THREE MIDRASHIM AND THEIR EXEGETIC METHOD

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This article discusses three midrashim that include *peshat* and linguistic inter-pretations of verses in the Bible. At first glance, it seems that the verses are in-terpreted in a typical midrashic manner, namely, imaginatively and creatively, unlike the approach of modern scholars. An investigation of the literary and lin-guistic aspects of the verses reveals that these midrashim actually reflect valid *peshat* interpretations of the type that modern scholars may be willing to con-sider. Indeed, two of the interpretations discussed are found in medieval and modern exegesis, but scholars have not noticed that they are already found in the midrash. The reason for this is that a single, standard midrashic terminology is used for all kinds of interpretation; consequently, only a thorough investigation can detect the *peshat* interpretations in midrashic literature. One implication of this article is that scholars interested only in the plain meaning of biblical texts should not overlook the *peshat* traditions preserved in midrash.

The sharp distinction between *peshat* and *derash*, between the search for the plain meaning of the Bible and the creative way it is interpreted in talmudic literature, was the most prominent achievement of the commenta-tors of the Middle Ages.[1] In midrashic literature itself, where we find interpretations of both kinds, no attempt is made to differentiate between them, neither by explicit remarks nor by the terminology employed. The re-sult is that comments on the plain meaning of the text are buried amongst so many midrashic interpretations that one hardly notices that many *peshat* in-terpretations are scattered throughout midrashic literature as well. This situa-tion is supported by the fact that in most cases the midrash, when interpreting the Bible text in accordance with its plain meaning, does not reveal its motive. A systematization of the exegetic activity and systematic research of linguistic matters, on which the exegetic activity in the Middle Ages was based, and without which no systematic *peshat* interpretation is possible, hardly existed in the Talmudic era, so the motive for the interpretation is lacking in most cases.

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[1] As is common, e.g., by Rashi who, although he combines the two types of interpretation in his commentary, makes a remarkable effort to differentiate between them, usually by the terms לפי פשוטו and לפי מדרשו (e.g., Gen 9:7) and similar expressions. Many medieval commentators do not use the midrashic technique at all. For a detailed discussion see M. Haran, "Midrashic Exegesis and the Peshat, and the Critical Approach in Bible Research," in *Studies in Judaica*, ed. M. Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1986), pp. 65–72.

In this article I point out three interpretations found in midrashic literature which, in my opinion, shed light on the plain meaning of the biblical text. The first example presents a literary analysis of the text; the other two present linguistic ones. The analyses do not appear in each midrash and are presented in the same manner as are imaginative midrashim. One accustomed to the typical ways of midrash may be oblivious to the *peshat* interpretations in them; interpretations made clear only by investigating thoroughly their intent.

1. THE SONG OF THE COWS

This example considers the story of the Holy Ark that was captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4–6). After a series of plagues brought upon the Philistines, they decided to return the Ark. They put it on a cart, to which they harnessed two cows. In describing how the cows chose the right way to Beth-Shemesh, the text says:

וַיִשַּׁרְנָה הַפָּרוֹת בַּדֶּרֶךְ עַל־דֶּרֶךְ בֵּית שֶׁמֶשׁ בִּמְסִלָּה אַחַת הָלְכוּ הָלֹךְ וְגָעוֹ

and the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-Shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went (1 Sam 6:12).

In the Babylonian Talmud we find the following discussion:

וַיִשַּׁרְנָה הפרות בדרך על דרך בית שמש וגו'. מאי "וישרנה"? א"ר יוחנן
משום ר"מ: שאמרו שירה; ורב זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב: שישרו פניהם
כנגד ארון ואמרו שירה. ומאי שירה אמרו? א"ר יוחנן משום ר"מ: אז ישיר
משה ובני ישראל. ור' יוחנן דידיה אמר: ואמרתם ביום ההוא הודו לה'
קראו בשמו וגו'. ור"ש בן לקיש אמר: מזמורא יתמא, מזמור שירו לה' שיר
חדש כי נפלאות עשה, הושיעה לו ימינו וזרוע קדשו. ר' אלעזר אמר: ה'
מלך ירגזו עמים. ר' שמואל בר נחמני אמר: ה' מלך גאות לבש. ר' יצחק
נפחא אמר: רוני רוני השיטה, התנופפי ברוב הדרך, המחושקת בריקמי
זהב, המהוללה בדביר ארמון ומפוארה בעדי עדיים

"and the cows went straight [וישרנה] in the direction of Beth-Shemesh" etc. What is the meaning of the word וישרנה? Said R. Johanan in the name of R. Meir: They rendered song. R. Zutra b. Tobiah said in the name of Rab: They directed their faces towards the Ark and rendered song. And what did they sing? It was stated in the name of R. Johanan on behalf of R. Meir: [The song beginning with] "Then sang Moses and the Children of Israel" (Exod 15:1). R. Johanan, however, declared as his own opinion that they sang: "And on that day shall ye say, Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples" etc. (Jes. 12:4–5). R. Simeon b. Lakish said: [They sang]

the 'Orphaned' Psalm: "A Psalm. O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvelous things; His right hand, and His holy arm, hath wrought salvation for Him" (Ps. 98:1). R. Eliezer said: "The Lord reigneth, let the peoples tremble" (Ps. 99:1). R. Samuel b. Nehmani said: "The Lord reigneth; He is appareled with majesty" (Ps. 93:1). R. Isaac Nappaha said: [They sang:] Sing, O sing, acacia tree, Ascend in all thy gracefulness. With golden weave they cover thee, The sanctuary-palace hears thy eulogy, With divers jewels art thou adorned (Aboda Zara 24b).[2]

R. Yohanan in the name of R. Meir interprets the verb וַיִּשַּׁרְנָה, instead of "take the straight way", as meaning "sing", and so he comes to the conclusion that the cows sang. On the question what exactly they sang, a list of various Biblical songs is adduced. This is a typical midrash: the verb is interpreted wrongly, and an imaginary situation is invented, in which the cows sang, and even the exact wording of their song is determined. In order to understand it, we have to take into consideration some facts, which lie at the basis of this somewhat strange midrash.

1.1 The Linguistic Background

וַיִּשַּׁרְנָה is interpreted "sang" as if derived from the root שִׁיר, instead of "took the straight way" from the root יָשַׁר. It would seem to reflect a confusion of ע״י and פ״י roots. A similar confusion is revealed at the end of this paragraph, where the song attributed to the cows is רוני רוני השיטה (Sing, O sing, acacia tree), which most probably reflects the phrase אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים (an ark of acacia wood, Exod 25:10), thus confusing ארון with רָנַן.[3] These interpretations reflect not so much a confusion, but rather a different approach to the concept of "root." According to the early Hebrew grammarians, the root is made up of one, two, three, or more consonants, depending upon the appearance of these consonants in the declined forms of the word: if any of the consonants drop off in any of these declined forms, that consonant is not considered part of the root. It was only R. Yehuda Hayyuj who established the three radical consonant root system accepted to this day.[4] I shall not elaborate on this point here, but merely note that, although we have no grammatical literature from the Talmudic period, it is quite clear that in their view, too, the root did not necessarily include three radical conso-

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[2] I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud*, 25 (London: Soncino, 1935), pp. 123–124.

[3] The word רוני may also reflect the last letters of the word וַיִּשַּׁרְנָה, but the word שיטה undoubtedly refers to אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים. The connection to אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים is mentioned by Rashi a.l. In the parallel passage in *Bereshit Rabba* (see *infra*, n. 7) several manuscripts read רומי instead of רוני; רומי = "ascend," as in התנופפי in the same sentence. According to this version, there is no reference to אֲרוֹן in this word.

[4] See e.g., W. Chomsky, *David Kimhi's Hebrew Grammar* (New York: Bloch, 1952), pp. xiv–xv.

nants,[5] and this is what enables them to relate וַיְשָׁרְנָה to שִׁיר—both derived from the root שׁר, and אָרוֹן to רנן—both from the root רן. In the case of אָרוֹן and רנן, another point must be mentioned. The grammarians of the Middle Ages could not confuse אָרוֹן and רנן, since in Biblical Hebrew אָרוֹן retains its א in all of its occurrences. However, in Mishnaic Hebrew an initial א may drop off (a phenomenon which produced forms like ליעזר, instead of אליעזר and so on),[6] and so אָרוֹן is necessarily related to רן and can be connected to the verb רנן. This example is particularly significant in this midrash, as it finds that the two main elements of this paragraph—the song and the Ark—share the same root.

1.2 The Exegetic Technique

At first glance, the various songs mentioned above are but a random collection of biblical songs. However, there is no doubt that the first suggestion, אָז יָשִׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, taken from the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1), was not chosen randomly. Here the beginning of the first phrase is quoted, but the song itself begins with the words אָשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֹה גָּאָה. In our phrase there occur the words הָלְכוּ הָלֹךְ וְגָעוֹ. Thus, what we have here is actually a *gezera shava* based on the similarity between גָאֹה and גָּעוֹ, as is explicitly said in the parallel paragraph in *Bereshit Rabba*:

> אי זו שירה אמרו? ר׳ מאיר אמר: שירת הים אמרו, נאמר כאן הלכו הלוך
> וגעה ונאמר להלן כי גאה גאה[7]

> What song did they sing? R. Meir said: The Song of the Sea, for here it is stated: "They went along…lowing (געו) as they went", while there it says: "For He is highly exalted (גָּאֹה גָּאָה)".[8]

The word גָאֹה appears only once in the Bible, and this is true, too, for גָּעוֹ. Since in Talmudic times the gutturals were significantly weakened, these two words sounded very much alike.[9] The fact that this is the basis for our

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[5] See A. Berliner, *Beiträge zur hebräischen Grammatik im Talmud und Midrasch* (Berlin: Benzian, 1879), pp. 31–32; S. Rosenblatt, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Mishnah* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1935), p. 6.

[6] See e.g., H. L. Ginsberg, "Zu den Dialekten des Talmudisch-Hebräischen," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 77 (1933): 427–428.

[7] *Bereschit Rabba*², ed. J. Theodor and C. Albeck, II (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965), p. 581.

[8] H. Freedman and M. Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, I (London: Soncino, 1951), p. 479.

[9] See the detailed discussion in E. Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic* (trans. M. Sokoloff; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1976), pp. 67–96. See also S. Sharvit, "Gutturals in Rabbinic Hebrew," in *Studies in the Hebrew Language and the Talmudic Literature: Dedicated to the Memory of Dr. Menahem*

midrash changes its balance: at first glance it seems that the midrash claims that the cows sang, and only then turns to clarify what the actual song was. According to this interpretation, the opposite is true: the initial intention of the midrash is to lead to the conclusion that the song they sang was the Song of the Sea, relying on this similarity. If this is true, the most important suggestion made in the text is the first one, all the other songs being additions to the first and main one. This is supported by the fact that the rabbi who initiates the idea that the cows sang is the same rabbi who says that it was the Song of the Sea, R. Yohanan in the name of R. Meir, while all the other songs are proposed by later sages.

1.3 The Literary Background

First, it should be noted that, while on several occasions in the Bible the Ark is led from one place to another, this is the only place where it is led only by animals, without the participation of human beings. Secondly, in other instances when the Ark is led to its place, it is accompanied by singing or playing musical instruments, as in the following cases:

וַיַּרְכִּבוּ אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־עֲגָלָה חֲדָשָׁה וַיִּשָּׂאֻהוּ מִבֵּית אֲבִינָדָב...וְדָוִד
וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מְשַׂחֲקִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּכֹל עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים וּבְכִנֹּרוֹת וּבִנְבָלִים
וּבְתֻפִּים וּבִמְנַעַנְעִים וּבְצֶלְצֶלִים

And they carried the Ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab…and David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals (2 Sam 6:3–5).

וְדָוִד וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעֲלִים אֶת־אֲרוֹן יְהוָה בִּתְרוּעָה וּבְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר

So David and all the House of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the horn (2 Sam 6:15).

אִם־אֶתֵּן שְׁנַת לְעֵינָי לְעַפְעַפַּי תְּנוּמָה
עַד־אֶמְצָא מָקוֹם לַיהוָה מִשְׁכָּנוֹת לַאֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב
. . . .
נָבוֹאָה לְמִשְׁכְּנוֹתָיו נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַהֲדֹם רַגְלָיו
קוּמָה יְהוָה לִמְנוּחָתֶךָ אַתָּה וַאֲרוֹן עֻזֶּךָ
כֹּהֲנֶיךָ יִלְבְּשׁוּ־צֶדֶק וַחֲסִידֶיךָ יְרַנֵּנוּ

I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, / until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.… / Let us go to His dwelling-place; let us worship at His footstool. / Arise, O Lord, and go to Thy resting place, Thou and the Ark of Thy might. / Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Thy saints shout for joy (Ps 132:4–9).

It is quite natural to assume, or to imagine, that here again the leading of the Ark to its proper place would be accompanied by singing.[10] And since it is said that the cows "lowed," it is almost inevitable to interpret their lowing as singing.

However, the main idea of this midrash is yet another point. The original biblical story emphasizes once and again the similarity between the Philistines and the Egyptians.[11] Thus, at the beginning of the story, when the Ark arrives at the camp, the fear of the Philistines is described in these words:

אוֹי לָנוּ מִי יַצִּילֵנוּ מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הָאַדִּירִים הָאֵלֶּה אֵלֶּה הֵם הָאֱלֹהִים הַמַּכִּים אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּכָל־מַכָּה בַּמִּדְבָּר

Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness (1 Sam 4:8).

The only thing that is told of these gods is the plagues that they brought upon the Egyptians. Consequently, the plagues that were indeed brought upon the Philistines, which forced them to rid themselves of the Ark, resemble the plagues brought upon the Egyptians, causing them to free the people of Israel.[12] This comparison is explicitly stated by the priests, when convincing the Philistines to get rid of the Ark:

וְלָמָּה תְכַבְּדוּ אֶת־לְבַבְכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּבְּדוּ מִצְרַיִם וּפַרְעֹה אֶת־לִבָּם הֲלוֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלֵּל בָּהֶם וַיְשַׁלְּחוּם וַיֵּלֵכוּ

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[10] For a connection between the Ark and singing (here, too, the Song of the Sea!) see also: אני חבצלת השרון—אמרה כנסת ישראל, אני היא וחביבה אני, אני שחבבני הקב״ה משבעים אומות. חבצלת השרון—שעשיתי לו צל על-ידי בצלאל, דכתיב: ויעש בצלאל את הארון. השרון—שאמרתי לפניו שירה על-ידי משה, דכתיב: אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל "'I am a rose of Sharon' (Songs 2:1). Said the community of Israel: I am the one, and beloved am I. I am she whom the Holy One, blessed be He, loved more than the seventy nations. 'A rose of Sharon': so called because I made Him a shade by the hand of Bezalel, as it is written, 'And Bezalel made the Ark' (Exod 37:1). 'Of Sharon': so called because I chanted to him a song together with Moses, as it is written, 'Then sang Moses and the children of Israel' (Exod 15:1)" (*Shir Hashshirim Rabba* 2:1; H. Freedman and M. Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 9: *Song of Songs* [London: Soncino, 1939], p. 91).
[11] See, e.g., David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 73–88; *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 2:1011.
[12] Compare also אִם־מְשַׁלְּחִים אֶת־אֲרוֹן אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַל־תְּשַׁלְּחוּ אֹתוֹ רֵיקָם (if you send away the Ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; 1 Sam 6:3), which echoes וְהָיָה כִּי תֵלֵכוּן לֹא תֵלְכוּ רֵיקָם (and when you go, you shall not go empty; Exod 3:21).

> Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After He had made sport of them, did not they let the people go, and they departed? (1 Sam 6:6).

The capture of the Ark is thus depicted as a reproduction of the capture of Israel in Egypt: as the Egyptians captured Israel, and after a series of plagues were forced to free them, so the Philistines captured the Ark, and the plagues forced them to free it.

The Biblical narrative of Israel in Egypt reaches its peak with the Song of the Sea, which celebrates not only the destruction of the enemy, but also the liberation of Israel. If we compare our story with its Egyptian parallel, we see that this point in the story, the song, is missing here. In my view, this is what led the midrash to add a song at this junction. By doing so, the midrash follows the path already paved by the biblical story and stretches the comparison a little further, bringing our story to its expected culmination as is done in the parallel narrative. Since the background of our story is the Egyptian one, the song here, too, must be the Song of the Sea (which, as demonstrated above, is the main song here).

Thus, this midrash is based on an analysis of the biblical story, which reveals the comparison between the Egyptian and Philistine narratives. A modern scholar would indicate this by an explicit remark; the midrash does so by "completing" the Philistine story in accord with its Egyptian parallel.

One further point should be stressed here: it is assumed that while the biblical narrative is rich, colorful, and related with strong emotional force, this force is missing in Talmudic literature. I think this impression is misleading. In the Talmudic literature, the emotional force does exist, the difference lying only in the way it is expressed. Our case is a good example: exactly as the Bible does, the midrash, too, seeks to compare the two stories, but while the Bible does so by means of a lengthy description and an explicit expression, the midrash achieves the same result by adding a little, at first glance a ridiculous, detail. The way of expression is different, but the artistic force is the same.

2. TWO MEANINGS OF THE WORD מת "DIE"

Regarding the verse

וַיּוֹשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרָיִם וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת
עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore (Exod 14:30).

We find this note in the Mekhilta:

> וירא ישר' את מצרי' מתים אינו או' כן, אלא מת על שפת הים, מתים ולא
> מתים. כעינין שנ' ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה, וכי מתה היתה, והלא כבר נאמ'
> ותקרא שמו בן אוני, אלא מתה ולא מתה[13]

It is not written here: "And Israel saw the Egyptians who were מתים", but rather "מת upon the sea-shore", meaning, they were מתים ולא מתים. It is the same as: "And it came to pass as her soul was in departing, כי מתה" (Gen. 35:18). Now, was she at that moment already מתה? Is it not said: "That she called his name Ben-Oni"? It can only mean, she was מתה ולא מתה.[14]

In order to understand this passage we have to deal with three questions: (1) what is the meaning of מתים ולא מתים? In other words: what does the midrash say about the meaning of this verb, and what is the uniqueness of this verb that motivated the midrash to specify its exact meaning? (2) How does the midrash interpret the two verses mentioned here? (3) What is special about these verses, and why does the midrash refer specifically to them rather than to all the other occurrences of this verb?

The answer to the first question is simple: the verb מת can express a state of being, as in the meaning "dead," or a process of moving from one state to another, as in the meaning "die" or "dying."[15] The midrash interprets the verb here as מתים ולא מתים. The construction "X and not X" in Mishnaic Hebrew denotes a situation located between two other close situations; hence it also serves to denote an incomplete process, for example,

> שחין, יכול מורר, תל' לו' לו' ונרפא. או ונרפא, יכול עד שיעשה צל(י)קת, תל'
> לו' שחין. הא כיצד, נירפא ולא נרפא.[16]

"a boil"—might one suppose it is festering? Scripture says, "that has healed" [so it is no longer festering]. If it is healed, might one suppose that this is the

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case before it produces a cicatrix? Scripture says, "a boil". Lo, how is this case? It is healed but not healed.[17]

In Exod 14:30, the midrash also interprets the verb as describing a situation that is between life and death, namely, the process of dying. Thus, according to the midrash, the verb here means "dying" rather than "dead."[18]

Now to the second question: what is the interpretation of these verses according to the midrash? We shall consider first the verse from Exodus. The main problem here is the connection between the words מֵת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם and the rest of the verse. Most commentators interpret these words as referring to מִצְרַיִם.[19] Accordingly, it was the Egyptians who lay dead on the seashore. This interpretation probably stems from the fact that the words מֵת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם are adjacent to מִצְרַיִם. However, according to this interpretation, it is hard to understand what the Egyptians were doing on the seashore, since we are told that they drowned at sea. To solve this difficulty the Talmud adds a fact to the narrative:

מלמד שהמרו ישראל באותה שעה ואמרו, כשם שאנו עולין מצד אחד כך
מצריים עולים מצד אחר. אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לשר של ים, פלוט
אותן ליבשה....מיד פלט אותן ליבשה, ובאו ישראל וראו אותן, שנאמר וירא
ישראל את מצרים מת על שפת הים.

This teaches that in that moment the Israelites were rebellious, saying: Just as we ascend at one side [of the sea], so do the Egyptians ascend from another. Whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, ordered the Prince of the Sea, "Spew them forth on to the dry land"....Straightaway he spewed them forth on to the dry land, and Israel came and saw them, as it is said: "and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore" (b. Pesaḥ. 118b).[20]

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[17] J. Neusner, *Sifra: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988), 2:286. Similarly, the situation between sleep and wakefulness is described in the Talmud: היכי דמי נתנמנם, אמר רב אשי, ניים ולא נים, תיר ולא תיר, כגון דקרי ליה ועני, ולא ידע לאהדורי סברא, וכי מדכרו ליה מדכר "What condition is meant by 'a light sleep'?—Said R. Ashi: A sleep which is not sleep, a wakefulness which is not wakefulness. E.g., if he answers when called, cannot make a reasoned statement, yet recollects when reminded" (b. Pesaḥ. 120b; I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* [London: Soncino, 1938], 6:620).

[18] Indeed, in the English translation (J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*), the original reads "they were dying but not yet dead"; "she was dying but not yet dead." I changed it to the Hebrew original in order to discuss this construction.

[19] So, e.g., Rashi and Nahmanides (Ramban).

[20] I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud*, 6:609–610. The idea that the Egyptians lay dead on the seashore is reflected also in Tannaitic sources, e.g. *t. Soṭa* 6:4.

This interpretation is reflected also in the accents which divide the phrase: וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם / מֵת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם.[21] The difficulty with this interpretation is that it adds a detail of which there is no hint in the biblical narrative and which seems imaginative. Therefore, the interpretation of Ibn-Ezra and Rashbam seems more plausible. They consider the words עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם to be connected to וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל, and conclude that it was the Israelites who stood on the seashore, from where they watched the Egyptians dying in the sea. The following is the statement made by Ibn-Ezra:

> וכתוב כי המצריים טבעו בים, והים לא השליכם אל היבשה, כי כן כתוב: תבלעמו ארץ. על כן פי׳ וירא ישראל את מצרים מת על שפת הים—שהיו ישראל על שפת הים וראו מצרים מת כאשר טבע.

> And it is written that the Egyptians drowned in the sea, and the sea did not throw them onto the dry land, since it is written 'the earth swallowed them' (Exod 15:12). Therefore, the meaning of וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם—that Israel were on the seashore, and saw the Egyptians dying when they drowned.

The difference between these two interpretations lies not only in the division of the phrase, but also in the exact meaning of the word מֵת. If the Egyptians were on the seashore, then the verb necessarily means "dead." On the other hand, if it was the Israelites who stood on the seashore, and the Egyptians were in the sea, only then can we interpret the verb as meaning "dying."

According to the midrash, the verb here means "dying," rather than "dead." Since the Egyptians died in the sea, we can conclude that the midrash sees the words עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם as referring to Israel, like Ibn-Ezra and Rashbam.[22]

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[21] See M. Breuer, טעמי המקרא בכף-אלף ספרים ובספרי אמת (*Ta*ᶜ*amei Hammiqra be-Kaf-Aleph Sefarim uv-Sifre ʾEmet*) (Jerusalem: Mikhlala Yerushalayim, 1982), p. 376; S. Kogut, המקרא בין טעמים לפרשנות (*Hammiqra ben Te*ᶜ*amim le-Farshanut*) (Correlations between biblical accentuation and traditional Jewish exegesis: Linguistic and contextual studies) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), pp. 64–65; 193–194; 207–209.

[22] R. J. Meklenburg in his book הכתב והקבלה (*Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabbala*), I (Jerusalem: Am Olam, 1961) to Exod 14:30 (Exodus p. 29), correctly interpreted the midrash, but accepted the division of the accents as well, and so reached the conclusion that Israel saw the Egyptians dying on the seashore, without considering the possibility that the midrash and the accents reflect two different interpretations. The assumption that the Egyptians died on the seashore seems quite strange. In a similar fashion, in Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan* we read וחמון ישראל ית מצראי מיתין ולא מיתין רמאין על גיף ימא. This was correctly translated into English "and Israel saw the Egyptians dying but not (yet) dead, thrown upon the seashore" (M. McNamara, R. Hayward, and M. Maher, *The Aramaic Bible* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994], 2:202). The expression "dying but not (yet) dead" is taken from the Mekhilta, while "thrown upon the seashore" is taken from the Talmud (*The Aramaic Bible*, 2:202, nn. 38–39); but this combination of the two sources results in a contradiction, since the Egyptians did not die on the seashore. On the other hand, see the excellent note by R. Y. Kafih to מרפא לשון (*Marpe Lashon*) in Y. Hasid, כתר התורה (*Keter Ha-Tora*) (Jerusalem, 1970), 1:250.

In this context, attention should be directed to the interpretation by Targum Onkelos to this verse. While in Hebrew מֵת is ambiguous, in Aramaic there is a morphological distinction between the various meanings: "dead" is מִית, while "dying" is מָיֵת. Onkelos translates our verse: וחזא ישראל ית מצראי מָיתִין על כיף ימא.[23] The form מָיתִין shows that the translator, too, understood the verb to mean "dying," as did Rashbam, Ibn-Ezra, and the Mekhilta. This means that the interpretation by Rashbam and Ibn-Ezra was not an innovation of the Middle Ages, but was already current in ancient times, prevailing during the Tannaitic period as reflected in the Mekhilta and Onkelos.

Let us turn now to the other verse mentioned in this context. That verse is:

וַיְהִי בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי מֵתָה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן־אוֹנִי

> And as her soul was departing, כִּי מֵתָה, she called his name Ben-oni (Gen 35:18).

The problem in this verse lies in the meaning of the phrase כִּי מֵתָה. These words can be interpreted as a parenthetical or a background clause, meaning "when her soul was departing—for she died—she called…"[24] The midrash prefers to see it as a temporal clause, parallel to בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ. Accordingly, the word כִּי means "when," and the phrase is interpreted "when she was dying, she called…"[25] The midrash adds that the verb here necessarily means "dying" and not "dead," because if it means "when she was dead," she could not call.

As for the third question—what is the uniqueness of these two verses?—the answer is that, according to the interpretation of the verses by the midrash, these are the only passages where this verb denotes a continuous process. In order to clarity the uniqueness of these verses, the precise meanings the form מת can indicate must be described.[26]

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[23] A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 1:113.

[24] So according to P. Schlesinger, *S. D. Luzzatto's Commentary to the Pentateuch* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1965), p. 143, and so also in these translations: והוה במיפק נפשה ארום ממת עלה מותא (*Pseudo-Jonathan*); (and as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Ben-oni [RSV; similarly KJV]).

[25] The following translations also reflect such an interpretation: והוא דכד נפקא נפשה ומיתא קרת שמה (Peshitta)—מיתא is a participle (the perfect being מיתת); פענד כ'רוג נפסהא והי מאיתה אסמתהו (R. Saʿadia Gaon).

[26] For the principles discussed here see S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1892), pp. 195–211; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 2:622–624.

1. מֵת expresses a state with the meaning "dead"; with this meaning the verb usually serves as an adjective or a nominal adjective, e.g.: עַל־נֶפֶשׁ מֵת לֹא יָבֹא (he shall not go near a dead body; Num 6:6).

2. מֵת describes a single action that takes place before or after the narrative; in this case it expresses a punctual action, e.g.: צַו לְבֵיתֶךָ כִּי מֵת אַתָּה וְלֹא תִחְיֶה (set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover; 2 Kgs 20:1).

3. מֵת is depicted as occurring simultaneously with another verb. This is how this verb appears in our two verses. Under these circumstances only, ambiguity may arise, for the verb can denote either a state or a continuous action ("dead" or "dying"). To the phrase וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת compare: וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־הַנְּבֵלָה מֻשְׁלֶכֶת בַּדֶּרֶךְ (and saw the body thrown in the road; 1 Kgs 13:25), where מֻשְׁלֶכֶת expresses a state, and וַיִּרְאוּ הַשֹּׁמְרִים אִישׁ יוֹצֵא מִן־הָעִיר (and the spies saw a man coming out of the city; Judg 1:24) where יוֹצֵא expresses a continuous action. With the phrase כִּי מֵתָה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ (according to the interpretation of the midrash, כִּי = when) compare כִּי יִהְיֶה נַעֲרָ בְתוּלָה מְאֹרָשָׂה לְאִישׁ וּמְצָאָהּ אִישׁ בָּעִיר וְשָׁכַב עִמָּהּ (If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her; Deut 22:23)—where מְאֹרָשָׂה describes a state, and עוֹד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמַר (While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said; Job 1:16), where מְדַבֵּר describes a continuous action. Since in these circumstances the verb can denote either a state or a continuous action, the midrash has to make clear that it is expressing a continuous action here. Indeed, in another instance, where מֵת and another verb are depicted as occuring simultaneously, מֵת denotes a state: וַיַּרְכִּבֻהוּ עֲבָדָיו מֵת מִמְּגִדּוֹ (And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo; 2 Kgs 23:30).

Thus, the two verses mentioned here are the only occurrences of this verb in the Bible where it expresses a continuous action, since it describes an action (rather than a state) simultaneous with another action (rather than a single action).

In my view, we have here a remarkable linguistic feature. The midrash makes two distinctions, one explicitly and the other implicitly: explicitly, it distinguishes between the various meanings of the verb—"dead" versus "die"; implicitly, by the very fact that it deals exclusively with these two verses, it underscores the continuous aspect the verb expresses here only.

3. A SPECIAL USE OF THE INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE

Regarding the verse

וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהַאֲזַנְתָּ
לְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל־חֻקָּיו כָּל־הַמַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי בְמִצְרַיִם לֹא־אָשִׂים עָלֶיךָ
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה רֹפְאֶךָ

Saying, If you will diligently[27] hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord, your healer (Exod 15:26).

We find this remark in the Mekhilta:

ר' אלעזר המודעי אומר, אם שמוע, יכול רשות, ת"ל תשמע, חובה ולא רשות

R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: אִם שָׁמוֹעַ "if you begin to hearken". One might think that it is voluntary, but Scripture says: תִּשְׁמַע "you shall hearken"—declaring it obligatory and not voluntary.[28]

In this passage, the infinitive absolute is interpreted to mean obligation rather than option. Notes on the infinitive absolute are quite frequent in the midrash. Usually the midrash interprets the infinitive absolute, which is actually a doubling of the root, as if expressing a doubling of the action, for example:

ורפא ירפא—נתרפא וחזר, ונתרפא וחזר, אפי' ארבע' וחמשה פעמים, חייב
לרפותו, ת"ל ורפא ירפא

"and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed" (Exod 21:19). If it gets healed and then gets sore again, gets healed and gets sore again, and even if this happens four or five times, he is still obliged to pay for curing it. It is to teach us that Scripture says: ורפא ירפא "and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed".[29]

כי השבע השביע—השביעם שישביעו לבניהם

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[27] Here and in all the translations from the Bible, I have left the RSV translation as it is, although in my opinion, the translation of the infinitive absolute (here rendered as "diligently") has to be modified, *v. infra*.
[28] J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933–1935), 2:95–96.
[29] J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, 3:55.

"for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel" (Exod 13:19). This means he had made them swear for themselves and also that they would impose the oath upon their children.[30]

Such an interpretation is also found regarding the verse discussed here:

<div dir="rtl">

ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע: מכאן אמרו, שמע אדם מצוה אחת משמיעין לו מצות הרבה, שנ׳ אם שמע תשמע, שכח אדם מצוה אחת משכחין לו מצות הרבה, שנ׳ והיה אם שכח תשכח[31]

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"And he said: if thou wilt diligently hearken". On the basis of this passage the sages said: If a man hearkens to one commandment he is given the opportunity to hearken to many commandments. For, it really says: "If you begin to hearken you will continue to hearken". If a man forgets but one commandment he will be led to forget many commandments. For it says: 'And it shall be, if you begin to forget that you will continue to forget'.[32]

In our case, the midrash attributes to the infinitive absolute the meaning of obligation rather than option. The reason why the Bible, according to the midrash, has to specify the obligation is that it appears in a conditional clause, where the natural interpretation is that of an option.

Modern research tends to see the infinitive absolute as expressing emphasis. However, the infinitive absolute occurs quite frequently in a conditional clause, where the action is presented as an option. It is hard to see the role of emphasis when the action is optional. The answer suggested by Gesenius-Kautzsch, that "the infinitive absolute in this case emphasizes the importance of the condition on which some consequence depends,"[33] is not clear enough; it is hard to define importance, so that such a description could apply to any condition.[34] Actually, we have to distinguish between two main kinds of an infinitive absolute in a conditional clause. Usually, as has already been noted, it stands in contrast with another verb.[35] Here are two examples:

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[30] J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, 1:181.

[31] The wording here is according to *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael*, ed. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrman, 1960), p. 157.

[32] J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta*, 2:95.

[33] A. E. Cowley, *Grammar*, pp. 342–343. More vaguely A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax* (3d ed.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1901), p. 178: "The prot. is often strengthened by inf. abs."

[34] T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem-Leiden: Magnes, 1985), p. 87, includes condition among other modal expressions reinforced by the infinitive absolute; according to him, "the use of the inf. abs. strengthens it 'if indeed…'" My question is: When does the speaker feel it necessary to strengthen the condition?

[35] T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words*, p. 87; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *Grammar*, 2:423. It should be noted that the infinitive absolute expresses contrast not only in a condition.

לֹא יַחֲלִיפֶנּוּ וְלֹא־יָמִיר אֹתוֹ טוֹב בְּרָע אוֹ־רַע בְּטוֹב וְאִם־הָמֵר יָמִיר בְּהֵמָה
בִּבְהֵמָה וְהָיָה־הוּא וּתְמוּרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה־קֹּדֶשׁ

He shall not substitute anything for it or exchange it, a good for a bad, or a bad
for a good; and if he makes any exchange of beast for beast, then both it and that
for which it is exchanged shall be holy (Lev 27:10).

אִם־כֹּה יֹאמַר טוֹב שָׁלוֹם לְעַבְדֶּךָ וְאִם־חָרֹה יֶחֱרֶה לוֹ דַּע כִּי־כָלְתָה הָרָעָה
מֵעִמּוֹ

If he says, "Good!"—it will be well with your servant; but if he is angry, then
know that evil is determined by him (1 Sam 20:7).

In such cases, the infinitive absolute expresses contrast, meaning "but,"
"on the other hand." As is well known, emphasis and contrast are frequently
expressed by the same means; for example, the words אַךְ and אֲבָל initially
denote emphasis, meaning "indeed," and from this meaning, the meaning
"but" is derived. It is only natural that the infinitive absolute, which expresses
emphasis, also expresses contrast.[36]

This rule covers most of the cases,[37] but there are a few examples that do
not seem to fit. Here are two representative instances:

וַיִּדַּר יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶדֶר לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמַר אִם־נָתֹן תִּתֵּן אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּיָדִי וְהַחֲרַמְתִּי
אֶת־עָרֵיהֶם

And Israel vowed a vow to the Lord, and said: "If thou wilt indeed give this
people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities" (Num 21:2).

כִּי אִם־הֵיטֵיב תֵּיטִיבוּ אֶת־דַּרְכֵיכֶם וְאֶת־מַעַלְלֵיכֶם אִם־עָשׂוֹ תַעֲשׂוּ מִשְׁפָּט בֵּין
אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ...וְשִׁכַּנְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

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[36] Note that this interpretation affects the precision of the translation. For example, the above-mentioned
verse from Lev 27:10 וְאִם־הָמֵר יָמִיר is rendered by RSV as "and if he makes any exchange," the word "any"
being an attempt to account for the infinitive absolute. The correct translation seems to be "but if he makes
an exchange." In the same way, בְּיוֹם זִבְחֲכֶם יֵאָכֵל וּמִמָּחֳרָת וְהַנּוֹתָר עַד־יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בָּאֵשׁ יִשָּׂרֵף וְאִם הֵאָכֹל יֵאָכֵל
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי פִּגּוּל הוּא לֹא יֵרָצֶה (it shall be eaten the same day you offer it, or on the morrow, and anything
left over until the third day shall be burned with fire. If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an
abomination; it will not be accepted; Lev 19:6–7). Instead of "at all," which is used to reflect the infinitive
absolute (actually, it does not mean anything, as it could be added to any forbidden act), the translation
should be "but if it is eaten on the third day." In other cases, the contrast is reflected in the translation, e.g.,
1 Sam 20:7 mentioned here, and so also Exod 22:11; Lev 14:48; 1 Sam 12:25 (although I am not sure
whether the translator meant to reflect the infinitive or simply added "but" because of the context).
[37] I found thirty-four cases of this type.

> For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice
> one with another…then I will let you dwell in this place (Jer 7:5–7).

According to Joüon-Muraoka,[38] in such cases "there is…only a slight emphasis…in a vow…in a promise." I suggest that in these cases the infinitive absolute expresses a wish or desire. Expression of wish or desire in a conditional clause is needed, since a conditional clause expresses an option, and its natural interpretation is that the speaker is indifferent. When the speaker is not indifferent and wants to signify that he is interested in the fulfillment of the condition, he adds an infinitive absolute to the protasis: this emphasizes the protasis and signifies the interest of the speaker.[39] Indeed, when the speaker is truly indifferent, the infinitive absolute does not occur, for example,

אִם־תֶּחֱזַק אֲרָם מִמֶּנִּי וְהָיְתָה לִּי לִישׁוּעָה וְאִם־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן יֶחֱזְקוּ מִמְּךָ
וְהָלַכְתִּי לְהוֹשִׁיעַ לָךְ

> If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the
> Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you (2 Sam 10:11).

This is why in eight cases the condition begins with the words אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע, as in our case.

When God addresses a man and expresses a wish, it is an obligation. My suggestion is that the midrash sensed this nuance, and this is why it concluded that the infinitive absolute here denotes an obligation.[40]

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[38] P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *Grammar*, 2:423.

[39] Here again this suggestion can be reflected in the translation. Thus, while according to RSV אִם־נָתֹן תִּתֵּן אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּיָדִי is rendered "if thou wilt indeed give this people into my hand" and אִם־הֵיטֵיב תֵּיטִיבוּ אֶת־דַּרְכֵיכֶם is rendered "if you truly amend your ways," I would translate them as "if you only give this people into my hand" and "if you only amend your ways," to express the desire of the speaker, as suggested above.

[40] I found eighteen instances of this type, eight beginning with the phrase אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע and the like (Exod 15:26; 19:5; 23:22; Deut 11:13; 15:5; 28:1; Jer 17:24; Zach 6:15) and ten with other expressions (Num 21:2; Deut. 11:22; Jud 11:30; 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 15:8; Jer 7:5; 22:4; 38:17; 42:10; 1 Chron 4:10). In one case the condition begins with לוּא: אַף כִּי לוּא אָכֹל אָכַל הַיּוֹם הָעָם מִשְּׁלַל אֹיְבָיו אֲשֶׁר מָצָא כִּי עַתָּה לֹא־רָבְתָה מַכָּה בַּפְּלִשְׁתִּים (How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found, for now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great; 1 Sam 14:30); only on this example do Joüon-Muraoka comment: "the nuance seems to be *if only he had eaten*," but they seem to rely on the word לוּא (= לוּ) rather than on the infinitive absolute. In my opinion, this verse supports my suggestion. I have discussed the two main types here. There are eight cases which do not belong to these types: (1) in three cases the infinitive absolute refers to a claim introduced previously, with the meaning "if indeed," e.g., וְהַאֲכִילֻהוּ לֶחֶם לַחַץ וּמַיִם לַחַץ עַד בֹּאִי בְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר מִיכָיְהוּ אִם־שׁוֹב תָּשׁוּב בְּשָׁלוֹם לֹא־דִבֶּר יְהוָה בִּי ("and feed him with scant fare of bread and water, until I come in peace." And Micaiah said: "If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." 1 Kgs 22:27–28); (in the parallel passage in 2 Chron 18:26, the first sentence reads עַד שׁוּבִי בְשָׁלוֹם, which seems to fit better with the following condition אִם־שׁוֹב תָּשׁוּב בְּשָׁלוֹם); so also 1 Sam 20:9; Jer 42:15. (2) In one example there are two successive conditions, the first expressing a contrast and the second is probably attracted to the first one, and since the conclusion has the

Having discussed the need to express a wish in a conditional clause, I would like to add that in Biblical Hebrew there are at least two additional ways of expressing a wish in a conditional clause. One is by adding the word יֵשׁ. There are four cases where a condition is introduced by יֵשׁ with a subject pronominal suffix, for example: אִם־יֶשְׁךָ מְשַׁלֵּחַ אֶת־אָחִינוּ אִתָּנוּ נֵרְדָה וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לְךָ אֹכֶל (If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; Gen 43:4); אִם־יֶשְׁךָ מוֹשִׁיעַ בְּיָדִי אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ (If thou wilt deliver Israel by my hand, as thou hast said; Judg 6:36).[41] In my opinion, this also expresses a desire that the condition be fulfilled; this may account for all cases found.[42]

Yet another way is to omit the apodosis, for example: וְעַתָּה אִם־תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם־אַיִן מְחֵנִי נָא מִסִּפְרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתָבְתָּ (But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written; Exod 32:32). Omitting the apodosis also seems to signify that the speaker is not indifferent and that he is interested in the fulfillment of the condition.[43]

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infinitive as well, there are three infinitives in the same sentence, which create a strong emotional impact: כָּל־אַלְמָנָה וְיָתוֹם לֹא תְעַנּוּן אִם־עַנֵּה תְעַנֶּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם־צָעֹק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמֹעַ אֶשְׁמַע צַעֲקָתוֹ (You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; Exod 22:21–22). (3) For four cases I have no explanation: Judg 14:12; 16:11; 1 Sam 20:6; 20:21 (for the last two cases see T. Muraoka's explanation, *Emphatic Words*, p. 88, which seems to be convincing).

[41] The other instances are Gen 24:42, 49. Similarly in Biblical Aramaic in Dan 3:15. According to this suggestion, this case does not reflect "the weakening of the particle into a simple copula" (T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words*, p. 81). On the other hand, the use of אִיתַי in negation (such as Dan 3:14) fits the custom of late western Aramaic dialects.

[42] Muraoka's suggestion, that "these words emphatically indicate the fact that a state of things or behaviour of a certain man or men is actually as one wants or expects it to be, or as one thinks it should be" (T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words*, pp. 77–78), is not far from my own, but according to his description, the emphasis is on the actualization of the idea, while according to my suggestion the emphasis is on the wish. In other words, he would translate it "if indeed," while I would translate it as "if only." See also his conclusion, p. 81, and P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *Grammar*, 2:576 ("when one wants to ascertain or confirm what one is only half sure about").

[43] So also Dan 3:15; 1 Chron 4:10. A similar expression, without the regular conditional pattern, is 2 Sam 5:8 (cf. 1 Chron 11:6, where a result is added). See also Nahmanides on Gen 21:23. The wish expressed by this construction was noted by C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956), p. 161; see C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax*, p. 161 for other kinds of such ellipsis. In Dan 3:15, the two ways combine—omission of the protasis and addition of כְּעַן הֵן אִיתַיכוֹן עֲתִידִין דִּי בְעִדָּנָא דִּי־תִשְׁמְעוּן קָל קַרְנָא מַשְׁרוֹקִיתָא קיתרס [קַתְרוֹס] שַׂבְּכָא פְּסַנְתֵּרִין וְסוּמְפֹּנְיָה וְכֹל זְנֵי זְמָרָא תִּפְּלוּן וְתִסְגְּדוּן לְצַלְמָא דִּי־עַבְדֵת וְהֵן לָא תִסְגְּדוּן בַּהּ־שַׁעֲתָה תִתְרְמוֹן לְגוֹא־אַתּוּן נוּרָא יָקִדְתָּא (Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image which I have made, well and good; but if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace; the words "well and good" were added by the translator; in Exod 32:32, however, these words were not added); this combination can demonstrate that these two ways aim at the same purpose. Two more questionable cases are Gen 4:7 and 1 Sam 12:14; the question whether the apodosis is omitted depends on the exact interpretation, see commentaries. Gen 38:17 and Num 5:20, brought by P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *Grammar*, 2:632, rely on a conclusion mentioned in the context and are not clear examples of ellipsis of the apodosis.

4. CONCLUSION

Midrashic literature contains within it observations and insights about literary structures and connections, as well as lexicon and grammar that address the types of questions that interest many contemporary students of the Bible. The problem, however, is that the conventions of classical midrash do not signal where these are to be found. Unlike medieval commentaries, which differentiate explicitly between *peshat* and *derash* interpretations, no similar distinction is found in midrashic literature even implicitly. Consequently, modern scholars make use of medieval commentaries while neglecting midrashic literature in their pursuit of *peshat*.

Using midrash as a tool for modern research of the biblical text may help not only in investigating and interpreting the biblical text, but also in tracing more accurately the history of biblical interpretation. As has been shown above, interpretations considered to be the discoveries of medieval commentators or modern scholars are in fact much older. They are found in midrashic literature. Awareness of this phenomenon may make the midrash an important tool for the modern scholar.

Thus, an important task of biblical and midrashic research is to analyze all biblical exegesis found in midrashic literature and to define its nature. This should be done cautiously and carefully by scholars of both biblical and talmudic literature. The results of such investigation will be invaluable.