

THE CONTRADICTORY PHILOSOPHICAL LESSONS OF THE PARABLE OF THE LAME AND THE BLIND GUARDS IN VARIOUS RABBINIC MIDRASHIM

LIEVE M. TEUGELS

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY AND PTHU AMSTERDAM

The ancient rabbis designed many meshalim with the purpose of instructing and teaching. Most rabbinic parables are transmitted in a context of interpretation of a biblical text, i.e., midrash.¹ They are tools that provide a narrative a means of explaining a biblical text, in addition to the other ways and methods employed in midrash. Moreover, apart from teaching the interpretation of biblical verses,

¹ Much has been written about parables in the New Testament, with or without their relation to rabbinic parables. Acknowledging the importance of this research, in this study I focus solely on parables in midrashic rabbinic literature. Studies about parables in midrash referenced in the present article include David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991); Yonah Fraenkel, "Ha-Mashal," in *Darkei Ha-Aggadah Vebamidrash*, 2 vols. (Givataim: Yad letalmud, 1991), 323–93; Arnold Goldberg, "Das schriftauslegende Gleichnis im Midrasch," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 9 (1981): 1–90; C. Thoma, S. Lauer, and H. Ernst, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen. 1. Tl: Pesiqta deRav Kahana (PesK): Einleitung, Übersetzung, Parallelen, Kommentar, Texte* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1986). The first volume contains a general introduction serving the entire series. Three additional volumes have appeared in this series, treating parables in Genesis Rabbah and Exodus Rabbah.

the midrashic meshalim often teach something else also: a theological lesson,² a political view, or a philosophical issue. Therefore most midrashic parables are doubly pedagogical: they teach an interpretation of a biblical text, and at the same time they teach another, theological, political, or philosophical, lesson.³

In the present paper I will discuss several versions of the same rabbinic mashal, namely the parable of the lame and the blind

² Yonah Fraenkel suggests that the author of the mashal (whom he calls the *memasbel*) uses the unexpected or shocking elements of the mashal (*peritsat degem bamasbal*: the breaching of the pattern of the mashal), to convey a theological message. See Fraenkel, “Ha-Masbal,” 330–37.

³ I believe that the opposition which is often made between “rhetorical” and “exegetical” meshalim, or between their mainly “rhetorical” or “hermeneutical” function, is artificial. Hermeneutics is not just “biblical interpretation” in the academic sense. Good rhetoric, in mashal as in midrash in general, depends on good hermeneutics. Cf. already Paul Ricoeur: “The task of hermeneutics, defined as the task of displaying the kind of ‘world’ projected by a certain type of text, would find its fulfillment at this stage: in the deciphering of the *limit-experiences* of human life (as well as the peak experiences ...). At the same time, the task of connecting the interpretation of the text and the interpretation of life would be satisfied by a *mutual* clarification of the limit-expressions of religious language and the limit-experiences of human life.” Cf., P. Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 4 (1975): 99. In a similar vein, Clemens Thoma and his colleagues wrote about the “renewal” brought about by a mashal: “Ein Gleichnis kann erst als gelungen bezeichnet werden wenn ein *hiddūs* zum Aufscheinen kommt. Rabbinische Gleichnisse können in diesem Sinne als *hiddūsē tōra* verstanden werden, d.h. als literarische Einheiten, die die rabbinisch verstandene Tora des Hörern/Lesern so anbieten dass sie diesen zu einem Eigentum werden kann, dass sie bejahen können, weil es mit ihrem Leben und ihrer Situation korrespondiert.” Cf. Thoma, Lauer, and Ernst, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*. 1, 21–22. See also Lieve Teugels, “Between Hermeneutic and Rhetoric: The Parable of the Slave Who Buys a Rotten Fish in Exegetical and Homiletical Midrashim,” in Eveline van Staalduin-Sulman, ed., *Your Text and My Text. FS Alberdina Houtman* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

guards.⁴ This parable, in its various versions, not only serves the interpretation of various biblical texts; it also conveys various, even contradictory, philosophical views on the nature of body and soul in the human, and the relation between them. We will see that these contradictory interpretations cannot be resolved or harmonized: they rather attest to the fact that various opinions about the relation between body and soul competed with each other in the rabbinic world.⁵

THE PARABLE IN THE MEKHILTOT

In the Mekhilta de rabbi Ishmael (MRI) and her sister-midrash Mekhilta de rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (MRS), both tannaitic Midrashim from the third century CE, the mashal of the lame and the blind follows a midrash on Exodus 15:1: *The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea*. For easy reference in the following discussion, I indicate the various sections of this text by capital letters A,B etc. Section A is the midrash.⁶

⁴ The material I use in this paper issues from the annotated edition with translation of meshalim in tannaitic Midrashim on which I am working as part of the parable project of the Dutch national research fund (NWO) which is currently running in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The first part of this edition will cover the fifty meshalim in the two Mekhiltot. The parable of the lame and the blind is in chapter 20. I presented about this topic on the SBL Annual Meeting in 2016 in San Antonio. My study about the same parable was published in Dutch in 2016: L. Teugels, “De Parabel van de Lamme en de Blinde in de Rabbijnse Overlevering: Externe en Interne Confrontaties,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 73, no. 3 (2016): 236–45.

⁵ Cf. Marcel Poorthuis, “Gott, die Seele und der Leib: Kernfragen religiöser Anthropologie im Spiegel eines jüdischen Morgengebets,” in Albert Gerhards, ed., *Identität durch Gebet. Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 413–28. Poorthuis also quotes the present mashal.

⁶ All the translations in this article are mine, based on Lauterbach’s (for MRI) and Nelson’s (for MRS). In sections A and B the texts of MRI and MRS are very similar. See Jacob Zallel Lauterbach and David Stern, eds., *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition, Based on the Manuscripts and*

A. *The horse and its rider (He has hurled into the sea)* (Exod 15:1) The Holy One, blessed be He, would bring the horse and its rider and make them stand trial. He would say to the horse: “Why did you run after My children?” It would answer: “The Egyptian drove me against my will,” as it is said: *the Egyptians gave chase to them, (and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his warriors overtook them)* (Exod 14.9). God would then say to the Egyptian: “Why did you pursue My children?” And he would answer: “It was the horse that ran away with me against my will,” as it is said: *For the horses of Pharaoh, (with his chariots and horsemen), went (into the sea)* (Exod 15.19). What would God do? He would make the man ride upon the horse and thus judge them together, as it is said: *The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.*

The midrash on the first verse of the “Song at the Sea” draws on a detail of the biblical text. The words **סוס וְרִכְבּוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם** are difficult to explain, not only from a textual, but also from a theological perspective. Textually, the first two words literally translate as “the horse and its rider.” Whereas this makes grammatical sense, one would rather expect the other way around: the driver and his horse. For the rabbis, this textual focus on the horse would already be enough to serve as a “peg” on which to “hang” a midrash. But there is more: Theologically, this verse raises a problem which begs

Early Editions (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 182; W. David Nelson, *Mekbilta de-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 127–28. In MRI this is found in tractate Shirata chapter 2: Lauterbach and Stern, *MRI*, 182; S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, eds., *Mekbilta d’Rabbi Ismael cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus edidit H.S. Horovitz. Defuncti editoris opus exornavit et absolvit I.A. Rabin.*, Corpus tannaiticum. Section 3; pt. 3 (Frankfurt a. M.: Kauffmann, 1931), 125. For MRS, see J.N. Epstein and E.Z. Melamed, eds., *Mekbilta d’rabbi Sim’on b. Jochai. Fragmenta in Geniza Cairensa reperta digessit apparatu critico, notis, praedatione instruxit* (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1955), 76–77. The textual witnesses of MRI for this section are, apart from the Editio Princeps (Constantinople, 1515): Oxford Bodeleian Marshall Or. 24; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Heb. 117; Vatican Biblioteca Apostolica ebr. 299; and Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense H 2736.

for an explanation: why did the horses need to drown together with their Egyptian drivers? Were they merely collateral damage? The midrash answers this question by evoking a divine court. As an answer to God's question why each of them pursued "His children," both horse and rider "reply" that the other partner was responsible for this action, and they state their answer (or their answer is stated) with a biblical proof-text. God doesn't accept these excuses and tries them both together. He judges them as one entity in the exact way that they pursued the Israelites: one riding on the other, together. Thus, summarizing the midrash, the remarkable construction "horse and its driver" draws the attention to the togetherness of both partners in crime. The textual anomaly serves a theological message that possibly surpasses the interpretation of this verse. Indeed, there is no indication that the ancient Rabbis were so driven by animal welfare that they would question the divine judgment of war horses.

Immediately after this midrash, the Mekhilot introduce a philosophical discussion between Rabbi—short for Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi (ca. 135 – ca. 200 CE)—and Antoninus (B). This Antoninus has been identified with various Roman emperors, but most importantly, he stands for the skeptic, Roman philosopher, or for a generic rabbinic construct of the "Other."⁷ As a rule, Antoninus is depicted in a positive light, and often he is presented in dialogue with Rabbi, as is the case here. It is plausible that the dialogues between Rabbi and Antoninus reflect the former's good relationship with the Roman authorities in his capacity of leader of the Jewish community. Antoninus' question deals with the judgment of the

⁷ The latter is suggested by Ron Naiweld, "There Is Only One Other: The Fabrication of Antoninus in a Multilayered Talmudic Dialogue," *Jewish Quarterly Review* (2014): 81–104. On Antoninus, see already Arnold Bodek, *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus als Zeitgenosse und Freund des rabbi Jehuda ha-Nasi. Ein Beitrag zur Culturgeschichte* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1868); Samuel Krauss, *Antoninus und Rabbi* (Wien: Israel-theol. Lehranstalt, 1910). More recently, and with reference to this passage, S. Newmeyer, "Antoninus and Rabbi on the Soul: Stoic Elements of a Puzzling Encounter," *Koroth* 9 (1988): 108–124.

body after death. Such a question is obviously a way to introduce the rabbinic opinion(s) on the matter.

B. Antoninus asked our teacher: “In the hour that a human being dies, and the body ceases to be, does the Holy One make it/him/them stand to trial?” He said to him: “Instead of asking me about the body which is impure, ask me about the soul which is pure.”

Antoninus’ question is not entirely clear in either midrashic version: in the manuscript versions of MRI it is asked whether the Holy One makes “them” stand trial—which seems to refer to the human being and his body; in the Editio Princeps of MRI, and in MRS, Antoninus asks whether God makes “him/it” stand to trial, which according to the male grammatical form can refer to the human being, but most possibly to the body (*guf* is masculine).⁸ Rabbi’s answer seems to work better with the version that applies Antoninus’ question only to the body: “Why do you ask about the impure body and not about the pure soul?” From Rabbi’s response-question we can deduce that the relationship between body and soul and their judgment after death is at stake here.

This dialogue reflects speculation about body and soul in antiquity. In antique mind-body or mind-matter dualism, the soul is considered of a *different* nature than the body, which is matter, and it is moreover placed on a *higher* level. Dualism in this sense, therefore, implies a hierarchy: the nature of the soul is “higher” than that of the body. Interestingly, Rabbi’s response-question, rather than Antoninus’ initial question, represents a hierarchical dualist view, as he speaks about the “impure” body and the “pure” soul.

In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the horse and the rider represent different sections of (only) the soul.⁹ This known imagery must have been the main reason why the question of Antoninus is attached here to the midrash on “horse and rider.” Indeed, in retrospect, the midrash of the horse and the rider must have been influenced by this classical image. The midrash is *presented* as a mere solution of a

⁸ The versions either read: מעמידן בדין or מעמידו בדין

⁹ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 253c–254a. In fact, here three parts of the soul are represented by a charioteer and two horses.

grammatical issue (horse and *its* rider). The answer to this grammatical issue, however, implies questions of theodicy: why did God drown the horses along with the riders? The latter is an unlikely rabbinical concern, if the “horse” was considered as nothing else than an Egyptian horse. In the rabbinic view, which, unlike Platonism, is inherently “carnal,” the body is also an integral part of the human being. Therefore the classical imagery of the horse(s) and the rider seems to have undergone a rabbinic revision that also includes the body. This basic idea, that “horse” stands for body and “rider” stands for soul must have been in the back of the mind of the rabbinic darshan who composed the midrash of the “horse and its rider.” This gradually becomes evident in the context of the dialogue between Antoninus and Rabbi, and the following sections of this literary unit: the mashal and its nimshal.

The mashal, which follows now, is presented as an answer to the questions raised by Antoninus and Rabbi. MRI does not present the mashal in full. It is, rather, introduced as a well-known story which does not need quoting: the implied audience is supposed to know it.¹⁰ This is the text as it occurs in all textual witnesses of MRI.¹¹

¹⁰ Other, maybe even older versions of the mashal existed. See the quotation of a similar parable (probably in combination with other sources) by the church father Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.70.5–17. For the text of the Apocryphon, from Epiphanius and other sources, see James R. Mueller, *The Five Fragments of the Apocryphon of Ezekiel: A Critical Study* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 14, 38–47, 79–100; Michael E. Stone, Benjamin G. Wright, and David Satran, eds., *The Apocryphal Ezekiel* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). In the latter see esp. Esther Chazon, “The Blind and the Lame” (9–19) and Marc Bregman, “Excursus: The Rabbinic Versions of the Blind and the Lame” (61–68). See for further studies: Marc Bregman, “The Parable of the Lame and the Blind: Epiphanius’ Quotation from an Apocryphon of Ezekiel,” *Journal of Theological Studies* (1991): 125–38; Richard Bauckham, “The Parable of the Royal Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14) and the Parable of the Lame Man and the Blind Man (Apocryphon of Ezekiel),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1996): 471–88; Reuven Kiperwasser, “A Bizarre Invitation to the King’s Banquet: The Metamorphosis of a Parable Tradition and the

C. They told this parable. To what is the matter similar? To a king of flesh and blood who had a beautiful orchard. The king placed in the orchard two guards, one lame and one blind. Until: “and afterwards: to judge with it (Ps 50:4 cont.)”—that is the body.¹²

The text is, fortunately, quoted in full in MRS.¹³ I will henceforth discuss the mashal as present in MRS. In the following translation, C marks the mashal, D is the nimshal—the application of the mashal, and E introduces the prooftext Ps 50:4 with its midrash.

C. They told this parable. To what is the matter similar? To a king of flesh and blood who had a beautiful orchard. The king placed in the orchard two guards, one lame and one blind. The lame said to the blind: “Beautiful young fruits do I see.” Said the blind one to him: “As if I can see?!” The lame one said: “As if I can walk?!” The lame rode on the back of the blind, and they went and took the first fruits. After (some) days, the king came and sat in judgment over them. He said to them: “Where are the young fruits?” Said the blind to him: “As if I can see?!” Said the lame to him: “As if I can walk?!” The king was clever: What did he do? He let the one ride on the back of

Transformation of an Eschatological Idea,” *Prooftexts* (2013): 147–81. The theme of a blind person carrying a lame person to perform treacherous deeds is not unique to Jewish and Christian literature, but is widely represented in world folklore. For more, see bibliography: Bregman, “The Parable of the Lame and the Blind,” 127 note 5, and Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; a Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), N886 (Folktale Type 519).

¹¹ The textual witnesses for this passage are listed in note 6.

¹² The end of this unit in MRI introduced by “Until,” which is identical to its parallel in MRS (see below), indicates that not only the content but also the wording of the mashal was well-known. The midrash of Ps 50:4 involves a specific reading of this verse, which I will explain later.

¹³ The manuscript containing this section of MRS is Paris, Alliance Israelite XI 126 5v–6r.

the other, and they would walk. The king said to them: “So you did, and you ate!”

D. So the Holy One blessed be He brings the body and the soul and puts them to trial. He says to the body: “Why did you sin before me?” It says before Him: “Master of the World, from the day that the soul went out of me, I am cast down like a stone.” He says to the soul: “Why did you sin before me?” It says before Him: “Master of the World, Is it me who has sinned? The body has sinned! Since the day that I went out from it, haven’t I been pure before you?” The Holy One takes the soul and enters it in the body and judges them together,

E. as it is said: *He summoned the heavens above* (Ps 50:4)—to bring the soul. *And the earth* (Ps 50:4 cont.)—to bring the body. *And afterwards: to judge with it* (לְדוֹר עִמּוֹ) (Ps 50:4 cont.).

The mashal uses yet another image, of one “riding” on another, namely a lame guard riding on the shoulders of a blind guard.¹⁴ These two are appointed by the king to guard the fruit in his orchard. Each on his own cannot access the fruit, but they cooperate and thus manage to steal the forbidden fruits. Just as in the midrash of the horse and its rider, the lame and the blind each plead innocent and blame the other “partner” for stealing the fruit. The smart king, just like God in the midrash, judges the two together “as one.”

The nimshal (D) does not revert to the base text Exod 15:1 and its midrash (A), as is usually the case in a midrashic mashal. It, rather, picks up on the philosophical discussion between Antoninus and Rabbi (B) and applies the story of the lame and the blind to the body and the soul. In line with the dialogue between God and the horse and rider (midrash) and the king and the two guards (mashal), a third dialogue is presented here, between God and the body and the soul. The dialogue is structured in the same way as

¹⁴ According to I. Ziegler, *Die Königsleichnisse des Midrasch, beleuchtet durch die römische Kaiserzeit* (Breslau: Schottländer, 1903), 299, garden work was known to be done by weak and old people in antiquity. For references, see there.

the two previous ones: the body and the soul each in their turn blame the other partner for the fact that they have sinned. Thereupon God judges them both together. Unlike Rabbi's statement about the impure body and the pure soul, which involves a dualist hierarchy, the nimshal, in line with the mashal, rather treats body and soul as *equal* parts of the human being which operate, sin, and are being judged together—just as the horse and the rider in the midrash.

The nimshal concludes with the quotation of Ps 50:4, which, in turn, is subjected to a midrash (E) that reads it as an application of the issues portrayed in the nimshal. Because this verse deals with “judging,” it is an appropriate proof-text. The “heavens” are asked to bring on the soul, and the “earth” is asked to supply the body. This placing of the soul in heaven, which is “higher,” and the body on earth, which is “lower,” entails the possibility of a hierarchical dualistic view of the world and the human. This is, however, not elaborated here: it is not said that the soul is “higher” because it comes from heaven.

The specific reading of לְדִין עָמוֹ in Ps 50:4 still needs to be addressed. According to the Masoretic vocalization, which is reflected in the modern translations, the text reads “to judge his people.” The darshan, however, “reads” the word עָמוֹ (*amo*) differently by vocalizing it *imo*—with it, i.e. the body with the soul. This is also explicitly the case in the parallels to this mashal in later Midrashim, which we will discuss after we wrap up the discussion of this textual unit in the Mekhiltot.

To summarize: In the Mekhiltot, the mashal is not presented as a direct interpretation of Exod 15:1: *the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea*. The midrash (A) is a direct interpretation of that verse. In the midrash, horse and rider are not explicitly presented as images for body and soul, and without the following passages, they would not be read as anything more than the Egyptian horse and “its” rider. The dialogue between Antoninus and Rabbi (B) forms the connection between the midrash (A) and the mashal and nimshal (C, D). This dialogue is appended to this midrash, or the other way around, because “horse and rider” are a traditional image for “body and soul” in Greek philosophy.

As opposed to the twofold structure typical of the mashal, this results in a threefold repetition of the same structure: the dialogue between God, horse and rider in the midrash; the dialogue

between king, lame and blind in the mashal; and the dialogue between God, body and soul in the nimshal. In addition, there is the dialogue between Antoninus and Rabbi. Structure, as is well known, is one of the ordering principles of rabbinic texts. However, the similar structure camouflages different philosophical views. Throughout this passage, the relation between body and soul shifts back and forth between a simple mind-body dualism (body and soul are separate instances within the human but one is not “higher” than the other), and a hierarchical dualism (the soul is of a higher order than the body). I will return to this in the conclusion of this chapter, after having discussed some parallels in later rabbinic works which present a similar juxtaposition of various philosophical views.

THE MASHAL OF THE LAME AND THE BLIND IN LATER RABBINIC SOURCES

Babylonian Talmud

The mashal, together with its narrative context (Antoninus and Rabbi), but without the midrash of Exod 15:1, is also found in the Babylonian Talmud, where it appears in a collection of several “Antoninus” episodes. The fact that the mashal appears here without its exegetical context is an indication that, at least in a later stage, it circulated independently from a biblical text.¹⁵ The discussion between Antoninus and Rabbi is structured differently in the Bavli: it is Antoninus who initiates the story about body and soul blaming each other (the nimshal in the Mekhiltot):

Antoninus said to Rabbi: “The body and the soul can both free themselves from judgment. Thus, the body can plead, ‘The soul has sinned: from the day it left me I lie like a dumb stone in the grave.’ While the soul can say, ‘The body has sinned:

¹⁵ See also note 10.

from the day I departed from it I fly about in the air like a bird.”¹⁶

The mashal is presented as Rabbi’s answer:

He (Rabbi) replied, “I will tell you a parable. To what may this be compared?” etc.

As in the Mekhilot, the mashal is followed by the nimshal, including the midrash of Ps 50:4:

So will the Holy One, blessed be He, bring the soul, [re]place it in the body, and judge them together, as it is written, *He summoned the heavens above, and the earth, to judge imo: He summoned the heavens above—this refers to the soul; and the earth, to judge imo—to the body.*

Leviticus Rabbah

In Leviticus Rabbah, the mashal appears in the context of a midrash on Lev 4:2: *when a soul has sinned by mistake against any of the Lord’s commandments* (literal translation). This verse may be a more original exegetical context for the mashal than Exod 15:1. A premise behind this midrash, and in all midrashim about Lev 4:2 mentioned in this paper, is that *nefesh* does not refer to a “human,” a “person,” as it is meant in the biblical verse, but that it is taken to mean “soul,” a particular part of the human, separate from his body.

The mashal of the lame and the blind is followed here by a “twin” mashal about a priest with two wives, which reveals the exactly opposite view about the relation between body and soul, and their mutual responsibility. Whereas, as we have seen, the mashal of the lame and the blind illustrates that body and soul are equally responsible, this new mashal, with its nimshal, demonstrates that the soul is *more* responsible than the body, because it is of a higher order.

¹⁶ Translation: Isidore Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1978), with some adaptations.

R. Chiyya taught: This may be compared to a priest who had two wives, one the daughter of a priest, and the other the daughter of an Israelite, and handed to them dough of terumah, and they rendered it unclean. Said he to them: "Who made the dough unclean?" Each said that the other had made it unclean. What did the priest do? He let the daughter of the Israelite alone, and began to judge the daughter of the priestly family. Said she to him: "My lord priest, have you not handed it [i.e. the dough] to both of us alike? Why do you judge me and are you letting the daughter of the Israelite alone?" Said he to her: "You are the daughter of a priest and trained [in the laws appertaining to terumah] from your father's house, therefore I judge you, but she is the daughter of an Israelite, and is not trained from her father's house; for this reason I judge you."

Even so in the Time to Come, the Holy One blessed be He will say to the soul: "Why have you sinned before me?" The latter will say before Him: "O Lord of the Universe, I and the body have sinned as one; why do You judge me and let the body alone?" He will answer her: "You are from the upper regions, from a place where they do not sin but the body is from the lower regions, from a place where they sin. Therefore I judge you (אני מדיין עימך)."¹⁷

The idea formulated at the end of the nimshal, that the soul is of a higher order than the body, is as we have seen, is already present *in nuce* in the midrash of Ps 50:40. That verse, with its midrash, is again quoted at the end of the mashal of the lame and the blind which comes before the new mashal of the two priestly wives. Interestingly, Ps 50:4 and its midrash is not repeated at the end of this new mashal. However, it seems to be implied in the reference to the "upper" and "lower" regions, which is this time elaborated in an explicitly hierarchical, dualistic way. Moreover at the very end of the passage, the expression לדין עם/מדיין עם is used in the sense of "to judge," with the preposition עם denoting the object of "judg-

¹⁷ Translation taken from Soncino Midrash Rabbah, with some adaptations.

ing, whereas in the midrash of Ps 50:4 at the end of the mashal of the lame and the blind, this expression was used in the sense of “to judge with.” This different use of the expression reflects a different anthropology.

To sum up: in *Leviticus Rabbah* the mashal of the lame and the blind occurs in an exegetical context, a midrash of Lev 4:2, without the dialogue between Antoninus and Rabbi. In *Leviticus Rabbah*, as in the *Mekhiltot*, the mashal of the lame and the blind reveals a certain dualism, but no hierarchical view of body and soul. Like the lame and the blind guards, the body and the soul sin together and are being judged together, as one. Ps 50:4 is quoted at the end of this mashal and explained in exactly the same, non-hierarchical way as in the *Mekhiltot*. This mashal-nimshal unit is, in *Leviticus Rabbah*, immediately followed by a different mashal of two priestly wives who defile the *terumah*, with its *nimshal*. That mashal-nimshal unit, quoted above, betrays a different view of the relation between body and soul. Just like the priestly wife, who should have “known better,” the soul is deemed more responsible for sin than the body. The reason why this is so is explained at the end of the *nimshal*: because the soul is from a “higher region” than the body. Thus, the second mashal promotes a hierarchical dualistic view of the relation between body and soul. Interestingly, both *meshalim* are juxtaposed without any introduction or explanation of their different implications.¹⁸

Tanchuma Buber Vayikra 11–12

In *Tanchuma Buber*, the mashal of the lame and the blind is also accompanied by a twin-mashal, but a different one than in *Leviticus Rabbah*. This time, the twin-mashal, about two people working

¹⁸ Marc Bregman, “The Parable of the Lame and the Blind,” 131 note 23 suggests that the view that the soul and the body are reunited after death and can be punished together for sin is more characteristic of Tannaitic sources, whereas the view that only the soul survives and is punishable for sin is more characteristic of the Amoraic sources. The fact that various opinions about the relation between body and soul co-existed in ancient Judaism is discussed by Marcel Poorthuis, “Gott, die Seele und der Leib,” 413–28.

in the royal palace, precedes the mashal of the lame and the blind. Both meshalim are brought anonymously, as is often the case in later Midrashim. As in Leviticus Rabbah, both meshalim are connected to a midrash of Lev 4:2. In the Tanchuma, they are preceded by a fascinating midrash of that verse, which reads the sentence in an alternative way.¹⁹

When a soul has sinned by mistake (Lev 4:2). Is it the soul that sins? Scripture says: In the place of justice (tsedek), there is wickedness (Eccl 3:16)—the place of the soul, that was given from the Righteousness, from a place where there is no iniquity or sin. And (when) it does sin, Scripture cries out in surprise: When a soul has sinned by mistake?! In the place of justice—there is wickedness!

The exact interpretation of this midrash is difficult, as both the question and exclamation marks are not present in the Hebrew text. In a typical petichta-style, the base verse, Lev 4:2 is connected with a “remote” verse: Eccl 3:16. The tendency of the present midrash seems to be that it is unthinkable that a “soul” sins, because the soul issues from a “higher” place, where there is only justice, or even from the Divine, from Righteousness. When a soul sins, this implies that wickedness enters that righteous place. This midrash thus involves a dualistic-hierarchical view of the relation between body and soul. This is immediately followed by the first mashal:

To what is the matter similar? To two persons who sinned against the king, one from the province and one from the palace. When he saw that both of them had committed a single offense, he released the one from the province but rendered a guilty verdict against the person from the palace. His palace people said to him: Both of them committed a single offense; yet you released the one from the province and gave a verdict against the one from the palace. He said to them: I released the

¹⁹ Translation based on: Salomon Buber, ed., *Midrasch Tanchuma: ein agadischer Commentar zum Pentateuch* (Wilna: Wittwe & Gebrüder Romm, 1885). For my translation I was guided by John T. Townsend, *Midrasch Tanbuma. S. Buber Recension. Vol. 2 Exodus and Leviticus* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publ. House, 1997), 194–95.

one from the province because he did not know the laws of the kingdom, but the one from the palace is with me every day and knows what the laws of the kingdom are. Now for the one close to me who sinned, [what verdict] will be pronounced against him?

In this mashal, the person who has always lived in the palace bears a higher responsibility than the outsider. Even without an explicit nimshal, it should be clear, in view of the midrash that precedes it, that the “one from the palace” stands for the “soul” who stems from a “place of righteousness.” When such a person *casu quo* soul “sins,” “wickedness” enters the “righteous place.” The mashal, unlike the midrash, introduces the “one from the province,” who—as explained in the nimshal that follows—is identified with the body, the soul’s counterpart.

So also the body is like one from the province. *The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth* (Gen 2:7). But the soul is a palace person from above. *He blew into his nostrils the breath of life* (Ibid.) Yet both of them sinned.

Given this “application” of the mashal’s images to the body and the soul, the tendency seems to be hierarchical-dualistic, just as in the mashal of the two wives of the priest in Leviticus Rabbah. Hereafter, however, the nimshal reverts to the position that body and soul are *equally* guilty and responsible, as in the mashal of the lame and the blind.

Why? Because it is impossible for the body to exist without the soul. Thus, if there is no soul, there is no body, and if there is no body, there is no soul. So both of them sinned.

The nimshal continues with the quotation of several prooftexts which divert into various directions that are of lesser interest for this study. Then it reverts again to the base verse, and it renders explicit the reasoning behind the midrash: the text deliberately uses the word *nefesh*, “soul,” to indicate that it is “from above.” Here, we are back to hierarchical dualism.

When a soul sins (Lev 4:2). (It is) because it is from above that “a person (*adam*)” is not written here.

After this, Tanchuma proceeds with the mashal of the lame and the blind with exactly the same implications as in the previously quoted sources: body and soul have sinned together and will be judged together, *as one*.²⁰

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In all the rabbinic sources that feature the parable of the lame and the blind, it is adduced to illuminate the relation between body and soul. Notably at stake is the responsibility of the body and the soul for sin, and their respective punishment after death. The mashal is included in the two Mekhiltot—tannaitic Midrashim—and in the amoraic Leviticus Rabbah, the Babylonian Talmud, and Midrash Tanchuma. The tendency of the mashal and its nimshal is the same in all sources: body and soul, like the lame and the blind guards in the story, can only sin together and will therefore be punished together, as a unity.

In all the rabbinic sources, the nimshal ends with an identical midrash of Psalm 50:4: in this midrash, it is also said that body and soul will be judged together, yet the kernel of a hierarchical dualist view is introduced: the body is said to be “from the earth,” i.e., below, and the soul is placed in heaven, i.e., above. In this midrash, however, no consequences are drawn from this spatial hierarchy: it is not said that the soul is more responsible because it is “better” in any way.

In the Mekhiltot and the Bavli, the mashal is preceded by a dialogue between Antoninus and Rabbi. The attributions (who says what?) are different in both sources. In the Mekhiltot, it is, interestingly, Rabbi who suggests that the soul is “pure” whereas the body is “impure.” In the Bavli this hierarchical distinction is not made. In the Mekhiltot, the mashal and this dialogue are embedded in the

²⁰ The section “In the world to come the Holy One blessed be He will bring in the soul and say to it: Why have you transgressed against the commandments?” serves here as the introduction to the mashal. After the mashal, follows the “rest” of the nimshal: “So the Holy One blessed be He will take a spirit and toss it into a body, as stated: *He summoned the heavens above* (Ps 50:4), i.e., the soul; *and the earth, to judge imo* (Ibid.), i.e., the body.”

context of a midrash on Exod 15:1 (the horse and its rider). I have demonstrated that the connection between this midrash and the theme of the body and soul is forged by the traditional Hellenistic imagery of “horse and rider” (or charioteer) for parts of the soul. The midrash of the horse and the rider, which at first sight appears to deal with a purely exegetical question, seems to have been inspired by the concerns about the body and the soul that are the topic of the dialogue between Antoninus and Rabbi, and the *meshal* of the Lame and the Blind.

In Leviticus Rabbah and the Tanchuma, the *meshal* functions in a midrash of Lev 6:2: *When a “soul” has sinned by mistake*. The combination of “soul” and “sin” is the lead here for reflections on the nature and origin of the soul, and its relation with the body. In both collections, the *meshal* of the lame and the blind is presented exactly as in the Mekhilot, with the same “egalitarian” view of body and soul. However, in both sources, this *meshal* is combined with a “twin” that reflects a different, hierarchical-dualistic view which amounts to the idea that the soul is more, or even solely, responsible for sin because it is of a higher, even divine, order. The combination of the various components of the literary units in both Midrashim—midrash and two *meshalim* with their respective *nimshalim*—reveals a redaction that did not smooth away the bumps and seams of different philosophical views. Not only do the two *meshalim* reflect various views, but different perspectives are also traceable within the *nimshalim* of the two *meshalim*, and in the midrash.

To conclude: In the various sources that have been studied in this chapter, different, even mutually excluding, opinions about the nature of and the relation between body and soul appear side by side. In view of the contrast that is often made between “Athens” and “Jerusalem,” between the “carnal Jewish” and the “ideological Hellenistic” views, one could expect that the Roman Antoninus would promote a more hierarchical dualistic view of the relation between body and soul. In addition, in view of assumptions about the development of ideology in rabbinic literature, one could possibly expect that the tannaitic sources would reflect a less dualistic

view of the human than the later sources.²¹ Both assumptions are not obvious in the studied materials: The parable of the lame and the blind—which, because of its inclusion in the Mekhilot, can, in its rabbinic form, be assumed to be “tannaitic”—indeed reflects an “egalitarian” view of body and soul. This stands in contrast with the hierarchical-dualist stance of the two other (amoraic) meshalim. However, in the Mekhilot, it is the Jew, Rabbi, and not the Roman, Antoninus, who distinguishes between the “pure soul” and the “impure body.”

Returning to the theme of pedagogy that was the topic of the 2016 SBL Midrash Section session: the rabbinic sources that include the mashal of the lame and the blind, are, especially in the literary context surrounding the mashal, replete with internal contradictions. According to present-day standards, this would not be considered pedagogically sound, but rather confusing. On the other hand, the texts may reflect the actuality of the debate, and the uncertainty about these matters during the entire rabbinic period. Side-by-side presentation of contradicting views is, moreover, very characteristic of rabbinic literature, and we can therefore assume that learning to deal with conflicting views was part of rabbinic pedagogy.

²¹ See note 18.