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The Image of the Tzaddik Gamur in Rabbinic Literature;

A Study of Righteousness in the Rabbinic Imagination

Scott Hausman-Weiss

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination.
Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion
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Referee, Professor Edward Goldman

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Natalie and Abraham. You both have been and continue to be the rock-bed of my foundation. This year of living dangerously has taught me and reminded me of what's most important. As I strive to fill the gargantuan shoes of my rabbinic forebears who have taught me the path of the *tzaddik gamur*, I know that I do not walk alone. I follow this path with you, my wife and my son, hand in hand, as we take on the world and all it has to offer. I dedicate myself to this path from which I will strive not to falter, on which I will always walk in peace with you.

A Travelers Prayer

May it be your will, ever Present God and God of my ancestors, to lead me, to direct my steps, and to support me along the way that I may be guided on the path of well-being. Lead me throughout my life, tranquil and serene, until I reach my destination. Deliver me from every enemy, conflict, and hurt that I might encounter along the way and from all painful afflictions that trouble the world. Bless all that I do and grant me mercy, loving kindness, and compassion in your eyes and in the eyes of all who behold me. Hear my prayer for You, God, listen to my prayers. Praised are You, God, who hearkens to prayer.

Babylonian Talmud 29b

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DIGEST

This thesis plumbs the depths of the rabbinic imagination as to the image of the *tzaddik gamur* in the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, as well as the general breakdown of social institutional life, the Rabbis paved new paths for achieving salvation. These new paths were founded upon the individual's dedication to living a life dedicated to righteous behavior. This righteous behavior not only made the Rabbi an admired individual in the eyes of the Amoraim, but also imbued him with divine powers. In the midst of a powerful secular culture that boasted Divine Men as well, the Rabbis gained divine power not through birth or the assignment of godly power, but fundamentally as a result of their dedication to righteousness.

The dedication to living a righteous and holy life is not limited to *gemilut chasadim*, but additionally is manifested in one's dedication to learning, to keeping mitzvot, and to a patient and humble nature. The Rabbis of the Talmud were minorities living under the thumb of their host rulers. In Palestine, the Rabbis were significantly more weighed down by the Romans than were the Rabbis in Babylonia by the Persians. Nonetheless, the need for establishing the way for Jewish self-determination in both locations ruled their course and their destiny. Our rabbinic tradition teaches us that the Rabbi must be dedicated to becoming a *tzaddik gamur*, even if the full achievement of it is elusive. As one will see from this thesis, the *tzaddik gamur*, the complete righteous individual, is not

without human flaws and shortcomings. What is crucial is the Rabbi's recognition of his weaknesses and his rededication to the paths of righteousness.

In a Jewish world where many of us have become disillusioned with the lack of a general dedication to righteous behavior at all times, this thesis is quite timely. I hope that it will remind us all of the origins from which we come. I hope that it will remind us of the inordinate import of righteousness to discovering and achieving salvation in our lives, as well as in the lives of our families, colleagues, students and friends.

PREFACE

THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS THESIS

In Bin Gurions's collection of aggadot, *Mimekor Yisrael*, there is a series of three versions of a story first found in the Babylonian Talmud. "Rabbi Joshua and the Angel of Death," as it is titled in Bin Gurion's collection, tells the story of Rabbi Joshua at the end of his life. As will be recounted later in this thesis in much greater detail, the Angel of Death, or Samael, comes to Rabbi Joshua to inform him that his time has come to leave this world. The great righteous Rabbi refuses to leave until finally Samael agrees to show him *Gan Eden*. At the moment when they arrive and peer over its walls, Rabbi Joshua steals into *Gan Eden*, the place of everlasting life. Samael, at this point, outwitted and outrun, speeds off to God to make his report.

Upon arriving in God's court, God tells Samael that the only way Rabbi Joshua can be "extradited" from the garden is if it can be proven that he had ever had an oath annulled during his entire life. It turns out that Rabbi Joshua, throughout his entire life, had fulfilled all oaths, *sh'vuot*, he had ever taken. He is therefore allowed to remain in *Gan Eden* in everlasting life. Above and beyond his incredible word, we learn as well that it was for his sake alone that the rainbow did not appear during his lifetime. He was such a righteous man, that for his sake alone, God did not destroy the earth and therefore the rainbow did not need to appear.

The possibility that an individual human being could be so committed to his word so as never to need to retract it at any time is a stupendous and inspirational proposition. We live in a world today where too often a person's word is just never enough to instill

confidence. The Rabbis knew in their time and place that one's reputation, the essence of one's being, could be defined by one's trustworthiness.

And so the seed for my love of Rabbinic literature was sewn. When I first read this story, I was enrolled in an elective course taught by Dr. Lewis Barth, "The Rabbinic Self Image and the Rabbinic Imagination." In this course, we plumbed the depths of the image of the Rabbi as wonder-worker and holy man. Time and time again, I discovered that a Rabbi's ability to consort with angels, heal the sick, and cause rain to fall was made possible by the Rabbi's commitment to acts of righteousness and deeds. Furthermore, when I came across the above story of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, the edited text in *Mimekor Yisrael* began by describing him as a *tzaddik gamur*.

> Said the Sages of old, may the memories be a blessing, that Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was a *tzaddik gamur*, an utterly blameless and completely righteous man.

With this introduction to Rabbi Joshua's meeting with the Angel of Death, according to Berditchevsky's rendering, my interest in the Rabbinic imagination had peaked. The *tzaddik gamur*, the utter righteous individual, blameless in his pursuit of truth and justice in society and in his own life, is to me a most fascinating conception offered by the Rabbis. In a world where power was a non-existent commodity for the community of Israel, the Rabbis turned inward to a new conception of power. How could they discover holiness in a world that had sought to destroy the only paths to holiness the people of Israel had known for thousands of years? The Temple was destroyed. With the efforts of the *Tannaim* in the Mishnah to act as if nothing had substantively changed as a result of this destruction no longer capturing the hearts and minds of Israel, the *Amoraim* discovered a new, an inner source of power for connecting with the divine. The paths to holiness, exemplified by Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, that the Rabbis paved by their pursuit of the *tzaddik gamur* set the stage for this thesis.

Ironically though, upon studying the original version of "Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and the Angel of Death," as rendered in Ketubot 77a, I discovered Berditchevsky's creative editing. As it turns out, the text there does not call Rabbi Joshua ben Levi a *tzaddik gamur*, although his actions and their descriptions point directly to just such a formation of this Rabbinic ideal-type. While initially disappointed by this reckless editing, it did indeed lead me to examine in greater detail the term *tzaddik gamur* to discover its original context. As I discovered and has become the backbone of this thesis, the Rabbis spent a great deal of energy attempting to define, evaluate and critique a person's success in life against this imposing measuring stick.

The term *tzaddik gamur* is mentioned close to thirty times in the Babylonian Talmud. The idea, however, of this great righteous Rabbinic ideal-type is referred to and aimed towards in thousands of aggadot and halakhot from both Talmuds. To achieve a level of inner purity required not only long hours of study but intense self-control and commitment to the good of all people in one's midst. In these stories, the sages are more than just great scholars; they are *mensches* of the highest degree.

THE PROCESS

The process by which I created this thesis is as follows. Using the Soncino Talmud CD-rom and the Bar Ilan Database, I made an initial search of all uses of the term *tzaddik gamur*. Additionally, I then combed the pages of *Mimekor Yisrael*, *Sefer HaAggadah*, and other collections of aggadot that anthologize the stories of the sages. In each of these stories, I looked for a direct or indirect broadening of the definition of *tzaddik gamur* and how it expanded upon the concept of Rabbinic righteousness. I then searched for these same texts in their original forms to examine both literary context and accuracy of terminology. After having identified the texts from the Palestinian and Babylonian

Talmuds, I brought to these texts a series of questions that formed the basis of my analyses:

1. What is the source of this citation?
2. What are the characteristics of the individual referred to as *tzaddik gamur*? Does he achieve this status by way of faith, deeds, theurgic ability, birth?
3. What kind of person has been deemed *tzaddik gamur* in this reference? Rabbi, scholar, average citizen?
4. What common traits does this particular *tzaddik gamur* share with others studied thus far?

With these particular questions in mind, I developed a structure within which to place the texts that explicitly employ the term *tzaddik gamur* (Chapter 4), as well as the series of texts that explore this Rabbinic ideal-type of the utterly righteous individual (Chapter 5). The texts throughout the thesis are all cited in their English translation. Their translation is based upon the Soncino translation of the Babylonian Talmud. Other sources for translation are otherwise footnoted.

Once I had identified and then analyzed the texts from the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, I examined my secondary sources. In order to properly synthesize the meaning of these texts that explore Rabbinic righteousness, I had to first understand the societal, historical, and cultural framework within which these texts had been set as well as written down. With the prolific help of Jacob Neusner's studies on Rabbinic Judaism, as well as works by Peter Brown, Jack Lightstone, and William Scott Greene, I have been able to examine these frameworks and establish the sociological and religious worlds in which these texts take shape.

Beginning with Chapter 1, the thesis examines the world of the Rabbis at the beginning of the first century and through the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70

CE. The chaos that defined the world of 1st century Judaism created the opportunities for the appearance of wonder-working sons of Israel, akin to those wonder workers prominent in surrounding cultures, to establish themselves as miners of new opportunities for holiness.

Chapter 2 then builds upon the great societal impact of the destruction of the Second Temple. Additionally, it makes a case for the appearance of the "Rabbinic" wonder-worker, whose power is based primarily upon his commitment to righteousness and justice - concepts culled from the philosophy of the Rabbis themselves. The story of *Honi HaMeaggel* is instructive in this transformation from the solitary, non-Rabbinic wonder-worker to the Rabbinic master of Halakha, who gains his power to do wondrous acts from his commitment to struggling and seeking to overcome his *yetzer ra*.

Chapter 3 concludes the historical framework for these texts by briefly examining the worlds of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds and how they each sought to create a new kind of Judaism built upon the Mishnaic resurrection of the cultic religion of Israel and the Temple. In so doing, the Rabbis created a Judaism with seeds well planted, the branches of whose trees have continued to blossom and grow, nurturing the Jewish people for thousands of years.

CHAPTER 1

A COMMUNITY IN CHAOS

In Jacob Neusner's book Ancient Israel after Catastrophe, Neusner describes a post Temple-destruction Jewish community in chaos. This community, which for centuries had relied upon the Temple for its sacred ordering of community and the universe, had now been thrown into disarray of cosmic proportions. The sources for holiness and the divine were obtuse and as yet, unidentified.

In his book, Ancient Israel after Catastrophe, Jacob Neusner organizes the history of Israel in the first two centuries, CE, according to three principal events.

> (1) The first war against Rome, from 66 to 73, with its climax in August 70, in the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, the abrogation of its sacrificial order, the burning of the city, and the capture and slaughter, or enslavement, of masses of people; (2) the second war against Rome, from 132 to 135, with its still greater human disaster and its aftermath of brief repression and the permanent closing off of Jerusalem from Jewish access; (3) and the formation of the Mishnah and its adoption as the constitution and law code of the Jewish government of the Land of Israel toward the year 200. These are the three events- two wars and a book – which set the boundaries around the period in which the Judaism before us took shape, in the very forms in which we have known Judaism from that time to this.[1]

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[1] Jacob Neusner, *Ancient Israel After Catastrophe*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 10-11.

With the history set before us, we must begin with the particular society of Israel during the first century prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. For the community of Israel, the *locus sanctus* was situated in one place - the Temple. This Second Temple of more than 500 years had stood the test of time and was the symbol of power, history and identity for the Israelite community from days of old. The Persians and Greeks had arrived, conquered and left. The Romans held the country now but the Jewish community was still able to live their religious and cultural lives with little or no interruption. Most importantly, the actual site of the divine on earth was to be found in this Ancient Temple by which the entire structure of Israelite society was established.

> The Temple, on the Deuteronomic-Priestly conception, offered the unique locus of the sacred on earth. That sacrality, moreover, stemmed not from the nature of the place on which the Temple stood. Rather, the organized behavior about that place defined the sanctuary as the center of sacred order in this realm. Sacred place results from the concentric arraying of classes of persons about the center and the limiting of access to the various sancta to specific persons. Were one to breach those boundaries and blur the ordering of humanity thereby maintained, the Temple would cease as a sacred locus.[2]

In the era of the first century, in which the seeds of the future of the Western World were germinating, the Temple remained a steadfast symbol of all that had remained in this world of revolution.

> By preserving and protecting God's presence in the Temple, the cultic rites exhibit what Mary Douglas calls 'instrumental efficacy.'.....the Temple rites assume an added dimension: they reflect, shape, and indeed constitute that which is truly real,

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[2] Jack N. Lightstone, "Magicians, Holy Men and Rabbis: Patterns of the Sacred in Late Antique Judaism" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Studies in Judaism and its Greco-Roman Context* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 143.

> or holy. From the priestly perspective, it was in the Temple that the cosmic and social lines were clearly defined, and God's command that Israel be a holy people could be fulfilled only in the cult. The Temple was a saving institution.[3]

Until 70 CE, salvation was yet guaranteed by means of the Temple rites. One's access to the sacred was made possible in the Temple, where the god of the Jews dwells in perpetuity. The cosmos and the fates had been lassoed by the priests, whose ministrations kept them in the order of the Jewish universe. "The Temple was the point at which the threads joining heaven and earth were knotted, and although God's power was 'produced in heaven,' it was distributed from the Temple."[4]

> To understand the gravity of the change, we recall that for eleven centuries and more, the Jewish people had organized its entire life - social, metaphysical, natural and super-natural – around sacrifice organized in the Jerusalem Temple. The cult had marked off the passage of time and the seasons through the punctuation of slaughtering sacrifices of sheep and cows. Israel had recognized the hierarchy of its society by reference to Priests and Levites, then Israelites. Three times a year all Israelites were supposed to come to Jerusalem; many did at least once a year. These climactic moments, marking the passage of the natural year and celebrating the formative moments in Israel's national life with God as well, infused the Israelites' lives with meaning, made sense of nation and nature all at once. Nor should we forget that, in ancient times, meat generally was eaten in a cultic setting, as part of a meal served to God and shared with God. Consequently, these massive gatherings in Jerusalem, their exalted moments of celebration and their outpourings of petition, their thanks for what God now must give, the processions and parades, with their bonfires and their barbecues – these defined the order of

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[3] William Scott Green. "Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Romischen Welt.* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 623.
[4] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...,", 623.

> life. In the Temple in Jerusalem, Israel celebrated God and creation, humanity and the nation, and also ate heartily and well.[5]

THE EMERGENCE OF MYSTERY AND PHILOSOPHY CULTS

Two types of religion were forming in the first century, according to William Scott Greene in his article, "Palestinian Holy Men; Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition." Philosophy and mystery cults both promised deliverance from the anxiety that afflicted mankind in the first three centuries CE, but their programs for attaining this common goal were essentially different. While, according to Green, the mystery cults relied upon ecstatic and dramatic rituals as the path to salvation, the philosophy cults promised salvation by means of *homoiosis,* assimilation to rather than identification with the god.[6]

> The immediate objective of philosophy was not freedom from death per se but escape from the pain and unpleasantness of life, achieved through conscious, disciplined living in accord with the rational and proper perception of reality as taught by the founder of the school. A mystery evoked a strong emotional response and touched the soul deeply for a time, but philosophy was able both to turn men from evil and hold before them a good, perhaps never to be obtained, but presenting a permanent object of desire to which one seemed to draw gradually nearer and nearer.[7]

Even with the continued existence of the Temple through more than the first half of the first century, different Jewish entities were already beginning to order the sacred in the Jewish world, in new ways outside the *locus sanctus* of the Temple in Jerusalem. "The mystery cults offered salvation through the miraculous commutation of the soul. Whereas

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[5] Neusner, *Ancient Israel*, 12.
[6] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...,", 620.
[7] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...,", 620.

the philosophy cults presented a slower and more difficult route, the transformation of the intellect. The philosophic schools regarded their founders and great teachers as divine, but shared a 'common consensus' that the ideal wise man is divine not because of his miraculous powers but because of his moral courage and wisdom."[8]

This development of these philosophy cults would lay the groundwork for Rabbinic Judaism. In the midst of the tumult of the first century Roman Empire, with the first stirrings of revolution and dissent within the power structure of the Jewish world, the average Israelite discovered the need for other, more solid and trustworthy institutions of power. Tannaitic, and later Amoraic, Judaism built their foundations upon this newly born and continued need for access to sacredness outside the Temple walls. In the face of the breakdown of institutions such as the cult and the priesthood, faith and access to the divine found its home in charismatic individuals whose piety and scholarship alone were the means for salvation.

Setting the stage for Rabbinic Judaism, the philosophy cults were based in Greco-Roman society. They emphasized the human being's ability, through thought, discipline, and meditation, to rise above corporeal existence. They taught that the body's appetites are not the means by which one can attain salvation and neither, in the view of the philosophy cult, was the ancient sacrificial worship at the Temple. Neusner notes that Rabbinic Judaism created a world in which the Temple rites, themselves, were no longer necessary for access to the divine. Rather, by insisting that nothing has changed, as Neusner notes is *the modus operandi* of the Mishnah, the Tannaim created a new world in which access to the divine had not ever been lost, nor had it lessened to a significant degree.

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[8] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...,", 620.

> The heritage of Ancient Israel supplied the guidelines for the Mishnah's account of future Israel. Accordingly, as we shall see, the Mishnah's utopian plan follows the lines surveyed by ancient priests and adheres so closely, in so many ways, to what had gone before as to suggest the Mishnah offers nothing new. Its affirmation, then, is reactionary: the old order endures, nothing has changed....the truth is the opposite. In the Mishnah, everything has changed.[9]

DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE JEWISH HOLY MAN

In the year 70 CE, the boundaries established by the Temple in its ordering of humanity were breached, throwing all of Israelite society into chaos not known in the Israelite world since the first expulsion and destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE. A new sacred ordering was now needed to reestablish a sense of normalcy in the after-math of the destruction of the Israelite sacrificial cult. Neusner points out that the Israelites had already had their share of false messiahs and disparaged hopes placed in one who was promised to be their savior.

> In the first century...a great many Jews in the Land of Israel looked for and expected a messiah. Whether he would be a wonder-worker, magician, teacher of righteousness, a general, a God-man, hope for his coming provoked people to vigorous action. Some left their homes and families and followed a messiah. Others joined together in military oR monastic bands. For all it was a time to do things in the belief that history had approached its climax and reached its end. So there were things to be done to get ready for the end. But, as we know, what they

[9] Neusner, *Ancient Israel,* 19.

> did was validate the expectation of the end, for it really was the end of the world as anyone had known it.
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> In the earlier part of the second century, these same hopes for God's intervention in the life of Israel in its land came to a crescendo in the war led by Ben Kosiba, whom some called Bar Kochba, son of a star. The aftermath of the calamity of that last messianic war for the Jews of the Holy Land in ancient times proved to be a defeat of more than this-worldly proportions. For the Jews of the land lost not only a war. Gone for good were the Temple and its ongoing life of celebration, service to God, animal offerings and other rites concretely linked to God enthroned on high. Since the Temple had flourished, with a brief interruption, for more than eleven hundred years, we cannot but stand in awe at the change that then proved to be final.[10]

Turmoil of the first century reached its climax with the destruction of the Temple. Therefore, we must now return to the issue of the access to the sacred in a world in which the *locus sanctus* is no more. The Temple had served for thousands of years to order the universe for Israelite society. Without it, as Neusner points out, there develops a great vacuum to be filled with other institutions and more particularly, individuals, who will come to represent the past access to the divine by means of their own piety and charismatic leadership. Prior to this destruction of the very foundation of Israelite society, individuals acting as holy vessels outside of the Temple cult could not exist, at least in the world of the mainstream folk, because the Temple filled the "cosmic universe." There were yet no possible societal structures from which the Holy Man could gain power.

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[10] Neusner, *Ancient Israel*, 11.

> So for example, not only the dead but also charismatic, holy men, persons who straddle the boundary between ordinary human and divine being, as do prophets and inspired 'judges,' cease during the Second Commonwealth to find a legitimate social role. And later in the Greco-Roman period the Temple system will find no role for itinerant Holy Men who by their semi-divine character appropriate the benefits of heaven for this earthly realm.[11]

So then the drawing of lines had begun. As small groups of Israelites sought to regain access to the divine promised to them by the Temple rites, notable individuals began to appear to fill the vacuum left by the disappearance of the Temple cult. There are those who remained loyal to the Temple priests and all the rituals that would someday soon, in their minds, be returned to their hands. There are other groups who broke away from the Temple, revolving their new manner of living around the teachings of a particular holy man. What is crucial to this discussion, prior to and coinciding with the development of the teaching of the *Tannaim*, is that there came new challenges in the midst of the attempts to recreate the ancient holy access.

> The boundaries and the "territorial" divisions of that world of Yahwehists corresponds to a set of paired labels and phenomena. First, Judaic, charismatic Holy men constitute Christianity's 'magicians' as no doubt do men like Paul for Jewish authorities. In so labeling the other's Holy Man, the boundaries of legitimate religious authority seem drawn. Second, within the confines of the Judaic world, one party's sources of uncleanness stands in apposition to another's demons, priests with exorcists, purificatory rites with exorcisms, incantations and amulets, and finally, Temple with living Holy Men. The boundaries drawn by these binary pairs define not problems of self-definition among competing groups as much as the frontiers of meaningful accessibility to the Temple's structured world.

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[11] Jack Lightstone. *Commerce of the Sacred.* (Scholars Press, 1984), 165.

> Where the cult operates to purify the unclean, demons rarely appear bothersome. When for any number of reasons the Sanctuary remains remote, demons and Holy Men thrive, as in the Greco-Roman diaspora.[12]

Whereas these Holy Men rose to prominence only during the first century in Palestine, the vacuum created by the lack of a working Temple in proximity to the Israelite community already for hundreds of years, provided ample opportunity for Holy Men to flourish well before this time, outside of Palestine.

> Moments of intense sacrality, of linkage between heaven and earth, appear mediated for Hellenistic Jewry by a variety of intermediaries, living and dead. But what of the more mundane, hour to hour, life of the Hellenistic Yawehist? At this level too an ordered, that is to say, sacred, world must exist with requisite divine legitimation. The island of order endures between moments of extraordinary mediation. For the Judean Jew before 70, the regularity of the Temple ritual assimilated to itself both ordinary and extraordinary means of world-maintenance.....Still the link with the Temple of such a vicarious kind could hardly have sufficed, and what little world-maintaining function the cult could play for the Graeco-Roman Jews of the Diaspora ceased after 70 in any case. Torah provided the only medium of sacrality sanctioned by revelation, at least the Yawehists of the post-Deutero-Priestly stream; much of Torah, however, could hardly have applied to life in the Diaspora.[13]

Despite all these pressures, as Neusner points out, the Rabbis of the Mishnah wished to act as if nothing had changed. Access to the divine was still intact for the Jewish people.

> Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was approached by a fellow Jew who stood at the Temple site that sat in ruins and smoke. He asked the great Rabbi how the Jewish

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[12] Lightstone, *Commerce*, 56.
[13] Lightstone, *Commerce*, 89-90.

> people would ever again find salvation. With the Temple destroyed, there could never again be safety and access to God. Rabbi Yochanah ben Zakkai assures his distraught fellow Jew. He tells him, we may no longer have the Temple, but we do have another way that will bring God's mercies upon our people. We have Torah, worship and lovingkindness and these will do instead of the sacrifices.

The *Tannaim*, the Rabbis of the words of the Mishnah, sought to create or recreate a world that could still operate peacefully and with hope for the salvation of the Jewish people. With the Temple destroyed and Rome pressing down ever-harder for taxes and the removal of rights, it would seem all but useless to have created a book that acts as if all was still in their hands. Yet, this is what the *Tannaim* did. They built a world in which there was still hope for Israel, and for our purposes, interestingly enough, almost, but not quite empty of any Divine figures or Holy Men by whom one should model his life.

CHAPTER 2

HONI THE CIRCLE DRAWER – HIS ELECTION, HIS ORDINATION

PAVING A NEW PATH FOR SALVATION: THE MISHNAH

The *Tannaim* acted as if nothing had changed. Neusner teaches us that it was their task to ensure access to the divine for the Israelite people, even without access to the Temple rites. The most recent Temple, that had structured the Jewish world for close to six hundred years, had now been destroyed, and as mentioned above, the Israelite community had been thrown into chaos.

> Beyond the abyss of calamity, therefore, we find that the most powerful impulse is to speak of the future in terms of the past. The heritage of ancient Israel supplied the guidelines for the Mishnah's account of future Israel. Accordingly, as we shall see, the Mishnah's utopian plan follows the lines surveyed by ancient priests and adheres so closely, in so many ways, to what had gone before as to suggest the Mishnah offers nothing new. Its affirmation, then, is reactionary: the old order endures, nothing has changed. The truth is the opposite. In the Mishnah, everything has changed.[14]

Underneath this picture of calamity and chaos, is the loss of a fundamental access to salvation. Prior to 70, salvation for the Israelite people was guaranteed. Despite the hundreds of years of struggle and oppression against outside forces, the Temple would always save the individual and the people. God would provide for the people in return for the people providing for God, by means of the sacrifices and Temple rites, governed by the Priests. With the Temple gone, the Israelite people had a choice to make. They could

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[14] Neusner, *Ancient Israel*, 18.

either assimilate into the conquering population or they could build new columns of salvation from the rubble of their destroyed guarantee, the Temple. The *Mishnah* was the guidebook for laying this new foundation, its rules and precedents the mortar for building its columns. The *Tannaim* created a new institution, built with the rubble of the destroyed Temple system, that would lead the Israelites forward, with the promise of salvation from God.

The vector of the Jewish people had now changed. Instead of aiming outwardly towards an edifice and its requirements, they now looked inward at their souls and their paths to salvation. Neusner points out that the saving power in the world of the *Tannaim* was guaranteed by means of one's actions as a pious individual.

> The Mishnah's message is that what little a person is able to do matters in supernatural, cosmic ways. It states that message to an Israelite world that can shape affairs in no important ways and speaks to people who by no means will the way things now are. The *Mishnah* therefore lays down a practical judgement upon, in favor of, the imagination and will to reshape reality, regain system, reestablish that order upon which trustworthy existence is to be built. All that survived calamity was despair – therefore, the will. Israel yet commanded its own will, and that, the Mishnah's sages judged, sufficed for the restoration.[15]

Commanding their own will, the *Tannaim* codified the *Mishnah*. In so doing, they took control over their destiny. Their daily actions would not only guarantee them salvation, but by reworking and re-interpreting the Temple rites, they stole the responsibility for their downfall from the victor's hands, Rome, and placed it into their own. They did this by

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[15]Neusner, *Ancient Israel*, 22.

recreating their access to the divine in places and time, developing it by means of telling their story.

> The Temple was destroyed because of sin. When it is rebuilt, it will follow the laws to which it should have conformed to begin with. The next stage in the argument – not reached in articulated form – can only be this: had the Temple conformed to the law we now state, it would not have been destroyed. So we see the strange spectacle of sages, not priests, presuming to tell priests what to do and how to do it. In this drama, we find a partisan account of what happened, together with a powerful appeal for support to regain the old and stable world of Temple, cult and celebration, through right knowledge and right action – which only sages can teach.[16]

The *Tannaim* still teach us, having codified the *Mishnah*, about how the Jewish people can live "freely" in the face of oppression. This account is decidedly different than the failed mission of Bar Kochba and his troops in the previous century. Unlike Bar Kochba, theirs was a path to spiritual salvation. It led them to express their freedom in spiritual and creative ways, yet allowed them to remain "safely" under the thumb of the host oppressor.

> Early Rabbinic Judaism claimed that the holy life of the cult, limited by the priests to the confines of the Temple, applied everywhere to all Israel. This idea came from the Pharisees, the sect of which the Rabbis were heirs, and assumed an urgency in the aftermath of the Temple's destruction in 70. The concrete realization of this idea engaged the *Tannaitic* Rabbis in substantial theorizing both about the detailed nature of the rituals themselves and about their actual or hypothetical applications to everyday life. This largely accounts for the centrality of *halakhah* in Rabbinic Judaism. But if the performance of rituals within the

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[16] Neusner, *Ancient Israel*, 31.

> Temple exposes the lines of God's revealed reality, then thinking and debating about those rituals outside the Temple, even without the possibility of performing all of them, has the same effect. As Neusner recently has shown in striking detail: 'the Mishnaic Rabbis express their primary cognitive statements, their judgments upon large matters, through ritual law, not through myth or theology, neither of which is articulated at all.'[17]

This engagement with ritual law, as the new means by which the divine would become accessible to the Israelite people, was the platform upon which the Mishnah quietly stood. Without admitting that there had at all been a rift between time before and after the destruction of the Temple, the *Tannaim* created a guidebook that described and prescribed the paths to salvation in this life under oppression. "As the new masters of holiness, the Rabbis claimed for themselves, and their piety, the religious authority which once had belonged to the priests and the cult."[18] The distinction, however, between these new masters of holiness and those that surrounded them in their time, is that the Holy men of the *Tannaim*, as pious as they were, did not perform miracles. Their righteous behavior, their commitment to study and prayer, their intense personal scrutiny over their personal behavior, made the divine accessible in spiritual but not practical terms.

> Neusner's comprehensive studies of the Pharisees after 70 and his biographical studies of Yohanan ben Zakkai and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus reveal a virtually total absence of such stories, even in late Rabbinic collections where we would expect to find them. In the Mishnah Tractate Avot, various Pharisaic and early Rabbinic masters are praised for their possession of any number of moral, intellectual, or spiritual virtues, but not for their ability to perform miracles.[19]

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[17] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...," 624.
[18] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...," 624.
[19] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men ," 625.

THE HONI TRADITION – THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

The *Mishnah* is all but void of stories of great Rabbis performing miracles. This is true except in one case in the Mishnah, the story of Honi *HaMeaggel*, Honi the Circle Drawer. William Scott Green, in his article, "Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition," analyzes the story of Honi as it appears in Mishnah Taanit 3:8.

In his analysis, Green establishes why the Honi tradition is crucial to an understanding of the intention of the *Tannaim*. Understanding that this is the only miracle tale in the Mishnah as a whole, one must analyze why and how the *Tannaim* included it in the codification.[20] In terms of this thesis, I have examined Green's analysis in order to set the stage for the election of Honi as miracle worker followed by the *Amoraic* ordination of Honi as Rabbi. In this transformation from ordinary miracle worker, who can command rain from the heavens, to Rabbi, whose power relies upon his piety and scholarship, is the crux of the Rabbi as Holy Man, the Rabbi as *Tzaddik Gamur*.

The Honi tradition from Taanit 3:8 opens with the phrasing that would suggest it is an *aggadah* meant to establish a precedent in terms of what one is expected to do in times of drought. The tale begins:

> They sound [the shofar] on account of any calamity which may befall the community, except for too much rain. Once they said to Honi the Circle-maker, "Pray so that rain will fall."[21]

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[20] A detailed examination of the Honi tradition can be found in the Green article. Here, instead of repeating Green's analysis, I have examined the key aspects as are important for the subject of this thesis.
[21] Translation based on that of Green's, in his article, "Palestinian Holy Men...," 626.

Although this begins with the presumption that a legal precedent is to follow, one does not. Instead, Green sets out to discover the rationale for including this tale in the Mishnah, a document decidedly empty of miracle working tales. Green discovers that the Honi tale has a much broader, sociological role than the narrow focus of a legal precedent.

The Honi tale proceeds as Honi agrees to go ahead and pray for rain. The circumstances are a bit more precarious in that it is set during Passover, a time traditionally devoid of rain or the chance of rainfall in Palestine. Honi's prayer demands a greater than average miracle. Prayer, itself, is a key component of the story. Personal "prayer" holds a permanent foothold in the Rabbinic understanding for accessing the divine in one's life. Surprisingly, however, Honi's prayer does not succeed. Honi must resort to drastic measures.

Before moving on to the next step Honi will take, we must first examine a Toseftan version of this same story. In Tosefta Taanit 2:13, Green points out a significant, altered portion of the Honi narrative. In this text, the Honi character is now "one *hasid*" and his prayer, unlike Honi's, does succeed. This Toseftan version is not an abridgement of the Honi narrative, but rather a re-writing with a different message. Whereas the *hasid* first succeeds to bring rain as a result of his prayer, Honi fails by these same means. This distinction between the Honi narrative from the Mishnah and the *hasid* narrative in the Tosefta illumines a sociological aspect with which the *Tannaim* have to wrestle. The *Tannaim* lived in a society in which miracle workers were gaining stature and popularity. The *Tannaim*, as opposed to the *Amoraim* to come, could not afford to entirely limit their abilities to their piety and righteous behavior alone. At some point, the *Tannaim* realized, as is proven by the inclusion of the Honi narrative, that they must claim the ability to demand miracles from God, not only patiently wait for them as they perform acts of piety and devotion to prayer and study. The Toseftan version of the Honi narrative kept to the

general party line of the Tannaim. There were no miracle workers within the Tannaitic tradition who could command divine feats directly. The Mishnaic Honi story reveals a different intention.

Now we continue once again with Green's analysis of the Honi narrative from the Mishnah. Once his prayer is denied, he then draws a circle around himself and demands from God that rain should fall. Here he employs a legal formula. By swearing an oath, he thereby places the onus on God to perform the miracle. Furthermore, once rain begins to fall, Honi is shown not only to be able to control when the rain falls, but also in what quantity. When the rains are little, he demands that they should fall with greater force. When the rains are too great, he demands that they lighten. In the vision of the *Tannaim*, he has the power to perform miracles. His ability to control the amounts of rainfall is not, as Green points out, a main part of the narrative. ".....its purpose evidently is to certify that the rainfall is neither an accident nor a caprice of God, but the direct result of Honi's actions.....To be sure, in conformity with both biblical and Rabbinic theology, the narrative depicts God as the source of the rain and attributes to Honi appropriate supplicatory language, but this in no way mitigates the fact that Honi, not God, dominates and controls the action."[22]

Furthermore, Honi calls himself, when demanding from God that rain should fall and swearing his oath, a *ben bayit*. As Green points out, he is more than just a child; he is the son of the house, the son of God's house. This attributes to him a very special relationship and power with and from God. Above and beyond the righteous individuals referred to in the *Tannaitic* tradition, Honi represents a new metamorphosis of the Rabbinic ideal type. This ideal type still relies upon righteous behavior and intense

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[22] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...," 624.

scholarship for its power, but his ability to perform miracles borders on the magical or fantastic.

> This combination of elements gives the entire account a decidedly magical character, and all the elements of Honi's technique in fact have counterparts in either ancient or Greco-Roman magic. The circle is an "ancient and universal magical symbol." Circles were solar symbols in Hellenistic magic, especially in magical rites practiced by members of the mystery cults. In the magical rainmaking competition with the priests of Baal described in 1 Kings 18, Elijah produces rain in a time of drought by digging a circular trench around the altar on Mount Carmel.[23]

Magic, not mere prayer, is the means to Honi's success. This magic of the Greco-Roman world surrounded the *Tannaim*. In a society where they too were competing for a share of the "cosmic pie," they needed to co-opt the popular sources of the divine. As I discussed earlier, with the destruction of the Temple, access to the divine was no longer available in a certain place at certain prescribed times. Rather, the Pharisees developed the Rabbinic tradition which saw access to the divine in every action and interaction of life. In terms of the Honi tradition, the Rabbis are flirting with, albeit not yet committed to, the magic of the Greco-Roman world. We will see that the Rabbinic mind will soon change, understanding access to the divine, still in the pious terms of the tradition, however with a more imaginative sense of how to execute this access and precisely what it yields.

Through careful analysis, Green establishes that the Honi narrative has undergone considerable redaction to make it conform to early Rabbinism. The magical rite for rain is presented in legal language in line with Rabbinic piety. Initially, Honi turned to prayer, thus establishing his intent of making the request for rain according to Rabbinic tradition.

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[23] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...," 634.

Finally, the concluding part of the story, in which Shimon ben Shetah criticizes Honi for his hubris, simultaneously attacks Honi as well as assures his place within the Rabbinic circle.

Green's analysis touches on an additional issue in the Honi narrative. Rain as the venue by which Honi proves himself both a righteous "Rabbi" and miracle worker must be analyzed as well. As has been mentioned a few times already, the Temple was the center of the divine in Palestine. All things holy were somehow connected to its life-giving power. Palestine, a geographical area in desperate need of regular and expected rainfall in order to survive, would most certainly suggest that rain is the greatest symbol of all of divine reward. With rain, people will live and thrive. Without it, people will die. Acquiring the power of the promise for rain, that had once belonged to the Priestly Cult, is the most significant manifestation of Rabbinic power.

> From this perspective, the inclusion in Mishnah of the account of a popular rain-maker and the transformation of him as a Rabbi would have been one way of documenting the claim that the new religion of the Rabbis has superseded the old religion of the priests. The Rabbinic appropriation of Honi the Circle Maker, then, is part of the larger Rabbinic enterprise: the application of the holy life of the Temple everywhere to all Israel.[24]

Honi the Circle-maker goes through one more important transformation that leads to his official canonization in Rabbinic Literature. As we have seen, Honi, in the Mishnah, has no official credentials except on the basis that he is called by the people as well as able to perform the miracle. The boundaries upon which the *Tannaim* insisted, that pious Rabbinic figures were not magicians or miracle workers, are all but erased within the few

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[24] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...," 641.

hundred years separating the Mishnah and the Talmud. Green states that within these hundreds of years, there is a breakdown of the functional distinctions that separated Rabbi from magician. With the writing of the *Gemarra* in Babylonia, however, Green points out the emergence of a synthetic religious leader. He quotes Neusner from A History of the Jews in Babylonia to make his case.

> The Rabbi was the authority on theology....on the structure and order of the supernatural world. He knew the secret names of God and the secrets of the divine chariot – the heavens – and of creation....The Rabbi was therefore a holy man, overcame the evil impulse which dominated ordinary men, was consequently less liable to suffering, misfortune, and sickness. He knew the proper times and forms of prayer, and could therefore pray more effectively. Moreover, the efficacy of his prayers was heightened by his purity, holiness, and merits, which in turn derived from his knowledge of the secrets of Torah...He could bring rain or cause drought. His blessings brought fertility, and his curses death. He was apt to be visited by angels and to receive communication from them. He could see demons and talk with them and also communicate with the dead. He was an authority on the interpretation of omens and dreams...and the manufacture and use of amulets. He was, in anthropological terms, a medicine man.[25]

Neusner's description of the Rabbi as wonder worker sets the stage for the "ordination" of Honi as Rabbi. In the Mishnah Tannait 3:8 text, Honi is just a man, a divine man, but just a man, nonetheless. His piety is not identified, his devotion to learning is as yet unqualified. The *Amoraim* of the Talmud, however, transformed Honi into one whose being is aligned with the ideals of the *Amoraic* mind.

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[25] Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia, Vol. V* (Leiden, 1969), 253, quoted in Green, *Palestinian Holy Men,* 642.

The Babylonian Talmud rereads Honi in Taanit 23a as a Rabbi whose Miracle working ability is due entirely to his learning and piety. The *Amoraic* transformation begins with Honi's first act of spell casting, when he vows not to move from the circle he has drawn around himself until rains begin to fall. The *Amoraim* add a verse from Habakkuk, 2:1, to remind their audience that Honi, like any good Rabbi, cites a biblical prooftext to support his defiant action. Following the first drops of rain, the people complain to Honi that it appears that these rain droplets are appearing only to free Honi from his Rabbinic oath, his *sh'vuah*. They call him "Rabbi," and he turns to God and demands greater and more powerful rains. Finally, when the people ask Rabbi Honi to pray that the rains may cease, he tells them, "I have received a tradition that they do not pray on account of too much good. Nevertheless, bring me a bull of confession."[26] Honi has received this Rabbinic tradition and yet goes ahead and offers the bull in order to request that the rain will stop. Rabbi Honi is now a direct recipient of Rabbinic precedent and priestly tradition. He is tied to the establishment of the Rabbis and the power of the Temple, both elements entirely missing from the Mishnaic account.

Additionally, there are two more talmudic accounts of Honi that add to his ordination as Rabbi. In the first, also from Taanit 23a, we find a justification for Honi's actions. Honi's hubris still seems to remain in question as to his Rabbinic character.

> R. Nahman b. R. Hisda discoursed, "What message did the members of the Chamber of Hewn Stone send to Honi the Circle-maker?"

The text opens with Job 22:28-30, in which Honi is likened to one whose decrees have been fulfilled by God. It goes on to state that Honi brightened, lifted up, humbled, and delivered an entire generation by his prayer. "The alleged confirmation of the Sanhedrin

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[26] Green, "Palestinian Holy Men...," 641.

serves to condone the legality of Honi's action and certainly transforms him into a pious figure."[27]

Lastly, an additional passage from the same page in the Babylonian Talmud serves to complete the Honi cycle. This tells the story of how Honi fell asleep for 70 years. Upon awakening, he went to the Beit Midrash and listened to the teaching.

> He went to the house of study. He heard the Rabbis say, 'our studies are as clear to us today as they were in the times of Honi the Circle-maker, for when he came to the House of Study he would explain to the Rabbis all their difficulties.

Honi is a *tzaddik* and now he is a *chacham*, completing his transformation from Honi the Magician to Rabbi Honi the pious and wise Circle-maker and commander of rain. While the Mishnah included Honi as a means of co-opting the powers of magic that surrounded the *Tannaim* in their society, the Talmud transforms him. "Rabbinic Judaism dealt with the charisma of miracle-working by making its validity depend on knowledge of Torah and controlled it by making it a function of the Rabbinic system."[28]

With nothing but the remains of the Temple, the *Tannaim* create a vision of their world in which access to the divine is still attainable. By pursuing the study of the Temple rites and culture, as well as striving to live in a manner worthy of a *tzaddik gamur*, the *Tannaim* invoke the power of God and assure God's hands in the life of the Israelite people. Through the few hundred years following the codification of the Mishnah, the *Amoraim* create a metamorphosis of the Rabbinic ideal, as testified by the character of Honi the Circle-maker. Before delving into the actual texts that plumb the Rabbinic image of the *tzaddik gamur*, we must now examine the development and growth of this Rabbinic ideal in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. Foundational to this development of the

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[27] Green, *Palestinian Holy Men*, 645.
[28] Green, *Palestinian Holy Men*, 646.

tzaddik gamur is the role of salvation and how it is guaranteed by the Rabbinic-Talmudic system.

CHAPTER 3

THE RABBINIC IDEAL-TYPE IN THE BABYLONIAN AND PALESTINIAN TALMUDS

The transformation of *Honi haMeaggel* from Honi the Magician in the Mishnah to Rabbi Honi the pious in the Talmud is indicative of great changes. These great changes are reflected in the development of the Rabbinic ideal-type over a period of approximately 300 years, from the codification of the Mishnah, c. 200 CE, until the completion of the Babylonian Talmud, c. 500 CE. The Rabbis of both Talmuds sought to make sense of the Mishnah in their time and place. In so doing, the intentions of the Mishnah were enveloped into the Rabbinic mindset of the late Antique world. Quoting Peter Brown, Jacob Neusner applies the social reality of the late Antique period to that of the Rabbis of the Jerusalem Talmud.

> The Late Antique period has too often been dismissed as an age of disintegration, an age of other-worldliness in which sheltered souls withdrew from the crumbling society around them, to seek another, a Heavenly, city. No impression is further from the truth. Seldom has any period of European history littered the future with so many irremovable institutions. The codes of Roman Law, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the idea of the Christian empire, the monastery – up to the eighteenth century, men as far apart as Scotland and Ethiopia, Madrid and Moscow, still turned to these imposing legacies of the institution building of the Late Antique period for guidance as to how to organize their life in this world.....They were, many of them, the creations of 'new men'; and the central problem of Late Roman religious history is to explain why men came to act out their inner life through suddenly coagulating into new groups, and why they needed to find a new focus in the solidarities and sharp boundaries of the sect, the

> monastery, the orthodox Empire. The sudden flooding of the inner life into social forms: this is what distinguished the Late Antique period, of the third century onwards, from the Classical world.[29]

This sudden flooding of the inner life of the Israelite person into social forms is the world in which the Rabbis of both Talmuds lived. The old structures, defined and informed by the Temple, had been destroyed and forgotten in any real-life ways. Nevertheless, the *Tannaim* created a world with the Mishnah in which access to the divine is not lost as a result of the destruction of the Temple. With the Talmuds, the *Amoraim* drew from a time in which the Temple's symbolic meaning had lost its ability to inspire the Israelites to seek out access to God. As a result, the Rabbi, himself, became the new means by which the Israelites would be inspired to discover this access. By simply following the Rabbi, by acting according to his word and his way, one could learn how to live a life of holiness in the midst of chaos and the complete loss of choosing the destination of one's life.

> The power to change the world, not merely judge or describe it, was the Rabbi's. The power of the Rabbi extended backward to Moses' Scripture, forward to the Messiah. He was the link, his word the guarantee. The lifeless names of the Mishnah can scarcely compete.[30]

The charismatic figure of the Rabbi caught and held the imagination of the Israelites. As Brown teaches in The World of Late Antiquity, the classical world was an impersonal world, in which human beings were merely pawns subject to the greater forces of nature and divinity. The Temple stood for the Jews as the access point of the divine; the individual priest only followed the rites and rituals that then connected this figure to the pawn. "In the fourth and fifth centuries, however, the individual as a "man of power,"

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[29] Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) 247.
[30] Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, 249.

came to dwarf the traditional communities....In the popular imagination, the emergence of the holy man at the expense of the Temple marks the end of the classical world."[31]

In terms of the Babylonian Talmud, Neusner further explains the role of the Rabbi as the central exemplification for living a life of Torah. Above and beyond the power of the Exilarchate, whose rule relied entirely on the support of the Sassanian authorities, the Rabbi was a master of theurgy, imbued with the ability to cause action to ensue from heaven above.

> The Rabbi both presented himself as, and was widely believed to be, a holy man, whose charisma weighed at least as heavily as his learning, and whose learning to begin with encompassed far more than a mere collection of ancient traditions of Scriptural exegesis. What was extraordinary about him was his mastery of a body of theurgical learning, and power over which rendered him exceptionally influential in heaven and earth. .....No phenomenon above or below proved too hard for their understanding. They were neither wizards nor sorcerers, but their wisdom was such that they could interpret natural phenomena and consort with heavenly beings. They were not physicians, but possessed sound knowledge about healing. The substance and effects of their gnosis sufficiently impressed other Jews that they were seen, by virtue of what they *knew*, to have been transformed into extraordinary men.[32]

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[31] Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, quoting Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*.
[32] Jacob Neusner, *The Wonderworking Lawyers of Talmudic Babylonia*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987) 48.

A SHIFTING OF VECTOR

This inner life which Neusner and Brown identify is the crux of this transformation from the Classical to the Late Antique World. For thousands of years, Classical society, of which the Jewish world was a significant part, set its sights on the impersonal monument or edifice that forced respect and belief upon those who helped to build it and keep it strong. The direction, the vector, shifts in Late Antiquity from the outwardly focused attention to these monuments of stone to an inwardly focused attention to the monument of flesh, the human being. With the destruction of the Temple for the Jews, and the great shifts in stability in the Roman Empire as well, the Truths of old no longer seemed to ring true. "What changed in no uncertain manner....between the second and fifth centuries, were men's views as to where exactly this "divine power" was to be found on earth, and consequently, on what terms access to it could be achieved..."[33] This underlies the shifts in vector from the Mishnah to both Talmuds. From this viewpoint, while the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, it did not truly meet its demise until the *Amoraim* sought to alter its Mishnaic manifestation. The Mishnah held that one could still access the divine in as accurate and powerful of ways as the actual sacrifices at the Temple. This *Amoraic* meeting with the Mishnah, hundreds of years later, denied the Temple and its rites that had previously promised access. Access to the divine could now only be found for the human being from inside out, not outside in.

> If the Mishnah speaks mainly of the Temple, on the one side, and public life, on the other, the Talmud addresses an inner world of privacy, both in petty transactions and in peoples' dreams and fears, to which the Mishnah is oblivious. So, in line with Brown's conception, the movement from the Mishnah to the Talmud belies the formal design of the Talmud as a mere commentary to, and extension of, the

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[33] Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, quoting Peter Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*.

> Mishnah. In fact, what takes shape is a new construction, in literary and conceptual terms alike, built with the bricks and mortar of the old. The Talmud is indeed an amplification and extension of the Mishnah. But the net result of the Talmud is a kind of Judaism asymmetrical with the Mishnah, off center, or as Brown says, 'reflections of a building in troubled water.'[34]

THE NEW ACCESS – A GUARANTOR FOR SALVATION

As the Rabbinic world created these new foundations from the rubble of old, the prime search for redemption remained the continuous common denominator. How can Israel, without the structures held up by the Temple, find salvation in this chaos of the present?

> What we want to know is how the Talmud explains its purpose, tells us what will happen if the laws are kept and the Rabbis obeyed. The answer to this question of sanctions lies in the Talmud's theory of salvation. For its ultimate concern is to provide Israel with an account of how to overcome the unsatisfactory circumstances of an unredeemed present, so as to accomplish the movement from here to the much-desired future.[35]

This movement from an unredeemed present to a much-desired future undergirds both Talmuds as each community searched for meaning in their time and place. Neusner points out that the Jerusalem Talmud linked salvation directly to the keeping of the law. "Keeping the law in the right way is represented as not merely right or expedient. It is the way to bring the Messiah, the son of David."[36] In one example in which the Jerusalem Talmud exemplifies this access to salvation, we need only look at Taanit 1:1. Here, R. Levi declares, "If Israel would keep a single Sabbath in the proper way, forthwith the son

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[34] Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, 250.
[35] Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, 198.
[36] Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, 199.

of David would come." In a world where the classical moorings of tradition are ripped away, the promise of a better world no longer lies in God's or the gods' hands. Rather, it is in the hands of the people, who cannot be oppressed in any real ways as long as they act in faith with the spiritual powers already available to them.

Nevertheless, the power to bring on the Messiah is not entirely one of immediacy. The statement of R. Levi above is only operative if and when the Sabbath is observed properly by all Israelites. In a world of assimilation and societal fracture, the *Amoraim* knew very well that this would not take place in any one moment. Rather, the Rabbis of the Talmud introduced the concept of the arrival of the Messiah as a result of fulfilling the *mitzvot* over the long term.

> What this means is that, between the conclusion of the Mishnah and the closure of the Talmud, room had been found for the Messianic hope, expressed in images not revised to conform to the definitive and distinctive traits of the Talmud itself.....The "Rabbinization" of the messianic hope required its neutralization, so that peoples' hopes would not be raised prematurely, with consequent, incalculable damage to the defeated nation. This meant, first of all, that Rabbis insisted the Messiah would come in a process extending over a long period of time, thus not imposing a caesura upon the existence of the nation and disrupting its ordinary life. Accordingly, the Yerushalmi treats the Messianic hope as something gradual, to be worked toward, not a sudden cataclysmic event. That conception was fully in accord with the notion that the everyday deeds of people formed a pattern continuous with the salvific history of Israel.[37]

This idea is exemplified in the Yerushalmi in Yoma 3:2. Here R. Hiyya the Elder and R. Simeon b. Halapta were walking and saw the light of the morning star breaking forth. R.

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[37] Neusner, *Judaism in Society*, 201.

Hiyya said: "This is what the redemption of Israel is like - at first, little by little, but in the end it will go along and burst into light."

MEANWHILE IN BABYLONIA.....

The emergence of the Babylonian Talmud takes place in a significantly different societal context than that of the Palestinian Talmud. While Palestinian Judaism dwells under the looming presence of the Temple ruins, Babylonian Jewry had been established for hundreds of years completely absent from this physical legacy. Moreover, Babylonian Jewry was far less centralized then in Palestine, at least in so far as the role of the Rabbi was concerned. Perhaps the greatest difference between the two is the fact that its host officially recognized Babylonian Jewry as not only a source of levies, but in addition, a partner in the management of the Empire.

> As a party, the Rabbinate could not easily be compared to the inchoate masses upon which it worked, or to the subordinated Exilarchate, or to the imperial government. The people were not similarly coherent, the imperial government not so purposefully engaged or single-minded, the exilarch not equivalently motivated. Sporadic persecution would not destroy them, nor was such persecution undertaken to begin with. Occasional setbacks would not deter them. All the while, as the government ignored them, and the exilarch made use of some, perhaps many, of them, for its own purposes, the Rabbinate continued to seek every possible means to win over to its particular viewpoint on politics and theology whomever it could, to educate in its schools, and through the exemplars it sent out from them, as many people as possible.[38]

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[38]Neusner, *Wonderworking Lawyers*, 43.

The Rabbi of the Babylonian Talmud lived in a more protected world than that of his Jerusalem counterpart. Nonetheless, his task was just as great - the building of a new Judaism whose task was to inspire others to keep the *mitzvot* of Torah, as interpreted by the *Amoraim*, in order to create their own access to the divine and a path to salvation. Living in exile, the Rabbis of Babylonia seek to discover holy time in unholy space. The synagogue and the Torah scroll itself lend sacredness to these unholy spaces within this land of exile in order to build a solid foundation of faith based on the Talmudic system.

> The varied and decentralized loci of the sacred which the Holy Man, among other persons and institutions made available better suited a dispersion. Here the cosmos remained only partly ordered, fraught with ambiguity and in need above all of exorcism. Thus that world had spread throughout its regions, links between heaven and earth at any of which one might have access to the sacred.[39]

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Living in the Greco-Roman diaspora, the structures of old are no longer operable. As noted above, the Talmuds radically depart from the great institutions of old and embark on a journey into the human spirit. Under the brunt of oppression, be it civil or merely financial, Israel must rediscover itself or die. To infer that studying the sacrifices, praying and performing acts of loving kindness will be seen in God's eyes as just as efficacious as the sacrifices of old is tantamount to blasphemy in the ancient eyes of tradition. But this is precisely what the Rabbis in both Babylonia and Palestine do! They suggest that what God truly cares about is the spiritual purity of the heart, not the physical purity of the hands of the priests. But we must remember that to do this, to embark on this world of

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[39]Jack Lightstone, "Magicians, Holy Men and Rabbis: Patterns of the Sacred in Late Antique Judaism" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Studies in Judaism and Its Greco-Roman Context*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 145.

revolutionary ideas and a yet-to-be-proven theology, is a frightening venture indeed. It must be taken with much precaution, eternally tethered to the edifying biblical text. Stepping back a few hundred years, Jack Lightstone describes this vast transformation from a physical expression of sacrifice to a spiritual one.

> What all non-exorcists appear to have in common is an orientation to the Temple, its system of cleanness and rites of purification. The Sadducees were primarily Temple based by all accounts. Pharisees extended that Temple system to their daily lives, and in particular to their table fellowship. They likened themselves to priests, their table to the altar, their food to the sacrifices. Hence, Pharisees demanded of themselves the maintenance of purity with regard to meals normally incumbent upon priests and Israelites in the sanctuary. These rites of purification and avoidance of uncleanness, normally a concern only for persons about to visit the Temple, the Pharisees performed regularly as part of their daily regimen. The early Rabbis, although they lived when the Temple no longer functioned, are not odd men out. As Neusner has shown, the reaction of early Rabbinism as depicted in the Mishnah to the destruction of the Temple, was to insist that nothing had changed....The very editing of the Mishnah, and with it the bringing to closure of Mishnaic law, may well reflect this loss of faith. And it is after that abandonment, it would appear, that Rabbis, among other things, enter the world of the demons.[40]

No longer safe from the demons that at once had haunted others, the Rabbis face their greatest demons of all, those oppressors who have stolen away their access to the divine. In building the new roads, there are new signs, new speed limits, new entrances and exits. The Rabbis of Babylonia and Palestine embark on this journey knowing full well that the only catalysts to discovering the divine in life are their actions, their thoughts and the way they speak to God.

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[40]Jack Lightstone, *The Commerce of the Sacred; Mediation of the Divine Among Jews in the Greco-Roman Daispora* (Scholars Press, 1984) 52.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMAGE OF THE *TZADDIK GAMUR*, THE WHOLLY RIGHTEOUS INDIVIDUAL

This new-world of *mitzvot* of the heart, the hand, and the head required a much convincing of the masses of Jewish population to follow and pursue. If they were to succeed, the Rabbis, the creators of the Judaism that has lasted into our Modern Age, would not only be required to philosophically and theologically argue their case in a cogent manner, but they would also need to become personal examples of this behavior. New access to salvation and the divine would require the eager search for them in every aspect of everyday life. Therefore, above and beyond the interpreted words of the *mitzvot*, the Rabbis themselves had to model the prescribed behavior.

> The Rabbis created emphasis on law for all people to follow. In light of their view of history, we can understand the reason: it was through the complete realization of the Torah in Israel's life that they intended to bring the redemption. The achievement of justice and morality, the protection of the rights of the poor and weak, the establishment of a serene and decent public order - these were crucially significant, because through them, as much as through prayer, Israel would carry out its side of the Messianic contract. Prayer, study, and fulfillment of Torah as a whole therefore represented in the end a very rigorous response to the events of the age, and from the Rabbis' point of view, embodied more powerful instruments than any other for the achievement of the better age for which Jews longed. Prayer, study, deeds - these three, but of greatest weight and consequence was the legal and judicial enterprise...The great number of Jews must have been convinced of the correctness of the Rabbis' view that only through a grand reformation would

> redemption be reached. And if they accepted the Rabbi's definition for substantial parts of the needed reformation, or at least, conformed to it, the reason may well have been that they hoped that by doing so, they would see the realization of the ancient hope of Israel, the time their lips would tire from saying, "Enough!"[41]

One of the most significant modes by which the Israelite was expected to behave in his search for salvation was his moral behavior. The rabbinic view of *tzedek* here plays a key role. The way one prays, how one treats others, how one thinks of himself, must all be approached, according to this rabbinic ideal, with the purest possible intention. To live within this most moral framework while yet challenged by human weakness, is the achievement of those individuals the Rabbis deemed, in theory and in practice, *tzaddik gamur*. The Babylonian Talmud engenders this term with meaning as the *Amoraim* argue and debate over the individual whose actions and thoughts deserve such a meritorious honor. In theory, the term *tzaddik gamur* is employed within the moral rubrics of honesty, humility, a dedication to aiding the sick and the poor, to learning, and to fulfilling *mitzvot*. Rarely is the term used in a practical sense to actually identify a particular sage as a *tzaddik gamur*. This is not to say that the mode of living to which the Rabbis swear loyalty was failed by them, but rather, the measuring bar of morality was raised so high that none but a certain few were actually honored with the title.

For the vast majority of individuals cited in the Talmud then, why is it so seemingly impossible to be honored as a *tzaddik gamur*? The following text analyses will seek to answer this question by examining the texts from the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, as well as Midrash Rabbah, that actually employ the term *tzaddik gamur*. I will identify patterns of behavior that suggest that the *Amoraim* are most often creating and illustrating

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[41]Neusner, *Wonderworking Lawyers*, 36.

a rabbinic ideal-type rather than an actual person that one could realistically become. This is not to suggest that the *Amoraim* did not imagine the reality of this individual. On the contrary, one could argue that amongst the Rabbis of the Talmuds, there are many more who might have been deemed *tzaddikim gamurim*. However, it is interesting to note, that one of the primary definitions of the *tzaddik gamur* is one who has an ever patient and humble nature. Therefore, this rabbinic ideal-type is kept, most often as an ideal towards which to strive. For if it were a title given out continually to the Rabbis, the aspect of the *tzaddik gamur*, of remaining humble and true, might be challenged too greatly for the individual to fulfill it.

With this brief introduction to the actual term *tzaddik gamur*, we will now delve into the series of instances in which it is found. Further, as the texts reveal the meaning and intention of the Rabbis in employing this term in mostly theoretical ways, we will note that of primary concern is the real, hands-on ways with which each Israelite should approach the living of each and every day. Having come to fruition in the midst of chaos and powerlessness, this body of texts that represents the flowering of rabbinic Judaism still engages the reader to this day with ideals, concepts and an understanding of the meaning of our lives that is wholeheartedly eternal. We will now begin our search into these texts.

IDENTIFYING THE *TZADDIK GAMUR*

The first series of texts answers two questions that speak to the issue of defining and identifying the *tzaddik gamur*. The first question is, "Who is the *tzaddik gamur*?" and the second is "How does one become a *tzaddik gamur*?"

Passage from Berachot 61b:

> It has been taught: R. Jose the Galilean says: The righteous are swayed by their good inclination, as it says, "My heart is wounded within me" (Psalms 109:22). The wicked are swayed by their evil inclination, as it says, "Transgression speaks to the wicked within his heart, there is no fear of God before his eyes" (Psalms 36:2). Average people are swayed by both inclinations, as it says, "For he stands at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those who would judge his soul" (Psalms 109:31). Raba said: People such as we are of the average. Said Abaye to him: The Master gives no one a chance to live! Raba further said: The world was created only for either the totally wicked or the totally righteous. Raba said: Let a man know concerning himself whether he is completely righteous or not! Rab said: The world was created only for Ahab son of Omri and for R. Hanina b. Dosa; for Ahab son of Omri this world, and for R. Hanina b. Dosa the future world.

This text begins with the statement from R. Jose the Galilean that the righteous are judged (*shuftan*) by their good inclination, *yetzer tov*. The proof text for this statement comes from Psalms 109:22 in which the lowly figure asks God for mercy upon him in the sight of his enemies. He claims, "My heart is wounded within me," meaning that he has closed off all desires that would lead him to the unrighteous path. (This citation is connected to the previous discussion in the Gemarra regarding the roles of the different body parts.) This citation from Psalms supports the statement that the righteous follow their *yetzer tov* in order to keep on the correct path. The text continues to explain that the wicked are judged (*shuftan*) by their evil inclination, *yetzer ra*. The proof text for this comes from Psalms 36:2 in which the speaker tells of the wicked and how he is able to act wickedly, "Transgression speaks to the wicked within his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes." The connection to body parts and their roles is continued here. Having described the righteous and the wicked, there are now the average with which to contend.

Returning to Psalm 109:31, the text states, "For he stands at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those who would condemn him to death." This is where the average struggle according to the Rabbis, with God on one's right side and evil forces on one's left.

Raba now steps up and claims, "People such as we are of the average." Abaye, who knows and recognizes Raba's "saintliness," is appalled and declares that if Raba is "of the average," the Master (Raba) therefore gives no one the chance to live. This is because whoever would be called righteous or average, once this statement has been made, would be at least equal to if not greater than Raba, a truly absurd notion. If this were true, if Raba was "of the average," then anyone other than he, in Abaye's estimation, would therefore be necessarily wicked. Raba now must respond. First, he fires back that the world was created for either the totally righteous (*tzaddik gamur*) or for the totally wicked *(rasha gamur*). Accordingly, this world was created for the enjoyment of the wicked; the world to come was created for the enjoyment of the righteous. Furthermore, the ever-humble Raba claims that it is not righteous for anyone to judge the righteousness or wickedness of another. Rather, he claims, "Let a man know concerning himself whether he is completely righteous or not." The text concludes with the statement further proving Raba's point, "The world was created only for [the evil] Ahab and [the righteous] Hanina ben Dosa, Ahab for this world, Hanina ben Dosa for the World to come.

It would seem that Raba is making a consciously exaggerated statement. To suggest that this world has no place for the righteous is to suggest that truthfully, there is no way of knowing the kind of life one has led until the end of one's life at the moment of one's divine judgement. In the meantime, for Raba to claim that he is anything other than "of the average" would be tantamount to denying the true righteous character of his being. The role of humility as a key to the definition of the truly righteous will appear later in

texts that base the judgement of one's character entirely in terms of one's level of personal humility.

The key to Raba's statement lies in his response to Abaye. When Raba states that no one can ever judge another's place in the world, in so doing he remains the true *tzaddik* that the Talmud knows him to be. This first text understands that the image of the *tzaddik gamur* is difficult to identify. As Raba's statement implies, the *tzaddik gamur* is a persona to which one must aim in his every day life, and yet remain significantly humble enough not to capitalize upon his own "saintliness." As soon as one embarks upon the task of identifying the *tzaddik gamur* and his lot in the world to come, one engages in judgement that is not becoming of this rabbinic ideal-type.

Passage from Pesachim 8b:

This passage centers on a discussion of the requirements for searching certain small buildings such as a fish pantry, or a salt and wax shed for *hametz* to prepare for Pesach. Eventually, the discussion comes around to the issue of whether one must perform any *mitzvah* even if there is potential danger in doing it. For instance, the Rabbis here ask if one is required to place his hands into the holes in the wall of a shed to check for *hametz* if there is a potential for a snakebite. The text continues from here:

> But R. Eleazar said: Those sent to perform a religious duty do not suffer harm? Said R. Ashi: He may have lost a needle and come to look for it. But is it not regarded as the fulfillment of a religious duty in such a case? Surely it was taught: If one declares, 'This sela be for charity in order that my son may live,' or, 'that I may merit the future world,' he is completely righteous (*tzaddik gamur*). Perhaps after he searched for the leaven, he will come to look for it.

In a discussion of the requirements of *bedikat hametz*, the Rabbis discuss certain kinds of places that do not need to be searched: fish pantries, sheds, holes in walls due to potential danger, and cases in which the walls of a shed have fallen. If the walls have fallen, then the shed is considered as "removed of leaven." Then the question comes to the searcher's intention. If he had lost a needle and had come to look for it and happened to find *hametz*, the question is, "Is this regarded as the fulfillment of a religious duty?" The answer is yes and the text proves it in light of an issue with a *tzaddik gamur*. Here, actually it does not seem to be the issue that there is a person who is a *tzaddik gamur* but rather that the person's actions make him a *tzaddik gamur* in that one instance. "If one declares, 'this sela is for charity in order that my son may live,' or 'that I may merit the future world,' he is a *tzaddik gamur, harei zeh tzaddik gamur*.

This text expands the definition of the term *tzaddik gamur*, in that being a *tzaddik gamur* may not be a life time description of all the actions of an individual, but a description of individual actions performed by someone. Furthermore, becoming a *tzaddik gamur* according to a lifetime of action or merely a particular instance, may not have to be, as this text points out, a matter of intention.

Bava Bathra 10b provides us with an interesting spin on this text from Pesachim 8b. In further attempting to identify the *tzaddik gamur*, this discussion follows the analysis of the verse from Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but the kindness of the nations is sin." The Rabbis decipher this to mean that the nation exalted by righteousness is Israel, while the kindness of the nations is all for naught. While Israel's commitment to righteous behavior is fueled with the correct intention, the nations perform acts of kindness simply to "magnify themselves." Thus, the same passage from Pesachim 8b is presented, "If one declares, 'This sela be for charity in order that my son may live,' or, 'that I may merit the future world,' he is completely righteous. It is asked why this too does not apply to the

"nations." The Rabbis respond that this ruling applies to the Israelite, not the inherently wicked pagan. Additionally, this exact usage is found once again in another text, Rosh Hashanah 4a. Here, the question is raised regarding the performance of sacrifices to Adonai by the peoples themselves. In this text, as in Bava Batra 10b, the talmudic ruling that one may still merit the future world even if one's intentions are not true, is used initially to suggest that perhaps the nations can perform good acts in order to receive a place in the world to come. Once again we see a repeat of the same logic; this is allowed for an Israelite, but not for a pagan.

Becoming a *tzaddik gamur* is projected over and over onto the screen of life as an ideal that one may achieve after a lifetime commitment to righteousness or even due to one simple incident. These texts that employ the term *tzaddik gamur* return us to the Rabbis' search for the access to salvation. That righteousness plays such a critical role in the creation of this path is indicative of the Rabbis' belief that the final, real power over one's destiny has nothing to do with one's power, money or stature, but rather one's commitment to living in a righteous way. In these texts from Pesachim 8b, Bava Batra 10b and Rosh Hashanah 4a, the *tzaddik gamur*, while being wholly righteous, is still not perfect and here he is yet given the benefit of the doubt.

Passage from Berachot 7a:

As prelude to this next text that actually defines the identity of the *tzaddik gamur*, as well as the *rasha gamur*, the *Amoraim* are discussing the kindness of God. Throughout the first part of Berachot 7a, the discussion ensues regarding how one can explain that God remains kind and just to His people Israel. We learn that Adonai prays that His Mercy will suppress His anger so that Adonai does not attack and destroy His "sinning" people. This prayer for mercy over anger is a wonderful introduction to the rabbinic mindset as the Rabbis seek to explain the apparently undeserved kindness engendered by Adonai. This

approach to understanding one's role as who strives to become a *tzaddik gamur* is crucial to the dedication to a patient and humble nature. In light of this dynamic that would seem at times to benefit Israel and at times to benefit its enemies, the Rabbis now engage the term *tzaddik gamur* once again to analyze the chaotic world in which they live. Following this discussion over God's mercy, the Rabbis now shift subjects and attempt to define the *tzaddik gamur* and the *rasha gamur*.

In this passage, Berachot 7a, the Rabbis set for Moses the task of asking God the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Of course, they do not leave out the other side of the equation, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" In searching for a pattern of action, thought and intention, the Rabbis have to discover a logic that supports their belief in the importance of being earnest, or at least a *tzaddik gamur*. Therefore, they teach that Moses, according to the Rabbis, asked three things of God. He asked that the *Shechinah* would rest upon Israel; he asked that the *Shechinah* would not rest upon the idolaters. Lastly, Moses asked God to show him God's ways. These ways which Moses sought to understand are centered about the following discussion from the text:

> Moses said before Him: Lord of the Universe, why is it that some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity? He replied to him: Moses, the righteous man who prospers is the righteous man, the son of a righteous man; the righteous man who is in adversity is a righteous man, the son of a wicked man. The wicked man who prospers is a wicked man, the son of a righteous man; the wicked man who is in adversity is a wicked man, the son of a wicked man. The Master said above: 'The righteous man who prospers is a righteous man son of a righteous man; the righteous man who is in adversity is a righteous man son of a wicked man'. But this is not so! For, one verse says: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children"

> (Exodus 34:7), and another verse says: "Neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers" (Deut. 24:16). A contradiction was pointed out between these two verses, and the answer was given that there is no contradiction. The one verse deals with children who continue in the same course as their fathers, and the other verse deals with children who do not continue in the course of their fathers! You must therefore say that the Lord said thus to Moses: A righteous man who prospers is a perfectly righteous man (*tzaddik gamur*); the righteous man who is in adversity is not a perfectly righteous man (*tzaddik gamur*). The wicked man who prospers is not a perfectly wicked man (*rasha gamur*); the wicked man who is in adversity is a perfectly wicked man (*rasha gamur*). Now this saying of R. Johanan is in opposition to the saying of R. Meir. For R. Meir said: only two requests were granted to him, and one was not granted to him. For it is said: "And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious," although he may not deserve it, "And I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19), although he may not deserve it.

This text describes details regarding the relationship between God and the Jewish people. God's anger is kept in check and this is out of mercy for God's people. R. Johanan states that there were three things that Móses asked of God and they were granted to him. He asks that God rests upon Israel, that God does not rest upon the idolaters, and he asked for God to show him His ways. In light of this last request, Moses asks, "Why is it that some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity?"

God responds with four rules of thumb. In the Rabbis' minds, this is their structure for making sense of this search for the *tzaddik gamur*. 1. The righteous man who prospers is the righteous man son of a righteous man. 2. The righteous man who suffers is the righteous man son of a wicked man. 3. The wicked man who prospers is the wicked man

son of a righteous man. 4. The wicked man who suffers is the wicked man son of a wicked man.

Not all the Rabbis agree, however, with this *quid pro quo* understanding of divine justice and punishment. These statements are then challenged in light of biblical verses which promise that God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children and that children shall not be put to death on account of their fathers' sins. According to the first authorities in this argument, there is no contradiction. The first verse (Exodus 34:7) deals with children who continue in the same path as their fathers; the second verse (Deut. 24:16) regards children who do not continue in the same path as their fathers.

The argument now concludes with a compromise for understanding the process by which one is identified as a *tzaddik gamur* or a *rasha gamur*. This coupling of the two terms is additionally indicative of the Rabbis' sense of the balance of God's justice. In this pursuit of the path of the totally blameless and the path of the totally guilty, the Rabbis can create a path for the average person which lies somewhere in between.

In this last concession in this text to an understanding of these terms, the Rabbis now lay out a new but different logic than the one with which the argument begins. In the first part of the text, the terms *tzaddik gamur* and *rasha gamur* are defined by one's family lines as well as one's relative well-being in this life. This latter part sets out a compromise that removes the family lines from the picture and seeks to understand one's status simply in terms of one's behavior and relative well being in this life. Therefore, a *tzaddik gamur*, in this context, is a righteous man who prospers; one not identified as a *tzaddik gamur* is a righteous man who suffers. Additionally, a *rasha gamur* is a wicked man who suffers; one not identified as a *rasha gamur* is a wicked man who prospers. Divine justice and

punishment has once again found a solid path in the imagination of the Rabbinic self-image.

These latter descriptions of the *tzaddik gamur* and the *rasha gamur* focus the terms on an understanding of those people who fall into these categories in terms of their lifetime actions. The Rabbis here understand that a man's state in this life is a direct sign of both his personal actions in the latter argument as well as his lineage in the former. The issue of how one is identified by these extremely weighty markers is one that will envelop a great deal of discussion among the Rabbis in this regard. Further on, we will see that there is a dynamic played out, at times obviously and at other times more subtly, between discovering a *tzaddik gamur* or a *rasha gamur* by way of human intuition or divine proclamation.

Passage from Kiddushin 40b.

This text begins with the concluding discussion of the Gemarra at the top of the page. Here, the Rabbis are discussing the merit and the detriment of one single good or bad act for the world and for oneself. Based on a verse from Ecclesiastes, 9:18, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good," the Rabbis place the fate of the world and an individual in the hands of just one act. They profess that a scale that weighs according to the weighty individual acts of each person judges all people. Therefore, the Rabbis here conclude that the Ecclesiastes verse teaches that one act for the good can tip the scales in that direction as well as one act for the bad in the other. These acts effect not only the fate of the individual *rasha* or *tzaddik*, but have implications for the fate of the entire world. This is a greatly empowering vision of the individual's role. This argument regarding the perilous or beneficent effect of the individual now becomes the prelude to the final piece of this Gemarra. Here, the Rabbis now wish to understand

the images of the *tzaddik gamur* and the *rasha gamur* in this light. This text from Kiddushin 40b is as follows:

> R. Simeon b. Yohai said: Even if he is perfectly righteous (*tzaddik gamur*) all his life but rebels at the end, he destroys his former good deeds, for it is said: "The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression" (Ezekiel 33:12). And even if one is completely wicked (*rasha gamur*) all his life but repents at the end, he is not reproached with his wickedness, for it is said, "And as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turns from his wickedness" (Ezekiel 33:12.) Yet let it be regarded as half transgressions and half-meritorious deeds! Said Resh Lakish: It means that he regretted his former deeds.

In light of the previous argument in which the acts of one individual are seen as single incidents, R. Simeon b. Yohai presents us with a more scathing threat to the *tzaddik gamur*. It is possible for the *rasha gamur*, the one totally guilty throughout his life, to repent and thus be saved. As the Ezekiel quote continues to describe, this type of *teshuvah* must not only represent one's promise to make *teshuvah* but this *rasha gamur* must make amends for all his transgressions, returning all that he had stolen, etc. Ironically, if the *tzaddik gamur* turns against his ways, his past is not accounted to him on his behalf. At the end of this passage, the Talmud wishes to state that this *tzaddik gamur* who rebels at the end does not become totally guilty, but rather half good and half bad according to his deeds. Resh Lakish, however, disagrees, and claims that this individual who had lived his life as a *tzaddik gamur* and then abandoned this principled life, could only always have been a completely wicked person who regrets his former righteous deeds.

The new Mishnah here follows on the conclusion of this previous passage. The Mishnah states, "He who is versed in Bible, Mishnah, and *derekh eretz* will not quickly sin, for it is said, "And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12). In the eyes of the *Tannaim*, this commitment to a life of good deeds stood as the third strand of the connecting cord of life. Without this, the cord would unravel and so too the individual who represents it. Following this Mishnah is the Gemarrah that discusses to what the righteous and the wicked should be compared in this world. The righteous should be compared to a tree standing wholly in a clean place, but whose bough overhangs to a place of uncleanness. When the bough is lopped off, it stands entirely in a place of cleanness. "Thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, brings suffering upon the righteous of the world in order that they may inherit the future world." The wicked, on the other hand, should be compared to a tree standing wholly in a place of uncleanness, but whose branch overhangs a place of cleanness. When the bough is lopped off, it stands entirely in a place of uncleanness. "Thus the Holy One, blessed be he, makes them prosper in this world in order to destroy and consign them to the nethermost rung."

This text continues the debate on how one is judged to be a *tzaddik gamur*, a continual issue for the Rabbis in light of this terminology. Is one truly judged at the end of his life based on the majority of one's acts, good or evil? Or is it ordained in heaven? Or is one's status as *tzaddik gamur* so tenuous, as Simeon ben Yohai insists, that one bad act can reverse all the good one has done and conversely, one good act can reverse all the bad one has done? And finally, how does one rectify the fact that there are those righteous who do indeed suffer in this world and there are those considered evil who are indeed blessed? In the end, there is a divine judgment that will finally set the record straight. One might argue that if the righteous appear punished and the wicked appear blessed, then the Rabbis have it all wrong. But the Rabbis are making here a twofold proposition. Firstly, each individual must strive to become a *tzaddik gamur* and suffer the potential consequences in

this world. Secondly, while one may suffer in this world amidst one's acts of total righteousness, in the world to come, the *tzaddik gamur* and the *rasha gamur* will receive their just desserts.

Passage from Moed Katan 28a

Unlike the previous text, this text very much challenges the presumption that one has the power to control his destiny with his acts. Directly preceding this text is a detailed listing of different kinds of deaths judged according to the particular age or manner by which each person dies. This means that if one dies suddenly, it is understood that this person was "snatched away, *meitah chatufah*." If however, the person is ill one day and then dies, it is understood that he was "hustled away, *meitah d'chufah*." Additionally, if one dies at the age of fifty, this is understood as death by *karet*, whereas if one dies at the age of eighty, this is the death of a vigorous old man. Thus, according to these statements, it is possible to judge the character of one's life according to the manner and age at which one dies, the ultimate day of judgment. As referred to above, the Rabbis' safeguard in all their philosophy is that in the end, in the world to come, the righteous and the wicked will be known according to the final accounting of their souls. Immediately following this detailed accounting of the dead, a story now comes to teach how the above is precisely true.

Raba now states: "Length of life, children and sustenance depend not on merit but rather on *mazzal*." (Raba, who himself is considered one of the most pious and righteous of all the Rabbis, is a shocking figure to be quoted as such.) Nonetheless, his comment from Berachot 61b that he is "of the average" fits well with the above statement. If he does not recognize any ulterior motive for acting righteously, or does not consider himself anything more than average, he can maintain his intention to perform deeds for their own sake or for the sake of God's Torah. Now that Raba has declared that ultimately, one's success in

life has only to do with one's *mazzal*, Raba explains how this plays itself out in one particular story of two saintly Rabbis. While this text does not employ the term *tzaddik gamur*, it does call these Rabbis, Rabbah and R. Hisda, "*rabanan tzaddikei havo*, these saintly Rabbis." This short *aggadah* from Moed Katan 28a is as follows:

> Raba said: Length of life, children and sustenance depend not on merit but rather on mazzal. Take Rabbah and R. Hisda. Both were saintly Rabbis; one master prayed for rain and it came, the other master prayed for rain and it came. R. Hisda lived to the age of ninety-two, Rabbah only lived to the age of forty. In R. Hisda's house there were held sixty marriage feasts, at Rabbah's house there were sixty bereavements. At R. Hisda's house there was the purest wheaten bread for dogs, and it went to waste; at Rabbah's house there was barley bread for human beings and that not to be had. This too, Raba said: These three requests I made of Heaven; two were granted me and one was not. I prayed for the scholarship of R. Huna and the wealth of R. Hisda which were granted me; but the modest disposition of Rabbah son of R. Huna, that was not granted me.

Rabbah and R. Hisda as described above are *rabanan tzaddikei havo*. They were both pious Rabbis who yet lived very different lives, one blessed, the other cursed. As we see in this text, despite their apparent Holy Man powers as rainmakers, Rabbah was greatly blessed while R. Hisda was greatly cursed. It would seem that Raba was proven correct that despite one's merits in this world, one may very well suffer. We have thusly seen this in previous texts that seek to understand the *tzaddik* who suffers. A caveat, however, is added here that seems to undermine Raba's declaration. At the end of the passage, it is taught that Raba prayed for three things from heaven. The first two were the scholarship of R. Huna and the wealth of R. Hisda. These two were fulfilled. But he also prayed for the "modest disposition" of Rabbah, son of R. Huna, and this was not granted. So, despite one's *mazzal*, it would appear that even in this instance, Rabbah is doomed not by

mazzal but rather his own hubris which he does not keep in check, as is expected of a *tzaddik gamur*.

Humility is a significant aspect of the *tzaddik gamur* who must strive beyond the normal human inclinations to be impressed with his own powers and success. As we continue to see, humility must accompany great acts and great prayer or in the end, it would seem, the *tzaddik gamur* has forgotten for whom or for what he dedicates himself and his life. God is the ultimate *tzaddik gamur*, according to the Rabbis, and it is God who teaches these ways through Torah and Talmud. Just as Raba must insist that he is "of the average," despite his obvious saintliness, so too must every individual Holy Man. This is so he does not forget that the access to holiness made available to one who follows in this path, is held open by means of one's acts, prayers, or even by one's even thoughts.

Passage from Bamidbar Rabbah 10:1

This midrash opens with the verse from Bamidbar 6:2, "When either a man or woman shall pronounce a special vow of a Nazir to separate themselves to the Lord." Seeking meaning of this verse, the Rabbis read it in relation to one from Shir HaShirim 5:15 in a woman's description of her lover. Describing the man's physical beauty, the text teaches that *shokav*, "his legs," refers here to the universe that God created with longing. Connecting *teshukato*, "longing," by way of a shared root, to *shokav*, "shoulder," the Rabbis teach that God longed to create the universe. The text continues drawing parallels between verses from Genesis 1 and Song of Songs 5 until it yields that there are three things from which all was created: 1) wisdom from which was created the earth; 2) understanding, from which was created the heavens; and 3) knowledge, from which was created the depths. The text now explains the yielding of wisdom and understanding, but what is of import to the discussion at hand regarding the *tzaddik gamur* emerges from the yielding of knowledge. Here, knowledge, one of the three things from which all else was created, is

the recognition of one's Creator. In the Rabbis' words, *da'at zeh ha-ma-chir et bor-o*. The proof text for this is derived from Hosea in which it is stated, "Because there is no knowledge, *da-at*, of God in the land." Jeremiah 9:23 is then quoted, "He understands and knows Me," *has-kel v-ya-du-a o-tee*. Finally, the Rabbis identify the one who has come to understand and know God as the penitent, the *baal teshuvah*, who is thusly called righteous, *tzaddik*, drawing from Psalms 92:13 in which the righteous is likened to a palm tree that flourishes, *tzaddik ka-tamar yif-rach*.

Here, the point is made that this is all about the *rasha* who turns away from his wickedness and seeks God, as taught in Amos 5:4, "Seek Me and live." Furthermore, as taught in Ezekiel 33:12, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live," the one who knows God can surely be the one who abandons his wickedness. Simeon b. Lakish challenges that if the evil one repents, it is only the good works he performs for which he has a good fate bestowed upon him. Here, we learn about how the concept of *tzaddik gamur* plays into this discussion.

> R. Simeon ben Yohai taught: Behold if a man was thoroughly wicked (*rasha gamur*) all his life and in the end he became thoroughly righteous (*tzaddik gamur*), of such a man, Scripture teaches, "As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not stumble thereby" (Ezekiel 33:12). No, more, observed, R. Johanan, all the transgressions that he has committed, the Holy One, blessed be He, accounts to him as merits.

Simeon b. Yochai here teaches, as he gleans from the Ezekiel verse, that this *rasha gamur* can repent and he will not be held back from becoming a *tzaddik* because of his past actions. R. Johanan says that this is not even reward enough for the repentant one. Not only will he not be penalized for his past, R. Johanan declares, but all the sinning from his past will be accounted to him by God as merit.

This text builds upon the search for an understanding of what one needs to do to become a *tzaddik gamur*. Does one have to be utterly honest his entire life, like Joshua ben Levi, Nachum ish Gamzu or Abba bar Ahava, as they are reported to have been? Or is it simply a matter of turning one's life around at the end of his life? Here, it would seem that one could become a *tzaddik gamur* by repenting whole-heartedly at the end of one's life, as unfair or unjust as it would seem to be. But here we see the development of a philosophy that is meant to include all those followers of the Rabbis. It is never too late to discover the rabbinically inspired, yet divine, access to God. We must remember to keep in mind Raba's earlier teaching that one should never judge another's place in God's world and another's deeds before God. This, the world of the Rabbis as well as our own, is a world in which many of God's actions do not make sense. So the world, at least to God, has to have a plan and make sense. If God wishes to save the *rasha gamur* from spending eternity in Gehenna, then God can do that. It makes sense in the world of the Rabbis because all the verses of Scripture teach the way.

Song of Songs Rabbah 6:1 virtually repeats the same ideas expressed in this Bamidbar Rabbah text. There is one subtle, yet important difference. This subtle difference makes one addition that adds a caveat to this miraculous change of face and destiny of a *rasha gamur*. Unlike the Bamidbar Rabbah text, in which he can simply turn away from evil, in the Song of Songs Rabbah text, he must be truly "sorry" for all his misdeeds in order to become a *tzaddik gamur*. In the first, there is no discussion as regards how one could effect such a dramatic transformation from *tzaddik gamur* to *rasha gamur*. Here we see at least a hint. One must turn in his heart towards God to at least begin this change.

THE NAMING OF THE *TZADDIK GAMUR*

The following texts build upon the issues presented above regarding the *tzaddik gamur*, who he is and how one theoretically becomes known as having achieved this great rabbinic ideal-type. These texts move this rabbinic ideal-type from theory into practice. In these texts, the naming of the *tzaddik gamur* is in the hands of God.

Passage from Gittin 68b

The following text is a wonderful story that revolves around Solomon seeking the ability to build the Temple. The "Rabbis" inform Solomon that the Temple cannot be built with use of iron tools. He therefore asks them how then he would be able to construct the Temple and they inform him of the *shamir*, a special worm that would cut through the sharpest stone. Solomon now searches for the *shamir* and learns that perhaps Ashmedai, the Prince of Demons, may know where to find it. Solomon sends Benaiahu to find Ashmedai and bring him to Jerusalem. Benaiahu tricks Ashmedai into getting himself drunk and then chains him and drags him to Jerusalem. On the way, struggling against the chains, Ashmedai causes a tree to fall over and a house to be knocked down. He also sees a blind man straying from his path and puts him on the correct path; he sees a drunken man losing his path and puts him back on the path as well.

Finally, upon arriving in Jerusalem, Solomon calls upon Ashmedai to ask him how to find the *shamir*. Ashmedai tells the king that the *shamir* is entrusted by oath into the hands of the woodpecker by the Prince of the Sea. The woodpecker then brings the *shamir* to a rock that splits and the seeds from the splitting of the rock are placed in an open field that

then produces great growth. In order to find the *shamir*, they go to a woodpecker's nest with young in it and place clear glass over the nest. When the woodpecker cannot get into the nest, it retrieves the *shamir* and places it on the clear glass in order to break it, whereupon, Solomon's men steal the *shamir*. Herein lies the most fascinating part of this prelude to this text's use of the term *tzaddik gamur*. Once the woodpecker realizes that the *shamir* has been taken, it flies away and commits suicide on account of its unfulfilled oath to the Prince of the Sea.

This is a long and involved story that sets up the use of the terms, *tzaddik gamur* and *rasha gamur*. What is the most fascinating of all is the Rabbis' awe of true honor and the fulfillment of a vow. When the woodpecker realizes that, though through no fault of its own, it will be unable to fulfill the vow of returning the *shamir* to the Prince of the Sea, it can only end its own life, having failed to fulfill a vow. The extremes of honor, honesty, valor, and spiritual strength are some of the keystones of the rabbinic ideal-type of the *tzaddik gamur*. In the midst of a world out of control, the only control one can maintain is over one's own character and honor. It is, therefore, all the more interesting that this story of how nature can be dedicated to true righteousness, precedes another use of the rabbinic terms, *tzaddik gamur* and *rasha gamur*. The next bit of text in this passage from Gittin 68b is as follows:

> Benaiahu said to Ashmedai, Why when you saw that blind man going out of his way did you put him right? He replied: It has been proclaimed of him in heaven that he is a wholly righteous man (*tzaddik gamur*), and that whoever does him a kindness will be worthy of the future world. And why when you saw the drunken

> man going out of his way did you put him right? He replied: They have proclaimed concerning him in heaven that he is wholly wicked (*rasha gamur*), and I conferred a boon on him in order that he may consume here his share in the future.

This short text citation follows up on the journey of Benaiahu and Ashmedai as they travel towards Jerusalem. Benaiahu asks Ashmedai why he helped the blind man going out of his way. Ashmedai responds that it had been declared on high that this man is wholly righteous, a *tzaddik gamur* and he, himself, will receive the world to come for helping this man. Benaiahu then asks Ashmedai why he helped a drunkard going out of his way. Ashmedai responds that it had been declared on high that this man is wholly evil, a *rasha gamur*, and by putting him straight (i.e. saving his life), he made it so the drunk will live and use up his share in this life and therefore not inherit his place in the world to come.

This text refers indirectly to the previous texts with regard to the actions taken against the *rasha gamur*. That is to say, Ashmedai contends with the evil-doer, a declaration made in heaven, and it is his responsibility to do so because he is certainly more righteous than this man, even though Ashmedai himself is not referred to as a *tzaddik gamur*. Most importantly, however, is the fact that here these individuals have been declared to be *tzaddik gamur* or *rasha gamur* by God. We are not privy to their actions or their intentions, yet they have been assigned these destinies not on earth but in heaven. In light of the first half of the story that highlights the righteousness of the woodpecker, the importance of righteous behavior cannot be over-exaggerated. One's destiny, whether animal or human, is judged entirely by God in heaven and it relies entirely on the level of one's commitment to righteous living on earth.

Passage from Shabbat 55a

The following text is another example in which God, and not human beings, makes the declaration of *the tzaddik gamur* and the *rasha gamur* on high. It begins with the statement that this is the one time when God made an oath for good and retracted it for evil. In Ezekiel 9:4, God tells Gabriel to place a *tav* of ink on the foreheads of the righteous, and a *tav* of blood on the foreheads of the wicked. This way, the destroying angels that God is sending will kill only the wicked and save the righteous. Against God's command, the *midat hadin*, "the Attribute of Justice," challenges God as to what the difference is between these two groups. God claims that the first group are *tzaddikim gamurim* and the second group are *rashaim gamurim*. The *midat hadin*, however, claims that this group, the *tzaddikim gamurim*, had the power to protest the plight of those to be killed and did not. God then defends His decision with a not-so-incredibly strong argument. God declares that the *tzaddikim gamurim* knew full well that had they protested, their protest would not have been heard in any case. Sometimes, God makes the decision regarding those who are deemed worthy of the honorific title *tzaddik* gamur, according to God's understanding of the universe, not ours.

This is seemingly an absurd reason that God assigns to these individuals the title *tzaddik gamur*. Yet, as we will see immediately following this text analysis in Berachot, in some rabbinic opinions, it is not allowed to contend with evil-doers. This text from Shabbat 55a seems to lend credence to this minority opinion from Berachot 7b that there is mostly ignored. The *Amoraim* wrote the following opinion in Berachot 7b:

> For R. Isaac said: If you see a wicked man upon whom fortune is smiling, do not attack him. For it is said, "His ways prosper at all times" (Psalms 10:5). And more than that, he is victorious in the court of judgment; for it is said, "Your judgments are far beyond him" (Psalms 10:5).

This statement, which is mostly ignored as a strong opinion in Berachot 7b, may shed a bit of light on this seemingly "easy-out" that God gives these individuals so that they can be called *tzaddikim gamurim*. In the midst of a chaotic world, there may also be some truth to protecting one's own interests and not "contending with the wicked," which might just get someone killed. Most importantly, if all humanity lives within this world of God's plan, then the evil ones will be judged in the end of days for their evil acts. God has provided here, via the Rabbis' interpretive lenses, that the *tzaddik gamur* may not always have to challenge the wicked, especially when it would either seem useless or a death-wish.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A *TZADDIK GAMUR*

Passage from Berachot 7b

This text begins with a statement from Simeon b. Yohai that claims that it is permitted to contend with the wicked in this world. Proverbs 38:4 is now cited to prove this point. It states, "They who forsake Torah praise the wicked, but such as keep Torah contend with them (*yitgaru vam)*." This statement is a support of the proposition that it is permitted to contend with the wicked in this world. In other words, it is not enough to be righteous, but being righteous also calls upon one to challenge the wicked.

The text continues then to teach that if one hears another cite the verse from Psalms 37:1, "Contend not with evil doers, neither be thou envious against them that work unrighteousness," one should ignore this because it would only be cited by one whose own conscience is bothering him. In other words, the only person who would make the claim that one should not challenge the wicked is one who himself is not completely free of wicked acts. The text goes on to explain that this verse from Psalms actually means do not be like evil doers, do not be like those who work iniquity. Proverbs 23:17 is added here to support this re-reading of the text. It states, "Let not thy heart envy sinners, but be in the fear of the Lord all the day," to claim that the verse only teaches one not to be like the wicked, not that one should contend with them.

R. Isaac enters the conversation to contradict the preceding statements. He quotes several lines from Psalm 10:5 that claim that one should not attack evil doers. The Gemarra text now claims there is no contradiction. The verses that R. Isaac cites teach us that one should not challenge another's evil doing when it comes to private matters (*d'milei didei*). The verses that R. Johanan cites teach us that one should challenge another's evil doing when it comes to religious matters (*d'milei d'shmei*).

The text continues that one could also say that they both speak of matters of religion. The one in which R. Isaac claims that one cannot contend with evil doers refers to the wicked man upon whom fortune is smiling (i.e. one does not contend with him). The second one in which R. Johanan claims that one can contend with evil doers refers to the wicked man

upon whom fortune is not smiling (i.e. one does contend with him). Furthermore, one could also say that both refer to the wicked man upon whom fortune is smiling. The first (when we should contend with the individual) refers to a man who is a *tzaddik gamur*, the second (when one should not contend with the individual) refers to a man who is not a *tzaddik gamur*.

All of the above is a prelude to the important usage of *tzaddik gamur* in this text. In light of what has been said above regarding who is allowed to contend with evil doers, a citation from Habakkuk 1:13 is brought in: "Why does thou hold thy peace when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he?" If Habakkuk admits that the wicked can swallow up the righteous, everything that has been said previously is moot. One's righteousness does not matter if the wicked can swallow him up. The caveat is that the key is in the wording of "more righteous than he." Another can swallow up one person if he is merely "more righteous than he." If he however is a *tzaddik gamur*, then he cannot be swallowed up by anyone, wicked or not.

This text struggles with coordinating the differing passages from Tanach that suggest one can and one cannot challenge an evil doer. The crux of the meaning here comes in the last bit from Habakkuk. This passage devotes itself to the enormous power that one who is a *tzaddik gamur* has from being hurt by another. Through his righteous acts and being, he is able to create a protecting shield from all who would do him harm.

This text asks several questions of the *tzaddik gamur* that lead to a broader understanding of his role. First, we are confronted with the proposition that to be a *tzaddik gamur*, one may be required to challenge and conquer the wicked. To act only according to the strict law in one's own life, never to see beyond the bounds of one's own fate, is not sufficient action on the part of the *tzaddik gamur*. Rather, it is suggested that the *tzaddik gamur* must go above and beyond the call of duty, challenging the wicked as well as acting righteously for the sake of all whom he meets.

Passage from Megilah 6b

This is essentially a repeat of the previous text with a few differences. The issues regarding whether one can or cannot contend with evil doers arise including the statements by R. Johanan and R. Isaac. Here, however, the texts differ as to the instance in which one may contend with an evil doer. Whereas in the previous text, one may contend with another only in regards to religious matters, this text reverses the supposition and states that one may contend with evildoers only in regard to personal matters. Further, this text explains that they could both refer to personal matters; one may contend with an evil doer who is a *tzaddik gamur*, one may not contend with an evil doer who is not a *tzaddik gamur*. The most important issue that arises from this text and the previous one is that ostensibly it is possible to be a *tzaddik gamur* and still err in one's ways.

Passage from Ketubot 105b

This text focuses on the law against taking bribes or gifts in the context of the responsibilities of judges as commanded in Deuteronomy 16:19-21. Judges are

commanded to judge people with *mishpat tzedek*, righteous judgement. Deut. 16:19 states, "Thou shall not respect persons, neither take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous." The text as interpreted by the Rabbis is as follows:

> Our Rabbis taught: For a gift blinds the eyes of the wise, and much more so those of the foolish; And perverts the words of the righteous, and much more so those of the wicked. Are then fools and wicked men capable of acting as judges? But it is this that is meant: 'For a gift does blind the eyes of the wise,' even a great Sage who takes bribes will not depart from the world without the affliction of a blindness of heart (*smiut halev*).[42] 'And pervert the words of the righteous', even one who is righteous in every respect (*tzaddik gamur*) and takes bribes will not depart from this world without the affliction of confusion of mind (*teiruf da-at*).

Expounding upon the verse, "For a gift does blind the eyes of the wise," the Rabbis state that a sage who takes bribes will not depart the world without the affliction of a blindness of heart. The text goes on to interpret the words, "And pervert the words of the righteous," to mean that even one who is a *tzaddik gamur* and yet takes bribes, will not depart from this world without a confusion of mind.

This text presses a question alluded to in the previous one. Is it possible for one to be a *tzaddik gamur* and yet not always act with perfect righteousness? Then what exactly makes one a *tzaddik gamur*? If it is not simply one's actions then is it a matter of being ordained in heaven or something else. In the Gittin 68b text, the blind man was ordained

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[42] Jastrow translates *sm'* as blinded or blind and interprets this usage as meaning "short sighted."

in heaven as a *tzaddik gamur* and the drunkard had been ordained in heaven as a *rasha gamur*. The reader does not know anything about these two individuals except that they had been ordained in heaven as perfectly righteous or perfectly wicked. The clear definition of the *tzaddik gamur* is not at all as clear as one would hope. Yet, the fact that we have seen that the Rabbis are not able to fully identify the exact characteristics of the *tzaddik gamur* is indicative of the depths to which the Rabbis pursue in attempting to understand their goal of pure righteousness. On the one hand, it would make things much more clear if the Rabbis had been explicit about the requirements for such a lofty title. Unfortunately, in the real world, it is truly a towering proposition to be perfectly complete at anything. This is all the more true when confronting the exterior rules of perfect righteousness with the interior imperfections of the human being. The Rabbis therefore allow for the possibility that one may strive and even become a *tzaddik gamur* at certain times in his life but not always. Furthermore, one may even earn the title of *tzaddik gamur* and still experience moments of imperfection in his life. The Rabbis seem to have had an all the more realistic view of the world, the human being, and the heart.

BIBLICAL FIGURES PORTRAYED AS *TZADDIKIM GAMURIM*

In the following texts, the Rabbis retroactively assign the term *tzaddik gamur* to several of our biblical ancestors. In so doing, the Rabbis stake their own claim of authenticity upon the presumption that in striving towards the status of *tzaddik gamur*, they align themselves with those great ones of the Bible who had direct access to the divine throughout their lives. For the Rabbis, this privilege was not random, nor even reliant upon God's

choosing these individuals. Rather, it is as if these individuals, by way of their wholly righteous behavior, chose God. By their actions and their commitment to righteousness, the patriarchs brought blessing upon themselves. What is striking throughout the following texts is that these individual patriarchs were certainly not free of dark moments in their lives. They were human with human weakness and failings, ever-strengthening the rabbinic position that to become a *tzaddik gamur* does not require a perfect record.

Passage from Ketubot 111a

The text discusses different meanings of verses that refer to the resurrection of the dead in Israel in the world to come. The Rabbis all agree here that one who lives in the land of Israel will be resurrected in Israel in the world to come. The discussion then pursues whether this is true for those in Babylonia as well. It is finally agreed in this text that to live in Babylonia is as good as living in Israel. Furthermore, just as one who lives in Israel is forbidden to move to another country, so too is one who lives in Babylonia forbidden to move to another country, except of course, Israel. The Rabbis continue to expound upon these verses and state that anyone who walks even four cubits in the Land of Israel is assured of a place in the world to come.

R. Eleazar then asks about the righteous who live outside the land. He wishes to know if the righteous outside the land of Israel will also be revived. It is taught that they too will find their way to Israel by rolling through underground tunnels. R. Abba Sala the Great is concerned about the pain that this would cause the righteous, rolling through underground tunnels. Abaye assures him that cavities will be made for them so that it is more

comfortable. The Rabbis take this seemingly preposterous idea quite seriously and literally. The Land of Israel is the Holy Land and it is from there that one would be physically resurrected, according to rabbinic thinking. Ultimately, all the preceding and following texts find common ground in these sentiments. The struggle to become a *tzaddik gamur* is undergirded by the belief that there is a greater hope that the world will someday change. The Rabbis pray that they will be able to overcome the persecution and powerlessness in both Palestine and Babylonia. They will one day be worthy of discovering the Holy Land in the glory which is destined for it and for its people, Israel.

With this idea in mind that even the righteous outside the land will be resurrected in the land by way of underground tunnels, the Rabbis are puzzled. They wish to know why it is that Jacob, who in the Rabbinic estimation was most definitely a *tzaddik gamur*, makes his sons promise that they will bring his bones up to the Land from Egypt. The text is as follows:

> "Thou shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying-place" (Bereshit 47:30.) Karna remarked: There must be here some inner meaning. Our father Jacob well knew that he was a righteous man in every way (*tzaddik gamur*), and, since the dead outside the Land will also be resurrected, why did he trouble his sons? Because he might possibly be unworthy to roll through the cavities.

Passage from Chullin 89a

This text makes a brief and isolated comment regarding the *tzaddik gamur* that is interesting only in light of the fact that there is an allusion made to Abraham as *tzaddik gamur*. The text is as follows:

> R. Abba said: Grave indeed is theft that has been consumed, for even the wholly righteous (*tzaddik gamur*) cannot make amends for it, as it is said in Genesis 14:24: Save only that which the young men have eaten.

This text establishes a caveat for the term *tzaddik gamur*. The text states that not even the *tzaddik gamur* can restore a theft of property that had been consumed. The proof text for this statement is derived from the time when Abraham cannot restore that which had been eaten by the young men. Because Abraham is understood to be a true *tzaddik gamur*, he will deny all the offerings made to him by the King of Sodom. Even more so, he wishes he could make amends for that which the young men ate but, even he, a true *tzaddik gamur*, must be satisfied not to be able to return that which had already been consumed.

Passage from Shir HaShirim Rabbah 6:20

This text is simply an exegesis on several verses from Shir Hashirim . The forefathers are mentioned as those to whom these verses refer. In Shir Hashirim 6:9, it is written, "My dove, my undefiled, is but one." The Rabbis here read the word "one" to refer directly to Abraham, as it is said in Ezekiel, 33:24, "Abraham was one." Continuing with the verse from Shir HaShirim 6:9, "She is the only one of her mother," the Rabbis read this to refer to Isaac, who was his mother's only son. Lastly, the verse finishes with the words, "She is the choice one of her that bore her." The Rabbis claim that this refers to Jacob because he was a *tzaddik gamur*. The Rabbis here seek to continually prove their point that they can

access God and the divine just as the patriarchs did by living a life of complete righteousness.

Passage from Sifre D'Agadata Al Esther – Midrash Aba Gorion – Parashah 3

This text expounds upon the possible meanings of the verse from *Megilat Esther* which states, "After these things (*achar had'varim haeleh*), Ahashverosh raised up Haman." In a section beginning as a *davar acher*, the Rabbis put forth that "these things" were plans and schemes. The text asks then, "Who was scheming?" Rabbi Judah states that Haman was scheming to discover if perhaps Esther was not Jewish after all. Rabbi Nechemiah states that Ahashverosh was scheming because Mordechai wanted to rebuild the Temple. "Hazal" states that God is scheming that Mordechai, who is a *tzaddik gamur*, will take money from Haman and build the Beit Hamikdash.

Passage from Agadat Bereishit Perek 25

This text expounds upon Genesis 19:15 in which Lot and his family are saved from the destruction of Sodom and Lot tells his family to flee to the mountain so that they are not consumed by God's destruction of the city. Presumably asking what the mountain refers to, Abraham who had previously been called *har*, is said to be the place to where they are told to go. But because Abraham is a *tzaddik gamur* (as established in the previous midrashic verses), Lot cannot go there. Why? Because all the time that Lot lived in Sodom, he was considered THERE a *tzaddik gamur*. When God looked at his actions and those of his neighbors, he appeared righteous compared to them. But now if he goes to the place of Abraham, a *tzaddik shalem,* God will look at his actions in comparison to Abraham's and he fears he will therefore be uprooted, *okarni*.

TZADDIK GAMUR AND HIS DEDICATION TO A PATIENT AND HUMBLE NATURE

Passage from Taanit 21a

This text tells two stories of Nachum ish Gamzu. Known to all as a wholly righteous individual, he is found by his students in a horrible condition. He is blind, his legs and arms are cut off, and he is covered with boils. He is in the middle of a dilapidated house, lying on a bed whose feet are standing in bowls of water to prevent ants from crawling on to him. His disciples want to bring him out of this dilapidated house but he tells them first to bring out all the vessels (because he knows that the house will not collapse while he is in it). The students do as their master tells them and as soon as Nachum is removed from the house, it collapses.

This first story of Nachum ish Gamzu presents a most powerful Rabbi-wonder worker who has been stricken with a most terrible punishment. His body has been attacked such that he has nothing left of himself but his mind. Once Nachum has been safely removed from the house and his foretelling of a miracle has occurred just as he had predicted, his disciples now must know how it is that their master could be so horribly afflicted, knowing that he is so righteous. They say to him, "Since you are a *tzaddik gamur*, why has all this befallen you?" He tells them that he brought this affliction, this punishment, upon himself. He now tells them his story.

There was a poor and hungry man who stopped him in the road and asked him for something to eat. Nachum told him to wait until he unloaded the donkey. Immediately following, the man fell over and died. Being the *tzaddik gamur* that he is, Nachum is devastated because he did not recognize the man's pain soon enough to make the hungry man's nourishment the first thing to which he attended. At that moment, he claimed, "May my eyes which had no pity upon your eyes become blind; may my hands which had no pity upon your hands be cut off. May my legs which had no pity upon your legs be amputated; my mind was not at ease until I added, may my whole body be covered with boils." He then tells his disciples that thank God they did see him like this, for if not, he would not have received the punishment he deserved. The story concludes with the question, "Why was he called Nachum ish Gamzu?" It answers that this is because whatever befell him, he would declare, "This also is for the best." Nachum is one of the few Rabbinic figures who is actually called a *tzaddik gamur* in all of Rabbinic literature. The erasure of ego and the full and complete act of repentance are keys to one's being named as a *tzaddik gamur*.

The text continues with another story of the man "to whom miracles happen" in which he is sent to the Emperor of Rome to give him a gift. The gifts are stolen and replaced with dirt but Elijah appears as a Roman and claims that this is the dirt that will win them victory in battle. Of course, the dirt does win the Romans victory and Nachum once again prevails. Here, in this story, there is another description of this wholly righteous Rabbi. He is not only the *tzaddik gamur*, but one to whom miracles happen, as a result of his being so wholly righteous. Humility, the belief that all one has received is due entirely to

the grace of God and wonderful *mazzal*, is a constant theme in rabbinic literature. In terms of the *tzaddik gamur*, it is an imperative ingredient that what one may deserve one cannot expect to receive. As Raba teaches us earlier, one should not become aware of one's own or another's status as *tzaddik gamur*. Rather, it is only in terms of the world to come that one will ever fully know one's status in this world.

CHAPTER 5

THE IMAGE OF THE HOLY MAN AS RIGHTEOUS FIGURE IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

The preceding texts are illustrative of all that the Rabbis hoped to teach about the *tzaddik gamur* himself. Who is he? How does one become a *tzaddik gamur*? Is the *tzaddik gamur* truly perfect and blameless in all his ways? These questions are dealt with as the Rabbis seek to understand and exemplify the most possibly perfect rabbinic behavior. Every *tzaddik gamur* is in sync with his *yeter tov*. For a very few, this is a lifelong pursuit in which they succeed. For most others, there are moments when they achieve this status of *tzaddik gamur* and then once again fall away from it. A *tzaddik gamur* may very well not be able to be judged as a *tzaddik gamur* in this world, but only in the next. The Rabbis struggle with the fact that some of the most righteous become the most downtrodden. How does one reconcile this with the Rabbis' great emphasis on the purity of one's deeds and thoughts? They understand very clearly that there is a world beyond this one towards which they aim the inclination of their behavior and every day living. Humility, patience, and having the presence of mind to act as a *tzaddik gamur* as often as possible in one's life is of the utmost importance.

These texts were not intended as hidden codes for entering the world to come. Rather, these guideposts, by which the Rabbis challenged all Jews to live, were made available to all who wished to pursue them. The Rabbis sought, once again, to regain, to reestablish, the loci of holiness into the lives they were living. There was no longer one locus of holiness to be found in the Temple, but instead, these loci of holiness were created by the people with their actions, thoughts, and deeds for their fellow human beings.

> The ultimate issue, therefore, was not politics but piety: What must one do to serve God in heaven? Piety was manifested by right action in society and right knowledge of what right action consisted of, by continual study and reflection upon revelation which defined right from wrong, and by acts of devotion. If the Rabbi was the object of divine or angelic favor, that was not authenticated by the miracles he supposedly could perform, though those clearly mattered to everyone, but in the end, by the rightness of the ideals he advanced in Jewish society.[43]

Fundamental to these ideals was the presumption that the goal of Jewish living was creating and acting upon the portals of holiness that were available by good and just action. The rabbinic ideal-type of the *tzaddik gamur* may not have been a term that was easily assigned to different rabbinic figures, as we have seen in Chapter 4, but rather, it serves as an ideal towards which to strive in this world and the next. Many of those deemed, if not *tzaddikim gamurim*, then at least greatly righteous or distinguished by their merits, were subsequently able to produce great acts or miracles on behalf of others and even the entire world. Akin to the wonder workers and holy men that also existed and thrived in other surrounding cultures, these great miracle workers attracted others and encouraged them to live righteous lives as well. The Rabbis make it clear, however, that these great holy men were not miracle workers except for the fact of their dedication to righteousness and justice. Whether praying to God to make rain, or simply treating one's wife with the utmost respect, these holy men were powerful. They gained their power not for the miracles they could create but for the changes in others they could cause.

> It is quite fruitless, however, to distinguish between the study of Torah or knowledge of Torah and other sources of magical power. R. Adda bar Ahava clearly made no distinction. He had great merit, he thought, because he was a

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[43]Neusner, *Wonderworking Lawyers*,

> gentle husband, a modest student, a meticulous and pious person, who never walked without talking about Torah, or wearing his t'fillin. He also never slept in school, or dishonoured a colleague. So he was a model Rabbi and his magical successes were held up to others as the signs of his reward for his exemplification of the virtues of the academies. What is important is that because of his merits, he could hold up houses and bridges. Torah, including all the requirements attendant upon those who studied it, produced that kind of power, and transformed an ordinary person into a holy man who could do things others could not.[44]

But very few of even the Rabbis were able to earn the title *tzaddik gamur* and thus we must look at a level deeper than the one we have just reviewed. That is to say, while there are many texts that actually use the term *tzaddik gamur*, there are many more texts that refer to the qualities or characteristics of an individual that are tied with those that define the *tzaddik gamur*. In the following sample of such texts, I will present a series of examples in which different rabbinic holy men are portrayed according to their achievement of one or more of the characteristics listed above. Their holiness and their magical power is due in direct terms to their study, their moral behavior and the ethical foundations that undergird all of their actions.

THE RABBINIC HOLY MAN AND THE TEMPTATIONS OF SEX

Matia ben Heresh and the Satan

This *maaseh* as recorded in *Mimekor Yisrael* tells of the story of Matia ben Heresh who was in the midst of studying Torah. He was so dedicated to his studies that nothing could steal his attention. He was so incredibly focused on the study of Torah that he had never

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[44]Ibid, 65.

in his life looked at his fellow's wife or even another woman in the world. The Satan comes along, as inevitably occurs, and we learn he is jealous of Matia. He declares that he cannot believe that there could be anyone truly like him in the world who has never committed any kind of sin. So the Satan rises to heaven and requests before God, "Who is Matia ben Heresh before you?" God tells the Satan that Matia ben Heresh is a *tzaddik gamur*. With God's permission, the Satan is permitted to go and test the will of Matia.

The Satan returns to earth and disguises himself as the most beautiful woman ever to have existed in the world. The Satan appears before Matia ben Heresh and Matia turns his gaze from the vision of this beautiful woman. The Satan continues to attempt to attract Matia's attention, and even though Matia's reserve is wearing down, he manages to keep averting his gaze. Finally, when the pressure becomes too great, Matia calls for his friend to bring him burning hot coals. With these, he burns out his eyes so that he would be physically unable to sin. The Satan explains to God what has occurred and God then sends the Angel Michael to heal Matia. At first Matia refuses the healing out of fear that he might be tempted again to sin. God then promises Matia that God will ensure that he would never again be ruled by his *yetzer ra*.

This *maaseh* sets the scene of a perfectly righteous man (*tzaddik gamur*) who is challenged with an examination of endurance. Can even this man, this *tzaddik gamur*, be able to resist the workings of the Satan? We learn that one so deemed is quite capable of going to any and all extremes to preserve the level of righteousness to which he has risen. The role the Satan plays here as a physical realization of the *yetzer hara* reminds us that despite how much power the Rabbis believe the individual has over choosing the direction of one's life, there is much going on in heaven, completely out of human control. The Satan plays here a familiar role that will repeat itself several times in the following texts,

both as a temptation to forbidden sex as well as the general adversary who challenges the most righteous.

Kiddushin 81a – The Satan is at it again

In the following two stories from Kiddushin 81a, the Satan once again disguises himself as a beautiful woman in order to tempt both R. Meir and Rabbi Akiva. Both, great holy men and wonder-workers, are tempted by the Satan to act in a way unworthy of the righteous lives they lead. Nonetheless, they are tempted. It is interesting to note the context in which both stories are told.

The particular part of Kiddushin that precedes these two stories focuses on the issues of sexual immorality and the different ways by which one may be tempted to sin sexually. One may be tempted in the case of a beautiful woman left alone with a man; one may be tempted at a wedding when the men and women are preparing for the ceremony. All this precedes two very short stories about R. Meir and Rabbi Akiva.

In the first, R. Meir is said to have had the habit of scoffing at those who were too weak to avoid transgressing sexually. His cavalier attitude toward the apparent weakness of others seems to have led to his own testing. It is taught that the Satan appeared to him as a woman on the opposite side of a river. R. Meir climbs a rope and pulls himself across. But as he reaches half way, the Satan returns to his normal form and says, "Had they not proclaimed in heaven, 'Take heed of R. Meir and his learning,' I would have valued your life at two ma'ahs." The second story about R. Akiva tells essentially the same tale. Here, the Satan appears to Akiva at the top of a palm tree. Akiva attempts to climb the tree and half-way up, the Satan appears in his normal form and makes the same declaration, "Had they not proclaimed in heaven, 'Take heed of R. Akiva and his learning,' I would have valued your life at two ma'ahs."

Sinning sexually appears here as one of the many temptations that might cause a Holy Man to act a bit less holy. In both instances, as in the first with Matia ben Heresh, the Satan sets out in a purposeful way to tempt these Holy Men. Matia ben Heresh goes to extraordinary lengths to pass his test; R. Meir and R. Akiva seem to fail quite easily and without any fanfare. In both instances, the texts seem to exaggerate the circumstances in order to make their point. Sex, as is today as well, was then a primary source of sin. When one's righteousness is measured accordingly, we learn that the Rabbis too believed that the world of sex is a significant measuring stick by which to judge the level of one's commitment to righteous living.

The last story in this section comes from Menahot 44a. In this story, we see an interesting turn of events. A Torah scholar is tempted to sin sexually but does not. He is then justly rewarded in this world for the great righteousness to which he ultimately remains true. This story is introduced with R. Nahman's teaching. He states, "There is not a single precept in the Torah, even the lightest, whose reward is not enjoyed in this world, and as to its reward in the future world, I know not how great it is." The following story is then used to illustrate how even the commandment of *tzitzit* is true in this regard.

A Torah scholar wishes to sleep with a particular famed prostitute. He goes in, pays her fee, and she prepares a lavish room filled with six beds of silver and one of gold. She lies down naked in the golden bed and beckons for him to join her. He approaches with the intention of lying down with her when just at that moment, his four *tzitzit* slap him across the face and he falls to the floor along with the woman. She insists to know what was wrong with her and he tells her that the four *tzitzit* slapped him across the face and stood witness against his sinful intentions. He takes his leave of her. She is so impressed with this man's commitment to his faith and the miracle that had occurred in her presence, she

decides to leave her profession and find him to become his wife. She does however keep her bedclothes. She finds the man, they marry and now the text is very clear to make one last point. It states:

> Those very bed-clothes, which she had spread for him for an illicit purpose, she now spread for him lawfully. This is the reward of the precept in this world, and as for its reward in the future world, I know not how great it is.

Sex is certainly a rich field for the potential sinning of mankind. It is also, here, and in the Rabbis' minds, a rich field for reward. In my opinion, the Rabbis tip their hand a bit to let us know just how human and subject to desire they really were. On the one hand, they recognize that sex is an area of human action and will that can easily lead one to sin. On the other, the Rabbis are certain that there is quite a powerful reason that this is possible: human desire. When the Rabbis write that sleeping with this woman in particular is a reward for the precept of *tzitzit*, it becomes apparent the Rabbis were quite a realistic and human group of men.

The *tzaddik gamur* is one whose will is measured according to a strict scale of righteousness. It is not enough to perform a righteous act but one must also be in the right frame of mind while performing it. The rituals, such as *tzitzit*, are more than mere fulfillments of the *mitzvot*. In addition, they lead one away from sin and act as a guard to temptation.

THE RABBINIC HOLY MAN AND HIS COMMITMENT TO STUDY

Paths of holiness in the decentralized world of Late Antiquity were being forged by all ethnic and religious groups. Most often however, these paths were forged and controlled by the elite of each religious tradition. They were not open for study and discovery by the masses. Jacob Neusner examines the ways in which the Rabbis were committed to

opening the rabbinic world to all Jews such that, ideally, every Jewish person could become a Rabbi himself through the study of sacred text.

> Unlike the Christian monks, however, it was the aspiration of the Rabbi not to form a separate society. He kept to himself very little. He did not live in a tight little eschatological community, confidently awaiting the day in which the sinners would know that he was right and they were wrong....What he most wanted was to teach the people how to live up to these convictions as he understood them. So if he was not a sectarian, the reason was that he aspired to a wider influence than others. He wanted all the Jews to become Rabbis. He asked nothing of himself that he felt inapplicable to others, and nothing of others that did not pertain to himself.[45]

The Torah is the ultimate source for accessing the divine in a world without the Temple or another centralizing force. In the Psalms, we read that God is not only spoken of metaphorically as residing in the Temple; God is said to actually have made His residence there. In a world where access to the divine was the *raison d'etre* of the Rabbinic mind, the potential for this access was found in all aspects of living. We see this further in the actual study of Torah as the guidebook for this interpretive struggle.

Yoma 35a - Hillel on the Roof

There is a series of stories regarding Hillel's origins as a student of Torah. As is well known, Hillel is one of the greatest Rabbis referred to in rabbinic literature. His origin as a student of Torah is linked directly to the democratic nature of the rabbinic mindset. Coming from humble origins, yet recognizing that the rabbinic world was the truest path to holiness, Hillel comes close to sacrificing his life for its sake. He is a simple man with

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[45] Neusner, *Wonderworking Lawyers*, 137.

no wealth, nor rabbinic *yiches*, yet as we learn, it is he who becomes one of the greatest sages in rabbinic literature.

This story, "Hillel on the Roof," from Yoma 35a, tells the tale of Hillel's origins as a great Rabbi and as a devoted student of Torah. The story teaches that every day Hillel worked to earn enough money to support his family and to pay the entrance fee to learn in the academy. One day, he was not able to earn enough to pay for the entrance fee. He was so dedicated to the Torah and its pursuits, however, that he climbed to the roof of the Beit Midrash to hear the lessons of Shemayah and Avtalyon. He remained there, frozen from the falling snow, all night long. He was found the next day, on Shabbat, and they brought him down from there where he had frozen overnight. They then said, "This man is worthy of profaning the Shabbat."

This story teaches of Hillel's devotion to learning and it is precisely because of this devotion that he does not perish, frozen and covered with snow for an entire night. In this tale, a great miracle is performed inadvertently by this holy man. He is girded by the strength of study of Torah that leads to his protection from the elements. Hillel will continually be a model for righteous behavior for all Rabbis.

The Palestinian Talmud as well greatly emphasizes the study of Torah as the foundation of Rabbinic power. In Moed Katan Chapter 3, Halakhah 7, we learn, "He who sees a disciple of a sage who has died is as if he sees a scroll of the Torah that has been burned." Here, the sage is not only committed to the study and integration of the Torah and its lessons. Even more intensively, the Rabbi actually becomes the Torah itself. This calls to mind Heschel's teaching that what the Jewish community needs are not more texts but more text people. To become a teacher of Torah, one must embody the moral and religious principles upon which the interpretation of Torah is based. The Rabbi becomes a

tzaddik gamur when he has found unity between his own soul's desires and the teachings of the Torah that keep him on the true path of righteousness.

The words and study of Torah are the central guide by which the Rabbis lead their lives. In this pursuit, most can only hope to at times achieve the status of *tzaddik gamur*. In the following text from the Palestinian Talmud, we have before us a long laundry list of the righteous actions of a rabbinic holy man. This text comes from Taanit Chapter 3, Halakhah 11:

> There was a house that was about to collapse over there [in Babylonia], and Rab set one of his disciples in the house, until they had cleared out everything from the house. When the disciple left the house, the house collapsed. And there are those who say that it was Adda bar Ahava. Sages went and said to him, "What sort of good deeds are to your credit that you have that much merit?" He said to them, "In my whole life no man ever got to the synagogue in the morning before I did. I never left anybody there when I went out. I never walked four cubits without speaking words of Torah. Nor did I ever mention teachings of Torah in an inappropriate setting. I never laid out a bed and slept for a regular period of time. I never took great strides among the associates. I never called my fellow by a nickname.....I never walked over in the marketplace to someone who owed me money. In my entire life, I never lost my temper in my household."

With regard to this story, Jacob Neusner teaches, "This story shows that the storyteller regarded as a fact of life the correlation between mastery of Torah sayings and supernatural power....The upshot is that the sage was made a magician by Torah learning and could save Israel through Torah, source of the most powerful magic of all."[46] The Rabbi is a great figure, but only because he is so righteous. The areas referred to in this

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[46] Ibid 220.

text, which the Rabbi cites as examples of righteous behavior are simple. The text concludes with the statement that Adda bar Ahava never lost his temper in his household his entire life. Statements such as these that are of such an exaggerated nature lead one to contemplate just how pure the intentions of the teller of this story were. To make this sort of claim, then as now, is a challenge most continually find impossible to fulfill. Perhaps, one who could be innocent of the charge of ever losing his temper amongst his family might very well be a wonder-worker indeed!

THE RABBINIC HOLY MAN AND HIS INTERACTIONS WITH DIVINE BEINGS

The study of Torah not only yields wonder working abilities that protect the individual Rabbi in the midst of study, but additionally, can yield even protection from death. For example, as is taught in the following text from the Palestinian Talmud, the very words of Torah study are able to fend off the Angel of Death. A short story from Moed Katan Chapter 3, Halakhah 5 teaches the following.

> [Proving that while one is studying Torah, the Angel of death cannot touch a person, the following is told:] A disciple of R. Hisda fell sick. He sent two disciples to him, so that they would repeat Mishnah traditions with him. The Angel of Death turned himself before them into the figure of a snake, and they stopped repeating traditions, and the sick man died.

The power of Torah before the Angel of Death can make the Angel powerless from acting. The words themselves act as weapons that would protect one from even the power of death. The Rabbis become great wonder workers as they use these holy words as spells or incantations that yield them power over even the heavenly figures. Access to the divine leads to great defensive, physical power, not only moments of spiritual elation.

In this story from Berachot 23b, we learn that the powers over demons were not only considered to be present in death, but even over those demons one might encounter on an every day basis. The text is as follows:

> Rava said, "When we were following R. Nahman to the privy, if he had a book of *aggadah*, he would give it to us. But if he wore tefillin he did not give them to us, saying, "Since the Rabbis have permitted them, they will guard me against the demons of the privy."

One might wonder what exactly the demons of the privy are, but that is for another thesis! In any case, especially in the time of the Rabbis, but even today, as so many gastro-intestinal medicines would stand witness, there is potential danger too in the W.C. The ability to fend off the demons of every day may suggest an even greater and more important level of power that the holy man carries with him to make the difficult tasks of every day just a bit easier.

The most fascinating story about a sage and how he confronts the Angel of Death is found in Ketubot 77a as regards the death of Joshua ben Levi. There are several elements in this story that serve to underline very clearly the truest definition of a *tzaddik gamur*. He is faced with death, something that no sage, no matter how righteous he is, can avoid. Yet, Rabbi Joshua challenges the Angel of Death with the same strength of character with which he leads his most righteous life. The text is as follows:

> When Rabbi Joshua was about to die, the Angel of Death was instructed, 'Go and carry out his wish.' When he came and showed himself to him, Rabbi Joshua said, 'Show me my place in Paradise.' 'Very well,' he replied. 'Give me your knife,' Rabbi Joshua demanded, 'since, otherwise, you may frighten me on the way.' The Angel of Death gave it to him. On arriving there the Angel lifted Rabbi Joshua up and showed him his place. Rabbi Joshua then jumped over to the other side of the wall. The Angel seized Rabbi Joshua by the corner of his cloak; but he exclaimed,

> 'I swear that I will not go back.' Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'If he ever had an oath of his annulled he must return; but if not, he need not return.'
>
> Elijah heralded him proclaiming. 'Make room for the son of Levi, make room for the son of Levi.' As he proceeded on his way, he found R. Simeon b. Yohai sitting on thirteen stools of gold. 'Are you,' the latter asked him, 'the son of Levi?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'Has a rainbow ever appeared in your lifetime?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'If that is so, you are not the son of Levi.' The fact, however, is that there was no such thing in his lifetime, but Rabbi Joshua thought, 'I must take no credit for myself.'

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is a model from which we can learn how to become a true *tzaddik gamur*, for his reward is eternal life. The rainbow that shines in most every generation is there to remind God not to destroy a generation unworthy of saving. This *brit* is not made with the Jewish people, but rather with all the people of the world. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is not only righteous enough to save the Jewish people. It is solely because of him, and not the rainbow, that the entire generation during which he lived on earth is not destroyed, for they too were surely unworthy of saving. The generation that rules this world is one that oppresses the Jewish people. It is not because of Jesus, nor the pagan gods, that the Gentiles are saved from the certain destruction they deserve, but because of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi.

THE RABBINIC HOLY MAN AND HIS COMMITMENT TO A PATIENT AND HUMBLE NATURE

Hillel - Al Regel achat - Shabbat 31a

The stories of Hillel continue here to teach the great righteous lessons of patience. In this next famous story from Shabbat 31a, Hillel shows amazing patience, the mark of a great teacher. We learn that a certain man once approached Shammai, Hillel's nemesis, and asked to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai, not a great man of patience, sends the man away. Hillel, on the other hand, is approached by the man with the same request. Hillel tells him, as we have heard many times, "What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it." Hillel's tremendous patience is a model for the Rabbinic mindset.

There is a reward here in this world and the next; one is able to draw more people into the Rabbinic way of life in this world, and be rewarded for the patience of a *tzaddik gamur* in the world to come.

Hillel – Slow to Anger – Shabbat 30b-31a

Hillel is approached by two heathens who have made a wager for four hundred zuz for the one who can make Hillel lose his temper. Both men approach Hillel and ask him a series of random questions that they believe will make him angry that his time had been wasted in such a way. Hillel responds calmly to all their absurd questions. In the end, one of the heathens complains that on account of Hillel's patient nature, he has lost 400 zuz. Hillel tells this heathen that it was worth it for he has learned that no matter what, Hillel will not lose his temper.

THE RABBINIC HOLY MAN AND DEATH AND PURITY

Passage from Avodah Zarah Chapter 3, Halakhah1

> When R. Aha died, a star appeared at noon. When R. Hanah died, the statues bowed down. When R. Yohanan died, the icons bowed down. The said that this was to indicate there were no icons as beautiful as he. When R. Hanina of Bet Hauran died, the Sea of Tiberias split open. They said that this was to commemorate the miracle that took place when he went up to intercalate the year, and the sea split before him.

This begins a series of great miracles that occurred at the passing of the great sages of Palestine. "What is important in the foregoing anthology is the linkage between the holy deeds of the sages and the miracles done at their demise. The sages' merit attained through study of Torah or through acts of saintliness and humility, despite mastery of Torah, was demonstrated for all to see. So the sage was not merely a master of Torah. But his mastery laid the foundations for all other things he was.[47]

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[47] Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 212.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has delved into the imagination of the rabbinic mind. In a world filled with the breakdown of trusted institutions, the destruction of deeply held belief systems, and a society that did not support the most powerless individuals and peoples, the Rabbis sought new paths to holiness. These paths were paved with a creativity that still today challenges the mind and awakens our own most deeply cherished values. The belief that we have a responsibility to treat with respect our family, our colleagues and even the stranger within our midst, is a conviction that the Rabbis held to the highest degree. We learn this clearly in a passage from the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a:

> In the hour when an individual is brought before the heavenly court for judgment, the person is asked:
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> Did you conduct your business affairs honestly?
>
> Did you set aside regular time for Torah study?
>
> Did you work at having children?
>
> Did you look forward to the world's redemption?

The first question one is asked as he comes before the heavenly court is not about faith or prayer. Rather, God wants to know if we have conducted ourselves honestly and decently, having the utmost respect for God's creations.

This theme, the commitment to righteous behavior above all else, pervades the *aggadot* that speak of the merit of the sages. As Neusner teaches, the sages themselves became the greatest models of the proper behavior such that average individuals would not only model these Rabbis and their behavior, but they would become Rabbis themselves through this

behavior. The goal of Rabbinic Judaism was to entice the masses to walk upon these new paths of holiness as the people of Israel would once again discover the divine within its midst. Rabbinic Judaism, however, leveled the greatest challenge of all of Jewish history at the people of Israel. These rules, these laws that guide a person's behavior every day of his life, are incumbent upon each son and daughter of Israel, not just the rabbinic leadership. To succeed in creating these new paths to discovering the divine, one needed to realize that the power to make this happen belonged to each and every Jew. Each child of Israel could become, or at least strive to become, a *tzaddik gamur*. As we have seen in the texts above, while the ideal is to become a *tzaddik gamur*, such as Nachum ish Gamzu, one is challenged to seek opportunities to act as a *tzaddik gamur* as often as possible. We saw that even Nachum was not able to fulfill the ideal of the *tzaddik gamur*, and he was therefore punished for his lapse in consciousness of the hunger and pain of the man standing before him.

The *aggadot* in rabbinic literature that describe an individual as a *tzaddik gamur*, paint a picture of an individual whose greatness comes not from his ability to effect God and heaven, but rather from his ability to control his *yetzer hara*. The Rabbis created models of behavior by referring to the *tzaddik gamur*, that challenge each and every person to achieve this greatness of character through righteousness, piety, study, and self-control.

Living in an entirely different cultural context than our own, the Rabbis understood the need for powerful images of Holy People. These images act as wells from which we can draw life-affirming lessons for what it means to act with greatness of soul, with holiness. The Rabbis faced a time of great tumult in institutions and the redefinition of cultural values. No longer was the sacred sequestered to a particular geographic location in Jerusalem, but with the destruction of the Temple and Cultic Jewish worship, access to the sacred became possible throughout the world. These circumstances provided the

opportunity for those in the society with charismatic leadership to take hold as "holy" figures. Furthermore, it was the Rabbis who set the definitions of the Holy Man as one even less infused with unworldly power, and to a greater extent, infused with a knowledge of self and the world coupled with the purest of heart. Kindness, mercy, charity, truthfulness, and intensity in study and prayer are those attributes that gird the strength of the Jewish Holy Man. Rabbi Akiva, Joshua ben Levi, Honi HaMaagal, and Hillel, among others, are found throughout our literature. The Rabbis created a world with this literature in which access to the sacred is occasioned not by a place, but by a time, not by birth, but by a certain attitude toward the meaning of life. In particular, the Rabbis' use of the term *tzaddik gamur*, the complete and total righteous person, is indicative of their belief in the power of models. To have acted with *tzedek* is only the beginning of leading the truly good life. The Rabbis reserve the term *tzaddik gamur* for those who act with the purest of heart and hands. In a time during which we continue to witness a deteriorating trust in the institutions of our own society, these models of greatness speak to us in determining what kinds of Rabbis to become, what kinds of Jews to become, and what kinds of human beings to become.

Peter Brown writes in "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity":

> The holy man's popularity is too simply explained as a product of the oppression and conflict that the social historian often tends to see as a blatant feature of East Roman Society. Such a view sees too little of the life of the holy man. It was through the hard business of daily living his life for twenty-four hours in the day, through catering for the day-to-day needs of his locality, through allowing his person to be charged with hopes and fears of his fellow men, that the holy man

> gained the power in society that enabled him to carry off the occasional *coup de theatre*.[48]

As Brown explains, the Holy Man played an extraordinary role in these societies. The ultimate Jewish Holy Man, the *tzaddik gamur*, is more than simply a person believed to have theurgic powers. In Jewish society, especially, the Holy Man's strength did not lie in his power over the gods, or God, but rather his power over self.

In the preface of this thesis, I introduced the topic of the *tzaddik gamur* with the *aggadah* of "Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and the Angel of Death." As Rabbi Joshua was the inspiration for me to pursue this topic, it is only right that a few more of his stories conclude this thesis. As we learned from the passage from Kebubot 77a, Rabbi Joshua is known to have been one of the greatest forces of righteousness in the rabbinic world. His righteous behavior made him worthy of not only visits from and the ability to challenge the Angel of Death, but also visits from Elijah the Prophet. The last two *aggadot* of this thesis focus on two of these visits from Elijah with Rabbi Joshua ben Levi. Rabbi Joshua is a *tzaddik gamur* at the end of his life. What seems to surface from the series of Rabbi Joshua-Elijah stories is that becoming the *tzaddik gamur* was, for him, a process. Elijah acts, if you will, as a mentor who has spotted great potential and has decided to push his student to ever greater and more righteous ends.

In this first visit, Elijah sends Rabbi Joshua to the Messiah to ask when he will come. The first question Rabbi Joshua asks of Elijah is, of course, where to find the Messiah. We learn that the Messiah is changing the bandages of the lepers, for where else could he be? Even the Messiah is committed to this utmost righteous behavior. He keeps in mind that he is the Messiah and yet he is ministering to the weakest and most vulnerable people in

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[48] Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London) 105.

the society, waiting for the rest of the world to understand how he can be brought. The text from Sanhedrin 98a is as follows:

> R. Joshua ben Levi met Elijah standing by the entrance of R. Simeon b. Yohai's tomb. He asked him, 'When will the Messiah come?' 'Go and ask him yourself,' was his reply. 'Where is he sitting?' 'At the entrance of the city.' And by what sign may I recognize him?' 'He is sitting among the poor lepers. All of them untie them all at once, and re-bandage them together, whereas he unties and re-bandages each separately, before treating the next, thinking, should I be wanted, it being time for my appearance as the Messiah I must not be delayed through having to bandage a number of sores.' So Rabbi Joshua went to the Messiah and greeted him, saying, 'peace upon thee, Master and Teacher.' 'peace upon thee, O son of Levi,' he replied. 'When will you come Master?' asked he, 'Today,' was his answer. On his returning to Elijah, the latter inquired, 'What did he say to you?' 'Peace Upon you, O son of Levi,' he answered. Thereupon he [Elijah] observed, 'He thereby assured thee and thy father of [a portion in] the world to come.' 'He spoke falsely to me,' he rejoined, 'stating that he would come to-day, but has not.' He [Elijah] answered him, 'This is what he said to thee, Today, if you will hear his voice.'

To be an acquaintance of Elijah the Prophet is to make a full and complete commitment to righteous behavior. When the actions of an acquaintance of Elijah, himself the ultimate *tzaddik gamur*, do not measure up to the status of *tzaddik gamur*, Elijah definitely has the last word.

> The extreme of his rigor Elijah displayed toward teachers of the law. From them he demanded more than obedience to the mere letter of a commandment. His estrangement from his friend Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is characteristic. One who was sought by the officers of the law took refuge with Rabbi Joshua. His pursuers

> were informed of his concealment. Threatening to put all the inhabitants of the city to the sword if he was not delivered up, they demanded his surrender. The Rabbi urged the fugitive from justice to resign himself to his fate. Better for one individual to die, he said, than for a whole community to be exposed to peril. The fugitive yielded to the Rabbi's argument, and gave himself up to the bailiffs. Thereafter Elijah, who had been in the habit of visiting Rabbi Joshua frequently, stayed away from his house, and he was induced to come back only by the Rabbi's long fasts and earnest prayers. In reply to the Rabbi's question, why he had shunned him, he said, "Do you suppose I care to have intercourse with informers?" The Rabbi quoted a passage from Mishnah to justify his conduct, but Elijah remained unconvinced. "Do you consider this a law for a pious man? Other people might have been right in doing this as you did, you should have done otherwise."[49]

To be a *tzaddik gamur* is to be more than just upstanding and a mensch. This aggadah does not suggest to me that Elijah expected Rabbi Joshua to allow all the inhabitants to be killed under the premise of saving this fugitive. Rather, to be a *tzaddik gamur* means that Rabbi Joshua had needed to go beyond the call of duty, beyond the extent of his own strength, to bring a peaceful resolution to all sides involved. It would seem that Rabbi Joshua, at this moment, has yet to have learned what we see he acquires by the end of his life. In the *aggadah* that tells of the end of his life from Ketubot 77b, he does go beyond the call of duty. As noted earlier, he refuses to admit that it was for his sake that the rainbow did not appear during his lifetime. Righteousness perhaps is easier to acquire than humility. To be righteous means to always seek the path for the betterment of another. To be humble means to be willing never to take credit for it.

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[49] Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America) 213.

Becoming a *tzaddik gamur*, according to the Rabbis of the Talmud, is just that, a process of "becoming." There was no magic formulaic set of instructions according to which one lived his life. Rather, the measuring stick was constant and all-encompassing. Yet, as we have learned in a few of the texts, unpredictable as well. A person who has not been attentive to righteousness all his life and experiences a sudden change of heart can become a *tzaddik gamur*. A person who has concentrated on living in a righteous way all his life and suddenly abandons this path can lose all the credit he had stored up until that time. The Rabbis were idealists in very real ways. To strive for the highest form of righteous living in how one thinks, prays, talks with others, treats his loved ones, and treats the stranger are all areas by which he can be judged. The world to come is promised to those who seek to act according to God's ways, to walk along God's path. The rest, as they say, is history.

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