

THEMES IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses

Perspectives from Judaism,
the Pagan Graeco-Roman World,
and Early Christianity

edited by George H. van Kooten



BRILL

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Jewish and Christian Traditions

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drawing with pen and brush, ca. 1655

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CONTENTS

Introduction	ix
Contributors	xv

PART I

THE NAME IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND EARLY JUDAISM

What's in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition	3
WOUT JAC. VAN BEKKUM	
Bare Feet and Holy Ground: Excursive Remarks on Exodus 3:5 and its Reception	17
EIBERT TIGCHELAAR	
YHWH's Name in the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:22–27)	37
HORST SEEBASS	
The Name in Kings and Chronicles	55
EEP TALSTRA	
A Burning Bush on the Stage: The Rewriting of Exodus 3:1–4:17 in Ezekiel Tragicus, <i>Exagoge</i> 90–131	71
JACQUES T.A.G.M. VAN RUITEN	
'God Tempted Moses for Seven days': The Bush Revelation in Rabbinic Literature	89
RONIT NIKOLSKY	

‘GOD TEMPTED MOSES FOR SEVEN DAYS’:
THE BUSH REVELATION IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

Ronit Nikolsky

INTRODUCTION

It would come as a surprise that rabbinic literature of the late-antique and Byzantine era does not tell us much about the extraordinary revelation which took place, as it is told in Exodus 3:1–4:17, next to the Bush—the revealing of God’s name. Even when the event is discussed in late-antique rabbinic literature, the name revealed there: ‘I am who I am’, is *not* mentioned. The bush revelation was not acknowledged by the rabbis as a name revealing event; we find only very few references to the name which was revealed by the bush. These references are listing this name together with other names of God while discussing halakhic or theological aspects of it such as: can this name, once written, be erased or which aspect of God does this name represent?¹ It seems that other aspects of the revelation story were easier for the rabbis, and are better represented in rabbinic literature of Late Antiquity. In rabbinic writings we find discussions about the allegorical or symbolic interpretations of the *Sne* bush itself (see also Geljon, this vol., §1; cf. Tigchelaar, this vol., §2);² for example, in *Shmot Rabba* we read: ‘As the *Sne* has thorns and has flowers, so among the Israelites there are pious ones and evil ones’.³ We find the revelation interpreted as a pedagogical event; again in *Shmot Rabba*:

When God revealed himself to Moses, he [Moses] was a ‘beginner’ in prophecy. God said: if I reveal myself in a loud voice I will frighten Moses; in a low voice—he will despise prophecy. What did He do? He revealed Himself in the voice of his [Moses’] father . . .⁴

¹ This name does appear two times in the Hekhalot literature in connection to the revelation at the bush, but also there the discussion of it is not elaborated.

² In this article I will use the term ‘Sne’ to refer to the bush described in Exod 3:1–4:17, ‘Sne’ being the Hebrew name of the plant by which this event took place.

³ *Shmot Rabba* (Wilna), parasha 2:5.

⁴ *Shmot Rabba* (Wilna), parasha 3:1.

There are linguistic or semantic discussions about the various lexemes and phrases of the biblical narrative. An example is found in *Midrash Lekah Tov*: What is the meaning of the word ‘Sne’? It is derived from the word ‘sin’a’, hatred, to indicate the hatred which fell on the worshippers of stars [when Israel received the Torah].⁵ Or in *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*: ‘Sne’ because it’s the same mountain where they later received the Torah, i.e. ‘Sinai’.⁶

In this article, I will examine the development of one rabbinic narrative which is part of the story of the revelation at the *Sne*: it claims that the event lasted seven days. I will chronologically trace the development of the narrative throughout the various rabbinic writings, and show how it changes in a way which reflects rabbinic attitudes towards the event described in the biblical story. We first encounter the idea that the revelation lasted seven days in the second-century Rabbinic chronicle *Seder Olam*; it later appears in Rabbinic texts which seem to reflect negatively on Moses’ behaviour during the *Sne* revelation (§1). The next step is the crystallization of this narrative, which falls into a fixed textual unit in the classical midrash (§2). In turn, this fixed textual unit loses its negative attitude in the midrash corpus known as the *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* literature (§§3–4).

The criticism of Moses’ behaviour is not the invention of the rabbis, but is already part of the biblical narrative (see also Van Ruiten, this vol., §3a). In the biblical story itself Moses is criticized and Aaron is elevated: Moses twice refuses to comply to God’s request to go and talk to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exod 3:11 and Exod 4:10), and God, being angry, brings Aaron forth as a replacement for Moses in telling the Pharaoh: ‘and God was angry with Moses and said: here is Aaron your brother the Levite, I know that he will speak, and here he comes happily to greet you’ (Exod 4:14). There are more episodes in the Bible in which Moses is criticized; a famous one being the episode in Numbers 20:1–14, known as ‘The Water of Disputation’, when Moses fails to follow God’s instructions as to the manner of extracting water from the rock: Moses sanctifies God by hitting the rock instead of talking to it as was expected. Nonetheless the overall and prevailing opinion about Moses in the Bible is highly positive, presenting him as the prophet

⁵ *Lekah Tov (Psikta Zutarti)*, Shmot, 3.

⁶ *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*, Xorev, 6th descent.

of the highest level (Deut 34:10) '... and there was not a prophet like Moses in Israel, whom God knew face to face'.

In what follows we will see how the rabbinic view about Moses changes over time, and how the rabbis use the texts which were in front of them, biblical or others, to convey their opinion.

1. EARLY RABBINIC REFERENCE TO THE *SNE* REVELATION:
SEDER OLAM AND *MEKHILTA DE RABBI SHIMON BEN YOCHAI*

1.1. *Seder Olam*

The earliest attestation of the *Sne* revelation in rabbinic literature is in *Seder Olam*, a second-century chronography of biblical events.⁷ Regarding the revelation at the *Sne* we find there the following:

כל שבעת הימים היה הקב"ה מדבר עם משה בסנה. ויאמר משה אל ה' "לא איש דברים אנכי" תמול, "גם תמול", שלשום, "גם שלשום", מאז דברך אל עבדך, "גם מאז דברך אל עבדך, כי כבר פה [וכבר לשון אנכי]".

All of the seven days the Holy One Blessed be He spoke to Moses in the *Sne*. 'And Moses said to the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent (Exod 4:10)'. [Now, instead of saying] yesterday [Moses said] 'and yesterday', [instead of saying] the day before yesterday [Moses said] 'and the day before yesterday', [instead of saying] since you spoke to your servant [Moses said] '... and since you spoke to your servant because I am slow in speech' (Exod 4:10).⁸

Seder Olam says that the revelation at the *Sne* lasted seven days. God was speaking for seven days, and only afterwards Moses reacted, saying: 'I am not a man of words, says Moses—according to *Seder Olam*—, therefore I did not say anything throughout the seven days, not yesterday, not on the day before yesterday because I am not eloquent in speech.' *Seder Olam* explains the words 'I am not a man of words' as relating to the seven days of the revelation, and not—as could be understood from the biblical text—to the past life of Moses as a whole. The clumsiness of Moses' answer, which is illustrated by his excessive use of the word 'and', proves that Moses was indeed: '... not eloquent in speech'!

⁷ Milikowsky 1986, 311.

⁸ *Seder Olam*, chap. 5.

Why does *Seder Olam* speak of a seven-day revelation, while there is no trace in the biblical text for this time period? This chronicle includes the dates and duration of the biblical events since the early days of humanity, until late into the second temple period. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that it can tell us how long the revelation at the *Sne* lasted. *Seder Olam* also says that the event took place on the 15th of Nisan, as did the exodus event exactly one year later; the chronicle goes into great length, showing how the flight of the Israelites from Egypt also lasted seven days, starting with their leaving Egypt until their safe arrival on the other side of the Red Sea.⁹ It is clear that *Seder Olam* makes the *Sne* event parallel or typological to the exodus event: both began on the 15th of Nisan, and lasted seven days. The assigning of seven days to the revelation at the *Sne* is, thus, part of a general scheme of *Seder Olam*.

1.2. *Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai*

We see a different attitude in an early midrash, discussing aspects of the *Sne* revelation, the *Mekhilta of R. Shimon Ben Yochai*. This third-century¹⁰ halakhic midrash is concerned with other parts of the *Sne* story.

The question put forward by the *Mekhilta* is concerned with Moses' reaction to God's request to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Why does Moses refuse to carry out God's command when he should have complied?¹¹ Various reasons are given as to why Moses should have agreed, e.g.: 'It is, after all, the fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15), and you, Moses, refuse to carry it out?', or:

⁹ *Seder Olam*, chap. 5: 'from Ramses to Sukkot, from Sukkot to Eitam, from Eitam to Pi-Hahiroth—this is three [days], and on the fourth [day] "and it was told to the king of Egypt" and in the fifth and sixth "the Egyptians chased them" (Exod 14:9), in the evening before the seventh day they went into the [Red] sea . . . and in the morning they were singing the song on the sea . . . and this was the seventh day, which is the last day of the holiday of Passover.' On this symmetry in *Seder Olam*, see Milikowsky 1993.

¹⁰ Thus according to some scholars whereas others think of it as a later text (4th or even 5th century). Still this particular tradition could be of early date. The text of this midrash is re-composed into a more or less sequential narrative from quotes appearing in other midrashim and fragments found in the Geniza and other places.

¹¹ The formulation of this question is: *הרי שבועה מבוהלת ובאת לפני להוציא את בני ישראל ממצרים ואתה אומר שלח נא ביד תשלח* (and now this promise to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, hurries and comes before me, and you tell me 'send in the hand of whom Thou wilt?!').

'I, the merciful God, want to save the Israelites from their hardship and slavery, and you do not want to carry it out?' The *Mekhilta* is critical of Moses' refusal, which is looked upon as disturbing the execution of God's plan.¹²

A different paragraph in the *Mekhilta* tells of another aspect of the *Sne* story:

לפיכך כבש הקב"ה את משה ששה ימים ובשביעי אמר לו שלח נא ביד תשלח שנא
ויאמר משה אל ה' בי ה' לא איש וגו'.

Therefore God held Moses for six days, and on the seventh, he [Moses] said to him: 'send by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send' (Exod 4:13), as it is said: 'and Moses said to God, Please Sir, I am not a man of [words]' (Exod 4:10).¹³

What is told here is nothing new; the *Mekhilta* is recounting what was previously told in *Seder Olam*. It is likely that the *Mekhilta* took this idea over from *Seder Olam* or from a mediating source.

But there is an important difference between what is said in the *Mekhilta*, and what was said in *Seder Olam*. The *Mekhilta* adds an extra biblical verse to the version quoted in *Seder Olam*, hereby giving the narrative another meaning. *Seder Olam* quotes verse 10 ('and Moses said to God, Please Sir, I am not a man of [words]') of Exodus 4, as an illustration for Moses' heaviness of speech; the *Mekhilta* inserts verse 10 before verse 13 of the same chapter ('send in the hand of him whom Thou wilt send') in which Moses expresses his refusal to succumb to God's request, and is asking God to send someone else instead. This sequence results in a narrative which says, that after God spoke to Moses for seven days, Moses refused God's request. Moses is here presented in an unfavourable way. He refuses, not because he was ineloquent, but for an unexplained reason. Thus the reader may easily assign Moses bad qualities, such as stubbornness or laziness.

To make sure the reader has understood this point, the *Mekhilta* goes on to explain what happened at the *Sne* by way of a parable:¹⁴

¹² We do find in the *Mekhilta* favourable attitudes towards Moses' behaviour, explaining Moses' answer to God as stemming from his lack of assertiveness due to his meekness, or from his trying to allow his brother to share his honour. These statements come under the name of R. El(i)azar Hamodai, and Chakhamim.

¹³ *Mekhilta de R. Shimon ben Yochai*, edn. Epstein & Melamed, Jerusalem 1955.

¹⁴ *Mekhilta de R. Shimon ben Yochai*, chap. 3.

This is similar to a king who had a slave, whom he loved dearly, and the king wanted to make him the *Apotropos* [= one responsible] for his property; what did the king do? He took the slave by the hand and led him into his palace of treasures and showed him all his vessels of silver, gold and precious stones and everything which he had in his storage place; then he took him out and showed him trees and gardens and plantations and fields and everything he had in his fields.

Then the slave took [back] his hand and said: 'I cannot become *Apotropos* for all the things of the king.'

The king said to him: 'Since you cannot become responsible for all my things, why did you let me bother with you for so long?' And the king was angry with him, and ordered him not to enter his palace.

This is how God held Moses for seven days, and in the seventh he (Moses) told him: 'send by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send'. God swore to him that he will not enter the land of Israel, as it is said: 'therefore you shall not bring [this crowd into the land which I have given to them]' (Num 20:12).

God's talking to Moses at the *Sne* has been likened to a king who went to much trouble to convince his beloved slave to accept a position of an *Apotropos* of the entire king's treasure. The slave rejected the honour. The king became angry with the slave for letting him go to so much trouble all to no avail, and forbids him from entering his palace altogether. Thus, claims the *Mekhilta*, because Moses did not want to bring the Israelites out of Egypt God stopped him from entering the land of Israel.

The *Mekhilta* goes even further in changing the biblical account of the *Sne* event: the story in the *Mekhilta*, unlike the biblical version, does not end well. Rather we are left with a bitter taste concerning the relationship between God and Moses, and as a result of his refusal to comply to God's will, Moses is prohibited from entering the Holy Land.¹⁵ In the biblical text, as we saw above, this prohibition is connected to the Water of Disputation episode (Num 20:12, 20:24, 27:14; Deut 32:51).

¹⁵ The same connection is made two times later on in the *Mekhilta*, first without attribution to any rabbi: אמר לו [הק' אתה או' שלה נא] ביד תשלח הרי יהושע תלמידך [אין אתה נכנס עמהן ומשרתך ונידול ירך הוא יכניס את יש' לארץ אתה] [אין אתה נכנס עמהן] (God said to him: 'you say "send in the hand of whom Thou wilt", Joshua your disciple and servant, whom you nurtured, he will bring the Israelites into the land, and you will not enter with them'). And still later in chap. 6, with attribution to the name of R. Akiva: ר' עקיבא אומ' אמ' הקב"ה למשה בשבועה בניורה באמירה נשבעתי שלא חכנס לארץ ישראל (R. Akiva said: 'God said to Moses: by an oath and a verdict and a [Godly] statement I swear that you will not enter the land of Israel').

To sum up, we find in the *Mekhilta* criticism of Moses' refusal to comply with God's demand. In addition, when retelling what is known from *Seder Olam*, that the event lasted seven days, the *Mekhilta's* account presents Moses more negatively than the *Seder Olam* by adding another biblical verse, and arranging the verses in a specific order. This attitude does not exist in the earlier rabbinic text, *Seder Olam*.

We can now see how the tradition of the seven-day revelation and the criticism of Moses' behaviour are utilized in the classical midrash.

2. THE CLASSICAL MIDRASH: DEVELOPMENT OF A FIXED TEXTUAL UNIT

In what is known as classical midrash,¹⁶ the attitude as well as the narrative which was presented above became widespread, and crystallized into a fixed textual unit. Being a fixed textual unit, means that not only the idea that the revelation at the *Sinai* lasted seven days passes on from one text to another; it does so in the exact same wording, or at least some of its key words are found in the narrative. The idea crystallized by now into an actual text. This does not necessarily mean that the text was written; it could have been memorized and passed on orally.¹⁷ This fixed unit is found, for example, in *Vayikra Rabba*:¹⁸

אמר שמואל בר נחמן: כל שבעת ימי הסנה היה הקב"ה מפתח את משה שילך בשליחותו למצרים הה"ד "גם מתמול גם משלשום גם מאז דברך אל עבדך" הרי ששה. ובשביעי אמר לו "שלח נא ביד תשלח". אמר לו הקב"ה: משה, את אומר שלח נא ביד תשלח – הייך שאני צוררה לך בכנפיך! אימתי פרע לוי? רבי ברכיה אמר: ר' לוי ור' הלבן. ר' לוי אמר: כל ז' ימי אדר היה משה מבקש תפלה ותחנונים שיכנס לא"י ובשביעי אמר לו "כי לא תעבור את הירדן הזה". ר' הלבן אמר: כל ז' ימי המילואים היה משמש בכהונה גדולה וכסבור שלו היא בן אמר לו לא שלך היא אלא של אהרן אחיך היא הה"ד "ויהי ביום השמיני".

¹⁶ The vagueness of dating midrashic compositions is a known fact. The period of the classical midrash can roughly be designated to late-antique until pre-Islamic period (fourth to sixth centuries).

¹⁷ See Mandel 2000, 74–8, also Kipperwasser 2005, 34–42.

¹⁸ *Leviticus Rabba*, parasha 11. A parallel is found in *Shir-Hashirim Rabba*, parasha 1 and in *Midrash Tehilim*, on Psalm 18. The passage in *Leviticus Rabba* seems to be more comprehensive than *Shir-Hashirim Rabba*, and perhaps preserves a version close to the original. *Midrash Tehilim* does not have the rabbis' opinions about Moses' punishment, maybe because of a tendency which will be discussed below, in §3 on the *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* literature.

R. Shmuel son of R. Nachman said: all seven-days-of-the-*Sne*, God was tempting Moses to go as His messenger to Egypt, as it is said: (Num 4:10) ‘also from yesterday also from the day before yesterday, since You spoke to Your servant’—this is six [days], and on the seventh day he said to Him: ‘send with whom Thou wilt send’. God said to him: Moses, you are telling me ‘send with whom Thou wilt send’—I swear that I will tie it in your clothes¹⁹ [= this will be remembered as your sin].

When did He repay him [for this sin]?

R. Berachia said: [There are two opinions about this, the one is of] R. Levi and [the other is of] R. Chelbo.

R. Levi said: All seven days of [the month of] Adar Moses was asking [through] prayer and supplication to enter the Land of Israel, and on the seventh day He told him (Deut 3:28) ‘you shall not cross this Jordan’.

R. Chelbo said: All seven days of *Milluim*²⁰ [Moses] served as the chief priest, and he thought that this [position] was his; on the seventh [day] He told him: It is not your [position], but it is Aaron’s, your brother, as it is said (Lev 9:1) ‘and on the eighth day [Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel] and ordered Aaron to serve as a priest.’

Some of the ‘key words’ that tend to appear in this textual unit, which will appear again and again in others texts, are:

1. The allocation of its first part to R. Shmuel bar Nachman, a third generation Palestinian *Amora*.
2. The word ‘tempting’ (בִּפְתוּחַ) which is used to describe God’s action to convince Moses to go in his mission.²¹
3. The expressions ‘I will tie it to your clothes’ (which means here: I will remember it [as your sin]), and ‘when did he repay him?’ (מַחְי פָּרַע לוֹ).
4. R. Berachia, a fifth-generation *Amora* from Palestine, who brings the two opinions: of R. Chelbo (the student of R. Shmuel mentioned above, thus a fourth-generation *Amora* from Palestine, and a teacher of R. Berachia) and R. Levi.

This text parallels the seven-day revelation by the *Sne* on the one hand, with the seven days in which Moses asked God to allow him

¹⁹ The meaning of this expression is close to the modern meaning of carrying something in one’s pocket.

²⁰ The *Milluim* is part of the ritual of inauguration of a new priest; see Exodus 29, Leviticus 8. Moses served as a priest in the *Milluim* ritual of Aaron and his sons.

²¹ See Bregman 2003, 109 and 218.

to enter the Land on the other; as Moses refused to comply with God's request at the beginning of his career, so did God refuse Moses' request at the end of his life. God's refusal to grant Moses his wishes is presented as the punishment for Moses' refusal to succumb to God's will. The idea that Moses was punished for his refusal is known already in the *Mekhilta*. There we may also find other, more positive, attitudes towards Moses' refusal. Here, in the fixed textual unit, the negative attitude appears to be prevailing. The only issue which is still being discussed is the nature of Moses' punishment. R. Levi says that the prohibition of entering the Land of Israel was the punishment, an idea which was already expressed in the *Mekhilta*. The other opinion, that of R. Chelbo, claims that denying Moses the position of high priest is a punishment for his refusal at the *Sne*.

The two views about this punishment are a development of the negative attitude towards Moses' behaviour at the *Sne* beyond what is found in the *Mekhilta*. Another development concerns the duration of the *Sne* event. In the fixed textual unit this duration is learned from the Bible in the following manner:²² the word **נ** (also) means one day; **מחרמול** (from yesterday) means two days; the next word **נ** (also) is three days; **משלשם** (from the day before yesterday) is four days; another **נ** (also) is five days and the expression **מאז דברך אל עבדך** (since you spoke to your servant) refers to the sixth day; on the next, the seventh day Moses spoke. The very same verse (Exod 4:10) was used by *Seder Olam* to illustrate Moses' heaviness of speech. Here, in the fixed textual unit, the duration of the *Sne* event is learned from the same verse.

The claim that the event by the *Sne* lasted seven days is by now an independent tradition, no longer a part of an overall chronological system, as it used to be in *Seder Olam*. It is justified, then, to question the origin of this information. The rabbis answer that this is learned from a calculation in the biblical verse itself.

This fixed textual unit seems to be based on the story as it appears in the *Mekhilta*; it is not a part of an overall chronological system, and it is quoting the same two verses as the *Mekhilta* (verses 13 and 10 of chap. 4 in Exodus), albeit in the order of their appearance in the biblical text (i.e. first verse 10 and then 13).

²² In the two other versions (in *Midrash Tehilim* and in *Shir Hashirim Rabba*) the calculation is slightly different.

The expression ‘tied in his clothes’ which is used in the fixed textual unit adds a unique connotation. This expression is used in connection with the episode of the Water of Disputation, with regards to Moses, in two early midrashim: the haggadic section of *Sifre Deuteronomy*²³ and *Mekhilta on Deuteronomy*. In these two midrashim, the event by the *Sne* is interpreted in a positive manner, and contrasted against Moses’ behaviour at the Water of Disputation. The expression under discussion is used for Moses’ punishment for his misconduct at the Water of Disputation; he was punished in not being allowed to enter the land of Israel:

you did not hesitate [to perform] the early miracles [of converting your stick to a snake, by the *Sne*], [why did] you hesitate within this effortless miracle? How does one know that Moses did not leave this world without God tying [this mistake] into his clothes? As it is said ‘for you see land opposite you [and do not enter it]’²⁴ (Deut 32:53).

The negative view of Moses’ behaviour during the revelation at the *Sne* is by now an acceptable thesis. The difference in opinion concerns only the nature of the punishment bestowed on Moses. The fixed textual unit presents a crystallization of the previous tradition, which can now be recognized as ‘a text’, and as such it can be written or memorized.

Now, we can proceed to see how this textual unit is used in the *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* corpus.

3. THE FIXED TEXTUAL UNIT IN THE *TANCHUMA YELAMDENU*

The *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* corpus is a group of midrash texts, which have been developed over hundreds of years. Parts of it can be traced back to fourth-century Palestine. The bulk of the composition is from the vague period of 5th-8th centuries Palestine. It is of drashic nature, and many drashot typically open with the words *ילמדנו רבנו*: ‘Let our Rabbi teach us’.²⁵

²³ The date of this midrash is uncertain; according to one conjecture it was created between the third and early-fifth century.

²⁴ ומה אם נסים הראשונים שהיו קשים לא עיכבת מהם הדבר הונה שהוא קל צריך היית לעכבו: מכי אתה אומ' שלא יצא משה מן העולם עד שצדקה בכנפו שנ' כי מנגד תראה את הארץ, *Midrash Tanaim*, on Deuteronomy 32.

²⁵ See Bregman 2003, 3–20; Teugels 2001, x–xi.

The fixed textual unit, which was studied above, appears in the *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* six times.²⁶ Surprisingly, it is not found in the place where we would most expect it to be: in connection to the biblical account of the revelation at the *Sne* (i.e. Exodus 3).²⁷ It appears in connection with other biblical narratives, and always in a fragmentary or altered form. The part dealing with the nature of Moses' punishment is omitted in all places, except for one, and in this one place, its meaning is completely changed. The fact that in one occurrence, the discussion concerning Moses' punishment is included may indicate that in other cases an editor omitted these discussions purposefully.

The first occurrence of the fixed textual unit in the *Tanchuma* literature is a drasha about Genesis 25:1, 'and Abraham got another wife'. The drasha starts with a halakhic question, about prayer.²⁸ In the answer we read about the three Jewish prayers, explaining that '... a man should always be increasing the number of prayers, and not only his prayers, but he should also be "increasing" in his study of the Torah, and not only there, but also in sons, so if his wife dies, he should take another wife and have more sons' as Abraham did in the biblical story under discussion.

The midrash then goes on to discuss a verse from Job 8:7 'Your beginning was low and your end will be very elevated'. The midrash explains this verse as follows:

This [verse] is about Moses. R. Shmuel bar Nachman said: seven days God was tempting Moses, and he (Moses) was running away, as it is said: 'Send with whom Thou wilt' (Exod 4:13) and it is written 'I am not a man of words' (Exod 4:10), and it is said 'Moses hid his face' (Exod 3:6).

'... and your end will be very elevated', as it is written: 'and he looked at the image of God' (Num 12:8); Rabi Shimon Ben Yochai said: it means that he saw the form [of God].

This passage from the *Tanchuma* is using the fixed textual unit to show that Moses was in a poor state at the beginning of his career, but later on his position was elevated. The midrash then returns to

²⁶ In the *Printed Tanchuma*: parashat Hayey Sarah, siman 6; parashat Toldot, siman 12; parashat Vayikra, siman 3; in *Tanchuma Buber*: parashat Vayikra, siman 4. In *Deuteronomy Rabba*, parashat Vaetchanan, 'ata hachilota'.

²⁷ An exception is found in the *Tanchuma Buber*, but was probably added later. About this quality of *Tanchuma Buber* see Bregman 2003, 168–9.

²⁸ 'למדנו רבנו כמה תפילות אדם מתפלל ביום'.

discuss the original biblical text about Abraham taking another wife (Gen 25:1), telling that Abraham too was in a low position in the beginning, because he was childless; later he begot two sons, and still later, after the death of his first wife, he begot even more children.

When quoting the fixed textual unit the *Tanchuma* adds the words ‘and he was running away’ referring to Moses, and omits the parts which talk about Moses’ punishment; Moses emerges, then, not as a person being punished or deserving a punishment; on the contrary, he ends up seeing the form of God, a level never superseded by any prophet. For this purpose the *Tanchuma* adds another verse (Exod 3:6) to the fixed textual unit ‘Moses hid his face’ in order to contrast it with Moses’ later development, when he sees the form of God.

The structure of this drasha is typical of a *Tanchuma* drasha. I have discussed here only a part of it, that which shows how the fixed textual unit was used. There is no need to analyse in such details the other parts of this drasha, or other occurrences of the fixed textual unit in the *Tanchuma* literature. I shall briefly describe the other occurrences.

The next occurrence of the fixed textual unit in the *Tanchuma* literature is in connection with the story of how Jacob deceived Isaac in order to get his blessing, and Isaac’s reaction when realizing the lie (Gen 27:33). The midrash talks about the control a man has of his organs; it concludes that some organs are under man’s control—legs, hands, mouth, and some not. If God wants, says the midrash, He can take control even over organs which are usually under man’s control. This happened, for example, to Moses by the *Sne*: he did not want to go, using his legs, to Pharaoh, but God compelled him to do so. How do we know that Moses did not want to go? ‘As R. Shmuel bar Nachman said, seven days God was tempting Moses by the *Sne* . . .’ etc. The midrash quotes here the fixed textual unit, but without mentioning Moses’ punishments.

The context of the next occurrence²⁹ is a discussion about achieving a high social status. If a man is chasing an honourable status, this status will escape him, but if he tries to avoid high honour, the honour will as if ‘chase’ him. This is what happened to Moses by the *Sne*: ‘Seven days God was tempting Moses by the *Sne*’ and Moses, being meek, rejected the honour. But in the end Moses became an

²⁹ *Printed Tanchuma*, parashat Vayikra, siman 3.

honourable leader, not only bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, but he also parted the Red Sea, brought them to the desert, fed them the quail, gave them a well, made the tabernacle and so forth; all things brought him the honour, of which he was trying to escape because of his meekness. There are no negative overtones about Moses here, and the fixed textual unit is used in part.

Another passage from the *Tanchuma* literature was published by Mann³⁰ and was later republished³¹ from a Geniza fragment TS C₁ and analyzed in detail by Bregman.³² Here, the fixed textual unit serves to show that the *Sne* revelation lasted a long time; the author needs the length of time for a lengthy dialogue between God and Moses to take place.³³

The next occurrence from the *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* literature is from *Deuteronomy Rabba*.³⁴ Here the fixed textual unit is used in connection to the verse (Deut 3:24) 'You (God) started showing Your servant (Moses) Your mightiness and Your strong hand . . .' The midrash explains that God started showing His greatness to Moses at the *Sne*, when he was talking to him for seven days. The parts about the punishment are again omitted.

In one case in the *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* literature,³⁵ the punishment of Moses is mentioned. This is in connection to Leviticus 9:1 ' . . . and in the eighth day Moses called Aaron . . . and said . . . take a calf . . . and sacrifices before God'. In this episode Moses asks Aaron for the first time to perform the task of chief priest. The midrash discusses Moses' emotions toward his brother who was appointed to this high position:

זויהו ביום השמיני . . . "אז"ל: כל שבעת הימים שהיה משה בסבה, א"ל הקב"ה: לך בשליחותי והוא אומר לו: "שלה נא ביד תשלח". כך יום ראשון ושני א"ל הקב"ה אני אומר לך לך ואתה אומר לי שלה נא ביד תשלח? חייך למחר אני פורע לך; כשיעשה המשכן תהא סבור בעצמך שאתה משמש בכהונה גדולה ואני אומר לך: קרא לאהרן שישמש. לכך נאמר: "קרא משה לאהרן ולבניו" . . . א"ל משה: כך אמר לי הקב"ה למנותך כהן גדול. א"ל אהרן: אתה ינעת במשכן ואני נעשה כהן גדול? א"ל: חייך אע"פ שאתה נעשה כהן גדול כאילו אני נעשה, שכשם ששמחת לי בגדולה כך אני שמח בגדולתך.

³⁰ Mann 1940.

³¹ Bregman 2003, 295–7.

³² Bregman 2003, 97–137, esp. 108–9.

³³ This analysis was offered by Bregman 2003, 109.

³⁴ *Deuteronomy Rabba*, parashat Vaetchanan on Deut 3:24.

³⁵ *Printed Tanchuma*, parashat Shmini, siman 3.

‘And it was on the eighth day’ . . . The rabbis said: all seven days in which Moses was by the *Sne*, God told him: go as my messenger, and he (Moses) told him: ‘Send with whom Thou wilt send’ (Exod 4:13). Thus it was in the first day, and in the second day God told him: I am telling you: go, and you are telling me: send with whom Thou wilt send?! I swear to you that I will repay you in the future. When the tabernacle will be constructed, you will think that you will be the chief priest, but I will tell you: call Aaron so that he will serve. Thus it is said: ‘Moses called Aaron and his sons’ (Lev 9:1) . . . Moses said [to Aaron]: This is what God told me, to make you the Chief Priest. Aaron said to him: You troubled yourself so much with the tabernacle, and I am becoming the Chief Priest? [Moses] said to him: I swear to you that although you are becoming the Chief Priest, it is as if I am becoming [it], as you were happy for me in my greatness [when I was called to speak to Pharaoh (Exod 4:14)], thus I am happy for you for your greatness.

Only one of Moses’ punishments is quoted in this passage, and even this one has the very opposite meaning to that in the fixed textual unit. The punishment is used to show the greatness of Moses: he is not jealous of his brother, but happy for him. Moses’ prohibition to enter the land is omitted here, as well as the expression ‘I tie it to your clothes’, which entered the fixed textual unit from a text which discusses exactly this prohibition in *Sifre Deuteronomy*, as we saw above.

The negative attitude of the fixed textual unit is systematically avoided in the *Tanchuma* literature, even though this textual unit is widely used here.

4. THE FIXED TEXTUAL UNIT IN LATER TEXTS

This seven days’ tradition appears in a few later rabbinic texts and midrashic collections.

*Shmot Rabba*³⁶ (a medieval compilation) discusses extensively the *Sne* revelation, and is using the fixed textual unit, not actually quoting it, but using some of the key words from the fixed unit, such as ‘tempting’ (בִּפְתוּחַ), and the calculation of the number of days from the biblical verse Exod 4:10, albeit in a different manner. The content of the fixed textual unit is altered here heavily: the seven days, according to *Shmot Rabba* occur *before*, not during the revelation; after the revelation took place Moses was persuaded by God’s words, and was ready to go in order to punish Pharaoh.

³⁶ *Shmot Rabba*, parasha 3, 14.

Collections of midrashim are quoting earlier compositions. Such is the case with *Midrash Agada* on Lev 9:1³⁷ (quoting the text from the *Tanchuma* on the same biblical verse and again when discussing Lev 1:1³⁸ it is quoting the *Tanchuma* on this same verse).³⁹ *Yalkut Shimoni*⁴⁰ is a re-telling of *Seder Olam*, thus not being critical of Moses at all; and again on another instance it is quoting the fixed textual unit as it is found in *Vayikra Rabba*, in a context similar to *Midrash Tehilim*.⁴¹

Many other later compositions about Moses do not include the fixed textual unit or the idea that the revelation at the *Sne* lasted seven days. Such is the case in *Sefer Pitron Torah*, *Midrash Esphe*, *Divrei Yeme Moshe*, *Midrash Petirat Moshe* or the *Zohar*.

CONCLUSIONS

We can observe four stages in the narrative which assigns seven days to the revelation at the *Sne*:

1. In *Seder Olam* we first encounter the opinion that the revelation by the *Sne* lasted seven days. The attitude toward the revelation is neutral.
2. A negative attitude towards the *Sne* revelation develops in *Mekhilta de rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai*: Moses is seen as a person who misbehaved and should be punished. The prohibition on Moses to enter the Land of Israel is suggested as a punishment for his behaviour at the *Sne*.
3. A fixed textual unit develops on the basis of the text in the *Mekhilta*, where a critical attitude towards Moses' behaviour is taken for granted. Two possible punishments are suggested here: not entering the land, and not being appointed high priest.
4. The next stage is represented by the *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* literature. This corpus systematically avoids presenting Moses in a negative way: the fixed narrative unit is being reused in a manner which

³⁷ *Midrash Agada*, chap. 9.

³⁸ *Midrash Agada*, chap. 1.

³⁹ *Printed Tanchuma*, parashat Vayikra, siman 3.

⁴⁰ *Yalkut Shimoni* on the Torah, remez 172.

⁴¹ *Yalkut Shimoni* is not quoting *Tanchuma Yelamdenu* when talking about the duration of the *Sne* revelation. It is therefore the only late rabbinic text which has a negative attitude towards Moses' behaviour.