

**The Menoras Hamaor
Midrash Anthology**

The Light of Contentment

Yaakov Yosef Reinman

copyright © 2023

Ode to the Menorah

Because this work will shed much light
For all that seek to find the light
To separate the dark from light
I've called it Menorah of Light
The words within glow shining bright
As heavens sparkled with starlight
And angels in celestial flight
Words of greatness, soaring might
Surpass the honeycomb's delight
And free the worthless from their blight
Imbue the fool with wisdom's light
Fulfillment to the erudite
Dispel the spirit's somber night...

Hark then you noble gentry
So ravenous for luxury
Turn away from the thunder
That tears mountaintops asunder
And illuminate your sight
By the seven gleaming Lights
Exalted tablets explained
By the Lord's Finger ingrained
Come break the bread that I extend
All who truly are my friends
Drink deeply of the wines I blend
Upon the table that I've laid
Showbread beautifully arrayed
The table that stands before God.

&&Translator's Foreword

Menoras Hamaor is one of the holiest seforim written in the last thousand years. Over the centuries, it has appealed to the hearts of countless Jewish people and brought them closer to Hashem. In modern times the need for this holy work is greater than ever, and I humbly express my gratitude to the Master of the Universe for granting me the privilege of making it available to the English-speaking Jews of the world.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that Hashem will grant me the strength and the health to complete this important work and that He will grant that my translation be instrumental in the perpetuation of the powerful influence of *Menoras Hamaor*. In the words of David Hamelech, Teach me Your Ways, O God, let me walk in Your Truth, devote my heart to fear Your Name, I will thank You, O God my Lord, with all my heart, and I will honor Your Name forever (Tehillim 86:11-12).

About the Author

The Abohav family was a very prominent Spanish family of outstanding scholars who lived in the Middle Ages., After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, in 1492, branches of the family were established in North Africa, Turkey, Italy, and the ex-Marrano communities of Northern Europe.

The life of the author, Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav, is shrouded in mystery, with very few details available. It is generally accepted that he lived in Spain in the latter half of the fourteenth century. His father, Rabbeinu Avraham Abohav, was quite possibly the Rabbeinu Avraham Abohav to whom Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Asher of Toledo, the son of the R'ash, addressed responsa in *Zichron Yehudah*.

The author's fame rests entirely upon his authorship of *Menoras Hamaor*, which is but one part of a trilogy. The other parts of the trilogy, *Aron Ha'edus* and *Shulchan Hapanim*, have been lost. The author describes all three parts of the trilogy, and their interrelationship, in the "Ode to the Menorah" (Appendix A).

The little that is known about the author's life must be gleaned from what he himself writes in the introductory “Ode to the Menorah” (Appendix A) and “Profile of the Menorah” (Appendix B). In “Profile of the Menorah”, the author writes that a substantial part of his life was devoted to secular affairs. It was in his later years that he turned to writing and the rabbinate. He implies that part of his motivation for writing *Menoras Hamaor* was to have a systematic arrangement of the Agada to draw upon when he had to speak before the people. There is also a tantalizing reference in the “Ode to the Menorah”, Part V. to some time spent in captivity. However, this might only be an allegorical allusion to the time he spent in secular pursuits.

Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav II, a descendant of the author who lived one hundred years later and died in 1493, was known as “the last gaon of Castille”. He studied with Rabbeinu Yitzchak Canpanton and became the head of the Toldeo Yeshiva. In 1491, Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abarbanel studied with him. Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav II wrote many works, including a commentary on *Arba'ah Turim* of Rabbeinu Yaakov ben Asher, the son of the R'ash. Although this last work has been lost, it is quoted extensively in the commentaries of Rabbeinu Yosef Caro, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, who refers to him as one of the greatest scholars of his generation. The authorship of *Menoras Hamaor* is sometimes erroneously attributed to the better known Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav II, but the “Chida” proves that this is not so. (See also *Toldos Haposkim* under “Aron Ha'edus”.)

About Menoras Hamaor

Menoras Hamaor, the Menorah of Light, is one of the great classics of Jewish religious literature. It is a masterwork consisting of seven separate and distinct works, each dealing with a separate and distinct area of Jewish thought — the seven branches of the Menorah.

For over five hundred years, *Menoras Hamaor* has enjoyed spectacular popularity. It has appeared in seventy-six editions and has been translated into Ladino, German, and Yiddish (see Bibliography of Previous Editions

— Appendix C). In 1700, Rabbi Moshe ben Shimeon Frankfurt of Amsterdam wrote a commentary, *Nefesh Yehudah*, on *Menoras Hamaor*. It clarifies many of the author's remarks and draws very heavily *from* the commentaries of Rashi on the Talmud. In 1701, Rabbi Moshe ben Shimeon Frankfurt also published the first translation of *Menoras Hamaor* into German, and in 1721, he published a synopsis of *Menoras Hamaor*, which he called *Sheva Pesilos*, the Seven Wicks.

As its basic premise, *Menoras Hamaor* uses the verse, Turn away from evil and do good, search out peace and pursue it (Tehillim 34:15). Drawing on the chronicles and timeless wisdom of the Agadic portion of the Talmud and on the Midrashim, it develops a system for the improvement of the individual and the fulfillment of his role in society.

This volume, *The Light of Contentment*, discusses the difficulties of coping with a troublesome world and the solutions to be found in the Torah. Other volumes include: *The Light of Expression*, *The Light of Mitzvos*, *The Light of Torah*, *The Light of Teshuvah*, *The Light of Harmony*, and *The Light of Humility*. In the “Profile of the Menorah”, the author outlines the specific purpose of each volume and explains the exact framework and system of the entire Menorah.

In the “Ode to the Menorah”, the author suggests a second purpose for *Menoras Hamaor*. Complaining that, because of the lack of an orderly arrangement of the Agada, Talmudic scholars have concentrated on the Halacha, the legal portion of the Talmud, he insists that the Agada is, at least, of equal importance. He claims that it is foolish to neglect the soul-elevating Agada and study only the finer points of legalities; it is “an affliction without remedy”. With *Menoras Hamaor*, the author hoped to create an orderly structure for the study of the Agada. It has even been suggested that his aim was to accomplish for the Agada what the Rambam had accomplished for the Halacha with his *Mishneh Torah*. The chief success of *Menoras Hamaor*, however, has been as a work of popular inspiration.

There is another *Menoras Hamaor* written by Rabbeinu Yisrael ben Yosef Alnakava, a contemporary of the author. Except for scholarly study, however, it has remained largely unknown. There are both similarities and differences between the two works, and their relationship has always intrigued scholars.

Since *Menoras Hamaor* is, in essence, an orderly arrangement of the Agada, I feel that it is incumbent upon me to interject a cautionary note about the Agada. Unlike the Halacha, which can be adequately understood on many different levels of study, an adequate understanding of the Agada can be achieved only by an in-depth study. The avowed purpose of *Menoras Hamaor* is to use the Agada to underscore the system for personal improvement developed by the author; it is not an analysis or study of the Agada itself, and as such, it quotes the Agada with hardly any comment.

If the reader should take the Agada at face value he will come away with many unanswered questions. There are, however, many excellent works available to assist the reader interested in acquiring a better understanding of the Agada. Among others, these include; the commentary of Rashi on the Talmud, the commentary of Maharsha, which appears as an appendix to most editions of the Talmud, the works of Maharal, and the *Ein Yaakov* anthology. Occasionally, I have quoted from the commentaries, in a footnote, for the benefit of the reader.

It should also be noted that the Agada makes extensive use of the device of anthropomorphism; it often ascribes human form and characteristics to other things and beings in making a point.

About the First Light of the Menorah

The First Light of the Menorah — *The Light of Contentment* — is centered around the Mishnaic statement, “Jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of honor remove a person from the world (Avos 4:21).” The central theme of this volume is developed at length in the extensive “Prologue”. In fact, the Prologue to the First Light of the Menorah is more than twice as long as

any of the Prologues of the other Lights of the Menorah. The author then returns to the theme in the “Epilogue”.

The middle part of the First Light of the Menorah is divided into three sections: Jealousy, Desire, Pursuit of Honor. The second two sections deal with various aspects of those particular drives. The first section, although it is titled “Jealousy”, does not discuss jealousy at all. Rather, it discusses the consequences of a sinful life, focusing on both the danger of retribution in the material world and on the contamination of the soul. Apparently, the author considers jealousy to be the underlying cause of those drives that lead a person into sin. Thus, it is fitting that a general discussion of sinfulness should come under the heading of “Jealousy”.

The author proposes that the first step towards personal improvement is to overcome jealousy and learn to be content. The human yearning for fulfillment should not be sought in momentary advantage in a fleeting world. It should be sought in the timeless rewards of adherence to Hashem and His Torah. It is the enrichment of the soul that is lasting. The enrichment of the body is no more than an illusion.

David Hamelech has told us where to find fulfillment. He wrote, The Torah of God is perfect, it refreshes the soul, the testimony of God is faithful, it enlightens the fool, the directives of God are righteous, they gladden the heart, the commandment of God is clear, it illuminates the eyes, the awe of God is pure, it endures forever, the laws of God are true, they are consistently just, they are more delightful than gold, than many fine gems, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb (Tehillim 19:8-11).

About the Translation

In approaching the translation of *Menoras Hamaor*, I have classified the text into three categories: quotations from the Scripture, quotations from the Talmud and Midrashim, and the discourses of the author. I have used three different methods of translation, translating each respective category according to the method that was, in my opinion, most appropriate.

In translating quotations from the Scripture I have tried to give an exact, word-for-word translation, except for an occasional rearrangement of the words to conform to English syntax. It should be noted, however, that these verses are constructed in such a way that they can take on many different meanings and lend themselves to various interpretations, all of which are valid. In a translation of the Scriptures themselves the translator must address himself to the primary meaning of the verse. However, the Talmud often bases a premise on a secondary meaning of the verse. In this case, the translator must use the meaning that is consistent with the text that quotes it. Wherever the text did not dictate otherwise, I have based my translation on the commentaries of Rashi.

In translating quotations from the Talmud and Midrashim I have done a linear translation, translating the text sentence by sentence. However, I have taken the liberty of easing the task of the reader by amplifying some of the terse statements that are easily understandable only to Talmudic scholars. Wherever it was, necessary and possible I have incorporated the explanations of Rashi into the text itself. Otherwise, I have mentioned them in footnotes. Also, many of the Talmud's derivations from the Scripture are based on Hebrew syntax and lexicology. I have avoided extensive descriptions of these derivations, noting only that the derivation is based on the Hebrew. I have also tried to preserve some of the flavor of the original by translating idioms as they are and not using their English counterparts.

Often, the quotations from the Talmud in *Menoras Hamaor* vary from the standard text. Scholars have, therefore, found it to be a fascinating source that sheds light on some of the various versions of the Talmud that were prevalent in medieval times. Rabbi Moshe ben Shimeon Frankfurt, however, in his introduction to *Nefesh Yehudah*, raises the possibility that some of the variations may be errors due to the uncertainties of typesetting and printing hundreds of years ago. In fact, there are many discrepancies among the various editions of *Menoras Hamaor* itself. Therefore, wherever

I felt it would serve the purpose of clarity I have followed the standard texts.

In translating the thoughts of the author, I have not been able to use either of these methods. These methods are suitable to verses or to passages from the Talmud which are constructed of a series of short, independent phrases. A discourse, however, does not lend itself to linear translation because of the different structure of the two languages. Therefore, I have taken all of the author's thoughts and restructured them in suitable English form, taking care not to include any of my own thoughts. The author's parenthetical comments appear as footnotes.

Only in translating the author's "Ode to the Menorah" have I done a strictly linear translation. However, in order to maintain rhythm and rhyme, a certain amount of descriptive latitude was necessary, and some clarity may have been lost. For a more precise understanding of the author's intention the original should be used.

I would also like to point out that in translating one of the Names of Hashem I have deviated from the standard translation. The Name Elokim is ordinarily translated as "God". Rashi, in Sanhedrin 2b, points out that Elokim is an expression of sovereignty, and therefore, it is an appropriate designation for the courts. Rabbeinu Moshe ben Yosef di Trani (the "Mabit"), in *Bais Elokim*, Part 3, Chapter 4, explains that there are two classes of Names of Hashem. One class reflects his essence and power. Chief among these is the Tetragrammaton (Yod Kay Vav Kay). The other class reflects his sovereignty over the universe. This class includes such Names as Elokim, Kail, Eloka, and Adnus. Therefore, I have translated Elokim as "the Lord".

It is possible that the standard translation is based on an error. Because the Tetragrammaton is unutterable, the Name of Adnus is used in reading it. Thus, in translating the Tetragrammaton followed by Elokeinu the first Name is translated as "the Lord", an acceptable translation of the Name of Adnus, and consequently, Elokeinu is translated as "our God". In fact,

regardless of its reading, the Tetragrammaton should be translated as “God” and Elokeinu as “our Lord”.

Because of the brevity of the Hebrew language as compared with the English language, I have also synopsised some parts of the text to gain readability. These parts are essentially concerned with the derivation of concepts rather than with the concepts themselves. Some segments, especially in Section II, Part 3, have also been abridged where the subject, because of its delicacy, did not lend itself to translation out of Hebrew, the holy language. The index, however, contains all references mentioned in *Menoras Hamaor*. If they do not appear in this translation they appear in the original.

PROLOGUE

%%Rabbi Elazar Hakapor says: “Jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of honor remove a person from the world (Avos 4:21).”

&&These three character traits cause great harm to anyone who possesses them. They undermine his faith in Hashem; they lead him to die before his time; they cause him to be banished from the world to come.

The Negative Effects of Jealousy

Jealousy is a despicable emotion and is rooted in a baseness of the spirit. The jealous person always feels that other people have much, while he himself has little. Therefore, anything good that happens to another will arouse his anger and aggravate his jealousy. Since it is inevitable that there will always be something good happening to someone associated with him, the jealous person will always be in a state of anger. Furthermore, since the source of all good in the world is Hashem, the jealous person will be constantly resentful of the deeds of Hashem.

Besides having a negative effect on a person's relationship with Hashem, jealousy also has disastrous effects on his relationships with other people. The jealous person is always trying to take advantage of other people; in his own distorted perception, he is merely trying to correct an unjust imbalance. He nurtures within himself irrational feelings of blind hatred, and he develops a mean and unsavory character. As his character deteriorates so do his relationships with other people deteriorate.

In the end, the jealous person himself is the one who suffers most from his Feelings of jealousy. He cannot enjoy his life, since he is always afraid that he is not getting his fair share. He cannot have meaningful relationships with other people, since he is always seeking ways to increase his own advantage at the expense of others. His mean character makes him

unpleasant company. Increasingly isolated, he is left to stew in the juices of his own resentment.

Feelings of jealousy are also physically damaging to the person who habitually experiences them. His constantly agitated emotional state does not lend itself to good health. It erodes the body and causes serious, chronic illnesses. Thus, not only does jealousy destroy the character and cause spiritual, emotional, and social harm, it also destroys the body and leads to an early grave.¹

The Talmud goes beyond this and tells us that the harmful effects of jealousy are manifest even after death (Shabbos 152b):

%%The bones of those who harbor jealousy in their hearts will rot in their graves. The bones of those who do not harbor jealousy in their hearts will not.

&&Ironically, jealousy backfires on the jealous person in a more direct way. The jealous person imagines that another person has more than he himself does and becomes enraged. As a result, we find, the fortunes of the object of his jealousy rise, while his own fortunes decline. Shaul Hamelech was intensely jealous of David, and in a jealous rage, he ordered the slaughter of the inhabitants of Nove, the city of kohanim. In the end, Shaul Hamelech was killed, and David ascended to the throne (Shmuel 118:9-31:4.). Jealousy inspired the Kasdim to inform on Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and cause them to be thrown into the furnace. Yet, the informers themselves were the ones who ultimately perished in the flames.² Jealousy inspired the Kasdim to inform on Daniel and cause him to be thrown into the lions' den. Yet, the informers themselves were the ones who were devoured by the lions.³

¹ As it is written, And jealousy causes the rotting of bones (Mishlei 14:30).

² As it is written, Those powerful men who threw Shadrach, Meisach, and Aved Nego into the furnace were themselves slain by the sparks of the flame (Daniel 3:22).

³ As it is written, And the king gave out his command, and those powerful people who had informed on Daniel were brought before him and thrown in the lions' denand before they had even fallen onto the floor of the den, the lions were upon them and ground their bones to powder (Daniel 6:2,5).

Spiritual and Material Jealousy

There are essentially two types of jealousy: jealousy of people because of their spiritual accomplishments and jealousy of people because of their material possessions. Jealousy of spiritual accomplishments is the worse of the two. The jealous person may be angered by people who live virtuous lives because he is resentful of Hashem and, consequently, of anyone who serves Him and fulfills His Will. This is, by far, the worst form of jealousy.

However, such jealousy need not stem from resentment towards Hashem. It may simply reflect unwillingness to begrudge other people more ultimate good than he himself will realize. The jealous person, in this case, is fully aware of the inherent good in the life of the people who serve Hashem and the shortcomings of his own existence. Yet, unwilling or unable to change his own ways, he cannot bear to see other people living a life that is more rewarding than his own. Such jealousy — although it is certainly not to be equated with jealousy stemming from resentment towards Hashem — is still a serious deviation from the Will of Hashem. Better that he should feel affection for those people that devote their lives to Hashem. Rather than resent them, he should associate himself with them and let himself be influenced by them.

Jealousy in spiritual matters, however, can be used constructively. If the jealous person sees the spiritual riches of others and their great wisdom, and reacts by striving to increase his own knowledge and improve his own ways, then his jealousy is serving him well. Indeed, the Talmud tells us that jealousy among scholars proliferates wisdom (Bava Basra 21a). Yet how much better it would be if one is motivated by generosity of spirit, love, and sincerity than by jealousy of other people!

To this did Shlomo Hamelech refer in his great wisdom: “And I have seen all the toil and the profitable deeds that stem from jealousy of one another, this too is emptiness and folly (Koheles 4:4).”

Shlomo Hamelech was saying that to do a mitzvah constructively out of feelings of jealousy is emptiness in comparison with doing it out of love for Hashem.

Jealousy of people because of their material possessions also takes various forms. The jealous person may be resentful of rich people because he despises all people and does not begrudge anyone — other than himself — the luxury of riches. Such an attitude reflects an extreme meanness of spirit.

Sometimes, the person jealous of rich people does not begrudge them their riches, but wants that he himself should be the richest among them. This person is courting disaster by setting his heart on a goal that is unattainable. No matter how rich he may become, there will always be someone richer than he is. His jealousy will drive him and gnaw at him; never to be satisfied, it will erode his body and shorten his life. The Midrash has anticipated this attitude and told us that no person departs from the world having achieved even half of his desires (Koheles Rabah 1:13).

Yet others are jealous of rich people, not because they begrudge them their riches, nor because they are driven to be the richest among the rich, but because they too would like to be rich. Such jealousy — although not as malignant as the other forms — should still be scrupulously avoided. It does not stem from the nobility of the spirit. It, too, is included in the general admonition of Shlomo Hamelech: “Let your heart not be jealous of sinners ... (Mishlei 23:17).”

Different Forms of Desire

Desire also manifests itself in different forms, both physical and psychological. There are those that crave for gluttonous and unwholesome foods. They long to pass their days drinking in taverns, drowning their thirst for wine in the company of buffoons. These people are clearly inviting serious illness and the deterioration of their health. Gratification of these

desires will bring them only harm.⁴ There are also those that crave for women. Unchecked, this too will only bring them harm.⁵

Then there are those whose desires are for the intangibles that feed the ego. They yearn for honor and the power to sway the lives of their fellow men. Surely theirs is a futile quest, with frustration their likely reward. Moreover, even if they were to somehow achieve the positions of honor and power towards which they strive, they quite probably would still not find contentment and happiness. How can they be sure that they will be able to adjust to the unexpected complications and consequences that will surely come with those positions? Isn't it possible that they will have such difficulty coping with those positions that they will be worse off than before?

The only desires that should be nurtured are the desires for wisdom and knowledge. He who follows these desires will be rewarded at every step of the way as he comes closer and closer to realization of the truth; his expanding knowledge will form an increasingly solid foundation for the service of the Lord. David Hamelech was referring to this when he wrote, My Master! All of my desires are directed towards you (Tehillim 38:10) — that is to say, all my desires are only in matters of Your service.

It was to suppress his physical desires that the prophet Shmuel refused to accept generosity from anyone. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 10b):

%%Rava said in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak: "He who wishes to accept generosity may do so, according to the example of Elisha. He who wishes not to accept generosity may do so and need not be concerned that he is being pretentious, since he is following the example of Shmuel the Ramasi. For it is written, And he would return to Ramah for there was his house (Shmuel 1 7:17). From the context of the statement, Rabbi Yochanan inferred: 'Wherever he went he carried his household effects with him.'"

⁴ As it is written, The desires of the slothful shall cause his death (Mishlei 21:2,5.)

⁵ As Shlomo Hamelech advised, Invest not your strength unto women (Mishlei 31:3).

&&Similarly, we find that Rabbeinu Hakodosh,⁶ in spite of his riches and status, did not want to partake of the pleasures of the world, other than that which was absolutely necessary to keep body and soul together so that he could properly serve the Creator. The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 104a):

%%At the time when Rabi passed away, he extended his ten fingers towards the heavens and said: "Master of the World, it is manifest before You that I toiled with these ten fingers in the Torah and did not partake of the pleasures of the world even with the exertion of my smallest finger. May it be Your Wish that my rest shall be in peace,"

Thereupon a Divine Echo was heard to say: "Let them come in peace and lie in their resting places (Yeshayahu 57:2)."

&&The Results of Jealousy and Desire

Indeed, one should always try to free himself from the shackles of the temptations of the world. Whoever lets himself be overcome by burning jealousy of riches and honors is embarking on a perilous road. Of one thing, though, he can be sure: whether he attains them or not, his jealousy will fester in his bones and consume him. Whoever lets himself be inflamed by desires will surely bring upon himself illness and death. Whoever hungers for wealth and glory shall never find contentment, for even if he does succeed, he will only arouse the jealousy of other people who will come to hate him or, even worse, betray and destroy him. Besides, his hunger for wealth can never be satisfied. Nor can he ever attain even half of the glory he seeks, for there will always be someone greater than he is. He is doomed to a life of unrelieved wretchedness.

Worse yet, one who embarks on a quest for wealth and glory stands to lose infinitely more than he can ever possibly gain. He stands to lose his share in the immortal world, for if he has difficulty achieving his ends he will likely turn to any means at his disposal, not hesitating to Overstep the boundaries of what is permitted. Even if he does not enter the realms of the

⁶ [Translator's note: Literally "our holy master", the Talmudic designation for Rabbi Yehudah the Prince, sometimes used in the abbreviated form of Rabi, "the master."]

forbidden, he will still be squandering his life on the pursuit of emptiness and illusions; he will have missed the opportunity to fulfill his true purpose and earn timeless rewards.

Furthermore, not only will he fail to reach the illusory goals that he is pursuing, he will actually lose whatever he already possesses. The Talmud tells us that this is what happens to the sinful (Sotah 9a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: The adulteress coveted one who was forbidden to her. In the end, that which she coveted she did not get, and that which she already had, she lost. Similarly, we find that the ancient serpent coveted the woman who was forbidden to him; what he coveted he did not get, and what he already had he lost.

The Holy Blessed One said: "I decreed that the serpent should be king over all domestic and wild animals; but now, Cursed are you among all beasts (Beraishis 3:14).

I decreed that he should walk erect; but now, Upon your belly shall you go (Ibid.).

I decreed that he should eat food such as humans eat; but now his food shall be the dust of the earth, as it is written, And dust shall you eat all the days of your life (Ibid.).

He schemed to kill Adam and marry Chavah; but now, I will sow malice between the woman and you (Beraishis 3:15)."

&&The final reckoning, however, for those whose lives are ruled by jealousy and desire will come after they leave the world. What will they be able to say in their own defense? What shame! What disgrace! When the day of judgment comes, how will they explain why they spent their days chasing after pleasures and ignoring the Torah?

Indeed, the first issue that is dealt with in the judgment of a person is the extent of his involvement with the Torah (Sanhedrin 7a). This refers even to someone who did not substitute forbidden pursuits for the study of the Torah but merely idled away his time, doing neither good nor bad. It goes without saying that the judgment will be harsh for those who are led into sin by their great jealousy, hungry desires, and the pursuit of power. Surely they will have lost both this world and their share in the world to come.

A person of clear vision should look about him and see how many truly righteous people live in grinding poverty, far worse than his own. His heart should go out to these people, and he should thank the Lord for giving him bread to eat and clothing to wear, even if he only has enough to last but a day or two. He should not worry about what he will eat tomorrow. He should place his trust in his Creator. The Talmud tells us (Sotah 48b);

%%It was taught: Rabbi Eliezer says: 'Whoever has a loaf of bread in his basket and still asks, "What shall I eat tomorrow?" is certainly lacking in faith.'"

In this same vein did Rabbi Elazar say: "it is written, For those who scorned the day when the edifice was small. .. (Zechariah 4:10).

The structure of the Hebrew words implies that those righteous people who squander their place in the world to come, do so by their shortsightedness in that they do not trust sufficiently in the Holy Blessed One."

&&A person, therefore, should not distress himself with concerns about what tomorrow will bring when he cannot possibly even know what the rest of today will bring. If his Creator has graciously bestowed upon him more than the minimum he needs for subsistence, then he certainly has cause to be grateful. He should sing the praises of his Creator every day and thank Him for His endless wonders and gracious favor in protecting him from all sorts of disasters to which he might fall victim. Let him not ask for embroidered clothing and silver vessels! Let him not ask for lavish banquets! Let him ask only for that which he needs for his sustenance.

Examples from the Talmud

It would be fitting for a person of intelligence to learn from the example set by the righteous people of the early days.

The Talmud tells us of the poverty of Hillel the Elder (Yoma 35b):

Our rabbis have taught: A poor man, a rich man, and a sinner are called to heavenly judgment.

The poor man is asked: "Why did you not study the Torah?"

If he replies: "I was a poor man, and I was busy scrounging for food," he is told: "Could you possibly have been poorer than Hillel the Elder?

it was said about Hillel the Elder that every day he would work and earn one tropaeic;⁷ he would give one half to the guard at the door of the house of study and keep one half to feed himself and his family.

"One day, he found no work and earned no money. The guard at the house of study turned him away from the door. Hillel climbed up and sat upon the skylight so that he should be able to listen to the Lord's immortal Words, as spoken by Shmayah and Avtalion. It is told that that day was a wintry Friday, and the snows were falling.

"When the following morning came, Shmayah said to Avtalion:

'Avtalion, my brother, every day the chamber is brightly lit, but today it is dark. Might it then be a cloudy day?'

"They peered up and made out the form of a man against the skylight. They climbed up and found Hillel lying there under a drift of snow three cubits deep. They cleared the snow off him, washed him, smeared him with oils, sat him before the fire, and said: 'This one is worthy of having the Shabbos violated on his behalf.'" "

When the rich man comes up for judgment he is asked: "Why did you not study the Torah?"

⁷ [Translator's note: An ancient Greek coin equivalent to one half dinar (Kesubos 64a).]

If he answers: "I was a rich man, and I was busy managing my properties," he is told: "Could you possibly have been richer than Rabbi Elazar the son of Charsum?"

"It was said about Rabbi Elazar the son of Charsum that his father left him one thousand estates on land and one thousand ships at sea. Yet, each day, he would lift a goatskin of flour onto his shoulder and trudge from town to town and from province to province to study the Torah. Once his servants came upon him and, mistaking him for one of the townspeople, pressed him into forced labor.

"He said to them: 'Leave me be for I am going to study the Torah.'

"They said to him: 'By the life of our master, Rabbi Elazar the son of Charsum, we will not leave you be.'"

Rabbi Elazar the son of Charsum paid them a great deal of money to gain his freedom. He did not try to prove his true identity to them because he spent his every waking moment in the study of the Torah and did not want to waste even one minute unnecessarily."

When the sinner comes up for judgment he is asked: "Why did you not study the Torah?"

"if he answers: "I was a handsome fellow, and I was overcome by my impulses," he is told: "Could you possibly have been more handsome than Yosef?"

"It was said about Yosef the Just that every day the wife of Potiphar tried to seduce him with words of blandishment. The clothes with which she adorned herself for him in the morning she would not wear in the evening. The clothes with which she adorned herself for him in the evening she would not wear in the morning.

"She said to him: 'Lie with me!'

"He said to her: 'No!'"

"She said to him: "I shall lock you in the dungeon.'

"He replied: 'God releases the captives (Tehillim 146:7).'

"I shall put out your eyes.'

“God opens the eyes of the blind (Tehillim 146:8)’

“I shall bow your stature.’

“God makes the bent stand erect (Ibid.).’

“She thereupon offered him one thousand talents of silver and still, he did not heed her to lie beside her to be with her (Beraishis 39:10). She had wanted him to 'lie beside her' in this world and 'to be with her' in the world to come.”

Thus, Hillel's example condemns the poor, the example of Rabbi Elazar the son of Charsum condemns the rich, and the example of Yosef the Just condemns the sinners.

&&Because of his great dedication, Hillel rose to prominence and became Prince of Yisrael. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 66a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: This law (that the Pesach sacrifice takes precedence over the observance of the Shabbos) was unknown to the sons of Besaira. Once, the fourteenth day of Nissan fell on Shabbos, and they could not recall whether or not the Pesach sacrifice took precedence over the observance of the Shabbos.

They asked: “Is there possibly anyone here who knows if the Pesach sacrifice takes precedence over the Shabbos?”

They were told: “There is one person here who has arrived from Bavel and is known as Hillel the Bavli. He attended the two greatest scholars of the generation, Shmayah and Avtalion, and he knows if the Pesach sacrifice takes precedence over the Shabbos.”

They summoned him and said: “Do you possibly know whether or not the Pesach sacrifice takes precedence over the Shabbos?”

He said to them; “Is there only the one Pesach sacrifice that takes precedence over the Shabbos? Why there are more than two hundred similar sacrifices throughout the year that take precedence over the Shabbos.”

They said to him: “How do you know this?”

He replied: “It is written, In its appointed time (Bamidbar 9:2) in reference to the Pesach sacrifice, and it is written, In its appointed time (Bamidbar 28:2) in reference to the daily sacrifice. Just as the appointed time of the daily sacrifice takes precedence over the observance of the Shabbos, so does 'the appointed time' of the Pesach sacrifice take precedence over the Shabbos.

“Furthermore, the rules of the lesser can be inferred from the rules of the greater. If the daily sacrifice, whose omission does not carry a penalty of premature death, takes precedence over the Shabbos, the Pesach sacrifice, whose omission does carry a penalty of premature death, should certainly take precedence over the Shabbos.”

Upon hearing this exposition, they immediately made a place for him in the front of the chamber and appointed him to be their head. All day he would sit and expound on the laws of Pesach. After a while, he began to berate them.

He said: “Who was responsible for my coming from Bavel and becoming the head of your school? Your own laziness in riot exerting yourselves to attend to Shmayah and Avtalion, the two greatest scholars of the generation.”

They then asked him: “Our master, what if the slaughtering knife, which could have been brought before the Shabbos, was forgotten? Is it permitted to bring it on the Shabbos?”

He replied: “I once knew the answer to this, but I have forgotten it. However, do not worry about the Jewish people, for if they themselves are not prophets, they are descended from prophets; they will know what to do.”

On the next day, he whose Pesach sacrifice was a lamb inserted the slaughtering knife into its wool and thus avoided carrying it on the Shabbos; he whose Pesach sacrifice was a kid inserted the slaughtering knife between its horns.

As soon as Hillel observed this practice, he remembered the law and said: "Indeed so have I heard from Shmayah and Aitalion that such is the proper practice."

This was the essence of the question: "Since abnormal transportation by means of an animal is permitted according to Scriptural Law, and is forbidden only by Rabbinic enactment, is it permitted to violate this prohibition for the purpose of performing the mitzvah of the Pesach sacrifice?"

To this he replied: "I once knew the answer to this, but I have forgotten it. However, do not worry about the Jewish people, for if they themselves are not prophets, they are descended from prophets; they will know what to do."

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: "If a wise man becomes arrogant his wisdom deserts him. If a prophet becomes arrogant his gift of prophecy deserts him."

"That wisdom deserts the wise was demonstrated by Hillel. As previously mentioned, he began to berate the members of the school, and immediately afterwards, he had to admit that he had forgotten an important ruling."

"That the gift of prophecy deserts the prophet was demonstrated by Devorah. It is written, The rulers ceased in Yisrael, they ceased when I, Devorah, emerged (Shoftim 5:7). Thereafter it is written, Awake, awake, Devorah, awake and speak words of song (Shoftim 5: 12)."

&&Not only was Hillel rewarded by becoming Prince of Yisrael, he was also fortunate to have his disciples become the great scholars of Yisrael. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 28a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: Hillel the Elder had eighty disciples. Thirty were worthy of having the Divine Presence rest upon them as it did on Moshe Rabbeinu. Thirty of them were worthy of having the sun stop for

them as it did for Yehoshua bin Nun. Twenty were, by comparison, only fair. The greatest of Hillel's disciples was Yonasan the son of Uziel; the smallest was Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai.

It was said about Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai that he learned all of Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, Halacha, Agada, the finer points of the Torah, the finer points of the scribes' scholarship, inferences of lesser from greater, parallel expressions, orbital calculations, numerical significances, acrostic allusions, conversations of palm trees, washermen's fables, fox fables, a great thing, and a small thing. A great thing” refers to the nature of the Divine Chariot, “a small thing” to the questions and legal arguments of Abaya and Rava. This was in fulfillment of that which is written, To pass on to my dear ones things of substance and to fill their treasuries (Mishlei 8:21).

If the smallest of Hillel's disciples was so great, the greatest must have been many times greater. Indeed, it was said of Yonasan the son of Uziel that whenever he was sitting and studying the Torah any bird that happened to fly by overhead was immediately incinerated.⁸

⁸ This entire passage is explained in detail in the following interpretation of Rashbam (Bava Basra 134a): The Talmud infers from the parallel expression of that which is written, I shall implore (Devarim 2:25) in quoting Moshe, and that which is written, I shall implore (Yehoshua 3:7) in quoting Yehoshua, that the sun stopped for Moshe as well (Taanis 20a), Nevertheless, the Talmud compares the second level of Hillel's disciples to Yehoshua rather than to Moshe in their ability to make the sun stop, This is because stopping the sun in its orbit is not so notable a feat as being a resting place for the Divine Presence. Since stopping the sun is only a lesser feat, being capable of it does not dictate a comparison to Moshe who was capable of greater feats.

Rashbam goes on to explain the references to the topics in which Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai was proficient: "Talmud" refers to the explanation of the Mishnah that points out where the text is based on a particular premise or where an abbreviation in the text has resulted in a loss of clarity, "Halacha" refers to the Oral Law that Moshe received from the Divine Power on Sinai. "Agada" refers to Midrashic interpretation of the Scripture such as Tanchuma, Beraishis Rabah, and Vayikra Rabah,

"The finer points of the Torah" refers to anything learned from a close study of the lexicology of the Scripture. For example, in that which is written, And this shall you consider unclean (Vayikra 11:29), the word "And" implies the inclusion of the blood of insects in the category of the unclean (M'eelah 17b), "The finer points of the scribes' scholarship" refers to Rabbinic prohibitions enacted to serve as a buffer against violation of Scriptural prohibitions, "Inferences of lesser from greater" refers to logical deductions

&&There are other examples of great men of Yisrael who lived in extreme poverty. One of these was Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa through whose merit the entire world was fed, while he himself lived in poverty and was sustained by miracles. The Talmud elaborates (Taanis 24b):

%%Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa was walking along the road, carrying a keg of salt on his shoulder, when it started to rain.

that, within certain parameters, one may draw on one's own, "Parallel expressions" refers to exegetic devices based on similar wording in two or more places, For instance, the Talmud determines that the marriage bond can be created by the transfer of money by virtue of the fact that there is mention of "taking" in reference to marriage (Devarim 22:13) and a similar mention of "taking" in reference to the purchase of land (Beraishis 23:13). See Kedushin 2a. "Orbital calculations" refers to ascertaining the exact time of the appearance of the new moon. "Numerical significances" refers to inferences based on the numerical value of words. For instance, the numerical value of the Hebrew word for "He shall be"— yeehyeh — is thirty, signifying that the duration of the standard Nazirite vow is thirty days (Nazir 5a). "Acrostic allusions" refers to words whose combined initial letters form a word in the Scripture. For instance, the letters of One Hebrew word used in the Scripture for "contrary" (Bamidbar 22:32) form the initials of the words "She saw, feared, and turned aside." Also, the letters of the word used in the Scripture for "I"(Shemos 20:2) form the initials of the words "I, myself, wrote it, and delivered it" (Shabbos 105a). "Conversations of palm trees" refers to conversations of people about palm. trees, such as it is written about Shlomo Hamelech, And he spoke about the nature of the trees (Melachim I 5:13). The Aruch explains that they would spread sheets over the trees and invoke predictions of the future (Entry 68:1). "Conversations of demons" also refers to invocations and were useful in the preparation of amulets for the sick. "Conversations of angels of service" also refers to invocations. "Washermen's fables and fox fables" are useful in the study of Torah, as it is written, He pondered, sought out, and set in order many proverbs (Koheles 12:9), and it is also written, To understand proverbs and metaphors (Mishlei 1:6).

"The nature of the Divine Chariot" refers to the study of that subject in the Book of Yechezkel. "A small thing" refers to the questions that Abaya and Rava asked about many passages in the Mishnah and Beraisa and the solutions they proposed. "Things of substance" contains a numerical significance intimating that they will inherit three hundred and ten worlds by having their treasuries filled with Torah and wisdom (Uktsin 3:12). "Any bird that happened to fly by overhead was immediately incinerated" because of the angels of service who always gathered about Yonasan the son of Uziel when he expounded the Torah. [Translator's note: This final interpretation is not drawn from the commentary of Rashbam but from the commentary of Rashi in Sukkah 28a. Rabbeinu Chananel's interpretation is that the bird was incinerated by the Divine Presence which rested upon Yonasan the sort of Uziel.]

He said before Him: “Master of the Universe, the entire world is at ease while Chanina is in distress.”

The rains stopped.

When he reached his house he said before Him.: “Master of the Universe, the entire world is in distress, while Chanina is at ease.”

The rains resumed.

Rav Yosef said: “Of what use were the prayers of the kohen gadol to protect from such as Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa?”

For we have been taught: The kohen gadol would say only a short prayer in the outer chamber of the Bais Hamikdash's inner sanctum so as not to frighten the people who were anxiously awaiting his safe emergence.

What was the text of the prayer?

Rav Yehudah said: “May it be Your Wish, O God our Lord, that this year be very warm and rainy.” [Is it an advantage for it to be very warm? On the contrary, it is a liability. What he actually meant was that if it will be very warm, then let it be rainy.] “And may it also be Your Wish not to pay heed to the prayers of wayfarers who are plagued by the rains.”

Rav Acha said that the conclusion to the kohen gadol's prayer was as follows: “And that the reins of government shall not be taken from the House of Yehudah, and that Your people Yisrael should not have to depend on each other or on another people for their livelihood. “⁹

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “Every single day a Divine Echo was heard to say: 'The entire world is sustained through the merit of my son Chanina, while my son Chanina is satisfied with one peck of carobs from Friday to Friday.'”

Every Friday the wife of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa would burn a certain substance that gives off much smoke in order to give the appearance of cooking for the Shabbos. She had a malicious neighbor who said to

⁹ [Translator's note: Rav Acha's opinion does not appear in the extended version of the passage quoted here but is excerpted from the abbreviated version in Yoma 53b, where it appears in the standard text with a slight variation.]

herself: "I know that she has nothing to cook, yet I see all of this smoke. Let me go over there and investigate."

She went to the house of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa and knocked on the door. The wife of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa, expecting the discovery of her ruse, secluded herself in a back room. However, a miracle occurred, and the neighbor, upon coming into the house, found the oven full of freshly baked bread and the dough-trough full of dough.

She called out: "Come quickly, and bring a bread-shovel because your bread is beginning to burn."

[It was taught: Indeed, the wife of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa had gone to the back room to get a bread-shovel, because living with Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa, she had become accustomed to miracles,]

The wife of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa said to him: "How long shall we go on suffering like this?"

He replied: "What can we do?"

She said: "Pray for mercy that we be given from the good that is reserved for the righteous in the world to come."

Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa prayed for mercy, and there appeared a leg of a golden table. Subsequently, Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa dreamed that everyone in the world to come was dining on a three-legged table, while he himself was dining on a two-legged table.

Upon hearing of the dream, his wife said to him: "Pray for mercy that it be taken back,"

He prayed for mercy, and it was taken back,

[It was taught: This last miracle was greater than the first. We have a tradition that the heavens give more easily than take back.]

One Friday evening, Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa noticed that his daughter was dejected.

He asked her: "Why are you so sad?"

She replied: "Because I mistakenly added vinegar instead of oil to the reservoir of the lamp,"

He said to her: "The One who decreed that oil should burn can decree that vinegar should burn as well."

[It was taught: The flame lasted so long that they were able to take from it for the havdalah ritual at the conclusion of the Shabbos.]

Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa once had some goats. He was told that they were causing damage to property in his area.

He said: "If they are causing damage, let them be eaten by bears; if not, let them bring back bears upon their horns."

That evening each of the goats brought back a bear upon its horns.

A neighbor of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa once approached him.

She said: "I have a house, but the beams do not reach from wall to wall.

He asked her; "What is your name?"

She said; "Aylvu."

He said to her: "Aylvu, Aylvu, may your beams become longer."

The beams expanded,

[It was taught: Plimo says: "I saw that house and its beams extended a full cubit from either side, and I was told: 'This is the house that was constructed by Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa through his prayer.'"

It was taught: Others say: "The beams were extended by the miraculous addition of links."]

&&It is quite apparent that Rabbi Chanina the son of Dossa did not want to use up, in this world, any part of the portion reserved for him in the world to come and, therefore, prayed for mercy that the golden table leg be taken back. He realized that the good of the world to come is infinite, while the illusory good of this world is merely emptiness and folly. Indeed, the Talmud tells us that one hour of contentment in the world to come is better than all the life of this World (Avos 4:17).

The Talmud goes on to tell of the poverty of Rabbi Elazar the son of Pidas (Taanis 25a):

%%Rabbi Elazar the son of Pidas underwent a phlebotomy to relieve his high blood pressure. Afterwards, having nothing else to eat, he found a wedge of garlic and put it into his mouth.¹⁰ Feeling faint, he went home and fell asleep.

While he was asleep, the rabbis came into his house to seek his Halachic opinion. They were startled to see him crying in his sleep, then laughing in his sleep, and finally, sparks coming out of his forehead.

When he awoke, the rabbis asked him: “Why was the master crying and laughing? And why were sparks coming out of his forehead?”

He replied: “Because I saw the Divine Presence, and I said: ‘How long must I continue in such poverty?’

“He said to me: ‘If you wish, My son, I shall destroy the world, create it all over again, and you might then be born in prosperous times.’

“I said, You mean that, even after the destruction and recreation of the entire world, it will still be uncertain whether I will live in prosperous times!? Tell me which are more, the years I have already lived or the years I have yet to live?’

“He said to me: ‘The years that you have already lived.’

I said: ‘If so, I will not accept Your offer.’

“I continued: ‘What have You reserved for me in the world to come?’

“He replied: ‘I shall give you thirteen rivers of the purest oil of persimmon for your enjoyment.’

“So I said: ‘Shall I get no more than that?’

“He said to me: ‘Do I not have to give portions to others as well?’

“I said: ‘Master of the Universe, am I asking this of a mere mortal whose resources are limited?’

He snapped His Fingers above my forehead in delight and said: ‘Elazar, My son, I have tapped you with My arrows.’”¹¹

¹⁰ [Translator's note: It is obligatory to eat following a phlebotomy (bloodletting), as mentioned in Shabbos 129a.]

¹¹ [Translator's note: Rabbi Elazar the 5011 of Pidas had cried when he learned that the majority of his years had already passed; he had laughed with delight at the prospect of the

&&Elsewhere, the Talmud tells of Rabah the son of Avuha being in similar straits (Bava Metzia 114a):

%%Rabah the son of Avuha found Eliyahu standing in a gentile cemetery.

He asked him: “When the courts attach the properties of a debtor, are they required to leave him enough for his basic needs?”

He replied: “They are required to do so. This is implied by the parallel expression between the passage dealing with debtors and the passage dealing with valuation vows to the Bais Hamikdash, as it is written, And if He will be poorer than your valuation (Vayikra 27:8), and it is written, And if your brother shall become poor (Vayikra 25:25).”

...Rabah the son of Avuha asked Eliyahu: “Is the master not a kohen? Why then does the master stand in a cemetery, something that is forbidden to a kohen?”

Eliyahu replied: “Does not the master study the Mishnaic Order of Taharos?”

“It has been taught: Rabbi Shimeon the son of Yochai says: ‘The graves of gentiles do not make one unclean, as it is written, And you are my sheep, the sheep of my flock, you are people (Yechezkel 34:31)— you are referred to by the unqualified designation of ‘people’, the other nations of the world are not. “¹²

Rabah the son of Avuha responded: “I have difficulty enough studying the middle four Orders of the Mishnah; how can you expect me to study the first and last Orders that do not apply to the daily conduct of the lives of Jews living outside of the Holy Land?”

Eliyahu asked Rabah the son of Avuha: “And why are you having such difficulty?”

thirteen rivers of oil of persimmon; the sparks had come out of his forehead when he was tapped by the “arrows” of Hashem.]

¹² [Translator's note: For clarification of this statement, see Tosefos in Yevamos 61a and Tosefos in Bava Kama 38a.]

Rabah the son of Avuha replied: "Because I am very poor, and I am beset by the troubles of seeking a livelihood. How can I study the Torah?"

Eliyahu led Rabah the son of Avuha into the Garden of Eden and said to him: "Remove your coat and gather for yourself some of these plants."

Rabah the son of Avuha gathered some leaves and took them with him.

As he was leaving, he heard it being said: "Who else is there that rushes to consume his eternal rewards as does Rabah the son of Avuha!?"

He promptly retraced his steps and carefully emptied his coat of all the leaves he had gathered. Nevertheless, upon returning to his home, he still found one petal.¹³ He sold it for twelve thousand dinars and divided the sum among his sons-in-law.

&&It would seem that these great men found it easier to work wonders and perform miracles than to provide for the basic necessities of their existence in a natural way. Yet, they accepted this state of affairs without questioning the Ways of the Omnipresent. The Talmud tells us (Shabbos 53b):

Our rabbis have taught: There was an incident of a man whose wife had died, leaving him with an infant child. The man could not afford to hire a wet nurse for the child. Miraculously, his breasts became as the breasts of a woman, and he nursed his son.

Rav Yosef said: "Behold! How great is this man that such a miracle should happen for him!"

Abaya said to him: "On the contrary! How inferior is this man that the order of creation had to be changed for him."

Rav Yehudah repeated the observation of Rav: "Behold! So difficult is it for a person to provide for his needs that the order of creation had to be changed for this man!"

¹³ [Translator's note: The Aramaic word for the item he found is "margenisa", which is generally used as the equivalent of the Hebrew word "margalis" — pearl. However, here it seems to have been used as the equivalent of the Hebrew word "marganis" —pimpernel, a plant. In the standard text, it is interesting to note, he found nothing at all. But because of the wonderful scent that adhered to his coat, he was able to sell it for the large sum.]

Rav Nachman said: “Indeed it is so! For quite often are people miraculously saved from disasters, yet rarely do we see food miraculously appear.”

&&There are many other examples of great Torah scholars who, though poor, were quite content with what they had; they were not jealous of the rich people of their times but were satisfied with whatever they had received, whether much or little. It would be wise to follow their example and not be jealous of the rich. Indeed, they are not to be envied, for the accumulation of wealth brings with it an accumulation of anxieties (Avos 2:7). Furthermore, wealth is not permanent; the rich man of today may be a poor man tomorrow. Even if he is fortunate to hold onto his wealth until his death, will it accompany him to plead for him on his day of judgment? Certainly not! It will remain in the house he has vacated, to be enjoyed by others — possibly even by people who despised him in his lifetime.

This World in Perspective

A person would do well to closely study — and open his heart — to the words spoken by Shlomo Hamelech in his great wisdom. After Shlomo had amassed the greatest of fortunes, great wisdom, and prominence, he stepped back, took a long look at the tremendous estate he had acquired in this world, and pronounced it all emptiness, as is all advantage beneath the sun.

He said: “I said to myself, Let us joyfully spice our wine and be happy, and behold, this too I saw to be emptiness. I said of laughter, It is a mockery! and of joyfulness, What is the use! I attempted to gratify my body with wine while keeping my heart accustomed to wisdom, and to grasp that which appeared to be pointless, hoping to discover which is the preferable pursuit for people during the days that they live beneath the heavens. I expanded my activities; I built houses for myself, and I planted vineyards for myself. I cultivated gardens and orchards for myself and planted in them every species of produce. I constructed reservoirs for myself from which to

irrigate young forests. I bought bondsmen and bondswomen, and I had domestic servants; I also had great herds of cattle and sheep, greater than any that had previously existed in Yerushalayim. I also collected silver, gold, and royal and mercantile treasures; I acquired various musical instruments and cart upon cart of things that bring people delight. And thus I grew great, and my position surpassed anything that had ever existed in Yerushalayim; still my wisdom endured for me. And all that my eyes demanded I did not refuse; I did not deprive my heart of any kind of joyfulness, so my heart delighted in all I did; yet only this was what remained from all my exertions. And I looked about at all I had done, and how I had exerted myself in the doing of it, and behold, it was all emptiness and folly; and there is nothing of advantage beneath the sun (Koheles 2:1-11).”

This then was the conclusion reached by the great sage Shlomo Hamelech after he had acquired everything that this world had to offer and examined it. He came to the realization that it is all emptiness and folly; that the time spent in this world is as the fleeting shadow — one glance and it is gone; that “there is nothing of advantage beneath the sun.”

If this was the conclusion reached by Shlomo Hamelech, who had experienced all the dominion and pleasure that this world has to offer, what then can be said by all the ordinary people of the world who cannot aspire to even a thousandth part of that which had been attained by Shlomo Hamelech?

Shlomo Hamelech is teaching us that the only worthwhile advantage is that which is above the sun, not beneath it; it is to attain the goodness that is permanent, that has no aspects of evil in it, that has no bounds. This is what endured for Shlomo Hamelech from all of his exertions, as he said: “Still my wisdom endured for me.”

It should be clear that a person should not hunger after the illusory goodness of this world. Nor should he look jealously at the wanton ways and indulgences of the sinful; he must not permit himself to yearn for them,

or even desire them. The only jealousy he need not banish from his heart is the jealousy of people who follow the true road —provided that it will cause him to follow their example. Certainly, it would be better to reject evil and choose good because of a noble desire to fulfill the Will of Hashem rather than because of jealousy. Nevertheless, even if his original motivation stems from jealousy, he will ultimately do what is right for its own sake.

Jealousy as a Mitzvah

There is, however, a form of “jealousy” which is, indeed, a mitzvah of the highest order. When a righteous person witnesses sinful people desecrating the Name in public, it is his obligation to react jealously and to let the jealous rage of Hashem be vented through him.¹⁴ Disregarding his personal safety, he must reprimand and rebuke them to the best of his ability, either verbally or by any other means available to him.

The Torah tells of Pinchas, who let the jealous rage of Hashem be vented through him and, by killing Zimri, the Prince of one of the Tribes, put an end to the corruption to which the people had sunk. By doing so, he managed to turn away the wrath of the Blessed Lord from His nation Yisrael, and the Holy Blessed One repaid him in full.¹⁵ From this the Talmud infers that one who copulates with an Aramaic (gentile) woman may be struck down by zealots (Sanhedrin 81b). So too, time and time again, did the prophets and the righteous people of the early days put their lives in jeopardy in order to reprimand the people and divert them from evil ways.

The Talmud tells of the examples set by Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon and Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi (Bava Metzia 83b):

¹⁴ [Translator's note; The technical meaning of the word "jealousy", both in Hebrew and in English, is "extreme zealousness". Therefore, the word has undesirable connotations when it is directed towards undesirable ends and has the opposite meaning when it is directed toward desirable ends.]

¹⁵ As it is written, Behold I give to him My Covenant of Peace (Bamidbar 25:12).

%%Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon met an officer of the king who was searching out thieves and pressing them into forced labor.

He said: "How do you manage to outsmart them? Do they not conceal themselves in their lairs during the day like the animals, as it is written, In the darkness all the animals of the forest swarm (Tehillim 104:20)? How can you be sure that you are not taking virtuous people instead of vagrants?"

[Some say that the source he quoted was from that which is written, He lurks in hiding like a lion in his den (Tehillim 10:9).]

The officer replied: "What can I do? it is in the service of the king that I am doing this, and I dare not stop to investigate too closely."

Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon said to him: "Come! I shall teach you what to do. In the fourth hour of the day, go into a wineseller's store, and if you see a person drinking wine with his meal and dozing off check after him. If he is a scholar, then he was probably up very early to study, and therefore, he is dozing. If he is a laborer, then he was probably up very early to work. If he is a craftsman who works at night, and the sounds of his labors were not heard in the night, he might be a threader of metal wire for needles whose work is painstaking and noiseless. If he is none of these, then grab him, for he is surely a thief in the night."

Word of Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon's advice got back to the king's court. It was decreed that "the one who expertly reads the proclamation should be the bearer of it", and Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon was forced to serve the king in the impressment of thieves into forced labor.

One day, Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Karchah met him while he was performing his duties and said to him: "Vinegar the son of wine! How long will you persist in sending the people of our Lord to their deaths?"

He answered: "I am merely destroying the thorns of the vineyard."

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Karchah replied: "Let the Master of the vineyard come Himself and destroy His own thorns."

One day a washerman came upon Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon as he was performing his duties and addressed him as “vinegar the son of wine”. Since the washerman had such great effrontery, Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon assumed that he was an evil person, and he commanded the soldiers: “Grab him! Grab him!”

After he regained his composure., he tried to gain the washerman's release from captivity, but he could not do so. He was extremely distraught about the plight of the washerman, and he quoted: “He who guards his mouth and tongue protects himself from woe (Mishlei 21:23).”

The washerman was hung from the gallows. Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon stood below the gallows and wept.

It was said to him: “Master, do not distress yourself! Both this man and his son were deserving of this fate because they copulated with a betrothed maiden on Yom Kippur.”

Thereupon he placed his hands upon his abdomen and said: 'Rejoice, my intestines, rejoice! If even your suspicions are borne out, then certainly your convictions are well justified. I am sure that worms and maggots will never affect you.’

Still, his mind was not completely set at ease.

By his direction, he was given an anesthetic and brought into a house of marble. His abdomen was opened and great amounts of body fat were removed. The fat was placed in the sun during the summer months to see if it would become rancid and full of maggots. It did not. (But, indeed, all fat does not become rancid, so wherein lay the proof of the justice of his actions? Pure white fat does not become rancid, but fat that has in it fleshy red tinctures does become rancid. The fat taken from the abdomen of Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon, although it did have red tinctures, did not become rancid.]

Upon seeing the results of the test, Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon quoted in reference to himself: “My flesh, too, will rest in safety (Tehillim 16:9).”

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi was also involved in a similar episode. He, too, was forced to serve the king by pressing thieves into forced labor.

Once Eliyahu met him as he was performing his duties and said to him: "How long will you persist in sending the people of our Lord to their deaths?"

He answered: "What can I possibly do? I am forced to perform the service of the king."

Eliyahu replied: "Your father fled to Assia, you can flee to Ludikia."

&&We also find that Rabbi Shaila, disregarding his personal safety, let the jealous rage of Hashem be vented through him. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 58a):

%%Rabbi Shaila thrashed a Jewish man who had copulated with a gentile woman. The man retaliated by informing against Rabbi Shaila at the king's court, saying: "There is a man among the Jews who dispenses justice without royal license."

An orderly was sent to summon Rabbi Shaila. When Rabbi Shaila arrived at the king's court, he was asked: "Why did you thrash that man?"

He replied: "Because he had copulated with a donkey."

He was asked: "Do you have witnesses?"

He said: "Yes."

Eliyahu came in the guise of an ordinary person and bore witness to the effect that the man had copulated with a donkey.

Thereupon, Rabbi Shaila was told: "If so, the man deserves to die."

Rabbi Shaila replied: "From the day we have been exiled from our land we are no longer permitted to mete out the death penalty, but you may do with him as you wish."

While they were deliberating, Rabbi Shaila began to recite: "To you, O God, belong all greatness, power and glory (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11)."

He was asked: "What are you saying?"

He replied; "I was saying — Blessed be the Merciful that He has allowed there to be a kingdom. on earth that resembles the Kingdom of Heaven."

He was told: "Since you respect us so greatly, you may henceforth sit in judgment."

As Rabbi Shaila was leaving the king's court, he was confronted by the man he had thrashed who said: "Since when does the Merciful perform miracles for liars?"

Rabbi Shaila replied: "Villain! Are the gentiles then not called donkeys? For it is written, That their flesh is as the flesh of donkeys (Yechezkel 23:20)."

Rabbi Shaila sensed that the man was about to report these remarks to the king's court and said to himself: "This man is a mortal menace, and the Torah has commanded, If anyone comes to kill you kill him first! (Berachos 62b)."

He struck the man with the iron rod and killed him.

He then said: "Since a miracle was performed for me in connection with this verse, I shall expound upon it."

He went to the house of study and began to expound: To You, O God, belong all greatness"

&&Thus did the righteous people of the early days risk their lives to sanctify the Name and to destroy the thorns of the vineyard. In the name of Heaven, they challenged those who followed evil ways, reprimanded and rebuked them.

Indeed, it is the duty of every person, when he sees sinfulness and the desecration of the Holy Name, to rage at the deeds of the evildoers. He should not hesitate to challenge them and confront them with their faithlessness. He must be very careful not to be jealous of the evildoers, even if he sees that they are being successful. Let him not be fooled by that

temporary success, for in the end they shall pay the price of their transgressions.

Illusions of Success

Although it sometimes seems as if the sinful lead happy and successful lives, the appearance is misleading. In fact, the Blessed Lord is extending to these people beneficence and tranquility in this world to compensate for any merit they may have and, thus, ensure that they will be punished in full in the world to come.

The Talmud tells us (Taanis 11a)

It is written, The Lord of Trust (Devarim 32:4).

Just as the Holy Blessed One gives fair reward to the righteous in the world to come for every simple mitzvah that they do in this world, so does He reward the sinful in this world for every simple mitzvah that they do in this world.

It is also written, With no injustice (Ibid.).

Just as the Holy Blessed One exacts payment from the sinful in the world to come for their every simple transgression in this world, so does He exact payment from the righteous in this world for their every simple transgression in this world.

It is also written, Righteous and just is He (Ibid.).

It was said: At the time of each person's death, all of his deeds are recorded in front of him. It is said to him: "Is this what you did on such and such a day?"

He answers: "Yes."

He is told to sign, and he signs. For so is it written, in the hand of each person, He shall sign (Iyov 37: 7). Read the Hebrew word in such a way that its meaning is "shall make to sign".

Furthermore, each person endorses his own sentence and says: "You have judged me well. You have judged me well."

This is in fulfillment of that which is written, Against You alone did I sin". so that You shall justify through Your words (Tehillim 51:6).

The Talmud also tells us (Chagigah 16a):

Rabbi Yehudah the son of Nachmeini, the meturgeman¹⁶ of Raish Lakish, expounded upon that which is written, Do not place your trust in the blandishments of your comrade nor seek security in a guide (Michah 7:5): "If your evil inclination shall tell you to sin and expect that the Holy Blessed One will forgive you, do not trust him. For it is written, reading the verse with an alternative pronunciation, Do not place your trust in evil. 'Evil' refers to the evil inclination, as it is written, For the instinct of the heart of a person is to evil (Beraishis 8:2). "Guide' refers to the Holy Blessed One, as it is written, You are the Guide of my youth (Yirmiyahu 3:4).

"You might wonder: 'Who will bear witness against me?'

"The stones and beams of the house of a person and the rafters of his house shall bear witness against him, as it is written, For the stone shall cry out from the wall, and the knots of the rafters shall bear witness (Chavakuk 2:11)."

Rabbi Shaila says: "The two angels of service that constantly escort a person bear witness against him, as it is written, For He shall appoint His angels to you (Tehillim 91 :11)."

Rabbi Chidkai says: "The soul of a person shall bear witness against him, as it is written, From the one who rests in your bosom you must guard the openings of your mouth (Michah 7:5). Which thing lives in the bosom of a person? It would seem that it is the soul."

¹⁶ [Translator's note: The Hebrew words used here — meturgeman — normally translates to "interpreter" or "translator". However, in this particular usage the reference is to a "circulator" who, upon occasion of large assemblages, used to relay the teachings of the rabbi to the people who were out of earshot. See the commentary of Bashi in Pesachim 50b.]

Others say: "The limbs of a person bear witness against him. as well, as it is written, And you are my witness by the Word of God (Yeshayahu 43:10)."

&&Occasionally, Hashem permits the sinful to live in tranquility because He is giving them the opportunity to return to Him through teshuvah. For so it is written, I swear by the Word of God the Lord that I do not seek the demise of the sinful (Yechezkel 33:11).

This then is the reason that Hashem is called "the Patient" (Shemos 34:6), meaning that He is patient both with the righteous and the sinful. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 111a):

%%It is written, And Moshe rushed to bow down to the ground and prostrate himself (Shemos 34:8).

Which Divine Attribute did he perceive?

Rabbi Chanina the son of Gamaliel said: "He perceived the Attribute of Patience."

Our rabbis say: "He perceived the Attribute of Truth."

There is a teaching that bears out the opinion that it was the Attribute of Patience that Moshe had perceived.

It has been taught: When Moshe ascended to heaven, he came upon the Holy Blessed One as He was writing the word "patience". Moshe said: "Is this patience towards the righteous?"

He replied: "Towards the sinful as well."

Moshe said: "Let the sinful perish!"

He replied: "There will come a time when you will need this."

When the people of Yisrael sinned, He said to Moshe: "Did you not say to Me that patience should be reserved for the righteous?"

Moshe replied: "Did You not say to me that it was for the sinful as well?"

This is the meaning of that which is written, And now I beg that You let Your power be great, just as You have spoken (Bamidbar 14:17).

The Talmud further tells us (Bava Kama 50a):

Rabbi Ghana said, or according to another version, Rabbi Shmuel said; 'Why is the Attribute of Patience expressed as "forbearing wraths", the plural, rather than as forbearing wrath', the singular? "It is to signify patience towards both the righteous and the sinful."

&&Sometimes, Hashem permits the sinful to live in tranquility because of the merit of their ancestors. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 7a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yosi the son of Zamra: "Moshe made three requests of the Holy Blessed One, and they were granted.

"He asked that the Divine Presence should rest upon Yisrael, and it was granted, as it is written, And how shall it become known that I have found favor in Your Eyes, I and Your people, is it not in Your going with us? (Shemos 33:16).

He asked that the Divine Presence should not rest upon the gentile nations, and it was granted, as it is written, Then I and Your people shall be distinguished from all other peoples on the face of the earth (Ibid.).

"He asked that he be made to know His Ways, and it was granted, as it is written, I beg You let me know Your Ways (Shemos 33:13).

"Moshe said before Him: 'Master of the Universe! Why do things go well for some righteous people and badly for others? Why do things go well for some sinful people and badly for others?'

"He replied: 'Moshe, if things go well for a righteous person, then he is a righteous person the son of a righteous person. If things go badly for a righteous person, then he is a righteous person the son of a sinful person. If things go well for a sinful person, then he is a sinful person the son of a righteous person. If things go badly for a sinful person, then he is a sinful person the son of a sinful person.'"

&&Retribution

Hashem also differentiates between the righteous and the sinful in the method of meting out punishment for transgression. The sinful receive their entire accumulated retribution all at once.¹⁷ Therefore, while it may seem as if things are going well for them, in fact, it is merely as the calm before the storm. When the time for retribution comes, all their troubles will befall them simultaneously, and their lives will be irreparably shattered.¹⁸ Not so does Hashem deal with the righteous. Just as one who lends money to a friend will accept small payments over a longer period of time in order to make the repayment of the debt as painless as possible, so too does Hashem mete out punishment to the righteous in small doses over a longer period of time in order that it be easier for them to withstand it and survive.

The Talmud tells us (Avodah Zarah 4a):

%%Rabbi Abahu described Rav Safra to the infidels as a great man. Out of respect, they exempted Rav Safra from paying taxes for thirteen years.

One day, they came upon Rav Safra and asked him: "It is written, Only you did I love among all the clans of the earth, therefore I shall visit upon you all of your guilt (Amos 3:2). If someone has within him great fury, does he unleash it on his loved ones?"

Rav Safra was at a loss for a proper response, The infidels tied a halter about Rav Safra's neck and began to harass him.

Rabbi Abahu came upon this scene and said to them: "Why are you harassing him?"

They said: "Did you not tell us that he was a great man? He couldn't even explain this verse to us."

¹⁷ As it is written, God created everything for His glory, and the sinful too shall fulfill this purpose on their day of reckoning (Mishlei 16:4).

¹⁸ As it is written, Seven times shall the righteous fall and still rise, but the sinful shall founder on their villainy (Mishlei 24:16).

Rabbi Abahu replied: "I was only referring to Oral Law teachings, not to Scriptural verses."

They said: "Then why is it that the members of your school are proficient in the Scripture?"

Rabbi Abahu replied: "Since we live among you, who always question us about the meaning of the Scripture, we make it a point to closely study the Scripture: Rav Safra and his colleagues do not live among people who question them about the Scripture and, therefore, do not study it as closely as we do."

They said: "Then you tell us the meaning of that Scriptural verse."

Rabbi Abahu explained: "Let me draw an analogy for you. Two people borrow money from the same person, one is his friend and the other his enemy. When the loans come due, he demands payment in full from his enemy, but he lets his friend schedule his payment in small amounts over a period of time."

&&The inevitability of retribution is what Shlomo Hamelech had in mind when he instructed: "Be happy in good times, but take heed of the bad times (Koheles 7:14)." He was saying that, much as one enjoys the present when things are going well, one must not overlook the possibility of bad times coming in the future. The intelligent person recognizes this possibility and tries to live his life properly so as not to bring bad times upon himself as retribution. The sinful person, however, does nothing of the sort. He constantly searches out new luxuries and new forms of gratification and eagerly pursues them. Seeing fortune smile upon him, he deludes himself into thinking that there is no Satan, that there can be no calamity lurking in his future. It does not enter his mind that the smile of fortune can easily turn to rage. Corrupted by jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of honor, he is blinded and stupefied; he cannot perceive the true light. He mistakes the darkness of this world for light, while the light of the world to come he shrouds in darkness. It was to these people that the prophet referred: "Woe

unto them that call evil good and good evil, that deem darkness light and light darkness (Yeshayahu 5:20).”

Sinfulness and Lust

The underlying reason for the waywardness of the sinful is that they are overcome by lust. Lust is at the root of all jealousies, desires, and transgressions and is the nemesis of mitzvos.

The Midrash tells us (Bamidbar Rabah 18:21):

%%The Commandment stating, You shall not lust for ...(Shmos 20:14) outweighs the rest of the Ten Commandments, which represent the entire Torah.

&&Clearly, lust is at the root of everything that goes against the Torah. If you will not lust, you will acknowledge that Hashem is One and that He is your Lord; you will not go astray. If you will not lust, you will not want to worship any besides Him; you will shun all semblance of idolatry and its accessories. If you will not lust, you will not swear falsely in His Name in order to appropriate someone else's money. If you will not lust, you will observe the Shabbos and the Festivals; you will not desecrate them with forbidden labors. If you will not lust, you will honor your father, your mother, and your teachers; you will be in awe of them. If you will not lust, you will not kill the innocent; you will love your fellow man as you do yourself and bear no hatred towards your brother; you will not take vengeance or bear grudges or do any other similar thing that leads to sinfulness. If you will not lust for women, you will not commit adultery. If you will not lust, you will not steal or plunder; you will not desire or take bribes, usury or other forbidden money. If you will not lust, you will not bear false witness against your fellow man; you will not be the bearer of slander or gossip with intent to gain another's money, but you will guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking falsehoods. All the other mitzvos of the Torah are but corollaries to and branches of these basic precepts. Therefore, anyone who wants life, both temporal life and immortal life, should uproot lustfulness from his heart. If he doesn't, it will lead him

into jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of that which seems to be honor in this world but will ultimately bring him disgrace. He should gird up his loins and overpower the evil inclination that seeks to lead him astray. If he doesn't, it will arouse in him jealousy of the sinful and unjust, and it will cause him serious, chronic illnesses. He should always nurture in his heart a strong fear of the retribution visited upon those that transgress the Torah. He should be aware of the nature of that retribution, both in this world and in the world to come, as outlined in the first section of this work. Thus can he ensure that he shall abhor transgressions and flee from them. For even a beast knows to flee when catastrophe looms, let alone a person created in the Image of the Lord.

Section I

JEALOUSY

Part 1: Consequences in this World

Chap. 1-7

Part 2: Consequences in the Next World

Chap. 8-9

Part 1: Consequences in this World

Chapter One

Measure for Measure

NATURAL PHENOMENA

The Judge of Truth judges a person according to his deeds and punishes him measure for measure. Sometimes, this retribution comes through the agency of other people or through natural phenomena; other times, this retribution comes upon him directly from the Hand of Heaven.

The Talmud tells of the former (Sotah 8b):

%%The measure that a person uses for himself is in turn used to measure for him.¹⁹

She adorned herself for sin; the Omnipresent commanded that she be made ugly. She uncovered herself for sin; the Omnipresent caused her sins to be disclosed. Her thighs were first to engage in sin, followed by her belly; her thighs are first to be stricken, followed by her belly. Nor does the rest of her body escape injury.

Rav Yosef says: "Although the instrument of measurement may be temporarily destroyed, the actual measurement itself endures."

¹⁹ [Translator's note: The Talmud is referring to the procedure of the drinking of bitter water by which the guilt or innocence of the suspected adulteress is miraculously established. The kohen takes holy water in an earthen vessel and puts earth from the holy ground into it. He then writes parts of the relevant Scriptural passage on a parchment. He soaks the parchment in the water until the letters dissolve. He then gives the suspected adulteress this water to drink. If she had, indeed, committed adultery, the water brings a curse upon her; her thighs wither away, her belly swells, and there is a general deterioration of her body. If, however, she is innocent, the water brings blessings upon her; her fertility increases, and her childbearing becomes easier.]

This is according to that which Rav Yosef said and Rabbi Chiya also taught: "From the day that the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, although the Sanhedrin was disbanded, the four major forms of the death penalty remain."

What is the meaning of this? Has not the administration of the death penalty also been discontinued?

Rather, the reference here is to the judgment of the death penalties that endures, not their administration.

This means that a person who deserves to be stoned will either fall off a roof or be pounced upon by a wild beast. One who deserves to be burned will either perish in a fire or be consumed by the venom from a snakebite. One who deserves to die by the sword will either be executed by the authorities or die at the hands of thugs. One who deserves to die by strangulation will either drown or die of diphtheria.

It has been taught: Rabbi Meir used to say: "How do we know that the measure a person uses for himself is in turn used to measure for him?"

"Because it is written, In the se'ah measure that Mitzraim used when she sent Yisrael away, so shall she herself be dealt with (Yeshayahu 27:8).

"However, this reference is only to the larger measures such as se'ah. Now do we know that this concept includes even the smaller measures such as tarkav, half-tarkav, kav, half-kav, quarter-kav, eighth-kav, tuman, half-tuman, and ukla?"

"For it is written, For every measure makes clamorous noise (Yeshayahu 9:4).

"And how do we know that every small amount combines into one larger collective account? For it is written, Adding one to another to arrive at a reckoning (Koheles 7:27).

"So, too, with the suspected adulteress. The measure she used for herself is in turn used to measure for her. She loitered at the entrance of her home in order to attract the attention of the adulterer; therefore, the kohen makes her stand at the Gates of Niknor and reveals her shame to all. She

bedecked her head with beautiful scarves; therefore, the kohen removes her hat and places it beneath her feet. She braided her hair; therefore, the kohen dishevels her hair. She wore lovely sashes; therefore, the kohen brings Egyptian twine and ties it above her breasts.

“She made up her face; therefore, her face turns green from the drinking of the bitter water. She painted her eyes; therefore, her eyes protrude. She beckoned to the adulterer with her fingers; therefore, the nails of her fingers slough off. She extended her thigh to the adulterer; therefore, her thigh withers away. She received him upon her belly; therefore, her belly swells.

“She fed him delicacies of the world; therefore, her offering is of grain which is used for animal feed. She gave him to drink fine wines from fine goblets; therefore, the kohen gives her to drink bitter water from an earthen jug.

“She committed her deeds in stealth; the One Who Sits in Seclusion turns His Face upon her, as if is written, And the adulterous eye awaits the night, saying, No eye shall see me, but the Secluded Face turns upon him (Iyov 24:15).”

Otherwise: She committed her deed in stealth; the Holy Blessed One reveals it in public, as it is written, Who conceals hatred in darkness, will have his villainy revealed in public (Mishlei 26:26).

..... Shimshon followed the dictates of his eyes; therefore, the Pelishtim put out his eyes.

Avshalom took pride in his beautiful hair; therefore, he was hung by his hair. He copulated with the ten concubines of his father David Hamelech²⁰; therefore, he was pierced by ten spears, as it is written, And the ten young armsbearers of Yoav turned about, struck Avshalom, and put him to death (Shmuel II 18:15).

²⁰ "As it is written, And the king left the ten concubines to watch over his household (Shmuel II 15:16)." (Rashi)

He carried on three deceptions, the deceptions of his father, of the courts,²¹ and of all the people of Yisrael, as it is written, And Avshalom deceived the people of Yisrael (Shmuel II 15:6); therefore, he was impaled upon three rods, as it is written, And he took three rods in his hand, and he drove them into the heart of Avshalom while he was still alive (Shmuel II 18:14).

Our rabbis have taught: Shimshon was rebellious through his eyes, as it is written, And Shimshon said to his father, Take that one for me, for she pleases me (Shoftim 14:3); therefore, the Pelishtim put out his eyes, as it is written, And the Pelishtim seized him, and they put out his eyes (Shoftim 16:21).

..... Our rabbis have taught: Five things were created in superhuman form, and each was instrumental in its possessor's downfall: Shimshon in his strength, Shaul in his neck, Avshalom in his hair, Tsidkiahu in his eyes, and Assa in his legs.

“Shimshon in his strength” is derived from that which is written, And she shaved the seven locks of his hair and his strength deserted him (Shoftim 16:9).²²

“Shaul in his neck” is derived from that which is written, And Shaul took his sword and fell upon it (Shmuel I 31:14).²³

²¹ "As it is written, Let me go, I pray, and I shall fulfill my vow (Shmuel II 15:6), and it is written, Along with Avshalom went two hundred men who had been summoned and were going innocently (Shmuel II 15:11). The Talmud Yerushalmi in the Tractate Sotah explains that these men had, in fact, been summoned by David Hamelech and accompanied Avshalom in his insurrection by the inadvertent command of the king. Avshalom said to his father David Hamelech: 'Give me a written order that any two men I select should accompany me,' When David Hamelech complied, Avshalom would show the paper to two men who thereupon joined him. He would then show it to two others who would also follow him. In this way, he gathered two hundred picked men, each of whom was the head judge of a court. Thus, Avshalom deceived his father and the courts." (Rashi)

²² "These sources are brought to demonstrate that these five things were instrumental in the downfall of their possessors; they are not meant to demonstrate the superhuman nature of these five things." (Rashi)

²³ "The implication is that the sword pierced him that part of the body where executions by sword are carried out — the neck." (Rashi.)

“Avshalom in his hair” is derived from that which is written, And his head was caught in the oak tree (Shmuel 11 18:9).

“Tzidkiyahu in his eyes”²⁴ is derived from that which is written, And the eyes of Tzidkiyahu were blind (Melachim 11 25:7).

“Asa in his legs” is derived from that which is written, When he became old, he suffered illness of the legs (Melachim 11 15:23).

And Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “This means that he was afflicted by podagra.”²⁵

Mar Zutra the son of Rav Nachman said to Rav Nachman: “What are the symptoms of podagra?”

He replied: “It is as a needle in raw flesh.”

Some say that Rav Nachman himself suffered from podagra. Others say that he had been told of the symptoms by his teacher.

There is another view that Rav Nachman's knowledge can be explained by that which is written, The secrets of God are known to those who are in awe of Him (Tehillim 25:14).

Rava expounded: “Why was Assa punished?”²⁶

“Because he extended the royal impressment of forced labor to Torah scholars as well, as it is written, And King Assa proclaimed²⁷ to all of Yehudah, without exception, and they carried away the stones of the high tower²⁸ (Melachim I 15:22).”

What is the meaning of “without exception”?

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “Even a groom from his chamber and a bride from her bridal canopy,”²⁹

²⁴ "I do not know where it is indicated that Tsidkiahu's eyes or Assa's legs were of extraordinary quality. Apparently, this was known by oral tradition" (Rashi)

²⁵ "A form of illness that grips the legs." (Rashi) [Translator's note; Gout.]

²⁶ "In that he fell ill." (Rashi)

²⁷ "He stormed at them." (Rashi)

²⁸ "The high tower was part of a fortress being built by King Baasha of Yisrael, the enemy of King Assa of Yehudah, in order to restrict the movements of King Assa." (Rashi) [Translator's note: The source of Rashi's explanation is in Melachim I 15:17.]

²⁹ "The indication is in the use of the same Hebrew word in expressing 'without exception' and in that which is written in reference to grooms, He shall be free for his home (Devarim 24:5)." (Rashi)

&&Similarly, we find that Issachar of the village of Barkai was punished by the Holy Blessed One measure for measure through the agency of other people. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 57a):

Our rabbis have taught: Four cries were uttered by the courtyard of the Bais Hamikdash.

The first cry: "Remove the sons of Eli, for they have defiled the Sanctum of Hashem."³⁰

The second cry: "Remove Issachar of the village of Barkai for he seeks honor for himself and desecrates the sacred things of Heaven."

What did he do?

He would wrap his hands in protective sheathing before he performed the sacrifice services.

The third cry: "Raise up your heads, O gates, and welcome Yishmael the son of Pabi, the disciple of Pinchas, and let him assume the kehunah gedolah."

The final cry: "Raise up your heads, O gates, and welcome Yochanan the son of Rachvai, the disciple of Pinkai, and let him have his fill of the sacred things of Heaven."

It was said about Yochanan the son of Rachvai that at each meal he would consume three hundred calves, three hundred jugs of wine, with four hundred fledglings for dessert.³¹ It was said that throughout the tenure of Yochanan the son of Rachvai there were no neglectfully unconsumed remnants of the sacrifices.

What was the retribution of Issachar of the village of Barkai for covering his hands during the sacrifice services?

³⁰ "As it is written, That they would lie with the women who gathered at the door of the Meeting Tent (Shmuel I 2:22)." (Rashi)

³¹ "This is a description of the hospitality of his home and refers to the feeding of many kohanim in his house." (Rashi)

The king³² and queen were once discussing the relative merits of kids and lambs. The king said: "Kids are more tasty."

The queen said: "Lambs are more tasty."

They said: "Whom can we ask? Let us ask the kohen gadol who offers up sacrifices every day."

The kohen gadol, Issachar of the village of Barkai, came before them. Wagging his finger,³³ he said: "If kids were preferable they would be used for the daily sacrifice."

The king declared: "Since this man is not in dread of royalty, let his right hand be cut off."

Issachar bribed the king's men, and they cut off his left hand instead of his right. When the king heard what had happened he ordered that the right hand be cut off as well.

Rav Yosef said: "Blessed is the Merciful in that he dealt Issachar of the village of Barkai his retribution in this world."

Rav Ashi said: "Issachar of the village of Barkai did not study sufficiently, For it has been taught: Rabbi Shimeon says: 'Sheep always take precedence over goats. One might suspect that this is because sheep are of a better species, were it not written, If from sheep does he bring his sacrifice ,(Vayikra 4:32). This verse teaches us that they are considered of equal quality. '"

Ravina said: "Nor did he read sufficiently of the Scriptures. For it is written, If a sheep ... (Vayikra 3:7), and it is written, And if a goat,(Vayikra 3:12) — if he wants to bring a sheep, he may bring a sheep, if he wants to bring a goat, he may bring a goat."

&&Just as we find that a person is punished measure for measure, so too is he rewarded measure for measure. The Talmud tells us (Sotah 11a):

%%Similarly with regard to good. Miriam delayed one hour for the benefit of Moshe, as it is written, And his sister stood (Shemos 2:4).

³² "One of the kings of the House of Chashmonai." (Rashi)

³³ "In jest, an improper gesture towards a king." (Rashi)

Therefore, the entire nation of Yisrael waited seven days for her recovery in the Desert, as it is written, And the nation did not journey on until Miriam had returned (Bamidbar 12:15).

How can one compare a delay of one hour to a delay of seven days?

Abaya said: "Let us assume that the Mishnah is saying that measure is not dealt for measure in regards to good."

Rava said to him: "But the Mishnah expressly states, 'Similarly!'"³⁴

Instead Rava explained: "This is the meaning of the Mishnah: Similarly with regard to good, the measure that a person uses is in turn used to measure for him, only the measure for good is always greater than the measure for punishment."

&&The Talmud also tells us (Taanis 21b):

%%In the city of Sura there was a plague, but it did not affect Rav's neighborhood. The people assumed that this was because of Rav's merit. It was revealed to them in a dream, however, that Rav's merit was very great, far greater than necessary for something of this sort. In fact, the neighborhood had been spared because of the merit of one man who used to lend his axe and shovel to the gravediggers.

In the city of Drokras there was a fire, but it did not spread to the neighborhood of Rav Huna. The people assumed that this was because of Rav Huna's merit. It was revealed to them in a dream, however, that Rav Huna's merit was very great, far greater than necessary for something of this sort. In fact, the neighborhood had been spared because of the merit of

³⁴ [Translator's note: This dialogue, whereby Abaya is willing to assume that there was an error in the oral transmission of the Mishnah, while Rava is not, recurs repeatedly throughout the Talmud, Rashi, in Sanhedrin 10b, explains that, in Rava's opinion, it is possible that a word may have been omitted in the transmission, but it is unlikely that one word or expression was substituted for another. Similar exchanges between Abaya and Rava can be found in Shabbos 107b, 122b, 123b, 134b, Pesachim 45b, 58a, Yoma 10b, Yevamos 31b, Kesubos 12a, Gittin 10b, Bava Kama 46b, Bava Basra 4a, 19a, 86a, 128b, Shevuos 29a, Menachos 21a, and many more.]

one woman who used to heat up her oven at her own expense and, then, let her neighbors use it.

&&This clearly demonstrates that the Holy Blessed One repays a person measure for measure in reward as well as in punishment.³⁵

³⁵ [Translator's note: The man who had assisted the gravediggers merited protection from death by plague. The woman who had stoked the fires of her oven for the benefit of others merited protection from the destruction of fire. Measure for measure!]

Chapter Two

Measure for Measure

THE HAND OF HEAVEN

Some people receive their retribution measure for measure directly from the Hand of Heaven. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 108a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: The generation of the Great Flood became arrogant only because of the good that the Holy Blessed One bestowed upon them.

It is written about them, Their homes are at peace, safe from terror, nor is the rod of the Lord laid upon their selves. His ox impregnates and his seed is not expelled, his cow gives birth and does not miscarry. Their children roam, safe as sheep, and their young cavort. They raise their voices in song to the accompaniment of drums and fiddles, and they rejoice to the sound of flutes. They live out their entire lives in happiness, and their death is but a painless moment. And they say to the Lord, Leave us be! We do not wish to know Your Ways. Who is the Almighty that we must worship Him? For what benefit need we beseech Him? (Iyov 21:9-15).

The thought: “What do we need besides the benefit of rain? Even for that, we have streams and springs from which to draw water for irrigation.”

The Holy Blessed One said; “Because of the good that I have bestowed upon them, they are angering Me; through it I will visit judgment upon them, as it is written, And behold. I will bring the waters of the Flood (Beraishis 6:17).”

Rabbi Yosi the son of Durmaskis says: "The generation of the Great Flood became arrogant only because of their eyeballs, which are similar to water, as it is written, And they took themselves women from wherever they chose (Beraishis 6:2). Therefore, the Holy Blessed One visited their judgment upon them through water which is similar to the eyeball, as it is written, All the wellsprings of the great abyss were split open (Beraishis 7:11)."

... Rav Chisda said: "The generation of the Great Flood corrupted themselves through inflammation, and their judgment was visited upon them through boiling water. This is indicated by it being written in reference to the Flood, And the waters subsided (Beraishis 8:1), it also being written, And the hot anger of the king subsided (Esther 7:10)."

&&The Talmud gives other examples of retribution measure for measure administered by the Hand of Heaven (Shabbos 31b, 33a, 62b, Sanhedrin 90a, Kallah):

%%Because of three sins do women die during childbirth. Because they are not careful in observing the Niddah laws of the menstruant women, the laws of the holy challah portion of dough designated for kohanim, and the lighting of the Shabbos candles.

What is the connection between the laws of the niddah and death during childbirth?

Rabbi Yitzchak said: "She sinned with the chambers of her belly; therefore, she is stricken in the chambers of her belly."

That explains the connection to the laws of niddah. What can be said for the connection to challah and the lighting of Shabbos candles?

It can be explained by that which a certain Gallilite expounded before Rav Chisda: "The Holy Blessed One said: 'I have injected a quarter measure of blood into you, and I have cautioned you about matters concerning blood. I have designated you 'first', and I have cautioned you to heed the laws of the tithe, which is also called 'first'. I have imbued you with a soul that is called 'candle', and I have cautioned you concerning the

lighting of candles. If you heed my warning, all is well. If you don't I shall take your souls from you.'"

And why at the particular time of childbirth?

Rava said: "The time to quickly sharpen the slaughtering knife is when the ox has fallen down and is vulnerable."

Our rabbis have taught: There are four marks. The mark of sin is dropsy. The mark of undeserved hatred is jaundice. The mark of arrogance is poverty. The mark of gossip is diphtheria.

Our rabbis have taught: Diphtheria comes because of violation of laws of tithing.

Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Yosi says: "Because of gossip."

Rava said, or according to another version, Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: "What is the Scriptural source for this? For it is written, And the king shall rejoice in the Lord, all who swear by Him shall be praised, for the mouths of liars shall be gagged (Tehillim 63:12)."

Rav Ula the son of Rav Ilai expounded: "That which is written, And God said, Because the daughters of Zion became arrogant (Yeshayahu 3:16) refers to their walking with proud bearing. And they walked with outstretched throat (Ibid.) refers to their emphasizing their stately height by walking beside others shorter than they. And painted their eyes (Ibid.) refers to their covering their eyes with blue shadow and winking alluringly. Walking and mincing as they go (Ibid.) refers to their promenading with mincing, heel-to-toe footsteps."

It is written, And clattering with their feet (Ibid.).

Rabbi Yitzchak said in the school of Rabbi Ami: "This comes to teach that they would put myrrh and persimmon on their shoes and walk in the marketplaces of Yerushalayim. When they came upon young men of Yisrael, they would stamp their feet and sprinkle them, causing the evil inclination to awaken in them, as venom in a snake."

What was their punishment?

*This can be known from that which Raba the son of Ula expounded:
“That which is written, And it shall be that instead of perfume there shall be
decay (Yeshayahu 3:24) is saying that those places they perfumed will be
covered with patches of decay.”³⁶*

*“And instead of a sash a bruise (Yeshayahu 3:24) is saying that those
places they adorned with belts will become covered with bruises.*

*“That which is written, And instead of tresses baldness (Ibid.) is saying
that those places with which they preened themselves were covered with
bald spots.*

*“That which is written, And instead of festive robes a girdle of sackcloth
(Ibid.) is saying that their gates of promiscuous delight shall be shrouded in
sackcloth.”*

The verse concludes, For this instead of beauty (Ibid.).

*Rava said: “This coincides with the popular saying that beauty brings
ulcers.”*

*It is written, And God will bring sores upon the heads of the daughters
of Zion (Yeshayahu 3:17).*

*Rabbi Yosi the son of Chanina said: “This teaches that they broke out
in leprosy. This is deduced from the similarity between the Hebrew word
used here for 'bring sores' and the Hebrew words used elsewhere to
indicate the off-white form of leprosy (Vayikra 14:56).”*

It is written, And God will lay bare their secret parts (Yeshayahu 3:17).

Both Rav and Shmuel proposed interpretations.

One said: “This means that they gushed forth like pitchers.”

*The other said: “This means that their gates became densely overgrown
like a forest.”“*

*Our rabbis have taught: Among those that have no share in the world to
come is one who denies that the Scripture indicates future resurrection of
the dead.*

³⁶ "The Hebrew usage here is similar to the usage in that which is written, And his flesh shall become gangrenous (Zechariah 14:12)." (Rashi)

Why is this so?

He denied the concept of resurrection of the dead; therefore, he himself shall not participate in the resurrection of the dead. For all of the measures used by the Holy Blessed One are measure for measure of the measures used by the person himself.

This was said by Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: "How do we know that all of the measures used by the Holy Blessed One are measure for measure of the measures used by the person himself?"

For it is written, And Elisha said, Listen to the Word of God, so has God said, At this time tomorrow a se'ah of flour shall sell for a shekel, and two se'ahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Shomron (Melachini II 7:1).

"And the verse goes on, And the king's captain, upon whose arm the king would lean, answered the man of the Lord, and he said, Behold, God will make windows in the sky, can there be such a thing? and he said, Behold, you shall witness it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it (Melachim II 7:2).

"And it is written, And so it happened to him, and the people trampled him at the gate, and he died (Melachim II 7:20)."

How do we know he was being repaid measure for measure, maybe the fate was merely the result of Elisha's curse? For, indeed, Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: "The curse of a sage has effect even if it is undeserved." Maybe this was the case here, too.

This cannot be, for if so, it would have been sufficient to write, And they trampled him, and he died. To what purpose was it written, At the gate? It is meant to imply that he died because of his skepticism of the promise of abundant supply of grain at the gate of Shomron.

Rabbi Nehorai says: "Whoever disgraces another is, in the end, himself disgraced. Furthermore, the angels of service jostle him and reveal his shame to the entire world."

&&Some things that a person may do are so abominable that the Holy Blessed One administers the punishment by His own Hand. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 94a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Karchah says: “Pharaoh was himself insulting, as it is written, And he said, Who is God that I should heed His Voice? (Shemos 5:2). Therefore, the Holy Blessed One punished him by His own Hand, as it is written And God tossed the Mitzriim into the midst of the sea (Shemos 14:27).

“And it is written, You trampled multitudes with Your Steed (Chavakuk 3:15). Sancheriv was insulting through an envoy, as it is written, Through your envoys you have insulted the Lord, and you said, With my many chariots I have stormed the mountaintop (Melachim II 19:23), And it is written, I dug down and drank newly found waters, and with the tread of my footsteps I will dry up the rivers of the besieged city (Melachim II 19:24). Therefore, the Holy Blessed One punished him through an envoy, as it is written, And an angel of God went out and slew in the camp of Ashur... (Melachim II 19:35).”

&&Chapter Three

Cause and Effect

There are some sins that are directly related to specific calamities that befall a person. The Talmud describe these “cause and effect” relationships and finds allusions to them in the Scripture (Shabbos 32b):

It was taught: Rabbi Nassan says: “Because of the sin of violating vows, a person's wife dies, as it is written, If you cannot fulfill your obligation, why should you cause that your bed be taken from you? (Mishlei 22:27).”

Rabi says: “Because of the sin of violating vows, a person's small children die, as it is written, Do not let your mouth bring guilt on your flesh, and do not tell the messenger that it was an error, why should the Lord be angered by your voice and strike your creations? (Koheles 5:5). What are the creations of a person? It would seem that these are his sons and daughters.”

Our rabbis have taught: “Because of the sin of violating vows, a person's children die,” said Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon.

Rabbi Yehudah the Prince says: “It is because of the sin of neglecting to study the Torah. Where is the allusion in the Scripture to this? For it is written, In vain did I strike your children, for you have not accepted chastisement (Yirmiyahu 2:30).”

Rav Nachman the son of Yitzchak says: “The one who is of the opinion that the sin of violating vows is the cause can also find an allusion in this verse: 'In vain' can be taken to mean 'because of vows taken in vain'.

Let us reflect! Rabbi Yehudah the Prince and Rabi are one and the same; was not Rabi previously quoted as saying that the sin of violating vows is the cause, not the sin of neglecting to study the Torah?

After he heard the opinion of Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon, he accepted it in place of his own view.

There is a difference of opinion on this matter between Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba and Rabbi Asi. One is of the opinion that small children die

because of the parents' sin of neglecting to put the mezuzah scroll on their doorposts. The other contends that it is because of the sin of neglecting to study the Torah.

The one who traces the cause to the mezuzah is of the opinion that a Scriptural verse can be related only to the verse that immediately precedes it, not the one before that. The one who traces the cause to the neglect of the study of the Torah is of the opinion that a Scriptural verse can be related to two preceding verses.³⁷

There is a difference of opinion on this matter between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah. One is of the opinion that the cause can be traced to the sin of neglecting to put the mezuzah scroll on one's doorpost. The other contends that it can be traced to the sin of neglecting to wear tsitsis fringes on one's garment.

Granted that the connection to mezuzah can be found in that which is written, And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house (Devarim 11:20), followed by, So that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied (Devarim 11:21). Where, however, is there a connection to the tsitsis fringes of garments?

Rav Kahana said, or according to another version, Shaila Mari said: "Where is there an allusion to this in the Scripture? It is written, Even on your skirts is found the blood of innocent, wretched souls, you did not corner them in some underground tunnel but through all of these things (Yirmiyahu 2:34)."

Rav Nachman the son of Yitzchak said: "The one who is of the opinion that the cause can be traced to the neglect of mezuzah can also find an allusion in this verse. With a slightly different reading, it is saying, 'I did not find them consistent even in their constructions.' The implication there is

³⁷ [Translator's note; This dispute revolves around three consecutive verses in Devarim 11:19-21. These are: And you shall teach them to your children..., "And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and your gates." "So that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied on the land ..."

that they constructed frameless doors, tunnellike, in order to circumvent the mitzvah of mezuzah.”

It was taught: Rabbi Nechemiah says: “Because of the sin of undeserved hatred³⁸ discord develops in a person's home, his wife miscarries, and his sons and daughters die young.

Rabbi Elazar the son of Yehudah says: “Because of the sin of neglecting to set aside the holy challah portion of dough there is no plentitude in inventories of wine and oil, dislocations develop in the market prices, there is planting of crops, but others consume them, For so is it written, I, too, will do the same to you, and I shall call down panic upon you (Vayikra 26:16). With a slight variation, the Hebrew word for 'panic' can be read as 'because of challah'. The verse continues, And you shall sow your speed in vain (ibid.).

“If, however, people are careful in the observance of the mitzvah of challah, they will bring upon themselves blessings of plentitude, as it is written, And the first parts of your dough that you shall give to the kohen in order to bring plentitude into your home (Yechezkel 44:30).

“Because of the sin of neglecting to set aside terumah portions and tithes the skies hold back from giving forth dew and rainfall, inflation abounds, profit disappears, and people try desperately to earn their livelihood, but they are not successful. For it is written, Aridity, also heat, have they stolen, and moisture of snow too, for in the abyss have they sinned (Iyov 24:9).³⁹

(This derivation was explained in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: Because of the things I commanded you to do in the days of summer, and which you neglected to do, you were deprived of the moisture of snow in the rainy season.]

³⁸ "If one sees sinfulness in another, one may harbor hatred towards that other person; any other hatred is considered undeserved hatred." (Rashi)

³⁹ "The Hebrew word for 'aridity' is used here in the variant form meaning 'command'; the verse is, therefore, interpreted as saying, 'because of the things I commanded you to do in the time of warmth, to wit, setting aside terumah portions and tithes, were you deprived of the moisture of snow.'" (Rashi)

“If, however, people are careful to set aside these holy portions, they will bring upon themselves blessings of plentitude, as it is written, Bring all of the tithes to the storehouses so that there shall be food in My House, and test Me through this, said God, the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of the skies and shower you with blessings without limit (Malachi 2:10).”

[What is the implication of “without limit”?

Rav said; “Because of the alternative meaning of these Hebrew words, they can be interpreted to mean, Until your lips shall become sore from saying, 'Enough!'"]

“Because of the sin of stealing, locusts arrive, famine comes, and people are forced to eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, as it is written, Heed this, ministers' wives of Mount Shomron who rob the poor, oppress the destitute, and say to their masters, Bring us wine to drink (Amos 4:1).”

[Rava said: “Such as the women of Mechuza who eat but do no work.”]

“And it is written, I have afflicted you with blight and with mildew, the luxuriation of your gardens, vineyards, fig trees, and olive trees were eaten by the young locust, and still, you did not return to Me, by the Word of God (Amos 4:9).

“And it is written, What was left over by the young locust was eaten by the locust (Yoel 1:4).

“And it is written, And the nation plundered on the right and was still hungry, then it ate from the left and was still not sated, it was as if each man was eating the flesh of his own arm (Yeshayahu 9:19). With a slightly different pronunciation, these last words can be read as, The flesh of his own children.”

“Because of the sins of delay of justice,⁴⁰ perversion of justice,⁴¹ and corruption of justice,⁴² and because of the sin of neglecting to study the Torah, slaughter, pillage, plague, and drought come. People eat but are not satisfied; they carefully measure out the bread that they eat. For it is written, And I will bring upon you an avenging sword avenging the Covenant (Vayilcra 26:25). 'Covenant' refers to the Torah, as it is written, Were it not for My Covenant of day and night (Yirmiyahu 33:25).⁴³ And it is written, When I have broken for you the staff of bread (Vayikra 26:26).⁴⁴ And it is written, Only because they loathed My justice (Vayikra 26:43).⁴⁵

“Because of the sins of false oaths and oaths taken in vain,⁴⁶ desecration of the Name,⁴⁷ and the desecration of the Shabbos, wild and vicious beasts roam wild, domestic animals become scarce, populations shrink, and the roadways become desolate. For it is written, And if by these things you still do not become chastened for Me (Vayikra 26:23). Do not read the Hebrew word in such a way that it will mean 'by these things' but by the slightly different pronunciation whereby it means 'because of oaths'. And it is written, And I will let loose against you the wild beasts of the open country (Vayikra 26:22).

It is written in reference to false oaths, And you shall not swear falsely in My Name and thus desecrate the Name of your Lord (Vayikra 19:12). It

⁴⁰ "They postpone the trial of cases, not because that postponement will serve to improve the administration of justice; even after all the elements of the case have become clear, they still postpone the trial." (Rashi)

⁴¹ "They intentionally pervert justice, handing down unjust verdicts." (Rashi)

⁴² "They are not careful enough in passing judgment, nor are they thorough enough in their deliberations, thereby causing justice to go astray." (Rashi)

⁴³ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that the connection of this verse to the Torah is based on the phrase "day and night", which is also used in reference to the Torah in that which is written, And you shall study it day and night (Yehoshua 1:8).]

⁴⁴ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that this is an allusion to the affliction of drought.]

⁴⁵ "This is a collective reference to delay, perversion, and corruption of justice." (Rashi)

⁴⁶ "The word for 'in vain' is used here to describe 'pointlessness'. An oath taken in vain is one that declares something to be different from what it is known to be, such as declaring that a man is, in fact, a woman. A false oath is one whose falsity is not manifest, thereby convincing people of falsehood." (Rashi)

⁴⁷ "This refers to a prominent person, from whom people take example, that is not careful in his conduct. Ordinary people take note and disregard the Torah, saying, 'Obviously, this man has discovered that there is no substance to the Torah and the mitzvos.' As a result, the Name is desecrated, and His Words are profaned." (Rashi)

is written in reference to the desecration of the Name, And you shall not desecrate the Name of My Holiness (Vayikra 22:32). It is written in reference to the desecration of the Shabbos, Those who desecrate her shall surely die (Shemos 31:14). Since there is a parallel expression of the Hebrew word for desecration in all three cases, it can be assumed that the afflictions associated with the sin of false oaths apply to the others as well.

“Because of the sin of bloodshed, the Bais Hamikdash is destroyed, and the Divine Presence departs from Yisrael. For it is written, And you shall not pollute the land in which you are, for blood pollutes the land. And you shall not defile the land in which you live, that I am present within her (Bamidbar 35:33-34). If you defile her, I shall not dwell within her.

“Because of the sin of idolatry, incest, and neglecting to leave the land fallow during the shemitah and yovail years, exile comes, people are banished from their homes, and others come and settle in their place. For so is it written in reference to incest, For all these abominations were committed by the people who were here before you, and the land was defiled. Let not the land expel you for defiling her as she expelled the nation that was there before you (Vayikra 18:27-28). And it is written in reference to idolatry, And I shall cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and My Soul will reject you (Vayikra 26:30): And it is written in reference to shemitah and yovail, Only then will the land have the satisfaction of its sabbaths during all the days that it lies desolate, while you shall be in the land of your enemies (Vayikra 26:34).

“Because of the sin of obscene language many great troubles and oppressive decrees appear, the young men of the enemies of Yisrael⁴⁸ die, their orphans and widows cry out, but they are not answered. For it is written, Therefore, God takes no joy in its young men and takes no pity on its orphans and widows, for it is entirely polluted and evil, and every mouth

⁴⁸ . [Translator’s note: "Enemies of Yisrael" is a euphemism for Yisrael, commonly used where a dire fate is involved.]

speaks obscenity, and still they have not seen to induce Him to withdraw His Wrath, and His Hand is still outstretched (Yeshayahu 9:16)."

What is the meaning of "His Hand is still outstretched"?

Rav Chanan said in the name of Rava: "Everyone knows for what purpose a bride enters the bridal canopy. Yet, if anyone filthies his mouth and utters an obscenity, the judgment that has been sealed in his favor, even for a span of seventy years, is turned to his detriment."

Rav Chisda said: "Whoever filthies his mouth with obscenity descends to the lower realms of Gehinom, as it is written, A deep pit for the mouth of strangenesses (Mishlei 22:14)."

Rav Nachman the son of Yitzchak said: "The one who hears and is silent suffers the same fate, as it is written, The one who angers God shall fall into it (Ibid.)."

Rav Oshia said: "Whoever makes deliberate arrangements preparatory to sin develops bruises and wounds, as it is written, Bruises and wounds shall scour the evil (Mishlei 20:30). Furthermore, he is stricken with dropsy, as it is written, And afflictions of the chambers of the belly (Ibid.)."

And Rav Nachman the son of Yitzchak said: "The mark of sin is dropsy."

&&In view of all of these calamities that are directly traceable to specific sins, it would be wise to shun evil conduct and choose only good.

Chapter Four

More Cause and Effect

There are also other punishments that are reserved for particular sins. However, unlike those outlined in the previous chapter, these were taught by our early teachers without allusions taken from the Scripture.

The Talmud tells us (Avos 5:8-9):

Seven kinds of punishment come to the world for seven different sins.

If some people set aside tithes and some don't, there comes famine caused by drought, whereby some are hungry and some are full. If all the people do not set aside the tithes, there comes a more severe famine caused by drought and turmoil. If they do not set aside the challah portion of the dough, there comes an absolute, destructive famine.

Plague comes to the world because of widespread guilt that would be punishable by death penalties mentioned in the Torah if the courts were in a position to administer them and because of violation of the laws pertaining to shemitah year fruits.

Slaughter comes to the world because of delay of justice, perversion of justice, and those who give out Torah rulings that are contrary to accepted authoritative opinion.

Wild and vicious beasts come to the world because of oaths taken in vain and desecration of the Name.

Exile comes to the world because of idolatry, incest, bloodshed, and the neglect of the laws of shemitah.

&&Elsewhere, the Talmud gives other examples (Shabbos 32a, Sukkah 29a, Yoma 9a):

Our rabbis have taught: Because of these three sins (violation of the laws of niddah, challah, and lighting of Shabbos candles) women die during childbirth.

Rabbi Eliezer says: "Because of these sins women die young."

Rabbi Acha says: "Young women die because they wash the excrement from the clothing of their children on Shabbos."

Others say: "Young women die because they refer to the holy ark of the Torah disrespectfully as 'the box'."

It was taught: Rabbi Shimeon the son of Elazar says: "Because of two sinful things the ignorant die: because they refer to the synagogue disrespectfully as 'the house' and to the holy ark of the Torah as 'the box'."

Our rabbis have taught: Because of four things the sun goes into eclipse:⁴⁹ because of a president of the court who died and was not eulogized properly; because of a betrothed maiden who was raped in the city, and her cries went unheeded; because of homosexuality; because of two brothers whose blood was shed at the same time.

Because of four things the heavenly lights go into eclipse: Because of people who forge documents; because of people who bear false witness; because of people who breed small cattle in the settlements of Yisrael;⁵⁰ because of people who chop down healthy trees.

Because of four things the property of householders falls into the hands of the authorities: Because they save promissory notes that have already been paid up; because their wealth gives them the power to speak out against the sinful of their times, but they fail to do so; because they pledge money to charity, but they do not give it.

Because of four things does the property of householders go down the drain: because they delay paying wages to their hirelings; because they swindle their hirelings out of their wages; because they shift the burden of their community responsibilities onto the shoulders of others; because they become arrogant. Arrogance outweighs all the others.

⁴⁹ "I do not know of an explanation for the connection." (Rashi)

⁵⁰ [Translator's note; Breeding small cattle, such as sheep and goats, in the settlements of Yisrael was prohibited by Rabbinic Law because of the likelihood that they would destroy neighbors' crops. This prohibition was not extended to larger, burden-bearing cattle because it would have placed unbearable hardship on the community. See Bava Kama 79b.]

Rabbi Yochanan said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, The fear of God adds days, but the years of the sinful are shortened (Mishlei 10:27)?

“The fear of God adds days' refers to the first Bais Hamikdash; it lasted four hundred and ten years, but that long span was divided among the tenures of only eighteen kohanim gedolim.

“But the years of the sinful are shortened' refers to the second Bais Hamikdash; it lasted four hundred and twenty years, during which time there were over three hundred kohanim gedolim. Deduct the forty years of the tenure of Shimeon the Just, the eighty years of the tenure of Yochanan the Kohen Gadol, the ten years of the tenure of Yochanan the son of Nadvai, and the eleven years of the tenure of Elazar the son of Charsum, and then calculate the number of years against the number of kohanim gedolim. You will find that none of the other kohanim gedolim that served in the second Bais Hamikdash lasted a full year.”

Why was this so?

Because they attained the office of the kehunah gedolah by paying for it. As Rabbi Asi said: “Marsa the daughter of Baisus paid King Yanai a tarkav of dinars to appoint Yehoshua the son of Gamla as kohen gadol.”⁵¹

&&This teaches us that the sinful are punished for their sinfulness, while those that fear Hashem add days to their lives.

⁵¹ [Translator's note: Variation from the standard text.]

Chapter Five

The Power of Courts

There are some sins for which the courts are empowered to administer punishment, according to guidelines set down by Chazal. Among these are sins that are punishable by the death penalty or flogging. The courts are also empowered to administer arbitrary penalties and corporeal punishment if they feel it necessary do so because of temporary emergencies.

The Talmuds tell us (Sanhedrin 46a, Yevamos 90a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Eliezer the son of Yaakov said: "I have heard of the courts administering punishments and penalties unsanctioned by the Torah, not with the intention of overstepping the boundary of the Law, but with the intention of providing a buffer against the violation of the Torah,

"There was an incident of a man who rode a horse on Shabbos during the period of the malignant Greek influence. He was brought before the courts, and he was sentenced to be stoned to death, not because his relatively minor violation was punishable by such a severe penalty, but because contemporary circumstances required drastic measures.

"There was another incident of a man who cohabited with his wife under a fig tree. He was brought before the courts and flogged, not because his relatively minor violation was punishable by such a severe penalty, but because contemporary circumstances required drastic measures."

&&The courts are also empowered to ostracize, to excommunicate, to declare property forfeit, to shackle hand and foot, to imprison, and to administer any other penalty as they see fit. This license, of course, applies only to the courts of the great Torah judges, who had achieved the very highest levels of legal and moral accomplishment.

The Talmud tells us (Mo'ed Katan 16a):

%%How do we know that the courts have the power to ostracize?

For it is written, Curse Meroz (Shoftim 5:2).

And how do we know that the courts have the power to excommunicate?

For it is written, Curse him strongly (Ibid.).

And how do we know that it also extends to anyone that eats with, drinks with, or comes within four cubits of the ostracized?

For it is written, Her inhabitants (Ibid.).

And how do we know that the sins that brought on the ostracism are revealed in public?

For it is written, Because they did not come to the aid of the people of God (Ibid.).

And Ula said: "Barak ostracized Meroz to the accompaniment of four hundred heraldic trumpets."

Some say: "Meroz was a prominent person.

Others say: "It was a star, as it is written, From the skies they fought, the stars from their paths fought against Sisera (Shoftim 5:20)."

And how do we know that the courts have the power to declare property forfeit?

For it is written, And whoever shall not come within three days, as counseled by the ministers and the elders, let all his possessions be forfeit (Ezra 10:8).

And how do we know that the courts are empowered to shackle, imprison, and otherwise persecute?

For it is written, To execute or to root out or to levy fines or to imprison (Ezra 7:26).

What is the meaning of "to root out"?

Persecution.

What is the meaning of "persecution"?

Rav Yehudah said "They immediately ostracize him, extend the ostracism after thirty days, and excommunicate him after sixty days."

Rav Huna said to him.: "This does not coincide with that which Rav Chisda said: 'He is given warning on a Monday, the following Thursday, and the following Monday⁵² before the process of ostracism is begun.'"

⁵² [Translator's note: The reference here is to three consecutive sessions of the courts, which used to convene only on Mondays and Thursdays.]

There is a difference. If the reason for the ostracism is his refusal to make restitution for money illicitly obtained, he is, indeed, given three warnings. However, if the ostracism is in reaction to his demeaning Torah scholars, the process is begun immediately.

&&The Talmud also tells us (Sanhedrin 58b):

%%Raish Lakish said: "Whoever threateningly lifts his hand at another, even if he does not actually strike him, is considered a villain. For it is written, And he said, Villian, why will you strike your fellow (Shemos 2:13)? He did not say 'did you strike' but 'will you strike'.

Ze'iri added in the name of Rabbi Chanina: "He is considered a sinner. For it is written, If you will not give, I shall take by force (Shmuel I 2:16), and afterwards it is written, And the sin of the youths was very great before God (Shmuel I 2:17)."

Rav Huna added: "His hand deserves to be cut off, as it is written, And the raised arm shall be smashed (Iyov 38:15)."

Rav Huna once cut off the hand of a man who habitually struck people.

&&The courts were also empowered to mete out punishments called "inducers of death"⁵³ to those who are deserving of execution but are not technically liable to the death penalty. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 81b):

%%If someone was twice flogged for a particular sin, and he still repeated the offense, the courts confine him to a small enclosure and feed him barley until his belly bursts.

If someone commits murder, but the testimony is technically insufficient to convict him, the courts confine him to a small enclosure and feed him the "bread of adversity and the water of distress (Yeshayahu 30:20)".

&&The courts are also empowered to mete out any similar punishment that will torment the sinful and, thus, permit the people to fulfill their purpose in peace.

⁵³ "Those punishments that induce and prompt death to come before its time." (Rashi — Shabbos 32a)

Chapter Six

Abominations and Instant Retribution

There are some transgressions that are so abominable that their retribution does not require prior trial by the courts. Rather, it is in the power of any truly righteous and sincere person who witnesses such acts to follow the example of Pinchas and let the jealous rage of Hashem be vented through him in vengeance.

The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 81b):

%%One who steals the vessels of service from the Bais Hamikdash or who invokes idolatrous sorcery and curses Heaven, or who copulates with a gentile woman may be struck down by zealots. A kohen who serves in the Bais Hamikdash while he is in a state of defilement need not be taken before the courts by his fellow kohanim, Instead, the young kohanim remove him from the courtyard of the Bais Hamikdash and split his head open with firewood.

..... Rav Kehana asked Rav: "How is the transgressor dealt with if he has not been struck down by zealots?"

Rav was not able to recall this information and was at a loss for an answer.

Afterward, Rav Kehana dreamed that he was being shown that which is written, Yehudah was treacherous, and an abomination was done in Yisrael and Yerushalayim, for Yehudah that was consecrated for God was desecrated in that he loved and copulated with the daughter of a foreign deity (Malachi 2:11).

Rav Kehana came back to Rav and said: "This is what I was shown in my dream."

Thereupon Rav was reminded of what he had been taught on the subject. He said: "Yehudah was treacherous' refers to idolatry. For so is it written, You have betrayed me, O House of Yisrael, by the Word of God (Yirmiyahu 3:20).

“And an abomination was done in Yisrael and Yerushalayim' refers to homosexuality. For so is it written, And you shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination (Vayikra 18:22).

“For Yehudah that was consecrated for God was desecrated in that he loved' refers to prostitutes. For there is a similarity in the Hebrew words to that which is written, There shall be no promiscuity among the daughters of Yisrael, nor shall there be promiscuity among the sons of Yisrael (Devarim 23:18).

“And copulated with the daughter of a foreign deity' refers to one who copulates with a gentile woman. The verse concludes, God will deny to the man that does these things descendants who are reasonable among the dwellings of Yaakov and bring offerings before the God of Hosts (Malachi 2:12). This means that if the transgressor is a learned man, he will not have sons who are learned and can answer the questions of bright pupils. If the transgressor is a kohen, he will not have sons who will bring offerings before the God of Hosts.'“

Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba said: “Whoever copulates with a gentile woman is considered as if he has wedded himself to idolatry. For it is written, And he copulated with the daughter of a foreign deity (Malachi 2:11). Do foreign deities have daughters? This is clearly referring to one who copulates with a gentile woman.”

When Rav Dimi arrived he said: “The courts of the Chashmonaim decreed that whoever copulates with a gentile woman is considered in violation of Nashga.⁵⁴“

When Ravin arrived he said: “He is considered in violation of Nasgaz,⁵⁵ the violation of aishess ish⁵⁶ not being applicable, since matrimony, in the gentile world, is meaningless.”

⁵⁴ An acronym of the Hebrew words, niddah (menstruant woman), shifchah (bondswoman), goyah (gentile woman), and aishess ish (wedded woman).

⁵⁵ An acronym of the Hebrew words, niddah (menstruant woman), shifchah (bondswoman), goyah (gentile woman), and zonah (prostitute).

⁵⁶ See Footnote 36.

Rav Dimi, however, is of the opinion that, although promiscuity in the gentile world is widespread, the gentiles do not permit their wives to be promiscuous.

Rav Chisda said: "If a purported zealot tells the court of an abomination he has witnessed, and asks if he may strike down the perpetrator, the courts forbid him to do so.

"Furthermore, if Zimri had stopped his corrupt activities while Pinchas was in the midst of striking him down, Pinchas would have been required to desist immediately; if he had then killed Zimri anyway, Pinchas himself would have been put to death by the courts.

"Also, if Zimri had turned on Pinchas and killed him, he would not have been held responsible, for he would only have been acting in self-defense to protect himself from a mortal menace."

It is written, And Moshe said to the judges of Yisrael, Let each man slay those of his men who are attached to Baal Peor (Bamidbar 25:5).

The people of the tribe of Shimeon approached Zimri and said: "They are passing death sentences. How can you sit by silently?"

What did Zimri do?

He assembled twenty-four thousand men of Yisrael and went to Kazvi, the daughter of Tzur.

He said to her: "Lie with me!"

She said to him: "I am a princess, and my father has commanded me, Do not lie with any but the greatest among them."⁵⁷

Zimri said to her: "I, too, am a prince of a tribe. Better yet, I am greater than he is, for I am of the tribe of Shimeon, who was second-born of Yaakov, and he is of the tribe of Levi, who was third-born of Yaakov."

He grabbed her by her hair and dragged her before Moshe.

⁵⁷ He was referring to Moshe.

*He said to Moshe: "Son of Amram, is this one allowed or forbidden? And if you say that she is forbidden, how were you permitted to wed the daughter of Yisro?"*⁵⁸

The law that permits the immediate striking down of abominators eluded Moshe, and he was not able to quash the insubordination. The people, upon hearing this exchange, burst into tears, as it is written, And they were crying at the entrance to the Meeting Tent (Bamidbar 25:6).

The verse goes on, And Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon saw it (Bamidbar 25:7).

What did he see?

Rav said: "He observed this episode and was reminded of the law.

"Pinchas said to Moshe: 'Great uncle, did you not teach us when you descended from Mount Sinai that one who copulates with a gentile woman may be struck down by zealots?'

"Moshe replied: 'Indeed, and the one who expertly reads the proclamation should be the bearer of it.'"

And Shmuel said: "Pinchas saw that, There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against God (Mishlei 21:30). The meaning: When a desecration of the Name is being perpetrated it is time for swift action and not for deference to the great."

Rabbi Yitzchak said: "Pinchas saw the angel of death setting out to wreak destruction among the people."

..... It is written, And he arose from amidst the congregation and took a lance in his hand (Bamidbar 25:7).

Rabbi Yochanan said: "From here it is apparent that weapons are forbidden in a house of study."

Pinchas removed the point of the spear, concealed it in the folds of his garment, and used the wooden shaft to lean on as he walked along. When he came to the tent where the abominations were being perpetrated, he

⁵⁸ [Translator's note; Rashi explains that the case of Moshe and that of Zimri were, in fact, dissimilar, since Moshe had taken the daughter of Yisro before the giving of the Torah.]

said: "Who says that the tribe of Levi is greater than the tribe of Shimeon?"⁵⁹

They said: "Let him enter! He too wishes to indulge himself."

When the devout people saw Pinchas enter the tent they assumed that what was going on was not forbidden.

Rabbi Yochanan said: "Six miracles occurred for Pinchas. One was that Zimri should have had the sense to cease his activities when he saw the imminent danger, but he did not. Another was that Zimri should have cried out for help when he saw the imminent danger, but he did not. Another was that Pinchas was able to simultaneously impale the organs of both the man and the woman and thus demonstrate the altruism of his motives. Another was that they did not separate at the sight of the lance to give the appearance of innocence. Another was that an angel came and raised up the crossbar of the doorway so that Pinchas was able to carry out the bodies as they were impaled on the lance. Another was that an angel came and wreaked destruction among the people of Shimeon, distracting them from avenging themselves on Pinchas for the slaying of Zimri, their Prince.

"Pinchas came and dropped the bodies before the Omnipresent. He said: 'Master of the World! Must twenty four thousand people of Yisrael perish because of these!?'"

"This is the meaning of that which is written, And Pinchas stood up and prayed, and the plague came to a halt (Tehillim 106:30)."

Rabbi Elazar said: "That the Hebrew word for 'prayed' is not used in the reflexive form is an intimation that Pinchas entered into a legal dispute with his Creator. The angels of service wanted to stop him by pushing him away.

⁵⁹ Meaning: "Why shouldn't I also be allowed to participate in your activities?"

“The Holy Blessed One said to them: leave him be! He is a zealot descended from a zealot,⁶⁰ a deflector of wrath descended from a deflector of wrath.”⁶¹

“The tribes began to insult Pinchas, saying: 'Did you see this descendant of Puti? His grandfather fattened calves to sacrifice to idols, and he kills a Prince of Yisrael!'

“Therefore, the Scripture, at this point, mentions Pinchas's illustrious lineage, as it is written, Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon deflected My Wrath from the children of Yisrael (Bamidbar 25:12).

“And the atonement of Pinchas is so great that it is worthy of being a continual source of forgiveness forever.”⁶²

⁶⁰ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that this is a reference to Pinchas's great grandfather Levi who was zealous in the episode of Dinah and Shechem, as mentioned in Beraishis 34:31.]

⁶¹ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that this is a reference to Pinchas's grandfather Aharon who deflected His Wrath during the episode of Korach's insurrection, as mentioned in Bamidbar 17:12.]

⁶² (Translator's note: Rashi explains that this is derived from that which is written, And it shall be for him and his descendants after him a covenant of everlasting kehunah because he was jealous for his Lord and atoned for the children of Yisrael (Bamidbar 25:13).]

&&Chapter Seven

Responsibility for Others

In some instances, a person may be held responsible for the sins of others, and he is punished for them, The Talmud tells us (Shabbos 54b):

%%It was said: Whoever has the ability to protest against the wrongdoing of the members of his household but does not protest is responsible for their actions; if he can protest the wrongdoing of his townspeople but fails to do so, he is held responsible for the actions of his townspeople; if he can protest the wrongdoing of the entire world, he is held responsible for the actions of the entire world.

Rav Pappa said: "And the council of the Prince of the Exile is held responsible for everyone."

Rabbi Chanina said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, God will bring to justice the elders of His nation and its ministers (Yeshayahu 3:14)? If the ministers sinned, why is it considered that the elders sinned?

"It must be because the elders did not protest the actions of the ministers.

Rav Yehudah was sitting before Shmuel. A woman came before them, screaming, but Shmuel paid her no attention.

Rav Yehudah said to him: "Does not the master accept that which is written, Who shuts his ear to the cry of the wretched, he too shall call out but not be answered (Mishlei 21:13)?"

Shmuel replied: "Sharp one!⁶³ Cold water will be poured on your head but boiling water on the head of your head.⁶⁴ Mar Ukva is also sitting here, and he is the president of the court. For it is written, House of David, so said God, sit early in judgment and rescue the robbed from the robber (Yirmiyahu 21:12)."

⁶³ [Translator's note: Shmuel habitually called Rav Yehudah by this affectionate name. See Berachos 36a, Bava Kama 14a, 15b.]

⁶⁴ I, who am your master, will not be scalded in punishment, but Mar Ukva, who is master to me as well, and is the president of the court, will be scalded! (Rashi)

Rabbi Zeira said to Rabbi Seemon: "Let the master rebuke the council of the Prince of the Exile for their failure to protest wrongdoing."

He replied: "They will not pay heed to me."

Rabbi Zeira said: "Even if they pay no heed, the master should still rebuke them."

*"For Rav Acha the son of Chanina said: 'No measure for good uttered by the Holy Blessed One has ever been turned to detriment other than because of this thing.'*⁶⁵

"For it is written, And God said to him, Pass through the midst of the city, the city of Yerushalayim, and make the mark of the tav on the foreheads of those people who lamented and cried out against all the abominations that were done in her midst (Yechezkel 9:4).

"The Holy Blessed One said to the angel Gavriel: "Go and write upon the foreheads of the righteous the Hebrew letter tav in ink, so that the angels of destruction should not have ascendancy over them, and upon the foreheads of the sinful a tav in blood, so that the angels of destruction should have ascendancy over them.'

"The Attribute of Strict justice said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, why are these different from these?'

"He replied: 'These are thoroughly righteous, while these are thoroughly sinful.'

"The Attribute of Strict Justice said: 'But it was in their power to protest and they didn't.'

"He replied: 'It is perfectly clear to Me that even if they had protested, they would not have been heeded.'

"The Attribute of Strict justice said before the Holy Blessed One: 'Master of the Universe, if to You it is clear, was it then clear to them?'

"Indeed, there is a subsequent reversal implicit in that which is written, Old men, young men., maidens, infants, and women shall you kill, wreaking

⁶⁵ As the following verse tells that He uttered a Word for good but reconsidered as retribution for the failure to rebuke." (Rashi)

total destruction, but you shall not approach any man that has upon him the mark of the tav, and you shall commence from My Sanctum, and they commenced with the elders that were before the House (Yechezkel 9:6).

“And Rav Yosef taught: 'Do not read the Hebrew word in such a way that it means 'from My Sanctum' but with a slightly different pronunciation whereby it means 'from my sanctified' and includes even those people, previously exempt, who had fulfilled the entire Torah, from the first letter, aleph, to the last letter, tav.’⁶⁶

“And it is also written, And, behold, six men came through the upper gate that is open to the north, and each man had his hammer in his hand, and among them was a man dressed in linens, an inkwell at his loins, and they came and stood next to the copper altar (Yechezkel 9:2).

“Was there then a copper altar at that time?⁶⁷

“Rather, the Holy Blessed One had told them: 'Begin at the place where they sing before me.’⁶⁸“

Who were these six men?

Rav Chisda said: “They were the angels of destruction whose Hebrew names are the equivalent of 'anger,' 'wrath,' 'rage,' 'destroyer,' 'smasher,' and 'annihilator'.”

And why, of all the letters of the alphabet, was the tav used to mark the righteous and sinful?

Rav said: “The tav is the initial of the Hebrew word for 'you shall live', and it is also the initial of the Hebrew word for 'you shall die'.”

And Shmuel said: “The tav is the initial of the Hebrew phrase 'The merit earned by ancestors has been exhausted'.”

⁶⁶ [Translator's note: "From aleph to tav" is an expression meaning from beginning to end, similar to "from A to Z".]

⁶⁷ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that in Yechezkel's times there was no longer the copper altar of Moshe's time, for Shlomo Hamelech had already concealed it and replaced it with a larger stone altar, measuring thirty two cubits square (Melachim I 8:64).]

⁶⁸ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that this is a reference to the Leviim who sang the daily song to the accompaniment of copper instruments.]

And Rabbi Yochanan said: "The tav is the initial of the Hebrew phrase 'May the merit earned by ancestors stand in favor'."

And Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish said, "The tav is the last letter of the signature of the Holy Blessed One, as Rabbi Chanina said: 'The signature of the Holy Blessed One is the Hebrew word for truth:'"

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini said: "It is referring to the people who fulfilled the entire Torah, from aleph to tav."

&&The Talmud also tells us (Beitsa 23a.):

%%The cow of Rabbi Elazar the son of Azariah used to wear a bridle while walking in the thoroughfares on Shabbos, contrary to the views of the Sages.

Did he have only one cow? Didn't Rav say: "Every year, Rabbi Elazar the son of Azariah used to set aside a tithe of twelve thousand calves from his herds"?

It was taught: This particular cow did not belong to him but to his neighbor, but because he did not protest this violation of the ruling of the Sages, it was considered as if it were his.

&&The Talmud also tells us (Avodah Zarah 4a):

%%Rabbi Aba the son of Kehana expounded: "What is the meaning of that which is written, Far be it from You to put to death the righteous together with the sinful (Beraishis 18:25.)?"

"Avraham said before the Holy Blessed One; 'Master of the Universe! It would be secular for You to do such a thing."

Is such a thing not done? Is it not written, And I shall cut off from among you the righteous and the sinful (Yechezkel 21:8)?

That is referring only to those who are not thoroughly righteous.

Are then the thoroughly righteous different? Is it not written, And you shall commence from My Sanctum (Yechezkel 9:6)?

And did not Rav Yosef teach: "Do not read the Hebrew word in such a way that it means 'from My Sanctum' but with a slightly different

pronunciation whereby it means 'from my sanctified' and includes even those people who fulfilled the entire Torah from alpeh to tav”?

Since it was in their power to protest the actions of the sinful, and they did not, they are considered not to be thoroughly righteous.

&&The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 29a):

%%One of the four reasons for the property of householders falling into the hands of the authorities is that their wealth gives them the power to speak out against the sinful of their times, but they fail to do so.

&&Even if one is not in a position to protest, one should, nevertheless, reprimand those people whom one sees behaving disgracefully. The Talmud tells us (Arachin 16a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: It is written, You shall not hate your brother (Vayikra 19:17). One might think that this is an injunction only against swatting, striking, or cursing: therefore, the verse concludes, In your heart (Ibid.) signifying that the Scripture is referring to unexpressed hatred.

How do we know that one who sees someone else behaving disgracefully must reprimand him?

For it is written, You shall surely reprimand (Ibid.).

If his reprimands fall on deaf ears, how do we know that he must try again?

For it is written, You shall surely reprimand (Ibid.), the repetitive nature of the Hebrew syntax implying that one is not released from the obligation to reprimand by the lack of acceptance.

One might think that the obligation to reprimand applies even in public where he might cause the other's face to blanch; therefore, it is written, But you shall not bear guilt because of him (Ibid.).

It was taught: Rabbi Tarfon said; “I wonder if there is anyone in our generation who is in a position to reprimand the sinful.”⁶⁹ If one should say,

⁶⁹ [Translator's note: In the standard text, Rabbi Tarfon wondered if there was anyone capable of responding to reprimand. In the author's version, this statement appears in the

*'Remove that splinter from between your teeth,' he will surely be answered, 'First you remove that beam from between your eyes.'"*⁷⁰

Rabbi Elazar the son of Azariah said: "I wonder if there is anyone in our generation who knows how to reprimand effectively."

*Rabbi Akiva said: "I wonder if there is anyone in our generation who accepts reprimands."*⁷¹

Rabbi Yochanan the son of Nuri said: "As the heavens and the earth are my witnesses, many times did I cause Rabbi Akiva suffering by reporting his misdeeds to Rabban Gamaliel, and each time, he loved me more. This is a fulfillment of that which is written, Reprimand the wise man, and he shall love you (Mishlei 9:8)."

&&Furthermore, a Torah scholar should not refrain from reprimanding his townspeople because he fears that they might come to hate him. Being hated for reprimanding them is preferable to being loved for not reprimanding them.

The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 105b):

Abaya said: "If a Torah scholar is loved by his townspeople, it is not because of his fine qualities, but because he refrains from reprimanding them for their misdeeds in the affairs of Heaven."

&&Therefore, he who fears the Lord should not refrain from reprimanding the sinful because they might come to hate him. He is better off being loved by Hashem than being loved by the sinful. On the contrary, it is his obligation to despise the foes of Hashem, as it is written, Surely those who hate You, O God, I shall hate them (Tehillim 139:21).

name of Rabbi Akiva. The meaning is the same, but the perspective is different; in the standard text, the emphasis is on the refusal of the sinful of that period to heed chastisement, while in the author's version, the emphasis is on the lack of qualification of the righteous of that period to reprimand.]

⁷⁰ [Translator's note: This is an allegorical way of saying, "How can you reprimand me for my small sins when you yourself have greater sins?" The implication is that no one in Rabbi Tarfon's generation was without sin.]

⁷¹ [Translator's note: In the standard text, Rabbi Akiva is not involved in the discussion, this statement being attributed to Rabbi Tarfon. See Footnote 51.]

Part 2: Consequences in the World to Come

Chapter Eight

Decontamination of the Soul

The extent of retribution for the thoroughly sinful after they die is endless and inexhaustible. They must then give an account of all of their intentions and actions, and they are judged upon it.

The Talmud tells us (Rosh Hashanah 16b):

It was taught: The disciples of Shamai say: "On the day of judgment, the judged are divided into three groups: One consists of the thoroughly righteous; one consists of the thoroughly sinful; one consists of average people.

"For the group of the thoroughly righteous, it is immediately written and sealed that they are to live in the world to come.

"For the group of the thoroughly sinful, it is immediately written and sealed that they are to be consigned to Gehinom. For it is written, And many of the dead who sleep in the dust of the earth will awaken, these for everlasting life, and these for everlasting shame and disgrace (Daniel 12:2),

"The group of average people⁷² descend to Gehinom, whimper for a while, and ascend to Heaven, as it is written, And I shall bring the third into fire, and I shall refine them as silver is refined, and I shall purify them as gold is purified, he will call My Name and I shall answer him, I have said, He is My Nation, and he shall say, God is my Lord (Zechariah 13:9).

"It was to this group that Chanah was referring when she said, God puts to death and brings to life, lowers into the abyss and brings back up (Shmuel I 2:6)."

The disciples of Hillel say: "The One who is called Magnanimous (Shemos 34:6) tips the balanced scale of the average to their favor, and they avoid Gehinom completely.

⁷² People whose merit and demerit are in equal balance.

It was to this group that David was referring when he said, I yearned that God should listen to my voice in entreaty. For He turned His Ear to me, thus all of my days shall I call out to Him (Tehillim 116:1-2).

“Bodily sinners of Yisrael, however, and bodily sinners of the nations of the world as well, descend into Gehinom and are subjected to it for twelve months. After twelve months, their bodies are destroyed,⁷³ their souls consumed, they are scattered by the wind, and they become dust under the soles of the feet of the righteous, as it is written, And you shall trample the sinful, for they will be as dust beneath the soles of your feet (Malachi 3:21).

“But the heretics who perverted the Lord's immortal Words, the informers, the apostates, those who scorned Torah scholars, those who denied the validity of the Torah or the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, those who deviated from the commonfold, those who were intimidating in the land of the living, and those who both sinned and led others into sin, in the manner of Yeravam the son of Nevat and his cohorts, descend into Gehinom and are subjected to it for generation after generation. For it is written, And they shall go out and see the carcasses of the people who transgress against Me, for the worms that afflict them shall not die, nor will their fire be extinguished (Yeshayahu 66:24).

“Even when Gehinom will have fulfilled its purpose and ceased to exist, the hellish condition of their souls will still endure, as it is written, And their form will outlast the abyss (Tehillim 49:16).”

And why such severity?

Because they caused the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. For it is written, From being an abode for Him (Ibid.), and the Hebrew word for

⁷³ [Translator's note: The statement that the body is destroyed in Gehinom does not refer to the actual material body. Rather, it refers to the special characteristics with which the spiritual soul is provided in order to be able to function in the material world (see Footnote 68). These characteristics, although also of a spiritual nature, are of a lower spiritual level than the soul in its natural state. As such, they are a hindrance to the soul in the completely spiritual world. Ordinarily, this aspect of the soul should cease to exist at the time of the death of the body. However, indulgence in sin and materialism greatly strengthens this aspect of the soul, and it endures even after death. It is therefore, necessary for the soul to be cleansed in the spiritual crucible of Gehinom to return it to its natural state of total spirituality.]

abode used here is used in reference to the Bais Hamikdash, as it is written, Indeed I have built a mansion for Your abode (Melachim I 8:13). To these people did Chanah refer when she said, God will shatter His adversaries (Shmuel I 2:10).

Rav Yitzchak the son of Avin said: “And their faces resemble the black bottom of a pot.”

And Rava said: “And the self-indulgent elite of the city of Mechuza will ultimately be known as the residents of Gehinom.”

... The master has said: The disciples of Hillel say: “The One who is called Magnanimous tips the balanced scale of the average to their favor.”

But is it not written, And I shall bring the third into fire (Zechariah 13:9)?

That is referring to bodily sinners of Yisrael.

The bodily sinners of Yisrael? Weren't they mentioned among those sinners whose situation is hopeless?

Those bodily sinners of Yisrael whose situation is hopeless are the ones whose guilt outweighs their merit. Here the reference is to those sinners whose guilt and merit are in balance,

This then is what the disciples of Hillel are saying: “If their guilt and merit are in balance, and part of their guilt is for the sin of being a bodily sinner in Yisrael, then they must inevitably be subjected to 'And I shall bring the third into fire'. If, however, their guilt and merit are in balance, and they were not guilty of the sin of being a bodily sinner in Yisrael, then the One who is called Magnanimous tips the scale to their favor.”

It was to this group that David was referring when he said, I yearn that God should listen to my voice in entreaty. For He turned His Ear to me, thus all of my days shall I call out to Him (Tehillim 116:1-2).

Rava expounded: “What is the meaning of that which is written, I yearn that God should listen (ibid.)?”

“The community of Yisrael said before the Holy Blessed One: 'Master of the Universe, Your love for me is manifest when You listen to my voice in entreaty.'

*“What is the meaning of was impoverished, but He rescued me’
(Tehillim 116:6)?*

“It means that 'although I was poor of mitzvos, it was kindly of You to rescue me .

Who is considered a “bodily sinner of Yisrael”?

Rabbi Yishmael said: “Anyone who has never worn tefillin on his head.”

Who is considered “a bodily sinner of the nations of the world”?

Rav said: “An adulterer.”

Who is considered “intimidating in the land of the living”?

Rav Chisda said: “This refers to a leader who terrorizes his community for purposes other than the benefit of Heaven. For Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: 'Every leader who terrorizes his community for purposes other than the benefit of Heaven shall never have a son who is a Torah scholar, as it is written, Because people feared him, he shall not see those who have wisdom in their hearts (Iyov 37:24).”

&&The Talmud tells us that on the day of judgment the sinful will endorse their own sentences (Eruvin 19a):

%%Rabbi Yirmiyah the son of Elazar said: “Come let me show you how the nature of the Holy Blessed One differs from the nature of mere mortals of flesh and blood. In the nature of mortals, if a person is sentenced to death by the royal court, a hook is plated in his mouth to prevent him from cursing the king. But with the Holy Blessed One it is not so. A person who is sentenced to death by the Holy Blessed One is silent, as it is written, Before You there is silence (Tehillim 65:2).

“Furthermore, the sentenced person praises Him, as the verse goes on, Psalm (Ibid.). Better yet, he considers it as if he has brought a sacrifice, as it is written, And a vow to You fulfilled (Ibid.).”⁷⁴

This coincides with that which Rabbi Shimeon said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, And those who cross in the Valley of Bacha shall appoint a spring (Tehillim 84:7)?⁷⁵

“ ‘Those who cross’ refers to those who transgress the Will of the Holy Blessed One. ‘In the Valley’ implies that they are consigned to the lower realms of Gehinom. ‘Bacha shall appoint a spring’ implies that they weep and shed tears as profusely as the flow of libations into the pit at the side of the altar.

“It is also written, Blessings will also envelop the master (Ibid.). This implies that they endorse their own sentence and say before Him: ‘Master of the Universe, You have judged excellently. You have acquitted excellently. You have convicted excellently, You have excellently prepared the Garden of Eden for the righteous and Gehinom for the sinful.’”

How can this be? Did not Raish Lakish say, “The sinful do not do teshuvah even at the gate of Gehinom, as it is written, And they shall go out and see the carcasses of the people who transgress against me (Yeshayahu 66:24) — not ‘transgressed’, but ‘transgress’, implying that they are eternally in transgression”?

This does not pose a difficulty. Rabbi Shimeon is referring to transgressors of Yisrael, Raish Lakish to gentile transgressors.

⁷⁴ The plain meaning of the verse is as follows; The silence is the hopeful expectancy of the psalm, waiting to be recited before You in a rebuilt Zion, at which time sacrifices will be brought to the Sais Hamikdash in fulfillment of vows made in Exile.

⁷⁵ The word “Bacha” has many meanings. If the plain meaning of this verse is referring to David Hamelech when he was exiled in the land of the Pelishtim, then he is saying, “Those who pass among the fountains of wisdom shall appoint springs from which their disciples will drink the waters of wisdom and come to know Hashem.” If it is referring to the thrice yearly pilgrimages to Yerushalayim, then he is saying, “Those whose journey takes them through the valley of thorns shall find that He has prepared springs of drinking water for them along the way.”

... Rabbi Yirmiyah the son of Elazar also said: "There are three entrances to Gehinom, one at sea, one in the desert, and one in Yerushalayim.

"That there is one at sea is alluded to by that which Yonah said from the belly of the whale, From the depths of the abyss I cried out, You heard my voice (Yonah 2:3).

"That there is one in the desert is alluded to by that which is written about the fate of Korach and his group in the desert, And they and all their possessions descended live to the abyss (Bamidbar 16:33).

"That there is one in Yerushalayim is alluded to by that which is written, By the Word of God that He has prepared a flame in Zion and a furnace in Yerushalayim (Yeshayahu 31:9). And it was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: 'A flame in Zion' refers to Gehinom, 'A furnace in Yerushalayim' to the entrance to Gehinom."

Are there only three entrances and no more? Is there not another one? For Rav Seemon said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi: "There are two date-palms in the ravine of ben Hinom between which smoke rises and about which we have learned that the leaves of the palm trees of the Mount of Iron are acceptable for the mitzvah of lulav, There lies the entrance to Gehinom."

It is possible that this entrance and the entrance in Yerushalayim are one and the same.

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: "Gehinom has seven names. These are: Abyss, Perdition, Pit of Destruction, Cistern of Turbulence, Filthy Mud, Shadow of Death, and Land of Terror.

"That it is called Abyss is inferred from that which is written, From the depths of the abyss I cried out, You heard my voice (Yonah 2:3).

"That it is called Perdition is inferred from that which is written, Can Your benevolence be retold in the grave, Your faith in perdition (Tehillim 88:12).

“That it is called Pit of Destruction is inferred from that which is written, And You, O Lord, shall lower them into the Pit of Destruction (Tehillim 55:24).

“That it is called Cistern of Turbulence and Filthy Mud is inferred from that which is written, And He raised me up from the cistern of turbulence, from the filthy mud (Tehillim 40:3).

“That it is called Shadow of Death is inferred from that which is written, A land of darkness and the shadow of death (Iyov 10:21).

That it is called Land of Terror we know by tradition.”

Does it not also have the name Gehinom?

This is not an authentic name but a hybridization of several Hebrew words meaning “the ravine whose inhabitants are all there in connection with adultery or incest”.

Does it not also have the name Inferno, as it is written, For from yesterday is the inferno already prepared (Yeshayahu 30:33)?

This is also not an authentic name; the use of this Hebrew word as a designation for Gehinom is not based on its primary meaning “inferno” but on the allusion in its structure to “a place into which fall all who let themselves be seduced by their evil inclinations”.

&&We can also draw our own conclusions about the retribution in store for the sinful From the various chronicles that appear in the Agada. The Talmud tells us (Gittin 56b):

%%Onkelos the son of Klonimos, the son of Roman Emperor Titus's sister, was considering conversion to Judaism. He conjured up the spirit of Titus and asked him: “Who is esteemed in the other world?”

The spirit of Titus replied: “Yisrael is esteemed.”

Onkelos asked: “Would it be advisable to convert to them?”

The spirit of Titus replied: “They have many laws, and you will not be able to comply with them. Go and provoke them in the present world so that

you may become a lord. For it is written, Her adversaries have become her lord (Eichah 1:5). Whoever oppresses Yisrael becomes a lord. ⁷⁶

*Onkelos asked him: "What is the retribution in store for that man?"*⁷⁷

The spirit of Titus replied: "It is that which he himself had chosen. Each day, his ashes are gathered, and he is formed again and sentenced again. Then he is cremated, and his ashes are scattered over the seven seas. ⁷⁸

Onkelos then conjured up the spirit of Bil'am and asked him: "Who is esteemed in the other world?"

The spirit of Bil'am replied: "Yisrael is esteemed."

Onkelos asked: "Would it be advisable to convert to them?"

*The spirit of Bil'am. quoted: "You shall not seek their peace and well-being in all the days forever (Devarim 23:7)."*⁷⁹

*Onkelos asked him: "What is the retribution in store for that man?"*⁸⁰

*The spirit of Bil'am replied: "He is condemned to be placed in boiling semen."*⁸¹

Onkelos then conjured up the spirit of Yeshu and asked him: Who is esteemed in the other world?"

The spirit of Yeshu replied: "Yisrael."

Onkelos asked: "Would it be advisable to convert to them?"

*The spirit of Yeshu replied: "Seek only their good; do not seek their detriment. Touching them is like touching the pupil of one's eye."*⁸²

*Onkelos asked him: "What is the retribution in store for that man?"*⁸³

⁷⁶ [Translator's note: Tosfos in Chagigah 13b explains that any nation that successfully oppresses Yisrael is first *elevated* to a position of international prominence so that it not be said that He turned His children over to the hands of a humble nation.]

⁷⁷ [Translator's note: An oblique reference to Titus himself.]

⁷⁸ [Translator's note: Titus had commanded that he be cremated and his ashes scattered over the seven seas so that the Lord of the Jews should not be able to find and judge him.]

⁷⁹ [Translator's note: Bil'am used this verse in the reverse of its true meaning — an injunction to Yisrael not to associate themselves closely with the nations of Ammon and Moav. Maharasha explains that Bil'am did not dare repeat the blunt advice of Titus. Instead, he quoted this verse as a veiled statement to the same effect.]

⁸⁰ [Translator's note: An oblique reference to Bil'am himself.]

⁸¹ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that this is measure for measure for causing promiscuity in Yisrael.]

⁸² [Translator's note: Paraphrase of Zechariah 2:12.]

⁸³ [Translator's note: An oblique reference to Yeshu (Jesus) himself.]

The spirit of Yeshu replied: “He is condemned to be placed in boiling excrement.”

For anyone who is contemptuous of the words of the Sages is condemned to boiling excrement.”

How different are even the renegades of Yisrael from even the prophets among the gentile nations!

&&The Talmud further tells us (Kallah Rabasi):

%%Rabbi Akiva went to see that place.⁸⁴ He met a man who was carrying a heavy load on his shoulder. Unable to walk because of the heavy burden, he was alternately screaming and groaning.

Rabbi Akiva asked him: “What was it that you did to deserve this?”

He replied: “There was not one forbidden act in that world that I left undone. Now I have been assigned guards who continually prod me and don't permit me to rest.”

Rabbi Akiva asked him: “Did you leave a son?”

He replied: “By your life. I beg you do not detain me. I am terrified of the angels of destruction who strike me with fiery rods and ask me why I don't hurry.”

Rabbi Akiva insisted: “Tell me what you left behind you.”

He replied: “I left a pregnant wife.”

Rabbi Akiva traveled to the province where that man lived. He inquired: “Where is the wife of such and such a man?”

He was told: “May the memory of that bone grinder be eradicated.”

Rabbi Akiva asked: “Why do you say this?”

He was told: “He was a robber who fleeced people and tormented creatures. What's more, he raped a betrothed maiden on Yom Kippur.”

Rabbi Akiva went to the house of that man and found that his wife had not yet given birth. He waited until the child was born and circumcised him. When the boy was older, Rabbi Akiva brought him to the synagogue to recite benedictions before the congregation.

⁸⁴ [Translator's note: Gehinom.]

After a time, Rabbi Akiva returned to that place and was approached by that man. He said to Rabbi Akiva: "May you have peace of mind, for you have given me peace of mind."

&&I have found this episode recorded at greater length in the Midrash (Midrash Tanchuma, Noach):

%%It once happened to Rabbi Akiva that he was walking in a cemetery and met a blacksmith who was carrying a load of wood on his shoulders and galloping like a horse.

Rabbi Akiva commanded that he stop, and he did.

Rabbi Akiva said to him: "My son, why are you doing such difficult work? If you are a bondsman, and your master is laying such a heavy burden on you, I shall redeem you from him and set you free. If you are a poor man, I will make you rich."

He replied: "Leave me be, my lord, for I cannot stop."

Rabbi Akiva asked him: "Are you a person or a fiend?"

He replied: "That man died⁸⁵, and every day he is made to gather wood which is then used to burn him."

Rabbi Akiva asked him: "What was your occupation during your lifetime?"

He replied: "I was a tax collector. I was lenient with the rich and tormented the poor. What's more, I copulated with a betrothed maiden on Yom Kippur."

Rabbi Akiva asked him: "My son, did your appointed guards ever tell you that there is a remedy for your situation?"

He replied: "Don't detain me, for the masters of retribution may become furious with me. For that man there is no remedy or redemption. But I did hear them say that if he had a son who would stand amidst the congregation and say, 'Bless the Blessed God' he would be released from retribution. But that man had no son. When he died, his wife was pregnant, and he doesn't

⁸⁵ [Translator's note: An oblique reference to himself.]

know if she gave birth to a son or a daughter. Even if it were a son, who would teach him Torah?"

Rabbi Akiva asked him: "What is your name?"

He replied: "Arkevasah."

"And the name of your wife?"

He replied: "Shushmirah."

"And the name of your city?"

He replied: "Aduka."

Rabbi Akiva's sympathy was aroused, and he traveled from city to city until he came to that city. He inquired as to the whereabouts of that man's home.

He was told: "May his bones be ground up in Gehinom." Rabbi Akiva then inquired after the man's wife,

He was told: "May her name and her memory be erased from the world."

Rabbi Akiva then inquired after the man's son.

He was told: "Why, he is still uncircumcised, Not even with the mitzvah of circumcision did his parents concern themselves."

Rabbi Akiva immediately got hold of the son and circumcised him. He sat down with him and started to teach him the Torah, but the boy would not learn.

Rabbi Akiva fasted for forty days until a Divine Echo was heard to ask: "Are you fasting for such a one as this?"

He replied: "Yes."

Only then did the boy begin to learn the alphabet.

Rabbi Akiva took the boy home with him and taught him the benediction after meals, the reading of Shema, and the prayers. He got him to stand up, lead the congregation in prayer, and say, "Bless the Blessed God."

The congregation answered: "Blessed is the Blessed God forever."

At that moment the boy's father was released from retribution. He appeared to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and said to him: "May you have peace of mind, for you have given me peace of mind."

Rabbi Akiva immediately began to recite: "O God, Your Name lasts forever, Your Remembrance for generation after generation (Tehillim 135:13)."

&&The Talmud also tells us that the soul combines with the body to receive the retribution (Sanhedrin 91a):

%%Antoninus said to Rabi: "The body and the soul can each avoid judgment. How? The body can say: "The soul sinned. Indeed, from the day that the soul left me I was left lying as an immobile stone.' The soul can say: 'The body sinned. Indeed, from the day that I left the body I am as a bird flying through the air.'"

Rabi replied: 'Let me draw an analogy to this situation. A mortal king had a beautiful orchard containing beautiful fruit. He appointed two watchmen to the orchard, one lame, the other blind,

The lame man said to the blind man: 'I see beautiful fruit in the orchard. Come carry me on your shoulders, and I will bring fruit so that we both can eat.'

"The blind man replied: 'How can I come to you if I don't see you?'

"The lame man began to clap his hands, and guided by the sound, the blind man came to him. In tandem, they brought the fruit, and they both ate.

"Presently, the owner of the orchard returned and asked: 'Who took the beautiful fruit that were in my orchard?'

"The lame man said: 'Do you suspect me? Do I have legs?'

"The blind man said: 'Do you suspect me? Do I have eyes?'

"What did the owner of the orchard do? He placed the one atop the other and judged them in tandem.

“So, too, does the Holy Blessed One do. He places the soul within the body and judges them together.⁸⁶ For it is written, He will summon the heavens from above (Tehillim 50:4). This refers to the soul. And it is written, And the earth to judgment with Him (Ibid.). This refers to the body.”

&&Therefore, a person would do well to dread this great retribution. He should not let himself be overwhelmed by desires that are inspired by his evil inclination. He should recognize that the evil inclination is his mortal enemy. Only by keeping his vision clear and resisting the inclination to evil will he be saved from the judgment of Gehinom.

⁸⁶ [Translator's note: This does not mean that Hashem returns the soul to the dead body for judgment. Maharal explains that this refers to the characteristic of a person that bridges his spiritual and material beings. A person's material body is, as Antoninus said, no more than "an immobile stone". A person's spiritual being, or soul, is a completely spiritual entity. It lives on a different plane of existence and cannot function in the material world; it is "as a bird flying through the air." In order for a person to be able to function in this world, Hashem provides him with a bridge between his spiritual and material beings. This is, in essence, an extension of his spiritual being, in a lower form, that has the ability to function in the material world and controls the material body. At the time of death, there is no longer any need for this extension of the spiritual self, and it should cease to exist. The soul should return to its completely spiritual state; the body is relegated to the grave. Antoninus claimed that the soul, in its completely spiritual state, bears no guilt, for it cannot function in the material world. Rabi replied that the soul maintains its extended, hybrid form until it is judged.]

Chapter Nine

Return to the Eternal Source

For a punishment to be most effective, the direct relationship between it and the deed for which it comes must be clear. Logic would therefore seem to dictate that sinfulness in this world should be punished in the world to come where the connection between the sin and its punishment will be perfectly clear. In fact, reward and punishment do exist in this world as well. The connection between them and the deeds for which they come, however, is not always clear.

Reward and punishment in this world are, by definition, outside the normal process of nature. A virtuous deed results in a deviation from the natural order of things to the benefit of the doer. A sinful deed results in a deviation from the natural order of things to the detriment of the doer. These concealed miracles appear to people as yet another shift in a very complex natural order; they do not recognize them for the reward and punishment that they truly are.

This explains the extensive treatment the Torah gives to destiny in this world, while it touches only briefly on consequences in the world to come. That the destiny of people in this world is determined by their actions is a wondrous miracle that goes directly against the natural order of the world. As such it is necessary for the Torah to strongly emphasize that there is, indeed, a cause and effect relationship here.

On the other hand, no special leap of the imagination is needed to realize that reward and punishment determine the destiny of the soul in the world of souls. It is only natural that the soul that maintained its high level of spirituality shall return to the Lord who is its source and continue its existence in attachment to Him. The soul that was drawn into following the desires of the body, however, falls from its high level of spirituality. It assumes material characteristics and becomes vulnerable to destruction when its material form dies.

This is what the Torah was saying in that which is written, Cut off, the soul shall be cut off, her sin shall be against her (Bamidbar 15:31). The Sages explained (Sanhedrin 90b):

“Cut off” in this world, the soul shall be cut off in the world to come. The soul causes its own destruction by “cutting off” its own intelligence in this world and behaving contrary to its spiritual nature.

&&This is also the implication in that which the Sages said (Berachos 18a):

Righteous people are considered alive even in death, sinful people are considered dead even during their lifetimes.

&&Righteous people maintain the high spirituality of their souls which live on after their deaths. Sinful people destroy that spirituality even as they live and breathe.

The Talmud tells us (Ibid.):

Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Yonasan were walking in a cemetery, and Rabbi Yonasan's tsitsis were flapping over the graves,

Rabbi Chiya said to him: “Lift up your tsitsis so that the dead will not say: 'Tomorrow they will come join us, but now they taunt us.'”

Rabbi Yonasan said: “Are they then aware? Is it not written, For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all (Koheles 9:5)?”

Rabbi Chiya replied: “If indeed you have read the Scriptures, you have not reviewed them. If you have reviewed them, you have not gone over them a third time. If you have gone over them a third time, then they were apparently not explained to you.

“For the living know that they will die' refers to the righteous people, for they are considered alive even in death, as it is written, And Benayahu the son of Yehoyada, the son of a living man,⁸⁷ great in deeds, from

⁸⁷ [Translator's note; The interpretation of the Hebrew words in this verse as "a living man" is based on the ksiv (written version) of the Scriptural text. On rare occasions, a word may carry with it a krei (oral version) which substitutes a variant word in the primary

Kavz'el,⁸⁸ he killed the two heroes of Moav, and he went down and killed the lion in the pit on a snowy day (Shmuel II 23:20).

“What is the meaning of 'the son of a living man'? Are the rest of the world the sons of dead people?

“Rather, it means that he was the son of a living man who was considered alive even in death.

“Great in deeds from Kavz'el' carries an implication in the Hebrew wording that he gathered many people together for the study of the Torah,

“He killed the two heroes of Moav' carries an exegetic implication that he had no equal either during the time of the first Bais Hamikdash or during the time of the second ;Bia Hamikdash.

“And he went down and killed the lion in the pit on a snowy day.' Some say that this is allegorically saying that he broke through the icy surface of the pond and immersed himself for the purpose of purification. Others say that this is allegorically saying that he learned the entire Book of the School of Rav in one short winter day.

“But the dead know nothing at all' refers to the sinful, for they are considered dead even during their lifetimes, as it is written, And you, slain villain, Prince of Yisrael, whose day of retribution has come with your final sin (Yechezkel 21:30).

“Otherwise, it is implied in that which is written, By the word of two witnesses or three witnesses shall the dead man be put to death (Devarim 17:6) — even before the punishment is administered he is already considered dead.”

&&If the sinful are considered dead even during their lifetimes, then they are certainly destined for death after their souls become separated from their bodies. Having become entangled in materialism they cannot function

meaning of the verse. In this case there is also a krei which adds one letter to the word and changes its meaning to "a man of valor", See Tosefos Berachos 18b.]

⁸⁸ Kavz'el is the name of a place mentioned in the inheritance of the people of Yehudah in Yehoshua 15:21.

when they return to their natural spiritual state; they are doomed to be cut off from the world to come.

This is the meaning of that which is written, And I shall cause that soul to be lost from among its community (Vayikra 23:30). It shall not be able to return to the place of its origin; it will remain mired in the grit and the clay that it so coveted while it was still in the body.⁸⁹

That which is written, Cut off, the soul shall be cut off (Bamidbar 15:31) is also saying that it shall forever be cut off from its source.

It should be noted that it is those who were scornful towards Hashem and those who worshipped idols that the Scripture condemns to eternal severance from their source. Our masters of the Talmud explained that atheists and incorrigible sinners are included as well (Rosh Hashanah 16b). Those sinners who were guilty of other sins because they could not resist the impulse to gratify themselves are not included. These are not considered renegade souls who have betrayed their spiritual essence. Instead, they are only considered guilty of delinquency in letting themselves be overcome by their evil inclinations and contaminated by sinful deeds. As such they do not deserve to be doomed to destruction. Their punishment is temporary and is designed to cleanse them of their contamination so that they can return, purified, to their source.

It was to these sinners that the masters of the Talmud were referring when they said (Ibid.):

They descend to Gehinom and are subjected to it for twelve months. After twelve months, their bodies are destroyed, their souls consumed, they are scattered by the wind, and they become dust under the soles of the feet of the righteous.

&&These souls cannot avoid being detained in Gehinom, for they have become conditioned to material impulses and must be cleansed to return to a purely spiritual state. Even then they will still be only as dust beneath the

⁸⁹ As it is also written. And they shall go out and see the carcasses of the people who transgress against Me (Yeshayahu 66:24).

feet of the righteous. In other words, even after they have been cleansed by Gehinom they can only achieve the very lowest level attainable in the world of souls. They will have missed the opportunity to enhance their spirituality during their sojourn in this world.

Therefore, it would be to the benefit of a person to overcome his material being and subjugate it to his spiritual being. He should resist his material drives and cleanse his soul while he is still in this world, which is but as a fleeting shadow. Thus will he arrive safely in the world to come and live in luxury in the eternal world of truth.

There are also some sins that are so serious that the masters of the Talmud, as a precautionary measure, have forbidden the use of anything associated with them, even for medicinal purposes. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 25a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said: "Any forbidden matter may be used for healing except for the ashera wood used for idolatry."

What are the circumstances? If there is mortal danger, then the use of ashera wood should also be permitted. If there is no mortal danger, then the use of any other forbidden matter should also not be permitted.

Actually, this rule applies even in cases involving mortal danger. Still, ashera wood may not be used. For it has been taught: Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: "If it is already written, With all of your soul (Devarim 6:5), why need it also be written, With all of your wealth (Ibid.)? And if it is already written, 'With all of your wealth,' why need it also be written, With all of your soul'? This is meant to anticipate two different attitudes. For the person who values his money more than he does himself it is written that you shall love Him 'with all your wealth'. For the person who values himself more than he does his money it is written that you shall love Him 'with all of your soul'.

&&Not only is it forbidden to transgress these serious sins in order to avoid death by disease, it is also forbidden to transgress them to avoid the

more immediate danger of an external threat of death. The Talmud goes on (Pesachim 25a):

When Ravin arrived he said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: “Any forbidden matter may be used for healing except where it involves idolatry, adultery, incest, and bloodshed.”

That idolatry may not be used is derived as previously explained. How do we know that neither adultery and incest nor bloodshed may be used to save one's life?

It has been taught: Rabi says: “It is written, For as a man rises up against his fellow and murders him, so is this matter (Devarim 22:26).

“Why are the laws of murder mentioned in connection with the laws of the betrothed maiden?

Although the laws of murder seem to have been mentioned only to clarify the laws of the betrothed maiden, they are actually clarified themselves as well. The laws of murder are compared to the laws of the betrothed maiden: Just as it is permitted to rescue the betrothed maiden by killing the rapist, so too is it permitted to thwart the attempted murderer by killing him.

“The laws of the betrothed maiden are also compared to the laws of murder: Just as one must let himself be killed rather than commit murder, so too must one let himself be killed rather than commit adultery.”

How do we know this rule that one must let himself be killed rather than commit murder?

It is simple logic, as is apparent from the episode of the man that came before Rava and said: “The overlord of my city has commanded me to kill such and such a person or be killed myself:”

Rava said to him: “Let yourself be killed, but do not kill that person. How do you know that your blood is redder than his?”⁹⁰ Maybe his blood is redder than yours.”

&&Indeed, all thoughts of retribution aside, the intelligent person should still avoid sinfulness. Since everyone knows that he will eventually die, it would be only wise to make efficient use of his limited time in this world to gain everlasting life rather than to squander it on the concerns of the fleeting moment. A person would do well to take example from the righteous people of every period in our history who devoted themselves to sanctifying the Name. No creature in the world comes close to them, for they scorned the fleeting moment out of love for their Creator. They died by His Kiss and lived on forever.

⁹⁰ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that the Torah generally permits transgression in saving a Jewish life because a Jewish life is very valuable. However, in the case of murder, the transgression will have been done and Jewish life would still be lost.]

Section II:

DESIRE

Part 1:

Desire for Wealth

(Chap. 1-6)

Part 2:

Desire for Pleasure

(Chap. 7-8)

Part 3:

Libidinous Desire

(Chap. 9-15)

Part 1: Desire for Wealth

Chapter One

Robbery and Theft

Many people are under the impression that the only thing standing between them and the fulfillment of their desire for wealth is their own hard work. They think that, with dedication and diligence, the riches they desire are within their grasp, and consequently, they expend their entire lives indulging their lust for wealth in a futile attempt at gratification.⁹¹ In fact, it is only those who are content with what they have who live out their entire lives in true riches.⁹²

The Talmud tells us (Shabbos 25b):

Our rabbis have taught: "Who is considered a wealthy man? He who is satisfied with his fortune," so said Rabbi Meir.

No one is more satisfied with his possessions than one who has no ambition for wealth but is content with whatever he has. Indeed, the Talmud tells us (Avos 4:1):

Who is considered a wealthy man? He who is content with what he has.

We find a similar theme in the Rishonic commentary on Mishlei: It is written, It is the blessing of God that enriches, and with it there is no more grief (Mishlei 10:22). If a person is content with what the Blessed Lord has graciously bestowed upon him, no matter if it is little or much, then he will have peace of mind; he will not brood over not having more than he does. Only then will he live out his entire life in riches, as it is written, The benevolent spirit shall become fat (Mishlei 11:25) — a spirit that is content and delighted with whatever it has been blessed shall always be pleased, fat, and prosperous. Thus, the righteous man is always well

⁹¹ In reference to these people is it written, All the days of the poor man are wretched (Mishlei 15:15).

⁹² In reference to these people is it written, But the contented heart is always festive (Ibid.).

provided for and is never lacking for anything, as it is written, I was once a youth, I have also grown old, yet I have never seen a righteous man forlorn (Tehillim 35:25).⁹³

The Rishonic commentary continues: It is written, All the days of the poor man are wretched, but the contented heart is always festive (Mishlei 15:15). Whoever is poor in faith and is afraid to spend his money to feed and otherwise support himself because his resources may become depleted, such a person will surely spend his entire lifetime in sorrow and wretchedness. On the other hand, whoever is content with whatever he has and trusts that the Holy Blessed One will provide for his needs, such a person will always feel as if a banquet is laid out before him.

Therefore, a person should always depend on his Maker for his sustenance; he should not expect that his own hard work or the fortunes of other people will bring him prosperity. He should always be satisfied with whatever his Creator had graciously bestowed upon him.

Furthermore, a person who is not satisfied with whatever he has will forever be caught up in the lust for money; if he does not find it within the boundaries of what is permitted, he is likely to search for it in the realms of the forbidden. Also, fearing people more than he fears Heaven, he will take care to be stealthy as a thief in the night while taking that which does not belong to him. Indeed, the Torah prescribes a more severe penalty for the stealthy thief than for the brazen robber.⁹⁴

The Talmud tells us (Bava Kama 79b):

%%Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai's disciples asked him: "Why was the Torah more severe with the thief than with the robber?"

He replied: "Because the robber, at least, didn't differentiate between the degree of his respect for the slave and the degree of his respect for the

⁹³ This means that a righteous man is never hungry, for he sustains himself with whatever pittance has been prepared for him by the Holy Blessed One and does not thirst for that which is beyond his reach.

⁹⁴ [Translator's note; The thief must repay double the value of the stolen property — Shemos 22:3.]

master. The thief, however, showed more respect for the slave than for the master. So to speak, he acted as if the Eye of Above does not see and the Ear of Above does not hear. For it is written, Woe unto them that think deeply to conceal their schemes from God, and their deeds were done in the dark, and they said, Who sees us and who knows of us? (Yeshayahu 29:15). And it is also written, for they said, God has forsaken the earth, and God no longer sees (Yechezkel 9:9)."

Rabbi Meir used to say: "There is an analogy to this situation. Two people in the same town gave feasts. One invited the townspeople but did not invite the family of the overlord. The other invited neither the townspeople nor the family of the overlord. Whose penalty is greater? It would seem to be that of the one who invited the townspeople but did not invite the family of the overlord."

&&The Talmud also tells us (Berachos 28b):

%%Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai said to his disciples: "May it be His Will that the fear of Heaven. should be upon you as is the fear of mere mortals of flesh and blood.

They said to him: "Our master, only as much and no more?"

He replied: "If only it were as much! A person who sins is careful not to be seen by other people. If he were as afraid of Heaven, which always sees him, he would never sin,"

&&Just as the Torah prescribed a more severe penalty for the thief than for the robber, so too will he be dealt with more severely by the Upper Court. It is for this reason that the prohibition against taking another's property is expressed in the Ten Commandments as, You shall not steal (Shemos 20;13), stealing being more serious than robbing.

The worst form of theft is theft through the use of inaccurate measures and weights. One who uses inaccurate measures and weights can never do teshuvah and make restitution, for he doesn't know from whom he has stolen.

The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 88b):

%%Rabbi Levi said: "The retribution for the use of inaccurate measures is more severe than the retribution for adultery and incest, as is indicated by the use of the abbreviated form of the Hebrew word for 'these' in reference to adultery and incest and the use of the complete form in reference to inaccurate measures" ⁹⁵

And what is the indication that the abbreviated form of this word is an expression of severity?

Because a variation of this form is used in that which is written, And he took the mighty of the land (Yechezkel 17:13). If the abbreviated form indicates severity, the complete form indicates even greater severity.

But we find that the complete form is used in reference to adultery and incest as well. Where then is the indication that the retribution for the use of inaccurate measures is more severe than the retribution for adultery and incest? ⁹⁶

That particular usage is not an indication of the relative severity of adultery and incest. It is meant to indicate that, although the violations of adultery and incest carry a penalty of premature death, the more severe violation of using inaccurate measures does not.

What attribute does the use of inaccurate measures have that sets it apart from even adultery and incest?

With those teshuvah is still possible, with this it is not.

&&Therefore, it is in the best interest of a person to be content with whatever he has. and not risk incurring everlasting retribution in the lustful pursuit of a passing world.

⁹⁵ In reference to adultery and incest it is written, For all of these abominations (Vayikra 18:27).

⁹⁶ As it is written, That shall do any of these abominations (Vayikra 18:29).

Chapter Two

The Offense of Stealing

One should be extremely careful to avoid any semblance of stealing, for if one steals even a pennysworth from another it is considered as if he has stolen that person's soul.

The Talmud tells us (Bava Kama 119a):

It is written, What is the expectation of the sinner in that he steals, surely God will dislodge his soul (Iyov 27:8).

Rav Hanna and Rav Chisda differ on the meaning of this verse. One says that it is the soul of the robbed that will be dislodged from the robber. The other says that it is the soul of the robber himself that is dislodged from him.

The one who says that it is the soul of the robbed bases his interpretation on that which is written, This is the way of all who are greedy for plunder, it is the soul of its possessor that they are taking (Mishlei 1:19).

The one who says that it is the soul of the robber himself bases his interpretation on that which is written, Do not rob the impoverished to exploit his impoverishment, nor crush the poor man in the gates of justice. For God will wage their battle and despoil the souls of their despoilers (Mishlei 22:22-23).

How does the one that says it is the said of the robber himself explain that which is written, "It is the soul of its possessor that they are taking"?

He holds that the word "possessor" refers to the present possessor of the plunder and interprets the verse according to the alternate meaning of the Hebrew words, "The soul of its possessor shall He take."

How does the one that says it is the soul of the robbed explain that which is written, "And despoil the souls of their despoilers"?

He follows an alternate interpretation of the verse whereby the second part is an independent clarifying clause, and he reads the verse as saying, And He shall despoil the despoilers because they have stolen a soul."

For Rabbi Yochanan said: “Whoever robs another of even a pennysworth is considered as if he is taking away that person's soul, as it is written, This is the way of all who are greedy for plunder.... (Mishlei 1:19).

“And it is written, And he will eat your harvest and your bread, they will consume your sons and your daughters (Yirmiyahu 5:17). It is also written, From the extortion of the children of Yehudah who shed innocent blood (Yoel 4:19), it is also written, And God said, It is because of Shaul and because of the house of blood, because they put the Gibeonim to death (Shmuel II 21:1).”

To what purpose does Rabbi Yochanan bring there additional references from the Scripture?

From the first reference it is only indicated that one who robs another is considered as if he is taking away the soul of the robbed; the souls of the sons and daughters of the robbed are not mentioned. Therefore he quotes the verse saying, “They will consume your sons and your daughters.”

One might say that this applies only where the robber takes what he wants forcibly and does not pay, but it does not apply where the robber leaves money in its stead. Therefore, he quotes the verse saying, “From the extortion of the children of Yehudah...”⁹⁷

Still, one might say that this applies only where the robber is directly responsible for the loss suffered by the robbed, but does not apply where his actions are merely an indirect cause for another's monetary loss. Therefore he quotes the verse saying, “And God said, it is because they put the Gibeonim to death.” Where do we find mention of Shaul killing the Gibeonim? Since Shaul slaughtered Nobe, the city of kohanim, for whom the Gibeonim were suppliers of food and water, the Scripture considers him to have killed the Gibeonim as well.

&&Not only does this apply to a robber who removes something from the possession of another, it also applies to someone who withholds the

⁹⁷ [Translator's note: The Hebrew word for extortion used here — *chamas* — is used throughout the Talmud in reference to forcible purchase.]

wages he owes to his hireling. He, too, is considered a robber. He, too, is considered by the Scripture to have stolen the soul of the robbed.

The Talmud tells us (Bava Metzia 111a):

%%What is considered exploitation and what is considered robbery?

Rava said: "Exploitation and robbery are one and the same here. The Torah uses two different expressions to indicate that violation transgresses a double injunction."

... It was taught: It is written, You shall pay his wages on the same day, and the sun shall not set upon it, for he is poor, and his life depends on it (Devarim 23:15).

Why did he imperil himself by going up the loading ramp and hanging from trees? Was it not in order to receive his wages?

Otherwise: "And his life depends on it." From here it was derived that whoever withholds the wages of a hireling is considered to have taken away his soul, as it is written, It is the soul of its possessor that they are taking (Mishlei 1:19).

To whose soul does this refer?

Rav Huna says....

Our rabbis have taught: It is written, You shall not hold over the wages of the hireling with you until the morning (Vayikra 19:13)

One might assume that this injunction applies even when the hireling did not demand his wages. Therefore it is written "with you", meaning to your knowledge.

One might assume that this injunction applies even when the householder does not have the money to pay him. Therefore it is written "with you", meaning if you yourself do have it.

One might still assume that this injunction applies even where the householder has assigned payment of the wages through a moneychanger or storekeeper. Therefore it is written "with you", implying that if the householder has assigned payment through a money changer or storekeeper he is not in violation of this injunction.

&&Stealing from another is an even more serious offense than stealing from hekdaish, the holy estate. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 88b);

%%And Rabbi Levi said: “Stealing from a layman is a more serious offense than stealing from the estate of Heaven, for the Scriptural passage dealing with stealing from a layman mentions 'guilt' before 'fraud', while the Scriptural passage dealing with stealing from the estate of Heaven mentions 'fraud' before 'guilt'.

&&The retribution for stealing is very great indeed. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 108a):

%%It is written, And the Lord said to Noach, I have decided to put an end to all living creatures (Beraishis 6:13).

Rabbi Yochanan said: “Come let me show you how great is the destructive power of stealing. For the generation of the Great Flood violated every injunction, yet their fate was not sealed until they reached out for plunder, as it is written, And the earth was filled with extortion. (Ibid.).⁹⁸ And it is written, The extortion became a staff of retribution upon the extortionist (Yechezkel 7:11).”

It was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: Noach was also condemned to die in the Flood; he was only saved because he found favor in God's Eyes, as it is written, For I regret that I created them and Noach found favor in the Eyes of God (Beraishis 6:7-8).

&&When the world is parched it is the sin of stealing that stops the rains from coming. The Talmud tells us (Taanis 7b):

%%Rav Ami said: “Rain is held back for no other reason than for the sin of stealing, as it is written, Because of hands He covers up the light, and He commands it to resume only through insistence (Iyov 26:32.). 'Hands' refers to extortion, as it is written, And of the extortion that was in their hands (Yonah 3:8). “Light' refers to rain, as it is written, Aph-bri belabors the clouds, he spreads the mists of its light (Iyov 37:11).

“What is the remedy for withheld rains?.

⁹⁸ [See Footnote 1.]

“An increase in prayer, as it is written, And He commands it to resume only through insistence (Iyov 36:32). ‘Insistence’ refers to prayer, as it is written, And you shall not pray on behalf of this nation, nor shall you raise a cry or entreaty on their behalf, nor shall you be insistent towards Me (Yirmiyahu 7 :16).”

&&So repulsive does the Holy Blessed One find the pollution of stealing that He does not want stolen money to be used even for bringing sacrifices. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 30a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the son of Yochai: “What is the meaning of that which is written, For I, God, love justice and detest plunder in an olah sacrifice (Yeshayahu 61:8)?

“There is an analogy to this. A mortal king of flesh and blood was passing by a customs house. He said to his servants: ‘Pay the tax to the collectors.’

“His servants said to him: ‘Our master the king, why pay tax since all the tax goes to you anyway?’

“He replied: ‘Let all wayfarers take example from me and not try to avoid paying the tax.’

“So too does the Holy Blessed One say: ‘For I, God, love justice and detest plunder even in an olah sacrifice. Let all my children take example and recoil from plunder.’”

&&Furthermore, the Holy Blessed spurns blessings that come as a result of stealing. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 6b):

%%Rabbi Eliezer the son of Yaakov says: “If someone stole a se'ah measure of wheat, milled it, baked it, and set aside from it the holy challah portion, how can he possibly recite a blessing over the setting aside of the challah? This is not considered a blessing but an insult. In reference to this is it written, He who plunders and blesses is insulting God (Tehillim 10:3).

&&In spite of the seriousness of the offense of stealing, most people are nevertheless guilty of it to some degree, some because they cannot resist their overwhelming lust, some because they delude themselves into thinking

that what they are doing is not really stealing. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 165a):

%%Most people are guilty of stealing, a few are guilty of adultery and incest, and everyone is guilty of shades of slander.

&&Not only is it forbidden to steal from a Jew, it is also forbidden to steal from a gentile. The Talmud tells us (Bava Kama 113b):

%%Rabbi Shimeon the Pious said: "It is forbidden to steal from a gentile, but it is permitted to keep an object that the gentile has lost."

That it is forbidden to steal from him coincides with that which Rav Huna said in the name of Rav: "How do we know that it is forbidden to steal from a gentile?"

"For it is written, And you shall devour all of the nations that God your Lord turns over to you (Devarim 7:76). Only when they are under our domination are they at your disposal, not when they are not under your domination."

That it is permitted to keep an object that he loses coincides with that which Rav Chama the son of Guria said in the name of Rav: "How do we know that it is permitted to keep an object that a gentile has lost?"

"For it is written, And so you shall do with any lost object of your brother (Devarim 22:3), You are only obliged to return the lost object of your brother; you are not obliged to return the lost object of the gentile."

Still, it is possible that only so long as the finder has not actually gained possession of the object lost by the gentile is he not required to exert himself to pick it up and return it. However, once he gains possession of the object he is obliged to return it even though the one that lost it is a gentile. How do we know that this is not so?

Ravina said: "Because it is written, And you will come upon it (Ibid.). The implication is that it has come into possession of the finder."

It was taught: Rabbi Pinchas the son of Yair says: "Whenever there is a possibility of desecration of the Name even an object lost by a gentile is forbidden."

And Shmuel said “It is permitted to profit from the mistake of a gentile.”

Shmuel once bought a golden goblet from a gentile who thought that he was selling him a brass goblet and charged him only four zuzim. Adding mistake upon mistake, he accepted three zuzim in place of the four. Shmuel did not remark.

Rav Kehana bought one hundred and twenty jugs from a gentile who thought he was selling him only one hundred jugs.

Rav Kehana told the gentile: “Take note that I am relying on you, and I am not bothering to count them.”

&&Only the righteous man who turns away from the lustful pursuits of this passing world can completely avoid any semblance of stealing, as it is written, No injustice shall befall the righteous man (Mishlei 12:21).

The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 99b):

%%It is written, And Reuven went out in the days of the wheat harvest and found mandrakes (Beraishis 30:14).

Rava the son of Rav Yitzchak said in the name of Rav: “From here it is apparent that righteous people carefully avoid any semblance of stealing.”

&&He is saying that Reuven did not want to enter the field to pick the wild-growing mandrakes except after the harvest when people commonly walk in the fields. This is meant to teach us to put great distance between ourselves and any semblance of stealing.

Chapter Three

Lending at Interest

If someone lends money to a poor man in need at no interest, he will not suffer for it. If, however, he lends money to even a rich man at interest, his own fortunes will decline. The Talmud tells us (Bava Metzia 71a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Shimeon the son of Elazar says: "If someone has money and lends it at no interest, it is written of him, He did not give out his money at interest, nor did he take bribes against the innocent, whoever does these shall never decline (Tehillim 15:5). By inference, all who do lend at interest do decline."

Do we not see people who do not lend at interest and their fortunes nevertheless decline?

Rabbi Elazar said: "Indeed they decline, but they eventually rebound. Those who lend at interest, however, decline and never rebound."

&&The Talmud also tells us (Bava Metzia 70b):

%%It is written, One who increases his fortune through gouging and interest is collecting it for the benefactor of the poor (Mishlei 28:8).

Who is considered a benefactor of the poor?

*Rav said: "Such as King Shevor."*⁹⁹

&&A person should not delude himself into thinking he can conceal his transgression by claiming that the money he is lending at interest belongs to a gentile and that he himself is merely acting as an agent. The Knower of Secrets will exact retribution from him.

The Talmud tells us (Bava Metzia 61b):

%%Rava said: "Why is the Exodus from Mitzraim mentioned in the Scriptural passages dealing with lending at interest (Vayikra 25:38), tsitsis (Bamidbar 15:41), and accurate weights (Vayikra 19:36)?

"The Holy Blessed One said: "I am the One who distinguished between those Who were truly first born and those who were not when I was striking

⁹⁹ King Shevor was a Persian king who used to take Jewish money and distribute it among the gentile poor.

down the first horn of Mitzraim. I will someday exact retribution from those who claim that their money actually belongs to a gentile and lend it to other Jews at interest; from those who pack their weights in salt to make them heavier and then purchase according to the loaded weights; from those who dye their tsitsis indigo blue instead of the genuine techailless dye.’”

&&How blind are the eyes of those who lend at interest! The Talmud tells us (Bava Metzia 71a):

%It was taught: Rabbi Yosi said: “Come let me show you how blind are the eyes of those who lend at interest. If someone is called a villain by another he will react by becoming that person's mortal enemy. Yet those who lend at interest bring ink and pen and witnesses and formally record that they deny the Lord of Yisrael.”

&&Even to give or receive interest before the fact, interest after the fact, or interest in the form of words is forbidden, The Talmud tells us (Bava Metzia 75b):

%Rabban Gamaliel says: “It is possible for forbidden interest to be before the fact or to be after the fact.

“What are the circumstances?

“If he decides to. approach someone for a loan, sends a gift to that person, and says, 'This is in order that you should lend me money when I ask you,' it is considered interest before the fact. If someone lends him money and he repays it, and afterwards, he sends a gift to that person as compensation for the loss of potential profit, it is considered interest after the fact.”

Rabbi Shimeon says: “It is possible for forbidden interest to be in the form of words.

“What are the circumstances?

He may not tell the lender valuable information such as, 'Be advised that such and such a person is arriving from such and such a place.'“

&&The Talmud goes on (Bava Metzia 75b):

%%It was taught: Rabban Shimeon the son of Gamaliel said: “How do we know that, if upon meeting each other, the lender normally greets the borrower first, the borrower should be careful not to greet the lender first now that he owes him money?”

“For it is written, Or any other thing through which he is gouged (Devarim 23:20). The Hebrew word implies that even extra speech is forbidden.”

&&Furthermore, people who lend at interest are only defeating their own purpose and, as previously mentioned, are causing their own financial decline. The Talmud tells us (Ibid.):

%%It was taught; Rabbi Shimeon the son of Elazar says: “Those who lend at interest lose more than they gain. Even worse, they are disputing the wisdom of Moshe Rabbeinu and the truth of the Torah; it is as if they are saying that if Moshe Rabbeinu had been aware of how profitable lending at interest was, he would never have written a prohibition against it into the Torah.

&&Those who lend money at interest have their special retribution in store for them. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 70b):

%%Our rabbis have taught; To those who cause economic distress by hoarding produce to sell at higher prices, by lending money at interest, and by selling small measures at higher prices does the Scripture refer in that which is written, Saying, when will the leap month be added so that we can begin selling our grain, and the fallow year come that we can bring out our hoard of corn, to make small the ephah measure and sell it for a large shekel, and to corrupt the scales of deceit? (Amos 8:5). What is written afterwards? It is written, God has sworn by the majesty of Yaakov, I will never forget all of their deeds (Amos 8:7).

&&Those people who collect interest on money they lend are holding money to which they have no right. By law, they are required to return it to make restitution. However, if such a lender wanted to return through teshuvah, but had been involved in this practice for such a long time that he

could not possibly make restitution for all of the interest he had collected over the years, his offered payments are not accepted and all of his obligations to make restitution are cancelled. This is a special dispensation for such people who would otherwise find it impossible to return through teshuvah and is conditional on their never reverting to such practices. If they are truly sincere, the Blessed Lord who takes pity on His creatures will forgive them, for He does not seek the death of the sinful but that he abandon his ways and live on.

In reference to this, the Talmud tells us (Bava Kama 94b):

%%Our rabbis have taught: if habitual robbers and lenders at interest come to make restitution it is not accepted from them. If someone does accept such restitution wise men find no pleasure in him.

Rabbi Yochanan said: "This mishnah was taught during Rabi's lifetime. It happened then that there was a man who wanted to do teshuvah.

"His wife said to him: 'Fool! If you do teshuvah you will not be left with anything, not even your belt.'

"He changed his mind and did not do teshuvah.

"At that time the rabbis decreed that if habitual robbers or lenders at interest come to make restitution it is not accepted from them, and if someone does accept such restitution, wise men find no pleasure in him."

&&Therefore, anyone who foregoes money owed to him by such people has fulfilled that which is written, And you shall do that which is fair and good (Devarim 6:18). May he be blessed.

Chapter Four

Bribery

The Torah repeatedly cautions against any subversion of justice. It emphasizes that justice demands a diligent search for the truth. It emphasizes that justice demands evenhandedness, treating people of all classes equally. Nevertheless, the Torah still found it necessary to expressly enjoin against taking bribes. Clearly, bribes are forbidden even if they do not lead to a deliberate subversion of justice. If a judge takes a bribe it is inevitable that he will somehow be influenced; the bribe will certainly cloud his vision.

It is for this reason that both times the Torah enjoins against a judge taking bribes it is immediately after that which is written, You shall not subvert justice (Shemos 23:8, Devarim 16:9). This is to teach us that if the injunction were only against a judge taking money as payment for subverting justice it would be superfluous; subversion of justice has already been forbidden in its own right, even where no exchange of money takes place. Why then is there an additional injunction against taking a bribe? It is to forbid the taking of a bribe even when the judge feels that he will not be influenced by it. The Torah has attested to the futility of such a notion, as it is written, For bribery shall blind the eyes of the clear sighted (Shemos 23:8).

The Sifrei tells us (Devarim 144):

%%It is written. And you shall not take bribes (Devarim 16:19). It goes without saying that it is forbidden to take a bribe in order to acquit the guilty or to condemn the innocent. It is even forbidden to take a bribe in order to acquit the innocent or to convict the guilty.

For bribery shall blind the eyes of the wise (Ibid.). It goes without saying that it blinds the eyes of fools.

And distort the words of the righteous (Ibid.). It goes without saying that it distorts the words of the sinful.

Our rabbis have said: Even a Torah scholar that takes a bribe ultimately becomes deranged, forgets his learning, and becomes dim-sighted.

&&Once he has taken the bribe, it is inevitable that he will become favorably disposed towards the giver of the bribe and attempt to contrive a way to turn the case to his advantage.

The Talmud also makes this point (Kesubos 105a);

%%*Our rabbis have taught: it is written, For bribery shall blind the eyes of the wise (Devarim 16:19) — and certainly those of fools. And distort the words of the righteous (Ibid.) — and certainly those of the sinful.*

Can fools and the sinful serve as judges that it is necessary to make this point?

This then is what they are saying: “For bribery shall blind the eyes of the wise.” Even if one is very wise but takes a bribe, he will not leave this world without becoming a fool. And distort the words of the righteous.” Even if one is otherwise thoroughly righteous but takes a bribe, he will not leave this world without becoming deranged.

&&The Midrash tells us:

%%*To what can bribery be compared?*

It can be compared to a man standing on the shore who takes a small worm, puts it onto a fishhook, and tosses the fishhook into the water. A big fish comes along, swallows the worm, and is caught by the fishhook. Woe to this wretched fish that was undone by such a trifling thing.

It is written, for bribery shall blind the eyes of the clear-sighted (Shemos 23:8). Do we not find many people who take bribes but do not become blind?

What this means is that they become blinded to the truth and can no longer see anything detrimental to the briber.

Bribery also blinds him in the days to come. The righteous will bask in the glow of the Divine Presence, as it is written, For eye to eye shall they

see when God returns to Zion (Yeshayahu 52:8). All will be able to see, but the one who accepts bribes will not. All will be healed, but he will not.

Thus will the Holy Blessed One say to him in judgment: "I created you clearsighted; why did you blind yourself? After reading that which is written, 'You shall not subvert justice,' why did you subvert it anyway? After reading that which is written, 'You shall not discriminate,' why did you discriminate anyway? After reading that which is written, 'You shall not take bribes,' why did you take bribes anyway?"

&&Not only does the judge who takes bribes injure himself, he also imperils his entire generation. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 9b):

%%Rabbi Yitzchak said: "Any judge that takes a bribe brings great wrath to the world, as it is written, And a bribe in the bosom, great wrath (Mishlei 21:14)."

&&The injunction against bribery applies not only to bribes of money but to bribing words as well. The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 105b):

%%Our rabbis have taught: It is written, And you shall not take bribes (Shemos 23:8). Not only are bribes of money forbidden, bribing words are also forbidden. Otherwise it would have been written, And you shall not take gainful bribes.

&&Our pious masters of old took great care to avoid anything that even resembled a bribe in order to underline the seriousness of the matter to their disciples. If a participant in a case they were judging would bring them something, even something owed to them, or if a participant in a case they were judging would say something to them that could somehow conceivably prevent them from seeing his detriment, even if they felt sure that it wouldn't, they would say, "I am now disqualified from judging your case."

The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 105b):

%%What would be considered bribing words? Here are some examples. Shmuel was once helped across a footbridge by another man. Shmuel asked him; "What brings you here?"

The man replied: "I have a case pending before your court."

Shmuel said: "I am now disqualified from judging your case."

The hired man of Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi used to collect a basket of fruit from the fields and bring it to him every Friday. One time he brought it on a Thursday.

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi asked him: "Why are you bringing the fruit today instead of tomorrow?"

The hired man replied: "I have a case pending before you today, and I thought that, since I was going to be here anyway, I might as well bring the fruit along for the master."

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi refused to accept the fruit and said: "I am now disqualified from judging your case."

He then appointed a group of rabbis to judge the case in his stead. While he was passing to and fro, he thought to himself: "He could use such and such an argument to strengthen his case, or possibly such and such an argument."

He exclaimed: "May the bones of those who take bribes become bloated! If I was so affected although I did not take the bribe, and even had I taken it, it would only have been my own fruit that I was taking, how drastic must be the effects of real bribes on those who take them."

A man once brought the first shearing of a sheep that is reserved for the kohen io Rabbi Yishmael the son of Elisha.

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Elisha said to the man: "From where are you?"

The man replied: "From such and such a place."

He said: "Do you mean to tell me that between there and here there was no other kohen besides myself to whom you could have given it?"

The man replied: "I have a case pending in your court, and I thought that, since I was going to be here anyway, I might as well give it to the master who is also a kohen."

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Elisha refused to accept it and said: "I am now disqualified from judging your case."

He then appointed a group of rabbis to judge the case in his stead. While he was passing to and fro, he thought to himself: "He could use such and such an argument, or possibly such and such an argument."

He exclaimed: "May the bones of those who take bribes become bloated! If I was so affected although I did not take the bribe, and even if I had taken it, it would only have been something that was rightfully coming to me, how drastic must be the effects of real bribes on those who take them."

A man once brought a basket of small fish to Rav Anan.

Rav Anan asked him: "What brings you here?"

The man replied: "I have a case pending before you."

Rav Anan refused to accept the fish and said: "I am now disqualified from judging your case."

The man persisted: "Let the master not judge my case, but let him at least accept my gift. Let not the master prevent me from fulfilling the bikurim mitzvah of bringing the early fruit offering to the Bais Hamikdash. For it has been taught: It is written, And a man came from Baal Shalishah, and he brought bread of bikurim to the godly man (Melachim II 4:42). How could Elisha eat bikurim since he was not a kohen? This comes to teach that if one gives a gift to a Torah scholar it is considered as if he has brought a bikurim offering to the Bais Hamikdash."

Rav Anan replied: "I did not want to accept it, but now that you have given Me a good reason, I will accept it."

Rav Anan then referred the man to Rav Nachman and sent along a message. saying: "Let the master please judge the case of this man, for I, Anan, am disqualified from judging it."

Rav Nachman thought: "It is apparent from Rav Anan's message that this man is his relative, and therefore, he cannot judge the case."

There was pending before Rav Nachman a case involving orphans. He thought: "There are two cases here, each of which I am commanded to judge. The commandment whose fulfillment coincidentally honors the Torah takes precedence."

Having reached this conclusion, Rav Nachman postponed the case involving the orphans and brought before him the case of the man sent to him by Rav Anan. The man's adversary in the case saw how partial Rav Nachman was being to the man. He became discouraged and could not satisfactorily present his arguments in the case. He lost.

Before this episode, Eliyahu would regularly come to Rav Anan and teach him the Order of Eliyahu, After this episode he stopped coming. Rav Anan fasted and prayed for mercy that Eliyahu should come again. Eliyahu began coming again, but from then on, Rav Anan found his presence terrifying. Rav Anan constructed a cubicle within which he would sit while Eliyahu taught him the rest of the Order. The early part of the Order is, therefore, known as the Major Order of Eliyahu, the remainder the Minor Order of Eliyahu.

&&It should be perfectly clear how carefully justice must be formulated and how important it is to avoid even the slightest suspicion of anything resembling bribery, even bribing words. Whoever does so shall never suffer for it.

Chapter Five

Deceptive Business Practices

People are under the mistaken impression that, so long as they do not actually steal someone else's property outright, they can conduct their affairs and business dealings in any way they choose. Driven by their hunger for worldly pleasures, they devise all kinds of artful deceptions by which to gain an extra measure of advantage at the expense of the people with whom they are dealing.

The Torah has anticipated this tendency and written, You shall not deceive one another (Vayikra 25:14) to teach us that people should always deal in good faith. Of course, people are in business to make a profit. Nevertheless, the Torah has forbidden deceiving a buyer by selling at more than one sixth above the normal market price or deceiving an unwitting seller by buying at more than one sixth below the normal market price. Even this variance factor was only permitted by the Sages because they estimated that people usually forfeit an overcharge or underpurchase of no more than one sixth, and therefore, the transaction need not be invalidated. Strict adherence to the spirit of the law, however, dictates that there be no variance factor at all; profit should be made only by buying at normal seller's cost and selling at normal market price. People should not perceive a business transaction as an adversary situation, trying to outwit one another.

It should be noted that overcharging is permissible under certain conditions. For instance, if the seller specifies the normal market price, but insists upon receiving twice that amount or else he will not sell, he may do so. If the buyer explains to the seller that, although the price he is offering is well below the market price, he is only willing to pay the amount he is offering, he may also do so. If either the buyer or the seller insists that the transaction be on the condition that the price need not comply to any prescribed relationship to the normal market price, he may do so. In all of these cases, while there may be an overcharge or an underpurchase, there is no deceit. The Talmud discusses these cases in detail (Bava Metzia 51b).

Also, if someone is selling his personal effects rules of overcharging do not apply; people develop a close attachment to these items and hold them in much higher value than the normal market price. Again, there is no deceit involved.

The Talmud tells us (Bava Metzia 51a):

%%Rav Chisda said: "The rules of overcharging only apply when one buys from a merchant, not when one buys from a householder."

Rav Dimi said; "This is accurate."

So too did Rabbi Elazar say: "This is accurate."

.. Why is there a difference?

Because people value their personal possessions and only sell them for more than their value.

&&Any person involved in business would be well advised to make a careful study of the codes of law dealing with overcharging, invalid transactions, undetected flaws, and the like. He should try to conduct himself in a manner that is pleasing to Heaven. He should resist the temptations of money that is not rightfully his. If he does so, the Blessed Lord will provide for his needs.

Chapter Six

Informers

To inform on another Jew and cause his property to be confiscated by gentiles is one of the most serious offenses in the Torah, whether the informer himself benefits from his treachery or whether he does it purely out of spite. Such a person is Halachically liable for any damage he causes. Furthermore, if he had been previously warned but was defiant, he is considered a mortal menace. Blessed is the one who lets the jealous rage of Hashem be vented through him and strikes down the treacherous informer.

The Talmud tells us (Bava Kama 117a):

There was a man who was preparing to divulge to the authorities the hiding place of someone else's hoard of straw. The owner of the straw asked Rav to help him.

Rav summoned the informer and said to him: "By no means should you inform on this man."

Defiantly, the informer replied: "I certainly shall inform on him."

Thereupon, Rav Kehana, who was sitting there at the time, rose up and broke the informer's neck.

Rav approved of Rav Kehana's actions and said: "It is written, Your children fall senseless at the edge of the square as the buffalo trapped in a snare (Yeshayahu 51:20). Just as the buffalo who has fallen into a snare is beyond pity, so is the one who betrays Jewish money to the gentiles beyond pity."

Rav was, however, concerned for the safety of Rav Kehana. He said to him: "As long as we were under the domination of the Greeks there would have been no cause for concern. The Greeks did not take exception when we resorted to bloodshed in the enforcement of our laws. Unfortunately, today we are under the domination of the Persians who do take exception when we resort to bloodshed in the enforcement of our laws; they perceive such practices as a usurpation of their power and an expression of disloyalty. You are, therefore, in grave danger and must flee. Leave Bavel immediately

and go to the Land of Yisrael to study in the school of Rabbi Yochanan, but refrain from debating Rabbi Yochanan's teachings with him for seven years.”

Rav Kehana traveled to the Land of Yisrael. When he entered the school of Rabbi Yochanan he found Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish, Rabbi Yochanan's brilliant disciple, reviewing that day's lessons with the other disciples.

Rav Kehana asked: “What questions were posed today? And what solutions were proposed?”

He was told: “Such and such questions were asked, and such and such solutions were proposed.”

Rav Kehana replied; “These questions are not valid questions, nor are these solutions valid. This then is what should have been asked, and this is what should have been answered.” He went on to explain his views on the subject at hand.

Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish was impressed and reported to Rabbi Yochanan: “A lion has arrived from Bavel. The master should prepare carefully for tomorrow's lesson.”

The following day Rabbi Yochanan directed that Rav Kehana be seated in the foremost of the seven rows of disciples. Rabbi Yochanan taught one lesson, but Rav Kehana did not comment. Rabbi Yochanan went on to teach the second lesson, but still Rav Kehana did not comment. Rabbi Yochanan, thereupon, directed that Rav Kehana be moved back to the second row of disciples.

Rabbi Yochanan continued his lesson, and still Rav Kehana did not comment. Rabbi Yochanan directed that Rav Kehana be removed to the following row. This went on and on until Rav Kehana was removed to the very last row of the disciples.

Rabbi Yochanan turned to Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish and said: “It seems that this roaring lion you told me about has turned out to be no more than a silent fox.”

Hearing this, Rav Kehana thought: "May it be His Will that these seven rows through which I have been removed should be counted as the seven years that Rav had commanded me to refrain from. debate."

Rav Kehana stood up and requested that Rabbi Yochanan repeat the first lesson. Rabbi Yochanan repeated it, and Rav Kehana posed a strong question, Rabbi Yochanan directed that Rav Kehana immediately be returned to his seat in the foremost row of the disciples.

Rav Yochanan was sitting upon seven cushions. He repeated the next lesson and again, Rav Kehana posed a strong question. Rabbi Yochanan removed one of the cushions, leaving only six. Rabbi Yochanan then repeated lesson after lesson, and to each one, Rav Kehana posed difficult questions. With each question, Rabbi Yochanan removed another cushion from under him until he was seated upon the ground.

Rabbi Yochanan was, at that time, a very old man, and his eyebrows had grown shaggy, drooping over his eyes. His attendants would lift them with a golden stick whenever he wanted to see something.

He said to them: "Lift up my eyebrows so that I may see the one who is asking these questions."

Rav Kehana had a cleft upper lip. Seeing him, Rabbi Yochanan thought that he was smiling derisively. Rabbi Yochanan was deeply, albeit mistakenly, offended, and his resentment caused Rav Kehana to die.

The next day, Rabbi Yochanan said to his disciples: "Did you notice how impudent these rabbis that come from Bavel are?"

They told him: "Rav Kehana was not smiling; it was merely the appearance of his features that made it seem so."

Rabbi Yochanan said: "If this is so, then I must go to him."

He went to the cavern where Rav Kehana had been buried, but there was a serpent at the entrance, and he could not go in

He said: "Serpent, Serpent, move aside so that the master can enter to the presence of his disciple."

The serpent did not budge.

He said: "Serpent, Serpent, move aside so that one colleague can enter to the presence of another colleague."

Still, the serpent did not budge.

He said: "Serpent, Serpent, move aside so that the disciple ran enter to the presence of the master."

The serpent moved aside.

Rabbi Yochanan entered and prayed for mercy, and Rav Kehana was revived.

Rabbi Yochanan then said to him; "If I had known that it was merely the appearance of your features that made it look as if you were smiling I would not have been offended. Would the master please come join us in the house of study?"

Rav Kehana replied: "If you pray for mercy that my life will not be in danger whenever I dispute your teaching I will go with you. Otherwise, I will not. I will not rely on your again performing a miracle to revive me.

Rabbi Yochanan asked Rav Kehana all of the difficult problems he had come across over the years in his studies. Rav Kehana solved all of them, and they parted company.

After this episode, Rabbi Yochanan used to say: "We think that we, in the schools of the Land of Yisrael, are the masters of the Torah, but in fact, if is in the schools of Bavel that the masters of the Torah are found."

&&The Talmud goes onto discuss the disposition of the property of the informer (Bava Kama 117b):

%%What is the status of the property of the informer?

Rav Huva and Rav Yehudah have differing opinions. One says that it is permitted to destroy his property. The other says that it is forbidden to destroy his property.

The one who permits the destruction of the informer's property contends that the status of his property can be no better than the status of the informer himself. Since the informer himself may be struck down, it is also permitted to destroy his property.

The one who forbids the destruction of the informer's property bases this prohibition on that which is written, The sinful shall prepare the coat, but the righteous shall wear it (Iyov 27:17). This informer might someday have virtuous descendants who would be entitled to enjoy his property.

&&Whoever is merciful with the property of others, will in turn be worthy of mercy from Heaven.

Part 2: Desire for Pleasure

Chapter Seven

Gluttony

The Exalted Creator has provided people with the intelligence to select that which is beneficial and to reject that which is harmful. In this way, people are set apart from beasts. Beasts are not directed by judgment but by the demands of their bodies. People, however, are of a higher order of creation. Their bodies are meant to serve their intelligence and help them realize their full potential.

Physical pleasure should not be a motivation in itself; it should only be incidental to keeping the body in properly functioning order. The body's demands should be satisfied only insofar as doing so will keep it healthy so that one can serve Hashem and gain everlasting life.

The Rishonim have expounded: It is written, The righteous man eats to satisfy his spirit (Mishlei 13:25). This means that the righteous and intelligent person eats only enough to sustain his spirit so that he will be able to worship the Holy Blessed One. The sinful fool, however, does not do so. He eats purely for the gratification of his body. He spares no expense to fill his stomach, because fool that he is, he thinks that the world was created so that people should be able to eat and drink.¹⁰⁰ However, a person who seeks the truth must control his physical desires. He must scorn the sinful whose life is one long feast at which they cram their stomachs with delicacies. Theirs is a hunger that is unenviable, for it can never be satisfied, as the verse concludes, But the stomach of the sinful is always wanting (Ibid.).

The intelligent person, therefore, eats for the well-being of his body, not its gratification.¹⁰¹ He does not choose those gluttonous foods that bring the most pleasure. Instead, he chooses those foods that are the most healthful.

¹⁰⁰ There is an allusion to this attitude in the Hebrew word for fool, "eveel". This word is an acronym for that which is written, Eat and drink, he tells you (Mishlei 23:7).

¹⁰¹ As it is written, The righteous man eats to satisfy his spirit (Mishlei 13:25).

His main intent is to free his spirit from its basic physical needs and allow it to seek timeless wisdom. Thus, when his body dies, his spirit will remain in its exalted state.

However, the person who devotes his life to pursuit of physical gratification is treading on thin ice. Even if at first he stays within the boundaries of what is permitted, his insatiable desires will lead him into the realms of the forbidden. When his own resources are exhausted, he will steal from others to gratify his desires.

It is for this reason that the Torah has condemned the son who is becoming a glutton and a drunkard. If he is beginning to consume inordinate amounts of meat and drink inordinate amounts of intoxicating wines then it is evident that he is being overcome by his physical drives. If nature is permitted to take its course, his gluttony will exhaust his father's resources. Then he will begin to satisfy his hunger by preying on other people. Such a person is an enemy to himself and an intolerable social menace.

The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 71b):

%%The rebellious son is judged in anticipation of his iniquity. Better that he should die innocent than die guilty. The death of the sinful is good for them and good for the world. The death of the righteous is bad for them and bad for the world. Calm in the lives of the sinful is bad for them and bad for the world. Calm in the lives of the righteous is good for them and good for the

&&The Talmud goes on (Sanhedrin 72a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Yosi of Gallilee says: "Does the rebellious son deserve to be brought before the Court and stoned merely for eating a large amount of meat and drinking a large amount of intoxicating wine?"

"Only, the Torah is anticipating the development of the rebellious son. The Torah has perceived that he will exhaust the resources of his father and seek to satisfy his habits by lurking at the crossroads and preying on the

passersby. The Torah, therefore, decreed that he die innocent rather than die guilty.”

&&The Talmud also tells us (Sanhedrin 94b):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, The curse of God is in the house of the sinful (Mishlei 3:33)?

“This refers to such as Pikach the son of Ramalyahu who used to eat forty se'ah measures of fledglings for dessert.

“That which is written, But the homes of the righteous are blessed (Ibid.) refers to such as Chizkiyah the Pious whose meal was a small measure of meat.”

&&Chapter Eight

Intoxication

Wine is one of those foods that are beneficial in small amounts but harmful in large amounts. Wine taken with meals helps to digest the food. Wine also uplifts the spirit. However, anyone who uses wine to intoxicate himself is making his body go to waste and destroying his mind; he is inviting catastrophe.

Noach came to grief because of wine, bringing disgrace upon himself and curses upon his descendants, The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 70a):

%%Oved of Galilee expounded: "Speaking of wine, the Torah uses the connective Hebrew letter vav followed by the letter yod thirteen times. Together these letters form the sound 'vye', an expression of lament.

"It is written, And Noach became a man of the earth, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and he undressed within his tent. And Cham the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father, and told of it to his two brothers outside. And Shem and Yafess took the coat and placed it upon both of their shoulders and went backwards and covered the nakedness of their father, and their faces were averted, and they did not see the nakedness of their father. And Noach awoke from the stupor of the wine and realized what his youngest son had done to him (Beraishis 9:20-24)."

There is a difference of opinion between Rav and Shmuel as to what Noach's youngest son Cham had done to him. One says that he had castrated him. The other says that he had sodomized him.

The one who says that Cham castrated Noach bases his interpretation on the fact that Noach cursed Canaan, the fourth son of Cham. Since Cham had prevented Noach from having a fourth son, it was only fitting that his own fourth son should be the bearer of his accursedness,

The one who says that Cham sodomized Noach bases his interpretation on parallel expression. It is written here, And Cham the father of Canaan

saw.....(Ibid.). It is also written, And Shechem the son of Chamor saw her.....(Beraishis 34:2) in reference to the rape of Dinah.

According to the one who says that Cham castrated Noach, the reason for Noach's directing his curse at Canaan, the fourth son of Cham, has already been explained. However, according to the one who says that Cham sodomized Noach, why did he single out Cham's fourth son in his curse?

Indeed, this one also agrees that Cham castrated Noach; he only adds that Cham first sodomized him.

It is written, And Noach became a man of the earth, and he planted a vineyard (Beraishis 9:20).

Rav Chisda said in the name of Mar Ukva who said in the name of Rabbi Zakai: "The Holy Blessed One said to Noach: 'Noach, you should have learned from the lesson of Adam, the original man of the earth, who was banished from the Garden of Eden because of wine.'"

This statement coincides with the view that the forbidden Tree of Knowledge was a grapevine, since nothing else brings people as much grief as does wine.

There are, however, other views. Rabbi Yehudah contends that the forbidden fruit was wheat grain, grain being called the Tree of Knowledge because an infant speaks his first words only after he has begun to eat grains. Rabbi Nechemiah contends that it was a fig tree, the source of their downfall participating in their rehabilitation, as it is written, And they sewed together fig leaves, and they made themselves robes (Beraishis 3:7).

&&The Talmud outlines the proper use of wine (Sanhedrin 70a, Eruvin 65a):

%%Rav Chanan said: "Wine was created for no other reason than to console the bereaved and to repay the sinful in this world for any merit they may possibly have, as it is written, Give spirits to the doomed, and wine to the embittered souls (Mishlei 31:6).

Rav Yitzchak said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, Do not look at wine in its redness (Mishlei 23:31)?

“Do not be drawn to wine that flushes the faces of the sinful in this world but makes them become pale in the world to come.

Rava said: “Do not be drawn to wine for there is bloodshed in its aftermath.

Rav Kehana asked: “Why is it written, New wine (Hoshaya 4:11) in the abbreviated version of the Hebrew word but read in the variant full form?”¹⁰²

“There is an intimation here that if wine is used wisely it helps one attain greatness, but if it is abused it brings destitution.”

Rava asked: “Why is the Hebrew word in that which is written, And wine will devastate the heart of people (Tehillim 104:15) read in the variant form meaning ‘will gladden’?”¹⁰³

“There is an intimation here that if wine is used properly it brings gladness, but if it is abused it brings devastation.”

This coincides with what Rava said: “Wine and fine scents have sharpened my wits.”

Rabbi Amram the son of Rabbi Shimeon the son of Avin said in the name of Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba who said in the name of Rabbi Chania: “What is the meaning of that which is written, Who cries out, who howls, who has quarrels, who has complaints, who has undeserved wounds, the ones who have bloodshot eyes, those that linger over wine, that search out blended wines (Mishlei 23:29-30)?”

When Rav Dimi came, he said: “It was said in the Land of Yisrael that these verses can validly be read both as a question and answer and as a declaratory statement. In the first meaning, they are asking who are the ones that have all of these and answering that it is the ones who linger over wine. In the alternate meaning, they are saying that those who are bereaved and cry out in pain and those who are quarrelsome and sinful are the ones for whom wine is fitting.”

¹⁰² [Translator's note: See Section I, Footnote 69.]

¹⁰³ [Translator's note: See Section I, Footnote 69.]

&&The Talmud also tells us (Avos 3:10):

%%*Rabbi Dossa the son of Harkinos says: “Oversleeping in the morning, drinking wine at noon, idle chatter, and participating in assemblies of the ignorant cause a person to be banished from the world.”*

&&The Talmud further tells us (Berachos 63a):

%%*It was taught: Rabbi Meir says; “Why are the laws of the nazir written next to the laws of the suspected adulteress?*

“To tell you that whoever sees a suspected adulteress in her disgrace¹⁰⁴ should take on the Nazirite vow to refrain from the drinking of wine.”

&&This, of course, is because it was drunkenness that clouded her judgment in the first place and led her to commit adultery. A person who sees the consequences of debauchery would, therefore, be well advised to take the Nazirite vow, thereby placing a strong barrier between himself and the potential dangers of wine. The wise person will always take care not to overindulge his thirst for wine. It will save him from disgrace and misfortune.

¹⁰⁴ [Translator's note: See Section I, Footnote 1.]

Part 3: Libidinous Desire

Chapter Nine

Conversation

Our early Sages took note of the strong attraction that men feel towards women. They realized that association with women inevitably arouses the libido, and that, by nature, the more forbidden the woman, the greater the stimulation. In order to help people protect themselves from these strong drives, they developed strict guidelines for the conduct of relationships between men and women. These guidelines were designed to erect barriers between men and women and, thereby, prevent illicit contact.

One of these guidelines was the limitation of conversation between men and women to the necessary minimum. They understood that amiable conversation between men and women is a subtle form of exploratory contact and can easily lead to illicit relationships.

To help overcome these powerful drives, they even advised placing a limitation on conversations between husband and wife. The Talmud tells us (Avos 1:5):

%%Yosi the son of Yochanan of Yerushalayim says: "Let your home be open to all, and let the poor frequent your household. And do not converse overmuch with women."

This was said in regards to one's wife, let alone the wife of another.¹⁰⁵ Thus the Sages said: "Whoever converses overmuch with women brings troubles upon himself, neglects the study of the Torah, and, ultimately, descends to Gehinom."

&&The Talmud describes "overmuch" (Eruvin 53b):

%%Rabbi Yosi of Gallilee was walking along the road and met Beruria. He asked her: "Which way does one go to Lud?"

She replied: "Foolish Gallilite! Didn't the Sages advise not to converse overmuch with women? Why didn't you say simply, "Which way to Lud?"

¹⁰⁵ [Translator's note: it should be noted that "overmuch" is a subjective word and takes on a different meaning when used in regard to one's own wife]

&&Indeed, a person must ultimately account for every detail of his life, including even the intimate conversations between husband and wife. The Talmud tells us (Chagigah 5b):

%%As Rabbi Aila was walking up the stairs in the school of Rava the son of Shaila, he heard a child reciting, For, behold, the One who forms mountains and creates the wind and tells people what they have spoken ... (Amos 4: 13).

Rabbi Aila exclaimed: “What hope is there for a servant whose master confronts him with all of his conversations?”

What is the meaning of “What they have spoken”?

It means that even the intimate conversations between husband and wife are repeated to them at the time of their death.

&&In one sense, promiscuity is a more serious offense than any other sin in the Torah. Promiscuity involves cooperation between two people. However, unlike other sins involving two people, such as stealing or killing, whereby the sinner benefits and the other party suffers, promiscuity is enjoyed by both. Thus, the promiscuous person not only sins himself, he also causes another person to sin.

Also, promiscuity is an indication of a malevolent spirit.¹⁰⁶ It involves careful planning and preparation, and as such, it is particularly offensive. Indeed, one Hebrew word for promiscuity is zimah, a word that implies planning and premeditation.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, anyone who fears the consequences of sin should do everything in his power to avoid the subtle inducements to promiscuity that are normally encountered in everyday life. He should not risk an unfavorable judgment and the loss of his everlasting life for the sake of carnal pleasures. He should be quick to repent even the slightest transgression in this area and should always be aware of the potential loss.

¹⁰⁶ As it is written, And promiscuity, wine, and new wine take away the heart (Hoshaya 4:11). This means that it destroys the intelligence of a person.

¹⁰⁷ As it is written, And you shall do to him as he planned to do to his brother (Devarim 19:19).

Chapter Ten

Gazing

Because of the dire consequences of promiscuity, the Sages decreed that one should not gaze at a woman, not even at her clothing. This is to prevent him from having promiscuous thoughts, for thoughts lead to deeds; the heart is drawn to what the eye sees, and then it is very hard to resist. As our Sages have said, the eye and the heart are agents of sin (Yerushalmi, Berachos 1:5). The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 57b):

%%It is written, And he squeezes shut his eyes not to see evil (Yeshayahu 33:15).

Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba said: "This refers to one who refrains from gazing at women who are laundering clothes in the river."

What are the circumstances? If he has no other route to his destination, then he has no choice but to go there, and he need not shut his eyes. If he has another route to his destination, but he deliberately chooses to pass by the spot where the women are laundering clothes, then he is a villain even if he closes his eyes.

Indeed, the verse refers to one who has no alternate route and need not shut his eyes. It commends the one who is, nevertheless, careful to avert his eyes.

&&The Talmud also tells us (Eruvin 18b, Berachos 61a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: Whoever deliberately contrives to transfer coins from his own hand to the hand of a woman or from her hand to his own in order to gaze at her, even if he is as proficient in the Torah as Moshe Rabbeinu who received it directly on Mount Sinai, he will never avoid the judgment of Gehinom.

In reference to him is it written, Hand to hand shall the sinful not go unpunished (Mishlei 11:21).

&&The Talmud also tells us (Berachos 24a):

%%Rabbi Yitzchak said: "One uncovered handbreadth of a woman is considered nakedness."

Pertaining to what? It cannot pertain to gazing at her, for Rav Shashess has said that one should not even gaze at her small finger. Only, this pertains to the prohibition of reading the Shema in the presence of nakedness.

Rav Chisda said: "The thigh of a woman is considered nakedness. For it is written, Uncover your thigh, cross the rivers (Yeshayahu 47:2). The verse goes on, Your nakedness shall be uncovered (Yeshayahu 47:3)."

Shmuel said: "The voice of a woman in song is considered nakedness, as it is written, For your voice is sweet (Shir Hashirim 2:14)."

Rav Shashess said: "A woman's hair is considered nakedness, as it is written, Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead (Shir Hashirim 4:1)."

&&The Talmud further tells us (Avodah Zarah 20a):

%%It was taught: It is written, And you shall avoid all evil things (Devarim 23:10).

This means that one should not gaze at a beautiful woman, even if she is unattached. Nor should one gaze at a married woman, even if she is ugly. Nor should one gaze at a woman's colorful clothing, even if she is not wearing them at the time. Nor should one gaze at donkeys, hogs, and birds when they are mating, even if one is as full of eyes as the angel of death.

Our Sages said of the angel of death that he is entirely full of eyes and that at the time of person's passing the angel of death stands at the head of the sickbed with his sword drawn and a drop of bile suspended from it. When the sick person sees this sight he shudders and opens his mouth. The angel of death hurls the drop of bile into the sick person's open mouth. This drop causes him to die; this drop causes his body to decompose; this drop causes his face to become discolored.

... Our rabbis have taught: It is written, And you shall avoid all evil things (Ibid.). This means that a person should avoid lewd thoughts during the day so that he will not become contaminated in the night.

Based on this, Rabbi Pinchas the son of Yair said: “The study of Torah leads to practice. Practice leads to careful observance. Careful observance leads to diligence. Diligence leads to cleanness. Cleanness leads to abstinence. Abstinence leads to purity. Purity leads to holiness. Holiness leads to the fear of sin. The fear of sin leads to humility. Humility leads to devotedness. Devotedness leads to divine inspiration. Devotedness is the greatest state of all, as it is written, Then did You speak in a vision to Your devout (Tehillim 89:20).”

This final point is not in agreement with that which Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: “Humility is the greatest state of all, as it is written, Because God had anointed me to bring good tidings to the humble (Yeshayahu 61:1), The devout and righteous are not mentioned, only the humble. Clearly, this comes to teach us that humility is the greatest state of all.

&&So great is the importance of avoiding to gaze at women that if someone's profession brings him into contact with women, and he still avoids gazing at them, the Holy Blessed One Himself sings his praises. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 113a):

%%The Holy Blessed One Himself announces the merits of three people: A bachelor who lives in a metropolis but does not sin, a poor man who returns a lost object to its rightful owner, and a rich man who tithes his produce in private.

Rav Safra was a bachelor who lived in a metropolis. When this teaching was repeated in the presence of Rava and Rav Safra, Rav Safra's face became flushed in embarrassment.

Rava said to him; “This does not refer to one such as you but to one such as Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Oshia who were cobblers in a marketplace that was frequented by prostitutes. They made shoes for the prostitutes as well and fitted the shoes on their feet, but they did not lift their eyes to gaze at them. The rabbis, therefore, held Rabbi Chanina and

Rabbi Oshia in such high esteem that they swore by them saying: 'By the life of our holy rabbis in the Land of Yisrael.'"

&&Indeed, promiscuity is one of the three sins for which the Scripture specifies the punishment of Gehinom. These are: One who commits adultery, one who is a bearer of gossip and slander, and the villainous, oppressive conquerors of Yisrael.

That one who commits adultery is destined for Gehinom is implied in that which is written, Can a man stoke a fire in his lap and his clothing not burn? Can a man walk upon coals and his feet not become scorched? So, too, the one who comes to the wife of another, whoever touches her shall not go free of punishment (Mishlei 6:27-29).

Therefore, the intelligent person should take heed of the dangers of Gehinom and stay far away from sin. He should shield his eyes not to see those sights that may lead him to the act.

Chapter Eleven

Thoughts and Purity

The Sages were concerned that a person should avoid lewd thoughts and, thereby, not expend his seed wastefully but only to fulfill his conjugal obligation and for the preservation of the species. They stressed this point strongly and often.

The Talmud tells us (Kallah 2):

%%... It was taught: The entire generation of the Great Flood used to expend their seed wastefully.

Their astrologers had advised them: "Civilization will last no less than six thousand years. Let us then refrain from having offspring, and inevitably, we ourselves will live for that entire duration."

The Holy Blessed One said to them: "You have decided to consider yourselves as the most important thing in the world. Behold, I shall uproot your name so that you will not even figure in the history of the world."

How do we know that this was indeed the practice of the generation of the Great Flood?

For it is written, And Onan knew the seed would not be attributed to him, thus whenever he came to the wife of his brother, he would waste it upon the ground, so as not to let the offspring be attributed to his brother (Beraishis 38:9). He would arouse himself and expend his seed wastefully. There is a parallel Hebrew usage in that which is written in reference to the generation of the Flood, For all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth (Beraishis 6:12).

&&Because of this corruption, the measure of retribution for the generation of the Great Flood was the boiling waters of the Flood, as the Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 108b):

%%Rav Chisda said: "The generation of the Great Flood corrupted themselves through inflammation, and their judgment was visited upon them through boiling water."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ See Section I, Chap. 2.

&&Therefore, a person should be careful to guard his body from anything that might inflame it and cause it to lead him into sin. Whoever exercises extreme caution in this matter can only enhance the purity of his state.

Chapter Twelve

Resisting Sin

Anyone who looks ahead to his day of judgment will be able to dominate his evil inclination and desires, and he will be able to avoid sin.

The Talmud tells us (Avos 3:1):

%%Akavia the son of Mahalalel says: "Pay heed to three things, and you will be able to avoid sin, Know from where you have come, to where you are headed, and before whom you will have to give an accounting in the future. From where you have come—from a malodorous droplet. To where you are headed—to a place of dust, worms, and maggots. Before whom you will have to give an accounting in the future—before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy Blessed One."

&&The devout people of our early history showed great strength in overcoming their evil inclinations and not letting themselves become contaminated by sin. We find that Yosef the Just resisted the repeated advances of his mistress, the wife of Potiphar. [The Talmud describes that episode in detail (Yoma 35b). The entire text has been quoted in the Prologue to the First Light.] By not succumbing to temptation Yosef earned his rise to greatness and the many blessings that were showered upon him. He was considered worthy of having the Hebrew letter heh from the name of the Holy Blessed One added into his own name.

The Talmud tells us (Sotah 36b):

%%Rav Chana the son of Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the Pious: "Yosef sanctified the Name of Heaven in public; therefore, he earned that one letter from the Name of the Holy Blessed One, the Tetragrammaton, was added to his name."

In what way did Yosef sanctify the Name?

It is written, And it was on that day that he came into the house to perform his duties (Beraishis 39:11). [Rav and Shmuel have different opinions as to the meaning of this last phrase, One says that he entered the house to do his work. The other says that he entered the house to move his

bowels.] The verse goes on, *And no man of the household staff was there (Ibid.).*

Is it possible that in the great house of that villain Potiphar there was a time when no one was about?

It was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: That day was a pagan holiday, and the entire household went to worship the idols, The wife of Potiphar, however, claimed illness and did not go. She thought to herself that this day, above all others, presented an ideal opportunity for the seduction of Yosef.

It is written, And she grabbed him by his coat (Beraishis 39:12).

It was taught: This intimates that they both came naked into the bed. At that time, the image of his father Yaakov appeared to Yosef in a vision, saying: “Yosef! The names of all of your brothers are destined to be inscribed on the precious jewels of the vestment of the kohen gadol, your name among them. Do you want your name removed from among them and that you should be known as one who consorts with prostitutes, as it is written, And the one who consorts with prostitutes squanders fortunes (Mishlei 29:3)?”

Yosef immediately responded to his father's plea, as it is written, And his bow retained its strength (Beraishis 49:24).

Rabbi Yochanan said: “This teaches that his desire subsided.”

And it is written, And the arms of his hands remained strong (Ibid.).

This teaches that he dug his ten fingernails into the ground to overcome his desire.

And it is written, From the might of Yaakov (Ibid).

Who was responsible for Yosef's name being included among the inscriptions on the vestment of the kohen gadol? It was the persistence of Yaakov as he appeared in the vision to Yosef.

The verse concludes, From there he became the shepherd, the rock of Yisrael (Ibid.).

Because of his conduct in this episode he was worthy of being called the shepherd of his people. For so is it written, Leader of Yisrael, pay heed, that leads them like the sheep of Yosef (Tehillim 80:2).

It was taught: Yosef was worthy of having twelve tribes descending from him, just as twelve tribes descended from his father Yaakov. This is intimated by that which is written, These are the generations of Yaakov, Yosef (Beraishis 37:2). It was only because he had partially succumbed to his evil inclination that this did not occur.

Nevertheless, Yosef's brother Binyamin had twelve sons, all of whose names referred to Yosef, as it is written, And the sons of Binyamin were Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gaira, Naaman, Aichi, and Rosh, Mupim, Chupim, and Ard (Beraishis 46:21).

The Hebrew name "Bela" implies that he was lost among strange peoples—a reference to Yosef. The Hebrew name "Becher" implies that he was the firstborn of his mother—a reference to Yosef. The Hebrew name "Ashbel" implies that he was delivered into captivity by the Lord—a reference to Yosef. The Hebrew name "Gaira" implies that he lived in hostels in strange lands—a reference to Yosef. The Hebrew name "Naaman" implies that he was an extremely pleasant person—meaning Yosef.

The Hebrew names "Aichi" and "Rosh" imply that he is my brother and guide—a reference to the relationship between Yosef and Binyamin. The Hebrew name "Mupim" implies that his mouth was as the mouth of his father—a comparison of the Torah knowledge of Yosef to that of his father Yaakov. The Hebrew name "Chupim" implies that he was not present at my wedding nor I at his—a reference to the prolonged separation between Yosef and Binyamin.

The Hebrew name "Ard", according to one view, implies that his face was like a rose—a reference to Yosef's beauty. Otherwise, it implies that he went down among the strange peoples of the world—a reference to Yosef's captivity.

Under what circumstances was a letter from the Holy Blessed One's Name added to Yosef's name?

Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "It is written that Pharaoh said to Yosef, And none other than you shall lift his hand or his foot in all the land of Mitzraim (Beraishis 41:44).

"At the time that Pharaoh elevated Yosef to his position of power, Pharaoh's stargazers objected: 'How can it be that a slave that was purchased by his master for a mere twenty pieces of silver should become a ruler over all of us?'

"Pharaoh replied: 'I see in him signs of royalty.'

"They persisted: 'Is he then proficient in the seventy major languages of the world?'

"Pharaoh replied: 'Tomorrow we shall test him.'

"That night the angel Gavriel came to Yosef and tried to teach him the seventy languages, but Yosef was not able to absorb them. Gavriel added a letter from the Holy Blessed One's Name to Yosef's name, and Yosef was then able to learn all seventy languages. For so is it written, As a testimony in Yehosef was it enacted when he went out over the land of Mitzraim (Tehillim 81:6).

"In the morning, Pharaoh spoke to Yosef in all of the languages, and Yosef was able to converse in each one. However, when Yosef spoke in Hebrew, the holy language, Pharaoh did not understand.

"Pharaoh asked him: 'What language are you speaking?'

"Yosef replied: 'The holy language.'

"Pharaoh demanded: 'Teach it to me.'

"Yosef tried to teach Hebrew to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh was unable to learn it.

"Pharaoh said to Yosef: 'Take an oath to me that you will not reveal to anyone that I do not know Hebrew.'

"Yosef took an oath not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.

“In later years, Yosef took an oath to his father Yaakov that he would bury him in the land of Yisrael. When Yaakov died Yosef asked Pharaoh's permission to comply with his father's will, as it is written, My father made me take an oath.....(Beraishis 50:5). Pharaoh, however, objected.

He said: 'Obtain a release from your oath and stay here.'

“Yosef replied: 'If I obtain a release from this oath, I will also obtain a release from my previous oath to you.'

“Thereupon it is written that Pharaoh said, Go up and bury your father ... (Beraishis 50:6).”

&&We also find that Boaz and Palti the son of Layish overcame their evil inclinations and earned that the Scripture speak in their praise. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 19b):

%%Why, in one place, is he called Palti (Shmuel I 25:44) and in another, is he called Paltiel (Shmuel II 3:15)?¹⁰⁹

Rabbi Yochanan said: “His name was really Palti; Why then was he called Paltiel? This form of the Hebrew name implies that the Lord delivered him from sin. Palti thrust a sword between Michal and himself and exclaimed: 'Whoever attempts to consummate this marriage shall be pierced by the sword.'”

Why then is it written, And her husband went with her (Shmuel II 3:16)? In what way was he her husband?

He behaved to her as a husband, seeing to her welfare and lavishing affection on her.

Why then is it written, Walking and weeping after her (Ibid.)?

He was weeping because he was losing the opportunity to gain constant reward by constantly resisting his evil inclination. The verse concludes, Up to Bachurim (Ibid.).

¹⁰⁹ [Translator's note: David was married to Michal, the daughter of Shaul Hamelech. When David fled from the persecution of Shaul, Shaul gave Michal's hand to Palti the son of Layish.]

There is an intimation in this Hebrew name that they were to each other as youths who had never known the taste of sin.

Rabbi Yochanan said: “The great thing that Yosef did in resisting the temptation of a married woman was small in comparison to Boaz's resisting the temptation of Rus, an unattached maiden. For it is written, And it was in the middle of the night, and the man became uneasy, and he spun about, and behold, a woman was lying at his feet (Rus 3:8).”

Rabbi Yehudah said: “The Hebrew word for 'he spun about', in an alternate meaning, implies that Boaz became aroused when he found Rus.”

The great thing that Boaz did in resisting his evil inclination for one night was small in comparison to that which Palti the son of Layish did in resisting his evil inclination for many years.

Rabbi Yochanan said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, Many daughters have acted valiantly (Mishlei 31:29)?

“This alludes to Yosef and Boaz.

“The verse concludes, But you rose above them all (Ibid.).

“This alludes to Palti the son of Layish.”

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: “What is the meaning of that which is written, Grace is misleading, and beauty is empty (Mishlei 31:30)?

"Grace is misleading' alludes to Yosef, 'beauty is empty' alludes to Boaz.

“The verse concludes, But a woman who fears God, she shall be praised (Ibid.)—an allusion to Palti the son of Layish.”

&&Whoever is confronted with the temptation to sin, but manages to overcome his evil inclination and avoids sinning, will have miracles performed for him and will receive rewards as if he had done good deeds. The Talmud tells us (Kedushin 39b):

%%Rav Tuvi the son of Kisna posed a question to Rava: “We have learned in the Mishnah that anyone who does even one mitzvah will be rewarded with good things. This implies that to receive these rewards he must actually perform the act of doing a mitzvah. We have also been taught

that one who remains seated passively and does not sin will receive the same rewards as that received by one who performs a mitzvah. There seems to be a discrepancy here.”

Rava replied: “Refraining from sin earns these rewards only in instances where one is confronted with the temptation to sin but resists it.

“This can be seen in an episode that occurred with Rabbi Chanina the son of Pappi. Once a gentile noblewoman was trying to seduce him. Hoping to make himself repulsive to her, he recited an incantation that caused his body to become covered with sores and boils. The noblewoman, however, was not so easily dissuaded. She used an incantation of her own that returned him to health.

“Rabbi Chanina the son of Pappi had no choice but to flee and go into hiding. He concealed himself in a deserted bathhouse that was reputed to be so infested with demons that even if two people entered together during the daylight hours they were likely to be harmed. He, however, was not harmed.

“The next day, the rabbis asked him: Who protected you from the demons?’

“He replied: ‘Two Roman nobles from Caesar’s court appeared and kept watch over me throughout the night.’

“They said: ‘Perhaps you were confronted with temptation to sin but resisted it. For it has been taught: Whoever is confronted with the temptation to sin but resists it has miracles performed for him.’”

It is written, The mighty in strength that fulfill His Word, heeding the voice of His Word (Tehillim 103:20). This refers to such a one as Rabbi Tsadok.

A gentile noblewoman once tried to seduce Rabbi Tsadok.

He said to her: “I feel very weak, and I cannot do as you wish. Do you have anything for me to eat?”

She replied: “I only have nonkosher meat.”

He said: “What does it matter? If I am capable of doing what you ask I should also be capable of eating nonkosher meat.”

The noblewoman heated up her oven and put in the meat to roast. Rabbi Tsadok climbed into the oven and sat down.

She asked him: "Whatever are you doing?"

He replied; "If I were to do as you wish I would be destined for the fires of Gehinom anyway."

She said: "If I had known that you felt so strongly about this I would never have bothered you."

Rav Kehana used to sell women's baskets. He was approached by a gentile noblewoman who tried to seduce him.

Rav Kehana said to her: "Let me first go and prepare myself."

He went up to the roof and jumped off. Eliyahu appeared and caught him before he hit the ground.

Eliyahu said to him: "You have caused me to go four hundred parsahs out of my way."¹¹⁰

Eliyahu continued: "Why were you in this predicament in the first place? It is clearly because of your poverty that you were forced into women's baskets,"

He thereupon gave Rav Kehana a container full of golden dinars.

&&Therefore, an intelligent person would do well to keep in mind that he will someday be judged and that he will have to answer for his deeds. He should keep in his heart the fear of being condemned to Gehinom. Only thus will he overcome his evil inclination and control his desires. Only thus will he avoid losing the rewards of an everlasting world for the sake of a momentary insignificant pleasure.

¹¹⁰ [Translator's note: A parsah is a Persian mile equivalent to about four miles.]

Chapter Thirteen

Gentile Women

It is of the utmost importance that a person should avoid being alone with a gentile woman, for gentile women are very lecherous and are likely to force him into promiscuity, as outlined in the previous chapter with regard to Yosef's mistress and the gentile noblewomen in the times of the Talmud. We also find that the women of Moav, through their seduction and promiscuity, were the cause of thousands of deaths among the people of Yisrael. Were it not for the heroic actions of Pinchas in deflecting His Wrath countless more could have died (as described in Section I, Chapter Six). It was for this reason that the Sages decreed that whoever copulates with a gentile woman may be struck down by zealots.

Indeed, so destructive is the power of promiscuity that the Holy Blessed One did not vent His Anger upon the false prophets Achav the son of Koloyah and Tsidkiahu the son of Maseiyah for all their transgressions until they engaged in promiscuity. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 93a):

%%It is written, So said the God of Hosts, the Lord of Yisrael, of Achav the son of Kolayah and Tsidkiahu the son of Maaseiyah who told false prophecies in My Name, Behold, I will give them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Bavel, and he shall strike them down before your eyes. And a curse will be derived from their fate for the entire exile of Yehudah that is found in Bavel, saying, May God make you like Tsidkiahu and like Achav that the king of Bavel roasted them in the fire (Yirmiyahu 29:21-22).

The verse does not say that the king of Bavel burned them, but rather, that he roasted them, Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the son of Yochai: "This implies that he roasted them like chestnuts."

The verse continues, Because they have performed this outrage in Yisrael that they committed adultery with the wives of their fellows and spoke falsities in My Name that I had not commanded them to do, for I am

the One who knows and is a witness, by the Word of God (Yirmiyahu 29:23).

What was it that they had done?

Tsidkiahu approached the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Bavel, and said to her: "So said God, Lie with Achav."

Achav, in turn, said to her: "Lie with Tsidkiahu."

She repeated these conversations to her father who said: "I know that their God despises promiscuity. See that when they come to you that you send them along to me,"

When they came to her she sent them to her father.

The king asked them: "Who gave you these messages?"

They replied: "The Holy Blessed One."

He asked: "Why did He not tell this to Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but only to you?"

They replied: "They are not true prophets, while we are. Therefore, it was told to us but not to them."

The king continued: "Then I wish to test you as Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were tested by being thrown into the furnace."

They replied: "It would not be a fair test because they were three, while we are only two and, consequently, do not have enough collective merit to withstand the test of the furnace."

The king said: "The two of you may select a third person of your choice to join you in the furnace."

They selected Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol, thinking that by his merit they would be saved. Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol was summoned and all three of them were tossed into the furnace. The two of them were immediately consumed like wood shavings. Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol was unharmed, except that his coat was singed.

The king said to Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol: "I know that you are a great saint; why then was your coat singed, while Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were not even touched by the smell of smoke?"

He replied: "They had the collective merit of three people, while I only had my own merit."

The king asked: "Was not Avraham thrown into the furnace by himself, and he still survived?"

He replied: "In his case, the fires were not permitted to destroy. However, in my case, the fires were permitted to destroy the others, and once their destructive power was unleashed, it was impossible for me not to be affected. If two dry shavings and a wet one are put into the fire, when the two dry ones burn, can the wet one avoid becoming scorched?"

What was the real reason for Yehoshua's being punished?

Rav Pappa said: "Because his sons married divorced women, who are forbidden to kohanim, and Yehoshua did not object. For it is written, And Yehoshua was wearing filthy clothing (Zechariah 3:3). Was it the habit of Yehoshua to wear filthy clothing? Rather, this means that his sons married women who were unsuited for kohanim, yet he did not object."

&&The Midrash also makes this point (Beraishis Rabah 24):

%%Rabbi Azariah said in the name of Rabbi Yehudah the son of Levi: "With all transgression does He show patience but for the transgression of promiscuity.

"How is this known?

"For it is written, And the sons of the lords saw the daughters of men that they were fair (Beraishis 6:2), Soon after it is written, And God said, I will wipe off the people I have created from the face of the earth (Beraishis 6:7)."

&&Anyone who is promiscuous with a gentile woman becomes vulnerable to the eleven curses that are outlined in the Scripture. The Talmud tells us (Sotah 37b)

%%Rabbi Yehudah the son of Nachmeini the meturgeman¹¹¹ of Raish Lakish expounded: "The entire portion that lists the curses is discussing the promiscuous man and woman.

¹¹¹ [See Prologue, Footnote 16.]

“It is written, Cursed is the man that makes a graven image or a molten image (Devarim 27:15).

Is it possible that for the idolatrous practice of making graven and molten images a mere curse is sufficient?

“Only, this is a reference to one who copulates with a gentile woman and has a child that worships idols.

“The Holy Blessed One said: 'Cursed are the parents of this child that are responsible for this.'”

&&The Rishonim have interpreted all of the other curses in the portion in a similar exegetic manner as applying to promiscuity.

Anyone who copulates with a gentile woman descends to Gehinom along with her. The Talmud tells us (Yoma 35b):

%%It is written, And he did not listen to her to lie beside her to be with her (Beraishis 39:10). Potiphar's wife had wanted that Yosef should lie beside her in this world and be with her in the world to come.

&&If a person is guilty of promiscuity, his sin openly sticks to him when he is brought to heavenly justice. The Talmud tells us (Avodah Zarah 5a):

%%Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: “If a person does even one mitzvah in this world, that mitzvah rushes to go before him in the world to come, as it is written, And your righteousness shall go before you (Yeshayahu 58:8).

“If a person does even one sin in this world, that sin wraps itself around him and goes before him when he is brought to heavenly justice, as it is written, The paths of their ways go winding, they go up to the desolate places that are lost (lyov 6:18).”

Rabbi Elazar says: “The sin attaches itself to him like a dog, as it is written, And he did not listen to her to lie beside her to be with her (Beraishis 39:6). 'To lie beside her' in this world. 'To be with her' on the day he is summoned to heavenly justice.”

&&Not only does the one who copulates with a gentile woman descend to Gehinom, he can never even be cleansed by Gehinom and emerge. The Talmud tells us (Eruvin 19a):

%%Raish Lakish said: “Sinners of Yisrael cannot be destroyed by the fires of Gehinom. This is apparent from the fact that the golden altar in the Inner Sanctum of the Bais Hamikdash was not destroyed by the burning of incense upon it for many years. If a sheet of gold as thin as a coin could protect the altar from the fires upon it, certainly the people of Yisrael, who are as full of mitzvos as a pomegranate is of seeds, are protected from the fires of Gehinom.

For it is written, Like a slice of pomegranate is Your temple (Shir Hashirim 6:7). And Raish Lakish said: “The Hebrew words of this verse, in an alternate meaning, can be read to say that even the seemingly empty people of Yisrael are full of mitzvos as a pomegranate is full of seeds.”

What then is the meaning of that which is written, Those who cross in the Valley of Bacha shall appoint a spring (Tehillim 84:7)?¹¹²

That refers to someone who has been condemned to Gehinom. He spends but one hour there before Avraham goes down and pulls him out.

However, one who copulates with a gentile woman destroys the holy mark of his circumcision, and Avraham does not pull him out.

&&Therefore, any man that is concerned about the consequences of his actions, and afraid of what might befall him, should be extremely careful to avoid being alone with a gentile woman. In this way, he will not come to be seduced. He should not even let them into his thoughts. Only thus can he be totally free of the perils of this deadly sin.

¹¹² [Translator's note: See Section I, Chapter 8.]

Chapter Fourteen

Battling the Evil Inclination

Praiseworthy is the person who is in constant fear of falling into the clutches of his evil inclination and, consequently, wages a daily battle to avoid even the slightest taste of sin. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 87a):

%%Mar Zutra the son of Tuviah said in the name of Rav: “What is the meaning of that which is written, That our sons may be like seedlings grown up. in their youth, our daughters like corner pillars sculptured in the form of a palace (Tehillim 144:12)?

“That our sons may be like seedlings' refers to the young men of Yisrael that never knew the taste of sin.

“The Hebrew phrase 'our daughters like corner pillars’ refers to the young women of Yisrael who inform their husbands when the period of separation due to menstruation begins ...

“The verse concludes, 'Sculptured in the form of a palace.' This tells us that these young men and young women are considered to have built up a holy palace in their lifetimes.”

&&The Talmud also tells us (Eruvin 21b):

%%Rava expounded: “What is the meaning of that which is written, The mandrakes gave forth fragrance (Shir Hashirim 7:14)?

“This refers to the young men of Yisrael that never knew the taste of sin.

“The verse continues, And at our doors are all kinds of choice fruit (Ibid.).

“This refers to the young women of Yisrael who inform their husbands when the period of a separation due to menstruation begins

“The verse concludes, Old and new, my beloved, have I laid away for you (Ibid.).

“The community of Yisrael said before the Holy Blessed One:

‘Master of the Universe, if is abundantly clear before You that I have devised many restrictions for myself, over and above those that You decreed for me, and I have adhered to all of them.’

&&A person should never allow himself to feel confident that he is capable of resisting sin. On the contrary, he must realize that he is forever vulnerable if he lets down his guard. He must recognize that he is in constant danger of falling into the trap of sin, and he must always be in fear of it. The Talmud tells us (Avos 2:4):

%%Hillel says: "Do not withdraw from society, and do not be sure of yourself until the day of your death ..."

&&We find that even the greatest people fell into this trap by being too sure of themselves. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 107a):

%%Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: "A person should never let himself come to the point where he is put to the test, for David Hamelech let himself come to the point where he was put to the test, and he failed."

"David Hamelech said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, why do people call you the Lord of Avraham, the Lord of Yitzchak, and the Lord of Yaakov, but they do not call you the Lord of David?'

He replied: 'They withstood trials on My behalf, while you didn't.'

"David Hamelech then said: 'Test me, O God, and let me prove myself, purify my kidneys and my heart (Tehillim 26:2).'

"He replied: 'Indeed I will test you, and I will even give you an advantage. I did not let the others know that I was testing them, but I am telling you right now that I shall test you with a matter of lewdness.'"

It was immediately after this exchange that the episode of Bas Sheva occurred.

It is written, And it was in the evening, and David rose from his bed (Shmuel II 11:2).

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: "This means that he visited his conjugal bed during the daytime so as to still his desires. However, he momentarily forgot that which Rabbi Yochanan said: 'A person has a small organ that is always hungry if it is well-fed, but if it is starved, it is satisfied.'"

The verse continues, And he walked upon the roof of the house of the king, and from upon the roof, he saw a woman bathing (Ibid.).

She was washing her hair under cover of a large basket. Satan assumed the guise of a bird and alit upon the basket. David Hamelech shot an arrow at the bird, but he missed it. Instead, the arrow broke the basket, and the woman was revealed.

Immediately, the verse continues, And David sent to inquire about the woman, and he said, Is this not Bas Sheva, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Chiti? And David sent messengers, and he took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her, and she had already been purified from her uncleanness, and she returned to her house (Shmuel II 11:3-4).

To this episode was David Hamelech referring when he said, You have tested my heart, you have thought of me in the night... (Tehillim 17:3).

&&To guard against being exposed to temptation, the Sages decreed that a man should not be alone together with a woman. The Talmud tells us (Kedushin 80b):

%%One man should not be alone together with two women. However, one woman may be alone with two men.

Rabbi Shimeon says: "One man may be alone with two women as long as his wife is with him. He may even sleep in the same room with them, because his wife stands watch over him.

"A son may be alone with his mother, or a father with his daughter, and he may sleep with them even if their flesh touches. If the son or daughter are mature they must be fully clad.

"A bachelor should not be a teacher of small children, because he will come into contact with the mothers of the children. Nor should a woman be a teacher of small children, because she will come into contact with the fathers of the children."

Rabbi Elazar said: "Even a married man whose wife is not presently at home with him should not be a teacher of small children."

Rabbi Yehudah said: "A bachelor should not tend to animals. Nor should two bachelors sleep together under one blanket."

The Sages, however, permitted this.

Anyone whose business brings him into contact with women should avoid being alone with even many women.

Furthermore, a person should not teach his son a profession that will bring him into constant contact with women.

Why should a man not be alone with two women?

It was taught in the school of Eliyahu: Because women are suggestible. . . Rav said: "The courts may flog those that are alone together, but they cannot forbid a woman to her husband on the sole basis of her being alone with another man.

Rava said: "If the woman's husband was in the same town at the time she was alone with another man the courts do not even flog them.

Rav Bibi once came to visit Rav Yosef.

After they had dined, Rav Bibi said to Rav Yosef: "Please remove the ladder from under the gutters so that I will be confined to my quarters and not be able to be alone with your wife.

Why was this necessary? Didn't Rava say that the prohibition against being alone with a woman applies only when her husband is away?

This case is an exception. Rav Bibi was a close friend of theirs, and Rav Yosef's wife felt very affectionate towards him.

... Several captive women were once brought into Neharda'a. Rav Amram the Pious paid a ransom to obtain their freedom and put them up in the loft of his house. He then commanded his servants to remove the ladder leading up to the loft.

While one of the women was passing by the opening between the loft and the house, a light fell upon her face. Seeing her glowing face, Rav Amram took the ladder which was too heavy for even ten men to lift and carried it to the loft by himself. He started to climb up the ladder.

Halfway up the ladder, Rav Amram stopped. He planted his feet firmly and made a tremendous effort to muster up enough strength to overcome his aroused evil inclination.

He began to yell: "There is a fire in the house of Rav Amram! There is a fire in the house of Rav Amram!"

The rabbis came running into Rav Amram's house. They immediately realized what the situation was and the purpose of Rav Amram's outcry.

They said to him: "You have embarrassed us by letting us see you struggling with your evil inclination."

He replied: "Better that I cause you embarrassment in this world because of this than that I should cause you embarrassment in the world to come."

Rav Amram addressed himself to his evil inclination: "Behold! You are made of fire and I of flesh, yet I am stronger than you are."

Rabbi Meir used to ridicule people who sinned, because he felt that it was not that difficult to overcome the evil inclination.

One day, Satan who is the source of the evil inclination appeared to Rabbi Meir in the guise of a beautiful woman standing on the other side of a river. There were no boats available for crossing the river, only a rope bridge. Rabbi Meir grabbed onto the rope and started making his way across the river.

When Rabbi Meir had gotten halfway across the river his evil inclination released him from its grip.

Satan said to Rabbi Meir: "Were it not proclaimed in the heavens to take heed of Rabbi Meir and his Torah I would have reduced you to two small heaps of remains."

Plimo would often say: "Let arrows find their way into the eyes of Satan."

Once, on the day before Yom. Kippur, Satan appeared to Plimo in the guise of a beggar. He stood on the doorstep of Plimo's house begging for food, and some bread was brought out to him.

He said: "Everyone is inside today eating large meals in anticipation of the fast day tomorrow, and I must eat outside."

He was brought into the house and Seated at the table together with the members of the household. He made that he should be covered with boils and running sores, and as he sat at the table, he was squeezing pus from them.

Plimo said to him: "Please do not behave in such a revolting manner at our table."

The beggar then asked for a cup of wine. When he was given the wine he brought up some bile and spit it into the cup. Plimo was very revolted and started yelling at the beggar. Satan, in the guise of the beggar, made as if he had died of shock.

Plimo heard that people were saying: "Plimo has killed a man."

Afraid that the police were going to come for him, he ran away from the town and hid in an outhouse in the fields. Satan followed him there and saw that Plimo was extremely agitated.

Satan then revealed himself to Plimo in his true guise and said to him: "Why does the master always insist on cursing me with arrows in my eyes?"

Plimo asked; "What then should I say to push you away when you are trying to coerce me to sin?"

Satan replied: "It would be sufficient for the master to say that the Merciful One should rebuke Satan."¹¹³

It was the habit of Rabbi Chiya the son of Ashi, whenever he prostrated himself during prayer, to say: May the Merciful One save us from the evil inclination."

One day his wife heard him saying this. She wondered: "Many years have already passed since we have stopped having relations because of old age; why then is he so worried about his evil inclination?"

¹¹³ [Translator's note: This expression appears in the Scripture in that which is written, may God rebuke you, O Satan (Zechariah 3:2).]

Once, while he was studying in the garden, his wife disguised herself and started walking back and forth in front of him.

He asked her: "Who are you?"

She replied: "I am Chadusa,¹¹⁴ and I have only today returned to this town."

He asked her to lie with him, and she said: Only if you bring me the small branch that is at the top of that palm tree."

He clambered up to the top of the tree and brought her the branch.

Later, when he returned home, he saw that his wife was stoking up the fires in the oven. Feeling despondent about what he had done, he started to climb into the oven so that he would die.

His wife stopped him, asking: "What is going on?"

He related the entire incident to her, and she told him: "That woman was none other than I."

Unconsoled, he said: "I did not know this at the time, and my intention was to do a forbidden act. Therefore, I still deserve to be punished."

It was said that for the rest of his life Rabbi Chiya the son of Ashi was distressed by that incident and that eventually he died of the heartache.

How did he know that doing a permitted act under the mistaken impression that one is doing a forbidden act is something that requires forgiveness?

It has been taught: It is written, But if her husband had annulled them on the day he heard of them, then all the utterances of her lips, to her vows and to that which is binding upon her, shall not remain valid, her husband has annulled them, and God will forgive her (Bamidbar 30:13).

What are the circumstances to which this verse is referring? If the vows were annulled why does she require forgiveness?

It refers to a woman who made a Nazirite vow forbidding her to drink wine or to be contaminated by corpses. Her husband, upon hearing of the vow, exercised his power to annul it. The woman, however, did not know

¹¹⁴ A prostitute who was well known in that town. (Rashi)

that her husband had annulled the vow, and nevertheless, she drank wine and let herself become contaminated by corpses. She is in need of forgiveness.

Whenever Rabbi Akiva would read this verse he would cry. If someone who intended to eat nonkosher hog's meat but actually was eating permitted lamb's meat is required by the Torah to seek forgiveness, someone who intended to eat the hog's meat and actually ate it is certainly in need of forgiveness many times over.

There is a similar derivation from that which is written, And if someone should sin and do one of the actions forbidden by the command of God, but he was not aware of his guilt, and he shall bear his sin (Vayikra 5:17).

What are the circumstances? If he does not know of his guilt why does he bear sin?

It refers to someone who intended to eat permitted fats but mistakenly ate prohibited fats. If someone who intended to eat permitted fats but ate prohibited fats is considered by the Torah to be a bearer of guilt, someone who intended to eat forbidden fats and actually ate them certainly bears guilt many times over.

&&It should be noted that it is not only men who must be in constant fear of falling into the clutches of their evil inclination. True, women are shier and not as aggressive as men. Still, they must be afraid of sin and extremely careful not to be drawn into it. We find that one of the greatest women in our history ridiculed that which the Sages said that women are suggestible (Kedushin 80b) and she herself fell victim to sin. The Talmud tells us (Avoda Zarah 18b):

%%Rabbi Meir fled to Bavel. Some say that it was as a result of the episode involving his wife Beruria.

Once she ridiculed that which the Sages said that women are suggestible.

Rabbi Meir said to her: "By your life, someday you will acknowledge the truth of their words."

Rabbi Meir appointed one of his students to try to seduce her. It took a long time, but he was very persistent, and she finally agreed.

When she found out that it was all a charade orchestrated by Rabbi Meir she strangled herself. Not expecting such a turn of events, Rabbi Meir fled to Bavel out of shame.

&&The prohibition against being alone with a woman includes not only married women or women with whom relations would be incestuous but even unmarried, unrelated women. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 21a):

%%Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “At that time the Sages prohibited being alone with a married woman and having relations with an unmarried woman.

Is not the prohibition against being alone with a forbidden woman already implied in the Scripture? For Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the son of Yehotsadak: “Where is the prohibition against being alone with a forbidden woman hinted to in the Scripture? It is written, If your brother, the son of your mother, should entice you (Devarim 13:7). Is it only the son of your mother that entices, not the son of your father? Only this contains an intimation that a son may be alone with his mother, but no one may be alone with any of the other forbidden women mentioned in the Scripture.”

Rav Yehudah must have been saying in the name of Rav that it is forbidden to be alone with an unmarried, unrelated woman.

&&Therefore, anyone who is confronted by temptation should subjugate his desires and overcome them. Indeed, this is a very difficult task, and for this very reason, his reward will be great. The reward for an achievement is measured according to the amount of pain caused by the achieving of it (Avos 5:23). The Talmud tells us (Makos 23b):

%%Rabbi Shimeon says: “It is written, Only be strong not to eat blood (Devarim 12:23). It is also written, Do not eat it so that there shall be good for you and your children after you (Devarim 12:25).

“Blood is something for which people have no appetite. Yet, the Torah tells us that one who avoids eating blood will be greatly rewarded. Theft and promiscuity are things that people desire and lust after. Therefore, all who avoid them will certainly receive great reward many times over for themselves, for their children, and for all of their descendants until the end of time.”

&&Chapter Fifteen

Overcoming the Evil Inclination

Although a person develops an evil inclination early in his childhood it is still possible for him to overcome it. As long as he begins to battle with his evil inclination during his youth and does everything in his power to crush it, he will always be able to emerge victorious from his battles with the evil inclination. If, however, he falls into the clutches of the evil inclination, and lets it take control of him, the evil inclination will become an increasingly formidable foe. It will become very difficult to overcome an evil inclination that has become entrenched in his character. The evil inclination will become his master and dominate him every day. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 52a, Berachos 61a):

%%Rav Asi said: "In the beginning the evil inclination appears as a gossamer thread, but in the end, it is as thick as a wagon rope. For it is written, Woe to those that draw guilt with cords of falsehood, and as with wagon ropes, sin (Yeshayahu 5:18)."

Rav Nachman the son of Rav Chisda expounded: "What is the meaning of that which is written, And the Lord God formed the man (Beraishis 2:7)? Why is the Hebrew word 'formed' written in the unusual form of having the letter yod repeated twice?

"There is an intimation here that there is a duality in the formation of people, one for good and one for evil."

Rav Nachman the son of Rav Yitzchak asked: "It would follow from this that a beast, whose creation is not expressed in this unusual form, is free from the evil inclination. Yet this is not so. Do we not find beasts that are deliberately vicious and destructive?"

Rather, the explanation for the unusual usage in the word "formed" that indicates duality can be found in that which Rabbi Shimeon the son of Pazi said: "Woe to me from my evil inclination, woe to me from my Creator."

This means *that the evil inclination. overpowers a person and prevents him from fulfilling the Will of his Maker unless he constantly battles with it.*

... *It was taught: Rabbi Yosi from Gallilee says: "Righteous people are ruled by their inclinations for good, as it is written, And my heart is fallen within me (Tehillim 109:22)."*¹¹⁵

"Sinful people are ruled by their evil inclinations, as it is written, The word of sin to the sinful, within my heart (Tehillim 36:2).

"Average people are ruled by both, as it is written, For He stands at the right of the pauper to save him from the rulers of his soul (Tehillim 109:31)."

&&It would appear to me that this means that righteous people manage to overcome their evil inclination, leaving their inclination for good in control. Sinful people do the exact opposite. Average people are not under the total control of either inclination; sometimes they follow one, sometimes the other. This is the intimation in the verses that the Talmud quotes.

We find that the evil inclination is known by many names, according to the effect that it has upon the person. Among these are the seven names mentioned by Rabbi Elazar. These are referring to the evil inclinations of those people who place their trust in the astrological significance of the disposition of the seven planets instead of in the Master of the Universe and, consequently, fall under the domination of their evil inclinations. The evil inclination also has other names such as the lurking "Lion" and the "Foe". Once the evil inclination overcomes a person it affects every aspect of his existence. There is a traditional name for the evil inclination that corresponds to each of these effects. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 52a):

%%Rabbi Elazar expounded: "The evil inclination is known by seven names. The Holy Blessed One calls it 'Evil', as it is written, For the inclination of a person's heart is evil (Beraishis 8:21).

¹¹⁵ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that this refers to the evil inclination who is as dead within my heart for I am able to vanquish it.]

“Moshe Rabbeinu called it the 'Enemy', as it is written, If your enemy is hungry feed him bread, if he is thirsty give him water to drink. For you will be heaping burning coals upon his head, and God will repay you (Mishlei 25:21-22).¹¹⁶ Do not read the Hebrew word in such a way that it means 'will repay'. Read it with a slightly different pronunciation whereby it means 'will make him be at peace with you'.

“Yeshayaha called it the 'Obstacle', as it is written, Lift the obstacles out of the way of my people (Yeshayahu 57:14.).

“Yechezkel called it the 'Stone', as it is written, And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh (Yechezkel 36:26).

“Yoel called it the 'Hidden', as it is written, And I will remove the host of the north far away from you (Yoel 2:20). The phrase 'host of the north', in a variant pronunciation, refers to the evil inclination that stands hidden in the heart of a person.

“The verse goes on, And I will drive him into a barren and desolate land (Ibid.). This means to a place where there are no people to challenge.

“The verse continues, His face towards the eastern sea (Ibid.). In the variant meaning, this is saying that he set his eyes upon the first Bais Hamikdash and brought about its destruction and the death of its Torah scholars.

“The verse continues, And its remainder toward the western sea (Ibid.). In the variant meaning, this is saying that he set his eyes upon the second Bais Hamikdash and brought about its destruction and the death of its Torah scholars.

“The verse continues, And his stench will rise and his reek go up (Ibid.), for he does not restrict himself to the nations of the world but challenges the

¹¹⁶ [Translator's note: Rash' explains that the verse is referring to the evil inclination who is hungry and desirous of sin. Feed him the bread of Torah disputation, as it is written, Come eat of my bread (Mishlei 9:5). Give him to drink the water of Torah., as it is written, Hark, all thirsty, come to the water (Yeshayahu 55:1). Thus will you come to be at peace without inclinations, and they will not to try to coax you into sin and the loss of eternity,

nation of Yisrael, because as the verse concludes, For he has done great things (Ibid.).”

Abaya said: The evil inclination is more challenging to Torah scholars than to anyone else.”

Abaya based this statement on an incident in his own experience. He once heard a man asking a woman to accompany him to a particular place. Abaya thought that he would follow them and prevent them from doing any forbidden acts. He followed them for three parsas¹¹⁷ through a swamp. Presently, he saw that they were parting and taking leave of each other.

He heard them telling each other: “We must part because we each have far to go, but it would have been enjoyable to continue on in such pleasant company.

On that note, they parted.

Abaya felt that if he had been in that situation he would not have been able to resist giving in to the temptation to sin.

He leaned dejectedly on the bolt of a door, saying: “If it were I, I would not have been able to resist.

An old man¹¹⁸ reassured him by replying to him that which had been taught: The greater a person is, the greater is his evil inclination.

&&A person's evil inclination tries to overpower him every single day. It never leaves a person alone; it always seeks to bring about a person's death, at which time it comes to bear witness against him. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 52a):

%%Rabbi Yitzchak said: “A person's evil inclination tries to overpower him every single day, as it is written, And every inclination of his thoughts was only evil every day (Beraishis 6:5).

Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish said: “The evil inclination of a person tries to overpower him every day and seeks to bring about his death, as it is

¹¹⁷ [Translator's note: See Footnote 20.]

¹¹⁸ [Translator's note: The unqualified mention of “an old man” in the Talmud refers to the prophet Eliyahu.]

written, *The villain watches for the righteous and seeks to cause his death (Tehillim 37:32).*

“If it were not for the assistance of the Holy Blessed One it would be impossible to resist the evil inclination, as it is written, God will not leave him in his hand (Tehillim 37:33).”

... Rabbi Yochanan said: “The evil inclination seduces a person in this world then bears witness against him in the world to come, as it is written, Let one pamper his slave from youth, and in the end, he will become a tyrant (Mishlei 29:21).”

There are two explanations of the connection between the Hebrew word for tyrant and the Hebrew word for witness. One is based on Rabbi Chiya's numerical system of “Atbach” in which the word tyrant converts to the word “witness”. In the school of Rabbi Acha the son of Rabbi Chanina it was said that the Hebrew word for tyrant means witness in Arabic.

Rava said: “In the beginning the evil inclination is called a traveler, then a guest, and finally, a man. For it is written, And the traveler came to the rich man, and he was reluctant to take from his own sheep and oxen to prepare for the guest who had come to him, and he took the ewe of the poor man, and he prepared it for the man who had come to him (Shmuel II 12:4).”

&&The remedy for the affliction of the evil inclination is in the study of the Torah. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 52b, Kedushin 30b):

%%It was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: My son, if you meet up with that corrupt fellow drag him into the house of study. If he is of stone he will be dissolved, as it is written, Water wears away the stones (Iyov 14:19). “Water” refers to the Torah, as it is written, Hark, all thirsty, come to the water (Yeshayahu 55:1). And if he is of iron he will be shattered, as it is written, Surely My Words are like fire, by the Word of God, and as a hammer shatters stone (Yirmiyahu 23:29).

&&Ideally a person should look upon his evil inclination as a potential sacrifice. He should make every effort to overpower his evil inclination and

slaughter it as a holy sacrifice for the honor of Hashem. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 43b):

%%Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: “Whoever slaughters his evil inclination and confesses his sins over it is considered to have brought honor to the Blessed Name in two worlds, this world and the world to come. For it is written, He who offers up thanksgiving honors Me, and who sets his way well, to him will I show the salvation of the Lord (Tehillim 50:23) — the Hebrew word for 'honors me' being written with the letter nun repeated twice to indicate duality.”

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi also said: “Come let me show you how great the humble of spirit are considered before the Holy Blessed One. During the time that the Bais Hamikdash was still standing, whoever brought a burnt offering received reward commensurate with bringing a burnt offering; one who brought a meal offering received reward commensurate with bringing a meal offering. But one who is humble is considered by the Scripture to have brought all of the different kinds of sacrifices, as it is written, The sacrifices of the Lord are a broken spirit (Tehillim 51:19).

“Furthermore, his prayers are never rejected, as it is written, A broken and crushed heart, O Lord, You will not scorn (Ibid.).”

&&If a person feels that he has made every effort to overcome his evil inclination, but he is still not able to resist it, he should at least leave the place where he is known so as not to desecrate the Name. The Talmud tells us (Chagigah 16a, Kedushin 40a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Ilai the Elder says: “If a person sees that his evil inclination is overpowering him he should go to a place where he is not known. He should dress in humble black clothing and wrap himself in a humble black cloak before he gives in to his heart's desire; he should at least not desecrate the Name in public.”

&&Indeed, the righteous people perceive the evil inclination in this world as if it were a thin strand of hair. The Talmud tells us that they are not

intimidated by it; they crush it (Berachos 5a). The sinful, however, perceive the evil inclination as a huge mountain. By not trying to overcome it in their early years they let it become so powerful that they can no longer overcome it.

In the world to come the perception of the righteous and the sinful will be reversed. At that time, the evil inclination will crumble of itself, for the Holy Blessed One will remove from people the heart of stone and revive the living heart of flesh. Then the righteous will perceive the evil inclination in its true nature. They will think of the great battles they had to wage against the evil inclination to overcome it, especially since the greater a person is, the greater is his evil inclination. Realizing that they need no longer battle against the evil inclination, and remembering the difficulties of the early battles, it will appear to them as a huge mountain that they need no longer try to scale.

The sinful, however, who always accommodated their evil inclination, and did not even undertake to battle it, will now see it surrender of itself without any effort, as it is written, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh (Yechezkel 36:26). Then they will see the evil inclination as a strand of hair that could have been vanquished so easily. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 52a)

%%Rabbi Yehudah the son of Hai expounded: "In the world to come the Holy Blessed One will bring the evil inclination and execute it in front of the righteous and the sinful. To the righteous it will appear as a huge mountain, to the sinful as a strand of hair. They will both burst out in tears.

"The righteous cry and say: 'How was it possible for us to conquer this huge mountain?'

"The sinful cry and say: 'How could we not have conquered this strand of hair?'

"The Holy Blessed One wonders along with them, as it is written, If it should be amazing in the eyes of the remainder of this people in those days,

*so shall it be amazing in My Eyes, by the Word of the God of Hosts
(Zechariah 8:6).”*

&&Section III:

PURSUIT OF HONOR

Part 1:

Positions of Power

(Chap. 1-2)

Part 2:

Political Influence

(Chap. 3)

&&Part 1: Positions of Power

Chapter One

Pitfalls of Power

A person who is ambitious for power is only causing trouble for himself. He arouses the jealousy of other people and risks dying before his time and being banished from the world to come. The Rishonim have told us that when a person assumes a position of leadership he becomes as a villain in the eyes of Heaven. It would be almost impossible for him to avoid abusing his power over his own people, and in punishment, he will lose years off his life.

Indeed, we find that although Yosef the Just was sold into captivity by his brothers, when he became Prince of Egypt during the years of famine he took good care of his brothers and did not revenge himself upon them. Nevertheless, Yosef died before his brothers because he exercised power and authority over them (Sotah 13b). The Talmud also tells us (Pesachim 87b, Berachos 55a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said: "Woe to power for it buries the one who possesses it You cannot find a prophet that did not outlive four kings, as it is written, The vision of Yeshayahu the son of Amotz that he saw about Yehudah and Yerushalayim in the days of Uziah, Yosam, Achaz, and Yechizkiah, the kings of Yehudah (Yeshayahu 1:1)."

Rav Yehudah said: "There are three things that cause a person's lifetime to be shortened; Being called to read in the Torah scrolls but refusing to go, being offered a cup of wine over which blessings were said but refusing it, and becoming accustomed to power.

"That being called to read in the Torah scrolls but refusing to go shortens life is derived from that which is written, For it is your life (Devarim 30:20).

"That refusing a cup of wine over which blessings were said shortens life is derived from that which is written, And I will bless those that bless you (Beraishis 12:3).

“That becoming accustomed to power shortens life is based on that which Rabbi Yosef the son of Chanina said: 'Why did Yosef die before his brothers? Because he became accustomed to power.'”

How can this be? Did not Rabi instruct his son Rabban Gamaliel: “Conduct your presidency with prestige, and instill fear into your disciples”?

There is no discrepancy here. Indeed, in public it is important for a leader to be strong. It is in private that one must not become accustomed to power.

&&If someone attains a position of leadership he should not delude himself into thinking that it was his own shrewdness and talent that got him there. He should realize that he has reached that position only by the direction of the Holy Blessed One. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 55a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said: “The Holy Blessed One makes three announcements by Himself: Famine, plentitude, and the rise of a leader.

“That he announces famine is derived from that which is written, For God has called for a famine (Melachim II 8:1).

“That He announces plentitude is derived from that which is written, And I will call upon the grain and increase it (Yechezkel 36:29).

“That He announces the rise of a leader is derived from that which is written, Behold, I have called out the name of Bezalel (Shemos 31:2).”

Rabbi Yitzchak said: “A community leader may only be appointed with the previous consent of the community. For it is written, And Moshe said to the people of Yisrael, Behold, God has called out the name of Bezalel (Shemos 35:30).

“The Holy Blessed One said to Moshe: 'Do you find Bezalel acceptable?’

“Moshe said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, if he is acceptable to you, he is certainly acceptable to me.’

“He said to him: 'Nevertheless, go ask the people of Yisrael.’”

“Moshe went and asked them: 'Is Bezalel acceptable to you?’

“They replied: ‘If he is acceptable to the Holy Blessed One and to you, he is certainly acceptable to us.’”

&&If someone attains a position of leadership he must learn to be humble. He should take example from Moshe and Aharon who were leaders of the entire nation of Yisrael and yet they said: “And what are we... (Shemos 16:7).” He should also take example from David Hamelech who was King of Yisrael and yet he said: “And I am but a worm and not a man (Tehillim 11:7).” If he will learn to be humble amidst greatness he will be able to crush his pridefulness and thus ensure the perpetuation of his greatness. The Talmud tells us (Megillah 13b):

%%Rabbi Elazar said: “When the Holy Blessed One assigns greatness to a person He assigns greatness to him, to his children, and to his children's children until the end of time, as it is written, And he established them forever, and they were uplifted (Iyov 36:7).”

&&If a leader develops an exaggerated sense of self-importance and becomes arrogant the Holy Blessed One brings about his downfall, as it is written, And if they are imprisoned in chains, entrapped, in snares of misery (Iyov 36:8).

Therefore, anyone who fears Heaven should avoid any kind of position of power over the community unless he is completely confident that his only intention is to further the designs of Heaven and for the benefit of the community itself. If he does decide that it is proper for him to become a leader in his community he should be extremely careful not to become a tyrant in the exercise of his power. The Talmud tells us (Rosh Hashanah 17a):

%%Who are the ones that instilled fear in the land of the living and, therefore, stay permanently in Gehinom?

Rav Chisda said: “This refers to a leader that tyrannizes the community other than for the sake of Heaven.”

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “Every leader that tyrannizes the community other than for the sake of Heaven will never have a son who is a

Torah scholar, as it is written, Therefore people fear him, he shall not see any that are wise of heart (Iyov 37:24).”

&&The proper role of a leader of Yisrael is to guide the people of Yisrael, which is called the holy nation (Shemos 19:6), with love and devotion. If the people are living virtuous lives the leader must be careful not to annoy them or to impose upon them unduly. If the leader sees the people straying from the true path he should duly and properly rebuke them and subjugate them in order to bring them back into line. He should take example from the Lord of the Universe who gently guided Yisrael through the barren desert as a tutor leading the small child by the hand. Someone who has attained leadership by the design of Hashem should certainly do so as well.

Chapter Two

Prominence as a Torah Authority

There is a prominence that a person can attain that is even greater than a position of authority in the administration of society. It is to be acknowledged as a great Torah authority and to have one's opinions on legal questions accepted as authoritative. Such greatness can only be attained by people that do not aspire to it, who humbly devote themselves to the study of the Torah for its own sake. If they become learned enough the Holy Blessed One raises them up to prominence. However, those that actively pursue prominence as Torah authorities will find it a very elusive goal that they will never attain. The Talmud tells us (Eruvin 13b):

%%Rabbi Aba said in the name of Shmuel: "For three years there was a dispute between the school of Shamai and the school of Hillel, each claiming that its own legal rulings should be accepted as authoritative.

"After that time, a Divine Echo was heard to say: The opinions of both schools are the Lord's immortal Words and are worthy of study as valid parts of the Torah. However, in actual practice, it is the opinions of the school of Hillel that are authoritative and must be followed.'

"Why was the school of Hillel worthy of achieving such a high level of learning that its opinions are always considered authoritative?

"Because they were easy-going and patient; they always taught both their own opinions and those of the school of Shamai. Moreover, they would teach the opinions of the school of Shamai before they taught their own.

There is an indication of this in the mishnah (Sukkah 28a): If someone was not sitting completely within the sukkah, but had only his head and the greater part of his body within the sukkah and his table in the house, the school of Shamai is of the opinion that this does not constitute a fulfillment of the mitzvah of eating in the sukkah on Sukkos. The school of Hillel is of the opinion that this is sufficient for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of sukkah.

*The members of the school of Hillel said to the members of the school of Shamai: "Did it not once happen that the elders of the school of Shamai and the elders of the school of Hillel, went to visit Rabbi Yochanan the son of Hachoranis and found him sitting with his head and the greater part of his body within the sukkah and his table in the house?"*¹¹⁹

The members of the school of Shamai replied: "Can you bring proof from that incident? Indeed, they told Rabbi Yochanan the son of Hachoranis that if such was his practice it was obvious that he had never fulfilled the mitzvah of sukkah."

&&The Talmud is teaching us here that whoever lowers himself is raised up by the Holy Blessed One, while whoever tries to elevate himself is humbled by the Holy Blessed One; whoever pursues high office finds that it flees from him, while one who is worthy of high office but flees from it finds that he is in demand for that office. Whoever is impatient and presses time to force things to his advantage finds himself shunted aside by the march of time, while one who is patient and is willing to let events take their course will see time and events turn to his advantage. The Talmud also tells us (Eruvin 54a, Nedarim 55a):

Rava had a quarrel with Rav Yosef. On the day before Yom Kippur, he decided to visit Rav Yosef and smooth it over. When he came to Rav Yosef's house, he found the servant preparing to blend a cup of wine for Rav Yosef.

Rava said to the servant: "Hand me the cup, and let me blend the wine for Rav Yosef."

Rav Yosef was blind and did not see Rava, but when he tasted the wine, he said: "This wine tastes like one of Rava's blends."

Rava spoke up: 'Indeed, it was I that blended the wine.'

¹¹⁹ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that the indication that the school of Hillel deferred to the school of Shamai is in the fact that they mentioned the elders of Shamai before the elders of Hillel.]

Rav Yosef said to him: “Do not take a seat until you explain these verses to me. What is the meaning of that which is written, And from the desert to Matanah, and from Matanah to Nachaliel, and from Nachaliel to Bamos, and from Bamos to the valley (Bamidbar 21:18-20)?”

Rava replied: “If a person lets himself become as a desert that is trampled underfoot the Torah is given to him as a present, as is intimated in the Hebrew meaning of that which is written, And from the desert to Matanah (Ibid.).

“Once he receives the Torah as a present, the Lord gives it to him as a birthright to pass on to his children, as is intimated in the Hebrew meaning of that which is written, And from Matanah to Nachaliel (Ibid.).

“Once the Lord has given it to him as a birthright, he rises to greatness, as is intimated in the Hebrew meaning of that which is written, And from Nachaliel to Bamos (Ibid.).

“If, however, he becomes arrogant in his new-found greatness the Holy Blessed One humbles him, as is intimated in the Hebrew meaning of that which is written, And from Bamos to the valley (Ibid.).

“Still, if he comes to regret his arrogance the Holy Blessed One raises him up again, as is intimated in that which is written, Every valley shall be raised up (Yeshayahu 40:4).”

Rav Huna said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, Your hordes were settled there, You prepared, in Your goodness, for the Lord's deprived ones (Tehillim 68:11)?

“This intimates that if a person lets himself be as one of the hordes of wild beasts that pounces on its prey and devours it immediately just as it is, not seeking relish or condiments, then his learning will be longlasting. If, however, he seeks delicacies and luxury his learning will dissipate.

“If he does ignore the pleasures of the world, the Holy Blessed One prepares a feast for him, as it is written, You prepared, in Your goodness, for the Lord's deprived ones (Ibid.).”

... Rav Dimi the son of Chama said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, It is not in heaven . . . Nor is it beyond the sea (Devarim 30:12-13)?"

"This is telling us that even if the Torah is high up in a place that is difficult to reach you must climb up after it, for it is not inaccessible in the heavens, And even if the Torah is far away in a place that is difficult to reach you must cross whatever obstacles you find, for it is not inaccessible beyond the sea."

Rava said: "This is telling us that you will not find the Torah with someone who lets himself become arrogant as the high heavens, Nor shall you find it with someone who seeks to broaden his pleasures as the wide horizons of the sea."

Rav Yochanan said: "This is telling us that you will not find it among the arrogant. Nor will you find it among peddlers and merchants who are preoccupied by their business."

&&Elsewhere the Talmud makes a similar point (Avos 4:5):

%%Rabbi Tsadok says: "You shall not use the Torah as a crown by which to gain greatness. Nor shall you use it as an axe with which to dig."

Hillel used to say: "One who makes use of the crown of Torah shall vanish. Thus, whoever makes personal use of the words of the Torah is destroying his own life."

&&It must be understood that, although a Torah scholar must not allow himself even a trace of arrogance, this does not mean that he should be as a dumb beast either. Indeed, the Talmud tells us (Yoma 22b):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the son of Yochai: "Any Torah scholar that is not as vengeful and vindictive as a snake is not a true Torah scholar."

How can this be? Is it not written, You shall not take vengeance nor bear grudges (Vayikra 19:18)?

That refers to someone who offended him in monetary matters, not to someone who caused him personal pain.

For it has been taught: It is written, You shall not take vengeance nor bear grudges (Ibid.).

What is considered vengeance and what is considered bearing a grudge?

Sometimes, a person asks his neighbor for the loan of a scythe and is refused. The following day, the neighbor asks him for the loan of an axe.

It is considered vengeance if he says: "Just as you didn't lend me your scythe I will not lend you my axe."

It is considered bearing a grudge if he says: "Here you are. I am not like you who didn't want to lend me your scythe."

Still, how can you say that it is permissible for a Torah scholar to be vengeful and vindictive if someone causes him personal pain? Have we not been taught otherwise? For it has been taught: Torah scholars bear insult but do not give insult in return; they bear their humiliation silently but do not respond; they act out of love for Hashem and gladly accept suffering. In reference to them is it written, And those that love Him shall be as the emergence of the sun in its strength (Shoftim 5:31).

Indeed, the Torah scholar must react with vengeance and vindictiveness to anyone causing him personal pain, but he must keep these sentiments bottled up in his heart and not give expression to them.

How can this be? Did not Rava say: "Whoever overlooks affronts to himself will have his sins overlooked by Heaven"?

Rava is only saying that one should accept apology and easily forgive.

&&The Torah scholar must react angrily to disrespect towards him, because it is an affront to the Torah he has acquired. Therefore, the greater the scholar, the greater the respect he deserves, and consequently, the greater should his resentment be towards disrespect. The proper attitude for a Torah scholar is summed up by the Talmud (Avos 6:5):

%%Do not seek greatness for yourself, and do not lust for honor.

Do more than you seem to be capable of according to your learning.

And do not yearn for princely banquets, for your table is greater than their table, and your crown is greater than their crown.

Your Employer can be relied upon to reward you for your labor.

&&Part 2: Political Influence

Chapter Three:

Use and Abuse of Political Influence

The people of Yisrael living among the nations of the world are constantly at the mercy of their host countries. The Holy blessed One, out of His great and continuing kindness to the people of Yisrael, sees to it that in each generation great leaders arise among the Jews who are capable of interceding with the authorities on behalf of their people. In times of great danger to the Jews these leaders who have access to the halls of power are able to plead their people's cause before the government. Very often, these leaders are able to save their people from catastrophe.

If these leaders do not intend to use their political influence for their personal gain, but purely for the benefit and welfare of the people, their greatness shall endure, and they shall become very rich. The Talmud tells us (Yoma 22b):

%%Shmuel said: "When a person becomes a leader in the community he becomes rich. This is derived from the difference between the method Shaul Hamelech used to count the Jews before he became king and the one he used after he became king.

"Before he became king it is written, And he counted them according to the collected scraps (Shmuel I 11:8).

"After he became king it is written, And he counted them according to the collected lambs (Shmuel I 15:4)."

How do we know that these lambs were from Shaul Hamelech's personal property? How do we know that these lambs were not the property of the individual Jews from whom they were collected?

If that were the case then the fact that the counting was done by collecting lambs would have been irrelevant. Clearly, there is a lesson to be learned here, and it is that political influence brings riches along with it.

&&A leader that is considerate and kind towards the community achieves greatness in the world to come as well. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 92b):

%%Rabbi Elazar said: "Any leader that is kind towards the community earns the privilege of being its leader in the world to come."

&&Hashem will give those leaders that act out of sincere concern for the community the strength to prevail in the halls of power, and the righteousness of their actions will stand them in good stead forever. The Talmud tells us (Avos 2:2):

%%Rabban Gamaliel the son of Rabbi Yehudah the Prince says: "The study of Torah combined with a worldly pursuit is wholesome, for the efforts involved in both endeavors dispel thoughts of sin,

All study of Torah that is not accompanied by work is bound to be impermanent and drags along sin.

"All that are occupied with community affairs should do so for the sake of Heaven, for the merit of their forefathers will assist them, and the righteousness of their actions will stand them in good stead forever.

"Although Hashem is the one that guides the world, He will say to them: 'I will give you great reward as if you had accomplished it by yourselves.'"

&&Sometimes, however, a leader who has gained political influence seeks to use it to further his own interests and to exercise power over the holy people; he doesn't seek to use it to serve the needs of the people, only to gain honor for himself and his family. Such a person will become divorced from his people and his faith will begin to erode.

Seeking to curry favor with the authorities, he will have to constantly devise new ways to be of service to them, The Talmud tells us that the powers that be bestow favor only when it suits them to do so (Avos 2:3).

True, those in power will appear in him *as* true friends as long as it is in their interest to do so. It is when he will be in difficult straits, and no longer

of use to them, that they will show their true colors and desert him. The Talmud tells us (Avodah Zarah 17a):

%%It is written, The sucking leech has two daughters that cry, Give, give (Mishlei 30:15).

Rav Chisda said in the name of Mar Ukva: "This refers to the cries of two daughters in Gehinom who, while they were in this world, demanded: 'Bring us! Bring us!'

&&For this reason, the Talmud warns (Avos 1:10):

%%"Heretics and the authorities,"

For this reason, the Talmud warns (Avos 1:10):

Shmayah says: "Love labor, despise power, and do not become intimate with the powers that be."

&&A leader who becomes intimate with the powers that be is likely to begin putting his own interest before the interest of the people he is supposed to represent.

Intimacy with the powers that be, no matter who they are, is potentially corrupting. It is well known that this is what happened to Do'eg the Edomi, even though the king with whom he was intimate was none other than Shaul Hamelech, the anointed of Hashem and a prophet in his own right. Do'eg incited Shaul Hamelech against Nove, the city of kohanim, telling him that the inhabitants of the city were supporting David in rebellion against the king (Shmuel I 22:9-10). His intrigues led to the deaths of eighty-five vested kohanim and the slaughter of the entire city, down to the last babe. This terrible outrage ultimately resulted in Shaul Hamelech's seven sons being hung and Do'eg himself being banished from this world and the world to come.

Indeed, it is wisest to stay far away from intimacy with the powers that be, unless it is absolutely necessary to do so for the sake of Heaven — to plead the cause of the people in times of need.

Epilogue

EPILOGUE

A person of clear vision should avoid sinfulness not only because of the fear of retribution but because of the abominable nature of the acts themselves. He should realize that these are foul and despicable practices that condition a person to evil and distort his sense of value. Even if the Torah had not specifically forbidden them, the intelligent person should be repulsed by them.

Idolatry and Pagan Cults

A prime example is the practice of idolatry and the various cults of the occult. The Torah specifies those practices, known as the “ways of the Emori”, that were prevalent among the pagan tribes that lived in the Holy Land before it was conquered by the Jewish people. It is written, There shall not be found among you anyone that makes his son and his daughter pass through the fire or a soothsayer or an astrologer or one who divines by omens or a sorcerer or one who uses charms or one that consults with Ov or Yidoni or one that makes inquiries of conjured up spirits of the dead (Devarim 18:10-11.). This also includes many other similar practices that have developed over the years in various parts of the world.

All of these practices are useless and have no substance. Those foolish people who believe that there is substance to these practices and become drawn into them are only hurting themselves. By deluding themselves into believing that they can gain lasting benefit from following these cults they are making a mockery of their lives. The act in itself becomes their immediate retribution.

Moreover, there is no turning back. This is one of those sins for which it is almost impossible to do teshuvah, as it is written, The heart of this people will remain insolent (Yeshayahu 6:10).

Determining the Direction of One's Life

The Talmud tells us (Makos 10b, Yoma 38b):

%%Rabbi Elazar said “There are indications in the Chumash, the Prophets, and the Kesuvim that a person is led along the path that he chooses for himself.

“The allusion in the Chumash is from the portion that tells of the messengers of Balak, the king of Moav, who came to Bil’am to ask him to curse the people of Yisrael. It is written, and the Lord said to Bil’am, Do not go with them (Bamidbar 22:12). Yet, when Bil’am showed an inclination to go along, it is written, And the Lord came to Bil’am in the night and said to him, If the people came to call for you, arise and go with them (Bamidbar 22:20).

“The allusion in the Prophets is from that which is written, I am God, your Lord, who teaches you to succeed and leads you in the way you shall go (Yeshayahu 48:127).

“The allusion in the Kesuvim is from that which is written, if they are scornful, He will show them scorn (Mishlei 3:34).”

Raish Lakish said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, if they are scornful, He will show them. scorn, and upon the humble He bestows favor (Mishlei 3:34)?

One who wants to contaminate himself is given the opportunity to do so. One who wants to purify himself is assisted.”

In the school of Rabbi Yishmael it was taught: There is an analogy to this. A person is measuring off quantities of kerosene and persimmon.

When he is measuring the kerosene people tell him: “Go and measure it by yourself.”

When he is measuring the persimmon people tell him: “Wait until we can come help you so that we can also enjoy the wonderful scent.”

... Our rabbis have taught: It is written, Do not contaminate yourself through any of these things (Vayikra 18:24). If a person contaminates himself even a little he is given the opportunity to become very contaminated; if a person contaminates himself in the lower world he will

be contaminated in the Upper World; if a person contaminates himself in this world he will be contaminated in the world to come.

Our rabbis have taught: It is written, And you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am holy (Vayikra 11:44). If a person sanctifies himself even a little he is assisted to become very holy; if a person sanctifies himself in the lower world he will be sanctified in the upper World; if a person sanctifies himself in this world he will be sanctified in the world to come.

&&The lesson to be learned from these passages of the Talmud is that it is in the power of every person to determine the direction of his life. If he seeks out and becomes immersed in sinfulness it is made easy for him. He is constantly presented with opportunities to contaminate himself even further. But if he is wise and chooses to use his life for the good he is given every assistance, and he is shielded from the contaminating influences in the world.

Clearly, the intelligent person should choose good and reject evil, not only out of fear of retribution, but in order to live a constructive and meaningful life.

Pagan Influence during the First Bais Hamikdash

In the times of the first Bais Hamikdash, many Jews fell into the trap of idolatry. At first, they were lured into it by the inducements and false promises of the worshippers of the idol Baal. But soon these false beliefs became implanted in their hearts, and then it was too late; they could no longer break free of the idolatrous influences. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 102b):

%%Rav Ashi was teaching his disciples about the various people who had lost their share in the world to come. When he came to the three scholar-kings of the Jews – Yeravam, Achav, and Menasheh — he stopped for the day.

He said to his disciples: 'Tomorrow we will discuss those of our colleagues — Torah scholars — who lost their share in the world to come.

That night Menasheh appeared to Rav Ashi in a dream and said to him; “Do you consider our Torah scholarship on a level with yours that you call us your colleagues, or is it possibly on a level with the scholarship of your forefathers? Tell me then, which part of the bread should one eat first in order to recite the blessing over it?”

Rav Ashi replied: “I don't know.”

Menasheh said: “Apparently, you are not even well versed in the rules of the blessing over bread, since you do not know over which part of the bread it should be recited. How then can you call us your colleagues?”

Rav Ashi said: “Would the master at least tell me the rule now so that I can repeat it in your name during tomorrow's lesson?”

Menasheh said: “One makes the blessing over the part of the bread that gets baked first. Thus, the crust of the bread should be eaten first, not the middle,”

Rav Ashi asked him: “If you were such a great scholar why did you worship idols?”

Menasheh replied: “If you yourself had lived in those times you would have lifted up the skirts of your robes so that you could run more quickly to worship the idol.”

The next day, Rav Ashi reworded his statement to his disciples: “Today we will discuss those of our masters (not colleagues) who lost their share in the world to come.”

&&It is apparent from this episode that the people of those times were not such fools that they didn't know that idolatry has no substance. Only, the evil inclination to idolatry was so strong at that time because of the influences of the idol worshippers in their midst that they could not resist dabbling in it. However, once they embarked on that road there was no turning back. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 63b):

%%Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “The people of Yisrael were fully aware that idolatry has no substance. Yet they worshipped the idols so that they could have orgies in public.”

Rav Mesharshia asked: "Is it not written, Like their memories of their children, were their altars (Yirmiyahu 17:2)" And did not Rabbi Elazar say: 'It was like a person that yearns for his child?'"

Once they became involved with idolatry that became their attitude.

&&In fact, so attached did they become to the idols that they thought that their very existence depended on them. The prophet quotes them, But from the time we ceased to burn incense for the queen of heaven, and to pour ablutions for her, we have lost everything (Yirmiyahu 44:18).

The Logic of Mitzvos

It is essential that a person should uproot from his heart any trace of belief in idolatry, sorcery, or any of the other cults. If he accepts as even a remote possibility that there is some substance to those beliefs then he is denying the power of the Blessed Creator. It is abundantly clear that the world was created by Hashem. He is the master of the entire universe, and it is He, and Fie alone, that guides the progress of the world. If someone accepts the possibility that there are other powers in the world that coexist with the power of Hashem he is guilty of total heresy.

Therefore, it is only logical to observe the commandments and the prohibitions, not only because of fear of retribution, but because they define a person's relationship with his Creator.

Who would consider behaving disrespectfully toward a mortal king of flesh and blood? Certainly, the Creator who sustains and watches over a person deserves at least the same respect. Hence, the prohibitions against idle or false oaths taken in His Name, directing curses heavenward, and being irreverent towards His holy temple, the Bais Hamikdash and its holy objects. One who is truly in awe of his Creator would not dream of violating these prohibitions.

Following this line of reasoning, it cannot be denied that there is a separate code of conduct for those people that serve a mortal king of flesh and blood within his palace. Their behavior must be more dignified and restricted than the behavior of the general population,

There is a separate code for the kohanim who have been set apart from the rest of the Jews to perform the service of Hashem. They are required to keep themselves in a constant state of purity; they are restricted in the type of women they can marry; they are required to dress in a particular way during the performance of the temple service. If a special code exists for the palace retinue of a mortal king, certainly it can be expected of those who have been set apart to serve in the palace of the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy Blessed One.

The mitzvos that apply to the everyday life of all the Jews are also logical; they are designed for the physical and spiritual benefit of the people. Jews are forbidden to eat certain foods or to commit certain acts because those foods and acts will damage them. They harm the body and contaminate the soul. They bring spiritual degradation and cause a person to become dominated by his physical desires. Even if the exact cause and effect relationship between these acts and the resulting damage is not clear, if the Torah tells us so, indeed it is so.

It is much easier to appreciate the logic behind the mitzvos that govern the relationships between people. There are many mitzvos that require a person to deal fairly with other people in business. Indeed, to covet another's property is a reflection of an evil nature, as it is written., The villainous soul yearns for evil (Mishlei 21:10). There are mitzvos that require a person to be considerate in his personal relationships. All of these are necessary for the preservation of civilized societies. They promote peace among people and build good character.

The Talmud makes this point beautifully (Shabbos 31a). It tells of a gentile who came to Hillel the Elder and asked him to help him convert to Judaism — but only if he could teach him the Torah in a nutshell. Hillel the Elder quoted to him that which is written, Love your fellow as you do yourself (Vayikra 19:18). Do not do to your fellow that which is hateful to you.

Idolatry, Adultery, Incest, and Bloodshed

Most of all, a person should stay very far away from those grave sins about which the Sages decreed that it is better to die than to commit them. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 25a, Yoma 82a):

%%When Ravin arrived he said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: “Any forbidden matter may be used for healing except where it involves idolatry, adultery, incest, and bloodshed.”

That idolatry may not be used is derived as previously explained. How do we know that neither adultery and incest nor bloodshed may be used to save one's life?

It has been taught: Rabi says: “It is written, For as a man rises up against his fellow and murders him, so is this matter (Devarim 22:26).”

“Why are the laws of murder mentioned in connection with the laws of the betrothed maiden?

“Although the laws of murder seem to have been mentioned only to clarify the laws of the betrothed maiden, they are actually clarified themselves as well. The laws of murder are compared to the laws of the betrothed maiden: just as it is permitted to rescue the betrothed maiden by killing the rapist, so too is it permitted to thwart the attempted murderer by killing him.

The laws of the betrothed maiden are also compared to the laws of murder: Just as one must let himself be killed rather than commit murder, so too must one let himself be killed rather than commit adultery.”

How do we know this rule that one must let himself be killed rather than commit murder?

It is simple logic, as is apparent from the episode of the man who came before Rava and said: “The overlord of my city has commanded me to kill such and such a person or be killed myself.”

Rava said to him: “Let yourself be killed, but do not kill that person. How do you know that your blood is redder than his? Maybe his blood is redder than yours.”

&&The Talmud also tells us (Sanhedrin 74a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the son of Yehotsadak: “It was discussed and decided by the Sages in the upper story of Bais Nitzah in Lud that if a person is told to commit a sin or be killed he should commit the sin rather than be killed—except for the sins of idolatry, adultery, incest, and bloodshed.

&&It was because of these three sins that the first Bais Hamikdash was destroyed. The Talmud tells us (Yoma 9b):

%%Why was the first Bais Hamikdash destroyed?

Because in its time the sins of idolatry, adultery, incest, and bloodshed were prevalent.

That the sin of idolatry was a cause is derived from that which is written, For the bed is too short to stretch out upon (Yeshayahu 28:20). And Rabbi Yochanan said: “This is an allegory for the Bais Hamikdash saying that it was too small to be shared by two and refers to the idolatrous images that were brought into it by Menasheh, the king of Yehudah.”

The verse concludes, And cover too narrow to be wrapped in (Ibid.).

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini said: “When Rabbi Yonasan would read this verse he would burst out in tears and say: ‘O that the One about whom it is written, He gathers together like heaps the waters of the sea (Tehillim 33:7) should find the covers too narrow.’”

That the sin of adultery and incest was a cause is derived from that which is written, Because the daughters of Zion became arrogant, and they walked with outstretched throats, walking and mincing as they go, and clattering with their feet (Yeshayahu 3:16).

Rabbi Yitzchak said: “This comes to teach that they would put myrrh and persimmon on their shoes and walk in the marketplaces of Yerushalayim. When they came upon young men of Yisrael, they would stamp their feet and sprinkle them, causing the evil inclination to awaken in them, as venom in a snake.”

That the sin of bloodshed was a cause is derived from that which is written, And Menasheh also spilled very much blood, until he filled Yerushalayim with it from end to end (Melachim II 21:16).

In the times of the first Bais Hamikdash the people were sinful, and still, they thought that the Holy Blessed One would protect them. For it is written, Her leaders judged for bribes, and her kohanim taught for reward, and her prophets divined for money, yet they relied on God, saying, Is not God in our midst? (Michah 2:11).

Therefore, the Holy Blessed One visited upon them three forms of retribution for the three grave sins that they had committed, as it is written, Therefore because of you shall the fields of Zion be plowed up, and Yerushalayim shall become rubble, and the mount of the House wooded hills (Michah 3:12).

Why was the second Bais Hamikdash destroyed? Didn't the people of that time study the Torah, keep the mitzvos, and do acts of benevolence?

It was because of the undeserved hatred that they felt towards each other. This should teach you that the sin of undeserved hatred is as serious as the combined sins of idolatry, adultery, incest, and bloodshed.

&&Desecration of the Name

The sin of desecrating the Name is so grave that if someone commits it he cannot be thoroughly cleansed of it during his lifetime. The Talmud tells us (Yoma 86a);

%%Rabbi Masia the son of Charash asked Rabbi Elazar the son of Azariah: "Have you heard of the four types of atonement expounded by Rabbi Yishmael?"

He replied: "There are actually only three, and each of them requires teshuvah with it.

"If a person violates a positive commandment, and he repents, he is immediately forgiven, as it is written, Return, you unruly children, .I will heal your unruliness (Yirmiyahu 3:22).

“If a person violates a prohibition, and he repents, his teshuvah suspends his punishment, and Yom Kippur completely absolves him, as it is written, For in that day shall be an atonement for you to cleanse you (Vayikra 16:30).

“If a person commits a sin that is punishable by premature death or execution, and he repents, teshuvah together with Yom Kippur suspend his punishment, and suffering cleanses him, as it is written, And I will punish their sins with a rod (Tehillim 89:33).

However, if a person commits the sin of desecrating the Name teshuvah cannot suspend his punishment, Yom Kippur cannot atone for him, and suffering cannot cleanse him. Only the three of these together can suspend his punishment, and only then will his death cleanse him, as it is written, And it was revealed in My Ears, the God of Hosts, if this sin shall be forgiven you until you die, said the Lord God of Hosts (Yeshayahu 22:14).”

&&Exactly what constitutes desecration of the Name depends on the person, the time, and the place. If a person is prominent then even a relatively minor transgression may be considered desecration of the Name. The Talmud tells us (Yoma 86a):

%%What is considered desecration of the Name?

Rav said: “If someone such as I were to buy meat from a butcher and not pay immediately it would be considered desecration of the Name,”

Abaya explained: “This applies only to such butchers that do not regularly collect their bills but expect the customers to bring the money. In other cases it is not considered a desecration of the Name.”

Ravina said: “In Masa Mechasia, the town where I live, the butchers collect their bills.”

Rav Yochanan said: “If someone such as I were to walk even four cubits without studying the Torah and without tefillin on my head it would be considered a desecration of the Name.”

Rav Nachman the son of Yitzchak said: "If people regularly say of a person that he should be forgiven by Hashem that person is considered to have desecrated the Name."

Rav Yitzchak the son of Avdimi said: "A person whose reputation causes his friends embarrassment is considered to have desecrated the Name."

Abaya quoted that which had been taught: "It is written, And you shall love God your Lord (Devarim 6:5). This means that the Name of Heaven should become loved because of you."

"If a person reads the Scriptures, studies the Talmud, attends to Torah scholars, speaks gently to other people, conducts his business honorably, and deals in good faith, what do people say of him?"

"They say: 'Praised is that person for he studied the Torah. Praised is his father for he taught him the Torah. Praised is his teacher for he taught him the Torah. Have you seen that person that studied the Torah? How beautiful are his ways! How consistent are his deeds!'

"About such a person is it written, And he said to me, You are my servant, Yisrael, through you will I be glorified (Yeshayahu 49:3)."

"But if a person reads the Scripture and studies the Talmud, then speaks roughly with people, conducts his business less than honorably, and does not deal in good faith, what do people say of him?"

They say: 'Woe to that person that studied the Torah. Woe to his father that taught him the Torah. Woe to his teacher that taught him the Torah. Praised are the people that did not study the Torah. Look at this person that studied the Torah. How repulsive are his deeds! How corrupt are his ways!'

"About such a person is it written, And they came among the nations where they had gone, and they desecrated My Holy Name, for they said about them, These are the people of God, and they have come out of His land (Yechezkel 36:20)."

&&Sometimes, a relatively minor transgression is considered a desecration of the Name even for ordinary people. If the gentiles try to force

a Jew to violate any part of the Torah because they are trying to undermine that Jewish faith then such a violation is considered a desecration of the Name. There are qualifications to this. If it is an isolated incident then it is considered a desecration of the Name only if the violation is in public. If it is part of a general campaign against Judaism then even a violation in private is considered a desecration of the Name. Any Jew that finds himself in such a situation is required to let himself be killed rather than desecrate the Name. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 74a):

%%When Ravin came he said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "Even if there is no general campaign to apostatize the Jews, violation in order to avoid being killed is permitted only in private. If it is to be in public then it is better that he be killed and not violate even a minor mitzvah.

What is considered a 'minor mitzvah'?

Rabah the son of Yitzchak said in the name of Rav: "This even includes tying one's shoelaces according to the custom of gentiles if it differs from the custom of the Jews."

How many people are considered "public"?

Rabbi Yaakov said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "Less than ten people is not considered "public'."

&&Some Who Died to Sanctify the Name

The intelligent person should learn from the example of our forefathers who were willing to give their lives to sanctify the Name, and by doing so, they gained everlasting reward. However, it was not only the righteous people that did so. There were even people who had been sinners throughout their lives that were willing to give their lives to sanctify the Name. For that one moment they, too, gained everlasting reward. The Talmud tells us (Avodah Zarah 17a):

%%It was taught: It was said of Elazar the son of Durdiah that there was no prostitute with whom he did not copulate. Once he heard of a prostitute, who lived in one of the coastal cities, that demanded and

received a purse of dinars as her payment. He took a purse of dinars and traveled to her, crossing seven rivers during his journey.

While they were copulating the prostitute passed gas. Elazar thought “just as this gas will never return to its place, so will Elazar the son of Durdiah never be taken back through teshuvah,”

Despondent, he went and sat down among the mountains and the hills. He said: “Mountains and hills, beg mercy for me.”

They replied: “Before we beg mercy for you we must beg mercy for ourselves. For it is written, For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wear out like a garment (Yeshayahu 51:6).”

He said: “Sun and moon, beg mercy for me.”

They replied: “Before we beg mercy for you we must beg mercy for ourselves. For it is written, Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed (Yeshayahu 24:23).”

He said: “Stars and constellations, beg mercy for me.”

They replied: “Before we beg mercy for you we must beg mercy for ourselves. For it is written, And the host of the heavens shall be dissolved (Yeshayahu 34:4).”

He said: “It seems .I can depend on no one but myself.”

He put his head between his knees and wept bitterly until his soul passed out of his body.

Thereupon, a Divine Echo was heard to say: “Rabbi Elazar the son of Durdiah is invited to everlasting life in the world to come.”

When Rabi heard this story he cried and said: “Some people gain everlasting reward in one moment, while some people gain everlasting reward only after laboring for many years.”

Rabi said: “Not only are those who do teshuvah accepted back, apparently, they are even called Rabbi”.

&&We find that gentiles, too, can gain everlasting reward in the world to come for just one moment of merit. The Talmud tells us (Avodah Zarah 18a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: When Rabbi Yosi the son of Kisma fell ill Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion went to visit him.

Rabbi Yosi the son of Kisma said: “Chanina, my brother, do you not realize that the Romans were crowned by Heaven? They have destroyed His House, burned His Sanctum, killed His pious people, and wiped out His administrators, and still they endure,

“Yet, I have heard that you still sit and study the Torah, that you convene great gatherings and sit with the Torah scrolls in your lap, expounding on the Torah in public.

Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion replied: “Heaven will have mercy on me.

Rabbi Yosi the son of Kisma was not convinced. He said: “I am speaking reasonably to you, and all you tell me is that Heaven will have mercy on you. I will be very surprised if they don't burn you and your Torah scrolls together.”

Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion asked: “My master what is waiting for me in the world to come?”

Rabbi Yosi the son of Kisma inquired.: “Has anything happened to you from which I can make an evaluation?”

Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion replied: “I had money put away for the Purim meal, Mistakenly thinking that this money had been set aside for charity, I gave it out to poor people. When I realized my mistake I did not take reimbursement from charity.”

Rabbi Yosi the son of Kisma said: “If this is what you did then I wish that my share shall be like y our share and my lot like your lot. ”

It was told that soon after this meeting Rabbi Yosi the son of Kisma passed away. All the Roman nobles came to the funeral and delivered great eulogies over him.

Upon returning from the funeral they came upon Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion as he was sitting before a great gathering with a Torah scroll in his lap, expounding on the Torah. They took him, wrapped him in his Torah

scrolls, surrounded him with bundles of branches, and set fire to them. They then brought pieces of wool soaked in water and placed them over his heart so that he should not die quickly.

His daughter cried out to him: "Father! O that I should see you like this!"

He said to her: "If it were I alone that was being burned it would be very difficult for me to accept. But since I am being burned together with the Torah scrolls I am confident that the One who will avenge the insult to the Torah will also avenge the insult to me."

His disciples said to him: "Master! What do you see?"

He said: "I see the parchment being burnt, but the letters flying up to the heavens."

They said to him: "Open your mouth wide so that the fire will enter, and you will die quickly and mercifully."

He said: "Better that the One who gave me my soul shall take it Himself and that I should not do anything to harm myself."

The Roman guard said to him: "Master, if I make the flames larger and remove the soaked wool from over your heart will you assure me a share in the world to come?"

He said: "Yes."

The Roman said: "Swear it to me."

Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion swore.

Immediately, the Roman made the flames larger, removed the soaked wool from over his heart, and Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion died. Then the Roman himself jumped into the flames, and he also died.

Thereupon, a Divine Echo was heard to say: "Rabbi Chanina the son of Tradion and the Roman guard are invited to everlasting life in the world to come."

When Rabi heard this story he cried and said: "Some people gain everlasting reward in one moment, while some people gain everlasting reward only after laboring for many years."

&&The Talmud relates another episode involving a gentile (Avodah Zarah 10b):

%%Ktia the son of Shalum was a high official in the Roman government. A Roman emperor who hated Jews came to power. He called a conference of his high officials, Ktia the son of Shalum among them.

He spoke to them in an allegory that clearly referred to the Jews: “If someone has a leg that has become gangrenous, should he have it amputated and recover or should he leave it alone and continue to suffer?”

The officials replied: “He should have it amputated.”

Ktia the son of Shalum objected: “First of all, you will not be able to accomplish what you plan to do . For if is written, For like the four winds of heaven have I scattered you, by the Word of God (Zechariah 2:10). What is the meaning of this verse? If it means that He scattered them to the four winds of heaven it should have read 'to the four winds', not 'like the four winds'. Only, the verse is saying that just as the world cannot exist without the four winds of heaven, neither can it exist without the Jews. Clearly, you are setting yourself an impossible task.

“Furthermore, even if you should be successful, you will always be known as the amputating king.”

The emperor said to him: “What you say has merit. However, anyone that shows up the emperor is condemned to be buried alive in an earth-filled chamber.”

The emperor commanded that Ktia the son of Shalum be sent to the earth-filled chamber.

As he was being led away, a Roman noblewoman said to him: “Woe to the ship that did not pay duty and cannot enter the harbor. Woe to you that are dying for the Jews but will not be able to share with them in the world to come because you are not circumcised.”

Ktia the son of Shalum bent over and cut off his foreskin.

He exclaimed: “I have paid the duty; now I can enter.”

When they were preparing to toss him into the earth-filled chamber, he called out: All my possessions are given to Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues.”

Upon hearing this Rabbi Akiva expounded: “It is written, And it shall belong to Aharon and to his sons (Vayikra 24:9). Ktia the son of Shalum has given me great honor by singling me out from among my colleagues.”

A Divine Echo was heard to say: “Ktia the son of Shalum is invited to everlasting life in the world to come.”

When Rabi heard this story he cried and said: “Some people gain everlasting reward in one moment, while some people gain everlasting reward only after laboring for many years.”

&&The Talmud relates yet another such incident (Taanis 29a):

%%It was taught: When Turnus Rufus plowed under the Great Hall of the Bais Hamikdash, he issued a decree that Rabban Gamaliel should be killed.

A Roman general came to the house of study and called out: “We are looking for the great leader. We are looking for the great leader.”

Rabban Gamaliel went into hiding.

The Roman general found him and came to him privately.

He said: “If I save you will you assure me a share in the world to come?”

Rabban Gamaliel said: “Yes.”

The Roman general said: “Swear it to me.”

Rabban Gamaliel swore.

The Roman general went up to a roof, jumped off, and died. The Romans had a tradition that if they issue a decree and one of them dies while trying to carry it out then that decree must be voided. Thus, the decree against Rabban Gamaliel became void.

A Divine Echo was heard to say: “The Roman general is invited to everlasting life in the world to come,”

&&Conclusion

Therefore, a person of intelligence should look about him and realize that the frenzied pursuits of this world are all emptiness and folly. If he hungers for the physical pleasures of this world he should remember that his life beneath the sun is but a fleeting shadow. It is even better to die or let himself be killed before his time rather than gain extra time by doing something that goes against his faith. Better to live a shorter life in this world but gain everlasting life in the world to come. Let him open up his eyes, and he will be repelled by the emptiness of this world. Let him not be jealous of any person that chooses sinfulness and lives a successful life. Such success is only temporary; in the eternal world of souls it is failure.

A person should direct all of his drives towards loving Hashem and serving Him; he should study Hashem's Ways and try to pattern his own life after them. Only thus can he elevate himself to the highest spiritual levels and enjoy the pleasure of eternal goodness. Only thus will he be able to enter the Yerushalayim of the world to come wherein only the invited can enter.

The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 75b):

%%What is the meaning of that which is written, And God will create upon every dwelling on Mount Zion and upon her gatherings a cloud by day, and smoke and the brilliance of a flaming fire by night, for a canopy over all the glory (Yeshayahu 4:5)?

Rabah said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "There is an intimation in the Hebrew usage that Yerushalayim of the world to come is unlike the Yerushalayim of this world. Anyone can enter into the Yerushalayim of this world, Only the invited can enter into the Yerushalayim of the world to come."

&&Appendix A:

Ode to the Menorah

ODE TO THE MENORAH

I.

The favor of the Lord shines eternal
Upon seekers of the Torah's perfection
Fount of love and awe to humble
Inlaid with wisdom and instruction
On Sinai through Moshe to the holy people
Delivered for their elevation
Its secrets inscribed for perusal
Provide mystery with explanation.
Indeed for each man is it possible
To choose wisdom or illusion
Heavenward the wise souls settle
Through reason, exaltation
Bound up in life eternal
Assume their rightful station
Sin, guilt to the souls that stumble
Foolish, as beasts to destruction.
Eternal Holy One, us you have shown
Apart among nations, elite
My Lord! all my striving's for your own
I beseech for your kindness complete
In understanding, in knowledge, in wisdom
For secrets of holy heights discreet
Not to falter in the words of Your Law unknown
Do my body and soul entreat

Splendor and glory in this world and to come
Are the Midrash and Tanchuma replete
In Scripture, Mishnah, and Talmud in sum
Perfection within holiness sweet.

II.

“Your words illuminate my footsteps
and shed light upon my path.”¹²⁰

“The candle of God
is the soul of man
that peers into
the innermost chambers.”¹²¹

“For the mitzvah
is as a candle
and the Torah light
and the way of life
through moral chastisement.”¹²²

“Heed advice
and welcome chastisement
so that you will grow
to be wise.”¹²³

“For lengthy days
and years of peaceful life
will they heap upon you.”¹²⁴

The fruits of the virtuous
are as the living tree
and who gathers souls

¹²⁰ Tehillim 119:105

¹²¹ Mishlei 20:27

¹²² Mishlei 6:23

¹²³ Mishlei 19:20

¹²⁴ Mishlei 3:2

is truly wise.”¹²⁵

III.

Which is the man that desires life?¹²⁶

Upon him shall be poured the waters of life ¹²⁷

The Torah of the wise — the source of life¹²⁸

For thenceforth emanates all life¹²⁹

Let him take from the tree of life

And by eating gain everlasting life¹³⁰

By command of the Lord Unbeheld

The celestial ladder to ascend

But more than all — the Torah to comprehend.

IV.

I am but a youth in reasoning

And profundities of meaning

Therefore I tread with foreboding

For I am not yet filled with learning

Nor intelligence, understanding

To teach a fool to be cunning

Yet some Gemara have I seen

Vehicle that it's always been

For gates of light to enter in

And some Midrashim have I seen

From each book did I glean

Words of honesty pristine

¹²⁵ Mishlei 11:30

¹²⁶ Reference to Tehillim 34:13

¹²⁷ Reference to Bamidbar 19:17

¹²⁸ Reference to Mishlei 13:14

¹²⁹ Reference to Mishlei 4:23

¹³⁰ Reference to Beraishis 3:22

Spoken by the ancient greats
From Yisrael's early days
Who received them face to face
Sought the Torah's many ways
Illumined by its dazzling rays
Discoursed on its glory, grace
Pace by Scriptured pace
To find its seventieth face
But now, alas, I see the Talmud
The bulwark of our fortitude
Cast forlorn in solitude
Not read nor understood
As each man tends to his own brood
Its voice does not intrude.
And even those with competence
Devote their time to excellence
In forming legal arguments
Or laws and jurisprudence
A few or in abundance
Distracted by the elements
Not seeing wider consequence
Trapped by their ambivalence
Discerning just some fragments
They wallow in their impotence
They squander days in novelty
On points of domesticity
And dialogues of originality
Oaths and vows of sanctity
And various legality
With morning's fresh vitality
The ten princes of the city

Preoccupied with liability
Ignoring jewels of rarity
Concentrate on the validity
Of judgments, proveability
Never reaching finality
An unblessed nuptiality
Afflictions without remedy
Struggling with intensity
Over the opinions of Rabbi Akiva
And the questions of Abaya and Rava.
Fitting such for the neophyte
Who hears the Word of God with fright
And seeks to kindle wisdom's light
Yet only during youth's respite
For even those with good intent
Who seek to find fulfillment
Are better with dry bread content
If Torah's peace it will present
Your pleasure's unimportant
Still others search throughout their years
For rulings that are firm and clear
And teach them in the streets and squares
To penetrate the meanest ears.
Alas! they have forsaken homily
Discoveries and mystery
Paradox and analogy
Which shame gold with their beauty
Perfect wisdom and sublimity
Quintessential and obscure
God's Words infinite pure
Grasp them tight, secure

Their honor to ensure
Then your kehunah shall endure
For if you grasp them faithfully
Behold your Lord will then decree
Your blessing on all lips shall be
Almighty's vision there to see.
This for all who serve God with piety
God's awe to wisdom's door the key
Evening, morn, and noon's entreaty
In the words of the Lord their scrutiny
Wisdom and reflection their affinity
The search for truth their fidelity
And knowledge their proclivity
For intelligence through eternity
Scripture and Mishnah are their occupation
To fill their days to saturation
Passages that want interpretation
Mitzvos and their effectuation
Exquisite moral presentation
A pillar of sacred fire in their attendance
Their wisdom glows upon their countenance
The Ark of God's Covenant gives them guidance.
Such did our early Sages elect
Not one whit of God's Word to neglect
Thus gaining this world and the next
And included in the Talmudic text
Every difficult legality
Every enchanting homily
Every enigmatic mystery
Every intellectuality
Every thought of singularity

Every statement of lucidity
Every crowning quality.

V.

Youngest am I among studentry
Least among nobility
While I was in captivity
Found rulings of authority
Arranged with great diversity
In vessels of variety
No volume lacked integrity
Economy, totality
Both early and those afterwards
Spoke the Lord's immortal Words
O the pearls left abandoned
What lips would they not sweeten
What arsenals not strengthen
In shadowed corners strewn
And thus awoke the notion
With diffident hesitation
To beg my Master's sanction
For craftsmen's words collection
From Midrash their selection
To all things preparation
Each branch's preservation
Omitting the most mystical
So high and so imponderable
That shimmer on the pinnacles
Through gates to few accessible
I gathered words delectable

Enchanting yet formidable
Laws and justice virtuous
Arranged in seven sections
Each section made to stand alone
Characteristic in its tone
To suit each subject for its own
Man's true image mastered, shown
To travel by God's Word alone
No longer left to wander
As sheep without a shepherd.
Because this work will shed much light
For all that seek to find the light
To separate the dark from light
live called it Menorah of Light
The words within glow shining bright
As heavens sparkled with starlight
And angels in celestial flight
Words of greatness, soaring might
Surpass the honeycomb's delight
And free the worthless from their blight
Imbue the fool with wisdom's light
Fulfillment to the erudite
Dispel the spirit's somber night
From principles constructed
The great thereby instructed
And foolish hearts seduced
The neophytes attracted
Acquaint the uninducted
To hasten their participation
In Torah's heated disputation
Profundities of legislation

Longer than the far horizon
Wider than the vastest ocean
To satisfy each inclination
And give to children counsel
To aged and the youthful
To worthy and the idle
In any place they choose to dwell
To chide both men and women
To deaf ears penetration
For blind, illumination.
This is a work of disclosure
Unequivocal moral lecture
A menorah entire golden pure
For bride and groom candescent
Adorned upon its crescent
A treasure ever present
Seven candles upon it
Bright and luminescent
Six shafts therefrom extended
Near the curtain in the holy tent
The seven lights in close arrangement
As stars across the firmament
Their tasks to them incumbent
Lights that to mitzvos beckon
Torah and fraternal affection
Modesty, lack of pretension
And vanity's detestation
For thirst it's satiation
And sorrow's consolation
To shamefulness rejection
Abandoning fluctuation

For reconciliation
Peace and deep devotion
To shine in perpetuity
Reflect God's awful majesty
Redemption for posterity
And so each section's name implies
A light that from the chasm shines
To clouds that scud across the skies.
Such is the Menorah's construction
Pure and entirely golden
Restricted, arranged to perfection
For the day that His wrath is awakened
To protect against misfortune
Each section's by topic collated
Breadth and scope regulated
To enter and be elevated
Each topic's by theme separated
Each theme by chapter collated
Both long and abbreviated
So that the reader's eye will glide
A book to teach and gently guide
Promised blessing intertwined
No longer to rebel or be defiant
A remembrance indelibly outlined
To stay within the path defined
With spirit humbled, softly pliant
Midrashim learned, retained
Researched and explained
Ascetics' pleasure gained
God's Word sought out, attained
To mitzvah precepts furtherance

In measured words of eloquence
Reward and dire consequence
Their basis and their essence
Their rules and their ascendance
And residual beneficence
Their meaning and deliverance
Their reason and their sustenance
Derived from Scriptured pages
As expounded by the Sages
Yisrael's wise and righteous
And our ancestral experience
Historical significance
In Midrash their endurance
From these shall Torah exude
Wisdom with splendor imbued
Ethics and rectitude
Then each man will clearly see
Mere mortal though he be
To seek their words so charming
Be guided by their teaching
And find the essence of his being.
Though the volumes that preceded me
And those my eyes did never see
About rulings and legality
Drawn from multiplicity
Are splendid in perfection
With words of pure distinction
Not to be outdone
Nor improved upon
Yet since this I chose
To discourse and compose

From Midrash and Agadic prose
If scope of Law I did forclose
How it would berate me
And storm at my iniquity
For if this work's intention
Is for public dispensation
To clear away confusion
Point out clear direction
In all things education
For virtuous conception
To teach the mitzvah's elegance
Its greatness and its recompense
Mitzvos known, traditional
Whose rationales are logical
Must also teach the peremptory
And those of practicality
Describe the many elements
And educate the miscreants
In the ways of observance
And details of performance
Measurements and substance
Deriving from their origins
Foundations and radiance
From the teachings of Tanaim
And statements of Amoraim
Both Rishonim and Acharonim
Explained by the Geonim
Thus with spirit's limitations
And feeble aspirations
As a straggler at the harvest
Or the vintager arriving last

For this I've always yearned
To marshall all I've learned
Based on the Commandments
In words of perfect pureness
Engraved upon the tablets
By the Lord of All Expanses
Each one by clause dissected
Some long and some restricted
In ordered form erected
From Mishnah and Gemara divined
Wherein each law is clear defined
Bavli and Yerushalmi combined
Within each other intertwined
Discourses are accredited
And source from where elicited
By volume and chapter noted
Each passage that is quoted
All in proper setting
In a manner that is fitting.

VI.

And since the laws are very strict
To learn decrees made to restrict
And find each subject's verdict
Both varied and prolific
I'll bring ripe fruit from Geonim picked
And comments exegetic
Those I've seen in times that passed
And those I'll see as time will pass
With Talmud's words to center round
And notes and comments that surround
This work reflects their thoughts profound

I've called it Ark of Witness
To bear to me its witness
Before my eyes remembrance
Forever on my countenance
Of what is of importance
Now that by our sinfulness
Our Temple's been denied to us
Till the day of our deliverance
We pray it come with swiftness
And part of it I've separated
Table of Showbread designated
Twelve facets in it segregated
From Talmud's waters extricated
Arranged the benedictions
Salutations and conclusions
And needed supplications
By Talmud's disposition
And law their distribution
By them to thank our Maker
And glorify our Creator
Sing praises to our Ruler
Implore for our requirements
And blessings for our sustenance
Gateway to all structures
Entry to all matters
Completion to all numbers
The three crowns of the diadem
No holy vessels rise above them
Divine Presence rests upon them
Crown of Table, Crown of Menorah

Crown of the Ark of the Torah¹³¹
The Menorah will be first produced
The others through it introduced.
VII
Hark then you noble gentry
So ravenous for luxury
Turn away from the thunder
That tears mountaintops asunder
And illuminate your sight
By the seven gleaming Lights
Exalted tablets explained
By the Lord's Finger ingrained
Come break the bread that I extend
All who truly are my friends
Drink deeply of the wines I blend
Upon the table that I've laid
Showbread beautifully arrayed
The table that stands before God.

¹³¹ [Translator's note; "Crown of Menorah" refers to "Menoras Hamaor", which is but one part of a trilogy written by the author. "Crown of the Ark of the Torah" refers to another part of the trilogy, entitled "Aron Ha'edus" — Ark of Witness, and deals with assorted halachos (laws) that are relevant to the times. "Crown of Table" refers to the final part of the trilogy, entitled "Shulchan Hapanim — Table of Showbread, which is actually a subdivision of "Aron Ha'edus" and deals with berachos (blessings) and tefillos (prayers). In these final verses, the author discusses the interrelationships of the three parts of the trilogy. The only part of the trilogy extant today is "Menoras Hamaor".]

Appendix B:
Profile of the Menorah

PROFILE OF THE MENORAH

The Talmud tells us (Eruvin 21b):

%%It is written, His locks arranged in ringlets (Shin Hashirim 5:11).

Rav Chisda said in the name of Mar Ukva: “The structure of the Hebrew words implies that there are mounds upon mounds of rules to be deduced from every tip of every letter of the Torah,”

&&Written Law and Oral Law

Only a fraction of the vast body of laws and minute details of the Torah are actually spelled out in the Written Law. The majority do not appear explicitly in the written part of the Torah. They were, however, transmitted orally directly to Moshe Rabbeinu — beginning a long chain of transmission down through the generations. This portion of the Torah came to be known as the Oral Law and is no less valid than the Scripture or Written Law.

The Talmud describes in detail the original process of the absorption of the Oral Law (Eruvin 54b):

%%Our rabbis have taught: By what process was the Oral Law learned?

Moshe would first be taught by the Divine Power. Aharon would then enter, and Moshe would review with him whatever he had learned. Aharon would then take a seat to the left of Moshe, Next the sons of Aharon would enter, and Moshe would review the same portion with them. They would then move to their seats — Elazar to the right of Moshe and Isamar to the left of Aharon. (Rabbi Yehudah contends: “Aharon's seat was always to the right of Moshe.”]

Next the elders would enter, and Moshe would once again review the portion with them. The elders would then stand aside, and the rest of the people would enter. Moshe would then review the portion with them all.

At this point, Aharon would have already gone over the material four times, his sons three times, the elders twice, and the rest of the people once.

Moshe would then leave, and Aharon would review the portion with everyone. Aharon would then also leave, and his sons would review the portion with everyone. They, too, would then leave, and the elders would again review the portion with everyone.

In this way everyone was able to review the material four times.

From this Rabbi Eliezer deduced that a pupil should be taught his lesson four times. The rules for the lesser can be inferred from the rules for the greater. If Aharon, who had learned from Moshe who had been taught by the Divine Power, was required to review his material four times, it goes without saying that an ordinary person learning from an ordinary person is required to do so as well.

Rabbi Akiva said: "How do we know that a teacher must review with his pupil until he has successfully been taught?"

"Because it is written, And he shall teach it to the children of Yisrael (Devarim 31:19),

"And how do we know that he must persist until the pupil becomes fluent in the material?"

"Because it is written, To be placed into their mouths (Ibid)."

And why didn't everyone enter together from the start and learn four times directly from Moshe?

This was in order to bestow honor upon. Aharon, upon his sons, and upon the elders.

And why didn't Aharon enter and learn from Moshe, then his sons enter and learn from Aharon, then the elders enter and learn from his sons, and then the rest of the people enter and learn from the elders?

Since Moshe had been taught directly by the Divine Power he was able to transmit it more effectively.

&&The Recording of the Oral Law

After its original absorption by Moshe Rabbeinu and his generation, the body of the Oral Law in its entirety was transmitted orally by the leading Torah authority of each generation to that of the next. With the passing of

many generations this chain of transmission was becoming less and less effective. The possibility arose that before many more generations some of this law might be forgotten. To guard against such an eventuality the recording of the Oral Law was begun.

The recording of the Oral Law took many forms and was accomplished over a long period of time that spanned several eras. The major records of the early or Tanaic era were the Mishnah, Beraisa, Tosefta, Sifra, and Sifrei. The records of the later or Amoraic period were essentially the Yerushalmi version of the Gemara and the Bavli version of the Gemara. The entire body of the recorded Oral Law came to be known as the Talmud. At the end of the Amoraic period all of the recorded Oral Law was assembled and arranged by Ravina and Rav Ashi. After determining that everything had been duly recorded, they formally announced the completion and closing of the Talmud.

During the time that the Oral Law was still being transmitted from person to person, the great teachers of the Law attempted to take those laws that they had received through the chain of transmission and connect them to the original Written Law. This was done either by employing one of the Thirteen Methods for Expounding the Torah or by finding some oblique reference within the text of the Scripture.

It must be understood that the acceptability of the Oral Law is in no way dependent on one's perception of the validity of its derivation from the Scripture. The Oral Law must be accepted without reservation solely on the basis of its coming from the historically accepted chain of transmission. The Torah has expressly forbidden us to doubt these teachings, as it is written, You shall not deviate from the teachings of the elders either to the right or to the left (Devarim 17:11).

The reason for the insistence of the great teachers of that time on connecting the Oral Law to the Written Law — even where that connection was clearly a departure from the plain meaning of the text — was that they felt it was needed for mnemonic purposes; it would help their students to

remember the great mass of orally transmitted law. To achieve this end they devised a system of allusions, symbols, numerical significances, and various other means of formulating references to these laws in the Scripture. This provided a framework for the study of the Oral Law and resulted in better retention in the memories of the students. Thus, the source of the law was to be found in the teacher's link to the chain of oral transmission and his understanding of it, while the derivation from the Written Law was a device for teaching and remembering.

The Recording of the Agada

The great teachers of that time also concentrated on the significance of the mitzvos, their rewards, the protection they provided, and the dreadful consequences of their violation. As a rule, they discussed these subjects at great length. They felt that these subjects were of the utmost importance because they were the basis of faith and could provide immediate and universal benefits. They could intimidate the sinful into abandoning their evil ways. They could also reassure and strengthen the virtuous and, hopefully, induce them to rise above the level of serving the Creator out of fear and awe and achieve the level of serving Him out of love. By serving Him out of the desire to attain reward they would eventually be drawn into perceiving the truth and serving Him for the sake of the act itself.

The great teachers of that time were also generally conversant in mystical studies of the highest order. This is clear from the Talmud's description of Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai as the most junior of the students of Hillel the Elder who, nevertheless, did not fail to study even one great or small thing. The Talmud goes on to explain that “a small thing” refers to the questions and legal arguments of Abaya and Rava, while “a great thing” refers to the nature of the Divine Chariot (Sukkah 28a).

From time to time these great scholars would discourse on mystical subjects for the benefit of their students. However, they did not deal with these subjects at length. Furthermore, even when they did touch on these

subjects, they spoke in allusion and were deliberately vague so that only the most astute student should be able to fathom the inner meanings.

At the time of the closing of the Talmud, Rav Ashi — one of the compilers of the Bavli version — turned his attention to this great body of ethical and mystical lore. He saw that these teachings were also being transmitted orally for the most part, with the only notes in existence being sketchy and difficult to locate. He realized that, as much as it was important to compile and record the legal aspects of the Torah, it was equally important to preserve for posterity these teachings that dealt with the highest of matters. It was essential that a complete record be kept of the homilies and chronicles of the great men of early times. There would always be much to learn from them — both in points of law and in moral and character lessons. They shed light on miracles of the past, promises for the future, and various other observations that would be important for the maintenance of faith through difficult times. They also included many mystical teachings that form the foundation and roots of our Torah and faith.

To achieve this purpose, Rav Ashi included all of these chronicles and teachings in the Talmud and interspersed them among the discussions of the legal parts of the Talmud. This aspect of the Talmud became known as the Agada and the legal aspect as the Halacha. In this way it was assured that it would never be forgotten; it would always be there for all who delve into it to derive whatever the scope of their intellect and vision would permit. It would also form the basis for rabbinic sermons to the people to guide them in the right direction,

The inclusion of the Agada in the Talmud should not be viewed as the inclusion of extraneous material within the text of the divinely inspired Oral Law. In fact, the Agada was also among the teachings that Moshe received from the Divine Power and was conveyed to future generations along the same chain of transmission (Megillah 19b).

Halachists and Agadists

Although all the great scholars of the early or Tanaic period — the Tanaim — were well versed in all parts of the Talmud, some were more expert in the Halacha, while others excelled in the Agada. This is clearly demonstrated in the Talmud in the context of a discussion about Daniel's prophecies — in particular the verse, I saw a vision of two chairs being prepared and the Timeless One sitting upon them in judgment (Daniel 7:9). The Talmud states (Chagigah 14a):

%%We have learned: “One chair is for strict judgment, the other for merciful judgment, so said Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Elazar the son of Azariah said to him; “Akiva! Why do you involve yourself in discussions of Agada? Leave off these conversations and concentrate on legal discussions dealing with leprosy and shelters. One chair is for a throne, the other for a footstool.’

&&Apparently, Rabbi Akiva was not considered by his contemporaries to be especially proficient in the Agada. Yet he was undisputedly the greatest scholar of his generation.

Conversely, we find Tanaim whose renown was based largely on their expertise in the Agada. The Talmud gives an example (Chulin 89a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimeon: “Wherever you encounter the Agadic expositions of Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Yosi of Gallilee perk up your ears to receive them as the hopper receives the wheat.”

&&The Talmud suggests that there were also varying degrees of proficiency in the Agada among the great scholars of the later or Amoraic period — the Amoraim. The Talmud gives an example of a particular Amory being sought out for his knowledge of the Agada (Berachos 10a):

%%Rav Shimi the son of Ukva used to frequent the school of Rabbi Shimeon the son of Pazi to learn the Halacha and the school of Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi to learn the Agada.

Once he asked Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi: “What is the meaning of that which is written, My spirit gives praise to God and all my intestines to His Holy Name (Tehillim 103:1)?”

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi replied: “Come let me show you how the nature of the Holy Blessed One differs from the nature of mere, mortals of flesh and blood. A person draws a picture but does not include intestines and bowels. The Holy Blessed One draws a picture within a picture, creating intestines and bowels.

“To this did Chanah refer in her prayer, There is none as holy as God, for there is none besides You and no rock like our Lord (Shmuel I 2:2).

“What is the meaning of ‘no rock like our Lord’?

“Rabbi Yehudah the son of Menasheh said: ‘Read the Hebrew words with a slightly different pronunciation so that they mean ‘no artist like our Lord.’

“What is the meaning of ‘there is none besides you’?

“Rabbi Yehudah said: ‘Do not read the Hebrew word so that its definition is ‘besides you’. Read it with a slightly different pronunciation by which it means ‘witness your decay’. The creations of a mortal usually outlast him, but the Holy Blessed One ultimately always sees the decay of his creations.’

Rav Shimi continued: “My question was not directed towards the reference to intestines but rather to the fact that the phrase “my spirit gives praise to God’ is repeated five times in the psalms. What is the significance of this?”

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi explained: “The Holy Blessed One permeates the entire world; the soul permeates the entire body. The Holy Blessed One sees but is not seen; the soul sees but is not seen. The Holy Blessed One sustains the entire world; the soul sustains the entire body. The Holy Blessed One is unblemished pure; the soul is unblemished pure. The Holy Blessed One dwells in the innermost chamber; the soul dwells in the innermost chamber.

“Let the one that has these five attributes come and sing the praises of the one that has these five attributes.”

&&In the context of this beautiful interpretation the Talmud stresses the fact that Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi specialized in the Agada. This is meant to demonstrate that experts in the Agada were able to go beyond the plain meaning of the verses of the Torah and derive wonderful meanings. In the Halachic portions of the Talmud this would be very unusual.

The Talmud brings another illustration of preferences for Agada over Halacha in a humorous vein (Bava Kama 60b):

%%Rav Ami and Rav Asi were sitting before Rabbi Yitzchak Nafcha.

One of them. asked; “Would the master please tell us something from the Agada?”

The other one asked: “Would the master please tell us something from the Halacha?”

Rabbi Yitzchak Nafcha began to expound on the Halacha, but the one who preferred the Agada objected. He then began to expound on the Agada but the one who preferred the Halacha objected.

Rabbi Yitzchak then said to them: “Let me draw you an analogy to this situation. A man had two wives. One was young, the other was older. The young wife would always pluck out his white hairs, while the older one plucked out his dark hairs. The man was left without any hair at all.

“Let me tell you something that will be equally pleasing to both of you. It is written, If a fire should go forth and consume thorns — the inference being that the fire went forth of itself. Yet the Torah goes on to say, The one who ignites the fire shall indeed have to pay (Shemos 22:5).

This then is the meaning: The Holy Blessed One said: 'I set fire to Yerushalayim, as it is written, And He set fire to Zion (Eichah 4:11). By fire will I rebuild her in the future, as it is written, By the Word of God, I will be as a wall of fire for her (Zechariah 2:9).'

“In the verse, The one who ignites the fire shall indeed have to pay, the Holy Blessed One is saying: ‘It is My responsibility to restore that which has been destroyed by My fire.’

“There is also a Halachic interpretation to the two varying descriptions of the emergence of the fire. They are meant to indicate that, as regards liability, damage caused by the fire — although it would seem to fall into the category of damage caused by animals or other property — is in fact considered as damage caused by the person himself. Igniting a fire is considered to be similar to shooting an arrow which causes damage through force generated by the shooter's body.”

&&The Talmud gives another example of one Amora seeking out another who was more expert in the Agada (Taanis 5b):

%%Rav Nachman and Rav Yitzchak were dining together.

Rav Nachman said to Rav Yitzchak: “Would the master please tell us something from the Agada?”

Rav Yitzchak replied: “This is what Rabbi Yochanan said: It is forbidden to converse during meals. One who does so places his life in jeopardy because he might inadvertently ingest food into his windpipe and choke.”

After the meal had been completed Rav Yitzchak complied with Rav Nachman's request and said: “This is what Rabbi Yochanan said: ‘Our father Yaakov did not die.’”

Rav Nachman asked in wonderment: “Did the eulogists then eulogize him, the embalmers embalm him, and the gravediggers bury him for naught?”

Rav Yitzchak replied: “That which is written bears me out. For it is written, By the Word of God fear not, My servant Yaakov, nor be dismayed, Yisrael, for I shall redeem you from the distant places and your children from captivity, and the House of Yaakov shall be reinstated, tranquil and secure, no longer to be terrorized (Yirmiyahu 30:10). A parallel is drawn

between Yaakov and his offspring to suggest that as his offspring endure so does he himself endure.”

Rav Yitzchak continued: “Whosoever pronounces the name of Rachav¹³² immediately experiences an unclean discharge.”

Rav Nachman responded: “I have spoken it and was not affected.”

Rav Yitzchak replied: “I was only referring to people that were acquainted with her.”

When the time came for them to part, Rav Nachman asked: “Would the master please bless me?”

Rav Yitzchak replied: “Let me draw you an analogy to this situation.

A person was traveling in the desert, hungry, thirsty, and extremely tired. He came upon a large tree whose fruit were sweet and whose shade was lovely. A stream of fresh water passed beneath the tree.

“The wayfarer ate of the fruit and drank of the waters. He sat in the shade of the tree and rested from his weariness.

“When he rose to leave he exclaimed: ‘Tree O tree! What blessing can I possibly give to you? I cannot wish you sweet fruit, for your fruit are already sweet. I cannot wish you lovely shade, for your shade is already lovely. I cannot wish you a stream of water to pass beneath you, for indeed, one already exists. May it be His Will that all shoots replanted from you should grow into trees such as you.’

“So with you, Rav Nachman, what blessings can I possibly give to you?

“I cannot wish you Torah, for you already possess Torah. I cannot wish you wealth, for you are already wealthy. I cannot wish you sons, for you already have sons.

“May it be His Will that your offspring should be such as you.”

&&The Influence of the Agada

The Talmud itself repeatedly emphasizes the singular influence of the Agada. It compares the words of the Halacha to bread and the words of the Agada to water (Chagigah 14a).

¹³² [Translator's note: Rachav was a prostitute mentioned in Yehoshua 2:1].

If we follow this analogy a little further we find that the sustenance of the body requires both bread and water — normally, bread twice a day and water frequently throughout the day. So too does the sustenance of the soul require both the bread of Halacha and the water of Agada — the Halacha periodically, as the need arises, and the Agada constantly, because the need is always there.

The Sifrei also contains a description of the singular influence of the Agada (Sifrei 48, 49, 317):

%%That which is written, For not by bread alone does a man live (Devarim 8:3) refers to the Scripture.

That which is written, But by every utterance of God can a man exist (Ibid.) refers to the Halacha and the Agada.

Do you wish to come to know the One who commanded the creation of the world?

Study the Agada, for thus you will come to know Him and to adhere to His Ways.

That which is written. He mounted him upon the high places of the earth (Devarim 32:13) refers to the Torah, of which it is written, God formed me at the start of creation (Mishlei 8:22).

That which is written, And he ate the produce of the fields (Devarim 32:13) refers to the Scripture.

That which is written, And he nursed him with honey from a stone (Ibid.) refers to the Mishnah.

That which is written, And oil from a flinty rock (Ibid.) refers to the entire Talmud.

That which is written, The cream of cattle and the milk of sheep with the fat of lambs (Ibid.) refers to the rules of Halachic debate.

That which is written, With the fat of kidneys of wheat (ibid.) refers to the Halacha, the essence of Scripture.

That which is written, And from the grape's bleedings you will drink fine wines (Ibid.) refers to the Agada.

&&The Talmud further states that mastery of the Agada brings honor along with it (Bava Basra 9b):

%%It is written, He who pursues charity and kindness shall find life, charity, and honor (Mishlei 21:21).

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi says: "It is his fortune to have sons who are wise, rich, and masters of the Agada. That they shall be wise is inferred from the word 'life', since wisdom is called 'life', as it is written, For those who discover me discover life (Mishlei 8:35). That they shall be rich is inferred from the word 'charity'. That they shall be masters of the Agada is inferred from the word "honor', as it is written, Wise men shall inherit honor (Mishlei 3:35)."

&&The Talmud is clearly saying that the honor and charm of wise men is enhanced by a wide knowledge of the Agada.

The Agada also brings honor to the wise man in a practical sense. Knowledge of the Agada will enable him to speak before the common people and guide them in the right direction. They, in turn, will bestow honor upon him.

The Talmud makes this point as well (Bava Basra 145b):

%%Our rabbis have taught: The master of Agada is compared to one whose riches are the kind that are conspicuous — such as land holdings and large herds. The master of debate is compared to one whose riches are the kind that steadily increase in value — such as coins and precious oils. The master of practical rulings is compared to one whose riches are the kind that are measured and stored — such as grain. All, however, are dependent on the master of the Talmud, for it is the basis of everything.

&&As to the relative popularity of the Halacha and the Agada, it would appear that the people were more receptive to expositions of the Agada. The Talmud tells us (Sotah 40a):

%%Rabbi Abahu and Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba arrived at a certain place to speak before the people. Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba was to expound on the Halacha, Rabbi Abahu on the Agada. The people of that

place turned their backs on Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba and flocked to Rabbi Abaha. Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba was extremely disheartened.

Rabbi Abahu tried to reassure him: “Let me draw you an analogy to this situation. Two merchants entered the same town. One was selling small needles, the other jewels and pearls. To whom would the buyers flock? Can it be denied that it would be to the seller of the cheap needles?”

Rabbi Abahu then made a further attempt to reassure him. Every day it was the habit of Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba to escort Rabbi Abahu to the entrance of his quarters in deference to Rabbi Abahu's high standing in the emperor's court. On this day Rabbi Abahu instead escorted Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba to his quarters.

In spite of everything Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba was not fully reassured.

&&Evaluating the Agada

Rav Shriria Gaon has postulated¹³³ that Midrash and Agada derived from the Scripture are to be viewed as hypothesis rather than as incontrovertible fact. Discernment and careful study are required in determining the truth. Among others, he cites as an example that which the Talmud says (Shabbos 96b):

%%Our rabbis have taught: The episode of the unnamed man who violated the Shabbos by gathering wood (Bamidbar 15:32) involved Tselaphchad.

&&However, it has subsequently been pointed out that Rav Shriria Gaon was referring chiefly to the later Midrashim — such as Midrash Tanchuma, compiled by Rabbi Tanchuma, and Midrash Rabah, compiled by Rabbi Oshia — that were not incorporated into the Talmud itself. Of the Agada that has been included in the Talmud only a small part can be considered hypothesis. These are invariably passages that attempt to derive

¹³³ [Translator's note: Quoted at length in Sefer Ha'eshkol (Halberstat, 1868) Part II, p. 47, It should be noted that this is the opinion of one school of thought on an issue of considerable controversy and should not be taken to be universal.]

factual information of a historical or Halachic nature from the Scriptural texts. All of the examples cited by Rav Shriria Gaon fit this mold.

For the most part, however, the Agada is not concerned with the derivation of factual information but with the description of the true nature of the universe and the ideal towards which one should strive. It speaks allusively of mysteries and mysticism. It speaks of ethics and character and human nature. It speaks of purification of the body and sublimation of the soul. These are absolute truths. They are not merely hypotheses, and it would be a grave error to view them as such.

That some of the Agada is hypothesis, and not incontrovertible fact, should not be allowed to impeach the total reliability of the majority of the Agada. Even in matters of Halacha, the Talmud consistently brings minority rulings and opinions that are clearly not accepted. The Talmud does this for purposes of clarity. It would be next to impossible to appreciate every nuance and implication of an authoritative ruling without a full understanding of the entire discussion that preceded its formulation. The purpose of the Talmud is to reveal the truth; everything it brings is directed towards achieving that purpose — whether because it is in itself the truth or because it provides a perspective for the truth.

Rav Hai Gaon was once asked to distinguish between the Agada that is incorporated into the Talmud and the Agada that is not part of the Talmud. Why is it required to clarify the obscure passages in the Agada of the Talmud, and to emend any error that may have appeared in the text, while it is not required to do so with the Agada that is not part of the Talmud?

He replied that the Agada that was chosen to be part of the Talmud is more reliable than the other. If there was nothing of importance to be learned from the passage it would not have been included in the Talmud. Hence, if the texts are not corrected and clarified something may consequently be done improperly. However, the Agada outside of the

Talmud carries no such assurance. Thus, only if the passage seems lucid and free of error need it be expounded and taught.¹³⁴

Therefore, in writing Menoras Hamaor, I have quoted but sparingly from the Midrashim that are not mentioned in the Talmud and only when those selections would be especially effective in making a point. I have concentrated almost exclusively on the Agada of the Talmud and have drawn from it exhaustively wherever I could. I have only omitted those infrequent passages that do not really belong in this work whose avowed purpose is to give constructive guidance to the reader.

The Purpose of Menoras Hamaor

Unfortunately, the great wisdom that existed in earlier generations no longer exists today. People in this generation are incapable of absorbing the volumes that already exist, let alone of authoring new works. The Talmud tells us that the capacity for learning is diminished with the passing generations (Eruvin 53a):

%%Rabbi Yochanan said: "The minds of the early scholars were as wide open as the gates of the Great Hall of the Bais Hamikdash. The minds of the later scholars were open only as wide as the gates of the Inner Sanctum of the Bais Hamikdash And our minds today are no more open than the eye of the small needle used for mending clothes."

Abaya said: "Learning enters our minds today as reluctantly as a peg being driven into a small hole."

Rava said: "Logic enters our minds today as reluctantly as a finger being forced into hard wax."

Rav Ashi said: "We acquire forgetfulness, however, with the ease of a finger being inserted into a gaping hole."

&&Of course, Rav Ashi and his contemporaries were greatly exaggerating their limitations because of their modesty. Yet how true do those words ring for our generation! By our sinfulness and moral depravity

¹³⁴ [Translator's note: It must be understood that such determinations can be made only by the very highest Torah authorities who are properly equipped to do so.]

we have estranged ourselves from wisdom; perception and knowledge have vanished from our lives. We have caused our memories to lapse, as the dead who fade from remembrance, and forgetfulness overtakes us. What we learn enters one ear and immediately exits the other, as suddenly as a woman who gives birth while her labor has barely begun.¹³⁵

Overwhelmed by troubled times, we find it difficult to learn through our own reading. Teachers are no longer to be found among us. Diligent study is nonexistent.

The people of our times are hungry for food and thirsty for wine; they do not hunger or thirst for the Word of God. They neglect to prepare for everlasting life and occupy themselves with the fleeting concerns of the moment. They spend their entire lives amassing fortunes that will end up in the hands of others — possibly even in the hands of the men who will marry the widows they leave behind. They don't even set aside a small portion of their fortunes to acquire provisions for their long journey into eternity.

I have seen the indolence of the people who will not exert themselves to study the great volumes of the Law that are bursting with detail on all subjects. I have seen the indolence of the people who will not exert themselves to search for the Agada that is sprinkled throughout the Talmud and the Midrash. How it would bring sweet taste to their palates! How it would rouse their slumbering hearts and bring them to refuge under the wings of the Divine Presence! Were they even to do what is right because it would benefit themselves, in the end they would do it for its own sake.

Therefore, I have collected selections from the laws of the basic mitzvos and the Agada, taking care to list every source. I have arranged these selections in an order designed to ease the task of the reader. This shall be a work that combines the Halacha and the Agada — a work that is equally pleasing to all.

¹³⁵ [Translator's note: This is a reference to the attribute of mashpaich (funnel) in Avos 5:15 and to Yeshayahu 66:7.]

By interspersing the Agada throughout the Talmud Rav Ashi insured its preservation and perpetuation. However, this diffuse quality of the Agada has made it become less accessible with the passage of time. Many themes in the Agada are developed piecemeal in various tractates across the entire spectrum of the Talmud. It is only by viewing all of the segments together that the true design of the Agada begins to emerge. Often the same passage will be repeated verbatim in several different places, both as the center of discussion and because it has bearing on other discussions. There are also many beautiful and instructive comments in the more obscure Midrashim that would be especially illuminating if seen in context with the related themes of the Agada in the Talmud. Yet there are few people today whose knowledge is broad enough to achieve this clarity or who are prepared to exert themselves to search out every passage dealing with a particular Agadic theme.

It is in order to fill this great void that exists because of the need for the Agada, and the lack of access to it, that I have dared undertake to collect the passages from the Agada and arrange them in order according to subject. I have set aside for this effort a period of time that is but a fraction of the time I have devoted to secular matters. Let this endeavor be as an offering to Him to compensate for my days of neglect, since He accepts an offering of flour as if it were an offering of an ox. As the Talmud tells us, it does not matter whether one does much or little as long as one is wholeheartedly trying to fulfill His Will (Menachos 110a). He knows it is not my intention in writing this work to gain prominence and fame. I have done it so that the words of the Agada shall always be as a remembrance before my eyes; so that I shall be able to immerse myself in it and probe into it to the limits of my ability, groping as a blind man for what is therein concealed; so that I shall always have its words at my fingertips when I must speak to the hearts of the people.

I have arranged the passages of the Agada in logical sequence according to topic. I have also included some of my own observations and remarks

only parenthetically, with the prefix “It would appear to me”. Wherever appropriate I have also mentioned other opinions. In those places where I felt that the text itself required clarification, I have drawn from the commentary of Rabbeinu Shlomo,¹³⁶ with the prefix “The Kunterais¹³⁷ explains”.

May the Omnipresent judge on the scale of merit all those who will judge me on the scale of merit.

The Structure of Menoras Hamaor

The Talmud tells us (Avodah Zarah 19b):

%%Rabbi Alexandri announced: “Who wishes life?”

Everyone immediately surrounded him.

He then said to them: “It is written, Which is the man that desires life and loves days for seeing good? Guard your tongue from evil . . . Turn away from evil and do good, search out peace and pursue it (Tehillim 34:13-15).”

&&The Talmud here is teaching us that in order to attain everlasting life there are three steps that must be followed. These are: turn away from evil; do good; search out peace and pursue it. These steps must be followed in sequence since the successful accomplishment of each step lays the groundwork for the next.

The first step must be to turn away from evil, because the natural inclination of a person is to sin. This is implied in the verse, Sin crouches at the door (Beraishis 4:7). The perversities of the heart, of course, dictate the actions and condition of the entire body.¹³⁸ Therefore, the first step must necessarily be to overcome this inclination towards evil.

The second step is to condition oneself to do good. To cease doing evil without going on to do what is truly good would make one no better than a

¹³⁶ [Translator's note: Commonly known as Rashi.]

¹³⁷ [Translator's note: Literally "booklet", the term used by the Tosaphists when referring to Rashi's commentary on the Talmud.]

¹³⁸ [Translator's note: The author apparently follows the interpretation of Targum Yonasan ben Uziel that the door at which sin crouches is the door to the heart.]

neutral beast that is neither sinful nor just. After the first step removing the negative, there must follow a second step providing the positive.

The third step is to search out peace and pursue it. This is essential to the development of a person because it enables him to coexist with other people. By law of nature, a person is meant to live as a member of society, to interact with other people, and to do his part in perpetuating society. Only by being devoted to the pursuit of peace can a person effectively fulfill his desired role in society.

Thus, a person must first turn away from doing evil. Then he must rise above the level of a beast. Having progressed in his refinement as an individual, he must then go on to let society benefit from that refinement.

I have written this work “The Menorah of Light”— to guide the reader through these three steps. Of the seven Lights of the Menorah, the first two will lead him through the first step, the middle three through the second step, and the last two through the third.

To accomplish the first step of turning away from evil, one must first overcome the strongest inclination to sin, which is to do sinful deeds. This is the theme of the first light — “The Light of Contentment.” This step is then completed by turning away from sinful speech, as is specifically mentioned in the aforementioned verse. Hence the second light — “The Light of Expression.”

The second step is accomplished in three parts. The first part is the performance of the mitzvos of the Torah. These will condition and purify the body. Hence the third light — “The Light of Mitzvos.” The second part is the study of the Torah which will elevate the mind and bring it to the realization of the truth. Hence the fourth light — “The Light of Torah.” The third part is an understanding of the ways of teshuvah. Since nature dictates that there does not exist a just man who does only good and never sins (according to Koheles 7:20), one must always be familiar with the ways of returning. Hence the fifth light — “The Light of Teshuvah.”

The third step is accomplished by learning how to live together with other people in peace and love. Hence the sixth light — “The Light of Harmony.” To be truly successful in the third and final step it is necessary to develop humility. This will remove the final obstacle to harmonious relationships with other people. Hence the seventh and last light — “The Light of Humility.”

Such are the seven Lights of the Menorah. The three Lights on each side of the Menorah shine in splendid escort to the Great Light in the Center — the Light of Torah that is as a blazing sun among seven brilliant stars.

These three steps together form the basis for the preservation of civilization. The Talmud tells us (Avon 1:18):

%%Rabbi Shimeon the son of Gamaliel says: “There are three things necessary for the preservation of civilization: justice, truth, and peace.”

&&Justice is concerned with the prevention of evil and the punishment of the evildoer. This corresponds to the first step — “turn away from evil.”

In the Hebrew word for truth — *emes* — there is an allusion to the second step — “do good.” The three letters that comprise this word are the first, middle, and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet — “*aleph, mem* and *tav*.” These represent: the mitzvos which are the first things that must be learned in one's youth; the Torah which one truly acquires only after coming to know the ways of the Lord; and teshuvah that waits in the end for those who have sinned and need to return.

Peace, of course, refers to the pursuit of harmonious relationships and corresponds to the third step. No other mitzvah carries as strong an emphasis on the pursuit of it as does the mitzvah of living at peace with other people. The achievement of social harmony is the culmination of civilization. The climax of the kohanim's benediction to the people is that they be blessed to live in harmony. Pursuit of harmony brings benefits both in this world and in the next. He who leaves this world in peace shall be greeted by the angels of peace who will say to him, “Come in peace.” For

so it is written, Let them come in peace and lie in their final resting places (Yeshayahu 57:2).

The seven Lights are arrayed upon these three foundations — the two sides of the Menorah and its center. Their sections, parts, and chapters are the vessels of the Menorah. All is of one piece, golden, pure, and sevenfold refined. Let the seven glittering Lights irradiate the golden Menorah.