תוכן העניינים

CONTENTS

Midrash and/as Allegory: the case of "*Ella*"

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Tannaitic Midrash is famous for its adept utilization of fixed terms and structures,[2] some of which are echoed hundreds and even thousands of times across its diverse compositions. These elements stand as the fundamental building blocks of the *derashot*, thus enabling us to uncover the inherent underlying logic of the Midrash.

The specific structure I will discuss in this article is made of a question, marking a difficulty in the verse, followed by a homily. The homily opens with the word "*ella*" (but or rather). I posit that this structure possesses distinct characteristics, and that a comprehensive exploration of all its occurrences presents a formidable test to our perception of the midrashic methodology. This analysis also functions as an illustrative case study of a particular approach: the decipherment of hermeneutic presumptions through the analysis of midrashic terms and structures.

The term "*ella*" finds its origins in Aramaic (אֶן לֹא; if not),[3] but its adoption to convey the meaning of 'rather' likely bears the imprint of Greek influence. The usage of ἀλλά in a comparable manner can be traced

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2 See S. D. Fraade 'Rewritten Bible and Rabbinic Midrash as Commentary', in Bakhos C. (ed.), *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, Leiden 2006, 59–78.

3 See Sh. Friedman, *Talmud Ha-Igud, Gittin Chapter 9: Ha-Megaresh*, Jerusalem 2021, 6.

back to the Homeric scholia, forming a question-and-answer structure, as highlighted by Yakir Paz.[4] However, neither the Aramaic lineage nor the Greek parallel fully elucidates the consistent and widespread application of this structure within the Tannaitic Midrashim.[5]

Tannaitic midrash stands out for its utilization of prescribed terminology organized within rigid configurations, reiterated repeatedly. This sharply contrasts with the landscape of pre-rabbinic biblical interpretation, where scholars toiled hard to assemble only a handful of midrashic-like terms.[6] These midrashic frameworks establish a series of constraints, within which diverse permutations come to light. Our focus should thus encompass both commonalities and deviations, involving an exploration of the structure as a vessel of domestication (everything sheltered beneath it emerges as a recognizable midrashic maneuver) and as a generative force (enabling the continual origination of fresh variations).

My interest here is not with the thousands occurrences of "*ella*" as a word in Tannaitic midrashim, but rather with a specific structure in which "*ella*" appears after a question and before a *derasha*.

Roughly 380 such *derashot* can be identified within the Tannaitic Midrashim across both schools. Within this distinct structure, the term "*ella*" serves as a pivotal juncture, facilitating the shift from a typical straightforward and minimalist interpretation to a more enriched, homiletical, and moral perspective. The salient hallmark of this configuration lies in its dialectical nature, wherein the interplay between the question and its response cultivates a transformation in the comprehension of the biblical text. Deciphering this transformation, explicitly marked by "*ella*", is our primary endeavor.

A final caveat before delving into the texts: below we shall encounter a considerable diversity within "*ella*" structure. For example, in some cases, the questions before the "*ella*" *derashot* are distinctly contrived, serving merely as a prelude to a homiletic discourse, whereas others manifest as bona fide interpretive inquiries. It is imperative to recognize

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4   Y. Paz, *From Scribes to Scholars: Rabbinic Biblical Exegesis in Light of the Homeric Commentaries*, Tübingen 2022, 167-228.
5   See the examples cites in Paz, *From Scribes to Scholars*, 203, 211 n.112, 292.
6   See review of scholarship in I. Rosen-Zvi, *Between Mishnah and Midrash - Reading Tannaitic Literature*, Raanana 2020 (Hebrew), 209-230.

that we are navigating through variations of a framework, and consequently, our categorization remains necessarily incomplete.

Here are two simple examples of this structure, one halachic and one aggadic:[7]

But No Uncircumcised Shall Eat from it (Ex. 12:48). Why is this said? Has it not already been said: "There shall no alien eat from it" (Ex. 12:43)? **Rather**, if one is an uncircumcised Israelite I might understand that he is qualified to eat the paschal lamb? It teaches: "But no uncircumcised shall eat from it" (Ex. 12:48) (Mekhilta RI, Pascha 15).	"וכל ערל לא יאכל בו" (שמות יב, מח). למה נאמר? והלא כבר נאמר "כל בן נכר לא יאכל בו" (שם, מג)? **אלא** אם היה ישראל ערל שומע אני יהיה כשר לאכל בפסח? תלמוד לומר "כל ערל לא יאכל בו" (שם, מח) (מכילתא דר״י, פסחא טו).
The Enemy Said (Ex. 15:9). This is Pharaoh. But how did the Israelites know what Pharaoh planned against them in Egypt? **Rather**, the Holy Spirit rested upon them and they knew what Pharaoh had planned against them in Egypt (Mekhilta RI, Shira 7).	"אמר אויב" (שמות טו, ט). זה פרעה. וכי מנין היו ישראל יודעין מה פרעה חשב עליהן במצרים? **אלא** רוח הקודש שרת עליהן והיו יודעין מה פרעה חשב עליהן במצרים (מכילתא דר״י, שירה ז).

The first homily rejects an understanding that *a'rel* refers to a gentile (as is the case in rabbinic Hebrew),[8] since such a reading creates redundancy in the verse. It therefore reinterprets the term to refer specifically to a non-circumcised Israelite. The second homily struggles with Israel's ability to

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7   Texts are cited according to '*Maagarim*'. Translations are mine (aided by existing translations, mainly Lauterbach's Mekhlita de RI), and are meant to be as literal as possible. Most of the examples are taken from the aggadic section in the Mekhiltot on Exodus, in which the term is most frequent.

8   See see m. Ned 3:8 with Y. Koren, "foreskinned Jew" in Tannatic literature: another aspect of the rabbinic (re)construction of Judaism," *Zion* 82 (2017) (Hebrew), 397-437.

know Paroah's secrets plans, and thus interprets the Song at the Sea as a testimony to the involvement of the Holy Spirit.[9]

The term is used in the Tannaitic Midrash mainly in the aggadah.[10] Moreover, within the halachic framework, "*ella*" emerges primarily in configurations where its presence is atypical.[11] We will therefore discuss this structure as first and foremost aggadic in nature.[12] Given its appearance in both schools, as well as within the extensive aggadic units shared by these schools, and its consistent role across these segments, we shall not differentiate between the midrashic schools within this context.[13]

In nearly a quarter (24 out of 103) of the "*ella*" homilies that find parallels in Tannaitic literature, the corresponding homily lacks this term.[14] This serves as an illustration of the variability among parallel sources:

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9   Compare t. Sot 6:2 with I. Rosen-Zvi, "Mishna Sotah Chapter 5 and the Midrash of Rabbi Akiva," *Tarbiz* 70 (2006) (Hebrew), 95-128, esp. 105-114.

10 267 of the 381 total occurrences in the Midrashim are aggadic, more than twice as much as the halakhic occurrences, even though about 70% of the material in the Midrashim is halachic. For example, more than half of the 22 occurrences of "*ella*" in the *halachic* part of Sifre to Deuteronomy (paragraphs 56-305) are aggadic. Similarly, half of the 11 occurrences of "*ella*" in the Mishnah are aggadic.

11 Thus, most (100 out of 115) occurrences of "*ella*" in halacha appear after "*ma talmud lomar*", but these occurrences are less than one-fifth of all "*ma talmud lomar*" homilies in the Tanaitic midrashim.

12 On the independent hermeneutic of aggada in Tannaitic Midrashim see I. Rosen-Zvi and A. Rosen-Zvi "Midrashic Hermeneutics: Between Halakha and Aggadah", *Tarbiz* 86 (2019) (Hebrew), 203-232. There, we show that even identical terms are used differently in halakhic and aggadic contexts. For the migration of terms from halakha to aggada and vice versa see idem, "the Hermeneutics of Aggadic Exegesis in Tannaitic Midrashic: a Terminological Survey," *Mehkarei Talmud* 4 (2023) (Hebrew), 765-816.

13 In general, scholars tend to overemphasize the distinction between the schools of R. Akiva and R. Ishmael, which in many cases is a matter of gradation rather than of essence. For this argument see my *Between Mishnah and Midrash*, 259 and passim.

14 There is also some variability between manuscripts. For example: in 22 of the 120 occurrences (almost 20%) of "*ella*" in MS Oxford Bodl. 150 of the Mekhilta deRI do not appear in MS Munich 117.1. No doubt that scribal habits are involved here. Since we are dealing mainly with the structure of "*ella*" homilies, adding or subtracting the word itself is of secondary significance for us.

And Miriam the Prophetess Took (Ex. 15:20). But where did we find that Miriam prophesied? **Rather**, She said to her father: "You are destined to beget a son who will arise and redeem Israel." **As it says**, "There went a man of the house of Levi", "and the woman conceived", "And she could no longer hide him" (Ex. 2:1–3) … (Mekhilta RI, Shira 10).

"ותקח מרים הנביאה" (שמות טו, כ). וכי היכן מצינו שנתנבאת מרים? **אלא** שאמרה לאביה: סופך שאת מוליד בן שהוא עומד ומושיע את ישראל. **שנאמר** "וילך איש מבית לוי" "ותהר האשה" "ולא יכלה עוד הצפינו" (שם ב, א–ג) ... (מכילתא דר"י, שירה י).

And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took (Ex. 15:20). Where did Miriam prophesied? **Behold Scripture says**, "The woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw him, etc." (Ex. 2:1) – She said to her father, "You are destined to beget a son who will redeem Israel from Egypt" … (Mekhilta RSBI 15, 20, Genizah fragment).

"ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן" (שמות טו, כ). היכן נתנבאה מרים? **הרי הוא אומר** "ותהר האשה ותלד בן ותרא אותו וגו'" (שמות ב, א – אמרה לו לאביה: סופך להוליד בן שעתיד לגאל את ישראל ממצרים ... (מכילתא דרשב"י טו, כ, על פי קטע גניזה).

The homilies are similar, but in the *Mekhilta* RSBI the verse precedes the homily (using הרי הוא אומר instead of שנאמר in *Mekhilta* RI) a structure that does not require "*ella*".

In certain instances, *derashot* akin to those integrated within "*ella*" structure emerge as direct interpretations, devoid of any preceding question. This phenomenon can even happen in adjacent homilies, as demonstrated in the following example:

And When He Seeth the Blood (Ex. 12:23). R. Ishmael used to say: Is not everything revealed and known before Him? as it is said: "He knows what is in the darkness" (Dan. 2:22), "Even the darkness is not too dark for Thee," etc.

"וראה את הדם" (שמות יב, כג). היה ר' ישמעאל אומר: והלא הכל גלוי לפניך? שנ' "ידע מה בחשוכא" (דניאל ב, כב). "גם חשך לא יחשיך ממך" וגו' (תהלים קלט, יב). ומה תלמוד לומר: "וראה את הדם"? **אלא** לשכר מצוה שהן עושין הוא נגלה וחס עליהם [...]

(Ps. 139:12). And what does "And when He sees the blood" teaches? **Rather**, as a reward for a commandment they perform He reveals Himself and protects them […]

Another Interpretation: *And When He Sees the Blood* - He sees the blood of Binding of Isaac. As it says: "and Abraham called" (Gen. 22:14) etc. and it says: "and as he was about to destroy the people, the LORD saw" (1 Chron. 21:15) – what did he see? He saw the blood of Binding of Isaac. As it says "God will provide (lit. see) Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son" (Gen. 22:8) (Mekhilta RI, Pascha 11).

דבר אחר: "וראה את הדם" – רואה הוא דם עקידתו של יצחק. שנ' "ויקרא אברהם" וגו' (בראשית כב, יד). וכת' "ובהשחית בעם ראה" (דהי"א כא, טו) – מה ראה? ראה דם עקידתו של יצחק. שנאמר "אלהים יראה לו השה" (בראשית כב, ח). (מכילתא דר"י, פסחא יא).

Both successive homilies reinterpret God's seeing the blood on the side posts metaphorically: the first read it as referring to the Passover blood ("a commandment they perform")[15] and the second – to the blood of Isaac.[16] A substantial theological difference exists between these homilies: the first emphasizes human action while the second underlines the merits of the fathers.[17] But for our purpose it is the formal difference that is significant: Rabbi Ishmael's homily comes after a rejection of the simple reading, while the subsequent homily appears with no introduction. In this case, however, it is clear that the "*ella*" structure is not a secondary addition, since the question itself is cited in the name of R. Ishmael. It seems thus likely that the second homily is a condensed rendition of the more elaborate structure found in the first. Given that the question has already been posed, one can proceed directly to an added interpretation without

15 Maybe the root ר.א.ה is read here as "to approve" as in Rabbinic Hebrew.
16 On the question of whose blood was shed in Isaak's binding see S. Spiegel, *The last Trail*, New York 1967.
17 See E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their concepts and Beliefs*, Translation: I. Abrahams, Jerusalem 1975, 497-498.

repeating the introduction. I posit that in at least certain instances (I suspect that in many, but cannot say how many) "*ella*"-less homilies might be an abridged form that omits the preliminary question phase. Yakir Paz compared the question-and-answer style in Alexandrian Scholia and tannaitic Midrash, showing that in both cases "good questions are conserved by a scholarly community in fixed forms and handed down unchanged from generation to generation. In every period, new solutions are suggested alongside the old ones".[18] It is thus unsurprising that "new" answers can appear with or without citing the "old" questions anew.

Beyond these specific philological considerations, a more fundamental observation regarding the instability of the term is warranted. "*Ella*" is not an indispensable term, i.e. a term which is an integral part of a structure, without which a midrashic move cannot be conveyed. Rather it is a conscious-evoking term, added in order to raise the awareness of the hearer and emphasize the deliberate nature of the midrashic interpretation.[19] We shall return to this point below, but for now we shall center our focus on the instances where this term is retained, analyzing its structure and role.

The first stage of "*ella*" homilies is the question. Yet, any question implies an interpretation of some sort. On occasion, this interpretation remains nominal, amounting to nothing more than a replication or rephrasing of the verse itself:

"And when her soul/life was in departing, when <u>she died</u>" (Gen. 35:18). Was <u>she dead</u>? Is it not said: "and she called his name Ben-oni" (ibid.)? **Rather,** she was dead and not dead (Mekhilta RI, Beshalach 6).	"ויהי בצאת נפשה <u>כי מתה</u>" (בראשית לה, יח). וכי <u>מתה היתה</u>? והלא כבר נאמר "ותקרא שמו בן אוני" (שם)? **אלא** מתה ולא מתה (מכילתא דר״י בשלח ו).[20]

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18   Paz, *From Scribes to Scholars*, 225.
19   On conscious-evoking terms and structures see Rosen-Zvi, *Between Mishnah and Midrash*, 318-345.
20   For this technique of solving contradictions and redundancies (later applied in the Bavli to solve similar problems in the Mishnah) see Rosen-Zvi, *Between Mishnah and Midrash*, 271.

However, in the majority of instances, the question includes a summary or an inference, rather than a mere paraphrase:

R. Eliezer ben Arach says: <u>Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, appear from the highest heavens and spoke with Moses in the bush</u>? […] **Rather**, the Holy One, blessed be He, humbled His presence, and made His speech in a human manner […] (Mekhilta RSBI 3, 8).	ר' אליעזר בן ערך אומר: וכי מפני מה <u>נגלה הקב״ה משמי מרום והיה מדבר עם משה בסנה</u>? ... **אלא** השפיל הקב״ה את שכינתו ועשה דברו כדרך ארץ... (מכילתא דרשב״י ג, ח).
"The Reubenites and the Gadites owned much cattle" (Num. 32:1). <u>Could it be that these had, but the other tribes did not have</u>? **Rather**, it teaches that these took it forcefully (Mekhilta RSBI 12, 38).	"ומקנה רב היה לבני ראובן ולבני גד" (במדבר לב, א). יכול <u>לאלו היה ולשאר שבטים לא היה</u>? **אלא** מלמד שאילו פשטו ידיהן בו (מכילתא דרשב״י יב, לח).

The first question offers a particularly curated overview of the burning bush narrative, highlighting a sole detail: the descent intertwined with this revelation.[21] The second question seems to derive from midrashic inference (if the verse says that these had, it means that the others did not). Both scenarios involve distinct forms of extrapolation that go beyond mere restatements of scripture. I argue that behind the introductory questions of the "*ella*" structures reside interpretations, with varying degrees of intuitiveness, which then give way to the homily.

Why does the initial interpretation find expression solely through a question, rather than being overtly articulated? The homilist could have aimed to avoid excessive emphasis on this initial stage, or thought that the implied paraphrase within the question is sufficiently self-evident.[22] This

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21 This reading may be affected by Ex. 3:8 "I *come down* to deliver them …". See also 2:23 "their cry *came up* unto God".

22 In most cases the interpretation is indeed clear from the question. Here are some examples from the homilies cited in the article: "was she [i.e. Moses wife] a Cushite [Ethiopian]?! Wasn't she a Midianite?", "Could it be that they had [cattle] and the others did not?", "Is not everything revealed and known before Him [so why does He need to see the blood]?", "and was there no animal there [to carry the dough trays]?".

dynamic may be compared to the Tannaitic *derashot* which marks a verse or part thereof as "*Kishmuo*" (literally: as it is heard). There too, the simple interpretation is considered self-explanatory (no explicit interpretation is presented after "*Kishmuo*"), and there too, it often gives way to a midrashic exegesis.[23] In both cases the Midrash does not offer a peshat-like solution for the challenges posed by the plain reading (the way for example Philo does, before moving to his allegorical reading).[24] The difficulties are exclusively addressed through midrashic means. Both terms shed light on a fundamental aspect of Midrash: it seeks to present the plain reading while simultaneously highlighting its inadequacy.

And, most significantly for our matter, both terms explicitly label the midrashic move as a non-trivial, conscious movement beyond the plain sense. They serve to underscore the purposeful nature of midrash. This explains why "*ella*", much like "*Kishmuo*", may appear in certain *derashot* while being conspicuously absent in others, as observed earlier.

The question itself varies. It can mark redundancy, contradiction, or thematic problems. In some cases it seems as nothing more than a trigger for the homily:

They Shall Take to Themselves (Ex. 12:3). <u>Did all of them take?</u> **Rather**, to indicate that man's agent is like himself (Mekhilta RI, Pascha 3).	"ויקחו להם" (שמות יב, ג). <u>וכי כולם היו לוקחין?</u> **אלא** לעשות שלוחו של אדם כמותו (מכילתא דר"י, פסחא ג)
The Horse and His Rider (Ex. 15:2). <u>Is it only one horse and one rider?</u> Has it not been said: "And he took six hundred chosen chariots," etc. (Ex. 14:7); "Pharaoh's chariots," etc. (ibid. 15:4)? **Rather**, when the Israelites do the will of the Omnipresent, their enemies are	"סוס ורוכבו" (שמות טו, ב). <u>וכי סוס אחד ורכב</u> <u>אחד הוא?</u> והלא כבר נאמר "ויקח שש מאות רכב בחור" (שמות יד, ז) וגו' "מרכבות פרעה" (שם, טו, ד) וגו'. **אלא** כשישראל עושין רצונו של מקום אין אויביהם לפניהם אלא כסוס אחד ורוכבו (מכילתא דר"י, שירה ב).

23   See I. Rosen-Zvi, "Midrash and Reflectivity: *Kishmu'o* as a Test Case," M. Niehoff (ed.), *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, Leiden 2012, 329-344.
24   For the polemical context behind Philo's insistence on preserving the literal option along the allegorical one, see M. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*, Cambridge 2011.

before them as but one horse and his
rider (Mekhilta RI, Shira 2).

In the first case, the initial interpretation is based on the reflective להם
which is read emphatically as if saying that each one should take the
Passover lamb for oneself.[25] This reading is unsustainable, for the
following words are "according to their fathers' houses" (לבית אבות). In the
second homily the emphasis "**one** horse and **one** rider" is a result of a
hyper-literal reading of the collective nouns.[26] Both questions seem as little
more than a prelude to the subsequent homilies, serving as a rationale for
the midrashic interventions—a practice reminiscent of Philo's habit of
introducing questions prior to his allegorical interpretations.[27] However, in
roughly half of the aggadic "*ella*" homilies the plain reading isn't merely a
starting point, but rather stands as a genuine alternative, which is rejected
due to substantial interpretive or ideological challenges. Similar
interpretive questions are common in the Hellenistic Scholia.[28] Consider
the following two examples:

'Ye are standing this day all of you" etc. "your little ones," etc. (Deut. 29:9). <u>But what do the little ones know about distinguishing good from evil?</u>	"אתם נצבים היום כולכם" וג' "טפכם" וג' (דברים כט, ט). <u>וכי מה טף זה יודע להבין בין טוב לרע?</u>

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25 Compare *Sifra Emor* 12:3 which reads the words ולקחתם לכם in Lev 23:40 as: כל
    אחד ואחד"each and every one."

26 On midrashic reading of collective nouns as singular see A. Glatzer, "The Linguistic
    Background of Biblical Exegesis in the Tannaitic Midrashim" PhD Dissertation, the
    Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 2022, 102-103 (Hebrew).

27 See M. Niehoff, "Commentary Culture in the Land of Israel from an Alexandrian
    Perspective", *DSD* 19 (2012), 442–463. For linguistic anomalies as signaling the
    need to find new meanings, see A. Yadin, *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and
    the Origins of Midrash*, Pennsylvania 2004, 48-80. On midrashic use of linguistic
    anomalies see I. Rosen-Zvi, "Can the Homilists Cross the Sea Again? Time and
    Revelation in *Mekhilta Shirata*," G. Brooke et al. (eds.), *The Significance of Sinai,
    Themes in Biblical Narratives* (Leiden 2008), 217-246.

28 See n. 4 above. For the lack of such questions in Philo see Paz, idem, 225.

Rather, to give the parents reward for their children, to increase the reward of he who does His will. To confirm what has been said: 'The Lord was pleased for His righteousness' sake," etc. (Isa. 42:21) (Mekhilta RI, Pascha 16).

אלא ליתן שכר בנים לאבות, לרבות שכר עושה רצונו. לקיים מה שנ' "ה׳ חפץ למען צדקו וגו׳" (ישעיהו מב, כא) (מכילתא דר״י, פסחא טז)

"The children of Jacob were twelve" (Gen. 35:22). <u>Is it not known that they were twelve?</u> **Rather**, He was announced by the Holy One, blessed He, that Reuben had repented (Sifre Deut. 31).

"ויהיו בני יעקב שנים־עשר" (בראשית לה, כב). <u>והלא בידוע ששנים־עשר הם?</u> **אלא** שנתבשר מפי הקב'ה שעשה ראובן תשובה (ספרי דברים לא).

Why is it necessary to bring young children to a covenant-making assembly? Why does scripture interrupt the story of Reuben's sin with the seemingly disjointed phrase "and Jacob sons were twelve"? The first question pertains to the event represented (though it can readily transform into a textual inquiry: why does the Torah emphasize this particular aspect?) while the second centers on the biblical text itself. However, in both these instances, and many similar ones, the questions are genuine ones, intriguing contemporary commentators as well. Note that the sign of genuine questions is that they may give rise to multiple answers, while artificial queries are consistently followed by a single response, to which they function as an introduction.[29]

A distinct phenomenon becomes evident in these two homilies: the reinterpretations stemming from the "*ella*" introduce an additional layer of theology and morality to the scripture, a layer that is absent in a plain reading. The purpose of including the children is to "give a reward";[30] the enumeration of Jacob's sons does not just rehearse a familiar detail, but rather alludes to a comprehensive narrative of repentance and forgiveness.

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29   See the *derashot* above on "And When He Seeth the Blood" and Paz's remark (n. 18 above).
30   A discussion of the broader concept of deed and reward then follows.

In approximately two-thirds of the occurrences of the term in aggadic context, the '*ella*' homilies indeed end with an additional religious-moral message. This additional loading occurs with all types of questions, but is more common when there is a hyper-literal trigger for the homily. This indicates that the infusion of moral and theological import becomes an independent objective, distinct from the nature of the interpretative challenge it addresses. Here are two examples:

Being Bound up in Their Clothes upon Their Shoulders (Ex. 12:34). R. Nathan says: And were there no animal there? Has it not been said: "And a multitude went up with them [and flocks and herds even very much cattle]"? (Ex. 12:38) What does "being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders" teaches? **Rather**, <u>the Israelites cherished the commandments</u> (Mekhilta RI, Pascha 13).	"צרורות בשמלותם על שכמם" (שמות יב, לד). רבי נתן אומר. וכי לא היה שם בהמה? והלא כבר נאמר "וגם ערב רב וגו' [עלה אתם וצאן ובקר מקנה כבד מאד]" (שם יב, לח). ומה תלמוד לומר "צרורות בשמלותם על שכמם?" **אלא** <u>שהיו ישראל מחבבין את המצות</u> (מכילתא דר״י, פסחא יג).
"A Psalm, A Song at the Dedication of the House of David" (Ps. 30:1). Was it David who built it? Did not Solomon build it, as it is said: "So Solomon built the house, and finished it" (I Kings 6:14)? What does "A Psalm; A Song at the Dedication of the House of David" teaches? **Rather**, <u>since David gave his whole soul to it, it is named after him</u> (Mekhilta RI, Shira 1).	"מזמור שיר חנוכת הבית לדוד" (תהלים ל, א). וכי דוד בנאו? והלא שלמה בנאו. שנאמר "ויבן שלמה את הבית ויכלהו" (מל״א ו, יד). ומה תלמוד לומר "מזמר שיר חנוכת הבית לדוד". **אלא** <u>לפי שנתן דוד נפשו עליו נקרא על שמו</u> (מכילתא דר״י, שירה א).

In both of these homilies, the seemingly inconsequential details of the verse evolve into profound teachings: a reverence for the commandments and a dedication to the temple. Comparable shifts are a recurring theme within "*ella*" homilies. Here's another illustrative example:

R. Eliezer says: But was there not water underneath the feet of the Israelites, since the earth is floating upon nothing but the water, as it is said: "To Him that spread forth the earth above the waters" (Ps. 136:6)? Therefore, what does "And found no water" (Ex. 15: 22) teaches? **Rather**, to tire them out (Mekhilta RI, VaYasa 1).

רבי אליעזר אומר: והלא המים תחת רגלי ישראל היו והארץ אינה צפה אלא על המים, שנאמר "לרוקע הארץ על המים" (תהלים קלו, ו)? הא מה תלמוד לומר "לא מצאו מים" (שמות טו, כב)? **אלא** כדי ליגען" (מכילתא דר"י ויסע א).

The verse does not say that there was no water, but rather that the Israelites did not find it. God, deduces the homilist, concealed the water purposely, in order to test the resolve of the Israelites (cf. Deuteronomy 8:2). Thus, the phrase "they found no water" evolves from a mere factual observation into a tale of divine providence, holding within it an explicit directive for the ancient Israelites and an implicit one for the homilist's audience.

On some occasions, this shift from information to lesson is explicitly marked:

Now, why was the account whether Amram took a wife or did not take, needed? **Rather**, to make known to all the inhabitants of the world the merit of Amram the Righteous! (Mekhilta RSBI 6, 2).

וכי למה הוצרך הדבר אם לקח עמרם אשה אם לא לקח? **אלא** להודיע לכל באי העולם זכותו של עמרם הצדיק (מכילתא דרשב"י ו, ב).

The verse's goal is not to convey facts, but to "make known", to teach a lesson on righteousness.[31]

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31   Compare *Sifre Deuteronomy* 334: דוד ...יוסף של צדקו להודיעך **אלא** "**Rather** to make known to you the righteousness of Joseph… David". So also regarding the collective, Mekhilta de R. Ishmael VaYassa 1: ישראל של שבחן להודיע **אלא** "**Rather** to make known the praise of Israel". On להודיע as a technical term for "exegetical encomium" see T. Novick, "Scripture as Rhetor: A study in Rabbinic Midrash, *HUCA* 82 (2004): 37-61. In most cases להודיע, like מגיד and מלמד, does not come after אלא, but as a direct interpretation.

The supplementary moral layer often introduces a figurative-like (for lack of a better term) interpretation, dislocating the verse from its straightforward, literal reading. Thus, David is narrated above *as if* (כאילו) he built the temple. This is indicative. The majority of aggadic *derashot* with an added dimension incorporates an 'as if' maneuver, with or without the explicit term, which transforms a word or phrase into a non-literal rendition.[32] For example:

"*And They Believed in the Lord and in His Servant Moses*" (Ex. 14: 31). If they believed in Moses, *needless to say* in God! **Rather**, to teach you that whoever trusts in the shepherd of Israel it is *as if* he trusts Him who spoke and the world came into being (Mekhilta RI, Beshalach 6).	"ויאמינו בייי ובמשה עבדו" (שמות יד, לא). אם במשה האמינו קל וחומר בה'! **אלא**[33] ללמדך שכל המאמין ברועה ישראל **כאילו** מאמין במי שאמר והיה העולם (מכילתא דר״י, בשלח ו)[34]
"*...and let them that hate you flee before you*:" (Num. 10:35) And are there haters to the One who spoke and brought the world onto being? **Rather**, the verse says that whoever hates Israel is *as if* he	"וינוסו משנאיך מפניך" (במדבר י, לה). וכי יש שונאין לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם? **אלא** מגיד הכתוב שכל מי ששונא את ישראל **כאילו** שונא את מי שאמר והיה העולם (ספרי במדבר פד)

32   There are 20 explicit *as if* homilies (*Mekhilta* RSBI 12: 30; 14: 31; 18: 13; *Mekhilta* RI Pascha 3 (x2); Pascha 12; Pascha 13; Beshalach 6; Beshalach 7; Amalek 2; *Sifra* Nega'im 2:2; Metzora 4:1; Aharei Mot 2:1; 4:1; Emor 9:1; 10:3; *S. Num.* 84 (x2); *S. Deut.* 49; 279). These serve as the solid structural basis for my identification of readings as figurative-like. I cannot offer more rigid criteria than that, for the borders are fussy by their very nature. But even if the exact boundaries are vague, the phenomenon is clear enough.

33   Thus, according to MS Oxford, and MS Rome Casanatense Library H 2736. MSS Munich and Vatican Ebr. 299.6 (on their proximity see Kahana, *A Catalogue of the Manuscript of the Halakhic Midrashim*, Jerusalem 1995, 39 [Hebrew]) have no "*ella*".

34   In the parallel homily in the *Mekhilta* RSBI 14:31 (Geniza Fragment) there is no "*ella*," but it does appear in the next homily (in a sentence reconstructed from *Midrash Ha-Gadol*) which is almost identical: **אלא** ללמדך שכל המדבר ברועה ישראל כאלו מדבר במי שאמר והיה העולם.

hates him who spoke and brought the world into being (Sifre Num. 84).

"*The soul that they had made in Haran*" (Gen. 12:5). But is it not the case that if everyone in the world got together to create a single fly and to bring into it the breath of life, they cannot? **Rather**, it teaches that our father, Abraham, converted them and brought them under the wings of the divine presence (Sifre Deut. 32).	"ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן" (בראשית יב, ה). והלא אם מתכנסין כל באי העולם לברות יתוש אחד להכניס נשמה אינן יכולין? **אלא** מלמד שהיה אבינו אברהם מגיירן ומכניסן תחת כנפי השכינה (ספרי דברים לב).

The difficulties in these three homilies differ: in the first one there is a textual redundancy (if Moses, then *obviously* God);[35] in the second – an ideological problem (is there a competition between gods?) and in the third – a hyper-literal reading that makes the verse nonsensical (how can one "make" a soul). But the solution in all these cases is similar – an *as if* reading: *as if* they believe, *as if* they hate, *as if* they made. Consequently, the verse gains an augmented theological significance, regarding the appropriate demeanor towards leaders, the connection with the divine, and the pivotal value of mission and conversion.

The *as if* interpretation may encompass either an overt or a more subtle moral message. Here is an example from a series of *derashot* on the word "*Cush*" in the Bible.

"a Cushite woman" (Num. 12:1): Now was she a Cushite (Ethiopian)? Wasn't she a Midianite, as it says "And the priest of Midian [had seven daughters]" (Ex. 2:16). What does "Cushite" teach? **Rather**, just as a Cushite is exceptional in his skin, so Tzipporah was exceptional in her beauty, more so than all the women.	"אשה כשית" (במדבר יב, א). וכי כושיה היתה? והלא מדיינית היתה, שנ' "ולכהן מדין [שבע בנות]" (שמות ב, יז). מה תלמוד לומר "כושית"? **אלא** מה כושי זה משונה בעורו, כך צפרה הית משונה בנוייה יותר מכל הנשים.

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35   Perhaps the difficulty here is the fact that God and Moses are put on the same plane.

Similarly, "A Shiggayon of David [which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush a Benjaminite]" (Psalms 7:1). But was he [Saul] a Cushite? **Rather,** Just as a Cushite is exceptional in his skin, so Saul was exceptional in his appearance, as it is written "from his shoulder and upwards" (I Sam. 9:2).

כיוצא בו אתה אומר: "שגיון לדויד [אשר שר לה׳ על דברי כוש בן ימיני]" (תהלים ז, א) וג'. וכי כושי היה? **אלא** מה כושי זה משונה בעורו כך היה שאול בן קיש משונה במראיו, שנ' "משכמו ומעלה" (שמ"א ט, ב).

Similarly, "Are you not like Cushites to Me, O children of Israel?" (Amos 9:7). But are they Cushites? **Rather**, Just as a Chushite is exceptional in his skin, so, is an Israelite marked by Torah commandments, more than all the nations of the world (Sifre Num. 99).

כיוצא בו אתה אומר: "הלא כבני כושים אתם לי בית ישראל" (עמוס ט, ז). וכי כושיים הם? **אלא** מה כושי זה משונה בעורו כך ישראל מצויינין במצות תורה מכל אומות העולם.

Similarly, "And Eved-melech the Cushite heard (Jer. 38:7). But was he a Cushite? **Rather,** just as a Cushite is exceptional in his skin, so, was Baruch ben Neriah exceptional in his deeds, more than any of the others in the king's palace (Sifre Num. 99)

כיוצא בו: "וישמע עבד מלך הכושי איש סריס" (ירמיה לח, ז). וכי כושי היה? **אלא** מה כושי זה משונה בעורו כך היה ברוך בן נריה משונה במעשיו יתר מכל פלטין שלצדקיהו (ספרי במדבר צט).

In the first homily, it is not immediately clear what is the lesson from the fact that Zipora was "exceptional in her beauty" (that is, exceptionally beautiful),[36] but from the comparison with the subsequent homilies on Shaul and Baruch ben Naria it is clear that this is a praise for Moses. In the third homily, the praise becomes explicit: "they are marked by Torah commandments."

In many "*Ella*" homilies, the dislocation is the vehicle for asserting the values that the sages wish to promote: commandments, Torah study, and the world to come.

36   See Kahana, *Sifre on Numbers: An Annotated Edition*, Jerusalem 2011, 659.

And When He Seeth the Blood (Ex. 12:22). … **Rather**, As a reward for a commandment they perform He reveals Himself and protects them […] (Mekhilta RI, Pascha 11).

"וראה את הדם" (שמות יב, כב) ... **אלא** לשכר <u>מצוה</u> שהן עושין הוא נגלה וחס עליהם" (מכילתא דר"י, פסחא יא).

"For I am the Lord that heals you"? (Ex. 15:26) … **Rather**, God said to Moses: Say to Israel: <u>The words of the Torah</u> which I have given you are life unto you […] **Rather**, "I will put none of the diseases upon you which I have put upon the Egyptians," (ibid) – in this world. And in case I do put [sickness upon you]: "For I am the Lord your healer" – in the world to come (Mekhilta RI, VaYasa 1).

"כי אני ה׳ רופאך" (שמות טו, כו) ... **אלא** אמר המקום למשה: אמור להן לישראל: <u>דברי תורה</u> שנתתי לכם חיים הם לכם ... **אלא** "כל המחלה אשר שמתי במצרים לא אשים עליך" (שם) – בעולם הזה. ואם אשים[37] "כי אני ייי רופאיך" – לעולם הבא (מכילתא דר"י, ויסע א).

"Before God"? (Ex. 18:12) … **Rather**, it teaches that whoever welcomes <u>his fellow</u>, it is as if he had welcomed the Divine Presence (Mekhilta RI, Amalek 2).

"לפני האלהים" (שמות יח, יב) ... **אלא** מלמד שכל המקביל <u>פני חבירו</u> כמקביל פני שכינה" (מכילתא דר"י, עמלק ב).

Through these equations (*a* is considered as *b*)[38] these *as if* homilies inject moral theological lessons into the verses: trusting the leader is like trusting God, converting people is like creating them, etc.

Let us end the textual survey with a homily in which all these motifs appear together:

R. Eleazar says: what does "Israel prevailed" teaches and what does "Amalek prevailed" (Ex. 17:11) teaches?

רבי אליעזר אומר: מה תלמוד לומר "וגבר ישראל" או מה תלמוד לומר "וגבר עמלק" (שמות יז, יא)?

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37   These two words are missing from the parallel homily in the *Mekhilta* RSBI.
38   For *as if* as a term for legal fiction in the Mishnah see L. Moscovitz, "Legal Fictions in Rabbinic Law and Roman Law: Some Comparative Observations", Catherine Hezser (ed.), *Rabbinic Law Its Roman and Near Eastern Context*, Tübingen 2003, 105-132.

teaches? **Rather**, when he raised his hands towards heaven, Israel would be stronger in the words of the Torah, to be given through Moses' hands. And when he lowered his hands, Israel would be weaker in the words of the Torah to be given through his hands (Mekhilta RI, Amalek 1).

אלא כל זמן שהיה מגביר את ידיו כלפי למעלן עתידין ישראל להגביר בדברי תורה שהן עתידין להנתן על ידיו, וכשהוא ממיך את ידיו עתידין ישראל להמיך בדברי תורה שהן עתידין להנתן על ידיו (מכילתא דר״י עמלק א).

All the elements discussed above are here: an exegetical difficulty (as explicated in a parallel version in Mishnah Ros. Has. 3:8: "And does Moshe's hands make or break war?"), a dislocation (*as if* Moses hands affected the war, for truly it was only a sign) that includes a theological lesson ("Israel would be stronger in the words of the Torah"; compare the Mishnahic parallel: "direct their hearts to their Father in heaven").[39]

    Scholars commonly perceive Midrash as the antithesis of allegory due to its refusal to recognize distinct exegetical strata – surface versus depth – positions instead all interpretations on an equal plane. In the Midrashic approach, according to a prevalent perception, a non-hierarchical intertextuality supplants the vertical allegorical logic, and metonymy takes precedence over metaphor. This tendency is frequently linked to the rabbinic disavowal of the Platonic partition between language and reality, rhetoric and (hidden) truth. The metaphysical quest for veiled truths is replaced by a endless intertextual play. Here are two classic examples: "[N]or does the midrashic meaning take any precedence over the plain, simple meaning… There is no hierarchical scheme in midrash; no

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39   A similar homily is found in Justin Martyr (*Dialogue* 90). The theological loading is different of course, but the structure is strikingly similar. On another fascinating parallel to this homily in Origen see M. Kister, "Allegorical Interpretations of Biblical Narratives in Rabbinic Literature, Philo, and Origen: Some Case Studies," in Gary A. Anderson, Ruth Clements, and David Satran (eds.) *New Approaches to the Study of Biblical Interpretation in Judaism of the Second Temple Period and in Early Christianity*, (Leiden 2013), 133-184, 161 n. 112.

interpretation has more authority than any other;" [40] "Ben Azzai does not speak of having achieved the original meaning or inner meaning or hidden meaning of Torah… He did what he did not by linking texts with their meanings but by linking texts with texts." [41]

Given this contextualization of Midrash, it is remarkable to encounter a structure which is fundamentally akin to that employed by Alexandrian allegorists, as delineated by David Dawson. Dawson contends that allegory should not be defined by its thematic components (abstraction, spiritualization, transformation, etc.), as these descriptions are laden with theological implications, but rather through its formal characteristics: two coexisting levels of interpretation – literal and non-literal – held in a dynamic tension.[42] This mirrors precisely the situation at hand: a paraphrase or basic inference supplanted by a creative reinterpretation that reveals deeper moral or theological insights. The homily is explicitly presented as a second tier of interpretation, emerging when the straightforward meaning faces complications or revealed as inadequate. It is this second level that bestows the text with its full significance.[43]

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40   S. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses*, New York 1982, 75. For a modern use of Handelman's study for a radical alternative to western thought see E. Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question: A Critique of Anti-anti-Semitism*, New York 2020, 302.

41   D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Bloomington 1990, 110. Compare: "The essential moment of midrash is the stringing together of parts of the language of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings, forming new linguistic strings […] For the Rabbis what is found is no interpretations and no knowledge of truth, but only the words themselves" (D. Boyarin, "Allegory and Midrash in Origen," in Ronald E. Heine and Karen Jo Torjesen (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Origen*, Oxford 2022, 100-117, 114-115).

42   "In allegory, indirect, nonliteral or 'other' meanings occur together with direct, literal or 'obvious' meanings of the narrative" (D. Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, Berkeley 1991, 7).

43   Are we better off avoiding "interpretation" altogether when describing this second level with its fancy moral theological additions? Should we use "retelling" or the like instead? For an interesting argument in this general direction see D. Lambert, "How the 'Torah of Moses' Became Revelation? An Early, Apocalyptic Theory of Pentateuchal Origins" *JSJ* 47 (2016), 22-54, 52-54. I discuss my own understanding of Midrashic interpretation *qua* interpretation in Rosen-Zvi, *Between Mishnah and Midrash*, 258-317.

Figurative interpretation and intertextuality need not be perceived as alternatives.[44] Midrash seamlessly integrates both approaches, occasionally even concurrently. Consider the following homily, wherein the verse is reread figuratively ("as if") through an intertextual maneuver ("Here… and there"):

"Moses Sat to Judge [… from morning unto the evening]" (Ex. 18:13). But was Moses sitting and judging Israel from morning to evening? Is it not [the case] that judges hold court only until meal time? "What does from morning unto the evening" teaches? **Rather,** it teaches that whosoever renders a true judgment is accounted *as if* he had been a partner in the work of creation. **Here it is written**: "From the morning unto the evening," **and there it says**: "And there was evening and there was morning, a first day" (Gen. 1:5) (Mekhilta RI, Amalek 2).	״וישב משה לשפט [... מן הבוקר עד הערב]״ (שמות יח, יג). וכי מן הבקר ועד הערב היה משה יושב ודן את ישראל? והלא הדיינין אינן דנין אלא עד זמן סעודה? ומה תלמוד לומר ״מן הבקר ועד הערב״? **אלא** מלמד שכל מי שמוציא את הדין לאמיתו מעלין עליו **כאילו** שותף במעשה בראשית. **כתוב כאן** ״מן הבקר ועד הערב״ **ולהלן הוא אומר** ״ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד״ (בראשית א, ה) (מכילתא דר״י, עמלק ב).

Within "*ella*" homilies, the plain meaning is recognized as inadequate, but is not discarded. It precedes the more comprehensive interpretation, thus holding a dialectical status reminiscent of the role of the literal meaning in the works of Philo or Origen. Despite the often-discussed thematic differences between the genres, the structural resemblance is significant. While a handful of explicit allegorical instances in Tannaitic Midrash have been discussed by scholars,[45] here a parallel phenomenon is revealed in one of its central idioms.

At the same time, the shared formal trait also underscores a crucial

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44 On intertextuality in Philo see D. Runia, "The Structure of Philo's Allegorical Treatises," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984), 209–56, esp. 212-213, 238-241.

45 See J.Z. Lauterbach, "The Ancient Jewish Allegorists in Talmud and Midrash - Part 1," *JQR* 1 (1911), 291–333; Kister, "Allegorical Interpretations".

differentiating aspect of "*ella*" homilies: their steadfast commitment to the realm of actuality. The "as if" lesson doesn't elevate these homilies to a loftier, spiritual dimension. Rather, this twist allows the homilist to anchor the massage in the real world: the "soul they did" means conversion (real conversion of real people!) just as "a horse and its rider" remain in the tangible realm of actual horses and riders while also becoming a sign of divine providence.[46] Rather than spiritualization, we have a moral turn.[47] Tannaitic midrash seeks to eat the cake and have it, and this is exactly what this structure enables.

But does this emphasis on staying within the tangible realm categorize "*ella*" homilies as non-allegorical or even counter-allegorical in nature? The answer hinges on the definition and interpretation of allegory. Without attempting to resolve this thorny issue, it's worth observing that certain homilies which we would unambiguously label as allegorical don't involve such a transition from one domain (physical) to another (spiritual). Although the matter deserves a thorough discussion that cannot be offered here, allow me to present two short examples:

a. Paul famously calls the narrative of Sara and Hagar an allegorical way of speaking ("ἀλληγορούμενα" Gal 4:24). But he also argues that Christ's believers are not only *like* Isaak (28) but actually *of* him, as they are offspring of Sara (31). Allegorical argument of resemblance and genealogical claims of actual pedigree are thus intertwined.[48]

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46   On traces of allegorizing of "horse and rider" in Tannaitic homilies see Kister, "Allegorical Interpretations", 176-179.

47   Unlike fifth and sixth centuries' Midrashim like Leviticus Rabba, in which we can already find full-blown spiritualization. These byzantine Midrashim can thus be considered "the beginning of the 'normative' allegorization of the Torah and its commandments" (D. Stern, "Vayikra Rabbah" and my life in Midrash', *Prooftexts* 21 [2001], 23–38, at 36). Compare S. Swanson, "Fifth Century Patristic and Rabbinic Ethical Interpretation of Cult and Ritual in Leviticus", PhD dissertation, Hebrew Union College 2004; T. Jacobowitz, "Leviticus Rabbah and the Spiritualization of the Laws of Impurity", PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania 2010.

48   See Y. Fisch, *Written for Us: Paul's Interpretation of Scripture and the History of Midrash*, Leiden 2022. Chap. 2 ("Hagar and Sarah"), 78-130. The dialectic of allegory in Paul was already narrated in E. Auerbach, 'Figura', *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays*, New York 1959, 11–76 (German

b. In his *De praemiis et poenis*, Philo offers corporal, material readings of the biblical blessings and curses (based on Lev 26, Deut 28 and additional verses). These readings reveal striking similarities to (and probably shared traditions with) the Sifra on Lev 26.[49] Philo combines allegorical readings into his interpretation, but these are integrated into the literal readings. Thus, he argues that the removal of the wild animals (Lev 16:6) does not refer only to actual animals but also to "the wild passions in the soul" (τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ θηρία). But then he clarifies that these are not actually separate dominions, for there is a causal connection between them: "since men will be ashamed to be seen to be more savage than even the brute beasts."[50]

These are but two short instances but they are enough to give a pause to any attempt to present a clear shift between the physical and the spiritual

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original in: *Archivum Romanicum* [1939], 436–489). According to Auerbach, Paul's significance in the history of exegesis lies in his unique ability to render the Bible simultaneously historical and transcendent.

49   On the *Sifra*'s homilies see J. Weinberg, "A rabbinic disquisition of Leviticus 26:3-13: a utopian vision between Jews and Christians," Deborah A. Green and Laura S. Lieber (eds.) *Scriptural Exegesis - the Shapes of Culture and the Religious Imagination; Essays in Honour of Michael Fishbane*, Oxford 2009, 121-134. The shared traditions of Philo and the *Sifra* on the blessings are discussed in an unpublished paper by Yonatan Sagiv. I am thankful to him for sharing this superb paper with me.

50   Philo, *De praemiis et poenis* 88, 91 respectively (LCL translation). Philo's interpretation of the sacrificial laws is as another example of this blend. The purification of one's soul serves there both as an allegory for the physical purification of the worshiper and, at the same time, as accompanying and complementing this purification. See *De Specialibus Legibus* 1:257-272, esp. 269, 272. Compare Yehoshua Amir's review of the two hermeneutic layers in Philo, and his summary: "These different images do not quite add up to the same notion of the relation between the two modes of exegesis. But all of them do suggest that Philo thought he could capture some kind of communication between the two methods he practices" (Y. Amir, "Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Writings of Philo." *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*. M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling eds., Assen 1988, 421-453, 449). See also Adam Kamesar's remark that "for Philo, biblical *personae-as-exempla* are on a kind of line of continuum with biblical *personae-as-minds*" (A. Kamesar, "Biblical Interpretation in Philo." *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*. idem ed., Cambridge 2009, 65-91, 84).

as a prerequisite for proper allegory. They further serve as cautionary reminders against overly rigid dichotomies between midrash and allegory.[51] The necessity to reevaluate this traditional contrast has recently been championed by scholars focusing on allegory, particularly within the context of Origen's exegesis, where new emphasis is placed on the embodied aspect of his exegesis.[52] It is opportune to challenge this dichotomy from the angle of Midrash as well.

And so "*ella*" homilies exhibit both divergence from and resonance with Philonic allegory. Instead of debating whether or not these homilies qualify as allegory, perhaps we can settle on 'allegory-like', 'allegory-light' or simply '*ella*-gory'.[53]
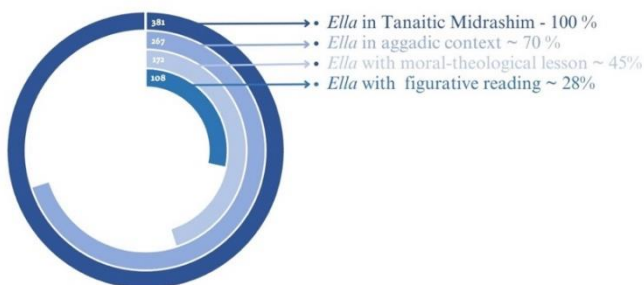

Figure 1. *Ella* in Tannaitic Midrashim

- 381 • *Ella* in Tanaitic Midrashim - 100 %
- 267 • *Ella* in aggadic context ~ 70 %
- 172 • *Ella* with moral-theological lesson ~ 45%
- 108 • *Ella* with figurative reading ~ 28%

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51   On allegory as a spectrum of forms see N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton 2020, 89-95.

52   See esp. D. Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*, Berkeley 2001, criticizing R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, Louisville 1959. See also Boyarin, "Origen". On this scholarly trend see I. Rosen-Zvi "Two Midrashic Selves: Between Origen and the Mekhilta", in M. Niehoff and J. Levinson (eds.), *Constructions of the Self in the Roman Empire* (Tübingen 2019), 469-501.

53   After all, *alla* is but the neuter accusative plural of *allos*. I am delighted to bring a double redemption to the world by acknowledging that *ella*-gory was offered to me independently by Moulie Vidas and James Redfield.