

Between hermeneutic and rhetoric: The parable of the slave who buys a rotten fish in exegetical and homiletical Midrashim

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Dineke and I have always shared a fascination for ‘weird’ midrashim, most notable about the beautiful Joseph. The present parable about a poor slave who has to eat the rotten fish that he bought by mistake is equally strange, though less appealing. I hope nevertheless that it will catch her attention and that she will enjoy its adventures throughout rabbinic literature. Fate has arranged that our carriers have crossed at several points: one marking point was when I was reader of her dissertation and one of the ‘opponents’ at her defence at the Faculty of Theology of Utrecht University which has since become part of history itself. After many wanderings, especially on my side, our paths are now crossing again as I will follow her in her position of lecturer of Jewish Studies at the PThU. I see this as a new step, and in no way and end of our adventures into fascinating Jewish texts.

Introduction

In the two Mekhilot, Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael (MRI) and Mekhilta de-rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (MRS)¹, a parable (Hebrew: *mashal*) is used to explain Pharaoh and his servants’ ‘change of heart’.² Where they first had agreed to let the Israelites go (Exod 10:7), they later *had a change of heart* and said: *What is this we have done, letting Israel go from our service?* (Exod 14:5). According to the midrashic reading that follows, the Egyptians experienced *the loss of the Israelites as a punishment as bad as the ten plagues*. The parable, or *mashal*,³ that is used in the course of the midrash, features a slave who has to eat a rotten fish and undergo other humiliations because of the mistake of buying that fish in the first place. The parable has something of a comic tragedy: it is absurd and excessive. In the Mekhilot (3d cent. CE), the *mashal* has an exegetical function in the midrash – it serves to explain the apparent discrepancy between the two verses. This same *mashal* is, with some variations, also found in Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (PRK, 5th cent. CE), and Tanchuma Buber (TB, 7th -9th cent. CE).⁴ In each of these works, its form is moulded, and its function adapted, to

¹ For MRI, cf. H.S. Horowitz, - I.A. Rabin, eds., *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ismael, cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1931, 2nd ed. Jerusalem 1960), 86; J.Z. Lauterbach, ed., *Mekhilta de-rabbi Ishmael: A critical edition on the basis of the MSS and early editions with an English translation, introduction, and notes*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1933-1935; new ebook edition with introduction by D. Stern, Philadelphia, 2004), 131-132. For MRS, cf. J.N. Epstein, - E.Z. Melamed, eds. *Mekhilta d’rabbi Sim’on b. Yochai. Fragmenta in Geniza Cairensa reperta digessit apparatus critico, notis, praedatione instruxit ...* (Jerusalem, 1955; rev.ed. Jerusalem, 1979), 49. About the Mekhilot and their relationship, see M. Kahana, ‘The Halakhic Midrashim’, in *The Literature of the Sages. Part II* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2006), 3-105.

²This paper is an offshoot of my work on tannaitic *meshalim* in the NWO-funded project ‘Parables and the Partings of the Way’ conducted at Utrecht University. I am preparing an annotated edition of all tannaitic *meshalim*. The first volume to be published will deal with the parables in the two Mekhilot.

³ I use both terms indiscriminately in this paper. A rabbinic *mashal* has generally two parts: the ‘*mashal proper*’ (here in 5) and the ‘*nimshal*’, the application of the *mashal* (here in 6-7). When I want to make that distinction and refer to only one of these two parts, I make that explicit.

⁴ The dating of midrashic works is tentative and often contested because of long redaction histories. I followed the dates suggested by G. Stemmerger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrash. 9. Auflage*, (München: Beck, 2011). The present *mashal* is also found in Midrash Mishle (ca. 9th cent. CE), where it functions in a midrash on Prov 27:17. In my discussion of this *mashal* in my annotated edition of the *meshalim* in the Mekhilot, I also discuss this parallel. For the sake of the present argument, the discussion of the version of Midrash Mishle would lead us to far astray. However, the message of the *mashal* as it is found in the Mekhilot is preserved better in Midrash Mishle than in TB and PRK.

fit the new literary context and purpose. In this paper I will trace the working of this mashal as it moved from one exegetical context to another by closely reading the respective texts. Special attention will be given to the interplay between hermeneutics and rhetoric throughout the versions. The latter issue deserves a brief introduction.

Rhetoric and hermeneutics; homiletical and exegetical

In almost every study about rabbinic meshalim, most notably David Stern's, *Parables in Midrash*, Daniel Boyarin's, *Intertextuality and the reading of Midrash*, and Yonah Fraenkel's extensive chapter in his *Darkhei ha-Aggadah ve-ha Midrash*,⁵ the question comes by as to whether the parables in midrash have a primarily 'rhetorical' or a primarily 'hermeneutical' function. I restrict myself here to parables in midrash, which is the main locus for meshalim in rabbinic literature. Rhetorics is the art of convincing; hermeneutics is about interpretation, also called exegesis when dealing with biblical texts. Yonah Fraenkel ^{ל"ט} and Daniel Boyarin advocated a primarily 'hermeneutical' role for the mashal, with only accidental rhetorics. In this study, I want to argue that both functions cooperate in the rabbinic mashal: like midrashim in general, meshalim cannot convey a convincing message if their hermeneutics are not sound. This is in line with David Stern, who sees hermeneutics in meshalim as a function of the rhetorics. I would not go so far as to say that the rhetorics have priority and steer the hermeneutics, as he puts it. I would rather say that it is the way of midrash, to convince *by means of interpretation*, and this hold for the midrashic mashal as well.

A generally accepted, be it somewhat problematically named⁶, distinction is that between hermeneutical and exegetical Midrashim. This difference is visible in the *presentation* of the midrash: exegetical Midrashim provide 'running' commentaries on each verses of (lectionary) portion, whereas the homiletical midrashim do not treat each verse individually but focus on the first few verses as representative for the entire portion. This difference runs also through the works from which the texts that we are about to study are taken: PRK and TB are homiletical Midrashim, and the Mekhilotot are exegetical Midrashim. One would be inclined to think that the homiletical midrashim are more 'rhetorical' and the exegetical more 'hermeneutical'. The present study will show that this is not the case and that a rhetorical message can go missing when the exegesis is less strong: in this case, not incidentally as I hope to show, in the two homiletical midrashim. This is because they have moved the mashal to another exegetical context where it is less effective. For the following discussion of the text I refer to the synoptic table attached to this paper. The table is divided in numbered section, for easy reference.

The mashal of the rotten fish in the Mekhilotot

In the 'midrash before the mashal'⁷ (3-4), a previous verse, Exod 10:7 (2), and the 'base verse'⁸, Exod 14:5, are chronologically connected and opposed by means of the categories

⁵ D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, esp. 80-92 and 105-116; D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Y. Fraenkel, 'Ch. 11: Hamashal' in his *Darkhei ha-Aggadah ve-ha-Midrash* (Jerusalem: Yad leTalmud, 2007), 323-393.

⁶ Because evidently, also 'homiletical Midrashim' contain exegesis.

⁷ This is how I call this section, for want of a better name. I do not want to name it 'nimshal' as a formal nimshal still follows. The relation between these two sections of meshalim, which is directly related to the embedding of the mashal in midrash, or to the use of the mashal as a midrashic 'form' so you want, is complex. Often, the 'midrash before the mashal' takes an advance of the nimshal; they are also frequently identical. For a formal discussion of the mashal I refer to A. Goldberg, 'Das Schriftauslegende Gleichnis im Midrasch,' *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträege* 3 (1981), 1-90 (also included in A. Goldberg, *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung. Gesammelte Studien II*, ed. M. Schluter & P. Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

⁸ This refers to the verse that is the subject of the midrash (Goldberg calls it *inyan*). In the table, the base verses of all midrashim are in section 1.

‘formerly/yesterday’ and ‘but now/today’ (3). These verses display a change in attitude that demands an explanation: First it is related how Pharaoh and his servants want to let the Israelites go, and afterwards the same servants are said to be sorry that they have let them go. This discrepancy or gap is filled in by means of a ‘reasoning’ of Pharaoh’s servants: they realize that they received the plagues because they refused to let the Israelites go. Therefore they thought it better to let them go after all. As a result, however, two additional things happened: they lost the people who worked for them, and the Israelites took their valuables. Thus, they have been punished thrice. The latter is important – the ‘letting go’ of the Israelites is also experienced as a punishment, according to his midrash. That the problem with ‘letting them go’ is in fact that by doing so, they lost their slaves, is implied in the last part of the base verse: *What is this we have done, releasing Israel from our service?* (explicitly quoted in MRS in section 7). This midrash is in fact an advance on the nimshal (6-7), as is often the case. In an interesting twist of main actors, it reminds of the *dayyenu* (‘It would have been enough’) song recited at Passover.

The parable (5) illustrates this situation. The comparison is not so much on the level of content but rather structural. The structure of the mashal moulds the biblical text into a certain reading. In the mashal, one stupid act (buying a rotten fish) entails three unforeseen consequences (having to eat it, lashes (*makkot*), paying for it). According to the nimshal (6-7), this applies to the biblical story which, in view of this mashal, relates three problems that the Egyptians have to face: they were struck with the plagues (*makkot*); they let their slaves go; and the Israelites took their money. Note that the same word (מכות) that is traditionally used for the ten plagues is also used here to denote the ‘lashes’ given to the servant.⁹ The excessive amount of lashes (60 or 70, depending on the version) reflects the heavy burden of the plagues. Read through the lens of the mashal, these three problems are presented as consequences of a non-specified (stupid) act, or in any event a wrong assessment of possible consequences, corresponding to buying a rotten fish in the mashal. In the biblical story, this stupid act can be identified as the fact that the Egyptians had made the Israelites into slaves and treated them harshly. Israel, is thus, rather confusingly, put on a par with a ‘rotten fish’, that is thoughtlessly bought, but that may yield annoying consequences.¹⁰ In the case of the Egyptians, turning Israel into slaves eventually made them dependent on these slaves, caused them to receive the plagues at their refusal to free them, and the loss of their valuables, when they eventually did release them. The nimshal (6-7) summarizes the midrash before the mashal. Unlike the version in MRI (where it is implied), the nimshal in MRS ends with the quotation of the base verse, including the last word ‘from our service’— מעבדנו. This quotation emphasizes that for the Egyptians the real problem of ‘letting them go’ was that they lost their servants.

An interesting complication is the switching identity of the *eved* between the various elements of the story (Bible/midrash/mashal/nimshal): The Egyptian servants (עבד) complain that they lost those who served them (same root עבד)— the Israelites! The Egyptians realize that they are now struck thrice. In de mashal, a servant (עבד) is struck thrice because he buys a rotten fish. Who is the missing figure, the master of the slave? This can only be God who struck the Egyptians (the real slaves, as they were dependent on the Israelites) three times!

The mashal in Pesikta de-Rab Kahana and Tanchuma Buber

⁹ מכות comes from the root נכה, which is unrelated to the verb לקה used all through the mashal and which I translated as ‘being struck’. Because of the similar sound, there might have been an association between the two terms, however. In the parallel in Midrash Mishle (below) the word מלקיה is used once for ‘lashes’; the second time מכות is used: this indicates that the two roots were associated, if not confused.

¹⁰ C. Thoma and S. Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen, 1. Teil, Pesiqta deRav Kahana (PesK): Einleitung, Übersetzung, Parallelen, Kommentar, Texte* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1986), 175 call the rotten fish a *stumpfes Allomotiv*, i.e. an element that has no parallel in the nimshal. As I explained, I believe that, on a structural level, the *buying* of the rotten fish does have a parallel in the biblical story, namely making the Israelites into slaves.

Pesikta de Rav Kahana (PRK) contains midrashic homilies for the Jewish holidays and special *shabbatot*, and is organized according to the lectionary readings (*piska'ot*) for these special days. Piska 11 is a homily that focuses in part on parashat Beshalach, one of the readings of Shabbat ha-Gadol, the Shabbat before Passover. This particular midrash is construed as a *petichta*¹¹, with as *petichta*-verse Proverbs 17:10 (in section 2) which contains the word הכות (blows) from the same root as (the ten) plagues--מכות. Hence, the association with Pharaoh and the Egyptians and the connection to the base verse, Exod 13:17, which is the first verse of parashat Beshalach. Moreover, Prov 17:10 mentions a 'fool' that is struck, which reminds of the negligent slave in the mashal. This thematic combination of elements that also occur in the mashal must have been the reason why the (existing) mashal was attached to this midrash. The *petichta* consists in its entirety of the mashal, which is here attributed to Rabbi Ishmael and explicitly marked as a tannaitic source by means of the verb תני.

The mashal uses of synonyms for well-known words such as 'lashes', 'blows' and 'money', probably to adapt them to current colloquial use. Two Greek loan words are used for the 'lashes' and 'plagues': *burdalin* and *kataforas*.¹² 'Mammon' (money) is used instead of the 100 *maneh* in the Mekhiltot, possibly because the latter monetary unit was no longer customary. These differences in vocabulary in comparison with the Mekhiltot could be an indication that the mashal was not directly taken over from the Mekhiltot or another tannaitic source but that it circulated independently as a popular story. In doing so, the automatic association with the ten plagues (*makkot*), established in MRI and MRS by the use of this word for the 'lashes' is lost. This is, however, made up in the nimshal in PRK, where the ten blows are identified as *makkot*. Note that the servant receives 'only' fifty stripes here, whereas the Mekhiltot mention sixty or seventy. In any event, whether fifty, sixty or seventy, it is still excessive and more than the maximum punishment of 40 lashes prescribed in Deut 25:3, which became 40-1 in rabbinic law (BT Makkot 22a).¹³

An important difference with the message in the Mekhiltot is found in the nimshal (6) where the three misfortunes of the slave are equated with the misfortunes of the Egyptians: in PRK the last two are reversed. The Egyptians received the plagues, they lost money, and, only in the third place, and presented as a necessary consequence of the two others, they had to let the Israelite people go. Because of the attachment of the mashal to a different base verse, we miss the idea that the Egyptians are *sorry* that they had to let their workforce go. Thus, the clue of the mashal, as it is embedded in the midrash in the Mekhiltot, is missing. I will get back to this after discussing the mashal in Tanchuma Buber.

Midrash Tanchuma is a homiletical Midrash which is variously dated from the fifth to the ninth century, because of its long and layered redaction-history. It exists in two recensions 'the printed edition', and the 'Buber edition' – named after its first modern editor Solomon

¹¹ The *petichta* ('opening') is a major compositional form of rabbinic homilies (and exegetical Midrashim). In short, it involves a 'remote' verse, called *petichta*-verse, often from the Hagiographa, which is expounded so as to lead up to the exposition of the base verse. See, also for more bibliography, Stemberger, *Einleitung*, p. 268-272-246: 'Synagogenpredigt, Peticha und Chatima'. On the structure of PRK and notably the *petichta'ot*, see Braude & Kapstein, in the introduction to their translation of PRK (see note 20), pp. xxxiii-xxxvi.

¹² בורדלין is a Hebrew variant of the late-Latin *burdillus*, which would be derived from the Greek βουρδουλιζειν: 'to whip'. Cf M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushlami, and the Midrashic Literature* (London-New York, 1903), 149; S. Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum* (Berlin, 1898-99), vol. 2, 144. קטפורס is a Greek loan-word, καταφοράς: 'downward strokes'. Cf. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1352; Krauss, *Lehnwörter* II, 526.

¹³ Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen. 1. Teil*, p. 174 are of the opinion that this is not a reference to the well-known 39 lashes but to *makkat marduth*, disciplinary flogging (m. Nazir 4.3)

Buber.¹⁴ The present mashal only occurs in the Buber recension. Also here, the mashal functions in a midrash on tractate Beshalach. There is no petichta-verse that explains a thematic association with the mashal, as is the case in PRK. Rather, just as in the Mekhiltot, the midrash starts with an opposition between two verses from Exodus. However, these are different verses than in the Mekhiltot: The base verse, as in PRK, is Exod 13:17, where Pharaoh is said to have let Israel go. This verse is contrasted with the chronologically earlier verse Exod 5:2, where Pharaoh is said to refuse to let Israel go. The same hermeneutical move as in the Mekhiltot, but for a different part of the story, is found here: what happened between Exod 5 and Exod 13 that made Pharaoh change his mind and let the Israelites go? The mashal gives an answer to that question. In this version, yet another word for ‘floggings’ is found: *maglebin*¹⁵, and for ‘money’: *damim*, both Hebrew words in contrast to the Greek loan words in PRK. As in PRK, the servant collapses after 50 lashes, and it is moreover explicitly mentioned that he almost died. Even though no strict equation can be assumed, because Pharaoh is represented in the mashal by the servant, not by the king, there may be an echo of this in the TB version of the nimshal (6) where it is stated that Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites *excessively*. The first half of Exod 5:2, in which Pharaoh denies the existence of the God of Israel is presented here as the immediate trigger for God to unleash the plagues. The fact that the Israelites took the money of the Egyptians is presented as their ‘reward’, by quoting Exod 12:36. Just as in PRK, the fact that they had to ‘let them go’ is brought as the necessary consequence, or even as a punishment, but not for the same reason as in the Mekhiltot: also in TB, we do not find the aspect that the Egyptians are ‘sorry’ that they have let the Israelites go.

Consequences of the move of the mashal to a different exegetical context

Pesika de-Rav Kahana, and Tanchuma Buber, being homiletical Midrashim, typically have the first verse of tractate Beshalach, i.e. Exod 13:17, as their base verse. This verse, like the base verse in the Mekhiltot, deals with ‘letting the people go’. This was probably the main reason for the introduction of this mashal at this place in these Midrashim. In PRK there is the additional correspondence with two elements in the petichta verse: the ‘fool’ and the ‘blows’.

Because of the nature of the homiletical midrashic genre, in which not all verses of a biblical pericope are provided with midrash, but the first verses ‘represent’ the entire pericope, the fact the mashal is attached here to Exod 13:17 rather than 14:5 is to be expected. Indeed, there is no specific midrash to 14:5 in these Midrashim.¹⁶ Still, the mashal does not apply to the entire parashah Beshalach, but is specifically used in a midrash on Exod 13:17, playing on specific words in that verse. In TB, Exod 13:7 is combined with a specific other verse, Exod 5:2. In PRK it is combined with a petichta verse that is picked for its similarity to Exod 13:17, not to the entire parashah. In other words, even though the presentation of the midrash is ‘homiletical’, the individual midrashic units are exegetical. And here is where the problem arises. The attachment of the mashal to this different base verse, from an earlier part in the Exodus story results, in a different message. This is apparent in the nimshalim in both midrashim (section 6). The message of the nimshal (according to the words of TB but the content is the same in PRK) is: ‘When Pharaoh had received the plagues, and had given them their reward, after that, he let them go’. In the Mekhiltot, the fact *that they have let them go* is experienced as a punishment (because now they lost their slaves), whereas in PRK and TB the punishment of the Egyptians will be *that they will have to let them go!*

This is also apparent from the order of the punishments listed in PRK and TB (6): ‘letting them go’ is listed there as the third punishment, being the consequence, as it were, of the two

¹⁴ Wilna, 1885. See Stemberger, *Einleitung*, 335-340; M. Bregman, *The Tanchuma-Yelammedenu Literature. Studies in the Evolutions of the Versions* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Cf. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 729: ‘instrument of torture; goad or whip’

¹⁶ In PRK Piska 11, only Exod 13:7.8 and 9 are being used as ‘base verses’. In Tanchuma Buber, midrash is found on two sections of 13:7 (Beshalach 8, 9 and 10), after which the midrash moves on to Exod 15 (Beshalach 11).

others, whereas in the Mekhilotot ‘they let them go’ is listed as the second punishment. This is not, as it might seem at first sight, a simple variation. There is a different, deeper message in the Mekhilta that is missing, and that was probably not picked up the two parallels: that the presence of Israel in Egypt was in fact *a good thing* for Egypt. *They did not just keep the Israelites to bug them; they kept them because they brought them good fortune; maybe they did not realize this at all times, but now that they are gone, they miss them.* Other meshalim in the Mekhilotot confirm this message, such as the twin-meshalim of the man who inherited a field c/q residence but sold it immediately: afterwards the buyer discovered that it was very fertile c/q found treasures in it, so the heir was very sorry that he let go of what befell him so easily.¹⁷ Also these meshalim illustrate the fate of the Egyptians who moaned their loss of the Israelites. It need to be mentioned that these meshalim, even a series of three of them, also occur in PRK, and there the same point is made as in the Mekhilotot, namely that the Egyptians let go of something valuable when they sent the Israelites away.¹⁸ Therefore, the problem of the ‘missed message’ is not related to the fact that PRK and TB are *homiletical* Midrashim as such (and thus less exegetical), but to the fact that this particular mashal of the rotten fish was moved from one verse to another, and that *has* to do with the typical structure of homiletical Midrashim who do not treat each and every verse of a pericope.

The message of the mashal of the rotten fish in the Mekhilotot raises new questions: the darshan(im) seem(s) to be saying: if the Egyptians would have treated us better we would have stayed and that would have been better, at least for them, *but maybe for both of us.* Historically, this could be seen as covert criticism against the Romans, as if the Jews were saying: ‘We are being exiled against our will, but in the end they will be sorry because it is good for a country to have some Jewish population!’ Since it is not likely that these midrashic meshalim were meant for a Roman audience, but rather for a Jewish one, it could also entail criticism of those Jews who rebelled against the Romans and who thereby indirectly caused the exile, which was experienced by some to be worse than life under the Romans.

Conclusions

Reverting to the difference between the rhetorical and hermeneutical functions of the rabbinic meshalim that was raised at the beginning of this paper, I can conclude that, in their use of this mashal, the Mekhilotot, convey a strong rhetorical message namely that Egypt would have been better of if the Israelites would have stayed with them – and maybe the other way around too. This message is specifically related to the midrash of Exod 14:5, in its relation to the ‘earlier’ verse Exod 10:7. What is special about this rhetoric is thus that it is packed in exegesis – and that makes it all the more convincing. The ‘homiletical’ midrashim PRK and TanB have lost some of that rhetorical message, because, by default, they needed to apply the mashal to a different verse, or in TB to tension between to other verses, to which it in fact doesn’t fit so well: therefore the exegesis is less convincing, and as a result the rhetorical effect is lost.

From the journey of this particular mashal we can learn about the processes and techniques with which parables were adapted and re-used in the course of the history of rabbinic literature. In Tanchuma Buber we find an exegetical midrash similar to the Mekhilotot, but dealing with the gap between two other verses from Exodus. In Pesikta de Rav Kahana, the mashal is fitted into a homiletical petichta form, featuring a verse from Proverbs. In all three occurrences of the mashal, we can find both hermeneutical and rhetorical features. This

¹⁷ MRI and MRS Beshalach to Exod 14:5 (Lauterbach, p. 133; Epstein, p. 50).

¹⁸ Also these meshalim are attached to Exod 13:7 and are found in PRK 11:7. Here, however, the focus is on the initial word of the verse וַיִּרְאֵהוּ, which is ‘read’ as וַיִּ, ‘Woe’. Pharaoh said ‘woe’ because he realized that he had lost something valuable, namely the Israelites. These meshalim recur, in various combinations, in other Midrashim and are treated by Thoma and Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen. I Teil*, 181-184; C. Thoma and H. Ernst, *3. Teil. Von Isaak bis zum Schilfmeer: BerR 63-100; ShemR 1-22: Einleitung, Übersetzung mit Kommentar, Texte* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), 313-316 and 317-320.

confirms my conviction that the dichotomies that are often made between ‘rhetorics’ or ‘hermeneutics’ being the primary function of midrash, are artificial. To the contrary: I believe this case demonstrates that the better the hermeneutic, the stronger the rhetoric. It is the force of good midrash to convey a convincing message by means of exegesis.¹⁹

¹⁹ There is one more, I believe related, divide that has been separating of scholars of midrash into ‘schools’ since the beginning of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. This is the question as to whether its origin is in the ‘synagogue’ or in the ‘academy’. In previous work I have been a vehement adherent of the ‘academy’ camp. Maybe because of my study of parables, I have now become convinced that there is no dichotomy: just like today, the ancient rabbis operated in both institutions, which were often in the same ‘JCC’. Most scholars would agree that a midrash is not stenography of a *drashah* in the synagogue: yet the rabbis must have used the material which they gathered in the study house in their weekly *drashot*. Just like ministers use in their sermons what they learned in their theological training or study. In the same vein, the rabbinic *mashal* is not a straight ‘oral’ genre, but it is very likely that it was a convincing ‘rhetorical’, rather standardized, device to use in *drashot* in the synagogue as well as in running commentaries, with the knowledge that rabbinic *drashot* always deal with the interpretation of a text from the Torah, that is, hermeneutics.

	MRI Beshalach 2²⁰	MRS Beshalach	PRK 11:3	TanB Beshalach 8
1	<i>Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart etc. (Exod 14:5).</i>	<i>Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart about the people (Exod 14:5).</i>	<i>And it came to pass, that Pharaoh let (the people) go (Exod 13:17). [...]</i>	<i>And it came to pass, that Pharaoh let (the people) go (Exod 13:17).</i>
2			<i>A rebuke works on an intelligent man more than one hundred blows on a fool (Prov 17:10).</i>	
3	Formerly: <i>Pharaoh's servants said to him, 'How long shall this one be a snare to us?' (Exod 10:7), but now: Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart. (Exod 14:5)</i>	Yesterday: <i>Pharaoh's servants said to him, 'How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go' (Exod 10:7), but today: Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart about the people and said, 'What is this we have done, letting Israel go (from our service?)' (Exod 14:5)</i>		And elsewhere it says: <i>(But Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord,) nor will I let Israel go.'</i> (Exod 5:2). And here he lets them go.
4	They said: If we had been struck and not let (them) go, it would have been enough, but we have been struck and let (them) go. Or, if we had been struck and let (them) go but our money was not taken, it would have been enough. But we have been struck, let (them) go, and our money was taken.	They said: If we had let them go but not been struck, it would have been enough, but we have let them go and have been struck. If we had been struck but not let them go it would have been enough, but we have been struck and let them go. If we had been struck and let (them) go but our money was not taken, it would have		

²⁰ I chose to make my own translations of the texts that follow, because I needed to make the similarities and differences with the mashal in the Mekhiltot clear. For each referenced Midrash, a modern translation is available: J.Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-rabbi Ishmael* (see note 1), 131-132; D. Nelson, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. Translated into English with Critical Introduction and Annotations* (Philadelphia: JPS Publication Society, 2006), 90; W. Braude-I Kapstein, *Pesikta de Rab Kahana* (Philadelphia: JPS Publication Society, 2002), 272; J.T Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma (S. Buber Recension)*, Vol. II: Exodus and Leviticus (Hoboken: Ktav, 1997), 79-80.

		been enough. But we let them go and have been struck and our money was taken		
5	They tell this parable. To what is the matter similar? To one who said to his servant: 'Go out and bring me a fish from the market.'	They tell this parable. To what is the matter similar? To a king of flesh and blood who said to his servant: 'Bring me a fish from the market.'	R. Ishmael taught: To a king who said to his servant: 'Go get me a fish from the market.'	To what is the matter similar? To a king who gave his servant some cash, and said: 'Get me one fish'.
5a	He went and brought him a rotten fish.	He went and brought him a rotten fish.	He went and brought him a rotten fish.	And he went and got him one rotten fish.
5b	He said: 'By decree, you eat the fish or you will be struck with a hundred lashes (<i>makkot</i>), or you pay a hundred <i>maneh</i> .'	He said: 'A decree: or you eat the fish or you will be struck with a hundred lashes (<i>makkot</i>), or you pay a hundred <i>maneh</i> .'	He (the king) said: 'As you live, you will not escape one of three punishments: You will eat the offensive thing (<i>serayut</i>), or you will receive a hundred stripes (<i>burdalim</i>), or you will give money (<i>mamon</i>) .'	He (the king) said: 'As you live, you will not escape one of three: or you eat the fish, or you give payment (<i>damin</i>), or you will be struck with a hundred floggings (<i>maglebin</i>)'.
5c	He said: 'See, I will eat it.' He began to eat, but did not succeed to finish, until he said: 'See, I will be struck (with lashes).'	He said: 'See, I will eat the fish.' He did not succeed to finish, his soul fainted on him. He said: 'See, I will be struck with a hundred lashes'.	He said: 'I will eat the offensive thing.' He did not succeed to eat the offensive thing until his soul fainted on him. He said: 'I will be struck (with stripes).'	[He did not manage to eat]
5d	He was struck with sixty [or] seven[ty], he did not succeed to finish, until he said: 'See, I will pay (the hundred <i>maneh</i>).'	He was struck with sixty or seventy; He collapsed. He said: 'See, I will pay a hundred <i>maneh</i> '.	He did not succeed to receive fifty stripes when he said, 'I will pay the money.'	He did not succeed to be struck with fifty until he was in danger of dying. He said: 'I will give the payment'.
5e	The result was that he ate the fish, was struck with lashes, and paid a hundred <i>maneh</i> .	The result was that he ate the fish, was struck with a hundred lashes, and paid a hundred <i>maneh</i>	The result was that he ate the offensive thing, and was struck (with stripes), and paid money.	The result was that he ate a rotten fish, and was struck, and gave the payment.

6	<p>So also it was done to the Egyptians: <u>They were struck, they let (Israel) go, and their money was taken.</u></p>	<p>So also it was done to the Egyptians: <u>They were struck, they let [(Israel) go, and their money was taken].</u></p>	<p>So said the Holy One to the wicked Pharaoh: ‘As you live, you will be struck with ten blows (<i>kataforas</i>), or you will pay a fine out of your wealth, or you will let Israel go. <u>You will be struck</u> with ten blows (<i>kataforas</i>)—these are the ten plagues (<i>makkot</i>); <u>you will pay a fine—thus they stripped the Egyptians</u> (Exod 12:36); <u>and you will yet Israel go</u></p>	<p>So (it was with) Pharaoh, who enslaved Israel in Egypt excessively. The Holy One blessed be He said to him: ‘Let my people go’. He said to him: <i>I do (not) know the Lord</i> (Exod 5:2). He brought over him ten plagues (<i>makkot</i>) and he did not let them go. The Holy One blessed be He said to him: By your life, you have to give them their reward, as is stated: <i>And the Lord had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people</i> (Exod 12:36). <u>When he had received the plagues, and had given them their reward, after that, he let them go.</u></p>
7		<p>Therefore it is said: <i>What is this we have done, letting Israel go from [our service?]</i></p>	<p>—<i>and it came to pass, that Pharaoh let (the people) go</i> (Exod 13:17).</p>	<p>Therefore it is stated: <i>And it came to pass, that Pharaoh let (the people) go</i> (Exod 13:17).</p>