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## Abraham Weiss as exegete and text critic : the case of b Berakot 35a

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# IV. ABRAHAM WEISS AS EXEGETE AND TEXT CRITIC

## The Case of b. Berakot 35a

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### ABSTRACT

The exegesis of the late Abraham Weiss, Yeshiva University, is grounded in his perception of logical gaps and inconsistencies in the text of the Talmud. Weiss thus allows the text itself to generate its own exegetical problems, and he uses other rabbinic materials and manuscript evidence to help solve them.<sup>1</sup>

Abraham Weiss spent the bulk of his scholarly career as Professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University,<sup>2</sup> where he wrote numerous articles and books on the development of the Talmud.<sup>3</sup> Weiss's material is marked by great attention to the Talmud's internal evidence of its formation. For the most part, he is not interested in the mere validation of *a priori* theories.<sup>4</sup> This paper provides one example of Weiss's exegesis, that of the opening unit of b. Berakot, Chapter Six. In order to place Weiss's comments in context, we shall first translate and outline the entire pericope. With the text firmly in hand, we shall summarize Weiss's comments, and provide a brief critique.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Davis prepared the translation and outline of the relevant texts, b. Berakot 35a. The analysis of Weiss's comments was written by Mr. Brooks.

<sup>2</sup> For full information on Weiss's career, see "Prof. Abraham Weiss—A Biographical Sketch," *The A. Weiss Jubilee Volume, English section*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> See Benjamin Weiss, "Rabbi A.-Weiss's Bibliography," *ibid.*, Hebrew section, pp. 5-11.

<sup>4</sup> See Shammai Kanter, in J. Neusner, ed., *The Formation of Babylonian Talmud*, (Leiden:1970), pp. 87-88. Also, see Charles Primus, in J. Neusner, *The Modern Study of the Mishnah* (Leiden:1973), p. 197.

1. Translation  
Joseph M. Davis

*Mishnah Berakot 6:1*

- A. What blessings does one say over fruit?  
Over fruit of the tree one says, "[Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe], Who created the fruit of the tree,"
- C. except wine, over which one says, "... Who created the fruit of the vine."
- D. Over that which grows from the ground one says, "... Who created the fruit of the ground,"
- E. except bread, over which one says, "... Who brings forth bread from the earth."

*Babylonian Talmud: Berakot 35a*

- A. [The *gemara* begins with a question that forms the basis of the entire pericope.] From what [Scriptural verse can we derive] the law [that one is required to say a blessing before eating]?<sup>p</sup>
- B. [A tannaitic saying derives the law that one must say blessings both before and after eating from Lev 19:24:] We have learned: [It is written concerning produce of the fourth year of a plant's growth, "All its fruit shall be] holy [worthy of] praisegiving unto the Lord."
- C. This teaches that one is required to say a blessing before and after eating [that fourth year produce]. [The saying interprets "praisegiving" as specifically referring to blessings. Since the Hebrew word for "praisegiving" [*hlwlym*] is plural, it means two blessings: one before eating, and one after.]
- D. [R. Aqiba now generalizes the conclusion.] On this basis, R. Aqiba said, "A man is forbidden to taste anything at all before he has said a blessing over it." [We thus have concluded that the law of blessings over food is derived from the word "praisegiving" in Lev 19:24.]
- E. [The *gemara* now objects to this conclusion. The law that one must say blessings over food cannot be based on the word "praisegiving," because, as we shall see at F-H, there are other laws that must be derived from that word. The *gemara* assumes that only one law can be derived from any word in Scripture (two laws from a word in its plural form). Another law derived from "praisegiving" therefore would leave no room for the interpretation offered above, at B.] And do these words, "holy, [worthy of] prasegiving [to the Lord] (*qdš hlwlym*)" mean [to teach that one must say blessings over food]? [Surely] they are required [as the basis for two other

interpretations, now presented at F–H.]

- F. [The two interpretations are based on the similarity between two words *hll*, to praise, and *hll*, to redeem or desanctify. Food that is in certain minor states of holiness—and in particular fourth year produce—may be redeemed by its owner for its value in cash. The money takes on the sacred character of the food, and the food becomes desanctified and may be eaten forthwith. The first interpretation is as follows:] [In using the word “praisegiving” (*hlwlym*) it is as if] the Merciful One said, “Redeem it [i.e. fourth year produce] (*'hlyh*) and then eat it (*'klyh*).” [The pay on *'hlyh* and *'klyh* is irrelevant to this interpretation.]
- G. [We now present a second interpretation. It seeks to use the word “praisegiving” to show that the laws of the fourth year produce apply only to wine. Only wine had songs of praise (*hll*) sung over it when it was offered on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem, cf. H. Only wine, therefore, requires redemption (*hll*) from the status of fourth year produce, or is subject to the laws of fourth year produce at all:] That which requires a song [of praise—wine—] requires redemption (*hlwl*) [and is thus subject to the laws of fourth year produce]. That which does not require a song [of praise—everything except wine—] does not require redemption [and is exempt from the laws of fourth year produce].
- H. [We now provide Scriptural evidence that only wine required a song of praise when it was offered on the altar.] And it is as R. Samuel b. Nahmani taught in the name of R. Jonathan. For R. Samuel b. Nahmani taught in the name of R. Jonathan, “From what [Scriptural verse can we learn] that they sang songs [of praise at the altar] only over [offerings of] wine? As it is written [in Judg 9:13], ‘And the vine said to them, “Shall I leave my wine, which makes God and men joyful?”’ Granted that wine makes men joyful. But how does it make God joyful? [It must be through the songs of praise that were sung over the wine-offerings at the altar.] It follows from this that they sang songs of praise at the altar only over the wine-offerings.”
- I. [B–H therefore bring us to the following point. We have three interpretations, each of which bases a different law on the word “praisegiving” in Lev 19:24. The first (B–D) derives the law that one must say blessings before and after eating. The second (F) derives the law that fourth year produce may be redeemed and eaten. The third (G–H) derives the restriction that only wine is subject to the law of fourth year produce. But the existence of these three distinct interpretations posed a problem, as we saw

earlier, at E. It is assumed that no more than a single law may be based on a single word in Scripture. To accept one of the interpretations, therefore, is to reject the other two, and leaves those laws, then, without a basis in Scripture. The *gemara* now sets out to solve this problem as best it can.] If one takes the position that all crops [and not just wine] are subject to the law of fourth year produce, then there is no problem. [Because then one will not need the interpretation of "praisegiving" that restricted the law of fourth year produce to wine. The other two interpretations both may be based on this word, because it is plural. On one "praisegiving" we base the first law; on the other "praisegiving" the second.]

- J. [But this is only a partial solution. We object:] But for the one who takes the position that only wine is subject to the laws of fourth year produce, what is there to say? [He has a problem, because he requires all three interpretations of "praisegiving." While two laws may be derived from "praisegiving" (cf. I) three may not.]
- K. [K does not advance the discussion but merely supplies a dispute between tannaim concerning whether the law of fourth year produce applies to all crops or only to wine.] As we have learned: R. Hiyya and R. Simeon b. Rabbi—one held the position that only wine is subject to the law of fourth year produce, and the other held the position that all crops are subject to the law of fourth year produce.
- L. [The *gemara* now presents a solution to the problem posed at J.] There is no problem for the one who takes the position that only wine is subject to the law of fourth year produce, if he bases his view on a *gezerah shavah*. [A *gezerah shavah* is a particular mode of interpretation of Scripture. The connotations of a word as it is used in one context in Scripture are transferred to the same word used in a different context elsewhere in Scripture. If one bases on a *gezerah shavah* the position that only wine is subject to the law of fourth year produce, then one will not need to base that position on the word "praisegiving." Thus he will no longer be deriving too many laws from that word.]
- M. [We now present the *gezerah shavah* on which we can base the law that only wine is subject to the law of fourth year produce.] As we have learned: Rabbi said, "It is written [in connection with the law of fourth year produce, Lev 19:25] 'to increase for you its produce (*tbw'tw*)'; and it is written elsewhere [Deut 22:9], 'and the produce (*wtbw't*) of the vineyard.' Just as in the latter verse [the word 'produce' specifically means the produce of a vineyard, so too in the former verse [the word 'produce'

- must mean only the produce of a vineyard.” [Thus, by use of a *gezerah shavah*, we have derived the restriction that the only produce subject to the law of the fourth year of growth is the produce of a vineyard, namely wine.]
- N. Therefore there is one “praisegiving” left [from which to derive the law that one must say] blessings [before and after eating.] [There are, as we said, two “praisegivings” available to be interpreted. If we use the *gezerah shavah* as the basis of the restriction to wine of the law of fourth year produce, then there is one “praisegiving” left over, which can be used as the basis of the requirement to say blessings over food.]
- O. But if one does not accept the *gezerah shavah*, then from what [Scriptural verse can one derive the law that one must say] blessings [over food]? [Without the *gezerah shavah*, one is forced back into basing too many laws on the word “praisegiving.” No answer is given to this objection. The *gemara* moves on to another objection.]
- P. And even if one does accept the *gezerah shavah*, then [still only the requirement to say a blessing] after [eating] can be derived [from Scripture.] From what [Scriptural verse can one derive the requirement to say a blessing] before [eating]? [At I and again at N, we had based on a single “praisegiving” the law that one must say blessings over food. The *gemara* now objects: from a single “praisegiving” one cannot derive two blessings. Only one blessing can be derived; that is assumed to be the blessing after eating.]
- Q. [An answer is given to the question just proposed.] This is no problem. [Although only the blessing after eating can be derived directly from Scripture, the requirement of saying a blessing before eating] can be derived by a *qal vehomer*. [A *qal vehomer* is a deduction from a weaker to a stronger case, a *minori a majus*.]
- R. If one says a blessing [after eating], when he is full, then how much more so should he say a blessing [before eating] when he is still hungry? [If one acknowledges God when one’s needs are satisfied, then how much more should one acknowledge Him when one is still in need of His aid.]
- S. [But we now raise another objection. From Lev 19:24] we may derive [only the law that one must say blessings before and after drinking] wine. [For if we accept the *gezerah shavah* at L, then we must interpret the whole verse as referring only to wine, and the law of blessings, which we derived from the verse, as likewise referring only to wine.] From what [Scriptural source can we derive the requirement to say blessings

- before and after eating] other kinds [of food, except wine]?
- T. [We attempt to answer the question by comparing wine to all other food.] We derive [the law that all food requires blessings] from [the fact that] wine [does]. Just as wine is something that is enjoyed, and requires blessings, so too everything that is enjoyed [that is, all food] requires blessings.
- U. [This answer, however, proves too much. By this logic, wine and all other food would be subject to the same laws in all cases. But we know this is not true. So we object: Surely] we can make a distinction [between wine and other food]. Wine [—*kerem*, literally a vineyard—] is distinguished in that it is subject to the law of defective clusters [(cf. Deut 24:21), but other food is not. Perhaps only that which is subject to the law of defective clusters—i.e. wine—is subject to the law of blessings.]
- V. [We answer:] [The case of] standing grain will prove [that the law of blessings is not restricted only to things subject to the law of defective clusters. For standing grain is not subject to the law of defective clusters, but we know that one is required to say a blessing after eating it, since Deut 8:9–10 states, “You shall eat bread without scarceness . . . and you will eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God.”]
- W. [But we now object: How can standing grain be compared to all other food?] Standing grain is distinguished [from other food] in that it is subject to the law of dough-offering [(cf. Num 15:21) but other food is not]. [Perhaps only that which is subject to the law of dough-offerings is subject to the law of blessings.]
- X. [And we answer:] Wine proves [that this is not so. Wine requires blessings, but is not subject to the law of dough-offerings.]
- Y. And so the argument turns full circle. The characteristics [of wine] are not like the characteristics [of standing grain] and the characteristics [of standing grain] are not like the characteristics [of wine].
- Z. What [wine and bread] have in common is that both are things that are enjoyed and require blessings. Therefore, everything that is enjoyed must require blessings. [Thus, while we could not generalize from the case of either wine or bread individually to the case of all kinds of food, we now suggest that perhaps we can make that generalization from the case of wine and bread in combination.]
- AA. [But we object: wine and bread, even in combination, can be distinguished from other kinds of food.] That which [wine and bread] have in common is that they were offered on the altar [in the Temple.] [Perhaps it is only those kinds of foods that could be offered on the altar that require blessing.]

- BB. [BB-DD move away from the main stream of argument to discuss the question of how we may derive from Scripture the requirement to say blessings over olive oil. We work within the supposition just proposed at AA, that those kinds of foods that could be offered on the altar require blessings. So we begin by suggesting:] Therefore, olive oil [would require a blessing] because it was offered on the altar.
- CC. [But we object:] Do we have to derive [the law that] olive oil [requires blessings] from the fact that it was offered on the altar? Does not [Scripture explicitly] call [both olive orchards and vineyards] *kerem*? [And therefore can we not make a direct inference that just as the produce of vineyards requires blessings, so too does the produce of olive orchards?] As it is written [Judg 15:5] "And it burnt both the shocks and the standing grain, together with the olive orchards (*kerem zayit*)."
- DD. Answered R. Papa, "[Olive orchards] may be called *kerem zayit*, but they are never called simply *kerem*." [Therefore olives are not governed by laws applying to *kerem*, a vineyard. We must derive the requirement to say blessings over olive oil from the fact that it was offered on the altar.]
- EE. [The *gemara* now returns to the main stream of the argument, restating the question posed earlier at AA.] In any case, we still have a problem. [Wine and bread, and even olive oil] have in common that they were offered on the altar. [But how do we know that one is required to say a blessing over those kinds of foods not offered on the altar?]
- FF. [We propose an answer.] Rather, we derive [the law that one is required to say blessings over all kinds of food] from [the requirement of saying blessings over] the "seven kinds." [The "seven kinds" are the seven foods mentioned at Deut 8:8, wheat, barley, wine, figs, pomegranates, olive oil, and date honey. At V, we interpreted Deut 8:10, "And you will eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God," as referring only to the bread mentioned in Deut 8:9. We now interpret it as referring to all seven kinds mentioned in 8:8.] Just as the "seven kinds" are things that are enjoyed and require blessings, so too everything that is enjoyed, [all food], should require blessings.
- GG. [But as at T, we have now proved too much. By the same logic, the "seven kinds" and all other food would be subject to the same laws in all cases. We object:] The "seven kinds" are distinguished in that they are subject to the law of firstfruits. [Other food is not. Perhaps only food subject to the law of firstfruits is subject to the law of blessings. There is no answer, and we move on to another objection.]



- HH. Furthermore, granted that [we may derive the requirement of saying a blessing] after [eating, from the explicit verse Deut 8:10], from what [Scriptural verse can one derive the requirement to say a blessing] before [eating? Deut 8:10 speaks only of saying a blessing after eating.]
- II. [We asked a very similar question at P. We give the answer that we gave at Q.] The requirement of saying a blessing before eating is derived from a *qal vehomer*: if one says a blessing [after eating] when he is full, then how much more so should he say a blessing [before eating] when he is still hungry?
- JJ. [We now back up the unanswered objection at GG with a further objection. At I, we said that there is no problem for the one who holds that all planted crops, and not just wine, are subject to the law of fourth year produce. We now raise an objection to that.] And for the one who takes the position that all planted crops are subject to the law of fourth year produce, there is no problem in saying that planted crops require blessings. But whence does he derive the law that one is required to say blessings over food that is not planted, for example meat or eggs or fish? [As at S, if the requirement to say blessings over food is based on "praise-giving" then it can govern only those kinds of foods spoken of at Lev 19:24, namely planted crops—those kinds of food subject to the law of fourth year produce.]
- KK. We answer the objections at GG and JJ together.] Rather, [the extension to all food of the requirement of saying blessings is based on] a reasonable supposition: that a person is forbidden to derive any benefit from this world without saying a blessing.

## 2. Outline

*Joseph M. Davis*

- I. A. 1. Question: What is the Scriptural basis for the law that one must say a blessing before eating?
2. Answer: The law is based on the word *hlwlym* in Lev 19:24. *Hlwlym*, praise-giving, is used in that verse as an epithet of fourth year produce. It is interpreted as meaning requiring blessings.
- B. Objection to the answer of A.2. The word *hlwlym* cannot be used as a basis for the law that one must say a blessing before eating, because it is needed as the basis for two other laws, namely:
1. The law that fourth year produce may be redeemed.
  2. The law that only wine is subject to the restrictions of fourth year produce.

- C. Two solutions to the objection of B, and one rejected potential solution to that objection.
1. First solution: We may reject the law that only wine is subject to the restrictions of fourth year produce, and take the contrary position. We will then have only two laws, one of which is the law of saying a blessing before eating, to be based on *hlwlym*. Since *hlwlym* is plural, it may be used as the basis for both laws.
  2. Second solution: Or we may accept that only wine is subject to the laws of fourth year produce, but base that law not on *hlwlym*, but on the word *tbw'tw* in the same verse. Once again, we will have only two laws based on *hlwlym*; one of them is the law that one must say a blessing before eating.
  3. Rejected potential solution: But we cannot both accept the law that only wine is subject to the restrictions of fourth year produce, and also base that law on *hlwlym*, because then we would be deriving too many laws from *hlwlym*.
- D. Two objections to the second solution (C.2).
1. The first objection is answered quickly.
    - (a) Objection: One can derive from *hlwlym* only the law that one must say a blessing after eating, not before eating.
    - (b) The requirement of saying a blessing before eating may be deduced logically. If one says a blessing after eating, when he is full, will he not say a blessing when he is still hungry?
  2. The second objection provokes a long series of rebuttals and further objections. There are six objections in the series, five of which are answered by rebuttals. The fifth, or next to the last, is not answered until the end of the pericope (F). After the fourth objection in the series, there is a *discursus* and the objection has to be repeated.
    - (a) 1. Objection: One can derive from *hlwlym* only the law that one must say blessings over wine, not over other food.
    2. Rebuttal: Wine is like all other food in that both wine and other food give pleasure. If wine requires blessings, then all food must require blessings.
    - (b) 1. Objection: But wine is unlike all other food in that it is subject to the law of defective clusters, but other food is not. Perhaps only that which is subject to the law of defective clusters is subject to the law of blessings.
    2. Rebuttal: That cannot be, because bread, which is not subject to the law of defective clusters, requires blessings (cf. Deut 8:9–10).

- (c)1. Objection: But not all food is like bread. Perhaps only food that is subject to the law of dough-offerings is subject to the law of blessings.
    - 2. Rebuttal: That cannot be, because wine is not subject to the law of dough-offerings, and it requires blessings.
  - (d)1. Objection: Wine and bread have in common that they were offered on the altar. But not all kinds of food were offered on the altar. Perhaps only those kinds of food that were offered on the altar require blessings.
    - 2. Discursus: How should the requirement of saying blessings over olive oil be derived from Scripture?
      - (a)It can be derived from the fact that olive oil was offered on the altar.
      - (b)Objection to (a): There is a better way to derive the requirement. *Kerem* means both vineyard and olive orchard; therefore, the law of blessings, which applies to the produce of a *kerem*, should apply equally to olive oil as to wine.
      - (c)Rebuttal to (b): *Kerem* means vineyard; *kerem zayit* means olive orchard.
    - 3. The objection at 1 is repeated: Perhaps only those kinds of food that were offered on the altar require blessings.
    - 4. Rebuttal: The seven kinds of food mentioned in Deut 8:8-10 all require blessings, but not all of them were offered on the altar.
  - (e)Objection: Perhaps only food that is subject to the law of firstfruits requires blessing. Wine and bread and olive oil and the seven kinds of food in Deut 8:8-10 are all subject to the law of firstfruits, but not all food is.
    - (f)1. Objection: The commandment in Deut 8:8-10 only speaks of saying a blessing after eating. How can we derive the requirement of saying a blessing before eating?
      - 2. Rebuttal: The requirement of saying a blessing before eating may be deduced logically. If one says a blessing after eating, when he is full, will he not say a blessing before eating, when he is still hungry?
- E. We now raise an objection to the first solution of the original problem (C.1).  
 Objection: Even if one takes the position that all planted crops are subject to the law of fourth year produce, then still one may derive from *hlwlym* only the requirement to say blessings over planted crops. How can one derive the requirement of saying

blessings over food that is not planted, such as meat, eggs, or fish?

- F. We answer simultaneously the objection just posed at (E), and the still unanswered objection of (D.2.e).

Answer: The extension to all food of the requirement to say blessings before and after eating is based on a reasonable supposition. It is reasonable to suppose that a person is forbidden to derive benefit from this world without saying a blessing.

### 3. Summary and Critique

*Roger Brooks*

My analysis of Abraham Weiss's<sup>5</sup> comments is in two parts, a summary and a brief critique. As we shall see, Weiss provides his readers with questions based on inconsistencies within the text. He then resolves these textual difficulties by adducing the evidence of variant texts and manuscripts. His goal, then, is to establish a reliable version of the passage, not through harmonization or contradictions, but on the basis of solid textual evidence. With this new version in hand, Weiss gives us an account of the text's history, explaining how the present, in his view, corrupt, edition came into being. His program thus is well-rounded and full, comprising questions, answers, and explanations.

Weiss begins his analysis by reviewing the passage's main question: What is the Scriptural basis for the requirement of saying a blessing before and after eating? According to Weiss, the simplest solution to this question is provided by Lev 19:24, which states: "All fruit shall be holy, [worthy of] praisegiving (*hlwlym*) to the Lord" (cf. B). Because the word "praisegiving" appears in the plural form, the verse is suited to serve as the basis for two blessings, one before the meal and one after. The Talmud's ensuing discussion (C-O), we recall, rejects this straightforward solution. Rather it claims that one of the two "praisegivings" mentioned in Lev 19:24 is used to derive the restrictions applying to four-year-old vines (D-I). As explained above (cf. I), the plural "praisegivings" can serve as the basis for at most two laws. It therefore no longer is possible to derive from this single word blessings before and after the meal.

With this summary of the pericope's basic issues in hand, Weiss raises two logical questions, which we shall take up in turn. Weiss's first question concerns the statement at H, that Lev 19:24 justifies blessings before and after the meal, even if one of the "praisegivings" already has been used to derive the restrictions of fourth year produce. This lemma, Weiss claims, poses a problem, since a parallel case, M-O, gives rise to a

<sup>5</sup> Weiss's comments to this section are found in an untitled article that appeared in *Horeb*, Vol. 10:19-20, pp. 1-6.

quite different response. At M-O, we recall, one of Lev 19:24's two "praisegivings" has been used as the scriptural basis for the restrictions of a four-year-old wine. As a result, only one "praisegiving" remains from which to derive the two blessings, before and after eating. This, of course, is precisely the same shortage of scriptural prooftexts as at H. Within the logic of the Talmud, Lev 19:24 ought to be adequate justification for only one blessing, the one after the meal (so O). Thus the Talmud quite logically asks (O), "Whence does one derive the requirement to say a blessing *before* eating?" Why, Weiss wishes to know, does this same problem not arise at H, a lemma that presents precisely the same situation?

Weiss's second question arises because the Talmud overlooks an obvious solution to its basic problem. At issue, we recall, is how to find scriptural bases for two blessings, assuming that one of Lev 19:24's "praisegivings" already has been used to derive the restrictions of four-year-old vines. The answer, it seems to Weiss, should be found in Deut 8:10, which states, "You shall eat and be full, and then bless the Lord your God." Later in this very pericope (U), the verse provides an adequate basis for the requirement to bless after the meal. The single remaining "praisegiving" would justify the blessing before the meal. The question, then, is why the Talmud does not appeal to Deut 8:10 in order to solve its problem.

Before turning to Weiss's solutions, let us ask how Weiss frames his questions. Weiss's inquiries are entirely fitting to the nature and scope of his source, for they derive from his identification of logical gaps or inconsistencies in the text. Because of a contradiction between two stichs (H and M), Weiss isolates a problem requiring his attention as an exegete. That is to say, the text itself determines what questions are deemed important.

In the next step of his argument, Weiss disposes of those two problems in a single motion. He adduces a parallel version of the passage, contained in the Florence manuscript:

*Printed Edition*

N. If one does not accept the *gezerah shavah*, then from what [scriptural verse can the law that one must say] blessings [over food be derived]? [Without the *gezerah shavah*, we recall, one is forced to base more than two laws on the word "praisegiving" in Lev 19:24.]

*Codex Florence*

1. [Let us assume that we deal with a case in which] one does not use a *gezerah shavah*. [Again, the result is that no "praisegivings" remain from which to derive the rules of blessings.]

O. And even if one does accept the *gezerah shavah* [leaving a single “praise-giving” from which to derive the two blessings],

granted that [in this case] one must say] a blessing after [eating, because of Deut 8:10’s injunction].

From what [scriptural verse can one derive the requirement to say a blessing] before [eating]?<sup>2</sup>

2. Granted that [in this case] one must say] a blessing after [eating, because of Deut 8:10’s injunction].

3. From what [scriptural verse can one derive the requirement to say a blessing] before [eating]?<sup>2</sup>

The Florence manuscript differs from the standard printed version only at O. MS Florence lacks the first clause of O, and so refers only to a case in which neither of the two “praise-givings” mentioned in Lev 19:24 is available for the purpose of justifying blessings before or after the meal. One of the “praise-givings” is used as the basis for the restrictions of fourth year produce in general. The other is taken as indicating the specific injunction concerning four-year-old vines. According to Codex Florence, both “praise-givings” have been assigned to these other laws, and so Lev 19:24 has no relationship to the requirement to bless over food at all.

Weiss claims that this variant reading solves the pericope’s two problems. As we recall, the first problem arises when we compare the statements at H and M–O. In both cases, according to the printed edition, a single “praise-giving” remains from which to derive two blessings. Nevertheless, one case (H) gives rise to “no difficulties,” while the other (M–O) draws in its wake a lengthy explanation (P–Q). The Florence manuscript, for its part, posits a situation at M (unlike that of H) in which there are no “praise-givings” at all from which to derive the laws of blessings. The two cases actually refer to separate circumstances, and so the logical contradiction within the passage is eliminated.

Weiss’s second question also is answered by reading the passage in line with the Florence manuscript. Deut 8:10, ignored by the printed version, now is taken as the prooftext for blessing after eating. The statement that we can derive from Scripture the requirement to bless after meals (2) must refer to Deut 8:10, for Lev 19:24 is completely unavailable as a prooftext.

With these problems and their solutions in hand, Weiss now proceeds to the next logical question, how did the printed version of the text come into being? That is to say, he provides us with an account of the

text's history. Weiss posits that the Florence manuscript represents the original version of the text. At some point, a copyist added a marginal gloss, "And if one does accept the *gezerah shavah* . . ." (= first clause of O). This note was intended to set up the entire discussion following R, turning from a case in which Lev 19:24 is unavailable as a proof-text (N-Q) to a case in which one "praisegiving" remains (R-II). The note, then, should have been attached to the beginning of R. Instead, Weiss claims, the phrase was erroneously added before O, for both stichs (O and R) begin, "Granted that. . ." Had the note been placed properly, the passage would read:

O. [If one does not accept the *gezerah shavah*, so that no praisegivings remain], granted that [he must say a blessing] after [eating, because of Deut 8:10's injunction]. Whence [does one derive the requirement to say a blessing] before [eating] . . . ?

R. And even if one does accept the *gezerah shavah*, granted that [the law of blessings applies to] wine. Whence [does one derive the requirement to bless] all other sorts of food?

Instead, of course, the phrase was misplaced, creating the present version of the text, with all its complications.

Let us now evaluate Weiss's approach. His questions prove him to be a sophisticated and insightful exegete. His lines of inquiry are determined solely from a straightforward reading of the text. Furthermore, Weiss's solutions to these problems are inductive. He answers textual questions on the basis of solid evidence, not of *a priori* assumptions. His use of MS Florence provides him with facts that resolve the text's problems. In short, his answers are not mere announcements that a line or section is out of place. Rather he presents carefully reasoned attempts to regain the logically consistent text that he believes underlies the sometimes corrupt printed edition. Finally, it is noteworthy that Weiss's analysis is comprehensive. He succinctly notes the text's problems, and then provides answers. This is followed by his account of how the text before us might have developed. His reader thus is not left with isolated remarks about this or that detail, but is led from the "original" version to the text before us. Weiss's well-rounded work is highly satisfying, for he asks precisely the question which all readers of the Talmud pose: How do we make sense of the text before us?