

Keepers of the Vineyard and the Fence around the Torah: The Vineyard Metaphor in Rabbinic Literature

Lieve M. Teugels

Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands/Research Associate,
University of Pretoria, South Africa

g.m.g.teugels@pthu.nl

Abstract

Rabbinic texts apply the metaphor of the vineyard to the Torah as well as to Israel. Conceptual Metaphor Theory allows us to explain the parallel use of the vineyard metaphor for the two target domains, Israel and the Torah. The conceptual metaphor of the vineyard includes such aspects as the fence, the vines and the wine. The generic metaphor SOMETHING PRECIOUS IS A CULTIVATED PIECE OF LAND enables us to include related conceptual fields, such as a field of wheat, or another cultivated piece of land. By means of the principle of the “creation of similarity,” the Torah and Israel are linked in the rabbinic cultural world, using the notion of preciousness, *segulah*. The metaphor of the vineyard not only reflects, but also induces the similarity: conceived as vineyards, Israel and the Torah become precious in the minds of the people using and hearing or reading the metaphorical texts.

Keywords

metaphor, parables, midrash, vineyard, Torah, rabbinic

Introduction

In rabbinic literature, a vineyard, like other property that needs guarding or tending, is often equated with the Torah. In other words, the vineyard is a metaphor for the Torah. The vineyard metaphor is a structural metaphor that also contains elements such as a fence, a tower, a press, vines, workers, grapes and wine. The way this metaphor is structured is partly determined by culture: in some cultures a vineyard is surrounded by a stone wall, in others by a fence; some have a tower, some not; on some vineyards, the workers are slaves, on others they are tenant farmers. Yet in cultures where the vineyard metaphor is used, vineyards are an important way of cultivating the land, and wine is an important drink.

To get a taste of the topic of this paper, I will start by referring to a text in which we find many elements of the vineyard metaphor applied to the Torah (text A). This midrash in Sifre Deut 48, exploits the metaphor of the vineyard and its parts, in the form of an exegesis of Prov 24:30-31. Both this biblical base text as well as the midrash will recur at several points in this paper because

they are crucial to the formation of the vineyard metaphor as it is conceived and developed by the rabbinic sages.

A. *I went by the field of a slothful man* (Prov 24:30-31), who had already purchased a field, and by the vineyard of a person void of understanding (cont.), who had already purchased a vineyard—since he had already purchased the field or the vineyard and is called “man,” and called “person,” why is he called “slothful” and “void of understanding?” Because he had purchased a field or a vineyard but did not toil in them. What indicates that such a disciple will overlook two or three things in the Scriptural lesson [that he has studied]? The statement, and lo, *it was all grown over with thistles*. And what indicates that he will seek the true interpretation of the lesson but will not find it? The statement, *the face thereof was covered with nettles*. Hence it is said of him, *and the stone wall thereof was broken down*—although he sees that nothing remains in his hand, he sits [in judgment] nevertheless and pronounces the clean unclean and the unclean clean, and thus breaks down the fences erected by the Sages. What is his punishment? Solomon proceeded to specify it in the Writings: *he who breaches a fence will be bitten by a snake* (Eccl 10:8)—thus whosoever breaks down the fences erected by the Sages will be punished in the end. (...) ¹

The comparison of Torah to a vineyard and to wine is rife in midrash and other rabbinic texts,² but in Tanach, however, the vineyard is rather known as an image for Israel, such as in the well-known song of Isa 5:1-7, the mother of all vineyard metaphors, and its counterpart, Isa 27:2-7.³ In these songs we find the elements that recur in many later texts that feature the image of the vineyard: the vine, the tower, the press, the stones, the fence, thorns and thistles, sour grapes.⁴ How can this metaphor, the vineyard, be used for two such different concepts, Israel and the Torah, in Jewish interpretation? And what happened along the way that transformed the vineyard from an image for Israel to primarily an image for Torah?

1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

To flesh this out, I based myself on the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, and later revised and further developed by themselves and others.⁵ Following their way of formulating a metaphor, Torah is the “target domain,” vineyard the “source domain,” and together they form the conceptual metaphor TORAH IS A VINEYARD. The term “metaphor” refers to more than just one concept. TORAH IS A VINEYARD is shorthand for the entire conceptual domain of the vineyard (including fence, vines, wine etc.) as it combines with the

¹ Sifre Deut 48 (transl. Hammer, *Sifre*, 100–105 with some adaptations). Biblical quotes from the JPS translation. The midrash is also included in Midr. Prov 24. A variant of this midrash, also quoting Prov 24, is found in Avot R. Nat. A 24, attributed to Elisha ben Avuya. See note 20 about the latter text.

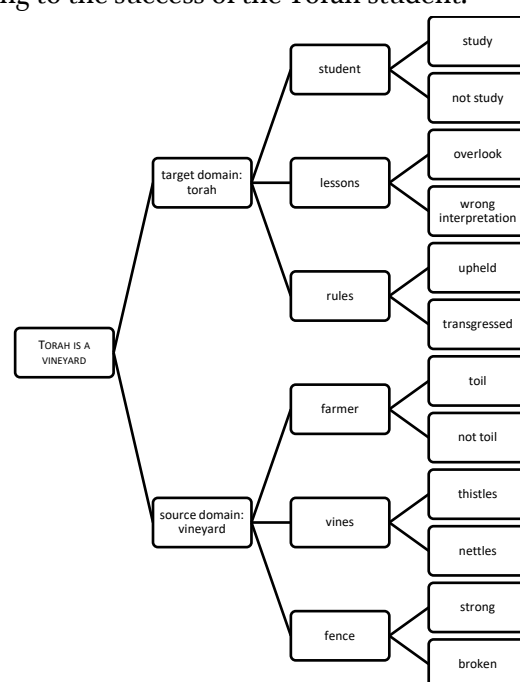
² See e.g. the continuation of Sifre Deut 48; M. Avot 4:20 (old wine in new vats, cf. Mat 9:14-17 and par.)

³ Cf. Gemünden, *Vegetationsmetaphorik*, 69.

⁴ So e.g. in the parable of the tenants in the vineyard in Mark 12:1-12, Matt 21:33-46 and Luke 20:9-19 as well as the Gospel of Thomas.

⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. I use the e-book and will therefore refer to the chapters. See also the more recent study of Lakoff, “Contemporary Theory” and Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory.” Osborne, “The Tree of Life,” discusses the metaphor Life is a tree in Proverbs and Psalms, based on CMT. Interestingly, the Tree of Life as whole is a metaphor used for Wisdom in Prov 3, and, in Jewish tradition, for the Torah. Osborne, 107, speaks of a “dead metaphor” in this respect.

conceptual domain of the Torah (including teachers, students, rules etc.).⁶ Typically, the source domain is a more concrete, tangible, or accessible element (here: vineyard) and the target domain is a more abstract, complex, or elusive concept (here: Torah). The process of combining the characteristics of the vineyard with that of the Torah is called “mapping”: we map certain elements of the source domain onto corresponding elements of the target domain. All the images attested in the midrash in Sifre can be fitted under either the target or the source domains of the metaphor TORAH IS A VINEYARD (see figure). The exact correspondence between the elements of the two domains will vary among the texts where the metaphor is found, depending on the intended message and the context. The “fence,” e.g., may refer to various aspects in the economy of the Torah, as we will see further when studying the fate of Adam (who made his fence too wide) and Elisha ben Avuya (whose broken fence destroyed his plants). In other texts, the “wine” may be added to the map, referring to the success of the Torah student.⁷



Not all elements of the source domain will be mapped onto the target domain in the conceptual metaphor. In the case of the TORAH IS A VINEYARD metaphor, for example, the wine press is not easily mapped onto the Torah, even though I won’t exclude the possibility.⁸

⁶ An earlier, similar theory is the *Bildfeld* model developed by Weinrich, “Münze und Wort.” An English discussion of this model is found in Jäkel, “Kant, Blumenberg, Weinrich.” This approach is also advanced in Gemünden, *Vegetationsmetaphorik* and Zimmermann, *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu*, 40 and passim.

⁷ The terminology of “mapping” with respect to the vineyard metaphor is also used by Lanier, “Mapping the Vineyard.” An analysis of the process involved in getting from a linguistic metaphor (metaphor used in language, as in our case, rabbinic texts) to a conceptual metaphor (metaphor used in thought) is given by Gerard Steen, “From Linguistic to Conceptual Metaphor,” in Gibbs and Steen, *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, 57–77.

⁸ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, ch. 3 discuss this in terms of “highlighting and hiding” aspects of a metaphorical concept. In chapter 11 they discuss “used” and “unused” part of a metaphor. They add that the “unused” parts are sometime used anyway, be it not in everyday literal language, but in, e.g., poetic language. Their example is the THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS metaphor: “he has constructed a theory” is everyday language, but “the theory is covered with gargoyles” may be used in more imaginative language. In the case of metaphors used in midrash, the demands of

Three notes need to be made about CMT with respect to the present study of rabbinic texts. First, whereas many metaphors are universal,⁹ some metaphors are particular to a specific language or culture. E.g. the XX IS A VINEYARD metaphor will not work in a place that is unsuitable for growing vines or a culture where wine is not appreciated. The fact that it is used as a metaphor for things that have special value (Israel, Torah) in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature confirms that wine is considered valuable and has mostly positive associations.

Second, the most important and distinguishing point of *conceptual* metaphor theory is that metaphors not only reside in language, but also in thought. We use the metaphor to frame an abstract concept: e.g., speakers of English think of anger in terms of fire, and therefore the metaphorical expression “burning with anger” makes sense. In addition, metaphors not only make similarities visible, they induce them.¹⁰ Sometimes the abstract, metaphorical sense of a word even re-influences the concrete use of the term.¹¹ This “creation of similarity”¹² holds for abstract terms for which the same metaphor is used as well. In the conclusion of this paper the double use of the vineyard metaphor, for Israel and for the Torah, will be examined against this theory.¹³

Third, conceptual metaphors not only occur in poetic or literary language, but also in everyday speech, and sometimes the distinction between these genres is unclear. With respect to the metaphor ANGER IS FIRE, we can say that our anger was kindled, or flaring, or quenched, without engaging in specifically poetic language.¹⁴ The firm distinctions that are traditionally made between prose and poetry, everyday speech and literary language, fiction and legal texts, are therefore questioned and even abolished in this approach.

This has obvious repercussions for the discussion of rabbinic texts, such as presented in this study, since the relationship between law and literature, halakhah and aggadah is germane to our corpus. The question as to the distinction between law and literature is not limited to metaphor studies but is topical in recent Jewish Studies scholarship in general. Narrative or literary approaches are used for the analysis of texts that straddle the border between halakhah and aggadah, such as legal stories in the Babylonian Talmud, and the blurred lines between these genres are laid bare. Among others, Jeffrey Rubenstein and Barry Wimpfheimer have argued that the same methods used for the literary study of aggadah should be applied to legal stories such as found, specifically, in the Babylonian Talmud.¹⁵

the target domain, the midrash, are usually decisive in selecting which elements of the source domain will be used. That wine can make one drunk is, e.g., not often used in when the TORAH IS A VINEYARD metaphor is employed but there are cases where that aspect of the metaphor is useful: see the example in note 26.

⁹ Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” 19 gives as example KNOWING IS SEEING.

¹⁰ Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” 16; Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, ch. 1 and passim.

¹¹ Not using CMT but other approaches to metaphor, Lynn Kaye, “Time and Fixity” investigates the metaphorical use of the verb “fixing” for time in rabbinic literature. Kaye demonstrates, among other things, how the metaphorical use of “fixing,” for time, in its turn triggered new meanings for the concrete use of the term in the case of a “fixed” sukkah. See Kaye, “Time and Fixity,” 139, with reference to Rubenstein, “The Sukkah,” 132-33.

¹² “The Creation of Similarity” is the title of ch. 22 in Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

¹³ Gail Labovitz, *Marriage and Metaphor* (also referenced by Kaye) also bases her study of marriage in rabbinic literature on CMT.

¹⁴ Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” 14-15.

¹⁵ See Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories; Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*; Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law*. In ch. 2 of the latter book, “Deconstructing Halakhah and Aggadah,” Wimpfheimer refers to the hermeneutic expectations that are different if texts are presented, or assumed to be, “aggadah” or “halakhah” and questions the usefulness of the

Reverting to our topic, the use of the XX IS A VINEYARD metaphors in songs (Isaiah), poetry (Wisdom texts), and parables (NT and rabbinic), can be considered literary, narrative, even poetic. We will see, however, that this literary language spilled over to domains that are not generally considered poetic, such as in the halakhic texts about the “fence around the Torah,” and the “vineyard of Yavne.”¹⁶

2. A Vineyard, *yetsiat mitsrayim*, Israel, and the Torah in a Rabbinic Parable

I will now proceed to study a rabbinic parable, a *mashal*, that features primarily the metaphor of ISRAEL IS A VINEYARD (text B). I will demonstrate, however, that the metaphor TORAH IS A VINEYARD is there in a way as well. The *mashal* is part of a midrash on Exod 32:11: “But Moses implored the LORD his God, saying, ‘Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.’”

B. Another interpretation of *whom You delivered* (הוצאת) *from the land of Egypt* (Exod 32:11). Why did he see it fit to make mention here of the departure from Egypt (יציאת מצרים)? R. Abin in the name of R. Simeon b. Jehozadak said: **It can be compared to a king** who had an uncultivated field and who said to a tenant-laborer: “Go improve it and convert it into a vineyard (כרם).” The laborer departed and tended the field and planted it as a vineyard. The vines grew and produced wine, which, however, became sour. When the king saw that the wine had become sour, he said to the laborer: “Go and cut it all down; what is the use to me of a vineyard which produces vinegar?” But the laborer pleaded: “O my lord and king consider what sums you did lay out before the vineyard was planted (כמה יציאות הכרם הוצאת על הכרם), and now you seek to cut it all down. Do not give me the reply: ‘But its wine becomes sour.’ For this is due to the newness of the vineyard, and a freshly-planted vineyard cannot produce good wine.” **Similarly**, when Israel made the Golden Calf, God intended to destroy them, but Moses pleaded: “Lord of the Universe! Did You not bring them forth from Egypt (ממצרים הוצאתם), a place of idol-worshippers? They are yet young,” for it says, *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son* (Hos 11:1). Be patient with them yet awhile and go with them, and they will yet perform good

dichotomy for the analysis of legal narratives. The forced distinction between legal texts and narrative is also reflected in the binary distinction that is made since the early beginnings of Jewish Studies between Halakhic and Aggadic Midrashim despite the fact that much material in so-called Halakhic Midrashim is plainly aggadic (e.g. parables). Moreover, midrash as a rule completely ignores poetic features of biblical texts, such as poetic parallelism. See, among many others, Fränkel, *Darkhei ha-agadah vehamidrash*; Sipur ha-agadah. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories* acknowledges that Fränkel “laid the groundwork for all subsequent literary analysis of rabbinic stories,” (10) but deplores that the latter deliberately overlooked the literary as well as the cultural contexts of the stories. In reaction, Rubenstein advances an analysis that includes source-, redaction, and literary analysis of all rabbinic stories, with attention for both literary and cultural contexts. More recently Mandel, *The Origins of Midrash* has argued that midrash originated as a legal and educational, rather than exegetical, genre.

¹⁶ About the vineyard metaphor applied to the academy in Yavne, see Klein, “Oral Towns,” 29. See the excursus further in this paper.

deeds (מעשים טובים) before You.” This is why it is said: *whom You delivered from the land of Egypt.*¹⁷

In this mashal,¹⁸ the people of Israel is compared to a vineyard. Isa 5 is not quoted explicitly, but much of its imagery is there, notably the sour wine, which allegedly comes from new vines.

Important is the Biblical anchoring of the midrash, i.e. the story of the Golden Calf, which is intrinsically interwoven with the giving of the Torah on Sinai that followed the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Indeed, in the Biblical account, Moses is still on Sinai when the people decide to build the calf. When he returns from the mountain and sees what has happened in his absence, he smashes the tablets with the Torah. The text in Tanach where the base verse originates from (Exod 32), contains a play on the root יצא and the concept of the exodus (*yetsiat mitsraim*), a play that is extended in the mashal. In v. 7, it is God who blames Moses and refers to “*your people, whom you* (i.e. Moses) brought out of the land of Egypt.” This is in flat contradiction to the first commandment (Exod 20:2) where God presents Himself as “the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” Yet in our base verse, v. 11, Moses begs God to spare the people for the very reason that He brought them out of Egypt, using the words “Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt.” Thus, Moses endeavors to restore the original relation between God and the people He delivered and to whom He gave the Torah.

In the mashal, the king appoints a farmer to turn an unspecified field into a vineyard, by tending to it and planting vines on it. This process of cultivation is costly. In the mashal, this costliness is expressed in terms that remind of the *yetsiat mitsraim* by means of an additional wordplay on the verb יצא: The tenant farmer reminds the king of how much he spent on the vineyard with the words: כמה יציאות הוצאת על הכרם. In this mashal, the vineyard is primarily applied to the people of Israel, using the conceptual metaphor ISRAEL IS A VINEYARD. This shows that the old biblical metaphor is still in use in rabbinic texts. The text uses the traditional images of the vineyard metaphor: the tenant wine farmer, the planting, the vines—applied to the people of Israel, the (sour) wine, and the threat of the destruction of the vine. The sour wine is attributed to the young age of the vines and their grapes. Important elements on the mashal side that return in the nimshal are: the improved field-turned-vineyard, the root יצא, the sour wine, the young vines, and the expenses that warrant saving the vineyard. Important corresponding elements on the nimshal (application) side are: the election of Israel (“Your people”), *yetsiat mitrayim*, the neglect of the commandments (the Golden Calf), the “youngness” of the people, and the expectation of future good deeds. By means of the recurrent root יצא, the expenses of the owner towards the cultivation of the barren field into a vineyard, on the mashal side, are equated with God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt on the nimshal side.

Apart from the obvious presence of the ISRAEL IS A VINEYARD conceptual metaphor, there is evidence for the TORAH AS VINEYARD metaphor in this text. This is, first, due to the biblical text on which the midrash draws, i.e. Exod 32, which, as we have seen, contains a play on the words of the first commandment (“Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt”). The image of the vineyard, and specifically the (sour) wine, forges the link between the target domains ISRAEL and

¹⁷ Exod Rab. 43:9 transl. Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. 2, 505 with some adaptations.

¹⁸ For easy reference I mark the introductory formula of the mashal proper (or simply “mashal”), as well as the introduction of the nimshal, usually “similarly” (כך), in bold type. The mashal-nimshal terminology is common in rabbinic studies, see, e.g., Stern, *Parables in Midrash*; Fränkel, “Hamashal,” in *Darkhe ha-aggadah*, vol. 2, 323-93; Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot*, 7–19. It has also been adopted in some studies of NT parables, such as Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*.

TORAH. Indeed, the sour wine is the reason why the owner wanted to destroy the vineyard, which in the *nimshal*, in line with the biblical base text, is put on a par with the making of the Calf by Israel, their first act of flagrant neglect of the first commandment of the Torah.

Second, Moses' final words in the *nimshal* emphasize the connection to the Torah: "Be patient with them yet awhile and go with them, and *they will yet perform good deeds*," i.e. when they "grow up," the people of Israel will no longer sin like the did by making the Calf. To be sure, the term "good deeds" is used here rather than "commandments," or "Torah." But since the "bad deed" of the *mashal*, i.e. producing sour wine, is in the *nimshal* equated with an evident transgression of a biblical commandment, i.e. the construction of the Calf, also the "good deeds" (good wine in the *mashal*/metaphor) can by inference be read as a reference to doing the commandments of the Torah. "Torah and good deeds" are a well known duo in rabbinic literature, and the distinction between them is not always clear.¹⁹ When a clear distinction is made between Torah and good deeds, these are often complementary: no Torah without good deeds.²⁰ If one may deduce from this that Torah leads, ideally, to good deeds in the rabbinic mind, this would support the idea that the "young" Israel in the above midrash will eventually do good deeds when they start implementing the Torah which they just received.²¹

A note about Torah is due here. In the texts studied in this paper, Torah refers to the rabbinic Torah in its broader scope, including the Oral Torah, and in some views even good deeds.²² The concept of the Dual Torah developed gradually in rabbinic literature. In tannaitic sources we already find the notion that Torah was not acquired all at once at the revelation on Sinai. It was a long process, that involved more than one revelation, even before Sinai, and experience and study afterwards, i.e. midrash, a feature of Oral Torah.²³ In our text from Exodus Rabbah, a late midrash, we can expect to find a fully developed ideology of the Dual Torah.²⁴

¹⁹ E.g. M. Avot 3:11, 6:9, b. Ber. 61a, Sanh. 99a.

²⁰ See the traditions *attributed to* Elisha ben Avuya in Avot R. Nat. A 24, e.g. in section 2: "A person who doesn't have good deeds (מעשים טובים) but has learned Torah, what is he like? Like a person who builds by placing the bricks first, and then stones. Even if a little water comes, it will topple (the building) immediately." In the continuation such a person is compared to a cup with a round base, and a horse without bridle. Conversely, the stories *about* Elisha himself, notably as they are found in the Babylonian Talmud, testify to the fact that Torah and sinful behavior can coexist. This coexistence, embodied in the figure of the sinful sage Elisha, is, however, perceived as a major problem which the Bavli tries to come to terms with. This will be discussed further in this paper. See Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 64-104.

²¹ See about the intrinsic connection between Israel and Torah in the Mekhilta, which can in many ways be extrapolated to all rabbinic literature, see Kadushin, "Rabbinic Concept of Israel."

²² Constanza Cordoni demonstrates that in the late rabbinic work *Seder Elishahu*, and notably in its parables, Torah becomes an all-encompassing category which, apart from Scripture, Mishnah, midrash, halakhot and aggadot also includes good deeds. Cf. Cordoni, *Seder Elishahu*, 138-40.

²³ See Kadushin, "Rabbinic Concept of Israel." That this broader view of Torah was already present in tannaitic midrash is shown by the following two examples: In Mek. Rab. Shim. Baḥodesh 9 (to Exod 20:15) we read that Israel "interpreted the divine word as soon as they heard it," which shows the intricate relationship between Torah and midrash. In Sifre Deut 48, a chapter that is quoted several times in the present study, Deut 11:22 "all this commandment," is interpreted as not only Scripture but also "Midrash, halakha and aggadah."

²⁴ Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 84-99: "The Ideological Construction of Torah in the Mouth" describes the tension between the two aspects of Oral Torah, i.e. the text-interpretive tradition, and the independent rabbinic traditions, in and after tannaitic literature and their gradual mediation in the concept of Torah. About the two main meanings of Oral Torah for the Sages ("passed on orally" and "unfolded through intensive analysis, interrogation and debate") see also Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing," 39. For the cultural differences between the ideologies of Oral Torah in Palestinian/Galilean rabbinic sources and Babylonian sources, see especially the introduction (1-27) in

With this in mind and in view of the well-known, even tannaitic,²⁵ rabbinic use of the vineyard imagery for Torah, it is safe to conclude that two concepts, the people of Israel, and the Torah, are connected to the deliverance from Egypt in this text. In other words, we find a combination of the ISRAEL IS A VINEYARD and TORAH IS A VINEYARD conceptual metaphors. The images of vineyard and vines apply to Israel, but the sour wine applies to their initial neglect of the Torah. This indicates a selective use of certain aspects of the XX IS A VINEYARD conceptual metaphor: whereas the vineyard and the vines, i.e., the plants, can be used as metaphors for either Israel and the Torah, the product, wine is easier associated with Torah than with Israel. This may have to do with the intrinsic qualities of the parts of the source in relation to the target, or with the focus of the midrash.²⁶ The combination of the two metaphors reflects the promise that Israel will eventually “bear good grapes that will yield good wine,” i.e. it refers to Israel’s gradual development into a people that lives with the Torah, understood in the rabbinic way as including Oral Torah in all its facets, including good deeds. Torah and Israel are two sides of a coin.

3. Segulah

The vineyard metaphor is not the only one used for Israel and/or the Torah. Other images are used in rabbinic texts to depict the preciousness of both. Coins and other precious items are used as well, because these too can be preserved, protected, multiplied etc.²⁷ As a metaphor for Israel, sometimes not a vineyard but another type of cultivated land is found. Text C contains a parable from the Mekhilta that features an unspecified field that is not turned into a vineyard, but cultivated otherwise. Also in this parable, the context is the deliverance from Egypt: God acquired Israel as his special valuable possession by *delivering them from Egypt*.

C. Treasured possession (סגולה) among all the peoples (Exod 19:5). Just as a person’s treasured possession means the most to him, so Israel means the most to Me. Just as a person’s treasured possession is dear to him, so Israel is dear to Me. **They told this parable. To what is the matter similar?** To one to whom many fields fell as an inheritance (ירושה) and he stood up and acquired (קנה) one for himself. And that one was the most dear to him. Why? Because he acquired it for himself. **So** even though the entire world belongs to He who spoke, and the world came into being, only Israel is dear to him. And why? Because

Elman and Gershoni, *Transmitting Jewish Traditions*. For the equation of Torah, good deeds, and other aspects usually assumed to be part of Oral Torah in another late rabbinic work, see Cordoni, *Seder Eliyahu*, 138–40 (note 19).

²⁵ See note 2

²⁶ Sometimes the metaphor TORAH IS WINE does not quite work. In Sifre Deut 48 subsequent voices question a metaphor and switch to a new one: “Or might one think that just as water does not make the heart to rejoice, so words of Torah do not make the heart to rejoice? (No,) for Scripture says *For thy love is better than wine* (Song 1:2)—just as wine makes the heart to rejoice, so do words of Torah make the heart to rejoice, as it is said, *The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart* (Ps. 19:9).” And, alternatively: “Or is it possible that just as wine is sometimes bad for the head and bad for the body, so too are words of Torah? (No,) for Scripture says, *Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance* (Song 1:3) etc.”

²⁷ For the metaphor of money as applied to Torah see e.g. the mashal of the two brothers who inherit from their father in Sifre Deut 48, the same chapter that also includes the mashal with which we started this study. The mashal of the two brothers shares the imagery of the money with the NT parables of the Talents (Matt 25:10-3) and the Minas (Luke 19:12-27). Sifre Deut 48 mentions yet other metaphors of precious things used for Tora, such as silver, gold, glass, a special bird, water, and oil. Also Israel is compared to a treasure (in a field!) in certain parables, e.g. Mekh. R. Ishm. and Mekh. R. Shim. Beshalah to Exod 14:5. This text is discussed in Teugels, *The Meshalim*, 134-42

He took them from Egypt and redeemed them from the house of slaves. Therefore it is said:
*You shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples.*²⁸

In this *mashal*, a person owns many fields, because of an inheritance (ירושה), yet he only “acquires” (קנה)²⁹ one. This means that he invests in it and cultivates it, so that it really becomes his “own.” The midrash deals with the distinction between simply “owning something,” e.g. because of an inheritance, and acquiring something, so that it becomes a “treasured possession,” the סגולה of the base text.³⁰ The continuation of the base verse, Exod 19:5, reads “for all the earth is Mine.” The midrash bears on the distinction made in this verse between God’s owning the whole world, yet having a special relationship with Israel.

In the parable, it is not stated that the person cultivated the field by turning it into a vineyard specifically. The reason for this may be that the distinction in the base verse between “the whole earth is Mine” and “You shall be My treasured possession” calls not so much for a focus on the specific nature of the cultivation, on the source side, but rather on the selection, and the cultivation as such, which corresponds to the election of Israel on the target side of the metaphor.³¹ Also in this verse, the election of Israel is related to the covenant, which, from Israel’s side means the keeping of the commandments. Yet, the focus in the midrash is rather on the divine side here, on God’s redeeming Israel from the slavery in Egypt: therefore the owner of the field is put in the spotlight rather than the specific qualities of the cultivated land.

Since other fields are used with a similar purpose, the vineyard seems to be only one instance of a conceptual metaphor that is part of a larger, more generic conceptual metaphor³² that, on the source side, contains all sorts of cultivated land including, e.g., a wheat field.³³ The generic conceptual metaphor used in texts B and C would thus be: ISRAEL IS A CULTIVATED PIECE OF LAND. The properties of all cultivated lands are similar: they are first prepared, then planted, then tended and often fenced in. They yield produce, which can be good or bad, and they can be threatened by weeds, fire and destruction, even a falling fence.

Does the same hold for the Torah? Already in the midrash in *Sifre Deut*, the field as well as the vineyard from the verses *I went by the field of a slothful man and by the vineyard of a person void of understanding* (Prov 24:30-31), are applied to the Torah. Hence, this midrash, like many others, employs the conceptual metaphor TORAH IS A CULTIVATED PIECE OF LAND. We will investigate further

²⁸ Mekh. Rab. Shim. Bahodesh to Exod 19:5. Translation Teugels, *The Meshalim*, 403.

²⁹ The root קנה is found in rabbinic texts with respect to Torah as well, as in *kinyan torah* (m. Avot 6). This expression is in essence also a metaphor that is based on the conception that Torah is a property that can be acquired. In Prov 8:23 the same root is applied to Wisdom, which is in rabbinic literature identified with the Torah.

³⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 745 explains that סגולה is a property in which one invests. See e.g. b. Baba Batra 52a, where a Torah scroll is given as an example of a *segulah*, a safe investment.

³¹ See note 8.

³² The various scholars of CMT refer to these generic metaphors with various terms. Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors we Live By*, ch. 13 refer to “simple ontological metaphors” (e.g. TIME IS A RESOURCE and LABOR IS A RESOURCE can be both brought down to the metaphor AN ACTIVITY IS A SUBSTANCE.). Grady, “THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS Revisited,” refers to “primary” and “basic” metaphors (ORGANIZATION IS A PHYSICAL STRUCTURE would be the basic metaphor underlying the more “composite” metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS). Zoltán Kövecses, “Metaphor. Does it constitute or reflect cultural models?,” in Gibbs and Steen, *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, 167–88 uses the terms “constitutive” and “generic” for such basic metaphors. See also Kövecses, “Levels of Metaphor”. I will use the term “generic.”

³³ See e.g. the parables of the sower and the weeds between wheat in Matt 13. Gemünden, *Vegetationsmetaphorik*, discusses various vegetation metaphors in the Bible and its literary context from this perspective. Unfortunately, she has not included rabbinic texts in her study.

whether an even more generic conceptual metaphor may be behind both ISRAEL IS A CULTIVATED PIECE OF LAND and TORAH IS A CULTIVATED PIECE OF LAND.

4. WISDOM IS A VINEYARD

There seems to be a development in rabbinic literature towards an almost univocal application of *everything* to the Torah (water, fire, treasure, wood, vineyard, wine etc.),³⁴ even to the disadvantage of Israel. This universal application of all images to the Torah may lead to doubts about the meaning of the metaphors: if most things are automatically applied to the Torah, how relevant is the TORAH IS A VINEYARD metaphor?³⁵ Yet, this metaphor has deep roots: it can be traced to certain texts from the ancient Jewish Wisdom Literature.³⁶ The image is well-developed in Ben Sira 24:18-22. Wisdom speaks there, referring to herself as a vine, with sweet fruit. Eating and drinking the grapes and the wine (21) are put on a par with “obeying” and “working” wisdom (v. 22),³⁷ verbs that are commonly associated with the “hearing” and “doing” of the Torah even in Tanach.³⁸

In Prov 24:30-31, as we have seen, a vineyard metaphor is applied to the domain of wisdom and understanding as well. The vineyard, as well as the field, are used there as images for wisdom, not for Israel.³⁹ Together with the fence or wall, and the nettles or thistles, which feature in the poetic parallelisms of this text, they constitute metaphors with two domains, the vineyard or field source domain on the one hand, and the wisdom target domain on the other.

The emphasis on wisdom, often personified as a woman, in biblical and extra biblical Wisdom Literature, is in many respects the precursor of the Logos theology found in Philo and the Gospel of John.⁴⁰ In rabbinic literature, later, we find the radical move from “all Logos and Sophia talk to the Torah alone” (Boyarin).⁴¹ The move away from Israel as the target domain of the vineyard metaphor, towards Wisdom, the Logos and the Torah as the new target domains, is a consequence of this emphasis on wisdom. Yet, the break in rabbinic texts is not absolute, as it is always Israel that needs to perform and study the Torah. Moreover, many rabbinic parables depict Israel in terms of a vineyard without reference to the Torah.⁴²

³⁴ Several of these metaphors, with textual examples, are discussed by Kister, “Allegorical Interpretation.” Kister shows that the metaphors are often shared by other than rabbinic traditions, notably Philo and church fathers. See about the metaphors of money and other precious items for Torah, Teugels, “Money and Torah.”

³⁵ Dschulnigg, *Rabbinische Gleichnisse*, 12-13, sees a similar unilateral focus in the NT parables on the *Basileia*, the Kingdom of God.

³⁶ Besides the texts to be discussed, see also e.g. Job 15:33; 24:6.

³⁷ Those who obey me, will never have cause for embarrassment; those who will work me will be safe from sin (ὕπακούων μου οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσεται, καὶ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐχ ἀμαρτήσουσιν).

³⁸ Comp. Exod 24:7: *בַּעֲשֵׂה וְנִשְׁמַע*.

³⁹ The translation of *חסר-לב* as “void of understanding,” is not self-evident. It can also have the meaning of “heartless,” or in parallel to “lazy,” as “unproductive” (see v. 33-34). V. 32 “I took it to heart” (*אָשִׁית לִבִּי*) may be a reflection of *לב-לב*. However, in combination with the second half of that verse (“I saw it and learned a lesson”), we can infer that v. 30 is also about wisdom, in a broad sense.

⁴⁰ In early Christian literature and Christian art, Jesus is often symbolized as a vine, which may be related to his identification with the Logos. See already John 15:5.

⁴¹ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 129. See e.g. Gen Rab. 2; Midr. Prov 8. See also recently Schafer, *Two Gods in Heaven*.

⁴² See e.g. Ruth Rab., proem, 7:4.

5. TORAH IS A VINEYARD in Sifre

The midrash in Sifre with which I started this paper (text A) comments on the verses from Proverbs that were just discussed (Prov 24:30-31). The vineyard imagery, but also that of the field, which is put on a par with the vineyard because of the parallelism that is already there in Tanach, are applied one on one to the Torah, as we have seen. The “man” is “such a disciple”; he is “slothful” and “void of understanding” because he overlooks lessons of Torah etc. Besides the vineyard, which is the metaphorical expression for the Torah, we encounter the thistles, which constitute an oft-used image for transgression.⁴³ “Toiling” (עמל) in the vineyard, which in this case is neglected, is another metaphorical expression that is often used for studying and doing the Torah in rabbinic texts.⁴⁴

The “stone wall was broken down,” is applied in the midrash to the neglect of the Torah student, of which it is later in the midrash stated that he “thus breaks down the fences erected by the Sages (ופורץ גדרם של חכמים).” The broken wall in the proverb is literal, but it is interpreted in the midrash in a metaphorical way, as standing for bad judgment in matters of purity. This is, in its turn, rendered in the midrash in a metaphorical way as “breaking down the fences of the sages.” In this way “wall” and “fences” are equated, with the bad judgment in purity issues serving as the target domain that connects both source domains. “Breaking the fences erected by the sages,” being a metaphor itself, is presented as the midrashic interpretation of “breaking the stone wall” from the proverb. Thus, “fences” is at the same time source and target domain, and the boundaries between the two domains fade. At the end of the midrash, an additional proof-text, Eccl 10:8, using the same expression “breaking the fence” with exactly the same words for “breaking” and “fence” as in the midrash of Prov 24:31, is adduced: “What is his punishment? Solomon proceeded to specify it in the Writings: *he who breaches a fence (ופורץ גדר) will be bitten by a snake (Eccl 10:8).*”

This verse from Qohelet may have served as the connection between Adam (who was well acquainted with a serpent) and his putting up, and breaking, of a fence around his words, as found in Avot Rab. Nat. B 1, a text to be discussed in the following section.

6. A Fence around the Torah

The use of “fencing” related to Torah is well-known in rabbinic literature, most predominantly in the expression “building a fence around the Torah.”⁴⁵ This is the case in texts that are traditionally dubbed “halakhic” as well as in “aggadic” passages, midrash and otherwise. As explained in the beginning of this paper, this distinction is not necessary important, neither when it comes to the use of metaphors as defined in CMT, nor in the study of rabbinic stories in general.⁴⁶ The idea of a fence around the Torah would be incomprehensible if the comparison of the Torah to a vineyard or another sort of cultivated land would not be a common concept. In CMT terms, the expression a “fence around the Torah” is a metaphorical entailment or inference: we know that vineyards (or

⁴³ Cf. Isa 27:3-4 (about a watching a vineyard, and weeds), which is the source text for many later interpretations; Prov 24:30-31. Matt 13:24-30 uses the similar image of weeds sown between grain.

⁴⁴ עמלי תורה (laboring in the Torah) is an expression for students of the Torah. See e.g. Deut Rab. Re'eh 4:8; Song Rab. 6:11; Eccl Rab. 11:1.

⁴⁵ Cf. m. Avot 1:1: “Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence (סיג) for the Torah.” See further e.g. m. Avot 3:13; Sifre Deut 16 on Deut 1:16; Mekh. Rab. Ish. Pisha 6 (to Exod 12:8); Avot Rab. Nat. A 1:5; Avot Rab. Nat. B 1:5.

⁴⁶ See note 15.

fields etc.) can be fenced in; and Torah is viewed as a vineyard (or field etc.); hence, in view of this metaphor, Torah can be “fenced in” by the sages.⁴⁷

I want to suggest that it is specifically the fence around the vineyard, as opposed to any other sort of cultivated land, that gave rise to the expression “fence around the Torah.” The word for fence that is mostly used in rabbinic texts that refer to “a fence around the Torah,” סייג, alternates with גדר in rabbinic Hebrew to refer to a fence around a vineyard in non-metaphorical parlance.⁴⁸ This is confirmed by text D1 below, from Avot de Rabbi Natan B 1, where we find a combination of the two domains of the metaphor—the vineyard and the Torah—both combined with the fence.

D1. And make a hedge (סייג) around the Torah (m. Avot 1:1).

A vineyard which is surrounded by a fence (גדר) is unlike a vineyard not surrounded by a fence. No one should make the fence (גדר) more important than what is to be fenced in, for if the fence falls down, then it will cut down the plants (קיצץ את הנטיעות). For this is what we find in connection with Adam: he treated the fence as more significant than what was essential. When the fence fell down, it cut down the plants.⁴⁹

In the continuation, the midrash elaborates on the (unnecessary) hedge or fence that Adam made by adding to Eve that they should not touch the tree (Gen 3:2-3) whereas God had only commanded that they were not allowed to eat from it (Gen 2:16-17), which enabled the serpent to act. As stated above, the connection between the serpent and the fence around the Torah may have originated in the rabbinic reading of Eccl 10:8.⁵⁰ Because the connection of the fence to Adam recurs in various ways in the following sections, I quote it in full:

D2. Where are we told that Adam made a hedge about his words . When the Holy One, blessed by He, said to him: *You may eat freely of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat* (Gen 2:16-17). Now, from the words of Eve we learn that Adam hedged her in. The serpent debated with himself, saying: “If I go to Adam and speak to him, I know that he will not listen to me. Instead, I will go to Eve because I know that women are influenced by everyone.” He went and said to her: *Did God say, “You shall not eat of any tree of the garden”* (Gen 3:1). She said to him: *No, we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die”* (Gen 3:2-3). As soon as the serpent heard Eve’s words, he found the weak spot in her argument.⁵¹

⁴⁷ See note 50 below.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Mekh. Rab. Ish. Pisha 1 (to Exod 12:1). “Baruch son of Neriah! There is no vineyard, what need is there of a fence (ברוך בן נריה אם אין כרם אין סייג)?”

⁴⁹ Kister, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 3; Saldarini, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan Version B*, 29.

⁵⁰ Eccl. 10:8 is also adduced as a proof-text in a legal story that deals with a literal snake bite in y. Avod. Zar. 2:2, 40d-41a. Also in that story, the verse comes as proof for the “violation of the fence of the sages.” This text is discussed by Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law*, 56 who emphasizes that it is “the sages who erect the fence, not the law that enforces the sages’ hands.”

⁵¹ Transl. Saldarini, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan Version B*, 31-32. This is also found in Avot Rab. Nat. A, which misses text D, Gen. Rab. 19:3, Midr. Ps. 1:9 and PRE 13.

7. Elisha ben Avuya

The expression “cut down the young plants” (קיצץ את הנטיעות), which refers to actual vines in text D₁, is a metaphor too, the “target” of which being the Torah, as can be inferred from the first line, the quote from Pirke Avot on which this text is an elaboration.⁵² The expression “cut down the young plants” is well known from its use in Tosefta, Yerushalmi and Bavli Ḥagigah, with respect to Elisha ben Avuyah, also called *aḥer* (“the other”) because he was considered a heretic, who “cut the young plants” (קיצץ בנטיעות) in an “orchard” (*pardes*) that he entered with three other scholars.⁵³

E1. Four entered the orchard: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aḥer, and Rabbi Akiva. One looked (הציץ) and died. One looked and was harmed. One looked and cut down the young plants (וקיצץ בנטיעות). And one went up in peace and went down in peace.⁵⁴

From the foregoing mystical context in the Mishnah and Tosefta,⁵⁵ it can be inferred that “entering the orchard” is a metaphor for the study or interpretation of certain biblical texts, such as the account of the chariot in Ezekiel 1 (Merkavah) and the account of creation.⁵⁶ The use of the same expression in Avot de Rabbi Natan B 1 (text D₁) confirms that cutting “young plants” is used metaphorically in the Pardes episode, and is related to the “hedge around the Torah.”⁵⁷ The “transgression” of Elisha ben Avuya, which metaphorically led to his “cutting the young plants,” had to do with his transgressing, deliberately or involuntarily, the limits of what was considered appropriate study or legitimate interpretation of mystical texts from the Torah.⁵⁸ The exact nature of his original mistake, which led to his further development as a “sinning sage,” is presented

⁵² On the relation between Mishnah (or Pirke) Avot and the two versions of Avot Rab. Nat. see M.D. Lerner, “The External Tractates,” in Safrai, *Literature of the Sages* 1, 369–79.

⁵³ The fate of each of the four sages is fitted with a relevant (but enigmatic) biblical proof-text. I will not discuss the relation between the specific sages and their sins, and the proof-texts, since it would divert us from our argument. Sweeney, “Pardes Revisited Once Again,” involves the verses in his reading of the story. Sweeney holds that the Pardes episode served to present Rabbi Akiva as the model sage who embodied all the qualities of a sage, of which the three others each miss some. Whereas this is evident in the case of Elisha ben Avuya who has the reputation of “quintessential heretic,” the two others, who are presented positively in other texts but, e.g., were also not ordained and had other failures, served as “foils in relation to the successful R. Akiva.” (46)

⁵⁴ t. Ḥag. 2:2; y. Ḥag. 2:1, 77b; b. Ḥag. 14b-15a. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories* emphasizes the editorial character of both Talmudic versions which each are literary constructs that reworked earlier sources (Mishnah, Tosefta, and for the Bavli maybe part of the Yerushalmi) into a new story with a specific (theological) message about the conflict between sin and Torah and the possibility of the intrinsic merit of Torah, independent of the behavior of its “carrier.” In a similar vein, Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 37–61 considers the Pardes story and the picture of Elisha ben Avuya as a sinner in the Talmudic sources as a typology and an editorial construction. In addition to the relevant sections from Mishnah and Tosefta Ḥagiga, he refers to m. Avot 4:20 and Avot Rab. Nat. A and B (notably Avot R. Nat. A 40) which he calls “the Yavnean testimony.”

⁵⁵ I.e. m. Ḥag. 2:1, the halakhic/literary context for the Elisha story in both Talmudim, and t. Ḥag. 2:1 which is quoted in both. Cf. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 100.

⁵⁶ This whole section in t. Ḥag. 2:1-7 and the Talmudim is dubbed “the mystical collection,” by David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 28–29 and passim.

⁵⁷ Similarly, in Deut Rab. 7:4 a parable about “planting” (נטה) and cutting down trees in an orchard is applied to learning and not fulfilling Torah.

⁵⁸ Another interpretation, suggested by b. Ḥag. 15b and p. Ḥag. 77b is that Elisha (threatened) to kill young students, which would be metaphorically referred to as “young plants.” Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 86-87 explains that this is another exegesis of the Toseftan passage.

differently in the various sources,⁵⁹ and debated by the various scholars who studied this story. All scholars which I have consulted agree, based on the sources, that “cutting the young plants” has something to do with the transgression of Torah. According to Goshen-Gottstein, the expression refers to the destruction of Elisha’s own Torah.⁶⁰

Indeed, Elisha ben Avuya, despite being excommunicated and condemned as a heretic who transgressed all the rules of the Torah—such as, typically and hyperbolically in the Yerushalmi—admitting that he was riding a horse past the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur which also fell on a shabbat,⁶¹ was also famous for his knowledge of Torah.⁶² In various rabbinic sources, the end of Elisha ben Avuya’s life is remembered like this: “Elisha Aḥer will be saved through the merit of his Torah.”⁶³

8. From Vineyard to Orchard

The orchard imagery of the Pardes episode may be a modification of the vineyard imagery and if so, the metaphorical expression “cutting the shoots” was transferred from the vineyard to the orchard.⁶⁴ To explain this, we need to refer to the continuation of the episode in the Tosefta, which includes a mashal that also deals with an orchard.

E2. They gave a parable: What is this similar to? To the orchard of a king and there is an attic built above it (ועלייה בנוייה על גביו). It is upon the man to gaze (להציץ) so long as he does not move his eyes from it.⁶⁵

Rather unusual and seemingly forced, this orchard is said to have a construction above it, an “attic.” If such an unusual detail occurs in a parable, it is meaningful.⁶⁶ I want to suggest that the

⁵⁹ Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 64–104 argues that the Babylonian Talmud, in contradistinction to the Yerushalmi, constructs a rather sympathetic portrait of Elisha.

⁶⁰ See the traditions attributed to Elisha in Avot Rab. Nat. 24 (cf. note 1). Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 56–57 refers to “going against his own teaching” and “spiritual gluttony as a cause for falling away.” This is in line with his view that the message of the “mystical tradition” is that “the only legitimate approach to the merkava is the path of exegesis” and that visionary activity is something else than studying Torah (Ibid., 55-56). In contradistinction to this, Sweeney, “Pardes Revisited Once Again,” holds that, given the fact that Rabbi Akiva, the model sage, was able to enter *pardes*, mystical exegesis in itself is not wrong, but one only needs to do it correctly, as rabbi Akiva did.

⁶¹ Y. Ḥag. 77b; Transl. Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* vol. 20, 48.

⁶² Cf. the encounter between R. Meir and Elisha ben Avuya in b. Ḥag 15 a-b; y. Ḥag. 2:1, 77b-c. A passage in Lerner’s edition of Ruth Rab. 6:7 (not in the regular Vilna edition but included in the Bar Ilan Responsa database and <https://schechter.ac.il/midrash/ruth-raba/>), depicts Elisha as the wisest man who ever taught in the temple (an anachronism) and in Tiberias. See Lerner, “The Book of Ruth.” Cf. Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 44-45, who considers (based on Lerner) this passage as tannaitic.

⁶³ Y. Ḥag 2:1, 77c; Eccl Rab. 7:8; Ruth Rab. 6:4 (6:7 Lerner edition).

⁶⁴ This is argued by Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 56–57. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 71, 80 draws attention to the fact that the story in the Bavli contains other vegetation metaphors as well, i.e., Elisha uprooting a radish, the unusual locution “evil growth” (*tarbut ra’a*) to refer to his aberrant behavior, and the date, nut and pomegranate that are given as examples of fruits which have a good inside if you take off the peel. These are compared to Elisha’s knowledge and teaching of Torah which was good despite his bad behavior.

⁶⁵ This is the translation offered by Sefaria.org following Lieberman, *Toseft’a*, vol. Moed, 381. Neusner, *The Tosefta*, 669, offers a more interpretative translation. He considers the upper room a room for the guardian, and the duty of the guard would be “to look, but not to feast his eyes from it.” I will argue that looking up, rather than looking down, as a guard does, is the matter here.

construction above the orchard refers to the matters “on high,” the contemplation of which is discussed in m. Ḥag 2:1.⁶⁷ Gazing at it, contemplating in a correct fashion as did rabbi Akiva, is allowed, but doing it in an incorrect fashion, as did the three others, is detrimental. In y. Ḥag 77c (after the Pardes episode) a similar parable with similar images occurs:

E3 (...) To the orchard of a king, and above it was built an attic, to look at, but not to touch.⁶⁸

In Avot Rab. Nat. B 23, yet another similar parable is found, attributed to Ben Zoma. The main difference is that this parable deals with a vineyard:

F. He used to say: Do not gaze (אל תציין) into a man’s vineyard. If you have gazed, do not go down into it. If you have gone in, do not gaze. If you gazed, do not touch. If you touched, do not eat. If a man eats, he removes his soul from the life of this world and the life of the world to come.⁶⁹

The addition of “touching” and “eating” to the “gazing” is a clear reference to the fate of Adam, who erected an excessive “fence” by adding “touching” to God’s words and hereby cause himself and Eve to eat and sin (as expressed in text D2)

If we accept the argument of Goshen Gottstein, that the version in Avot Rab. Nat. B is older than that in the Tosefta—he calls it part of the “Yavnean Testimony”⁷⁰—then Ben Zoma, who himself “gazed” in the Pardes episode thus acted against his own Torah, as did Elisha.

Additional proof that the vineyard is the original metaphor that gave rise to the expression “cutting the shoots” is this: the parable with which we started this paper, from Sifre Devarim (text A), commenting on Prov 24:30-31, is also attested in Avot Rab. Nat. A 24, where it is attributed to Elisha ben Avuya.⁷¹ He tells it in an exposé about the danger of forgetting one’s Torah if one does not study regularly. The result is the same as in Sifre: such a person declares the clean unclean etc. In Elisha’s version, the parable ends a little different than in Sifre. Instead of the reference to Eccl 10:2, and the punishment by the sages, we read: “For once the wall of the vineyard falls, the whole vineyard is destroyed.”⁷²

In sum: In Elisha ben Avuya, many elements of the TORAH IS A VINEYARD metaphor come together, notably the shoots or vines that can be destroyed by the wall or fence that will fall down when it is broken. In Elisha’s own saying in Avot Rab. Nat. A 24, these images are applied to Torah study in the conventional way, including matters of purity. In the traditions about him, Torah is

⁶⁶ Cf. Fränkel, *Darkhei ha-aggadah*, vol. 2, 335 calls this the “breaking of the pattern of the mashal,” which as a rule, indicates the presence of a theological message. Cf Teugels, *The Meshalim*, 52.

⁶⁷ Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 100–101 demonstrates that “the storytellers [of the Bavli, LT] created a narrative exegesis of t. Ḥag. 2:3 in light of m. Ḥag. 2:1,” but does not discuss the parable and hence not the meaning of the attic.

⁶⁸ Lieberman, *Tosefta kifsuta*, part Beitsa-Ḥagiga, 1291 refers to this parallel but does not explain the specific meaning of the attic. See about “touching”, the next text.

⁶⁹ Kister, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 72; Saldarini, *Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan B*, 195. Saldarini translates “orchard” but the Kister’s critical edition reads “vineyard.”

⁷⁰ Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 37.

⁷¹ That sayings of Elisha are preserved in Avot and Avot Rab. Nat. demonstrates that he was not considered a heretic in the tannaitic period. In his book, Goshen Gottstein argues that the image of Elisha as a sinner and heretic was a construct by the editors of the Talmudim.

⁷² Kister, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 78. Transl. Goldin, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, 104.

also at the focus, but there “destroying the vines” of the vineyard of Torah (that somewhere in the tradition became the young trees of the orchard) is specifically used for doing something wrong in one’s study of Torah, in particular when it comes to the mystical texts.

Excursus: The Vineyard of Yavne

The “Vineyard” is the famous name of the rabbinic academy located in Yavne, instituted soon after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70CE. It is mentioned as such in several rabbinic sources starting in the Mishnah.⁷³ There is no unanimity about the meaning or origin of this name. It has been suggested that this designation of the rabbinic academy should be seen in the context of Hellenistic learning, where it was customary to refer to philosophical schools in terms of gardens and similar spaces.⁷⁴ In the Palestinian Talmud it is questioned whether this name refers to an actual vineyard. There, the first metaphorical explanation of the name is given: the vineyard refers to the scholars who sat in rows like vines in a vineyard.

G1. And it was taught elsewhere. This teaching R. Eleazar b. Azariah expounded before the sages at the vineyard at Yavneh (m. Ket. 4:6). And was there a vineyard there [where they sat and learned]? Rather this refers to the scholars who were arranged in rows, like [vines in] a vineyard.⁷⁵

It is not excluded that the sages and students actually gathered to study in a vineyard, or in a location designed like a vineyard. In the immediately preceding text in the Yerushalmi, where the seating arrangements are discussed, it is mentioned that certain people, maybe the audience, would stand “behind the fence.”

G2. And how many benches were there [in the Academy]? R. Jacob bar Sisi said, “There were eighty benches full of scholars besides those who stood behind the partition (גדר).” R. Yose b. R. Abun said, “There were three hundred there besides those who stood behind the partition.”⁷⁶

Catherine Hezser suggests that the anonymous voice that gave the explanation in the first-quoted text, i.e., “the scholars who were arranged in rows, like a vineyard,” based its explanation on the preceding remark about the seating arrangements, because the sages behind the anonymous voice were too removed from the original tradition that they had no idea what the academy in Yavne was like.⁷⁷ By hearing “vineyard,” they thought “fence.” This confirms that fences were in particular associated with vineyards. Hezser refers to a similar, also metaphorical, reference to the academy in Yavne as a “storehouse” (אוצרה של יבנה) that would denote “the treasure trove of halakhic

⁷³ E.g. m. Ket. 4:6; b. Ber. 63b; b. Shab. 33b; 138b.

⁷⁴ Klein, “Oral Towns,” 29-30; Hezser, *The Social Structure*, 174; Schäfer and Hezser, *The Talmud Yerushalmi*, vol. 2, 164; Cohen, “Patriarchs and Scholarchs,” 82.

⁷⁵ y. Ber. 4:1, 7d. וכי כרם היה שם אלא אלו תלמידי חכמים שהיו עשויין שורות שורות ככרם. Zahavy, *Talmud of the Land of Israel, Berakhot*, 177.

⁷⁶ Zahavy, 176. Hebr.: חוץ מן העומדים לאחורי הגדר. The representation of Yavne in the Talmud Yerushalmi

⁷⁷ See Hezser, “Yavne in the Yerushalmi.”

traditions that were emulgated by Yavnean rabbis.”⁷⁸ The fact that two mutually exclusive locales for the academy are given,⁷⁹ confirms that we most probably have to do with metaphorical designations of the Torah academy. Like “vineyard,” also “storehouse” is an metaphor that is frequently found to refer to the Torah in rabbinic sources.⁸⁰

9. The Creation of Similarity: Israel and the Torah as Vineyards

In the mashal from Exod Rab. (text B), the vineyard metaphor is connected to two concepts: the people of Israel, and the Torah, both in the context of the deliverance from Egypt. In other rabbinic texts, it is either Israel, or the Torah that are represented by the metaphor of the vineyard or one of its constituents, such as a fence, vines or wine.⁸¹ When two concepts, *in casu* Israel and Torah, are represented by the same metaphorical expression, *in casu* vineyard, this is explained in CMT by the similarity of the two (target) concepts in a culture.⁸² The overlap between the target domains of Israel and Torah warrants the use of the same metaphor. The specific contribution of the CMT is, however, that the use of the same conceptual metaphor makes not only the similarities visible *but even induces similarities*.

What is this similarity between Israel and the Torah that is made visible, or possible, by the use of the same, vineyard, metaphor? The most obvious similarity is that, like a vineyard, both Israel and the Torah are conceived as *precious* in the biblical and rabbinic cultures. Another similarity is that both are set apart. The word *segulah* expresses this preciousness and singularity.⁸³ Because rabbinic literature seems to display a tendency to apply the vineyard metaphor more and more to the Torah (as in “the fence around the Torah”), next to, or even more than to Israel when compared to the use of the metaphor in Tanach, we can infer that the preciousness of the Torah became more and more topical for the rabbinic sages.⁸⁴

As we have seen, the vineyard is only one example of cultivation of a previously barren field. It is a metaphor that can be joined with other related metaphors (wheat field, orchard) in the

⁷⁸ Y. Dem. 3:4, 23c. See t. Dem. 1:10 too. Hezser, “Yavne in the Yerushalmi,” 188. Also here, however, she concedes that it could have had a literal basis in that the academy may have been located in a storehouse. In sum, nothing is known about the actual setting of the academy in Yavne.

⁷⁹ Unless one thinks of the storehouse of the vineyard. I don’t exclude the possibility but, with Hezser I tend to believe that these references are metaphorical.

⁸⁰ See e.g. the mashal in Mek. Rab. Ish. Bahodesh 5 (to Exod 20:2) about two overseers, one who oversees the אוצר של תבן, the supply of straw, and one oversees the אוצר של זהב, the supply of gold, which, in the nimshal, refers to the Torah. See Teugels, *The Meshalim*, 425-428.

⁸¹ For wine as a metaphor for Torah, see e.g. m. Avot 4:20 (old wine in new bags, compare Matt 9:14–17, Mark 2:21–22, Luke 5:33–39); Sifre Deut. 48 (continuation of the mashal quoted in this paper).

⁸² See note 12. Lakoff and Johnson, chapters 13 and 22, give the example of “time” and “labor” that are both viewed as substances that can be quantified. In our culture, labor is primarily valued in terms of time, i.e., productivity and efficiency.

⁸³ In post-rabbinic Judaism the notion *segulah* is even transferred from Israel to the Torah. An example is the expression אין סגולה כתורה (There is no *segulah* like the Torah) in the song *Mipi-el* (see e.g. <https://opensiddur.org/prayers/lunisolar/pilgrimage/shavuot/ayn-adir-kadonai-mipi-el-there-is-none-like-yvh/>). Despite the fact that the Torah is singled out as *segulah* here, the song systematically makes the connection between the Torah and Israel, who interprets Torah, learns it, is devoted to it etc.

⁸⁴ In specific sections of midrash, such as in the two parables in texts B and C, the position of Israel as a chosen people remains central because this aspect is already present in the biblical text to which the midrash relates itself explicitly as interpretation.

generic metaphor of the “cultivated piece of land.” In terms of CMF the generic, most basic metaphor would be SOMETHING PRECIOUS IS A CULTIVATED PIECE OF LAND.⁸⁵

In the case of the Torah, the fact that this cultivated land is “bounded” is given special prominence. The constituent “fence” of the source domain is often singled out and applied to the boundedness of the Torah, which is seen as necessary (“a fence around the Torah”) but which can also be overdone, as in the texts that use the image of the fence that is too large, more important than what needs to be fenced in (texts D1 and D2). Therefore other cultivated lands that can be fenced in, such as, specifically, the orchard, of which the fence, when it falls down, can topple the young trees (texts D2 and E3), are used parallel to the vineyard in metaphorical texts.

Nevertheless, several components of, specifically, the “vineyard” source domain lend themselves exceptionally well to depict the complex target domains of Israel and the Torah, such as sour grapes, sweet wine, and the fence. The latter images are used more systematically in rabbinic texts that refer to Israel and the Torah than, e.g., the field. We have also seen that the most common rabbinic word for the “fence” around the Torah, גִּזְרֵי, is specifically used in a non-metaphorical way for vineyards.⁸⁶ Also in early Christian texts, it is the vineyard, the vines and the wine that were specifically seen as apt metaphors to reflect election and preciousness, notably in the depiction of the Kingdom of God.⁸⁷ But also there, related metaphors, such as the weeds among the wheat, are found.⁸⁸

In sum: CMT allows us to explain the parallel use of the vineyard metaphor and two target domains, Israel and the Torah, in rabbinic parables and other rabbinic metaphorical texts. The notion of the generic metaphor is a useful tool to include related conceptual fields, such as a field of wheat, an orchard, or another bounded cultivated piece of land. The principle of the “creation of similarity” has been demonstrated by means of the notion of preciousness, *segulah*, which links the Torah with Israel in the rabbinic cultural world. The metaphor of the vineyard not only reflects, but also induces the similarity: conceived as vineyards, Israel and the Torah become precious in the minds of the people using and hearing or reading the metaphorical texts.

⁸⁵ Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” 21.

⁸⁶ See note 48.

⁸⁷ See note 40 (about Jesus as the vine). The parable of the Tenants of the Vineyard starts with a quotation of Isa 5 and includes an explicit application to the Kingdom of God (Matt 31:43).

⁸⁸ See note 33.

Bibliography

- Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
- Cohen, Shaye J. D. "Patriarchs and Scholarchs." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 48 (1981), 57–85.
- Cordoni, Constanza. *Seder Eliyahu: A Narratological Reading* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018).
- Dschulnigg, P. *Rabbinische Gleichnisse und das Neue Testament: die Gleichnisse der PesK im Vergleich mit den Gleichnissen Jesu und dem Neuen Testament* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988).
- Elman, Yaakov and Gershoni, Israel. *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
- Fränkel, Yonah. *Darkhei ha-agadah vehamidrash*. 2 vols. (Givataim: Yad letalmud, 1991).
- Fränkel, Yonah. *Sipur ha-agadah. Aḥdut shel tohen vetzurah* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2001).
- Freedman, H and Simon, M, eds, *The Midrash Rabba*. 5 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1983).
- Gemünden, P. von. *Vegetationsmetaphorik im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt. Eine Bildfelduntersuchung* (Freiburg and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).
- Gibbs, Raymond W., and Gerard J. Steen, eds. *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997).
- Goldin, Judah. *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
- Goshen-Gottstein, Alon. *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha Ben Abuya and Eleazar Ben Arach* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- Grady, Joseph E. "THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS Revisited." *Cognitive Linguistics* 8, no. 4 (1997), 267–90.
- Halperin, David J. *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988).
- Hammer, Reuven. *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
- Hezser, Catherine. *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).
- Hezser, Catherine. "The Representation of Yavne in the Talmud Yerushalmi." In *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: The Interbellum 70–132 CE*, ed. Joshua J. Schwartz and Peter J. Tomson (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 185–187.
- Jaffee, Martin S. *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Jäkel, Olaf. "Kant, Blumenberg, Weinrich: Some Forgotten Contributions to the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor." In *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. Raymond W. Gibbs, and Gerard J. Steen (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997), 9–27.
- Jastrow, Marcus. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Pardes, 1950).
- Kadushin, Max. "Aspects of the Rabbinic Concept of Israel. A Study in the Mekilta." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 19 (1945), 57–96.
- Kaye, Lynn. "Time and Fixity in Talmudic Law and Legal Language." *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 23 (2015), 127–60.
- Kister, Menahem. *Avot derabi Natan: mahadurat Sh. S. Schechter 'im tzionim lemaqbilot ben hanusahim uletosfot shebemahadurat Schechter* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997).

- Kister, Menahem. "Allegorical Interpretations of Biblical Narratives in Rabbinic Literature, Philo, and Origen: Some Case Studies." In *New Approaches to the Study of Biblical Interpretation in Judaism of the Second Temple Period and in Early Christianity*, ed. Gary A. Anderson, Ruth A. Clements, and David Safran (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 133–83.
- Klein, Gil P. "Oral Towns: Rabbinic Discourse and the Understanding of the Late Antique Jewish City." In *Imagining the City – Vol. 2: The Politics of Urban Space*, ed. Catherine Keen and David Midgley (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 27–48.
- Kövecses, Zoltán. "Conceptual Metaphor Theory." In *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language*, ed. Elena Semino and Zsófia Demjén (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 13–27.
- Kövecses, Zoltán. "Levels of Metaphor." *Cognitive Linguistics* 28 (2017), 321–47.
- Labovitz, Gail. *Marriage and Metaphor: Constructions of Gender in Rabbinic Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009).
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- Lakoff, George. "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor." In *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 202–51.
- Lanier, Gregory. "Mapping the Vineyard: Main Lines of Investigation Regarding the Parable of the Tenants in the Synoptics and Thomas." *Currents in Biblical Research* 15 (2016), 74–122.
- Lerner, Myron B. *The Book of Ruth in Aggadic Literature and Midrash Ruth Rabba 1-3*, (Hebrew University, 1971).
- Lieberman, Saul. *Tosefta: According to Codex Vienna, with Variants from Codex Erfurt, Genizah Mss. and Editio Princeps (Venice 1521) Together with References to Parallel Passages in Talmudic Literature and a Brief Commentary* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955).
- Lieberman, Saul. *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955).
- Mandel, Paul. *The Origins of Midrash: From Teaching to Text* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Tosefta* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, Volume 20. Hagiga and Moed Katan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
- Osborne, William R. "The Tree of Life in Proverbs and Psalms." In *The Tree of Life*, ed. Douglas Estes (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 100–121.
- Rubenstein, J. L. *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).
- Rubenstein, J. L. *Talmudic Stories. Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. "The Sukkah as Temporary or Permanent Dwelling: A Study in the Development of Talmudic Thought." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1993), 137–166.
- Safrai, Shmuel, ed. *The Literature of the Sages, First Part: Oral Tora, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987).
- Saldarini, Anthony J., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan (Abot de Rabbi Nathan) Version B: A Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1975).
- Schäfer, Peter, and Catherine Hezser, eds. *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

- Schafer, Peter. *Two Gods in Heaven: Jewish Concepts of God in Antiquity*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).
- Shanks Alexander, Elizabeth. "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38-57
- Snodgrass, K. R. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).
- Stern, David. *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- Sweeney, Marvin A. "Pardes Revisited Once Again: A Reassessment of the Rabbinic Legend Concerning the Four Who Entered Pardes." *Shofar* 22 (2004), 43-56.
- Teugels, Lieve M. *The Meshalim in the Mekhilot. An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).
- Teugels, Lieve M. "Money and Torah. A Comparison of Early Christian and Early Rabbinic Parables," In *The Power of Parables*, ed. E. Ottenheim, M. Poorthuis and A. Merz (Brill: Leiden, forthcoming).
- Weinrich, Harald. "Münze und Wort. Untersuchungen an einem Bildfeld." In Harald Weinrich, *Sprache in Texten* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), 276-90.
- Wimpfheimer, Barry S. *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
- Zahavy, Tzvee. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, Volume 1 Berakhot*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- Zimmermann, Ruben, D. Dormeyer, G. Kern, A. Merz, C. Münch, and E. Edzard Popkes, eds. *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007).