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Exploring mythological components in the Midrashic Interpretations

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Abstract

The foremost objective of the present paper is to unfold the existential Mythopoesis components in the Midrashic texts that appeared in the Jewish cultural tradition. The study will stress the variety of meanings, which are embedded with the Midrash. It will focus on the importance of the Sinai-Theophany on Jewish cultural and religious life. With this intention, it attempts to examine the various arguments on the voice of God and revealed that the voice is the public encounter of the whole Jewish community, rather than a private encounter between God and Moses.

Keywords: Midrash, Sinai-Theophany, Torah, Haggadah

Introduction

The term “Midrash” comes from the root verb “darash” (a Hebrew word), which designates to search, inquire. Midrash is oft-repeatedly in both (scholarly and non-scholarly) inside and outside Judaism right from the ancient to contemporary literary works. It has been widely used by different writers to apply in a variety of senses. The term itself is ambiguous and uncertain; as a result, it is difficult to suggest any specific meaning to it. Let us begin by finding the meaning of the word. Jacob Neuser accepted the term to be equivalent to the English word “exegesis.” Neuser further adds, the native word “Midrash” is satisfactorily working for the study of Judaism, and the use of an English “exegesis” is no lesser or greater degree in terms of the meaning. Gary Porton defines in the form of “the literary work connected straight to the unchangeable authority, the sacred text.” The historian Daniel Boyarin puts in this way, “the hermeneutics procedure of the Rabbinic Judaism.” In another instance, James L. Kugel makes it clear that “Midrash” does not simply mean the usages of the genre in the process of exercising interpretation of the text, but, it is also significant to point it as the interpretive standpoint of the reader. In a few texts, the word is given with the impression to mean the “story” or “history.”

It may also be pointed that Midrash is related to the “Greek word ‘Historia’” through a detailed examination, it seems to have a close connotation with the term “midrash” which means “research” or “investigation.” However, the Greek ‘Historia’ proposes a type of “investigation into the past,” whereas “Midrash” becomes “the investigation of the scripture.” Whenever sift through several writings, it is found that the word is used in both small and Big “M” to refer to midrash. The usage is possibly related to the work of Michel Distefano. He makes an explicit distinction between the small and the big letter. The small letter “m” is used to refer to “a short text produced by an application of Midrashic hermeneutics,” and the big letter ‘M’ is used to refer to a large accumulation of the Midrash. Besides, Distefano identifies the word with the word commentary. The Merriam-Webster English dictionary defines commentary as “a systematic series of explanation or interpretation (as of writing).” Midrash is generally used by theological scholars like Mark Boda, K. Vanhoozer, Josiah H. Penniman, etc., to refer to, as a commentary.

Midrash is the activity, a form of exegesis in the literary composition which is directly related to the religious text, particularly with the Jewish exegesis. Midrash unfolds the Jewish Bible by employing storytelling or the historicity of the past occurrences differently. It is not merely the repetition of the scripture, the activity of the Midrahists might be the one that has been enclosed in the Scripture or others added, or increasing more down the road. Midrash is a way of understanding the text within the given context, and the hermeneutics

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technique of interpretation involves the authorial intention alongside the interpretative standpoint of the reader. The major objective of its function is to construct the meaning of the text in the best interests of the audience.

The extensively established meaning is to “inquire” or “search,” this is connected with God or to “search God.” Craig A. Evans argues of the shift of meaning at different times in the scripture, earlier the medium of searching God is through his chosen prophets, (e.g. 1 Kings 22: cf. 8:1 Sam 9:9). Latter, the search is shifting, not prophets, but “through the study or reading God’s law, the scripture”, (Ezra 7:10 RSV). Other texts in Jewish Bible discloses, which corresponds to the latter meaning, such as (Ps 111:2 RSV). Torah is a Hebrew word meaning instruction or law, the word can be used in two senses. In the specific sense, Torah is commonly believed to be the first five books (the Pentateuch of the Greek) of the Jewish Bible comprises of Bereishit, Shemot, Vayikra, Bamidbar, and Devarim. As Torah signifies instruction, thus in a broad sense, it is possibly referred to as a whole traditional exposition of the scripture in Judaism.

The study of Midrash became widely popular in the 21st century. It is the ancient exposition of the Torah. Even though, the theme is no longer new in the academic field, especially in the Hebrew study. Before this century, the topic has been examined narrowly at the minimum. It is considered merely the derivation of historical facts to discern “the Palestinian Judaism.” Midrash at some point in time has been undervalued with the preference of the “Talmud.” This is measured as important and has a consequential tool in the “literature” of the Rabbis for its etymological concern. The 21st century was substituted by the new inquisitiveness relative to the Midrash with the emergence of the “Post-Structuralist literary” theory and partially along with the advance of the theme under the Hebrew academic program of study. Today Midrash became an independent literary work in itself.

One of the most important points is that Jewish culture since ancient times is well familiarized with the arts of myths creation. Myths are presented in a variety of forms in the exposition of texts, especially of the divinely inspired scripture. One of the major mythopoetic is discovered in the Torah in the book of Exodus chapters 19 and 20. Many Jewish and non-Jewish scholars are interested in the debate about the “Sinai-Theophany” extracted from the Torah. The meaning of the Theophany is not modest and simple as one might imagine, the pieces collected in this narrative perhaps complicated. The appearance of the deity/angels has certainly led to more confusion in the intellectual domain from the ancient to the contemporary researchers. Before a discussion of this Theophany, it is worth to mark the extensive viewpoint presumed – the purge of mythopoetic elements in Jewish scripture. This fact is ensured by the identification of mythopoetic and the myth; the myths are always identified by some religions to belong to the world of paganism.

In the process of constructing mythopoetic elements, particularly of the “Sinai-Theophany”, There are instances that make sense of the claim (The disappearance of mythopoetic in the scripture of the Jews). The general reading of the narrative may possibly draw a hasty judgment of the content, in so doing, it constitutes merely the act of “Law given” traditionally to Jewish people. The chronicle of Jewish people from Egypt to the “promised land” did not

give any signal of the prominent Theophany, but all is said, it occurred altogether of a sudden. Certainly, the “law given” to the Israelites failed to mention in the other texts. Though, the notion of law occupies a central place in the custom and practice of the Jews even to this contemporary era of civilization.

The fold tradition of the Jewish community that is explicitly manifested in the Torah is repeatedly used in many instances in the divinely inspired texts of the scripture. The use of the Theophany has been discovered again in the song of Asaph (Psalms 78:5). It is significant to say, Yahweh’s supernatural activity is expressed in an extremely excellent modus in the song. Nevertheless, it is uncanny to intelligible that such a prominent occasion of “Sinai-Theophany” anticipated beseeching the apex over entire events, out of the 12 songs chanted by Asaph, it is positively unfolded only in this song. The word Torah is repeatedly appeared here heedless of the meaning within the given situation for in any case a reference is made in the song. But other songs (eg. Psalms 105, 106, and 136) corresponding with this tone could not regulate to accommodate by the same amplitude. Undoubtedly, the song cited here did make an indication to the chronicle of the Jews but did not attempt to deliberate appertaining to the “Sinai-Theophany”. An accurate cognitive of the fact is that the term “Sinai” materialized in this song conveyed a bit of discomfort. In the first sense, as it symbolizes “the name of Yahweh,” and in the second sense, it denotes “the specific place of the Jews.” Suffice to say for the concern of the present investigation, as the objective is to adduce the mythopoetic elements of Jewish Midrash.

The search of the mythopoetic notion is the practice under the present investigation. Moving forward to another text appeared in the Hebrew scripture intending to obtain the mythopoetic interpretative position of the Jewish culture. Let us attempt to see the writings of Enoch that is considered to be the apocalyptic literature in the Jewish scripture. The book of (I Enoch 1:3-7), it is written, “The Holy Great One will come from his dwelling... [at] Mount Sinai... there shall be a judgment” (Gruenwald, 1993) ^[6]. Certainly, this is a type of prophecy that is given to the writer of the text, though, in actuality, historically speaking Enoch existed much longer before the time of given the Mosaic law or what is called, the “Sinai-Theophany”, it is substantial to have an argument presupposition. Now, we must focus on the stimulating appeal in this piece, the character indication of the text to the Mount Sinai. Yet, the citation in this specific context is contrary to the “Warrior-Judge Theophany” and the “Sinai-Theophany.” Enoch, the writer of the text unambiguously defined Mount Sinai as a people’s venue (station) where the judgment of God will happen to the people. Undeniably, the link of the passage to the Mount Sinai provides a critical presumption to this reading. It is necessary at this moment to inquire about the text on the issue, either the Theophany in this particular situation is the by-product of the overall patterns exhibited in the entire scripture of the Jews or else merely the bunch of fresh argumentative version of the text. If in the case of the second sentence, it would be fair to say, there are some creative tasks of mythopoetic interpretations within the structure of the text itself (Gruenwald, 1993) ^[3].

There were different mythopoetic facets on the narratives in the interior of Jewish perception. A modernistic reconnoitres that deserved an appropriate cognizance in this study. The

Jewish culture ignores the prominence of commemorations to the heroes existed in diverse narratives in Jewish history, culture, and tradition. The Sinai event or (Sinai Theophany) that a few scholars measured to be the center of the Jewish ritual practices, but the idea of a personal figure is omitted from the tradition. At the event, Yahweh presented the Torah (Law) to the people through Moses, an intermediary. The leading role of the scene is not so important, his name is not mentioned. The event that took place on the Mount Sinai explicitly cognizant that the law of God is handed down to them. It is recognized, the personal figure of the event had never been told in the book of "Haggadah" which is used in the Jewish customs while performing the "Passover-even." It is in contradistinction to other religious traditions that of Islam and Christianity. Overall speaking, these two traditions are the daughters of Judaism. It is fascinating to divulge here the imperative notions constituted in other scriptural texts, these duo sisters are highly concerned with the personal figures (e.g Moses) within their religious traditions. In Islam, Moses is known as one of the six great prophets, whereas in the Christian world, the name Moses is referred to several times predominantly in that of the New Testament. The splendour of other historical mythologies, cultures, and ethos depends on the act of veneration of the personal figure as the archetype, legend, or hero of the event. However, this description is worth noting, the Jewish rabbis do not concern with the personal figure whatsoever may be unexceptional to Moses. In the Jewish culture, "Moses is not [the] hero"; the tradition itself derogates the key role player of the narrative.

It is significant to question the belief because without revering the personal figure like other religious and cultural traditions within the story, firstly, how the Jewish people possible to retain the mythopoetic narratives since the ancient tradition, Secondly, what signals beyond the non-ascription of the homage to any particular legend? But need not to say much, where the main concern of the present study in which the focus is concerned mainly with the interpretative functions of the Midrashim in a specific sense. The whole argument on the voice of God and the privacy of the encounter with Moses had repudiated in the Midrashic interpretative technique with the text. It is argued that neither Moses conventionally received the Torah in sequestration nor the voice of God has gotten from him in seclusion. The Torah was given directly by God and his voice is heard by the whole Jewish community, including the "prophets and sages and even the future generations" The two contemporary Rabbis N. Coopersmith and M. Zeldman, they underscored, the misreading of the Sinai Theophany is certainly conceded into the narrative by the Director and the Producer Cecil B. DeMille on the classical [movie] titled as, "Ten Commandments" released on [1956] in the U.S.A. Correspondingly, the misreading has had a protracted collision even to the contemporary Jewish people. The duo assumes the number of the crowd that existed in this particular event is approximately three million at that time and this factually endorsed in the history of Jewish country for almost "3000 years". There are manifold exemplifications in the Torah, the voice of Yahweh is perceived unequivocally by the multitude at Mount Sinai. One of the illustrations is established in the book of (Deut: 9-13) "God spoke to you from the midst of the fire, you were hearing the sound of words, but you were not seeing a form".

In conclusion, although the Jewish Torah had explicitly presented that God spoke to Moses in a private place. But, contemporary thinkers had given a new interpretation of the Sinai-Theophany. The Midrash mythological practice of the Jewish people had not ceased to exist as argued by many various interpreters. But the mythological making in the culture of the Jews is a continuous process in the present-day era. Modern Midrash interpreters are interested to find the gap or the absence in the texts by comparing a variety of texts found in the Torah.

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