THE MEKILTA DE RABBI ISHMAEL:

A Study in Form and Content

a thesis by
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referee
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To

My Beloved Parents

ואף אלה דרבו בפרוש על אופן לשונה,

לשונה לשון מפורש בחוש ושלוחותיה אמרות

טהורות; רוח האמונה פעור בה ומחשבות רמות

ומלאה, אשר כמעט אין משלם בכל המפרשים.

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Part the First

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

Date and Composition of the Mekilta

The rabbinic concept of תלמוד תורה is not so simple as to entail merely a reading knowledge of Scriptures and an understanding of its literal sense. Rather, it involves a precise and intricate process which seeks to interpret the underlying spirit of the Torah and to exhaust the implications of every word and phrase. This process is commonly designated as עיון תורה.[1] The large body of rabbinic literature which has grown out of this study of Torah is generally divided into two classifications -- halachic midrash and haggadic midrash. Halachic midrash is chiefly concerned with the legal positions of Torah; while the haggadic midrash deals mainly with the narrative portions, interpreting their significance and extracting lessons of an ethical and moral nature.[2] The Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, with which this treatise is concerned, is a collection of midrashim composed of both halachic and haggadic matter.

Unquestionably, collections of midrashim, in the form of commentaries to the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy existed very early in talmudic times; and since their contents were quoted in the names of the tannaim, they are classified as Tannaitic Midrashim. Of these midrashim, the one to Exodus, which later became known as the Mekilta (מכילתא), is the oldest.[3] J. Klausner, in discussing the dating of these tannaitic

midrashim, claims that an important clue to the composition of the Mekilta may be deduced from the fact that it begins almost exactly where the Book of Jubilees comes to an end.[4] The Book of Jubilees is, largely, a midrash of both halachic and haggadic character, written to Genesis and the first part of Exodus during the reign of John Hyrcanus, sometime between 135 and 105 B. C. E.[5] Our present Mekilta contains some very old midrashim in which are preserved the teachings of the early tannaim. In its treatment of Scriptural verses, scholars have detected, for the most part, the simpler exegetical and hermeneutical techniques characteristic of the older tannaim; and, with the exception of a few names of later sages about whom scholars are still uncertain, all the teachers mentioned in the present Mekilta belong to the tannaitic period.[6] Eighty-six sages are quoted by name in the Mekilta.[7] Many of these tannaim are rabbis of the second century B. C. E., and the list extends from that period down to Rabbi (Judah Ha Nassi) of the second century A. D.[8]

Although there is no decisive proof available, the indirect evidence seems to warrant the assumption that the original compilation of the Mekilta was made in the school of Rabbi Ishmael, whose teachings, as well as those of his disciples, occupy a substantial and prominent place in this particular midrash.[9] Of these disciples of Rabbi Ishmael, only two are known to us, with certainty, by name --

R. Jonathan and R. Josiah [ר' יאשיה].

The rest are preserved to us only in their midrashim, quoted under the name בה"ר ישמעאל.[10] Succeeding redactors of that original draft of the Mekilta introduced large numbers of other midrashim taken mainly from the school of Rabbi Akiba, R. Ishmael's great colleague.[11] These two men, though their systems of interpretation differ radically, may be considered to be two of the greatest masters of אספרא תורה. Both were famous teachers of the first and second centuries A. D. -- which corresponds to the third tannaitic generation. On the basis of this evidence we may assign the first drafts of the present Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael to the second century of the Christian era -- about the same period as the Bar Cochba rebellion and almost a century prior to the final redaction of the Mishna.

However, the Mekilta underwent a number of subsequent revisions and redactions before it assumed its present form. According to a number of scholars, one of these editors was probably Rabbi Johanan b. Nappaha, famous Palestinian Amora of the last half of the third century. Many statements attributed to him in the Talmud are found in the Mekilta quoted anonymously as סתם.[12] Still another redaction is ascribed to Rab, famous Babylonian Amora and a contemporary of Johanan b. Nappaha. Rab (Abba Arika) was a pupil of Judah Ha Nasi (Rabbi),

who is quoted frequently in our Mekilta.[13]

The final redaction of the Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael probably took place in the fourth or fifth century.[14] Some authorities are of the opinion that the book in its present form is not complete, sections having been lost over a period of centuries.[15] George Foot Moore suggests that a tannaitic midrash dealing with the plans of the Tabernacle (עשרת המאמרות - ed. Friedman) may be one of these missing parts.[16] Lauterbach, however, proposes that there is sufficient evidence to prove that, aside from unavoidable textual variations and a few minor changes and omissions, the Mekilta which we possess "has been preserved to us completely in the extent and in the form given to it by its final redactor."[17]

CHAPTER II

The Name and Arrangement of the Mekilta

Although passages from the present Mekilta appear in the Talmud, they are never quoted in connection with any book called מכילתא.[1] This does not suggest that such a tannaitic collection was not known to the Amoraim. It proves, merely, that during the Amoraic period it was not yet known by its present name.[2] The other two collections of this particular tannaitic group of midrashim, i. e. Sifra and Sifre, are mentioned in the Talmud by name. (Hag 3a, Kid. 49b, Be . 47b, etc.).[3] Most recent scholars agree that the Talmud seems to consider all three of these tannaitic midrashim a part of a larger collection, designated by the general title

ספרי דבי רב ; ספרי דבי רב ועם

and quotations from the collection to Exodus, therefore, are simply ascribed to ספרי.[4] Moore, who bases his assumption on the studies of D. Hoffman (Zur Einleitung in die halachischen Midrasch) says: "The name Mekilta is first found specifically appropriated to the Midrash to Exodus after the close of the Babylonian Talmud."[5] Lauterbach, however, whose studies on the subject are quite extensive, produces much evidence to prove that the practice of alluding to this halachic midrash to Exodus as Mekilta began sometime near the close of the Gaonic period. He demonstrates, further, that as late as the 14th century scholars and rabbinic authorities continued to

refer to the Exodus collection as Sifre.[6] It seems, from evidence found in the Responsa literature that the first to use the title מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל were the contemporaries of Hai Gaon.[7] When the Talmud, both Babli and Jerushalmi, use the word מכילתא, it invariably refers to a mishna or a Baraita collection, and never to a midrashic collection.[8]

Until the recent studies by Dr. Lauterbach, scholars were generally agreed that the word מכילתא was the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew word מדה (or מדות), meaning rules or standards, and that this appellative, descriptive of the exegetical nature of the work, gradually became its proper title.[9] However, an understanding of the original arrangement and intent of the Mekilta, throws an entirely different light upon the meaning of the word. As stated above, this particular collection of midrashim was originally intended as an halachic midrash to Exodus. And, in spite of the fact that our present editions are arranged according to the weekly Sidra, the earliest drafts of the book were undoubtedly arranged in separate tractates, divided according to subject matter, and independent of the Torah cycle.[10] This original plan of arrangement was tampered with by later editors, especially medieval rabbinic authors whose purpose it seems to have been to make of the Mekilta a midrash for the weekly Sidra, rather

than a group of tractates on selected subjects.[11] Even the first printed editions (1515 and 1545) showed this revision of the earlier arrangement,[12] and all subsequent editions have adopted the newer scheme which obviously rendered the Mekilta of greater value to the preacher. In rabbinic literature, the word מכילתא is frequently employed to refer to a special compendium of halakot, giving the term almost the same meaning as מסכתא.[13] Contrary to the earlier opinion, therefore, we are led to believe that the title Mekilta did not originate as an Aramaic rendering of the word מפה (מכולתא), but rather as a term describing the chief distinguishing characteristic of this particular collection of halachic midrashim, i. e. its original division into nine separate tractates, topically arranged.[14] The full title of our Mekilta- מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל does not indicate that Rabbi Ishmael was the author of these tractates. It is more likely that R. Ishmael's name became a part of the title simply because the first tractate began with the words:

רבי ישמעאל אומר .[15]

Although the original arrangement has been altered in accommodation to the Sidra, the division into nine tractates is still preserved in our editions of the Mekilta. These tractates in order of their present position are:

1) Pisha (מסכתא דפסחא)
2) Beshallah (" דבוא בשלח)
3) Shirata (" דשירתא)

4) Vayassa' (פרשת ויסע)
5) Amalek (" פרשת עמלק)
6) Bahodesh (" פרשת בחדש)
7) Nezikin (" פרשת נזיקין)
8) Kaspa (" פרשת כספא)
9) Shabbata (" פרשת שבתא)

These tractates, according to a colophon found amoung some early manuscripts, were divided into eighty-two chapters.[16] The existing editions, however, have only seventy-seven chapters and two פתיחות, or introductory chapters.

These, then, are the salient facts concerning the historical development of one of the most ancient midrashic collections in our possession. In the following chapters, the purpose of this study will be to penetrate beneath the surface and analyze the salient features of its homiletical form and content.

Part the Second

EXEGETICAL FORM OF THE MEKILTA

CHAPTER III

General Characteristics

The Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, originally intended to be an halachic midrash, does not begin with the first chapter of Exodus, but rather with the first legal portion.[1] The existing editions of the midrash cover the following portions of the Book of Exodus: Chapter 12. v. 1 - 23. v. 19; Chapter 31. vv. 12-17; and Chapter 35. vv. 1-3. Although it is classified as an halachic midrash, well over half of the Mekilta is of an haggadic nature. Of the nine tractates, Pisha, Nezikin, Kaspa, and Shabbata are largely halachic; while Beshallaḥ, Shirata, Vayassa, Amalek, and Baḥodesh are almost entirely haggadic. The halachic and haggadic portions of the Mekilta are readily distinguishable; however, they do not constitute two distinct pieces of literature. Rather, they are inseparable features of the same body of tannaitic literature. The fact that many haggadic midrashim appear scattered throughout some of the halachic tractates only attests to the close relationship between Agada and Halacha, a trait which seems to be characteristic of the tannaitic spirit.[2] It is solely with the haggadic portions of the Mekilta that this thesis is concerned.

The language of the Mekilta is almost exclusively Hebrew. Since it is somewhat in the nature of a commentary to the Biblical text which is Hebrew, and since many of the homilies and interpretations are drawn from a treatment of certain key words in that Hebrew text, any other language

would have robbed the midrash of much of its meaning.[3] Furthermore, it is to be remembered that Hebrew was the medium of expression in all tannaitic literature, of which the Mekilta is a part.

It has been mentioned before, in connection with the dating of the Mekilta, that in its exposition of a Scriptural verse, our midrash usually employs the simpler exegetical principles of the older tannaim.[4] Dr. Israel Bettan has aptly defined the purpose and described the spirit of these early homilies in the following terms: "The purpose of the 'drashah', then, is to build an exegetic scaffolding to buttress and sustain a sound religious outlook. It is, therefore, essentially poetic, imaginative, inspiring."[5]

In spite of the fact that the "exegetic scaffolding" of the Mekilta is relatively simple, when compared with some of the later works, it would be confusion to attempt an analysis of the manifold and diverse details of this method without some satisfactory system of classification. In the introduction to his volume on Medieval preaching, Dr. Bettan has constructed such a system;[6] and since it suits the purpose of this study, we shall take the liberty of employing it as the general outline of our delineation of the Mekilta's exegetical form.

CHAPTER IV

Use of Texts

1. The Obscure Text.

In the development of a midrashic homily, the main cross-beam which supports the preacher's proposition, is the Scriptural text. Of the hundreds of texts employed by the homileticians of the Mekilta, the great majority may be classified as Obscure Texts. An obscure text is one "that presents a challenge to the interpreter, the text that seems to bristle with difficulties, whether they be of a linguistic, a logical, a theological, or ethical character."[1] In view of the fact that many Biblical verses are replete with such difficulties and obscure points, which lend themselves readily to homiletical interpretation, it becomes apparent why this type of text found such widespread popularity among the early 'darshanim'.

A clear example of the use of an Obscure text involving a logical difficulty is found in R. Nathan's interpretation of Exodus 12.30.[2] The text reads: "For there was not a house where there was not one dead." What appears as a difficulty in the mind of the sage is the fact that the tenth plague doomed only the first-born males to death, and he rightly asks: "Were there no houses in which there were no first-born males?" If there were, then one would have to explain why Scripture makes the statement that no house escaped the plague. However, the difficulty is resolved by R. Nathan in terms of Egyptian burial and memorial

customs. He points out that the Egyptians set up statues of their dead in their houses; and every household, therefore, would be sure to have a statue of a first-born male. When the tenth plague came, these statues were crushed and broken -- as if they were dying again. Therefore the scriptural verse is correct.

Another example of an obscure text, this one involving a theological difficulty, is found in R. Ishmael's treatment of Exodus 12.13.[3] It is God who speaks saying: "And when I see the blood." What troubles R. Ishmael is a question of God's omniscience. If it is true that everything is revealed before Him, then why is it necessary for Him to have a sign to distinguish between the house of an Israelite and the house of an Egyptian? R. Ishmael explains it in terms of God's providence. Indeed, God needs no sign, but He asked the Israelites to make one so that by performing this duty they would merit a reward.

Still another text involving a theological obscurity is found in the midrash to Exodus 20.1.[4] The verse reads: "And the Lord spoke all these words." The point which suggests itself to the preacher is the superfluity of the word "all". "These words" would have been sufficient. However, this superfluity is used as a means of attributing greatness to God; namely, that He spoke <u>all</u> of the Commandments simultaneously -- in one utterance.

Finally, we get to those obscure texts which in-

volve some linguistic or grammatical problem, and of which there are many in the Mekilta. For instance, Exodus 14.27b reads:[5] וינער ה' את מצרים בתוך הים . At first, the Mekilta interprets this by merely elaborating upon its literal sense, i.e., that the Lord overthrew (נער) the Egyptians in such and such a manner. However, a פנים אחרים is added, which seems to be concerned about the selection of the root נער for this particular verse. The usual meaning of the word is ignored, and וינער is interpreted as a verb derived from the noun נער , meaning youth. "And God rejuvenated the Egyptians." That is, He put the strength of youth in them so that they could receive the punishment. And still another interpretation in this vein -- God placed them in the hands of youthful angels, so to speak, who are cruel.

Another choice example of the homiletical enrichment of an obscure word or expression comes to our attention in R. Eleazar of Modi'im's explanation of the expression כגביד טל , in Exodus 16.31.[6] Usually, is rendered as "coreander", and is taken to be a description of the color and appearance of the manna. Rø. Eleazar, however, construes it as a pun on the words טל and הטפה . He says that the manna was like the word of the Haggadah, which attracts the heart of man. (The Aramaic root טפח means "to draw" or "to attract".)[7]

2. The Transparent Text

Of the remaining types of texts, the one which occurs most frequently in the Mekilta is the Transparent Text. This kind of text is one "the thought of which, though clear and obvious, is yet capable of wider applications, and whose terms...lend themselves to stronger emphasis."[8] Obviously, this is the simplest kind of text to use, and, for the most part, requires only a forthright elaboration of the central idea or ideas explicit in the Scriptural verse itself. When the idea contained in such a text appeals to the preacher, or is especially suited to a subject of his interest, the transparent text recommends itself more readily than even the obscure type. Let us consider a few examples of the transparent text in the Mekilta.

Many of the Midrashim based on transparent texts consist merely of one or two direct statements, either applying the idea contained in the verse, or briefly elaborating it. For instance, Exodus 12.11 instructs the people on the eve of deliverance from Egypt, to eat the paschal lamb "with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, etc."[9] All the midrash adds is: "Like people starting on a journey. R. Jose the Galileean says: This passage teaches you that according to Torah, it is proper for people who are starting on a journey to be alert."

A more elaborate treatment of a transparent text is found in the interpretation of Exodus 14.10b which reads:

"And they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord."[10] The meaning of the verse is clearly that the people were in grave danger and prayed to God for help. The idea of prayer, therefore, suggested itself to the preacher who immediately proceeded to compose a homily on that subject. By quoting a number of illustrative verses he makes the point that prayer was always the special occupation of our forefather; and adding to his Biblical quotations he explains that prayer is Israel's only real weapon of defence.

Exodus 22.20 deals with the proselyte. "And the stranger shalt thou not vex, neither shalt thou oppress him, etc."[11] The midrash then proceeds merely to explain what "vex" and "oppress" imply. You should not vex him with words, or oppress him with matters of money, or remind him of the fact that he was once an idolater, etc. With this introduction, the preacher then proceeds to expatiate his own ideas concerning converts to Judaism, in keeping with the spirit of the original text.

3. The Allegorical Text.

Although it is not found as frequently as the two previous types, the Allegorical Text is one of the most effective for homiletical purposes. The Allegorical Text is one "from which the interpreter seeks to infer a thought not unlike the one expressed, though the process by which he arrives at it necessitates the substitution of the subject

with another suggestively familiar."[12] Few of the Allegorical texts found in the Mekilta will typify this definition in all particulars; they do, however, illustrate its essential elements.

Thus, for example, the midrash interprets "Thou hast guided them in (Thy) strength" (Ex. 15.13) in the following manner: "For the sake of the Torah which they were going to receive, for "Thy strength" here is but a designation for Torah."[13] This allegorical interpretation of "strength" is applied also to Ps. 29.11 and Ps. 99.4.

Likewise, in commenting on Exodus 18.7, the Midrash explains the word "tent" as meaning the house of study.[14] And a more extensive allegorical treatment of a text is found in R. Eleazar of Modi'im's homily to Exodus 17.9. "Tomorrow I will stand upon the top of the hill." R. Eleazar's interpretation is as follows: Let us declare tomorrow a fast day and be ready, relying upon the deeds of our fathers. "The top" (ראש) means the deeds of the fathers, and "the hill" (הגבעה) means the deeds of the mothers.[15]

4. <u>The Pictorial Text</u>.

Another type of text, which occurs often in the Mekilta, and which is employed with particular effectiveness is the Pictorial Text. Here we find that "the thought seems to revolve around some graphic word or phrase, which it is the aim of the preacher to trace in vivid colors and with impressive effect."[16] Whereas the Biblical narrative of

such dramatic events as the crossing of the Red Sea, the trek through the Wilderness, and the giving of the Torah at Sinai is rich in suggestive imagery, it is, on the other hand, terse and simple. One can well understand, therefore, how the active imagination of these early preachers was stimulated by such pictorial verses to reconstruct the striking details of these historic events, and in such a manner as to disclose to their listeners the veiled significance of the graphic descriptions.

An excellent specimen of the Pictorial Text in the Mekilta is Exodus 13.21:[17] "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud", etc. The graphic symbol which attracted the preachers is, of course, the "pillar of cloud". Citing Exodus 40.36-38, Numbers 14.14 and Numbers 9.19 as supplementary texts, also containing the word "cloud", the midrash describes the wonders of God's providence in vivid detail: "Thus there were seven clouds, four on the four sides, one above them, one beneath them, and one that proceeded before them on the road, filling the depressions and leveling the hills. (cf. Isa. 40.4). It also killed the snakes and the scorpions, and swept and sprinkled the road before them", etc. Thus, out of what was only a suggestive figure, the midrash has painted a pictorial scene, subtly embodying an object-lesson of God's providence.

Still another example of this kind is found in the midrash to Exodus 16.14: "And when the layer of dew was

gone up," etc.[18] What serves to excite the imagination of the 'darsham' in this verse is "the layer of dew;" and again he makes it a symbol of God's providence, prodeeding to furnish the details in the following description: "Behold Scripture teaches how the manna used to come down for Israel. The north wind would come and sweep the desert; then rain would come down and level the ground; then the dew would come up and the wind would blow upon it. The ground thus became a sort of golden table on which the manna would come down," etc.

The treatment of Exodus 19.18 furnishes us with another variation of the Pictorial Text. The Biblical narrative describes Mount Sinai just prior to the giving of the Law, and it visualizes God as "descending upon it in fire." Here, the graphic word which strikes the eye of the haggadist is "fire", and he employs the main elements of both the allegorical and pictorial interpretations to construct a brief, but pungent homily on Torah. The text, he says, teaches that Torah is fire, was given in the midst of fire, and is comparable to fire. If one comes too near to it, one is burned. If one stays too far away, one gets cold. Therefore, one can only seek to warm himself by the flame.[19]

5. The Relative Text

Of the five types of texts included in this

classification, the one which occurs most infrequently in the Mekilta is the Relative Text, being one "the homiletical significance of which appears in full force only when it is viewed in relation to a verse prededing it."[20] Sometimes the verse related to the main text appears immediately before it. In other instances, it is taken from a prededing chapter of the same narrative.

An example of the latter case is found in the Mekilta's interpretation of Exodus 13,8.[21] An Israelite is bidden to explain the eating of matzoh to his son by saying: "It is because of that which the Lord did for me," etc. The midrash seems to question the use of the first person singular pronoun, suggesting that one should say "what the Lord did for us." However, this difficulty is explained by interpreting the text as an answer to the question in Exodus 12-26, "What mean ye by this service?" Since in the question, the son excludes himself, he is also excluded in the answer. Thus a transparent or obscure text takes on new meaning in light of the related text.

The clearest example of the Relative text in the Mekilta, is one in which the two verses are contiguous. This particular midrash serves as a kind of bridge connecting the conclusion of Tractate Beshallah and the beginning of Shirata.[22] Exodus 15.1 is the beginning of

ויאמר משה. The Midrash seeks to interpret

the force of the word אז (then), and the answer is found in the preceding verse (Ex. 14.31) which reads: "And they believed in the Lord and in Moses His servant." Read together, these two verses preach an eloquent homily on faith. When did Israel receive the inspiration and have good reason to sing a song of praise and triumph? Only after they had exhibited the faith with which they believed in God.

6. Similar or Identical texts.

While on the subject of the use of texts in the Mekilta, it is important to take note of another exegetical technique which occurs frequently in our midrash, as well as in others. It is important because it illustrates that spirit of early rabbinic literature which strives in its exposition of Torah to achieve the same exactness and consistency in the haggadic portions as it does in the halachic. In the case of two or more texts which have similar or identical phraseology and express the same thought, that midrash which is used to interpret one of these texts will be repeated verbatim in the exposition of the subsequent texts. This practice occurs again and again in the Mekilta. Let us examine only a few instances.

Exodus 12.12 reads: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt," etc. One interpretation of the verse is to regard ועבר not as "pass", but rather as

"anger" [עברה]. Psalm 78.49, Zephaniah 1.15, and Isaiah 13.9 are quoted in support of this interpretation.[23] Later the Biblical text reads: "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians." etc. (Ex. 12.23), and here the above midrash is quoted again, even using the same illustrative verses.[24]

Exodus 19.13 reads, in part: "And the voice of the ram's horn soundeth long." Later in the same chapter (19.19)[26] the voice of the horn is described as "waxing louder and louder." In both instandes the identical midrash is applied.

Still a third example is found in the case of two identical texts. Both Exodus 31.15[27] and 35.2,[28] being the commandment to observe the Sabbath, have the same reading; and in both places we find the identical midrash which harmonizes these texts with a variant reading in Exodus 20.9. The interpretation is haggadic, and not halachic in character.

CHAPTER V

Illustrative Materials in the Mekilta

The text taken from Scriptures is, of course, the sine qua non of the midrashic homily; and the purpose of the 'dashan' is to expound and interpret that text. However, once the text has been selected and the proposition is stated or implied, it then becomes necessary to develop the central idea with pertinent supplementary material. The illustrative matter found in midrashic literature is both diversified and distinctive. Indeed, it is this feature of the midrash which gives it the stamp of creative literature; and it is here, too, that the modern preacher finds the greatest store-house of valuable and suggestive material for his own homiletical endeavors.

In the Mekilta we find examples of most types of illustrative media, used in various ways, with the purpose of making the homilies as effective and as intelligible as possible. In this respect, the ancient sages evinced a more intelligent understanding of audience and classroom psychology than do many of our modern preachers. Their awareness of the value of simple, meaningful illustrations in achieving the maximum of pedagogic efficiency is best described in the words of the Mekilta itself. Explaining the use of a certain analogy, R. Joshua b. Karha says: "This figure is used in order to penetrate the ear."[1]
(משל הפתאי)

1. Illustrative Scriptural Verses

Since one could quote no higher authority, and since one could find numerous examples and statements in Tanach to support virtually any ethical or religious idea, the most common type of illustration used in the Mekilta is the Illustrative Text.[2] Literally hundreds of Biblical verses are cited in the Mekilta in this manner, and only rarely is there a midrash which does not employ at least one Illustrative Text. This practice is so widespread in the midrash that to read the midrash not only gives one a knowledge of the book to which it is written, but also offers a survey of all of Tanach. The Mekilta employs Illustrative Texts taken from every book of the Old Testament.

These Scriptural verses are used in a number of different ways. Generally, however, they may be grouped into three categories. The simplest of these is the citation of a verse which expresses the idea of the preacher or which bears out the point which he has just made. It is in the nature of supporting evidence, frequently introduced by שנאמר and כתיב אומר אתה אין. Secondly, there are those verses which are ostensibly unrelated to or in disagreement with the main text; but which, in the course of the homiletical development, prepare the way for the preacher's conclusion. They are sometimes introduced by הרי כאן שנאמר . Thirdly, there is a large

group of illustrative texts which are usually introduced by כן תעשה, "similarly" or "likewise you must interpret".

An example of the first type is found in a rather elaborate exposition of the Ten Commandments.[3] The midrash is speaking of the merit with which Joseph deserved that his coffin should be transported by the side of the Ark, i.e., that Joseph fulfilled all the commandments. By citing over twenty verses from the Joseph narratives in the Pentateuch, the midrash illustrates exactly how he fulfilled each pf the commandments. A variation of this manner of Scriptural illustration involves an interpretation which is based on a similarity of phraseology. The midrash explains that Moses did not really sit in judgment "from the morning until the evening." (Ex. 18.13)[4] Scripture merely wishes to teach that he who renders a true judgement is as one who had been a co-worker of God in the creation of the world. This idea is held to be correct because in describing creation, Scripture uses a similar phrase "and there was evening and there was morning." (Gen. 1.5)

The second type of Illustrative Text is clearly set forth in the interpretation of Exodus 15.3:[5] "The Lord is a man of war." The midrash, however, cites three verses (Jer. 23.24, Isa. 6.3, and Ezek. 43.2) which show God not as a man, and certainly not a man of war. The preacher then proceeds to explain the apparent disagreement as an indication of God's care for Israel; that He is both transcendent and

imminent, proving the point with another illustrative text from Hosea 11.9. An example of this type of Illustrative text, but in a case where it is apparently unrelated to the main text is found at the very beginning of Tractate Amalek. The text reads: "Then came Amalek" (Ex. 17.8)[6] The homiletician interprets the verse by illustrating it with the thought in Job 8.11: "Can the rush shoot up without mire? Can the reed-grass grow without water?" In the same way, can Israel live without Torah? Since they neglected the Torah, Amalek was sent against them.

Finally, let us consider two examples of the variety of Illustrative Texts. In commenting on Exodus 12.1,[7] the Mekilta speculates as to the purpose of mentioning Moses before Aaron. However, it concludes that since Aaron is mentioned first in another place (Ex. 6.26), Scripture meant one to be regarded as important as the other. This same interpretation is then applied to four pairs of verses, each containing two or more objects, mentioned in one sequence in the first verse of the pair, and in reverse order in the second verse. Thus, heaven and earth were created simultaneously (Gen. 1.1,2.4); Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are of equal importance (Ex. 3.6, Levit. 26.42); mother and father deserve equal respect (Ex. 20.12, Lev. 19.3); and Joshua and Caleb are peers. (Num. 14.6, 32.12).

In another place (Ex. 17.11), the midrash dismisses the possibility of Moses bringing victory to Israel against

Amalek by merely raising his arms. It is interpreted to mean that Moses' upraised arms would inspire the Israelites to faith, and God would, therefore, give them victory. This interpretation is then applied, with the introduction אף כאן , to two other symbolic acts which bring Divine protection to Israel; i.e., the fiery serpent in Numbers 21.8,[8] and the blood on the doorposts in Ex. 12.13.

2. The Example.

After the ancient homiletician derived an idea from his text and presented further Scriptural evidence in support of that idea, the homily was not necessarily complete. He usually inserted, somewhere in the development of his lesson, an illustration which helped to concretize the abstract idea. One of the simplest forms of such concrete elucidation is the Example, "A parallel from daily life, which brings the thought...very close to one's personal experience."[9] For instance, in explaining the difference between the ways of God and the ways of man, the Mekilta says: "Man does not heal with the same thing with which he wounds, but he wounds with a knife and heals with a plaster. The Holy One, blessed be He...heals with the very same thing with which he wounds." Following this are several illustrative verses proving the latter part of the example.[10] Another type of example is found in R. Nathan's conception of those who love the Lord and keep His commandments. (Ex. 20.6)

The Eaxmple is also intended as a description of oppression under Roman rule. Those who love the Lord are the ones who risk their lives to keep His commandments. One meets a prisoner and asks him: "Why are you being led to be decapitated", and he answers: "Because I circumcised my son." "Why are you being led to the stake?" "Because I read the Torah." "Why are you going to be crucified?" "Because I ate Matzohs."[11]

3. The Analogy.

Another simple form of clarification employed frequently by the rabbis is the analogy, "by means of which the preacher seeks to make clear the relation between ideas, bringing a remote principle near by identifying it with one that is familiar to all." Since most people become familiar with the natural phenomena which they observe almost daily, many of the midrashic analogies are taken from nature. For example, in a homily on the efficacy of prayer, the Mekilta says: "Just as the termite has only its mouth to smite the cedar, so Israel has only prayer" (as a means of overcoming obstacles).[12] So, too, in explaining Jethro's advice to Moses, the midrash says: "Observe, a beam when it is still green and moist, two or three people get under it but cannot support it. But four or five people get under it and can support it." So, Moses needed assistance in administrating the affairs of his newly emancipated nation.[13]

4. The Proverb.

Another common literary illustration employed by the 'darshanim' in the Mekilta is the Proverb. Most of the proverbs in the Mekilta are maxiomatic principles attributed to one or another of the sages, and used as a terse, striking summary of the preacher's idea. In summarizing a midrash on prayer, the Mekilta says: "R. Eliezer used to say: There is a time to be brief in prayer and a time to be lengthy."[14] Wishing to point out that not a living creature escaped the thirst which caused Israel to murmur against Moses, the Midrash quotes R. Joshua's proverb: "When the house falls, woe to the windows."[15] One of the most frequently repeated aphorisms in the Mekilta is: "With that measure which a man metes unto others, is it meted unto him." במדה שאדם מודד בה מודדים לו .[16] Still another well-known proverb, quoted in the Mekilta in the name of R. Nathan is: "Do not reproach your fellow with a fault which is also your own."[17] This particular proverb is used to illustrate the midrashic interpretation of the admonition against vexing the proselyte (Ex. 22.20), implying that Israel, too, was at times guilty of idolatry.

5. The Parable.

One of the most popular and widely-used illustrations in the Mekilta, as in other midrashim, is the משל, or Parable. It is this form of elucidation which really tests the creative ingenuity of the preacher. The Parable is, es-

sentially, an elaborate analogy, in which "The preacher strives to create an imaginary but not impossible situation, in the light of which his text and theme assume fresh meaning and lustre."[18] Most parables are composed of two elements, the משל and the נמשל -- the story and its application to the preacher's proposition. If the latter is not stated explicitly, it is always implied.[19] The parable is introduced by the formula למה הדבר דומה, or משל לפלוני.

For example, R. Jose the Galilean is interpreting the verse: "And the heart of Pharoah and of his servants was turned."(Ex. 14.5) He wishes to say that after the Israelites had gone, the Egyptians began to realize how valuable they were. So, he makes his point by the following parable: "It is like a man to whom there has come as an inheritance a Bet-kor of land which he sold for a trifle. However, the purchaser dug wells in it and planted gardens, trees, and orchards. The seller, seeing this, began to choke with grief. So it happened to the Egyptians who let (Israel) go without realizing what they relinquished."[20]

Many of these parables are found especially in those midrashim which seek to emphasize the fact that God is not at all like a man. A choice example of this is found in a midrash on praising God for His great works. "To what is it like? To the following: A King of flesh and blood enters a state surrounded by a circle of guards; his heroes stand to the right and to the left of him; his soldiers before and be-

hind him. All the people ask: 'Which is the King?' For he is flesh and blood like the rest. But when the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself at the sea, no one had to ask which one was the King."[21]

6. The Allegory.

We come next to the use of the Allegory as an illustration of some homiletical idea. In this form, "An abstract truth is conceived under the form of a person or any object of sense, and is given concreteness and dramatic intensity."[22] In the Mekilta there is no example of a well-defined or fully-developed allegory; although, as we have seen, there are many examples of texts which are interpreted allegorically. In the Mekilta, such interpretations are attributed to the דורשי רשומות (The Allegorists). Aside from their brief statements, found scattered throughout early midrashic literature, little is known about this school. According to Lauterbach, it was one of the earliest schools of Biblical interpretation, having a distinct exegetical method. It seems that their underlying motive was to explain away anthropomorphisms and to spiritualize the concept of God. While we have no reason to believe that they categorically denied the validity of literal interpretation, they clearly believed that many Scriptural verses made little sense when taken literally, and therefore demanded a metaphorical elucidation.[23] Thus, we find that in treating the narrative concerning the lack of

water in the wilderness (Ex. 15.22), R. Joshua takes the verse literally; but R. Eliezer makes the suggestion that they could have dug wells. One solution to the problem is suggested by a quotation from the Allegorists, who say: "They did not find words of Torah which are likened to water."[24] Likewise, in explaining the name "manna" (Ex. 16.31), the literalists say that one person asked another: "What is it?" (מן הוא ?). But the Allegorists say: "The Israelites called it by the name מן ."[25] Now, according to some scholars, the Allegorists, like Philo, took the word to be a פתרון or symbol for "word of God" or spiritual food."[26]

7. The Legend.

Of the variety of illustrative literary forms in the Mekilta, one of the most colorful is the Legend. Jewish folklore is especially rich is what might be called "legendary history", which grows out of the real experiences of a people and becomes part of its traditions. In every age and among every folk, these legends constitute one of the most popular means of instructing the people in the cultural, ethical, and spiritual traditions of the group. There are two types of legends in midrashic literature -- "those that spring from the scriptural text, or its context...,and those that have no inherent or direct connection with the text...", but are adapted to the text by the preachers because they illustrate his thought.[26]

One of the best known examples of the first variety, is the legend concerning the bones of Joseph which Moses took with him when the Israelites left Egypt. (Ex. 13.19) Moses is lauded for his piety. While Israel busied themselves with preparations for the Exodus, Moses was concerned with fulfilling a great Mitzvah. The fascinating legend is inserted to explain how Moses discovered where Joseph was buried, and how he retrieved the coffin from its sepulchre.[27]

Following is an illustration of the legend which has a non-Biblical setting. Apparently wishing to dramatize his proposition that even the sight of anything evil is enough to bring injury to a man, R. Abba relates this story: "There was a man in the land of Israel whom people called Merutah (Plucked Hair). They say of him that once he went up to the top of a mountain to gather wood, and he saw a sleeping serpent. Although the serpent did not harm him, the hair of his head fell out immediately. Unto his dying day no hair grew back on his head. Therefore they called him Merutah."[28]

8. The Dialogue.

A conventional form of exposition, especially in ancient literature, is the Dialogue. Thus, we find that, in developing an idea or elucidating a certain point, the Mekilta often prefers to cast its presentation in the form of a simple conversation between two parties, rather than employ

a more formal disquisition. The dialogue is usually simple and straightforward, sometimes between God and a prophet -- sometimes between a rabbi and his disciple -- sometimes between two anonymous parties.

For example, in a discussion of the relative importance of prayer and timely action, the midrash records the following conversation between God and Moses: "Moses was standing and reciting long prayers. The Holy One said to him: 'Moses! My friend is sinking in the water; the sea is closing in upon him; the enemy is pursuing him; and you recite long prayers.' Moses said: 'Ruler of the world, what can I do?' God answered him: 'Lift up thy rod', etc." (Ex. 14.16)[29]

An excellent illustration of the Dialogue is found in a discussion on monotheism and idolatry between R. Gamliel and a certain philosopher. Here we find quite an extended conversation in which R. Gamliel introduces examples, a parable, and Scriptural texts.[30]

9. The Kal Vahomer.

It is not the purpose of this study to analyze the various hermeneutic systems and principles employed in rabbinic literature. There is, however, one such rule which is applied so frequently in the homilies of the Mekilta, as to make it worthy of our attention. The קל וחומר is essentially a syllogism, an a fortiori inference, i.e., an inference from minor to major.[31] Just as it is used with almost

decisive effect in questions of halacha, so the homiletician employs it to demonstrate an ethical or religious idea.

The sages explain the ten plagues as a form of Divine punishment; and infering from the order of the verse that he who sinned first is punished first, they apply the Kal Vahomer with the following result: "If with regard to meting out evil, which is of less importance, the rule is that he who sins first is punished first, how much more should this be the rule in meting out good, which is of greater importance!"[32] Another example is contained in a midrash on justice. Scripture states that if a man commits an injustice, his wife will become a widow and his children will be fatherless. (Ex. 22.22f) Reasoning by way of Kal Vahomer the midrash concludes: "If for mere refraining from violating justice your reward will be that your wives will not be widows and your children fatherless, how much more so when you actually perform an act of justice."[33]

10. The Sermonette.

By and large, the haggadic midrashim of the Mekilta are in the nature of homiletical notes and outlines, rather than fully developed sermons. There are, however, a number of instances where the haggadist has composed a protracted and unified discourse on a given subject, and which might be described as a Sermonette. Tractate Beshallah concludes with such a sermonette on faith.[34] The midrash had been in-

terpreting the verse: "And they believed in the Lord and in Moses His servant." (Ex. 14.31) The meaning of this verse is transparent, and the preacher uses it as the text of his sermon on faith. He speaks of the faith of the patriarchs and of the rewards for a life of faith, quoting illustrative verses in profusion. Similarly, there are sermonettes on the evil of idolatry,[35] on prayer,[36] on chastisement, on suffering,[37] on proselytism,[38] and on justice.[39]

This, then, concludes our study of the homiletical style of the Mekilta. Let us proceed to a review of its ideas and concepts.

Part the Third

THE HOMILETICAL CONTENT OF THE MEKILTA

CHAPTER VI

God

The homilies of the Mekilta touch upon a great variety of subjects; even, indeed, to include almost every aspect of the religious, social, and personal life of man. Distinctly prevalent in this extensive array, are those midrashim which deal with the doctrine of God. In one section alone (שירתא -- Ex. 15), the Mekilta sets forth a collection of statements which, according to Moore, "come nearer than any other passage in this literature to being a connected exhibition of these topics in what may be called the Biblical doctrine of God, as that doctrine was interpreted by Jewish scholars."[1] When these midrashim, together with those scattered throughout the rest of the Mekilta, are assembled and arranged, one has a rather elaborate exposition of the God-idea of rabbinic Judaism.

1. The Creator.

The idea of God as the creator of the universe and the nature of His creative power, is best illustrated by one of the titles used very frequently in referring to God. (There are several such titles of Divinity, among them יוצרנו and הקדוש ברוך הוא). With this appellation the Deity is addressed as אמר שלומר והיה העולם , usually rendered as "He, by whose word, the world came into being." The nature of God as the creator is further described by the following midrash: Human beings make a roof of wood, or slate, or

clay. God used water as a roof for the world. (Ps. 104.3) Human beings cannot shape things out of water. God created forms out of water. (Gen. 1.20) Human beings start with a foundation and build upward. God started with the upper part and built downward. (Gen. 1.1) Human beings, in making a figure must have a model and must begin with a single part. God forms the entire figure at once, and out of a drop of fluid gives man a son in the image of his father.[2]

2. General Attributes

One of the most important of the divine attributes insisted upon by the rabbis is His Unity. Thus, the haggadist is troubled by the verse: "The Lord is a Man of war," (Ex. 15.3), so he hastens to emphasize the second part of the verse, "the Lord is His name", explaining that this is said so the nations will not have grounds to say that there are two powers. "He is a man of war, at the sea -- but He is also the merciful One. It is He who was in the past, and who will be in the future. It is He in this world, as well as in the world to come."[3]

Of importance, too, is the question of Transcendance and Immanence. This problem is suggested to the preacher by the text: "And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai", etc. (Ex. 19.20) So, he cautions against taking the verse literally and applies this analogy. "If the sun, one of the many servants of servants, remains in its place and yet is effective beyond its place, how much more is this true of the glory of

Him by whose word the world came into being."[4]

Closely related to the foregoing, is the attribute of Omnipresence. On this point, the Mekilta says: "God said to him (Moses), wherever you find a man's footprints, I am there before thee."[5] In another place God's omnipresence is maintained in the interpretation of "That soul shall be cut off from Israel." (Ex. 12.15) The midrash says that one might take this to mean that one cut off from Israel could go and live among another people. But this is impossible since God's dominion is everywhere.[6] (cf. Lev. 22.3) Also, in explaining Jonah's flight from before the Lord, the Midrash quotes a number of illustrations to show that such a thing is impossible. (Cf. Ps. 139.7f, Job. 34.22, etc.) Hence, Jonah was not escaping from God's presence. He merely fled from Eretz Yisroel to a foreign land where, it was commonly believed, God would not reveal Himself in prophecy.[7]

Next we observe what the Mekilta has to say about God's Omnipotence and Omniscience. In one place it makes the observation: "Even if you stand silent the Lord will fight for you -- and how much the more so when you render praise unto Him, for in His hands are the fortunes of war."[8] In another place, a parable is used to demonstrate His Omnipotence. "A priest had a slave who said: I will run into the cemetery where my master is forbidden to follow me. But the priest said: I have other servants like you. So when Jonah thought to escape from the Lord, the Holy One, praised be He, said: I have other agents like you at my command." So He

brought about the great storm. (Jonah 1.4)[9] On God's Omniscience, the Mekilta has the following thought: God did not really need the blood as a sign on the Israelites' doorposts, since everything is revealed before Him. It was only that He wanted Israel to merit His protection by obeying His commands.[10]

One of the most recurrent attributes ascribed to God by the Mekilta, is that of Incomparability (or Incorporeality). The rabbis seem to have been especially anxious to impress the people with the fact that God is not anthropomorphic. This tendency is particularly noticeable in those parables which are preceded by the formula משל למלך בשר ודם. "A King of flesh and blood enters a province surrounded by guards. His heroes stand on either side of him, and his soldiers in front and in back of him. And all the people ask: Which is the King? Because he is of flesh and blood like those about him. This is not so with God." (When He reveals Himself no one need ask which one is the King.)[11]

To conclude this section on attributes, we cite a midrash which lists the following qualities of God, and the Biblical texts which support them: God is Mighty (Deut. 10. 17, Ps. 24.8, etc.), Incomparable (Jer. 10.6), Rich (Owning the entire universe, Deut. 10.14, Ps. 24.1, Ezek. 18.4, etc.), Wise (Prov. 3.19, Job. 12.13, etc.), the Source of Wisdom, (Dan. 2.21), Faithful (Deut. 7.9, 32.4), Merciful (Ex. 34.6, Ps. 145.9), and He is the Supreme Judge (Deut. 1.17, Ps. 82.1).[12]

3. The Merciful Judge.

To have developed the doctrine of ethical monotheism, which is both the pedestal and the crown of Jewish theology, it was necessary to conceive of God not only as being One and Almighty, but also as being the God of Absolute Justice. There are inumerable statements in the Mekilta which portray God as the Supreme Judge of the universe. The name Elohim, for instance, is always taken to mean "the judge who is just in exacting punishment and faithful in giving reward."[13] In another place R. Pappias and R. Akiba emphasize the point that not only is He just, but His justice is perfect and incontrovertable. "He judges all that come into the world Himself and there is no one to argue against His words." "For every word is in accordance with truth and every decision in accordance with justice."[14]

An indispensable corollary of the doctrine of Divine Justice, is the notion that God tempers His judgments with mercy. This idea is reflected in a Kal Vahomer which appears several times in the Mekilta. "If with regard to meting out evil (punishment), which is of less importance, the Holy One, blessed be He, acts when He says He will act, how much the more is it so with regard to meting out good, which is of greater importance."[15] Here, the quality of God's mercy is inferred from the belief that God Himself attaches greater importance to reward than He does to punsihment. However, this midrash does not yet suggest that the judgment itself is modified. We

find such a suggestion in another place. "Glorious in power" (Ex. 15.6) means that God is long-suffering; for just as in the case of the generation of the Flood, the generation of the Tower, and just as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, so in the case of the Egyptians God extended mercy and gave them time to repent.[16] (Further evidence of this will be found in a subsequent section on Repentance). And in speaking of the Exodus from Egypt, the Mekilta says: "They (Israel) were rebellious, but He dealt with them charitably and delivered them anyway."[17] Moreover, this quality of Divine Mercy or Compassion is <u>infinite</u>. "It is the nature of a human being that he cannot listen to two people cry at the same time. God, however, is not so -- but even when all who come into the world cry before Him, He hears their cries."[18] (Cf. Ps. 65.3)

The rabbis, however, were not satisfied with merely proposing the idea of mercy. Evidently, they, like the prophets of old and the theologians of today, felt the necessity of explaining on what grounds the Supreme and Perfect Judge tempered his absolute justice with mercy. In answer to this question the rabbis employed two main ideas -- the doctrine of זמנין לאו (similar to "grace") and the doctrine of זכות אבות. The following midrashim are representative of these ideas. "The sages say that for <u>the sake of His name</u> He acted thus toward them." (Saved them at the sea in spite of their rebelliousness).[19] In another place, the

Mekilta explains that God provided food and drink for Israel in the wilderness, and led them and protected them only because of the merit of Abraham, since he accompanied the ministering angels and gave them food and drink and shelter.[20]

This entire question of justice and mercy is, of course, part of the general problem of theodicy; and the following midrashim summarize the attitude which prevails in the mekilta. "'And none of you shall go put', etc. (Ex. 12.22). This tells that once permission to do harm has been given to the angel, he does not discriminate between the righteous and the wicked."[21] However, " כשיכלו , there was no rejoicing over the destruction of the wicked before Him on High. Now, if there is no rejoicing before Him over the destruction of the wicked, how much more is there no joy before Him over the destruction of the righteous, of whom one is as important as the whole world."[22]

4. Monotheism vs. Polytheism (Idolatry)

The theology of the Mekilta may be inferred from its negative as well as its positive statements; for, not only does it propound the God-concept of Judaism, but it also engages in polemics against the prevailing polytheistic creeds of the day. And the vehemence with which they attack idolatrous beliefs and practices is equalled in intensity only by the zeal with which they preach the doctrine of monotheism.

One statement says: "The law against idolatry outweighs all other commandments in the Torah. One who worships idols breaks the yoke (עול תורה מן עול מצות), annuls the covenant, and perverts the Torah."[23] In another place "other gods" is interpreted to mean gods that are backward (מאחרים), for they delay the coming of good into the world.[24] The strongest statement concerning idolaters is attributed to R. Simon b. Yohai. "The nicest of the idolaters (heathens) -- kill them. The best of serpents -- smash its brains."[25]

Some of the arguments against idolatry in the Mekilta are as trenchant and as brilliant in satire as the famous passage in Isaiah 44. For instance, R. Eliezer said: "If a man has an idol of gold, and he needs the gold, he makes one of silver. Then if he needs the silver, he makes one of copper. When he needs the copper, etc." And in the same passage R. Isaac says: "If the name of every idol were to be mentioned by name, all the parchment in the world would not suffice."[26] The most striking passage of this nature is a long debate between R. Gamaliel and a heathen philosopher. Successfully countered in all his points, the philosopher finally resorts to the following question: "If there is no usefulness in idols, why does not God annihilate them?" To which R. Gamaliel replies: "Behold, you worship the sun, the moon, the stars, mountains, rivers, and even human beings. Shall God destroy the world because of fools?"[27]

In this connection, we find a number of passages in the Mekilta which anticipate the day when the God of Israel will be universally recognized as the only deity. Thus, the midrash explains "that wherever God punishes the nations, His name becomes renowned in all the world."[28] And in another place: "When the nations of the world saw that Pharoah and his hosts perished in the Red Sea and that the reign of Egypt came to an end, and that judgments were executed against their deities, they all renounced their idols, and confessed God."[29] The conflict between monotheism and polytheism is summarized in a statement concerning Amalek, one of the goyim' traditionally used in referring to Israel's enemies. "When will the name of these people be blotted out? At that time when idolatry will be eradicated together with its devotees, and God will be recognized throughout the world, and His kingdom will be established forever."[30]

5. God's special relation to Israel.

The universalistic point of view in the Mekilta, as in some of the prophets, is qualified by an attempt to reconcile the concepts of a universal God and a chosen people (Israel). This harmonization is clearly recognizable in the following midrash: "Thou art a helper and support of all who come into the world, but of me (Israel) especially. Thou art the subject of song to all who come into the world, but to me especially. Behold, all nations declare the praise

of Him who created the world. But my praise is more pleasing (to Him). Thou art the salvation of all who come into the world, but of me especially."[31] This intimate relationship between God and Israel is demonstrated in a parable which portrays God as a King whose son (Israel) goes to one foreign country and then to another -- and each time the father follows in order to be near his son. "So, also, when the Israelites went to Egypt, the Shekinah went with them; and the Shekinah came out of Egypt with them."[32] Similarly, it says: "So, you find that whenever Israel is enslaved (or exiled), the Shekinah, as it were, is enslaved with them."[33] God's special protection of Israel is beautifully allegorized in the following parable: "It is comparable to a dove that is fleeing from a hawk. It enters the palace of a king. The king opens the eastern window, permitting the dove to escape. But when the hawk enters, he shuts the window and begins shooting at the hawk." (So with the Egyptians after Israel had crossed the Sea).[34] In this connection see also the parable of R. Judah, Beshallah, V, ויסע אלהים ויבא).

6. Providence.

The Mekilta abounds in Midrashim on the nature and bounty of God's providence. Among the general statements in this connection are: "He who created the day also created the sustenance thereof. Hence R. Eleazar said that he who has enough for today and asks what he will eat tomorrow, he is of

little faith."[35] "While you are sleeping on your beds, behold God provides food for you."[36] It is in the graphic and striking illustrations, however, that we find the most significant homilies on providence. "It is a rule among human beings that when a man labors for an employer, he gives the laborer a coin and lets him go. Not so with God. He can give whatever a man desires. (Children, wisdom, possessions, etc.)"[37] Even more impressive is the following: "As soon as the sun shone upon the manna it began to melt and formed streams which flowed into the sea. Harts, gazelles, and stags, and all manner of animals came and drank. The nations of the world would hunt these animals and would taste in them the taste of the manna which came down for Israel."[38] Similar to this is a midrash we have already discussed in connection with Illustrative materials, wherein is described how the wind and rain joined to make of the ground a fitting table from which the people would eat the manna. It concludes by saying: "If God thus provides for those who provoked Him, how much more will He in the future pay a good reward to the righteous."[39] (Note that the reward is not promised for the present but in the future).

Am especially fine midrash connected with the idea of providence will conclude this section fittingly. The story is told of a banquet given for the sages by R. Gamaliel who proceeded to wait on them himself. Some of the scholars suggested that it was not proper for a man as great as Gamaliel

to wait on them. But R. Zadok said: "Let him do the serving. We have One greater than R. Gamaliel who has waited upon people. It is the Holy One, blessed be He, who gives to everyone his wants and to everyone according to his needs. And not to good people alone, but even to the wicked and to heathens. All the more, therefore, is it proper for R. Gamaliel to wait upon sages who are sons of the Torah."[40]

CHAPTER VII

Israel

1. The Chosen People.

"Scripture designates Israel as a nation, holy and sacred, separated from the nations of the world and their abominations."[1] "The whole world is thine, and yet Thou hast no other people than Israel."[2] These are the most definitive and explicit statements in the Mekilta on the subject of Israel's selection by God, and its special status in relation to the other nations. In elaborating this idea, the midrash explains the selection of Israel as a reward for the faith with which they believed in God and Moses. "They did not say: 'How can we go out in the wilderness without provisions.' Rather, they believed in him and followed him. What was their reward? Israel was the Lord's hallowed portion." (Jer. 2.3)[3] Following are two choice examples used by the rabbis to illustrate the Chosen People idea. "A man betroths a woman. Sometimes he (may have reason to) be ashamed of her, sometimes of her family, sometimes of her relatives. I (Israel) however, am not of that kind. I am a queen, the daughter of kings; beloved, the daughter of beloved ones; holy, the daughter of holy ones; pure, the daughter of pure ones."[4] (The use of the feminine personification of Israel is due to the Influence of Song of Songs).

In another place a story is told of Antoninus the

Emperor who, on occasions when he held court until after dark, would take a torch and light the way for his sons who had been waiting beside him. He explained that it was not because he had no servants to carry torches for him; rather that he did it himself to show how dear his sons were to him. "In the same way God showed the nations of the world how dear the children of Israel were to Him, in that He, Himself, went before them, so that the nations should treat them with respect."[5]

2. Nationhood.

By definition, there are four essentials which constitute nationhood, i.e., a land, a common history, a common tongue, and common institutions. All four of these elements are adduced in the Mekilta with regard to Israel.

There are two midrashim, in particular, which reflect the rabbis' attitude toward Israel's nationhood. "As soon as the nations heard that God was exalting the horn of Israel and bringing them into the land, they began to tremble with rage. Said God to them: Fools that you are! How many were the kings that reigned among you, and yet Israel did not get angry. And now you get angry! I, too, will vent anger upon you!"[6] A more extensive and positive exposition of the founding of Israel's national life is the following: "Before the land of Israel was chosen, all lands were suitable for divine revelation. After the land of Israel was chosen, all other lands were eliminated....Before the Temple had been

especially selected, the whole of Jerusalem was appropriate for the manifestation of the divine presence; after the Temple-site had been selected, all other places were eliminated....Before David had been chosen, all Israelites were eligible for the kingship; after David's selection, all others were disqualified."[7] Still another midrash proposing the elements of nationhood is found in a passage which states that four things are called ירושה (possession) -- Israel, Eretz Yisroel, the Torah, and the Temple. "Let Israel, (the group) which is called possession, come to the land which is called a possession, and build a temple (common institutions) which is called a possession, by virtue of their having received the Torah (common culture and law) which is called a possession."[8]

Two other homilies are important in this connection. One concerns Eretz Yisroel. "You should not look upon it (the land) as something inherited from your fathers but as something which was given to you on that day."[9] The second concerns a common language and group history. R. Eliezer lauds Israel for having four virtues, than which there is nothing worthier. Among them he mentions the fact that they did not change their names (sever their historical ties); nor did they change their language.[10]

The strong ties which bind Israel together as a group are found illustrated in one of the most famous homilies in this literature. "The people of Israel may be com-

pared to a lamb. What is the nature of a lamb? If one of its limbs is injured, all its limbs feel the pain. So also with Israel. If one commits a sin (or is injured) all of them suffer."[11]

3. The Oppression of Israel.

As might be expected, the ancient preachers made a great deal of homiletical capital on the persecution of Israel, especially since much of the Mekilta dates from the period of Roman hegemony. Some of these midrashim are merely descriptive; some attempt to explain Israel's fate; some are vindictive, and still others preach a message of hope.

The following analogy, applied in the Mekilta to Israel at the Red Sea, is certainly a pointed description of many crises in the history of the Jews. "What was Israel like? Like a dove fleeing from a hawk and about to enter a cleft in the rock, where there is a hissing serpent. If she enters, there is the serpent! If she stays out, there is the hawk!"[12] And, in a similar vein: "One was travelling along the road. He encountered a wolf and was saved from him. He went along telling the story of the wolf. Then he encountered a lion and was saved from him. He forgot the story of the wolf and went along telling the story of the lion. Then he met a serpent, etc....So it is with Israel. Later troubles cause the former ones to be forgotten."[13]

In the main, the sages offered two explanations of

Israel's sufferings. One explanation rationalized the fact in the following terms: "The reason that Pharoah pursued after Israel is to proclaim Israel's excellence. For had it been any other people he would not have pursued them."[14] Similarly: "And so you find that every nation or tongue that subjugated Israel, ruled from one end of the world to the other -- for the sake of the honor of Israel." (Israel could be subjugated by no less than a world-empire).[15]

The other opinion holds that the oppression of Israel is brought about by the waywardness of Israel -- the neglect of God and Torah. The choicest illustration of this is found in a story about R. Johanan b. Zakkai. On a walking tour with his disciples, the master sees a girl engaged in some degrading task for a horseman. Upon inquiry he is told that the girl is a Jewess and the horseman an Arabian. The master immediately recites a text (Cant. 1.8) and preaches the following homily to his disciples: "You (Israel symbolized by the girl) were unwilling to serve God. Now you serve the most inferior of nations. You were unwilling to pay the poll-tax to God. Now you pay a fifteen shekel tax under a government of your enemies. You were unwilling to repair the roads and streets leading to the Temple; now you have to repair the posts and stations on the royal roads. Because you did not serve God with love, you will serve your enemies with hatred. Because you did not serve God when you were affluent, you will serve your enemy in hunger and thirst, etc."[16]

In another midrash the rabbis attempt to disclose the various motives for the oppression of Israel. In a sense, it is an apt analysis of modern anti-semitism. "The Egyptians at the sea were divided into three groups as regards the Israelites. One proposed to plunder Israel without killing them. (Economic motive). The second proposed to kill them without plundering them. (Religious or racial motive). And the third proposed to kill them and to plunder them."[17] In a similar fashion, the haggadists attempted to generalize the various programs of defensive action proposed by different factions in Jewish life. As in the case of the previous midrash, this one, too, has a modern significance. "The Israelites at the Red Sea were divided into four parties. One said: Let us throw ourselves into the sea. (The defeatists or assimilationists). Another said: Let us return to Egypt. (Reactionary segregationists). A third said: Let us fight them. (The militant Jewish groups). And the fourth said: Let us cry out against them." (Anti-defamationists, apologetes). All four groups are answered in the conclusion of the midrash which quotes Exodus 14.13: 1) "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. 2) For whereas ye have seen the Egyptians today, ye shall not see them again forever. 3) The Lord will fight for you. 4) And ye shall hold your peace."[18]

An example of the vindictive spirit is found in a simple statement attributed to the former sages, who said:

"Such is the rule obtaining throughout all generations, that the scourge with which Israel is smitten will in the end be smitten itself."[19] The message of hope, which is recurrent in the Mekilta, may be summarized by the following typical statement: "And you find that the people of the diaspora will be assembled again in the future, but only as a reward for faith."[20]

4. The Mission of Israel.

There is no direct statement in the Mekilta concerning the assignment of a special mission to Israel by God. The idea, however, is clearly implied in a number of midrashim. With slight variations, we find the following statement in several places: "When Israel does the will of God, His name becomes known in the world. But when they fail to do His will, His name is profaned in the world."[21] The nature of the task which Israel alone could discharge, is even more specific in another midrash. "Moses said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Ruler of the World, this wicked one (Amalek) is coming to destroy your children from under your wings. Who, then, will read this book of the Law which thou hast given them?"[22]

The mission idea is also implied in a very interesting passage which is in the form of a dialogue between Israel and the nations, employing a number of verses from Canticles. "The nations ask Israel: 'What is thy beloved more than another, etc. (Cant. 5.9), that you are ready to

die for Him....'You are handsome, you are mighty'. Come and intermingle with us. But the Israelites say to the nations: 'Do you know Him? Let us but tell you some of His glory.' After hearing the praise the nations would say, 'we will join you.'" Now, if the midrash ended here, it would constitute a perfect homiletical illustration of the mission of Israel. The conclusion of the passage, however, introduces a completely contradictory note. Israel answers the nations: "You can have no share in Him...for, 'my beloved is mine and I am His.'" (Cant. 2.16)[23]

5. Proselytism.

The universalistic spirit of the Mekhilta is brought to full light in the midrashim on proselytism. One of the most expressive homilies in this collection is the reply which the homiletician ascribes to Jethro when Moses asks his father-in-law to stay with Israel. "Is a lamp of any use except in a dark place? What use could a lamp be where there is the sun and the moon? You (Moses) and Aaron are the sun and the moon (here). I shall go to my land and tell everybody (of God's mighty works), and convert all the people of my country, leading them to the study of Torah and bringing them under the wings of the Shekinah."[24] Still another fine homily in this connection is the ingenious explanation of Abraham's circumcision at the late age of ninety. The midrash proposes that had he been circumcised at twenty or thirty years of age

only those gerim under twenty or thirty would have been able to convert to Judaism. Therefore, God tolerated Abraham in uncircumcised condition for ninety years, "so as not to close the door to future proselytes."[25]

According to the Mekilta, once a ger has converted, he is to be treated with respect and regarded as an equal. Therefore, Exodus 12.49 is taken "to declare that the proselyte is equal to the born Jew with respect to all the commandments."[26] In another place it states explicitly: "You shall not vex him (the proselyte) with words. You should not say to him: 'But yesterday you were worshipping Bel, Kores, and Nebo; and until now swine's flesh was sticking in your teeth...' For all we know, if you vex him, he may also vex you (with accusations of idolatrous practices)."[27] The paragon of these attitudes toward the proselyte is found in a passage attributed to R. Eliezer, who says: "God said to Moses: I who spoke the word by which the world came into being, I am the One who welcomes; not one who rejects. So also, you, when a man come to you wishing to become a convert to Judaism, as long as he comes in the name of God, befriend him and do not reject him."[28]

CHAPTER VIII

Torah and Revelation

1. The Nature of Torah.

It goes without saying that in a work like the Mekilta, the concept of Torah is both eminent and exalted. Any number of Allegorical texts are rendered in such a manner as to enrich the audience's mental-image of the Torah, and to emphasize its significance as the "book of life". For instance, in one place, the word עז (strength) is taken to be a designation for Torah.[1] Elsewhere, the Allegorists say that it was not a tree which God showed to Moses (Ex. 15.25), but the Torah which is likened to a tree of life.[2] In a more extended homily, the Torah is said to be like fire. For not only was the Torah given in fire; but like fire, also, if one comes too close to it one is burned. If one stays too far away, one gets cold. "The only thing for a man to do is to seek to warm himself by its flame."[3]

Just as in the case of proselytism, so in the matter of Torah, the Mekilta expresses itself in lofty universalistic terms. "The Torah was given openly in public, in a free place. For had it been given in Eretz Yisroel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: 'You have no share in it.' But since it has been given in the wilderness, publicly...everyone wishing to accept it can come and do so."[4] Similarly, "The Torah is comparable to

three things: to the desert, to fire, and to water. This is to teach you that just as these things are free to all who come into the world, so also are the words of Torah."[5]

2. The Study of Torah.

The study of Torah was regarded by the rabbis to be an essential condition of Israel's existence. "Is it possible for a rush to grow without mire, or the reed-grass to grow without water? (Cf. Job 8.11) So, also, is it impossible for Israel to exist unless they busy themselves with the words of Torah."[6] We also find the oft-quoted statement that the study of Torah is as important as all the other mitzwoth together. Therefore, a father is adjured to teach his son Torah; and a man whose father has not taught him, must teach himself.[7] The verse: "For sweet is they voice and thy countenance comely" (Cant. 2.14), means to the homiletician that the voice is sweet in prayer, and the countenance comely when studying Torah.[8] The study of Torah was regarded as important enough to nullify the requirement to put on phylacteries.[9] "He who 'steals away' from his friend to go study Torah, although he might be called a thief, he acquires merit for himself. In the end, he will be appointed a teacher of the community."[10]

There are two points of view in the Mekilta, with regard to the question of taking time to study Torah. One is highly idealistic -- the other quite practical. The former is illustrated in a dialogue between Jeremiah and the people.

The prophet has exhorted the people to study the Torah and they have replied that if they do, there will be no time to earn a living. Whereupon Jeremiah exhibits a small bottle of manna, saying: "See what your fathers, who busied themselves with Torah, were provided. If you busy yourselves with the words of Torah, God will provide sustenance for you, too."[11] The more practical view holds that only those who have manna, or eat the terumah (those whose sustenance is provided, ~~form~~ precisely that they may have the time to study) have the privilege of scholarship." For how can a man be sitting and studying when he does not know where his food and drink and raiment will come from?"[12] Elsewhere, it is suggested that, to avoid complete negligence of the Torah by those who are occupied with mundane affairs, the prophets instituted the reading of Torah on Sabbaths, Mondays, and Thursdays.[13]

3. Revelation.

The question of revelation is not dealt with at length in the Mekilta. We do find some interesting opinions, however. We have noted before that the rabbis believed revelation to be impossible outside of Eretz Yisroel.[14] Those instances when God was supposed to have revealed Himself in a foreign land (e.g., Babylonia and Egypt), are explained as having been possible only because of צכות אבות.[15] It is made clear, too, that God reveals Himself only in a place which is pure, and uncontaminated by idolatry.[16]

The sages express the belief that, in the case of every prophet from Moses on, God revealed Himself only for the sake of the people, and for no other reason. In this connection, the Mekilta presents an elegant illustration. Baruch had complained that, whereas other disciples of great prophets had shared in the Holy Spirit (prophecy), he had not. God answers him saying: "Baruch son of Neriah! There is no vineyard, what need is there of a fence? There is no flock, what need is there of a shepherd?"[17]

4. The Mitzwoth.

One of the dominant themes in the homilies of the Mekilta is the importance of performing the mitzwoth. The rabbis not only exhort the people, but often take the time to explain why these religious acts were commanded and how they enrich the life of man. Issi b. Abihu says: "With every new mitzwoh that God decrees to Israel, He adds holiness to them."[18] Another sage submits the idea that the commandments were decreed not because God needs these services of man, but only to give man the opportunity of meriting a reward by fulfilling them.[19] Similarly, R. Ishmael himself questions the purpose of the mitzwoth , since it is impossible to conceive of God requiring them for His own glory. "It is only that man becomes beautiful before Him in observing the mitzwoth."[20] It is even suggested that a man may achieve immortality by observing the commandments. The story is told of Joseph's coffin

being transported side by side with the Holy Ark containing the two tablets. The nations ask Israel what is in the two chests. To which Israel replies that one contains the Eternal and the other is a coffin with a body in it. When asked what one is doing next to the other, Israel replies: "The one lying in the coffin has fulfilled all that which is written upon that which lies in the Ark."[21]

In the Mekilta, we also find a variation of the famous rabbinic principles: מצוה גוררת מצוה ; עבירה גוררת עבירה Our midrash says: "If a man hearkens to one mitzwoh, he is given the opportunity to hearken to many. If a man forgets but one mitzwoh, he will be led to forget many."[22] Another familiar idea is expressed in the interpretation of Exodus 12.28. וילכו , the midrash says, indicates that a reward is given for intending to perform a mitzwoh, as well as for actually performing it.[23] The people are taught that the performance of these religious acts takes precedence over every other activity. "One should not be slow to perform a religious duty. But if a mitzwoh comes your way, do it immediately."[24] And, just as it is important to observe the mitzwoth, so it is a serious matter to transgress any mitzwoth. It not only constitutes a violation of the Torah, but it also leads to the breaking of God's covenant with Israel.[25] The then current attitude that men and women were not equally responsible in the observance of mitzwoth is illustrated in the following homily: "'Thus shalt thou say to the House of Jacob',

-- means tell the women the main things in a mild tone.

'And tell the sons of Israel', means be strict with the men."[26]

(Cf. Ex. 19.3)

CHAPTER IX

The Doctrines of Man

1. Faith.

According to the rabbis of the Mekilta, faith in God not only resulted in Israel's being chosen by Him as His "hallowed portion",[1] but faith will also bring about the redemption from the diaspora.[2] The forefathers are recurrently cited as exemplars of faith. Thus, we find that they displayed their faith in both God and Moses by following Moses into the wilderness without question as to provisions.[3] And in similar vein, the midrash asks how the Israelites could have obtained flutes and timbrels in the wilderness. (Cf. Ex. 15.20) The answer is that the righteous had brought them out of Egypt, having been confident that God would work great deeds and that they would sing His praises.[4] "We find that as a reward for the faith with which they believed, our forefathers were considered worthy of having the Holy Spirit rest upon them. He keeps in remembrance the faith of the fathers."[5] In this connection, the midrash also states that to believe in the shepherd of Israel (its religious leaders) is to believe in God Himself. And to speak against the shepherd of Israel, is to speak against God.[6]

2. Prayer

Perhaps the sharpest homily on prayer is the admonition which R. Eliezer b. Jacob presents as the word of God:

"If you come to My House, I will come to your house. If you do not come to My house, I will not come to your house."[7] With this call to the synagogue as an introduction, let us proceed to examine a number of passages on prayer itself. We have already mentioned the statement which interprets "For sweet is Thy voice", etc. (Cant. 2.14) as meaning that the voice is sweet in prayer.[8] The midrashic rationalization of Israel's helplessness in the face of Roman arms, proposes some lofty spiritual ideas. For instance, "Just as the worm has only its mouth with which to smite the cedar, so Israel has only prayer."[9] Likewise, "Esau (Rome) prides himself on his heritage (the sword). 'The hands are the hands of Esau.' Isaac prides himself on his heritage, (prayer). 'The voice is the voice of Jacob.'" (Gen. 27.22)[10]

The idea that everyone is equal when standing before God in prayer or devotion is expressed in the interpretation to Exodus 15.1: "Moses and the children of Israel sang," etc. Moses was equal to Israel, and Israel equal to Moses in uttering the song."[11] We find two other ideas in the Mekilta, which are familiar to us from other midrashic collections. One is the famous aphorism: "The prayer of the righteous is short." And, "There is a time to be brief in prayer and a time to be lengthy."[12] The other principle is that one owes devotion to God whether what He gives you is good or bad.[13]

3. Repentance.

Closely akin to the doctrine of prayer in the theology of the Mekilta, is the concept of Repentance. Repentance, as we have seen in the chapter on God, is made possible by the quality of mercy with which the Supreme Judge tempers His judgments. There are a number of passages which elucidate the idea. According to one preacher, the Torah makes forgiveness possible only through four things: Chastisement (Ps. 89.33), Death (Isa. 22.14), the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16.30), and Repentance (Jer. 3.14).[14] In another place there is the suggestion that not only does God's mercy make repentance possible, but that repentance, in turn, causes God to be merciful. So, when the Mekilta asks why should God be so lenient -- the answer given is: "Because of the power of repentance which is mighty."[15] This power of repentance is illustrated in the following analogy. "There might be a great hero in a country. However, once the arrow leaves his bow, he has not the power to recall it. It is not so with the Creator of the World. When Israel fails to do His will, a decree is sent forth. If Israel repents, however, He immediately makes it come back."[16]

4. Righteousness and Evil.

If the rabbis were sometimes at a loss for a satisfactory explanation of theodicy, they were never inhibited in their praise of the righteous and their denunciation of the wicked. Thus, when Rabbi is asked, "Who is greater, the

world or the righteous man," he answers without hesitation: "The righteous man."[17] This same attitude is expressed in a Kal Vahomer which appears several times with slight variations. "If there is no joy before Him on high over the destruction of the wicked, how much more is there no joy before Him over the destruction of the righteous, one of whom is as important as the whole world."[18]

Although they do not always promise an earthly reward for the righteous, the sages emphasize the belief that God is ever aware of their deeds. "We find that the names of the righteous and their deeds are revealed before God even before they are born."[19] And in this same connection we also find: "If with regard to meting out evil, which is of less importance, God makes public the evil deeds done in secret; how much more should this be the rule with regard to meting out goof, which is of greater importance."[20]

Another significant attitude concerning good and evil is the importance which the Mekilta attaches to motives. In brief, there are three elements which go into making a certain deed good or evil: the motive, the act itself, and the results. Of these three, the midrash seems to attach greatest importance to the motive or intention; and the following passages will serve to illustrate the point. "Let the work of saddling which our father Abraham did in order to go and do the will of the Creator, come and stand out against the same work which Balaam the wicked did in order to go and

curse Israel. Let the work of harnessing the chariot done by Joseph in order to go meet his father, come and stand out against the same work which Pharoah did in order to pursue Israel." Similarly, "Let the 'sword' and the 'hand' used by our father Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son, come and stand against the 'sword' and the 'hand' used by Pharoah in pursuing Israel."[21]

5. Reward and Punishment.

The problem of reward and punishment was no less an important issue in the days of the tannaim than it is to theologians today; and the Mekilta contains a number of interesting attitudes on the subject. On the one hand, we find the statement that "once the angel is given permission to destroy, he makes no distinction between the righteous and the wicked."[22] But, in another place the midrash expresses the idea that he who is first to sin, is first to be punished; and he who is first to do good is first to be rewarded.[23] The latter idea implies that there is a distinction made on behalf of the righteous; and this same attitude is expressed in more definite terms when the midrash explains that the Egyptians sank in the Red Sea according to their relative wickedness. "The wicked ones were tossed about like straw. (Pain prolonged). The intermediate sank like stones, and the good ones like lead."[24] The prevailing attitude, however, at least as far as this world is concerned, seems to be ex-

pressed in the recurrent proverb: בראה שלשם מודיע בה מובדים הן [15]

Mark Twain, in his fascinating story about "The Mysterious Stranger", makes much of the observation that nature and dumb beasts, which are not supposed to know anything of right and wrong, are often kinder and more admirable than man who is supposed to have a moral sense. However, Mark Twain was preceded in this notion some few centuries by the sages of the Mekilta. In illustrating how God employs natural forces as agents of punishment, the midrash says: "It was fitting that the sea, which has no heart, but had a heart ascribed to it, should come and punish the Egyptians who had a heart, but subjected Israel to all manner of cruelties. It was fitting for the terebinth which has no heart, but which had a heart ascribed to it, to come and punish Absalom who had a heart, but who sinned against his father." [26]

6. Chastisement and Suffering.

Closely related to questions of reward and punishment, are the rabbinic doctrines proposed as explanations of suffering in human life. One opinion holds that hardship and suffering are merely a means of refining man and testing his character. [27] Another attitude explains chastisements as one of the few means of obtaining heavenly pardon for one's sins. [28] Elaborating this point of view, the preacher says: "A man should rejoice in adversity more than in prosperity. For even if he lives in affluence all his life, it does not

mean that his sins have been forgiven. What brings forgiveness? Suffering!"[29] The familiar doctrine that human suffering may be regarded as יסורין של אהבה, is expressed in two statements attributed to R. Jose b. R. Judah and R. Simon b. Yohai. The former said: "Precious are chastisements for the name of God rests upon him to whom they come." The latter applied the idea to Israel specifically. "Precious are chastisements for only through them was Israel given the three good gifts which other nations covet: Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and the world to come."[30] It is to be noted that there is one constant factor in all of these varying rationalizations of human suffering, i.e., that chastisements are a blessing rather than a curse.

7. The Body and the Soul.

We find nothing in the Mekilta concerning the rabbinic concept of dualism in the human personality -- the notion of the Yetzer. There is one passage, however, which infers that, in the final reckoning before God, a man is regarded as an integrated being. No one aspect of his dual nature, rather the whole man, is held responsible for the quality of his life. The idea is illustrated in a rather extended but skillfully constructed parable in which a king employs a blind man and a cripple to guard his orchard. The two of them, tempted by the fruit, devise a means of obtaining it. The lame one rides on the shoulders of his blind com-

panion, and together they are able to do what neither could accomplish alone. When the king, however, discovers the act, each protests innocence on the basis of his incapacitation. The king sees through the ruse and holds both responsible. So when God judges a man, "he places the soul in the body and judges them as one."[31] (For another novel approach to this same idea, see a similar midrash found in Leviticus Rabbah, IV. Here the soul is held more responsible than the body, because it is the soul which is expected to know the difference between right and wrong).

8. Freedom of Will.

The doctrine of free will in the Mekilta complies with the general rabbinic compromise that freedom of will is given to man, but with certain limitations. This compromise is necessary in order to avoid a serious conflict with the doctrines concerning predetermination and God's omniscience. Thus, the Mekilta states that God gave man the choice of two ways -- the way of life and the way of death. Since man chose the way of death, it is inferred that he also relinquished some of his freedom.[32] In another place the midrash declares that once a man wills to perform a mitzwoh, he will be led to perform others whether he wills it or not. And if he deliberately neglects a mitzwoh, he will be led to neglect other things whether he wills it or not. The inference, then, is that freedom of will is given to man; but once a man

chooses a certain way, he is compelled to follow that course.[33]

The Mekilta, therefore, teaches that the fate of man is determined both by factors within his control and factors beyond his control. The factors which are beyond the powers of man are implied in a homily which lists seven things, the knowledge of which is hidden from men: the day of death, the day of comfort, the depths of judgment, what can be turned to profit, or what is in the heart of a fellow man; when the Kingdom of David will be restored, or when the evil kingdom will be uprooted.[34]

9. The Sanctity of Human Life.

The rabbinic doctrine of the sanctity of life is often based on the belief that man was created in the image of God. In the Mekilta, we find two other reasons for regarding the life of man as something sacred. When God commanded Moses to warn the people against coming too close to Mount Sinai during the giving of the Law, the midrash explains that God said: "Every one of them that might be taken away is to me as valuable as the whole work of creation."[35] A more ingenuous illustration is based on the arrangement of the commandments as they were engraved upon the two tablets -- five on one side, and five on the other. The commandment concerning God is opposite the one concerning murder. Therefore, if one commits murder, it is as if he desecrated the divine image.[36]

10. Eschatology.

There are many references in the Mekilta to future redemption, to the Messiah, and to [illegible]. However, only a few passages are of significance or interest. To Rabbi, for instance, is attributed the deduction of resurrection of the dead from Scripture itself. His reasoning is based on the use of the imperfect rather than the perfect tense in Exodus 15.1 ([illegible]).[37] R. Eliezer interprets Psalm 81.4 as indicating that the future redemption will occur on Rosh Hodesh Tishri (Rosh Hashonah), rather than Erev Pesach.[38] This redemption, however, will not be universal; and among those for whom there will be no redemption are the heathen nations.[39] In still another passage the inference is made that many rewards are not to be found in this world, but in the world to come.[40]

CHAPTER X

Human Relationships

1. Leadership

The Mekilta does not deal with the theme of leadership, per se. A number of passages, however, reflect opinions on the subject and were unquestionably intended as lessons of contemporary significance. For instance, the role of the wise leader in times of crisis is exemplified by Moses who rallied and pacified the children of Israel at the Red Sea.[1] Using the prophets as examples, the haggadist determines that there are three kinds of religious leaders. One is zealous for the honor due the father (God) as well as the honor due the son (the people), exemplified by Jeremiah (Lam. 3.42). The second is zealous for the honor due God, but not for the honor (welfare) of the people. (Elijah in I Ki. 19.10). The last, is concerned about the people without being concerned about God (Jonah 1.3, 3.1).[2] It goes without saying that the rabbis regard Jeremiah as the proper model for religious leadership.

Responsible and authoritative leadership should be given only to those who have proven themselves deserving of such eminence. It is like a king who entered a province and asked to be made king, whereupon the people asked him what he had done to deserve to rule over them. He then proceeded to build walls, to bring in a water supply, and to fight their battles. Only then did they accept him as their king.[3]

2. Justice and Peace.

In the Mekilta we find that the ideal of human justice is modelled closely after the concept of divine justice. In fact, the midrash makes the explicit declaration that to render a true judgment is tantamount to having been a co-worker with God in the creation of the world.[4] Another general statement emphasizes the positive aspect of justice. In brief, it is a mitzwoh to refrain from committing an injustice, but it is a far greater mitzwoh to actually execute justice.[5] It is interesting to note what punishment the rabbis foresaw for those who pervert justice, the punishment, of course, to be administered by heaven, not by man. One of three things happens to the man who perverts justice: his mind will become confused with respect to Torah (knowledge of right and wrong), he will become dependent upon charity, or his eyesight will be impaired.[6]

In a passage which deals more specifically with the administration of justice, the Mekilta implies that each case must be judged on its own merits, without personal regard or prejudice. If the case involves two men, one pious and one wicked by reputation, one should not decide the case against the wicked man simply on the basis of his previous reputation.[7] Elsewhere, it is taught that, in their sphere, the legal ordinances which expedite the administration of justice, are as important as the lofty ethical and moral commandments of the Torah. For if there is some litigation

between two men, there is always ill-will between them. But when the case is decided for them (justly), peace may be restored between them.[8]

Justice, then, is regarded as the basis for lasting peace. The ideal of peace is epitomized in the following illustration: The stones of the altar do not speak nor hear nor see. Yet because they serve to establish peace between Israel and God, He commanded that no tool should be lifted against them. How much the more will He protect from harm the one who establishes peace between man and his fellow, between husband and wife, beyween city and city, or between nation and nation.[9]

3. Parents.

Respect for one's parents was regarded by the sages as one of the greatest mitzwoth. Indeed, they taught that in the sight of God, to honor one's parents is equal to honoring Him; and to show disrespect for them is equal to blaspheming Him.[10] Nor should one parent be shown any less respect than the other.[11] Rabbi observed that a man may honor his father more than his mother because she wins him over with persuasive words. Or a man may fear his father more than his mother because it is a man's father who teaches him Torah. To prevent this unseemly distinction between one's parents, Torah mentions the mother first in one verse, but mentions the father first in another.[12]

Just as the child has certain responsibilities toward his parents, so the parents have a responsibility toward their children. Most of the parents' duties, according to the Mekilta, are of an educational nature, for a man's first duty is to teach his son Torah. Other duties mentioned are practical enough, i.e., arrange a proper marriage, teach a child how to swim, and teach him the essentials of good citizenship (ראוי אומנות).[13]

Parents also have the important responsibility of preparing their children, from early childhood, for the good life. Even if the child is too young to comprehend all that he hears and sees (as in the case of the children who were brought by their parents to witness the acceptance of the Law), the parent who does so fulfills the will of God and merits an additional reward.[14]

4. Respect for Others.

Respect for one's fellow-man is one of the basic principles of human relationships. One homily compares it to the stones of the altar. They have no feelings, and yet God commanded that they be treated with respect. How much the more so should one have respect for a fellow-man, who is made in the image of God.[15] Similarly, if a man welcomes his fellow-man, it is considered as if he had welcomed the Divine Presence.[16] Proper respect is especially becoming in the case of a teacher and his students. Not only should the

teacher hold his pupil as dear as he holds himself, but respect for one's teacher should be as dear to one as the fear of heaven.[17] It follows, too, that one should be careful to show respect for his colleague. One who attempts to embarass his colleague for his own aggrandizement is regarded as a speaker of falsehoods.[18] In a negative sense, the principle of respecting one's associates is epitomized in R. Nathan's statement: אוי לאדם שמלבין פני חבירו ברבים[19]

In this connection, one of the preachers manifests an unusual understanding of human psychology when he makes the following observation: "It is in the nature of a human being to be more revered by those who are at a distance than by those who are close to him."[20]

CHAPTER XI

The Good Life

1. Labor.

Rabbinic literature, generally, exalts the concept of honest labor. In the Mekilta this attitude is reflected in a passage attributed to R. Meir. Commenting on the ordinances pertaining to restitution for damages, he points out that for an ox, which performs labor, the payment is fivefold. In the case of a sheep, which does not perform labor, the payment is merely fourfold. This, he concludes, is to teach how highly labor is regarded by the Creator.[1] Indeed, without labor and effort, a man loses much of the bounty of providence. This idea is illustrated by the story of a man who inherits a plot of uncultivated land and sells it for a pittance. He realizes his great loss only after he discovers that the buyer has irrigated the land, and planted trees and gardens.[2] A practical suggestion is introduced in a statement of derech eretz, which advises that the proper conduct for a man who takes ill, is to rest from work until he is thoroughly cured. (שמות כ"ו ל"ב).[3]

2. Reputation.

There are a number of midrashim in the Mekilta which not only emphasize the value of a good reputation, but also point out the special privileges which attach themselves to a man of great repute. The sages say that a man, for the

sake of his reputation, should not associate with a wicked man -- not even for the purpose of teaching him Torah.[4] This regard for one's good name is exemplified by the pure-minded of Jerusalem, of whom it is said that they would never go to a banquet or never sign a document unless they knew with whom they would be associating.[5] Among his four paramount virtues, R. Eliezer ha-Kappor mentions being above suspicion of immorality and tale-bearing.[6]

With regard to the rewards of a good reputation, R. Jose says: "It is not the place which honors the man, but the man which honors the place."[7] And in another place it is observed that if a man devotes himself to anything with his whole soul, it is named after him (his reputation becomes inseparably associated with it).[8] The idea of noblesse oblige is illustrated in a midrash about Moses, who appealed to God for permission to enter Eretz Yisroel, even if he had to enter as an ordinary man, and not as a great leader. God replies: "A King cannot enter as an ordinary man."[9]

3. Honesty and Charity.

With regard to honesty, the Mekilta says it not only wins ~~the~~ respect and admiration for a man, but he is also regarded as one who had fulfilled the whole Torah.[10] And who is most likely to be an honest man? One who disdains his material wealth; for if he disdains his own wealth, it is logical to assume that he will not covet the wealth of

others.[11]

According to the rabbis, the first purpose of a man's wealth is to provide his sustenance. The greatest purpose of wealth, however, is to have the opportunity of giving charity. Almsgiving was regarded as one of the means by which a man could atone for his sins.[12] Moreover, a man of means who ~~refuses to~~ neglects his obligations to the poor, may, in the end, become poor himself.[13] In the administration of charity, the rabbis adduce the principle that a man's first obligation is to those closest to him -- his relatives before others, his own townspeople before strangers, and his own people (Israel) before the gentile.[14]

Besides גמילות חסדים, the rabbis also mention קבורת מתים, and ביקור חולים as virtuous acts which every man should perform. And in fulfilling these mitzwoth, a man is exhorted not only to act according to שורת הדין, but also to go לפנים משורת הדין.[15] To conclude this section, we cite a passage which teaches the principle of imitatio dei in human behaviour. "Abba Saul says: Be like Him. Just as He is gracious and merciful, be thou also gracious and merciful."[16]

CHAPTER XII

Midrashim of Ceremonial and Historical Significance.

1. Ceremonies.

Although the Mekilta contains many passages dealing with the festivals and religious ceremonials, most of them are of a halachic nature, and we need not deal with them here. Nevertheless, there are a few midrashim in this connection which do have homiletical significance. Of special interest is a passage which reflects the general attitude of the rabbis toward changes in the ceremonial life of the Jewish community. It is an attitude based on a sound principle. The midrash observed that any ceremony or institution, to which Israel was wholly devoted, has been preserved, But those to which Israel has not been devoted, have fallen into disuse and oblivion. Thus the Sabbath, circumcision, study of Torah, ritual bath, etc., have been preserved, while the Temple, civil courts, the sabbatical year, and the jubilee year have disappeared.[1.]

The other ceremonial midrashim which are of interest to us, deal with the Sabbath. The holiness of the Sabbath in this world is compared to the holiness of the world to come.[2] And one who observes this holy Sabbath is kept far from sin. (Cf. Isa. 56.2).[3] Another interesting passage infers from the behaviour of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which led Israel through the wilderness, that proper the

custom on Erev Shabbath is to kindle the lights while it is still daylight. In this way there is no danger of there being an interim during which Israel will have neither the cloud nor the fire to lead them.[4]

2. Midrashim of Historical Significance.

Like any other work of this nature, the homilies of the Mekilta, in general, reflect the conditions and the historical background of the day. There are a number of midrashim, however, which are of particular importance in this connection, since they contain either direct or implied references to specific events which occured during the tannaitic period. Many of these passages have been treated from an historical point of view by L. A. Rosenthal, in an article entitled "Einiges über die Agada in der Mekilta", appearing in a volume of Semitic studies in memory of A. Kohut. Some of Rosenthal's hypotheses, concerning the background of these midrashim, seem to be rather tenuous; others make sound sense.

Those midrashim which deal with the bones of Joseph and with burial, suggest to Rosenthal a subtle reference to the martyrs who died in the Bar Cochba rebellion, and to whom the Romans refused proper burial.[5] The two passages which speak of the Israelites who perished during the three days of darkness, may well have been a homiletical denunciation of those who refused to support the Bar Cochba rebellion.

Rosenthal, evidently, infers from the midrash that those who died in the darkness were those who did not wish to follow Moses out of bondage into freedom.[6] The midrash which explains the circuitous route through the wilderness is assigned by Rosenthal to the post-Bar Cochba period, and is said to be a rationalization of the failure of the rebellion to bring redemption from the Roman yoke.[7] In another place the Mekilta says: "When I (God) smite the Land of Egypt, there will be no plague upon you. But there will be at some future time."[8] The concluding statement of this passage is clearly an attempt to explain the persecution under Rome, even though we may not be able to assign it to any specific event.

There are a number of midrashim which refer specifically to the destruction of the Temple. The prevailing attitude of the rabbis is epitomized in the following illustration: "It is comparable to robbers who entered the palace of a king, despoiled his property, killed his royal household and destroyed his palace. After some time, however, the king sat in judgment upon them. Some he imprisoned, some he executed. He then reinhabited his palace, and thereafter his reign was recognized in the world."[9] The first part of this analogy clearly reflects the events of 70 A. D.

One of the most direct references to Rome is found in a statement by R. Simon b. Gamaliel: "Come and see the wealth and greatness of this wicked empire. Not one of its numerous legions is idle, for all of them are running about

day and night."[10] Actual conditions which existed under the tyrannical surveillance of Roman governorship are specifically illustrated in two other passages. One preacher had explained that God Himself led Israel through the wilderness in order to teach the nations to hold Israel in high regard. "Not only do they not respect Israel", says he, "rather they put the Israelites to death in all manner of cruel ways."[11] The second passage demonstartes these cruel methods of execution employed by Rome. One sees a fellow-Israelite and asks: "Why are you being decapitated?" "Because I circumcised my son." "Why are you being led to the stake?" "Because I read Torah." "Why are you being crucified?" Because I ate unleavened bread."[12]

It was the usual habit of the ancient preachers, whose works we have been reviewing, to conclude their homilies and their exhortations with a word of hope. Let us follow their example in concluding this thesis. The following interpretation of the martyred Akiba, is his message of hope to the generation that bore the yoke of Roman hegemony: "Succoth here means clouds of glory....So far I know only about the past. How about the future? Scripture says: 'And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads." (Isa. 35.10)[13]

חסלת מכולתכו לאולהכו שאיכו תושבחתכו

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11. Vayassa, VI – ותן שמה מלבד המוהר אין
12. Vayassa, III – קבר יום ביומו
13. Vayassa, I – ויהי שלשת ימים במדבר
14. Pisḥa, I – במרכב מצרים
15. Pisḥa, I – " "
16. Pisḥa, I – " "
17. Pisḥa, I – לאמור
18. Kaspa, II – ואדני קדש תהיון לי
19. Pisḥa, XVI – לי הוא
20. Shirata, III – ואלוהו
21. Beshallaḥ, I – ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף
22. Vayassa, I – ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע
23. Pisḥa, XII – וילכו וישאו
24. Pisḥa, IX – ושמרתם את המצות
25. Pisḥa, V – והיה לכם למשמרת
26. Baḥodesh, II – תשמר לבית יעקב וחי'

Chapter IX

1. Beshallaḥ, VII – ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו

2. Pisha, XIV – ולא עשו לכם
3. Pisha, XIV – " " " "
4. Shirata, X – את התוף בידה
5. Beshallah, VII – ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו
6. Beshallah, VII – " " " "
7. Bahodesh, XI – בכל מקום וגו'
8. Beshallah, III – התיצבו וראו וגו'
9. Ibid., III – ויכלו מאכל ויצרקו וגו'
10. Ibid. (cf. Rosenthal, p.48)
11. Shirata, I – משה ובני ישראל
12. Vayassa, I – ויצרק אל ה' וגו'
13. Pisha, XVI – ויאמר משה אל העם זכור וגו'
14. Bahodesh, VII – לא תשא את שם ה' וגו'
15. Bahodesh, I – ויספו מרפידים וגו'
16. Shirata, IV – ה' איש מלחמה ה' שמו
17. Shirata, IX – עמך בני ישראל
18. Shirata, I – את השירה הזאת
19. Pisha, XVI – לי הוא
20. Pisha, XIII – כי אומנו מתים כולנו
21. Beshallah, II – ויסור את רכבו
22. Pisha, XI – ולתת לכם תבואו.
23. Pisha, VII – מאפס ועד בהמה
In this connection we also find a statement which says that the transgression of one individual can bring harm to the entire group. Cf. note 35 below.
24. Shirata, V – כמו שאין
25. Beshallah, I – ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף
26. Shirata, VI – בלב ים

27. Beshallaḥ – ויסע אלדים את העם ואי'
28. Nezikin, IX – לחפש ישלחנו
29. Baḥodesh, X – לא תעשון אתי
30. Baḥodesh, X – " "
31. Shirata, II – סוס ורוכבו
32. Beshallaḥ, VII – ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה
33. Vayassa, I – ויאמר עם שמוע תשמע
34. Vayassa, VI – זה הדבר אשר צוה ה'
35. Baḥodesh, IV – ויאמר ה' אל משה רף העם הזה
36. Baḥodesh, VIII – לא תעשה ברעך ואי'
37. Shirata, I – אלף ישיר משה
38. Pisḥa, XIV – לון שורים הוא לה'
39. Nezikin, X – את כופר ושת עליו ואי'
40. Vayassa, V – ויאמר משה ואי' – היום לא תמצאוהו

Chapter X

1. Beshallaḥ, III – ויאמר משה אל העם ואי'
2. Pisḥa, I – בארץ מצרים
3. Baḥodesh, V – אנכי ה' אלהיכם
4. Amalek, VI – ויאמר משה לשפוט ואי'
5. Nezikin, XVIII – והיו נשבעים אלמנות ואי'
6. Kaspa, III – ושחק לא תקח
7. Kaspa, III – אפסר שקר תרחק
8. Nezikin, I – ואלה המשפטים
9. Baḥodesh, XI – כי תרבק הנשמה עליה ואי'
10. Baḥodesh, VIII – כאשר את אלהיכם ואת אומן
11. Pisḥa, I – ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן
12. Baḥodesh, VIII – כאשר את אלהיכם ואת אומן

13. Pisḥa, XVIII – וכל בכור בני אלפה
14. Pisḥa, XVI – לי הכל
15. Baḥodesh, XI – אשר לא תלקה וגו'
16. Amalek, III – ויבא אהרן וכל זקני ישראל
17. Amalek, I – ויאמר משה אל יהושע וגו'
18. Kaspa, III – אפבר שקר תרחק
19. Nezikin, XVIII – ואיש לא קונה וגו'
20. Shirata, VIII – נורא תהלות

Chapter XI

1. Nezikin, XII – ומשה הקר יקח
2. Beshallaḥ, II – ויפקן לפה פרעה
3. Mekilta, Weiss ed., p. 89b.
4. Amalek, III – ויאמר יתרו
5. Kaspa, II – אל תשת ידך עם רשע
6. Pisḥa, V – והיה לכם למשמרת
7. Baḥodesh, III – במשוך היובל
8. Shirata, I – את השירה הזאת
9. Amalek, II – ויום המלחמו ויהושע
10. Vayassa, I – ויאמר כום שמוע תשמע
11. Amalek, IV – ומחה תמחה את זכר עמלק
12. Nezikin, X – שם כופר ונשא עליו וגו'
13. Amalek, IV – וישלח משה את חותנו
14. Kaspa, I – את עמי ישראל וגו'
15. Amalek, IV – והודעת להם את הדרך
16. Shirata, III – ושלשה

Chapter XII

1. Shabbata, I – אות היא לעולם
2. Shabbata, I – כי אני ה' מקדשכם
3. Vayassa, VI – ויאמר ה' אל משה עשה אלה
4. Beshallaḥ, I – לכו ימוש-שמוש הפלין
5. Rosenthal, op. cit., p. 479; cf., Beshallaḥ, I
6. Ibid., cf. Beshallaḥ, I and Pisḥa XVI under חמוש"ק.
7. Ibid., p. 480, cf. Beshallaḥ, I
8. Pisḥa, VII – ופסח עליכם
9. Shirata, X – ה' ימלוך (Cf. Rosenthal, op. cit., pp. 474ff.)
10. Beshallaḥ, II – ויקח שש מאות רכב
11. Beshallaḥ, I – וה' הולך לפניהם יומם
12. Baḥodesh, VI – לשוחה ולשומרי מצותו
13. Beshallaḥ, I – ויסעו מסכות וגו'

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