Lore and Order: Enlisting Rabbinic Epistemology

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Most probably, all of us like a good list.[1] Lists condense information and make us feel organized and in control. Some might describe life as a chain of incidental happenings, and lists help to structure and tame the often-times disempowering sensation of chaos which follows in its wake. Studies have pointed out that it is precisely the ubiquity of and our familiarity with enumerations or lists that make them almost disappear from our minds as an actual discursive strategy, literary form, and cultural practice.[2] Most scholarship, even on premodern lists, tends to focus almost exclusively on the pragmatic aspects. Lucie Doležalová has pointed out that the list

> is most frequently a tool – a table of contents, dictionary, phone book, etc. One does not read but only uses a list: one looks up the relevant information in it, but usually does not need to deal with it as a whole – and is happy about this fact. (Doležalová 2009a, 1)

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While this observation might apply to the already very elaborate forms of lists mentioned in this quote, lists, throughout history, were often conceptualized or perceived as more coherent entities with complex literary and epistemic dimensions. In the case of rabbinic and other premodern lists, this includes the production of ad hoc lists as notes or lists as an addendum to a copied text. Eva von Contzen has pointed out the manifold *affordances* of the list.[3] The list's great functional potential is worth bearing in mind when analyzing how enumerations that are passed on through time are expanded, shortened, or otherwise altered. The following discussion addresses the problem that lists do not usually supply any further explanations as to their theoretical underpinnings. The singularized items which they are composed of are not contextually embedded and thus they tend to be elliptic. However, as such, they are open to (re)interpretation. They invite future reutilizations and transformations that alter or add structure, contents, and commentaries (Mainberger 2003, 20).

This chapter will explore the manifold manifestations of lists in rabbinic texts of late antiquity and the strategies of structuring, producing, and conveying knowledge through lists. Those traditions form the basis of and remain important sources for Jewish religious ideas and practices even today. The discussion is embedded within a broader perspective on (the scholarship of) lists as didactic and epistemic tools within ancient cultures of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. I argue that lists play an important role in the production of knowledge in premodern Jewish history. The following examples aim at demonstrating that in Talmudic medical discourse, legal prescriptions, exegetical or ethical midrashic texts lists function as versatile "epistemic forms." The main bi-partite section presents different interrelated figurations of lists. First, many rabbinic texts feature different kinds of simple lists or enumerations. Second, one may find more complex versions of such enumerations as compound or growing lists featuring interdependent sequences that complement and cross-reference each other.[4] I will focus on sample texts from two different realms: (a) the Talmudic discourse on illness and health that utilizes lists (recipes, preventive advice, therapeutic instruction) in ways similar to other ancient medical traditions; (b) midrashic works with exegetical, homiletical, and ethical interest.

Lists in the Making: From Ancient Practice to Modern Theory?

With a rather derogatory attitude, cultures of the Ancient Near East were primarily conceived by early scholars through the paradigm of a "science of lists" (*Listenwissenschaft*). The term expresses the extent to which "Eastern" knowledge systems were regarded as inferior to Western "Science" (with a capitalized S), which built upon the theoretical discourse of Greco-Roman traditions.[5] Such assumptions about the "Oriental mind" as structurally incapable of abstract, theoretical scientific thinking have long been dismissed in favor of a more nuanced study of the historical and cultural factors in the production of knowledge.[6] Accordingly, scientific thought is a socially embedded cultural practice of generating, ordering, and transmitting knowledge about and within the (empirical) world. The lack of an explicit concept of "science" (and related issues) or a fully fledged theoretical or epistemological discourse should not be taken as a proof for the historical absence of any systematic thinking in our sources. Rather, in several ancient traditions (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Jewish) first- and second-order procedures of knowledge production (like sequencing, hierarchization, comparison, binary and oppositional thinking, abstraction, synthesis, and generalization), which often underlay the extant discourse, but rarely were addressed openly, are embodied and can be studied in lists.[7]

Lists as artifacts—on a clay tablet, in a scroll, codex, or written on a napkin—constitute the material embodiment of epistemic conventions within a certain culture and time at a specific locality. The deployment of lists for the production of knowledge and its didactic imparting becomes a part of the represented items, since the form has an impact on the cognitive act itself.[8] The specific blending of form and content as well as language and discursive framing played a crucial role for the creation and transmission of knowledge in Jewish traditions and their dynamic exchanges with other cultures.[9] Ancient scientific usage of lists was often intertwined with scribal education and the field of exegesis and interpretation, that is, the core expertise of the rabbinic sages.[10] From ancient times onward, lists had a decidedly epistemological function: they created and (re)presented patterns or concepts that guided the cognitive processes of their authors and their audience.[11] However, due to the dearth of sources (for triangulation), the inquiry into the function(s) of lists within their

contexts or the scientific concepts underlying specific lists is often a difficult, if not impossible task.

In the following, I will explore how lists display a rather stable enumerative form across different times and cultures whose flexible and hybrid nature allowed for various adaptations to specific purposes and contexts.[12] While Belknap's broad and inclusive understanding of lists as a "block of information that is composed of a set of members"[13] is certainly applicable to rabbinic texts, a typographical or medial definition of lists as an entity using columns or rows would be rather inexpedient for the material at hand. Although rabbinic lists are thus represented in modern-day scholarly editions for analytical purposes, this is not what they looked like in the manuscripts or the most common earlier prints. Be that as it may, I will use the term *list* in the sense of a flexible enumerative format.[14] Besides preliminary studies by Wünsche and Towner, Roy Shasha's first form-critical study of lists as a literary device in early rabbinic traditions (Mishnah) describes a textual unit featuring a caption with a deictic ("these are they"/*we-ʾilu hen*) and/or a numerical reference ("Three things do/are X") to items following within the list.[15] Lists can be simple or compound, combining several lists or addressing more than one topic.[16] Lists may serve to introduce a particular topic (agenda) at the beginning of a chapter. Some lists may be comparative or contrastive, while others connect heterogeneous items under one rubric.[17] Moreover, the density and brevity of lists help to create coherent units for transferring knowledge, since they function not only as a literary device but also form an effective tool for instruction and information storage (see Cancik-Kirschbaum 2010, 2012).

Introduction to Rabbinic Sources: Background, Dating, and Characteristics

Diverse forms of lists and approaches to list-making served as discursive and epistemic tools in Jewish traditions that were composed in Hebrew and Aramaic throughout late antiquity and early medieval times, roughly from the first to the tenth century. One strand of rabbinic tradition, namely *Halakha* (lit. "way of life"), developed a set of religious normative rules and related (theological) issues that strove to include almost every realm of life—from rituals, liturgy, or festivals to agriculture, business ethics, and even medical topics. This corpus includes the early Mishnah (m.)

and its companion, the Tosefta (t.), from circa third-century Palestine. Two later Talmudic traditions commented and elaborated upon those earlier texts, often adding new material from their respective cultural background: the Palestinian/Jerusalem Talmud (y.), from the sixth century; and the Babylonian Talmud (b.), a vast tradition compiled between the sixth and the eighth centuries in the region of today's Iraq. This body of texts is accompanied by other works subsumed under the label *midrash*, mainly from Palestine, which can be described as "exegetical literature" in the broadest sense of the term. These texts include exegetical and homiletical examinations of the Hebrew Bible and also feature ethical teachings.[18]

Although rabbinic traditions commonly ascribe certain teachings to named sages, this polyphonic concert of rabbinic voices appears in texts with an anonymous and collective authorship. These teachings are thought to have been transmitted orally or else as written notes over quite a long time before they were compiled in written collections. This supposed orality of earlier rabbinic traditions ties in well with theoretical considerations regarding the form of the list. While some scholars see list-making primarily as a writing practice, media scholar Liam Cole Young has compellingly emphasized that the list "challenges the common assumptions about a dichotomy between orality and literacy/writing" because it occupies "a liminal or interstitial space between orality and literacy; 'savage' and 'domestic'; 'primitive' and 'advanced'" (Young 2013a, 501–502). Since lists were inherent parts of the curriculum learned by heart, at least in Babylonia, rabbinic list-making may have emerged as a mnemonic device that builds a bridge between the oral and written traditions. Some contents or additions to compound lists were probably added at a later point, when rabbinic teachings already circulated for some time in writing.

Lists in Ancient Jewish Texts

Before discussing the sample texts, a brief historical contextualization of rabbinic list-making seems in place. Already the Hebrew Bible features genealogies, lists of kings and priests, lists on places ("itinerary of biblical stories"), or about ritual procedures or objects.[19] Prescriptive lists figure also prominently as ordering devices in biblical (Decalogue) and later Jewish law. Enumerations of converts from different ethnic backgrounds who, to varying degrees, are permitted to intermarry with Israelites exemplify the list's political or religious power of inclusion and exclusion.

Detailed lists of items within the biblical dietary laws—specific types of beasts, wild animals, fowl or fish and plants, fruits or trees—did not only have a prescriptive purpose; they were also crucial for the ongoing formation of identity. Moreover, these lists demonstrate the terseness and specificity of the form. Devoid of further explanations regarding their items, these lists pose a challenge during their history of reception/transmission. Post-biblical traditions (e.g., texts from Qumran) and especially the Talmudic refinements of biblical law struggled with many of these names, yet oftentimes found creative solutions. Talmudic authors between the West (Syria-Palestine) and the East (Babylonia) had to translate and actualize transmitted lists according to their contemporaneous and regional contexts (specific plant life, animals, etc.).

Lists were also used to convey ethical ideas and knowledge about the order of the world in Wisdom traditions like Ecclesiastes (Qohelet), Proverbs or Sirach/Ben Sira, which were appropriated by later rabbinic ethical texts (*Avot, Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, Derekh Eretz* etc.).[20] In the post-Talmudic, early Islamic period, one may observe an increased interest in and the frequent deployment of lists. Some texts, like *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* ("Chapters of R. Eliezer"/ henceforth: *PRE*) or *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* ("The Minor Order of Elijah"/*henceforth: SEZ*), feature thematic lists on key concepts such as charity (*PRE* 33/*SEZ* 1 and 5), repentance (*PRE* 43), or righteousness (*SEZ* 1 and 3). In particular, *PRE* utilizes lists and enumerations as compositional patterns for chapters and the whole work, thereby restructuring biblical chronology according to lists about the seven days of creation, ten things created at twilight, or ten descents of the divine presence.[21] Moreover, in *PRE* lists connect between biblical traditions, Jewish religious custom, and scientific knowledge of different sorts (astrology, cosmology, etc.).[22]

Of special importance are the so-called *Ma'aseh-Torah* traditions.[23] For the first time, these texts accumulated and (re)arranged lists and other material from earlier rabbinic traditions into thematic clusters of lists.[24] The increased interest in condensing information about various fields of knowledge in lists which are combined in one work appears to have been triggered by the "beginning of Hebrew scientific literature" (Langermann 2002) in post-Talmudic Jewish texts as well as by both the penchant for florilegia or compendia and a broader model of education/learning (Arabic: *adab/*أدب) in early medieval (Byzantine) Christian and Islamic cultures.[25]

Recipes and Rules for a Healthy Lifestyle in Lists

As mentioned before, lists served as stock formats within ancient Jewish traditions. Moreover, lists played an important role in various ancient medical traditions (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman) as an aid in therapeutic instruction, advice on *dieita* ("healthy lifestyle"), diagnosis, and prognosis.[26] Enumerations take center stage in pharmaceutic works and in recipes. They work as *aide-mémoires* for the practitioner or as handy forms to distribute and transmit pertinent knowledge through prescription-formulas to non-experts or later recipients. In rabbinic medical discourse, as in other traditions, recipes and their lists were altered, expanded, or shortened, while sometimes a piece of empirical evidence was added by way of an anecdote or a statement (efficacy label).[27]

The list structure in recipes often follows a rather simple scheme: the indication (i.e., disease), a list of ingredients or *materia medica* ("healing substances"), steps for preparation and/or application, and, sometimes, alternative therapies. However, lists should not be perceived only as an accumulation of the single items contained in it; rather, lists can intersect, accumulate, and form sequences. In general, medical or recipe lists tend to appear in clusters of lists. Sometimes two or more lists are contiguous or exhibit a close textual and/or thematical proximity. Often such lists show a high degree of either coherence or contrast as in the following brief example from the Babylonian Talmud that contains advice on health regimens. The text is embedded in a longer discussion, mostly in Hebrew, deploying lists of three, five, six, or ten items. Those lists deal with positive and negative signs in dreams or with things that are beneficial or harmful for the human body and mind:

> Three things enter the body without benefiting it: *gwdgdnywt*/גוגדניות (a fruit/plant), *kphnywt*/כפניות (spadix of palms?), and *pgy tmrh*/פגי תמרה (unripe dates?).[28]

> Three things benefit the body without entering / being absorbed by it: washing, anointing, and usage [of one's bed] (*tashmish* = intercourse). (Babylonian Talmud, b. Berakhot 57b, in Hebrew)[29]

The connection between these lists is twofold: first, both are introduced by the same numerical value (three); second, using an antithetical rhetoric they refer to specific items that interact with one's body in opposing ways.

The marked action of "entering the body" is clearly derived from the process of ingestion or consumption. The items are plants or fruits which grant no particular benefit or pleasure to one's body. The second list, by contrast, focuses on bodily activities that improve the body's constitution from the outside without entering into it. The antithesis is developed along two dichotomies: internal/food for consumption versus external/treatment, care, or action in relation to one's body.

One may note that, in this case, the introductory phrases with their numerical value (*deixis*) strongly resemble the enigmatic and learned questions that are abundant in the common ancient genre of "questions/riddles in a contest of wisdom."[30] Complying with the standard feature of brevity, the two lists do not provide any explanation whatsoever—neither why these particular items were subsumed under these inverse categories, nor what their (non-)beneficial qualities are. The recipients of these lapidary enumerations must either receive this message without further questioning or be familiar with knowledge from other sources. This might point to a certain degree of acquaintance with non-rabbinic expertise in the field of dietetics and personal health, which was an especially thriving genre in Greco-Roman cultures.[31] However, background information on the issues at hand might be gleaned also from other teachings dispersed throughout various Talmudic traditions. For instance, various types and parts of dates as well as the plant(s) *gwdgdnywt/gdgdnywt* figure frequently in Talmudic recipes and dietetic advice.[32]

Similarly, beneficial behaviors or practices (nutrition, toilet habits, bathing, anointing, or massaging)[33] are discussed extensively in rabbinic texts, often deploying lists as part of the discourse. Thus, a bath house is included in b. Sanhedrin 17b in a list of the absolutely necessary "infrastructure" in a dwelling place for rabbinic scholars—apart from a doctor, bloodletter, or a public privy. Sexuality, an important subfield within physical well-being, is understood as an integral part of divine creation whose importance for the individual (intimacy, companionship) and the collective (procreation) is highlighted. The sexual impulse and various social conventions and practices with regard to sexuality were discussed in rabbinic traditions mostly in a positive way, while also creating religious and cultural boundaries.[34] The positive attitude toward sexual relations is stressed also through a list that is added to our enumerative pair: "Three things are a reflection of the world-to-come; and these are they: Sabbath, sun and usage (*tashmish*/תשמיש), i.e. sex." Accordingly, sexual activity ("usage") is likened to

savoring a small bit of the eternal gratification expected for an eschatological or otherworldly state.[35]

Accumulation, Structure, and Orderly Sequence

The following list on sexual practices and the perils of pregnancy discusses the impact of external factors on the conception and gestation of the baby in the mother's womb. Also, it is embedded in a lengthy discussion about actions (e.g., intercourse) and products that are deemed bad for breast-milk, that is, harmful for the nursed infant. In a typically associative manner the Talmudic text in b. Ketubbot 60b-61a adds in Aramaic:

> 1-A Woman who has intercourse in a [public] mill will have epileptic children.[36]
> 2-[A woman] who has intercourse on the ground will have children with dislocated legs.
> 3-[A woman] who treads on donkey's blood will have children with scrapings (a skin disease?).
> 4-[A woman] who eats mustard [seed] will have gluttonous children.
> 5-[A woman] who eats cress will have blear-eyed children.
> 6-[A woman] who eats [fish] brine will have children with sparkling eyes.
> 7-[A woman] who eats clay will have ugly children.
> 8-[A woman] who drinks 'beer' will have dark-skinned children.
> 9-[A woman] who eats meat and drinks wine will have healthy children.
> 10-[A woman] who eats eggs will have children with big eyes.
> 11-[A woman] who eats fish will have graceful children.
> 12-[A woman] who eats parsley will have bright children.
> 13-[A woman] who eats coriander will have fleshy children.
> 14-[A woman] who eats etrog will have fragrant children.

This list supplements the preceding discussion focused on breastfeeding with other factors that affect the future child's character or bodily constitution. Instead of a caption this list features recurring conditional or propositional statements (*protasis-apodosis*) with a strict if-then logic introduced by "a woman who [does X]," thus focusing on the future mother's responsibility. The 14 items—another instance of abundance or accumulation—form three distinct areas of impact: the sexual act (1 and 2), contact with specific substances (3), eating, and drinking (4–14). So, the majority of the list items is concerned with nutrition, which is also the most important branch of ancient medical tradition.

The first two strands (sexual conduct/contact) may seem odd to a modern reader and burdened with moralizing implications or, probably, ideas of ritual impurity.[37] However, the same concept is corroborated in another Talmudic tractate (b. Nedarim 20a) by a Hebrew teaching in list-form about the impact of conception on fetal development:

R. Yoḥanan b. Dahavai said: "The ministering angels told me four things:

1) People are born lame because they (their parents) 'turned their table' (i.e., practiced some other position / sort of cohabitation).
2) [People are born] mute, because they kiss 'that place' (i.e., the sexual organs).
3) [People are born] deaf, because they talk [lewdly] during sex.
4) [People are born] blind, because they look at 'that place' (i.e., the sexual organs)."

The transmitter of this teaching, an early rabbinic scholar from Palestine, refers to a superhuman, angelic source of his surplus knowledge. This list specifies the exact bodily reciprocity between supposedly improper sexual conduct of various kinds (practice, speech, vision) and the resulting congenital disabilities. Accordingly, muteness is caused, for instance, by practicing oral sex. One has to add that the majority opinion in the Talmud does not grant R. Yoḥanan's report any legal status, that is, no prohibition of said sexual practices, but they also do not reject his moralizing claims about their consequences.[38] In general, such a connection between non-normative behavior producing (anatomically or mentally) non-normative offspring is based on ancient ideas of teratology. This branch of knowledge was concerned mainly with exploring the teratogenic causes of "wondrous births" and congenital disorders. In Jewish traditions, non-normative bodies were categorized and discussed in lists.[39] Simultaneously, a discourse on the dichotomy of (ritual) un/fitness often excluded a person from many basic religious commandments and social practices (prayer, rituals, sacrifice, marriage, etc.) that defined the Jewish community.[40]

The ideas underlying the list above have many parallels in ancient concepts of gestation and pregnancy as attested in various medical and other texts. Many authors (Plato, Aristotle, Hippocratic texts, Pliny the Elder, Soranus, etc.) agree that the unborn child, "planted" into the woman's womb, depends on the mother's nutrition, while being endangered by her

unhealthy actions and conditions. In addition, not only physiological fac-
tors but even certain sensations affecting the mother during conception or
pregnancy will shape the physical appearance, mental faculties, and charac-
ter of the fetus.[41]

Yet, when one ignores the strict mechanical causality, the general idea
that the actual behavior and especially the nutrition of the mother may
benefit or harm the child sounds not at all alien to modern ears. Anyone
acquainted with pregnancy advice literature might also notice that these
books eagerly make use of lists as a format for conveying their message.
The emphasis on the mother's behavior and thus her responsibility seems
rather familiar and indeed has a long history.[42]

The above enumeration is not a straightforward list of admonitions,
however. Rather, the Talmudic authors included both harmful and benefi-
cial actions—this time not in well-distinguished groups but mixed up and
with a slight preponderance of positive effects. Through its conditional
structure, this list does more than just itemize things under one caption.
The format does not only produce topical coherence: the lists' model of
causality (if the mother does X, the child will be Y) also reflects an under-
standing of world coherence (*sympatheia*). The list points to a complex
interplay between the human body, nature, and the cosmos ("creation")
at large. Similarly, rabbinic and other Jewish traditions reiterate a model of
perfect correspondence between the macrocosmic dimension of God's
creation and its tool or blueprint (the Torah) and the microcosmic sphere
of human experience, nature, and specifically the body.[43] Furthermore,
prediction or prognosis seems of particular importance here, since it har-
bors an interest in the temporal dimension and divinatory aspects similar
to those that prevailed in Greco-Roman, Mesopotamian, or Persian
traditions.

Midrashic List-Making: Between Verse, Exegesis, and Ethical Discourse

In regard to exegetical and ethical discourse in rabbinic traditions
(midrash), midrashic lists and those discussed before are not mutually
exclusive. Moral topics are often linked to questions of a healthy way of life
and deploy bodily imagery, as shall be seen in a moment.

The sample text comes from *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* (*SEZ*), a unique tradi-
tion in Hebrew from the ninth or tenth century combining discourse on

moral behavior and Jewish (religious) identity. In *SEZ* and its sibling tradition *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* (*SER*), lists are utilized as powerful discursive tools for exegetical, homiletical, and ethical purposes.[44] The following list is embedded in a chapter discussing the human origin of evil and the initial divine plan of a perfectly good and just world order.

1) Three things/words a man ought to meditate upon every day:

    (a) the hour when he makes use of a privy,
    (b) the hour when he is bled [as part of a therapy],
    (c) the hour when he stands over a dead body.

        a1) When he makes use of a privy, he is reminded, 'Behold, your ways are like the ways of the beast'.
        b1) When he is being bled, he is reminded, 'Behold, you are [only] flesh-and-blood'.
        c1) And when he stands over a dead body, he is reminded, 'Behold, where you are going'.

2) And still, he does <u>not</u> return in penitence [to right conduct].

    A) rather, he keeps saying things that are inappropriate, as it is said [in Scripture], *When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord (Prov. 19:3)*;
    B) and about lies [Scripture] says: *Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked (Exod. 23:7)*;
    C) and [about malevolence Scripture] says: D*o not plot evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD (Zech. 8:17)*.

But how?[45]

    I) When a man makes himself act like a righteous man and speaks the truth, he is assigned an angel who acts towards him in the way of the righteous and speaks the truth.
    II) When a man makes himself act like a pious, being willing to suffer all, he is assigned an angel who acts towards him in the way of pious and helps the man to accept all suffering.
    III) If, on the other hand, a man makes himself act like a wicked man, deceiving and lying, he is assigned an angel who acts towards him in the way of the wicked by deceiving and lying.[46]
    IV) And if a man makes himself follow a middle way, he is assigned an angel who acts towards him in the middle way.

So, we are told by the Holy One Himself: *I the Lord search the heart, I examine the minds (lit. 'kidneys'), in order to give every person [an angel/reward] according to their ways, according to the fruit of their deeds (Jer. 17:10)*. (Seder Eliyahu Zuta 3)[47]

This is a complex version of a compound list or an enumerative cluster that functions as an epistemological device for the ethical agenda of *SEZ*. Within a broader narrative and homiletical discourse, this passage deploys four deeply intertwined lists in order to stress the importance of moral mindfulness. The first double-set exemplifies how to apply techniques of consciousness or self-awareness to reach a state of humility leading to virtue.[48] It starts with a typical caption phrase that points to three occasions as opportunities to guide one's mind and behavior. Those occasions are specified briefly in the first list. This is followed by a repetition of those occasions accompanied by the actual moral advice for each setting, which is derived from previous traditions. The contemplation focuses on human corporeality or mortality and brings one to abstain from or repent immoral actions.[49]

Given the general topic of the "human origin of evil," the text integrates the case of the inconvincible who, even after such strong admonition, keeps up his unethical behavior. This taxonomy of the wicked person (2.A–C) is amplified by the biblical proof-texts focusing on the different sins listed. The listed verses clearly show not only that the said transgressions are already discredited in Scripture, but also that divine punishment awaits those who stubbornly follow an immoral path.

The final list, which has no introductory caption, characterizes four types of behavior and how angelic beings react to them: the righteous, the pious, the wicked, and the average. This list, along with its several parallels in various rabbinic texts, proves that the divine system of "reward and punishment" works, as there is a chance for every person to change one's own ways. The reference to another proof text (Jeremiah 17:10) firmly underlines *SEZ*'s key concepts: human freedom of choice, divine justice, and the chance to repent. Moreover, with this verse, in particular its expression "to give every person according to their ways," the authors refer back to the tenet preceding this list in *SEZ*, chapter 3: "Accordingly, humans are judged because of their ways. They are judged according to their ethical behavior (*derekh eretz*) in order to save them on the Day [of Judgment]."[50]

Lists in *SEZ* function on three interconnected levels of ethical knowledge production. First, as shown above, the lists form a dense cluster that weaves together instructions on ethical mindfulness with a taxonomy of the wicked person and teachings on the divine system of "reward and punishment." So, it provides a didactically efficient but still brief summary of ethical and theological key concepts to its audience, combined with practical advice (techniques of the self). Second, these lists function within the third chapter featuring other complex lists on human ethical traits and within the broader context of *SEZ* as a whole.[51] Third, *SEZ* deploys lists as tools in order to participate in a shared discourse on a much broader scale. One may compare its discourse to similar techniques of teaching morality through lists in various (Jewish, Persian, Arabic) ethical traditions in late antiquity and early medieval times.[52]

CONCLUSION: MAKING LISTS RABBINIC—FORMAT, DISCOURSE, AND EPISTEMIC VALUES

Seizing on an already developed stock of list-making and enumeration, rabbinic authors cultivated and advanced these strategies in surprising ways that suited their discursive needs and their epistemic project. They took advantage of the fluidity and versatility that make lists powerful discursive forms. The manifold contexts of usage include, as in *Seder Eliyahu*, exegetical operations and narratological deployment for instruction and moral advice. Other sample texts demonstrate how rabbinic texts use lists in order to appropriate, transmit, and create medical knowledge in the form of recipes, therapeutic advice, and instructions for well-being (diet and regimen). In all cases, one notices their function as a general texturing element within a broader discourse, wherein lists work hand in hand with other literary and epistemic micro-forms (e.g., question-and-answers, exempla, dialectic speech, dialogues, parables, case-stories).

The affinity between rabbinic discourse and lists might be explained by one of their shared dimensions. As "lists function to facilitate various forms of interaction between human beings […] while also standing as a record or an index of […] this interaction,"[53] so do rabbinic texts, especially when concerned with normative or legal questions (*Halakha*). Lists form an integral part of that (late) ancient Jewish tradition, namely because they trigger a prescriptive momentum while also creating a record or index of historical or ideally imagined rabbinic (normative) culture. For instance,

the rabbis adopted and created lists of items forbidden or permitted for ritual reasons such as items you may carry with you for healing purposes on Shabbat. Other texts list elements of a healthy diet or prescribe the right way to behave during conception or pregnancy. This corroborates the notion that lists are intriguing instruments of organizing and producing information, while serving also as "technologies of power" that are crucial for communities, institutions, and states to communicate and implement rules and structures (taxation, census, administration, etc.).[54]

Another similarity can be adduced that connects lists with the heart of ancient rabbinic discourse. Both modern scholarship and the tradition itself have highlighted that Talmudic texts originate in an oral tradition complementing revealed Scripture. Within this context of transmitting teachings, (hybrid) lists perform the function of a structuring, mnemonic device that facilitates the study and transfer of whole chunks of tradition.[55] This holds true for pairs of opposing lists, thematically bound enumerative sequences or clusters of repetitive elements (e.g., the ethical discourse in *SEZ* 3).

Furthermore, it has been emphasized that selection and decontextualization of the singular items are prerequisite for list-making, which is supplemented by their (re)contextualization within the lists and its broader context (Mainberger 2003, 19). Studies on rabbinic literature have likewise stressed that the rabbis built their discourse on the purposeful selection, segmentation, and atomization of biblical verses, words, or Talmudic teachings from which they developed their exegetical, homiletical, and legal thinking. These techniques were adumbrated through careful actualization, intertextual relations, and their embedding into new discursive coherencies.[56] Lists seem to chime in well with this preference. In simple or contrasting form, they enumerate diverse items connected only by their respective caption or a broader theme. Consequently, the rabbinic preference for atomization forms a solid base for the itemization in lists. In rare cases, the ancient and indeed the modern recipient is in the position to identify the particular sources of lists as well as their ways of transmission so as to better understand their (different) functions and purposes.

In most of the above examples, we could see that lists are not standalone elements. They are deeply embedded in discourses on moral behavior, religious law and lore, or on historical, sociological, and scientific knowledge about the world and human life in particular. These overarching themes define the various functions of rabbinic lists. Conversely, the lists themselves shape the discourse. However, lists constitute only one

discursive element among others. Most lists neatly interact with other stylistic and instructional elements from rabbinic tradition such as exempla, anecdotes, parables, or dialectic reasoning. In *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, we saw how lists use biblical verses or quotes from Jewish tradition, thereby drawing on the core-expertise of rabbinic sages—namely the knowledge and interpretation of Scripture and religious law.

Finally, the texts have shown that rabbis employed lists and enumerations within various and, at times, converging contexts—from recipes and health advice to exegesis and ethical formation—but to the same ends. For those small text forms do not only constitute a simple device or container for indexing and conveying already self-contained knowledge; rather, they serve as powerful cognitive tools or vehicles that offer additional epistemic value and advance the broader project of the production of rabbinic knowledge. The use of numerical list captions, guiding questions, or categories resemble core features of what Gianna Pomata designates as "epistemic genres," where they serve as "signposts indicating direction for further observation and enquiry" (see Pomata 2014; here: 8). While facilitating the classification of phenomena, observations, or experiences, they "challenge extant knowledge formations, but also create new ones […] (which amount to new ways of seeing and doing)."[57]

In his seminal study from 1977, while clearly pushing back dichotomies such as Western/Oriental or Modern/Ancient, Jack Goody emphasizes that the production of lists as a cultural practice is connected to specific "modes of thought," which he subdivides into three types or functions. First, *retrospective* lists that form a kind of inventory of persons, objects, or events (e.g., lists of kings, treasures, or battles). These can store and transmit data. Second, *prescriptive* lists, which are mainly geared toward a particular action, event, or process (shopping lists, administration procedures, flowcharts, guest lists, etc.). Although the function of such lists is not primarily related to storage, their reception may shift them into lists of the first category (i.e., guest lists of a certain event). Third, *lexical* or *encyclopedic* lists combine a bundle of concepts or practices that may serve as a proto-dictionary/lexicon of a culture or a handbook for a certain field.[58] Rabbinic lists for the most part appear to combine all three of Goody's functions in astonishing, multifarious, and often inextricable ways. Lists constitute epitomes of information received in a form that represents and affords order, accessibility, and usability. As such, lists helped the rabbinic authors to structure and authorize their discourse, while creating new insights, orders, and hierarchies—be it through sociological-ethical

categorization of behavioral patterns and character types, lists of symptoms, or via elaborated disease taxonomies or catalogues of therapies.[59] Accordingly, lists contributed to the rabbinic project(s), primarily as collections of law and lore that functioned simultaneously as cultural inventories, store houses of knowledge, and practical reference works.[60] They thus facilitate the transfer of knowledge of the world and the body into the world of the rabbinic study house and eventually into the quasi-canonical Talmudic corpus, an encyclopedic body of knowledge. Although we know little about how rabbinic lists were used by contemporary readers, it is worth noting that early medieval traditions (e.g., the "midrash of lists") valued Talmudic list-making as a crucial cultural practice, a means of making sense of religious lore and the order of the world.[61]

NOTES

1. I am very grateful to the LISTLIT work group at Freiburg for organizing a truly inspiring, interdisciplinary conference and for their diligent editing of this volume. I am also indebted to the questions and comments on my paper during the conference and the editing process as well as to my colleagues' presentations from which I have learned much. My study of lists within the medical discourse in rabbinic texts is based on my research as a member (2013–2020) of the transdisciplinary working group A03 "The Transfer of Medical Episteme in the 'Encyclopedic' Compilations of Late Antiquity" as part of the DFG-funded Collaborative Research Center SFB 980 "Episteme in Motion" at the Freie Universität Berlin. Moreover, I have learned a lot about lists within ancient Mesopotamian culture from the members of the ERC-funded research group BabMed (Babylonian Medicine): Markham J. Geller, Ulrike Steinert, and J. Cale Johnson. I am much obliged to Markham J. Geller, who read and commented on a previous version of this article.
2. Mainberger 2018, 97. On ad hoc lists, see Doležalová 2009b.
3. See von Contzen 2017. See also Young 2013a, 498–499 on the multifariousness of the list.
4. For a detailed discussion of such compound lists, see the discussion on the midrash *Seder Eliyahu* later. The overlap and differences between rabbinic clusters of lists and complex list formats such as tables, catalogues, or indices will be further discussed in Lennart Lehmhaus, Rabbinic Lists as "Epistemic Genre": exegesis, ethics, and science, in *Lists and Synopses* (forthcoming 2021).
5. See von Soden 1936, 411–464 and 509–557. For *Listenwissenschaft* as a concept, a survey of the reception and critique of this idea, see Hilgert

2009; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2010, 13–18, and most recent Van De Mieroop 2018. Visi 2009, esp. 12–14, questions the uncritical adoption of this idea in disciplines that deal with different sources and cultural backgrounds.

6. For a sharp critique of the traditional approach (van Soden), see Veldhuis 1997, 137–139.

7. Cancik-Kirschbaum 2010, 19–33. See also Rochberg 2016.

8. On ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian lists and their didactic purposes, see Cancik-Kirschbaum 2010, esp. 19–21; Veldhuis 1997, 137–146; Quack 2015. See Steinert 2018, and the other contributions in the same volume on *Assyrian and Babylonian Scholarly Text Catalogues* dealing with lists that form a curriculum or field of knowledge.

9. Reed 2014, 25, in her theoretical discussion states: "attention to choices of literary form and framing, as possible clues as to the different settings of 'scientific' training and transmission; not just to consider the content of the extant records of 'ancient Jewish sciences,' but to ask what their literary context might reveal about the 'context of transmission of scholarly knowledge'—'what textual formats or genres of scientific writings are attested? And what sort of authorial strategies did ancient Jewish scholars pursue?'"

10. See Neusner 1990, 317–321; here 317: "The logical basis of coherent speech and discourse derives from *Listenwissenschaft*. The paramount mode of reasoning in the Mishnah is 'analogical contrastive reasoning'. The logic may be expressed very simply. All persons, things, or actions that fall within a different species of that same genus follow a single rule. All persons, things, or actions that fall within a different species of that same genus follow precisely the opposite rule. Reasoning by analogy and contrast dominates in the formation of the Mishnah's rules, and is, therefore, its generative mode of thought."

11. See Young 2013a. On the knowledge-producing function of lists, see Pommerening 2015 (ancient Egypt); and the other contributions in Deicher and Maroko 2015.

12. Young 2013a, b, 499: "No matter which epistemological order determines the conditions of truth and knowledge of an epoch—be it conceptualized as an episteme, 'mode of thought,' monopoly of knowledge, or otherwise—the list persists." See also Schaffrick and Werber 2017.

13. Belknap 2000, 35–36.

14. While not following her terminology, I very much agree with Mainberger 2018, 92, who argues against a medial/visual definition: "Entscheidet man sich aber statt der Rede von 'Listen' für diejenige vom 'Aufzählen' und vom 'Enumerativen', hat man eine in viele verschiedene Richtungen offene und Vorentscheidungen (auch für mediale Aspekte) vermeidende Terminologie gewählt."

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15. See Wünsche 1911; Nador 1962; Towner 1973; Shasha 2006. The ency-clopedic character of the Mishnah is emphasized in the title of its recent German translation (see Correns 2005).
16. Shasha 2006, 36–51 (for a definition) and 52–79 (for a form-critical description).
17. For example, ethical concepts, knowledge of nature, hermeneutical, lexi-cal, syntactical, legal, or exegetical analogy; see Towner 1973, esp. 59–212.
18. For an introduction to rabbinic literary formats, see Samely 2007.
19. See the instruction for the specific garments of the (High) priests (Ex. 28), the inventory of items stolen by Nebuchadnezzar from Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7–11), the detailed census and genealogy of the exiled in Babylonia (Ezra 2). See Scolnic 1995. On lists in post-biblical Jewish traditions, see Tzoref 2011 (Qumran); Brady 2009 (eschatological lists in Targum), Swartz 2018, esp. 135–149 (incantations and curses).
20. See the survey in Lehmhaus 2015.
21. On the 18 benedictions of the daily *Amidah*-prayer as a list-making device, see Adelman 2009, 265–268. On the trope of Abraham's ten trials in ancient Jewish tradition, see Noegel 2003. For different usages of the list in *PRE*, see Keim 2016, 209–211.
22. See Reed 2014, 31: "In *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer*, moreover, ethical, ritual and 'scientific' materials are all presented in terms of a *Listenwissenschaft* that raises intriguing possibilities of some connection to pedagogical prac-tice. Through numbered lists, the cycles and principles of Jewish piety are depicted as part of the divine order that permeates, enlivens, and supports the entire created world." See also Langermann 2002, 169–176.
23. This tradition comprises different branches of texts: the "Midrash of Three and Four," the "Seven Canopies" or "Canopy of Elijah" and the "Chapters of our Holy Master" (*Pirqe Rabbenu ha-Qaddosh*). The major part of all texts contains lists with three and four items. All traditions feature a con-stantly growing number of items in the lists but differ with regard to the highest number in a given text. In *Huppat Eliyahu* the number of list items grows up to 24 (God's gifts to the priesthood in Israel) in the last one. The *Midrash Three and Four* even adds a list concerning the 70 names of Torah. However, the text omits some lists and has after 13 items only 18, 24, and 70. The most condensed range of those three traditions has the midrash *Pirqe Rabbenu ha-Qaddosh* proceeding only from 3 to 12 items (12 impor-tant parts of the human body).
24. While all three traditions share this overall structure, the exact sequence, comprehensiveness, and content of these texts and the various lists con-tained vary significantly. For a discussion of the non-eclectic but creative momentum of knowledge-making and the different topics covered by those lists (i.e., biology; the human body; diet, health and illness; biblical

events, figures and places; linguistic peculiarities; rituals and customs; dream interpretation; astrology/astronomy; cosmology; eschatology; ethics; scholarly etiquette), see Lehmhaus 2015, esp. 71–83.

25. See Lehmhaus 2018 on interaction between post-Talmudic Jewish traditions (midrash etc.) and new models of writing, thought, education, and cultural behavior in early Islamic times.

26. See Nutton 2013, 43–44, 72, 152 and 174–182 (Dioscorides, Scrribonius, Pliny, the Elder).

27. On lists and recipes as a key genre in ancient Mesopotamian traditions, see Geller 2010, 89–117 (and the literature mentioned there); Goody 1977, esp. 129–145. See Telle 2003, for discussions of recipes as a (literary) genre. On rabbinic recipes, see Amit 2017; Lehmhaus 2017; and the other chapters in Lehmhaus and Martelli 2017. On efficacy labels, see Lehmhaus 2019, esp. 150–152; Steinert 2015.

28. The exact meanings of the Hebrew terms for plants or fruits used in this list are far from obvious. The standard translations refer to either "melilot ('sweet clove'?), date berries, and unripe dates" or "cherries, bad dates, and unripe dates." See the lists in b. Eiruvin 28a and b. Gittin 70a, Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (ARNa) 41, 66b. Löw 1881, 94–96 questions the medieval and early modern understanding of *gdgdnywt* as "cherries." Based on Syriac evidence he proposes the reading *grgrnywt*. Also y. Peah 8,5 (21a) and y. Eruvin (20a) mention *gdgdnywt*. Rabbinic texts (e.g., t.Shevi'it 3:21, t. Ma'asser Sheni 1:14, y. Orla 1,7, 61b) mention *kpnywt*, which the Academy of the Hebrew Language connects to Aramaic and Arabic *kwprʾ* ("inflorescence of palms"). On *pgy tmrh* for "unripe dates," see Löw 1881, 390–391, and Sokoloff 1992, 424.

29. For my translations of this and other Talmudic texts, the manuscript versions and printed editions in the Sol and Evelyn Henkind Talmud Text Databank of the Saul Lieberman Institute of Talmudic Research (http://www.lieberman-institute.com) were consulted. The same list figures in Kallah Rabbati 8:1, and in the above-mentioned *Ma'asse Torah* tradition (see Eisenstein 1915, *Pirka Rabbeinu Ha-Kaddosh* ch. 1, list 58).

30. Such questions figure in the genre of riddle-tales (e.g., the *Story of Ahikar*, Samson's biblical riddle in Judges 14:14; *Midrash Mishle* (Proverbs), or the questions posed to the protagonist by King Nebuchadnezzar in the early medieval *Tales of Ben Sira*) but are also deployed in several rabbinic traditions such as the contest between rabbis or the elders and Alexander the Great or the wise men of Athens. See Yassif 1982; Lassner 1993, esp. 9–24, Hasan-Rokem 2000, esp. 39–66.

31. See Donahue 2016a & 2016b.

32. See Lehmhaus 2017.

33. See Avot de-Rabbi Nathan B, chapter 30; Leviticus Rabbah 34,3 (toilet); m.Berakhot 2:6 and y.Berakhot 2:7 (5b); t.Shabbat 12:13 amd y.Shabbat 14:3 (14c); b.Shabbat 41a (discussion of the practice and benefits of bathing); see y.Shev 8:2 (38a); y.Ma'asser Sheni 2:1 (53b); y.Shabbat 8:1 (11b); y.Shabbat 14:3–4 (14b-d); b.Berakhot 43a-b; b.Yoma 77b (anointing against different ailments).

34. See Satlow 1995. On the distinct nature of Jewish discourse on sexuality in comparison to Greco-Roman and early Christian traditions, see Boyarin 1993. On the Persian-Iranian contexts, see Kiel 2016.

35. The anonymous compilers, however, questioned the understanding of "usage" (*tashmish*) as referring to sex because of the supposedly weakening of the body through intercourse. Rather, they recommend the meaning of "usage" as referring to the body's orifices and the act of excretion. This interpretation would comply with the crucial importance of functioning digestion and purgative measures within Greco-Roman health regimens.

36. See parallels in Leviticus Rabba 16,1; Kalla Rabbati 1. See b.Pesahim 112b. and b.Gittin 70 for other sexual practices that cause epilepsy in adults and children.

37. Sex omens in ancient Mesopotamian traditions that also link the specific circumstances of the intercourse to different effects—such as various diseases, bodily, the sex of the conceived child, the prognosis for a healthy pregnancy—might compare to those Talmudic lists. See Guinan 1997 and Geller 2004, esp. 34–35.

38. For a careful and learned analysis of the coital discourse of the rabbis in their ancient contexts, see Bickart 2016.

39. Such lists include: for example, priestly blemishes in m.Bekhorot 7; those exempted from the pilgrimage festivals because of disabilities, sickness, age, gender, and so on (m. Ḥagigah 1:1). See Abrams 1998, 16–70; Wyszynski 2001.

40. See Belser/Lehmhaus 2016, esp. 436–442.

41. See Bien 1997: 79–84 (during conception) and 130–42 (during pregnancy). A Talmudic tradition in y.Ḥagigah 2:1 (77b-c) explains the later apostasy of a famous scholar via the smell of sacrificial wine and meat from gentile temples that drew his mother's attention during pregnancy.

42. See Mulder 2015.

43. See Lehmhaus 2019, 133–134, and the literature mentioned.

44. On lists in *SEZ* 1 as devices to define and convey the integrated concept of justice, righteousness and charity, see Lehmhaus 2015, 66–71.

45. This question might refer either to the system of judgment according to one's ways (the core topic of *SEZ* 3) or to the problem how one is supposed to change one's ways.

46. I argue that, since *SEZ* focuses on return and repentance, by doing so the angel mirrors the person's deeds and eventually makes them change their ways.

47. *SEZ*, ch. 3. The translation is my own, based on the edition by Friedman 1902, 176. See translation by Braude/Kapstein 1981, 375.

48. Such techniques of self-awareness and mindfulness are also applied in SEZ, ch. 13 (see ARNa 20,70) to emphasize the triad of study, righteousness, and charity as well as the crucial importance of Torah and human dependence on God. On these techniques, see Schofer 2005, 106–115 and 147–160.

49. See similar lists with ethical advice in Hebrew traditions such as Avot 3,1; *Derekh Eretz Rabbah* 3,1; *Derekh Eretz Zuta* 4,9; ARNa 19,69; y.Sota 2:2 (18a); Leviticus Rabbah 18:1; Kalla Rabbati 6: "Meditate upon three things and you will not descend into transgression: Know from where you are, where you are going, and before whom you will give account. From where do you come? From a putrid drop. Where will you go? To a place of dust, worm, and maggot. And before whom will you give account? Before the King of king, the Holy One, blessed be He." On such techniques, see Foucault 1988.

50. *SEZ*, ch. 3, 375 (Braude/Kapstein translation) and 176 (edition Friedman). Divine "surveillance" is stressed in Avot 2:1; ARNb 32,70.

51. In *SEZ*, ch. 3 follows another cluster of lists introduced by a numerical caption ("Generally a man marries for one of four reasons"), which is then specified (lust, wealth, fame, sake of heaven) and adumbrated with short narratives and biblical proof texts. On other lists in *SEZ*, see ns. 46 and 47.

52. For ethical traditions, see Schofer 2007. See Sperber 1990; Bernard 2008 (*Avot*) for lists within rabbinic manuals of ethical conduct. Those lists focus on modest or pious behavior of the learned sage but also specify the hardships to expect by choosing a "life of Torah study." Other lists contain social observations about different types of behavior, hatred, social classes, and so on. Cf. Charles 2000 on similar taxonomies (wirtues and vices) in other traditions.

53. Young 2013a, 501–502 and 505.

54. See Vismann 2008, 71–101.

55. On the orality/literacy of lists, see Young 2013a, 499–501. On their mnemonic function, see Mainberger 2003, esp. 64–75. On rabbinic orality and mnemonics, see Jaffee 1995; Hallo 2003.

56. Among others, one may mention here Samely 2007, esp. 25–77.

57. Young 2017, 26 (on Goody). See Young 2013b, and von Contzen 2016, 257: "Lists, because they encapsulate the tensions and fascinations of narration and dis-narration, are a perfect way of throwing new light on the complex interplay of the creation of meaning in and through narratives, of

involving the readers in the processes of sense-making, and, ultimately, of the inextricable connection between form and function that lies at the heart of all literature."

58. On the last point in Mesopotamian contexts, see below n. 12.

59. For the use of lists to create disease taxonomies or therapeutic catalogues, see Lehmhaus 2015, 83–93, and Lehmhaus, Rabbinic Lists as "Epistemic Genre," see n. 4.

60. See Towner 1973, 4, who sees lists "as devices for systematizing observations about nature, geography and man, and as pedagogical and mnemonic tools for conveying this information to students and posterity."

61. On lists as scaffold of the *Ma'aseh Torah* and its sibling traditions, see Lehmhaus 2015, 71–83.

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