

**A STUDY OF THE HOMILIES IN BERESHITH RABBAH**

by

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Dedicated to my Parents  
for their direction  
and  
to my Wife  
for her inspiration

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*Personal virtues?*

*Personal?*

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## CHAPTER I

### The Book

#### A. Origin:

Genesis Rabbah or Bereshith Rabbah<sup>1.</sup> is the oldest and the most important of the series of Midrashim on the books of the Bible. In its original form, according to tradition, it was composed in the Third Century of the current era,<sup>2.</sup> by R. Hoshayah, a Palestinian scholar belonging to the first generation of Amoraim. The present title, Bereshith Rabbah, is used presumably in order to distinguish it from a shorter and older Midrash, which may basically ascend to Hoshayah,<sup>3.</sup> with whose name the first proem begins. The appellation Rabbah has nothing to do with the epithet רבנן 'the Elder' or 'the Great' by which Hoshayah was known. So רבנן with ר at the end is the best attested spelling.<sup>4.</sup>

This book is a representative example of Palestinian agada. The fact that the first pericope, consisting of twenty-nine chapters, constitutes more than a quarter of the whole, has led to the theory that it may have formed part of a larger Agadic work on Genesis which was either lost or remained incomplete.<sup>5.</sup> "This larger work", says H. Freedman, "may have been called Bereshith Rabbah to distinguish it from this present smaller work preserved in the other eleven pericopes, but subsequently the name was applied not only to the first pericope but to the whole." It was not improbably designed at

first to form a supplement to the halakic midrashim, Mekilta, Sifra and the Sifre with which it would complete the cycle of Pentateuchal Books.<sup>6.</sup>

It is very possible the first scholar mentioned in the text, R. Hoshayah, had nothing to do with the original work, for in the best MSS., he is simply called R. Hoshayah, not R. Hoshayah Rabbah. But whatever its origin, the designation Rabbah, which originally belonged to Genesis alone, was subsequently applied to the other Midrashim on the Books of the Pentateuch, as well as to the five Megilloth, and thus, ten distinct works were eventually included under the single title, Midrash Rabbah.<sup>7.</sup> Therefore, we may assume that if various Midrashic works received the title Rabbah, it was only natural for many supplementary passages, commenting on Genesis, to be compiled into the single collection which we know as Bereshith Rabbah.

#### B. Date of Compilation:

As stated above, Bereshith Rabbah is one of the oldest Midrashic works, and its redaction took place in Palestine. Hermann L. Strack in his Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash holds the opinion that if we abstract the additions to the book, it cannot have been compiled later than a very short time after the redaction of the Jerusalem Talmud. It cannot, however, be demonstrated that the latter was made use of. Zunz in his Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden holds that this work was edited in its present form (mainly) in the Sixth Century, but later interpolations have been added. From

"vayyishlach" on we find extensive passages bearing marks of the later Agada. The last section, from Genesis 48:28 onward, (beginning "and Jacob lived" 'h', hence called "'h' Rabbah") is usually regarded as a composition of much later date; according to Zunz, of the Eleventh or Twelfth Centuries. Dr. M. Margel, in his essay on Der Segen Jakob's, argues this point as regards the section dealing with Genesis 49. In almost all manuscripts, the exposition of Genesis 49 appears in a younger recension which in part is derived from Tanhuma homilies. This recension alone is cited in Aruk and in Yalkut. For example, Parashas 95 and 96 are Tanhuma homilies on Genesis 46:28 and 47:28f.<sup>8.</sup>

Bacher holds that on the basis of the extensive use of the Proem in the Bereshith Rabbah, which is characteristic of the Post-Tannaitic period, the date of its compilation should be placed at a comparatively early period, estimated as from the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries.<sup>9.</sup> Quite inconclusive are the arguments which S. Maybaum<sup>10.</sup> supports his theory that Bereshith Rabbah was not compiled before the end of the Seventh Century and possibly even as late as the second half of the Eighth Century. The most reliable studies, safely place the date of its compilation about the beginning of the Sixth Century.

#### C. Structure:

In form, Bereshith Rabbah is an expository Midrash, differing from the other Rabbah Midrashim in that it is a running commentary on the first book of the Bible, verse by verse and often word by word, whereas, the others are purely

homiletic Midrashim and do not comment on each verse separately. This is a continual sequence in Bereshith Rabbah, broken only toward the end.

The parashiyoth (sections, chapters) begin with proems, such as characterize the beginning of homilies collected in the homiletical Midrashim. Theodor counts some 230 in par. 1-96. Thus, the book is a combination of the running commentary with the homily complete in itself, in keeping with the character of the Midrashic exegesis demanded by the age in which it was compiled.

The total number of Parashiyoth varies from 97 to 101. Nearly all MSS., and all editions count 96 Parashiyoth up to the exposition on Genesis 47. The principle used in the division was on the basis of the 'open' and 'closed' Parashiyoth of the Biblical text itself, but not on the present division of the Pentateuch into pericopes or weekly portions, whereby the whole Pentateuch is divided so that its public<sup>12.</sup> reading may be completed in one year.

However, it seems that the system of division is more or less an arbitrary one, as it does not correspond to any of the several divisions of the book itself, but they are merely devised to break up the entire subject into smaller sections to facilitate study and reading.

It has been observed that the material on the first pericope "Bereshith" has been compiled on a far more lavish scale than that on the other eleven pericopes. Perhaps, the increase in bulk is to be explained by the acceptance of later expansion. A number of the Parashiyoth treat only of a few

verses and some even just one verse.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HOMILIES

#### A. Exegesis:

The basis for the entire book of Bereshith Rabbah is, of course, the Pentateuchal book of Genesis. Although other Biblical verses, from sources other than Genesis, as well as Mishnaic and Halachic material, are introduced, the very props upon which the whole structure stands are verses from Genesis. It has been stated that "the difference between the Midrash Rabbah and other Midrashim is this, that in the Midrash Rabbah, every interpretation is based on a Scriptural verse from some other book"<sup>1</sup>. This does not, however, deny the fact that the essential points of departure in Bereshith Rabbah are from verses in Genesis.

Upon examination of the exegetic techniques used--- that is the methods of explanation and exposition of the Biblical verses---we marvel at the ingenuity of the preachers in their endeavours to transmit their messages to their audiences. Moreover, we are amazed by the fact that nothing human was strange to them and to their teachings. They spurned nothing that could serve their purpose. They went for illustration to every realm of human knowledge and experience, and being keen observers, as well as eager students, they enriched their homilies with all manner of learning and lore. Whether their ideas were drawn from the text, or read into it----whether, to use Professor Stracks's phrase, they were Auslegung or Einlegung----they main-

tained contact with Scripture. It was the unceasing stimulus to all their ideas and efforts.

Perhaps, we can best get an idea of both the aim and the manner of the book Bereshith Rabbah by a few illustrations taken from what is well-nigh an infinite treasure-house. If we can follow the exegetical thread spun by the prachers, we will be led through what might otherwise prove a hopeless labyrinth.

The most frequent method of exegesis is an ingenious interpretation of a whole verse, which by an original division or combination of words yields an entirely fresh and unsuspected meaning. This is what makes for the constant element of surprise in the Midrash, which is one of its chief fascinations. Take for example, Psalm 119:160!

"The beginning of Thy word is Truth and all Thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever." The first half of the verse reads: "The beginning of Thy word is Truth," leaving us in doubt as to whether this means from the beginning of time or the beginning of the word. But this is how the preacher interpreted the text: "From the beginning of Creation, the beginning of Thy word was truth; for in every decree that Thou visitest upon Thy creatures, they affirm as righteousness of Thy Judgement, and they accept it faithfully. There is no creature that could maintain that two powers had created the universe; for the Scripture does not use the verb in the plural, but in the singular. It does not say *וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים* 'And the Gods spoke, but *וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים* 'And God spoke.' It does not say *וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים* 'In the beginning the Gods created; but *וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים* 'In the beginning God created.' 2.

Ingenious construction of a text, thus, yields a lesson in righteousness, as well as the Unity of the Creator.

The preachers were fond of teaching not merely by the variation of a verse, but also by exploiting particular words. By a slight change in the reading of a word, its meaning is changed. Practically, the same word thus yields various meanings. To a large extent, this was a matter of correlated ideas. "Association of ideas was a great force in the Agada, as it is in all poetry, in all creative work. No wonder the earliest anonymous Agadists were called 'Doreshe Hamuroth', which Professor Bacher would construe to mean "interpreters by means of association."<sup>3.</sup>

For example, let us look at the interpretation of the preachers of Proverbs 8:30. */n'lc /d'3lc d',d'lc/*

"Then I was by Him, as one brought up by Him." R. Hoshayah used this verse in opening a sermon on the Creation of the World, in connection with the first verse of Genesis. He took the word */n'lc*. This word, he says, may mean: either a 'teacher', 'pedagogue' (cf. Num. 11:12); or, 'veiled', 'covered' (cf. Lam. 4:5); or, 'hidden' (cf. Esth. 2:7); or, 'great' (cf. Nah. 3:8); or finally, */n'lc*, may mean 'craftsman', 'master builder' or 'artist', by changing the word to read */n'lc*. The Torah says: "I was the Lord's instrument." As a rule, when a human king builds a palace, he does not build after his own notions, but according to the ideas of an architect, nor does the latter follow his own will, but he has before him plans and diagrams containing the arrangements of chambers and doors. Similarly, the Lord

looked into the Torah and created the world. 'With א'על "In the beginning God created", "beginning" א'על refers to nought but the Torah, as in the verse, Proverbs 8:22 יצר א'על "The Lord made me as the beginning of His way."

This single instance affords us some idea of the skill, as well as the scope, of the preachers. We have here, Biblical learning in the ready conjunction of passages; philology, in the elucidation of the various meanings of the words; observation, in the example from architecture; analogy of the material and spiritual, in the comparison of the Divine Builder and the human; and finally, substitution of words on the ground of probable kinships as a method of exegesis. Though this form of exegesis may not be "scientific", the imagination of the preacher is a vitalizing factor, and though mere emphasis on a particular word would not suffice for methods of research today, it satisfied the writers of the Midrash.

Often, the Midrash achieves its object by play on words. One marvels at the adroitness and fertility of the minds of the preachers. An interesting Midrashic fancy plays about the Hebrew words for man and woman. Genesis 2:23 reads:

א'ב אהפ' ע'ל כ' דע'ל י'ר' א'ב "She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man." On this passage, we find the comment, that from this is to be inferred that the Law was given in the Holy Tongue, and that the world was created in the Holy Tongue. "Did you ever hear that man is called

(חַוָּה) 'ח'ל which would be allied to 'woman' י'ל' (חַוָּה),

or that from 'עִוְיָא (ἑρπῆσ), 'עִוְיָא (ἑρπῆσ) is formed; or that from 'עִוְיָא the word 'עִוְיָא is formed for woman? And yet from 'ע' / ע, the word 'ע' is formed." The preacher points out in this Midrash, that when Adam said "She shall be called, woman 'ע' / ע, because she was taken out of man 'ע' / ע," his remark would be unintelligible unless he spoke in Hebrew, i.e., Hebrew was the first language used.<sup>4.</sup>

By a play on the word 'ע' / ע, "And Sarah said unto Abram: My wrong 'ע' / ע be upon thee" (Gen.16:5) is derived 'ע' / ע "to scratch" and the verse is rendered, "My scratch be upon thee."<sup>5.</sup>

Another example: 'ע' / ע is identical with 'ע' / ע, for, says the preacher, "the letters of both are identical. Thus it is written, "And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very 'ע' / ע good, i.e., and behold, "Adam (man) 'ע' / ע was good."<sup>6.</sup> Also, while the ministering angels were arguing with each other whether Adam should be created or not, God made him and then said: What can ye avail? Man is already been made! 'ע' / ע 'ע' / ע instead of 'ע' / ע 'ע' / ע.<sup>7.</sup>

"And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain" (Gen.4:22) 'ע' / ע is made to read 'ע' / ע : 'he perfected' 'ע' / ע Cain's work. This is logically, or perhaps, illogically deduced from the fact that when Cain slew Abel, he lacked the weapons for slaying, whereas, Tubal-Cain was "The forger of every cutting instrument, etc." i.e., he perfected Cain's sin.<sup>8.</sup> 'ע' / ע 'ע' / ע 'ע' / ע

A more attractive use of the play on words is found in the interpretation of "With rooms 'ע' / ע shalt thou make the

ark: i.e. cells and chambers. R. Isaac said: Just as /p 'pair of birds' cleanses a leper (Lev. 14:4), so shall thy ark cleanse thee." This play on words, besides connecting p'p with /p, also points out that even Noah was not worthy--hence he needed cleansing.<sup>9.</sup>

No less a fertile field did the preachers find in the very letters of Scripture. Take the first letter of the Bible. "R. Jonah said in the name of R. Levi: 'Why does the story of the Creation commence with the letter p? Because just as the p is closed on three sides and open only in front, so you are not able to say what was above and below and behind the world until it was completed.'<sup>10.</sup>" The way this view is stated is no less interesting than the view itself. On another occasion, R. Judah b. Pazi explained that the story of the Creation began with a z in order to teach that there are two worlds, the present and the future, and also, because p is the first letter of the word ppp (blessing). The account does not begin with / because it is the initial of /p'p (curse). And there was danger that the heretics might say: How can the world last, seeing it was created with the initial of p'p/. Thus, the Lord said: "I shall create it with the z of ppp, because I wish it to continue!"<sup>11.</sup>

The careful scrutiny of the text by the preachers, showed them that not until Genesis 2:11 does the letter "o" appear. Could such opportunity be neglected? Of course not! The conclusion drawn from this observation is: as soon as Eve was

created, Satan /C<sub>Q</sub> was created with her."<sup>12.</sup> The Rabbis felt that every "jot and tittle" needed explanation. Why is 7311 in Genesis 2:7 written with two yods , instead of 1311 with one yod, as it is written in Genesis 2:19 in reference to animals? This connotes two formations, viz. that of Adam and that of Eve."<sup>13.</sup>

In order to delve deeper into the hidden meanings of the Scripture, the Rabbis use another exegetical technique, Gematria. R. Hanina b. Papa said: Even Noah who was left of them was left not because he merited it, but because the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that Moses was destined to descend from him, 7222 and 722 both having the same numerical value of 345. The Rabbis adduced it from the following: "And his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."<sup>14.</sup>

Another tool in the preachers bag of exegetical devices was Notarikon, the method whereby words are broken up and each letter or syllable is treated as an abbreviation. It is related that R. Abba, R. Berekiah, R. Abba b. Kahana, and R. Samuel b. Ammi, when sitting and studying, once raised the question: How is Notarikon (as a permissible method of exegesis) deduced from Scripture? We know from this: "And thou shalt be Ab Hamon (the father of a multitude--of nations); the 7 being lacking. His name was changed from 7222 to 7221, so that it might read 21 (father of) 722 (an abbreviation of 7222, 'multitude'). Hence the 7 must be ignored in a case where Scripture itself provides the exegesis. Thus we see that in this method of treatment, Notarikon, the general form of the

word only is considered, while a particular letter or so may be ignored.<sup>15.</sup>

The exegetical technique of analogy is used quite frequently. In Genesis 13:16, we read "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth." The preacher draws an analogy from this verse illustrating the eternity of Israel. "Just as the dust of the earth is found from one end of the world to the other, so shall thy children be found from one end of the earth to other; and as the dust of the earth can be blessed only through water, so will thy children be blessed only for the sake of the Torah, which is likened to water; and as the dust of the earth wears out even metal utensils yet itself endures for ever, so will Israel exist for ever while the nations of the world will cease to be; and as the dust of the earth is trodden upon, so will thy children be downtrodden under the heel of powers....."<sup>16.</sup>  
<sup>17.</sup>

Not only did the preachers reason by means of analogy for themselves, but they also ascribed this ability to the Patriarchs. "And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." (Genesis 17:2). R. Huna said in Bar Kappara's name: Abraham sat and pondered and drew an inference: םדד (foreskin) is used in this passage (v.11), and םדד occurs in reference to a tree (Lev.19:23): just as םדד in the case of trees refers to the place where it yields fruit, so םדד employed in reference to man means the member which produces offspring."<sup>18.</sup>

*You compare methods of exegesis with those of  
exposition.*

Another example of analogy is the following: "So Abraham returned unto his young men." (Gen.22:19). And where was Isaac? R. Berekiah said in the name of the Rabbis of the other place: He sent him to Shem to study Torah. This may be compared to a woman who became wealthy through her distaff. Said she: 'Since I have become wealthy through this distaff, it will never leave my hand.' By analogy, Abraham is supposed to have said: 'All that has come to me is only because I engaged in Torah and good deeds; therefore, I am unwilling that it should ever depart from my seed.'<sup>19.</sup>

Of course, truth was often knowingly sacrificed on the altar of cleverness, in the use of such exegetical techniques as cited above. A glaring example of this weakness of the preachers is contained in the passage: "Jepthah died through his limbs falling off: wherever he went a limb would drop off from him, and it was buried there on the spot." What is the proof? "Because it is written, "Then died Jepthah the Gileadite and was buried in the cities<sup>of</sup> Gilead." (Judges 12:7). It does not say, 'In a city of Gilead,' but, 'In the cities of Gilead.'<sup>20.</sup> To cite another example: up to the point of cursing the serpent, (Gen. 3:14) the Divine Name occurs seven times. This intimates, says the preacher, that the serpent was judged by a full court,<sup>21.</sup> because the Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one members!

Essentially, the writers of Bereshith Rabbah were Biblical critics. Wherever contradictions occurred, they tried to solve them. Wherever there were discrepancies, they set out to resolve them. Obscure passages, they tried to explain. But

despite their intense application in squeezing the text dry, the body and soul of the Bible was always sacred to them. And it was precisely this deep reverence that impelled them to expound it, explain it, develop it and derive as much meaning from it as possible. If they did tamper with the text, altering or correcting words here and there, they did so only to adjust the sacred word to reality.

The methods and techniques which we have discussed and analysed, as far as possible within the scope of this thesis, artificial as they may appear, were devised only to penetrate beneath the outward garb of the Torah into the inner significance and beauty of their Religion. Of course, they had to develop methods of their own to achieve their high-minded purpose. Sometimes, if a contradiction could not be resolved, they said that the contradiction rests in the minds of men, but not in the text.<sup>22.</sup> The difficulties in explaining the text could not always be ignored with this explanation, or rather excuse. Such was the case in which a Roman lady got the best of the argument with R. Jose, when by every rule of logic and rational thinking, she disputed his explanation for the reason of a certain omission in the text. When he saw that he was bested in the argument, he immediately diverted to another explanation, one given previously<sup>23.</sup> by R. Samuel b. Nahman.

No doubt, these mental gymnastics by the preachers, delighted the congregations no end, but further study of these devices will add little more to the understanding of Midrashic

exegesis. What might be of interest, in understanding the reaction of the people to the sermons of the preachers, is a reference to an occasion when R. Abbahu related to the congregation that: "milk came to Mordecai and he was able to suckle Esther. The congregation laughed." Their gullibility must have reached the point of exhaustion.<sup>24.</sup>

This in brief, is an exposition of the exegesis contained in the composition of the homilies in Bereshith Rabbah.

*Treatment inadequate and superficial*

#### B. Freedom of Spirit:

In the last reference cited above, when the statement of R. Abbahu was ridiculed, he turned to them and said: "Yet is it not a Mishnah?"<sup>25.</sup> R. Simeon b. Eleazar said: The milk of a male is clean." This freedom of spirit in propounding an idea, having it refuted, offering rebuttel, is characteristic of the Midrash. Though open discussion is the process through which the Halacha was compiled, it eventually resolves itself into a body of Halachoth which become binding. Not so with the Midrash. Not set rules and facts were thrown out to the listeners, but rather ideas, which they could accept or reject, over which they could mull and ponder. Every preacher was a personality in himself. Hieronymous, who lived in Palestine, reports as an eye witness (about 420 c.e.) that Jews would call one to another, "Let us go and listen to this or that preacher who possesses a wonderful talent."<sup>26.</sup> "The Halachoth

are the body of the Torah; but the Agada is the soul and the spirit of our Torah." <sup>27.</sup> Sifre, to Deuteronomy 11:22 says, "If thou wishest to know Him at whose command the world came into existence, learn Agada, for thereby shalt thou know the Holy One, blessed be He, and cling to his ways." It is assumed <sup>28.</sup> that even though Midrash is not binding, it teaches a love of God which will endear the Halachoth to the heart of the Jew.

There are a number of disturbing passages in Bereshith Rabbah which seem to restrict the freedom of spirit in the discussions of the Rabbis. "R. Azariah and R. Judah b. R. Simon in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi said: Heaven forbid that we should conjecture what the tree was (in the Garden of Eden) ! The Holy One, blessed be He, did not and will not <sup>29</sup> reveal to man what that tree was." At first glance, this may appear to restrict speculation on the contents of the Bible. But the real reason for this warning is that God did not reveal the nature of the tree that it might not be said, 'Through this tree Adam brought death into the world.'

R. Leazar said in Bar Sira's name: About what is too great for thee inquire not; what is too hard for thee, investigate not; about what is too wonderful for thee know not; of what is hidden from thee, ask not; study what was permitted thee: thou hast no business with hidden things." <sup>30</sup> This statement does not in any way destroy man's freedom of spirit in his interpretation of the "word of God". In fact, what this quotation by R. Leazar actually says is that: the Torah knows what was before the Creation of the world, but you have no

business to inquire about aught save 'since man was placed upon earth.'<sup>31.</sup>

Man's problem should deal with men. "One may not speculate too much on what was before or will be, but one may actually study or lecture on the Creation itself."<sup>32.</sup> "It is for this reason that Scripture writes, 'And behold, it was very good'. At this point, it desires to indicate that from here on,<sup>33.</sup> one may search out a matter."

That man's problem should deal with men is illustrated in very subtle manner by the story of Ben Zoma who was contemplating the process of Creation. Finally, he immersed himself so deeply in supra-mundane thought, that R. Joshua turned to his disciples and remarked to them, 'The son of Zoma has gone.' But a few days passed and the son of Zoma passed away. He was no longer for this world.<sup>34.</sup>

The freedom of spirit among the preachers in their exegesis and homilies, goes so far as interpreting the Bible, but not criticizing the textual content or the actions of God which are written in it for all men to read. The preacher says that God can impose an interdict upon His creatures, but they cannot impose an interdict upon Him. They may not criticize His actions, since there is much that is not revealed to them. "This may be compared to a king who possessed mixed stores, and his subjects criticized him saying, 'The king is miserly' (He is keeping all for himself). What did the king do? He opened up for them the best, and they filled the country with stench,<sup>35.</sup> so that they had to sweep it out and cast it in the fire." The obvious meaning here is that man should be satisfied with

the knowledge revealed to them. More than that, they cannot use, nor do they know how to use it.

God gives all men the opportunity to follow their desires, whether they are good or bad. This assertion of free-will is illustrated by the Midrash which says that in Genesis 11:2 we read: "And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, they found a plain, and they dwelt there." R. Judah said: all the nations of the world assembled to discover which plain would hold them all, and eventually they found it..... then it is written, "If it concerneth the scorers, He permits them to scorn." (Job 3:34).<sup>36.</sup> Thus, God permitted them the freedom of will to find a spot suitable for their purposes, viz., building the Tower of Babel.

The clearest expression of the free-spirit in man is found in the words of R. Levi who said: "Six organs serve a man: over three he is master, and over three he is not. Over the eye, ear and nose he is not master, for he sees what he does not wish to see, hears and smells what he does not wish to hear and smell. Over the mouth, hand and foot, he is master. If he desires, he studies the Torah, while if he wishes, he engages in slander, and if he wishes, he blasphemes and reviles. With the hand, he can dispense charity if he wishes, while he can rob and murder if he so desires. With his feet, he can go to the theatres and circuses, while if he wishes he can go to synagogues and houses of study."<sup>37.</sup>

Despite their deep respect for the word and letter of the Torah, one is pleasantly surprised by the freedom of spirit of their interpretations, and by the great humanity

*You can find freedom in interpretation with freedom of will.*

that seems to course through the veins of the preachers.

### C. Literary style:

As literature mirrors the soul of a people, the Midrash may be called a distinctly Jewish species of literature. It is peculiarly Jewish, both in content and form. <sup>38.</sup>

<sup>39.</sup> Whatever the technical origin of the word "Midrash" may be, Bereishith Rabbah outgrew the etymological limitation of the term. Aside from representing the ethical and spiritual imagination of the earliest preachers among the Jewish people, it is a creative work from the standpoint of literary style. It is essentially poetic, and perhaps, because it is poetic, it went straight to the hearts of the people. "The Halachah ruled the people, the Midrash swayed their hearts. They respected the Halachah but they loved the Midrash.....it came from the heart of Israel and went to his heart." <sup>40.</sup>

The language of Bereishith Rabbah is concise and its phrases are pithy. If brevity is 'the soul of wit', then this book is proof of the adage. It contains 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn'. At times it is lively and spirited, at other times ponderous and sublime; at times it is full of a carefree humour, at other times, slashing, bold and pungent. For the most part, it is written in neo-Hebraic. Aramaic occurs principally in the narrative and popular matter, and is of the Galilean variety as is the Palestinian Talmud. <sup>41.</sup> It contains <sup>42.</sup> a few Halachic discussions.

The homilies and parables tell some very interesting

and well-chosen stories. With a minimum of words, they impart a maximum of religious and ethical ideas. There seems to be an excessive use of extraneous Biblical verses to prove a point, which in many cases is unnecessary and often confuses the central idea of the homily. Perhaps, the preachers felt that by the display of greater erudition before their congregations, the people were more likely to accept their messages. Though the illustrations are simple and easily understood, even by the housewife or the untutored, it is doubtful whether the numerous uses and misuses of exegetical techniques made for popular consumption. This is especially true of the first part of the book wherein the Midrashim explain Biblical verses, sentence by sentence and often word by word. The latter part of the book, chapter 55ff., contains more illustrative material, examples, analogies, parables, fables and legends which adorn the sermons. As a whole, the latter part of the book seems to deal with more human and contemporaneous problems than the earlier sections. Since we will discuss the manners in which these have been put to use in Chapter III of this study, it is unnecessary now to cite examples of the illustrations of the preachers.

Our main purpose in this chapter is to point out a few of the best samples of literary value in Bereshith Rabbah. By no means is this an exhaustive listing of material, but it is a representative group of excerpts that could stand the test of standards with the best literary evaluation today.

One of the most striking literary gems in Bereshith Rabbah,<sup>is</sup> distinguished by the realistic observation of the Rabbis

in regard to "woman-kind" in general and by the literary usage of parallels. "R. Joshua of Siknin commenced in R. Levi's name: 'But ye have set at nought all my counsel' (Prov.1:25). Thus it is written, 'And the Lord built the rib' (Gen. 2:22). This is written /רִיב/, signifying that He considered well /חשב/ from what part to create her. Said he: 'I will not create her from Adam's head, lest she be frivolous; nor from the eye, lest she be a coquette; nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth, lest she be a gossip; nor from the heart, lest she be prone to jealousy; nor from the hand, lest she be light-fingered; nor from the foot, lest she be a gadabout. But I will create her from the modest part of man, for even when he stands naked, that part is covered.'<sup>43.</sup> The preacher goes on to show, by means of Biblical verses, that all these qualities in women which the Lord tried to eliminate, nevertheless, remain part of their natures. It is obvious, that the preacher did not so much wish to interpret the verse in Genesis 2:22, as he desired to call to the attention of women, their own failings and shortcomings and sins. The passage is written poetically; no wonder that it has been copied by other writers in all languages. (There is, of course, the likelihood that this passage was copied not so much for its literary style as for its recognition of the universal characterization of woman.)

One of the chief characteristics of the Midrashic literary style is the literary use of metaphor. Such an example is based on Genesis 15:9. The "Heifer" threefold" alludes to Babylonia, which produced three kings, Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-

*allusion*

Merodach, and Balshazzar. "And a she-goat threefold" alludes to Media, which produced three kings: Cyrus, Darius, and Ahasuerus.<sup>44.</sup> "And a ram threefold" alludes to Greece."....."And a turtle dove and a young pigeon" alludes to Edom (Rome): it was a turtle-dove, but of a predatory nature.<sup>45.</sup> "And he took him all these"... means He showed him the princes of the Gentile nations. R. Nehemiah said: He showed him the princes of Israel. On the view of R. Judah, "He laid each half over against the other" symbolizes the throne of one prince opposing the throne of another. According to R. Nehemiah, it symbolized the place where the great Sanhedrin of Israel sat and determined the laws of Israel."<sup>46.</sup>

In the course of Jewish history, when it became more and more difficult for the Rabbis to preach their messages against the wickedness of the ruling governments, they resorted more and more to this metaphorical use of language.

The rich imagination of the preachers transformed common objects of human industry and utility to serve as analogies for their many picturesque and sententious sayings. "R. Samuel b. Nahman said: The names of the wicked are like weaving implements; as long as you use them, they remain taut, if you lay them aside, they slacken."<sup>47.</sup> To cite another example: "A lid for a vat is made not of gold or silver but of earthenware, which is the self-same material. Thus the wicked are darkness, Gehenna is darkness, and the deep is darkness: hence I brought the wicked to Gehenna and covered them with the deep: let darkness cover darkness."<sup>48.</sup>

One of the most complete sermons, including text, exhortum, proposition, textual analysis, body and appeal is *no comment with above*

found in the Midrash on Genesis 22:13. "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold "behind him" וְהָיָה a ram.." What does וְהָיָה mean? R. Judan said: "After all that happened" (that which God had done for Israel, redeeming them from Egypt, etc.) Israel still falls into the clutches of sin and therefore becomes the victim of persecution; yet it will be "ultimately" redeemed by the ram's horn, as it says, "And the Lord God will blow the horn, etc." R. Judah b. R. Simon interpreted: "At the end" of all generations Israel will fall into the clutches of sin and be the victim of persecution; yet "eventually" it will be redeemed by the ram's horn, as it says, "And the Lord God will blow the horn, etc." R. Hanina b. R. Isaac said: Throughout the year Israel is in sin's clutches and led astray by their troubles, but on New Year, they take the Shofar and blow on it, and "eventually" they will be redeemed by the ram's horn. In R. Levi's name, it was said: Because the Patriarch Abraham saw the ram entangled in a thicket, extricate himself and go and become entangled in another, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'So will thy children be entangled in countries, changing from Babylon to Media, from Media to Greece, and from Greece to Edom; yet they will "eventually" be redeemed by the ram's horn,' as it is written, "And the Lord God will blow the horn...the Lord of hosts will defend them."<sup>49.</sup>

In the above Midrash, we can see how the Rabbis were able to transform, as if by magic, the sketchy Biblical narrative into a sermon which reached the hearts of the people and gave them hope to face the slings and arrows of adversity which they encountered on every side.

The preachers seemed to take delight in the use of proverbs and popular sayings in their sermons. Among some of the most graphic are: "If one man tells you that you have ass's ears, do not believe him; if two tell it to you, order a halter." Or, "Do your own duty, while the Holy One, blessed be He, will do His. Physician, physician, heal thine own limp!"<sup>51.</sup> "The owner of the beam has to bear its own weight."<sup>52.</sup> They even had a version of our modern proverb "Bringing coals to Newcastle" when they said: "Would you bring straw to Afrayim, or pitchers to Kefar Hananiah, or fleeces to Damascus, or witchcraft to Egypt--- witchcraft in a place of withcraft!"<sup>53.</sup> Some proverbs, which are not original with the Midrash or with the preacher are used nevertheless to emphasize a point. Such is the use of the proverb: "According to the camel so is its load",<sup>54.</sup> which appears in Sotah, 13b. From the story of Cain and Abel, the preacher deduced the origin of the proverb, "Do not do good to an evil man, and evil will not befall you."<sup>55.</sup> A more realistic proverb<sup>56.</sup> is "In a field frequented by passers-by, tell no secrets."

Though the use of proverbs and the creation of aphorisms requires a delicate treatment of language, the literary mastery of the Midrash in its word pictures cannot be excelled. Where is there a more beautiful description of rain and the blessing of rain upon earth than: "Deep calleth unto deep at the voice of Thy cataracts" (Ps. 42:8). R. Levi said: The upper waters are male while the lower are female, and they say one to the other: 'Receive us, you have been created by God, whilst we are His messengers.' Immediately they receive them: thus it is

written, "Let the sky pour down righteousness; let the earth open (Isa. 45:8)--like a female who receives the male;"that they may bring forth salvation" (ib.)--in that they are fruitful and multiply."<sup>57.</sup>

To express the retrogression in a man's moral actions, the expression is used: "Yesterday a chicken and today an egg! Yesterday thou didst soar aloft with religious actions and noble deeds, whilst now thou art shut up like a chicken in an egg." This is terse, and to the point.

The Mashal "parable" is used most frequently. This is best illustrated by citing a few examples. In a discussion about which tree was the cause of all the grief in the Garden of Eden, R. Jose said: "They were figs.....This may be compared<sup>58.</sup> to a royal prince who sinned with a slave girl, and the king on learning of it expelled him from court. He went from door to door of the slaves, but they would not receive him; but she who had sinned with him opened her door and received him. So when Adam ate of that tree, He expelled him and cast him out of the garden of Eden; and he appealed to all the trees but they would not receive him.....but because he had eaten of its fruit, the fig-tree opened its doors and received him, as it is written, "And they sewed fig-leaves together,etc." (Gen.3:7). (An important exegetical technique is used in this Midrash. See note 58 to Ch.II of this Study).

Another example of the Mashal: "Now the earth was unformed and void" (Genesis 1:2). R. Abbahu said: This may be compared to the case of a king who bought two slaves on the same bill of sale and at the same price. One he ordered to be

supported at the public expense, while the other he ordered to toil for his bread. The latter sat bewildered and astonished: 'Both of us were bought at the same price', he exclaimed, 'yet he is supported from the treasury while I have to gain my bread by my toil!' Thus the earth sat bewildered and astonished, saying, "The celestial beings (angels) and the terrestrial ones (man) were created at the same time: yet the celestial beings are fed by the radiance of the Shechinah, whereas the terrestrial beings, if they do not toil, do not eat. Strange it is indeed!"<sup>59.</sup>

Still another example of the Mashal, in which we see how powerfully it may be used, is the case of "a banquet arranged by a king, who invited the guests and showed them what they would eat and drink, whereby their souls were satisfied and they fell asleep happily. So does God show the righteous while yet in this world, the reward which he is to give them in the future, and thus they fall asleep (die) with satisfied souls."<sup>60.</sup>


Perhaps, the most beautiful Mashal, and the most aptly applied in Bereshith Rabbah concerns the king "who had an orchard which he entrusted to a steward. Now this orchard contained two trees which were intertwined, and of which one yielded life-giving fruit and the other a deadly poison. Said the steward: 'If I water the life-bearing tree, the death-bearing tree will flourish with it; while if I do not water the death-bearing tree, how can the other exist?' On reflection, however, he decided: 'I am a steward; I will do my duty, and whatever the owner of the orchard wishes to do, let him do.' In like manner Abraham argued: 'If I bless Isaac, the children of Ishmael and of Keturah are

included; while if I do not bless the children of Ishmael and Keturah, how can I bless Isaac?' On reflection, however, he decided: 'I am but flesh; I will do my duty, and whatever God wishes to do in His world, let Him do it.'<sup>61.</sup>

In one section, by the clever use of a series of parallel sentences, each one asking a question, the preacher manages to cover the high-lights in Hebrew history wherein, through trust in God, deliverance was exercised for Israel.<sup>62.</sup> This is just another device used by the preachers for rhetorical effect and gives us further proof of the variety of literary styles employed in the Midrash.

The preachers occasionally personified plants and animals and inanimate objects. For instance: "The wheat, the straw and the stubble engaged in a controversy. The wheat said: 'For my sake has the field been sown'; and the stubble maintained: 'For my sake was the field sown.' Said the wheat to them: 'When the hour comes, you will see.' When harvest time came, the farmer took the stubble and burnt it, scattered the straw, and piled up the wheat into a stack, and everybody kissed it. In like manner Israel and the nations have a controversy, each asserting: 'For our sake was the world created.' Says Israel: 'The hour will come in the Messianic Future and you will see how the other nations will be carried away by the wind, but Israel shall rejoice and glory in the Lord. (Italics mine).<sup>63.</sup>

The language and expressions used by the Midrash are not always poetic and effete. Though the preachers are stringent in their moral standards, and stress modesty<sup>64.</sup> the



vigour of their language and the "earthy" and rich pictures with which they approach a subject directly, is rarely surpassed in the literature of any other people. Such indication is found in the words of the preacher who said: "Four there were upon whose flask the Holy One, blessed be He, knocked, only to find it a chamber-pot, viz. Adam, Cain, Balaam and Hezekiah."<sup>65.</sup>

R. Levi said: "...two men, one possessing a thick head of hair and the other bald-headed, stood near a threshing-floor. When the chaff flew into the locks of the former, it became entangled in his hair; but when it flew on to the head of the bald man, he passed his hand over his head and removed it"<sup>66.</sup>

The preacher then says that this illustrates how other nations have difficulty when they wish to procure forgiveness from their sins, but Israel has the Day of Atonement. Or, in their speculation as to where Adam was while Eve was talking to the serpent, one of the Rabbis very frankly says that he believes Adam was asleep after the performance of his natural functions (intercourse).<sup>67.</sup>

One Rabbi was asked: "Why must a woman use perfume while man does not need perfume?" "Man was created from earth," he answered, "and earth never putrefies, but Eve was created from a bone. For example: if you leave meat three days unsalted, it immediately goes putrid."<sup>67.</sup> For vigour of expression, what can compare with this: "And why does a man make demands upon the woman, whereas the woman does not make demands upon the man? This may be compared to a man who loses something. He seeks what he lost, but the lost article

does not seek him." <sup>69.</sup> Sometimes, their euphemisms are more lurid than would be a statement of natural terms. For instance, in discussing the birth of Isaac, begotten by Abraham at the age of a hundred years, the comment is made in R. Hilkiah's name that: "The standing crop of our father Abraham had been dried up, but now it turned to ripe ears of corn." <sup>70.</sup> For sheer raw expression, nothing can be more vivid than the description of Sarah's breasts when she was giving Isaac suck: "She uncovered her breasts and milk gushed forth as from two fountains, and noble ladies came and had their children suckled by her.." <sup>71.</sup>

Quite a bit of humour is apparent in many of the homilies. R. Hanina delivered a sermon in which he told of the wickedness of the generation of Sodom. What did they used to do? They would bring balsam, and during the daytime would smear the most favourable spot for breaking into a home or building, and at night, they would come and dig through it. On the very night after R. Hanina taught this in Sepphoris, three hundred house-breakings took place." <sup>72.</sup> R. Hanina certainly must have expressed the desire to himself that : "Would they only heed his examples for good, as they do the bad." (Italics mine).

But their words were not always heeded. R. Judah b. R. Simon once said that the dust of Adam (in his grave) was dissolved by the flood. But the congregation would not accept this. <sup>73.</sup> Sometimes the preachers lulled their congregations to sleep. <sup>74.</sup> For the most part, however, we can rest assured, the preachers were persuasive speakers, rich in their use of literary expression, as we have seen. Some of the preachers

possessed enough eloquence to move their congregation to tears.  
Such talent is attributed to R. Akiba.<sup>75.</sup>

This then, is a brief study of the literary style and characteristics of Bereshith Rabbah. From such a vast treasure store of literature, it has been impossible to give more than a few examples. In greater measure, however, the following pages of exposition and quotation on the wide range of subjects in Bereshith Rabbah, will convey some further evidence of the high literary qualities of the Book.

*The material in this chapter is poorly organized.*



"Ordinarily, a king is honoured in his realm and great men of his realm are honoured with him, because they bear the burden of state with him. But God is not so. He is independent. He created the world alone; He alone is glorified in the universe."<sup>3.</sup> God therefore needed no help to build and create the world. First, R. Hanina draws the conclusion that the angels were created on the fifth day. If they were created the first day, people might assume that they assisted God to stretch out the firmament. God did it alone.<sup>4.</sup>

As may be gathered from the various appellatives for God scattered over the pages of Bereshith Rabbah, He was not only the Creator of the world,<sup>5.</sup> but He is "the eye of the world"<sup>6.</sup> "the light of the world"<sup>7.</sup> He is the immanent One<sup>8.</sup> "the fountain of Truth",<sup>9.</sup> "a teacher"<sup>10.</sup> "the Father of all".<sup>11.</sup> "God Who had faith in the world when He created it, mourned over its moral decay, which compelled Him to punish it with the deluge, as a father mourns over the death of his son."<sup>12.</sup>

God is sometimes called *רִיבָּנָא* "place". How is this? "R. Ammi said: Why is God given the appellation of 'place'? Because He is the place of the world, and the world is not His place." He fills the world but the world does not contain Him. R. Abba b. Yudan said: 'The matter is like a warrior who rides upon a horse, and his weapons hang down on each side; the horse is an adjunct and secondary to the rider, but the rider is not an adjunct and secondary to the horse.'<sup>13.</sup>

Apparently some magical use was made of the various names of God in the Bible by the Minim, and especially of *דל* *ר' דל* and *דל דל*. Hence R. Simlai's statement to his

disciples: "The three words are just mere different names for one and the same God, even as you may call one and the same monarch, Basileus, Caesar or Augustus."<sup>14.</sup>

Some allusion to polemics is also made in the following: "Hearken unto  $\delta\iota\varsigma$  Israel your father" (Genesis 49:2).

The Midrash says that  $\delta\iota\varsigma$  "unto" means also  $\delta\iota\varsigma$  God. R. Elazar b. Ahwi said: From the verse in question, the Israelites received the privilege of reading the "Shema". When Jacob was about to die, he called his twelve sons and said to them, 'hearken unto the God of Israel, your heavenly father; perhaps there may be in your hearts a controversy about God.' Then they said: 'Even as your heart is whole and undivided towards God, so too is our heart: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'<sup>15.</sup>

"A Samaritan asked R. Meir: 'How is it possible that He of whom it is said, "Do  $\alpha$  not fill heaven and earth" (Jer.23:24) should have spoken to Moses between the two staves of the Ark?' (Exod.25:13). R. Meir said: 'Bring me a large mirror'. And he said to the man, 'Look at yourself in it.' He did so, and saw his face magnified. 'Then bring me a small mirror' said R. Meir. 'Look at yourself in it'. He did so, and saw his face made small. Then  $\alpha$ . Meir said: 'If you, a mortal man of flesh and blood, can change your appearance at will without altering your substance (italics mine), how much more can God.'<sup>16.</sup>

In one of the Midrashim, there is a change in text to avoid the implication that God is male or female.<sup>17.</sup>

The omnipotence of God is continually expressed.<sup>18.</sup>

"The world and the fullness thereof, belong to God" (Ps.111:6).

"When He wished, he gave it to you; and when He wished, He took it from you, and gave it to us."<sup>19.</sup> Human achievement<sup>20.</sup> may fall short of perfection, but not the work of God.

God can perform miracles! "Is anything too hard for the Lord"(Genesis 18:14). In the name of R. Judan b. R. Simon: "This may be compared to a man who had in his hand two parts of a chain and went to a smith and asked him: 'Can you repair these?' 'I can make them from the outset' he replied, 'and you think I cannot repair them!' So here God said: 'I can create men from the beginning, yet you would say that I cannot restore them to their youth!'"<sup>21.</sup> The very word of God is equivalent to action.<sup>22.</sup> His mere promise is as though it were already fulfilled.<sup>23.</sup>

Of course, there were many anthropomorphisms and materialistic conceptions of God. "God was indignant with Himself."<sup>24.</sup> He is conceived of as light or fire.<sup>25.</sup> He can be drawn up like water which is drawn from a well.<sup>26.</sup> Some of the anthropomorphisms of the Rabbis jar upon us. The things that God is made to do and feel and think are sometimes so completely on the human level that we are repelled and troubled by them. But since the Rabbis and preachers are an inconvenient lot of people because their views and beliefs are such an odd mixture, we cannot criticise the anthropomorphisms which they brought into the text. We must remember that many of the preachers, in spite of their learning, were simple folk; it was with simple folk that they had to deal. Anthropomorphisms were unavoidable. But they were often mitigated by such caveats as *לפיכך* "If it be proper to say so." To generalize is difficult. For example,

"We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, took a cup of blessing and blessed Adam and Eve." <sup>27.</sup> He acts as 'best man' at wedding of Adam and Eve, <sup>28.</sup> He visits Abraham on his sick bed; condoles with Isaac after the death of Abraham; He "Himself in His Glory" is occupied in doing the last honours to Moses who would otherwise have remained unburied. <sup>29.</sup> This record of Imitatio hominis is naive and daring, but it may also appear flippant to modern readers. But the apparent flippancy is not due to any Rabbinic lack of deep reverence for God or fervent love for Him. It may rather be said that this very reverence and love produced a certain intimate familiarity, which may be compared to the familiarity of a loving son who is on very intimate terms with his father. It is, besides, a graphic way, for the preacher, of showing God's close participation in the affairs of man. He is with us in our joy, as He is with us in our pain and sorrow.

It is this recognition of God in every aspect of life that gave rise to such a beautiful Midrash as the following: "And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth." (Genesis 24:3). R. Phinehas said: Abraham said, 'Before I made Him known to His creatures He was the God of Heaven; now that I have made Him known to His creatures, He <sup>30.</sup> is the God of the earth.' No! the Rabbis could not separate themselves at a distance from God. God was the atmosphere in which they lived and moved and had their being.

Let us proceed to a discussion of some of the Attributes of God. It is noteworthy that perversion of justice, respecting persons, and taking bribes are not permitted under any conditions.

for the very attributes of God are Justice and Mercy. Therefore, since God never disobeys His own moral law, (even when to man it appears so), so man should obey God's moral law.<sup>31.</sup> Justice and Mercy! These two together are to be the very foundations of God's rule over mankind. Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden was an act of Justice; yet it was tempered with Mercy, since Adam did not die immediately.<sup>32.</sup>

"A king once had some empty glasses. Said the king: 'If I pour hot water into them, they will burst; if cold, they will snap.' What did the king do? He mixed hot and cold water and poured it into them, and so they remained unbroken. Even so, the Holy one Blessed be He said: 'If I create the world on the basis of mercy alone, its sins will be great; on the basis of judgement alone, the world cannot exist. Hence I will create it on the basis of judgement and of mercy, and may it then stand!'"<sup>33.</sup> The Rabbis hold that hence we read "The Lord God made heaven and earth." וַיֵּצֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֶדְמָתָא. The tetragrammaton יהוה refers to God under the Attribute of Mercy, while יהוה describes Him as a God of Judgement.<sup>34.</sup>

Judgement and Mercy are often hypostasised as living personalities. "And the pillar of cloud removed from before them, and stood behind them." (Exod. 14:19). It means that that very attribute of Judgement, which threateningly confronted Israel, was turned round by God, and directed against the Egyptians."<sup>35.</sup>

Both Justice and Mercy are difficult to maintain at times even by God. "If Thou desirest the world to endure, there can be no absolute justice, while if Thou desirest absolute

justice the world cannot endure, yet Thou wouldst hold the cord by both ends, desiring both the world and absolute justice." <sup>36.</sup>

"Moreover, when Thy children take to transgressions and evil deeds, I will see one righteous man amongst them who will be able to say to my Attribute of Justice, "Enough!", whereupon, I will take him and make him atone for them." <sup>37.</sup>

Here is Justice, tempered by Mercy. Here also is the personification of Justice, referred to above. The Attribute of Justice exists in the world, <sup>38.</sup> and does not permit God to remain silent about it. <sup>39.</sup>

Sometimes, the Justice of God is questioned. "Even in the case of a human judge, an appeal can be made from the commander to the prefect and from the prefect to the governor; but Thou, because no appeal can be made from Thy Judgement, wilt Thou not do justly?" <sup>40.</sup> "When a man dies without previous suffering in this world, the Attribute of Justice is stretched out against him; but if Thou causest him to suffer in this world, the Attribute of Justice will not be stretched out against him." <sup>41.</sup>

Even though the dispensation of punishment were abandoned, the law of *שָׂרָא כְּעֵצוֹ שָׂרָא* "measure for measure" would still be given to man. For each good deed, he would receive good. For each bad deed, he would receive evil. Man will receive the punishment befitting the crime. <sup>42.</sup> R. Meir presents a remarkable teaching concerning God's Attribute of Justice; it differs so with the accepted teaching. He says: "God is unconcerned by what is done in this world and is

not incensed by the deeds of the wicked----like a judge before whom a curtain is spread, so that he does not know what is happening without." <sup>43.</sup> His colleagues sharply rejected this interpretation and told him: "You have said enough, Meir, heaven forbid that this teaching should be true."

We must not assume that God is always wroth at man. Even creation was made, so that no harm should come to His creatures. <sup>44.</sup> God showed mercy unto Cain, by just driving him out into the world and not slaying him. Why? Because Cain had none from whom to learn the enormity of his crime. <sup>45.</sup> God took Enoch while Enoch still walked with God. Why? Because Enoch was a hypocrite, and God wished to take him while he was still righteous. <sup>46.</sup> R. Berekiah said: "When God came to create Adam, He saw the righteous and the wicked arising from him. Said He, 'If I create him, wicked men will spring from him. If I do not create him, how are the righteous to spring from him?' What then did the Lord do? He removed the way of the wicked out of his sight (deliberately disregarded it) and associated the quality of Mercy with Himself and created man." <sup>47.</sup> The imagination of the preachers assume exalted form when they say: God Judges the nations by night, when they are asleep from their sins, so that His Judgement can be more lenient." <sup>48.</sup> Furthermore, God judges man only as he is at the moment, so that his sins will not be too great, as they would be taken collectively. <sup>49.</sup> In the expression, "Pour mercy and mercy will be poured" we discover, perhaps, the highest form of sympathetic magic. <sup>50.</sup> "God should be merciful, says one Rabbi,

remembering Abraham's loss of compassion for his son, in fulfilling God's will."<sup>51.</sup>

In R. Joshua's name, it was said: "God is long-suffering about everything except immorality. What is the proof? "The sons of men saw the daughters of men" (Genesis 6:2), which is followed by, "And the Lord said: I will blot out man" (Genesis 6:7).<sup>52.</sup>

God also possesses the attribute of repentance. He repented that He had created man, and put the blame upon His heart.<sup>53.</sup> Truth is the seal of God. "Let truth spring up from the earth."<sup>54.</sup> The profession of the Holy One, blessed be He is charity and loving kindness, and Abraham who will command his children and his household after him 'that they shall keep the way of the Lord' (Genesis 18:19) is told by God: 'Thou hast chosen my profession.'<sup>55.</sup> God brings good and bad. Can the bad be good? This means, God takes care that from the bad shall come forth good, and God takes care how to bring down the bad.<sup>56.</sup> God is also a teacher. He sits in His heavenly court and teaches a new law every day.<sup>57.</sup> God is also a Trustee. He returns what is deposited with Him. Amalek deposited with Him bundles of thorns (wrong-doings). He returned to him bundles of thorns (punishments).<sup>58.</sup>


#### B. His Relation to Man:

"When their Creator praises them, who may disparage them; when their Creator lauds them, who may find fault with them? But they are comely and praiseworthy; hence it is written,

'These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth whe<sup>n</sup> they were created.'<sup>59.</sup> The preacher quotes this to show that in man, too, God took pride, the phrase "Whom He had formed" being understood as though God pointed with pride at man, His handi-work. The very corollary of the unity of God is the brotherhood<sup>60.</sup> of man.

R. Levi said: God is good to all men because He has made them. R. Samuel said: God is good to everyone who partakes of His Attribute of Mercy. R. Joshua said: God is good to all as evidenced by his having endowed man with the quality of<sup>61.</sup> mercy. God takes part in the experiences of man.<sup>62.</sup> (See discussion in previous section).

From some of the examples given, one might almost say that man was created in order to give God an opportunity to display His forgiveness, His beneficence and His greatness. "The world is compared to a treasure house built by a king just at the entrance to an orchard. Into the orchard, he brought workers and said to them: 'Whoever will labour conscientiously in the work of the orchard may enter the treasure-house, but<sup>63.</sup> he who neglects his work, will not enter.' The world is also compared to a fine feast with dishes containing all good food. Man needs to bless the Giver by good deeds and precepts in order<sup>64.</sup> to enjoy the repast before him.

Man can also assist God and work with Him, as in<sup>65.</sup> the case of Abraham who received the captives; or as Abraham<sup>66.</sup> who was a counselor with God; or he can become a  a partner with God, as Abraham was when he helped God in slaying those

who were already destined or doomed to death.<sup>67.</sup> The purpose of Creation, say the Rabbis, was the making of man who should ever strive to come nearer to God. By diffusing the knowledge of God among men, Abraham thus became a partner in God's work.<sup>68.</sup>

A beautiful, but rather disturbing homily is told by R. Judah in commenting upon the verse, "Noah walked with God". "This may be compared to a king who had two sons, one grown up and the other a child. To the child he said, 'Walk with me' but to the adult, 'Walk before me.' Similarly, to Abraham, whose moral strength was great, He said 'Walk thou before me' (Genesis 17:1); of Noah, whose strength was feeble, He said, 'Walk thou with me.' Here, the preacher explains that Abraham could get along without God. R. Nehemiah said: He might be compared to a king's friend who was plunging about in dark alleys, and when the king looked out and saw him sinking in the mud, he said to him, 'Instead of plunging about in dark alleys, come and walk with me.' (This is the case of Noah). But Abraham's case is rather to be compared to that of the king who was sinking in dark alleys, and when his friend saw him he shone a light for him through the window. Said he to him, 'Instead of lighting me through the window, come and show a light before me.' Even so did the Holy One, blessed be He, say to Abraham: 'Instead of showing a light for Me from Mesopotamia and its surroundings, come and show one before Me in Eretz Israel.'<sup>69.</sup> R. Nehemiah tries to show here that God could not get along without Abraham. The obvious meaning is that God is glorified only through righteous and religious individuals. This is a relation between God and

man that is perhaps the central theme of all the teachings of the Rabbis.

Many of God's actions are determined by His desire to teach men a lesson through them.<sup>70.</sup> And when men cannot understand some of God's actions and purposes, they should remember this, and know that men see not as God sees.<sup>71.</sup>

The Midrash also tells how God allows His beneficent work to be anticipated by good men. This is a similar idea to God causing the Shechinah to rest upon men possessed of certain qualifications. The world of good men is a phase of God's immanent beneficent activity in the world.<sup>72.</sup> When a man adds his quota of usefulness to God's activity, he ipso facto becomes a co-worker with God, and the sum of Divine blessedness in the universe is increased.

God is engaged in making ladders upon which one man climbs to success, but down which another descends to failure.<sup>73.</sup> The success and failure of men is the result of the Divine plan brought to bear unremittingly upon the things of the world. This is illustrated by the fiasco of "A matron (Roman) who asked R. Jose: 'In how many days did the Holy One, blessed be He, create the world?' 'In six days,' he answered. 'Then what has He been doing since then?' 'He sits and makes matches,' he answered, 'assigning this man to that woman, and this woman to that man.' 'If that is difficult,' she said, 'I too can do the same.' She went and matched her slaves. Some time after, those who were thus united went and beat one another, this woman saying, 'I do not want this man,' while this man protested, 'I

do not want that woman.' Immediately, the Roman matron called for R. Jose and admitted to him: 'There is no God like your God: it is true, your Torah is indeed beautiful and praiseworthy, and you spoke the truth.'<sup>74</sup>

Another point to be considered in the discussion of God's relation to man is the homily in which, "R. Samuel b. Nahman said that, כֹּסֶם וְרֵז 'sustenance' is greater than פְּדוּת 'redemption'. And why? Because the latter is affected by means of an angel, as it is said: 'The angel that redeemed me from all evil' (Genesis 48:6), but the former can only be brought about by God Himself, as it is said, 'Thou openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.'<sup>75</sup> It is quite obvious here, that the difference between an angel and God is not one of fact, but of degree. Redemption by an angel is not meant to be a different thing than redemption by God, but only a different degree of care and providence exercised by God.

The Rabbis, like most teachers of religion, ascribe human methods by action to the Deity, but, concurrently with such ascription, they always maintain God's unlikeness to man--- His omniscience, for example, and his foreknowledge. Thus, a sentence like the following is a commonplace: "Before a thought is framed in a man's heart, it is known already to God. Even before a man is fully formed, his thoughts are made manifest to God."<sup>76</sup> Man is mastered by anger. God masters anger. Man is mastered by jealousy. God masters jealousy.<sup>77</sup>

With the saying, "wherever the pious go, there the Shechinah accompanies them in closest relation,"<sup>78</sup> we may end

this discussion on the relation between God and man.

### C. His Relation to Israel:

The Rabbis sincerely and honestly believed that God and Israel were united together by a passionate love on both sides. Though God was the Lord of all men, He remained in a peculiar sense the God of Israel. Though their ideas of God do not fit in with the God of the Copernican system, says C. G. Montefiore, or with our ideas of the supreme impartiality of God, the Rabbis, in expressions which contain a tender beauty of their own show that the love of God for Israel produced or corresponded with their own intense love for God. Let us quote some of the passages dealing with God's relation to Israel.

"R. Yudan said: The world was created for the sake of the Torah. R. Joshua b. Nehemiah said: For the sake of the tribes of Israel."<sup>79</sup> In the last quotation (B.R. 26:6) cited above in the previous section, we see that the Rabbis were ready to generalize, and to say quite simply that the Shechinah ever accompanies the righteous. Doubtless, they thought of their righteous almost wholly as Israelites, just as the Church Fathers thought of their righteous as almost wholly composed of orthodox Christians.

Even the terms of Creation refer to Israel. "Let there be light" alludes to Abraham. "And God called the light, day" refers to Jacob. "And the darkness, he called night" alludes<sup>80</sup> to Esau (who was not of the Israelites.)

God is the father, the strength, the shepherd, the hope, the salvation, the safety of Israel. They are His people, his children, his first-born son, his treasure. There is not a single endearing epithet in the language, such as brother, sister, bride, mother, lamb, or eye, which is not applied by the Rabbis to express this intimate relation between God and His people. "And the desire of the Holy One, blessed be He" is for none but Israe.<sup>81.</sup>

"The intention to create Israel preceded everything else."<sup>82.</sup>

Such stories or theories, the Abbis thought, explained and justified the peculiar relation and nearness of God to Israel and of Israel to God. This nearness is half spiritual and half physical. He is ever close, accompanying them in their pilgrimages and exiles from land to land.

The relation of God to Israel will be further explained by the chapter dealing solely with Israel.

#### D. Creation:

The discussion of creation naturally falls into the chapter on God, for in their speculations about the manner of Creation, many interesting conceptions of God are brought to light.

R. Abuhah, must have been an accomplished geologist, inasmuch as he maintained that before the creation of our world, God was ever constructing and destroying worlds.<sup>83.</sup> God had created many worlds and destroyed them until He created this one and declared: "This one pleases me, the others did not please me."<sup>84.</sup>

"Six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were actually created while the creation of the others was already contemplated." <sup>85.</sup> (But contemplation and decision are identical and simultaneous with God). They were: the Torah, the

Throne of Glory, the creation of the Patriarchs, Israel, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah. "The work of heaven and earth were in existence, but could not be seen as long as formlessness and void was in the world; but as soon as formlessness and void were eradicated from the world, the work of heaven and earth could be seen. They became finished products." <sup>86.</sup> The

meaning of this is that: God did not create the earth and heaven out of nothing---creatio ex nihilo. <sup>177</sup> and <sup>178</sup> are regarded here, together with darkness, as forms of matter, which was God's raw material in the creation of the world. The object of this Midrash is to refute the arguments of Creatio ex nihilo. *But God created these ingredients*

<sup>177</sup> <sup>178</sup> <sup>179</sup> <sup>180</sup> <sup>181</sup> <sup>182</sup> <sup>183</sup> <sup>184</sup> <sup>185</sup> <sup>186</sup> <sup>187</sup> <sup>188</sup> <sup>189</sup> <sup>190</sup> <sup>191</sup> <sup>192</sup> <sup>193</sup> <sup>194</sup> <sup>195</sup> <sup>196</sup> <sup>197</sup> <sup>198</sup> <sup>199</sup> <sup>200</sup> <sup>201</sup> <sup>202</sup> <sup>203</sup> <sup>204</sup> <sup>205</sup> <sup>206</sup> <sup>207</sup> <sup>208</sup> <sup>209</sup> <sup>210</sup> <sup>211</sup> <sup>212</sup> <sup>213</sup> <sup>214</sup> <sup>215</sup> <sup>216</sup> <sup>217</sup> <sup>218</sup> <sup>219</sup> <sup>220</sup> <sup>221</sup> <sup>222</sup> <sup>223</sup> <sup>224</sup> <sup>225</sup> <sup>226</sup> <sup>227</sup> <sup>228</sup> <sup>229</sup> <sup>230</sup> <sup>231</sup> <sup>232</sup> <sup>233</sup> <sup>234</sup> <sup>235</sup> <sup>236</sup> <sup>237</sup> <sup>238</sup> <sup>239</sup> <sup>240</sup> <sup>241</sup> <sup>242</sup> 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was one mass of water, yet you actually say, "Into one place". This may be compared to ten inflated wineskins lying in a chamber. When the king needs their place, what does he do? He unties them, permits their air to escape, and removes them to a corner. Even so, did the Holy One, blessed be He, tread down all the primeval waters and remove them to the Ocean." <sup>89.</sup>

A certain philosopher wanted to prove that there really was no creation, but that the elements were eternal. <sup>90.</sup>  
R. Gamaliel shows that God created even the elements.

There are numerous examples of the speculation of the Rabbis. They believed that <sup>91.</sup>  $\delta' m$  'expansion' refers to the second of the seven heavens. They believed that heaven has a vault or arch which is conceived as solid. Through this, <sup>92.</sup> day has to force its way. They were really puzzled by the passage of the orbs through the heavens. So we see that for some problems, even their imagination, elastic as it was, was not unlimited. "It is an exceedingly difficult matter and no person can fathom it." <sup>93.</sup> Upon the verse:  $\rho' n e \delta' p d \rho' n h k p' i$  "And God called the expansion heaven", Rab said:  $\rho' n e$  is composed of  $\rho' k$  and  $\rho' n$ --fire and water. <sup>94.</sup> A clever play on words!

The old problem of "which came first" is raised in regard to the creation of light. Some held that light came first, just as a king in building a palace, first lights up the sight. The minority held that the world was created first, for a king <sup>95.</sup> first builds a palace and then adorns it with light. The <sup>96.</sup> world was created through Divine Fiat, which can create and

97. destroy. "Not through labor or toil but through a word, was the world created. That is why it is said: 'And there was light' not 'And there will be light.' 98. Some hold that the world was created by אֶלֹהִים, אֶלֹהִים 'ten words'. 99.

There is purposefulness in creation. "The son of Sira said: God caused drugs to spring forth from the earth; with them the physician heals the wound and the apothecary compounds the preparation. R. Simon said: There is not a single herb but has a constellation in heaven which strikes it and says, 'Grow,' which proves that everything in creation serves some purpose." 100. Fleas, gnats, flies, snakes, serpents and scorpions serve some purpose and are not superfluos. "When the wicked Titus entered the Holy of Holies, he dragged down the veil, blasphemed and reviled God. On his return, a mosquito entered his nose and began piercing his skull. And when he died, they split open his brain and found that it was like a bird weighing two pounds." 101. More unpolished in details is the story of R. Eleazar who was sitting to ease himself in a privy, when a Roman came and drove him away and sat down. 'This has a purpose,' remarked R. Eleazar. Immediately a snake emerged and struck and killed the Roman." 102.

*nature's  
understands  
control.*

Heaven and earth play an equal role in creation. When a mortal king builds a palace, after having built the lower stories, he builds the upper ones; but God created the upper and the lower stories in a single act. 103 R. Johanan however holds that heaven plays the major role in God's scheme, earth being subsidiary to it. He thus compares the universe to

a building in which the lower stories serve as a support to  
104.  
the upper ones.

In summarizing the discussion in Bereshith Rabbah on creation, we see that it gave rise to much speculation and debate. In their exegesis of the theme, the Rabbis were confronted by many external views, old and contemporary, as to the origin of matter and the contact between the divine and human. These views were examined, some approved, some rejected when they proved incompatible with Scriptural teaching. We can see that the Rabbis were acquainted with various Greek cosmological theories, as well as Babylonian and Phoenician. The Epicurean theory that the world arose from fortuitous combinations of elements was repugnant to the Rabbis because it left no room for a Creator. It is sufficient to say that many apparently strange Rabbinic sayings about God and the world and creation become intelligible when we realize that we are not treating with philosophers, but with men who elaborated no system of their own. The single utterances and quaint sayings, the cliches, clothed in simple speech for the ready comprehension of a simple audience, should not lessen their interest. There is no reason to doubt that the Greek ideas came to the Rabbis from wandering disciples of the Greek masters or from Jewish travelers. The Rabbis had no hesitation in adopting such ideas as seemed consistent with Judaism.

#### E. Idolatry:

Abraham, the friend of God, who was destined to be-

come the first winner of souls and the first monotheist in Jewish history, began his career, according to the legends of the Rabbis, with breaking idols; and it was his particular glory to have been in opposition to the whole world.<sup>105.</sup>

The generation of Enosh, the generation of the deluge, and the generation which built the tower of Babel are described as rebels who transformed the worship of God to idols or to man, and thus profaned the Holy Name.<sup>106.</sup> Idolatry<sup>107.</sup> degrades men and makes them susceptible to demons.

The evil effects of idolatry are felt both before and after it is actually practiced. Because Jeroboam was destined to set up a golden calf at Dan (Kings I, 12:19), Abraham was weakened ~~was~~ when he came to that place and so could pursue his enemies no further. Similarly, even after the golden calf at Dan was destroyed Jeremiah speaks of terror raging at Dan.<sup>108.</sup>

"Because some of the Sodomites worshipped the sun and others the moon, God said: 'If I punish them by day they will say, "Had the moon been here, it would have protected us"; while if I punish them at night they will say, "Had the sun been here it would have protected us." Therefore God destroyed them on the sixteenth of Nisan, when both the sun and the moon are visible in the sky.' Thus we see that by the clever reasoning of the Rabbis, God punished the people in such a way as to destroy their faith in the sun and moon as objects of worship.<sup>109.</sup>

Likewise, the sun and the moon were both created. Why? So they would oppose each other and people not bow down to them and worship them. As it is, people worship them. But,

how much more so, if only one had been created.<sup>110.</sup>

The Rabbis ask, 'Why was Rebekah not remembered with children until Isaac prayed for her?' The answer is that heathens might not say, 'Our prayer bore fruit'.<sup>111.</sup>

The only respect in which idolatry was still, in their actual life, important to the Rabbis was in relation to the world around them. Bereshith Rabbah has few references to this subject, and no parables at all on idolatry. This must have been a minor problem in their day, for they stress the ethical attitudes more strongly than they harangue against idolators. In fact, they mention that the generation of the flood was completely destroyed because they indulged in robbery, whereas, of the Generation of the separation, a remnant remained, even though they did build a large idol (the Tower of Babel).<sup>112.</sup>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ISRAEL

#### A. Distinction of Israel:

In a statement made by the Rabbis, referred to above, Israel's election was predestined before the creation of the world (just as was the name of the Messiah), and sanctified unto the name of God even before the universe was called into existence.

Israel is found from one end of the earth to the other, it is blessed through its devotion to the Torah, and it will endure forever, while other nations pass away.<sup>1.</sup>

Since it is difficult to see how any revealed religion can dispense with the doctrine of its election, Israel's election is not quite of so exclusive a nature as is commonly imagined. It is the privilege of the first-born son which the Rabbis seem to claim for Israel, that they are the first in God's kingdom, not<sup>to</sup> the exclusion of other nations. After our observations on the relation of God and mankind, we can not think otherwise.

#### B. Israel's Faithlessness:

But what of Israel's sins, even though Israel is the elect of God? The Rabbis were conscious of these. Sometimes they speak as if God regards Israel as His people only when they do His will. More often, they hold that Israel is still His people even if, and when, they sin, and that they will never be wholly

cut off. Through repentance, they can return and find forgiveness and favour.

However, the Rabbis never give Israel total assurance that just because it was elected by God, it is free to indulge unbridled in sin. When God punishes the heathens, the sinners in Zion (should) be afraid.<sup>2.</sup> "This may be illustrated by two children who ran away from school: when one is punished the other trembles."<sup>3.</sup> So, in the Messianic future, Israel will fear punishment by God--the punishment that may be pronounced upon him because of his faithlessness.<sup>4.</sup>

Since Abraham is the prototype of Israel,<sup>5.</sup> God tells him: "Know that I shall disperse thy seed; know that I will gather them together, know that I will give them in pledge, know that I will redeem them; know that I will allow them to be enslaved, know that I will free them."<sup>6.</sup> The pledge, referred to here, means that the exile is regarded as putting Israel in pledge to expiate their sins. When Israel returns to the qualities of Faith, Sacrifice and Sense of Religious Duty which have made it worthy of the Priestly Benediction, then God will forgive Israel and give it a lasting peace.<sup>7.</sup>

### C. Israel Among The Nations:

The Rabbis, however, are not too optimistic about the benefits accruing to Israel when it returns from exile. "Just as the dove could find no rest and returned to the ark, Israel finding no rest returns to God. If she found rest, she would not return to God."<sup>8.</sup> (What a potent Rabbinic support for

the arguments of the non-Zionists!) However, this seems to be a minority opinion. The Diaspora is looked upon as a deep tragedy, and concerning it, the Rabbis often strike a very poignant note.

"And Jacob said: Sell me today, ~~etc.~~" (Genesis 25:31).

9.  
'Sell me one day of yours,' he asked. R. Aha commented: whoever is able to calculate the period of the dispersion will find that but one day did Jacob dwell in peace under the shadow of Esau." 63:13

The preacher, in the words of Jacob pleads, "leave me just a little peace for a short while!" He observes that this has been Israel's plea throughout the Diaspora.

The Rabbis also make the comment that by selling the birthright to Jacob, Esau transferred to Jacob the future world while he retained the present. Therefore, Jacob is left with the Hereafter, but no enjoyment of this world. 10. The Midrashim in this particular section ( 63-67 ) must have been written during a time when the lot of the Jews under the reigning governments was particularly difficult to bear. A remarkable parable is presented to illustrate the incomplete kindness of the foreign powers. A certain decree was dispatched against the Jews. When the Community of Israel received it, they burst out weeping and wanted to revolt against the (Roman) power. Thereupon the Sages decided: Let a wise man go and pacify the congregation. So they let R. Joshua b. Hanania go, as he was a master of Scripture. He went before the people and harangued them: "A wild lion killed an animal and a bone stuck in his throat. Thereupon he proclaimed: 'I will reward anyone who

removes it.' An Egyptian heron, which has a long beak, came and pulled it out and demanded his reward. 'Go,' answered the lion, 'you will be able to boast that you entered the lion's mouth in peace and came out in peace.' Even so, let us be satisfied that we entered into dealings with this people in peace and have emerged in peace."<sup>11.</sup>

The bitterness of the preachers against the Roman State sometimes openly expressed itself in harsh language. Why is the Roman State compared to a swine? "For this reason: when the swine is lying down it puts out its hoofs, as if to say, 'I am clean'; so does the wicked State rob and oppress, yet pretend to be executing justice,"<sup>12.</sup> and from the verse "Every raven after its kind" (Lev. 11:15) the Rabbis drew the lesson that the wicked nations join together.<sup>13.</sup> (The ancient Axis!) The deadly feud with Rome, is a feud that began from the beginning of time and will be brought to an end with history itself.<sup>14.</sup> Also, since Esau (Rome) is called 'great', his slaughterer (God) will likewise be great for "according to the size of the ox is its slaughterer."<sup>15.</sup> Israel is to succeed Rome. "A Roman prefect asked a member of the family of Sallu: 'Who will enjoy power after us?' In reply, he brought a blank piece of paper, took a quill and wrote upon it: "And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel."<sup>16.</sup> (Genesis 25:26).

The struggle between Jacob and Esau, as one Rabbi puts it, is a struggle between differences in ideals.<sup>17.</sup> They could, however, appreciate the greatness of Rome, and they

were not averse to praising it. "R. Simeon b. Lakish said: 'And God saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good.' Previously, He had said with regard to the works of the other days, 'It was good.' The words 'and it was good' refer to the Kingdom of Heaven. 'Very good', to the kingdom of the Romans. What? the kingdom of the Romans was very good? Yes,<sup>18.</sup> for it sets up justice among men.<sup>18.</sup> Thus we see that human justice can be praised even above the Kingdom of Heaven, and even when exercised by a Gentile king. This is rendering unto Ceaser his due in full measure. This idea of loyalty to countries of domicile<sup>19.</sup> and to the rulers was an important rule for the Rabbis. "One must show respect to the Roman conqueror. One must not insult the humblest Roman or the meanest soldier."<sup>20</sup> Where Rome was concerned, the same idea of loyalty prevailed. It is true that there are many references to "Wicked Edom", but these refer to Roman sinfulness, and not to the question of loyalty to the sovereign power. "Insolence to a king is like insolence to the Shechinah."<sup>21.</sup>

#### D. Israel's Destiny:

Israel is small, but lasting! "R. Nahman said: As long as the light of the greater luminary functions, the light of the smaller one is not noticeable, but when the light of the greater ones sets, the light of the smaller one becomes noticeable; even so, as long as the light of Esau prevails, the light of Jacob cannot be distinguished; but when the light of Esau sets, that of Jacob shall be distinguished."<sup>22.</sup>

When the morning of the nations of the world turns to evening, then the evening of Israel will turn to morning. At that time, the Kingdom of God will be attained. The Rabbis seemed to feel that the future for Israel is not a future limited to it alone, but it will be the breaking of a new day when "nation will not rise up against nation" but the whole world will be ruled by God. Jacob's promise to join his brother at Seir meant that meeting in the distant future when the Messiah of Israel will appear and the Holy One will make His Kingdom shine forth over Israel.<sup>23.</sup>

Israel must also attain to the blessing of this great future. "The angels who have only one heart are free from the Evil Inclination, a blessing to which Israel will attain only in Messianic times."<sup>24.</sup>

Israel will be purified from guilt and will last forever. "Just as the street outlives those who travel upon it, yet itself remains for ever, so shall Israel outlive those nations of the world which have trodden upon it and will remain for ever."<sup>25.</sup>

#### E. Proselytes:

Noble in tone and perhaps intended for the ears and hearts of all men, was Simon b. Azzai's generous utterance: "This is the book of the Generations of man" (Genesis 5:1) is the the grand rule of the Torah"<sup>26.</sup> The implications of this statement are clear. The Books of the Torah are intended for all human beings, even for those not included within the community of Israel.

The famous declaration in Deuteronomy 10:18, that God loves the proselyte, was accepted whole-heartedly by the writers of Bereshith Rabbah, as will be seen.

"The souls whom they had made in Haran" (Genesis 12:5).

R. Elazar b. Simeon said: If all the inhabitants of the world came together to create even one single fly, they could not put life into it. How, then, can it say, "The souls which they had made in Haran"? And why does it use the word 'made'? To teach you that if anyone brings an idolator and converts him, it is as if he had created him. And why does it say 'They made'? (in the plural). R. Huna said: Abraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women. Abraham received them at his home, and gave them food and drink, and dealt lovingly with them, and brought them under the wings of the Shechinah. This is to teach you that he who brings a man under the wings of the Shechinah is regarded as if he had created him."<sup>27</sup>

In connection with this same homily we see that the general proposition is laid down that he who brings his fellow man to dwell under the wings of the Shechinah is reckoned as though he had conceived, patterned and shaped his very being. To give a man a new outlook on life, is to remake him.

Abraham was impelled to this activity by God's initial blessing: "Be thou a blessing ( ברכך )." An anonymous authority puns and reads: "Be thou a pool ( ברכך )" Even as a pool cleans the unclean, so do thou bring near (to Me) the distant ones and purify them unto their faith in Heaven."<sup>28</sup>

"Aquila, the proselyte, went to R. Eliezer and said

to him. 'It says, "God loves the stranger (proselyte) in giving him food and raiment" (Deut. 10:18). Is that all the remuneration which God gives to the proselyte?' Then R. Eliezer said, 'Is that so light in thine eyes for which the patriarch Jacob begged in Prostration? And now this proselyte comes, and God offers it to him straightway.' Then he went to R. Joshua, who appeased him by telling him that by food was meant the Law, and by raiment the praying-shawl. When a man has proved himself worthy in the law, then he is held worthy of the shawl, and such proselytes may give their daughters in marriage to priests, and their children may become high priests and offer sacrifices upon the altar. It was said, 'Had it not been for the patience which R. Joshua showed to Aquila, he would have returned to his errors.'<sup>29.</sup>

Similarly, on his death bed, the Patriarch Jacob rebuked his sons Simeon and Levi for their heartless and cunning attacks on the ailing inhabitants of the city of Shechem. Bitterly he turned to them with the reproach, "Your act shattered the faith of the proselytes."<sup>30.</sup>

When Abraham called unto the Name of God, he caused all creatures to proclaim the Name of God. The implication is that Abraham's invocation of God was in reality an unbroken series of conversions.<sup>31.</sup> Abraham's faith in his hour of trial won many converts.<sup>32.</sup>

When Abraham returned the elders of the captives to their former position, he kept the children to teach them righteousness. They underwent circumcision.<sup>33.</sup> However, proselytes

can come in at any age.<sup>34.</sup>

From the examples above, we can see that the pride of race and the particularism of the Rabbis are strangely combined with a certain universalism, for the proselytes comprise more classes than one. For not only is he a "ger" who formally joins the religious brotherhood of Israel, but he too is a "ger" who believes in the one God, Father and King---the God to whom men pray. We must be careful, therefore, of seeing particularism where it is not to be found, in studying the homilies of the Rabbis in Bereshith Rabbah. Though you may find all possible teachings in the literature, even though some are of a single example, we correctly observe that most of the teachings concerning Israel reach out towards the larger view that Israel was chosen for service and not for privilege.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TORAH

#### A. Torah and Creation:

Quite opposed to the common conception of the outsider, that the Torah is suggestive of something external, forced upon men by the authority from the outside, sinister and burdensome, is the sentiment which the Rabbis and the preachers in Bereshith Rabbah expressed in their lessons on the origin and the performance of the Law and the motives urging them.

To the Rabbis, the whole Torah represented the Word of God, dictated by the Holy Spirit, suggesting edifying lessons everywhere and embodying even while it speaks of the past, a history of humanity written in advance.<sup>1.</sup> Like rain and light, the Torah was a gift from Heaven of which the world is hardly worth, but which is indispensable to its maintenance.<sup>2.</sup> R. Banayah said: "The world and the fulness thereof was created only for the sake of the Torah."<sup>3.</sup> Elsewhere it is related that among the six things created before the creation of the world, was the Torah.<sup>4.</sup> "The Torah preceded the creation of the world by two-thousand years as it is written, "Then I (the Torah?) was by Him, as a nursling, and I was his delight day after day." (Prov. 8:30); now the day of the Lord is a thousand years, as it is said, "For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past" (Ps.90:4)."<sup>5.</sup>

As cited elsewhere in this study, the Torah was the blueprint for God when he set about creating the world. Just

as the architect of a palace employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and doors, so God consulted the Torah and created the world."<sup>6</sup> (See page 8, chapter I of this study.) As the  $\int$  of creation, the Torah seems to correspond to the "logos" of Greek philosophy, the continual creative process.

#### B. Study of Torah:

Torah, however, is never assumed to be greater than the Wisdom of God. It is more like the handmaiden to God. It is the incomplete form of Heavenly Wisdom.<sup>7</sup> It is simply the manifestation of God's will; the working tool, the pedagogue of God.<sup>8</sup> The knowledge of Torah will teach man better than all philosophical studies and scientific experiments. "A certain philosopher wished to know after what period of time a serpent bears young. When he saw them copulating, he took them and placed them in a barrel and fed them until they bore. When the Sages visited Rome he asked them how long it takes a serpent to bear its young.....R. Joshua said, "After seven years." "How do you know that?" asked the philosopher?" And R. Joshua proceeds to tell him how he was able to deduce it from Scripture. The philosopher began to beat his head against the wall in grief, crying: "All that for which I toiled seven years, this man has come and offered to me on the end of a cane!"<sup>9</sup>

The deserving man labors in the Torah. "R. Liezer said: He who does not earn for himself the epithet  $\int$   $\nu$   $\delta$   $\nu$   $12$ <sup>10</sup>  
"a toiler in the Torah, earns for himself the epithet  $\int$   $\nu$   $\delta$   $\nu$   $12$ "<sup>11</sup>

"a heap of dung".

"R. Liezer's brothers were once ploughing in the field, while he was ploughing in the mountain, when his cow fell and was maimed. It proved fortunate for him that his cow was maimed, for he fled to R. Johanan ben Zakkai, to study there in his academy. Because of his poverty, he ate there clods of earth until his mouth emitted an offensive odor, and when they went and told it to R. Johanan ben Zakkai, he said to him: 'As the smell of your mouth became unpleasant for the sake of the Torah, so will the fragrance of your learning be diffused from one end of the world to the other.'<sup>12.</sup>"

A man who has a son who toils in the study of the Torah is filled with compassion for him, and even the Holy One blessed be He is filled with compassion for the man who toils<sup>13</sup> in the study of the Torah.

"Ahaz said: if there are no kids, there are no wethers; if there are no wethers, there are no sheep; if there are no sheep, there are no shepherds; if there is no shepherd there is no world. He reasoned thus to himself: No children, no adults; no adults, no disciples; no disciples, no sages; no sages, no elders; no elders, no prophets, and if there are no prophets the Holy One, blessed be He, will not cause his Shechinah to rest upon us."<sup>14.</sup> "He who leaves behind a son toiling in Torah<sup>15.</sup> is as though he had not died." "R. Ishmael said: If you have studied Torah in your youth, study it in your old age, because you do not know which you will retain."....R. Akiba said: If you have raised disciples in your youth, raise disciples in your

old age, because you do not know what God has destined for you.....R. Akibah had twelve thousand disciples...and all died at the same period. Why? Because they grudged each other the knowledge of the Torah."<sup>16.</sup> He who knows Torah, therefore, should not begrudge teaching it to others. To visit a wise man is like visiting the Divine Presence.<sup>17.</sup>

<sup>18.</sup> The protection of wisdom is like the protection of money.

#### C. Obedience to the Commandments:

The study and the practice of the Torah clothe men with dignity and strength, and the reward thereof is in the Hereafter.<sup>19.</sup>

R. Judah said: It was fitting that the Torah should have been given through Adam. Whence does it follow?--"This is the book of the generations of Adam." The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'He is the creation of My hands, and am I not to give it to him!' Subsequently, however, He said: "I gave him six commandments (see B.R. 16:6) and he did not remain loyal to them; how then shall I give him six hundred and thirteen precepts...?" Hence it is written, "And He said to Adam, (reading פָּרָא לְךָ for פָּרָא לְךָ). But to whom will I give it? To his descendants: hence it is written, "This is the book of the generations of Adam."<sup>20.</sup>

Abraham, who is constantly referred to as the prototype of Israel, said: "All that has come to me is only because I engaged in Torah and good deed. Therefore, I am unwilling that

it should depart from my seed." <sup>21.</sup> The study and the observance <sup>22.</sup> of the Torah will deliver the descendants of Adam from Gehenna. All the punishments brought upon the world and man were due to his neglect of the Torah and its commandments. An example is cited in the case of the flood. <sup>23.</sup> So great are the benefits of the Law and its rewards that its observance makes a man truly free. "When Law came into the world, freedom came into the world." <sup>24.</sup>

A most beautiful parable is related concerning the reward of the observance of the Law. "Artaban sent to Rabbenu a priceless pearl, and said to him, 'Send me a precious object of equal value.' R. Judah sent him a mezuzah. He said to him, 'I sent you a priceless gift, and you send me something worth a penny.' R. Judah replied, 'Our respective gifts cannot be compared. Moreover, you sent me something which I must guard, but I sent you something which, when you sleep, will guard you, as it is said, "When thou walkest, it will lead thee, when thou liest down, it will watch over thee, and when thou awakest, it will talk with thee." (Prov. 6:22); it will lead thee in this world, it will watch over thee in the hour of death; it will talk with thee in the world to come." <sup>25.</sup> This is a clear conception of the Torah as an active agent.

A very liberal understanding of the meaning of Torah is displayed by the statement of Rab: "The commandments were given to Israel only in order that men should be purified through them. For what can it matter to God whether a beast is slain at the throat or at the neck?" <sup>26.</sup>

Though it is commonly assumed that the Rabbis specially adored all the ceremonial enactments of the Law because they were so exclusively intended for Israel, yet, we may see by some of the examples in Bereshith Rabbah, that they realized that the moral took precedence over the ceremonial. Don't emphasize such strict obedience to the letter of the Law. "R. Hiyya taught: Don't make the fence more than the principal thing, lest it fall and destroy the plants."<sup>27.</sup> Don't add too much to the Law! Because there is no particular logic about some of the legislation, the observance of them is purely a discipline, and should therefore be obeyed for that reason.<sup>28.</sup> One must not observe the Law more scrupulously than God commands us to.<sup>29.</sup>

Here I may quote the famous and familiar passage in which the unity of the human race---the brotherhood of man--and the love of the neighbour are called the greatest and most inclusive principles of the Law:

"Ben Azzai quoted the verse, 'This is the book of the generations of Adam' (Genesis 5:1), and said: This is the greatest principle of the Law. R. Akiba said: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Lev. 19:18) is the greatest principle in the Law. Do not say, 'Because I am despised, so may my neighbour be cursed with me.' If you act thus, said R. Tanhuma, know whom you despise, namely, a being made in the image of God."<sup>30.</sup> The word for "neighbour" in R. Akiba's comment is not the same as the word רֵעַ in Leviticus. It is רֵעָה.

#### D. Practical Wisdom:

The Rabbis were imbued with the necessity of making their teachings practical. Though they sometime seem to be drab and uninspired, it must be observed that in the Midrash, paradox and height are not wanting in their proper place. It has, perhaps, been the practical wisdom of their Law that has safeguarded Judaism from wild and uncontrolled ecstasy. The following are some example of the practical wisdom which the Rabbis found in the words of the Torah.

"And he left off talking with him." It was taught: He who departs from his neighbour, whether he is greater or smaller than he, must ask leave of him. From whom do we learn it? From Abraham. On one occasion Abraham was speaking to God, when the ministering angels came to speak to him. Said he to them, 'Let us take leave of the Shechinah, which is greater than you, and then I will speak with you.' When he had spoken with God, he said to Him, 'Sovereign of the Universe! I have need to speak with the angels.' 'Then let me take leave of thee in peace,' replied God.<sup>31.</sup> Here, of course, is a lesson in manners!

"...the Torah teaches you practical knowledge" said Bar Huta, "that if a man builds a ship which is to stand upright in harbor, he must make its breadth a sixth of its length and its height a tenth."<sup>32.</sup> Even such practical things the Rabbis found in the Torah.

"R. Levi said: The Torah teaches you here a rule of worldly wisdom: spend according to your means on food; less

than you can afford on clothing, but more than you can afford on a dwelling. Spend according to your means on food, as it is written, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest eat freely" (Genesis 2:16). Less than you can afford on clothing: "And the Lord God made...garments of skin, and clothed them." These were simple, inexpensive garments. More than you can afford on a dwelling: for lo! they were but two, yet they dwelt in the whole world."<sup>33.</sup>

Amusing, is the following bit of advice: "R. Judah said: 'Imagine a king who wished to increase his friend's allowance. I intend to double your allowance, the king informed him. 'Do not fill me with a false hope' he rejoined, 'pray only that you do not withhold my present allowance.'"<sup>34.</sup>

"A man who sets out on a journey without his necessary provisions will suffer."<sup>35.</sup> "A fatherless maiden may not be given in marriage without her consent" From whence do we learn this? From: "And they said: We will call the damsel and inquire at her mouth." (Genesis 60:55)."<sup>36</sup>

Many of the above examples show an intricate process of rationalization, but nevertheless, they throw the lie in the teeth of those who say that the Law is limited. To the Rabbis, it was a never-ending stream.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RELIGIOUS ETHICS

#### A. Sin and Righteousness:

There are indications in Bereshith Rabbah that the Rabbis had given some thought to the question: how far does God help man to be good? They emphasize, on the whole, the free will of man; yet while he is free to do good or bad, for sin the door is left open, for righteousness, there is always aid. Any very deep theological discussion of the difficult questions on the problem of evil in the world seems to be lacking. "Satan walks about in the broad places of the highway. When he sees a sinful man, he says, "This man belongs to me."<sup>1.</sup>

"At first, sin is weak, like a woman, but then it grows strong, like a man. R. Akiba said: at first it is like a spider's web, but eventually it becomes like a ship's rope.... E. Isaac said: At first it is like a visitor, then like a guest who stays longer and then finally like the master of the house... R. Tanhum b. Marion said: There are dogs in Rome that know how to deceive men. One dog goes and sits down before a baker's shop and pretends to be asleep, and when the shopkeeper dozes off he dislodges a loaf near the ground, and while the onlookers are collecting the scattered loaves he succeeds in snatching a loaf and making off."<sup>2.</sup> Thus sin pretends to be asleep until it catches its victim off his guard.

Thus we see that sin is ever prevalent and it is up to the men to be ever watchful that even the smallest sin

is not committed by them, for it grows into tremendous proportions without man being able to control it any longer.

It is interesting to note that the Rabbis were not bothered too much by the fact that both good and evil came from God. "God on the seventh day ceased from the creation of His world, but not from the creation of good and evil men."<sup>3.</sup> Referred to above is the Midrash (B.R. 61:4) which says that both good and evil must exist together. It is up to God to really decide in end which is good and which is bad. Man needs only perform his duties on earth.

One of the most important teachings of Judaism is expressed by the Midrash which relates that a wrongful deed dishonours one's faith and one's God.<sup>4.</sup> The *inc / ync* idea!

The three cardinal sins are: robbery, violence and incest.<sup>5.</sup> The generation of the flood sinned through passion and lust.<sup>6.</sup> They also abused their fountain, viz., they poured their semen upon trees and stones.<sup>7.</sup> (Idolatry is also implied here.)<sup>8.</sup> Falsehood is a sin of primary importance. Sin is attributed to those who do not permit charity, as in the case of the people of Sodom who burned a girl to death because she practiced charity.<sup>9.</sup> Abundant prosperity also leads to sin.<sup>10.</sup> If demoralization does not proceed from the leaders, then it is not real demoralization, since they are in a position to stop it. The Rabbis emphasized the responsibility of the leaders of the people in preventing sin from flourishing among their subjects. They cite instances in which leaders have overlooked the mistakes of the people; in transgressing themselves; in ius primae noctis; in homosexuality

and pederasty; in fully legalizing sexual perversions.<sup>11.</sup> They forget that they are mortal, and their long life lessens their fear of death.<sup>12.</sup> Pride and vanity is also a form of sin, as<sup>13.</sup> is intemperance.<sup>14.</sup> The catastrophe of the destruction of the Temple was the result of sin.<sup>15.</sup>

Commenting on the verse, "And I will cause it to rain...forty days and forty nights" R. Johanan said, "They corrupted the features, which took shape after forty days."<sup>16.</sup> The idea here is that the features of an embryo take shape after 40 days, and when man sins, it is an essential degradation of the human dignity. The Rabbis even go a step farther by saying that the wicked even during their lifetime are called dead.<sup>17.</sup> Adam's face originally bearing the image of God, after his sin, became disfigured and hateful.<sup>18.</sup> Wine and sleep are good<sup>19.</sup> for the wicked because when they are asleep they do no harm.<sup>20.</sup> Wickedness tends to destroy itself,<sup>21.</sup> and chaos is the inevitable result of lawlessness.

Let us close this rather haphazard conglomeration of Rabbinic ideas on sin with two excellent homilies drawn from the Midrash:

"When iron was created, the trees began to tremble. God said to them: 'Why do you tremble? Let none of your wood enter it, and none of you will be harmed.'<sup>22.</sup> the idea here is that iron cannot harm the tree unless the tree first furnishes a handle for the axe. So harm cannot come to man unless he supplies the cause for it, which is sinfulness.

"R. Abba b. Kahana said: The real home of the Shechinah

was in the nether sphere; when Adam sinned it departed to the first firmament; when Cain sinned, it ascended to the second firmament; when the generation of Enosh sinned, it ascended to the third; when the generation of the flood sinned, to the fourth; with the generation of separation, to the fifth; with the Sodomites to the sixth, with the Egyptians, in the days of Abraham, to the seventh. But against these arose righteous men.....and they brought it down again to earth. Abraham from the seventh to the sixth; Isaac from the sixth to the fifth; Jacob from the fifth to the fourth, Levi from the fourth to the third; Kohath from the third to the second; Amram from the second to the first, while Moses brought it down below."<sup>23.</sup> Therefore, only the righteous can bring the Shechinah down to earth, whereas, the sinful, do not permit it to dwell on earth.

A curious teaching of the Rabbis is that man's moral actions are controlled by God. If man has desire to commit an offense and he does not do it, the credit is God's not man's.<sup>24.</sup> What then becomes of man's free-will? But as we stated previously, the Rabbis made no attempt to be philosophers.

Among the beautiful analogies in Bereshith Rabbah is that which compares the various qualities of the righteous to the qualities of trees. "As the palm and the cedar have neither crooked curves nor excrescences, so the righteous have neither crookedness nor excrescences (in their character). As the shadow of the palm and the cedar is cast afar, so is the reward of the righteous far away (in the future world). As the heart of the palm and the cedar is directed upward, so are

the hearts of the righteous directed towards God."<sup>25.</sup>

What is the fruit of the righteous, is asked? Life,<sup>26.</sup> religious actions and good deeds.

The righteous were rewarded in this world by receiving the high esteem of their fellow-men. One must bless a righteous man when one makes

mention of him.<sup>27.</sup> He who assists a righteous person is as though he fulfilled the ten commandments. He who gives a

piece of bread to the righteous is as though he fulfilled the five books of the Pentateuch.<sup>28.</sup>

One righteous man can nullify<sup>30.</sup> an evil decree,<sup>29.</sup> and one righteous person can save a city.

Even God is stricter in defense of the honor of the righteous<sup>31.</sup>

than He is in defense of His own honor. The righteous are<sup>32.</sup>

fellow craftsmen with God, and when one righteous man dies,<sup>33.</sup>

there will be another to take his place. R. Jehuda says

that righteousness is a relative thing. (Comparing Noah to

Abraham.) R. Nehemiah says it is an absolute, not based on a

relative standard. A man may be righteous in spite of his environment; how much the more so would he stand out in an age<sup>34.</sup>

favourable to righteousness. "He might be compared to a tightly closed phial of perfume lying in a graveyard, which nevertheless gave forth a fragrant odor; how much more then<sup>35.</sup>

if it were outside the graveyard."

This idea is disputed by the Midrash concerning Abraham, about whom it is said, he influenced his whole generation. "Lot said: Before I went to Abraham, the Lord saw my good deeds and the deeds of my fellow citizens, and mine exceeded theirs. Now that I am to go to Abraham, his deeds are

so much more than mine, and I cannot withstand his burning coals." <sup>36.</sup>

The general idea of the homilies of the preachers seems to be that if man, by an effort of will, moves forward on the right road, God will aid him, and come forward, as it were, to meet him.

#### B. The Evil Inclination:

The preachers do not eulogise virginity and monasticism, but they were prevaillingly chaste. Perhaps the absence of natural and healthy social intercourse between men and women in the age when this literature was created, is the cause for the frequent sexual allusions. The Evil Inclination towards immorality is the source of all sin. This influence is termed

הַיָּסוּד הָרָע. But the term is very obscure and so variously used in Bereshith Rabbah, that it is defiant of any real definition. We may say that in general, the הַיָּסוּד הָרָע is anything that prompts man to do other than the good.

"As long as the Evil Inclination exists in the world, thick darkness and the shadow of death are in the world; when the Evil Inclination will be uprooted from the world, thick darkness and the shadow of death will pass away from the world." <sup>37.</sup>  
"God repents that he had created the Evil Inclination, for had he not, man would not have rebelled against him."

"For the imagination of man's heart is evil." R. Hiyya the Elder said: How wretched must be the dough when the baker himself testifies it to be poor! Abba Josef said: How poor must be the leaven (simile for the evil passions) when

he who kneaded it testifies that it is bad."<sup>38.</sup>

Since the spirits know man's weaknesses and vulnerability to do evil, our Evil Inclination lays us open to attack and hurt by them.<sup>39.</sup> Therefore, it is improper for a man to walk behind a woman, lest it give rise to impure thoughts.<sup>40.</sup> He who desires evil will only receive evil in return.<sup>41.</sup>

Man must always be on guard against the Evil Tempter. "Generally speaking, if one is brought up along with another for two or three years, he becomes closely attached to him; but this one (the Evil Tempter) grows with man from his youth until old age, and yet if he can, he strikes him down even in his seventies or in his eighties."<sup>42.</sup> "The Evil Inclination is placed in man as soon as he is formed in embryo."<sup>43.</sup>

A remarkably sane teaching is given by Nahman who said in R. Samuel's name: "Behold it was very good" refers to the Good Desire; "And behold, it was very good" to the Evil Desire. Can then the Evil Desire be good? That would be extraordinary! But for the Evil Desire, however, no man would build a house, take a wife and beget children."<sup>44.</sup> The preacher says here that the Evil Desire in the first place inspires rivalry which leads to great efforts. One may triumph over his human failings by turning even them to noble purposes.

### C. Reward and Punishment:

At times, it seems as if the Rabbis in Bereshith Rabbah attach an undue importance to reward, as if the motive for right-doing and for observing the commandments was the hope

of reward, whether in this world, in heaven or in the future world. One of God's primary duties, as regards man, was to punish and reward. When the Law is violated, Israel had to be punished; when it was observed, it was God's delight to reward them. Indeed, it may be said, that one of the reasons God gave the Law to Israel was to enable Him to reward them for its acceptance and fulfillment.

God rested from all His work, in order to punish the wicked who destroy the world which was created with labour, and to reward the righteous who uphold the world which was created with toil.<sup>45.</sup>

We have already seen, in several cases, that even God's Omnipotence is submitted to a certain law, which though designed by His own Will, He cannot alter without detriment to the whole Creation. It is only in the light of this that we are able to understand such passages as that God suffers Himself when he has to inflict punishment either on individuals or on whole communities. Thus, have we seen above (B.R. 27:4) that God is represented as mourning for seven days, as in the case of one who loses a child, before He brought the flood upon the earth.

All that befalls a man, either as reward or punishment,<sup>46.</sup> is dependent upon his merit or demerit. Although some preachers say that punishment and suffering is necessary for man, because it place him on a firm foundation and brings out the best in man,<sup>47.</sup> an argument against this is brought out by another preacher who says that the wicked are

likened to fools, and he who chastises a fool thinks to improve him, yet even as the pestle rises and falls (when one pounds grain) so will the foolishness of the wicked not depart from them.<sup>48.</sup>

The Rabbis are bothered by the problem: if punishment descends from Heaven, how then can something evil come from Heaven, viz., how then can fire and brimstone rain down on Sodom. But it is explained by a far-fetched answer: God caused ordinary rain to descend, and it turned into brimstone and fire when it approached the earth.<sup>49.</sup>

God is likened to a trustee who returns punishment for evil and wrongdoing; and returns good reward for pious acts and good deeds.<sup>50.</sup> Furthermore, if a man's sins are unpunished in this world; he will be punished in the next world, and vice versa.<sup>51.</sup> He punishes them here so they will not be called to account in the world to come, where they may enjoy a goodly reward. If a wicked man finds ease in this world, he may be certain to receive his punishment in the next world, where<sup>52.</sup> the wicked will be burned up in Gehenna.<sup>53,</sup> God shows the righteous their reward in the hereafter.<sup>54.</sup> A contrary view is held that the life of the righteous is precious before God both in this world and in the future world.<sup>55.</sup> There are contradictions, as we observe, between these various views.

A beautiful Midrash seeks to explain why the righteous suffer and the wicked do not, in this world. "God does not test the wicked, but only the righteous, just as a potter does not test a defective vessel, because if he gave it a single blow

it would break. A flax worker beats flax so that it will improve in quality, if it is good. If it is inferior flax, he will not beat it because then it will split. When a man has two oxen, one weak and the other strong, the strong one receives the yoke to bear."<sup>56.</sup>

There was frequently too little external reward on earth for the fulfillment of God's Law. It was therefore possible and necessary for the preachers and Rabbis to look forward with complete confidence to heavenly reward, and yet to fulfill the commandments for their own sake and for their love of God. This peculiar combination was real in olden times and it is real today for many millions of simple believers in other religions besides Judaism.

#### D. Individual Merit and Demerit:

The doctrine of מְרִיט "merit" is very important but also very complicated. It is of great interest, but because of the numerous complications which are involved, let us only look at a few characteristic quotations out of a possible multitude.

"Merit" can be stored up. the merits of the Patriarchs helped their descendants. They form a sort of treasury upon which Israel can claim to draw. "God found three treasures with whom He was pleased: Abraham, who introduced the worship of the true God; Israel, who received the Torah, and David, who wielded sovereignty over Israel."<sup>57.</sup>

The thought of the creation of the Fathers preceded

the creation of the world. This was their merit.<sup>58.</sup>

What makes a life notable enough to receive merit?

R. Levi said: One who has initiated revolutionary changes.

Rabbi said: One who contributes to the support of civilization--

who did things for other.<sup>59.</sup> The preacher did not scruple to give the ideal man his due, to speak of him as forming the

throne of God,<sup>60.</sup> besides investing him with pre-mundane exist-

ence.<sup>61.</sup>

In spite of his comparative righteousness, Noah was punished for his sins. How much more are the really wicked to be punished.<sup>62.</sup> Noah lived through the days of Enosh, flood and separation, but yet he did not imitate the evil ways of his generation and contemporaries. This was his merit.<sup>63.</sup>

Noah did not merit to be saved, only because Moses was to descend from him was he saved.<sup>64.</sup> (Note the contradictions?) Noah

was saved only for the sake of his children.<sup>65.</sup> Noah begat at the age of five hundred years, so that if his sons were wicked, they would not perish in the flood for their father's

sake.<sup>66.</sup> God delivers him who has an ounce of merit. Noah was

delivered because of this.<sup>67.</sup>

There are meritorious men in every generation.<sup>68.</sup>

On account of Abraham's merit, Israel was privileged to have the manna given to them.<sup>69.</sup> Lot was saved for the sake of some-

thing good he had done to Abraham.<sup>70.</sup> Relief from stress came

Esther because the merits of her ancestors stood her in good

stead.<sup>71.</sup> Famine was not visited in the days of Saul (and here

is a curious bit of reasoning!) because he lacking merit, would

have been broken by a famine. All famine came in days of mighty men who could withstand it and not in days of weak, lowly men.<sup>72.</sup>

R. Johanan said: If a man is worthy enough, he enjoys both worlds.<sup>73.</sup> Even one good bunch of grapes in a whole vineyard deserves and merits a blessing over it.<sup>74.</sup> Even if there were no more than one or just a few meritorious men in Israel, it still merited some blessing from God.

R. Eleasar b. Azariah said: We find that a portion of a man's merits may be declared in his presence, but all of them in his absence.<sup>75.</sup>

Simeon b. Gamaliel taught: Tombstones are not erected for the righteous, as their words and teachings are their memorials,<sup>76.</sup> (and he might have said, "Their merit.")

#### E. Pride and Humility:

We now come to problems which are more human, and closer to actual living. In these, the preachers are at their best, for their logic seems to be limited in metaphysical and philosophical discussion, whereas their power of observation in the experiences of life are profound.

The Rabbis in Bereshith Rabbah never seem to grow tired of attacking pride and of praising humility. Let a man not be over-confident in his virtue or in his ability to resist temptations. "R. Judan said: Even for the righteous, there can be no self-confidence, so long as he lives on earth."<sup>77.</sup> God's humility, to the Rabbis, is manifest through His regard for the humble. "The small should not encroach upon the domain

of the great." An example is given: "The moon is a small light, and the sun is a great light. The moon is sometimes seen by day too and this encroaches upon the domain of the sun. God said, 'It was I who caused it to enter its neighbours domain.' Then, if the moon which entered with permission was disparaged by Scripture (because it was called 'the lesser light') think how much more one is deserving of disparagement who enters without permission."<sup>78.</sup>

"R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: Whoever elevates himself at the cost of his fellow man's degradation has no share in the world to come."<sup>79.</sup>

If there be ought discreditable in thee, be thou the first to tell it, lest you be put to shame by another revealing it."<sup>80.</sup>

"The non-fruit bearing trees asked the fruit-bearing trees, 'Why is your sound not audible?' (when the wind rushes through your branches.) 'We do not need it' they reply, 'as our fruits testify for us.' Said they to the non-fruit bearing trees: 'Why is your sound audible?' 'Would that we could make our voice heard so that we might be seen,' they answered. R. Huna said: This is not the true reason; but because the fruit trees are heavy with fruit, their voice is not audible; and because non-fruit bearing trees are light in fruit, their voice is audible."<sup>81.</sup> We can just imagine the preacher making the appeal to his listeners that if they possess real solid virtues to their credit, they need not advertize their greatness.

"And unto Eber were born two sons; the name of the one was Peleg (division)....and the name of the other was Joktan." (Genesis 10:25) No explanation of the name 'Joktan' is given, and among the Rabbis, when a name is unexplained, but, none the less, distinctively mentioned in a clause of its own, and not merely enumerated in a catalogue, there is a reason for the choice of name which must be looked for and interpreted homiletically:

"Therefore, asks the Midrash, why was he called 'Joktan (he belittles)? Because he belittled himself in his affairs, never exalting himself. What was his reward? To raise twelve families of descendants. Now if this is the reward of a small man who makes himself small, what will be the reward of a great man who makes himself small?"<sup>82.</sup>

With regard to the preceding Midrashim in this section, it is remarkable how true to life they are. They are easily intelligible today, since they deal with foibles to which human nature is ever prone.

#### F. Hospitality and Good Manners:

Most oriental people and their teachers lay great stress on hospitality. The Rabbis in Bereshith Rabbah were no exception.

Abraham is particularly held in high regard because he deliberately went out of his way to seek wayfarers,<sup>83.</sup> and all people were impressed by his hospitality.<sup>84.</sup>

If your neighbour invited you and you were fed beans,

and then you invited him in return and fed him meat, you are still indebted to him because he invited you first.<sup>85.</sup>

(For other examples, see above, page 68.)

G: Peace:

It may be imagined that to the Rabbis, who composed the literature of Bereshith Rabbah, there could be no greater blessing than peace and concord, for they lived during times of exile, war, persecutions and cruelties and danger to Israel at all times from the foreign powers and governments. They emphasized peace between man and man, and especially between Jew and Jew.

Creation was planned by God in a certain manner so that peace would be preserved, in the universe.<sup>86.</sup>

Even Scripture made a mis-statement in order to preserve peace between Abraham and Sarah. "And the Lord said unto Abraham: Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying....seeing that I am old" (Genesis 18:13). Bar Kappara said: Great is peace, for even Scripture made a mis-statement in order to preserve peace between Abraham and Sarah. Thus it is written, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying: shall <sup>^</sup> of a surety bear a child?" It does not say, "Since my lord is old," but "Seeing that I am old."<sup>87.</sup>

About Abraham it is said that he would not hear of violence without seeking to remedy it.<sup>88.</sup>

"Rabbi said: Great is peace, for even if the Israelites worship idols, and there is peace among them, God says, 'I have no power, as it were, over them, seeing that peace is

among them."<sup>89.</sup>

"R. Simeon b. Gamaliel taught: Great is peace, for even the tribal ancestors reported a lie to Joseph in order to preserve peace between him and themselves."<sup>90.</sup>

"Happy are the righteous who increase Torah and pursue peace for Israel....."<sup>91.</sup> "Israel, by its acceptance of the Torah made peace between God and His world, since but for them, He would have destroyed His world."<sup>92.</sup>

The love of the Rabbis for peace is not to be regarded as absolute 'pacifism'. True, they attached tremendous emphasis to it, as can be seen from the above quotations---but there is a great difference between love of peace and non-resistance. They believed that they must live by God's commands and not die.

"Two disciples changed their garments in the time of the Great Persecution. (They dressed as Gentiles). A Roman soldier, himself an apostate Jew, met them and said, 'If you are children of the Torah, give your lives for it. If you are not, why should you be killed because of it?' They replied, 'We are its children, and we are ready to be slain for its sake; but it is unnatural for men to destroy themselves deliberately.'<sup>93.</sup>

*But peace is a social relation. Since  
about? Your distinction between "religious  
ethics" and "social ethics" is meaningless.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SOCIAL ETHICS

#### A. Brotherhood of Man:

The social ethics of the Rabbis, as portrayed in Bereshith Rabbah, is penetrating; it is very practical; it shows a delicate understanding of the most personal problems; it is detailed; it seeks to cover the ordinary conditions of life, and to make these conditions decent, just, kindly and honorable. They exalted pity and urged charity, and the ideal of justice and fair dealing dominated all.

We have already quoted one of the most significant passages on the subject of Brotherhood, above (page 67. See B.R. 24:7). According to the Rabbis, man is man, sans phrase, created in the image of God. This is the basis for all Social Ethics. A striking tribute to the value assigned to brotherly-love and unity by the Rabbis, is the statement that "of the generation of Separation (tower of Babel) a remnant was left, because they loved each other, as it is written: 'And the whole earth was of one language.'<sup>1.</sup>" The preachers recognized that man was a combination of acts of love and acts of falsehood,<sup>2.</sup> acts of righteous deeds and acts of strife, and that their task was to bring out and emphasize the good and finer qualities which made for a happier life among and between all men. All men are entitled to pre-eminence only as long as they cultivate their God-like qualities; when they voluntarily abandon these qualities,<sup>3.</sup> they are lower than the brute creature.

All nations come to Jerusalem. How can they all fit? In worshipping God, the Holy One, blessed be He will order it by enlarging the boundaries.<sup>4.</sup> Here is universalism, par excellence!

#### B. Social Justice:

Quoting a great deal of Scripture, the preacher enforces his message on social justice. In fact, he almost allows the Scriptural verses speak for themselves. "He that walketh righteously" (Isaiah 33:15) alludes to Abraham, as it is written, "To the end that he (Abraham) may command his children...that they may keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19). "And speaketh uprightly" (Isaiah 33:14), as it is written, "The upright ones do love thee (Song of Songs 1:4) "He that despiseth the gain of oppressions" as it says, "I will not take a thread or a shoe latchet" (Genesis 14:23). "That shaketh his hands from holding of bribes" (Isaiah 33:14).<sup>5.</sup>

God made His Mercy forget men at the time of the flood, because they did not practice social justice and mercy to their fellow men.<sup>6.</sup> The reason why not a remnant was left of the house of Judah is that, "Hand did not join hand."<sup>7.</sup> They did not stretch forth their hands to good deeds; they did not give assistance; the rich never helped the poor.

Two stories must be quoted here to illustrate the force with which the preachers enhanced their messages on social justice. "When R. Joshua b. Levi visited Rome he saw there pillars covered with tapestry in winter so that they should not contract, and in summer that they should not split. As he was

walking in the street, he saw a poor man wrapped in a mat or in half an asse's saddle-pack. To these pillars, he applied the verse, 'Thy righteousness is like a mighty mountain'--where Thou givest, Thou givest in abundance; while to the poor man he applied the verse, "Thy judgements are like the great deep"--where Thou smitest, Thou smitest with force." <sup>7</sup> The preacher is disgusted with civilization, where wealth accumulates and man decays!

"Alexander of Macedon visited King Kazia beyond the dark mountains. He came forth, offering him golden bread on a golden tray. 'Do I then need your gold?' he demanded. 'Had you then nothing to eat in your own country that you have come here?' he retorted. 'I came only because I wished to see how you dispense justice,' was the reply. As he sat with him a man came with a complaint against his neighbour. 'This man,' he stated, 'sold me a dunghill and I found a treasure in it.' The buyer argued, 'I bought a dunghill only,' while the vendor maintained, 'I sold the dunghill and all it contained.' Said the king to one: 'Have you a son?' 'Yes,' replied he. 'And have you a daughter?' he asked the other, 'Yes,' was the answer. 'Then marry them and let the treasure belong to both.' He noticed Alexander sitting astonished, and asked him, 'Have I then not judged well?' 'Yes' he replied. 'Had this happened among you, how would you have judged?' 'I would have slain both and kept the treasure for myself.' 'Does rain descend in your country?' 'Yes,' 'Does the sun shine?' 'Yes.' 'Have you small cattle?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'By heaven!' he

exclaimed, 'it is not for your sake but for the sake of the cattle, as it is written, "Man and beast Thou preservest, O Lord:" Man for the sake of beast Thou preservest, O Lord.<sup>8.</sup>

Though the world was created for the sake of man, when man does not practice social justice, then only the beast deserves the bounty of the earth.

### C. Charity:

Particular stress is laid upon charity in the ethics of the Rabbis. Charity is not limited to almsgiving alone, but to all sorts of lovingkindness.

"R. Joshua b. Levi said: The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all, because they are His works. R. Samuel b. Nahman said: The Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all, for it is His nature to be comapssionate. R. Joshua in R. Levi's name said: The Lord is good to all and He inspires mankind with His spirit of compassion. R. Akiba said: Should a year of famine commence tomorrow and men show compassion to each other, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will also be filled with compassion for them.<sup>10.</sup>"

The following story is very characteristic. Piety is displayed in the attitude of humanity. The frank admission of reward for charitable acts is also expressed here as in the story above:

"In the days of R. Tanhuma, Israel had need of a fast (on account of a drought) so they went to him and requested:

'Master, proclaim a fast.' He proclaimed a fast, for one day, then a second day, and yet a third day and no rain fell. Thereupon he preached to them and said: 'My sons, be filled with compassion for each other, and then the Holy One, blessed be He, will be filled with compassion for you.' Now while they were distributing relief to the poor they saw a man give money to his divorced wife, whereupon they said to R. Tanhuma, 'Why do we sit here while such deeds are going on!' 'What have you seen?' he inquired. 'We saw So-and-so give his divorced wife money.' He summoned the man and the woman and asked them, 'Why did you give money to your divorced wife?' 'I saw her in great distress,' he replied, 'and was filled with compassion for her.' Upon this R. Tanhuma turned his face upward and exclaimed: "Sovereign of the Universe! This man upon whom this woman has no claim for sustenance, yet saw her in distress and was filled with pity for her.....while we are Thy children... how much more so shouldst Thou be filled with compassion for us!' Immediately the rain descended and the world enjoyed relief."

There are certain special deeds which are regarded by the Rabbis as peculiarly 'loving' deeds. These include visiting the sick, comforting the mourners and even accompanying the bride in the marriage festivities. (See B.R. 59:4)

#### D. Marriage:

Upon this subject, we enter controversial ground. The Rabbinic attitude towards women was not as respectful as our attitudes today. But Bereshith Rabbah literature does attest

to the fact that the Rabbis seem to have loved their wives, that they all, apparently, had one wife, and that the position of the wife was one of much influence and importance.

"R. Jacob said: He who has no wife lives without good, or help, or joy, or blessing, or atonement. R. Joshua of Siknin in the name of R. Levi, added that he is also without life. R. Hiyya b. Gammada said that he is not really a complete man, and some say that he diminishes the divine likeness" for unless men and women are married, they do not fulfill the function of having children.<sup>12.</sup> (Although the proof of these passages are quaint, they are too long to quote here.)

They are definitely against the wicked manner of the generation of the flood, where husbands had one wife for procreation and another for sexual purposes only.<sup>13.</sup> Marriage should not be a perfunctory fulfillment of a command, but should depend on love and desire. God created Eve later than Adam, because since He knew Adam would bring charges against Eve, he did not wish to create her until Adam expressly asked for a mate.<sup>14.</sup>

The following story, which is quite bald and by no means "elegant" is related merely because it shows a remarkable understanding of human psychology, what we today would call "good marriage counseling". "A Roman lady asked R. Jose: "Why was woman created by a theft?" 'Imagine,' replied he, 'a man depositing an ounce of silver with you in secret, and you return him twelve ounces of silver openly; is that theft!' 'Yet why in secret?' she again asked. 'At first He created her for him

and he saw her full of discharge and blood; thereupon He removed her from him and created her a second time.' 'I can corroborate your words,' she said. 'It had been arranged that I should be married to my mother's brother, but because I was brought up with him in the same house, I became plain in his eyes and he went and married another woman, who is not as beautiful as I.' 15.

"I will make him a help ( עֲזָרָה ) against him ( מְקַיֵּם )." (Genesis 2:9) The preacher interprets this to mean, if a man is fortunate, then his wife is a help. If not, then she is against him. 16.

A wife ascends with her husband's good fortune, but she does not descend with him. Explanation of this is given in Kethuboth, B.T. 48a and 61a. 17. Rebecca was fit to succeed Sarah as a wife and mother in the home of Isaac, only because she continued a Jewish home, fulfilling the commandments for women to observe. 18. If you bring a virtuous woman into the house of a corrupt one, then the latter will learn from the former. But you do not bring a corrupt woman into the home of a virtuous. 19. A man owes his wife food, raiment and marital privileges. A woman owes her husband the fulfillment of the domestic duties of grinding corn, baking, laundering, cooking, suckling her child, preparing his bed and working in wool. 20.

In some very bizarre illustrations, the Rabbis emphasize the strong differences between men and women. A man comes forth at birth with his face downward, because he looks to earth, the place of his creation. A woman with her face turned upward because she looks towards the rib, place of her

creation. A man does not need perfume because he was created from the dust and does not putrify. Woman was created from a bone, and needs perfume, because meat putrefies. A woman has a shrill voice because if you place meat in a pot, it does not sizzle, but if you place a bone in a pot, it sizzles immediately. A man is easily appeased because dust absorbs water when poured over it. A bone may be soaked in water for many days but is not saturated. Man desires woman more than woman desires man, because he is looking for something lost (his rib). A man deposits sperm in a woman and she does not deposit sperm in a man, because woman is more trustworthy person with whom to have something deposited, since what the man gives to her will be returned, for a woman has only one husband, but a man may have many wives. A man goes bareheaded, whereas a woman covers her head, like one who has done wrong and is ashamed of people (Eve's sin). Women walk in front of a corpse at a funeral, because they brought death into the world. The precept of menstruation was given to woman because she shed the blood of Adam by causing death in the world. She was given the precept of dough because she corrupted Adam who was the leaven in the world. The precept of the Sabbath lights was given to woman, because she extinguished the soul of Adam.<sup>21.</sup> H. Freedman, in the note to this Midrash in the Soncino edition says: "The attitude of Judaism towards woman is shown in these replies. In accordance with Scripture, she is charged with having brought death into the world through her disobedience, yet her punishment is not to be accursed, but on the contrary, hers is the

privilege to emphasize the inviolate character of woman, to sanctify the bread one eats and spread the cheer of the Sabbath as symbolized by light."

The Rabbis agree that woman is more understanding than man, because her understanding develops earlier than his,<sup>22.</sup> but yet in marriage, though lower in birth than his wife, a man yet rules over her.<sup>23.</sup> A woman's desire is to her husband. When woman is in labour, she would say, I will not fulfill my marital duties any more. Therefore, God said:<sup>24.</sup> "Thou wilt return to thy desire of thy husband."

In general, the attitude of the Rabbis towards women is half kindly, half oriental.

Divorce must have been rather frequent, but divorce for the sake of mere indulgence is abhorred. "God, as it were, said: 'Who will accept weeping and sighing from husbands when they cause their own wives to weep. Having robbed her, oppressed her and deprived her of her beauty, thou castest her away!'"<sup>25.</sup>

"R. Jose the Galilean was married to his sister's daughter, who treated him shamefully. Said his disciples to him, 'Divorce her.' 'I cannot pay her dowry,' he answered. 'We will pay it' they said. So they gave it to him and he divorced her. She then married the town watchman. Later the watchman became afflicted with blindness and she used to lead him by his hand through the streets of the town. But when she came to the street of R. Jose she would stop. When he saw this one day and a second day, the watchman began beating her. Their cries brought down R. Jose, who said to him, 'Why do you

beat her?' 'She deprives me of the profit of this street every day,' was the reply. On hearing this R, Jose took and settled them at his own expense, in accordance with the verse, 'And that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.'<sup>26.</sup>

To understand this story fully and to appreciate it, one must understand that if a man divorced his wife, it was regarded as suspicious if he had anything more to do with her. However, the ethics of the Rabbis was stronger than their obedience to law. First of all, we can see the frequency with which they divorced their wives and at the same time we see illustrated the tender heart of the Rabbis towards those in suffering and in want.

"There was once a pious man who was married to a pious woman, and they had no children. They said, 'We are no profit to God.' So they divorced one another. The man went and married a bad woman, and she made him bad; the woman went and married a bad man, and she made him good. So all depends upon the woman."<sup>27.</sup>

This story teaches us two things: First, the purpose of marriage is service to God. Second, divorce is not always a good thing, and also, the attitude of the woman and her character are of utmost importance in the establishment of a good home, and in the molding of a man's character.

#### E. Parents and Children:

There are many sayings about children. Religious education, which is praised has already been touched upon.

Upon the verse: "And she said: I have gotten a man, etc" R. Isaac said: When a woman sees that she has children she exclaims, 'Behold, my husband is now in my possession.'<sup>28.</sup> The preacher teaches by this, that children bind a husband and wife together in marriage. To beget children is a sign of righteousness.<sup>29.</sup> And it was taught, "He who has no children is as though he were dead and demolished."<sup>30.</sup>

"Fathers are a crown to their sons, and sons a crown to their fathers.....Abraham was saved from the fiery furnace only for Jacob's sake. This may be compared to a man who was on trial before the governor, and was sentenced by him to be burnt. But the governor, foreseeing by means of astrology that he was destined to beget a daughter who would marry the king, said: 'He is worthy of being saved for the sake of his daughter.'<sup>31.</sup>

When Jacob and Esau grew up, "They were like a myrtle and a wild rose-bush growing side by side; when they attained to maturity, one yielded its fragrance and the other its thorns. So for thirteen years, both went to school and came home from school. After this age, one went to the house of study and the other to idolatrous shrines. R. Eleazar b. R. Simeon said: A man is responsible for his son until the age of thirteen; thereafter he must say, 'Blessed is He who has now freed me from the responsibility of this boy.'<sup>32.</sup> "Throw a stick<sup>33.</sup> into the air, and it will fall back to its place of origin." As a child is trained early in life, so will he grow when older.

The Rabbis understood the difficulty in raising children properly. An echo from Bereshith Rabbah seems to be

taken from the complaints of mothers today: "Woe that my son has not eaten! Woe that he has not drunk (his milk)! Woe that he has not gone to school!"<sup>34</sup> (See also B.R. 20:6).

Children's rights and duties to their parents can be summed up in the single statement: "Everywhere a father's honor is mentioned before the mother's honor, but in one place it says, "Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father"<sup>35</sup> (Lev. 19:3): this teaches that both are on par."

#### F. Birth-Control:

Scattered here and there through the pages of Bereshith Rabbah, we find some very modern conception in regard to birth-control.

There seems to have been a time in the experience of the preachers when parents were averse to having children, and so the story is brought out that Adam told Lamech and his wives:<sup>36</sup> "Do your duty while the Holy One, blessed be He, will do His." Your duty is to procreate, whatever God may do. Also the following: "R. Eleazar b. Azariah lectured: He who refrains from procreation is as though he impaired God's image.....Said R. Azzai: He who refrains from procreation is as though he shed blood and impaired God's image.....R. Eleazar said to him: Teachings are becoming when they are uttered by those who practise them, but you, son of Azzai, preach well, but do not fulfil your teaching! That is because I desire to study Torah,<sup>37</sup> he pleaded, while the world can be preserved through others." The generation of the flood sinned because they poured their semen upon trees and stones.<sup>38</sup> They also indulged in sexual

enjoyment without any intention of precreation. Noah was different. Therefore, Noah was blessed with generations which continued after him and formed the original of the new world. <sup>39.</sup>

But despite these attitudes against birth-control, we yet have to consider another attitude. "In the name of R. Samuel b. Isaac it was said: As soon as Noah entered the Ark, cohabitation was interdicted to him.....When he went out, God permitted it to him." This is to teach you that: "When want and famine visits the world, regard your wife as though she were lonely (i.e. menstros)."<sup>40.</sup> This view does not differ from the high-purposed advocates of birth-control today. Another example, though a bit more subtle is: "When Adam saw that his descendants were fated to be consigned to Gehenna, he did not engage in procreation. But when he saw that after twenty-six generations Israel would accept the Torah, he applied himself to producing descendants; hence, "And Adam knew Eve his wife" (Genesis 4:1)."<sup>41.</sup> Of course, this disagrees with the faith that Adam displayed in his statement above: "Do your duty and God will do His."

Though the Rabbis were against lewdness and unchastity, they were well aware of the problem of "bearing children for a curse."<sup>42.</sup> (Into misfortune.)

G. Influences of Environment:

Above, we cited a passage which said: "Throw a stick into the air, and it will fall back to its original place."<sup>43.</sup> The Rabbis were cognizant of the influences of environment.

*Self-control is not the same as birth-control as the expression is commonly understood.*

The whole of one's personality is involved in the pursuit of idealism. When Abraham is told, "Get thee out", the passage in Scriptures has a sociological meaning and connotation. Get thee out of thy provinciality, neighborhood, old family life---break with your environment. Even sacrifice your son. If Abraham had not done so, the degrading effects of his environment would have lost him to the world.<sup>44.</sup>

Very far fetched, yet at the same time showing the importance which the Rabbis attached the environment, is the story of the ass belonging to R. Phinehas b. Jair. Once it was stolen by some robbers, yet it refused to eat for three days, because the food which was offered to it was not ritually fit.<sup>45.</sup>

#### H. Labor:

A beautiful illustration of the Rabbinical method of reinterpreting the ethics of the Bible is demonstrated in the following Midrash:

"Thou shalt eat the grass of the field" (Genesis 3:18)  
The Rabbis felt that labor was a blessing. "When Adam heard this ("Thou shalt eat the grass of the field") his face broke out in perspiration and he exclaimed with anguish, 'What! Shall I be tied to the feeding-trough like a beast!' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him, 'Since thy face has sweated, "Thou shalt eat bread" (Genesis 3:19).'<sup>46.</sup> Eating grass was the real curse, but when Adam perspired at the thought of eating without working for it, God gave him the blessing of labor, with eating

bread as the reward.

Man is a slave to his wants, and must toil for what he gets.<sup>47.</sup>

Of course, some of the preachers feel that labor is really a curse. It was the result of the downfall of man.<sup>48.</sup> Also, in the case of Cain, if he had not sinned, toil would have been unnecessary.<sup>49.</sup> But in most cases, the Rabbis were intensely keen on economic independence, industry and on the rightness of labor. A reason for the generation of the flood being destroyed was because of the extreme ease of their lives. This led to over-confidence in themselves and rebellion against God.<sup>50.</sup> "R. Jeremiah said: Labour is more precious than ancestral merit; for ancestral merit saved wealth, whereas labor saved life, because it is written: "God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and gave judgement yesternight." (Genesis 31:42.)

The social ethics in regard to the relations between employer and employee are also emphasized by the Midrash. "We learned elsewhere (Baba Mezia 83a): If a man has engaged laborers and arranged with them to commence early before morning and continue after nightfall, where local usage is not to commence early and continue after nightfall, he cannot compel them. R. Muna said: Where there is no established usage, it is a stipulation of the great Beth Din that the laborer goes to work in his employer's time and returns home in his own."<sup>51.</sup> (Here is an example of Halachic sources being used for Haggada.)

CHAPTER EIGHT  
ESCHATOLOGICAL IDEAS

A. Death:

The attitude of the Rabbis towards death is, in the main, one of humble resignation. As we have noted above, by suffering and chastisements are most frequently meant bodily sufferings. The Rabbis, in their convinced faith in the future life, were imbued with that fortitude necessary to face suffering. If you must be punished for your sins, how much better to be punished by suffering on earth and before death, than to be denied eternal felicity in the world to come.

"And God saw everything which He had made, and behold it was very good." (Genesis 1:31). Why does death befall the righteous too, and not only the wicked? It had to befall the righteous, or else the wicked might have said, 'The righteous live because they practise the Law and good works: we will do so too,' and they would have fulfilled the commandments deceitfully, and not for their own sake. Again, death befalls the wicked, because they cause vexation to God. But when they die, they cease to vex Him. Death befalls the righteous, because all their life, they have struggled with their evil inclination; when they die, they are at peace."<sup>1.</sup>

This pious resignation of the Rabbis, in the view that God knows best, and that His visitations and dispensations must be accepted without murmuring, is something to be admired even by us today.

If a man keeps death always before him, it will be a potent force for repentance.<sup>2.</sup> The angel of death comes to him who does not lay up precepts and good deeds in his lifetime.<sup>3.</sup> Death will not come to any but non-Israelites in the Messianic age.<sup>4.</sup> An idea which can only be analogous to "mercy-killing" for the wicked is expressed in the Midrash which says that when a man sees his grandson practising idolatry, immorality and murder, he cries out: Better that he quit this world in peace!<sup>5.</sup> Hence it is written, "For Thy loving-kindness is better than life." (Ps. 63:4).

"What is the difference between the death of young men and that of old men? R. Judah said: When a lamp goes out of itself, it is good for it and good for the wick. (This means there is no more oil in it and both the oil and wick have served faithfully.) But if it does not go out of itself, it is bad for itself and bad for the wick. R. Abbahu said: When a fig is gathered at the proper time, it is good for itself and good for the tree; but if it is gathered prematurely, it is bad for itself and bad for the tree."<sup>6.</sup>

"Well does the owner of the fig-tree know when it is time for the tree to be plucked, and he does so. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, knows when it is the right time for the righteous to depart from the world, and then He removes them."<sup>7.</sup>

Sleep is an incomplete form of death.<sup>8.</sup> Of no particular interest except that it is a very homely statement is the following: "Most righteous people die of stomach trouble."<sup>9.</sup>

Except for their interest in the Hereafter, the

Rabbis did not brood too much upon the subject of death. They were more concerned with life and the problems of life.

"It was taught, R. Simeon b. Eleazar said: For a live infant one day old is greater in the order of things than a dead king. (italics mine) For it, the Sabbath may be desecrated; for David, king of Israel, the Sabbath may not be desecrated." <sup>10.</sup>

#### B. Immortality:

Man rebelled against God because they gave birth but did not bury. <sup>11.</sup> Therefore, was death decreed for man.

"A son of one of the notables of Sepphoris happened to die.....R. Jose b. Halafta went up to visit him, and he began laughing. 'Why are you laughing' asked the father? Said R. Jose: 'We trust in God of Heaven that you will see your dead son's face in the future world.' 'Have I not enough trouble,' exclaimed the father, 'that you have come to trouble me more. Can broken potsherds be joined together?' R. Jose answered, 'An earthen vessel is made from water and clay and finished off with heat, while a glass vessel is made from fire and finished with fire; the glass when broken can be repaired, whereas the other when broken cannot be repaired!' 'The glass vessel can be repaired because it is made by blowing,' said the father. 'well,' retorted R. Jose, 'if what is made with the breath of a mere mortal can be repaired, how much the more what is made with the breath of God?' <sup>12.</sup>

Immortality is so interrelated to the idea of resurrection, that we must take up that problem next.

### C. Resurrection:

While the Rabbis knew no more about the future life than we, they thought about it in terms and conceptions, most of which have become obsolete and remote for us today. Their ideas are of small interest and profit. There is a great deal of confusion about the 'world to come.' The phrase may refer either to the days of the Messiah, to a purified earth, and to a last judgement. The following extracts are given in a haphazard way, which partly illustrates these confusions and contradictions.

"For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

R. Simeon b. Yohai said: Here Scripture hints at resurrection, for it says, "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou re<sup>13</sup>turn." It does not say, "unto dust shalt thou go". Meaning, thou shalt return at the resurrection.

"There shall be resurrection for all save the wicked<sup>14</sup> and the generation of the flood."

"Hadrian---may his bones rot!--asked R. Joshua b. Hanania: 'From whence, or from what part will the Holy One, blessed be He, cause man to blossom forth in the future?' 'From the nut of the spinal column,' he replied. 'How do you know that?' he asked. 'Bring me one and I will prove it to you,' he replied. He threw it into the fire, yet it was not burnt; he put it in water, but it did not dissolve; he ground it between millstones, but it was not crushed; he placed it on an anvil and smote it with a hammer; the anvil was cleft<sup>15</sup> and the hammer split, yet it remained whole." Hence, it will remain as the nucleus of the resurrected man.

"R. Judah b. R. Ilai said: There will be neither a day of Judgement nor a Gehenna, but fire shall come forth from the body of the wicked himself and burn him up."<sup>16.</sup> Wickedness tends to destroy itself. In all probability, this marks a different strata in the development of the idea of resurrection among ancient Jews.

God took in the whole world with one glance and saw that everything He had made was good. He saw the next world too.<sup>17.</sup> The idea underlying this is that heaven and earth, this world and the next, are all interrelated and have one purpose.

Abraham entered both this world and the next. He was born into this world and earned the Hereafter.<sup>18.</sup>

A laborer at the end of the day must render an account of his work. So man, too, must render an account in the next world for his actions in this world.<sup>19.</sup>

The Rabbis seemed to take almost a sadistic delight in speculating upon the punishments to be visited upon the wicked in the future world. The generation of the flood will not enjoy the future world, but in their Gehenna, every drop of water which God poured upon them in the flood, He will boil up and pour it scalding hot upon them again, so that they will be destroyed absolutely.<sup>20.</sup> Also, the punishment of some men is temporal, and death ends it, but in other cases, punishment will be eternal. At the time of resurrection, the bodies of the wicked will be resurrected, only to exist forever so as to receive continual punishment.<sup>21.</sup>

Things were created in their fulness. When Adam

sinned, they were spoiled, and they will not return to their former perfection until the Messiah comes,<sup>22.</sup> to heal the wounds of the world.<sup>23.</sup> He will come riding on an ass.<sup>24.</sup>

Some Rabbis say that the spirit of God which moved upon the face of the waters is the spirit of the Messiah.<sup>25.</sup> What becomes of the first light that was created, ask the Rabbis, since the sun was created on the fourth day? The answer:<sup>26.</sup> it is being stored up for the righteous in the Messianic future.

When will the Messiah come? When you see the Powers fighting each other, look for the coming of the King Messiah. The proof is that in the days of Abraham, because the various powers were fighting against each other, greatness came to Abraham.<sup>27.</sup> Another answer: the Son of David, or the Messiah, will come only after all souls which God contemplated creating have been created.<sup>28.</sup> Other references say that the Messiah is destined to be the grandson of Joseph.<sup>29.</sup> The Messiah son of Joseph will precede the Messiah son of David.<sup>30.</sup>

## CHAPTER NINE

### MISCELLANEOUS

The following chapter includes material such as could not be pigeon-holed into any of the previous chapter headings, but which we cannot afford to overlook because of the fund of ideas which it contains. Let us choose a few quotations at random. We may find a few gems!

#### A. Prayer:

When the Temple was destroyed and sacrifices ceased, prayer became all-important. We are made aware of this by the statements of R. Isaac who said: "Everything happened well for Abraham as a reward for worshipping." Israel was redeemed, the Torah was given, Hannah was remembered, the exiles were re-assembled, the Temple was built and the dead came to life---- all because of worshipping.<sup>1.</sup> Abraham receives particular merit, because he was the first to pray to God for another's sake.<sup>2.</sup>

Prayer reverses an evil decree.<sup>3.</sup> The very righteous have their prayers answered while the petition is still on their lips.<sup>4.</sup> Mere prayer, however, will not suffice. The prayer of the man whose hands are tainted by robbery will not be answered, for his supplication is unclean and turbid, just as are his hands. Therefore, man is bound to cleanse his heart from every covetousness before he prays.<sup>5.</sup> Nor can prayer overcome the natural elements.<sup>6.</sup> And the prayer of one cannot overcome the prayers of an entire congregation.<sup>7.</sup> The prayer of a congregation

is more efficacious than the prayer of an individual is further expressed in the Midrash which says that in Jerusalem, the people would stand pressed together in the Temple, yet when they prostrated themselves, there was ample room for all.<sup>8.</sup> The basis for prayer is the human inability to grasp the whole of the Divine scheme of things.<sup>9.</sup>

b. Sabbath:

The delight of the Sabbath was keenly felt. In the hyperbolic language of the Midrash, the Sabbath is personified as the "Bride of Israel" Just as the bridal chamber needs a bride, so does the world need the Sabbath. Just as the ring needs a signet, so does the world need the Sabbath. God not only afforded man a day of rest, but also made for him the gift of a sacred day.<sup>10.</sup>

Thus, we are told that a man must change his garments on the Sabbath, or if he cannot afford an entire new outfit, let him add just one new thing. He may also let his cloak hang down on Sabbath, because the rest of the week, he wears it tucked up.<sup>11.</sup> The very light or expression of a man's face is different on the Sabbath, testifying to his inward peace and rest.<sup>12.</sup>

God blessed the Sabbath by providing it with additional expenditure.<sup>13.</sup> He blessed it with tasty dishes. R. Judah the Nasi made a meal for Antoninus on the Sabbath. Cold dishes were set before him; he ate them and found them delicious. On another occasion, he made a meal for him during the week, when hot dishes were set before him. Said Antoninus to R. Judah: 'Those others

I enjoyed more.' 'These lack a certain condiment,' he replied.  
'Does then the royal pantry lack anything?' Antoninus exclaimed.  
'They lack the Sabbath,' Judah replied; 'do you possess the Sabbath?'<sup>14.</sup>

Numerous other stories illustrate the love and sanctity with which the Sabbath was held, but the above examples are sufficient for a basic understanding of the attitudes.

### C. Circumcision:

To the Rabbis, circumcision was a sacred covenant, sealed in the flesh, and typifying the subjugation of passion and the consecration of the body and soul to God.

"R. Judan said: 'Just as a fig contains nothing inedible save its stalk, and with its removal even the defect ceases, so did God say to Abraham: 'There is nought unworthy in thee save thy foreskin: remove it and the blemish ceases,' hence, it is written, "Walk before me and be thou whole."<sup>14.</sup>

A philosopher once asked R. Hoshaya: 'If circumcision is so precious, why was it not given to Adam?' R. Hoshaya replied, 'Whatever was created in the first six days requires further preparation, e.g., mustard needs sweetening, vetches need sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and man too needs to be finished off.'<sup>15.</sup>

The merit of circumcision is believed by the Rabbis<sup>16.</sup> to deliver the descendants of Adam from Gehenna. Shem was more righteous than his brothers and therefore, he was born circumcised,<sup>17.</sup> When Abraham was circumcised, besides being called<sup>18.</sup> 'whole-hearted'<sup>19.</sup> and regarded as a new creation he also cut

off the 'reproach of his father'. That means, he freed himself from his father's ways.<sup>20.</sup> To be circumcised is to be 'whole' id further illustrated by the Midrash on the King of Salem. He was born circumcised, as is implied by his name, *pse* 'whole being'.<sup>21.</sup> Jacob was also born circumcised.<sup>22.</sup> Some Rabbis conjecture that Abraham was also born so.<sup>23.</sup>

Circumcision sometimes discourages proselytes. How? The following Midrash explains. "Why should Abraham not have circumcised himself at the age of forty-eight, when he first recognized his Creator. In order not to discourage proselytes" for if he had done so at forty-eight instead of eighty-five proselytes might think that it was too late in life for them to be circumcised.<sup>24.</sup>

Circumcision is the touch-stone of acceptance of Judaism. "Once Monabaz and Izates, the sons of King Ptolemy, were sitting and reading the book of Genesis. When they came to the verse, "And ye shall be circumcised" each turned his face to the wall and commenced to weep. Then each went and had himself circumcised, without his brother's knowledge. Some time later they were sitting and reading the book of Genesis, and when they came to the verse, "And ye shall be circumcised" one said to the other, 'Woe to thee, my brother!' to which he replied, "Woe to thee, my brother, but not to me." Thus they revealed the matter to each other. When their mother learned about it, she went and told their father: 'A sore has broken out upon our sons' flesh and the physician has ordered circumcision.' 'Then let them be circumcised,' said he." The Holy One, Blessed be He requited these two boys by saving them

from the hands of attacking enemies.<sup>25.</sup>

There is much material in Bereshith Rabbah on this subject, which is too abundant to present here. Much of it is Malachic in nature. (See B.R. 46)

#### D. Kiddush-ha-Shem:

The idea of consecration by martyrdom, is brought out in some of the Midrashim in Bereshith Rabbah. This is one of the cardinal teachings of Judaism: it is man's duty to act nobly and uprightly even at the cost of his life, for in so doing he sanctifies the Divine Name.

"Abraham said: I will go forth and fall (in battle) sanctifying the name of the Holy One, blessed be He."<sup>26.</sup>

"R. Tanhumah b. Abina commented in R. Hanina's name: For this very purpose did Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah descend into the fiery furnace, that a sign should be wrought through them."<sup>27.</sup> (Either of God's greatness, or of loyalty to God even at the cost of their lives.)

#### E. Nature:

"A certain Gentile asked R. Joshua, observing to him: 'You have festivals and we have festivals; we do not rejoice when you do, and you do not rejoice when we do. When then do we both rejoice together?' 'When the rain descends.' What is the proof? 'The meadows are clothed with flocks' (Ps.65:10); what follows? 'Shout unto God all the earth' (Ps.66:1): not priests, Levites, or Israelites is written here but, 'All the

earth." <sup>28.</sup>

This universalistic note is <sup>as</sup> refreshing as the rain which the Midrash describes. The preacher tells us here that religions divide us, but Nature unites us.

The elements in Nature have a moral plan and purpose. "On account of four things did the Holy One, blessed be He, subsequently decide that the earth should drink only from above: first, because of lawless men (who would steal other peoples water if it were gathered on the ground); secondly, in order to wash away obnoxious vapours; thirdly, that the highlands might drink equally with the lowlands (equality expressed here); and fourthly, that all might lift their eyes heavenwards..." <sup>29.</sup>

Everything in Nature has some purpose, <sup>30.</sup> and all in nature is responsible alike for everything else: man for <sup>31.</sup> beast and beast for man.

#### F. Miracles:

Miracles are explained as being in the nature of <sup>32.</sup> the object to act in a certain way at a certain time. *Indignate*

#### G. Angels, Demons and Spirits:

The Rabbis indulge in many speculations about superhuman creatures. Their imaginations sometimes seem to run wild. We will cite a few examples.

The angels sometimes appear as men, sometimes as women and sometimes as spirits. This is derived from the verse, "His ministers are as a flaming fire turning every way" <sup>33.</sup>  
(Ps. 104:4)

When Isaac became old and feeble, God provided him with two angels who supported him so he should not fall.<sup>34.</sup> The angels of mercy delayed coming into Sodom, thinking that perhaps Abraham might find something in favour of the people of Sodom.<sup>35.</sup> Samael the angel tries to dissuade Abraham from following God's command.<sup>36.</sup> God performs his missions through angels, each angel having one particular mission to perform.<sup>37.</sup> To men of religious strength, such as Abraham, the angels appear as men. To feeble persons, they appear as angels. Abraham was always familiar with them as men.<sup>38.</sup> Angels are only superior to men so long as they have a mission to perform. That is, it is up to God to make them superior or inferior to man!<sup>39.</sup>

The names of the angels come from Babylon.<sup>40.</sup>

Why can we not see demons? Because God created the demons just before the sanctity of the Sabbath began, and so he did not have time to create their bodies.<sup>41.</sup> The demons were even capable of having intercourse with Adam and with Eve.<sup>42.</sup> Satan is always on hand when there is a semblance of tranquility in a man's life. Tranquility arouses his ire. Also by bringing accusations, Satan tries to destroy a man's contentment. During eating and drinking, Satan is there to work mischief.<sup>43.</sup>

Spirits appear in the ark with Noah. A spirit entered Hagar and she miscarried.<sup>44.</sup> Elijah, the familiar spirit in all Jewish legends, visits people frequently and even studies with scholars sometimes.<sup>45.</sup>

Spirits, however, are ever present with man, and will attack us at our slightest weakness, of which they are ever aware.<sup>46.</sup>

## H. Palestine:

The affinity of Israel to Palestine, is indicated by a few passages, both in reference to the Land and to the Temple. These passages exemplify a sentimental and warm love of the land, no doubt inspired by the stories about Palestine which the preachers emphasized in their sermons.

Better is it to lodge in the deserts of Eretz Yisroel than in the palaces abroad.<sup>48.</sup> Palestine is the place from whence religious awe went forth into the world; the place from whence light goeth forth into the world; the place from whence retribution goeth forth into the world.<sup>49.</sup>

Though Palestine does not flourish as well as other lands, God has implanted within man a love of his native soil and climate.<sup>50.</sup> Other people are interested in their land as it is agricultural; Israel is interested in the national homeland as the seat of the Temple.<sup>51.</sup> The creation of Palestine was contemplated before the creation of the world, as was the Temple;<sup>52.</sup> and when the flood was visited upon the earth, Palestine was not submerged.<sup>53.</sup> Even gold and cedar were created for the sake of the Temple which was to be in Palestine.<sup>54.</sup>

The Rabbis decreed that the land outside of Eretz Israel was unclean, in order to discourage emigration. "R. Hoshaya said: 'God said to Isaac: Thou art a burnt-offering without blemish: as a burnt-offering becomes unfit if it passes out beyond the Temple enclosures, so wilt thou become unfit if thou goest without the country.'<sup>55.</sup>

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, we cannot have failed to detect the principal aims and the leading themes of Bereshith Rabbah. It seeks to foster the spiritual enlightenment, the ethical education and the moral fortification of the people.

It was the aim of the preachers to help the people penetrate beneath the outward garb of the Bible and the commandments into the inner significance and beauty of Judaism. They sought to make their listeners appreciate the soul and the secret of their religion. They sought to develop the moral sense of the people and to habituate them all, both rich and poor, high and low, to a life in accordance with the highest ethical standards. And finally, they sought to fortify the people against the perils and the hardships surrounding them. This they did by nourishing a noble pride in the achievements of their heritage, and their history and a fervid hope for future glory. With these aims in view, it is natural that the themes most often discussed are those which we have mentioned in this study: God, Torah, Israel, heroes and teachers, Israel's relation to other nations, the world to come as well as the various aspects of religious thought and ethical conduct. It is equally natural to find in the homilies, time and again, vindications of Jewish teachings against the attacks of critics, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

The Midrash did make the Bible meet the needs of the

people. Scripture required interpretation, exposition and expansion, and though, as we have seen, these attempts sometimes reach ad absurdum, the essential factor is there---meeting a human need for enlightenment.

To have been able to read the complete sermons which the Rabbis gave before their congregations, would of course be of greater interest; but thankful we must be that there are available the central ideas which make up the Midrash of Bereshith Rabbah. Though this Study, perforce must be incomplete and in many sections, sketchy, (for it is most difficult to imprison within a limited measure the total essence of the book) we have been able to trace our way to the springs from whence flowed the whole process of thought of the preachers, and round which they wove their orations and picturesque homilies. At times, it eludes us; at other times, it glares forth in its obviousness.

"There was once a dense forest into which no one ventured to enter, for it was considered impossible to secure a safe journey back. One man, however, resolved at least to make an attempt. Accordingly, he began by gradually cutting away the trees, until he succeeded in forming a road, by means of which he could penetrate into the heart of the forest, without fear of going astray. That great difficulty was now removed, for everyone was able to penetrate into the heart of the forest."

Bereshith Rabbah 12:1

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER ONE

1. Also known under the names of Bereshith derabbi Osha'yah (Hosha'yah), Bereshith Rabbah derabbi Oshayah (Hoshayah), Bereshith derabbi Hosha'yah rabba, and Raraitha derabbi Oshaya. (Midrash Rabbah Bereshith, Soncino, Vol.I, p.xxvii)
2. Oesterley and Box, Religion and Worship. 1911.
3. Lerner, Magazin, 1880, 157; Theodor, Monatsschrift für Geschichte u. Wiss. des. Judts., Breslau, 1852ff.
4. Strack, Hermann L., Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash. Note 1. to ch. XVIII, p.217.
5. Midrash Rabbah Bereshith, Soncino, Vol.I, p. xxvii.
6. Oesterley and Box, Religion and Worship, 1911
7. Midrash Rabbah Bereshith, Soncino, Vol.I, p. xxvii.
8. Strack, Hermann L., Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, Note 7 to ch. XVIII, p. 217.
9. Universal Jewish Encyclopedia. Vol. 7., p. 539
10. Die ältesten Phasen in der Entwicklung der Jud. Predigt, I (Berlin 1901), 43.
11. Midrash Rabbah Bereshith, Soncino, Vol.I, pp. xxviiff.

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1. Rosenau, Wm., Jewish Biblical Commentators, p. 23.
2. B.R. 1:7
3. Enelow, H.G. Significance of the Agada. Reprint from C.C.A.R. Yearbook, XXIV, 1914. In the discussion contained in the chapter "The Homilies" I am indebted to this reference for its guidance in what to look for in the Midrash.
4. B.R. 18:4
5. " 45:5
6. " 9:12
7. " 8:5
8. " 23:3
9. " 31:9
10. " 1:10
11. " 1:10
12. " 17:6
13. " 14:2
14. " 26:6
15. " 46:7
16. Isaiah 55:1
17. B.R. 41:9
18. " 46:4

19. B.R. 56:11
20. " 60:30
21. " 20:4
22. " 56:8
23. " 4:6
24. " 30:8
25. Ibid. The Mishnah referred to is Makshirim, vi,7. R. Simeon b. Eleazer's answer is based on Shab. 53b.
26. Dubnow, S.M., Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes, Vol.III, p.281.
27. Zadikoff, Midrash Hagadol, I., p. 57.
28. B.R. 56:6
29. " 15:7
30. " 8:2
31. " 8:2
32. " 1:10
33. " 9:11
34. " 2:4
35. " 28:4
36. " 38:7
37. " 67:3
38. Enelow, H.G., Significance of the Agada.
39. See Strack, Herman L., Introd. to the Talm. and Midr., p.217
40. Enelow, H.G. Op.cit.
41. Strack, Hermann L., op.cit.
42. see 2:24, 4:4, 8:17, 9:6,24, 12:3.
43. B.R. 80:5 and 18:2
44. This refers only to those kings who affected Jewish history
45. This interprets לֹב not as a "young dove" but as an attribute לֹב to rob; "a robber turtle-dove." Soncino, B.R. Note 2, p.371
46. B.R. 44:15
47. " 49:1
48. " 33:1
49. " 56:9
50. " 45:7
51. " 23:4
52. B.R. 42:6
53. " 86:5
54. " 19:1
55. " 22:8
56. " 74:2
57. " 13:13
58. An important method of Midrashic exegesis is stated here: "He learns the obscure from the explicit, and the meaning of a statement from its context."
59. B.R. 2:2
60. " 62:2
61. " 61:6
62. " 88:7
63. " 83:5
64. " 53:9
65. " 19:11
66. " 65:15
67. " 19:3

68. B.R. 17:8  
69. " 17:8  
70. " 53:9  
71. " 53:9  
72. " 27:3  
73. " 28:3  
74. " 58:3  
75. " 33:5

### CHAPTER THREE

1. B.R. 8:8  
2. " 1:7  
3. " 1:3  
4. " 1:3  
5. " 1:12  
6. " 42:3,7  
7. " 1:6  
8. " 3:9  
9. " 8:5  
10. " 64:4  
11. " 24:7  
12. " 27:4  
13. " 68:9  
14. " 8:9  
15. " 98:3  
16. " 4:4  
17. " 8:11  
18. " 4:3,4  
19. " 1:2  
20. " 12:1  
21. " 48:19  
22. " 44:22  
23. " 44:22  
24. " 8:3  
25. " 85:12  
26. " 70:9  
27. " 8:13  
28. " Ibid.  
29. " Ibid.  
30. " 59:8  
31. " 55:3  
32. " 21:7  
33. " 12:15  
34. " 33:3,37:3  
35. " 35:3  
36. " 39:6  
37. " 44:5  
38. " 49:6  
39. " Ibid  
40. " 49:9

41. B.R. 65:9  
42. " 9:11  
43. " 36:1  
44. " 24:4  
45. " 22:12  
46. " 25:1  
47. " 8:4  
48. " 50:3  
49. " 53:14  
50. " 33:3  
51. " 56:10  
52. " 26:5  
53. " 27:4  
54. " 8:5  
55. " 58:9  
56. " 9:11  
57. " 49:2,64:4  
58. " 53:5  
59. " 15:5  
60. " 39:3  
61. " 33:3  
62. " 8:13  
63. " 9:9  
64. " 9:10  
65. " 43:3  
66. " 49:2  
67. " 44:4  
68. " 43:7  
69. " 30:10  
70. " 7:5  
71. " 65:11  
72. " 77:1  
73. " 68:12  
74. " 68:4  
75. " 97:2  
76. " 9:3  
77. " 49:8  
78. " 86:6  
79. " 12:2  
80. " 2:3  
81. " 20:7  
82. " 1:4  
83. " 9:2  
84. " 3:7  
85. " 1:4  
86. " 10:2  
87. " 1:5  
88. " 10:3  
89. " 5:3  
90. " 1:9  
91. " 6:6  
92. " 6:7  
93. " 6:8

94.	B.R.	4:7
95.	"	3:1
96.	"	27:1
97.	"	28:2
98.	"	3:2
99.	"	17:1
100.	"	10:6
101.	"	10:7
102.	"	Ibid.
103.	"	12:12
104.	"	12:13
105.	"	38:13
106.	"	23:7
107.	"	23:6
108.	"	43:2
109.	"	50:12
110.	"	6:1
111.	"	60:13
112.	"	38:6

#### CHAPTER FOUR

1.	B.R.	41:9
2.	"	44:6
3.	"	Ibid.
4.	"	Ibid.
5.	"	40:6
6.	"	44:18
7.	"	43:8
8.	"	33:6
9.	"	63:13
10.	"	63:14
11.	"	64:10
12.	"	65:1
13.	"	65:3
14.	"	61:6
15.	"	65:11
16.	"	63:9
17.	"	Ibid.
18.	"	9:13
19.	"	39:12
20.	"	63:8
21.	"	94:9
22.	"	6:3
23.	"	78:2
24.	"	48:11
25.	"	41:9
26.	"	24:7
27.	"	39:14
28.	"	39:11
29.	"	70:5
30.	"	98:5

31.	B.R.	39:16
32.	"	39:8
33.	"	43:4
34.	"	46:2

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1.	Shechter, S. <u>Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology</u> , p.120.
2.	B.R. 6:4
3.	" 1:4
4.	" Ibid.
5.	" 8:2
6.	" 1:1
7.	" 17:5
8.	" 1:1
9.	" 20:4
10.	" 13:7
11.	" 39:15
12.	" 42:1
13.	" 63:1
14.	" 42:3
15.	" 49:4
16.	" 61:3
17.	" 63:6
18.	" 91:3
19.	" 59:2
20.	" 24:5
21.	" 56:11
22.	" 21:9
23.	" 32:5
24.	" 53:7
25.	" 35:3
26.	" 44:1
27.	" 19:3
28.	" 44:1
29.	" 35:1
30.	" 24:7
31.	" 47:6
32.	" 31:10
33.	" 20:12
34.	" 47:4
35.	" 60:11
36.	" 60:12

#### CHAPTER SIX

1.	B.R.	22:6
2.	"	Ibid.
3.	"	11:10

4.	B.R.	39:7
5.	"	31:5
6.	"	32:7
7.	"	Ibid.
8.	"	32:1
9.	"	49:6
10.	"	28:6,7
11.	"	26:5
12.	"	26:6
13.	"	22:6
14.	"	36:4
15.	"	21:8
16.	"	32:5
17.	"	39:7
18.	"	11:2
19.	"	9:6
20.	"	6:6
21.	"	2:3
22.	"	5:9
23.	"	19:7
24.	"	52:7
25.	"	41:1
26.	"	30:6
27.	"	49:1
28.	"	58:8
29.	"	44:12
30.	"	49:13
31.	"	39:12
32.	"	32:2
33.	"	58:2
34.	"	36:9
35.	"	Ibid.
36.	"	50:11
37.	"	89:1
38.	"	34:10
39.	"	20:11
40.	"	60:14
41.	"	20:5
42.	"	54:1
43.	"	34:10
44.	"	9:7
45.	"	10:9
46.	"	10:5
47.	"	26:6
48.	"	38:2
49.	"	51:3
50.	"	53:5
51.	"	26:6
52.	"	33:1
53.	"	6:6

54.	B.R.	62:2
55.	"	58:1
56.	"	32:2,3
57.	"	29:3
58.	"	1:4
59.	"	30:8
60.	"	47:6
61.	"	1:1
62.	"	30:6
63.	"	26:1
64.	"	26:6
65.	"	29:5
66.	"	26:2
67.	"	29:1
68.	"	56:7
69.	"	48:12
70.	"	51:6
71.	"	56:1
72.	"	25:3
73.	"	8:1
74.	"	29:2
75.	"	32:3
76.	"	82:10
77.	"	76:2
78.	"	6:3
79.	"	1:5
80.	"	60:9
81.	"	16:3
82.	"	37:7
83.	"	52:1
84.	"	54:2
85.	"	38:3
86.	"	12:8
87.	"	48:18
88.	"	43:2
89.	"	38:6
90.	"	100:8
91.	"	97 of curr.ed.
92.	"	66:2
93.	"	82:8

# CHAPTER SEVEN

1.	B.R.	38:6
2.	"	8:5
3.	"	8:12
4.	"	5:7
5.	"	48:6

6.	B.R.	33:5
7.	"	28:5
8.	"	33:1
9.	"	Ibid.
10.	"	38:3
11.	"	Ibid.
12.	"	17:2
13.	"	23:2, 72:5
14.	"	17:4
15.	"	17:7
16.	"	17:3
17.	"	20:11
18.	"	60:16
19.	"	14:6
20.	"	52:12
21.	"	17:8
22.	"	18:7
23.	"	20:7
24.	"	Ibid.
25.	"	18:5
26.	"	17:3
27.	"	17:7
28.	"	22:2
29.	"	54:2
30.	"	45:2
31.	"	63:2
32.	"	63:10
33.	"	53:15
34.	"	26:4
35.	"	1:15
36.	"	23:4
37.	"	34:14
38.	"	32:7
39.	"	30:2
40.	"	31:12, 34:7
41.	"	21:9
42.	"	23:4, 34:6
43.	"	53:15
44.	"	39:9
45.	"	60:8
46.	"	20:10
47.	"	14:10
48.	"	19:6
49.	"	22:10
50.	"	34:11
51.	"	72:4

## CHAPTER EIGHT

1.	B.R.	9:5-9
2.	"	Ibid.
3.	"	9:10
4.	"	26:2
5.	"	63:11
6.	"	62:2
7.	"	Ibid.
8.	"	17:5
9.	"	62:2
10.	"	34:12
11.	"	34:11
12.	"	34:7
13.	"	20:10
14.	"	23:1, 26:6, 32:1
15.	"	28:3
16.	"	26:6
17.	"	9:3
18.	"	59:6
19.	"	10:5
20.	"	28:8
21.	"	26:2
22.	"	12:6
23.	"	10:4
24.	"	56:2
25.	"	8:1
26.	"	3:6
27.	"	42:4
28.	"	24:4
29.	"	75:2
30.	"	95 and 99:2

## CHAPTER NINE

1.	B.R.	56:2
2.	"	52:13
3.	"	44:12, 63:5
4.	"	60:4
5.	"	22:3
6.	"	6:5
7.	"	Ibid.
8.	"	5:7

9.	B.R.	12:2
10.	"	10:9
11.	"	11:2
12.	"	Ibid.
13.	"	11:3
14.	"	46:1
15.	"	11:6
16.	"	21:9
17.	"	26:3
18.	"	30:8
19.	"	39:11
20.	"	43:4
21.	"	46:6
22.	"	59:8
23.	"	47:9
24.	"	46:2
25.	"	46:10
26.	"	43:2
27.	"	56:11
28.	"	13:6
29.	"	13:9
30.	"	33:5, 54:1
31.	"	28:6
32.	"	5:5
33.	"	21:9
34.	"	44:3
35.	"	50:1
36.	"	56:4
37.	"	50:2
38.	"	Ibid.
39.	"	48:14
40.	"	48:9
41.	"	7:5
42.	"	24:6
43.	"	38:17
44.	"	31:13
45.	"	45:5
46.	"	35:2
47.	"	20:11, 24:6
48.	"	39:8
49.	"	55:7
50.	"	34:15
51.	"	13:2
52.	"	1:4
53.	"	33:6
54.	"	15:1, 16:2
55.	"	64:3