Halakhah and Aggadah: Some Sources
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(1) Exodus 12:26, 27:
26 And when your children ask you, “What do you mean by this rite?” 27 you shall say, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.”

(2) Exodus 13:8, 14:
8 And you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt.’
14 And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘It was with a mighty hand that the LORD brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.

(3) Exodus 20:2:
2 I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage:

(4) Parashat Beshalach: For the Revisers of the Schottenstein Edition:
(4) Tanhumah Bereshit 11 (ed. Buber):

Rabbi Isaac said: It was not necessary to begin to write the Torah but from “This month shall be to you” (Exodus 12:2, introducing the laws of Passover). Why then did he write from “In the beginning” (Genesis 1:1)? To make known his mighty power, as it is said, “He declared to his people his mighty works, in giving them the heritage of nations” (Psalms 111:6).

(5) Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael Bahodesh 5:

“I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2). Why was the Decalogue not said at the beginning of the Torah? They gave a parable. To what may this be compared? To one [a king] who entered a province, saying to them [the people], “Shall I rule over you?” They said to him, “You have not done anything good for us that you should rule over us.” What did he do? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought battles for them. He said to them, “Shall I rule over you.” They said to him, “Yes, yes.” Likewise, God brought Israel out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down the manna for them, brought up the well [of Miriam] for them, brought the quails for them, fought for them the battle with Amalek. He said to them, “Shall I rule over you?” They said to him, “Yes, yes.”

(6) Avot deRabbi Natan A 8:

“Provide yourself with a teacher”: how so? This teaches that one should provide himself with a single teacher and study with him Scripture and Mishnah (oral teaching)—Midrash, Halakha, and Agada. Then the interpretation which the teacher neglected to tell him in the study of Scripture he will eventually tell him in the study of Mishnah; the interpretation which he neglected to tell him in the study of Mishnah he will eventually tell him in the study of Midrash; the interpretation
which he neglected to tell him in the study of Midrash he will eventually tell him in the study of Halakha; the interpretation which he neglected to tell him in the study of Halakha he will eventually tell him in the study of Agada. Thus, that man remains in one place and is filled with good and blessing. R. Me’ir used to say: He that studies Torah with a single teacher, to whom may he be likened? To one who had a single field, part of which he sowed with wheat and part with barley, and planted part with olives and part with oak trees. Now that man is full of good and blessing. But when one studies with two or three teachers he is like him who has many fields: one he sows with wheat and one he sows with barley, and plants one with olives and one with oak trees. Now this man’s (attention) is divided among many pieces of land, without good or blessing.

(7) **Avot deRabbi Natan B 18:**

“Provide yourself with a teacher for wisdom”: A man is obliged to provide for himself a teacher for wisdom so that he can learn from him Midrash, Halakha, and Aggada, as Scripture says: “One who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, (and one who cares for his master will be honored)” (Proverbs 27:18).

(8) **Sifre to Deuteronomy 306:**

Another interpretation of “May my discourse come down as rain” (Deuteronomy 32:2): Just as rain falls on trees and infuses each type with its distinctive flavor — the grapevine with its flavor, the olive tree with its flavor, the fig tree with its flavor — so too words of Torah are all one, but they comprise Scripture and Mishnah: Midrash, Halakhot, and Haggadot ....Another interpretation: Just as rain cannot be anticipated until it arrives, as it says, “And after a while the sky grew black with clouds [and there was wind and a heavy downpour]” (1 Kings 18:45), so too you cannot know what a disciple of the sages is until he teaches: Mishnah, Halakhot, and Haggadot; or until he is appointed administrator over the public.
(9) Avot deRabbi Natan A 28:

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammai says: There are three types of scholars: the hewn stone, the cornerstone, the polished stone. The hewn stone: for example, the disciple who has studied (only) Midrash: when a scholar comes to him and asks him about Midrash, he answers him. That is a hewn stone, for only one of its sides is exposed. The cornerstone: for example, the disciple who has studies (only) Midrash and Halakha: when a scholar comes to him and asks him about Midrash, he answers him; about Halakha, he answers him. That is the cornerstone, for only two of its sides are exposed. The polished stone: for example, the disciple who has studied Midrash, Halakha, Agada, and Tosephta: when a scholar comes to him and asks about Midrash, he answers him; about Halakha, he answers him; about Tosephta, he answers him; about Agada, he answers him. And that is a polished stone, for it has all its four sides exposed.

(10) Pesikta deRav Kahana Bahodesh Ha-shelishi 25:

Another comment on “I am the Lord thy God” (Exodus 20:2): R. Hanina bar Papa said: The Holy One appeared to Israel with a stern face, with an equanimous face, with a friendly face, with a joyous face: with a severe face appropriate for the teaching of Scripture—when a man teaches Torah to his son, he must impress upon him his own awe of Torah; with an equanimous face appropriate for the teaching of Mishnah; with a friendly face appropriate for the teaching of Talmud; with a joyous face appropriate for the teaching of Agadah. Therefore the Holy One said to them: Though you see Me in all these guises, [I am still One]—“I am the Lord thy God.”

(11) Sifre to Deuteronomy 48:

Another interpretation of “If, then, you carefully keep [all this commandment]” (Deuteronomy 11:22). Lest you say, “I will study a difficult Scriptural lesson and ignore the easy one, Scripture
teaches, “For it is no vain (empty) thing for you, because it is your life” (Deuteronomy 32:47): something which you say is worthless is your very life. For you should not say, “It is enough for me that I have studied laws.” Scripture teaches, “commandment,” “the commandment,” “all this commandment”: study Midrash, Halakhot, and Haggadot. Similarly Scripture says, “That man does not live on bread alone ” (Deuteronomy 8:3), referring to Midrash, “but by everything that issues from the mouth of the Lord” (ibid.), referring to Halakhot and Aggadot.

(12) Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 8a:

Raba said to Rafram b. Papa: Let the master please tell us some of those fine things that you said in the name of R. Hisda on matters relating to the Synagogue! — He replied: Thus said R. Hisda: What is the meaning of the verse: “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion [Ziyyon] more than all the dwellings of Jacob?” (Psalms 87:2). The Lord loves the gates that are distinguished [ne-zuyanim] through Halachah more than the Synagogues and Houses of Study. And this conforms with the following saying of R. Hiiya b. Ammi in the name of ‘Ulla: “Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in this world but the four cubits of Halachah alone.” So said also Abaye: At first I used to study in my house and pray in the Synagogue. Since I heard the saying of R. Hiiya b. Ammi in the name of ‘Ulla: “Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in His world but the four cubits of Halachah alone.” I pray only in the place where I study. R. Ammi and R. Assi, though they had thirteen Synagogues in Tiberias, prayed only between the pillars where they used to study.

(13) Sifrei Deuteronomy 49:

“If, then, you faithfully keep all that I command you, loving the Lord your God, walking in all His ways,] and holding fast to Him” (Deuteronomy 11:22): But is it possible for a person to ascend to heaven and to cleave to fire? For has it not been said, “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24), and it says, “His throne was fiery flames” (Daniel 7:9).
Rather, attach yourself to the sages and their disciples, and I will account it to you as though you had ascended to heaven to receive it [Torah] — not that you ascended to receive it in peace, but rather as though you waged war in order to receive it. And thus it says, “You went up to the heights taking captives” (Psalms 68:19). The expounders of haggadot say: If you desire to come to know the one who spoke and the world came into being, study haggada, for thereby you will come to know the one who spoke and the world came into being and cling to His ways.

(14)Halakhot Giborim Meschat D'ha M'Emudah:

R. Abbahu and R. Hyya b. Abba once came to a certain place. R. Abbahu expounded ‘aggadah and R. Hyya b. Abba expounded law. All the people left R. Hyya b. Abba and went to hear R. Abbahu, so that the former was depressed. [R. Abbahu] said to him: “I will give you a parable. To what can this be compared? To two men, one of whom was selling precious stones and the other various kinds of small ware. To whom will the people hurry? Is it not to the seller of various kinds of small ware?”

(15)Babylonian Talmud Sotah 40a:

When R. Ammi and R. Assi were sitting before R. Isaac the Smith, one of them said to him: ‘Will the Master please tell us some legal points?’ while the other said: ‘Will the Master please give us some homiletical instruction?’ When he commenced a homiletical discourse he was prevented by the one, and when he commenced a legal discourse he was prevented by the other. He therefore said to them: I will tell you a parable: To what is this like? To a man who has had two wives, one young and one old. The young one used to pluck out his white hair, whereas the old one used to pluck out his black hair. He thus finally remained bald on both sides. He further said to them: I will accordingly tell you something which will be equally interesting to both of you.

(16)Psikhot Giborim Pesekh Sheni:

פִּסְקֵי גִּבְוָרִים פֶּסֶקַח שְׁנֵי

עַל חֲלֵבִיָּהל מַחְפֶּה (דָּבְרֵים לְכָּל), אוֹ הֲלֹאות שֹׁפֵט מַפְּסַח. וְדָמֶּנָּה מַשְּׁמַח, אוֹ הֲנָדוֹת שֵׁמֶשׁ מְשַׁפֶּחַ

לָבַּּל חֲלֵב כִּי.
(16) **Sifre to Deuteronomy 117:**

“[He suckled him] with the kidney fat of wheat” (Deuteronomy 32:14): This refers to the laws, which are the body of the Torah. “And the blood of grapes you drank for wine” (ibid.): This refers to the narratives, which draw the heart of a person like wine.


A living and healthy *halachah* is an *aggadah* that has been or that will be. And the reverse is true also. The two are one in their beginning and end.

(18) **Abraham I. Kook (1865-1935), *Ihud halalakhah v'ha aggadah* (trans. B.Z. Bokser):**

The *halakha* and the *aggadah* must be united. The necessity that moves us to concern ourselves with both must also lead to their spiritual unification. The fact that one who concerns himself with *halakha* and feels he has entered a different world when he enters the realm of *aggadah* and vice versa destroys much of the spiritual stimulation that is inspired by the peace of mind that comes from inner unity. We are summoned to chart paths in the method of study through which the *halakha* and the *aggadah* will be merged in a substantive unity.... As we commence the process of unifying *halakha* and *aggadah*, many other unifications and harmonies will be stimulated in its wake. The heavenly and the earthy realms, our physical and intellectual selves, with all the hidden riches in each of them, will join to activate in each the process needed for its full growth and development. .... In truth there is always a *halakhic* element in the *aggadah*, and similarly an inner *aggadic* content in the *halakha*. For the most part the *aggadic* content is present in the qualitative aspect of the *halakha*, and the *halakhic* content in the theory behind the quantitative proliferation of the *aggadah*. Without any searching or special sensitivity we are influenced, while studying *halakha*, by the *aggadic* dimension hidden therein; and while studying *aggadah*, by the particular *halakhic* formulations, which are merged in the *aggadic* content..... We must stress the joining of these two forces in a proper form, so that each will give added strength to the content of the other, help clarify its particulars and shed more light on its general concepts, on the depth of its logic and its far-reaching significance. The *halakha* must be made more appealing through association with the *aggadah*, in an appropriate manner, and the *aggadah* likewise needs to be assessed in its relation to the clearly defined, fixed laws and the particularized delimiting logic represented in the established structure of the *halakha*. Thereby will the vitality and fruitfulness of both be doubled.


In this normative world, law and narrative are inseparably related. Every prescription is insistent in its demand to be located in discourse — to be supplied with history and destiny, beginning and end, explanation and purpose. And every narrative is insistent in its demand for its prescriptive point, its moral.