

MICHAEL FISHBANE

## Spiritual Transformations of Torah in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition

### Abstract:

*The article deals with changing conceptions of Torah in the formative two phases of Jewish tradition. The first major transformation in the Hebrew Bible is the 'arcanization' (Idel's term) or esotericization of the subject. This occurs through the use of an old term for divinization (the verbal stem darash) for exegetical inquiry into the meaning of Torah (Ezra 7: 9-10). The second is the 'spiritualization' of Torah, evident in the transfer to it of verbs used with respect to relationship with God (see Psalm 119). A notable transformation in early rabbinic texts is the role of study as a substitute for ritual action.*

Michael Fishbane,  
Nathan Cummings Professor of  
Jewish Studies at the University of  
Chicago, Chicago Illinois, USA.  
Author of the books:  
Biblical Interpretation in Ancient  
Israel (1985); The Garments of  
Torah. Essays in Biblical  
Hermeneutics (1992); The Kiss of God.  
Mystical and Spiritual Death in  
Judaism (1994); The Exegetical  
Imagination. Jewish Thought and  
Theology (1998); and Biblical Myth  
and Rabbinic Mythmaking (2004).  
Email: mfishban@uchicago.edu

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In his many important contributions to Jewish thought, history, and tradition, spanning the entire cultural spectrum – from ancient rabbinic antiquity to early modern Jewish culture – Moshe Idel has opened many new vistas with penetrating insights and analyses. In particular, his scholarly works are marked by striking phenomenological insights that give deep comparative structures to his detailed philological work, organizing the material in unexpected patterns which illumine internal and interdisciplinary dimensions of the subject at hand; and they are also marked by methodological insights and applications that construct new models for the material at hand. One of the most challenging and valuable dimensions of this, integrating both of these two dimensions (the phenomenological and the methodological), is Idel's claim that many later features of Jewish mystical literature and culture (medieval and early modern), characterizing its theological and spiritual mentality, have their roots and initial formations in antiquity. By this I do not simply mean his striking observations that notions like the feminine divine Presence, or Shekhinah, finds ancient reflexes (and perhaps preformations) in ancient Near Eastern sources dealing with goddess (like the occurrence of the comparable term *shikintu* in old Mesopotamian texts), or even that one of the medieval terms for the divine 'form', or *tzurah*, has antecedents in designations of the very same sort in the Dead Sea scrolls. Rather, I have in mind the singular and valuable insights that so-called Gnostic elements in medieval Jewish sources (like the book of *Bahir* or the book of *Zohar*) are already found in ancient Jewish theological elements, as part of the vast theological dimension of rabbinic antiquity; and that various theological dynamics, like the empowering or weakening of the divine Reality or Structure (called in antiquity, the *Gevurah* or Power on High) through ritual behavior, so characteristic of medieval texts, is already evidenced in a variety of rabbinic sources, which must therefore be appreciated in such concrete theological ways. Through these and other insights, Idel

has taken the old technical designation 'Kabbalah' (Tradition) with full seriousness, and found new scholarly ways of reinforcing the claims of the medieval adepts that Jewish mystical traditions are of hoary antiquity, and that they were transmitted continuously by mystical teachers into the Middle Ages and beyond. Thus, in contrast to certain scholarly opinions that have had a wide impact, Idel has opened our eyes to the important dimension of native continuity in mystical traditions, and shown that assumptions of breaks and alien imports often distort the picture and are presumptuous. This is a contribution of singular cultural importance.

One of the domains of Jewish religious culture that Idel has illumined is that of Scriptural interpretation – both through detailed studies of medieval mystical hermeneutics (especially), but also by organizing these features into phenomenological structures and historical patterns. His recent work *Absorbing Perfections. Kabbalah and Interpretation* is a vast, compendious treatise filled with historical examples, methodological insights, and sharpened by insights stressed in several modern works of philosophical hermeneutics and semiology<sup>1</sup>. All this is vintage Idel, as is his frequent attempt to point out the ancient biblical and other roots of certain elements. In this regard, he referred to an earlier observation of mine regarding a new oracular dimension given to the study of Torah in antiquity<sup>2</sup>. I should like to return to this matter here, as my contribution to this collection of studies in Idel's honor, and to expand upon the citation which he adduced from my work and to develop other aspects of this important subject. Two features will emerge. The first are preformations (through the transfer to the study of Torah of a kind of oracular inquiry) of that feature of Torah and its interpretation in Kabbalah which Idel has termed the 'arcanization' of the subject (that is, the transformation of Torah and its contents into a medium of secret and esoteric wisdom); the second is a distinct spiritual transformation of the process of 'inquiry' into Torah – that is, the transformation of study into a pious, spiritual exercise, this being something we may refer to as its 'interiorization'. In the first instance, I would like to show that these two features (both transformations of much significance for the subject) have their precursors in the Hebrew Bible. Analysis of the materials opens up a significant dimension of biblical religiosity and religious mentality. I shall then follow-up certain aspects of the subject with reference to classical rabbinic Midrash. Without going over the same ground, I shall adduce a significantly new development which is only understandable in light of earlier transformations, and which must be duly appreciated for a proper understanding of the nature of Torah in Jewish religious history. I offer these comments to celebrate the great scholarship of Moshe Idel and to reinforce his many insights into the origins and preformations of Jewish spiritual attitudes and orientations.

## I.

In order to put the subject of 'Torah' in biblical antiquity into context, it behooves us first to review several contours of its nature and occurrences. In the course of time, these elements come together in significant ways. So we may first ask: What is Torah and its instruction(s) in the major genres of Scripture?

We begin with the Priestly literature and its traditions. In this corpus, the noun *torah* refers to a specific ritual or cultic instruction, or better, to a specific domain of priestly concern and activity. *Torah* is thus literally an 'instruction' bearing on the priestly concern for purity and holiness, and for the separation of the holy and profane

– as we are told in a comprehensive way in Leviticus 10: 10 f, where Moses informs Aaron that both he and his lineage are duty bound “to make a separation between the holy and the profane, and between the impure and the pure, and to instruct (*le-horot*) the Israelite people all the statutes which the Lord their God spoke via Moses”. These matters are taken up in considerable detail in Leviticus 11-15, which delineates the *torah* of permitted and forbidden foods and their separations (ch. 11; note the colophon at vv. 26 f); the *torah* pertaining a childbearing woman and the regulations of her impurity and purification (ch. 12; and note the colophon at vv. 7-8); the *torah* pertaining to the diagnosis, containment, and purification of skin lesions, scabs, and discolorations, and also types of related infections and ‘plagues’ affecting cloths and building of various materials (chaps. 13-14, and the colophons at 13: 59 14: 54-57); and the *torah* dealing with male and female fluxes and emissions (ch. 15, and the colophon at vv. 32 f.). Elsewhere the priestly texts delineate a “*torah statute*” dealing with the purification of persons defiled by corpses (Numbers 19: 2, and vv. 3-13), and the *torah* dealing with a person who dies in a tent, and the various potential miasma and purification rites pertaining thereto (vv. 14-22)<sup>3</sup>.

Such instructions are provided the priests in detail. Presumably such rules and more were the types of technical matters referred to by Moses, when, in an old poetic designation, he states that Levi (and his descendants), “shall instruct (*yoreh*) Jacob with laws and Israel with Your (God’s) *torah*” (Deuteronomy 33: 10). But it is not possible to determine from this passage if the *torah* referred to has a comprehensive sense (including judicial matters), or whether it only refers to those specific ritual matters which the priests might adjudicate or diagnose. The designation found in Jeremiah 18: 18 is similarly ambiguous, in its warning that through disobedience that people are subject to the loss of leadership and instruction – stating that the sinful people will suffer an absence of “*torah* from the priest, *davar* (oracular word) from the prophet, and *etzah* (counsel) from the wise”. Certainly such a tripartite division is most striking with regard to the forms of instruction and instructors highlighted; and whatever the scope, the context suggests that the priests deal with matters already revealed as divine *torah*, as against new prophetic oracles or teachings of natural wisdom. According to a probably contemporaneous tradition recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, we learn that *shoftim ve-shotrim* (judges and magistrates) were to be set up in the various locals to “judge (*ve-shafetu*) the people with due justice (*mishpat*)” (Deut. 16: 18); whereas in baffling or difficult cases, bearing on capital or civil rulings, as well as torts and injuries, one should go to a higher authority – namely, to “the levitical priests or the judge” (or magistrate) of that time, and “seek out” (*ve-darashtra*) a legal ruling from them (17: 8-9); and that one should then carry out the verdict delivered, enacting all that the judges “instruct you” (*yorukha*), “in accordance with the *torah*-instruction which they instruct you and the ruling (*mishpat*) handed down” (vv. 10 f). In these complex cases, the priests or magistrates administer public rulings and their provisions – designated as *torah* instructions of a specific type<sup>4</sup>.

It would seem from the context that there is an expansion of the term *torah* here, to cover the administration or technical execution of the judicial rulings – though it is certainly possible that the double designation of *torah* and *mishpat* may distinguish ritual from other adjudications. In any event, the decisions of *torah* (by priests or others) are reached through some ratiocinative or customary procedure. There is no reason to assume otherwise from these texts, even if the *mishpat* announced by the Levites is oracular in some cases (as we may deduce from Exodus 29: 30). By contrast, in the late post-

exilic prophecy of Malachi, we are clearly told that the people “seek out (*yivaqshu*) *torah*” from the mouth of the priestly Levite, “because he is a messenger (angel) of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2: 6-7). Clearly in this setting the ‘seeking out’ referred is oracular in nature (as also in Ezekiel 7: 28). This mantic dimension of priestly *torah*-instruction is thus linked to the medium-like personal status of the Levites. Other post-exilic sources will similarly introduce an oracular dimension to *torah* learning, but will locate this elsewhere. It is to this that we now turn.

The point of departure is the book of Deuteronomy. Just previously, we observed that in puzzling cases the people (or local administrators) were to go to higher courts and ‘seek out’ a remedy or ruling. The verb used is *darash*, with the sense of an ‘application’ or ‘searching’ for a decision. As noted, in this setting the verb has a human, deliberative quality. Similar usages occur also in Deuteronomy 16: 4, in cases dealing with the examination of evidence dealing with persons accused of false worship. The formulation is given in a more expansive way in 13: 15, in connection with persons inciting others to false worship, and there is no doubt that it involves a careful scrutiny and ‘inquiry’ of evidence and details. Such a ratiocinative aspect reflects the larger emphasis in Deuteronomy on wisdom and rational procedures. And thus it is instructive to compare this material with the earlier traditions of legal remedies found in the book of Exodus – specifically the change in procedure indicated in chapter 18. In that setting we are told that Moses sat “from morning to night” administering justice. He explains his actions to Jethro his Midianite father-in-law, telling him that when the nation comes “to seek out (*lidrosh*) God”, they come to him and he “judges” their cases and informs them of “the statues of God and his *torahs*” (vv. 15-16). Certainly, the sense of the text is that Moses functions as a legal medium or sorts, administering divine justice through his own person. Upon hearing this, Jethro suggests a more viable plan, and proposes upright and God-fearing persons to serve as magistrates who will deal with the easier cases, and only the difficult ones would come before Moses. This hierarchical structure of adjudication stands behind its repetition and explication in Deuteronomy 1: 9-18 – where, however, the judicial innovation is presented without reference to foreign suggestion, the appointees are specified as “wise, sage, and knowledgeable”, and there is no reference to people seeking out god or Moses functioning as a judicial medium (rather, Moses ‘hears the cases and commands the verdicts to be complied with). Surely the same ‘rational’ spirit pervades this revision as occurs in Deuteronomy 17, which now appears as an instantiation in the settlement period of the hierarchical judiciary founded in the desert and pre-settlement periods.

This focus on deliberative, investigative clarification affects the nature of Torah itself. In the book of Deuteronomy, the bulk of priestly *torah*-instructions are deleted (with the exception of the rules of permitted foods, truncated and slightly revised in ch. 14), and it is now only the entire corpus of divine instructions that is called a ‘Torah’. Indeed, at the very outset, we are told that at the end of the desert sojourn Moses said to the people “all that the Lord had commanded” (Deut. 1: 4), and that he then began “to explain (*be’er*) all this Torah” to the people (v. 5). The deictic reference (‘this’) is prospective of course, and points to the various teachings which follow; but it is noteworthy that the entire sum of it is now designated a Torah, and that it is all subject to the exegetical clarification by Moses. This latter instruction is not the product of either inspiration or revelation, but the result of rational pedagogy, as appropriate to the issue at hand. But the Torah corpus is not limited to technical explication, and can also serve as spiritual instruction – as we may observe from ch. 17: 18-20, where it is stated that a

king should transcribe a copy of this Torah and “read from it all his life, that he learn to fear the Lord his God, to observe all the words of this Torah ..., and that he not raise his heart (pridefully) over his compatriots ...” The emphasis on knowledge of the law and the inducement of proper piety is stressed here, and one may assume that what the Torah is meant to do for the king it is also meant to do for all the people. The case of the king, and his transcription and study of the Torah is thus emblematic for everyone. The study of the Torah and its explication, as well as the piety to be derived from its teachings, is thus all highlighted by the book of Deuteronomy. As the work itself indicates, this instruction “is not in heaven”, but “near” to the people, as something accessible – to be put in their heart for practical study and religious guidance (Deut. 30: 11, 14). In the larger context of Deuteronomy, and its focus on ratiocinative praxis and wisdom, this coda is not exceptional. The distinctive ideology occurs elsewhere.

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The significant shift in these matters is observable in a key post-exilic text. In it, earlier and late traditions of consulting (or ‘seeking’) a medium-like individual for divine instruction (*torah*) merges with the practice of studying Torah and of investigating (or ‘seeking explication’) legal or other cases (called both *torah* and *misphat*) for an actionable verdict. The result is the study or consultation of the Torah as a medium of divine truths and teachings. This exegetical arcanization of Torah is strikingly recorded in Ezra 7: 9-10, where we learn that Ezra the priest, at the beginning of the people’s return from Babylonian exile (following the decree of Cyrus in 539 B.C.E.), “set his heart to consult (*lidrosh*) the Torah of the Lord (*torat YHWH*), to do and to teach law and statute in Israel”. The construction is as unexpected as it is striking. It is axial in every cultural sense. Two phrases are blended here. The first, indicating ‘the setting of one’s heart’ or mind (*hekhin lev*), is found especially in late sources to indicate a pious orientation, as noted for example regarding King Hezekiah, who we are informed, “set his heart to seek God (*lidrosh ha-elohim*)” (2 Chronicles 30:19). The spiritual aspect of this is undoubted and the writer of Ezra 7: 10 may capitalize on its resonance; but the particularly innovative element, most surely intended, is the use of the verb *darash* in connection with the Torah. Significantly, early mantic sources speak of a person going to “seek” a divine oracle, in connection with some difficult personal or national matter. Thus (leaving aside the consultation of God through Moses for juridical purposes in Exodus 18), we note that Rebecca in her travail goes *lidrosh et YHWH* (Genesis 25: 23); that King Jehoshaphat in his quandry whether to join a military alliance asks the king of Israel to “please consult (*derosh na*) this day the oracle of YHWH” (1 Kings 22 5); and that King Josiah, having initiated Temple repairs in a fit of piety, was informed that a Torah book was found and in his consternation as the priests to “consult the Lord (*dirshu et YHWH*) ... regarding words of the scroll” (2 Kings 22: 13). Exactly how these oracular consultations were conducted in each case is not altogether clear (but notably, 1 King 22: 6 suggest some type of binary inquiry addressed to designated persons; a similar binary form is implied in the mantic queries ‘asked’ [verb: *sha’al*] by David of the Lord via the priestly Ephod in 1 Samuel 23: 2-4, 8-12), but the plain sense is that the question were posed to God through some medium on behalf of some life situation.

By contrast with these technical cases of divination, in Ezra 7: 10, the inquiry is made of the Torah itself. To be sure, there is no doubt that the ostensive purpose of such



inquiry was to derive new rulings for a the new situation; but the significant absence here of terms like read, study, learn, or explicate underscores the particular nature of the present case. A weak construal of the phrase would suggest that an intense inquiry was made of the words of Torah so that new, divinely authorized explications might result; whereas a stronger construal would even suggest a divinatory orientation, whereby the reader-inquirer believed that the exegesis was divinely given and a teaching from the arcane depths of Torah. Either way, we stand before a new significantly new cultural moment: for hereby the content of revelation is the source for further revelation or learning, and the God of Torah continues to teach through the written Torah. If all this is not yet an explicit indication of some pneumatic revealment of Torah mysteries, it is surely some sense that pious Torah study would be complemented by divine inspiration of true understanding. But such a bold possibility cannot be excluded in some cases. For in Psalm 119, alongside such 'exoteric' appeals to God to "teach me (*horeni*)" or "cause me to understand (*havineni*)" the words and path of Torah (cf. v. 32), there is the remarkable request that the Lord "open my eyes (*gal eynai*) that I may perceive wonders *nifla'ot* from (the words of) your Torah" (v. 18). Is this language also a reuse of mantic-visionary terms? Merely recall the depiction of the soothsayer Balaam, who, when the "spirit of God" was upon him, called out and said, "This is the oracle of one who hears the words of El, who perceives the visions of Shaddai, who falls (in trance?) *galuy einayim* (his eyes opened)" (Numbers 24: 3-4). Unless we are wholly mistaken, it would seem that Psalm 119: 18 suggests that for some people the Torah had become a meditative medium for the disclosure of mysteries. Be this as it may, certain members of the Dead Sea scroll fellowship took this verse in precisely this mantic sense!<sup>5</sup>

## II.

We may now turn from such arcana to the *spiritualization* of Torah learning and the new *spiritual relation* to Torah that results. This is the second part of our inquiry; and here again our biblical sources formulate or prefigure a striking dimension of religiosity.

To set the parameters, we shall begin with the contents of Psalm 1, an important Torah based composition which undoubtedly reflects the values of the final redactors. In this liturgical piece, highest felicity is accorded one who not only keeps apart from evil persons, sinners, and scoffers (a genuine piece of wisdom advice), but "whose delight (*heftzo*) is the Torah of YHWH, and who recites his Torah day and night" (v. 2). Such a person will be firmly rooted against the hardships of life, and all that he does "shall succeed (*yatzliah*)" (v. 3). In brief, there are practical benefits to Torah study and commitment – a providential reward for such involvement. Our text leaves the matter as such, without a specific application. But later tradents were more specific, and produced a striking inner-biblical revision of an earlier case of direct divine mediation. That initial situation involves Moses's stirring exhortation to Joshua as future leader of the conquest. According to the formulation found in Deuteronomy 31: 6-7, the aged leader addresses his successor before the national assembly, and tells him to "be strong and courageous", for he is soon to enter the land promised by the Lord to the ancestors to give to them, and he will enact the inheritance thereof. Moreover, God himself "will go before you and be with you", neither failing him or abandoning him – hence, he repeats:

“be not afraid or terrified”. The repeated exhortation that frames the reference to divine protection in battle is a clear inducement to military courage in the face of a fear-some enterprise. The leader is told to go forward, knowing that God will aid his activity. Resoluteness is the demand of the hour, nothing more. By contrast, when this tradition is re-cited (in the same terms) at the beginning of the book of Joshua, it is placed in God’s mouth, who first of all tells Joshua that he will be with him, and neither fail or abandon him; hence Joshua should be strong and courageous, because he will cause the people to inherit the land which God swore to the ancestors (vv. 4-6); and this exhortation to be courageous and not be afraid is repeated for good emphasis one more time (v. 9). But on closer examination, these military exhortations form a bracket within which another exhortation occurs. In vv. 7-8 Joshua is now told to be strong and mighty (the same terms) “to observe and do all the Torah which Moses my servant commanded you; do not depart from it, to the right or left, that you be succeed in all that you do: let the Torah not depart from your mouth, but recite it day and night, that you observe and do all that is written in it, for then you will succeed in all your ways and be successful (*tatzliah*)”. Surely it is evident here that notions of *nomos* have influenced our final version – specifically, that benefits of Torah study (found in Psalm 1: 2-3), and the exhortation to hew to its observance, and not veering right or left (as emphasized in Deuteronomy 17: 11). Granted, this is not an outright spiritualization of Torah, but it is a spiritualizing revision of military terms for all that, and the religious revision is more than evident. A shift in Scripture centered religiosity must be presupposed.

Surely such a shift must have meant a more spiritual valuation of Torah itself and its benefits. Famously, such a dimension and its benefits is celebrated in Psalm 19, where, for example, the psalmist exults and expresses the following equations: “The Torah of YHWH is pure: it restores the soul; the Testimony (*edut*) of YHWH is trustworthy: it makes wise the foolish; the Statutes (*pequdei*) of YHWH are upright: they rejoice the heart; (and) the Commandment (*mitvah*) of YHWH is pure: it enlightens the eyes” (vv. 4-5). Such a series of synonyms for Torah (*edut*, *pequdim*, *mitzvah*) recur in the grand celebration of Torah and its learning found in Psalm 119, along with a rich catalogue of virtues and benefits. Such encomiums are of course greatly to be appraised for the window they open to an emergent Torah-based spirituality in ancient Israel. But it is even possible to perceive this beyond such topical remarks. Indeed, a close comparison of spiritual attitudes directed to God in various Psalms and elsewhere in Scripture are applied or addressed to the Torah in Psalm 119. This is not of course to imply that Torah piety became a substitute for God-centered piety, or that the Torah mediated divine benefits and displaced spiritual attitudes directed to God alone. It is rather to disclose how language expressive of the most profound God-oriented piety was transferred to the Torah, where it came to serve as a focus and locus of religious attachment. To make the point as succinctly and as strongly as possible, I shall compare a verse expressing a religiously charged verb related to God with one where the referent is Torah (based on a passage from Psalm 119). One could certainly multiple examples on both sides; but the following list makes the point in nuce.

1. “You shall love (*ve-ahavta*) YHWH, your God” (Deuteronomy 6: 4)  
 “How greatly do I love (*ahavti*) your Torah” (Psalm 119: 87)
2. “Loving YHWH, your God ...and cleaving (*le-davqah*) to him” (Deuteronomy 11: 22)  
 “O YHWH, I have cleaved (*davaqti*) to your testimonies” (Psalm 119: 13)

3. "I have set (*shivviti*) YHW before me, always" (Psalm 16: 8)  
 "I have chosen a path of faith (*emunah*), and set your statues (before me) (Psalm 119: 30)
4. "O Israel, trust (*betah*) in YHWH" (Psalm 115: 9)  
 "I have trusted (*batahti*) in your words" (Psalm 119: 42)
5. "Rise up (*se'i*) ... your hands to him (God)" (Lamentations 2: 19)  
 "I shall raise (*esa*) my hands to your commandments" (Psalm 119: 48)
6. "And they trusted *va-ya'aminu*) in YHWH" (Exodus 14: 31)  
 "I have trusted (*ha'emanti*) in your commandments" (Psalm 119: 66)

We should not minimize the seismic implications of the expressions found in Psalm 119. They reveal a spiritual attitude in which the Torah and the commandments are the object of spiritual veneration, love, and trust; this is more than a piety of study and observance, and remarkably discloses a dimension of relationship to the commandments and Torah which is pious and religious in its own right. With the transformation of Torah study and its teachings, we are close to the heartbeat of the birth of Judaism. Psalm 119 is thus an axial document in the history of the religion of Israel – one which sets the course for millennia of Jewish spirituality, from late antiquity on. It is at once an ancient formation and preformation of subsequent types.

### III.

By way of conclusion, I wish to point to one example from classical Jewish sources which integrates the great transformative powers of Torah study together with a sense of (and belief in), its role as a substitute for other rituals. To my mind, it too is of axial and paradigmatic significance for understanding Jewish spirituality and hermeneutics. I shall provide examples occurring in one Talmudic source – which not only mark this change, but provide the paradigm formulation for its ongoing cultural impact.

The source is b. Menahot 110a. The pertinent portion begins with an interpretation of Malachi 1: 11: "Everywhere incense is burnt to My Name". In context, the prophet celebrates the world-wide worship of the Lord among the nations (as contrasted to Israelite desecrations); but the rabbis interpret otherwise. Referring to the phrase "everywhere", R. Samuel bar Nahman provides an unexpected twist in the name of R. Yohanan: It is now averred that the passage refers to "students of the wise who are everywhere engaged in Torah study", and that God is now said (through this reinterpreted passage) to assert that He "counts (this behavior) as if they (the scholars) actually offered incense to My Name". At first glance this has all the marks of a strong rhetorical flourish – a kind of pious exhortation transforming and enhancing Torah study into a kind of ritual offering, in all the places of study, throughout the diaspora. And this may indeed have been R. Yohanan's meaning, as a series of similar exhortations recorded in this section could suggest. This aside, R. Yohanan's brother-in-law, and celebrated study-partner, R. Simeon ben Lakish (Resh Lakish), turns attention in a different direction. He asked: "Why is it stated (in Leviticus 7:37): 'This is the Torah for the holocaust (-offering), the meal (-offering), and for the sin (-offering) and the guilt (-offering)'?" And his answer is given forthwith: "Everyone who studies the Torah is as if he offered up the holocaust-, meal-, sin-, and guilt-offerings". Now it might seem that Resh Lakish is simply giving another version of R. Yohanan's teaching; but this would, I think,



under-read the interpretation. For it would appear that Resh Lakish's exegesis turns on the phrase "This is the Torah for x"). In context, the word 'torah' here seems to be distributive, and refer to the various 'torah-instructions' – along the lines of priestly torahs noted earlier (and indeed vv. 37 f function as a summary colophon). By contrast, the force of Resh Lakish's remark would seem to read the phraseology in a new way, supporting the new powers of study: "'This is the Torah' (and its study is equivalent to the performance) 'of holocaust- etc. offerings'". That is, the sage hermeneutically transforms the syntax. The deictic "This is the Torah" is now said to serve *le-* ("for") the erstwhile offerings. Granted, the teaching is terse; and it was probably for that reason studied and explicated in the academy, as we may confirm from the juxtaposition of a teaching of Rava (a later sage in Babylonia) to this tradition, which indeed seems like a subsequent interpretation of it along the lines just proposed. Hereby, Rava says (and note that he does not quote a text but offers a dictum, suggesting that he is commenting on the previous remark – or at least that is how the Talmudic tradition understood it or chose to construe it): "Whoever studies Torah has no need of the holocaust- (or sin-) or meal- or guilt- offering"). Thus according to Rava, presumably explicating Resh Lakish, we told of the transformative powers of Torah study, a new and effective act of devotion and offering in the absence of the Temple. Now, study of the passages dealing with the offerings serve as the functional substitute of the actual performance. The rhetorical 'as if' is reciprocally transformed into a marker of true equivalence. To reinforce this point, and perhaps to buttress it, the Talmudic tradition adduces in conclusion the teaching of R. Yitzhak, who came to the same conclusion by a different textual route. For him, other Scriptural phraseology made the point just as well (and perhaps even better). He asks: "Why is it written (in Leviticus 6: 2, 7, 18; and 7:1): 'This is the torah of x' (i.e., *torat ha-olah/ha-minhah*, etc.)? – To teach you that whoever engages in the study of the torah dealing with the *olah* (holocaust), etc., is as if he offered the *olah* (in fact; etc.)".

Herewith we come to a remarkable cultural moment. Torah is not only the focus of devoted inquiry and interpretation, but more: the Torah that one studies (in the rabbinic manner) as an object of veneration and spiritual trust may now effect benefits otherwise unavailable. In the present instance, study of the sacrifices provides the ritual equivalent of their performance. Study is thus a transformed priestly rite, and sacrificial satisfactions may be achieved through rabbinic hermeneutics alone. Here then is one of the secrets of Jewish spiritual survival, and, I would add, one of the most compelling inner-Jewish responses to the claims of Christianity and its contentions regarding atonement and forgiveness through sacrificial substitution.

## Notes:

1. (New Haven:Yale University Press, 2002).
2. *Ibid*, 216, citing my *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 245 (as printed, the citation omits the key reference to Ezra 7:10, to be supplemented below).
3. For these and other colophons, and their text-critical implications, see my discussion, "On Colophons, Textual Criticism and Legal Analogies", in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980), 438-49.
4. For a consideration of the text, and the possibility of diverse judicial elements integrated herein, see M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford:

Clarendon Press, 1972), 235 f.

5. See the pneumatic reuses of Psalm 119: 18 in 1Q *Serah Ha-Yahad* xi.3 (cf. lines 5-6); and the allusion to it and Numbers 23: 3-4 in 1Q *Hodayot* vii.19 (cf. x.4-7).