

INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES AND PRIZE ESSAYS

AUTHOR	Steven C. Kushner
TITLE	"Light from Within the Cave: A Study of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai"

TYPE OF THESIS: Ph.D. ☐ D.H.L. ☐ Rabbinic ☒
Master's ☐ Prize Essay ☐

1. May circulate ☒) Not necessary
2. Is restricted ☐ for _____ years.) for Ph.D. thesis


Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses or prize essays for a period of no more than ten years.

I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis. yes no

March 17, 1977
Date

yes no



Signature of Author

Library
Record

Microfilmed

Date _____

Needing Steiner
Signature of Library Staff Member:

**LIGHT FROM WITHIN THE CAVE:
a study of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai**

Steven C. Kushner

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Cincinnati, Ohio 1977**

Referee: Professor Jakob J. Petuchowski

for my mother and my father

It was taught in a baraita, that Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai says: "So great is the honor paid to one's parents that the Holy One, blessed be He, prefers it to His own glorification."

(Talmud Yerushalmi)

DIGEST

Simeon b. Yohai, a tanna of the second century C. E., is one of the most often quoted authorities of the rabbinic period. Despite this fact, very little is known about Rabbi Simeon. This is true for three reasons: a) much of what is commonly "known" about him is based on tradition and legend; b) the materials left to modern scholarship are not entirely conducive to scientific inquiry; c) scholarship's treatment of Simeon has primarily been encyclopedic at the expense of precision, and in certain instances, accuracy. As a result, this study is an attempt to separate fact from fiction, and to broaden our perspective of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai.

The thesis is divided into four units. Unit I is a brief introduction to the problems involved in finding the "real" Simeon b. Yohai. Unit II, in evaluating that which has already been established concerning Simeon, strives to distinguish between the historical and the legendary. Chapter 1 provides a background and general history of Simeon, while Chapter 2 investigates the two most common designations of Simeon, as a political dissident and as a mystic. Unit III concerns itself with those aspects not emphasized by scholarship and tradition. Chapter 1 observes Simeon as a rabbi, noting his emphasis upon Torah. Chapter 2 seeks to comprehend Simeon's understanding of Torah. This is done through an examination of his methodology, aggadic as well as halakhic. Chapter 3 is devoted to establishing, if possible, anything concerning the personality of Simeon b. Yohai. Finally, Unit IV is a short expression of the author's thoughts regarding this study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

About a year and a half ago, when I first began contemplating a topic for this thesis, one concern was persistent in my mind: this endeavor must be a learning experience. I had already decided that the area I would work in would be rabbinics, but more difficult to determine was in what way could I write a thesis that would give me the greatest exposure with the literature? The idea of investigating a rabbinic personality was perfect for my needs. Furthermore, Simeon b. Yohai was ideal for the task. Nothing exhaustive had ever been written on Simeon, and, by virtue of the fact that he was an extremely important tanna, references to Simeon could be found in the entirety of the rabbinic literature.

Fortunately, I was not forced to search through every index, anthology and lexicon in existence. Israel Konowitz had already compiled in a single volume the collected mishnaic, talmudic and midrashic sayings by and about R. Simeon b. Yohai. All initial research was based on this collection which apparently was incredibly complete. As a result, it is no wonder that I am indebted to Rabbi Konowitz for the painstaking research he must have endured in compiling that volume. Nevertheless, there are a number of people to whom my gratitude is eternal, for there is as much of them in this thesis as there is of myself.

First and foremost is my rabbi, Jakob J. Petuchowski. Through his insights, care and superior German understanding of the English language, I was able to make this thesis come to fruition. He gave me the methodology, the ability to know "how."

From my family came the motivation. It was the example of Larry and the continuous love and encouragement of my mother and father that made my thesis a source of accomplishment and pride.

Special mention is also due to all my friends in Ann Arbor and Battle Creek, and in particular, to Larry Osher and Larry Snider who showed concern, interest, and even an indication of amazement.

" אהרן אהרן הביב " - and to Roselyn, my dearest friend. Without her compassion, understanding and unselfishness this thesis would never have come to be.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNIT I - "PROLOGUE"	1
Notes to Unit I	7
UNIT II - "IN THE SHADOWS OF THE CAVE"	8
Chapter 1	9
Notes to Chapter 1 (Unit II)	21
Chapter 2	24
Notes to Chapter 2 (Unit II)	47
UNIT III - "IN THE DARKNESS OF THE CAVE"	50
Chapter 1	51
Notes to Chapter 1 (Unit III)	67
Chapter 2	71
Notes to Chapter 2 (Unit III)	96
Chapter 3	103
Notes to Chapter 3 (Unit III)	116
UNIT IV - "EPILOGUE"	118
LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED	122

UNIT I

"PROLOGUE"

It can be argued that the period of rabbinic Judaism, particularly the tannaitic and amoraic stages, was the most influential and formative era in the development of Judaism. Faced by the need for adaptation to an ever-changing world, Pharisaism provided an approach that could satisfy both the need to adjust and the obligation to remain faithful to the tradition. Ironically however, the people for whom this period is named, those individuals who created, recorded and preserved the rabbinic literature, are nothing more than names in the past. Who they were, what they looked like and how they lived their lives are questions that probably will never be answered. The fact of the matter is that we know very little about the rabbis and what is known is often suspect. There are various reasons for this.

One of the major problems confronting the student of the rabbinic period is the absence of parallel sources. Nearly everything we know about Jews and Judaism of the first five or six centuries of the Common Era is based entirely upon the rabbinic literature. Therefore, even if such materials are to be relied upon as authoritative, the absence of other source material makes validation problematical. This is further complicated by the inability of most scholars to consider the rabbinic literature as a dependable source of authority. At this point it should be noted that it is not the purpose of this study to determine whether such sources have historical value, and if so, to what extent (although such concerns will be taken into consideration when necessary). To date, numerous books and articles have been devoted to the subject and various conclusions have been arrived at. Suffice it to say, there are

many problems involved in the utilization of rabbinic literature as historical sources. Indeed, it is even felt that there was never the intention in the rabbinic literature to be historical or, of specific interest to this study, as William Green theorizes, to be biographical: "The literature of Judaism offers no systematic or coherent biographies of its important sages. Indeed, unlike other religious systems of late antiquity, rabbinic Judaism seems to have produced no hagiographies, no lives of 'holy men,' and no literary form uniquely suited to that enterprise."¹ According to Green, it was the dicta, stories and legal discussions that were important, not the persons involved. For the rabbis, their names were often merely labels for identification.² It is therefore not surprising that, when attempting to understand a rabbinic personality, much caution is characteristic of the methodology involved.

This study seeks to understand one of those rabbis. Simeon b. Yohai, a tanna of the fourth generation in the Second Century, is one of the most often cited authorities of the rabbinic period. And yet, primarily for the reasons enumerated above, like most of his teachers, colleagues and disciples, who Rabbi Simeon really was and what he was really like remains a mystery. Consequently, before attempting to understand a rabbi like Simeon b. Yohai, it is first worthwhile to examine the problems involved in such an investigation. Essentially, we are dealing with two kinds of source material. The first would be all primary sources in the first-person. This would include that which he supposedly said and that which was transmitted in his name. The sec-

ond kind of source are those things which have been said about Rabbi Simeon. Here we are dealing not only with primary sources in the third-person, but later folklorist legend and modern scholarship as well. Such an exposure to the sources will afford the reader an understanding of not only the precaution one should take when dealing with such a subject, but also of how the various sources combined to create the tradition of the alleged life of Simeon b. Yohai.

It stands to reason that the most authoritative material would be first-person accounts. It would thus seem easy to build our understanding around texts of this nature. Unfortunately, even these primary sources, statements supposedly made by Rabbi Simeon, can be often doubtful. Although there is no certain way to distinguish between fact and fiction, it is very important to pay close attention to flaws in these texts. An obvious example would be contradictions. For instance, in the Sifre Simeon is seen expounding Numbers 11:27 which refers to a "youth." In this text Simeon unquestionably denies this could have been Joshua.³ However, in the Sifre Zuta the same exegesis is found but in this account Simeon asserts that the "youth" referred to in Numbers 11:27 was Joshua.⁴ Similarly, in Songs Rabbah the question is posed as to what was the transgression of Israel in the days of Haman? Opposed to the rabbis who blame it on their (Israel) worshipping idols, Simeon b. Yohai says it was on account of their having eaten forbidden foods.⁵ In Talmud Megillah however, their answers are reversed.⁶

At this point one might question exactly to what extent are these

texts in the first-person? How do we know that Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai really said those things? In all probability their preservation is somewhat less than perfect. Indeed, it is dubious whether any statements transmitted have retained their original form.⁷ The process of transmission is so suspect that any and all attributions likewise fall questionable. Thus it is not only possible that statements can be altered in the process of transmission, but even the attributions can be mistaken or perhaps fabricated.⁸ As a result, if we can question the authenticity of statements seemingly made by Rabbi Simeon, how much the more so statements transmitted in his name. This is well illustrated in a collection of midrashim attributed to Simeon. In particular, I am referring to the Mekhilta of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. The opinion of most modern day scholars is that Simeon had nothing to do with the compilation of this source. Although he is quoted several times within it, the only probable reason it was attributed to him was that it is an exegesis of Simeon that initiates the book (in much the same way, the volume was also entitled or referred to as Mekhilta de Sanya, which means the Mekhilta of the Bush (burning bush) which is the first biblical event addressed).⁹

The entire question of attribution therefore, is indicative of "obstacles" between the truth and our recognition of it. It unfortunately intimates a third party between Rabbi Simeon and ourselves. Unfortunately that is, for there is no way to get around it -- one can only hope to recognize it. Although this "third party" is merely suggested as a transmitting editor, there are many other instances wherein it is obvious

that we are receiving the opinion of another, not that of Simeon. This is most easily observed in narratives about Simeon. Similarly, there exist a great deal of material unquestionably after Simeon's lifetime that is either attributed to him, written about him, or both. Can these sources be utilized as authoritative in determining the truth about Simeon b. Yohai? The fact of the matter is that as early as his own lifetime until the present day people have written or transmitted information about Simeon, and that more or less, they have shaped our present conception of him. Consequently, the sources have been so affected that it may be entirely impossible to ever discern who or what Rabbi Simeon really was. It is not surprising then that William Green should write, "In the strict sense of the term, rabbinic biography is an impossibility."¹⁰

If "rabbinic biography" seems to be such an impossibility, why bother with a study such as this? What can we ever hope to learn about Rabbi Simeon? In all honesty, even the conclusions arrived at in this thesis are questionable. There is no real way to ever know for certain. On the other hand, one might almost feel that we have the obligation to undertake such an investigation. Even if, at best, all that can be determined about Simeon b. Yohai is what we do "not" know, such knowledge will bring us that much closer to this individual. Only after such an understanding albeit vague, can we hope to comprehend what Simeon "allegedly" said, and what he is reported to have done during his lifetime.

Utilizing tannaitic and amoraic sources as the control material of my research, the thesis is divided into two major sections. The first

(Unit II - "In the Shadows of the Cave") is primarily devoted to affirming or negating those elements or characteristics of Simeon already established by history and tradition. The second section (Unit III - "In the Darkness of the Cave") concerns itself with those aspects of Simeon b. Yohai that have been neglected over the centuries. By virtue of the fact that our primary resources are rabbinic in nature, and given the difficulties in working with such materials, it is not the intention of this thesis to find the "real" Simeon b. Yohai. At best all we will be able to discern is the tannaitic and amoraic "Rabbi Simeon." Thus, this is not a "conventional biography" nor even an "intellectual biography."¹¹ It is merely an investigation of the materials dealing with Rabbi Simeon in the hope that what will emerge will be a faint illumination (or even reflection) of this man. Indeed, all that we can aspire to do is to strive to shed even a strand of light upon an area currently hidden in shadows and darkness.

NOTES UNIT I "PROLOGUE"

1. William Scott Green, "What's in a Name? - The Problematic of Rabbinic Biography" (unpublished paper, University of Rochester, 1976), p. 6.
2. Ibid., p. 22.
3. Sifre "Beha'alotekha" ch. 96; ed. Horowitz, p. 96, lines 12-14.
4. Sifre Zuta 11:27, ed. Horowitz, p. 272, lines 34-36.
5. Songs Rabbah 7:13, ed. Warsaw, p. 60a.
6. Megilah 12a.
7. Furthermore, albeit the text has been preserved intact, if it had been attributed to merely "R. Simeon," it can be questionable as to whether it was Simeon b. Yohai that was being referred to. For additional discussion of this, see Louis Finkelstein, Akiba: Schdar, Saint and Martyr (New York: Atheneum, 1975), pp. 229, 316-317.
8. See Green, p. 13, #28.
9. For an in-depth analysis of the situation, see J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed, Mekhilta de-Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai (Jerusalem: Mekitsay Nirdamim, 1955), pp. 13-25.
10. Green, p. 20.
11. See Green, p. 22.

UNIT I

The first unit of the course is devoted to the study of the history of the United States from the early colonial period to the present. This unit covers the major events and figures of American history, including the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction period. The unit also includes a study of the American Constitution and the role of the federal government.

UNIT II

"IN THE SHADOWS OF THE CAVE"

This unit is devoted to the study of the history of the United States from the early colonial period to the present. This unit covers the major events and figures of American history, including the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction period. The unit also includes a study of the American Constitution and the role of the federal government.

Chapter 1.

Over the centuries Simeon b. Yohai has by and large been treated as an historical figure. In much of the midrashic literature Simeon was a miracle worker in constant contact with Elijah, the immortal prophet. For the kabbalists he was portrayed as a kind of patriarchal individual, endowed with the knowledge of the secrets of the universe, traveling throughout Palestine with his entourage of disciples. And in recent scholarship, Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai has been depicted as a self-involved radical never quite satisfied with the political or moral situation of his day. In view of Green's attestation, however, that it is impossible to write a biography of a rabbinic personality, the question arises if the real Rabbi Simeon may ever be discerned at all. Nevertheless, by virtue of the fact that for nearly two thousand years Jewish historians, be they rabbis, mystics or scholars, have dealt with him as a real historical entity, it would not be unreasonable to assume that "Simeon b. Yohai did live." What entailed that "life" is another question. And yet, if we are to establish any ground for discussion of this man, it is impossible to ignore his historicity. It is therefore essential that such an investigation seek out a consensus of secondary opinion, and by noting select relevant pericopae it may be possible to arrive at a reasonable albeit vague understanding of the life of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai.

Before entering upon Simeon's life however, a discussion of his historical setting is first called for. According to all available information, Rabbi Simeon was a second century Jew. Being a fourth-generation tanna, most scholars would concur that he was born near the end of the

first century and died midway through the second century.¹ His life spanned one of the most tumultuous times of Jewish history. Having grown up in the Yavnean period, Simeon witnessed the reconstruction of a Jewish life he had never known. Nevertheless, the effects of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C. E. were to last for generations and centuries. Although the next few decades following that catastrophe were devoted to a peaceful and autonomous reorganization, the all-powerful Roman domination was ever present. In fact, the first half of the second century was characterized by severe oppression on the part of the Romans toward the Jews, and resulted in numerous uprisings culminating in the Bar Kokhba revolt in 133. Although initially successful like the Hasmonean uprising three centuries earlier, its good fortune was not to last. As early as two years later the revolt was stifled and Jews were again under Roman domination. On the other hand, immediately thereafter, the Jews were again given a considerable degree of autonomy and this resulted in a new reorganization at Usha. Although no major historical events occurred for the remainder of Simeon's lifetime, as we shall see below, late in his life Simeon was sent to Rome to have certain harsh decrees lifted from upon the Jews. Hence, it seems that Simeon's environment was characterized by a fluctuation between relative peace, oppression and rebellion, but in any event it was a period entirely marked by Roman domination. With this as a background, let us now attempt to reconstruct as accurately as possible the life of Simeon b. Yohai.

At the outset it must be emphasized that with perhaps the exception of one or two events none of the following is historically verifiable. This is simply because there exist no contemporary parallel accounts which would support the authenticity of these occurrences. As alluded to above however, in order to adequately comprehend such a rabbinic personage, a general even though questionable historical background is required.

There is absolutely no mention in any of the rabbinic literature of the birth of Simeon b. Yohai. On the other hand, given other events later on in his life, scholars have surmised that he was born near the end of the first century C. E. Hyman has even gone so far as to pinpoint the date of 80 C. E. saying that Simeon was born when Yohanan b. Zakkai died.² It seems that he bases this on the first event attributed to Rabbi Simeon. It takes place in 95 C. E. at Yavneh. It is the historic dispute between R. Joshua and Rabban Gamaliel over the evening prayer. The dispute began with a disciple asking both men if that prayer was compulsory or optional. The account merely identifies the inquisitor as תלמיד

תלמיד - single disciple. However at the conclusion of the baraita the text identifies that disciple as R. Simeon b. Yohai.³ Although many scholars accept this account as being factual, Zacharias Frankel has enumerated three reasons why the attribution to Simeon at the end of the text should be considered "spurious." The first, according to Frankel, is that if Simeon's father is still alive forty-five years later when Akiba is thrown into prison,⁴ then Simeon would have been far too young to have participated at Yavneh in and before 95 C. E. The second reason is that

in no other place in the literature does one find Simeon in interaction with any of these tannaim. Finally, Frankel notes that although the argument is recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud,⁵ Simeon's name is not mentioned.⁶

Consequently, the first event of Simeon's recorded life which has some authenticity is Simeon's studying at B'nai B'rak with his renowned master, Akiba. That Akiba was his teacher is indisputable. That Simeon studied with Akiba in B'nai B'rak is based on the account found in Leviticus Rabbah: "Rabbi Hanina b. Hakinai and R. Simeon b. Yohai went to study Torah with Rabbi Akiba in B'nai B'rak, they remained there thirteen years..."⁷ I find no reason to question that Simeon went to study at B'nai B'rak for this is where Akiba established his academy. That Simeon might have accompanied Hanina b. Hakinai is also possible for there is another incident in the Babylonian Talmud where Simeon asks Hanina to wait until the conclusion of Simeon's wedding so that they could leave for the academy together.⁸ The one fact that is highly questionable is whether or not his stay lasted thirteen years. As we shall see, Simeon also remains in a cave for thirteen years, and not coincidentally Akiba had spent thirteen years at Yavneh before he openly challenged his masters, and over a period of thirteen years Akiba established his legal principles, from 97-110.⁹ The number "thirteen" appears to be a commonly used number, perhaps much the same way "forty" is used in the Bible. That Simeon stayed a long time is highly probable. More difficult to ascertain is when Simeon was at B'nai B'rak. Since there is no mention of any

parallel event, it is impossible to determine exactly when this occurred. We may assume it was in and around the turn and the beginning of the second century.

The early years of Simeon's life are perhaps the most difficult to recreate. This is primarily because, as just mentioned, there are little if any pericopae in which there are identifiable historical occurrences. The consensus of opinion has it that in about the third decade of the second century Simeon either had a school or was studying and teaching at Sidon. The most memorable event attributed to this segment of his life is that it was allegedly in Sidon that Simeon wrought a miracle for a couple who until that time was barren. However, not only are miracles not considered historically verifiable, but the only reference to Sidon was that the couple was from there.¹⁰ On the other hand, there is a reference of Simeon being at Sidon in Niddah, where Hanina b. Hakinai said to him: "When you arrive at R. Akiba's..."¹¹ thus intimating that Simeon was geographically separated from Akiba. Whether or not this was before or after B'nai B'rak is not clear, although in as much as Hanina is requesting Simeon to ask an halakhic question it would appear that the two have already had a rather extensive education (to ask such a complex question).

The next event that is of some historical value is Simeon's visit to Akiba while in prison.¹² Whether or not this is the same imprisonment as referred to in Berakhot ("R. Akiba was arrested and thrown into prison ..." for defying the Roman decree against observance of Judaism¹³) is uncertain. However, the fact that Akiba was imprisoned is reflective

of oppressing times and thus it is fairly safe to date it in the near vicinity of the Bar Kokhba rebellion.¹⁴ Perhaps more interesting is Simeon's reply to Akiba upon the latter's refusal to teach him Torah while in prison: "If you will not teach me I will tell my father Yohai and he will deliver you to the state."¹⁵ Here then we are informed that Simeon comes from a family that apparently has ties with the Roman authorities. It can hardly be thought however that Simeon shared his father's loyalties. Rather, Simeon had a very negative attitude toward the Roman government. This is indirectly observed when Judah b. Baba secretly ordained five (or six) students of Akiba's (of which Simeon was one) and paid for it by having "three hundred iron spear heads (driven) into his body making it like a seive."¹⁶ That this was also around the same time (c. 130) is evidenced by two factors: a) Judah b. Baba is performing the ordination, not Akiba (hence intimating Akiba's death or imprisonment), and b) the reason Judah had to perform it secretly was because, as in the case of Akiba, Jewish observance was forbidden.

Simeon's hatred for the Romans however is unquestionably more direct in this account from Shabbat:

R. Judah, R. Jose, and R. Simeon were sitting, and Judah, a son of proselytes, was sitting near them. R. Judah commenced the discussion by observing, 'How fine are the works of this people (the Romans)! They have made streets, they have built bridges, they have erected baths.' R. Jose was silent. R. Simeon b. Yohai answered and said: 'All what they made they made for themselves; they built market-places, to set harlots in them; baths, to rejuvenate themselves; bridges, to levy tolls for them.'¹⁷

It is quite obvious that Simeon did not exactly have an affinity for the Romans. Similarly, it is not surprising that the Romans were not particularly fond of Simeon. As the Shabbat incident continues:

They (the Romans) decreed: Judah, who exalted (us), shall be exalted; Jose, who was silent shall be exiled to Sepphoris; Simeon who censured, let him be executed.¹⁸

The story continues with Simeon and his son fleeing to a cave where they hid until the death of the ruler, which according to tradition was twelve (or thirteen) years.

Although this will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter, two questions merit discussion here. The first deals with the historicity of the entire event. Admittedly, in its present form, the story contains many allegorical allusions which detract from its credibility. The second question however may shed light on the first. That is: when did this occur? Scholars are divided on this. Graetz feels Simeon entered the cave in 161.¹⁹ Seligson dates the incident around 128.²⁰ Finally, for a compromise solution, Hyman is of the opinion that it occurred in 141.²¹ In order to determine the truth, an examination of yet another incident may be helpful: the conference at Usha.

As we saw above, following their ordination by Judah b. Baba the newly ordained were compelled to flee. However, after the conclusion of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 and the death of Andrionus in 138 these rabbis returned and held a conference at Usha (c. 140). As recorded in Songs Rabbah, Simeon was a part of this meeting.²² The question then arises, would the incident of Shabbat 33-34 have occurred before, during

or after the synod at Usha? Although it is impossible to determine, it does not seem probable that Judah would have anything good to say about Rome before Bar Kokhba. This would challenge Seligson's contention that the incident occurred around 128. It is further more unlikely that it could have occurred in 161, as Graetz maintains, for the men involved would already be old men. Hyman's opinion, however, places the event around 141. By virtue of the fact that the discussion between Judah, Jose and Simeon is never given a locality it could have happened anywhere, even Usha. This might also explain why Judah's comment is so favorable to the Romans (since Antonius Pius took control in 138, and in the beginning was quite hospitable to the Jews).

In addition, the problem of Simeon's absence must be accounted for. Although, according to Seligson, it could have been from 128-140 (assuming it was a duration of thirteen years), we also know that during those years Simeon and his colleagues were supposedly forced to flee after their ordination and did not return until the synod at Usha in 140. On the other hand, if, as Hyman contests, it took place in 141 then Simeon could have been absent from approximately 141-154. This is all complicated by a passage from Berakhot where the rabbis entered the vineyards at Yavneh, but Simeon was not present. In actuality it appears to be near identical with the meeting at Usha, for Judah makes the same exposition in both accounts.²³ Could this mean that Simeon did not take part at Usha? But Berakhot identifies this incident as having occurred at Yavneh!

As critics have shown, dealing with rabbinic material as historical evidence is dangerous. There are too many contradictions and too much vagueness. It is possible that the editor(s) interchanged the names of the cities, or one tradition has one set of personages while the other has another list. Personally, I am inclined to the former for the following reasons: It is easier to confuse an exegesis and attribute it to Judah in both cases, than to confuse both the names of the people involved as well as the place. Thus, if we accept both accounts, (Usha having occurred first, Songs Rabbah 2:5) Simeon's having to hide in a cave after 141 would explain his absence from the Yavneh meeting of Berakhot.²⁴ Finally, if Simeon lived in that cave for thirteen years or so, his exit would be around 154. Most scholars would agree that around this time Simeon established his academy at Tekoa. This is supported by the fact that Judah haNasi reportedly studied there as a youth with Rabbi Simeon, and if Judah ascended to the patriarchate c. 170 as an already mature man,²⁵ it would not be far fetched to envision him as a young scholar in c. 155.²⁶

This approach operates on the assumption that Simeon took no part in national affairs after the initial Usha conference in 140. His abstention might have been for two reasons. The first and most obvious is that having to flee from Roman persecution he had no choice. Second, upon his exit from the cave, he repaired to Tekoa instead of returning to the mainstream. The reason most scholars agree upon is that he had a double fear of getting himself and others involved with the Romans on

account of his severe attitudes toward them. Consequently, he essentially effected a self-imposed exile to protect himself as well as other Jews.²⁷ The fact of the matter is that the period from 128-160 in Simeon's life is historically confusing. It is impossible to reconstruct a neat and ordered chronology of events and that of course assumes that those events really happened.

The final recorded event of Simeon's life is his visit to Rome. The consensus of opinion here is that it occurred sometime between 160-170. The reason he went was to intercede with the Emperor in hoping to lift certain oppressive decrees from upon the Jews.²⁸ The question immediately arises: why would the Jews send Simeon who hated the Romans so vehemently? In all probability, he had mellowed over the years so that his hatred was not as strong as it had been twenty years earlier. Furthermore, according to Graetz, by virtue of the fact that he outlived his contemporaries, Simeon became the only authority of that period.²⁹ Inherent in this is the reality that Simeon had miraculously survived countless catastrophes and it was beginning to appear as if G-d had placed his finger upon Simeon.³⁰ Simeon thus became a chosen one for the people. More difficult to determine is the authenticity of this event. There exist no Roman parallels of this account nor is any Emperor mentioned, although most scholars concur that the Emperor was Antonius Pius. There is, however, another text wherein Simeon is identified as the tanna who traveled to Rome to plead with the Emperor, and is seen in conversation with Matthiah b. Heresh whom Graetz assumes to have

been in Rome.³¹ Furthermore, Graetz feels to have found confirmation in the story, for "Eleazar ben Joseph, Simeon's friend, boasted that he had seen in the room the vessels of the Temple, the frontal of the High Priest, and the curtain of the Holy of Holies, which Titus carried off as trophies, and which could be seen only by those especially favored."³²

There is no mention of Simeon's death, although according to a kabbalistic tradition³³ he died on the eighteenth of Iyyar, or Lag B Omer. Nevertheless, there remain two areas to consider before concluding. The first is: where was Simeon's life geographically? Simeon was a Galilean Jew. As shown above, he and Hanina b. Hakinai came from the same place and studied at B'nai B'rak. After being in Sidon he was probably forced to flee to the south, perhaps even to Babylonia.³⁴ Upon returning he went to Usha and had to flee to the cave, which, according to Seligson, was near Gadara.³⁵ Upon exiting the cave he established his academy at Tekoa, which Bacher identifies with Meron (not the Biblical Tekoa which would be in the south, or Judah) in the Galil.³⁶ It was in Meron or Tekoa that he probably finally settled, for he chose his grave there. His life was thus marked by a constant change of place for numerous reasons, whether desire to move, to travel or to flee.

Finally, what of his friends and family? Who were the people who made up his life? As we shall see in Unit III, Simeon's closest colleagues were Jose b. Halafta, Meir and Judah b. Ilai. Hanina b. Hakinai also appears to have been a close friend. Perhaps most of all, the man

Simeon admired the most was his teacher Akiba. As for family, there is very little mention of them. By far, his son Eleazar appears most often in the literature.³⁷ All that is known of his father is that he was, as Finkelstein labels him, a romanophile.³⁸ Urbach feels that his father had a position in the Roman police administration,³⁹ while most other scholars simply attribute to him close connections with the Roman authorities.⁴⁰ The only mention of his mother is that she would talk too much on Shabbat.⁴¹ As for other family members, we are told that his wife would bring him and their son food when they were hiding in the house of study, but because he feared she would reveal his hiding place, Simeon and Eleazar went secretly to a cave.⁴² Finally, the last member of the immediate family, his daughter, is known only to have married Pinhas b. Yair.⁴³

As stated above, it is impossible to determine an accurate historical account of the life of Simeon b. Yohai. All this chapter has intended to do was to supply a background which the reader could then utilize in attempting to understand Rabbi Simeon. Needless to say, of all the events enumerated above, the most troublesome and yet most interesting account was that of the cave incident. Not surprisingly, later rabbis and scholars have placed their emphasis upon this story, and from it comes the legacy of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. Chapter 2 of this unit intends to illustrate just how influential this story has been in determining the treatment of Rabbi Simeon.

NOTES UNIT II CHAPTER 1

1. Hyman recognizes his lifespan as being from approximately 80-160; Aaron Hyman, Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim (3 volumes, London, 1910), vol. III p. 1188a.
2. Ibid.
3. Berakhot 27b-28a.
4. See Pesahim 112a.
5. P. Berakhot IV:i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 7c-d. See also P. Ta'anit IV:i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 67d.
6. Zacharias Frankel, Darkhei Ha-Mishnah (Leipzig, 1859), p. 168.
7. Leviticus Rabbah 21:8, ed. Marguleis, vol. III, p. 484 line 6 - p. 485 line 1.
8. Ketuvot 62b. It is nevertheless possible that both accounts could stem from the same tradition, such that their authenticity cannot be founded upon each other.
9. See Finkelstein, pp. 91 and 154.
10. Songs Rabbah 1:31; ed. Warsaw, p. 27a. See also M. Avodah Zarah 3:7; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, p. 335. For a more complete listing of places wherein Simeon is identified as being in Sidon, see Frankel, p. 173.
11. Niddah 52b.
12. Pesahim 112a.
13. Berakhot 61b.
14. It is noteworthy that according to Graetz, approximately fifteen years earlier (c. 115-118) Roman oppression was also at an extreme affecting small scale revolts. See Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews (6 vols., Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891), vol. II, pp. 393-420.
15. Pesahim 112a.
16. Sanhedrin 14a.
17. Shabbat 33b.
18. Shabbat 33b.

19. See Graetz II, pp. 447-449 and Max Seligson, "Simeon b. Yohai," Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Funk and Wagnall, 1905), vol. XI, p. 360.
20. Seligson, p. 360.
21. Hyman III, p. 1188a.
22. Songs Rabbah 2:16; ed. Warsaw, p. 35b.
23. See Berakhot 63b.
24. This would indicate a move from Usha back to Yavneh - see Graetz II, p. 448 and Hyman III, p. 1180a.
25. See Alexander Guttman, Rabbinic Judaism in the Making (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970) p. 237.
26. Shabbat 147b.
27. See Simeon's midrash on the effect of the individual upon the community in Leviticus Rabbah 4:6, ed. Marguleis, vol. I, p. 91 line 4 - p. 92 line 3.
28. Me'ilah 17a-b.
29. Graetz II, pp. 440-441.
30. I. H. Weiss, Dor, Dor ve-Dorshav (5 vols., Vilna, 1904), vol. II, pp. 143-144.
31. Yoma 53b-54a; see also Graetz II, p. 443.
32. Graetz II, p. 449.
33. "Hillula de-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai," Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. VIII (1971), pp. 495-496.
34. See Graetz II, p. 443 and Yevamot 62b.
35. Seligson, p. 360.
36. Wilhelm Bacher, Aggadot ha-Tannaim, trans. A. Z. Rabinowitz (2 vols. Jerusalem-Berlin: D'vir, 1922), vol. II, p. 47.
37. Furthermore, he was not always treated so favorably. See Baba Metzia 84b and Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11:15-24; ed. Mandelbaum, vol. I, pp. 190-200.

38. See Finkelstein, p. 168.
39. Ephraim E. Urbach, The Sages, trans. Israel Abrahams (2 vols. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), vol. I, p. 512.
40. See Pesahim 112b.
41. Pesikta Rabbah ch. 23; ed. Friedman p. 116b.
42. Shabbat 33b.
43. Shabbat 33b.

Chapter 2.

"A" (Babylonian Talmud)

R. Judah, R. Jose, and R. Simeon were sitting, and Judah, a son of proselytes, was sitting near them. R. Judah commenced by observing, 'How fine are the works of this people! They have made streets, they have built bridges, they have erected baths.' R. Jose was silent. R. Simeon b. Yohai answered and said, 'All what they have made they made for themselves; they built marketplaces, to set harlots in them; baths to rejuvenate themselves; bridges, to levy tolls for them.' Now, Judah the son of proselytes went and related their talk, which reached the government. They decreed: Judah, who exalted (us), shall be exalted; Jose, who was silent, shall be exiled to Sepphoris; Simeon, who censured, let him be executed.

He and his son went and hid themselves in the Bet Hamidrash, (and) his wife brought him bread and a jug of water and they dined. (But) when the decree became more severe he said to his son, 'Women are of unstable temperament: she may be put to the torture and expose us.' So they went and hid in a cave. A miracle occurred and a carob tree and a water-well were created for them. They would strip their garments and sit up to their necks in sand. The whole day they studied; when it was time for prayers they robed, covered themselves, prayed, and then put off their garments again, so that they should not wear out. Thus they dwelt twelve years in a cave. Then Elijah came and stood

"B" (Pesikta de-Rav Kahana)

R. Simeon b. Yohai and his son R. Eleazar hid themselves in a cave in a valley for thirteen years. All they had to eat was Teruman carobs, so that their bodies came to be covered with sores. At the end of the thirteen years, R. Simeon b. Yohai went out and sat at the entrance to the cave whence he saw a man spread a net to catch birds. When the man spread it the first time, R. Simeon heard a heavenly voice say "Mercy," and thereupon the bird went free; when the man spread it a second time, R. Simeon heard the heavenly voice say "Death," and thereupon the bird stayed caught. R. Simeon then said: Without the will of heaven, even a bird does not perish, so why should we remain in a cave?

at the entrance to the cave and exclaimed, 'Who will inform the son of Yohai that the emperor is dead and his decree is annulled?' So they emerged. Seeing a man ploughing and sowing, they exclaimed, 'They forsake life eternal and engage in life temporal.' Whatever they cast their eyes upon was immediately burnt up. Thereupon a heavenly Echo came forth and cried out, 'Have ye emerged to destroy My world: Return to your cave!' So they returned and dwelt there twelve months, saying, 'The punishment of the wicked in Gehenna is (limited to) twelve months.' A heavenly Echo then came forth and said, 'Go forth from your cave!' Thus they issued: wherever R. Eleazar wounded, R. Simeon healed. Said he to him, 'My son: You and I are sufficient for the world.' On the eve of the Sabbath before sunset they saw an old man holding two bundles of myrtle and running at twilight. 'What are these for?' they asked him. 'They are in honor of the Sabbath,' he replied. 'But one should suffice you?' - 'One is for REMEMBER (זכור) and one is for OBSERVE (שמור).' Said he to his son, 'See how precious are the commandments to Israel.' There at their minds were tranquilized.

R. Phinhas b. Ya'ir his son-in-law heard and went out to meet him. He took him into the baths and massaged his flesh. Seeing the clefts in his body he wept and the tears streamed from his eyes, 'Woe to me that I see you in such a state!' he cried out. 'Happy are you that see me thus,' he retorted,

'for if you did not see me in such a state then you would not find me thus (learned).'
For originally, when R. Simeon b. Yohai raised a difficulty, R. Phinhas b. Ya'ir would give him thirteen answers, whereas subsequently when R. Phinhas b. Ya'ir raised a difficulty, R. Simeon b. Yohai would give him twenty-four answers.

Since a miracle has occurred, said he, let me go and amend something, for it is written: "And Jacob came whole (to the city of Shechem)" (Gen. 33:18), which Rab interpreted. Bodily whole, financially whole, and whole in his learning. "And he was gracious to the city" (Gen. 33:18), Rab said: He instituted coinage for them. Samuel said: He instituted markets for them; R. Yohanan said: He instituted baths for them. Is there ought that requires amending? he asked. There is a place of doubtful uncleanness, he was informed, and priests have the trouble of going round it. Said he: Does any man know that there was a presumption of cleanness here? A certain old man replied. Here (R. Yohanan) b. Zakkai cut down lupines of teruman. So he did likewise. Wherever it was loose he marked it out. Said a certain old man, 'The son of Yohai has purified a cemetery!' Said he, 'Had you not been with us, or even if you have been with us but did not vote, you might have said well. But now that you were with us and voted with us, it will be said. "Even whores paint one another; how much more so scholars!"' 'He cast his eye upon him, and he died. Then He went out into the street

(Thereupon he and his son left the cave), and after a while, having heard that the execution of (Rome's) decrees had been relaxed, R. Simeon said: Let's go down to the springs of Tiberias, bathe in them, and be healed. Later, R. Simeon and his son said, We ought to show our gratitude as our forbears used to do: they set up markets where they sold produce at low prices. So R. Simeon set up a market where he sold at low prices. (To show their gratitude further), he and his son said: We ought to remove the impurities caused by the bones of the dead strewn about Tiberias. R. Simeon gathered lupines, cut them up, and scattered the pieces around the public thoroughfares: thereupon, wherever a corpse was buried, it rose up and came to the surface. A Cuthean saw what R. Simeon was doing, and said: Shall I not make sport of this elder of the Jews? What did he do? He got hold of a corpse and buried it in a thoroughfare which R. Simeon b. Yohai had purified. The Cuthean then went to him and said: Do you claim to have purified such-and-such a thoroughfare? He replied: Yes. The Cuthean said: Suppose from that very place I produce a corpse for you? He replied: "Say no more: show me." R. Simeon

and saw Judah, the son of proselytes. 'That man is still in the world!' he exclaimed. He cast his eyes upon him and he became a heap of bones.¹

b. Yohai, having perceived by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Cuthean had placed it there, declared: I decree that they who are above shall descend and they who are below shall ascend. And thus it befell that the Cuthean descended.

As R. Simeon was departing, he passed by the Synagogue of Magdala and heard the voice of Nakai, Magdala's schoolmaster, call out: Here is b. Yohai who is supposed to have purified Tiberias. R. Simeon said to Nakai: Were you not counted among those who officially declared that Tiberias was purified? Thereupon he lifted his eyes and looked at the schoolmaster - in that instant the man became a heap of bones.²

* * *

These are the two versions of the allegation that Simeon lived in a cave sometime during the second century C. E. As can be readily seen, version "A" is much longer, and, in parts, more detailed. Excepting the particulars nowever, there are two major differences between the two accounts. The first is that there is no mention in "B" of the discussion between Judah b. Ilai, Jose b. Halafta and Simeon b. Yohai. The second is that whereas in "A" Simeon is depicted as condemnatory towards everyday labor, in the Palestinian version "B" there is no such allusion. In fact, these two differences taken together show a marked absence in version "B" of Simeon's intolerance, both toward the Romans and those who neglect Torah study in favor of everyday work. This can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the absence of such attitudes in the Palestinian version could mean that such a characteristic

for R. Simeon was fictitious. However, as shall be seen below, there are many other instances wherein Simeon exhibits strong elements of intolerance so that whether version "A" is factual, or even a later insertion, it does not seem out of line with his character. On the other hand, it is also possible that such elements were purposely deleted in version "B" for some unknown reason (perhaps to protect the integrity of R. Simeon). Notwithstanding these major discrepancies however, the two versions possess adequate similarities to provide a homogeneous account of the incident.

In searching for a consensus of opinion between the two versions, the cave incident appears to be the initial event. Similarly, their (Simeon's and Eleazar's) stay lasted thirteen years. Upon a Divine sign indicating a change in the current political situation, both Simeon and Eleazar exit the cave, infected and diseased. Thereupon they proceed to Tiberias where they are involved in three activities: being healed, setting up markets and a ritual cleansing of Tiberias. Finally, both accounts conclude with Simeon displaying his miraculous abilities in his execution of two men (the power to destroy by looking at something).

As discussed in chapter 1 of this unit, the attempt to prove or disprove the historicity of this event is a very difficult one. That Simeon had a reason for fleeing to a cave for an extended period of time (according to the texts), is obvious. Although version "B" does not specify any such reason, it would not be out of the question to accept the rationale as detailed in version "A". As we shall see below, Simeon's atti-

tude appears to have been somewhat less than complimentary toward the Roman authorities, and thus the discussion between Judah, Jose and Simeon seems to be very much in context with the contemporary environment.³ Furthermore, although there is no parallel evidence to support the events connected with Tiberias, this too may have some basis of reality. By this time in his life Simeon was probably reknowned as a tanna and scholar and consequently, his "cleansing" of an entire city (Tiberias) could have really happened. This is further supported by Josephus who notes that "Herod Antipas had built Tiberias on the site of tombs which had been obliterated."⁴

In any event, whether true or not, the occurrences as enumerated in both versions "A" and "B" have a profound effect on the historical treatment of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. From the second century until the present day, there appear to be two characteristics of Rabbi Simeon that have been stressed. Furthermore, in many ways these emphases are directly derived from this account. The first, as evidenced by his need to flee to a cave, is the portrayal of Rabbi Simeon as a rather intolerant individual, specifically toward the Romans. The second, as illustrated by his living in isolation for thirteen years in addition to his ability to perform miraculous feats, has led centuries of rabbis to envision Simeon as the author of the Zohar. Let us observe these two characteristics of Rabbi Simeon and attempt to determine whether they are accurate representations or not.

(i)

Over the past two centuries modern scholarship has depicted Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai as a kind of political radical, intolerant of Gentiles and specifically of Romans. As will be shown in chapter 3 of Unit III, Simeon was intolerant toward many things. Furthermore, scholars were not unaware of this.⁵ However, for various reasons as will be enumerated below, Simeon in recent scholarship has been portrayed as a hater of Romans and in some places, as a hater of Gentiles in general.⁶ Baron calls Simeon "a radical opponent of Roman rule."⁷ Graetz writes, "In opposition to his father, Jochai, who stood in favor with the Roman authorities, the son was a decided enemy of Rome and was not much liked by them."⁸ Finkelstein concurs with this rejection of the father, stating, "Simeon b. Yohai, whose father was almost as Romanophile as Elisha b. Abuya, was a secret revolutionary."⁹ Whether his hatred for the Romans stemmed from an internal family relationship is difficult to determine. It is highly possible that this animosity arose from the contemporary events of his day. Burgansky writes, "he refused to accept the defeat of Bar Kokhba so the Romans sentenced him to death..."¹⁰ In all likelihood, it was precisely his reaction to the governing Roman authorities and their oppressive relationship to the Jews that angered Simeon. That this would have brought him into conflict with his father is also possible. Nevertheless, this opposition to the Romans has resulted in a number of theories as to the true identity of Rabbi Simeon. The most obvious, in a rejection of the current ruling administration,

would be an affirmation of the oppressed. Hence, Finkelstein labels Simeon as an ultranationalist: "the ultranationalist view was still held by many; indeed it was defended in the following generation by Simeon b. Yohai."¹¹ However, some scholars have gone considerably further in their theorizing about Simeon. In Israel and the Nations, Bloch asserts that "Rabbi Simeon, the son of Jochai, no doubt belonged to the adherents of the Essenes..."¹² But perhaps most extreme of all, Raffalovich equates Simeon b. Yohai with Bar Kokhba.¹³ That any of these hypotheses are correct is impossible to determine. An investigation of the primary sources, however, will afford us the opportunity to come somewhat closer to the truth.

It is only natural that such an inquiry should begin with the cave incident. In the Babylonian version, the account begins with the discussion between Judah, Jose and Simeon. It is here that the reader is first introduced to Simeon's leanings: "All what they made they made for themselves; they built market-places, to set harlots in them; baths, to rejuvenate themselves; bridges, to levy tolls for them."¹⁴ As a result of this remark, the Romans decreed that Simeon should be executed for such slanderous statements, and he was forced to flee to safety. The only other reference to difficulties with the Romans comes upon his exit from the cave. In version "A" Elijah comes and says, "Who will inform the son of Yohai that the emperor is dead and his decree annulled?"¹⁵, while in version "B" the reader is merely told that Simeon had "heard that the execution of decrees had been relaxed."¹⁶ In any event it is

obvious that inherent in both accounts is a degree of antagonism between the Roman government and Rabbi Simeon. Fortunately, this is not the only instance wherein Simeon's attitudes toward the Romans are discussed. Indeed, there are numerous places in the literature that indicate a tension between the two parties.

As shown in the previous chapter, Simeon was among a number of other colleagues who openly defied the Romans by being ordained by Judah b. Baba. That this was a serious offense is attested to by the fact that Judah was immediately killed by the Romans.¹⁷ It is not surprising then that a strong element of nationalism should be found in Simeon. Baron points this out when he notes that Simeon emphasized both the establishment of Palestinian controls over the calendar as well as that a man should not leave the Land of Israel.¹⁸ Simeon's insistence on Palestinian controls is evidenced by his involvement in the correcting of the calendar at Rimmon.¹⁹ That Simeon was opposed to emigration from the land of Israel can be clearly seen here: "Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion were (of the) great men of their generation, and they were (also) leaders of their generation. Why, then, were they punished? Because they left Palestine for a foreign country..."²⁰ Simeon's love for the Land of Israel is certainly not out of the ordinary for a rabbi of this or any time. Indeed there are numerous instances wherein Simeon asserts that love. And yet, as just illustrated, sometimes that "love" was carried to the extreme of a nationalistic fervor, to the point that anyone who left it, no matter how great, would be

punished.

It is difficult to ascertain whether Simeon's hatred for the Romans was a result of his nationalistic leanings, or whether his nationalism was a reaction to the oppressive Roman intruders. In any event, Simeon often seemed to be anti-Roman. This was shown in the discussion concerning his having to flee to a cave. In Leviticus Rabbah there is a story wherein Rabbi Simeon dreams his nephews are asked by the Romans to pay 600 dinari. Later on it turned out that the Romans did come and demand that they either make a purple robe for the King or pay 600 dinari. The result was they were put in prison.²¹ From this account and others like it, it does not seem questionable that Simeon was exposed to the oppressiveness of the Romans. Consequently, one is not surprised to find statements somewhat less than positive toward the Romans. Indeed, perhaps most infamous of all the statements attributed to Rabbi Simeon is just such a condemnation. In the Mekhilta, Simeon is quoted as saying: "The best among the nations - kill."²²

To adequately appreciate the magnitude of this statement, a more critical understanding is called for. Essentially, there are three parts to the pericopie: a) הַטֹּב ; b) טַבְּוֹיִים ; c) הַרֹג . Of the three, only the last - "kill" - is constant.²³ That is, in all the variant readings, there can be no mistake as to what action Rabbi Simeon is encouraging. As for the first two, there is a considerable amount of variety. Rather than list the various readings of the text (which Bacher has already done - see note #22 above), it will be sufficient to say that as for a), all the

variants connote a positive adjective (either the best, or the bravest, or the nicest, or the most proper among the...), concerning b), the implication in all of the texts is "non-Jew". The two most common readings are "among the nations" and "among the idol worshippers."²⁴ Based on this knowledge, it would follow that essentially Simeon is saying "Even the best or the good among the non-Jews should be slain."

It is therefore not surprising that just such a statement was a favorite quote among Gentile polemicists. It was perfect proof that the Jews wanted to kill all non-Jews. As a result, the Jewish treatment of Simeon's dictum has been a reaction highly characterized by apologetics. Such statements as "(Simeon's) anti-Gentile utterances which are not illustrative of the Talmud as a whole..."²⁵ or "It is evident that a precept bidding Jews slay the best of the goyyim is inconceivable"²⁶ are commonly found in discussions of Simeon and his attitudes toward the Romans.²⁷ Furthermore, this reaction is not a recent phenomenon, nor even limited to the last few centuries, but finds its roots as early as the amoraic period. Nevertheless, more difficult for the modern scholar is the need to separate the apologetics from the truth, if a distinction is needed. In other words, the apologetic response, albeit an understandable one, need not be a fabrication.

All things considered, the Jewish response has been homogeneous in one major respect: Simeon's statement can only be understood in the context of war. This can be observed in perhaps the earliest source of apologia on the subject: Masekhet Soferim. Here Simeon's dicta is

quoted in full, "The best among the heathens - kill!" There is however, an addition, so that the proper reading is: "The best among the heathens - in a time of war - kill!"²⁸ By inserting "in a time of war" the editor softens Simeon's remark in two ways: a) it justifies killing even the best; and b) in a time of war, it would only be natural that if Jews are involved, the enemy must be Gentiles. That this is an insertion is highly possible by the fact that "in a time of war" is found only in this source.²⁹ And yet, what is meant by "a time of war"?

There are three major possibilities as to the meaning of "a time of war". The first would be "any war". That is, in a time of armed conflict one should have to kill even the best of the enemy. Michael Guttman expressed this when he wrote that Simeon's statement is "like a command of war that is carried out by the thousands and the tens of thousands to the bloodiest."³⁰ For Guttman, such a cry or command can only be understood "as an exclamation of pain."³¹ A second possibility of interpretation would be that Simeon is referring to the context as found in the Mekhilta: war with the Egyptians. The text reads: "We thus learn that even those that feared the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh became a snare for Israel. In this connection R. Simeon the son of Yohai said..."³² In arguing that this was the true interpretation and that therefore "in a time of war" was not an insertion, Bloch feels that inasmuch as Simeon's statement in the Mekhilta was in the context of war, "it would have been superfluous to add the words "in a time of war."³³ Actually, it is highly possible that, even in the Mekhilta,

apologetics are at work, as indicated by the wording: "In this connection R. Simeon the son of Yohai said..." This statement is obviously the wording of the editor and we only have it on his authority that Simeon intended his remark thusly. Finally, as most scholars would agree, Simeon's statement was a reaction to his own oppressive environment. The enemy was the Romans, but for obvious reasons, it had to be generalized to all non-Jews. Weiss expresses this quite well, noting that Simeon could not erase his strong hatred toward the Romans, "and so, it is not surprising if one heard from his mouth bad things against the Gentiles who hated the Jews until their death."³⁴ Bloch also writes that "it is significant that a maxim of Rabbi Simeon's, the son of Jochai, who had been a close witness of the desecration of Jerusalem and the atrocious terrors of the Hadrianic time, should be adduced to prove that the Jews of the present time are obliged to kill Christians."³⁵ Similarly, Lauterbach notes that given Simeon's circumstances, he "naturally could not, and actually did not, have any good opinion of the heathen Romans and could not entertain any friendly feelings toward them."³⁶ Indeed, Bacher concurs by noting that given Simeon's personal situation of always having to flee, there is no reason to supply justification ("in a time of war") for his statement.³⁷

Therefore, on the one hand, it is certainly understandable that for centuries Jewish writers have found it necessary to justify Simeon's statement, but on the other hand, there is no firm reason to believe their rationalizations to be fabrications or fictitious. Given the cir-

cumstances of Simeon's life, it is not surprising that he held such animosity toward the Romans. The question then arises, even though one obvious target of his maxim were the Roman authorities, is it not also possible that his hatred was so intense that he expanded it to all Gentiles? That although his statement was engendered by "a time of war", is it possible that the severity of this environment caused him to hate all non-Jews, at all times?

According to some, it is possible. Bacher notes that Simeon is never seen in dialogue with the Gentiles for he hated them so violently.³⁸ And yet, even here it is difficult to generalize, for absence of dialogue does not necessitate hatred. Furthermore, there are a number of texts wherein Simeon is expressly hospitable to converts. Most famous is his exegesis on the treatment toward proselytes, where he asks: "Who is greater: He who loves the king or he whom the king loves? One should say, he whom the king loves, as it says, 'who loves the stranger; love therefore the stranger (proselytes) (Deut. 10:18-19).'³⁹ On the other hand, the fact that Simeon welcomed converts and estranged Jews is not necessarily proof that he loved non-Jews. Baron points out that although this trait is "not quite in keeping with R. Simeon b. Yohai's generally intolerant and impulsive character, it is understandable in the period after Bar Kokhba, which undoubtedly witnessed the return to Judaism of many weak-kneed escapists."⁴⁰ Urbach similarly writes that "He was the strongest opponent of the Roman Empire... Despite this attitude and his bitter, disillusioning experience with proselytes (Judah b. Gerim -

see p. 1 of this chapter)... it was just this tanna who taught: 'Behold Scripture says: But they that love Him shall be as the sun when he goes forth in his might... (Judges 5:31)... Thus, his attitude tends to show that the harsh expressions... regarding Gentiles and proselytes do not necessarily attest opposition in principle to conversion...."⁴¹ Furthermore, Urbach notes that "it is not feasible to attempt to classify the sages according to their dicta relative to proselytes... such a division is an oversimplification...."⁴²

Hence, in view of the facts, it is rather obvious that Simeon did have feeling of animosity toward the Romans. How strong they were and whether they were applicable to all non-Jews is a matter for speculation. Nevertheless, such knowledge does lend an element of credence to the "cave" incident, and consequently is helpful in determining the historicity of Simeon b. Yohai. Perhaps more intriguing is the portrayal of Simeon as the author of the Zohar. Let us turn our investigation to Simeon b. Yohai, the mystic.

(ii)

From a purely religious level (as opposed to a scientific, scholarly approach) Simeon b. Yohai has primarily been portrayed as a mystic. Possessing powers and knowledge that few before and after him have attained, Simeon is perhaps best known as the author of the Zohar. As far as I can tell, there are basically three stages in the development of this characterization. The first, essentially amoraic, depicts Simeon as a miracle worker. As will be shown below, it is very possible that this

preliminary stage began as early as during Simeon's own lifetime, and was characterized by the acceptance of Simeon as an individual out of the ordinary - that he had been singled out by G-d. The second stage develops near the end of the first millennium C.E. In this era, Simeon's mystical nature found a home among the then flourishing apocalyptic writing. Specifically, there remain two apocalyptic midrashim which are attributed and/or are about Rabbi Simeon. Dated sometime between the days of the Arab conquest of Palestine and the Crusades, they are entitled The Secrets of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai and The Prayer of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai.⁴³ These paved the way for the third and final stage: the concretization of Rabbi Simeon as a mystic.⁴⁴ This most notably took form in the Zohar, whose authorship was attributed to Rabbi Simeon. In fact, the Zohar originally circulated under the title The Midrash of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai.⁴⁵ It was in the Zohar where Simeon was envisioned "against the background of an imaginative Palestinian setting... wandering about with his son Eleazar, his friends, and his disciples, and discoursing with them on all manner of things human and divine..."⁴⁶, that Simeon reached the ultimate as regards his mystical identity. From that point until the present day, within religious circles, Simeon has been regarded perhaps as the mystic par-excellence.

The reason we distinguished this "religious" level is primary because very few if any scholars today accept his authorship of the Zohar or his "mystical" character. Gershom Scholem, the undisputed authority on Jewish mysticism, writes that "the legend which he (the real author of

the Zohar) builds up around the figure of Simeon b. Yohai is fanciful in the last degree."⁴⁷ Furthermore, Weiss had already noted that the Zohar was merely attributed to him.⁴⁸ Primarily, the evidence that Scholem, Weiss and others like them adduce is that the ideas, events and even terminology are not chronologically viable with Simeon. Indeed, even as early as the fifteenth century, doubts arose as to the authorship of the Zohar.⁴⁹ Finally, most scholars are apprehensive at best when it comes to envisioning even the Simeon as portrayed by the early amoraic writers. As Graetz writes, "he was falsely reported to be a worker of miracles - a mystic and a kabbalist."⁵⁰

Notwithstanding the fact that modern scholarship does not accept the "mystical" Rabbi Simeon, we are still obliged to investigate the primary sources. By "primary" sources, the intention is in terms of the "first stage" of Simeon's mystical development (see above), which would include the contemporary historical, late tannaitic and amoraic sources. In this way we will be able to determine with greater accuracy whether Simeon was as the rabbis attest or as the scholars deny - or whether he was even a little of both.

As has been customary in this chapter, we shall begin with the "cave" incident. Although later rabbis base a great deal of their contentions on the fact that Simeon lived in a cave for thirteen years, there is nothing to indicate in either version "A" or "B" that Simeon had any out-of-the-ordinary mystical experiences while in the cave. There are references to miraculous feats performed by Simeon, but they in no way suggest

that their performance was as a result of Simeon having been in the cave. The only things that might lead one to consider that G-d was particularly aware of Simeon's exile (and thus may have enlightened him as to the secrets of the universe) were the facts that "A miracle occurred and a carob-tree and a water-well were created for them" ("A") and in both versions Simeon exits as a result of a divine sign.⁵¹

Nevertheless, within that account the reader also sees Simeon performing various miracles. Specifically, his ability to destroy men with nothing more than a glance. The fact of the matter is that there are numerous places throughout the rabbinic literature wherein Simeon is either observed performing miracles or engaged in a somewhat mystical activity (discoursing with Elijah, returning from the dead, etc.) Inasmuch as such examples already exist in the "cave" account, there really is no need to specify other instances. Suffice it to say, in many of the rabbinic sources Simeon b. Yohai is envisioned as possessing qualities most men cannot lay claim to. Such examples however exist in the third person narrative and really do not inform us of Simeon, but of what others saw him to be. This then requires a discussion of those pericopae which are of a mystical nature and in the first person.

Albeit there are not many texts attributed to Rabbi Simeon that can be labeled as "mystical" (see Unit III, chapters 1 and 2), there are some that are certainly noteworthy. In particular, in Sanhedrin one finds a baraita attributed to Simeon⁵² in which a seven-year plan preceding the arrival of the Messiah is enumerated. The formulation is interesting for

two reasons. It is highly apocalyptic in nature and although it appears more often at a time much later than Simeon, as Ibn-Shemuel has noted, such a midrash was characteristic of a period marked by Messianic hopes and disappointment (which could easily correspond to the first half of the second century).⁵³ In a similar text from the Sifre, Simeon is seen commenting on Psalms 16:11 wherein he enumerates seven signs of joy that are representative of the time to come. What is particularly mystical is that almost all of the seven references can in one way or another be identified with light (which in mysticism is a frequently occurring symbol). They are the sun, the moon, the firmament, the stars, lightning, flowers and the candlestick of the Temple.⁵⁴ In Pesikta Rabbati there is another reference by Simeon to the power of light, such that if one were to make even an opening in the grave of Moses, the entire world could not endure the light.⁵⁵

There are also other characteristics of mysticism in the sayings attributed to Simeon b. Yohai. For instance, in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan and in the Midrash on Psalms, we find two texts which envision the universe in a somewhat mystical configuration. In ARN Simeon (and R. Eleazar) makes a reference to "the upper and lower seas",⁵⁶ whereas in Midrash on Psalms, Simeon envisions heaven as having "doors".⁵⁷ And finally, in a midrash highly reflective of Merkavah mysticism, Simeon likens the patriarchs to "chariots", worthy enough to have the shekhinah rest upon them.⁵⁸

On the other hand, although such statements are mystical in nature,

how much they indicate that Simeon was a mystic is highly questionable. From a critical point of view, there are major problems in definitely attributing these pericopae to Simeon. Although the Sanhedrin text is a baraita (a tannaitic text), as noted above, it is highly reflective of the apocalyptic literature which flourished centuries after Simeon's death, and there are difficulties with attributing it to Simeon b. Yohai. Similarly, the midrash from Midrash on Psalms is quoted "in the name of" Simeon, and thus must be considered suspect. As Urbach has shown, "... it was just the Apocalyptic stories and dicta of the sages that were not always handed down in their original form."⁵⁹ Furthermore, even such statements that are "mystical" do not preclude that the author was a mystic. On the contrary, many rabbis have made allusions to mystical concepts without being labeled "mystic". In a like manner, simply because miraculous feats are attributed to an individual does not necessitate that he was any different from other rabbis. Here again Urbach notes that "the stories about Simeon b. Yohai and R. Yohanan who cast their eyes on people and turned them into a heap of bones, are not different from many other stories regarding righteous and saintly men."⁶⁰ The fact of the matter is, as shall be shown in Unit III, Simeon was very rational in his exegesis. Indeed, there was very little, if any, mysticism in his thinking. Scholem has written that with the exception of the two apocalyptic midrashim (see above), Simeon "is nowhere mentioned as a mystical authority (before the Zohar)."⁶¹ Bacher also notes that Simeon "did not become involved in philosophy and of all the mystical

things attributed to him, only in one area does one find a trace of mysticism - relations between G-d and Israel."⁶² Even here I question Bacher's observation, for it is very difficult to say Simeon was mystical in one area alone.

At this point it must be assumed that the characterization of Simeon b. Yohai as a mystic is the work of later authors. And yet, for centuries Simeon b. Yohai was unquestionably considered not just as a mystic, but perhaps as "the" mystic. What was it then that made him so attractive to be portrayed not just as a mystic, but as one especially chosen by G-d? As best I can discern, there are two possibilities why Simeon seems to have become a legend. If one accepts the historical outline as given in the previous chapter, Simeon's life seems to have been rather extraordinary. Having lived through the Hadrianic persecutions and Bar Kokhba revolt, having had to flee to safety on numerous occasions, it seems almost a miracle that he outlived most of his contemporaries. In addition, he seems to have been separated from the mainstream (being in exile after Judah b. Baba's ordination, living in the cave, and establishing his own academy in Tekoa) to such an extent that people actually began to fantasize about him. As Weiss has noted, because of the kind of life he lived, it must have appeared to others as if G-d "had placed His finger on Simeon b. Yohai."⁶³ That this is possible is evidenced by his being sent to Rome late in his life. Everyone knew that Simeon was a perennial enemy of Rome, but by that stage in his life, having survived numerous encounters with death, having outlived his colleagues from B'nai B'rak,

Yavneh and Usha, it possibly seemed as if Simeon was specially chosen by G-d. Seligson notes that "the reason Simeon b. Yohai was sent to Rome was that he was known to have wrought miracles."⁶⁴ Second, although Simeon cannot be identified as a mystic by virtue of his aggadic lore, as will be shown later, one particular characteristic of Simeon was his preoccupation with Torah study, often at the expense of normal, secular pursuits. Consequently, as Baron shows, "his hiding in a cave for twelve years and his flaming denunciation of worldly pursuits after his mystical experiences there (version "A") elevate him as a natural spokesman of general Jewish mystic beliefs and particularly as the revealer of the mysterious personality and actions of the Messiah."⁶⁵

Therefore, when it came to attributing messianic midrashim and mystical works like the Zohar, a personality like that of Simeon was perfect for two reasons: 1) he fulfilled the requirements of appearing to be a mystic, and 2) he was a tanna, a reputable traditional sage. As Baron notes, "in this way many old folkloristic concepts of unknown authorship, as well as many newly invented teachings or stories, were supported with authoritative paternity."⁶⁶ Similarly, Graetz pointed out that the real author of the Zohar "found the most likely author for his secret doctrine against whom there could be no objection... Simeon b. Yohai... who is said to have spent thirteen years in a cave, solitary and buried in profound reflection and which ancient mysticism represented as having received revelations."⁶⁷

These two perspectives of Simeon, as an outspoken rabbi, intolerant of the political and moral situation, and as a mystic, endowed with powers and knowledge unattainable for normal people, have been predominant in the treatment of Rabbi Simeon. Furthermore, there can be no doubt that the "cave" incident as recorded in the beginning of this chapter was instrumental in the creation and development of these perspectives. The intent of this chapter, however, has been to illustrate how these two portrayals have shadowed the life of Simeon b. Yohai. Shadowed in the sense that, whether true or false, the extreme emphasis put upon them by tradition and scholarship has in effect limited our knowledge of Rabbi Simeon. Consequently, Unit III will explore those elements of Rabbi Simeon that were so often neglected or at the most, merely touched upon.

NOTES UNIT II CHAPTER 2

1. Shabbat 33b-34a.
2. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11:16; ed. Mandelbaum vol. I, p. 191 line 9 - p. 193 line 8. Note also P. Shevi'it IX: i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 38d, which Seligson regards as the most authentic of the Palestinian accounts (Seligson, p. 360).
3. See Chapter 1 of this unit, pp. 13-15.
4. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, Pesikta de-Rab Kahana (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975), p. 217 #61.
5. See Salo W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (12 vols. New York-Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America 1952-1967), vol. II, pp. 265 and 309.
6. See Seligson, p. 362.
7. Baron II, p. 96.
8. Graetz II, p. 440-441.
9. Finkelstein, p. 242.
10. Israel Burgansky, "Simeon b. Yohai," Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), vol. XI, p. 1552.
11. Finkelstein, p. 209; see also p. 256.
12. Joseph Bloch, Israel and the Nations, trans. L. Kellner (Berlin: B. Harz, 1927), p. 207.
13. See Hyman, p. 1188a-b.
14. Shabbat 33b.
15. Shabbat 33b.
16. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11:16; ed. Mandelbaum, vol. I, p. 192 lines 5-6.
17. See Sanhedrin 14a.
18. Baron II, pp. 124-125.
19. P. Hagigah III: i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 78d. See also Graetz II, p. 433.

20. Baba Batra 91a.
21. Leviticus Rabbah 34:12; ed. Marguleis, vol. IV, p. 796 line 1 - p. 799 line 3.
22. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael "Beshallah" (VaYehi), ch. 1; ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 89 lines 9-10. For the various readings of this, see Bacher II, p. 55 #28.
23. See Nathan Susskind, "Tov Sheba-Goyim..." CCAR Journal, XXIII (Spring, 1976), p. 34. Here Susskind offers the possibility of translating הררג as a noun ("killer"), as opposed to the accepted reading of it as verb in the imperative state ("kill!").
24. Konowitz reads "among the Egyptians" and credits it to the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, although I cannot affirm the manuscript he was using - Israel Konowitz Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1965), p. 78 #5. Susskind also states that the original reading was "Egyptians," not "goyyim." Personally, I am of the opinion that "Egyptians" is a recent addition and that "goyyim" was, in all likelihood, the original reading. There are basically two reasons for this. First, although both "Egyptians" and "goyyim" were designed as symbols for Rome, if "Egyptians" was used originally, there would be no sound reason to add "in a time of war" (see #28, this chapter). That this is more plausible is evidenced by the second reason: in the critical edition to the Mekhilta, "Egyptians" is not listed among the variant readings. See Mekhilta "Beshallah" (VaYehi) ch. 1; ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 89. See also Bacher II, p. 55 #28, where he notes that Rashi quotes "Egyptians" from the Mekhilta, as does Solomon Buber in his edition to the Tanhuma.
25. Shabbat 33b, trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1938) p. 157 #1(2).
26. Bloch, p. 204.
27. For an interesting example of apologetics on this statement, see Susskind, pp. 27-40.
28. Masekhet Soferim 15:7; ed. Higger, pp. 281-282.
29. See Bacher II, p. 55 #28. Although some identify it as being found in the Palestinian Talmud, the only mentioning of it I could find was in the Tossafot to Avodah Zara 26b of the Babylonian Talmud. In Kiddushin of the Palestinian Talmud, Simeon's statement is recorded without the insertion "in a time of war," IV: ii; ed. Krotoschin p. 66c. See also Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "Attitude of the Jew Towards the Non-Jew" CCAR Yearbook vol. XXXI (1921) p. 213, #61. Note that, ac-

cording to Susskind, Simeon's statement was omitted from "all printed versions of the Yerushalmi," p. 31, #5.

30. Michael Guttman, Das Judentum und Seine Umwelt (Berlin: Philo Verlag, 1927) p. 185.
31. Ibid.
32. Mekhilta "Beshallah" (VaYehi) ch. 1; ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 89 line 9.
33. Bloch, p. 209.
34. Weiss II, p. 143.
35. Bloch, p. 210.
36. Lauterbach, p. 213.
37. Bacher II, p. 55 #28.
38. Bacher II, p. 48.
39. Mekhilta "Mishpatim" (Nezikin) ch. 18; ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 311 lines 9-11.
40. Baron II, p. 309.
41. Urbach I, pp. 549-550.
42. Urbach I, p. 549.
43. Baron III, p. 93 and IV, p. 296.
44. See Bacher II, pp. 100-101.
45. Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken, 1973) p. 118.
46. Scholem, p. 157.
47. Scholem, p. 169.
48. Weiss II, p. 144.
49. See Graetz IV, p. 292 where he notes that Elias del Medigo (Elias Cretensis 1463-1498) was convinced the "Zohar was by no means the work of the celebrated Simeon b. Yohai, but the production of a forger."

50. Graetz II, pp. 440-441.
51. In version "A" Simeon exits after twelve years on the word of Elijah, only to return by G-d's command and wait until a bat kol issued forth a year later. In version "B" Simeon leaves upon a sign which also involves the bat kol or "Heavenly Echo."
52. Actually, in Sanhedrin it is attributed to the rabbis and only in Derekh Eretz Zuta is it credited to Simeon b. Yohai; Derekh Eretz Zuta 10:1; ed. Harburger, p. 50.
53. Sanhedrin 97a. See Yehuda Ibn Shmuel, Midrashei Ge'ulah (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), pp. 15-55.
54. Sifre "Deuteronomy" ch. 10; ed. Finkelstein, p. 18 lines 7-12.
55. Pesikta Rabbati ch. 21; ed. Friedmann, p. 102a.
56. Avot de-Rabbi Natan 33:2; ed. Schecter, version "A", p. 98.
57. Midrash on Psalms 78:3; ed. Buber, p. 345.
58. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai "Va Ereh" 6:3 (וַיִּשְׁמַע ה'); ed. Hoffmann, pp. 170-171.
59. Urbach I, pp. 682-683.
60. Urbach I, p. 579.
61. Scholem, p. 182.
62. Bacher II, p. 48.
63. Weiss II, pp. 143-144.
64. Seligson, p. 360.
65. Baron V, p. 140.
66. Baron VIII, p. 283.
67. Graetz IV, pp. 12-14.

UNIT III

"IN THE DARKNESS OF THE CAVE"

Chapter 1.

As one can readily discern, history's approach to and understanding of Simeon b. Yohai has been largely influenced by the cave incident. Both characterizations of Simeon as a "mystic" and as a "political radical" revolve around that account. As we saw however, the attempt to portray Rabbi Simeon as a kabbalist was a lukewarm one at best. Although there are those who still identify Simeon as the author of the Zohar, most scholars are aware of its pseudepigraphic nature. Furthermore, albeit there may be validity to envisioning Simeon b. Yohai as an opponent of the Roman government, we must be careful not to shade our perception of this man. As mundane as it may seem Simeon was also a rabbi.

It is not that this perspective was purposely or intentionally neglected. Rather, it would be far more accurate to say that Simeon's role as rabbi or sage was "easily overlooked" or "taken for granted". Indeed, every major Judaic personality of the early Christian centuries excepting Bar Kokhba and Josephus was a rabbi. Furthermore, barring few exceptions, like Elisha ben Abuya and Akiba, most of what these rabbis said was conventional enough not to merit distinction. Certainly there was heterogeneity and a wide diversity of thought, but few stood out strong enough to be characterized vis-a-vis their theological preferences. Simeon b. Yohai was no exception. Hence it is not surprising that only certain elements of Simeon's character have been stressed over the centuries.

The fact remains however, that this man was a great teacher. Great enough to be recognized as such by his own contemporaries. The nasi, Simeon b. Gamaliel (2) sent his son Judah (later to be called Judah

HaNasi, or simply "Rabbi") to study with Simeon, and in relation to all of Akiba's other pupils the nasi identified Simeon as the "lion" of the group.¹ Similarly, the great Akiba made a point of affirming Simeon b. Yohai's scholarly talent when he said "It is sufficient for you that I and your Creator recognize your power..."² In another text, Issi b. Judah, in enumerating the qualities of various sages, describes Simeon as one who grinds and brings forth little. In a corresponding baraita this is interpreted as one who studies a great deal and forgets little, and what he does forget are only such things which are likened to bran.³

Furthermore, there is ample evidence to suggest that Simeon himself was well aware of his prowess as a teacher.⁴ Indeed, he was rather surprised when his own teacher chose Meir first instead of himself.⁵ Simeon unquestionably considered himself the most capable student of Akiba when he said: "My sons, learn my rules, since my rules are the cream of the cream of R. Akiba's."⁶ He even elevated his own ideas above those of his highly esteemed master, Akiba: "R. Simeon said: There are four expositions among those given by R. Akiba with which I do not agree..."⁷

As a teacher Simeon b. Yohai was able to attain possibly the most sought after goal of any rabbi: to establish an academy. Sometime after his exiting the cave and before his mission to Rome (which would be c. mid second century) Simeon established his academy at Tekoa. That he had his own school is substantiated by Judah HaNasi who makes reference to having studied "...Torah at R. Simeon's (academy) in Tekoa."⁸ What

exactly emanated from that school is questionable. According to the tradition Rabbi Simeon is credited with writing the Sifre and editing the Mekhilta of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai.⁹ Unfortunately, much of this is disputed and there is no certain way to determine the truth. On the other hand, much of what Rabbi Simeon allegedly said or was quoted in his name still remains. Let us observe some of the teachings and sayings of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai:

Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, revealed the reward for two precepts, which are the easiest of the easy and the most difficult of the difficult. The easiest of the easy: "Let the mother go and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life." (Deut. 22:7) The most difficult of the difficult: "Honor your father and your mother... that you may long endure, and that you may fare well in the land of the Lord your G-d is giving you." (Deut. 5:16). Hence, in this world, both their rewards are equal.¹⁰

Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai says: just as their rewards are equal, so too are their punishments.¹¹

So great is the honor paid to ones parents that the Holy One, blessed be He, prefers it to his own glorification.¹²

R. Simeon said: There are three crowns: the crown of study of the Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of royalty, but the crown of a good name surpasses them all.¹³

"Gather for Me seventy of Israel's elders..." (Nu. 11:16). Thus in every place where you find elders, G-d apportions glory to the elders. R. Simeon b. Yohai says: Whence do we know that this will be the case even in the future? for it says: "Then the moon shall be ashamed, and the sun shall be abashed, for the Lord of Hosts will reign on the Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His elders shall be glory (Isa. 24:23). Behold, does this not lead us to a fortiori reasoning? If He who spoke and the

world came into being is to apportion glory to the elders in the future, how much the more so mortal man should apportion glory to the elders.¹⁴

"... in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (Gen. 18:19) It was taught, Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai says: If one has a son who toils in the Torah, it is as if he never died.¹⁵

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai: It is better for a man that he should cast himself into a fiery furnace rather than he should put his fellow to shame in public.¹⁶

Rabbi Simeon says: Upon them that speak slander plagues come. For thus we find concerning Aaron and Miriam, that they engaged in slandering Moses and punishment came upon them; as it is said, "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses." (Nu. 12:1).¹⁷

Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai says: Come and see the power of a transgression. Before they (Israel) became involved in sin what was said about them? "Now the Presence of the Lord appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain" (Ex.24:17), and they did not show fear nor did they tremble. Once they became involved in sin what was said about them? "Aaron and all the Israelites saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant; and they shrank from near him." (Ex. 34:30)¹⁸

R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: If Israel were to keep two sabbaths according to the laws thereof, they would be redeemed immediately, for it is said, "Thus said the Lord: as regards the eunuch, who keeps My sabbaths" (Isa. 56:4) which is followed by, "I will bring them to My sacred mountain." (Isa. 56:7)¹⁹

R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: If a man has a fixed place for his prayer, his enemies succumb to him.²⁰

R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: How do you know that we must not try to placate a man in the time of his anger? Because it is said, "My face will go and I will give you rest." (Ex. 33:14).²¹

"Your righteousness is like the high mountains; Your

justice like the great deep" (Ps. 36:7). R. Simeon b. Yohai says: The text is mixed up. Rather it should read "Your righteousness upon your judgements is like the high mountains upon the great deep." How can this be? The Holy One, blessed be He, would measure the waters of the great deep and this abyss which he had seen from ever, began to increase, so He would take a high mountain and place it over the great deep so that each abyss was subjected to these mountains on high in order that they would not rise and flood the entire world. Similarly, righteousness subjects over judgement in order that the world not perish as a result of judgements.²²

At the time when Israel heard "I am the Lord your G-d" at Mount Sinai their souls left their bodies... R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: The Torah restored to them their souls, as it says, "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul..." (Ps. 19:8).²³

How did speech go out from G-d's mouth? R. Simeon b. Yohai says: It teaches that the speech (or communications) would go out from G-d's right side to Israel's left, return and encircle the camp eighteen miles by eighteen miles, return and encircle from Israel's right to G-d's left. Then G-d would receive it and carve it on the tablet and his voice would go out to the ends of the earth, to establish as it says, "The voice of the Lord kindles flames of fire." (Ps. 29:7).²⁴

Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai says: Love upsets the natural order, for it is written: "Abraham arose early in the morning and saddled his ass" (Gen. 22:3). But did he not have servants (to do this for him)? Rather, love upsets the natural order. Hatred upsets the natural order, as it says: "When he arose in the morning, Balaam saddled his ass" (Nu. 22:21). But did he not have servants? Rather, hatred upsets the natural order... Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai said: Let (this) "saddling" come and counteract (that) "saddling". Let the "saddling" of Abraham our father who did so trying to do the will of G-d... come and counteract the "saddling" of Balaam who did so to profane Israel.²⁵

"So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel from the morning until the time appointed..." (Sam. II 24:15). R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: Thirty six hours of punishment were decreed upon Israel at that time, but the great "defenders"

stood up and annulled them: They were the seven days of a sabbatical week, the eight days of circumcision, the five books of the Torah, the merits of the three patriarchs - and this leaves thirteen hours - who annulled them? There are two opinions: One says on the merit of the twelve tribes, while the other said on the merit of the ten commandments and the two tablets, hence leaving only one hour, "So the Lord sent a plague²⁶ upon Israel from the morning until the time appointed. . . "²⁷

"And He appeared. . . unto him in a blazing fire out of a bush" (Ex. 3:2). R. Simeon b. Yohai says: Why would the Holy One, blessed be He, who reveals Himself from the heavens, speak with Moses from within a bush? Only (to teach you) that just as the bush is the most difficult of all trees in the world, seeing that no bird can enter it and leave in peace without doing some damage to its limbs and appendages, so the servitude of Israel in Egypt was the most difficult of all servitudes in the world. "²⁸

"In the land of Egypt. . ." (Ex. 11:1). R. Simeon said: great is G-d's love for Israel, for the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed himself in a place of idol worship, a place of filth, a place of impurity for the sake of redeeming them (Israel). This may be compared to a priest whose tithe offering fell into a cemetery. "What shall I do?" he said. "To purify myself is out of the question, but to abandon my tithe offering is also out of the question. It is better for me to impurify myself one time and then return and repurify myself than to lose my tithe offering." So Israel was the tithe offering of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says: "Israel is the sanctified portion of the Lord. . ." (Jer. 2:3), and they were between graves as it says: "... for there was no house where there was not someone dead," (Ex. 12:30), and it says: "The Egyptians were meanwhile burying those among them. . ." (Nu. 33:4). The Holy One, blessed be He said, "How can I save them? To abandon them is out of the question - it is better to descend and save them" as it says: "I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians" (Ex. 3:8). After he brought them out, He called to Aaron and He purified him, as it says "and he shall make atonement for the Holy sanctuary (Lev. 16:33) and "he shall make atonement for the Holy. . ." (Lev. 16:16).²⁹

Rabbi Simeon says: Such is the punishment of the liar,

that even when he speaks the truth none believe him. For thus we find concerning the sons of Jacob who deceived their father: at first he believed them, as it is said, "And they took Joseph's coat and killed a he-goat... and he knew it and said, "It is my son's coat" (Gen. 37:31, 33); but in the end even though they spoke the truth to him, he did not believe them as it is said, "And they told him, saying: Joseph is yet alive... And his heart fainted, for he believed them not..." (Gen. 45:26).³⁰

"Shall one man sin, and will You be angry with all the congregation?" (Nu. 16:22) R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: This may be compared to the case of men on a ship, one of whom took a borer and began boring beneath his own place. His fellow travelers said to him: "What are you doing?" He replied to them? "What does that matter to you, am I not boring under my own place?" They said: "Because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all." Even so did Job say, "And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself" (Job 19:4), and his friends said, "He adds transgression unto his sin, he extends it among us" (Job 34:37), (so they said to him): "You extend your sins among us."³¹

This then is a sampling of some of the aggadic material attributed to Rabbi Simeon. As Frankel has rightly pointed out, he said many deep and profound things.³² Bacher concurred that Simeon's style was "full of imagination and strong of expression."³³ There can be no question that as an insightful man, Simeon was a master homilist. It is easy to understand how so many students and teachers could be attracted to him. And yet, Simeon b. Yohai was not exceptional. As beautiful and as complex his exegeses were, they were not in the realm of unique. On the contrary they were in complete harmony with rabbinic theology.³⁴ Even the somewhat "mystical" aggadot (such as "How did speech go out

of G-d's mouth?³⁵ or references to the soul leaving the body³⁶) are not out of place in rabbinic theology. Indeed, they are not even mystical. Although as we saw earlier Rabbi Simeon does make some scattered references to Merkavah, etc., his theology is unquestionably main-line rabbinic. As a result, one is not surprised when Simeon's ideas about G-d, man, Israel, revelation, redemption, and even messianism are quite similar to those of his contemporaries. And yet, it is possible to maintain that there is absolutely nothing in the aggadah or literature of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai that is not unique, or at least characteristic of him? Fortunately, there is. Albeit it is not exclusive to him, for it was (and is) a commonly shared value. Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly the most characteristic element of Simeon's theology: Torah.

To Rabbi Simeon, Torah was the essence of Jewish life. Without it Judaism was incapable of existing. This, of course, was not an extraordinary opinion among the contemporary rabbinical authorities of his day. Indeed it is still the basis of Judaism. But for Simeon b. Yohai it was everything. It was a "weapon to its possessor".³⁷ It was a life sustaining force as we saw earlier: "At the time when Israel heard "I am the Lord Your G-d" at Mount Sinai their souls left their bodies... R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: The Torah restored to them their souls, as it says, "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul..." (Ps. 19:8)³⁸ As we also saw above, the Torah was even an assurance for immortality: "... if one has a son that toils in Torah, it is as though he never died."³⁹ In short, the Torah was the essence of the covenant, of the

relationship between man and G-d. As long as man observed it, it would provide security - but when neglected, calamity would follow. "If, then, you faithfully keep all this instruction..." (Deut. 11:22). Rabbi Simeon said: "... so the Holy One, Blessed be He said to man: 'My Torah is in your keeping and your souls are in my keeping. If you protect that which is mine I will protect that which is yours. But if you lose that which is mine, I will destroy that which is yours...' "40

As one can readily discern, to Simeon b. Yohai the Torah was a protective shield, a source of security. It would be very easy to simply admit this and continue on. There certainly is nothing creative or particular about this approach. And yet, it may well be that there was a particular reason for such an approach. Consider the times, the environment. This is the time of the birth of Christianity, the destruction of the Temple, the Hadrianic persecutions and the Bar Kokhba revolt. It must have been a terribly insecure, challenging, oppressive period for the average Jew.

As is apparent from the tradition, Simeon was well aware of the situation. Realizing that the study and performance of Torah was the bastion of Judaism, it must have been quite distressing to see so many fellow Jews lax in their study, in their observance. In fact it was crucial enough to merit several responses on the part of our rabbi. Here are just a few examples:

Rabbi Simeon b. Menasya says: Who is crooked? "He who cannot be made straight" (Eccl. 1:15)... R. Simeon b. Yohai says: We may only apply "crooked" to

one who was straight originally and then became crooked. And who is this? The wise student who has departed from the Torah.⁴¹

Come and hear: for when our rabbis entered the vineyard in Yavneh, R. Judah, R. Eleazar b. Jose and R. Simeon were present, and this question was raised before them: Why does this affliction (croup) commence in the bowels and end in the throat? Thereupon R. Judah b. Ilai, the first speaker on all occasions answered and said: Though the kidney counsels, the heart gives understanding, and the tongue gives form, yet the mouth completes it. R. Eleazar b. Jose answered: Because they eat unclean food therewith... Rabbi Simeon answered and said: As a punishment for the neglect of study.⁴²

So it is the way with wise students: he studies two or three things a day, two or three chapters on Shabbat, two or three sidras in a month -- after some time he is a "wealthy" man. The other says: today I will study, tomorrow I will study; Today I will do Mishnah, tomorrow I will do Mishnah -- after some time he is found to possess nothing.⁴³

What is meant by "The sluggard will not plough when winter sets in" (Prov. 20:4)? Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai said: This is one who neglected to study Torah in his youth and wants to study in his old age but cannot...⁴⁴

These oppressing times of the second century took their toll. Students neglected Torah; Torah fell into disuse. For an individual like Simeon who hated the Romans so vehemently, it had to have been highly disillusioning to watch his own people succumb to resignation and apathy. What he saw was not merely a neglect of Torah study, but a deterioration of Jewish life in general. Commenting on a mishnah in Sanhedrin "The ten tribes will not return (to Palestine), for it is said, 'And cast them into another land as is this day' (Deut. 29:27)." Rabbi Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco said on R. Simeon's authority: If their deeds are

as this day's⁴⁵ they will not return; otherwise they shall.⁴⁶ What were the deeds of "this day", of Simeon's generation? There were obviously many things that frustrated our rabbi, but perhaps nothing as aggravating as forgetting the destruction of the Temple and wholesale sellout: apostasy:

"And God came that day to David, and said unto him: Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord..." (Sam. II 24:19). Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai taught: this may be compared to one who would punish his son, but his son did not know why. After punishing him the father said to his son: go and do this thing which I commanded you many days ago and you did not do it. So, all of the thousands that died during the war of David's time, died only because they did not demand that the Temple be built. Is it not a fortiori reasoning? Just as those, who did not have a Temple to be destroyed in their time, and they were punished thusly because they did not demand (it to be built), as for us, for it was destroyed in our day and we do not mourn for it, nor do we request mercy because of its destruction, how much the moreso (we should suffer the same fate)...⁴⁷

R. Simeon said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: When you execute judgements against an apostate city I will reckon it to you as if you offered up before Me a whole burnt offering.⁴⁸

Although a bitter, negative attitude on Simeon's part is easily discernable, one should not make the mistake of interpreting this attitude as destructive. On the contrary, his objective was nothing but constructive. As Urbach has shown, during such oppressive times "the sayings of R. Simeon b. Yohai and R. Meir were intended to encourage and stimulate the observance" of Torah.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Bacher noted that "in order to emphasize the great value of the Torah, Simeon b. Yohai would utilize exaggeration... and frightening stories to emphasize the

importance of the matter."⁵⁰ By a system of reward and punishment, Rabbi Simeon hoped to encourage, frighten and possibly even coerce fellow Jews into maintaining their Jewishness. As for reward:

Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai taught, saying: If you should see men greatly abandoning Torah, arise and be strong with them, and you will receive a reward...⁵¹

Every man who puts Torah to his heart will alleviate ten difficult things:

1) impure thoughts; 2) thoughts of dying by the sword; 3) thoughts of (oppressive) kingdoms; 4) thoughts of (the power of) names; 5) thoughts of the evil inclination; 6) thoughts of lust; 7) thoughts of evil women; 8) thoughts of idol worship; 9) thoughts of the yoke of mankind; and 10) thoughts of worthless things.⁵²

There can be no question that in such unstable times, such rewards were designed as security, as positive reinforcement. But if that did not work, there was always the power of fear. We already saw what happened to the inhabitants of a city who became apostates.⁵³ Equally as destructive was the punishment for a city who merely failed to remunerate its teachers of Torah: R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: When you see whole villages of people plucked up and removed from their place in the land of Israel, know that this fate befell them because they failed to provide fees for teachers of Scripture and teachers of Mishnah.⁵⁴

According to tradition Rabbi Simeon put such an exceedingly great amount of stress upon Torah, that he affirmed it above any and all other types of livelihood. There is support for this in the famous dispute between Rabbi Ishmael and Simeon. Commenting on the Scriptural verses: "If, then, you obey the commandments... you shall gather in your new

grain..." (Deut. 11:13, 14), R. Ishmael asserts that the text "implies that one is to combine the study of them (words of Torah) with a worldly occupation." Simeon b. Yohai, on the other hand, fears that too much labor will leave no time for study. His opinion is that when doing the will of G-d, one's labor is performed by others, and when not doing the will of G-d, they do their own labor as well as the labor of others. That this is true is supported by Abaye who claims many have tried both Ishmael's and Simeon's approach, but whereas Ishmael's "has worked well" Simeon's "has not been successful."⁵⁵ We also saw an illustration of this in the cave incident, for as he left the cave he cursed the local farmers for indulging in everyday work and not studying Torah.⁵⁶ As a result his life has been described as one of solitude "with concentration on a life of Torah."⁵⁷ Graetz pointed out that at that time he was "the only man whose life's business was the study of the law."⁵⁸ Baron labels Simeon an "extremist" who was totally devoted to Torah at the expense of all economic endeavors ("a failing attitude").⁵⁹

However, it would be incorrect to believe that Simeon expected others to indulge in such a Torah-engulfed isolationism. Indeed, it is questionable whether Simeon himself actually maintained such an idealistic mode of existence. As Urbach notes, "R. Simeon b. Yohai's extremism does not necessarily find expression in his demand that scholars should devote themselves entirely to the study of Torah, without giving a thought to questions of livelihood."⁶⁰ Even Baron admits that Simeon "conceded that day and night meditation has been possible only to a

generation living on manna or to priestly recipients of heave-offerings."⁶¹

It seems safe to assume then that Simeon was a realist. He knew only too well the immediate dangers he and his people faced and the only apparent solution was to immerse oneself in Torah. Nevertheless, he also realized this was not feasible for all. The great treasure of Torah was not revealed to all and so "one does not have permission to immerse oneself into Torah except before proper men."⁶² And although if one says the Shema at morning and at night he has fulfilled the Biblical precept "This book shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shall meditate therein day and night..." (Josh. 1:8), Simeon was apprehensive of making this known to the average ignorant individual.⁶³ He realized only too well that Torah study must be balanced by everyday work. "R. Simeon would take a basket on his shoulder saying: work is so great that it brings honor to its performers."⁶⁴

If then Simeon was aware that a life totally devoted to Torah study was unrealistic, perhaps there is another way to understand "devoting one's life entirely to Torah." We already know that the study of Torah was essential, but it is possible that Torah might also mean living "by" Torah. It need not always apply to study. Returning to the Ishmael-Simeon dispute, a closer look at the text will reveal that it does not say "When Israel studies their work shall be done by others," but rather "When Israel does the will of G-d..."⁶⁵ Should the "will of G-d" only apply to talmud Torah? Rather as we see also in Berakhot: "R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: The service of the Torah is

greater than the study thereof."⁶⁶

This discrepancy between devoting one's life to Torah and the dealing with the contemporary secular world undoubtedly posed a problem to Rabbi Simeon's idealism. This is illustrated when he suggested that perhaps G-d could create man with two mouths - one to study Torah, and one for secular needs.⁶⁷ He knew only too well the need for an emphasis upon Torah. And yet, he also knew that not everyone was a talmid hakham, a student of Torah. He knew man could not successfully live on Torah alone. In an attempt to reconcile the dichotome, Simeon responded by seemingly polarizing his attitude and putting solitary emphasis toward the one extreme: Torah.

NOTES UNIT III CHAPTER 1

1. Shabbat 147b: It is possible to interpret "lion" as referring to his temper or intolerance toward gentiles. However, it appears much more plausible that the nasi would want his son to study with a good, competent scholar and that being a "lion" would refer to Simeon's prowess as a teacher, not an intolerant individual. See Hyman III, p. 1186a.
2. P. Sanhedrin I:ii; ed. Krotoschin p. 19a. It should be noted, as we shall see later, that in context Akiba's statement is consolation for Simeon being chosen second behind Meir. However, it can hardly be assumed that Akiba would flatter Simeon simply to appease him. It is possible that in addition to being hurt, Simeon was overcome by a deep insecurity concerning his own abilities to which Akiba responded with positive reassurance. Whatever the case, it is still obvious that Rabbi Simeon was esteemed greatly in the eyes of his master.
3. Gittin 67a.
4. There is one example in particular where this is not the case. In P. Sanhedrin I:i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 18a, Simeon is quoted as saying, "Blessed be the All Merciful that I am not learned enough to judge." However, Urbach (vol. II, p. 962 #70) points out that "it is very possible that this blessing implies acceptance of the existing position -- that he need not be a judge in view of his experiences. This is attested by his criticism of the judges. . . ." See Genesis Rabbah 26:2; ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. I, p. 247 lines 7-9.
5. P. Sanhedrin I:i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 19a.
6. Gittin 67a.
7. Rosh Hashanah 18b.
8. Shabbat 147b.
9. On this, see Burgansky, p. 1553.
10. Tanhuma Buber "Ekev" ch. 3; ed. Buber (Deuteronomy) p. 17.
11. P. Peah I:i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 15d.
12. P. Peah I:i; ed. Krotoschin, p. 15d.
13. Avot de-Rabbi Natan 41:1; ed. Schechter, version "A", p. 130. See also M. Avot 4:13; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, p. 371.
14. Sifre "Beha'alotekha" ch. 92; ed. Horowitz, p. 92 line 21 - p. 93 line 4.

15. Genesis Rabbah 49:4; ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. II, p. 503 lines 4-6.
16. Berakhot 43b.
17. Avot de-Rabbi Natan 9:2; ed. Schechter, version "A", p. 39.
18. Sifre "Naso" ch. 1; ed. Horowitz, p. 4 lines 16-20.
19. Shabbat 118b.
20. Berakhot 7b.
21. Berakhot 7b.
22. Tanhuma Buber "Noah" ch. 8; ed. Buber (Genesis) p. 34.
23. Numbers Rabbah 10:3; ed. Warsaw, p. 87b-c.
24. Songs Rabbah 1:13; ed. Warsaw, p. 23a. See Psalm 29 in its entirety which speaks of the power of the voice (Kol) of G-d.
25. Genesis Rabbah 55:8; ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. II, p. 592 line 9 - p. 593 line 9.
26. "Plague" being in the singular.
27. Midrash on Samuel 31:3; ed. Buber, p. 93.
28. Mekhilta de Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai "Shemot" 3:2; ed. Epstein-Melamed. p. 1 lines 1-4.
29. Exodus Rabbah 15:6; ed. Warsaw, p. 142d.
30. Avot de-Rabbi Natan 30:4; ed. Schechter, version "A", p. 90.
31. Leviticus Rabbah 4:6; ed. Marguleis, vol. I, p. 91 line 4 - p. 92 line 3.
32. Frankel, p. 170.
33. Bacher II, p. 48.
34. According to Bacher, there are very few sayings of Simeon concerning theological inquiry. He seems to accept the status quo of rabbinic theology; Bacher II, p. 98.
35. Songs Rabbah 1:13; ed. Warsaw, p. 23a.

36. Numbers Rabbah 10:3; ed. Warsaw, p. 87b-c.
37. Numbers Rabbah 12:3; ed. Warsaw, p. 98b.
38. Numbers Rabbah 10:3; ed. Warsaw, p. 87b-c.
39. Genesis Rabbah 49:4; ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. II, p. 503 lines 4-6.
40. Deuteronomy Rabbah 4:4, ed. Warsaw, p. 148a.
41. M. Hagigah 1:7; ed. Albeck, vol. III, p. 393.
42. Shabbat 33b.
43. Sifre "Deuteronomy" ch. 11; ed. Finkelstein, p. 108 lines 12-15.
44. Deuteronomy Rabbah 8:7; ed. Warsaw, p. 153d.
45. ... which can be interpreted as referring to 'his own day' -- in the second century -- as opposed to this day of Deuteronomy.
46. Sanhedrin 110b.
47. Midrash on Psalms 17:4; ed. Buber, p. 127.
48. M. Sanhedrin 10:6; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, p. 205.
49. Urbach I, p. 348.
50. Bacher II, p. 58.
51. P. Berakhot IX:viii; ed. Krotoschin, p. 14d.
52. Tanna de-Bei Eliyahu Zuta ch. 16; ed. Shalom, M. A. (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 2nd printing, 1960) - under Pirkei Derskh Eretz ch. 1, pp. 1-2.
53. M. Sanhedrin 10:6; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, p. 205.
54. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 15:5; ed. Mandelbaum, vol I, p. 253 lines 6-9.
55. Berakhot 35b.
56. Shabbat 34a.
57. Burgansky, p. 1552.

58. Graetz II, p. 441. See also Berakhot 11a.
59. Baron II, p. 251.
60. Urbach I, p. 606.
61. Baron II, p. 251. Mekhilta "Beshallah" (Va Yisa) ch. 2; ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 161 lines 13-15.
62. P. Avodah Zara II:viii; ed. Krotoschin, p. 41d.
63. Menahot 99b. It appears that Simeon was fearful the masses should know this, for if so, they would say the shema twice daily, feel that they had fulfilled their obligation, and continue to neglect Torah.
64. Nedarim 49b. However, it is worth pointing out that this exact statement (except "carrying a pitcher on his shoulder") is attributed to R. Judah b. Ilai (also Nedarim 49b).
65. Berakhot 35b.
66. Berakhot 7b. Nonetheless, it is interesting and worthwhile to note the following story: "Once as R. Simeon b. Yohai went about visiting the sick, he found a certain man, afflicted and laid up with bowel sickness, uttering blasphemies against the Holy One, blessed be He. 'Wretch!' Rabbi Simeon cried, 'you should be beseeching mercy for yourself, and you utter blasphemies!' Said the man: 'May the Holy One, blessed be He, remove the sickness from me and lay it on you!' Thereupon R. Simeon exclaimed: 'Well has the Holy One, blessed be He, done with me, for I neglected the words of Torah and engaged in idle matters.'" Avot de-Rabbi Natan 41:1; ed. Schechter, version "A", p. 130. "... idle matters" here meaning bikur holim (visitation of the sick) or 'service of the Torah.'
67. P. Berakhot I:v; ed. Krotoschin, p. 3b.

Chapter 2.

At this juncture, having already established the primacy of Torah for Simeon b. Yohai, it follows that we should now proceed to investigate his particular methodology. It is not surprising that a tanna of the caliber of Simeon would have his own style and approach to exegesis. However, to adequately comprehend that methodology, an exposure to and understanding of his background is essential.

As noted several times previously, Simeon b. Yohai was a student of Rabbi Akiba. Having left his wife on his wedding day to go off to study,¹ he remained in B'nai B'rak with Akiba for thirteen years.² Consequently, Akiba's influence on Rabbi Simeon is rather profound. Akiba maintained that "every word in scripture and indeed every letter had significance."³ That is to say that when expositing the Torah absolutely nothing is meaningless. Most illustrative of this is the Akiban tendency to interpret the sign of the direct object: אֵת.⁴ In Pesikta de-Rav Kahana we observe Simeon commenting on Numbers 7:1. Although the translated verse reads "To establish the tabernacle..." the original Hebrew also has the definite article אֵת הַמִּשְׁכָּן. Simeon concludes that the sign of the direct object: אֵת, which by denoting a particular "tabernacle" indicates that there must be "another tabernacle" which is called the "Tent".⁵ Similarly, in Numbers Rabbah we also see Simeon b. Yohai interpreting the conjunctive "WAW", another distinctive Akiban characteristic. Commenting on Leviticus 1:1, he points out that the conjunctive "WAW" in "And He called..." indicates that before G-d spoke there was a pause. Simeon continues by noting

that this pause (and other pauses like it) were intended to allow Moses time to contemplate what G-d had said to him. By a fortiori reasoning it follows that if Moses should need time to contemplate what G-d has said, how much the more so each individual should consider what a friend or teacher says to him.⁶

This Akiban methodology was a very penetrating system. Nothing escaped notice, everything had a reason. Quite often in the Bible one encounters a double-usage of the root [אמר]. For example "And the Lord said to Moses saying (לאמר): So you shall say (ואמרת) to them... Thus, according to Simeon b. Yohai every place were אמר and אמרת

אליהם are together G-d should be regarded as speaking to all generations. But in those places where they are not together, then G-d was simply speaking to that moment, not to eternity.⁷ Similarly, wherever there is duplicity there must be a reason. Commenting on Exodus 3:4 "And He said: Moses, Moses..." Simeon concluded that the first time G-d said Moses it was in "love" whereas the second calling was in "exhortation."⁸

As alluded to earlier, however, Simeon was not always in agreement with Akiba. A particular phrase one finds Simeon b. Yohai using is: "There are four expositions among those given by R. Akiba with which I do not agree."⁹ The fact that Simeon must make special mention of his disagreement with Akiba is interesting in and of itself. In all probability there were more than four times that Simeon and Akiba could not agree, and that we might surmise that these particular arguments were significant enough to merit their preservation.¹⁰ Hence they also merit

consideration here.¹¹

The first disagreement is an exegesis on the word פִּנְסָה .¹² In context, we find Sarah observing Ishmael "making sport". Rabbi Akiba interprets this "making sport" as idolatry. He supports it with another proof text which utilizes the root פִּנְסָה . In that text the reference is to the incident of the Golden Calf.¹³ Akiba's midrash is followed by that of Eliezer b. Jose HaGalili. Eliezer interprets it as sexual depravity and bases his exegesis on the seduction of Joseph by the wife of Potiphar.¹⁴ There is also an exposition by Ishmael. Here he interprets the "making sport" as the spilling of blood, as he plays on the word יִסְחָק in II Samuel wherein Abner and Joab ask young men to "play" before them and it resulted in their murder.¹⁵ Simeon, on the contrary, cannot attribute such iniquitous ideas (idolatry, lewdness, murder) to the house of Abraham.¹⁶ Furthermore, unlike Akiba, Eliezer b. Jose HaGalili and Ishmael, Simeon does not go to another story to find support for his exegesis. Rather, dealing on a peshat level, he feels that Ishmael's making sport was connected with his inheritance as the first born. Indeed the issue of the inheritance is a major element of that story as Simeon points out by citing the next verse: "Sarah said unto Abraham: 'Cast out this bond woman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac (יִצְחָק)'".¹⁷

The second dispute revolves around G-d's reprisals for Israel's iniquity. Based on Numbers 11:22: "Shall flocks and herds be slain for them, to suffice (סָפֵק) them?...", Akiba is interpreting פִּנְסָה in terms of

the children of Israel (including Moses according to Rabbi Simeon) doubting whether or not G-d will send "enough" food to sustain them. In much the same manner as the argument above, Simeon cannot agree to implicate such a righteous individual as Moses to such an iniquitous act (questioning the power of G-d - to provide for Israel). Rather Simeon interprets $\overline{p\ b\ b}$ as Moses' questioning whether G-d's gifts could ever "satisfy" the Israelites. Therefore, unlike Akiba, Rabbi Simeon refuses to include Moses (or Abraham as we saw earlier) in the guilt of his contemporaries.

The third dispute also operates around the sins of Israel. The particular case is one of "inheriting the land". Based on Ezekiel 33:24 "Son of man, they that inhabit those waste places of the land of Israel speak, saying: Abraham was one man, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance", Akiba does a similar a fortiori reasoning saying that if Abraham worshipped one G-d and inherited the land, it should follow that we (the inhabitants of the waste places) who are many should also inherit the land. In line with Akiba, Rabbi Nehemiah says: "Just as Abraham who only had one son whom he sacrificed and inherited the land, should it not follow that we who have sons and daughters who sacrifice to idol worship should also inherit the land?" Then comes Rabbi Eliezer b. Jose HaGalili.¹⁸ His opinion is that "if Abraham, who had no one to rely on (ancestors), inherited the land, does it not follow that we, who have ancestors to rely upon (to pass on their inheritance), should also inherit the land?" Finally, Simeon b. Yohai

says that Abraham was only given one commandment¹⁹ and inherited the land, so these inhabitants of the waste places feel that since they have been commanded many mitzvot they should also inherit the land.

There can be no doubt that all are said in a facetious tone. Akiba as well as Simeon agree that these "inhabitants of those waste places of the land of Israel" do not merit the inheritance of the land. However their departure involves their evaluation of the sins of these people. Akiba (and Nehemiah like him) attribute "idol worship" to this generation. Simeon accuses them of eating torn flesh from a living animal, bowing down to idols, murder, sexual deviations, etc. One might think that Simeon's description of their iniquities is by far more serious than that of Akiba. However, as Lieberman has shown,²⁰ whereas according to Akiba they were entirely disgraceful being idolatrous, Simeon interprets them as being "wayward". That is, at least they accepted the yoke of the mitzvot and strayed, while Akiba's description portrays them as entirely iniquitous.

This then brings us to the fourth and final discrepancy. Here Akiba is enumerating the four minor fast days. They are: the 17th of Tammuz which is the fourth month which commemorates the time when a breach was made in the walls of Jerusalem; the 9th of Ab which is the fifth month commemorating the destruction of the Temple; the 3rd of Tishrey marking the murder of Gedaliah in this the seventh month; and finally the 10th of Tevet which happens to be the tenth month wherein the king of Babylon invested Jerusalem. Simeon on the other hand disagrees only with the

last fast. Whereas Akiba lists the fast days according to the order of the months, Simeon insists they should be ordered according to chronology. Hence, according to Simeon, the fast of the tenth month should be on the fifth day of Tevet (commemorating the day when the news of the destruction of Jerusalem came to the exiled Jews) if it is to be last in order. Otherwise, if it is on the tenth of the month commemorating the Babylonian king's investment of Jerusalem (which is chronologically first), then it should be mentioned first.

In reviewing these four differences of opinion it seems obvious that the fourth stands separate from the first three. The first three disputes, undoubtedly aggadic in nature, all revolve around iniquity and Israel. In each one Akiba is more condemning than is Simeon. The fourth argument however involves legalities. Although it is difficult to determine just why Simeon prefers "historical chronology" it is nevertheless apparent that the result is an halakhic discrepancy. That this was also the most substantive disagreement for Simeon is indicated in a manuscript version of Rav Hananel's commentary²¹ where he shows that the only halakhic dispute (not the only dispute as Lieberman points out) of these matters concerned the fast of the tenth month.²²

In attempting to categorize these differences of opinion between Akiba and Simeon it is apparent that the qualitative distinction is primarily one of content. In particular, the first three arguments all have exegeses wherein Simeon b. Yohai takes the least condemning or most positive attitude. In none of these is there an obvious departure of methodology.

However, the fourth midrash does show an indication of dissent on the part of Simeon regarding methodology. Here it is that Simeon is striving for continuity and simplicity. Although all of Akiba's exegeses are valid, Simeon is peculiarly disturbed by the chronologically first event being listed (and observed) last. In addition there is also an attempt on Simeon's behalf not to pervert or distort the truth. Albeit less subtle in the fourth dispute (where Simeon feels the observances must do justice to the historical), it is quite obvious in the first. Here Simeon, rather than looking to another biblical story to support his exposition, finds his answer in the context of the question. Ishmael was not involved in the "golden calf" incident, nor was he involved with the wife of Potiphar. Rather Simeon interprets Ishmael's "making sport" in connection with the actual context of that narrative: the problem of inheritance.

This approach which has Simeon looking for the most simple and accurate approach to scripture is somewhat reminiscent of the Ishmaelian methodology. For Rabbi Ishmael the Torah speaks in human language and can be understood accordingly. That Simeon utilized this Ishmaelian approach has been acknowledged by several scholars. Weiss admits that although having learned a great deal from Akiba, Simeon did not always agree with him. This manifested itself not only in small matters but in principle as well (in particular, Weiss notes that Simeon would not always translate or interpret "תקן").²³ Bacher also noted that Simeon would fluctuate between both Akiban and Ishmaelian methods.²⁴ However, the fact that Bacher says that Simeon "fluctuated," or as Weiss noted,

that Simeon did not "always" agree with Akiba, is significant. It is indicative that Simeon was not particular to either approach but in striving to derive the true or accurate exegesis he would utilize whatever methodology suited his needs.²⁵

Hence, on the one hand, we have observed Simeon utilizing the Akiban methodology, while on the other hand, we have also seen him at odds with his master. Never, however, do we find Simeon rejecting Akiba or his methodology. On the contrary, in the Sifra to Leviticus, in an apparent dispute with Akiba, Simeon emphasizes that "I am not arguing with my master; I am merely adding to his words."²⁶ Although a student of Akiba, he was also influenced by Ishmael. The result was the development of his own methodology. It was neither anti-Akiban nor anti-Ishmaelian - it was "in addition" to their approaches.

In many ways Simeon's approach to exegesis seems to have been a blend of Ishmaelian and Akiban ideologies. On the one hand, like Ishmael, Simeon b. Yohai does not seem to look for hidden meanings. Rather, in an attempt to understand the true meaning of Torah, Simeon opted to expound Scriptures according to the most obvious and simple explanation. On the other hand, as we saw earlier, according to Akiba's system everything has a purpose, nothing is meaningless. It is therefore not surprising that perhaps the most characteristic trait of Simeon's methodology is his affinity to search out the underlying meaning or rationale of a given biblical text.²⁷ Let us investigate this further.

Rabbi Simeon was very straightforward in his interpretations. He

has been described as one who "would speak plainly and simply."²⁸

This is not to say that his midrash was dry or uninteresting. On the contrary, he used some of the most colorful and powerful illustrations in the rabbinic literature. Nonetheless, a great deal of his expositions attempt to interpret the scripture or solve the problems therein according to the most simple or literal explanation. For example, in the Sifra Simeon asks: "Whence do we know that the Israelites set aside the priestly portions at Mount Sinai and that Aaron and his sons did not merit those portions until they first merited being annointed with oil? For the Torah teaches: "... these the Lord commanded to be given them, once they had been annointed, as a due from the Israelites for all time throughout all generations"(Lev. 7:36).²⁹ Here Simeon is unquestionably expounding according to the literal meaning. Similarly, commenting on G-d's supplying of quail until it becomes loathsome (see Num. 11:16-20) to those who eat it, Simeon remarks that this means that those who originally complained for it will in the end complain against it: "The quails will eventually become more loathsome to you than they are now desirable in your eyes."³⁰ Here also it is obvious that Simeon's explanation is by no means out of line with the meaning of the text. Again, in another literal interpretation: "R. Yohanan said in the name of Simeon b. Yohai: from the day that the Holy One, blessed be He, created His world there was no man that praised the Holy One, blessed be He, until Leah came and praised Him. For it is said: This time will I (Leah) praise the Lord" (Gen. 29:35),³¹ implying that this had never been done before.³²

All of this is not to say that Simeon always interpreted according to the peshat, or literal meaning. Were that the case it would be rather difficult to do any exegesis at all. And yet even then his expositions are sound, not far-fetched. In Genesis Rabbah commenting on "You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise" (Gen. 49:8), Simeon interprets this to mean that by "praise" they will call themselves by Judah's name (to be a Jew, not a Reubenite or Simeonite).³³ It seems that even when doing legitimate midrash, Simeon must do justice to the text. It would be wrong to distort the truth by reading into the context something that is not there. This was well illustrated in Tosefta Sotah where we observed Simeon and Akiba disputing over the meaning of "making sport - פנסו " in Genesis 21:9. Akiba attributed it to idolatry (which was not in the Genesis account), whereas Simeon interpreted it as referring to Ishmael's reaction to the inheritance (a major issue in context).³⁴

In line with Simeon's desire to interpret Torah as simply as possible is his ability to explain it in an equally simple manner. At the basis of rabbinic Judaism is the belief that the Written Law is often difficult to understand and therefore requires interpreters (i. e. rabbis) to make it more comprehensible. As an interpreter Simeon often utilized perhaps the most expedient tool in making the complex simple: the marshal (פסוק - parable). In trying to understand Genesis 4:10: "Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground," Simeon admits the difficulty of the verse, for it can be explained as being condemnatory toward G-d (for not saving Abel from his aggressive brother). Simeon

thus likens it to "two athletes who were fighting before the king. The king was in a position to intercede (and stop the fighting) but he did not. In the end one overcame the other and killed him. The victim cried out (before dying) and said: Let my cause ("I blame him for not saving me") be pleaded before the king."³⁵ By illustrating it thusly Simeon brings it to the level of the average individual. Similarly, Simeon would also show how biblical situations were also applicable in the lives of the average Jew. Commenting on Numbers 12:6: "Hear (שָׁמַעְתָּ) these my words," in a style reminiscent of Akiba, Simeon interprets אֱלֹהֵינוּ. Hence, when Miriam and Aaron wanted to enter into dialogue with G-d, G-d first asked (אָמַר) them to wait until He explained everything. Should it not be so much the moreso with us that we should not interrupt our friends (from speaking) until they have explained everything?³⁶

In an effort to accurately understand Torah, to make it simple and comprehensible, Simeon often had to go "beyond" the text. In an approach highly reflective of Akiban methodology (that everything in Torah has a meaning), Simeon would often look for the underlying meaning or rationale of a given Biblical text.³⁷ This is by no means, however, contradictory to his approach elaborated on above. In his striving for simplicity, Simeon "would look for consistency, and when a variant appeared, it had to be for a reason."³⁸ Thus, in explaining the double usage of the phrase

וְלִי אֱלֹהִים in Ezekiel 10:2, Simeon concludes that the duplicity was "meant" to be expounded upon (לְהַדְרֵם).³⁹ This element of Simeon's searching for the ultimate reasoning has become a trademark of

his methodology. Graetz indicated this when he wrote "the system of following out the reasoning of the law and thence drawing deductions was peculiar to Simeon. This was an improvement on Akiba's system."⁴⁰ Consequently, it is not surprising to see many of Simeon's teachings preceded by "Why is this? (?... מַה הַמִּשְׁפָּט)" or "What is the reasoning? (?... מַה הַדָּבָר)". In an aggadic example we see this illustrated with a mashal (מָשָׁל) or parable:

R. Simeon b. Yohai was asked by his disciples: Why did not the manna come down to Israel once annually? He replied: I shall give a parable: This may be compared to a mortal king who had one son, whom he provided with maintenance once a year, so that he would visit his father once a year only. Thereupon he provided for his maintenance everyday, so that he called on him everyday. The same with Israel. One who had four or five children would worry, saying: Perhaps no manna will come down tomorrow, and all will die of hunger. Thus they were found to turn their attention to their father in Heaven.⁴¹

I have purposely labeled this an aggadic example primarily to differentiate it from an halakhic or legal example. In fact, the majority of instances wherein Simeon searches out the underlying rationale are halakhic in nature. Although we can say many things about his methodology, the utilization of aggadic sources as support is incomplete at best. Whereas such exegesis may attempt to understand scripture by bringing it into focus, an investigation of halakhic methodology takes such an understanding from the ideal and inserts it into the concrete realm of the practical. It is therefore obligatory that we take into consideration the halakhic methodology of Simeon b. Yohai as well.

As one might expect, there are a great many similarities between the aggadic and halakhic works of Rabbi Simeon.⁴² Consequently, it is not at all surprising to find a strong utilization of midrashic exegesis in his halakhic methodology. For example, on numerous occasions involving halakhic decisions, Simeon relies entirely upon scripture as legitimization for his point of view. In Talmud Sanhedrin, Simeon b. Yohai is seen finding Toraitic support for burying one's dead, and more specifically, for not allowing a body to remain unburied all night. Hence, "his body shall not remain all night..." is an explicit negative command, while "you shall surely bury him" (Deut. 21:23) indicates the positive precept in mind.⁴³ Similarly, in Yevamot the question is raised whether a common priest may defile himself for a betrothed sister. Rabbis Meir and Judah (b. Ilai) agree that in such a case one may defile himself for his betrothed sister. Simeon then goes on to say however that one may defile himself if she is fit for a High Priest - that is, if she is a virgin. Leviticus 21:14 clearly states a High Priest may marry only a virgin, while earlier in the chapter (v. 3) the text specifies for whom a priest may defile himself, and when "sister" is mentioned the word "virgin" is added. Thus by means of Gezera Shava (since in both v. 3 and v. 4 the word "virgin" is used) Simeon b. Yohai argues a priest may only defile himself for his sister if she is a virgin.⁴⁴

In Baba Metzia the question arises concerning when one should not muzzle an ox: "... לא תחסום שור בליטו " (Deut. 25:4). Rabbi Jonathan asked Simeon b. Yohai⁴⁵ whether we should translate this "Do not muzzle

an ox while threshing" or "Do not thresh with a muzzled ox?" Rabbi Simeon affirmed the latter by means of an analogy. Citing the prohibition of entering into the tabernacle intoxicated, he reasoned the prefix "כ" in Leviticus 10:9, "Do not drink... when you enter (וּבְנִיכֶם)" can only mean not to drink before entering. It would be ridiculous to prohibit drinking only while entering. Similarly, in Deut. כ"ט must be understood to imply that the prohibition refers to an ox muzzled before and during the act of threshing. This analogy or hekesh is based on the similarity of the two biblical verses: both are prohibitions involving time. Hence, just as it would be ridiculous to prohibit a priest from drinking only while entering the tabernacle and so must refer to entering the tabernacle intoxicated, so the prohibition of the muzzling of an ox must mean the muzzling before the act of threshing is performed.⁴⁶

In another instance we see Judah and Simeon arguing over how many individuals are involved in the "laying on of the hands" ceremony. Utilizing the text: "And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands..." (Lev. 4:15), Rabbi Judah argues that וְסִמְּכּוּ implies two (being plural) while וְקָנְיָ also intimates two (being plural), and since no court can consist of an even number, a fifth is added. Simeon b. Yohai however, does not interpret וְסִמְּכּוּ for he feels it plays its own part in the text. Hence, Simeon says that the court need only be made up of three men (two for וְקָנְיָ plus one for the odd number).⁴⁷ In an almost identical dispute, trying to determine how many men are involved in breaking the heifer's neck, Judah says five while Simeon says three. Basing their

arguments on "And thy elders and thy judges shall come forth..." (Deut. 21:2), Judah feels "elders" and "judges" are referring to two different people (being plural, thus two elders and two judges plus one), whereas Simeon interprets "judges" as a modifying noun to "elders" and ignores the conjunctive waw⁴⁸ (indicating that these elders must also be judges). He thus asserts that only three are needed.⁴⁹

The fact that Simeon employs exegesis in his legal discussions is not the only similarity between his aggadic and halakhic works. In addition, the methodologies are also highly similar to each other. Just as we saw Simeon expositing according to the most simple and obvious meaning, and just as we observed how Simeon attempted to relate those teachings in a simple and non-confusing manner (by means of the parable), so too in his halakhic statements is there an emphasis upon organization and simplicity. He has been described as having been "systematic, clear, dogmatic,"⁵⁰ with a strong memory, the ability to crystallize everything and to eliminate that which was meaningless.⁵¹ In particular, it has been said concerning Simeon that he endeavored to categorize numerically, or enumerate, but in places where the number was not suitable, he then would establish general principles.⁵² An illustration of his establishment of "general rules" is found in Zevahim:

R. Simeon stated four general rules about sacrifices:

- 1) If he consecrated them when bamot (altars) were forbidden and slaughtered and offered them up when bamot were permitted, without, they are subject to a positive and negative injunction, and entail karet (cutting off - a kind of Divine punishment).
- 2) If he consecrated them when bamot were permitted

and slaughtered and offered them up when bamot were forbidden, without, they are subject to an affirmative and a negative injunction, and do not entail karet.

3) If he consecrated them when bamot were forbidden, and slaughtered and offered them up without when bamot were permitted, they are subject to an affirmative precept, but not a negative precept.

4) If he consecrated them when bamot were permitted and slaughtered and offered them up when bamot were permitted, he is not liable to anything at all.⁵⁴

There are also instances where Simeon goes beyond "general rules" and actually enumerates "specifics." For example:

Rabbi Simeon said: Four (kinds of slaves) are presented with gifts (on becoming free), three in the case of a man, and three in the case of a woman. And you cannot say four in the case of either, because (menstrual) 'signs' do not apply to a man, nor 'boring' (of an ear) to a woman.⁵⁵

As is obvious, Simeon "insisted on laying down clear limits."⁵⁶

There could be no room for doubt. Just as he was so concerned with not distorting the truth in his aggadic exegesis, so too in his halakhic methodology he tried to remove any room for doubt. This is also seen in yet a third characteristic of Simeon's methodology: his desire for decisiveness. In Tosefta Menahot he illustrates this when he says "all the standard measures of the Torah are fixed."⁵⁷ This tendency toward unquestionable limits is also seen in Tosefta Negaim:

Rabbi Simeon stated three rules from R. Akiba:

- 1) any garment, whether it is artificially or naturally colored, cannot contract uncleanness from leprosy-signs.
- 2) any house, whether it is artificially or naturally colored, can contract uncleanness from leprosy-signs.
- 3) naturally colored hides can contract uncleanness; if they are artificially colored, they cannot contract uncleanness.⁵⁸

This then brings us to the fourth⁵⁹ and perhaps most characteristic element of Simeon's methodology: the system of interpreting the reasoning for the biblical law in order to establish the halakhah. Indeed, in the Talmud Simeon is identified as the tanna who "always interprets the biblical law on the basis of its meaning."⁶⁰ An excellent illustration of this occurs in an argument over Deuteronomy 24:17 "you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge..." Rabbi Judah (b. Ilai) feels that this applies to all widows, rich or poor. Simeon, on the other hand, argues that the "reasoning" of the biblical verse was that one would not want to embarrass a widow if she could not repay her pledge... how much the more so a poor widow.⁶¹ Similarly, Simeon's refusal to accept at face value the biblical precept "an eye for an eye..." is seen when in an appeal for consistency ("you shall have one manner of law") he interprets the biblical law according to monetary compensation.⁶²

Here again, in searching out the reason, we also see Simeon striving toward simplicity ("you shall have one manner of law"). Indeed, although when dealing with this approach (searching for the reason) earlier we distinguished it from Simeon's inclination to interpret Scripture as simply as possible, Graetz has correctly shown that in reality they are very similar. "His reasoning with regard to biblical laws was always of a simple nature." It was merely a system whereby he would "follow out the reasoning of the (biblical) law and thence draw deductions."⁶³

Undoubtedly, a more penetrating question would be why did Simeon utilize such a methodology? What was it that made him so obsessive

toward continuity and simplicity? For what purpose would he search out a particular text's reasoning? Obviously, no easy solution exists. It is impossible to ever know with certainty the answers to the above questions. Nevertheless, if we assume that Simeon had a reason for such a methodology, it may be worthwhile to advance some possibilities.

As was explained in the previous chapter, it is highly possible that the circumstances surrounding Simeon's life in the second century were instrumental in determining Simeon's attitudes toward Torah and study. Similarly, if these external forces were dynamic enough to affect Simeon's attitudes, it would also seem likely that such circumstances might be influential regarding his halakhic concerns. Like the first century, second century Judaism in Palestine was a period of crisis. In such times ancient laws were not always applicable. Hence the Oral Law of rabbinic Judaism sought to expand and conform the religion of its fathers to the world of its own day. In many ways, Simeon's stress on "searching out the reasoning" is very much in line with rabbinic Judaism of the second century. Urbach asserts this in The Sages when he points out that "Simeon's view is... that the Torah did not reveal the reasons of its precepts, but left this matter to the sages."⁶⁴ He supports this by noting that "Simeon employed the expository method of the 'reason' of Scripture even where only Rabbinic enactments are involved. In this way he raises them to Torah status and creates thereby new halakhot."⁶⁵ Urbach however is not the only scholar to regard Simeon's methodology thusly. Seligson also notes that "the particular characteristic of Simeon b. Yohai's teach-

ing was that... he endeavored to find the underlying reason... This often resulted in a material modification of the command in question..."⁶⁶

Similarly, Weiss affirms the fact in seeking out the reasoning of a particular text, in the process he would also change the nature of the mitzvah. Weiss even mentions that at times Simeon would invent a reason from his own thinking to set bounds on a particular commandment.⁶⁷ An excellent illustration of this is to be found in Mishnah Yevamot regarding the issue of marrying specific nationalities:

An Ammonite and a Moabite are forbidden and their prohibition is forever. Their women, however, are permitted at once. An Egyptian and an Edomite are forbidden only until the third generation, whether they are males or females. R. Simeon, however, permits their women forthwith. Said R. Simeon: This law might be inferred a minori ad majus: if where the males are forbidden for all time the females are permitted forthwith,⁶⁸ how much more should the females be permitted forthwith where the males are forbidden until the third generation only.⁶⁹ They replied: if this is an halakhah we shall accept it. But if it is only an inference, an objection can be pointed out. He replied: not so.⁷⁰ (But in fact) it is an halakhah that I am reporting.⁷¹

Simeon later on explains that the Torah's rationale never intended to include women in the prohibition. He bases this on Deuteronomy 23:5 which explicitly states the reason of the prohibition was because "they did not meet you with food and water." According to Simeon this obligation is incumbent only upon the males.⁷² Here, then, Simeon is advancing his own exegesis as equal to that of Halakha. And yet, as adept as Simeon was at interpreting the "rationale" of biblical laws which often involved a "restructuring" of that law, it probably never would have occurred to

him that he might have been unjustified in doing so. On the contrary, the times demanded it. As Urbach has also indicated, "the attention paid to the reasons of the precepts emanated also from a practical need. Additions and adjustments were made to the laws and precepts in the course of their daily observance in everchanging circumstances. Often it was explained that it was precisely these innovations and amendments that fulfilled the basic reason of the commandment, whereas its literal observance nullified its original content."⁷³ However, Simeon's "interpreting the reason" is not the only element of his methodology that reflects his contemporary surroundings. Simeon's proclivity to organize, systematize and simplify may also be interpreted as being reflective of second century Palestine.

We shall consider two reasons why Simeon might have implemented such a methodology in that environment. The first is somewhat reminiscent of the old "divide and conquer" theory. In the second century the Jews of Palestine were undergoing threats from both without and within. From without is of course the ongoing threat of the Roman Empire, in addition to the rising challenge of Christianity. The threat from within, although more subtle, may in truth have been more serious. At the conclusion of the Bar Kokhba revolt, like seventy years previous, Jewish Palestine was disorganized. Akiba was dead. Yavneh was broken up. Furthermore, as we just saw how such demanding times could affect rabbinic legislation, it is not surprising that by virtue of "rabbinic license" there ensued a high degree of difference of opinion. Although the sur-

vivors attempted a physical reorganization at Usha, Simeon seems to have been aware that among individuals there was too much inconsistency. He indicated this when he said "You put the Law for each man into his own hand."⁷⁴ Similarly, this is recognizable when Simeon attempts a reconciliation between "(the Torah) shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their children" (Deut. 31:21) and "they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord and shall not find it" (Amos 8:12). According to the Amos verse, Simeon concludes this must mean "They will not find a clear halakhah or a clear mishnah in any place."⁷⁵ Freedman, in his notes to his translation (ed. Soncino) interprets a "clear halakhah or a clear mishnah" as "an absolute and definite ruling, completely intelligible and not subject to controversy."⁷⁶ Similarly, Adler concurs when noting "Rabbi Simeon is pointing out the danger that will arise when, because of the multiplicity of opinions, there will be no one clear and definite ruling."⁷⁷

Consequently, Simeon seems to respond by striving for cohesiveness through continuity. As Urbach has shown, "the freedom and multiplicity of the expositions cast doubt on the unity of the one Torah, for the disputes increased and the authority to decide declined. Rabbi Simeon... insisted on laying down clear limits..."⁷⁸

The second reason why Simeon was so concerned with coherency and simplicity may in fact be more reflective of Simeon than of his environment. By making the laws intelligible, one also makes them easier to follow. Consequently, by making laws easier to maintain, one also in-

creases their potentiality of being fulfilled. This makes even more sense if we accept the idea advanced in the previous chapter that Simeon considered the observance of Torah as a protective shield, or as "a weapon to its possessor."⁷⁹ That this is particularly representative of Simeon is further demonstrated in many of his halakhic decisions. By and large, Simeon b. Yohai was lenient in halakhah.⁸⁰ For example, here are several illustrations involving observance and their conflict with contemporary surroundings. In each, Rabbi Simeon takes a lenient stand:

If a gentile was found standing by the side of a wine vat and he had a lien upon the wine, it is forbidden; but if he had not, it is permitted. If a gentile fell into it and came up again, or if he measured it with a reed, or flicked out a hornet with a reed, or if he patted the mouth of a frothing jar - these cases all happened and the sages said: It must be sold. But R. Simeon permits it. If he took a jar and in his anger threw it into the vat - this once happened and they declared the wine fit.⁸¹

What is an asherah? Any (tree) beneath which there is an idol. R. Simeon says: any tree which is worshipped. It happened at Sidon that there was a tree which was worshipped and they found a heap of stones beneath it. R. Simeon said to them: examine this heap. They examined it and discovered an image in it. He said to them: Since it is the image that they worship, we permit the tree for you.⁸²

Our rabbis taught: All must observe the law of tzitzit; priests, levites, and Israelites, proselytes, women and slaves. R. Simeon declares women exempt, since it is a positive precept dependent on a fixed time, and women are exempt from all positive precepts that are dependent on a fixed time.⁸³

If a man wrote (on his skin) pricked-in writing (he is culpable). If he wrote but did not prick it in, or

pricked it in but did not write it, he is not culpable, but only if he writes it and pricks it in with ink or eye-paint or aught that leaves a lasting mark. R. Simeon b. Judah says in the name of R. Simeon: He is not culpable unless he writes there the name (of G-d), for it is written, 'Nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord' (Deut. 19:28).⁸⁴

Simeon b. Yohai says: 'Eye for eye' means pecuniary compensation. You say pecuniary compensation, but perhaps it is not so, but actual retaliation (by putting out an eye) is meant? What then will you say where a blind man put out the eye of another man, or where a cripple cut off the hand of another, or where a lame person broke the leg of another? How can I carry out in this case (the principles of retaliation) 'eye for eye', seeing that Torah says, 'You shall have one manner of law', implying that the manner of law should be the same in all cases...?⁸⁵

By a lenient stance, Simeon could make Torah more accessible and less burdening to the average individual. By striving for consistency Simeon could hope to bring more organization and less confusion to contemporary Jewish life. But most of all, as we just saw above, by making an attempt to legitimately understand the reasoning of a given law, Simeon could enable Torah to have relevance and meaning for the Jews of second century Palestine. Taking this into consideration we can see how other scholars had respect for Simeon, regarding him as a reliable and responsible authority.⁸⁶

This then brings us to one final question. What was Simeon's historical place in the Halakhah? As is apparent, Simeon b. Yohai appears quite often in the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash.⁸⁷ This is not surprising however, for as we saw earlier, Simeon was one of Akiba's choice students. In particular we can narrow down the number of exceptional

students of Akiba to four: Judah b. Ilai, Meir, Jose b. Halafta and Simeon b. Yohai. (Nehemiah may also be added, although the majority of halakhic decisions involving Simeon in the Mishnah and Talmud, he is seen with Judah, Meir and Jose.)⁸⁸ Of these students he usually sided with Jose on halakhic matters, disputing with Judah and Meir. Predominantly his major opponent was Judah.⁸⁹ Although there are many halakhic instances we could observe wherein Simeon and Judah are at odds, I feel the following aggadic examples illustrate their polarity satisfactorily:

A man once said to his wife, 'Konam'⁹⁰ that you benefit not from me until you make R. Judah and R. Simeon taste of your cooking.' R. Judah tasted thereof, observing, 'It is but logical (that I should do so): if, in order to make peace between husband and wife, the Torah commanded, "Let My Name, written in sanctity, be dissolved in "the waters that curse" (Nu. 5:23), though it is but doubtful, how much the moreso I!' R. Simeon did not taste thereof, exclaiming, 'Let all the widows' children perish, rather than Simeon be moved from his standpoint, lest they fall into the habit of vowing.'⁹¹

Isbian figs were placed before R. Judah and R. Simeon. R. Judah ate; R. Simeon did not. R. Judah asked him, 'Why are you, sir, not eating?' He replied, 'These never pass out at all from the stomach.' But R. Judah retorted, 'All the more (reason for eating them), as they will sustain us tomorrow.'⁹²

However, there are two questions from the tannaitic level which merit our consideration. Having already noted above⁹³ that Simeon's name is mentioned in the Mishnah over three hundred times, it is also interesting that aside from 184 disputes with the anonymous Mishnah⁹⁴ Simeon is also involved in over eighty legal arguments with contemporary

individual tannaim. Of those arguments, Simeon's name is mentioned last over seventy-five percent of the time.⁹⁵ If we can infer from previous generations that the last ruling is authoritative,⁹⁶ is it possible to maintain that Simeon's view in these discussions is decisive?⁹⁷ The second question is partially dependent on the outcome of the first. If Simeon's view was more authoritative in these various mishnahs, for what reason would Akiba choose Meir over Simeon to continue the chain of tradition?⁹⁸

There are no easy answers to these questions. We can never know for sure the meaning implicit in Simeon being mentioned last, nor can we ever hope to know what it was that made Akiba prefer Meir. Perhaps a more accurate question might be "what was it that made Akiba reject Simeon?" Could it be that Simeon took too lenient a stance, too often? Perhaps Akiba did not trust Simeon as a "link in the chain?" Was there something in Simeon's personality that Akiba (and others) might have found objectionable? These may all have validity, but in fact there is a myriad of possibilities. Nevertheless, although Simeon was relegated to a role of secondary importance behind Meir, the fact remains that he left his imprint on rabbinic scholarship. The desire to exposit according to the true meaning of a biblical verse and his recognition of the need for simplicity and consistency in rabbinic exegesis and legislation was highly respected by his contemporaries. But perhaps most of all, Simeon's contribution of basing contemporary observances upon the "underlying rationale" of a given law was a perspective that has never been lost from Judaism.

NOTES UNIT III CHAPTER 2

1. Ketuvot 62b.
2. Leviticus Rabbah 21:8; ed. Marguleis, vol. III, p. 484 line 6 - p. 485 line 1.
3. Finkelstein, p. 89.
4. According to grammar, it cannot be translated.
5. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 1:5; ed. Mandelbaum, vol.I, p. 11 lines 1-3.
6. Numbers Rabbah 14:35; ed. Warsaw, p. 114 c-d.
7. Mekhilta "Beshallah" (VaYehi) ch. 1; ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 83 lines 1-3.
8. Exodus Rabbah 2:12; ed. Warsaw, p. 129d.
9. For the various forms which this phrase takes, see M. Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshuta (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1967) Sotah, p. 669.
10. It is highly possible that such an initiatory phrase may be indicative of a later sage's means of memorizing various statements. Consequently, by using a "catchy" phrase after which a number of quotes are itemized, a tanna or memorizer can retain quantity as well as quality.
11. This particular text comes from Tosefta Sotah 6:6-11; ed. Lieberman, Nashim vol. II, pp. 184-190 (Vienna Manuscript).
12. Genesis 21:9.
13. Exodus 32:6.
14. Genesis 39:7
15. II Samuel 2:14-16.
16. The fact that Simeon mentions the other opinions of Eliezer and Ishmael according to Lieberman might suggest that Simeon was really aware of their expositions and thus, they were not additions. For a complete discussion, see Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshuta, p. 671.
17. Genesis 21:10.
18. It is significant to note that in the Erfurt manuscript Nehemiah's and Eliezer's names are reversed. This is interesting, for this third

opinion is less derogatory than that of Akiba, and in the Ehrfurt text it even follows Simeon's statement. Furthermore, one will recall that in the first dispute Eliezer b. Jose ha-Galili spoke in accordance with Akiba, perhaps indicating that Nehemiah's statement is in accordance with Simeon, not Akiba - see Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshuta, p. 674.

19. Brit milah.
20. Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshuta, pp. 673-674.
21. As quoted by Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshuta, p. 669.
22. See also Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshuta, p. 669.
23. Weiss II, p. 142 and note #1 (same page). I have added the word "always" here (referring to Simeon's interpreting of "תמיד") for there are some places where he does interpret "תמיד"; see also notes #4 and #5 of this chapter.
24. See Bacher II, pp. 67-68.
25. That this is true is also recognizable in an apparent contradiction involving two separate statements from the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. In Sanhedrin we read: "The rabbis hold that סתירה (or סתירה - written text) is determinant in Biblical exegesis, while Rabbi Simeon holds that the סקרא (or קרי - pronounced text) is determinant" (Sanhedrin 4a). However, in the Jerusalem Talmud, in a dispute with Rabbi Judah over the redemption of a house in a walled city, the two rabbis cite the same verse: "Then the house that is in the walled city" (Lev. 25:30). However, Simeon b. Yohai reads סתירה (written text) and not the קרי (which he held to be determinant in Sanhedrin 4a); P. Ma'aserot III:xi; ed. Krotoschin, p. 51a.
26. Sifra "Leviticus" 2:12; ed. Weiss p. 4a-b.
27. In reality, this attempt on my part to categorize the Ishmaelian and Akiban influences is somewhat forced. Nevertheless, I feel that these two elements (of striving for simplicity and searching for the underlying meaning) are representative of the respective Ishmaelian and Akiban systems, and furthermore, are instrumental in illustrating the various influences upon Simeon.
28. Weiss II, p. 142 and #4 (same page).
29. Sifra "Tsav" 18:2; ed. Weiss, p. 40b.
30. Leviticus Rabbah 18:4; ed. Marguleis, vol. II, p. 410 lines 2-3. See

also Leviticus Rabbah 18:4 (trans.). Israelstam (London: Soncino Press, 1939) p. 232 #4.

31. Berakhot 7b.
32. Berakhot 7b, trans. Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1948) p. 35 #5.
33. Genesis Rabbah 98:6; ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. III, p. 1257 lines 8-10.
34. See note #17 above in this chapter.
35. Genesis Rabbah 22:9; ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. III, p. 1257 lines 8-10.
36. Sifre "Beha'alotekha" ch. 103; ed. Horowitz, p. 101 lines 7-10. Note the similarity to Numbers Rabbah 14:35; ed. Warsaw, p. 114c-d, as quoted above (#6) in this chapter.
37. It is certainly worth noting that in some cases Simeon's searching for the reason would take him beyond the text and might result by being in conflict with a particular Akiban interpretation (which is based on the text).
38. Bacher II, p. 68.
39. Lamentations Rabbah 1:43; ed. Warsaw, p. 90d. See also #7 above in this chapter.
40. Graetz II, p. 441.
41. Y ma 76a.
42. Although most scholars acknowledge the presence of both Akiban and Ishmaelian characteristics in the writings of Simeon, among some there is a tendency to distinguish between the aggadic and the halakhic. In particular, as Burgansky has shown, "in halakhic midrash he followed Akiba" (Burgansky, p. 1553), while Seligson felt that whereas his "halakhah was rationalistic" his "aggadah contained a strange mysticism" (Seligson, p. 362).
43. Sanhedrin 43b. Interestingly enough, Simeon here is "interpreting" the text, for in context the biblical verse is not speaking about "any" corpse, but rather that of a criminal who has been hanged. Hence, the full text should read: "His body shall not remain all night upon the tree...."
44. Yevamot 60a-b.

45. Baba Metzia 90b, trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1935), p. 521 #9.
46. Baba Metzia 90a-b.
47. Sanhedrin 13b.
48. Which is rather "un-Akiban;" see note #6 above in this chapter.
49. Sanhedrin 14a. The end result is that the text seems to be in agreement with Judah. Indeed, his reasoning is more consistent than that of Simeon, although we are never told why Simeon would insist on three. Nonetheless, it seems obvious that he had a reason for neglecting to interpret the conjunctive waw.
50. Seligson, p. 362.
51. Bacher II, p. 46.
52. Weiss II, p. 142.
- 53.
54. Zevachim 119b.
55. Kiddushin 16b.
56. Urbach I, p. 301.
57. Tosefta Menahot 8:8; ed. Zuckermann, p. 523 lines 31-32.
58. Tosefta Negaim 5:3; ed. Zuckermann, p. 623 lines 30-34.
59. These four classifications are so designated by Frankel, pp. 170-171.
60. Sanhedrin 16b.
61. Baba Metzia 115a.
62. Baba Kamma 84a.
63. Graetz II, p. 441.
64. Urbach I, p. 376. An example of Simeon asserting his "rabbinic license" and affirming the Oral Law can be found in Mekhilta "Beshallah" (VaYehi) ch. 1; ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 83 lines 1-3: "R. Simeon b. Yohai says: When in any commandment to the people Scripture uses the expression 'saying - לֵאמֹר ' and 'and you shall say unto them -

ואמרת אליהם "that command is for all generations. When neither "saying" nor "and you shall say unto them" is used, it is only for the moment."

65. Urbach I, p. 376.
66. Seligson, p. 361.
67. Weiss II, p. 141.
68. Ammonites and Moabites.
69. Egyptians and Edomites.
70. "Even though the ruling were based on an inference no valid objection could be raised against it." Yevamot 76b, trans. Israel W. Slotki (London: Soncino Press, 1936) p. 516 #13.
71. M. Yevamot 8:3; ed. Albeck, vol. III, pp. 42-43.
72. Yevamot 771. See also Urbach I, pp. 376-377.
73. Urbach I, p. 373. Indeed, albeit Simeon may have "interpreted" the laws, he had the utmost respect for tradition, as we observed in his exegesis. In particular, Simeon stresses the importance of maintaining tradition when commenting on "Do not remove the ancient landmark which our fathers have set" (Prov. 22:28), he says: "Do not alter the customs which our forefathers did..." Midrash on Proverbs 22:28; ed. Buber, p. 93.
74. M. Shevi'it 2:1; ed. Albeck, vol. I, p. 140.
75. Shabbat 138b-139a.
76. Shabbat 138b-139a, trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1938) p. 700 #3.
77. Morris Adler, The World of the Talmud (New York: Schocken, 1963), p. 37.
78. Urbach I, p. 301. Urbach continues to show that it was the same Simeon who "came to the conclusion that only Elijah would compose the differences of opinion and integrate the Torah again into a single whole..." M. Eduyot 8:7; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, p. 317.
79. Numbers Rabbah 12:3; ed. Warsaw, p. 98b. See Unit II, ch. a, #37.
80. See Frankel, p. 172.

81. M. Avodah Zara 4:10; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, p. 339.
82. M. Avodah Zara 3:17; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, pp. 334-335.
83. Menahot 43a.
84. M. Makkot 3:6; ed. Albeck, vol. IV, p. 231.
85. Baba Kamma 84a.
86. Note in particular the many times students and scholars (including Akiba) would consult Simeon on the reasoning of a certain law (מה תעשה? מה תעשה?), and also R. Joshua b. Levi's remark in Berakhot 9a: "R. Simeon is a great enough authority to be relied upon in a case of emergency."
87. Specifically, Hyman notes that Simeon is involved in 323 halakhic disputes in the Mishnah, Hyman III, p. 1184a.
88. In the Mishnah, in all but one place, Simeon b. Yohai is identified merely as R. Simeon. The solitary exception is M. Hagigah 1:7; ed. Albeck, vol. I, p. 393.
89. See Frankel, p. 173.
90. An expression used in taking a vow of abstinence.
91. Nedarim 66b.
92. Nedarim 49b.
93. See note #87 in this chapter. All these figures are recorded in Hyman III, pp. 1182-1184.
94. In which case the anonymous mishnah is authoritative. See #93 above.
95. Actually, of 81 disputes, only nine times does Simeon's name appear anything but last. See #93 above.
96. Shamma and Hillel; Ishmael and Akiba.
97. The actual question should be, "Why is Simeon mentioned last? Could it be to designate the deciding opinion, or is it coincidence, or was it the tanna's means of remembering R. Simeon's opinion (that is, as we saw above, Simeon who so often took a lenient position -- could it be that the recorder as a rule put Simeon last for he always offered a particular position?, i. e. lenient)?"

98. In particular, Simeon and Meir alone are involved in twelve arguments, ten of which Simeon is mentioned last (Hyman III, p. 1183). See also P. Sanhedrin I:ii; ed. Krotoschin, p. 19a or #5 of chapter 1 of this unit.

Chapter 3.

Undoubtedly the most difficult aspect of Simeon b. Yohai to understand would be his personality. Separated in time by almost two millenia, any attempt to accurately reconstruct the minute personal characteristics of a given individual is futile. However, if our goal is to shed even a spark of light on a person so shaded by mystery, such a study cannot be complete without even trying to comprehend what kind of man he was. Operating in much the same manner as we did in Unit II, we shall first consider the secondary sources. Then, after having established a suitable consensus of opinion regarding Simeon's personality makeup, we will proceed to investigate the primary tannaitic and amoraic sources in order to determine whether or not history has done credit to the person of Simeon b. Yohai.

Modern scholarship's attitude toward Rabbi Simeon has been somewhat less than positive. In fact, excepting his particular teachings, Simeon has been treated in a most negative manner. Most scholars would probably concur that above all, Simeon b. Yohai was exceptionally egocentric. Urbach has called him "an absolute individualist..."¹ For Bacher, he was "conceited."² Louis Finkelstein, in his book Akiba: Scholar, Saint and Martyr, has termed Simeon a near "megalomaniac."³ There are, in addition, other traits scholars have labeled Simeon with. Finkelstein also points out that Simeon had neither "the wit or impulse to conceal his vanity."⁴ Urbach continued to portray him negatively as an individual "who esteems the person who acquires perfection by the hard way of suffering and tribulation... (being) disinclined to reconcile

himself to human weaknesses."⁵ Salo Baron concurred depicting this man as "intransigent,"⁶ "intolerant and impulsive."⁷ On the other hand, although not full of praise, Graetz in one portrayal was certainly not as demeaning. "Simeon b. Yohai was as striking but not so many sided a personage as Meir... he was rather matter-of-fact than of an imaginative turn of mind."⁸ Finally, Burgansky avoided the entire issue by using a highly ambiguous term: "charismatic."⁹ In any event, disregarding the particulars, it is safe to assume that there does exist a consensus of opinion, and it is not very complimentary.

The question now arises: How true are these appraisals? At the risk of sounding redundant, there is no certain way to know. Nevertheless, inasmuch as these scanty rabbinic sources are all we possess, it should be worthwhile to investigate these pericopae and extract whatever insights are possible. Proceeding in the proper order, this investigation shall begin with the allegation of "Simeon b. Yohai as an egotist."

As illustrated in chapters 1 and 2 of this unit, it appears that a man possessing the rabbinic skills of Simeon would have reason to be haughty. He demonstrated himself to be an insightful homilistician as well as a conscientious legislator earning the respect and admiration of his colleagues. However, as is common with persons plagued by excessive egotism, "Rabbi Simeon had no need of the esteem of others..."¹⁰ Rather, it was far more important to affirm that "greatness" himself. This is illustrated most thoroughly and clearly in the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana.¹¹ In Piska 11, part of which is an elaborate aggadic representation of Sim-

eon b. Yohai (and son), in addition to observing his miraculous powers, one is also confronted with Simeon's acknowledging of those traits.

R. Simeon b. Yohai used to say, Let Abraham bring close to G-d the people from his generation to my generation, and I will bring close to Him the people from my generation to the generation of the time when the king Messiah comes. And if Abraham is unwilling, let Ahijah the Shilonite join me, and he and I will bring close to G-d all the world's inhabitants.¹²

In that same chapter there is another illustration of Simeon acknowledging his miraculous powers wherein he returns from the dead to converse with Elijah and R. Joshua b. Levi (third century).

Elijah, may he be remembered for good, and R. Joshua b. Levi sat together expounding Torah. When they came to a certain traditional interpretation transmitted in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai, R. Simeon b. Yohai himself happened to pass by. So they said: Here comes in person the transmitter of the interpretation. Let us rise and ask him to state it. When they proceeded to ask him, R. Simeon b. Yohai inquired of Elijah: "Who is this with you?" Elijah replied: It is Joshua b. Levi, and he is the greatest man of his generation. R. Simeon b. Yohai asked: "Is the rainbow seen in his days?" Elijah answered: "Yes." Then R. Simeon b. Yohai remarked: If the radiance of the rainbow is seen in his days, he is not up to beholding the radiance of my countenance.¹³

Simeon's reference to the "rainbow" has been explained as "the rainbow in the sky, the token of G-d's pledge never again to bring a flood, which according to R. Simeon b. Yohai, does not appear in the sky during the lifetime of one like himself who in his own person is a rainbow."¹⁴ However, if Simeon's self-assuredness is implied in these two accounts, it is unquestionably explicit in this third text from Pesikta de-Rav Kahana:

According to R. Simeon b. Yohai, the Holy One, swore to our father Abraham that the world would never be

without thirty righteous men like him. And the proof? The verse 'Abraham shall surely become (אֲבִרָא) a great nation (Gen. 18:18), the numerical value of the letters in אֲבִרָא = 10, א = 5, ר = 10, א = 5, adding up to thirty. But R. Simeon concluded, if there be only one righteous man in my generation, I am the one.¹⁵

In another source (Midrash on Samuel) Simeon quotes his famous statement found in Mishnah Avot concerning the three crowns of study of Torah, the priesthood and royalty. However, here Simeon continues to expound that whereas David merited the crown of royalty and Aaron the crown of priesthood, the crown of the study of Torah is available to all. Nevertheless, Simeon also maintains that were it still possible to achieve the crowns of priesthood and royalty, Simeon himself would merit them.¹⁶

Of all these texts, perhaps the most amazing is one wherein Rabbi Simeon equates his preferences with those of G-d.

R. Simeon b. Yohai observed: There are four things which the Holy One, blessed be He, hates, and as for me, I do not like them: The man who enters his house suddenly and much more so (if he so enters) his friend's house,¹⁷ the man who holds the membrum when urinating, the man who when naked urinates in front of his bed,¹⁸ and the man who has intercourse in the presence of any living creature.¹⁹

The problems arising with these pericopae however, are that they are all (or at least those elements within them denoting "egotism") suspect. For example, the first three quotes, all from Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, are in a sermon partially devoted to praising particular personages. A closer look at Piska 11:15-24 will reveal that it deals entirely with Rabbi Simeon and his son Eleazar. Furthermore, the nature of the material is exceptionally aggadic, praising the miraculous powers of R.

Simeon b. Yohai. Finally it is essential to point out that many if not all of these accounts were transmitted from R. Hizkiah in the name of R. Jeremiah. By virtue of the fact that these two names are the only names of transmitters mentioned, it is highly possible that they not only are responsible for all the passages contained therein, but are also of a later school of R. Simeon b. Yohai. It follows that being from the school of Simeon they would not want to say anything derogatory but rather statements of praise. Finally, inasmuch as these statements were in all probability transmitted from a generation later than that of Simeon, their value as documents verifying Simeon's egotism is highly questionable.

Regarding the text from Midrash on Samuel, this too is possibly unreliable. Although in Midrash on Samuel the entire quote is preceded by ^בוּרְבִי, perhaps being indicative of its tannaitic origin, we must also remember that in Mishnah Avot the section dealing with Simeon meriting the crowns of priesthood and royalty is missing. Although both Mishnah Avot and Midrash on Samuel may be considered late works, the fact that the two texts do not duplicate each other leaves room for doubt. Finally, as we saw in the preceding chapter, any statement which is initiated by a distinctive formulated phrase may be the sign of a later editor. In Niddah, Rabbi Simeon's statement begins "There are four things which the Holy One, blessed be He, hates and as for me, I do not like them..." In addition, on the same page (17a) we find R. Simeon saying: "There are five things which (cause the man) who does them to forfeit his life and his blood is upon his own head..." As stated previously, such phrases

may be indicative of a later sage who used them in order to facilitate memorization.

On the other hand, simply because these texts are questionable is not definite proof that Simeon was "not" egotistical. Indeed, even if late in origin, they all connote a strong degree of self-esteem on Simeon's behalf. It seems doubtful that such a consensus of opinion was coincidental, or fictitious. As a matter of fact, such a characteristic for Simeon might make sense. Taking into consideration Akiba's rejection,²⁰ it would be very natural for Simeon's response to be one of overcompensation. This is substantiated by not only his immediate reaction ("turning pale" - an indication of disappointment), but his abstention from Usha and removal to Tekoa may also be indicative of a counter-rejection of his "Akiban" contemporaries. Nevertheless, although such psychoanalysis is in itself suspect, as shown above, the fact that such a quote in Niddah is initiated by such a "catch-phrase" does not necessitate that what follows is fictitious. On the contrary, it is highly possible that those statements of R. Simeon are correctly attributed. This then brings us to the second topic of inquiry: the negative attitudes of Rabbi Simeon:

One of the seemingly distinct characteristics of Simeon b. Yohai is his harsh and extreme attitudes toward things or types of individuals. This was clearly evident in the Niddah passages wherein Rabbi Simeon explicitly outlines what types of individuals or what particular actions are detestable to him. There are nine listed in that passage:

- 1) the man who enters his house suddenly and much moreso if he so enters his friend's house
- 2) the man who holds the membrum when urinating
- 3) the man who when naked urinated in front of his bed
- 4) the man who has intercourse in the presence of any living creature
- 5) (the man) who eats peeled garlic, a peeled onion, or a peeled egg
- 6) (the man) who drinks diluted liquids that were kept overnight
- 7) (the man) who spends a night in a graveyard
- 8) (the man) who removes one's nails and throws them away in a public thoroughfare
- 9) blood letting followed immediately by intercourse.²¹

Inherent in all these ideas is a very negative perspective of man. This is not to say that Simeon would deny the existence of free will. Rather, he is apparently wary of the Yetzer haRa, the evil inclination. This is illustrated in the Tanhuma where Simeon b. Yohai stated that G-d will not write His Name upon the righteous when they are alive. Why? "Because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not believe that they will not be led astray by the evil inclination. Thus, at death, then G-d writes His Name upon them."²²

Far from being a second century Calvinist, Simeon was not out to condemn all of mankind. However, there were certain types of individuals or transgressions upon which Simeon did centralize his disapproval. In particular, Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai rarely had anything good to say about women and in addition, sexual offenses were on the top of his list. A favorite illustration of his portrayal of the archetype woman (as seen in Eve) is found in the Avot de-Rabbi Natan:

Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai says: I shall tell thee a

parable; to what may Adam be likened? To one who had a wife at home. What did that man do? He went and brought a jar and put into it figs and nuts, a definite number of them. Then he caught a scorpion and put it at the mouth of the jar. The jar he sealed with a tight-fitting lid and put it in a corner. "My dear," he said to her, "everything I have in this house is in thy hands except this jar which thou mayst not touch at all." What did the woman do? As soon as her husband left for the market place, she arose and opened the jar and stuck her hand into it - and the scorpion stung her. She started back and fell on the couch. When her husband returned from the market place, he exclaimed, "What is this?" "I put my hand on the jar," she replied, "and a scorpion stung me; and now I'm dying!" "Did I not tell thee so in the beginning," he demanded, "everything I have in the house is in thy hands, except this jar which thou mayst not touch at all?" Forthwith he grew angry with her and sent her away.²³

As seen in chapter 2 of Unit II, Simeon did not have much trust in women: "Women are of unstable temperament..."²⁴ More specifically, Simeon particularly lashed out at sexual transgressions. As we saw in Niddah, four of the nine enumerated acts involved sexual behavior. There are many other passages which also reflect Simeon's bent toward sex. In Talmud Yeru halmi, Rabbi Simeon is found expositing Numbers 11:10: "Moses heard the group weeping..." According to Rabbi Simeon, they were crying about the six prohibitions concerning nakedness which Moses had stipulated.²⁵ Similarly, while commenting upon Numbers 11:4: "The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving...", Simeon interprets their craving as not for food but to have those sexual prohibitions lifted.²⁶ Simeon's attitude is also demonstrated in his treatment of Solomon. In particular, there is a story found in the Tanhuma in which the Torah is seen complaining before G-d that Solomon's life-style is contradictory

to the Torah. In Deuteronomy 17:16-17 the text stipulates "he shall not have many wives... he shall not keep many horses... nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess." Solomon of course had all these things. G-d reassures the Torah, however, that "Solomon and one thousand like him will perish from the world, but not one letter will ever be negated from the Torah. What causes this? Because (Solomon) busied himself in things for which he had no need..."²⁷

Anything that seemed a waste, or anything that was not devoted to Torah was worthless. Consequently, Simeon also had a rather negative attitude toward the wealthy. In the Midrash on Psalms we find Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai stating: "In this world the rich consumes the poor, but in the world to come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will take it away from them..."^{28, 29} In a somewhat more subtle aggadah, the extremes of monetary riches and the wealth of Torah are juxtaposed:

Simeon b. Yohai had a friend who lived near him in Tyre. Once when he visited him he heard his servant say to him: What are we going to have today, thin or thick lentil soup? He replied: Thin. He began speaking (contemptuously of him) with him and his friend noticed him, whereupon he sent to his household saying: Prepare for me all those silver vessels of mine. He then said to R. Simeon: Would you do us the honor to drink with us today? He said: Yes. When he went to the house he saw all the silver vessels and was astonished and said: Can a man with all that money dine off lentil broth? Said the other to him: That is so sir. You scholars command respect through your learning, but we- if we have not the money, no one respects us.³⁰

All things considered, Simeon b. Yohai did not appear reluctant in expressing his feelings toward people and things that bothered him. This

was particularly well illustrated in the "cave" incident, wherein Simeon condemned those not involved in Torah. Indeed he was rather specific in his condemnation. The question then arises: was Simeon similarly as negative and expressive with people around him? As difficult as it is to ascertain, a number of observations merit mention here. It is unquestionable that Simeon was often seen in argument with his colleagues. In the 323 times Simeon's name appears in the Mishnah close to three hundred times he is involved in an halakhic dispute. Similarly the number of recorded disputes Simeon had with Judah and Meir as opposed to agreements is considerably outnumbering.³¹ It is also interesting to note Simeon's reaction to Issi b. Judah's remark in Avot de-Rabbi Natan: Simeon says: "Why do you cause my words to be despised among the Sages?" As Issi explains, his remarks were only praiseworthy, not despising.³² Did Simeon have reason to worry? Was he already despised? Again, it is impossible to determine. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in a baraita it is explained that "Rabbi Simeon's teeth grew black because of his fasts." Simeon's fasting was apparently in atonement for his disrespect to his teacher, Akiba.³³ Whatever the case, Simeon's relationships with other individuals do not impress one as having been perfect.

On the other hand, there is also evidence to the contrary that this negativism was not as dynamic as some scholars have portrayed it to be. Although there is no reason to question the exactness of Simeon's attitudes toward sexuality, it is certainly worthwhile to note that he was not terribly unique in his opinions. Sexual modesty has always been a sig-

nificant value in Judaism. Furthermore, a closer investigation of the Niddah passage will reveal that none of the nine "habits" as listed by Simeon b. Yohai are objected to. There are some minor points which are discussed, but in principle there are no objections. Similarly, as shown in chapter 1 of this unit, although Simeon affirmed Torah and stressed it over other worldly occupations, there is reason to believe that he was also aware that such idealism was unrealistic. Consequently, in the incident where Simeon confronts his friend from Tyre there is no condemnation of his wealth. Indeed, there is not even a rebuke of such secular prosperity.

Furthermore, there are also several pericopae which suggest anything but a harsh and negative attitude on the behalf of Rabbi Simeon. Not only was Simeon's attitude toward women in line with accepted rabbinic thought, but there are also a number of statements in which his approach to women is strikingly positive. In Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer Rabbis Meir and Simeon are expounding the following verse: "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and the singing men and singing women spoke of Josiah in their lamentations..." (Second Chronicles 35:25). Rabbi Meir interprets the "singing men" to be the Levites that stood on their platforms singing. He explains that the "singing women" were their wives. Rabbi Simeon however interprets it to be "all the wise women (of Israel)," ³⁴ Similarly, in Deuteronomy Rabbah Rabbi Simeon exempts Miriam from slandering Moses realizing her intention was to help Moses fulfill the precept of "be fruitful and multiply." ³⁵

This leniency toward Miriam is by no means uncharacteristic for

Simeon. In fact, as in halakhah, Simeon is also considerably lenient in his aggadic exegesis. The reader will recall that in Tosefta Sotah 6:6-11, it is unquestionable that Rabbi Simeon consistently takes the more lenient stand in each of those disputes with Akiba. In each of the first three reported disputes, Simeon refuses to apportion any serious guilt to Abraham, Moses or Israel. In a similar text the issue is over whom is to be identified with the male and female horses alluded to in Songs 1:9. The rabbis compare Israel to the female horses and the Egyptians to the male horses (chasing the female horses). Rabbi Simeon however cannot reconcile himself to comparing Israel to female horses. Hence, Simeon compares the female horses to waves and the male horses to Egyptians.³⁶

There are also places where Simeon comes across as an exceptionally kind and sincere person. Can a person who is supposedly as negative and condemning as Simeon possibly say "It is better for a man that he should cast himself into a fiery furnace rather than he should put his fellow to shame in public?"³⁷ Similarly, in one of the most beloved aggadic stories attributed to Simeon b. Yohai, he is portrayed as a benevolent rabbi working miracles for the deprived. In the story, a woman, barren for ten years, goes with her husband to Rabbi Simeon seeking a divorce. He then asks them to end their marriage as they began: with a feast. During the party the husband told his wife that she could have anything she wanted. While he was sleeping, she chose him. They then went to Rabbi Simeon seeking help and he obliged them by praying for them, whereupon she became pregnant.³⁸

Unfortunately, just as suspect as are the texts depicting Simeon as a negative individual, so, too, are these texts wherein Simeon is portrayed positively. If we are to question material from the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana partially on the basis of its purely aggadic nature (wherein Simeon performs miracles), is there any reason why this touching story of Simeon working a miracle for this troubled couple should be any more verifiable? In reality, it is almost impossible to concretely determine any of the personality of a tanna on the basis of rabbinic material. It is true that a strong degree of negativism runs through the sayings of Rabbi Simeon. And it cannot be denied that he often seemed to be at odds with his contemporaries. Furthermore, it seems difficult to ignore the tone of egotism that permeates much of the sayings attributed to this rabbi. And yet if that is so, how is one to interpret the following quote: "R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: Every man in whom there is haughtiness of spirit is as though he worships idols..."³⁹?

NOTES UNIT III CHAPTER 3

1. Urbach I, p. 607.
2. Bacher II, p. 46.
3. Finkelstein, p. 169.
4. Finkelstein, p. 169.
5. Urbach I, p. 607.
6. Baron II, p. 265.
7. Baron II, p. 309.
8. Graetz II, pp. 440-441.
9. Burgansky, p. 1553.
10. Urbach I, p. 622.
11. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana; ed. Mandelbaum, vol. I, pp. 190-194. See also Sukkah 45b.
12. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11:15; ed. Mandelbaum, vol. I, p. 191 lines 5-8.
13. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11:15; ed. Mandelbaum, vol. I, p. 190 line 8 - p. 191 line 2.
14. Braude-Kapstein, p. 215 #55.
15. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11:15; ed. Mandelbaum, vol. I, p. 191 lines 2-5.
16. Midrash on Samuel 23:3; ed. Buber, p. 69.
17. This may be in reference to Hanina b. Hakinai who entered his home quickly after a long absence, whereupon his wife immediately dropped dead (perhaps from shock or fear); see Leviticus Rabbah 21:8; ed. Marguleis, vol. III, p. 486 lines 1-2.
18. The emphasis here is probably on his being naked in front of his wife. See Leviticus Rabbah 21:8; ed. Marguleis, vol. III, p. 486 line 5 ("the man who performs his marital duty naked").
19. Niddah 16b-17a.
20. P. Sanhedrin I:ii; ed. Krotoschin, p. 19a.

21. Niddah 16b-17a.
22. Tanhuma "Toledot" ch. 7; ed. Zundel, p. 35b.
23. Avot de-Rabbi Natan 1:8; ed. Schechter, version "A", p. 6.
24. Berakhot 33b.
25. P. Ta'anit IV:xiii; ed. Krotoschin, p. 68d.
26. Numbers Rabbah 15:19; ed. Warsaw, p. 117c.
27. Tanhuma "Va-ereh" ch. 5; ed. Zundel, p. 73a.
28. That which they consumed.
29. Midrash on Proverbs 13:23; ed. Buber, p. 73.
30. Esther Rabbah 2:4; ed. Warsaw, p. 6b-c.
31. For an extensive list of arguments in the rabbinic sources in which R. Simeon is involved, see Hyman III, pp. 1182-1184.
32. Avot de-Rabbi Natan 18:2; ed. Schechter, version "A", p. 69.
33. Nazir 52a-b.
34. Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 17:65; ed. Luria, p. 41b.
35. Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:6; ed. Warsaw, p. 151b. This is particularly interesting for in Avot de-Rabbi Natan 9:2; ed. Schechter, p. 39, R. Simeon condemns Aaron and Miriam for slandering Moses.
36. Yalkut Shemoni "Song of Songs" #983; ed. Kara, p. 1067a.
37. Berakhot 43b. It is noteworthy that, in the gemara itself, this statement is also attributed to Rab and Simeon the Pious.
38. Songs Rabbah 1:31; ed. Warsaw, p. 27a.
39. Sotah 4b.

UNIT IV
"EPILOGUE"

In reality, it is easier to determine what Simeon b. Yohai was not rather than what he was. For hundreds of years this rabbi was labeled as a mystic, as the author of the Zohar. Similarly, he was also identified by virtue of his infamous statement: "The best of the Gentiles should be killed," not merely as a political radical but as a hater of Christians in general. Unfortunately, whether true or not, this has been the heritage of Rabbi Simeon. As a mystic, or as an uncompromising, intolerant rabbi, Simeon b. Yohai has had to accept the fate of both. It is understandable that such characteristics would be emphasized. They are peculiar, unique and perhaps even exciting. Indeed, without them Simeon b. Yohai might have been lost to obscurity entirely. In searching for the "real" Simeon however, it became apparent that there was more to this man than what history or tradition had seen fit to stress. All too often we tend to overlook qualities that are not unique, not particular. But for Simeon such attributes need being pointed out. Without them, it becomes easy to ignore the fact that he was also a rabbi. Like the rest of his contemporaries, Simeon b. Yohai seems to have been a product of his environment. He was aware of the dangers that faced Jews and Judaism, from without as well as from within.

And yet, as easy as it is to ascertain the fictions of Rabbi Simeon, it is equally as difficult to say anything positive about the man. One can observe the various sayings attributed to him, but what they tell us of him is really minimal. If such attributions could be considered authentic and reliable, there would still be the problem that what remains are merely the scattered parts of a puzzle. As stated in the "Prologue," it was the

goal of this study to shed but a trace of light upon the figure of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. Unfortunately, it is also possible that in the process of "illumination" this study has, in all likelihood, done to Simeon b. Yohai what a prism does to a strand of light. Although the light enters pure, it cannot be seen or recognized. Once it enters that prism however, its different parts become easily discernable and separable. On the other hand, in the process it also loses its pristine effulgence. Similarly, although previously we may have known little or nothing of the character of Simeon b. Yohai, it is also possible that in the process of discovery something is also lost.

When dealing with this subject it must be emphasized that there are (at least) two levels of reality. This study has sought to understand one but in the process has in turn undermined the other. The prime goal here has been to seek out the "real" Simeon b. Yohai. Although this task was invariably impossible, it was possible to arrive at a comprehension of the tannaitic and amoraic "Simeon". In doing so we were forced to distinguish between fact and fiction. By attempting to solidify what was seemingly fact we also destroyed that which was fiction. In Judaism however, even the fiction is a reality. As important as it is to do justice to the Simeon b. Yohai of the second century, it is equally as important to do justice to the Simeon b. Yohai of tradition -- he too is a reality.

Although I am fully aware that this thesis far from fulfills the requirements of first-rate scholarship, hopefully it has succeeded in shedding even a "spark" of light on Simeon b. Yohai. Despite the fact that

he lived more "great-grandfathers" before me than I can count, his confrontation and reaction to the world seems to be very much at home in the twentieth century. Indeed, his world of the second century, a world that threatened Judaism both from without and within, is probably no different from ours today. And yet, although his response may have been extreme, it has nevertheless been understandable and instructive. Hopefully, this thesis has brought about a greater understanding of Simeon b. Yohai, and in doing so has afforded the reader the opportunity to grasp his message. If I have succeeded in this, then I can truly feel as having done justice to the person of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai.

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

PRIMARY SOURCES

(Bible)

Biblia Hebraica. ed. Rudolf Kittel, 1973.

(Mishnah and Tosefta)

Mishnah. ed. H. Albeck. Tel Aviv: Bialik Institute, 1969.

Tosefta. ed. M. S. Zuckerman. Pasewalk, 1881.

Tosefta. ed. M. Lieberman. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955-1967.

(Talmud)

Talmud Bavli. ed. Vilna. New York: Otzar HaSefarim, 1957.

Talmud Yerushalmi. ed. Krotoschin, 1876.

(Midrash)

Avot de-Rabbi Natan. ed. Schechter. Vienna, 1887.

Derekh Eretz Zuta. ed. I. Harburger. Bayreuth, 1839.

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael. ed. Horowitz and Rabin. Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1970.

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. ed. D. Hoffmann. Frankfurt, 1905.

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. ed. Epstein and Melamed. Jerusalem: Mekitsay Nirdamim, 1955.

Midrash Mishlei. ed. Buber. Vilna, 1893.

Midrash Rabbah. ed. Warsaw, 1924.

Bereshit Rabbah. ed. Theodor and Albeck. Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965.

Vayikra Rabbah. ed. Margulies, M. Jerusalem, 1952.

Midrash on Samuel. ed. Buber. Vilna, 1925.

Midrash Tanhuma. ed. Zundel. Jerusalem, 1963.

Midrash Tanhuma. ed. Buber. Vilna, 1885.

Midrash Tehillim. ed. Buber. Vilna, 1891.

Pesikta Rabbati. ed. M. Friedmann. Vienna, 1880.

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana. ed. Bernard Mandelbaum. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962.

Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer. ed. D. Luna. Warsaw, 1852.

Sifra. ed. J. H. Weiss. Vienna, 1862.

Sifre al Sefer Bemidbar ve-Sifre Zuta. ed. H. S. Horowitz. Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1966.

Sifre al Sefer Devarim. ed. L. Finkelstein. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969.

Seder Eliyahu Rabba ve-Seder Eliyahu Zuta. ed. M. A. Shalom. Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1960.

Yalkut Shemoni. ed. S. Kara. Jerusalem: Levin-Epstein, 1966.

TRANSLATIONS

(Bible)

The Holy Scriptures. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916.

The Holy Scriptures. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 1969.

The Book of Isaiah. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973.

The Book of Psalms. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972.

The Torah. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962.

(Mishnah and Tosefta)

The Mishnah. trans. Herbert Danby. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

(Talmud)

The Babylonian Talmud. translating editor Isadore Epstein. London: Soncino, 1961.

(Midrash)

The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan. trans. Judah Goldin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.

Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael. trans. J. Z. Lauterbach. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933.

Midrash Rabbah. translating editors Freedman and Simon. London: Soncino, 1939.

The Midrash on Psalms. trans. William G. Braude. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

Pesikta Rabbah. trans. William G. Braude. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

Pesikta de Rav Kahana. trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975.

Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer. trans. Gerald Friedlander. New York: Hermon Press, 1970.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Adler, Morris. The World of the Talmud. New York: Schocken, 1963.

Bacher, Wilhelm. Aggadot Ha-Tannaim. trans. A. Z. Rabinowitz. Jerusalem-Berlin: D'vir, 1922.

Baron, Salo W. A Social and Religious History of the Jews. New York-Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952-1967.

Bloch, Joseph S. Israel and the Nations. trans. L. Kellner. Berlin: B. Harz, 1927.

Burgansky, Israel. "Simeon b. Yohai." Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem: Keter, 1971.

Epstein, J. N. and Melamed, E. Z. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. Jerusalem: Mekitsay Nirdamim, 1955.

- Finkelstein, Louis. Akiba: Scholar, Saint and Martyr. New York: Atheneum, 1975.
- Frankel, Zacharias. Darkhe ha-Mishnah. Leipzig, 1859.
- Goldin, Judah. "The Period of the Talmud." The Jews. ed. Louis Finkelstein. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955.
- Graetz, Heinrich. History of the Jews. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891.
- Green, William Scott. "What's in a Name - The Problematic of Rabbinic Biography." Unpublished paper, University of Rochester, 1976.
- Guttmann, Alexander. Rabbinic Judaism in the Making. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970.
- Guttmann, Michael. Das Judentum und Seine Umwelt. Berlin: Philo Verlag, 1927.
- "Hillula de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai." Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem: Kieter, 1971.
- Hyman, Aaron. Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim. London, 1910.
- Ibn-Shemuel, Yehuda. Midrashe Ge'ulah. Jerusalem-Tel-Aviv: Bialik Institute, 1968.
- Konowitz, Israel. Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai. Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1965.
- Lauterbach, Jacob Z. "Attitude of the Jew Towards the Non-Jew." CCAR Yearbook, vol. XXXI, 1921.
- Lauterbach, Jacob Z. "The Two Mekiltas." American Academy for Jewish Research -- Proceedings. New York, 1933.
- Lieberman, M. Tosefta Kifshuta. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955-1967.
- Neusner, Jacob. Development of a Legend. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970.
- Scholem, Gershom G. Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. New York: Schocken, 1973.
- Seligson, Max. "Simeon b. Yohai." The Jewish Encyclopedia. New York: Funk and Wagnall, 1905.

Susskind, Nathan. "Tov Sheba-Goyyim..." CCAR Journal, vol. XXIII (Spring), 1976.

Urbach, Ephraim E. The Sages. trans. Israel Abrahams. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975.

Weiss, I. H. Dor, Dor Ve-Dorshav. Vilna, 1904.