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THEODICY IN THE TALMUD

by

Robert M. Miller

Thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of requirements
for the Master of Hebrew
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DIGEST

The object of this thesis is to present the Talmudic explanation for the existence of evil, suffering and injustice in light of a Just God. In Chapter One the author has attempted to show that the Rabbis were acquainted with those philosophical concepts which underlie the problem of theodicy. In treating the existence of evil, the Rabbis sought to explain the evil that befell men, the various evil forces in the world and the social evil that man creates.

Dealing first with the evil that befalls man, the author presents the three basic biblical explanations of human affliction - suffering as punishment for sin; suffering as incentive for repentence; and affliction as the means by which the personality is transformed. These three ideas are then traced in the Talmud where they are shown to have undergone minor transformations. Noted, also, are those ideas which are the creation of the talmudic period as affliction is the result of corporeality and suffering a means of atonement.

In the third Chapter the role of the צדיק is examined and it is pointed out that the righteous are considered to be superior beings, possessing special powers and in addition are promised rewards primarily of an other-worldly nature. This would indicate that the righteous are in a special catagory; not subject to the law of retribution as the average

individual. The צדיק therefore may be afflicted in order that his generation may be saved, or in order for him to secure a better life in the next world. His affliction may be a form of "Chastisement of Love", a form of suffering reserved only for the righteous.

In examining the Talmudic conception of Job, the writer has shown that one group of Rabbis attributed his affliction to his misconduct, while the other group understood Job's suffering to be a form of "chastisement of love".

The tragic history of Israel is discussed in Chapter Four since this topic is inexorably bound up with the Theodicy of the Talmud. As God's chosen Israel was required to be a people beyond reproach. Through its affliction, the Rabbis saw a means by which Israel would retain this nobility of character. Entirely absent from this period, the author notes, are the concepts of Israel suffering vicariously for other nations, or as a result of a mission. This biblical idea, introduced by Deutero-Isaiah reappears only after the Talmudic period closes.

The final chapter concerns itself with the evil wrought by non-human forces and mortal beings. Satan, the Angel of Death, the Yezer Harah, Demons and Matter are each analyzed before the Talmudic Theodicy is given. The Talmud accounts for the moral evil manifest in the world by either of three means. The non-human forces of evil - Satan Destructive Angels - are not considered to be absolute forces, but

rather agents of God. The Yezer Harah, if properly controlled could be a source of Good. Man himself could do evil because in creating him with free choice God had limited Himself.

TO

MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER

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CHAPTER ONE

RABBINIC THOUGHT AND THEODICY

A. Theodicy a Problem in Religious Philosophy

Theodicy, a term first introduced by Liebnitz,[1] is an attempt to explain the existence of evil, suffering and moral injustice in the light of a just God. In so far as the procedure followed is both rational and logical it falls within the general scope of philosophy, more particularly religious philosophy. The object of this thesis is to present the rabbinic answer to this problem as found in the Talmud.

The author feels compelled to justify this under-taking in the light of recent interpretations of the Talmudic literature which deny the existence of any philosophic elements within Rabbinic Judaism. While Schechter, in Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, recognized the absence of dogmatic formulations within the literature, he at no point denied the existence of a philosophic element within it.[2] Max Kadushin on the other hand, has gone to the other extreme in saying, "Unless we emancipate ourselves from philosophic influences we shall struggle in vain to comprehend what the Rabbis felt and said about God. Or to put it more fairly, only on the occasions when we are free from philosophic influences can we sense the authentic Rabbinic experience of

God."[3]

While insisting that Rabbinic ideas are not in a logical and hierarchical order as other philosophical and ethical systems, he goes to great lengths to show that there is a certain unity and coherence in Rabbinic thought.[4]

Dr. Cohon has correctly pointed out the fallacy of this approach when, in reviewing this book, he wrote: "The concern for Rabbinic ideas and concepts places his study, much against his will, within the realm of rudimentary philosophy. His inhibition against rational interpretations and against seeking the origins of religious ideas impairs his efforts.....On one hand while opposing the tendency to intellectualize Rabbinic thought, Kadushin, himself, forces it into a modern Semantic mould not contained in rabbinic literature."[5]

Further proof to discredit Kadushin's position can be adduced from the following illustrations from the Aggadah which clearly point to the fact that the Rabbis were concerned not only with philosophical questions but also metaphysical ones. Implicit in the following passages are the concepts of Omniscience and Omnipotence.

"The Emperor said to Rabban Gamaliel: It is written 'He counteth the number of stars.' In what way is that remarkable?, I too can count them. Rabban Gamaliel thereupon brought some quinces put them in a seive, whirled them around and asked the Emperor to count them. 'Keep them still,'

✓ incomplete

the Emperor demanded."[6]

"A certain philosopher said to Rabban Gamaliel; Your God is a great artist only he found good material ready which helped him; such as waste, void, darkness, water, and depths. Then Rabban Gamaliel replied: 'Thou art beside thyself. All these things scripture tells us were created.........."[7] Thereby proving the metaphysical idea of creatio ex-nihlo.

The fact that the Rabbis were often put to the task of answering heathens, as is shown, in the above illustrations, seems to indicate that the Rabbis were acquainted with the philosophical world and were capable of defending their position within that framework. This knowledge and interest in philosophical matters was pointed out by Weiss:

בריאת העולם נקראת מעשה בראשית מחדירה
בה כי התעורר מסרבו, ומרבה חכמים נמנעו מלהרבות
בה והזהירו שאין לדרוש במה שלמעלה ומה שלמטה
מה לפנים ומה לאחור וככל זאת נתחייבו מדרשים
בגלה כזאת. ונלמד מהם דעותיהם בענין בריאת
העולם האמונה בבריאה יש מאין.[8]

B. Philosophic Elements within the Talmud

Moore, too, acknowledges the factor of apologetics as an important impetus in creating interest in philosophic problems and directly connects it with the problem of theodicy. "The difficulties of reconciling the evils in the world with the goodness of God was so strongly felt in the early centuries

in the East and the West, and a dualistic solution of one kind or another was so widely accepted in philosophy and religion, that it is idle to attempt to identify the Jewish circles which adopted this solution. It must suffice us to know that there were such circles; that they tried to fortify their position with texts from Scripture; and that the Rabbis refuted them with their own weapons."[9]

"The Rabbis were keenly aware of the difficulties in reconciling the goodness of God with the universality of moral evil."[10] This awareness was not the sole result of the struggle with the dualists in the early centuries. The book of Job which deals with one aspect of theodicy - the suffering of the righteous - is an early presentation of this problem. The concern with this problem is not so much the product and reaction to other philosophical systems as it is the logical outcome of beliefs held about God and man. It is a problem which is indiginous to the thought of Judaism - a faith characterized by the belief in One Absolute ethical being who is both immanent and transcendent.

Theodicy arises only when these beliefs are held. Polytheism and henotheism escape this dilemna by positing the existence of absolute forces for evil within the world. Deism, in emphasizing the transcendental aspect of God, who having once put the world into motion retires from the scene, also escapes this perplexity.[11] It remains only for ethical monotheism to face this challenge.

The Unity of God, his immanence and ethical attributes are concepts already found within the Bible. It is only necessary to point out a few Aggadic passages which contain these thoughts and which may serve as a point of departure in our study of theodicy.

The creation of man on the sixth day is explained in the following manner. "Adam was created on the eve of the Sabbath lest the Gnostics say that God had a partner in creation."[12] Various verses in scripture, in which the plural form was found in connection with God, were frequently used by the heretics to prove the existence of more than one God. The Rabbis, however, were successful in retorting to these arguments by resorting to their hermenutical skills.[13]

The Talmud abounds in Aggadic sources which describe the just and moral nature of the Divinity. Passages which allude to His justice, mercy, and righteousness all point to a Rabbinic conception of an Absolute Moral God, though the exact philosophical terms may be wanting. (The failure of the Rabbis to develop an exact, precise, philosophical terminology for such terms as Revelation, Omnipotence and Omniscience has been noted by Cohon and Kadushin. However, the absence of a philosophic vocabulary does not deny the existence of certain concepts of a philosophic nature.)

God's mercy is said to have endured for ten generations, from Adam to Noah, in spite of constant provoking by man in order that he may learn of His attribute of mercy.[14] Whereas

a man of flesh and blood lures another out of the ways of life into the ways of death, the Just God of Israel lures man out of the ways of death into life.[15]

Though God's justice is tempered with mercy, since the world could not survive on the attribute of Justice alone,[16] nevertheless when sin is deserving of punishment God is exact and utilizes the principle of "Measure for measure".

The immanence of God alluded to before is implicit in the following passage from the Talmud. Again we must note the absence of an exact term for this important concept. "The Emperor said to Rabban Gamaliel: Ye maintain that upon the gathering of ten Jews the Shechinah rests. If so, how many Shechinahs are there? Rabban Gamaliel called the Emperor's servant and tapped him on the neck, saying: 'Why do you let the sun enter the Emperor's house? He exclaimed: But the sun shines upon the whole earth. Then if the sun, which is but one of the countless myriads of the servants of the Holy One Blessed Be He, shines on the whole world, how much more the Shechinah of the Holy One."[17]

This doctrine of immanence carries with it certain corrolaries, which in turn become problems in theodicy, when one views the evil wrought by man. Where is the indwelling God when man does evil? If He is Absolute and Immanent why does He not prevent man from sinning? The Rabbinic answers to these questions will be examined at a later point. What is of consequence at this point, is the fact that those beliefs

necessary before the problem of theodicy can arise, are found in the Talmudic literature.

C. Rabbinic Uses of the Term "Evil"

In any general discussion of theodicy the very first problem to be faced is that of defining evil. Three broad areas can be distinguished in which the term evil was employed by the Rabbis. In the first catagory the term is a reference to the fate and experiences of an individual, as exemplified by the statement לא מן הטוב.[18] Within this area the Rabbis tried to explain the cause for evil which befell man and show that it was in consonnence with the doctrine of a Just and Merciful God.

In the second catagory the Rabbis viewed particular forces and powers within the world and termed them evil, i.e. מזיקין רעין. Evil is also employed by the Rabbis to describe the conduct and behavior of an individual in the moral sphere. One whose deeds are excessively evil is referred to as a רשע in Rabbinic thought. When dealing with evil of this type the Rabbis sought to explain how it is that this moral evil was permitted by God.

The criterion for judging whether an individual's fate has been good or evil is life itself. Since life is undoubtedly man's most prized possession, anything that detracts from the fulness of life can be deemed evil. Physical illness, famine, and poverty in that they diminish the fulness

of living are evil. Death, in that it terminates life, is an evil inflicted upon man because of the sin of Eve.[19] Pain endured during a period of suffering, though that suffering be intended to serve an ulterior purpose of good, is nevertheless an evil. (The Rabbis maintain that one must recite "the blessing for Evil" when a river overflows even though that event will prove to be a blessing at some later date.)[20]

In regard to the third catagory, establishing criterions for evaluating human conduct is often a difficult task in general philosophy. The controversy over what constitutes good or evil behavior has filled the pages of ancient philosophical works. One need only recall the opening chapters of Plato's Republic with its seemingly endless quest to determine what is just behavior.

This, however, is not the case within Rabbinic Judaism. In a supernaturalistic philosophy values are rooted in the Absolute who in turn has revealed them to man so that they become standards for conduct. "I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse..... therefore choose life, that thou mayest live." (Deut. 30: 15-19) Having before them a definition of evil, the Rabbis, within their own system of thought could define righteous or wicked behavior.

There is yet another point that must be made in connection with the Rabbinic discussion of evil. The point of

departure in any question of a philosophical nature was the people of Israel. Hence the Rabbis did not deal in detail with the universal problem of evil and how it affected other nations. Two standards in determining what is evil can be noted because of this. One applies to Israel while the other to the nations of the world. Whereas R. Hama says that floods would never be brought upon Israel they could be brought upon Egypt.[21] Rain, when falling in Israel, is considered a blessing, whereas, rain on the other side of the Jordan was considered as an evil omen for Israel.[22] R. Jochanan b. Zaccai praised one who gave to charity but a gentile doing the same was considered as if he had done evil. Similarly, to accept charity from a gentile is considered a bad sign for Israel.[23] Though death is an evil which God will eventually destroy, this promise is held out by Ulla only for Jews.[24]

This dual standard of defining evil is of consequence only in the attempt to reconcile the Rabbinic position with contemporary religious liberal philosophy. As such it does not come within the framework of this thesis.

NOTES

1. W. Fulton, "Theodicy", Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. XII
2. S. Schechter, Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, p.12
3. Max Kadushin, The Rabbinic Mind, p.280
4. ibid. p.31
5. Sammuel Cohon, "Review of Rabbinic Mind", Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. 44:3
6. Sanhedrin 39a
7. Gen. Raba. 1:9
8. Isaac Hirsch Weiss, [illegible], Vol. I, p.219
9. George F. Moore, Judaism, Vol. I, p.366
10. Sammuel Cohon, "Original Sin", Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XXI, p.21
11. J. Abelson; The Immanence of God in Rabbinic Literature, p.305
12. Sanhedrin 38a
13. Sanhedrin 38b
14. Aboth V:2
15. Menahot 99b
16. Gen. Raba. 12:15
17. Sanhedrin 39a
18. Berakot 7a
19. Gen. Raba. 12:5
20. Berakot 60a
21. Sotah 11a
22. Ta'anit 7a

23. Sotah 11a

24. Sanhedrin 91b

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVILS THAT BEFALLS MAN

A. Biblical Explanations of Human Suffering

The roots of Rabbinic theology are to be found within the Bible. Essentially there is no break between these two great systems of thought. Ideas and concepts implicit in the Bible undergo further expansion and evolvement within the Talmud. The interpretation of suffering and human misery is a case in point. In our study of the Rabbinic explanation of the cause of suffering it will be noted that, in some cases, there is no essential difference between the Rabbinic or the biblical view. There are, however, explanations of this problem which are indiginous to the age of the Talmud. To distinguish between the different strata it becomes necessary to present a cursory examination of ideas found in the Bible relating to human suffering. This presentation is not intended to treat the biblical material exhaustively, rather it is to highlight those ideas which are pertinent to this thesis.

The simplest view and perhaps the idea which is most often found is that suffering whether experienced individually, in the form of sickness or poverty, or nationally, in the form of subjection to hostile nations, was of a punitive or retributive character. This view arose from a deep-seated

conviction that the universe was ruled by God, and that He gave to man his just desserts.

In the opening chapters of Genesis, the punishment meted out for the sin of disobedience is that both Adam and Eve are condemned to life of sorrow. Adam's labour is to become wearisome; Eve is to bear children in pain. After a life of sorrow they must face death.[1] The curse put upon Cain, whether the passage be understood as referring to an individual or Cain as the symbol of mankind, also rests upon the relationship of sin and suffering.[2]

This relationship is the basis for the philosophy of history found within the prophetic literature. The destruction and terror of which Amos speaks is the result of Israel's iniquities.[3] The destruction of which Amos speaks is a complete one, for in this case there is no hope that the evil befalling the people will lead them to repentence.

The second interpretation of suffering found in the Bible, is that affliction will come upon an individual or a nation for the specific purpose of causing them, or him, to repent. In such a case suffering is not so much a form of punishment as it is a warning sign which needs to be seriously heeded lest more suffering befall the individual or the group. "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Middian for seven years..... And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Middianites; and the children of

Israel cried unto the Lord."[4]

The above passage represents Israel as being recalled to God by means of affliction. The account of the repentence of Manasseh illustrates that God also afflicts the individual in order to incite repentence. Though God spoke to Manasseh and to the people they paid him no heed. When, however, Manasseh found himself in fetters and exiled from his land, he turned in supplication to God.[5]

The type of repentence described above is on a very simple level. The fear of further affliction causes the sinner to repent. There are, however, other instances in the Bible in which misfortune and suffering have borught about a complete transformation of character. In these cases the process is more subtle and complex. One cannot reduce the process to a simple formula of sin, punishment and repentence. In these cases, during the period of affliction, the subject gains insights into religious truths and proper moral conduct which transform his total personality.

The story of Jacob is an illustration of such a personality transformation. Jacob, in his earlier life, is far from being an attractive character. There is a great difference between the Jacob who is a supplanter, defrauding his brother, and Israel, the venerable patriarch. The cause of this change in Jacob's character, according to the biblical writers, is due to the discipline of suffering. His exile, over a period of years, and disappointments at the hand

of Laban, serve to strengthen positive qualities in his character. The personality of Jacob has been refined and purified in the years of suffering. Out of affliction and disappointment have come a deeper understanding of God's ways.

The disciplinary and educative value of suffering is also stressed in the Psalms[6] and in Proverbs: "My son despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be wary of his reproof; For whom the Lord loveth He reproves; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."[7] These verses served as the basis for the Talmudic concept of "Chastisement of Love".

Reviewing briefly, it has been noted that affliction and suffering are interpreted in one of three ways: 1) punishment for sin; 2) incentive for repentence; 3) the process by which the personality is transformed. In all these cases the subject undergoing suffering is of questionable moral integrity. There is, however, a recognition by the biblical writers that often it is the innocent that suffer, which would seemingly negate the just nature of God. "Wilt Thou consume the righteous with the wicked?"[8]

While this question is difficult enough there is the further consideration which Jeremiah mentions. "Wherefore does the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are they at ease that deal very treacherously?"[9] Two of the Psalms seek to explain this difficulty by asserting that the prosperity of the wicked is insecure and that wealth will not avail

them in the hour of death.[10]

The Psalms abound in the utterences of saintly men who find themselves in sorrowful plights, who can not understand the reason for their suffering and are groping for light.[11]

The book of Job is another attempt to deal with this problem. It can be noted that the fiends seek to explain Job's suffering in one of the manners described above. Eliphaz turns to history to support his contention that the innocent are never left to perish. In contrast to these are the wicked who will perish by the breath of God for their iniquities.[12] Thus, for Eliphaz, suffering is an indication of sin. The theme of Job's sinfulness, in spite of his protests of innocence, are reiterated by Bildad and Zophar in their respective speeches.[13] Elihu adds rebellion to the crime of sin and reasons that this is the cause of Job's suffering.[14]

The suffering of the innocent is also dealt with in the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah. In chapter 50 the mission of the servant seems to entail suffering. He is subjected to persecution in performance of his work. "He is called to suffer for the sake of the truth which he professes."[15] In chapter 53 we learn that the suffering which befalls him is really the punishment due to others. "But he was wounded because of our rebellions, crushed because of our iniquities."[16] Whereas in this chapter the servant

undergoing atonement for others is Israel personified,[17] in the Talmud it is the צדיק who serves as an atonement for his generation.[18]

B. Talmudic View - Suffering as Punishment

Biblical theology in the main, relates human misfortune to human misconduct for the biblical writers recognized the moral government of the world. In Rabbinic thought too, the world is considered to rest upon justice, with God acting as the Divine Judge.[19] If evil befalls man it is most likely due to his unrighteousness which can not go unpunished. "There is no death without sin and no suffering without iniquity."[20] "It is not the snake that kills but sin."[21] In the Talmud are to be found formulas which relate the type of punishment with particular crimes. "Jaundice is an indication of hate, poverty a sign of vulgarity, and the croup is a sign of slander."[22] The above illustrations refer to the fate of individuals. In Tanannitic sources there is a tendency to assign some great crime as the antecedent to every serious calamity by which mankind was visited. "Pestilence comes into the world for capital crimes which are not brought before an earthly tribunal..... Noisome beasts come into the world for vain swearing and the profanation of the Name. Captivity comes upon the world for idolatry and incest and for the shedding of innocent blood."[23]

As justice is administered on earth according to the

principles of "measure for measure", this same rule is applied by God in dispensing divine Justice, (Here it should be noted a principle found in the Halachic portion of the Talmud is transferred to the realm of theology. In the case of an adultress who is to be punished the court follows this procedure. "As she girder herself with a belt, the court binds her with a rope around her breasts."[24])

The classic illustration of this principle of מדה כנגד מדה is seen in the story of Nachum Gimzo who explained his blindness and maimed condition of his legs in the following manner. He once inadvertantly was late in helping a poor man who perished because of his tardiness. He addressed himself to the body of the poor man and said: "Let my eyes which had no pity on your eyes be blind; may my hands and legs which did not hasten to help thine become maimed."[25] In a similar vein R. Jose predicted a premature death for his own son on account of his causing a fig tree to bloom and give fruit prematurly.[26]

Though God ordains that one is to be punished by the rule of "measure for measure", he will often resort to human agents to carry out retribution of this sort. "Because you drown others, others have drowned you; and those who have drowned you shall themselves be drowned."[27]

Death and premature death while being accepted as natural and inevitable for man was also interpreted as being a form of punishment for various types of crime. The crime

committed and deserving of such a harsh punishment could be either of an ethical or ritual nature.[28] The failure of R. Akiba's students to show one another respect was the cause of their death.[29] There is also a recorded incident in which an individual perishes for this same sin.[30] A curse laid upon the House of Eli brought about premature death to his progeny in Jerusalem.[31] The idea, however, that punishment was accorded to an individual because of the sins of his ancestors was on the whole rejected.[32]

Even the telling of a falsehood was interpreted as a cause of death.[33] Other crimes for which God decreed punishment were; failure to study the Torah,[34] and not fulfilling a promise.[35]

Poverty was explained in three ways. In one passage, poverty is compared to a revolving wheel, coming to all people sooner or later.[36] This would seem to indicate that the Rabbis sought a naturalistic interpretation to the existence of poverty in the world. However, in another source in Baba Bathra, in which R. Akiba attempts to explain to Turnus Rufus the reason that the God of Israel does not support the poor, the following two interpretations are given. 1) Those who are stricken by financial destitution have fallen in the sight of God (because of their sinful behavior). 2) In that the poverty-stricken require financial assistence, they afford other Jews the opportunity to redeem themselves from the punishments of Gehenom.[37]

The retributive character of suffering is then a view found in biblical and talmudic thought. Biblical thought also interprets human misery as a warning on the part of God to man to investigate his behavior. This idea is also found within the Talmud. "If a man sees that suffering comes upon him, he should examine his deeds, having examined them and found that they are not at fault, he should suspect that his suffering is due to his failure to study Torah."[38] The Talmud records the following in connection with R. Huna. Once four-hundred jars of vinegar belonging to R. Huna became sour. Visitors suggested to him that he examine his conduct lest he had committed a sin. To this R. Huna replied that surely one of his character was above suspicion. The students answered: מי חשד הקב"ה דעביד דינא בלא דינא "Is the Holy One suspected of punishing without justice?" Upon investigating his past actions, R. Huna found that he had indeed been unjust to some laborers. After setting right this injustice the vinegar became wine. "Others say he sold the vinegar at a much higher price."[39]

In an incident related about R. Judah in which his son's future bride died as the Ketubah was being written, Rabbi asked: "Was there, God forbid, any taint in the proposed union?" An investigation proved that the bride's family was not a direct descendent of the annointed family.[40]

The entire concept of evil befalling man in order for him to perfect his moral character and redress previous wrong

is in consonance with the biblical idea that God does not desire the death of a sinner, but only his repentence.[41]

C. Suffering as a Means of Atonement

Death and suffering, besides being viewed as forms of punishment are also recognized as means by which man atones for his sins and reconciles himself with God. "It was a generally accepted view of the Rabbis that all suffering of the righteous men, except temptations as those of Abraham and Job, are sent by God for the purpose of purging away the few sins which they as human beings naturally committed."[42] Every loss of property sustained by man, as well as every kind of physical suffering which he happens to undergo are considered as atonement. "A man stumbled in a transgression, and became guilty of death by heaven. By what means shall he atone? His ox died, his chickens went astray, or he stumbled on his finger so that the blood came out - by these losses and sufferings, his debts (to the heavenily court) are considered paid."[43]

When people must suffer loss for expiation of their sin, the loss is proportionate to their means. "Give thanks to the Lord, for when he collects his debts from man, He does it with kindness. From the rich (He takes) an ox, from the poor a sheep."[44] The constant use of economic terminology in connection with the expiation and atonement of sins through

suffering i.e. "debt", suggests that the Talmud viewed the world as operating on some kind of "Divine Economy". The individual in perpetrating an injustice falls into debt to the Diety. He can make reperations or to use the theological term, he achieves atonement by undergoing suffering. This idea of suffering being a means of atonement led a number of individuals to impose suffering upon themselves.[45]

Rab's prayer in which he sought atonement for his sins, also expresses the hope that this atonement will not be effected through sickness.[46] The final confession of a criminal executed by a Jewish court contained the phrase: "May my death be an atonement for all my iniquities."[47] Abaye, maintained that death administered by a Jewish court could not serve as atonement for sins, and held that this was only true in a case in which a Gentile government carried out the death penalty.[48]

Suffering has even a greater atoning effect than sacrifice in as much as sacrifice affects only man's property while suffering touches his very soul.[49] The term יסורין is used in connection with suffering. Büechler points out that this term has two meanings. One referring to the purging of the body while the other meaning refers to the purging of the soul through affliction.[50] The good son, therefore, does not seek that suffering should end, but rather says to God: "Father continue Thy chastisement."[51]

Atoning power is also ascribed to Torah and charity.[52]

The descendents of Eli could find no atonement through sacrifices and meat offerings, but they did receive pardon through the study of Torah.[53]

D. Talmudic View - Suffering the Fate of Mortals

Though the dominant view in Talmud regards man's misfortunes as the result of his misconduct, there is yet another view that recognizes that evil may befall man without him necessarily sinning. (The suffering of the righteous would fall within this catagory, but will be discussed in a separate chapter.) According to this view, evil comes upon man in consequence of his corporeality which makes him subject to genisis and decay irrespective of his moral behavior. Man, because of his corporeality is subject to the laws of nature, indifference to them brings tragedy. An individual who had just performed two מצות and ascended a broken ladder was killed instantly in spite of his beneficent behavior.[54] R. Chanina ben Jochanan attributes leprosy to a deficient diet and reports that in Babylonia this scourage is avoided by eating beets and drinking certain liquids. Various other diseases and illnesses are attributed to natural causes and to the failure of man to follow proper hygienic practices.[55] Talmudic thought, then, takes into account the principle of natural laws. The world conceived as a cosmos with set laws is implicit in the following passage. "Suppose a man has intercourse with his neighbour's wife; it is right that she

should not conceive, but the world pursues its natural course."[56]

Once the nature of man was understood and that he was subject to illness and other forms of physical affliction because of his inherent constitution the Rabbis could not accept R. Ammi's principle[57] without reservations. They could not look upon an afflicted person and know that his fate was the consequence of evil behavior. "R. Ammi's principle was never carried so far as to deny the sufferer compassion and sympathy."[58] On the contrary, concern for the sick and afflicted was greatly stressed and the reward for visiting the sick was unlimited.[59] R. Akiba held that one who did not attend the sick was to be considered as a shedder of blood.[60] The deaf and the blind were accepted as a part of a world full of all kinds of imperfections. Rabbi Judah would often visit with a blind scholar.[61]

The corporeality of man, meant that death was inevitable[62] in spite of the most righteous kind of behavior.[63] Death was unavoidable for man is born destined to die. Solomon thought he might prevent the death of his two Cushite servants by sending them to a different province. His efforts proved futile, for the servants met their death in that district. The Angel of Death cheerfully explains: "to the place where they were expected to be, there did you send them."[64] A number of individuals succeeded in delaying their death by the study of Torah, but this method also failed in

the end.[65] A favorite expression of R. Papa was: "It is usual for people to die, but not to become rich."[66]

The question which theodicy seeks to answer is why an Omnipotent God created man with flesh and bones subject to imperfections and to the accidents of matter. A passage in Sanhedrin touches on this matter. God after revealing to the angels the imperfection of man insists upon creating him in spite of these flaws.[67] This, then, would seem to be the best of all possible worlds, for many were created before God arrived at this one.[68] The only other alternative left for God would be to destroy this world entirely.[69] It would seem that man with his susceptibility to accidents which befall matter is still: "the best and most perfect being that can be formed of blood and semen and it is therefore impossible that man should be free from this species of evil."[70]

While realizing that the plight of man often makes him subject to the forces of nature and heredity, this did not stop some Rabbis from reading into their misfortunes some divine purpose. R. Joshua when asked about his disfigurement replied that this was the way the Almighty insured him that his scholary abilities would be retained.[71]

NOTES

1. Genesis 3
2. Genesis 4:12
3. Amos 2:6
4. Judges 6:6
5. II Chronicles 33
6. Psalms 94:12, 51:9-10
7. Proverbs 3:11-12
8. Genesis 18:23
9. Jeremiah 12:1
10. Psalms 49 and 73
11. Psalms 74:1, 39:10-13, 78:7-9
12. Job 4:7-9
13. Job 8 and 11
14. Job 33:36-37
15. James Batley, The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament, p.178
16. Isaiah 53:5
17. Sheldon Blank, "Studies in Deutro-Isaiah", Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XV, p.26
18. Megillah 15a
19. Ta'anit 24b
20. Shabbath 55a
21. Berakot 33a
22. Shabbath 33b
23. Aboth V:9

24. Soṭah 8b
25. Ta'anit 12a
26. Ta'anit 24a
27. Aboth II:7
28. Megillah 28a
29. Yebamot 62b
30. Gittin 33a
31. Rosh Ha-Shanah 18a
32. Berakot 7a
33. Sanhedrin 47a
34. Berakot 5a
35. Baba Mezia 4a
36. Shabbath 153b
37. Baba Batra 10a
38. Berakot 5a.
39. ibid.
40. Ketubbot 62b
41. Ezekiel 18:23
42. Adolph Buechler, Sin and Atonement, p.170
43. Pesahim 118a
44. ibid.
45. Baba Mezia 84a & 85a
46. Berakot 17b
47. Sanhedrin 6b
48. Sanhedrin 47b
49. Berakot 5b

50. Buechler, op.cit. p.328
51. Semahot 8
52. Berakot 5b
53. Rosh Ha-Shanah 18a
54. Gittin 39b
55. 'Avodah Zarah 28a
56. ibid. 54b
57. Shabbath 55a
58. Solomon Schechter, Studies in Judaism, p.231
59. Nedarim 39b
60. ibid.
61. Nedarim 59b
62. Shabbath 55a
63. Aboth IV:22
64. Sukkah 53a
65. Baba Mezia 86a
66. Gittin 30b
67. Sanhedrin 38b
68. Gen. Raba. 3:7
69. Ta'anit 39b
70. Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed, Part III, Chapter 12
71. Nedarim 50b

CHAPTER THREE

THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

R. Jannai is quoted as saying: "Average people enjoy neither the prosperity of the wicked, nor the afflictions of the righteous."[1] In this statement, R. Jannai seems to take for granted, that the just principles which govern the world by which the wicked are punished and the righteous rewarded are often operating in the reverse. The prosperity of the wicked, a fact commonly accepted in the Talmud,[2] does not constitute as great a problem in theodicy as does the suffering of the righteous. In order to understand talmudic thought and see that there is some degree of consistency in the concepts of Divine Retribution and the suffering of the righteous, it becomes necessary to examine the position of the צדיק within the literature.

A. The Role of the צדיק

The Talmud distinguishes between two types of צדיקים. The צדיק גמור is morally superior to the צדיק[3] in that he protects men against the wickedness of others. A further distinction is made between a צדיק טוב and a צדיק בינוני, which may be other terms for the צדיק גמור and the צדיק. The צדיק טוב is defined as one who is both just in the eyes of God and man, while the צדיק בינוני is one who is considered to be just in the eyes of

man.[4] Regarding the fate of the צדיק we are told that evil never befalls him.[5]

The importance and signifigance of these צדיקים for the entire world was constantly stressed. Even for the sake of one righteous individual the world would have been created. The deeds of a pious one is considered to be greater than the work of creation.[6] In evaluating the worth of the צדיק one Rabbi said that they were even greater than the angels.[7]

The functions of the צדיק in this world were manifold.[8] It is because of him that rain falls. In lengthening his prayers he was assured that they were heard and would be answered by God.[9] This is of great importance since the צדיק was the one who was often called upon to pray in time of drought and famine.[10]

Raba who was dejected because of the honor shown to Abaye was comforted when he was told that the whole city was protected because of his merits.[11] To the righteous was also attributed the power of awakening the dead.[12] Simeon B. Yochai claimed that through his merits he could save the entire world from judgment.[13]

God, we are told, interceeded with the laws of nature and caused the sun to set before its time so that the righteous Jacob should not depart from his resting place without sleep.[14] The world itself survives on the merit of 36 righteous individuals.[15] Upon the death of one of these thirty-six,

God causes another one to take his place, thus assuring the continuation of the world.[16]

In light of the benefits which Israel derived by reason of the existence of the צדיק, a proverb commonly held was[17]

צדיק בא לעולם טובה באה לעולם

It may then be, that whereas the "average" person falls within the law of retribution, and is held culpable for any sin committed, the צדיק in that he is a superior being possessing special powers and performing unique functions is not subject to the same law of retribution as the average individual. This does not mean that he escapes suffering and punishment in case of sin, but on the contrary he may know of tragic existence because of a minor transgression. "He who lives a righteous life is judged strictly in heaven!"[18]

The צדיק for whom the law of retribution is not applied, can also suffer for reasons which are not applicable to other men. יסורין של אהבה and לכפר על הדור would be cases in point.

B. The Reward of the Righteous

The unique position the צדיק occupies in Rabbinic thought is also seen in the rewards which he will secure. In the biblical period the reward for the righteous was of a this-worldly character. Such blessings as length of day, economic prosperity, the land free of oppression are all associated with righteous conduct. In the Talmud reward

for just conduct may come in this world or in the next world. Rabbi Jacob maintained that the reward for a מצוה never came in this world, since the reward for every מצוה involved תחיית המתים.[19] The biblical passages of למען ייטב לך and והארכת ימים were also construed by R. Jacob as referring to other-worldly rewards. R. Nathan maintained "There is not a single precept in the Torah, even the lightest, whose reward is not enjoyed in this world; and as to the next world I know not how great it is."[20]

That which is of particular importance to our study, is the fact that the reward promised to the righteous is almost completely of an other-worldly nature.

Whereas this world to the righteous is likened to the dim light of the morning, the world to come shall be as the rising sun.[21] That the reward of the righteous is deferred to the next-world is clearly stated in Aboth 2: "And know that the reward of the righteous is in the time to come."

In the next world the righteous sit with crowns on their heads and take pleasure in the radiance of the Schecinah.[22] Their souls find eternal life with He who is eternal and their abiding place is under the Throne of Glory.[23] When the righteous enter the next world, they are welcomed by three companies of ministering angels.[24] Because of the other-worldly rewards promised the righteous their death was termed "life".[25]

Perhaps, as is suggested by Schechter that "the fleeting existence on earth was not a fit time to compensate the righteous"[26] was the underlying reason for the Rabbis to defer the reward of the righteous to such a time when they could derive full reward for their deeds.

Having now pointed out the central and important role the next-world occupies in relation to the righteous, it is now understandable why the כלי קדש was used in explaining the injustice done to the righteous in this world.

C. Suffering of the Righteous and the Next World

Suffering endured by the צדיק in this world would insure him a reward in the next world. Through suffering he could make atonement for the minor transgressions he had committed. (It must be remembered that no individual within Judaism was ever believed to be completely free of the taint of sin. "There is no man who has not sinned."[27])

"To what are the righteous men compared to when they are in this world? To a tree which is standing in a place of purity, and some branches of which are stretching towards a place of impurity, so that when the branches are cut off, the whole of the tree is standing in a place of purity. So God brings chastisement upon the righteous men in this world in order that they may inherit the world to come."[28] In this allagory the tree represents the majority of the righteous man's actions which are of a pure nature, the impure place

refers to his sins which are very slight. The latter are blotted out by the visitations sent by God, so that the righteous are thereby cleansed from their transgressions and become worthy of the next-world.

Suffering not only removes the few blemishes from the righteous, but it also enables the צדיק to fulfill the Divine commandment of "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." Having thus fulfilled even this difficult commandment, the צדיק is assured of the world to come.

R. Akiba, who taught Torah after the Roman government had prohibited the study of Torah, was apprehended and sentenced to a cruel death. Amid his unspeakable pain he recited the Shma and explained it in the following manner. "All my life I was anxious for an occasion to fulfill the commandment concerning loving God with my soul, meaning even if he took my soul; and I considered whether if it happened, I could fulfill it, should I not fulfill it now that it has come to me?" At that moment a Bas Kol was heard in reply to the ministering angel's question concerning the justice of R. Akiba's fate. It proclaimed that through this martydom, R. Akiba was assured of the next world.[29]

An excess degree of prosperity was considered as a sign that one had already achieved his reward in this world.[30] When R. Eliezer became ill his students gathered about him and bewailed his misfortune saying: "Now the scroll of Torah

lies in pain." R. Akiba said that it was precisely because of this illness of R. Eliezer that he rejoiced. "As long as I saw my Master's wine did not turn sour, nor was his flax smitten, nor his oil nor his honey became rancid, I thought, God forbid, he may receive all his rewards in this world, leaving nothing for the next. Now that I see him lying in pain I rejoice knowing that his rewards have been transferred to the next world."[31]

In view of the rewards held in store for the righteous in the next world, the Rabbis said that the suffering endured by the righteous in this world was preferable to the prosperity conferred upon the wicked.[32] The type of affliction which insured the pious one a place in the next world varied. The two passages above illustrate this suffering to be either illness or martyrdom. A note of humor is added when the Rabbis say that even a bad wife whom one can not divorce may sometimes be the instrument by which an individual secures the next world.[33]

Self-imposed suffering did exist in the Talmud. "The wives of the scholars would deny themselves sleep in this world so that they would acquire the world to come."[34] It is difficult to determine in other instances of self-imposed suffering, whether the desire to atone for one's sins, or purify one's spirit, or to attain the next world was the motivation for one's undertaking this suffering.

The preceding answers to the problem of the suffering

of the just were not the only solutions the Rabbis gave. As in Halachic disputations different theories were asserted. Some were accepted others rejected or qualified.

An illustration of the latter is the important passage in reference to Exodus 33:13. Moses asked God to explain to him the method of retribution, a request that was granted. He asked God: 'Why are there righteous people who are prosperous, and righteous people who suffer; wicked who prosper and wicked who suffer?' The answer given to him according to one view was that the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous are the result of the conduct of their ancestors. The former being descendents of righteous parents and enjoying their merits, while the latter bear the sins of those to whom they owe their existence.[35] This view did not go unchallanged. Mar resorted to Scripture and utilized the verse in Ezekiel: "The children shall not die for the sins of the fathers."[36] Furthermore this idea of children suffering for the sins of their ancestors was contrary to the Rabbinic conception of Repentence and Judgment. "Man is judged according to his actions up to the time of judgment.[37] It was these last moments, which affected the fate of man.[38] By reason of these arguements the original theory was qualified and it was understood that children need suffer for the sins of their parents only when they perpetuate the crimes of the parents.[39]

D. Vicarious Atonement

Another explanation of the suffering of the just is based on the Rabbinic idea that a Jew "was not simply a member of the Jewish commonwealth, or a co-religionist, but a limb of the great and single body of Israel."[40] Operating with this concept of "human solidarity" the just, while being one part of the great body of Israel, could receive the pain intended for another part, or could confer benefits on the other parts of the body. This latter view is implicit in the statement: "The world is judged after the merits or demerits of the majority, so that a single individual by his good or bad actions can decide the fate of his fellow creatures as it may happen that he is just the one who constitutes the majority."[41]

The former view is known to us because of various passages in which the צדיק suffers and makes atonement for his generation.[42] During all the years that R. Eliezer suffered no man died prematurely, while during R. Judah's period of chastisement the world needed no rain.[43] The atonement made by the righteous may be effected either through physical suffering or through death.[44] If a righteous man dies it is only for his generation that he makes atonement.[45]

The atoning power of each individual differs.[46] R. Ishmael said that he was the atonement for all the Jews.[47] The chastisement of the leader for the sin of the group is

considered by the Rabbis to be an indication of an exceptionally merciful God.[48]

The justness of God in causing the righteous to serve as an atonement for the sins of the group is a question which must be answered. Inherent in the idea of צדיק מכפר על הצבור is not the Christian concept of vicarious atonement, but rather the idea that the צדיק as leader of the group is responsible for their behavior. If he has failed to influence the moral conduct of the group, then he becomes culpable to God. In a sense, this is the same idea presented earlier in this chapter - that there is an unique individual, occupying a special position in relation to other Jews, having particular responsibilities which at times cause him to suffer a seemingly unjust fate.

It must also be pointed out that the concept of atonement bears no affinity to sacrifice in the Levitical laws. In the affliction of the righteous, suffering is not enforced by an outside agent, but is a voluntary act on the part of the sufferer. In all cases the צדיק is willing to undergo this suffering for the sake of Israel.

E. Chastisements of Love

It is already understood in biblical religion that suffering can be the means by which the spirit of man is perfected and his soul enobled. It is often resorted to by God to bring the sinner back to his path,[49] but it may also

be employed by God to help those righteous ones who seek moral perfection. Suffering of this type is prompted by God's love for the righteous and His desire to see them fulfill their hopes of attaining great moral stature. Because these sufferings are infused with love, given out of love and accepted in love, they are called יסורי של אהבה - Chastisements of Love.

Since the suffering of the just can be attributed to different reasons, the Rabbis established specific criterions for judging that which was truly chastisements of love. Raba instructed the sufferer to first ascribe his fate to misdeeds or the failure to study Torah before terming the affliction as chastisements of love.[50] R. Jacob said that any form of suffering which did not disrupt the study of Torah was יסורי של אהבה, while R. Ahie used as a criterion the disrupting of prayers. R. Jochanan acknowledged that either formula was correct and also added the death of children as another means of determining that the suffering was motivated by God's love.[51]

God is concerned that the צדיק perfect his character. To this end he employs suffering. It is for this reason that he will often cause a צדיק to die while yet young so that like the ripe fig in the following illustration, he does not lose his moral excellence. "R. Jochanan was once going on a journey and he saw a man gathering figs, he was leaving those that were ripe and taking the unripe ones.

When asked why he was doing this, the man replied to R. Jochanan in the following manner: "I need these for a journey, the other ones (the ripe figs) will not keep."[52]

The Rabbis emphasized the need for submission and acceptance of all misfortunes.[53] In regard, however, to יסורין של אהבה the Rabbis stressed the idea that these must be accepted in love.[54] R. Eliezer, we are told, summoned his afflictions during different hours of the day and always loved them.[55] A popular maxim was: "He who bore his chastisements joyfully brought salvation into the world."[56]

The mastery of Torah was also viewed as the product of this kind of suffering. The learned R. Simeon ben Shetach was forced to hide in a cave, then in sand pits. While in this terrible situation he studied Torah constantly. Upon leaving the hiding place he retained marks on his body. R. Pinchas chanced to see these whelps and began to cry. Simeon admonished him: "Consider yourself fortunate that you see these stripes, for had it not been for them you would not have found me so well learned."[57]

F. Talmudic View of Job

The forgoing material provides the necessary background for the understanding of the talmudic conception of Job - the symbol par excellence of undeserved suffering. It has been noted that the Rabbis explained this phenomena in either

of two ways; the supposedly innocent were in truth not completely free of sin, or else the suffering was a sign of God's love intended to strengthen and enoble the character of the sufferer through a series of agonizing trials.

In the first chapter of the book of Job, Job is portrayed as a man of integrity, piety and benevolence. The Rabbis who sought to explain his suffering could not accuse him of flagrant transgressions in view of this prologue; instead he is accused of a sin of omission. "Pharoah had three councellors, when he decreed his oppressive measures against the Israelites, Balaam, Job and Jethro. Balaam, who advised him to issue the decree, was later killed. Job for keeping silent was punished by visitations."[58]

Job is also accused of other transgressions but these are all said to have taken place after he had begun his period of suffering. R. Eliezer interpreted Job's declaration "The earth has been given into the hand of the wicked" (Job 9:24) as an indication that Job sought to "turn the dish upside down" - Job wanted to assert the absence of a moral power in the universe. R. Joshua said to him, that by these words Job did not intend to blaspheme God, but was merely referring to Satan - that God had given the earth to Satan.[59]

R. Pappos interpreted Job's statement "But He is at one with Himself, and who can turn Him." (Job 23:12) in the following manner - God judges all human beings by Himself, there is no one in the position to argue with him.[60] In

doing this R. Pappos is accusing Job is criticizing God's alleged arbitrary procedure in passing judgment on man. R. Akiba took exception to this interpretation and explained Job's remark so: "God judges man by Himself, but to nothing in his judgment is objection to be found, as He judges all in truth and all in justice."[61]

As in the dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua so here the difference between R. Pappos and R. Akiba seems to be that R. Pappos follows the simple meaning of the text, which seems to indicate that Job blasphemed God and His providence. Accordingly then the suffering which Job undergoes is the result of his sin and the failure to accept his fate. This view is supported by another statement: "When the Holy One brought chastisements upon Job he cursed and blasphemed God."[62]

R. Akiba and R. Joshua, however, considered Job a righteous man and on that account they both sought to interpret the verses in such a way that all traces of blasphemy be removed from him. In their view, then, the suffering which Job undergoes is Chastisement of Love, since he is in the catagory of those who are almost wholly righteous.

In accordance with this view there are to be found various passages in the Talmud which praise his noble character and describe his generosity.[63] As the righteous, referred to above protected their generation, so it is said of Job: "He sheltered his generation as a tree."[64]

G. The Suffering of the Righteous-Unanswered

The nature of religion is such that there must always be an element of awe and mystery. Whereas Greek thought sought to explain the entire universe within a complete metaphysical system, in talmudic thought there always remained some area which the Rabbis felt could not be fully understood or explained by the finite human mind.

This study so far, has examined the opinions of those Rabbis who felt compelled to answer the enigma of the suffering of the righteous. There are those, however, who felt the need to be silent in the presence of a divine decree concerning the fate of an individual. Moses, according to the Talmud, was shown the learning ability of R. Akiba. "Then Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Thou hast shown me his Torah, now show me his reward! Turn thee around said God; and as Moses turned around he saw them weighing R. Akiba's flesh in the marketplace.' 'Lord of the Universe, cried Moses, such Torah and such a reward' God replied: Be silent, for such is my decree."[65] R. Jannai said: "It is not in our power (to explain) either the security of the wicked or the affliction of the righteous."[66]

The position taken by these Rabbis may be attributed to two basic ideas that are to be found within the Talmud. The first of these challanges the ability of man to fully understand the nature of Divine Retribution. Man can not

know the definite measure of reward for the doing of any precept. Hence he is told to be as heedful of a light precept as of a serious one.[67] Ben Azzai refutes the common conception of Divine Retribution when he says that the reward for performing a precept is a precept, and the recompense for performing a transgression is another transgression.[68] The noble character of this maxim can not be questioned. Herein is implied the ethical concept of doing the Good for its own sake. When this idea becomes the motivation for human conduct, suffering or material prosperity does not arise as a problem since moral behavior is divorced from reward.

A second thought which may have led the Rabbis to be reluctent in answering the problem of the suffering of the just, is man's inability to truly know that which is evil. The story is told of R. Akiba who was refused lodging in a town and was therefore forced to spend the night in the open fields. Within this field various incidents befall him, such as a strong wind extinguishing his only lamp, a weasel killing his cock both of which would appear at first to be misfortunes. The result, however, is that these seemingly evil events are responsible for his being saved from captors who invaded the nearby town.[69] R. Akiba from thenceforth said: "One should be in the habit of saying All that God does is for the best."[70]

A similar story is also found in connection with Nachum

Gimzo, who accepted all misfortunes with the attitude of "This too is for the best."[71] Even death, in one instance, is conceived to be better than life when that life is racked with pain and affliction. Though others prayed for the recovery of Rabbi Judah, his handmaid who knew the agony of his sickness prayed for his death.[72]

NOTES

1. Aboth IV:15
2. Berakot 7a
3. 'Avodah Zorah 4a
4. Gittin 4b
5. Berakot 7a
6. Ketubbot 5a
7. Sanhedrin 93a
8. Ketubbot 5a
9. Yoma 29a
10. Ta'anit 24a
11. ibid. 22a
12. Pesahim 68a
13. Sukkah 45a
14. Sanhedrin 95b
15. Sukkah 46a
16. Yoma 38b
17. Sanhedrin 103a
18. Ta'anit 8a
19. Gittin 39b
20. Menahot 44a
21. Pesahim 2b
22. Berakot 17a
23. Shabbath 152b
24. Kettubot 104a

25. Berakot 18a
26. Solomon Schechter, Studies in Judaism, p.219
27. Sanhedrin 46b
28. Kiddushin 40b
29. Berakot 61a
30. 'Arakin 16b
31. Sanhedrin 101
32. Shabbath 30a
33. 'Erubin 41
34. Yoma 77a
35. Berakot 7a
36. ibid.
37. Rosh Ha-Shanah 16b
38. Rosh Ha-Shanah 40a
39. Berakot 7a
40. Solomon Schechter, op.cit. p.282
41. Kiddushin 40b
42. Negaim 10a
43. Baba Mezia 85a
44. Shabbath 33b
45. Megillah 15a
46. Berakot 62a
47. Sanhedrin 39a
48. Shabbath 54a
49. Sanhedrin 101a
50. Berakot 5a

51. Berakot 5a
52. Hagigah 5a
53. Berakot 54a
54. Berakot 5a and Shabbath 88
55. Baba Mezia 84a
56. Ta'anit 8a
57. Berakot 33a
58. Sanhedrin 106a
59. Baba Bathra 16a
60. Lauterbach, Mekhilta, p.248, 7:70
61. ibid.
62. Baba Bathra 15b
63. Baba Bathra 15a
64. ibid.
65. Menahot 29b
66. Aboth IV:15
67. Nedarim 39b
68. Aboth IV:2
69. Berakot 60b
70. ibid.
71. Ta'anit 21a
72. Ketubbot 104a

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SUFFERING OF ISRAEL

A. The Tragic History of Israel

"If there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence. If the duration of sorrows and the patience with which they are borne enoble, the Jews are among the aristocracy of every land. If a literature is called rich which contains a few classic tragedies, what shall we say to a national tragedy lasting for thousands of years in which the poets and the actors are also the heroes."[1]

Whereas the vicissitudes of national existence would ordinarily not fall within the scope of theodicy, the tragic history of Israel, a people martyred throughout the centuries yet insisting that it was the "chosen of God",[2] is inexorably bound up with the problem of theodicy.

The Rabbis recognized that Israel was a nation, which as it were, experienced more than its share of tragedies and misfortunes. "The Rabbis asked: Who wrote the Scroll of Fasts? Hananiah and his band because they loved the memory of the great distress. R. Simeon ben Gamaliel said: 'We too cherish affliction but they are so many that time would fail to record them and the intervention of God in behalf of the Jews have been so often that it is impossible to record them."[3]

A Gentile seeking to become a proselyte was asked if he knew of the sufferings and persecutions undergone by the Jews.[4] The purpose of doing this was, no doubt, to warn him that a similar fate will befall him upon becoming a Jew.

The frequent and recurrent misfortunes of Israel led one Rabbi to associate their fate with the heavenly bodies. "An eclipse is an evil omen for Israel. Israel is well versed in receiving punishment. If a teacher should come into school with a whip, who is it that worries? Surely it is only he who has tasted the whip betimes that is concerned."[5] This constant suffering had made Israel grow insensitive to pain as the dead body is to a prick of a needle.[6]

The fortunes of Israel made her similar to the dust of the earth at times, while on other occasions she could be compared to the stars of the firmament. "In a period of oppression Israel is forced unto the dirt, when she rises it is unto the very heavens."[7]

In order to survive the harrowing existence of a Jew a special mentality was required. The Rabbinical dictum "Each Jew is responsible for his fellow Jew"[8] was broadened and expounded. It may very well be the basis for the following statements which define the attitude the Jew should take to national misfortunes. "When Israel is in the state of affliction, one must not say I will rather live by myself, eat and drink, and find peace in my soul." "When a man shows himself indifferent to the suffering of the community, there

come the two angels, who accompany each Jew, and they put their hands on his head and say: 'This man who has separated himself from his people, shall be excluded from their consolation."[9]

The creation of a proper attitude and mentality toward national calamity, and the anesthetic effect of long periods of suffering enabled the people to continue their existence, yet the question of how to reconcile hard reality with the justice of God remained a difficult one.

In attempting to answer this most vexing problem the Rabbis elaborated upon the biblical concept of "Israel's Election" ascribing to Israel a definite position, an unique station in the order of the world. The cosmos was created solely for the sake of Israel.[10] As the world depends upon the four winds for existence, in a similar manner the world is dependent upon Israel.[11] The evil and good that befalls mankind are also attributable to Israel.[12] Israel is the prime element of the world.[13] "God says: If I smite a people once they are destroyed, I need not visit them a second time, except Israel for destruction comes and passes over and Israel recovers."[14]

During the creation of the world a stipulation was made with the works of creation: "If Israel accepts my Law it will be well, if not all shall be reduced to a state of chaos.[15]

Occupying this privileged position implies corresponding

obligations. As God's chosen Israel must necessarily be a nation beyond reproach. Any transgression would bring instantaneous punishment. As has been noted, it was believed that God smote the hardest those nearest to righteousness. In explaining such an enigma it was believed that great compensation lay at the end of the hardest of roads. Often the great reward was simple enough in nature, e.g. that Israel would return to the right path after a period of suffering. In this vein R. Jochanan compared Israel to an olive. As an olive gives forth its oil under pressure, so Israel returns to the good only after the application of force.[16] "Severe decrees are more able to bring Israel to do the good than forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses."[17] It was further pointed out that the three gifts, Torah, Land of Israel and the next world,- enjoyed by Israel were obtained after periods of [illegible].[18]

While undergoing chastisement for the sake of a higher national morality, God retained His intimate relationship with His chosen ones. "God suffers with them in their oppression and abides with them in their distress."[19] He is joined by the pious, particularly the patriarchs, who grieve over Israel's suffering.[20] Even when Israel is defiled by sin and transgression the Schechinah rests upon them.[21]

Through chastisement God strengthened Israel's character in this world, and also insured them a goodly portion in the world to come. Rab explained the afflictions of Israel

as a sign by God: "That he did not intend to destroy Israel, but rather preserve her for the next world." While R. Judah reasoned that if a slave is freed for suffering the loss of one tooth, how much more is one who suffers in this world to be freed in the hereafter.[22]

The suffering of Israel was explained by others as a form of punishment for the worship of the golden calf. For this sin Israel was destined to study Torah in suffering and bondage, in exile and unrest, amid cares of life and burdens, until in the future world they would be compensated for their suffering.[23]

This idea that the fate if Israel is bound up with her moral conduct is essentially a biblical concept which reappears in the Talmud. There is, however, another explanation of Israel's suffering in the Bible, which is advanced in the Suffering Servant passages of Duetro-Isaiah.[24] "The prophet sees Israel as a man of woe and grief, chosen by Providence to undergo unheard of trials for a great cause, by which at last he is to be exalted. Bent and disfigured by his burden of misery and shame, abhorred and shunned as one laden with sin, he suffers no guilt of his own. He is called to testify to his God among all the peoples and is thus the Servant of the Lord - the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind from whose bruises healing come to all nations."[25]

The similarity between this concept and the rabbinic

concept of יסורין של צדיקים is obvious. The question arises did the Rabbis of the Talmud apply this interpretation to the collective suffering of Israel? Did they conceive of Israel's suffering as an expiation for the sins of other nations?

B. Israel as the "Suffering Servant"

The writer going through the talmudic sources finds no evidence to support this contention. To maintain that the Rabbis ascribed to this view is basically an argument from silence. Considering the non-universalistic trend that appears throughout the literature, one can hardly expect that this idea - implying a universalistic view of great magnitude - to prevail at this time.

The writer's view is substantiated by Moore. "It does not appear that the Jews in the beginning of our era understood this passage (The Suffering Servant passages - in which the nations realize that they are saved through Israel's suffering) in this way..... the pregnant idea of the mission of Israel found little comprehension in the centuries that followed."[26]

Kaufman Kohler, however, is of the opinion that this idea - Israel has a mission, in suffering because of this mission she atones for other nations - was indeed held by the Rabbis.[27] His proof is limited to two illustrations which must be judged on their own merits. The first passage

reads: "These shall be priviliged to see the majesty of God in full splendor, who meet humiliation but do not humiliate others, who bear insult but do not inflict it on others, who endure a life of martyrdom in pure love of God."[28]

While this passage dictates the manner in which Israel is to undergo suffering it does not, however, imply that this suffering is the product of Israel's missionary activity, nor a means of expiation for the sins of other nations. It is not related at all to the problem for which Kohler uses it as a proof source.

The second illustrations seems nearer the point. "Behold, how the Torah selects for the sacrificial altar only such animals as belonged to the pursued, not the pursuers: the ox which is pursued by the lion, the sheep which is pursued by the wolf..... in a like manner God chose for His own the persecuted ones: Abel, who was persecuted by his brother Cain; Noah, who was derided by the generation of the flood.... in the same manner God has chosen Israel from among the seventy nations, as the lamb hunted, by seventy wolfs so that it should bear His law to mankind."[29]

Two points must be noted in connection with this passage. As, in the Deutero-Isaiah passages, so here, Israel is chosen to bring God's message to mankind. However, at this point the similarity between the biblical concept and the rabbinic idea implied in the above passage ends. The persecution alluded to above is not the result of Israel's

bearing testimony to God; it is not the outcome of preaching God's message as in the case of the Suffering Servant passages in the Bible. In this passage we are told that "God chose for his own the persecuted ones." That is to say Israel is suffering even before she is charged with the commission to bring "His law to mankind". Her fate, then, is independent of her missionary activity.

The second point is of equal importance. Kohler in presenting the above passage alludes to two parallel passages in Ecc. R. 3:19 and Lev. R. 27:5. The theme in both these passages is that "God chooses the persecuted rather than those who persecute for his own." For this reason God has chosen Israel להיות לו לעם סגולה. The missionary implications are completely omitted in these passages, and what is of greater importance these passages end with the following sentence. לעולם הקב"ה תובע דמן של נרדפין מן הרודפין. The underlying theme is retribution, that those who persecute will in the end be punished. This idea can hardly be reconciled with the idea implied in Deutero-Isaiah, nor with Kohler's position that the Rabbis conceived of Israel's suffering as an atonement for the sins of other nations.

One must therefore conclude that during the talmudic period the suffering of Israel was not interpreted as related to her mission or as a means of expiation for the sins of other nations.

The study of Israel's suffering concludes our examination of the rabbinical explanation for the evil that befalls man. If the Rabbis have been successful in answering this problem it is because they have transferred the sphere of final retribution to another existence. Their theodicy is beyond refutation because it is beyond experience, and primarily a matter of faith. The rabbinic theodicy remains valid as long as the faith in this other life persists.

NOTES

1. Kaufman Kohler, Jewish Theology, p.367
2. Kiddushin 36a
3. Shabbath 13b
4. Ketubboth 4a
5. Sukkah 29b
6. Shabbath 13b
7. Megillah 16a
8. Shebuoth 13b
9. Ta'anith 11a
10. Berakot 32b
11. Ta'anith 3b
12. Yebamot 63a
13. Menahot 69a
14. Sotah 9a
15. 'Avodah Zorah 3a
16. Menahot 53b
17. Megillah 14a
18. Berakot 5a
19. Shabbath 12b
20. Berakot 18b
21. Yoma 57a
22. 'Avodah Zorah 4a
23. Sanhedrin 102a
24. Isaiah 42:1, 44:1, 50:4, 52:13-53:12

25. Kaufman Kohler, op.cit., p.372
26. George F. Moore, Judaism, p.239, Vol. II
27. Kaufman Kohler, op.cit., p.375
28. Yoma 23a
29. Pesikta di Rab Kahana 76a

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SOURCES OF MORAL EVIL

The Talmud acknowledges the existence of forces that are evil or make for evil. These powers vary in importance from the powerful Yetza Ha'rah, which plays a crucial role in rabbinic theology, to the various demons whose position is relatively insignificant in the total structure of rabbinic thought. The belief in evil powers created the problem of reconciling their existence, origin and activities with the Absolute Good-God. This latter problem will be dealt with after the forces of evil are described and analyzed.

Resh Lakish maintained that there was essentially one power of evil which manifested itself in different forms. "Satan, the Yetza Ha'rah, and the Angel of Death are all one."[1] Other Rabbis, however, attributed specific functions to these beings so that each of them takes on particular characteristics.

A. Satan

Satan like all celestial beings can assume any form, as of a bird,[2] a stag,[3] a woman or a beggar.[4] The chief functions of Satan are three-fold: to tempt, accuse and punish. "He cometh down and leadeth astray; he goeth up and worketh up wrath; he cometh down and taketh away the soul."[5]

In his role as tempter he was responsible for David's sin with Bathsheba.[6] Appearing in the likeness of a beautiful woman, he aroused the passion of R. Meir and could have destroyed him were it not for a heavenly voice which proclaimed: "Beware of R. Meir and his Torah."[7] In this particular role, he is dependent upon the Yetza Ha'rah within man to respond in such a manner as to cause man to sin.[8]

Satan's role as accuser is illustrated in the following passage. "Satan said to the Almighty: 'Sovereign of the Universe to this old man (Abraham) you have graciously vouchsafe a child at 100 years, yet at the banquet he prepared, he did not have one sacrifice for Thee.'"[9] Those who are righteous are accused by Satan of being upright for some selfish purpose.[10] In his eagerness to accuse, Satan seizes upon even a single word which may be prejudical to man, to that "one should not open his mouth unto Satan."[11] Satan accuses Israel every day of the year except on Yom Kippur.[12]

The Rabbis maintained that Satan had an independent existence, but at times he would enter the bodies of individuals, causing friction between friends. R. Meir successfully conjured him out of an individual, whereupon Satan exclaimed, "Meir has driven me from my home."[13] Satan is on occasion called the Angel of Strife.[14]

B. The Angel of Death

The Angel of Death is one of God's many messengers.

Having received his commission from God, he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked in carrying out his duties.[15] If God seeks to preserve the righteous he tells Gabriel to mark a Tau on the forehead of the righteous so that the Angel of Death may have no power over them.[16] David succeeded in thwarting his mission by studying the law. The Angel of Death distracted David by shaking a tree, and thus took his soul.[17] A vivid description of the Angel of Death and his method of operation is found in the Tracte 'Avodah Zorah. "It is said of the Angel of Death that he is full of eyes. When a sick person is about to depart, he stands above his head-pillow with his sword drawn out in his hand and a drop of gall hanging from it. As the sick person beholds it, he trembles and opens his mouth (in fright). The Angel then drops the gall into his mouth. It is from this that he dies, from this gall the corpse deteriorates."[18]

The Angel of Death is the most well known of the group of heavenly messengers that are considered evil. The Talmud, however, speaks of a good and bad angel that accompany man on Friday evening as he returns to his house from the synagogue. If the candles are lit, the table properly spread, and the couch arrainged the good angel says: "So may it be on the following Sabbath, to which the bad angel, even against his will, says Amen.[19] Some angels serve in the capacity of accusers, similar to Satan. "If 199 angels give a bad account of man and only one gives a favorable account, God

inclines the balance to the meritorious side. Should even 999 parts of one Angel's report be bad, and only one thousandth good, God will still do the same."[20]

C. The Yezer Harah

The Yezer Ha'rah has been translated as the "evil imagination" in the Authorized Version.[21] Montefiore suggests that the word "inclination" would cover the meaning more accurately, while Moore suggests that "evil impulse comes nearest to the term."[23] In all events both scholars agree that the Yezer Ha'rah is basically a force residing within man, and take exceptiong with Schechter who says: "The Yezer Ha'rah is a quasi-exteral agent responsible for man's sin."[24] There is indeed an outside or external factor in the operation of the Yezer Ha'rah. That is the opportunity or invitation to sin may come from without, but it is the response of the Yezer Ha'rah to this stimuli that converts it into a temptation and eventually into sin. It would seem then more prudent to recognize the Yezer Ha'rah as basically a force within man.

The names applied to the Yezer Ha'rah are various and indicative both of his nature and function. "The Yezer Ha'rah has seven names. The Holy One, called him evil;[25] Moses called him uncircumcised;[26] David called him unclean;[27] Solomon called him enemy;[28] Isaiah called him stumbling-block;[29] Ezekiel called him stone;[30] Joel called him the hidden-one[31]

in the heart of man."[32]

Minor functions of the Yezer Ha'rah includes accusing man; "The Yezer Ha'rah persuades man to sin in this world, and bears testimony against him on the world to come,"[33] and seeking to destroy man: "The Yezer Ha'rah of man assaults him every day, endeavoring to kill him."[34] His main activity consists of seducing and tempting man to sin. Through subtle persuasion he seeks to destroy man's inhibitions to sin. "If the Yezer Ha'rah says to you sin and God will forgive you believe it not."[35] "And let not the evil inclination assure thee that the grave is a place of refuge for thee; for without they will wast thou fashioned, without thy will wast thou born, without thy will wilt thou die, and without thy will art thou of certainty to give an account and reckoning before the King of Kings."[36]

The ways of the Yezer Ha'rah are those of the insinuating kind, appearing first to man as a modest traveler, פתי then as a welcome guest, אורח and ending as the master of the house בעל.[37] "This is the device of the Yezer Ha'rah, today it says do this, tomorrow this, till at last it says 'worship an idol!, and man goes and does it."[38] The snare in which the Yezer Ha'rah entangles man is at first sight as insignificant and vain as the thin thread of the cobweb, but it soon takes the dimension of rope, making it impossible for man to free himself from it.[39]

Those who are vain are most susceptible to the allurments

of the Yezer Ha'rah. "Simon the Just asked a Nazarite of stately appearance, beautiful eyes and curly hair: 'My son, why didst thou choose to have thy beautiful hair destroyed?' He answered: 'I acted as father's shepherd in my town. Once I went to fill the bucket at the well; but when I saw my image reflected in the water, my Yezer grew and sought to turn me out from this world. Then I said unto him; Thou wicked one, why dost thou pride thyself with a world which is not thine? I take an oath that I will have thee shaved in the service of heaven.'"[40]

The passion on which the Yezer Ha'rah plays most is the sexual desire. "R. Hiyya ben Ashi, when he fell on his face in prayer was wont to say: 'May God deliver me from the evil inclination.' When one day his wife overheard him, she thought: It is now many years that we have lived apart, why does he say this. One day he was studying in the garden, his wife disguised herself and passed before him two times. He said to her: 'Who are you?' She said: 'I am Hitra, and have returned today.' He solicited her and she yielded to him. Then she said: 'Fetch me the fruit on the top of the palm tree', he hastened and went and brought it to her. When he went home his wife was heating the oven, he went and sat in it. She said to him: 'What means this?' He said to her such and such have I done. She said to him: 'It was I.' He did not believe her till she gave him the fruit. Then he said to her: 'Nevertheless I intended what

is forbidden.' All his days thereafter did he fast, until his very death."[41]

The Yezer Ha'rah is often successful in arousing the sexual passion of the most pious. "Some women redeemed from captivity were brought to Nehardea, and they took them to the house of R. Amram the pious. They took away the ladder from the room in which the women were placed. While one of them was walking about the room, a ray of light fell upon her and revealed her. R. Amram took the ladder, which ten men could not lift, and lifted it unto position by himself. When he had gone half way up the ladder, he forced himself to stop, and called out in a loud voice: 'Amram's house is on fire.' Then the Rabbis came and said: 'You frightened us by a false alarm.' He said: 'It is better that you should be falsely alarmed about the house of Amram in this world than you should be ashamed of Amram in the world to come.' Then he conjured the evil inclination to leave him. It left him in the guise of a pillar of fire. He said: 'I perceive that thou art fire, and I am flesh, but I am stronger than you!'"[42]

In the above passage the Evil Inclination is half-personified as an evil spirit or demon separate from man. Though possessed by this evil spirit man can through great efforts rid himself of it.

There are instance in the Talmud in which the evil inclination has nothing to do with the sexual drive. If

there are two concurrent cases of need; a friend who seeks aid in unloading his donkey and an enemy who needs similar assistence, the Talmud maintains that the enemy takes precedence. Rashi explains this passage so; the purpose of the act is to crush the Yezer Ha'rah of the man, which tempts him to leave the enemy and help the friend.[43]

The beginning of the association of the Yezer Ha'rah with man is a controverted point amongst the Rabbis. R. Judah was of the opinion that the Yezer Ha'rah entered man while he was in the embryonic state, but abandoned this view as can be seen from the following passage. "R. Judah was asked by Antonius: 'When does the Yezer Ha'rah begin his rule over man; from the moment of his formation into bones, muscles and flesh or from the time of his birth?' R. Judah was inclined to favor the former view to which Antonius objected on the ground that there is no proof of an evil tendency on the part of the embryo. Thereupon R. Judah declared himself in favour of the latter view, and in a public lecture made this statement: "This fact Antonius taught me, and Scripture is in his support: as it is said: 'At the door (of man's entering the world) the sin lieth'."[44] There is an isolated opinion that till the age of ten a child is free of the Yezer Ha'rah.[45] "The general notion seems to be the one accepted by R. Judah, which is that the Evil Yezer accompanies man from his earliest childhood to his old age."[46]

Demons:

Rabbinic demenology recognizes three basic groups of demons. These were the "Shedim", the "Mazzikin" (harmers), and the "Ruchin" (evil spirits). Occasionally they are referred to in the Talmud as מלאכי חבלה (Angels of Destruction).[47] "They surround man on all sides as the earth does the fruit of the vine; if man could see them he would lack the strength to face them."[48]

R. Jochanan knew of 300 kinds of "Shedim".[49] These powers were considered to be especially dangerous at night. "It is unsafe to greet a man in the dark for he may be a demon."[50] "It is dangerous to sleep alone in the house for "Lilith" (the night spirit) may seize you."[51] On the evenings of Wednesday and Saturday ninteen demons haunt the air, each of them capable of doing harm.[52]

Demons may at time assume the shape of men, but they have no shadow.[53] "Like angels they have wings and fly from one end of the world to the other, and like men they eat, propagate, and die."[54] They are particularly attracted to students of the Torah. They are responsible for the faintness of students, the wear and tear of clothing in the schoolhouses and the assemblies of the learned. They are also attributed with bringing various forms of sickness upon man such as blindness,[55] leprosy,[56] and the croup.[57]

In fixing responsibility for the existence of these demonic forces the Rabbis resorted to two different explanations.

The Mishnah Aboth states that evil spirits were among the ten things created on the eve of Sabbath;[58] after their souls were created the Sabbath arrived and so they remained without bodies.[59] There is, however, another view that traces the origin of demons back to man. "When Adam, doing penance for his sin, separated from Eve for one hundred and thirty years, he by impure thoughts caused the world to be filled with "Shedim", "Lilin" and evil spirits."[60]

"In the main, demonology among the Jews preserved its simple character as a popular belief, the demons being regarded as mischievious but not as diabolical, or as agencies of a power antagonistic to God."[61] For this reason demonology never occupied an intregal part of rabbinic theology,[62] and is not touched upon in the theodicy of the Rabbis.

D. Matter as a Force for Evil

There remains one more factor which may be construed as a force for evil - the body of man. Stated in more general terms the question may be posited in this manner: Is matter to be considered evil, while spirit is the force for good in the world? The belief that the physical organism, as matter, is evil per se was an idea prevalent in the philosophies of the Hellenistic world.[63] This idea, however, made little inroads into the rabbinic thought. "The Rabbis do not ascribe the tendency to do evil specifically to the

flesh. We can not say that they ascribe righteousness to the soul and sin to the body or flesh."[64] If any organ of the human body were to be held responsible it would be either the heart or the mind of man. "The heart and mind of man generates the thoughts and devices..... while the body as a whole is a mere involuntary instrument in its accomplishments."[65]

To be sure the body is also held accountable for the committing of sins as is illustrated in the following passage: "Antonius said to the Rabbi: 'Body and soul can escape the judgment?' How? 'The body says, It was the soul that sinned, for since the day that I separated from it, here I lie like a stone, silent in the tomb.' And the soul says, It was the body that sinned, for from the day that I separated from it I am soaring in the air like a bird.' Rabbi replied: I will give you a parable for it. A human king had a fine park in which were fine new fruits. He stationed in it two keepers, one lame and the other blind. The lame man said to the blind man: 'Fine early fruits I see in the park; let me mount you and we will get them and eat them.' So the lame man rode on the back of the blind man and they got the fruits and they ate them. After a while the owner of the park came and said to them: 'Where are the fine early fruits?' The lame man said: 'Have I then legs to get them?' The blind man said: 'Have I then eyes to see them?' What did he do? He made the lame man mount

the blind man and judged them together. So God will bring the soul and inject it into the body and judge them together."[66]

In this joint responsibility the guilt of the soul is greater because it so, to speak, is better bred. "Two men committed the same offense against the king, one of them a simple villager, the other a man brought up in the palace. The king let the villager go and pronounced sentence on the other. His courtiers said to him: 'Both of them committed the same offence, yet you have let the villager go and pronounced sentence on the courtier.' He replied, 'I let the villager go because he did not know the laws of the government, but the courtier was continually with men and knew what the laws of the government are and what judgment is pronounced against one who offends against them and me." So the body is a villager - 'God fashioned man out of the dust from the ground'; but the soul is a courtier from above - He breathed into his nostrils a soul of life.'"[67]

In short then, matter in and of itself is not considered by the Rabbis to be a force for evil.

E. Talmudic Theodicy

The theodicy the Rabbis resorted to in explaining these forces of evil is one in which the absolute character of these forces are denied. Satan was not an eternal being, he was created by God in the same manner as Eve.[68] Neither Satan or the Angel of Death have powers of independent action,

both must receive God's permission before acting.[69] Satan, while he has powers over all the works of man,[70] can not prevail at the same time against two individuals of different nationalities, so that Sammuel, the noted astronomer and teacher of the Law, would start on a journey accompanied by a Gentile.[71] Satan's knowledge is further circumscribed on the New Year, for when the Shofar is sounded he is confounded.[72] R. Hisda rendered Satan powerless by marrying at the age of sixteen.[73] Thus Satan's power is proscribed by God's will and man's activity.

The Talmud records instances in which men were capable of thwarting the designs of the Angel of Death by the study of Law.[74]

In limiting the power of these "evil forces" the Rabbis eliminated the possibility of Judaism accepting any form of Dualism. The cosmic, absolute nature of evil was an idea forever alien to Judaism. The problem, however, remained, as to how God, the Absolute Good, could create these forces which were even in a limited sense evil. That the Rabbis were aware of this problem can be seen in the various passages in the Talmud in which the distance of the Angels of Destruction from God are mentioned.[75] In all these cases the underlying idea is that God - the original source of good would not come into contact with evil. Yet the Rabbis do not delve into the greater metaphysical problem of how these forces of evil, from which God seems to disassociate Himself,

could have eminated from a power that was completely Good.

Perhaps this is so, because the Rabbis never viewed these forces as completely evil. Such a view is expressed about Satan: "Satan had a pious purpose in acting as an adversary against Job. He feared that God would forget the love of Abraham."[76] "The Torah was given to Moses in secret because of Satan. He was kept in ignorance, since he opposed the Torah being given to Moses, on the ground that forty days later, the Israelites would violate it by worshipping the golden calf."[77]

The Yezer Ha'rah a supposedly evil force is similarly considered by the Rabbis to possess certain positive and moral value. "It is very good - R. Nahman ben Sammuel said: 'That is the evil inclination." But is the evil inclination very good? Yes, for if it were not for the evil inclination man would not build a house, or take a wife, or beget children, or engage in business, as it says: 'All labour and skillful work come of a man's rivalry with his neighbor.'"[78] It must be remarked that the impulses to which the title Yezer Ha'rah applies are not intrinsically evil, much less in themselves sin, but evil from their effects when man yields himself to be impelled by them to consciously unlawful acts.[79]

Since man, however, does so often yield to the Yezer Ha'rah instead of controlling it, the Rabbis viewed the Yezer Ha'rah as a sore calamity. "Rabbi said: 'So hard is the evil Yezer, that even its creator calls it evil as it is

said; For the Yetzer of man's heart is evil from his youth."[80] After observing the operation of the Yezer Ha'rah within man, God regretted ever having made it.[81]

Man in his struggle to constrain the Yezer Ha'rah requires great strength. When the Israelites say to God: "Lord of the Universe, Thou knowest how hard the Yezer Ha'rah is." God's only words of consolation are: "Try to remove it a little in this world and I will rid you of it in the world to come."[82]

The most effective means of restraining the Yezer Ha'rah is the study of Torah, occupying oneself with God's law. "Rab said: Though God created the Yezer Ha'rah, He created the law as an antidote against it."[83] This opinion is also reflected in the following parable. "A king had smitten his son a grevious blow. He bound a bandage upon the wound and said, My son, so long as this bandage is upon your wound you may eat and drink whatever you like, and bathe in warm or cold water, and you will not take harm. But if you remove the bandage from the wound a deep ulcer will result. So God says to the Israelites: 'My children, I have created in you the evil inclination, and I have created for you the Law as an antiseptic. So long as you occupy yourselves with it, the evil inclination will not have dominion over you, but if you do not occupy yourselves with the Law, you will be delivered into its power.'"[84]

In accordance with this principle the school of R.

Ishmael taught: "If the abomination meet you drag it to the house of study, if it is as hard as stone it will be crushed, if it is as hard as iron it will be broken into pieces."[85]

R. Simeon ben Lakish gave the following perscription in order for man to curb the evil impulse. "A man should always stir his good impulse against the evil impulse, for it is said 'Be stirred up and sin not' (Ps. 4:5). If he conquers it well; if not let him occupy his mind with the Law, for it is said 'Think in your heart' (ibid.) . If he conquers it, well; if not let him recite the Shma, for it is said 'Upon your heart'. If he conquer it well; if not, let him be mindful of the day of his death, for it is written 'And be silent'."[86]

To stimulate the better self to contend against the evil Yezer affords man his greatest reward. "Once R. Hanina and R. Jochanan were walking along a road when they came to a fork in the road. One path led to the door of an idolatrous Temple, and one to the door of a brothel. One Rabbi said: 'Let us pass the door of the Temple, for its Yezer is slain (ineffective). The other said: 'No, let us pass the brothel, subdue our own Yezer and gain the reward.'"[87] In a similar vein, R. Joshua ben Levi said: "He who sacrifices the evil inclination, Scripture considers him as though he had honored the Holy One in both worlds."[88]

Talmudic theodicy further recognizes that much of the evil found in the world is not directly attributable to God,

but rather to man. Man, within talmudic thought is considered to be a "Free Agent" capable through his own free volition of bringing evil upon himself and others. To secure this freedom it would seem that God has forgone his perogative in respect of preventing sin. These limitations to Divine Omnipotence are reflected in the following passages. "God in His providence determines beforehand what a man shall be and what shall befall him, but not whether he shall be godly or godless, righteous or wicked."[89] "Everything is in the power of Heaven, except the fear of Heaven."[90]

Philosophically man's free will not only conflicts with the idea of Divine Omnipotence, but also with concept of Divine Omniscience. For if God knows in advance what is to happen, then man's acts are determined by this very foreknowledge. "Before a thought is formed in a man's heart it is known already to God; even before a man is fully formed his thought is made manifest to God."[91] In the talmudic period this problem was never resolved. R. Akiba was content to assert both sides of the puzzle and leave it at that. "Everything is foreseen, (by God) and freedom of choice is given."[92]

The prevailing idea seems to be that man's destiny is determined by Providence, but his character depends upon his own free decision.

A deeper insight into the problem of free will and the evil that man do is offered in the saying: "It can be

proved by the Torah, the prophets and the other sacred writings that man is led along the road he wishes to follow."[93] Man is led by God in the way in which he chooses to go. "If a man comes to defile himself the opportunity is given to him; if to purify himself, he is helped to do it (Divine assistence)."[94]

The effect of doing evil is that it creates a pattern which is difficult to destroy. "Spring to fulfill the smallest duty and flee from sin; for a duty draws another duty in its train, and a sin draws after it another sin."[95] Rabbi Meir said: "If you neglect the Torah, many causes for neglecting it will present themselves to you."[96]

The Talmud, then, accounts for the moral evil manifest in the world by either of three ways. The non-human forces of evil - Satan, the Destructive Angels - were not absolute forces for evil, but agents of God; instruments through which the Divine will was executed. The Yezer Ha'rah - the inclination to do evil was a potential source for Good if properly controlled. The evil that man does to himself and other human beings is the result of God's gift of free choice.

NOTES

1. Baba Bathra 16a
2. Sanhedrin 107a
3. Sanhedrin 95a
4. Kiddushin 81a
5. Baba Bathra 16a
6. Sanhedrin 95a
7. Kiddushin 81a
8. Hukkat 66a
9. Genesis Raba 17
10. Hagigah 66a
11. Baba Bathra 16a
12. Yoma 20a
13. Yoma 67b and Shabbath 104a
14. ibid.
15. Baba Kamma 60a
16. Shabbath 55a
17. Shabbath 30a
18. 'Avodah Zorah 20b
19. Sanhedrin 119b
20. Shabbath 32a
21. Genesis 6:5
22. Claude Montifore, Rabbinic Anthology, p.305
23. Moore, op.cit., p.480
24. Schechter, op.cit., p.263

25. Genesis 8:21
26. Deuteuronomy 10:16
27. Psalms 51:12
28. Proverbs 15:31
29. Isaiah 57:14
30. Ezekiel 36:26
31. Joel 2:20
32. Sukkah 52a
33. Sukkah 52b
34. ibid.
35. Hagigah 16a
36. Aboth IV;22
37. Sukkah 52a
38. Shabbath 105b
39. Sukkah 57a
40. Nedarim 9b
41. Kiddushin 81b
42. Kiddushin 81a
43. Baba Mezia 32b
44. Sanhedrin 91b
45. Tanchuma 'Bereshit' 7
46. Schechter, op.cit., p.254
47. Berakot 51a, Ketubbot 104a, Sanhedrin 106b
48. Berakot 6a
49. Gittin 68a
50. Megillah 3a

51. Shabbath 151b

52. Pesaḥim 112b

53. Yebamot 122a, Gitṭin 66a

54. Ḥagigah 16b

55. Pesaḥim 112a

56. Ketubbot 61b

57. Ḥullin 107b

58. Aboth V:6

59. Gen. Raba. 7

60. Gen. Raba 20, 'Erubin 18b

61. I. Broyde, "Demonology", The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p.518

62. ibid. p.519

63. Moore, op.cit., p.485

64. Montifore, op.cit., p.311

65. Moore, op.cit., p.486

66. Sanhedrin 91a-b

67. Midrash Tanchuma Wayyikra II

68. Leviticus Raba 14:5

69. Ḥukkat 66a, Baba Kamma 60a

70. Berakot 46b

71. Shabbath 32a

72. Rosh Ha-Shanah 16b

73. Kiddushin 29b

74. Shabbath 30a

75. Gitṭin 88a, Ḥagigah 12a

76. Baba Bathra 16b
77. Sanhedrin 26b
78. Gen. Raba 9:7
79. Moore, op.cit., p.480, Vol. II
80. Kiddushin 30b
81. Sukkah 52b
82. Numbers Raba 15:6
83. Baba Bathra 16a
84. Kiddushin 30b
85. ibid.
86. Berakot 5a
87. 'Avodah Zorah 17a
88. Sanhedrin 42b
89. Nedarim 16b
90. Berakot 33b
91. Gen. Raba 9:3
92. Aboth 3:15
93. Makkot 10b
94. Shabbath 104a
95. Aboth IV:2
96. Aboth 4:12

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