASON, AND SWEETLY SAY: COME IN PEACE, DEW.

THE RAINS ARE OVER AND GONE, THE WINTER IS PAST; EVERYTHING IS CREATED WITH BEAUTY; GO IN PEACE, RAIN.

THE MANDRAKES GIVE FORTH THEIR PERFUME IN THE LOVERS' GARDEN; SORROWS ARE PAST: COME IN PEACE, DEW.

THE EARTH IS CROWNED WITH NEW GRAIN AND WINE, AND EVERY CREATURE CRIES, GO IN PEACE, RAIN."

THE USE OF IMAGERY CLEARLY TAKEN FROM THE SONG OF SONGS AND THE PSALMS IS EVIDENT THROUGHOUT. INDEED, WE CANNOT IMAGINE MOST OF THESE SONGS WITHOUT REFERENCE TO BIBLICAL ANTECEDENTS.

MUCH OF THE POETRY, PARTICULARLY THAT WHICH RELATES DIRECTLY TO THE WEEKLY PORTIONS OF THE TORAH CYCLE, HAS A MORE APPARENT AND IMMEDIATE CONNECTION TO THE SEFER TORAH, AS DOES THIS POEM OF YANNAI'S WHICH REFERS TO MOSES' VISION OF GOD AT THE BURNING BUSH.

WHAT IS INTERESTING IS THAT THE AUTHOR COMBINES, AS DO MOST OF THESE POETS, BIBLICAL THEMES WITH THOSE WHICH DERIVE FROM THE MIDRASH AND ARE CLEARLY AS WELL KNOWN--HERE, FOR INSTANCE THE MIDRASH THAT MOSES AT THE BURNING BUSH HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO AN ANGEL, AND THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF LOOKING AT THE BUSH ALLOWED

HIM TO BECOME AN ADEPT IN FIERY VISIONS.

"INTO THE WILDERNESS THE MESSENGER DROVE HIS FLOCKS; INTO THE WILDERNESS HE WOULD LEAD HIS PEOPLE LIKE A FLOCK.

WITHOUT FEET HE RAN, RUSHING HIS HERD TO THE PLACE WHERE HE WOULD SEE HIS VISION OF GOD.

GREEN CROPS SPRANG UP BEFORE HIM, THEN WERE SWALLOWED IN HIS WAKE.

IN A SINGLE DAY HE TRAVELED A LONG DISTANCE, FOR HE WHO LOVED STRAIGHTNESS STRAIGHTENED THE PATH BEFORE HIM.

WHEN HE REACHED THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD, HE WAS EASED OF HIS HARD-  
SHIP AND RELIEVED OF HIS TOIL.

AT FIRST AN ANGEL APPEARED BEFORE HIM TO CHANGE HIS FORM TO THAT OF AN ANGEL.

AND GOD TAUGHT HIM TO LOOK AT FIRE, TO BE EXPERT IN FIERY VISIONS.

HIS HEART WAS STRENGTHENED BY LOOKING AT THE FLAME, SO THAT HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND ALL MANNER OF FIRE.

THE PURE ONE REVEALED HIS SPLENDOR IN THE MIDST OF ISRAEL'S DEFILEMENT; THE HIGH ONE PROCLAIMED HIS GLORY FROM THE LOWLY BUSH.

FOR HIS PEOPLE'S DISTRESS IS HIS DISTRESS, AND THEIR SALVATION IS HIS OWN."

\* \* \* \*

THE SEMI-OFFICIAL TARGUM OF THE SEFER TORAH WAS DEVELOPED IN PALESTINE DURING THESE CENTURIES, ALTHOUGH IT WAS EDITED IN THE EAST, IN BABYLONIA IN THE SIXTH CENTURY C.E., THERE TO BECOME THE

"OFFICIAL" TARGUM OF THE SYNAGOGUE, TARGUM ONKELOS. THE ONKELOS  
 TRADITION AVOIDED ALL ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND MANDATED THE PROPER  
 RABBINIC INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW. IT IS LIKELY THAT ONKELOS IS  
 A CORRUPTION OF THE NAME AQUILA, A SECOND-CENTURY TRANSLATOR OF  
 THE BIBLE INTO GREEK. AQUILA WAS A CONVERT; ONKELOS IS SO DESCRIBED.  
 BIOGRAPHICAL SIMILARITIES ABOUT THE TWO MEN ARE REPORTED IN THE  
 TALMUD. IT SEEMS PLAUSIBLE THAT THE FACTS AND LEGENDS WHICH SURROUND  
 THE LIFE OF AQUILA WERE ATTACHED TO AN IMPORTANT TARGUM TRADITION  
 ABOUT WHOSE AUTHOR LITTLE WAS KNOWN. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS NOT THE  
 PERSONALITY OR EVEN THE IDENTITY OF THE PURPORTED AUTHOR OF THE  
TARGUM, WHICH, LIKE ALMOST ALL OTHER WORKS OF THE AGE, WAS A COMPOSITE  
 ACHIEVEMENT, BUT THE FACT THAT BIBLE TRANSLATIONS CONTINUED TO BE  
 MADE THROUGHOUT THE TALMUDIC CENTURIES INTO ARAMAIC, GREEK, SYRIAN,  
 AND OTHER TONGUES. THE BIBLE WAS READ.

BY DEFINITION A TARGUM IS A TRANSLATION OR PARAPHRASE OF BIBLICAL  
 BOOK INTO ARAMAIC. THE TRANSLATION CONFORMED TO RABBINIC STANDARDS.  
 ANTHROPOMORPHISMS, SO FREQUENT IN THE BIBLE, ARE REMOVED AND RABBINIC  
 INTERPRETATIONS ARE MADE CLEAR. SOMETIMES THE TARGUM ADDED MIDRASHIC  
 TALES TO THE BIBLICAL TEXT IT WAS TRANSLATING OR PARAPHRASING.

FOR OUR PURPOSES WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THE EXISTENCE OF SEVERAL  
 STRANDS OF TARGUM, EVIDENCE OF A CONTINUING AND FLOURISHING INTEREST  
 IN BIBLICAL CONCERNS AND STUDIES IN PALESTINE AND LATER IN THE EAST.  
 IN ADDITION TO THE TARGUM ONKELOS TO THE PENTATEUCH, A SIMILAR  
TARGUM DEVELOPED TO THE PROPHETS WHICH ALSO WAS BEGUN IN PALESTINE

VIOLENT MESSIANIC UPRISINGS THERE WERE SEVERAL RATHER VIOLENT

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AND DEVELOPED THERE FOR SEVERAL CENTURIES BEFORE IT, TOO, WAS TRANSPORTED AND FINALLY COMPLETED IN BABYLONIA AROUND THE SAME TIME AS ONKELOS, DURING THE SIXTH CENTURY. A NUMBER OF TARGUMIM OF THE HOLY WRITINGS WERE DONE AT THE SAME PERIOD.

THE TARGUM WAS TREATED WITH THE SAME FORMALITY WHICH CONTROLLED THE PUBLIC READING OF THE TORAH IN THE SYNAGOGUE. IT HAD BEEN CREATED, AFTER ALL, AS AN ADJUNCT TO THAT READING, TO GUARANTEE THAT THE READING WAS PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD BY JEWS WHO NO LONGER KNEW THE CLASSIC HEBREW. ACCORDING TO TALMUDIC PRESCRIPTION, THE TARGUM HAS TO BE READ, NEVER RECITED BY HEART, READ AFTER EACH VERSE OF THE PORTION OF THE WEEK AND AFTER EVERY THIRD VERSE OF THE HAFTARAH.

May 4:6 A MINOR COULD READ FROM THE TARGUM IN THE SYNAGOGUE, WHERE HE COULD NOT READ FROM THE TORAH, AND WE FIND IN THE CAIRO GENIZAH A FEW LETTERS FROM THE TWELFTH CENTURY PRAISING YOUNGSTERS FOR THIS ACHIEVEMENT. PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE, LIKE THE STORY OF REUBEN (GEN. 35:22) AND THE SECOND ACCOUNT OF THE GOLDEN CALF (EX. 32:1-25, 35) AND THE PRIESTLY BLESSING, WERE PROHIBITED TO BE TRANSLATED. THE PRIESTLY BLESSING WAS DEEMED TOO HOLY TO BE TRANSLATED; THERE WAS THE SUSPICION THAT THE GOLDEN CALF MIGHT HAVE HAD DIVINE POWERS SINCE IT EMERGED FULLY MOLDED OUT OF THE GOLD TOSSED INTO THE FIRE AND THEREFORE THE PORTION SHOULD NOT BE RECITED.

\* \* \*

THE TALMUDIC AGE WAS A PERIOD OF TRANSITION. DURING THE FIRST CENTURIES OF THE MUSLIM PERIOD THERE WERE SEVERAL RATHER VIOLENT MESSIANIC UPRISINGS ~~THERE WERE SEVERAL RATHER VIOLENT~~

~~MESSIANIC UPRISINGS~~ AGAINST AUTHORITY, BY SUCH MEN AS ABU ISA OF ISFAHAN AND HIS DISCIPLE, YUDGHAN. THESE REBELLIONS WERE LIMITED LARGELY TO RURAL AREAS AND TESTIFY NOT ONLY TO THE INTENSITY OF ✓ MESSIANIC HOPES BUT EQUALLY TO THE FACT THAT RABBINIC LAW HAD NOT YET BEEN FULLY ACCEPTED. THE LITTLE WE KNOW ABOUT THE DOMESTIC RULES OF THE BREAKAWAY GROUPS SUGGESTS THAT THEY DID NOT SLAVISHLY FOLLOW RABBINIC LAW. THE HEADS OF THESE ACADEMIES, THE GAONIM OF THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES, WIELDED A STRONG AND CENTRALIZED AUTHORITY. THEY ACCEPTED THE PIETY THAT THE TALMUD HAD REMAINED AN ORAL TEACHING UNTIL POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES MADE ITS INSCRIPTION A MATTER OF SOME URGENCY, AND PAINTED A PICTURE OF VARIOUS SIXTH-CENTURY SAGES RECOGNIZING THIS NEED: RABINA FOR THE JERUSALEM TALMUD, RAV ASHI FOR THE BABYLONIAN.

THERE WERE NO RULES OR PATTERNS WHICH SCRIBES WERE OBLIGED TO FOLLOW FOR THE MISHNAH AND LATER FOR THE TALMUD. EACH TEXT COULD BE INSCRIBED ON ANY USABLE SURFACE. NOTES COULD BE MADE IN THE MARGIN OR EVEN IN THE TEXT ITSELF. SCRIBAL ERRORS COULD BE STRUCK OUT AND WRITTEN OVER. THOUGH IN THE CENTRAL ACADEMIES CARE WAS TAKEN WITH THE ACCURACY OF THE TALMUDIC TRADITIONS, NO AUTHORITATIVE VERSION WAS PUBLISHED. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE TEXT WAS TREATED CAVALIERLY. THE SAVORAIM WERE CAREFUL EDITORS WORKING WITH A CHAOTIC TEXT.

A GRAMMATICAL TRADITION BEGAN TO DEVELOP AROUND THE TEXT IN GAONIC TIMES, FROM WHICH A SMALL NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS SURVIVE.

SOME WERE VOCALIZED AND SOME, LIKE ONE PRODUCED FOR HAI GAON (11TH CENT.), INCLUDED USEFUL LINGUISTIC AND GRAMMATICAL COMMENTS. THOUGH THE MISHNAH CIRCULATED IN AN UNVOCALIZED FORM AND THE GEMARA GENERALLY FOLLOWED SUIT, READINGS WERE STANDARDIZED BY THE LEARNING SONGS WHICH ACCOMPANIED ITS STUDY IN SCHOOLS.

THE TALMUD BECAME THE SCRIPTURE OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE 8TH AND 9TH CENTURIES. STUDENTS EXPENDED PRODIGIOUS EFFORT IN MEMORIZING BLOCS OF TEXT. THE BAGHDAD ACADEMIES OF ADVANCED STUDY ALSO EMPLOYED MEMORY PROFESSIONALS TO MAKE SURE THAT THE ACCEPTED TEXT WAS THE ONE DISCUSSED AND TAUGHT. FORMALITY GOVERNED DISCUSSION IN THE ACADEMIES. A FESTIVE OCCASION CELEBRATED COMPLETION OF A TRACTATE OF 'READINGS.' THE KADDISH PRAYER WHICH PRAISES AND THANKS GOD FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF STUDY MAY HAVE HAD ITS ORIGINS AS A BLESSING ON SUCH OCCASIONS.

BY ITS VERY BULK AND ITS MANY HALACHIC INTERESTS, THE TALMUD SEEMS, AS WE HAVE SEEN, TO BE NOT ONLY AN ATTEMPT TO REARRANGE AND TO ELABORATE JEWISH LAW INTO POSITIVE CODES BUT TO CREATE A NEW WORLD OF DISCOURSE. IT INCLUDED AGGADAH, HISTORY, DISCUSSION OF EXEGETICAL PRINCIPLES, LEGAL METHODOLOGY, UNRESOLVED LEGAL ISSUES AND LIKE ISSUES.

THERE COULD BE NO MISTAKING THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS BODY OF TORAH. IT WAS THE ORAL LAW, GIVEN AT SINAI, NURTURED BY GENERATIONS OF LEADERS AND SAGES, GOD'S WILL FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF ISRAEL'S



COMMUNAL LIFE. YET, THE ISLAMIC-JEWISH WORLD'S DEVELOPING CONCERN FOR PRECISION AND ORDER WAS A BIT PUT OFF BY THE TALMUD'S DENSE COMPLEXITY. ATTEMPTS WERE MADE TO PRESENT ISSUES WITH SOME SENSE OF ORDER. THE LEARNING CHARTS OF THE ACADEMIES OF THE EAST EMPHASIZED CORRECT PRONUNCIATION AND MEANING. DISCUSSIONS WERE CONDUCTED WITH A CARE AND CEREMONY WHICH WOULD BE CONSPICUOUSLY LACKING IN LATER EUROPEAN ACADEMIES. A GAON AIDED BY A PROVOST (AV) AND A SCRIBE PRESIDED OVER ACADEMIC MEETINGS. THE ACADEMY WAS ARRANGED HIERARCHICALLY; EACH ROW HAD A HEAD AND DISCUSSION WAS CARRIED ON BY A STRICT RULE OF SENIORITY. TWICE EACH YEAR PUBLIC LECTURES (KALLOT) WERE ORGANIZED. THE GAON CHOSE A PARTICULAR TREATISE AS HIS SUBJECT FOR A KALLAH AND VARIOUS OFFICIALS WOULD ADD THEIR REMARKS TO THE GAON'S. VISITING SCHOLARS WHO WERE PRESENT WERE EXPECTED TO CARRY BACK DECISIONS AND FORMULATIONS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES. NO ONE COULD PREACH OR TEACH IN THE COMMUNITIES WITHOUT PROPER AUTHORIZATION. ACADEMIC SCRIBES PREPARED LETTERS FOR VARIOUS COMMUNITIES WHICH REPORTED ON THE KALLAH AND ANSWERED SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON CHOSEN TEXTS AND OTHERS ASKED BY THE COMMUNITIES. THE ACADEMIES WERE SUSTAINED BY THE GIFTS THAT ACCOMPANIED SUCH REQUESTS AND BY THE INCOME FROM LANDS WHICH HAD BEEN DONATED TO THEM.

ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL ADVANTAGES OF THIS CORRESPONDENCE WAS THAT IT CLOSED DEBATE, PARTICULARLY ON ISSUES WHERE THE ACADEMY HAD MADE A SPECIFIC RULING ON AN ISSUE WHICH THE TALMUD HAD LEFT OPEN. EFFECTIVE AUTHORITY THEREFORE LAY IN THE INSTITUTION RATHER THAN IN THE TEXT. THE GREAT ACADEMIES WERE THE CENTER OF TALMUD STUDY.

OCCASIONALLY CIRCUMSTANCE OR APPOINTMENT WOULD LEAD AN ADVANCED STUDENT OR A SCHOLAR FROM THE ACADEMY TO SETTLE IN A (REMOTE) COMMUNITY WHERE HE WOULD BECOME THE RESIDENT AUTHORITY, WOULD LEAVE FOR OTHER PARTS AND THERE SET UP A SCHOOL FOR A FEW FAVORED SCHOLARS, ALMOST NEVER MORE THAN A HALF DOZEN OR SO. SOME MAY HAVE PREACHED IN THE SYNAGOGUE BUT ONE SUSPECTS THEIR IMPACT WAS GREATER IN AND THROUGH THE COURTS AND THE SCHOOLS. THE RABBIS LOOKED TO THE TEACHER, NOT THE TEXT, TO PROPAGATE THEIR IDEAS. THE TEACHER COULD EXPLAIN AND CLARIFY, PUT TEACHINGS IN CONTEXT, BRING NEW IDEAS TO BEAR ON THE ISSUES.

THE TALMUD WOULD BE A DIFFICULT TEXT EVEN IF IT HAD BEEN CAREFULLY EDITED. ITS THEMES ARE NOT SYSTEMATICALLY OR FULLY DEVELOPED AND CONFLICTING POINTS OF VIEW ARE FREQUENTLY CITED AND LET UNRESOLVED. MATERIALS STAND SIDE BY SIDE WHICH HAVE NO LOGICAL CONNECTION. THE ORAL TRADITION WAS TO BE STUDIED WITH A MASTER. AMONG THE TWENTY SOME WAYS THAT KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW WAS ACQUIRED WERE "ATTENDANCE ON THE SAGES, CONSORTING WITH FELLOW STUDENTS, CLOSE ARGUMENT WITH DISCIPLES. . ." (Avot ). STUDY OF A TALMUDIC TEXT IN THE QUIET OF ONE'S STUDY WAS NOT ONE OF THE TWO DOZEN RECOMMENDED WAYS. "LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING" (PIRKE AVOT 4:14).

AT FIRST THE RABBIS SHOW LITTLE INTEREST IN MAKING THEIR ORAL TRADITIONS AVAILABLE IN MANUSCRIPT. THE FAMOUS CHAIN OF TRADITION WHICH PREFACES THE ONLY WHOLLY AGGADIC TREATISE IN THE MISHNAH, THE RATHER LATE "SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS," DESCRIBES A VERBAL CHAIN

OF TRANSMISSION TO AND THROUGH RESPONSIBLE LEADERS IN EVERY GENERATION: "MOSES RECEIVED DIVINE TRADITION (TORAH) FROM SINAI, AND COMMITTED IT TO JOSHUA, AND JOSHUA TO THE ELDERS, AND THE ELDERS TO THE PROPHETS AND THE PROPHETS COMMITTED IT TO THE MEN OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE," WHO THEN SPEAK OF ITS VALUE AND OF COMMITTING THE TEACHING TO SELECTED DISCIPLES BUT NOT OF BROADCASTING IT: "THEY SAID THREE THINGS: TO BE DELIBERATE IN JUDGMENT, RAISE UP MANY DISCIPLES AND MAKE A FENCE AROUND THE LAW" (1:1).

THE ISSUE OF HOW MUCH TIME AND ATTENTION, BUT NOT HOW MUCH AUTHORITY, TO GIVE TO THE WRITTEN AND ORAL LAW, RESPECTIVELY, WAS FACED BY ALL WHO AFFIRMED THE RABBINIC TEACHING ABOUT THE AUTHORITY OF THE TWO-TIERED SCRIPTURE. NOT ALL JEWS DID. ALL JEWS AFFIRMED THE WRITTEN TORAH BUT NOT ALL ACCEPTED THE RABBINIC PIETY OF THE TWO TORAHS, WHICH IS TO SAY THAT NOT ALL ACCEPTED THE SELF-PROCLAIMED AUTHORITY OF THE RABBIS TO ORGANIZE JEWISH LIFE ACCORDING TO THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORAL LAW. IN EVERY GENERATION THERE WERE JEWS WHO OBSERVED THE SABBATH AND HOLY DAYS, WORSHIPPED IN A SYNAGOGUE, RECITED THE SHEMA, ADORED THE TANAKH, BELIEVED IN REPENTANCE, RESURRECTION, THE MESSIAH, AND AN ULTIMATE RETURN TO ZION, BUT WHO DID NOT FEEL COMPELLED TO ACCEPT THE AUTHORITY OF THE RABBIS OR MANY OF THEIR RULINGS. UNTIL RABBINIC AUTHORITY HAD BEHIND IT SUFFICIENT POLITICAL CLOUT TO INSIST ON CONFORMITY, THAT IS UNTIL THE LATE EIGHTH CENTURY, THESE GROUPS APPARENTLY SIMPLY CONTINUED TO BE TORAH-TRUE IN THEIR WAYS, LIVING QUIETLY ON THEIR OWN.

MANY COMMUNITIES ALL MEAT WAS FORBIDDEN EXCEPT DEER AND FOWL.



WITH THE RISE OF ISLAM AND THE CENTRALIZATION OF IMPERIAL POWER IN THE CALIPHATE AND OF EFFECTIVE POWER OVER THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE RESH GALUTHA AND THE RABBINIC ACADEMIES, THESE GROUPS WERE FORCED OUT INTO THE OPEN.

KARAH COMES FROM THE SAME ROOT AS MIKRA, SCRIPTURE. THE B'NEI MIKRA OR KARAITES WERE JEWS WHO CHALLENGED THE AUTHORITY OF THE ORAL LAW AND CONSEQUENTLY OF THE TALMUD. THE HISTORY OF THE KARAITE CHALLENGE IS COMPLEX. IT WAS CATALYZED IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY, AS CHALLENGES OFTEN ARE, BY A DISGRUNTLED FIGURE FROM WITHIN THE ESTABLISHMENT. ANAN BELONGED TO THE EXILARCH'S OWN FAMILY. LEGEND HAS IT THAT HE HAD BEEN PASSED OVER FOR THAT OFFICE. THE FACTS ARE HARD TO ASCERTAIN, BUT HE CERTAINLY FOCUSED A LOT OF LOCAL DISCONTENT AND DIRECTLY CHALLENGED RABBINIC AUTHORITY. HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING, "FORSAKE THE WORDS OF THE MISHNAH AND THE TALMUD AND I WILL MAKE YOU A TALMUD OF YOUR OWN" ( ).

ANAN'S TEACHINGS WERE NOT ANTINOMIAN. HIS TALMUD, IF ANYTHING, INCREASED THE RANGE AND RIGOR OF JEWISH OBLIGATIONS. BUT RABBINIC OBLIGATIONS WHICH WERE NOT SPECIFICALLY PRESCRIBED IN THE WRITTEN LAW--HAMUKKAH, THE SECOND DAY OF HOLIDAYS, AND USE OF A CALENDAR BASED ON ASTRONOMICAL CALCULATION--WERE DISCARDED. ANAN TOOK LITERALLY THE IDEA THAT NO LIGHT SHOULD BE LIT ON THE SABBATH AND THAT EVERYONE SHOULD STAY AT HOME. IN KARAITE COMMUNITIES THE LIST OF RELATIVES WITH WHOM MARRIAGE WAS PROHIBITED WAS ENLARGED AND IN MANY COMMUNITIES ALL MEAT WAS FORBIDDEN EXCEPT DEER AND FOWL.

Ag 35:3  
25 11/2/28  
5 11/2/28  
16/28

ANAN, LIKE LUTHER, HAD A COMPLEX, DIFFICULT, AND AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY. THE CHALLENGE HE RAISED WAS TO THE ORAL LAW WHICH HE DEFINED NOT AS SINAITIC BUT AS RABBINIC, NO MORE THAN THE INTERPRETATION OF CERTAIN SAGES. HE COMPILED IN ARAMAIC, USING RABBINICALLY FAVORED HERMENEUTICS AND EXEGESIS, HIS OWN BOOK OF PERCEPTS AS A DIRECT CHALLENGE TO THE GEMARA. ANAN AND HIS FOLLOWERS FOUND HALACHIC AUTHORITY IN ALL THE BOOKS OF THE TANAKH, NOT JUST IN THE FIVE SCROLLS OF THE SEFER TORAH. IN HIS EYES THERE WAS NO LONG-STANDING, CORRECT, GOD-DEFINED INTERPRETATION, NO ORAL LAW, ONLY THE RABBIS' OWN FANCIFUL INTERPRETATIONS. LIKE THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS, ANAN INSISTED ON HIS RIGHT TO CONFRONT THE TEXT DIRECTLY. A FEW YEARS LATER DISCIPLES WOULD GO FURTHER AND INSIST ON THE RIGHT OF EVERYONE TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE. BEGINNING WITH KARAITE SAGES SUCH AS BENJAMIN HANAVEANDI (9TH CENT.) AND DANIEL AL KUMISI (EARLY 19TH CENT.), KARAITE SCHOOLS REPLACED ARAMAIC WITH HEBREW AS THE VEHICLE OF TEACHING AND MADE THE STUDY OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS A MAJOR ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE. AS ONE WOULD EXPECT, THE KARAITES LAVISHED GREAT CARE ON THE WRITTEN TEXT. INDEED, MANY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MASORETES WERE KARAITES AND THE STANDARD MASORETIC TEXT, THE BEN ASHER CODEX, WAS THE WORK OF MEMBERS OF THEIR COMMUNITY.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF KARAISM IS NOT SO MUCH THAT OF A COHESIVE MOVEMENT AS OF A SERIES OF LOCALIZED PROTESTS AGAINST RABBINIC AUTHORITY, OFTEN TRIGGERED BY MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT RABBINIC RAPACITY. THE RABBIS SEEMED TO BE SETTLING

ISRAEL. OVER TIME A MODUS VIVENDI DEVELOPED AND THE BITTER

and others  
Baron refers  
to him as  
Nahawendi

or  
"of  
Nihavend"  
(E 223)

COMFORTABLY INTO GALUT. THEY HAD POWER AND PRESTIGE AND WERE FREE OF TAXATION. KARAITE PRACTICE CONTAINED A STRONG ELEMENT OF ASCETICISM AND OF ZIONISM'S IMPATIENCE WITH THE GALUT. THE FIRE OF THE MESSIANIC HOPE STILL BURNED BRIGHTLY IN MANY BREASTS. KARAITE LITURGY SOUGHT TO REPRODUCE THE WORSHIP OF THE TEMPLE. IN THE NINTH AND TENTH CENTURIES KARAITES ESTABLISHED PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM AS AN ACT OF OBLIGATION AND MANY STAYED ON AS AVELEI ZION, MOURNING FOR ZION AND PRAYING FOR ITS REESTABLISHMENT. AS A PROTEST WHICH EMPHASIZED THE RIGHT OF INTERPRETATION INDEPENDENT OF THE CONSTRAINTS OF A DEFINED AND AUTHORITATIVE TRADITION, KARAISM IN ITS EARLY PHASE WAS MORE A DIVERSE MOVEMENT THAN A SINGLE-MINDED PROTEST AND INCLUDED VARIOUS SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION. HOW COULD IT BE OTHERWISE WHEN LEADERS, WISHING TO SPUR THEIR FOLLOWERS TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY, INSISTED ON A PRINCIPLE THEY PUT INTO THE MOUTHS OF SEVERAL LEADERS: "SEARCH THOROUGHLY IN THE TORAH AND DO NOT RELY ON MY OPINION" (JOSEPH B. ALI).

Isn't this a  
quote from  
Anon?

IN ORDER TO HAVE MUSLIM AUTHORITIES TREAT THEM AS A SEPARATE, SELF-GOVERNING COMMUNITY, THE KARAITES HAD TO CONVINCE THE ADMINISTRATORS THAT THEY HAD THEIR OWN LAWS AND COURTS AND NO NEED OF THE RABEINATE OR EXILARCHATE. THIS WAS ACCOMPLISHED AND, OVER TIME, THE KARAITES DEVELOPED THEIR OWN POST-TORAH TRADITION, THE SO-CALLED HEVEL HA-YERUSHA (THE YOKE OF INHERITANCE).

SEPARATION GAVE THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES A CHANCE TO SEE WHAT THEY HAD IN COMMON AS WELL AS WHAT THEY DID NOT SHARE. THEY WERE BOTH ISRAEL. OVER TIME A MODUS VIVENDI DEVELOPED AND THE BITTER



QUARRELS OF THE EARLY CENTURIES LOST MUCH OF THEIR IMPORTANCE. THESE KARAITES SHARED ISRAEL'S FATE AND EVEN BEGAN TO PERMIT INTER-MARRIAGE. THE LATER KARAITES ACCEPT RABBINIC RULES EXCEPT IN A FEW SPECIFIC AREAS WHERE THEIR TRADITIONS DIFFERED. KARAISM HAD RAISED THE ISSUE OF WHAT IS SCRIPTURE AND, IN PART, HAD ANSWERED IT. THE AUTHORITY OF THE TANAKH HAD BEEN UNDERScoreD. IT WAS BEYOND CHALLENGE. BUT THE AUTHORITY OF THE TALMUD, THE RABBIS' SECOND TORAH, HAD BEEN CHALLENGED AS IT WOULD AGAIN BE CHALLENGED IN MODERN TIMES. BUT KARAISM'S CHALLENGE HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT A NAKED SCRIPTURE WAS NOT ENOUGH; A DISCIPLINED FAITH REQUIRED A BODY OF AUTHORIZED TRADITION AND INTERPRETATION. KARAISM COULD NOT SURVIVE WITH ONLY THE BIBLE. SCRIPTURE REQUIRES INTERPRETATION AND ELABORATION BECAUSE COMMUNITY REQUIRES DEFINITION AND AGREEMENT. PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY WOULD RELEARN THE LESSON CENTURIES LATER AT NO INCONSEQUENTIAL COST.

KARAISM REMAINED A FORCE FOR MANY CENTURIES AND TINY REMNANTS OF THE COMMUNITY SURVIVED INTO THIS CENTURY. NEITHER KARAISM NOR THE SINGLE-SCRIPTURE ISSUES THAT IT RAISED WOULD EVER COMPLETELY DISAPPEAR. IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, ALONGSIDE THE SURVIVING KARAITE COMMUNITIES BUT QUITE INDEPENDENT OF THEM, WE COME ACROSS INDIVIDUALS FROM MARRANO FAMILIES WHO HAD BEEN RAISED AND EDUCATED AS CATHOLICS IN SPAIN AND HAD MANAGED TO ESCAPE, PROBABLY AS MUCH OUT OF FEAR OF THE INQUISITION AS OUT OF DEEP LOYALTY TO JUDAISM. ONCE FREE, THEY SOUGHT TO REJOIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. SOCIETY IDENTIFIED WITH THE JUDAISM OF HIS ANCESTORS. HE DOES SO IN THE

WAS CORPORATE; THERE WAS NO OTHER PLACE OR OTHER COMMUNITY FOR THEM TO BE PART OF. IN VENICE, AMSTERDAM, AND LEGHORN THEY PRESENTED THEMSELVES, AT TIMES FULL OF ENTHUSIASM, ONLY TO FIND THAT THEIR LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF JEWISH PRACTICE AND THEIR EDUCATION AT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, WHERE THEY LEARNED SOMETHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BUT NOTHING OF THE ORAL TRADITION, DID NOT PREPARE THEM TO UNDERSTAND THE JUDAISM OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY HAD NOW REJOINED. CHRISTIANITY DEFINED JEWS AS THE ONCE CHOSEN PEOPLE. THE PEOPLE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. THE CHURCH CONDEMNED THE TALMUD AS ANTI-CHRISTIAN, A MASS OF SUPERSTITION. MARRANOS KNEW LITTLE OF THE RICH RABBINIC TRADITION AND WERE NOT PREPARED TO APPRECIATE ITS TEXTS OR METHODS. THEY FOUND IT HARD TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE BIBLE SHOULD NOT BE UNDERSTOOD AS THEY HAD HEARD IT INTERPRETED IN CATHOLIC SPAIN, WHERE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN WORTH THEIR LIVES TO FOLLOW THE DIETARY LAWS OR WORSHIP ON THE SABBATH. NEVER HAVING SEEN A TALMUD THEY FOUND IT HARD TO SPEAK OR THINK OF IT AS SCRIPTURE.

PERHAPS THE MOST DRAMATIC OF THESE STORIES IS THAT OF URIEL DA COSTA (1585-1646), A PORTUGUESE MARRANO WHOSE REVEALING AUTOBIOGRAPHY HAS ALL THE HALLMARKS OF A GREEK TRAGEDY. HERE IS THE STORY OF A MAN WHO SEEKS FAITH BUT CANNOT FIND PEACE. BORN IN OPORTO, PORTUGAL, DE COSTA WAS TROUBLED BY THE CATHOLIC TEACHINGS WHICH HIS FATHER AVIDLY ESPOUSED AND BEGAN TO WORK OUT WHAT HE BELIEVED TO BE A MORE PHILOSOPHIC AND RATIONAL FAITH WHICH HE IDENTIFIED WITH THE JUDAISM OF HIS ANCESTORS. HE DOES SO IN THE

ONLY WAY HE CAN, FROM A CAREFUL READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, SATISFIED THAT HE HAS FOUND HIS TRUTH, HE ESCAPED WITH HIS FAMILY TO AMSTERDAM AND EAGERLY JOINED THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ONLY TO FIND THAT THEIR JUDAISM WAS NOT WHAT HE HAD EXPECTED. UNHAPPY AND PUZZLED, HE LASHED OUT FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS CATHOLIC CONDITIONING AND JEWISH NEED AGAINST THE "PHARISEES OF AMSTERDAM" WHO ARE TOTALLY ABSORBED WITH WHAT HE CONSIDERED TRIVIA. HE IS FINALLY EXCOMMUNICATED FOR PUBLISHING A BITTER PAMPHLET EXPRESSING HIS VIEWS. DE COSTA LEAVES AMSTERDAM, BUT THERE WAS THEN NO NEUTRAL GROUND AND HE WAS, IN EFFECT, A MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY, NOT A CHRISTIAN YET EXCOMMUNICATED BY THE JEWS. HE RETURNS, RECANTS, AND ASKS TO BE READMITTED TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. HE IS READMITTED. HIS PAIN, HOWEVER, IS NOT OVER. DE COSTA HAS BEGUN TO ESPOUSE ADVANCED DEISTIC IDEAS AND TO DOUBT THE AUTHORITY OF ALL RELIGIONS. HE RENOUNCES JUDAISM AND TRIES TO PREVENT OTHER MARRANOS FROM REJOINING THE SYNAGOGUE. THERE IS A SECOND EXCOMMUNICATION. AGAIN, HE IS OUT IN THE COLD AND AGAIN, HE NEEDS TO BELONG. HE PETITIONS FOR READMISSION. THE COMMUNITY ELDERS AGREE BUT REQUIRE THAT HE MAKE A PUBLIC CONFESSION AND SUBMIT TO THIRTY-NINE LASHES. HE DOES, BUT HIS SPIRIT IS BROKEN AND SHORTLY AFTER THIS PURGATORY HE COMMITS SUICIDE.

OTHER RETURNEES HAD TROUBLE WITH THE ORAL TORAH, BUT DE COSTA IS ONE OF THE FIRST JEWS TO QUESTION THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE FROM THE WIDELY SCATTERED JEWISH COMMUNITIES WHICH DEFINED PRACTICE AND ESTABLISHED THE TEXTS AND THE CURRICULUM OF RABBINIC JUDAISM.



WRITTEN TORAH. IN THIS SENSE HE IS FAR AHEAD OF HIS TIME AND A FIGURE IN THE HISTORY OF CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD SCRIPTURE.

THE RISE OF ISLAM BROUGHT MANY CHANGES TO JEWISH LIFE. ISLAM, LIKE JUDAISM, AND UNLIKE CHRISTIANITY AND ZOROASTRIANISM, BELIEVED THAT THE TRUTH WAS IN A REVELATION, WRITTEN OUT IN GOD'S OWN LANGUAGE. DUTY AND PRACTICE LIE AT THE HEART OF THAT REVELATION. UNLIKE PERSIAN, GREEK OR LATIN, ARABIC IS A SEMITIC TONGUE WHOSE GRAMMAR APPROXIMATES HEBREW. ARABIC GRAMMARIANS MADE THE STUDY OF THE KORAN AN ACT OF DEVOTION AND DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT GRAMMATIC IDEAS WHICH PROVED USEFUL TO JEWS IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE. ARAB LINGUISTS DISCOVERED THE TRI-LATERAL ROOT OF SEMITIC WORDS. JEWS QUICKLY PICKED UP ARABIC AS EVERYDAY SPEECH AND DID NOT HESITATE TO WRITE MAJOR RELIGIOUS WORKS IN ARABIC, ALTHOUGH USUALLY USING A HEBREW SCRIPT FOR THAT PURPOSE. BOTH ISLAM AND JUDAISM SPAWNED CADRES OF INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS AND JURISTS WHO SET OUT TO ORGANIZE THEIR COMMUNITY'S JUDICIAL SYSTEM. LIKE JUDAISM, AND UNLIKE CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM INSISTS ON A PRISTINE MONOTHEISM. THE EIGHTH-NINTH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCIENCE OF ARABIC JURISPRUDENCE, SHARIYAH, CORRESPONDS WITH THE HEYDAY OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE GREAT EASTERN ACADEMIES OF SURA AND POMPEDITA WHICH QUICKLY MOVED TO THE CENTER OF CALIPHATE POWER, TO BAGHDAD. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NINE CENTURIES, JEWISH LIFE HAD A POLITICAL FOCUS. IT WAS THE AUTHORITY OF THE ACADEMIES AND THEIR RESPONSES TO QUERIES FROM THE WIDELY SCATTERED JEWISH COMMUNITIES WHICH DEFINED PRACTICE AND ESTABLISHED THE TEXTS AND THE CURRICULUM OF RABBINIC JUDAISM.

IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE MAJOR FAITH WAS BASED ON A WRITTEN SCRIPTURE, JEWISH THINKERS BEGAN TO TAKE A CLOSER AND MORE SYSTEMATIC LOOK AT THE WRITTEN TORAH. OF THE TRANSLATIONS INTO ARABIC, THE MOST IMPORTANT WAS THE TAFSIR OF THE GAON SAADYAH B. JOSEPH (882-942). WITH MANY ADDITIONS BY OTHER HANDS, IT BECAME THE QUASI-OFFICIAL BIBLE OF THE JEWS WHO LIVED IN ARAB LANDS.

THE WORK OF THE MASORETES ON THE HEBREW TEXT WAS BROUGHT TO EFFECTIVE CONCLUSION. FOR THE FIRST TIME THERE WAS SYSTEMATIC INTEREST IN PESHAT, A GRAMMATICALLY ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEXT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ITS ORIGINAL HISTORY, LITERARY STYLE, AND LANGUAGE. BIBLICAL SCROLLS WERE SYSTEMATICALLY ANNOTATED, BOTH IN ARABIC AND IN HEBREW. GROWING INTEREST IN THE TEXT OF THE WRITTEN TORAH PROMPTED FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIONS OF SERMONIC MIDRASHIM--RUNNING COMMENTARIES ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES AND THE FIVE MEGILLOT (RUTH, ESTHER, SONG OF SONGS, LAMENTATIONS, AND ECCLESIASTES). HEBREW AND ARABIC POETRY FLOURISHED, MUCH OF IT CREATED IN BIBLICAL STYLE. RECORDS FOUND IN THE CAIRO GENIZAH INDICATE THAT DURING THE ENTIRE MEDIEVAL PERIOD GROUPS MET IN THE EVENINGS AND ON SABBATH AFTERNOONS TO STUDY TANAKH.

ONE CONSEQUENCE OF THE GROWING USE OF CODES AND MANUALS WAS A DIMINISHING ROLE FOR THE RABBI. HE WAS NO LONGER THE THIRD LIVING TORAH. THERE WERE MORE BOOKS. SCHOOLS, AND EVEN PRIVATE HOMES, HAD THEIR OWN LIBRARIES. INFORMATION WAS MORE READILY AVAILABLE. PEOPLE HAD BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE RABBINIC WAY, AUTHORITY WAS

MORE CENTRALIZED. THE GREAT ACADEMIES IN BAGHDAD STUDIED THE LAW AND RULED ON LEGAL MATTERS. PEOPLE STILL LOOKED ON CERTAIN MEN AS HOLY MEN AND MIRACLE WORKERS, THOUGH THESE WERE NOT NECESSARILY THE GREAT RABBIS. THE IDEA THAT ONE MAN'S LIFE ILLUSTRATED TORAH BEGAN TO DISAPPEAR.

THE FORMULATION OF THE ORAL TORAH AND THE AUTHORITY TO TEACH AND INTERPRET IT WERE RESERVED BY HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCE TO THE RABBIS. THESE MEN WERE COMMITTED TO THE IDEA THAT THE OBLIGATIONS REQUIRED BY THE ORAL TORAH WERE NORMATIVE. SUCH WAS GOD'S WILL. THE INDIVIDUAL WHO OBEYED THE LAW MERITED LIFE IN THE WORLD TO COME, AND AN OBEDIENT COMMUNITY HASTENED THE DAY WHEN GOD WOULD END GALUT, THE EXILE, RESTORE THE TEMPLE, AND BRING THE MESSIAH. INFORMED BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE EXILARCH, EXPRESSED THROUGH THE BUREAUS AND THE COURTS, THE SAGES MADE RABBINIC LAW EFFECTIVE OVER ISSUES RANGING FROM FAMILY STATUS TO CRIMINAL LAW, ALL WITH THE GOAL OF OBEDIENCE THAT WOULD EARN THE END OF EXILE.

IN THE GAONIC PERIOD, THE FIRST FEW CENTURIES OF MUSLIM RULE, THE TALMUD WAS ONE ELEMENT IN THE CURRICULUM OF ADULT EDUCATION BUT NOT YET THE WHOLE OF IT. WE FIND AT THIS TIME A TENDENCY TO SIMPLIFY TALMUD INTO CODES OF LAWS WHICH COULD BE READILY AND EASILY CONSULTED. RABBINIC PRACTICES WERE WIDELY ACCEPTED AS NORMATIVE, BUT SOME MEN QUESTIONED THE SPIRITUAL BENEFIT OF SPENDING ALL ONE'S ENERGIES SORTING OUT THE SUBTLETIES OF RABBINIC REASONING. THE MANY-SIDED INTERESTS OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION ENCOURAGED JEWS TO STUDY PHILOSOPHY, MATHEMATICS, AND MEDICINE, AS WELL AS TORAH.



SHELEMUT HA-NEFESH, SPIRITUAL PERFECTION, COMMUNION WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD, WAS NOT BELIEVED TO RESIDE, AS MANY EUROPEAN SAGES WOULD LATER ARGUE, IN A SINGLE-MINDED IMMERSION IN THE GIVE AND TAKE OF TALMUDIC DISCUSSION. FOR JEWS INFLUENCED BY ISLAMIC ATTITUDES, IT LAY, RATHER, IN A THOUGHTFUL IMMERSION IN THE WHOLE OF TORAH LITERATURE.

MANY TOOK A PRACTICAL APPROACH TOWARD THE TALMUD AS A SOURCE OF LAW AND WANTED TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE COMMUNITIES TO HAVE ACCESS TO THE LAW. THEY ARGUED THAT MUCH OF THE HALACHIC DEBATE WAS TIRESOME AND MUCH OF THE AGGADAH UNINSPIRING. THEY HAD NO ARGUMENT WITH THE FUNCTIONAL PARTS OF THE TALMUD. ALFASI (11TH CENT.) PREPARED A SYNTHESIS OF THE TALMUD, BRILLIANTLY ELUCIDATED THE PRACTICAL HALACHA, AND DELIBERATELY ELIMINATED MOST AGGADAH. A SCHOLAR LIKE MAIMONIDES KNEW BUT HAD LITTLE PATIENCE WITH THE MASA-U-MATAN, THE ENDLESSLY UNRESOLVED LEGAL DEBATES OF THE TALMUD. FINDING THEM UNREWARDING, HE BROUGHT TO A CONSUMMATE CONCLUSION IN HIS MISHNAH TORAH SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF EFFORTS TO SYSTEMATIZE THE TALMUDIC APPROACH. THIS, NOT COINCIDENTALLY, WAS THE WAY MUSLIM SCHOLASTICS HAD PRESENTED THE SHARIYAH. MAIMONIDES FELT THE MISHNAH TORAH NOT ONLY SHOWED THAT IN EVERY RESPECT THE ORAL AND WRITTEN LAW WERE WOVEN OF ONE THREAD, BUT THAT THE MISHNAH TORAH ALSO HAD THE PRACTICAL BENEFIT, BECAUSE OF ITS COMPREHENSIVENESS, CLARITY, AND IMAGINATIVE ORGANIZATION, OF OBTAINING THE NEED TO SPEND ENDLESS HOURS MIRED IN THE EXHAUSTING, AND NOT NECESSARILY REWARDING EFFORT OF TALMUDIC DISCUSSION. OF COURSE, NOT EVERYONE

WAS HAPPY WITH THIS APPROACH. TO MANY SCHOLARS THE TALMUD WAS A LIBERATING DISCIPLINE, THE KEY TO ALL WISDOM.

WHILE ONE FINDS AMONG THE JEWS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD A CERTAIN IMPATIENCE WITH TALMUDIC STUDY AS AN END IN ITSELF, THEY EVIDENCE A STRONG APPRECIATION OF THE DRAMATIC MYTHS AND EVOCATIVE LANGUAGE OF THE WRITTEN TORAH. PESHAT, CONTEXTUAL TORAH LANGUAGE, BECAME A FAVORITE LITERARY APPROACH FOR EVERYTHING FROM PHILOSOPHY TO LOVE POETRY. THE INTELLECTUAL CENTERS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD WERE ATTRACTED BY PHILOSOPHIC SPECULATION, AND MANY PREFERRED TO APPROACH DOCTRINAL COMMENTS OR APOLOGETIC OR MYSTICAL SPECULATION THROUGH THE SIMPLE AND AFFECTING TEXTS OF THE WRITTEN SCRIPTURE RATHER THAN THROUGH THE COMPLEX MASS OF AGGADOT.

UNDER KARAITE AND RABBINIC INFLUENCE, AND AIDED BY THE LINGUISTIC SCIENCE AND LITERARY INTERESTS OF THE DOMINANT MUSLIM CULTURE, BIBLICAL EXEGESIS THRIVED. THERE WERE BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS, PARTICULARLY INTO ARABIC, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH WAS THE TAFSIR. BY THE 10TH CENTURY THERE WAS AN OFFICIAL HEBREW TEXT, THE MASORETIC TEXT, WHICH BECAME THE BASIS FOR ALL SUBSEQUENT BIBLICAL STUDIES. THERE WAS A BURGEONING NEW DISCIPLINE. BIBLICAL COMMENTARY, IN BOTH HEBREW AND ARABIC WHICH DIFFERED SHARPLY FROM THE OLDER MIDRASH BECAUSE IT ESCHEWED NON-CONTEXTUAL EXEGESIS, PREFERRING TO SEEK THROUGH TEXTS FOR MEANING BY USING THE MOST ADVANCED TOOLS OF SCIENTIFIC GRAMMAR AVAILABLE. FROM THE 10TH THROUGH THE FOURTEENTH CENTURIES THERE WERE LITERALLY DOZENS OF COMMENTATORS ON INDIVIDUAL BOOKS OR ON THE WHOLE TANAKH. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE WERE

TEXTS BY ABRAHAM IBN EZRA, RASHI, AND OTHERS WHICH DEVELOPED ALL POSSIBLE ASPECTS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT. WITH THE RISE OF PRINTING IN THE LATE 15TH CENTURY, CERTAIN OF THE MORE POPULAR OF THESE WERE CHOSEN TO BE PRINTED ALONGSIDE THE BIBLICAL TEXT AND THE TARGUM, IN WHAT CAME TO BE SEEN AS AN "OFFICIAL" SCRIPTURE. ONE BRIEF EXAMPLE CAN STAND FOR ALL. "AND ESAU DESPISED HIS BIRTHRIGHT" (GEN. 25:34). THE STORY IS, OF COURSE, THAT OF JACOB'S DEFRAUDING ESAU OF THE BIRTHRIGHT<sup>(25:29-34)</sup> IBN EZRA TENDS TO BE APOLOGETIC, ARGUING THAT ESAU THOUGHT SO LITTLE OF THE BIRTHRIGHT BECAUSE HIS FATHER WAS THEN A POOR MAN WHO HAD NOTHING TO GIVE, AND HE "PROVED" HIS CONTENTION BY CITING THE FACT THAT ISAAC FAVORED ESAU BECAUSE OF THE SOUP WHICH HE HAD BROUGHT AND WHICH COMPLEMENTED HIS RATHER SPARTAN DIET. IBN EZRA'S COMMENT TO THE TEXT IS CLEAR: "I SHALL BE CONCERNED WITH ANALYZING EACH WORD GRAMMATICALLY AND ONLY THEN PROCEED TO THE INTERPRETATION OF THE MEANING. . . I SHALL NOT DWELL ON THE REASONS AND EXPLANATIONS BY WAY OF DERUSH (HOMILETICAL INTERPRETATION) WHICH THE MEN OF THE TRADITION GAVE IN THEIR DAY, FOR THESE DO NOT BELONG AT ALL TO THE SUBJECT. . . AND ARE USEFUL ONLY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. I SHALL ALSO NOT MAKE USE OF THE EMENDATIONS OF THE LATER SCRIBES BUT TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION ONLY THE TARGUM (ARAMAIC TRANSLATION), FOR ITS RENDERING IS CORRECT AND MADE ALL THE OBSCURE PASSAGES CLEAR AND COMPREHENSIBLE" (INTRO TO COMM. ON PENTATEUCH). NACHMANIDES WOULD AGREE WITH IBN EZRA'S METHODOLOGY ALTHOUGH, AS WE SHALL SEE, HE AND THE EARLY KABBALISTS

A NEW AND MORE RELAXED ATTITUDE TOWARD SCRIPTURE, AND A BROADER

antecedent  
not  
clear



FOUND SOME ESOTERIC IDEAS IN THE TEXT. HIS EXPLANATION OF THIS TEXT WAS THAT ESAU'S ROLE AS A HUNTER PUT HIM IN MORTAL DANGER AND THAT HE HELD NO HOPE OF OUTLIVING HIS FATHER. THE BIRTHRIGHT, THEREFORE, WAS OF LITTLE VALUE TO HIM. RASHI, THE LEAST GRAMMATICALLY SOUND OF THE THREE, GAVE THE SIMPLE ANSWER: THAT AS A ROUGH MAN, ESAU DESPISED ALL THAT HAD TO DO WITH GOD'S SERVICE.

IN THE TALMUDIC PERIOD THE SERMON OR LECTURE HAD PULLED TEXTS FROM HERE OR THERE TO TEACH THE UNITY OF THE WRITTEN TORAH; BUT BEGINNING WITH THE SAADYA GAON IN THE TENTH CENTURY, WE FIND THE MORE PHILOSOPHICALLY-MINDED RABBIS FIXED ON THE SEARCH FOR THE MEANING OF THE WHOLE. INTELLECTUALS BEGAN TO OCCUPY THEMSELVES IN CONSTRUCTING "PHILOSOPHIES OF JUDAISM." TALMUDICALLY TRAINED AND OBSERVANT, THEY NONETHELESS, AND INTERESTINGLY, TENDED TO MAKE GREATER USE OF THE TEXTS AND IMAGES OF THE WRITTEN TORAH THAN THEIR PREDECESSORS HAD. THEY FOUND IN THE LAWS AND NARRATIVES OF THE TORAH, IN THE STATEMENTS OF THE PROPHETS, AND IN THE LITERATURE OF THE WRITINGS, THAT GOD HAD REVEALED WHAT COULD BE KNOWN ABOUT HIMSELF. DIVINE PROVIDENCE, FREE WILL, HUMAN NATURE, ELECTION, ATONEMENT, RESURRECTION, AND THE MESSIAH. TO THOSE WHO BECAME FASCINATED BY MATTERS PHILOSOPHIC AND APOLOGETIC, THE WRITTEN TORAH REGAINED PRIDE OF PLACE.

ONE SENSES THAT IN PRACTICE THE TALMUD WAS SEEN AS THE SCRIPTURE FOR POSITIVE LAW AND THE TORAH AS SCRIPTURE FOR FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY. WHY PHILOSOPHY? THE ANSWER WOULD SEEM TO LIE IN A NEW AND MORE RELAXED ATTITUDE TOWARD SCRIPTURE, AND A BROADER

DEFINITION OF LEARNING. ISLAM MADE MANY CONVERTS, PARTICULARLY AMONG WORLDLY AND AMBITIOUS JEWS AND NON-JEWS; THESE CONVERTS HAD A NEW FAITH BUT ESSENTIALLY NO FAITH. AN INTEREST IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGIONS, WHICH REACHED BACK TO PLOTINUS AND ZENO, WAS ENLARGED TO INCLUDE INQUIRY INTO THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAM AND JUDAISM.

A FAITH WHICH CLAIMED TO BASE BELIEF IN GOD ON REASON WAS POPULAR. SAADYAH GAON NOT ONLY TRANSLATED MAJOR PARTS OF THE TANAKH INTO ARABIC BUT PRODUCED A MAJOR PHILOSOPHIC WORK, THE BOOK OF BELIEFS AND OPINIONS, THE OPENING GUN IN ISRAEL'S ATTEMPT TO ADJUST SCRIPTURE AND REASON. IN IT HE QUOTES FROM THE TANAKH OVER THIRTEEN HUNDRED TIMES AND FROM RABBINIC WORKS, INCLUDING THE MISHNAH AND THE TALMUD,<sup>105</sup> THAN EIGHTY. MAIMONIDES' CLASSIC GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED QUOTES FROM GENESIS AS OFTEN AS FROM THE MISHNAH AND BOTH TALMUDS.

WHY THIS HEAVY USE OF BIBLICAL IDEAS AND LANGUAGE? PART OF THE ANSWER LIES IN THE DISTINCTIVE NATURES OF THE BIBLICAL AND TALMUDIC TEXTS. THE TALMUD IS LACONIC, SOMETIMES GNOMIC. IT DOES NOT OFFER THE READER FULLY DEVELOPED SENTENCES OR A FULLY FLESHED OUT TEXT. MUCH OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT IS SPARE, BUT IT IS FULLY DEVELOPED; ITS LANGUAGE IS UNCOMPLICATED AND POTENTIALLY ALLEGORICAL, CRYING OUT FOR INTEREST. WHILE JEWISH PHILOSOPHY WAS THE PLAYTHING OF AN INTELLECTUAL ELITE WHO KNEW BIBLE AND TALMUD AND WHO WERE HEIRS TO A PARTICULAR BIBLICAL TRADITION, THE PESHAT COMMENTARY WAS BASED ON THE BRILLIANT ADVANCES OF ARAB AND JEWISH GRAMMARIANS AND LINGUISTS.

HERE WAS THE FAMILIAR SCRIPTURE OF COMMANDMENTS AND NARRATIVES—IMPORTANT, FULL OF OBLIGATION, OPERATIVE, BUT NOT THE ORIGINAL TORAH.

SAADYAH'S BELIEFS AND OPINIONS DEFINED NOT ONLY REASON AND REVELATION, BUT TRADITION. PHILOSOPHERS AGREE THAT KNOWLEDGE CAN COME THROUGH OBSERVATION, EXPERIENCE, LOGICAL INFERENCES, AND THROUGH TRADITION. TRADITION INVOLVES REVELATION EMBODIED IN SCRIPTURE, THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF THESE TEXTS, AND RELIGIOUS CUSTOM. WHAT SAADYAH IS SAYING IS THAT SCRIPTURE MUST BE INTERPRETED IN TERMS OF TRADITION SO UNDERSTOOD. REASON MAY NEVER BE USED TO CONTRADICT THE TRADITION, BUT REASON MAY REQUIRE THE TEXT TO BE INTERPRETED ALLEGORICALLY.

SAADYA'S CONCEPT OF TRADITION WENT BACK TO TORAH AND REFLECTS EXTREME REVERENCE FOR THE PAST. IT IS SCRIPTURE UPDATED BY THE POST-SCRIPTURAL BUT NOT NECESSARILY BY CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS. THE CONCEPT THAT SCRIPTURE MUST BE INTERPRETED IN TERMS OF TRADITION LIES BEHIND MOST, IF NOT ALL, MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY.

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AS FAR BACK AS THE 7TH CENTURY B.C.E., AND CERTAINLY BEFORE THAT DATE, BIBLICAL PHRASES WERE ALREADY BEING USED AS TALISMANIC AMULETS. THE MAGICAL USE OF THE NAME(S) OF GOD IS A CONSTANT OF THE TRADITION. IN THE 12TH AND 13TH CENTURIES C.E. MAGIC AND MYSTICISM MELDED INTO KABBALAH A VAST LITERATURE WHICH CAN BE TRACED FOR WELL OVER A THOUSAND YEARS. DEALING PRIMARILY WITH THEOSOPHY, THE NATURE OF GOD.

ACCORDING TO THE KABBALISTS THERE WERE SEVERAL SCRIPTURES. THERE WAS THE FAMILIAR SCRIPTURE OF COMMANDMENTS AND NARRATIVES-- IMPORTANT, FULL OF OBLIGATION, OPERATIVE, BUT NOT THE ORIGINAL TORAH.



BEHIND ITS PHRASES LAY A SECRET OR MYSTICAL SCRIPTURE WHICH CONSISTED ENTIRELY OF THE NAMES OF GOD. THIS MYSTICAL SCRIPTURE WAS PART OF THE HIDDEN, YET REAL-LIFE, ENERGIES OF GOD WHICH THE KABBALISTS DEFINED IN TERMS OF TEN SEFIROT OR EMANATIONS. GENERALLY, THEY EQUATED THE SECRET SCRIPTURE WITH THE SECOND SEFIRAH, BINAH, UNDERSTANDING. PRESUMABLY, AN ADEPT MIGHT GLIMPSE THE SECRET OF THE NAMES AND SO MOVE TOWARD A FULLER KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND CONSEQUENTLY HAVE GREATER POWER ON EARTH.

KABBALISTS DID NOT DENY THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAMILIAR SCRIPTURE. THEY WERE PART OF THE SELF-VALIDATING JEWISH WORLD, BUT THEIR ACTIVE INTEREST LAY NOT IN 'YOU SHALL' AND 'YOU SHALL NOT' BUT IN THE NATURE OF THE GOD-HEAD AND MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO IT. AND SO THEY SPENT HOURS AND DAYS IN MYSTICAL COMMUNION. PHRASES AND LETTERS OF THE SCRIPTURES WERE STUDIED TO PIERCE THROUGH TO THE SECRET OF THE NAMES. THEOSOPHY RATHER THAN THEOLOGY WAS THEIR METIER. THE MYSTICAL TORAH WAS REALLY A MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S MOST PRIVATE LIFE. GOD MANIFESTED HIMSELF IN A PRIMAL STATE AS A THINKING GOD AND EACH STAGE IN GOD'S EXPOSURE TO THE "REAL" WORLD WAS PART OF THE PROCESS OF GOD'S THOUGHT MANIFESTING ITSELF. THE HEBREW LETTERS ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE WORLD BEYOND--THE PLANETS AND CONSTELLATIONS AND THE UNIVERSE AS WE SEE AND KNOW IT. BUT ACCORDING TO THE RABBIS, THE TORAH WHICH GOD HAD LOOKED INTO TO GUIDE HIM THROUGH THE DIFFICULT TIME OF CREATION WAS NOT THE SAME TORAH AS THE ONE IN THE SYNAGOGUE ARK; IT WAS A DIFFERENT TORAH, YET THESE TWO TORAHS ARE NOT ABSOLUTELY DISTINCT. BOTH ARE COMPOSED OF THE NAMES OF GOD, BUT

Jewish  
Mysticism ?

IN OUR SYNAGOGUE TORAH THE NAMES HAVE BEEN SCRAMBLED, WHILE IN THE CELESTIAL TORAH GOD'S NAMES ARE READILY APPARENT. OVER ITS TWO- THOUSAND YEAR HISTORY (KABBALAH) DEVELOPED MANY VARIATIONS ON THE NOTION OF AN EXISTING TORAH THROUGH WHICH MEN CAN SOMETIMES GLIMPSE THE TORAH OF GOD'S NAMES. IT IS A THESIS THAT ENCOURAGED ESOTERIC COMMENTARY AND THEOSOPHIC SPECULATION BUT DID NOT CHALLENGE THE AUTHORITY OF THE KNOWN TORAH IN EVERYDAY MATTERS.

FOR JEWS CHRISTIAN EUROPE WAS QUITE A DIFFERENT MATTER THAN THE ISLAMIC WORLD. UNLIKE THE MOSQUE, THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH DID ITS BEST TO KEEP ITS BIBLE OUT OF THE HANDS OF LAYMEN. THE TIES BETWEEN CANON LAW AND SCRIPTURAL TEXT WERE NOT SELF-EVIDENT. LAYMEN WERE TO TRUST THE PRIEST RATHER THAN THE TEXT. IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES FOLIOS OF THE BIBLE WERE ACTUALLY CHAINED TO THE DESKS OF MONASTERY LIBRARIES.

THE CHURCH FELT THAT SINCE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS SHARED THE OLD TESTAMENT, IT SHOULD BE EASY TO CONVINCE JEWS OF THE CHRISTIAN BELIEF THAT THE BIBLE PROMISED AND PROPHESED THE SECOND COMING OF THE CHRIST. THE CHURCH SAW THE TALMUD BOTH AS BLASPHEMOUS AND AN OBSTACLE TO JEWISH CONVERSION. ALREADY IN THE JUSTINIAN CODE (6TH CENT. C.E.) THERE IS A CHRISTIAN ATTACK ON THE TALMUD AS A SECOND LAW. THIS SECOND LAW, THE TALMUD, OFFERED ONE EXPLANATION TO CHRISTIANS OF JEWISH OBSTINACY; CHRISTIANS BELIEVED THE TALMUD HAD REINTERPRETED THE BIBLE TO DENY THE CHRISTOLOGICAL PROPHECIES THAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVED THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES CONTAINED. CHRISTIANS EXPLAINED THEIR LACK OF SUCCESS IN PERSUADING JEWS TO

CONVERT TO THE FACT THAT THE JEWS HAD OVER THE CENTURIES DELIBERATELY ALTERED THE TORAH. ONE OF THE REASONS WHY THE JESUITS WHO CAME TO CHINA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY WERE SO EAGER TO VISIT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF KAIFENG WAS THEIR HOPE THAT THEY WOULD FIND THERE TORAH SCROLLS IN THEIR PRISTINE FORM. SINCE TRADITION REPORTED JEWS HAD COME TO CHINA BEFORE JESUS' DAY AND HAD BEEN CUT OFF FROM THEIR CO-RELIGIONISTS SINCE THEN, CHRISTIANS ASSUMED THAT THE TORAH OF CHINA WOULD BE ORIGINAL AND WOULD INCLUDE THE REFERENCE(S) TO THE CHRIST WHICH THE RABBIS HAD EXCISED.

IN EUROPE ~~ON~~ JEWISH COMMUNITIES ADVANCED EDUCATION WAS ALMOST ENTIRELY TALMUDIC. TALMUD STUDY WAS AN END IN ITSELF. LIFELONG EDUCATION CENTERED ON MASTERING THE INTRICACIES OF THE TALMUD, WHICH OFTEN MEANT MANUFACTURING QUESTIONS FOR NO BETTER REASON THAN TO SHOW ERUDITION. THE TALMUD BECAME THE CENTER OF A VAST NUMBER OF COMMENTARIES, A FACT WHICH CAN BE VISIBLY APPRECIATED IF YOU LOOK AT A PAGE OF A PRINTED TALMUD. SINCE THE FIRST FOLIOS WERE PRINTED IN 1520, THE PRINTED TALMUD HAS FOLLOWED A GENERALLY SIMILAR FORM: IN THE CENTER OF THE PAGE IS A BLOCK OF MISHNAH AND/OR GEMARA, SURROUNDED ON ALL SIDES BY LARGE COLUMNS OF COMMENTARY IN SMALLER TYPE, USUALLY RASHI AND HIS STUDENTS, THE IOSEFISTS AND IN ANOTHER COLUMN, CROSS-REFERENCES TO OTHER PARTS OF THE TALMUD, VARIOUS MEDIEVAL CODES, AND BRIEF ADDITIONAL NOTES BY VARIOUS RABBIS.

DURING THE MIDDLE AGES THE IMPERIAL CHURCH HAD NO PATIENCE WITH JEWISH OBSTINACY. APOSTATES EXPLAINED TO CHURCHMEN THAT THEIR SERMONS FELL ON DEAF EARS BECAUSE THE JEWS HAD A SECOND SCRIPTURE,



THE TALMUD, WHICH HAD EFFECTIVELY REPLACED THE FIRST, AND THAT IT CONTAINED BESIDE ALL MANNER OF SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF, BLASPHEMIES OF THE WORST KIND ABOUT JESUS, MARY, AND CHRISTIANS GENERALLY. BUSY ROOTING OUT CHRISTIAN HERESIES, THE CHURCH STILL FOUND THE ENERGY TO TURN ITS ATTENTION TO THE TALMUD AND FOUND MUCH OF IT PERNICIOUS. IN ITALY DOMINICAN CENSORS BLUE-PENCILED OFFENDING SECTIONS. THE FRENCH CHURCH AND THE DOMINICANS WERE PARTICULARLY ZEALOUS IN THIS REGIMEN. CARTLOADS OF TALMUDS AND OTHER HEBREW WORKS WERE CONSIGNED TO THE FLAMES IN 1215, THE FIRST OF MANY BOOK BURNINGS.

RABBIS WERE FORCED TO DEFEND THE TALMUD BEFORE COURTS OF PRIESTS AND NOBLES, MEN WHOSE MINDS HAD ALREADY BEEN MADE UP. SUCH ATTACKS MADE THE TALMUD EVEN MORE PRECIOUS TO THE JEW. IT MUST BE POWERFUL, INDEED, IF THE CHURCH HAD TO UNLEASH THE INQUISITION AGAINST IT. IT WAS A MARK OF ITS VALUE THAT THE TALMUD WAS INCLUDED IN THE FIRST PUBLISHED LIST OF BOOKS PROHIBITED BY THE SACRED OFFICE.

CULTURALLY, MEDIEVAL EUROPE WAS A MUCH NARROWER WORLD THAN THAT OF ISLAM, PARTICULARLY DURING THE TENTH TO THE TWELFTH OR THIRTEENTH CENTURY. EUROPEAN JEWISH SCHOOLS HAD ONLY ONE TEXT, THE TORAH. JEWS LEARNED TO READ FROM THE BIBLE AND THEN TO READ THE BIBLE WITH THE RATHER STRAIGHTFORWARD COMMENTARY OF SOLOMON B. ISAAC OF TROYES (RASHI) (11TH CENT.). THE IDEA OF A JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION HAD NO STANDING. NOT ONLY WERE THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES SOCIALLY, CULTURALLY, AND POLITICALLY SEPARATE, BUT THEY DID NOT, IN FACT, SHARE A COMMON SCRIPTURE.

EACH HAD A SCRIPTURE IN A DIFFERENT TONGUE.

THE ORAL TORAH WAS NOT THE ONLY ORAL TRADITION WHICH JEWS KEPT OUT OF BOOKS AS LONG AS THEY COULD. THE BASIC FORM OF THE SYNAGOGUE SERVICE WAS ESTABLISHED AND ACCEPTED FOR WELL OVER HALF A MILLENNIUM BEFORE COPIES WERE MADE READILY AVAILABLE (10TH CENTURY). THE ESOTERIC LORE OR MYSTICAL SPECULATION IN THESE SCROLLS CIRCULATED SUB ROSA. AUTHORS OF PHILOSOPHY AND KABBALAH WHICH BEGAN TO APPEAR IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY OFTEN INDICATED THAT THE HEART OF THE MATTER, THE SECRETS, HAD ONLY BEEN HINTED AT AND THAT KNOWLEDGE OF THESE COULD BE GAINED ONLY FROM A KNOWLEDGEABLE TEACHER AND PRIVATE TUTORIAL INSTRUCTION.

THE ARAB CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT ENCOURAGED THE WRITING OF BOOKS AND THE MAINTENANCE OF SIGNIFICANT LIBRARIES BY THOSE WHO COULD AFFORD THEM. EVEN SO, JEWISH LEARNING CONSISTED LARGELY OF MEMORIZATION. MAIMONIDES IN HIS CODE, THE MISHNEH TORAH (1180), INSISTED THAT A STUDENT WILL FORGET WHAT HE HAS NOT REVIEWED AND RECITED ALOUD. THE HEART OF THE JEWISH EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISE REMAINED "LETTING YOUR EARS HEAR WHAT YOUR MOUTH HAS SPOKEN" (M.M. M.T. TALMUD TORAH 3:12). "IF ONE RECITES ALOUD WHILE STUDYING, WHAT HE LEARNS WILL REMAIN WITH HIM. HE WHO READS SILENTLY SOON FORGETS" (IBID 3:12).<sup>12</sup> MUSLIM LEARNING WAS OF THE SAME ORDER, THAT IS, IT BEGAN WITH THE MEMORIZATION OF PORTIONS OR ALL OF THE KORAN. AS BOOKS BECAME EVER MORE WIDELY AVAILABLE, THEY PLAYED AN EVER INCREASING ROLE IN JEWISH LIFE, BUT THE OLD SPIRIT WAS NOT DEAD AND MAJOR PROTEST MOVEMENTS-KARAISM, HASIDISM, REFORM--EMERGED WHEN

unclear  
eg. Nachmanides  
introduces the  
Torah commentary  
end.

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GROUPS FELT THAT UNDUE WEIGHT WAS BEING GIVEN TO THE AUTHORITARIAN, BOOK-DOMINATED SIDE OF TRADITION. JEWS WERE NOT ANTI-BOOK OR ANTI-LEARNING. QUITE THE CONTRARY; THEY VALUED EDUCATION AND LITERACY. THEIR GOAL WAS AN ACTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF ALL THAT WAS CONSIDERED TORAH, RATHER THAN A VENERATION OF BOOKS.

THE TORAH CAME TO OCCUPY A SPECIAL PLACE IN JEWISH LIFE AS DID THE TALMUD, THE PRAYER BOOK, CERTAIN CODES, AND BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES LIKE THE ZOHAR. HOWEVER MUCH JEWS RESPECTED TORAH LITERACY AND LOVED TORAH BOOKS, THE SAGES WERE GENERALLY NOT PREPARED TO MAKE THE LIVING FAITH DEPENDENT ON THE WRITTEN WORD. THE WORD OF TEACHERS TOOK PRECEDENCE OVER A WRITTEN TEXT. TEXTS WERE NOT ONLY FALLIBLE, PRONE TO SCRIBAL AND PRINTED ERROR, BUT FIXED, LIMITING. A WRITTEN SENTENCE GIVES NO INDICATION OF TIME, INFLECTION, OR EMPHASIS. THE ANSWER TO 'WHY MUST I?' WAS NOT 'SO IT IS WRITTEN' BUT 'SO IT IS TAUGHT.' THE DIFFERENCE SEEMS SLIGHT BUT THE REFERENCE TO AUTHORIZED SPEECH IS SIGNIFICANT. PAUL, WITH HIS USUAL TENDENCY TO EXCESS, CLAIMED THAT THE LETTER KILLS. THE JEWISH SAGES BELIEVED THE LETTER KILLS ONLY WHEN IT IS LEFT NAKED OF COMMENTARY, A DISCIPLINE THEY USED EASILY AND SUCCESSFULLY. TO COMMENT IS TO INTERPRET, TO SUGGEST THAT THERE ARE EVER NEW LEVELS OF MEANING. THE LETTER SUGGESTS THAT WHAT IS WRITTEN DOWN NEED NOT BE COMMITTED TO MEMORY. WHAT IS IN MANUSCRIPT NO LONGER NEEDS TO BE MEMORIZED, INEVITABLY CEASES TO BE MEMORIZED, AND SO DOES NOT BECOME AN INTIMATE PART OF ONE'S LIFE.



GOD DID NOT WRITE TO ISRAEL, HE SPOKE. THE SAGES DID NOT WRITE BOOKS, THEY TAUGHT. THEIR CLASSROOMS WERE NOT LIKE OURS, FILLED WITH STUDENTS BUSILY WRITING DOWN ALL THAT WAS SAID. THE SAGES SPOKE. THE CLASS LISTENED. THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS WAS TO MEMORIZE THE MATERIAL TO BE DISCUSSED. DISCUSSION CAME LATER. IT WOULD HAVE EASED THE STUDENTS' EFFORTS TO GIVE THEM PROFESSIONALLY PREPARED TEXTS. THAT THE RABBIS DIDN'T DO SO TESTIFIES TO THE RABBINIC CONCERN THAT MEMORIZATION WAS BOTH AN INTELLECTUAL NECESSITY AND AN ETHICAL DISCIPLINE: YOU ARE WHAT YOU KNOW.



like the one defined by Borges in a famous essay on Kafka, where a boldly original new writer retroactively makes earlier writers his "precursors" by introducing the authority of his innovative work into the system of literature. For a start, midrash has a coherence and power not much in evidence among the contemporary advocates of textual free play. In Harold Bloom's terms, the creators of midrash are the strong poets, Derrida and his followers the weak poets. Moreover, many of the procedural assumptions (not to speak of the aims) of midrash are very different from, or even radically opposed to, those of post-structuralism. These differences and oppositions deserve close attention.

To begin with, the associative play of midrash is not quite so free as it may look to the untutored eye, because in fact it proceeds along the course of fixed homiletic convention. Thus, every new section of midrash on the Pentateuch begins with a *proem* (in Aramaic, a *petihta*) more or less like the one in the first paragraph of our excerpt from Genesis Rabba. The trick of the convention—as modern scholarship has shown, and as the original congregations awaiting illumination on the weekly Torah reading surely knew—was to begin with a verse from somewhere at a distance in the biblical corpus, to link that with still other, mostly non-Pentateuchal verses, and then through a grand exegetical arabesque to alight deftly on the words from the weekly portion that were the point of departure, with a revelatory surprise in the juxtaposition of texts.

THE PROEM of our midrash is a virtuosic performance, beginning with the verse from Hosea, which it explicates by citing Song of Songs, Malachi, Psalms, and Exodus, reaching Genesis 39 only by way of "another reading." This second reading, in turn, by relating the end of the verse from Hosea ("And I laid food unto them") to Joseph's role as vizier, prepares the ground for the second section of our passage, in which the verse about Joseph brought down to Egypt is construed as an adumbration of his political ascendancy. It is also worth noting that the relation between the two readings of Hosea is by no means haphazard. What is first asserted about the history of Israel through a phrase-by-phrase reading of the verse is then reasserted about Joseph through a second scrutiny of the same phrases, so that Joseph sold into slavery becomes a typological

image of Israel enduring exile.

What assumptions enable the midrash to read in this way? Is the effect of such reading in fact the "deconstructurization," the destabilizing of the text, that is the goal of deconstructive criticism? The

midrash always has warrant to propose "another reading" because the text is divinely revealed. That is its primary assumption. Thus, in principle, the meanings of the text are not exhaustible, are not the univocal or palely polysemous

*You deserve a factual look at...*

## Aid to Israel: Does the American taxpayer get his money's worth?

It is quite true that Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. aid. In fiscal 1985, the amount was \$3 billion. Of that, \$1.8 billion was for military aid, and \$1.2 billion was for economic aid. Israel, however, paid \$1.1 billion in 1985 to the U.S., leaving a net balance of \$1.9 billion.

Is that a good deal for the American taxpayer? Do we get our money's worth?

### What are the facts?

■ Israel's dominant military and political position in the Middle East protects that entire area, including the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, from the inroads of the Soviet Union. Israel has one of the best armies in the world. It is a most reliable partner in the promotion of Western interests and in the stabilization of the Middle East. Twenty-five to 30% of its budget goes for defense—as against 7% in the U.S. and less than 1% in Japan. Israel's navy and air force are the major deterrent forces in the eastern Mediterranean against Soviet intrusion.

■ Israel effectively secures NATO's southeastern flank, without having a single American soldier stationed in its territory. Still, the superb military installations, the air and sea lift capabilities, the advanced medical facilities, the equipment and food storage capacity and the trained manpower to maintain and repair sophisticated U.S. equipment, are instantly at hand in Israel. It is the only country in the area that makes itself available to the United States, in any contingency.

■ There is no other country in the Middle East except Israel that can be considered to have a stable government or populace friendly to the United States.

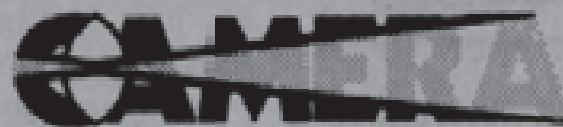
There is much danger that any military aid to Arab countries, and military equipment given or sold to them, will suffer the fate as the untold billions of dollars and priceless military secrets that were lost to our enemies in the debacle of Iran. Is Saudi Arabia more stable? Egypt? Jordan? Judge for yourself!

■ Only a fraction of the aid given stays in Israel. By far the largest share remains in the U.S., where it is spent with American defense contractors. Peter McPherson, administrator of the Agency for International Development, estimates that every billion dollars of aid to Israel creates 60,000 to 70,000 jobs in the United States.

■ Compared to the \$1.8 billion military aid to Israel, the U.S. has so far contributed \$130 billion in the support of Western Europe through NATO, and \$30 billion for the security of Japan, Korea, and the Far East. 340,000 U.S. troops are stationed with NATO—30,000 U.S. troops in the Far East. Not one single U.S. soldier needs to be stationed and put at risk in Israel. In contrast, U.S. naval, air, and land forces totally shield Japan. U.S. military analysts estimate that the U.S. would have to spend the equivalent of \$150 billion a year in the Middle East to maintain a force equivalent to Israel's.

President Reagan said it well: "The fall of Iran increased Israel's value as perhaps the only remaining strategic asset in the region on which the United States can fully rely". American aid to Israel is a two-way street. Aid to Israel is America's greatest defense bargain.

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meanings of mere human speech. Moshe Idel, in a useful discussion of kabbalistic Bible interpretation in *Midrash and Literature*, rightly suggests that the later mystical doctrine of the infinity of the Torah, a book that comes from the infinite God, has its seeds in the orientation of the classical midrash. But to say that the text is inexhaustible is not the same as to say that it is "undecidable."

Similarly, intertextuality, which is so prominent in midrashic interpretation, is dictated by a firm perception of the biblical canon as a timeless, all-inclusive, self-referential concordance. The juxtaposed texts are not what happens to be in the interpreter's head—say, Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Carlyle, and Derrida—but what is eternally given as a textual system. This textual system has fixed boundaries, in which every utterance, every word, is potentially relevant to every other utterance, every other word, because all are divinely underwritten. Midrash, then, operates on the following paradox: its reading habits are atomistic, but what enables them is a conception of the Bible as an endlessly complex combinatory unity. The isolation for inspection of small pieces of the text does not bring about a fragmentation of the text. On the contrary, it contributes to a sense of the participation of the text in an overarching unity.

THE ISSUE OF unity points in turn to what may be the most fundamental difference between midrash and poststructuralism. The latter has developed ingenious strategies for exposing the hidden contradictions in all textual assertions, the negations with which all affirmations of value in the deconstructive view, are necessarily pregnant. This activity of exposure has been generally formulated as the "reversal of hierarchical oppositions" (central and peripheral, canonical and extracanonical, presence and absence), which is the aim and virtual definition of deconstruction. Nothing could be further from the midrashic mind-set. Midrash is unabashedly a didactic mode of interpretation, in which, as one would say in rabbinic idiom, the ayes are ayes and the nays are nays. The free play of midrashic exegesis, far from unsettling hierarchical oppositions, constantly invokes them and reaffirms them: God and man, Israel and the nations, monotheism and paganism, good and evil, redemption and exile, and (in our passage) the

Land of Israel and Egypt—up and down.

Historically, the program of midrash involved not the questioning of a canon, but its imaginative and symbolic consolidation. And there were pressures of the era that made this consolidation a compelling enterprise. Jacob Neusner has recently argued that the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine early in the fourth century signaled a major crisis for the recently institutionalized rabbinic Judaism. Subjugation now had to be endured not under a pagan regime, but under a competing monotheistic faith with potent symbols and rituals. Edom, the "wicked kingdom," the archetypal designation of the Roman Empire, figures importantly throughout the midrash, though it is not mentioned in our text; but the story of Joseph's enslavement in Egypt is used to evoke the pain of political subjugation, as well as the consoling promise of redemption.

THE THEME OF consolation in particular suggests the programmatic political force of the midrash, its thirst for affirmation. In this regard, what the midrash repeatedly does is not to destabilize the biblical text, but rather to give it a stability it does not have on its own—harmonizing contradictions, easing tensions, seeking to make bright but distant narrative ends explicitly present in the darkest beginnings. Genesis 39:1 reports a catastrophe: Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, has been sold as a slave and is taken down to Egypt. The midrash converts this catastrophe into an intimation of triumph through the punning link it establishes between *hurad* (was brought down) and *yerd, radah* (to exercise domination). The third pun on this same verb, playing on the word used in Judges 14:9 to describe Samson's scooping out honey from the hive, intensifies this reversal by introducing the notion of forceful removal: Joseph the victim (passive verb *hurad*) is transformed into a powerful mover of peoples. And then the final pun, which revocalizes the verb to make it active ("He brought down to Egypt Jacob"), skips ahead from one narrative ending—Joseph's triumph as vizier—to another: the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, which in turn will be the precondition for the grand redemption of the people.

And lest we feel any uneasiness about the certainty of that awaited redemption—awaited in fact by the original an-

dience of the midrash—Rabbi Pinhas in the name of Rabbi Simon reminds us that Joseph brought down to Egypt not only his father and clan, but the Divine Presence as well.

The final point of difference between midrash and poststructuralism is in their style—style being, as usual, inseparable from substance and ideology. David Stern has shrewdly noted the frequency in midrash of the word *haviy*, meaning precious, dear, beloved; he has made the important suggestion that in general the style of midrash can be thought of as the language of *haviut* (roughly, affectionate intimacy):

Just as *haviut* represents an attempt through a literary discourse to recover God as a speaking presence, so the literary homily must be seen as an attempt on the part of the redactor to capture in writing those qualities of intimacy and familiarity that would have been associated by a reader with the oral sermon.

In our passage, one hears the language of *haviut* in God's tender words, "He is my son, my firstborn, and can I bring him down in disgrace?" and one sees it in the homey image of the calf led before the cow to coax her to the slaughterhouse. The pervasive language of midrash reinforces this sense of intimacy and accessibility: the fluent colloquial style of rabbinic Hebrew, at times switching to the actual vernacular, Aramaic, stands in contrast to the loftier, more formal diction of the Prophets and the Psalms embedded by quotation in this plain-spun prose.

IN CONTRAST to the accessibility of midrash, the poststructuralists have made an ideology of cultivating a difficult style, bristling with esoteric language. Not long ago Geoffrey Hartman argued, in *Criticism in the Wilderness*, that criticism owes it to itself to be as difficult as the poetry it studies, with which it enjoys equal rights of primary creation. Subsequently, he has proposed that ever since Addison and Steele there has been a tacit conspiracy in Anglo-American culture to write about literature only in a language that would be perfectly intelligible to the polished gentlemen who frequented the coffeehouses. Because of this self-imposed limitation, Anglo-American criticism, at least until its newest wave, is supposed to have closed itself off from the profundities of Continental metaphysical thought. Alas, most of the contributors to *Midrash and Literature* offer no stylistic



signs of hanging around coffeehouses. To the quotation I gave earlier from Myrna Solotarevsky I will add, in deference to the reader's sensibilities, only one further example, from an essay by Betty Roitman called "Sacred Language and Open Text":

In the movement from an existential interpretation to a metaphysical one there is, to be sure, an allegorized transposition which effects a displacement in the use of the demonstrative pronoun from the acknowledgment of a particular presence to the acknowledgment of Omnipresence. To this extent the two planes of signification are in a symbolic relationship, wherein the semantic feature called designation is metamorphosed into a sememe of revelation.

Reading such prose alongside the midrash, one begins to suspect that the supposed language of the coffeehouses may have a much greater affinity with the midrashic language of *havivut*, precisely in the shared assumption that the deepest and most serious matters could be explored in terms intelligible to all.

**T**HE ROLE OF loan-words in these two traditions of interpretation is especially symptomatic. The French-inspired vogue of criticism has triggered a veritable invasion of French and English by Greek: *aporia* (Derrida), *proairesis* (Barthes), *diagesis* (Gérard Genette), and so on. The double aim of such terms is to get at a concept presumably too complex or abstruse for ordinary language and to affirm criticism as the province of a small, specially informed elite working within the coordinates of a closed system. By contrast, the Greek and Latin with which the midrash is peppered are meant to give the Hebrew and Aramaic a flavor of immediacy. The cow in our passage is dragged to the *magolin*, the contemporary Greek term for slaughterhouse. The humiliation of enslavement or exile is having to wear a *qolar*, Greek and Latin for iron collar, as anyone living in the Roman Empire would vividly know. The shame of being hauled off in chains is *porifo*, apparently a somewhat mangled version of the Latin *opprobrium*. In its borrowings, then, as in its two indigenous languages, midrash strives to make its theology, its philosophy of history, its views of causation and morality, accessible to every ear—as pungently immediate as the trading stalls, the slave markets, and the bathhouses of the Greco-Roman world.

Of course the Torah is a text. But

there is an ultimate difference between Torah and textuality, especially as the latter is conceived by the new theorists to be the ineluctable human condition. (In Derrida's famous pronouncement, "There is nothing outside of text.") In the rabbinic view, the Torah was given by God, and is present in the world concretely as the source of all authority. It is not part of an infinite regression of texts mirroring other texts, of meanings endlessly deferred. Its imperative meanings are addressed clearly to the here and now, and that is the core of the midrashic enterprise.

**J**UST A LITTLE after the section from Genesis Rabba quoted above, there is an almost comic story about a certain matron who asks Rabbi Yosi how Joseph, in all the hormonal heat of his 17 years, could possibly have resisted the blandishments of Potiphar's wife, who attempted to seduce him. Rabbi Yosi's response is to take out a copy of Genesis and to read her the stories of quasi-incestuous union recorded about Reuben and Bilhah, Judah and Tamar:

He said to her: "If Scripture did not hide the acts of these, who were no longer minors and who were under their father's jurisdiction, how much more so would it not have hidden the act of someone who was a minor and who was under his own jurisdiction."

Scripture is a moral measure, as solid and close to hand as the copy of Genesis that the sage takes out for the benefit of the Roman lady. It provides, in the rabbinic view, a true, unflinching account of the human lives and historical events it reports. And it invites us to match those accounts against our empirical knowledge, in part because we are always implicitly invited to insert our lives into Scripture, to gauge them against it. Midrashic playfulness, then, is driven by a sense of moral and historical urgency. Unlike its supposed counterpart in contemporary literary theory, it cannot allow itself to lapse into the language of a mandarin elite. Nor can it conclude from the multiplicity of meanings that meaning is dizzyingly indeterminate, doomed forever to spin around in an arbitrary game of linguistic codes.

ROBERT ALTER

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failed to make me interested enough in her characters to care *how* they feel. Meanwhile, the work has been structured in a series of aimless episodic scenes marked "Wednesday, 2 in the afternoon" or "Tuesday, near dusk," as if it were a pseudodocumentary action film about tracking down terrorists in Central Europe or drug dealers in L.A. (There's no point whatever in identifying the

precise time of day or day of the week if you don't dramatize its relevance to the action of the play.) *Coastal Disturbances* is all very vapid and bloodless, totally lacking in density, and Tina Howe, who is certainly equipped to create wilder adventures than this, should not be encouraged to dissipate her talents in thin-lipped exercises about life among the boring and the bored.

## OLD RABBIS, NEW CRITICS

### Midrash and Literature

edited by Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick

(Yale University Press, 415 pp., \$28.50)

### Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition

by José Faur

(Indiana University Press, 226 pp., \$27.50)

There was a time not long ago when the term *midrash* would have been as puzzling to most literary scholars as the mysterious Hebrew *Keri* and *Chetiv* that Milton flaunts in the middle of his *Areopagitica*. Now, at least in some precincts of the academy, it seems as though midrash is on everyone's lips. As in most efforts to appropriate an exotic past, this new enterprise is impelled partly by the intrinsic fascinations of the material, partly by an intellectual agenda alien to the historical object of interest.

Midrash, a noun derived from the Hebrew verb that means to inquire, to investigate, to interpret, is exegesis of the Bible as it was practiced during and shortly after the formative period of rabbinic Judaism. The nucleus of the collections of these interpretations that have come down to us probably dates back to Palestine of the third century C.E.; the final articulation of the very earliest compilations occurred toward the end of the fourth century. The classical period of midrash continued until about the middle of the seventh century, and related midrashic compositions were produced for another 500 years or more. Midrash, then, is the great exegetical enterprise that went on during, as well as after, the creation of the Talmud. The Talmud also has exegetical moments, but

it is a set of discussions that follows the order and logic of a corpus of laws. Midrash, on the other hand, is based to a good extent on verse sequences, and adheres to the verse-by-verse order of Biblical texts. In the classical collections, convention distinguishes between legal and homiletic midrash, known respectively as midrash halakhah and midrash aggadah. For obvious reasons, it is homiletic midrash that has been of particular interest to contemporary literary critics.

I introduce this encyclopedia-like notation at the outset because one of the unfortunate consequences of the literary vogue of midrash is that some writers have begun to invoke the magic of the name for any interpretive text produced by a Jew. To be sure, the discovery of midrash by literary intellectuals is to be applauded on three grounds: as a distinctive body of athletically imaginative commentary, midrash is bound to be intriguing to anyone concerned with the interpretation of texts; through exegesis, midrash develops literary coherences of its own, both narrative and rhetorical, that are sometimes quite compelling; and, finally, midrash occasionally provides acute insights into certain minute literary aspects of the biblical texts it discusses. Still, it seems important to keep in mind that midrash arose in par-



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ticular historical circumstances, developed certain distinctive literary conventions, and was actuated by an ideology and addressed itself to issues that are not shared by modern literary culture. This element of historical distance does not mean, of course, that midrash is a matter of merely antiquarian interest. And yet something is awry in its contemporary critical use.

**T**HE AMBIGUITIES of the current interest in midrash are vividly mirrored in a new collection of essays, *Midrash and Literature*, edited by Geoffrey Hartman of Yale University and Sanford Budick of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The editors' alliance is underwritten by Jacques Derrida, whose language is echoed by many of the literary contributors to the volume, and who is himself represented (alongside the aphorist Edmond Jabès) in a section called "Contemporary Midrash" by an essay on Paul Celan that is another of his virtuoso performances in punning and conceptual free association.

In inadvertent consonance with deconstructive doctrine, *Midrash and Literature* is a book deeply divided against itself. On the one hand, it aspires

to a responsible presentation of the historical phenomenon of midrash, being careful to make certain distinctions between midrash and contemporary critical theory. The book begins with a suggestive essay by Hartman on the story of Jacob and the angel as canonical narrative, followed by an instructive discussion of "Inner Biblical Exegesis" by the Bible scholar Michael Fishbane. Then there are two sections on traditional midrash, written, with one exception, by specialists in the field; most of these essays are helpful guides, though they go over ground familiar to scholarship. By far the longest, and also the most crucial, section of the book is "Literature and Midrash," and it is here that things begin to pull apart violently. The section includes an intelligent essay by Frank Kermode called "The Plain Sense of Things," as well as useful discussions by Harold Fisch of biblical allusion in *Robinson Crusoe* and by Gershon Shaked of midrashic elements in an early story of S. Y. Agnon's. Unfortunately, the other contributors to this section speak in the heavy Gallic accents of deconstructive formula, and all too often the early rabbis are made to join hands with Derrida in a saturnalian dance of

"open textuality." These pieces thus lead quite naturally into the Derrida-Jabès coda at the end of the book.

Although the editors recognize that midrash involves a fixed standard of truth that is nowhere to be found in poststructuralist thought, their own language, as early as the book's introduction, tends at points to collapse this difference:

By confronting the undecidability of textual meaning, this species of interpretation [that is, midrash and poststructuralism] does not paralyze itself. Instead its own activity is absorbed into the activity of the text, producing a continuum of intertextual supplements, often in a spirit of high-serious play.

The language of intertextual supplement is orthodox Derridean. Such formulations become even more gratingly insistent in the hands of some of the contributors, like this set of assertions by Myrna Solotarevsky at the end of an essay on Borges:

What seems to be important are the correspondences between Borges and midrash in the idea of intertextuality, in the concept of reading not as lineality but as a configuration of textual space, in the notion of de-structurization of the text as a condition for deciphering it, and in the arch principle, as I have said, of interpretative textuality as the basis of decentralization.

I shall return later to the sheer barbarity of style in these critics—not for aesthetic reasons, but for what it indicates about their relation to their purported midrashic antecedents.

The collapsing of distinctions between contemporary theory and ancient practice is beginning to take place on the other side of the interdisciplinary encounter between midrash and literature, too. José Faur, hitherto known as a respected scholar of Maimonides, has published a bizarre intellectual potpourri called *Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition*. In Faur's presentation, there is no distance at all between the rabbis and current literary theory:

The object of *derasha* [the activity of midrash] is liberation from conventional reading, and dissemination of knowledge; more precisely, it is dissemination of knowledge through liberation from conventional reading. As did Jacques Derrida, the rabbis sought "a freeplay," amounting to a "methodical craziness" whose purpose is the "dissemination" of texts; this craziness, though "endless and treacherous and terrifying, liberates us to an *errance joyeuse*."



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Faur's collapsing of distinctions between the rabbinic and the contemporary is combined with an even more egregious collapsing of distinctions among all the far-flung historical periods and ideological trends of Jewish history. All are amalgamated here as expressions of one underlying Jewish worldview, opposed to what is represented as the Greek worldview: "The Hebrew and Greek types of truth correspond to two different levels of reality. The Greek truth is visual. Therefore it is related to the spatial World-Out-There. For the Hebrews the highest form of truth is perceived at the auditory level." Faur's source for this nonsense is Thorlief Boman's *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, a book long discredited for its sweeping simplifications and its leaps from formal features of language to conceptions of reality.

Still, the invocation of Boman, however naive, points toward the hidden agenda of the new midrashizers. For if Derrida and his literary followers have set as their goal nothing less than the subversion of Western metaphysics, with all its "logocentric" and theological assumptions, then the rabbis become attractive mentors if their activity can be shown to embody a radical alternative to

Western conceptions of reality. This, indeed, was the line of argument first proposed by Susan Handelman in *The Slaying of Moses*, which appeared in 1982: it invited us to see a distinctively Jewish, non-Greek mode of thought (an "alternative metaphysics") that descends from the early rabbis to Freud, Derrida, and the Ecole de Yale. No wonder, then, that Jonathan Culler, a leading spokesman for American deconstruction, should begin to murmur resentfully that at New Haven (to which one must now add Jerusalem) they talk as though critical theory were a Jewish invention.

There are marked differences, to be sure, between Hellenistic and rabbinic intellectual styles, but most of these stem from the rabbis' almost total lack of interest in symmetrical, sequential systems of the sort that played an important role in Greek thought. Since poststructuralism is unsystematic as a matter of principle, and often anti-systematic, it is easy to see how this un-Greek aspect of rabbinic literature would appeal to it. Still, it is quite another question whether the rabbis worked on assumptions that were a radical alternative to Greek metaphysics, as Faur explicitly argues and as the spokes-

men for the Jerusalem-New Haven axis often imply.

At the high end of the scale of expectations, some contemporary critics seek in midrash a historical precedent for a revolution in textual consciousness. At the lower end of the scale, somewhat more sensibly, others propose that the example of midrash will help us understand better how the activity of interpretation in modern literary and critical texts generates meanings and narratives. Thus Harold Fisch, on the utility of juxtaposing the concepts of midrash and of the novel: "The value, it would seem, is not only in providing a language of interdisciplinary communications, but in freeing the categories thus displaced from formal boundaries and restrictions and releasing their phenomenological essence." Fisch is obviously trying to be reasonable, but his formulation might well make a reasonable reader uneasy. What, after all, is the "phenomenological essence" of a mode of literature? Can it really exist outside the verbal forms in which the meanings of a literary text are so intricately embodied? Fisch's own intelligent essay on *Robinson Crusoe* is not reassuring, for although his afterword talks about midrash and the novel, the



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essay itself discusses biblical allusions and Bible-reading in Defoe's novel, which are altogether different matters.

LET ME TRY to bring this whole new enterprise into better focus by presenting an extended example of midrash. The length of the excerpt is dictated by the need to illustrate more than a single midrashic strategy of interpretation. I have chosen a text that I think is fairly representative, from *Genesis Rabba*, a compilation of midrashic commentary on the book of Genesis that goes back to the end of the fourth century. The translation is my own, except for the biblical verses, where I have followed the King James Version, silently emending it at a few points when its construal of the original clearly diverges from that of the rabbis. The language of the text, as is common in the classical midrashim, is Hebrew, with some Aramaic (here limited to a couple of formulas of transition) and a sprinkling of Greek and Latin loan words. The midrash begins with a verse from Genesis 39, which tells the story of Joseph's removal to Egypt. The verse is cited, and immediately the midrash, composed of other biblical citations and brief comments upon them, begins:

"And Joseph was brought down to Egypt" (Gen. 39:1). It is written, "I drew him with cords of a man" (Hos. 11:4)—that is Israel. "Draw me, we will run after thee" (Song of Songs 1:4)—"with bands of love" (Hos., *ibid.*), for it is written "I have loved you, saith the Lord" (Mal. 1:2). "And I was to them as they that take off the yoke" (Hos., *ibid.*)—for I took their enemies off from them. And why to such an extent?—"From their cheeks" (Hos., *ibid.*), because of the utterance they emitted from their cheeks when they said, "these be thy gods, O Israel" (Exod. 32:8). Then finally, "and I laid food unto them" (Hos., *ibid.*)—I extended to them abundant foods: "There shall be a handful of corn in the earth" (Ps. 72:16).

Another reading: "with cords of a man" (Hos., *ibid.*)—that is Joseph: "and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit" (Gen. 37:28); "with bands of love" (Hos., *ibid.*); "now Israel loved Joseph" (Gen. 37:3). "And I was to them as they that take off the yoke" (Hos., *ibid.*)—for I took his enemies off from him. And who are they?—the wife of Potiphar. And why, "from their cheeks" (Hos. *ibid.*), to such an extent? Because

of the utterance he emitted from his cheeks: "and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report" (Gen. 37:2). Then finally, "And I laid food unto them" (Hos., *ibid.*)—I extended to them abundant foods: "and Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold grain to all the people of the land" (Gen. 42:6).

Another reading: "and Joseph was brought down [*hurad*] to Egypt"—and Joseph was the governor. "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt"—he ruled them, as it is said, "and he shall have dominion [*yera*] from sea to sea" (Psalms 72:8); he subjugated them, as it is said, "For he had dominion [*rodeh*] over all the region on this side of the river" (1 Kings 4:24); he uprooted them, took them down from their places, as it is said: "and he drew out thereof [*wayirdehu*] to his palms" (Judges 14:9).

He brought down [*horid*] to Egypt Jacob our father. Rabbi Berechiah in the name of Rabbi Yehudah son of Rabbi Simon said: It is like a cow that resists being drawn to the slaughterhouse. What do they do to her? They lead her calf before her and she goes after him despite herself, against her interests. Thus should Jacob our father have gone down to Egypt, in chains and a neck-collar. But the Holy One said, "He is my son, my firstborn, and can I bring him down in disgrace? Yet if I give the idea to Pharaoh, won't I bring him down in shame? Then let me lead his son before him, and he will go down after him despite himself, against his interests." And he brought the Divine Presence down with him. Rabbi Pinhas in the name of Rabbi Simon said: from where do we learn that the Divine Presence went down with him? From the verse, "and the Lord was with Joseph" (Gen. 39:2).

(Genesis Rabba 86:1-2)

Just a few years ago, this would have seemed merely bizarre to Western literary eyes. But today readers acquainted with poststructuralist criticism are likely to detect certain familiar strategies. It is worth listing the points of contact before attempting to sort out the differences. The most obvious similarity is the midrashic proliferation of readings (for which there is even a fixed introductory formula: *hu ar aher* "another reading"). This is accompanied by an element of flaunted play with the texts. Such proliferation tends to effect a displacement of attention from the text set for interpretation to the exegetical text itself, and

that shift might in some ways remind us of Derrida on Celan, Paul de Man on Shelley, and so forth.

The readings proposed, moreover, are not of any large textual continuum, but of a single verse. As James Kugel aptly observes, "There simply is no boundary encountered beyond that of the verse until one comes to the borders of the canon itself." Indeed, one should go further: it is not just the verse (as is the case in the passage quoted from Hosea 11:4) that is the object of attention, but the single phrase, the single word (as one sees here in the treatment of Genesis 39:1). This atomistic exegesis seems to accord nicely with the practice of the Derrideans, who for the most part have lost interest or faith in reading larger textual continuities, or have come to believe that such continuity is a pernicious illusion. The process of interpretation depends on an elaborate shuffling among different verses, which has the look of offering confirmation of the primacy of intertextuality argued for by structuralists and poststructuralists as the root condition of all literary texts; it may indeed recall Derrida's own agility at textual leapfrog.

The midrashic method of exposition, furthermore, is associative and unsystematic, again in apparent accord with the procedures of certain contemporary critics. Finally, as Kugel also notes, midrash quite often begins its constructions by perceiving some rub in the text, a practice loosely reminiscent of the deconstructive search for the small telltale flaw in the text. That procedure, admittedly, may be somewhat less the rule in midrash than Kugel claims: in our passage, the only rub is a minuscule one evident in the Hebrew consonantal text of the Bible—the word for "was brought down," *hurad*, is spelled, untypically, with a consonantal indication of the first vowel, which apparently encouraged the interpreters to read other, phonetically similar verbs into the word, as well as to detect in it a different conjugation ("he brought down") of the same verb.

HOW IMPORTANT are these similarities between the old rabbis and the new critics? They are one of those instances of the convolutions of cultural history in which a new loop exhibits surprising correspondences to a very old loop, and by so doing shows certain instructive continuities in the diversity of cultural expression. But such similarities are decidedly not an instance, I think,