

U

THE PSALMS IN MIDRASHIC EXEGESIS

The composition and contents of
MIDRASH TEHILLIM and sections
610-890 of the YALKUT SHIMONI
critically considered

by

Joseph Narot

Submitted in partial
fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Rabbi.

Cincinnati, 1940

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I - COMPOSITION

	<u>Page</u>
Why Midrash Tehillim ?	1
Primary Sources	2
Statement Of Purpose	2
Buber's Midrash Tehillim	3
The Psalms of <u>Yalkut Shimoni</u>	13

PART II - CONTENTS

Introduction	18
GOD	19
a) In The Image Of Man	19
b) To Love Mercy	22
c) To Do Justice	23
d) Great Is God	24
e) For Thy Name's Sake	25
f) And God Created.....	27
THE SUPERNATURAL	32
a) Introduction	32
b) Angels Of Heaven	32
c) The Ineffable Name	34
d) Miracles	34
e) Evil Spirits	35
g) Satan	36
ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS	37
THE ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE	45
a) Good And Evil Inclinations - Freedom Of Will - Patience - Humility - Hypocrisy - Envy - Charity - Peace - Slander	48
b) Temple - Sacrifices - Prayer - Torah - Festivals - Sabbath - Martyrdom	57
ESCHATOLOGY	73
a) Introduction	73
b) Death - Judgement - Reward And Punishment - Salvation - Messsiah - Gehinnon - World To Come	75
AFTERTHOUGHTS	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

PART I - COMPOSITION

WHY MIDRASH TEHILLIM?

It is easy to understand why the Book of Psalms should have evoked so much homiletical and religious comment from the rabbis. Perhaps no other single book in the Bible has played so vital a part in the religious development and the liturgical composition of the Jewish people as has that book traditionally ascribed to King David. For many, many centuries it has served to inspire Israel to greater devotion to God, to deeper faith in His wisdom and power, to keener appreciation of His acts of creation. The Psalmist's lamentation for suffering Israel has struck a responsive chord in the hearts of an oppressed people from Pharaoh to Hitler. The weary of heart and the bruised of body has found comfort therein. Therein have the disciples of the ethical life, of humility, peace and justice found inspiration for added loyalty to those ideals. The lover of nature has found in the Psalms the reflection of his own observations.

Yes, the Book of Psalms has appeal to all: there is song and there are tears; there is rejoicing and there is lament; there is life and there is death. But always it has served as a source of prayer for life. With what ardor the pious, throughout the ages, have chanted the Psalms in the shadow of death! And how eagerly have they sought to attach some verse from the Psalms to every name, so that the individual might add that particular verse at the close of the Amidah in his daily prayers! In every book of liturgy from the earliest to the revised edition of the Union Hebrew Prayer Book, the Psalms

comprise a considerable portion of the devotional services both in prayers and hymns. For in that book is always unshaken faith in God, in hope and in the ultimate triumph of the good.

Thus, it is not at all strange that the preachers and teachers of old should have turned to the Book of Psalms for inspiration. Here was a springboard for speculation on any subject imaginable. Here there were themes sweeping in scope: the suffering of Israel, the majesty of David, the glory of God. There were obvious interpretations in the Psalter as well as hidden or dimly suggested meanings. But whether dimly or not at all suggested, the preacher and homiletician could conjure up the strangest and most fantastic and furthest removed interpretations, and somehow they "fit"...Yes, it is no wonder that the Old Testament Psalter should have shared a prominent part in rabbinic exegesis.

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. MIDRASH TEHILLIM (Schocher Tob). Salomon Buber, Editor. Wilna. Published by the Widow and Brothers Romm. 1891. Through this paper, the volume will be designated as B, particularly in the footnotes.

2. YALKUT SHIMONI, Vol. II. Wilna. Published by Widow and Brothers Romm. The footnotes will refer to this volume as Y. 1898.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this thesis to consider the date, authorship and character of the two primary sources and to present a synopsis, thematically, of their contents. This is being done only after a very detailed reading, not only of the two volumes abovementioned, but also of a list of significant, scholarly, secondary sources. These latter are to be found in the Bibliography elsewhere in this paper.

BUBER'S MIDRASH TEHILLIM

In addition to a complete text of Midrash Tehillim, the most complete edition extant--Salomon Buber has added a lengthy introduction in which he considers every problem of the collection of homilies. It is the most thorough treatment of the subject, and to this date, the final treatment. When Lauterbach, for example, wishes to discuss Midrash Tehillim in the Jewish Encyclopedia, he draws upon Buber's Wilna edition for illustration and corroboration.

Buber introduces his discussion of the homilies by tracing the history of its name. Ancients called it, he says, either Midrash Tehillim, Agodat Tehillim, Hagodat Tehillim or Midrash Schocher Tob. The latter name was derived from the phrase which begins the rabbinic consideration of Psalm 1. The practice of naming works after the words which begin their discussion is common in rabbinic literature, we learn. Thus, another name for Midrash Shir Hashirim has been Midrash Hazis,

a word taken from the opening passage of the same book. Still another illustration of this practice is Midrash Tadshe, named after the opening phrase--Tadshe ha-aretz. A Venetian publisher used the title Alfa-Besa for the collection of Midrash Tehillim because of the acrostic form of Psalm 119.

It seems that early publishers would confuse the collections of rabbinic homilies for the books of Psalms, Proverbs and Samuel, calling them all Midrash Socher Tob. Buber discounts this practice on the grounds that they always were separate collections, written at totally different times and stemming from different compositions. The confusion is explained as due to the issuance of a Venetian publication of all three collections above named in one volume in the year 1546. Actually, the first collection of Midrashim to Psalms was published in Constantinople in 1522, whereas the publication of the rabbinic interpretation of the Book of Proverbs is unknown. Buber adds the interesting item that one man believed Midrash Socher Tob and Hagodat Tehillim to be two different collections of homilies, simply because he had seen passages quoted from the collections at various times under the different names.

Lauterbach adds some interesting information. For example, he points out that Nathan of Rome had mentioned Midrash Tehillim in his Aruk; that Rabbi Isaac b. Judah ibn Ghayyat had spoken of it in his Halokot; and that Rashi often referred to it.

1. B Introduction, p. 3.

2. Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume 10, p. 248. I Samuel 17.49 and Deuteronomy 23.7 are two of citations of Midrash Tehillim by Rashi.

Actually the original manuscripts of Midrash Tehillim contained homilies only for Psalms 1-118. The first edition of Constantinople included that much and no more. It was not until three years later that a second edition appeared in Salonica containing the homilies for the rest of the Psalms, with the exception of Psalms 123 and 131. It seems that one known as R. Mattithiah Yizhari of Sargossa had taken the homiletical fragments to these additional Psalms directly from the Yalkut. The fact that the latter had no homilies for Psalms 123 and 131 explains the omission of these in the second edition of Midrash Tehillim. When Salomon Buber was about to publish his present edition, he gathered exegetical fragments from Pesikta Rabbati, Sifre, Numbers Rabbah, and the Babylonian Talmud for the two missing Psalms, thus completing the homiletical material available for the entire Psalter.

Buber's thorough work is indicated in his discussion of the manuscripts he studied prior to the edition of the work. In all he had eight different manuscripts of the Midrash Socher Tov before him. The first, a work of 1232, was from the collection of Azarya Dei Rossi of Parma. This was "written on heavy paper in strong characters, containing 220 pages and 440 sides, written in the letters or script of Rashi, 25 lines in every row, from one scribe and one writing, but it does not mention the name of the scribe or the year of the writing."

2a Ibid. Buber gives a brief sketch of Yizhari's life and works. We learn that this is the same Yizhari who was among the rabbis in the famous Tortosa disputations in 1412.

The second manuscript stems from Florence. This has 167 pages written on both sides, in a script similar to that of Rashi. "The paper is still white and the ink black," Buber adds by way of explaining how easy it is to read the old script. From a careful study of this manuscript, Buber deduces the fact that it may have been written by one, Moses. The other five scripts which he examined came from the Vatican at Rome, Munich, London and Paris. It was only after careful, painstaking analysis of each that he set himself to the edition of the present volume. When the edition of 1891 finally appeared, it became known as edition number 12. The eleven editions of the true and original Midrash Tehillim which had preceded Buber were: Constantinople in 1512; Venice in 1546; 1613 in Prague; Amsterdam in 1730; Polonoye in 1794; Zolkowa in 1800; Lebau in 1850; Shtetin in 1861; Warsaw in 1865; and Warsaw in 1875 and 1873.

In trying to arrive at some conclusion as to who might be the original compositor, Buber first discredits the traditional interpretations. Thus the assumption that Baal Ohel Yosef lh'r Abraham Hasfardi presents is erroneous. Abraham Hasfardi believes that a certain Yohanan was the original compiler of Midrash Socher Tob,^{it} cannot be accepted because it springs from a confusion of facts, Buber asserts. Yohanan's name might be confused with this collection of homilies only because his name has been attached to the Talmud Yerushalmi. There is, however

3. Ibid. p. 82f. Buber continues to list the various ethical sayings found in manuscripts 1 and 6 but not in the others. He also presents a detailed list of other noteworthy statements of the various manuscripts.

no basis for believing that he gathered the homilies for the Psalms. Wrong, too, is the theory that Aaron Moses Karlin of P_ag_aua who suggested the name of Tanna R'Shimon Berabi as the original compiler of Midrash Tehillim. Aaron Moses advanced his theory in the firm belief that this Shimon had begun to arrange the interpretations in the order of the passages and Psalms. There is, in this case as well, no evidence to substantiate the theory.⁴

As a matter of fact, posits Buber, there is no way of determining who might have been the original compositor of the homilies to the Psalter. All that we know is that the work has been composed, that it is very old in its present form. Perhaps there are many composers. Perhaps several or many men were responsible for the arrangement, each doing a portion. This multiplicity of authorship is made plausible by the linguistic differences as well as by differences of interpretations to the same Biblical verse.⁵

Lauterbach agrees with this latter suggestion of Buber. He proves this still further by citing passages which contain the same thought in different language, a fact which for him indicates multiplicity of authorship and editorship.⁶

In 1832 Leopold Zunz wrote his monumental work Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden. There, among many other problems, he discusses the time and place of the composition of Midrash Tehillim or Midrash Socher Tob. Regarding

4. B Introduction, p.3f.

5. Ibid.

6. JE op.cit. p.247.

the problem of locale, Zunz expresses the belief that it was compiled and edited and arranged in Italy. Italy was one of the lands in constant contact with Palestine at the time the volume was composed and this explains the Palestinian influences.⁷ Buber refutes this supposition forcefully and completely. Analyzing the linguistic peculiarities, the spirit, the names of Amoraim who are frequently mentioned in the homilies, along with many other factors of the text itself, Buber concluded in turn that the place of composition of Midrash Tehillim was undoubtedly Palestine. The composer, whoever he was, copied much from the style and approach of the Talmud Yerushalmi.⁸ Lauterbach again concurs with Buber. The spirit is too genuinely and too vividly Palestinian, he explains, as are also the linguistic characteristics, the rabbis referred to and the general spirit which pervades the work.⁹

In his scholarly and monumental work, Zunz had likewise, as has been pointed out above, referred to the date of composition of the homilies to the Psalms. After a careful and detailed study, asserts Zunz, he must date the original compilation of the exegetical work to the "second third of the ninth century, in the closing years of the Gaonic times."¹⁰ In a painstaking and thorough analysis of this theory, Buber proves its fallacy.

7. Die Gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden, Frankfurt aM edition, 1892. p. 361.

8. B Introduction, p.4.

9. JE op.cit. p.248.

10. Vorträge, op.cit. p.375.

Salomon Buber admits at the outset the difficulty of arriving at the decision as to the time of its composition. It is evident that the composer was influenced by the Talmud Yerushalmi, that he must have seen, at least, Midrash Genesis Rabbah, Pesikta derab Kahana and Tanhuma. Whether or not the composer was acquainted with Talmud Babli is a more difficult matter to determine. Buber is inclined to believe that he was not familiar with it. If there are passages from the Talmud Babli in Midrash Tehillim, they might have been gathered by later copyists, just as they gathered passages from other midrashic collections. More significant is the fact that many passages of Midrash Tehillim actually contradict the spirit and outlook of Talmud Babli.

Now Leopold Zunz had tried to show the lateness of the homilies to the Psalter. But as proof, he had employed the homilies to Psalm 119. This is not very good evidence, claims Buber, since it is an understood fact that the original of Socher Tob homilies included the Psalter only as far Psalm 118. Psalms 119-150 are admittedly of a later gathering. Zunz, it must be remembered, based his hypothesis that the Socher Tob was composed in "late Gaonic times" on the basis that it echoed, if not reiterated, passages from such works as Pesikta derab Assi. But, refutes Buber, this is no proof since Pesikta derab Assi is not a late but a quite early work. It is, moreover, incorrect to attempt to prove the lateness of the homilies from some of their passages. The collection must be studied

in its entirety. And such an analysis reveals no exact date.¹²

With this Lauterbach concurs wholeheartedly.

The composer of Midrash Tehillim availed himself of many homiletical works extant in his day. The influence of the Mishna, The Tosefta, Mechilta, Sifre, Talmud Yerushalmi, Genesis Rabbah, Pesikta Derab Kahana, Tanhuma and Targum Onkelos are apparent in the work, Buber cites. And in a long list of citations, he indicates many of the phrases, passages, ideas etc. culled by the compiler of Midrash Tehillim from the above-named works.¹³

As has been pointed out above, the homilies are arranged in the order of the Psalms and verses. Each homily, usually in a single paragraph, is numbered, alphabetically. And we shall refer henceforth to the homilies in this wise: Psalm I, homily 1 as I.1¹¹. Perhaps the most characteristic technique for introduction to the exegetical interpretations is the phrase zeh sheomar hakosuv, "Thus says the scriptures." This is found in Psalms 11, 12, 14, 17, 20, 24 etc., etc. Sometimes this phrase varies slightly, only including the words zeh sheomar--"this is said", implying the Scriptures, of course. Examples of this technique are to be found in the homilies to Psalm I, as, for instance, I.1,2,3,4 etc. A good many of the homilies for Psalms 122-137, taken bodily

11. B Introduction, p.5f.

12. JE op.cit. p.248.

13. B Introduction, p.10-17.

from the Yalkut (as will be explained below), are introduced with the name of some distinguished historical character, such as David or Solomon. Still other homilies began with the comparison of the written word to the form which the homiletician believes it should be interpreted. Known as the Keri-Ketib method, they are to be found, among many others, in III.4 and IX.7. Interpretations are sometimes derived from words by changing the spelling, or by adding or subtracting a letter from that word. This technique, usually known as mole-choser is applied in VII.2 and IX.1. Homily III.3 is a good example of the rabbinic attempt to interpret Biblical passages through the numerical value of the letters in a given word. This passage, plus V.5 and XXX.13 are good illustrations of the Notarikon style of approach to the Scriptures. In such cases the interpreter will examine a certain word letter by letter, each letter of the word representing some aspect or element of the problem that the rabbi wish to present. A popular method of introduction in other Midrashim which is also found in Midrash Tehillim is the al-tikre...elo...--" do not read so but thus.." For example, I.1.

Generally speaking, the homilies contain a good deal of parables, legends, proverbs, ethical sayings and delightful stories. The language is clear and to the point. The homilies are forceful and some of them, a great many, evidence great skill on the part of the preachers and homileticians.

Sometimes, as in LXXVI.3, there is strained and fanciful speculation. Even this, however, indicates the wholeheartedness and completeness with which they, the exegetes, were absorbed in their work and subject, rather than the strangeness of their interpretations. For the most part, Hebrew is employed. In a few instances, for example, LXXVIII.12, we find the use of Aramaic in the homily. Very often one homily will remind the exegete of another, and thus we find many cross-references. For example XLVIII.1 and XLIV.1. One of the frequently repeated characteristics is the comparison of God to man, the contrast of their respective powers, craftsmanship, wisdom, etc. Such contrasts are to be found in V.11; XXV.1; XVII.5; XVIII.29; etc.

According to the findings of Buber's thorough study of the contents of Midrash Tehillim and the other Midrashic collection, the former was a frequent source for materials and ideas for the other works. Exodus Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Deuteronomy Rabbah, Songs of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther Rabbah, Samuel and Pesikta Rabbati all drew amply upon the homilies to the Psalms of Socher Tob and quoted it frequently. In the Introduction to Midrash Tehillim, Buber devotes six full pages in which he cites the many quotations of this collection of homilies in the
14
above-named works.

14. Op.cit., p.54-60.

YALKUT SHIMONI

Since the Yalkut Shimoni is one of our primary sources in our consideration of the Book of Psalms in Rabbinic Exegesis, we shall now turn to a consideration of that volume.

The Yalkut Shimoni is a collection of haggadic material to the Bible. The composer had accumulated various homilies to the complete Bible, arranged them in the order of the Massoretic order of chapters, and then divided the homilies in so many sections. As Lauterbach points out, these sections have been arranged as they are arbitrarily, and there seems to be no way of determining why some section may have an half-dozen lines, whereas another section may comprise many pages.¹⁵

The compiler likewise divided the homilies into two divisions, numbering the first division alphabetically from Genesis to Deuteronomy and beginning anew the numbering also alphabetically from Joshua to Ecclesiastes. (He did not arrange the second division in their order of the Bible, placing the homilies to Chronicles somewhere in the center and Ecclesiastes at the conclusion. The homilies to the Psalms which we are considering fall, of course, in the second division and include sections 610-890.

Buber, in his analysis of the Yalkut Shimoni, points to the confusion in the mind of the man who gathered those

¹⁵. JE vol.12, p. 584.

homilies. Coming apparently from a time later than that of Midrash Tehillim, the Yalkut Shimoni, along with the other many homiletical collections, draws upon the ideas and approaches of Socher Tob. Thereferences, however, to Midrash Tehillim in the Yalkut are vague and confused. Whereas most editors would refer to the homilies to the Psalms as Midrash Socher Tob, the Yalkut speaks only of Midrash. In some instances the same editor would make reference to a volume called Socher Tob; but study would reveal this to be Pesikta Rabbati. Still again, the author of the Yalkut would refer the reader to Genesis Rabbah or Tanhuma for further information; and analysis would reveal that such material was to be found only in Midrash Tehillim or Socher Tob. Finally, many passages are quoted without naming the source; these, too, are shown to be from Socher Tob.¹⁶

The first edition of the Yalkut Shimoni appeared in Salonica, in 1521. This edition included only the homilies to the Prophets and Hagiographa. The second edition, Venice-1566, included the homilies to the entire Bible, and further editions have been mere reprints of this complete work. It is this master edition which gives us a clue as to who the original compiler may have been. At least, it was the source of stimulation of an intellectual controversy that lasted for years.

16. B Introduction, p.60f.

The title page of the Venice edition named a certain R. Simeon of Frankfort, "the chief of the exegetes" as the author of the volume. This inspired a considerable amount of speculation and debate. Hayyim Azulai (1724-1807) and David Conforte (1618-1685) both accepted the title page reference at its face value and said that the author of the Yalkut Shimoni was Simeon Ashkenazi of Frankfort.¹⁷ Solomon Judah Rapoport (1790-1868), however, expressed the belief that the Simeon referred to in the title page was R. Simeon, the father of Joseph Karo.¹⁸ This would mean that the compiler of the Yalkut lived in the eleventh century. Hermann L. Strack¹⁹ adds that this hypothesis put forth by Rapoport was accepted by many reliable sources and scholars, such as, for instance, David Cassel²⁰, and A. Levy²¹.

The most exacting and complete refutation of this supposition has been that of Abraham Epstein²². With polite but nonetheless firm language, he discredits the possibility of Rappoport's theory.²³ He shows that Simeon Karo could not have been the compiler of the Yalkut, since many of the midrashim are with certainty of a later date. Step by step, he proves that the author must have more certainly been of

17. JE op.cit., p. 584.

18. Kerem Hemed, vii, 4.

19. Introduction To The Talmud and Midrash, JPS, 1931, p. 230f.

20. Lehrbuch der jud. Gesch. u. Lit., Leipzig, 1879.

21. Die Exegese bei den Franz. Israeliten, Leipzig, 1873, p. xxii.

22. R' Shimon Karo and the Yalkut Shimoni, Krakau, 1891.

23. Ibid., p. 1.

several centuries after Joseph Karo's father. ^{With} ²⁴ Abraham Geiger²⁵,
and with Leopold Zunz²⁵, Epstein expresses the belief that the
author of the Yalkut Shimoni was rather the Simeon Kara who
lived in southern Germany in the early thirteenth century and
who later won the title of distinction, hadarshan, "the preacher."
Lauterbach's consideration of the Yalkut Shimoni gives the
same conclusion. ²⁶ However, in a later article ²⁷, he modifies
his point of view somewhat. Now he is ready to add that "The
Yalkut Shimoni was not composed later than the thirteenth
century." He bases this statement on the colophon to the
Ms. of the Yalkut Shimoni, Oxford 2637, dated for 1307. The
words of praise refer to the compiler of the Yalkut as dead,
affixing the zecher livracha to his name. Whereas in the
Jewish Encyclopedia article, Lauterbach had merely stated that
it is known that Azarya dei Rossi had a manuscript of the
Yalkut Shimoni in his possession in 1310, this added informa-
tion sheds interesting light on the date and authorship of
the homilies. It fixes the time more definitely and conclusively.

24. Nitei Neemonim, Breslau, 1847; p.10a; Judische Zeitschrift,
XI, 115.

25. Die Gottesdienstliche Vorträge, Op.cit.;, p.361, p.375.

26. JE Vol.12, p.586.

27. Unpublished Parts of the Yalkut ha-Makiri on Hosea and Micah,
Moses Gaster Anniversary Volume, London, 1936, pp.365-373.
It is interesting to note that Heinrich Gratz had likewise
accepted the hypothesis set forth by Rapoport, Cassel, Levy,
et.al. In volume III of the JPS edition of his History of
the Jews, p.346, the historian refers to Simon Karo, father
of Joseph Karo, as "the author of the Yalkut."

As for the style and language of the Yalkut Shimoni, it seems to suffer much by comparison to Midrash Tehillim. While the language is not more difficult, there is less lucidity and simplicity of expression in the Yalkut. There seems to be less imaginative power and the ability to develop the homilies than there appears in Socher Tob. There are less striking proverbs, parables, legends, ethical sayings in the Yalkut Shimoni. Too much of it seems to be a copy or an imitation of the style and linguistic flavor of the earlier work. Similar techniques of approaching the Scriptural passages are employed. Numerical calculation; changing spelling or reading of given words; referring directly to the passage of the Bible with the formula "thus does the Scriptures say"; quoting some historical authority; contrasting and comparing God to human abilities; etc.etc. are also to be found in the Yalkut. Here, too, is the same passion for righteousness, the devotion to God the Creator, the same outcry for Israel's suffering. Here, too, is found faith and optimism in the future, the conviction that God's powers will deliver the good and punish the wicked, that Torah and the ethical life are the sole requisites for the good life and salvation.

In short, the Yalkut Shimoni, too, reveals the rabbinic fervor and faith in their attempt to adapt the Scriptures to the situations and problems of their own day.

The study of the content should have been preceded by an analysis of the nature, the types, of pathogenesis.

PART II - CONTENTS

PART II -- CONTENTS

Introduction

The very nature of the Book of Psalms inspired the imagination of the homileticians to discuss a great variety of subjects and themes. Applying all the skill of the expert preacher, the exegete was able to derive whatever he wished from the Psalter. Almost anything that might suggest itself to the preacher's mind was there, in hidden or revealed form. It was merely his task to bring it out, to make the implicit explicit, the hint obvious. Yet, in the very looseness of the homilies, in their very assortment of subjects and themes, there is a unified pattern. This is a pattern made possible by the same religious spirit, the same devotion to God, the same sensitivity of the suffering of Israel and the good of all nations, the same religious hopes and ethical ideals that run through out the homilies. The only order the preachers themselves indicate is their treatment of each Psalm and verse in their numerical order. Yet, careful analysis reveals a unity of spirit and fervor that renders the collection of exegetical interpretations, somehow, a local entity, a systematic account of Israel's hopes and Israel's faith and of Israel's aspirations. It is this unity, this harmony of different preachers, this order-out-of-chaos, that we shall attempt to show in the following pages.

GOD

The outpourings of the soul to God being the pre-dominant element of the Psalter itself, it is natural that the homilies upon the same theme should occupy a central and outstanding portion in Mirash Tehillim and the Yalkut Shimoni. Truly, the Psalmist was a God-intoxicated man. Surely his is unmatched faith in despair as in hope, in the face of death as in the supremest moments of joy. God is taken for granted. There is neither questioning nor discussion of His existence. It is His attributes, His providence, His influence upon men, nations and Israel that are considered. His immanence and transcendence, the ideals He represents, the worthwhileness of faith in His power and wisdom, these are the themes of the Psalmist and likewise of the homilies built around the Psalter's 150 religious hymns.

"In The Image Of Man"

In both collections of homilies we find many references which might make the reader believe that the rabbinic idea of God is quite a human one. There seem to be many passages which give indications of anthropomorphisms in the rabbinic conception of God. These remind us of the anthropomorphisms of the Psalter itself. With J. M. Powis Smith²⁸ we recall that in the Psalms themselves "God shares in many of the frailties of human personality and is presented in a thorough-

28. The Religion Of The Psalms, University of Chicago Press, 1922, p. 140.

ly anthropomorphic way." To the Psalmist God was a very personal God. No abstract, vague deity but a very near and warm God. To God are even ascribed organs of the human body: face, ears²⁹ nose and mouth; He has speech, the power to breathe and swallow;³⁰ He sleeps and is capable of fatigue;³¹ He can be angry and His is proud and He loves flattery.³²

Upon these personal descriptions the rabbis amplify homiletically. According to one rabbi, all of God's actions are holy, since holiness is the central feature of the Creator. God's speech, His praise, His going and coming, His outstretched arm, His sitting and reclining, all these are vested with sanctity and sacredness.³³ Another rabbi, speaking of Moses' obtaining of the Law from God, asks how could Moses^{know} when it was night and when it was day if the clouds were always about the mountain. "When God read Scriptures," answers the rabbi, "it was day and when He read Mishna, the Israelites knew it was night. When He sang the Tefillah before the Shema it was night, and when He reversed the process Moses could have known it was day."³⁴ These are typical examples of the personal manner in which the rabbis considered the Creator.

To attempt to explain these anthropomorphisms is not as difficult as seems at first. Man has little choice but to describe the Divine force in human language and terminology. How else could he make his fellow men understand the feelings, however lofty, spiritual and depersonalized they may be? How else but in human and personal descriptions?

29. Psalms 80.4; 33.6; 11.7.
30. Psalms 32.4; 18.36.
31. Psalms 18.16; 33.6; 21.10; 102.3.
32. Psalms 18.48; 102.11; 115.17f.
33. Buber Ps. II, Homily 6.
34. Yalkut Psalm 19.

But perhaps a more significant answer is offered by the homiletician himself. In the very fourth homily of Socher Tov, the exegete has occasion to explain anthropomorphic language in the Midrash. The text he^{re}/feres to is Psalm 84.12: "For God is a sun and a shield." How, asks the rabbi, can the Lord be likened to such a common-place object as a sword or a shield? Well, in the first place, anthropomorphic expressions are nothing new in Scriptural writings. Amos had likened God unto a lion at whose roaring everyone should take fright. Ezekial spoke of God coming over the mountains and of God's voice which is as the voice of many waters. Why such anthropomorphic language? Simply, because the language used is such that everyone will understand. Just as the shield protects the warrior, as the sword defends, so God will protect and defend all who have faith in Him. Just as the sun sheds its protective rays of warmth over humanity, so God will shed his protective Providence over all who fear him and revere Him. 35

Here, it seems, is a good example of the phenomenon 36 of which Dr. Kaufman Kohler has written : "While Judaism insists on the Deity's transcending all finite and sensory limitations, it never lost the sense of the close relationship between man and his Maker." Here is a God who not only created a world and set it in order, but who lives in every part of it every moment. God made in the image of man, perhaps.

35. Buber Psalm 1, homily 4.

36. Jewish Theology, Macmillan, 1928, p.78f.

But a God that is woven of the finest hopes, the highest ideals and the noblest dreams. Anthropomorphic? It seems so. And yet it may well serve as inspiration to religious spirits and move them to kindness, to charity, to humility, to the eternal aspirations of the most lofty.

"To Love Mercy..."

It was quite natural for an oppressed people praying longingly for mercy and failing to find it in the cruel tyrants that afflicted them throughout history to ascribe this "twice-blessed" quality to God. The kindness and mercy of the Creator is manifest everywhere, the homiletician believes. It is one of His chiefest attributes, that He deals mercifully with all men. Thus, for example, the three occurrences of the word ehyeh in Exodus 3 remind the rabbis of the thrice-told mercy of God. "In mercy did I create the world; in mercy will I lead it and in mercy will I return to Jerusalem."³⁷ With overflowing mercy does He guard over all men and keep them from disaster and pestilence. Very often when some plague is to be visited upon mankind, the Creator will shorten the time allotted to ravage the community. As a matter of fact, almost every kind of pestilence was wiped out because of God's abundant mercy. On one occasion a disaster was to last thirty-six hours, but God called upon the Pentateuch, the patriarchs, circumcision and a host of others to obviate the effect of the plague, and the community³⁸ suffered but one hour.

³⁷. Buber Psalm 72, homily 1.

³⁸. Ibid. 17 2.

"To Do Justice..."

Mercy alone is not enough, the homiletician realized. It is apt to blind the eye to justice. It is apt to be one-sided in its influence, partial in its bounties. Mercy must be tempered by justice--this is the ideal, and this is in the very character of God. Men may find this strange, accustomed as they are to human tyrants who exercise judgement through purely personal whims. God is not like that, but He directs His decisions and providence in accordance with a well-ordered and just point of view.³⁹ This is the explanation for the dual name of God: Elohim connotes His justice; Yahveh His mercy.⁴⁰

"Thus said David: 'I shall praise God. Whether you judge me in mercy or justice, I shall ever praise Thee.'" Already at that time the rabbis saw that justice is even a greater virtue than mercy; that justice is ethically all-inclusive, that he who is swayed by love may do violence to justice. Referring to Psalm 145.17, "God is just in all His ways and merciful in all His deeds," the preacher points to the precedence which justice takes to mercy in the make-up of the Creator.⁴¹ And it is exactly this strong emphasis upon justice which moves God to reward those who heed His commandments. For the commandments stem from the character of God, and disobedience or neglect of these commandments are therefore violence to the character, extreme human justice. Such behavior cannot

39. Buber Psalm 99, homily 2.

40. Ibid.

41. Yalkut Psalm 145.

be rewarded favorably. Justice must exact its price, at the
very cost of mercy.⁴²

"Great Is God..."

Many references are made to God's omnipotence, to the greatness of His accomplishments, to His strength. But what are the manifestations of this strength? We can see a man's power by the stones he lifts--and hurls. But of what God? Well, we come too appreciate His power through observation of the world about us. The very heavens declare the glory of God, and in scanning the horizons, we see the work of God's fingers everywhere.⁴³ According to Micah 1.11, the angels of heaven have sung of God's power enduring from sunrise to sunset among all the nations. Yet we heard the sons of Korah praising His greatness in Zion alone. How to reconcile this seeming contradiction? God was great in Zion, true. He had accomplished a great wonder there. He had brought His Sechina to rest there. He had built a Temple, and raised up a people. But where was His greatness among the other nations? "To teach you that if He is great in His city, He is great outside the city walls as well."⁴⁴ The greatness of man is determined by what he has done. If his deeds are known locally, he will be acclaimed everywhere, for greatness is universal. We may praise men for their accomplishments and the praise may equal or surpass the worth of their deeds. Not so with God. Regardless of the effusion of our adoration we cannot exceed the greatness of God.⁴⁵ For nothing in the world takes precedence

42. Buber Psalm 25, homily 11.

43. Yalkut, Psalm 19.

44. Buber Psalm 48, homily 1.

45. Ibid. 106, 2.

to the glory of God, not even the world itself. God is the "place of" the world, not the world the "place" of God. The religious takes precedence over the material, the spiritual⁴⁶ over the earthly.

And just as God character is a harmony of mercy and justice, so man's attitude to the greatness of God should be a syncheretization of fear and joy. This is the significance of Psalm 2.11 telling us to "serve the Lord with fear" and Psalm 100.2 bidding us to "worship the Lord with joy." What the Psalmist meant by this apparent contradiction, says the rabbi, is that neither fear alone nor joy alone should characterize our approach to the greatness of God. "When you see yourself alive, rejoice in your life, but fear God."⁴⁷ Typical of the otherworldly interpretation so often found in the Midrash Tehillim and Yalkut Shimoni, is the explanation another rabbi attempts of the contradiction named above. If one will serve God in fear in this world, he says, then man will rejoice⁴⁸ in God in the world to come.

"For Thy Name's Sake..."

To the rabbis, God, in order to uphold the reputation of His name and greatness, was, so to speak, compelled to do certain things--for His name's sake. Echoing earlier teachings,⁴⁹ especially as found in the prophet Ezekial, the exegetes too saw the necessity of this doctrine in their faith. Overtaken with humility at their own transgressions, with the inadequacy

46. Buber, Psalm 90, homily 10.

47. Ibid. 100, 3.

48. Ibid.

49. Chapter 20.9, 14, 22, 44. etc.

of their generation of people before God, with the impiety of their age, upon what other basis could they ask God to fulfill their desires, to grant them salvation from their oppressors? "If Thou canst not do this for our own sake, do it, we pray Thee, for the sake of the sanctity of Thine own name."⁵⁰ Again, we are told that when Israel had lived obediently to God's will, He will help them for their own deeds. When they neglect or violate His commandments, He⁵¹ must then help Israel for His own name's sake. It is the faith in the greatness of His name and ~~and~~ their consequent appeal to it, that gave the oppressed Israelites comfort. Believing themselves to be punished for their own inadequacies, for their spiritual poverty, for the lack of their intellectual accomplishments, they stood cowering before the glory of God. Came then the rabbis who comforted them in their humility and contriteness of heart. If there are no Samuels, or Joshuas to lead, even if you walk in the darkness, "trust in My name and I shall protect you." That saved Hananya, Mishaël and Azaryah, and many others down the centuries. That will deliver the present generations. There is no man who has sunk so low but that faith and the awareness of God and the greatness of His name will nor raise⁵² him to the greatest heights, to the realms of glory.

50. Euber, Psalm 22, homily 18.

51. Ibid. 94, 3.

52. Ibid.

"...And God Created."

Very much is said about God the Creator in both collections of homilies. The rabbinic appreciation of the world in which they lived is indicated in their belief that God created many such worlds, but found each less satisfactory than the other, until He finally shaped the present world into

⁵³existence. Regarding the creation of Adam, God saw this to be the wisest thing after some reflection. At first, there was some question about creating Adam first or Abraham first. But, thought God, suppose Abraham did something wrong, who possibly would follow him? Not, it was best that Adam be first, and let Abraham come upon a world already well ordered and understood by men. Together with Noah, Adam and Abraham ⁵⁴are the pillars of the foundation of the earth.

A heretic once asked R. Simlai why God was known with three names (ayl, elohim, yahveh). The To the heretic, this seemed to imply a trinity. In retort, R. Simlai explained that a singular verb is used when these names for God occur ⁵⁵together. But neither the heretic nor the disciples of R. Simlai are satisfied with that explanation. Then, adds the teacher, the three names represent the three aspects of God's creative ability. They correspond to the three attributes with which He shaped the world into being, namely, hahmah, ⁵⁶daat and tevunah. "See the difference between a human art-

⁵³.Buber, Psalm 34. homily 1.

⁵⁴. Ibid.

⁵⁵. Psalm 50.1 the singular verb diber is used, implying one God.

⁵⁶.Buber, Psalm 50, homily 1.

isan and God. Man, in fashioning a statue, begins with the feet first, or the head first; God created man all at once. ⁵⁷

Typical of the art of deriving all sorts of meanings from texts by analyzing each letter of a given word, is the homily which considers the verse in Isaiah 26.4: Ki beyah adonoy zur olamim. Olam implies the present and future worlds. With the letter heh, God created the present world. Witness the heh in the word hiborom, Genesis 2.4. And with the yod He created the world-to-come. But why should this world have been created with the letter heh? Because, just as the letter heh is easily pronounced and neither teeth nor lips are used, so God was able to create the world without difficulty. ⁵⁸

There are other clearly distinguishable differences between human artisans and God the Creator. For instance, the things that man shapes with his hands cannot in turn create. The creatures of God can. Nor can man's creations eat, or sleep, or carry out the normal human functions which are characteristic of God's creatures. What is more, man will shape things into existence and very often they will survive him. ⁵⁹ God's creatures however die off, but the Creator is eternal. God can fashion things in the dark, as he did when he shaped light into existence. Man has no such power. God has the power to create living things in the water; man cannot. And, finally, man may shape some object, praise its worthiness and

57. Buber, Psalm 50, homily	1.
58. Ibid.	62, 1.
59. Buber	103, 1.
	86, 3.
	18 26.

and then sell it, so that he may live. The Holy One, blessed be He, creates His creatures, they praise Him, and He sustains⁶⁰ them.

Aside from the aspect of Creation, there are many vital differences between God and man. As a protector: Man may have some human patron who claims some sort of responsibility over him. But in time of peril, the earthly patron can do nothing. Can an earthly guardian deliver from the ravaging sea? Joanh was delivered by God. Can an earthly patron save from the flames? Hananyah, Mishaël and Azaryah were so delivered by God. Can an human guardian be rescued from the wild beasts? Daniel was rescued by God. Furthermore, to reach thà ears of some human guardian, the one in danger must first yell to the servant, who in turn will call the patron. But as for God, one need only call to Him directly, and He will deliver the⁶¹ unfortunate victim.

As a friend: It is in the very nature of man that if he has wealthy friends and relatives, he will acknowledge them. Should they be poor, he will ignore them. Not so with God who will seek the welfare of man even though he be in the lowest and direst of straits. Man does not like to be bothered^{and} with people asking favors/gifts of him. As for God, the more men pray for their needs and welfare from Him, the more He loves them. A human host will receive a guest with kindness the first day and offer him a bed; on the second day

60. Buber, Psalm 18, homily 26.

61. Ibid., 4, 3.

he will let him use the chair; the third day he will extend to the guest nothing but a hard bench; and on the fourth day the weary cry will be apt to cry: "Why do you weary me?" But God's love for man increases with every added day that they dwell in His house of prayer and dwell with Him.

As a benefactor: The human benefactor soon wearies of his friends' constant request for favors and monetary assistance. The first day he will receive the caller with some kindness; the second day he will be disposed much less warmly; the next day he will turn his back upon anyone who comes to ask for favors. But God's kindness increases with every added petition.

As a king: Kings come and kings go, from Pharaoh to Caesar, while their cities endure and survive their human tyrannical builders. But as for God, Zion is destroyed, while He is eternal.

When one entrusts some precious object to the hands of a fellow human being, one is never certain of its safety. But souls are entrusted to God and His providence guards over them. Man is not always faithful to old friends, particularly when the friend is one who has lost his wealth. But God never deserts those who fear Him, even the humblest and the neediest. Man is inclined to pass by the fallen with indifference. But God will seek to uplift the weary and broken-down. In the same vein, another homily declares that a human judge is apt to show favor

62. Ibid.
 63. Ibid., Psalm 55, homily 6.
 64. Ibid., 9, 8.
 65. Ibid., 25, 2.
 66. Yalkut, Psalm 36.
 67. Ibid., 94.

to the rich
/and neglect the poor. But God is a judge before whom every-
one is alike, rich and poor, great and small.⁶⁸ Likewise,
when a man brings a gift to a human king, the king may re-
ceive it, or he may not, as the whim of the moment may strike
him. Should he accept it, he may look at or he may not, again
as he happens to feel at the moment. Should he see it, he
may do the request of the man who seeks the favor, or he
may^y not. Not so with God,^{who} for one cent (prutah) will bring
the presence of the ^vSechina to rest upon him who seeks the
⁶⁹boon.

68. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 102.

69. Ibid., 17.

THE SUPERNATURAL

While there is not an overwhelming amount of the supernatural in either collection of the homilies under our consideration, still there are sufficient references to the mystic and miraculous and superstitious to indicate that the rabbis did think about it, and that it did play some part in the thought, beliefs and actions of the people to whom they preached. It is not an easy matter to determine whether the rabbis actually believed everything they said that smacks of the supernatural. It is difficult to believe that they took it seriously, as seriously as it seems at first glance. Some would like to think that they spoke of them, as it were, metaphorically. At any rate, they are there, and it is our task to indicate them.

Angelology: There is never any attempt to define or to describe the angels; but there is frequent mention of them throughout the homilies of both collections. They, the angels are ever present. When Israel received the Torah at Sinai, sixty myriads of angels stood by.⁷⁰ When the Zadikim, the righteous pass away, three companies of angels join them to greet them as they enter the world-to-come. The wicked, however, get no such reception of the heavenly hosts.⁷¹ Incidentally, it is pointed out that the righteous are greater than these angels, because the latter stand in God's presence, only to tremble in awe; the righteous actually hear

⁷⁰. Buber, Psalm 103, homily 8.

⁷¹. Ibid., 30 3.

the Creator's voice, nor do they tremble, but are unafraid. At the same, it is said, however, that three angels do lead the name of God (SHADAY) about through the heavens.⁷² At the Creation, the angels are pictured as being jealous of man. They prefer that man be not created. However, after he is finally created and when the time comes for the other creatures of the earth to be named, man proves his superior ability to the angels, by naming every creature properly, a task which the angels could not do.⁷³ The same heavenly angels express their jealousy at Sinai. They would prefer to have the Torah for themselves. They point to their own holiness and purity--requisites for the reception of the Torah. But God instead prefers man's impurity and profanity and gives the Torah to him.⁷⁴

When Moses ascends the holy mountain to receive the Torah, and when the impatient Israelites persuade Aaron to lead them in idolatrous worship of the Golden Calf, the angels are triumphant. They rejoice because they had warned God of man's wickedness and of their superior sanctity. Now their convictions have been justified and proven correct. At its very reception of the Torah, on the day of their very consecration to God, the Israelites have sinned! The Lord, however, reminds the heavenly hosts of their own sins. Have they forgotten how they dared to mix the milk and meat dishes when they dined with Abraham?⁷⁵ Finally, we read of these angels praising God and preparing manna for the Israelites, apparently reconciled to the fact that man must share in Divine blessing.⁷⁶

72. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 19.

73. Buber, Psalm 8, homily 3.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

Tetragrammaton: Of the very few references to the Divine ineffable name, one of the significant statements posited by one preacher is that that name was not always so esoteric as it is today, that, as a matter of fact, there have been times in Jewish history when the name was used with Divine sanction. The generation of the Anshe Kneset Hagdolah, the Great Assembly and the generation of the martyrs used the name freely.⁷⁷ Apparently, then, auspicious generations, like that which attempted to carry out God's divine law on earth and that which gave itself up for Kiddush Hashem were permitted to do what under ordinary circumstances even the High Priest could not.

Miracles: The rabbinic concept of miracles are a bit easier to understand, since they are based upon the power and strength of God. They flow naturally from the great, unshaken faith which characterized the preachers. Given in a religious tinge, the exposition of the miracles reflect the deep and abiding religious belief of these men as well as their desire to implant some of that faith in the hearts of their people. The rabbis understood, likewise, the difficulty of most men to grasp the real significance of miracles. Only David seemed able to account for them, one rabbi explained. The weak, foolish multitudes, they cannot tell of them because they cannot comprehend God's strength. But there are miracles happening to us daily. Day in, day out, God sustains us, delivers us from unseen (by human eyes) perils.⁷⁸ Witness the exodus from Egypt: a people of humiliated, degraded slaves suddenly con-

⁷⁷.Ibid.

⁷⁸, Buber, Psalm 106, homily 1.

verted into a free and proud people with a law of its own and
a God of its own and a home-land to work for.⁷⁹ Or witness
another great miracle of history: David, the poor, shepherd
boy, unknown and unsung, suddenly transformed to a great
monarch.⁸⁰ Surely these are miracles of history. And we see
a certain rational, religious process of thought. The rabbis
do not talk of Christ-like miracles, of walking on waters, of
healing the maimed with a word, etc. Here are rather events
in Jewish history which show that through faith and hope
Israel will triumph and God's law vindicated. These are the
miracles.

Evil Spirits: It is not easy to determine whether or not
the preachers employed the threat of "mazikkim", of these evil
spirits to merely frighten the superstitious, ignorant masses
of people. Likewise, it is not simple to discern to what ex-
tent the rabbis believed in these spirits themselves. But
they did speak of them. For instance, a man should be sure to
repeat the Shema on coming home from the Synagogue, in order to
drive away the mazikkim, one teacher admonishes his audience.⁸¹
Man must be grateful for the protection he derives from God,
adds another homiletician. Were it not for God, the evil spirits
would harm and even destroy human beings.⁸² Prior to the erection
of the Tabernacle, there was constant contention between man and
these spirits. Curiously enough, these vague, indefinable

79. Buber, Psalm 118, homily 21.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

4,
104,

9.
24.

83

spirits rest on the Sabbath. Apparently, they too are obedient to the will and law of God. Perhaps this was but another way for the preachers to indicate their unshaken belief that nothing is evil, because all stems from God. Perhaps this was just another way for them to say that there is purpose, good, even for these "evil" spirits, a purpose which man could not see, and a good which the human mind could not understand.

Satan: Apart from the book of Job, Old Testament references to the arch-villain of religious lore, Satan, are very few and vague. In Job, we see, for the first time, the traditional character of the devil, the conspirator against man, the adversary, the heavenly force that seeks constant fault with the human race. This traditional interpretation is carried out in the Midrash Tehillim and the Yalkut Shimoni where he is mentioned. Satan is still seeking man's destruction, still fault-finding and blaming before God. In one instance, for example, man is admonished that if he will make the proper blessing after he washes his hands in preparation for a pastime, God will bless that meal, and Satan will not be able to desecrate it. ⁸⁴ Likewise, if man will be sure to say the amidah immediately after the geulah, Satan will not be able to denounce that day. ⁸⁵ In still another homily, Satan is depicted as sent by God to examine man's doings on the Day of Atonement. And when Satan appears on earth, only to find every one dressed in white, fasting and praying, he is greatly abashed and is forced to retreat. ⁸⁶

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid. Psalm 4, homily 9.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid. Psalm 27, homily 4.

ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

Except in those comparatively rare passages where the speaker of the Psalms is interpreted to be King David or some other historical character of Jewish history, the first person seems to be understood to be that of Israel. And the later rabbis who added their homiletical interpretations to these passages accepted this meaning. Expressions of suffering were the suffering of the people of Israel, and not that of some individual. Words of hope and joy were to be taken as hope and joy for all Israel, not for one heart alone. Elation implied a time of triumph and peace, despair a time of persecution and affliction by the neighboring peoples. It is always the people that is speaking, and the wicked means the wicked nations who prosper despite their evildoings. The preachers of Midrash Tehillim and Yalkut Shimoni obviously lived in times which reflected the times in which the Psalms themselves were penned. The cry of despair, the outburst of sorrow, the outpouring of questioning and with it the expression of invincible faith of the Psalter found a responsive chord in the hearts of the exegetes.

The preachers are for the most part narrow and bitter. That cannot be gainsaid, nor need it be explained. For great was their suffering and great their agony and pain.

There are a few noteworthy exceptions, in which passages the preachers indicate a universalistic and tolerant attitude. For example in one instance, he laments the fact that in his day there is so much particularistic banner-waving, each house and land having its own banner. In the future, he predicts, all will wave the banner of the Lord.⁸⁷ Again, the preacher speaks of the Torah as an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. For him that means not only Jew, but non-Jew as well. A non-Jew who studies Torah can be likened unto a High Priest among the Israelites, he asserts. For does not the Biblical passage, Leviticus 18.5, say that "man shall live by" the laws of God? This means, then, not Israelite alone, nor Levite alone, nor Priest alone, but man.⁸⁸

But these are exceptions, after all. And the general theme of the homileticians is narrow and bitter. In one instance, Israel is likened unto wheat, while the other nations are referred to as chaff. The wheat is necessary for the very existence of the world; the chaff is quite unnecessary and is ultimately only to be driven about in the winds.⁸⁹ The leaves, stem and root of the wheat plant often think that the plant is for their purpose; but they are proven wrong. Only the wheat remains and sustains life of humanity. Only Israel will remain and sustain the world.⁹⁰ When the other nations sing to God in praise, God tells

87. Buber, Psalm 20, homily 10.
88. Ibid., 1, 18.
89. Ibid., 2, 13.
90. Ibid., 2, 14.

them to sing to Israel first because it is really for Israel that the world exists, and without them the universe would not persist for one moment.⁹¹ Crying out from out of the depths of suffering, the preacher consoles Israel with the story of a father and his son who were walking in the highway. They were weary and footsore, and even though had walked for many days and traversed many miles, they did not find a city. The son was becoming desperate. But the father consoled him. "Do not fear, son, we are already come near to the cemetery. Know from this that the city is nearby." Thus it is with Israel. When they see the suffering and the persecution is near at hand, let them be certain that redemption is near at hand.⁹² Quoting the phrase from Canticles 8.7, "many waters will not quench love," one rabbi affirms that this could not but refer to Israel and the nations. Who could the many waters be but the many cruel tyrants? And what could love be but God's love for Israel?⁹³

For, despite the suffering and the affliction, Israel has sought to fulfill the Torah, every minute part of it.⁹⁴ As a result, God must be partial. Even though he ^{be}merciful to the nations by judging them at night when they are asleep and thus abstaining from their daily habit of sin, He judges Israel in the daytime, when they are occupied in fulfilling His mizvot, and thus more meritorious.⁹⁵

- | | |
|------------|---------------------|
| 91. Ibid., | Psalm 2, homily 14. |
| 92. Ibid., | 20, 4. |
| 93. Ibid., | 15, 4. |
| 94. Ibid., | 13, 3. |
| 95. Ibid., | 9, 11. |

The agony of Israel can be likened unto the agony of a dying man who waits for the doctor impatiently, constantly asking, pleading "when will the doctor finally get here?" So Israel, in its suffering, is impatient and continually pleads for the redemption of the Lord. But let Israel be confident, that though He seems to tarry, He will surely come.⁹⁶ He will come because of the intimate relationship that exists between the two. Israel was bade to fulfill certain laws and they were fulfilled without the knowledge⁹⁷ of the rewards which they brought with them. No matter in what name of God Israel calls upon, He will answer⁹⁸ them, be that name elohim, shaday or yahveh. Nor is the Creator's love for Israel limited by time; it is eternal⁹⁹ and everlasting and ever increasing in strength and intensity.¹⁰⁰ There is only one praise for God, and that praise is Israel.

God may have been great at the Creation of the Universe, but having made Israel a free people from the tyranny of¹⁰¹ Pharaoh made Him even still greater. In gratitude, regardless of how intensely the nations may try to separate God from Israel, still Israel calls upon His name several times daily¹⁰² in prayer. Everyone knows that even the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be complete nor at rest until these nations have¹⁰³ ceased tyrannizing Israel. On heaven and earth, there never¹⁰⁴ will never be complete joy and peace until Israel is redeemed.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 96. Buber, Psalm 6, homily 5. | 100. Ibid., Psalm 109, homily 1. |
| 97. Ibid., 119, 1. | 101. Ibid., 104, 4. |
| 98. Ibid., 118, 9. | 102. Ibid., 104, 12. |
| 99. Ibid., 118, 4. | 103. Ibid., 99, 1. |
| | 104. Ibid., 98, 1. |

With the suffering unabated, Israel seems to be as a widow or as an orphan, laments one preacher. Then he hastens to correct himself--but not as a real widow or as an actual orphan. Israel is merely as a woman whose husband has gone to some distant land but plans to return. Israel is as a child whose father has gone away and needs someone to sustain the child in the father's absence.¹⁰⁵ Alone and dejected, Israel cries out to God: "We are alone and cast down, but what difference does that make to you?"¹⁰⁶ And yet it does make a difference to the Creator, blessed be He. Did He not do wondrous things for Israel and always accredit them to Israel, as for instance, accrediting the victory over Egypt to Moses himself?¹⁰⁷ Does He not answer them when they pray to Him, and does He not regard Israel as His particular portion?¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, did not God prevent Israel's clothes from rotting and their bodies from wearying in the wandering through the desert for forty years?¹⁰⁹ Yes, He loves them with a three-fold love--with great attachment, with great pleasure and with especial favor.¹¹⁰ Consequently, when He looks upon the world and sees the triumph of the circuses and the amphitheatres of the idolatrous nations, even while the Holy Temple is in ruins, He is greatly stirred and would

105. Ibid.,	Psalm 68, homily 3.	
106. Ibid.,	42,	5.
107. Ibid.,	36,	1.
108. Ibid.,	28,	1.
109. Ibid.,	23,	3.
110. Ibid.,	22,	22.

destroy the world in His anger. 111 For He remembers
that everything that was ever good and noble, He had created
in Zion: Torah, blessing, life, dignity, etc. 112 If Israel
is cast down and impatiently waiting for God's redemption,
let them remember that God has not abandoned them, but that
they have abandoned God. And now they must wait until it
pleases Him to redeem them. 113 Israel carries on at times
like the woman who was travelling alone on the lonely high-
way. Toward nightfall she came to an inn and the inn-
keeper warned that she had better take the night's lodging
in the inn and continue her journey in the morning; for the
highway at night is a robber's den. The woman refused to
heed the innkeeper's advice and walked on. When night
came and the shadows deepened, and she saw suspicious-look-
ing characters coming toward her, she turned and ran
toward the inn, pleading for a night's lodging. Thus it
has been with Israel. When they walk in the light, they
are unafraid and would not heed the law. 114 But when
the darkness is upon them and they are afraid, they plead
for redemption and God's divine intervention. In the
night they come running impatiently and cringeingly to God. 115
Let Israel remember that they and God are mutual inherit-
ances; that if they would not have God abandon them, let not

112. Buber, Psalm 18, homily 12.

113. Ibid., 14, 6.

114. That this should be a contradiction to passages which
tell of Israel devoted fulfillment of God's law is not
strange. The preachers used their professional "license"
or prerogative to vary the theme as they willed.

115. Buber, Psalm 10, homily 8.

116
 them abandon God. If Israel will return, God will re-
 deem them again and finally, as He has done many times in
 117
 the past. Let Israel continue to attribute strength
 and glory to God even in trouble as they have in times of
 118
 prosperity. Let them praise God in every limb and nerve
 119
 of the human body, as they have done in times of hope.

Israel must have have hope and remember that like a man
 who has many casks of wine but finds them all soured with
 the exception of one, so God has created seventy nations,
 120
 but He finds favor only in one, only in Israel. Even
 though God has the world entirely at his command, even
 though all that is in creation belongs to Him, He finds
 121
 delight only in Jacob, only in the congregation of Israel.
 Like the two farmers who have each a vineyard, but find
 themselves living each far removed from his own vineyard
 but near to the vineyard of his neighbor, watch over each
 other's vines, so God will protect Israel in exchange for
 122
 the fulfillment of His law.

It matters not if there are not many righteous in any
 one given generation. Mere trust in God and faith in His
 123
 name will bring Divine blessing and providence. Let them

116. Buber, Psalm 5, homily 1.
 117. Yalkut Shimon 1, Psalm 48.
 118. Ibid., Psalm 43.
 119. Ibid., 35.
 120. Ibid., 20.
 121. Ibid., 19.
 122. Ibid., 17.
 123. Buber, Psalm 31, homily 1.

not despair with the present sufferance: this world is day
for the wicked nations and night for Israel; but the world-
to-come will bring day and hope to Israel and blackness to
those wicked nations.¹²⁴ For though Israel seems to be

like the dust under the heel of tyrants, let them remember
that dust will ultimately corrode and crush the strongest
of steel.¹²⁵ Let them remember that the mightiest of na-

tions from Persia to Greece, from the Hasmonean foes to
Rome have gone down.¹²⁶ Pharaoh, Sisera, Sennacharib,

Nebuchadrezzar, all tyrants of history have questioned
God's immutable will and have gone down in destruction
therefrom.¹²⁷ Like locusts who try to attack a precious

plant but are driven back by the wind, or like the waves
of the ocean that reach out for the shores but always
must recede, so the wicked nations, always reaching out
to destroy Israel, are driven back, are repelled.¹²⁸ Yes,

ultimately the light of salvation will shine for them,
not through the hands of any one man, but a final redemp-
tion through God Himself.¹²⁹ Ultimately, Israel will be

what it has always been, splendid, graceful, fruitful, rich
as the blessed Palm tree.¹³⁰ If the wicked who observe only

the Noahidian laws now prosper, how much more will Israel
prosper when they fulfill all the six-hundred and thirteen
laws.¹³¹ Without Israel the world will know no blessing.¹³²

Without them the very planets will not shine.¹³³

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 124. Buber, Psalm 25, homily 7. | 129. Ibid., Psalm 36, homily 10. |
| 125. Ibid., 119, | 12. 130. Ibid., 92, 11. |
| 126. Ibid., 30, | 6. 131. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 4. |
| 127. Ibid., 2, | 1. 132. Ibid., |
| 128. Ibid., 2, | 2. 133. Ibid. |

THE ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

There is hardly an aspect of ethical and religious life that the preachers of Midrash Tehillim and the Yalkut Shimoni do not touch upon in these homilies. Throughout both volumes, the authors are obviously imbued with deep ethical and spiritual inspiration. Every ethical principle, every religious practice and institution is described and discussed again and again. The themes may be disorganized and without apparent unity, but they are to be found in abundance throughout the two works. The deep sense of appreciation of the struggle of all humanity, and particularly of Judaism, for ethical achievement runs throughout the works and colors every word.

Perhaps the significant fact in this regard is that even the religious practices, as will be shown below, have been highly ethicized and spiritualized. There is less emphasis upon ritual and more upon morality; less stress upon ceremony and more upon the will and inclination of the heart to do good; less importance attributed to pageantry and ritual and more to the cleanliness of the utterances of the lips and the purity of the thoughts of the mind. Ceremony and ritual are here, true, but they seem to be media for transmission of ethical truth rather than ends in themselves. In most instances they are dealt with as mere tools to make clear some ethical and spiritual ideal.

One gets the feeling that the preachers are more interested in prophetic than in priestly Judaism, more in social justice than in ritual. And, though written centuries ago, the homilies make the modern student who seeks a faith of idealism and striving for the realization of a better world feels that he has an ally in these ancient preachers of the homilies to the Psalter.

The very first Psalm begins with a consideration of the ethical life. Referring to the verse "Blessed is he who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scoffers," the rabbi asks, "how is it possible that a man who has not walked shall stand, and if he has not stood, how shall he sit among the wicked?" Whence follows the explanation that this verse is merely to tell man that if he walks, ultimately he will stand, and if he stands, finally he will sit with the scoffers. For sin leads to another sin, whilst ethical principle leads to more ethical principles.¹³⁴ As a matter of fact, adds the preacher, let man remember that he who sits quietly and abstains from sin, Scripture will ascribe¹³⁵ it unto him as though he is fulfilling a commandment.

Etymologically, the preacher is troubled by the fact that Psalm 1.3 should use the verb shasul instead of natua. But, he concludes, this is an intensive form employed to reveal

134. Buber, Psalm 1, homily 7.

135. Ibid.

that the man of the purely ethical life is so deeply, intensely embedded in virtue that no wind, however fierce, shall uproot¹³⁶ him.

The significance of every single ethical ideal toward the salvation of man is shown in the story of Rabbi Gamliel and Akiba. It is said that when the former read the verse of Psalm 15.5, "He that doeth all these things (ethical principles) shall never be moved," he broke down and wept, crying, "Where is the man that can fulfill all these ideals?" When Akiba read the same passage, however, he began to laugh. Gamliel was amazed and asked for an explanation. "Does it not say in Leviticus 11.31," responded Akiba, "'these are the unclean in all the land,' telling that he who does one unclean thing is likened unto him who has committed them all? It is not logical, then, that we shall similarly consider the good precepts? And if a man has fulfilled one ethical ideal, is he not likened unto him who has carried them all out?" Whereupon, we are told, Rabbi¹³⁷ Gamliel said, "I am sorry, Akiba, I am sorry."

In their emphasis upon the ethical life, the rabbis purported to be emulating the ways of God as well as the habits of the heavenly hosts themselves. Thus, when Abraham was host to the messengers of God, the rabbis note, he sat while the^v Sechina stood waiting for the angels to finish their repast. This indicates that hospitality to

¹³⁶. Buber, Psalm 1, homily 11.

¹³⁷. Ibid., 15, 7.

strangers is more important than the reception of the Sechina
itself.¹³⁸ It is the custom of mankind that the rabbi
speaks first and the disciples responds. But as for God,
we know that Moses spoke first, and then the Creator, blessed
be He, responded.¹³⁹ Usually a disciple walks before the
Rabbi to illumine the way for the latter. God, however, pre-
ceded Israel that He might illumine their path with a pillar
of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.¹⁴⁰ That God
appreciated the ethical emphasis is shown in the fact that
when He created the days of the week He selected the Sabbath
for Himself because on that day Israel would fulfill their
ethical obligations. When He created the months of the year
He selected the months in which the festivals occur, because
then again Israel would fulfill His ethical precepts. When
He created the years, He chose the Sabbatical year for the
same reason.¹⁴¹ Prophecy, knowledge, mercy, righteousness-
these are among the things which God created and considered
as precious, and without which He regards man as valueless.¹⁴²

The Good and Evil Inclinations: Like all Rabbinic lit-
erature, Midrash Tehillim and Yalkut Shimoni deal at length
with the two inclinations in human character, the will to
do good and the inclination for evil. The struggle between
these two forces, man's duty to subdue the evil and to
feed the will and purpose of the good, these concepts play

138. Buber, Psalm 22, homily 5.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

141. Ibid., 24, 4.

142. Ibid., 115, 15.

an important part in the thoughts of the preachers. Thus, referring to Psalm 41.2, "Happy is he that considereth the poor," Rabbi Aba explains that this must refer to the man who can conquer his inclination for evil with his will for good.¹⁴³ In another homily to the same Psalm the preacher analyzes the meaning of the words in Ecclesiastes 9.14. The "small city" must mean the body of man; the "few men" refer to the limbs of the body; the "great king" represents the yezer ra and the "wise man" typifies the yezer tov.¹⁴⁴ With typical rabbinic faith in everything that has been created, in God's wisdom and goodness, the preachers see no evil in anything. Even this Yezer Ra has been a force for good. For without it, the preacher explained, man would not marry, nor beget children, nor would the world persist. Ultimately, both inclinations give praise to God and declare¹⁴⁵ their obeisance to Him.

But especially to be prized is the Yezer Tov. It is likened unto the "wise boy" of Ecclesiastes 4.13. It directs the world to ways of wisdom; all nations heed it; its counterpart, the "old king" is the yezer ra, which is called "king" because all the limbs would heed its desires and "old" because it remains with man to his dying day.¹⁴⁶ A man can walk with another one hour and become fast friends, observes one preacher. But man is born with the yezer ra, he is reared with it, it follows him everywhere--

143. Buber, Psalm 41, homily 2.
144. Ibid., 1.
145. Ibid., 9, 1.
146. Ibid., 5.

can there be a greater and more persistent enemy than that?¹⁴⁷
Its enmity is great and only one means will save man from
it--repentance.¹⁴⁸ David himself was troubled by the conflict
of both inclinations in his soul and he sought God's counsel
in this matter. Whereupon he was told that man should deal
with it as he does with an animal which refuses to stay in
line to plow--man must force it to work with the force of
goodness.¹⁴⁹ And if man cannot conquer the evil easily,
let him study Torah. If this does not avail, let him
read the Shema in bed. If this is not effective, let him
remember the day of his death.¹⁵⁰ Because Psalm 48.14 says
shishu libchem instead of shishu levavchem, i.e., the singular
noun, the rabbis concluded that only the Yezer Tov will re-
main to enjoy the pleasures of the world-to-come.¹⁵¹

Freedom Of Will: From the above, it should be con-
cluded that the rabbis believed wholeheartedly in man's
freedom of will. Man is endowed with knowledge of both
good and evil. Within his soul is the power to choose
between the two. There are not many references to this
subject in either collection, but those that do occur are
fully in agreement with man's free will. A typical homily
tells that Moses was asked if God did not prevent him from
entering the Promised Land and Moses answered that he
chose this voluntarily. Likewise Adam compared himself to

147. Buber, Psalm 34, homily 2. 150. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 4.
148. Ibid., 32, 4. 151. Ibid., 48.
149. Ibid., 86, 5-6.

a sick man who was told what to do and what not to do by the physician (God). His evil action which followed was of his own accord and had nothing to do with the physician, and if he had obeyed God, he would not have died.¹⁵² The theological-philosophical problem as to how to reconcile freedom of will and the omniscience of God is not discussed in either collection of homilies.

Patience: The man who hears some other man cursing him but can be patient enough to remain silent, he is called pious. For David overheard overheard men cursing him and he remained silent, whereupon he won the title of pious or ¹⁵³Hasid.

Humility: The same admiration for humility, contriteness of heart that characterize the Psalms are found in the homilies. Thus, it is not fitting that man should express self-praise, but he should let others praise him. This we may learn from God who did not utter His own self-praise but let Israel adore Him, as it is said in 118.2: "Let Israel say that God's mercy endureth forever."¹⁵⁴ The great figures of Jewish history are humble, according to the rabbis.¹⁵⁵ Moses was modest. Solomon expressed contempt for the arrogant and admiration for the modest.¹⁵⁶ David, the paragon of rabbinic virtue, shared this blessing too. In a moment of anguish he is said to have cried out: "O God, when

¹⁵².Buber, Psalm 92, homily 14.

¹⁵³.Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 16.

¹⁵⁴.Buber, Psalm 118, homily 6.

¹⁵⁵.Ibid., 10, 7.

¹⁵⁶.Ibid., 28, 3.

Thou wilt judge the wicked, judge me too. And when Thou wilt judge the merit of the righteous, do not judge me then." ¹⁵⁷

When the Temple was established and a man would bring an offering to its altar, he would be accredited for that particular offering. But when a humble man approached, Scriptures would reckon it as though he has brought up all the sacrifices specified in the Torah. ¹⁵⁸ So great is humility, indeed, that one rabbi believed that when a man works with a broken vessel he is usually ashamed of it; but God--His favorite vessels are broken and shattered. ¹⁵⁹

He who utters self-praise, who does share some of this divinely-blessed humility is doomed to tragic destruction, the rabbis concluded. This fact may be inferred from the horrible fate that befell arrogant generation of the flood, the generation of the Tower of Babel, Sodom, Sennacharib, Sisera, Edom, Doeg and Gog and Magog. All of these paid bitterly for their haughtiness. ¹⁶⁰

Hypocrisy: Rabbinic indignation against hypocrisy and flattery was burning and great. The Lord's wrath shall be upon the man who speaks words of hypocrisy. ¹⁶¹
The wicked-mongers of 28.3 are none other than hypocrites. ¹⁶²
One should never forget the fate of Absalom who spoke words that were not in his heart. ¹⁶³

157. Buber, Psalm 26, homily 1.	160. Buber, Psalm 11, homily 5.
158. Ibid., 23, 2.	161. Ibid., 52, 1.
159. Ibid., 28, 3.	162. Ibid., 28, 4.

Envy: As in their analysis of the Yezer Ra, the rabbis, while realizing the danger of jealousy in man, still saw its value. And as above, they could say that without envy the world would not persist, for man would not marry nor build a home.¹⁶³ Thus, did they realize that the danger of certain human traits could best be met by channelling those traits into the right directions. Envy for the fear of God is a virtue rather than a vice; envy for the light of the Torah is likewise most meritorious.¹⁶⁴

Charity: If a man, once rich, loses his wealth, his neighbor should approach him and say: I have heard that you are about to inherit a fortune and that so-and-so owe you a great deal of money. If you want, take from me and when you will get your inheritance and when you will get back the money men owe you, then will you pay me back.¹⁶⁵ Thus, do the rabbis indicate their sensitive souls, their great pity for the poverty-stricken, their passion for the duty of giving charity to the poor. So that if a man but express the intention to give charity, Scriptures will reckon it as though he has given it.¹⁶⁶ On the final day of judgement, charity will plead for the salvation of him who gave it in his life-time. Ben Azzai went so far as to say that any man who gives charity may rest assured that his prayer is heard and answered.¹⁶⁷ "See the power of charity," said another rabbi, "a man will give one cent and merit the very Sechina to attend him."¹⁶⁸

163. Buber, Psalm 37, homily 1.

164. Ibid.

165. Ibid., 41,

166. Buber, Psalm 50, homily 2.

167. Ibid., 41, 4.

3. 168. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 17.

Peace: The prophetic longing for a world of peace, of surcease from strife, is echoed again and again by the rabbinic preachers of the Psalter. Many are the virtues and fruits they would heap upon the ideal of peace:

Peace is so great a virtue that lies are told to preserve it, as when Joseph's brothers lied to him about their father's hope that the brothers would live peacefully, when he, Jacob, died.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, peace is great because when God created the heavens and earth, He also created peace between them.¹⁷⁰ The messiah, indeed, will come only in a time of peace.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the importance of peace is revealed in the fact that all blessings are consummated with the word for peace. Even in war we pray for peace.(!) Peace is the reward of the penitent, of the righteous, of the students of Torah, of givers of charity. Of all the ethical precepts the rabbis tell us to "pursue" only peace.¹⁷²

Slander: Perhaps the most frequently repeated warnings of the rabbis are given against slander, tale-bearing, idle gossip. This must have been a very serious problem in the days in which the preachers lived, that it should occupy so great a part of their attention. Every opportunity that avails itself, they lash out against slander. Perpetrators of slander are threatened with the most terrifying ends.

169. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 29.

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid.

172. Ibid.

The rabbis use the most indignant and forceful terms to characterize those guilty of gossip. Thus: "The reward of slander are the fires of hell," asserts one teacher, "and the slanderer will never, never rise to the world-to-come."¹⁷³ God broke the legs and shattered the teeth of the serpent that must now eat the dust of the earth, and this will be the fate of the slanderer.¹⁷⁴ The heart was created to tell truth alone.¹⁷⁵ Slander is more serious a crime than murder, adultery or idolatry. Murder ends the life of one person; while slander murders the speaker, the one spoken to, and the one spoken about.¹⁷⁶ The story is told of a man who was selling the "medicine of life." Rabbi Yannai's daughter wanted to purchase some of this medicine. Whereupon she was shown the verse--"He who wants life, let him guard his tongue from speaking evil."¹⁷⁷ When Yose Halafta was a lad, he used to spend much time sporting with his companions, one rabbi narrates. Once a man threatened to tell Yose's father. Whereupon the lad spoke up: "By your life, why would you do this? If you tell father, I shall be whipped, and you shall be in the habit of telling slander."¹⁷⁸ While many historic slanderers are referred to in the homilies, the most frequently mentioned is Doeg, the infamous man who slandered David.¹⁷⁹

173. Buber, Psalm 58, homily 3.
174. Ibid., 2.
175. Ibid.
176. Ibid., 52, 2.

177. Ibid.
178. Ibid., Psalm 50, homily 3.
179. Ibid. 52, 1.

Woven into the religious idealism of these preachers are the essential elements of the historical religious institutions of Judaism: the festivals, the love for the Temple, prayer, the Sabbath, etc., etc. Sometimes their fervor seems to be little more than nostalgia. Again, their devotion to certain institutions appears to be little more than mere appreciation of an ideal they have inherited from previous generations and which has little value in their own day. At all times, however, is their devotion to these things great and abiding. Even if sacrifices have little meaning in their own day, they are discussed with reverence and fervor. Even if the Temple does not stand today, its glory is cherished as if it still is the center of Jewish life. And if there are values that seem outmoded, they are given new interpretations and are then adapted to the day of the preacher. There is no sector, nor element, nor institution of historical Judaism that does not inspire the homileticians in one fashion or another. It may be to tell a story with a moral. It may be to encourage Israel to rededicate itself to that particular ideal anew. It may be to give hope and faith to desperate souls. In all cases, there is warmth and appreciation and reverence. In all cases, there is the obvious attempt to spiritualize and ethicize the most ritualistic and ceremonial elements.

Out of their devotion to the Temple, comes the rabbinic belief, for example, that ever since the destruction of the House of God, there has not been one day without cursing, nor has there been the fruit-yielding dew, nor do the fruits of the earth possess the same flavor they once had.¹⁸⁰ In the minds of the preachers God is now like a bird that wonders about without a nest; since the destruction there is no abode for the Shechina.¹⁸¹ Now it must remain in the heavens until another such Temple is constructed for it.¹⁸² Sometimes it will hover over the Wailing Wall, but that is not enough.¹⁸³

What of man since the destruction of the Temple? The generation of David fell in battle because, and only because, they did not request the construction of the Temple in their day. Yet today, men neither have the Temple, nor do they mourn its loss. How much more terrible will be their fate.¹⁸⁴ Once, when the Temple existed, sinners could bring offerings to its altar, whereupon their transgressions would be forgiven by God. Today, man can only hope for God's mercy.¹⁸⁵ Man, in the day of the preacher, seems to be like that generation which followed David, sinners. That was why God did not let David construct the Temple, despite the fact that David begged Him so. God knew that the generations that were to follow would be bad

180. Buber, Psalm 7, homily 9.
181. Ibid., 11, 1.
182. Ibid., 2.
183. Ibid.

184. Buber, Psalm 17, homily 1.
185. Ibid., 25, 3.

and that the Temple would have to be destroyed. If David were to build it, He could not destroy it. Therefore, the following generations of Israel will build, but it will be called in David's name.

When the Temple stood in its glory, Israel would come silently with its offerings. Now God stands silently before them! For while He may appreciate the synagogues over the land, the Temple is still His favorite abode. He recalls how he prepared cedars and gold for it long before Creation. He termed the Temple "rock" to show its stability and importance. Now He must witness His chosen people called contrite and crushed---ever since the ruin of the Temple in Zion.

Yes, the wicked nations will be repaid for what they did to Israel. For what they perpetrated in destroying the Temple, however, they will be repaid seven-fold. When the House of God was reduced to ashes, the houses of righteousness everywhere were destroyed with it. As surely as God will one day restore these, so surely will He utterly crush the houses of the wicked!

Yet, in typical optimism, the rabbis declare that Israel must accept the very destruction of the Temple with joy!

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 186. Buber, Psalm 62, homily 4. | 191. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 9. |
| 187. Ibid., 42, 4. | 192. Ibid., Psalm 79. |
| 188. Ibid., 87, 1. | 193. Buber, Psalm 125, homily 1. |
| 189. Ibid., 104, 13. | 194. Ibid., 92, 9. |
| 190. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 9. | |

Rabbinic consideration of sacrifices is most^{ly}/involved in their comparison or contrast of sacrifices to prayer. Rare is the reference to sacrifice in itself, such as, for example, the homily that declares that of all the offerings specified in the Torah, the offering of thanksgiving is¹⁹⁵ the favored offering of God. However, we find the same things said of prayer--that the prayer of thanksgiving is¹⁹⁶ the most effective form of prayer. Furthermore, God prefers the prayers of the righteous to the sacrifices of¹⁹⁷ the wicked, be it Balaam or any other sinner. When Balaam began to build his altars with the intention of offering sacrifices to God, the Creator rebuked him, saying: "Wicked man, I do not want your altars; but I long for the¹⁹⁸ prayer of man." For it is only when man prays that the Creator, blessed be ^{He}, is willing to consider a bribe. Only¹⁹⁹ prayer can bribe God from punishing man for his sins. Only when man prays is God's kingship over the world truly expressed. Then it is that the angels of prayer gather up the words of prayer as they drift up into the heavens and weave them into a crown which they place upon the head of²⁰⁰ the Creator. In gratitude, the Shechina remains standing²⁰¹ when Israel prays in their synagogues. A man may be able to hear only one person speaking at a time, or be able

195. Buber, Psalm 50, homily 3.	199. Ibid., Psalm 17, homily 5.
196. Ibid., 56,	4. 200. Ibid., 19,
197. Ibid., 90,	1. 201. Ibid., 65,
198. Ibid., 17,	1.

to behold one person or object at one time. God, however, beholds every synagogue simultaneously and hears every prayer uttered at once.²⁰² He is content, for He regards²⁰³ prayer as the most fitting form of worship.

Accordingly, when it says to "Sing Unto The Lord," as it does in Psalm 96 three times, it means that man should pray his three daily services.²⁰⁴ The future generations of Israel should particularly take notice of this fact, because they will have no other representative, no other intercessor before God, but prayer.²⁰⁵ In trouble, let them remember that God never rejects a prayer of a congregation.²⁰⁶ Consequently, if a man prays in the synagogue and the prayer does not seem to be answered immediately, he must not despair, but pray again.²⁰⁷ If he happens to be an impatient man, he may try weeping, for while the gates of prayer are sometimes closed, the gates of tears to God are never closed.²⁰⁸ Of course, sometimes prayer is not answered because man does not know the ineffable name of God which will be revealed to them in the world-to-come.²⁰⁹ This world may be the "day" of which Psalm 86.3 speaks when it says "And I shall call upon Thee all the day." This is the day for the wicked when Israel's prayers go unanswered.²¹⁰

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 202. Buber, Psalm 65, homily 3. | 207. Yalkut Shimoni, Ps. 27. |
| 203. Ibid., 66, 1. | 208. Ibid., Psalm 39. |
| 204. Ibid., 96, 1. | 209. Buber, Psalm 91, homily 8. |
| 205. Ibid., 102, 13. | 210. Ibid., 86, 2. |
| 206. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 5. | |

Should a man ask how long must he pray at a given time if his prayers go unanswered, he should be told to continue praying until his heart faints away.²¹¹ However, let him not stand in jest, laughter, levity or idle talk.²¹² Nor should he exaggerate his petitions and praise for God; he who praises God too much, may be considered, like the flaterer, insincere, and lose his share in the life of the present world.²¹³

Basic to the religious life in rabbinic thought is the love of and fulfillment of the Torah.

For the Torah, like water, is one of the greatest blessings of life. Both Torah and water are given to man from the heavens; both are always free to him who wants it; both are life-giving and life-sustaining; both begin drop by drop or law by law; in both, each bit, each drop or law accumulates and makes rivers or groups of laws; both hide the sins of the people; just as an old man can say to a child "Give me a drink," so an aged man may say to a youth "Teach me something of the Torah;" both are fruit-yielding.²¹⁴ Sometimes the Torah seems to be like a rich fruit-yielding tree: the former has its branches in the form of scholars and disciples.²¹⁵

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------|---------|
| 211. | Buber, Psalm 61, homily | 2. |
| 212. | Ibid., | 108, 1. |
| 213. | Ibid., | 19, 2. |
| 214. | Ibid., | 1, 18. |
| 215. | Ibid., | 1, 19. |

Of course, scholars and disciples of the Torah must be prepared to withstand poverty. God knows that if He were to give them material wealth, they would abstain from the study of the Torah.²¹⁶ Old and young alike, Israel is responsible for the preservation of its precepts. At Sinai the children of future generations were given as surety that the commandments would be fulfilled.²¹⁷ Consequently, everyone is certain that the future generations will fulfill them, though they be enslaved by the surrounding wicked nations.²¹⁸ For Israel is zealous of the Torah, as zealous as it was at Sinai to get it from the Creator. Then Israel behaved like a child who was told by his father that he was to give the child a precious thing; the child begged the father until it got the precious object, and Israel pleaded with God until it was given the Torah.²¹⁹ In appreciation, the Shechina always stands among the men who study the Torah.²²⁰ In appreciation, too, reward awaits the scholars. This reward will come from God who acts like a king who has a large orchard--he promises his workers reward if they will guard his treasures. God promises Eden to those who guard His holy law.²²¹ And how much better is this reward: when a man gives a gift to another, the

216. Buber, Psalm 5, homily 2.
 217. Ibid., 8, 4.
 218. Ibid., 13, 3.
 219. Ibid., 28, 6.
 220. Ibid., 68, 9.
 221. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 3.

recipient must constantly guard it or stand the chance of losing it or having it taken it away from him. But the Torah, the gift of God to Israel, guards man and protects him from evil, disaster or accident.²²² However, man must remember one thing about the Torah: it is upright and life-sustaining only when it is on the lips of the upright man. In the mouth of the unclean and sinner, the Torah is desecrated and does not therefore have the same saving effect.²²³

The references to the holidays and festivals of Israel are not very plentiful. Those that are to be found are most illuminating. While something is usually said of the holidays under discussion in themselves, the greater part of the consideration is stressed upon the significance of the festivals to the time of the preachers. The holidays are interpreted in the light of the situation under which the homileticians lived. The ideals they represent and symbolize are adapted to present-day conditions. This, of course, is a process not uncommon in our own day and is, therefore, doubly noteworthy. We see here the recognition of the fact that the development and reinterpretation of religious practices is an old and familiar phenomenon and one of which preachers of all ages make frequent use.

²²². Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 5.

²²³. Buber, Psalm 19, homily 14.

In this regard, one preacher believes that the "flock" to which the High Holiday liturgy refers, the "flock" which is supposed to pass before God, the judge, for the annual judgement, represents the passing line of generations from the beginnings of time to the present. Each year every generation, passing before the presence of God, must feel the sense of its own guilt, must realize its own transgressions and repent. This repentance must be, likewise, in accordance with the dictates of its own heart. For this repentance, God restores their souls, he cleanses them, he makes them "like new." Whereupon every generation, cleansed of its sins, passes on and transmits its heritage
224
to the following generations.

When these generations pass before the Divine Judge, they behold three large tomes in His hands, instead of the one book to which the liturgy refers. The first of these books records the life of the completely righteous; the second inscribes the history of those completely wicked; the third book includes the names of those whose destinies are temporarily indeterminable. The first book is sealed immediately for "life." The second book is closed after the seal of "death" is placed upon it. The last volume is left open and unsealed until the Day of Atonement.

224. Buber, Psalm 102, homily 1.

The preacher refers to the prayer popularly known as Unsaneh Tokef.

It is in anticipation of the seal that will ultimately be placed upon that book, that those who are not certain of their fate may help determine their own ends. Each generation, may by its own actions and thoughts, determine its own destiny.²²⁵

One of the few references to the festival of Tabernacles deals with the question of the fate of every man on the annual judgement. Men often ask themselves questions regarding their own fates. Have they lost or won in their judgement? Was their seal for "life" or for "death"? Have they been victorious or did the wicked nations triumph? Let Israel be certain of this, then: if, when Sukkot arrives, and the world sees Israel, all of the, great and small, young and old, taking their lulavim and esrogim in their right and left hands, respectively, then they may rest assured that they have triumphed in judgement, that their fate for the coming year is "life."²²⁶

Surprisingly enough, the historic festival that is given most prominence by the preachers of both Midrash T'hilim and Yalkut Shimoni is--Purim. It is illuminating to see the importance they attribute to the Feast of Lots. But it is quite understandable. For, again, this reflects

²²⁵. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 86.

²²⁶. Buber, Psalm 17, homily 6.

the fact that the times in which the preachers delivered their homilies were, no doubt, times which reminded them and their audiences of the times of Haman and Ahasuerus. The times in which the preachers wrote and preached must have been, like the days of Esther, times of great crisis, despair and turbulence for Israel. New Hamans must have arisen to plague a weary and dispersed people. The entire generation of Jews must have yearned for the emergence of some new Mordecai or some new Esther to deliver them, even as their ancestors were delivered in ancient Persia. The miracle of Purim is idealized and romanticized and elaborated by the preachers. In and between the lines can be seen the hope of those men for a similar miracle to take place.

Queen Esther is likened by one rabbi to the morning star. For just as the morning star is the last star to appear in the heavens during the night, so the emergence of this beautiful and pious Queen was the last miracle in the development of the story of Israel's infamous night of oppression. Likewise, just as all the other stars of the heavens set when the morning star rises, so did the constellation of Haman fall with the appearance of Esther's star.²²⁷ In a similar vein is Israel's lot compared to the morning star. For the light of this star

227. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 22.

emerges with a faint light which grows increasingly brighter and brighter until it illumines the heavens and earth with its brightness, so was Israel's hope faint at first but grew brighter with the emergence of Esther and Mordecai, until finally the light of joy and the brightness of triumph of goodness illuminated the entire world. ²²⁸

Somewhat more crudely, is Esther compared to a hind. Physiologically this animal is constructed with a small womb and is consequently always pleasing to the stud. So ²²⁹ was Queen Esther always beloved by King Ahasuerus.

Whether hind or morning star, welcome indeed was the salvation that came with Esther and Mordecai. For never was there such darkness in the world as there was in the days of Haman. ²³⁰ Even the tyranny of Egypt under Pharaoh was a lighter burden for Israel than proved the burden of Haman and his wickedness. In Egypt, they cried out to God and He heard them immediately; at once He came to their rescue. In the night of Haman's oppression, Israel cried out for three consecutive days until God finally paid heed to their outcry. On the first day they cried "My God!" but were not answered. The second day they cried again "My God!" Again they went unheeded. Finally, on the third day they exclaimed "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" Then

228. Buber, Psalm 22, homily 13.

229. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 22.

230. Buber, Psalm 22, 7.
22, 15.

it was that God heeded their cry, and answered them.

The story of the Exodus serves, among other purposes, that of being a basis for teaching some lesson or moral for the day of the preachers. While the historic event is considered in itself and often referred^{to}, nothing new is said about it that cannot be found in other rabbinic works. Noteworthy, however, is the fashion in which the festival of Passover is employed to tell some lesson or moral not particularly related to the Exodus. Thus, we learn that once Shimon ben Halafta found his home without the proper needs for Passover. On his way to the Synagogue to pray, he found a precious gem. Were he to sell this stone, he could have gotten all the needs for the Seder. His wife, however, wanted to know where he got that stone. When he told her how he came across it, she insisted that he take it back to the place in which he found it and that he go immediately to the synagogue and pray that it be taken back by its rightful owner. For, was her contention, if they keep the stone, they will lose their reward that will be theirs in the world-to-come.²³² Two morals may then be drawn from the story, the preacher concludes: first, that man should be as eager to pray that wealthy be taken from him as he is eager to pray that he gain riches; and

231. Buber, Psalm 22, homily 6.

232. Ibid., 92, 8.

secondly, that he who is free from material care in this life decreases his reward in the life of the world-to-come.²³³

If, however, Israel is wearied by its poverty and suffering, let them remember that just as they must now drink the four cups of sorrow, they shall one day come to drink^{of} the cup of salvation and joy. Their enemies, the wicked nations, will then be forced to quaff of the²³⁴ sorrow and bitterness which are Israel's lot now.

Surprisingly few references are made to the Sabbath as an institution in the history and religious life of Israel. Those that do occur are in the traditional vein. Rest seems to be the most frequently emphasized element of that day. Thus: In this world a man may work in the orchard picking figs on the Sabbath. In the world-to-come, however, the very figs will cry out "Sabbath!" For in this world men do not seem to realize the sacredness of the holy day. They do not realize, for instance, that this is the day that God chose from all the days of²³⁵ the week. Or that it was gotten before the Torah.²³⁶ Or that God did not give manna to the Israelites on the Sabbath, not because He could not but because He would²³⁷ not. Or that it is Israel's most special possession

233. Ibid.

234. Buber, Psalm 75, homily 4.

235. Ibid., 92, 2.

236. Ibid.

237. Ibid.

transmitted from generation to generation.²³⁸ Or that it was the Sabbath that originally saved man from eternal damnation in the fires of Gehinnom. For man was created on the sixth day, he rose to his feet on the eighth, he was advised by the Creator on the ninth, he sinned on the tenth, he was judged on the eleventh and driven out from the Garden of Eden on the thirteenth. The angels demanded that God punish man immediately, and God was about to comply when He realized that the Sabbath was approaching, and He refused to mete out²³⁹ damnation to man on the Sabbath. Furthermore, as the Sabbath saved man from damnation originally, it will save him again from the punishment awaiting him. Let Israel observe the Sabbath and the Messiah will be sure to rise and deliver them²⁴⁰ from their oppression.

The most telling proof for the severity of the times in which the preachers of Midrash Tehillim and the Yalkut Shimoni lived and wrote is the emphasis and significance they attributed to martyrdom in the religious life of Israel. The blood that was shed, the agony of lingering death to which countless numbers of pious, innocent men, women and children were submitted, the unspeakable brutalities and indescribable barbarities, these disasters did not shake the preachers from their faith in the goodness

238. Ibid.

239. Ibid., Psalm 92, homily 3.

240. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 95.

of the world and in the ultimate justice of God's moral law. For them there was reason and purpose in the suffering of Israel. They elevated their people's misery to a spiritual and religious level that became a source of inspiration and hope for the masses rather than a curse that it apparently seemed to be.

Comfortingly, the preachers told their people that every righteous man who loses his life in martyrdom can be certain that his name will be inscribed upon the royal robe of the Creator.²⁴¹ At the same time, God dips His pen into the blood of those who give up their lives for the sanctification of His name and seals the tragic fate that is destined to befall the tyrants who murdered His righteous ones.²⁴² No, He shall never forget nor neglect those who cry out to Him in any generation. How much less will He forget them in times of forced conversions and martyrdom.²⁴³ God is aware that there is not another people on earth that has been so devoted to His moral law, that has striven to live by it unto death, as has Israel.²⁴⁴ Tyrants like Nebuchadrezzar are always amazed at the unswerving faith of Israel's pious who surrender to death rather than betray their religious hopes. They are amazed at the example set forth by Shadrach, Mesach and Ebednego.²⁴⁵

241. Buber, Psalm 9, homily 13.

242. Ibid.

243. Ibid.

244. Ibid., 9, 17.

245. Ibid.

To witness thousands upon thousands of innocent people succumbing to death with glowing coals searing into their arm pits or splinters driven far under their finger nails,²⁴⁶ should be, it seems, enough to make any man despair and to break down in scepticism. Not so with these preachers. In their suffering they sanctify God's name and are to be considered as blessed.²⁴⁷ Such a lot is more acceptable before God as a means of atonement than are all the sacrifices that specified in the Torah.²⁴⁸ Such a destiny is the fulfillment of the truth that three generations are destined to bear the sorrows of history: the generation of the patriarchs is the first; the age of martyrdom and forced conversion is the second; the final is the generation of the days of Messiah.²⁴⁹

246. Ibid., Psalm 16, homily 4.

247. Ibid.

248. Ibid.

249. Ibid.

ESCHATOLOGY

Every age of suffering in human history has inclined mankind toward the mystic. Every epoch of persecution, for this or that people, has turned the generations of those epochs to thoughts of death, of after-life, of another world in which the wrongs of this life would be righted. To Judaism--the history of which is scarred with ages of affliction--this is an old truth. The times of stress that it endured throughout its long history have always increased the speculation regarding final things, death, reward and punishment, immortality. Under the tyranny of Greece and Rome, in Easter Europe and in Spain, in every period of duress, Israel has developed its particular and unique doctrine of eschatology. Christianity with all its mysticism, its dream of salvation through a messiah; the periods of false redeemers in Europe throughout the middle ages as late as the seventeenth century; Hassidism--all these were marked by their concern for another world in which the good who suffer in this life will, at long last, find surcease from their afflictions and in which the wicked who prosper in this life will, at long last, be shown that their way of life is not the will of God, that wickedness does meet its due punishment as goodness will be repaid with a proper reward.

The concern of the preachers in Midrash Tehillim and the Yalkut Shimoni for these eschatological problems is great and very much in keeping with the eschatological conjectures of other rabbinic works. Here, too, are the considerations of death, the final destruction of this present world, immortality, reward and punishment, the messiah, the world-to-come. In the main, these phenomena are not pictured for the reader, they are not characterized or described. Most of them are merely taken for granted. They are discussed as if their character was known to all. It is difficult, of course, to determine just how far the preachers believed the things they talked about. In this wise, however, they not only escaped the necessity of describing the indescribable, but they also reflected their own faith.

Important is the fact that those rabbis must have known how necessary it was for them to hold out some hope to their persecuted people. They must have sensed the need to bolster the morale of Israel, or else witness its extinction, not only at the hands of the merciless persecutors and inquisitors from without, but likewise at the hands of despair and defeatism from within the heart of Judaism itself. The success of these preachers should be judged by the results: they did accomplish the miraculous; they did help their people survive waves of persecution; they did pilot their masses of people to safer waters.

The final battle between the forces of good and evil, the conflict of all good against Gog and Magog, is referred to, but not extensively. Apparently, at the end of time such a conflict will come, the preachers believed. The two forces for evil, Gog and Magog,²⁵⁰ will come upon the city of Jerusalem in three consecutive and critical invasions, even as Nebuchadnezzar besieged Zion three times, and even as Sennacharib had surrounded its walls in as many sieges.²⁵¹ Yet, terrible as that conflict will undoubtedly be, there are worse things to the minds of some preachers. Worse than the battle of Gog and Magog, for example, is the son who mistreats the father.²⁵²

Worse than death, sometimes too, is life. Of course, it seems to us that there is no day of our lives than that of our death,²⁵³ and it is also true that because it is so terrible God concealed the knowledge of the day of our death from our eyes.²⁵⁴ But man must remember that, in spite of these terrible thoughts, God does not call a man holy until he is interred. Why? Because in life the Yezer Hara harnesses him and keeps him from good works. What is more, man will not believe in life-after-death until his dying day. Let Israel remember that the patriarchs were not considered holy until they were buried.²⁵⁵

250. Taken from Ezekial, chapter 38.

251. Buber, Psalm 118, homily 12.

252. Ibid., 3, 2.

253. Ibid., 41, 4.

254. Ibid., 9, 1.

255. Ibid., 16, 2.

Apparently, the problem of immortality troubled the preachers of our homilies even as it troubles many a modern teacher of religion. How best to explain this question? The rabbinic attempt to answer it is most interesting. For it is very, very modern and rational. They ask, for instance, what could David have meant when he said in Psalm 61 "I shall dwell in Thy tents for ever (olamim)"? ²⁵⁶ Considering the word in Hebrew, olamim, they continue to ask--is it possible that David believed that he would dwell in both this world and the world-to-come? No, this is what the monarch meant: he hoped that the words and songs of praise for God which he was composing (the Psalms) will be sung in the Synagogues and schools of Israel for all ages. ²⁵⁶ Similarly, another rabbi suggests that David must have meant this: he hoped that he could in his life times say or do something that would be worthwhile enough to persist after he is gone, ²⁵⁷ that would endure throughout the ages. In a word, immortality for these men was very much like what it is for many men today--the undying quality of ideas and ideals, the eternality of hopes and dreams.

It is was very natural that these preachers, witnessing the folly and corruption of the wicked judges who determined

256. Buber, Psalm 61, homily 3.

257. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 61.

their miserable lot, should dream of a day when true and last judgment would at last be realized. Such a day of judgement would, of course, find God at the bench of jurisdiction. Such a court would be guided by truth and justice. There the righteous will be judged and vindicated, even while the wicked will be condemned and punished. ²⁵⁸ There ²⁵⁹ God will be exalted.

It is a simple matter to determine when this final day of judgment will actually come. There is considerable difference of opinion among the preachers. One rabbi believes that it will be another of those occasions which will never be known to man, because God knows how much it would frighten him. ²⁶⁰ Some say that the day will arrive when all the nations of the world will acknowledge God, when ²⁶¹ the upper and lower worlds will declare His greatness. At that time will God gather all the peoples before Him. Those who will be condemned must remember that the decision will have been made because they were idolators while Israel alone had accepted the Torah. ²⁶² After, all, if Israel had not accepted it, where would have God ruled? Where would he have made His abode? How could the world have been ²⁶³ saved from immediate destruction?

At this final judgement, the nations will be greatly ashamed when they hear Israel's favorable vindication. They

References:
258. Buber, Psalm 1, homily 22. 261. Ibid., Psalm 20, homily 2.
259. Ibid., 8, 8. 262. Ibid.
260. Ibid., 9, 1. 263. Ibid.

will be further ashamed when God will place the Yezer Hara before them to remind them of the way in which they lived in this world.²⁶⁴ In despair, each nation will call upon its particular God. Receiving no answer, it will be further distressed. Finally, they will come pleadingly to God. He will rebuke them. He will refuse to heed their plea²⁶⁵ because they had once ignored Him.

Ignored will be all such villains as Korah, the arch-villain of Jewish history. Because he rebelled against God and because he refused to repent for his rebellion, God decided to refuse him a share in the world to come. He²⁶⁶ determined to deny him resurrection to eternal life.

Likewise, did Ahitofel merit the damnation of suffering and extinction rather than the glory of the world-to-come.²⁶⁷ He, too, stands as an object lesson for all humanity.

The good, on the other hand, need not fear. They who have been charitable and helpful to the poor and needy, they²⁶⁸ need not lose hope for eternal life. Israel, above all, should have no fear of the final day of judgement. Indeed, Israel will never know when that day is at hand, because the decisions will be determined through someone with whom²⁶⁹ they are very familiar and they will see no terror in it.

264. Buber, Psalm 31, homily 5.

265. Ibid.

266. Ibid., 49, 3.

267. Ibid., 53, 2.

268. Ibid., 41, 4.

269. Ibid., 118, 10.

For the wicked, however, the terror will be quite great and evident. The earth will be shaken from its moorings when the decree of the final judgement is made.²⁷⁰ The waters of the depth will roar and foam, the wicked will be tossed about and Jerusalem alone will survive the catastrophe.²⁷¹ When the debris is cleared away, the world will witness the righteous, vindicated at last, finding shelter under the wings of the Schehina.²⁷² From then on God Himself will rule and His moral law will hold sway over all men and nations.²⁷³

At that time reward and punishment will be meted out to mankind justly and truthfully. The good deeds, being fruitful will reap great remuneration, while the evil actions, barren, will be reciprocated only with disaster.²⁷⁴ Of course, it is not always clear what the reward or punishment will be.²⁷⁵ God considers Himself like the gardner who does not tell his workers how much he will pay them for each separate task, because he wants the entire garden to be cultivated. The Creator knows that if men will know the reward offered for every mizvah, there is danger that they will not all be kept.²⁷⁶

Indeed, the justice which determines God's rewards is even greater than the justice which rules the gardner. For the latter will not pay his workers for any task until

270. Buber, Psalm 46, homily 2.	274. Ibid., Psalm 62, homily 13.
271. Ibid., 3.	275. <u>Yalkut Shimoni</u> , Psalm 9.
272. Ibid., 2.	276. Buber, Psalm 9, homily 1.
273. <u>Ibid.</u> , 47, 1.	

the work is ended. Not so with God. When a man declares his intention to do some good task, even before he has had time to fulfill that intention, God ascribes it to him as though he had fulfilled it. Thus we realize that although David did not personally build the Temple, it was called in his name because he declared his desire to build it.²⁷⁷ On the other hand, when a man contemplates doing something evil, God does not consider it at all until it is actually finished.²⁷⁸ In a similar manner, God does not balance the good deeds against the evil actions, as does a human bookkeeper balance the debits against the credits. First the Creator punishes man for the evil deeds; then he rewards him for the good actions. In that way does man reap the benefit of every good deed of his life.²⁷⁹ But in any case, let man remember that there is never any death without sin preceding it and no chastisement without transgression²⁸⁰ and no reward without some good deed.

Therefore, let Israel who has lived a life of righteousness and law-fulfillment know that it will be rewarded with final salvation. Let them not despair if this salvation does not seem to be at hand when they seek it. Surely as God helped the mother in her labor pain and then helped the daughter in her delivery, so will He who has saved past generations of suffering Israelites deliver the present generations.²⁸¹ In the meantime let them cherish five

277. Buber, Psalm 30, homily 2.

278. Ibid.

279. Ibid., 62, 4.

280. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 89.

281. Buber, Psalm 20, homily 4.

things as helps to salvation--suffering, prayer, merit of
their ancestors, repentance and the final day of judgement. ²⁸²
Let them look to heaven and they will be saved. ²⁸³ Let them
not heed the ways of Korah and Datan, the rebels against
God's law, but let them follow in the footsteps of the sons
of Korah who abided by His will. ²⁸⁴ If the Creator will then
not be able to save them because they have sinned, He will
be compelled to deliver them because of His reputation for
righteousness. ²⁸⁵

This salvation will not be like the salvations which
Israel had experienced in the past at the hands of human
redeemers, salvation unstable and ephemeral. The final
redemption will come through God Himself and it will be
for all times. ²⁸⁶ Then will joy fill every corner of the
earth. For then will not only Israel be free, but God
Himself whose right hand was fettered as long as Israel
was in chains, will be likewise free. ²⁸⁷

Toward the attainment of this salvation, the concept
of the Messiah is not very clear in the homilies under
consideration. Who will he be? When will he come? These
questions are not answered specifically. He is taken for
granted in a hazy sort of way, like other rabbinic concepts.

282. Buber, Psalm 106, homily 9.	285. Ibid., Psalm 71, homily 2.
283. Ibid., 32, 1.	286. Ibid., 36, 6.
284. Ibid.	287. Ibid., 98, 1.

It does seem that he will be a descendant of the house of David.²⁸⁸ Some think that he will come to this world only

when all souls have passed away, when no living inhabitant is left in the universe.²⁸⁹ Another believes that the

Messiah will not arrive until all the world has observed faithfully one Sabbath. Better still, he will not come until the whole earth has repented for one full day.²⁹⁰

His arrival to this earth will be marked by a huge parade. He, the Messiah, will march at the head of that parade. He will be followed by Israel of all generations.

The nations of the earth, repentant, bringing gifts to God, will follow the Israelites.²⁹¹ As the parade will

approach the throne of God, the messiah will be asked to select one gift. He will choose life. Granted²⁹²

this request, he will then proceed to teach the world six fundamental mizvot: the building of the Sukkah,

the use of the Lulav, the use of the phylacteries, etc.²⁹³

At the same time, Israel will be studying Torah with God Himself.²⁹⁴

While Israel is thus occupied, the wicked will be burning in Gehinnom. There, the wicked of all nations will fall from this life, never to rise again, their fate sealed forever and ever.²⁹⁵ There, the world will behold

288. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 82.
289. Ibid., Psalm 82.
290. Buber, Psalm 95, homily 1.
291. Ibid., 87, 6.

292. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 2.
293. Buber, Psalm 21, homily 1.
294. Ibid.
295. Ibid., 62, 2.

an eternal vale of tears. ²⁹⁶ For there they shall behold the wicked being scorched by the blazing rays of the sun which, for the first time in history, will be removed from its sheathe. The heat will utterly destroy them, whereupon ²⁹⁷ the sun will return again to its sheathe. Last minute confession of all transgressions alone will save them from ²⁹⁸ their tragic fate.

Occasionally, God will take the wicked from their abode to let them catch a glimpse of the world-to-come in which the righteous shall be living at ease. He will show the wicked what fate they might have shared had they lived wisely, or at least confessed and repented for their evil doings. Then He will hurl them back into their own ²⁹⁹ abode of suffering. For while the present life finds God good to all men, in the world-to-come He will be good ³⁰⁰ only to the good. No villain of the calibre of Doeg, Ahitofel, Balaam or Gehazi will be allowed either stay ³⁰¹ or entry in that future world. The righteous converts of other nations, however, shall be given a share in that life of everlasting peace and joy. Men like Antoninus (Pius) would be among the first of those to enter the life ³⁰² of the world to come. Even children whose lives are

296. Buber, Psalm 84, homily 3.	299. Ibid., Psalm 31, homily 6.
297. Ibid., 19, 13.	300. Ibid., 5, 9.
298. Ibid., 92, 7.	301. Ibid., 22, 29.
302. Ibid.	

are indetermined shall have a place in the life of the world-to-come. There is, however, difference of opinion as to when the child enters that life. Some say when it is first conceived in the mother's womb; others say at birth; another theory suggests when the child has learned to count; a final suggestion is at the time of ³⁰³circumcision.

No man can describe this world to come, unfortunately. The sons of Korah, righteous men, had a glimpse of it, but when they wanted to picture it to their fellow men, they ³⁰⁴found themselves unable to do so. One thing is certain, however, the stress upon money and material wealth of this ³⁰⁵world will have no place in the spiritual world-to-come. There the righteous will be sub-divided into seven categories and as many respective abodes of spiritual glory will be ³⁰⁶made available for each type of zaddik. They shall have three hundred and ten worlds to choose from for their ³⁰⁷eternal dwelling place. In each of these, they shall be constantly fed by the splendor of the Shechina; it will ³⁰⁸guard them for all time to come.

-
303. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 22.
304. Buber, Psalm 46, homily 1.
305. Ibid., 87, 3.
306. Ibid., 45, 3.
307. Yalkut Shimoni, Psalm 30.
308. Buber, Psalm 45, homily 3.

III - MIDRASHIC EXEGESIS

MIDRASHIC EXEGESIS

309

In his Studies In Jewish Preaching, Dr. Israel Bettan categorizes the exegetical methods that the various preachers employ. Bachya ben Asher, for instance, uses four distinct techniques of interpretation ranging from the simple pshat to the Kabbalistic approach.³¹⁰ Jacob Anatoli proceeds to explain him homilies from the "obvious to the abstruse" by means of allegory.³¹¹ Isaac Arama, rather than substituting the derived interpretation for the literal, employs the two as supplementary to each other.³¹² etc. An analysis of MIDRASH TEHILLIM and the Psalms of the YALKUT SHIMONI reveals, at least to the novice in the world of scholarship, no such systematic formulae for homiletical exegesis. While it is true that these traditional approaches or techniques are present in the homilies under discussion, they are present not in any clearly discernible pattern. They seem to be interwoven. Thus the pshat, the most imaginative derash, together with the varying degrees of interpretations that range between these two extremes often run wild even in a single homily.

There are apparent, however, a very definite and clearly distinguishable number of approaches by which the preachers of our homilies interpret the Biblical passages. These approaches may best be called, not techniques or methods but "points of view." Somehow the great majority of the homilies fit in with

309. Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1939.

310. Ibid., pp. 104-11.

311. Ibid., pp. 66-67.

312. Ibid., p. 154.

these points of view. Thus, when the two collections of homilies are considered from their entirety, stereotyped, even mechanical approaches which border on formulae may be discerned. It is these frequently recurring methods of homiletical exegesis that shall be pointed out below.

Very often the preacher will employ the rabbinically familiar method of homiletical exegesis which introduces a Biblical verse completely extraneous to the verse that prompted the discussion originally. The effort is made ultimately, of course, to relate the newly introduced passage to the verse of the Psalter under consideration. A good example of this approach may be found in the homily to Psalm 1.6, in which the preacher introduces Proverbs 17.3 and proceeds to discuss its significance homiletically. At first there is no relationship between the two passages whatsoever. Masterfully, the homiletician leads the audience away from the Psalter, only to bring it back again with the message clearly and inspiringly considered. 313

Equally entertaining to the reader as it was, no doubt, to the original audience, is the story method the preacher employs. When we read, for instance, Psalm 3.8: "You have crushed the teeth of the wicked," the preacher develops his homily through a delightful story. It seems that a pious and a wicked man were on the highway together. At nightfall they stopped in an inn. The good man ate very sparingly. The wicked fellow dined lavishly. When it came time to pay the bill, the good man had enough money but the scoundrel could not pay his own bill. Whereupon the enraged innkeeper proceeded to knock the teeth out of the wicked man. In what better manner could the preacher explained to his 313. Buber, Psalm 1, homily 22.

simple audience, as no doubt it was, the reward of foresight and the unhappy lot that will befall him who lacks it? ³¹⁴

Another frequently recurring approach to the passages of the Psalter is the purely ceremonial or ritualistic. Obviously, in such homilies, the preachers are interested in only one thing: the emphasis upon the importance of some ceremony, custom, festival, prayer, ritual etc. Thus we are told that he who reads the Shema twice daily at least, Scripture will reckon it for him as though he has labored in the Torah day and night. ³¹⁵ When the wicked nations want to cast away the bonds that tie them to the Almighty Creator, says another preacher, they mean that want to discard the phylacteries. ³¹⁶ Again, we are informed that the uncircumcized will not go to gehinnom, and those who are circumcized will surely spend their life in the World to Come ³¹⁷ in the shelter of God's Sechina.

Psalm 5 affords the preacher, in both the MIDRASH TIRILLIM and the YALKUT SHIMONI to try their skill at the art of interpreting a passages by calculating the mathematical value of and meaning for each letter that go to make any given word. (While this approach is not so frequently employed, it does occur in a number of homilies, and merits mention. In Psalm 5 the word hanchilot of verse 1 is analyzed letter by letter. The heh is made to represent the five books of Moses; the nun the fifty days between Passover and Shabuot; the het the eight days prior to circumcision; the yod the decalogue, etc. ³¹⁸

- | | | |
|------|----------------------------------|--------|
| 314. | Buber, Psalm 4, homily | 13. |
| 315. | <u>Ibid.</u> , | 1, 17. |
| 316. | <u>Ibid.</u> , | 2, 1. |
| 317. | <u>Ibid.</u> , | 6, 1. |
| 318. | <u>Yalkut Shimoni</u> , Psalm 5. | |
| | Buber, Psalm 5, homily | 5. |

Very often the preacher will approach his text by reflecting on the various qualities of human nature. The virtues and the failings, the traits to be admired and those to be shunned by all are pointed to in a very vivid and impressive manner. One preacher, for example, considers the various ways in which different types of men react to the wonders of nature. The admiring type of individual, when he beholds the heavens created by God is moved to exclaim: "If I have been created only to behold the heavens, that is sufficient for me." The individual who is inclined to be lazy will look up at the skies and demand the rewards of life here and now. The good man, seeing the wonders of nature, will say: "Everything that you have, O Lord, store up for me in the World To Come." Content and admiring; lazy, petulant and selfish; appreciative and with regard for the future, into these three categories do men fall.³¹⁹

Still reflecting the rabbinic keen observation of human nature, but from a different angle, there are some homilies which indicate the preachers' attempt to understand the human body. In such homilies, the message of the preacher is interwoven with biological and physiological allusions. The Creator, Blessed be He, for instance, tests the heart and kidneys of men, asserts one homiletician, for a definite reason. It is in the heart and kidneys that the entire thought process takes place. The senses follow the inclinations of the heart which in turn completes its thoughts in the kidneys.³²⁰

319. Buber, Psalm 8, homily 6.

320. Ibid., 14, 1.

Equally keen is the preacher's eye in his analysis of the natural world about him. Often he will draw upon his knowledge, correct or erroneous, of the natural world to elucidate his homily, or to paint some striking simile. God executes great and wondrous miracles, one preacher asserts. Man may use a sieve to sift some stuff, and the matter sifted will drop through the holes of the sieve, drop intermingling with drop. The Creator, blessed be He, however, drops countless myriads of rain-drops, but not one drop touches another in their descent from the heavens to the earth. In another homily we learn that what may not seem to have life and living existence as man knows it to be, that does not mean that those things do not actually possess vitality. To the eyes of man, for instance, the sea is a lifeless body of water; the mountains a dumb mass or clod of earth; the earth and the skies lifeless elements. Not so with God, before Whom the sea has eyes, the depths of the universe a heart, the earth a mouth and the heavens the power of speech.

Still a further approach to the homiletical interpretation employed by the preacher is that which aims to explain the meaning behind a phrase which seems to him to be cryptic or elliptical. Such a phrase, apparently, is Psalm 1.1: "Who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of the sinner, nor sit in the seat of the scoffers." It seems impossible, asserts the homiletician, that one who has not gone to stand, and for one who has not stood to sit. The real meaning

321. Buber, Psalm 18, homily 16.
322. Ibid., 19, 11.

is, however, that if a man but presume to walk toward goodness or evil, ultimately he will stand with it; and if he but intend to stand with the scoffers or the righteous, he is destined to sit with either of them. In effect, the intention is equal to the act itself.³²³

Perhaps the most oft-repeated method of interpretation used in these homilies of the two volumes is that which reads some historical character or event into the words of the Psalter. This is, of course, quite arbitrary and often the reader might, by emulating the ingenuity of the preacher, apply another character or event to the same passage with equal ease and plausibility. Examples of this type of point of view employed by the preachers are numerous and one example will illustrate amply. Thus, the "planted tree in pools of water" of Psalm 1.2 refers, as far as one preacher is concerned, to the garden of Eden; "he who yields his fruit" is Cain; Abel is he "whose leaf does not wither;" Seth is among those who "prosper in all that they do;" the wicked serpent is among the wicked "who are not like that."³²⁴ In another homily, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph and the sons of Korah are derived from the simple passage, "happy is the man."³²⁵

The preacher maybe interesting in contrasting or comparing some traditional hero or Israel with some arch-villain of our heritage. Passages of the Psalter which express wickedness, misfortune, evil, these are identified with the traditional trouble-makers of the Scriptures. The promising passages are related to

323. Buber, Psalm 1, homily 7.

324. Ibid., 1, 6.

the outstanding heroes. Thus, are the model good and the model wicked help up for all to see and take heed. They who will do as the wicked will meet the same unhappy lot; they who will emulate the righteous will be rewarded as their good ancestors were paid. Korah receives considerable consideration as an outstanding villain.³²⁶ Haman likewise receives the vehement condemnation of the preachers.³²⁷ Doeg and Ahitofel are two other oft-mentioned villains.³²⁸ Balaam and his evil intentions are alluded to often and bitterly.³²⁹ Amalek, traditional foe of Israel, is denounced again and again.³³⁰ Of the preachers' model heroes, David stands out, for obvious reasons. He who penned the Psalter, he who poured out his heart in the great doxology, logically becomes the homiletician's greatest model hero. David's humility, his piety, his genius, his wisdom, his heroism, his devotion to Israel and to God, these are the qualities stressed time and again.³³¹ The sons of Korah are always praised for their piety.³³² Bezalel, builder of tabernacles, is given laudatory consideration.³³³ Esther is exalted to the category of the morning-star who brought the light of salvation to Israel in one of its dark nights of oppression.³³⁴

Often the rabbis wrote their homilies from the purely eschatological point of view. The Psalter lends itself well to this purpose. Thus, Psalm 23: the rod means the suffering of Israel; the staff is the Torah; the cup is the cup of ultimate salvation which the righteous of all nations, together with Israel, will share in the World To Come.³³⁵

326. Buber, Psalm 1, homily	15.	331. Ibid., Psalm 18, homily	2.
327. Ibid., Psalm 7,	12.	332. Ibid.,	1, 15.
328. Ibid., Psalm 3,	4.	333. Ibid.,	1, 20.
329. Ibid., Psalm 17,	1.	334. Ibid.,	22, 10.
330. Ibid.,	9, 10.	335. Ibid.,	23, 7.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

The question may well be asked at this point--what contribution, if any, have the foregoing pages made to the study of Midrashic exegesis generally and to the Rabbinic thought on the Book of Psalms specifically?

This question can be best answered by summarizing what this paper has humbly attempted to do. In Part I, it was the purpose of the writer to sum up and to analyze the character of the primary sources under consideration. The questions of their date, place, authorship, sources, influence on later thought, language, etc. were noted. In addition to Buber's thorough and brilliant introduction--it would be presumption for the writer to think that he has even tried to improve upon it--there have been indicated earlier and more recent opinions of scholars. This was done with a view to rounding out the picture of the intellectual "controversy" that took place over these homilies.

The greater emphasis was, obviously, placed by the author in Part II, because it was there that he felt most capable to make some contribution. Since the homilies were arranged both in Midrash Tehillim and the Yalkut Shimoni in the order of the Psalms and the verses, rather than according to their subject matter, there was complete disorganization with

regard to the latter aspect. This paper, therefore, attempted to study both works in detail and with care, and then to unify the subject matter topically. While every Psalm does inspire the preacher to an unpredictable variety of subjects, the writer found a consistency and unity of thought. The hopes and faith, the aspirations and despair, the joy and the sorrow of the rabbis is there clearly and distinctly. They needed some unification and gathering together of their scattered strands. What they thought of God and the universe, Israel and the nations, man's ethical and religious duties, the supernatural, eschatological problems--these were co-ordinated and unified. In that manner, the paper attempted to show consistency and harmony where there is apparent chaos.

In addition, the author has indicated, wherever possible, how much the Psalter meant to the preachers as well as to the people, and how much the Psalms reflected the thoughts of the men who composed the homilies. It can be realized that this Book of Psalms contained for those rabbis the essence of all their thinking and believing; it merely needed their elaboration and amplification.

If, then, this paper has shed any light upon these problems, the author shall feel well rewarded.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

MIDRASH TEHILLIM, (Midrash Socher Tov), Salomon Buber edition, Wilna 1891, published by the Widow and Brothers Romm, with introduction, 542 pp.

YALKUT SHIMONI, Volume II, Wilna 1898, published by the Widow and Brothers Romm, sections 610-890, 91 pp.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Cassel, David - Lehrbuch der jüdischen Geschichte und Literatur, Leipzig, 1879.

Epstein, Abraham - R'Shimon Karo And The Yalkut Shimoni, Krakau, 1891.

Geiger, Abraham - Nitei Neemonim, Breslau, 1847, p. 10.

Gratz, Heinrich - History Of The Jews, Vol. III, JPS edition.

Kohler, Kaufman - Jewish Theology, Macmillan, 1928.

Lauterbach, J. Z. - Midrash Tehillim, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. X, p. 248ff.

Lauterbach, J. Z. - Yalkut Shimoni, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. XII, p. 584ff.

Lauterbach, J. Z. - Unpublished Parts Of The Yalkut ha-Makiri on Hosea and Micah, Moses Gaster Anniversary Volume, London, 1936, pp. 365-373.

Levy, A. - Die Exegese bei den französischen Israeliten, 1873.

Strack, Hermann - Introduction To The Talmud And Midrash, JPS edition, 1931, p. 230f.

Zunz, Leopold - Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, Frankfurt a M edition, 1892.