

Four Entered Paradise Revisited

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The story of the four who entered *pardes*, or the orchard, is the *crux interpretum* of the study of ancient Jewish mysticism. The answer to the question of how much mysticism existed in rabbinic Judaism depends on the interpretation of this story. In the history of scholarship of the past several decades, two major approaches have been taken. One approach, spearheaded by Gershom Scholem,¹ although by no means initiated by him,² sees in this story a record or some testimony of a mystical experience. The various terms employed, and in particular the term *pardes*, are seen as expressive of a heavenly ascent into paradise, and thus as a testimony of a mystical experience.³ The other approach, which consciously seeks to tone down the mystical and ecstatic element of the *pardes* story, sees in this story a parable. If it is a parable, then we do not have a record or testimony of an event of a mystical nature. Of course, even if the story is parabolic, the question of the subject of the parable remains open. Ephraim E. Urbach, who first took this line of interpretation, suggested that the story is a parable, and not a mystical record. The story refers, however, to the study of *ma'aseh merkabah* ("the work or story of the divine chariot," referred to in the first chapter of Ezekiel), and thus retains esoteric signifi-

¹Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (2d ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965) 14–19.

²See C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 1: The Jewish Sources," *HTR* 86 (1993) 177–217.

³See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 16.

cance.⁴ Following Urbach, several readings of the story were offered, some of which move both the story and that to which it refers out of the realm of Jewish esotericism. Thus, Peter Schäfer interprets the story of the four as a parable of four types of Torah scholars.⁵ A similar interpretation was offered at the same time by Christopher Rowland, although Rowland allows for the particularly mystical dimension to figure as well. For him it is a parable of four types of Torah students, where much of the danger involved in certain kinds of overengagement in Torah study stems from the areas of *ma'aseh bereshit* ("the work or study of creation") and *ma'aseh merkabah*.⁶ David Halperin's detailed analysis of the various *merkabah* traditions takes a similar approach, maintaining that the original meaning of the story of the four who entered is independent of its context, and therefore need not express any particularly mystical content.⁷ Other scholars have sided with one of the two above-mentioned camps.⁸

Recently, the discussion has come to the fore again with the publication of C. R. A. Morray-Jones's learned piece, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate."⁹ As is obvious from the title of his paper, Morray-Jones's prime interest lies in the significance of the story of the four for an understanding of Paul's heavenly

⁴Ephraim E. Urbach, "Ha-Masorot al Torat ha-Sod bi-Tequfat ha-Tanna'im," in idem, R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, and Chaim Wirszubski, eds., *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 1–28 [Hebrew].

⁵Peter Schäfer, "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkabah Mysticism," *JJS* 35 (1984) 19–35.

⁶Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982) 306–40.

⁷David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (AOS 62; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980). Note, however, that Halperin is unable to suggest what is in fact the precise meaning of the original story (see pp. 90–91). See also David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 16; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988) 33.

⁸Notable among these are Ithamar Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* [AGJU 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980]), who follows Scholem closely, and Yehuda Liebes (*The Sin of Elisha, the Four Who Entered Paradise and the Nature of Talmudic Mysticism* [2d ed.; Jerusalem: ha-Universitah ha-Ivrit bi-Yerushalyim, 1990] [Hebrew]), who accepts Scholem's basic premise that *pardes* designates an ascent to heaven, but develops his own direction in the interpretation of the story. Yonah Frankel elaborates upon Urbach's thesis, while retaining Urbach's basic understanding that this parable refers to the study of the *merkabah*. Frankel's interpretation of the *pardes* parable, which differs from Urbach's, has been delivered orally (Institute of Jewish Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 5 December 1994), but has not yet been published.

⁹Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited, Part 1," 177–217; and idem, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background to Paul's Apostolate, Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and its Significance," *HTR* 86 (1993) 265–92.

ascent. His discussion, however, is divided into two parts, the first of which concentrates exclusively on an analysis of the Jewish sources of the *pardes* story. In this discussion, Morray-Jones makes an interesting new suggestion which, if correct, would add great weight to the position identified above as that of Scholem. Through linguistic analysis of a particular tradition that appears in the hekhalot literatures, or literature of the heavenly palaces, Morray-Jones attempts to arrive at the original version of the *pardes* story. According to Morray-Jones, the original tradition preserved in the hekhalot literature is a first-person narrative, placed in the mouth of R. Akiba, which is in fact a record of his mystical experience. The testimony is prior to any of the known versions of the *pardes* story found in rabbinic literature and thus supports the understanding that the original meaning of the story—or at least of the source underlying it—is of a mystical nature.

This move is important for Morray-Jones, because by establishing the authenticity and the nature of R. Akiba's mystical experience, he has laid the ground for an understanding of Paul's heavenly ascent. Rabbinic and hekhalot literature, which both provide evidence for mystical activity, thus join in a continuous stream with apocalyptic literature to provide us with an understanding of the background of Paul's experience. The second part of Morray-Jones's presentation is devoted to an analysis of Paul's heavenly ascent. Even if the portion of Morray-Jones's thesis that concerns the rabbinic sources is rejected, a rejection of the second part of his thesis does not necessarily follow. Even if we were to accept that an original mystical record of R. Akiba's heavenly ascent is before us, there is still a gap of nearly a century between the event recorded in Corinthians and the possible record of R. Akiba's experience. The chronological gap is even more pronounced in relation to other hekhalot material that Morray-Jones utilizes in order to understand Paul. Having established the authenticity of a particular passage in the hekhalot literature, Morray-Jones liberally utilizes other passages in this literature in order to gain a better appreciation of Paul. This can be justified only if the hekhalot literature is a phenomenological equivalent of the Corinthians passage, rather than part of the available historical background of Paul. Since none of the material found in the hekhalot literature and used by Morray-Jones is dated earlier than Paul, its prime importance seems to lie in its phenomenological equivalence to the Pauline experience. Therefore, even if one were to reject Morray-Jones's dating of the hekhalot passage and his particular construction of the literary history of the *pardes* traditions, this need not affect his suggestion concerning the interpretation of Paul, which seems to me to be his ultimate goal. In what follows, therefore, I shall limit myself to an examination of the Jewish sources discussed in the first part of Morray-Jones's presentation, without attempting to decide the relevance of these sources for Pauline studies.

For the picture of the history of scholarship, painted above, Morray-Jones has made a significant contribution to Scholem's reading of the *pardes* story. In what follows I shall attempt a fresh reading of the *pardes* story, one that is more in line with the approach first taken by Urbach. I believe this new reading is in and of itself a refutation of Morray-Jones's suggestions. I can best respond to the serious effort made by Morray-Jones to further Scholem's position by concentrating my efforts on a different approach to the question of the evolution of the *pardes* story. In conclusion, having presented what I believe is a more adequate explanation of the formation of the traditions under discussion, I shall engage some of Morray-Jones's particular claims and carefully examine some of his readings.

■ The Problem of Method: Traditions or Literary Creation

Certain methodological assumptions underlie the particular choice of interpretation of the *pardes* story. The *pardes* story appears in several versions,¹⁰ which significantly differ from each other. Therefore, the question of which version of the story is given priority is essential to the choice of line of interpretation. Scholem, who attempted to emphasize the mystical dimension of the story, relied on the version found in the Babylonian Talmud.¹¹ Urbach, in contrast, relied primarily upon the more modest version found in the Tosefta, which enabled him to present the story of the four as a parable, rather than as a record of a mystical experience.¹² Various scholars have since touched upon the question of the best or original version of the story. David Halperin has analyzed the *pardes* story in the context of other traditions that appear with it, thus adding a new dimension to the question of the original context of these traditions. Halperin referred to this collection of sources, which all appear in the Tosefta and the two Talmuds, and some in other sources as well, as the "mystical collection,"¹³ implying that this is a collection of sources that have been put together by an editor or perhaps several editors. The sources in the "mystical collection" antedate the collection itself; thus, each item found in this collection, may be questioned as to which of its versions is the most accurate and what changes have occurred in the context of transmission. Halperin's view of tradition history is one of traditions floating in an independent manner,

¹⁰A detailed survey of the versions and their differences can be found in Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 86–87.

¹¹Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 52–53.

¹²Urbach, "Ha-Masoret al Torot ha-Sod," 12–13. Concerning the story of R. Ele'azar b. Arakh, Urbach unequivocally accepted the Tosefta as the primary version (see pp. 2–11).

¹³Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 65.

receiving new meanings in new contexts, in accordance with the creative reworkings of able editors.¹⁴ It is then impossible to claim a priori superiority of any of the particular versions of the *pardes* story or of any of the other components of the “mystical collection.” Unable to point to any particular document in which these traditions were first formulated, we can only attempt to reconstruct the process of piecing these traditions together. The image of tradition history is reduced to individual literary units. Each of these units has a life of its own, and its particular evolution must be traced.

Murray-Jones, relying heavily on this methodology developed by Halperin, treats the *pardes* story as an independent unit, the roots of which can be sought elsewhere. This search leads Murray-Jones to the hekhalot literature, where he suggests that one can find the original version of R. Akiba’s statement. I believe that a different approach to the nature of the traditions at hand would yield radically different results. If these traditions are treated not as floating units, but as an integrated whole, then the question of provenance and meaning could be determined more easily. In fact, Halperin himself has taken us a certain distance toward such an approach.

Halperin’s choice of the term “mystical collection” is an important contribution, for it indicates that the sources in the second chapter of *Hagiga* are to be viewed as a whole and as belonging to a larger literary unit. The story of the *pardes*, then, does not exist in isolation, but rather is embedded within a larger literary framework. The key to its successful interpretation may well lie in the decoding of the meaning of this larger unit. While Halperin himself concentrates on both the analysis of the development of individual units within the collection and their tradition history, his grouping of these different traditions as part of a larger whole opens the door to an important methodological consideration—the successful interpretation of the collection as a whole. Most of the interpretations of the *pardes* story have not attempted a reading of this story within its wider literary framework; Scholem simply quotes this story from the Babylonian Talmud’s version; and while Urbach refers to other parts of the “mystical collection,” he does not offer a reading of the collection as a whole.

We find here a host of interrelated methodological problems, all of which entail conscious choices and all of which offer different possibilities for interpreting the *pardes* story. What is the best version of the story? What is the relationship between the story and other traditions that are transmit-

¹⁴For a critique of Halperin’s views of transmission and tradition history, see Jacob Neusner, *The Peripatetic Saying: The Problem of the Thrice-Told Tale in Talmudic Literature* (Brown Judaic Studies 89; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 172–75.

ted alongside it? Is the story a record of an event, a parable, or perhaps something else altogether? These questions are interrelated, and we must deal with them in a conscious manner.

Murray-Jones has opted for a view of individual tradition units, and the history of each can be unearthed. This has led him to the hekhalot, which in turn has made it possible for him to find there the record of a mystical experience. I shall attempt a reading of the *pardes* story based on the opposite premises, assuming instead that an understanding of the *pardes* story must be sought in the context of the entire “mystical collection.” We are thus forced to seek the version of the collection that best yields to interpretation. I suggest that the Tosefta is the best—and original—version of the collection. Only in the context of the Tosefta, as it comments on the Mishnah, can we account for the creation of these traditions. The point of these various traditions becomes obvious only when they are seen as a whole. I therefore suggest that the key to interpretation is the ability to discern the meaning of the whole, and a commentary on the Mishnah, such as the Tosefta, affords such a context. Within this analysis, I also address the question of the genre of the story of the four. The ultimate force of my presentation rests on the plausibility of the readings offered below. These carry weight because they interpret the entire unit, in context, as delivering a particular message. This message and pattern are perceived only in the Tosefta, which, I believe, is the context in which the “mystical collection,” as a literary creation, was conceived. Later traditions are reworkings—and, in part, misunderstandings—of this literary creation. If my argument is accepted, I shall have established the Tosefta as a literary invention and as the context in which the story of the four who entered *pardes* was created. Further search for the tradition history and source of this story then becomes unnecessary.

I shall concentrate on an analysis of the second chapter of *Hagiga* in the Tosefta, analyzing the various components of the “mystical collection” as they appear there. A detailed investigation of the differences between the versions of the Tosefta and the Talmuds, such as undertaken by Halperin, is clearly beyond the scope of the present study. I believe that the Tosefta is the context for the creation of the “mystical collection,” and this conclusion obviously leads me to a different presentation of the relationship between the Tosefta and the Talmuds. Rather than enter into detailed considerations of the relations between the different versions of the texts, I believe that the question of origin can be established by appealing to the logic of the whole, which can only be done in the context of the Tosefta. The second chapter of Tosefta, *Hagiga*, is a commentary on the opening mishnah, in the second chapter of *b. Hagiga*. We should therefore open our discussion with an examination of that mishnah.

■ Discussion of *m. Hag. 2.1*

The opening mishnah of the second chapter of *Hagiga* reads:

Laws of illicit sexual relations are not to be expounded [דרושין] by three people together, nor *ma'aseh bereshit* by two, nor *ma'aseh merkabah* by one alone, unless he was wise and understood on his own accord. Whoever looks [מסתכל] into four matters, it would be better for him had he not come into the world: What is above and what below, what is before and what after. Whoever has no regard for the honor of his creator—it would be better for him had he never come into the world.¹⁵

It has already been noted that this mishnah contains within it a seeming contradiction.¹⁶ On the one hand, no one should expound certain subjects, unless such study occurs under specific conditions that pertain to the expounder's qualifications and the number of listeners. On the other hand, there seems to be an absolute prohibition, under all circumstances, to engage in certain activities. If we understand the prohibition concerning looking into four things as related to creation,¹⁷ the end of the mishnah seems to contradict its beginning. Even if we suggest that the mishnah has combined conflicting sources,¹⁸ we still have to account for the way in which the editors of the mishnah have put these disparate sources together. A crucial distinction should be made between the different activities reflected in this mishnah. The first part of the mishnah, which endorses limited engagement in the study of the works of creation and the works of the divine chariot, utilizes the verb דרש. This implies an exegetical activity. What the mishnah seeks to control here is the study, public or private, of certain biblical passages. This type of activity is identical with the study of the Bible, which is found throughout rabbinic literature. The latter part of the mishnah employs a different verb: מסתכל (“to look, to gaze, to contemplate”). The difference between the two parts of the mishnah may thus be explained as reflecting two different types of activity. The activity that

¹⁵Translation of textual version of Parma de Rossi ms 138.

¹⁶See Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. Israel Abrahams; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975) 1. 193. See further Berechiyahu Lifshitz, “Expounding the Works of Creation,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1983–84) 514 [Hebrew].

¹⁷This is Urbach's understanding (*The Sages*, 1. 193), following the common interpretation of this mishnah. In my article, “Is *Ma'aseh Bereshit* Part of Ancient Jewish Mysticism?” *Journal of Jewish Thought* (forthcoming), I have suggested that the four things relate to the vision of the heavenly chariot (*ma'aseh merkabah*) and not to the works of creation. The total prohibition seems to conflict with limited permission given to engage in the study of the *merkabah*; my interpretation that these four things are related only to the vision and not to study diminishes the problem.

¹⁸As Urbach suggests (*ibid.*).

must be controlled, yet which under certain circumstances may be legitimate, is the exegetical activity, the study of certain biblical passages. The activity that is completely discouraged is a speculation, a type of visionary activity that is not textually or exegetically based. This mishnah, therefore, may already reveal a distinction between visionary experiences and the exegetical attention paid to certain potentially problematic passages of scripture. This distinction is fruitful to the understanding of the formation of the Tosefta that comments upon this mishnah. Let us then proceed to an analysis of the Tosefta.

■ Discussion of *t. Hag. 2.1–7*

The Tosefta is the earliest commentary on the passage of the Mishnah that is quoted above. As I have claimed, the Tosefta's commentary on this mishnah is the context in which the "mystical collection" was created. The following is a quotation of the Tosefta's discussion in its entirety:

1. A story of R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai, who was riding upon an ass, when R. Ele'azar b. Arakh, who was driving the ass behind him, said to him, "Rabbi, teach (שנה) me one section of the works of the chariot." He said to him, "Have I not said to you from the beginning that they do not teach (שניין) the chariot with one person, unless he is a sage able to understand from his own knowledge?" He said to him, "Let me now discuss (ארצה) before you." He said to him, "Speak on." R. Ele'azar b. Arakh began (פתח) and expounded (דרש) concerning the works of the chariot. R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai got down from his ass and wrapped himself in his tallith. The two of them sat down on a stone underneath the olive tree and he discussed (הרצה) before him. He stood up and kissed him on the head and said, "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel who has given a son to Abraham our father who knows how to understand and to expound (להבין ולדרוש) the glory of his father in heaven. Some expound (דורש) well and do not perform well, perform well and do not expound (דורש) well. Ele'azar b. Arakh expounds (דורש) well and performs well. Blessed are you Abraham our father that Ele'azar b. Arakh has come forth from your loins, who knows how to understand and expound (להבין ולדרוש) the glory of his father in heaven."

2. R. Yose b. R. Yehudah says, "R. Yehoshu'a discussed (הרצה) [the chariot] before R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai, R. Akiba before R. Yehoshu'a, and Hananiah b. Ḥaḥinai before R. Akiba."

3. Four entered the orchard (לפרדס).¹⁹ One gazed (הציץ) and perished, one gazed (הציץ) and was smitten, one gazed and cut the shoots (הציץ וקיץץ בנטיעות), and one went up whole and came down whole (עלה בשלום ויורד בשלום). Ben Azzai gazed and perished. Concerning him

¹⁹I follow the London manuscript of the Tosefta in omitting the names of the four at this point. See discussion below (n. 53).

scripture says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Ps 116:15). Ben Zoma gazed and was smitten. Concerning him scripture says, “If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you be sated with it and vomit it” (Prov 25:16). Elisha gazed and cut the shoots. Concerning him scripture says, “Let not your mouth lead your flesh into sin” (Eccl 5:5).

4. R. Akiba went up (עלה) whole and came down (ירד) whole. Concerning him scripture says, “Draw me after you, let us make haste (נרוצה). [The king has brought me into his chambers]” (Cant 1:4).

5. A parable: To what may the matter be compared? To the orchard (לפרדס) of a king with an upper chamber (עליה) built above it. What should a man do? Look, (להציץ) only let him not feed (יזין) his eyes on it. They employed another parable: To what may the matter be compared? To a highway (איסתרשא) that passes between two roads, one of fire and one of snow. He who turns aside that way is scorched by the fire. He who turns aside that way is scorched by the snow. What should a man do? Let him walk in the middle—only let him not turn aside, neither this way nor that way.

6. A story concerning R. Yehoshu‘a who was walking along a highway (איסתרשא), and Ben Zoma was coming toward him. When he reached him, he did not greet him. He said to him, “From whence and whither, Ben Zoma?” He said to him, “I was looking (צופה) upon the works of creation, and there is not even a hand breadth [of distance] between the upper waters and the nether waters, for it says, ‘The spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters’ (Gen 1:2). And it says, ‘Like an eagle that stirs up its nest [that flutters over its young]’ (Deut 32:11–12). Just as this eagle flutters above its nest, touching and not touching, so there is no more space between the upper waters and the nether waters than a hand breadth.” Said R. Yehoshu‘a to his disciples, “Ben Zoma already is on the outside.” It was not many days before Ben Zoma departed.

7. Whoever reflects (המסתכל) upon four things would have been better off had he not been born: What is above, what is below, what is before, and what is behind. One might think [one may inquire concerning the time] before the creation; therefore scripture says, “From the day that God created man upon the earth” (Deut 4:32). One might think, before the orders of the seasons were created; therefore scripture says, “And from one end of the heavens to the other” (Deut 4:32). For what purpose does scripture say, “From the day that God created man upon the earth?” From the day that God created man upon the earth, you expound (דורש); and you do not expound what is above, and what below, what was, and what is going to be.

Before beginning the analysis of this passage, a word is in order about the context in which this discussion is embedded. Following the discussion in *m. Hagiga* regarding the earliest halakhic controversy, the Tosefta en-

gages in a lengthy description of norms of establishing authority and common ruling in ancient Israel.²⁰ Even though this discussion is independent of the Tosefta passage quoted above, there is a certain thematic continuity throughout the chapter, as I shall demonstrate. The common theme is the proper authority and method involved in the execution of the study of Torah and its legislation.²¹ It is important to bear in mind this context—and the general theme it introduces—as we analyze the passages in the Tosefta.

The only one to pay attention to the logic of the Tosefta as a whole is Halperin.²² Since Halperin's view of tradition history is that the "mystical collection" was formed out of preexisting materials, he posits that the Tosefta presents a logic of association stringing together these preexisting materials by use of key words that connect one passage to another. What ties the unit together, then, are catch words that are designed to give the passage a sense of unity. According to this understanding, one should seek neither thematic unity nor a message that emerges from the logic of the unit as a whole. Rather, one should be content with finding traces of editorial activity that are left in the seams of the passages. In my opinion, the close relation between the various units of the Tosefta, as well as its overall thematic unity, are not just the work of a creative editor, who was able to piece together disparate material. They are signs of a literary creation that is best understood as having been created in the context of a commentary on *m. Hagiga*.

The quotations of the mishnah found within these passages of the Tosefta show that the Tosefta is indeed indebted to the mishnah. Thus, in the first unit we find a quotation of the first part of the mishnah, which limits the study of *merkabah*, even to one student. The seventh unit quotes the latter part of the mishnah, which concerns whoever looks at four things. The earlier part of the Tosefta's discussion is devoted to the limitations upon the study of the *merkabah*. The latter part of its discussion is devoted to the problem of speculating upon *ma'aseh bereshit*. In this, the passage from the Tosefta follows its understanding of the order of the mishnah.²³ We

²⁰*t. Hag. 2.9.*

²¹Note also the discussion at the end of the first chapter of *Hagiga* in the Mishnah and Tosefta. This discussion focuses on the relation of the written Torah to the teachings of the sages. Here too, issues of authority can be discerned. The end of the first chapter of the mishnah and the beginning of the second chapter form one ancient unit, as has been demonstrated by J. N. Epstein, *Introduction to Tannaitic Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes and Tel Aviv: Devir, 1957) 46–47 [Hebrew].

²²Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 68.

²³Regardless of what the four things may have meant in the Mishnah, the Tosefta seems to relate them to *ma'aseh bereshit*. See n. 18. One may argue that some sense of "what is above and what is below" is echoed in the expression "ascended and descended in peace," which is employed within the mystical collection. This may maintain some contact between the for-

may further notice that the removal of Ben Zoma from the world at the end of the sixth unit is an illustration of the mishnah's claim that it is better that whoever looks at the four things had not come into the world.²⁴ The fact is amply illustrated through Ben Zoma's fate. Judging by the quotations, as well as by the order of the Tosefta's discussion, we therefore may make the preliminary observation that the Tosefta's commentary upon the mishnah follows the mishnah's structure.

We have referred thus far to the opening and closing units of the "mystical collection." The *pardes* material is located between these extremes. In order to appreciate the meaning of the material in this context, we should call attention to some further facts. The Tosefta's material can be divided either thematically or qualitatively. If we attempt to analyze the material thematically, the distinction between *ma'aseh merkabah* and *ma'aseh bereshit* comes to the fore. The first and second units clearly discuss the *merkabah*, while the sixth and seventh units are devoted to *ma'aseh bereshit*. The third, fourth, and fifth units then remain puzzling. Are they part of a discussion of *ma'aseh merkabah* or of *ma'aseh bereshit*? In these units, the change in terminology is striking: we no longer find *ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkabah* as key words; instead, we are told of a *pardes*. It is precisely this change of terminology that has engendered the scholarly debate described in our introductory remarks. In order to appreciate the position of these units within the larger structure of the Tosefta, one should note the qualitative difference between units 1–2 and units 3–6. The first and second units are stories of praise. R. Ele'azar b. Arakh is extolled for having followed the injunctions of the mishnah and for having successfully engaged in the expounding of the *merkabah*. The third through sixth units are stories of blame. Various sages, with the exception of R. Akiba, incur harm for their activities. The lines of demarcation between stories of praise and blame are different from the demarcation between *ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkabah*. It is clear that the important issue for the Tosefta is not the distinction between these two areas of study, but rather between two different types of activity—one that engenders praise and one that engenders blame.

The Tosefta resorts to different terminology in units 1–2 and in units 3–7. It is thus reasonable to assume that paying attention to the different

mula and the context of *ma'aseh merkabah*. Judging by the quotation in the seventh unit of the "mystical collection," however, the primary sense given to the four things seems to be related to *ma'aseh bereshit*. Given its interpretation of this passage, the Tosefta remains true to the order of the mishnah in its discussion—first *ma'aseh merkabah* and then *ma'aseh bereshit*.

²⁴The content of the four things is reflected in his speculation. Ben Zoma looks at the waters above and below—that is, what is above and what is below. He also seems to be looking at what was at the beginning of the world—thus, what was before.

terminology would provide us with a key to understanding the difference between that which is praiseworthy and that which is dangerous and therefore deserving of blame. The terminology characteristic of the first and second units is the classical terminology found throughout rabbinic literature. The terms employed are *דרש*, *שנה*, *הרצה*. The frequency of the use of the verb *דרש* in the first unit is noteworthy;²⁵ it is repeated time and again in what seems to be an almost superfluous manner. All these terms are classical and describe the activities of the sages when they engage in the study of the Torah.²⁶ These terms are not particular to the field of *merkabah*; the choice of terms therefore constitutes an explanation for what makes this activity, when it is carried out successfully, praiseworthy. Studying the Torah by employing exegetical methods is commended. When this exegetically based activity is carried out in accordance with the restrictions of the mishnah and successfully performed, it is the cause of great praise.

From the third unit onward this classical terminology is completely absent. Replacing the previous set of verbs, we find *הציץ*,²⁷ *צופה*,²⁸ and *מסתכל*,²⁸ all verbs that have to do with looking. If the heroes who engage in activities related to the first set of verbs are praised, while the heroes engaged with activities related to the second set of verbs meet fateful ends, the point becomes obvious. Certain kinds of activities are to be commended, while others are fateful and must be discouraged. When we note the choice of verbs employed in the Tosefta, we realize that there is a repetition of the ambivalence expressed in *m. Hag. 2.1*. As we saw in the mishnah, exegetical activity is limited, but not completely discouraged, while visionary activity is totally prohibited. The Tosefta takes up this contrast between exegetical and visionary activity and uses it as the distinguishing feature of the two parts of its own argument. The first part, which is of a positive nature, refers to exegetical activity, while the second part, which tells of the ill fate of various sages, refers to visionary activity. The move between units 1–2 and units 3–7 reflects, then, the move between the two parts of the mishnah²⁹—the exegetical and the visionary. The story of the *pardes*

²⁵Urbach thus suggests (“Ha-Masorat al Torat ha-Sod,” 3 n. 4) that some of its appearances are secondary.

²⁶See Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 84–85.

²⁷In the sixth unit, the Erfurt manuscript reads *מסתכל*, rather than *צופה*, thus limiting the range of verbs employed in this part of the Tosefta’s discussion. The essential point, however, remains the same.

²⁸It should be noted that none of these terms are technical mystical terms. The various forms express the same meaning, that of looking, but the particular verbs employed lack any specifically mystical coloring in texts other than the *pardes* story. The mystical flavor thus emerges from the context and pattern of the story, but not from the choice of the particular verbs.

²⁹While the tone of the mishnah is more austere and seems to discourage the study of *merkabah*, it appears that the Tosefta goes out of its way to praise someone who expounds the

ought to be viewed in this context—as the opening of this second and negative part of the Tosefta’s commentary on the mishnah.

A final point should be made concerning the structure of the Tosefta. In the seventh unit, after the Tosefta refers to the mishnah’s statement concerning the four things at which one should not look, we find a midrash on Deut 4:32 (“For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings in the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of?”). By employing the verb דרש, this midrash seems to break with the neat division of the Tosefta’s discussion. The Erfurt manuscript eliminates this difficulty by reading שאל (“ask”), rather than דרש (“expound”). This is in accordance with the key term employed by the verse under discussion and in accordance with the earlier use of verbs in this same passage. The reading of the other manuscripts must be construed in one of two possible ways. First, there may be an attempt to close the circle opened in the first unit by returning to the verb דרש. In that case, the purpose of this *derashah* (“exposition, homily”) would be to find a source for the prohibition concerning the exposition of *ma’aseh bereshit*, at least in public.³⁰ Thus, while no proof text is brought for the prohibition to engage publicly in the study of the *merkabah*, such proof is exhibited concerning the study of *ma’aseh bereshit*. This would not necessarily weaken the emphasis on visionary activities prominent in units 3–7. It would simply be a return to the opening theme and a closing of the circle.

In view of the fact that the same formula concerning the four forbidden things is employed both in the beginning and at the end of the seventh unit, however, a second explanation may be offered. The forbidden activity is indeed of a visionary nature, as the opening statement in the seventh unit indicates. When looking for a proof text, however, the *derashah* cannot rely on a biblical text that refers to visionary activity and thus transforms Deut 4:32 from its original meaning into a warning against speculation about what preceded the world. The key term in the verse under discussion is שאל (“ask”), thus bringing the discussion more into the realm of intellectual inquiry. The move from שאל to דרש does not seem that far-reaching, since both are expressions of an intellectual nature. The subject, however, remains the same forbidden realm, as indicated by the repetition of the formula of four things at the beginning and end of the seventh unit.

merkabah well. Despite this difference in tone, the basic terminology is identical. Moreover, R. Ele’azar b. Arakh is praised precisely for adhering to the restrictions of the mishnah. This is the essential point of the story and what binds it to the mishnah.

³⁰This is the direction in which the Palestinian Talmud pushes this *derashah*, even though it may not be the sense of the original *derashah* in the Tosefta. See y. *Ḥag.* 2.1, 77c, and see further Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-feshuṭah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta*, vol. 5: *Order Mo’ed* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962) 1296.

Thus, the move from visionary language to more intellectual and exegetical language may bear testimony to the ultimate concern of our unit. Certain kinds of exegetical activities may be problematic precisely because they can lead to visionary activity. The return to exegetical language may thus indicate the close association that exists between these two activities.³¹ Whether it is an issue of correct reading or of interpretation, it seems to me that the appearance of the verb *דרש* at the very end of the Tosefta's discussion does not undermine the structure of the whole as I presented it, according to which the "mystical collection" is to be divided into two primary sections, following the same division within the mishnah.

The relationship between these two parts of the "mystical collection" accounts for the stories told about individual rabbis within this passage from the Tosefta. In the first unit we find an example of a sage who follows the limitations placed by the mishnah upon the study of *ma'aseh merkabah*. There is, I believe, one potentially important difference between the mishnah and the Tosefta at this point. According to the mishnah, one who is wise and understands on his own accord may expound the *merkabah*; the mishnah seems to place a limitation upon teaching others, yet it does not necessarily address the question of a competent student engaging in the study of the *merkabah* on his own. It is this point that the Tosefta seems to address. The point of the Tosefta's presentation seems to be that one should not engage in the study of the *merkabah* except under the direction of a qualified master. This aspect of relations between student and teacher is the thread that holds the various components of the "mystical collection" together. The opening story is not only an example of R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai following the injunctions of the mishnah. More important, it is an example of a particular relationship that exists between R. Yoḥanan and R. Ele'azar b. Arakh. The latter lectures (*הרצה*) before his master and receives his master's approval for his teaching.³² Thus, whereas the mishnah might be construed wrongly as stating that someone who understands of his own accord (*מדעתו*) may engage in the study of the *merkabah*, the Tosefta limits this by introducing the role of the master as controlling the free study of *ma'aseh merkabah*.

The theme of the relationship between student and teacher is the very subject of the second unit. Here there is a list of three successive stages of transmission of the doctrine of the *merkabah*. This list raises several ques-

³¹This association may also be witnessed in the sixth unit, where Ben Zoma is looking, although at the same time he is reflecting exegetically upon Gen 1:2.

³²Arnold Goldberg has gone as far as to suggest ("Der Vortrag des *Ma'asse Merkawa*: Eine Vermutung zur frühen Merkawamystik," *Judaica* 29 [1973] 9–12) that there is before us a ritualized form of an initiation ceremony into the secrets of the *merkabah* by the teacher to his student.

tions. Why is the lecturing of R. Ele'azar b. Arakh, which was the subject of the first unit, not mentioned here?³³ Why does the list not go further back than R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai?³⁴ What happens to this particular tradition after Hananiah b. Ḥaḥinai? In fact, the reader feels that this unit is interested only in R. Akiba and those immediately associated with him. Thus, we hear whom he taught, and from whom he learned. His immediate teacher, R. Yehoshu'a, also has his authority grounded one generation back. One receives the impression that this list, rather than attempting an exhaustive history of transmission of esoteric doctrine, is interested in the credentials and tradition history centered around one particular rabbinic hero—R. Akiba. Later in the discussion, I shall return to the question of the particular tradition history represented in the second unit and its relationship to the first unit. For now, the most important fact is the question of relationship between teacher and student as a key to understanding the relationship between the two parts of the Tosefta's presentation.

The third unit describes the differing fates of R. Akiba and the three other scholars when entering the *pardes*. It seems to me that given the structure of the Tosefta as a whole, the key to R. Akiba's successful entry into the *pardes* is the very fact that in the second unit he was established as a legitimate link in a chain of relations between teachers and students. It is this fact that ensures his safe exit from the *pardes*. The other three members who entered the *pardes* did not have the kind of protection afforded by the chain of tradition and by the presence of a teacher to control their activities. I believe this is precisely the point of the sixth unit. The story of Ben Zoma and R. Yehoshu'a revolves around three heroes: Ben Zoma, R. Yehoshu'a, and the group of students portrayed here. This very juxtaposition indicates the ultimate issue. The students are inside, while Ben Zoma is outside. They maintain a proper relationship with their master, although this is not in itself a point of concern for our story. Ben Zoma, in contrast, does not maintain the proper relationship with his teacher: he does not greet R. Yehoshu'a, and he is contemplating (צופה) in a free manner, without the supervision of a master. All that is left for R. Yehoshu'a to do is to proclaim that Ben Zoma is outside. He is thus outside the chain of tradition, the field of legitimacy, and therefore, in a sense, outside the world. The very same R. Yehoshu'a who legitimates R. Akiba in the second unit, serves to invalidate Ben Zoma in the sixth. Thus, we need not seek any particular error in the teaching expressed by Ben Zoma.³⁵ Rather,

³³See also Jacob Neusner, *Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions concerning Yoḥanan ben Zakkai* (Studia post-Biblica 16; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 299.

³⁴See Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 283.

³⁵See Saul Lieberman, "How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?" in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) 135–39; Urbach, *The Sages*, 1. 189–91.

his problematic relationship with R. Yehoshu'a is the point of the story.³⁶ Our unit seems to play the שלום ("peace or safety") with which R. Akiba ascended and descended against the שלום ("peace greeting") Ben Zoma fails to give R. Yehoshu'a.

If we tie the two themes that mark the organization of the "mystical collection" together, we find two types of activity—one exegetical and the other visionary. The former can be controlled through the presence of a teacher who supervises the nature of the exegetical process. The latter cannot be controlled; it is negative in that it defies supervision, as the story of Ben Zoma indicates. One question remains open: Does the exegetical—and therefore legitimate—activity in any way yield visionary activity? Does the intellectual engagement with the *merkabah* remain intellectual, or does it serve as a gateway to the visionary experience?³⁷ It is at this point that we can turn our attention to the story of the four who entered *pardes*.

■ Four Entered *Pardes*: Reading in Context

I have already suggested that the key to R. Akiba's successful activities lies in his relationship with R. Yehoshu'a. Until now, this point has emerged from contextual analysis of the Tosefta. Are there any indications within the *pardes* passage itself to support this understanding? If so, this would seem to be conclusive proof of the formation of the *pardes* incident within the literary context of the Tosefta. It seems that this is the very point of the proof text employed regarding R. Akiba: "Draw me after you, let us make haste" (Cant 1:4). It is to be noted that the first part of this verse alone is quoted here, even though reference to the latter part of the verse is indicated by the "etc." found at the end of the quotation.³⁸ Who is it that draws him? Read in context the answer becomes obvious: it is the master, in this case R. Yehoshu'a, who by guiding and supervising the person engaging in the study of the *merkabah*, draws the student after him. This "drawing after" may indeed describe the attainment of a particular mystical experience as a consequence of the study of the *merkabah*. The essential point, however, is that this is reached not in isolation, but by following the example of the master. The final word of the proof text further confirms this

³⁶This point has already been noted by Yehuda Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha*, 117–19.

³⁷The scholar most sensitive to this question is Rowland; see his discussion in *The Open Heaven*, 300. He assumes that there is a natural move from the one to the other. This assumption, however, is not justified by texts, as much as it is part of his intuitive understanding of these texts and the situation they portray. Moreover, one would imagine R. Ele'azar b. Arakh to be the subject of such a vision, rather than R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai.

³⁸We do find many instances in which the *derashah* is indeed contained in the unquoted portion of the verse. In this instance, however, there is a convincing and brilliant *derashah* in the earlier part of the verse, so that we need not concentrate our exegetical efforts on the latter part.

interpretation. “Let us make haste” is expressed by the Hebrew word *נרצצה*. The *derashah* on this word can only make sense in the context of the Tosefta. Read in context, this word can only be an echo of the main term employed in the first and second units of the collection—*הרצצה* (“lectured”). The *derashah* thus captures the voice of the student turning to his master and saying, “Draw me after you, and we shall jointly engage in that particular type of study of the *merkabah* through which we may come to the chambers of the king.”³⁹ This contextual understanding of the proof text regarding R. Akiba makes sense only within the context of the Tosefta. It therefore seems to me conclusive support of the formation of the *pardes* unit within the context of the Tosefta.

As soon as this context is lost, the meaning of the passage vanishes, and it must be altered. A clear example of this is to be found in *Canticles Rabbah's* version of the *pardes* story. The R. Akiba passage in that midrash reads as follows:

R. Akiba went in peace and came out in peace. And he said: “Not because I am greater than my fellows, but thus taught the sages in the mishnah: ‘Your deeds will bring you near, and your deeds will keep you far.’” And of him it is said: “The king has brought me into his chambers.”⁴⁰

It should be noted that this is the only existing version of the *pardes* story that is located outside the Tosefta and the direct commentaries upon *Hagiga* found in the two Talmuds. In my analysis—which cannot be entered into here—the Talmuds are consciously dependent upon the Tosefta and therefore do not fully sever the *pardes* incident from its related context, as can be seen by the fact that other materials from the Tosefta are included in the same context. It is precisely this continued dependence and the circulation of the same material that has led Halperin to adopt the term “mystical collection.” *Canticles Rabbah* is therefore the only place in which the *pardes* story is completely detached from its original context in the Tosefta. This detachment causes two significant changes in the version. The first change concerns the addition of an explanatory comment by R. Akiba; this comment becomes necessary as soon as the *pardes* passage is no longer explicated by its association with the second unit of the Tosefta. If we no longer account for R. Akiba’s successful entry and exit to *pardes* through his association with R. Yehoshu‘a, what then is the cause of his success? This text’s addition, which is obvious from the first-person language employed in a story told in the third person, attempts to solve this question. The explanation of R. Akiba’s success seems to refer to his deeds, rather than

³⁹Frankel has already noted this interpretation of the verse in his lecture, see n. 8 above.

⁴⁰*Cant. R.* 1.4.

merit inherited from his forefathers.⁴¹ This explanation also disallows the possibility of random divine favoritism, a charge that may emerge from the proof text: “The king has brought me into his chambers.” This is not a capricious act of the king, but a consequence of the merit acquired by R. Akiba. This very proof text, however, is further indication of the changes made in this version from the original understanding of the Tosefta. The earlier part of the verse, playing on the word גְּרוּצָה, is no longer understood in the new context. Therefore, the *derashah* is shifted to the latter part of the verse. It may be that the king’s chambers already allude to the chambers of the *merkabah*,⁴² although this is not stated explicitly. The verse now describes the relation between man—perhaps the mystic—and God, rather than the relationship between the teacher and his disciple.⁴³ The proof text, by focusing on the action of the king who brings man into his chambers, may even place the accent on divine initiative in the granting of a successful mystical experience. The statement placed in R. Akiba’s mouth, which emphasizes his actions and his merits, may be intended to offset such an impression. It is thus possible that both changes in this version of the *pardes* episode are further interrelated.

The recognition that the Tosefta is the context in which the *pardes* story must be interpreted helps us to account for further particularities in the story. Despite the fact that all four sages are reported to have done the same thing—to have entered an orchard—different things are told of the three sages, on the one hand, and of R. Akiba, on the other. Each of the three sages whose visit to the orchard was in some way unsuccessful is said to have gazed. This is the activity common to all three, and we may assume that this very activity turned out to be fateful. Despite the fact that R. Akiba, too, entered *pardes*, he is not said to have gazed. This change of language may hold the key to his successful entry and exit, important support for an appreciation of the *pardes* story in the context of the Tosefta’s layout. The one sage who entered successfully not only had a proper relationship with his teacher; beyond that—and perhaps because of that—what he did in the *pardes* is of a completely different nature. Thus, if the Tosefta is divided into two parts according to the particular terminology it employs,

⁴¹This seems to me the most likely way of understanding his claim that he is not greater than his fellows, which seems to contradict the latter part of his statement, where we learn that he is indeed greater than them in deeds. This greatness is self-acquired through his deeds, it seems, rather than inherited. This is precisely the manner in which *Ed.* 5.7, which R. Akiba quotes, uses this statement. Note that being brought near to the sages in the original quote has been changed here to being brought close to God.

⁴²See *Lev.* R. 16.4. See Joseph Dan, “The Chambers of the Chariot,” *Tarbiz* 47 (1977–78) 49–55 [Hebrew].

⁴³Both readings seem to me more adequate than the one offered by Rowland (*The Open Heaven*, 340), where the verse is addressed by others to R. Akiba, who serves them as a model.

R. Akiba's presence in the second part does not contradict his having belonged to the heroes of the first part. That the crucial verb *הציין* is not employed in reference to R. Akiba supports this conclusion. In this sense, the story of the four is really a story of two groups: one that engaged in gazing, and the other (R. Akiba) that did not.

What does this tell us about the relationship between exegetical and visionary activities? So far, both activities are separate. R. Akiba is not portrayed as engaging in visionary activity. Yet his very presence in the same narrative as the other three, who did look at the orchard, forces us to consider the possibility that R. Akiba is not totally disengaged from the visionary dimension. Perhaps his successful and legitimate exegetical activity, as stated in the second unit, may be the key to certain visionary activity reported in the *pardes* passage. We shall return to this possibility later in our discussion, but must first pay closer attention to the verbs describing R. Akiba and their relationship to other expressions appearing in the "mystical collection." Two different textual versions exist that describe R. Akiba's activity. Neither version describes activity that is related to the study of Torah; to that degree, the presentation of R. Akiba in the third unit fits in with the different nature of that unit. The one version describes R. Akiba as ascending and descending.⁴⁴ The other describes him as entering and exiting the orchard.⁴⁵ The opening of the *pardes* passage employs language of entry, a factor in favor of the latter version. The change from the opening statement, however, may testify to an authentic reading. We must then ascertain the nature of the opening statement and the literary nature of the unit as a whole, a matter to which we shall turn shortly. Peter Schäfer has attempted to play these two versions against each other, maintaining that the one reflects a more mystical⁴⁶ and the other a more parabolic understanding of R. Akiba's activity.⁴⁷ It is clear that ascending and descending evokes a more mystical association; this is, after all, a key term used by the hekhalot mystics. The language of ascent and descent stands in certain tension with the more neutral opening: "Four entered an orchard." The description of ascending and descending, however, may not only be a reflection of mystical language that exists elsewhere, but may also be echoed within the "mystical collection" itself. If we find an echo of this language

⁴⁴This version is recorded in all Tosefta manuscripts except for the Erfurt manuscript and in the Babylonian Talmud, with the exception of the Göttingen manuscript (Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 87).

⁴⁵This version is attested by the Erfurt manuscript and the Palestinian Talmud.

⁴⁶For Schäfer ("New Testament and Hekhalot Literature," 25–26), this version is later and reflects esoteric terminology.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 24–25. Morray-Jones has attempted ("Paradise Revisited, Part 1," 201) to downplay the difference. One has to go a long way, however, in accepting Scholem's approach in order to accept his neat solution.

in its indigenous context, the reading of ascent and descent would be preferred to that of exit and entry. The potential mystical implications of this linguistic usage, moreover, would not be eliminated. In the fifth unit we find a parable of a *pardes* and an upper chamber. The Hebrew for the upper chamber is עליה, which is closely related in etymology to the verb that describes R. Akiba's ascent—עלה. If, immediately following the description of R. Akiba's ascent, we find a play on words employing the same verb—a verb that is in fact an attempt to explain and account for R. Akiba's success, as I suggest below—the reading of ascent and descent is strongly favored.

One must now account for several other factors. What is the meaning of the change of activity between R. Akiba and the other sages? What is the meaning of the ascent and descent of R. Akiba, and what is its relationship to the type of activity that the second unit reports regarding R. Akiba? What is the relationship between the *pardes* story and the *pardes* parable that immediately follows it and seems to echo it? This last question brings us to a more fundamental consideration—that of genre. In order to understand the passage and its particular linguistic choices, we must come to a more precise understanding of the literary genre of this unit. Through this investigation, we may gain an understanding of both its peculiarities and the way in which it was formed, and thus of its ultimate message.

■ Four Entered *Pardes*: The Problem of Genre

As mentioned above, the discussion between Scholem and Urbach touches upon the question of the literary nature of the *pardes* episode. The Babylonian Talmud, upon which Scholem relied, clearly assumes that the story is a record of a factual event. It thus places a warning in the mouth of R. Akiba, who warns his fellows how to avoid certain dangers of the way.⁴⁸ The Babylonian Talmud thus views the *pardes* episode as a historical event. The question, of course, is not whether the story happened or not; what is important from the perspective of genre definition is that it is presented as a historical occurrence. In the context of the Tosefta, however, we encounter a major terminological difficulty; because of this, to conceive of the *pardes* incident as a historical narrative is virtually impossible. Within the “mystical collection” we have particular markers that indicate the specific genre employed by the text. Thus, the first and sixth units introduce their material with the term *ma'aseh*, thus indicating that we are to understand the text in narrative—and therefore ostensibly historical—terms. The fifth unit contains two passages that are introduced by the term *meshal*, indicating that we have before us a parable. The *pardes* passage, however, has no term

⁴⁸b. *Hag.* 14b.

introducing it. It is unlikely that if the other stories about sages are introduced with *ma'aseh*, the term would be omitted here. If the passage was understood as a historical story, the likely opening would have read מעשה בן עזאי ובן זומא ובאלישע וברבי עקיבא שנכנסו לפרדס ("A story about Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma and Elisha and R. Akiba, who entered the *pardes*"), as we find in other instances in which stories are told concerning several sages.⁴⁹ The particular opening formula in this case does not, therefore, accord with common opening formulae of stories told of a group of rabbis. Since the fifth unit tells a parable of an orchard, should the third unit also be viewed as a parable? This is the direction that Urbach takes; in fact, he conflates these two parables into one, or at least reads one in light of the other. Still, the lack of the introductory formula of the parable remains a problem, especially in light of the fact of the editor's care with regard to generic definition. Moreover, if the *pardes* episode is a parable, we lack a clear demarcation between it and its moral. These technical considerations force us to think of a third possibility in defining the genre of the *pardes* passage. In his support of Urbach, Halperin introduces a passage that enables us to consider another category of genre at work in the *pardes* episode.⁵⁰ Halperin attempts to support Urbach's analysis by comparing the structure of the *pardes* passage to that of haggadic enumerations found in the Mekhilta. He points to the following passage:

You may say: There are three sons. One sought the honor of the father and the honor of the son. One sought the honor of the father and not the honor of the son. One sought the honor of the son and not the honor of the father. Jeremiah sought the honor of the father and the honor of the son; as it is said: "We have sinned and rebelled, Thou hast not forgiven" (Lam 3:42). Therefore he received a double portion of prophecy, as it is said: "And much else was added" (Jer 36:32). Elijah sought the honor of the father and the not honor of the son; as it is said: "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Hosts, etc." (1 Kgs 19:14). What is said there. . . I do not desire your prophecy. Jonah sought the honor of the son and not the honor of the father; as it is said: "And Jonah arose to flee, etc." (Jonah 1:3), what is said there: (Jonah 3:1). . . a second time he spoke with him, but not a third.⁵¹

Because of the use of the metaphorical language of sonship and fatherhood, Halperin sees this passage as a kind of metaphor. He therefore finds

⁴⁹See, for example, the story of the sages who stayed awake all night in Bnei Brak, told at the beginning of the Passover Haggadah.

⁵⁰Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 90.

⁵¹The translation is based on *ibid.*; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el Pisha* 1 (eds. Hayyim S. Horovits and Yisrael A. Rabin; 1928–31; 2d ed.; Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrman, 1960) 4.

in this passage a structure similar to the metaphorical structure that Urbach suggested for the third unit of the “mystical collection.” A closer examination of this passage indicates that we should recognize it as belonging to a different literary genre, one that in turn sheds light on the story of *pardes*. This type of enumeration list serves as a kind of typology by means of which different types are distinguished from one another. What this unit emphasizes is not so much the metaphor of father and son, but rather the different types of attitudes that can be taken toward the father (God) and the son (Israel). Thus, its main point is the typology of different prophetic attitudes, or put differently, the typology of the prophet placed between God and Israel.⁵² The unit opens, moreover, with a theoretical statement of the different types. At this point the typology is pure, and the individual cases that conform to this typology are not mentioned. Each type is designated by the impersonal appellation: אחד (“one”). The individuals who correspond to this typology are then personally named, and concerning each one of them a proof text is brought. Finally, we hear of the fate or the due recompense appropriate to each. It is through this recompense that the midrash engages in evaluation. Clearly, Jeremiah is the favored type of prophet, with Jonah following as a dubious second. The structural similarity between this passage and the *pardes* story is obvious. The *pardes* story, too, opens with a general statement concerning four different possibilities.⁵³ Then those who formerly were identified merely as אחד are named. A suitable proof text is provided for each, in which the outcome of his behavior is described. This structural correspondence allows us to examine the *pardes* story as a kind of typology. It is particularly important to note that scriptural verses are applied to all four heroes of the *pardes* episode. These verses are certainly not a historical description, but represent the author’s evaluation. They thus express a particular ideology and conform to a given literary type; in this case it is the typological list.

Unlike the typology of prophets, the *pardes* story refers to four heroes, rather than three. This directs our attention to rabbinic enumerations employing the number four. Another passage in the Mekhilta is relevant in this context.

You find that you have to say: There are four types of sons: the wise, the simpleton, the wicked, and the one who does not know enough to

⁵²On the centrality of this tension to the very nature of biblical prophecy, see Yochanan Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992) 9–48.

⁵³Urbach’s analysis (“Ha-Masorot al Torat ha-Sod,” 12) relies on the London manuscript and the Palestinian Talmud’s omission of the names of the four from the opening statement. This seems to be the preferred reading, which is in turn confirmed by the conformity of this passage to the patterns of enumeration and typology in rabbinic literature in general.

ask. The wise—what does he say? “What mean the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God hath commanded you?” (Deut 6:20). You explain to him, in turn, the laws of the Passover, and tell him that the company is not to disband immediately after partaking of the paschal lamb. . . . The simpleton—what does he say? “What is this?” And thou shalt say unto him: “By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage.” The wicked one—what does he say? “What mean ye by this service?” (Exod 12:26). Because he excludes himself from the group, do thou also exclude him from the group, and say unto him: “It is because of that which the Lord did for me” (Exod 13:8)—for me, but not for you. “Had you been there, you would not have been redeemed.” As for him who does not know enough to ask, you should begin and explain to him. For it is said: “And thou shalt tell thy son in that day” (Exod 13:8).⁵⁴

This typology of four sons serves a hermeneutic purpose: the reconciling of contradictory or superfluous biblical passages. The hermeneutic dimension is thus central to this passage and perhaps to the genre as a whole.⁵⁵ Each son elicits a different reaction, which is supported by a particular verse. So far the correspondence with the *pardes* structure is obvious.⁵⁶ The typology of sons, however, is of particular importance for an understanding of the formation of the *pardes* episode. In this list of four sons, as opposed to the list of three prophets we saw above, we can recognize a pattern of qualitative differences between the four sons. The sons are characterized as wise, on the one extreme, and wicked, on the other, with two median positions that are harder to define. Other rabbinic listings of four types reflect a similar division. Thus, for example, the lists of four things found in *m. ʿAbot* 5, while slightly different in terminology, reflect a similar essential distinction between the two extremes of good and evil and the two median positions. We read, for example, of four types of character among disciples:

Quick to comprehend and quick to forget: his gain disappears in his loss. Slow to comprehend and slow to forget: his loss disappears in his

⁵⁴*Mekhlita de-Rabbi Yishmaʿel Pisha* 18 (ed. Jacob Lanterbach; 3 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961) 1. 166–67.

⁵⁵W. Sibley Towner, *The Rabbinic “Enumeration of Scriptural Examples”* (Studia post-Biblica 22; Leiden: Brill, 1973), has noted the important hermeneutic function of the enumeration lists in the Mekhlita.

⁵⁶It is interesting to note that the four sons passage, in the Passover Haggada, has been interpreted in light of the *pardes* story. See the commentary of the fourteenth-century exegete Rashbaz (Duran Shimʿon b. Zemaḥ), quoted in *Haggada Shleima* (Menaḥem M. Kasher; Jerusalem: 1961) 20 [Hebrew].

gain. Quick to comprehend and slow to forget: a wise man. Slow to comprehend and quick to forget: this is an evil portion.

Other types of character mentioned are the four types of temperament, four types of character in almsgiving, and the four types of character in attendance at the house of study.⁵⁷ The typology in all these cases describes the wise or pious man on the one extreme, the wicked man on the other, and two median positions that vary according to the situation.

This is another passage that functions as a typology, but unlike the passages from the Mekhilta quoted above, this typology does not serve a hermeneutic function. Neither the hermeneutic dimension's appearance in the midrash—nor its absence in the mishnah—need surprise us. The typologies vary from case to case, depending on the formulation that is appropriate for the particular subject at hand. It is possible, nevertheless, to recognize a consistent pattern throughout these lists. There is always the righteous, or pious, or wise; the evil; and two median positions which are often hard to define, ambiguous, or even themselves the subject of controversy. These median positions are less essential than the clear definitions of the two extremes. This genre of typology thus seems to be based on clear-cut distinctions defining the basic poles; in between these lie less significant median positions.

This allows us to reconsider some of the dimensions of genre, particular with regard to the *pardes* passage. Here, too, the key number is four. These four are divided into two extremes, which are represented by R. Akiba, on the one hand, and Elisha b. Abuyah, on the other. The one is a representation of a wise or righteous man; the other is an example of a wicked man. The two median positions are occupied by Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, who receive an equivocal evaluation. A clear example of this is found in the death of Ben Azzai. If Ben Azzai indeed dies, there seems to be something amiss where he is concerned. Yet the proof text refers to his death as the death of a pious man. The different versions of the *pardes* story reveal changes in tradition history that reverse the fates of Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma,⁵⁸ but this need not worry us unduly. From the perspective of this typological list, what is important is not the precision concerning the historical fate of either of these individuals,⁵⁹ as much as the interim place

⁵⁷*m. ʿAbot* 5.10–14.

⁵⁸The Palestinian Talmud reverses the fates of Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma. This is reflected also in the London manuscript of the Tosefta, which follows the order of calamities as in the Tosefta, however, and not the order of sages in the Palestinian Talmud. This may indicate the London manuscript's attempt to adjust the Tosefta's version to that of the Palestinian Talmud.

⁵⁹We should also remember the tradition concerning Ben Azzai's martyrdom, which obviously conflicts with the *pardes* story and which may have affected the parallel traditions concerning their respective fates. See *Lam. R.* 2.2.4. Rowland has attempted (*The Open Heaven*,

they jointly occupy in the list. From another perspective, one may also portray the arrangement of the list as follows. There seems to be a gradation in the presentation of the sages. Their fates are presented from the most extreme consequence—the death of Ben Azzai—through the insanity of Ben Zoma, the effects of Elisha b. Abuyah, who himself was not harmed, and concluding with the positive outcome of R. Akiba, who came out in peace and left his environment intact. From the perspective of their respective outcomes, Ben Azzai is the farthest removed from R. Akiba. From the perspective of the typological list, Elisha b. Abuyah is the contrary of R. Akiba, and the two are placed next to one another, as in other typological lists that juxtapose the wicked and the wise.

The parallels between these typological lists and the *pardes* story are convincing enough to allow consideration of the *pardes* incident in light of this genre. Yet, because of its opening, we cannot unequivocally define the *pardes* incident as a typological list. Unlike all other cases we have examined, the opening statement is not an abstract typology, but a concrete narration of an event that serves such a typology. What we have before us is therefore not a pure literary type, but a composite one⁶⁰ which has elements of the typological list and other elements as well. In view of the fact that the fifth unit introduces the term *pardes* in the context of what is clearly a parable, we must allow for a certain parabolic element to account for the particular formation of the passage under discussion, as Urbach has suggested.⁶¹ In order to appreciate the parabolic dimension of this narration, however, and in order to understand the very parable that is brought in the fifth unit, it is necessary to ask what is particular to parables of orchards in rabbinic literature. An appreciation of this particular type of parable in rabbinic literature will enable us to understand both the opening statement of the third unit and the orchard parable of the fifth unit.

■ Orchard Parables in Rabbinic Literature

The basic premise of this section is that parables resort to fixed literary patterns.⁶² Parables are not necessarily singular creations to suit particular

321–23) to read the version of Ben Azzai's fate found in the *pardes* story in light of this tradition. The recognition of the typological, rather than historical, nature of this source is the key to the reconciliation of the conflicts concerning Ben Azzai's fate. This is obviously part of my assessment of this source as a literary creation, as I shall suggest below.

⁶⁰I know of no other such combination of genres in one rabbinic text. This combination may be an ad hoc creation of the editor in the service of the message of the collection as a whole.

⁶¹Urbach, "Ha-Masorot al Torat ha-Sod," 13–14.

⁶²This premise was elaborated as part of my doctoral dissertation, "God and Israel as Father and Son in Tannaitic Literature" (Ph.D. diss. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986) 78–84 [Hebrew].

needs. Many parables are unique creations, particular to a given hermeneutic situation, and any pattern with regard to the use of parables may have as many exceptions as cases that fulfill the rule. As a starting point, nevertheless, we may ask whether thematic aspects characterize the use of a particular type of parable. If certain thematic characteristics exist in several other rabbinic orchard parables, these characteristics may account both for the *pardes* parable in the fifth unit and the particular choice of opening line for the typological list in the third unit. The problem of chronology, however, makes this attempt difficult. The “mystical collection” is a tannaitic work, and the majority of parables that take place in an orchard date to the posttannaitic period. A question then arises concerning the value of using such later texts to shed light on the earlier uses of the orchard parable. In attempting to distinguish between earlier and later—in particular tannaitic and amoraic—parables, I was not able to detect significant differences. This may stem, however, from the limited number of tannaitic orchard parables in our possession. More significantly, in reading these parables, it is important to remember that they are formations of oral literature, a literature that tends to fall easily into set patterns which survive for generations. Because this is a collective oral literature, it is not surprising to find certain consistent patterns that cut across various subperiods within rabbinic literature. For this reason, deviations from prevailing patterns as well as the particular imprint of individual authors on the use of parables are clearly recognizable.⁶³

As stated, many of my examples are significantly later than the “mystical collection.” These texts enable us, however, to raise new interpretive possibilities for the understanding of this collection. Since this text has attracted much speculation involving varied and diversified literatures,⁶⁴ it does not seem unreasonable to use later rabbinic materials in the attempt to uncover literary conventions that underlie earlier uses of the parable. Whether or not the themes I shall suggest below existed as part of tannaitic literary conventions, the later material brings fresh considerations to the reading of the *pardes* episode and thus perhaps uncovers its particular meaning, whether or not this meaning is part of a shared tradition.

In tannaitic literature, knowledge of the following *pardes* parable is taken for granted, and the text merely alludes to it and does not quote it di-

⁶³An example may be found in the use of parables in *Seder Eliyahu (Tanna debe Eliyyahu: The Lore of the School of Elijah* [trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981]). Due to the unique nature of this work—which is likely the work of one author and which bears unique stylistic features—its parables often tend to deviate from conventions of usage found in most of rabbinic literature.

⁶⁴A classic example is found in Henry A. Fischel’s interpretation of the story in *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy: A Study of Epicurea and Rhetorica in Early Midrashic Writings* (Studia post-Biblica 21; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 1–34.

rectly.⁶⁵ The following quotation of this tannaitic midrash, attributed to R. Yishma'el, is taken from *Leviticus Rabbah*.

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: "When a soul sinneth, etc." (Lev 4:2). R. Yishma'el taught: This may be compared to the case of a king who had an orchard containing excellent early figs, and he placed there two watchmen, one lame and the other blind. He said to them: "Be careful with these fine early figs." After some days the lame man said to the blind one: "I see fine early figs in the orchard." Said the blind man to him: "Come let us eat them." "Am I then able to walk?" said the lame man. "Can I then see?" retorted the blind man. The lame man got astride the blind man, and thus they ate the early figs and sat down again each in his place. After some days the king came into that vineyard, and said to them: "Where are the fine early figs?" The blind man replied: "My lord the king, can I then see?" The lame man replied: "My lord, the king, can I then walk?" What did the king, who was a man of insight, do with them? He placed the lame man astride the blind man, and they began to move about. Said the king to them: "Thus have you done, and eaten the early figs."⁶⁶

The referent of this parable is human behavior, the human person being constituted of body and soul. The relationship of body and soul—the lame and the blind—is the parable's focus; the orchard is of little significance. Yet it is important to reflect on the context in which the actions of the lame and the blind take place. The orchard serves as a testing ground for suitable and unsuitable behavior. The king's appointing a lame and blind person to the unlikely posts of guards may be an indication of the king's high degree of suspicion and his knowledge of the nature of these guards. If so, the very act of placing them as guards may constitute a type of test whereby their behavior is observed. This must be the parable's moral. The orchard is the world, an arena where various human behaviors are tested and then judged.

If indeed there is an element of testing, or even an opportunity for different behaviors to find expression, a further point in the parable becomes essential—the king's presence. The parable begins with the king's presence in the orchard at the moment of appointment and warning. What follows is predicated on the king's absence, for it is clear that only in his absence will the two watchmen attempt to eat the figs. The parable also tells us of the king's return to the orchard, a return that insinuates that the absence was not real. The king is able to reconstruct what transpired in his absence; thus, although absent, the king was ultimately present. Two themes in this parable are relevant to our discussion: the orchard as a testing

⁶⁵*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el Shirta 2* (Horovits and Rabin, 125).

⁶⁶*Lev. R. 4.5.*

ground and the degree and form of the presence of the king himself in the orchard. I suggest that these two themes recur in many rabbinic orchard parables and can shed light on the use of the term *pardes* in the “mystical collection.” Before returning to the *pardes* theme, however, it is interesting to note further instances of the application of these themes in other orchard parables.

Genesis Rabbah reads:

The matter may be compared to a king who had an orchard and brought workers into it, building a treasury at the gate. He said, “Whoever shows himself worthy through hard work in the orchard may go into the treasury, and whoever does not show himself worthy in the labor of the orchard may not go into the treasury.”⁶⁷

The different types of roles and associations by which people come to work in the orchard are interesting. People can enter as guards or laborers, and, as described in other sources, as tenants and sons as well. In most cases, the definition of the role the person plays in the orchard indicates the absence of the king from the orchard. The king is never—or virtually never⁶⁸—portrayed as tilling his own orchard. This allows for the presence of other characters in the orchard and, at the same time, touches upon the king’s absence from the orchard. The present midrash need not imply the king’s absence. The king must be present to judge whoever shows himself worthy in work. The orchard is a place where a selection or a choice takes place;⁶⁹ in this parable, the good workers are distinguished from the bad workers.

Different kinds of buildings are found alongside or within the orchard. The present midrash tells us of a treasury that is placed alongside the orchard. Thus the sorting between two types of people that takes place within the orchard is linked intimately to the reward that follows suit. In later midrashim, this situation is related both to the question of the king’s absence (or semiabsence) and to appropriate architectural expressions of his semipresence. Thus in *Exodus Rabbah*, in an almost identical parable, we read:

⁶⁷*Gen. R.* 9.9.

⁶⁸A very borderline case may be found in *Cant. R.* 6.3. See also *Exod. R.* 30.1.

⁶⁹I shall not go to great lengths here in documenting this function of the orchard parables. The transformations of types of both testing situations and ways in which the orchard parables serve to reflect binary oppositions of good and bad behavior make for an interesting study but are outside the scope of this article. Even many parables that upon first reading do not seem to express this idea of orchard as testing ground do in fact make use of this motif in some altered form. For some further examples of this theme, see *Gen. R.* 61.2; *Cant. R.* 6.3; *Deut. R.* 7.4.

God was here like a king who had an orchard, wherein he built a tall tower and commanded that workmen should be engaged to do his work there. The king said that the one who was proficient in his work would receive full reward, but one who was indolent in his work would be handed over to the governments. This king is the king of kings, and the orchard is the world in which God has placed Israel to keep the Torah; He also stipulated with them that he who keeps the Torah has the entry to Paradise, but he who does not keep it is faced with hell. Thus with God; although He seems to have removed His presence from the temple, yet “His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men” (Ps 11:4).⁷⁰

The parable in this later version is essentially the same. The tower is an added architectural element. Rather than orchard and treasury, we have here orchard and tower. It seems that the tower is the place where the king is present and from which he watches over the workers in the orchard. In this way the king may be said to be both present and absent from the orchard. The exegesis identifies the tower with the temple, thus establishing a further link between the king and the building that is in the orchard. Once the midrash moves from the parable to its referent, moreover, the question of presence and absence becomes a conscious focus of attention. God has removed his presence from the temple—possibly the tower—yet remains present in another form. Here we have two levels of struggle with presence and absence.

The parallel to this last midrash in Solomon Buber’s edition of the *Tanḥuma* has a slightly different architectural addition to the orchard.

To what may the matter be compared? To a king who had an orchard in which he placed workers, and at the entrance to the orchard was a treasury full of every good thing. The king said, “Whoever does his work wholeheartedly will take his wages from here, but whoever does not do his work wholeheartedly, I shall sit in my palace, and sentence him.”⁷¹

This midrash is a closer elaboration of the one found in *Genesis Rabbah*; Here again is the treasury, which was absent from the parable in *Exodus Rabbah*. A locus for the presence of the king himself has been added here. This midrash also comments on the presence of God in the temple, but a place for the king had to be found outside the confines of the orchard. The placement of the king in his palace, however, seems to be secondary. In all other cases, the orchard has one building alongside or within it. The need

⁷⁰*Exod. R. 2.2*; translation from *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus* (trans. S. M. Lehrman; eds. H. Freedmann and Maurice Simon; London and New York: Soncino, 1983) 48.

⁷¹*Tanḥuma* (Buber ed.) *Shemot* 10.

to refer to two structures stems from the adaptation of the earlier parable to the particular context of the temple. Regardless of the varieties in the structure of the parable, this version, too, indicates its concern for the place of the king himself.

The following midrash offers another variation on the same theme.

R. Yose the Galilean said: [Let me tell you a] parable: To what may this be likened? To a king of flesh and blood who had an orchard in which he built a tall tower. He showed affection for the orchard by assigning workmen to it, and ordered them to busy themselves with its cultivation. The king thereupon ascended to the top of the tower, from which he could see them but they could not see him, as it is said, "But the Lord in His holy temple; be silent before Him all the earth" (Hab 2:20). At the day's end the king came down and sat in judgment upon them.⁷²

Were the attribution of this parable to the tannaitic sage, R. Yose the Galilean, reliable, this might be the earliest known rabbinic orchard parable, and as such an invaluable source for the interpretation of the *pardes* episode. The similarity of this parable to the parable from *Exodus Rabbah*, as well as its appearance in a late midrash, however, make the attribution highly suspect. Nevertheless, the point of the parable is still relevant. It is clear that the orchard has a tower built within it, and that this tower is a dwelling place of the king. This parable is not associated with the temple; the tower is designed to convey the sense that God dwells and watches from on high. Once more, the orchard is a situation of choice and selection, where God can watch and monitor different types of human behavior.

The last parable of this type is once more found in a late rabbinic work, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer*. The parable is similar to the set of parables we have examined, but contains one particular linguistic feature that is important in the context of the *pardes* story. It reads as follows:

A parable—To what is the matter to be compared? To a king who had an orchard and a dog chained at the entrance to the orchard. The king was sitting in his upper room, watching and looking at all that [transpired] in the orchard. The friend of the king entered to steal [fruit] from the orchard, and he incited the dog against him, and it tore his garments. The king said: "If I say to my friend, Why didst thou enter my orchard? behold I will put him to shame; therefore, behold, I will say to him: Didst thou see that mad dog, how it tore thy clothes? And he will understand what he has done."⁷³

⁷²*Midrash Prov.* 16.11.

⁷³*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* 44; translation from *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (trans. Gerald Friedlander; New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1981) 348.

The introduction of the dog into this parable stems from the exegetical context this parable addresses, namely, the role of Amalek and the meaning of the Torah's commandment to remember what Amalek has done.⁷⁴ The other elements in the parable are significant for an interpretation of the *pardes* passage. Like the parable of the two guards, and unlike the parables of the workers, this parable assumes that the basic situation is that people should not be in the orchard; their presence constitutes a transgression which is punishable. The guardian dog is the means of punishment built into the parable. Thus, it is assumed that even the king's friend cannot enter the orchard. This parable is also very important with regard to the location of the king. The king is present in his higher chambers; these may be located within the orchard or outside it. Since the king watches what transpires in the orchard, the upper room is probably located within the orchard. Even though there are no set wages to be paid at the end of the day, the king watches precisely because the orchard is viewed as a testing ground. For this reason, too, the dog is chained at its entrance. The king personally incites the dog and is thus involved in reacting to those who enter the orchard. This test concerns the very act of entry into the orchard. The friend who transgresses the orchard grounds may not have been aware of the king watching him; had the king been located within the orchard itself, the friend might not have transgressed. Thus, the king is concurrently absent from the orchard and present to the testing situation. Here again are the themes of the orchard as testing ground and the question of the presence of the king within it.

One last point should be noted. Unlike some previous parables where there is a tower, here there is an upper room. The Hebrew here reads עליוהיו. This is precisely the same term that is employed in the fifth unit of the "mystical collection," which mentions the parable of an orchard and an עליה above it. The understanding that this upper room is the dwelling place of the king himself is of immense value for the interpretation of the tannaitic parable. What is common to the metaphors of both the tower and the upper room is the spatial sense of the presence of God on high. God is located above the orchard, and, as the parable attributed to R. Yose the Galilean demonstrates, in certain cases God must descend from it. Within these parables, and regardless of their particular referents, one may speak of the orchard—and, in the same context, of God—in terms of ascension. Once more, a vital possibility for the interpretation of the *pardes* passage emerges from these texts.

Before we return to the story of the four who entered *pardes*, a final observation should be made concerning some orchards found in rabbinic

⁷⁴Ibid. See also the parallel parable in *Pesikta R. Zakhōr* 12. The parable there, however, omits any reference to the king himself and concentrates only upon the orchard and the dog.

passages. The king's orchard is an expression of wealth and plenty; it is part of the display of royal plenitude, which finds expression in a luxurious orchard which contains many species. Thus, in the following tannaic midrash we read:

The matter may be compared to a king who had a servant he loved totally. The king desired to make him his administrator, who provides for all the needs of the king's household. What did the king do? He took the servant by the hand into his treasure house and showed him utensils of silver and utensils of gold, precious stones, and pearls, and everything he had in his treasure house. Then he took him out and showed him trees, gardens, orchards, and enclosures and everything he had in the fields.⁷⁵

This is not a parable of an orchard such as the ones we analyzed above. It does, however, provide a context within which the king's orchard is to be appreciated: the king's extreme wealth. The orchard is the equivalent of the king's treasure house.⁷⁶ Indeed, when we find descriptions of the layout of orchards, what often seems to be emphasized is the variety and wealth of vegetation found therein.⁷⁷ As the midrash succinctly states: "Orchard: ask what you will: figs, grapes, and pomegranates."⁷⁸ Unlike the vineyard which contains only one species, the orchard is, by its very definition, a display of great variety and wealth. It is precisely this sense of wealth that raises the need to protect the orchard from intruders and uninvited visitors. The orchard, which contains the king's wealth, should only be entered with the king's permission.

■ Four Entered *Pardes*: The Parabolic Dimension

Having explored features in other rabbinic orchard parables, we are now better equipped to appreciate the description of the four who entered *pardes*. Earlier, we questioned why the typological list of four sages is cast in terms of an entry into an orchard. In part, this question can be answered in terms derived from the structure of the "mystical collection," and in part in terms derived from the preceding discussion of rabbinic orchard parables. The division of the mystical collection into two distinct sections has already been noted. The third unit is the turning point that separates the two

⁷⁵*Mekhilta de-Rabi Shim'on b. Yoḥai* (eds. Nahum Y. Epstein and Ezra T. Melamed; Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1955) 2.

⁷⁶A further instance of the use of an orchard to express wealth can be found in *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* 25. See also *Midrash Prov.* 9.12, where fields and orchards, together with gold and silver, are used to describe the rich man's wealth.

⁷⁷See *Lev. R.* 23.3; *Cant. R.* 6.2.3; 7.2.3. See further *Cant. R.* 7.14; *Exod. R.* 30.1; *Deut. R.* 6.2; *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* 26; and *b. Soṭa* 10a.

⁷⁸*Gen. R.* 54.6.

sections. One indication of the qualitative change at this point in the presentation may be found in the choice of numbers. The mishnah is already conscious of the numeric significance of specific situations. Thus, the discussion of that which is permissible and the limits of that which is forbidden begins with the maximum number of three. It then states that there are four things at which one should never look.⁷⁹ A similar numeric transition from three to four may occur in the Tosefta's commentary on the mishnah. Three may figure as a number representative of legitimate activity, even if this activity needs to be tempered. Thus, in the second unit we find a list of three lectures by students to their masters. Both Talmuds highlight this fact with the introduction, "There are three lectures."⁸⁰ This is followed by the opening of the second part of the collection, which tells of four who engaged in a certain kind of activity. The move from three to four may be intended to convey to the audience the move from the realm of legitimate activity to that of illegitimate. This in no way reduces the typological function of this list; it merely serves to highlight the tension between the two parts of the "mystical collection."

The description of entering an orchard also emphasizes the tension between the two parts. The first part of the Tosefta described activities that were strictly related to the study of the Torah. There are certain horticultural components in the first unit, but they are secondary to the discussion. The olive tree, the location under which rabbis engage in the study of Torah, has no significance in itself. The second part of the collection, by contrast, does not refer to the study of the Torah, but to something that may be perceived as its opposite. Thus, the entry into a garden may be viewed as a form of leisure and pleasure seeking that is not compatible with the study of Torah, which is much to be preferred. The tension between the study of the Torah and the enjoyment of trees is expressed in the famous mishnah in *m. 'Abot* 3.7: "One who walks on the road and studies and interrupts his study and remarks: 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!' Scripture considers it as if he were guilty of a mortal sin." The following midrashic quotation is more to the point, in that it expresses a particular attitude to orchards: "Said R. Ḥanina of Caesarea: Seeing that water is conducted to gardens and orchards, to baths and privies, am I to say that it is the same with the words of the Torah? Not so, since it says, 'For the ways of the Lord are right' (Hos 14:10)."⁸¹

⁷⁹On the question of this numeric significance, see Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 21, as well as the literature he cites.

⁸⁰*b. Hag.* 14b. In *y. Hag.* 77b the opening phrase is slightly longer: "Three lectured their Torah before their master."

⁸¹*Cant. R.* 1.2.3; see also *Midrash Ps.* 1.18.

This statement, which is part of a wider exploration of the symbolic significance of water and its association with Torah, makes a qualitative distinction between the Torah and gardens and orchards: the Torah and orchards represent different things. The third unit of the "mystical collection," therefore, in opening with a statement describing four who entered an orchard, expresses its disapproval of certain kinds of activity that are viewed as qualitatively antithetical to the study of the Torah, which is the subject of the first and second unit. To the extent we chose to follow the version that describes R. Akiba as ascending and descending, rather than entering and exiting, R. Akiba is removed even from the act of entry into the orchard. Not only does R. Akiba not "look," but he may not even have entered the orchard. Rather, he engages in a different kind of activity, which is expressed in language of ascent and descent.

As noted earlier, although four sages are mentioned, these divide into two groups: R. Akiba, on the one hand, and the other three, on the other. This division conforms to the orchard parables we examined above. In these parables, two different behaviors are tested and judged. This type of parable recalls to us the use of the orchard as a testing ground. The three sages fail, while R. Akiba succeeds. We therefore have two reasons for the presentation of this typological list in terms of entry into a garden: one touches upon the very distinction between Torah study and this activity, and the other refers to the situation of trial at hand. Yet this still does not clarify what the sages are supposed to have done.

To attempt to answer this question, I shall put together the disparate elements noted thus far: first, the difference between exegetical and visionary activities, including the positive value attached to the one, and the negative value attached to the other; second, both the avoidance of certain language concerning R. Akiba and the way in which he seems to straddle both parts of the Tosefta's discussion. Put together, this information leads to the following conclusions. The *merkabah*, which is clearly the subject of the first and second units, as well as the subject of the mishnah upon which the Tosefta comments, should be examined exegetically. Any attempt to engage in direct visual experience is regarded as negative, as a form of pleasure seeking, rather than a form of religious activity. Direct visual experience receives the same negative attribution as the leisure and pleasure associated with entry into an orchard. The negative quality associated with direct visionary experience is indicated through the typological list, which in likening it to entry into an orchard, shows both the low esteem given to this kind of activity and the potential harm involved in it.

That the referent of the *pardes* episode is related to the *merkabah* is obvious from the fate of those who enter the *pardes*. If it is merely a parable of an orchard that refers to forms of Torah study, as some have

suggested,⁸² then the outcome of these actions does not make sense. It is a meaningless parable that describes looking at a tree and dying or going insane as a result of it.⁸³ To the extent that a parable relates to some reality, it must make sense in everyday terms. In the parables examined above, the means of reward and punishment, such as the treasury and the dog, were always separate from the orchard itself. Here, however, the means of retribution is collapsed into the description of the action and the function of the orchard itself. Even if this passage is a typological list, the list must still make sense in the terms in which it is cast. As no ordinary tree can cause this kind of outcome, we must assume that the typological list already addresses the subject matter that is the cause of death.⁸⁴ Thus, the entry into the garden is an expression of the negativity and the pleasure seeking associated with the activities of the three sages. The negative aspect of their activities is expressed by the visionary terms employed, which can only make sense against the background of the tension between different modes of activity—exegetical and visionary—to which the collection refers. The passage informs us that whoever engages directly in visionary activities, without the protection of a master and without accessing the realm of the *merkabah* exegetically, is personally at danger and is doing something of no value.

All this may account for the description of the three sages, but what of R. Akiba? How is he different, and in what way does the avoidance of certain kinds of language save him from the grave problems associated with the very entry into *pardes*?⁸⁵ The fifth unit addresses this question by clarifying the distinction between R. Akiba and his colleagues.

The parable mentions an orchard and an upper chamber built in it. We have already noted the linguistic association between the ascension attributed to R. Akiba, and this upper chamber. The purpose of this parable is to account for R. Akiba's success. What is the purpose of this upper cham-

⁸²See above nn. 5 and 6.

⁸³We do find looking as leading to death in the case of looking at the king. See *Gen. R.* 65.10. To the extent that the *pardes* parable refers to the context of *merkabah*, which would be the equivalent of looking at the king, then the metaphor makes sense.

⁸⁴I could argue, as I do below, that looking leads to entry, which in turn leads to eating the fruit. Yet, unless we refer back to Genesis 3, even the eating of fruit does not produce such terrible results. The unique nature of the action described is therefore obvious, regardless of what preceded it.

⁸⁵A further question is also resolved by the parable. Tension exists between the opening line, which indicates that entry into the garden is the problem, and the description of looking as the source of the problem. The parable harmonizes this difficulty by implying that looking leads to entry, and thus the two forms of expression pertain to the same sequence of events. Uncontrolled looking leads to entry into the garden without permission. Controlled looking leads to the king's invitation to enter his chambers.

ber? In other parables the king is present in such a chamber. There is an orchard that belongs to the king and is part of his wealth; above it there is an upper chamber where the king himself dwells. This parable asks the question: "What should a man do?" We must clarify the text's intention: "What should he do—in order to what?" This passage is usually read in light of the following parable, to refer to what someone should do to avoid danger. The parable therefore directly addresses the difference between the fate of the three and that of R. Akiba. At this point, however, we are reading a parable and no longer the parabolic introduction to another genre, such as the typological list, as in unit three. In the context of the parable another explanation emerges, which illuminates the third and fourth units. As noted above, orchard parables play out the presence and absence of the king in relationship to the orchard. The king is present in some form, yet absent in another. In this parable, the king is present in his chamber, but not in the orchard, which is merely a display of his wealth. If the king is present in his upper chamber, one should not waste one's efforts in the garden; one should seek to be with the king. The question is thus to be understood: "What should a man do in order to receive an invitation from the king to join him?" Read in this way, our parable makes perfect sense. Those who gaze at the orchard show their lack of interest in the king himself. They are interested in his riches and wealth; they are allured by his orchard, but they do not approach the king himself. Only he who limits his gazing at the orchard, showing his lack of interest in it as well as his own self-control, is worthy of the king himself. If he is not drawn to the orchard, it is because he desires to reach the king himself. The king invites such a person to join him. Thus, R. Akiba is not said to have looked at all, but rather to have ascended. R. Akiba ascended to the king himself, rather than losing himself in the delights of the garden. In this sense, then, R. Akiba never really enters the garden. The language of entry is avoided in his case. His association with the garden is minimal and indicates his lack of interest in it, as well as his self-control, which make him desirous of the king and worthy of his attention.

We now return to the proof text describing R. Akiba. The former part of the verse described his relationship with his teacher. Yet the quotation concludes with "etc.," suggesting that the latter part of the verse may also be employed. *Canticles Rabbah* employed only the latter part of the verse. I suggest that different parts of the verse are used in different units. The third unit refers to R. Akiba's successful ascent and descent as a function of his relationship with his teacher. The fifth unit tells us what the fruit of this relationship is. The conclusion of the verse is that "the king has brought me into his chambers," which is precisely what the parable describes. The king takes the initiative of inviting R. Akiba to his chambers.

The fine point of looking without feasting one's eyes makes sense in the context of the message of the "mystical collection." Exegetical study of the *merkabah* passages is a limited kind of looking, which is preferable to a direct attempt to gaze upon the *merkabah*. Attempting to see the *merkabah* is an expression of spiritual gluttony, such as the three sages exhibit; exegetical activity is a limited form of looking which precludes gluttony. This constrained activity, moreover, holds the promise of receiving a direct vision of the king, or a direct invitation by him. This is not human effort; a person enters without permission and takes of the fruit of the divine orchard. Rather, it is a gift given at God's initiative. It is the gift of God's presence, granted to the one who follows the path of moderation, which is mediated by the protecting tradition.

This passage expresses not only warning but also apology, polemic, and appropriation. The hero of this unit, R. Akiba, is referred to by particular terms, and other terms regarding him are avoided. Whatever R. Akiba accomplished, he did by means of following the path of moderation and controlled exegesis. The statement made by this passage can be construed as a response to other presentations of R. Akiba which cast him in a more actively visionary role. This document is thus a polemic focusing on the figure of R. Akiba, and it constitutes an important witness to the perception of R. Akiba as a mystical hero.⁸⁶ This perception occurs in the hekhalot literature; the Tosefta presents an early expression of the same perception, viewed from a polemical perspective. The polemic finds expression in its adaptation of the terms "ascended" and "descended," which are charged with meaning from other contexts. The fifth unit then casts these terms in a new context, one that neutralizes the original usage and appropriates the figure of R. Akiba for another understanding. R. Akiba did attain great mystical heights and ascension. He did not, however, follow the questionable path of self-initiated visionary activities; rather, he followed the exegetical path, and God, when God saw fit, granted him that which God chose to grant. Read in this light, this passage testifies to the recognition of R. Akiba as a mystical hero and to a discussion of the nature of this hero. This polemical document does not teach about R. Akiba in a historical fashion; rather, it shows us how certain circles may have described this hero and how other circles attempted to counter this description. It is thus an important historical document not as biography, but as testimony to conflicting ideological tendencies of competing religious groups.

⁸⁶Another possibility would be to understand R. Akiba as an alternative to other sages, who might have occupied a place of importance in mystical writings. I see this possibility as less likely, in view of the fact that both our passage and the hekhalot literature recognize R. Akiba as a mystical hero.

The polemical nature of this passage allows it to be interpreted as a mystical document. Since it is cast in language that shares points of contact with hekhalot literature, and since it attempts to touch upon a subject matter that crosses the lines of different groups and literary corpora, the history of the interpretation of this document is one of appropriation. Those against whom the passage speaks can find in this document an expression of their own voice, as one sees from the Babylonian Talmud's adaptation of this story, which sees it as the record of an actual heavenly journey. This is not testimony to the original meaning of our text, but indirect testimony to its polemical message, which can be misunderstood easily.

Once the passage is considered polemical, a host of questions emerge. If the text is constructed in a particular way, what is the historical value of the traditions that are incorporated in it? If indeed the *pardes* passage is a typological list, on what grounds and with what justification are the other three sages discussed? In other words, once an approach that sees this document as a historical record is rejected, and it is recognized as a literary creation which serves ideological tendencies, it is necessary to account not only for what is told of R. Akiba, but also for the manner in which the stories of the other three sages were created or constructed. If we can demonstrate that what we are told regarding them should not be understood with naive historical credulity, but must be seen as constructed in a particular manner, our particular reading of the "mystical collection" will gain further support.

■ Three Entered *Pardes*: Constructing the Typological List

The suggestion that the *pardes* story is a particular literary construction that serves specific ideological needs accounts for some of the unique features of this passage. I know of no other rabbinic text that exhibits this peculiar and complex mixture of genres. Moreover, the notion of a typological list involving known personages is somewhat problematic; in the examples previously discussed, typological lists referred to abstract types. When people talk of a particular person they normally tell a story rather than construct a typological list. Despite having certain features of a typological list, does this passage contain some historic information? Can it also be viewed as a story? I believe that it is an error to view this story in historical terms, and that the editor had no intention that this text be read in a historical manner. For this reason, there is no need to worry unduly about conflicts found either within the "mystical collection" or between it and other texts.⁸⁷ I believe that it is possible to retrace the manner in which

⁸⁷The fate of Ben Zoma presents a possible discrepancy within the "mystical collection" itself. The understanding that he went mad, found in the third unit, seems to contradict the understanding that he died, found in the sixth unit. This, however, depends not only on the

the editor constructed these materials, including the story of the four who entered *pardes*. One need not agree with what follows in order to accept the argument until this point; if what follows is accepted, however, then the *pardes* incident—as well as the “mystical collection” as a whole—must be seen in a completely different way. What follows is an attempt to offer a new relationship between the *pardes* passage itself and a group of texts known to all who have dealt with the passage. If this new relationship is accepted, the path taken by the editor of the “mystical collection” becomes clear.

Murray-Jones points to other traditions that list the three sages together.⁸⁸ The three sages are listed jointly as תלמידי חכמים (“disciples”), while R. Akiba, in a related list, is listed as a חכם (“sage”). This, according to Murray-Jones, is the clue to the different fate that meets the two groups. In his reconstruction, the editor of the “mystical collection” simply appended the names of the three sages, all of whom were unordained and therefore unsuitable for engaging in the *merkabah*, to another text, that of R. Akiba’s anonymous mystical testimony.⁸⁹ Murray-Jones thus recognizes the fictitious element in the *pardes* episode. This explanation, however, cannot account for the particularity of what is told about each of the three sages. The content, according to Murray-Jones, derives from an authentic R. Akiba tradition preserved in the hekhalot literature, while the editor of the “mystical collection” added only the names. I believe, however, that the editor did far more than put together two existing texts. I shall demonstrate the manner in which the editor actually created the *pardes* episode, and in doing so, shall account for its particularities.

Let us note the traditions in which these three sages appear. *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* states:

Of four sages: If one sees Rabbi Yoḥanan b. Nuri in his dream, let him look forward to fear of sin; if Rabbi Ele‘azar b. Azariah, let him look forward to greatness and riches; if Rabbi Yishma‘el, let him look forward to wisdom; if Rabbi Akiba, let him fear calamity. Of three dis-

interpretation of two ambiguous expressions in each of these passages, but also upon ascertaining what exactly happened to Ben Zoma, a matter which the different traditions dispute. See above n. 58. Of course, this discrepancy may have led to the crossing of traditions, attributing to one sage the fate of the others and thus interchanging their fates. Concerning the death of Ben Azzai, the passage may contradict other traditions that report he died a martyr’s death. See above n. 59.

⁸⁸Murray-Jones, “Paradise Revisited, Part 1,” 195.

⁸⁹The implied methodological assumption here is that anonymity precedes naming, and that therefore an anonymous statement probably antedates a similar statement that is attributed to known sages. This assumption is spelled out in the work of Rowland (*The Open Heaven*, 314). Once the literary pattern of the typological list is recognized, this methodological assumption loses its basis.

ciples: If one sees Ben Azzai in his dream, let him look forward to saintliness; if Ben Zoma, let him look forward to wisdom; if Elisha b. Abuyah, let him fear calamity. Of three prophetic books: If one sees the Book of Kings in his dream, let him look forward to greatness and riches; if Isaiah, let him look forward to consolation; if Jeremiah, let him fear calamity.⁹⁰

A similar tradition appears in version B of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*:

Concerning three sages: If one sees R. Ele'azar b. Azariah in his dreams, let him look forward to wisdom; if R. Akiba, let him look forward to fear of sin; if R. Yishma'el, let him fear calamity. Concerning three disciples: If one sees Ben Azzai in his dream, let him look forward to wisdom; if Ben Zoma, let him look forward to fear of sin; if R. Elisha b. Abuyah, let him look forward to calamity.⁹¹

These traditions must be quite early. The list of sages and disciples do not mention any rabbis of the later generations of the tannaitic period. Surely many of R. Akiba's or R. Yehudah the Patriarch's disciples would have qualified for a list such as this. Moreover, the subject matter of these lists indicates their antiquity. The dreamer sees someone whom he usually recognizes, which is an indication that the texts are contemporaneous with these sages. It is thus possible to assume that these traditions antedate the "mystical collection." The likelihood that this text created—and therefore does not know of—the *pardes* episode is further strengthened when we note the different lists. R. Akiba is not listed along with the other three disciples. If the *pardes* passage were the source of this information, it would be unreasonable to locate R. Akiba in a different list than his three comrades. It seems very likely, then, that the editor of the "mystical collection" took members of two existing lists and combined them into one story.

There is further evidence that this tradition is not cognizant of the *pardes* incident. To assume that this tradition is dependent upon the *pardes* incident would be difficult, since the characterization of the various sages in no way emerges from the *pardes* passage. Neither wisdom nor fear of sin find expression in the behavior of Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma. The most difficult question arises, however, concerning Elisha b. Abuyah. In version B of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, he is referred to as rabbi. If indeed Elisha b. Abuyah is the arch-heretic, it is unlikely that he would be referred to as rabbi, although this may be reckoned as a scribal error. There is an even

⁹⁰*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (A) 40; translation from *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (trans. Judah Goldin; New Haven: Yale, 1955) 167.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, (B) 46; translation from *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan (Abot de Rabbi Nathan) version B* (trans. Anthony J. Saldarini; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 290.

more essential point, however, concerning Elisha b. Abuyah. Virtually nowhere in talmudic tradition do we find teachings that are recorded in his name. Practically the only context in which his teachings are recorded is *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*.⁹² How is it that only this document preserves the teachings of one of the most wicked men of Jewish history?⁹³ Looking at the association that Elisha b. Abuyah is meant to conjure in dreams is even more perplexing: one who sees Elisha b. Abuyah should expect calamity. This is the term employed of R. Akiba and R. Yishma'el, saintly, revered, and learned figures. How could Elisha b. Abuyah raise the same associations as these great rabbis? Questions concerning other rabbis also arise. If Morray-Jones is right that they are not sages, then none of the three disciples should evoke the attribute of wisdom. After all, their problem is that they are not sages (*hakhamim*). Why associate wisdom (*hokhmah*) with any one of them?

All this leads me to view the relationships between these texts and the *pardes* passage in a different way. The *pardes* text utilizes these preexisting lists for its own purposes, namely, to say that a student must not engage in certain activities unless that student is guided by a master. The text thus takes a list of three students—who, as students, are vulnerable and in need of protection—and puts them into a narrative typological list, where their vulnerability as unaccompanied students is highlighted. The consequences are disastrous. The hero, R. Akiba, in contrast, receives protection through his association with R. Yehoshu'a, as mentioned in the second unit.

If the editor has simply created a narrative typological list in order to pit two groups of sages against each other, why then did he include certain details about each rabbi? If this is not a historical report, what is the logic

⁹²*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* A 24, B 35. See Louis Finkelstein, *Introduction to the Treatises Abot and Abot of Rabbi Nathan* (New York: Bet ha-midrash le-rabanim ba-Amerikah, 1950) 74–81 [Hebrew]. Finkelstein believes that this part of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* is organized around the sages who entered *pardes*. If this is the early logic of arrangement of the tractate, we have here further evidence that the author of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* did not know of the *pardes* incident, since Elisha b. Abuyah receives a place of honor in the arrangement. This, of course, would undermine the basis of Finkelstein's argument. Finkelstein also claims that in the earliest arrangement of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, the teachings of Elisha b. Abuyah were set forth first, and only as a consequence of the *pardes* story did he lose this place of priority.

⁹³The common answer is that the traditions preserved here go back to the period before his apostasy; it is, however, a contrived answer. Why then have other editors not chosen also to incorporate statements of Elisha b. Abuyah? I assume that his inclusion in the list of sages in *m. Avot* 4 occurred before his fame as an archvillain spread. His inclusion in this context is further indication that in the tannaitic period he was still considered a legitimate sage. This chapter commemorates the rabbis listed in it; not only the teaching—which tends to be repetitive—but the very act of naming and mentioning the individual tradents is important. Elisha b. Abuyah's inclusion in this context is a sign that the editor of this chapter was unaware of the traditions describing his wickedness.

behind the details? To understand the editor's logic, it is necessary to return to the basic structure of the "mystical collection." The unit is divided into two parts, which contrast legitimate study of the Torah with visionary activity that is external to the study of the Torah. The editor gave each of the three sages a fate appropriate to his teachings, which at the same time undermines them. The editor has taken statements attributed elsewhere to each of the three, many of which are found in the same context where the lists are found—*Avot de-Rabbi Natan*. Each of the three then acts in a way that contradicts his teaching or in some way undermines it. This accounts for the close relationship between certain statements of the *pardes* sages and the stories told of them. The editor's point is simple: visionary activity is a form of uncontrolled pleasure seeking. Whoever engages in it is doing something other than the study of the Torah. The sages who engage in visionary activity thus contradict their own teaching of the Torah. The editor, like the midrashic authors with their biblical heroes, takes great liberty with the sages, their sayings, and their fates. The midrashic genius turns toward the rabbis themselves, creating a powerful and original episode—the story of the *pardes*. Let us see the way in which "looking" subverts the teaching of each of the three who looked at the garden.

The most transparent case is that of Ben Azzai.⁹⁴ The proof text used with regard to him—"Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints"—is a clear echo of a statement attributed to Ben Azzai in *Genesis Rabbah*:

Ben Azzai says, "'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints' (Ps 116:15). When does the Holy One, blessed be he, show them the recompense that is coming? Right near their death. That is in line with this verse: '. . . is the death of his saints.' Therefore: 'She laughs at the time to come' (Prov 31:25)."⁹⁵

The same verse that appears concerning Ben Azzai in the Tosefta appears in this text. The editor could have resorted to an existing statement of Ben Azzai's by explaining the story in the following manner: rather than wait to see the recompense upon death, Ben Azzai's impatient desire led him to his own premature death, as he attempted to look upon something he was unable or unworthy to look upon. Ben Azzai's teaching that one can only see God upon death thus would be subverted by his attempt to see God in this life in order to indicate the harmful effects of unguided gazing.

⁹⁴This is also the only case where the proof text brought in the *pardes* passage accords with other known interpretations of the verse. Concerning the other three sages, I found no relationship between the application of the proof texts and other known usages of those texts. The meaning of these verses is created within the local context and does not rely on known midrashic traditions.

⁹⁵*Gen. R.* 62.2.

It is hard to be precise concerning the statements of these sages of which the editor was aware and might have employed in the creation of this critical typology. Several statements attributed to a particular sage may have simultaneously served the editor. Several other statements of Ben Azzai are thus relevant. In *Sifra on Leviticus*, Ben Azzai offers the following commentary: “Shim’on b. Azzai said, ‘I am not as one who contests the words of my teacher, but as one who adds to his words, “for no man shall see me and live” (Exod 33:20), even the ministering angels who live eternally do not see the glory [of God].’”⁹⁶ This text may be even more relevant to the *pardes* passage, for it discusses the question of when a human can see God. Ben Azzai says here that man simply cannot see God. Why then, asks the editor, was he unable to control his gluttony, and why did he attempt to have a vision of God which could only lead to his death? That death follows the vision of God is stated in the previous statement in the *Sifra*, which comments on the same verse: “In their lifetime they do not see me, in their death they do.” Ben Azzai, it seems, should have known better.

Two more statements of Ben Azzai are relevant. His commentary on Deut 6:5 also involves death: “Shim’on b. Azzai says: With all thy soul: love him until the last drop of life is wrung out of you.”⁹⁷ Another passage, which concerns affliction in relation to Torah study, would fit better with the textual version according to which Ben Azzai was stricken, rather than died. The statement is found in the *Tosefta*, tractate *Berakhot*: “He used to say, ‘One who became physically infirm on account of his [preoccupation with] wisdom, it is a good sign for him. One who became mentally infirm on account of his preoccupation with worldly matters, it is a bad sign for him.’”⁹⁸ If the editor contrasts Torah wisdom with worldly affairs,⁹⁹ this statement of Ben Azzai’s could serve as another source that he adopts and upon which he plays in portraying the fate of Ben Azzai. Because of the complexities of tradition history within the different versions of the *pardes* passage, and because we cannot safely say which of these passages was

⁹⁶*Sifra Lev. Nedaba* 2.12, my translation. We cannot rely too heavily on this attribution, as it is absent in parallel versions of this source. See *Sifre Num.* 101.

⁹⁷*Sifre Deut.* 32.

⁹⁸*t. Ber.* 3.4; translation from Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta* (6 vols.; New York: Ktav, 1977–86) 1. 12–13. See further *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (B) 33 for a related saying, or another version of the same saying. Isaac Hirsch Weiss (*Dor Dor ve-Dorshav: Divre ha-Yamim la-Torah She-be-al Peh im Korot Sofreha u-Sefareha* [5 vols.; Vienna: Pressburg, 1871–91] 2. 125) sees this statement as directed against Ben Azzai and Elisha b. Abuyah. This recognition of the relationship between these sayings and the *pardes* incident is significant. Rather than finding in these passages references to a concrete historical event we discover the raw material for the invention of the tale of that event.

⁹⁹This is true only if Neusner’s translation captures the correct relationship of חכמה and הנהגה.

available to the editor, it is difficult to state with certainty which of these texts the editor used. What was told of Ben Azzai suggests, however, that his statements were employed, but in some ways their intention was subverted.

This is also the case with Ben Zoma, the author of a vineyard parable, which has features similar to the *pardes* parable. The parable is found in version B of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*:

Ben Zoma says: Who is a wise man? He that learns from all men, as scripture says: "From all my teachers I have got understanding (Ps 119:99)." Who is an honorable man? He that honors mankind, as scripture says: "For those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed (1 Sam 2:30)." Who is a mighty man? He that subdues his evil impulse, as scripture says: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city (Prov 16:32)." Who is a rich man? He that is content with his portion, as scripture says: "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you (Ps 128:2)." "You shall be happy" in this world, "and it shall be well with you" in the world to come. He used to say: "Do not look (רָצַח) into a man's vineyard. If you have looked, do not go down into it. If you have gone in, do not stare. If you stared, 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."¹⁰⁰

Ben Zoma's vineyard passage has long been recognized as relevant to the *pardes* passage.¹⁰¹ It employs the same verb for looking as found in the Tosefta; it contains a warning not to do that which the *pardes* story reports was done; and it warns of dire consequences, some of which are expressed in the *pardes* story.¹⁰² In its original context the warning may have had no mystical meaning. The warning follows a series of statements of Ben Zoma, describing who is a wise, mighty, and rich man; such a person would clearly not go into another's vineyard. Thus, the vineyard passage may well be a moral admonition that combines reference to the various virtues upon

¹⁰⁰*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (B) 33; translation from Saldarini, *Fathers*, 195.

¹⁰¹See Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature*, 74–78. The hekhlot traditions have in fact directly elaborated upon this tradition in light of their particular understanding. See Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 2; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1981) §335.

¹⁰²Indication of the dependence of the *pardes* story upon this parable may also be found in that both parables in the fifth unit refer to what a "man" must do—precisely the same term as in Ben Zoma's statement. Note also that speaking in terms of an unnamed "man" who controls his looking once more removes R. Akiba from the area of looking. It is not said expressly that R. Akiba looked; rather, this was implied by the reference to a "man."

which Ben Zoma expounded previously.¹⁰³ In the hands of the editor of the “mystical collection” this passage served as the basis for the formation of the *pardes* story. The editor used this statement in an attempt to depict Ben Zoma as acting in contradiction to his own teaching; furthermore, the editor wanted to portray the three sages as being sensually allured by something other than Torah. For this reason, the editor changed the story: the sage who warned not to look at the vineyard became the sage who went into the orchard. We see from Ben Zoma’s statement that looking leads to entry, which in turn leads to eating the fruit. It may be that the editor of the Tosefta understands the entry into *pardes* to be the outcome of looking. He may then be presenting the cause for the sages’ entry into the orchard—it is because they looked from the outside, and the purpose of their entry into the orchard was to eat its fruit. The proof texts regarding both Ben Zoma and Elisha b. Abuyah refer to eating or at least tasting. While the Tosefta emphasizes looking as its key term, an equally significant sequence of actions follows from the original forbidden looking.¹⁰⁴ Even though the editor may imply that the sages entered the orchard and ate its fruit, he speaks only of “looking,” despite the fact that Ben Zoma’s vineyard passage describes all the forbidden activities. The editor wants to highlight the negative quality of the moment of looking, which is the key to the whole *pardes* passage. Thus desire is channeled as ocular desire. This would further highlight the difference between these sages and R. Akiba, who never really entered the orchard, but went straight to the king’s abode. In the hands of the editor, physical gluttony has been transformed into the three sages’ spiritual gluttony; they could not contain their passion—made manifest in the act of forbidden looking—and they entered the orchard to their detriment. Thus Ben Zoma is portrayed as one who is neither mighty, nor wise, nor rich: his desire leads him to transgress against his own admonitions. The proof text describing Ben Zoma’s inability to control his appetite fits well with the subversion of Ben Zoma’s statements in the hands of the editor of the *pardes* passage in the Tosefta.

If this passage is the raw material for the *pardes* story, why are we told of four who entered an orchard, rather than four who entered a vineyard? The stereotype of orchard parables plays a significant role in answering

¹⁰³See Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten*, vol. 1: *Von Hillel bis Akiba. Von 30 vor bis 135 nach der gew. Zeitrechnung* (Strassburg: Trubner, 1903) 430. One should note, however, that the consequences of such actions, if they are only moral transgressions, may be radical. Does this indicate that already for Ben Zoma the vineyard is no mere vineyard?

¹⁰⁴This is also made explicit in the Palestinian Talmud’s version of the parable, which mentions touching. This version may misunderstand the central importance of looking, yet it indicates an understanding that looking is only the first link in a series of forbidden actions. See *y. Hag. 2.1, 77c*.

this question. Our passage was changed into an orchard passage and parable in order to represent the situation of trial and enable the editor to distinguish between two groups and two types of behavior. It further allowed him to play on the question of the degree of the king's presence and absence—an issue often found in orchard parables. We can trace the editor's work and the manner in which he adapted the material to suit his needs in the context of prevailing literary standards.

There is, however, an additional factor to be reckoned with in the change from vineyard to orchard. Scholem,¹⁰⁵ and the scholars who have followed his line of interpretation,¹⁰⁶ have brought several parallels to the term *pardes*, where it seems to be a technical term for the heavenly paradise. This has led them to read our *pardes* passage as one further report of a heavenly ascent. I have already tended toward the reading according to which R. Akiba ascended and descended, rather than entered and came out.¹⁰⁷ In this usage we found echoes of mystical activity related to the ascent to the *merkabah*. It is therefore possible that the term *pardes* also echoes mystical terminology. Such an echo is not, however, indication that this text originated from mystically oriented circles, nor does it constitute a direct mystical testimony. Rather, it indicates the editor's awareness of such mystical linguistic usage, and his adaptation of it in the context of the collection. This language is recast in terms of literary conventions, common in rabbinic parables. Rather than serve as a mystical record, this language is transformed to convey the lessons that orchard parables commonly convey. Such a transformation of linguistic usage indicates that the editor's approach was one of appropriation and polemic. By using language typical of mystical literature and recasting it in a parabolic context, he allowed his particular message to emerge. The rich way in which language is recast suggests that this message was polemical and discouraged certain types of mystical activity. The shift from vineyard to orchard allowed the editor not only to express lessons typical of rabbinic parables, but to allow these lessons to operate within a polemical context.¹⁰⁸

One more sage out of the three—Elisha b. Abuyah—requires consideration. The editor has been most daring concerning him: one who sees Elisha b. Abuyah ought to fear calamity. Whatever this might have meant in its original context, our editor has transformed its meaning: calamity comes

¹⁰⁵Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 16.

¹⁰⁶See in particular the methodological reflections on this question in Ithamar Gruenwald, "Methodological Problems in Researching Rabbinic Mysticism," in Isaiah Gafni, et al., eds., *Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Period: Studies in Honor of Shmuel Safrai* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitshak ben Zvi, 1993) 307–8 [Hebrew].

¹⁰⁷See above p. 88 above.

¹⁰⁸I wish to thank Ithamar Gruenwald for engaging me in a conversation that led me to this last point.

not only to the person himself, as in the case of R. Akiba in the same source, but also to his surroundings. Elisha b. Abuyah brings calamity upon the orchard by cutting the shoots. Read in the context of the vineyard parable, this may be the ultimate sign of gluttony and impatience. Elisha b. Abuyah may not intend destruction; his desire is simply so powerful that as he plucks the fruit of the orchard, he rips the shoots as well. The editor of the *pardes* may have merely intended to portray Elisha b. Abuyah as expressing extreme desire. If we remember that typological lists are founded upon the contrast of the righteous and the wicked, the shift in the story of Elisha b. Abuyah may have been a way of adapting the typological list to the parable of the orchard and thus crossing between two literary genres. Elisha b. Abuyah's wickedness finds expression in the harm he brings upon the orchard itself. In the hands of the editor this is merely a typology of the most extreme form of desire and gluttony. The source in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* does not indicate any act of particular wickedness that Elisha b. Abuyah committed. Since the nature of the *pardes* passage is not biographical or historical, the story need not make concrete reference to the life of Elisha b. Abuyah.

Were we to seek a more concrete meaning to the cutting of the shoots, we ought to attend to a final rabbinic parable. In *Deuteronomy Rabbah*, itself a late midrash, we read:

It is like the case of a king who had an orchard which he let out to two tenants, one of whom planted trees and cut them down, while the other neither planted any [trees] nor cut any down. With whom is the king angry? Surely with him who planted [trees] and cut them down. Likewise, whosoever learns the words of the Torah and does not fulfill them, his punishment is more severe than that of him who has never learnt at all.¹⁰⁹

Cutting the shoots here is a parable for learning the words of the Torah and not fulfilling them. This is precisely the charge leveled against Elisha b. Abuya in both Talmuds.¹¹⁰ Is this also the intention of the editor of the Tosefta? I doubt it. He seeks to portray the sage as going against his own teaching because of spiritual desire. The possibility that the sage completely opposes all the learning of Torah that he has acquired could also make sense, given that Elisha b. Abuyah is the wicked one in the typological quartet. Moreover, the phrase "cut the shoots," according to my suggestions below, is taken from a context that describes the first transgression, that of Adam and Eve, and the editor may be sustaining this association through his use of the term. It is more likely, however, that the editor

¹⁰⁹*Deut. R.* 7.4.

¹¹⁰See *b. Hag.* 15a-b; *y. Hag.* 77b-c. See further Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 33.

intended nothing concerning Elisha b. Abuyah personally, just as he intended nothing personal concerning Elisha b. Abuyah's two colleagues. Rather, the editor may have reconfigured the raw material he had before him and, having put it together, have come to the striking conclusion that Elisha cut the shoots. To the editor, however, this only had meaning in the context of the story, not outside of it. To appreciate this process it is necessary to retrace how the editor came to speak of Elisha b. Abuyah as cutting the shoots. Statements found in Elisha's name in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* read:

He used to say: One may learn Torah for ten years and forget it [all] after two years. How so? For example: If for six months one neglects to review, he then says of the unclean, "It is clean," and of the clean, "It is unclean." If for twelve months he does not review, he then confuses the sages with one another. If for eighteen months he does not review, he forgets the chapter headings. If for twenty-four months he does not review, he forgets the treatise headings. And after saying of the unclean, "It is clean," and of the clean, "It is unclean," after confusing the sages with one another, after forgetting the chapter headings and the treatise headings, he sits and keeps quiet in the end. And of him said Solomon, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and lo, it was all grown over with thistles; the face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" (Prov 24:30–31); for once the wall of the vineyard falls, the whole vineyard is destroyed.¹¹¹

The theme of Elisha b. Abuyah's statement is the forgetting of the Torah. The editor of the Tosefta, who seeks to describe spiritual gluttony as causing a falling away from the Torah, obviously would find this theme fitting. Furthermore, the proof text for Elisha's statement refers to a vineyard, and the editor, who has already had recourse to the vineyard in Ben Zoma's statement, could not fail to notice this reference to the vineyard. This vineyard, which in the hands of the editor was transformed into an orchard, is described as being in a state of complete disrepair. Elisha's statement thus equates forgetting the Torah with bringing disrepair to the vineyard. Elisha, who himself spoke of moving away from the Torah and of vineyards falling into disrepair, easily serves the intent of the editor, who uses Elisha's statements to indicate that spiritual gluttony goes against the Torah. In this instance, it is not the particular teaching of the sage that is subverted; rather, his teaching is applied to a situation that equates gluttony with abandoning the Torah. To the extent that Elisha b. Abuyah's point is that one must be vigilant in not allowing forgetfulness to creep upon one's Torah, here too Elisha's teaching is subverted, as in the cases

¹¹¹*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (A) 24; translation from Goldin, *Fathers*, 104.

previously discussed. This disrepair alone could have been grounds for describing Elisha as causing harm to the orchard, but in further tracing the steps the editor took, we can even suggest how the expression “cutting the shoots” came to be employed about Elisha b. Abuyah. As we saw in this last passage, the proof text speaks of a stone wall falling on the vineyard. What happens to a vineyard when a stone wall falls on it? The answer to this question is found in a passage in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*.

And make a hedge about the Torah.

A vineyard which is surrounded by a fence is unlike a vineyard not surrounded by a fence. [This also means] that no one should make the fence more important than what is to be fenced in—for if the fence falls down, then it will cut down the plants. 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.¹¹²

The combination of the vineyard and the falling fence leads naturally to a description of the kind of calamity that could befall the vineyard—cutting the plants. Here, this concept concerns only the physical vineyard and is devoid of symbolic or mystical associations. When the editor, in the context of the metaphor of a vineyard or orchard, seeks to describe how Elisha b. Abuyah goes against his own Torah, he employs the expression “cutting the plants,” which may mean nothing outside the metaphorical context.

One further statement of Elisha b. Abuyah may have played a part in the editor’s work. “Do not let your mouth lead your flesh into sin” is the proof text for Elisha b. Abuyah’s behavior. Given Ben Zoma’s vineyard statement, the probable meaning of this proof text is that Elisha is drawn by his gluttony to eat the fruit of the orchard. His mouth leads him to sin through the act of eating in the wrong fashion and in the wrong context. The choice of proof text may once more express the sophistication of the editor. In the collection of Elisha b. Abuyah’s sayings we find the following saying:

He used to say: When one studies Torah as a child, the words of the Torah are absorbed by his blood and come out of his mouth distinctly. But if one studies Torah in his old age, the words of the Torah are not absorbed by his blood and do not come out of his mouth distinctly. And thus the maxim goes: “If in thy youth thou didst not desire them, how shalt thou acquire them in thine old age?”¹¹³

Here again the theme of acquiring or not acquiring the Torah. Elisha b. Abuyah expresses this in terms of blood and mouth; the ideal process is the absorption of the words of the Torah by the blood, leading to their finding expression in the mouth. Desire leads to a reversal of this relationship: in

¹¹²Ibid. (B) 1; translation from Saldarini, *Fathers*, 29.

¹¹³Ibid. (A) 24.

desire, the mouth causes the flesh to sin. Desire, in reversing the order of events that should be typical of ideal Torah study, is therefore once more portrayed as its opposite.

We thus see how the editor of the “mystical collection” in the Tosefta has taken various statements made by all three sages, and transformed the statements in order to indicate that the spiritual gluttony, expressed in the act of looking into the orchard, is contrary both to the sages’ teachings of the Torah and ultimately to the Torah itself. All this occurs in a highly elaborate literary construction that makes sense only within a specific literary context—that of the Tosefta. One final instance of transforming an existing tradition, which has been preserved in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, can be found in the second parable of the fifth unit of the “mystical collection.” Two kinds of gazing have already been described, one positive and one negative. The negative connotations of gazing emerge in the third unit, where looking leads to disastrous consequences. The potentially positive connotations emerge in the fifth unit, where a certain kind of controlled looking is endorsed and, moreover, is presented as the key to R. Akiba’s success. The second parable in the fifth unit comments upon the tension between the two kinds of looking. The parable of the two roads may be different from the parable of the orchard and the upper chamber, in that it is imported to our discussion from another context, rather than having been created ad hoc to solve a particular problem. Indications that this parable was imported are evident in its introduction. Unlike the previous parable, which began with the conventional opening, “a parable, to what may the matter be likened,” this parable is introduced by the opening, “they further made a parable, to what may the matter be likened.” This reference to someone who has created the parable may indicate that this parable was borrowed by the editor of the “mystical collection” from another context.¹¹⁴ The appearance of this parable in another context in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* not only serves as further testimony to the manner in which the Tosefta source was constructed, but it also helps us to understand the manner in which the parable is used in this source. The *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* text reads:

R. Yehudah b. IPai says: He who makes the words of the Torah primary and worldly matters secondary will be made primary in the world to come; [but he who makes] worldly matters primary and the words of the Torah secondary will be made secondary in the world to come. A parable is told: To what may this be likened? To a thoroughfare (איסטריא) which lies between two paths, one of fire and one of snow. If one walks on the side of the fire, lo, one is scorched by the fire, but if one walks on the side of the snow, lo, one is stricken by the cold.

¹¹⁴We have already noted the great care this editor takes in the introduction of his material.

What should a man do? Let him walk between the two of them, and take care of himself, lest he be scorched by the fire, or stricken by the cold.¹¹⁵

The preservation of the term *אסטרותא* indicates a relation between the two texts,¹¹⁶ and the dependence of these two texts upon each another is relatively easy to determine. The original context of this parable is probably found in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*. In addition to the Tosefta's indication that this text is borrowed from the outside, this parable makes sense in the context of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, while it makes much less sense in the context of the Tosefta.¹¹⁷ In *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* both Torah and *derekh erez*, or worldly affairs, must be incorporated. The issue is one of finding the balance between two forces, both of which must come to legitimate expression, and the precision involved in creating this balance is the theme of the parable. In the Tosefta, however, we do not really know what the two ways are, and therefore cannot think of a highway that comprises the qualities of fire and snow.¹¹⁸ What then is the purpose of bringing this parable in the Tosefta?

This parable may be employed in ways that recall overtones from its original context. If the purpose of the "mystical collection" is to present visionary activity as a kind of earthly activity that is akin to spending time in luxurious orchards and that must be qualitatively contrasted with the study of Torah, the parable from *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* is useful. The parable establishes the relationship between Torah study and earthly physical activities; its very context thus would fit the editor's message. Yet, while this may account for the editor's choice of parable, it does not explain its function within the Tosefta. It seems that this parable seeks both to resolve some questions left unresolved by the previous parable and to highlight further some of the collection's themes. If we find both legitimate and

¹¹⁵Ibid. (A) 28.

¹¹⁶Rather than see the editor of the Tosefta as adding this word in order to form a bridge to the sixth unit, as Halperin (*The Merkabah*, 95) has suggested, I see in the appearance of this term in the Tosefta a trace of the original parable, which we can find elsewhere.

¹¹⁷The attribution of the *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* parable to R. Yehudah would fit well with my suggestion that the "mystical collection" is a creation of the school of R. Akiba (see p. 124 below). The only named authority in the whole collection is R. Yose b. Yehudah. Was it this sage who employed a parable created by his father to put our source together? Later in this article I shall argue otherwise.

¹¹⁸This parable may serve as a transition point between the discussion of *ma'aseh merkabah* and the discussion of *ma'aseh bereshit*. The text may also allude to traditions that view the act of creation as involving forces of fire and snow. See *Gen. R.* 10.3. We do not find this tradition in tannaitic sources, however, and its context suggests that the parable was understood in connection with *ma'aseh merkabah*, which in turn raises the problem that the parable seems to be out of place.

illegitimate kinds of looking, how are we to address the difference between them? The unit answers with the parable of two paths. A very fine line separates laudable from contemptible contemplation, and R. Akiba from his colleagues. The key to R. Akiba's success lies not only in the fact that the king invited him but also in the fact that R. Akiba was able to maintain the precision of looking without feasting.

Furthermore, this parable highlights one of the main messages of the "mystical collection." The structure of the collection indicates that uncontrolled and unsupervised looking is the collection's concern, rather than intellectual error. This is precisely why even one who can understand on his own accord is in need of the accompaniment of a master. The second parable emphasizes the danger inherent in the act of unsupervised looking: it is likened unto fire and snow, which are destructive forces. Looking is thus not an intellectual, or even a moral, issue, but a question of playing with fire. The second parable contributes to the collection's overall message and to the note of warning that it sounds.

In this context, what is the balance to be sought between the two paths? Perhaps there is none, and the parable is merely employed to show danger, on the one hand, and the precision needed for legitimate looking, on the other. If we were to seek the parable's meaning within its context, the two extremes would be intellectual exegetical activity and the visionary dimension. Following the story of R. Akiba's successful exegetical activity, which leads to an invitation to the king's chamber, there is a parable that attempts to account for R. Akiba's activity. His activity contained a balance between two different methods of action and teaches that too much intellectual activity may yield nothing and too much visionary activity is dangerous. R. Akiba's fine balance allowed his exegetical activity to yield visionary fruit. While such an interpretation harmonizes this parable with the message of the collection as a whole, it should be noted that the two extremes are intended primarily to convey a sense of danger. This may be all that is intended here; a reading that attempts to express fine balances of intellectual and visionary activity may push this parable beyond its intended use.

We thus see how the editor of the "mystical collection" transformed existing traditions to fit into the statement he wished to make. The recognition that the "mystical collection" is the outcome of creative editorial work raises some important questions. Is there any historical core to these traditions? Did the editor merely play freely with traditions, crossing together genres and statements to produce his literary document, or do these traditions assume some factual basis? If these traditions have no historical basis, we must define the editor's intention, specify the context within which his statement was made, and hypothesize regarding the purpose of the "mystical collection" as a whole.

■ The “Mystical Collection”: Historical Reality and Ideological Tendency

In the context of the study of the *merkabah*, the question of the relationship between historical factuality and literary fiction is a natural outcome of the dispute between Scholem and Urbach. Morray-Jones, following Scholem’s lead, attempts to find what for him is the authentic voice of R. Akiba, a voice upon which we can then rely for historical testimony.¹¹⁹ If we follow Urbach’s line of argument, however, which does not see these texts as reporting a historical event, what is the historical value of their testimony? Urbach himself did not attend to this question, but following Urbach’s argument, Halperin raised the question of the historicity of the sources dealing with the *merkabah*. Halperin applied a hermeneutic of suspicion toward the rabbinic texts to a greater degree than Urbach. Halperin’s radical conclusion was that in fact a *ma’aseh merkabah* never existed, but is an invention that found literary expression without a corresponding reality.¹²⁰ Since my construction of the evolution of the rabbinic *merkabah* traditions differs from that of Halperin, in that I find the origin of the “mystical collection” in the Tosefta, the question of the historical testimony offered in this collection must be examined anew.

The “mystical collection” is an elaborate literary composition. The *pardes* episode was composed through a creative method of inverting the statements of certain rabbis in order to present a particular critical message. As such, it has no historical value. Does this hold true of the “mystical collection” as a whole, and if so, what kind of statement can we find in it? In order to answer this question it is necessary to concentrate attention on the different parts of the collection. In suggesting what parts of the collection may bear historical testimony, I shall weigh the possibility of accurate historical reporting against the question of literary and editorial tendency.

The second unit is slightly different than the other units in the collection. It is the only unit that is reported in the name of a particular sage—R. Yose b. Yehudah; all other units in the collection have no tradent affixed to them and therefore may be seen as the creation of the editor of this collection in the Tosefta. Furthermore, R. Yose b. Yehudah’s report is different from anything else in the collection. It is a report of tradition history; no literary embellishment is present, nor are any stories told here. Moreover, as I have stated earlier, students of this text have raised the question of the relationship of the first and second units. Why does the first unit report that R. Ele’azar b. Arakh lectured before R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai, while the second unit states that R. Yehoshu’a lectured? This discrepancy

¹¹⁹Morray-Jones, “Paradise Revisited, Part One,” 200.

¹²⁰Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 182–84.

allows us to consider that the second unit is an authentic part of tradition history, which was incorporated from the outside, while other parts of the “mystical collection” were the literary invention of the editor. The second unit’s focus on R. Akiba is also significant. The editor may have incorporated a tradition list that focused on this sage and then utilized it in his presentation. At first glance, the second unit is the collection’s best candidate for historical authenticity.

An additional question regarding this unit presents itself: Why is Ḥananiah b. Ḥaḥinai named? That the list does not go beyond R. Akiba’s disciple is understandable, since this would further highlight R. Akiba’s central role in this unit. The unit does not attempt to go beyond an illustration of how R. Akiba fulfilled his role as a teacher who guides a student in the study of *ma’aseh merkabah*. R. Akiba is known to have had five outstanding primary students, who are the backbone of tannaitic literature. Why not mention R. Meir or R. Yehuda, for example? One could assume this is simply the tradition the editor found before him. A more tendentious answer would be that a figure of secondary importance is chosen in order to tone down the excitement associated with this type of activity. It is not one of the famous rabbis who continues this activity, but rather a lesser figure. Enough major figures, however, are already mentioned within the “mystical collection” for this possibility to be unconvincing. It seems to me there is another possible explanation. There are several lists in which students of the generation of Yavneh are listed together. In these lists Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma appear alongside Ḥananiah b. Ḥaḥinai.¹²¹ These sages’ common appearance allows the editor to play them off against each other. The three who entered *pardes* were determined by the list of students found in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, and the student who followed R. Akiba properly was taken from other lists that describe the students of that period.¹²² The editor may have intended that Ḥananiah b. Ḥaḥinai stand in opposition to the figures of the three who entered *pardes*. This possibility would once more indicate active and sophisticated editorial intervention in this material. It may be that even the second unit, which seems to present a straightforward historical tradition, accords with the tendencies prevalent throughout the “mystical collection.”

Once the possibility is accepted that the second unit of the “mystical collection” is also expressive of certain ideologies, it is necessary to question the function of such a list of tradition within a polemical document. This list maintains that R. Akiba’s success stems from his position as a link in a chain. Who are the members of this chain? If this is a polemical document, could the particular choice of leading figures be composed in

¹²¹See *t. Ber.* 4.16; *b. Sanh.* 17b.

¹²²See also the similar stories told of the two rabbis in *b. Ketub.* 62b.

reaction to other lists that may prevail in other literatures? I shall not enter here into an analysis of various hekhalot traditions and their choice of certain authorities upon whom they base their claims. With the exception of R. Akiba, however, the sages mentioned in the second unit are not heroes of the hekhalot literature,¹²³ and other heroes of that literature are obviously absent from our list. Whether this fact bears any significance to understanding this passage would depend on a careful analysis of such factors as the genealogies and authorities of various hekhalot traditions. At this point, I can only raise this issue as one implication of the polemical understanding of the “mystical collection.”

The question of the possible discrepancy between the first and second units on the name of the sage who lectured before R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai remains. To answer this question, the meaning and purpose of the first unit should be examined. Why tell a story about R. Eleʿazar b. Arakh if there is no factual basis to this story? The question becomes even more difficult because this is a sage concerning whom there is almost no information, in whose name virtually no traditions have been preserved, and who is in no way a significant link in the chain of tradition. My suggestion, which I have developed elsewhere in a critical biography of this sage,¹²⁴ is that the lack of historical information regarding him, coupled with a particular attribution that was given to him in the history of tradition, have turned this sage into a symbol. Therefore, the sources referring to him ought to be viewed in this symbolic context, rather than as expressing historical information. This is also true of his appearance in the first unit. In *m. ʿAvot* 2.9 we find different appellations given by R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai to his five students. R. Eleʿazar b. Arakh is called “a fountain that flows with ever increasing strength.” This designation describes R. Eleʿazar b. Arakh’s powers of creation and innovation in the context of his study of Torah. This is to be contrasted to R. Eliʿezer’s appellation; in the same context, he is called “a cemented cistern, which does not lose a drop,” indicating the conservative nature of his learning, which is based on transmission of received tradition, rather than creation and innovation within tradition. It is easy to see why a sage who is likened to a flowing fountain would be a good example for *Mishnah Ḥagiga*’s stipulation that the *merkabah* should be expounded only by someone who is wise and understands of his own accord. R. Eleʿazar b. Arakh is the archetype of such a person. It seems,

¹²³See Morray-Jones’s observation, “Paradise Revisited, Part One,” 188 n. 32; and Halperin, *The Merkabah*, 139. On the significance of tradition lists in polemical contexts, see also Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 309.

¹²⁴See Alon Goshen Gottstein, “Rabbi Eleʿazar b. Arakh: Symbol and Reality,” in Gafni, *Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Period*, 173–97.

however, that more is involved in the mention of R. Eleazar b. Arakh in the first unit, especially in terms of the reference to R. Akiba.

The central position of R. Akiba in the collection has already been mentioned. His placement at the center of the collection, as its ultimate hero, may indicate that this document was composed by the school of R. Akiba. This would constitute further evidence to the link between the Tosefta and the mishnah in *Hagiga*, which is also said to have emerged from the school of R. Akiba.¹²⁵ Links between R. Akiba and R. Eleazar b. Arakh should be sought that account for the telling of a story in the first unit concerning this sage. The discussion of who is the greatest of R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai's disciples provides this link: the two candidates are R. Eli'ezer and R. Eleazar b. Arakh. The question of who is the greatest disciple in fact reflects a deeper question: What is the preferred path of Torah study—the path of transmission and retention, or the path of creation and innovation? *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* ascribes the following position to R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai:

Abba Shaul said in the name of R. Akiba, who used to say in his [R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai's] name: It is not thus [that is, favoring R. Eli'ezer] that he [R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai] used to say, but rather: if all the sages of Israel were on one side of the scale, and R. Eli'ezer amongst them, the finger of R. Eleazar b. Arakh would outweigh them.¹²⁶

The particular mention given to R. Eli'ezer sets forth a polemical position. The position favoring R. Eleazar b. Arakh is given in the name of R. Akiba. An affinity between these two sages stems from the similarity in methods of learning. With regard to R. Akiba, too, there are descriptions of learning Torah as a flowing fountain;¹²⁷ his method of learning Torah is thus similar to that attributed to R. Eleazar b. Arakh. One could even say that the latter was R. Akiba's spiritual hero. In a document emerging from the school of R. Akiba, in which much value is placed upon self-motivated understanding, it is only natural that a story about R. Akiba's ideal hero sage should be told. The second unit records R. Akiba's physical tradition history, which passes through R. Yehoshua; the first unit expresses his spiritual heritage and thus tells of R. Eleazar b. Arakh. We may conclude, therefore, that the mention of this sage is also not an innocent historical report, but stems from a particular school, which propagated particular ideals of learning and constructed stories to suit those ideals.

Having established one more instance of tendentious story telling, we should turn once more to the *pardes* story. Does this story have factual

¹²⁵See *y. Hag. 2.1.*, 77a.

¹²⁶*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (B) 29; translation from Saldarini, *Fathers*, 168.

¹²⁷*y. Soḏa 9.17*, 24c. See further *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* A 6 (Goldin, 41); Goshen Gottstein, "Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh," 177–81.

basis? We have already noted the conflicting traditions concerning Ben Azzai's death. Moreover, recognizing the literary nature of this unit makes us less inclined to take its report at face value. One thing that we can further question in this unit is the fate of Ben Zoma. We know that Ben Zoma may have engaged in the study of *ma'aseh bereshit*, since *Genesis Rabbah* has preserved some of his teachings on the story of creation.¹²⁸ Within the "mystical collection," there are two traditions concerning his fate. Depending on their interpretation, they may conflict with one another. Even if a line of interpretation that smooths these difficulties is selected, the question of the relationship between what is told of him in the third unit and in the sixth unit remains. Let us concentrate on the question of the error or problematic associated with him. According to the third unit the problem was that he looked into the orchard. If this were taken as a story, one would have to choose between the story in the third unit and the story in the sixth unit. Assuming that the text presents a typological list, however, it is possible that this list includes information gathered elsewhere. Thus, while the third unit's typological list alludes to the story, the story itself is narrated in the sixth unit. This too, however, is problematic. According to the sixth unit, the difficulty associated with Ben Zoma concerns his looking into *ma'aseh bereshit*. If we interpreted the *pardes* as referring to all kinds of forbidden visionary activities, which are listed in *Mishnah Hagiga*, it may be possible to harmonize the two reports. Yet with regard to R. Akiba and the meaning of the *pardes* passage as a whole, the reasonable context is that of *ma'aseh merkabah*, rather than *ma'aseh bereshit*; this conclusion emerged both from the location of the third unit after the second unit and from particular terms, such as the language of ascent and descent, and perhaps the term *pardes* itself, employed in the *pardes* story. If the *pardes* story is therefore not understood as an expression of all forbidden visionary activities, we once again have a double report—Ben Zoma engaged in speculation of *ma'aseh merkabah* and then, perhaps later, of *ma'aseh bereshit*. This seems unlikely. If indeed two stories are told of him, and the *pardes* episode retains a certain narrative dimension precisely because of its complex mixture of genres, then perhaps neither story has a historical foundation. Rather than assuming that the editor had recourse to different stories concerning this sage, which he then arranged topically, I believe all stories concerning Ben Zoma are local inventions. As described above, the sixth unit plays out the alternative to R. Akiba's relations with R. Yehoshu'a and thus figures in the structure of the "mystical collection" as a whole. If relations between teacher and disciple are the text's main concern, questions of *ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkabah* become

¹²⁸Gen R. 4.7.

merely occasions for illustrating another set of concerns. Seen in this light, the Ben Zoma traditions, particularly to the extent to which they repeat and even contradict each other, should be understood as further examples of the creative power of the editor.¹²⁹ If indeed this editor comes from the school of R. Akiba, we sense here the creative liberty that is part of a certain school's ideal of Torah study.

By far the most provocative and problematic hero of the "mystical collection" is Elisha b. Abuyah. The consequences of the critical investigation are most significant with regard to this sage. It is such a commonplace that Elisha b. Abuyah is a heretic who left the fold, stopped practicing the Torah, and committed many sins that to question the historical basis of the traditions concerning this sage might itself be deemed a heretical act. Nevertheless, the above analysis raises serious questions concerning the historical Elisha b. Abuyah. In whatever direction these questions are answered, the kind of analysis that I have offered for the "mystical collection" must be the starting point for critical inquiry into the biography of this sage. Such an analysis could not only undermine the common view of Elisha b. Abuyah, but could also help to account for the way in which traditions concerning this sage were formed. Regarding Elisha b. Abuyah, it is critical to determine the earliest records of this sage. From what I have suggested above, a chronology of sources emerges. The earliest record is found in the traditions preserved in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, which is the only collection that has preserved his teachings. In certain passages he is even called rabbi.¹³⁰ Moreover, the passages that speak of seeing him in a dream

¹²⁹This would still leave the question of why these stories are told regarding Ben Zoma, and not Elisha b. Abuyah. The ending of R. Yehoshua's statement, "Ben Zoma is outside," is reminiscent of the Babylonian Talmud's presentation of Elisha b. Abuyah as the one who is "outside." This emerges from the constant use of the verb *nefak* ("go out"), and various combinations of it, in the highly elaborate literary creation concerning Elisha b. Abuyah found in *b. Hag.* 15a–b. The two stories can be harmonized to some extent: the passage may intend not only to show the problematics of relations between students and teachers, but also to show an aspect of derangement in Ben Zoma's behavior. If that is the case, the choice of Ben Zoma becomes more obvious, since one story leads to another. Finally, the fact that "cut the plants" probably does not mean anything outside the parabolic context may be the text's reason for not referring to Elisha b. Abuyah. It is easier to create links within the "mystical collection" concerning facts that can be comprehended. The metaphor of cutting the plants does not lend itself to any particular association. We thus may conclude that the fact that such a story is not told of the archvillain, but of Ben Zoma, further testifies to the fact that the Tosefta did not entertain a negative view of the person of Elisha b. Abuyah, and therefore did not need to adumbrate such a view with additional material.

¹³⁰This may also be true of a certain passage in the Babylonian Talmud; see Raphael Rabinowitz, *Dikdukei Sofrim on Mo'ed Kaṭan* 20a (15 vols.; Monachii: Roesl/Huber, 1867–86) 8. 66. See also David Halivni, *Sources and Traditions: A Source Critical Commentary on the Talmud* (Jerusalem: Bet ha-midrash le-rabanim be-Amerikah be-Siyu'a keren Mosheh Vortsvayler, 1975) 555. If indeed he were a child murderer, as some later traditions would

seem to be contemporaneous with Elisha b. Abuyah. There is no mention whatsoever of any apostasy, heresy, or even cessation of ordinary religious activity in the earliest preserved records dealing with this sage. The association of calamity with his vision in no way assumes heresy or sin. On the contrary, the adjacent uses of calamity are instances of martyrdom of saintly rabbis. If anything, read in context, passages from *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* teach us of a saintly rabbi who died a martyr's death.

The next chronological link, and therefore the next step in the formation of Elisha b. Abuyah traditions, is found in the Tosefta. As we have suggested, the editor of the Tosefta reworked the statements of Elisha b. Abuyah, as well as those of the others who entered the orchard, from previously existing materials. In this context Elisha b. Abuyah is said to have cut the plants. The question whether this statement has any referent in the historical reality of the sage has already been discussed. Those traditions that portray Elisha b. Abuyah as not fulfilling the precepts of the Torah can easily interpret cutting the plants as nonobservance of the Torah. Yet, in the context of the Tosefta itself, this is by no means obvious. Moreover, we can view the passage in the Tosefta as the starting point of the formation of those traditions concerning Elisha ben Abuyah. This passage makes sense in the context of a parabolic expression; it also makes sense when one notes the chain of literary allusions and associations that led to its formations. In itself, however, it makes no sense, because it has no clear referent in reality. The mystical air of the *pardes* episode, coupled with the enigmatic expression, "cut the plants," leaves much space for the imaginative reader to ascribe sin to Elisha b. Abuyah. I would suggest that the traditions describing Elisha b. Abuyah's sins stem either from an attempt to interpret the meaning of "cut the plants" or from efforts to unpack the meaning of the Tosefta's proof text concerning Elisha b. Abuyah. This is true of most of the traditions in both Talmuds. While this article is not the occasion for a detailed examination of all the traditions concerning this sage, we should note that within the Talmudic and midrashic tradition there is an immense variety of descriptions of different sins attributed to this sage.¹³¹ Not one particular sin is attributed to him but several—some of them hideous—crimes. If we do not want to assume that Elisha b. Abuyah did all these things, we must ask how so many sins came to be attributed to him, and, moreover, we must question the variety of descriptions of his sins. One answer may be that in fact no one knows what his sin was. If all these traditions stem from an attempt to interpret the meaning of a mere literary expression, it is not surprising that such a wealth of interpretations

have it (see y. *Hag.* 77b), it would be hard to retain such an appellation concerning him unless we simply ascribed it to scribal error.

¹³¹As already noted, these sources are concentrated in y. *Hag.* 15a–b and y. *Hag.* 77b–c.

should exist. Moreover, once Elisha was viewed as a sinner, his person probably magnetized evil behavior, regardless of historical authenticity. If we thus break the sources down into pre-Tosefta, Tosefta, and post-Tosefta descriptions of Elisha b. Abuyah, serious questions concerning this sage arise. I realize that turning the one great heretic of the Jewish tradition into a martyred saint deprives the Jewish people of a great national treasure, but we must attend to the problem of historical reliability of these traditions. The alternative route would be to assume that there is a common memory of this sage's sinfulness, and that the Tosefta in its own way gives voice to this memory. In this manner, one could accept the collective testimony of the totality of tradition. One would nevertheless still have to be precise about the particulars of Elisha b. Abuyah's sins. As I have suggested, the attempt at precision is so difficult that it has led me to prefer the alternative course that I have outlined.

In a critical biography of this sage, one must also take into account his epithet—*aher*, “the other.” *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* does not seem to be aware of this epithet. Moreover, the Tosefta itself may not employ it, depending on the manuscript traditions of the Tosefta. If, following the London manuscript and Urbach's suggestion, we assume that the four sages are not mentioned by name in the opening line of the third unit, one occurrence of *aher* disappears.¹³² The testimonies of the Vienna manuscript, which retains the name of Elisha, and the Erfurt manuscript, which reads *aher*, are then our main witnesses. The readings of the Vienna manuscript concerning ascending and descending, rather than entering and exiting, have already been favored and it seems more likely that the name should be substituted by the appellation, rather than the reverse. It seems therefore that the Tosefta, too, does not know of Elisha's designation as *aher*. This would be further proof that the Tosefta does not yet recognize this sage to be a great sinner or heretic. Only later traditions introduce the name *aher*, as an outcome of their understanding Elisha b. Abuyah as a sinner.¹³³ In fact, one way of explaining the formation of this designation would be in relation to the *pardes* story, where *ehad* (“one”), by a simple orthographic change, was turned into *aher*, in order to avoid mentioning the archvillain in the same breath as sainted rabbis.

Finally, we may turn to the main hero of our unit—R. Akiba. Can the unit tell us anything concerning this sage? If we seek direct, objective evidence regarding this sage's activities, we shall find it difficult to glean

¹³²In fact, we may have here a further criterion for establishing the superior reading of the London manuscript. The Vienna manuscript mentions Elisha b. Abuyah in the body of the passage, but uses *aher* in the opening line, which is clearly a sign of a later addition. See Urbach, “Ha-Masorot al Torat ha-Sod,” 12.

¹³³Note how *b. Ber.* 57b quotes *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* tradition of three students.

such information from such a highly creative text as the “mystical collection.” I believe the structure of the collection as a whole, however, has important historical lessons to teach us; from it, we learn of tensions between different groups in early third-century Palestine. These groups debate concerning the role of visionary activity in religious practice. We hear the voice of those who oppose such practices, but the need to formulate such a polemical document testifies to the existence of another camp. Some of the language typical of that camp, moreover, may be employed in this document. What is of further importance is that within a generation or two after R. Akiba’s death, different groups seem to be appropriating him as a hero of mystical activity. If the purpose of the *pardes* unit is to tell us that R. Akiba did not follow a certain path in order to attain a goal, the attainment of the goal itself is beyond dispute. This agreement on the mystical dimension of R. Akiba’s activities is important and early testimony regarding a probable spiritual activity of R. Akiba. Thus this document not only teaches concerning R. Akiba’s spiritual activities, but also communicates how his figure is associated with such activities not long after his own time. Framing our document in this context allows us to view clearly its message, and its historical context, and to define more precisely its contribution to the study of ancient Jewish mysticism.¹³⁴ This is not a mystical testimony, as Scholem would have it, but neither is it a neutral parable, as Schäfer and others maintain.¹³⁵ Rather, it is a polemical document through which we can learn about the concepts and historical realities of what was probably early third-century Judaism.

■ Responding to Morray-Jones

Having offered my analysis of the “mystical collection,” I believe the reader must now choose between the two alternative pictures presented by Morray-Jones and myself. The appeal of my picture lies in its ability to account for the logic of the whole and to point to the context and the manner in which the “mystical collection” was composed. As such my presentation constitutes an alternative to Morray-Jones’s proposal. In conclusion, however, I wish to engage some of Morray-Jones’s particular observations in light of my previous presentation.

Morray-Jones attempts to establish the existence of two independent *pardes* traditions. One relied on the list of three disciples as found in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*. The point of that tradition was that the three were not ordained rabbis, and therefore should have not engaged in the study of the

¹³⁴On this, see Ithamar Gruenwald, “Methodological Problems in Researching Rabbinic Mysticism.”

¹³⁵Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 14–19; Schäfer, “The New Testament and Hekhalot Literature,” 19–35.

merkabah. The other tradition, found in the hekhalot, and similar to what is found in *Canticles Rabbah*, saw the key to R. Akiba's success in his actions. Morray-Jones argues that the explanation for R. Akiba's successful ascent offered in the hekhalot passage indicates its independence from the talmudic material. Had it been dependent upon that material, it would have resorted to the fact that only R. Akiba was ordained.¹³⁶ I find this argument unconvincing. As Morray-Jones himself states, no one has previously noted the connection between the list of three sages and the *pardes* episode. The reason is that while this list was incorporated by the author of the *pardes* episode, its sources have been obliterated. The *pardes* passage itself does not indicate that the other three were not ordained. Therefore, it is possible that early traditions do not resort to that explanation. We cannot expect early traditions, which take existing texts at face value and do not question their literary archaeology, to recognize the explanations that emerge out of our critical research, which seeks to retrace steps taken by ancient editors. Therefore, no one could be expected to realize that the key to R. Akiba's success was that he was a sage, while the other three were only disciples. Morray-Jones's observation enables us to understand how talmudic materials were put together, but does not serve as a yardstick that ancient writers should be expected to follow. Therefore, the fact that the hekhalot literature does not set forth the explanation unearthed by Morray-Jones is not proof of their antiquity. Rather, as I have suggested above concerning *Canticles Rabbah*, the *pardes* episode, having been severed from the original context in the Tosefta, now calls for a new explanation. This new explanation is a sign of the text's late date, and not of its originality.

Would it not be more helpful to suggest that the hekhalot has turned a third-person tradition into a first-person tradition? Morray-Jones himself considers this a valid option.¹³⁷ The course of development I have outlined in my presentation allows us to see the Tosefta as the source. The detachment of the *pardes* episode from the collection as a whole in a text such as *Canticles Rabbah* follows the Tosefta, and in turn occasions the introduction of another explanation for R. Akiba's success. This explanation is set in first-person language, which indicates its secondary nature. The hekhalot literature continues the trend by turning the whole passage into a first-person report. If economy is a yardstick, this scheme of things is highly economical; moreover, this agrees with the tendency of the hekhalot literature to report in first-person narrative. Unlike rabbinic literature, which tends to report in the third person, and rarely presents religious experience in first-person terms, hekhalot literature constantly employs first person terms to tell of the spiritual accomplishments of its heroes. The move from

¹³⁶Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited, Part One," 200.

¹³⁷Ibid.

third to first person, which is the ultimate cornerstone of Morray-Jones's structure, is thus typical of the hekhalot literature, and the motive for such a transition is quite transparent.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that in virtually all hekhalot manuscripts we discover traces of such editorial activity. In all the parallels to the *pardes* story we find not only the fuller version quoted by Morray-Jones, but also a shortened version. Here we have a brief opening line, attributed to R. Akiba: ארבעה היינו שנכנסו לפרדס ("We were [first person] four who entered [third person] *pardes*"). Rather than נכנסנו, we find here נכנסו.¹³⁸ This may be nothing more than a scribal error, echoing the well-known *pardes* story and slipping naturally into its mode of expression. It may also be a testimony, however, to the manner in which the hekhalot converted third-person materials into first-person materials. In this case, perhaps due to the fact that the passage is not inserted in its entirety, the conversion was not complete. Thus we are left with traces of this conversion process, which serve as proof for the process as a whole.

That the *pardes* motif is not indigenous to the hekhalot text but rather was imported from talmudic materials becomes obvious when we examine those passages that speak of *pardes* in the hekhalot literature. If indeed, as Morray-Jones suggests, the concept of *pardes* is indigenous to hekhalot literature, we should expect to find it in other hekhalot contexts. Peter Schäfer has already noted the absence of this term from contexts other than the story of the four.¹³⁹ Why then would we suddenly find one original hekhalot tradition employing this term? Again, the suggestion that the term was imported from the talmudic materials is more plausible.

Finally, in observing the series of texts in which the passage quoted by Morray-Jones is embedded, it can be noted that this passage is found within a series of opening statements attributed to R. Akiba. This belongs to the literary convention of placing first-person statements in his mouth. The list of opening lines is as follows:

R. Akiba said: We were four who went into *pardes*, etc.

R. Akiba said: At that time, when I went up to the heavenly height. . .

R. Akiba said: At that time, when I ascended to the merkabah. . .¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸See Schäfer, *Synopse*, §338; see also §671 in ms. Oxford 1531 (Michael 9) and mss. Munich 22 and 40.

¹³⁹More precisely, the combination of language of ascent and descent along with the context of *pardes* is not found within the hekhalot literature. See Schäfer, "New Testament and Helakhot Literature," 26. Despite Schäfer's claim, there is one context in which this combination does appear. See idem, *Synopse*, §597. In view of the fact that the speaker is Elisha b. Abuyah, however, it seems reasonable to assume that this passage is indirectly indebted to the *pardes* episode.

¹⁴⁰Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§344–48, 671–74.

The great variety of opening formulae is striking. The expressions use the typical language of heavenly ascent, entry into heaven, and ascent to the *merkabah*. They give the impression of having been collated from different sources, one of which would be the talmudic *pardes* material. It is difficult to assume that the *pardes* material originated here: language concerning *pardes* is not reflected in other parts of the hekhalot, and does not figure in the sequence of statements placed in R. Akiba's mouth. These statements resort to characteristic hekhalot language. The *pardes* passage thus remains an isolated usage that must be seen as completely dependent upon its talmudic sources; it therefore cannot be the source of the talmudic *pardes* traditions.

■ Conclusion

The story of the four who entered *pardes* has always been considered one of the classical texts of Jewish mysticism. Following a movement begun by Urbach, new readings of this text have been offered, readings that strip the text of its mystical testimonial quality. My reading, according to which we have a complex literary creation that employs features of several rabbinic literary genres, would seem to set this text further apart from the context of ancient Jewish mysticism. The new reading offered here still allows, however, for the significance of this text for the history of Jewish mysticism, even if the text's testimonial value is discounted. At an early date—certainly already in the Babylonian Talmud—the text was understood as a mystical testimony. Even the text itself, independent of early and late interpretations, is an important statement concerning the nature of Jewish mysticism. According to my reading, the “mystical collection” is a polemical document that discusses the nature and the path of valid and desirable mystical experience. Such a reading not only informs us of the existence of divergent understandings of the desired mystical path. It presents a certain mystical typology and introduces us to a tension between particular forms of mystical experience. The role of the visionary element and the role of the intellectual hermeneutic discourse, as two competing modes for the attainment of spiritual experience, emerge as the theme of the “mystical collection.” This text is significant in that it sets a tone and establishes a paradigm that finds various expressions in the course of Jewish mysticism. Not only the controversy expressed in our text, but also the implicit recommendation made by the “mystical collection,” are significant to later Jewish mysticism.

My reading has uncovered one further theme that is played out in various stages of later Jewish mystical speculation: the distinction between the orchard and the king, between spiritual wealth and direct access to God. The text asserts that true religious experience seeks to avoid the allure of

the king's riches in order to reach the king himself. This statement too echoes through various stages of Jewish mystical teaching. Even if the *pardes* text does not relate to later Jewish mysticism in the straightforward sense of direct dependence and continuity, it nevertheless raises issues and establishes paradigms that reappear in the rich course of the Jewish mystical tradition.