

however, the precise way in which the darshan will connect the two verses is not clear; indeed, according to Heinemann, the opening *petihta*-verse was chosen by the darshan specifically for its apparent remoteness from the lectionary-verse. In this way, he aroused his audience's suspense and made them wonder how he would journey, as it were, from the one verse to the other, the *petihta*'s destination, its telos—end but also ultimate determinant for the composition's shape and content.

Aside from clarifying its rhetorical function, the structure of the *petihta* exemplifies a fundamental tendency of midrash, the urge to unite the diverse parts of Scripture into a single and seamless whole reflecting the unity of God's will. This tendency derives directly from the rabbinic ideology of the canonical Torah—Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings—as the inspired word of God, a timeless unity in which each and every verse is simultaneous with every other, temporally and semantically; as a result, every verse, no matter how remote, can be seen as a possible source for illuminating the meaning of any other verse. While this tendency is manifest throughout midrash—every place two otherwise unconnected verses are joined in order to reveal new nexuses of meaning—the *petihta* is undoubtedly its most sophisticated literary expression.

As illustration of this structure, consider the following example, the first *petihta* in chapter 1 of VR. I have labelled its sections for the purpose of the discussion that will follow:

- R. Tanhūm b. R. Hanilai began his poem (*parah*): "Bless the Lord, ye messengers (*malakhav*) of His, ye mighty in strength that fulfill His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word" [Ps. 103.20].
- A. "Bless the Lord, ye messengers of His": Of what sort does Scripture speak?
- 1) If Scripture speaks of those who are above (*ha'elyonim*), does it not also say "Bless the Lord, all ye hosts of His" [Ps. 103.21]? And if Scripture speaks of those who are below (*hatahtonim*), does it not say, "Bless the Lord, ye angels [literally, messengers] of His" [Ps. 103.20]?
 - 2) It must therefore be that (*ela*) because those above are [all] able to execute the charges of the Holy One, blessed be He, Scripture says, "Bless the Lord, all ye hosts of His." Because those below cannot [all] execute the charges of the Holy One, blessed be He, Scripture says about them, "Bless the Lord, ye messengers of His," not "all ye messengers of His."
 - 3) Another opinion: Prophets are called *malakhim* [e.g., angels]. This is what is written, "And He sent a *malakh* and brought us forth out of Egypt . . ." [Num. 20.16]. But was it a *malakh*, an angel? Was it not Moses? Why is he called a *malakh*? But from this source [we learn] that prophets are called *malakhim*.

Similarly, "And the *malakh* of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bokhim" [Judg. 2.1]. But was it a *malakh*, an angel? Was it not Pinhas? So why is he called a *malakh*? R. Simon explained: The face of Pinhas, when the holy spirit rested upon him, flamed like a torch [thus appearing like an angel's face]. The Rabbis said: What did Manoah's wife say to her husband?—"A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of a *malakh* of God" [Judg. 13.6]. She must have thought he was a prophet when he was really an angel!

R. Yohanan said: The prophets are called *malakhim* because of their source in Scripture [*mi-bet av shelahen*]. This is what is written: "Then spoke Haggai, the Lord's *malakh*, in the Lord's messengership [*malakhut*], to the nation, saying" [Hag. 1.13]. By necessity you must conclude that because of their origins prophets are called *malakhim*.

- B. "The mighty in strength that fulfill His word": Of whom does the Scripture speak?

R. Isaac said: Scripture speaks of those who observe the Sabbatical year [*shomrei shevi'it*]. It is common in the world for a man to perform a precept for a day, or a week, or a month. But for a whole year? And yet this man sees his field untilled, he sees his vineyard untilled, he gives up his living, and still he says nothing! Is there a hero [*gibor*] greater than this man?

And if you should argue that this verse does not speak about the observers of the Sabbatical year, the proof that it does is that our verse says, "that fulfill His word [*davar*]," and later it says, "And this is the matter [*davar*] of the Sabbatical year's release" [Deut. 15.2].

Just as in the latter verse Scripture uses the word *davar* to speak about the observers of the Sabbatical year, so in our verse Scripture uses the word *davar* to speak about the observers of the Sabbatical year.

- C. "... ye . . . that fulfill His word hearkening": R. Huna said in the name of R. Aha: Scripture speaks about the Israelites who stood before Mount Sinai and undertook to obey and hearken" [Ex. 24.7].

- D. "Hearkening unto the voice of His word":

R. Tanhūm B. Hanilai said: Normally a burden which is heavy for one is light for two. Or if it is heavy for two it is light for four. But is a burden that is too heavy for sixty myriads ever an easy load for a single person? Now all of the Israelites were standing before Mount Sinai, and they said, "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, then we shall die" [Deut. 5.22]. And yet Moses heard the voice of the Lord by himself and he lived! Know that this is so: For out of all of them, the Voice called to Moses alone. Therefore it is said, "He called unto Moses" [Lev. 1:1]. (VR 1:1)

The *petihta* begins with Ps. 103:20 and concludes with Lev. 1:1, the lectionary-verse for the weekly reading. The author of the *petihta*—perhaps R. Tanhūm b. Hanilai, to whom the composition is attributed, but more probably the anonymous redactor of VR^a—connects the two verses by dividing the *petihta*-verse, Ps. 103:20, into several smaller phrases each of which he then identifies with a different subject who is commanded to bless God (as the verse declares). One of the author's