Avodah Zarah 27b-28a: Three Tales of Gentile Healing

Exploring Evolving Rabbinic Views on Gentile Healing of Jews in the Rabbinic Corpus

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Introduction

As I was in the early stages of researching my thesis, I came across two important pieces of Talmud that helped me refine my study question. The first is from Shabbat 67a:

> אביי ורבא דאמרי תרוייהו כל דבר שיש בו משום רפואה אין בו משום דרכי האמורי
>
> Abaye and Rava both maintain: Whatever is used as a remedy is not [forbidden] on account of the ways of the Amorite.

The second was a little vignette positioned in a larger *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud. In Avodah Zarah 28a we read:

> ת"ש רבי יוחנן חש בצפדינא אזל לגבה דההיא מטרוניתא עבדה חמשא ומעלי שבתא.
>
> Come and hear, Rabbi Yohanan suffered with צפדינא [*tsafdina*]. He went to a certain (non-Jewish) woman who treated him on Thursday and Friday.

In the first case, Abaye and Rava, tradents that are found throughout the Talmuds, seem to go against a previous decision. Whatever might be considered "the ways of the Amorite" in other situations, when it comes to healing are not forbidden. From this tradition, providing healing in a time of illness seems to be considered the greater value than the rabbinic proscription against dabbling in heathen practices. The second case seems to further the previous opinion. Rabbi Yohanan is not only confirming a rabbinic judgement, he is willing to seek healing from a non-Jew (a Roman woman no less!) for himself. These two small phrases changed the direction of my thesis.

Some of the research questions included:

- What is the nature of healing in the rabbinic worldview?
- How has the rabbinic opinion of healing and healers evolved over time?
- Are there differences between *Eretz Yisrael* and the Diaspora?
- How have the rabbis embraced/rejected non-Jewish sources of healing?
- What are primary concerns by which the rabbis erect their boundaries?
- How unified/divided was rabbinic opinion?

When I found the three narratives in sequence in the *sugya* from *b. Avodah Zarah*, I was excited to see whether/if/how the themes from my questions expressed themselves in this small piece of Talmud. I was excited that the nature of the healing was different in each tale. In one case a Jew (a Jewish apostate?) offered healing unsanctioned by the rabbinic "authority." The patient's death became a type of moral victory over fringe groups. In another case a rabbi sought healing from a Gentile woman and the healing was even revealed publicly to the Jewish community. The third case shared the tale of an important rabbi healed by an expert practitioner on Shabbat. In a relatively small amount of Talmudic real estate, a number of important issues were raised and discussed by the rabbis.

My research was motivated by questions raised in Jewish conversations. Are we, the Jewish people, primarily a closed community - preferring interactions within our own kind? Or are we, on the other hand, a community that evolves and grows through our interactions with other religious and ethnic groups? While these distinctions seem to create a binary division, separating the orthodox and progressive streams of Judaism, they also reflect larger issues of the nature *kelal Yisrael* and the relationship between religious

life and modernity. Though some of the questions stated above have been asked in relation to other focus areas (for example engaging in commerce with Gentiles and the binding nature of *halakhah*), I did not find research that used healing as a basis for furthering the existing discussion. I wanted to contribute my own research; health and healing was an avenue by which to participate in the conversations.

I have also been interested in the sacred nature of aging and spiritual dimensions of healing. Over the last two years I have participated as chaplain/rabbinic intern at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City. Though this particular *sugya* does not speak of end of life care, it does address the very nature of healing and leads to other conversations addressing the types of remedies that comprise "healing." For example, though some rabbis argued that Shabbat can be violated in order to heal someone who is mortally injured or ill, at least some of our rabbis believed that the psycho-social dimensions of healing were as important as physical dimensions. Shabbat proscriptions could be ignored in order to care for mental burdens of illness.

While this thesis is no means exhaustive, it is comprehensive. My research took me on an adventure through time and space, from the oldest writings of our tradition into the redaction of *halakhah* in the Talmud. I have even offered a few examples of later understanding of *halakhah*. In the end, I discovered that the multivocality of modern Judaism is, perhaps, a reflection of the multivocality that has been part of Judaism since late antiquity.

Chapter 1

Healing in the Biblical Imagination

Though Rabbinic Judaism is radically different from its biblical ancestor, the rabbis struggled to maintain a "hair" of connection between the Talmud and its biblical antecedent.[1] Therefore, prior to exploring the relationship between Jewish people and Gentile healing in rabbinic literature, one needs to begin with an exploration of healing in the First and Second Temple periods.

Among the terms describing healing in the Bible,[2] the word most frequently

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1. Martin A. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths: An Introduction to a Typological Approach to Early Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (based on the Second Annual Rabbi Joseph Klein Lecture at Assumption College, Worcester, MA, 14 October 1979), 17. This concept is explored more fully in footnote 49 of Chapter 2 in this thesis.
2. Julius Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* (trans. F. Rosner; Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), chapter 1. This "classic" treatment of healing in the Bible and Talmud, originally published in German in 1911, was translated by Dr. Fred Rosner who is a Talmudic scholar-physician. It should be noted, however, the limitations of this work are a consequence of its own academic context. The work can, at times, be reductionist, attempting to fit biblical and Talmudic illness, for which scanty information is provided in the best situations, into modern categories. Additionally, this work is limited in that it attempts to identify biblical and Talmudic "healers" as a separate "professional" class and to distinguish "traditional" healing from "alternative" healing. As many scholars argue now, "experience" and "success" were the greatest determinant of whether remedies and interventions were "permitted." A discussion of "permitted" healing follows in this paper. In effect, all medicine was "folk medicine" or "homeopathy" as we would call it today.

employed is *rofe* (רפא).[3] For example, in Ps 103:3,[4] "[God] forgives all your sins, heals [הרפא] all your diseases."[5] *Rofe*, however, is not limited to the healing of human beings. First Kings employs the root to detail Elijah's repair of an altar that has been destroyed, "And [Elijah] put together [וירפא] the altar YHWH had torn apart."[6] Therefore, as we understand healing in the Hebrew Bible, *rofe* suggests putting back together something that has been torn apart. This word forms the basis for the "medical theology" of the biblical context and remains an apt description of "healing" even into our age.

Biblical healing can be classified by three distinct characteristics. First, in the biblical imagination the Eternal is the source of illness and death and the Eternal is also the source of healing and life. Second, according to the record we have in the Bible, the "Israelite" priest is not the healer, which distinguishes Israel from other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Finally, in the cases where there is a "human" healer involved, we see healing by a prophet who operates either directly or as an agent of the Eternal God. Further, we have evidence in the biblical record that the Israelite prophet is a healer even for Gentiles, demonstrating the superiority of YHWH and Yahwism among Ancient Near Eastern gods and theologies. Though the way the Israelites of the Bible conceptualized

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3. The root רפא appears over 100 times in the Bible. See Gen 50:2; Deut 12:13; 2 Kgs 6:14; Jer 3:22, 8:22, 17:14, 30:17 and 33:6; Job 13:4; Prov 3:8; 1 Chron 4:12; 2 Chron 16:12. Other healing roots in the Bible include: אסף, רפה and חיה. Specifically referring to healing and its related activities רפה appears approximately fifty times (see Jdgs 19:9, Ps 60:4, Job 12:21, 1 Chron 8:37); אסף and חיה appear fewer than ten times each (see Num 12:14-15 and 2 Kgs 5) and (1 Kgs 17:17-22, 2 Kgs 4:20-37, 2 Kgs 8:1, Isa 38 and Isa 58).
4. The Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The traditional Hebrew text and the new JPS translation*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 2003). For this thesis, I have utilized the *New JPS Translation* (NJPS) as the basis for my translations from the Hebrew Bible. I have replaced "the LORD" with YHWH or the Eternal to more closely reflect the original Hebrew meaning. I have noted significant emendations to the NJPS translations.
5. See also Gen 20:17, Ps 30:3 and Ps 60:4. This meaning is carried into liturgy in the healing prayers of *Amidah* and *Mi Shebeirakh*.
6. 1 Kgs 18:30.

disease did not differentiate them from their neighbors, the way they sought healing did. This distinguished the ancient followers of YHWH and further defined their community identity.

YHWH is the source of illness and death; He[7] is also the source of healing and life

Exodus 15:26 addresses YHWH's power in its fullness.

> ויאמר: אם שמוע תשמע לקול יהוה אלהיך, והישר בעיניו, תעשה והאזנת למצותיו, ושמרת כל חקיו, כל המחלה אשר שמתי במצרים לא אשים עליך. כי אני יהוה רפאך:
>
> YHWH said: If you listen verily to the voice of YHWH your God, remaining upright in His eyes, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all of His laws, [then] all of the diseases that I brought upon Egypt I will not bring upon you. Because I am YHWH your Healer.

The power of YHWH is put in God's voice in this biblical verse. YHWH requires adherence to laws; the Eternal God demands observance of commandments. The consequence for insubordination, argued the biblical authors, is illness and disease. Just ask the Egyptians! YHWH's power supreme, says the Eternal, is God's ability to deliver illness and God's choice not to bring disease. YHWH as Healer so often shows restraint that this too testifies to God's strength. Found on healing amulets and talismans in early modernity, the importance of this verse endured well beyond antiquity.[8]

Similarly, this theme of YHWH's supremacy in His domination of illness and healing is revisited in Deut 32:39.

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7. I have retained the masculine pronouns referring to YHWH because (male) physicians look to the masculine "Eternal" as model for healing.
8. Margaretha Folmer, "A Jewish Childbirth Amulet from the Biblioteca Rosenthaliana" in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation* (eds. W. Th. van Peursen and J. W. Dyk: Leiden: Brill, 2011), 234. The verse was found on a 6th or 7th century CE Hebrew amulet in the ancient synagogue in Nirim "giving protection from evil spirits." The same verse was found in an Aramaic amulet found in Cairo Geniza 8.

ראו עתה, כי אני, אני הוא. ואין אלהים עמדי. אני אמית ואחיה. מחצתי ואני ארפא. ואין מידי מציל.

> See now, that I, I am He. There is no [other] God before me. I give death and I give life. To those I wounded,[9] I will give healing. There is no [other] who delivers from my hand.

In extending the reading that 1 Kings offers, the sense of the verse is "I, YHWH, will put back together those I have torn apart." This is similar to the understanding of the powerful YHWH extolled in the later prayers known as *Amidah*. *Gevurot, Amidah's* second paragraph, speaks of God's might and repeats the theme of "giving life to the dead." This power, belonging only to God, testifies to YHWH's supremacy over other gods worshipped. In our own day, we assert this power of YHWH three times daily during our recitation of *Amidah* and in other petitionary prayers on weekdays. The biblical authors emphasized that the Eternal's power is twofold; first is His ability to bring disease and His choice not to, and second is YHWH's strength to heal that which was torn apart.

The "Israelite" priest is not the healer

In the biblical imagination, the "Israelite" priest is not the healer. By way of example, the biblical authors address the ancient illness category "*tzaraat*" in great detail.[10] The presentation in Lev 12-13 follows the model of other Ancient Near Eastern "healer

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9. Or "struck." מחץ is in opposition to רפא so in this case "wounded" or "struck with illness" creates an apt dichotomy. Another meaning of מחץ is "wading" or "splitting a surface" as in Ps 68:24 "that your feet may wade through [תמחץ] blood; that the tongue of your dogs may have its portion of your enemies." What was split will then be put back together and healed.
10. *Tzaraat* was erroneously translated as "leprosy." Contemporary scholars understand *tzaraat* as a collection of "externally recognizable" skin afflictions. Ronald Isaacs, *Judaism, Medicine and Healing* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1998), 51-54, offers an accessible, if brief, treatment of *tzaraat* and the priest-role.

manuals" that detail the identification and treatment of various maladies of the ancient world.[11]

> אדם כי יהיה בעור בשרו שאת או ספחת או בהרת והיה בעור בשרו לנגע צרעת והובא אל אהרן הכהן או אל אחד מבניו הכהנים. ראה הכהן את הנגע בעור הבשר. ושער בנגע הפך לבן, ומראה הנגע עמק מעור בשרו, נגע צרעת הוא. וראהו הכהן וטמא אתו.

> If a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a shiny mark that might become on the skin of his body a touch of scales[12] then show yourself [13] to the Priest Aaron or to one of his sons the priests. The priest [then] examines the affection on the skin of his body. If hair in the affection has changed to be white and/or if the the affection's [appearance] seems deeper than the skin of his flesh, then the affection is *tzaraat*. Having examined it, the priest declares him *tame*.[14]

In contrast to other "medical journals" of the ancient world, Lev 13 outlines identification and diagnosis of the illness/disease. Though the priest may intervene, the priest does not involve himself in healing. In our present case, the priest ensures the person with *tzaraat* follows the proper protocol upon diagnosis. The person's clothes are torn, his hair is disheveled, he covers his face to his upper lip and he cries out "*tame! tame!* [unclean! unclean!]" wherever he goes.

> וכל ימי אשר הנגע בו יטמא. טמא הוא, בדד ישב, מחוץ למחנה מושבו.

> He is *tame* as long as the affection is on him. Being *tame*, he will dwell apart; his dwelling will be outside the camp.[15]

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11. Preuss, *Medicine*, 323-339. Hecton Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 263-266. Guiseppe Veltri, “The "Other" Physicians,” *Korot* 13-14 (1998-2000): 41. Veltri offers his assessment, "It is no longer surprising that in transmitting medical, pseudo-medical, folkloric and magical material, the Babylonian Talmud shows astonishing similarities and close parallels to Akkadian texts and traditions."
12. S. David Sperling, "Miriam, Aaron and Moses: Sibling Rivalry," *ATLA* 70-71 (1999-2000): 48-49. This "touch" of scales is understood, as outlined above, to be a divine punishment. The *metzora* (person with *tzaraat*) is understood as having been "touched" by YHWH.
13. Or "bring yourself."
14. Lev 13:2-3. טמא is variously translated as "impure" or "unclean." *Tame* is a status in opposition to *tahor* when a person is permitted to participate fully in civic and religious life.
15. Lev 13:46.

It is the obligation of the person afflicted with *tzaraat* to notify others of his "unclean" state, given that "impurity" is communicable from one person to another. The priest must ensure that this protocol is followed; it is the priest's obligation to ensure that the sufferer changes his outward appearance to match the change of his inner state. The Israelite priest does not heal. Healing is the domain of YHWH and, in some cases as we will see below, the prophet.

YHWH heals either directly or indirectly through one of His prophets

When Miriam speaks out against Moses, whether for challenging his position as primary prophet[16] or castigating him for selecting a Kushite wife, YHWH punishes her with a skin affliction, a disease that turns her skin "white as snow." In Num 12, Moses then calls out to YHWH:

אל נא! רפא נא לה!

Please God! I pray, Heal her![17]

YHWH is the source of Miriam's illness, meted out as punishment for speaking against God and God's prophet, Moses. YHWH is also the source of Miriam's healing, through Moses' intercession. After Moses' plea, Miriam "was shut out of the camp for seven days"[18] and it is not until after she is readmitted and presumably healed that the people set out again on their journey in the wilderness.

The saga of King Hezekiah's *tzaraat* demonstrates similar characteristics of

16. Sperling, "Sibling Rivalry," 48. This article explores struggle for prophetic authority between Moses and his siblings. It also explores *tzaraat* as a recurrent biblical punishment from YHWH for "failure to submit to the proper authority."
17. Num 12:13.
18. Num 12:15.

biblical illness and healing.[19] YHWH is the source of Hezekiah's illness, "Thus said YHWH, 'Prepare your testament, for you are about to die; you shall not recover.'" The Eternal God is also the only source of healing, so Hezekiah "turned toward the wall and prayed to YHWH, 'Please, O YHWH, remember how I served you faithfully and loyally, and did what was pleasing to you.'" Beyond the petitionary prayer, the only sanctioned human intervention is through YHWH's prophet, in this case Isaiah who conveys YHWH's message to Hezekiah and administers the remedy. "Then Isaiah said, 'Fetch a fig[20] cake.' They brought one and placed it upon the boil and [Hezekiah] recovered." Hezekiah's response upon recovery is appropriate; Hezekiah offers praise to YHWH.

אדני, עליהם יחיו,
ולכל בהן חיי.
רוחי, ותחלימני והחיני!
...חי, חי הוא יודך כמוני היום.

> Lord, those to whom You give life will live,
> All these have the spirit of life.
> Restore me, let me live!
> ...It is the living, the living who thank You as I do this day.

The King experiences punishment in the form of illness, prays to YHWH, and receives treatment from a sanctioned prophet. After he is healed, Hezekiah praises YHWH. This is a concise narrative summary of the characteristics of biblical medical theology.

The biblical corpus has other narratives of miraculous healing by YHWH and by the hands of His prophets. In 2 Kgs 4, the prophet Elisha revivied the son of the

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19. There are two parallel narratives of Hezekiah's illness and Isaiah's healing. They are found in 2 Kgs 20 and Isa 38. Thanks to Dr. Sperling for recommending Anchor Bible's synthesis and treatment of these two pericopae.
20. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, eds., *II Kings (*vol. 11 of *The Anchor Bible*: eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1988), 255. "The evidence from Jewish and classical sources on the widely held belief that dried figs had medicinal qualities.... For Ug. *dblt*, 'fig cakes,' used both as condiments and as a therapeutic."

Shunammite woman who was "laid out dead on his bed." Elisha, employing prayer and doing the work of YHWH on earth, ministers to the boy who subsequently "sneezed seven times and the boy opened his eyes." In 1 Kgs 17, the prophet Elijah performs a virtually identical miraculous healing. Unlike in other Ancient Near Eastern traditions,[21] the Israelite tradition does not require travel to one specific sacred site for healing. Healing could be performed at various Israelite and Judean temples. However as in the narratives of Elijah, Elisha and Hezekiah, healing could also come at the home of the individual.

The biblical authors address use of remedies, such as the "fig cake" employed to clear Hezekiah's *tzaraat*. The region of Gilead was known for its pasture land and spices.[22] The "balm of Gilead" was mentioned by name twice in the book of Jeremiah. The authors put in Jeremiah's voice a question about the efficacy of this remedy.

הצרי אין בגלעד? אם רפא אין שם, כי מדוע לא עלתה ארכת בת עמי?

> Is there no remedy in Gilead? There [must be] no physician there, because why [else] has healing not come to my poor people?[23]

Here the authors offer us YHWH's and Jeremiah's lament. The Israelites use balm for healing but do not involve YHWH in the process. The message is clearly intended as castigating. It is obvious to the authors that no balm can ever be effective without the involvement of YHWH. Healing can only be effectuated with the prophet's participation and collaboration and with the Eternal's sanction to heal. Jeremiah 46 reiterates this

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21. Avalos, *Illness*, 397.
22. Yohanan Aharoni, "Gilead" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 7 (eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik; Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 601. See references to the suitablility of Gilead's pasture land in Num 32:1, Jer. 50:19 and Mic 7:14. The legacy of this region continues to this day; Gilead Sciences, Inc., based in northern California, is a company innovating bio-pharmaceuticals for unmet medical need.
23. Jer 8:22.

message.

עלי גלעד וקחי צרי, בתולת בת מצרים. לשוא הרבית רפאות, תעלה אין לך.

> Go up to Gilead and make use of [her] remedies, young daughter of Egypt. In vain you seek many remedies, but there is no healing for you.[24]

Jeremiah and YHWH condemn the non-Israelite neighbors, not only the Israelites, for relying on the power of remedies rather than turning to YHWH. Here Jeremiah affirms the superiority of YHWH to extend illness and withhold healing. Though Jeremiah is speaking to the community, he uses healing remedies as his analogy to chastize the Israelites, suggesting familiarity with the balm and an accessibility of this comparison.

Healing by Gentiles in the Bible

There are few explicit narratives of healing by Gentiles in the biblical record. These few episodes, however, offer a consistent message and confirm the characterization of healing outlined earlier. The tribes of Ephraim and Judah go to Assyria to be healed from their disease.

וירא אפרים את חליו ויהודה את מזרו וילך אפרים אל אשור וישלח אל מלך ירב והוא לא יוכל לרפא לכם ולא יגהה מכם מזור:

> When Ephraim saw his diseases, and Judah his sores, Ephraim went to Assyria. When he sent [emmissaries] to the patron king, he was unable to heal them and he did not cure[25] the sores.[26]

Even though the parable offered by the biblical authors is the tribe of Ephraim, the reader can understand that this analogy has some meaning in their context. Therefore, we can

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24. Jer 46:12.
25. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 155. Other meanings suggest "repair, bandage." In this case, "cure" offers a closer compliment to "heal" in the chiasm.
26. Hos 5:13.

conclude that going to foreign nations, here Assyria, for healing is going to be unsuccessful just as individual Israelites or Ephraimites seeking remedies outside of the Israelite community, without involving YHWH, will be similarly unsuccessful.

The biblical authors offer us an innerbiblical midrash in the narrative of King Asa in 2 Chr 12.

> ויחלא אסא, בשנת שלושים ותשע למלכותו, ברגליו עד למעלה חליו. וגם בחליו, לא דרש את יהוה, כי ברפאים.
>
> Asa became ill in the thirty-ninth year of his reign as king, in his leg with a severe illness. And even in his disease he did not call out to YHWH, but rather to the physicians.[27]

Given that Second Chronicles is one of the latest books to be codified in the biblical corpus, the reader sees more influence of the Persian diaspora. The name of the king, "Asa" [אסא], plays on the fact that *asuta* [אסותא] is the Aramaic translation of Hebrew's *rofe*. Here, though we do not know whether the physicians to whom King Asa goes are Israelite or Gentile, King Asa explicitly does not call on YHWH as the source of healing. Therefore, irrespective of the ethnicity of the healers, YHWH is not involved and Asa is not healed.

The first chapter of Exodus introduces us to Hebrew midwives who save the lives of the Hebrew males in Egypt. Their faithfulness is seen by YHWH and they are therefore elevated in the Eternal's opinion.

> ויאמר מלך מצרים למילדת העברית, אשר שם האחת שפרה ושם השנית פועה. ...יהי כי יראו המילדת את האלהים ויעש להם בתים.
>
> Then the Egyptian king spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whose name was Shifra and one of whose name was Puah.... And it was because these midwives feared God that He raised up their houses.[28]

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27. 2 Chr 16:12.
28. Ex 1:15.

Here, the vagaries of the Hebrew text leave questions as to whether these midwives were "Hebrew midwives" or [Egyptian] midwives to the Hebrews. The Judean historian Josephus argues that these women, Shifra and Puah, must have been Egyptian midwives working for the multitude of Hebrew women. The predicted explosion of the Hebrew population in Egypt was such a fearful inevitability for the king that, according to Josephus, Pharaoh:

> ...commanded that they should cast every male child, which was born to the Israelites, into the river, and destroy it; that besides this, the Egyptian midwives should watch the labors of the Hebrew women, and observe what is born, for those were the women who were enjoined to do the office of midwives to them; and by reason of their relation to the king, would not transgress his commands.[29]

Here, Josephus argues that these midwives were certainly Egyptians, not Israelites. According to at least one scholar of Josephus, this understanding "is very probable," given that Pharaoh could not easily "trust the Israelite midwives to execute so barbarous a command against their own nation."[30] For Josephus, the Egyptian midwives could not be considered healing practitioners; they were collaborators in Pharaoh's anti-Israelite ethnic cleansing.

Preuss offers two understandings. On one hand, Preuss suggests it was Ibn Ezra's experience of similar circumstances in medieval Spain in the twelfth century that led him to concur with Josephus' understanding. Only "Egyptian midwives could help deliver Hebrew women in response to the decree of Pharaoh, because only then could one expect strict compliance with the royal decree."[31] Preuss relates the Bible commentators'

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29. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 2.9.2 (William Whinston, ed., *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1980], 66).
30. Whinston, *Josephus*, 66. See footnote c for Whinston's commentary.
31. Preuss, *Medicine*, 37, Ibn Ezra commentary on Exodus 1.15.

curiosity "that there should only have been two midwives for a population of at least one million people (600,000 adult men alone)." These commentators, such as Onkelos, translator of the Aramaic targum, assumed that "either every woman served as her own midwife," or "the two midwives listed by name...were, according to Egyptian custom, the leaders of an entire caste system of midwives and were therefore the ones who received orders directly from the king."[32] Conventional thinking now leans toward this episode being another example of innerbiblical midrash. Ultimately, this episode is most likely an attempt to explain the etiology of two households with women's names among the other Israelite households of historical record. Therefore, the reader must, at best, be skeptical of the one example of "successful" saving of life by Gentiles in the biblical narrative.

There is no ambiguity when it comes to the Israelite prophet serving as healer for Gentiles. Examine the case of Abimelech in Gen 20.

> ויתפלל אברהם אל האלהים, וירפא אלהים את אבימלך ואת אשתו ואמהתיו, וילדו.
>
> Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his concubines and they then bore children.[33]

YHWH's power is manifest in healing as a result of Abraham's intercession. Abimelech receives healing for his immediate illness; the Eternal, however, is able to further demonstrate His power by enabling Abimelech's line to continue, presumably to attest to YHWH's strength.

Second Kings offers us another tale of miraculous healing by the prophets of YHWH. Naaman, the general of King Aram's army, is strong and successful. YHWH, in spite of Naaman's being non-Israelite, grants victory to Aram. Unfortunately, Naaman is

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32. Preuss, *Medicine*, 37, Targum Onkelos on Exodus 1.19.
33. Gen 20:17.

also a *metzora*, a person suffering from *tzaraat*. Naaman travels to the prophet Elisha's house. Chronologically, this follows Elisha's healing of the Shunammite woman's son. The reader, just as Naaman, knows that Elisha is a powerful and successful healer and sanctioned prophet of YHWH. Though the words of YHWH are not put in the mouth of Elisha as in the previous narrative, the reader understands that Elisha takes only those actions sanctioned by the Israelite's Eternal God.

> ישלח אליו אלישע מלאך לאמר הלוך ורחצת שבע פעמים בירדן וישב בשרך לך וטהר.
> וירד ויטבל בירדן שבע פעמים כדבר איש האלהים וישב בשרו כבשר נער קטן ויטהר...

> Elisha[34] sent a messenger to say to him, “Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.” ... So [Naaman] went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had bidden; and his flesh became like a little boy’s, and he was clean.

The success of YHWH's prophets in healing non-Israelites, particularly Gentile kings and leaders, is perhaps the strongest statment of YHWH's superiority among the gods and idols Gentiles worship. The Eternal's success is also a promise to the Israelites of the inevitable dominance of Yahwism. At the conclusion of this episode, Naaman responds, "Now I know that there is no God in the whole world except in Israel!" When YHWH's power is exemplified in his healing Naaman's *tzaraat* through the handiwork of his prophet Elisha, the Gentile nations will have no choice but to rightly proclaim the Eternal's glory and magnificence.

In summary, it is possible to suppose that the strong hand of the redactor(s)/ codifier(s) suppressed other instances of healing by non-Israelites in order to offer the consistent characterization of biblical healing: YHWH is the source of illness and also the source of healing. The Israelite priest is not a healer, distinguishing Israel from other

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34. Entire episode is outlined in 2 Kgs 5:9-16.

Ancient Near Eastern nations. The involvement of a "human" healer is successful only when a prophet of YHWH serves as intermediary for the Eternal. Further, when sought through proper channels YHWH sanctions the healing of non-Israelites. Healing by non-Israelites is unsuccessful because YHWH is not involved; episodes of healing by Israelites without the sanction or involvement of YHWH are similarly unsuccessful.

Healing in the Second Temple Period Literature

By the Second Temple Period, healing narratives are more prevalent. The New Testament, which is replete with descriptions of Jesus' miraculous healing, the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature contain numerous examples.[35] The New Testament, while not a Jewish text, is a source from this same time period that provides us with additional information about healing in this period. The literature from this period suggests more openness to healing, reflecting specific details of medicaments, remedies, incantations and healing procedures. Perhaps it is even possible that parts of this literature could serve as a guide for the would-be healer. This corpus of literature reveals the emergence of proto-professional physicians[36] and a separate group of proto-professional pharmacists. The citations offer specifics about ingredients for salves and remedies and reflect an eschatological understanding of illness and healing. These changes in characteristics of physicians and medicines could be because we have more information from more extant sources. But these characterizations could also reflect the emergence of a diversity of healing cults and changes in concepts of healing and illness within the Greco-Roman context. Suffice it to say that one of the most noticeable changes of healing

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35. In addition to the examples cited here, see also *Jub*. 10 and 1 *En*. 9-10.
36. See chapter 2, footnote 54 for the full explication of this term.

as we move into the Common Era is the shift from healing being the exclusive domain of YHWH's prophets. Ben Sira, also known as Ecclesiasticus, offers us an outline of the importance of the *rofe* in his cultural context. He writes:

> Honor physicians for their services,
> for the Lord created them;
> for their gift of healing comes from the Most High
> and they are rewarded by the king.
> The skill of physicians makes them distinguished,
> and in the presence of the great they are admired.
> The Lord created medicines out of the earth,
> and the sensible will not despise them.
> Was not water made sweet with a tree
> in order that its power might be known?
> And he gave skill to human beings
> that he might be glorified in his marvelous works.
> By them the physician heals and takes away pain;
> the pharmacist makes a mixture from them.
> God's work will never be finished;
> and from him health spreads over all the earth.[37]

Within the florid and poetic language of these verses, the reader understands that physicians are now a "professional" class, specializing in healing, producing pharmaceuticals and offering their services to others.[38] As in our biblical understanding of healing, healing comes from the Eternal, but here we see that YHWH grants the skill and power to heal to the physicians. Because "prophecy" is closed shortly after the return from exile, YHWH requires new human partners in His healing endeavor. From this

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37. John R. Kohlenberger, ed., *The Parallel Apocrypha*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 543-545. I have used NRSV translations of the Apocryphal works drawn from *The Parallel Apocrypha* throughout. Sir 38:1-8 NRSV. Ben Sira continues through the chapter detailing the sacred relationship between the physician and God.
38. Efraim Lev and Leigh Chipman, *Medical Prescriptions in the Cambridge Genizah Collections: Practical Medicine and Pharmacology in Medieval Egypt* (Cambridge Genizah Studies Series 4: Leiden: Brill, 2012), 139. Here the authors address the historical means of transmitting medical knowledge and gaining practical experience. Elsewhere, they argue though comunity members had access to "theoretical medical knowledge" and "practical medicine and pharmocoloy" (4), there began to emerge a proto-professional physician and nascent specialists, such as pharmacists, known to have expertise in specific areas of healing.

passage we also learn that YHWH sanctions the use of "medicines out of the earth." Ben Sira chides those who do not avail themselves of their curative or, at the very least, palliative possibilty. Ben Sira also identifies the physician's goal as to heal, to take away pain, and to preserve life.

In the Book of Tobit, we receive a tradition about the powerful medicinal uses for a certain fish's organs. The angel, Raphael, speaks to our young protagonist saying: "Catch hold of the fish and hang on to it! ...Cut open the fish ...[for] its gall, heart, and liver are useful as medicine."[39] Tobias' epic adventure is punctuated by incidents of healing and homeopathy. Remembering the angel's sage advice from earlier in the narrative, Tobias uses the fish to repel the demon, who then flees "to the remotest parts of Egypt"[40] where the demon is pursued and destroyed by Raphael. Still later, Raphael advises Tobias how to use the medicinal properties of the fish guts to heal his father's eyes. He directs Tobias:

> Smear the gall of the fish on his eyes; the medicine will make the white films shrink and peel off from his eyes, and your father will regain his sight and see the light." ...[Tobias] blew into his eyes, saying, "Take courage, father." With this he applied the medicine on his eyes, and it made them smart. Next, with both his hands he peeled off the white films from the corners of his eyes. Then Tobit saw his son and threw his arms around him, and he wept and said to him, "I see you, my son, the light of my eyes!"[41]

Here, we see specific instructions from the angel, a sanctioned emissary of the Eternal, to effect healing for Tobit. The protocol includes a salve, an application of the remedy, an incantation over the wound, and a treatment or procedure. Employing this protocol with the endorsement of YHWH, Tobit once again regains his eyesight and is able to delight in

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39. Tob 6:4-5.
40. Tob 8:3.
41. Tob 11:7-15.

the sight of his son. This epic tale employs many of the characteristics we saw of biblical healing, but we also have a depth of detail on the preparation and application of medication and the procedure for healing one specific organ in one specific instance. Though we cannot generalize to other instances, this protocol and these elements were familiar enough in the listener's context to be employed in this narrative.

The Second Temple Period also introduces healing as part of the divine eschatological plan. As in its biblical predecessor, healing that comes in this life is only effected through the sanction of YHWH. If healing does not come and death occurs, true healing may come at the time of the Messiah. Second Baruch tells us:

> And it will happen that after [the Eternal] has brought down everything which is in the world, ...then health will descend in dew, and illness will vanish, ...and joy will encompass the earth. And nobody will again die untimely, nor will any adversity take place suddenly.[42]

The presence of illness, disease and death in this life is the result of the imperfect time in which we live. The promise of the Messianic Age includes God's promise of true joy and perfect healing. It is interesting to note that Second Baruch does not promise an end to death, but rather an end to "untimely" death. Beginning in this Second Temple Period, the emerging millenarianism and Jewish eschatological belief that gives rise to Jewish Messianism, Rabbinic Judaism and, ultimately Christianity, posits that ultimate healing only comes in *olam haba*, in the eternal afterlife. As we shall see below, these themes are quite dominant in the healing narratives of the New Testament.

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42. 2 Bar 73:1-3. A. F. J. Klijn, "2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) BARUCH: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments* (ed. James H. Charlesworth: New York: Doubleday, 1983), 645.

Healing by Gentiles in New Testament

All four of the New Testament Gospels detail episodes of Jesus' miraculous healing.[43] There are also numerous parables shared in the voice of Jesus that contemplate healing on Shabbat. Many of these tales include explicit rabbinic prohibitions against healing on Shabbat yet promote a value of healing Jews and non-Jews over strict observance of Shabbat. These healing episodes detail multiple modes of healing including incantations, healing by touch, faith healing and applying remedies. From the Gospel of Mark:

> And [Jesus] took [the deaf-mute] aside from the multitude, and put his fingers in to his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven he sighed, and said to Him, "*Ephphatha*," that is, "Be opened." And straightaway, his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed and he spoke plain.[44]

In this episode, Jesus heals a deaf-mute by using incantations and applying his saliva as a medicament to open the ears of the deaf man. Jesus' healing actions, however, are connected to the Eternal as Jesus looks heavenward and directs his incantation toward God. Here the text is attempting to portray Jesus as a healer sanctioned by God.

In an episode found in the Gospel of John, Jesus heals a blind man. The man is questioned by members of the Jewish establishment after he regains his eyesight.

> Then they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.'" And I went and bathed and I received sight.[45]

The specifics of Jesus' healing include: identifying the malady, preparing a salve, and

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43. Other stories of Jesus' miraculous healing located in the Synoptic Gospels include: Matt 12:9ff, 14:34-36; Mark 1:21ff, 2:1f, 3:1f, 5:1ff, 8:22-26, 9:14-29; Luke 4-9, 13:10-17, 14:1-6, 17:11-19, 18:35-43; John 5:2-18, 11:17-12:50.
44. Mark 7:33-35. I have based my translations for all New Testament citations on the KJV translation of the New Testament. I have made some emendations to the translations for a modern syntax and usage.
45. John 9:10-11.

offering a directive and purification. Following Jesus' specified protocol the blind man regains his sight. However, the narrator is careful to note:

> ...And it was Shabbat when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ...Some of the Pharisees then said, "This man is not of God because he does not keep Shabbat." Others said, "How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?" There was division/disagreement among them.[46]

This episode demonstrates the Gospel of John's reporting that Jesus healed this blind man on Shabbat and that the Jewish establishment was ambivalent about both this healing act and its taking place on the Sabbath. This division among the rabbinic/Pharisaic establishment, as reflected through the eyes of the author, changes the nature of the discussion from whether to heal and how to heal to who may heal and when healing may take place. Subsequent discussions on these very issues continue throughout rabbinic literature.

Unlike in our sources from the Hebrew Bible, the Gospel of Luke and other narratives in the New Testament clearly relate at least one instance of healing of a Jew by a Gentile. Here, the parable of the Good Samaritan highlights for the authors of the New Testament the real-world impracticability of strict Shabbat observance. This vignette describes a man, wounded on the road by a band of robbers, desperate for assistance. Because it is Shabbat, the Jews who see this man's desperation do not come to his aid in his time of need.

> But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him he had compassion on [the wounded man]. And he went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, set him on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. [47]

Not only do we see an openness of the "Good Samaritan" to offer healing to another

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46. John 9:14, John 9:16.
47. Luke 10:33-34.

regardless of his ethnic or religious tribal affiliation, but that he is willing to heal this man on the Sabbath. Most significantly, this parable reflects "the Samaritan fulfills the commandment [to heal] and the Jew circumvented it."[48]

As we moved into the Common Era and as messianism became more important to the Judean context, the eschatological implications of healing and illness became more prominent. Medical theology remained for the most part unchanged except for the character of the healer: the Eternal was the source of illness and healing, and both remained the domain of YHWH. God required servants on earth, acting as sanctioned emissaries for the divine purpose. In the Bible these helpers were exclusively the prophets. Second Temple literature introduced a proto-professional type of physician to whom people could turn in their time of need. Healing, however, came primarily from relatively disorganized individuals receiving guidance from Jewish leadership and YHWH directly. The New Testament offered that important, God-fearing people who were opposed to rabbinic/Pharasaic Judaism could be sanctioned by God to perform these healing acts on earth.

In early modernity, the rabbis sought to assert their locus of control at the center of the Jewish community. Their task became more difficult as the Jewish community became increasingly dispersed throughout the Middle East and as foreign ideas, primarily Greco-Roman ideas, became increasingly influential in the day-to-day lives of Jews and their leaders.

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48. Edward Dobson and Daniel R. Mitchell, eds., *The Annotated Study Bible: King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 1563.

Chapter 2

Healing in the Greco-Roman Milieu of Rabbinic Literature

The increasing Greco-Roman influence, the highly unsettled social circumstances, the fracturing of "ethnic" and "religious" subgroups and the prominence of eschatological beliefs offered an unstable situation in the waning days in advance of the Common Era. And in the emergence of practices after the destruction of the Temple the rabbis struggled to maintain a "hair" of connection between the Mishnah, Tosefta and Talmuds and their biblical antecedent.[49] In his typological analysis of early Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, Martin Cohen argues that the Greco-Roman influence is seen throughout the religious, social and policial changes in Judaism. There is no better source than *m. Hagigah 1:8* that "attests to the nature of these changes....":

> היתר נדרים פורחין באויר ואין להם על מה שיסמכו. הלכות שבת חגיגות והמעילות הרי הם כהררים התלויין בשערה שהן מקרא מועט והלכות מרובות.
>
> [The *halakhot* dealing with] absolution of vows hover in the air, without any [Scriptural] support. The *halakhot* of the Sabbath, the festal offerings

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49. Cohen, *Sister*, 17-18. "Instead of the rustic comforts promised for fulfillment of Temple obligations, the individual's fulfillment of the *halakhah* brought assurance of post-mortal survivial, reward and ultimately resurrection. Correspondingly radical innovations were reflected in the development of all other cardinal theological concepts, including Messiah, Election, Revelation, and God. Specifically they can be observed, for example, in expressions like 'God our Father,' in the emphasis upon God's love for the individual, in the new conceptualizations of repentance, and in the goal of 'completing the world' halakhically in order to establish the 'kingdom of God.'"

> and sacrilege are like mountains hanging by a hair, for there are cases where Scripture is scant but *halakhot* are many.[50]

In addition to changes in the nature of legal discourse, the presence of Hellenistic attitudes about medicine was reflected in changing rabbinic attitudes around healing. The rabbinic mindset, as in the surrounding milieu, began to emphasize a proto-scientific method of human beings working in concert with the metaphysical forces guiding the universe.[51]

In her article in *The Reconstructionist*, Laura Praglin offers a brief, historical survey of Jewish healing. She argues that the rabbis needed to frame their discussions in reality that was certainly characterized by a "lack of clear distinction between science and

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50. Cohen, *Sister*, 17. I am indebted to Dr. Martin A. Cohen for his guidance and inspiration in understanding the chaotic nature of these centuries. As he is fond of quoting, the greatest work of reform in Judiasm is the Mishnah. It was the influence of Hellenism that allowed the discourse and argumentation that brought the Judaism of the Bible into early modernity.
51. Lev and Chipman, *Medical Prescriptions*, 7-13. See the authors' accessible overview of Galenic medicine in the Near East in late antiquity. They cite "Greek books written by the renowned physician Galen in Rome during the second-century of the Common Era [that] were translated into Arabic in ninth-century Baghdad and then consulted in twelfth-century Cairo." (15) Further proof of the profound influence of Greco-Roman medicine are the fragments found in the Cairo Genizah. "Extant recipes from the Graeco-Roman world include those found in gynaecological treatises of …Galen's writings. …Extant prescriptions from the Hellenistic period are the two hundred and sixty fragments of papyrus dealing with medical issues that were found in Egypt and which were written in the Greek language, preserved…due to dry climate. These papyri date from the third century BCE to the seventh century CE, and despite their small size and fragmentary condition, they shed much light on medical knowledge and activity in Egypt over a period of a thousand years. These prescriptions can be considered the direct ancestors of the Genizah prescriptions, just as the Greek medical system was the ancestor of the one used in medieval Islamic world." (17) The authors continue (18) to address the stability of the recipes over the millennium. While it is not conclusive that these were the same sources used by the Jewish community of Palestine and Babylonia, their similarites cannot be discounted. The types of travel and commerce within the region seem to support this hypothesis. As we will see later, it is not uncommon to see an "Arab traveller" as a source for healing remedies.

    See also Fred Rosner, "The Oath of Asaph," in *Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud* (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1995), 182-187. "In addition to the tradition of ancient Hebrew medicine, the book contains passages of Babylonian, Egyptian, Persian, and Indian medicine, as well as sections demonstrating the influence of the various schools of Greek medicine." This book, written between the third and seventh centuries CE, contains "the most ancient translations ever made from a Greek orginial into Hebrew."

magic in medical practice in late antiquity." As such the rabbis were often faced with making a "necessary compromise with popular culture."[52] Praglin suggests that this evolution of rabbinic perspective is due in large part to this Greco-Roman context. She offers:

> True respect for the profession, as well as the specific obligation to heal – so critical to later Jewish views of health – may be traced to the Hellenistic period, where contact with the Stoic concept of natural law and Greek forms of non-magical, "scientific" medicine removed Jewish objection to cures by physicians.[53]

There was an obvious interaction between Jews and Hellenistic culture even before the rabbinic period. The Second Temple literature explored in the previous chapter attests to the movement toward employing proto-professional healers and medical practitioners.[54]

The rabbis, however, held wide-ranging opinions about the role of the Gentile in Jewish life. This chapter seeks to explore emerging and evolving attitudes toward the Gentile, specifically in those interactions involving healing.

Rabbinic Attitudes toward Gentiles

Our earliest layer of extant rabbinic sources is the Mishnah-Tosefta tannaitic layer. As Gary Porton explains, our Jewish literary and legal tradition uncovers for the reader "a variety of images of the Gentile," that also serve "to mark them off from Israelites."

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52. Laura J. Praglin, "The Jewish Healing Tradition in Historical Perspective," in *The Reconstructionist* (Spring 1999), 8.
53. Praglin, "Jewish Healing," 9.
54. Rosner, *Medicine*, 13: "While the Jewish doctors of the time, unlike their Egyptian counterparts, did not "specialize" in any one field, a distinction was made between *rofe* or 'general practitioner,' and the *umman*, or 'surgeon.'" David L. Freeman, "Gittin 68b-70a" in *Korot* 13-14 (1998-2000), 163. Even in the time of the Talmuds "there were individual healers, but there was no standardized education, licensing, professional guilds, or civil law governing medical practice." This is why I have chosen to use the terminology "proto-professional" physician or specialist.

Porton offers, "all Gentiles are grouped together as non-Israelites, and this also serves to divide the world and humanity between “us” and “them.” In some cases the Gentile represents "that part of humankind not covered by the term Israelite" while in other cases it "represents a sub-set of the population of the Land of Israel." Throughout our rabbinic tradition "our texts rarely distinguish among different Gentiles."[55]

Present in the tannaitic literature are explicit statements of the violent nature of the Gentile/Roman context. According to Porton, Gentile nations were "recognized as different groups of human beings" and in many cases within the rabbinic corpus "assumed to be dangerous and threatening to Israelites."[56] Porton continues, "Not only were Gentile rulers and their armies considered to be dangerous, but some assume that any Gentile who is in a position to harm an Israelite will probably do so." In agreement with this stream of earlier thought, the sages of the Mishnah and Tosefta sought to maintain a distinct separation between the Israelite and the Gentile nations. Gentiles at their core were not to be trusted. Therefore, it was imperative for the Jewish people to "remember YHWH’s statements concerning the punishments [He] would mete out to the Gentile nations."[57]

By way of example, the following selection from *m. Sanhedrin* outlines the "procedure" for various means of execution - beheading and strangulation - and identifies it as "the manner in which the government does." While there is no definitive statement as to which is the most disgraceful, this *perek* highlights an environment of extreme violence where people lived in fear from the government.

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55. Gary G. Porton, *Goyim: Gentile and Israelites in Mishnah-Tosefta* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 109.
56. Porton, *Goyim*, 109.
57. Porton, *Goyim*, 236-237.

מצות הנהרגים: היו מתיזין את ראשו בסייף, כדרך שהמלכות עושה. רבי יהודה אומר, "ניוול הוא זה." אלא, מניחין את ראשו על הסדן וקוצץ בקופיץ. אמרו לו: אין מיתה מנוולת מזו. מצות הנחנקין: היו משקעין אותו בזבל עד ארכובותיו ונותנין סודר קשה לתוך הרכה וכורך על צוארו. זה מושך אצלו וזה מושך אצלו עד שנפשו יוצאה.

[This is] the procedure for those who are beheaded: They decapitate him with a sword, in a manner in which the government does. Rabbi Yehudah says, "This is a disgrace." Rather, they lace his head on a block and cut it off with an axe. They said to him: "There is no more disgraceful manner of death than this." [This is] the procedure for those who are strangled: They place him in manure up to his knees, and place a coarse scarf inside a soft one and wind it around his neck. This one pulls toward himself and this one pulls toward himself until his life departs.[58]

The debate exists in this *perek* as to the most disgraceful manner of death. When one was beheaded by the government [likely the Romans, but certainly some form of Gentile government], he would be decapitated by sword. When one was strangled, he was held fixed and then strangled by a scarf being pulled in two directions. The graphic detail of this selection offers one view of the negative image of the ruling, Gentile power.

The rabbis understood that the people were subject not only to the violent tendencies of the Roman government, but were also vulnerable to the Romans' negative perceptions of the Israelite minority. In this following *perek* - later than the Mishnah-Tosefta but still Judean in context - government officers studied with Rabban Gamliel. In their study they uncovered text understood as being anti-Roman.

מעשה ששילח: המלכות שני איסרטיוטות ללמוד תורה מרבן גמליאל ולמדו ממנו מקרא משנה תלמוד הלכות ואגדות ובסוף אמרו לו כל תורתכם נאה ומשובחת חוץ משני דברים הללו שאתם אומרי': בת ישר' לא תיילד לנכרית אבל נכרית מיילדת לבת ישראל בת ישראל לא תניק בנה של נכרית אבל נכרית מניקה לבת ישראל...

The government sent two officers to study Torah with Rabban Gamliel.

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58. *M. Sanhedrin* 7:3. Translations from rabbinic literature are based on the Soncino classic translations, but are emended for modern syntax and usage. And with all due respect to scholars much more skilled, I have also emended some of the translations to reflect a more nuanced, less biased theology and interpretation of the original text.

> They studied with him Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, laws and lore. And they said to him, "the whole of your Torah is beautiful and praiseworthy, except for these two rules which you state. 'An Israelite girl should not serve as a midwife to a Gentile woman... but a Gentile woman may serve as a midwife to an Israelite girl. ... '(*m. Avodah Zarah* 2:1)"[59]

These two Roman officers found all of rabbinic Judaism "beautiful and praiseworthy" except for these examples deemed to be disparaging of Gentiles. Placed into the mouth of government officers, this vignette highlights the ways in which Romans could take offense if they were to study Jewish biblical and rabbinic texts. Rabban Gamliel rectified the decisions so that these rulings seemed less biased against the Romans. This could have been the redactor's way of explicating an increasing tolerance of Israelite-Gentile interactions. But this could just as easily have been the redactor's way of protecting the Israelite minority from a violent and punitive government. Perhaps this was the rabbis' warning that all of this could have been avoided had Rabban Gamliel not studied rabbinic literature with the government officers in the first place. While the motivation is not entirely clear, Rabban Gamliel's actual decision/corrective/solution regarding the employment of Gentile midwives carried forward into the amoraic period and also into the later Diasporic literature.

In the narrative, Rabban Gamliel changed the ruling so that it appeared more tolerant of Gentiles. However, the fact that the rabbis mentioned Israelites and Gentiles serving as midwives for each other suggests that this was a source of contention. It is unclear whether this contention was because of divergent views of utilizing Gentile medical practitioners, the frequency of its occurring within the rabbis' context, the extreme vulnerability of the Israelites in moments of childbirth, or another reason.

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59. *Y. Baba Qamma* 4:3.

However, significant to this thesis is that the rabbis urged caution particularly in the most intimate moments of life. In her exploration of the *halakhic* differences between the tractates *y. and b. Avodah Zarah,* Christine Hayes argues, "anxiety was a feature of Jewish culture in late antiquity that endured for centuries and was geographically widespread." She continues, over time the fact that we see "*halakhic* leniency in Babylonia" regarding tannaitic prohibitions "is most probably a result of pragmatic concerns about the feasibility of upholding the prohibition in the diaspora."[60] No matter the rationale, in this case the rabbis suggested that the Romans simply could not understand our tradition nor could they be fully trustworthy. As will become clear in other selections from the tannaitic literature, Porton offers, "clearly there were some sages who believed that Gentiles could not be trusted, although there were other rabbis who assumed that, at least in some circumstances, Gentiles would be honest."[61]

Rabbinic Attitudes toward Gentile Practitioners

As referenced above in the citation from the Jerusalem Talmud, according to the rabbis, Israelites may engage Gentile practitioners as healers for "property." Israelites may not engage Gentile practitioners, however, for the healing of "persons."

> מתרפאין מהן רפוי ממון אבל לא רפוי נפשות. ואין מסתפרין מהן בכל מקום, דברי רבי מאיר. וחכמים אומרים: ברשות הרבים מותר אבל לא בינו לבינו.
>
> They may be engaged to heal property but not persons; it is forbidden to let them cut hair anywhere - this is the opinion of Rabbi Meir. The sages say: it is permitted in the public domain, but not when they are alone.[62]

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60. Christine Elizabeth Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 152.
61. Porton, *Goyim*, 109.
62. *M. Avodah Zarah* 2:2.

The distinction between "persons" and "property" was not expounded in the Mishnah, but was explored in other traditions. The Toseftan traditions sought to explore the specifics of practical or "real-life" scenarios. Rabbi Meir argued that it is never permissible for a Gentile to be engaged as a barber for an Israelite. The sages determined it was safe as long as the hair-cutting happens publicly/with others present. In a later, Diasporic source, the Babylonian Talmud sought to identify the specific distinction between "property" and "persons."[63] The Mishnah did not offer further explanation as to why/how these decisions were rendered.

The tannaim were concerned about the safety of the Israelite minority in the midst of this Gentile milieu. Traditions brought in the name of Rabbi Meir reflected a position that was highly suspicious of the non-Jewish community and that perceived the Jewish community in an extremely vulnerable position with respect to the Gentile majority. On the other hand, the tradition brought in the name of the sages reflected a more open and permissive perspective that advocated caution but not segregation. It is unclear from these traditions what was the motivation for such a perspective, whether it was pragmatism, economic and professional realities, granting permissions for a practice that was already occurring, or something else entirely. The rabbis were conscious of their minority status in Palestine and were looking to define boundaries for interpersonal relationships. Generally, in the tannaitic traditions Rabbi Meir held a more conservative/

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63. Other traditions will explore what is the difference between "healing involving property" and "healing involving persons." This is the first discussion at the beginning of our *sugya* in *b. Avodah Zarah* 27a. The discussion argues this binary distinction differentiates between healing for free or healing for a fee, healing of non-life-threatening illness or life-threatening illness. Ultimately, the terms are understood as a distinction between healing of animals and healing of people because this is consonant with the tradition that Israelites may not even visit Gentile practitioners for bloodletting.

closed position in opposition to the sages who advocated cautious permissibility.

The Tosefta offered several scenarios in which an Israelite would either require the services of a Gentile practitioner or would likely come into contact with Gentiles. Each of these scenarios reflected a position of extreme physical vulnerability and the tradition required caution.

הולכין ליריד של גוים ומתרפאין מהן - ריפוי ממון אבל לא ריפוי נפשות.

> They go to a Gentiles' fair and accept healing from them - healing involving property, but not healing involving the person.[64]

According to the Tosefta, Israelites were permitted to accept "healing involving property" from Gentiles' fairs. Presumably, there were shamans, healers and magicians who would gather at fairs to offer healing and sell their remedies and amulets. According to this tradition, *rippui mamon* [healing of property] was permissible, but *rippui nefashot* [healing of persons] was not. The discussion in the next chapter will explore the specific differences between these two types of healing. It is sufficient to state now that the rabbis of the Tosefta were looking to establish boundaries between Gentiles and Israelites in the center of medicine.

The tannaitic tradition explored the permissibility of wet-nursing and midwifery in a multi-ethnic context. The tradition sought to balance concerns of "delivering persons into idolatry" and safety for mother and child. Again in this tradition, we see a distinction between Rabbi Meir and the sages. Here the sages' tradition seems to predominate, allowing for the use of Gentile "medical" professionals, though the sages did again urge extreme caution.

בת ישר' לא תניק בנה של נכרית מפני שמגדלת בן לעבו' זרה אבל נכרית מניקה את בנה

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64. *t. Avodah Zarah* 1:8.

> של בת ישר' ברשותה. בת ישר' לא תיילד את הנכרית מפני שמיילדת בן לע' זר' ונכרית לא תיילד את בת ישר' מפני שחשודין על הנפשות דברי ר' מאיר וחכמ' אומ' נכרית מיילדת את בת ישר' בזמן שאחרים עומדין על גבה בינו לבינה אסור מפני שחשודין על הנפשות:
>
> An Israelite woman may not nurse the child of a non-Jewish woman because she is birthing a child for idolatry. A non-Jewish woman, however, may nurse the child of an Israelite woman in public. An Israelite woman may not serve as midwife for a non-Jewish woman because she is delivering a child into idolatry. A non-Jewish woman may not serve as midwife for an Israelite woman because of a suspicion of bloodshed, according to Rabbi Meir's opinion. The sages say that a non-Jewish woman may serve as midwife for an Israelite woman when there are others standing nearby her. It is not permitted when they are alone because of the suspicion of bloodshed.[65]

An Israelite woman may not serve as wet nurse or midwife for a Gentile woman because in doing so she is "delivering" a child into the non-Israelite community, in effect bringing a child into a life of sinful idolatry. In the second scenario, the (unfortunately) likely scenario that a Jewish woman would die during childbirth, the rabbis seemed to recognize the challenge of finding nourishment for this baby. A Gentile woman could nurse an Israelite infant as long as it happened in public - necessity tempered with caution. In the third scenario, there was a disagreement whether a non-Israelite could serve as midwife for an Israelite woman. Rabbi Meir taught this was not permissible because of "the suspicion of bloodshed," arguably that both the Israelite woman and her child were in a vulnerable position and could not depend with certainty on the trustworthiness of the Gentile midwife. The sages, on the other hand, argued caution. They suggested it was permissible when the child was delivered in the presence of others because the associated risk was reduced. The risk remained in private so it was then not permissible for a Gentile woman to serve as midwife for an Israelite.

Elsewhere, the Tosefta continued to explore the balance between safety and

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65. *t. Avodah Zarah* 3:3.

necessity. For example, *t. Niddah* 2:5 allowed an infant to be nursed by a Gentile woman, even on Shabbat, as long as the baby had not yet been weaned from breastfeeding. Here, providing nourishment to the child and thereby preserving his life outweighed any other considerations - even those of Shabbat. Porton notes that it is unclear from this *halakhah* precisely what troubled the rabbis.

> On the one hand, it could relate to the prohibition of having a non-Israelite perform a specific task for the benefit of an Israelite on the Sabbath. On the other hand, it may relate to the theory that Gentiles pose a danger to Israelites, so that they should not be left alone with Israelite children.[66]

Suffice it to say, in spite of these potential confounders and without much clarification, the rabbis concluded that in this particular scenario, even if it were on Shabbat, the baby could be nursed by a Gentile wetnurse. In *t. Shabbat* 9:22 a similar decision was established regarding not only receiving nourishment from a Gentile nursemaid but also from an "unclean beast." It can be utilized, this *halakhah* read, only in "extreme circumstances" when it was a matter of life and death.[67]

The rabbis outlined other scenarios where Israelites were vulnerable in the following *halakhot*. Here, the rabbis contemplated what action to take when a fetus must be "cut out" of the womb of an Israelite woman.

> מתרפאין מהם ריפוי ממון אבל לא ריפוי נפשות. לא תחתך נכרית העובר במעיה של בת ישר'. ולא ישקנה כוס עיקרין מפני שחשודין על הנפשות.

> They may be engaged to heal property but not persons. A Gentile woman should not be called upon to cut out the fetus in the womb of an Israelite girl. And she should not give her a cup of bitters to drink, because of the suspicion of bloodshed.[68]

If an unborn, non-viable or miscarried fetus were causing harm to the mother and needed

66. Porton, *Goyim*, 101.
67. Porton, *Goyim*, 104.
68. *t. Avodah Zarah* 3:4.

to be "cut out," in order to save the life of the mother, even if time were limited, a Gentile woman was not permitted to serve as practitioner. Additionally, this Gentile woman could not offer "bitters" [a natural remedy designed as an anasthestic, abortifacient or a sedative] to the Israelite girl in this precarious situation. Even in the case where the life of the fetus was no longer of concern, the "suspicion of bloodshed" was still a concern for the life of mother.

Along with the previous examples, this next example addressed a time when an Israelite male would be especially vulnerable - an adult receiving circumcision for the purpose of conversion.

> ישר' מל את הגוי לשום גר. וגוי לא ימול את ישר' מפני שחשודין על הנפשות, דברי ר' מאיר. וחכמ' אומ': נכרי מל את ישר' בזמן שאחרים עומדין על גביו. בינו לבינו אסור מפני שחשודין על הנפשות.
>
> An Israelite may circumcise a Gentile for the purpose of conversion. A Gentile, however, may not circumcise an Israelite [for the purpose of conversion] because of the suspicion of bloodshed, according to Rabbi Meir's opinion. The sages say a non-Jew may circumcise an Israelite when there are others standing nearby. [It is not permitted] when they are alone because of the suspicion of bloodshed.[69]

An Israelite practitioner could be employed as *mohel* and circumcise a Gentile for the purpose of conversion. The first case could clearly be understood as an adult Gentile looking to come into the Jewish fold. With that as the immediately preceding clause, the case of an adult Israelite needing to receive circumcision followed. This could be a case in which there was not a qualified/skilled *mohel* in the Jewish community. According to the opinion of Rabbi Meir, if an Israelite required circumcision for the purpose of conversion, a Gentile practitioner could not be employed because of the associated risks and imminent danger. The sages conceded there was a risk and therefore required that

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69. *t. Avodah Zarah* 3:12.

others were present during the circumcision, but they concluded it was permissible. The sages prohibited employing a Gentile as *mohel* if the Israelite was alone. Whether practical or theoretical, this case reflected a scenario in which the expert practitioners[70] were non-Israelite.

As seen in these examples, throughout the generations of the tannaim, specifically in the context of Mishnah and Tosefta, the sages raised the challenges of living as a minority in a non-Jewish milieu. In addition to perceptions of the Gentiles themselves as inherently violent, and in addition to a consensus on the threatening nature of the government, we see some of these same trepidations echoed in the rabbis' discussions of seeking Gentile's medical help.

Later traditions of the amoraic period also confronted the realities of Gentile medical practitioners for Israelite communities and Jewish patients. In a story related in *b. Gittin* 56a-56b, during the Jewish War, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai requested and received physicians from Vespasian (69CE) for Rabbi Zadok, who was near death from fasting.[71] In order to ward off the fall of Jerusalem, he had abstained from all nourishment for forty years. He lived only on figs which he sucked and then threw away. He became so emaciated that when he ate something one could see it externally. Before the surrender of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yohanan made his request of Vespasian who indeed sent the physicians to heal Rabbi Zadok.[72] This tradition, though found in the Babylonian Talmud, reflected the perceptions of an explicitly Roman context. Preuss offers that this could

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70. Preuss, *Medicine*, 33-36. These Gentile practitioners would likely be barbers, bloodletters or surgeons, three proto-professional groups of people in late antiquity who were engaged to perform such services.
71. Preuss, *Medicine*, 15.
72. Preuss, *Medicine*, 441.

provide the reader some information about the medical system generally.[73] He suggests, "this might serve as proof that the Jews had no physicians of their own, but relied on Roman physicians."[74] Though no conclusion can be drawn definitively, this tradition reflects that, at the very least in certain circumstances, Roman physicians might be called to come to the aid of Israelites - even rabbis.[75] It leaves us to wonder whether these Roman practitioners were more skilled than any physician from the Jewish community.

Darkhe Haemori: The Ways of the Amorite

As offered earlier, the lack of clear distinction between science, magic and medical practice forced the rabbis to confront the realities of healing remedies and practices that came from "popular culture." A recurrent trope of "the ways of the Amorite" became another means by which the rabbis differentiated the Israelites from their Gentile neighbors. Giuseppe Veltri suggests, "As in biblical times, the Amorite of the Rabbis represent neighboring populations or foreign people among the Jews."[76] He continues that in the rabbinic imagination,

> The Amorite is not a totally negative individual: He is a charmer, a diviner, and a quack, but also a pious man. According to Rabban Gamli'el, "there is no people so patient like the Amorite. They believed in God and emigrated to Africa. And God gave them a land as beautiful as they had had." (*t. Shabbat* 7:25)[77]

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73. Here we see one of the limitations of Preuss' analysis. It is hard to suppose that from this one vignette, included in the Babylonian corpus but clearly reflecting percptions of an earlier time, that there were no Jewish physicians and that the Jews relied exclusively on Roman physicians.
74. Preuss, *Medicine*, 15.
75. Here I include the caveat that that this could certainly be a later edited, re-imagined or even created version of this tradition, a reflection of the Babylonian context retrojected into an earlier Palestinian one.
76. Veltri, "Physicians," 53.
77. Veltri, "Physicians," 47.

However, the Amorite was still a charlatan and thus, as the rabbis confronted the realities as a minority group in a Greco-Roman context, "*darkhe ha-emori"* was held in opposition to "*refuah*." Veltri explains, "Amorite practices are contrasted to true healing."[78] Beyond the binary of *darkhe haemori* and *refuah*, the linguistic characteristic of *"emori"* permitted a "successful metathesis for *Romi* (Roman).[79] In sum, discussing limits of healing in the Greco-Roman milieu in the language of "the ways of the Amorite" created a trope that became synonymous with "foreign customs," while simultaneously created an "anti-category" that separated true healing from magic or "dangerous cures."[80]

By way of example, the Mishnah states:

> יוצאין בביצת החרגול ובשן שועל ובמסמר מן הצלוב משום רפואה, דברי ר' מאיר וחכמים אומרים אף בחול אסור משום דרכי האמורי:
>
> We may go out with a locust's egg, or with a fox's tooth, or with a nail from a gallows, for the purpose of healing; [these are] the words of R. Meir. But the sages say: Even on weekdays these are forbidden because of [the prohibition against following in] the ways of the Amorites.[81]

According to Rabbi Meir, people could go out on Shabbat while carrying any number of amulets or protections if they were for the purpose of healing the carrier. The sages held the opposite position. Whether on Shabbat or on weekdays, people were not permitted to carry such things because of the prohibition against "the ways of the Amorite," which suggested the carrier was executing potentially idolatrous practices. In the Jerusalem Talmud's explication of this text, the Mishnah referenced includes some interesting differences.

> "יוצאין בביצת החרגול ובשן של שועל ובמסמר הצלוב משום רפואה," דברי רבי יוסי. ורבי

78. Veltri, "Physicians," 49.
79. Veltri, "Physicians," 53.
80. Veltri, "Physicians," 39.
81. *M. Shabbat* 6:10.

מאיר, "אוסר אף בחול משום דרכי האמורי," סליק פירקא.

> "They go out with a locust's egg, a fox's tooth, a nail from the gallows of an impaled convict, for purposes of healing," these are the words of Rabbi Yose. And Rabbi Meir says, "Even on a weekday it is prohibited [to go forth with such objects], "because of the 'ways of the Amorite' [which Israelites are not to adopt].[82]

In the Mishnah, the more permissive perspective was attributed to Rabbi Meir; in the Jerusalem Talmud, the permissive opinion was attributed to Rabbi Yose. In the Jerusalem Talmud, Rabbi Meir was quoted offering the tradition that prohibits carrying these amulets and charms, even on the weekdays. This follows more closely with other traditions, among those cited earlier in the chapter, given in the name of Rabbi Meir, who appears repeatedly as a conservative voice, preaching a more closed Israelite community. Additionally, the text of the Jerusalem Talmud augmented the Mishnah by offering the explication of the curative power of the amulets.

יוצאין בביצת החרגול טב לאודנא. ובשן של שועל טב לשינה. ובמסמר הצלוב טב לעכביתא.

> They go out with a locust's egg: It is good for the ear. And with a fox's tooth: It is good for the teeth. And with a nail from the gallows of an impaled convict: It is good to heal a spider's bite.[83]

Each of these amulets was able to cure specific diagnoses: the locust's egg was a protection for the ear, the fox's tooth was effective for the teeth, and the nail healed a spider bite.

The Tosefta contains a tradition, where the rabbis offered determinations and explanations for various "Amorite practices." The rabbis, however, were not always in agreement as to why such phrases were considered taboo. In *t. Shabbat* 7:1, Rabbi

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82. *Y. Shabbat* 6:9.
83. *Y. Shabbat* 6:8.

Yehudah reflected a more lenient position.

האומר "ימיא וביציא," הרי זה מדרכי האמורי. ר' יהודה או', "אומרי' ימיא וביציא."

> He who says "*Yame*" and "*Bise*", behold, this is the of "the ways of the Amorites." Rabbi Yehudah says, "They may say '*Yame*' and '*Bise*.'"[84]

Several of the proof texts show examples of the Judeans/Israelites wavering from their devotion to YHWH, enticed or seduced by idols. Others are proof texts brought to demonstrate the names invoked as Gentile gods. This prophetic fear was leveraged by the rabbis who were living as a minority in the Judean context.

The rabbis were concerned not only about sayings but also about other practices. The Tosefta offers examples of how Israelites should keep their homes, in distinction from Amorite adornments.

האומר "יתיר ונותר," הרי זה מדרכי האמורי. ר' יהודה או': לא יהא לו בביתו יתיר ונותר

> He who says, "Leave it over and let it go to waste," this is one of 'the ways of the Amorites.' Rabbi Yehudah says: Let there not be in his house anything left over and available to go to waste.[85]

According to Rabbi Yehudah, the larger issue was the frivolous and wasteful nature of the "Amorite." Not only should the Israelite not employ their invocations, but their manner of behavior was not something to which to aspire.

הקושר חוט על גבי אדום - רבן גמליאל או', "אינו מדרכי האמרי." ר' לעזר בי ר' צדוק או', "הרי זה מדרכי האמורי."

> He who ties a thread on red - Rabban Gamliel says, "It is not one of 'the ways of the Amorites.' Rabbi Eleazar ben Rabbi Zaddok says, "Behold, this is one of 'the ways of the Amorites.'"[86]

Something as simple as a red thread adornment carried with it the implication of an

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84. *t. Shabbat* 7:1.
85. *t. Shabbat* 7:7.
86. *t. Shabbat* 7:11.

idolatrous practice. While Rabban Gamliel argued this was a harmless practice, Rabbi Eleazar disagreed.

The rabbis' discussions of *darkhe haemori* in the Babylonian Talmud gave the reader more information and nuance about the issues at hand.

> האומר "גד גדי וסנוק לא אשכי ובושכי," יש בו משום דרכי האמורי רבי יהודה אומר גד אינו אלא לשון עבודה זרה שנאמר: הערכים לגד שלחן (ישעיהו סה). הוא בשמה והיא בשמו יש בו משום דרכי האמורי. "דונו דני" יש בו משום דרכי האמורי. רבי יהודה אומר אין דן אלא לשון עבודה זרה שנאמר: הנשבעים באשמת שמרון ואמרו חי אלהיך דן (עמוס ח).

> He who says, 'Be lucky, my luck [*gad gedi*] and tire not by day or night,' is guilty of Amorite practices. Rabbi Judah said: Gad is none other but an idolatrous term, for it is said, "You who prepare a table for Gad" (Isaiah 65.11). If husband and wife exchange their names, they are guilty of Amorite practices. [To say], 'Be strong, you barrels!' is [forbidden] as the ways of the Amorite. Rabbi Judah said: Dan [barrel] is none other but the designation of an idol, for it is said, "They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, 'As your god Dan lives' " (Amos 8.14).[87]

Wishing for luck and imploring an outside source to strengthen one's barrels was not harmless. These were, the Babylonian Talmud declared, "the ways of the Amorite." Rabbi Yehudah cited Scripture clarifying that these phrases invoked the names of idols. He quoted from Isa 65:11, "But as for you who forsake Adonai, Who ignore My holy mountain, Who set a table for Luck/Gad and fill a mixing bowl for Destiny." Here, idolatrous practices were personified as "Luck" and "Destiny."

In Amos 8:13-14, "In that day, the beautiful maidens and the young men shall faint with thirst— Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, Saying, “As your god lives, Dan,” And “As the way to Beersheva lives”— They shall fall to rise no more." Rather than calling out to YHWH, those praying for these young maidens and men called out to Dan and Beersheva, presumably the idols based in those locales. These two examples

87. *B. Shabbat* 67a paralleled by *t. Shabbat* 7:3.

exemplified a lack of devotion to YHWH and the rabbis recalled this errancy in castigating those who offered superstitious or even pro forma blessing and invocations. These seemingly harmless exhortations conjured up images of idolatry when read in conjunction with the Scriptures.

The rabbis urged caution when throwing around superstitious phrases because in so doing the names of idols were conjured. However these sayings were not monolithic. In this final example, lest one think that every phrase that followed this incantation formula was in fact prohibited, the rabbis cited a time when the great Rabbi Aqiva made a banquet for his son and offered an incantation-like benediction.

> חמרא וחיי לפום רבנן אין בו משום דרכי האמורי מעשה ברבי עקיבא שעשה משתה לבנו ועל כל כוס וכוס שהביא אמר חמרא וחיי לפום רבנן חיי וחמרא לפום רבנן ולפום תלמידיהון

> 'Wine and health to the mouth of our teachers!' is not considered the ways of the Amorite. It once happened that Rabbi Aqiva made a banquet for his son and over every glass [of liquor] that he brought he exclaimed, 'Wine and health to the mouth of our teachers; health and wine to the mouths of our teachers and their disciples!'[88]

Not every phrase that seemed superstitious was prohibited; the rabbis offered an example of such a harmless "blessing" uttered by the great Rabbi Aqiva.

By the time we reach the Diaspora, a tradition offered in the names of Abaye and Rava found in two places in the Babylonian Talmud permitted employing "whatever is used as a remedy."

> אביי ורבא דאמרי תרוייהו כל דבר שיש בו משום רפואה אין בו משום דרכי האמורי. הא אין בו משום רפואה יש בו משום דרכי האמורי.

> Abaye and Rava both maintain: Whatever is used for healing is not [forbidden] on account of the ways of the Amorite. Whatever is not for

88. *B. Shabbat* 67a.

healing is [forbidden] on account of 'the ways of the Amorites.'[89]

The prohibition against "the ways of the Amorite" did not hold in cases where healing was intended. This tradition refers to using remedies for the purpose of healing and does not address issues of carrying the remedy on Shabbat. The distinction is significant because other rabbinic sources mentioned *qemiya* [amulet] for the purpose of prophylaxis and protection. Here, the text reads "דבר שיש בו משום רפואה" [whatever is used for healing] which addresses whatever this "thing" is specifically for healing. As this tradition is further explored, remedies that came even from Gentile sources were permitted in order to accomplish the higher value of providing healing. The tradition continues that whatever was "not for healing" was prohibited, offering a distinction between sanctioned activities and an impermissible flirtation with idolatry.

The following text offers examples of Amorite practices, which the *baraita* claimed were recited as a chapter in the presence of Rabbi Hiyya bar Abin. They were practices that reflect classical theories of healing[90] - like heals like, complimentary touch, and accompanying incantations.

> תני תנא בפרק אמוראי קמיה דרבי חייא בר אבין אמר ליה כולהו אית בהו משום דרכי האמורי לבר מהני מי שיש לו עצם בגרונו מביא מאותו המין ומניח ליה על קדקדו ולימא הכי חד חד נחית בלע בלע נחית חד חד אין בו משום דרכי האמורי לאדרא לימא הכי ננעצתא כמחט ננעלתא כתריס שייא שייא
>
> A tanna recited the chapter of Amorite practices before R. Hiyya b. Abin. He said to him: All these are forbidden as Amorite practices, except for the following. If one has a bone [stuck] in his throat, he may bring [more[of that kind [of meat], place it on his head, and say: "One by one go down, swallow; swallow, go down one by one." This is not considered the ways of the Amorite. For a fish bone he should say: "You are stuck in

89. *B. Shabbat* 67a paralleled by *b. Hullin* 77a.
90. H.J. Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians, and Doctors: Studies in Folk Medicine and Folklore as Reflected in the Rabbinical Response,* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), 114.

like a pin, you are locked up as [within] a cuirass; go down, go down."[91]

The preceding sentence noted that actions taken for the purpose of healing were not considered "the ways of the Amorite." Subsequent examples did not highlight their curative or healing powers which was why the rabbis consider these Amorite practices.

Over time, the effectiveness of a particular remedy, amulet or incantation served as proof or justification for the rabbis' granting permission. Because, as stated earlier, we know that the Amorites might be a rabbinic stand-in for the Romans or, at least, for Gentiles in general. By the time of the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud it appears that the rabbis were more open to employing Gentile healing within the Jewish community. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Rambam)[92] offered an even later articulation of the rabbis' opinion. He summarized his understanding of the *halakhah*,

> ויוצא בקליפת השום ובקליפת הבצל שעל המכה ובאגד שעל גבי המכה וקושרו ומתירו בשבת, ...ובכל דבר שתולין אותו משום רפואה והוא שיאמרו הרופאים שהוא מועיל.
>
> One may also go out into the public domain [on Shabbat] with a garlic skin, an onion skin, or a bandage over a wound ...or any other article suspended on the body for medical reasons, provided that physicians say that it is medically effective.[93]

Provided that physicians determined these "amulets" were medically effective, the patient could travel into the public domain, even on Shabbat, with anything suspended from his body for medical reasons. This example supports Veltri's assertion that over time *darkhe*

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91. *B. Shabbat* 67a.
92. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon was born into an illustrious rabbinic family in Cordoba, Spain in 1135 C.E. After the fall of Cordoba to the Almohads, the family ben Maimon moved from Fez in Morocco to *Eretz Yisrael* eventually landing in the thriving Jewish community in Egypt. There, in addition to his commentaries on important works in the rabbinic corpus, he eventually became Chief Physician to the Caliph. His *Mishnah Torah*, though stirring much controversy within the rabbinic community, organized and summarized rabbinic arguments around issues of *halakhic* import to the layman. (See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13, "Maimonides, Moses," 381-397.)
93. Mishneh Torah Shabbat 19:13.

haemori were subsumed into a growing category of "the ‘other’ sciences and customs." These customs were evaluated in a semi-empirical fashion and were consequently "either allowed because of their usefulness or rejected because of their idolatrous or ‘superstitious’ tendencies."[94]

As discussed in this chapter, rabbinic attitudes toward medicine changed dramatically in this period. Hellenistic attitudes about healing emphasized a proto-"scientific" method and these ideas are found throughout rabbinic literature. Medicine described in rabbinic literature believed "the usefulness of a cure is the criterion for [evaluating] its 'scientific' value." The overwhelming fear of these "foreign and 'barbarian' procedures" gave way to permissibilty when they could be "of proven medical value." Under the influence of Greco-Roman medicine, practitioners became known as "specialists" - physicians, surgeons, bloodletters, *mohalim* - but there were still no central rabbinic or civic organizations that oversaw medical practice in the early centuries of the Common Era.

The Jewish community, however, remained cautious in their interactions with the Gentile community. "The ways of the Amorite" remained taboo, but the "pragmatic, empirical approach"[95] to assessing usefulness of remedies allowed for the Jewish community to deem some Gentile cures permissible. In spite of the foreign, ideological influence, the Jewish community remained vulnerable and the rabbis were not yet ready to remove boundaries erected between "Jew" and "Gentile." The next chapter will explore the nature of healing itself within the rabbinic worldview of the Babylonian Talmud.

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94. Veltri, "Physicians," 39.
95. Veltri, "Physicians," 47.

Chapter 3

Rabbinic Attitudes Toward Gentile Healers in the Babylonian Talmud

Biblical medical theology emphasized the supremacy of YHWH and the indebtedness of the physician-practitioner to the Eternal. Greco-Roman attitudes emphasized "empirical" evaluation of the world before them. These methods increasingly influenced rabbinic assessment of the healing endeavor. The rabbis did retain the central importance of the Jewish community and continued to urge caution in any interactions with outsiders. This view held strongly in the realm of healing because of the vulnerability of the patient. Wariness of the non-Jewish majority remained and "suspicion of bloodshed" was a refrain guiding rabbinic judgment of Jewish-Gentile relations. The world, however, was changing and the rabbis needed to confront the realities of the multi-ethnic context.

Permission to Heal

As discussed in the previous two chapters, Rabbinic Judaism was highly influenced by the ideological, social and political circumstances of the chaotic centuries in which it was born. Through *halakhah*,[96] "Torah law is effectively shaped to meet radically new contingencies, or radically new laws are at least theoretically hung on slender Torah

96. Cohen, *Sister*, 16. Meaning "way or procedure," rather than "'law' as it has come to mean."

threads." It is in this understanding of God's divine will that the *mitsvah* system became "a sacrament tying the individual to constant communion with the divine."[97] With the frequency of healing activities well testified in the corpus of Jewish and Ancient Near Eastern literature, the rabbinic brand of Judaism required not only to report healing events, but also through its retelling, to justify all actions related to healing. As explored in a previous chapter, the rabbinic tradition understood that the Torah granted permission for physicians to heal.

> דתניא דבי ר' ישמעאל אומר: "ורפא ירפא" (שמות כ"א). מכאן שניתן רשות לרופא לרפאות.
>
> As it was taught according to the school of Rabbi Yishmael: "And he shall surely heal him" (Ex 21:19). From this we know that permission is given to the doctor to heal.[98]

With the biblical basis for permission to be healed, the rabbis' discussions evolved into explorations of the mandate to seek healing and the obligation of practitioners to provide healing.

Some of these "permission to heal" discussions engaged situations, perhaps merely hypothetical, that challenged the limits of this permission to heal. The following citation underscores the complexity of providing healing in the early centuries of the Common Era.

> ואי א"ל: "אסייך," אנא א"ל: "דמית עלי כאריא ארבא." ואי א"ל: "מייתינא אסיא דמגן במגן," א"ל: "אסיא דמגן במגן מגן שוה." ואי אמר: "מייתינא לך אסיא רחיקא," אמר ליה: "אסיא רחיקא עינא עוירא." ואי א"ל: "היאך הב לי לדידי," ואנא: "מסינא נפשאי." א"ל: "פשעת בנפשך ושקלת מינאי טפי," ואי א"ל: "קוץ לי מקץ." א"ל: "כל שכן דפשעת בנפשך, וקרו לי שור המזיק."
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> If one says: "I can act as your healer," the other one can respond to him: "You are in my eyes like a lurking lion." If the [first] one says: "I will

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97. *Ibid.*
98. *B. Baba Qamma* 85a.

> bring you a physician who will heal you for nothing," the other can respond to him: "A physician who heals for nothing is worth nothing." If one says: "I will bring you a physician from a distance," the other can respond to him: "[If we wait for the arrival of] a physician from a distance, the eye will be blind [before he arrives]." If one says: "Give me money and I will cure myself," the other can respond: "You might neglect yourself and get too much from me." If one says: "Set for me a fixed sum," the other one can respond to him: "There is all the more danger that you might neglect yourself, and they will call me 'A harmful ox.'"[99]

If one were responsible for injuring another he was responsible to heal him. However, this *sugya* teaches that not only was one obligated to heal, but he was obligated to provide a qualified healer. The various alternatives - conducting the healing oneself, bringing a different physician who would heal *gratis*, and bringing a healer from a distance - ultimately were unreliable, could delay the healing, and put the patient's life at risk. Alternatively, if I were responsible to heal someone else because of an injury I caused, I am neither permitted to simply give him money nor to set a fixed sum in advance of the medical assessment. The patient could be delinquent and neglect himself or it might actually cost more to heal him. I must be concerned with over- or underpayment of his medical treatment. Not only was the individual obligated to heal, his obligation was also to offer skillful, reliable, acceptable and effective healing.

It was not only practical or economic motivations occupied the rabbis' minds. With permission to heal granted, the rabbis recognized the potential vulnerability of the citizenry. Therefore, as we can see in the previous citation, the rabbis sought to explore boundaries, limitations and potential risks of this permitted healing.

> הנכנס להקיז דם אומר: "יהי רצון מלפניך, ה' אלהי, שיהא עסק זה לי לרפואה ותרפאני, כי אל רופא נאמן אתה ורפואתך אמת, לפי שאין דרכן של בני אדם לרפאות אלא שנהגו." אמר אביי: "לא לימא אינש הכי דתני דבי רבי ישמעאל: 'ורפא ירפא' (שמות כ"א). מכאן שניתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות."

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99. *Ibid.*

> One who goes in for bloodletting says: "May it be Your will, Lord my God, that this business will be a cure for me, and that You will heal me, for You are a God of faithful healing and Your healing is truth, since it is not the way of human beings to heal but they have grown accustomed to it." Abaye said: "a person should not say this, as it was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: 'and he will surely heal him' (Ex 21:19), from this we know that a doctor is given permission to heal."[100]

The first tradition requires a prayer in advance of receiving bloodletting; the second tradition does not permit saying this particular prayer. Because we are permitted to entrust our care to practitioners, then, according to Abaye, we did not need to suggest that humans were incapable of effecting healing. Surely, healing happens under the guidance of "the Lord my God," but also due to the handiwork of human beings. The doctor was given permission to heal from our teaching from the school of Rabbi Yishmael. Dr. Fred Rosner notes: "Jewish law requires a physician to be skilled and well-educated. If he heals without being properly licensed, he is liable for any bad outcome." He continues, "the divine arrangement of the world requires and pre-supposes the existence of physicians." Therefore, the rabbis believed that if physicians acted responsibly and with the best intentions they could not be punished, even for a bad outcome. "If one were to hold the physician liable for every error, very few people would practice medicine."[101] Therefore, it was not necessary to indemnify the practitioner or the patient from

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100. Rosner, *Medicine*, 172. Rosner translates: "May it be Thy will, O Lord my God, that this operation may be a cure for me and mayest Thou heal me for Thou art a faithful healing God and Thy healing is sure since men have no power to heal but this is a habit with them." It is worth nothing that Rosner's translation presents a challenge; he seems to be offering an interpretation that so diminishes the human participation in healing with God. There is no debate here that healing ultimately comes only from God. However, separating his translation from the subsequent statements of Abaye and Ishmael virtually eliminates the reality that God acts to heal people through the sacred actions of his healers on earth, physicians.

101. Fred Rosner, “Unconventional Therapies and Judaism,” in *The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* (1990), 97-98.

culpability.

Part of a man's obligation to preserve life was to to offer protection to his colleague when an enemy pursued him to kill him. He was obligated to save the other man's life.

> תנו רבנן: מניין לרודף אחר חבירו להרגו שניתן להצילו בנפשו? תלמוד לומר: "לא תעמד על דם רעך" (ויקרא י"ט).
>
> And it was taught: From where is it taught that when one is coming after his colleague to kill him that [he is given permission] to save him [by killing the pursuer]? The text says: "Do not stand idly by the blood of your brother" (Lev 19:16).[102]

This leads us to draw an understanding that when an enemy, be it human or disease, was threatening his colleague's life with injury or illness, the physician was given permission to offer healing and to save him. This decision was further explicated in the post-Rabbinic *halakhic* literature. Summarizing the evolving legal traditions of the previous generations, Rambam[103] outlined in the Mishneh Torah:

> כל היכול להציל ולא הציל עובר על: "לא תעמוד על דם רעך" (ויקרא י"ט, ט"ז). וכן הרואה את חבירו טובע בים או ליסטים באים עליו או חיה רעה באה עליו ויכול להצילו ... ולא הציל, ...עובר על: "לא תעמוד על דם רעך."
>
> Whoever is able to save another and does not save him transgresses against [the commandment]: "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (Lev 19:16). One who sees his colleague drowning in the sea, or robbers pursuing him, or a beast mauling him ... and does not save him... transgresses against [the commandment]: "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (Lev 19:16).[104]

In addition to man's obligation to save the life of another when an enemy was in pursuit, Rambam further clarified and included cases where the present danger was not from another person. When a person was drowning, mauled by a beast or pursued by someone

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102. *B. Sanhedrin* 73a.
103. See chapter 2 footnote 92 for full citation.
104. Mishneh Torah Rotseah 1:14.

who sought to accost him, though not necessarily kill him, the requirement to save him held.

The rabbis' attitude was codified in the *halakhic* codes, such as the *Shulhan Arukh.* Not only did the Torah grant permission for the physician to heal, but it also required those skilled professionals to perform healing. If the physician deferred his religious obligation it was as if he shed the patient's blood himself.

> נתנה התורה רשות לרופא לרפאות. ומצוה היא, ובכלל פיקוח נפש הוא. ואם מונע עצמו, הרי זה שופך דמים.
>
> The Torah gave permission to the physician to heal; moreover, it is a religious obligation and is included in the category of saving life. If he withholds his services, it is considered as shedding blood.[105]

The antecedent texts move rabbinic law to the place where the *Shulhan Arukh* could offer this ruling. The physician who stood by while his colleague suffered from illness was like one who spilled the patient's blood himself.

The rabbis took great pains to interpret biblical texts so that they granted permission for healing. As a result, the rabbis' views can be summarized as follows: human beings are responsible to heal those they injure. To those they injure, people are obligated to provide qualified or proven healing. Further, human beings are capable of effecting healing in other human beings. These healers are physicians. The physician is given permission to heal in the Torah. If the physician is capable of offering healing, he is obligated to do so. The Talmuds offer detailed discussions, outlining even specific real-life or hypothetical scenarios, as an overlay to the medical theology offered in the Bible.

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105. Shulhan Arukh, *Yoreh Deah* 336:1.

Healing remedies in the Talmud

Beginning at the time of the codification of the Mishnah (early third century CE), "the healer posed an inherently dangerous challenge to the emerging institutional and spiritual authority of the priesthood and later developing rabbinical academies." Praglin suggests that few healing stories were written down and "tales of individual healing magicians were thus downplayed."[106] In spite of the rabbinic tendency to silence stories of healing by "magicians," non-Jewish or unsanctioned persons, the genre of the magical healer has, in fact, survived in rabbinic literature.[107] There emerged in the later rabbinic works more stories of healing and more explicit descriptions of Talmudic therapies. "Jewish physicians employed accepted contemporary medical practices, reasoning the 'religious imperative was to cure'" and the remedies offered in the Talmud "were simply suggestions based upon the medicine of the time."[108] Praglin concludes, "when authoritative texts failed to address particular situations," the reader can see "popular practices" that "supplant or even contradict rabbinical sanctions."[109]

Throughout rabbinic literature, there are explications of illness, causes of disease and suggested treatments. David Freeman explains: "At the time of the [Babylonian] Talmud, there were individual healers, but there was no standardized education, licensing, professional guilds, or civil law governing medical practice."[110] Beyond a glimpse at the social structure, many of the examples have *halakhic* import.

> אין אוכלין איזוב יון בשבת לפי שאינו מאכל בריאים אבל אוכל הוא את יועזר ושותה
> אבוברועה כל האוכלין אוכל אדם לרפואה וכל המשקין שותה חוץ ממי דקלים וכוס עיקרים

106. Praglin, "Jewish Healing," 8.
107. *Ibid.*
108. Praglin, "Jewish Healing," 11.
109. *Ibid.*
110. Freeman, “Gittin,” 163.

מפני שהן לירוקה אבל שותה הוא מי דקלים לצמאו וסך שמן עיקרין שלא לרפואה:

> One may not eat "Greek hyssop" on Shabbat, because it is not food for healthy people; but one may eat penyroyal, or drink knotgrass water. A person may eat any foods for healing; and he may drink any beverages, except for the water of palm trees or a potion of roots, because they are [cures] for jaundice. However, one may drink the water of palm trees to quench his thirst, and he may anoint himself with root oil [if it is] not for healing.[111]

Greek hyssop was a remedy for [a certain] illness. Penroyal and knotgrass water were not considered medicaments, therefore there was no prohibition against consuming them on Shabbat. Palm tree water and [palm] root oil were remedies identified as curatives for jaundice. Quenching one's thirst was not considered a type of "healing" and anointing was not understood as a "healing" activity. The ingredients mentioned demonstrate that certain remedies were used for multiple purposes. Of importance to these tannaitic rabbis, because of the prohibitions against healing on Shabbat, this selection urged caution, outlining a distinction between "food for healthy people" and "food for healing."

The Babylonian Talmud[112] has an extended section outlining homeopathic remedies of known substances for common illnesses and conditions. This section of healing and other folk remedies, known as "The Book of Remedies," is found in *b. Gittin* 68b-70a. Though during the early rabbinic period there was no standardization of medical care, this section offered the reader a possible view of the "medical system" of late antiquity. Freeman suggests that what so characterizes this section of the Babylonian Talmud is that the information contained therein "does not inherently belong to the

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111. *M. Shabbat* 14:3.

112. Judging from Preuss' index, there are 50% more unique *dapim* referencing healing in the Babylonian Talmud (versus the combination of references in Mishnah-Tosefta-Jerusalem Talmud) that Preuss cited in the course of his enormous project. Though this is by no means a statistically significant analysis, it is possible that at least some of the additional volume in the Bavli is because of these references to healing.

Talmud" and that it is itself "secular and applicable to non-Jews as well as to Jews."[113] The origins of this work almost certainly "stem from a contemporary literary genre of folk medicine."[114] Zoroastrianism, the dominant religion of Babylonia, where this book was presumably composed/redacted, "was suffused with demonology and has been said to have been the source of superstitious beliefs among the Talmudic Sages." Some of the Talmudic Sages were specifically depicted as healers and there are details of Jewish physicians practicing medicine in Rome and training in Alexandria.[115] Freeman argues that this lengthy treatment of medicine in late antiquity "has all the hallmarks of this Roman genre of compendia of folk medicine." These remedies advocate for holistic treatment - a combination of medicaments of natural and readily available substances with incantions, amulets and other types of faith healing. Freeman finds this format is similar to Cato's *On Agriculture* and the meeting of "natural" and "magical" mimic Pliny's *Natural History.*[116] Like the protocols found in Leviticus 12-13 around *tzaraat*, this section seems to be drawing from the literature of the surrounding context.

Veltri argues it was the goal of the Roman authors of medical textbooks and the rabbis themselves to collect the best medical information available at the time and, subsequently, "to examine, judge, and record past and present experiences, which could be helpful in everyday life." He suggests that it is most likely that the rabbis learned their medical, pharmaceutical and therapeutic knowledge "almost exclusively from books and informants."[117] In situations where a physician was unavailable, this manual provided a

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113. Freeman, "Gittin," 153.
114. Freeman, "Gittin," 151.
115. Freeman, "Gittin," 159.
116. Freeman, "Gittin," 162.
117. Veltri, "Physicians," 52.

guide for the rabbis in many real-life situations. Freeman posits that this manual provides the talmudic scholar of the Babylonian context, increasingly the "go-to" community leader for all questions guiding life, with his best chance of effecting healing. "A handbook of domestic medicine," though it does not "fit" with other sources in the rabbinic tradition, may have been "acceptable...because it consisted of straightforward information. It came without abstraction, rhetoric, theory, dogma, or appeals to pagan gods." Freeman offers his assessment that the author of the "'Book of Remedies' clearly wanted to enable rabbis and scholars to dispense medical advice to their communities."[118]

Sample of Healing Remedies from the Babylonian Talmud

These selections reflect something of the rabbis' understanding of pharmacology and homeopathy of the Ancient Near East. They also introduce techniques employed in various healing activities.

> לדמא דרישא - ליתי שורבינא ובינא ואסא דרא וזיתא וחילפא וחילפי דימא ויבלא ולישלוקינהו. בהדי הדדי ולנטול תלת מאה כסי אהאי גיסא דרישא ותלת מאה כסי אהאי גיסא דרישא. ואי לא ליתי ורדא חיורא דקאי בחד דרא ולישלקיה ולינטול שיתין כסי אהאי גיסא דרישא ושיתין כסי אהאי גיסא.
>
> For blood rushing to the head - the remedy is to take shurbina[119] and willow and moist myrtle and olive leaves and poplar and rosemary and yabla and boil them all together. The sufferer should then pour three hundred cups on one side of his head and three hundred on the other. Otherwise, he should take white roses with all the leaves on one side and boil them and pour sixty cups on one side of his head and sixty cups on the other side of his head.[120]

With the primary ailment identified and ingredients for the suggested remedy gathered,

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118. Freeman, "Gittin," 164.
119. Ronald Isaacs, *Judaism, Medicine, and Healing* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1998), 76. Here Isaacs translates *shurbina* as "bark of a box tree."
120. *B. Gittin* 68b.

materials were boiled into a "potion" and administered by pouring onto each side of the head. The next remedy, immediately following in the talmudic corpus, reflected different materials and techniques.

> דרישא לצליחתא - ליתי תרנגולא ברא ולישחטיה בזוזא חיורא אההוא גיסא דכייב ליה ונזדהר מדמיה דלא לסמינהו לעיניה וליתלייה בסיפא דבבא דכי עייל חייף ביה וכי נפיק חייף ביה.
>
> For migraine - one should take a rooster and cut its throat with a white *zuz*[121] over the side of his head on which he has pain, taking care that the blood does not blind him, and he should hang the bird on his doorpost so that he should rub against it when he goes in and out.[122]

Here a live animal, rather than herbs and plants, was slaughtered with a specified silver coin. The blood was spilled over the sufferer's head, though he was not to let the blood flow into his eyes. The slaughtered bird was then hung as an amulet on the sufferer's doorpost and it became a talisman as he entered and exited his home.

Our Jewish and rabbinic sources as well as others from the Ancient Near East[123] frequently addressed the threat of snakes, bees, scorpions and rabid dogs. These animals with their associated poisoning/illnesses/injury posed a significant danger because of the severe symptoms and the rapid progression to death and the severe threat these animals posed a threat to the lives of people and animals. The very young were particularly vulnerable, according to the tradition:

> אמר אביי: אמרה לי אם"האי בר שית דטרקא ליה עקרבא ביומא דמישלם שית לא חיי." מאי אסותיה? מררתא דדיה חיורתא בשיכרא. נשפייה ונשקייה.
>
> Abaye said: "My mother told me, 'A six year old child who has been bitten by a scorpion on his sixth birthday does not survive.'" What is his remedy? The gall of a white stork in beer. [The remedy is then] rubbed into the

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121. Isaacs, *Medicine and Healing,* 77. Here Isaacs translates *zuz* as "silver coin."
122. *B. Gittin* 68b.
123. Wu Yuhong, "Rabies and Rabid Dogs in Sumerian and Akkadian Literature" in *JAOS* 121.1 (2001), 32.

wound and [the rest should be] drunk.[124]

Presumably this remedy was recommended for all people suffering the sting of a scorpion bite, though the tradition cautioned against assuming it would be effective for the very young. Abaye continued to share the words his mother taught him.

> "האי בר שתא דטריק ליה זיבורא ביומא דמישלם שתא לא חיי." מאי אסותיה? אצותא דדיקלא במיא. נשפייה ונשקייה.
>
> "A one year old child who has been stung by a bee on his first birthday does not survive." What is his remedy? The creepers of a palm-tree in water. [The remedy is then] rubbed into the wound and [the rest should be] drunk.[125]

As in the previous example, the remedy was recommended for all people suffering from a bee sting, though the tradition cautioned against assuming it would be effective for the very young. A bee sting, though it did not carry the same poison that a scorpion sting did, would likely prove fatal to an infant. There was a different remedy suggested for this sting. Though it would have likely proved futile, Abaye still suggested using the remedy for the very young.

Below two separate remedies are outlined for illness/conditions related to snakes. The first was a curative remedy for someone suffering from a snake bite.

> אימיה דרב אחדבוי בר אמי עבדה ליה להההוא גברא חד כלילא וחד כוסתא דשיכרא שלקה. ואישקיתיה ושגרא, תנורא וגרפתיה ואותביתיה לבינתא בגוויה ונפק כהוצא ירקא.
>
> The mother of R. Ahadbuy bar Ammi prepared [a potion of] one rose and one glass of strong liquor for a certain man. She boiled them up, made him drink it, lit the stove and swept it out, placed bricks in it, and [the poison of the snake] issued like a green palm-leaf.[126]

New medicaments and a new technique were identified - lighting a stove and placing

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124. *B. Ketubbot* 50a.
125. *Ibid*.
126. *B. Shabbat* 109b.

bricks upon it in addition to drinking the remedy prepared from the materials. The second was a remedy for someone who swallowed a snake.

> האי מאן דבלע חיויא לוכליה כשותא במילחא ולירהטיה תלתא מילי. רב שימי בר אשי חזייה להההוא גברא דבלע חיויא אידמי ליה כפרשא אוכליה כשותא במילחא וארהטיה קמיה תלתא מילי ונפק מיניה גובי גובי.

> If one swallows a snake, he should be made to eat *cuscuta* with salt and run three *mils*.[127] Rav Shimi bar Ashi saw a man swallow a snake; thereupon he appeared to him in the guise of a horseman, made him eat *cuscuta* with salt and run three mils before him, [and] it issued from him rib by rib.[128]

The story of Rav Shimi bar Ashi detailed not only the suggested remedy but also outlined the outcome. The efficacy of the remedy was confirmed by the tale of its use, implementation and outcome. Rav Shimi was concerned he could not convince the one who "swallows a snake" to run the three *mil* distance. He therefore donned the attire of a more threatening horseman and compelled the man to drink the remedy and run the three *mils*. It is interesting that the rabbi did not believe that he was considered authority enough to compel adherence to the suggested remedy, rather he needed to be somewhat duplicitous. Here the prepared remedy, with different elements and a requirement for the patient to "run three *mils*," did not neutralize the poison as in the previous examples. In this case the remedy actually caused the snake to exit the person "rib by rib."

Attitudes toward Gentile tools of healing

The approach to medicine found in the Babylonian Talmud - requiring verifiable and/or

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127. Eliezer Bashan, Daniel Sperber, Haim Hermann Cohn and Itamar Warhaftig, "Weights and Measures" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 20, 708. "In the Greco-Roman period there was a syncretistic system for the longer measures, in which the *mil* (Roman mile, *milion* in Matt. 5:41) of 2000 *ammah* was reckoned at 7½ *stadia* (Heb. *ris*, Yoma 6:4), giving a convenient division of the *parasang* (Heb. *parsah*) into 30 *stadia*."
128. *B. Shabbat* 109b.

empirical evidence to prove the effectiveness of practitioners and tools - was soundly aligned with the "traditional" medical patterns of the Greco-Roman milieu. As we saw in "The Book of Remedies:"

> No rationale, theory, example, or proof is offered in support, no authority or tradition is quoted, the remedy is just assumed to be effective. …The remedy employs common natural substances assumed to have innate healing potency.[129]

Argued above, "the usefulness of a cure is the criterion for its 'scientific' value. Foreign and 'barbarian' procedures, can also be of proven medical value."[130] The Babylonian rabbis' reason for accepting "magical customs and recipes" was practical and somewhat opportunistic: "when official medicine fails, he wants to give an alternative."[131]

There was a discussion recorded in the Babylonian Talmud as to whether the practitioner himself or the amulet was considered "expert" or "efficacious."

> ולא בקמיע בזמן שאינו מן המומחה. אמר רב פפא לא תימא עד דמומחה גברא ומומחה קמיע אלא כיון דמומחה גברא אף על גב דלא מומחה קמיע. דיקא נמי דקתני "ולא בקמיע בזמן שאינו מן המומחה." ולא קתני בזמן שאינו מומחה - שמע מינה.

> And not with an amulet if it is not from an expert. Rav Papa said: One should not think that both the expert and the amulet must be *mumheh* [expert]; rather [as long as] the practitioner is *mumheh* [one may be healed by them] even if the amulet is not. This is also proved since it has been stated [elsewhere], "And not with an amulet if it is not from an expert." If it is not stated [as in this case] it is not approved. This proves it.[132]

Here Rav Papa shared his opinion that it was important that the practitioner be considered "expert." This was proven because one may be healed by an expert practitioner even if the amulet he employs was not proven. Further, if the proven amulet was not employed by an expert practitioner then it could not be used. According to Rav Papa's teaching the

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129. Freeman, "Gittin," 153.
130. Veltri, "Physicians," 46.
131. *Ibid.*
132. *B. Shabbat* 61a.

effect resided in the hand of the practitioner. In this citation, we also see the rabbis ensured that any healing they used on Shabbat would be certain to work and that Shabbat would not be violated without reason.

There are two differing traditions as to what was considered an expert amulet (*qemiya mumheh*). In the first tradition, the amulet was used successfully in healing three times, three different people.

> תנו רבנן איזהו קמיע מומחה? כל שריפא ושנה ושלש אחד קמיע של כתב, ואחד קמיע של עיקרין, אחד חולה שיש בו סכנה, ואחד חולה שאין בו סכנה. לא שנכפה אלא שלא יכפה. וקושר ומתיר אפילו ברשות הרבים ובלבד שלא יקשרנו בשיר ובטבעת ויצא בו ברשות הרבים משום מראית העין.

> Our rabbis taught: what is an expert amulet? Any one that has healed [once], then a second and a third time - whether it is an amulet in writing or an amulet of roots, an amulet for an ill person for whom there is a dangerous [or life-threatening illness] or an amulet for an ill person for whom there is no dangerous illness. [It is permitted] not only for one who has had an epileptic fit but also for one who has not had an epileptic episode [in the hope that the amulet might ward off a fit in the future].
>
> [On Shabbat,] one may tie and untie [the amulet] even in the public domain/street, in the case when he does not secure it with a bracelet or ring and [then] go out in the public space, [though this is a caveat] for the sake of appearances.[133]

It did not matter whether this was a written amulet or a carried amulet, whether the condition healed was for life-threatening illness, or whether the amulet was intended as a curative or as prophylaxis. The rabbis further concluded that this amulet could be tied or untied, even in the public space on Shabbat, as long as it was not secured by ring or bracelet. The rabbis added, however, this consideration was for the sake of appearances. The majority seemed to have moved quite a distance from only permitting "healing of property." Here the rabbis were concerned about the "appearance" of violating Shabbat in order to heal; the violation of Shabbat itself, however, no longer was in question.

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133. *B. Shabbat* 61a-b.

A second tradition indicated a different definition of what was an expert amulet.

> והתניא איזהו קמיע מומחה? כל שריפא שלושה בני אדם כאחד. לא קשיא - הא למחויי גברא הא למחויי קמיעא.
>
> But it was [elsewhere] taught: what is an expert amulet? One that that has healed three people at one time/simultaneously. There is no contradiction here: one case is to approve the man (healer), the other is to approve the amulet.[134]

Here, the tradition suggested that an approved amulet was one that healed three men at once. However, the redactor clarified that there was no contradiction because the first tradition concerned efficacy of the practitioner and the second teaching concerned the amulet itself. Again in Rav Papa's voice, the tradition sought further clarification about the distinction between efficacious practitioner and proven amulet.

> אמר רב פפא: פשיטא לי תלת קמיע לתלת גברי תלתא תלתא זימני איתמחי גברא ואתמחי קמיע. תלתא קמיע לתלתא גברי חד חד זימנא גברא איתמחי קמיעא לא איתמחי. חד קמיע לתלתא גברי קמיעא איתמחי גברא לא איתמחי.
>
> Rav Papa said: it is obvious to me that if three amulets [are efficacious] for three people, each [being efficacious] three times, both the practitioner and the amulets are expert/approved. If three amulets [are efficacious] for three people, each [being efficacious] one time, the practitioner is expert but the amulet is not approved. If one amulet [is efficacious] for three [different] people, the amulet is approved but the practitioner is not [deemed/considered] expert.[135]

One may trust both the practitioner and the amulet if three separate amulets were used to heal three different people successfully on three separate occasions. One may trust the healer who healed three separate people with three separate amulets one time each. One may not assume the amulets were efficacious, however. One may trust the amulet that effectively healed three separate people, presumably on three separate occasions. In this case, however, one could not assume the healer was expert.

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134. *B. Shabbat* 61b.
135. *Ibid*.

The number three carried significance because it reduced the likelihood that healing (whether due to the amulet or the healer) occurred accidentally, by chance or because of an outside influence. The Babylonian Talmud was concerned with identifying the source of the success and did not wish to attribute healing powers where it was not warranted. That would have bordered on superstition or idolatry, but unwarranted usage could needlessly threaten the life of a person who mistakenly placed his life and health in the hands of an untested amulet or an untrusted healer. This person would be violoating Shabbat in the process.

Rambam offered the summary of the above discussion - either the practitioner or the amulet itself could be tested.

> ויוצאין בקמיע מומחה, ואי זה הוא קמיע מומחה זה שריפא לשלשה בני אדם או שעשהו אדם שריפא שלשה בני אדם בקמיעין אחרים. ואם יצא בקמיע שאינו מומחה פטור, מפני שהוציאו דרך מלבוש, וכן היוצא בתפילין פטור.
>
> One may also wear an expert amulet - that is an amulet which has already cured three patients, or was made by someone who had previously cured three patients with other amulets. If one goes out into a public domain wearing an untested amulet, he is exempt, because he is deemed to have worn it as apparel when transferring it from one domain to the other.[136]

In his *halakhah*, Rambam offered that one could go out in the public domain with such a tested amulet on Shabbat. In the event that the amulet was untested, the wearer should be assumed to be donning it as part of his clothing and he was similarly exempt from Shabbat proscriptions.This was a dramatic shift from earlier rabbinic opinion. It seems that Rambam was being as lenient as possible to permit healing. While we cannot know for certain the thought process Rambam went through in determining his *halakhah*, he touched several important points. Rambam acknowledged the existence of a practice

136. Mishneh Torah Shabbat 19:14.

where Jewish people were wearing amulets into the public domain. He permitted (or sanctioned an ongoing practice of) patients' receiving psychological and potential physical benefits from the amulet regardless of its being proven efficacious. Medical efficacy was not the only way to judge an amulet. Rambam also argued that when an amulet was tested and deemed effective, there was no prohibition about wearing it on Shabbat. If the amulet was not tested, and therefore presumably not "expert," there was also no prohibition because one was assumed to have worn it as part of his clothing. Rambam offered a corrective that allowed a practice irrespective of the amulet's "expertise." Rosner assessed Talmudic medicine concluding "[p]atient attitude toward the physician and patient confidence in the treatment being used certainly played a role in the psychological if not physiological well-being of the patient."[137]

Beyond the discussion of carrying amulets into the public domain on Shabbat, the rabbis confronted the important debate of performing healing and offering care on Shabbat.

> מחמין חמין לחולה בשבת בין להשקותו בין לרפאותו. ואין אומ' "המתינו לו שמא יחיה." אלא ספיקו דוחה את השבת. ולא ספק שבת זו אלא ספק שבת אחרת. ואין אומ' "יעשו דברים בגוים ובקטנים אלא בגדולים שבישראל." אין אומ' ייעשו דברים הללו על פי נשים על פי כותים. אלא מצרפין דעת ישראל עמהן.

> They heat water for a sick person on Shabbat, whether to give it to him to drink or to heal him with it. And they do not say, "Wait on him, perhaps he'll live [without it]." Rather, a matter of doubt concerning him overrides [the prohibitions of] Shabbat. And the doubt need not be about this Shabbat, but it may be about another Shabbat. And they do not say, "Let the matter be done by Gentiles or children, but they should not be done by adult Israelites. And they do not say, Let these matters be done by the testimony of women, by Samaritans. Rather, they join the opinion of the Israelites with them [to decide to save a life by violating Shabbat].[138]

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137. Fred Rosner, “Unconventional,” 92.

138. *T. Shabbat* 15:15. See also *b. Shabbat* 129b for the discussion that permits assisting with childbirth and providing infant care on Shabbat.

If a person were sick on Shabbat, the rabbis ruled that water could be heated whether it was for his care or his healing. In such cases, the rabbis did not require surety of impending death or immediacy of the illness. Here, the rabbis were unhesitant to give priority to potentially life-sustaining interventions over strict Shabbat observance. Further, the responsibility for heating water and thereby violating the Shabbat prohibitions could not be deferred to those not bound by Shabbat observance. Finally, this *halakhah* argued that the responsibility for making the decision fell squarely in the hands of these same adult Jewish men. The decision, and perhaps the risk associated with making such a decision, was not deferred to Samaritans or women. If the matter was important enough to violate Shabbat then it was important enough to be decided and enacted by an adult Israelite.

By the time of the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, rabbinic opinion was more open to realities of a multi-ethnic context. The Jewish community was living as a minority, either in *Eretz Yisrael* or, increasingly, in the Diaspora. Rabbinic views spanned a broad range regarding interactions with the Gentile community - from the very open and permissive to the highly suspicious. Greco-Roman thought influenced the rabbis in their everyday lives and this included Hellenized medicine. While the medical theology of the early centuries of the Common Era still held the physician-practitioner indebted to the Eternal, Greco-Roman "empiricism" colored the rabbis' evaluation of their world. As the centuries elapsed, the necessity of employing efficacious healing and expert healers wherever available made logical sense. Rabbinic opinions became increasibly permissive of "whatever is used as a remedy."

Chapter 4

The Tale of Eliezer Ben Dama and Jacob of Kefar Sakanya

The preceding chapters described the "medical system" of the Babylonian Talmud. We next move into a discussion and analysis of three separate stories of healing by Gentiles in *b. Avodah Zarah* 27b-28a. Within the larger *sugya*, the rabbis addressed issues of healing on Shabbat, healing by Gentiles, approved remedies and the ever-present potential for the loss of life. We see the Babylonian Talmud continue to ease restrictions but to retain a wariness urging caution and reminding the Jewish community of the potential for later, negative consequences. Each of these stories reveals part of a larger, evolving rabbinic worldview.

Avodah Zarah 27b: Eliezer Ben Dama and Jacob of Kefar Sakanya

This first narrative presented urges caution in interactions with non-Jewish healing and Gentile practitioners. The rabbis offered that such interactions with Gentiles, even in an hour of need or a time of illness, posed a significant and present danger and could lead us to face the negative consequences of such interactions in the future.

> מעשה בבן דמא בן אחותו של ר' ישמעאל שהכישו נחש ובא יעקב איש כפר סכניא לרפאותו. ולא הניחו ר' ישמעאל. וא"ל ר' ישמעאל אחי הנח לו וארפא ממנו ואני אביא מקרא מן התורה שהוא מותר. ולא הספיק לגמור את הדבר עד שיצתה נשמתו ומת. קרא עליו ר' ישמעאל אשריך בן דמא שגופך טהור ויצתה נשמתך בטהרה ולא עברת על דברי

חביריך שהיו אומרים, "ופורץ גדר ישכנו נחש." (קהלת י)
שאני מינות דמשכא דאתי למימשך בתרייהו.
אמר מר לא עברת על דברי חביריך שהיו אומרים "ופורץ גדר ישכנו נחש" איהו נמי חויא טרקיה.
חויא דרבנן דלית ליה אסותא כלל.
ומאי ה"ל למימר? "וחי בהם" (ויקרא יח) ולא שימות בהם.
ור' ישמעאל? הני מילי בצינעא אבל בפרהסיא לא.[139]

A. There was a case involving Ben Dama, son of the sister of R. Yishmael, who was bitten by a snake. Jacob, a man from Kefar Sakanya, came to heal him [Ben Dama]. But R. Yishmael did not let him remain.[140] [Ben Dama] said to R. Yishmael, "Brother, let him remain and I will be healed by him. I will bring a verse from the Torah that permits [this healing]." But [Ben Dama] did not cease to finish [reciting] his verse before his soul departed and he died. R. Yishmael asserted before him, "I rejoice for you, Ben Dama, that your body is pure [*tahor*] and that your soul departed in purity and that you did not transgress the words of your colleagues who say, "He who digs a pit will fall into it; he who breaches a fence will be bitten by a snake."[141]

B. *Minut*[142] is different [from other transgressions] because [in teaching Gentiles] he is drawn in [with them and there is then a worry] that he will come to be drawn after them [the Gentiles].

C. Mar said: [Ben Dama] did not transgress against the words of his colleagues when they said "he who breaches a fence will be bitten by a snake" and still a snake bit him!

D. The snake of the rabbis [is different because] one can never be cured [from its bite].

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139. *B. Avodah Zarah* 27a.
140. R. Yishmael did not permit Jacob to remain long enough to heal Ben Dama.
141. Eccl 10:8.
142. Naomi Janowitz, "Rabbis and their Opponents: The Construction of '*Min*' in Rabbinic Anecdotes" in *JECS* 6:3 (1998), 452. "'*Minim*' [heretics] appear in numerous rabbinic anecdotes; they cast spells on rabbis and their friends, argue about the interpretation of biblical passages and are general nuisances." But the rabbis offer no one clear definition. "Was he a non-rabbinic Jew, heretical rabbi, Christian, Jewish-Christian, Gnostic, imperial official, or some other flavor of heretic?" In fact at the time of the destruction of the Temple the *y. Sanh.* 10:6 defined "twenty-four kinds of '*minim*.'" To the rabbis, then, *minim* designated "any dissident body..., which rejected in any respect the thought or practice of Jewish orthodoxy." To further understand Ben Dama's transgression it is helpful to outline his specific heretical activity. In this case the heresy seems to be studying with or learning from Gentiles. In this case, then, *minut* is offering access to Gentiles of Jewish teaching and Jewish understanding of Scripture.

> E. And what would [Ben Dama] cite [if he had lived to bring his proof text]? "One should live by them"[143] and not die by them.
>
> F. And what of R. Yishmael? These words [that is it permitted to transgress the *mitsvot* for the sake of preserving life] are regarding private matters, but in the case of public affairs [they do not apply].[144]

Section A outlines the narrative. This section is virtually unchanged from the parallel citations in the Tosefta and Jerusalem Talmud [see below]. The characters of the narrative are known elsewhere in the rabbinic corpus.[145] Ben Dama is the nephew of Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Yishmael[146] is a second century CE tanna whose "house" most famously debated the house of Rabbi Aqiva on many *halakhic* issues. Their debates are codified throughout *halakhah, aggada* and *midrash.* Jacob of Kefar Sakanya, elsewhere known as Jacob of Kefar Sama, is a known disciple of Jesus and a character brought by the rabbis to reflect and then discredit a Jewish-Christian perspective.[147] Snake bites, along with scorpion bites and the bite of a rabid dog, were feared across cultures in late antiquity and were known to be a mortal danger.[148]

In her extensive exploration of the influence of the Jerusalem Talmud on the formation of *b. Avodah Zarah*, Alyssa Gray argues that this clarifying statement in Section B is appended to the Babylonian text from its Palestinian predecessor. She argues that this addition to the previous text "actually resolves an implicit objection, for was Ben Dama not bitten by a snake?" The rabbis responded that this particular brand of heresy "is a different sort of 'breaching of the fence,' one which will result in the heretic's being

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143. Lev 18:5.
144. *B. Avodah Zarah* 27a.
145. Ben Dama: *t. Shav* 3:4 and *b. Ber* 56b; Yishmael ben Elisha: *t. Hal* 1:10 and *b. Ket* 105b.
146. Shmuel Safrai, "Ishmael ben Elisha," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 10, 83-84.
147. See below where I detail other stories of Jacob of Kefar Sakanya.
148. Wu Yuhong, "Rabies," 32.

'bitten by a snake,' or pulled after heresy."[149] In this case, the rabbis believed that using the healing remedies from Gentiles was as risky as teaching Gentiles Jewish text. In fact, Ben Dama's jeopardy is compounded because of his dalliance in both Gentile learning and healing. The rabbis perceived a danger in having too close relations with Gentile neighbors because of the susceptibility to be "drawn after them."

In Section C, an unidentified Amora spoke to the "fence" erected to keep individuals from the risk of being "bitten by a snake." Here the fence was the figurative and legal boundary the rabbis erected to keep Jews and Gentiles separate, and the snake was *minut* or some other deviant behavior. It is unclear whether maintaining a connection to the Jewish community and retaining a practice of Judaism was sufficient. Ben Dama was from a rabbinic family and he was learned enough in Torah to be able to find and bring a prooftext. One could suppose that Ben Dama was looking for healing, not to become a follower of the messianic subgroup. However, Jacob of Kefar Sakanya was a pariah and his teaching/healing was therefore taboo. In this case, the rabbis, in the person of Yishmael, preferred Ben Dama's death by snake bite to his healing by apostasy.

Section D details the "bite" the rabbis could inflict for transgressing against them. Theirs had no cure, unlike the bite from a real snake. Even more potent than the bite of a snake, scorpion or a rabid dog, and more deadly than the "bite" of another authority, the bite of the rabbis had no remedy and condemned the transgressor to a certain eternal suffering.

Section E shares the text Ben Dama would have quoted had he not died. Ben Dama's text from Lev 18.5 reads: "You shall keep My laws and My rules, by the pursuit

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149. Gray, *Exile*, 61 footnote 29.

of which man shall live: I am YHWH." Ben Dama would have said that the purpose of following YHWH's rules and laws was to preserve and sanctify life. The pursuit of YHWH's rules should not have be at the cost of one's life. According to this scriptural proof one could forego fulfilling the *mitsvot* for the sake of preserving life.

Given that this narrative suggested there were circumstances in which a person might "stand idly by the blood of his neighbor," in Section F the rabbis confronted the important question: "What was R. Yishmael thinking in allowing Ben Dama to die?" They offered the corrective that preserving life at the cost of transgressing against the *mitsvot* was only permissible when that violation happened in private. In public, the person could not violate the *mitsvot*, even at the risk to his life because of the message this violation would send to onlookers.

Parallels to the Tale of Eliezer Ben Dama and Jacob of Kefar Sakanya

This tradition has its origins in a tannaitic teaching, with parallels in both the Tosefta and the Jerusalem Talmud. In exploring these parallels, we can see the hand of the editor in some of the stylistic choices made in our present version in the Babylonian Talmud.

> מעשה בר' אלעזר בן דמה שנשכו נחש ובא יעקב איש כפר סמא לרפאותו משום ישוע בן פנטרא ולא הניחו ר' ישמעאל אמרו לו אי אתה רשאי בן דמה אמר לו אני אביא לך ראיה שירפאני ולא הספיק להביא ראיה עד שמת:

> A case of Rabbi Eleazar ben Dama who was bitten by a snake.[150] Jacob, a man from Kefar Sama, came to heal him in the name of Jesus ben

150. See Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 343-349, for an extensive treatment of snakes in ancient Israel. For other articles detailing the role of the snake in the Ancient Near East and late antiquity see: Rosner, "Snakes and Serpents in Bible and Talmud" in *Medicine in the Bible and Talmud*, 254-268; Pardee, "Ritual and Cult at Ugarit" that addresses liver models, and incantations against snakebites and scorpions; and Yuhong, "Rabies."

> Pandera. And R. Yishmael did not allow him [to accept the healing]. They said to him "You are not permitted [to accept healing from him], Ben Dama." He said to him, "I shall bring you proof that he may heal me." But he did not have time to bring the proof before he died.[151]
>
> אמר ר' ישמעאל אשריך בן דמה שיצאת בשלום ולא פירצת גזירן של חכמים שכל הפורץ גדירן של חכמים לסוף פורענות בא עליו שנ' ופורץ גדר ישכנו נחש:
>
> Rabbi Yishmael said: Happy are you, Ben Dama, for you have expired in peace, but you did not break down the fence erected by the sages/didn't transgress against the edicts of the sages. For whoever breaks down the fence erected by sages eventually suffers punishment, as it says; "He who breaks down a fence is bitten by a snake."[152]

This is our earliest version of this Ben Dama-Yishmael tale within the rabbinic corpus. There are several significant differences in this version that can offer suggestions, if not conclusive evidence, of the later rabbis' mindset. In this Tosefta version, Ben Dama was more precisely highlighted by both title, "Rabbi," and first name, "Eleazar." The healer Jacob was from the town of Kefar "Sama" rather than "Sakanya." Also made explicit in this version is that Jacob's means of healing was "in the name of Jesus ben Pantera." Elsewhere in the rabbinic corpus we see references to "Jesus,"[153] "Jeshu,"[154] "[Jesus] ben Pandera"[155] and "Jesus the Nazarene."[156] In the present iteration, there is additional dialogue about the negotiation between Ben Dama and Yishmael. The outcome, however, is the same: Ben Dama died before he had time to bring proof that would allow him to receive healing from Jacob of Kefar Sama, even if brought in the name of Jesus ben Pandera. As in the later narrative, Yishmael rejoices at Ben Dama's death for he died in "*shalom*" and did not transgress the words of his colleagues. What was made explicit in

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151. *t. Hullin* 2:22.
152. *t. Hullin* 2:23.
153. *B. Gittin* 56b-57a, *b. Sanhedrin* 43a.
154. *B. Sanhedrin* 43a.
155. *B. Shabbat* 104b, *y. Shabbat* 14d.
156. *B. Sanhedrin* 103a, 107b.

the Toseftan narrative is that whoever "breaks" the rabbis' fence "eventually suffers punishment."

The Jerusalem Talmud offers this narrative, drawn from its Toseftan predecessor, augmented with more explication of the rabbis' rationale.

> מעשה באלעזר בן דמא שנשכו נחש ובא יעקב איש כפר סמא לרפותו. אמר לו: נימא לך בשם ישו בן פנדרא. אמר לו רבי ישמעאל: אי אתה רשאי בן דמא. אמר לו: אני אביא ראייה שירפאני. לא הספיק להביא ראייה עד שמת. אמר לו ר' ישמעאל: אשריך בן דמה שיצאת בשלום מן העולם ולא פרצת גדירן של חכמים לקיים, מה שנאמר: "ופורץ גדר ישכנו נחש."
>
> A case of Eleazar ben Dama who was bitten by a snake. Jacob, a man from Kefar Sama, came to heal him. [Jacob] said to him, "let us say to you [heal you] in the name of Jesus b. Pandera." Rabbi Yishmael said to him: 'Ben Dama, you are not permitted [to be healed by Jacob].' [Ben Dama] said to him, "I will bring a proof that he may heal me." He did not manage to bring the proof before he died. R. Yishmael said to him: "Happy are you, Ben Dama, for you left the world in peace and did not breach the fence [erected around the Torah] of the Sages, as it is said: "a snake will bite the one who breaches the fence."[157]
>
> ולא נחש נשכו? אלא שלא ישכנו לעתיד לבוא. ומה הוה ליה למימר? אשר יעשה אותם האדם "וחי בהם."
>
> But didn't a snake bite him? Rather, [a snake] will not bite him in the world to come.[158] And what would he have said? That a man may do them "and live by them."[159]

In this case, the rabbis have removed Ben Dama's title, "Rabbi," but he retained his first name. In this iteration, the scene became a negotiation not between Ben Dama and Yishmael, but between Yishmael, Ben Dama and the healer, Jacob from Kefar Sama. Here, Jacob offered his services publicly and within earshot of Yishmael. Yishmael, representative of the rabbinic worldview, chastised Ben Dama for considering the proscribed healing. Ben Dama's response, also in public, made explicit his acknowledgement of the source of the healing. To preserve the rabbinic perspective, Ben

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157. *Y. Avodah Zarah* 2:2, 40d-41a.
158. The world to come, *olam haba*, either at the end of time or in the Messianic Age.
159. *Ibid.*

Dama surely had to expire.

In a detour from the Toseftan narrative, the rabbis challenged themselves to clarify their position. Here, the Jerusalem Talmud introduced the eschatological implications of accepting such healing. The logical question they raised was "But didn't a snake bite him?" How could this prooftext be brought since Ben Dama did not avoid being bitten by a snake even though he did not violate the commandments? Ben Dama was not actually healed by Jacob! The rabbis responded that his transgression already committed in this life could not save him in the present. However, his death, which maintained the fence erected around the Torah by Sages, ensured that he would not be bitten by a snake in the next life; Ben Dama secured the more important, longer-term healing. Ben Dama found eternal salvation.

Additionally, potentially for sake of clarification and undoubtedly because there was a value in knowing the source, the rabbis offered the teaching that Ben Dama would have offered that permitted him to be healed by Jacob of Kefar Sama. He would have quoted Leviticus 18:5 that a man fulfills the commandments in order "to live by them," not to die for the sake of the commandments. Thus, Ben Dama would have understood that he might violate the prohibition against idolatry in order to receive healing "and live." R. Yishmael did not disagree in principle that a scriptural verse existed that would justify such healing; he was primarily concerned with maintaining the integrity of the ‘fence’ the rabbis erected to prohibit the source of the healing. Rabbi Yishmael knew:

> Quoting the scriptural verse would have breached the fence….He compelled Ben Dama to sacrifice himself to maintain the integrity of the boundary separating the rabbis from the likes of Yakov [*sic*] of Kefar Sama.[160]

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160. Alyssa M. Gray, "A Contribution to the Study of Martyrdom and Identity in the

The editors of the Babylonian Talmud offered the reader some additional "clues" to their position. In the Tosefta and Jerusalem Talmud, the healer was “Jacob of Kefar Sama (סמא).” In Hebrew and throughout the Talmudic literature "סם" means remedy.[161] The Babylonian Talmud's version named the healer "Jacob of Kefar Sakanya (סכניאה)," where we know "סכן" [*sakan*] means danger. It would not be surprising to suggest the editors of the Babylonian Talmud would change the name of the healer from "Jacob of the Village of Remedies" to "Jacob of the Village of Danger." Though there are no extant Babylonian Talmud editions naming him Jacob of Kefar Sama, this fact does not discount the possibility that there was a conscious effort in later interpretations of the tradition to revise their position under a veil of artistic/literary license. The architect of this change and the reason for his efforts, however, are left only to hypothesis.[162]

Gray suggests that the amoraim "used a ‘fence’ rationale to prohibit activities that were *biblically permitted* (emphasis in original)." We are still left to wonder, why or whether Yishmael actually prohibited Ben Dama

> from accepting *biblically permitted* healing in order to firm up the boundaries between rabbis and non-rabbinic others who had dangerous

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Palestinian Talmud," in *Journal of Jewish Studies* LIV:2 (Autumn 2003): 270.

161. Translated in modern Hebrew as drug, so in this case it seems to suggest remedy, medicine or therapeutic. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 702. BDB argues that its exact translation is dubious, though it is related to Arab terms for "spice" or "drug." We can only suppose that these traditions orginated with the knowledge that ingredients for "pharmaceuticals" are composed in large part from spices and other herbs and thus connected to Arab spice trade. That it is likely a loan word from Arabic is not surprising.

162. I thank our HUC-JIR librarian, Yoram Bitton, for examining the Pizarro manuscripts with me. It is possible that the origin of this change was a copyist error, thus rendering סמיא as סכניא. This error was also possibly codified because a town, Sachne, was known in *Eretz Yisrael*. Interesting to note, the Salonika and Venice manuscripts are missing *kefar* from their editions. This rendering seems to offer a rabbinic description of Jacob himself. In those cases the text could be translated as a healer, Dangerous Jacob, who came to offer his incantation to Ben Dama.

dealings with heretics (emphasis in original).[163]

This tension is explored as the narrative itself grows and shifts from the tannaitic articulation in the Tosefta to the Palestinian and Babylonian references in the Talmuds. As previously discussed, the inclusion of the prooftext that Ben Dama would have used offers the reader evidence that the healing itself was not prohibited. In this case, it was receiving the healing from Jacob of Kefar Sakanya, a disciple of an apostate, which rendered Ben Dama's "Gentile" healing unsanctionable to the rabbis. In the midst of a proscription against healing by (certain) Gentiles was the citation that permited such healing in different circumstances.

The Toseftan articulation of the story of Ben Dama and Jacob of Kefar Sakanya addressed the primary concern of crossing a boundary that the rabbis erected between Jew and Gentile. The Jerusalem Talmud addressed this concern but added a layer of prohibition because of the eschatological implications of deviating from the rabbis' rulings. There, however, the editors of the text extended the tradition by demonstrating the healing was "biblically permitted" had it not been offered by this specific disciple of Jesus. The Babylonian Talmud took off where the Jerusalem Talmud left off and added three additional pieces of information.[164] The Babylonian text, like its Palestinian cousin, brought the proof text Ben Dama would have offered had he not died. The Babylonian Talmud also offered a critique of Yishmael for letting Ben Dama die. While that issue was not resolved, it reflected the ambivalence of the later rabbis who were concerned about the reasonable/hypothetical implications of taking the rabbis' proscriptions to their logical conclusions. The proscription in this particular case was further explicated and

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163. Gray, "Martyrdom," 256.
164. Gray, *Exile*, 61-62.

clarified, showing that this prohibition was appropriate in the case of Ben Dama because of the specific practitioner who offered the healing and the public nature of the healing.

Other Stories of Jacob of Kefar Sakanya

The rabbis must have considered what bringing the names "Jacob of Kefar Sakanya" and "Rabbi Eleazer" in conjunction with *minut* suggested to the reader. In fact, just slightly ahead of our present *sugya*-cluster, in *b. Avodah Zarah* 16b-17a, the rabbis also highlighted the importance of these two "characters" in the rabbinic tradition and the polemical "roles" they played.

> ת"ר: כשנתפס ר"א למינות, העלהו לגרדום לידון. אמר לו אותו הגמון: זקן שכמותך יעסוק בדברים בטלים הללו? אמר לו: נאמן עלי הדיין. כסבור אותו הגמון: עליו הוא אומר, והוא לא אמר אלא כנגד אביו שבשמים. אמר לו: הואיל והאמנתי עליך, דימוס, פטור אתה.
>
> Our Rabbis taught: When R. Eliezer [ben Hyrkanus] was arrested because of *minut* they brought him up to the tribune to be judged. The governor said to him, 'How can a sage man like you occupy himself with those idle things?' He replied, 'I acknowledge the Judge as right.' The governor thought that he referred to [the governor himself] — though he really referred to his Father in Heaven — and [the governor] said, 'Because you have acknowledged me as right, I pardon; you are acquitted.'[165]

In the above narrative, Rabbi Eliezer was arrested by the government because of some kind of heresy [*minut*]. He was subsequently questioned and only through a misunderstanding was he exonerated. The tale continued that following his acquittal, R. Eliezer returned to his disciples who offered consolation, though Eliezer could not be comforted. Rabbi Aqiva then supposed that Eliezer had approved of "some of the teaching of the *minim*" and it was for that reason he was arrested. Eliezer was reminded of a teaching which he then offered to his disciples. He began:

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165. *B. Avodah Zarah* 16b.

> פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בשוק העליון של ציפורי, ומצאתי אחד ויעקב איש כפר סכניא שמו, אמר לי, כתוב בתורתכם: "לא תביא אתנן זונה [וגו']." (דברים כג)
>
> I was once walking in the upper-market of Tzippori when I came across one [of the disciples of Jesus the Nazarene], Jacob of Kefar Sakanya by name, who said to me: It is written in your Torah, 'You shall not bring the hire of a harlot … into the house of the Lord thy God.'[166]

Jacob of Kefar Sakanya posed the following question based on this biblical teaching that he learned from Jesus the Nazarene.

> מהו לעשות הימנו בהכ"ס לכ"ג? ולא אמרתי לו כלום; אמר לי, כך לימדני:(מיכה א) "[כי] מאתנן זונה קבצה ועד אתנן זונה ישובו" - ממקום הטנופת באו, למקום הטנופת ילכו, והנאני הדבר, על ידי זה נתפסתי למינות, ועברתי על מה שכתוב בתורה: "הרחק מעליה דרכך" (משלי ה) - זו מינות, ואל תקרב אל פתח ביתה - זו הרשות.
>
> "May such money be applied to constructing a bathroom for the High Priest?" To which I [Eliezer] made no reply. [Jacob of Kefar Sakanya] said to me: "Thus was I taught [by Jesus the Nazarene], 'For they were amassed from fees for harlotry, And they shall become harlots' fees again.'[167] [The monies] came from a place of filth, let them go to a place of filth."[168]

Eliezer concluded that it was not only because he heard this teaching from Jesus the Nazarene but also because he favored this teaching of Jewish text that he was arrested for *minut*. His grave error was transgressing the words of Jewish Scripture, "Keep yourself far away from her,"[169] referring to *minut*, and "Do not come near the doorway of her house,"[170] referring to the ruling power. This tale, set in the early rabbinic, Palestinian context, reflected "an anxiety some Jews felt over the non-Jewish (Christian)

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166. Deut 23:18-19: "No Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute. You shall not bring the fee of a whore or the pay of a dog into the house of YHWH your God in fulfillment of any vow, for both are abhorrent to YHWH your God."
167. Mic 1:7: "All her sculptured images shall be smashed, And all her harlot's wealth be burned, And I will make a waste heap of all her idols, For they were amassed from fees for harlotry, And they shall become harlots' fees again."
168. *B. Avodah Zarah* 17a.
169. Prov 5:8.
170. *Ibid.*

appropriation of the Hebrew Bible," and what is more, the possibility of this heretical "appropriation of the Mishnah"[171] - the basis of the rabbis' legal authority.

This tale has another teaching by Jacob of Kefar Sakanya taught in the name of Jesus and brought in relation to a discussion of a(nother) "Rabbi Eleazar" and a discussion of *minut*. Though in the Babylonian iteration it was not explicitly stated that Jacob of Kefar Sakanya's healing was "in the name of Jesus ben Pandera," both the literary history of the narrative and the chronological situation of the *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud suggest the connection. Jacob of Kefar Sakanya was connected to Jesus in earlier traditions and earlier in *b. Avodah Zarah*, just as the name Eleazar [that reminds the ear of Eliezer] conjures associations with *minut*.

The citation of Proverbs 5 conjured the image of a father teaching his son to be wary of "a forbidden woman." While her lips may drip with honey and her mouth may be smoother than oil, "in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword," and "her feet go down to Death." The tradition included this teaching and placed it in the context of the Roman government and the growing threat of the Jewish-Christians. This tale of seduction began with innocence and sweetness and ended with death. The warning was, though she may seem harmless at first "keep yourself far away from her," because she was "a ruthless one" and your efforts will benefit this enemy, this forbidden woman, not the Jewish people.

Richard Kalmin addresses the perception of *minim* in rabbinic literature of late antiquity and notes that early Palestinian sources, like those of the Ben Dama story, "discourage contact with *minim* and Christians by emphasizing the seductive nature of

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171. Gray, "Martyrdom," 272.

such contact." On the other hand, later Palestinian and Babylonian sources, "do not portray *minut* and Christianity as attractive."[172] Like the later additions to the Ben Dama story, the presence of *minim* and Christianity was minimized and, when possible, omitted from the tradition. While we cannot be certain of the historical accuracy of such a tale, in the worldview of the rabbis, who wrote and edited this story in successive generations, continued to create a cautionary tale against having overly friendly relations with the Gentile community and unwittingly granting them access to Scripture and the rabbinic corpus. This story, like the story of the "hapless Eleazar ben Dama," works to mark boundaries of Jewish identity.

We see in this tale that the rabbis confronted issues related to healing by *minim*; here the rabbis specifically addressed healing by Christians or Jewish followers of the resurrected Messiah. The rabbis were concerned with Christians co-opting Jewish texts in service of their *minut*. The rabbis were also concerned by the public nature of Ben Dama's attempted healing. The rabbis asserted that their bite was worse than that of a snake, their bite was incurable, and death was preferrable to transgressing the rabbis' edicts. Finally, the rabbis erected a "fence" that kept the Jewish community far from *minut*, even if that meant that they prohibited healing that would be technically permitted. In this case, the rabbis reacted to their present situation more aggressively than *halakhah* demanded. This fence withstood the generations of the tannaim, but did this fence endure throughout the Babylonian generations?

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172. Richard Kalmin, "Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *HTR* 87:2 (1994), 162.

Chapter 5

Matrona Cures Rabbi Yohanan's *Tsafdina*[173]

The previous narrative confronted *minut*, public healing by Gentiles, and positioned the rabbis (at least in their own minds) as arbiters of God's punishment and reward. The tale of Ben Dama also traced the evolution of rabbinic opinion through the generations. Our subsequent tales, however, do not have parallels in the early tannaitic and Palestinian literature. They do include the issues of private healing, publically revealing the remedy to a Jewish community who (presumably) knew the remedy was from outside the Jewish community. We also see new healers; in this case a Roman woman serves as healer and an Arab trader provides a remedy. What do these tales reflect of the rabbis' evolving attitudes toward healing by Gentiles?

Avodah Zarah 28a: Matrona Cures Rabbi Yohanan's Tsafdina

This next narrative presented raises almost no warnings cautioning against receiving remedies from non-Jews, and in this case female, practitioners. Later in the narrative, the

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173. Preuss, *Medicine*, 171-172. Preuss understands this disease as "stomatitis" from its description symptomology in the Talmudic source. Rosner, *Medicine*, 54-56. Rosner understands this disease as "scurvy" or "thrush." Preuss argues this is the same ailment as R. Yehudah haNasi's thirteen-year tooth ache, cited in Genesis Rabbah, Ecclesiastes Rabbah, and Pesikta de Rav Kahana, and *tzipparna* referenced in *b. Baba Metzia* 85a.

rabbis offered a different source for a remedy, an Arab traveler. Additionally, the rabbis initiated discussions of healing on Shabbat that fit with the parallels to this story in the Babylonian Talmud and will continue in the third narrative of this present *sugya*.

ת"ש רבי יוחנן חש בצפדינא[174] אזל לגבה דההיא מטרוניתא עבדה חמשא ומעלי שבתא. א"ל למחר מאי? אמרה ליה: לא צריכת. אי צריכנא מאי? אמרה: אשתבע לי דלא מגלית.
אישתבע לה לאלהא ישראל לא מגלינא, גלייה ליה. למחר נפק דרשה בפירקא.
והא אישתבע לה: "לאלהא דישראל לא מגלינא"? אבל לעמיה ישראל מגלינא. והאיכא חילול השם דגלי לה מעיקרא.
אלמא כמכה של חלל דמיא? אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק: שאני צפדינא הואיל ומתחיל בפה וגומר בבני מעיים.
מאי סימניה? רמי מידי בי ככי ומייתי דמא מבי דרי.
ממאי הוי? מקרירי קרירי דחיטי ומחמימי חמימי דשערי ומשיורי כסא דהרסנא.
מאי עבדא ליה? א"ר אחא בריה דרבא: מי שאור ושמן זית ומלח. ומר בר רב אשי אמר: משחא דאווזא בגדפא דאווזא.
אמר אביי: אנא עבדי כולהו ולא איתסאי עד דאמר לי ההוא טייעא אייתי קשייתא דזיתא דלא מלו תילתא וקלנהו אמרא חדתא ודביק ביה דדרי; עבדי הכי ואיתסאי.

A. Come and hear, Rabbi Yohanan suffered with *tsafdina*. He went to a certain (non-Jewish) woman who treated him on Thursday and Friday. He said to her: "What about tomorrow [Shabbat]?" She said to him: "You will not need it." He responded to her: "If I do need it, what then?" [She replied:] "Swear to me that you will not reveal [the remedy or its ingredients and I will then give you the directions for preparing it]." [Rabbi Yohanan] swore to her: "To the God of Israel, I will not reveal it." And so she revealed [the remedy] to him. The next day he referred to it in his lecture.

B. But did he not swear to her: "to the God of Israel, I will not reveal [the remedy]"? But [this implies that] to the people of Israel he can reveal it. Is this not profaning the name of God? He revealed [this caveat] to her previously.

C. How [does this prove that *tsafdina* or another such gum or tooth affliction] is like an internal sore? Rav Nachman bar Yitzhak said: *tsafdina* is different because it starts with the mouth and finishes in the intestines.

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174. Michael Sokoloff, "צפורינא" in *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 970. There are manuscript variants where צפדינא is listed as צפורינא. There is no other translation for this variation so it is accepted as a scribal error. Preuss (171, see footnote 286) notes the manuscript variations and suggests it may have stayed in the *Aruch* or Kohut because of Rabbi Yehudah haNasi, who also suffered this ailment, and his association with Tzippori (Sepphoris).

D. What are the symptoms [of *tsafdina*]? If he places anything between his teeth, blood comes from the gums.

E. What causes [*tsafdina*]? The chill of cold wheat-food and the heat of hot barley-food, also the remnant of fish-hash and flour.

F. What [was the remedy that] she did for him? Said R. Aha, the son of Rava: Leaven-water with olive oil and salt. Mar son of Rav Ashi said: Geese-fat smeared with a goose-quill.

G. Abaye said: I did all of these [things] and I was not cured/healed until an Arab traveler said to me to take olive seeds of an olive not one third ripe and burn them on a new spade and spread [the ashes] on the gums; which I did and was cured.[175]

This narrative is rather simple on its face. In section A we learn Rabbi Yohanan had a disease called *tsafdina*[176] that caused him great pain. Yohanan received two days of treatment from the Matrona, on Thursday and Friday. As Shabbat approached, Yohanan began to worry about his treatment because he was unable to come to her on Shabbat. Matrona assured Yohanan that he would not need further treatment, that his pain if not his ailment would have subsided by the beginning of Shabbat. Wanting to insure he would be covered in the event that he was not cured, Yohanan swore to God before the Matrona that he would not reveal the remedy or its ingredients. And it came to pass that the next day, while delivering his *drashah* in front of the congregation he revealed the remedy to those present.

In sections B and C the rabbis then looked for clarification of the details of this

175. *B. Avodah Zarah* 28a.

176. As we see in the brief exploration of *Gittin*'s "Book of Remedies" (see above, chapter 3), the rabbis do not spend much time explicating the illness or venturing into disease symptamology. For the purpose of the present discussion, the specific diagnosis is immaterial. The progression of symptoms from "bleeding gums" that begin externally to later internal effects, is what affords the rabbis the opportunity to discuss its being healed on Shabbat.

case. In section B the rabbis raised their concern of taking the name of God in vain, the biblical prohibition against *hillul hashem* [profaning God's name]. The corrective offered was that Yohanan clarified before he swore in the name of God that he would not reveal the remedy beyond God. The rabbis revisited treating/healing disease on Shabbat in section C. Though other problems like the teeth or gums were treated like external sores and therefore could not be treated on Shabbat, *tsafdina* started externally in the mouth and extended through the body affecting the intestines which were clearly internal. Therefore, it could be treated on Shabbat, which Rabbi Yohanan was prepared to do. It is interesting to note that though we do not have evidence that R. Yohanan actually received treatment for his *tsafdina* on Shabbat, we know he was prepared to do so.

Sections D through F provide practical information about the illness *tsafdina* itself. The Babylonian Talmud addressed the symptoms and causes of this malady as well as offeringn the specifics of Matrona's remedy that Yohanan revealed publicly. There were two traditions of the ingredients of Matrona's remedy and both were offered here. Section G offered another tradition, with a different tradent (Abaye) who was healed by a different Gentile (Arab traveller) with a different remedy.

Parallels to the Tale of Matrona Curing Rabbi Yohanan's Tsafdina

We know from the previous chapter that the story of Ben Dama had its roots in the oldest layer of rabbinic tradition. The parallels to this present narrative were located in the Babylonian Talmud and later midrashic traditions. The parallel text of Rabbi Yohanan and the Matrona in *b. Yoma* is virtually unchanged.

> ועוד אמר רבי מתיא: רבי יוחנן חש בצפידנא. אזל גבה דההיא מטרוניתא עבדא ליה מלתא חמשא. ומעלי שבתא אמר לה: בשבת מאי? אמרה ליה: לא צריכת. אי מצטריכנא מאי?

אמרה ליה: אישתבע לי דלא מגלית. אישתבע לאלהא דישראל לא מגלינא. נפק דרשה בפירקא...

Further, Rabbi Matia said: R. Johanan suffered from *tsafdina*. He went to a matron, who prepared something for him on Thursday and Friday. He said to her: What should I do on Shabbat? She answered him: By then you will not need it [any more]. He said: But if I do need it, what then,? She replied: Swear unto me by the God of Israel that you will not reveal [the remedy to others]. He swore: 'To the God of Israel I shall not reveal it." She revealed it to him, and he went forth and expounded it in his lecture....[177]

מאי עבדא ליה? אמר רב אחא בריה דרב אמי: מי שאור, שמן זית ומלח. רב יימר אמר: שאור גופיה שמן זית ומלח. רב אשי אמר: משחא דגדפא דאווזא. אמר אביי: אנא עבדי לכולהו ולא איתסאי עד דאמר לי ההוא טייעא: "אייתי קשייתא דזיתא דלא מלו תילתא וקלינהו בנורא אמרא חדתא ואדביק בככי דריה." עבדי הכי ואיתסאי.

What did she give to him? R. Aha, the son of R. Ammi said: The water of leaven, olive oil and salt. R. Yemar said: Leaven itself, olive oil and salt. R. Ashi said: The fat of a goose-wing. Abaye said: l tried everything without achieving a cure for myself, until an Arab recommended: 'Take the stones of olives which have not become ripe one third, burn them in fire upon a new rake, and stick them into the inside of the gums.' I did so and was cured.[178]

This version has an additional tradent (Rabbi Yemar) who offered a slight modification of Rabbi Ammi's remedy. In this iteration the sections outlined above were in a slightly different order, with the symptoms and causes following the Arab traveller's remedy.

The version in *b. Avodah Zarah* offered a more lenient rabbinic position concerning receiving healing from Gentiles. In stark contrast to the narrative explored in the previous chapter, the Gentile healer was not regarded as "dangerous." For the Babylonian Talmud's editors:

> In Sassanian Iran, however, the relations between the two religious communities were different. Christianity was not in power, but was a fellow religious minority. Although Christians suffered sporadic persecution under Shapur II (309-379) and again in the fifth century CE. Christian martyrdom did not pose the ideological threat to rabbinic Jews in

177. *B. Yoma* 84a.
178. *Ibid.*

Iran that it did to Palestinian Jews.[179]

Though interactions were less pressured in the context of the Babylonian Talmud, they were not without risk or rabbinic limitations. While not necessarily fully collaborative, Matrona was able to be goaded, maybe, or perhaps even tricked, but certainly convinced to reveal her remedy for the sake of Yohanan's Shabbat observance. Nowhere in this tale was death imminent, either from the disease itself or from the Gentile's healing. Yohanan's actions were not considered *minut* nor was Matrona a *mina.* The rabbis offered Matrona as a qualified practitioner with a remedy known to be effectual for curing *tsafdina*.

In the *b. Yoma* parallel, this tale of Matrona and Rabbi Yohanan was positioned in relation to a larger discussion of healing on Shabbat and attributed to Rabbi Matia. In this version of the tradition, Matia offered the minority opinion that permitted healing on Shabbat by employing a liver lobe as a remedy to cure rabies.[180] The historical person Matia b. Heresh was supposed to have spent time in Rome, presumably to learn medicine among other Greco-Roman intellectual and academic disciplines.[181] Regardless of the historicity of such a characterization, Matia comes in this case to offer the lenient position regarding healing on Shabbat and using all remedies at one's disposal, even those that use *halakhically* prohibited materials and techniques.

The following *mishnah* offered one of the clearest examples of Matia ben Heresh's relationship to the rabbinical establishment.

> מי שאחזו בולמוס מאכילין אותו אפילו דברים טמאים עד שיאורו עיניו מי שנשכו כלב שוטה אין מאכילין אותו מחצר כבד שלו ורבי מתיא בן חרש מתיר ועוד אמר רבי מתיא בן

179. Gray, "Martyrdom," 268.
180. *M. Yoma* 8:6, *b. Yoma* 84b.
181. Preuss, *Medicine*, 196.

חרש החושש בגרונו מטילין לו סם בתוך פיו בשבת מפני שהוא ספק נפשות וכל ספק נפשות דוחה את השבת:

If one was stricken with bulimia, he may be given even impure/unclean things to eat until his eyes regain their light. If one was bitten by a mad dog, he may not be given the lobe of its liver to eat. But Rabbi Matia ben Heresh permits it. Further, Rabbi Matia ben Heresh says: if one suffers from an ailment of the throat, one may place medications in his mouth on Shabbat because there is a [potential] risk to his life, and all that threatens life [its treatment] supersedes Shabbat.[182]

In the rabbinic imagination, bulimia was an illness of the digestive tract, possibly including repeated vomiting, which rendered the patient incapacitated. This was not the same as the bulimia known to us today.[183] Here the anonymous majority opinion permitted eating even *devarim temaim* [unclean things] in order to facilitate healing. In the case of rabies, however, the majority did not permit eating a lobe of the rabid dog's liver. Liver, along with herbs, incantations and enchantments of water, was part of the popular practice to confront this formidable disease.[184]

In its context, the rationale of the rabbis' proscription was absent. On one hand, the rabbis could have been concerned with the source of the remedy rather than the nature of the remedy. This would make sense given that even *devarim temaim* were permitted to facilitate healing. The possibility exists that the rabbis did not believe that such a remedy or a practitioner using such a remedy would be efficacious. Finally, it was also possible

182. *M. Yoma* 8:6.

183. Preuss, *Medicine*, 182-183, 531; Rosner, *Medicine*, 30. Preuss variously understands בולמוס [*bulimus*] as a disease of the gastrointestinal tract and as a "ravenous hunger." Again, with such scanty information provided in the Talmudic record, the specific illness itself is secondary to the *halakhic* implication of remedies offered.

184. Yuhong, "Rabies," 42. See characteristics of and incantation against "mad dog" and "rabies" in *b. Yoma* 83a-84a. See also Yerushalmi Berakhot 8:5 and Yerushalmi Yoma 8:5 for more references. Whether intended by original authors or the redactors, stories of snake bites in late antiquity often conjured up tales of scopions and mad dogs. Wu explains, "In the Old Babylonian List of Diseases, the sting of a scorpion, the bite of a snake, and the bite of a dog are listed together." (Yuhong, 38) See footnote 150 in chapter 4 for additional references.

that the rabbis could view the means of retrieving such healing material too complicated, dangerous or grotesque to be sanctioned. The rabbis did not give us a clear statement of their motivation for preserving Matia's minority opinion permitting the liver lobe. Here, Matia not only permitted using all remedies at our disposal, even such unclean things, but he also permitted healing with these remedies on Shabbat. The majority opinion was clear, but the minority opinion had even more real estate in this *mishnah*. Perhaps this was the redactors' way of stating the "party line," while offering guidance to those who were certain to deviate from it.

Elsewhere, the Gemara added that the rabbis encouraged using a "less forbidden" food before opting for something as obviously unclean as a slice of liver from a rabid dog.[185] The Babylonian Talmud suggested some insight into the rabbis' reasoning. The rabbis supposed that if a rabid dog were to rub itself against a person, it endangered the person's life; if a dog were to bite a person, the person would certainly die.[186] The Jerusalem Talmud stated that no one should say he was healed by a lobe of liver and lived,[187] supporting the possibility that the rabbis questioned whether this remedy was a reliable or efficacious cure. In the Babylonian Talmud, the sages said that eating donkey flesh to cure jaundice and eating dog liver "are not considered cures."[188] As such, the rabbis' ambivalence called into question whether it could be offered on Shabbat because it was not certain to offer healing.

The final sentences of this *mishnah* state that according to Matia, medications could be administered orally even on Shabbat because when a person's life was

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185. *B. Yoma* 83b.
186. *B. Yoma* 84a.
187. *Y. Berakhot* 8:5.
188. *B. Yoma* 84a.

threatened Shabbat restrictions were suspended. Something as simple as a sore throat, argued Matia, was a potential risk to life and therefore he could take medication and risk violating Shabbat. The Babylonian Talmud understood that the anonymous majority agreed with Matia on this point. Had they opposed it they would have presented their opinion first and then presented Matia's minority view, as in the previous case regarding liver lobe.[189]

This narrative raised issues of diagnosis of disease and prescribing remedies. Here, Rabbi Yohanan was healed in private by a Roman woman. He then unapologetically revealed this remedy to the entire Jewish community. Later in the tale, Abaye revealed a remedy he learned from an Arab trader. This tale began to make a distinction between ailments internal and external, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the human body. Finally, this story confronted healing on Shabbat and led us to a discussion of healing on Shabbat with *devarim temaim*. This present case reflects that the rabbis were ambivalent of healing by Gentiles though they were also more permissive. Here, even if delivered in the hands of a Gentile woman or tradesman, when a person's life was threatened "whatever is for the sake of healing" took precedence over even Shabbat restrictions. As we see, the rabbis continued to engage in discussions around the issues of healing on Shabbat and whether healing on Shabbat could be performed by Gentiles.

189. *B. Yoma* 84b.

Chapter 6

Jacob the Min and the Expert Physician

Avodah Zarah 28a: Jacob the Min and the Expert Physician

The next tale begins where the story of Rabbi Yohanan and the Matrona ended.

ורבי יוחנן היכי עביד הכי? האמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן כל מכה שמחללין עליה את השבת אין מתרפאין מהן? אדם חשוב שאני.
והא רבי אבהו דאדם חשוב הוה? ורמא ליה יעקב מינאה סמא אשקיה ואי לא רבי אמי ורבי אסי דלחכוהו לשקיה פסקיה לשקיה.
דרבי יוחנן רופא מומחה הוה. דרבי אבהו נמי רופא מומחה הוה.
שאני רבי אבהו דמוקמי ביה מיני בנפשייהו "תמות נפשי עם פלשתים." (שופטים טז)

A. Rabbi Yohanan, how did he act this way? Did not Rabbah bar Bar Hanah say in the name of R. Yohanan: "any wound for which one may profane Shabbat [in order to heal it], one may not be treated by [Gentiles]"? It is different with an important person [who is ill and is receiving the treatment].

B. But isn't Rabbi Abahu [also] an important person? And it was that when Jacob the Min prepared for him a remedy[190] and gave it to him, if it were not for Rabbi Ammi and Rabbi Assi who licked his leg, he would have cut off his leg.

C. In the case of Rabbi Yohanan, [the Matrona] was an expert physician. But in the case of Rabbi Abahu [Jacob the Min] was also an expert physician. It was different in the case of Rabbi Abahu, for Gentiles establish themselves with the attitude of "Let me die with the Philistines!"[191]

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190. Also translated as medicine or therapeutic. See chapter 4, footnote 161, which addresses the translation of סם in Hebrew and rabbinic literature.

191. Judg 16:30.

Just ahead of the tale of Matrona, the tradition taught that if a person had a malady so severe that he must violate Shabbat in order to treat it, this person could not be treated by a Gentile.[192] In Section A of this present story, the Babylonian Talmud raised the question that remained unaddressed in the previous tale. The rabbis questioned Rabbi Yohanan's accepting healing from the Matrona. The redactors repeated the same teaching from earlier in the *sugya*. The Babylonian Talmud's anonymous voice offered the corrective, that if a person were particularly important he could be healed, even on Shabbat, by a Gentile.

In section B one might have thought that *adam hashuv* [important person] referred to the person performing the healing. The narrative continued and suggested that Rabbi Abahu was also an important person. When he received healing from Jacob the Min, the Gentile healer introduced in this section, Rabbis Ammi and Assi were so concerned about Abahu's receiving the remedy on Shabbat that they licked his leg clean of Jacob's salve. If that had not been successful, they would have cut his leg off to save him! It is unclear from this tale whether they were protecting Abahu from violating Shabbat, from receiving the Gentile healing or from something else entirely. The Rosh offered a different explanation. He argued that it was permitted because Jacob the Min only provided the salve and because there was no incantation involved in his treatment protocol.[193] He did not actually perform the healing on Shabbat. Jacob the Min armed Abahu with the remedy so that he, or another Jew, could effect the healing. The Rosh

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192. *B. Avodah Zarah* 27b:

אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: כל מכה שמחללין עליה את השבת אין מתרפאין מהן

Rabah bar Bar Hana said in the name of R. Yohanan: any sore for which one may profane Shabbat, one may not be healed by [Gentiles].

193. Rosh Avodah Zarah 2:9, R. Shraga haCohen Vilman edition, republished in Brooklyn, NY, 1996.

held that on Shabbat, the source of healing and the healer himself were important considerations. While the tradition can "excuse" either violating Shabbat or receiving a remedy from a Gentile, the Rosh could not permit the Gentile from performing the healing himself on Shabbat. Because Jacob the Min did not actually execute a full healing "protocol," presumably one that also included an incantation over the salve, he did not perform a complete act of healing and violate what Rabah bar Bar Hanah taught in the name of Yohanan.

Section C raises the question of whether a different approach was permitted if the Gentile healer was known to be an "expert physician?"[194] The anonymous voice stated that in both these cases, the Matrona for Yohanan and Jacob the Min for Abahu, the Gentile healers were considered "expert physicians." An(other) anonymous voice brought a counter claim about whether Jacob the Min was "expert." The prooftext here came from Judges, when Samson realized that he had been duped by the Philistines, particularly his Philistine bride. Samson decided that the sacrifice of his own life would benefit the Israelites well beyond his death. When the temple came crashing down upon all the people inside, "Those who were slain by him as he died outnumbered those who had been slain by him when he lived." In bringing this Scriptural citation, the tradition stated that Gentiles adopted this same attitude and were willing to sacrifice human life for the sake of pursuing their own agenda. The rabbis argued that being healed by Gentiles continued to be a dubious and threatening proposition.

This short tale confronted the primary concerns of the previous chapters. There

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194. As discussed in chapter 2, גברי קמיעא and רופא מומחה are variously translated as "expert physician," or "tested practitioner." There is no centralized certification authority, but as we saw with amulets, experience and success determine a practitioner's and an amulet's usefulness in the future cases.

was a risk in accepting healing from a Gentile source, even if the healing remedy would prove successful, stave off death, or the practitioner was considered "expert." Violating Shabbat restrictions was permissible when a person's life was threatened and that healing remedy could come from a non-Jewish source. The conclusion of this tale brings us back to an earlier opinion that Gentiles, particularly *minim* like Jacob, were not to be trusted. Given the opportunity they would still cause harm or death to a Jewish person. In this case, the citation from Judges spoke to an actual death, unlike the *min* in the story of Ben Dama who was trying to woo Ben Dama into heresy.

Parallels to the Tale of Jacob the Min and the Expert Physician

Jacob the Min is seen elsewhere in the literature, most often revealing a question or inconsistency within the rabbinic tradition. In *b. Hullin* 84a, Jacob the Min engaged in an intellectual discussion with Rava:

> אמר ליה יעקב מינאה לרבא: קי"ל חיה בכלל בהמה לסימנין, אימא נמי בהמה בכלל חיה לכסוי!
>
> Jacob the Min said to Rava: It is established that the term ‘cattle’ includes wild animals with regard to the characteristics [of cleanness]; should I not say then that the term ‘wild animal’ includes cattle with regard to the law of covering up [the blood]![195]

The specifics of this Talmudic discussion are far afield from the present thesis. Suffice it to say, that Jacob the Min was asking questions that demonstrate his level of education and his familiarity with biblical and rabbinic teaching. The second text comes from *b. Megillah* 23a and addressed the six *aliyot* read on Yom Kippur. Here Jacob inquired after the significance and meaning of the number.

> אמר ליה יעקב מינאה לרב יהודה: הני ששה דיום הכפורים כנגד מי? - אמר ליה: כנגד ששה

195. *B. Hullin* 84a paralleled by *Yal.* Shmini 542.

שעמדו מימינו של עזרא וששה משמאלו, שנאמר +נחמיה ח'+ ויעמד עזרא הספר על מגדל עץ אשר עשו לדבר ויעמד אצלו מתתיה ושמע ועניה ואוריה וחלקיה ומעשיה על ימינו ומשמאלו פדיה ומישאל ומלכיה וחשם וחשבדנה זכריה משלם. הני שבעה הוו! - היינו זכריה היינו משלם, ואמאי קראו משלם - דמישלם בעובדיה.

תנו רבנן: הכל עולין למנין שבעה, ואפילו קטן ואפילו אשה. אבל אמרו חכמים: אשה לא תקרא בתורה, מפני כבוד צבור.

> Jacob the Min asked R. Judah: What do the six of the Day of Atonement represent? — He replied: The six who stood at the right of Ezra and the six who stood at his left, as it says, "Ezra the scribe stood upon a wooden tower made for the purpose, and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah at his right, and at his left Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, Meshullam."[196] But these last are seven? — Zechariah is the same as Meshullam. And why is he called Meshullam? Because he was blameless [*mishlam*] in his conduct.
>
> Our Rabbis taught: All are qualified to be among the seven [who read], even a minor and a woman, only the Sages said that a woman should not read in the Torah out of respect for the congregation.[197]

As in the previous example, Jacob the Min was well educated. He was inquiring what the six Torah readings represented, showing that he was educated enough to ask the question in the first place and to understand the response. In the next paragraph, the rabbis shared their teaching that this man was not able to read from Torah, no matter how educated he was, though women and minors were qualified to read one of the seven *aliyot* read on Shabbat.

Tosafot comments that Jacob the Min did not refer to a specific Gentile individual but, as in the case of our Jacob of Kefar Sakanya, it referred to a man named Jacob from the town of Min. The commentary of the Tosafot assumed the historicity of the characters and the chronology of the text. They did not take into account the potential *midrashic* plays of the rabbinic authors and editors. Though Jacob the Min who offered the salve to

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196. From the story of Ezra's public reading of the Sefer Torah in Neh 8:1-8.
197. *B. Megillah* 23a.

Abahu above or discussed legal specifics with Rava may not have been the same "person," a character by the same name sat with the rabbis for such a discussion several times in the rabbinic corpus and elicited associations for the reader.

A Final Tale of Healing: Rava and Minyomi

There is one final healer mentioned in this *sugya*.

> ואמר רבא: אמר לי מניומי אסיא כולהו שקיינו קשו לאודנא לבר ממיא דכולייתא.
>
> So also said Rava: Minyomi the physician told me that any kind of fluid is bad for the ear except the juice from kidneys.[198]

Rava shared a healing tradition as he heard from Minyomi.[199] The same Rava who often engaged in discussion with Jacob the Min was here in conversation with Minyomi. "Minyomi the physician" was seen elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud.

> ונותנין עליה איספלנית. אמר אביי: אמרה לי אם איספלניתא דכולהון כיבי שב מינאי תרבא וחדא קירא. רבא אמר: קירא וקלבא רישינא דרשה רבא במחוזא קרעינהו בני מניומי אסיא למנייהו.
>
> We place a compress upon it. Abaye said: Mother told me, A salve [compress] for all pains [is made of] seven parts of fat and one of wax. Rava said: Wax and resin. Rava taught this publicly at Mahoza, [whereupon] the family of Minyomi the physician tore up their [bandage] cloths.[200]

In this section, there were traditions present that sought to understand what salve or remedy was put on the compress in order to effect healing. Abaye shared his mother's home remedy.[201] Rava then offered a different recipe for the salve, which he presumably

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198. *B. Avodah Zarah* 28b.

199. See also *b. Shabbat* 133b (below) and *b. Sanhedrin* 99b. The Pizarro manuscript and *dikdukei sofrim* variations suggest that Minyomi was a copyist error that renamed a physician, Benyamin, as Minyomi or Minyami(n). Preuss, *Medicine*, 20, reflects this reading and understands "Benjamin," "Manjome" and "Minyami" as the same practitioner.

200. *B. Shabbat* 133b.

201. Beyond the scope of this thesis is the role of women as healers and as guardians of

learned from a physician named Minyomi. Rava then revealed this remedy publicly which angered the family of this physician.

As in the previous citation "Minyomi the physician" is seen interacting with Rava. Preuss suggests that this physician, Minyomi, was actually a man named Benyamin who was a contemporary of Rava and "lived in the year 280 CE."[202] Preuss supposes that these tales are "an ancient illustration of the opposition between physicians." In his reading, Preuss attempts two things. He tries to Judaize Minyomi. He also tries to understand the division as one between the rabbinic establishment and an emerging group of physician-specialists. Therefore, the family Minyomi's storming off reflected their concern about maintaining a client base once their recipe had been revealed[203] or public embarrassment at Rava's hands. Either of these were plausible from the information given. This seems far too reductionist, however, for what we have seen as an evolving conversation within the rabbinic tradition about the interaction of Gentile healing and the Jewish community.

Given the nature of the preceeding discussion it is easy to read Minyomi as a fanciful, interpretive name for a Gentile healer, with the Babylonian Talmud's authors or editors taking creative license to further develop their message. Even if "Minyomi the physician" is not assumed to be Gentile, his name may still reflect the rabbis' disdain for these physician-healers. "Minyomi" could mean something like "trendy physician" or "born yesterday practitioner." In making this public revelation of Minyomi's remedy, the

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"traditional" healing remedies. Additionally, in other sections of this *sugya* Abaye shares his "mother's" home recipes. It could be interesting to explore how "Mother" like "Matrona," "Jacob the Min" and "Minyomi" are midrashic plays on the names of these "healers." As Kalmin suggests in "Christians and Heretics," putting historicity aside, one must consider what these name plays reveal about the "desires and prejudices of rabbinic authors and editors." (Kalmin, 155)

202. Preuss, *Medicine*, 20.

203. *Ibid.*

rabbis could be reasserting or reclaiming their dominance, taking the power of the healing remedy away from the non-Jewish (or even Jewish) healer. Like the Matrona in our second story, the rabbis wanted to publicize the healing remedies, presumably to make it easier for people to access these techniques and traditions. The rabbis did not object to either of Minyomi's remedies. Minyomi's remedy did not carry the same taboo as did those of Jacob the Min and Jacob of Kefar Sakanya. It is possible to understand that the rabbis, in revealing Minyomi's salve, sought to minimize the need for other Jews to visit him for healing and thus reduce Minyomi's power over the rabbis' followers. While we can only posit their motivation, it is in too close proximity to the larger discussion of Gentile healing to dismiss it outright. If nothing else, it adds an additional layer of interest to an already dynamic and intriguing *sugya*.

This final story of this exploration reflects the rabbis' evolving concept of "expert" practitioners. In the case of Abahu's illness, Jacob the Min was expert and Abahu himself was an important person. This tradition taught that the situation only required one (either the physician was "expert" or the patient was "important") in order to permit healing by a Gentile on Shabbat. And yet, in spite of this increasing leniency, suspicion remained high. Unlike the Matrona in the case of Rabbi Yohanan, Jacob the Min's motivations were not to be trusted; he was viewed like the Philistines of biblical tradition. Also in these tales, the rabbis continued to assert their power in an increasingly fragmented environment. Not only did the Gentile milieu present a threat to their authority generally, physicians of any religious affiliation challenged the rabbis' dominance. As such, the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud reflected a wide-range of attitudes and confronted the presence of external influences in myriad ways.

Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis I have explored the evolution of the "medical system" of the Babylonian Talmud. Biblical medical theology stressed the centrality of YHWH in all healing endeavors. YHWH was the cause of both illness and healing; YHWH's healing on earth was only enacted through the handiwork of His prophets. In the Second Temple Period, prophetic responsibility for YHWH's healing gave way to an emerging proto-"professional" physician/practitioner who was known as specialist in his community. As the Jewish community became increasingly dispersed, finding a Jewish specialist was not guaranteed. Combining that with the pervasive influence of Greco-Roman ideas and the eventual supremacy of Galenic medicine, the Jewish community had to confront the reality of receiving care from and providing care to the non-Jewish majority.

So what have we learned from this exploration? Over time, different realities necessitated confronting interactions with Gentiles; this included exchanges involving healing. The rabbis' opinions were wide-ranging. In the early tannaitic period, the rabbis reflected a more "closed" view, with Rabbi Meir repeatedly prohibiting open relations with Gentile healers. The Sages of the early rabbinic period, while reflecting a more pragmatic view, continued to urge extreme caution even prohibiting receiving care in private. Jewish apostates and Jewish-Christians posed a particular challenge to the rabbis

of this period. In the tale of Ben Dama, the threat this non-rabbinic group posed to the rabbinic establishment compelled the rabbis to erect immutable boundaries, preferring death to receiving healing from them. As reflected in the Tannaitic texts, the early period was highly fractured and the rabbis labored to establish their dominance as the central authoritative body of the Jewish community.

As we move outside *Eretz Yisrael* and into the Babylonian context, the rabbis included tales of Jews (even their rabbinic colleagues themselves!) receiving healing from Gentiles. The rabbis remained concerned about the public/private nature of healing activities and the message sent to Jewish onlookers. The tale of Ben Dama clearly reflected the evolution of rabbinic opinion over the early centuries of the Common Era, adding to and emending the mishnaic tale in order to contribute to an ongoing discussion. Matrona, an Arab trader, Jacob the Min and Minyomi offered healing to Jews; tales of their practice were all collected in this *sugya* and added after the tale of Ben Dama. The rabbis, however, also codified healing remedies and homeopathy in rabbinic literature. It seems that the editors of the Babylonian Talmud wanted to provide commonly recognized and tested remedies and salves to the would-be healer. This could reflect an increasing participation of the rabbis themselves in various healing activities. It could reflect the rabbis' preference for healing within the Jewish community even though they understood that circumstances might necessitate seeking healing from Gentiles. Finally, this could reflect the rabbis' endeavor to preserve and enhance their authority.

In the end, the rabbis of the Babylonian context continued to urge caution. There was still an "us" and "them" mentality. When the Matrona revealed her remedy for Yohanan's *tsafdina*, Yohanan assumed that he could reveal her recipe to the rest of "us."

For healing activities that would violate Shabbat, a Jew should participate. If there were a Jewish midwife, wet-nurse, *mohel*, or barber, the rabbis preferred using his/her services. Reality, however, necessitated flexibility. Rabbis preferred using the services of a Gentile practitioner to delaying medical care, receiving inferior care or even delaying bringing a Gentile into the Jewish fold.

The rabbis were a group of individuals and our rabbinic literature reflects their multivalent view of the world. The rabbis confronted the realities of a world in which their influence was challenged in the context of the realities with which they lived. Greco-Roman, Persian, and Christian attitudes toward healing made their way into the discussions of the rabbis. The rabbis were forced to balance popular practice with Jewish ideology and external attitudes, and on and on. Just as we in the twenty-first century must confront the realities of being a minority in a non-Jewish world, the rabbis of late antiquity were seeking to strike a balance between "us" and "them" by which both they and the Jewish community could abide. We are indebted to the redactors of the Babylonian Talmud who preserved the discussions, debates and minority opinions of our rabbinic predecessors. Even in this examination of a small slice of one *sugya* focusing on healing, we see the multivocal world that is our Jewish inheritance.

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