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Chochmah in the Aggadah

Lee Bycel

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
New York, New York

Date: April, 1979

Referee: Professor Eugene Borowitz

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
New York School

Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by Lee Bycel
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

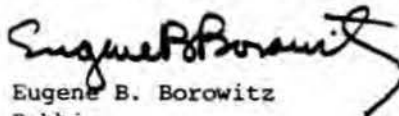
CHOCHMAH IN THE AGGADAH

Mr. Bycel has utilized the available indices and concordances to make a thorough study of the term chochmah (and some of its variants) in the aggadah. The rabbinic comments he has studied seemed naturally to organize themselves around four major themes: chochmah as a practical matter, the value of obtaining proper chochmah, the transcendental source of chochmah and the relation between chochmah and Torah as the rabbis saw it.

As with so many other concepts in rabbinic thought, chochmah takes its primary meaning from ordinary life and is then used by extension in a theological sense. The wisdom of ordinary affairs is not utterly different from that of Torah but there is a qualitative distinction between them, with "the wisdom of the nations" standing somewhere in between. Though much has been written about the way in which the rabbis equate chochmah and Torah, the author's close study of the texts indicates that the "equation" is one of subordination. Universal wisdom is not the equivalent of Torah in the rabbis' eyes -- and the latter phrase may be used here advisedly as there is no substantial rabbinic teaching to the contrary.

Mr. Bycel has been diligent, thoughtful and insightful. He has often had to correct initial impressions as a result of later study and his openness in this regard is particularly commendable. I am pleased to recommend this thesis for acceptance.

Respectfully submitted,


Eugene B. Borowitz
Rabbi

April 1979

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I am primarily indebted to Professor Borowitz. As my teacher, he has taught me the paramount lesson of study: to listen to the text and to think critically.

This thesis, although a major consumer of time, did not exist in a vacuum. My student pulpits have been a major part of my student life. I have worked with two great teachers - Rabbi Jack Stern and Rabbi Wolli Kaelter. Their insights into life and their love of Judaism have been my inspiration.

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Finally and ultimately, I thank my wife, Judy Pam, who shares with me, as I with her, in life and love.

Introduction

Purpose

The focus of this thesis is on the study of what the rabbis understood by the term chochmah. Wisdom is a term used frequently in the modern world, but its meaning is difficult to ascertain. Though people seem to have insight into what it is, standards for assessing who is wise and who is not wise are quite subjective.

Wisdom has been part of Western culture and thought ever since the Greeks placed great value on it. Chochmah has been a part of Jewish culture ever since its frequent mention in the Bible. Chochmah is the skill of Bezalel, the brilliance of Solomon. In modern times the chochmah of Proverbs, Kohelet, and Job has been classified as a genre of literature, the Wisdom Literature. It is in this literature that chochmah speaks and chochmah appears to be universal. The purpose of this study is to reveal how the rabbis defined chochmah, and to see what role chochmah played in the world of Rabbinic Judaism.

The searching for a rabbinic definition of chochmah, perforce, necessitates the study of Aggadah. Bialik offers an insightful definition of Aggadah:

Aggadah, nursling of the spheres,
deals with what ought to be and what
might be; to read it is to learn what
have been the desires, the pre-
occupations, the ideals of the Jewish
people.¹

To study Aggadah is to study a literature that brings life to the soul of Judaism. To study Aggadah is to live, once again, the history, philosophy, values, and language of the rabbinic period. Thus, the tracing of one concept, such as chochmah, through the Aggadah, brings life to a wealth of rabbinic concerns.

Methodology

The import of the word chochmah in Rabbinic Literature will be explored by way of the "linguistic-conceptual approach."² The focus is on the word, chochmah, itself. Tracing its occurrences throughout Rabbinic Literature, best reveals what the rabbis meant by this word. The efficacy of this approach is described by Max Kadushin, "The only authentic way to express abstractly a rabbinic value is by means of the term for it found in Rabbinic Literature."³

The first advantage of this method is that linguistically arranged indices are readily available. The Otzar Haaggadah, for example, presents a comprehensive collection of Talmudic and Midrashic passages dealing with specified concepts. A cursory reading of the concepts listed in Otzar Haaggadah is an expedient way of discovering what was of concern to the rabbis. The unlisted word or concept, most probably, was not of importance to them. Chochmah is listed in Otzar Haaggadah

128 times, and numerous times in Kassovsky's concordances. The frequency of its appearance, alone, invites careful study.

The second advantage of this method is that "it serves to limit the field of inquiry without sacrificing conceptual material."⁴ Thus to fully understand chochmah, one cannot limit his reading to the one sentence where chochmah occurs. The context in which it is found may be more revealing than the actual sentence. Although the rabbis may discuss chochmah indirectly, without ever using the word chochmah, there seems to be no systematic method of getting at the majority of the material except through the linguistic approach.

An apparent problem with this approach is that the chosen word creates its own limitations. For example, chochmah has synonyms in the Bible - binah, tevunah, daat. This problem, however, is readily soluble. First, in the Otzar Haaggadah, binah and tevunah are listed under the heading of chochmah. Implicit in this hierarchy of listings is that these synonyms played merely a subordinate role with respect to the rabbinic development of the concept of chochmah. Second, other linguistic indices contain very few references to these synonyms. Again, the secondary import of these words is apparent.

Moreover, the study of chochmah necessitates a search for the wise person, who was the chacham. In this regard,

Otzar Haaggadah, listing 137 references to chacham, is invaluable. The most relevant of these references have been incorporated into this study.

The research for this thesis proceeded in the following manner. 1). Chochmah was selected as a viable topic by locating its numerous occurrences in Otzar Haaggadah. 2). To develop an overview of the subject, the author read the secondary literature on wisdom: Encyclopedia⁵₆ Judaica, The Jewish Encyclopedia,⁷₈ Schechter, Moore, Montefiore, and Urbach. In addition, Bialik's Sefer Haaggadah, and Ginzberg's Legends of the Jews were utilized. 3). The author then collected all references listed in Otzar Haaggadah, and in the indices of H.J. Kassovsky to the Mechilta, Talmud, and Tosefta, and the indices of B. Kassovsky to the Sifre and the Sifra. 4). Then, all references to wisdom in the English translations were researched, using the Soncino Midrash and Talmud, and Braude's version of Pesikta d'Rav Kahana and Pesikta Rabbati. 5). After exhausting the linguistic approach, several central Biblical verses were traced by means of the verse indices of Hyman Sefer Torah ha-Ketuvah vha Mesorah: Torah, Neviim u'Ketuvim.

Once all the texts on chochmah and wisdom were collected, they were each studied. Translations were done to enhance understanding of the specific passages. The material was then organized into major themes, which after

many changes and rearrangings, became the basis for an outline of this project.

Structure

The structuring of this thesis was by far the most difficult and time consuming part of the work. The rabbis' understanding of chochmah does not fit into neat, organizable classifications. The material is not concrete, but abstract. The possible organizational categories are, thus, myriad. Professor Borowitz and the seminar students spent hours with the author helping to structure the material. The key to this arduous task, is to let the material shape itself, and not to impose more than is necessary, twentieth century conceptions upon it. The final framework consists of five chapters.

The first chapter attempts to provide an understanding of chochmah as the concept develops in the Bible and the Apocrypha. In order to understand the rabbinic conception of chochmah, the Biblical backdrop is essential. At times, the rabbis used the word chochmah as it was meant in the Bible; at other times, they altered its meaning. Only after knowing the Biblical backdrop can the dimensions of tradition and innovation be perceived in the rabbinic concept of chochmah.

The second chapter considers the practical meaning of chochmah. Next, the great value of chochmah is considered:

how one can utilize chochmah both to one's benefit and to one's detriment.

The fourth chapter focuses on God as the source of all chochmah. Finally, in the last chapter the relationship between chochmah and Torah in the rabbinic period is examined.

In sum, this study will illustrate how the initial Biblical view of chochmah has been enlarged, from its transformation into a "universal concept" in the wisdom literature to its ultimate rabbinic conceptualization as Torah, the way of life.

Notes - Introduction

1. H.N. Bialik, Halachah and Aggadah.
2. Dan Dorfman, Faith in Rabbinic Literature, unpublished Rabbinic thesis, p.4.
3. Max Kadushin, The Rabbinic Mind, p. 2.
4. Mark Golub, Love in the Aggadah, unpublished Rabbinic thesis, pp. i-iv.
5. Solomon Schechter, Aspects of Rabbinic Theology.
6. George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era.
7. C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology.
8. Ephraim Urbach, The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs.

Chapter One

Chochmah in the Bible

In order to understand fully the rabbinic conception of chochmah, it is imperative to study chochmah in the Bible. The methodology for revealing the meaning of the word chochmah in the Bible is twofold. First, the word chochmah need be traced in every one of its listed occurrences in the Mandelkern Concordance. By such an exploration, the various Biblical definitions of chochmah will come to light. Secondly, the word chacham must likewise be traced. This second process will, primarily, be a searching for who, in the Bible, is considered "wise", and how that "wise" person acquired his "wisdom", or chochmah.

In the Mandelkern Concordance, the word chochmah appears 147 times, while chacham appears 155 times. Appearing less frequently is the archaic form of chochmah, chochmot and the verb form of chacham which appears 26 times. Significantly, the majority of references to chochmah are found in what is now referred to as the Wisdom Literature - Job, Proverbs, Kohelet - appearing 180 times compared with 73 occurrences in the Historical Books, 41 times in the Prophets, and 13 times in the Psalms. To the extent that it is possible, the chochmah of the Wisdom Literature will be considered separately from the chochmah of the Historical Books and the Prophets.

The definition of chochmah extends far beyond the English translation of "wisdom". As will be seen, there

are many different meanings of the word chochmah. Chochmah is the skill of the craftsman or the inspired artist; it is Solomon's ability to be a judge of his people and to lead them in the right way; it is the practical wisdom of life and the ethical principles which make one happy. Chochmah is the ability to interpret dreams; it is an understanding of God and his will; it is an endowment of God to the world, manifested in the Creation and in all interreactions that God has with the world.¹ Thus, chochmah can not be rendered simply as wisdom. In some cases, the words chochmah and chacham will not be translated; while in many cases, a definition that fits the particular context will be offered.

The first instances of chochmah in the Bible relevant to this discussion are in reference to a specific skill, namely a knowledge and an ability to do certain types of labor. Bezalel was endowed with a chochmah to do any kind of work; he was a designer, a master craftsman:

He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, chochmah, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft and has inspired him to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, to cut stones for setting and to carve wood - to work in every kind of designer's craft - and to give directions.²

Bezalel's chochmah was specific, referring to his skill to be used in building a mishkan for God. In the context

of the mishkan and its construction, several different types of chochmah as a skill are mentioned. God gives the instruction to all those who are skillful (chochmah)³ that they should make Aaron's priestly garments. The chochmah of women pertained to their making of the mishkan's curtains. Their skill was in spinning, specifically⁴ the spinning of goat's hair. All the workers who helped in the construction of the mishkan, contributed their chochmah. In each instance, chochmah refers to a specific skill.

Solomon, when building a House to the Lord, was likewise in need of skilled workers. Solomon sent for Hiram of Tyre who was known for his skill, (chochmah)⁵ ability, and talent for doing work in bronze. Similarly, the skill of metal workers working on the⁶ sanctuary of God is considered chochmah.

Significantly, both Bezalel and Solomon, two of the most formidable exemplars of chochmah in the Bible, have their chochmah associated with the building of the mishkan, the sanctuary for God. Though the chochmah of Solomon is primarily connected with "governance", a significant aspect of his chochmah relates to the building of the mishkan. This inspired chochmah is not an abstract phenomenon; rather, a concrete one. This "concrete" chochmah comes directly from God and is used to express the highest possible form of tribute to God. The chochmah of

Bezalel, then, is not that of a sage or what we today call a "wise man." His chochmah is the creative ability of a great artisan.

In one instance, however, chochmah refers to business sense. In the following passage, chochmah can best be translated as "shrewd":

By your shrewd understanding, (chochmah)
you have gained riches, and have
amassed gold and silver in your
treasuries. By your great shrewdness
in trade, you have increased your
wealth.⁷

Chochmah, here, is the knowledge of the world and the ability to deal shrewdly in the business world.

Moreover, the talent of the seaman is considered chochmah:

They reeled to and from and
staggered like a drunken man.
And all their wisdom (chochmah)
was swallowed up.⁸

The sailors utilized all their seamanship (chochmah) in attempting to make it through the storm. Only when they turn to God, however, do the seas return to normal. Only in reliance on God, can they again utilize their chochmah. Thus, even when chochmah means a certain skill, it is inseparable from God, useless unless He allows it to be utilized.

In order to reach a deeper understanding of chochmah, the persona of the chacham must be analyzed. Solomon is the paradigm of the chacham. In a passage, centering

about the shrine at Gibeon and Solomon's interest in building a House of the Lord, God asks Solomon what he would like. Solomon does not ask God for chochmah, but for an understanding mind in order to judge the people and to distinguish between good and bad.⁹ Thus, by not asking for riches, or the life of his enemies, but by asking for discernment in justice, God gives Solomon chochmah:

I grant you a wise and discerning
mind (Lav chacham) there has never
been anyone like you before, nor
will anyone like you rise again.¹⁰

Solomon utilizes this chochmah in making a difficult decision. Two harlots were living in the same house, and they both gave birth to babies. When one of the babies died, both harlots claimed that the living one was theirs.¹¹ They came to Solomon and asked him to render a decision as to whom should get the baby. Solomon ordered the baby cut in half. One woman responded with a willingness to give the baby to the other; the other responded by acquiescing to Solomon's "compromise". Solomon possessed of chochmah, gave the baby to the woman who was willing to relinquish it to the other:

When all Israel heard the decision
that the King had rendered, they
stood in awe of the king: for they
saw that he possessed divine chochmah
to execute justice.¹²

Chochmah, in this context, involves a moral or ethical component, and thus, differs from the inspired chochmah

of the artisan or the craftsman. The chochmah of Solomon was apparent, as well, in his administrative and political abilities. He was praised by Hiram for his ability to govern the people.¹³ Hiram and Solomon were¹⁴ able to make a treaty for their people. In addition Solomon's chochmah was manifest in his great encyclopedic knowledge of the world and in his literary ability. This knowledge made him wiser than the Kedemites or the Egyptians. People from all the world came to hear Solomon's chochmah:

His fame spread among all the surrounding nations. He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five. He discoursed about trees, from the Cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; and he discoursed about beasts, birds, creeping things and fishes. Men of all peoples came to hear Solomon's chochmah, sent by all the kings of the earth who had heard of his chochmah.¹⁵

Thus, Solomon's chochmah is a combination of his great encyclopedic knowledge, his ability as a leader and a composer, and his ability to read the human heart.

Unfortunately, only a few passages in the Bible refer to the wise woman, the chachama. Joab, in pursuit of Sheba son of Bicri, finally surrounded him in Abel of Beth-maccah.¹⁶ He was prepared to destroy the city in order to capture Sheba. A chachama from inside the city asked Joab why he was besieging the city. Heeding Joab's response that he was seeking Sheba, the chachama acted cunningly:

The woman came to all with her clever plan, (chochmahta) and they cut off the head of Sheba, son of Bichri and threw it down to Joab.¹⁷

Here chochmah appears to mean shrewdness, cleverness, or cunning. The chachama, realizing that her city was in mortal danger, made use of her political cunning to convince the city of her plan, thereby averting the city's doom. Such cunning is similar to the advice of Jonadab, a chacham,¹⁸ to Amnon on how to employ his wives to acquire Tamar.

Another reference to chachama portrays a similar display of guile. After Absalom had killed Amnon and was¹⁹ in exile. David could not get his mind off of Absalom. Joab, wishing to clear Absalom with David, sends a chachama from Tekoa to David. Joab instructs her as to her role:

Pretend you are in mourning; put on mourning clothes and don't anoint yourself with oil; and act like a woman who has grieved a long time over a departed one.²⁰

Here, the chachama is an actress of guile, employing her wiles to achieve a desired end.

As discussed above, there are some discernible, specific meanings to the word chochmah, such as skill. However, there are many references where any such specific meaning is difficult to ascertain. For the sake of precision, then, it is necessary to look at a few words with which chochmah and chacham are frequently found in parallel. The most common parallels are found in derivatives of בין,

'to discern,' 'to perceive,' 'to understand how to act.'²¹

In several instances, chochmah is found in parallel with navon, meaning 'perceptive,' 'insightful,' or discernment.'²³

אִישׁ נָכוֹן וְחָכָם

"a man of discernment and chochmah."²⁴

For the most part, the chacham and the navon seem to have synonymous functions.²⁵

Chochmah and binah, "understanding,"²⁶ frequently occur in parallel.²⁷

כִּי הוּא חִכְמָתְכֶם וּבִינָתְכֶם

"this is your wisdom and understanding."²⁸

The final derivative of is tevunah, "insight" or "understanding."

חִכְמָה וְתְבוּנָה

"wisdom and understanding."²⁹

They are frequently seen in parallel.³⁰ Binah in Deuteronomy 4:6 and in several other passages is the object of knowledge, which is understanding the aspect of chochmah.³¹

Chochmah is also frequently found in parallel to the derivatives of יָדַע, 'know.'³² יָדַע can emphasize either 'understanding'³³ or 'experience.'³⁴ It is da'at-knowledge, or more specifically in the wisdom literature 'discernment,'³⁵ or 'knowledge' that can be seen in parallel with chochmah.

וְאֵמְלָא אוֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּחִכְמָה,
וּבְתְבוּנָה, וּבְדַעַת, וּבְכָל מְלָאכָה.

"I have endowed him with a divine spirit of chochmah, tevnah, and da'at, and every knowledge in every craft."³⁶

Daat seems to represent in many cases the knowledge³⁷ aspect of chochmah.

These examples elucidate the point that there are many levels of meaning to chochmah. (Many times throughout the Bible, chochmah is used in a poetic or a literary manner.) By knowing the subtleties of its meaning and the meaning of its parallels one is able to gain a more comprehensive grasp of the concept of chochmah. A working definition of chochmah must include "understanding," "knowledge," and "wisdom."

Furthermore, chochmah is found in construct with lav³⁸ in several instances. The ancient Israelites regarded the heart as the center of both the mental and physical abilities. A person learned, thought, and remembered through the heart. The one who has the quality of 'chacham lav' seems to have knowledge, understanding, and insight.

The acquisition of chochmah will next be considered. But first, what is the benefit of possessing chochmah? The passages that most poignantly describe it as a benefit are all found in the Wisdom Literature. Chochmah has been³⁹ compared to a valuable treasure, and in a few instances as more precious than a treasure. Chochmah can protect a⁴⁰ person, as well as help him to avoid obstacles.⁴¹ The

possessor of chochmah⁴² can steer clear of trouble, and
can evade misfortune.⁴³

The central theme of all chochmah in the Bible is that God gives chochmah to those he chooses, whenever He so desires. Pharoah observes the חכמת אל of Joseph, and appoints him as head of the court. Pharoah chooses Joseph because God has made known to Joseph all that there is,⁴⁴ and there is none so wise as Joseph. It is God who⁴⁵ gives Joshua chochmah through the hands of Moses. Bezalel received his chochmah directly from God, as God explains to Moses:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
See, I have singled out by name
Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of
the tribe of Judah. I have endowed him
with a divine spirit of chochmah,
ability, and knowledge.⁴⁶

Solomon receives his chochmah directly from God.⁴⁷ In
short, God is the source of all chochmah.⁴⁸

Thus, chochmah in the Bible was a valuable treasure to be sought by many, but given by God to only a few. The concept of chochmah develops from that of the skill of Bezalel the craftsman, and all those who worked with the mishkan, to the encyclopedic knowledge and insight of Solomon. Ultimately, in the Wisdom literature, chochmah takes on a religious and ethical value.

The Wisdom literature of the Bible includes Proverbs, Kohelet, and Job. Proverbs is concerned mainly with providing⁴⁹ practical advice for "getting along" in the world.

The book consists of accepted teachings which the chachamim, wise men, taught in their schools for the students who came to them. Job is concerned with finding a satisfactory solution to the problem of why the righteous suffer.⁵⁰ Kohelet concerns itself with the question of man's purpose on earth.⁵¹ In the Apocryphal literature, the two main works of chochmah are the Wisdom of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon. 'Wisdom literature, in general, seems to reflect a school of "wisdom thought," concerned with the proper life that an individual should lead. Wisdom literature can thus be contrasted to the work of the prophets which was concerned with ethical conduct and individual responsibility, and to the work of the Torah which was to bring ideals into legislation.⁵²

Gordis, who has studied this literature extensively, as well as Professor Sperling suggest that the emphasis of the chachamim (the wise men) was not the religious observance of the priest, nor the revelation of the word of God by the prophet, but the instruction of people in life. Their instruction was both from the perspective of how to lead a moral life and how to answer troubling questions about life.⁵³ The Wisdom school in Israel was certainly not a unique phenomenon in the Ancient Near East. The international context of chochmah is acknowledged in the Bible itself. Solomon's chochmah is said to have been superior to "that of the people of the east" and of Egypt,⁵⁴ and superior to that of all men.⁵⁵ When the wise men of Egypt

and Babylon⁵⁶ are referred to, however, the reference is to magicians, astrologers, and experts in the interpretation of omens and dreams, rather than as authors of wisdom writings. One modern author writes about the chochmah of Mesopotamia:

Generally 'wisdom' refers to skill in cult and magic lore... Though this term is thus foreign to ancient Mesopotamia, it has been used for a group of texts which correspond in subject matter with the Hebrew wisdom books.⁵⁷

This chochmah of magic is akin to the skill that Joseph, a Biblical chacham, demonstrates in his interpreting of⁵⁸ dreams. In the international context, there is a reference in the Bible to chochmah being a quality of⁵⁹ the political counselors of pharaoh. Finally the chochmah⁶⁰ of the Phoenicians is mentioned.

Thus, to understand fully the context of Israelite wisdom literature, a brief survey of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature is essential. Egypt had great cultural influence on Palestine (until the Hellenistic period) because of its proximity to Palestine. Egyptian⁶¹ wisdom writings display two different tendencies. The first type (similar to Proverbs in the Bible) was conservative in outlook, teaching and inculcating the moral code and beliefs of the social tradition. The second (similar to Job and Kohelet in the Bible) was more intellectually oriented, questioning traditional values and beliefs from a

moral perspective. The thrust of both types of writings was that "the cosmic order and the moral order were to be one, to be realized by men in thought, speech, and behavior."⁶²

In Egypt the unifying principle was Ma'at, the comprehensive idea of order, truth, goodness, and justice which was considered a divine reality creating the world and the

⁶³
world of men. The most characteristic documents of Egyptian Wisdom literature, the so called Instructions, usually take the form of admonitions and advice given by a king or high officer to his son and prospective successor.

The Instructions of Amen-en-opet bears close resemblance⁶⁴ to parts of Proverbs. The father to son form of moral instruction, the didactic use of proverbs and precepts, are common to both Egyptian and Israelite wisdom literature.⁶⁵ Both literatures are concerned with exploring the problem of the meaning of life and justice.

The wisdom literature of Mesopotamia, the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, as well, had great influence on⁶⁶ the Israelite wisdom literature. This wisdom literature attempted to describe the human experience by way of adages, parables, and anecdotes. Some compositions dealt with the ethical and theological problems of the suffering of the innocent. One of these compositions is a monologue known⁶⁷ by its opening line as "I will praise the Lord of Wisdom." The second work, the so called Babylonian Theodicy, resembles the Book of Job in presenting the issues in the form of a

debate, in this case with a single friend instead of three.⁶⁸
 In general, the positions taken by the two sages in the
Theodicy correspond to those of Job and his counselors.
 These works and many others greatly influenced the Israelite
 wisdom literature.⁶⁹ Although there are differences
 between the Israelite wisdom literature and the wisdom
 literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the similarities in
 style and subject matter are striking. The themes such
 as practical guidance, the limitations of life, the problem
 of evil are common to both literatures. These common
 themes elucidate the point that Israelite wisdom literature
 did not exist in a vacuum.

The chochmah of the wisdom literature dealt with living
 and is, thus, different than that of skill or encyclopedic
 knowledge. Chochmah is a guide for the trials and tribu-
 lations of life. There is a wisdom school, which teaches⁷⁰
chochmah.⁷¹ Chochmah can be taught either through musar⁷²
 or etsah.⁷³ One is instructed in how to avoid folly.
 The teachings have a practical aim: to provide maxims⁷⁴
 for conduct, to give moral advice, and to teach the young.
 The chachamim of the wisdom literature are concerned with
 personal conduct and the establishing of a moral code.
Chochmah is more universal than Torah or Prophecy. Its
 concern is the individual, not the nation. Thus, the
 characteristic vocabulary of Proverbs lacks the distinctively
 "nationalistic" terms, such as "Zion," "Israel," "my people,"

etc., so prevalent in the Torah and the Prophets.

In numerous places in the Wisdom literature, chochmah
75 is praised and even personified. In Job 28, God knows
where Wisdom dwells:

God understands its way, and he knows
its place. For he looks to the ends
of earth, and sees everything under
the whole heaven; when he makes a
weight for the winds; and he weighs
the waters by measure. When he made
a decree for the rain, and a way for
the lightning of the thunder; then
he saw it, (chochmah) and declared it,
he established it, yea, and searched
it out. And to man he said, Behold,
the fear of the Lord, that is chochmah;
and to depart from evil is understand-
ing.⁷⁶

Chochmah, in this passage, is seen, examined, and inves-
tigated by God. His possession of chochmah is not a
theoretical knowledge of the world, it is his practical
control over it.

Chochmah is considered the oldest of all the works
of creation. God created chochmah first:

The Lord created me at the beginning
of his way (Wisdom speaking), the
first of His works of old. I was
set up from everlasting, from the
beginning, before ever the earth was.
When there was no depths, I was brought
forth; when there was no fountains
abounding with water. Before the moun-
tains were settled, before the hills
was I brought forth; while as yet he
had not made the earth, or the fields,
or the highest part of the dust of the
world. When he established the heavens,
I was there: when he drew a circle over
the surface of the deep: when he
established the clouds above: when the

fountains of the deep became strong:
when he gave to the sea its decree,
that the waters should not pass his
commandment: when he appointed the
fountains of the earth: then I was by
him, as a nursling: and I was daily his
delight, playing always before him: playing
with the universe, his earth, and my
delights were the sons of men.⁷⁵

The nature of chochmah in this passage has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. Marcus, Ringgren, Rankin, and Whybray all agree that chochmah in the Wisdom literature is an attribute of God. However, the problem for them is whether chochmah is a hypostatization or a personification. They question whether chochmah as a poetic personification adequately describes her development in Wisdom literature. Ringgren argues for the theory that chochmah is one example of the hypostatization of divine qualities.⁷⁸ He defines hypostasis as a "quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God, occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings."⁷⁹ He views the passage in Proverbs 8:22-31, "wisdom is not an abstraction or a purely poetic personification but a concrete being, self-existent besides God."⁸⁰ Ralph Marcus disagrees with this theory of hypostatization and views "wisdom" as a poetic personification.⁸¹ Marcus argues that hypostatization assumes the existence of an independent entity, and that chochmah certainly never appears as an independent deity in Wisdom literature. In the text of Proverbs, chochmah appears

not as a deity, but as a personification. Thus, chochmah speaks:

Wisdom cries aloud in the street;
she utters her voice in the squares:
she cries in the chief place of business,
at the entrance of the gates: in the
city she utters her words.⁸²

Based upon a close textual examination, the author concurs with the viewpoint of Marcus, that chochmah, though separated to a degree from God, never was regarded as a deity independent of God. A reading of Proverbs 8 clearly supports this thesis.

One final point is worth noting. Chochmah in the Wisdom literature is not associated with Torah. Among all the prescriptions of how to learn chochmah, the study of Torah is not listed. Obviously, one can become "wise" without being grounded in Torah. Chochmah appears as a universal.

In the Inter-Testamental literature, however, a relationship between chochmah and Torah is developed. In the Wisdom of Sirach (about 180 b.c.e.), chochmah becomes identified with the Law, Torah:

All this is the covenant book of God
Most High, the law which Moses enacted
to be the heritage of the assemblies of
Jacob.⁸³

The same association is found in Baruch (200-150 b.c.e.):

There upon wisdom appeared on earth
and lived among men. She is the book
of the commandment of God, the law that
stands for ever. All who hold fast to
her shall live, but those who forsake
her shall die.⁸⁴

Similar references can be found throughout the Wisdom of Solomon. The association of chochmah and Torah had not been made in the Wisdom books of the Bible. In the Bible, chochmah is elevated and praised. In the Apocryphal literature, chochmah becomes identified with Torah. The nature of that relationship in the Rabbinic Literature will be the subject of the last chapter of this thesis.

Notes - Chapter One

1. Helmer Ringgren. Word and Wisdom. (Lund: 1947). p. 127.
2. Exodus 35:31-34.
3. Exodus 28:3
4. Exodus 35:25
5. I Kings 7:14
6. I Chronicles 22:15
7. Ezekiel 28:45
8. Psalms 107:27
9. I Kings 3:9
10. Ibid., 3:10
11. Ibid., 3:16-22
12. Ibid., 3:28
13. Ibid., 6:21
14. Ibid., 5:26
15. Ibid., 5:11-14
16. II Samuel 20:14-15
17. Ibid., 20:16f.
18. Ibid., 13:1-5
19. Ibid., 14:1
20. Ibid., 14:2
21. Brown, Driver, Briggs. Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. p. 106
22. Ibid.
23. Jewish Publication Society, The Torah p. 75.

24. Genesis 41:33
25. Deuteronomy 1:13, 4:6, IK 3:12, IS 5:21 etc.
26. Brown, Driver, Briggs. p. 108.
27. Job 28:12 etc.
28. Deuteronomy 4:6
29. Exodus 36:1
30. I Kings 5:9 etc.
31. Isaiah 29:14; Job 28:12
32. BDB p.393.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p.395.
36. Exodus 3:L3
37. Jeremiah 4:22, Job 34:2
38. Exodus 28:3, etc.
39. Proverbs 2:L20
40. Proverbs 2:8,20
41. Kohelet 2:14,16
42. Proverbs 14:8
43. Proverbs 28:26
44. Genesis 41:38
45. Deuteronomy 31:9
46. Exodus 31:3
47. I Kings 3:10f.
48. Proverbs 2:6
49. O.S. Rankin Israel's Wisdom Literature pp.i-iv.

50. S.R. Driver An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, p.409.
51. Ibid., pp.467-469.
52. Robert Gordis. Koheleth-the Man and his World. pp.15-16.
53. Ibid.
54. I Kings 5:10-11
55. Genesis 41:8, Exodus 7:11.
56. Isaiah 49:9ff. Daniel 5:7ff.
57. Lambert. Babylonian Wisdom Literature, p. 1
58. Genesis 41:32
59. Isaiah 19:11-12
60. Ezekiel 28:8-9
61. R.B.Y. Scott. The Way of Wisdom p.26.
62. E.J. "Wisdom" p.559.
63. R.B.Y. Scott. p.26.
64. R.B.Y. Scott Proverbs p.XLVII.
65. Ibid.
66. Lambert, pp.21-25.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., pp.63-91.
69. Rankin
70. Job 15:18
71. Proverbs 1:2-6
72. Ibid., 1:30
73. Ibid., 14:24
74. Ibid., 1-9
75. Proverbs 1-9, Job 28

76. Job 28:23-28
77. Proverbs 8:22-31
78. Ringgren, pp.7-8.
79. Ibid., p.8.
80. Ibid., p.104.
81. Ralph Marcus, "On Biblical Hypostasis of Wisdom"
p.166.
82. Proverbs 1:20
83. Wisdom of Sirach 24:23-24
84. Baruch 4:1-2

Chapter Two

Practical Chochmah

The focus of this chapter is on the description of what chochmah is in its practical, everyday sense. The task of defining chochmah is like defining the indefinable. The definition of the rabbinic concept, chochmah, is as elusive as the definition of wisdom in the modern world. The rabbis' concern with chochmah is evidenced by its frequent occurrences in the Aggadah.¹ However, there are a paucity of passages that define chochmah. For the rabbinic mind, then, the definition of chochmah must have been clear. The first part of this chapter will examine those passages where the meaning of chochmah, in the ordinary sense, is readily identifiable. In some of these references, the meaning is explicit; in others, it is implicit. What one can do with chochmah once having attained it, will be the concern of the second part of this chapter.

Chochmah, in its most tangible sense, means a specific kind of skill. In a discussion of whether the shofar can be blown when Rosh Hashanah falls on shabbat,² the school of Samuel ruled that the blowing of the shofar and the taking of bread from the oven are kinds of chochmah and not melachah:

The shofar and all its preliminaries supercede the shabbat, these are the words of Rabbi Eliezer... He said, the verse "a day of blowing it will be for you." a day-even on shabbat? And in respect of what? Shall we say in respect of blowing (the shofar), but

the school of Samuel taught: "You shall do no servile work." The blowing of the shofar and the removal of bread (from an oven) are excluded as being a chochmah not melachah.³

Chochmah, then, is a category distinct from that of melachah. The concept of melachah includes all areas of human productivity that were used in building the mishkan.⁴ The limitations and extensions of melachah have been the subject of much comment.⁵ Chochmah as a legal category distinct from melachah,⁶ on the other hand, only appears in two other instances.

Both the blowing of the shofar and the removal of bread require a certain technical skill. Both skills, moreover, are essential for the observance of their respective holy days. Bread must be taken out to provide sustenance on the shabbat.⁷ The observance of shabbat, of course, is closely identified with the eating of shabbat meals.⁸ Similarly, the observance of the New Year⁹ requires the blowing of the shofar. Thus, it is unclear whether the removal of bread and the blowing of the shofar are considered chochmah because they are skills, because they are essential for holy day observance, or both. In any case, there is a category of chochmah, distinct from melachah, which includes the blowing of the shofar and the removal of bread.

Chochmah, in the context of spinning, also refers to a level of skill.¹⁰ The rabbis, in a discussion concerning

the making of curtains for the mishkan, distinguish between the chochmah of making the lower curtains and the chochmah¹¹ of making the upper curtains. The Rabbis interpret the verse "And all the skilled women spun with their own hands, and brought what they had spun, in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen,"¹² as referring to the chochmah involved in the making of the lower curtains of the mishkan. The verse "and all the women who excelled in that skill spun the goats' hair,"¹³ is interpreted as the chochmah involved in making the upper curtains of the mishkan. The Rabbis then conclude that the spinning for the upper curtains is a greater chochmah than that of the lower curtains.¹⁴ Similarly, in a gemara explicating the thirty-nine categories of melachah forbidden on shabbat,¹⁵ the Rabbis discuss the melachah of spinning. Here, again, they emphasize that the spinning from the goat is a chochmah that is superior to the chochmah of regular spinning.

Lest there be a confusion of terms, spinning is considered to be chochmah because of its connection with the building of the mishkan, all of which was achieved through the power of chochmah:

And let all among you who are skilled
come and make all that the Lord has
commanded.¹⁶

Melachah, of course, is defined as all work done in the construction of the mishkan. Spinning, therefore, is a type of chochmah that is forbidden on the shabbat. The

removal of bread and the blowing of the shofar, by contrast, belong to a category of chochmah distinct from melachah.

Spinning is the only contribution of women to the building of the mishkan. Likewise, the chochmah of women in the Aggadah is primarily limited to the notion that a woman's chochmah is in her spinning. In one passage, a chachama, a woman with chochmah, asked of Rabbi Elizer, "Why if all were equally responsible in the sin of the golden calf, why were there different death penalties?"¹⁷ This question of the chachama apparently reflected her knowledge of Torah and her ability to ask a proper question about it. As reflected in her question, the chachama knew that there were indeed three penalties for the sin of the golden calf: some had died by sword,¹⁸ others by the plague,¹⁹ and the rest by drinking of the water containing gold dust.²⁰ In his response to the chachama's question, Rabbi Eliezer completely discredits her knowledge of Torah,²¹ "There is no chochmah in women except with the distaff." He cites as his scriptural basis, "And all the skilled women spun with their own hands."²² Of the few passages in all of the Aggadah dealing with the chochmah of women, the above passage is the only one to imply that a woman's chochmah might be in Torah, an implication quickly rejected by Rabbi Eliezer.

The term chachama, however, is used to refer to a midwife:

ומילדין אח האשה בשבת וקורין
לה חכמה ממקום למקום.

And one is permitted to go from place
to place to summon a chachama (midwife)
to attend her.²³

Similarly, the chachama (midwife), after delivering a baby,
may return to her original place on shabbat.²⁴ Thus, in
the Aggadah, as in the Bible, the terms chochmah, chacham,
and chachamim - subject to a few exceptions - refer to
men.

In contrast to the chochmah of an artisan's dexterity,
chochmah can also be the skill of observation and calcula-
tion:

R. Samuel b. Nahman asked a rhetorical
question in R. Johanan's name: How do
we know that it is one's duty to cal-
culate the cycles and planetary courses?
Because it is written "for this is your
chochmah and your understanding in the
sight of the peoples." (Deut. 4:6)
What chochmah and understanding is in
the sight of the people? It is the
science of cycles and planets.²⁵

The importance of such calculation is made clear by
R. Zutra b. Tobiah's quoting of Rab that it is forbidden
to hold conversation with anyone who can calculate the
planetary courses but refuses to do so.²⁶

In this passages, the rabbis are reinterpreting the
words ushemartem and vaasitem from Deuteronomy 4:6 to
mean "observe" and "calculate." The chochmah involved
here is the science of astronomy, a science essential for
the fixing of the calendar and, as a consequence, the

timing of the Jewish festivals. Astronomy, first done by observation and later by calculation,²⁷ was considered by the rabbis to be a chochmah. In these few passages that have been cited are found the total discussion of chochmah as a skill.

Though the above passages focus on the "skill" of chochmah, chochmah has various other attributes. Chochmah can be passed on from generation to generation. During the last moments of Rabbi's life, the following incident occurred:

'I desire,' he announced, 'the presence of my younger son.' R. Simeon entered into his presence and he entrusted him with the sidrei chochmah. 'I desire the presence of my elder son,' he announced. When R. Gamliel entered he entrusted him with the tradition and regulations of the Patriarchate.²⁸

Because of the unique nature of this passage, one can only speculate as to its meaning. The orders or rules²⁹ of chochmah appear to be concrete and specific. One individual can instruct another in these rules of chochmah. They, thus, differ from the sidrei of the Patriarchate.

Furthermore, in many passages the rabbis attempt to make clear the distinction between the chochmah of the Jews and the chochmah of the non-Jews. The differences between these two systems of chochmah are important to the rabbis:

Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that two men (Jews were taken captive) on Mount Carmel, and their captor was

walking behind them. One of them said to the other, 'The camel walking in front of us is blind in one eye, and is laden with two barrels, and of the two men leading us, one is a Jew, and the other is a heathen.' Their captor said to them, 'You stiff-necked people, from where do you know this?' ...And the two men leading it, one is a Jew, and the other a heathen: because a heathen obeys the call of nature in the roadway, while a Jew turns aside.³⁰

The non-Jew then praised the Jews for their chochmah, "Blessed be He who made choice of Abraham's seed and imparted to them of his chochmah." Two types of chochmah appear in this aggadah. First, a Jew knows how to conduct himself in the world without slavishly obeying the call of nature in the roadway. Secondly, chochmah is the skillful powers of observation of the Jews. Though not as scientific as astronomy or as formal as spinning, this chochmah is a practical attribute.

A further difference between the chochmah of Jews and non-Jews is that the chochmah of non-Jews does not extend to Torah:

אם יאמר לך אדם יש חכמה בגוים
תאמין. הנה הוא דכתיב והאבות
חכמים מאדום וחבונה מהר עשו. יש
תורה בגוים אל תאמין. דכתיב מלכה
ושריה בגוים אין תורה.

Should a person tell you there is chochmah among the nations, believe it; as it is written, shall I not in that day, says the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and discernment out of the mouth of Esau. (Obad. 8) But if he tells you that there is Torah among the nations, do not believe it; because it is written, Her King

and Her Princes are among the Nations
(where) Torah is no more.³²

The rabbis in the above passage, explicitly distinguish the chochmah of non-Jews from Torah.

Chochmah, moreover, can mean a specific sort of knowledge, that is, gemara.³³ When R. Johanan spent time with the disciples of R. Oshai, he gained a knowledge of everyone's chochmah. A question is then rhetorically posed: could he have learned everyone's chochmah and not have learned any gemara? The answer, of course, is in the negative. For the Amoraim, there cannot be a chochmah distinct from gemara.

While the passage equating chochmah with gemara is unique to Rabbinic Literature, the passages where the chochmah of the Jewish people is identified with Torah are frequent. The most explicit of these is in the exposition of the Biblical verse concerning Bezalel:

וימלא אותו רוח אלוהים בחכמה בתבונה
ובדעה ובכל מלאכה.

And he has filled him with the spirit
of God in chochmah...³⁴

The rabbinic meaning of chochmah in this verse is that Bezalel was chacham in Torah,³⁵ שהיה חכם בחורה .

The relationship of chochmah and Torah will be the discussion of the last chapter of this thesis. However, it is important to keep in mind the premise that Torah and chochmah are closely identified in Rabbinic Literature. As discussed above, Torah sets the chochmah of the

Jews apart from that of other peoples. This contrast is strikingly apparent in the context of Greek chochmah.

The rabbis were aware of the chochmah of the Greek world. During the first centuries, the Jewish people confronted and interacted with Greek civilization.

Chochmat Yivanit, Greek wisdom, has been defined by Isaac Herzog as "a variety of subjects- literature, poetry, rhetoric, history, logic... Greek learning in a general sense."³⁶ By contrast, Rashi suggests that Greek chochmah is merely "gestures and signs."³⁷ Regardless of which description is more apt, the rabbis ban its study and place a curse on anyone who would study it: "Cursed be the man who teaches his son Greek chochmah."³⁸

This curse is poignantly described in a passage relating the struggles between the sons of Alexander Jannaeus.³⁹ Hyrcanus was outside Jerusalem, besieging Aristobulus within the city. The people within the city could, each day, send down gold coins in exchange for animals for the Korban-Tamid.

An old man there, who was learned
b'chochmat yivanit, spoke with them
b'chochmat yivanit saying, 'As long
as they carry on the Temple service,
they will never surrender to you.'
On the morrow they let down gold coins
in a basket, and hauled up a pig... they
declared, 'Cursed be a man who rears pigs
and cursed be a man who teaches his son
Greek chochmah.'⁴⁰

Here the man, a Jew, becomes a traitor to his people, giving away the secrets of their survival in Jerusalem.

Herzog argues that the man must have known more than the Greek language, for many people in Jerusalem probably knew Greek and would have understood and stopped the message.⁴¹ Herzog argues that the guards who did not speak Greek would never have let a message out in a language they did not understand, Greek. Herzog, therefore suggests that the man got the message through by speaking enigmatically, b'lashon chochmah.⁴²

This concept of lashon chochmah can best be understood in the context of a passage where Rabbi's maid would speak with his students.

אמהתא דבני רבי כי הוה משתעיא בלשון
חכמה אמרה הכי: עלת נקפת בכך, ידאון
נישריא לקיניהון. וכך הוה בעי דליחכוון
הוה אמרה להו: יעדי בחר חברתה מיוה,
וחתקפי עלת בכך כאילפא דאזלא בימא.

When Rabbi's maid indulged in lashon chochmah she used to say this 'The ladle strikes against the jar, let the eagles fly to their nests'; and when she wished them to remain at table she used to tell them, 'The crown of her friend shall be removed and the ladle will float in the jar like a ship that sails in a sea.' R. Jose b. Asiyan, when speaking enigmatically, used to say, 'Prepare for me a bull in judgment on a poor mountain; and when he inquired about an inn-keeper he spoke thus: 'The man of this raw mouth- what comforts does he provide?'⁴³

Lashon chochmah apparently means enigmatic speech. Thus, the traitor's message, "As long as they carry on the Temple-service, they will never surrender to you," is

merely an enigmatic way of telling the besiegers to stop sending the necessary animal. Chochmat Yivanit, then, is clearly more than the Greek language.

The concept of Greek chochmah is further elucidated in an aggadah where Ben Damah asked R. Ishmael whether he (Ben Damah) who has learned all of Torah may now learn Greek chochmah.⁴⁴ R. Ishmael responds with the Biblical verse, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night."⁴⁵ He tells Ben Damah that he should find a time that is neither day or night and then learn Greek chochmah. Implicit in this response is that there is never a time during which one will be free to study Greek chochmah. The study of Torah and the study of Greek chochmah are, by definition, mutually exclusive.

The rabbis, however, do not deny the existence of Greek chochmah, nor that some Jews were involved with it.⁴⁶ Greek chochmah was studied by Rabban Gamliel's pupils. Such study was permitted only because of the students' close association with the government. No other instances of Jews studying Greek chochmah exists. The use of the Greek language, by contrast, seems to have been allowed. Rabbi asks, "Why use the Syriac language in Eretz Yisrael, (where) either the Holy Tongue or the Greek language could be employed."⁴⁷

In sum, there are four extensive and explicit aggadot

that focus in on the curse and ban of Greek chochmah. The rabbis, concerned with Torah learning, view Greek chochmah as a rival. As an exception to the ban, Greek chochmah was learned by the Jewish ruling class for use in their dealings with the government. As a result, Herzog claims that there were "many Torah masters who were pro-⁴⁸ficient in Greek learning." The few texts on the subject of Greek chochmah tell us little of its exact nature, emphasizing, rather, the ban against it, and the ultimate priority of Torah learning.

Such is the extent of the passages where chochmah is identifiable in an ordinary sense. The next question to be raised is what one does with chochmah once he has acquired it. By examining the uses of chochmah, one can learn a great deal more about its nature.

In a discussion of the criteria for becoming a chacham, the ability to answer a devar chochmah is listed⁴⁹ as the main criterion:

(Of one who uses the phrase) "On the condition that I am a Sage," we do not say (that he must be) "like the Sages of Jabneh or like R. Akiva and his companions, but (that he is) one who can be asked a devar chochmah in any place (in any area about any topic) and he can answer it.

Devar chochmah is, thus, a type of question. The ability to answer this question is of vital importance to the Rabbis.

The precise meaning of devar chochmah is clarified in

a passage where the Alexandrians asked R. Joshua b.
Hananiah twelve questions.⁵⁰ The first three questions
were divrei chochmah, followed by questions of Aggadah,
nonsense, and the way of the world. The three questions,
divrei chochmah, concern unclean corpses, the marriage of
a divorced woman with a priest, and the sacrifices of
lepers.⁵¹ These three questions are halachic questions,
as contrasted with the three aggadic questions which follow.
The chacham who answers must have a knowledge of halachah,
a matter of memory, and have, as well, the reasoning ability
to apply his knowledge to these particular cases, a matter
of skill. Here chochmah is identified with halachah,
the quintessence of Torah for the rabbis.

There are various levels of a chacham's ability to
handle halachah. When Rabbah b. Hana was about to go to
Babylon, an inquiry was made to see if he was authorized
to decide cases of ritual law, monetary cases, or declaring
firstborn animals permissible for slaughter.⁵² He was
granted the authority to do all three. When Rav, who was
known in this passage for his "eminent chochmah", was
going to Babylon, the same questions were asked in the
same order. He was granted permission for the first two,
but he was not authorized to declare firstborn animals
permissible for slaughter. The passage goes on to state
that the reason he was denied such permission, is because
he already had enough status in Babylon because of his
chochmah, but that Rabbah b. Hana needed to be elevated

in status. Different capabilities are, thus, required to handle the various levels of halachah.

In another aggadah, devar chochmah refers to halachic knowledge. The setting is Ruth's gleanings of Boaz's fields and his subsequent inquiry about her. R. Eliezer states: "He perceived a devar chochmah in her behavior, two ears of corn she gleaned; three ears of corn she did not glean."⁵³ The devar chochmah that Boaz perceived was Ruth's knowledge of law. Ruth, as indicated by her action, knew the following laws of reaping: "Two sheaves together may be deemed forgotten sheaves; three together may not be deemed forgotten sheaves."⁵⁴ The devar chochmah, then, is a halachic knowledge or a halachic question. Chochmah is not philosophic or esoteric matter, or practical skill or observation, it is a matter of halachah. The generalized term has here received a specific interpretation. The one who knows how to answer a devar chochmah, knows the halachah and how to apply it to various life situations.

The ability to answer a devar chochmah is the ability to give halachic decisions and information. The chacham, invested with legal powers, is called upon to settle and give decisions concerning different legal matters. In a discussion of the method of determining whether the blood of a menstruant is clean or unclean, R. Hanina was praised

for his chochmah in method of examination.⁵⁵ The chacham⁵⁶ has power in the rules and regulations concerning vows.

Chacham is a term meaning Sage, teacher, a scholar's title less than Rabbi.⁵⁷ Talmid chacham is the student of the chacham. Both terms occur frequently in Rabbinic Literature, and in most cases they refer to Torah learning, particularly halachah. If the chacham was primarily involved with halachah, one can assume that halachah was the Jew's chochmah. There are very few passages where chacham refers to anyone but one who is involved in halachah. In one passage, the chacham is one who can interpret a dream: "The Emperor of Rome said to R. Joshua b. Hananyah: You Jews profess to be very clever (chacham). Tell me⁵⁸ what shall I see in my dream?"

The vast majority of these passages, however, identify chochmah with Torah and with halachah, the essence of Torah. The ability to answer the halachic question, the devar chochmah, is a major function of the chacham. After the removal of Rabban Gamliel as the head of the Academy, it is said of R. Eleazar b. Azariah, who was a candidate for filling the post, that he is so great a chacham that if anyone puts a question to him he will be able to answer⁵⁹ it.

The chacham expresses his chochmah by speaking. The heart (our "mind") is the container of chochmah; the mouth is the vehicle for its expression. The articulation of chochmah, or Torah knowledge, is one of its signs.

It is only after a chacham brings chochmah from the realm of the inner-knowledge of his heart to the realm of expression that his chochmah is complete. A story is told of a cask full of precious stones and pearls. Because it had a tight-fitting cover, the cask was put away in a corner. No one knew what was in it, until someone came and emptied it and then everyone knew what was in it.

"So the heart of Solomon was full of chochmah but no one knew what was in it, but when the Holy Spirit rested on him and he composed three books, all knew his chochmah.⁶⁰ The idea that one could be a chacham without the ability to express his chochmah is not found in Rabbinic Literature. The value of chochmah is in sharing it with the community, by rendering halachic decisions, and answering halachic questions.

Chochmah is given to those who know how to utilize it. In explicating the verse "He gives chochmah unto the chacham,"⁶¹ R. Jose b. Halafta cited a parable. He raises the question of why one is better off loaning money to a rich man than to a poor man.⁶² He concludes:

If the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave chochmah to fools, they would sit and meditate upon it in privies, theatres, and bath-houses; but the Holy One, gave chochmah to the chacham who sit and meditate upon it in Synagogues and Houses of Study.⁶²

Chochmah, then, cannot be passively received. Rather, chochmah necessitates the active participation of its possessor. The chacham has a readiness to learn, as Ben Zoma

has said, "Who is wise? He who learns from every man."⁶³
Thus, there is a human or emotional component to the
possessing of chochmah.

The chacham, therefore, is seen in contrast to the fool.
The fool wants to know when he can learn or possess the
whole law. The chacham, on the other hand, reads one
chapter every day until he completes the whole law.⁶⁴
The chacham is also viewed in contrast to the uneducated
man.

Seven things are in an uneducated man and
seven concerning a chacham. A chacham
does not speak in the presence of one who
is greater than he in chochmah, and does
not interrupt the words of his associate, and
does not hasten to reply. He questions
according to the subject and answers according
to the rule. He speaks of the first things
first, and of the last things last, and
concerning what he has not heard he says I
have not heard. He acknowledges the truth.
The opposites of these are found in the
uneducated man.⁶⁵

The chacham, then, is not a mere possessor of data.
The chacham uses the data. The chacham has certain human,
personal qualities.

In addition, there are a few examples of what
individuals have done with their chochmah. The rabbis
interpret the following text:⁶⁶

And Moses took the Bones of Joseph
with Him. This proclaims the chochmah
and the piety of Moses. For all Israel
were busy with the booty while Moses
busied himself with the duty of looking
after the bones of Joseph. Of him
Scripture says: "The wise in heart take
on duties." (Proverbs 10:8)

In the above passage, Moses is fulfilling an oath. The rabbis transformed the meaning of this Biblical text into a generalization with respect to Moses' chochmah- the doing of commandments.

A similar transformation occurs with respect to Bezalel, the Biblical exemplar of the artisan inspired with chochmah. In Rabbinic Literature, the concern with Bezalel is focused not on his craftsmanship, but on a different dimension of his chochmah:

R. Samuel b. Nahami said in the name of R. Johanah: Bezalel was so called on account of his chochmah. At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses; Go and tell Bezalel to make me a tabernacle, an ark and vessels, Moses went and reversed the order, saying, Make an ark and vessels and a tabernacle. Bezalel said to him: Moses, our Teacher, as a rule a man first builds a house and then brings vessels into it; but you say, Make me an ark and vessels and a tabernacle. Where shall I put the vessels that I am to make? Can it be that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to you, Make a tabernacle, an ark and vessels? Moses replied: Perhaps you were in the shadow of God and knew! 67

Bezalel has a knowledge of minhag ha-olam. When Moses reverses the order of God's commands, Bezalel knows from his practical sense that such is not the order in which to build. Moses' only explanation is that Bezalel, in order to have the same insights as God, must have overheard the conversation with God. What seems apparent, however, is that Bezalel's chochmah was in his knowledge of minhag ha-olam.

A clear pattern arises from the study of this matter. The rabbis were not primarily concerned with the chochmah that means skill. They mention it, but probably only because it was such a large theme in the Bible. Their concern, on the other hand, is with the abstract concept of chochmah. The best and most inclusive chochmah is Torah. In this regard, chochmah is best seen as halachah. One who knows halachah is called a chacham. His disciples are students of the chacham, emulating him in order to acquire his chochmah. Chochmah exists among the nations. The rabbis attempt to exclusivize chochmah, to mean Torah. The nature of the relationship between chochmah and Torah will be looked at in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Notes - Chapter Two

1. There are 128 references to chochmah in Ozer Haaggadah, David Gross.
2. In Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 117b, it is read Ishmael.
3. Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 131b
4. Mishnah Shabbat 7:2
5. Ibid.
6. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 117b, Rosh Hashanah 29b
7. Shabbat 117b
8. Isaiah 58:13
9. Leviticus 23:24
10. Exodus 35:26
11. Shabbat 99A
12. Exodus 35:25
13. Exodus 35:26
14. Shabbat 99a
15. Shabbat 74b
16. Exodus 35:10
17. Yoma 66b
18. Exodus 32:27
19. Exodus 32:35
20. Exodus 35:25
21. Yoma 66b
22. Exodus 35:25
23. Mishnah Shabbat 18:3
24. Erubin 45a

25. Shabbat 75a
26. Ibid.
27. Soncino Talmud Shabbat, vol. 1 p.356.
28. Ketuvot 103b
29. Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of Midrashic Literature
p. 958.
30. Sanhedrin 104b
31. Esther Rabbah 1:17
32. Eicha Rabbah 2:13
33. Erubin 53a
34. Exodus 35:31
35. Shemot Rabbah 48:4
36. Isaac Herzog, Judaism: Law and Ethics, p.183.
37. Rashi on Menachot 64b
38. Menachot 64b
39. Menachot 64b
40. Ibid.
41. Herzog. p.184.
42. Ibid.
43. Erubin 53b
44. Menachot 99b
45. Deuteronomy
46. Sotah 49b
47. Baba Kamma 82b
48. Herzog p.191.
49. Kiddushin 49b
50. Niddah 69b

51. Ibid.
52. Sanhedrin 5b
53. Shabbat 113b
54. Mishnah Peah 6:5
55. Niddah 20b
56. Nidarim 21b
57. Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of Midrashic Literature
p.463.
58. Brachot 56a
59. Brachot 27b
60. Song of Songs Rabbah 1:7
61. Daniel 2:21
62. Koheleth Rabbah 1:4,5
63. Pirke Avot 4:1
64. Devarim Rabbah 8:3
65. Pirke Avot 5:10
66. Mechilta Bashalach 1:1
67. Brachot 55a

Chapter Three

The Value of Possessing Chochmah

In the modern world, the possession of money brings with it many benefits. Similarly, attractive individuals receive certain benefits that other people do not. It is perhaps indicative of our times that people feel there is little benefit to be gained by reasoning, thinking, or having a foundation in a moral or an ethical system. The rewarding of the rich and the attractive are not unique to our modern age. The rabbinic world also emphasized that these qualities brought with them many benefits. In the rabbinic world, however, the benefits of possessing certain more "spiritual" abilities or qualities were also emphasized. One asset of great value was chochmah. Chochmah was an ideal, something to be sought. The achievement of chochmah brought with it various benefits. That topic is the focus of this chapter.

Chochmah was a quality of great importance in the rabbinic world. In an aggadah that is an exposition of the verse "And the priest that is highest among his brethren,"¹ the rabbis describe "highest," as the highest in beauty, in strength, in chochmah,² and in wealth. This same³ interpretation is offered in several different texts. These qualities are grouped together to form the ideal, not simply the priestly ideal, but the ideal for everyone.

Chochmah is desirable. In one text that discusses the importance of what one sees in a dream, it is said that if one sees Solomon, Ezekiel, the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Rabbi, or Ben Zoma, one may hope for chochmah.⁴

All of the people and the books mentioned, with the exception of Ezekiel, are commonly associated with chochmah.

Dreams, of course, were significant; as R. Isaac stated:

"A dream stands upon its foundation."⁵ Similarly, if

one sees a reed (kaneh) in a dream, one may hope for chochmah.⁶ The proof text used is the Biblical verse

"Get (kaneh) chochmah."⁷ In another context, if one dreams of having had intercourse with his sister, one may expect to obtain chochmah.⁸ The proof text utilized here is "Say unto chochmah, you are my sister."⁹

The importance of chochmah is best seen in an aggadah discussing the differences between the Biblical verses:

"For chochmah is better than rubies; and all the things¹⁰ that may be desired are not to be compared to it,"

and Proverbs 3:15 where desirable things חפצִים are changed to חפצִיךָ .

חפצִים these are mitzvot and good deeds
 חפצִיךָ these are gems and precious stones.
 R. Aha explained it in the name of R. Tanhuma son of R. Hiyya: My desirable things and your desirable things are not to be compared unto her (chochmah), for, but 'let him that glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me...' (Jeremiah 9:23)¹¹

In Jeremiah 8:22, immediately preceeding the proof text cited, the chacham is told not to glory in his chochmah, followed by the text that all his glory should be because he knows God. R. Aha has gone so far as to say that chochmah is more important than mitzvot, good deeds, and material wealth. Chochmah, in the sense of fear of God,

is the foundation of all else.

The high value placed on chochmah appears in other instances. Rabbinic Literature, at times, discusses who is to take precedence in certain situations. These discussions are tantamount to a ranking of who is more important. In one aggadah, the question is raised concerning the different orders in which the daughters of Zelophehad¹² are found in the Bible. In Numbers 27:1, when the discussion concerns inheritance, they are listed as follows: Mahlah, Noah, Haglah, Milcah, Tirzah. In Numbers 36:11, when the discussion concerns marriage, they are listed according to their age: Mahlah, Tirzah, Haglah, Milcah, Noah. Thus, Tirzah, the youngest daughter with respect to inheritance, becomes the second oldest daughter with respect to marriage, while the reverse is true for Noah. R. Ammi explains that the ordering of the daughters with respect to inheritance was done according to their order in chochmah. He offers the following reasoning:

בישיבה הלך אחר חכמה, במסיבה
הלך אחר זקנה.

At a (study) session priority is to be
given to chochmah; at a festive
gathering, age takes precedence.¹³

A "session" refers to a meeting where law is discussed, while a festive gathering is merely a social function. In applying the above principle, R. Ammi regards inheritance as a matter of law, thereby necessitating a listing in order of their chochmah. Since a marriage is a social or festive gathering, the marriage listing is in order of

their age. R. Ashi adds to the above principle:

This (applies) when one is distinguished
in chochmah and that when one is
distinguished in age.¹⁴

R. Ashi qualifies the general principle by making it applicable only to cases where the individual is distinguished in either chochmah or age. Unfortunately, R. Ashi offers us no criteria for determining whether one is distinguished in chochmah or not.

Listing in order of chochmah is discussed in a passage based on the following Biblical text:

Then Abraham fell upon his face, and
laughed and said in his heart, shall
a child be born unto him that is a
hundred years old? and shall Sarah,
that is ninety years old bear?¹⁵

¹⁶

The rabbinic text then explains that since Abraham was two years older than Haran (Sarah's father), and ten years older than Sarah; therefore, Haran must have been eight years older than Sarah. Of course, this seems implausible, since perhaps Haran is most likely older than Abraham. The rabbinic solution is that Abraham is mentioned before Haran because of the superiority of his chochmah. The proof of this assertion is based on a discussion of another Biblical text, "And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth."¹⁷ Thus, if this list is according to age, Shem was at least a year older than Ham and Ham a year older than Japheth. But then the Biblical text states that Noah was 600 years

years old at the time of the flood,¹⁸ which seems to contradict the text, "These are the generations of Shem. Shem was a hundred years old, and begat Arphacad two years¹⁹ after the flood."

The Rabbis conclude: (about Shem)
But was he a hundred years old?
He must have been a hundred and two years old? Thus, one must say they are enumerated in order of chochmah (not age); then here too (in the case of Terah's sons) they are stated in order of chochmah.²⁰

For some of the rabbis, at least, there must have been an operative principle that people commonly are ranked in order of their chochmah, not their age. Thus, the apparent contradictions in the Biblical text are resolved by the explanation that Abraham and Shem were listed first, not because they were the oldest, but because they were the wisest. The Rabbis similarly use the text, "And Isaac²¹ and Ishmael his sons buried him," to emphasize that one would expect to find Isaac listed before Ishmael because²² such was the order of their chochmah.

Being listed first, or ranked the highest, is obviously a sign of esteem. Since listing is accomplished in terms of chochmah, then chochmah most assuredly played a major role in the rabbinic conception of esteem.

Further, David, in his kingship, is said to have humbled himself before anyone who was superior to him in²³ chochmah. Raba, the great Babylonian Amora, succinctly states the purpose of chochmah, and thereby acknowledges

the principle of ranking in order of chochmah:

The purpose of chochmah is repentance and good deeds, so that one should not occupy himself with the study of Scriptures and the Mishnah and hold in contempt his father and mother, as well as his teachers, and those who are greater than him in chochmah and in years.²⁴

This is one of the few passages where a limit is placed on chochmah: in this case, chochmah is a means to an end, rather than an end unto itself. The ones who possess chochmah are to be respected, at least as much if not more than an old person. Even one who is very learned, needs to know who has more chochmah than he, in order to be able to offer him the proper respect. Though chochmah is certainly not a tangible matter, there must have been a common understanding of which individuals had more chochmah than others.

Similarly, a rabbinic principle found in several texts is that "one Bet Din cannot annul the ordinances of another unless it is superior to it in number and in chochmah."²⁵ Number is easy to determine. But the difficulty lies in how to determine the superior in chochmah.

Chochmah, along with stature, good appearance, mature age, and few other qualities are the criteria for membership in the Sanhedrin.²⁶ In most passages, chochmah is listed as the first of the necessary qualities. Membership in the Sahhedrin, the highest honor and the

most powerful position that could be given to a chacham, had as its foremost criterion, chochmah.

Interestingly, some rabbis believed that the aged are better suited than the young to be members of the Sanhedrin, to pass judgments for the people, and to sit at sessions of study and legal decision making:

A Master said: "In session none is more fitting than an old man, and in war none is more fitting than a young man.²⁷

The nature of the relationship between old age and chochmah shall next be examined. In an incident in which²⁸ two disciples were sitting with Bar Kappara, one said the wrong blessing over the food and the other laughed. Bar Kappara initially rebuked the one who laughed, but then redirected his rebuke to the one who said the wrong blessing. Finally, Bar Kappara said:

אם חכמה אין כאן, זקנה אין כאן.

If there is no chochmah here, old age is not here.²⁹

For Bar Kappara chochmah and old age are inextricably connected.

The chochmah of the aged, the result of many years of worldly experience and knowledge, was also of concern to the rabbis. Even the chacham worries whether his appearance is that of an older individual. R. Elazar ben Azariah upon his appointment as head of the Academy, was concerned that he lacked the appearance (mature age) of

a person of such stature:

She (his wife) said to him (Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah): 'You have no white hair,' He was 18 years old that day, and a miracle occurred for him, and 18 rows of hair turned white. That is why Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said (in the Mishnah), 'Behold, I am like 70 years old,' and did not say simply '70 years old.'³⁰

R. Elazar ben Azariah although he was only 18 had chochmah, but needed to look old in order to feel qualified for his position as head of the Academy.

The connection between zaken and chochmah is made explicit by the following statement of R. Jose the Galilean:

אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה.

'zaken' only means he who has acquired chochmah.³¹

Zaken, here, is more of a technical term for an elder, a learned person, than simply an old person. There are several additional rabbinic passages where "elder,"³² meaning "sage," appears. However, it is not every old person that has chochmah, for as R. Ishmael the son of R. Jose said: "that scholars as they grow older acquire more chochmah, but the ignorant as they grow older become more foolish."³³ Certainly, then, not every old person has chochmah. But whenever the rabbis use the word zaken to mean elder or learned person, then that person has chochmah.

In most situations in Rabbinic Literature, the possession of chochmah is considered to be very valuable, and that

chochmah bestows many benefits. Chochmah, however, does not always bring benefits with it. For some people, chochmah is beneficial; for others, it is detrimental. In commenting on Kohelet 1:18, "For as chochmah grows, anger grows, to increase learning is to increase heartache," the rabbis in Bereshit Rabbah³⁴ expound that one's increase in chochmah increases the anger against oneself. They accredit to Solomon the statement, "Because I have multiplied chochmah to myself, I multiplied anger against myself."³⁵ Perhaps the inference is that chochmah and its concomitant benefits invite the jealousies of other people. Or, perhaps, people without chochmah will always be jealous of and despise the learned, those with chochmah.

Chochmah is capable of having various affects on an individual; as Ben Azzai has said:

If one's mind is serene because of his chochmah, it is a good sign for him; but if his mind is disturbed because of his chochmah, it is a bad sign for him.³⁶

For Ben Azzai chochmah is learning. His comment is psychologically very insightful. Some people are able to cope with chochmah and it is not distressful for them. For others, chochmah becomes only a source of confusion. In the same passage Ben Azzai states the possibility of a somatic affect of chochmah; one's body may be stricken because of it:

בן עזאי אומר כל שלקה בופו מפני חכמתו
סימן יפה לו חכמתו מפני בופו סימן רע
לו. הוא היה אומר כל שנטרפה דעתו מפני
חכמתו סימן יפה לו וכל שנטרפה חכמתו
מפני דעתו סימן רע לו. 37

Thus, Ben Azzai describes in very real terms the different affects of chochmah. Chochmah, then, can be very beneficial, while, to other people, it can also be highly detrimental.

In a passage concerning Joshua and Balaam, the distinction between beneficial and detrimental chochmah is made explicit:

There is wisdom which is either beneficial or detrimental to its possessor; beneficial like there is to Joshua, as it says, "And Joshua the Son of Nun was full of the spirit of chochmah" (Dt. 34:9) To what was he compared? To a pool of water that gave a whole city to drink. "When all were praising it, one said, 'Praise to the fountain which supplies this pool.' So people were praising Joshua for giving the whole of Israel to drink of his chochmah, but he said, 'Praise Moses, who is my source of chochmah.' Wisdom that is harmful was that of Balaam, of whom it said, "The saying of him who hears the words of God." (Numbers 24:16) And what happened to him? Balaam, also the son of Beor they killed with the sword. (Numbers 31:8) Thus there are riches kept by the owner for his hurt. 38

Joshua's chochmah was beneficial because he shared it with all of Israel. Balaam used his chochmah to curse Israel. Both Joshua and Balaam received their chochmah from God. The difference between the two is in how they utilized it. Chochmah is not given solely for the recipient;

rather, chochmah is to be shared with Israel, for the good of Israel. For anyone who does not so utilize his chochmah, or uses it against Israel, the chochmah will be detrimental.

However, despite these few dangers of possessing and misusing chochmah, the main theme of chochmah in Rabbinic Literature is that it is a value to be sought, and that chochmah brings much benefit to its possessor. Chochmah is so valuable it is even possible to preserve life with it. A text often used by the rabbis states:

החכמה תחיה בעליה

Chochmah preserves the life of him who possesses it.³⁹

This text appears in several contexts describing practical situations where chochmah proved to be very beneficial. One such discussion concerns the dilemma of what to do when possessed of a ravenous hunger. Various solutions are offered by different rabbis. ⁴⁰ R. Johanan offers a personal account:

Once I was seized by a ravenous hunger, whereupon I ran to the eastern side of a fig tree, thus making true in my own case, 'Chochmah preserves the life of him who has it,' for R. Joseph learned: (In a Mishnah or a Baraitha) One who would taste the full taste of a fig, turns to its eastern side, as it is said. 'With the bounteous yield of the sun.' (Dt. 33:14)⁴¹

Another account of this same story describes R. Johanan's motivation for going to the fig tree as being his knowledge of I Samuel 30:12, "And they gave him a piece of cake of figs... and when he had eaten, his spirit came back to

him." ⁴² The chochmah of R. Johanan was such that he knew either the Biblical verse or the Baraita of R. Joseph and was able to utilize his knowledge in the midst of his ravenous hunger. Chochmah is the knowledge of halachah and the ability to apply it to various life situations.

Similarly, R. Aha b. Jacob was the only scholar of a group of sixty who did not become impotent through the long discourses of R. Huna. R. Aha b. Jacob followed the principle, "Chochmah preserves the life of him that has it." (Ecc. 7:11) ⁴³ In another aggadah commenting on the Biblical verse, "Chochmah is a stronghold to the wise man," ⁴⁴ asserts that chochmah can lead to the control of all bodily drives. R. Aha b. Jacob's chochmah was apparently of this type.

Another example of the benefit of chochmah, again based on the same Biblical text is found in the following aggadah:

R. Jose b. Jasin was journeying in a boat, coming from Tarshish, when his attendant said to him, 'I require to go down (into the water to immerse myself because of my ritual impurity. He answered, 'You should not go down into the sea because it is dangerous.' The attendant said, 'But I wish to recite the Shema.' 'Recite it,' he replied, 'I want to eat,' he said, 'Then eat,' was the answer. When they reached the harbor, R. Jose said to him, 'You are now forbidden to do these things until you have bathed'; and the text was applied to him, 'And the advantage of intelligence is that chochmah preserves the life of him who possesses it.' ⁴⁵

The attendant is not ignorant, he demonstrated his knowledge by knowing that a ritual cleansing is a prerequisite to

saying the Shema and to eating; however, he does not have the ability to determine that, under these special circumstances, the law permits eating without a prior cleansing. By contrast, R. Jose b. Jasin, possessing chochmah, is able to apply the halachah to the particular situation. By utilizing his chochmah, he saves the life of the attendant. Chochmah is more than data or knowledge of halachah. It is the ability to reason and to apply the halachah to a particular life situation.

One text, depicting the Roman government's search for R. Meir, gives a slightly different meaning to chochmah.⁴⁶ R. Meir was walking by a Roman store, where the Roman soldiers were sitting, eating swine. The soldiers thought they recognized R. Meir, but decided, as a test, to invite him over to eat: if he did eat, they would know for sure that it was not R. Meir. R. Meir, of course, passed the test:

He dipped one of his fingers in the swine's blood and placed another finger in his mouth, dipping one finger and sucking the other. They said to one another, 'If he were R. Meir, he would not have done so.' They let him go and he fled. The text was therefore applied to him, 'and the advantage of intelligence is that chochmah preserves the life of him who possesses it.'⁴⁷

R. Meir's chochmah is an ability to think and to react quickly. He knew that if he did not go in for the meal, the Romans would seize him. Nor could he partake of the non-kosher Roman meal. His solution, devised in an instant, satisfied both horns of his dilemma. He enters

the restaurant, and with one finger dips into the food and then puts another finger in his mouth. Though R. Meir's actions here reflect a minimum of halachic knowledge, they still exemplify his chochmah. R. Meir knew what to do in life situations. Even in an area where halachah could not supply the answer, R. Meir is able to apply his learning and knowledge to reach an adequate decision.

Another Biblical passage utilized by the rabbis is, "Chochmah is more of a stronghold than ten 'magnates' that a city may contain." The ability of Moses to pacify his people and to allay their fears is linked to this passage. In Kohelet Rabbah, this verse is applied to several different people, one of whom is Adam:

'Chochmah is a stronghold to the wiseman' to Adam, as it is written, 'You were the seal of perfection, Full of chochmah and flawless in beauty.' (Ezekiel 28:12) 'Then ten rulers that are in a city' the ten organs that minister to the soul...51

Chochmah can be more powerful than the needs of the body and can combat any force, even ten rulers, because it is so strong. A similar text from Kohelet, "Chochmah is more valuable than weapons of war, but a single error destroys much of value," is likewise utilized. This text finds application to the chochmah of Jacob when he confronted Esau. In addition, it refers to the chochmah of Serah, the daughter of Asher, who the rabbis say was the chachama who encountered Joab when he planned to destroy her city in order to get Sheba, the son of Bichri. Serah, through

her cleverness, convinced her fellow citizens to relinquish Sheba and convinced Joab not to destroy the city. Her chochmah saved the city and is, thus, more valuable than weapons of war.

Chochmah, for the rabbis, was both a great ideal and a very real attribute which brought with it, despite an occasional problem, many benefits, such as the ability to preserve life. Thus, in the rabbinic world chochmah certainly had at least as much value as wealth or physical attractiveness, and from the texts we have seen, it often appears to be much more valuable.

In sum, chochmah, for the rabbis, was both the loftiest of ideals and a most real and valued personal attribute. Chochmah, on the whole, brought many benefits, such as the ability to preserve life. From the above discussed texts, the rabbinic world appears to have valued chochmah more than wealth or physical appearance.

Notes - Chapter Three

1. Leviticus 21:10
2. Horayot 9a
3. Tosefta Yoma 1:6, Hullin 134b, Tosefta Sanhedrin 11:8
4. Brachot 57b
5. Kohelet Rabbah 1:1
6. Brachot 56b
7. Proverbs 4:5
8. Brachot 57a
9. Proverbs 7:4
10. Proverbs 8:11
11. Bereshit 35:3
12. Baba Batra 120a
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Genesis 17:17
16. Sanhedrin 69b
17. Genesis 9:18
18. Genesis 7:6
19. Genesis 11:10
20. Sanhedrin 69b
21. Genesis 25:9
22. Baba Batra 16b
23. Megillah 11a
24. Brachot 17a
25. Gittin 36b, Avodah Zarah 36a, Moed Katan 3b, Megillah 2a

26. Sanhedrin 17a
27. Hagigah 14a
28. Brachot 39a
29. Ibid.
30. Brachot 28a
31. Kiddushin 32b
32. Jastrow, p.409.
33. Shabbat 142a
34. Berishit Rabbah 19:1
35. Ibid.
36. Avot D'Rabi Nathan 25
37. Ibid.
38. Shemot Rabbah 31:3
39. Ecc. 7:11
40. Yoma 83b
41. Ibid.
42. Kohelet Rabbah 7:12
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Jewish Publication Society The Prophets
49. Ecc. 7:19
50. Mechilta Yitro 2:9
51. Kohelet Rabbah 7:17

52. Kohelet 9:18

53. Kohelet Rabbah 9:18

54. Ibid.

Chapter Four

The Transcendent Source of Chochmah

For the rabbis, the source of chochmah is God. God created the world with chochmah.¹ God gave chochmah to Bezalel, Solomon, Job and to every other person possessing chochmah. This chapter will examine the rabbinic conception of how one receives chochmah and the nature of the chochmah received from God.

God gives chochmah; those who desire chochmah may receive it from him.

חכם לחכמה נותן שנאמר כי
י יתן חכמה חכם

If one desires chochmah, He can give it to him, as it is said: "For the Lord gives chochmah (Proverbs 2:6)²

Chochmah, however, cannot be acquired by the mere asking. The question is raised as to what a man should do to become wise.³ R. Hiyya offers the normative answer: spend much time in study and little time in business. The rabbis then ask R. Hiyya about all those scholars who had spent much time in learning, but still had not attained chochmah. R. Hiyya replies to them, "Rather let them pray for mercy from Him to whom is the chochmah."⁴ He cites as the Biblical proof text, "For the Lord gives chochmah, out of his mouth comes knowledge and discernment."⁵ Thus, for R. Hiyya, both study and the asking of God are essential for attaining chochmah. Chochmah is substantive. It requires a life-time of dedicated study. Equally as essential to its acquisition, though, is understanding that God is the source and the giver of

chochmah.

Just as God is the giver of chochmah, so too is He the provider of binah. There are three partners in the creation of a human being: God, father, and mother.⁶ The father and mother each are responsible for different parts and qualities of the new human being; but God, alone, provides the child with binah.

In the blessing for seeing a chacham, one is provided with more insight about God's giving chochmah:

חנו רבנו: הוזה חכמי ישראל אמר "ברוך
שחלק מחכמתו ליראיו." חכמי אומות העולם
אמר "ברוך שנתן מחכמתו לבשר ודם."

Our Rabbis taught: On seeing the chachamim of Israel one should say: Blessed be He who has given of His chochmah to them that fear Him. On seeing the chachamim of other nations, one says Blessed be He who has granted His chochmah to His creatures.⁷

This passage acknowledges that God gives His chochmah to both Jews and non-Jews. Both can possess legitimately divine chochmah. The distinction, however, is subtle. The chachamim of Israel are those who fear God; while the non-Jewish chachamim are merely God's creatures.

אם יאמר לך אדם יש חכמה בגוים -
תאמין; יש תורה בגוים - אל תאמין.

If a person says to you that the nations (non-Jews) have chochmah - believe it; if he says to you that the nations have Torah, do not believe it.⁹

For the Jews who fear the Lord, their chochmah is the Torah. On the other hand, Gentiles may be worldly wise, but their chochmah is not founded in Torah.

The relationship between 'fear of the Lord' and chochmah is further explored in the following passage:

R. Mathna said: That which chochmah has made a crown for her head, humility has made a shoe for her foot. 'That which chochmah has made a crown for her head,' as it says, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of chochmah.' (Ps. 111:10) 'Humility has made a shoe for her foot,' as it is written, 'The fear of the Lord is the heel of humility (Proverbs 22:4)10

'Fear of the Lord,' here seems to be both the basis of humility, and the highest form of chochmah. In the Bible and in the Rabbinic Literature, 'fear of the Lord' is consistently associated with the acquisition of chochmah. Akabiah b. Mahalalel was known for his chochmah and his fear of sin.¹¹ R. Judah exclaimed that Akabiah b. Mahalalel's apparent excommunication was not possible, because there were no equals to Akabiah b. Mahalalel in chochmah, in purity, and in fear of sin.

The importance of 'fear of God' or its equivalent 'fear of sin' cannot be over emphasized:

R. Chanina ben Dosa said, He in whom the fear of sin predominates over his chochmah, his chochmah endures, but he whose chochmah predominates over his fear of sin, his chochmah does not endure.¹²

R. Chanina ben Dosa explicitly states that 'fear of sin' is more important than chochmah. By exalting chochmah over the 'fear of sin', an individual has, by implication,

made chochmah a value by itself without any awareness that God is the giver. As a result, his chochmah will not endure. The message is clear. For Jews there can be no legitimate independent sense of chochmah. The best chochmah is the chochmah that God gives, and the highest form of that chochmah is Torah.¹³ In the same passage from Avot, R. Chanina ben Dosa continues with a comparison of chochmah and deeds, polemicizing against chochmah that is grounded in Torah, but which is not acted on:

He used to say, He whose deeds exceed his chochmah, his chochmah endures, but he whose chochmah exceeds his deeds, his chochmah does not endure. 14

If an individual's deeds or mitzvot exceed his chochmah, then his chochmah will endure. By contrast, if an individual's chochmah exceeds his deeds - if he cannot apply his great learning to the religious and practical problems of life - his chochmah will not endure.

While Rabbinic Literature stresses that chochmah is received from God, one passage implies that Solomon's chochmah did not come from God:

It has been taught: R. Simeon b. Menasia said: Kohelet does not render the hands unclean because it contains only the chochmah of Solomon. They said to him, Was this then all that he composed? Is it not stated elsewhere, 'And he spoke three thousand proverbs,' (IK 5:12), and it further says, 'Add not to his words?' (Proverbs 30:6) Why this further quotation? In case you might object that he composed very much, and what it pleased him to write he wrote and what it did not please him he did not write. Therefore it says, 'Add not to his words.'¹⁵

According to this passage, Kohelet does not "defile the hands," that is, Kohelet is not sacred, not canonized, because it contains only the chochmah of Solomon. A distinction is thus drawn between divinely-inspired chochmah and mortal chochmah. In rebuttal to R. Simeon b. Menasia, however, the rabbis prove that Solomon's chochmah was indeed divine chochmah. The rebuttal notes that in IK 5:9 "The Lord endowed Solomon with chochmah...." In this light, the text from Proverbs simply means that one cannot add to the words of God. Thus, the rabbis conclude that all of Solomon's chochmah was necessarily inspired chochmah.

Significantly, while God is the source of chochmah, chochmah itself is not transcendent. Rather, chochmah is but one of the creations of God. God's chochmah served as His instrument in the creation of the world, just as His goodness and mercy maintain it.¹⁶ God's creation of the world by chochmah is made explicit in the Biblical passage, "The Lord by chochmah founded the earth."¹⁷ In commenting on the verse, "Chochmah has built her house,"¹⁸ the Rabbis elaborated that "this is the attribute of God, blessed be He, who created the world with chochmah."¹⁹ Chochmah and God are not equals: chochmah was the first creation of God; God then utilized chochmah in his creation of the world:

On the third day they said, 'God stands in the congregation of God' because He covered the earth in his chochmah and established the world for his community.²⁰

God, moreover, gives chochmah to those who already²¹ have chochmah. How, then, can one acquire chochmah in the first place? R. Johanan teaches that God gives chochmah to the wise, basing his assertion on the Biblical text, "He gives chochmah to the chacham, and knowledge to them that know understanding."²² R. Abbahu discerns that God gives chochmah to the wise from the text, "in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put chochmah."²³ One understanding of the above principle is that a chochmah-seeking individual must immerse himself in the study of Torah. Once the individual is steeped in the world of Torah, then and only then may God bestow chochmah upon him. This interpretation is supported by a parable told of a matron who questioned this principle of God giving chochmah to those who are natively endowed with chochmah.²⁴ R. Yose bar Halafta asks her if two people came to her to borrow money, one rich and one poor, to whom would she loan the money. She responds that she would loan the money to the rich man; why? If the rich man lost the money, he would have other resources with which to repay her, while the poor man would not. R. Yose responds that this is precisely why God gives chochmah to the wise:

אם היה הקב"ה נותן חכמה לספסין היו
יושבין בבתי כסאות ובמכוואות מסונופות
ובבתי מרחצאות ואין מתעסקין בה אלא
נתנה הקב"ה לחכמים שיהו יושבין בישיבות
זקנים בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות. 25

The chacham is the individual who spends his time studying Torah, not attending circuses or engaging in other superfluous activities. The chacham, seeking chochmah, dedicates his life to Torah. To such individuals God bestows his divine chochmah.

The acquisition of chochmah is not a static event. Rather, it can be acquired throughout one's life. One aggadah comments on the final words of Moses, "I can no more go out and come in."²⁶ R. Shmuel b. Nahami, in the name of R. Jonathan, says, "It means to 'go out and come in' with words of Torah, thus indicating that the gates of chochmah were closed against him."²⁷ Thus, the flow of chochmah from God to Moses was a continuing process, only stopped at the end of Moses' life.

The acquisition of chochmah, however, is not without limit: mortals cannot acquire the full extent of the divinely bestowed chochmah. Even Moses was denied the full complement of chochmah:

Rab and Samuel (gave different interpretations of a certain text). One said: Fifty gates of binah were created in the world, and all were given to Moses save one, as it says, 'Yet you have made him but little lower than a God.' Now, 'Kohelet sought to find out worlds of delight.' That is to say, Kohelet sought to be like Moses, but a bat kol went forth and said to him, 'It is written uprightly even words of truth.' 'There arose not a prophet again in Israel like Moses.'²⁸

Moses acquired more chochmah than any other human being. Yet, his chochmah was not as great as the chochmah God

created.

Finally, the corollary of the notion of chochmah as transcendent is that "human" chochmah is but a shadow of its divine counterpart, transcendent chochmah:

The incomplete form of the heavenly light is the orb of the sun; the incomplete form of chochmah that is above is Torah.²⁹

Torah is the greatest chochmah that human beings can know. Yet, Torah is only a hint of the greater chochmah above. Perhaps when God bestows chochmah, he instills a taste of the divine, transcendent chochmah.

In another aggadah, the chochmah of Bezalel is described in terms mirroring God's creative powers:

לצרף אוניות שנברא בהם שמים וארץ

To combine the letters by which the heavens and the earth were created.³⁰

The proof text of this is that because God filled Bezalel³¹ with chochmah, tevunah, and da'at, and because God Himself had utilized these three attributes in creating the world, Bezalel could possibly possess the same creative powers. Combining letters, according to the Kabbalistic tradition, is a skill of great power; under certain conditions, this power is great enough to create worlds. In this text, Bezalel's chochmah approaches the transcendent ideal of God's chochmah. No other rabbinic texts, however, discuss human chochmah in such terms.

A paucity of material in the Rabbinic Literature is

devoted to the relationship of God and chochmah. However, from the passages that have been examined here, it is clear that the idea of a transcendent chochmah is not central in rabbinic thought. What is central is that the source of chochmah is transcendent. That transcendent source is God, who is above and independent of the material universe. Chochmah itself does not have that status; chochmah is only a creation of God. The rabbis were aware of chochmah that is independent from Torah. However, the implicit and explicit thrust of the rabbinic discussion is that for Jews, the only source of chochmah is transcendent.

Notes - Chapter Four

1. Sanhedrin 38b
2. Mechilta Bashelach 3:8
3. Nidah 70b
4. Ibid.
5. Proverbs 2:6
6. Nidah 31a
7. Brachot 58a
8. Psalms 111:10
9. Eicha Rabbah 2
10. Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:9
11. Brachot 19a
12. Pirke Avot 3:9
13. The relationship of chochmah and Torah will be the subject of the final chapter of this thesis.
14. Pirke Avot 3:9
15. Megillah 7a
16. Jeremiah 10:12, Proverbs 3:19, Psalms 104:24, 136:5
17. Proverbs 3:9
18. Proverbs 9:1
19. Sanhedrin 38b
20. Rosh Hashanah 31a
21. Brachot 55a
22. Daniel 2:21
23. Exodus 31:6

24. Midrash Tanhuma 128:B
25. Ibid.
26. Deuteronomy 31:2
27. Sotah 13b
28. Rosh Hashanah 21b
29. Bereshit Rabbah 17:5
30. Brachot 55a
31. Exodus 35:31

Chapter Five

Chochmah and Torah

The relationship of chochmah and Torah in the rabbinic period has been a subject of concern for various writers on rabbinic thought in the twentieth century. These secondary materials provide easy access to the rabbinic thought on this matter. Initially, this chapter will define the relationship between chochmah and Torah as explicated by Solomon Schechter, George Foot Moore, C.G. Montefiore, and Ephraim Urbach. The ideas of these authors are then compared with the concepts found in the primary Hebrew texts.

The problem to be examined is the nature of the identification between chochmah and Torah, and the possible implications of that identification. If chochmah is equivalent to Torah, and Torah is equivalent to chochmah, the implications are that the universal, chochmah, is as good as the particular, Torah: knowing and doing the universal is as good as knowing and doing the particular. However, the impression that the author has gained from this study is that for the rabbis, Torah is better than anything else. Thus, it is crucial to clarify the extent of the identification between chochmah and Torah.

Solomon Schechter, in his work Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, asserts it is the Torah, as the "sum total of the contents of revelation, as the expression of the will of God,"¹ which is identified with the chochmah of Proverbs 8.² However, what is unclear and what Schechter fails to

explicate is how chochmah is identified with Torah.

Schechter further states:

as the Torah was identified with the Wisdom of Proverbs, the mind did not rest satisfied with looking upon it as a mere condition for the existence of the world. Every connotation of the term wisdom in the famous eighth chapter of Proverbs was invested with life and individuality. The Torah, by this same process, was personified and endowed with a mystical life of its own, which emanates from God, yet is partly detached from him.³

Schechter seems to suggest that Torah is "assimilated" to chochmah, as if the latter were more important.

Although Schechter cites texts where Torah is personified in Rabbinic Literature, he fails to make the identification between Torah and chochmah explicit. The impression that one gains from reading Schechter is that in rabbinic times there is an independent chochmah and an independent Torah.

George Foot Moore in his work Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era⁴ adopts Schechter's comprehensive translation of Torah. Moore cites an early identification of 'law in this broad sense' with chochmah in Deuteronomy 4:6:

וּשְׁמִרָתָם וַעֲשִׂיתָם כִּי הוּא חִכְמָתְכֶם
וּבִינְחָתְכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים

Observe them faithfully, for this will be proof of your chochmah and discernment to other peoples.

Moore asserts, with this text as his proof, that the law is the distinctive chochmah of Israel. Other people can have wisdom, but the Jewish chochmah is Torah. Thus, in

his thesis, the universal is particularized. Up to this point Moore's argument is certainly textually based. However, he then argues that "Proverbs 8:22ff is the most fruitful of the passages in which this identification of divine revelation (Torah) with the divine wisdom (chochmah)⁵ is made, but many others contributed to this doctrine." In the author's study of Proverbs 8:22 and in reading modern Biblical commentators such as R.B.Y. Scott⁶, it is the author's impression that in Proverbs it is only chochmah speaking; no where is Torah mentioned. How Moore so clearly sees the identification of the two concepts in the Biblical passage is unclear to the critical reader.

In Moore's citing of Sirach and other Apocryphal works as proof of an identification of Law and chochmah, there certainly is textual basis. It is wisdom speaking in the following passage: "All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses⁷ commanded, an inheritance to the congregation of Jacob." The passage continues with the way that the Law pours out wisdom.

It is Moore's analysis of the rabbinic material that is untenable. He writes:

The identity of the Law and Wisdom is of frequent occurrence in the rabbinical books also, and even in the oldest passages is assumed as something universally acknowledged, from which further inferences are drawn. Besides Proverbs 8:22ff, several other passages are quoted in which 'Wisdom' is made equivalent to 'Law.'⁸

Moore is claiming that everyone knew of the identification, based on the Biblical "identification." The implication seems to be that universal wisdom is, in Jewish eyes, the same as Torah. The texts, however, do not support this assertion. The text he utilizes to demonstrate this 'equivalency' of chochmah and Torah is from Sifre:

וכן אתה מוצא בדרכי המקום שכל מי שהוא
חביב הוא קודם את חבירו. תורה לפי שהוא
חביבה מכל נבראה קודם לכל שנאמר: ה' קנני
ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז. 9

In this passage, Torah is created at the beginning. However, nowhere does it say that chochmah is the equivalent of Torah. One can speculate with respect to Moore's reasoning: 1) the Biblical passage Proverbs 8:22 is commonly understood and associated with chochmah. 2) In this passage, as well as in several other passages, this verse is now used in reference to Torah. 3) Thus, because the verse once referred to chochmah, and now it refers to Torah; therefore, chochmah is equal to Torah. It is this logic, this deduction, that has been questioned by Professor Borowitz and by the author. The logic that if something meant x at one time and y at a later time, thus x=y does not hold. The most that can be said is that both x and y are associated with the same thing. With respect to each of the verses used by Moore to prove that Torah is the equivalent of chochmah, the same fallacy is found. For example, in its Biblical context, the well known passage "עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה" ¹⁰ refers to

chochmah. However, in the Tanhuma it is written:

וַאֲיֵן עֵץ חַיִּים אֵלָא תּוֹרָה שְׁנֵאמַר:
עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחְזִיקִים בָּהּ. 11

To infer from this text that chochmah is equivalent to Torah would be erroneous. What is more plausible is that this Biblical text once was identified with chochmah and is now identified with Torah. That is, everything good that the Bible says about chochmah, the rabbis apply to Torah. Thus, the universal is assimilated to the particular. However, Moore fails to provide the reader with that information.

Montefiore in his only reference to 'Wisdom and Torah' in his index, offers the following text:

R. Elazar said: What was the blessing which Moses said over the Law when he received it? Blessed art thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who has chosen the Law, and has sanctified it, and has pleasure in those who fulfill it. He did not say, In those who labor to study it, or in those who meditate on it, but in those who fulfill it. A man may say, I have not learned chochmah, I have not studied the Law, what am I to do? God said to the Israelites, All chochmah and all the Law is a single easy thing: he who fears me, and fulfills the words of the Law, he has all chochmah and all the Law in his heart.¹²

Chochmah and Torah here appear as two separate entities, each a part of the larger category of 'Fear of the Lord' and divrei Torah. There is no sense conveyed here that being wise and doing what a wise man should really do would satisfy the rabbis, if those actions were not "observant." Thus, chochmah, though similar to Torah and

appearing in conjunction with it, is not expressly made the equivalent of Torah. Montefiore offers no analysis. The reader is, thus, left to interpret the text on his own. In reading Montefiore, one gains little insight into the nature of the relationship between chochmah and Torah.

The impression that the reader has from reading Schechter, Moore, and Montefiore, is that Torah (law in its most comprehensive sense), is identified with chochmah. They claim that, for the rabbis, there were two independent entities, Torah and chochmah. By contrast, Ephraim Urbach understands the rabbinic texts most accurately when he states that the remnants of the wisdom myth were transferred to Torah:

The remnants of the Wisdom myth referring to Wisdom's pre-existence and its presence at the creation of the world, found in Proverbs (8:22ff.), were transferred to the Torah, and it was said that it existed before the creation of the world.¹³

Urbach cites as his proof the passage from Sifre Deuteronomy 37 as well as most of the same passages that Moore utilized to identify Torah with chochmah. Urbach does not refer to an identification of chochmah and Torah in rabbinic times, but rather to a transference of the myths surrounding chochmah to Torah. One aggadah that Moore utilizes is from Bereshit Rabbah; where the amora R. Oshaia expounded on Proverbs 8:30 "נֹאחִיָּה אֵצֶל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵלֶּיָּהּ שֶׁשְׂוֹעִים."

As a rule when a human being builds a palace, he does not build it by himself, but calls in an architect, and the architect does not plan the building in his head, but he makes use of rolls and tablets, to know how to make the rooms and wickets. Even so the Holy One, blessed Be He, looked into the Torah and created the world. And the Torah declares, "With reshit God created, and reshit means none other than Torah, as it is said: 'The Lord made me reshit in his way.'¹⁴

For Schechter and Moore, as well as for some teachers of Midrash that the author has discussed this passage with, this passage seems to infer an identification of chochmah with Torah. Urbach, however, is clear that the passage is only speaking of Torah. It is Torah that was with God at the creation of the world. Again, chochmah is assimilated to Torah.

Careful study of the rabbinic texts reveal that Urbach was accurate in his assessment that the wisdom myth had been transferred to the Torah. In the previous chapters of this work, chochmah has been described and defined. In general, chochmah is the ability to apply Torah knowledge to practical life situations. Chochmah is given to those who occupy themselves with Torah. It is given by God. The rabbis acknowledge the chochmah of the Greeks, but ordinary Jews are prohibited from learning it. The author has found that the independent sense of chochmah that developed in the Wisdom Literature, collapses in the Rabbinic Literature. As part of the rabbinic outlook on life and reality, nothing was permitted to share

Torah's place, though they could not deny that, in part, Torah and chochmah overlapped. The specific texts utilized amply support this general theological orientation.

The problem is that chochmah was a universal. The chochmah of Wisdom Literature appeared to be a chochmah that could be pursued and was accessible to all people. Similarly, the Greek world had developed the concept of 'Sophia.' Robert Gordis compares the development of meaning of the Hebrew chochmah, from its practical and technical roots to a more metaphysical and ethical meaning, with the development of the Greek 'sophia.'

The basic meaning of the Greek word is 'cleverness and skill in handicraft and art,' then skills in matters of 'common life, sound judgment, practical and political wisdom,' and ultimately, 'learning, wisdom, and philosophy.'¹⁵

For the Greeks, 'sophia' came to represent universal wisdom, available to any person who pursues the proper course of learning and instruction in life. The rabbis, on the other hand, were concerned that the chochmah of the Wisdom Literature, focusing on ethical and moral principles, would be understood, as was the universal wisdom of the Greeks, as a thing that could be learned without Torah. The rabbis explicitly state that although there is chochmah in the Greek world, the ultimate form of chochmah, Torah, has been revealed to the Jewish people.

In the Wisdom Literature, chochmah had become personified into an independent entity. Chochmah speaks;

chochmah assists God in the creation of the world; chochmah is the ultimate goal of the chacham. In only a few passages in Rabbinic Literature does chochmah maintain that same independent status, distinct from Torah. In commenting on the various names of Caleb in the Book of Chronicles, R. Simon b. Pazzi refers to him as a "father in Torah, a father in chochmah, and a father in prophecy."¹⁶ Three distinct categories are enumerated: Torah, chochmah, and prophecy. For R. Simon b. Pazzi, these three categories are distinct and independent.¹⁷ Similarly, in one passage included in Montefiore's anthology, Torah and chochmah are viewed as being independent. In this passage, however, both terms fit into the general framework of 'fear of the Lord' and divrei Torah. Significantly, no other support for the proposition that chochmah is independent of Torah can be found in the Rabbinic Literature.

On the other side of the coin, Torah is clearly distinct from universal wisdom. Non-Jews can have chochmah, but not Torah:

Should a person tell you there is
chochmah among the nations, believe it...
~~but~~ if he tells you that there is
Torah among the nations, do not believe
it."¹⁹

Torah, the highest human form of chochmah, is only for Jews. It is in eretz Yisrael that the majority of chochmah is to be found: "Ten kabs of chochmah descended to the world, nine were taken by eretz Yisrael and one by the rest of the world."²⁰ Though the rabbis were cognizant of a chochmah independent of Torah, Torah, for them,

was the unique chochmah of the Jewish people.

Throughout the Aggadah, the problem for the rabbis was how to integrate the universal sense of chochmah that emerged from the Wisdom Literature into their particular conception of chochmah as Torah. Their method for doing this was, as Urbach states, to take the verses most commonly associated with chochmah and to transfer them to Torah. A paramount example of this is the following:

שבעה דברים נבראו קודם שנברא
העולם; אלו הן: תורה... תורה
דכתיב: ה' קנני ראשית דרכו
וגו. 21

Thus, Torah, not chochmah, becomes one of the seven things created before the creation of the world. Wisdom Literature had elevated chochmah to an independent status; in Rabbinic Literature, that status is eliminated. Chochmah is transformed from an independent entity to a subordinate of Torah.

In another passage, which is only one example of many that incorporate this mythic transference, the importance of Torah is seen:

Rabbi Banayah said: The world and its fullness were created only for the sake of Torah. 'The Lord in chochmah founded the earth.'²²

Thus, the purpose of creation was Torah, not chochmah. This transformation is not confined to the chochmah of the Wisdom Literature.

In defining the chochmah of Bezalel, the rabbis

clearly changed the definition from the limited chochmah or skill that Bezalel had in the Bible. Commenting on the verse that Bezalel had been filled with chochmah,²³ tevunah, and da'at, the transformed, rabbinic definitions offered are:

בַּחֲכָמָה. שֶׁהִיא חֵכֶם בְּחוּרָה.
וְתִבְוֵנָה. שֶׁהִיא מִבִּין בְּהִלָּכָה.
וְדַעַת. שֶׁהִיא מֵלֵא דַעַת בְּחִלְמוּד. 24

Bezalel's chochmah is that he was wise in Torah, not merely that he was a skillful artisan. Tevunah and da'at are defined, respectively, as halachah and Talmud. The rabbis are particularizing chochmah; chochmah becomes Torah.

The rabbis' intention was to eliminate an independent sense of chochmah. The power of chochmah, personified in the Wisdom Literature, is transferred, as Urbach states, to Torah. Chochmah, in rabbinic times, no longer has an independent status. While the Jews know of a universal chochmah, they have no need for it. Rather, chochmah is completed and fulfilled in Torah.

The progression is clear. The chochmah myth in the Wisdom Literature is universal. In the apocryphal literature, Torah and universal chochmah become identified. In Rabbinic Literature, the mythic transformation is completed as chochmah becomes subordinate to Torah. The fears of the rabbis are, thus, allayed. No longer can one achieve chochmah without the study of Torah.

Notes - Chapter Five

1. Solomon Schechter, Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, p.127.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.129.
4. George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, p.263.
5. Ibid., p. 264.
6. R.B.Y.Scott, Proverbs-Ecclesiastes.
7. Sirach 24:23
8. George Foot Moore, Judaism, p.265.
9. Sifre, Deuteronomy 37:6
10. Proverbs 3:18
11. Tanhuma 58:2
12. Deuteronomy Rabbah Berachah 11:6
13. Ephraim Urbach, The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs, p.287.
14. Bereshit Rabbah 1:1
15. Robert Gordis, Kohleth-The Man and His World, p.18.
16. Megillah 17a
17. Ibid.
18. Deuteronomy Rabbah Berachah 11:6
19. Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:6
20. Kidushin 49b
21. Nidarim 39b, Pesachim 64a, etc.
22. Bereshit Rabbah 1:4
23. Exodus 35:31
24. Shemot Rabbah 48:4

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Conclusion

This study has attempted to present, in a cogent and structured manner, the meaning of chochmah in the Aggadah. The rabbis' primary concern was to exclusivize the meaning of chochmah. In the Bible chochmah referred to the skill of the artisan in building the mishkan and to the great knowledge and sagacity of Solomon. In the Wisdom Literature, chochmah was personified. Chochmah had developed into a universal, accessible without the aid of Torah. In the Inter-Testamental literature, chochmah and Torah became identified with one another, while still retaining their independence from each other.

In the Aggadah, the rabbis do not develop the theme of chochmah as a skill, except in a few instances. Although the rabbis acknowledge a universal "wisdom," they explicitly state that Torah is the chochmah of the Jews. Biblical verses associated with chochmah became, for the rabbis, associated with Torah; for example, "She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; and happy are those who hold her fast." (Proverbs 3:18) The verses that once personified chochmah, refer to Torah in the Rabbinic Literature. The independent status of chochmah has dissipated. For a Jew, Torah is the ultimate. It is superior to any universal chochmah.

The rabbis have defined chochmah as Torah or halachic learning combined with the ability to apply it to halachic questions as well as to life situations. Solomon Freehof provides a poignant description of knowledge and wisdom.

Let us consider: In the winter, fuel, coal or oil or gas, is brought into a building. That fuel is put into a complicated system of machinery, furnace pipes, and radiators, until finally the fuel becomes warmth which is something rather abstract. The warmth is the purpose and, we might say, the ultimate goal of the fuel. What fuel is to warmth, knowledge is to wisdom. Knowledge is what you take in and put through the complicated machinery of the human personality; and it attains its ultimate, genial result then just as the fuel turns into warmth, the knowledge turns into wisdom.¹

For the rabbis, knowledge is the Torah or halachah, while chochmah is one's ability to utilize Torah. As we have seen, the chacham speaks divrei Torah, a reflection of his chochmah. The ultimate source of the chacham's chochmah is God.

The methodology involved in this study, the "linguistic-conceptual approach," has proven very successful. In focusing on one term chochmah, the author has been able to enter the world of the rabbis. As the term chochmah was traced from one text to the next, much of rabbinic thought, values, and concerns emerged. By the exhaustive study of one word, entry into the rabbinic mind was facilitated.

One limitation imposed on this study was the author's lack of time necessary for the study of Greek sources and the Greek concept of "wisdom." The knowledge of the influence of Hellenism upon Judaism would certainly provide a better understanding of the transformation of chochmah. In addition, the study of one concept itself creates certain limitations. One sees the role that a specific

concept plays in the rabbinic world, but that role is not viewed in comparison with other rabbinic values. Hopefully, a thorough study of various values and their relationships in the Aggadah will be undertaken by various scholars and brought into systematic form.

Personally, I have learned a great deal during the course of this study. Of great value is my newly acquired ability to read the rabbinic texts for what they say. Also, I have learned the importance of letting a structure emerge from the material itself, rather than imposing an extrinsic structure upon the material. Chochmah has taught me much. I will have learned the most if, as my Rabbinate develops as a continuing process of learning Torah, I have the ability to apply my Torah learning to life situations by utilizing chochmah.

Notes - Conclusion

1. Solomon B. Freehof Preaching The Bible: Sermons for Sabbaths and High Holy Days New York, Ktav. 1974. p.114.

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