



BRILL

JOURNAL OF JEWISH LANGUAGES 3 (2015) 309–323



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# Reconsidering the Emergence of Non-core Dative Constructions in Modern Hebrew

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## Abstract

This article critically scrutinizes the perceived view that the emergence of non-core dative constructions in Modern Hebrew is due to a Slavic-Yiddish influence. It studies the Biblical and Mishnaic sources, showing that these language strata contain highly similar constructions to the ones in Modern Hebrew. It additionally shows that parallel constructions existed in languages spoken in the Jewish communities at the time of the revival, revealing that this linguistic phenomenon is typologically widely attested. We therefore claim that this could be an example of an internalization of the old grammar in the new spoken language, enhanced by the fact that similar constructions are reflected in the non-Hebrew native languages of the revival era speakers. These speakers, at the same time, imported into their colloquial Hebrew a sub-type of non-core dative—the discursive dative—to which they could not have been exposed through the ancient written texts, since this type of dative construction occurs only in the spoken language.

## Keywords

non-core dative – affected dative – ethical dative – discursive dative – co-referential dative – Biblical Hebrew – Mishnaic Hebrew – Modern Hebrew

\* We wish to thank Edit Doron, an anonymous reviewer, and the audience at the Departmental Seminar, Department of Hebrew Language, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This research is supported by an ISF grant #1366/14 to Nora Boneh and the European Union grant IRG 030-2227 to Elitzur Bar-Asher Siegal. The translation into English of the Biblical Hebrew examples is from <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/>. The translation into English of the Rabbinic Hebrew examples is E. Bar-Asher Siegal's.

## Introduction

This article examines the emergence of constructions containing a non-core dative preceded by the dative preposition *le-* (henceforth, datives, dative constructions), which are frequently used in Modern Hebrew. It focuses on constructions in which a nominal phrase (henceforth DP) that is dative-marked is interpreted as an affected participant, positively or negatively affected by the underlying occurrence (i.e., as being a beneficiary or maleficiary participant or as being endowed possession or deprived of it—possessor dative), as a discursive dative, or as the reflexive co-referential dative, in which the dative-marked DP shares agreement features with the subject of the clause (for discussion of these classifications see Berman 1982; Halevy 2004, 2007, 2013; Dattner 2014; Bar-Asher Siegal & Boneh 2014, 2015a, 2015b).<sup>1</sup> An investigation concerning the evolution or disappearance of other types of constructions featuring a dative marked DP are beyond the scope of this short paper; thus, we leave out of the discussion dative marked DPs that are clearly arguments selected by the predicate covering the semantic roles: recipient/goal, experiencer and the agentive dative (cf. Berman 1982) in alternations such as *איבדתי את הספר/הספר אבד לי ?ibadeti ?et ha-sefer/?avad li ha-sefer* 'I lost the book/I got the book lost'<sup>2</sup> as they are known to be found in old strata of Hebrew (Gesenius 1910, §119s).<sup>3,4</sup>

Any inquiry about the origin of a given phenomenon in Modern Hebrew has to answer the following two questions:

- 1) Is the phenomenon under discussion attested in earlier Hebrew corpora, and if it is, are its distributional and interpretative properties similar to that of Modern Hebrew?
- 2) Is it possible to identify a language, or several languages in the same geographical area, spoken by Jewish communities prior to the revival of

<sup>1</sup> Previous literature also features the category of the ethical dative. Some of the examples from the literature that fall within this category are included as cases of affected dative (when there is a psychological effect), and some are characterized as discursive dative in the current typology (see Bar-Asher Siegal & Boneh 2015b for the relationship between the various classifications of the non-core datives).

<sup>2</sup> (i) a. *?ibadeti*                   *?et*                   *ha-sefer*  
            Lost                           ACC                   the-book  
            'I lost the book.'  
      b. *ha-sefer*                   *?avad*                   *l-i*  
            The-book                   lost                   to-1.SG  
            'I got the book lost.'

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Samuel 9:20, Minor Tractates, *Semachot* 6:11, and Babylonian Talmud 8a.

<sup>4</sup> See also Breuer 1987:132–134.

Modern Hebrew that is unique in instantiating the phenomenon under consideration, and which at the same time is not attested in Jewish languages that are unrelated geographically and genetically?

When answering the first question negatively and the second question positively, it is reasonable to assume, from a diachronic point of view, that the language which is mentioned in the answer to the second question is the origin of the phenomenon under discussion in Modern Hebrew. Answering the first question positively, however, does not necessarily reject the possibility that the existence of a similar phenomenon in other contemporary languages contributed to the re-emergence of that phenomenon in Modern Hebrew. It is still possible, and perhaps even likely, that the internalization of the old grammar in the new spoken language has been enhanced by the fact that it was reflected in the non-Hebrew native language of the revival era speakers as well.

We will show here that, for the most part, the first question should be answered positively and the second negatively. We will claim, however, that this is still not merely an internalization of the old grammar, as some development did take place in Modern Hebrew, although we cannot point to a specific origin, as there could be many. As we will show, beneficiary/maleficiary and so-called possessor datives, which we will refer to here as “affected datives,” are already attested in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew, in a way highly similar to Modern Hebrew, both distributionally and interpretatively. These constructions are also attested in languages that were spoken by speakers of different origins present at the time of the revival and, in general, by members of the Jewish communities prior to the time of revival in different regions of the Jewish Diaspora.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, this linguistic phenomenon is not limited only to these languages, as typologically non-core datives are a widely attested phenomenon (*inter alia* Payne & Barshi 1999; Zúñiga & Kittilä 2010; Horn 2008). Only one type of non-core dative, the discursive dative, which is a feature of spoken language, cannot be considered a re-emergence of an old phenomenon; since it does not appear in the ancient Hebrew texts, its appearance is probably purely due to the modern languages spoken at the time of revival. Affected and discursive datives are widely available in both European and Semitic languages spoken in the Jewish communities, so it is not at all clear to which languages the re-emergence of these constructions in Modern Hebrew should be attributed. Previously, it has been claimed that it is entirely due to a Slavic-Yiddish influence, and we wish to demonstrate that this is not a tenable claim as such

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that not only Jews of East-European origin lived in pre-1948 Palestine and were part of the time of the revival. See for instance Vilnay (1963:183–190).

and that it should be considerably nuanced. Consequently, the paper wishes to reject the following two claims, repeatedly made in the literature:

Claim 1: Non-core dative constructions have a much wider range of uses than in earlier stages of the Hebrew language (this claim is mentioned in Berman 1982 and endorsed by others, such as Halevy 2007, 2013; Linzen 2014; Zeldes 2013).<sup>6</sup>

Claim 2: The new dative constructions of colloquial Modern Hebrew are due to a Slavic-Yiddish influence (Evan-Zohar 1986; Halevy 2007, 2013; Zeldes 2013).

With respect to Claim 1, we will demonstrate that only one of its uses, the discursive dative, is unattested in the classical texts, whereas, with respect to Claim 2, we will argue that it is impossible to point to a specific language or group of languages as the source of the re-emergence of these constructions in colloquial Modern Hebrew.

### Non-core Datives in Modern Hebrew

In order to examine the origin of the phenomenon under discussion, we begin with a brief semantic description of the relevant constructions in Modern Hebrew. Such a description will allow us to seek parallels in previous periods and in other languages.

We discuss here three groups of non-core datives: affected datives, which cover beneficiary/maleficiary and possessive datives (and under some classifications also ethical datives) exemplified in (1); discursive datives in (2); and co-referential datives/reflexive datives in (3). The following are all attested examples:

- (1) a. *אחר-כך הוא טס לי לשנה למזרח, והשair אותו חרדה ולחוצה*  
 ?aharkax hu tas l-i le-šana la-mizrah ve-hiš?ir  
 then he flew to-1.SG to-year to.the-east and-left  
 ?oti ḥareda ve-leḥuca  
 me anxious and stressed

6 It is likely that a similar assumption stands behind the prescriptive opposition to the use of some of these constructions (Sivan 1976); See also "רישימת אל תאמר-אמור".

'Then he flew on me to the Far East for a year, and left me anxious and stressed.'

(<http://www.mishpat-info.co.il/%D7%A2%D7%93-%D7%A9%D7%90%D7%99%D7%AA%D7%99-%D7%A2%D7%A9%D7%94-%D7%A4%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%99B%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%90%D7%94-%D7%99C%D7%99-%D7%94%D7%A0%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%99>, May 19, 2007, accessed November 23, 2013)

b. מפתיע איך אף אחד לא שבר להם את הבית עד עכשו.

*maftiya<sup>c</sup>* eyx *af eħad* lo šavar la-hem ?et ha-bayit  
surprising how no-one not broke to-3.M.PL ACC the house  
ħad ſaxšav  
till now

'It's surprising how come no one broke their house on them yet.'

(<http://www.ynet.co.il/Ext/App/TalkBack/CdaViewOpenTalkBack/o,1382,L-4527341,oo.html>, June 5, 2014, accessed November 23, 2013)

- (2) a. איזה טס למשחק? באשקלון הוא לא הולך פתאום טס לי לשוויזן?  
*?eyze tas la-mišħak?* *be-ħaškelon hu lo holex*  
 which fly to.the-game in-Ashkelon he not go  
*pit?om tas l-i le-švayc?!*  
 suddenly flying to-1.SG to-Switzerland?!  
 'What do you mean fly to the (soccer) game, even to Ashkelon he won't go, suddenly he's flying to Switzerland?! Unbelievable!'  
 (<http://www.fxp.co.il/showthread.php?t=12983482&page=446>, June 9, 2005, accessed November 23, 2013 )

b. המשגה הרביעי הוא החשיבה שמסחר לטוח קוצר מספק הזרמניות להרוויה  
הרבה מהר ובקלות, ובaan שוברים לך שלושה חוקים מרכזיים של החיים

*ha-mišge ha-reviši hu ha-ħašiva*  
 the-mistake the-fourth to-3.M.SG the-thinking  
*še-mišhar li-tvaħ kacar mesapek hizdamnuyot*  
 that-commerce to.range short provides opportunity  
*leħarviaħ harbe maher u-vekalut ve-kan šovrim*  
 to.earn a lot quick and-easily and-here break  
*le-xa šloša ħukim merkaziym šel ha-ħayim*  
 to-2.M.SG three rules central of the-life

'The fourth mistake is thinking that commerce in the short run provides an opportunity to earn a lot quickly and easily, and here, contrary to your (=one's) expectations, three central rules of life are broken.'  
[\(January 31, 2007, accessed November 23, 2013\)](http://www.bizportal.co.il/list/articles/o)

- (3) a. *לא מזמן טסנו לנו לחץ שבוע בחו"ל*

*lo mizman              tasnu l-anu    le-haci šavuña be-hul*  
 not long.time.ago    flew    to-1.PL to-half week    in-abroad  
 'Not long ago we flew for half a week abroad.'

[\(October 13, 2007, accessed November 23, 2013\)](http://www.tapuz.co.il/forums2008/viewmsg.aspx?forumid=973&messageid=106943816)

- b. *נשבר לו עוד קיץ על המרפסת*

*nišbar    l-o              ſod        kayic        ſal ha-mirpeset*  
 broke    to-3.M.SG another summer on the-balcony  
 'Another summer came to an end on the balcony.'

[\(February 17, 2008, accessed November 23, 2013\)](http://shironet.mako.co.il/artist?type=lyrics&lang=1&prfid=301&wrkid=2235)

Affected datives contribute to truth conditions in that the dative marked DP denotes an event participant that is seen as affected by the occurrence expressed in the sentence either materially or psychologically (Bar-Asher Siegal & Boneh 2014, 2015b). In contrast, discursive datives and co-referential datives, which are only pronominal, do not have such a contribution to truth-conditions. The truth conditional meaning of the sentence is unaltered whether the dative pronoun is there or not. The discursive dative, restricted to first and second person pronouns, indicating the speech event participants, is felicitous in contexts where the proposition asserted constitutes an exception to a generalization available to the speech event participant in the conversational background (Bar-Asher Siegal & Boneh 2015a). Finally, the co-referential dative, easily identifiable as a subcategory of non-core datives because its inflectional features match those of the subject DP, is non-truth conditional, like the discursive dative (cf. Gesenius 1910, §119s). An adequate formulation of its interpretative contribution has not been achieved; see Al-Zahre & Boneh (2010) and Halevy (2004, 2007, 2013) for recent attempts. For studies on the various non-core dative constructions see Berman (1982), Borer & Grodzinsky (1986), Landau (1999), Halevy (2004, 2007, 2013), Dattner (2014), Gafter (2014), Linzen (2014), and Ariel et al. (2015).

### Non-core Datives in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew

Speakers of Hebrew at the time of its revival were likely to be exposed to affected (4) and co-referential datives (5) found in Biblical and Classical Rabbinic texts (as for these datives in the Biblical corpus, see Muraoka 1978; Dan 2013):

- (4) a. שָׁמַר לְעַבְדָּךְ דָּוד אֲבִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר דָּבַרְתָּ לוֹ  
 šəmor                      lə-'abda-kā                      Dāvid 'āb-i  
 keep.IMPR.2.M.SG    to-sevant-POSS.2.M.SG    David father-POSS.1.SG  
 'et                      'ašer                      dibbartā                      l-ō  
 ACC                      REL                      say.PST.2.M.SG                      to-3.M.SG  
 'Keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him.'  
 (1 Kings 8:25)
- b. השוכר את הפועל לשמר לו את הפרה ולשמר לו את התינוק  
 has-soker                      'et                      hap-po'el                      lišmor                      l-o                      et  
 the-hire.PTCP.M.SG    ACC                      the-worker                      watch.INF                      to-3.M.SG ACC  
 hap-para                      we- lišmor                      l-o                      'et                      hat-tinoq  
 the-cow                      and-watch.INF                      to-3.M.SG                      ACC                      the-child  
 'When someone hires a worker in order to watch his cow or his child.'  
 (Tosefta, Šabb. 17:26)
- c. מי ילְקַח־לְנוּ  
 mi                      yēlek=l-ānū  
 who                      go.FUT.3.M.SG=to-1.PL  
 'Who will go for us?' (Isaiah 6:8)
- (5) a. הַלְךָ לְאַתָּה הַלְךָ לְוָיְמָם  
 hag-gešem                      hālap̄                      hālak                      l-ō  
 the-rain                      pass.PST.3.M.SG                      go.PST.3.M.SG                      to-3.M.SG  
 'The rains are over and gone.' (Song of Songs 2:11)
- b. הַלְךָ לְמִדְיָנִית הַיָּם  
 halak                      l-o                      li-mdinat                      hay-yam  
 go.PST.3.M.SG                      to-3.M.SG                      to-land.of                      the.sea  
 'He is gone beyond seas.' (Mishnah, Ketubbot 9:8)

In the appendix we provide more examples of these constructions. As one can easily discern, among the examples mentioned in the appendix, there are

various examples of affected non-core datives that are classified in the literature as possessive datives (4b, iii, iv, v, xii), beneficiary datives (4a, i, ii, ix, x, xi), or maleficiary datives (vi, vii, xiii), alongside non-truth conditional non-core datives, which are co-referential datives (5a–b, xiv). In addition, among the affected datives, the dative expressions are attached to various kinds of VPs, such as unaccusative (vi, ix, x) and unergative (4c), and also to some stative predicates, VP (vii, viii, xi) & AP (xiii). Finally, it must be noted that the use of the dative is not restricted to material effects but may equally describe psychological effects (4a, ii, vii, viii, xi, xiii). As for the referents of the datives, in most of the examples they are represented with pronouns of all persons, but examples of full DP are found too (4a, xii, xiii). In most cases, the referents themselves are animate, but examples of inanimate are documented as well (xii). These are highly similar in their interpretation and distributional properties to the Modern Hebrew affected datives discussed by Bar-Asher Siegal & Boneh (2014, 2015b).

There are of course many Biblical and Mishnaic examples of co-referential datives (for recent studies concerning this construction in these corpora, see Shemesh 2010 and Dan 2013). It is sufficient to mention only a few examples (5, xiv) since there is an overall consensus (*inter alia* Berman 1982) that this is an original Hebrew phenomenon.

Finally, thinking about the corpora to which speakers at the time of the revival of Modern Hebrew were exposed, one must remember that in the rabbinic style of the Middle Period of Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew and Babylonian Aramaic were mixed together, and due to the fact that Hebrew and this dialect of Aramaic are so close, both in vocabulary and in grammar, their grammar often converged. Therefore, it is worth noting that in Babylonian Aramaic affected and reflexive datives are well attested, and could affect those who had used Rabbinic Hebrew as well (Bar-Asher 2007; Bar-Asher Siegal 2014).

Among the Modern Hebrew non-core datives, only the discursive dative group is unattested in the classical corpora. This is not surprising, since even in Modern Hebrew it is very rarely represented in the written language. As Ullendorf (1992:1) noted, this dative “belongs to the sphere of the colloquial, slightly sub-standard, and certainly to popular rather than high-flown speech or writing.” Thus, even if it were spoken in the ancient times when Hebrew was still a spoken language, its appearance in Modern Hebrew is most likely due to the foreign languages spoken by the revivers, but because it was available in all the major linguistic communities at the time of the revival, as we shortly show, it is impossible to pinpoint its origin to an exclusive Slavic-Yiddish origin. It is most likely that its origin is related to the foreign substrata of Modern Hebrew, as it could not have been an imitation of the classical layers of Hebrew. It is

reasonable to suggest that this is a calque at the level of a construction. Thus, speakers who had the three types of non-core datives in their native language, upon reviving the co-referential dative and the affected dative, imported the third type of the datival expression—the discursive one—into their colloquial Hebrew as well.

### Non-core Datives in the Contact Languages

Now that we have established that there is equivalence between constructions containing non-core datives in Modern Hebrew and in the earlier Hebrew corpora, we turn to tackle the second question to be examined when seeking the origin of a construction: which languages could support its existence during the period of the revival of Modern Hebrew?

Truth conditional and non-truth conditional non-core datives are attested in numerous Indo-European languages (Wierzbicka 1988; Zúñiga & Kittilä 2010; Bosse, Bruening, & Yamada 2012; Cuervo 2003, 2010; Horn 2008; Roberge & Troberg 2009 *inter alia*), including the immediate contact languages Yiddish (Mark 1978), Slavic (Evan-Zohar 1986), and Ladino (A. Quintana, p.c.), and can be traced back to Greek (Smyth 1920),<sup>7</sup> Latin (Van Hoeke 1996), and Old Persian (Kent 1953:80–81, Haig 2008:55–58). Due to limited space, here we provide illustrations of discursive datives only from Hungarian (6a) and French (6b). In both these examples, the dative is found in an environment where the underlying proposition counters expectations of the speaker and/or addressee:

- (6) a. *Hihetetlen!*      *Képes*      *és*      *tényleg*      *megnyeri*  
          unbelievable    capable    and    indeed    wins  
      *nekem*      *a verseny-t.*  
      DAT.1SG      the race-ACC  
      ‘It is unbelievable! He can and will bloody well win the race.’ (Rákosi 2008:ex. 3d)
- b. *Au mont St Michel la mer te monte à une de ces vitesses !*  
      At Mont St. Michel, the sea to.2.SG rises in one of these speeds  
      ‘You won’t believe how quickly the sea raises at the Mont St. Michel!’  
      (Leclère 1976)

<sup>7</sup> Bendavid (1967:146–147) attributes some of the features of the co-referential datives in Mishnaic Hebrew to Greek influence.

Similarly, these constructions appear in many Semitic languages (Ullendorf 1992), ancient (Contini 1988, Joosten 1989) and modern, as dialectal Arabic also instantiates this array of constructions. Feghali (1928), Al-Zahre (2003), Al-Zahre & Boneh (2010), and Haddad (2014), for example, documented such constructions in the Levant, in the Syrian and Lebanese dialects. Yoda (2013) provides examples of these dative constructions in various Syro-Palestinian dialects, and Brustad (2000) discusses the function of these constructions in the Egyptian and Moroccan dialects. There is even evidence that some of these constructions were already in use in medieval Judeo-Arabic (Blau 2005). The following are examples of these datives in Judeo-Arabic dialect of Tafilet.<sup>8</sup> Example (7a) illustrates an instance of an affected dative, where the speaker is emotionally affected by the occurrence described in the clause “wanting to go to the land of Israel”; example (7b) is an instance of the discursive dative, where “his standing in the middle of the road” counters the expectations of the speaker. According to our consultant, this example does not convey that s/he is in some way affected by this occurrence.

- (7) a. *la həbbət təmsi=l-i l-iris*  
     why want.PST.2.M.SG go.FUT.2.M.SG=to-1.SG to-the.land  
     ‘Why would you do that to me, to go to the land of Israel?’
- b. *hada wakf=l-i/na f-t-triq*  
     DEM.MS.G stand.3.M.SG=TO-1.SG/PL in-the-road  
     ‘Look at him, he’s standing in the middle of the road!’

It seems then that this phenomenon is widely attested in many languages that were in direct contact with Hebrew at the time of the revival, but is not limited to those. Note, for instance, that discursive datives that clearly resemble the one attested in Modern Hebrew are available in languages that had relatively limited contact with the Hebrew of the revival, as the examples from Hungarian and French above illustrate.

### Conclusions

In light of these data, it is evident that it is impossible to attribute the appearance of these constructions in Modern Hebrew to a single source. This seems

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8 We wish to thank our consultant Moshe Bar-Asher for the examples in this dialect.

to be a case in which the re-emergence of a linguistic phenomenon in Modern Hebrew could have been influenced by parallel constructions in the native spoken languages of the speakers of the revival period. Therefore, not only were the old constructions revived, but an additional construction sharing the same morphology appeared, or at least has been attested and documented for the first time in the history of Hebrew. At the same time, this is a linguistic phenomenon that is typologically widely attested and might be a general feature of natural language. It is difficult, however, to determine to what extent language contact may have influenced conventions of use of non-core datives and issues pertaining to register.

Previous studies that argued for a Slavic-Yiddish origin seem not to have seriously considered the older corpora, and have failed to provide any evidence that supports the claim that initially these constructions were used only among speakers of Slavic languages and not among Jews from other places in the Diaspora, especially in the absence of information pinpointing the emergence of the discursive dative. Their claim might therefore be taken to be sociologically biased at the expense of the linguistic facts.

## Appendix

- .i. אמר-ילִי אָחִי הוּא (בראשית כ,יג)
- .ii. וַתִּשְׁמַר-לָנוּ אֶת-הַחֶסֶד הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה (מל"א ג, ז)
- .iii. וַתִּגְנַּק לְךָ אֶת-הַיָּלֵד (שמות ב, ז)
- .iv. וַעֲבָדְתָּ לוּ אֶת-הָאֱדָמָה (שמו"ב, ט, י)
- .v. שׁוּבְרִין לוּ דְלָתוֹת הַבַּיִת (חֻסְפְתָא שְׁבַת טו, יג)
- .vi. נִשְׁבְּרָה לוּ חֲבִית בַּרְאָשׁ גַּנוּ (בְּבֵלִי, שְׁבַת קי"ע ב)
- .vii. כָּל-פְּשָׁעָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְאֵיךְרוּ לוּ (יחזקאל יח, כב)
- .viii. וְהִיא מַתִּירָה יְהוָה שֶׁלֹּא יִזְכּוּר לוּ מִעֵשָׂה תִּמְרָר (בראשית רבה, וייח פרשה צט)
- .ix. וּבִימִים הַהֵם, שְׁבַט הַדָּנִי מִבְקָשׁ-לוּ נִנְחַלָּה לְשִׁבְתָּה כִּי לֹא נִפְלָה לוּ עַד הַיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּתוֹךְ שְׁבַטִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּנִינְחָלָה (שופטים יח, א)
- .x. מַיְשָׁהוּ לוּ פִּירּוֹת שְׁבִיעִית שְׁנָפְלוּ לוּ לִירּוֹשָׁה (משנה שביעית ט, ט)
- .xi. כָּל זְכִוּתָיו של משה לא עמדו לו בשעת דחקו (מכילתא דרבנן ישמעאל יתרו - מסכתא דעתך פרשה א)
- .xii. שָׁהָר תְּעַשָּׂה לְתָבָה (בראשית ו, טז)
- .xiii. וְאֵשִׁי סְדָם רְעִים וְחַטְּאִים לְיִהּוּ (בראשית יג, יג)
- .xiv. עַתָּה הַגָּה בְּטִיחָתָךְ לְךָ עַל מִשְׁעָנָת הַקְּנָה הַרְצָיוֹן הַזֶּה, עַל-מִאֲרִים (מל"ב יח, כא)

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