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ETHICS AND THE PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE: B. MEGILLAH 30B–31A ON THE HAFTAROT FOR ANNUAL HOLIDAYS

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Introduction

The understanding of “ethics” developed in this essay for considering ethics in the Babylonian Talmud Gemara both builds upon and extends approaches developed over the last few decades—including my own. In roughly the mid-1990s, and earlier, an interest in ethics for rabbinic Judaism broadly, and the Babylonian Talmud specifically, could take at least two directions. First, the great studies of rabbinic ethics and theology, starting with Solomon Schechter’s *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, provided immense resources for ethical consideration. Among these works, the analyses of Max Kadushin are the most conceptually developed, and Richard Sarason in a 1990 study was also refining Kadushin’s analytic terms for continued rigor and relevance. I also highlight Adolph Büchler’s *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* as distinctively insightful on many points, and Ephraim Urbach’s *The Sages* as the latest and arguably most expansive as well as methodologically self-

aware regarding use of sources.¹ Second, Louis Newman developed a distinct method for bringing expertise in classical rabbinic texts to bear on modern Jewish ethics, and he published a set of essays in the late 1980s and early 1990s that emphasized readings of the Talmud for ethics (especially the collection *Past Imperatives*, which was published in 1998). Newman's study of the modern question of euthanasia, which highlights rabbinic discussions addressing the noise of a man chopping wood near the home of a person who is dying, exemplifies a strong way that ethics and the reading of Talmud may be integrated. Newman's work emphasizes at least three key points for the study of ethics: the need to specify the ways that "law" and "ethics" as terms in English are understood in relation to Jewish halakhah, the need to attend to covenant, and importance of wisdom transmitted through post-biblical sages, including the sayings of Hillel and Rabbi Akiva.²

A set of challenges for both approaches were articulated in the 1990s, and in the most outspoken form, they might say that the Babylonian Talmud Gemara is not concerned with ethics at all. Daniel Boyarin wrote in 1993 that we should not seek "rabbinic thought" but rather only rabbinic "culture, as a set of complexly related practices both textual and embodied."³ In 2009 he made the stronger argument that the Gemara is best understood as satire, combining contradictory elements:

¹ Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961); Richard Sarason, "Kadushin's Study of Midrash: Value Concepts and Their Literary Embodiment," in *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind: Essays on the Hermeneutics of Max Kadushin*, ed. P. Ochs (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); Adolph Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967); Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

² Louis Newman, *Past Imperatives: Studies in the History and Theory of Jewish Ethics* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998); Jonathan Schofer, "Ethical and Moral Duties in Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*, ed. Pamela Barmash (New York: Oxford University, 2019), 425–426..

³ Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1993), 18.

Concentrating on the Babylonian Talmud, I see a much more scholastic community, a text of intellectuals, of Sages (Sophists), and ask, why did they produce a literature like this, inter alia? What was at stake for them in incorporating blocks of a genre of (folk) literature that seems not only incompatible but betimes even distinctly hostile to their worldview and represented self-image? What kind of book is the Babylonian Talmud? To my way of thinking, the richest answer comes from the world of Menippean satire, the literary style that by definition combines seemingly contradictory elements. This is the textual form (genre?) whose very name, *satura*, meaning a kind of pudding or sausage of mixed aliments, indicates such incongruous interminglings. For me, then, the operative questions are ... of the intercutting and undercutting of antithetical genres.⁴

Boyarin highlights the very parts of the Talmudic commentary that provide a counter to the dominant voice of the Mishnah, passages that are bawdy or satirical, which not only offer alternative content but even an “undercutting” of the aim of setting out law as such.

Boyarin’s strong stances have influences in less boldly stated methods as well. Michael Satlow’s 1995 study of rabbinic sexuality argues that rabbinic texts should be understood as rhetoric, whose aim is to persuade people to follow sanctioned norms.⁵ Jeffrey Rubenstein’s *Talmudic Stories*, published in 1999, does take an interest in the virtuous character of the sage and how narrative material in the Babylonian Talmud (BT) Gemara can teach how to embody the sage’s Torah. He argues, though, that the narratives of the Gemara do not present ideal heroes who exemplify values in a straightforward way, but rather express tensions often concerning the role of Torah in a sage’s life and leadership. He writes,

BT stories criticize rabbis and candidly illustrate their faults to a greater extent than the Palestinian versions. For all their miracle-working

⁴ Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 197.

⁵ Michael Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 7–9.

capabilities, the sages of the BT display a thoroughly human capacity to err.

...The heightened criticism of sages in BT stories should be attributed to their provenance in the later Babylonian academy and their place in Stammaitic culture. Stories were reworked by the Stammaitim to teach the values of their elite, scholastic culture to other sages. The “implied audience” generally was not the average nonrabbinic or peripherally-rabbinic Babylonian Jew, and the purpose was not to propagandize about the virtues of rabbinic leadership and way of life. The focus, in other words, was internal, not external, and the redactors could afford to project failings and weaknesses upon earlier sages. Because stories provided them a way of working through important cultural issues, they portrayed rabbinic characters with realistic limitations and faults.⁶

These summaries of Rubenstein regarding his detailed studies of specific narratives exemplify the qualified and complex way that values were understood to be conveyed in the Gemara. His analyses are a long distance from both the large classic studies of rabbinic thought and the connection between modern Jewish ethics and Talmudic research found in Newman’s work.

In building my own approach to rabbinic ethics—given the stances of Boyarin, Satlow, and Rubenstein—I found one clue in scholarship on medieval and early modern Jewish mystical circles, where ethical literature and rules for conduct were composed, and scholarship by both Ze’ev Gries and Joseph Dan looked to a subset of rabbinic texts as their precedents. This approach coincided with Daniel Sperber’s research addressing collections of rabbinic proverbial sayings as “manuals of rabbinic conduct.”⁷ My own stance has been that historically grounded understandings of rabbinic ethics should employ the word “ethics” for

⁶ Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999), 279, 281; see also 282.

⁷ Ze’ev Gries, *Conduct Literature (Rgimen Vitae): Its History and Place in the Life of Beshtian Hasidim* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989); Joseph Dan, *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975); Daniel Sperber, “Manuals of Rabbinic Conduct,” in *Scholars and Scholarship*, ed. L. Landman (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1990), 9–26.

examining rabbinic literature starting with the collections of rabbinic proverbial wisdom—Mishnah Avot, Derekh Eretz Rabbah, and Derekh Eretz Zuta—as well as later post-Talmudic anthologies building upon or influenced by them, such as Avot de Rabbi Natan and Tanna Devei Eliyyahu. I built this argument through a study of Avot de Rabbi Natan in *The Making of a Sage* (2005), and then I showed in *Confronting Vulnerability* (2010) that these sources are at key points quoted in the Gemara of the Talmud, or that material from the Gemara is brought into the later anthologies and linked with proverbial sayings or midrash that emphasizes the ethical components. This “ethics” is concerned with ideals for character, motivation, leadership, and response to the needs of others. This ethics also, of course, is shaped to rabbinic concerns, values, and conceptions, even or especially when the sources reveal borrowing from Stoic ethical concepts and techniques, as I have emphasized, and more recently, Yair Furstenberg has argued as well.⁸

My selection of b. Megillah 30b–32a, commenting on m. Megillah 3:5–6, to explore reading the Talmud as an “ethical prompt” aims to identify a creative way that ethics can be found in the Babylonian Talmud Gemara by expanding from this trajectory of research rather than trying to re-create earlier forms of scholarly inquiry into rabbinic ethics. My use of the term “ethics,” then, will not be as narrowly defined as in my research centering on Mishnah Avot, Avot de Rabbi Natan, and related texts, but rather a more flexible conceptualization that aims to capture four ways that aspects of this *sugya* may inspire or prompt ethical consideration today. At the same time, I work to avoid presuming or prescribing a fixed modern or postmodern ethical outlook, whether those with longstanding influence in Jewish communities such as Ethical Monotheism, or

⁸ Jonathan Schofer, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Jonathan Schofer, *Confronting Vulnerability: The Body and the Divine in Rabbinic Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), especially 6–14 on the sources and the term “ethics,” and 21–24 on response to Stoic conceptions; Yair Furstenberg, “Rabbinic Responses to Greco-Roman Ethics of Self-Formation in Tractate Avot,” in *Self, Self-Fashioning, and Individuality in Late Antiquity: New Perspectives*, ed. M. Niehoff and J. Levinson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 125–149.

intellectual formulations such as the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas.⁹ Also, while studies of ethics in collections of rabbinic wisdom such as Mishnah Avot and Avot de Rabbi Natan can lead to a focus on sagely leadership, the *sugya* of b. Megillah 30b–32a prescribes public scriptural readings for annual holidays, which leads me to examine the significance of biblical texts prescribed for public recitation and reception by rabbinic halakhic materials. In this *sugya*, the subject matter leads to a consideration of the relation between elite prescriptions and influence on a broad popular scale, even if the nature and degree of that influence is difficult to delineate.

In identifying four types of ethical concern prompted by the *sugya*, I will address both a passage that presents ethical aggadah in a relatively straightforward manner, and legal prescriptions for the scriptural readings for which the sense of ethics needs to be drawn from either consideration of other rabbinic legal and ethical texts or from more modern sensibilities. First, the *sugya* does have an aggadic passage, building upon a Haftarah, in which Rabbi Yohanan sets out a theological and moral significance for Scripture. Second, the *sugya* at times selects for the public scriptural readings of biblical texts that have significance in rabbinic halakhah. Third, the *sugya* selects scriptural readings whose topics are arguably connected with concerns and priorities of rabbinic ethical or wisdom literature such as Mishnah Avot and Avot de Rabbi Natan. Fourth, even if correlates with other rabbinic sources cannot be identified for ethical content, there are choices made by the *sugya* for Torah and Haftarah readings that can be assessed from a modern perspective as adding ethical concern to the Mishnah's original selection of Pentateuchal readings for the holy days of the year. A full translation of the relevant material is available in the appendix, and in the rest of this essay I will give an overview of the *sugya* and then highlight key passages with these forms of ethical significance.

⁹ See the discussion and references in Schofer, *Confronting Vulnerability*, 9–14.

The *Sugya* and Basic Considerations: b. Megillah 30b–32a

Mishnah Megillah 3:5–6 and the Talmudic commentary of b. Megillah 30b–32a tend to be of interest to scholars and other readers primarily focused on three topics: Haftarah, midrash to special sabbaths such as *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* and *Pesiqta Rabbati*, and synagogue poetry. Elsie Stern draws upon this *sugya* to specify rabbis' roles in establishing lectionary traditions and rituals:

...[T]he presence of lectionary lists in b. Meg 31a–b shows that the rabbis of the academy whose comments are preserved in the Talmud were also responsible for determining certain lectionary traditions. In addition, the appearance of the cycle in [*Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*] and the early *piyyutim*, as well as the later ubiquity of the cycle throughout a wide range of lectionary rites, demonstrates that it was authorized and utilized by the rabbis from an early date.¹⁰

While we do not know the degree to which these rabbinic decisions were influential outside of rabbinic disciple circles and any immediate surrounding Jewish communities, we do have evidence here that rabbis were concerned with these lectionary traditions in the time of the Mishnah and even more so in the making of the Gemara. Also, Michael Fishbane summarizes in his commentary to the Haftarot:

Thematic links between the Torah and Prophets in the tannaitic sources of the Land of Israel appear ... in those instances where the Sabbath or another day commemorates a special ritual or religious occasion. In this respect, the Mishnah mentions several days when a special selection from the Torah is recited. ... [The Babylonian Talmud] supplements this list with a catalogue of corresponding haftarot, chosen because they are like the occasion commemorated (b. Megillah 31a–b).¹¹

¹⁰ Elsie R. Stern, *From Rebuke to Consolation: Exegesis and Theology in the Liturgical Anthology of the Ninth of Av Season*, (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown Judaic Studies, 2004), 23.

¹¹ Michael Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftarot: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation, Commentary by Michael Fishbane* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002), xxv.

This *sugya*, then, is a primary place in which the Mishnah and Talmud set out public readings of scripture for the annual holidays and more.¹²

Fishbane's extensive commentary upon the Haftarat does not emphasize ethical concerns. Rather, he argues that the selection of Haftarat emphasizes parallels or symmetries in the sacred history "between events, persons, or institutions." More specifically,

These diverse correlations also indicate a certain cast of mind or concern behind the selection—what appears to be a certain typological reading of sacred history. It may be added that, in this process, haftarat were chosen that do not have the personal voice of the prophet, but the narrative voice of a historian of the archival tone of a catalogue. This is significant, for it indicates that the haftarah was believed to instruct by means of comparison or analogy with the Torah portion. Moreover, the relative absence of the prophet's voice also results in the virtual absence of the prophetic tone of rebuke or criticism for personal or social evils—of commission or omission.¹³

This analysis fully respects Fishbane's stance, but also shows that, while the Mishnah presents Torah readings for the annual holidays that center on ritual concerns, the Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud prescribes Haftarat that frequently add ethical prescriptions and ideals. Attending to these prescriptions and ideals may help us see new components of rabbinic law for major holy days that shaped large parts of Jewish culture. Also, identifying ethical interests in the shaping of this material highlights interrelations between public rituals, scripture, and ethics as emphasized by rabbinic culture.

The study centers on commentary to m. Megillah 3:5–6 for Passover, Shavuot, The New Year, the Day of Atonement, Sukkot, Hanukkah, and Purim, which is basically the mishnah starting on b. Megillah 30b and the gemara on b. Megillah 31a. Several of these festivals and holidays,

¹² This focus on annual holidays, rather than on the more full cycle of Pentateuchal readings, means that the question of whether the Pentateuch was read on an Annual or Triennial cycle in the time of the Mishnah, or the time of the Gemara, is not at stake here; for a summary of the issues on this question, see Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftarat*, xx–xxx.

¹³ Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftarat*, xxix.

including Passover, The Day of Atonement, and Sukkot, have been examined in large studies, and my consideration of ethics aims to complement these works.¹⁴ Tractate Megillah of the Mishnah and Babylonian Talmud primarily addresses the Festival of Purim, including the reading from the Scroll of Esther. The *sugya* of b. Megillah 30b–32a concludes the tractate Megillah of the Babylonian Talmud, which has four chapters. While the first two chapters of m. Megillah focus on the reading of the Scroll of Esther on Purim, the last two chapters turn to different but related subjects. Hanoch Albeck observes, in his introduction to Mishnah Megillah, that chapters 3 and 4 of the Mishnah and related commentary came to be reversed in the Babylonian Talmud, especially printed editions, so in his edition of the Mishnah and others, the relevant mishnaic passages appear not in Chapter 4, which a reader today might expect if starting with the Babylonian Talmud, but in Chapter 3: m. Megillah 3:5–6.¹⁵

In m. Megillah 3:5–6, we find a list of special Pentateuchal readings for annual holidays, other distinct days, and discussion of a few other matters regarding public recitation of scripture and blessings. The presentation follows the sequence of Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28–29, with Passover, then Shavuot, then the days in what the biblical texts call the “seventh month”: The New Year, The Day of Atonement, and Sukkot. Hanukkah and Purim are placed afterward. These Mishnaic prescriptions are as follows:

¹⁴ This body of research includes Jeffrey Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995); Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999); Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *Passover and Easter: The Symbolic Structuring of Sacred Seasons* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). I will not try to find ethical significance in the Haftarat of rebuke and consolation, and the Haftarat with patterns of sin-punishment-restoration, for the Ninth of Av season, which are part of the later components of the *sugya* and have been studied by Stern; see Stern, *From Rebuke to Consolation*, 39–48.

¹⁵ Hanoch Albeck, *The Mishna, Seder Moed, Commentary by Hanoch Albeck* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: The Bialek Institute, 1988), 351.

On Passover, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that are in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:4–8).

On Shavuot, [they read from the Torah,] *You will count seven weeks: from the first time the sickle is put to the grain, start to count seven weeks* (Deut. 16:9; and more generally, Deut. 16:9–12).

On the New Year, [they read from the Torah,] *Speak to the descendants of Israel to say: In the seventh month, on the first of the month, there will be for you a day of rest, a sacred assembly, a memorial of a blast of a march* (Lev. 23:24; and more generally, Lev. 23:23–25).

On The Day of Atonement, [they read from the Torah,] *YHWH spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they came close to YHWH and died* (Lev. 16:1).

On the first holy day of Sukkot, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that is in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:33–43).

On the rest of the all the days of Sukkot, they read from the Torah in the sacrifices of Sukkot (Num. 29:12–38, probably starting on verse 17, describing the second day).

On Hanukkah, [they read from the Torah] in “The chieftains (*nesi'im*)” (Num. 7:1–89).

On Purim, [they read from the Torah,] *And Amalek came [and made war against Israel in Rephidim]* (Ex. 17:8–16).

[The mishnah continues from here with a series of prescriptions on related topics]

(m. Meg. 3:5–6).

The formal features of this mishnah are fairly simple. The sacred day is named, and then the relevant section of the Torah is presented, usually by an opening or key biblical verse and sometimes by a general designation. In translating and giving the citations within this material, as well as in the gemara, the question arises: how much of the scriptural reading should we consider to be indicated beyond the verse quoted, and could we presume that the modern sections or portions in their entirety are prescribed? Many but not all of the passages are still used in the modern period to the present. At times I have decided to focus on the verse directly cited and to note the modern portion separately, because it may be the

case that the readings at the time of the mishnah, or the time of the gemara, could have been different—for example, perhaps shorter and more compact.

The *sugya* in overall structure is also relatively simple: the gemara quotes a passage of the long mishnah and expands upon it. While the mishnah names only the Pentateuchal reading for one day, the gemara will set out Haftarat to accompany the Pentateuchal readings. The gemara generally then quotes the next component of the mishnah, and onward. The gemara may elaborate further on any number of issues, including how to address the observance of a prescribed day over two days in the diaspora and how to adjudicate more than one opinion for the readings. Twice the *sugya* presents a mnemonic: for Passover, initially a mnemonic is introduced in the name of Rav Papa, but this is later replaced by a more elaborate one in the name of Abaye. In the course of presenting the annual holy days, the gemara includes one tradition of Rabbi Yohanan that directly addresses ethical and theological concerns, inspired by the haftarah to the Day of Atonement, and I will examine that tradition directly below.

Beyond these features of the *sugya*, perhaps the one complex issue or even point of contention stems from the observation that the *sugya* begins with the introduction to a baraita (a teaching from the time of the Mishnah yet outside the Mishnah). The *sugya* reasonably quickly employs the language of Babylonian debate, but there is some uncertainty whether or not material later in the *sugya* is a continuation of one single early baraita whose quotation begins at the outset. My response to this question is that the opening baraita appears to be quite brief, and at the same time we need to attend to the regular ways that the gemara returns to quote from the sequence of prescriptions in the mishnah itself (in other words, we find a brief baraita followed by regular quotations later in the gemara from the original mishnah, not an ongoing adjudication of the mishnah with a single extra-Mishnaic source also attributed to the Tannaitic rabbis).

My translation and analysis emphasize that the presumed component of the mishnah initiating the discussion is the prescription for Passover:

“On Passover, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that are in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:4–8).” The *sugya* begins with a baraita that sets out the Haftarah for Passover: “The sages taught in a baraita: On Passover they read from the Torah in the section on set feasts (Lev. 23:4–8), and they read as Haftarah in the Passover of Gilgal (Joshua 5:10–12; the modern Haftarah is Joshua 5:2–6:1 and 6:27).” From here, the Babylonian discussion begins by addressing the two days of observance in the diaspora, the two mnemonics, and then returns to the mishnah to quote the next prescription, which is for Shavuot. The important point to note, then, is the frequency with which the *sugya* returns to the mishnah itself and quotes a new topic for discussion. In other words, the *sugya* is basically a discussion of elements in a long mishnah, each quoted and then elaborated relatively briefly, and keeping track of the mishnaic quotes (which my translation below presents in **bold**) is key to seeing the structure.

From the standpoint of feminist consideration, it is notable that the subject matter and biblical selections of the *sugya* center on males. The primary presentation of women appears in the discussion of the New Year. A secondary opinion, framed through the phrase “There are those who say” (*yesh ’omerim*), gives a Torah selection centering on Sarah and a Haftarah focusing on Hannah. These selections are among the modern readings for the first day of the New Year:

[From the mishnah:] **On the New Year, [they read from the Torah,] Speak to the descendants of Israel to say: In the seventh month, on the first of the month, there will be for you a day of rest, a sacred assembly, a memorial of a blast of a march (Lev. 23:24; and more generally, Lev. 23:23–25).**

The Haftarah reading is, *Is not Ephraim a dear son to Me, even a child of delight, for as often as I speak against him, I truly remember him, and because of this, My compassion warms to him. I truly will be compassionate upon him* (Jer. 31:20; the modern Haftarah for the second day of the New Year is Jer. 31:2–20).

There are those who say [that the Torah reading is,] *YHWH attended to Sarah, as He said, and YHWH did for Sarah as he had spoken . . .* (Gen. 21:1; the modern Torah portion includes Gen. 21:1–34), and the Haftarah

reading is with Hannah (probably the prayer of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1–10; the modern Haftarah for the first day of the New Year is 1 Sam. 1:1–2:10).

The biblical passages portraying Sarah and Hannah, however, emphasize the agency of God more than these women. Fishbane summarizes, “[T]o correspond to the Torah portion for the first day of Rosh Hashanah, which reports how Sarah’s barrenness was remembered by God and she was granted a son, the haftarah gives a report of Hannah’s barrenness and how God remembered her and gave her a son as well (1 Sam. 1:1ff).”¹⁶ Perhaps a modern re-reading of the use of these passages on the New Year, centered on maternal subjectivity, could be valuable. Though she does not cite these biblical passages in her account of maternal subjectivity, Mara Benjamin emphasizes, “A feminist account of obligation that begins with maternal subjectivity demands a recognition of constraint as well as choice.”¹⁷ These biblical passages might be understood as presenting complex portraits of constraint and choice through ancient Israelite conceptions of divine–human relations.

b. Megillah 30b–32a and Ethics (1): The Day of Atonement and Rabbi Yohanan

The strongest ethical shaping of a holy day in the gemara of b. Megillah 30b–32a is arguably The Day of Atonement:

[From the mishnah:] **On The Day of Atonement, [they read from the Torah,] YHWH spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they came close to YHWH and died (Lev. 16:1).**

The Haftarah reading is, *For thus said He, high and exalted, forever dwelling, and holy is His name, “I dwell on high and in holiness, and for the contrite and lowly in spirit, reviving the spirit of the lowly, and reviving the hearts of the contrite . . .”* (Isa. 57:15; the modern Haftarah is Isa. 57:14–58:14). In the

¹⁶ *The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftarat*, xxv–xxvi.

¹⁷ Mara Benjamin, *The Obligated Self: Maternal Subjectivity and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 14; on pages 97–98 Benjamin discusses Hagar in Genesis 16, and Hagar also appears in Genesis 21:1–34.

afternoon-prayer we read in the forbidden sexual relations (Leviticus 18), and the Haftarah reading is Jonah.

Rabbi Yohanan said; Every place that you see the might of The Holy One, Blessed Be He, you see His humility. This point is written in the Torah, and second in the Prophets, and third in the Writings.

It is written in the Torah: *For YHWH your God, he is the God of all gods, and the Lord of all lords, the God who is great, mighty, and awesome, who does not show favoritism and does not take a bribe* (Deut. 10:17), and it is written after that, *He carries out judgement for the orphan and the widow, He loves the sojourner, to give him bread and clothing* (Deut.10:18).

Second, [it is written] in the Prophets: *For thus said He, high and exalted, forever dwelling, and holy is His name, "I dwell on high and in holiness,"* (Isa. 57:15) and it is written after that, *and for the contrite and lowly in spirit, reviving the spirit of the lowly, and reviving the hearts of the contrite . . .* (Isa. 57:15).

Third, [it is written] in the Writings: that it is written, *Sing to God. Make music for His name. Lift up a song to the One who rides the clouds [or: the steppes]. YHWH is His name. Exult before Him* (Ps. 68:5), and it is written after that, *The Father of the orphans and the judge for the widows: God in the dwelling of His holiness* (Ps. 68:6).

The ethical concerns of the gemara here can be seen in two respects: first in Rabbi Yohanan's teaching, and second in the place of the afternoon scriptural readings elsewhere in rabbinic law.

Rabbi Yohanan's teaching builds from the key Haftarah verse for the morning of the Day of Atonement. He identifies three verses or pairs of verses—one each in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings—in which divine might is coupled with divine concern for the disadvantaged and marginalized. The verse in the Prophets, Isaiah 57:15, is the same one that is cited for the Haftarah of the Day of Atonement, which is probably the reason for the *sugya* incorporating the teaching. For Rabbi Yohanan, throughout Scripture, the power of God is linked with justice and care for the orphan, widow, and sojourner, and in more general terms, the lowly and contrite. This interpretation concerning the totality of the Bible, then, becomes linked in the Babylonian gemara with the observance of the Day of Atonement, intensifying the ethical resonance of the prophetic poetry.

b. Megillah 30b–32a and Ethics (2): The Day of Atonement and Rabbinic Law

The afternoon Torah and Haftarah sections for the Day of Atonement each have a place elsewhere in rabbinic law. For the Haftarah, this is quite concrete: the fast of the people of Ninevah in chapter 3 of the Book of Jonah, an act of repentance and transformation, becomes incorporated into the rituals of fasting in times of disaster (m. Taanit 2:1 for Jonah 3:10). For the Torah reading in Leviticus 18, the list of forbidden sexual relations raises a number of difficult ethical concerns. The list includes the well-known prohibitions concerning male homosexual relations and concerning intercourse between a male and a menstruating woman, and both have been the focus of important critical consideration.¹⁸ Along with and surrounding these prohibitions are early formulations of protections for vulnerable members of families against incest. In rabbinic law, the forbidden sexual relations become prominent parts of the laws for both corporal and capital punishment. I have analyzed elsewhere the implicit reasoning in the allocations of the punishments to the specific crimes. Key specific passages in the Mishnah are as follows:

These are those who are punished with lashes:

The one who has sexual intercourse with his sister,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with the sister of his father,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with the sister of his mother,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with the sister of his wife,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with the wife of his brother,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with the wife of the brother of
his father [or, his paternal uncle],

¹⁸ Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Man: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 74–80; Charlotte Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); also Shai Secunda, *The Talmud's Red Fence: Menstrual Impurity and Difference in Babylonian Judaism and Its Sasanian Context* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020); Schofer, *The Making of a Sage*, 75–79. I thank Beth Berkowitz for her comments on these materials.

and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with a menstruating woman .
(m. Mak. 3:1).

These are those who are condemned to death by stoning:
The one who has sexual intercourse with his mother,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with the wife of his father,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with his daughter-in-law,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with a male,
and [the one who has sexual intercourse] with a quadruped domestic
animal,
and the woman who brings close a quadruped domestic animal [for
sexual intercourse]... (m. Sanh. 7:4).

These are those who are condemned to death by burning:
The one who has sexual intercourse with a woman and her daughter,
And the daughter of a priest who becomes a prostitute.
And there is included, under the rule, “a woman and her daughter”:
[the one who has sexual intercourse with] his daughter and the
daughter of his daughter, and the daughter of his son, and the daughter
of his wife and the daughter of her daughter, and the daughter of her
son... (m. Sanh. 9:1).¹⁹

These laws of the Mishnah are all built from Leviticus 18:6–17, and they specify the concluding statement in verse 29: “For anyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do [them] shall be cut off...” (Lev. 18:29). The Torah selection for the afternoon of Yom Kippur prescribed in this *sugya*, then, is not simply a text of sacred law of the past, but a foundation for laws prohibiting incest that play a meaningful role in the legal expressions and articulations of the Talmud.

b. Megillah 30b–32a and Ethics (3): Hanukkah and Avot

A somewhat counterintuitive link between this *sugya* and rabbinic ethical teaching begins with the scriptural selections for Hanukkah:

¹⁹ Jonathan Schofer, “Pain and Punishment in Mishnaic Law: *Mishnah Makkot* 3:1–2,” in *Pain and Its Representation in Biblical, Post-Biblical, and Other Texts of the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Michaela Bauks and Saul Olyan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 239–246. Other relevant texts noted in this study include m. Yevamot 1:1 and m. Ketubbot 3:1.

[from the mishnah:] **On Hanukkah, [they read from the Torah] in “The chieftains (*nesi'im*)” (Num. 7:1–89).**

The Haftarah reading is in the lamps of Zechariah (Zech. 4:1–3; the modern Haftarah is Zech. 2:14–4:7). If two Sabbaths happen to fall, the first one is the lamps of Zechariah, and after that, the lamps of Solomon (the modern Haftarah is 1 Kings 7:40–50, and lamps are described in 1 Kings 7:50).

It is initially hard to find ethical significance in this combination of texts, whether we look in Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, Piska 1, on Numbers 7, which Fishbane describes as “a series of old sermons celebrating this occasion as the espousal of God with His bride (*kallah*) Israel in the bower of the shrine...,”²⁰ or in the *sugya*’s choices for the Haftarah readings, which focus on the lamps of the Temple in the prophetic vision of Zechariah (Zech. 4:1–3) and on Solomon’s building of the First Temple (1 Kings 7:50). The combination links the celebration of the Maccabees’ rededication of the actual Second Temple, in the second century BCE (Hanukkah), with the Tabernacle in the desert wilderness and Moses’ leadership (Numbers 7:1–89), and in between, for the first Sabbath a prophecy anticipating the construction of the Second Temple (Zechariah 4:1–3), and for the second Sabbath the earlier construction of the First Temple by Solomon (1 Kings 7:50). These appear to reflect in a fairly direct way Fishbane’s observation, noted above, that “a dominant concern in the haftaroth of the Annual Cycle is to establish historical symmetries between events, persons, or institutions and thus to show various types of continuities and correlations within Scripture.”²¹

The ethical concern with the maintenance of a sacred and ceremonial center, and its beauty, appears in a notable way within Mishnah Avot and Avot de Rabbi Nathan. These texts from rabbinic ethical literature give a distinct perspective from which to consider the scriptural readings prescribed for Hanukkah in the *sugya* of b. Megillah 30b–32a. In other

²⁰ Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftarat*, 366.

²¹ Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftarat*, xxix, 366–368.

words, if we allow an integrated picture of rabbinic culture that can interpret a prescription in the Gemara through concerns articulated in these ethical anthologies, then we can consider an ethical significance in this selection of Haftara that might be missed otherwise.

The saying of Simeon the Righteous appears early in both Mishnah Avot and Avot de Rabbi Nathan: “Upon three things the world stands: upon the Torah, upon the Temple service, and upon deeds of loving kindness” (m. Avot 1:2). Late in the primary five chapters of Mishnah Avot is the series of collections of ten items:

With ten utterances the world was created... (m. Avot 5:1).

There were ten generations from Adam to Noah... (m. Avot 5:2).

There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham... (m. Avot 5:2)

Abraham our father, may peace be upon him, was tested with ten tests, and he withstood all of them... (m. Avot 5:3).

Ten miracles were carried for our forefathers in Egypt and ten at the sea (m. Avot 5:4).

Ten miracles were carried out for our forefathers at the Temple (m. Avot 5:5).

The series sets out a sequence from creation, through the primeval sacred history, to Abraham the patriarch, the Exodus from Egypt, and then the Temple. Along the way, ethical significance is given to some of these key components in the creation of the heavens and earth and establishment of covenantal relations—with condemnation of the wicked and celebration of the righteous—but overall this component of the tractate is focused on gathering the sequence from creation to Temple in a compact form.

In Avot de Rabbi Nathan, Version A, chapters 31–35, there is expansion both in the imagery of cosmos and temple and also in some of the ethical teaching, including a striking emphasis on the importance of saving or preserving each and every life (Avot de Rabbi Natan, Version A, chapter 31).²² Most notable, though, is the elaboration of the saying of

²² For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on Version A of Avot de Rabbi Natan, partially to streamline the presentation of the argument, partially because I think it preserves more

Simeon the Righteous in Avot de Rabbi Natan, Version A, chapter 4. This chapter, in striking imagery, both sets out a program for Torah and for deeds of loving-kindness substituting for Temple practices and also celebrates the grandeur of the very temple that was destroyed. Concerning both “on the Torah” and “on deeds of loving-kindness,” the text cites Hosea 6:6—God says, *For I desire kindness and not sacrifices; and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*—to say that the study and practice of Torah, and the enacting of deeds of loving-kindness, can take the place of Temple sacrifices in the divine accounting. Here the discussion of “on deeds of loving-kindness” includes an account of the destruction of the Second Temple and the founding of rabbinic Judaism by Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, whose negotiation with Vespasian establishes a new program reformulating the saying of Simeon the Righteous: “I request from you only Yavneh, so that I can go and teach students, fix prayer, and fulfill all the commandments there” (Avot de Rabbi Natan, Version A, Chapter 4).²³ In between these expositions, however, the greatness of the Temple is celebrated in the commentary to “upon the Temple service.” Building upon the second paragraph of the Shema, Deuteronomy 11:13–17, the commentary states, “All the time that the Temple service is maintained, the world is blessed for its inhabitants” (Avot de Rabbi Natan, Version A, Chapter 4). The ethical teachings emphasizing deeds of loving-kindness and Torah study are supported by also including a discussion of the social and cosmic significance of the Temple and its sacrifices.

The texts of rabbinic wisdom literature emphasize, first, that considerations of Temple practice by rabbis are always remembering the Temple as no longer existing. Also, the grief for the loss of the Temple,

relevant traditions for this analysis, and partially because this version is the scholarly designation for the text preserved in the Minor Tractates of the Babylonian Talmud, along with manuscripts as well as fragments close to that text; the designation “Version B” is for a group of manuscripts, quotations, and fragments further removed from that text in the Minor Tractates.

²³ Schofer, *The Making of a Sage*, 35–36 and notes.

and any emphasis on good deeds or Torah study taking the place of sacrifices, depend on the remembrance of the beauty and significance of that very Temple. From the standpoint presented in Mishnah Avot and Avot de Rabbi Natan, (a) the sacrifices at the Tabernacle by the chieftains under the leadership of Moses, (b) the lamps at the Temple established by Solomon, (c) the vision of lamps in Zechariah's image of what the Second Temple may be, and (d) the rededication of the Temple by the Maccabees, all are part of the remembrance of sacrificial practices as well as of a central structure that should be recalled in its glory. The rabbinic texts channel this remembrance into the post-destruction emphasis on the importance of good deeds, along with teaching, establishing prayer, and fulfilling commandments.

b. Megillah 30b–32a and Ethics (4): Ethical Implications of Scriptural Readings for the Festivals

In addition to the connections between scriptural readings prescribed in this *sugya* and mishnaic law, and between the scriptural readings and the sayings of Mishnah Avot, there are a number of cases where it may be fair for a scholarly analysis to say it is reasonable to assess the gemara of b. Megillah 30b–32a as adding ethical content to the mishnah's Pentateuchal selections for holidays. These ethical additions are evident for each of the festival holidays: Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. For each of these festivals, the mishnah simply calls for reading relevant prescriptions in Leviticus 23 or Deuteronomy 16, which are the laws for the holidays in each Pentateuchal book. For Passover, the *sugya* quickly invokes the reforms of King Josiah, and his commitment to "this scroll of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:21):

On Passover, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that are in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:4-8).]

The sages taught in a baraita: On Passover they read from the Torah in the section on set feasts (Lev. 23:4–8), and the read as Haftarah in the Passover of Gilgal (Joshua 5:10–12; the modern Haftarah is Joshua 5:2–6:1 and 6:27).

Today, since there are two days, the first day is the Passover of Gilgal, and the next day is the Passover of Josiah (2 Kings 23:21–23; the modern Haftarah is 2 Kings 23:1–9 and 21–25).

And for the rest of the days of Passover, one collects and reads on the subject of Passover.

The “Passover of Josiah” is not simply a ritual act, but an affirmation of Deuteronomic values that are emphasized in the depiction of Josiah’s reforms. Josiah followed the prescriptions of the female prophet Huldah to reinforce covenantal relations with the deity by centralizing worship at the Jerusalem Temple and eliminating syncretic forms of worship—and these reforms culminated in the offering of the Passover sacrifice.

The *sugya* sets out readings for the remaining or intermediate days of Passover through a mnemonic attributed to Abaye. Three of these readings directly relate to Passover, with selections from the early laws of Passover in the Book of Exodus, chapters 12 and 13. The readings prescribed by Abaye also include other passages from Pentateuchal law, and two of these emphasize key rabbinic values for interpersonal relations: one concerning lending money and interest, and one concerning the tablets of the Decalogue, after Moses broke them upon seeing the incident of the Golden Calf. Abaye presents eight readings, and the two with these ethical concerns are placed in sequence as fourth and fifth. I will mark in bold the word in the biblical verse that the mnemonic draws from:

Abaye said, Today the world follows in practice the reading in the Torah [of these selections]. “Proceed”: *Moses called to all the elders of Israel and said to them, “**Proceed** (mishkhu) and take for yourselves sheep for your family, and slaughter the Passover offering”* (Exod. 12:21; the modern Torah portion is Exod. 12:21–51).

“The ox”: *YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, “**An ox**, or a lamb, or a goat, that is born will have seven days with his mother, and on the eighth day and onwards, it will be accepted as a sacrifice of fire to YHWH* (Lev. 22:26–27; the modern Torah reading is Lev. 22:26–23:44).’

“Sanctify”: YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, “**Sanctify** for Me every first-born, the first-born of each womb, among the descendants of Israel, among the people and the cattle. They will be for Me” (Exod. 13:1).

“With money”: If you lend **money** to My people, to the poor one who is with you, let it not be as a creditor. Do not place interest upon him (Exod. 22:24).

“Hew out”: YHWH said to Moses, “**Hew out** for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke” (Exod. 34:1).

“In the wilderness”: And YHWH spoke to Moses **in the wilderness** of Sinai, in the second year of their leaving the land of Egypt, in the first month, to say... (Num. 9:1).

“Send”: When the Pharaoh **sent** the people, God did not lead them by the land of the Philistines, although it was close, because God said, “Lest the people suffer grief when they see war, and return to Egypt” (Exod. 13:17).

“The first-born”: Every **first-born** that is born in cattle and in your sheep that is male, you will sanctify to YHWH your God. You should not work a first-born of your oxen, and you should not shear the first-born of your sheep (Deut. 15:19).

From the standpoint of ethical concerns, in the mnemonic of Abaye, links between the Exodus and both the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:1) and the following laws of Exodus, chapters 21–23 (Exod. 22:24) are both explicitly added to the mishnah’s simple prescription for reciting the laws of the ancient festival itself.

For Shavuot, the gemara makes the connection—now well-presumed in Jewish symbols and practice—between the festival day and the revelation at Sinai, and in fact, only through preserving a secondary opinion introduced by “others say...” This alternative to the Mishnaic focus on simply the counting of seven weeks from Passover emphasizes the verse describing the arrival of the Israelites at Mount Sinai:

[From the mishnah:] **On Shavuot, [they read from the Torah,] You will count seven weeks: from the first time the sickle is put to the grain, start to count seven weeks** (Deut. 16:9; and more generally, Deut. 16:9–12).

The Haftarah reading is in Habakkuk.

Others say [that the Torah reading is,] *On the third new moon after the descendants of Israel left Egypt, on that day, they came to the wilderness of Sinai*

(Exod. 19:1; the modern Torah reading for the first day of Shavuot is Exod. 19:1–20:23 and Num. 28:26–31), and the Haftarah reading is the *Merkavah* (the modern Haftarah is Ezek. 1:1–28 and 3:12).

Today, since there are two days, we act according to the two of them, but in the reverse order.

The link between Shavuot and the Ten Commandments of Exodus, chapters 19–20, appears not in the mishnah but only in the Talmudic commentary.

In the scriptural readings for Sukkot, the *sugya* of b. Megillah 30b–32a preserves a set of social and interpersonal values that has been dropped in modern scriptural readings. Solomon's dedication of the Temple, which is said to have been carried out on Sukkot, is presented in 1 Kings 8. This chapter is employed in parts as Haftarah for the festival of Sukkot in the Talmudic discussion, and also today. The Talmudic prescriptions, though, include what Fishbane describes as "Solomon's great prayer, which he recites at the dedication of the Temple" (1 Kings 8:22–53)²⁴ for the Haftarah on what the *sugya* calls the second day of the last holy day. Modern practices for the corresponding day, Simhat Torah, though, employ a different selection (from Joshua, chapter 1). The *sugya* states:

On the next day, the Torah reading is, *This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, blessed upon Israel before his death* (Deut. 33:1; the modern Torah portion for *Simhat Torah* includes Deut. 33:1–34:12).

The Haftarah reading is, *Solomon stood before the altar of YHWH, in front of the entire congregation of Israel, and he spread the palms of his hands to the heavens* (1 Kings 18:22; this may indicate the prayer in 1 Kings 18:22–53, just before the reading named for the Haftarah of the previous day above).

Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:22–53 names social concerns that are relevant for Temple practices, including conflict or offence between individuals, facing a military enemy, drought, plague and disease, and the arrival of a foreign person.

²⁴ Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftarot*, 409.

Conclusion

While this analysis has not presumed that the priorities of the Talmudic Gemara are predominantly ethical, we can identify four ways that the *sugya* of b. Megillah 30b–32a adds ethical significance to the prescriptions for Pentateuchal readings set out in m. Megillah 3:5–6: its own presentation of a teaching by Rabbi Yohanan, connections between the Pentateuchal readings and Haftarat prescribed by this *sugya* and other rabbinic law, connections between this *sugya* and rabbinic wisdom teachings, and a modern assessment of the ethical significance to be found in biblical passages prescribed for public reading of scripture. The combination is a notable transformation of the overall significance of the public readings, as compared to the prescriptions of the mishnah, including new emphases on sacred history, royal prayers and reforms, and the Decalogue. God’s concern for the orphan, widow, and sojourner, and God’s valuing of repentance, become emphasized. The prohibitions against incest are presented in their foundational form, which are refined and specified further in rabbinic law set out elsewhere in the Talmud. The value of the Temple, in the context of enduring social relations after its destruction, is remembered—a memory that in Mishnah Avot and Avot de Rabbi Natan is crucial to reinforcing the importance of both Torah study and deeds of loving-kindness.

Appendix: Translation of b. Megillah 30b–31a on Haftarot for the annual holidays

Mishnah:

On Passover, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that are in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:4–8).

On Shavuot, [they read from the Torah,] *You will count seven weeks: from the first time the sickle is put to the grain, start to count seven weeks* (Deut. 16:9; and more generally, Deut. 16:9–12).

On the New Year, [they read from the Torah,] *Speak to the descendants of Israel to say: In the seventh month, on the first of the month, there will be for you a day of rest, a sacred assembly, a memorial of a blast of a march* (Lev. 23:24; and more generally, Lev. 23:23–25).

On The Day of Atonement, [they read from the Torah,] *YHWH spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they came close to YHWH and died* (Lev. 16:1).

On the first holy day of Sukkot, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that is in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:33–43).

On the rest of the all the days of Sukkot, they read from the Torah in the sacrifices of Sukkot (Num. 29:12–38, probably starting on verse 17, describing the second day).

On Hanukkah, [they read from the Torah] in “The chieftains (*nesi'im*)” (Num. 7:1–89).

On Purim, [they read from the Torah,] *And Amalek came [and made war against Israel in Rephidim]* (Exod. 17:8–16).

[The mishnah continues from here with a series of prescriptions on related topics]

(*m. Meg.* 3:5–6).

Gemara:

[Author’s Note: The implicit start to the gemara is the mishnah’s prescription for Passover:

On Passover, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that are in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:4–8).]

The sages taught in a baraita: On Passover they read from the Torah in the section on set feasts (Lev. 23:4–8), and they read as Haftarah in the Passover of Gilgal (Josh. 5:10–12; the modern Haftarah is Josh. 5:2–6:1 and 6:27).

Today, since there are two days, the first day is the Passover of Gilgal, and the next day is the Passover of Josiah (2 Kings 23:21–23; the modern Haftarah is 2 Kings 23:1–9 and 21–25).

And for the rest of the days of Passover, one collects and reads on the subject of Passover.

To what is this referring? Rav Papa said, mem, aleph, peh, vav is a mnemonic [note: Rav Papa’s mnemonic is not elaborated in the gemara itself, but this likely overlaps with the preferred mnemonic of Abaye below: Exod. 12:21; Exod. 22:24; Exod. 34:1; and Num. 9:1; Rashi also lists verses.]

On the last holy day of Passover, they read from the Torah, *When the Pharaoh sent the people, God did not lead them by the land of the Philistines, although it was close, because God said, “Lest the people suffer grief when they see war, and return to Egypt”* (Exod. 13:17; the modern Torah portion is Exod. 13:17–15:26), and read as Haftarah, *David said to YHWH the words of this song, on the day that YHWH rescued him from the hands of his enemies, from the hands of Saul* (2 Sam. 22:1; the modern Haftarah is 2 Sam. 22:1–51).

The next day, [they read from the Torah,] *Every first-born that is born in cattle and in your sheep that is male, you will sanctify to YHWH your God. You should not work a first-born of your oxen, and you should not shear the first-born of your sheep* (Deut. 15:19; the modern Torah portion is Deut. 15:19–16:7), and they read as Haftarah, *Still on that day, He will brandish His hand toward the mountain of the House of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem* (Isa. 10:32; the modern Haftarah is Isa. 10:32–12:6).

Abaye said, Today the world follows in practice the reading in the Torah [of these selections]. “Proceed”: *Moses called to all the elders of Israel and said*

to them, "**Proceed** (*mishkhu*) and take for yourselves sheep for your family, and slaughter the Passover offering" (Exod. 12:21; the modern Torah portion is Exod. 12:21–51).

"The ox": YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, "**An ox**, or a lamb, or a goat, that is born will have seven days with his mother, and on the eighth day and onwards, it will be accepted as a sacrifice of fire to YHWH (Lev. 22:26–27; the modern Torah reading is Lev. 22:26–23:44)."

"Sanctify": YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, "**Sanctify** for Me every first-born, the first-born of each womb, among the descendants of Israel, among the people and the cattle. They will be for Me" (Exod. 13:1).

"With money": If you lend **money** to My people, to the poor one who is with you, let it not be as a creditor. Do not place interest upon him (Exod. 22:24).

"Hew out": YHWH said to Moses, "**Hew out** for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke" (Exod. 34:1).

"In the wilderness": And YHWH spoke to Moses **in the wilderness** of Sinai, in the second year of their leaving the land of Egypt, in the first month, to say... (Num. 9:1).

"Send": When the Pharaoh **sent** the people, God did not lead them by the land of the Philistines, although it was close, because God said, "Lest the people suffer grief when they see war, and return to Egypt" (Exod. 13:17).

"The first-born": Every **first-born** that is born in cattle and in your sheep that is male, you will sanctify to YHWH your God. You should not work a first-born of your oxen, and you should not shear the first-born of your sheep (Deut. 15:19).

[From the mishnah:] **On Shavuot, [they read from the Torah,] You will count seven weeks: from the first time the sickle is put to the grain, start to count seven weeks (Deut. 16:9; and more generally, Deut. 16:9–12).**

The Haftarah reading is in Habakkuk.

Others say [that the Torah reading is,] *On the third new moon after the descendants of Israel left Egypt, on that day, they came to the wilderness of Sinai* (Exod. 19:1; the modern Torah reading for the first day of Shavuot is Exod. 19:1–20:23 and Num. 28:26–31), and the Haftarah reading is the *Merkavah* (the modern Haftarah is Ezek. 1:1–28 and 3:12).

Today, since there are two days, we act according to the two of them, but in the reverse order.

[From the mishnah:] **On the New Year, [they read from the Torah,] *Speak to the descendants of Israel to say: In the seventh month, on the first of the month, there will be for you a day of rest, a sacred assembly, a memorial of a blast of a march (Lev. 23:24; and more generally, Lev. 23:23–25).***

The Haftarah reading is, *Is not Ephraim a dear son to Me, even a child of delight, for as often as I speak against him, I truly remember him, and because of this, My compassion warms to him. I will truly be compassionate upon him* (Jer. 31:20; the modern Haftarah for the second day of the New Year is Jer. 31:2–20).

There are those who say [that the Torah reading is,] *YHWH attended to Sarah, as He said, and YHWH did for Sarah as he had spoken...* (Gen. 21:1), and the Haftarah reading is with Hannah (probably the prayer of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1–10; the modern Haftarah for the first day of the New Year is 1 Sam. 1:1–2:10).

Today, since there are two days, the first day can be as “those who say” above. For the second day, [the Torah reading is,] *It happened, after these things, that God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” and he said, “Here I am”* (Gen. 22:1). The Haftarah reading is, *Is not Ephraim a dear son to Me, even a child of delight, for as often as I speak against him, I truly remember him, and because of this, My compassion warms to him. I will truly be compassionate upon him* (Jer. 31:20; the modern Haftarah for the second day of the New Year is Jeremiah 31:2–20).

[From the mishnah:] **On The Day of Atonement, [they read from the Torah,] *YHWH spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they came close to YHWH and died (Lev. 16:1).***

The Haftarah reading is, *For thus said He, high and exalted, forever dwelling, and holy is His name, “I dwell on high and in holiness, and for the contrite and lowly in spirit, reviving the spirit of the lowly, and reviving the hearts of the contrite...”* (Isa. 57:15; the modern Haftarah is Isa. 57:14–58:14). In the

afternoon-prayer we read in the forbidden sexual relations (Leviticus 18), and the Haftarah reading is Jonah.

Rabbi Yohanan said; Every place that you see the might of The Holy One, Blessed Be He, you see His humility. This point is written in the Torah, and second in the Prophets, and third in the Writings.

It is written in the Torah: *For YHWH your God, he is the God of all gods, and the Lord of all lords, the God who is great, mighty, and awesome, who does not show favoritism and does not take a bribe* (Deut. 10:17), and it is written after that, *He carries out judgement for the orphan and the widow, He loves the sojourner, to give him bread and clothing* (Deut. 10:18).

Second, [it is written] in the Prophets: *For thus said He, high and exalted, forever dwelling, and holy is His name, "I dwell on high and in holiness* (Isa, 57:15), and it is written after that, *and for the contrite and lowly in spirit, reviving the spirit of the lowly, and reviving the hearts of the contrite...* (Isa, 57:15).

Third, [it is written] in the Writings, that it is written, *Sing to God. Make music for His name. Lift up a song to the One who rides the clouds [or: the steppes]. YHWH is His name. Exult before Him* (Ps. 68:5), and it is written after that, *The Father of the orphans and the judge for the widows: God in the dwelling of His holiness* (Ps, 68:6).

[From the mishnah:] **On the first holy day of Sukkot, they read from the Torah in the section on the set feasts that is in the Book of Leviticus (Lev. 23:33–43).**

The Haftarah reading is, *Behold, a day comes for YHWH, and your plunder will be divided in your midst* (Zech. 14:1; the modern Haftarah for the first day of Sukkot is Zech. 14:1–21).

Today, since there are two days, the second we read the Torah section from Leviticus also. What is the Haftarah? The Haftarah reading is, *All the males of Israel assembled to King Solomon, in the month of Etanim on the Festival of Sukkot: it was the seventh month* (1 Kings 8:2; the modern Haftarah for the second day of Sukkot is 1 Kings 8:2–21).

[From the mishnah:] **On the rest of all the days of Sukkot, they read from the Torah in the sacrifices of Sukkot (Num. 29:12–38, probably starting on verse 17 describing the second day).**

On the last holy day, the Torah reading is, *Every first-born that is born in cattle and in your sheep that is male, you will sanctify to YHWH your God. You should not work a first-born of your oxen, and you should not shear the first-born of your sheep* (Deut. 15:19; the modern Torah portion is Deut. 14:22–16:7); commandments and statutes (the modern Torah portion is Numbers 29:35–30:1, which addresses the sacrifices for the last day), and *Every first-born*.

The Haftarah reading is, *When Solomon finished praying to YHWH all these prayers and supplications, he rose from before the altar of YHWH, from bowing on his knees, and his hands spread to the heavens* (1 Kings 8:54; the modern Haftarah is 1 Kings 8:54–66).

On the next day, the Torah reading is, *This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, blessed upon Israel before his death* (Deut. 33:1; the modern Torah portion for *Simhat Torah* includes Deut. 33:1–34:12).

The Haftarah reading is, *Solomon stood before the altar of YHWH, in front of the entire congregation of Israel, and he spread the palms of his hands to the heavens* (1 Kings 18:22; this may indicate the prayer in 1 Kings 18:22–53, just before the reading named for the Haftarah of the previous day above).

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav: A sabbath that falls on the intervening days of a festival, whether in the middle of Passover, or in the middle of Sukkot, we read the Torah portion, *Moses said to YHWH, “See, you say to me, bring up this people, and you have not made known to me who you will send with me. You said, “I know you by name, and also you have gained favor in My eyes”* (Exod. 33:12; the modern Torah portion includes Exodus 33:12–34:26).

The Haftarah reading for Passover is, *the dry bones* (Ezek. 37:1–14; the modern Haftarah is Ezek. 36:37–37:14) and for Sukkot, *It will be, on that day: on the day that Gog comes to the land of Israel—speaks the Lord YHWH—My raging anger will flare* (Ezek. 38:18; the modern Haftarah is Ezek. 38:18–39:16).

[From the mishnah:] **On Hanukkah, [they read from the Torah] in “The tribal chiefs” (Num. 7:1–89).**

The Haftarah reading is in the lamps of Zechariah (Zech. 4:1–3; the modern Haftarah is Zech. 2:14–4:7). If two Sabbaths happen to fall, the first one is the lamps of Zechariah, and after that, the lamps of Solomon (the modern Haftarah is 1 Kings 7:40–50, and lamps are described in 1 Kings 7:50).

[From the mishnah:] **On Purim, [they read from the Torah,] *And Amalek came [and made war against Israel in Rephidim]* (Exod. 17:8–16).**

(The *sugya* continues to the topics of the New Moons and beyond)