


Article

# Talmud Today: A Politics of Forgetting

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the way in which the “theological” as the question of the Biblical G-d’s involvement in the world, as in the Talmuds, and in light of Heidegger’s thought about forgetting and forgetfulness (*Verborgenheit* and *Vergessenheit*), becomes a political question about the attitude of the Jew and Israel toward the *Heimat*. In Heidegger, forgetting is about beings hiding from the view rather than about a psychological or “subjective” process to which forgetting has been reduced in modernity. The *Heimat* hides from the persons’ life, no matter how strongly the persons strive for their *Heimat* “subjectively” or politically, Heidegger argues. The essay further detects a residual modernity and subjectivism in Heidegger’s concession to forgetting as only a secondary operation, a loss, in comparison to the primary, “authentic” relationship to the *Heimat*, which, for him, one can and should hope for. That residual modern subjectivity in Heidegger enables and necessitates a comparison with the roles forgetting plays in relationships between G-d, Israel, and the Land in the two Talmuds as, similarly to Heidegger, dealing with and working against forgetting, if not Being, then the Law of the mutual obligations between G-d and Israel. The resulting analysis distills a conundrum in the Palestinian rabbis. Delivery on Israel’s obligations towards G-d conditions Israel’s arrival to the Land, that is to say Israel’s fully successful exodus from Egypt. Yet, any clear memory of, and delivery on, these obligations, i.e., any humanly delivered testament to the law of G-d, constitutes an acute danger of forgetting masked as a would-be-certitude in the “memory” of the would-be-original law. Regaining the status of a full-fledged, never-tamed primordial power in relationships between G-d and Israel, forgetting, in the Palestinian rabbinic thought, undermines the deployment of *logos* as a way to formulate the Law fully. Letting the G-d in the world, *logos* however proves prone to reducing G-d to (a) *theos*, thus drawing the G-d into disappearance and forgetting. Such a counter-current to the copulation of *theos* with *logos*, the primordial power of forgetting operates even before any memory captured in words and images becomes possible. Arriving from antiquity to modernity, this counter-current continues to operate despite the currently prevalent demotion of forgetting to a subjective political act of a person or nation.

**Keywords:** forgetting and memory; Heidegger; Palestinian Talmud; homeland/*Heimat*; exodus; modern subjectivity



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## 1. Introduction

Theism, the key, central power in focus in this Special Issue, implies positing a god or gods, one or many. This god or gods impose order on the primordial chaos of untamed elements. Forgetting, the main concern in this paper, belongs to these elements. Theism, the advent of the thetic gods, who are definitive, defined, and defining everything in the thereby ordered world, promote order by demoting the primordial elements. That means, in part, demoting the primary, elemental forgetting to a secondary role of a memory loss. In the theistic order of god or gods, memory, whether it is understood as a faculty or as a content, is promoted to a primary position of a default, and forgetting is demoted to a secondary position of either a lost memory (content) or a threat to memory (in which case forgetting means a negative power, undermining the faculty to remember). From an elemental, originary power or operation, forgetting recedes to a secondary operation of negation of the would-be already pre-given memory.

Where does the tetragrammaton of the Bible belong to theism? Does the four-letter name introduce a position both between and above the thetic order of god(s) and the primordial chaos of elements? These broader questions inform this paper's inquiry into a reversal of relationships between forgetting and memory on the double helix of relationships between antiquity and modernity.

A closely related concern of this Special Issue is the secularization of theism and the limits of theism in the sense described above. One facet of "secularization" of religious tradition in that particular sense is the question of the role of the Talmud in the modern context. The question is more specifically of the pertinence and the transformation of the tradition of tradition (Gérard Granel) of Talmud without the "the", as a discipline of thought and action in and for the politics of forgetting. The argument unfolds between late ancient prevalence of forgetting as a primary operation and memory as a struggle against the ever-looming sway of forgetting on the one hand and the modern reversal and thus "secularization" of the relationship between memory and forgetting, wherein memory becomes the initial state and forgetting is reduced to a loss of memory.

The essay locates the beginnings of this reversal not only in modernity, but also in late ancient strata of thought. The analysis proceeds through Heidegger's reading of forgetting in light of his interpretation of *lethe* as concealment (a notion that for him was broader and more precise than forgetting in a psychologized, modern form of "an experience of the soul"). The analysis consequently turns to discussing the Palestinian schools of rhetoric (in the Palestinian Talmud) to retrieve a version of forgetting that precedes, undergirds, necessitates, and makes insufficient any effort or attempt at memory and remembering. The resulting argument is that of the transformations of the politics of forgetting from late antiquity to modernity.

In method, the essay advances with reading slowly as distinct from and complementary to close reading and distant reading. The latter two methods regulate distance between a reader and the chronologically and geographically localized text. The former negotiates the temporalities in which the tradition of tradition to which a read text belongs changes. Such a change is not necessarily chronologically progressive and must instead be checked up in two directions at the same time: not only on the way "forward" from antiquity to modernity, but also on the way "backward" from modernity to antiquity, towards what it helps to see about ancient texts, as modernity and antiquity help to shed light as well as heuristic darkness on one another.

## 2. Results

A primary, elemental power of forgetting continues to work in the modern context, despite the dominant modern constellation in which memory becomes a primary given and forgetting recedes to a memory loss. The modern constellation is predicated by the horizon of subjectivity, in which a subject-agent (either an individual or an individual nation) is the one who is foundationally defined as remembering oneself. Lived in that modern context of subjectivity, as self-conflictual and as monstrous and heterogeneous as modern subjectivity is (de Libera 2016), the tradition of Talmudic thought runs the risk of becoming lost to and due to the modern subject. The same lived tradition, however, carries resources yet to be mobilized in order to invoke a politics of forgetting promising both a backward and forward movement beyond the horizon of the modern individual and national subject-agent. The applied version of this result is both the necessity and insufficiency of the *Heimat* (homeland)—either local or traveling—as the *topos* to which to anchor today's politics of forgetting and memory.

## 3. Discussion

My argument in this essay concerns Talmud as a politics of forgetting.<sup>1</sup> I am careful in saying "Talmud" without the "the" to gesture to the *tradition* of the Talmud as a way of learning, reading, interpreting, and acting practically in view of the folios of the medieval manuscripts of the Talmud and its modern printed editions, taken not only as tractates

in the medieval sense of the terms, but also as archives of rabbinical schools in Palestine and Babylonia.

Summarily, this constitutes Talmud (rather than *the* Talmud) as the tradition, and even more precisely as a tradition of that tradition, in Gérard Granel's terms (Granel 1972). It unfolds, changes, appears, and disappears in and from the view century by century and epoch by epoch. Each century and each epoch casts a new view on the beginnings and the future of Talmud as a tradition. Talmud as a tradition of tradition also spells out an epistemic direction, a discipline of thought and of practical action regarding how one engages with the world and with others therein.

Why forgetting? The topic is instigated by Daniel Boyarin's *The No-State Solution: A Jewish Manifesto* (Boyarin 2023) as a part of a larger constellation of discussions about "solutions": "no-state "solution", "two-states solution". The instigation consists of asking: a solution to which problem, to which question? This is one element that informs my thinking here.

The second element can be introduced in theoretical terms as "gnome". Aristotle differentiates three elements in thinking (and action): (1) syllogism, (2) enthymeme, and (3) gnome. The first is in the sense of topical or logically necessary combination of logoi, for which combination there stands the term "syllogism". The second, enthymeme has a sense of *either* (2a) "truncated syllogism", for a convenience of persuasion (according to Boethius), *or*, alternatively (2b), the sense of co-consideration of confronting "logoi" or "logics" of action in the area of the "possible" (the area of *ars rhetorica*) as distinct from the logoi introducing the "necessary" or the "impossible" (with the latter two not pertaining to action at all). Finally, the third interest here is gnome: a very short-circuited version of thinking or acting, that of a simple phrase, hashtag, slogan, association, etc., and the acts carried out thereupon. None of these simple logoi (slogans, half sentences, etc.) raise up to enthymeme, let alone to syllogism.

One example of such *gnome*, such a short-circuit "logics", is a view of (the) nation-state as an answer or a solution to the Holocaust. In this gnome, the emergence of the State of Israel is often understood or misunderstood (I am bracketing the difference for now) as directly connected, in whichever way this connection is thought of, with the Holocaust.

### 3.1. *The Problem in First Iteration: How Not to Forget It, When You Cannot Remember It Either: In a Limbo*

This is where, in the context of such a gnome, the question of forgetting comes in its first iteration: We must remember; and we also must not forget. Is that the same? The very first approximation to the problem of forgetting here is that the Holocaust is either denied or commemorated under the name of genocide.<sup>2</sup> The State of Israel is often "gnomically" understood as a solution to that. A problem of forgetting here is that on either scenario, in either denying or commemorating the *genocide*, the Holocaust is forgotten. This transpires precisely because the event so named does not yield itself to any kind of full recollection, to any kind of descriptive or narrative account; it does not yield itself to any kind of memory. This is where my question comes from: how not to forget if you cannot remember. There is a Yiddish proverb, "If you cannot remember it, forget it!" There is a kind of limbo in between, between forgetting and memory. This limbo between inability to forget and inability to remember interests me here.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.2. *A Trajectory of Analysis*

By necessity, which I will immediately explain, navigating this limbo between memory and forgetting of or after the Holocaust makes me travel and visit the areas of Heidegger's thought and of German language, in which I humbly ask to be treated as a guest. My *first* reason necessitating such a trip is that Heidegger's thought might have grasped the Holocaust philosophically much more precisely and even more intimately than any kind of either memorializing or denying the Holocaust under the rubric of genocide. My *second* reason of turning to Heidegger is that, in his thinking about the war in 1944–1946

(Heidegger 2020), he thinks and writes about forgetting and forgetfulness, arguably in direct connection with the war (whether he does so with or without regrets about the defeat of the German National Socialist State; this has been sufficiently argued both ways and I bracket this question as irrelevant for the argument at hand). My *third* reason of turning to question of forgetting follows from the second and concerns forgetting in relation to the tradition of tradition of Talmud today, i.e., in both modernity and more specifically after the Holocaust, which, as indicated, we cannot forget, but are too quick to memorialize or deny as a genocide. Let me slow down to elaborate on this third reason more.

Today, we can only work on and interpret forgetting and forgetfulness in (and as I will argue, of) the rabbinic tradition against the backdrop of the philosophically worked-up interpretation of forgetfulness in a most developed and, again, perhaps most intimate version of Holocaust: Heidegger's critique of the tradition of Western philosophy. Heidegger criticizes this tradition for having taken a false "new beginning" with Kant, having lost the power of its "first beginning" in pre-Socratics and Heidegger's own working up of the "other beginning" both in pre-Socratics and in the future to be hoped for, a future from which the Kant's "new beginning" (with its emblem, *subjectivity*) has locked "all of us" out. It is against the backdrop of this Heidegger's critique of Western thought and practice that we have to take up the tradition of Talmud's tradition and, for the present argument, of the role of forgetting therein.

### 3.3. Stakes

In this, the stakes cannot be higher. For a position on and of Israel today (in the altogether unavoidable homonymy of Israel as Biblical Israel, Rabbinic and Christian Israels, the Jewish Israel of the Law of Return, along with the Jewish "racial" Israel of the camps, to name just a few elements that are nearly inseparably enmeshed in the homonym) *must* take Holocaust and its forgetting into account to move beyond the gnome of the direct connection between Holocaust and (the State of) Israel. To articulate and to live up to these stakes takes no less than considering the forgetfulness of Holocaust behind the new collective memory thereof re-styled, as it became, into the memory of genocide. Only in this framework can the problem or the question to which the two "solutions", the state and the no-state, come into view. We, therefore, have to keep this problem in view as clearly as we can, and if not, then, at the very least lay out its obscurity as articulately as possible.

### 3.4. A Key

This also introduces a key in which my argument concerning the past, the future, and the forgetting of the tradition of tradition of "Talmud" develops: I sense even more danger in falling for the future Heidegger spells out than I sense in the past of gas chambers (or their glaring absences in concentration camps to have been transformed into memorials and museums) for today's Jews, Germans, and the Germany WWII victors alike.

At the very least, thinking of Germany, we should trust Hegel that philosophy could still be "the epoch grasped in thought". To grasp the epoch in thought was the hope for Hegel and German idealism. The same can be trusted to have remained for Heidegger, and even more so for him. For his philosophy's aims grasp more than an "epoch;" offering instead "another beginning", which means another view on the past which is another view on the future for the humans across and beyond the epochs. I submit, therefore, that, in 1944–1946, Heidegger, the philosopher and pronounced "German" (even if also a criticizer of the "Deutschland über Alles"), had understood and "grasped" the war and the Holocaust "in thought" better and more intimately, reliably, and precisely than perhaps any less critically apt national socialists or their enemies did.

Heidegger casts a future for which Israel, if Israel were not to lose its own tradition (be it rabbinic Israel, Christian "Israel in Spirit", or civic Israel of the State of Israel), should rather not fall into. Heidegger's future means dissipation of Israel's future. That relationships between the two futures needs to be accounted for. To do so, we have to take Heidegger's cast of the future even more seriously than how the current world of the victors

and losers of WWII understands the past of the camps and chambers, including the ensuing collective future of the guilt, regret, victory, “never again”, and “never forget” as parts thereof.

The front line of the future at stake is not merely the solution of either state or (no)state, but rather *the question* to which the state, be it understood as a nation-state, sovereign state, or more loosely as modern state, became, is and threatens to continue to be an answer in the first place. What is the question or the problem to which the modern state, including the “no-state solution”, is a response. The question in question is the one of the futures at stakes. Both futures, the one Heidegger hopes, in which Israel dissipates, and the future in which Israel has a portion, have to do with a cast of the past, and more specifically with forgetting.

A future, which means the very possibility of a future, is defined or cast by what one forgets; and more precisely by the powers of forgetting as such. The stakes of the future concern the role of forgetting.

If this is so, Heidegger thinking about forgetting and forgetfulness becomes important for sorting out the future without Israel that he anticipates and the future for Israel as the question to which “solutions” had been offered, even if the question is yet to be properly asked. Heidegger’s thinking about forgetting becomes crucial here, for it provides a starting point to think about forgetting and forgetfulness today in the Talmud or in relation to Talmud and the tradition of its tradition, in view of Israel’s future.

Forgetting and forgetfulness in his thought are articulated pertinently enough to serve as a starting point to think about the role and stakes of forgetting or non-forgetting of *that* which we cannot remember (or, as it will soon become clear, even in forgetting or non-forgetting without any particular “that” or “it” to be posited.)

As a consequence of such an engagement with Heidegger in thinking about forgetting in and of Talmud today, there is yet another element informing the present analysis. In Daniel Boyarin’s (and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s<sup>4</sup>) language, this element of the future is “(the) Talmud as a traveling homeland”. In Heidegger’s language, that would be traveling “Heimat”. For Heidegger, *Heimat* would mean neither the nationalist “Deutschland über Alles”, per se, nor a state defined by its borders or by the national broadcast of always self-explanatory and therefore never sufficing news in a standardized, i.e., almost exterritorial, and surely nationalized, parlance of Hoch Deutsch. Rather, and more fundamentally, *Heimat* is a locale, a village, a place where one and one’s parents and their parents grew up, lived and died. What then is a relationship between the two homelands, the one in Heschel’s Talmud as a traveling homeland of Israel and the other in Heidegger’s thought? This question will help guide the balance of the analysis in this essay, as, as will become clear, the question of *Heimat* as the future has everything to do with forgetting.

### 3.5. Two Homelands and Forgetting

In 1944–1945, in *Von der Vergessenheit* (“On Forgetting”), Heidegger directly connects forgetting with the question of the *Heimat*, namely, the question of being sent away from the *Heimat*. Forgetfulness for him is being removed from the *Heimat* in this local sense. That does not mean “you have forgotten your *Heimat*” in a psychological or subjectivist sense. In fact, in your travels and peregrinations, you might never forget the *Heimat*. Rather, that means, for Heidegger, that the *Heimat* has forgotten you. That, of course does not have to be understood in a sense that *Heimat* were a psychological subject, a person who forgot about you. Rather, in this economy, forgetting is not a subjective process at all; “you left” or “you were sent away” means you are forgotten—in the grammatically speaking passive voice; but that does not mean the homeland has forgotten you, in grammatically active voice. Being forgotten is a state that is donned on you, not an action anyone takes.

Forgetting, therefore, in Heidegger’s analysis, is not about something disappearing from the subject’s memory. Rather, it is a human status of being forgotten—to an extent that even the *what* or a *who* that has been forgotten is forgotten as well. Voluntary or not,

leaving the *Heimat* means becoming forgotten altogether, to an extent of full loss of the who or the what, which would otherwise be remembered. Importantly, and again, the *Heimat* does not do that in a psychological sense. Forgetting is an act that is neither yours nor of your *Heimat*; rather it is an operation in which you and your *Heimat* are involved. Forgetting strikes at the moment at which that radically impersonal operation turns on, at the moment of leaving the *Heimat*, on whichever grounds or due to whichever forces that leaving takes sway.

Let me pause here for a moment to ask provisionally: can anchoring forgetting and memory in the traveling *Heimat* solve that problem, if, as traveling, the *Heimat* does not need to be left behind? Advancing a Heidegger argument can help prepare to address this question with due attention.

Heidegger arrives at the above (one might say geographical) meaning of forgetting, which neither you nor your *Heimat* can control, as he makes his way from the Germans to the Greeks. To do so, in this text as in others, he, in his words, “listens” to languages beyond what and how those who use the languages for merely “communication” purposes are able “to hear”. Hearing the language extends beyond adhering to the established use of the language, and Heidegger judges the latter by the former. In the case at hand, that listening involves paying attention to progressing from *Vergessen* and *Vergessenheit* to their stem “*gessen*” akin, as Heidegger finds it to be, to the English “get” (in “forgetting”) and to the German stem “*gezen*”, to which he returns at the later stages of the analysis. Beforehand, Heidegger attends to two different meanings of the “*Ver*”, one of amplification (his example: “*einigen*” versus “*vereinigen*”, with the latter indicates an effort to come to an agreement despite differences and the former, a simple “be in agreement”.) The other, and, for him, more crucial, meaning of the “*Ver*” is that of “failing to do something properly” or “having done something more intensely in a negative or uncontrolled sense”. Examples of that negative sense of an overdoing would be “*versagen*” (to say more than planned); *versprechen* (not simply to say but to deliver it as promise); and *verändern* (to change by itself and on purpose rather than to be changed by someone.) In such a negative sense of the overdoing, the “*Ver*” means to “get into” or “fall into” the action or operation with a negative connotation of falling into a trap or a step or action in which one loses. In that second, negative sense “*Ver*” always connotes “falling into a trap” (*geraten*, which always implies a misstep or misfortune).

Having found the English analogue “getting” for the German “*gessen*”/“*gezen*” and drawn on the German misfortune-tainted negative meaning of “loss” or “overdo” in the “*Ver*”, Heidegger launches a search for a German antonym to “*ver-gessen*” (“forget”). At this point, he constructs what would have been but never was a word in German, a would-have-been antonym for *vergessen*: \**ergessen* (I use an asterisk to indicate that the word is a hypothetical only). The “*er*” expresses an accomplishment of getting something done (or, in a possible English analogue, “begotten”). To schematize Heidegger’s analysis here: If the German *lernen* means “to learn” then *erlernen* means “to successfully finish learning”, and *verlernen* means “to lose all your learning, to unlearn”.

To Heidegger’s initial, indeed merely rhetorical, dissatisfaction, \**ergessen* is not a word; the closest the German language gets to \**ergessen* and the antonym for *vergessen* (“forget”) is the German *ergötzen*, Heidegger observes. Preparing to move from an initial rhetorical dissatisfaction to the victorious final move, Heidegger complains: the word *ergötzen* means something seemingly not related to the *vergessen* at all: *ergötzen* means “to play with, to have fun with, to cheer up oneself with, to enthrall, etc.”.

However, Heidegger finds a connection! The cheering up (with) a friend or a toy is a brightening state, that of clearing up (*Aufheiterung*<sup>5</sup>) as one exits from the dark into a clearing in the forest. Out of the dark between trees, one is in the hemming: the light hems-it-out into the clearing of brightness amid dark trees around. From the merely hypothetical \**ergessen* (“to acquire fully” as opposed “to get into trouble”) Heidegger moves to the real word, *ergeutzen* as “cheering up”, and then to *Aufheiterung* of brightening up that hems out the dark of the forest. That maneuver allows Heidegger to turn to the antonym of the

*Aufheiterung*, now understood as “the brightening hemming-out”. That antonym is the *Verheiterung* or clouding up, deeming up, and losing things (and oneself!) in the dark. As we move out of the hemming, the darkness looms in again and takes away the holding and the being held of the light: the brightening falls out from the hem, and the hemming out of the light and of the cheerful opening comes into a miss (*Versaummiss*). The ground of such deeming up (*Verheiterung*) of the cheerful bright of the *Aufheiterung* is what Heidegger was looking to articulate: the originary (rather than any kind of psychological or subjective) forgetting (*Vergessen*). One can summarize the result: Ver-gessen or for-getting is, thus, the getting of that which one was not seeking to get, in the negative sense.

In the final analysis in its English and German part, this deeming up is, for Heidegger, the forgotten ground of not being able to hold the ground—we normally understand forgetting as simply not being able to hold, without understanding the ground thereof: the ground of the *Verheiterung* or the deeming up. That means, as Heidegger concludes the German part of his analysis, that “the originary essence of forgetting [as such] remains forgotten” (Heidegger 2020, p. 941). It does, even if Heidegger succeeds in finding a symptom of that forgotten forgetting in the impersonal operations of deeming up versus hemming in, i.e., in forgetting as deeming up versus brightening of the cheer.

From the German “region of meaning” achieved thereby, Heidegger continues his diagnosis of the forgetting forgotten or deemed up by having reduced the forgetting to either a subjective state or objective status. He does so by moving to symptoms in the Latin and Greek languages. In using German to help diagnose the Latin and the Greek better, the remainder of his analysis of the Latin and Greek allows him to discover the connection of that deeming up of the cheer to the *Heimat*. The German helps the Greek to be understood in its affinity with the German—yet only with a stipulation: the present-day Germans of the Hoch Deutsch and nearly exterritorial (and surely delocalized) nationalism have fallen into the darkening of the deeming up and failed to cheer up. By listening up to what such a deemed-up Germans fail to hear in their own language, Heidegger now turns to a similarly careful listening of Latin and Greek.

The Latin for forgetting, *obliviscor*, comes from “oblino”: “to scribble all over”, to “smear” what is written on the wax tablet; that entails wiping away and, thus, making it inaccessible, Heidegger argued. This is where the tinological moment of forgetting as forgetting *something* (including somebody) is fading away: *obliviscor* is a median form, he highlights. This bespeaks, “I am smearing and erasing for myself, so that the erased will be and remain inaccessible to me”. The shift is from the *what* is being erased (a tinological approach, in this case the *what* is the writing erased) to the *who* becomes erased, or over whom does the erasing take sway. This is counterintuitive: the erased is not the writing, but the one whom this writing corresponds to, whom or to whom does it articulate. The emphasis here shifts: erasing is what takes hold of me, no longer what specifically is erased. Erasing means becoming inaccessible for me. It is not that I erase, but rather that the erased becomes inaccessible to me, just as I am no longer accessible as a reader or writer of what has been erased.

Transposed back to German, that “erasing and making inaccessible means the following: forgetting (*Vergessen*) is misplacement (*Verstellen*) and losing—having no longer preserved. Interpreting the *obliviscor* as “getting the writing on the wax table lost on me” is a very important step here. What I render here in the context as “lost on me” is “*Verbergen*”. The interpretation of *obliviscor* as *Verbergen* connects Heidegger’s analysis in 1944/45 with his 1931/32 lectures on the “essence of truth” (Heidegger [1931] 1977). Heidegger insisted then, in *The Essence of Truth*, that the true meaning of any forgetting is *Verborgenheit* (usually rendered as “concealment”), a term Heidegger connects with the Greek *lethe*, generally understood as the river of forgetting. For him, rather than interpreting it as forgetting, *lethe* is better interpreted as *Verborgen* = “concealment”. At this earlier point, Heidegger explicitly doubts that it is even possible to interpret *Verborgenheit* as *Vergessenheit*, or concealment as forgetting, for forgetting, at the time, for him seems to be a subjective state, a state of the subject, and thus borders on the *contradictio in adjecto*: “I still leave open the question of

whether one can at all comprehend forgetting by conceiving it as psychological event (seelisches Erlebens, experience of a soul) or occurrence in consciousness".<sup>6</sup> In 1946, however, Heidegger was more affirmative in outlining the contours of forgetting as an "experience of a soul", even if reducing it, as he still does, to *Verborgenheit* or "concealment".

At this crucial point of arrival from *Vergessenheit* (forgetfulness) to *Verborgenheit*, generally understood as concealment, I need to pause this exposition in order to question that regnant interpretation of forgetting as concealment, even if only for the purposes of my argument here. That would mean to apply Heidegger's wits about the "Ver" to reading and listening to his "Verbergen" and *Verborgenheit*, too. That means listening to "bergen" and "borgen" more closely. *Kluge etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* derives "bergen" from balto-slavic root *\*b<sup>h</sup>herg<sup>h</sup>* "bewahren" connecting that with *birginti* "sparen" ("save"); *nebrešti* "außer Acht lassen, missachten" (leave without attention, fail to attend to) and with Russian *berěč* "hütten, bewahren, schonen, sparen" (protect, care/beautify, save/preserve)" (Seebold 2011, p. 111).<sup>7</sup> The region of meaning of *bergen* as saving, caring about, preserving, and holding in keep allows one to interpret *Verborgenheit* not merely as concealment, but rather as falling out of saving, protection, or care. Just as a river is kept by its embankment (*bereg*) and flows out of keep or beyond the embankment when flooding, so too can *Verborgenheit* be heard as escaping the keep, failing out from keeping in check.<sup>8</sup>

With this reinterpretation of *Verborgenheit* as not only concealment, but, rather, also as falling out of keep, Heidegger's next move is from Latin to Greek. There, *Verborgenheit* reaches, in his terms, a new "region of meaning" as well. The Greeks, as he argued in 1944/45, experienced what German calls *Vergessen* and Latin *oblivisci* rather differently. The Greek word for that which German and "we the Germans" articulate as *Vergessen* is ἐπιλανθασμομαι. The base of this word is λαθ-λαθω, and that means "Ich bin verborgen" (Heidegger 2020, p. 942): I am lost, I have fallen out of check, I am out of keep (rather than only "I am concealed"). This is the same word base, λαθ-λαθω, of the Greek word for what "we" (the Germans) name "Wahrheit" (to mean "truth", but to hear and connote "protection, being in custody, being taken under ward (Bewahren) or keep"), Heidegger argues. Similarly to Latin *obliviscor*, ἐπιλανθασμομαι is a median form, but the disposition or the way one holds oneself is radically different, Heidegger continues. In Greek, it is neither about an act, action, or operation (*Tun*) of erasing, nor about "letting" something happen—letting something to become erased). Rather, ἐπιλανθασμομαι bespeaks a gift and/or fate (*Geschick*, *idem*), he argues further.

At this point, to exemplify the result, i.e., the diagnosis Heidegger had achieved, the *Heimat* comes into focus. When one is pushed out in a foreign land and forgets home, the Greek is not talking about "an experience of the soul;" the Greek expression ἐπιλανθανεται της πατριδος means to Heidegger that, away from *Heimat* where he/she himself/herself falls out of keep, one remains un-preserved ("er bleibt sich selbst verborgen").

Thought of in the "Greek" way, forgetting thus means to fall out of keep of one's own lack of protection of the *Heimat*, whereas the *Heimat* also and by the same token becomes unprotected or fallen out of keep of the person. This falling out of keep in the relation to the *Heimat* means that the Heiman has also fallen out of keep, and no recollection of the traveler about his/her homeland, nor the homeland memorialization of its hero travelers, can help: the homeland falls out keep. The double falling out of keep furthers the person in the darkening (*Verbeiterung*, *idem*)<sup>9</sup>.

This is why, when away from the homeland, humans, despite their most sincere efforts to remember, can and indeed are destined to forget, Heidegger concludes. For him, this conclusion means that, in such an arrival into the darkening of being away from the homeland (which means into a nationalized or national-socialized exterritoriality), something that was accessible and permissible to the humans and even already transferred to them becomes moved away from them; yet, this moving away works and remains unwatched and out of keep (*verborgen bleibt*). Forgetfulness (*Vergessenheit*) is, thus, the condition of the humans who, unwatched and unguarded, run out of keep in their relation to the *Heimat* (Heidegger 2020, p. 943).



### 3.6. Homeland-Forgetting in Travel and a Traveling Home-Land

In short, forgetfulness for Heidegger is (a) a condition of having fallen out of keep of the *Heimat* with the *Heimat* having fallen out of keep and (b) this condition having fallen out of keep of the humans as well. This is not a “an experience of the soul” in which something disappears and/or is erased from memory without return, but rather a human status of having fallen out of keep. If you are elsewhere outside of your *Heimat*, one can say in a diaspora at this point, you are risking being forgotten, which means risking having fallen out of keep in the condition of unguarded forgetfulness.

Such a result, as provisional as it might be, posits a problem: the traveling homeland becomes an impossibility, for it entails a delocalization with and despite all the efforts to re-localize. A traveling homeland remains a form of forgetting. A traveling homeland for Heidegger would still mean “*verborgen bleiben*”. The question therefore becomes: can Talmud overcome this impossibility of the traveling homeland? How can Talmud undo the fate of forgetting, which any travel and any exterritorialization or ex-localization tacitly brings?

### 3.7. Talmud and Forgetting beyond “the Experience of the Soul”: A Possibility

The stakes in this analysis of forgetfulness beyond the experience of the soul—either individual or collective, on the one hand, and beyond the reduction of forgetfulness to concealment, on the other hand—are tremendously high. For what kind of a collective does one build, when one appeals to the Talmud as one’s *Heimat*? One can say yes to such a collective built by reading the same newspapers and the same pages of the printed editions of the Talmud, or even of the daily page of the Talmud (*daf yomi*), with all and everyone reading the same thing globally to have a common parlance. Yet, what exactly is being read? Under which circumstances? Under which “tradition of tradition” (to borrow Gérard Granel’s term) are we operating when we are talking about Talmud today?

My concern, indeed, an invitation and a necessity to think further, is that even if the Talmud is something that exists and continues in time (rather than in space, as Heschel and Boyarin have it, each in his own way,) the question becomes what happens to Talmud with time, and what happens to time with Talmud? This second part of the question means: what role does time, rather than, say, a genealogical order or sequence of events, play in the intellectual horizons of Talmud as way of thinking in and approaching the world?

We tend to think about and read the Talmud today in the context of modern state. It can be understood as a nation-state such as, say, France, or as a not-a-nation state, which, in Hannah Arendt’s assessment, the USA is. We can equally well think about the modern state as defined by internationally recognized and/or contested borders, or else as a sovereignty operating under a constitution by the mechanism of exception. I bracket these important distinctions for now—in part because the emphasis is on the locality of *Heimat*/Homeland, rather than on an abstract map of, say, *Deutschland*. The point is that, even in the context of diaspora—as always localized and universalized as diaspora is—the latter is still a version of a nation in the modern sense.

In other words, under *any* notion of a modern nation, under these differing assessments of modern states and modern diasporas, we are running (on a preliminary assessment, at least) a modern discourse of what Alain de Libera (de Libera 2015) analyzed and historically localized as modern “subject-agent”, or as what Kant first introduced according to de Libera’s analysis with a philosophical neologism *Subjektivität*, which has become a common and even self-explanatory word, “subjectivity” to underly our modern thinking about nation-states and diasporas alike. As a modern invention of Kant, “subjectivity” serves as a common, uniting principle for a nation, whether in space or in time. This is precisely where the question of traditions of tradition of the Talmud, that is, of the changing nature of the question “What Talmud is as an intellectual enterprise”, comes afore and becomes crucial in thinking about the role of the Talmud today for a nation.

### 3.8. Talmud without the “the” and a Nation with/out (before) the Land

In this and following sections, I would like to offer a couple of general observations concerning the foundational narrative structure of Israel as not necessarily and primarily a state, but rather a homonym in an Aristotelian sense: a speech about several distinct but closely interconnected and easy to confuse things (“human” as a living being and “human” as a portrayal—two things which are all too easily confused in speaking, thinking, and, as a result, in practical action). Biblical Israel (the title Jacob has earned, and his heirs received), Israel as a Biblical kingdom, or else the modern State of Israel would be just several foundational and not easily fully separable elements at work in such a homonymy.

Many more crucial elements intertwine in the living being and the portrayal of Israel. Daniel Boyarin’s work indicates the Paulinian and then Christian “Israel in Spirit” versus Paul-created “Israel in flesh” from which the Christian theological-political designation “Jews” stems following the Roman geographical designation “Judeans”. These, in turn, are followed by the biological reduction of theological difference down to difference posited by racist elitism and anti-elitism. These rather different elements are working together in the theological-political and geographical figure of “Israel” today, often without practical separation—either in life or in description.

### 3.9. Exodus as a Celebrated Lost Part of the Homonymy “Israel”

I would, however, like to highlight an underappreciated or, indeed, forgotten element of the narrative of which the homonymy of Israel is a part. This element has to do with the canonized version of the Five Books of Moses. The canon was built on the five books of Moses, which meant the sixth book, that of Jehoshua, was placed in the **Prophets**. What that means, however, is that, from a narrative standpoint, The Five Books is a cliffhanger. It also means the main narrative move or constitutive move, or, if I may borrow the term, “existential” move of the Five Books is what is either under-translated as “exodus” or over-translated as “expulsion” of Israel from Egypt.

It, rather, is a movement of getting out (I am very close to say “a movement of forgetting”, as it is not necessarily that Israelites leave Egypt, but rather that Egypt, through the exodus, forgoes them and they it. This movement of getting out from Egypt integrates therein the *getting* of the first husband and wife *out* from the Gan Eden, of Abraham from his *Heimat*, and most obviously, the moving out of Israel or the moving of Hebrews (for Egyptians) out of Egypt.

This moving out, getting out (and if I can still risk it, forgetting) is the constitutive of the foundational narrative of Israelites. The Five Books are centered at and stop at that move, reaching, as they are, at the cliff right before its conclusion. Getting out of Egypt is the cliffhanger. Of course there is a sequel, and not one. In the books of Prophets, the history of Israel in relation to land and landing begins. Yet, in a substantial way, the sequel repeats the main move: landing, having the moment of exodus fall out of keep, the forgetting of the moment of exodus, the repeat of an exodus followed by another landing, followed by forgetting.

Importantly, here, being forgotten is not a *Heimat*, but rather the *Exodus* and the G-d of exodus therewith. This is a forgetting that is radically different from what Heidegger had; even if the Biblical “exodus” is, too, in Heidegger’s words, far from “an experience of the soul”. Exodus, landing, forgetting, and new exodus are all outside of what psychology of the “experience of the soul” (including the soul of a nation) can account for. The prophetic motive of forgetting the G-d of Exodus is not an experience of the soul either. Instead, the forgetting strikes where one seems to worship the G-d of Exodus in the most obvious way: though the sacrifices in the land-based shrine of the Holy Temple and of the Holy of the Holies therein. Forgetting of exodus is not a psychological movement, which has no space, but rather a spatial movement: landing.

The constitutive move first expressed in the Five Books becomes and continues to be the main concern of Israel’s history: not to forget. Specifically, it means how exactly

not to forget the exodus behind the landing. If, in Heidegger, forgetting is instigated by expulsion/exodus from the *Heimat*, the Biblical forgetting is the forgetting of the exodus.

### 3.10. *The Forgotten Exodus in the Two Talmuds*

#### 3.10.1. The Babylonian Fumes of Forgetting a What

Drawing closer to the pages of the two Talmuds, I would like to highlight the elements of this problematization of forgetting and forgetfulness of Exodus in two different iterations: in the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic schools of rhetoric. It is easier to begin with the Babylonian schools because the politics of forgetting in these schools is, for us, the moderners, easier to be grasped. In the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, there is a sensitivity the rabbis express about their schools located in Babylon as the place where the Biblical Babylonian Tower was.<sup>10</sup> The fumes of forgetting are still there, coming from that very place, even if the tower is no longer, the rabbis felt. These fumes are still dangerous, for them. The existential concern for their—if you wish a modern term—diasporic community is as follows: how not to forget the Mishnah or, even more broadly, the Torah beyond what the community has in the Scripture.

Not to forget the Mishnah means: it is not enough to reproduce the Mishnah by recorded notes or have it regurgitated by heart. Involving no understanding, such a mechanical regurgitation is necessary, lest an understanding of the reciter cripples in terms of leaving a trace and distorting the remembered (or, to come back to Heidegger's imagery of forgetting, making the Mishnah erased from the wax-tablet.)

These mechanical ways of remembering the words are, thus, insufficient. Rather, the mechanical memory needs to be subjected to scrutiny through the dance of refutations and counter-refutations in hopes that, if this process repeats time and again, in as many variations as one can have, the sense of a greater reliability of the Mishnah's memory becomes stronger and the Babylonian fumes of forgetting recede.

The fumes of forgetting in Babylon can, therefore, be read as an analogy for the powers by which exodus is becoming forgotten through solid landing. In such an analogy, the Torah, given as the memory of the exodus, becomes forgotten if reduced to land-solid mechanical remembering in recitation and regurgitation.

#### 3.10.2. To Palestine from Alexandria: The Forgotten Who

If we now move from this scene of forgetting in Babylon back to Palestinian rabbinic schools of rhetoric, then the concern with forgetting becomes even more fundamental. It is no longer just how to remember the Mishnah better, as if there already were something fixed to remember. Rather, and more blatantly, the concern is how not to forget. But what? What is **it** that is not to forget?

The Palestinian rabbinic concern about non-forgetting could be understood better if we move even further down in chronology and geography to Alexandrian schools, to Philo, who at the end of *On the Creation of the World* polemically responds to the godless or atheists. These were not modern-day atheists denying the "existence" of the G-d of the Bible; rather they were "godless" in the sense of people in despair about G-d's involvement in their lives. Educated in Greek philosophy and thinking about the G-d of the Bible, who by the standards of that philosophy is not a part of the world, these "atheists" argued: if G-d is not a part of this world, how can G-d intervene with the matters of the world? How can G-d help anybody? Theirs was not an act of denial of G-d, but rather an act of despair.

Their "atheists" question how the G-d-who-is-not-a-part-of-the-world can take part in the matters of the world became the definitive question to inform Rabbinic thought through the medieval period as well (which would have to be a matter of a separate exposition and analysis). Pertaining to the present argument, however, is that Philo, who arrived into the Western philosophical and theological tradition mainly through Latin reception in Marius Victorinus, is held responsible for introducing the notion of *existentia* in application to G-d and beyond. Namely, at the end of *On the Creation*, Philo firmly responds to the godless or atheists that G-d of the Bible "is and exists" (*esti kai huparxei*; *On*

*the Creation*: 170). That means that G-d is, and the world is literally “under his arche”. The world being “under the G-d” would correspond to the Rabbinic sense of G-d as the קונה, master, proprietor, or acquirer of the world. In short, Philo’s answer to the “atheists” was that the owner can control the property without being a part of that property.

Philo’s heralding notion, *huparxein*, was translated by Victorinus in Latin as *existentia*—not in the Heideggerian, or, if you wish, Fichtean sense of *Vorhandene* as “an object [Objekt] within reach of hand”, but rather in a more foundational sense, which, then, through a long history of Church Fathers and scholasticism, shaped the question: what does it mean for G-d to “exist” without having an “essence”? Philo’s “*esti*” came to mean “essence” and “*huparxein*”, “existence”. The latter meant “to be”, yet without any definable “essence” attached. That complex and multifaceted reception and transformation constitutes one better known line of *huparxein*’s life in the history of thought.

Yet, *huparxein* had another life, too.

In the life accounted for above, “the world’s being under the G-d” came to mean G-d’s *existentia* in the world, even if precisely not as any definable essence, thing, or part of that world. In a parallel life I expose below, “the world’s being under the G-d” or “the world’s being under dominion of the G-d” comes to mean something else. Alas, that meaning is far less self-explanatory for us, the moderners. That other meaning and that other life of *huparxein* is: G-d is testified to in the world.

How then, did we reach this meaning and this life of the *huparxein*?

This other life is that of rabbinic reception and rethinking of *huparxein*. It unfolds not by interpreting *huparxein* as *existentia*, but rather as קיום מקיים and derivatives. Under-interpreted, this rabbinic idiom means “to fulfill” (*plerosai*). For example, in Mishnah Yevamot 8:4, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Betira witnessed (העיד), regarding a son of Mesiga, that he followed the procedures of exemption from the requirement of levirate marriage to the widow of his brother (who was a man-neutered eunuch) in order to “testify to” [לקים] the teachings of Rabbi Akiva. The teaching to which Mesiga testified was that, because a man-neutered eunuch was once upon a time able to procreate, his brothers were still subject to levirate marriage, that is if the eunuch left no children.

Rabbi Akiva testified [קיים] too. He famously recited the *shema*-prayer when tortured by Romans. He did so in order to testify [לקיים] that the verse “and you shall love Lord, your G-d ... with all your soul ...” must be *practically* interpreted and, in that sense, testified to mean: “recite that verse even when your soul is brutally tortured”. In this, Rabbi Akiva also testified to his disagreement with his own students, who considered torture an exemption from the obligation to recite the *shema*-prayer.

These practical interpretations of or testaments to a commandment of levirate marriage and of reciting the *Shema*-prayer, respectively, extend beyond the meaning of “to fulfill” to another, otherwise inaccessible, region of meaning, that of testifying or providing a testament.

To access that region of meaning in the rabbis, we, not fully unlike Heidegger, are not simply to listen, and but also to listen in, to advance beyond what the words of the rabbis convey to what they express.

Along the lines of such a listening in, once interpreted as a testament, קיום affords us an opportunity to hear the answer the rabbis provided to the question of the “atheists” in Philo: G-d intervenes in the world if and when G-d and its law is testified in the world by and through *practical* interpretations of that law in the exemplary deeds of the rabbis, such as Rabbi Akiva’s recitation of the *Shema*-prayer at the time of his torture or Mesiga’s performance of the laws of levirate marriage for his deceased neutered brother.

Consisting of testifying to the divine law by performing that law, that answer was heavily inflected by the Roman senses of law of *ius*, that is, of the law of obligation, contract, and procedure. The procedure (or in rabbinic terms, *halakhah*) was the law of obligation or the law of contract between G-d and Israel. The answer to Philo’s atheists thus becomes: the G-d of the Bible participates in the world through Israel, who testifies to the contract with G-d by following the procedures (*halakhah*) on Israel’s part of their mutual obligations

in hopes that G-d will, therefore, follow the procedures on G-d's part. That latter part, of course, works only on a condition: Israel must uphold Israel's part of the contract meticulously. Such meticulous upholding constitutes the "testament" to, perhaps one can even say the performance of, G-d's involvement with(in) the world.

### 3.11. From a Testament to the G-d to the (Non)forgetting of the Law

In this economy of testifying to G-d's involvement with the world by meticulously performing the procedures of Israel's part of the contract with G-d, forgetting becomes a real danger. If Israel forgets how to deliver on Israel's part of the contract, G-d might forget to deliver on G-d's part.

That makes the danger of forgetting these obligations, or any detail of such obligations, cosmic in scope. In this scheme of things, קיום, which, in Palestinian Aramaic, has the meaning of "oath, confirmation, answer"<sup>11</sup>, shifts from rendering the Biblical ברית to expressing the Latin "contract" and "covenant" including a sign thereof, קיומא (circumcision), as well.

There is more to the קיום as a testament to the contract between Israel and G-d. In a region of meaning of the rabbinic parlance in Palestine, לקיים is not only to testify, but also to accept as a testimony in court. There are conditions and procedures by which a testimony offered by the witnesses can be accepted in court as a testament. That applies not only to court-hearings of the witnesses and their testimonies in monetary or capital cases, but also, and indeed much more importantly, to how the court or the students of the law are to examine the witnesses and their testimonies to what the law is. The judges and/or the students of the law must ask themselves: can we accept such and such witness or and such and such testimony of that witness as a testament to the law, that is, as the way in which the law is to be presented, interpreted, and therefore practiced? In Rabbinic parlance, this is the question of מה (אנן) מקיימין, what [testimony] do (we/they) accept as a testament (to the law). The question is, thus, of קיום.

(In brackets, we could listen and hear this today in the formula "הקמת מדינת ישראל" translated descriptively as "pronouncing or proclaiming the establishment or existence of the State of Israel", the language could also be heard as "testifying to the State of Israel; and accepting that testimony as testament", so that the State becomes the testament to and of itself.)

Collectively, in these regions of meaning, לקיים as a testimony that has been accepted and, therefore, become a testament (to the law and thus to G-d in the world) is a version of an answer the rabbis in the Palestinian schools of rhetoric have to the Philo atheists' question of how the G-d can interfere in the matters of the world. Namely, "we", the rabbis in the schools of rhetoric, in the schools of judges, and in our courts, need to decide מה לקיים, what to accept as a testimony and, therefore, as a testament to the divine instruction, for this instruction is nothing else but G-d's interference with and enmeshing in the world.

### 3.12. Between the Ius of Mutual Obligation and Nomos of Unilateral Berith

A more down-to-earth answer to the godless of Philo, I submit, is the rabbinic preoccupation with the *halakhah* in Roman Palestine. In the Roman context, *halakhah* is *ius*, i.e., the way, the procedure, the procedural law. This is in distinction from *nomos* in the sense of the divine law of apportionment that needs no procedure, but rather just feels and falls and befalls upon. At stake for the rabbis in the Palestinian schools of rhetoric, and this is where forgetting looms large, as what are the exact procedures, exact *halakhah*, in a mutual contract, fancily called covenant, between Israel and G-d. The question of the forgetting becomes: do we know and therefore testify to and fulfill, i.e., provide testament to that contract, or do we instead find ourselves forgotten by G-d? If what we do is a testament to these contractual procedures carried out correctly, that gives us hope that G-d upholds G-d's part of the contract, as well. The Palestinian preoccupation with what is the exact procedure in each segment of providing a valid testament to the contract, i.e., to every single divine precept, has to do with these very stakes: If we testify correctly and our tes-

timony is accepted as testament, then we have hope that G-d will do G-d's part. Yet if not, we have no hope. This marks an epistemic transition from Philo and *nomos* to the Roman context of *ius*, the context in which the stakes of forgetting sky-rocketed: If we forget the proper procedure, G-d may forget us.

To highlight a resulting contrast with the Babylonian schools of rhetoric, the rabbis there did not preoccupy themselves with the dangers of forgetting. Instead, they focused on how to remember the Mishnah better. The difference is decisive. The Babylonian rabbis assumed that they already had the Mishnah as the formulation of such a proper procedure, and their real question was only to remember and thereby to apply this procedure in the best way possible. That means the question of forgetting becomes, for them, the same as the question of remembering. To forget, for them, is just not to remember properly, despite the fumes of the place of the Babylonian Tower.

Not so in the Roman Palestine: there, the stakes of forgetting were much higher. Since the *halakhah*—as the very possibility of testifying to and having a testament to the contract (covenant) by way of having cited the contractual and procedural law as a fully accepted testament to the law—is always yet to be established among the Palestinian Rabbis (in the Mishnah and in the Palestinian Talmud alike). The question is of *מה אנן מקיימי*: what we accept as a testament to the law is the genuine question without an ultimate answer. Failing to testify and to attain the testament to the law runs the risk of forgetting that which does not yet present itself to memory either. On the hand, and in other words, having testified to the law runs the risk of having forgotten that law as well.

### 3.13. From the Palestinian Academy to Heimat

This is why, in conclusion, I would like to come back, once again, to Heidegger, in order to propose if not an alternative, then a heuristic reading of his analysis of forgetting and forgetfulness. This is an attempt to rethink how the *Verborgenheit*, which, as Heidegger insisted, is the core of what forgetting and the state of forgetfulness is, can—and perhaps even needs to—be understood. In the regnant reading, *Verborgenheit* and, thus, forgetting and forgetfulness is translated and understood as concealment (of a thing from the human and of the humans from themselves once they leave their locality of their *Heimat* behind). You conceal yourself from your *Heimat*, which means you are concealed from the land, indeed from any land and from yourself; that such a concealment is concealed from you, too: forgetfulness is, thus, the concealment of that concealment. The proposed rethinking evokes the “bergen” and its participle form, “borgen”, of the *Verborgenheit*. *Bergen* here is to be taken in its basic sense of “protection, help, defense, guard and ward”, the protection or keeping—including the protection and keeping of that which cannot be remembered either.

*Bergen* indicates keeping the river in its banks, keeping it from flooding. If the river floods, is this still a river or does the river escape from view, sinking into forgetting? *Verborgenheit*, thus, has to do with *verbergen* as both “protecting intensely” and “to fail to protect” at the same time. In the Palestinian rabbinic economy of (for)getting, the testament to the law of G-d in the world means: G-d can protect us, i.e., not forget us, if we do not let the G-d's law be forgotten behind having that very law cited, testified to, and accepted as a testament. Does the fully accepted testament to the law not run the danger of having the law and, thus, G-d forgotten behind that very testament? This paradox of (for)getting, of the overkeep that means losing, applies, in that reading, to the Palestinian rabbis and to Heidegger's *Verborgenheit*, despite their obvious differences in relation to exodus and the *Heimat*.

If *bergen* means to keep something in check, to watch over it, to save and protect it, that does not exclude “to conceal”, but it does highlight to protect the law even if and precisely where there is a problem: can the law be fully testified to? Can the river be kept in check? *Verborgenheit* thus spells not only concealment, but also failing to keep in check. If so, the powers of (for)getting sway away from a modern psychological view of forgetting

as memory loss. Instead, these powers become that which memory is attempting to tame, to keep in check, at the always imminent risk of having overdone that.

If this is how we begin thinking about *Verborgenheit*—as both keeping and overkeeping in check—then we should also think about Heidegger’s analysis of *aletheia* as *Unverborgenheit* in 1931/32, in that non-psychological key of (for)getting.

In these earlier years, Heidegger questions and sidelines a reading of *lethe* as forgetting, which for him sounds too close to an “experience of soul, *seelische Erlebnis*”, that is to say, to the psychology of modern subjectivity. Instead, he insists on reading *lethe* as an ongoing concealment, a current, against which a human is supposed to work by not letting things hide as they like. This is, thus, about things, not about the subject, and is therefore an “ontological” rather than “psychological” operation. So it was in 1931/32.

After the war, however, in 1946, Heidegger returned to this question. He worked to prove that “forgetting” is not merely an insufficient “psychological” interpretation of *lethe*. Rather, his readers learned that forgetting and forgetfulness are the “concealment” of beings and of humans as beings from each other. Far from being an experience of the soul, forgetting now becomes a geographical operation. Precisely due to having left their *Heimat* behind, one does not forget (one can even remember the *Heimat* vividly). Yet, one becomes forgotten. From psychology, we move to geography and “ontology”, in which the darkness, the condition of having been forgotten by the lost *Heimat*, is juxtaposed with the brightening of the exodus from the dark forest to the **Heiter** of the out.

Still, in 1944/5, even after having restored forgetting to its own geographical (and thus, if one prefers, “ontological”) rights, Heidegger still believed—at least, on the standard reading—that concealment is the core of what forgetting is. Heuristically missing here is a reading of *Verborgenheit* as not only “concealment”, but also as failing to save and protect. This dual power of *Verborgenheit* as both having in keep and becoming lost precisely because of that becomes more noticeable in the duality of (for)getting as always risking having it overdone. In this, there emerges a commonality and a difference between Heidegger and the Palestinian Rabbis. For Heidegger, what falls into concealment is one’s relationship to one’s own *Heimat*, however much one remembers it. For the rabbis, by contrast, it is about failing to protect, that is to say to remember, the moment and movement of exodus—a failing that is taking sway in remembering, i.e., in testifying to the law all too well.

In the final analysis, if, for Heidegger, having left the *Heimat* means to become forgotten, then for the Palestinian rabbis, it is the movement of leaving, the exodus from Egypt, which has never been the *Heimat*, constitutes the geographical movement in the scope of which the drama and the danger of having forgotten the G-d and G-d’s law is unfolding. The danger for the rabbis is not in the leaving. Rather, the danger of forgetting the exodus hides in having landed, that is, in having to have remembered all too well.

### 3.14. A Resulting View on *Wahrheit*

Contrary to what immediately meets the eye, in 1931/32, in Heidegger’s analysis of *Wahrheit* (truth) as *Unverborgenheit* (unconcealment) at least two negatives operate. One is a privative negation of *bergen* (keep in check) as one of the two aspects of *Verborgenheit* (the aspect of having failed to save, failed to protect). Then follows another, more noticeable privative negation, that of *Unverborgenheit* (“unconcealment”, the lack of failure to save and protect”). This double privative negation, if *lethe*, a basic operation with no negation involved, becomes interpreted in Heidegger, as *Vergessenheit* or *Verborgenheit* in 1946, entails the third, indeed, initial negation built in: the double-edged sword of the *Ver* of both failing to keep (or failing to get) while also overly keeping and getting, that is, keeping too well.

This double and, indeed, triple negation in English (for)getting and German *Vergessenheit* is not what can be seen as primary operations of *lethe* and שכחה in Greek and in the Hebrew of the Bible, respectively. That induces a contrast between the secondary nature of the operation of forgetting in German and English and the primary nature of the

operation of שכחה in the Biblical command לא תשכח, usually translated as “do not forget” and understood as “erase the memory of Amalek ..., do not forget!” (Deut. 25: 17–19).

The contrast works out as follows. If one reduces forgetting to modern psychologized terms of “seelisches Erlebnis” or, more broadly, to a subjective experience of either having forgotten or having been forgotten, then the Biblical commands to erase the memory of Amalek and not to forget what Amalek done to you are not quite adding up. Yet, if “forget” there entails not a psychological operation of a memory loss, but rather the primary geographical operation of continuing the exodus with a continuously suspended landing in sight, then “not-forgetting to erase the memory of Amalek” means to continue exodus despite all the dangers of not only Amaleks attacking from behind, the attack of the past, or the attack of having just left, but also the dangers of the safe, perhaps all too safe, arrival in the too-solid land of firmly established memories that relegate the exodus to the past, which again exposes one’s back to the other Amalek, that of having firmly and surely arrived. The second Amalek strikes from the back, too; this time, however, it takes a form of forgetting that is reduced to a subjective (passive or active) experience of the *Heimat*, which thus hinders the primordial power of exodus by a sense of the collective subject who thinks of themselves as staying put in a national border, be it the national border in which one finds oneself in diaspora or at home.

If שכחה, then, is retrieved as a primary operation, geographical or otherwise, that of always unfolding and always adverting exodus, the primary operation for which any effort at memory is only a secondary attempt at taming (with the said and always present risk of having overdone that to the effect contrary to the effort), then that operation of exodus or שכחה needs to be understood in a median voice. In that operation, there is nobody, i.e., no subject who, as Heidegger thought in 193, forgets the mode of the experience of the soul, nor is it there, unlike what Heidegger posited in 1946, anybody forgotten either. However necessary they might be, neither the *Heimat* (lived or left) nor the transnationally construed localities of the modern diaspora can suffice to live up to the primary operation of forgetting for which the median voice of the Exodus is the name.

What, then, remains?

The open space or the open time between forgetting and remembering, which is at work in how the Palestinian rabbis were answering the question of how to go about the powers of forgetting even if and precisely when their concern was with what, and more precisely with who cannot be fully remembered, cannot be forgotten either. Theirs is the time or the place we would have had a hard time grasping without Heidegger. However, for grasping that space or time, Heidegger’s orientation to the *Heimat* does not quite suffice either. Instead, if read together with and despite Heidegger, the Palestinian Talmud presents itself as a display of a politics of forgetting which we are challenged to work very hard not to forget today.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the modern predicament, forgetting is (a) a loss of memory, which (b) the subject (either the individual “I” or national “we”) suffers and/or eschews. Heidegger disconnected the forgetting from that modern “psychological” notion of the subject, as well as from the national or individual subjectivity. He, therefore, is helpful in articulating forgetting as independent from any subject or person (be it even the *Heimat*, thought of as a subject or person) “to do” the forgetting. Rather, forgetting strikes. It does so when triggered by one giving up the life in the *Heimat* in favor of living in another place, or even in the same place, conceived as a nation-state. In that, Heidegger helps to see: contrary to modern sensitivities, forgetting is not an action of any subject. Still, Heidegger runs the (a) part of the modern predicament, still approaching forgetting as a memory loss. Despite or perhaps due to that, Heidegger helps to make legible the attention the Palestinian rabbis pay to forgetting as the primary power, to which any memory—including the memory of the Law as the contract/covenant between G-d and Israel—is an always-limited attempt to remember the G-d, who can be neither remembered nor forgotten. Similarly to Heidegger, the



Palestinian rabbis, therefore, do not ascribe forgetting to an act of any person (individual or collective), be it Israel or even the G-d. Dissimilarly, they approach forgetting as a primary power operating in relationships between G-d and Israel, while relegating memory to a secondary and never-sure effort to prevent forgetting from striking and undermining the relationships between G-d and Israel.

In a broader perspective, forgetting thus entails a primary operation to always threaten any achievement of memory. However, in the modern horizon of subjectivity, the relationship between the elemental, primary forgetting and its remediation in and by memory is reversed. Forgetting recedes to a secondary role of the loss of memory that takes place “in the modern subject”. In the theology of the latter, even the Biblical G-d remains always remembered in the first place. By reducing G-d to *theos* always connected to *logos*, “the modern subject” becomes numbed to a possibility for G-d to become forgotten, unless such forgetting is a choice the “subject” makes or else unless that forgetting takes place “in the subject”.

The main applied result of the argument is in detecting limitations of the modern figure of either localized or traveling *Heimat*/homeland as the (im)possibility of the Exodus-driven politics of primordial forgetting. In this, the tradition of the Palestinian rabbis and its continuation today is a counter-current in the politics of forgetting and memory, as opposed to the dominant politics of memory and forgetting.

## 5. Materials and Methods

The materials are the texts quoted and referred to in the argument. I employed the method of slow reading, as articulated at the end of the introduction.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay was presented on 27 April 2023, at Lille University (via Zoom). I thank Elad Lapidot for the invitation and for providing a stimulating environment for discussion. I thank Edouard Nadtochi of the University of Lausanne for readings and discussions we had on the problem this essay addresses. I am also thankful to the anonymous reviewers for the very helpful feedback on the earlier draft of the essay.
- <sup>2</sup> Commemorations of Holocaust by visiting the sites of the concentration camps or else Holocaust and Genocide museums evoke what has been described a collective post-memory. In 2021, I took a train to Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen and have a gamut of feelings as if it was me being transported there, even if I know all well that this is not a personal recollection it feels like one. This and similar effects of post-memory and places of such post-memory through which collectives, “imaginary” that is to say real “communities” are come together introduce memory (a pseudo-memory even if it is a true one, yet they do not account for what this essay is after: that which cannot be remembered, does not yield itself to a narrative; but cannot be forgotten either.
- <sup>3</sup> As Ernest Renan has it in his “What is a Nation?” (1882) “Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation”, in Ethan Rundel’s translation (Renan 1992). The limbo between memory and forgetting concerns not what a nation forgets, but what it can neither forget nor remember. The issue also extends beyond the scope of a modern nation, for which forgetting and remembering are parts of the nation’s collective subjectivity. The argument below probes the limbo between forgetting and memory, which subjectivity, an all too modern a notion, cannot account for.
- <sup>4</sup> The relationships between Boyarin’s “traveling homeland” and Heschel’s “the palace in time” in his *Shabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man* (Heschel [1951] 1994) calls for a separate thinking through—a task to be mentioned here only to indicate that the archeology of the figures “traveling home land” and “civilization in time”, as well as related figures of thought, such as “traveling police” and “invisible college” are still awaiting their explorer.

- <sup>5</sup> *Aufheiterung* may connote both (1) what one finds upon exiting from or entering the dark forest, i.e., a clearing and (2) what one feels about it: cheering up, being out of the gloom. *Verheiterung* may complement the two connotations with their opposites in both what one finds and how one feels.
- <sup>6</sup> Ted Sadler's translation, slightly modified (Heidegger and Sadler [1931] 2002, p. 103; Heidegger 2020, p. 141).
- <sup>7</sup> *Verborgenheit* derives from past participle of *verbergen*: *verborgen*. In semantic interplay "being concealed or more intensively "being kept in concealment or confinement" could also mean to have escaped from the watch, to hide; thus a river that floods over the embankment escapes and hides from the watch, being no longer captured as a river, becomes a flood in its stead.
- <sup>8</sup> For interpreting Heidegger's analysis here, it is important to highlight his refraining from inscribing *Verborgenheit* (concealment, falling out of keep) or, for that matter, *Vergessenheit* (forgetfulness, forgetting, being forgotten) into the economy of action or agency in either passive or active voice; Heidegger insists instead on the median form, which means, in this case, the operation, rather than on the operator or the operated.
- <sup>9</sup> "Verbeiterung" stands in the text (Heidegger 2020, p. 943). It may well be a typo (either in the type-writer-produced text or in the edition); and the word was likely to be *Verheiterung*.
- <sup>10</sup> In bSanhedrin 109a, one reports a dictum in the name of Rabbi Yohanan, "A third of the tower [of Babylon] was burned, a third was swallowed [by the earth] and a third stands (קיים)", followed by a dictum/commenatry of Rav: "The air of the tower causes forgetting [משכה]", followed by a dictum in the name of Rabbi Yosef, "Babylon and and Borsif is a bad omen/sign for the Torah", followed by an anonymous question, "And what is Borsif"? answered in the name of Rabbi Asi: "Borsif reverberates with [the Aramaic for] "empty pit" [בור שאפין] which is a phonetic cognate of the toponim Borsif.] The "Babylon" in Rabbi Yosef's words can mean narrowly "(the remnants of the tower of) Babylon" or broadly "(the land of) Babylon", both implying a place that induces forgetting. Translated above as "stands", קיים, the verb also connotes "testifies", "serves as a sign, as a witness" of the once fully erected Babylonian Tower, of the edifice of the humans to have forgotten of G-d behind the towering elation of human achievement.
- <sup>11</sup> Sokoloff (2002b, p. 489) The terminology of קיים discloses a region of meaning related to "testament" not only in the Palestine but also, residually, in Babylon. That means not only in the Palestinian מה (אנו) מקיימין ("where do we stand/what do we take/approve as a testament") but also by the Babylonian קיימה לן ("[it is] standing by testament to us that... or we have a testament" (Sokoloff 2002a, p. 1012) is suggesting that the region of meaning of "testament" reaches the Babylon, too, where it is overshadowed, however by the Babylonian's rabbis' larger concern with making sure they do not forget—that is deflect every possible attack on—the Mishnah. This is distinct from the Palestinian concern that any formulation of the law should not be a form of losing the law to forgetting masked as the certitude of remembering the law clearly. Following the English translators of Heidegger, who rendered *das Sein* as Being and *das Seinde* with beings, one can propose a similarly rendered distinction between Law and laws, as far as the Palestinian rabbis are concerned with making sure the Law is not forgotten behind the all-too-certain formulations of laws.

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