6

Tannaitic Midrashim: The Clouds of Glory

The previous chapter presented a history of the legal development of the Sukkot rituals in the tannaitic period. Analysis of these halakhot, in and of themselves, provides limited insight as to the meaning of Sukkot to the tannaim. To discover the tannaitic understanding of the festival and the nature of their religious experience it is necessary to turn to midrashic literature. Unfortunately, little tannaitic aggadic material relevant to Sukkot is extant. The most important traditions link the sukkka to the "clouds of glory." These midrashim are comprehensively analyzed here. After exploring the aggadic midrashim and the web of associations connected to the traditions I relate the aggadic motifs to certain halakhot, and show that the two are reflections of the same underlying religious experience. The clouds of glory which the sukkka symbolized were associated with divine protection, love and intimacy, and these sentiments are connected with shade, the fundamental halakhic requirement of the sukkka.

The motif of the "clouds of glory" (ananei kavod) appears in a debate concerning the sukkot of the exodus in Sifra 'Emor 17:11 (103a-b):

In order that future generations may know that I caused the Israelites to live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt (Lev 23:43). R. Eliezer says: They were real sukkot. R. Akiba says: The sukkot were the clouds of glory.

Suk 11b has the attributions reversed, with R. Akiba expounding sukkot as real booths, as does Mekhila RSBY, 33 (cited below, p. 250.) The Sifra version of the attributions appears to be more reliable. It is consistent with the parallel debate of R. Eliezer and R. Akiba concerning the meaning of the place "Sukkot" of Exod 12:37 and 13:20 – whether the term refers to "real" sukkot (sukkot mammash) or to the clouds of glory – which appears in Mekhilla Pisha §14 (48) (cited below, p. 253), as well as Mekhilla Beshalakh, petihta (80), and Mekhilla RSBY, 47. In Sifre Deut.
R. Eliezer interprets the sukkot in which God placed the Israelites as real, ordinary booths. R. Akiba interprets the sukkot as divine, preternatural shelters formed from “clouds of glory,” the ethereal substance surrounding the presence of God.

The interpretation of sukkot as clouds of glory also appears in the targums, the Aramaic translations of the Pentateuch. Targum Onqelos translates Lev 23:43 as: “in order that your future generations should recognize that I made the Israelites dwell under the sukkah of my cloud when I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt.” The Palestinian targums are similar: Neofiti reads “with the cloud of the glory of my presence in the form of booths”; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan reads “under the sukkah of my cloud of glory” and the “Fragmentary Targum” reads “with clouds like booths.” The targumic traditions thus follow the opinion of R. Akiba in the Sifra. These Aramaic translations suggest that the popular understanding of the exodus sukkot in both Palestinian and Babylonian circles followed Akiban tradition.

The disagreement between R. Akiba and R. Eliezer has a significant bearing upon the symbolism of the sukkah. For R. Akiba ritual sukkot

---

§213 (246) R. Eliezer also employs the term mammash (“real”), whereas R. Akiba provides a midrashic explanation: ḥפתה את אלהי אבא יהוה את עמי אלהי אמא יהוה רבי אליעזר. רבי עקיפא אמתי אבא יהוה את עמי עם יהוה רבי עקיפא אמתו את עמי יהוה. So too in Mekhilta Neziqin §8 (277) R. Eliezer comments to the verse with the term mammash (cf. bBBQ 84a; but see the variants Horovitz cites in line 8; the term is not found in all manuscripts.) Thus tannaitic sources in three independent documents attribute the tendency to interpret the verse more literally (mammash) to R. Eliezer, while R. Akiba expounds a competing midrashic interpretation in both the Sifra and Sifre. On R. Eliezer’s penchant for literal explanation, especially for halakhic purposes, see Gilat, Eliezer, 68-82. For parallels to the Sifra tradition see Tan Bo §9 (210); ShR 1:7. Only the Akiban position is cited in PRK, “Alternative Parsha,” 457. And see C. Albeck, Untersuchungen über die halakischen Midraschim (Berlin, 1927), 37-38.

2 Onqelos employs the Aramaic matla which corresponds to the Hebrew sukkah. The phrase can also be translated “under the shelter of My cloud.”


4 Note the variation between “cloud” and “clouds.” On the relationship between Onqelos and R. Akiba, see A.E. Silverstone, Aquila and Onkelos (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), 107-22; R. Le Déaut, “The Targumim,” in The Cambridge History of Judaism, vol. 2, The Hellenistic Age, ed. W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 576; and Grossfeld, Leviticus, 53 n. 12. bMeg 3a claims that Onqelos was directed in his translation by R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. Scholarly consensus, however, associates Onqelos with the school of R. Akiba. This is further evidence to trust the attributions of the Sifra (see n. 1.)
symbolize the clouds of glory, the miraculous sukkot of the wilderness period. The temporary shelters represent something much larger than themselves, the mythical sukkot of the exodus. For R. Eliezer no such symbolism exists.\(^5\) The festival sukkot simply symbolize the sukkot in which the Israelites resided. These different symbolisms point to disparate religious experiences of dwelling in a sukkah. For R. Eliezer the annual ritual \textit{re-enacts} the exodus from Egypt. Just as the biblical Israelites resided in rudimentary shelters as they fled from Egypt, so the tannaim re-enact that event and occupy a similar shelter.\(^6\) For R. Akiba the annual ritual does not \textit{re-enact}, but rather \textit{commemorates}, the exodus sukkah, the clouds of glory.

What provoked the interpretation of the sukkah of Lev 23:43 as the clouds of glory? Why did R. Akiba eschew the \textit{sensus literalis} of the term sukkah? First, apart from this verse, the Bible never states that the Israelites dwelled in booths during their desert sojourn. The actual narratives of the desert trek in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy make no mention of booths, although they occasionally describe the Israelites residing in tents.\(^8\) Why does Leviticus presuppose an institution that is never mentioned elsewhere? Second, the rabbis, although not always concerned with historical realism, perhaps realized that the assertion of Leviticus is highly implausible. They knew, both from experience and scripture, that desert travelers reside in tents, not

\(^5\)At least none that derives from this passage. It is theoretically possible that R. Eliezer agrees that the sukkah symbolizes the clouds of glory, based on other prooftexts, but nonetheless believes that the sukkah of the wilderness were real sukkot. Y. Epstein, \textit{Arukh hashulkhan, Orah Hayyim} §625 (reprint: Jerusalem, 1986), wrestles with this issue.

\(^6\)Stern, \textit{Reference}, 121, defines \textit{re-enactment} as follows: "One gesture \textit{re-enacts} another (i) only if the two are \textit{replicas} of one another, i.e. only if they are performances (tokens) of the same type of ritual. But the \textit{re-enactment} is also not simply a matter of performing another replica of past performances. Re-enactment also requires (ii) that the individual perform the ritual replica \textit{aware} that his gesture is a replica of past performances, believing that the given performance belongs to a succession of parallel performances and that it falls within a historical tradition." The ritual dwelling in sukkah for R. Akiba fails the first criterion, for the ritual sukkah are not replicas of the exodus-sukkot.

\(^7\)Tur-Sinai, \textit{Halashon}, 78-86 argues that "sukkah" in Lev 23:43 actually means "clouds," that this is the \textit{sensus literalis}. That a prominent scholar suggests the midrash captures the plain sense of the verse indicates that the rabbinic exegesis is plausible. I know of only one extra-rabbinic tradition that identifies the clouds of glory with sukkah - and that depends on a manuscript variant. The Vatican manuscript of Pseudo-Philo 13:7 reads "et nubem posui in umbraculum capitis eorum." However, the Phillips manuscript has "tabernaculum" for "umbraculum": "and he put a cloud for a tabernacle (sukkah) for their heads." See Pseudo-Philo's \textit{Liber-Antiquitatum Biblicarum}, ed. G. Kisch (Indiana, 1949), ad loc.

\(^8\)Exod 16:16; 33:8,10; Num 11:10, 16:27, 24:5; Deut 1:27, 5:27.
The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods

Booths were fashioned from wood, reeds, foliage and other substances unavailable in the desert. The claim of Leviticus that the Israelites dwelled in booths when they came out of Egypt was difficult to accept. Third – and this is more subtle – there is something odd about building a booth to commemorate a booth. Usually rituals commemorate miracles, other supernatural acts, tragedies or events of major historical importance. Yet the ritual of the sukka, according to the Lev 23:43, commemorates the fact that the Israelites stayed in ordinary booths. Why make a festival and a ritual practice out of this?

Fourth and most important, the verb *hoshavti*, "I caused to dwell," suggests that God provided the sukkot, and hence that they were supermundane. God presumably supplies something greater than ordinary shacks. A God who brought ten plagues, split the Sea of Reeds, and provided manna in the desert, should bestow commensurate, miraculous shelter. Now in several biblical passages the term *sukka* actually refers to a supernatural cloud. Isa 4:5-6 prophesies that God will cause a cloud to descend upon Zion. The cloud is described as a *huppa* (canopy) and a sukka. Ps 18:12 (= 2 Sam 22:12) calls the clouds the sukka of God: "Dense clouds of the sky were His sukka round about him." Moreover, while the narrative of the exodus never mentions actual booths, it frequently describes clouds around the Israelite camp, namely the pillar of cloud and fire that guided the people in the desert and rested over the Tabernacle. Did the term sukka refer to the divine cloud-sukka or the mundane earth-sukka? Which meaning of sukka – cloud or booth – is most appropriate in Lev 23:43? Given the considerations above, especially the fact that God provided the sukkot, R. Akiba reasoned that the term *sukka* referred to the divine cloud-sukka.

---

9See the previous note.
10Rashi to Lev 23:43 implies the interpretation of sukkot as clouds is the *pshat*. (Although Rashbam to Lev 23:43 disagrees.) E. Mizrahi on Rashi, ibid., explains that Rashi believed this was the *pshat* because the verb "I cause to dwell" indicates a divine act, hence a divine object, the clouds of glory. Ramban to Lev 23:43 provides a similar explanation. See too Beit Yosef to Tur, 'O.H. §625.
11See below, p. 253.
13Exod 13:21-22; 14:19 etc. See below.
14Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 1-38 defines midrash as intertextuality, as interpreting any part of the text with any other part and filling in "gaps" in the text with other biblical verses. That is exactly the process here. The midrash read Lev 23:43 in light of other texts that refer to sukkot as clouds and in light of the repeated presence of the cloud in the desert camp.
Thus for one stream of tannaitic thought ritual sukkot symbolized the clouds of glory.\textsuperscript{15} Dwelling in the sukkah recalled the associations of the clouds of glory and evoked the feelings this imagined covering instilled. To apprehend that experience it is necessary to explore the associations of the clouds of glory in Jewish thought.\textsuperscript{16} In the following discussion I cite sources from the Bible, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha which reflect patterns of thought inherited by the tannaim, as well as amorai midrashim that develop associations documented in tannaitic texts. My purpose in citing the amorai texts is both to bring to fuller expression the images and thinking of the tannaim and to explore notions of the clouds of glory in amorai times. I do not claim on this basis that these complementary midrashim, documented first in amorai texts, are necessarily tannaitic in origin – though this is a possibility. Given the paucity of tannaitic aggadic midrashim, I hope to attain a better sense of their conceptions through study of the legacy of their traditions.

I. The Biblical Background

In the biblical worldview clouds symbolize the celestial presence, residence and chariot of God. "Dense clouds are around him," sings the psalmist of God in His celestial abode.\textsuperscript{17} This image derives from the

\textsuperscript{15}This position appears to have been the dominant or at least majority opinion. As mentioned above, tannaitic sources attribute the interpretation of sukkot as clouds of glory to R. Akiba in Sifra 'Emor 17:11 (103a-b); Mekhilta Pisha §14 (48); Mekhilta Beshalah, petihta (80) and Mekhilta RSBY, 47, while only Mekhilta RSBY, 33 attributes it to R. Eliezer (see n. 1.) That TO and the other targums preserve the same tradition confirms the fact that the clouds of glory is the Akiban tradition, since the targums reflect Akiban hermeneutics, and Akiba is thought to have had connections with Onqelos (see n. 4.) R. Eliezer is known for his idiosyncratic tendencies, while Akiba and his students became influential tannaim. And numerous amorai midrashim continue the clouds of glory theme, while none exhibit a contrary opinion.

\textsuperscript{16}The best studies of the clouds are Riesenfeld, Jésus, 130-145 and Luzarraga, Nube. See too Ulfgard, Feast, 124-27; Michaelis, Skënë.

\textsuperscript{17}Ps 97:2. Cf. Jgs 5:4, Ps 104:3, Ezek 1:4, 34:12, Isa 19:1, Joel 2:2, Zeph 1:15. See Ps 18:12 (= 2 Sam 22:12), cited above, where the cloud is described as a sukkah, and Ps 105:39, 1 Kgs 8:12. For a full discussion of the biblical passages see TDNT, 4:905-906. In the ancient Near East, clouds are regularly associated with the gods. G.E. Mendenhall, The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 32-66, 210-13 explains the divine cloud in terms of the Akkadian mellamu, a type of splendid aura surrounding the deity which shared in his glory and power. Mellamu also masked the bodies of the gods in order that they not be seen. Mendenhall suggests that in Ugaritic texts 'anan "designates something closely identified with divine beings: it is a substitute for their names or an aspect of their person" (p. 56). See too his
widespread conception of the sky and heavens as the divine realm. Atmospheric phenomena such as thunder, lightning and rainstorms are understood as results of God's actions on high. Clouds have the specific function of serving as the chariot of God, as in Ps 104:3: "He makes the clouds His chariot, moves on the wings of the wind." The cherubim upon which God sits or rides reflect this original conception of a chariot of clouds.

Clouds are characteristic elements of biblical theophanies. At Sinai God reveals himself amid thunder, lightning and a dense cloud. In Isaian eschatology a cloud fixed upon Mt Zion symbolizes the eternal presence of God (Isa 4:5-6). The wilderness narratives portray the presence of God as the "pillar of cloud" that alternates with the "pillar of fire." The pillar of cloud speaks with Moses, signals to the Israelites when to march and leads them through the desert. These pillars are conspicuous symbols of the presence of God in the camp of the Israelites: "Now they [the inhabitants of the land] have heard that You, O Lord, are in the midst of this people; that You, O Lord, appear in plain sight when Your cloud rests over them and when You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night" (Num 14:14). In other

discussion of 'anan in the Bible (pp. 57-66), and see R.J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 125 for Canaanite parallels. In many religions clouds are associated with deities or divine powers; e.g., the Greek goddess nephelē.  

18Cf. Isa 19:1, "Mounted on a swift cloud, the Lord will come to Egypt"; Nah 1:3; Deut 33:26; Ps 68:5, 35. See Tur-Sinai, *Halashon*, 20-24; M. Haran, "Ha'aron vehakeruvim," *Eres Yisra'el* 5 (1963), 86-87.  

19Tur-Sinai, *Halashon*, 20-24; Haran, ibid.; Kaufmann, *Toledot*, 2:350-54. Thus Ps 18:11: "He bent the sky and came down, thick cloud beneath his feet. He mounted a cherub and flew, gliding on the wings of the wind." For Ezekiel, the fiery keruvim serve as the chariot of God (see Ezek 9:3, 10:4, 18-19, 11:22.) Tur-Sinai points out that God also rides in a chariot of fiery horses (2 Kgs 2:11, 6:17, Hab 3:8, 15). The keruvim can be interchanged with other celestial creatures, given that they symbolize God riding upon the chariot in the clouds.  


21Exod 13:21-2, 14:19, 33:9-10, Num 12:5, 14:14, Deut 31:15, Ps 78:14, 99:7, Neh 9:12, 19. For a survey of theories concerning the origin of this image, as well as ancient Near East parallels, see T. Mann, "The Pillar of Cloud in the Reed Sea Narrative," *JBL* 90 (1971), 15-30. In Exod 14:24 there is one pillar, a "pillar of fire and cloud." G.E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 32-66 proposes that this was the original tradition, which then developed into two pillars, a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.  

Tannaitic Midrashim: The Clouds of Glory

Theophanies, as in the revelation to Moses in the cleft of the rock, God simply descends in a cloud, not a pillar of cloud and fire.\textsuperscript{23}

The "glory" (kavod) of God also appears in the form of a cloud.\textsuperscript{24} A cloud fills Solomon's Temple after its dedication as a signal that God has taken his residence there (1 Kgs 8:10). The next verse identifies the cloud with the glory of God: "the priests were not able to stand and perform the service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the House of the Lord" (1 Kgs 8:11).\textsuperscript{25} The description of the theophany at Sinai also coordinates the glory and the cloud: "When Moses ascended the mountain, the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord abode on Mt Sinai and the cloud hid it for six days. On the seventh day He called Moses from the midst of the cloud" (Exod 24:15-16).\textsuperscript{26} These accounts engendered the midrashic term, the "clouds of glory," as the designation for the presence or "glory" of God manifest as a cloud.\textsuperscript{27}

II. The Clouds of Glory in the Midrashim

While the cloud, the pillar of cloud and the cloud appearing with the kavod are generally discrete images in the Bible,\textsuperscript{28} the midrashim quickly assimilated the three. This amalgamation has some biblical precedent in that the Bible occasionally juxtaposes "cloud" with "pillar of cloud" and elsewhere has God reveal himself in a cloud without any mention of the glory.\textsuperscript{29} Midrashim identify the cloud and pillar of cloud with the clouds

\textsuperscript{23}Exod 34:5; and see Lev 16:2; Num 11:25, 14:14. See too M. Haran, "The Tent of Meeting," \textit{Tarbiz} 25 (1957), 15-17 (Hebrew).

\textsuperscript{24}The literature on the kavod = glory = doxa is enormous. See the bibliographical references in \textit{TDNT}, 2:232-53.

\textsuperscript{25}Cf. 1 Kgs 8:12-13 and 2 Chr 5:13-6:2. A parallel event signals that God occupies the Tabernacle: "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of God filled the Tabernacle" (Exod 40:34).

\textsuperscript{26}Cf. Exod 16:10, 40:34-38, Num 17:7 and Ezek 1:4, 1:28, 10:3-4 where the glory and the cloud appear together. The biblical authors are not in complete agreement as to the relationship between the glory and the cloud. See \textit{TDNT}, 2:240-41; Luzarraga, \textit{Nube}, 51ff.; Cross, \textit{Canaanite}, 165 and 153 n. 30.

\textsuperscript{27}The phrase "clouds of glory," \textit{ananai kavod}, is not biblical. It first appears in the Tosefta and tannaitic midrashim. The LXX of Sira 50:7 reads "as a rainbow giving light in the nephelais dokses" (the Hebrew has only \textit{be\'anan}.) Although this would seem to translate "clouds of glory," the meaning of the phrase in context is "brilliant clouds." Thus Sira does not know of the midrashic concept. However, the LXX of 2 Chr 5:13 translates the MT \textit{anan} as \textit{nephel\'es dokses} (cloud of glory), which may relate to the tannaitic concept.

\textsuperscript{28}Cross, \textit{Canaanite}, 164-65 suggests the images all derive from the poetic descriptions of God manifested in a cloud.

\textsuperscript{29}Num 10:34, 14:4 (where both a cloud and a pillar of cloud appear); Num 9:15-16 and Exod 40:38 (where a cloud and fire are mentioned, but no pillar); Num 12:5 and 12:10 (where God descends in the pillar of cloud, but then a cloud moves
of glory or conceive of the pillar of cloud as one of the clouds of glory. Variations in midrashic documents often interchange the "pillar of cloud" and "clouds of glory" or simply "cloud." Manuscript variants of the same source also exhibit free interchange. Thus an analysis of the associations with the "clouds of glory" must include sources that speak of the "pillar of cloud" and "cloud."

from the tent); Exod 14:19-20. God generally speaks from a pillar of cloud (Num 11:25, 12:5, Deut 31:15, Ps 99:7) but occasionally from a cloud (Exod 16:10, Num 17:7-10).

30SZ 10:33 (266): "The Lord's cloud kept above them by day (Num 10:34); and it says, The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them; and the pillar of cloud... (Exod 14:19); and it says, For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord (Exod 40:38); and it says, The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exod 13:22); and it says, The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud (Exod 13:21). This teaches that there are seven clouds of glory..." Thus the prooftexts for the clouds of glory are the verses which mention the pillar of cloud. TSot 4:2 describes seven clouds of glory with the "cloud of the shekhina" in the middle and the pillar of cloud leading the way. Cf. Sifre Num. §83 (79), BMM 14.1-4 (218). In Sifre Num. §84 (83), the cloud that surrounds the camp at rest seems to "fold up" when the march begins and become the pillar of cloud. The point of this midrash is to reconcile the images of a pillar of cloud with a cloud covering (cf. Ginzberg, Legends, 3:235 and Rashi to Num 10:35). PRK 4:5 (70-71) assumes the "cloud" from which God spoke to Moses (Num 11:25) and the pillar of cloud (Ps 99:7) are identical. And see bTan 9a: "When Aaron died the pillar of cloud disappeared, as it says, And the Canaanite, the King of Arad heard (Num 21:1). What did he hear? He heard that Aaron died and the cloud of glory disappeared." (So MS Munich; see DQS ad loc. and below, p. 248.) In TY Exod 16:10 "cloud" becomes "cloud of glory." And see ShR 4:5, bYom 4a-b, targum to Job 26:9 and TY to Num 9:15. The same amalgamation occurs in the targums. See e.g. TY and TN to Num 11:25; TY to Num 12:8-10. Most sources assume there are seven clouds of glory, although opinions of two, four, five and thirteen are found. See SZ and Sifre Num. ad loc. and §106 (105), TSot 4:2, Mekhilta Beshalah, petihta (81).

Where SZ 10:33 (266) has "clouds of glory," Sifre Num. §83 (79) and Mekhilta Beshalah, petihta (81) have "clouds." Mekhilta Vayasa §5 (173) and Sifre Deut. §305 (326) read "When Aaron died the pillar of cloud was taken away" (cf. TSot 11:1), while SOR 9 (39) reads "clouds of glory" (in some MSS; so VR 27:6 [636-37], BR 62:4 [676], TY to Deut 10:6). Among the ten descents of God, ARNB §37 (96-97) lists one in the cloud (Exod 34:5) and one in the pillar of cloud (Num 12:5) where ARNA §34 (102) lists only the descent in the pillar of cloud, but cites Num 11:25, which only mentions the cloud. See also TO to Deut 33:3 (cananakh) and TY there (ananey yeqarakh.) In general the tannaic sources are more consistent than the amoraic and medieval midrashim, which substitute the terms freely. These later midrashim also interchange other expressions for the presence of God with the clouds of glory. See n. 36.

31Where SZ 10:33 (266) has "clouds of glory," Sifre Num. §83 (79) and Mekhilta Beshalah, petihta (81) have "clouds." Mekhilta Vayasa §5 (173) and Sifre Deut. §305 (326) read "When Aaron died the pillar of cloud was taken away" (cf. TSot 11:1), while SOR 9 (39) reads "clouds of glory" (in some MSS; so VR 27:6 [636-37], BR 62:4 [676], TY to Deut 10:6). Among the ten descents of God, ARNB §37 (96-97) lists one in the cloud (Exod 34:5) and one in the pillar of cloud (Num 12:5) where ARNA §34 (102) lists only the descent in the pillar of cloud, but cites Num 11:25, which only mentions the cloud. See also TO to Deut 33:3 (cananakh) and TY there (ananey yeqarakh.) In general the tannaic sources are more consistent than the amoraic and medieval midrashim, which substitute the terms freely. These later midrashim also interchange other expressions for the presence of God with the clouds of glory. See n. 36.

32Sifre Num. §84 (83), apparatus to line 9, "cloud" vs "pillar of cloud"; Mekhilta Beshalah, petihta (75), apparatus to line 10, "cloud" vs. "pillar of cloud"; MM 14.3 (109), "clouds of glory" vs. "the clouds"; MM 14.84 (119), "pillar of cloud" vs. "cloud." TSot 4:2 "clouds of glory" (MS Vienna) = "clouds" (MS Erfurt).
Midrashim continue the biblical tendency to symbolize the presence of God with the clouds of glory. **SZ** 11:10 (276) explains that when the cloud rose from the tent after Aaron and Miriam murmured against Moses (Num 12:10), “immediately the shekhina departed.” Thus the cloud is understood as the shekhina, the presence of God.\(^{33}\) One of the seven clouds of glory is called the ‘anan shekhina, the “cloud of the presence” in several midrashim.\(^{34}\) And parallel midrashim interchange “cloud” and shekhina, since both terms refer to the divine presence.\(^{35}\) Abraham identified Mt Moriah as the intended place for the sacrifice of Isaac by the cloud hovering above it.\(^{36}\) The mosaic of the Beit Alpha synagoge and the paintings of the Dura synagoge also symbolize the presence of God by a cloud.\(^{37}\)

The dominant characteristic of the clouds of glory is protection.\(^{38}\) According to the midrashim, the clouds surrounded the Israelite camp in the wilderness like an impenetrable shield. Here too there is some biblical precedent. While camped in the desert before the passage through the Sea of Reeds, Exod 14:19-20 narrates that the pillar of cloud moved from the front of the Israelite camp to the back to separate them from the Egyptians such that the two camps could not approach each other during the night.\(^{39}\) The Mekhilta fleshes out the idea that the cloud formed a barrier, suggesting that the Egyptians “would shoot at them

\(^{33}\)SR 45:4: “When Israel saw the pillar of cloud they knew that the shekhina revealed itself to Moses.” See bSuk 5a, **TanB** 2:124, and targum to Song 3:1-2, where the Israelites search for the shekhina after the clouds of glory disappear. For Josephus, too, the cloud contains the presence of God, **AJ** 3:203. In Philo the cloud contains an angel or “a vision of the Godhead”; **Life of Moses** 1:166, 2:254; cf. Rev 10:1.

\(^{34}\)tSot 4:2, **BMM** 14.5 (218), **SZ** 10:33 (266), **TanB** 4:12-13, targum to Song 1:4. See Goldberg, **Schekhinah**, 91-99 and **Mekhilta Pisha** §12 (41).

\(^{35}\)Compare **SZ** 6:89 (254) with Sifra, **Vayiqra** 1:8 (3a =Baraita derabi yishma’el §8). And compare Mekhilta Bahodesh §4 (216) with bSuk 4b-5a: the kavod becomes the shekhina, subsequently identified with a cloud. **SZ** replaces “cloud” with shekhina. Goldberg, **Schekhinah**, 42 and 475 comments that the shekhina is not identical to the cloud, but is thought to reside in the cloud. In later midrashim the cloud regularly represents the shekhina. See **SZ** 11:10 (276) SR 45:4, **ARNA** §34 (102); cf. Sifre Deut. §296 (314). We also find such expressions as “the cloud of the glory of the shekhina” (**TanB** 4:12, **TN** to Lev 23:43). In **PRK** 4:5 (70-71) God speaks to Moses and Aaron from the cloud, and the homily endeavors to show that God likewise spoke to Samuel from the midst of a cloud.

\(^{36}\)The cloud above Mt Moriah in BR 56:2 (595-96) becomes the “cloud of glory” in **TY**, kavod hashekhina in **PRE** §31 (70a-b) and shekhina in **Tan Vayera** §23 (77).


\(^{39}\)See Ps 105:39 and Wis. Sol. 19:6-7: “that the children might be guarded, unhurt, [as] a cloud shadowing the camp.”
arrows and stones from their catapults, which the angel and the cloud intercepted.\textsuperscript{40} As prooftexts the midrash cites Gen 15:1, Ps 18:3 and 18:31 where God is described as a shield (\textit{magen}). Thus the cloud was seen as a screen that protected the Israelites from attack. Indeed, the protective beneficence of the cloud extended to the individual Israelite: “If one of the Israelites was drawn away from the wings of the cloud, the cloud would be drawn with him, behind him, until he returned [to the camp].”\textsuperscript{41} The same source demonstrates that the clouds “protected” (\textit{magen}) the Israelites but not the other nations of the world.\textsuperscript{42} The clouds also protect Moses and Aaron from stones thrown at them during the incidents of the murmurings of the people.\textsuperscript{43} When the fire on Mt Sinai scorched the Israelites during the revelation, God sent the clouds of glory to discharge a protective dew over the people.\textsuperscript{44} Recall that Targum Onqelos translates \textit{sukkot} of Lev 23:43 as “the shelter of my cloud.”\textsuperscript{45} So secure were the Israelites within their retinue of clouds that the midrash attributes their vulnerability to attack to the temporary disappearance of the clouds:

While Aaron was alive the pillar of cloud used to lead the Israelites.
When Aaron died, what does it say? \textit{And the Canaanite the King of Arad}

\textsuperscript{40}Mekhilta Beshalah §4 (102); Mekhilta RSBY, 60-61. This idea may derive, in part, from Ps 105:39, “He spread a cloud for a screen” (\textit{masakh}).
\textsuperscript{41}Sifre Num. §83 (79). See, too, Mekhilta RSBY, 135 to Exod 18:27: “[The families of the scribes...] the Sucathites. (I Chr 2:55).” They used to reside in sukkot. Another explanation: They sheltered Israel and protected them (םכתיות שלחין). The midrash reads the MT as מתחים מתחים. ר׳ שלמה מתחים על ישראל מענים לעון (םכתיות מתחים). According to PRE §14 (33b), Adam and Eve were covered with a garment made from clouds of glory and a skin of nails (see BHM 2:52, 5:42). See too TY to Gen 3:21. DR 7:11 (113) relates that the garments of the Israelites never wore out in the desert (Deut 8:4), because the cloud rubbed and whitened them.
\textsuperscript{42}TY to Deut 32:10, which recalls the exodus, employs the same verb. The targum renders “[God] engirded him (the people), watched over him,” as “they were protected by the seven clouds of his glory.” See too the LXX and PRK 3 (35).
\textsuperscript{43}Exod 16:1-10 and Num 14:1-10 as interpreted in Mekhilta Vayasa §2 (163) and Mekhilta RSBY, 108 to Exod 16:10. Later midrashim about the sedition provoked by the spies in Num 14 are more dramatic. Thus BaR 16:21: “And the glory (\textit{kavod}) of God was revealed in the Tent of Meeting (Num 14:10). This teaches that they threw stones and the cloud intercepted them.” So Yalqut §743. In Exod 16:10 and Num 16:19 the “glory” of God supports the leaders of the Israelites against murmurings and rebellion. The midrash again identifies the glory with the cloud: ER §29 (145) describes Moses and Aaron running under the clouds of glory to escape the stones. See TanB 4:69, bSot 35a, and Ginzberg, \textit{Legends}, 6:96, n. 538. In \textit{Midrash Tannaim}, 11, the people explain they wish to send spies because the clouds, which had been their “scouts” in the desert, would not enter the land with them. They felt defenseless and vulnerable.
\textsuperscript{44}Mekhilta Bahodesh §9 (236). Cf. tAr 1:10.
\textsuperscript{45}Above, n. 2.
According to this midrash God gave the cloud on account of Aaron's merit, so when he died, the pillar of cloud temporarily disappeared from the camp. Observing that the Israelites now lacked divine defenses, the Canaanite king attacked. Prior to the death of Aaron, with the clouds of glory intact, the camp was inviolable. Similar thinking governs the midrashim about the attack of Amalek upon the "stragglers" at the rear of the camp (Deut 25:18). According to Sifre Deut. §296 (314), the Amalekites could assault only those "who 'straggled' from [obeying] God's ways and found themselves cast out from under the wings of the cloud." For how could they attack the camp of the Israelites if the clouds of glory surrounded it? Only when the divine protection of the clouds was removed were sinners exposed to the dangers of their enemies. In a later version of the midrash, the Amalekites must trick the Israelites into leaving the enclosure of the clouds of glory before they can attack. As long as the Israelites remain within the clouds of glory, they are immune to enemy onslaught.

Midrashim portray the structure of the clouds as a force-field that surrounded the camp.

---

46 Sot 11:1. MS Vienna reads: "Their scout has gone..." Cf. ARNB §25 (51); bRH 3a; BaR 19:20; TK, 8:719-20. The antiquity of this tradition can be seen from the similar tradition of Pseudo-Philo 20:8. The Tosefta suggests that God gave the clouds of glory because of the virtue of Aaron, the well on account of Miriam, and the manna on account of Moses. But in ARNB §37 (95) "the clouds" are reckoned among the ten things created "at twilight" (so TY to Num 22:28 of "the clouds of glory.") A later tradition asserts that God created the clouds of glory on the second day, BHM 6:38. On the cloud straightening the land, see tSot 4:2, cited below.

47 The parallels state explicitly that when Aaron died the clouds disappeared. The clouds reappeared on account of the merit of Moses. See below where the clouds are given on account of the merit of Abraham. On these "merit" traditions see Luzarraga, Nube, 141-47.

48 See TK, 8:719-20. TY to Num 21:1 reads: "...Aaron died, the pious man by whose merit the clouds of glory were defending Israel, and the pillar of cloud disappeared."

49 See the version of PRK 3:12 (49-50): "All the stragglers in your rear (Deut 25:18). R. Yehuda, R. Nehemiah and the Rabbis differ. R. Yehuda said: Every one who desisted [from obeying God's commands] was left outside [of the cloud.] R. Nehemiah said: Every one whom the cloud expelled was left outside. The Rabbis said: It was the tribe of Dan whom the cloud expelled, for all the Danites worshipped idols." Cf. Mekhilta RSBY, 119 to Exod 17:8. TY to Exod 17:8 also relates that the cloud did not protect the tribe of Dan. See targum to Song 2:15 and Ginzberg, Legends, 6:24.

50 TanB 5:41.
By Abraham it is written, *Recline under the tree* (Gen 18:4). So God gave to his children seven clouds of glory in the desert, one to their right, and one to their left, one before them, and one after them, and one above their heads, and one as the *shekhina* that was in their midst. And the pillar of cloud would precede them, killing snakes and scorpions, burning brush, thorns and bramble, reducing mounds and raising low places, and making a straight path for them, a continuous, ongoing highway, as it is said, *The ark of the covenant of the Lord traveled in front of them* (Num 10:33).51

In return for the resting place Abraham offered the angels, God endowed his descendants with the seven clouds. Note again that the pillar of cloud is reckoned as one of the seven clouds of glory. It leads the way in the desert while six other clouds encompass the Israelites on all sides. The identification of one cloud as the “cloud of the *shekhina*” in the midst of the camp shows once more the understanding of the cloud as the divine presence.52 Here the clouds protect the Israelites not from enemy attack but from the natural dangers of the desert. The divine escort ensured the safety of the camp and allowed it to journey easily through the most difficult terrain.53

The midrashic imagination sensed in the surrounding structure of the clouds of glory not only the proximity and protection of God, but also his love:

*And the children of Israel went from Raamses towards Sukkot* (Exod 12:37)...

Sukkot of clouds of glory came and settled upon the roofs of Raamses. They made a parable: What is this like? To a groom who brought a

---

51*Tot 4:2* (MS Vienna). Cf. *Sifre Num.* §83 (79); *SZ* 10:33 (266); *Mekhilta RSBY*, 47 to Exod 13:20; *Mekhilta Beshalah*, *petihta* (81, the clouds are termed “clouds of glory” in line 17) and many later parallels, including *PR* 14 (57a); *BaR* 19:22. And cf. *BR* 48:10 (487) and *BaR* 14:2 where the reward for Abraham is directly linked to sukkot.

52The continuation of this passage, *Ttot 4:6*, correlates the fact that Abraham accompanied the angels when they departed for Sodom with the reward of the pillar of cloud and fire that led the Israelites for forty years. Thus the clouds are seen as a divine escort.

53*SZ* 10:33 (266), in a more modest variation of this theme, remarks that the clouds screened the Israelites from the sun and protected the soles of their feet so that they did not have to walk barefoot. Cf. 1 Cor 10:1, “They (our ancestors) were all of them protected by the cloud, and they all passed safely through the sea,” and Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, §131. In Pseudo-Philo 15:5 God relates that he “made their enemies melt away and set the angels beneath their feet and placed the cloud as a covering for their head.” The flip side of the cloud’s protective nature, an offensive, destructive capability, appears occasionally. See *Mekhilta Beshalah* §5 (108). In Greek thought, too, the gods provide protection by sheltering men in a cloud or mist; *Iliad* 20:444; *Odyssey* 7:15, 41; 23:372.
According to this midrash, the term sukkot of Exod 12:37 does not refer to the name of a place. When the Bible relates that Israel went from “Raamses towards Sukkot” it does not report the stopping-points of the journey but describes an encounter between Israel and God. At Raamses the Israelites entered the sukkot, the clouds of glory that God provided for them. The clouds settle upon the rooftops because sukkot were regularly erected upon the flat tops of houses. Imagining the divine “sukkot” of the exodus, the midrash projects them upon the rooftops of houses where festival sukkot were typically built. The clouds of glory are compared to the bridal canopy brought by an enthusiastic groom to the very doorstep of his bride. To consummate, as it were, his marriage to the people, God sends the clouds of glory. The image poignantly expresses love, harmony and intimacy. This midrash is particularly significant because it connects these sentiments not only to the clouds of glory but directly to the sukkah. The author of the midrash evidently drew on the emotions he experienced when dwelling in sukkot. Residing in the sukkah elicited a sense of the divine presence, love and intimacy.

The Mekhilta expresses the divine love connected with the clouds of glory through the metaphor of filial love:

And the angel of God, going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them. And the pillar of cloud moved from before them and went behind them (Exod 14:19). R. Yehuda said: Here is a verse made rich in meanings by many passages. He made of it a parable; to what is the matter similar? To a king who was going on the way, and his son went before him. Brigands came to kidnap him from in front. He took him from in front and placed him behind him. A wolf came behind him. He took him from behind and placed him in front. Brigands in front and the wolf in

---

54 Mekhilta RSBY, 33; MG 2:214, 2:251; cf. TY to Exod 13:20 and Num 33:5. This source ascribes to R. Eliezer the opinion that the sukkot were clouds of glory and to R. Akiba the explanation of sukkot as real booths. See p. 239 and n. 1.

55 It seems that the reference of Lev 23:43 to sukkot in which God caused Israel to dwell provoked this exegesis of Exod 12:37. For outside of this toponym (also mentioned in Exod 13:20), the Book of Exodus does not contain the term sukkot. Cognizant of this fact, the midrash interprets Exod 12:37 as an allusion to the sukkot to which Leviticus refers. The exegesis is based in part on the juxtaposition of themes in Exod 13:20-21: “(20) They set out from Sukkot and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the wilderness. (21) The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night...” The midrash takes v. 21 as an explanation of the term sukkot of v. 20: “sukkot” should be understood as the pillar of cloud, the cloud of glory.

back, he took him and placed him in His arms, for it says, I taught Ephraim to walk,\textsuperscript{57} taking them on My arms (Hos 11:3).

The son began to suffer; He took him on his shoulders, for it is said, In the desert which you saw, where the Lord, your God carried you (Deut 1:31).

The son began to suffer from the sun; He spread on him His cloak, for it is said, He has spread a cloud as a curtain (Ps 105:39). He became hungry;

He fed him... He became thirsty, He gave him drink...\textsuperscript{58}

The parable compares the relationship of the angel / cloud\textsuperscript{59} and the Israelites in the desert to that of a king and his son on a journey. When dangers arise the king takes precautions to protect his son. When the son needs food or water, the king provides it. The parable is further enriched through the quotation of biblical passages which depict (or are so interpreted) God's relationship to the Israelites with similar images. The passage once again illustrates the consummate protection provided by the cloud (= angel, king, God.) But the parable goes further, expressing the protection specifically as filial love, as nurturing, cherishing devotion. The clouds of glory are not simply an impersonal screen, shield or barrier, but are associated with love and nurture. This sentiment also emerges from the Hosean prooftext where God holds Ephraim (= Israel) in His arms like a father doting upon his son. Two verses earlier in Hosea God relates how he “fell in love with Israel when he was still a child, and have called [him] My son ever since Egypt (Hos 11:1).” The clouds in the desert enveloping the Israelites on all sides are understood as the embrace of God's arms and his paternal love. That the king supplies the needs of his son, providing him food, water and shade, also expresses love in addition to mere protection.

Later midrashim also understand the clouds of glory as expressions of divine love. Bamidbar Rabba 20:19, following Neh 9:18-20, insists that although the Israelites worshipped the molten calf, God “did not cease loving them. The clouds of glory accompanied them, and the well and the manna did not cease.”\textsuperscript{60} Yalqut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim §986 expresses a similar thought: “His left hand is under my head (Song 2:6) – that means the clouds that surrounded Israel from above and below.” The midrash associates God’s love for Israel as understood in the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs with the shelter of the clouds. The surrounding presence of the clouds has become a metaphor for God’s tender embrace.

\textsuperscript{57}JPS translates, “I have pampered Ephraim, taking them in My arms.”

\textsuperscript{58}Mekhilta Beshalah §4 (101). The translation follows Boyarin, Intertextuality, 28 based on his forthcoming edition.

\textsuperscript{59}According to Exod 14:19, both the angel and the pillar of cloud moved to the rear of the Israelite camp. The repetition is due to the conflation of sources: the angel is J, the pillar of cloud E. See Luzarraga, Nube, 101-102.

\textsuperscript{60}According to the targum to Song 2:17, the cloud of glory did indeed depart when the Israelites built the calf.
In the targum to Song 2:6, the cloud that protected the people from below is compared to a nurse who carries a baby at her breast.

An eschatological dimension of the clouds of glory appears in Mekhilta Pisha §14 (48):

[And the Children of Israel journeyed from Raamses] To Sukkot (Exod 12:37)...R. Akiba says: “Sukkot” only refers to the clouds of glory, as it is said: [The Lord will create over the whole shrine and meeting place of Mt Zion cloud by day and smoke with a glow of flaming fire by night;] for over all the glory shall hang a huppa (canopy) (Isa 4:5). This only tells me about the past. Whence do I know about the future? Scripture says: Which shall serve as a sukka for shade...(Isa 4:6). And it also says: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come with singing into Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads (Isa 35:10).61

R. Akiba cites Isa 4:5-6 to substantiate his identification of sukkot with the clouds of glory. The prophet designates the cloud which serves as the divine shelter as a huppa and a sukka. The cloud hangs “over all the glory,” so the term sukka is synonymous with the “clouds of glory.”62 The midrash then adduces Isa 4:6 to demonstrate that clouds of glory will return in the future, focusing on the double description of the cloud as both huppa and sukka. “Huppa” refers to the exodus sukkot and, in classic midrashic style, the “superfluous” term sukka is not taken as a synonym, but assumed to refer to a different entity, the eschatological cloud. This actually suits the context of the verse which refers not to the wilderness sojourn but to eschatological times.63 The introduction of the motif of the messianic future adds another association to the clouds of glory and a corresponding dimension to the symbolism of the sukkah. Just as the clouds of glory surrounded the Israelites during the desert sojourn, so they will once again shelter the people in messianic times. Festival sukkot, which symbolize the clouds of glory of the exodus, thus symbolize the eschatological clouds of glory, the divine sukkah of the future, as well. They call to mind the divine presence and protection that will characterize the World to Come.64

---

61 Cf. the parallel tradition in Mekhilta Beshalah, petihta (80). Cf. Mekhilta RSBY, 47 to Exod 13:20; BR 48:10 (487); TY to Exod 12:37, 13:20, Num 33:5.
62 In Job 36:29 sukka is used in parallel with ‘av, cloud, from which God thunders. See also Ps 18:12, Lam 3:43-44.
63 Clouds also carry eschatological overtones in the Bible through their connection to the Day of Judgment: Ezek 30:3, 38:9, Joel 2:2, Zeph 1:15, Isa 45:8 (and see LXX there.)
64 In amoraic midrashim the righteous reside in sukkot in the World to Come. See Chapter 7, 1.
Similar eschatological associations appear in the *Baraita d’Melekhet Hamishkan*. This text defines the pillar of cloud as one of the clouds of glory and describes how it "was spread over all the sons of Judah like a sukkah." This phrase, incidentally, suggests that the conception of the clouds of glory was modeled after the sukkah. The midrash then relates that the clouds provided light for all the Israelites, even while it was dark outside, and claims that in the World to Come (*la'atid lavo*) they will do the same. Similarly, the *Mekhilta* asserts that God will redeem his people from their exile by means of clouds. The clouds and their eternal light, then, are elements of messianic times. This eschatological role of the cloud may be seen already in 2 Macc 2:7-8:

The passage carries forward the biblical image of the glory of God manifest as a cloud. Just as God signaled his occupation of Solomon’s temple by filling the temple with a cloud, so in the eschatological future when the ark, Tabernacle, altar and sacred fire are returned to the temple the cloud and glory will descend once again.

A related stream of thought associates the Messiah with the cloud. Dan 7:13 relates: "One like a human being came with the clouds of heaven; he reached the Ancient of Days and was presented to him." The meaning of "one like a human being" is uncertain. Often translated as "Son of Man," the figure has long been seen as the Messiah. Inspired by this passage, the messianic figure in 4 Ezra 13:1-4 flies with the clouds of heaven. This motif becomes prominent in New Testament eschatology. In the transfiguration scene of the Gospels, in which Jesus appears to his disciples as the Messiah arrayed in heavenly glory, a cloud overshadows them and a voice from a cloud proclaims Jesus the "beloved son."

---

65 The eschatological reference appears in several, but not all, the manuscripts. See BMM 14 (220), apparatus to lines 12-13.
66 *Mekhilta Beshalah §5* (108). The prooftext comes from Isa 60:8, "Who are these that float like a cloud, like doves to their cotes."
67 For eschatological associations with the sukkah, see Riesenfeld, *Jesus*, 188-205; Daniélou, *Symbols*, 8-12.
68 In 1 En 14:8, clouds and mist call Enoch to heaven, and he ascends by means of winds.
69 Mark 9:2-8 = Mt 17:1-8 = Lk 9:28-36. There is some question as to the function of the cloud in this pericope. Some believe that the cloud simply marks the theophany of God. As in the exodus narratives where God spoke to Moses from the midst of a cloud, here God addresses Jesus and his companions from the
Elsewhere Jesus warns the high priest that he will see the Son of Man "coming with the clouds of heaven." And in the final judgment, the Son of Man returns from heaven seated upon a cloud. Rabbinic traditions interpreted the figure in Daniel in similar terms.

R. Joshua ben Levi raised a contradiction: It is written, One like a human being came with the clouds of heaven (Dan 7:13). Elsewhere it is written, Lowly, and riding upon an ass (Zech 9:7). If they are meritorious, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven; if they are not meritorious, lowly and riding upon an ass.

This statement occurs in a long aggadic section that deals almost exclusively with the Messiah. R. Joshua ben Levi interprets the "One like a human being" as the Messiah who will make his appearance with the majestic clouds of heaven. Thus the clouds constitute a retinue for the Messiah. The obscure appellation of the Messiah bar naflei of bSanh 96b, explained there in light of Amos 9:11, "I will rebuild the fallen (nophelet) suukka of David," that is, the scion of the fallen Davidic monarchy, perhaps should be understood as bar nephele, the "one from the cloud." Consistent with these ideas, the targum translates the name 'anani of 1 Chr 3:24 as "the King Messiah." Clearly the targum presupposes a tradition associating the Messiah with a cloud.

cloud. Still, the cloud covers Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Eschatological symbolism emerges from the appearance of these messianic figures among the clouds of heaven, as in Daniel and Esdras. This passage is doubly significant for Peter proposes building skeness, which might refer to sukkot. On this question see Chapter 2,IX n. 133. In Apocalyptic of Peter 6, the cloud carries Jesus, Moses and Elijah to heaven.


72bSanh 98a.


74A proper name in context, 'anani can be translated "my cloud."

75Thus TanB 1:140: "Who is 'anani? This is the King Messiah, as it is written, One like a human being came with the clouds of heaven (Dan 7:13)." See the passages collected in H. Strack and P. Billerback, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Munich: Beck, 1922-28), 1:956-57. See too TYG to Exod 15:18: "Moses will come from the middle of the desert, and the King Messiah from the middle of Rome. This one speaks from the top of a cloud, and that one speaks from the top of a cloud." (Cf. Ginsberger's note, p. 82. But see G. Vermes, Scripture and Tradition in Judaism [Leiden: Brill, 1961], 217 for a different reading, and see TN to Exod 12:42 and Diez Macho's notes, p. 442.)
The limited eschatological associations with Sukkot that we noted among marginal groups in second temple times surface in the tannaitic conception of the sukkot as clouds.\textsuperscript{76} For R. Akiba in the Mekhilta, the festival sukkot represent the divine cloud that will form a permanent presence in eschatological time. The experience of the ritual should also be understood in this light. Dwelling in a suka acted out the messianic experience for which the tannaim longed, the time when the divine presence would once again reside over the Jerusalem temple. Within the confines of the suka, the tannaim felt the continual presence of the clouds of glory, just as they believed would be the case in messianic times.

\textit{ShR} 2:6 vividly expresses these interrelated associations.

\textit{His left hand is under my head} – that means the suka. \textit{And his right hand embraces me} (Song 2:6) – that means the cloud of the shekhina in the World to Come. As it is written, \textit{No longer shall you need the sun for light by day, nor the shining moon for radiance}. Who will provide light for you? \textit{For the Lord shall be a light to you forever} (Isa 60:19).\textsuperscript{77}

The midrash coordinates the suka with the shekhina. This tradition presupposes the symbolism of the suka as the clouds of glory, here identified as the "cloud of the shekhina,"\textsuperscript{78} which the Tosefta designated as the central cloud. That is, the understanding of the suka in terms of the clouds of glory and its associated themes has become so ingrained that the term "clouds of glory" need not appear explicitly. The reference to the shekhina and the prooftext referring to the eschaton convey the nature of the experience of residing in the suka. In the suka the rabbis experienced the same protection and love of God for his people as expressed in their allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, and as they pictured in messianic times.

**III. The Clouds of Glory and the "Desert Motif"**

The associations of the clouds of glory, and hence the suka, essentially cohere with those that characterize the idealization of the desert motif in biblical thought. In contrast to the generally unfavorable conception of the forty years of desert wanderings portrayed in the

\textsuperscript{76}Chapter 2, text to nn. 41 and 153.

\textsuperscript{77}Cf. the interpretation of the verse in \textit{Yalqut Shir Hashirim} §986, above p. 252. The "cloud of the shekhina" recalls the eschatological cloud that will form a permanent cover over Zion, protecting the people from the sun (Isa 4:5-6). See too \textit{Sifre Num.} §83 (80) and \textit{SZ} 10:33 (266) where the cloud supplies light for the Israelites.

\textsuperscript{78}See above n. 26, and Goldberg, \textit{Schekhinhah}, 324. And see \textit{TY} to Lev 23:42-43 which links several laws about the construction of the suka to the "sukkot of clouds of glory" which God gave the Israelites.
Pentateuch, certain prophets and Psalms picture the desert experience in a favorable light. The people faithfully followed their God into the desert, trusted in his benevolent care and loyalty entered into a covenant. For forty years an unmitigated relationship of love bound the nation and their God. Prophets who propounded the "nomadic ideal," as the pioneer of this analysis, K. Budde, called it, also made their conception of the desert experience a model of hope for the future when God and Israel would be reconciled. The idealized mutual devotion after the redemption from Egypt became a paradigm for eschatological deliverance from the troubles of the present. Now Talmon has judiciously warned against exaggerating the prominence of this theme in the Bible; the dominant biblical outlook imagines the wandering in the desert as marred by constant murmuring and transgression. For our purposes, however, the crucial motif is not as much the loyalty of the Israelites as the manner in which God related to the people. Biblical authors who conceive of the Israelites as constantly rebelling in the desert often depict God as nurturing, loving and doting on his people. Moreover, our goal is not to provide a balanced evaluation of the biblical evidence as a whole, but to discern certain motifs that the tannaim garnered from their reading of the Bible. They appropriated this idealized view as one interpretation of the desert experience and, as we shall see, concretized the sentiments of divine nurture, love and devotion in their conception of the clouds of glory.

The Song of Moses in Deut 32 pictures God protecting the people from the dangers of the desert through the metaphor of an eagle hovering over her young:

He found him [Israel] in a desert region, in an empty howling waste. He engirded him, watched over him, guarded him as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings, gliding down to his young, so

---

80 Talmon, ibid., 34-37, 46-63. Talmon points out that even the prophets who romanticize the desert wanderings desire a return to the desert as a means to an end, not as a goal in and of itself. Reliving the utter dependence of the desert will effect a reconciliation with God and restitution of a harmonious relationship in the normative agricultural setting. See too the comments of de Vaux, *Israel*, 13-14.
81 Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 46-47 demonstrates the tension in the tannaitic conception of the desert experience, and astutely connects it to the tension within the Bible itself. See also G.W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968).
did He spread His wings and take him, bear him along on His pinions (Deut 32:10-11).

In the utter desolation of the desert God completely "engirded" his people in order to guard them from harm. The eagle image suggests both maternal love as well as closeness and intimacy, recalling Exod 19:4, where God relates that he brought the people to him on "eagles' wings." Hosea also expresses the image of parental love: "When Israel was a child I loved him and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos 11:1). As a parent tends to the needs of his child, God "looked after you in the desert, in a thirsty land" (Hos 13:5).

Hosea and Jeremiah depict God's love for his people in the wilderness as the love of a husband for his wife. God plans to lead his wayward wife "through the wilderness, and speak to her tenderly." The wife will then "respond as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt" by calling God "my husband." Finally God "remarries" his wife: "I will espouse you forever; I will espouse you with righteousness and justice and with good and mercy. And I will espouse you with faithfulness; Then you shall be devoted to the Lord" (Hos 2:16-23). Here the relationship between Israel and God following the exodus is seen as mutually faithful. At that time Israel called God her husband and loyally followed him, not the Canaanite gods, her current adulterous pursuits. By forcing Israel to return to the desert God will rekindle that devotion and restore pristine harmony. With yet more glowing ardor Jeremiah recalls "the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer 2:2-3). God responded in kind: "Eternal love I conceived for you then" (Jer 31:3) and promises to restore the loving relationship in the future (Jer 31).

Deutero-Isaiah models the imminent new redemption after the exodus from Egypt. God clears a highway in the desert, leads his people through the wilderness and brings them into the promised land. Once again he protects the people from all dangers such that they proceed unharmed through water and fire and are sheltered from wind and sun (Isa 43:2-3). God "who loves them will lead them"; indeed he has already "taken back his afflicted ones in love" (Isa 49:10,13).

Soon the glory (kavod) will appear, "and all flesh, as one, shall behold." That is, all will experience directly the presence of God as they did in the

---

82 See Anderson, Exodus.
83 See too Isa 41:13, 45:5, 54:11-17.
84 So Isa 43:4-6, 49:14-18, 54:5-10.
desert (Isa 40:5). This eschatological vision recalls our familiar themes of divine protection, love and presence.\(^5\)

The images used by the prophets to describe God’s relationship to the Israelites in the desert parallel the midrashic view of the clouds of glory. Just as the clouds constituted the presence of God in the camp and guided them by day and night, so God hovered over his people and led them faithfully for forty years. The cloud protected the Israelites from heat, scorpions and enemy attack in the same way as God safeguarded the people, his beloved child. The clouds greeted the Israelites like “a groom who brought a canopy to the entrance of the house of his wife in order that she would come to him immediately.”\(^6\) With similar images the prophets portray the love of God and Israel in the desert. And the eschatological associations of the clouds dovetail with the eschatological conception of the new exodus. Thus the motif of the clouds of glory functions as a concretization of the idealized conception of the desert experience. They provide a tangible image, a concrete symbol, with which to express the sense of God as loving, intimate and protective.

Beyond these parallel associations linguistic and thematic evidence suggests that the clouds of glory were modeled after the idealized view of the desert. The highway God forges through the desert features prominently in Deutero-Isaiah.\(^7\) The prophet exhorts, “Let every valley be raised, every hill and mount made low” (kol gei yenase vekhol har vegiv’a yishpalu; Isa 40:4). The Mekhilta and Mekhilta RSBY cite this very verse as prooftext for the enveloping structure of the clouds of glory.\(^8\) The prophet, relating that the pillar of cloud “would precede them, killing snakes and scorpions, burning brush, thorns and bramble, reducing mounds and raising low places (mashpil lahem ‘et hagavoah), and making a straight path for them, a continuous, ongoing highway.” With a clear allusion to the pillar of cloud, Deutero-Isaiah prophesies “For you will not depart in haste, nor will you leave in flight; for the Lord is marching before you, the God of Israel is your rear guard” (Isa 52:12). Recall that the pillar of cloud preceded the camp in the desert and swung to the back to protect the Israelites from the Egyptians.\(^9\) Anderson remarks of this verse, “[t]he

\(^5\)N. Wieder, *The Judean Scrolls and Karaism* (London: Horovitz, 1962), 35-47 connects the cloud to messianic redemption based on the “prophets who envisaged the Messianic salvation in terms of the exodus from Egypt and sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness.”

\(^6\)Above, p. 251.

\(^7\)Isa 40:3-5, 42:16, 43:19, 45:2, 49:11.

\(^8\)Mekhilta RSBY, 47 to Exod 13:20; Mekhilta Beskalah, petihta (81).

\(^9\)p. 250.

new event not only surpasses the old; it supersedes it in many respects."  

Unlike their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites will not depart in haste but in triumphant glory. So too the midrashic conception of the clouds of glory surpasses the biblical view of the first exodus. Protection from snakes and scorpions in the desert, as in Deut 8:15, a sign of God's benevolent care, becomes the physical destruction of these menaces by the clouds in the Tosefta.

Midrashim and targums to these passages also establish the connections between the clouds and the idealized view of the desert. *Sifre Deut.* §313 (355) comments to Deut 32:10: "Everything was found and provided for them in the desert. The well rose up for them, Manna descended for them, clouds of glory surrounded them." In a similar vein Targum Pseudo-Jonathan understands "engirded" and "guarded" as God "protected them with the seven clouds of glory." Isa 35:10 has the exiles return "crowned with joy everlasting," which the targum interprets: "everlasting joy will be theirs, that does not cease, and a cloud of glory will cover their heads." The *Mekhilta* cites this very verse as proof that the clouds of glory will reappear in eschatological times. Thus midrashim appropriate aspects of the idealized conception of the desert and concretize them in terms of the clouds of glory. The clouds of glory represent divine devotion, protection and intimacy, and the pristine harmony between God and his people.

The clouds of glory connect the idealized view of the desert period to the festival of Sukkot. Divine protection, care and love – the ideas with which the Prophets characterize the desert experience – are associated with the clouds of glory. The clouds serve as a symbol, as a vehicle for the conception of this idealized time. The sukkah in turn evoked the associations of the clouds and the idealized view of the desert. The annual ritual of dwelling in the sukkah actualized these emotions. For the tannaim, the sukkah meant the protection and presence of God, and fostered a sense of divine love and immediacy. The sukkah recalled the desert experience, when God was close at hand, surrounding his people with His glory, and when the Israelites faithfully followed their Creator in a "land not sown."

### IV. The Halakha and the Aggada

The attempt to relate halakhic prescriptions to the aggada is a problematic endeavor. Rarely do legal sources self-consciously explain themselves in terms of midrashic conceptions or base themselves on mythic symbolism. Rarely do midrashim explicitly connect the

---

homiletical point to legal considerations. Connections between these two realms can be conjectured, not proven. Yet to recoil from an opportunity to explore the connection would be most unfortunate. It is unlikely that the entire law evolved in a vacuum, self-perpetuating by some internal force, governed by a sort of mathematical logic, with no relation whatsoever to external conceptions. And even if this is true in some spheres of law, it is unlikely that it holds for Sukkot and the festivals where the ritual experiences defined by the laws were still part of the living religion. Moreover, the same rabbis who worked out the legal parameters that defined the sukkah and the obligation to dwell therein also transmitted the aggadot that expressed its symbolism. Their legal traditions must reflect, to some extent, how they conceived of the ritual experience, and what they intended the ritual to mean to those performing it.

Two elements are central to the tannaitic legal discussion of the sukkah: shade and skhakh. No sukkah is valid unless the skhakh casts more shade than sun. The presence of shade thus defines a sukkah. The obligation is not merely to reside in a booth, but in a booth that produces shade. Tannaitic halakha also displays great concern that the resident of the sukkah directly sense the shade cast by the skhakh. A sukkah may not be built within a house, since in that case no shade is produced. One may neither sleep under a bed, nor eat below a barrier, such as a sheet, for such obstructions interfere with the direct perception of the shade. In these cases the sukkah is valid since it produces the requisite amount of shade. But the resident fails to perform the ritual correctly since he does not dwell under that shade. Not only must shade be produced, but it must be experienced.

The law that a sukkah may not be built under a tree is especially significant. In this case the resident both dwells in a sukkah and experiences shade. Indeed, the shade produced by the tree may be identical to shade produced by the branches, leaves and other foliage that form the skhakh. Yet this scenario is unlawful because the resident does not experience the shade produced by the skhakh. The sukkah – the skhakh – must produce the shade, not any outside object.

---

93See Chapter 5, IV-V.
94mSuk 1:1, t1:2.
95That shade is the essence of the sukkah is clear from its Aramaic translation, metalalta, the regular term in the targums and talmuds, which comes for the root TLL, shade.
96m1:2; Sifra 'Emor 17:4 (102d).
97m1:3, 2:1; b10b, 21b.
98m1:2, Sifra 'Emor 17:4 (102d).
Even the tannaitic disagreement concerning the maximum height of the sukka is explained by certain amoraim to stem from considerations of shade. The sages rule in mSuk 1:1 that twenty cubits is the maximum height of the sukka. R. Zera and R. Abahu in the name of R. Yohanan explain that when the roof reaches such a height, its shade does not extend to the ground, and hence one does not reside in the shade of the sukka. In this case the shade comes from the walls, which are not considered the essence of the sukka. These amoraim explanations presuppose that the resident experience the shade produced by the skhakh.

The extensive interest in skhakh is a reflex of the centrality of shade. A sukka requires a special type of roofing to create shade: a solid roof of plaster, bricks or even boards produces the “inside” of an abode, but not shade, any more than we would call the inside of a house a “shaded” place. Shade is essentially a comparative concept; it is the lesser brightness or heat caused by an object intercepting rays of light. To recognize shade involves an awareness of an area in which light is absent even as the sun is perceived in the environs. Hence a “thatched” roofing, which allows shade to be perceived, is imperative. The examples of materials used for skhakh – cut foliage, such as straw, wood or brushwood; vines, gourds and ivy; sheaves of grain, stalks or flax; ropes and bundles of stubble are precisely those that generally allow some light to penetrate and thereby create shade.

The demand for shade seems to be partially responsible for the laws defining skhakh as foliage. Skhakh must come from materials that “had roots in the soil,” from vegetation of various sorts. The law makes sense if we understand that shade is generally associated with trees and other vegetation. Of course a mountain or large rock produces shade, as does any object in theory, and one cannot say that the concept of shade is restricted to elements of the vegetable kingdom. Nonetheless, in biblical and midrashic usage shade seems to be most closely associated with trees, branches, shrubs and other organic materials. These are the
common cultural associations of shade in symbolism and, undoubtedly, experience. Other objects associated closely with shade, clouds and the wings of flying birds for example, cannot be put to ritual use. These considerations, in part, explain why skhakh must derive from foliage. I do not mean to reduce all the laws of skhakh to matters of shade, nor do I claim that a desire to create shade accounts completely for the limitation of skhakh to organic materials. Other factors are clearly involved. But the concern for creating shade shares some responsibility for the laws of skhakh.

The concern that the resident experience the shade can also be seen in the rulings that disqualify wooden beams from skhakh and prohibit the resident from sleeping under a beam of a certain size. Such beams satisfy the requirements for skhakh: they derive from the soil, no longer grow in the ground, and are not subject to impurity. But they may not be used because they resemble the solid roofing of a house. That is, they do not create a shady environment. The tannaim made this exception and instituted a specific prohibition against beams to insure that the resident experience shade.

To understand the experience of the sukkah it is necessary to explore what shade meant and symbolized in biblical and rabbinic culture. Shade served as protection from the hot, Mediterranean sun. Jonah felt “extremely happy” as he reclined under the shade of the plant, and so uncomfortable when God destroyed it that he begged for death (Jon 4:5-9). From a physical and perhaps psychological point of view, shade brings relief, joy and delight. In the Bible shade is used metaphorically for protection. Lot beseeches the Sodomites not to harm the strangers who have come under the “shade of my roof,” that is, the protection of his domain. This metaphor is widely applied to the protection a leader or king provides. Isaiah prophesies doom for those who dare: “To seek refuge with Pharaoh, To seek shelter under the shade (protection) of

---

104Isa 25:5, Ps 17:8, 36:8, 57:2, 63:8; see below.
105For example, foliage still growing in the ground cannot be used as skhakh, although it produces shade; m1:2, 1:4, Sifre Deut. §140 (194). This prohibition probably requires a different explanation. (Unless the reason is that such shade is considered to derive from an independent object – a living plant – and not from the skhakh.)
106mSuk 1:6-7. See Chapter 5, IV text to n. 107.
108Song 2:3, Hos 14:7-8, Gierlich, Lichtgedanke, 73. Cf. Mekhilta Shira §4 (168); bTa 5b.
Egypt. The refuge with Pharaoh shall result in your shame; the shelter under Pharaoh’s shade in your chagrin” (Isa 30:2-3). The author of Lamentations bewails the Judean King: “The breath of our life, the Lord’s anointed, was captured in their traps; he in whose shade we had thought to live among the nations” (Lam 4:20). Shade appears in these passages as a synonym for “refuge” and “shelter.”

The same metaphor extends to the protection of God. Thus Ps 121:5-7:

The Lord is your guardian, the Lord is your shadow (shade) at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night. The Lord will guard you from all harm, He will guard your life.

The psalmist expresses God’s constant presence and protecting care as an ever-present shadow or shade – the Hebrew word sel is used for both. Like a shadow, God is always present, close to each and every human being. And like someone protected by shade throughout the day from burning sun, and at night from the moon, so the psalmist feels God’s constant protection. A similar metaphor that includes the same cluster of words for protection, guarding and refuge appears in Isa 25:4: “For you have been a refuge for the poor man, a shelter for the needy man in his distress – shelter from rainstorm, shade from heat.” Again the psalmist expressed the protection God affords to the defenseless with the image of shade.

The most profound expression of the biblical symbolism appears in Ps 91:

(1) O you who dwell in the shelter of the Most High and abide in the shade (sel) of Shaddai –
(2) I say of the Lord, my refuge and stronghold, my God in whom I trust,
(3) That He will save you from the fowler’s trap, from destructive plagues
(4) He will cover (yasekh) you with His pinions; you will find refuge under His wings; His fidelity is an encircling shield.
(5) You need not fear the terror by night....
(9) Because you took the Lord – my refuge, the Most High – as your haven,
(10) No harm will befall you, no disease touch your tent.
(11) For He will order his angels to guard you wherever you go.


See too Isa 51:16; Ps 57:2, 91:1-4; Sira 34:17 (217). On the “right hand,” see Ps 16:8 and 109:31.
(12) They will carry you in their hands, lest you hurt your foot on a stone.

To reside in the shade of God is to be within a divine "shelter," "refuge" and "stronghold." He who does so is protected from snares, diseases and plagues. The psalmist reassures his audience that a constant escort of angels protects him from harm. He feels an absolute sense of security such that he remains safe even while thousands die around him in wars, or even if he encounters snakes and lions (vv. 7,13). The psalmist uses the metaphor of the sheltering wings of a bird, an image which evokes a sense of maternal love in addition to protection. The Bible often expresses this metaphor more graphically as the "shade of God's wings,"\(^\text{112}\) which evokes a sense of love as well: "How precious is Your faithful care, O God! Mankind shelters in the shade of your wings (Ps 36:8)."\(^\text{113}\) Ps 91 combines the wings of God sheltering above with the angels bearing the human being on their palms from below (v. 12) to create an image of encircling spiritual defense – most reminiscent of the clouds of glory.\(^\text{114}\) At the end of the Psalm God promises that he will answer his follower when called upon, and be with him in distress. That is, God will be immediately present, a faithful and loyal guardian.\(^\text{115}\)

Finally, in biblical imagery clouds, too, provide shade: "The rage of strangers like heat in the desert; You subdued the heat with the shade of clouds" (Isa 25:5). Just as a cloud provides a cool respite from the heat of the sun, so God mellows the rage of strangers. Isaiah's eschatological vision of the reappearance of the divine cloud emphasizes that the cloud "shall serve as a sukkā for shade from heat by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain" (Isa 4:6). This verse is particularly important since it portrays the cloud in terms of a sukkā and focuses on shade as its protective function. All three elements – the cloud, sukkā and shade – appear in tandem and reveal the same associations. Sira 43:26

---

\(^{112}\)Ps 17:8, 36:8, 57:2, 63:8; Isa 31:5, 49:2. See Deut 33:12 and LXX; Ps 140:8 and LXX. See too Ps.-Sol. 11:5-6 and 1 Bar 5:5-7. Gierlich, Lichtgedanke, 104, connects the metaphor of the shade of God's wings to the wings of the keruvim which covered the ark; Exod 25:20, 37:9.

\(^{113}\)See too Ps 17:8, 57:2.

\(^{114}\)Verses 12-13, which assure that stones will never injure his feet, and that he will tread on snakes and asps, are a striking parallel to the clouds of glory which protected the feet of the Israelites from the hot sand and destroyed the snakes and scorpions that infested the desert.

\(^{115}\)Tan Nasso §23 (512) attributes the Psalm to Moses, who recited it upon the completion of the Tabernacle when he ascended Mt Sinai. That context, although historically impossible, is emotionally appropriate: the Psalm poignantly expresses the type of feelings Moses is imagined to have experienced during his encounter with God on Sinai. bShevu 15b calls this Psalm the "song [against] dangers" or the "song [against] plagues" (shir shel peg'ā'im).
sees in clouds succor from the heat of the sun. Ps.-Sol. 11:5-6 and 1 Bar 5:6-8 associate the glory (doxa) of God with shade. Although the cloud is not explicitly mentioned, the identification of the glory with the cloud probably forms the background to these images. Wis. Sol. 19:6-7 refers to the “cloud shadowing the camp” to protect the Israelites.116

Midrashim carry forward the biblical associations with shade. Shade typically symbolizes the protection of God. According to MTeh 104:24 (447), “were it not for the shade of God that protects a human being, the demons (meziqin) would kill him.” The following parable expresses a related idea:

Whoever learns the Torah, Prophets and Writings, Mishna and midrash, halakhot and aggadot and serves the sages – God Himself guards him. They made a parable. To what is it similar? To a king who was walking with his son in the desert. When they encountered the sun and the burning heat, the father stood up in the sun and made shade for his son, so that he should not be touched by the sun and burning heat. Thus it is written, The Lord is your guardian, the Lord is your shade at your right hand (Ps 121:5).117

God guards the righteous just as a father protects his son from the desert heat. Shade symbolizes more than protection; it expresses the paternal care a loving father extends to his son, even interposing his own body if need be. The resemblance of this text to the Mekhilta passage cited above is particularly striking.118 The Mekhilta invoked a similar parable, that of a king and his son on a journey, to express the relationship of the pillar of cloud and angel to the Israelites in the desert. When the son of the king suffers from heat the king spreads his garment to provide shade from the sun. That midrash cites Ps 105:39, “He has spread a cloud as a curtain (masakh)” as a prooftext illustrating the shelter God provides with his “garments,” the clouds. Thus the king and the father in the parables, and the cloud and God as their analogs, all provide shade. I am hinting here, and will argue explicitly below, that the symbolism of clouds and shade shares a great deal in common.

The PT promises that “whoever engages in [the study] of Torah and acts of lovingkindness will sit in the shade of God.”119 This may refer

---

116 See the LXX to Deut 33:12, Ps 140:8 and Gierlich, Lichtgedanke, 85-103.
117 ER §18 (100). Deut 1:31 compares God carrying the Israelites in the desert to a father who carries his son on a journey. TY, as we might expect, interprets the verse in terms of the clouds of glory. See too CTgF in P. Kahle, Masoreten des Westens (Stuttgart, 1930), 2:56; TY to Exod 19:4; PRK 3:1 (35).
118 p. 251.
119 yMeg 3:7, 74b. The prooftext is Ps 36:8: “How precious is Your faithful care, O God! Mankind shelters in the shadow of your wings.” Cf. PRK 16:1 (264); RR 5:4; yTa 4:1, 68a (=ySot 7:4, 21d).
either to an eschatological conception of the righteous dwelling under divine shelter or to an immediate experience of the presence of God. With a similar image the targum to Song 2:3 explains the phrase “I love to sit in his shade” as “When God revealed himself upon Mt Sinai... I longed to dwell in the shade of the shekhina.” The midrash portrays the emotional response to the revelation at Sinai, when God’s presence was manifest and experienced in a most intense manner, as a longing to be close to God, which it expresses in terms of shade. To “dwell in shade” – like the resident in the sukka – is to feel the divine presence and to draw near to God. Conversion to Judaism is expressed symbolically as entering under the shade of God.

R. Abahu began: Those who sit in his shade shall be revived (Hos 14:8). These are the gentiles who come and take refuge in the shade of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

The image for conversion, for “drawing near” to God, is that of entering under God’s shade.

Midrashim, like the Bible, associate clouds with shade and its symbolism. R. Yehuda interprets Ps 105:39, “He spread a cloud for a cover,” to refer to a cloud which God spread over the Israelites when they began to suffer from the heat of the sun in the desert.” A cloud that provides shade serves as a metaphor for general protection. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan paraphrases Num 14:14, where Moses convinces God of the ignominy that would result from the destruction of the people “when your cloud rests over them,” as “your cloud shades (shelters) them so that they may not be harmed by heat or rain.” The targum to Song 2:17 also expresses the protective shade provided by the cloud. The illustration of the verse “the shadows flee away” is “the clouds of glory that had shaded them departed, and they were left exposed and devoid [of the ability] to take up their arms.” Shade here is synonymous with protection. As long as the cloud remains the people are secure under its shade. When it departs, due to the sin of the calf, the shade disappears.

---

120PRK 12:10 (210) interprets the same verse as Israel’s desire to approach Sinai when the other nations fled. See too Yalqut §273.
121VR 1:2 (6), BaR 8:1. TY translates Deut 23:16, the prohibition against returning a runaway slave, as a prohibition against delivering a gentile who desires “to be under the shade of My shekhina” back to idolatry. According to yTa 3:2, 68a (=ySot 7:4, 21d), whoever performs good deeds merits to sit in the shade of God. See too bAr 32b.
122See further TY to Deut 32:11. R. Yohanan, bSanh 99b, interprets Isa 51:16, “I have put My words in your mouth and sheltered you in the shadow of My hand,” in terms of protecting the whole world from sin.
123Mekhilta Beshalah §4 (101), Mekhilta RSBY, 60 to Exod 14:19.
124See TY to Num 10:34 and Gen 50:1.
and the Israelites become vulnerable. It is not surprising that several versions of the midrash which describe the protective function of clouds of glory in the desert mention specifically that the clouds sheltered the Israelites from heat and sun. Apart from the other miraculous modes of protection – destroying scorpions, burning away thistles, smoothing the way, providing a base under their feet – the clouds of glory created a covering of shade as shelter from the desert sun.

Shade, therefore, bears the same associations as the clouds of glory. Both convey a sense of the protection of God. Shade is a metaphor for the sheltering divine presence, while the cloud represents the tangible form of the presence. We noted two strikingly similar midrashim wherein clouds and shade occur in parallel. And clouds of course provide shade. Indeed, it appears that clouds are associated with protection by virtue of the fact that they produce shade, the outstanding symbol of shelter. All this suggests that shade in the halakha parallels the clouds of glory in the aggada.

The laws deeming a sukkah valid only if

---

125SZ 10:33 (266) (cf. n. 53); TY to Num 14:14. See too Wis. Sol. 18:3; Mekhillta Bahodesh §9 (236); CTgG to Exod 15:13 (86).

126Shade unambiguously symbolizes the presence of God in Tan Vayaqhel §7 (337). The midrash explains that Exod 37:1 specifies that Bezalel himself fashioned the ark (rather than delegating the task to another) because “there [in the ark] resides the shade of God, who contracts his presence (shekhina) there. On this account he was named besalel (besel ‘el = in the shade of God), since he made the shade of God between the keruvim, as it says, Then I will meet with you, and I will impart to you – from above the cover, from between the two keruvim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact – all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people (Ex 25:22).” The most concentrated locus of God’s presence, that which dwells in the ark, manifests itself as shade. In another version of the midrash, cited in M. Kasher, Torah shelema (Jerusalem: Hatchiyah, 1964), 21:51, Bezalel makes the shade of God, “in order that all Israel can dwell in his shade.” Cf. bBer 55a, Tan Vayaqhel §3 (332-33).

127Maharam to bSuk 2a, s.v. ‘amar sensed the connection between the shade, skhakh and the clouds of glory: כל בר כוכב הוא מקום של השכינה והكنيס היא מצה. ובו, שנאמר: בנו עץ נוח владוי מdecessא ו累累ל שם اللاך: Beit Yosef to Tur, ‘Orah Hayyim §625, end, also connects shade to the clouds of glory. See too ‘Arukh hashulkhan, ‘Orah Hayyim §625:5 on sitting in the shade of God in the sukkah.

tSot 4:2 connects shade and the clouds by explaining that the clouds were given by God as a reward for Abraham offering the angels repose under the shade of a tree. Thus the shade of the tree parallels the shelter of the clouds. A version of the midrash in ER §13 (60) spells this out clearly: “As reward for the shade of the tree under which Abraham had the angels sit, God surrounded Israel with seven clouds of glory under which to dwell in the desert for forty years.” In BR 48:10 (487), the rewards for Abraham’s offer of the shady tree are the cloud, linked to the desert (Ps 105:39), sukkot linked to the inhabitation of the Land of Israel, and the eschatological cloud of Isa 4:5-6 linked to the World to Come. The midrash emphasizes that this cloud will be for shade. Two points emerge from this source. First, sukkot symbolize the cloud of the desert sojourn and the
there is more shade than sunlight parallel the symbolism of the sukka as a divine cloud. The laws that define the nature of skhakh and require that the resident dwell under its shade reflect the aggadic conception that the clouds enveloped the Israelites on all sides. Shade is the crucial element which links the "myth" – that the exodus generation dwelled within the clouds of glory – with its "ritual," the annual commandment to reside in the sukka. The succinct biblical idea that Israelites annually dwell in sukkot to commemorate the desert sukkot of their ancestors is expressed by the tannaim in terms of shade and the clouds of glory. Jews must dwell directly beneath the shade of the sukka just as their ancestors dwelled within the protective shelter of the clouds.128

At a deeper level, both the halakhic and aggadic traditions are expressions of, and central to, the tannaitic religious experience of the sukka. Residing in the shade of the sukka, the tannaim experienced a sense of divine protection, love and intimacy. To create that experience the sukka had to provide a sort of sheltering protection, and the resident had to sense that shelter directly. Tannaitic halakha therefore requires that the sukka produce shade and that the shade be experienced by the resident. The same experience is reflected in the midrashic understanding of the sukka as symbol of the clouds of glory. The laws concerning shade and skhakh should not be seen as merely definitional. They express the aggadic understanding of the sukka as a symbol of the eschatological cloud. These three are equivalent-motifs, the form varying in the different historical periods. Second, the clouds and the sukka serve to provide shade, as did Abraham's tree, and as Isa 4:5-6 explicitly states.

128I am not making historical claims here as to which came first, the midrashic understanding or the halakhot. The halakhot originally may have required shade for reasons unrelated to the midrashic interpretation. Indeed, the interpretation of the sukka as symbolizing clouds of glory may have developed out of the experience of residing in the shade prescribed by the halakha for those other reasons. My sense is that both the halakha and aggada derived from the experience of residing in sukkot, which were built according to common practice, and undoubtedly provided some shade. That experience eventually gave rise to laws requiring a majority of shade and led to the symbolic conception of the aggada. But my argument here is phenomenological: shade and the clouds of glory carry a similar set of associations, hence the halakha and aggada reflect and create the same religious experience. For discussion of this issue, see R. Lapidus, "Halakhah and Haggadah: Two Opposing Approaches to Fulfilling the Religious Law," JJS 44 (1993), 100-113 and the references to Zunz, Bialik, Heschel and others. And see D. Boyarin, Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 15-16. Boyarin adopts the method of "cultural poetics," which "recombines aggada and halakha, but in a new fashion...both the halakha and the aggada represent attempts to work out the same cultural, political, social, ideological, and religious problems."
divine clouds and create an environment where that understanding becomes a living experience.\footnote{I have not analyzed the liturgical uses of these motifs – a topic worthy of further investigation. Let me just mention that in the Hashkiveinu blessing of the evening service this same complex of symbols appears. The prayer requests that God “spread over us a sukkah of peace,” a clear petition for God’s protection, as evident from the rest of the prayer, which solicits succor against enemies, plagues and hunger. The image then turns to the divine shade: “shelter us in the shade of your wings.” The eulogy (every day in the Palestinian tradition; on Sabbaths and festivals in Babylonia) returns to a request for the “sukkah of peace.” The liturgy has appropriated the sukkah and shade as outstanding metaphors for the presence and protection of God. How early this precise wording can be dated requires further study, but it may well be tannaitic. The eulogy is found already in a statement of R. Abun, yBer 4:5,8c, and in a midrash attributed to R. Levi in VR 9:9 (194). The entire prayer is known to Amram. See Elbogen, Hatefila, 78-80.}

\footnote{Philo, Special Laws, 2:204-214; Josephus, BJ 1:73 = AJ 13:303-308; BJ 16:301. See Chapter 2, VIII.}

\footnote{Sensitive to the discrepancy, Philo, Special Laws, 2:208-209 observes that in times of prosperity and joy it is most appropriate to recall earlier misfortunes.}

\footnote{129}

Conclusions

The tannaitic conception of the sukkah as a symbol of the clouds of glory connects the festival to the exodus. Of course Lev 23:43 itself explained the sukkah as a commemoration of the sukkah inhabited during the desert sojourn, so the rabbinic interpretation was not an innovation. As an explicit declaration of scripture, we must assume that the symbolism was recognized throughout the second temple period. Yet our sources rarely reveal an awareness of this idea. Of the sources surveyed in Chapter 2, only Josephus and Philo associate the sukkah with the exodus. Jubilees, Maccabees, Pseudo-Philo and even the Nehemian account which directly alludes to Lev 23, reveal no such awareness. And Josephus and Philo seem to de-emphasize the connection. Philo offers this explanation as the second of three reasons why Jews stay in sukkot. Josephus perforce acknowledges the connection to the exodus in his paraphrase of the biblical legislation, but elsewhere declares that sukkot are built in honor of God.\footnote{Prior to the destruction Sukkot was primarily a temple celebration, so the understanding of the festival as a commemoration of the exodus was secondary. Indeed, to recall a time of wandering during the most joyous occasion of the year, while celebrating at the temple, the foundation of order and stability, probably seemed somewhat incongruous.}

After the destruction and the cessation of cultic rituals, the sukkah became the focus of the festival. Sleeping and eating for seven days in the sukkah makes one continuously aware of the ritual, and naturally
leads to a conception of the festival that places the sukka at the fore. With the temple in ruins and, after the Bar-Kochba revolt of 132-135 CE, Jerusalem transformed into a pagan city, the tannaim experienced a sense of dislocation, and could relate well to the Israelites of the exodus. Just as God had protected their ancestors in the hostile desert, so God would protect his people in the current predicament. The rabbinic interpretation of the sukka as the clouds of glory thus indicates a shift in the orientation of the festival from earlier times. The temple festival became a commemoration of the intimate relationship between God and the Israelites that had prevailed during the exodus. The shade of the sukka reified the experience of divine protection, love and intimacy, and foreshadowed the eschatological future when God would again deliver his people.