

MEALS IN EARLY JUDAISM

Social Formation at the Table

Edited by

Susan Marks and Hal Taussig



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Performing Myth, Performing Midrash at Rabbinic Meals

Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus

A major achievement of our seminar has been the recognition that all formal banquets of the Greco-Roman period more or less assume and draw from the same set of conventions of Greco-Roman symposia. They differ in the different selection, emphasis, and combination of these conventions by the groups who perform the meals, and in the different meanings those groups attribute to their particular performances of them. In light of this, it seems increasingly clear that we need to focus more attention to myths, to the numinous “back stories” put into play at the Greco-Roman banquets we study, especially early Jewish and Christian meals. Through various ritual strategies, communal myths of identity and aspiration are evoked to encourage participants to experience their “ordinary meal” as somehow “enhanced,” as part of a broader, deeper social, historical, cosmic drama. We saw particularly striking examples of this in Philo’s account of the Therapeutai and Therapeutrides’s ritual reenactment of the crossing of the Red Sea through their antiphonal choral singing and dance.¹ Whether or not really Therapeutae ever did this or they were a product of Philo’s fantasy, Philo was not alone among Greco-Roman Jews in recommending that certain specific passages from the Torah be recited, sung, taught, or explained over the dinner table. In particular, the early rabbinic meals prescribed and described in

the Tannaitic sources adopt the sympotic convention of appropriate table talk about meal topics—as they put it, *divre torah al hashbulhan* (“words of Torah” both about and literally “over the table”)—to bring their communal myths of identity and aspiration to bear on the participants’ experience of performing the meals.

These words of Torah recited, sung, and explained at the table do not stand alone, but are integral parts of a ritual process. They are what Jane Harrison would call the “things said” (*legomena*) component of her tripartite model of ritual based on ancient Greek mysteries: “things said,” “things done” [*dromena*], and “things shown” (*deiknymena*).² The thesis of this paper is that the strategic placement of “words said” at rabbinic meals are meant to be a kind of interpretation, midrash, of the things done and shown at the meal (and vice versa). This is a distinctively early rabbinic way of deploying Jewish myths at meals, which proved to have legs in subsequent Jewish meal practices.

I use the term myth to refer to culturally specific language that is imaginative, symbolic, sensually evocative, and emotionally charged. Myths are stories that groups of people tell. Or they elliptically allude to verbal or gestural shorthand, which both consciously and unconsciously shape their relationships to other people and the natural world around them. Ninian Smart’s discussion of the “mythic/narrative” dimension as one of six dimensions of “worldviews” has somewhat influenced my use of the term “myth” and its relation to ritual, as has Victor Turner’s essay, “Social Dramas and Stories About Them.”³ In other words, myth to me is primarily something linguistic or language-like, in which narrative and symbolic reference are crucial components. I also consider mythic language to have a numinous quality. This is not necessarily because of something *essentially* “sacred” behind it (though I admit that Jungian theory of archetypes shape my thinking), but rather because that is mythic language’s rhetorical intent—to use words to evoke emotionally charged experiences of “the sacred” (however a particular culture constructs it, if it even does so at all).⁴ There should be no question that both Biblical and rabbinic Jewish cultures

construct experiences of “the holy” by labeling objects, people, times, and the Deity as *kadosh*, literally “set apart.” Indeed, rabbinic Hebrew often uses the verbal form *le-kadesh* to mean “to say or do something to make it holy,” as in the expressions “sanctify the day” (to say a Sabbath or holiday *Kiddush* blessing) or “sanctify the Name” (*kiddush ha-Shem*—doing something that bears witness and inspires awe toward God, including martyrdom). So I use the terms “myth” or “mythic” primarily refer to the “words of Torah” or words of blessing used explicitly or implicitly to ascribe “holiness” to their ritual actions and the experiences they are intended to evoke.⁵

Nevertheless, I attempt to give some sort of phenomenological content to the experiences of holiness, which I argue the mythic language of rabbinic meal rituals is intended to evoke. In that sense, I follow Mircea Eliade and Rudolf Otto, or better, the other scholars inspired by their phenomenological approach whom I cite throughout this essay. So what are the qualities rabbinic mythic language is supposed to evoke? According to Ruth Fredman Cernea and Baruch Bokser, the mythic rabbinic language of the Passover seder conveys a “timeless quality.”⁶ Another aspect of rabbinic mythic language is what I call its “*ke-ilu* [‘as if’] quality.” This is an “is/is not” metaphorical awareness quite important to the Tannaitic rabbis’ conceptualization of how their sacred myths of the Torah are to be deployed at meals.⁷ Thus, when rabbinic texts use a demonstrative “*this is*” to introduce a scriptural passage to be recited at a meal, the palpable context implicitly puts more emphasis on the “is” rather than the “is not” dimension of the metaphor, though the word “*ke-ilu*” keeps the “is not” from being completely forgotten. This kind of midrash applied to the events of the table is “mythically” metaphorical precisely in this way. However, by calling rabbinic metaphors mythic, I do not mean “untrue” in the sense that “we as modern critical outside observers of religious phenomena know them to be,” in contrast to their precritical beliefs, or to imply that the rabbis themselves did not believe that supernatural beings really existed. On the contrary, rabbinic myth emphasizes stories where the actors are supernatural beings, especially stories about the creation of how things now

originally came to be *ab illo tempore*.⁸ The last important qualities of rabbinic mythic language I discuss are its predilection for associative thinking, and for what Marc Bregman describes as midrashic visualization, namely evocations of dream-like experiences of “condensed, symbolic, immediately visual images.”⁹ Suffice it to say that while the theoreticians I mention here and subsequently inform my understanding of myth, I use the terms “myth” and “mythic” primarily pragmatically. They are shorthand for the particular set of emotionally evocative, narrative, and symbolic features of the words said in rabbinic meals, which I have summarized here and will expand upon in what follows.

From the early rabbinic Passover seder prescribed in the Mishnah, to medieval Jewish mystical meal manuals such as R. Bahya ben Asher’s *Shulhan Shel Arba* recommending apt Biblical and rabbinic passages as talking points; to the early modern and contemporary versions of a Tu Bishvat Haggadah, rubrics for reciting passages from the Bible, Talmud, and Zohar in praise of fruits in honor of the New Year of the Trees (and frequently employed by contemporary Jewish environmentalists), saying words from sacred books at the table have become almost a *sine qua non* of Jewish Sabbath and festival meals.¹⁰ Namely Jewish stories are applied to the physical experiences of the meals, and the physical experiences themselves—sweet and bitter tastes, flickering flames, the pleasant intoxicating buzz of the wine, cracking nutshells, or even the postprandial drowsiness often felt at the end of a satisfying meal—implicitly “comment” back on stories.¹¹ As the modern Jewish foodie movement puts it in the words of the neo-Hasidic Rebbe Shlomo Carlebach, “The Torah is a commentary on the world, and the world is a commentary on the Torah.”¹²

In this view, which originates from early rabbinic meal practices, meals and all they involve are a microcosm of the natural and social world, and Torah has something to say about them. Each reciprocally supplies contexts of interpretation for the other. In other words, to say “Blessed are You YHWH our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth”¹³ with the bread right in front of you, or “Because God

‘passed over’ [*pasah*] over our fathers’ homes in Egypt”¹⁴ and “Because the Egyptians embittered [*marreru*] our fathers lives in Egypt”¹⁵ just before one does not eat a *pasah* lamb sacrifice but does eat the bitter herb, maror, at the Passover seder are actually rather complex interpretations of Torah in which Jewish myth, ritual, and doctrine are fused into single psychosomatic experiences.

I will use the rabbinic Passover seder, the Mishnah Avot 3:3 tradition about saying “words of Torah” over the table, rabbinic table blessings, and Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher’s postrabbinic medieval interpretation and expansion upon the Avot tradition as examples to sketch out a trajectory of the ritual use of words of Torah to perform Jewish myths by performing midrash at meals. I justify my use of fourteenth-century Spanish kabbalist and Biblical exegete R. Bahya ben Asher’s interpretation of rabbinic meal practices for an essay ostensibly on early rabbinic meals as an expression of the fourth of the ten theses we stated elsewhere in this volume.¹⁶ Namely that there is a *rabbinic* “symptotic ethic,” adopted from Greek and Roman meal practices and literary representations of them, that can be traced across a trajectory from Pharisaic *havurot*, Tannaitic meal traditions (the Passover seder, “*divre torah al ha-shulhan*,” table *berakhot*), Amoraic meal traditions (*midrashim*, especially stories with meal settings and the *Derekh Eretz* literature), and even through postrabbinic, kabbalistic meal traditions (and even up to the contemporary “new Jewish food movement”).

I skip from the Tannaitic traditions directly to the postrabbinic, kabbalistic meal traditions I discuss merely to illustrate my point that rabbinic table talk as an example of its symptotic ethic had a postrabbinic Jewish afterlife long after ancient Greek and Roman symposia were cultural norms. Also, I think R. Bahya made explicit what I think was implicit in the strategies of early rabbinic traditions and their use of scriptural passages and blessings to involve meal participants in performing rabbinic myths.

There are several ways in which scholars have characterized the ways that myths are deployed in rabbinic meal rituals. Joseph Tabory, in his research of the Passover Haggadah,

distinguishes two different ways the words of the Passover seder are connected to the other ritual actions: “remembrance” versus “reenactment.” Thus, when one mentions the bitter herb in the haggadah, “telling” of the Passover story “because the Egyptians embittered our fathers’ lives, that’s a remembrance. But when one postpones the singing of triumphant Psalm 114 of Hallel “*betzeyt yisrael mi-mitzrayim...*” to after the meal (according to the school of Shammai), one is “reenacting” the Exodus from Egypt. The Hallel psalms are like the song at the sea that the Israelites sang, having miraculously crossed the Red Sea, after they had sacrificed and eaten the Pesah lamb. Hence, to reenact the Exodus at the seder, one doesn’t sing this “song at the sea” until after eating the Passover meal.¹⁷ Tabory seems to imply that reenacting is somehow a “more mythic” experience than remembering, as if singing and reenacting dissolves more thoroughly the “what they did then/ what we’re doing now” awareness, than if one merely spoke words about the Exodus as a sort of self-conscious mnemonic.

Without drawing the same distinction between *shirah* and *haggadah* (singing vs. telling the story), Cernea similarly suggests that the mythic dimension of the Passover ritual resides in its timeless quality:

The Seder works with time on many levels, presenting the Exodus as a historical event as well as paradigmatic sequence explaining the experience of the Jews for all times. The Exodus is both history a sequence of events, and myth, a timeless explanatory model for the society’s existence, and this “mythical history” is made objective and palpable through the objects and actions of the rituals.¹⁸

Bokser takes Fredman a step further to say that the style of the Mishnah itself that prescribes the rabbinic seder has a “timeless quality [especially] suited to the specific mythic nature of the Passover rite”:

In describing the order of Passover eve and in setting out the rules of etiquette in chronological sequence, the Mishnah creates a single narrative in which attributed comments and the occasional disputes are integrated. It formulates much of the narrative with a participle construction used for the present tense and therefore

suggests a timeless procedure that ostensibly remains unaffected by history.¹⁹

It’s the narrative’s linguistic style that gives it its “mythic” quality of timelessness, not necessarily something inherently “deeply symbolic” about the story itself.²⁰ Though given my Jungian predilections, I don’t rule that out.

Now Mishnaic legal traditions like these are traditionally understood as having been composed and recited in a *bet midrash* (a rabbinic “house of study”) and not necessarily at a meal. These traditions about the Passover seder may or may not be an exception that proves the rule, since it is possible that meals were indeed the original setting for some teachings about meals.²¹ However, in the rabbinic house of study, they get “homogenized” into precisely the kind of “timeless” style Bokser says is typical throughout the Mishnah. Of course, Bokser points to this language as a symptom of the rabbis’ “post-traumatic stress” response to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, especially when they described or prescribed practices that pertained to the Temple and priesthood connected with it. The mythic timeless linguistic style of the Mishnah taught in the *bet midrash* allowed the rabbis to continue to engage (at least in words) in the activities of the Temple after its physical destruction. Here, even words of Torah about the table in the Mishnah that were originally uttered in a *bet midrash* clothed the Passover rite in a mythic aura of timelessness, or better, in Eliade’s terms, a “return” *in illo tempore*. How much the more so when rabbis and their disciples took these words “about the table” out of the *bet midrash* and performed them at their banquets literally “over the table.”

Mythic language is also usually highly metaphorical. Metaphor has been said to be a way of simultaneously saying that one thing both is and is not another thing.²² In tannaitic tradition we have metaphorical words of Torah about the table in *bet midrash* discussions of the table (but not necessarily at the table), and in words specifically prescribed to be said over the table, like the scripture passages at the Passover seder that we just mentioned, and in most of the blessings to be recited at

the table. Perhaps the most well-known example of the first sort of metaphorical saying is the one from Mishnah Avot 3:3:

R. Simeon said, "Three who have eaten at one table and have not said words of Torah over it, it is as if they have eaten from sacrifices of the dead [mi-zivkhey metim], as it is said, "All the tables are full of vomit and filth without room for anything else [bli makom]." (Is. 28:8) But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten from the table of God, as it is written (Ezek. 41:22), "And he told me: This is the table that stands before the Lord."

Here tables over which three or more have eaten and said no words of Torah are compared to idolatrous sacrifices, revolting to the senses and clearly not to God (playing on a rabbinic term for God, "ha-Makom," lit. "the Place"). In contrast, the table over which three or more have eaten, and said words of Torah, is like the sacrificial altar of the Temple in Jerusalem (to which the verse from Ezekiel refers)—"the table of God." Eating plus Torah table talk is and is not the same as performing the sacrifices in God's Temple in Jerusalem, an awareness that the emphatic repetition of "as if" (*ke-ihu*) shows.

But what if one were to recite the very verse from Ezekiel 41:22: "This is the table that stands before the Lord" that is the "punchline" of Mishnah Avot 3:3 *while one was sitting at the dinner table*? Here the postrabbinic reception of this tradition makes it explicit that any discussion of Torah at the table transforms it into a "table that stands before the Lord." For that is exactly what R. Bahya ben Asher has in mind much later in the fourteenth century, when he uses Ezekiel 41:22 to begin his book *Shulhan Shel Arba* on how to use blessings, torah table talk, and other rabbinically prescribed table rituals to make one's table holy as if it were an altar before the Lord. To this end, he expects his readers to have his how-to book at their side at the table.²³ This contextualization of the demonstrative "this" of the scriptural passage from Ezekiel at a dinner table seems to put more emphasis on the "is" rather than the "is not" dimension of the metaphor.

Something similar occurs in rabbinic blessings over food, drink, and other activities at the table. In a sense, the formulation

of the most basic rabbinic blessings over food and drink at the table are fundamentally metaphorical. The participants at the rabbinic table who recite "Blessed are you God... who brings forth bread from the earth" know very well that the bread in front of them was not exactly put there in its present form directly by God. As ben Zoma is said to have said, Blessed be the Discerner of Secrets and Blessed be Who created all these to serve me. How many labors labored Adam until he found his bread to eat: he ploughed and sowed and harvested and sheaved and threshed and winnowed and assorted (the ears) and ground and sifted (the flour) and kneaded and baked and only after all this he ate. But I rise and find all these prepared before me.²⁴

This blessing is ostensibly an expression of gratitude to God for the progress and complexity of civilization and division of labor when one sees a big crowd of people, and may or may not have been uttered in the setting of a meal. Its reference to bread, and that immediately following it, is another saying of ben Zoma about what good and bad guests say to their hosts, suggest a meal setting as a possibility.²⁵ In any case, it certainly shows that sages at a rabbinic table were quite aware that God both did and did not "bring forth the bread" on the table in front of them directly "from the earth."

I don't mean to imply here that all "God talk" at the table is metaphorical and therefore mythic, because supernatural beings don't really exist (at least, not in the minds of critical outside observers of religious phenomena). Rather, there is also something to be said for the Eliade's understanding of myth as stories where the actors are supernatural beings, especially stories about the creation of how things now originally came to be *ab illo tempore*.²⁶ That's certainly applicable to the language of early rabbinic blessings, which as we've just seen, specifically refer to God's presence and involvement with what's served and who's being fed at the table. So to say the words "Blessed are you YHWH God who brings forth bread from the earth" and "who creates the fruit of the vine," "Blessed is YHWH our God from whose [table] we have eaten" (from *birkat hazim-mun*, the "blessing of invitation to the grace after meals), or "Blessed are you YHWH our God who has sanctified us by his commandments and commanded us and taken pleasure

in us, and made his holy Sabbath our possession out of love and favor, a remembrance of the work of creation... [and] the Exodus from Egypt... (from the Sabbath eve Kiddush)" is not only to talk about God's ongoing and past activity in general, but refer it to the specific things, places, and times that right now occasion their utterance. Even though these specific words of blessing were not necessarily fixed, as Tannaitic disputes over wording suggest, they were orally composed improvisations of certain basic syntactical formulae employed by the early rabbinic sages.²⁷

And as later medieval commentators pointed out, even the syntax of the blessings teach something important about the way human beings experience God. In particular, the typical shift from the second-person singular "You" of the first part of blessings for performing a commandment: "Blessed are You Lord" [*barukh atah Adonai*] to the third person singular in the second part: "who commanded us by His commandments [*asher kidshanu be-mitzvotav*]" ... "reminds us how God is both visible and invisible. God is visible through His actions and their effects in the world, but who He is in and of Himself we cannot see or know."²⁸ So, in a sense, even the syntactical formulation of rabbinic blessings themselves is metaphorical, stating that God is both visibly present and not present at one's table as one eats what, when, and how God commanded one to eat.²⁹

It seems that this "is/is not" awareness is quite important to the Tannaitic rabbis' own conceptualization of how their sacred myths of the Torah are to be deployed at meals. I would label this the "*ke-ilu* (as if) experience," after the expression used in two of the most well-known early rabbinic statements on how one is to experience "words of Torah" at a meal:

In every generation a person should view himself as if (*ke-ilu*) he himself went out of Egypt³⁰

and

if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of the Torah, it is as if (*ke-ilu*) they had eaten from the table of the

Omnipresent, for it is written (Ezekiel 41.22) "He said to me, 'This is the table which is before the LORD.'"³¹

In this way, whether one sings or says these words of Torah, it is not either a "reenactment" or a "recollection" of rabbinic myths—it is both/and. The separate awareness of the "past-ness" and "present-ness" is fused into single experience, prompted especially by specific visual cues provided by the food, drink, activities, and company at the table. It's the early rabbinic performance of the sympotic convention of the *fait divers*, the self-conscious use of a notable thing or event at the table to provoke an appropriate table conversation.

Demonstrative pronouns in what one actually says play a particularly crucial role connecting the past-ness of the story to the present-ness of the meal being experienced by the participants, though sometimes nonverbal cues can have the same effect.³² In "the four questions" immediately preceding R. Gamaliel's "answer," that is, his instructions to say *pesah*, *matzah*, and *maror* at the Passover seder, a father provides a script of questions that accentuate the demonstrative. "Why is this night different from all other nights? ... on this night it's all *matzah*, ... on this night *maror*; ... on this this night it's all roasted meat [i.e., the *pesah* lamb], ... on this night [we dip] twice." (m. Pesah. 10:4). Likewise, Rabban Gamaliel's talking points: "Whoever has not said these words/things [*devarim*] on Passover ... These are them [*ve-aylu ben*]: *Pesah*, *matzah*, *maror*." To each of these things immediately present at the table in word or in fact one is to attach verbally a scriptural verse or allusion to the past Passover story:

Pesah—because the Omnipresent "skipped over [*pasah*] the houses" of our fathers (Ex 12:27); *matzah*—because our fathers were redeemed in Egypt (Deut 16:3); *maror*—because the Egyptians "embittered [*mereru*] the lives" of our fathers in Egypt... as it is said, "you shall tell your child on that day, saying, because of this that YHWH did for me when I went out of Egypt."³³

The paronomasia of words in the scriptural allusions with names of the items at the table "*pesah* [the verb]/*pesah* [the noun], "

yatzab mi-mitzraim/matzab,” and “*mereru/maror*” even further bridges the conceptual gap between the past and present Passovers. I hear and see them as the same things even though I am also aware on some level they are not.

There is a kind of “associative thinking” encouraged here, what the medieval Jewish table conversationalist R. Bahya ben Asher describes as both “*mekaynin et mabshevato u-meshotetet*” (“directing one’s thought and having it ramble about”),³⁴ and what the modern scholar of midrash Marc Bregman would call “midrash as visualization.”³⁵ Bregman’s remarks here are particularly apt:

The process of midrashic visualization may be pictured as a kind of double move, from the scriptural sub-text to the mental image and from that image to the resultant midrashic text. Perhaps for this reason, the relatively ephemeral stage of mental imaging, which connects two more concrete textual expressions, has hitherto received relatively little scholarly attention. The problematic relation of the visual to the verbal might profitably be compared to what Freud described as the primary and secondary processes of the human psyche (what Jung referred to as the distinction between fantasy and directed thinking). The former, which is particularly characteristic of the original content of dreams, is more immediately visual, condensed and symbolic[,] while the latter is more logical, narrative and cognitive. Such directed thinking is employed in the secondary stage of translating the dream images into thoughts that can be expressed verbally.³⁶

While Bregman refers here to midrash taught in the rabbinic *bet midrash*, or to the literary texts in which those midrashim are preserved, what he says applies to midrash over the table as well, and even more so.

The scriptural passages spoken at the table not only themselves evoke the visual demonstratives that we have just discussed, but they also tell us to look at what and who is at the table. We have an even larger set of mental images at play, those prompted by the scriptural passages, those prompted by the sight of the food, drink, and company, at the table, and those prompted through the other senses—the tastes, smells, sounds, the physical feelings of hunger and satisfaction experienced

at the table. The single setting of the table provides a dream-like experience of “condensed, symbolic, immediately visual” images, and I would add gustatory, olfactory, auditory, and palpable “images” as well. Perhaps this is the real implication of the description of revelation at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24:11: *ve-yehesu et ha-elohim veyokhlu vayishtu* (“they dreamed God and they ate and drank”).³⁷ Thus, I conclude that this sort of “fixing and rambling of the mind’s eye” back and forth between Torah verses said, things done, and things seen at the table, this sort of “associative thinking” is the characteristically rabbinic, midrashic way of deploying myth at the dinner table. This kind of performance of midrash at the table is the distinctively mythic “mode of paying attention” (to borrow J. Z. Smith’s term) in early rabbinic table rituals.

NOTES

1. Concerning the Therapeutae see chapters 6–9 in this volume.
2. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010).
3. Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000); Victor Turner, *Social Dramas: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: de Gruyter, 1969).
4. Smart, *Worldviews*, 78. But see Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2013), who rightly criticizes the use of “the sacred” as a noun synonymous with a generic sort of ineffable *experience*, as Rudolf Otto does. Harvey says, “If ‘sacred’ should not be used as a noun, its traditional use as an adjective remains potent. While we need not accept that there are sacred people, places, times and things, we will fail to understand some of the dynamics that could be definitive of religion if we do not appreciate that others do accept such matters.” So when I refer to the rabbinic Jewish “traditional use” of the adjectival and verbal forms of *kadesh*, “to make something holy,” in what follows, it is in that spirit.
5. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy*; Jewish Literature and Culture (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 75–102, interprets “sacred myth” as *narrative texts* performed and applied in a Jewish liturgical context, the Passover seder, similarly. And see also Harvey,

- especially 163–166, for other examples of Jewish performances that categorize things as holy or not using food and texts.
6. See ensuing paragraph.
 7. See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), for this “is/is not” formulation as a way of speaking theologically.
 8. Indeed, modern critical understandings of “belief” as a static state of consciousness, or the inflated importance given to it for understanding religion have been challenged recently by folklorists such as Sabina Magliocco, “Beyond Belief: Context, Rationality and Participatory Consciousness,” *Western Folklore*, 71 no.1 (2012): 5–24; Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001); and religious studies scholars such as Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), and the research he cites.
 9. Marc Bregman, “Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization,” *Journal of Textual Reasoning* 2, no.1 (2003).
 10. Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “Communal Meals. II. Judaism,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).
 11. Bahya ben Asher Hlava, “Second Gate” in Brumberg-Kraus trans, *Shulhan Shel Arba*, <http://acadblogs.wheatoncollege.edu/jbk/>. For Hebrew see Charles Chavel, ed., *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, (Jerusalem: Mosad ha Rav Kuk, 1964), 493.
 12. Nigel Savage and Anna Stevenson, *Food for Thought: Hazon’s Curriculum on Jews, Food & Contemporary Life*. (New York: Hazon, 2007).
 13. From Ps.104:14.
 14. From Ex 12:27.
 15. From Ex 1:14.
 16. See chapter 1.
 17. Joseph Tabory, *Pesah Dorot: Perakim be-Toldot Lel Ha-Seder* (Tel Aviv: ha-Kibutsha-meuhad, 1996), 314.
 18. Ruth Fredman Cernea, *The Passover Seder: Afikoman in Exile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 95
 19. Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 84–85.
 20. Smart, *Worldviews*, 75.
 21. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 91–92, suggests some sort of midrash on Deut. 26:5–8 predates its inclusion in the rabbinic Passover seder liturgy as we know it, but does not specify whether it may have originated in the Bet Midrash or in discussions occurring at rabbinic Passover meals. Klein, *Torah in Triclinia*” provides persuasive evidence that rabbinic meals were the context for the some *midrash balakbah*, legal interpretation and application of Torah. See Klein, *Torah in Triclinia*” and chapter 1 in this volume.
 22. James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (London: Pearson, 2008), 87 (referring to theologian McFague’s discussion of metaphor).
 23. *Shulhan Shel Arba* (Chavel, *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, 457).
 24. *t. Ber.* 6:5 and parallels in *b. Ber* 58a and *y. Ber* 13c, IX.2, cited by Henry A. Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 52.
 25. Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy*, 52.
 26. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 87
 27. Joseph Heineman, *Hatefilab* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1964).
 28. *Shulhan Shel Arba* (Chavel, *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, 467). There is no actual subject in the second part of these blessings except the one implied in the verb. Examples of blessings over commandments are the Sabbath Kiddush, and the blessings before washing hands before a meal, and before eating *matzah* or *maror* at the Passover seder). In medieval Hebrew, the grammatical term for the form of third person verbs is *nistar*, literally, “hidden.”
 29. In R. Bahya’s medieval Hebrew, the grammatical term for the form of third person verbs is *nistar*, literally, “hidden.”
 30. *m. Pes* 10.4.
 31. *m. Avot* 3:3.
 32. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 93–94, also calls attention to demonstrative pronouns *zeh* (this) or *ayleh* (these) as formal stylistic features of the midrashic exegetical texts or oral traditions from the rabbinic academies that were redeployed liturgically in the rabbinic seder. That is, “*this* verse or word refers to . . . , *as it is written* . . .” I take it one step further by suggesting that the demonstratives are not only pointing to other illuminating texts, but also to material objects at the table.
 33. *m. Pes* 10:5; see Albeck, ed., 3:178, see esp. n5.
 34. Brumberg-Kraus, “The Ritualization of Scripture, 4, referring to what R. Bahya says in *Shulhan Shel Arba* (Chavel, *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, 496): And thus it is necessary that when one eats, he direct his thought [*mabshevato*] and that it ramble about [*mesbotetet*] the Holy One Blessed Be He over each and every bite according to the matter of ‘they envisioned God and they ate and drank.’ [Ex 24:11]

35. Bregman, "Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization," Full citation is now in note #9.
36. Bregman, "Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization."
37. See Brumberg-Kraus, "'Real Eating:' A Medieval Spanish Jewish View," where I discuss R. Bahya's midrash on this verse. He basically equates "words of Torah over the table" with a prophetic visionary experience of God (the *hazon* ["vision"] implied in the verb *ve-yehesu*) that is so palpable you could "eat it and drink it," an example of *akhilah vada'it* ("real eating").