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The Case of Leviticus Rabbah

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The Case of Leviticus Rabbah

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While the world at large treats Judaism as “the religion of the Old Testament,” the fact is otherwise. Judaism inherits and makes the Hebrew Scriptures its own, just as does Christianity. But just as Christianity rereads the entire heritage of ancient Israel in the light of “the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” so Judaism understands the Hebrew Scriptures as only one part, the written one, of “the one whole Torah of Moses, our rabbi.” Ancient Israel no more testified to the oral Torah, now written down in the Mishnah and later rabbinic writings, than it did to Jesus as the Christ. In both cases, religious circles within Israel of later antiquity reread the entire past in the light of their own conscience and convictions. Accordingly, while the framers of Judaism as we know it received as divinely revealed ancient Israel’s literary heritage, they picked and chose as they wished what would serve the purposes of the larger system they undertook to build. Since the Judaism at hand first reached literary expression in the Mishnah, a document in which Scripture plays a subordinate role, the founders of that Judaism clearly made no pretense at tying up to scriptural proof texts or at expressing in the form of scriptural commentary the main ideas they wished to set out. Accordingly, Judaism only asymmetrically rests upon

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the foundations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and Judaism is not alone or mainly “the religion of the Old Testament.”

Since Judaism is not “the religion of the Old Testament,” we cannot take for granted or treat as predictable or predetermined the entry of the Hebrew Scriptures into the system of Judaism at hand. That is why we must ask exactly how the Scriptures did enter the framework of Judaism. In what way, when, and where, in the unfolding of the canon of Judaism, were they absorbed and recast, and how did they find the distinctive role they were to play from late antiquity onward?

The Importance of Leviticus Rabbah

If we wish to know in detail how the framers of Judaism confronted the challenge of Scripture, we logically turn to the books they wrote in which they expressed their ideas by making use of verses of Scripture. Some of these are organized around the structure of the Mishnah, others around that of Scripture. Clearly, the latter bring us closer to the answer, since in them the confrontation with Scripture proves immediate and ever-present. The issue of the Tosefta and the Talmud is the Mishnah, however, to which Scripture forms a merely critical component, but not the definitive issue. The issue of Sifra, the two Sifres, Genesis Rabbah, and Leviticus Rabbah is Scripture, specifically, the rereading of Scripture in the light of the rabbis’ established system. All the texts, both those formed around the Mishnah and those ordered in accord with a book of Scripture, find a place within and point toward a larger matrix of values and convictions—the rabbinic system as a whole. Each one testifies in its own way. Sifra and the two Sifres address the Mishnah through Scripture. They explain how the Mishnah relates to Scripture. In Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah the issue is not the Mishnah but Scripture itself.

But how do rabbis propose to speak within, about, and

through Scripture, when the Mishnah is *not* a principal issue? And what modes of discourse do they find useful when the exegesis of the Mishnah or the accommodation of the Mishnah to Scripture does not dictate the appropriate redactional and rhetorical forms? Only Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah provide evidence of the answers to these questions.

The former, however, stands altogether too close to its predecessors – the Tosefta, Sifra, the two Sifres. How so? Just as they take shape essentially around the phrase-by-phrase exegesis of an established text, so too does Genesis Rabbah. The group that focuses upon the Mishnah adopts a rhetoric of word-for-word or phrase-by-phrase exegesis. The largest arena of discourse then is defined by a complete sentence or two, not a topic or a problem. In this regard, Genesis Rabbah takes only one step away from established conventions. It organizes ideas around a book other than a Mishnah tractate, the book of Genesis. That is stunning and original. But then the framers express their ideas in exactly the same rhetorical pattern – exegesis of words and phrases – that had long predominated in the study and amplification of the Mishnah. There are no large-scale discursive constructions on themes or problems, no evidences of a philosophical reading of Scripture such as Philo or Origen accomplished. It is only when we reach Leviticus Rabbah that we come to an essentially new situation.

A Sample of Leviticus Rabbah

Leviticus Rabbah deals with a biblical book, not a Mishnah tractate. But it approaches that book with a fresh plan, one in which exegesis does not dictate rhetoric, and in which amplification of an established text (whether Scripture or Mishnah) does not supply the underlying logic by which sentences are made to compose paragraphs – completed thoughts. To state matters affirmatively, the framers of Leviticus Rabbah treat topics, not particular verses. They

make generalizations which are free-standing. They express cogent propositions through extended compositions, not episodic ideas. Earlier, things people wished to say were attached to predefined statements based on an existing text, constructed in accord with an organizing logic independent of the systematic expression of a single, well-framed idea. Now the authors so collect and arrange their materials that an abstract proposition emerges. That proposition is not expressed only or mainly through episodic restatements, assigned, as I said, to an order established by a base-text, rather it emerges through a logic of its own. In this paper, I claim to uncover that logic which transforms exegesis of a biblical text into a syllogistic, propositional discourse about the vivid issues of Israel's life, that is, that moves from Scripture to Judaism.

Before proceeding, let us consider a complete *parashah* of Leviticus Rabbah, taking account of the traits of its individual units and noting how it develops its large ideas. The translation is my own, based on the critical text and commentary of M. Margulies.¹ My individual comments on each unit of thought of the *parashah* should not obscure our main interest, which is to see how the plan of the framer of the document pursues a theme, rather than verse-by-verse exegesis of individual verses. The theme, moreover, does not impose an order based on the sequence of specific verses of Scripture. So the mode of organizing and laying out comments on Mishnah tractates, familiar in the Talmud of the Land of Israel and of Babylonia, and biblical books, well known in such exercises as Sifra on Leviticus, Sifre on Numbers, Sifre on Deuteronomy, and Genesis Rabbah, is abandoned. A quite different mode is at hand.

Parashah One

I:I

1. A. The Lord called Moses [and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, Speak to the children of

Israel and say to them, When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of cattle from the herd or from the flock].

B. R. Tanhum bar Hinilai opened [discourse by citing the following verse:] “Bless the Lord, you his messengers, you mighty in strength, carrying out his word, obeying his word” (Psalm 103:20).

C. Concerning whom does Scripture speak?

D. If [you maintain that] Scripture speaks about the upper world’s creatures, [that position is unlikely, for] has not [Scripture in the very same passage already referred to them, in stating], “Bless the Lord, all his hosts [his ministers, who do his word]” (Psalm 103:21)?

E. If [you maintain that] Scripture speaks about the lower world’s creatures, [that position too is unlikely,] for has not [Scripture in the very same passage already referred to them, in stating], “Bless the Lord, you his messengers”? (Psalm 103:20). [Accordingly, concerning whom does Scripture speak?]

F. [We shall now see that the passage indeed speaks of the lower ones.] But, since the upper world’s creatures are perfectly able to fulfill the tasks assigned to them by the Holy One, blessed be he, therefore it is said, “Bless the Lord, *all* his hosts.” But as to the creatures of the lower world [here on earth], who cannot fulfill the tasks assigned to them by the Holy One, blessed be he, [the word *all* is omitted, when the verse of Scripture states,] “Bless the Lord, you his messengers” – but not *all* of his messengers.

2. A. Another matter: Prophets are called messengers [creatures of the lower world], in line with the following passage, “And he sent a messenger and he took us forth from Egypt” (Numbers 20:16).

B. Now was this a [heavenly] messenger [an angel]? Was it not [merely] Moses [a creature of the lower world]?

C. Why then does [the verse of Scripture, referring to what Moses did] call him a "messenger"?

D. But: It is on the basis of that usage that [we may conclude] prophets are called "messengers" [in the sense of creatures of the lower world].

E. Along these same lines, "And the messenger of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim" (Judges 2:1). Now was this a [heavenly] messenger [an angel]? Was it not [merely] Phineas?

F. Why then does [the verse of Scripture, referring to Phineas] call him a "messenger"?

G. Said R. Simon, When the holy spirit rested upon Phineas, his face burned like a torch.

H. [There is better proof of the allegation concerning Phineas, deriving from an explicit reference, namely:] rabbis said, What did Manoah's wife say to him [concerning Phineas]? "Lo, a man of God came to me, and his face was like the face of a messenger of God" (Judges 13:6).

I. [Rabbis continue,] She was thinking that he was a prophet, but he was in fact a [heavenly] messenger [so the two looked alike to her].

3. A. Said R. Yohanan, From the passage that defines their very character, we derive evidence that the prophets are called "messengers," in line with the following passage: "Then said Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, in the Lord's agency, to the people, I am with you, says the Lord" (Haggai 1:13).

B. Accordingly, you must reach the conclusion that on the basis of the passage that defines their very character, we prove that the prophets are called "messengers."

4. A. [Reverting to the passage cited at the very outset,] "You mighty in strength, carrying out his word [obeying his word]" (Psalm 103:20).

B. Concerning what [sort of mighty man or hero] does Scripture speak?

C. Said R. Isaac, Concerning those who observe the restrictions of the Seventh Year [not planting and sowing their crops in the Sabbatical Year] does Scripture speak.

D. Under ordinary conditions a person does a religious duty for a day, a week, a month. But does one really do so for all of the days of an entire year?

E. Now [in Aramaic:] this man sees his field lying fallow, his vineyard lying fallow, yet he pays his *anona*-tax [a share of the crop] and does not complain.

F. [In Hebrew:] Do you know of a greater hero than that!

G. Now if you maintain that Scripture does not speak about those who observe the Seventh Year, [I shall bring evidence that it does].

H. Here it is stated, "Carrying out his word" (Psalm 103:20) and with reference to the Seventh Year, it is stated, "This is the word concerning the year of release" (Deuteronomy 15:2).

I. Just as the reference to "word" stated at that passage applies to those who observe the Seventh Year, so reference to "word" in the present passage applies to those who observe the Seventh Year.

5. A. [Continuing discussion of the passage cited at the outset:] "Carrying out his word" (Psalm 103:20):
 - B. R. Huna in the name of R. Aha: It is concerning the Israelites who stood before Mount Sinai that Scripture speaks, for they first referred to doing [what God would tell them to do], and only afterward referred to hearing [what it might be], accordingly stating "Whatever the Lord has said we shall carry out and we shall hear" (Exodus 24:7).
6. A. [Continuing the same exercise:] "Obeying his word" (Psalm 103:20):

B. Said R. Tanhum bar Hinilai, Under ordinary circumstances a burden which is too heavy for one person is light for two, or too heavy for two is light for four.

C. But is it possible to suppose that a burden that is too weighty for six hundred thousand can be light for a single individual?

D. Now the entire people of Israel were standing before Mount Sinai and saying, "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die" (Deuteronomy 5:22; verse 25 in KJV). But [for his part], Moses heard the voice of God himself and lived.

E. You may find evidence that that is the case, for, among all [the Israelites], the [Act of] Speech [of the Lord] called only to Moses, on which account it is stated, "The Lord called Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).

Leviticus 1:1 intersects with Psalm 103:20 to make the point that Moses was God's messenger *par excellence*, the one who blesses the Lord, is mighty in strength, carries out God's word, obeys God's word. This point is made first implicitly at No. 1 by proving that the verse speaks of earthly, not heavenly, creatures. Then it is made explicit at No. 6. No. 1 and No. 2 present two sets of proofs. The second may stand by itself. It is only the larger context that suggests otherwise. No. 3 is continuous with No. 2. No. 4 and No. 5 refer back to the cited verse, Psalm 103:20, but not to the context of Leviticus 1:1. So we have these units:.

1.A. Psalm 103:20 refers to earthly creatures.

2–3. Prophets are called messengers.

4. Psalm 103:20 refers to a mighty man who observes the Sabbatical Year.

5. Psalm 103:20 refers to the Israelites before Mount Sinai.

6. Psalm 103:20 refers to Moses.

If then we ask what is primary to the redaction resting on Leviticus 1:1, it can only be Nos. 1 and 6. But since No.

1 does not refer to Moses at all, but only sets up the point made at No. 6, No. 6 does not require No. 1. It makes its point without No. 1's contribution. Furthermore, No. 1, for its part, is comprehensible by itself as a comment on Psalm 103:20, and hardly requires linkage to Leviticus 1:1. If, therefore, I may offer a thesis on the history of the passage, it would begin with Leviticus 1:1 + No. 6. Reference to Psalm 103:20 then carried in its wake Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5—all of them to begin with autonomous sayings formed into a kind of handbook on Psalm 103:20. So first came the intersection of Leviticus 1:1 and Psalm 103:20 presented by No. 6, and everything else followed in the process of accretion and aggregation, mostly of passages in Psalm 103:20.

I:II

1. A. R. Abbahu opened [discourse by citing the following verse]: "They shall return and dwell beneath his shadow, they shall grow grain, they shall blossom as a vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon" (Hosea 14:7).
 - B. "They shall return and dwell beneath his shadow"—these are proselytes who come and take refuge in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be he.
 - C. "They shall grow grain"—they are turned into [part of] the root, just as [any other] Israelite.
 - D. That is in line with the following verse: "Grain will make the young men flourish, and wine the women" (Zechariah 9:17).
 - E. "They shall blossom as a vine"—like [any other] Israelite.
 - F. That is in line with the following verse: "A vine did you pluck up out of Egypt, you did drive out the nations and plant it" (Psalm 80:9; verse 8 in KJV).
2. A. Another item [= Genesis Rabbah 66:3]: "They shall grow grain"—in Talmud.

- B. "They shall blossom as a vine" – in lore.
3. A. "Their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon [and Lebanon signifies the altar]" –
 B. Said the Holy One, blessed be he, The names of proselytes are as dear to me as the wine-offering that is poured out on the altar before me.
4. A. And why [is that mountain called "Lebanon"]?
 B. In line with [the following verse]: "That goodly mountain and the Lebanon" (Deuteronomy 3:25).
 C. R. Simeon b. Yohai taught [= Sifre Deuteronomy 6:28], Why is it called Lebanon (LBNN)? Because it whitens (MLBYN) the sins of Israel like snow.
 D. That is in line with the following verse: "If your sins are red as scarlet, they shall be made white (LBN) as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).
 E. R. Tabyomi said, It is [called Lebanon (LBNN)] because all hearts (LBB) rejoice in it.
 F. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "Fair in situation, the joy of the whole world, even Mount Zion, at the far north" (Psalm 48:3; verse 2 in KJV).
 G. And rabbis say, It is [called Lebanon] because of the following verse: "And my eyes and heart (LB) shall be there all the days" (1 Kings 9:3).

So far as we have a sustained discourse, we find it at Nos. 1 and 3. No. 2 is inserted whole because of its interest in the key verse, Hosea 14:7. Reference at that verse to "Lebanon" explains the set-piece treatment of the word at No. 4. These units may travel together, but the present location seems an unlikely destination. But someone clearly drew together this anthology of materials on, first, Hosea 14:7, and, by the way, second, the word Lebanon. Why the two sets were assembled is much clearer than how they seemed to the compositor of the collection as a whole to belong to the exposition of Leviticus 1:1. Margulies' thesis that the theme of the righteous proselyte

intersects with the personal biography of Moses through Pharaoh's daughter (a proselyte) on the surface seems far-fetched. So, in all, the construction of the passage surely is prior to any consideration of its relevance to Leviticus 1:1, and the point of the construction certainly is the exegesis of Hosea 14:7—that alone. Whether the materials shared with other collections—Nos. 2, 5—fit more comfortably in those compositions than they do here is not a pressing issue, since, as is self-evident, there is no link to Leviticus 1:1 in any event.

I:III

1. A. R. Simon in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi, and R. Hama, father of R. Hoshaiah, in the name of Rab: The Book of Chronicles was revealed only for the purposes of exegetical exposition.
2. A. "And his wife Hajehudijah bore Jered, the father of Gedor, and Heber, the father of Soco, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah—and these are the sons of Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered took" (1 Chronicles 4:17).
 - B. "And his wife, Hajehudijah [= the Judah-ite]"—that is Jochebed.
 - C. Now was she from the tribe of Judah, and not from the tribe of Levi? Why then was she called Hajehudijah [the Judah-ite]?
 - D. Because she kept Jews (Jehudim) alive in the world [as one of the midwives who kept the Jews alive when Pharaoh said to drown them].
3. A. "She bore Jered"—that is Moses.
 - B. R. Hanana bar Pappa and R. Simon:
 - C. R. Hanana said, He was called Jered (YRD) because he brought the Torah down (HWRYD) from on high to earth.
 - D. Another possibility: "Jered"—for he brought down the Presence of God from above to earth.

E. Said R. Simon, The name Jered connotes only royalty, in line with the following verse: "May he have dominion (YRD) from sea to sea, and from the river to the end of the earth" (Psalm 72:8).

F. And it is written, "For he rules (RWDH) over the entire region on this side of the river" (1 Kings 5:4; 1 Kings 4:24 in KJV).

4. A. "Father of Gedor" –

B. R. Huna in the name of R. Aha said, Many fence-makers (GWDRYM) stood up for Israel, but this one [Moses] was the father of all of them.

5. A. "And Heber" –

B. For he joined (HBR) Israel to their father in heaven.

C. Another possibility: "Heber" – for he turned away (HBYR) punishment from coming upon the world.

6. A. "The father of Soco" –

B. This one was the father of all the prophets, who perceive (SWKYN) by means of the Holy Spirit.

C. R. Levi said, It is an Arabic word. In Arabic they call a prophet "sakya."

7. A. "Jekuthiel" (YQWTY'L) –

B. R. Levi and R. Simon:

C. R. Levi said, For he made the children hope (MQWYN) in their Father in heaven.

D. Said R. Simon, When the children sinned against God in the incident of the Golden Calf . . .

E. "The father of Zanoah" –

F. Moses came along and forced them to give up (HZNYHN) that transgression.

G. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "[And he took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder] and strewed it upon the water" (Exodus 32:20).

8. A. "And these are the sons of Bithiah (BTYH), the daughter of Pharaoh" –
 B. R. Joshua of Sikhnin in the name of R. Levi: The Holy One, blessed be he, said to Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, Moses was not your child, but you called him your child. So you are not my daughter, but I shall call you my daughter [thus BTYH, daughter of the Lord].
9. A. "These are the sons of Bithiah . . . whom Mered took" –
 B. [Mered] is Caleb.
 C. R. Abba bar Kahana and R. Judah bar Simon:
 D. R. Abba bar Kahana said, This one [Caleb] rebelled [MRD] against the counsel of the spies, and that one rebelled [MRDH] against the counsel of her father [Pharaoh, as to murdering the babies]. Let a rebel come and take as wife another rebellious spirit.
 E. [Explaining the link of Caleb to Pharaoh's daughter in a different way], R. Judah b. R. Simon said, This one [Caleb] saved the flock, while that one [Pharaoh's daughter] saved the shepherd [Moses]. Let the one who saved the flock come and take as wife the one who saved the shepherd.
10. A. Moses [thus] had ten names [at 1 Chronicles 4:17]: Jered, Father of Gedor, Heber, Father of Soco, Jekuthiel, and Father of Zanoah [with the other four enumerated in what follows].
 B. R. Judah bar Ilai said, He also was called [7] Tobiah, in line with the following verse: "And she saw him, that he was good (TWB)" (Exodus 2:2). He is Tobiah.
 C. R. Ishmael bar Ami said, "He also was called [8] Shemaiah."
11. A. R. Joshua bar Nehemiah came and explained the following verse: "And Shemaiah, the son of Nethanel the scribe, who was of the Levites, wrote them

in the presence of the king and the princes and Zadok the priest and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar" (1 Chronicles 24:6).

B. [Moses was called] Shemaiah because God heard (ŠM^c YH) his prayer.

C. [Moses was called] the son of Nethanel because he was the son to whom the Torah was given from hand to hand (NTN 'L).

D. "The scribe," because he was the scribe of Israel.

E. "Who was of the Levites," because he was of the tribe of Levi.

F. "Before the king and the princes" – this refers to the King of kings the Holy One, blessed be he, and his court.

G. "And Zadok the priest" – this refers to Aaron the priest.

H. "Ahimeleh" – because [Aaron] was brother (Ḥ) of the king.

I. "The son of Abiathar" ('BYTR) – the son through whom the Holy One, blessed be he, forgave (WYTR) the deed of the Golden Calf.

12. A. R. Tanhuma in the name of R. Joshua b. Qorhah, and R. Menehemiah in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: He also was called [9] Levi after his eponymous ancestor: "And is not Aaron, your brother, the Levite" (Exodus 4:14).

B. And [he of course was called] [10] Moses – hence [you have] ten names.

C. Said the Holy One, blessed be he, to Moses, By your life: Among all the names by which you are called, the only one by which I shall ever refer to you is the one which Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, gave to you: "And she called his name Moses" (Exodus 2:10), so God called Moses.

D. So: "He called Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).

Now we see some slight basis for Margulies' view of

the relevance of I:II, that the daughter of Pharaoh was named Moses, and she was a proselyte. But the passage at hand stands fully by itself, leading to the climax at the very end, at which the opening words of the opening verse of the book of Leviticus are cited. The point of the entire, vast construction is the inquiry into the various names of Moses. From that standpoint we have a strikingly tight composition. But still, the unit *is* a composite, since it draws together autonomous and diverse materials. The first passage, No. 1, is surely independent, yet it makes for a fine superscription to the whole. Then the pertinent verse, at No. 2.A, 1 Chronicles 4:17, is cited and systematically spelled out in Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Not only so, but at No. 10, we review the matter and amplify it with an additional, but completely appropriate, set of further names of Moses, Nos. 10 + 12, to be viewed, in line with No. 12, as a unified construction. No. 11 is inserted and breaks the thought. Then 12.C tells us the point of it all, and that brings us back to Leviticus 1:1, on the one side, and to No. 8. But, as we have seen, we cannot refer to No. 8 without drawing along the whole set, Nos. 2-9. So the entire passage forms a single, sustained discussion, in which diverse materials are determinedly drawn together into a cogent statement. We notice that No. 7 presents a text problem, since Levi's statement is not matched by Simon's. Levi speaks of Jekuthiel and Simon of "the father of Zanoah." But the only problem is at 7.B. If we omit that misleading superscription – which served perfectly well at 3.B + C-F – and have 7.D and E change places, we get a perfectly fine autonomous statement.

I:IV

1. A. R. Abin in the name of R. Berekhiah the Elder opened [discourse by citing the following verse]: "Of old you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, saying, I have set the crown upon one who is mighty, I have

exalted one chosen from the people" (Psalm 89:20; verse 19 in KJV).

B. [The Psalmist] speaks of Abraham, with whom [God] spoke both in word and in vision.

C. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "After these words the word of God came to Abram in a vision, saying . . ." (Genesis 15:1).

D. "To your faithful one" – "You will show truth to Jacob, faithfulness to Abraham" (Micah 7:20).

E. "Saying, I have set the crown upon one who is mighty" – for [Abraham] slew four kings in a single night.

F. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "And he divided himself against them by night . . . and smote them" (Genesis 14:15).

2. A. Said R. Phineas, And is there a case of someone who pursues people already slain?

B. For it is written, "He smote them and he [then] pursued them" (Genesis 14:15):

C. But [the usage at hand] teaches that the Holy One, blessed be he, did the pursuing, and Abraham did the slaying.

3. A. [Abin continues,] "I have exalted one chosen from the people" (Psalm 89:20).

B. "It is you, Lord, God, who chose Abram and took him out of Ur in Chaldea" (Nehemiah 9:7).

4. A. ["I have exalted one chosen from the people" (Psalm 89:20)] speaks of David, with whom God spoke both in speech and in vision.

B. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "In accord with all these words and in accord with this entire vision, so did Nathan speak to David" (2 Samuel 7:17).

C. "To your faithful one" (Psalm 89:20) [refers] to David, [in line with the following verse:] "Keep my soul, for I am faithful" (Psalm 86:2).

D. "Saying, I have set the crown upon one who is mighty" (Psalm 89:20) –

E. R. Abba bar Kahana and rabbis:

F. R. Abba bar Kahana said, David made thirteen wars.

G. And rabbis say, Eighteen.

H. But they do not really differ. The party who said thirteen wars [refers only to those that were fought] in behalf of the need of Israel [overall], while the one who held that [he fought] eighteen includes five [more, that David fought] for his own need, along with the thirteen [that he fought] for the need of Israel [at large].

I. "I have exalted one chosen from the people" (Psalm 89:20) – "And he chose David, his servant, and he took him . . ." (Psalm 78:70).

5. A. ["Of old you spoke in a vision to your faithful one"] speaks of Moses, with whom [God] spoke in both speech and vision, in line with the following verse of Scripture: "With him do I speak mouth to mouth [in a vision and not in dark speeches]" (Numbers 12:8).

B. "To your faithful one" – for [Moses] came from the tribe of Levi, the one concerning which it is written, "Let your Thummim and Urim be with your faithful one" (Deuteronomy 33:8).

C. "Saying, I have set the crown upon one who is mighty" –

D. The cited passage is to be read in accord with that which R. Tanhum b. Hanilai said, Under ordinary circumstances a burden which is too heavy for one person is light for two, or too heavy for two is light for four. But is it possible to suppose that a burden that is too weighty for six hundred thousand can be light for a single individual? Now the entire people of Israel were standing before Mount Sinai and saying, "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die" (Deuteronomy 5:22; verse 25 in KJV).

But, for his part, Moses heard the voice of God himself and lived [= I:I.6.B-D].

E. You may know that that is indeed the case, for among them all, the act of speech [of the Lord] called only to Moses, in line with that verse which states, "And [God] called to Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).

F. "I have exalted one chosen from the people" (Psalm 89:20)—"Had not Moses, whom he chose, stood in the breach before him to turn his wrath from destroying them [he would have destroyed Israel]" (Psalm 106:23).

The whole constitutes a single, beautifully worked out composition, applying Psalm 89:20 to Abraham, David, then Moses, at Nos. 1, 3 (Abraham), 4 (David), and 5 (Moses). No. 2 is a minor interpolation, hardly spoiling the total effect. No. 5.D is jarring and obviously inserted needlessly. That the purpose of the entire construction was to lead to the climactic citation of Leviticus 1:1 hardly can be doubted, since the natural chronological (and eschatological) order would have dictated Abraham, Moses, David. That the basic construction, moreover, forms a unity is shown by the careful matching of the stichs of the cited verse in the expositions of how the verse applies to the three heroes. If we had to postulate an "ideal form," it would be simply the juxtaposition of verses, A illustrated by X, B by Y, etc., with little or no extraneous language. But where, in the basic constituents of the construction, we do find explanatory language or secondary development, in the main it is necessary for sense. Accordingly, we see as perfect a construction as we are likely to find: whole, nearly entirely essential, with a minimum of intruded material. To be sure, what really looks to be essential is the notion of God's communicating by two media to the three great heroes. That is the clear point of the most closely corresponding passages of the whole. In that case, the reorganization and vast amplification come as an

afterthought, provoked by the construction of a passage serving Leviticus 1:1. Since 5.E contradicts the message of the rest, that must be regarded as a certainty. Then the whole, except 5.E (hence, 5.D, too), served Psalm 89:20, and 5.F is the original conclusion, with 5.D-E inserted by the redactor.

I:V

1. A. R. Joshua of Sikhnin in the name of R. Levi opened [discourse by citing the following] verse: "For it is better to be told, Come up here, than to be put lower in the presence of the prince" (Proverb 25:7).
 - B. R. Aqiba repeated [the following tradition] in the name of R. Simeon b. Azzai, Take a place two or three lower and sit down, so that people may tell you, Come up, but do not go up [beyond your station] lest people say to you, Go down. It is better for people to say to you, Come up, come up, than that they say to you, Go down, go down.
 - C. And so did Hillel say, When I am degraded, I am exalted, but when I am exalted, I am degraded.
 - D. What is the pertinent biblical verse? "He who raises himself is to be made to sit down, he who lowers himself is to be [raised so that he is] seen" (Psalm 113:5-6).
 - E. So too you find that, when the Holy One, blessed be he, revealed himself to Moses from the midst of the bush, Moses hid his face from him.
 - F. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "Moses hid his face" (Exodus 3:6).
2. A. Said to him the Holy One, blessed be he, "And now, go (LKH), I am sending you to Pharaoh" (Exodus 3:10).
 - B. Said R. Eleazar, [Taking the word "Go," (LK), not as the imperative, but to mean, "to you," and spelled LKH, with an H at the end, I may observe that]

it would have been sufficient to write, "You (LK)," [without adding] an H at the end of the word. [Why then did Scripture add the H?] To indicate to you, "If you are not the one who will redeem them, no one else is going to redeem them."

C. At the Red Sea, Moses stood aside. Said to him the Holy One, blessed be he, "Now you, raise your rod and stretch out your hand [over the sea and divide it]" (Exodus 14:16).

D. This is to say, If you do not split the sea, no one else is going to split it.

E. At Sinai Moses stood aside. Said to him the Holy One, blessed be he, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron" (Exodus 24:1).

F. This is to say, If you do not come up, no one else is going to come up.

G. At the [revelation of the instructions governing sacrifices at] the tent of meeting, [Moses] stood to the side. Said to him the Holy One, blessed be he, How long are you going to humble yourself? For the times demand only you.

H. You must recognize that that is the case, for among them all, the speech of God called only to Moses, as it is written, "And [God] called to Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).

We have once more to work backward from the end to find out what, at the outset, is necessary to make the point of the unit as a whole. It obviously is the emphasis upon how the humble man is called to take exalted position and leadership, that is, No. 2. Then what components of No. 1 are thematically irrelevant? None, so far as I can see. We may regard 1.A as standing by itself, a suitable introduction to a statement on the theme at hand, namely, it is better to be called upon, as at Leviticus 1:1. Then Nos. 1.B, C-D, E-F illustrate the same theme, leading to the introduction of the figure of Moses. E-F are so formulated

(“so too you find”) as to continue the foregoing, but, of course, they form a bridge to what follows, No. 2. Accordingly, a rather deft editorial hand has drawn together thematically pertinent materials. I find it difficult to imagine that the composition was not worked out essentially within a unitary framework, with the exegetical program of the whole, expressed at No. 2, fully in hand before the anthology of No. 1 was gathered. But the fact is that Nos. 1.B, C-D, do come from already framed materials.

I:VI

1. A. R. Tanhuma opened [discourse by citing the following verse:] “There are gold and a multitude of rubies, but lips [that speak] knowledge are the [most] valuable ornament” (Proverb 20:15).
 - B. Under ordinary circumstances [if] a person has gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, and all sorts of luxuries, but has no knowledge – what profit does he have?
 - C. In a proverb it says, If you have gotten knowledge, what do you lack? But if you lack knowledge, what have you gotten?
2. A. “There is gold” – all brought their free-will offering of gold to the tabernacle.
 - B. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: “And this is the offering [which you shall take from them, gold] . . .” (Exodus 25:3).
 - C. “And a multitude of rubies” – this refers to the free-will offering of the princes.
 - D. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: “And the rulers brought [onyx stones and the stones to be set]” (Exodus 35:27).
 - E. “But lips [that speak] knowledge are the [most] valuable ornament” (Proverb 20:15).
 - F. Now Moses was sad, for he said, Everyone has

brought his free-will offering for the tabernacle, but I have not brought a thing:

G. Said to him the Holy One, blessed be he, By your life: Your words [of address to the workers in teaching them how to build the tabernacle] are more precious to me than all of these other things.

H. You may find proof for that proposition, for among all of them, the Word [of God] called only to Moses, as it is written, "And [God] called to Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).

Once more we see a complete construction, with a seemingly irrelevant introduction, No. 1, serving to cite a verse in no way evoked by the passage at hand. The exposition of the verse, further, does not appear to bring us closer to the present matter. But at No. 2, both the cited verse and the exposition of the verse are joined to the verse before us. If we may venture a guess at the aesthetic *jeu d'esprit* involved, it is this: how do we move from what appears to be utterly irrelevant to what is in fact the very heart of the matter? The aesthetic accomplishment is then to keep the hearer or reader in suspense until the climax, at which the issue is worked out, the tension resolved. It must follow, of course, that we deal with unitary composition.

I:VII

1. A. What subject matter is discussed just prior to the passage at hand? It is the passage that deals with the building of the tabernacle [in which each pericope concludes with the words], "As the Lord commanded Moses" (cf. Exodus 38:22; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 32, 42, 43; 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32).

B. To what may this matter be compared? To a king who commanded his servant, saying to him, Build a palace for me.

C. On everything that [the employee] built, he wrote

the name of the king. When he built the walls, he inscribed the name of the king, when he set up the buttresses, he wrote the name of the king on them, when he roofed it over, he wrote the name of the king on [the roof]. After some days, the king came into the palace, and everywhere he looked, he saw his name inscribed. He said, Now my employee has paid me so much respect, and yet I am inside [the building he built], while he is outside: He called him to enter.

D. So when the Holy One, blessed be he, called to Moses, Make a tabernacle for me, on [every] thing that Moses made, he inscribed, “. . . as the Lord commanded Moses.”

E. Said the Holy One, blessed be he, Now Moses has paid me so much respect, and yet I am inside, while he is outside.

F. He called him to come in, on which account it is said, “And [God] called Moses” (Leviticus 1:1).

The passage begins with the imputation to the verb QR' of the sense of invitation. The focus of exegesis shifts from Moses to God's calling him. The exegetical resource is the repeated reference, as indicated, to Moses' doing as God had commanded him. But this is now read as Moses' inscribing God's name everywhere on the tabernacle as he built it, and the rest follows.

I:VIII

1. A. R. Samuel bar Nahman said in the name of R. Nathan, Eighteen times are statements of [God's] commanding written in the passage on the building of the tabernacle, corresponding to the eighteen vertebrae in the backbone.

B. Correspondingly, sages instituted eighteen statements of blessing in the Blessings of the Prayer, eighteen mentions of the divine name in the recitation of the *Shema*, eighteen mentions of the divine name in

the Psalm, "Ascribe to the Lord, you sons of might" (Psalm 29:1).

C. Said R. Hiyya bar Ada, [The counting of the eighteen statements of God's commandment to Moses] excludes [from the count the entry prior to the one in the verse], "And with him was Oholiab, son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan" (Exodus 38:23), [thus omitting reference to Exodus 38:23; verse 22 in KJV: "And Bezalel, son or Uri son of Hur of the tribe of Judah, made all that the Lord commanded Moses"]. But the counting then includes all further such references to the end of the book [of Exodus].

2. A. To what is the matter comparable? To a king who made a tour of a province, bringing with him generals, governors, and lesser officers, and [in watching the procession], we do not know which one among them is most favored. But [when we see] to whom the king turns and speaks, we know that he is the favorite.

B. So everyone surrounded the tabernacle, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy elders, so we do not know which one of them is the favorite. But now, since the Holy One, blessed be he, called to Moses and spoke to him, we know that he was the favorite of them all.

C. On that account it is said, "And [God] called Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).

3. A. To what may the matter be compared? To a king who made a tour of a province. With whom will he speak first? Is it not with the market-inspector, who oversees the province? Why? Because he bears responsibility for the very life of the province.

B. So Moses bears responsibility for Israel's every burden,

C. Saying to them, "This you may eat" (Leviticus 11:2), "and this you may not eat" (Leviticus 11:4), "This you may eat of whatever is in the water" (Leviticus

11:9), and this you may not eat, "This you shall treat as an abomination among fowl" (Leviticus 11:13), and so these you shall treat as an abomination, and others you need *not* abominate, "And these are the things that are unclean for you" (Leviticus 11:29), so these are unclean, and those are *not* unclean.

D. Therefore it is said, "And [God] called Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).

No. 1 bears no relationship to what follows. It continues I:VII, with its interest in the repetitions of the statement about Moses' having done as God had commanded him. However, 1.A-B stands completely outside the present frame of reference, Leviticus 1:1. 1.C harmonizes the number of times the cited phrase actually occurs with the number of vertebrae in the backbone. No. 1 further occurs at TB *Berakhot* 28b, TY *Berakhot* 4:3, so we may be certain the passage was tacked on because of the interest in the verse at the center of the preceding item.

No. 2 and No. 3 match one another, making essentially the same point and leading up to the citation of the verse by establishing the same connotation, "called" in the sense of "recognized, gave preference to." 3.C is wildly out of place, since, as it is now composed, the emphasis is on the fact that, if Scripture says you may *not* eat a certain thing, whatever is not covered in the negative statement then *may* be eaten. That is why the language of the verse is repeated, ". . . not this . . . but then that is permitted." In fact, we should move from 3.A-B to D. The passage as a whole then is a composite of three distinct items.

I:IX

1. A. "And [the Lord] called to Moses" (Leviticus 1:1) [bearing the implication, to Moses in particular].
 - B. Now did he not call Adam? [But surely he did:] "And the Lord God called Adam" (Genesis 3:9).
 - C. [He may have called him, but he did not speak

with him, while at Leviticus 1:1, the Lord “called Moses and spoke to him”], for is it not undignified for a king to speak with his tenant-farmer [which Adam, in the Garden of Eden, was]?

D. “. . . and the Lord spoke to him” (Leviticus 1:1) [to him in particular].

E. Did he not speak also with Noah? [But surely he did:] “And God spoke to Noah” (Genesis 8:15).

F. [He may have spoken to him, but he did not call him,] for is it not undignified for a king to speak with [better: *call*] his ship’s captain [herding the beasts into the ark]?

G. “And [the Lord] called to Moses” (Leviticus 1:1) [in particular].

H. Now did he not call Abraham? [But surely he did:] “And the angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven” (Genesis 22:15).

I. [He may have called him, but he did not speak with him,] for is it not undignified for a king to speak with his host (Genesis 18:1)?

J. “And the Lord spoke with him” (Leviticus 1:1) [in particular].

K. And did he not speak with Abraham? [Surely he did:] “And Abram fell on his face, and [God] spoke with him” (Genesis 17:3).

L. But is it not undignified for a king to speak with his host?

2. A. “And the Lord called Moses” (Leviticus 1:1), but not as in the case of Abraham.

B. [How so?] In the case of Abraham, it is written, “And an angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven” (Genesis 22:15). The angel did the calling, the Word [of God] then did the speaking.

C. Here [by contrast], said R. Abin, the Holy One, blessed be he, said I am the one who does the calling, and I am the one who does the speaking.

D. "I, even I, have spoken, yes, I have called him, I have brought him and he shall prosper in his way" (Isaiah 48:15).

The point of No. 1 is clear, but the text is not. What is demanded is three instances in which God called someone but did not speak with him, or spoke with him but did not call him, in contrast with the use of both verbs, "call" and "speak," in regard to Moses at Leviticus 1:1. If that is what is intended, then the pattern does not work perfectly for all three: Adam, Noah, and Abraham. 1.A-D and E-G are smooth. With Abraham, however, the exposition breaks down, since the point should be that he called Abraham but did not actually speak with him, and it is only No. 2 that makes *that* point. The repetition of I at L therefore is only part of the problem of the version. We can readily reconstruct what is needed, of course, in the model of the passages for Adam and Noah.

No. 2 of course is independent of No. 1, and handsomely worked out. But No. 2 cannot have served the form selected by the framer of the triplet at No. 1.

My guess is that No. 1 fails as it does because of yet another problem. F does have God *speaking* with Noah, while G says that that is undignified, and the same problem recurs with Abraham. In all, No. 2 is a success, and No. 1 is not. Here it is difficult to claim that someone deliberately worked up the entire unit, leading to the climax at the very end. Two existing sets have been combined, and the first of the two turns out to be flawed.

I:X

1. A. "[And the Lord called Moses and spoke to him] from the tent of meeting" (Leviticus 1:1).

B. Said R. Eleazar, Even though the Torah [earlier] had been given to Israel at Sinai as a fence [restricting their actions], they were liable to punishment on ac-

count of [violating] it only after it has been repeated for [taught to] them in the tent of meeting.

C. This may be compared to a royal decree, which had been written and sealed and brought to the province. The inhabitants of the province became liable to be punished on account of violating the decree only after it had been spelled out for them in a public meeting in the province.

D. Along these same lines, even though the Torah had been given to Israel at Sinai, they bore liability for punishment on account of violating it[s commandments] only after it had been repeated for them in the tent of meeting.

E. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "Until I had brought him into my mother's house and into the chamber of my teaching [lit.: parent]" (Song of Songs 3:4).

F. ". . . into my mother's house" refers to Sinai.

G. ". . . and into the chamber of my teaching" refers to the tent of meeting, from which the Israelites were commanded through instruction [in the Torah].

The passage is formally perfect, running from the beginning, a general proposition, 1.B, through a parable, C, explicitly linked to the original proposition, D, and then joined to the exposition of a seemingly unrelated verse of Scripture, which turns out to say exactly what the general proposition has said. So the original statement, B, is worked out in two separate and complementary ways, first, parabolic, second, exegetical.

I cannot see any problem but one: what has the stated proposition to do with the present context? In fact, the theme is the tent of meeting, that alone. We may expect an anthology of materials on the tent of meeting, none of which bears any distinctive relationship to what happens there, so far as the verses following Leviticus 1:1 will tell us. In other words, the redaction of materials following

the order of verses of Scripture in the present instance imposes no thesis upon what will be said *about* those materials, what is important *in* them. Rather we have nothing more than a list of topics, each to be treated through the formation of an anthology of materials relevant to a topic, not through the unpacking of a problem indicated by the substance and the context at hand.

I:XI

1. A. Said R. Joshua b. Levi, If the nations of the world had known how valuable the tent of meeting was to them, they would have sheltered it with tents and balustrades.

B. [How so?] You note that before the tabernacle was erected, the nations of the world could hear the noise of [God's] speech and [fearing an earthquake(?)] they would rush out of their dwellings.

C. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "For who is there of all flesh, who has heard the voice of the living God [speaking out of the midst of the first as we have, and lived]?" (Deuteronomy 5:23).

2. A. Said R. Simon, The word [of God] went forth in two modes, for Israel as life, for the nations of the world as poison.

B. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "as you have, and lived" (Deuteronomy 4:33).

C. You hear [the voice of God] and live, while the nations of the world hear and die.

D. That is in line with what R. Hiyya taught [= Sifra Dibura dinedabah 2:10], "from the tent of meeting" (Leviticus 1:1) teaches that the sound was cut off and did not go beyond the tent of meeting.

Nos. 1 and 2 go over the same ground but are unrelated. For the sense of 1.B, I follow Margulies. But then the relevance of the verse cited at 1.C is not clear. I should have thought that the nations of the world would benefit from

the possibility of hearing God's speech, which would then have warned them about an impending earthquake, for example, getting them out of their houses in time. But 1.C and No. 2 make the point that the tent of meeting *prevented* the gentiles from hearing God's voice, and this was good for them, since the Torah was life for Israel and death for the gentiles. Accordingly, the sense of 1.B as Margulies reads it seems incongruous to the meaning required by its context. Israelstam² gives: "rushed in fright out of their camps." I cannot suggest anything better. As noted above, the larger context of Leviticus 1:1 makes no impact upon the exegesis of the passage, which is focused upon the theme, the tent of meeting, and not on the meaning of the place or tent in this setting.

I:XII

1. A. Said R. Isaac, Before the tent of meeting was set up, prophecy was common among the nations of the world. Once the tent of meeting was set up, prophecy disappeared from among them. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "I held it [the Holy Spirit, producing], and would not let it go [until I had brought it . . . into the chamber of her that conceived me]" (Song of Songs 3:4).

B. They said to him, Lo, Balaam [later on] practiced prophecy:

C. He said to them, He did so for the good of Israel: "Who has counted the dust of Jacob" (Numbers 23:10). "No one has seen iniquity in Jacob" (Numbers 23:21). "For there is no enchantment with Jacob" (Numbers 23:23). "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob" (Numbers 24:5). "There shall go forth a star out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). "And out of Jacob shall one have dominion" (Numbers 24:19).

"The chamber" of 1.A is the tent of meeting, as before. In fact the passage at hand is continuous with the fore-

going. As we shall see, the established theme then moves forward in what follows. The construction is of course unitary. "They said to him" of B simply sets up discourse; it is not meant to signify an actual conversation, rather serves as a convention of rhetoric. B then allows C to string out the relevant verses. We now continue the same matter of Balaam, prophet of the gentiles, and Israel.

I:XIII

1. A. What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and those of the nations [= Genesis Rabbah 52:5]?
 - B. R. Hama b. R. Hanina and R. Issachar of Kepar Mandi:
 - C. R. Hama b. R. Hanina said, The Holy One, blessed be he, is revealed to the prophets of the nations of the world only in partial speech, in line with the following verse of Scripture: "And God called [WYQR, rather than WYQR', as at Leviticus 1:1] Balaam" (Numbers 23:16). On the other hand, [he reveals himself] to the prophets of Israel in full and complete speech, as it is said, "And [the Lord] called (WYQR') to Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).
 - D. Said R. Issachar of Kepar Mandi, Should that [prophecy, even in partial form] be [paid to them as their] wage? [Surely not, in fact there is no form of speech to gentile prophets, who are frauds]. [The connotation of] the language, "And [God] called (WYQR) to Balaam" (Numbers 23:16) is solely uncleanness. That is in line with the usage in the following verse of Scripture: "That is not clean, by that which happens (MQRH) by night" (Deuteronomy 23:11). [So the root is the same, with the result that YQR at Numbers 23:16 does not bear the meaning of God's calling to Balaam. God rather declares Balaam unclean.]
 - E. But the prophets of Israel [are addressed] in language of holiness, purity, clarity, in language used by

the ministering angels to praise God. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "And they called (QR') one to another and said" (Isaiah 6:3).

2. A. Said R. Eleazar b. Menahem, It is written, "The Lord is far from the wicked, but the prayer of the righteous does he hear" (Proverb 15:29).

B. "The Lord is far from the wicked" refers to the prophets of the nations of the world.

C. "But the prayer of the righteous does he hear" refers to the prophets of Israel.

D. You [furthermore] find that the Holy One, blessed be he, appears to the prophets of the nations of the world only like a man who comes from some distant place.

E. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "From a distant land they have come to me, from Babylonia" (Isaiah 39:3).

F. But in the case of the prophets of Israel [he is always] near at hand: "And he [forthwith] appeared [not having come from a great distance]" (Genesis 18:1), "and [the Lord] called" (Leviticus 1:1).

3. A. Said R. Yose b. Biba, The Holy One, blessed be he, is revealed to the prophets of the nations of the world only by night, when people leave one another: "When men branch off, from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men" (Job 4:13), "Then a word came secretly to me" (Job 4:12). [Job is counted among the prophets of the gentiles.]

4. A. R. Hanana b. R. Pappa and rabbis [= Genesis Rabbah 74:7]:

B. R. Hanana b. R. Pappa said, The matter may be compared to a king who, with his friend, was in a hall, with a curtain hanging down between them. When [the king] speaks to his friend, he turns back the curtain and speaks with his friend.

C. And rabbis say, [The matter may be compared]

to a king who had a wife and a concubine. When he walks about with his wife, he does so in full public view. When he walks about with his concubine, he does so discreetly. So, too, the Holy One, blessed be he, is revealed to the prophets of the nations of the world only at night, in line with that which is written: "And God came to Abimelech in a dream by night" (Genesis 20:3). "And God came to Laban, the Aramean, in a dream by night" (Genesis 31:24). "And God came to Balaam at night" (Numbers 22:20).

D. To the prophets of Israel, however, [he comes] by day: "[And the Lord appeared to Abraham . . .] as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day" (Genesis 18:1). "And it came to pass by day that the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 6:28). "On the day on which he commanded the children of Israel" (Leviticus 7:38). "These are the generations of Aaron and Moses. God spoke to Moses by day on Mount Sinai" (Numbers 3:1).

Once the topic of comparing Israel's receiving of revelation to that of the nations of the world has arisen, at I:XII, we pursue it further, and, as we shall see, I:XIV adds still more pertinent material. We have a fine superscription, 1.A, with three independent items strung together, 1.B-D, 2-3, and 4. Nos. 1.B-D and 4 follow an obvious, simple pattern, and Nos. 2-3 simply assign a protracted saying to a given name. We have no reason to suppose the entire set has come from a single hand. Since the same points are made by two or more authorities, it is likely that a redactor has chosen pertinent materials out of what he had available.

I:XIV

1. A. What is the difference between Moses and all the other [Israelite] prophets?
 - B. R. Judah b. R. Ilai and rabbis:

C. R. Judah said, All the other prophets saw [their visions] through nine mirrors [darkly], in line with the following verse of Scripture: "And the appearance of the vision which I saw was like the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the River Chebar, and I fell on my face" (Ezekiel 43:3) [with the root R^cH occurring once in the plural, hence two, and seven other times in the singular, nine in all].

D. But Moses saw [his vision] through a single mirror: "in [one vision] and not in dark speeches" (Numbers 12:8).

E. Rabbis said, All other [Israelite] prophets saw [their visions] through a dirty mirror. That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "And I have multiplied visions, and by the ministry of the angels I have used similitudes" (Hosea 12:11; verse 10 in KJV).

F. But Moses saw [his vision] through a polished mirror: "And the image of God does he behold" (Numbers 12:8).

2. A. R. Phineas in the name of R. Hoshai: [The matter may be compared] to a king who makes his appearance to his courtier in his informal garb [as an intimate].

B. For in this world the Indwelling Presence makes its appearance only to individuals [one by one], while concerning the age to come, what does Scripture say? "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see [it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken]" (Isaiah 40:5).

The continuous discourse continues its merry way, ignoring not only the passage at hand—Leviticus 1:1—but the several topics provoked by exposition of the theme under discussion in connection with the tent of meeting. Having compared Balaam to Israelite prophets, we proceed to compare Israelite prophets to Moses, with the predictable result. No. 1 preserves the matter. But No. 2 on the

surface is wildly out of place, since Moses now is forgotten, and the contrast is between prophecy in this age and in the time to come—a subject no one has hitherto brought up. But the messianic finis is a redactional convention.

Note that Margulies rejects as spurious I:XV, in the standard printed text. This passage is absent in all manuscript evidence of Leviticus R. except for one and was added in the earliest printed texts.³

Judaism and Scripture

To state the outcome at the very beginning, when Judaism had defined its matrix of myth and rite—a system of worldview and way of life focused on a particular social group—then Judaism attained its independent voice, its inner structure and logic. At that moment Scripture would reenter and assume its proper position as source of truth and proof for all (autonomously framed, independently reached) propositions. Scripture became paramount when it no longer provided a source of proof texts for the Mishnah but began to dominate discourse and define rhetoric. But Scripture succeeded the Mishnah as the focus of discourse only when discourse itself had expressed determinants autonomous of both the Mishnah and also Scripture—determinants, or propositions—prior to all else. To revert to the operative myth, it is only when the Torah had reached full expression as an autonomous entity of logic that the (mere) *components* of Torah—Scripture, the Mishnah and associated writings alike—found their proper place and proportion.

Accordingly, when we listen to the framers of Leviticus Rabbah, we see how statements in the document at hand thus become intelligible not contingently, that is, on the strength of an established text, but *a priori*, that is, on the basis of a deeper logic of meaning and an independent principle of rhetorical intelligibility. How so? Leviticus Rabbah is topical, not exegetical. Each of its thirty-seven *par-*

ashiyyot pursues its given topic and develops points relevant to that topic. It is logical, in that (to repeat) discourse appeals to an underlying principle of composition and intelligibility, and that logic inheres in what is said. Logic is what joins one sentence to the next and forms the whole into paragraphs of meaning, intelligible propositions, each with its place and sense in a still larger, accessible system. Because of logic one mind connects to another, public discourse becomes possible, debate on issues of general intelligibility takes place, and an anthology of statements about a single subject becomes a composition of theorems about that subject. In this sense, after the Mishnah, Leviticus Rabbah constitutes the next major logical composition in the rabbinic canon. Accordingly, with Leviticus Rabbah, rabbis take up the problem of saying what they wish to say not in an exegetical, but in a syllogistic and freely discursive logic and rhetoric. It follows that just as much as the Mishnah marks a radical break from all prior literature produced by Jews, so Leviticus Rabbah marks a stunning departure from all prior literature produced by a particular kind of Jew, namely, rabbis. Since these same rabbis defined Judaism as we have known it from their time to ours, we rightly turn to the book at hand for evidence about how the Scripture entered into, was absorbed by, and reached full status as the foundation document of the Judaism taking shape at just this time.

What Is New in Leviticus Rabbah?

To seek, through biblical exegesis, to link the Mishnah to Scripture, detail by detail, represented a well-trodden and firmly packed path. One document opened a new road to Scripture, and that is Leviticus Rabbah. How so? Leviticus Rabbah is the first major rabbinic composition to propose to make topical and discursive statements, not merely a phrase-by-phrase or verse-by-verse exegesis of a document, whether the Mishnah or Scripture itself. Rather,

the framers of that composition undertook to offer propositions, declarative sentences (so to speak), in which, not through the exegesis of verses of Scripture in the order of Scripture but through an order dictated by their own sense of the logic of syllogistic composition, they would say what they had in mind. To begin with, they laid down their own topical program, related to, but essentially autonomous from, that of the book of Leviticus. Second, in expressing their ideas on these topics, they never undertook simply to cite a verse of Scripture and then to claim that that verse states precisely what they had in mind to begin with. Accordingly, through rather distinctive modes of expression, the framers said what they wished to say in their own way—just as had the authors of the Mishnah itself. True, in so doing, the composers of Leviticus Rabbah treated Scripture as had their predecessors. That is to say, to them as to those who had gone before, Scripture provided a rich treasury of facts.

The Mode of Thought of Leviticus Rabbah

The paramount and dominant exegetical construction in Leviticus Rabbah is the base-verse/intersecting verse exegesis. Parashah I:I provides an ample instance. In this construction, a verse of Leviticus is cited (hence: base-verse), and another verse, from such books as Job, Proverbs, Qohelet, or Psalms, is then cited. The latter, not the former, is subjected to detailed and systematic exegesis. But the exegetical exercise ends up by leading the intersecting verse back to the base-verse and reading the latter in terms of the former. In such an exercise, what in fact do we do? *We read one thing in terms of something else.* To begin with, it is the base-verse in terms of the intersecting verse. But it also is the intersecting verse in other terms as well—a multiple-layered construction of analogy and parable. The intersecting verse's elements always turn out to stand for, to signify, to speak of, something other than

that to which they openly refer. If water stands for Torah, the skin disease for evil speech, the reference to something for some other thing entirely, then the mode of thought at hand is simple. One thing symbolizes another, speaks not of itself but of some other thing entirely.

How shall we describe this mode of thought? It seems to me we may call it an *as-if* way of seeing things. That is to say, it is *as if* a common object or symbol really represented an uncommon one. Nothing says what it means. Everything important speaks metonymically, elliptically, parabolically, symbolically. All statements carry deeper meaning, which inheres in other statements altogether. The profound sense, then, of the base-verse emerges only through restatement within and through the intersecting verse—*as if* the base-verse spoke of things that, on the surface, we do not see at all.

Accordingly, if we ask the single prevalent literary construction to testify to the prevailing frame of mind, its message is that things are never what they seem. All things demand interpretation. Interpretation begins in the search for analogy, for that to which the thing is likened, hence the deep sense in which all exegesis at hand is parabolic. It is a quest for that for which the thing in its deepest structure stands.

Exegesis as we know it, in Leviticus Rabbah (and not only there), consists of an exercise in analogical thinking—something is like something else, stands for, evokes, or symbolizes that which is quite outside itself. It may be the opposite of something else, in which case it conforms to the exact opposite of the rules that govern that something else. The reasoning is analogical or it is contrastive, and the fundamental logic is taxonomic. The taxonomy rests on those comparisons and contrasts we should call, as I said, metonymic and parabolic. In that case, what lies on the surface misleads. What lies beneath or beyond the surface—there is the true reality, the world of truth and

meaning. To revert to the issue of taxonomy, the tracts that allow classification serve only for that purpose. They signify nothing more than that something more.

How shall we characterize people who see things this way? They constitute the opposite of those who call a thing as it is. Self-evidently, they have become accustomed to perceiving more—or less—than is at hand. Perhaps that is a natural mode of thought for the Jews of this period (and not then alone), so long used to calling themselves God's first love, yet now seeing others with greater worldly reason claiming that same advantaged relationship. Not in mind only, but still more, in the politics of the world, the people that remembered its origins along with the very creation of the world and founding of humanity, that recalled how it alone served, and serves, the one and only God, for more than three hundred years had confronted quite a different existence. The radical disjuncture between the way things were and the way Scripture said things were supposed to be—and in actuality would some day become—surely imposed an unbearable tension. It was one thing for the slave born to slavery to endure. It was another for the free man sold into slavery to accept that same condition. The vanquished people, the nation that had lost its city and its temple, that had, moreover, produced another nation from its midst to take over its Scripture and much else, could not bear too much reality. That defeated people will then have found refuge in a mode of thought that trained vision to see things other than as the eyes perceived them. Among the diverse ways by which the weak and subordinated accommodate to their circumstance, the one of iron-willed pretense in life is most likely to yield the mode of thought at hand: things never are, because they cannot be, what they seem.

The Role of Scripture in Leviticus Rabbah: Renewal and Reconstruction

Everyone has always known that Jews read Scripture. Every system of Judaism has done so. But why did they do so? What place did Scripture take in the larger systems of reality presented by various Judaisms? Why one part of Scripture rather than some other, and why read it in one way rather than another? These questions do not find ready answers in the mere observation that Jews read Scripture and construct Judaisms out of it. Nor is that observation one of a predictable and necessary pattern, since some of the documents of the rabbinic canon did not focus upon Scripture or even find it necessary to quote Scripture a great deal. The Mishnah, Tosefta, and important units of discourse of both Talmuds, for example, did not express their ideas in the way in which people who “read Scripture” ought to. They make use of Scripture sparingly, only with restraint adducing proofs for propositions even when these are based upon scriptural statements. So the paramount and dominant place accorded to Scripture in Leviticus Rabbah and documents like it cannot pass without comment and explanation.

Exactly what can we say for the position of Scripture in this composition in particular, and what did Scripture contribute? We ask first about the use of Scripture in the mode of thought at hand: where, why, and how did Scripture find its central place in the minds of people who thought in the way in which the framers of our document did? The answer is that Scripture contributed that other world that underlay this one. From Scripture came that other set of realities to be discovered in the ordinary affairs of the day. Scripture defined the inner being, the mythic life, that sustained Israel. The world is to be confronted *as if* things are not as they seem, because it is Scripture that tells us how things always are – not one-time, in the past

only, not one-time, in the future only, but now and always. So the key to the system is what happens to, and through, Scripture. The lock that is opened is the deciphering of the code by which people were guided in their denial of one thing and recognition and affirmation of the presence of some other. It was not general, therefore mere lunacy, but specific, therefore cultural.

To spell this out: the mode of thought pertained to a particular set of ideas. People did not engage ubiquitously and individually in an ongoing pretense that things always had to be other than they seemed. Had they done so, the Jewish nation would have disintegrated into a collectivity of pure insanity. The insistence on the *as-if* character of reality collectively focused upon one, and only one, alternative existence. All parties (so far as we know) entered into and shared that same and single interior universe. It was the one framed by Scripture.

What happens in Leviticus Rabbah (and, self-evidently, in other documents of the same sort)? Reading one thing in terms of something else, the builders of the document systematically adopted for themselves the reality of the Scripture, its history and doctrines. They transformed that history from a sequence of one-time events, leading from one place to some other, into an ever-present mythic world. No longer was there one Moses, one David, one set of happenings of a distinctive and never-to-be-repeated character. Now whatever events the thinkers propose to take account of must enter and be absorbed into that established and ubiquitous pattern and structure founded in Scripture. It is not that biblical history repeats itself. Rather, biblical history no longer constitutes history as a story of things that happened once, long ago, and pointed to some one moment in the future. Rather it becomes an account of things that happen every day—hence, an ever-present mythic world, as I said.

A rapid glance at Leviticus Rabbah (and its fellows)

tells us that Scripture supplies the document with its structure, its content, its facts, its everything. But a deeper analysis also demonstrates that Scripture never provides the document with that structure, contents, and facts, that it now exhibits. Everything is reshaped and reframed. Whence the paradox?

Scripture as a whole does not dictate the order of discourse, let alone its character. Just as the talmudic authors destroyed the wholeness of the Mishnah and chose to take up its bits and pieces, so the exegetical writers did the same to Scripture. In our document they chose in Leviticus itself a verse here, a phrase there. These then presented the pretext for propositional discourse commonly quite out of phase with the cited passage. Verses that are quoted ordinarily shift from the meanings they convey to the implications they contain, speaking—as I have made clear—about something, anything, other than what they seem to be saying. So the *as-if* frame of mind brought to Scripture brings renewal to Scripture, seeing everything with fresh eyes.

And the result of the new vision was a reimagining of the social world envisioned by the document at hand, I mean, the everyday world of Israel in its Land in that difficult time. For what the sages now proposed was a reconstruction of existence along the lines of the ancient design of Scripture as they read it. What that meant was, from a sequence of one-time and linear events, everything that happened was turned into a repetition of known and already experienced paradigms, hence, once more, a mythic being. The source and core of the myth, of course, derive from Scripture—Scripture reread, renewed, reconstructed along with the society that revered Scripture.

So, to summarize, the mode of thought that dictated the issues and the logic of the document, telling the thinkers to see one thing in terms of something else, addressed Scripture in particular and collectively. And thinking as

they did, the framers of the document saw Scripture in a new way, just as they saw their own circumstance afresh, rejecting their world in favor of Scripture's, reliving Scripture's world in their own terms.

That, incidentally, is why they did not write history, an account of what was happening and what it meant. It was not that they did not recognize or appreciate important changes and trends reshaping their nation's life. They could not deny that reality. In their apocalyptic reading of the dietary and leprosy laws, they made explicit their close encounter with the history of the world as they knew it. But they had another mode of responding to history. It was to treat history *as if* it were already known and readily understood. Whatever happened had already happened. How so? Scripture dictated the contents of history, laying forth the structures of time, the rules that prevailed and were made known in events. Self-evidently, these same thinkers projected into Scripture's day the realities of their own, turning Moses and David into rabbis, for example. But that is how people think in that mythic, enchanted world in which, to begin with, reality blends with dream, and hope projects onto future and past alike how people want things to be.

The upshot is that the mode of thought revealed by the literary construction under discussion constitutes a rather specific expression of a far more general and prevailing way of seeing things. The literary form in concrete ways says that the entirety of the biblical narrative speaks to each circumstance, that the system of Scripture as a whole not only governs, but comes prior to, any concrete circumstance of that same Scripture. Everything in Scripture is relevant everywhere else in Scripture. It must follow that the Torah (to use the mythic language of the system at hand) defines reality under all specific circumstances. Obviously we did not have to come to the specific literary traits of the document at hand to discover those prevailing

characteristics of contemporary and later documents of the rabbinic canon. True, every exercise in referring one biblical passage to another expands the range of discourse to encompass much beyond the original referent. But that is commonplace in the exegesis of Scripture, familiar wherever *midrash* exegesis was undertaken, in no way particular to rabbinic writings.

The System of Leviticus Rabbah

The message of Leviticus Rabbah comes to us from the ultimate framers. It is delivered through their selection of materials already available as well as through their composition of new ones. What we now require is a clear statement of the major propositions expressed in Leviticus Rabbah. That will emerge through classification of the statements, with the notion that the principal themes, and the messages on those themes, should coalesce into a few clear statements.

The recurrent message may be stated in a single paragraph. God loves Israel, so he gave them the Torah, which defines their life and governs their welfare. Israel is alone in its category (*sui generis*), as in Parashah One, so what is a virtue to Israel is a vice to the nation, life-giving to Israel, poison to the gentiles. True, Israel sins, but God forgives that sin, having punished the nation on account of it. Such a process has yet to come to an end, but it will culminate in Israel's complete regeneration. Meanwhile, Israel's assurance of God's love lies in the many expressions of special concern, for even the humblest and most ordinary aspects of the national life: the food the nation eats, the sexual practices by which it procreates. These life-sustaining, life-transmitting activities draw God's special interest, as a mark of his general love for Israel. Israel then is supposed to achieve its life in conformity with the marks of God's love. These indications moreover signify also the character of Israel's difficulty, namely, subordination to

the nations in general, but to the fourth kingdom, Rome, in particular. Both food laws and skin diseases stand for the nations. There is yet another category of sin, also collective and generative of collective punishment, and that is social. The moral character of Israel's life, the treatment of people by one another, the practice of gossip and small-scale thuggery – these too draw down divine penalty. The nation's fate therefore corresponds to its moral condition. The moral condition, however, emerges not only from the current generation. Israel's richest hope lies in the merit of the ancestors, thus in the Scriptural record of the merits attained by the founders of the nation, those who originally brought it into being and gave it life.

The world to come upon the nation is so portrayed as to restate these same propositions. Merit overcomes sin, and doing religious duties or supererogatory acts of kindness will win merit for the nation that does them. Israel will be saved at the end of time, and the age, or world, to follow will be exactly the opposite of this one. Much that we find in the account of Israel's national life, worked out through the definition of the liminal relationships, recurs in slightly altered form in the picture of the world to come.

If we now ask about further recurring themes or topics, there is one so commonplace that we should have to list the majority of paragraphs of discourse in order to provide a complete list. It is the list of events in Israel's history, meaning, in this context, Israel's history solely in scriptural times, down through the return to Zion. The one-time events of the generation of the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the patriarchs and the sojourn in Egypt, the exodus, the revelation of the Torah at Sinai, the golden calf, the Davidic monarchy and the building of the Temple, Sennacherib, Hezekiah, and the destruction of northern Israel, Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of the Temple in 586, the life of Israel in Babylonian captivity, Daniel and his associates, Mordecai and Haman – these events occur over

and over again. They turn out to serve as paradigms of sin and atonement, steadfastness and divine intervention, and equivalent lessons. We find, in fact, a fairly standard repertoire of scriptural heroes or villains, on the one side, and conventional lists of Israel's enemies and their actions and downfall, on the other. The boastful, for instance, include (VII:VI) the generation of the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh, Sisera, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked empire (Rome) — contrasted to Israel, "despised and humble in this world." The four kingdoms recur again and again, always ending, of course, with Rome, with the repeated message that after Rome will come Israel. But Israel has to make this happen through its faith and submission to God's will. Lists of enemies ring the changes on Cain, the Sodomites, Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman.

Accordingly, the mode of thought brought to bear upon the theme of history remains exactly the same as before: list making, with data exhibiting similar taxonomic traits drawn together into lists based on common monothetic traits or definitions. These lists then, through the power of repetition, make a single enormous point or prove a social law of history. The catalogues of exemplary heroes and historical events serve a further purpose. They provide a model of how contemporary events are to be absorbed into the biblical paradigm. Since biblical events exemplify recurrent happenings, sin and redemption, forgiveness and atonement, they lose their one-time character. At the same time and in the same way, current events find a place within the ancient, but eternally present, paradigmatic scheme. So no new historical events, other than exemplary episodes in lives of heroes, demand narration because, through what is said about the past, what was happening in the times of the framers of *Leviticus Rabbah* would also come under consideration. This mode of dealing with biblical history and contemporary events produces two recip-

rocal effects. The first is the mythicization of biblical stories, their removal from the framework of ongoing, unique patterns of history and sequences of events and their transformation into accounts of things that happen all the time. The second is that contemporary events too lose all of their specificity and enter the paradigmatic framework of established mythic existence. So (1) the Scripture's myth happens every day, and (2) every day produces reenactment of the Scripture's myth.

In seeking the substance of the mythic being invoked by the exegetes at hand, who read the text as if it spoke about something else and the world as if it lived out the text, we uncover a simple fact. At the center of the pretense, that is, the *as-if* mentality of Leviticus Rabbah and its framers, we find a simple proposition. Israel is God's special love. That love is shown in a simple way. Israel's present condition of subordination derives from its own deeds. It follows that God cares, so Israel may look forward to redemption on God's part in response to Israel's own regeneration through repentance.

Salvation and Sanctification

The message of Leviticus Rabbah attaches itself to the book of Leviticus, as if that book had come from prophecy and addressed the issue of salvation. But it came from the priesthood and spoke of sanctification. The paradoxical syllogism—the *as-if* reading, the opposite of how things seem—of the composers of Leviticus Rabbah therefore reaches simple formulation. In the very setting of sanctification we find the promise of salvation. In the topics of the cult and the priesthood we uncover the national and social issues of the moral life and redemptive hope of Israel. The repeated comparison and contrast of priesthood and prophecy, sanctification and salvation, turn out to produce a complement, which comes to most perfect union in the text at hand.

The basic mode of thought – denial of what is at hand in favor of a deeper reality – proves remarkably apt. The substance of thought in Leviticus Rabbah confronts the crisis too.

Are we lost for good to the fourth empire, the now-Christian Rome? No, we may yet be saved.

Has God rejected us forever? No, aided by the merit of the patriarchs and matriarchs and of the Torah and religious duties, we gain God's love.

What must we do to be saved? We must do nothing, we must be something: sanctified.

That status we gain through keeping the rules that make Israel holy. So salvation is through sanctification, which is all embodied in Leviticus and read as rules for the holy people.

The Messiah will come not because of what a pagan emperor does, nor, indeed, because of Jewish action, but because of Israel's own moral condition. When Israel enters the right relationship with God, then God will respond to Israel's condition by restoring things to their proper balance. Israel cannot, and need not, so act as to force the coming of the Messiah. Israel can attain the condition of sanctification, by forming a moral and holy community, that God's response will follow the established prophecy of Moses and the prophets. *So the basic doctrine of Leviticus Rabbah is the metamorphosis of Leviticus.* Instead of holy caste, we deal with holy people. Instead of holy place, we deal with holy community, in its holy land. The deepest exchange between reality and inner vision, therefore, comes at the very surface: the rereading of Leviticus in terms of a different set of realities from those to which the book, on the surface, relates. No other biblical book would have served so well; it had to be Leviticus. Only through what the framers did on that particular book could they deliver their astonishing message and vision.

The complementary points of stress in Leviticus Rab-

bah – the age to come will come, but Israel must reform itself beforehand – address that context defined by Julian, on the one side, and by the new anti-Judaic Christian policy of the later fourth and fifth centuries, on the other. The repeated reference to Esau and Edom and how they mark the last monarchy before God’s through Israel underlines the same point. These truly form the worst of the four kingdoms. But they also come at the end. If only we shape up, so will history. As I said, that same message would hardly have surprised earlier generations and it would be repeated afresh later on. But it is the message of our document, and it does address this context in particular. We therefore grasp an astonishing correspondence between how people are thinking, what they wish to say, and the literary context – rereading a particular book of Scripture in terms of a set of values different from those expressed in that book – in which they deliver their message. Given the mode of thought, the crisis that demanded reflection, the message found congruent to the crisis, we must find entirely logical the choice of Leviticus and the treatment accorded to it. So the logic and the doctrine – the *logos* and *topos* of our opening discussion – prove remarkably to accord with the society and politics that produced and received Leviticus Rabbah.

Scripture in Judaism

Scripture proves paramount on the surface, but subordinated in the deep structure of the logic of Leviticus Rabbah. Why so? Because Scripture enjoys no autonomous standing, e.g., as the sole source of facts. It does not dictate the order of discussion. It does not (by itself) determine the topics to be taken up, since its verses, cited one by one in sequence, do not tell us how matters will proceed. Scripture, moreover, does not allow us to predict what proposition a given set of verses will yield. On the contrary, because of the insistence that one verse be read in light of

another, one theme in light of another, augmentative one, Leviticus Rabbah prohibits us from predicting at the outset, merely by reading a given verse of Scripture, the way in which a given theme will be worked out or the way in which a given proposition will impart a message through said theme.

So, in all, the order of Scripture does not govern the sequence of discourse, the themes of Scripture do not tell us what themes will be taken up, the propositions of Scripture about its stated themes, what Scripture says, in its context, about a given topic, do not define the propositions of Leviticus Rabbah about that topic. The upshot is simple. Scripture contributes everything and nothing. It provides the decoration, the facts, much language. But whence the heart and soul and spirit? Where the matrix, where source? The editors, doing the work of selection, making their points through juxtaposition of things not otherwise brought into contact with one another, they are the ones who speak throughout. True, the voice is the voice of Scripture. But the hand is the hand of the collectivity of the sages, who are authors speaking through Scripture.

If, moreover, Scripture contributes facts, so too do the ones who state those ineluctable truths that are expressed in parables, and so too do the ones who tell stories, also exemplifying truths, about great heroes and villains. No less, but also no more, than these, Scripture makes its contribution along with other sources of social truth.

Greek science focused upon physics. Then the laws of Israel's salvation serve as the physics of the sages. But Greek science derived facts and built theorems on the basis of other sources besides physics; the philosophers also, after all, studied ethnography, ethics, politics, and history. For the sages at hand, along these same lines, parables, exemplary tales, and completed paragraphs of thought deriving from other sources (not to exclude the Mishnah, Tosefta, Sifra, Genesis Rabbah and such literary compo-

sitions that had been made ready for the Talmud of the land of Israel) these too make their contribution of data subject to analysis. These sources of truth, all together, were directed toward the discovery of philosophical laws for the understanding of Israel's life, now and in the age to come.

So, to state the main conclusion, standing paramount and dominant, Scripture contributed everything but the main point. That point comes to us from the framers of Leviticus Rabbah—from them alone. So far as Leviticus Rabbah transcends the book of Leviticus—and that means, in the whole of its being—the document speaks for the framers, conveys their message, pursues their discourse, makes the points they wished to make. For they are the ones who made of Leviticus, the book, Leviticus Rabbah, that greater Leviticus, the document that spoke of sanctification but, in its augmented version at hand, meant salvation. As closely related to the book of Leviticus as the New Testament is to the Old, Leviticus Rabbah delivers the message of the philosophers of Israel's history.

I have emphasized that Leviticus Rabbah carries a message of its own, which finds a place within, and refers to, a larger system. The method of thought and mode of argument act out a denial of one reality in favor of the affirmation of another. That dual process of pretense at the exegetical level evokes the deeper pretense of the mode of thought of the larger system, and, at the deepest layer, the pretense that fed Israel's soul and sustained it. Just as one thing evokes some other, so does the rabbinic system, overall, turn into aspects of myth and actions of deep symbolic consequence what to the untutored eye were commonplace deeds and neutral transactions. So too, the wretched nation really enjoyed God's special love. As I stated at the outset, what is important in the place and function accorded to Scripture derives significance from

the host and recipient of Scripture, that is to say, the rabbinic system itself.

But so far as Leviticus Rabbah stands for and points toward that larger system, what are the commonplace traits of Scripture in this other, altogether new context?

1. Scripture, for one thing, forms a timeless present, with the affairs of the present day read back into the past and the past into the present, with singular events absorbed into Scripture's paradigms.

2. Scripture is read whole and atomistically. Everything speaks to everything else, but only one thing speaks at a time.

3. Scripture is read as an account of a seamless world, encompassing present and past alike, and Scripture is read atemporally and ahistorically.

All of these things surprise no one; they have been recognized for a very long time. What is new here is the claim to explain why these things are so, meaning the logic of the composition that prevails *also*, when Scripture comes to hand.

1. Scripture is read whole, because the framers pursue issues of thought that demand all data pertain to all times and all contexts. The authors are philosophers, looking for rules and their verification. Scripture tells stories, to be sure. But these exemplify facts of social life and national destiny: the laws of Israel's life.

2. Scripture is read atomistically, because each of its components constitutes a social fact, ever relevant to the society of which it forms a part, with that society everywhere uniform.

3. Scripture is read as a source of facts pertinent to historical and contemporary issues alike, because the issues at hand, when worked out, will indicate the prevailing laws, the rules that apply everywhere, all the time, to everyone of Israel.

Accordingly, there is no way for Scripture to be read

except as a source of facts about that ongoing reality that forms the focus and the center of discourse, the life of the unique social entity, Israel. But, as we have seen, the simple logic conveyed by the parable also contributes its offering of facts. The simple truth conveyed by the tale of the great man, the exemplary event of the rabbinic sage, the memorable miracle – these too serve as well as facts of Scripture. The several truths, therefore, stand alongside and at the same level as the truths of Scripture, which is not the sole source of rules or cases. The facts of Scripture stand no higher than those of the parable, on the one side, or of the tale of the sage, on the other. Why not? Because to philosophers and scientists, facts are facts, whatever their origin or point of application.

What we have in Leviticus Rabbah, therefore, is the result of the mode of thought not of prophets or historians, but of philosophers and scientists. The framers propose not to lay down, but to discover, rules governing Israel's life. I state with necessary emphasis: *as we find the rules of nature by identifying and classifying facts of natural life, so we find rules of society by identifying and classifying the facts of Israel's social life.* In both modes of inquiry we make sense of things by bringing together like specimens and finding out whether they form a species, then bringing together like species and finding out whether they form a genus – in all, classifying data and identifying the rules that make possible the classification. That sort of thinking lies at the deepest level of list-making, which is, as I said, work of offering a proposition and facts (for social rules) as much as a genus and its species (for rules of nature). Once discovered, the social rules of Israel's national life yield explicit statements, such as, that God hates the arrogant and loves the humble. The readily assembled syllogism follows: if one is arrogant, God will hate him, and if he is humble, God will love him. The logical status of these statements, in context, is as secure and unassailable as the logical status

of statements about physics, ethics, or politics, as these emerge in philosophical thought. What differentiates the statements is not their logical status—as sound, scientific philosophy—but only their subject matter, on the one side, and distinctive rhetoric, on the other.

So Leviticus Rabbah is anything but an exegetical exercise. We err if we are taken in by the powerful rhetoric of our document, which resorts so ubiquitously to the citation of biblical verses and, more importantly, to the construction, out of diverse verses, of a point transcendent of the cited verses. At hand is not an exegetical composition at all, nor even verses of Scripture read as a corpus of proof texts. We have, rather, a statement that stands by itself, separate from Scripture, and that makes its points only secondarily, along the way, by evoking verses of Scripture to express and exemplify those same points. We miss the main point if we posit that Scripture plays a definitive or even central role in providing the program and agenda for the framers of Leviticus Rabbah. Their program is wholly their own. But, of course, Scripture then serves their purposes very well indeed.

So too, their style is their own. Scripture merely contributes to an aesthetic that is at once pleasing and powerful for people who know Scripture pretty much by heart. But in context, the aesthetic too is original. The constant invocation of Scriptural verses compares with the place of the classics in the speech and writing of gentlefolk of an earlier age, in which the mark of elegance was perpetual allusion to classical writers. No Christian author of the age would have found alien the aesthetic at hand. So while the constant introduction of verses of Scripture provides the wherewithal of speech, these verses serve only as do the colors of the painter. The painter cannot paint without the oils. But the colors do not make the painting. The painter does. As original and astonishing as is the aesthetic

of the Mishnah, the theory of persuasive rhetoric governing Leviticus Rabbah produces a still more amazing result.

Conclusion

We may say that Leviticus Rabbah provides an exegesis of the book of Leviticus just as much as the school of Matthew provides an exegesis of passages cited in the book of Isaiah. Yet, I must reiterate at the end, Leviticus serves as something other than a source of proof texts. It is not that at all. And that is the important fact I mean to prove. What is new in Leviticus Rabbah's encounter with Scripture emerges when we realize that, for former Israelite writers, Scriptures do serve principally as a source of proof texts. That certainly is the case for the school of Matthew and also for the Essene writers whose library survived at Qumran. The task of Scripture for the authors of the *To-sefta*, *Sifra*, *Genesis Rabbah*, and the Talmud of the Land of Israel emerged out of a single need. That need was to found the creations of the new age upon the authority of the old. Thus the exegetical work consequent upon the Mishnah demanded a turning to Scripture. From that necessary and predictable meeting, exegetical work on Scripture itself got under way, with the results so self-evident in most of the exegetical compositions on most of the Pentateuch, including Leviticus, accomplished in the third and fourth centuries. None of this, in fact, defined how Scripture would reach its right and proper place in the Judaism of the Talmuds and exegetical compositions. It was Leviticus Rabbah that set the pattern, and its pattern would predominate for a very long time. How so? The operative rules would be these:

1. From Leviticus Rabbah onward, Scripture would conform to paradigms framed essentially independent of Scripture.
2. From then onward, Scripture was made to yield paradigms applicable beyond the limits of Scripture.

In these two complementary statements we summarize the entire argument. The heart of the matter lies in laying forth the rules of life — of Israel's life and salvation. These rules derive from the facts of history, as much as the rules of the Mishnah derive from the facts of society (and, in context, the rules of philosophy derive from the facts of nature). Scripture, then, never stands all by itself. Its exalted position at the center of all discourse proves contingent, never absolute. That negative result, of course, bears an entirely affirmative complement.

Judaism is *not* the religion of the Old Testament because Judaism *is* Judaism. Scripture enters Judaism because Judaism is the religion of "the one whole Torah of Moses, our rabbi," and part of that Torah is the written part, Scripture. But that whole Torah, viewed whole, is this: *God's revelation of the rules of life: creation, society, history alike.*

Obviously, every form of Judaism would be in some way a scriptural religion. But the *sort* of scriptural religion a given kind of Judaism would reveal is not to be predicted on the foundations of traits of Scripture in particular. One kind of Judaism laid its distinctive emphasis upon a linear history of Israel, in a sequence of unique, one-time events, all together yielding a pattern of revealed truth, from creation, through revelation, to redemption. That kind of Judaism then would read Scripture for signs of the times and turn Scripture into a resource for apocalyptic speculation. A kind of Judaism interested not in one-time events of history but in all-time rules of society, governing for all time, such as the kind at hand, would read Scripture philosophically and not historically. That is, Scripture would yield a corpus of facts conforming to rules. Scripture would provide a source of paradigms, the opposite of one-time events.

True enough, many kinds of Judaism would found their definitive propositions in Scripture and build upon them. But while all of Scripture was revealed and author-

itative, for each construction of a system of Judaism, only some passages of Scripture would prove to be relevant. Just as the framers of the Mishnah came to Scripture with a program of questions and inquiries framed essentially among themselves, one which turned out to be highly selective, so did their successors who made up Leviticus Rabbah. What they brought was a mode of thought, a deeply philosophical and scientific quest, and an acute problem of history and society. In their search for the rules of Israel's life and salvation, they found answer not in the one-time events of history but in paradigmatic facts, social laws of salvation. It was in the mind and imagination of the already philosophical authors of Leviticus Rabbah that Scripture came to serve, as did nature, as did everyday life and its parables, all together, to reveal laws everywhere and always valid – if people would only keep them.

Notes

1. Mordecai Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah: A Critical Edition Based on Manuscripts and Genizah Fragment with Variants and Notes*, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Louis M. and Minnie Epstein Fund of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 1953-60).

2. J. Israelstam and Judah J. Slotki, *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices*, H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds. (London: Sordino, 1939), 14.

3. Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, p. 32, n. to line 5.