In 1929 Louis Ginzberg published responsa from the Cairo Geniza by Pirkoi ben Baboi, a student of a student of R. Yehudai Gaon. In those responsa ben Baboi criticized customs practiced by the Jews in the Land of Israel, including in the writing of Torah scrolls. The Jews of the Land of Israel did not customarily tan hides for the Torah scroll with the specific intention that they were tanning the hides for the purpose of using them for writing Torah scrolls. Ginzberg’s argument — that the Babylonian Jews were more stringent than the Jews of the Land of Israel about the law that required tanning the hides with the intent that they be for Torah scrolls — differs from the picture painted by Saul Lieberman. According to Lieberman, the Jews of the Land of Israel were more stringent than the Jews of Babylon about the law requiring intent, regarding all commandments.

In “The Law Requiring Intent in the Preparation of Ritual Objects”, Yuval Blankovsky focuses on the development of the law requiring intent in the preparation of ritual objects only, that is, *tzitzit* (the strings tied on the corners of four-cornered garments), *tefillin* (phylacteries), *mezuzot*, and Torah scrolls. The core of the article is an analysis of the Babylonian *baraita* from which the Talmud concluded that R. Shimon b. Gamliel held that one must tan the hide used for manufacturing *tefillin* with the intent that it be used for that purpose. The question is the authenticity of the *baraita*. Does the *baraita* reflect a tannaitic position that the law requires preparation “with intent” in preparing objects used in the fulfillment of *mitzvot*, so that it fits into the picture Lieberman painted, or should one accept Ginzberg’s argument that the *baraita* does not reflect Land of Israel rabbinic tradition?

In “‘Reciting Shema Is a Biblical Commandment’? — The Babylonian Amoraim versus the Anonymous Redactors of the Sugya”, David Henshke deals with the amoraic discussions as to whether the *mitzvah* of reciting Shema is of biblical origin or of rabbinic origin. He shows that some *amoraic* stated explicitly that this *mitzvah* is of rabbinic origin, yet the opposite does not stem directly from amoraic statements, but only from interpretations of amoraic statements added by the anonymous redactors of the sugya. These interpretations do not arise by necessity from the amoraic statements themselves, and in some cases they are

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subject to dispute due to different formulations, even in the anonymous level of the sugya.

One of the sugyot serves as an example of the phenomenon of “a double sugya”, that is, a sugya whose entire course is repeated in a nearby sugya that begins from a different starting point. Henshke shows that the original sugya is the second one. Only after the first amoraic statement in the first sugya was interpreted differently from its original meaning did it become necessary to copy the course of the second sugya into the first sugya.

The fourth chapter of Mishnah Bava Metzia is dedicated as a whole to the issue of fairness in business transactions, including the rules of ona‘ah (deception). The inclusion in the chapter of mishnayot 7–8, which are apparently unrelated to the overall subject, is a puzzling aspect of the redaction of this chapter. Two explanations have been offered: one talmudic and the other by Chanoch Albeck. Albeck applied his fundamental approach that the redaction of the Mishnah was based on combining pre-existing units. However, both of these explanations are unconvincing. Noam Zohar, in “Halakhah as Aggadah: Solving the Riddle of a Pair of Mishnayot in Bava Metzia Chapter Four” proposes a new explanation of the redactor’s decision to include these two clauses in this chapter. Examination of the text shows that they constitute a matching pair of mishnayot in polished literary form, carrying a clear conceptual, value-laden message. Even though the halakhic details contained in this matching pair of mishnayot are unrelated to the chapter’s subject, the message conveyed by their formatting and composition is definitely relevant to the subject. Thus these mishnayot fulfill a function here akin to the function of other aggadic units sometimes included in the Mishnah.

The scriptural exegeses in the tractates of Vayassa and Amalek in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael contain fifty-six interpretive controversies between R. Joshua and R. Eleazar ha-Moda’i. In “Torah Study, Labor, Piety, and Realism: The Controversy between R. Joshua and R. Eleazar ha-Moda’i in the Aggadah of Mekhilta”, Menahem Kahana attempts to present their consistent controversies on the fundamental issues of Torah study, labor, piety, and realism.

R. Eleazar ha-Moda’i deduced from the episode of the manna in the wilderness that a person should devote all his time to Torah study, in the belief that God will supply all his wants. By way of contrast, R. Joshua held that a person must ensure his immediate livelihood, and also prepare the economic basis for his future, and if "a person studies two halakhot in the morning and two halakhot in the evening, and is engaged in his labor the entire day, it is accounted for him as if he fulfilled the entire Torah."

Based on these and other exegeses, Kahana delineates the broad worldview of these sages. R. Eleazar ha-Moda’i advocated the ideal of a pious person, who trusts
in God’s miraculous providence, and seeks intimate connection with Him through study, prayer, and fasting, engaging in the affairs of this world to the smallest extent possible. In this spirit, he used allegorical interpretation to infuse the verses with contents of God’s miraculous direction of the world and religious import that are not to be found in the simple meaning of Scripture. R. Joshua, on the other hand, was a realistic sage, who was engaged with the world, did not rely on miracles, and viewed healthy and balanced human activity as the fulfillment of God’s word. His exegeses teach that man must employ his rational cognitions and spiritual experiences in determining the halakhic way of life. R. Joshua, too, sometimes digressed from the simple meaning of Scripture in his exegeses to provide a basis for his worldview, but only infrequently did he impart to the verses religious content that is not explicit in them, and he opposed allegorical interpretation.

Thus the _aggadah_ of _Mekhilta_ preserves a rare dialectic document of religious phenomenology that reflects two polar religious experiences that were current in the tannaitic period. The great majority of the exegeses in the _aggadah_ of _Mekhilta_ have no parallels in other Talmudic compositions, but several underlying features in the characters of R. Joshua and R. Eleazar ha-Moda’i that were portrayed in the _Mekhilta_ were also expressed in other Talmudic sources. Although one cannot derive definite conclusions from these literary sources regarding the image of these sages, yet the sources’ consistency supports the idea that they reflect a reliable historical nucleus.

The Talmud ( _Ta’anit_ 19b–20a) tells the story of Nakdimon b. Gurion borrowing twelve cisterns full of water from a heathen nobleman to provide water for pilgrims to Jerusalem during a drought, and God’s providing rain, so that Nakdimon did not have to pay for the water. In “Nakdimon and the Nobleman — a Tale of Prayer and Trust in God”, _Mordechai Sabato_ analyzes this story. Sabato sees the story as dealing with the relationship between the character trait of trust in God and the need for prayer. A literary analysis shows that the story contains criticism of Nakdimon for not praying to God _ab initio_, because of his trust in God. Faith in God’s ability to bring rain had become Nakdimon’s belief that God was obliged to do so. Sabato compares Nakdimon’s two prayers and shows that the first was more like a demand than a prayer. At that point Nakdimon had not yet changed his attitude. The second prayer, which consisted completely of a plea, showed that Nakdimon had completed a process of improvement, and that he recognized that confidence in God must be accompanied by turning to God in supplication.

Archeologists have found that many Second Temple Period _mikvaot_ in Jerusalem (ritual baths for the purpose of ritual purification; singular: _mikveh_ ) did not have an attached _otzar_ — a reservoir of ritually acceptable rain water connected by a pipe to the _mikveh_, which made any water poured into the _mikveh_ acceptable for
ritual immersion, by virtue of its contact with the *otzar* water through the pipe.

In light of this finding, the question has arisen as to how the *mikvaot* served the people of Jerusalem, and the *cohanim* (priests) in particular, who needed to use the *mikveh* daily throughout the year for numerous sacred activities. The rainy season is short, and the need to maintain the *mikvaot* and to change the water occasionally continued year round. Dirty *mikveh* water could not be emptied out during the dry season and replaced with fresh water, since the fresh water would have to be carried to the *mikveh* in utensils, and, as “drawn water”, it would not be ritually acceptable for immersion.

In “Making a *Mikveh* Ritually Fit Without an *Otzar*”, Yoel Fixler proposes a novel interpretation to the mishnah and its parallel tosefta in Tractate *Mikvaot* according to which the *mikvaot* could be made ritually fit after being filled with drawn water, without having to have an *otzar* attached to the *mikveh*.

Similarly, Fixler sheds new light on the dispute between the Sadducees and the Pharisees concerning a column of liquid, in which the matter of principle is physical. The Pharisees held that impurity and purity cannot pass through liquid against gravity, whereas the Sadducees held that since the moisture is connected continuously it constitutes a single moist body, and so impurity and purity can pass even against the direction of gravity. This interpretation supports the solution Fixler proposes for making *mikvaot* ritually fit without an *otzar*.

The daily *amidah* prayer (recited softly while standing) is modified — when recited on Sabbaths and holidays — to contain phrases called *kedushat ha-yom* (the sanctity of the day) and *Ya’aleh V’Yavo* (a prayer whose initial plea is “May [consciousness of us] arise and enter [before You, God]”). In “Kedushat HaYom and Ya’aleh V’Yavo — Are They One and the Same?”, Aaron Kellerman demonstrates that the answer to the question is complex, partially negative and partially positive.

During the period of the *tannaim* and the *amoraim* the terms *me’ein hameor’a* (like the event), *kedushat hayom*, and *zekhirat hayom* (mentioning the day) indicated distinct concepts, and the concept of *ya’aleh v’yavo* did not exist at all, for that text was a later product of the *piyyut* period. The term *me’ein hameor’a* referred originally to all of the supplements to the *amidah* prayer on special days in the calendar, including holidays of Torah origin and of rabbinic origin, and fast days. The concept *kedushat hayom* related in parallel to three different components of the *amidah* prayer: a) the fourth blessing, which related to matters special to the day — Sabbaths, holidays, and *Rosh Hodesh* (New Moon holidays); b) a supplement to the “temple service blessing” inserted on holidays and *Rosh Hodesh*; c) the *Kiddush* recited over a cup of wine on Sabbaths and holidays. It may be, then, that all of these three *kedushat hayom* texts may have been similar. The concept *zekhirat hayom*
related primarily to the supplement to the Grace after meals inserted on Sabbaths, holidays, and New Moons.

The *piyyut*, ya’aleh v’yavo, is a plea for salvation. Apparently, it was first inserted into the *zikhronot* section of the Rosh Hashana *musaf* (additional) standing prayer, as is appropriate for the holiday of asking for salvation. Perhaps it was added at the same time to the Rosh Hashana Grace after Meals, and afterwards to the *amidah* prayers and blessings after a meal on the other holidays and Rosh Hodesh, in a gradual process, at least in Babylon. As a consequence of the insertion of this *piyyut* not only into the fourth blessing of the holiday *amidah*, but also in the *avodah* blessing of the eighteen-blessing and the seven-blessing *amidah* prayers, ya’aleh v’yavo came to constitute a *kedushat hayom*, *ex post facto*, even though there is no special mention of sanctity in the Rosh Hodesh prayers. Beginning with the gaonic period, an overlap was created, in effect, between the concepts above. *Me’ein hameor’a* did continue, nevertheless, to denote the generality of the supplements to the *amidah* prayers on special days.

The prophetic vision of the divine throne in Daniel (7, 9-10) may be the most daring description of God found in the Bible, containing unparalleled anthropomorphic revelations. The biblical passage depicts God sitting on His throne in judgment, surrounded by myriads of angels, with a description of the color of His clothing and His hair, as well. This portrayal joins additional biblical descriptions of God sitting on His throne — in I Kings 22, Isaiah 7, and Ezekiel 1.

In “The Design of the Throne Vision (Daniel 7:9–10) in Rabbinic Literature and Rabbinic Attitudes towards Anthropomorphisms”, Rivka Raviv examines the various methods that the sages employed to contend with this singular portrayal, as well as their relationship to the various anthropomorphic revelations in it.

In this literature, the vision is cast in three essential modes. One is similar to the design of the prophetic vision as presented in the Bible itself — a scene of judgment. Two additional approaches in which this prophetic vision has been cast have distanced themselves from the biblical context, restructuring it either as a scene of Torah study or as a scene of mourning. These two interpretations have significantly intensified the anthropomorphic revelations found in the Bible.

Raviv concludes that the sages continued the biblical attitude towards anthropomorphisms. They did not oppose anthropomorphisms found in the Bible, in general, but some sages did tone down the anthropomorphisms with the aid of allegoric exegesis or by creating new contexts to the original description. Observing this with a perspective of time and place, Raviv found these attitudes in the *Bavli* and in other rabbinic sources, but noted that the more cautious attitude became stronger over the course of time.

The list of capital crimes in Mishnah *Sanhedrin* includes among those whose
punishment is death by strangulation “one who has intercourse with a[nother] man’s wife”. The language of the lists implies that strangulation is the punishment of both the adulterer and the adulteress. Other textual witnesses in tannaitic literature indicate that the capital punishments of adulterers were death by sword and stoning. Nevertheless, the explicit mishnaic statement that their punishment is death by strangulation is the principal, generally accepted rule in tannaitic and amoraic literature. This appears to be the case also from the place of the adulterer in the list of those who are deserving of *karet*, in Mishnah *Keritot* 1:1. This list parallels the lists of those to be given capital punishment and those to be punished by stripes, in the mishnah in *Sanhedrin*. Nevertheless, scholars have noted the unusual way in which the death penalty for adulterers is inserted into the mishnah of those whose punishment is by strangulation.

In “The Punishment of Adulterers — On Traces of an Early *Halakhah* in the Mishnah”, Yoav Rosenthal examines the expressions that reflect the division of the crimes in Mishnah *Keritot* 1:1. He shows that a simple reading lists an adulterer together with one who has intercourse with both a woman and her daughter, whose punishment is by burning. Indeed, reexamining the mishnah in Sanhedrin reveals a notable textual deviation also in the list of those capital crimes which were punished by burning, a deviation that may hint at a sin that was in the list but which was moved elsewhere. The combination of the various deviations and hints in the *mishnayot* in *Sanhedrin* and in *Keritot* fits well with the possibility that, according to the early Mishnah, “one who has intercourse with a[nother] man’s wife” was part of the list of those punishable by burning, and that this sin was removed from that list in our Mishnah and set in place in the mishnah listing those punishable by strangulation.

According to this proposal, the halakhah of the early Mishnah coincides with the halakhah of the Book of Jubilees, which established the following rule: “If any woman or daughter has unlawful intercourse, burn her by fire.” It is true that this law in the Book of Jubilees relates to the capital punishment of the woman only, with the capital punishment of the man left unspecified, so that it may be that the man’s punishment was different according to the law of the Book of Jubilees. Yet this question arises also from an examination of the formulation of the mishnah in *Keritot*. The textual traditions differ concerning this mishnah. One tradition states “and for a married woman”, thus including the adulterer. The second tradition states “and a married woman” — implying that it is she who receives the punishment, not the man who had intercourse with her. Following Rosenthal’s suggestion, the two traditions may have differed concerning the question of whether the capital punishment of burning applied only to the adulteress, or whether it also applied to the adulterer.