**Group Dynamics in Beit Midrash Organizations: Revisiting the Legend of the Conflict between Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Lakish**

(**Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzi’a 84a)**

The *beit midrash* in the period of the Mishna and Talmud,[[1]](#footnote-2) as a “defined social construct” that aspired to attain a common goal which defined its functioning and constituted its *raison d’être* and had structures such as roles, hierarchies of authority, and generally accepted rules,[[2]](#footnote-3) fulfills the accepted definition of “organization” or “work group.”[[3]](#footnote-4) In this organization, knowledge produced and acquired through a variety of methods of learning (*midrash*, explanation, Talmudic debate, etc.)[[4]](#footnote-5) was the “product” and, as such, served as almost the only criterion for evaluating colleagues.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Tensions in beit midrash life are described in a variety of legends dispersed throughout the Babylonian Talmud. These stories reveal the complex, and at times even violent, nature of the experience of studying in the beit midrash.[[6]](#footnote-7) Using concepts harvested from the discipline of “organizational discourse,”[[7]](#footnote-8) these legends may be examined as texts that function as “storytelling” for the Sages in the beit midrash of the Talmudic period. “Storytelling” is the presentation of an episode in an organization’s life that imparts information and provides a unique opportunity for the analysis of issues of relational power and the degree of members’ identity with the organization. Via “storytelling,” messages are transmitted to the organization as to its internal culture and values. Its aim is to unite members of the organization, strengthen their connection with the organization, and attest to power struggles among members of the organization for the authority to control and manage the organizational discourse. In this capacity, “storytelling” yields a narrative that bears emotional and symbolic tension. It does not provide information or facts in regard to a “case”; instead, it enriches the case with multiple interpretations.[[8]](#footnote-9)

An exemplum of storytelling, one of many, is the well-known legend of the relationship between R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish (BT, Bava Metzi’a 84a). [[9]](#footnote-10) This archetypal text has been discussed by scholars from a broad range of viewpoints. Daniel Boyarin, Admiel Kosman, and Yehuda Liebes mull a variety of aspects that surround Eros and gender themes in this story.**[[10]](#footnote-11)** Jonah Fraenkel deals with the tension that emerged between the two heroes as a reflection of the hierarchy within which the Sages’ beit midrashwent about its business. Although Fraenkel refers to a number of literary components and poetical constructions, his discussion is brief, focusing in particular on R. Yohanan’s conceptions of how the beit midrash should operate and how these expectations are confronted with the evolving reality of the “growing” of Resh Lakish.[[11]](#footnote-12) Ruth Calderon discusses the relationship between these men as private individuals and as representations of opposing and complementary cultural worlds.[[12]](#footnote-13) Yariv Ben Aharon analyzes the story as a representation of the struggle between Babylon and Israel for hegemony over learning and knowledge. Shamma Friedman indicates the plausibility of a motif that gravitates from the legends of R. Shimon Ben Yohai and R. Elazar, his son, to the legends of R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish,[[13]](#footnote-14) while Yaffa Zilkah compares the version of the story in the Palestinian Talmud with that in BT.[[14]](#footnote-15) Shlomo Kasirer and Yakir Englander deal with psychological aspects of the conflict.[[15]](#footnote-16) Michal Bar Asher Segal compares several motifs in the story with those of accounts in the Syrian monks corpus,[[16]](#footnote-17) and Elie Holzer focus on arguments that may be gleaned from the story in relation to the essence and quality of the unique pedagogy of study (i.e., the *ḥevruta* [couple] method) practiced in the beit midrash.[[17]](#footnote-18)

As this brief review shows, most of this legend genre reveals and analyzes various literary and rhetorical figures and yields insights about various areas of discourse in the story. Research thus far, however, focuses almost exclusively on the personae of the main protagonists in the legend in question—R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish—and sometimes also on R. Yohanan’s sister or R. Elazar Ben Pedat. In contrast, the manner in which the group of scholars, the disciples of the Sages, pursued their calling in R. Yohanan‘s beit midrash has remained in the shadows and received little consideration. Some researchers often cite the group ‘s passivity (and define it as flattery to their rabbi)[[18]](#footnote-19) but focus primarily on describing the difficult experience that these scholars went through as their rabbi lost his sanity.[[19]](#footnote-20)

Given the centrality of reliance on a group of scholars in the life of beit midrash organizations,[[20]](#footnote-21) attention to the role of the group dynamic processes in R. Yohanan’s beit midrash may further refine some of the insights that my predecessors raised. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to expose processes and levels of discourse that have been less central in research to date in order to uncover other meanings and arguments that arise from this story. I base myself on previous researchers’ insights and analyses but move beyond their scope. Indeed, in this story the exposure of the group's behavior faces a challenge: the "group" appears only twice in the narrative, once to select Elazar ben Pedat to comfort R. Yohanan and once to pray for mercy for R. Yohanan, after which he dies. Nevertheless, the behavior of the two main protagonists throughout the story and the reactions of the group may both give us clues as to the nature of the group's behavior in the beit midrash even before the episode recounted in the story. Examining the account from this angle will illuminate arguments that the story evokes about the division of responsibilities between the stakeholders in the beit midrash—the head of the organization and its rank-and-file members—and the organizational culture patterns and practices that flow from the responsibility of each side to ensure the vitality of the organization.

To elaborate on these aspects of the story, I invoke concepts and theories from two areas. The first is organizational discourse, with special consideration for the contribution and impact of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan[[21]](#footnote-22) and his followers.[[22]](#footnote-23) Lacan’s concepts are particularly helpful in revealing R. Yohanan’s motives in designing the patterns of his beit midrash and analyzing his various responses throughout the crisis with Resh Lakish against the organizational background. Thus, Lacan's model will help us to see that the harsh dialogue between the characters (in Scene 3 below) does not trace to R. Yohanan's impulsive response to Resh Lakish in view of their interpersonal relationship. As I will show, it may be interpreted as a well-planned act of “storytelling” of its own account, by which R. Yohanan sends a message to the entire organization as to his position as head of the organization, the status of other members of the organization (including Resh Lakish), and the limits of what is allowed and what is forbidden in his beit midrash.

Pursuant to this, I employ concepts of group-dynamic processes set forth by the psychoanalyst Wilfred R. Bion[[23]](#footnote-24) to enhance our understanding of the underlying processes among group members in R. Yohanan’s beit midrash. As noted above, I am aware that the group of sages took action only at the end of the story (and only twice even then). However, by focusing on R. Yohanan's reactions throughout the story, on the one hand—and I will limit the discussion solely to comments relevant to the topic of this article, which focuses on the group and less on the heroes of the story—and analyzing the same modes of the group’s operations, on the other, I may elucidate motivations and processes that the group evinced beneath the surface for much time. These theoretical concepts strengthen the possibility of seeing the proposals in this article as perhaps the most likely interpretation of the events. At the end of my discussion, the story may be read as a drama that unfolds not only at an interpersonal level but also at a collective one. This perspective will bring an additional discourse to the surface, yielding important insights into how the scholastic life of the beit midrash should be conducted.

**Jacques Lacan’s “Master Discourse”—a Concise Explanation**

Jacques Lacan defined a discourse as “a social bond constituted in language” and used the term to stress “the trans-individual nature of language.” He introduced four types of social connections, i.e., four different patterns of discourse[[24]](#footnote-25): Master, University, Hysteric, and Analyst.[[25]](#footnote-26) Although the Lacanian model of discourse is a communication model, this communication includes more than messages from the speaker to the other, the addressee (listener), on the conscious, rational level; it has an unconscious dimension as well. The message aimed at the listener is also intended for the speaker and returns to the latter with enhanced meaning.[[26]](#footnote-27)

The “Master discourse”, as for its light I will examine the patterns of the behavior of R. Yohanan, describes a social connection in which the “speaker” demands of the “listener” knowledge, which is passed on via the language, the network of signifiers. The knowledge that returns from the “listener” confirms and validates for the speaker his or her status as “Master signifier,” which identifies her or him as the leader (in our context, the head of the beit midrash). The “Master signifier” is any signifier with whom the subject identifies or, by establishing a powerful positive or negative value, opposes.[[27]](#footnote-28) She or he is established as such only *a* *posteriori*, from information or knowledge provided by the second signifier. At this point, the unconscious subject breaks out. The subject identified with the “Master signifier” ignores the unconscious truth that motivates him or her (she or he, too, is an absent subject, who desires something). The “Master signifier,” with whom he or she identifies, provides the illusion—to him/herself and to those surrounding—that he or she is a complete, perfect subject. Master signifiers’ unconscious revelations (their desires and the fact of their imperfection) do not necessarily diminish their social status; they merely reveal their vapidity.

An important point for the purposes of our story is that, according to Lacan, the “Master signifier” role in an organizational discourse is realized not in the image of the manager who heads the organization but in the person who controls and actually manages the organization’s discourse. In other words, people on other echelons who attempt to define the topic and content of the organization’s discussion may supplant the “Master signifier.” In retrospect, their role as Master will be received, as usual, via the information-knowledge (recognition and validation) granted by the other participants in the organization, of which the organization’s titular manager may be one.[[28]](#footnote-29) Using these concepts, I now investigate R. Yohanan's actions throughout the story—especially those that occur within the beit midrash, the “organization.”

**Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzi‘a 84a—the Story Divided into Scenes**[[29]](#footnote-30)

1. One day R. Yohanan was swimming in the Jordan.

Resh Lakish saw him [and believed him to be a woman. He plunged his spear into the ground][[30]](#footnote-31) and jumped into the Jordan after him.

[R. Yohanan] said to him: "Your strength is for the Torah."

He said to him: "Your beauty is for women."

He [R. Yohanan] said to him: “If you repent, I will give you my sister, who is more beautiful than I."

He [Resh Lakish] accepted [took] upon himself [to repent]. He wished to return [with a jump] to get his clothing, but he was unable to do so.

1. He taught him Bible and Mishna and made him into a great man.
2. One day there was a difference of opinion in the study hall: "A sword, and a knife, and a dagger, and a spear, and a handsaw, and a sickle—from when are they susceptible to ritual impurity?

 From the time that their manufacture is completed.

 And from when is their manufacture completed?

 R. Yohanan says: From when he tempers them in the furnace.

 Resh Lakish said: From when he immerses them in water.

 [R. Yohanan] said to him: "A robber understands about robbery."

 He said to him: "And what good have you done to me? There they called me master [and] here they call me Master.”

He [R. Yohanan] said to him: "I have done you good by bringing you under the wings of the Divine presence."

 R. Yohanan was deeply offended [and] Resh Lakish became ill.

1. His [R. Yohanan’s] sister came and wept and said to him: "Act for the sake of my children."

He said to her: "‘Leave your orphans, I will preserve them alive’"(Jeremiah, 49:11).

"Act for the sake of my widowhood."

He said to her: “‘And let your widows trust in me.’”

1. Rabbi Shimon son of Lakish died, and R. Yohanan was greatly distressed about him.

 The Rabbis said: "Who will go [and] relieve his mind?

 Let R. Elazar ben Pedat go, for his statements are sharp."

 He went and sat before him. [After] everything that R. Yohanan said, he said to him: "There is a Baraita that supports you."

 He [R. Yohanan] said: "Are you like the son of Lakish? When I would say something, the son of Lakish would raise twenty-four objections against me, and I would give him twenty-four answers, and the statement would thereby be clarified. All that you say is ‘There is a Baraita that supports you.’ Do I not know that what I have said is right?"

1. He [R. Yohanan] went on rending his clothes and weeping and said: “Where are you son of Lakish, where are you son of Lakish?” And he cried out until his mind slipped from him.

 The rabbis pleaded for mercy on his behalf and he died.

**The Organizational Culture in R. Yohanan‘s Beit Midrash**: A**nalysis of the Legend**

The first two scenes in the legend place the “knowledge–power” relationship at the beginning of the story. They undermine the ability of those who possess the discursive knowledge to control the entire reality and to secure their place as “Master signifiers” for their environment. Indeed, only the two main protagonists in the story appear in these scenes. However, the structure of the power relations between the two heroes, and its foundation on the knowledge products that are used and created in the beit midrash, reflect both the patterns of R. Yohanan’s conduct as the head of the organization and those of the entire organization with all its partners. Therefore, to understand the dominant dynamics in R. Yohanan’s beit midrash*,* these scenes should be analyzed as well. Below I offer this analysis briefly, focusing mainly on significant details of specific relevance to our prism because most particulars relating to the event have already been noted in previous research.

The two personae—R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish—represent a specific essentialist sphere. Each sphere creates a type of characteristic knowledge that yields a different type of power. Resh Lakish represents “nature,” the “outside” that contrasts to the world of the beit midrash. [[31]](#footnote-32) The latter milieu is identified both with R. Yohanan and with “culture.”[[32]](#footnote-33) R. Yohanan, the prey, understands reality and responds to it by using the knowledge that he possesses. Applying his rhetorical talent, he convinces Resh Lakish to agree to an exchange: “I will give you my sister […].” Thus, at the outset of the story we see that the knowledge created in the beit midrash is superior to that acquired in the external sphere. One who possesses this knowledge is able to overturn the ultimate balance of power in the outside world and impose his will on the “strong one” who inhabits that space.[[33]](#footnote-34) R. Yohanan’s position as “master,” one who controls the discourse and, through it, all of reality, is determined at the very beginning of the legend. [[34]](#footnote-35)

The second scene fixes the protagonists’ power relations as outlined at the end of the previous scene. Entering the beit midrash, Resh Lakish loses not only his physical strength but also his original status in the balance of power then existing between himself and R. Yohanan. If in their first encounter each protagonist represents a significantly different knowledge-power locus and, therefore, the two are equal in the extent of their authority, on leaving his previous world Resh Lakish renounces the possibility of being R. Yohanan’s equal (and also, apparently, the possibility of achieving superiority if the two were to remain in the “real world”) because as a pupil, he is inferior to (in organizational terminology, an “employee” of) R. Yohanan. In this scene, the Talmudic account expresses the new level of authority/power by ascribing the verbs that denote the “teaching/learning” process -“taught him” and “made him” - to R. Yohanan alone. The process of teaching is seemingly depicted not as a partnership between teacher and pupil, a dialogue between two personae, but from the standpoint of one side, the teacher. Moreover, Resh Lakish the pupil seems completely passive, “present but absent,” clay in the hands of his potter, his spiritual father.[[35]](#footnote-36) Indeed, the achievement described at the end of the process—“a great scholar/man”—is ascribed not to the pupil but to the rabbi who “made him.”[[36]](#footnote-37) This stage, and the way the pupil challenges it, rest at the center of the controversy that unfolds in the next scene.

**The Crack in R. Yohanan’s Hegemony: Its Implications for R. Yohanan and for the Exposure of Group Behavioral Patterns**

The third scene introduces the complication of the legend, as posited in its opening with the expression “one day”—which, in BT, alludes to the rupture of a convention. The scene has multiple tiers and multiple meanings. It begins with a conventional description of daily life in the beit midrash. On the surface level, the Sages are discussing a trivial issue concerning the halakhot of weapons and tools (its source is Mishna Kelim 14:5): there is a process of turning a raw material, iron, in this case, into a finished implement (which can, however, be rendered ritually impure). At what point may this process be said to be completed? The debate is conducted, as we learn from the next scenes, in accordance with a convention constructed in R. Yohanan’s beit midrash: R. Yohanan opens the debate and is followed by Resh Lakish (and hypothetically by others), who raises questions and offers suggestions. Under the surface, however, both the content taught, and the didactic structure bear interrelated and interwoven symbolic meanings. The weapons and implements under discussion in the beit midrash that day are not randomly chosen; many of them represent Resh Lakish’s previous world. They are selected not only to create the logical underpinnings that Resh Lakish needs in order to challenge R. Yohanan’s superiority but also to raise a question of principle found in the subtext of the discussion: “At what point is the ‘manufacturing’ of a person complete?” The repeated use of the metonymy that represents Resh Lakish in the first scene—the “spear”—now broadened by the addition of other tools, emphasizes that the subtext involves more than a question of principle. This metonymy is realized in the personality of Resh Lakish.[[37]](#footnote-38) R. Yohanan’s ruling—“From when he tempers them in the furnace”—establishes, at the obvious level of the debate, the moment of tempering in the furnace as that at which the implement receives its form and “his [its] manufacture is complete.” At the implicit level, however, R. Yohanan reminds Resh Lakish of his past by alleging that the latter received his form/essence while living in the outside world, before entering the beit midrash. Thus R. Yohanan nullifies the significance of the personal process that Resh Lakish underwent during his years of study in the beit midrash, the very process that established his new calling as a pupil of the Sages, and changed his identity of “weapon” to that of “handsaw” and “sickle”—productive tools of a normative community.[[38]](#footnote-39) Resh Lakish’s response: “From when he immerses them in water,” should also be understood as a double entendre. At the surface level, Resh Lakish calls upon the sources of knowledge available to him in order to answer the concrete, practical question. By offering “reality-based knowledge,” he presents an alternative and a more accurate (and therefore preferable) answer to R. Yohanan’s answer: The process is complete when the implement is immersed in water, at which point its form cannot be changed unless it is again melted down and re-formed. At the implicit level of the discourse between the two, Resh Lakish rejects the identity posited for him by R. Yohanan. R. Yohanan does not accept his pupil’s assertion and therefore challenges Resh Lakish with a malicious aphorism: “A robber understands about robbery.” In one go, R. Yohanan has turned the implicit level of the debate into its surface level.

By changing the topic of the discourse, R. Yohanan is trying to maintain his status as the persona who plays the role of “Master signifier” in his beit midrash. Thus far, it is he who has determined the curriculum in the beit midrash, opened the debates (both in this scene and in Scene 5, in which the pedagogical methods used in the beit midrashare depicted), and presented his arguments.[[39]](#footnote-40) Up to now, his peers’ approval and validation of his “Master signifier” status in the beit midrash are granted in two ways:

(1) Via Resh Lakish’s questions. Until now, these problematic issues have not been raised as alternate truths to those presented by R. Yohanan.[[40]](#footnote-41) In other words, Resh Lakish does not ask these awkward questions in order to demand the role of “Master signifier” for himself; such a step might nullify R. Yohanan’s control of the organization. Instead, he asks them in order to “broaden the discussion,” i.e., to enrich and inspire the studies (the discourse) that take place in the beit midrash under the leadership and control of R. Yohanan.[[41]](#footnote-42)

(2) Via the behavior of the other members of the organization. Apart from the fact that no member of the beit midrash other than Resh Lakish attempts to offer his input on the “manufacture-completed” question, this scene underscores the silence and lack of involvement of the peers. They neither try to comfort Resh Lakish nor to advise R. Yohanan of the serious harm that his words embody. In other words, they present neither a halakhic alternative to Rabbi Yohanan's position nor a moral critique of his conduct in the beit midrash. As for why the group is utterly passive during the conflict—before the members’ eyes, I believe—I venture an explanation in the next section, in which I examine the patterns of group behavior in R. Yohanan's beit midrash according to Bion's group model.

As I mentioned earlier, it is only natural that R. Yohanan, as the head of the beit midrash, chooses the topic of discussion. I have suggested that he chose this topic because of its subtext, which I have analyzed, and not because of its explicit content. He apparently senses a potential challenge to his position as “Master signifier,” not specifically from the direction of Resh Lakish but possibly by other “employees,” his peers in the beit midrash, who detect Resh Lakish’s greatness. Therefore, he chooses content through which he can send Resh Lakish, and the organization as a whole, an indirect message about Resh Lakish’s place as an “employee.”[[42]](#footnote-43) The discursive use of the rhetorical metaphor “A robber understands about robbery” frames Resh Lakish’s “knowledge” as belonging to, and being significant in, the outside world.[[43]](#footnote-44) By “surrounding and cutting off” Resh Lakish’s speech, R. Yohanan excludes the former’s words from the halakhic debate and shoves aside any claim to their truth. Thus, R. Yohanan reestablishes his control of the discourse and protects his position as head of the organization.

In terms of Lacan’s “Master discourse,” the reassertion of authority enables R. Yohanan, as well as the other members of the organization, to retain the illusion that he is a perfect subject, “lacking any shortcomings.” This is seen in R. Yohanan’s answer to Resh Lakish’s painful question: “And what good have you done to me? There they called me Master and here they call me Master.” R. Yohanan’s response puts an end to the discussion and complements the previous scene: “I have done you good by bringing you under the wings of the Shekhinah [the Divine presence] and made [you] into a great man/scholar.” R. Yohanan’s retort skips over the scene that has just taken place, in which the mask of the “Master signifier’ has been torn off, thus revealing its vapidity and rendering it void. By so doing, he connects the text directly to Scene 2, in which Resh Lakish’s learning process and success reflect R. Yohanan’s illusory grasp—and that of other members of the organization—of reality, rather than reality itself, or the narrator’s viewpoint. Now we see, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, the exposure of the “Master signifier” as an “impostor,” one who is not perfect but rather bears his own imperfections. These imperfections, however, do not preclude the maintenance of the rabbi’s position as head of the organization’s social structure.[[44]](#footnote-45)

Yet R. Yohanan’s hegemony over the discourse is breached and the illusory reality eventually collapses: “R. Yohanan was deeply offended.”

**The Behavior Patterns of the Student Group according to Bion’s Concepts**

In the scenes we have seen so far, and in the one that follows, as R. Yohanan’s sister pleads with her brother to reconcile with Resh Lakish, the group of the students is absent. Ostensibly, the storyline concerns itself solely with what happens among these three protagonists.[[45]](#footnote-46) The group, however, will appear as a major actor down the road (in Scenes 5 and 6) as they try to assuage R. Yohanan and return him to the beit midrash. This begs the question, that we raised earlier, of why the group does not mobilize to act in the earlier stages of the story. What dynamic motivates them to intervene (or prevents them from intervening) at the outbreak of the crisis and appeasing the two opponents? Or another possibility: Supposing the students witnessed the insult inflicted by Resh Lakish on R. Yohanan, they could, at the very least, express their empathy for him and thus attenuate his humiliation and, possibly, forestall his death. This brings me to Bion’s theoretical concepts, developed as a result of his work with groups, which apply psychoanalytical processes to group processes.[[46]](#footnote-47) Below I combine Bion’s concepts with Lacan’s “Master discourse.”

According to Bion, a group’s mission is consciously determined. Bion uses the expression “work group” to denote the communal mental activity that the group invokes in pursuit of its goal.[[47]](#footnote-48) In our story, the mission for which the group has assembled in the beit midrash is the study of Torah. Bion, however, discerns a different level of mental activity, in which the group does not appear to assume any responsibility for events that take place. This is an unconscious level of the doings of the group, which Bion terms the “basic assumptions group:” [[48]](#footnote-49)

Group mentality is the unanimous expression of the will of the group, contributed to by the individual in ways of which he is unaware, influencing him disagreeably whenever he thinks or behaves in a manner at variance with the basic assumptions. It is thus a [mechanism] of intercommunication that is designed to ensure group life in accordance with the basic assumptions.

At any point in time, the group entertains one of the “basic assumptions.” It is this “basic assumption,” instead of the conscious goal, the “work,” that often activates events that occur within the group. Bion conceptualizes three “basic assumptions” that drive dynamic processes in an organization (or group): the “dependence group,” the “fight-flight group,” and the “pairing group.”[[49]](#footnote-50) As with the “work group,” each of these concepts depicts the group’s way of mental functioning but not the people of whom the group is composed. [[50]](#footnote-51) In a situation where the group is motivated by the “basic assumption of the dependence group,”[[51]](#footnote-52) this assumption is apparently the factor of fundamental relevance to the situation that the group of R. Yohanan’s pupils faces. The group chooses one person, whom they expect to serve the needs of its other members. Bion explains[[52]](#footnote-53):

The basic assumption in this group culture seems to be that an external object exists whose function it is to provide security for the immature organism. This means that one person is always felt to be in a position to supply the needs of the group, and the rest in a position in which their needs are supplied.

Combining this with Lacan’s “Master discourse” terminology, I see the group as identifying with R. Yohanan, its “Master signifier.” The members sense that they are totally dependent on the individual who “holds the group together,” the one responsible for providing them with the formal concrete setting—the beit midrash of which they are members—and for meeting their intellectual needs as pupils of the Sages. This mental premise explains why, in the third scene, the group does not turn to comfort Resh Lakish or to confront R. Yohanan for his aggressive behavior toward him. Their dependence on R. Yohanan does not allow them to do so. As Bion puts it, “[…] Unless a group actively disavows its leader it is, in fact, following him.”[[53]](#footnote-54) Moreover, Bion emphasizes: “From the basic assumption about groups there springs a number of subsidiary assumptions, some of immediate importance.”[[54]](#footnote-55) Three such assumptions relate to the survival of a group and reinforce the explanation of the Sages’ behavior in the previous scene. First, “People come together as a group for purposes of preserving the group.”[[55]](#footnote-56) This premise is relevant for every group, including that of learners in the beit midrash, because according to Bion, as noted, every group has a purpose (the “work group”). Second, “A group seems to know only two techniques of self-preservation, fight or flight. The frequency with which a group, when it is working as a group, resorts to one or other of these two procedures, and these two procedures only, for dealing with all its problems, made me first suspect the possibility that a basic assumption exists about becoming a group. […] Preoccupation with fight/flight leads the group to ignore other activities, or, if it cannot do this, to suppress them or run away from them.”[[56]](#footnote-57) And third: “There will be a feeling that the welfare of the individual does not matter so long as the group continues, [even if sometimes even] directly opposed to the good of the group.”[[57]](#footnote-58) Returning to the confrontation in the scene that I presented above, it now becomes possible to interpret the group's behavior as stemming from “fight/flight” patterns, through which it tries to preserve itself. The group escapes the threatening situation by maintaining silence. By doing so, it abandons the individual Resh Lakish.[[58]](#footnote-59) In an attempt to cling to the leader, however, it refrains from attacking his abusive behavior, thus not pushing him away and continuing to follow him in the hope that he will continue to fulfill their needs.

The aggravating confrontation between R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish, however, breaches the covenant built over the years in the beit midrash, a pact based not only on R. Yohanan’s ways but also on the patterns of the student group. Therefore, the process that costs R. Yohanan his sanity deprives the peer group in the beit midrash of its confidence that the organization will continue to exist. The students’ growing horror indeed requires them to step out of their “comfort zone” and change their patterns. However, as the following scene demonstrates, the dominance of the dependence group’s “basic assumption” does not allow them to conceive of options other than the return of R. Yohanan to the beit midrash in his prior capacity as the “Master signifier” of the organization. This also comports with Bion’s description of the behavior of the dependent group, which operates on the assumption that the leader alone is the one who solves individuals’ problems and has particular concern for their welfare. Thus, all facts that clash with this premise are denied. However, when the group can no longer ignore the contradictions that have surfaced between the leader’s behavior and its own perception, it sometimes treats the leader like “a baby that has to be humoured by indulgence in its self-display. This brings into play the state that I [the leader] have described as the dual of the ‘simple’ form of[the basic assumption of the ‘dependent group’]*—*I do not nourish and sustain the group so they nourish and sustain me.”[[59]](#footnote-60)

To reinstall R. Yohanan as the leader of the group and in accordance with the pattern of the “dependence group” of which they are part, the group of Sages quickly appoints an ad hoc leader who will fulfill its immediate need for the return of R. Yohanan. Chosen for this role is R. Elazar ben Pedat, a person eminently most suited to the task because his identity appears to coincide with the “Master signifier,” R. Yohanan. He is depicted as the latter’s successor, fit for the task in every possible way.[[60]](#footnote-61) However, he personifies the group’s total dependence on its leader from another perspective: by appointing him as a “partner” (“an opponent in an argument”) of R. Yohanan, the group appears to have repositioned its coping behavior from the basic framework of the “dependence group” to that of the “pairing group.” Underlying the existence of a “pairing group” is the assumption that the group has met for the purpose of reproduction, i.e., that two people may be brought together for one purpose only: a sexual one. Two people, regardless of the sex of either, carry out the group’s work through their continued interaction. The other members of the group listen eagerly and attentively with a sense of relief and hopeful anticipation. A notable feature of this mentality, Bion advises, is its focus on the future rather than the present as a form of escape from current negative experiences[[61]](#footnote-62):

It usually finds expression verbally in ideas that marriage would put an end to neurotic disabilities; that group therapy would revolutionize society when it had spread sufficiently; that the coming season, spring, summer, autumn, or winter, as the case may be, will be more agreeable; that some new kind of community—an improved group—should be developed, and so on. These expressions tend to divert attention to some supposedly future event, but for the analyst the crux is not a future event but the immediate present—the feeling of hope itself. This feeling is characteristic of the pairing group and must be taken by itself as evidence that the pairing group is in existence, even when other evidence appears to be lacking.

Therefore, in my opinion, it would be correct to see this “basic assumption” about the mental process that the group of Sages applied whenever R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish quarreled as part of the prevalent learning routine in the beit midrash.[[62]](#footnote-64) In the group fantasy, a new (and not necessarily symmetrical) partnership takes shape between R. Yohanan and R. Elazar Ben Pedat, replacing the previous partnership. As Bion describes it [[63]](#footnote-65):

[המובאה המסומנת הלאה שולבה לעיל—האם יש צורך לחזור עליה כאן?—העורך] This feeling [hope] is characteristic of the pairing group and must be taken by itself as evidence that the pairing group exists, even when other evidence appears to be lacking. […] The optimistic ideas that are verbally expressed are rationalizations intended to effect a displacement in time and compromise with feelings of guilt—the enjoyment of the feeling is justified by appeal to an outcome supposed to be morally unexceptionable. The feelings thus associated in the pairing group are the opposite pole to feelings of hatred, destructiveness, and despair. […] There is a tendency for the work group to be influenced in the direction of producing a Messiah, be it person, idea, or Utopia. In so far as it succeeds, hope is weakened; for obviously nothing is then to hope for, and, since destructiveness, hatred, and despair have in no way been radically influenced, their existence again makes itself felt. This in turn accelerates a further weakening of hope.

In the group fantasy, therefore, the new partnership—between R. Yohanan and R. Elazar Ben Pedat—will return the equilibrium of the beit midrash to its original state. It follows that the appointment of R. Elazar ben Pedat is not an expression of the group’s independence and responsibility but its opposite: a reflection of the lack of cognitive independence, i.e., the conformism, of the members of the organization.

R. Elazar ben Pedat’s mission, however, is doomed to failure.[[64]](#footnote-66) Resh Lakish’s death breaks down the conscious aspect of R. Yohanan and evokes the reason for its unconscious desire, revealing at long last that he—R. Yohanan—is a lustful subject.[[65]](#footnote-67) The illusion of R. Yohanan, as well as that of the members of the organization, shatters before their very eyes. He discovers his need for reform and for the unique confirmation that had been received from the challenging questions posed by Resh Lakish, the “Other.”[[66]](#footnote-68) The members of the group discover that they are worthless to him once he has discovered his desire. The recognition of R. Yohanan as an absent subject, incapable of fulfilling his own needs and those of the group, marks the end of his hegemony in the organization.

The last scene completes R. Yohanan’s expulsion from his role as “Master signifier.” As we have seen, the breaking down of R. Yohanan’s conscious level has revealed his unconscious subject: the fact that he is an absent subject who needs Resh Lakish to satisfy his desires. The descent from his place as the “Master signifier” is thus accompanied by an awakening that forbids him to return to the illusion that accompanied him in his position as “Master signifier.” R. Yohanan searches for Resh Lakish to the point of madness. Concurrently, as we have seen, the group functions largely in accordance with the “dependence group” patterns, thus inducing the actual death of the leader when the latter can no longer meet the group members’ expectations and needs.

**Conclusion**

The legend of the conflict between R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish reflects the Sages’ awareness of the various spheres in which knowledge bearing disciplinary characteristics is structured, as well as the ways of discourse and types of power created within the framework of each. The legend, as “storytelling” that was taught, disseminated, and recreated again and again among pupils in the Babylonian yeshivot, makes a claim as to the balances that should exist within the beit midrash, and between the beit midrash and its surroundings, for the organization to continue to exist and develop. The beit midrash can continue to thrive only when it retains a framework diffuse enough to allow products of knowledge from a variety of sources to penetrate and fertilize it. Situations in which masters of discourse crowd out a different type of knowledge (such as that created by Resh Lakish and by R. Yohanan’s sister[[67]](#footnote-69)) through the use of exclusion mechanisms cause the organization to descend into atrophy and death and plunge its members into their own degeneration and death, be it intellectual or physical.

From the perspectives that this article discusses in the legend, however, is not just about the role that the theme of “knowledge,” or even the “knowledge-power” relationship, plays in the beit midrash. The story also points to the deep abyss between the professed image of the beit midrash as an unsullied place where fraternity between the teacher and the peer group of students, together seeking the proximity of God through the study of his Torah, should prevail, and what it is in fact: an organization whose members pursue a power struggle for place and influence.[[68]](#footnote-70)

As we have seen, this legend discusses the interpersonal processes that take place between the head of the beit midrash and his students at two levels of relationship: between him and one individual in the group and between him and group at large. At this point, the legend constructs an argument not only about the devastation occasioned by power struggles in the beit midrash but also about the dynamics that should exist in this setting so it can evolve as a healthy and productive organization. The responsibility for the proper functioning of the beit midrash, according to the stratum of discourse in the story, belongs first and foremost to its leader. As the “Master signifier,” he controls the process of structuring the discourse within the beit midrash and has the ability to raise and empower its students or reduce them to, and keep them in, a state of dependency. The peer group, however, also participates in shaping its organization’s patterns of behavior and thus bears responsibility for what occurs there. By reflecting on the “basic assumptions” that animate the organization, the group of Sages can develop as individuals and as a group; thus, eventually they will acquire the capacity to attain their goal as a “work group” that pursues fruitful studies on the basis of varied sources of knowledge. When the legend is read this way, its moral is directed at all participants in the organization. All are called upon to examine their motivation and their patterns of behavior—each in his position and role—so that they may develop the sensitivity to motives that forms the basis of the discourse taking place among them. This sensitivity will contribute to the vitality and productivity of the organization and ultimately guarantee its long-term existence, sparing it from atrophy and disintegration.

1. \*

 In this article, *beit midrash* serves as a generic term for the academic institution of the Sages. Historically speaking, a distinction exists between the beit midrash in the Land of Israel and the *yeshiva* in Babylon. See I. Gafni, “Yeshiva and Metivta,” *Zion* 43 (1978): 12–37; Z. Safray, “The Nature of the Beit Midrash,” *Cathedra* 24 (1982): 183–5; M. D. Goodblatt, “New Development in the Study of the Babylonian Yeshivot,” *Zion* 46 (1981): 14–38; H. Shapira, “The Beit Midrash in the Land of Israel in the Period of the Mishna and Talmud: the Concept and the Institution,” in *12th World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 2 (1997), 45–60; J. L. Rubinstein, “The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence,” *JSIJ* 1 (2002): 55–68; M. D. Goodblatt, “History of the Babylonian Academies,” in *The Cambridge History* *of Judaism Volume 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period,* ed. S. T. Katz (Cambridge, 2006), 821–89; P. Mandel, “Concerning the Public Role of the Early Beit Midrash,” *Zion* 79 (2014): 327–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Each of these components is addressed in this study. A selection from the literature follows: I. M. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era* (Jerusalem, 1990), 177–236; R. L. Kalmin, “Collegial Interactions in the Babylonian Talmud,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* (1992): 383–415; J. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore and London, 2003); Ishay Rosen-Zvi, “‘Protokol bet ha-din be-Yavne? ‘Iyyun meḥudash be-Tosefta Sanhedrin perek 7,” *Tarbiz* 78 (2009): 447–77; Shimon Fogel, “Sidre ha-si’ah be-vet ha-midrash be-sifrut hazal be-erets Yisrael: tekes, irgun ha-merhav ve-‘anisha,” Ph.D. Diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. B. Berelson and G. A. Steiner, *Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964); E. H. Schein, *Organization Psychology* (Englewood Cliffs, 1965). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. For dialectic study, see Rubenstein (note 2 above), 39–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. “Knowledge” was used as a criterion for evaluating the Sages’ pupils and as a reflection of their academic standing vis-à-vis various practices and privileges in the beit midrash, such as the order of seating, the right to study exclusive areas of knowledge (such as *ma’aseh merkava*), the right to serve the rabbi, to receive rabbinical ordination, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See, for example, the debate between R. Idi and a group of Sages in R. Yohanan’s beit midrash (Babylonian Talmud [hereinafter: BT], Hagiga 5b); the silenced debate between R. Shimi and R. Hiya Bar Ashi (BT, Ta’anit 9b) and its possible implications for the general functioning of the beit midrash; and the difficulties that R. Pappa faced in replacing the deceased head of his yeshiva (BT, Ta’anit 9a); see also the Sages’ decision to dismiss Rabban Gamliel (BT, Berakhot 27b). Cf. E. Holzer, “‘Either a Hevruta Partner or Death”: A Critical View on the Interpersonal Dimensions of Hevruta Learning,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 75 (2009): 134: “In fact, these literary creations serve as a subtle vehicle to heighten self-criticism and self-awareness of the potential flaws and inherent dangers of this culture without undermining the primary value of Torah study.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See D. K. Muby and R. P. Clair, “Organizational Discourse,” in *Discourse as Social Interaction,* Vol. 2, ed. T. A. Van Dijk (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 1997), 181–205. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See F. L. Smith and J. Keyton, “Organizational Storytelling: Metaphors for Relational Power and Identity Struggles,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 15 (2001): 150; M. Humphreys and A. D. Brown, “Narratives of Organizational Identity and Identification: A Case Study of Hegemony and Resistance,” *Organizational Studies* 23 (2002): 421–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The version of the legend used in this paper is Babylonian. Therefore, it must be viewed as reflecting the culture of the Babylonian yeshiva rather than the Land of Israel beit midrash*.* For another example of use in BT of a disagreement set in the Land of Israel beit midrash, see H. Shapira, “Hadaḥat Rabban Gamliel—ben historia la-aggada,” *Zion* 64 (1999): 5–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. D. Boyarin, Carnal Israel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 197–226; A. Kosman, "R. Johanan And Resh Lakish: The Image Of God In The Study Hall: ‘Masculinity‘ Versus ‘Femininity,’” *European Judaism* 43:1 (2010): 128–45; Y. Liebes, “Eros ve-anti-Eros ‘al ha-Yarden,” in *Ha-ḥayyim ke-midrash—’iyyunim be-psychologia yehudit li-kh’vod Professor Mordechai Rotenberg,* ed. S. Arzy, M. Fachler, B. Kahana (Tel Aviv, 2004), 152–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. J. Fraenkel, *‘Iyyunim be-‘olamo ha-ruhani shel sippur ha-*aggada (Tel Aviv, 1981), 75–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. R. Calderon, *Ha-shuq. Ha-bayit. Ha-lev* (Jerusalem, 2001), 27–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. S. Friedman, “La-aggada ha-historit ba-Talmud ha-Bavli,” in *Sugiyot be-ḥeker ha-Talmud ha-Bavli: Asufat meḥkarim be-‘iynhane mivne, herkev ve-nusaḥ, Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, ed. S. Friedman (New York and Jerusalem, 1993), p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Y. Zilkah, “Gilgulo shel sippur—ben metsiyut le-ideologia: ‘Iyyun mashve be-sippur R. Yohanan ve-Resh Lakish ba-Yerushalmi u-va-Bavli,” *Assif* 4 (2013): 87–104. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Shlomo Kasirer, “‘Ha-nefashot ka-mar’ot’: Hebetim psikhologi’im be-maḥloktam ha-aḥarona shel Rabbi Yohanan ve-Resh Lakish ‘al pi Rabbi Tsodok ha-Cohen mi-Lublin,” *Michlol* 29 (2013): 141–59; Yakir Englander, “Ha-persona ve-ha-tsel—Parshanut Yunga’it le-sippur ḥayehem u-motam shel R. Yohanan ve-Resh Lakish,” *Deot* 18 (2004): 32–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. M. Bar Asher Segal, “Ethic and Identity Formation: Resh Lakish and the Monastic Repentant Robber,” in *L‘identité à Travers L‘étique: Nouvelles perspectives sur la formation des identités Collectives dans le monde Greco-romain,* ed.K. Berthelot et al. (Turnhout, 2015), 53–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. E. Holzer (note 6 above): 130–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. See A. Kosman, *Men‘s Tractate: Rav and the Butcher and Other Stories: On Manhood, Love and Authentic Life in Aggadic and Hassidic Stories* (Jerusalem, 2002), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Zilkah (note 14 above): 90–2, 96–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Here I separate the stated purpose of the beit midrash—Torah study and halakhic endeavor—from other secondary benefits that its students gained by participating (e.g., accumulating social capital, fulfilling intellectual and spiritual needs, and even obtaining socially sanctioned shelter from the abrasive routine of making a living and having family life). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. I refer to Lacan’s four types of discourse, as presented in Seminar 17, and to a variety of works in which scholars analyzed his concepts and applied them to a broad range of disciplines. See, for, example: J. Clemens and R. Grigg, eds., *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, sic. 6 (Durham and London, 2006); M. Bracher et al., eds. *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* (New York and London, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See A. Contu, M. Driver, C. Jones, “Jacques Lacan with Organization Studies,” *Organization* 17 (2010): 307–15; C. Cederström and Casper Hoedemaekers, eds., *Lacan and Organizations* (London, 2010); M. Fotaki, S. Long, H. S. Schwartz, “What can Psychoanalysis Offer Organization Studies Today? Taking Stock of Current Developments and Thinking about Future Directions,” *Organization Studies* 33 (2012): 1105–20; M. Driver, “The Lack of Power or the Power of Lack in Leadership as Discursively Constructed Identity,” *Organization Studies* 34 (2013): 407–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Bion, an influential British psychoanalyst who served as president of the British Psychoanalytical Society from 1962 to 1965, performed numerous group experiments while in charge of the training wing of a military hospital. On his clinical work and for more specific information about his concepts that I invoke in this paper, see J. and N. Symington, *The Clinical Thinking of Wilfred Bion* (London, 1996) and, in particular, the chapter “The Study of Groups,” 125–42; J. Aguayo and B. D. Malin, eds. and Introduction, *Wilfred Bion: Los Angeles Seminars and Supervision* (London, 2013); N. Rosenwasser and L. Nathan, *Hanḥayat kevutsot: Mikra’a* (Jerusalem, 1998), 75–100. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Lacan introduced the concept of the Four Discourses in *Le s****é****minaire,* ***l****ivre XVII****:*** *L’****e****nvers de la* ***p****sychanalyse (1969–1970), The Other Side of Psychoanalysis****.*** *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan****:*** *Book XVII*, J.-**A**. Miller et al., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan****:*** *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limit****s*** *of Love and Knowledge (Encore), 1972–1973* (Book XX), ed. J.-**A**. Miller and trans. B. Fink (New York and London, 1998). For a concise overview of the sources of the Lacanian discourse, see L. Lev, “The Master‘s Discourse as a Model for Understanding the Manager-Employee Relationships: The Case of a Tender Committee” [Hebrew], *Organizational Analysis* 20 (2014): 66–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Lacan drew the following schema to describe discourse in general (I present these concisely, referring to points that are relevant to the story under discussion):



In the diagram, the “addresser” (the speaker) appears on the left and the “addressee” (the listener) on the right. Four positions connected with language are illustrated. Those above the line are conscious; those below are unconscious. The “agent” occupies the position of the conscious aspect of the “speaker.” He faces the “Other,” the “listener,” on the conscious level. The “agent” is motivated in speech by his unconscious “truth.” The “production” is the unconscious outcome or result of the “Other’s” response to the “speaker’s” petition. In each type of discourse, different terms are placed in the positions that represent the discourse in the scheme. Therefore, there are different places for impossibility and inability; different aspects of discourse are repressed or fail to be communicated within the four different discourses. Mark Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change* (Ithaca, 1993), 53, explains this in terms of four psychological factors: knowledge, ideals, self-division, and *jouissance*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. See Coral Houtman, “Lacan‘s Theory of the Four Discourses and the Sixth Sense,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 7 (2003): 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. According to Bracher, n. 25 above; see also Lev (note 24 above): 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Jonathan Clifton, “A Discursive Approach to Leadership: Doing Assessments and Managing Organizational Meanings,” *Journal of Business Communication* 49 (2012): 148–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. The English translation of the text is taken from *Koren Talmud Bavly,* Translation by Adin Steinsaltz*,* Vol. 26 (Jerusalem, 2012), 122–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. See Kosman (note 10 above): 142, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Passage through water is a metaphor for the rebirth or the religious conversion of Resh Lakish; see Kosman (note 10 above): 131; Calderon (note 12 above), 37; Holzer (note 6 above): 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. The difference here between “nature” and “culture” is that posited by Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (London, 1969). “Inside” and “outside” as related to the beit midrash and everything external to it are sharply defined in other legends, e.g., the clash between Rabbi Jehuda Ha‘Nasi and Rabbi Haiah (BT, Mo′ed Qatan 16a–b). In the legend of the controversy between Rabbi Elazar and “the Ugly One” (BT, Ta’anit 20a–b), we discern the question of the linkage of knowledge created in the beit midrash (“Torah”) with that created in the “real world.” See I. Hevroni, Ha-kanne, ha-erez, ve-ha-ru’ah: Ha-yaḥas she-ben ha-’Torah’ la-’olam’ be-sippur talmudi (Ta’anit 20a–b),” in *Ma’ase sippur: Mehkarim ba-sipporet ha-yehudit*, Vol. 2, ed. A. Lipsker and R. Kushelevsky (Ramat Gan, 2009), 103–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. See also Kosman (note 10 above): 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. In contrast, as Kosman points out: “On a second level, this metaphoric tableau shows the extent to which Resh Lakish is dependent upon Rabbi Johanan from this moment on; his symbolic transition from one ‘riverbank’ to the other in his life was totally contingent upon Rabbi Johanan‘s aid, so that he could swim in the “water of the Tora.” Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. The question “Who makes the man—his biological father or the rabbi who teaches him and introduces him to culture?” is discussed by the Sages (e.g., Mishna B. Metzi′a 2:11). For the pupil as the “son of the Torah” and of his spiritual father, his rabbi, see Yisrael Hazani, “Mi-mitos le-etos: Ben Torah, ben navi ve-talmud Torah (he’arot mispar ‘al ha-av, ha-em ve-ha-ben,” *Derekh aggada* 10 (2007): 114ff. For an interpretive proposal to view the struggle between Resh Lakish and R. Yohanan as a son‘s battle against his father in an oedipal process of the liberation of the son (Resh Lakish) from the castrating burden of the father who takes the mother (the Torah) to himself, see Kosman (note 10 above): 143, n. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. The expression “made him into a great scholar/man” is not coincidental. It is a figure of speech based on midrashim that depict Abraham and Sarah as activists in religious conversion. See L. Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, verse 32 (New York and Jerusalem, 1993), 54. For a broader view, see Genesis Rabba 84, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba,* ed. J. Theodor and H. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1965), 1004. (For further parallels see Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy*). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Cf. Calderon (note 12 above), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. The possibility of a change of calling on the personal-psychological level is realized when the concrete didactic content—“A sword and a knife and a dagger and a spear and a handsaw and a sickle”—echoes the order of the tools presented in Isaiah’s vision of the Eschaton (Isaiah 2:4): “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” Here, too, the implement changes its purpose from a weapon of war to an agricultural tool, symbolizing a normative society at peace. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. It is noteworthy that the R. Yohanan’s identification with the “Master signifier” is presented in the opening scene. See also Fraenkel (note 11 above), 75–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Holzer (note 6 above): 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. See also Fraenkel (note 11 above), 75–6, and Holzer, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Or, in Lacan’s model, a “slave.” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. This ouster of the area of knowledge associated with Resh Lakish from the confines of the organization takes place according to the principle of “division and rejection,” one of the exclusion mechanisms defined by Michel Foucault. See M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language,* trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), 217. “Division and rejection,” says Foucault, “turns the ‘speaker’ [the ‘Folly” in Foucault‘s analysis, or Resh Lakish in our case] into one whose ‘speech could not be said to form part of the common discourse of men. His words were considered null and void, without truth or significance.” [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. S. Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York, 1992), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. As stated above, Kosman devotes extensive discussion to the role of the woman in the story and to the gender claims evoked; see Kosman (note 10 above, 135–8, and note 18 above, 45–51). Therefore, I merely comment that, from the aspects of interest to me in this article, the purpose of the dialogue between R. Yohanan and his sister is to illuminate the ways in which R. Yohanan tries to retain his position as “Master signifier” not only in the eyes of his surroundings but also, and mostly, for himself. Ironically, this scene reveals the growing dissonance between the conscious stratum and the subconscious level in R. Yohanan’s personality and between him and his surroundings. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Wilfred R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London, 1961). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Ibid., 98–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Ibid., 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. This is a defense mechanism of the individual within the group. These three stances are based on the division of instincts suggested by Wilfred Trotter: the compulsion for self-protection, the compulsion for sex, the compulsion for nourishment. See N. Torres, “Gregariousness and the Mind: Bion and Trotter, an Update,” in *Bion‘s Sources: The Shaping of his Paradigms,* ed. N. Torres and R. D. Hinshelwood (London and New York, 2013),. For characteristics common to the “basic assumptions,” see Bion, ibid., 146–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Ibid., 143–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. On the “dependence group,” see ibid., 74–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Ibid., 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Ibid., 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Ibid., 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Ibid., 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Importantly, Bion distinguishes between a “fight/flight” pattern, which manifests in a group of any kind, and a different pattern typical of a group whose mentality he characterizes as “fighting/fight. See his discussion of “fight/flight” behavior in the “dependent group” (pp. 81–2), in which he teaches that “In the dependent group, flight is confined to the group, fight to the psychiatrist [who is identified with the group leader]; the impulse of the group is away from the hostile object; of the psychiatrist towards it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. Ibid., 119-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. R. Elazar ben Pedat is considered Rabbi Yohanan’s most outstanding pupil. He served R. Yohanan for many years and was the most loyal and important transmitter of R. Yohanan’s teachings. Indeed, it was universally known that all of R. Elazar’s teachings were in fact Rabbi Yohanan’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. Ibid., 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Ibid., 96: “There is no direct conflict between basic assumptions, but only changes from one associated state to another, which are either smooth transitions or brought about through intervention of the sophisticated group [the work group—S.M]”; and at 154: “The contemporary basic assumption that pervades its activities can be changing frequently; there may be two or three changes in an hour or the same basic assumption may be dominant for months on end.” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
63. Ibid., 151–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
64. So according to both Bion’s conclusions from his experience with groups (ibid., 151) and Lacan’s “Master discourse,” as I show below. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
65. And, according to Slavoj Žižek’s addition to Lacan’s ‘Master Discourse,” his being a mere imposter. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
66. For the unsolvable stance of the “Master signifier” who cannot grant recognition to the “slave” (because thus he would cease to be the master) yet is dependent on the slave and needs his recognition, see Lev (note 24 above): 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
67. The sphere of knowledge represented by the sister/woman in Scene 4 is that of “family relationships” (the “home”). It is based on a different model from the hierarchic arrangement of “power over” people and things that exist in the outside world, in which “a violent man is a real man” (as represented by Resh Lakish in the past) and that exists within the beit midrash and expressed by the collocation “made him” in Scene 2 (representing R. Yohanan’s relations of control and dominance over Resh Lakish, his subordinate in the hierarchy). The alternate model is cooperative—“power with and power for,” as expressed by the sister in the collocation “act for.” See D. Francis, “Culture, Gender and Power Asymmetries and Gender in Conflict Transformation,” in *Berghhof handbook for Conflict Management* (2004): 3–4. Retrieved from http://www.Berghof-handbook.net. For application of these models in analyzing relationships between organizations, see T. Rubel-Lifschitz and D. Kazhdan, “Shutafut, ko’ah ve-tarbut: Be-‘ikvot ‘avoda be-forum ben-irguni,” *Analiza irgunit* 16 (2012): 45–67. The knowledge created in the “home” sphere differs from Resh Lakish’s violent, power-based, physical knowledge and R. Yohanan’s verbal knowledge. “Home” knowledge is emotional, symbolized by the sister’s weeping, a form of nonverbal expression. The verbal language of discourse—feminine, emotional—is direct language. It symbolizes the object as it is, set within its “natural order” in reality: according to its place in the family (son, husband, wife). The language of “nature” does not project on the object the perceptions of other subjects, which include value judgments that are associated with it as a result of the language of the male-cultural discourse—a symbolic language that relies on signifiers (words) freighted with images, allegories, and metaphors. Cf. Kosman (note 22 above): 45–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
68. The gap between the image and reality is largely reminiscent of Frisch’s analysis of psychoanalysis, as a body of knowledge used to gain power within societies for psychoanalytic psychotherapy. See S. Frisch, “The Legacy of Power Play in Societies for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy,” in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in Institutional Settings,* ed. J. Pestalozzi (London, 1998), 175–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)