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L A M E N T A T I O N S R A B B A H :

ITS COMPOSITION AND CONTENTS
CRITICALLY CONSIDERED

by

Harry B. Pastor

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fulfillment of the
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PART ONE: THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORK

The Need for A Midrash on Lamentations

Soon after the destruction of the Temple it became the custom that, on the Ninth of Ab, the anniversary of the religio-national catastrophe, one should refrain from reading the books of Holy Writ in general and should restrict himself particularly to those Biblical passages concerned¹ with sorrow and mourning. In this category, of course, the Book of Lamentations was foremost. It was, therefore, in response to a definite need of the people that the Darshanin on Tischa b'Ab used to hold public discourses based on Echah; and it was in response to this same need that it became urgent to arrange in proper order the haggados concerned with the verses of Lamentations,² thus giving rise in turn to our present Midrash, Echah Rabbah,³ or at least to the first recension of it.⁴

THE ARRANGEMENT: PROEMS AND RUNNING COMMENTARY

Our Midrash begins with a number⁵ of proems (פתיחות), forming a separate collection and constituting more than one-fourth of the work. These are characteristic of the homiletic type of Midrash, in which entire homilies and haggadic discourses, as delivered during public worship or in connection with it, were collected and edited. Accordingly, the proems do not deal in regular order with the text of a book of the Bible, but they constitute, both in name and in nature, an introduction to the exposition of the Biblical lesson proper, leading up to the latter by means of

the interpretation of an extraneous text, usually from the Hagiographa. One could, in certain respects, call them rhetorical exercises, at which no more than two ^{cues} are given--
 6 the introductory verse and the word "Echah" as conclusion, and the task falls upon the speaker to construct a bridge between the two. The art of the haggadist appears in the use he makes of his exegetic material, in the interesting combination, grouping, and connection of the several interpretations into a uniform structure so developed that the last member forms a fitting introduction to the exposition
 7 of the lesson proper.

The proems are followed by the exegetical Midrash to Lamentations itself, arranged in the form of a running commentary to the verses of the text. The character of this part of the Midrash is on the whole the same as in Bereshis Rabbah. "Side by side with the simple interpretations of sentences and words, and with various Midrashic explanations dating from different authors, whose comments are placed in juxtaposition, the Midrash contains Haggadic passages having
 8 some sort of relation to the verse." Thus it is that there are brought in numerous tales and legends comprising more than one-fourth of the Midrash proper (exclusive of the proems). The language of Echah Rabbah is mixed - Hebrew for the exegetical passages, the Aramaic vernacular for the legends and stories, and withal, a wealth of Greek and Latin
 9 words. There are numerous repetitions of the same Haggadah,
 10 sometimes three or more times. Finally, the style of the exegesis is most interesting. Quite often the tendency displays itself to leave the simple, literal meaning of the text

and, through a change in the vocalization, or through a trans-
version of the consonants of a word to give the Biblical
verse a different meaning -- for example, אֶל־אֱלֹהִים is read as אֶל־אֱלֹהִים
 אֶל־אֱלֹהִים as אֶל־אֱלֹהִים ; and אֶל־אֱלֹהִים (alas!) as אֶל־אֱלֹהִים (oh!), through which
latter twist Rabbi Yochanan ben Zaccai is supposed to have
saved his life!¹¹

THE SOURCES OF ECHAH RABBAH

With more than moderate degree of certainty we may say
that the compiler of our Midrash was acquainted with the
Mekhilta, Sifra and Sifre, and also with Bereshis Rabbah;¹²
and that, of these, Bereshis Rabbah was of the greatest use
to him. But as regards the compiler's use of the Pesikta
d'rav Kahana and of the Talmud Yerushalmi and the Talmud
Babli, there are differences of opinion.

Zunz held that the Pesikta is dependent on Genesis
Rabbah, Lamentations Rabbah, and Leviticus Rabbah.¹³ Buber,
on the other hand, states that Echah Rabbah frequently draws
from the Pesikta, and that many of the Pesichtoth to Echah
are taken from this latter work.¹⁴ Abrahams, who made a special
and exhaustive study of the sources of our Midrash, carefully
compared the parallel passages in Echah Rabbah and in the
Pesikta and found equally convincing arguments for either side
of the question. His researches led him to the following con-
clusion: "...The author of Midrash Echah was acquainted with
some work now unknown to us, which contained narratives and
expositions similar to those occurring in Pesikta derab Kahana;
and further,...there are cases in which the Pesikta accounts

are decidedly younger than the Eḥah versions. There is nothing, scientifically speaking, to hinder us from going one step farther and asserting that the passages which appear to be dependent on the Pesikta...are in reality derived from the unknown work just mentioned...That Midrash Eḥah is older than the Pesikta; that the outward form of the latter and some modifications in its text are due to the Midrash, can be maintained with as much reason as the statement that Eḥah Rabbah is dependent on the Pesikta. Which of these two counter-hypotheses is the correct one, I do not undertake to decide.¹⁵ Among more recent scholars, Theodor states that "older collections must have served as the common source for Eḥah Rabbah, Bereshit Rabbah; and especially for the Pesikta de Rab Kahana."¹⁶ The writer of this paper would not presume to make a decision where these eminent scholars find themselves at variance or undecided; but we may merely state that the matter of the relationship between Eḥah Rabbah and the Pesikta is now exactly where Abrahams left it over fifty years ago.

The Talmud Yerushalmi is, according to Zunz, a much-used source of Eḥah Rabbah.¹⁷ Rapoport, however, in his Erech Millin, discussing those stories in our Midrash wherein the wit of the Jerusalemites and Athenians is contrasted, says that there is a common source for these stories in the Yerushalmi¹⁸ and in Eḥah.¹⁹ Frankel agrees with Zunz. Abrahams, after a thorough and scholarly comparison of the parallel passages, concludes that "Midrash Eḥah...in its original form was completely independent of the Talmud Yerushalmi;" and he goes on

to say that the Midrash must have drawn upon various collections of Haggadoth "similar to, perhaps the same as those which provided the material for a large portion of the Yerushalmi."²⁰ Buber, agreeing with Zunz and Frankel that the Yerushalmi is a frequently used source of Echah, is troubled by the perplexing fact that the Midrash, when using the same haggados that appear in the Talmud, often presents them in an altered form; these variations Buber attempts to explain away by conjecturing that the compiler of Echah had different readings in his Yerushalmi from those we have now.²¹ Weiss merely states categorically that the compiler of Echah did not borrow from the Yerushalmi.²² Theodor makes the rather ambiguous claim that "the sources from which Yerushalmi drew must have been accessible to the author of Echah Rabbah, which was certainly edited some time after the completion of the former, and which probably borrowed from it;"²³ and Strack, while making no general statement, does say, in discussing one particular parallel passage, that the "marked textual divergences point rather to a common source."²⁴

When it comes to Talmud Babli, the wealth of varied opinions is not quite so great. Rapoport, in discussing those stories in our Midrash that tell of the great wit of the Jerusalemites, says: "I consider the Agada of the Talmud Babli on this subject to be much later than that of the Midrash;"²⁵ and Weiss goes even further and states that the Babli drew from Echah. Wunsche, on the contrary, claims that "the Midrash borrowed a great number of Messianic Haggadahs from both Talmudim."²⁶ Whereas Buber maintains that the compiler of Echah

did not know the Babli, and that, on the other hand, the Babli did not draw from the Midrash. Buber, however, makes these reservations: (a) In the case of the proems, which are later than the Midrash proper, there are some passages taken from Babli; (b) there are places in the Midrash proper where later editors have added passages taken from the Babli.²⁷

All of which leads up to that theory which, in our opinion, is the most convincing and most consistent and most logical, and which is presented to the reader in a complete and systematic form -- namely, the theory of Abrahams. After a very painstaking examination of the parallel passages in Echah Rabbah and in the two Talmudim, and after a careful weighing of the implications involved, Abrahams comes to the following --and, it seems to us, well-substantiated, conclusions: "The Midrash, in its present form, is written in two totally different styles; the West or Palestinian Syriac stands side by side with the East Syriac, and with the usual modes of expression peculiar to the Talmud Babli. This use of the Babylonian language is not confined to the last chapters...Midrash Echah not infrequently exhibits a strong tendency to combine the Yerushalmi and Babli versions of the same narrative;... it often shows a decided preference in favor of the latter Talmud, by rendering in the Babylonian phraseology single words and whole sentences which, we have every reason to believe, were originally written in the Palestinian dialect. Lastly we have examined instances which point to the conclusion that, where similarity exists between Echah Rabbah and the Yerushalmi alone, the Midrash is independent of the Talmud. The question

arises, what are we warranted in inferring from these data?

"In the first place, it is clear that two such distinct styles as characterize the Midrash could never have emanated from one and the same writer; Echah Rabbah is, therefore, the work of at least two authors. Secondly: the later revisor was acquainted with both Talmudim. Thirdly: the first recension of Midrash Echah was composed in Palestine (the language in which it is written proves this), and the second recension, in Babylon... We find that the Babylonian dialect has been copiously used, even in cases where the Palestinian Talmud is adduced. There can be only one reason for this deviation from the words of the text. The second author...preferred the Babylonian dialect, because that dialect was best understood by his readers; in other words, because he was in Babylon. Fourthly: the original Midrash is independent of Talmud Yerushalmi. Our previous investigations have established the fact that all those passages which are really taken from the Yerushalmi are young. Since the original Midrash contains a large number of Haggadoth, which have nothing corresponding with them in Yerushalmi, and since those sections which do correspond with similar narratives in the Talmud are, as far as we have seen, independent, we are justified in asserting that the same source which supplied the author with the former furnished him also with the latter."

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

Before considering the larger aspects of the date and authorship of Echaḥ Rabbah, we must deal with the relationship of the separate parts of our Midrash to one another. What, for instance, is the relation of the proems to the Midrash proper? Buber affirms that one author did not compile both, but that the proems were redacted later, after the body of the Midrash had already been arranged, and that the compiler³⁰ of the proems drew much material from the Midrash. Theodor disagrees with this and asserts that the proem collection was certainly made by the author of the Midrash, and, what is more, that, where similar passages occur in the proems and the Midrash proper, the latter drew from the former.³¹ Likewise Strack concludes: (1) that the proems by no means need to be regarded as coming from a later compiler; (2) it is apparently from the Tischa b'Ab discourses on Lamentations that the greater part of the exposition, arranged according to the sequence of verses, proceeded.³² Both from the standpoint of the development of the Haggadah,³³ and from the examination of the parallel passages,³⁴ we are led to agree with Theodor and Strack that the contention of separate authorship for proems and running commentary cannot be sustained.

A similar issue to the one just discussed was raised by Zunz, when he put forth the theory that the last four chapters are all later additions, because: (1) the first chapter is as large as the remaining four chapters put together; (2) what is more, the last four chapters, as short as they are,³⁵ contain many repetitions. But the weight of later scholarly

opinion is against Zunz. Weiss, Buber, and Winter and Wunsche all agree in their disagreement with Zunz. Especially cogent are the arguments adduced by Winter and Wunsche: (1) The concluding formula of the proems shows expressly that the beginning of the Book of Lamentations was preferred as a text for exposition; (2) since the whole book was read in one day, more homilies were naturally preached about the first chapters; (since Lamentations itself repeats again and again the same ideas), the compiler may have exhausted his material with the first chapters.

We may, then, as we now come to consider the date of Echah Rabbah, speak of it as a whole -- both proems and Midrash proper. Zunz maintains that the completion of the whole work must not be placed before the second half of the seventh century; because, he says, the empire of the Arabians is referred to even in a passage of the first chapter. Weiss would place Echah Rabbah before the completion of the Yerushalmi, because the sages who flourished at the time when the Yerushalmi was completed are not mentioned. Buber, in line with his contention that the compiler of Echah was not acquainted with the Babli, but was acquainted with the Yerushalmi, would set the limits of the date of our Midrash within the fourth century. Theodor and Strack draw a conclusion from Buber's critical text which the latter himself failed to draw. According to a reading of Buber's edition, it is Seir and not Ishmael (i.e. Arabia) that is mentioned in the passage on which Zunz places so much reliance for fixing the date of Echah; and that Seir is the only correct reading, says Theodor,

is shown by the context. All that can be definitely stated, continues Theodor, is that Lamentations Rabbah was edited after the completion of the Talmud Yerushalmi and of Bereshis⁴² Rabbah.

As regards the date of our Midrash, we personally consider the theory of Abrahams to be best-substantiated, even as we considered his theory of the sources of Echah Rabbah to be the most convincing. It will be noted that, while we have concluded above that the proems and the five chapters of Echah should be taken as one unit when it comes to determining their date, we have not excluded the possibility that the whole Midrash --taken as one unit-- may have undergone more than one recension. And this is exactly what Abrahams maintains, as we have stated in our discussion of the Talmudim. After weighing all the evidence to the best of our humble ability, we must express agreement with Abrahams when he asserts: (1) The Midrash Echah, in its present form, is the work of at least two authors or compilers, the latter of whom was thoroughly acquainted with the Talmud Babli; (2) the first recension of Midrash Echah was composed in Palestine, and the second in Babylonia; (3) the first edition of Midrash Echah was completed before the end of the⁴³ fourth, and the second after the sixth, century.

PART TWO: THE CONTENTS OF THE WORK

I. THE DISPERSION OF ISRAEL

A. Israel's Sufferings

Introduction:

It is naturally to be expected that a Midrash on Lamentations would be concerned -- as its central point-- with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and, in general, with the loss of national autonomy. Appropriately enough, we find in Echah Rabbah, large collections of stories (especially in I:5, I:16, and II:2) vividly portraying the horrible experiences which the children of Israel underwent as a result of their defeat and dispersion, both in the times of the First and Second Temples, and also during the fateful revolt led by Bar Kochba. And, although these catastrophes are regarded as beyond doubt a Divine visitation, nevertheless the conquerors are cursed and criticized for having so far exceeded all the bounds of mercy and decency. The reader of these Midrashim must surely feel that the deep sorrow expressed therein is by no means merely academic, or foreign to the actual mental state of the writer; one can readily see that this is no feigned emotion, but that the wounds are fresh and smarting. Especially illustrative of this fact is the following Midrash about Rabban Gamaliel. A woman, living next door to him, had been bereft of her only son, and was wont to spend the nights in weeping. When Rabban Gamaliel would hear this, he would be reminded of the destruction of

the Temple; and he wept so long and bitterly that his eye-lashes finally fell out. When his pupils became aware of this, they brought it about that the woman should move away.⁴⁴

Destruction of the First Temple

For eighteen years in succession-- our Midrash tells us-- there came forth a Bath Kol in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, saying: "O bad servant, go, destroy the House of thy Master, for His sons do not obey Him." But the Babylonian monarch was afraid. He thought to himself: "God only wants to get me into a position where He can do to me what He did to Sennacherib." Then Nebuchadnezzar went to consult a charmer. The latter tried various methods of casting lots⁴⁵ in an attempt to choose between Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem; and always it came out that Jerusalem was the city⁴⁶ which he was to attack. Nebuchadnezzar then took up his residence in Daphne, a suburb of Antiochus, and he sent Nebuzaradan to destroy Jerusalem. The latter besieged the city for three and a half years, and remained unable to subdue it. Finally, he was about to leave, when God put into his mind the idea of measuring the height of the wall. Then it was that he noticed that the wall was sinking two and a half hand-breadths each day. He waited until it sank⁴⁷ down completely and then he invaded Jerusalem.

Now Nebuchadnezzar had commanded Nebuzaradan not to harm Jeremiah. But Jeremiah himself, seeing a group of fellow-Jews weighted down by a neck-halter, put his own neck under the same yoke; until Nebuzaradan came and took him away.

Then again, when Jeremiah saw a group of old men bound with chains, he placed himself among them and once more Nebuzaradan⁴⁸ had to come and take him away.

When Nebuzaradan came up to the Temple Mount he noticed some blood on the ground there that began to seethe and bubble. When he inquired about it, he was informed that this was the gore of sacrificial beasts; but, by comparing it with the fresh blood of animals, he found this statement to be false. Thereupon he threatened to rake the people's flesh with iron combs if they did not speak the truth. Then finally they told him that this was the blood of the arrogant Zechariah (II Chronicles 24:20), who had denounced the people, and who had been stoned to death by them; and that, throughout all these years, his blood had not stopped seething. "I shall appease it," said Nebuzaradan. He had the great Sanhedrin and the Small Sanhedrin brought before him, and had them executed, so that their blood mingled with that of Zechariah, but still the blood kept boiling. They brought youths and maidens and slew them there; but the blood did not yet come to rest. They brought little school-children and slaughtered them, and still the blood was not quieted. They brought 80,000 young priests and put them to death; but the blood continued to bubble. Thereupon Nebuzaradan exclaimed: "Zechariah, Zechariah; all the finest among them have I already destroyed; dost thou desire that we exterminate them completely?" Immediately the⁴⁹ blood came to rest.

As though this massacre of the Jews were not horrible enough, the enemy found ways to torture fiendishly those who

remained alive. They would take the prisoners and tie them by their hair to the tails of horses; then they would make the horses run, dragging the victims along until their hair was torn out by the roots, and was strewn on the ground all the way from Jerusalem to Lydda.⁵⁰

Many of the young men of Israel were captured, but not tortured. Instead they were just held prisoners, with their hands tied behind their backs. But these young men wept bitterly over the destruction of the Temple. Because their hands were not free to wipe off the tears that ran so copiously down their cheeks, the tears ate their way into the skin, causing sores and scars to be formed.⁵¹

The neighboring nations took advantage of the Babylonian attack to express their hatred for the Judaeans. When 80,000 young priests had succeeded in breaking through the ranks of the besieging troops and, having made their way to the Ishmaelites, asked the latter for water, the Ishmaelites brought out instead skins that were blown up with air. When a priest, thinking the skin full of water, would put it to his mouth, the air would rush into his bowels and cause him to die in agony.⁵² The Ammonites and the Moabites were no better than the Ishmaelites. When the enemy entered Jerusalem, Ammon and Moab came with them. They entered the Holy of Holies and found the two Cherubim there. Putting them in a box, they carried them around the streets of Jerusalem, at the same time shouting: "Did ye not assert that this nation is not idolatrous? Look what we found out about them; see what they worship. Behold, all divinities are alike!"⁵³ Another thing these

nations did was to seize the Scroll of the Torah, so that they might erase therefrom the commandment: "An Ammonite or a Moabite may not join the assembly of the Lord." (Deut. 23:4).⁵⁴ Thus it was that gentiles invaded the Sacred Temple. And when they entered it, what did they do? They put their hands at the back of their necks, turned their faces upward, and uttered curses and blasphemy. And the nails of their boots⁵⁵ left marks in the Temple floor.

Misfortune pursued the captives also on their way to Babylon. They had failed to bring with them utensils for kneading dough. Therefore, each one would dig a hole in the ground and prepare his dough in it; and the dough would become full of dust and pebbles; and when one would put such bread in his mouth to chew it, his teeth would be set on edge.⁵⁶ When, finally, they reached Babylonia, the exiles of Jeconiah's time came forth to meet them, dressed in garments that were white on the outside, but black underneath. Approaching Nebuchdanezzar with shouts of praise, they exclaimed: "Hail! conqueror of barbarians." In a very low voice, however, they kept asking the recent arrivals: "How is my father?" "How is my brother?" "How is my son?" And the others answered them in the words of Jeremiah (15:2): "Such as were for death, to death; and such as were for the sword, to the sword." Thus, while outwardly they praised Nebuchdanezzar, inwardly they⁵⁷ were in deep mourning.

The patriarchs arose from their graves to join in lamenting the terribly sad fate of their people. When the Temple was destroyed, Abraham appeared before God, weeping and plucking his own beard and tearing his hair, and beating

his face and rending his garments. Moses, in his anguish, cried out: "Cursed be the sun! Why did not darkness fall when the enemy was about to enter the Temple?" To which the sun replied: "By thy life, I swear, O Moses, faithful shepherd! How could I grow dark when the heavenly powers would not desist from me? They took me and smote me with sixty scourges of fire, and said: 'Go, and cause light to shine.'⁵⁹" Bitterly did the patriarchs and Moses bemoan the hardships of the exiles in Babylon: "Alas for what has befallen our children! How ye are become like fatherless waifs! How ye must sleep in the blazing sun without garments or covering! How ye must climb on the rocky cliffs without shoes or sandals! How ye are weighted down with heavy loads of sand! How your hands are tied behind you! Ye are even not free to swallow the spittle in your mouths!"⁶⁰

Destruction of the Second Temple

Vespasian besieged Jerusalem for three and a half years. Within the city, at that time, there were three tremendously wealthy Jews, each of whom could have supported the province for five years out of his own resources. These three men were: Ben Tsitsis HaKeses, Ben Calba Sabua, and Nakdimon ben Gurion. One of them promised to provide Jerusalem with a ten-year supply of wheat and barley; the other promised to do the same with wine and oil; and the third, the same with firewood. But Ben Betiach, the nephew of Jochanan ben Zakkai, who had been put in charge of all these provisions, arose and set fire to them all; for, said Ben Betiach, all the time that

those provisions would have lasted, the Jews would have been unwilling to go out to meet the enemy in battle.⁶¹

The besieged Israelites were now famished beyond endurance. What did the enemy do? They roasted kids on grates and then they hung them up in such a manner, that the wind would carry the odor to the nostrils of those inside the city. When the latter, already at the point of starvation, inhaled the savory odors, they could endure it no longer, and they expired.⁶² Things came to such a pass that mothers ate their own offspring.⁶³ And one day, as Jochanan ben Zakkai was walking about, he saw men cooking straw and drinking the water; whereupon he thought to himself: "Shall men who are forced to drink straw-soup be able to withstand the armies of Vespasian? I must find some way to leave the city."

So he had himself put into a coffin and carried outside the walls of the city to the cemetery. Later, he managed to get out of the coffin unobserved; and, making his way to Vespasian's quarters, he finally succeeded in gaining an audience with the Roman general. Rabbi Jochanan then addressed Vespasian in the manner due a king; at which Vespasian became very angry, and exclaimed: "Should the emperor hear of thy addressing me as king, he would suspect me of conspiring against him, and would have me executed." Replied Rabbi Jochanan: "Thou mayest not now be king, but thou art destined for that position; for our Holy Temple is not to be destroyed by the hand of a commoner, but only by the hand of an emperor." And, indeed, a few days later, documents came from Rome stating that the Emperor had died, and that Vespasian had been made ruler in his

stead.

When Vespasian was about to subdue Jerusalem, he said to Jochanan: "Thou mayest make a request, and I shall grant it." "I request that thou leave without invading the city." "That is the reason why the Romans have made me king-- because of my campaign here. How, then, can I leave the city unsubdued?" "If so, I request that thou leave open the Western gate that leads to Lydda, until the third hour; so that whoever wishes to leave before the attack may do so without being harmed."

Just before the attack was to begin, Vespasian again spoke to Jochanan: "If thou hast any dear ones here, thou mayest have them taken out of the city." Whereupon Rabbi Jochanan sent in and had all the Rabbis brought out to safety.

Vespasian assigned the demolition of one of the four ramparts of the Temple Mount to each of his four generals; and the Western Wall came under the command of Pangar. Now it had been decreed from Heaven that the Western Wall should never be destroyed, and although the other three generals demolished the other three walls, Pangar allowed the Western Wall to stand. When Vespasian asked him the reason for this, he answered: "Had I destroyed this wall, the kings who follow thee would have had no evidence at all of the great splendor which thou hast destroyed."⁶⁴

In addition to the Temple, there were in Jerusalem four hundred and eighty synagogues, in connection with each of which there was an elementary school and an advanced school;

and Vespasian came up and destroyed them all.

Vespasian--curses on him!-- filled three ships with men and women of the noble families of Jerusalem, with the intention of placing them in the Roman houses of prostitution. When they were put on the ships, the nobles said to one another: "Is it not enough that we have vexed God in His holy Temple; must we make Him more angry by our conduct in a foreign land?" The men asked the women: "Will ye submit to being made prostitutes?" "No!" answered the women with one accord. "In that case," said the men, "how much the less can we submit." But they were afraid lest, if they should cast themselves into the sea, they would have no portion in the world to come. At this point God brought into their minds the following Scriptural verse: "I will bring them back from the depths of the sea." (Ps. 68:23). One after another, the nobles in each of the three ships cast themselves into the sea. And the Holy Spirit cried out and said: "For these I weep." (Lam. 1:16)

Period of Trajan and Hadrian: Siege of Bettar

The wife of Trajan (may his bones be pulverized!) bore a son on the eve of Tischa b'Ab; and the Jews, of course, were mourning. The child died on Chanukkah -- and the Jews kindled the festive lights. An evil report was brought to Trajan's wife, as follows: "When thy son was born, those Jews lamented; and when he died, they kindled lights of rejoicing." Immediately she sent a message to her husband: "While thou art on thine African military expedition, go and subdue those Jews who have rebelled against thee"... Trajan complied with her request, and set out against the Jews. Coming upon an assembly of men who

were studying the Torah, his legions surrounded them and mercilessly slaughtered them. Then the emperor spoke to the Jewish women: "Yield to the desires of my soldiers; for, if not, I shall do to you as I did to your husbands." To which the women bravely replied: "As ye did to our men, so do to us." They surrounded them and massacred them; and their blood mingled with that of their husbands, all of it flowing as a separate current in the waters of the sea until it reached the Island of Cyprus.⁶⁷

Hadrian--curses on him!-- issued^a/ proclamation that whoever did not salute the king was to be executed. A Jew passed by and saluted him. Said the Emperor indignantly: "Dost thou, a Jew, presume to salute the king?" And he ordered the Jew to be done away with. Later, another Jew came by and refrained from greeting the king; whereupon the king ordered him to be put to death for disobeying the decree. The king's counsellors were bewildered: "We do not understand your actions. He who salutes you is executed; and he who fails to salute you is executed." To which Hadrian answered: "Just leave it to me; I know how to get rid of my enemies."⁶⁸

In the days when the last Jewish stronghold, Bettar, was being besieged by Hadrian, the Jewish defenders of the fortress were under the leadership of Bar Kochba (Ben Cozba). The latter had under his command 200,000 men, each of whom had bitten off his own thumb to prove his valor. When, however, the Rabbis protested against this mutilation of Jewish men, Bar Kochba was induced to use another method for testing the courage of his men -- whether one could, bare-handed, uproot a Lebanon

cedar. And there were finally 400,000 Jewish soldiers, half of them tested by one method, and half by the other. What is more, Ben Cozba himself was of miraculous strength. It is reported that he could take great stones on his knee and, in this manner, could catapult them with such force that he slew many men.

For three and a half years Hadrian besieged Bettar. And all this time Rabbi Elazar of Modim used to sit in sack-cloth and constantly pray as follows: "O Lord of the Universe, do not sit in judgment today; do not sit in judgment today." When Hadrian saw that after all this time he was still unable to subdue the city, he was about to return home. But there was with him a certain Samaritan who said: "Have patience for one more day, and I'll show thee how to be victorious; however, all the time that that hen (Rabbi Elazar) is wallowing in ashes thou wilt not be able to conquer the city." Then the Samaritan secretly entered Bettar, went up to Rabbi Elazar, who was praying, and acted as though he had whispered in the latter's ear. But Rabbi Elazar did not even know that he was there. The report was then brought to Bar Cozba that Elazar was conspiring to betray the fortress. The Samaritan was summoned, and Bar Cozba asked him: "What did you tell Elazar?" And the answer was: "If I tell, the king will kill me for betraying him. Rather will I suffer death at your hands than divulge the secrets of the king." Then Elazar was brought in, and, when questioned, said (truthfully) that he had never before seen the Samaritan. Angered at what he felt sure was Elazar's treachery, Bar Cozba struck the latter and killed him instantly. Immediately there-

upon Bettar was taken by the enemy and Ben Cozba was slain.

When they brought the latter's head to Hadrian, he asked: "Who slew him?" "Some Goth killed him," was the answer. The king, however, did not believe this; but instead ordered them to bring the rest of the corpse. Ben Cozba's body was brought to him, and he found a snake wound around the knee. Said Hadrian: "If this man's deity had not slain him, no one would have been able to overcome him..."

Hadrian, the Wicked One, killed so many of the Bettarites that their blood flowed from the doors and the water-pipes in such volume as to make Bettar like a flooded city; and horses sank into the blood up to their noses; and the stream of blood was so strong that it carried along rocks weighing forty s'ah and bore them out to sea for a distance of four miles.

There were five hundred school houses in Bettar, the smallest among them having at least five hundred pupils. And all these children used to say: "If the enemy comes in against us, we will take these pens and gouge out their eyes." When the sins of the people brought about their downfall, and the enemy did invade the city, they took those children, wrapped each one in his own scroll, and cast them into the fire...

Hadrian had a vast vineyard, eighteen miles by eighteen miles, and he fenced it around entirely with the slain of Bettar, piled up as high as the height of a man. And the bodies did not become desiccated or foul-smelling, until another king arose and gave permission that they be buried.

Those that escaped the terrible massacre by fleeing into hiding were brought to such a state of starvation that they used to go out at night and eat of the dead bodies of their co-religionists. It even happened once that a son unknowingly ate of the corpse of his own father; and it was only after the flesh set his teeth on edge that he was led to make inquiry, and finally found out the awful truth.⁷⁰

B. Why Israel Was Made to Suffer

The Guilt of Israel

The major tendency of our Midrash is to state categorically and unequivocally that Israel's own guilty conduct caused God to visit upon it national disaster. The regular formula with which most of the proems concludes is witness to this view of the Rabbis: "As soon as Israel sinned, they were exiled, etc." In other places the same thought is presented as being a general law that works through Israel's history: When the children of Israel obey the will of God, then He causes them to rejoice over their enemies; when they anger God, He causes the enemy to rejoice over them.⁷¹ Or, to phrase it differently: Whenever Israel casts the words of the Torah to earth, then the government issues harsh decrees and succeeds in enforcing them.⁷² Knowing this viewpoint, we can then readily understand what motivated the Rabbis to represent Israel as having addressed Babylonia in the following manner: "If it had not been that 'God sent down fire from on high' (Lam. 1:13), then ye could not have prevailed over me. Ye have ground grain that was already pulverized; ye have killed

a dead lion; ye have set fire to a house that was already burning.⁷³"

Just what were these sins which brought down such terrible penalties upon the Jewish nation? As the Midrash tells us, in explaining why the chapters of Lamentations were written as acrostics, the gamut of Israel's transgressions extended from Aleph to Tav;⁷⁴ and, indeed, in analyzing the contents of the Midrash we find that the wrongs imputed to Israel ranged from the minor one of grumbling to the most serious moral and social guilt.

Around one of the causes given for the fall of Jerusalem there hangs an entire story. A Jerusalemite was giving a banquet and, among others, sent an invitation to a friend of his, named Kimtza. By mistake, however, the invitation was delivered to an enemy of his having the same name. When the host saw this other Kimtza at his banquet, he insisted that the latter should leave. And so, in spite of all his entreaties to be allowed to remain, this Kimtza was forced to depart before the banquet began. Determined upon getting revenge, he went to the king and said: "The Jews are not sacrificing the animals which thou art sending to the Sanctuary for that purpose; instead, they use the beasts for food." His suspicions aroused, the king sent an official to investigate. Meanwhile, Kimtza had secretly made a blemish on one of the animals which the king had sent, making it unfit for sacrifice. The king's official waited for three days to see whether the royal gift would be offered up, but that particular animal did not make its appearance. Without inquiring any further, the official

returned and confirmed the accusation of Kimtza. Whereupon the king immediately went out and destroyed the Temple. Thus, because the host of the banquet and the Rabbis present there showed no regard for the feelings of Kimtza and humiliated him, a great catastrophe befell all Israel.⁷⁵

This is not the only case where what seem to us small things caused terribly serious consequences. The town of Tur Simeon was so devoted to the principles of charity that it used to distribute three hundred measures of flour among the poor every Friday afternoon. Why, then, was the city destroyed? Because they played ball on the Sabbath.⁷⁶

One Midrash, based on Isaiah 3:16, excoriates the Israelitish women of the prophet's time for their affectation and their arrogance: They were proud of their high stature, and would walk along in a most haughty manner, inclining their head from one side to another, so as to show off their bejewelled necks to the best advantage. Each one would purposely choose short companions to walk along with her, one on each side, so that her own height would be all the more accentuated. Those, on the other hand, who themselves were short, would wear heavy-soled shoes to make themselves appear much taller. Another trick the woman of Jerusalem would use is this: She would take the gullet of a hen, fill it with balsam, and put it inside her shoe right under her heel; and when she would see a group of young men approaching, she would force her heel down hard and burst the gullet, so that the fragrance of balsam would permeate the atmosphere around her.

When these women were warned of the approaching doom, they would say: "'(Isa. 5:19) Let Him hasten His work that we may see it.' What can the enemy do to us? The officers will take us to be their wives." And when, finally, sinfulness brought it about that the enemy invaded Jerusalem, the women of Zion dressed themselves like harlots; and the officers took them into their travelling coaches... What did the Lord do? He caused the genitals of these women to discharge blood until the wagons were full of it. When the officers saw this, they thrust the women through with their swords, and then, to make doubly sure of killing them, caused the wagons to run
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over their bodies.

But the women of Israel were not the only ones who were guilty of arrogance. Later on, in Hadrianic times, it was the presumption of Bar Kochba which contributed to the downfall of Bettar. When he used to go out to war, he would say: "O Lord of the Universe, do Thou neither help nor hinder
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us."

In one place in our Midrash, various Rabbis discuss the reason for the downfall of Jerusalem, and they arrive at various answers: (1) because of the abrogation of the Torah; (2) because they failed to distinguish between greater and lesser among men; (3) because the children no longer went to school; (4) because they ceased to feel shame before one an-
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other; (5) because they ceased to admonish one another.

In the following two cases, the reason given for the downfall is that Israel sinned against the laws of social and

economic morality. Quoting Second Chronicles 25:12--which tells how Amaziah and his army defeated Seir, and after capturing ten thousand of them alive, brought them back to Judah to the top of a high cliff, and cast them over the precipice to be dashed to pieces -- the Midrash comments: When God saw this, He said, "What are such people doing here in Zion. Let them be exiled."⁸⁰

Another highly unsocial practice of the men of Zion was this: They used to take advantage of the villagers of Bet-tar. When one of the latter would visit Zion, the Jerusalem-ites would, by subterfuge, detain him, while they would forge a deed to his property and send it on to his household with the instructions that the former owner was no longer to be permitted on the estate. When the Bettarite, finding that he had been dispossessed, would call upon the officers of the city for redress of the wrong done to him, they would reply: "We have nothing to do with you." And thus would his property⁸¹ be extorted from him.

The sin that looms up in the Midrash as most serious of all is that connected with the rejection of God and the Torah, and the worship of idols. The children of Israel were exiled, we are told, only after they had rejected God, and the Ten Commandments, and circumcision, and the Five Books of the⁸² Torah. Or, as stated elsewhere: They did not go into exile until they had become blasphemous... until they had become con-⁸³testants against the Lord.

Israel's idolatrous tendencies were as old as the nation itself. When Israel at Sinai worshipped the Golden Calf, and later, in Jeroboam's time, set up two calves as gods,

it committed a wrong so heinous as to have besmirched the name of the nation throughout all the centuries until the time of its destruction.⁸⁴

Nor did the children of Israel profit by previous mistakes. In Temple times, they had the almost unbelievable audacity to bring their idolatrous practices into the confines of the Sanctuary itself! At first they carried on their abominable worship in secret; but, becoming bolder and ever bolder in their apostasy, they finally introduced idolatry into the Holy of Holies! Commenting upon this state of affairs, Rabbi Aha exclaimed: "Alas, alās, that the stranger dislodges the owner!" And, in similar vein, Rabbi Berachyah stated: "The bed is too short for a woman and her husband, and also her paramour."⁸⁵

Not stopping at this, Israel even went to foreign countries to find false gods to worship. There used to be 365 idolatrous shrines in Damascus, and they were wont to dedicate one day a year to the worship of each one of these divinities; while on the remaining day of the year they would pay homage to all of them at once. And Israel declared all these deities to be one pantheon, and revered them all. And they did not serve God even on an equal plane with all these other deities. Said Rabbi bar Kahana: "Should not the priest's wife be treated as well as the woman who keeps the inn? (i.e. should not the Lord be revered at least as much as the idols?)" Said Rabbi Jose bar Chanina: "(God said:) 'Would that my children had considered Me at least like the dessert, which is served up at the end of the meal.'⁸⁶"

To add insult to injury, the idolatrous scoffers of Isreel resorted to all kinds of subterfuge to pursue their re-

prehensible practices. What did they do? They would make an image on a double door in their homes, half of the image being on each half of the double door. When the scholars came to inspect their homes for evidences of idolatry, they would, on entering, naturally leave the double door open. As a result, they would not be able to find any images there. When the scholars were leaving, the scoffers would say: "Close the door as you go out." When the scholars complied with this request, the image on the inside of the doors would become complete again.⁸⁷

God's Responsibility in This Matter

There is another strand of thought in the Midrash which instead of placing the blame for all the trouble squarely on the shoulders of a guilty Israel, boldly chides God for forgetting the past and present merits of His children, and for not being more considerate and forgiving in His attitude. "God", says Israel, "has failed to remember to our credit the blood of Abraham, who was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcized"⁸⁸ (Gen. 17:24). And in another place God is flatly charged with having broken His oath which he swore to Abraham: "By Myself have I sworn...because thou hast...not withheld thy son...that I will bless thee...and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies."⁸⁹ (Gen. 22:16-18)

In fact, Abraham himself rose up to challenge God, and asked Him why He had exiled Israel and destroyed the Temple. The answer was: "Thy sons have sinned, having violated the entire Torah and all the twenty-two letters that are in it."

And then God called the Torah itself to witness against Israel. Whereupon Abraham addressed the Torah as follows: "My daughter, wilt thou come to witness against Israel that they transgressed thy commandments? Art thou not ashamed before me? Recall now the day when God carried thee around to every race and nation, and none was willing to accept thee, until my children came to Mt. Sinai and received thee and honored thee. Shalt thou then testify against them in this day of their anguish?" When the Torah heard this, it stood to one side and refused to bear witness against the children of Israel. Then God called up all the letters of the alphabet, one by one; and one by one Abraham shamed them into unwillingness to accuse Israel of guilt. Then Abraham pleaded with God, reminding the Lord of his own loyalty and obedience to God's will. Likewise did Isaac and Jacob and Moses plead. Finally, even Rachel added her exhortations to those of the others. Then did God's mercy prevail, and He said: "For thy sake, Rachel,⁹⁰ shall I return Israel to their home."

The great King David also took Israel's part: "O Lord of the Universe," he said "why do those who love Thee suffer poverty, while those who should be their servants are rich? Why are those who love Thee in tribulation, while those who should be their servants are at ease? Why must all those who love Thee be in a state of weakness, while those who should⁹¹ be their servants are strong and healthy?"

Nor did Israel itself hesitate to argue with God: "Lord of all worlds, am I deserving of all these afflictions-- I who was the only one, among all the nations, willing to re-

ceive the Torah?" To which God answered: "Nay, rather did I declare all other nations disqualified, out of preference for you." And Israel countered with this rejoinder: "Not so. They it was who refused to receive the Torah. Why didst Thou go to Mt. Seir; was it not to give the Torah to the Sons of Esau, and did they not refuse it? And then to Mt. Paran -- was it not to give the Torah to the Sons of Ishmael, and did they not refuse it? Why didst Thou go to the Ammonites and Moabites? Was it not to give the Torah to the Sons of Lot, and did they not refuse it? How many good things did I do before Thee! I sanctified Thy Name at the Red Sea and sang to Thee a song; I received Thy Torah gladly, whereas the other nations refused it. And in spite of all these praiseworthy deeds,
⁹²
 'I am the man that seeth affliction' (Lam. 3:1)"

Especially forceful are the parables through which Israel expresses its dissatisfaction with God's treatment of her. "Lord of the Universe," Israel is represented as saying, "when a man trains two gladiators in his house, he restrains the stronger one from harming the other, because they are both his property. Thou, however, art not sparing of Thine own people, but thou dost leave them scattered among the
⁹³
 nations of the world."

The situation between God and Israel, say the Rabbis, is comparable to the case of the king who became angry at his queen and wrote her a bill of divorcement and put it into her hand -- and then immediately snatched it from her. Whenever she sought to marry another, the king would say to her: "Where is thy decree of divorce, stating that I have freed thee?"

And whenever she demanded that the king support her, he replied: "I am no longer thy husband." Likewise, whenever Israel sought to worship another deity, God would say to them: "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, wherewith I have put her away?" (Isaiah 50:1) And whenever, on the other hand, Israel would ask Him to perform for them a miracle, He would say to them: "I have already divorced thee;" as it is written: "I have put her away and have given her a bill of divorcement." (Jer. 3:8)⁹⁴

Or, to change the "mashal", it is like a queen who was warned by the king to have nothing to do with her neighbors. Once the king became angered at her and drove her out. She went around to all her neighbors, but none was willing to receive her. Finally she was forced to return to the palace. Said the king to her: "See how thou hast made thyself obnoxious to everyone around thee." To which the queen replied: "Didst thou not order me to keep away from all my neighbors? Had I been permitted to be on friendly terms with them, then surely they would now have been glad to grant me shelter." Similarly, when the Temple was destroyed, the neighboring nations sent out soldiers to capture all the Israelites who had escaped into hiding. Said God to Israel: "See how ye have made yourselves obnoxious in the eyes of all your neighbors!" To which the Israelites rejoined: "Didst Thou not cause this? Didst Thou not command us to refrain from intermarrying with them?" (Deut. 7:3) "If Thou hadst permitted us to mingle with them, would they not now receive us in friendship?"⁹⁵

Even if Israel has been guilty, the Midrash makes bold to say, upon God rests the responsibility both to forgive Israel and to lead them to repentance. Commenting upon Lamentations III:42: "We have transgressed and rebelled; Thou hast not forgiven", the Rabbis say: "When the endive is bitter the fermenting wine turns sour"; which, according to Buber's explanation, means: Israel has done a wrong in having rebelled, and God has done wrong in not having forgiven them.⁹⁶

In another place, Israel is represented as having said to God: "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord" (Lam V:21); to which God's answer was: "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you." (Mal. III:7) "O Lord of the Universe," replied Israel, "does this belong to me? Rather it is Thy responsibility: 'Do Thou restore us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thine indignation toward us to cease.'" (Ps. 85:5)⁹⁷

God's Sorrow Over the Sufferings of Israel

Another aspect of this whole situation appears in the strikingly vivid pictures which the Rabbis draw of God weeping and mourning over the sad fate that has befallen his children. God, it seems, was not altogether a willing agent of destruction; rather He was compelled by irrevocable moral law to visit upon Israel punishment for its unpardonable sins. "See," says God to Israel, "what your sins have forced Me to do! To burn My House; to destroy My city; to send My children into exile among the nations of the world, and to remain dwelling all alone."⁹⁸ "Would that My children were with Me in the land of Israel," says God, "even though they do defile it."⁹⁹

The Midrash compares God to a king who had two sons. The king became angry at one of them and drove him out of the palace, saying: "Woe unto thee in being deprived of the luxury thou wast wont to enjoy!" But when, after being vexed at the second son, he drove him out also, he suddenly realized his own plight, and he exclaimed: "I am the one whose conduct is improper." So it was with God. When He exiled the Ten Tribes He said, "Woe to them because they strayed from Me." (Hosea 7: 13) But when Judah and Benjamin were also exiled, God, as it were, said: "Woe is me for My hurt!" (Jer. 10:19)¹⁰⁰

In fact, God wept like a mortal over the misfortunes which had befallen His people; and weeping, He caused all Nature to weep: the ministering angels, the sun and moon and stars, the earth and the heavens, the mountains and hills; the seventy nations of the world (for whom Israel offered seventy bullocks on Succoth); and, finally, Israel itself.¹⁰¹

As soon as the Temple was burned, God said: "I no longer have a dwelling-place on earth. I shall withdraw My Shechinah, and ascend to My original home." At that moment, God began to weep and lament: "Woe is Me! What have I done? I caused My Shechinah to rest on earth for the sake of Israel, and now that they have sinned, I have returned to My former residence. Heaven forbend that I should become the laughing-stock of the nations and the sport of all earthly creatures!" Thereupon the Metatron came and prostrated himself and said: "Let me weep, O Lord; but do Thou not weep." And God replied: "If thou dost not permit Me to weep here, I shall go to a place where thou art not permitted to enter, and there I shall weep."¹⁰²

God stood, crying, at the scene of the Temple ruins: "Alas for My House! O My sons, where are you? O My priests, where are you?... I warned you, yet you did not mend your ways." Then, the Midrash goes on to relate, God sent the prophet Jeremiah to summon the patriarchs and Moses. When these latter heard about the sad fate that had befallen their nation and its Shrine, they bitterly wept and tore their garments, until, thus wailing and mourning, they arrived at the gates of the Sanctuary. As soon as He saw them, immediately "the Lord, God of Hosts, proclaimed on that day weeping, and mourning, and the shaving of the head, and the putting on of sack-cloth." And -- if it were not expressly stated in Scriptures, it would not be possible to say it -- they went about from gate to gate, weeping like men whose dead lie before them; and the Holy One, Blessed be He, lamented and exclaimed: "Woe to that King Who in His youth was successful, but in His old age did not succeed."¹⁰³

C. The Brighter Aspects of Israel's Dispersion:

The Messianic Hope

Not all of the pictures of Israel's dispersion are as dark as those painted above. When it comes to an evaluation of the exile's significance and of the future destiny of Israel, a far more cheerful note is struck. In the very incidents of the Exile itself, we are told, God showed abundant mercy. If God had sent Israel into captivity during the wintry, rainy season, then they would have found no fruit or grain to eat, and without doubt would have perished because of hunger and

of cold; but, instead, Israel was exiled during the summer season, when the trees and vines were bearing fruit, and the weather was so mild that one could comfortably sleep outdoors.¹⁰⁴

After all, Israel did not go the extreme of rebellion against Justice, and so Justice did not go to the extreme in punishing them.¹⁰⁵ In fact, as soon as Israel went into Exile,¹⁰⁶ God's wrath was appeased. Before the Israelites were dispersed, God called them "Wicked" (Jer. 13:10); but after they had been exiled, He began to praise them, as it says: "But after he has gone his way, then he is praised."¹⁰⁷ (Prov. 20:14) It is in this connection that the Book of Lamentations may be said to have been of more value to Israel than all the forty years of Jeremiah's prophetic activity; for, through this Book, Israel was credited with full payment for all its sins on the day that the Temple was destroyed; as it says: "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion." (Lam.¹⁰⁸ 4:22)

In a certain sense, one may even rejoice over the destruction of the Temple. Consider the heading of Psalm 79: "A song of Asaph: O Lord, Gentiles have entered into Thine inheritance." Why should Asaph sing about such a calamity? Should he not rather weep? Said Rabbi Eliezer: It is comparable to a king who prepared a new home for his son who was about to be married. But after it had been finished and lavishly furnished, the king became angry at his son and destroyed the whole thing. Then the youth's governor began to sing. They said to him: "Thy pupil's new home has been destroyed, and yet ^{dost} thou sing about it!" To which the tutor replied: "I

sing because the king poured out his wrath upon the house, and not upon the person of his son." Similarly, when Asaph was reproached for singing about the demolition of the Temple, his answer was: "I sing because the Lord has poured out His wrath upon wood and stones, and not upon Israel itself."¹⁰⁹

One positive accomplishment of the Exile was to achieve unity and equality within the ranks of the children of Israel. Before the Jews went into captivity, we find that they were divided up into separate groups: the priestly class, the Levites, the plain Israelites. But as soon as they were exiled, they became one, unified flock, as it is stated in Scriptures: "The Lord's flock is (not "are") carried away captive."¹¹⁰ (Jer. 13:17)

Then, too, the sufferings of Israel have given the nation an opportunity to prove its devotion to the Lord -- an opportunity to which Israel has shown itself equal. God has tried Israel sorely; He has brought against them the Babylonians and the Chaldeans, the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks and the Macedonians, the Romans and the Idumeans; but, in spite of all these afflictions, Israel has remained faithful to its God. "Even though enemies 'came upon my neck'", says Israel, "I have continued to assert God's unity twice a day, as I recited the Shema."¹¹¹

This much is certain-- Israel is not a nation easily to succumb to oppression and persecution. Says Israel to God:¹¹² "Thou hast given me strength to endure all tribulations." "Israel," said the Babylonian Rabbis, "is like a wedge for a log." (i.e. the wedge --Israel-- is struck by the hammer; but

it is the log--the hostile nations--that is split.) And the Palestinian Rabbis said: "Israel is like the iron-shod post used as a target for arrows-- the archers keep on shooting at it, but nevertheless it endures."¹¹³

But mere persistence in the face of persecution, admirable though it may be, is hardly a satisfying state of affairs. Amid the deep darkness of trial and tribulation the eyes strain to catch the first rays of light that herald the dawning of a brighter day; and the heart feels sure that this brighter day is bound to come. Strong and unquenchable is the hope of the Rabbis for the coming of the Messianic era; and the wish being father to the thought, they proclaim, in beautiful parables and homilies, their confidence that ultimately there will come the Golden Age in which the steadfastness of Israel will be rewarded.

Right now, the Midrash tells us, the nations of the world taunt Israel as follows: "Your God does not care for you any more. He has departed and has removed His Shechinah from you. Join our group and we shall award you positions of honor among us." But the children of Israel go into their synagogues and their study-rooms, and they read in the Torah: "And I will have respect unto you and make you fruitful... and My Soul shall not abhor you." (Lev. 26:9,11) And, reading this, they are comforted. In the future, when redemption comes, God will say to Israel: "My children, I marvel at your steadfastness, in that ye waited for Me all these years." And they shall answer Him: "O Lord of all worlds, if it had not been for the Torah which Thou gavest us, wherein we could read of Thy

gracious promise, then the nations of the earth might have
lead us astray."¹¹⁴

At the very beginning of the Babylonian Exile, Moses and Jeremiah appeared on earth again to visit the Israelites in their captivity. When the exiles saw Moses, they said to one another: "The son of Amram has risen from his grave to deliver us speedily from our afflictions." Whereupon a Bath Kol issued forth, proclaiming: "Your punishment has been decreed by Me." Said Moses: "I cannot bring about your immediate return, for the decree of punishment has gone forth and must be fulfilled. But God will bring you back soon." And, with that,¹¹⁵ he left them.

Applying to God and Israel the statement in Ezekiel (24:11): "Then will I set it empty upon the coals thereof," Rabbi Elazar remarks: If it had said "broken", then it could never have been fixed; but since it says "empty", then there is hope that in the future it will be refilled. For what reason will it^{be}/refilled? The answer is found in the rest of the verse in Ezekiel: "That the impurity of it may be molten in it, that the filth of it may be consumed."¹¹⁶ Thus, in the figurative language of Ezekiel, does Rabbi Elazar give expression to the hope for a redeemed and purified Israel.

Simeon ben Lakish, who probably would translate Lamentations 5:22 as follows: "Thou canst not have utterly rejected us; Thou art merely exceeding wroth against us", makes the following comments on this verse: "If God had rejected Israel there would be no hope; but since God is only angry at Israel¹¹⁷ then there is hope; for an angry person may be appeased."

The last proem of our Midrash concludes with the following note of consolation: "And in the future, all will be returned to its former state; as it says: 'And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, whereas it had been a desolation in the sight of all that passed by. (Ez. 36:34)'"¹¹⁸

Especially interesting are the optimistic utterances attributed to Rabbi Akiba. In fact, Rabbi Akiba, in one case, is so enthusiastic that he evokes a bitingly sarcastic remark from a colleague: When Rabbi Akiba saw Bar Kochba, he applied to him Numbers 24:17: "There shall step forth a star (kochav-Kochba) out of Jacob," which was tantamount to calling Bar Kochba the Messiah. Said Rabbi Jochanan ben Turta: "Akiba, grass will grow on your cheeks, and still the Messiah will not have come."¹¹⁹

On two other occasions, however, Rabbi Akiba's optimism was much more persuasive: Once Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah and Rabbi Akiba were on their way to Rome, and they heard the noise of the city while they were yet one hundred and twenty miles away. The first three rabbis began to weep, but Akiba laughed. "Why art thou laughing?" they asked. "Why are you crying?" was the rejoinder. "Should we not cry?" they exclaimed, "when we see these idolaters enjoying such ease and security, while at the same time God's Holy Temple lies in ruins, and has become the lair of wild beasts?" To which Rabbi Akiba replied: "It is for this very reason that I laugh. If God deals so kindly with these pagans who vex Him, how much the more shall

He deal kindly with those that do His will!"

Another time these same Rabbis visited Jerusalem. When they arrived at Mt. Scopus, to the north of the city, they rent their garments. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox dash out of the ruins; and they all began to weep--except Rabbi Akiba, who laughed. Then Rabban Gamaliel exclaimed: "Akiba, thou dost act most strangely. We are crying, and thou art laughing!" "Why are ye crying?" asked Akiba. "See how he talks! There has been fulfilled the verse which says, 'Mt. Zion is desolate; foxes walk upon it', and yet he asks why we weep!" "It is for this very reason," answered Akiba, "that I rejoice; for Scripture says: 'I call faithful witnesses to testify, namely, Uriah the priest and Zechariah ben Yivrachyahu,' Now what did Uriah say, and what did Zechariah say? Uriah said: 'Zion shall be ploughed up like a field, and Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the Temple Mount shall be as the high places of a forest.' But Zechariah said: 'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age; and the broad places of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing there.' Said the Holy One Blessed be He: 'I have these two witnesses; if the words of Uriah are fulfilled, then the words of Zechariah will be fulfilled. But if the words of Uriah are vain, so also will be the words of Zechariah.' I rejoice, therefore, that Uriah's words have come to pass; thus, finally, Zechariah's prophecy shall likewise be fulfilled."

Then the Rabbis said to him: "Akiba, thou hast indeed im-
¹²⁰
 measurably consoled us."

II. THE DIGNITY AND THE SUPERIOR WIT OF THE JERUSALEMITES

Introduction

One of the most interesting elements in our Midrash is a group of stories describing the greatness of the city of Jerusalem and the intelligence of her inhabitants. Especially worthy of note in this connection is that series of anecdotes which describes how the Jerusalemites of even inferior education --as for instance, a tailor or a slave-- exceeded the best of the Athenians in wit and readiness of answer. The words of Lamentations I:1: "the populous city, the city great among nations" are vividly interpreted in the Midrash as meaning "great in intelligence", and this interpretation it is which gives an opportunity for introducing the above legends. Commenting on the historical significance of these stories, Rapoport says: "It seems that in the time of the compilers of the Midrash (to Lamentations), the Greeks had lost their pre-eminence in philosophy and in the other branches of knowledge, and they retained only certain witty proverbs... Thus the inhabitants of Athens came to be known as being cunning and tricky; and those who, in later times, recorded events, made use of this trait of the Athenians to demonstrate the
¹²¹
 superior intellect of the Israelites."

The Dignity of the Jerusalemites

Lamentations IV:2 speaks of the "precious sons of Zion." "Wherein," asks the Midrash, "did their dignity manifest itself?" And then a multiplicity of answers is given: When a Jerusalemite married a woman higher in social rank than himself, he would pay more attention to external appearances than he would to the food which they ate... When one of them made a banquet, he would cover the various dishes with a cloth for the sake of those who had feeble health or were of fastidious diet, so that they would not be tempted to eat anything which would harm them... When one of them had been invited to a meal, he would turn up the left sleeve of his garment, so that any one else who had the intention to do so, might be spared the trouble of inviting him at that particular time... Not one of them would ever consent to be a guest at a meal until he knew who were to be his companions at the table; nor would he put his signature to a document until he knew who were to be the others to sign the paper... It was a great custom among the Jerusalemites that, when one of them gave a banquet, he would hang a cloth over the door; all the time that the cloth was left hanging, guests might enter; but when the cloth was removed, no more persons were permitted to come in... Another custom which they followed was that, whenever one of them gave a banquet, he would put a caterer in charge of it; so that, if anything went wrong at the meal, they could punish the caterer according to the rank of the host and of the guests... Finally, never would a Jerusalemite come to a banquet unless invited.

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The Great Wit of the Israelite Children

Rabbi Joshua, while travelling, came to a cross-roads, and, finding a child sitting there, he inquired as to which was the better road to the city. "This road," said the child, "is short and long; and this one is long and short." Rabbi Joshua took the road that was "short and long". When he came near to the wall of the city, he found that there were gardens and parks surrounding the wall, and that it was impossible to enter the city by this route. Retracing his steps, he came back to where the child was sitting, and he said: "My child, didst thou not tell me that this road was short?" "Rabbi," replied the child, "thou who art a great scholar in Israel; did I not say it thus: This road is short, yet long; whereas the other road is long, yet short?" Thereupon, Rabbi Joshua exclaimed: "Happy are ye, O Israel, in that ye are wise, both young and old."

He walked along a little further, and he met a lad who was carrying a kettle with a cover on it. "What art thou carrying there?" asked the Rabbi. And the lad replied: "If my mother wanted thee to know what I am carrying, she would not have told me to cover it."

He entered the city and saw a little girl drawing water from a well. Said he: "Please draw a little water for me." She drew water, not only for him, but also for his beast. "Behold!" exclaimed the Rabbi, "thou hast done exactly as Rebecca did." "Yes," answered the little girl, "I have done as did Rebecca; but thou hast not conducted thyself as did Eliezer (who gave Rebecca costly gifts)."

Whereupon Rabbi Joshua said: "In my whole lifetime no one has ever bested me in a battle of wits except those children..."¹²³

The Jerusalemites and the Athenians

A Jerusalemite once visited an Athenian friend of his. When the time came for the visitor to depart, he left some property with his host, saying: "When my son comes to claim this property, do not give it to him unless he does three wise things." After the Jerusalemite had gone, the Athenians agreed among themselves that they would not point out to any stranger the house where the visitor had stayed. Meanwhile, the son of the Jerusalemite heard about the property, and he came to Athens to claim it. He knew the name of his father's friend, but did not know where he lived. He stood at the gate of the city, until he saw a man approaching, carrying a load of wood. The Jerusalemite purchased the wood and ordered it to be delivered immediately to the home of the man he was seeking; and thus, by following the wood-merchant, he found the place where his father had visited.

The Athenian welcomed the young man, and prepared a dinner for him. In addition to these two, there were seated at the table the man's wife, his two sons, and his two daughters; and there were brought, for the seven of them, five young birds. The host asked the Jerusalemite to apportion the food. He took one bird and set it before the master and mistress of the house; another he placed before the two sons; a third before the two daughters; and the remaining two fowls he reserved for himself. "What sort of apportionment is this?"

asked the host. And the Jerusalemite replied: "Did I not tell thee that the apportioning is for the host to do? But thou has insisted that I should do it; and I have, in fact, done it well: Thou and thy wife and one bird make three; thy two sons/^{and} a bird equal three; thy two daughters and a bird add up to three; and I and two birds make three also!"

That evening the Athenian prepared another feast, at which one chicken was served, and again the guests was requested to apportion the food. The head he placed before the host; the entrails before the wife; the two thighs before the sons; the two wings before the two daughters; and the breast and the remaining parts he kept for himself. "How hast thou divided?" asked the host. "Did I not tell thee that it was thy duty to do it?" replied the young man. "But thou didst insist; and I have, in fact, apportioned the food properly: I gave thee the head, because thou art the head of the house; and the entrails to thy wife, because these children came from her; the thighs to thy sons, because they are the pillars of thy house; the wings to thy daughters, because soon they shall be married and fly away; and I took the breastbone (אֶפְרוֹחַ) because soon I shall travel home by ship (אֶפְרוֹחַ). Come, give me my father's property, and I shall take my leave." So ¹²⁴ he arose and gave him his property, and he departed.

Four Jerusalemites once were guests at an inn in Athens. After they had gone up to bed, the inn-keeper said to himself: "I have heard that the Jerusalemites are very wise; I shall go up and listen in on their conversation." During

the night, one of them, who was sleeping on a broken bed, awoke and said: "I prefer to lie on a floor/^{rather} than on such a couch!" Then the second awoke and said: "Art thou surprised at this? The meat we were served this evening tasted to me like the flesh of a dog!" Then the third one awoke and said: "Are you surprised at that? The wine we were given to drink tasted as though it came from a grave!" The fourth one awoke and said: "And, what is more, the inn-keeper himself is not the son of the man whom he calls his father!" Hearing these remarks, the Athenian said to himself: "The first one was right, but the other three are liars."

The next morning he went to his butcher to inquire about the meat; and, in reply to his questioning, the butcher confessed: "I had one lamb whose mother died; and I had a dog suckle the lamb. Yesterday I was out of meat; but, since you insisted that you must have some, I slaughtered this particular lamb and sold it to you." Then the Athenian went to the wine-dealer, and learned that the latter had run short of wine the day before, and that, when the inn-keeper had insisted that he must have some, the dealer had given him wine, the grapes for which had come from a vine that grew in the cemetery. Hastily then the inn-keeper sought his mother and importuned her to tell him who his father was; and she confessed to him that he was an illegitimate child. Whereupon the Athenian exclaimed: "Who do those Jerusalemites think they are? They come among us and make bastards of us!" And the Athenians agreed among themselves that ¹²⁵no longer would they offer hospitality to the men of Jerusalem.

Some days after the above incident a Jerusalemite visited Athens, and no one was willing to receive him. He went to an inn, and after he had eaten his meal, he requested lodging for the night. "We have agreed among ourselves," said the inn-keeper, "not to grant shelter to any Jerusalemite unless he is able to take three long jumps." "I don't know your method of jumping," replied the Jerusalemite; "but do thou jump first, and I'll follow thee." The first jump took the Athenian to the middle of the room; the second took him to the door of the inn; and the third took him all the way out. Quickly the Jerusalemite shut the door in his face. Cried the inn-keeper: "What does this mean?" And the answer was: "That which thou didst think to do to me, I have done to thee."¹²⁶

An Athenian was on a visit to Jerusalem. Meeting a child on the street, he gave the lad some coins and said to him: "Go, buy me some cheese and eggs." When the child returned with the products, the Athenian asked: "Tell me, are these eggs from a white hen or a black hen?" Quickly the child retorted: "Tell me, does this cheese come from white goats or black goats?"¹²⁷

An Athenian came to Jerusalem. Meeting a child, he gave him some coins, saying: "Go, buy me some figs." When the child returned, the Athenian said: "Thanks." Said the child: "Must I run errands for thee for nothing? We each shared in procuring those figs; thou didst contribute thy money, I

worked with my legs." "I leave it up to thee," replied the Athenian, "to divide the figs between us." There were two fig-cakes there, one good and one bad; the child took the bad one for himself, and gave the good one to the visitor. Thereupon the Athenian exclaimed: "Well has it been said that the Jerusalemites are very wise. Since he realized that I provided the money, he gave the best figs to me." But the child had not yet finished. "Let us cast lots," he said. "The one who wins gets the figs that the other one has." They did so,¹²⁸ and the child came out the winner. (See my note on this.)

An Athenian came to Jerusalem and, meeting a child there, he said to him: "Take this money and buy me therewith something that I may eat and be satisfied, and yet have enough left over to take with me on a journey." The child left, and soon he returned with a package of salt. "Here," he said, "is something that thou mayest eat to thy full satisfaction and¹²⁹ yet have enough left over to take with thee on thy trip."

(See insert, page 49B)

An Athenian, on a visit to Jerusalem, happened to come in to a school-house while the teacher was away. He plied the pupils with questions, and they answered. Finally, they said: "Why should we work for nothing? Let us make an agreement that anyone who is asked a question which he cannot answer will have to hand over his garments." They offered the Athenian the privilege of asking first, but he said: "You ask first." Said they: "What does the following refer to: Nine

An Athenian was on a visit to Jerusalem. Finding a broken mortar there, he took it to a tailor, and said: "Here, sew this mortar together for me." Grasping a handful of sand, the tailor held it out to the Athenian, and said: "Twist this¹³⁰ into thread for me, and I'll sew up the mortar with it."

go out, eight enter, twenty-four serve, two give drink, one drinks?" He could not answer this, and so they took his garments. The Athenian went to Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai and complained to him. Rabbi Jochanan told him the answer to the riddle: "Go, tell the pupils: The nine that go out are the nine months of pregnancy; the eight that enter are the days before circumcision; the twenty-four that serve are the twenty-four months during which the mother nurses the baby; the two that give drink are the two breasts; and the one that drinks is the infant." The Athenian went and told the answer to the school-children. They returned the garments to him, saying: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." (cf. Judges 14:18)¹³¹

An Athenian came to Jerusalem, seeking to acquire wisdom. He stayed for three and a half years, but he didn't learn anything. When he was ready to leave, he bought a slave who was blind in one eye; but the man who sold him the slave said: "You may rest assured that this slave is exceedingly wise, and that he can see far." The two of them had not gone far outside the city when the slave remarked: "Let us hurry and overtake the party that is ahead of us." "What sort of group is it?" asked the Athenian; and the slave replied: "There is one camel, blind in one eye, pregnant with two young, loaded with two jars-- a jar of wine on one side and a jar of vinegar on the other; the camel-driver is a gentile; and they are four miles ahead of us." "How dost thou know that the camel is blind in one eye?" "From the grass on

the sides of the road; the camel is grazing only on one side and not on the other." "How dost thou know that she is about to bear two young?" "I can see from the imprint which she makes when she lies down." "How dost thou know that she carries a jar of wine on one side, and a jar of vinegar on the other?" "From the drops that have fallen to the ground; the wine-drops are absorbed, but the vinegar-drops bubble." "How dost thou know that the camel-driver is a gentile?" "Because a gentile urinates in the middle of the road, whereas a Jew would not do this." "How dost ^{thou} know that they are four miles ahead of us?" "From the hoof-prints: a camel's hoof-prints may be recognized for a distance of four miles, but no farther." ¹³²

One of the Athenians used to deride the Jerusalemites. "Who will bring that man here to Jerusalem?" they asked. "I shall," said one among them, "and when he comes here, his head will be shaven." So he went to Athens and managed to stay at the home of this particular Athenian. While they were taking a walk the next morning, the Jerusalemite tore one of his sandals. Giving the Athenian a generous sum of money, he said: "Take this money and have the sandal repaired for me." Said the Athenian: "These sandals must command a high price in Jerusalem, since thou art willing to spend so much to fix them." "They sell for nine or ten dinars," replied the Jerusalemite, "depending on the condition of the market." "If I bring a stock of such sandals to Jerusalem, will I find purchasers?" "Yes," was the answer, "but do not enter into the precincts

of the city without first sending for me."

When, some time later, the Athenian arrived at the gate of Jerusalem, he sent for his friend, the Jerusalemite, who came out to greet him, and said: "What shall we do now?" They have just passed an ordinance here that no foreigner may come in to sell his wares unless his head is shaven." "What matters it to me?" replied the Athenian. "I'll shave my head, and then I'll be able to sell my goods." So he shaved his head; and then, entering the city, he stationed himself in the market-place with his stock of sandals on display. A customer came up to inquire about the price of a pair of sandals, and, when the Athenian asked for ten dinars, the customer became so angry at this exorbitant demand that he hit the Athenian in the head with the sandals which he had picked up to inspect. Thus it happened with one customer after another, until the Athenian's head was wounded and bleeding. When, finally, the instigator of all this came up to him, the Athenian cried out in anguish: "All these misfortunes I owe to thee!" And the answer was: "Let this teach thee not to deride the Jerusalemites any more."¹³³

III. MISCELLANEOUS

The Romans Mock the Jews

The Romans -- at least as our Midrash presents them in the following passage-- were masters of anti-Jewish sarcasm. They feast and drink to the point of intoxication, we are told, and then they sit in their circuses and make sport

of the children of Israel, saying: "We're glad we don't have
¹³⁴
to eat carobs like the Jews." Then they ask one another:

"How many years would you like to live?" And the answer is
¹³⁵
given: "As long as a Jewish Sabbath-garment lasts." Then

¹³⁶
they bring into their theatre a camel with the covers on him,
and ask one another: "Why is this camel in mourning?" And the
answer is given: "Those Jews are observing the Sabbatical
year, and, since they have no fresh vegetables for their
table, they eat the fodder of this animal; this it is which
causes the camel to mourn."

Then they bring into their theatre a jester, whose
head is shaven, and they ask: "Why is his head shaven?" And
he answers: "Those Jews observe the Sabbath; and they consume
on this day all which they have earned during the week; then,
running short of firewood, they break up their beds and use
the lumber. As a consequence of this, they have to sleep on
the ground, where they get all covered with dust. Then, they
have to anoint their heads with oil to cleanse them, which,
¹³⁷
in turn, causes the price of oil to rise."

Domestic, Communal, and Religious Customs

Our Midrash quotes the Mishnah concerning the observ-
ance of Tischa b'Ab. One should not eat meat on the eve of
the day, nor should he drink wine, nor should he cook two
different kinds of foods. When Rav used to eat his repast on
the eve of Tischa b'Ab, he would take a piece of bread and
dip it in ashes, to fulfill the verse which says: "He hath made
¹³⁸
me to wallow in ashes."

One very interesting passage in our Midrash tells us of the troubles which the communal dispensers of charity had with a refractory female client, and of the evil fate which befell this woman as a punishment for her ingratitude: It happened in the case of Miriam, the daughter of Nakdimon, that the Rabbis allotted to her 500 dinars of gold every day for the purchase of spices alone! But she arose and cursed them, saying: "May your own daughters be forced to accept such an allotment!" Said Rabbi Acha: "To that we say 'Amen'." Said Rabbi Elazar ben Zaddok: "As I live, I saw her gathering up grain from under the horses' hoofs in Acco."¹³⁹

A fine example of Jewish hospitality is offered by our Midrash in the following narrative: Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba went to Lydda and was the guest there of Joshua ben Levi. They brought before Rabbi Hiyya twenty-four different kinds of food. Said Rabbi Hiyya: "You shouldn't have gone to all this extra trouble for me." "This is our usual meal," answered Rabbi Joshua. "If you eat so lavishly on week-days," exclaimed Rabbi Hiyya, "then what do you do on Sabbath?" "On Sabbath," came the answer, "we eat twice as lavishly."

Some time later, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi came to Tiberias and was the guest of Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba. Calling over the pupils of Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Hiyya gave them a large sum of money, and said to them: "Buy the necessary provisions, and prepare food for your master in the lavish manner to which he is accustomed."¹⁴⁰

An enviable record for fecundity, according to our Midrash, was that of the ancient Jerusalemites: A Jerusalemite would marry off his son, at twelve years of age, to a woman capable of bearing children; and, before a year was up, she would already have given birth. Similarly, this married son would marry off his sons at a very early age; so that each Jerusalemite would become a grandfather before he was¹⁴¹ twenty-six years of age!

Superstitious Beliefs and Practices

Our first example of superstitious beliefs -- regarding the effectiveness of a curse and of incantations -- has in it the added complication of anti-Christian feeling: Rabbi¹⁴² Jeremiah Shivshave plaited a crown of olive branches and put it on his head (in honor of a bridal couple). When Rabbi Sh'muel heard of this, he exclaimed: "Better were it that his head should have been knocked off, than that he should¹⁴³ have done this thing. And this curse actually took effect-- his ominous words, though not meant as such, came true.

The grandson of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi had a choking fit. Someone came and whispered an incantation over the lad in the name of Jesus ben Pandera, and the child recovered. When Rabbi Joshua ben Levi heard of this, he exclaimed: "Would that we had buried the child, rather than to have such a statement uttered over him." And these ominous words, though¹⁴⁴ not meant as such, actually came true.

A picture, as gruesome as it is interesting, is pre-

sented by our Midrash of the human sacrifices which were supposed to have been offered to Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom: There was a large idol there, contained in the innermost room of a seven-room structure; at its feet there was a copper stove, and a copper box was in its hands. When a person wished to offer up an animal, he was permitted to enter one of the first six rooms; the more valuable the animal, the farther in he was allowed to advance. But only if he brought a human sacrifice was he admitted into the seventh and innermost room. The attendant priest would receive the human that was to be sacrificed, and would place him in the copper box, and would kindle the fire underneath. Then they would all cry aloud: "May the sacrifice be sweet unto thee, Moloch; may it be pleasing in thy sight." Why all this shouting? So that the parents might not hear the shrieking of their children and
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take them back.

A strange demon is the one mentioned in our Midrash -- Ketev M'riri (poisonous pestilence) -- for he is not a denizen of the darkness, but like the pestilence (Ketev) mentioned in Psalms, he stalks about at noon-day! The period when he exerts his influence is during the "days of trouble", from the seventeenth day of Tammuz until the ninth of Ab. He walks neither in the shade nor in the sun, but in that which is between the two. He is covered all over with eyes, scales, and hair, having one eye placed right over his heart. And whoever even catches a glimpse of him, falls down dead on the spot. It act-

ually happened that a certain Chasid saw this demon, and he fell dead on the spot. Others, however, maintain that he did not die immediately; but they do admit that he died soon after, as a result of this experience.

When Rabbi Abbahu was teaching in Caesarea, he once saw a man running after another person with a switch; and that demon was running right behind the second man with an iron rod in its hand. Rabbi Abbahu rose and caught hold of the man who was doing the chasing; and said to him: "Thy wouldst thou slay thy companion?" "Thinkest thou I intend to kill him with this small switch?" replied the man. "Yes," said the Rabbi; "but dost thou not realize that that demon is right behind thee, carrying a rod of iron? The moment thou wilt strike him with the switch, the demon will smite him with the rod and he will die."

Rabbi Jochanan gave orders to the school-teachers that, during the "days of trouble", they should not use a strap on the children. Rabbi Shemuel bar Yitzhok gave orders to the teachers that, during these days, they should dismiss the children before the fourth hour (the time when the Ketev M'riri makes its appearance).¹⁴⁶

Great was the reputation of Rabbi Ishmael bar Rabbi Jose as an interpreter of dreams. When he heard, one day,¹⁴⁷ that a Samaritan was falsely claiming to have oneirocritical powers, he decided to listen in, and to find out the true situation.

A man came in to the Samaritan and said: "In my dream

I saw an olive tree exuding oil." "The olive tree," said the Samaritan, "means light; and so does the oil. They are both very good omens." Whereupon Rabbi Ishmael exclaimed: "Curses on that Samaritan! What the dream really means is that the man has had intercourse with his own mother."

Another person came in: "In my dream I saw one eye swallow the other." Said the Samaritan: "Each eye represents light; they are both very good omens." Whereupon Rabbi Ishmael exclaimed: "Curses on that Samaritan! The dream means that this man's son and daughter are having incestuous relations with one another."

Another man came to him: "In my dream I had four ears." Said the Samaritan: "The whole world shall hearken to thy words." "Curses on that Samaritan," exclaimed Rabbi Ishmael. "The dream means that the man is full of wine; two ears are his own, and the other two represent the ears of the wine-pitcher."

Another person came: "In my dream I saw all the people rise in my presence." "Thou art destined to attain great fame," said the Samaritan. "Curses on that Samaritan," exclaimed Rabbi Ishmael. "The dream means that when this man, who is a rubbish-collector, is carrying a load, all the people get up to make way for him."

Another man came in: "In my dream I swallowed a star." "That," said the Samaritan, "is a very good omen." Exclaimed Rabbi Ishmael: "Curses on that Samaritan! This man has killed a Jew!"

Another person came in: "In my dream I had a notebook with twenty-four pages, and I was busy writing in it, and erasing." "Thou wilt become great," said the Samaritan; "and thou wilt have much business to transact, and much writing and erasing to do." Whereupon Rabbi Ishmael exclaimed: "Curses on that Samaritan! The dream means that this man has only one, threadbare garment, with twenty-four patches in it; and he no sooner sews it up in one place than it becomes torn in another place."

Another person came: "In my dream all the people were looking at me." "Thou art destined to become great," said the Samaritan, "and all eyes will center on thee." As the man was leaving, Rabbi Ishmael addressed him: "If thou wilt pay me, I'll interpret thy dream properly." But the man refused. A little later the man came back again: "I dreamt that all the people were blowing at me with puffed-up cheeks." "Thou wilt become great," said the Samaritan; "and all people shall utter thy praises." Again Rabbi Ishmael offered to interpret the dream correctly, and again the man refused. A little later, he returned for the third time: "In my dream I saw all the people pointing at me." "Thou wilt become great," said the Samaritan; "and every one shall point to thee with pride." "Curses on that Samaritan!" exclaimed Rabbi Ishmael. "This man has a great store of wheat. When, in his dream, he saw all eyes directed toward him, it meant that water was dripping into his wheat. When he saw people blowing at him with puffed-up cheeks, it meant that the wheat was

becoming swollen on account of these rain-drippings. When he saw all the people pointing toward him, it meant that now the wheat has sprouted in the store-house (and is ruined), and he will derive no benefit therefrom." The man went to inquire about his wheat, and he found that Rabbi Ishmael¹⁴⁸ was right.

A Samaritan wished to vex Rabbi Ishmael, son of Rabbi Jose, so he sent to him and said: "I saw in my dream four sycamores, four cedars, a hide stuffed with straw, an ox standing upon it, and a man sitting astride the ox." Said Rabbi Ishmael: "The four sycamores are the four legs of a bed; the four cedars are the four bed-posts; the hide stuffed with straw is the matting on the bed; the ox standing upon it is the bed-spread (made of hide); and as for the man sitting astride the ox -- that man will go to bed and never get up from there alive." And that is what actually happened¹⁴⁹ to that Samaritan.

In general, The Rabbis were opposed to superstitious dream-interpretations, as is clearly evidence by their statement -- quoted in our Midrash, and attributed to Rabbi Jochanan -- that "a dream comes to pass according to the way¹⁵⁰ it is interpreted." And we have incidents reported in our Midrash designed to illustrate this principle:

A woman came to see Rabbi Eliezer, but he was away. When his pupils asked her what she wanted, she told them of a dream she had had: "I saw that the main beam of my house

was broken." "This," they said, "refers to the imminent death of thy husband." The women began to wail and lament. Rabbi Eliezer, who was just then returning, inquired as to the cause of all the commotion. When he had heard the whole story, he cried out to his pupils: "Alas, ye have killed a man! Is it not written: 'And as he interpreted to him, so it came to pass'¹⁵¹?"

One of Akiba's pupils was very sad; and, try as he might, Akiba could not cheer him up. Then the pupil confessed that he was worried about a bad dream which he had: "Nisan I shall not see, for in Adar I shall die; and I shall sow, but never reap." "These three things," replied Akiba, "are good omens, and not bad. It is not Nisan, but 'Nisayon' (a miracle) which thou wilt never see. Thou wilt not die in Adar, but through the glory of the Law shalt thou be exalted. (בהרוא דאורייתא את מיית is changed to באדר את מת) And as for sowing and not reaping, it merely means that thou wilt beget children, but will not bury them in thine own lifetime."¹⁵²

Biblical Criticism

From the standpoint of Biblical criticism, we have in our Midrash an important and rather daring statement. The question is propounded: "How far did the prophecy of Jeremiah extend?" Two answers are given: (1) to chapter 31, verse 9;¹⁵³ (2) to chapter 31, verse 16. In view of the fact that some modern Biblical scholars maintain that there are no original Jeremianic utterances in the chapters subsequent to 31, the

statement in our Midrash takes an added significance.

Proverbs

We have thought it worthwhile to collect various proverbial sayings found scattered throughout our Midrash; and, though these maxims are not numerous, they are both interesting and instructive. Not all of them are moral in nature; some of them are merely reflections on human psychology or on sociological conditions.

Our first proverb, which is non-moral in nature, is presented to us in two versions, each of which carries its point without need of explanation. The Babylonian Rabbis used to say: "When the bride is famished, she recalls the seven days of the wedding feast." And the Palestinian Rabbis used to express the same thought as follows: "When a man has great affliction, he remembers the well-being he enjoyed in his father's house."¹⁵⁴

The next proverb may best be understood in its context. Israel is speaking to God: "Lord of all worlds, I know that Thou wilt in the future repay the nations of the earth for all which they have done to me, but what shall I do meanwhile; for 'my soul is bowed down within me'?" And it is in this connection that the following proverb is quoted: "Before the fat one becomes lean, the thin one may expire."¹⁵⁵ Clearly, this saying is not limited, in its scope, to its immediate context, but applies wherever there exists a condition of oppressor and oppressed, or exploiter and exploited.

Equally realistic and equally appropriate to general social and economic conditions, past and present, is the following: "When it is well with my master, I do not benefit; but when things go ill with him, woe is unto me!"¹⁵⁶

Our next proverb seems to derive its chief attractiveness from the play on words which is involved: "The heart knows whether a thing is done for a legitimate purpose (לֵב) or out of perverseness (לֵב לֵב)."¹⁵⁷

The following maxim, which we have previously quoted for other reasons, we present here because of its applicability to human character in general: "When the endive is bitter, the fermenting wine turns sour,"¹⁵⁸ which means, namely, that sin begets sin.

The thought that, in critical moments, man's sins come home to him, is presented to us in a proverb of which two versions are given. The Babylonian used to say: "When the ox is thrown down, they sharpen the knife." And the Palestinian Rabbis expressed the same truth thus: "When the ox is thrown down, the butchers are numerous."¹⁵⁹

Moral Lessons

The title for this, our final section, requires some explanation. We realize, of course, that the amount of homiletic material in our Midrash is vast, depending to a great extent on the ingenuity of him who would use it. But what we would do here is to present those passages which, without need of further comment or elaboration, present their own moral

lesson or exhortation.

Our first selection is a funeral sermon which, because of the exceptionally pathetic circumstances under which it was delivered, is unusually effective. Rabbi Chananiah, our Midrash tells us, had a son who consorted with robbers. Once this young man betrayed one of their secrets, and so they slew him. Out of respect for Rabbi Chananiah, the people were willing to recite a dirge over the worthless son; but Rabbi Chananiah would not permit them to. Said he: "I myself shall deliver the funeral address for my son, as follows: (Proverbs 5:11-14) 'Lest thou moan, when thine end cometh, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say: How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; neither have I hearkened to the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to them that instructed me! I was well-nigh in all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly.'" And his mother recited over him: "A foolish son is ^a vexation to his father, ¹⁶⁰ and bitterness to her that bore him."

The rest of our selections concern the value of studying the Torah, and of educating children therein:

Rabbi Chuna said: "Learn Torah even though not for its own sake; for though you start out studying it not for its own sake, you will soon come to be studying it for its own ¹⁶¹ sake alone."

In another passage, God is represented as saying about Israel: "Would that, even though they have forsaken Me, they would observe My Torah. For on account of their being occupied with it, the leaven that is therein would cause them to

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return to the good life."

In the following midrash, it is from the mouths of gentiles that we learn a vital lesson regarding our survival as a people: Among the nations of the world there were no greater philosophers than Balaam and Oenemans of Gedarah. When the nations asked them: "Can we vanquish Israel?" Balaam and Oenemans replied: "Go about among their synagogas and schools; as long as you hear the voices of their children chirping in their schools, then will you not be able to overcome them; when the children's voices are silent, then you will prevail."
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Finally, we have this justly famous narrative: Rabbi Jehudah ha Nasi sent Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi to inspect the cities of Palestine. Upon entering each municipality, the two rabbis would ask to be shown the guardians of the town; whereupon the officers of the military guard would be presented to them. "Do you call these the guardians of the city?" Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi would exclaim. "These are the destroyers of the city. The real guardians of the city are the teachers of the Written and the Oral Law, who meditate upon and teach and observe the Torah day and night, as it says: "Ex-
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cept the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."
And we can think of no finer lesson with which to conclude our analysis of the contents of Midrash Echa Rabbah.

CONCLUSION

For our closing remarks, we take a text from another Midrash: "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 last to make an attempt. Accordingly, he gradually cut away the trees and formed a road, by means of which he could penetrate into the heart of the forest without fear of going astray. The great difficulty was now removed, and every one was now able to make his way through those woods."

Our present Midrash constitutes such a forest in a double sense; first, because of the maze of problems which surrounds the question of its composition; and secondly, because of the seeming disorder of its contents. As regards the composition of the work, the path through the woods was constructed by far more capable hands than our own, and our concern was merely to organize and evaluate the separate efforts which the individual scholars contributed to the task of road-building. When it comes, however, to a consideration of the contents of our Midrash, we can claim a more definite personal contribution. Because the Rabbis, as they wove the threads of their own ideals and aspirations into the texture of the Bible, followed the pattern of the Scriptural verses, and not some preconceived topical arrangement, the innate unity and coherency of their thought -- even as presented within the scope of one Midrashic book -- is often lost sight of. If, therefore, we have succeeded in showing that, be-

neath the seeming diversity in our Midrash, there is an underlying unity of ideas; that the seeming incoherence gives way, upon analysis, to a commendable coherence; and that, while there is ample latitude for difference of opinion, there is at the same time a praiseworthy consistency in their thinking -- if, in some measure, we have demonstrated these facts with regard to Echah Rabbah, then our work shall have been well rewarded.

NOTES TO PART ONE

1. This custom was extended to include also the eve of Tischa b'Ab.
2. See Winter and Wunsche, I:543; Weiss, III:262; Jew. Encyc., V:85.
3. It is usually called Midrash Echah, after the initial word of Lamentations; but it is also referred to as Aggadath Echah by Hananel, as Megillath Echah in the Aruch, as Echah Rabbati by Rashi and in the Yalkut, and also as Midrash Kinoth and Megillath Kinoth. Among all these, the title of special interest is "Rabbati." Zunz tells us that this name was understood to apply only to the first chapter, and that it was taken from the first verse of Lamentations itself (רַבָּתִי עִם). Later, he adds, it was applied to the entire Midrash Echah. Buber and Weiss disagree with this, claiming that it was called "Rabbati" to distinguish it from another Midrash to Echah, smaller than our present one -- perhaps the Midrash Echah Zuta. On this whole subject of names, see Buber, Introduction, p.3, note 1; Weiss III:262; Jew. Encyc., V:86,87; Strack, pp. 217, 218, 339; Zunz, 2nd ed., pp. 189-191.
4. The possibility of composite authorship will be discussed later.
5. The actual number of the Pesichtoth is a moot point. Zunz counted 33 (2nd ed., p.190). Buber divided proems 2,24,31 each into two separate proems, making 36 (Intro., p.4) Abrahams (pp.50,51) would divide also proems 9 and 25, making 38. But Strack and Theodor agree with Buber that the proper number is 36; and, in this connection, it is interesting to note that 36 is the numerical value of אֵיכָה.
6. With but a few exceptions all of the proems end with the formula אֵיכָה or אֵיכָה יְשׁוּעָה בָּרַךְ. Weiss points out that the three proems which -- according to his division of them -- do not end with "Echah", are not really introductions to Lamentations, "but are complete homilies, and they end on a note of consolation." (Weiss, III:262). See proem 24, for an example.
7. On the matter of proems in general, and those of Echah Rabbah in particular, see: Jew. Encyc., VIII:552-3; Wunsche, Intro., p.vi.; Zunz, 2nd ed., p.190.
8. Jew. Encyc., V:86.

9. Wunsche tells us (Introduction to German Translation, p.xi):
"These Latin expressions were familiar to the people because of the (Roman) Legions stationed in the provinces."
See Midr. on Lam. I:5, p.67, where there occurs an entire Latin phrase -- "Vive domine imperator!"
10. For specific examples, see Jew. Encyc., V:86.
11. See on Lam. I:1, p.41; on I:1, p.56; on I:4, p.66.
12. Abrahams, pp.5,6,59; Jew. Encyc., V:85-6; Buber, Introd. pp.11,13.
13. Zunz, 2nd ed., p.206; cf. also Wunsche, Introd., p. x; par.3.
14. Buber, Introd., pp.13,14.
15. Abrahams: pp.47-59.
16. Jew. Encyc., V:85.
17. Zunz, 2nd ed., p.190.
18. p. 253, art. שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂר
19. ה'רש"ל, pp.53 a,b.
20. Abrahams, pp.5,6.
21. Introd., pp.11-13; footnote, p.11.
22. III:263; also footnote 18.
23. Jew. Encyc. V:85.
24. p.341, par.1, note 2.
25. Erach Millin, p.253.
26. Introduction, p. ix.
27. Buber's Introd., pp.15-19; footnote p.15.
28. Zunz, Buber, Winter and Wunsche, and Theodor all agree that the Midrash is of Palestinian origin. Since they don't discuss the theory of a second recension, they do not, of course, envision the possibility of a Babylonian compiler in addition to the Palestinian redactor. See Zunz, 2nd ed., p.191; Buber's Introd., p.10, par.3; Winter and Wunsche, p.544; Jew. Encyc., V:86.
29. Abrahams, pp.41,42.

30. Buber's Introd., p.4, par.3.
31. Jew. Encyc., V:85,86.
32. Strack, p.219.
33. Theodor, Monatsschrift, 1880, p.185; Maybaum, I:42.
34. See Buber, p.122, where the Midrash has retained the introductory proem formula: רַבִּי חֲנִינִיּוֹס בֵּרַךְ עַמָּא פְּתַח; p.127: רַבִּי אֲמַרְהוּ פְּתַח; and the other passages referred to by Theodor, Jew. Encyc., V:86.
35. Zunz, 2nd ed., pp.189,190,191.
36. Buber, Introd., p.10, par.2; Weiss, III:263.
37. Winter and Wunsche, p.544. Theodor aptly remarks that, without the many stories and legends in the first chapter, the differences in the size of the several chapters would have been less apparent: Jew. Encyc. V:86.
38. Zunz, 2nd ed., pp.189,190.
39. Weiss, III:263. It might be added that such argumentum e silencio is far from convincing.
40. Buber, Introd., pp.9,10.
41. Buber, p.77, bottom.
42. Jew. Encyc., V:86; Strack, p.219.
43. Abrahams, pp.5,6. Alexander Marx, in speaking of Buber's critical edition, says that the mss. herein used represent an Italo-Palestinian recension, while that of the earlier (printed) editions (see my bibliography, under Buber) is Spanish-Babylonian. -- Quoted by Strack, note 4, p.341.

NOTES TO PART TWO

(Pages cited are from Buber's critical edition; the chapter and verse citations refer to the particular place in Lamentations on which the Midrash is commenting.)

44. p.61 -- I:2 .
45. Note the anachronism here.
46. Proem 23, p.19 .
47. Proem 30, p.32 .
48. Proem 34, p.37 .
49. The Midrash goes on to tell how Nebuzardan was then stricken with remorse over the murder of so many people. Forthwith he sent home a document concerning the disposal of his property, and then he became converted to Judaism. Proem 23, pp.20-22. Also Proem 5, p.6; IV:13, p.149.
50. II:10, p.115 .
51. I:2, p.61 .
52. II:2, p.108 .
53. Proem 9, p.8 .
54. I:10, p.74 .
55. II:7, p.113 .
56. I:2, p.58 .
57. Proem 23, p.22 .
58. Proem 24, p.26 .
59. Proem 24, pp.27,28 .
60. Proem 24, p.27 .
61. I:5, p.65,66 .
62. IV:9, p.147 .
63. II:20, p.121 .
64. I:5, p.66-69 .

65. Proem 12, pp.11,12; II:2, p.100.
66. I:16, p. 82.
67. I:16, p.83; IV:19, p.152.
68. III:58, pp.138,139.
69. II:2, pp.101-4; III:51, p.138.
70. I:16, p.182.
71. II:17, p.120.
72. Proem 2, p.3.
73. I:13, p.76.
74. I:1, p.56, 57.
75. IV:2, pp.142-3.
76. II:2, p.106.
77. IV: 15, p.151.
78. II:2, p.101.
79. I:20, p.92,93.
80. Proem 14, p.12.
81. II:2, p.103.
82. I:1, p.41.
83. IV:15, p.152.
84. II:1, p.97.
85. Proem 22, p.17.
86. Proem 10, p.9.
87. I:18, p.91.
88. II:1, p.96, 97.
89. I:2, p.59.
90. Proem 24, p.27,28.
91. II:3, p.111.

92. III:1, pp.122, 123; see also Buber's footnote.
93. V:1, p.154.
94. I:1, p.46.
95. I:21, pp.93, 94.
96. III:42, p.137. See Buber's footnote.
97. V:21, p.160.
98. Proem 10, p.9. Cf. also Proem 20, p.15.
99. III:20, p.131.
100. Proem 2 (2) p.4.
101. I:2, pp.59,60.
102. Proem 24, p.25.
103. Proem 24, pp. 25,26.
104. I:14, p.77.
105. I:1, p.45.
106. II:6, p.112.
107. Proem 31 (1), p.33. I have translated the Proverbs
verse as I think the Midrash would translate it in order
to carry out the thought intended here.
108. IV:22, p.154.
109. IV:11, p.148.
110. Proem 25, p.30.
111. I:14, p.78.
112. III:1, p.124; III:12, p.127.
113. III:12, p.127.
114. III:21, p.132.
115. Proem 24, p.27.
116. Proem 5, p.6.
117. I:2, p.59, 60; V:22, p.161.

118. Proem 34, p.40.
119. II:2, p.101.
120. V:18, pp.159, 160.
121. Erech Millin, p.253; see also Buber, p.46, note 72.
122. IV:2, p.141-2.
123. I:1, pp.55,56.
124. I:1, pp.46,47.
125. I:1, pp.47,48.
126. I:1, p.48.
127. I:1, p.49.
128. I:1, p.49. Buber's text for this story is not so good. I referred, in addition, to the regular, uncritical text, and have given here a combination of the best readings of both. It will be noted that the main point of this story is expressed only by implication. So, at least, it seems to me. The child's great shrewdness consists of this: If he had chosen the best for himself, the Athenian would probably have taken everything from him. But, by taking the bad figs first, he gained the man's good-will. Then, when they drew lots, the child was placed in the favorable position of betting something bad against something that was worth much more; he had very little to lose, and a lot to gain.
129. I:1, p.49.
130. *ibid.*
131. I:1, pp.48, 49.
132. I:1, pp.49, 50.
133. I:1, pp.50,51.
134. Carobs were a sign of poverty. Cf. Jastrow on the words קרובים
135. Buber, in his footnote, tells us that, since the Sabbath-garment was worn only one day a week, it would last for many years. Jastrow adds that it was transmitted from father to son.

136. Since they wore sack-cloth covers, they looked like mourners. -- Buber's footnote.
137. Since oil is too dear for this jester to buy, and since, without oil, there is danger that his hair may become infested with vermin, he has decided to shave it off altogether. -- Buber's note.
Proem 17, p.14; also III:14, pp.127, 128.
138. III:16, p.129.
139. I:16, pp.86, 87.
140. III:17, p.131.
141. I:1, p.44.
142. The name שֶׁבַע means: "one who plaits branches."
143. The Rabbi, we may assume, objected to the crown of branches because it smacked too much of the Jesus story.
144. V:16, p.158, 159.
145. I:9, p.72.
146. I:3, pp.63, 64.
147. The word used here is כֹּהֵן; but, perhaps originally there stood here the word לֵוִי (or לִוְיָרִי), and it was probably deleted by the censor.
148. I:1, pp.51-53.
149. I:1, p.53.
150. I:1, p.55.
151. Ibid.
152. I:1, p.54.
153. Proem 34, p.38.
154. I:7, p.71.
155. III:20, p.131.
156. Proem 24, p.27.
157. I:5, p.68.
158. III:42, p.137.

- 159. I:7, p.71.
- 160. III:16, p.128.
- 161. Proem 2, p.3.
- 162. Ibid.
- 163. Proem 2, p.3.
- 164. Proem 2, p.2.

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