

SOME ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF THE

MECHILTA OF RABBI SIMON BEN YOCHAI

as edited by D. Hoffmann (1905)

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PREFACE

The Mechilta of Rabbi Simon ben Yochai, like all other collections of Midrashim, contains many theological and ethical concepts. It is the purpose of this thesis to bring to light the more important ones.

The manuscript referred to in this thesis was compiled by Dr. D. Hoffmann, and first appeared in the Hebrew publication הפלי
In 1905 the manuscript was published in Frankfurt a.M. under the title "Mechilta de-Rabbi Simon b. Yochai", ein halachischer und haggadischer Midrash zu Exodus.

„מכילתא דרבי שמעון בן יוחאי על ספר שמות“ מלוקטת מחוך סדרה
הגדול כ"י בית עקד המפרים אשר לסלך יר"ה בבערלין הבירה ווער
אז זעיר אט מחוך ספרים זכ"י אחרים עם הערות וסרא מלוקטת
ופתיחה קצרה אמת דוד צבי האפסכאן .

All references to the Mechilta are given by the page number in the manuscript, the only known edition.

The manuscript in its present form follows the Biblical chapter and verse and is not divided into sections as the Mechilta of Ishmael is. It is possible, however that in an earlier form this Mechilta was also divided ^(in 4) in sections, for we find in the text letters which would seem to indicate that this assumption is true, e.g. Ms. 118, 122, 137, 138, 140, 141, 142 etc.

I have also endeavored to compare the Mechilta of Simon with the Mechilta of Ishmael, and wherever both Mechilta agree I have so given the reference to the tractate of Ishmael. In all cases where the chapter and verse of the Mechilta d' Ishmael ^{are} not recorded, the reference is to the same verse as that in the Mechilta of Simon. Very rarely do both Mechilta have the same wording. If the text is better in the Mechilta of Ishmael, the latter text is quoted in the footnote. If the same idea is versed in both

Mechilta, but given from two different authorities, mention is made in the footnote. Whenever the note of the editor, D. Hoffmann, is of value in understanding the text, it is also quoted in the footnote. The translations of the Biblical verses follow the Jewish Publication Society's rendition in most cases; however sometimes a different translation is necessary to make the Midrash understandable. In such instances I have given my own translation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	p. 1
Introduction	
The problem of the Mechilta of Rabbi Simon b. Yochai.	
Chapter II	p. 11
God	
The Almighty.	
God wills and it is accomplished.	
God's omnipotence contrasted to the impotency of the idols.	
Miracles.	
Omniscience.	
God in His personal aspect.	
Chapter III	p.53
God and Israel	
God the guardian and father of Israel.	
Partnership between God and Israel .	
God suffers when Israel suffers.	
Reciprocal relationship between God and Israel.	
Chapter IV	p.66
Israel	
Selection of Israel.	
Israel accepts God's yoke.	
Israel accepts God's Torah.	
Holiness of Israel.	
Israel punished for rebelling .	
All Israel brethren.	
Land of Israel.	
Chapter V	p.83
Torah	
Complexity of concept.	
Hypostatization of Torah.	
Giving of the Torah.	
Eternality of the Torah.	
Universalistic and nationalistic outlook.	
The Torah as the Logos.	
The rewards of the Torah.	

Chapter VI

p.96.

Zecuth

**The concept.
Zecuth of a pious ancestry.
Zecuth of a contemporary.
Zecuth of a pious posterity.
Negative aspect of the Zecuth.**

Chapter VII

p.107

Ethics

**Totality of Jewish life.
Ethics of the family.
Business dealings.
The courts.**

SOME ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN THE MECHILTA DE

RABBI SIMON BEN YOCHAI

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The word Mekilta is an Aramaic word corresponding to the Hebrew "Middah" meaning a measure of capacity and, in its larger sense, collection of rules of interpretation, a treatise or a tract. This name has been given to collections of scriptural comments because they contain exercises based upon fixed rules.

During the Talmudical days an interpreter of the Midrash was called a Bar-Mekilan, that is a man of rules. (1) We have extant two Mekiltas to the book of Exodus, the first and most well known, the Mekilta d' Ismael called by most modern scholars "our Mekilta"; (2) and a recently edited midrash to the book of Exodus called the Mekilta D' Reb Simon ben Yochai.

Hoffman, the editor, feels that the Simon Mekilta was known in the Babylonian schools, (3) although throughout Talmudical literature there seems to be no mention of it. We find references to it, however, by Medieval authors. Some refer to a Mekilta der Reb Simon or a Mekilta

1- Lev. R. iii.

2- Most modern scholars speak of this as "unsere Mechilta" vide: D. Hoffman "Zur Einleitung in die Mechilta de Rabbi Simon ben Yochai" in Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft-5666-1906 p. 194

3- Zur Einleitung in die Mekilta des Rabbi Simon ben Yochai p. 26.

Ahrita der Reb Simon or a Mekilta Aheret. Nachmanides in his commentary (1) refers to it. Rabbi Tedres Halevi in his work "Sefer Haresin" and also in his work "Ozer Hakabed" makes reference to it. We also find the collection mentioned in Elijah Mizrahi's commentary on Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch.

Rab Shemtov ben Abraham in his "Migdal Oz," a commentary, the "Yad" of Maimonides and likewise Rab Mayer ibn Gabbai in his work "Tolaat Jaakob" (2) also make mention of our collection.

There are many and varied difficulties involved in a discussion of the collection known as the Mekilta d' Rab Simon ben Yochai. Some of the questions which seem to puzzle those interested in this work are: Who is the author? When was it redacted? By whom? Is it permissible to gather such a collection and call it by this name?

Dr. David Zvi Hoffman reconstructed from various sources a work which he has called the Mekilta de^r Rabbi Simon ben Yochai, Ein Malachischer und Haggadischer Midrasch zu Exodus. His work first appeared in the Hebrew monthly "Ha-Pelas," (3) and was republished by J. Kaufman in 1905.

Leopold Zunz, an eminent nineteenth century Hebraic scholar, thought it a Kabbalistic work. Dr. M. H. Landauer felt that the Mekilta d' Ishmael and that of Simon were identical. J. Perles in an article written in the

1- Leviticus xlix:31, xxiii:24, and Exodus xiv:19, xxi:3, xxii:12

2- 63-b in Krakow 1570

3- Vols. I-IV

"Monatsschrift" (1) claimed that the maxims of Simon found in the Mekilta d' Ishmael constituted the so-called Mekilta d' Rab Simon ben Yochai. Friedman, however, in his edition of the Mekilta d' Ishmael, was the first to claim that there was a distinction between the Mekilta d' Ishmael and that of Simon. (2)

Before 1905 many people felt that the Sifre de Be Ra' of the Talmud to Exodus was identical with the Mekilta de Rab Simon. Hoffman, however, in an article entitled "Zur Einleitung in Die Mekilta des Rabbi Simon ben Yochai" (3) maintains that there are many differences which convince him that both the aforementioned books were drawn from other sources.

Hoffman is inclined to believe that the Mekilta des Rab Simon is to be identified with the Tanna d' be Chiskiya, redacted by Chiskiya ben Rabbi Chija. Hoffman further contends that the use of the name Rabbi Simon ben Yochai, is due to the fact that firstly it begins with a quotation from Simon ben Yochai and secondly many sentences therein have been attributed to him.

Dr. Louis Ginsberg however (in his article "Der Anteil Rabbi Simon an der ihm zugeschriebenen Mekilta" to be found in Festschrift zu Israel Levy's Siebzigsten Geburtstag, Breslau 1911) refutes this as well as the statement of Levy who believes that we have named this Midrash by

1- 1858 p. 145

2- 1870, Vienna, P. 54

3- To be found in Jahrbuch des Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft 5666, 1905

the name of Rab Simon merely because the book begins with a quotation from this second century Tanna. Ginsberg rightfully points out that it is very impracticable to begin a Midrash with the third chapter of a scriptural book. Those who point to the Mekilta d' Rab Ishmael as a refutation of Ginsberg's position (for we know that Ishmael's Mekilta begins with Chapter xii of Exodus) may be answered by the fact that there is a definite reason for beginning the Mekilta with Chapter xii. Chapter xii begins with the first laws given to Israel and for that reason are we well aware that the Mekilta of Ishmael opens its exegesis there.

Ginsberg also feels that Hoffman's other argument, namely that many sentences have been attributed to Simon ben Yochai and for that reason the book is so named, is likewise inadequate.

The Mekilta d' Rab Simon ben Yochai belongs to the Akiba School rather than ^{that} that of Ishmael. These two schools of thought existed side by side. Dr. Herman Strack in his "Einleitung zu der Talmud und Midrash" says, "The expert may easily recognize the Midrashim of the School of Ishmael, in the first place by the names of the teachers cited, e.g. Josiah and Jonathan, which occur neither in the other Tannaitic Midrashim nor in the Mishna or Tosephta; secondly, by certain technical terms." (1)

The school of Akiba more often uses the "Gezerah Shavah" whereas Ishmael is more likely to proceed according to the rule "Kelal Uferat". Akiba went so far as to use peculiarities of language, doubling of

1- English edition p. 206 J. T. S. 1931

expressions and various other seemingly forced interpretations for his deductions. Ishmael, on the other hand, rejected all such hermeneutics.

The Tannaim appearing in the Mekilta d' Reb Simon are the same as those cited in the Midrash^e de be Rab which are of course those belonging to the Akiba school. On the other hand ~~whereas~~ those who are mentioned in the school of Ishmael are almost entirely lacking. Hoffman says that Achi bar Joshaiah does not appear in the manuscript. However I find that a Tanna of this name appears once. (1)

On the other hand, Rab Isaac who is not to be found in the genuine parts of the Mekilta d' Reb Simon appears twenty-six times in Ishmael and Aba Hanan who is to be found in the Midrash Ishmael and Sifre to Numbers is not to be found in the Mekilta of Simon. Isi ben Jehudah, the Babylonian Joseph, often to be found with variant names, in Talmudical literature appears but twice in our manuscript (146 and 153). The Babylonian Rabbi Nathan who is quoted fifty-one times in the Mekilta of Ishmael and thirty-nine times in the Sifre to Numbers appears but a few times in the legalistic portions of our manuscript; and Rabbi Judah ben Betara appears but twice. (2)

Rabbi Simon in the legalistic portions of the manuscript most often appears without his patronym, a fact which is quite usual in the

1- Manuscript 161

2- Manuscript 161, 107

^e
Midrashe de be Rab. The Mekilta de Reb Simon has much besides in common with the Midrashe de be Rab but is distinguished from the Sifre to Deuteronomy. There are contained in the Mekilta de Reb Simon many explanations of scripture which are not in accordance with the current interpretation to be found in other sources of tradition and also much new material is to be found therein.

Hoffman in his article has stated that we possess but a few authentic texts, which were found in a "Genizah". They are manuscripts 12, note 5 to manuscript 14, note 60; ms. 118, note 6 to ms. 119, note 90; ms. 137, note 2 to 145, note 2. The remainder was taken from the Midrash Haggodal.

Lewy in his article "Ein Wort über die Mekilta des Rab Simon" (1) said that much of this Midrash is to be found in the Midrash Haggodal and that it is most probable that much of the manuscript may be accepted without too much criticism. Concerning the haggadic parts, much in both the Mekilta de Ishmael and that of Simon are similar for Chiskiah, the reputed redactor of the Mekilta of Simon, received much of the haggadic tradition.

It is also probable that the Midrash Haggodal had at its disposal the Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael from which it took many of its ideas.

Ginsberg (2) is of the opinion that Chiskiah ben Rabbi Hayas was the redactor and that due to the style and the hermeneutics it is definitely

1- I. Lewy: "Ein Wort über die Mekilta des R. Simon;"
Jahres-bericht des Jüdisch-theologischen Seminars,
Franckelischer Stiftung: Breslau, 1889

2- I. Ginsberg: "Der Anteil Rabbi Simons an der ihm zugeschriebenen Mekilta;"
Festschrift zu Israel Lewy's Siebzigstem Geburtstag: Breslau,
1911.

a part of the Akiba school. The views of Akiba are almost always reproduced whereas Rabbi Ishmael's opinions are either ignored or expressly provided with his name. There are to be found two places where Akiba is left out and the adverse opinions are cited as ד'ר'ר (Exodus xiii:9 and xxii:9). Lewy believes that much of the Mekilta de Reb Simon is not to be found in the Talmudic Midrashic literature at all.

Ginsberg shows that due to corruptions in the text of Jer. Peah I: 15 d, Simon's grandson is meant, not Rabbi Simon himself and that in the question of honoring one's father and mother Simon's grandson goes even a step further than his grandfather, which would not contradict Simon's view in the Mekilta. Ginsberg also feels that in many cases Rab Simon has been misquoted for Rab Ishmael. (1)

Simon in the Pesichte, says Ginsberg, is never mentioned without his patronym. Lewy finds some of Simon's Haggadah^o which he thinks should appear in the manuscript but does not, e.g. that dealing with the breastplate of the high priest found in Canticles Rabbah I:10 and Tanchuma (ed. Buber) II:12 and again in Canticles Rabbah V:16 where an aggadah concerning the revelation on Sinai is quoted. Ginsberg answers that the ~~tenor~~ shown in the aforementioned Aggadat belongs to Deuteronomy v:22 and not Exodus xx:16 and therefore it is not to be expected in our manuscript. Lewy seems to think our manuscript has legalisms contrary to the views of Rabbi Simon.

1- Pesichte Rabati xvii 78 a; Mekilta Bo I.

In Babylonian Kiddushin 18 a, it says according to Simon that a father may sell his minor daughter into slavery only once and then only if she has not been married before. To the verse (1) "to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power seeing he has dealt deceitfully with her" Rabbi Simon says the first who dealt deceitfully with her and divorced her does not have permission to make her a slave. Lewy contends that this statement contradicts that attributed to Rabbi Simon in the Talmud and should this contention of Lewy be justified that would throw possible doubt on the authorship of the Mekilta being that of Simon. Ginsberg however says that firstly it often happens in Talmudical literature that there are two contradicting expostulations concerning the point of view of a Tanna and secondly in this case under closer scrutiny the manuscript and the Talmud seem to essay identical ideas though in different words.

The manuscript cites anonymously the opinion of Akiba in regard to "bigdo ber" according to which these words mean *in'ye w'ye* which prohibits the father to sell his daughter into slavery if she has been already once mated. Simon's contention follows, i.e. that the right of the father is limited and also that he may sell his daughter only once. Rabbi Simon expresses this as her first master (her father) who may not make a slave out of her after he has driven her into slavery once before from his house. Rabbi Simon explains "bigdo" exactly as Rabbi Eleazer in Kiddushin 18a. However, while Simon rejects the

1- Exodus xxi:8

comprehension of Akiba that "בגדו" means פלש עלינו, he accepts the general law but ascribes a different meaning to "bigdo". "בגדו"

Ginsberg explains away the other seeming contradictions that Lewy contends are in the manuscript in like manner. He, however, is forced to admit that there is one contradiction remaining, namely that of the Halacha to xxiii:1 that of ^{לפי דעת רבי} which is in accord with the opinion of Haggah in Jer. Sanh. VIII 26 c, whereas Rabbi Simon's contention consists of ^{לפי דעת רבי} It must be admitted that this one contradiction is not enough to deny the authenticity of the manuscript for if one contention were enough then we would not be able to call the Sifra a Midrash of Rabbi Judas. For not only are there omitted a number of his interpretations to Leviticus but there are also to be found therein Halachot contrary to his opinions.

There are many places which show definitely that the opinions are of Rabbi Simon and that the two ^{דברים} in the manuscript which are definitely in contradiction to Akiba's view are, however, in conformity with those of Rabbi Simon. While many views seem to be in accordance with Rabbi Akiba it is safe to say that Simon as Akiba's pupil acquired many of these views. Since many of the ^{דברים} continues Ginsberg, are in accordance with Rabbi Simon, the tradition ascribing the manuscript to this Tanna seems to be a correct one although we do not intend to say that the manuscript as we have it was such as left the hand of the author.

Just as we call the other Mekilta that of Rabbi Ishmael though it contains only part of the teachings of that Tanna and also material which is ~~both~~ of a later date and even contradictory to the views of Ishmael, and as we call the ~~Sifre~~ that of Rabbi Judah, of which we may say the same thing, there is no reason then to deny that the manuscript which we possess is largely that of the work of Simon even though it contains ideas and views which this Tanna would never have accepted.

CHAPTER II

GOD

In considering the theology of any Rabbinic writing the first picture that meets our gaze is that of a triad in Judaism. This triad, namely: God, Israel and Torah, is to be found in all of Rabbinic literature, and there is no book of that type extant which does not concern itself with these three fundamental dogmas in Judaism. It is therefore necessary, in discussing any Rabbinic Midrash, to deal firstly with these three basic principles of Rabbinic Theology and to examine just how these ideas were developed in the collection under consideration.

The existence of God was never questioned by the Jew who lived in the age of the Tannaim. Scripture was enough proof of His existence. However with the way in which God made Himself manifest, His attributes, His relation to the people of the world in general and to Israel in particular, His omnipotence and omniscience, and His abode, Midrashic literature does concern itself. It is therefore our task to show just what the Mechilta of Rabbi Simon ben Jochai has to teach concerning the aforementioned references to God.

The sentence found in Genesis Rabba (1) הוא מקומו של עולם
ואין עולם מקומו "He is the seat of the Universe, but the

1- Genesis Rabba 68

Universe is not His seat", sums up a general Rabbinic view of God. God is everywhere to be found. He is all inclusive as well as exclusive. This idea gives a totality to Jewish life; a life in which everything, no matter how simple or complex, is a manifestation from Him. There is no place in the Universe which is free of God. This same idea is to be found in our Mechilta in the following form: "A non-Jew asked Rabbi Gamliel, 'For what purpose did God appear to Moses in the midst of a נֶחֱלֶמֶת ?' (1) Rabban Gamliel answered, 'If God had revealed Himself to Moses in the midst of a carob tree, or a fig tree, I might be able to say, that there are places in the world which are void of God. Therefore we are taught that God revealed Himself to Moses from the midst of a נֶחֱלֶמֶת to teach us that there are no places in the Universe which are void of God'". (2)

The first great quality that was attributed to God was His Omnipotence. Throughout the Bible one also receives the feeling of God's great might and power. The Rabbis in the Midrash have used the word הַנּוֹכָחִית, the Almighty, and in certain instances call God by his name. We read in the Mechilta of Rabbi Simon, "Rabbi Eleazer of Modiim says, 'The Israelites were accustomed to speak complainingly against Moses, and not alone against Moses did they speak but also against the Almighty הַנּוֹכָחִית'". (3)

1- נֶחֱלֶמֶת lowliest of trees, as being a mere bush

2- Ms. 2 to Exodus iii:2

3- Ms. 72 commentary to Exodus xv:23: cf. Mechilta of Ishmael Tractate Vayassa

Many other manifestations of God's omnipotence are given by the Rabbis and the Mechilta of Rabbi Simon has its share of them. The great and famous idea that God created the world by the Word; that all that was required of Him to create this vast Universe was an utterance, is also to be found in this Midrash. This idea shows very conclusively the theology of Rabbinic Judaism. God to the Rabbis was so all-powerful that by his mere utterance all this great Universe came into being. "And God spoke unto Moses and said unto him, I am the Lord", says the Scriptures and to this our Midrash adds, "Rabbi Eliezer says, 'The Holy One Blessed be He said unto Moses, I am He who spoke and the world came into being' for it is written, (Ps. L:1) 'God the Lord has spoken and called the earth'." (1)

God's greatness is again manifested in the fact that He does whatever he wills, and nothing can stand in His way. If He wishes to retract he may, if not he does not. The picture of the soldier is given by our Mechilta to illustrate this. In commenting upon the verse "The Lord is a man of War", (Ex. xv:3) the Midrash says: "There may be a mighty hero in the war, but once His arrow has left the bow it is impossible for him to retrieve it; but He who spoke and the world came into being is not like this hero (i.e. He is able to retrieve it if necessary). When Israel does not do the will of God a decree comes forth from Him as it is written, (Dt. xxxii:41)

1- Ms. 4 Exodus vi:2

'If I whet my glittering sword' and then they repent, God immediately withdraws it, ~~as it is~~ said, 'And my hand takes hold on judgment'. Perhaps it might ~~be then~~ said that He turns it back into nothingness, but Scripture says, 'I will render vengeance on my enemies.' And upon whom does He turn it? Upon the nations of the world, as it is said 'And will recompense them that hate me'". (1)

It is God Himself who will destroy the nations who do not recognize His Name and refuse to realize that He is God in Heaven above and upon the earth beneath. It is for this reason that God smote the Egyptians. Rabbi Jose the Galilean says, "And God spoke unto Moses saying (Ex. vi-2), The Holy One Blessed be He said to Moses, 'My children were worthy of destruction in Egypt'. As it is said, (Ezk.xxvi:7,8) 'And I said unto them, Cast ye away every man the detestable things of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against Me, and would not hearken unto Me. They did not every man cast away the detestable things of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt, then I said I would pour out My fury upon them, to spend My anger upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt'. But behold I shall do something for them because of My great name, so that it may not be profaned. As it is said, (Ezek. xx:9) 'But I wrought for My name's sake that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among whom they were, in

1- Ms. 62 Exodus xv:3 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tractate Shirata

whose sight I made myself known to them so as to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt'. 'And ye say unto me send by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send.'" (1)

The all powerful God rules over the world and is the cause of all things. "I am the Lord" (Ex. xii:12), "God is the ruler of all things and wherever the pride of idolatry is mentioned there is to be found the praise of God. For so it is written (Jer. x:9), 'Silver beaten into plates is brought from Tarshish and gold from Ophir; the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the goldsmiths; blue and purple is their clothing; they are all the work of skillful men'; And there follows, 'Thus shall ye say unto them, the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, they shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens (Jer. x:11). And it says, 'He that hath made the earth by His power, that hath established the world by His wisdom and hath stretched out the heavens by His understanding'. It is written (Ps. cxv:5), 'Mouths they have and they speak not'. And it is said (ibid 3), 'But our God is in the heavens, all that he wishes he does'". (2)

It was to show His might that God hardened the hearts of the Egyptians and even when Pharoah weakened, the Egyptians' hearts became harder. "From whence do we learn when Pharoah weakened, the Egyptians' hearts were hardened? We are told, 'And I

1-Ms. 4, Exodus iv:13

2- Ms. 13

harden the hearts of the Egyptians'. (1) And when both of them, Egyptians and Pharoah, seemed to weaken, God hardened their hearts, as it is written (Ex. x:1) 'For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of all his servants (ibid).'" Not only did God harden their hearts but He also enticed them. ^{Scripture} It says "over against it shall ye encamp by the sea" to which our Midrash adds "in order to entice the hearts of Egypt." (2)

Once again does God show his greatness and power when He punishes the wicked, (xiv:4) "And I shall harden the heart of Pharoah", to which the Mechilta of R. Simon adds, "When the Holy One Blessed be He punishes the wicked His name becomes great in the world as it is written (Is. lxvi:19), 'And I will mark sign among them and I will send such as escape of them to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul and Lud, that draw the bow to Jubal and Javan, to the isles afar off that have not heard My fame and have not seen My glory'. What does it say? 'And they shall tell of My glory among the nations'; and thus you must interpret 'And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood and will cause to rain upon him and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hail stones, fire and brimstone'. And what does it say then? 'Thus will I magnify Myself and sanctify Myself and make Myself known in

1- Ms. 36:37 to Ex. xiii:15

2- Ms. 41 Ex. xiv:2

the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord'. And thus you must interpret, (Jer. xvi:17) 'O Lord my strength and my stronghold and my refuge in the day of affliction.' What does it say then? 'Unto Thee, nations shall come from the ends of the earth and shall say, Our fathers have inherited naught but lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit'. And so must you interpret (Is. xlv:14), 'Thus saith the Lord, The labor of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabaens, men of stature shall come over unto thee and shall be thine. They shall go after thee in chains. They shall come over and they shall fall down unto thee. They shall make supplications unto thee.' What then does it say? 'Surely God is Thee and there is none else'. In like manner you must interpret the verse (Obadiah, 1:21), 'And saviors shall come upon Mt. Zion to judge the Mt. of Esau'. And what does it say then? 'And the kingdom shall be the Lord's'. And it says (Ps. x:16), 'The Lord is King for ever; the nations are perished out of His land'. And it says (Ps. ciii:35) 'Let sinners cease out of the earth and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul, Hallelujah'. And it says (Ps. cxlvi:9), 'The Lord preserveth the strangers. He upholdeth the fatherless and the widow. But the way of the wicked He maketh crooked.' What then does it say? 'The Lord will reign for ever and ever. Thy God O Zion unto all generations. Hallelujah! "' (1)

1- Ms. 42 cf. Tektita of Ismael tractate Besh llach

For this reason it was God Himself who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and the evil men of the flood and dispersion periods for in commenting upon the verse, "I am the Lord" (xii:12) our Midrash adds, "I am He who took punishment from the men of the generation of the flood and of the dispersion and of the people of Sodom"¹). Likewise God destroys all the wicked ones upon the earth. "Scripture tells us that when God stretches out his hand the evil ones perish from the earth. As it is said (Zeph ii:13), 'And He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria'. And it also says (Ezek. xxv:16), 'Behold I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines and I will cut off the Cherethim, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast'. And it is written (Zeph. i:4), 'And I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem'. To give an example of what this is like, when eggs are placed in a man's hand, if he but turn his hand a little the eggs will fall and be broken. Likewise 'when God stretches out His hand both he that helped shall stumble and he that is helped will fall and together they shall be destroyed'". (Is. xxxi:3) (2)

The Rabbis were unable to conceive of any one's being as powerful or as great as God and this idea recurs in the Rabbinic writings. To the verse (Ex. xv:11), "Who is like unto thee among the mighty?" the Midrash comments, "When they saw Pharaoh and his army destroyed in the

1- Ms. 13

2- Ms. 58 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Shirata

sea and the kingdom of the Egyptians had come to an end and judgments executed upon their idols, they all opened their mouths and said, 'Who is like unto thee O Lord among the gods?' Not only did Israel alone feel this but when the nations of the world perceived what had happened to Egypt and its idols, all of them threw away their idolatrous practices and gave obsequance to God and said, 'Who is like unto thee along the gods?' And so did Rahab say (Josh ii:10), 'For we have heard how God dried up the Red Sea for thee and we have hearkened and our hearts have melted, and so do we find that in the future the nations of the world will renounce their idols'. So it is said (Is. ii:20), 'On that day man shall cast away his idols of silver and of gold, which they have made to worship, to the moles and bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crevices, from before the terror of the Lord and from the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake mightily the earth'. And what does it then say? 'And the idols will be utterly destroyed (Is. ii:18).'" (1)

He is so great that all the idols are as naught before Him, for when He smites the nations He also smites their gods. For we read, "And upon the gods of Egypt shall I execute judgments (Ex. xii:12)"; to which the Midrash adds, "There is no nation which is smitten that its gods are not smitten also. For it says (^{Is. xlvi}Jer. 1,2) 'Bel is put to

1- Ms. 66 of Mekilta of Israel tract. Shirata

shame, Merodach is broken in pieces.' Put to shame are her idols; broken in pieces are her images. And so it says (Is. xxi:9), 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon and all the idols of her gods are broken to the ground'. And so it says concerning our fathers (Lev. xxvi:30), 'And I shall place their corpses upon the corpses of their idols'. And so is it to be in the future when the nations of the world perish: their idols shall perish with them. As it says (Is. ii:18) 'And the idols shall be completely destroyed'". (1)

Once again is the impotency of the gods of the rest of the world shown in the case of the first born of the captives who also received the death penalty as the rest of the first born in Egypt. (Ex. xii:29) "Why were they also smitten? Because they said our gods shall punish the Egyptians who caused us to serve them. (2) 'The wailing was so great in Egypt' (Ex. xii:30) because 'the Egyptians saw their gods break up and fall before them'. And even though Scripture does not specifically say so, it is explained (II Sam. xxii:8), 'Then shook and trembled the earth, the foundations of the heavens were moved; and they shook because He was wroth'". (3)

But Pharaoh thought that Baal Zephon would come to his aid, according to our Midrash, for, "He closed the wilderness about them".
^{Ex.} (xiv:3) And in explaining this verse the Rabbis say, "Pharaoh said,

1- Ms. 13 and 14

2- Ms. 23

3- Ms. 41 to Ex. xiv:2 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tractate Beshallah

Baal Zephon shall gather all the wild animals against them (Israel) and they shall not be able to pass through". (1) This treachery is carried out, for when the Egyptians "overtook them encamping by the sea" (Ex. xiv:9) before Baal Zephon "Pharoah rejoiced greatly when he saw Baal Zephon for he said, 'Baal Zephon has listened to my decree; I have said to destroy them in the sea and Baal Zephon has agreed to drown them in the sea.' Pharoah thus began to offer incense to the idols for it says, 'before Baal Zephon Pharoah sacrificed'". (2)

Once again do the Rabbis show the greatness of God when they say that until the exodus, "no slave had ever been able to run away from Egypt and at this time the Holy One Blessed be He brought out six hundred thousand people from Egypt. Referring to this it is said, 'The Lord is greater than all gods'." (Ex. xviii-11) (3)

The Rabbis held Jethro, the father of Moses in high esteem, for he suggested to Moses a plan to settle the dispute of the people. They also see in his words the realization that the God of Israel was the greatest of all gods. And so our Midrash says, "There was not an idol in the world which Jethro had not served, but now he recognized that God was above all the gods". (Ex. xviii:11) (4)

1- Ms. 41

2- Ms. 45

3- Ms. 68 Ex. xviii:11 cf. Mekilta of Israel tract. Amalek

4- Ms. 68 Ex. xviii:11 cf. Mekilta of Israel tract. Amalek

Not only did Jethro recognize this but other great figures in those days did also, for we read, "Naaman recognized the fact even more for it is said, 'Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel'. (II Kgs. v:15) (1) So too Rahab the harlot says, 'For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath'. (Josh. ii:11) (2)

Comparing God to the idols of the other nations the Rabbis once again show His sovereign power. The Psalms say, the idols "have eyes but they see not". (Ps. cxv:5) "But He who spoke and the world came into being is not as these idols for the eyes of the Lord wander about the earth". (Zech. iv:10) And also it says, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good'. (Prov. xv:3) 'Ears they possess but they hear not', (Ps. cxv:6) But He who spoke and the world came into being is not so for it says, (Ps. lxxv:1) 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee doth all flesh come'. And it says, (Ps. x:17) 'Thou wilt direct mine heart, thou wilt cause thy ear to attend'. It says concerning the idols, 'nostrils they have but they smell not'. (Ps. cxv:6) But He who spoke and the world came into being is not so for it is written (Lev. 1:10), 'an offering of sweet savor to the Lord'. And it also says, (Lev. viii:21) 'And the Lord smelled the sweet savor'. 'Hands they have but they move not' (Ps. cxv:7) is said of the idols but "He who spoke and the world came into being is not so." (Is. xlviii:13) 'Yea My hand has laid the found-

1- i.e. Jethro said, 'God was above gods' and Naaman recognized his oneness.

2- Ms. 88 to Ex. xviii:11; cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Analek

ations of the earth, and My right hand has spread out the heavens.¹ And it also says, (Is. xlv:12) 'I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens and all their host have I commanded'. 'Feet they possess but they walk not'. (Ps. cxv:7) But He who spoke and the world came into being is not so, for it says, 'And God went out and fought against those nations'. (Zech. xiv:3) And it also says, (Zech xiv:4) 'And His feet stood on that day on the Mount of Olives' 'Nor do they speak with their throats' (Ps. cxv:7). But He who spoke and the earth was, is not so (S. S. v:16) 'His mouth is most sweet, He is altogether lovely'. And it also says, (Job xxxvii:2) 'And the sound that goeth out of His mouth'". (1)

All these things which God does are to emphasize His great name and even though the people should have been destroyed, yet God has shown Israel His greatness. In commenting upon the verse, "And the waters close", (Ex. xiv:27) our Midrash says, "The Holy One Blessed be He dried up the waters first. But the mud He did not dry up. Israel began to say, the waters He was able to dry up but the mud He wasn't. The Holy One Blessed be He then said to them, I have tested you and ye have not withstood the test. You should be destroyed from the world as the Egyptians were. But what shall I do? Behold I shall do this because of My great name which is called upon you. For so scripture says, (Ps. cvi:7) 'But were rebellious at the sea'. Immediately the Holy One Blessed be He dried up the mud". (2)

1- Ms. 66 to Ex. xv:11

2- Ms. 50

From the foregoing analysis of God's omnipotence we can understand that this power was not meant to be an attribute of omnipotence but an assurance that nothing can thwart God's purpose. This greatness on the part of God has ever been linked with Israel's history. In understanding the various miracles which God performed, we must recognize the fact that they too were linked with Israel's history. One of the greatest contributions that Judaism has given to the world is this feeling of continuity of life, a manifestation of "the one great divine event to which the whole creation moves". This fundamental philosophy of Judaism was easily reconcilable with the Platonic doctrine for both were teleological. It is for this reason that many of our tannaitic Rabbis were neo-Platonists.(1)

George Foote Moore in his "Judaism" (2) says:-

"To understand the Jewish conception of miracle, we must enter into their way of thinking about God and nature. A miracle, from this point of view, is an extraordinary phenomenon or occurrence wrought by God, presumably for some special purpose. It cannot be described as something at variance with the laws of nature, transcending or suspending them, for, as has been said, there was no idea of laws of nature in the modern sense. Nor is it the mere wonder of it that makes such an event a miracle; it is the religious interpretation of the occurrence, the belief that in this phenomenon or event God in a peculiar way manifests his presence, reveals his will, or intervenes for the deliverance of his worshippers and the discomforture of their enemies, to provide for their needs in distressful times, to avert calamities, to heal mortal diseases, and to save from a thousand evils where human help is

1- See Gen. Rabba 1:1 Tanchuma to Genesis 1:1

2- Vol. I Part II Ch. I p. 376

vain. The greatness, the power of God is abundantly manifest in the ordinary course of nature; it is His goodness that is peculiarly revealed in the miracle as faith interprets and appropriates it."

Since the *Lechilta* de Rabbi Simon deals with the book of Exodus, the departure from Egypt, the Rabbis quoted therein have shown countless more miracles which God wrought for the people of Israel when they were about to leave Egypt and while they were in the wilderness marching toward the promised land. Most of the above-mentioned reasons for the miracles may be found in the large collection of miracles recorded in our Midrash.

There are miracles connected with the call of Moses; we read, "A great miracle Moses saw when he saw the tree burn and not be consumed; and if you wonder at that, then come and see how the staff of Aaron which was of dry (dead) wood gave forth leaves and flowers". (1) When Moses answered God saying that he feared to come to Egypt for his enemies wished to kill him God answered him saying, "Fear not Moses, for these men are already dead". (Ex. iv:19) For all who seek ye are dead, The Holy One Blessed be He answered Moses and said unto him, You tell me that you fear the children of men from whom you fled. The children of men whom Pharaoh has sent after you to seize you: who has made them deaf, dumb and blind? Behold I the Lord have". (2)

1- Ms. 2 to Ex. iii:2

2- Ms. 3

Many other miracles were added by the Rabbis to the ten plagues which harassed the Egyptians before the Israelites left Egypt. Not only were the gods in Egypt destroyed but also were the gods of the Egyptians in other places destroyed. In commenting upon the verse "and against all the gods of Egypt" (Ex. xii:12) the Rabbis say, "This seems to say only the gods of Egypt which were in the land. Concerning the gods of other peoples in Egypt, how do we know they also were destroyed? Scripture says 'and against all the gods of Egypt'. How do we know the gods of Egypt in other places were destroyed? Scripture teaches against all gods, 'The gods of Ham and Ethiopia and Egypt and Put and Canaan'. From whence do we learn these gods were also destroyed? Scripture teaches against all gods. 'And so He says, (Is. xliii:3) 'I have given Egypt as thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee'. Different punishments have I given them, the wooden idols have been broken, the stone ones burned and the clay ones rotted". (1)

"The smiting of the first born was a complete destruction, no first born of Egypt had the power to escape God's wrath, for it says, 'And I smote all the first born of Egypt'. (Ex. xii:12) This seems to tell us that the first born of the Egyptians in Egypt were smitten but how about the first born of others in Egypt? This we learn from the wording 'all the first born', that even the first born of the Egyptians

1- Ms. 13 to Ex. xii:12 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Piska

in other lands were smitten? This too is derived from the wording, 'all the first born'. (1) "The first born of Ham, Ethiopia, Egypt, Put and Canaan: from whence do we deduce these too were smitten? Scripture teaches (Ps. lxxviii:51) 'And He smote all the first born of Egypt the first of the strength in the tents of Ham'. Not only were the first born of the people killed but even of the cattle. We derive this from the statement 'from man unto cattle'. (2)

To prove that there "was no house which was void of a death" the Midrash in the name of R. Jacob says, "And was there no house which did not have a son as first born? But the manner of the early people was that he who did not have a son as the first born would call the eldest son the בְּכוֹר (first born), as it says (I Chr. xxvi:10) 'Hosai^h of the children of Merari had sons: Simri the chief (for though he was not the first born yet his father made him chief)'. A house that had many men and none of them had sons, the oldest of the house died. From whence do we deduce that the eldest of a house is called the first born? For so it is said of David (Ps. lxxxix:28) 'I also will appoint him first-born'." (3)

Rabbi Simon even estimated the number of deaths among the Egyptians. He says, "There were no less than 600,000 first born

1- Ms. 13 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Fisha

2- Ms. 13

3- Ms. 23 Ex. xii:20 cf. Mekilta of Ismael Tract. Fisha

who died in that night. For it is said (Is. xliii:3) 'I shall place Egypt as thy ransom'. And the ransom is one for one" (1) If the first born had already died R. Nathan said the following happened, "When a first born son was born to one of the Egyptians a statue was made of him, and on that day the statue was destroyed in front of them and it was as though it were the day when they buried the first born son". An anonymous Tanna gives an even more gruesome picture in this, "The Egyptians were accustomed to bury their dead in their houses and on that day the dogs entered through the drains and dug their way in and brought out the first born from their graves and sported with them. It was then as evil a day for the parents as on the day of their death". (2)

The other plagues, too, were a source of horror for the Tannaim and we read of the various plagues with which God plagued Egypt. The verse concerning the Israelites "and there shall be no plague upon you" (Ex. xii:13) proves according to our Midrash that, "in Egypt there were plagues and destruction". (3) "That three kinds of punishments afflicted Egypt on that night, namely, plagues, destruction, and affliction is proved by the verse 'when I smote Egypt'". (4)

These plagues were emphasized by our Rabbis and wherever they

1- Ms. 23 to Ex. xii:30

2- Ms. 23,24

3- Ms. 14

4- Ms. 14 to Ex. xii:13

could infer that plagues took place they did. "For it says (Exodus xii:12) 'And I shall pass through the land of Egypt'. Just as the word here used is **עבר**, the word further on (Ex. xii:23) is **עבר**, 'And the Lord will pass through and smite the Egyptians'. Just as **עבר** means plagues there, so does it mean plagues here. For so it is written (Amos v:17), 'And in all the vineyards there is mourning for I shall pass into thy midst said the Lord'.⁽¹⁾ 'For with a strong hand did God take the Jews from Egypt', is to be interpreted as the ten plagues and the tenth one is equal to all the former ones." (2) This same method of interpretation is again used, for the Mekilta says, "The word discomfort means plague as it is said (Dt. vii:23) 'And shall discomfort them with a great discomforture, until they be destroyed'". (3)

The going out of Egypt was accompanied by many types of miracles which aided Israel and added to the discomforture of the Egyptians. When Israel left Egypt Moses' voice traveled greatly. In considering the verse, "From Ramesis to Succoth", (Ex. xii:37) which is 160 miles according to the Mekilta, the Rabbis say, "And the voice of Moses went for forty days"; and do not wonder at this, for so it is said (Ex. ix:3) 'And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, Take ye handfulls of soot from the furnace, and let Moses throw them heaven-

1-Ms. 13

2- Ms. 31, 32 to Ex. xiii:2

3- Ms. 47 to Ex. xiv:13

ward'. And behold here we may deduce this, by an "a fortiori" argument. If dust, whose manner is not to go, goes for a distance of forty days, how much the more can the voice which is wont to travel, go". (1)

When the people were about to leave Egypt Moses remembered the command of their forefather Joseph who had asked that his bones be buried out of Egypt. This incident gave the Rabbis a means of showing a miracle. The first question that would naturally have to be answered was, "How did Moses know where to find the bones of Joseph"?

"It so happened that Sarah the daughter of Asher was still alive. She lived in Joseph's generation and Moses inquired of her where Joseph was buried. Sarah answered Moses and said, 'A coffin of clay the Egyptians made for Joseph and placed it in the Nile so that its waters might be blessed'. Moses thereupon went to the banks of the Nile and said, 'Joseph, Joseph the oath which God took to redeem Israel is about to be fulfilled and the time has come for the fulfillment of the oath which Israel took. Now the oath of Israel is being prevented of fulfillment by you. If you reveal yourself, it is well; if not we are free from our oath'. Immediately the coffin of Joseph appeared on the water". (2) R. Nathan has another interpretation. "Joseph was buried in the sepulchre of the kings. Moses went and stood at the sepulchre of the kings and said, 'Joseph, Joseph.' Im-

1-Ms. 26 cf. Mekilta of Israel tractate Pisha

2- Ms. 39 cf. M. of Is. to Ex. xiii:19

mediately the coffin of Joseph moved and Moses went to it, took it and brought it with him. For so it is written, 'And Moses took the bones of Joseph'. (1)

In order to protect Israel the clouds of glory were over them when they encamped at Ramsis. In explaining the word Succoth, (Ex. xii:37) Rabbi Eliezer says, "There were the clouds of glory which came and encamped over Israel at Ramsis. This is to be likened to a bridegroom who brings a palanquin to the door of his bride's house in order that she may enter immediately". (2)

The Jews finally reached the Red Sea where God was to perform many more miracles for them. The Rabbis find there were ten miracles performed for Israel at the Red Sea. "The waters were divided, as it is written (Ex. xiv:21) 'And the waters were divided;' and made like a vault, as it says (Habakkuk iii:14) 'Thou hast stricken through with his own rods the head of his rulers'; made the sea in sunder, as it is written (Ps. cxxxvi:13) 'To Him who divided the Red Sea in sunder', made of it dry land, as it is said (Ex. xiv:29) 'But the children of Israel walked on dry land', made a wall against the Egyptians, as it is said (Habakkuk iii:15) 'Thou hast trodden the sea with thy horses, through the foaming of mighty waters', made it as rocks, as it is written (Ps. lxxiv:13) 'Thou didst shatter the heads of the sea monsters in the waters', hast split it, as it is written (ibid)

1- Ms. 39 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Besallah

2- Ms. 26 to Ex. xii:37

'Thou didst break the sea in ~~pieces~~ by Thy strength'; made of it as a pane of glass and they were able to see each one the next, as it is said (II Sam. xxii:12) 'Gathering of waters, thick clouds of the skies;' (1) made of it for them a memorial, sweet water in the midst of salt water, as it is said (Ex. xv:8) 'The floods stood upright as a heap'; and those waters, as soon as they had subsided, congealed, as it is said, 'The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea' (2)

Not only were the waters of the Red Sea turned back but also the waters of the rest of the world¹. 'From whence do we gather that the water in the wells, and caves and springs and pitchers and barrels and glasses and flasks were also turned back? We read ~~in the word~~ 'And the waters were divided' in the plural not in the singular, i.e. all waters of the world were divided'. (3) R. Nathan asked, "How do we know that the upper and lower waters were divided? It is written, (Ps. lxxvii:16) 'The waters saw Thee and they were in pain'. 'These are the upper waters.' 'The depths also trembled'. 'These are the lower waters. And it also says (Habakkuk iii:10) 'The deep uttereth its voice and lifteth up its hands on high'. 'And when the waters receded so did all the waters of the earth do likewise'." (4)

1- The ¹MS adds, "that is to say, there were divisions as clear as the heavens

2- Ms. 48 and 49 to Ex. xiv:16 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Beshallah

3- Ms. 50

4- Ms. ⁵⁰Exodus iiv:21 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Beshallah

"Both the upper and lower waters covered the Egyptians. The very depths came up and covered the sky and made dark the lights for so it says (Ezek. xxxii:8,9), 'All the bright lights of the heaven will I make black over thee and I shall place darkness upon thy land, says the Lord God. And I shall vex the hearts of many peoples when I shall bring thy destruction among the nations, unto the countries which thou hast not known.' And it says (Is. xlii:10) 'For the stars of the heavens and the constellations thereof shall not give their lights. The sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine'. Why? 'For I will visit upon the world their evil and upon the wicked their iniquity'. And it is written (Ezek. xxx:18), 'At Tehaphnes also the day shall be darkened when I shall break there the yokes of Egypt; and the pride of her power shall cease in her; as for her a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity'". (1)

It is also said that "the depths covered them" (Ex. xiv:5). The Rabbis ask, "Were there any abysses there? Was it not a beach there? But this teaches us that the lower depths arose as well as the upper depths and began fighting with the Egyptians and inflicted upon them all kinds of punishments. Jonah only went down to one depth as it is written (Jonah ii:4) 'For Thou didst cast me into the depth, into the heart of the seas'. And the Egyptians were cast to two depths, as it says 'They went down to the depths'". 2)

1- Ms. 62 to Ex. xv:5 cf. Midrash of Ismael Tract. Shirata

2- Plural use here of Hebrew word Ms. 62 cf. " of Ismael does not contain full passage.

In comment on the verse, "And He took off their chariot wheels", R. Judah says, "By the fire from above, the wheels below burned. But the yokes and the chariots kept on running ahead even in spite of the drivers for these were laden with vessels of silver and gold and with precious stones and pearls, and the Israelites were to get the spoil". The Israelites were to get the many spoils of the Egyptians, and even though the chariots were destroyed, God saw to it that they would get the precious contents.

The Egyptians were sorely afflicted while they waited to destroy Israel the evening before their destruction. "And there was a cloud and darkness. The cloud was at Israel and the darkness about the Egyptians. One who is enveloped in darkness, can see what happens in the light. And since the Egyptians were enveloped in darkness they saw Israel, who were enveloped in light. Israel was eating and drinking and rejoicing. Egypt thereupon shot arrows and burning stones at Israel but an angel and the cloud received them as it is said, (II Sam. xxii:3) 'The God who is my rock, in Him I take refuge, my shield and my horn of salvation, my high tower and my refuge'. And it also says (ibid 31), 'The word of the Lord is tried. He is a shield unto all of them that take refuge in Him'. So dark was it among the Egyptians that if an Egyptian stood up he was then unable to sit down again, 'if he were sitting he could not get up. If he were carrying something he couldn't get rid of his burden; if he were free of a burden he couldn't pick one up. And the dark was so thick it was touchable, as it says, (Ex. x:21) 'And darkness was felt'". (1)

Egypt tried to flee (Ex. xiv:27) but was unable. "From whence do we know that wherever an Egyptian ran the water would get there first? The verse says, 'And Egypt tried to flee'. This is to be likened to a dove that flees before a hawk and enters into the palace of the king. The king opens the eastern windows and the dove goes out. The hawk enters after it and the king locks all the windows and shoots arrows. So it was when the last Israelite came up out of the sea; the Egyptians went into it. The sea was closed upon them from the four sides in order to destroy them and the administering angels threw at them hail stones and brimstone, as it says (Ezek. xxxviii:22) 'And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will cause to rain upon him hailstones, fire and brimstone'". Not only did God give them many punishments but the Rabbis say, "God made them as strong as youths so he could punish them **even more**". (1)

"When any ~~kind~~ of wood burns there is no sound but when stubble burns there is a sound. So was it with the Egyptians. The noise was loud because of the punishment which was brought upon them. Every wood that burns has substance to it but stubble has no substance to it. So it was with Egypt. They did not have any substance because of the great punishments that came upon them, as it is written (Is. xliii:17) 'They lie down together, they shall not rise, they are extinct. They are quenched as a wick'". (2)

1- Ms. 53 and 54 to Ex. xiv:27 play on word ¹⁹³ of Ismael, tract Beshallah

2- Ms. 63 to Ex. xvi:7 cf. Mekilta of Ismael, tract. Shirata.

Not only did Israel take many things out of Egypt when they left but God saw to it that the spoil at the Red Sea was even greater. Our Midrash asks, "Why does Scripture praise the spoil at the sea over the spoils in Egypt? Because what was in the house they took from Egypt, and what was in the treasury they took at the sea. For it is the custom of kings when they engage in war to bring out all their silver and gold with them in order to subject others to them.(1) For so it says (Ps. lxxiii:14), 'The wings of the dove are covered with silver and her pinions with the shimmer of gold'. 'The wings of the dove are covered with silver' refers to the spoils in Egypt*, 'and her pinions with shimmers of gold' refers to the spoils at the Red Sea. It is written (SS. 1:11), 'We will make thee circlets of gold'. This refers to the spoil in Egypt; 'With studs of silver'. This refers to the spoils at the Red Sea. And also (Ezek. xvi:7), 'And thou didst increase and grow up'. This refers to the spoils in Egypt. 'And thou camest to excellent beauty'. This refers to the spoils at the Red Sea. The spoils at the Red Sea were more than two fold those in Egypt." (2)

So great was the going out of Egypt that it echoed over the whole world. In commenting upon the verse, "And Jethro the father-in-law of Moses heard" (Ex. xviii:1), Rabbi Eliezer said, "He heard about the dividing of the Red Sea and he came. For we find that on

1- So that the captives will not rebel, seeing the great wealth.

2- Vs. 25 and 26 to Ex. xiii:36 cf. Mekilta of Imael tract. Pisha.

the day the Red Sea was divided for Israel, it was heard from one end of the world to another, as it is said, (Josh. v:1) 'And it came to pass when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings who were at the sea heard that the Lord dried up the river Jordan so that Israel could pass over'". (1)

The going out of Egypt was a very great thing in the eyes of the Rabbis for it marked the beginning of the nationhood of Israel. The People of Israel were brought out so they could be given the Torah with which they were to become a special people. It is therefore from this time on that Israel begins not only its physical freedom from bondage but also its advent into nationhood. The Rabbis therefore say that the verse, "The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt" tells us that the exodus from Egypt was equal in the eyes of the Lord to all the miracles and greatnesses which the Lord wrought for the children of Israel". (2)

Not only did God bring the forces of nature against Egypt but he also brought them to aid Israel in the going out of Egypt. "When Israel left Egypt 'seven clouds of glory went out with them to protect them'. During the day, 'a pillar of cloud, which was one', 'Thy clouds standeth over them' (Num. xiv:14) is two", 'and in a pillar of cloud thou goest before them' is three" (ibid); 'And when the

1- Ms. 85 cf. *Mekilta* of *Ismael*, tract. *Amalek*

2- Ms. 86 to Ex. xviii:1 and Ms. 76 to Ex. xvi:6 cf. *Mekilta* of *Ismael* M. Vayassa

cloud tarried' (ibid ix:19) is four; 'And when the cloud was taken up' (Ex. xl:36) is five; 'and when the cloud was not taken up' (Ex. xl:37) is six; 'For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day' (Ex. xl:38) is seven. Four on the four sides of them and one above and one below, and one went before them to prepare the way for them. It raised the low places and made lower the high places and made for them a plain, as it is said (Is. xl:4) 'Every valley shall be lifted and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the rugged shall be made level and the rough places a plain'. And it also says, (Is. xl:16) 'And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people ~~and~~ that shall remain from Assyria, as there was for Israel in the day that she came up out of the land of Egypt'. This also teaches us that just as in the future all valleys will be raised and all mountains and hills will be lowered so it was when Israel went up from Egypt." (1)

"The pillar of cloud did not move by day nor the pillar of fire by night'. (Ex. xiii:22) This proves that the pillar of cloud was still there, when the pillar of fire shone forth, and while the pillar of fire was yet there the pillar of cloud came forth. The lights of the sun did not annihilate the pillars of the cloud by day nor the light of the moon make vivid the pillar of fire at night".(2)

From the verse "to go by day and night", the Rabbis deduce the fact that, "The journeying during the day was with the same comfort

1- Ms. 40 to Ex. xiv:21 cf. M. Beshallah in the Mekilta of Ismael

2- Ms. 40 to Ex. xiv:21 cf. M. Beshallah in the Mekilta of Ismael

as their march at night". Just as during the day they didn't lack the light necessary for travel, so too at night. And just as at night the sun did not scorch them nor did they become hungry and thirsty, so too did it happen that during the day their journey was without hunger, thirst or the scorch of the sun." (1)

"In order to prevent them from entering the wilderness recklessly when Israel saw the waters in front of them and the enemy pursuing them, God sent wild beasts to keep them from running into the wilderness. For so it is said, 'And the wilderness closed them in' (Ex. xiv:3). The word closing can mean nothing else but wild beasts as it is said, (Dan. vi:27), 'My God hath sent his angels and hath shut the lion's mouth.'" (2)

The Israelites became disheartened and came unto Moses asking him when will God save us, for we are afraid. The Israelites felt that they were unable to endure this and wait for redemption. "Moses then prayed to God and God caused the Israelites to see squadrons upon squadrons of ministering angels standing before them, as it is said, "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early and gone forth, behold, a host with horses and chariots were around the city. And his servant said to him, Alas, my master how shall we do? And the master answered, Fear not; for they are with us more than they are with them. And Elisha prayed and said, "Lord I pray thee open his eyes," that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round

1- Ms. 40

2- Ms. 41 and 42 cf. Beshallah in the Mekilta of 'smael

about Elisha'. (II Kgs. vi:15-17) And so also at this time Moses prayed and God caused them to see¹ squadrons of ministering angels standing before them. And thus it says, 'At the brightness before Him, there passed through His thick clouds hailstones and clouds of fire'. (Ps. xviii:13) His thick clouds as against their squadrons, hailstones as against their catapults; coals as against their arrows, fire as against their naptha. 'The Lord also thundered in the heavens' (ibid 14) as against the clashing of their shields and the noise of their trampling shoes. 'And the Most High gave forth His voice' (ibid) as against their whetting the swords. 'And He sent out His arrows and scattered them' (15) as against their arrows. 'And He shot forth lightning⁺s and discomfited them', as against their shoutings. He confounded them and brought confusion among them. He took away their signals so they did not know what they were doing".(1)

The forty years wandering in the wilderness also occasioned many miracles. It was here that God gave Israel the manna to eat; it was here that water gushed forth from the rock, and it was here that salt water became sweet. These miracles given in the Bible were added to and embellished by our Rabbis. New speculations accompanied the discussions of each of these. "We are told in the Bible, 'The people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders'. (Ex. xii:34) This was done because they didn't have a caravan to carry

1- Ms. 46 and 47 to Ex. xiv:13 cf. M. of Israel tractate Be-shallah.

the things. Later in the Bible it seems to say that the children of Israel were wealthy, but this teaches us that though they were able to carry only a little food yet a blessing entered there-upon and they ate of this unleavened bread for thirty-one days. This was as tasty to them as the manna." (1)

The Rabbis, too, delighted in showing the various kinds of tastes that the manna and water gave the Israelites. "Rabbi Joshua said Jethro was talking about the goodness of the manna when the verse says, 'And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel'. (Ex. xviii:9) He said in the Manna that the Holy One Blessed be He gave to us we are able to taste bread, or meat, or fish or locusts, and all the sweet tasting things in the world as it is said, the best, that is, the best of everything that is good". (2)

"Rabbi Eliezer of Modium says that Jethro here means not the manna but the water of the well. He said, in the water that God gave us we tasted honey, milk, wine, both old and new, and the taste of all the sweet things in the world for it is written, the best of the best, that is, all the best of everything that is good". (3)

The manna appeared to the person in any form or taste that he wished according to our Mekilta. "R. Joshua said, for him who wished it to be baked, it was baked; for him who wished it to be cooked, it

1-Ms. 24 cf. M. of Ismael to verse 30 which reads
וּם נִדּוּל וְיִצְחָק לָהֶם
בְּיָמָהּ שֶׁאֵכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ שְׁלִשִּׁים יוֹם יָדָה צִיּוֹר לָהֶם הָיָה

2- Ms. 37

3- Ms. 87-88 cf. M. of Is. Tractate Amalek

was cooked; and R. Eliezer of Modium said, he who wished to taste in it a baked thing did, he who wished to taste in it a cooked thing also did. He could taste in it the taste of any baked food in the world". (1)

The Rabbis were very interested in showing that God caused water to come from the rocks, "And to make sure that there were no wells there He asked Moses to take the Elders of the people with Him". (2)

"The symbol of Moses' election was the staff of God. Moses said to God, with this staff Thou hast brought them from Egypt and caused them to pass over the Red Sea and gave them the quails, and sent them manna and wrought for them many miracles and now in this hour Thou shalt also create many miracles and wonders for them". (3)

Not only is God omnipotent, the all powerful creator of heaven and earth; the source from which all might and power flows; but He is also all-knowing and an all wise God. The Rabbis of the Talmudic age stressed this fact and we have a number of such reminiscences in our Mekilta. "God did not really need the blood of the lamb on the houses of the children of Israel for everything is revealed before him and this blood is placed there for God alone to see but so others would not see it." (4)

To show the omniscience of God the Rabbis play beautifully on the words **וַיֵּדָע** and **וַיִּשְׂכַּח** used by God and Moses respectively. Says

1- Ms. 78 to Ex. xvi:23 cf. M. Vayassa of Mekilta of Ismael

2- Ms. 81 to Ex. xvii:5 cf. Is. Tract. Vayassa

3- Ms. 82 to Ex. xvii:9

4- Ms. 14 to Ex. xiii:13 cf. M. of Is. to xii:7

Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai, (Ex. xii:9) "Moses who did not know the hours and minutes and seconds of the night said (ex. xi:4), 'About midnight'; but the Holy One Blessed be He who knows the exact hour, minutes and seconds of the night says 'And it shall come to pass at midnight'." (1)

"Moses said to Israel (Ex. xii:12), 'And I shall pass over the land of Egypt on this night; but he did not fix the exact time of God's passing so that Israel might not sit and think evil thoughts, saying that the time has already come and we have not been redeemed. But as Moses said unto Pharoah, 'Thus saith the Lord, About midnight'. He said unto him, 'The thing is weighed when midnight will be reached.' Perhaps it will be a split second earlier or later; but the Holy One blessed be He said, 'And it shall come to pass at midnight', for He sitteth up in the hour stone and superintends the hour as a needle point for no kingdom shall touch its neighbor even a split second. (V. Berachot 48:b) But when the time of a kingdom comes to be destroyed, if it is in the day so it is done; and if in the night so it is done and so it is written, (Ezek. xxx:16) 'And in both shall come adversaries in the day time' and also (Isa. 13) 'At Tehaph/ches also shall the day withdraw itself' and it also says, (Dan. v:30) 'In that night Bel/shazzar the Chaldean king was slain'". (2)

God knows the minutest detail of every one's existence. Even

1- Ms. 22 cf. M. to same verse M. Fische of Mekilta of Ismael

2- Ms. 22 to Ex. xii:29

clandestine love affairs and the committing of adultery in secret do not escape His gaze. "For the Egyptians wondered why 'we are all dead men' (Ex. xii:33) for according to the decree of Moses only the first born were to die. Yet many others who were not first born in the household died. "What they did not know", say the Rabbis was the fact that "all of them were steeped in adultery. One man would come upon ten wives and these would bear children and all these would be first born of the woman; and ten men would come into one woman and ten children would be born and these were all first born of the men". God knew all this and in their death exposed their adulterous parents. (1)

Not only does God know everything which is about to take place in nature but He also is cognizant of all future happenings. "It was known and revealed before He who spoke and the world came into being, that when Israel would enter the land in the future, she would observe the Passover ceremonies. For so is it written, (Josh. v:10) 'And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal and they observed the Passover in the first month, the 14th day of the month in the Plains of Jericho'. (Lev. 23) And in the words of R. Joshua, The Holy One Blessed Be He said to Moses that it is revealed and known before me what Israel has said and what Israel shall in the future say". (2)

1- Ms. 24 cf. M. of I. Tract. Pische

2- Ms. 76 to Ex. xvi:12 cf. Is. Tract. Vayassa

God is the summation of all those moral perfections which man in his small way hopes some day to reach. God is so great, however, that man cannot approach Him. The Rabbis often accentuated the vast gulf that lies between God and man for His ways are not as man's. (1)

"R. Ishmael ben Johanan son of Brika said, come and see how different the ways of man ~~are from~~ the ways of God. Man adds sweetness in order to cure the bitter but He who spoke and the world came into being does not so; He adds bitterness to cure the bitterness. How so? He puts a thing that is spoiled into something that has spoiled in order to perform a miracle. In like manner you must interpret (2 Kgs. ii:21), 'And He went forth with the spring of waters, and cast some salt therein and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or miscarrying'. And behold even good water if you put salt into it will taste bad. How so then? He puts a thing ^{with a thing that spoils} that spoils, in order to perform a miracle therewith. And so must you interpret (Is. xxxviii:21) 'And Isaiah said, Let them take a cake of figs and lay it for a plaster upon the boil and he shall recover'. Is it ~~not true~~ if you put figs upon raw flesh they will spoil? But He places a thing that spoils on something which has spoiled in order to perform a miracle therewith". (2)

"Who is like unto Thee glorious in holiness". (^{Ex.}xv:11) Thou art fair and mighty in holiness for the nature of Man is not as the nature

1- Ms. 169 to Ex. iii:17

ללמדך שלא כסדר בשר ודם דרכי הקדוש

2- Ms. 73 to Ex. xv:25 cf. Mekilta of Is. tract. Wyassa

of God. Man is not able to say two words in one utterance but He who spoke and the world came into being is not so, for He spoke ten commandments in one utterance, as it is said (Ex. xx:1) 'And God spoke all these words saying'. Man is not able to listen to two people at once, but He who spoke and the world came into being is not so, for the whole universe comes and prays to him and He listens to their prayers as it is said, 'Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee doth all flesh come'. (Ps. lxxv:3) And also in this way ~~the~~ man and God are different. A man works for a master; he sows for him, ploughs for him, weeds for him and he receives a coin for his work. But He who spoke and the world came into being is not so. If the man desires children, He gives them to him, as it is written (Ps. cxxvii:3) 'Behold children are a heritage of the Lord'. If He desires wisdom, He gives it to him as it is written, (Prov. ii:6) 'For the Lord giveth wisdom. If he desires riches, He gives them to him, as it says, (I Ch. xxix:12) 'Riches and honor come from Thee'. 'Fearful in praises' not as man, is God. For with man, He is more revered who is farther away from him; but with Him who spoke and the world was, it is not so. For He is revered by those who are near Him more than by those who are far from Him, as it says (Ps. 1:3) 'And round about Him it stormeth mightily'. And it says, (Ps. lxxxix:8) 'A God dreaded in the Council of the Holy Ones and feared of all them that are round about Him'. And it says, (Job xxv:2) 'Dominion and fear are with Him'. And also (Lev. xi:3) 'Through them that are near Me I will be sanctified'. Not as the

manner of man is the manner of God in doing wonders. Man builds the lower stories first and then the upper stories. But He who spoke and the world came into being is not so; ^{He} builds the upper parts first and then the lower, as it is said, (Gen. 1:1) 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. And so is it when man makes a roof, he builds it with wood and stones and dirt. But He who spoke and the world came into being is not so. For when He makes a roof, he shapes it with water, as it is said, (Ps. civ:3) 'Who maketh of water a cover for his upper chambers.' Man is unable to form things from water alone but He by whose word the world came into being can, as it is said, (Gen. 1:20) 'And the Lord said, Let the waters swarm forth creeping things with life'. (1) Likewise man cannot make forms with darkness. But He by whose hand the world came into being can, as it is said, (Ps. cxxxix:15) 'When I was made in secret and wrought in the lowest part of the earth'. Likewise when man wishes to create a form, he begins with the head or foot or another of its members. But He who spoke and the world came into being is not so, for when He forms a creature it is all formed at once, as it is written (Jer. x:15) 'For He creates all'. And also, (I Sam. ii:2) 'There is no rock like our God', that is, there is no creator like our God. (2) When man makes a form he just put (ה'ויגז) all the colors into it. But the Holy One Blessed be He creates Man from one color; the pupil

1- Cf. Is. tractate Shirata

2- MS. reads גז for גז

of the eye which is black, he surrounds with white; and the white teeth he surrounds with red. Man is unable to create one from within another, while God creates man from the womb of his mother. Man makes an image and it cannot move from its place; but the Holy One Blessed Be He created man who can go from one end of the world to another. Man creates a form which can neither see, hear nor speak; but the Holy One Blessed be He created man and he sees, hears and speaks. Man creates an image but he cannot place therein a soul and insides; but the Holy One Blessed be He created man and gave him a soul and insides, as it is written concerning David (Ps. ciii:1) 'Bless the Lord O my soul; and all that is within me bless His Holy Name'. (1)

Since, as we have seen, the Rabbis believed that God was the Creator of heaven and earth, the all powerful and all knowing God, one might expect that He was ^{an}unrelenting, avenging terror who made people worship Him and who acted as a tyrant over them. We find just this kind of chief god among many primitive peoples, gods who need propitiation in order to look upon their peoples with favor. The Rabbis, however, felt that because God was so great and powerful He was able to allow His leniency and His mercy to temper His divine justice. We therefore find that God created this world with the attribute of mercy as well as that of Justice.

1- Ms. 66-67 Ex. xv:11

"The use of the word **אל** (God) reflects his attribute of mercy, as it says, 'God of my father'" (Ex. xv:2), to which the Rabbis add, "With me He used his attribute of mercy whereas with my fathers He used the attribute of justice. One use of **אלוה** means the attribute of mercy, as it is written (Ps. xxii:2), 'My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me'. And also, (Num. xii:13) 'God please heal her', and also (Ps. cxviii:27) 'The Lord is God and has given us light'". (1)

"The reason that God said, 'I am the Lord thy God', was that the Holy One Blessed be He said, If ye do my will then I shall be the Lord as it is said, (^{Ex} xxxiv:6) 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and compassionate', and if ye do it not, then I am your God, I shall punish you for your sins. For the word 'thy God' (**אלהיך**) means the attribute of justice. (2) As it says, 'And God spoke all these words, saying' "in the name of the attribute of justice (3) and so at times must God be an avenging God, a hard God, an unmerciful God". (4)

Not only is God this way but He is also (**אלוהי חסדים**), the master of mercy. "For God said unto Moses, thou art a leader, for I do not have any agents nor armies, nor seraphim nor ophanim nor ministering angels nor chariots that I should send forth to take out My people, that you should say unto Me, send by the hand whom Thou shall send. I am He who has been called 'from the rising of the sun

1-Ms. 61 to Ex. xv:2

2- Ms. 103 to Ex. xx:2

3- Ms. 103 to Ex. xx:1

4- Ms. 105 to Ex. xx:5

unto its setting.' For according to strict justice you are worthy of annihilation, but I am all-merciful, therefore it is said, 'And God spoke to Moses and He said to him, 'I am the Lord'. (1) R. Judah says, 'And God spoke unto Moses' (Ex. vi:2); the Holy One Blessed be He said unto Moses, I am the master of the world, I am full of mercy, I am faithful to reward my children who have been enslaved by man and you say unto me, 'Send by the hand whom thou shall send'". (2)

In the foregoing picture of God, we have seen Him as the great and powerful. The vast God to whom it would seem quite difficult for man to reach. The psalmist is able to picture it is God by saying 'the heavens declare the glory of God.' It takes the vastness of the heavens to approach Him. God, however, according to Rabbinic theology, had another aspect, a God to whom each and every man was able to come and pray; a God who would listen to the woes and heartaches of puny man and answer him with a comforting reply; a God to whom man could go and pour out his soul, a God with whom man could commune. This type of God also appears in the Bible, and a most touching scene is given in the book of Samuel, when Hannah came before God to ask "in the bitterness of her soul" (I Samuel 1:10) to be blessed with a son.

"All souls are in the hand of Him by whose word the world came to being as it is written; (Job. xii:10) 'In whose hand is the soul

1- Ms. 3

2- Ms. 4 to Ex. vi:2

of every living thing.' (1) Since this is so, all may come to Him for comfort for 'Thou art the helper and supporter of all those that came into the world'. (2) For God loveth all His creatures, and Thou hast shown us mercy even though we had no good deeds, as it is said, 'I shall make mention of the love of the Lord' (Is. lxiii:7) and 'The love of God fills the earth.'" (Ps. cxix:44) (3)

Throughout the history of Hebrew theology the possibility of approaching God has ever come up. We find that the Rabbis, too, felt that few can get near to God, physically, for when the Bible tells us that "Moses approached toward the thick darkness" the Rabbis ask, "Is it the inner or the outer darkness? The verse says, 'There whence God was'. From this we know that there are two walls of darkness and Moses walked between them until he reached the innermost darkness, as Solomon says, (I Kgs. viii:12) 'the Lord hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness.' From this it is said all the prophets received their prophecy from behind the spectrum which is not lit; but Moses our teacher received it from behind the one lit spectrum." (4)

"Not only does God dwell on High far away from the reach of man but His dwelling places may also be found here on earth. The

1- Ms. 57 to Ex. xv:12

2- Ms. 59 to Ex. xv:2 cf. Is. Tractate Shirata

3- Ms. 68 to Ex. xv:13 cf. Is. Tractate Shirata

4- Ms. 114 to Ex. xx:21

verse, 'The place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in' (Ex. xv:17) is one of the places which shows the throne on earth is as the throne on high; as it says, (Is. lxvi:1) 'Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My throne and the earth My footstool'; likewise, (Ezek. xliii:7) 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever'. It also says, (Ps. xli:4) 'The Lord is in His Holy Temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids try the children of men'; and also, (I Kgs. viii:13) 'I have surely built thee a house of habitation, a place for thee to dwell in forever'. (1)

Once again God as a personal God is stressed by the Rabbis of the Mekilta of Rabbi Simon when they show that God, too, has humility and wishes man to be humble. The Great God was willing to talk to Moses from the midst of the lowliest of trees, the S'neh, when He could have spoken to Moses from the heights of the mountains or the heights of the world or from the tall cedars of Lebanon. But no, says R. Eliezar ben Aroch, "He humbled himself and spoke from the midst of the S'neh and so has Solomon said of Him, (Prov. xxix:23) 'But he that is of humble spirit shall attain to honor'. (2)

"And when God spoke to Moses", says this same Rabbi, "He spoke to him in the manner of the earth, so that the despoilers of the world

1- Ms. 69 to Ex. xv:17

2- Ms. 2 to Ex. iii:2

would not say that since He is so great and the Master of the Universe, He does things which disregard every sense of decency and morality." (1)

We see that the Rabbis too, had this double picture of God, on the one hand the great, all powerful, all cognizant creator of the world and on the other the personal, merciful and just God. This personal one was the relationship that God had for Israel.

1- Ms. 2 to Exodus iii:14

CHAPTER III

GOD AND ISRAEL

"And I have taken you for a people and I shall be to you as a God". This verse from our holy scriptures epitomizes the relationship between the people of Israel and God, as the Rabbis of old saw it. Israel has been accepted by God as an especial people. It is Israel who is to carry God's revelation to men upon earth. It is they who by their very actions are to reflect the great moral and ethical precepts that were given to mankind at the mountain of Sinai. Since Israel has been accepted by God as His people there are certain reciprocal relationships which have been entered into. The Rabbis of the Tannaitic age often stress these relationships and a great number of correlative relations have arisen. The Mechilta of Rabbi Simon ben Jochai sets forth some of these which we shall examine.

Since God has accepted Israel, He acts as a father or guardian to them, and the picture of the bird caring for its young is given, in a commentary to the verse "Upon the wings of eagles" (Ex. xix:4) "It is the manner of birds" say the Rabbis, "to rest their young between their feet for they fear birds stronger than they; but the eagle who has no fear of a stronger bird rests its young upon its shoulders for it fears the stones of the sling and the arrows which

men throw up at it; therefore it makes a partition between its young and man. So did God. He placed the menacing angels between Israel and Egypt, as it is said. 'And the angel of God journeyed'". (Ex. xiv:19) (1)

God, too, acts as the Father of the Israelites and He therefore holds Israel very dear to Him. Rabbi Simon ben Gamliel said, "Come and see how dear Israel is to their father in heaven. And because of this endearment He changed the course of nature for them, that is He made the upper things lower and the lower things come from above. For from the beginning the bread came up from the earth, as it is said, (Dt. xxxiii:28) 'To a land of corn and wine'. And the dew came down from heaven, as it is said, (Dt. xxxiii:28) 'Even the heavens drip down dew'. Now have the things changed and bread came down from heaven, as it is said, (Ex. xvi:14) 'bread from the heavens', 'and dew came up from the earth', as it is said, (Ex. xvi:14) 'And when the layer of dew was gone up'." (2)

Not only does God look over Israel as a father over a son but, "Israel is precious in God's sight and they are especially His." (3) "Israel is treasured above all peoples and just as the treasure of a man is dear to him, so is Israel dear to God". (4)

1- Ms. 94 Cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Bahodesh- gives in an entirely different form the same idea.

2- Ms. 75 to Ex. xix:4 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Vayassa

3- Ms. 95 to Ex. xix:5

4- Ms. 95 to Ex. xix:5 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Bahodesh.

"Because Israel is so dear unto God the Holy One Blessed be He watches over Israel as it is said, (Ps. cxxi:4) 'Behold the watches of Israel sleepest not nor slumbereth'". (1)

Rabbi Simon said, that because of Israel's preciousness in the sight of God He gave them bread each day. "To what may this be compared?" asked the Rabbi. "To an earthly king who became angry at his son and said, 'Do not see my face but at the beginning of the year you shall come and receive your sustenance'. The son was sustained all the year and he feared lest he see the face of his father and then he would not be sustained. However when he became endeared again, the king said, 'Come every day and take your sustenance'. The son said, 'If I have nothing else but the sight of the king each day that is enough'. So Israel; because of their preciousness, sustenance is given every day so that they may atone and receive the Divine Presence every day". (2)

Our Rabbis have said that "God has proclaimed Israel of special distinction and Israel has proclaimed God of special distinction, as it is said, (Dt. xxvi:18) "And the Lord has avouched thee this day"; and Israel has proclaimed Him of special distinction as it is said, (Dt. xxvi:17) 'Thou hast avouched the Lord this day'. Israel said, (Ex. xv:11) 'Who is like thee among the mighty O God'. And the Spirit of God answered, (Dt. xxxiii:29)

1- Ms. 27 to Ex. xii:42 R. Eliezer

2- Ms. 75 to Ex. xvi:4

'Happy art thou O Israel; who is like thee'. Israel has said, (Dt. vi:4) 'Hear O Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord is One'. And the Spirit of God has answered, (I Chron. xvii:21) 'Who is as thy people Israel, one nation in the earth'. Israel has said, (S. of S. ii:3) 'As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my loved one among the sons'. And the Spirit of the Lord has answered and said, (S. of S. ii:2) 'As a rose among the thorns, so is my loved one among the daughters'. Israel has said, (Ex. xv:2) 'This is my God and I will glorify Him'. And the Spirit of God has answered, (Is. xlviii:3) 'Israel in whom I shall become great'. (1)

Israel is especially to be saved from all peoples even though God saves others. "And this salvation was and shall be in the future as well, as it is said, (Is. xlv:17) 'O Israel thou art saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation'". (2)

The idea of a partnership of God and Israel is quite evident from many of the passages in the Mekilta of R. Simon. "It was God Himself who led Israel from out of Egypt, for the word **וַיֵּצֵא** means leading, as it is said, (Ps. lxxvii:21) (3) 'Thou didst lead thy people like a flock'." "God always dwells with Israel, be they in a good state or a sorrowful one. This care of Israel by God is also

1- Ms. 60 to Ex. xiv:2 cf. Mekilta of Israel tract. Shirata

2- Ms. 60 to Ex. xv:2

3- Cf. Mekilta to Israel tract. Beshalah

seen in our Midrash. "For all who harm Israel harm Him by whose word the world came into being, and so did R. Joshua say, Come and see how merciful and gracious is the Holy One Blessed be He over Israel. Israel went down to Egypt and the Divine presence went with them, as it is said, (Gen. xli:4) 'I shall go down with you to Egypt'. They went up from Egypt and the Divine Presence went up, as it is said, (ibid) 'and I shall also go up'. They went down to the sea and the Divine Presence also accompanied them, as it is said, (Ex. xiv:19) 'And the angel of God journeyed'. They came to the wilderness and the Divine Presence was with them, as it is said, (Dt. 1:31) 'and in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bore thee'. When Israel is in distress so does God dwell in distress, as it is written, (Ex. iii:2) 'In the midst of a tree', when they dwell in comfort so God dwells with them in comfort, as it is written (Ps. cvi:5) 'that I may behold the prosperity of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thy inheritance'"(1) R. Joshua said, "Why did God speak to Moses through a tree from the heights of heaven? Because at the time that Israel is in trouble it is as if God were in trouble as it says, (Is. lxiii:9) 'in all their troubles is He troubled' the same as ours". (2)

1- Ms. 1-2 to Ex. iii:1 repeated again Ms. 60 to Ex. xv:2

2- Ms. 1 to Ex. iii:1 cf. *Seikilta* of Ishmael tract. *Pisha* to Ex. xii:41
 ויהי בעצם היום הזה יצאו כל צבאות ה' מארץ מצרים
 סלסר שאף צבאות סקום היו עם ישראל בצער שנאמר (יש"ס'נ"א)
 בכל צרתם לו צר

R. Nehemia said, "And God spoke with Moses. The Holy One Blessed be He said to Moses, It is revealed and known to me the oppression of my children in Egypt as it is said, (Ex. ii:25) 'and God saw the children of Israel and God knew'. My children dwelt in distress and ye will dwell in comfort and I seek to take them out from Egypt and yet ye say, 'send by the hand of whom Thou wilt send'". (1)

R. Eliezer of Modiim said, "God called it 'D' for every time Israel dwells with a Miracle it is as though the miracle were before Him; if they dwell in trouble it is as though trouble were before Him; if they dwell in joy it is as though joy were before Him; for so it says, (I Sam. ii:1) 'for I rejoiced in thy salvation'". (2)

God realized the greatness of the sufferings of Israel. "For the slavery of Israel in Egypt was greater than all the slavery in the world before God, for it says, (Ex. iii:7) 'I surely see'; (3) the word "see" is written twice, for after Israel drowned the Egyptians in the sea they returned and subdued them in the houses. This is as a person who took a stick and hit two people; both of them received the lash of the stick. So was the oppression and slavery of Israel known and revealed before God, for it so states, 'For I know his pains'. (4)

1- Ms. 4 to Ex. vi:2

2- Ms. 84 to Ex. xvii:15 f. Mikilts of Israel tract. Amalek

3- דא דא דא

4- Ms. 158 to Ex. iii:7

7

God protects Israel from all these sufferings. R. Judah says commenting on the verse "'And the angel of God journeyed', (Ex. xiv:19) This is like a man who is walking with his son in the wilderness. When robbers come to capture him, he takes the son and places him behind himself. A wolf comes to take him from behind, he picks up his son before him. If robbers come before him and a wolf comes behind him, he places his son upon his shoulders, as it is said (Dt. 1:31) 'And in the wilderness where ye say that the Lord thy God lifted thee up'. If the son begins to tire, he takes him in his arms, as it is said, (Hosea xi:3) 'And I, I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; and they knew not that I healed them'. If he begins to be oppressed by the sun, he spreads his cloak over him, as it is said (Ps. cv:39) 'He spread a cloud for a screen'. If the son is hungry, he gets him something to eat, as it is said, (Ex. xvi:4) 'Behold I will cause it to rain bread from heaven for you'. If he becomes thirsty, he gets water for him, as it is said (Ps. lxxviii:16) 'He brought streams out of the rock'." This is, of course, a picture of the deeds that God wrought for Israel. (1)

So, too, did God make sure that He took care of each and every Israelite when the children of Israel left Egypt, for there are three types of passing over given in our section of the book of

1- Ms. 49 to Ex. xiv:19 cf. Mekilta of Ismael Tractate Beshallah

Exodus. "From whence do we gather", ask the Rabbis, "that if a place held only Israelites, the passing over was accomplished for the whole house at once? For it says 'who passed over the houses of the children of Israel'. If Egyptians and Israelites lived however in the same place, the passing was over the door, as it says (Ex. xii:13) 'And God passed over the doors! Where an Egyptian and an Israelite slept in the same bed, the passing was over the Israelite, as it says (Ex. xii:13) 'and I passed over you.' 'And so does it say, (Is. xxxi:5) 'As birds hover, so does the Lord of hosts protect Jerusalem'; protects, redeems, passes over and rescues". (1)

In protecting Israel God appeared to them in the form that He thought would aid their cause in the best possible manner. "He appeared to them as a ^Roseman, as it says, (Ps. xviii:11) 'And He rose upon a Cherub and did fly'; He appeared to them with coat of mail and helmet, as it is said, (Is. lix:17) 'And He put on righteousness as a coat of mail and a helmet of salvation upon His head'. He also appeared to them as a man of war girdled with a sword, as it is said, (Ps. xlv:4) 'Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh O Mighty One'. He appeared to them with a bow as it is said, (Hab. iii:9) 'Thy bow is made quite bare.' He appeared with a lance and shield, as it is said, (Ps. xxxv:2) 'Take hold of shield and buckler'. He appeared to them with lance, as it is said, (Hab.

1- Ms. 21,22 to Exodus xii:27

iii:11) 'At the shining of thy glittering spear'. He however does not need all these attributes for it says, 'The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name'. With His name he fights. Then why do the verses of Scripture stress these various implements of war? They do so for if Israel needs any one of these, He provides it for them. At the Red Sea God appeared to them as a youth in war, as it says, 'The Lord is a man of War, the Lord is His name'. At Sinai He appeared as an old man, as it says, (Dan. vii:9) 'I beheld till thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days did sit.' His raiment was as white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool". (1)

This partnership of Israel, this feeling on the part of God that He would protect Israel, placed upon Israel certain obligations. These obligations were the fulfillment of the commandments and the will of God, for if Israel did not live up to its part of the bargain then God would not continue to protect Israel. "If ye do according to My commandments and My Torah, and so it is written, (Lev. xx:26) 'And I shall divide you from the peoples to be Mine'. When you are separate from the peoples ye are Mine and if not ye are Nebuchadnezzar's and his cohorts". (2)

Our Rabbis also say in considering the verse, (Ex. xv:6) "'Thy right hand O, Lord has dashed in pieces the enemy'. Come and see

1- Ms. 61 to Ex. xv:3 cf. Mekilt. of Israel tractate Shirata where it is quoted only in part.

2- Ms. 95 to Ex. xix:5.

when Israel doeth the will of God, He makes the left hand right as it says, 'Thy right hand O God, thy right hand, O God'; and when they do not do His will He makes the right hand left as it says (Lam. ii:5) 'He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy'. When Israel doeth the will of the Creator there is no anger before Him, as it says, (Is. xxvii:4) 'I have no anger'; but if Israel does not do His will there is anger unto Him against those that hate Him, as it says, (Dt. xi:17) 'And the anger of the Lord be kindled'. When Israel doeth the will of God, He fights for them, as it is said, (Ex. xiv:14) 'The Lord shall fight for you'. But when they do not do the will of God He fights against them, as it is said, (Is. lxiii:10) 'And He was turned to be their enemy and fought against them'. And even the all merciful becomes merciless, as it says, (Lam. ii:5) 'The Lord has become as an enemy'. When Israel does the will of God there is no sleeping before Him as it says, (Ps. cxxi:4) 'Behold He that watches Israel sleepeth not nor slumbereth'; but when they do not do His will there is sleep in front of Him as it says, (Ps. lxxviii:65) 'Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep'; and so it says, (Job xvii:2) 'And does not my eye sleep in their provocation?'; as it were there is sleep before Him in the time when Israel is oppressed and the rest of the nations of the world are in comfort". (1)

1- Ms. 63 to Ex. xv:6 cf. Mekilta of Ismael Tract. Shirata

Rabbi Eliezer said "Did the hand of Moses make Israel strong or did it break the power of the Amalekites? Neither, for when Israel does the will of God and believes in that which God entrusted to Moses, God does for them miracles and wonders. And so we must interpret (Ex. xii:7) 'And they took from the blood and placed it on the two doorposts'. Was the blood a delight to the angel or to the doorpost? No, for whenever Israel does the will of God and believes in whatever Moses was entrusted with, the Lord takes compassion upon them. And so you must interpret, (Num. xxi:8) 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent'. And did the serpent kill and restore to life? No. Whenever Israel does the will of the Creator and believes in what Moses entrusted to them they are healed".

And so, too, do we see that if the Israelites hearkened unto the ways of God they were aided and if they did not, then they received their punishment. This reciprocal relationship was truly a mutual one; for God did not aid Israel just because He liked them but because Israel was willing to do those things that God had asked them to do. It is said, "In three places the Holy One Blessed be He warned Israel that they should not return to Egypt. Here (Ex. xiv:13) 'For the Egyptian whom ye have seen today ye shall never see them no more'; and also, (Dt. xvii:16) 'And God said to you, Thou shalt not continue to return in this way any more', and it

7

says, (Dt. xxviii:68) 'On the way I said to you thou shalt not any more see it'. Three times they returned and three times they stumbled". (1)

Since the Mekilta deals with the book of Exodus it is natural that many illustrations surround the exodus from Egypt and various happenings which took place while the Israelites wandered toward the promised land. God showed his care for Israel in many instances during this period in Israel's history, and wherever the Rabbis were able they stressed this care with numerous illustrations. In considering how many of the Jewish people went out of Israel, Rabbi Nehorai said "By Jove!, Not even one out of five hundred came out, as it says (Ezek. xvi:7) 'I cause thee to increase even as the growth of the field'. And when did these die? They died during the three days of darkness when Egypt dwelt in darkness, so that Israel could bury their dead without being seen by those that hated them and those who were their enemies so that they might rejoice in Israel's punishment". (2)

God in caring for Israel will also destroy all the enemies of Israel. Rabbi Meir said, "When the Holy One Blessed be He revealed Himself to the Egyptians at the sea He was revealed to them in the form of nine hundred thousand angels of destruction.

1- Ms. 47 There is a fuller accounting in the Mekilta of Isaac tractate Beshallah-"The first time was in the days of Sennacherib" as it is said 'Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help' (Is. xxx:1) The second time was in the days of Johanan ben Kareah as it is said 'Then it shall come to pass that the sword, which ye fear, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt'. (Jer. xlii:16) The third time was in the days of Trajan".

2- Ms. 38 to Ex. xiii:18 cf. Mekilta of Isaac tract. Beshallah

Some of them were angels of agitation and frightening angels; angels of hail; others fiery angels; and a great fear grasped those that saw them. The angels said to Him, O Master of the Universe, Let us go and we will do Thy will against Egypt. He said to them, My mind is at unrest until I myself punish those who hate Israel. Therefore it is said, 'And made them to drive heavily'". (1)

Before God finally accepted Israel God tested Israel. He gave them the Torah and wrought for them miracles and wonders, to test them and to make them great among the nations. "As it says, (II Kgs. xxv:27) 'Evil Merodach did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison'. And also did He test them to make them great in the commandments, as it is said, (Zech. ix:16) 'For they shall be as the stones of a crown glittering over His land'. And also, (Ps. lx:6) 'Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee so that it may be displayed because of the truth'." Because Israel stood the test of this partnership with God Israel was elected to fulfill a special place in the history of the nations of the world.

1- Mss. 52, 53 to Ex. xiv:25

CHAPTER IV

ISRAEL

We have seen that there was a special relationship between Israel and God. This relationship would naturally tend toward the election of Israel as a people set apart from the rest of the world. The Rabbis however never felt that Israel was the best of the peoples, a people who were beyond reproach, a people selected and whose selection barred all other peoples from achieving greatness or salvation. The Talmud says that the heathen who practices the Law is to be considered even as the high priest.(1) This statement on the part of the Rabbis shows the universal outlook of Jewish theology. The Jew was entrusted with the Torah, oral and written, and it was his duty to practice all the commandments he found therein. If he were willing to do this then he would receive his place in the sun, and his eternal salvation; if, however, he refused, then he would be destroyed and another nation would come to take his place.

Israel was selected before the world was created, for God knew that the Israelites would proclaim Him King and would accept the yoke of His kingdom. Israel was therefore made a (Ex. XIX:6)

1- Talmud Babilá Tractate Sanhedrin :

"kingdom of priests and a holy nation". This holiness, however, did not exclude other peoples from being holy. The prophet Amos says, "Behold are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians to me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord. Have I not brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphter, and Aram from Kir?" (Amos ix:7) God is the God of all the nations; but He is especially the God of the Israelites.

Reasons for the selection of the people of Israel are apparent in the Mechilta of Rabbi Simon ben Yochai. Rabbi Eliezer of Modiim says, "The Holy One Blessed be He said to Moses, Do you urge Me concerning My sons and the works of My hands? Do I need to be urged? Have they not already been designated to be before Me from the time of the six days of creation? As it says (Jer. xxxi:35) 'If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off the seed of Israel'". (1)

God in creating the world also created the twelve springs from which the twelve tribes were to drink and the seventy palm trees under which the seventy elders were to judge the people of Israel, says this same Rabbi Eliezer of Modiim. (2)

"The Lord will reign forever and ever", said the people of Israel at the Red Sea. (Ex. xv:18) This proclamation of God's

1- Ms. 48 to Ex. xiv:15 cf. Mekilta of Ismael Tract. Vayehi Beshalach, where the version differs a little.

2- Ms. 74 to Ex. xv:27 cf. Mekilta of Ismael Tract. Vayassa

sovereignty was largely responsible for their election as the chosen people. "Not only for the miracles which thou hast performed for me (Israel) will I utter song and praise before Thee, but for the miracles which Thou hast performed for my fathers and for those in the future which thou shalt do for me, as it is written, 'My father's God, I will exalt Him'". (1) This exaltation was proclaimed at the Red Sea and acknowledged God as the God of the Israelites. Israel in accepting God showed their faith in Him even before He performed miracles for them. "Because of this faith that Israel had in God while they were yet in Egypt I dried up the Red Sea. For they did not say to Moses, 'Are we going out to this wilderness of waste, which has nothing in it, and there is no life in our hands on the way?' Thus saith the Lord, 'I have remembered for your good the love of thy youth, the love of thy bridal days; when ye went after me in the wilderness, in a land which was not sown'. (Jer. 11:2) The reward that they received for this was that Israel became holy unto God, 'the first of his produce'". (ibid 3) (2)

Not only did Israel accept God and therefore expect election, but they also listened attentively to the commandments of God. God told them to take out the bones of Joseph and we are told, (Joshua xxiv:32) 'The bones that the people of Israel brought up from the land of Egypt they buried in Shechem'. This tells us that all of

1- Ms. 61 to Ex. xv:2 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Shirata

2- Ms. 48 to Ex. xiv:15

Israel had expected to bring the bones of Joseph up from Egypt, but when they saw Moses engaged in the work they said they must give the honor to the great one rather than to the lesser ones. (1)

The Israelites had so much faith in God that they did everything Moses told them to do. "This shows the praiseworthiness of Israel, for they did not say to Moses, 'How can we turn back?' for fear that they might break the hearts of the children that were with them. They believed and followed Moses. (2) Israel did everything that Moses asked of them and did not transgress his command". (3)

"For surely," say the Rabbis, "if the people of Israel believed in Moses then how much more so did they believe in Him, by Whose word the world came into being? This teaches us that he who believes in the pastor of Israel believes in God. And so must you interpret the following verse, (Num. xxi:5) 'And the people spoke against God and against Moses'. If they spoke against God how much more so against Moses? This teaches us that all who speak against the leader of Israel speak also against Him who spoke and the world was."

"Israel gladly accepted the yoke of the kingdom of God at Mount Sinai and after journeying to the mount they encamped there. 171

1-Ms. 40 to Ex. xiii:19

2- Ms. 42 to Ex. xiv:4 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Beshalach

3- Ms. 77 to Ex. xvi:17 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Vayassa

It is written, 'And the children of Israel journeyed, and the children of Israel encamped'. (pl. יָסַע) This shows that they journeyed with dissension and encamped with dissension. But when they came to Sinai to accept the yoke of God's kingdom it says, 'And it encamped there' (s. יָסַע) to show that all the people were of one intention, that all loved each other and wished to receive the Torah". (1) "All the people answered together that they would do what God had spoken. They did not answer with hypocrisy nor did they take council with one another". (2)

Israel was willing to accept the Korah and to show their willingness where other peoples had refused. "They entered a covenant with God, which stipulated three things: circumcision, ritual bathing, and sacrifices. Of circumcision it is written, (Ex. xii:48) 'But no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof'. Moses, our teacher, circumcised them in Egypt in order that they might eat of the Passover feast. And so it says, (Ezek. xvi:6) 'And when I passed by thee and saw thee wallowing in thy blood, I said unto thee, In thy blood live; yea, I said unto thee, In thy blood live'. These two types of blood are the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Passover feast. Concerning the sacrifices it is written, (Ex. xxiv:5) 'And He sent forth the youth of Israel who offered burnt offerings for the sake of all of Israel'. And con-

1- Ms. 94 to Ex. xix:2 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Bahodesh

2- Ms. 96 to Ex. xix:8 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract Bahodesh.

cerning ritual immersion it is written, (Ex. xix:10) 'And let them wash their garments'. It only says that they were required to wash¹ their garments; from whence do we know that they were also required to immerse? In cases where they are not required to wash their garments, they are required to undergo the ritual of immersion. Therefore in those cases where they are required to wash their garments, it is logical that they are^{also} required^{to} fulfill the ritual of immersion. (1)

"In accepting the Torah the children of Israel were required to give something as a pledge that they would live up to it. They immediately came forth with their children. And God said that they were acceptable pledges, as it is said, (Ps. viii:3) 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou found strength'. And it is also said, (Hos. iv:6) 'Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children'". (2)

"Israel walked in light while the other people walked in darkness, for the children of Israel busied themselves with the Torah. Among the Egyptians a 'man could not see his brother, nor could he rise from his place. The Egyptian who was standing was unable to sit; if he were sitting he was unable to get up; he who was bowed down could not straighten himself out; and he who was straight could not bow¹ down. As it is written, (Ex. x:23) 'And a man

1- Ms. 97 to Ex. xix:10

2- Ms. 100 to Ex. xix:17

could not rise from his place'. Rabbi Isaac said, 'Woe to the nations of the world for they are judged according to their works'. And it is said, (Is. xxix:15) 'Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord', and their works are in the dark'. Therefore are they smitten in darkness, as it says, (Ps. xxxv:6) 'Let their way be dark and slippery'. But Israel, what is it written concerning them? 'And to all the children of Israel there was light in their habitations'; for they busied themselves in the Law and commandments, as it is said concerning them, (Prov. vi:23) 'For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light'". (1)

The people of Israel are a holy people, and this holiness was a reason for their selection. "Isi the son of Judah said, 'Every time that the Holy One Blessed be He adds a commandment to Israel, he also adds holiness to them.' (2) Rabbi Meir said, 'God spoke unto Moses saying, For one man I made the waters dry up' as it is written, (Gen. 1:9) 'And God said, Let the waters be gathered from under the heavens to one place and let dry land be seen'. Shall I not then, for this holy congregation, as it is said, (Ps. xvi:3) 'As for the holy that are in the earth', shall I not dry up the sea for them?" (3)

This holiness of Israel was also the basis of their great glory. The Rabbis, in showing the glory given to Israel, say that all of

1- Ms. 173 to Ex. x:23

2- Ms. 153 to Ex. xxii:30 cf. Mekilta of Ishmael Tract. Kaspā

3- Ms. 47 to Ex. xiv:15

Israel's great sufferings were not really as great as one might think. When Israel was enslaved to a country, that country was the greatest in the world, for it is not as shameful to be slaves to a great country as it is to be enslaved by a small and insignificant one. We are also acquainted with the philosophy of Isaiah in which he says that the other nations of the world are but the

שֵׁבַע עָמֻד , the staff of vengeance of God, and that God uses these nations to chastise Israel when she does evil in His sight. The Rabbis have also said that Egypt's work was finished after the people of Israel had left her land. (1) "Pharoah ruled from one end of the world to the other and had governors from one end of the world to the other because of the glory of Israel. About him it is written, (Psalm cv:20) 'The King sent and loosed him; even the ruler of peoples set him free'". (2)

"There was no people or kingdom that enslaved Israel which had not ruled from one end of the world to the other", say our Rabbis. This was done "for the glory of Israel. Concerning the king of Assyria it is written, (Is. x:14) 'And my hand has found as a nest the riches of the peoples and as one gathereth forsaken eggs, have I gathered all the peoples of the earth'. Concerning the kingdom of Babylon, it is written, (Jer. xxviii:8) 'And it shall come to pass that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same

1- Ms. 43 to Ex. xiv:5

2- Ms. 43 to Ex. xiv:5 cf. Mekilta of Issael tract. Beshallah

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, that nation will I visit, saith the Lord, with the sword, and with famine, and with pestilence until I have consumed them by his hand'. Concerning the kingdom of the Medes it is written, (Dan. vi:26) 'Then King Darius wrote unto all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth, Peace be multiplied unto you'. And, (Ester x:1) 'The king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea'. Concerning the kingdom of the Greeks, it is written, (Dan. vii:6) 'The beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it'. Concerning the fourth kingdom it is written, (Dan. vii:23) 'And shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down and break it in pieces'. Therefore we learn that there was no kingdom or people that ruled them who did not rule from one end of the earth to the other because of the glory of Israel. It is therefore said, 'And they (Egyptians) said, What is this that we have done?' (1)

Although the people of Israel recognized that יהוה was the God of the world, He who created heavens and earth; He who ruled all the peoples and looked after them as a father looks after his children; and although this philosophy is again iterated in the various prophets (Amos-Jonah-etc.); yet they felt that God was ^Yed of the whole world but particularly ^Yed of Israel. "For even though Thou art a saviour for the rest of the world, Thou art a savior to me

1- Ms. 43 to Ex. xiv:5 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Beshallah

(Israel) especially. (1) Thou art the song of all the people of the world but to me (Israel) in particular. For behold, the peoples of the world have blessed and praised Him by Whose word the world came into being, but my praise is best before Him, as it is written, (II Sam. ^{KXXI} ~~xxv~~:1) 'And sweet are the songs of Israel'". (2)

The Mekilta says, "Even though the whole world belongs to Thee, You have no other people but Israel, as it is written, (Is. xliii:21) 'The people which I formed for Myself'. (3) And Scripture further says, 'The people that Thou hast possessed'. (Ex. xv:16) Therefore since the Torah is also called a possession, (Prov. viii:22) 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way'; the land of Israel is also called a possession, (Gen. xiv:22) 'Possessors of Heaven and earth'; And the Beth Hamidrash is also called possession, (Ps. lxxviii:54) 'And he brought them to the mountain which His right hand has possessed'. Let Israel that is called possession come to the land which is called a possession, and build the Temple which is called possession by the grace of the Torah which is called possession, there is it said a people whom thou hast possessed". (4)

When Israel rebelled against God, the Rabbis were not ashamed to record it. Ofttimes in the Midrash we have very bold statements,

1- Ms. 58 to Ex. xv:1 cf. Mekilta of Iqmael tract. Shirata

2- Ms. 59 to Ex. xv:2 I have thus translated the verse for the needs of the Midrash; the J.P.S. version is "sweet singer of Israel"

לְקוֹמָם וְלִמְלִיכָתָם

3- Ms. 68 to Ex. xv:13 cf. Mekilta of Iqmael tract. Shirata

4- Ms. 69 to Ex. xv:16 cf. Mekilta of Iqmael tract. Shirata Where the order differs although the idea is the same.

statements which on the surface seem blasphemous but which in reality show a piety that is unsurpassed. When the Rabbis feel that God has done a possible injustice they will emphasize it only to show their great love for and belief in Him. "Rabbi Eliezer of Modiim ~~(against Moses, and not against Moses alone by they direct their complaints)~~ said, The Israelites were in the habit of complaining but also against the Almighty. In this sense it says, 'What shall we drink?' (1)

As an outward sign of this selection of Israel they were given three crowns: "The crown of the Torah, Priesthood and the kingdom. Concerning the Torah it is written, 'And Thou shalt keep My covenant.' Concerning the priesthood and the kingdom it is written, 'And ye shall be to Me as a kingdom of priests'. Rabbi Nathan said the crown of a good name was above all of them, (i.e. the good name of Israel)." (2)

This election of Israel lifts them above the other peoples of the earth, and raise them on high. "Just as the eagle goes up from the earth to the heavens in a short while, and just as their ascent is not in the accustomed way, so is their descent not in an accustomed way. And so is it said, (Hosea vii:12) 'Even as they go I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of heaven; I will chastise them as their congregation has been made to bear'". (3)

A very beautiful and important note is struck by our Rabbis in the Midrash; a note which has been the rallying cry of the Jewish people

1- Ms. 72 to Ex. xvi:24 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Vayassa. This is repeated to Ex. xvi:2 by the same authority, the verse, "And all the congregation of Israel murmured". Ms. 74 cf. Mekilta of Ismael Tract. Vayassa to the same verse.

2- Ms. 96 to Ex. xix:6 cf. Pirke Aboth iv:13

3- Ms. 95 to Ex. xix:4

for many years; a note which has enabled the Jewish people to bear all the burdens of persecution and pogrom, of captivity and dispersion. Always has the idea that, "All Israel are brethren" been with us and it is stated in our Midrash in the following way. "The word teaches that they (Israel) are as one body and soul and so it says, (I Chron. xviii:21) 'And who is like thy people Israel, a nation one in the earth'. If one of them sin, all are punished, as it says, (Josh. xxi:20) 'Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass concerning the devoted thing, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel'. One man did not die for his sin, but one man was smitten and all of them felt it. And so it says, (Jer. 1:17) 'Israel is a scattered sheep'. Just as when one of the limbs of an ewe is harmed, all of her body feels it, so is Israel: when one is smitten, all of Israel feels it". (1) This idea is ever true among the Jewish people; for when one community of Jews ^{was} pillaged and plundered another community, no matter how far away, always came to rescue them and take them in, so that they might live again as Jews. (2)

Nothing can make the name of God greater than Israel's acceptance of His will for when Israel does the will of her Creator, "His name is made great in all the world; as it is said, (Josh. ii:10) 'For we have heard how God dried up the waters of the Red Sea from before you, when you went out of the land of Egypt; and what you did

1- Ms. 95 to Ex. xix:6 cf. Mekilta of Iqmael tract. Bahodesh.

2- See chapter on Zecuth for discussion of situations where each Jew suffers for and has zecuth from every other.

to the two kings of the Amorites; and we heard and our hearts melted; and there did not arise the spirit in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath! 'But when Israel does not do the will of God, what is written? (Ezek. xxxvi:20) 'And when they came unto the nations whither they came, they profaned My Holy name, in that men said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord and are gone forth out of His land.'" (1)

Just as the people of Israel were elected as a distinct nation, so, too, was the land upon which they were to dwell a distinct land. The Rabbis have said that the Bible was begun with the creation of the world so that all peoples might know that the land belongs to God and He may give any parcel of the globe to any people He so desires. The rest of the nations of the world may not then say that Israel are robbers, for they have stolen away the land of the other nations. Our Mekilta recognizes that the land of Israel originally belonged to other peoples for in commenting upon the verse, "To the land of Canaan" (Ex. xiii:11) they say "Was it the land of Canaan? Was it not the land of the five peoples? This teaches us that Canaan was the father of them all and so it says, (Gen. x:15) 'And Canaan begot Zidon his first born son and Heth'". (2)

1- Ms. 61 to Ex. xv:2

2- Ms. 35

And once again it says, to the verse, "And it shall come to pass when ye come into the land; this is the land of the seven peoples which I shall give unto thee; this is the land of the three peoples". (1)

"This land of Israel shall be given to the people as a present from God; it shall not be in thy eyes as an inheritance from thy fathers but as though God gave it unto thee (Israel) now", say our Rabbis. (2)

This land which the Lord, God promised Abraham he would give unto his descendants was to be a beautiful land; a land which no other would surpass. Throughout the literature of the Rabbis we find references to the choiceness of the land of Israel as well as to the election of the people of Israel. The land of Israel has ever been described as "a land flowing with milk and honey". (Ex. xiii:5) Rabbi Eliezer says of this verse, "This is the milk of the fruits and the honey of the palm trees". Rabbi Akiba said, "This is actual milk and so it is written, (Joel iv:18) 'And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drop down sweet wine and the hills shall flow with milk'. The honey is the honey of the forest, as it is written, (I Sam. xiv:26) 'And when the people were come unto the forest; behold a flow of honey'. (3) Just as it says, 'Here a land flowing with milk and honey' (Ex. xiii:5) and there it says, (Dt.

1- Ms. 21 to Ex. xii:25

2- Ms. 35 to Ex. xiii:11

3- Ms. 32

xxvi:9) 'A land flowing with milk and honey', just as it there means the land of the five peoples so does it mean here the land of the five peoples". (1)

The Israelites had to enter the land when it was as beautiful as God had promised their forefathers it would be and our Mekilta says, "When the Canaanites heard that Israel was about to enter the land, they arose and burnt the seeds, cut down the trees, destroyed the buildings, and stopped up the wells. The Holy One Blessed be He then said, I promised their fathers that I would not bring them to a desolate land but to houses full of all good things! (Dt. vi:11) Therefore will I detain them in the wilderness until the Canaanites will arise and fix what they have destroyed. (2) Said Rabbi Eliezer, It is^{of} the goodness of the land that Scripture speaks when it says that Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness that God does for Israel". (3)

"This land is to be the highest in the world", say our Rabbis, "A land good and wise; a land which makes the heart of man glow. And so it says, (Jer. iii:19) 'And I shall give thee a pleasant land, the goodliest heritage'. Just as the deer is swiftest of all the animals, so all the fruits of the land of Israel will bloom the fastest of the fruits of any other land". (4)

1- Ms. 32

2- Ex. xiii:17 cf. Mekilta of Issaḥai Tract. Beshallah

3- Ms. 88 to Ex. xviii:29 cf. Mekilta of Issaḥai Tract. Amalek

4- Ms. 168 to Ex. iii:8

"So good is this land, that every other land needs aids; Egypt waters her land from the Nile; Babylon from the Tigris and Euphrates; but the land of Israel does not need any aid. For they sleep upon their beds and God sends them down rain. This teaches that God's ways are not as man's, for man gets slaves in order to have them sustain the man; but He, by Whose word the world came into being, acquires servants and He feeds and sustains them". (1)

This land of Israel is a land from which all Jewish knowledge and thought is to flow. It is truly the land that Isaiah speaks of when he says, (Is. 44:3) "For out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of God from Jerusalem". It is in this land that the months of the year and the calendar are to be reckoned. "From whence do we know this?" ask the Rabbis. "The Bible says, 'And thou shalt keep this ordinance in its season'; and the verse, 'And it shall be when ^{you} come into the land', follows this immediately. From this do we learn that you do not fix the months and calculate the leap years anywhere outside the land of Israel but in the cities of Judah. For the Divine Presence is in its midst, as it is said, (Dt. 34:5) 'Even unto this habitation ye shall seek'". (2)

Not only is this land a land of goodness and choiceness, but also it is a land from which prophecy emanates. "For all lands were

1- Ms. 169 to Ex. 33:17

2- Ms. 35 to Ex. 33:10

proper for prophecy before Israel became holy; but as soon as the land of Israel became holy, then the visions came to the prophets only at the waters, as it is said, (Ezek. i:3) 'The word of the Lord came unto Ezekiel, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar'. And it says, (Dan. viii:2) 'And I was by the stream Ulai' (Dan. x:4) 'And I was by the side of the great river, which is the Tigris'. And so also Jonah; He did not speak to him except by the water". (1)

1- Ms. 5 to Ex. xii:1

CHAPTER V

TORAH

There is hardly a concept in Judaism that is more complex, more inclusive and at times more exclusive than Torah. The Torah consists, according to the Rabbis, at times of but the Five Books of Moses, at other times of the whole written Law and at still other times the Oral Law. Torah is also used to designate the sum total of revelation without special regard to any particular element in it.

It has been considered one of the things which was predestined even before creation. (1) According to the neo-Platonic view, which finds expression in both Genesis Rabbah and Genesis Tanchumah the Torah was the effectuating and motivating force in Creation as well as the pattern from which this world was created. And the world itself was created for those who upheld the Torah.

Throughout the history of Rabbinic Judaism we find that the Torah, according to many of the Rabbis, was even hypostatized, that is, given almost a personality of its own. The Torah was the link between Divinity and Humanity for we read in many of our Midrashim that on the day of the Revelation, the earth was wedded to the heavens, that is, Torah as the bride was wedded to Israel. (2)

1- Gen. Rabbah 1:1

2- Pesikta Rabati 98 a and b; Exodus Rabbah xxviii:1

The giving of the Torah made such an impression upon the world in general that both heaven and earth gave ear to its revelation. This latter idea reflects the universalistic aspect of the Sinaitic revelation and for this reason we are told the Torah was not given in the land of Israel for if it had been given in that land Israel could have laid claim to the Torah as its very own. (1)

In accepting the Torah, Israel made peace between God and his world for without the Torah man could not exist. This Torah which Israel accepted was a full gift, a complete revelation and in accordance with our Rabbis everything which aids the religious, ethical, moral or ceremonial life of the Jew is a part of the Torah. (2)

Israel received the yoke of God's kingdom when she was willing to accept the Torah. In the Torah was to be found everything that would make this kingdom of God a perfect kingdom, for God, according to the Rabbis, manifests himself in all minutiae of life. And for this reason there is a totality in Jewish life, a totality which not only includes the religious and ethical doctrines but also the ways of life which man is to follow in his every day existence.

According to our Rabbis, the physical freedom of the Jewish people instituted at their departure from Egypt could not be complete until they were spiritually free as well. This spiritual freedom had its genesis at Sinai when the Law was given to the people of Israel.

1-Mekilta de Ishmael 62 a

2- Sifre 79

In reading through the Mekilta of Rabbi Simon ben Yochai the above-mentioned theological views of most of our Midrashim are similarly discernible. Our Torah, according to the Mekilta of Simon, is eternal. It has existed since the beginnings of existence. Our Rabbis say that, "'Because the Lord descended upon it in fire' (Ex. xix:18) teaches that the Torah was compared to fire. Just as fire exists forever so does our Torah exist forever." (1)

There are two attitudes toward the Torah which may be perceived in many of the Midrashim: the Torah is universalistic and the Torah is nationalistic. Every nation had the opportunity of accepting the Torah. Our Mekilta says, "The Holy One Blessed be He asked each of the peoples of the world to accept his Torah but they refused it. He then offered it to Israel." (2) Our Mekilta further states "In the view of the world was the Torah given to Israel, for if it were given in the land of Israel the children of Israel could say 'it is ours' and if it were given in another place, the inhabitants of that place could say 'it is ours'. Therefore are we told it was given in view of the world so that all who wished to learn its ways might come and partake." (3)

"Rabbi Jose used to say 'God did not speak to the children of

1- Manuscript 100; cf Mekilta Ishmael tractate Bahodesh

2- Manuscript 104 to verse "I am the Lord thy God" Ex. xx:2

3- Manuscript 93 to verse "And they encamped in the wilderness" Ex. xix:2; cf Mekilta de Ishmael tractate Bahodesh to the same verse.

Israel in secret nor did he speak to them in a dark place' (Isaiah xlv:19) 'when God gave the Torah to Israel he did not give it in a secret place nor in a dark place; that is, God did not say to the seed of Jacob the Torah is thine; God did not hide it but placed the reward within it.'" (1)

We read in Exodus xvi:4 "In order to test them whether they will walk in My Torah or not". The Rabbis ask, whose test is it and they answer, "It is a test for Israel and all of the peoples of the world, for all who fill their hearts so that they may serve God will find sufficiency for all their needs." (2)

The Rabbis go so far as to say that even if Israel had not wanted to accept the Torah, God gave them no alternative. This thought is hinted at in the following quotation from our Mekilta, "God placed the mountains over their heads as a roof and said 'If ye receive the Torah it is well but if not, here shall be thy graves.' At that moment all of Israel moved and cried and poured out their hearts as water in penitence and exclaimed 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will hearken' (Ex. xxiv:7). The Holy One Blessed be He then said 'I wish a security.' Israel offered the heavens and the earth as vouchers for them but God refused saying that these phenomena of nature were much too busy. Israel then offered their

1- Manuscript 93 to the verse "They came to the wilderness of Sinai"
Exodus xix:1

2- Manuscript 75

children. God willingly accepted." (1)

The Torah was so linked up with Jewish life that its transgression by Israel led to the destruction of Jerusalem. This viewpoint is expressed anonymously in the story of a man who met Rabbi Jose the son of Rabbi Halaphta and quoted Micah 1:5 "Because of the sin of Jacob is all this."

This anonymous author continues the conversation with Rabbi Jose by saying, "Blessed be God who has given you the Torah that ye should busy yourselves with it and trust in it and forsake all the vanities of the world." Rabbi Jose answers him, "I said to him, May it be Thy will that our zeal shall not come up upon the heart of others nor the zeal of others come upon our hearts." (2)

The Torah is so important for the continuation of Judaism that it is considered by our Rabbis as the elan vital of Jewry. We recite every day "For they are our life and the length of our days." This same attitude is continually brought out by the Mekilta. "Our aggadists have said that, God taught him the words of the Torah which are compared to a tree, as it says (Proverbs 3:18) 'It is a tree of life to those who take hold of it.'" (3)

"The Holy One Blessed be He said unto Moses, The words of the

1- Manuscript 100 to the verse "And they stood at the bottom of the mountain" Ex. xix:17

2- Manuscript 98 to Exodus xix:14

3- Manuscript 73 to the verse "And he cried unto God and the Lord showed him a tree." Ex. xvi:25

Torah that I gave unto you are life and are healing as it is said (Proverbs 4:22) 'For they are life unto those that find them and health to all their flesh.'" (1)

The verse "And Amalek came" hints at and explains the verse in Job (viii:11) "Can the rush grow up without mire, can the reed grow without water?" According to the words of Rabbi Josiah and Rabbi Eliezer Hisma, "Just as the rush cannot exist without mire and the reed without water so is it impossible for Israel to separate herself from the Torah. When Israel separates herself from the Torah she brings about dissension so that an enemy may come up upon her. For only because of sin and transgression does an enemy come up." (2)

It is evident from the above quotation that whenever Israel forsook the law she laid herself open to attacks from without. The Torah was her protector and guide. "The agadists said 'Rephaim' means but weakness of hands because Israel weakened in living up to the law. Therefore an enemy came upon them and an enemy comes only as a result of sin and transgression." To prove their point the Rabbis quote (II Chronicles xii:1) "And it came to pass when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him" and there follows (ibid 2) "And it came to pass that in the fifth year Shishak, King of Egypt,

1- Manuscript 74 to the verse "The Lord will heal thee" Ex. xv:26

2- Manuscript 81 to Ex. xvii:8 cf. Mekilta de Ishmael tractate Amalek

came up against Jerusalem because they had transgressed against the Lord." (1)

The Torah, according to the Neo-Platonists, is synonymous with the Logos of Philo. It is the Divine Wisdom which, "was set up from everlasting, from the beginning before the earth was. When there were no depths it was brought forth. When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was it brought forth." (Proverbs 8:23 ff). As Divine Wisdom it diffused Wisdom to all who were willing to possess it. "Just as a small fire lights a larger one or a large one may combine with a smaller one, so too will one greatly learned in the Law both give and receive from one who is not as learned." (2)

Those who are willing to busy themselves with the study of the Torah, according to Rabbi Eleazer of Modim, "shall judge Israel at all times for so is it written. (Judges v:10) 'These that ride on white asses'. These are the learned scholars who go from city to city, from province to province, and busy themselves in the law. The Bible continues, 'who sit on carpets,' that is, those who sit and judge honestly." (3)

The Mekilta of Rabbi Simon in discussing the verse, "And Moses

1- Manuscript 82 to Ex. xvii:8 cf. Ishmael tractate Amalek

2- Manuscript 100 to Exodus xix:18

3- Manuscript 90 to Exodus xviii:23

brought Israel from the Red Sea" (Ex. xv:22) tells us that the words of the Torah were compared to water for it says, (Isaiah lv:1) "Behold, all who are thirsty, let them come to the waters. Since they were separated from the Torah three days Israel rebelled." (1)

The Torah brings with it goodness, prosperity and reward, whereas the lack of Torah brings in its wake destruction and punishment. The giving of the Torah is itself a reward, according to the Rabbis, if the people of Israel will but hearken to it. "Since He said unto them the giving of the reward is in obeying it. From whence do we know that if Israel does not hearken unto the Law God said unto her she would receive all sorts of punishments? We read in Exodus xxiv:4 'And Moses came and he told to the people all the words of God and all the Laws.'" (2)

Many attributes that were given to God by the Bible have been interpreted by our Rabbis as the Torah. "The words 'my strength' only mean Torah, as it is written (Psalm 29:11) 'The Lord will give strength to his people' and it is likewise written (Psalm 99:1) 'The King's strength also loveth judgment'". (3)

The Torah was given by God to every man be he mature or not. The Mekilta of Reb Simon emphasizes this view in the commentary to Ex.(xx:10), "'Thou and thy son and daughter'. One might say

1- Manuscript 72 Cf. Ishmael tractate Shirata

2- Manuscript 96 to Ex. xix:9

3- Manuscript 59 to Ex. xv:2 ; cf. Ishmael tractate Shirata

that this refers to the mature sons and daughters, but by the use of 'thou', those who have reached their majority are included and the latter part of the verse refers, therefore, to the minor sons and daughters.' (1)

Those who have ever felt that there existed among the ancient Jews an aristocracy of learning which because of its learning enjoyed leisure and the benefits of the community without working for them, are greatly mistaken. Throughout Midrashic literature the very famous thought that "if there is no meal there is no Torah and if there is no Torah there is no meal" is ever perceptible. (Ethics of the Fathers, Ch. 3:21). This idea is iterated in our Midrash as well. Rabbi Joshua says, "If a man but studies two *Halakot* in the morning and two in the evening and works all day it is as though he fulfills the whole Torah." (2)

Rabbi Eleazer says, "Only to those who have manna to eat is it given to study the Torah. How is it possible for a man to sit in his study when he does not know where his food and drink will come from nor where he can get his clothes and covering? Therefore only to those who have manna is it given to study the Torah." (3)

1- Manuscript 108

2- Manuscript 75 to Ex. xvi:4

3- Manuscript 75 to Ex. xvi:4 This quotation is given in the name of Rabbi Eleazer in our *Mekilta* but in the *Mekilta de Ishmael*, tractate *Vayassa*, the identical reading is given under the name of Rabbi Simon ben Yochei.

Rabbi Eleazer ben Azariah says, "Work is a great thing, for the Divine Presence of God did not dwell upon Israel until they pursued some work, as it says, (Ex. xxv:8) 'And they shall make a tabernacle for Me and I shall dwell therein.'" (1)

The Torah permeates all of the life of him who studies it. He who has tasted of it wishes to embrace it even more. The story is told of Rabbi Jose ben Rabbi Halaftha that he once met a man who asked him from where he came. Rabbi Jose said that he came from among a people of a large city which boasted many wise men and scribes. The man was much impressed and asked Rabbi Jose to remain in his city. The man was even willing to sustain him and grant him gifts of gold and silver. Rabbi Jose answered that for all the money in the world he would not remain in this strange city for man turns into dust and all his material possessions perish with him. But that which remains at his death are the words of the Torah. (2)

The Rabbis, however, tell us that we should be careful not to try to grasp more than we are able. This thought is brought out by the following analogy. "Just as if one comes too near fire he is burnt but if he keeps too far away from it he is cold. So is it with the Torah. If man comes too near it he is consumed but if he remains too far away he is cold. We should therefore study the Torah so we may become warm from the light of the wise men but should be cautious in

1- Manuscript 107 to Exodus xx:9

2- Manuscript 93 to Exodus xix:14

the study." (1)

The Rabbis also speculated on the form of the Ten Commandments. The picture which is most familiar to us, five commandments written on each half of a double tablet was also the Rabbis' conception. They asked themselves why the commandments were arranged in the particular order that they were. "The command 'Thou shalt not kill' was placed opposite the command 'I am the Lord' for he who commits murder is the same as he who diminishes from the Divine Likeness. Opposite 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' was the command 'There shall be no other gods before Me'. This teaches that he who commits adultery is equal in the eyes of God to him who worships idols. And so it says (Jeremiah iii:3) 'And it came to pass through the lightness of her harlotry that she defiled the land'. 'Thou shalt not steal' was written opposite 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain' for all who steal will in the end swear falsely. 'Thou shalt not bear false witness' is written opposite 'Remember the Sabbath day' for God said, so to speak, if you bear false witness against your neighbor it is as though you have denied that I created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. 'Thou shalt not covet' was placed opposite 'Honor thy father and mother' for he who covets his neighbor's wife, a son shall be born of her who will honor him who is not his father, but curse his father. (2)

1- Manuscript 100 to Ex. xix:18 cf. Ishmael tractate Bahodesh where a much more incomplete version is given.

2- Mekilta of Ishmael reads "He will have a son"

"A man might say that he is not guilty until he transgresses every command. Lest we think this, Scripture teaches 'Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet.' This teaches that each of them must not be transgressed. He who disobeys one of them will in the end disobey all. From whence do we know that if a man transgresses the command 'Thou shalt not kill' he will in the end commit adultery? It is written, (Proverbs 1:10) 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not'. How do we know that if one commits adultery he will in the end steal? It is written, (Psalm 50:18) 'When thou hast seen a thief then thou consented with him and hast been partaker with adulterers.' How do we know that he who steals will finally swear falsely? It is written (Proverbs 29:24) 'He who is partner with a thief hateth his own soul. He hears cursing and says nothing.' (1)

The Torah itself is an entity, a totality. The Rabbis are able to read into the text of the Torah all the above-mentioned things for they have first established the principles that nothing precedes or succeeds anything else. The Mekilta of Rabbi Simon ben Yo hai brings as illustration to this principle the following. "In Exodus xv:9, the verse 'The enemy said' is the beginning of the section. But since there is no before or after in the Torah it is permissible. And so you must interpret (Leviticus ix:1) 'And it came to pass on the eighth day

1- Manuscript 113 to Ex. xx:17; cf. Ishmael tractate Bahodesh

Moses called..... '. This is the beginning of the book but there is no before or after in the Torah. So you must also interpret (Jeremiah ii:2) 'Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem saying'. This is the beginning of the book but there is no before or after in the Torah. And so must you interpret (Ezekiel ii:1) 'Oh son of man stand upon thy feet and I shall speak to you.' And there are some who say (Ezekiel xvii:2) 'Son of man, tell a riddle and give a parable concerning the land of Israel' is the beginning of the book. And so you must interpret (Hosea^{x:1} ~~ix:1~~) 'Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself'. This is the beginning of the book but there is no before or after in the Torah. Likewise is (Ecclesiastes 1:12) to be interpreted 'I am Koheleth who was king over Israel in Jerusalem'. This is the beginning of the book but there is no before or after in the Torah." (1)

1- Manuscript 64 cf. Ishmael tractate Shirata

CHAPTER VI

ZECUTH

There is in Judaism a conception called "Zecuth" which may be translated approximately as "merit" or "grace". Throughout the Midrashim, there appear certain men, the merits of whose righteousness accrue to the good of Israel. There is also a complementary conception, that of Israel suffering for the sins of others.

According to Dr. Schechter (1), there are three types of men from whom Israel may receive Zecuth. Firstly there is the Zecuth from a pious ancestor; secondly the Zecuth that Israel receives from a contemporary; and thirdly the Zecuth which Israel gets in advance from a pious posterity.

We find in pseudo-Jonathan (to Ex. xviii:9) that the Zecuth of the Fathers and Mothers is invoked in times of stress. The Zecuth of the Fathers appears most often throughout the Midrashim. One of the things predestined before creation was the Fathers. (2)

It is most interesting to note that the greatest and most worthy among Israel were never thought of as dieties, for the

1- Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, Ch. xii

2- Genesis Rabba 1:4 and Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer. 3

Rabbis always took caution to prevent this, lest the people fall into the habit of worshipping these great men. The Rabbis therefore say that even The Fathers were not declared holy until they had died. (1)

Israel received much because of the Zecuth of The Fathers, for through it she was brought out of Egypt. It was necessary for Moses to appeal to God in the name of the Zecuth of the Fathers after the episode of the Golden Calf, for not until he did, was his prayer heard. (2)

A man may transfer his Zecuth to his son, and the Zecuth of an ancestor won for an individual a great deal of respect from the community. The Talmud relates that when Rabban Gamliel and Eliezer ben Azariah contended for the leadership of the Academy many wished to bestow it upon Eliezer ben Azariah, being influenced by the fact that he had the Zecuth of coming from Ezra. (3)

The Rabbis, however, did not wish to place too much emphasis on the Zecuth of the Fathers and as a result of this, there are many discussions found throughout Midrashic literature concerning the time when the Zecuth terminated. (4)

1- Midrash Targum to Psalms xvi:2

2- Exodus Rabba xliiv:1

3- Talmud Babli, tractate Berachot 27 a

4- D.G. Talmud Babli, Sabbath 55a

The early Israelites felt that both the sins and the good deeds of a man carried over to his descendants. Therefore, a man would receive either merit or punishment for his ancestors' good deeds or sins. This attitude is expressed in the decalogue, "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me and showing loving kindness unto the thousandth generation of those that love me and keep my commandments." (Ex. xx:5)

With the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people to Babylonia, the philosophy of corporate responsibility underwent a change, and individual responsibility for one's own acts took its place. If the old responsibility had been still applicable, the Jews in Babylonia would have said that they could not go back to Palestine to build up the land again, for they were suffering for the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel answers, "If the fathers eat sour grapes will the children's teeth be set on edge?" (1)

Our rabbis also try to minimize the reflection of the merit or the sins of the fathers upon their descendants. In place of that they express the belief that the covenant with the Fathers is everlasting and independent of Israel's actions, so that this covenant replaces, in many instances, the Zecuth. A hint of this idea is

1- Ez. xviii:2

given in the Mekilta of Rabbi Simon, in which it says, "The covenant of the Fathers and the Zecuth of the children." (1)

The Zecuth now holds a less important place in the doctrines of Judaism. It is useless unless it is accompanied by good deeds on the part of the person who wishes to reap its benefits. (2)

Dr. Schechter says, "What this Zecuth served mostly to establish was the consciousness of the historic continuity and to increase the reverence for the past which has thus become both foundation and inspiration." (3)

The Mekilta of Rabbi Simon senses the difficulty of reconciling these two seeming contradictions. It quotes the decalogue, "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers on the children" and asks the question, "How, then, is this verse, 'The father shall not bear the iniquity of the son and the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father'. (Ex. xviii:19) to be accepted? If the fathers are righteous, they shall not bear the iniquity; if they are not righteousness, they shall bear the iniquity. And likewise for the sons." (4)

The Mekilta of Rabbi Simon points out that there were no sins committed by the Fathers. Rabbi Eliezer of Modiim says,

1- Ms. 94

2- See Leviticus Rabba xxxvi:6 and Exodus Rabba 1:36

3- Some Aspects of Rabbinic Judaism, p. 184

4- s. 106

"The Bible states this only because of the patriarchs, when it says, 'And they turned toward the wilderness' (Ex. xvi:10). Just as the wilderness contains no sin or iniquity so also was there no sin or iniquity in the Fathers." (1)

Rabbi Banai said, "'For the grace which Abraham has before me, I have rent the sea and have ~~cl~~ave the wood for the burnt offering'. (Gen. xxii:3). As it is said, 'And the waters clave'" (Ex. xiv:21) (2)

Rabbi Akiba said, "By the grace of Jacob I have rent the sea before them, as it is said, (Gen. xxviii:14) 'And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth and thou shalt burst the sea.'" (3) Rabbi Eliezer of Lodin said "It was due to the merit of the Fathers, God said unto Moses, 'Behold, I will cause rain to come down.'" (4) Rabbi Meir said, "Behold it says of Abraham, (Gen. xviii:8) 'And he stood with them under the tree and they ate.' For that reason did the Holy One Blessed be He cause the seven clouds of glory to precede them." (5)

Rabbi Joshua ben Korcha said, "The Holy One Blessed be He said to Moses, Israel was unworthy to receive the manna in the wilderness. For they should have gone hungry, thirsty and naked."

1-Ms. 76 cf. Mekilta of Is. tractate Vayassa

2- Ms. 48 to Ex. xiv:15

3- J. P. S. and King James version of this verse is, "and send abroad to the west." מס' 48 to Ex. xiv:15

4- Ms. 75 to Ex. xvi:4 of Mekilta Is. tract. Vayassa which has a better reading, מס' 75 to Ex. xvi:4

5- Ms. 41 to Ex. xiii:22

But what could I do? I gave them the reward of Abraham My beloved who ministered to the angels, as we are told, (Gen. xviii:8) "And he stood by them under the tree and they ate". (1)

The Zecuth of the Fathers aided the Israelites many times on their march from Egypt to the Promised Land. Our rabbis say that all which was said to the "House of Jacob" (Ex. xix:3) was because of the merits of Jacob; and all which was told to "Israel" (ibid), was due to the merit of Israel. (2) The reason that the oath given to Israel was fulfilled was, "Due to the merit of the Fathers." (3)

Moses was greatly aided by the covenant which was made between God and the Fathers. When, "'Moses went up unto God', he ascended in a cloud and descended in a cloud. Both the covenant of the Fathers and the merit of the children ascended and descended with him". (4) The deeds of the fathers helped Moses further in the time of his own affliction. When Amalek fought with Israel at Rephidim, God told Moses to hold up his hands. While his hands remained up, Israel prevailed. But when his hands came down, Israel began to lose. Rabbi Eliezer of Modina said, "The sin ~~laid~~ heavily upon the hands of Moses and he could not bear it. What then did he do? He turned to the deeds of the Fathers, as it is said,

1-Ms. 5 to Ex. vi:2

2- Ms. 94 to Ex. xix:3

3- Ms. 32 to Ex. xiii:5 cf. Ms. 35 to Ex. xiii:11

4- Ms. 94 to Ex. xix:3

'And they took a stone and put it under him.' (Ex. xvii:12)

This refers to the deeds of the Fathers. 'And he set thereon'.

This refers to the deeds of the Mothers." 'And Aaron and Hur supported his hands.' For what reason does Scripture state that one stood on either side of him? This is only to teach us that Aaron would make mention of the deeds of Levi and Hur would make mention of the deeds of Judah." (1)

Before Israel fought Amalek at Rephidim, Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of a hill. Rabbi Eliezer of Modiim says, "The verse 'Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill' (Ex. xvii:9) refers to a fast which was declared by the Israelites so that they might be ready. 'The top' refers to the deeds of the Patriarchs; 'the hill' refers to the deeds of the Mothers." (2)

God took the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt in the month of Abib. "In a month that is correct כֶּסֶל that is, not warm nor cool. And so it says, (Ps. lxxviii:7) 'God maketh the solitary to dwell in a house; he bringeth out the prisoners into prosperity', בְּכֹרֶת that is, with correct deeds. These refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And others say they refer to Moses, Aaron and Miriam." (3)

1- Ms. 83 to Ex. xvii:12; cf. Mekilta of Israel Tractate Amalek where the deeds of the tribes are reversed, i.e. "Aaron would make mention of the deeds of Judah and Hur would make mention of the deeds of Levi." It would seem that the Simon version is more correct for Aaron came from the tribe of Levi.

2- Ms. 82 to Ex. xvii:9 of Mekilta of Israel tract. Amalek there a more complete and better reading is given, "Rabbi Eliezer of Modiim says, Tomorrow we shall declare a fast and be ready, relying upon the deeds of the patriarchs." מחר ונזכר חלונות ונחיה מעותדין
על מעשה אבות

3- Ms. 32 to Ex. xiii:4

Moses received a Zecuth from his father. "The wise men say that the Holy One Blessed be He said to Moses, The Zecuth of Amram thy father stands by you so that you will do a great thing in Israel. When Egypt enslaved Israel with an overburdening slavery and decreed that all the youths should be drowned in the sea, the Israelites said, If one marries and has children the Egyptians will drown them in the sea; why, then, shall we weary ourselves for naught? Amram, however, performed a great deed in Israel. After his wife was pregnant for three months he divorced her and then he remarried her, as it says, (Ex. ii:1) 'And there went a man of the house of Levi and took to wife a daughter of Levi'. The administering angels blessed them as bride and groom for it says, (Ps. cxlii:9) 'The mother of children rejoiced.' The Egyptians then counted nine months but she gave birth after six months. Why is it necessary to state that Amram took a wife? Only because the Bible wishes to tell us the merit of Amram the righteous". (1)

Not only does Israel receive merit from any of its great characters but she may also receive divine grace through the Torah, the tribes, circumcision (which was a covenant between God and Abraham) and other things. "Because of the merit of the Torah, 'Thou hast guided them in strength'; (Ex. xv:13) as it says, (Ps. xxix:11) 'The Lord will give strength unto his people'". (2) Others say that this

1- Ms. 3

2- "Strength" is Torah

is due to the merit of the Kingdom of the House of David, as it is said, (Ps. xxi:2) 'Oh, Lord, in Thy strength the King rejoices.'" (1)

The Rabbis ask, "What caused Israel to escape from the Red Sea, a wall of sea coming up on the right hand and the left? Because of the merit of the Torah which Israel would receive in the future with the right hand and because of the merit of the Tephilin which they would use on their left hand." was the answer of the Rabbis. (2)

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yosuda of Bartota said, "By the Zecuth of the Tribes has God rent the sea for Israel, as it is written, (Gen. xxxix:12) 'And he left his garment and fled outside.' What does it say then? (Ps. cxiv:3) 'The sea saw it and fled'". (3)

An anonymous Tanna adds, "Because of the merit of the Temple which will be built in the future, as it is written (Ex. xv:13) 'To Thy holy habitation', and also (Ps. lxxix:7) 'And laid waste His habitation', God has 'guided them in strength to His holy habitation.'" (4)

Simon the Temanite said, "By the grace of circumcision has God rent the sea for Israel, as it says, (Jer. xxxiii:25) 'If my covenant be not with thee day and night'. What is the cov-

1- Ms. 68 to Ex. xv:13 cf. *Mekilta of Israel Tract. Shirata*

2- Ms. 54 to Ex. xiv:29 cf. *Mekilta of Israel tract. Besalach*

3- Ms. 48 to Ex. xiv:15

4- Ms. 68 to Ex. xv:13; cf. *Mekilta of Israel Tract. Shirata*

enact that extends through day and night? Is it not circumcision? What does it say? (Ps. cxxxvi:13) 'To divide the Red Sea into pieces.' Read not, 'in pieces' פורקים but 'with decrees.'

גזירות " (1)

Rabbi Beneniah said, "From whence do we know that if a man performs one Mitzvah in faith, the Spirit of God rests upon him? For, so we find with our fathers, that, as the reward for faith, they were worthy to have the Divine Presence rests upon them." (2) Our Rabbis say, "Great is faith before Him by Whose word the world came into being; for the reward of their belief is the resting of the Divine Presence upon them. For so we are told, (Ex. xiv:31) 'And they believed in God and in Moses His servant.'" (2)

There is also the negative aspect of the conception of Zecuth. He who does not do what is required of him will receive his due deserts. The idea which seems to run throughout the Mekilta of Rabbi Simon is, "In the measure that man does, so is it meted out to him." (3)

If a man is willing to observe the commandments then he will reap his reward. Rabbi Meir said, "When the tribes came to the Red Sea, each one was eager to plunge into it first. In the con-

1- Ms. 55 to Ex. xiv:31; cf. Mekilta of Ishmael tract. Besalach

2- ibid

3- Ms. 40 to Ex. xiii:21; Ms. 52 to Ex. xiv:25 and others, cf. Mekilta de Ishmael tract. Besalach to same verses.

fusion, Benjamin jumped in first, as it is said, (Ps. lxviii:28) 'There is Benjamin the youngest ruling them'. Read not **וְיָדוּ** but **וְיָדוּ** The princes of Judah began to stone them, as it is said, (ibid) 'The princes of Judah stoned them.' Because of their eagerness, they were both rewarded". (1)

"If you obey the commandments, you will enter into the Land of Israel as a reward for obeying them," adds an anonymous Tanna. (2)

"For in six days did God create the heavens and the earth.' Why does it say that God created the world in six days for does it not already say, (Ps. xxxiii:6) 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.' This is only said so that the evil-doers who destroy the world which was created in six days may be punished and the pious who established the world which was created in six days may receive their reward." (3)

1- Ms. 50 to Ex. xiv:22. The Jewish Publication Society bible reads, "The princes of Judah their council" as does the King James version. They translate the word **וְיָדוּ** as a noun whereas if we translate it as a verb it means "you stoned them".

2- Ms. 32 to Ex. xiii:5

3- Ms. 109 to Ex. xx:11

CHAPTER VII

ETHICS

One of the fundamental precepts of Jewish theology is the totality of Jewish life. Everything that man does no matter how minute, is, according to our Rabbis, definitely linked up with Judaism. Every simple fact is a manifestation from God. The ancient Jew read into every act a revelation from Him. Jeremiah, seeing that his girdle (which he had probably left on the shore in ancient Judea) was rusted by the waves and the dampness, felt that this represented the coming destruction of Judea. This every-day event, in the eyes of the prophet, became a revelation.

Likewise, throughout all of Jewish life, are minute details linked up with God. When the ancient Jew observed festivals at the time of the harvest, or when he gave a tithe offering to the temple, he was not doing only a religious act or only a social act or only a patriotic act, but all of these.

This ~~totalitarian view~~ has been reflected in the literature of the Jewish people. In the Bible and the Talmud we find laws governing every act of life; from the moment he is born until his

death, the Jew's acts are guided and regulated by sacred scripture. It is for this reason that in any literary work of the ancient period, we are likely to find ethical principles by which the Jew lived at the time of the compilation of the literature.

Not only do these comprise a system of ethics, but they even have the authority of law. The early Midrashim, those of the Tannaitic age, are largely legalistic rather than aggadistic. The Mekilta of Rabbi Simon, since it is a Tannaitic Midrash, contains many legalisms. From these laws we may construct the then accepted system of ethical conduct.

When we examine the Mekilta of Rabbi Simon, certain important ethical doctrines present themselves. We may epitomize the ethical conception of these early rabbis in the statement of Abba Saul. "Oh be like Him; just as He is gracious and merciful, so should you be gracious and merciful". (1)

Since the family was a fundamental institution, in which the child received his early training so that he might become a respected member of society, our Rabbis have much to say concerning it. In order to base the family upon a solid foundation, mutual happiness between man and wife was considered necessary. The Mekilta of Rabbi Simon therefore insists

1- Ms. 60 to Ex. xv:2 cf. Mekilta Ishmael, tract. Shirata

that the woman must consent to her marriage. "One may not marry a girl without her consent and this shall be the law for all women". (1) The Rabbis arrive at this law by an "a fortiori" argument. "In the case of a Hebrew maid-servant who is enslaved, the Torah says she is to be married only with her consent. Therefore the remainder of the women should even the more so be married only with their consent. And how may a woman be betrothed? The man is to say to her in the presence of two people, 'Be thou consecrated unto me'". (2)

After the marriage has taken place, the husband is supposed to take good care of his spouse. Rabbi Eliezer said, "A man should give his wife garments that befit her, that is, she should not wear the garments of an old person if she be young nor should she wear the garments of a young person if she be old". (3)

The husband must also provide his wife with summer garments in the summer time and with winter garments in the winter time and he may not reverse this. (4) This last statement of the rabbis shows their very definite concern for convention. The woman was not to look incongruous in the society in which she lived.

1- Ms. 123 to Ex. xxi:8

2- Ibid

3- Ms. 124 to Ex. xxi:10 cf. Mekilta Ishmael tract. Nezekin where this is given in the name of Rabbi Jonathan

4- Ibid

A very important part of the decalogue was the exhortation to honor one's father and mother. The Mekilta of Rabbi Simon explains just how a man is to live up to this commandment. "To honor his parents, a man must give them food, drink, clothes, lodgings and enough of the necessities to live comfortably. Rabbi Simon ben Yochai said, 'Great is the honoring of one's parents for God has likened their honor to His and a reverence to them to a reverence for Him'. It is written (Proverbs iii:9) 'Honor the Lord with thy substance'. And it is also written (Ex. xx:12) 'Honor thy father and thy mother'. Scripture states, (Deut. vi:13) 'The Lord thy God ye shall reverence'. And it also states (Lev. xix:3) 'A man shall reverence his mother and his father'. It is written (Lev. xxiv:15) 'He who curses the name of God shall be put to death'. And it is written (Lev. xxiv:16) 'He who curses his father and mother shall be put to death'". (1)

This honor and reverence for his parents was to carry over to a man's mother-in-law and father-in-law. (2) The Rabbis are puzzled by the verse, (Ex. xviii:7) "And they asked each man the welfare of the other, and he bowed and kissed him." (3) The Rabbis say, "We do not know who bowed to whom.

1- Ms. 110 to Ex. xx:12

2- This is an interesting contrast to many primitive tribes for among many, a man or woman was not even to see his or her parents-in-law.

3- At the meeting of Moses and Jethro

Who is called man *W'N* ? Is it not Moses, as it says,
 (Num. xii:3) 'The man *W'N* Moses, was very meek'. We may de-
 duce from this that it was Moses who bowed down and kissed his
 father-in-law from which we learn that a man should show respect
 to his father-in-law. And likewise is it said concerning David
 when he spoke about Saul, (II Sam. xxiv:12) 'My father has seen',
 which proves one should honor his father-in-law as he does his
 father. (1)

Likewise do the Rabbis derive the fact that one should honor
 his parents-in-law from the use of the word *DN* which
 includes both the father-in-law and the mother-in-law. And
 this also includes the wife of one's father during the life-
 time of the father as well as the husband of the mother while
 she is alive. (2)

The father was to provide for his children all necessities
 of life. The Rabbis of our Midrash state, "A man should see to
 it that he circumcises his son, performs the rite of redemption
 for him, teaches him the Torah, that is, educates him, teaches
 him a trade, teaches him to swim and provides a wife for him". (3)

One of the important differences between Judaism and

1- Ms. 87 to Ex. xviii:7 cf. Mekilta of Igmael tract. Amalek

2- Ms. 110 to Ex. xx:12 cf. Mekilta of Igmael tract. to Bahodesh
 where it is given in the name of Rabbi although the wording is
 different.

3- Ms. 108 to Ex. xx:10

Christianity is that Judaism demands strict justice whereas Christianity demands love. We find throughout the history of Jewish life that the ideal of justice, even though it may be tempered with mercy, was ever present. The Rabbis never felt that a judge should lean toward the poor for that would be incongruous with all of Jewish law.

The Bible states (Ex. xxiii:3), "'You shall not favor a poor man in judgement'. That is, say not, 'He is a poor man, the son of good people; I shall acquit him so that he may find a means of sustenance'. For we are also told, (Lev. xix:15) 'Thou shalt not favor the poor'". (1)

A judge is not to favor any man because of his background. The Mekilta asks, "Why is it necessary to state, (Ex. xxiii:6) 'Thou shalt not pervert the judgement of the needy in his cause'. For does it not already say, (Deut. xvi:19) 'Thou shalt not pervert judgement'. This refers to the case where a man is poor in good deeds. That is, you must not say, 'This man is a wicked one and it is to be presumed, therefore, that he is a liar'; or say, 'This man is a pious one and it is to be presumed, that he does not swear falsely; therefore will I pronounce the judgement against the former'". (2)

1- Ms. 154-155 to Ex. xxiii:3

2- Ms. 155 to Ex. xxiii:6 cf. Mekilta of Iqmael tract. Kaspa

The Rabbis, however, were more lenient in criminal cases, for the judges are told to weigh the evidence very carefully before they render a decision. In such cases a judge who, "Has declared one innocent may not retract and declare him guilty. But we also learn that the judge may review the evidence in order to acquit him and once acquitted the same evidence may not be used to condemn him". (1)

The Sanhedrin was also warned not to begin the discussion of the evidence by calling upon the senior judges. For if such were done, the younger judges were likely to be influenced by the decision of the older ones. (2)

The learning of the judges brought them much honor. "Moses appointed judges and commanded the judges to bear the troubles of the congregation, as it says, (Deut. 1:16) 'And I commanded your judges'. So also did he command the people to give honor to the judges, for it says, (ibid :18) 'And I charged you at that time all the things which ye should do'". (3)

The Jews of this period were expressly told to conduct themselves ethically in all their business dealings. The verse, "And that which is right in His eyes ye shall do" (Ex. xv:26) refers,

1- Ms. 154 to Ex. xxiii:2

2- Ibid

3- Ms. 91 to Ex. xviii:25

according to our Rabbis, "To business dealings, for a man who conducts business faithfully and is an upright member of society, it is as though he fulfills the whole Torah". (1)

Throughout the medieval world, the Jew was always looked upon as a money lender and a usurer. Although this unfortunate role was forced upon him by the non-Jew, because of it the Jew was looked down upon and degraded in the eyes of all other peoples. We have but to look at our ancient literature to discover the hateful place that the usurer had in the eyes of the Jewish people at large. To the verse, "If thou lend money to any of My people, even to the poor with thee, thou shalt not be to him as a creditor; neither shall ye lay upon him interest", (Ex. xxii:24) our Rabbis add, "A man might say that he can either accept this or reject it. But scripture also teaches, (Deut. xv:8) 'Thou shalt lend him sufficient for his needs'. That is, this command is obligatory and no alternative is offered. Rabbi Ishmael said, "Every use of the word ^{CN} is a permission with the exception of three places and this is one of them". (2)

If a man takes something as a pledge from another man and the pledge is a necessity, it must be returned when it is needed. That is, if a man takes a winter coat it must be returned when cold weather gets in, whether it has been redeemed or not.

1- Ms. 73 to Ex. xv:26

2- Ms. 151 to Ex. xxii:24

If a man takes a plow as a pledge, he must return it to its owner during the day and may call for it again at night. (1)

"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child", says the Bible. (Ex. xxii:21) The Rabbis ask, "Does not this only say the widow and the fatherless? From whence do we know that it includes every man? It is written, (Ex. xxii:21) 'Ye shall not afflict them.' Then why does it expressly say the widow and the fatherless? Man is more likely to afflict the fatherless and the widow than anyone else, for a child is protected by his father and a woman is protected by her husband but these have none to protect them". (2)

Not only are we told not to take interest from our own people but also are we exhorted not to take interest from the stranger. "Scripture states, (Ex. xxii:20) 'A stranger thou shalt not vex'. There are two kinds of vexations: those concerning money and those concerning other things. Likewise are there two types of oppressions, those concerning money and those concerning other things. And we are also exhorted not to oppress the stranger". (3)

The Sabbath played a very important part in the life of the Jewish people. The Sabbath, as its name implies, was the day upon which every living thing was to cease from its work. Not

1- Ms. 151 to Ex. xxii:25

2- Ms. 150 to Ex. xxii:21

3- Ms. 150 to Ex. xxii:20 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Nezikin where a different reading is given.

only was a man charged to rest on it himself and to allow his slaves to do the same, but he was also to rest his animals. "'Six days shalt thou do all thy work and on the seventh day thou shalt cease from thy work in order that thine^{ox} and thine ass shall rest'. (Ex. xxiii:12) This teaches us that man is charged concerning not only the ox but all the rest of his cattle as well." (1)

Not only must a man not allow his animals to work on the Sabbath in his own fields but he may not hire them out to others to work, for the Bible expressly states that the ox and ass are to rest, also. This extension of the biblical decree shows the humane outlook of the early rabbis, that even the animal was entitled to a full day of rest. (2)

The rabbis tell us that "man was not given to the Sabbath but that the Sabbath was given to man". (3) This definitely tells us that we are to rejoice in the Sabbath and that in certain instances, in order to preserve life, the Sabbath may even be profaned. Rabbi Nathan, in considering the verse, "And the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath" (Ex. xxxi:16) says, "This teaches us that we may profane the Sabbath for the sake of saving a person so that he may observe many more Sabbaths". (4)

1- Ms. 157 to Ex. xxiii:12

2- Ms. 109 to Ex. xx:10

3- Ms. 160 to Ex. xxxi:13 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Shab^bata

4- Ms. 161 to Ex. xxxi:16; See also the statement of Rabbi Akiba
Ms. 160 to Ex. xxxi:13; cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Shabbata

The Rabbis were also interested in מנהגים manners.

"And Moses said unto Joshua 'choose for us men'. (Ex. xvii:9)

From this we learn that the honor of a man's pupil should be dear unto him as the honor of his friend. All the world may learn this from Moses for he did not say unto Joshua, 'Choose men for me' but, 'Choose men for us'. He placed Joshua on the same plane as himself". (1)

"Even though a man learns the message that he has dispatched someone to bring him, the messenger should relate it to him. This we may learn from Moses who, (Ex. xix:8) 'Repeated the words of the people to God'". (2)

Israel always hoped for a society in which peace was ever present.

The Hebrew concept of peace שלום means completeness, wholeness.

Whenever a society is wholesome then it may be safely said that that society is at peace. But whenever there is a breach in any portion of the societal organism, that society does not have peace.

"Great is peace", say our Rabbis, "For it even precedes the praise given to the Holy One Blessed be He. So we find in the story of Jethro and Moses. The conversation did not begin with the Exodus nor the crossing of the Red Sea, nor the manna, nor the incident of the quails, but with peace, as it says (Ex. xviii:7) , 'And each man inquired of the peace of the other'. And then it

1- Ms. 82 to Ex. xvii:9

2- Ms. 96 to Ex. xix:8 of Mekilta of Ismael tract. Bahodesh

continues, (Ex. xviii:7) 'And Moses told his father-in-law'. (1)

The absence of peace and the presence of contention ever bring about evil. Our Midrash tells us, "Nothing good comes from quarreling, as it says (Gen. xiii:7) 'And there was strife between the shepherds of Abraham and the shepherds of Lot'. What caused Lot to separate from that righteous man if not this quarrel?" (2)

Man himself is responsible for all the wrongs that he does and all the sins that he commits. Rabbi Akiba states, "Everything is in the hands of heaven with the exception of the fear of heaven." (3) All things are predestined and foreseen but the moulding of man's character; for man himself is responsible for that. Man is not to blame God for the יֵצֶר הָרָע, the evil inclination which is placed in him. And when he comes for judgement, he may not say, "The soul which you placed within me has caused me to sin".

Discussing the trial of the Egyptians after they pursued the Israelites, the Rabbis in our Mekilta present a very interesting analogy. "The Holy One Blessed be He brought the horse and the rider to judgement. He said to the horse, 'Why have you chased after My children?' The horse answered, 'The Egyptian drove me against my will'. As it is said, (Ex. xiv:9) 'And the Egyptians

1- Ms. 87 to Ex. xviii:7

2- Ms. 127 to Ex. xxi:18

3- Ethics of the Fathers

persued'. God then said to the Egyptian, 'Why did you pursue My children? He answered, 'It was the horse that ran away with me against my will'. As it is written, (Ex. xv:19) 'For the horses of Pharaoh went in'. What did God do? He made the man ride on the horse and judged them together".

"Antonius asked Rabbi, 'After man has died and his body ceased to be, does the Holy One Blessed be He make him stand trial?' Rabbi answered, 'Rather ask me about the soul which is pure and not the body which is impure. This may be likened to a king who had an orchard of beautiful fruit. He placed two of his slaves, one blind and the other lame, in the orchard to protect it. The lame one said to the blind, 'I see beautiful fruits'. The blind one answered, 'I am unable to see'. The lame one then said, 'I am unable to walk'. They then decided that the lame one was to ride on the back of the blind one and direct him to the fruits. Thus they did and ate the fruits. The king, when he perceived that his choice fruits were eaten, asked his slaves what had happened. The lame one immediately answered, 'I know not, for I am lame'. The blind man answered, 'I know not for I am blind. The king, being a wise man placed the lame man on the back of the blind one and said to the slaves, 'Thus did you procure the fruits to eat.'

"Likewise is the Holy One Blessed be He. He brings in the body and the soul and has them stand in judgement. He says to

body, 'Why did you sin?' The body answers, 'O Master of the Universe, I did not sin; it was the soul which sinned. For as soon as it departed from me I was as a cast-off stone'. He then says to the soul, 'Why did you sin before me?' The soul answers, 'I did not sin; it was the body. For as soon as I left it I became pure'. The Holy One Blessed be He takes the soul and places it within the body and judges them together, as it is said, (Ps. 144) 'He calls to the heavens above and to the earth beneath that he may judge his people'. 'To the heavens above' refers to the soul and 'to the earth beneath' refers to the body". (1)

There are many more examples of the various principles upon which the Jew was to conduct his life. These are found in the laws concerning Sabbath, the festivals, and the various rituals and ceremonies which are discussed in our Mekilta. The foregoing are the more striking examples of ethical, moral and theological concepts as they are represented in the Mekilta of Rabbi Simon ben Yochai.

1- Ms. 59 to Ex. xv:1 cf. Mekilta of Ismael tract. Shirata where the version given is somewhat condensed; cf also Talmud Babli tractate Sanhedrin, 91 a and b.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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