Chapter Fourteen

Joseph and His Brothers

Our next pericope consists of a collection of seven interpretations by R. Benjamin bar Japheth\(^1\) in the name of R. Eleazar. All of them deal with the story of Joseph and his brothers, and several focus specifically on the figure of Benjamin.\(^2\) The collection is brought here because the first dictum in the series cites Esther 8:15.\(^3\)

\(^1\) He was a third-generation Palestinian Amora, a student and tradent of R. Johanan. See Albeck, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 231.

\(^2\) It is possible that R. Eleazar’s comments have been assembled from discourses for the appropriate lections in Genesis. See our discussion above concerning the compendium by R. Eleazar in the name of R. Ḥanina (15a-b). If R. Benjamin b. Japhet was responsible for the selection of the dicta, then it is conceivable that he was showing a personal interest in traditions dealing with his biblical namesake. On the connection between the names of (possibly pseudepigraphic) sages and the subject-matter of their attributed traditions see Reuben Margaliot, *Leheger shemot vekhinnuyim ba-talmud*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1989), 5.

\(^3\) The order of the comments does not follow the order of the verses in Genesis. Rather it is as follows: 45:22; 45:15; 45:14; 45:12; 45:23; 50:18 [or: 47:31]; 50:21. As regards the location of the first tradition, it is understandable that it was moved to the head of the collection because, by creating the connection to Esther, it provided the justification for the presence of the entire series in the Esther-Midrash. It is not clear however why the second dictum does not follow the two comments on 45:12. Note that the Genizah fragment Antonin 247 reverses the order of the last two items.

As we shall have occasion to remark below, the Palestinian parallels to the last of the units (to Genesis 50:21) are contained within homiletical proems, mostly to Isaiah 40:1. It is not unlikely that the collection as a whole originated in such a proem, though no such text (expounding more than that one verse) is extant.
1. Five Royal Garments

[16a] “And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue etc.” (Esther 8:15).

It is written:10 “To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of raiment” (Genesis 45:22).

Is it possible that the thing in which that righteous man11 stumbled,12 [16b] his seed13 should stumble!

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4 MSS M, R*, W add: “A mnemonic.”
5 “he fell”—MS W: “he falls”; ~ in MS M.
6 None of the witnesses record a separate mnemonic for dictum #4. Rabbinowicz (Diqduqé Soferim, n.*) attributes this to the fact that units #3 and #4 are based on the same biblical verse. The explanation is not entirely satisfying, and we might be dealing with a textual error in the common prototype of all the witnesses.
7 “he went”— ~ in MS M.
8 “saw...consoled”— ~ in MS L.
9 “a mnemonic”— ~ in MSS M, R*, W.
10 “It is written”— thus only in MS Y and AgE; ~ in all other witnesses.
11 “righteous man”— ~ in MS B (and filled in in B*).
12 “stumbled”—thus only in MS Y and AgE; in all other witnesses: “was troubled.”
13 “his seed”—MSS G, M, R, Mf, Printings, YS: “he.”
For\(^{14}\) R. Ḥama bar Ḥaninah\(^{15}\) says: \(^{16}\) R. Ḥama bar Goria says (in the name of) Rav: \(^{17}\)

MSS Y, B, O, P, EY, Hg\(^{T1}\), Printings, Ag\(E\)

MSG (with variants from MSS N, W, Mf, Ashkenazic family, Hg\(^{T2}\), YS)

A person should not ever\(^{18}\) treat his son\(^{19}\) differently from among\(^{20}\) his sons, for because of two selā’s\(^{21}\) weight of fine wool which Jacob\(^{22}\) added\(^{23}\) for Joseph,\(^{24}\) his brothers became jealous of him and the matter developed\(^{25}\) and they\(^{26}\) went down into Egypt.

\(^{14}\) "For"—~ in MSS M, R.

\(^{15}\) "Ḥama bar Ḥaninah"—thus only in MS Y and Ag\(E\); MS M: "Rabbah bar Jeremiah"; in all other witnesses: "Rabbah [or: "Rava"] bar Maḥasia."

\(^{16}\) "R. Ḥama bar Ḥaninah says"—~ in MS L..

\(^{17}\) "R. Ḥama bar Goria...Rav"—~ in MS P.

\(^{18}\) "ever"—~ in Hg\(^{T2}\).

\(^{19}\) "his son"—~ in MS M (and filled in in M\(^*\)).

\(^{20}\) "among"—MSS L, R, Hg\(^{T2}\), YS: "the rest of"; YS: "the custom of the rest of."

\(^{21}\) "selā’s"—~ in MS B (and filled in in B\(^*\)).

\(^{22}\) MSS O, W add: "our father."

\(^{23}\) "added"—Mh\(G\): "made"; Ag\(E\): "returned" (?).

\(^{24}\) MSS G, N, B, L, W, Mf, Spanish family add: "over the rest of his sons";
Printings add: "over the rest of his brothers."

\(^{25}\) "his brothers became jealous...developed"—MS B: "the matter developed and his brothers became jealous of him."

\(^{26}\) "they"—thus only in Yemenite family.
And he is acting towards Benjamin in such a manner that his brothers will become jealous of him?! 

Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth: A hint did he suggest to him that there was destined to proceed from him a descendant who would go out in five royal garments. 

And who is he?—Mordecai. As it says: "And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad."

The objection, which is phrased in the Hebrew that characterizes formal Amoraic dicta, was probably posed by R. Benjamin bar Japheth. However the statement of R. Hama bar Goria was undoubtedly added by the redactor from a separate source. It originates in

27 Spanish family adds: "again."
28 "acting towards"—thus only in MS Y and AgE; MS P: "doing an additional thing to"; in all other witnesses: "doing a thing to."
29 Spanish family, YS add: "Rather."
30 "Says...Japheth"—Genizah fragment: "Says R. Benjamin"; ~ in YS.
31 "Says R. Eleazar"—~ in Printings, YS, Genizah fragment.
32 "A hint"—~ in MSS O, P, MhG.
33 "to him"—~ in MS R.
34 AgE adds: "He said to him."
35 "to proceed from him"—~ in Genizah fragment (and filled in in margin).
36 "a descendant"—MhG: "Mordecai"; Genizah fragment: "one."
37 "go out in"—Printings: "go out from the presence of the king"; MhG: "wear."
38 "garments"—MhG: "decorations."
39 "And who is he?"—~ in Printings, Genizah fragment.
40 "Mordecai"—AgE: "This is Mordecai."
41 "says"—MSS G, N, B, W, Mf, Spanish family, Ashkenazic family, YS: "is written."
43 See Bacher, Die Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer, 2:86.
a collection of sayings by R. Hama in the name of Rav that is found in *TB Shabbat* 10b.\(^{44}\)

R. Eleazar’s explanation is that, since it is inconceivable that Joseph should have acted so stupidly in terms of the psychological and moral rationales for his behavior towards Benjamin, we must therefore seek another, different significance for the fact that he had not learned the lesson of Jacob’s mistakes,\(^{46}\) and insisted on preferring Benjamin

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\(^{44}\) A dictum that is virtually identical to Rav’s is ascribed to R. Simeon b. Laqish in the name of R. Eleazar ben Azariah in *Genesis rabbah*, 84:8 (1010), except that there the consequence that is mentioned is limited to the fact that Joseph’s brothers came to despise him. It is possible that Rav’s innovation here was to expand the historical implications of what appears on the face of it to be a purely domestic dispute. A version that bears a closer resemblance to Rav’s is contained in *Tanhuma*, *Vayyeshev*, 4 as part of a discourse whose main body seems to be attributed to R. Joshua ben Qorah [cf. Buber’s n. 13 to *Aggadat bereshit*, 61:3 (p. 123)]: “For the sake of the ‘coat of many colors’ he caused all the tribes to descend into Egypt.”

\(^{45}\) *Shabbat* 10b-11a contains ten dicta on assorted topics by Rava b. Mahasia in the name of R. Hama bar Goria in the named of Rav. The conclusion of that pericope is constructed in such a way that the criticism voiced against Jacob’s preferential treatment of Joseph is made to stand, whereas Joseph’s apparent favoring of Benjamin is reinterpreted.

Kashe r [*Torah shelemah*, 7 (8):1659-60, #79] cites several medieval discussions which focus on the problem that veiled hints about the destinies of generations yet unborn do not adequately refute the immediate charges of Jacob’s favoritism. The framers of such objections are missing the point of midrashic exposition, where archetypal relationships do unite distant generations, and not only because of the presumed prophetic gifts that were vouchsafed the ancients.

\(^{46}\) There is an operative assumption that no such justification is required for Jacob’s favoring Joseph in the first place, an action that continues to stand condemned and criticized by the Talmud. This might simply reflect the literary fact that the homilist was uninterested in that aspect of the story or had no serviceable solution at hand. Nevertheless, the reasoning here is internally consistent as it implies that Joseph’s conduct was more unforgivable precisely because he had had the opportunity to learn—and suffer—from his father’s ill-advised behavior towards him. Jacob, on the other hand, had to make his own mistakes.

Of course had the midrash required it, the argument could have been reversed, as noted by several biblical commentators: Joseph had much more reason to treat Benjamin with affection because the two had the same mother, and because Benjamin had not been involved in his sale to the Egyptians. See Maharsha and Kashe r (to *Vayyigash*). Many of the commentators are equally sensitive to the midrash’s selec-
over his other siblings. According to R. Eleazar this was not a display of discriminatory treatment, but rather a sort of prophetic signal of the fate that would befall one of Benjamin’s most illustrious descendants, Mordecai, when he would be celebrated by the Persian emperor and honored with royal robes.
2. Benjamin’s Necks

[16b] “And he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck [literally: necks], and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck[s]” (Genesis 45:14).

How\textsuperscript{50} many necks did\textsuperscript{51} Benjamin have?\textsuperscript{52} \textsuperscript{53} \textsuperscript{54}

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The identification of the five garments which are being mentioned in the verse is not obvious, and does not seem to have been of great concern to the commentators. The verse itself divides the wardrobe into three syntactical units: (1) “royal apparel of blue and white”; (2) “a great crown of gold”; and (3) “a robe of fine linen and purple.” There are several items which the midrash might have treated as separate units in order to reach the desired total of five, but the most likely solution is that “royal apparel” is being treated as a general heading, so that the five garments are: (1) blue; (2) white; (3) crown of gold; (4) robe of fine linen; and (6) purple. Cf. the “Anonymous Commentary” quoted by Alkabetz, who (for homiletical purposes) divides them into: (1) royal apparel; (2) blue; (3) white; (4) crown of gold; (5) robe of fine linen and purple.

\textsuperscript{50} “How”—MSS N, Mf, HgT\textsuperscript{2}, YS: “And how.”

\textsuperscript{51} “did”—Genizah fragment: “does.”

\textsuperscript{52} “How many...have”—YS: “Did Benjamin have two necks?”; ~ in MSS M, R.

\textsuperscript{53} The question is worded in Aramaic in most, but not all, of the witnesses, indicating that it is not original to the talmudic pericope. The exceptions are: MSS N, L, YS, MhG. In some versions the difference between the languages is barely discernible, based on the variation between א and א.

\textsuperscript{54} Printings, YS, MhG add: “Rather.”
The Babylonian Esther Midrash

—Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth:55 Says R. Eleazar:56 57 Joseph58 wept over the two Temples59 that60 were destined to be61 in the portion of Benjamin62 and were destined to be destroyed.63

"And Benjamin wept upon his necks"64 65—over the Tabernacle66 of Shiloh, which was destined to be67 in the portion of Joseph and was destined to be destroyed.68

The Hebrew word for neck, $\text{savvar}$, can be treated as a morphologically plural form even when it denotes a semantically singular limb. For the midrashic homilist, the choice between singular or plural is, like everything else in a divinely authored text, not considered to be accidental.69 As in the previous dictum, R. Eleazar's explanation of the textual difficulty is based on the midrashic approach which views bibli-

56 "Says R. Eleazar"—~ in MhG, Genizah fragment.
57 MS P, EY add: "This teaches that."
58 "Joseph"—Genizah fragment: "Benjamin"; MS Mf: "he."
59 "two Temples"—MS P, EY, MhG: "the First Temple and [MS P adds: "over"] the Second Temple."
60 "over...that"—YS: "that two Temples."
61 "were destined to be"—MhG: "are."
62 "the portion of Benjamin"—EY: "his portion."
63 "and were destined to be destroyed"—MhG: "as it is written: ‘and he shall dwell between his shoulders’ (Deuteronomy 33:12)."
64 "upon his necks"—~ in MSS G, L, R, HgT2.
65 YS adds: "It is written." MS O, EY, Printings add: "He wept."
66 "Tabernacle"—MS N: "Temple."
67 "over the...to be"—YS: "He saw that the Tabernacle of Shiloh was destined to be built."
68 "Joseph wept...destined to be destroyed"—Genizah fragment: "Benjamin weeps over the Tabernacle of Shiloh which was destined to be in the portion of Joseph and was destined to be destroyed. Joseph is weeping over the two Temples that were destined to be in the portion of Benjamin and were destined to be destroyed."
69 On the exegetical issues arising from this passage see Eliezer Segal, "The Exegetical Craft of the Zohar: Towards an Appreciation," AJR Review 17 (1:1992), 33-5, where much of the current discussion is duplicated.
cal protagonists as trans-historical archetypes who embody eternally recurring themes and values. He also ascribes to Joseph and Benjamin a degree of prophetic inspiration that enables them to discern future events in their present experiences. Here the midrash is alluding to some fundamental facts of Jewish religious history: The two Temples in Jerusalem were housed within the tribal territory of Benjamin, whereas the sanctuary at Shiloh was situated in the region belonging to Joseph’s son Ephraim. Bearing these facts in mind, it is not difficult to understand how R. Eleazar, responding to the plural usage of Joseph’s weeping on [or, as the Hebrew permits: “over”] Benjamin’s “necks,” was able to discern in the episode a prophetic insight into the

70 Jerusalem was situated on the border between Judah and Benjamin; see Joshua 15:8, 63. However it is enumerated among the cities that were apportioned to Benjamin (Joshua 18:28; Judges 1:21). But cf. Judges 1:8, which poses a contradiction which occupied the rabbis.

71 See Joshua 16:1-10; Judges 21:19.

72 Similar exegesis is found in Genesis rabbah, 93:7 (1161) and 93:12 (1170) [see Albeck’s comments to 1170]; Targum “Jonathan” to Genesis 45:14. See Ginzberg, Legends, 2:13; 5:355.

The hermeneutical observation makes fine sense as applied to the first part of the verse, which tells of Joseph’s lamenting over the two necks [or Temples] of Benjamin. The second part, where Benjamin is said to be weeping over a single destroyed sanctuary, is however problematic. The midrashic deduction would fit neatly if the word for “neck” appeared in the singular form. Unfortunately though, it does not, and the symmetry of the homily and its exegetical logic are thereby marred. The traditional commentators have proposed several solutions to the problem. Some have drawn the conclusion that underlying the midrashic interpretations was a biblical text which did actually switch from the plural to the singular form, thereby furnishing the basis for the homily. Regrettably, the existence of such a text is not attested. On the question see the exhaustive discussion in Albeck’s note to Genesis rabbah. As remarked there, the second clause, about Shiloh, is missing in most of the witnesses to the first passage. Albeck observes that several authorities make reference to a singular form in the second part of the verse, which would obviate the need for the Talmud’s problematic question. He also refers to C. D. Ginsburg’s edition of the Masorah (The Massorah Compiled from Manuscripts (London, 1880)], which records the singular form in the name of “other versions,” though no one else seems able to locate an actual manuscript that contains that reading. Cf. the remarks of R. Yedidiah Norzi in his Minhat shai, who also questioned the existence of such a reading, on the basis of the known Masoretic traditions.

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future destinies of the two sanctuaries,\footnote{On the destruction of Shiloh see Jeremiah 7:12, 14; 21:6, 9.} which was, more than any personal emotions that might have overcome them on the occasion,\footnote{If we opt to accept Rashi's emendation, then we should probably understand that R. Eleazar's comment is based merely on the facts of the narrative: i.e., what was it that moved Joseph and Benjamin to shed tears on what ought to be a happy occasion [and excluding the possibility that weeping can be an expression of pure joy]? Such an in-} the real cause of their tears.

On the basis of the above exegetical difficulties Rashi proposed to emend the Talmud's text here, insisting that the question "How many necks did Benjamin have?" be deleted since the use of the plural of "neck" is the rule rather than an exception. Ignoring for the moment the fact that the objectionable question is attested in all known manuscripts except for those Ashkenazic witnesses which consistently incorporate Rashi's emendations [see E. L. Segal, "'The Goat of the Slaughterhouse...' —On the Evolution of a Variant Reading in the Babylonian Talmud," \textit{Tarbiz} 49 (1979-80):50], it is clear (as several commentators have observed) that in solving the one difficulty, Rashi has created another: i.e., without emphasis on the singulars and plurals there is no longer any visible textual foundation for the homily. On this point see, e.g., the objection of R. Josiah Pinto regarding the dubious coherence of the connection once the question has been deleted. Several of the supercommentaries to Rashi on the Pentateuch make their own attempts to justify the talmudic reading by positing finer grammatical distinctions. E.g.: Admittedly the plural is used in both clauses; in one however it is normal (in a construct form), while in the other it is unusual (as a possessive), and hence subject to midrashic exposition. Alternatively: \textit{savvarei} is always plural, and \textit{savvaro} is always singular; however \textit{savvarav} can be either, so that it can be expounded in both senses. See R. Elijah Mizrahi and \textit{Gur arieh} to the Pentateuch, and Maharsha to our pericope. All of this strikes us as too subtle and elaborate to have been presupposed by our pericope or its parallels.

We may note in passing that the plural construct form of \textit{savvar} does occur, if extremely rarely, in rabbinic Hebrew, though the matter should be reexamined according to reliable manuscripts. See e.g. Mishnah \textit{Kelim} 14:4 where the reading is supported by the Kaufmann, Parma and Cambridge (Lowe) manuscripts.

As noted by the author of the \textit{Zohar} (Vayyigash, 209b) the midrashic association between necks and the Sanctuaries most likely suggested itself because of biblical passages like Song of Songs 4:4 "Thy neck is like a tower of David builded with turrets." See also the reading of \textit{MhG} recorded above, which evokes Deuteronomy 33:12, a passage whose reference to God's dwelling "between his shoulders" has traditionally been applied to the Temple. See the sources indicated in the notes to Solomon Fisch, \textit{Midrash Haggadol on the Pentateuch: Deuteronomy} (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1975), 766-9. See in detail Segal, "The Exegetical Craft of the Zohar," cited above.

\footnote{On the destruction of Shiloh see Jeremiah 7:12, 14; 21:6, 9.}\footnote{If we opt to accept Rashi's emendation, then we should probably understand that R. Eleazar's comment is based merely on the facts of the narrative: i.e., what was it that moved Joseph and Benjamin to shed tears on what ought to be a happy occasion [and excluding the possibility that weeping can be an expression of pure joy]? Such an in-}
3. "It Is My Mouth That Speaketh Unto You"

[16b] "And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you" (Genesis 45:12).

Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth:75 Says R. Eleazar:76 He said to them:77 Just as I have76 nothing in my heart against Benjamin79 who was not involved in my sale, so do I have nothing in my heart against you who were involved in my sale.80

R. Eleazar is sensitive to the peculiar formulation of Joseph’s address to his brothers,81 in which he singles out Benjamin in spite of the fact that his words should be directed to all of them equally.82 R. Eleazar explains, not unreasonably, that by means of this nuance Joseph was implying a comparison between his present feelings towards Benjamin and towards the other brothers:83 Just as he never had reason to entertain any animosity towards Benjamin, so has he (at least at the

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interpretation could not attach exegetical significance to the numbers (one Tabernacle vs. two Temples).

75 "Says...Japheth" — in Printings, Genizah fragment.
76 "Says R. Eleazar"— in Genizah fragment.
77 "He said to them”—MSS N, B, Genizah fragment: “Said Joseph to his brothers”; — in MSS P, R*.
78 “have”—Genizah fragment: “had.”
79 All witnesses except MS Y add: “my brother.”
80 “who were involved in my sale”— in MS P, Printings, Genizah fragment.
81 Maharsha connects this verse with Joseph’s pledge in verse 6 above that he will maintain them all through the remaining years of famine.
82 Maharsha: “For Benjamin was [already] included in ‘your eyes see.’” For some different attempts to explain this phenomenon see Zev Gotlieb and Abraham Darom, eds., Be’ur ‘al hatorah lerabbi ‘ovadiah sforno (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1980), 109; Ch. D. Chavell, ed., Hizquni: Perushei hatorah lerabbi hizqiah b”r manoah (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1981), 160.
83 Pinto objects that the verse cannot really prove anything to the brothers since it can be read just as easily as a contrast between the innocent Benjamin and the other guilty brothers, and therefore it does not increase the credibility of Joseph’s assurances to his brothers.
moment) no resentment left in his heart against his other brothers for selling him.84

4. Mouth and Heart

[16b] "...That it is my mouth [ki fi] that speaketh unto you" (Genesis 45:12).

Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth:85 Says R. Eleazar:86 Like my mouth [kefi] such is my heart.

This comment is based on a word play:87 The Hebrew “ki fi,” “that my mouth,” is virtually identical to “kefi,”88 “like my mouth,” which suggests R. Eleazar’s interpretation that this phrase also can be read as a profession of Joseph’s sincerity, indicating a correspondence between Joseph’s verbal utterances and his true convictions.89

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84 As stated in verse 8 above, Joseph regards the brothers as unwitting agents of a divine plan.

On the passage in general see Ginzberg, Legends, 2:112-3; 5:355, n. 284; Kasher, Torah shelemah 7 (8):1653, # 52. Neither lists any parallels to this dictum.

85 “bar Japheth”—— in MS R.

86 “Says R. Benjamin...Eleazar”—— in Printings, YS, Genizah fragment.

87 The same words which are most conveniently rendered as in the ARV translation employed here, can also (and perhaps, more naturally) be read as “because my mouth which speaketh unto you,” thereby creating an incomplete sentence that lacks a predicate. It is possible that R. Eleazar’s interpretation involves an attempt to respond to that problem by filling in the missing clause.

88 The comparative ke appears in Babylonian Aramaic as a separate word “ki”; see, J. N. Epstein A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic, 138.

89 See Ch. D. Chavell, ed., Rabbenu bahya: be’ur ‘al hattorah (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1966), 1:355:

And in the midrash [The reference is to our pericope—E. S.]: “...Like my mouth, such is my heart.” The heart is not mentioned in the verse. However the sages expounded it as follows: Since he could have just said “That it is I who speaketh unto you,” the fact that it said instead “my mouth” was because that which is placed in my mouth is a vessel for the heart through which it expresses its contents. On this basis they interpreted “Like my mouth, such is my heart.”

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Although it would not be difficult to imagine a variety of homiletical contexts in which the comment might have been used, it nevertheless appears to have been inspired primarily by exegetical considerations.

5. “The Good Things of Egypt”

[16b] “And to his father he sent after this manner, ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt” (Genesis 45:23).

What is “with the good things of Egypt”?91

Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth:92 Says R.93 Eleazar:94 95 He sent to him96 wine which was acceptable to the elders.97

The midrash is concerned here with furnishing a specific referent to the undefined expression “the good things of Egypt” which Joseph sent to his father.98 It is not clear why wine was singled out, though it

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As is common in such midrashic readings, it is not quite clear whether R. Eleazar is claiming that the Bible is giving us an abbreviated version of Joseph’s actual words or (and this seems more probable) if it is presuming that the biblical protagonists were capable of understanding the subtle allusion and nuances that were embedded in each other’s words.

90 See our analysis of the last of R. Benjamin bar Japheth’s traditions (to Genesis 50:21) below.

91 “What... ‘...Egypt’”— Genizah fragment: “What did he send to him?”; ~ in MSS N, B, Spanish family (except HgT1).

92 “bar Japheth”— ~ in MS R.

93 “Says R.”— ~ in MS M (and filled in in M*).

94 “Says R. Benjamin...Eleazar”— Genizah fragment: “Says R. Isaac Nappaha”; ~ in YS.

95 MSS N, L, M, Mf, YS, Genizah fragment add: “This teaches that.”

96 MS W, EY, HgT1 add: “old.” Genizah fragment adds: “‘And he comforted them, and spake unto their heart’ (Genesis 50:21)—Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth: Says R. Eleazar: Joseph spoke to his brothers words which are acceptable to the heart. He said to them: Just as ten lamps cannot extinguish a single lamp, how shall a single lamp be able to extinguish ten lamps!”

97 Spanish family (except HgT) add: “And this is ‘the good things of Egypt.’”

98 It is evident that the question “What are the ‘good things of Egypt’” is not original to the Amoraic pericope, as is indicated by the facts that it is formulated in Aramaic, it is
probably owes largely to the fact that “corn and bread and meat” were already enumerated separately. R. Eliezer thus tried to identify a food item that would be pleasing to a man of Jacob’s advanced age.100

missing in some texts, it is transferred to the end of the unit in the Spanish tradition, and there are textual variations in its wording. In theory this could open the possibility that the comment was not made originally with reference to this particular scriptural expression. However it appears most likely that R. Eleazar’s statement originated as an explanation of the words “the good things.”


Maharsha remarks that wine was included in the list of products for which the Land of Israel was renowned (Deuteronomy 8:8)—though this would hardly serve as proof for the excellence of Egyptian wine. He adds that the large quantity which Joseph sent could only have been required by an old man who needed the beverage in order to keep warm.

Virtually all the commentators understood the allusion as being to the quality of the wine and its appropriateness to the needs of the aged. Such an interpretation is also supported by the textual traditions which specify that it was “old” wine. I nevertheless propose, with much hesitation, as an alternative interpretation, that the comment might refer to the wine’s halakhic fitness; i.e., Joseph was able to send to his father a shipment of wine which, in spite of its being produced in the infamous heathen environment of Egypt, was nevertheless free of the contamination that would result from contact with idolaters and hence it satisfied the halakhic demands of the “elders”; i.e., the Jewish religious sages. This explanation would add a homiletical dimension in that it extols Joseph for maintaining his religious integrity in pagan surroundings—a theme which the preacher could easily apply to the situation of his own community.


100 See Rashi.
6. When the Fox Has His Day

[16b] “And his brethren also went and fell down before his face [and they said, Behold, we be thy servants]” (Genesis 50:18).

Says Rabbi Benjamin bar Japheth:① Says R. Eleazar: This is what people say: When the fox has his day bow down to it.

The midrash ② is amazed that Jacob’s proud sons could have been reduced to such a state of fawning servility before Joseph. In the

① “bar Japheth”—~ in MS B (and filled in in B*).
② See Ginzberg, Legends, 2:168; Kasher, Torah shelemah, 7(8):1879-80, #61. Cf. Aggadat bereshit, 94-6] [=Tanhuma, ed. Buber, Vayyese, 5; John T. Townsend, transl., Midrash Tanhuma: Vol. 1: Genesis (Hoboken: Ktav, 1989), 179-80]: “Joseph abandoned himself to his fate when they were selling him... And now, his fortune turned and put him at an advantage, as it says ‘And his brothers, etc.’” The wording in these texts makes it amply clear that the point of the comment is that one should not waste one’s energies in resisting a person who is currently being favored by fate, since it is wiser to sit back and wait until the situation changes, as it inevitably will. As illustrations of this advice the midrash reminds us of Naboth’s futile resistance of Ahab, which is contrasted with the behavior of other biblical protagonists who preferred a policy of temporary strategic retreat (Abraham from Nimrod, Isaac from the Philistines, Jacob from Esau, Joseph from his brothers, Moses from Pharaoh, David from Naioth, Saul and Absalom), all of whom fled or appeased their enemies, waiting until the constellations could reverse themselves and they, like Joseph, could achieve ascendancy.

In an important chapter of his book ‘Olamah shel ha-aggadah (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1972), 256-62, E. E. Hallevy correctly notes that the vocabulary employed by these rabbinic sources and others when speaking of the decisive importance of opportun timing makes it evident that the terminology and the philosophical patterns were borrowed from Greek thought, where the force of kairos (“the hour”; i.e., fate) is absolute. Hallevy adduces other rabbinic texts (e.g., Mishnah Avot 4:3; TB Berakhot 64a; Mekhila derabbi shim’on ben yohai, 142) that praise the prudence of not resisting those who are currently chosen by fate; to which he matches an abundance of quotations from Greco-Roman sources. On 259-60 Hallevy discusses the corollary that “all people honor the one who is favored by Fate” (Tanhuma, Vayyese, 3, applied to Jacob’s asking Joseph, and not any of the other brothers, to arrange his burial). Here too Hallevy is able to bring to bear many instructive parallels from the words and deeds of Greek and Latin writers and historical figures. It is against this ideological background that we should understand the midrash’s reference to Joseph at last enjoying his “hour” after previously submitting without resistance to his fate at the hands of his brothers.
end R. Eleazar does nothing to erase or interpret away this impression, but simply acknowledges, with a discernible measure of cynicism, that such is the way of the world, and that prudence often instructs us to swallow our pride in the face of those who exercise power over us.

[16b] Is he a “fox”? And in what lies his inferiority with respect to them?

—Rather, says R. Isaac: Thus was it said:

“And Israel bowed himself upon the bed’s head” (Genesis 47:31).

Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth: Says R. Eleazar: This is as people say, etc.

As frequently occurs, especially in Babylonian aggadic discourse, the talmudic rabbis have approached R. Eleazar’s proverb with a


104 “Is he”—thus only in MS Y; ~ in all other witnesses.

105 “Is he a ‘fox’?”—HgT: “What is a ‘fox’? If you should say: Joseph’; ~ in MSS N, B, L*, R, YS.

106 “And”—thus only in MSS Y, B, EY; ~ in all other witnesses.

107 “them”—thus only in MS Y; in all other witnesses: “his brothers.”

108 “Is he...to them”—Genizah fragment: “A fox? [With respect to] his brothers he was a king!”

109 “says R. Isaac”—thus only in MS Y; in all other witnesses: “If it was said.”

110 “This is as people say”— ~ in MSS G (and filled in in G*) L, R., W, Mf, HgT, Printings, MbG.

111 “etc.”—thus only in MS Y; MS G: “[when a fox] has his day”; in all other witnesses: “When a fox has his day [“has his day”—Genizah fragment: (incomprehensible)] bow down to it.”

narrow literalism.\textsuperscript{113} No doubt the original point of the saying was that \textit{even} a fox\textsuperscript{114} enjoys its day in the sun.\textsuperscript{115} The anonymous objector insists that the image be employed with full precision as implying that Joseph was regarded by his brothers as essentially inferior to themselves. Although we need not accept that Joseph was fully superior to them—in spite of the fact that his present success had placed him in a position of exalted power in the Egyptian court—what right did his siblings have to rate themselves as his betters?\textsuperscript{116}

For this reason an alternative context is proposed for R. Eleazar's proverb: Genesis 47:31 which relates how Jacob, after obtaining Joseph's pledge to bury him in his ancestral tomb, "\textit{bowed himself upon the bed's head.}" Since no one but Jacob and Joseph was known to be present in the room at the time, it is possible to understand that Jacob was prostrating himself before his son.\textsuperscript{117} In this instance the hi-

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item On this phenomenon see Joseph Heinemann, \textit{Aggadah and Its Development}, Sifriyyat Keter: 'Am yisra'el vetarbuto, 4: Hagut vehalakhah, J. Dan, ed. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 165-70.
\item On foxes in rabbinic lore see L. Lewysohn, \textit{Die Zoologie des Talmuds}, 77-81. I was unable to locate his article in \textit{Jüdische Volksblatt} 1, 136, which apparently discusses this proverb in detail. From the sources adduced by Lewysohn it is evident that the fox was thought of proverbially as a lowly creature often contrasted with the majesty of the lion. See e.g., Mishnah \textit{Avot} 4:15; TP \textit{Shevi'it} 9:4 (39a) [Yehuda Feliks, \textit{Talmud Yerushalmi: Tractate Shevi'it Critically Edited}, Part Two (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1986), 263]; \textit{TB Bava qamma} 117a; E. E. Hallevy, \textit{Aggadot ha-'amora'im} (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1977), 40.
\item The English reader will undoubtedly feel more comfortable with Shakespeare's formulation (\textit{Hamlet} 5:1:313) about how the "dog will have his day."
\item Pinto analyzes the midrash's possible criteria for ranking superiority and inferiority. He argues that the brothers could not be belittling Joseph because of his youth, since Benjamin was even younger. Several of the brothers could be considered of lower status because their mothers were Jacob's concubines.
\item Cf. J. Skinner \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary to Genesis}, International Critical Commentary, S. Driver, ed. (Edinburgh: T. \\& T. Clark, 1956), 503: "An act of worship, expressing gratitude to God for the fulfillment of his last wish..." Several of the classical Jewish commentators take special care to explain that Jacob was bowing in gratitude to God, and not before Joseph. See Aaron Greenbaum, ed., \textit{The Biblical Commentary of Rav Samuel ben Hofni Gaon According to Geniza Manuscripts} (Jerusalem: Harav Kook Institute, 1978), 316-7 and nn. 33-4; Hizquni
\end{enumerate}

\end{footnotesize}
erarchical relationship between parent and child is a clear one, and hence the proverbial designation of Joseph as a "fox" in comparison with Jacob makes sense.

7. Speaking to the Heart

[16b] "And he comforted them, and spake unto their heart"\(^{118}\)

(Genesis 50:21).

---Continued from previous page---

(ed. Chavell, 167); R. Joseph Bekhor-Shor [Perush lehamish-shah humshei torah me'et r. yosef bekhor shor (Jerusalem: Makor, 1968), 1:76]; Qimhi (ed. Kamlehr, 201); Sforno (ed. Chavell, 114); Abraha Maimonides (Ephraim Judah Wisenberg, ed., Perush rabbenu avraham ben haramba" m z"l bereshit ushemot (London: S. D. Sasoon, 1958), 186]. Cf. literalists such as Ibn Ezra (ed. Weiser, 1:124; according to one of his explanations) and Rashbam (ed. Bromberg, 64) who insist nonetheless that Jacob was bowing out of respect for Joseph. The material collected in Tosafot Hashalem (ed. Gellis, 5:9-10) reflects both approaches. See also Ginzberg, Legends, 5:363, n. 348.

E. Speiser, Genesis, Anchor Bible, W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman, eds. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 356-7, cites the Septuagint reading as της βόσκου, reflecting the Hebrew mathe (staff), as symptomatic of the exegetical difficulty inherent in the verse. See Alan England Brooke and Norman McLean, eds., The Old Testament in Greek (London: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 1:143. The reading also underlies the Syriac rendering hudra; see Ch. Heller, ed., Peshitta (Berlin, 1927), 62 and n. 20; Arthur Vööbus, The Pentateuch in the Version of the Syro-Hexapla, Corpus Scriptorum Orientalium (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1975), 166; The Peshitta Institute, The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 1:1:56; Rud. Kittel, ed., Biblia Hebraica (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937), 74. The Septuagint reading was well-known to Jewish commentators in the Middle Ages as a "Christian" text (though it is not found in the Vulgate) which was understood by Christians to be an allusion to the cross, thereby transforming the exegetical question into a polemical issue. See Greenbaum, Samuel ben Hofni, ibid.; Tosafot Hashalem, 5:9; Isaac Samson Lange, ed., Perush hactorah ler. hayyim palti'el (Jerusalem: 1980), 152; Sefer nissa'hisn [in J. D. Eisenstein, ed., Ozar Wukuheim: A Collection of Polemics and Disputations (Jerusalem: 1969), 240]; David Berger, The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 59, 248 (English); 20 (Hebrew). See also Maharsha; Kasher, Torah shelemah, 7 (8): 1737, #137.\(^{118}\) ARV: "spake kindly unto them."
Says R. Benjamin bar Japheth: Says R. Eleazar:119 120 That he121 spoke to them122 words which are acceptable123 to the heart:124

Just as ten lamps could not extinguish a single lamp, how shall a single lamp125 be able to extinguish ten lamps!126

The biblical text suggests that after the consoling words which Joseph addressed to his brothers and which were reported in verses 19–21, Joseph persisted in his efforts to persuade them with additional words and arguments127 which the narrator did not see fit to record.128

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119 “Says R. Benjamin...Eleazar”— ~ in MS L, YS.
120 Spanish family, Ashkenazic family, MS Mf, Printings, YS add: “This teaches.”
121 “he”—MS N: “Joseph.”
122 “them”—MS N: “his brothers.”
123 “acceptable”—MSS P, Mf (before emendation): “compatible.”
124 MSS N, B, W add: “He said to them”; MS R adds: “The words which he said to them.”
125 “a single lamp”—MSS B, O, L, R, HgT2, YS: “it.”
126 “'And he comforted...’...ten lamps”— ~ in Genizah fragment (see above).
127 Pesiqta derav kahana, 16:5 (ed. Mandelbaum, 271-2; transl. Braude and Kapstein, 293-4) and Genesis rabbah, 100:9 (1293-4) enumerate a series of different arguments by means of which Joseph strove to prove that he posed no threat to his brothers [I summarize them here according to their order in Pesiqta derav kahana; Genesis rabbah has a somewhat different arrangement]:

1) R. Simlai reasons that a head would never contemplate destroying the limbs of its own body. [See also Efraim Urbach, ed., Sefer Arugat Habosem Auctore R. Abraham b. R. Azriel (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1939-63), 302.]

2) The tribes have been likened by Scripture to such imperishable things as the dust of the earth, the sand on the sea-shore [or according to Genesis rabbah: the beasts of the field], and the stars of the heavens.

3) Joseph would never try to counteract his father’s will.

4) Nor would he venture to oppose the divine purpose.

5) The existence of twelve tribes is an unalterable “law of nature” corresponding to the number of hours in the day and night, the months of the year and the constellations.

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We have already seen that the midrashic exegetes were unable to resist such an inviting challenge to reconstruct an appropriate

6) The brothers constitute proof before the Egyptians that Joseph stems from freeborn stock and is not a mere slave. Joseph would not cause suspicion to be cast upon these claims.

7) Killing the brothers would destroy Joseph’s moral reputation and credibility among the Egyptians. [#6 and #7 appear as one unit in Tanhuma, ed. Buber, see below.] Hallevy (see below) cites an interesting parallel to this argument in the advice ascribed to Cyrus by Xenophon.

*Genesis rabbah* adds a further argument in elaboration of #2 and #5: “Ten stars wanted to destroy one star and did not succeed. With respect to the twelve tribes, then, how could I ever expect to alter the order of the universe, etc.?” This passage, which of course evokes Joseph’s dream from Genesis 37:9, is substantially identical with the lamp analogy in the Babylonian Esther-Midrash. It should be noted that the parallel segment in *Tanhuma* (ed. Buber), *Shemot*, 2 (2:2), mentions neither lamps nor stars, but merely the numerical improbability of one overcoming ten. *Pesiqta rabbati*, 29-30B (29:6-9; ed. Friedmann, 138a; transl. Braude, 2:582-3) appears to agree with the Esther-Midrash’s image of the ten lamps, but the passage in question is part of a reconstruction by Friedmann based on the Talmud (following the emendation of the traditional commentators. See Braude, n. 3).

Hallevy, ‘*Olamah shel ha-aggadah*, 210-11 observes that for the ancient rhetor, as for the rabbis who expounded Joseph’s behavior in the current episode, it was not considered sufficient to offer an insecure or distrustful person promises that they would not be hurt. Far better was a logical demonstration that it was improbable or undesirable for the speaker to inflict any harm on the threatened party.

128 This seems to be the implication of the biblical text, though I do not know of any commentators who have discussed the matter.

See Buber’s note to his edition of *Tanhuma*, *Shemot*, 2 (2:2, n. 15) according to which two manuscripts of *Tanhuma* read as follows: “The scriptural text is not lacking anything! What is ‘unto their heart’? —Words which are close [semukhin] to the heart” [Perhaps this should be emended to: Words which sustain (somekhin) the heart].

129 Unlike the Esther-Midrash which, as usual, restricts itself to an exegetical analysis of the biblical text at hand, *Pesiqta derav kahana* and *Genesis rabbah* incorporate the commentary into a homiletical discourse, a proem for “Shabbat nahamu” (the Sabbath following the Ninth of Av). This is achieved by appending the concluding formula: And is this not a qal vahomer argument: Just as Joseph, who addressed gentle words to the hearts of the tribes, was able thereby to console them—even so, when the Holy One will come to console Jerusalem, will he not do so all the more! This is what is written:
continuation of Joseph’s conversation with his brothers.\textsuperscript{130} R. Eleazar also takes his exegetical cue from the verse’s graphic image of speaking to a person’s heart, which he explains as a figure of speech employed in order to indicate comfort and consolation.\textsuperscript{131}

\begin{center}
\textit{"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem" (Isaiah 40:1-2).}
\end{center}

See also Pesiqta rabbati, 29-30B; 30:4 (ed. Friedmann, 142a; transl. Braude, 2:596); 12:5 (496/1:230); Song of Songs rabbah, 8:1 [S. Dunsky, Midrash rabbah: Shir ha-shirim, midrash hazita (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1980), 167]; Exodus rabbah, 5:10 [Avigdor Shinan, ed., Midrash shemot rabbah: Chapters I-XIV (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1984), 152-3]. As noted astutely by Shinan, “the proper place of the unit, which extends to 5:1(3), should be after Exodus rabbah, 5:9 [pp. 158-62]... where it constitutes a remnant of a proem to Exodus 4:27.” See the full discussion and references there.

Similarly, in Tanhuma (ed. Buber), Shemot, 2, the interpretations of Genesis 50:21 function as part of a proem to Exodus 1:1.

\textsuperscript{130} E. E. Hallevy, Sha’arei ha-agadah, revised edition (Tel-Aviv: Niv, 1982), 67: “Although the Torah has remained reticent and not informed us of the content of this conversation, no qualified student of rhetoric in the Hellenistic world would have any difficulty in supplying Joseph with a speech ‘that should have been stated by him in accordance with the circumstances.’” The last allusion is to the famous words of Thucydides [1:22; transl. Foster (Loeb), 1:38-9], which typify the attitude of ancient historians to such phenomena.

\textsuperscript{131} In Genesis rabbah, ibid., the question is posed explicitly: “Do you ever find a man who speaks [literally] to the heart? —Rather, this refers to words which console the heart.” As noted by Albeck, the same question is posed above in Genesis rabbah 80:7 (959) in connection with Genesis 34:3 where Shechem “spake unto the heart of the damsel”—to which the same reply is given: “Rather: Words which console the heart...”; the midrash there proceeds to supply Shechem with an appropriate argument.


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As regards the content of Joseph's words, there does not seem to be any particular clue in the wording of the scriptural passage that would suggest an association with lamps. The analogy alludes to the physical characteristics of fire: Although capable of consuming many materials, it cannot consume other flames, but only serves to amplify them.\textsuperscript{132}

**Concluding Remarks**

The seven dicta which make up this section all deal with questions related to the story of Joseph and his brothers in the second half of the

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\textsuperscript{132} Thus according to Maharsha who concludes: "...and so it was in my [i.e., Joseph's] case that by virtue of being sold I rose to greatness, and as Scripture states 'But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good' (Genesis 50:20) [the verse is also cited in this context by Pinto]. The significance of the image was not understood properly by the Tosafot commentaries to the verse [See Sefer Tosafot Hashalem, 5:92; Kasher, Torah shelemah 7(8):1882-3, #74], as can be deduced from the objections which they raise:

...This is difficult. Where do we find that a lamp can extinguish other lamps? —We may answer that the ten lamps allude to the merits [zekhuyyot], and that the extinguishing mentioned here refers to the hiding of the light, since it is the nature of a large light to obscure a smaller one. Hence he said to them: You who have many merits failed to obscure my merit, so how can my individual merit ever eclipse your merits...?

In another commentary cited there we read:

I.e., the smoke of ten lamps will not be able to extinguish one lamp. The plain sense is unacceptable here because lamps do not extinguish one another. However smoke is capable of extinguishing a lamp.
book of Genesis.\textsuperscript{133} Although the inclusion of the collection is justified, as noted above, by the quote from Esther 8:15 in the first unit, it is possible that the redactors also wished thereby to give some acknowledgment of the close literary affinity that binds Esther to the Joseph cycle, a phenomenon which is well known to Esther scholarship.\textsuperscript{134} In their present context all the comments appear to be responding to legitimate exegetical questions, whether by resolving difficulties in the text or by attempting to reconstruct the thoughts and motivations of the biblical protagonists. However it is not difficult to imagine how most of the comments could be incorporated into homiletical contexts without major alterations. Only the first two dicta involve departures from the simple sense of the scriptural texts, treating the events described there as archetypal or prophetic allusions to future events.

Only two of the dicta have equivalents in \textit{Genesis rabbah}.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{133} For an overview see the beginning of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{134} See \textit{Esther rabbah}, 7:7. Some basic studies of the phenomenon are cited in Eliezer Segal, "Human Anger and Divine Intervention in Esther," \textit{Prooftexts} 9 (1989), 250-1; see references on 254, n. 20.

\textsuperscript{135} #2, in \textit{Genesis rabbah}, 93:12 (1170), and #7, \textit{ibid.}, 100:9 (1293-4) and parallels. It should be noted that \textit{Genesis rabbah}, 84:8 (1010) contains a parallel to the dictum that was cited as an objection to #1, but not to R. Benjamin bar Japheth's statement itself. See also \textit{Aggadat bereshit}, 47:1 (ed. Buber, 94-6), and parallels (to #6).