

THE LIFE AND WORK OF RABBI JOSHUA BEN LEVI  
AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE TALMUD AND SECONDARY WORKS

by

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DIGEST

Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi, a third century Palestinian Amora, headed an academy in Lydda. A man of considerable stature spiritually and mentally, he exerted a tremendous influence on his contemporaries by his competence in Halacha and Aggada . As a result of his spiritual nature and his immense Agadic competence, legend has enshrouded the man and raised him to heights beyond the human ken of understanding. In a sense this thesis tries to restore some of the wordly demeanor of the man.

Rabbi Joshua played an active role in the formalization of prayer and ritual for the Jew in the synagogue - the Temple having been destroyed. In this respect, Rabbi Joshua struck a happy medium between the reality of the present need for a synagogue-centered ritual and the hope for the restitution of the cult.

As interested in the formalities as he was,,our Amora never lost sight of either the human qualities inherent in prayer or the nature of the Divine Recipient of our thanks, our praise, and our protestations. Prayers and rituals had to be more than "meaningful". They had to be real.

Scholarship, the respect for it, the acquisition of it, and its practical value were of the utmost concern to Rabbi Joshua. God had revealed himself in the written word. Those who deciphered this revelation had the key to happiness and fulfillment. By respect for learning, the Jew could participate in some of its rewards.

Rabbi Joshua must have had a rare understanding of womankind. He seemed sensitive to their emotions and needs and recognized that in their fulfillment lay man's fulfillment. He opened for them the doors of the pleasures of ritual involvement and ever so firmly defended their conjugal rights.

Pleasure and pain had added dimension when Joshua ben Levi discoursed on Gehenna and the world to come. With color and even with passion he could light the fires under the wicked and give the righteous a foretaste of their rewards through his words and symbols.

Days of joy and sadness add flavor to life. Joshua built for us a Sabbath picture which showed care and concern both for God and His creations. Sabbath was clothed with the raiment of devotion and observance as defined by the rabbi whose life passes before us. Every holiday had a unique touch of the Master.

Torah was most certainly a "tree of life" for our rabbi. "It" could soothe and smite, free and enslave. It had a personality all its own. It had the power to cement families together. To Joshua it was the source of knowledge, truth and beauty. Torah served as his guide as much as its Author was his master.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was involved in every aspect of the communal life of Palestinian Jewry. His Halachic decisions are all encompassing and reveal a broad knowledge of the knowable universe of his day. In short, one might say of this thesis, "This Is Your Life -

Joshua ben Levi."

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- A. Statements by Joshua ben Levi in Babylonian Talmud not dealt with in the text of the thesis.
- B. Comments by Marmorstein on Rabbi Joshua ben Levi.

### Bibliography



## -I - INTRODUCTION

It has often been said that great men do not die until they fall into the hands of romantic biographers. It is at the hands of such imaginative geniuses that the true lives of men are lost in the maze of the folk literature, myth, romanticization and even out and out lies. The biographers of whom we speak do not necessarily have to be novelists. They may come in a number of guises such as historians, psychologists, anthropologists, or just plain every day scholars. They weave the webs of fantasy or their particularly specialized fabric of interest around the hero-victim of their study until it is nigh on impossible to remember the man apart from his scholastic mummy. It is also a truism that the more time elapses, the more solidified becomes the mummy and the essence of the real man deteriorates even as the flesh and blood of the human body is lost.

Betimes it behooves us to attempt to search out the man - the true man - devoid of myth, and uncover him either in all his greatness and magnitude or - as often happens - in his weakness and ignobility. Such will be our attempt in discoursing on the life of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi. I will grant at the outset that we are hampered by a tremendous lack of accurate historical information. The entire period of his life and time are shrouded and obscure by virtue of both the unsettled nature of that millenium and by the unfortunate fact that the rabbis rarely glorified themselves through the written word devoid of the decisions, stories, and insights as found in the Talmudic literature. This study will be divided into five parts. First I will

attempt to describe the history of the time that produced such a man as Joshua ben Levi, for certainly he did not live in a vacuum but was the product of some interesting historical circumstances, I will rely for the most part on Judaism's classical historian Heinrich Graetz for these details.

Secondly, I will attempt to give a biographical sketch of the man himself. This will be devoid of the aids of legend that have given us such a strange picture of the man and catapulted him from a fine, normal, highly dedicated, sensitive, and intelligent human being to a mystical, venerable magician - saint. X

Thirdly, I plan to discuss the major areas of Joshua ben Levi's concerns as they are found in the Babylonian Talmud. A great bulk of this material will deal with his approach to the liturgy and ritual, for in this field lay his major contribution and concern. I will then deal with his attitudes towards scholarship, women, Gehenna and the world to come, Sabbaths and Festivals, Torah and man, his practical decisions and work, and many of the random thoughts that were not included in my major categories.

I will have two appendices. The first will list those references in the Babylonian Talmud that were not quoted and the second is the compilation of views by the Talmudic scholar Marmorstein. I did not deal with the Joshua ben Levi of legend and Aggada since these areas were covered quite adequately by Martin Katzenstein in his thesis, "The Homilies of Joshua ben Levi".

I trust that this will give us a clearer understanding of a significant Rabbi, teacher, and human being, Joshua ben Levi-Amora extraordinare.

In all honesty, however, this thesis should be a contemporary document. The accumulation of wisdom from the past is all well and good, but of a certainty it is not enough. My general impression is that Judaism seeks to take the life of its adherents and give that life direction and purpose. I believe that those who painstakingly recorded the words and opinions of these sages did so to sharpen the focus of purpose and direction spoken of. And so it is that the words of a third century Amora should have a purpose of a contemporary nature. Joshua ben Levi can teach us and inspire us. He may once again influence us. What made prayer and Torah important for him may still have value. His concept of "Man" may still be useful in terms of the values we might treasure. As I believe his dedication to scholarship was not barren of the human element so ours should not be barren of the human element. I would certainly not want our Amora to teach me anthropology<sup>1</sup>, but the understanding of the responsibility of a husband toward a wife, a father toward a son, a teacher toward a student, and by inference, a rabbi towards his congregants. That, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi can teach and thereby sound as contemporary as a learned man of our century. With the scythe of Reform intuition we may reap the Simcha and reject the Shechita, we may search for the Shechina and put aside Shatnes. Do we X

<sup>1</sup> Epstein, Isidore, Soncino Talmud, (Babylonian) English Translation Soncino Press, London 1948, "Rosh Hashonoh, 11A."

seek a contemporary insight? Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, "Money purifies Mamzerim,"<sup>2</sup> For the pithy, the wise and the enlightened, Joshua ben Levi has something to offer. Come and look with me at the man - ancient, yet in many ways our contemporary. Did one ever hear a rabbi proclaim that he was so busy he had no time to be a rabbi? Come and hear! "Thus Rabbi Joshua ben Levi once complained that because he was occupied with the needs of the community, he forgot a great part of his learning."<sup>3</sup> Contemporary? Alive? Indeed it rings true, loud, and clear. Come and hear!

<sup>2</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Kiddushin 71A

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Belkin, In His Image, New York: Abelhard and Schuman, 1960, p. 150

## II - HISTORY

Bar Cochba had been defeated. The debacle of his revolt was at an end. Judea was despirited and the heel of Rome was felt ever more firmly on the necks of the stiff-necked people. The Pharasaic scholar class was in a state of disrepute since that scholar and sage, Akiba, supported the abortive and short lived rebellion. The Sanhedrin was dispersed and anarchy threatened the people who lived within the shadow not only of law but of the Law. The social, political, and religious scene required the cement of charisma, brilliance, and respect to recover from the tidal wave of dejection and despair that engulfed Judea. This need was met by Judah ben Simon II who became Patriarch of Palestine. Judah ha-Nasi took over the reigns of the faltering scholar class and revived Palestinian Jewry, at the same time raising the power of the Patriarchate to unmatched heights of prestige and authority. Judah possessed wealth, so he could not be bought; scholarship, so he could not be juggled; and authority, so he could not be moved easily.

Judah arrogated for himself the power to appoint teachers and disciples. This granting of "Semicha" placed him in almost absolute authority over his contemporaries, especially those who had not yet been ordained. With the abolition of the office of Av Beth Din, Judah remained the leading power of Palestinian Jewry - a power that would also give him eventual authority in the Babylonian community as well, after the death of Huna.



Judah worked incessantly on the codification of Jewish law that eventually became the Mishna. There is no positive proof that Judah was the first to put this law in writing but if it was not his handiwork, he can at least be credited with laying the groundwork for the compilation and completion of the Mishna.

It was inevitable that Judah's relations with his contemporaries would be strained. Many a scholar, no doubt, chafed at the bit of Judah's authority. Huna, the Resh Galuta in Babylonia, was the only rival for dominance in the Jewish world that Judah had. Graetz recounts that Chiya was excluded from Judah's presence for thirty days when he angered the master by informing him that the Resh Galuta was coming to Palestine, failing to mention the fact that it was Huna's corpse.<sup>4</sup> We are certainly made cognizant of the tremendous conflict that must have existed between the Nasi and the Resh Galuta.

Bar Kappara, for another jest that hurt Judah's pride, never received an appointment as an independent teacher of the law. Chanina Bar Chama was similarly fated. At any rate, Graetz considered personal pettiness Judah's Achilles' heel.<sup>4a</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Graetz, Heinrich, History of the Jews II, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1893, pps. 479-498.

<sup>4a</sup> Graetz, Heinrich, History of the Jews II, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1893, pps. 479-498.

Opinions have been expressed by Graetz and others that Levi bar Sissi, who was sent by Judah ha Nasi to Simoneus as teacher, was the father of Joshua ben Levi, yet there is no information to substantiate this view.

The reign of Marcus Aurelius was not a happy one for the Jews. He did not promulgate one law in their favor. The "aurum coronurum", or crown tax, became increasingly burdensome under his reign.

The pains, pleasures and powers of the Patriarchate of Palestine were turned over to Gamliel III after the death of Judah ha Nasi. Judah had reigned for over thirty years. Much of his unfinished work that was not included in the Mishna was included in the Boraitha by Judah's contemporaries after Judah's death during the Patriarchate of Gamliel III. With the death of Gamliel III and the younger contemporaries of Judah, the Tanaitic period came to an end.

Judah II took the reigns of the Patriarchate from Gamliel III and a period of relative stability settled on Palestine. The seat of authority was moved to Tiberius. Judah II held on to the authority entrusted in the patriarchal office and the resentment against this authority was still very much alive although it was not as strong as in the days of the first Judah.



With the ascension to the throne of Alexander Severus, things became brighter for the Jews. Judah II was given almost royal authority and there was a marked change in the attitude of the Jewish colony toward Rome. With greater freedom came greater laxity and for the first time attacks on the patriarchal office were openly voiced. One of these voices belonged to the influential Simeon ben Lakish. At this time Origen, one of the Church Fathers, visited Hillel II and the Patriarch began to draw revenues from communities outside Palestine. Things were looking up for the Jews and it seemed for a while that a new day was dawning. It was upon this scene that Joshua ben Levi made his appearance.

### III- BIOGRAPHY

Scholars disagree as to the date of birth of Joshua ben Levi. Hirschel Revel in the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia states he was born toward the end of the second century CE<sup>5</sup> while Herman Abramowitz claims it was the first half of the third century.<sup>6</sup> In Bader's biographical sketch he avoids the issue and just states that he belonged to the first and second generation of the "Amoraim".<sup>7</sup>

Graetz called Joshua ben Levi part of the great triumverate that included Jochanan Bar Napacha and Simeon Ben Lakish. Joshua ben Levi had his school in Lydda while Tiberius was the seat of the Patriarchate. This caused some strain but did not affect the reputation or position of Joshua ben Levi. Graetz tells us that his authority was greatly respected and that his Halachic opinions had the force of law even when opposed by the other members of this old time Troika. He was active in the organization of the southern cities of Judea. Graetz claims Joshua was sent to Rome by Judah II as part of the "United Judean Appeal Drive" and that he was eminently successful with the merchants and shipowners there. He also accompanied Chanina Bar Chama to the pro-consul in Caesarea.<sup>8</sup>

Date-wise the Jewish Encyclopedia calls Joshua ben Levi an elder contemporary of Jochanan Bar Nappach and Resh Lakish. Joshua ben Levi was the pupil of Bar Kappara, whom he often quoted. He received

- 5 Revel, Hirschel, Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Press, 1942, p.208
- 6 Abromowitz, Herman, The Jewish Encyclopedia, New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904, p. 293
- 7 Bader, Jewish Spiritual Heroes, Volume II, New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1940, p. 139
- 8 Graetz, Henrich, History of the Jews, Volume II, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1893.

a good part of his Halachic education from Judah ben Pedaiah. One of the more saintly creatures of that period was Phinehas ben Jair whose personal piety cast a lasting image on Joshua ben Levi, and whom he emulated in his later life. Joshua was known to be gentle and rather sickly, prone to fasting. Revel states that in many ways he was like the Essenes.<sup>9</sup>

He was very gentle toward the Christian heretics. Although they often annoyed him and was prone to curse them out, he claimed he never quite around to it because he remembered the phrase from Psalm CXIV:9, \* "And His tender mercies are over all his works."<sup>10</sup>

Rabbi Joshua was known to be a devoted worker in his community. He spent much time looking after the public welfare, using his wealth and position to the best advantage of his southern Judean sphere. His son, Joseph, was married to the daughter of the Nasi and Joshua had great respect for the institution. This respect did not prevent our Amora from asserting his independence on some crucial issues that tended to decrease the patriarchal power. "For Joshua was the first to ordain fully his own pupils in all cases where ordination was requisite, thus assuming a power that hitherto had been in the hands of the Nasi alone."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Revel, Hirschel, Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia Press, 1942, p. 208

<sup>10</sup> Soncino Talmud; *ibid*: Berakoth 7A, also Sanhedrin 105B, also Aboda Zara 4B

<sup>11</sup> Abromowitz, Herman, The Jewish Encyclopedia, New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904, p.294.

It might be added that Joshua ben Levi stiffly opposed the granting of ordination outside of Palestine.<sup>12</sup> He claimed that all too often those who found ordination too difficult in Palestine went to Babylonia where it was probably a bit cheaper to obtain.

Bader claims that Joshua even attended the academy of Rabbi Jehuda for a while, noting that he quotes the master in some legal observances. He was, as stated before, an extremely accomplished Halachist but his popular fame is as an Aggadist. He was opposed to committing the Aggada to writing and threatened those who did so with "no share in the world to come." Furthermore he stated that he only once read a book of Haggadoth and had been afraid of evil dreams ever since.

The father-in-law of Joshua ben Levi was Rabbi Joseph b Patros, a friend of Bar Kappara, and in his father-in-law's honor he called his own son Joseph. He taught his own children Torah and seemed to have deep familial ties. Every Friday afternoon he would listen to the portion of the week as recited by his grandchildren. Every Purim he read the Megillah to his family. It is no wonder that Joshua ben Levi became a popular folk hero. Even Bacher, whose writing and approach is rather historical, finishes his biographical sketch of Joshua ben Levi with these words: X

<sup>12</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sanhedrin 14A

"Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was one of those sages who merited the revelation of Elijah. Even with the Angel of Death he had contact. And thus it was that Rabbi Joshua ben Levi became the beloved giant of legend in ancient days and in later times as well."<sup>13</sup>

In the article on the life of Joshua ben Levi in the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Herschel Revel cites a view by a scholar named Marmorstein that Joshua ben Levi may have been identified as the central figure of a messianic movement which may account for his place in legend. I have included as an appendix some of Marmorstein's own views concerning the activity of Joshua ben Levi.

<sup>13</sup> Bacher, Wilhelm, Agadot Palestinian Amoraim, Volume I, Tel Aviv: D'vir Publishing Company, 1924, p. 30.

#### IV - LITURGY AND RITUAL

One of the major concerns of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was ritual and prayer. The rabbis occupied themselves with the formal structure of the service trying to give it meaning, sense, and roots. Even then they concerned themselves with the "sitz im leben" of prayer, though not in our scientific sense of the words. And so it is that we find Joshua ben Levi's liturgical opinions throughout the Talmud. Tefillah was to be recited between the first and the second recital of the Shema in the morning prayers.<sup>14</sup> The Geula was not to be joined to the Tefillah in the evening because deliverance came in the morning.<sup>15</sup> Among the many arguments Rabbi Joshua had with Rabbi Jochanan, one X concerned the recital of the Shema. One was to recite the Shema at rising and again at going to bed. Not only that, but it was to be recited in the synagogue and then again in the home at night before retiring.<sup>16</sup> He also held that a man may recite the Shema twice in one night to make up for the night prior and the morning after. The case was decided by him when some scholars became drunk at the wedding feast of his son and were in a stupor for a prolonged period of time incorporating the time they should have recited the evening Shema.<sup>17</sup> A laborer could recite the Shema under the peculiar condition of the labor involved.<sup>18</sup> An oft repeated statement of Joshua ben Levi's was that a person lying on his back would be physically stimulated to have an erection and his sexual desire, thus aroused, would nullify the intent of

14 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 4B

15 *Ibid*.

16 *Ibid*.

17 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 7A

18 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 16A



the act of praying especially a prayer as important as the Shema.<sup>19</sup>

Our rabbi was not only concerned with the mechanical aspects of liturgy but with the intention and purpose of the suppliant. He was lenient and sensible in his pronouncements and usually took cognizance of the circumstances of the people involved in the decisions. A man could recite the Shema if he was walking in a dirty alley if he covered his mouth. Others argued one should not recite the Shema in a place of filth.<sup>20</sup> The Tefillah was one of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi's major interests and his rulings concerning the recitation thereof are numerous. He reminds us that they were instituted in place of sacrifices and that the morning Tefillah could be recited till noon just as the morning sacrifices lasted until noon.<sup>21</sup> A man was only to start the repetition of the Tefillah if he knew he could finish it before the reader reached the sanctification.<sup>22</sup> When the time for evening Tefillah arrived it was forbidden that a man should eat until he had recited it.<sup>23</sup> As stated before, Rabbi Joshua was not only concerned with the act but with the intention. Commenting on the verse, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,"<sup>24</sup> X he substituted the word Hedrath for Hadrath (trembling for holiness) X claiming that the verse should teach us to pray with greater concentration.<sup>25</sup>

- 19 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 13B, also see Niddah 14A
- 20 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 24A
- 21 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 26B
- 22 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 21B
- 23 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 28A
- 24 Psalm XXIX:2
- 25 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 30B



A man riding on an ass, he also stated, should recite the Tefillah without descending lest he be distracted by worrying about the whereabouts and actions of the animal.<sup>26</sup> Not only the words, but the physical movement of the one praying was commented upon by our Amora. When one says the Tefillah, he noted, one should bow at the proper places "until all the vertebrae of the spinal column become loose, even to the little vertebrae."<sup>27</sup> Slightly exaggerated? Maybe! But the intent is clear. Other suggestions were made concerning the suppliant and his fellows. One was not to stand within four cubits of one reciting the Tefillah,<sup>28</sup> and the suppliant himself was to refrain from activity for an hour after its recitation.<sup>29</sup>

A leniency in the matter of worship does not necessarily mean that the rabbi took the prayers lightly: If one forgets to mention the New Moon in his prayers, no matter how far along he is, he must go back to the Abodah and include it.<sup>30</sup> It is also interesting to note that it was Joshua ben Levi who instituted the practice of taking three steps backward upon the recitation of "May he who maketh peace in His high places, make peace for us and for all Israel..." Since this phrase comes at the end of the Amidah prayer one takes three steps backward as if one is taking leave of his master. It

- 26 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 30A
- 27 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 28B
- 28 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 31B
- 29 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 32B
- 30 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 29B

was a sign of submission and respect to God.<sup>31</sup>

Another item that struck my fancy concerned Joshua ben Levi's use of two terms or phrases of speech considered modern. The first is the poetic line, "He also serves who stands and waits," and the second is the concept of the "iron curtain" that separates the nations of the conflicting ideologies of Communism and Democracy. Both phrases were used together in a completely different context. They pertain to the worshipper as related to the Object of worship par excellence. "Even a man standing at the doorstep of the temple participates in the sacrifice....for even an iron curtain cannot interpose between Israel and their Father in heaven."<sup>32</sup> A similar, though in some way unrelated thought, is expressed in the passage: "He who listens to grace is as though he responds."<sup>33</sup> The attitude of the worshipper was to be one of humility before the Most High, according to Rabbi Joshua. He stated that the lowly of spirit were held in high esteem by the Holy One, Blessed be He. It was equivalent to one who had performed all the sacrifices - for sacrifice was seen by a verse in Scripture as a contrite heart.<sup>34</sup>

Propriety, dignity, and respect for the sacred were paramount in Joshua ben Levi's teachings to his sons, his disciples and to his colleagues. This is indicated from his very first utterance in the

- 31 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Yoma 53B
- 32 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Pesachim 85B
- 33 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Sukkah 38B
- 34 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Setah 5B, Sanhedrin 43B

Talmud. "One may discuss in the presence of a dead body only things related to the dead."<sup>35</sup>

The synagogue was the center of focus of what Joshua ben Levi called sacred. He might even serve as a guide to modern congregants. "Come early to the synagogue."<sup>36</sup> "A man should rise early for the privilege of being among the first ten even if a hundred come in after him."<sup>37</sup> Since the direction in which one prayed was important, it was Joshua ben Levi who said, "Let us be grateful to our ancestors for showing us the place of prayer."<sup>38</sup> He was also quoted as saying that nothing should separate the person who prays from the wall, presumably of the synagogue. This was probably to help him concentrate.<sup>39</sup> He taught his sons to complete their Parshiot together with the congregation, twice in Hebrew and once in the Targum.<sup>40</sup> He also ruled that it was not permitted for a man to pass behind a synagogue while the congregation was praying.<sup>41</sup> This was probably for superstitious reasons as well as for common courtesy and decorum.

The Torah scroll and respect for its sanctity as well as the practices related to its use were often commented upon by Rabbi Joshua.

- 35 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 3B
- 36 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 8A
- 37 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 47B
- 38 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Baba Bathra 25A
- 39 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 5B
- 40 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 8B
- 41 Ibid.

There was a custom that on fast days the ark was taken out to an open space. In searching for a reason Rabbi Joshua came up with this suggestion: Once Israel had a vessel that they kept hidden (and thereby sacred and protected) but now that they have sinned it has been rendered common.<sup>42</sup> It was customary to take the Torah out of the synagogue to a place of safe keeping from service to service. It was Joshua ben Levi who ruled that the congregation was not to leave the synagogue until the Torah was back in its place of safe keeping.<sup>43</sup> It was also Rabbi Joshua who informed us of the procedure of the Maftir in the synagogue. The Maftir must read a section from the Torah before he reads the prophetic portion. He cannot begin the prophetic recitation until the Torah has been rolled up. The decorations on the ark were not to be removed while the congregation was present.<sup>44</sup> This meant that the Shammosim and the Gabbaim or their equivalents had responsibilities to maintain decorum as did the congregants.

Concerning the weekday readings of the Torah, a minimum of ten verses were to be read, one for each member of the quorum,, otherwise called "men of leisure".<sup>45</sup> One was to begin with no less than three and end with no less than three.<sup>46</sup> A synagogue, furthermore, could

- 42 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Rosh Hashonoh 16A
- 43 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Sotah 39B
- 44 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Sotah 39B
- 45 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Megillah 21B
- 46 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Megillah 22A

be converted into a Beis Hamidrash as long as the Torah was magnified therein.<sup>47</sup> Always a protagonist of what in Yiddish is called "shtume aliyahs", Joshua stated that the one who rolls up the Torah has a great reward.<sup>48</sup>

In reference to a minyan (quorum) Rabbi Joshua ruled that an infant could not be counted as a third person when such a person was required for the recitation of the Birkat Hamazon, or grace after meals. Under dire circumstances an infant could be counted in a quorum of ten. Nine Jews and a slave would also suffice if a kosher minyan could not be obtained.<sup>49</sup>

During the service the priests were required to bless the people and were themselves blessed by the act, according to Rabbi Joshua.<sup>50</sup>

There was a deep strain of the genuinely spiritual in Joshua ben Levi. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his recitation of and attitude toward blessings. The impregnation of holiness into the mundane was achieved by the Jew by ascribing sanctity to sound, to smell, to events, and to human encounters. Nature and history were all ultimately the results of God's good graces and due recognition was accorded them by the recitation of blessings. "Praised be those who recite the beracha over wine before and after their meals on Shabbos and festivals," ruled Rabbi Joshua.<sup>51</sup>

- 47 Soncino, Talmud, ibid: Megilla 27A
- 48 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Megilla 32A
- 49 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 47B
- 50 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sotah 38B
- 51 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 42B



One was to recite blessings after all seven types of grain.<sup>52</sup>

If one saw a river in his dreams he was to recite the proper benediction upon his awakening. The same applied to birds or grapes or mountains or dogs, to lions, and yes, even if one dreamt he were shaving there was an appropriate benediction to be recited and a verse from

Scripture to remind one of the all inclusive nature of his religion.

One should be sure to rise early and recite the appropriate verses for such a dream.<sup>53</sup> Rabbi Joshua expressed the force of berachot

not only in relation to things but incorporated the human element as well. "One who sees a friend after a lapse of thirty days says, 'Blessed be He who has kept us alive, preserved us, and brought us to this season.' If one had not seen his fellow man for a period of twelve

months or over, one said 'Blessed be He who revivest the dead.' "<sup>54</sup>

It might seem quite foreign to us who look upon physical deformity with great discomfort, sometimes pity, and often revulsion, that

Joshua ben Levi commented that upon seeing a pock marked person

one says, "Blessed be He who makes strange creatures."<sup>55</sup> By this

statement Joshua ben Levi asked his fellow man to see the wondrous,

the sacred and the handiwork of the Almighty even in the seeming

distortions of nature. This was not an idle gesture on the part of

Rabbi Joshua. We are told of a fellow who suffered from a disease

52 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 44A

53 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 56B

54 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 58B

55 *Ibid*.

akin to St. Vitus Dance with whom Rabbi Johanan could not study, for he felt that this nervous condition would hamper him in his academic pursuits. Fully consistent with his character and his utterances, our Amora studied with the man.<sup>56</sup> The sacred was manifest in man. Joshua ben Levi, like Diogenes, took the lamp and searched for the sacred, and usually found it. As stated before, the beracha was the verbal response to the recognition of the seemly and the sacred, be it sensual or of the soul. A man who sees the sky in all its purity says: "Blessed be He who has wrought the work of creation."<sup>57</sup> Joshua ben Levi went so far as to suggest that one should fall on his face upon seeing a rainbow or hearing a clap of thunder.<sup>58</sup> This was rejected, however, because it was reminiscent of cult worship. Yet the idea is clear. In Buber's language it is "I" meeting "Thou" freely and fully and with eyes open and heart pouring forth.

The polarity between private meditation and public practice was indicative of the strain between what one might call "natural religion" as opposed to "institutionalized religion". Although the problem was not as serious for the rabbis as it is for our generation it did find expression in some of the practical problems of the organization of the liturgy. An example in which our Amora took a part is found

56 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Kethuboth 77B

57 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 59A

58 *Ibid*.



in the tractate Aboda Zara. "Though it has been decided that private prayers for personal needs may only be inserted in the benediction 'Who heareth prayer' yet if one is disposed to offer supplication after the Prayer to the extent of the Day of Atonement service he may do so."<sup>59</sup>

59 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Aboda Zara 8A

## V - SCHOLARSHIP

The criterion of spiritual aristocracy was knowledge for the Rabbis. Wisdom was not achieved by osmosis and he who attained it through diligent labor was to be honored. God had revealed Himself through the written word. How could the illiterate take part in this revelation? Certainly a second-hand knowledge was possible but the static-free first hand contact was not to be sneezed at. "The Scholar Class" was not a term of derision. It was a term of endearment and esteem. The eggheads were respected and valued members of society. One's house was to be opened to them for the privilege of sitting at their feet and drinking in their words with thirst.<sup>60</sup>

Scholarship was not a fad, but the foundation of life. The daily needs of the people were entrusted to the hands of the scholar-rabbis and upon them depended that which was fit to eat and drink, the hows and whys of sexual conduct, the celebration and commemoration of holidays- everything from the fundamental to the fancy, from the basic to the beautiful. The angry young men were harnessed and the old, far from being forgotten, as in our society, were revered.

Now this was the proclaimed ideal, but people needed to be reminded of their responsibilities toward the realization of that ideal. Early in the game Hillel reminded the people that "an empty-headed man cannot be a sin fearing man, nor can an ignorant person be truly pious."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Aboth I:4

<sup>61</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Aboth II:6

Our Amora, Joshua ben Levi, was exceedingly sensitive to the problem of the respect due to scholars, not because he was one of them, but because he recognized their vital place in society, and even more, I believe, because of their being transmitters of the will of God. It was primarily in their latter capacity that we can best fit the attitude of Joshua in his teachings concerning the scholars. It is for this reason that the attacks against the detractors of scholars and teachers is so vociferous. "Whoever makes derogatory remarks about scholars after their death is cast into Gehinom...even at a time when there is peace in Israel."<sup>62</sup> Since derogatory remarks concerning the scholars at a time of war meant that one was insulting the leadership, political and military, it would probably have been rendered an act of treason. A further reading of the text tells us that in twenty-four places recorded in the Mishna the Beth Din excommunicated a man for an insult to a teacher. When Joshua was asked to enumerate all twenty-four he used many comparable cases even though they may not have been directly stated as such.<sup>63</sup> The attitude of respect was not only to be maintained for the scholars directly but also to be maintained in the presence of a scholar. For an example I would cite Joshua's definition of an apikoros. "An apikoros is a person who insults his neighbor in the presence of a scholar."<sup>64</sup> Always mindful of the human situation, and the frail shell into which wisdom may have been poured, by the Almighty, Joshua ben Levi reminds

62 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berakoth 19A  
63 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berakoth 19A  
64 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sankedrin 99B

us. "Be careful (to respect) an old man who has forgotten his knowledge through no fault of his own."<sup>65</sup> This little quote has so many ingredients that make up Joshua ben Levi's personality. One must respect age - not for the chronological achievement, which is not of man's doing but for the toil of knowledge attained that gave man stature in the fulness of his years. And if that knowledge became dim through no fault of man's - the shell was to be respected for the knowledge it once contained. The human element is always what made our Amora human. It is said that Joshua ben Levi was once reproached by his old adversary Rabbi Johanan for taking a child to the synagogue without the proper head gear. Rabbi Joshua answered that the education of the child was more important than the headgear of the Rabbi.<sup>66</sup>

Knowledge - forgotten, actual, and potential is that which lubricates the ideal society. Joshua ben Levi was its mentor and protector, expounder and defender: and always its practitioner par excellence.

65 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berachot 8B

66 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kiddushin 30A

## VI - WOMEN

Much has been written both factually and theoretically about Judaism's attitude towards women. Some have viewed Judaism as a religion where women were considered chattel without rights, privileges, or obligations. Others have viewed Judaism's attitude toward women in an equally untrue light, "accentuating the positive, and eliminating the negative." One scholar cites women's passive roles in marriage and divorce contract procedures. The other describes in glowing detail the contribution of Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir, who was noted for her wisdom and her piety. Of course the truth lies at neither extreme, but somewhere in the middle - always dependent upon time and circumstance.

One of the most positive and sympathetic pictures of womanhood is found in the writings of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi. It was Rabbi Joshua who placed the responsibility of certain rituals upon women by virtue of their participation in the historical events that grounded certain holidays and festivals. Over and above the pleasant phrases that women are the rulers of the household thereby giving them the thrills and joys of washing and cooking and mending - in preparation for the holidays and festivals - Rabbi Joshua lets them participate in the ceremonies.

"Women are obligated on the four cups of wine because they too were included in the miracle!"<sup>67</sup> This lets them enjoy Passover. Making matzo balls is not enough. Men and women now drink the cups of freedom, redemption, deliverance, and salvation together, thanks to Joshua ben Levi's recognition of their participation in the historical event.

<sup>67</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Pesachim 108A

Women are obligated to light the Hanukkah menorah since they too took part in the miracle."<sup>68</sup> Women were no longer relegated to the position of latke makers but rejoiced with their husbands and families in the remembrance and commemoration of the rededication of the Temple by the Maccabees.

"Women are under obligation to read the Megillah since they also profitted by the miracle then wrought."<sup>69</sup> How fitting that women were not obligated to participate in a festival commemorating a heroine's deliverance of her people out of a dangerous situation. Once again it was Rabbi Joshua ben Levi's pronouncement that gave women not only the Z'Chus but the Chova in much the same way that Esther was given the Chova by Mordecai.

Women, to Joshua ben Levi, were creatures who merited sensitive conjugal treatment. With a full recognition of their essentially passive natures it was the responsibility of the husband to provide sexual fulfillment. It was also the duty of the husband to abstain during the "unclean" periods of his wife. Since this was God's world, Rabbi Joshua saw God rewarding his righteous servants for obeying Him but the nature of the reward as we shall see is grounded in what may be termed psychologically valid grounds. "Whoever compels his wife in marital obligations will have unworthy children."<sup>70</sup>

68 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Shabbat 23A

69 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Megilla 4A, also Arakin 3A

70 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Erubin 100A



Hand in hand with this aforementioned statement is his charge, "He who separates himself from his wife near her period will have sons worthy to be teachers."<sup>71</sup>

Sex is part of a happy home. The phrase "then thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace,"<sup>72</sup> was used by the rabbis and particularly by our Amora to ground a man's marital relations in Scripture. Linked to this verse was the observation in Genesis that "thy desire shall be to thy husband."<sup>73</sup> Recognizing this, Joshua ben Levi stated: "Whosoever knows his wife to be a God fearing woman and does not duly \*visit her is a sinner."<sup>74</sup> Not only is the man culpable for his own action but Joshua recognized that if a man does not fulfill his wife's needs he may lead her to sin. Unchaste action and adultery were unforgivable crimes to the rabbis but the human element always had to be taken into consideration and spoken up for in the most positive manner possible. Rabbi Joshua is also quoted as saying, "It is a man's duty to visit his wife when he starts on a journey."<sup>75</sup> One must certainly agree that this insurance policy for a contented home, though not infallible, is most certainly exceedingly sound.

71 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shebuoth 18B

72 Genesis III:16

73 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yebamoth 62B

74 Ibid.

75 Deuteronomy 6:5



Somewhere I was taught that the term "impulse" was first used by the rabbis without adjectives denoting that it had both positive and negative elements. Although the adjectives "good" and "evil" were subsequently appended, the evil impulse in many cases retained a positive character. One was to serve God with both impulses.<sup>76</sup> Without the "evil" inclination men would not build houses or societies, engage in business, and raise families.<sup>77</sup> And so we realize that the sexual nature of the "impulses" are very important. The most vital function it does have, however, is procreation. The pressures of population explosion did not occur to the rabbis, for was it not God's universe and did He not provide? The large and the good families were men's precious assets. To raise one's children to the point where they had children of their own was a man's great reward. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi commented: "As soon as your children have children there will be peace in Israel; for they will not be subject to Halitza or to Levirate marriage."<sup>78</sup> These two institutions were often a source of personal pain and even involved blackmail and extortion.

These and other areas of womanhood were discussed by our Amora. Meyasha, his grandson, quotes Rabbi Joshua as to whether large breasts on a woman were to be considered a deformity.<sup>79</sup> Indeed a

<sup>76</sup> Sefre to Deuteronomy 6:5

<sup>77</sup> Raba to Genesis IX ad Genesis I:31

<sup>78</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kethuboth 50A

<sup>79</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kethuboth 75A

far cry from other societies where a woman's breasts are considered a material asset. Rabbi Joshua ruled that a nursing woman should be given an extra allowance for wine for that helped lactation (breast feeding).<sup>80</sup>

He had many a battle over the Ketubah and Get with his old adversary Rabbi Johanan.<sup>81</sup> They fought about the intention clause in the Get.<sup>82</sup> Joshua argued that a Get should be accepted as valid if it is contested to avoid deceit as well as heartache.<sup>83</sup>

In dealing with women, Rabbi Joshua was more than a legalist. He was a human being aware of the frailties of womanhood and of its obligations and its rights, conjugal, ritual, and legal.

<sup>80</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kethuboth 65B  
<sup>81</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kethuboth 57A  
<sup>82</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Gittin 5B  
<sup>83</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Gittin 19A

## VII-GEHENNA AND THE WORLD TO COME

Fully consistent with his age and the Weltanschauung of his day, Joshua ben Levi believed in a world to come as well as a place of punishment - otherwise known as Gehenna or Gehenom. He was not adverse to considering people likely candidates for either place. We have already noted that those who cursed scholars were sent down, if that was the direction thought of in those days.<sup>84</sup> "Gehenna is made deep for sinners and Paradise made for the righteous,"<sup>85</sup> was the core statement upon which others were based. Joshua, in one of his many number games, gave Gehenna seven names just to make the concept as colorful as possible. First and foremost he called it the Nether world. Then came his descriptive phrases - destruction, pit, tumultuous pit, miry clay, shadow of death, and the underworld.<sup>86</sup> As always our Amora's descriptions were apt and colorful. One now knows what to expect if he merited the nether world.

Now the world view of Joshua ben Levi had a few interesting elements in it with respect to the world to come. We read that once his son Joseph fell ill and was in a coma. When Joseph recovered, his father asked him what he had seen. Joseph answered, saying that he saw a topsy turvy world. Those who were on the bottom seemed to be on top and those on top seemed to be on the bottom. Whereupon Joshua ben Levi informed his son that he saw the world to come quite clearly.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berakoth 19A

<sup>85</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Erubin 19A

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesachim 50A

We also learn that he who appraises his ways in this life becomes privileged to behold the salvation of the Holy One, Blessed be He.<sup>88</sup> Joshua was especially noted for his unique use of Scripture to substantiate his point of view. "Whence is resurrection derived from the Torah?" Rabbi Joshua inquired. He found the answers to this rhetorical question in the fifth verse of the eighty-fourth psalm, "Blessed are they who dwell in Thy house, they shall ever praise Thee." He reinforced his stand by poetic injunction, "He who utters a song of praise to God in this world shall be privileged to do so in the next world too."<sup>89</sup>

As Israel had a special place in the heart of Rabbi Joshua, so it had a special place in the world to come, provided of course, that the good deeds of Israel predominated. "All the good deeds which Israel does in this world will bear testimony unto them in the world to come."<sup>90</sup> These same good deeds will flutter like banners in the firmament on high.<sup>91</sup> Just to show that these statements were not just thrown "In die Welt Arein" Joshua reminded his listeners that "this day is the time to do the commandments of the Lord" for tomorrow may be too late.<sup>92</sup> This is a sentiment reminiscent of the popular saying in the Ethics of the Fathers "trust not thyself till the day of thy death."<sup>93</sup>

- 88 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Moed Katan 5A
- 89 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sanhedrin 91B
- 90 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Aboda Zara 2A & 4B
- 91 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Aboda Zara 4B
- 92 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Aboda Zara 3A
- 93 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pirke Aboth II:5

A very interesting anecdote of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi's comes down to us in which he and Rabbi Johanan likened Israel to an olive tree. I believe it bears mentioning here as an illustration of Joshua's conception of Israel and at the same time provides us with an insight into a peculiar strain in Joshua's adversary, Rabbi Johanan. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: "Why is Israel likened to an olive tree? To tell that just as the olive tree loses not its leaves either in the summer or the winter time, so Israel shall never be lost either in this world or in the world to come." Rabbi Johanan commented, "To tell you that just as the olive produces its oil only after pounding, so Israel returns to the right way only after suffering."<sup>94</sup>

A sine qua non of rabbinic thought was that there was such a thing as reward and punishment. It was Joshua ben Levi who put the seal on the Talmud with a classic use of gematria. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: "In the world to come the Holy One, Blessed be He, will make each righteous person inherit three-hundred-ten worlds for it is written 'That I may cause those that love me to inherit Yesh (numerical value of 310) and that I may fill their treasuries.' " <sup>96</sup> With this statement of promise, cryptic though it may be, the Talmud closes. Who are the righteous? In the narrow sense I would imagine them to be the lovers of Torah and in the universal sense those who follow Torah.

<sup>94</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Menahoth 53B

<sup>95</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Mishna 12



### VIII-SABBATHS AND FESTIVALS

The Sabbath is the most beautiful and important holiday of the Jewish calendar. This weekly respite from toil carries within it the fundamental concepts of Judaism. Subservience to God, the dignity of man, the thankfulness for the glories of creation, the foretaste of the world to come, all have their place in the philosophy underlying Sabbath observance. How profoundly Samson Raphael Hirsch put it when he said: "The person who observes the Sabbath places himself and all his endeavors into the service of God."

The skeleton of Sabbath observance was first to be found in Scripture. It was stated boldly and firmly in the zenith of the Pentateuch, namely the decalogue. First - "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy,"<sup>96</sup> and again its Deuteronomic setting, "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy."<sup>97</sup> It fell to the rabbis to put the flesh of actuality upon the skeleton, and in this work Joshua ben Levi took an active part.

He who recited the Kiddish before and after the meal on the Sabbath was praised,<sup>98</sup> Joshua argues, liturgically, that if the Sabbath fell on Yom Kippur it was to be specially mentioned during Neilah.<sup>99</sup> It was our Amora who often gave the Scriptural foundation for many of the ceremonies that marked the observance of the Sabbath. The distinctions between the Sabbath and the remainder of the week and the other distinctions enumerated in the Habdalah ceremony were all given bases in the Torah by Rabbi Joshua.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Exodus 20:8

<sup>97</sup> Deuteronomy 5:12

<sup>98</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Berachot 42B

<sup>99</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Shabbat 24B

<sup>100</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Pesachim 104A



The tithes, the erub, and the Sabbath lights are all given Scriptural foundation by Joshua ben Levi.<sup>101</sup> "And thou shalt know thy tent is in peace and thou shalt visit thy habitation and shalt not err."<sup>102</sup> When men did err the rabbis built their fences ever more firmly about the laws. Rabbi Joshua forbade the use of hot water on the Sabbath. The water was heated by the bathhouse attendants who often claimed that the water had been heated prior to the Sabbath.<sup>103</sup> Even then men tried to get away with excuses. There was to be no scraping and no cutting and no striking on the Sabbath to avoid even the suspicion of work.<sup>104</sup> A formula consistently found in tractate Shabbat has Simeon bar Pazzi quoting Rabbi Joshua ben Levi in Bar Kappara's name. One of these is most interesting. The three meals that are to be eaten on the Sabbath correspond to the travails of the coming of the Messiah, man's susceptibility to Gehinom and the wars of Gog of Magog. He who eats the Shalosh Seudos will be shielded from the above mentioned catastrophies.<sup>105</sup> Rabbi Joshua ruled that all animals that cause injury may be killed on the Sabbath. This is a characteristic leniency or our Amora.<sup>106</sup> Joshua was also more lenient when it came to the laws of Mukzeh as they related to the Sabbath. Various places had various customs and the people followed their rabbis' and teachers' customs until the matter became solidified into law. It is related that when

101 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 34A

102 Job V:24

103 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 40A

104 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 75B

105 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 118A

106 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 121B

Rabbi Abahu came to Joshua ben Levi things were less stringent than when he went to visit Johanan.<sup>107</sup> Almost every aspect of Sabbath is touched upon by our Amora from the recitation of the Vay'Chulu prayer + on Sabbath eve,<sup>108</sup> to the measuring of the town for the Erub to be constructed for the Sabbath.<sup>109</sup> He voiced an opinion that heathens could be "invited to participate in the Sabbath meals but not on festivals, probably out of fear of ritual contamination."<sup>110</sup> He permitted the lifting of the Unklai on the Sabbath provided that it was for medicinal purposes.<sup>111</sup> From the peripheral to the practical, from the historic to the halachic, the opinions of Joshua ben Levi on Sabbath and its observances were put down as part of the mainstream of thought in those formidable days. X

It was not the Sabbath alone that captured the attention of the sages. All of the holidays and festivals still lacked a certain solidity of practice. The impetus was to make the commemoration spiritually meaningful, historically valid, and free from the idolatrous practices of other cults. The business of establishing festival ritual was a problem in practical rabbinics.

Could one, for example, use the decorations on a Succah any of the seven days of Succos? Rabbi Joshua ben Levi ruled no by using the analogy of the Chanukah menorah that could only be used for sacramental purposes.<sup>112</sup> Referring to this menorah in and of itself, our Amora

- 107 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yebemoth 14A
- 108 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sabbath 119B
- 109 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Erubin 60B
- 110 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Bezzah 21B
- 111 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Aboda Zara 29A
- 112 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 22A

opined the view that its kindling fulfilled the Mitzvah of the Hanukah obligations, whereas others voiced the view that the Mitzvah was not fulfilled until the Menorah had been set down in a specific spot.<sup>113</sup> Rabbi Joshua also stated that all types of oil were fit for use in lighting the Menorah but that olive oil was far preferable because it yielded the clearest light.<sup>114</sup>

The obligation of reclining while eating the unleavened bread at Passover was stressed by Joshua ben Levi in his opinion that an attendant who reclines while eating Matza the size of an olive has fulfilled the commandment of reclining thereby proving that the act of reclining was obligatory.<sup>115</sup>

The personal piety and stringency of Joshua ben Levi set an example in the observance of religious holidays like Yom Kipper and Tish'a B'Av.<sup>116</sup>

Joshua ben Levi concerned himself with the measurements of the Succah,<sup>117</sup> the kind of leaves to be used for decoration,<sup>118</sup> the origin and use of the lulav,<sup>119</sup> and the obligation to recite a beracha on the first day, for that was the only day celebrated Mid'Oraissa, the other days being of rabbinic origin.<sup>120</sup> A man could light a lamp in his succah thereby indicating that it was no longer being used for ritual purposes.<sup>121</sup>

113 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 23A

114 Ibid.

115 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesachim 108A

116 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yoma 78A and B

117 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sukkah 7A

118 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sukkah 32A, also see Kiddushin 96B

119 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sukkah 44A

120 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sukkah 46A

121 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sukkah 48A

I believe it can be shown that whenever a rabbi wished to emphasize a certain ritual, even if it were an almost forgotten practice or was under attack by other rabbis - the defending rabbi's defense became vociferous. I would cite as illustrations the fights to get books like Ecclesiastes and Canticles into the canon. This kind of action may account for Joshua ben Levi's pronouncement that the annual recital of the scroll of Esther along with the greeting by the Divine Name and the Levit's tithe were among the three things enacted by the Tribunal Below and assented to by the Tribunal on High.<sup>122</sup> For the purposes of the reading of the Megillah in a city, Rabbi Joshua stated that a city was considered as being a unit as far as the eye could see.<sup>123</sup> If Purim fell on a Sabbath, Purim was to be discussed as all other holidays were discussed even if it was considered minor by nature.<sup>124</sup> The scroll of Esther was to be read on the eve of Purim and on the day of the festival itself.<sup>125</sup> By these and other statements, Joshua ben Levi defended Purim even to the extent of discoursing on the heredity of Mordecai.<sup>126</sup> X

122 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Makkoth 23B

123 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Megillah 2B

124 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Megillah 4A

125 Ibid.

126 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Megillah 12B

## IX- THE TORAH AND THE MAN

The blueprint that God used in creating the world was the Torah. In it were to be found all wisdom, past, present and future. "Turn it, turn it, everything is to be found therein."<sup>127</sup> Such was the extent of the Rabbis' view of Torah that they did not consider that anything new had come into the world since the great revelation at Sinai. All one had to do was search the text and search one's heart and the hidden became obvious, the dark became light, and ignorance made way for the knowledge that God had intended for the edification of men.

Our Amora, Joshua ben Levi, was a Torah conscious rabbi. We have discussed in another chapter the honor due to the scholar, and by scholar was meant one proficient in the Holy Writ. It was not only through book learning that one received Torah, so to speak. "He who gladdens bridegrooms at the bridal feast are privileged to acquire Torah through the five voices."<sup>128</sup> These five voices, by the way, were thunder, lightning, the shofar, and the voice of God. We find our sage describing the Torah and its giving by the Holy One, Blessed be He, with the rapture and the fragrance with which the spices are described in the Song of Songs. The giving of the Torah calls forth the poetic in the man Moses, the words of God, and the reaction of the choosing chosen people.<sup>129</sup>

127 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pirke Aboth V:25

128 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Berakoth 6B

129 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbath 88B



Our sage said, "If a man is on a journey and he has no company let him occupy himself with the study of Torah."<sup>130</sup> For the rabbis, and for Joshua ben Levi in particular, Torah had a personality all its own that could accompany a man when he was lonely, comfort him when he was sad, and be a healing balm to the afflicted. Rabbi Joshua further said, "If a man feels pain, let him study Torah."<sup>131</sup>

In the tractate Pesahim Rabbi Joshua discussed the meaning of the term "halleluyah". To him it incorporates the divine name and praise simultaneously. As opposed to the opinion of Rab who sees in the term many forms of praise with the divine name being an afterthought.<sup>132</sup> They are discussing twenty-six verses incorporating the theme of giving thanks, corresponding to the twenty-six verses of Psalm 136. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, playing the numbers game again, attributes the twenty-six verses to the first twenty-six generations by His love.<sup>133</sup>

Torah was a divine gift and was to be used with the utmost care and consideration. This law of God's which Moses set before the children of Israel was binding. The reward or punishment of Torah depended a great deal on how a man used it. So we find Rabbi Joshua's statement, "If a man is meritorious it is the medicine of life; if not, it is the poison of death."<sup>134</sup>

130 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Erubin 54A and Sotah 46B

131 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Erubin 54A

132 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 117A

133 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 118A

134 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yoma 72B



Torah was the gateway to freedom, but a man had to be willing to accept the price that freedom brought, and that price was responsibility. No one was forced to go free. Rabbi Joshua ordained that a man is forbidden to teach his slave Torah if the slave is unwilling to learn.<sup>135</sup> A very interesting corollary to this observation is that if a man bought a slave from an idolator and the slave refused to be circumcised, the owner could bear with him for twelve months. If by that time the slave had not been circumcised, he was obliged to resell him to the idolator from whom the slave had been bought.<sup>136</sup> I am not sure whether this opinion had any practical consequences but it certainly does give us an indication of Rabbi Joshua's point of view vis a vis a household dedicated to Torah even if only symbolically. The act of emancipation for a slave was if his master placed phylacteries on him.<sup>137</sup> If a man sold his slave to a heathen he could be penalized by having to ransom him for as much as ten times his value and some readings even say one-hundred times the value.<sup>138</sup>

"He who teaches his son Torah, the Writ regards him as though he had received it from Mount Sinai."<sup>139</sup> We know from the personal life of Joshua ben Levi that this was no idle quote. He taught his son, Rabbi Joseph, who himself became a teacher and he even taught his grandchildren Torah and listened to their recitation of the parshiot every Friday afternoon prior to the Sabbath.

135 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kethuboth 28A

136 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yebamoth 48B

137 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Gittin 40A

138 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Gittin 44A

139 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kiddushin 30A

Rabbi Joshua commented that whosoever occupies himself with the Torah, his possessions shall prosper. As always he gives scriptural proof which he found in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa.<sup>140</sup> Moreover he noted that in places where students studied Torah, Israel was victorious in war.<sup>141</sup> Naturally quite a few verses had to be juggled and interpreted to give his observation foundation.

Probably no saying of Joshua ben Levi's is as well known as the one found in the second Baraitha of tractate Aboth. "Every day a Bath Kol goes forth from Mount Horeb, and makes proclamation and says: 'Woe unto men on account of their contempt towards the Torah, for whoever occupies himself not with the study of Torah is called the rebuked one.' "<sup>142</sup>

Joshua ben Levi was dedicated to Torah. He expounded it day and night, praising its adherents and denouncing its detractors. He felt himself to be a responsible agent whose main function it was to disseminate Torah from his academy at Lydda. He fought for the spiritual application where it was warranted. Dedication was combined with wisdom and love of God reigned supreme. Joshua ben Levi was a teacher of Torah in his home and in his academy. He was the exemplification of Torah whether he stood in front of his wife, his son, his students, the patriarchs, or the representatives of the government in Caesaria.

140 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Abodah Zara 19B  
141 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Makkoth 10  
142 Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Aboth-Baraitha 2

X- YOREH YOREH YODIN YODIN - HE WILL SURELY TEACH AND JUDGE

The rabbinate of the century in which Joshua ben Levi lived dealt primarily with the practical problems of the daily lives of those in their charge. Their work was more practical than theoretical. The inspiration was heavenly, but the work was earth-bound. While the ideal of the Temple was to be preserved, the institution of the synagogue, because it existed, had to take priority. Life goes on amidst all kinds of tragedies and upheavals and the rabbi had to serve as the anchor for the storm-tossed people. Our Amora once mentioned that the merit of the patriarchs had been exhausted by the time of Elijah and it was now up to the rabbis to lead on their own merit.<sup>143</sup> There were laws to be administered and those laws had to be just. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi taught his son that he who errs is to have one law.<sup>144</sup> Judges who administered the law had to bear the responsibility of that law. "If ten judge a case, the chain hangs on the neck of all."<sup>145</sup> The rabbi had to judge the utility of foods and objects so as not to violate any ritual or taboo. For that which was forbidden as food was forbidden for use.<sup>146</sup> For example, just as one could not eat chazer, so one could not use pig skin to play football. Sound, <sup>\*</sup>sight, and smell however did not involve trespass.<sup>147</sup> Our Amora was an authority on different kinds of rolls, seeded and plain, Palestinian and Babylonian.<sup>148</sup> Our Amora was concerned with the

143 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 55A

144 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Shabbat 68B

145 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sanhedrin 7B

146 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 23B

147 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 26A, also Kerithoth 6A

148 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 48B

the construction of bath houses.<sup>149</sup> Our Amora was concerned with shatnez.<sup>150</sup>

X

In case the Temple was ever rebuilt, Joshua ben Levi reminded those under his sway that the cleanliness of blood and water at sacrifices was very important.<sup>151</sup> He concentrated on the way offerings were to be brought to the rebuilt Temple<sup>152</sup> and who was to deal with the Holy of Holies.<sup>153</sup> He preached on the sacrificial cult and atonement procedure.<sup>154</sup> On many occasions he used the illustration that the shew bread that was brought to the altar was as fresh from week to week as when it was first brought. This miracle tended to emphasize that the greater miracle of the restoration of the Temple would some day take place and the people had best be prepared.<sup>155</sup>

Back to the problematical. The problems of Yebomoh and Halitza were vital to women. On this problem Joshua and Johanan continually fought. Is intercourse or halitze preferable for the girl involved and which solution to her marital status is more in keeping with the law?<sup>156</sup> Was the issue that came forth of an Israelite woman by the hands of an idolator a bastard or was he only exempt from the priesthood as Rabbi Joshua opined?<sup>157</sup>

X

- 149 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 112B
- 150 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yoma 69A, Bezah 14B
- 151 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 17A
- 152 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yoma 19B
- 153 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yoma 49A
- 154 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yoma 60B
- 155 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Hagigah 26B
- 156 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yebamoth 39A and 39B
- 157 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Yebamoth 45A

These questions were of searching and immediate importance to those who stood waiting for the decision of the rabbi. What kind of a Ketubah was a woman entitled to after twenty-five years of marriage?<sup>158</sup> When is property hefker?<sup>159</sup>

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was an authority on health. A man who sleeps in the open during certain summer months or one who eats turnips with beef will get the chills, and the cure for diarrhea is dardara.<sup>160</sup> Rabbi Joshua had to decide what constituted legal possession.<sup>161</sup> At what point did wine deteriorate into vinegar.<sup>162</sup>

Some problems that Joshua discussed have a most contemporary ring. He had a dispute with Rabbi Johanan as to whether the Romans or all people under their sway should celebrate the Kalends, which is the Roman new year. Joshua felt it was all right to celebrate the secular new year secularly without any of the pagan or religious influences. Johanan took the stricter view. What rendered something piggul?<sup>163</sup> The zenith of practical rabbinics would best be found in tractate Hullin 126B where our sage discusses the kosher status of a mouse.

How does one tax a priest who became a shochet?<sup>164</sup> Why are mules called yemin?<sup>165</sup> What is the legal age for a practicing Levite? All these questions were part of the ministerial

- 158 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kethuboth 104B
- 159 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Nedarim 45A
- 160 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Gittin 70A
- 161 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Baba Kama 52A
- 162 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Baba Bathra 96A
- 163 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Zebhim 13B and 44B
- 164 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Hullin 123B
- 165 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Hullin 7B

X



work of Joshua ben Levi. He was particularly adept at discussing the laws of shechita. He commented on the size of the windpipes of animals, as well as on the types of brain the animal possessed.<sup>166</sup> What happens if the gizzards of a fowl turn green? And if the top of its gullet is perforated? Is it terefa?<sup>167</sup>

X

Our Amora commented that there can be no impregnation of a clean animal with an unclean one, a larger one from a small one, a small one from a large one, a domestic beast from a beast of chase.<sup>168</sup>

If a woman miscarried what is the state of the fetus that issued forth?<sup>169</sup> And at what age, eleven or twelve, is a girl considered mature?<sup>170</sup>

Yoreh Yoreh-Yodin Yodin, the rabbi will teach and the rabbi will judge. The variety of responsibilities, communal, social, political, and ritual weighed heavily on the brow of our brilliant Amora. There is hardly an area of interest in the world of his day on which he did not voice an opinion or give a decision or make an observation. In all this, he remained meek, modest, and saintly. "Meekness," he once said, "is the greatest virtue of all."<sup>171</sup> He reproved people who went with people who were stuck up for how could anyone be stuck up in a world which is entirely in the hands of God? As he put it: "One should not walk four cubits with a haughty mein 'for the whole earth is full of His glory!'" <sup>172</sup>

- 166 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Hullin 45B
- 167 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Hullin 56B
- 168 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Bekoroth 7A
- 169 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Niddah 25A
- 170 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Niddah 45B
- 171 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Abodah Zarah 20B
- 172 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kiddushin 31A



## XI- OTHER THOUGHTS

I believe that we have covered the major areas on Joshua ben Levi's long and industrious career as aptly illustrated in the Babylonian Talmud. I found that I was still left with a collection of that Amora's wisdom which, I felt, I could not in good conscience neglect. Most of them reflect that strain of his thoughts that I have chosen to call "the human element."

Commenting on the verse "There shall not be male and female barren among you or among your cattle." The question posed itself: Are we to be put on the same level as our cattle? Joshua ben Levi offered this solution. Male barrenness meant that your house had no scholars and female barrenness referred to the prayers of women that they not be barren and that these prayers be not fruitless before the Lord.<sup>173</sup>

How does one explain away the sin of the generation of those who received the Decalogue first hand? The Israelites, claimed Joshua ben Levi, made the Golden Calf only in order to place a good argument in the mouths of the penitents who had to rely on the efficacy of repentance.<sup>174</sup>

It is questionable whether this next contribution is the handiwork of Joshua ben Levi, according to Soncino, but it is in his spirit nevertheless. He gave seven names to the Evil Inclination: They

<sup>173</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Bekoroth 44B

<sup>174</sup> Soncino Talmud, *ibid*: Aboda Zara 4B

were; Evil, Uncircumcised, Unclean, Enemy, Stumbling Block, Hidden One, Stone. As always verses were found to support each name.<sup>175</sup> He did say, however, "Happy is the man who rules over his inclination like a man."<sup>176</sup>

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi would not go to visit a house of mourning, we are told, save to that of one who has gone childless.<sup>177</sup> In the same line of understanding that marked his feeling for all human beings, especially the childless ones it is said, "A man who is childless is accounted as dead."<sup>178</sup>

It must have done the hearts of the old Zionists good when they saw the comment of disgust pronounced by Joshua ben Levi when he went to visit the vineyards of Gabla and saw the clusters of grapes hanging fruitfully on the vines of the Arabs. It sometimes does one's heart good to see that so pious a man as Rabbi Joshua could occasionally be angered by a simple natural event.<sup>179</sup>

Always a man of propriety and good taste we can readily understand why and how this gem has come down to us. "Three things did Rabbi Joshua ben Levi say in the name of the men of Jerusalem. 'Do not practice immodesty (frequent places where immodest sights are seen, like rooftops) on account of the incident (David and Bathsheba) which occurred; if your daughter has attained puberty, free your slave and give him to her; and beware of your wife with

175 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Sukkah 52A

176 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Aboda Zara 19A

177 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Moed Katan 27B

178 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Nedarim 64B

179 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Kethuboth 112A

her first son-in-law.' " Sage advice in all three instances, taking full cognizance of the human element. The old rabbinic function of the inculcation of morality was certainly well vested in Joshua ben Levi.<sup>180</sup>

Although the homilies of Joshua ben Levi were treated in a separate thesis by Martin Katzenstein in 1950, I feel this example of our Amora's understanding heart will put us in good stead. "Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: 'When the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Adam, 'Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee,' tears flowed from his eyes and he pleaded before Him: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Shall I and my ass eat out of the same crib?' But as soon as the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: 'By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread,' his mind was set at rest."<sup>181</sup> A Labor Day sermon of the highest calibre, is it not?

In the introduction I stated that I would not want Joshua ben Levi as my anthropology teacher. His statement that all creatures of the creation were brought into being with their full stature, capacities, and beauty would not necessarily jibe with Darwin.<sup>182</sup> Still and all, the rabbi, not being an anthropologist and limited by the knowledge extant in his day was right in his realm of the poetic

180 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 113A

181 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Pesahim 118A

182 Soncino Talmud, ibid: Rosh Hashana 11A

when he proclaimed the beauty of the world in which he dwelled and the magnificence of the creatures that surrounded him. He truly saw the world as watered from the Garden of Eden.<sup>183</sup>

To see the world through rose colored glasses is not all realistic nor wise but how comforting every once in a while to lean back with a teacher like Joshua ben Levi and see that indeed the world, for all its misery and sorrow, for all the frustrations and pains, for the most part looks very, very good.

## APPENDIX A

### Statements by Joshua ben Levi in Babylonian Talmud Not Dealt with in the Text of the Thesis

- |          |      |  |
|----------|------|--|
| Berachot | 7A   | On Peace (Expounds Verse)  |
|          | 22A  | On Act of Bathing  |
|          | 26A  | Torah Encased for Protection Against Pollution                     |
|          | 34B  | Act of Bowing during Tefillah by King, Priest, and<br>Ordinary Man |
|          | 51A  | Discussion with the Angel of Death                                 |
| Shabbat  | 33B  | Textual Foundation "Mouth of Utterer Must be Stopped"              |
|          | 46A  | Discusses Use of a Lamp on Shabbos                                 |
|          | 75A  | On Astronomy   |
|          | 105B | Quotes Bar Kappara on "Worthy Men"                                 |
|          | 119B | On Sabbath Prayers   |
|          | 156A | On Birth on Sundays  |
| Erubin   | 13A  | Identifies Term Disciple   |
|          | 46A  | Halachah on Erub   |
|          | 50A  | Donation of Loaves for Erub  |
|          | 82A  | Attempt to Understand Judah's Commentary on Mishna                 |
| Pesachim | 3A   | "One Should Not Utter Gross Expression with His Mouth"             |
|          | 36A  | Kneading Dough with Milk and Honey                                 |
| Yoma     | 3B   | Interprets Laasoth on Yom Kippur                                   |
|          | 10A  | Prediction Concerning Rome   |

Yoma	19B	On Temple Offerings
	69B	On Great Synod
	78A	On His Tish'a B'Av
Bezzah	25B	Old Man Carried on Sedan Chair on Festivals
Rosh Hashonoh		
	19B	On Adar
	20A	Witnesses for Moon
Taanith	3B	On Blessing for Wind
	8A	On Chastisement
	25A	On Rabbi Joshua ben Levi's Fasting for Rain
	26B	On Nazarite's and Priests Drinking Wine
Megillah	3A	On Greeting Men at Night
	3B	A City Has Men to Care for Synagogue. A Village Has not. City Defined for Purim
	10B	On Purim
Yebamoth	45B	On Offspring of Heathen
	60B	Quotes on Halacha
	65B	Conflict with Johanan
	75B	On Corona



Yebamoth	86B	Priests Described as Levites
Kethuboth	13B	On Intercourse with Heathen Captor
	19B	On Paid Bills
	25B	On Levite's Testimony
	27B	Testimony of Slave's Offspring
	57A	On Ketubah
	77B	Story of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and the Angel of Death
	96A	Slave-Master; Student-Teacher
	104B	Additional Ketubah
Nedarim	41A	Man's End
	45A	Property Hefker
	76B	On Halacha
Gittin	39B	Jacob ben Iddi Quotes Rabbi Joshua ben Levi
Kiddushin	33B	His Son and House of Nasi
	51A	On Tithes
	75B	Iddi Quotes Rabbi Joshua ben Levi
Baba Kama	52A	On Property Sale
	55A	On Hespel
	82A	On Boundary Rights
	115B	On Venom in Neighbor's Trough

Baba Metzia

- 9B Difference of Opinion
- 54B On Tithes

Baba Bathra

- 9B On Charity
- 25B On Facing during Prayer
- 96A On Wine into Vinegar
- 97B On Wine into Vinegar
- 116A On Disciple or Teacher
- 145B On Poverty

Sanhedrin 14A No Ordination Outside Palestine

- 20B Substantiates Halacha
- 43B On Evil Inclination
- 98A Story about Messiah
- 99A On Stored Wine

Aboda Zara

- 25A On Sun Standing Still for Joshua
- 30A On Kinds of Wine
- 32A On Quality of Wine
- 35A On Song of Songs Verse on Wine
- 39B On eating Gifts of Food
- 43A On Idolatry
- 44A On King David and Phylacteries
- 45B On Idolatrous Trees
- 57A On Wine Proclaimed Nezek
- 58A On Wine Proclaimed Nezek

Shebuoth 15B On Evil Spirits

Zebahim 13B On Piggul  
44B On Piggul  
52B On Residue  
88B On Atonement

Menahoth 26B On Priest's Sacrifices

Hullin 10A On Cleanliness of Water  
19A On Shechita  
24B On Age of Levites  
45A On Shechita  
45B On Shechita  
49A On Halacha  
56B On Shechita  
57B On Shechita  
85A On Shechita's Relation to Sacrifice

Bekoroth 11B On Tithing of Grain  
36B On Shechita Outside Palestine  
41A On Boil of Egypt

Arakin 16A On Atonement  
16B On Leprosy

Terumah    9B    On Sacrifices

          18A    On Sacrifices

          20B    On Sacrifices

Tamid      27A    On Priesthood

Niddah     18B    On Miscarriage and Sacrifice

          25A    On Miscarriage and Sacrifice

          29A    On Miscarriage and Sacrifice

## APPENDIX B

The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God by A. Marmorstein  
Oxford University Press London 1937

(80) A contemporary of Rabbi Yochanan, a teacher of Lydda, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, advances the teaching that the Exodus of Israel from Egypt was conditional on the erection of the Tabernacle; otherwise the liberation would not have taken place, or might have later on been annulled. (Tanhuma Iv ed. Buber p 36) The exegetical force of this Haggadic teaching appears so weak that one cannot help assuming that the idea of the Tabernacle was at this time sorely in need of apologetic support. The Law of the erection of the Tabernacle, as this teacher is endeavoring to imply, is of greater importance and significance than is commonly assumed.

(81) ... in the case of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi an indication is still at our disposal which makes it more than probable that in uttering these words he intended to defend this institution and its religious meaning against evil minded critics. He emphasizes in another homily the great blessing and source of welfare which the Temple has been to the Gentile world. (he sought to show that institutions were of the utmost importance now and in the future).

(85) Footnote 221 lists Rabbi Simon b. Judah as the reporter of Joshua ben Levi and therefore having many things attributed to him by his reporter.

(101) mentions that Rabbi Menasyah was the grandson of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi.

(135) About the middle of the third century a movement which disapproves of spreading Haggadic Lore in writing appears in contemporary literature. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is inclined to deprive the writers of such books of their share in the world to come. He is not less averse to those who look into, or read out of, such manuscripts. (Sof. 16).



(138) Although Rabbi Joshua ben Levi also confesses with great regret that he sometimes used a Haggadic compilation on Psalms but this may have been before his proclamation.

(141) Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, the third apponent of written and the writing X of Haggadoth, holds and altogether exceptional position in the history of the Haggadah. It would require a bulky volume to do justice to his Haggadic activity, and production which cannot be discussed here ... Legends and traditions of various sorts occupy a great space in this teacher's Haggadah. Their source may have been the so called Massoreth Haggadah, alluded to in some instances. They abound in anthropomorphistie thoughts and ideas. X The nature of these sources involves more or less pronounced anthropomorphism as is the case in all popular secular or religious takes and narratives. Significantly enough, these legends or tales about Biblical heroes, are supported by Biblical references, or are skillfully interpolated into the Scriptures. .... One has to have recourse to the allegorical method Zeira perpetuated the teachings of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi... The anthropomorphic trend in Rabbi Joshua Levi's Haggadah may go back either to his earlier way of thinking and teaching, which he later on abandoned, or to his dependence on his sources, Haggadic traditions and compositions, the origin of which is in most cases unknown to us.

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