INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES AND PRIZE ESSAYS

AUTHOR Audrey S. Pollack

TITLE Tanna debe Eliyahu: A Study In The Interrelation of Its Form and Content

TYPE OF THESIS: Ph.D. [ ] D.H.L. [ ] Rabbinic [X]

Master's [ ] Prize Essay [ ]

1. May circulate [ ]) Not necessary
2. Is restricted [ ] for ___ years.) for Ph.D.) thesis

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

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

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

March 8, 1994
Date

Audrey S. Pollack
Signature of Author

Library Record

Microfilmed 6/30/94
Date

Marilyn Kreder
Signature of Library Staff Member

Tanna debe Eliyahu:

A Study in the Interrelation of Its Form and Content

Audrey S. Pollack

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

1994 תשנ"ד

Referee: Dr. Richard S. Sarason

The nature of humanity being what it is, the Holy One said to Israel: My children, have I not written for you in My Torah, "This book of guidance shall not depart out of your mouth (Joshua 1:8)"? Although you must labor all six days of the week, Shabbat is to be given over completely to Torah. Accordingly, it is said that one should rise early on Shabbat to recite Mishnah and then go to the synagogue or to the academy where one is to read in the Torah and recite a portion of the Prophets. Afterwards, one should go home and eat and drink, thus fulfilling the command "Eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God has already accepted your works (Ecclesiastes 9:7)." For the contentment of the Holy One comes only from those who are busy with Torah, as it is said, "For the sake of all these things has my hand made [the heavens and the earth] (Isaiah 66:2)."

- *Tanna debe Eliyahu:* Seder Eliyahu Rabbah Chapter 1, page 4.

Blessed is the one who submits like an ox to the yoke and like an ass to the burden; the one who sits and meditates every moment of every day upon words of Torah. Immediately the holy spirit suffuses such a person whose Torah has taken deep root within. "Blessed are you that sows eagerly beside all waters" (Isaiah 32:20). By "waters" is meant Torah, of which Scripture says, "Everyone that thirsts, come to the waters" (Isaiah 55:1). What is implied by the word "all" in the phrase "all waters"? That one should read the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings; one should recite Halachot and Midrash; one should spend as much time as possible in the company of scholars and as little time as possible in the company of businesspeople. Immediately the holy spirit will suffuse you to your very depths, and God's word will come readily to your tongue, as David went on to say, "The spirit of Adonai spoke by me, and God's word was upon my tongue (2 Samuel 23:2)."

- *Tanna debe Eliyahu:* Seder Eliyahu Rabbah Chapter 2, page 8.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicatedwith love to my family:

To my parents, Roz and Phil Pollack, whose love and dedication has supported me throughout all of my years of study, and whose commitment to Judaism planted the seeds within that led me towards this journey. Your enthusiasm for learning coupled with the joys that we share together as a family have taught me the true meaning of *derech eretz*.

To my sisters, Melissa and Rebecca, who are my friends, my playmates, my buddies. You have been there for me and made me smile in more ways than you know.

To my grandparents, Frank and Lillian Kaplan, Anna and Abe Pollack, whose memories are for a blessing. Their passion for life and devotion to being Jewish have taught me the value of tradition and family.

And to Phil, whose sense of humor kept me sane throughout it all. Your certainty that I would see this thesis completed kept me going. Your support and confidence are a source of strength and comfort for me. You are my joy, my love, my best friend.

זֶה דוֹדִי וְזֶה רֵעִי

You are my beloved, You are my friend. (Song of Songs 5:16)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Blessed be the One whose presence is everywhere. Blessed be the One who chose the Sages and their disciples to teach us the Mishnah: "Go as a voluntary exile to a place where Torah is taught. Do not say that the Torah will seek you out. It is those you study with, and 'not reliance on your understanding alone' (Proverbs 3:5), that will help make it your permanent possession (Avot 4:14)."

- *Tanna debe Eliyahu:* Seder Eliyahu Rabbah Chapter 16, page 72.

I would like to thank Dr. Richard Sarason for his wisdom, his teaching and his encouragement throughout not only the process of my thesis but throughout my years of study at the Hebrew Union College. His excitement for delving into the mysteries of text is contagious and he shares this enthusiasm in his love for teaching others. He is truly a *rav b'Yisrael*.

I would also like to thank Rabbi Peter Knobel, Cantor Jeffrey Klepper, and Rabbi David Polish who inspired me to become a rabbi. They are my teachers, my friends.

ברוך המקום ברוך הוא, יהי שמו הגדול מבורך לעולם ולעולמי עולמים

I give thanks to God who has implanted within me the desire for learning, that I might study Torah and from it gain wisdom and understanding.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DIGEST

Among the midrashim, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* or *Seder Eliyahu* is unique. This is due to several elements: First, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* seems to have been the work of one author, giving it a single voice from beginning to end. Second, much of the material seems to be original. The result is a midrash which utilizes earlier traditions, reworked with highly original and distinctive materials. Third, while *Tanna debe Eliyahu* seems to be organized in part around the exposition of biblical passages, its structure is not primarily governed by these verses. Rather, the primary organizing principle seems to be thematic. Clearly, this is not a midrash which is easily categorized as either homiletical or exegetical because the biblical texts appear to be chosen primarily for their thematic value, not as means for sequential exegesis.

Because this midrash is primarily a thematically unified text that expresses a particular viewpoint, it is considered to be a unique masterpiece of midrashic literature, singular in its substance and form. Most recently, scholarship on this text has begun to focus on the relationship between its structure and content. In his seminal article, "בין מדרש לספר מוסר", Yaakov Elbaum advances the theory that the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* aspired to bring a distinctive mixture of content and form to the work, utilizing elements of the exegetical form while introducing a different stylistic arrangement within his text, based on thematic unity. He maintains that, in analyzing *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, its content should not be isolated from literary and exegetical context because it is the interrelationship between

content and form which is in fact crucial to the understanding of this midrash's unique and masterful expression.[1]

This thesis is meant to advance the study begun by Elbaum and to determine the validity of his theory. In my thesis I focus upon the interdependency of textual process and content in order to determine how and to what extent each of these exact an influence on the other. The analysis also outlines the broad thematic issues emphasized by the author. Additionally, this analysis is meant to illustrate the ways in which Elbaum's theory changes previous understandings of this text.

Chapter One consists of a general overview of the text of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* itself as well as an overview of the previous research that has been done. This includes attention to such questions as the text's origin, authorship, particular characteristics, form and content and previous understandings of the text.

Chapter Two contains a review of Elbaum's ideas and work based on Chapters 1-6 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* as well as a summary and background to these chapters.

Chapter Three consists of a detailed rhetorical analysis of Chapters 7-17 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* in order to gain an overall understanding of the form and content of the text. The analysis focuses on how scriptural exegesis structures the text, how thematic concerns structure the text, and how these elements influence each other.

Chapter Four consists of a detailed thematic analysis of Chapters 7-17 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* in order to gain an overall understanding of the

---

[1]Yaakov Elbaum, "*Beyn midrash lesefer musar*", in Mehqaré Yerushalayim besifrut ivrit 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), pp. 144-154.

ideational content of the these chapters. The analysis explores the themes and ideas which are presented in the text and how these are conveyed at the level of content and form. Thus Chapters Three and Four demonstrate how to understand the text in light of the new analytical perspectives that have been presented.

Chapter Five contains my conclusions regarding how and to what extent the textual process and content exact an influence on each other, and the extent to which Elbaum's theory is borne out in the previous analysis.

CHAPTER ONE:

An Introduction To the Text

Among the midrashim, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* or *Seder Eliyahu* is unique. Unlike other midrashim, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* seems to have been the work of one author, giving it a single voice from beginning to end. While its author makes use of common ideas and traditions, much of the material seems to be original. Thus, the resulting text is a midrash which, while utilizing some earlier traditions, reworks these together with highly original and distinctive materials. During the past century, a great deal of study has been devoted to unlocking the key to what Meir Friedmann has called "the jewel of Haggadic literature". Because this midrash is primarily a thematically unified text that expresses a particular viewpoint, it is considered to be a unique masterpiece of midrashic literature, singular in its substance and form.

The language and style of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is, in the words of Ephraim Urbach, "a pure but flowery, 'classicistic' Hebrew"[1] which is ornamented with the author's own unique expressions and characteristic idioms. This contributes to the novel character of its content which is expressed through

> .... interpretations of legal provisions, enlivened by parables, sentences, prayers and admonitions, and ...stories about the author's travels (he claims to be from Yabneh and to have moved to Babylonia) and adventures. Elijah appears repeatedly; but he is probably not

---

[1]Ephraim E.Urbach, "*Leshe'elat leshono umeqorotav shel sefer Seder Eliyahu*" in Urbach, Me'olamam shel HaZaL (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), p. 419.

**Note: All English renditions of Hebrew texts are my translation.

intended as the narrator throughout, even where he is not explicitly named....[2]

What imbues these interpretations with spirit are the ideas expressed within a skilled and unique literary construction. For example, through his parables and stories, the author reports events in first-person narrative, bringing home the personal significance of the values expressed. In this way, the impact of the moral message is made clear in a manner unlike other characteristic midrashim.

According to the narrative, our author came from Yavneh. He wandered from place to place in Babylonia and Israel where he gave instruction in Torah and taught unlettered Jews how to pray. Braude and Kapstein suggest that "...he was a wandering preacher and teacher who taught the word of God.....(His) adventures are of the mind and spirit, tests of faith."[3] We must of course be careful to distinguish between what may simply be literary devices and that which we can reasonably determine to be real events. That is, we have no conclusive proof that the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* actually lived the life described in the text. In any event, these details serve to enhance the development of the drama which takes place within its pages.

The author's intention is expressed from the outset as having a didactic moral aim. In his interpretations of Torah and the reasons behind the laws, he preaches the importance of moral conduct (*derech eretz*), knowledge of Torah, prayer, and repentance. This focus on the ethical has earned the text comparisons with later *musar* literature and suggestions by some that it

---

[2]H.L. Strack and G. Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, translated by Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 369.

[3]William G. Braude and Israel Kapstein (translators), Tanna debe Eliyyahu: The Lore of the School of Elijah (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981), p. 21.

constitutes a forerunner of this type of literature, or even that it is the crucial link that forms a bridge between traditional midrash and the *musar* literature of the Middle Ages.[4]

The text is known as both *Seder Eliyahu* and *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. Although there are various references to, and parallels with, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* in texts ranging from Genesis Rabbah to the Babylonian Talmud, its origin is still the subject of debate and discussion, as is the question of whether the text we have today is the same referred to in these other sources. There has also been some question as to whether these two titles refer to two separate works. At one time the earliest reference to the work was thought to be the eleventh-century *Arukh* of R. Natan. In the *Arukh*, R. Natan quotes R. Natronai, a Babylonian Gaon of the ninth century who makes reference to the text, but does not quote directly from it. The *Arukh* states that the text is divided into two sections, Seder Eliyahu Rabbah and Seder Eliyahu Zuta, as mentioned in the Talmud Ketubot 106a. (Although Bavli Ketubot 106a refers to "Seder Eliyahu Rabbah" and "Seder Eliyahu Zuta" it is not at all clear that our text is meant. However, the division of our text into Rabbah and Zuta is likely to have been modeled upon the Talmud Bavli reference.) According to the *Arukh*, the Rabbah portion consists of three "gates" comprising thirty chapters and the Zuta portion consists of twelve chapters. In the Venice edition of 1598, the first part has thirty-one chapters and the second part has twenty-five chapters, in keeping with the divisions in a manuscript from 1186 upon which this edition is based.[5]

---

[4]Yaakov Elbaum, "*Beyn midrash lesefer musar*", in Mehqaré Yerushalayim besifrut ivrit 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), p. 146.

[5]Strack and Stemberger, p. 370.

There are several extant manuscripts of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. The oldest of these is Codex Vatican 31, completed in 1073. Meir Friedmann utilized this manuscript as the primary source for his critical edition, the only critical edition of the text that exists.[6] It contains only Eliyahu Rabbah and Chapters 1-15 of the Zuta. In addition, there are two other, later manuscripts of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*: Parma MS 2785 and Parma MS 1240. Parma 2785 was completed in 1290 by Samuel bar Joseph, possibly in Uncastello in northern Spain. It includes the text of Eliyahu Zuta in a rescension which is different from Codex Vatican 31. The chapters are in a different order. It begins in the middle of Eliyahu Zuta, Chapter One, and ends with two stories found in Eliyahu Zuta, Chapter One. Parma MS 2785 has only twelve chapters in Eliyahu Zuta (as opposed to Vatican Codex 31 which has fifteen chapters). Friedmann was unable to make use of this manuscript and its variants because he did not obtain a copy of it until after he had completed his edition. However, his notes list variants found it. The third manuscript, Parma MS 1240 was completed in 1270 by Menahem ben Jacob, a scribe living in the Rhineland. His manuscript includes texts of the Pesikta Rabbati, Tanhuma and eleven other midrashim, including Pirke R. Eliezer and Pirke haYeridot. Friedmann added these last two to his critical edition as supplements. He also refers to variant readings from this manuscript.[7]

Many and varied are the opinions regarding the authorship, date and place of origin of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. Scholars have variously dated *Tanna*

---

[6]Meir Friedmann [Ish Shalom], ed., Seder Eliahu Rabba weSeder Eliahu Zuta (Vienna, 1902).

[7]The information in this paragraph is derived from Braude and Kapstein, pp. 35-36.

debe Eliyahu from the third century through the tenth century and have postulated an equally wide array of locations, ranging from Palestine to Babylonia to southern Italy to Byzantium.[8] Legend attributes the text to none other than Elijah the prophet himself. It is said that Elijah dictated the work to R. Anan, a third-century Babylonian Amora, in two sections over two separate periods of time.[9] This legend was accepted by some as being the basis for the text's origin, most notably by Meir Friedmann (Ish Shalom), the editor of the only critical edition of Seder Eliyahu Rabbah and Zuta. Friedmann (1831-1908) believed *Tanna debe Eliyahu* to be the result of a direct religious experience of R. Anan and others, whom the prophet Elijah taught as if he were one of the authorities in a Tannaitic school. As proof of his theory, Friedmann collected Talmudic passages which describe Elijah revealing himself to the Rabbis, and maintained that, where the author speaks in first person in the text, the speaker is Elijah himself. However, according to Friedmann, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* was not dictated to R. Anan but existed long before him. Rather, it was edited by R. Anan's school from sources consisting of many Baraitot or collections of Baraitot containing the revelations of many earlier disciples of Elijah which were handed down to these later disciples. Thus the expression "Tanna debe Eliyahu" (the house/school of Elijah taught) might refer either to the pious men known to have been taught by Elijah or to a school in Jerusalem or Yavneh named after Elijah where these sayings and homilies were studied. The phrase might also

---

[8]William G. Braude, "'Conjecture' and Interpolation in Translating Rabbinic Texts: Illustrated by a Chapter from Tanna debe Eliyahu", in Jacob Neusner, ed., Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty, volume 4 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), p. 79.

[9]Braude and Kapstein, pp. 3-4.

refer to one student of that school who taught the homily that was introduced by the phrase.[10]

Another supporter of the Elijah theory was Samuel ben Moses Haida who produced a "new and correct version of the original text" in Prague in 1677. Haida was a mystic who took it upon himself to restore the original text of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* from the editio princeps of Venice, 1598, published under the title *Tanna debe Eliyahu* (based on a manuscript dated 1186). The Venice edition's preface contains an apology from the editor who, stating that he was pressed for time, simply printed the MS of 1186 without attempting to restore parts of the text which were mutilated, and without correcting errors. At wit's end, Haida prayed for help from heaven to correct the manuscript. After fasting, prayer and contemplation, and entreating the aid of Eliyahu HaNavi, Haida claims that Eliyahu appeared to him and revealed the authentic text as he had dictated it centuries earlier. Because Haida's 1677 version was much more readable and comprehensible than the Venice edition, it became the standard version of the text for the next 200 years. It was printed in many editions, both with and without the Venice text, most often only with Haida's commentary. This version spawned new commentaries based solely on Haida's text which are still studied today in Hasidic circles.[11]

The first modern scholar who considered the questions of the date and origin of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* was Solomon Rapoport (1790-1867). In Rapoport's opinion, the text we have is not the Seder Eliyahu referred to in

---

[10]Max Kadushin, The Theology of Seder Eliahu (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1932), p. 7.

[11]Braude and Kapstein, pp. 11-12.

the Talmud. He bases this contention on the presence of quotes attributed to "Tanna debe Eliyahu" in the Talmud which are not found in our text. Rapoport believes that the Venice edition of 1598, the first printed edition, cannot be the original *Seder Eliyahu* because it is entitled "Tanna debe Eliyahu" not "Seder Eliyahu". Furthermore, because its Rabbah is not divided into three parts and has thirty-one chapters and the Zuta has twenty-five chapters, incompatible with the description given in the *Arukh*, he asserts that the text we have in hand is not the same text referred to in the *Arukh*. From the dates referred to in the text itself he concludes that our text was composed in the middle or late tenth century in Babylon.[12]

Other scholars have attempted to date the text on the basis of certain scenarios presented by the author in the course of his parables. Friedmann dates the text no later than the sixth century and perhaps as early as the third century. This claim he bases in part on passages which he feels reflect the ideas and conditions of the age in which they were written, such as the author's discussion with the fire-worshipping Persian priest (i.e., a Zoroastrian magus). Friedmann sees this passage and others related to it as indicative that the author lived when the Persian religion of fire-worship was flourishing, no later than the sixth century and perhaps as early as the third century. Similarly, he sees the passages describing the division of the world between two kingdoms as another allusion to Persia (and Rome). And the text's references to the concept of marrying the daughter of one's sister, which is a virtue not among Jews but among Persians, he also views as an allusion

[12]Kadushin, pp. 3-4.

to Persia. These considerations in part help Friedmann to fix his date at or around the third century.[13]

Friedmann believes that his text is the one referred to in the Talmud and *Arukh* and, as discussed above, takes the legend of its composition to be factual. In his critical edition he has renumbered the chapters of the Rabbah, combining Chapters 15 and 16. He also separated Chapters 16-25 from the Zuta, calling these ten chapters "Pseudo-Seder Eliahu Zuta". He divides the ten chapters into two parts, calling Chapters 16-18 "Pirke Derek Eres" and Chapters 19-25 "Pirke R. Eliezer". He adds three more chapters to these ten under the title "Pirke haYeridot", which he took from Parma MS 1240. These ten, he says, are a later addition to the text, a collection of passages dealing with the statements of Rabbi Eliezer.[14] Based on his analysis of continuity in the text itself and in its use of biblical texts, as well as what he sees as logical separations, Friedmann believes that his changes replicate the text's original divisions. Moreover, by making these new divisions, he is able to square his edition with the numbers given in the *Arukh*.[15] Friedmann based his edition on a Vatican MS of the year 1073, except for the last ten chapters of Seder Eliyahu Zuta. He used the Venice edition where his manuscript was inadequate and, in a few cases, the parallel passages in Yalkut Shimoni. He made corrections in a critical commentary of his own which drew on his vast knowledge of rabbinic literature, clarifying passages, filling in gaps, and making corrections where other errors occurred in the text.[16]

---

[13]Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[14]Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[15]Braude and Kapstein, pp. 5-6.

[16]Kadushin, p. 2.

From an examination and comparison of a number of parallels between *Tanna debe Eliyahu* and the Babylonian Talmud, Friedmann concludes that neither borrowed from the other. Rather, he determines that both used common earlier sources, making the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* an independent work compiled before the close of the Talmud and after the compilation of the Mishnah (prior to the fifth century and most likely in the third century). Friedmann sees Rapoport's conjectures as inconclusive. Instead, he solves the problems of the late dates given in the text as being later interpolations by a copyist.[17] As further evidence of this earlier date, Friedmann notes that the Mishnah is mentioned in the text many times but the Talmud is not mentioned except in one case which has proven to be doubtful. There are also no Amoraim cited, but the names of Tannaim are mentioned. Additionally, the fifty-fourth chapter of Genesis Rabbah (written in the fourth or fifth century) contains a parallel quotation which is introduced by the phrase "Tanna debe Eliyahu". Because the Talmud was edited around 500 C.E., Friedmann believes that the text was composed before the close of the Talmud and after the close of the Mishnah.[18] As to the problem of citations in the Talmud which are not found in our text, Friedmann theorizes that there were many Baraitot in Talmudic times designated by the phrase "Tanna debe Eliyahu" which were current among the disciples of Elijah. He contends that our *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is but one collection of these Baraitot. Thus, some passages which were included in the Talmud were not selected for our text.[19]

---

[17]Braude and Kapstein, p. 5.

[18]Kadushin, pp. 7-8.

[19]Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Jacob Mann (1888-1940) uses a passage reflecting religious persecution as his basis for dating the work. According to Mann, this passage reflects the persecution of the Jews in Babylon and Persia under the Sassanid empire ruled by Yezdejerd II (454-455).[20] Likewise, he fixes the location on the basis of other scenarios which he says could only pertain to Babylon in the fifth century:

> There is further a clear reference to the Magians in Babylon and to their power in the state at the very beginning of our Midrash which those scholars, who assigned the work to the 10th century, ought to have first accounted for, in view of the elementary historical fact that the political power of the Magians came to an end with the overthrow of Sassanid Empire by the Muslims in 639. The author relates of an official raid (evidently against the Jews) in 'a great city in the world' (probably Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanids) in the course of which he himself was arrested. ...[21]

Mann dismisses the problem of the author's references to the great schools of Jerusalem and Yavneh, saying that these are "..only metaphors of speech whereas really the Babylonian academies are meant."[22]

Victor Aptowitzer and Jacob Epstein put forth theories on grounds similar to that of Mann. Aptowitzer (1935) dates the work to the first half of the ninth century in Babylonia because Jews and non-Jews mingled freely there, and *Tanna debe Eliyahu* continuously warns against close social relations with non-Jews which might lead to lapses in right conduct. A second reason for this conjecture lies in the text's more lenient attitude toward conversion (converts for marriage were accepted in Babylonia but not in Palestine). Third, Aptowitzer sees certain formulaic liturgical expressions

---

[20]Jacob Mann, "Date and Place of Redaction of Seder Eliyahu Rabba and Zutta" in appendix to article "Changes in the Divine Service Due to Religious Persecutions", HUCA 4 (1927), p. 305.

[21]Ibid., pp. 305-306.

[22]Ibid., p. 308.

and practices as pointing to Babylon rather than Palestine.[23] Epstein (1948) posits that our text represents a fifth-century augmentation of R. Anan's earlier compilation of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. He concludes this on the basis of a description of Jewish oppression which he associates with a fifth-century persecution under King Peroz.[24]

Wilhelm Bacher (1874) and Hayyim Oppenheim (1881) think the text is from the geonic period (tenth century) because of the references to the author's disputes with "those who know Bible but not Mishnah", which they take to mean denial of the Oral Law. On this basis they attempt to prove that the author was a rabbinic preacher who disputed with Karaites of the geonic period.[25] Moshe Zucker (1959) also dates the text on the basis of what he considers to be polemics against the writings of Hiwi al-Balkhi, a ninth-century heretic. He dates *Tanna debe Eliyahu* between 850 and 860 C.E. because it attacks the Karaite Daniel al-Kumisi, who flourished in the middle of the ninth century. Furthermore, Zucker contends that the latest possible dating had to be 860 C.E. because by this date R. Natronai wrote of the text already being extant.[26]

Interestingly, as late as 1973 Joshua Brand, after reviewing the various and sundry possibilities posited by other scholars, decides that the date of composition is clearly given to us by the author (see chapter 2, pp. 6-7 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*). Based on his calculations, the text was written in

---

[23]Avigdor Aptowitzer, "*Seder Elia*" in Jewish Studies in Memory of George Alexander Kohut (New York, 1935), pp. 5-39, as cited by Braude and Kapstein, p. 7.

[24]J.N. Epstein, philological notes, in Mabo lenosah haMishnah volume 2 (Jerusalem: Leifman Heller, 1948; 2nd ed., 1964), p. 763.

[25]Kadushin, p. 5.

[26]Moses.Zucker, Targumo shel R. Saadia Gaon laTorah (New York: Philipp Feldheim, Inc., 1959), pp. 218-219.

984 C.E., although he notes the difficulty of reconciling this with the references in the Talmud, and the legend of R. Anan in the third century, as well as the references of R. Natronai Gaon in his responsa of 860 C.E. "Accordingly," says Brand, "knowledgeable scholars take the position that two books by this name existed and that our Seder Eliahu is not the same as that mentioned in the Talmud or in R. Natronai Gaon's writings." He attributes the persecutions and calamities to the Seliguk invasion of the Eastern Caliphate from Turkistan. Furthermore, the Seliguks were probably fire-worshippers.[27] (This is his answer to Mann's assessment of the sections regarding fire-worship being attributed to fifth-century Persia.) It should be noted that most scholars consider the figures that point to 984 C.E. to be a later interpolation by a copyist.[28]

Mordecai Margulies (1953) returns in part to Friedmann's conclusions in his analysis. He agrees that the number of chapters do correspond to those in the *Arukh* and maintains that the dates which would indicate that the text is a ninth-century or tenth-century composition are later scribal interpolations.[29] He further determines that *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is at least as old as the Talmud by comparing the parallels in the two texts, thus refuting Rapoport's notion that *Tanna debe Eliyahu* was a tenth-century composition.[30] Margulies also argues against the views of Mann and Aptowitzer. The claims that one can date the text on the basis of scenarios

---

[27]Joshua Brand, "*Seder Tanna debe Eliyahu Rabba weZutta (zemano umehabro)*", in R.Z. Luria, ed., Zer ligevurot: The Zalman Shazar Jubilee Volume (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1973), pp. 615-617.

[28]Kadushin, p. 4.

[29]Mordecai Margulies, "*Leva'ayat kadmuto shel Seder Eliahu Rabba*", in M.D. Cassuto et al. eds., Sefer Assaf (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1953), pp. 371.

[30]Margulies, pp. 373-377.

presented in the narrative as referring to specific historical events are false because hostile decrees and persecutions are recurrent in Jewish history, states Margulies.[31] Similarly, he refutes Epstein's position that R. Anan was the compiler of an earlier version of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* which was later augmented, saying that the text's uniform style and unique treasury of expressions proves it to be an integral composition, not a compilation.[32] Margulies concludes that the author was one Abba Eliyahu who lived in the first half of the third century during Yezdegerd I's persecution of the Jews. The author lived in Yavneh, studied and taught in Jerusalem, and traveled in Babylonia and Persia, instructing in prayer and Torah.[33]

Shmuel Mirsky (1964) understands the text to function as a midrashic Baraita, in the same category as other texts which were passed down orally. He maintains that it is clear that this was the understanding of the Geonim and Rishonim in their relation to this text.[34] He believes that it may be an ethical treatise which was the result of discussions between yeshiva students on Shabbat evenings and that its teachings were passed down orally and compiled into a written text by someone in Yavneh. Perhaps the teachings come from the mouths of the rabbis themselves, and their ethical teachings were collected into the text we have today. As such, says Mirsky, we should study it in the spirit in which it was written, as a book of ethical discussions

---

[31]Ibid., pp. 379-382.

[32]Ibid., pp. 378-379.

[33]Ibid., pp. 387-390.

[34]Samuel Mirsky, "*Lemahuto shel Midrash Seder Eliyahu*", in Shanah beshanah (Jerusalem: Hekhal Shelomoh, 1964), p. 219.

meant to plant the spirit of love of Torah and Israel in the hearts of these students.[35]

Max Kadushin (1932) also believes that the text served as a midrashic Baraita, basing himself on the theories of Louis Ginzberg (1922). Ginzberg proposed that *Tanna debe Eliyahu* originally comprised a Baraita which was composed early and a "Talmud" which was added later, most likely after the Babylonian Talmud. He maintained that the text we have before us no longer has distinct divisions between these parts; they are mixed together.[36] On this basis, Kadushin also believes that our text is a mixture of two parts, some instances that point to an author in Palestine, and others that denote a location outside of Palestine. He asserts that in no way is our text or its divisions the same as that described in the *Arukh*.[37] He sees the key to understanding the text as being able to separate the earlier from the later, and the original Baraita from its commentary. This Baraita was presumably completed shortly after the close of the Mishnah. Its commentary corresponds to the late dates - ninth or tenth-century - as specified in the text, unless these are scribal interpolations. There is no common source from which *Tanna debe Eliyahu* and the Talmud drew. Indeed, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* may have borrowed from the Talmud for its commentary sections and the Talmud may have borrowed from the Baraita section of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. Thus, any attempt to reestablish the original textual coherence is impossible, concludes Kadushin. For this reason, Kadushin's work itself is

---

[35]Ibid., p. 222.

[36]Kadushin, p. 14.

[37]Ibid., pp. 13-14.

primarily devoted not to reconstructing the text, but to an examination of the themes of its pericopes.[38]

It is apparent that many scholars have endeavored to determine *Tanna debe Eliyahu*'s authorship (who was "Elijah"?), the probable locality and time period in which it was written, and the nature of the work itself. Most of this scholarly effort however, has focused on the text's themes, culling out of the text the various ideas ["the importance of Torah study, repentance, piety, and proper conduct as the ways mandated by God for humanity to achieve happiness in this world and life eternal in the world to come"],[39] or upon various details which are made the basis for dating the work, without regard to its overall underlying framework.

More recently, several scholars have begun to look at the rhetoric of presentation in *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, that is, how the message of the text is conveyed both at the level of form and at the level of content. Two scholars' efforts offer a preliminary approach to the text in this respect, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Ephraim E. Urbach. However, the most extensive work to date on *Tanna debe Eliyahu* which focuses on the relationship between its structure and content can be found in an article by Yaakov Elbaum, entitled "בין מדרש לספר מוסר".[40] The work of all three will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

In the chapters that follow, I intend to advance the study begun by Elbaum regarding the interdependency of textual process and content. I hope

---

[38]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[39]Richard S. Sarason, "Kadushin's Study of Midrash: Value Concepts and Their Literary Embodiment", in Peter Ochs, ed., Understanding the Rabbinic Mind: Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 65.

[40]Elbaum, pp. 144-154.

to determine how and to what extent each of these exact an influence on the other. I will also study the text to determine what broad thematic issues are emphasized by the author. In addition, I will illustrate the ways in which Elbaum's theory changes previous understandings of this text.

CHAPTER TWO:

Yaakov Elbaum and His Novel Analysis of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*

We have seen that a great deal of effort has been devoted to understanding the origins of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* and its authorship. Until recently, scholars have focused primarily upon the thematics of the text, its particular utilization of common sources and the nuances which set it apart from other texts. Little attention however, has been given to analyzing what it is that makes *Tanna debe Eliyahu* so unique, that is, how these building blocks are put together.

As noted in the last chapter, two scholars devoted some of their research to the area of structural form and rhetoric, although they were primarily concerned with the original sources of some of the midrashim and their thematic applications. But in focusing on the form of the text, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (1955) and Ephraim E. Urbach (1956) touch on what is most distinctive about *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, namely, its rhetorical structure.

In his analysis of Chapters 10 and 11 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, Werblowsky states that "Its pericopes are coherent, well-developed expositions of specific themes," although he notes that it is also difficult to follow the thread that runs throughout if one is led astray by the tangents. Nevertheless, although the presentation of the material may seem confusing, there is something in it which, according to Werblowsky:

> ....suggests the existence of simpler, primary sources which our author has strung together on the thread of his associations.....the associations by which they are joined together, the new meaning with which they are invested - all these are the author's own....it may be useful to analyse the structure of the homilies of SE. Our immediate interest here is not in the usual distinction between "original text" and"interpolations"; these categories are altogether inadequate for an

> understanding of the basic nature of the text. We have to ask ourselves: what are the elements, the bricks as it were, which the author's mind built into a coherent structure?[1]

Here Werblowsky highlights what has been neglected in previous analyses: the very element of the author himself in the creation of this text. And in his subsequent comparison of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* with the talmudic parallel versions of some of the pericopes, he wonders whether the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* version in fact is not simply a variant of the same story but rather a tendentious rewriting in order to serve the author's purpose.[2] This, he states, "...would account, among other things, for the disappearance of all scriptural support (in the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* version), although another, equally suitable text was easily available."[3] Werblowsky's main intent was to set up a comparative analysis meant to uncover the sources of material and their variant uses and in so doing, to better understand the nature of the text. By virtue of this thematic outline he concludes that the pericopes in the *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, while seemingly straightforward, are in actuality an arrangement of "...a rather complex series of simpler aggadic units joined together according to certain laws of association."[4] With this he is on the brink of a fundamental understanding of the nature of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* itself.

Similarly, Ephraim E. Urbach notes that there has been insufficient focus on the question of literary style and structure in *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. Much of the effort expended in research on *Tanna debe Eliyahu* has been

---

[1]R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "A Note on the Text of Seder Eliyahu", in Journal of Jewish Studies 6 (London, 1955), p. 201.

[2]Ibid., p. 208.

[3]Ibid., p. 209.

[4]Ibid., p.211.

toward determining the time and place of composition as well as culling out of the text its individual thematic references. "But certainly this question [of literary style and structure] deserves an honorable place, for the language and style are unlike most of the midrashim in collected and anthologized works; rather they are of unique creation, impressed with the personal seal of one author," states Urbach.[5]

Urbach sets out to give a detailed analysis of Chapter One of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* in order to better understand the author's style, thought patterns and the connection of the text to earlier sources of the elements of this text. As a result of carefully studying patterns in the text and comparing the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* versions to the way in which the material was originally presented, he defines the style of the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* as follows:

> .... the author himself reveals the secret of his style and his work in his words: "To what are the words of Torah similar? To a hide given to a man who would tan it; he smooths it out and stretches it until he brings it to a delicate finish.(Eliyahu Rabbah ch.3 p. 15)" Not for all words of Torah is the analogy appropriate, but it suits the author himself, for he does not copy the language of his sources, rather he adapts (tans) them and their style, removes the dross, smooths out what was not in keeping with his (ideas) and stretches the shrunken and contracted (parts).[6]

Urbach describes the author's method as being similar to that of the psalmists. The midrash *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is an "intricate mosaic", he says; a string of pearls upon which hangs the essence of the midrash in each delicate bead. Urbach sees the work of the author to be a harmonization of the traditions he has received from the midrash of *Hazal* and from the *Tanach*. This inheritance the author takes, smooths out and reworks into a

---

[5]Urbach, p. 418.

[6]Ibid., p. 419.

new framework. And in his new creation, not only the form and language of the sources may be changed, but even their original intent and their meanings, significance, and implication as well.[7]

With their observations and theories, Werblowsky and Urbach have broached the subject of the interplay between rhetorical form and content. The questions left unanswered center around just exactly what the author's aim was and how he went about achieving his purpose. In other words, if in fact this midrash is different, what makes it so? What was the author's method and what did he hope to present with this new midrashic approach?

In 1981, Yaakov Elbaum addressed this issue in his seminal article "בין מדרש לספר מוסר".[8] Focusing on the importance of the relationship between the rhetorical structure and content of this midrash, Elbaum advances the theory that the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* aspired to bring a distinctive mixture of content and form to the work, utilizing elements of the exegetical form while introducing a different stylistic arrangement within his text, based on thematic unity. He maintains that, in analyzing *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, its content should not be isolated from literary and exegetical form because it is the interrelationship between content and form that is in fact crucial to the understanding of this midrash's unique and masterful expression. Elbaum states that with this text we are "on the brink of an extraordinary phenomenon, the introduction of conceptual themes within the vehicle of midrash, combining the techniques of midrash with the literary method of the sages of *musar* literature."[9]

---

[7]Ibid.

[8]Elbaum, pp. 144-154.

[9]Ibid., p. 146.

Midrashic literature is characterized by both its literary and its hermeneutical traits. Typically the texts present units of discourse which are contiguous but are at the same time connected by what seem to be minor associative conjunctions. The links between the ideas may thus appear to be coincidental and extrinsic. An "exegetical" midrash is arranged as a running sequential commentary on the verses of a specific biblical book, or a large section thereof. This may include multiple comments on a particular verse, which are connected to each other only by the designation *davar acher*. The chapters of the so-called "homiletical" midrashim are organized around particular themes. The materials are unified (to a greater or lesser extent) around these themes through careful rhetorical and redactional methods which serve to bring together varied sources. Furthermore, most homiletical midrashim are structured through their use of particular rhetorical forms (such as the *petihta* format).[10]

While *Tanna debe Eliyahu* seems to be organized in part around the exposition of biblical passages, its structure is not primarily governed by these verses. Rather, the primary organizing principle seems to be thematic (although some of the biblical passages chosen are explicated at length in tangents which may be unrelated to the themes at hand). While *Tanna debe Eliyahu* does center around the introduction and development of conceptual themes through the vehicle of midrash, its author has not utilized the typical formal structure of homiletical midrashim. (That is not to say that this midrash is without structure, rather that its structure is unique unto itself.) Moreover, the structure of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is not governed by the verses that it interprets. It appears instead to be a thematic ethical treatise in

[10]Sarason, p. 56.

which ideas are followed for their own sake. Although the midrash has not been edited so sharply as to remove all development through textual explications, these sections appear on the whole to be digressions from the main thematic exposition. Thus, it is clear that it is not a midrash which is easily categorized as either homiletical or exegetical because the biblical texts appear to be chosen for their thematic value and are not interpreted sequentially, nor do they provide the entire framework on which this midrash is founded.[11]

Because the text that we have in front of us does not possess the clearly established formal markings of either exegetical or homiletical midrash, Elbaum at the outset poses the question of genre: "Does the midrash we have before us stand in a no-man's land between the two categories of midrashim, something which is lacking uniqueness and character, *or* is it an independent entity, substantial and original?!"[12] Through his independent analysis of the text, Elbaum is convinced that the second possibility is the correct one. This is supported by Urbach's previous contention that the individuality of the author was of unique importance in his development and reworking of well-known midrashim. Elbaum contends that the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* was not comfortable with the scattered nature of themes and ideas in the usual midrashim. Thus, the author

> ....wished to present his words in an order and a structure (emanating) from the examination of the ideas that the character of the (prior) midrash did not make clear, (so that) the verses brought in are exclusively for illustrative purposes and are not the focus of the matter;

---

[11]Elbaum, pp. 144-154.

[12]Ibid., p. 146.

> they are (brought in) solely to promote scriptural support (for the thematic ideas).[13]

The author wanted to present his words based on the examination of ideas instead of allowing the scriptural exegesis to dictate the order and thematic exploration. While he wanted to embrace the exegetical system of his predecessors, and saw himself as a "link in the darshanic chain", he also had a desire to present his material within "...a closed stylistic arrangement of ideas in a personal manner, one that is not based only in the technical specifics that can be discerned in the midrashim of the darshanim," writes Elbaum.[14]

The author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* **is** following in the footsteps of his predecessors inasmuch as midrashic literature is in part anthological. That is,

> ... its redactors [seek] to preserve discrete inherited exegetical traditions in accessible, transmissible structures while at the same time routinely making creative use of the inherited traditions to convey their own meanings and perspectives on those traditions through the very processes of juxtapositioning and reworking.[15]

The rhetoric of midrashic literature is, as Sarason describes, as much a function of the editor or authors' personal style(s) as it is of the focus on the pure exegesis of the biblical texts. Some of these midrashic comments serve to highlight ideas and themes, while others serve to fill in perceived gaps in the biblical narrative. Midrash is interpretation of the biblical narrative plain and simple, but it is more than that. It is also the act of carefully combing the elements of the text for peculiarities that might be utilized as jumping-off points for discourse and dialogue on very real issues of the

---

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Sarason, p. 59.

rabbinic ethos. The specific attention given to the "...peculiar textual phenomena - morphology, syntax, grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic usage..." serve to provide the rabbis with opportunities to comment upon key elements of rabbinic teaching and to elicit these dicta from within the text itself by virtue of associative and rhetorical techniques.[16] Thus it is essential that one devote particular attention not only to the thematic statements that are made, but also to *how* they are made - the rhetoric and discourse that characterizes a particular midrashic text. For it is through the use of rhetoric that an author is able to articulate his unique views. Isolating statements from the literary and exegetical context within which they are found cannot possibly deliver a true impression of what is actually conveyed in the text.

Tanna debe Eliyahu is, according to Elbaum, "....at the brink of an extraordinary phenomenon, that is to say: the experiment of introducing conceptual themes in the vehicle of midrash...." He believes that in this text the author has attempted to grasp the method subsequently utilized by the authors of medieval *musar* literature, mediating between traditional midrashic method and a literary approach typical of the writings of one such as R. Saadia Gaon.[17] Like the *musar* literature, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* draws on traditional themes and sources while reworking them to create a new literature reflected in an innovative didactic structure. Elbaum asserts that *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is the work of a single author and that part of its individuality lies in the fact that the text therefore presents an emphatic, distinct viewpoint. The work emphasizes ethical ideals - the efficacy and

---

[16]Ibid., p. 61.

[17]Elbaum, p. 146.

value of Torah study, repentance, pious behavior, and *derech eretz* as the path that God has ordained. Proper conduct according to the values thus enumerated will bring happiness in this life, and also eternal life - secure and comfortable passage into the world-to-come.[18]

Elbaum seeks to uncover the unique characteristics of the text with a detailed analysis of the first six chapters of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. As Urbach and others have previously noted, it is a text unique in language and style, but Elbaum believes that, more than this, it is the combination and interplay of the elements of structure, rhetorical style, and thematic ideas that forms the essence of what Meir Friedmann has called "the jewel of haggadic literature." In order to unlock the secrets contained therein, Elbaum chose in his analysis to devote his attention to three main areas: the arrangement of the composition; the interaction between pericopes, between the chapters, and the rhetorical interplay throughout the entire work; and the significance of the concepts dealt with by the author. These thematic concepts Elbaum sees as forming the centerpiece of the document as a whole. Although it is clear that some verses have been grouped together and are dealt with in the traditional exegetical manner, we cannot conclude that this is the main focus of the midrash for two reasons: First of all, the discourse on the verses in *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is, generally speaking, not sequential. It is saturated with digressions. Secondly, the discourses on specific groups of verses are not carefully refined. Elbaum's plain analysis makes it apparent that the author did not intend to explicate the Torah sequentially, either wholly or in part. Thus, the task that Elbaum sets for himself is to try to explain the nature of

---

[18]Elbaum, pp. 144-154. (This can be elucidated from a thorough reading of the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* text itself.)

the author's application of these two paths - both avoiding the sequential midrashic exposition that typifies other midrashim and yet also grouping *particular* verses. Elbaum posits that in determining the criteria used in the application of these two paths, the solution to the questions will be apparent and we also will gain unique insight into many of the mysteries of this midrash in its entirety.[19]

Chapters One through Six of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* are a coherent and relatively self-contained unit. The main thematic thrust here is the connection between God and man, utilized as a focal point for many secondary matters. Thus, the midrash itself begins with man at the creation and the subsequent distancing of man from God at the time of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The author begins with the larger theological questions regarding the relationship between God and man, and then begins to examine in detail the nature of man's obligation to God - study of Torah, avoidance of sin, and the like.

Chapter One opens with God and Adam in the Garden of Eden. We are told that God withdrew His presence from the Garden and dwelt in the heavens. He created the flame of *Gehenna* in order to ensure obedience to *derech eretz*, the right conduct which can be learned from Torah. The theme of *derech eretz* and its value learned through the study of Torah is a major motif of the text which will be returned to again and again. Another major theme addressed here and expanded throughout the text is that of God's mercy: God who knows the beginning and end of all things chooses to see the good and allow the evil to pass away from before Him. For after all, if God could foresee all of the evils of humanity He might not have chosen to create man.

---

[19]Ibid., pp. 144-145.

Therefore God does not hold man accountable for the successive deeds of humanity. Moreover, God does not remember the iniquities of Israel. And it is through Shabbat rest that man too, forgets any thoughts of evil and turns to the study of Torah, as he should, to learn the good ways. For we should know that the contentment of God comes only from those who are busy in Torah. Similarly, God gave Israel Yom Kippur as an expression of His love. For God rejoices when He is able to pardon iniquity. We should therefore remember the mercies and favors that God has bestowed upon us. The author turns from this theme to the question of evil in the world: If God loves goodness and not evil, why does Israel now suffer? Why does God not strike down our enemies now? Our author answers that, as we have already seen, God knows all from beginning to end, yet He is merciful. Thus, all creatures of evil must be given a chance for mercy. That is why evil exists in the world. This theme is also often repeated throughout the text, as is the concluding idea which is addressed: Is God a God of vengeance and punishment? In answer, we are reminded once again of God's mercy. He chastises only as a means of discipline, not vengeance. For God desires that we should learn from our chastisement and repent. God does not wish to punish us.

Chapter Two opens with a return to the verse regarding Shabbat. From here the author offers a new interpretation, one that leads us into another key concept in *Tanna debe Eliyahu*: the world-to-come. We are informed that the world we know was designed to last for six thousand years. In fact, we are now supposed to be enjoying the messianic time but our sins have caused the delay of the coming of the Messiah. Nevertheless, God will soon grant us a Sabbath, a respite from the troubles of the world, so that we might know the world-to-come. On that day, God will bring us into the world-to-come; a place where there is no destruction, no evil, and no death. Then

every man will rejoice in his understanding of Torah. The author shifts here to a message extolling the virtues of Torah. A man who busies himself in Torah will be suffused by the words of God. Such a man is called righteous. Indeed, it is because of these righteous ones that light comes into the world. However, our author reminds us that every day we do evil. Why should God care for us? The author tells us that God is mindful of us because we praise Him. We move here into a discussion of how God is praised through the works of the heavens. And the heavens praise none other than man's study of Torah. But until such time as God's name is hallowed by all peoples, no one shall be spared God's anger. That is why the righteous suffer even for the minor offenses that they commit. This is the answer to why the good suffer and the wicked prosper. For it is explained that the righteous suffer for their sins in this world, while the wicked suffer for their sins in the world to come. Yet, we are reminded not to neglect the study of Torah, for without it God may choose to destroy the world. Indeed one who does not concern himself with Torah will be punished by God. But God is merciful and gentle to those who are truly unable to study Torah. They will be accorded merit for their good deeds and efforts. Finally, another attempt to explain the problem of Israel's suffering is given: Although some of it is due to chastisement, most of the suffering we now feel is due to the agitation of the world preceding the coming of the Messiah, explains the author.

Chapter Three begins with references to David. The focus of the chapter is on David but the author uses him to illustrate key concepts and themes. It is stated that because David said that his awe of God arose from his joy of God, that God made a covenant with David. The covenant they made promised David a life that would foreshadow life in the world-to-come. This is how the author introduces an explanation for why wise scholars do not

gain monetary reward. First, they are not rewarded monetarily so as not to tempt them away from Torah. Second, they are rewarded with a greater reward. Like David, they are rewarded with the kind of a life that foreshadows life in the world-to-come. In addition, they are able to bring the dead to life, and are able to intercede on behalf of sinners. Returning to the focus on, and example offered by David, we are told to learn from his example regarding study of Torah. Yet, our author recognizes that David's actions were not exemplary in every case. As to the matter of his relationship with Bathsheba, this is why, despite his unrelenting perseverance on the battlefield, David was unsuccessful. But even here David provides us with a model to follow because he repented. The chapter concludes with the reiteration that in the world-to-come light will shine for the righteous. Additionally, sinners too have a chance at the light of the world-to-come if they only repent before their death. Those who do not, however, will see none of the light in the world-to-come. Again, we see the importance of Torah, for it is the source of such a radiant countenance. But our author reminds us that for those who cannot study Torah, listening to the guidance of sages and heeding chastisement will cause one to be considered worthy of merit by God.

Chapter Four opens with another example of how the righteous rescue sinners and are entitled to a foretaste in this world of the light and the reward that will be theirs in the world-to-come. The incident of the Golden Calf caused Moses great anxiety for he knew that it profaned the glory of God and Israel. Indeed, as a result, God slew three thousand calf worshippers. But Moses persuaded God not to destroy any more people. Because Moses made God aware of the dreadful act He was about to commit, Moses was given an everlasting radiant countenance, resembling the light that we will have in the world-to-come. Furthermore, we are told that no true student of

Torah will really die because he will be treasured in life forever. Thus, we should only mourn exceedingly for unrepentant sinners. Additionally, wise students of Torah will be rewarded with the protection of God such that they will need no weapons of war. Again we are told that in the messianic age the righteous will not be subject to distress, nor to the evil impulse. In fact, all will have a new heart. But as for now, Israel has not yet heeded God's precepts, so that God does not have regard for them. Yet, God's compassion is such that he will deliver them again and again from the evil impulse and from oppression at the hands of the other nations. For the evil impulses and oppressive acts which led to the destruction of the First and Second Temples are acts for which God has no compassion.

Chapter Five opens with a further description of what will happen in the days of the Messiah. In that day Israel will be hailed both by the nations of the world and by the angels. The angels will overcome their envy of Israel and the nations of the world will come to admit that they have not followed Torah. Additionally, in the world-to-come, those who were poor in deeds but repented before their deaths will sit in God's presence along with the righteous. This comes to teach us that if this promise of reward is made to sinners who make no more effort than to yearn for repentance, how much the more so is it certain that the righteous will have life in the world-to-come. This is, of course, an admonishment to the reader to act righteously so as to ensure his reward in the world-to-come. The author then returns to the motif of the power of the righteous to resurrect the dead. We are provided with examples of righteous men who were able to do so; Elisha, Elijah, and Ezekiel. However, the oppressors of Israel will not enjoy resurrection in the world-to-come. Instead, their flesh and bones will be split apart and strewn over Israel's mountains. Yet again the author addresses the problem of why

Israel suffers. We are told that we suffer because we did not heed the teachings of God. Yet, as is typical of our author's theodicy, he reminds us that God does not wish to punish Israel and does not do so out of vengeance. God punishes us out of His mercy. The righteous of Israel will have great enjoyment in the world-to-come, just as they have had some enjoyment in this world because of their righteousness. Thus, anyone who studies Scripture and Mishnah for the sake of heaven, eats what he has earned, and is content with his portion will be revered by his community and loved by God with an everlasting love.

Chapter Six opens with Abraham, another example of a righteous man who has had a life which resembles that of life in the world-to-come; a life without distress and without the evil impulse, like that of David and Moses. Additionally, Abraham's life on earth was such that after his deliverance he experienced renewed youthful vigor. Both he and Sarah became young again. He was blessed with wisdom, wealth, and children even though he observed no toraitic precepts aside from belief in one God. Our author uses Abraham's life as an example of what we may have if we live a righteous life. Indeed, if God loved Abraham so much and granted him such good fortune while he did not have the Torah, how much more does God love us, Abraham's his children, now that we have Torah. The message, of course, is that because we have been given the Torah, we should live by it and attain the rewards given to the righteous. The remainder of the chapter consists of examples of other righteous men who merited enjoyment in this world that resembled life in the world-to-come. Jacob merited this because he immersed himself in Torah and instructed his children in it. As a reward, God made him the father of those who would father the twelve tribes of Israel. Jethro, who was not born a Jew, merited the reward of a life resembling that of life in the

world-to-come because he came eventually to the essence of true faith. Therefore, his children and their descendants are found in the academies of learning. And one should learn from his example and marry off one's daughters to scholars. But although Torah possesses infinite worth, cautions our author, one should first demonstrate his righteousness through the doing of good deeds and then seek out Torah. One should act out of humility and then seek out God's understanding. In this way our author concludes the first six chapters of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* .

Throughout the text's development, the main themes of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* are detailed and reiterated in many illustrations, all of which serve to highlight the author's ethical concerns and value concepts in one manner or another. In his analysis, Elbaum is able to painstakingly lay out the development and recapitulation of the themes and their offshoots in the first six chapters of the text. These are illustrated by various scriptural examples, which in these six chapters emphasize the importance of Torah study and avoidance of sin in order to attain happiness in the world-to-come.[20]

Elbaum's contextual examination and explicit charting of thematic and rhetorical recapitulations make apparent the essential elements of thematic issues and structural form within this unit. It is also clear that these cannot be separated from one another, that the organizing principles are precisely what makes this text unique. In other words, it is precisely the absence of standard rhetoric that gives *Tanna debe Eliyahu* its unique character. But there is a structure. It is not stream-of-consciousness writing, although in certain segments this might at first appear to be the case. Our task is to find the straight lines in the text and diagram what is happening so

---

[20]Ibid., pp. 146-153.

as to better comprehend the jewel that we have before us. We must ask ourselves: 1) what is the author saying; and 2) how is he saying it and how does this affect the content? This type of careful examination will give us a true sense of what the document is as a whole.

In the conclusion to "בין מדרש לספר מוסר" Elbaum maintains that in his analysis he has tried to establish the link of the author to the verses, midrashim, and pericopes, both the inherited traditions and the ones that he himself has molded. But he has concentrated mainly on following the length and breadth of a conceptual theme throughout the midrash. These themes he feels are not incidental but have been placed deliberately into the text by the author in his creative process.[21] That is to say: we have before us a composition in which the author tried to forge a link between midrashic structure and thematic content. While it is difficult to diagram the methodology that links the style, the form and the ethical thematic content, the composition of the book according to this method is what makes it unique as well as what makes it a unified whole.[22] In his novel approach to *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, Yaakov Elbaum has laid the foundation for a greater understanding of the nature of the rhetorical structure of this midrash - the editorial and compositional logic behind the deployment of ideas. In the following chapter I will illustrate the organizing principles and rhetoric that form the basic structure of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*'s thematic development in its subsequent eleven chapters.

---

[21]Ibid, p. 146.

[22]Ibid, pp. 153-154.

CHAPTER THREE:

The Rhetorical Form of Chapters 7-17, A Structural Analysis

In light of the new analytical perspectives presented by Yaakov Elbaum, we are brought to a new understanding of the text. Since the message of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is conveyed not only at the level of content but is interdependent with the textual process, it is useful to look at how scriptural exegesis, thematic concerns, and rhetorical tropes structure the text, and how these elements influence each other. In order to demonstrate this, I have made a careful and thorough analysis of the rhetoric of presentation of the materials in Chapters 7 through 17 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*.

In Chapter Two I gave a brief overview of the first six chapters of the text which have already been examined in detail by Elbaum. As we begin a rhetorical analysis of Chapters 7-17 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, it is of critical importance to note the relationship of these chapters to those which preceded them. We must look at the text as an entire rhetorical unit. Some of the major themes and rhetorical tropes typical of the text will be recapitulated and redeveloped throughout the midrash. Others may be of minor importance or may simply be developed within one section alone.

Of particular note to our analysis are some of the major areas already touched upon in the first six chapters: As we have already seen strongly emphasized in Chapters 1 and following, the theme of *derech eretz*, and its source in the study of Torah, is of major importance to our author. This is immediately picked up in Chapter 7, as is the idea brought out in Chapter 1 regarding the distancing of God from man. These ideas will be brought together in Chapter 7 through a rhetorical interweaving that portrays God's

inner sanctum, Torah, and the essence of God Himself, as being accessible through the medium of Torah study.

God's mercy and His desire for Israel's repentance are given even greater import in the chapters which follow. We are reminded that God is not a vengeful God, that He desires repentance and does not wish to punish Israel. This is an extension of His attribute of love, manifest towards Israel whom He loves with a great love. In the chapters which follow, we shall see that God loves all of His creations, Jew and gentile alike, but that His greatest love is reserved for Israel. Additionally, God's compassion for Israel causes Him to be much more forgiving and indulgent towards them than towards the other nations. Israel is admonished repeatedly to keep far from sin and transgression, to take care not to associate with the wrong kinds of people, and to remain humble in their hearts. Yet, if one should sin, repentance brings true reward, both in this world and in the world-to-come.

This theme of reward is articulated in many different rhetorical guises throughout the text and is often recapitulated in the same typical phraseology. Such reward comes from many acts which are variously illustrated by the author. Although the reward for righteousness may not be manifest in this world, we are nevertheless required to live lives of *derech eretz*, humility and Torah study. The wisdom of Torah is also intrinsic to the rhetorical and thematic scheme of the text. The study of Torah brings merit, teaches wisdom, and is a reward in and of itself. With the merit of Torah and God's great love for Israel do we begin our analysis of the second unit of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu*, Chapter Seven:**

Chapter 7 begins with the citation of a verse from Song of Songs 1:4, in the manner of a *petihta* verse, which is systematically interpreted through the development of a thematic statement: מָשְׁכֵנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נָּרוּצָה הֱבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נָגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בָּךְ נַזְכִּירָה דֹדֶיךָ מִיַּיִן מֵישָׁרִים אֲהֵבוּךָ: The theme introduced by the verse is that of God's everlasting love for Israel. This idea is additionally supported rhetorically by a verse from Jeremiah 31:2. But the connection between these two verses is more than thematic; the author uses a rhetorical twist to tie in the second verse: the verb מָשַׁךְ, which is common to both verses, brings them together to serve his rhetorical purpose. He focuses momentarily on the Jeremiah verse to highlight God's love for Israel as an undying, unconditional, and eternal love The author then introduces a parable to underscore the theme: a king (God) takes his favorite servant (Israel) into his innermost chamber, just as is described in the verse Song of Songs 1:4 (הֱבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו) which the author then returns us to, advancing to the second half of the verse to prove the thematic statement. Continuing in a lengthy exposition of the Song of Songs 1:4 verse, the author utilizes the usual method of textual explication to move through the verse in its entirety. A *davar acher* syllogism introduces the next interpretation of the Song of Songs verse, which expands the idea of the innermost sanctum of God. Using Isaiah 26:20 as his intertext (whose link to the Song of Songs verse is the concept of *hadarav / hadarecha* - innermost chambers), our author construes that one can flee from suffering into the innermost chambers of Torah. As one penetrates to its inner secrets, as the sages do in their studies, one experiences its salvific power. Thus, the message is that one should study Torah and find salvation through it. Through careful rhetoric our author has now managed to clarify the theme:

God so loves Israel that He has brought them into His inner sanctum, and into the inner sanctum of Torah itself.

Moving on to the third section of the Song of Songs verse, the next exposition is rather fragmentary. The comment on נָגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בָּךְ gives a motivation for Israel's rejoicing in God: because God has set us apart and given us the Torah. But then the text becomes confusing. The word שהתנית is unclear. The Vatican manuscript reads שהתנה, but the first printed edition reads שהנחת. Braude follows the reading of the first printed edition, interpreting it as "You left your angels and came and cleaved to us - to Israel - forever...."[1] The rhetoric here is: "We will rejoice in You, because You have done these things for us - because You, who have no real need for us since You have the angels, nonetheless have called us 'my brothers', 'my children', 'my people'...." God accords Israel special status, treating us as His beloved, His equal. This paragraph concludes with two cross-referenced verses in Song of Songs, 5:1-2. These are also thematically similar to the points thus far elaborated, and accordingly the author utilizes the cognate reference to wine and rejoicing -- אִכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דּוֹדִים in Song of Songs 5:1 refers back to נְזְכִּירָה דֹדַיִךְ מִיַּיִן in Song of Songs 1:4 -- to underscore the message of the paragraph. These references to רֵעִים and דֹדַיִךְ convey the rhetorical thrust of this paragraph: the relationship of God and Israel as lovers. Their thematic connection, although not explicitly stated, is apparent: בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה (Song of Songs 5:1) is a parallel image to the Song of Songs 1:4 verse הֲבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו and to the Isaiah 26:20 verse, לֵךְ עַמִּי בֹּא בַחֲדָרֶיךָ.

[1]Braude and Kapstein, p. 115.

The exposition of the base verse, Song of Songs 1:4, continues with the next section of the verse: נַזְכִּירָה דֹדַיִךְ מִיַּיִן, and here the author uses a stylistic marker characteristic of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*: יהי שמו הגדול מבורך לעולם ולעולמי עולמים, a pious interjection. He puts forth an interpretation of the word נַזְכִּירָה, reading it both as "we will praise" and as " God takes note of". The author first tells us that men should always mention and praise words of our "Beloved's" Torah, just as God always makes mention of the deeds of the righteous, His beloved. He then explains how God "takes note of" the deeds of the righteous, citing as examples Jacob, Moses, and David. Following this, he introduces Hosea 14:10 to underscore that the study of Torah leads one to an understanding of God's righteous ways so that he will learn to walk in them. Now our author continues with a theme that is recurrent in *Tanna debe Eliyahu*: When does God "take note" of the deeds of our righteous ancestors and the deeds of the pious ones? When it is necessary to remember these merits to offset Israel's current transgressions. This is followed by prooftexts which emphasize the purity and righteousness of our ancestors, and an example of when God has recalled their merits on Israel's behalf: When Israel is wicked, nevertheless God sees fit to ascribe righteousness to them because of the merits of men such as Jacob. Even Amos knew that he should plead on Israel's behalf by recalling the merit of Jacob. Rhetorically, at this point we have seen the equivalent of a כשם ש.....כך גם syllogism: Just as God mentions His beloved, so too we should mention words of Torah. This is followed by a clarification of when and how God recalls the merits of the righteous.

Following an account of Amos' prayer, the author interjects a plea to God that He may always derive satisfaction from Israel since He answered Amos' prayer on their behalf. It is also a formulaic insertion:

אבינו שבשמים יהי שמך הגדול מבורך לעולם ולעולמי עולמים
ותהא קורת רוח מישראל עבדך.... שלא הנחת לעמם....

He then continues with an exposition of six verses from Amos 7:1-6 which are thematically relevant here: Amos's plea to God on behalf of the people not to destroy them even though they are not worthy. The textual connection works well here because in the second verse Amos invokes the name of Jacob in his plea on behalf of the people Israel. The phrase מִי יָקוּם יַעֲקֹב (verse 2) is paraphrased midrashically as "Just because there is no one like Jacob in the world, is the entire world to be destroyed?" Furthermore, the fifth verse refers again to Jacob in the same words as verse two. This is all in the form of a dialogue between God and Amos which the author now uses to show that, as in Deut. 33:28-29, God has indeed promised to cause Israel to dwell safely and rejoice for they are saved by the Lord, whether they are righteous or wicked. Likewise, Moses also intercedes on Israel's behalf as did Jacob, explains the author. For there were none in the days of Amos, Micah and all of the prophets who knew how to pour out supplication as did Moses. Here the verse Malachi 3:22 prompts the rhetorical question: Why is the Torah, which is God's, called by Malachi the "Torah of Moses"? The answer is that as a reward for Moses's intercession on behalf of Israel, God gave the Torah to Moses. Rhetorically there is a tripartite structure here: The three righteous men introduced at the outset - Jacob, David, and Moses - are each presented as being righteous because they interceded on behalf of Israel. Finally, the author finishes out his references to Amos by citing 9:10-11, deemed relevant here because of the rhetorical association to David, the third righteous man in the tripartite structure (although there is no explicit reference here to his righteousness or his intercession on behalf of Israel). Because of his

righteousness, David will be restored among all of the kings of Israel and Judah.

The exposition continues with a very short alternative explanation of the same section of the Song of Songs 1:4 verse - נְזְכִּירָה דֹדַיִךְ מִיַּיִן. It seems to be a short anecdote which reiterates that we should take note of God's Torah for it is worth more than "old wine stored by the king in his innermost chambers." Shifting back again to the preceding section of the verse, הֱבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו, the phrase is explained as being a metaphor for God having brought Israel into the inner sanctum of Torah, into the secrets of Torah in its innermost parts. Where is this inner sanctum? The author answers by referring to Lev. 1:1-2. Again this deals with Moses, the righteous man who pleaded on behalf of Israel. God called to this wise disciple from His holy of holies (His inner sanctum), the tent of meeting.[2] But Moses did not enter the inner sanctum unbidden (see Ex. 3:4), rather he knew how to behave properly and waited until he was called (וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה - Lev. 1:1) and thus he is an example to us. What follows is a comparison of the two verses - Lev. 1:1 and Ex. 3:4 - which both involve God calling to Moses. A parable is invoked to explain the difference between the situations of Israel in each context, in Lev. 1:1 and Ex. 3:4. The end of this paragraph is a tangent, but the author returns to the idea of God calling Moses into the sanctum for an intimate encounter, paralleling the action of the king in the Song of Songs verse - הֱבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו.

An exposition of the next verses of Leviticus Chapter 1 now ensues: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם. The focus is on the word אָדָם

---

[2]Friedmann, p. 33, notes that this same example was set up in Leviticus Rabbah but that it is significantly different in style here.

which the author uses to explore what takes place in God's inner sanctum. There God addresses Israel in the language of intimate companionship, hence the use of the word אָדָם, which reflects a more familiar relationship, as is demonstrated in the usage בֶּן־אָדָם in Ezekiel 2:1. A clever midrashic wordplay assists the author in making his thematic point: Ezekiel's name, יחזקאל בן בוזי, is paraphrased as בן שמבזין (עצמן על כבודי ועל כבוד ישראל), "One who is a descendant of those willing to abase themselves for My sake and for the sake of Israel." The theme here is God's intimate love for Israel which is so great that He has compassion for them even when they do not merit it. The theme is further developed midrashically in the parable that follows. This parable is brought in to explain the meaning of the phrase בן אדם (construed as "son of my wife, Israel") in the Ezekiel verse. Additionally, the Ezekiel verse seems to have been strategically chosen not only for the more superficial reasons outlined by the author, namely the reference to the בן אדם phrase, but also for its underlying thematic content: This section of Ezekiel's vision exhorts Israel to repent and turn back to God, just as the author exhorts his audience throughout the entirety of this midrash. He continues with an exposition of Ezekiel's vision referring to various verses from Ezekiel and including a reference to angels, which is repeated from the fourth paragraph - ארבע מאות ותשעים ושש אלפים רבבות של מלאכי השרת. This is used here to illustrate the idea that God has no need for Israel's praise and worship because God has the angels to praise Him. What God does for Israel is done out of His love for them, not out of need. God's benevolence towards Israel is simply divine grace. In response to this expression of love, given freely by God, Israel is merely requested to behave properly. Nevertheless, even if Israel misbehaves, God will ultimately redeem them out of His great love for them, for the sake of His name, if not

for their own sake. Such redemption is not based upon merit. God's great love for Israel, and His compassion in saving Israel even when they do not merit it, is a major theme in *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. Because God loves Israel so greatly, He will find merit for them or other reasons to save them. God loves Israel ultimately out of a great and pure love, a love without need or expectation. This is what is described by the concluding verse of this segment, Ezek. 20:14.

The next comment is also on the word אדם in our new Lev. 1:2 base verse. In this case, the discussion again revolves around semantics: the meaning of the word אדם and other possible synonyms - i.e. איש (Ex. 12:3) - are clarified in the midrashic explanation which follows. On the face of it, this is a piece of midrash halacha, explaining that Scripture's terminology is meant to include converts and exclude gentiles from certain cultic provisions (although certain allowances are made for gentiles). However, it is not primarily concerned with cultic rules, but with pointing out that God's love for Israel includes converts. The continuation of the paragraph at first glance appears to be tangential - the author veers off on a discussion of a heathen's right to offer a burnt offering in the Temple and the use of public funds for the offering. But when the author introduces a first-person account of his own encounter with a heathen (a literary trope in this text), he returns to his larger theme of the salvific value of Torah, to which all are called. Thus the paragraph proceeds through elucidating the relation between גרים and גוים. The term אדם is used in Lev. 1:2 to include גרים, those who are the bridge to the גוים. This teaches us that *all* people should draw near to Torah. Even the gentiles cannot flee from this call because the converts are there to exhort them to draw near to the Torah. The encounter described by the author then

relates the giving of Torah as a guide *for all peoples* and thus returns us to the theme of Torah as a valued guide for life.

The exegesis of the Leviticus verse now continues with an examination of the terminology used in its second half. The author could have chosen to stop explicating the verse after the first half, but it seems to me that he has continued his explication in order to make a thematic point, one which is rhetorically and thematically continuous with the previous paragraph: The various offerings which are acceptable from repentant sinners indicate that God will accept Israel's repentance in any form (and with any offering) because of His unconditional love for Israel.

Continuing the themes of sacrifice entailed by the Leviticus base verse, the author opens the next paragraph with a stylistic marker:
(שספר עצמו עם הצדיקים הראשונים) ברוך המקום ברוך הוא
and returns to his comments on אדם. Here he lists righteous men, beginning with אדם the first man, through David, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Judah and Joseph, all of whom were righteous because they observed the precepts of Torah even before it was revealed. These examples are each supported with biblical prooftexts. The author's message presumably is a sort of *kal v'homer*: If these men who were without Torah could be so righteous, we who have Torah should be able to do likewise. Then God will bless us with His great love just as he blessed them with His name and allowed terms which describe His own attributes to be applied to them.

We return to Leviticus, Chapter 1, this time to verse 1:5 which discusses sacrifice. The author's methodology here is midrashic: he reads צפונה not as "*north of* the Lord" but as if the root were צפה, "*is seen* before the Lord". What is "seen" by God when one performs this offering is the sacrifice of Isaac. Thus, again, it is the merit of the deeds of the ancestors, in

this case Abraham and Isaac, that influences God's graciousness and causes God to be merciful to us, their descendants. Here a midrashic wordplay displays the thematic relevance of a seemingly irrelevant verse in Scripture. In a second midrashic wordplay, the author connects the word צפונה with צפונין (treasured, stored up), to a different verse, Song of Songs 7:14. This verse the author also construes as referring to the Patriarchs. They represent yet another example of righteous men in Israel whose deeds are "stored up" by God as merits to be appealed to on Israel's behalf so that God may save Israel even if they do not merit it of their own accord. Additionally, the author includes righteous rabbinic sages, such as Hillel, Yohanan ben Zakkai and his disciples, R. Meir and his disciples, among those whose merits are worthy to be "stored up" to be appealed to when Israel is not worthy to merit God's redemption. The author thus understands the sacrificial act as an invocation of the merits of the righteous ancestors on behalf of sinful Israel.

We continue with another set of verses from the first chapter of Leviticus, 1:9-13, that deal with the tangential theme of animal sacrifice (i. e. the comparison between the offering of a bullock and the offering of a ram). This theme is dealt with again as a semantic problem, but the author manages by means of a parable to link it to the performance of good deeds and the study of Torah. More Leviticus verses are used to similar effect. Lev. 2:5 and 2:7 refer to two types of meal offerings. What is the semantic difference? One is soft, the other firm - a wordplay on מרחשת (stewing pan) and רחשין (soft). This the author interprets as referring to two kinds of people; those who do mix (soften) their deeds with Torah, and those who do reprehensible deeds and then perfunctorily offer up sacrifices to atone for them. Torah and good deeds are deemed to be pleasing fragrances and oil poured out before the Lord - שמן תורק (Song of Songs 1:3). The end of this

verse is also explicated, with yet another wordplay on עלומות, which is variously construed as referring to the nations, אומות העולם, who love God because of Torah regardless of whether their fate is good עלומות (young maidens) or bad על מות (unto death).[3] Here the author begins the conclusion of the chapter. By bringing in Song of Songs 1:3, he subsequently returns us to where we began, Song of Songs 1:4.

Continuing the exposition of עלומות, several other meanings are offered on the basis of verbal similarities with various verses. The author returns to his theme of rabbinic Torah study, linking עלומות with נעלם. The message is that if one does not serve the sages, it is as if his own Torah study disappears from him and he is lost, leading על מות, "unto death".

אבל קרא אדם תורה נביאים וכתובים ושנה משנה מדרש הלכות ואגדות ושימש חכמים אפילו מת עליך אפילו נהרג עליך הרי הוא בשמחת עולם

"But a man who studies Torah, Prophets and Writings and studies Mishnah, Midrash, Halachot and Aggadot and is guided by the sages, even if he dies on Your behalf, even if he is executed on Your behalf, he will rejoice forever."

Thus, what is meant by עלומות (construed as על מות "unto death") in Song of Songs 1:3, is that students of Torah are faithful to God unto death.

From here we are brought back to the Lev. 2:7 wordplay on מרחשת (stewing pan) and רחשין (soft). This is another example of the author's technique of "resumption". He returns to one phrase from a previous discussion and pulls it out for fine-tuning, analysis, and comment. The author likens the description of a stewing pan and its trembling ingredients to the man who possesses knowledge of the Torah and trembles lest he be overtaken by sin. God blesses such a person. The underlying theme is that knowledge

---

[3]Braude and Kapstein, p. 127.

and acting through Torah are what makes a person righteous. The end of this paragraph picks up verses from Prov. 20:5 and Ps. 130:1 because of their reference to the word עמוק which was part of the quote that began this segment, understood as referring to the depths of Torah.

The final paragraph continues the comparison of sacrificial offerings as dealt with in the previous paragraphs. Because several of these offerings have the word תורה attached to them, our author is able to pursue the theme of Torah (which is where he intended to travel from the outset) by introducing these verses. Again we discuss Scripture's specific word choices, all of which, we are told, are there to teach us not to sin and to repent. We should note that the same formulary - כדי שלא יאמר אדם בעצמו אלך ואעשה דרכין מכוערין - that has appeared in the previous paragraphs appears here. In the previous paragraphs comparisons were made between the different types of sacrifices (bullock, ram, and two kinds of meal offerings). Here this phrase is used to explain the significance of the "ו", ... וזאת תורת, rather than simply .... זאת תורת. The "ו" is placed here to emphasize that God desires the less elaborate offerings accompanied by good deeds and Torah study. Thus the author concludes with a *nehemta*: Despite a person's sins, God forgives one who truly repents, and will bring upon him blessings. For God does not wish to punish man - see Isaiah 53:10, the beginning of which our author reads in question form - but (continuing the verse explication) if he realizes his sin and repents, God will lengthen his days. The end of this verse is explicated a second time to refer to this world and the world-to-come - - the world of reward. But in truth, more than offerings, God desires good deeds and Torah, as in Jer. 7:21 and Hosea 6:6. Finally, he concludes with Jer. 3:11-13, a plea that Israel turn from evil and repent. It is in this way that we show appreciation to God, and that God will look with favor upon us.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Eight:**

Chapter 8 opens with a quote taken from Ecclesiastes 9:18. Thematically this is a further explication of what was discussed previously. Here the focus is specifically on wisdom which is, of course, understood by our author as attained by studying Torah and acting righteously. What follows is a series of examples which support the claim of the opening verse - "Great is wisdom." The author chooses the biblical example of Elisha giving advice to the king of Israel. He utilizes a wordplay on the word כִּיתָה "feast" and the Greek כַּיְרֵי (see Jastrow p. 636) for the greeting "hail", to demonstrate that Elisha's advice (his wisdom) was not that one should smite his enemy, rather, one should greet him. This supports the Ecclesiastes verse, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war..." Friedmann believes that this section is a continuation of the theme begun with הֲבִיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו in the last chapter (p.32), referring to knowledge of God and Torah, which he says was interrupted by a digression of the discourses on sacrifices.[4] This is possible, but it may also be the beginning of a new ideational progression.

The author then proceeds with similar scriptural examples of wisdom. What he appears to be doing is embellishing or creating new stories from the biblical examples available to him in order to illustrate key thematic points. While this is in some ways reflected in midrashic explication earlier than *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, it is particularly unique here for the reasons that these stories are chosen: In earlier midrashim, stories are created to fill in textual gaps which seem to be begging for an answer. Although there is some precedent for homiletical embellishment in the homiletical midrashim, this is

---

[4]Friedmann, note 1, p. 39.

not found to be as extensive or as thematically single-minded as we find here in *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. In this text the narrative embellishments the author has created seem to be utilized not to answer apparent questions in the scriptural text, but rather to further the aims of the author and his thematic development. This is a genuine homiletical deployment of materials. For instance, the author quotes passages about David and his wisdom, using the verses to fill in his own story: With I Chronicles 21:11, the author embellishes on David's thought processes and illustrates how he chose pestilence over war or famine as a punishment for his census-taking. This midrashic explanation concludes that this plague was selected because it does not favor certain social classes over others. Similarly, the missing gaps in the I Chron. 21:16 story are filled in with I Kings 1:11 to create a version of the story which fits the author's purpose.

The author chooses to continue with Ps. 139:16 because in this verse Israel stands exposed before God just as David did in the previous account. Yet, God did not totally destroy Israel in the plague described in I Chron. 21:11-16. Our author puts the words of Ps. 139 in the mouth of David, and immediately inserts a stylistic refrain: ברוך המקום ברוך הוא (שהבטיח את אבותינו ונתן ביטחון לבנים שכשם שהקב"ה יהי שמו הגדול מבורך לעולם ולעולמי עולמים.....). He repeats some of the themes of Chapter 1 of the text, where Ps. 139:16 first appears. Here his use of the verse presents one of the major recurrent themes in the text, the idea that although God sees and knows all of Israel's flaws, He does not act vengefully or judge them accordingly, although He could do so. Even more, God gives to Israel the wisdom of Torah, not withholding it from them as a punishment although He could have done so. But God does execute vengeful judgements on Israel's enemies, as we learn from the example of Pharaoh -

צא ולמד מפרעה. We learn from this that God gives to each according to his due - ....צא ולמד מיום שנברא העולם. The verse from Jeremiah 32:19 is brought to illustrate the idea of God's great judgement, Job 34:10 to demonstrate that God gives to each what he is due, and Nahum 1:2 to reiterate that God is a jealous and avenging God.

Having introduced the idea of Egypt and Pharaoh, the author revisits this example to ask the question of why Egypt was dealt with so harshly. He explains that this was because Egypt was steeped in evil ways more so than any other nation and thus God punished them. A parable of a king and his vassal armies is used to illustrate this point through Isaiah 19:1. The *burden* of Egypt was the punishment for their evil ways, and all because the counselors of Pharaoh were fools (as in Isaiah 19:11). As Egypt *staggered* in her perverse ways, (Isaiah 19:4) so, says our author, Egypt will *stagger* under the *burden* of Israel (Zechariah 12:3). Thus, taking selections from Isaiah 19: 1-11, the author has created a rationale for Egypt's punishment - their immorality, perverseness, and lack of wisdom. However, God's love for Israel causes Him to be merciful to us, even while He diligently exacts punishment upon the other nations for their moral affronts.

Egypt and its sufferings are now the central focus of the next several sections. Ten plagues were visited upon Egypt as a result of their own iniquities. The punishments fit the crimes according to our author's explanation. These he proceeds to enumerate and describe. It is apparent now that what we have is a thematic digression. That is, we have been diverted from the major theme of wisdom and Torah to a lesser, incidental idea - Egypt - which now overtakes the progression of the midrash for the majority of this chapter. Nonetheless, in justifying God's punishment of Egypt, the author again reminds us that God's ways are true and just, that

men bring punishment upon themselves by their evil deeds and immorality. The entire discussion of the plagues is set up as "measure for measure". That is, the Egyptians brought these plagues upon themselves by planning to do the same to the Israelites. Thus, they were punished in accordance with their immoral acts by a plague which was fitting for each evil deed. The plagues are therefore their own responsibility, not the result of God's whims.

Our author begins with the first plague, blood, and asks why it came upon the Egyptians. The format introduced here is followed in the discussion of most of the other ten plagues: דם מפני מה עליהן and similarly later: כינים מפני מה באו עליהן. Typically the scenarios proceed with a formula such as this and are concluded with לפיכך הביא הקב"ה. The explanation given here is that the Egyptians seized water from the Israelites so that they could not purify themselves from *niddah*. The Egyptians hoped thereby to prevent any further Israelite procreation. לפיכך, Thus, in punishment God visited them in kind by turning their water into blood. This is proved by a verse from Ps. 78:44. The author expands this, creating a scenario in which the water remained water to the Israelites but turned into blood for the Egyptians and fulfilling what is described in Ex. 10:2. (It is interesting to note the apparent connection between menstrual blood/ritual purity and the water/blood.)

We move on to the next plague, frogs. Here too, the Egyptians are punished with the very thing with which they taunted the Israelites. The midrashic explanations which follow are generated on the basis of linguistic discrepancies - why is a certain word inserted seemingly unnecessarily (i.e., גם in Ex. 7:11) or why there is a discrepancy in description (i.e., Ex. 8:2 states וַתַּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּעַ read as "*and the frog [singular] came up*", whereas Ex. 7:28 describes the plague as וְשָׁרַץ הַיְאֹר צְפַרְדְּעִים "*and the river shall*

bring forth frogs [plural] *in swarms*)". Following are the 14 types of lice that God brought upon Egypt; this follows the pattern of rhetoric מפני מה....לפיכך, as begun above. The explanation is likewise underscored with a biblical prooftext. The description of the plague of beasts revisits the idea of Egypt trying to prevent Israel from reproducing and increasing their numbers. The following plagues, murrain, boils, hail, and locusts, also were devised to divert the Israelites from reproducing. All of these examples follow the same rhetorical pattern. The only notable midrashic creativity is found in the paragraph dealing with hail. The author quotes Ex. 9:26-27, which describes the plague of hail, and brings in Ps. 78:47-48 because it also has the word "hail", and then cleverly reads the word for frost, בחנמל, as בא חן נמל, "*He came, encamped and cut down*", showing the real relevance of the verse, that God came and destroyed Egypt.

With the explanation of darkness, the familiar refrain ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שאין לפניו משוא פנים returns. This phrase is found throughout the midrash *Tanna debe Eliyahu* and is a marker of the author's style. The author wants to reiterate that God is just towards all people, even though it might seem that He favored the Israelites. This is why it is necessary to explain that there were sinners among the Israelites as well and thus Israel was also punished with plagues. However, God sent Egypt darkness so that they would not see that Israel suffered, as is proved in Ex. 10:23, says the author.

The plague of the first-born sons is dealt with next. This too is explained as a "measure for measure" punishment since Pharaoh had decreed earlier that all first-born Israelite sons be put to death. The quotation from Exodus 1:16 of Pharaoh's order to the midwives is embellished. The author points out that this decree was not so tragic because it was customary for a

man to have many wives (by whom to produce offspring even if the number of males was decreased). As it was, we then see in verse 17 that the midwives did not obey Pharaoh. But the Egyptians were held accountable as if the deed had been done. However, Israel is not held accountable unless a deed is done.

The final calamity to befall the Egyptians, their drowning in the sea as the children of Israel passed over in safety, is the subject of more midrashic elaboration: Once again the rationale is that just as Pharaoh decreed that the Israelite children be drowned, the Egyptians suffered this as their punishment. Ex. 1:22 describes Pharaoh's decree but Ex. 36:6 is brought in to make a *gezerah shavah* through the use of a אף.....גזה syllogism, to illustrate that, as the צו (commandment) of Moses in 36:6 was to to be proclaimed publicly throughout the camp, so the צו of Pharaoh was also public. Because of this, the author tells us, the Egyptians, too, were liable to drowning just as the Israelite babies were subject to drown as a result of Pharaoh's decree. Using the rest of the verse, the commandment itself, the author reiterates the argument used in the previous section; that it wasn't such a terrible decree because most men had as many as ten wives. He continues the story, embellishing what the Egyptians did. The author applies Song of Songs 2:15 to the events: שועלים are likened to the Egyptians, שועלים קטנים to the Egyptian children, they are the ones who "spoil the vineyards..." The spoilers, the first-born Egyptian children, deserve to die because they informed on the Israelites. Isaiah 5:7 is brought in to prove that the vineyards in Song of Songs 2:15 refer to Israel - another *gezerah shavah*. Attached to this are the words of R. Eliezer, an additional support to the idea of Israel being a vineyard. Those who despoil God's vineyard (Israel) as the Egyptians did will in turn be destroyed by the owner of the vineyard (God).

Another story regarding what happened to the Israelite infants as they were being thrown into the river follows, as well as another midrash on how God miraculously rescued them, thwarting the commands of Pharaoh. These stories are interesting because of their creativity - it seems as if the author designed the details of the midrashim to match the verses precisely so as to illustrate God's saving power.

It was intimated that God intended to drown all of Egypt because Egypt had intended to drown all of the first-born Israelite sons. Our author asks "Why did this not occur?" This scenario is introduced to emphasize two themes: the saving power of God and the compassion of God. The author begins again with the familiar phrase: ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שאין לפניו משוא פנים, which emphasizes God's impartiality; that God looks out for all (i.e., even for Israelite sinners). The idea that there were rebellious Israelites who did not trust in God's saving power is introduced here. This is why God was forced to detain the drowning of Egypt until they had reached the Reed Sea. He had to do so in order to prove to these skeptics that He had the ability to save Israel beyond any doubt. Continuing with Ex. 14:10 and 14:15, the author shows that the entreaties of the Israelites were sufficient for God to save them. The entreaties of prominent leaders such as Moses were not answered until the people themselves began to pray to God. It was not for Moses's sake that God saved them, but for the sake of the Israelites themselves. This is to explain the apparent discrepancy in Scripture's report that both Moses and the children of Israel cried out, and that in Ex. 14:15 God reproached Moses, proving that his entreaty was unnecessary. This also underscores the theme that God takes care of great *and small* alike. The author concludes this with verses which emphasize God's saving power and triumph.

At last we return to a major theme which was set out at the beginning of the chapter, the jealousy and vengeance of God. God restrains His anger against Israel but He does not hesitate to exact vengeance against the nations who act immorally. The author makes a comparison between Pharaoh and another wicked king, Sennacherib of Assyria. He does so in order to further the discussion of God's vengeance and power against the gentiles who treat Israel harshly, using language similar to the second paragraph of this chapter where these ideas were previously laid out. The author makes the general comparison and then outlines each similar characteristic by utilizing scriptural references. Then he moves the story along methodically; first asking a question, giving an example and supporting it with a biblical reference. We have seen the Jeremiah reference before, at the beginning of this chapter, and the references to Nahum are also brought back here. It seems that in using Nahum 1:11 the author may have a problem; this verse refers to evil devised against the Lord, not against Israel; but, in truth, by utilizing this verse, he is able to demonstrate that devising evil against Israel is like devising evil against God. Of course, God will not allow this destruction, so Nahum 1:9 and 1:2 reiterate that God protects and avenges His children.

The author utters another characteristic phrase of praise to God for having punished Israel's enemies: ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שניפרע מִשׁוּנאיהן שׁל ישׂראל. Continuing with the theme of punishment for the enemies of God, the author illustrates another "measure for measure" punishment with a comparative (גם....כך) syllogism: Just as it was Sennacherib's intention to root out Israel, thus it was God's intention to root out Sennacherib, as stated in II Kings 19:35. A description is given of Sennacherib's plan (Isaiah 10:14) and of his enemies. The author brings in

several Bible verses that relate to the story of Sennacherib but which seem to have little to do with the main themes (i.e., they focus on discrepancies in the number of soldiers); rather, they are a minor digression. At last the paragraph is wrapped up with verses from Ps. 37 that describe God's vengeance, saving power, and justice against the wicked.

The chapter concludes with emphasis on avoiding doing business with a heathen (as Abraham did, illustrated in Gen. 21:27). It is at first difficult to see where this connects to the above midrashic expositions. But as we move on, the connections become more clear. A midrash is told about the angels accusing Abraham on this account before God; thus Abraham needed to be tested. Apparently Abraham's mistake in forging a partnership with a gentile, against God's implicit prohibition, led to the oppression of Israel by the Egyptians. Although part of this section is fragmentary and confusing, it is clear that this is the connection to the minor digressionary theme - Egypt. The warning against making covenants with heathens carries the consequence that one will thereby be led to idolatry. And if he is a wise man, it is worse: Here the author introduces a key phrase which will reappear again and again to drive home the importance of his main theme, that one who is wise should follow the path of Torah:

ואם תלמיד חכם הוא מזלזל את תורתו ומחלל שמו של אביו שבשמים
ומבזבז את מזמנו ומוסר את בניו ומפיל אותם בחרב ומגלה אותם
מארצם ומוכרן לעבודה זרה.

"*And if he is a wise man (and does business with heathens), he disrespects his Torah, profanes the name of his Father in heaven, and wastes his wealth, (It is as if) he delivers over his sons to the sword and exiles them from their land and introduces them to idol worship.*" There is clearly a strong antipathy toward gentiles in this chapter and in those which follow. With this closing

phrase we have returned to the major overriding theme - the wisdom of Torah. Indeed, we have seen from Abraham's example that business relations with a heathen are deemed to be a desecration of Torah. This major theme (wisdom) will be developed in the next chapter as the problem of relations with a heathen is played out as a violation of Torah's teaching.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu*, Chapter Nine:**

Chapter 9 begins with the same phrase which ended the final paragraph of the previous chapter. It is obviously a continuation of the previous thematic and rhetorical materials. Now we are told that a Jew should not sit at table (i.e., share a meal) with a heathen. This entire chapter revolves around a very small cluster of verses, primarily from Isaiah, Chapters 37-39, and II Kings, Chapter 20, all of which tell of Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah. These Hezekiah materials connect on a superficial level with Sennacherib as discussed in the previous chapter. Taking Isaiah 37:15-20, the author develops the story, explaining that Hezekiah was struck down because he sat at table with a heathen and because he addressed God without proper reverence. If a man in addressing one of higher station should show proper reverence, how much the more so should Hezekiah have shown proper respect for God. This supplies the background for Isaiah 38:1, the notice of Hezekiah's illness and Isaiah's prophecy of the king's death. The author tells us that from Hezekiah's subsequent entreaty to God we can learn four truths regarding how one should pray to God. God's compassion and mercy in hearing Hezekiah's plea are emphasized in II Kings 20:4-5 and 8-11. Here again, the author picks up the story and re-introduces the theme: one should not share a meal with a heathen. One should not be too familiar with a gentile because it will lead him to sin. Indeed, because he was grateful, Hezekiah showed all that he had and revealed all, including "God's secrets", and the Temple treasury, to the heathens (Isaiah 39:1-2). We see that because of this Hezekiah was punished. Yet again he had not shown proper reverence for God and this is what motivates the denouement in II Kings 20:17. From this the author derives a moral lesson, that a man should not be boastful in his knowledge of Torah. Hezekiah was rooted out for this sin; this

was the reason that God sent him the wicked son Menashe. The author reads into this story moral concepts, reasonings, and cause and effect relationships to drive home his key ethical themes.

Then, the case of Hezekiah, who was punished with a wicked son, Menashe, is contrasted with the case of Elkanah, who was rewarded with an upright son, Samuel. The discussion is introduced by means of another characteristic formulary: כיוצא בדבר אתה אומר. The author describes the righteousness of Elkanah (I Sam. 1:1-3), who thrice yearly made a pilgrimage with his entire household to Shiloh. Why, asks our author, did Elkanah bring everyone with him? This was to keep them from associating with gentiles and learning the idolatry of the Canaanites in his absence. This should be compared with Hezekiah, who freely associated with gentiles and learned bad ways from them. Then another scenario, a *davar acher*, is suggested: Elkanah brought along his family in order to influence others to join him. They were to serve as role models for the proper way an Israelite should act, making pilgrimages and acting piously before God. The reasoning the author develops is characteristic of his literary style: question and answer, detail building upon detail. The message is clear: by giving proper respect to God, keeping his family from idolatry and training them and other Israelites in *mitzvot*, Elkanah is blessed with a reward, his son Samuel. Samuel is a righteous son, a reward for his father's righteous actions, in contrast with the wicked Menashe, a punishment for his father Hezekiah's improper actions. The chapter wraps up with what *we* learn from all this - הא למדתה. How it applies to the reader must be inferred but it is obvious. The author concludes with the same refrain that concluded Chapter 8 and emphasizes the negative outcome of associating with gentiles versus the virtues of keeping Judaism and Torah: .... מכן אמרו כל האוכל עם הגוי ... ואם תלמד חכם הוא

We have come full circle to arrive at the same conclusion as before: one should not consort with a heathen for it leads to sin and exile, and is contrary to the precepts of Torah. The implied idea is that one should engage in Torah which brings reward.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu*, Chapter Ten:**

The author begins the tenth chapter with another example of a righteous person, the prophetess Devorah. The author asks what special qualities Devorah possessed that she was singled out when she was not the only judge serving Israel at this time. He inserts a phrase that has appeared in earlier chapters and that recurs throughout the text, reiterating the concept that God awards punishment or merit according to one's deeds, particularly emphasizing the importance of good deeds:

מעיד אני עלי את השמים ואת הארץ בין גוי ובין ישראל בין איש ובין אשה בין עבד ובין שפחה הכל לפי מעשה שעושה כך רוח הקודש שורה עליו - *"I call heaven and earth to witness; whether a heathen or a Jew, a man or a woman, a manservant or a maidservant, according to one's deeds shall the Holy One measure out to him (reward or punishment)."* With this admonition, he goes on to explain why Devorah was considered so righteous. Because the story includes the bringing of wicks to Shiloh, perhaps this is why it immediately follows the story of Elkanah (who also had a connection with Shiloh). More crucially, Devorah and Elkanah are linked together as being two of a kind: Both cause others to acquire merit through their good deeds. Elkanah brings crowds of people to Shiloh. Devorah urges her husband to donate wicks there. Both Elkanah and Devorah bring others to *mitzvot*. Thus, they teach us that bringing others to meritorious deeds brings comparable merit to you, as it is expressed in the rhetorical formulary which is repeated here, first applied to Elkanah, now to Devorah: הקב"ה בוחן לבות וכליות הוא אמר לו/לה..... Proverbs 14:1 is cited in part to describe Devorah and righteous women like her. This verse returns us again to the theme of wisdom.

With the phrase כיוצא בדבר אתה אומר, the same phrase used to introduce the Elkanah story which served as a contrast to Hezekiah, the author brings in Devorah's opposite, the wicked Jezebel as described in I Kings 21:25. We have another pair of opposites: Devorah and Jezebel vis `a vis their husbands just as we had Hezekiah and Elkanah vis `a vis their sons. It is Jezebel who led her husband Ahab into idolatry and because of their deeds they and their sons were cast out of both this world and the world-to-come. A parable is introduced which represents Ahab's situation, and the Proverbs 14:1 verse is applied to Jezebel in conjunction with several other scriptural citations, all from Psalm 37, which describe the wicked being cast out of the world. (Note that these are the same verses cited in chapter 8 to describe God's vengeance against the wicked and that the rhetoric at the end of this paragraph parallels that of the preceding paragraph regarding Devorah.)

Now the author employs a first-person narrative again. The connection to the previous story is that he tells now of Omri, the father of the wicked Ahab. The author begins with a typical statement, פעם אחת הייתי יושב בבית המדרש, and introduces his topic in the form of a question to the masters there: Do they know why Omri merited having three descendants on the throne? Because he added a large city to Israel, Samaria, and established it as the capital of Israel as Jerusalem was for Judah, as described in I Kings 16:24, and borne out by Ezekiel 23:2-4. The author interjects ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שאין לפניו משוא פנים and establishes yet another example of God's impartiality: We are told that Omri turned the sons of his vassals from idolators into God-fearers, and for this he was accorded merit (II Kings 20: 13-15). Subsequently, one of the vassals, Mesha the king of Moab, rebelled against Israel. When the three kings rose

up against Moab, Mesha offered up his only son (see II Kings 3:27). But because of what Mesha did, Israel descended in merit, for, after seeing this, the sons of the vassals turned away from God and Israel and decreased the number of righteous worshippers of God.

ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שמשלם לבני אדם איש כדרכיו. Another characteristic phrase praises God for measuring out to each man what he deserves. We are returned to the story of Devorah and the explication begun earlier of Judges 4:4ff. The details of Scripture's account of where she sat and taught are understood to signify specific aspects of her merit and to exemplify the proposition that God metes out what is due to each person. The next verse cited, 4:6, introduces the theme of Devorah's wisdom in Torah study. Focusing on the words הלא צוה "hasn't God commanded?", the author asks where God commanded Barak to wage war against the Canaanites and how Devorah knew this. The answer is that Devorah knew this because like a good rabbi, she knew how to interpret Scripture. She found the answer not through a direct revelation but through study of Torah. Noting a verse from Deut. 19:18, which says that judges are to inquire wisely (ודרשו which is understood as מדרש, inquiry into Scriptures), the author implies that because Devorah was a judge she wisely examined Scripture, noting that the next verse, Deut. 20:1, speaks of battle with one's enemies (hence Sisera). This is a clever development of the story as well as a reinforcement of the theme.

The rest of the paragraph is a continued explication of the Judges passage, although not in detail. First, the issue of the relationship between Devorah and Barak is addressed. It was only because he was a disciple of the sages that he served her. From this, Devorah learns that deliverance comes from the merit of those who are continually engaged in the study of Torah.

The paragraph asks in succession why Barak, the tribes of Naftali and Zevulun (who fought under Barak's command), and Yael merited being the instruments of Israel's salvation. The answer has to do with their righteous behavior. Barak served the sages and studied with them. The two tribes served Jacob and Issachar. Yael served her husband. Yet another rhetorical question in the same style is posed: Why is Barak included in Devorah's song? It is because through her song he is ascribed merit. He deserves merit because he feared God and believed Devorah's prophecy, concepts supported by Judges 4:8-9. The author thus has the opportunity to reintroduce the theme of reward for faith in God. Finally, Yael provides yet another example of one who has brought deliverance to Israel. In Judges 4:11-17 we see that she is worthy of this because she obeyed her husband's will - another important moral theme, אין אשה כשירה אלא העושה רצון בעלה. This is the conclusion of the discussion of Devorah for this chapter.

פעם אחת הייתי יושב בבית המדרש הגדול בירושלים. The author concludes the chapter with another first-person narrative. He is thus announcing his intention to pursue his own ideas. He continues with a supplication to the great sages and then a prayer to God,

אבינו שבשמים יהי שמך הגדול מבורך לעולם ולעולמי עולמים
ותהיה לך קרת רוח מישראל עבדיך בכל מקומות מושבותיכם,

a typical stylistic marker of his writing which we have seen previously. Then he arrives at the heart of his message, a complicated way of explaining that a good wife is one who obeys her husband (as we have seen in the case of Yael) and that a wife who provides for her husband is a blessing. These duties are, according to the author, ordained by God. After all, it is known from Gen. 2:18, now cited, that all that God gave to Israel was given with wisdom and forethought. God set up the world in such a way as to benefit Israel and

humankind. Here, specifically, a wife was provided for her husband with divine wisdom. The author explicates each part of the verse to demonstrate how a woman is a helpmate, given with wisdom to man. The sages in the story ask him to elaborate, he provides analogies. Then he moves on to another, related matter: the loyalty of a husband to his wife. This is compared with, and becomes a metaphor for, Israel's transgression against God. Although Scripture (in Hosea and Jeremiah) refers to Israel as an adulterer and a harlot, the same verses provide a *nehemta* - While human husbands may tire of their wives, God never tires of, or abandons, Israel. Israel returns to God because God has an unconditional love for Israel.

Concluding the chapter, we have a typical refrain which is recurrent throughout the text, proclaiming that God is merciful and overlooks Israel's backsliding. Despite their transgressions, God restrains His anger and does not withhold Torah from them. The citations depict God as refraining from casting off Israel (Jer. 31:35-36), and as coming to Israel's help (Deut. 33: 24-26). Even simple Israelites are worthy to bring sacrifices to the altar, as a means of atonement, although they are not priests. God watches out for all, not just the scholars or the very righteous. At the end, the author praises the man who desists from all transgression. The rest of the passage seems choppy, as if parts of it are missing. In the next chapter we revisit the Judges 4-5 explication.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Eleven:**

Chapter 11 opens with a continuation of the previously interrupted explication of Judges Chapters 4 and 5. We begin with an inquiry as to why Devorah began her prophecy with the statement in Judges 5:1, focusing specifically on the word פרע (construed as פורעות - divine retribution) in the verse. The author's answer is that Devorah's prophecy makes reference to the reason that God avenged Israel. God did so because of those who praise God in synagogue and study Torah, a refrain from the previous chapter. This is addressed in the next verse: "In time of tumultuous strife in Israel (when) the people willingly offered themselves (in) praise (of) the Lord" (Judges 5:2). Note also that the author makes a special effort to praise those who respond "Amen" in synagogues. He then cites Ps. 5:19, perhaps because it too refers to deliverance from battle as Devorah and Barak were delivered from Sisera. The reward for those who study Torah and praise God is that "he has delivered my soul in peace....." (Ps. 55:19). The verse is applied repeatedly to various situations, such as completing a *minyan*, supporting a student of Torah, and other scenarios that call for deliverance and reward. Indeed, there is no better way to keep away the angel of death than to support a student, such a person is likened to Moses who interceded on behalf of Israel, saving them from death (Deut. 9:19). The paragraph closes with a teaching from the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:5) "If you support one life it is as if you support a whole world," and a verse from Proverbs again stressing the merit of *tzedakah*.

The chapter continues with a *ma'aseh*, a description of two priestly families who come to Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai with a problem: their children continually die young. The author sets out a clever scenario which leads into I Sam. 2:32. Yohanan concludes that these children are the sons of Eli, and

that the parents should offer *tzedakah* because it saves from death, as we learned above in Ps. 55:19 and here in Prov. 10:2. Furthermore, the author embellishes that one who performs acts of *tzedakah* ransoms Israel from her exile and redeems God as well. He redeems the *Shechina* from her exile. Thus the author reiterates both the moral value and the efficacy of performing such acts, driving home their importance for his audience in their own lives. Regardless of the time period in which this was written, the author tries to leave his audience with a sense of control and a need for them to follow God and the ways of Torah despite whatever strife and hardship confronts them and the people of Israel in their own time. The rationale is also sharply contrasted with the resultant effects if the reader does not follow these ways: Isaiah 59:15 is applied. Here a characteristic plea is interjected: אבינו שבשמים יהי שמך הגדול מבורך לעולם ולעולמי עולמים ותהיה לך קורת רוח מישראל עבדיך, asking, and at the same time emphasizing, "Is it not You, O God, who really redeems, as you describe in Ps. 25:22 and 130:8?"

God then "responds" to this plea by citing Jer. 21:12, saying in effect, "Why do you look to me for redemption?" God admonishes the people that they have a means of hastening the redemption if they would only act justly. This "exchange" recognizes a potential conflict between the two verses, Ps. 25:22 and 130:8, that call God "redeemer of Israel", and Ps. 55:19, "he has delivered My soul in peace", which the author has interpreted to mean that the righteous man delivers *God* from exile. Thus, this emphasis on the efficacy of individual action is the author's resolution of the conflict.

Judgement according to the norms of Torah is what brings contentment in this world and in the heavens.[5] Continuing the theme of

---

[5]This is Braude's understanding, pp. 162-163.

judgement, the author proceeds to explicate Judges 5:10-11 phrase by phrase, applying each phrase to different manifestations of the idea of the blameless judgement of the Judges of Israel: In Devorah's praise of the governors of Israel, רֹכְבֵי אֲתֹנוֹת צְחֹרוֹת, he construes the word צְחֹרוֹת to signify innocence from plundering. Thus the governor's judgement is said to be uncorrupted by stealing. Taking the next phrase, יֹשְׁבֵי עַל־מְדָיִן, the author uses a wordplay to read מדין not as "couches" but as "judgement". He gives two examples of judgement, and by taking a phrase from Isaiah 10:2 which also contains the word מִדִּין he is able to justify the new translation by means of a *gezerah shavah* syllogism. Continuing the explication of verse 10, the next phrase is applied to the judges of the court of the Sanhedrin, and so on. The phrases from verse 11 are construed likewise: מִקּוֹל מְחַצְּצִים, the voice of the archers, is also read as a wordplay - from חצצ, "to divide" or "to decree"- and is said to refer to those who distinguish between that which is ritually pure and impure, etc. בֵּין מַשְׁאֲבִים is linked to the more metaphorical Isaiah 12:3 verse, וּשְׁאַבְתֶּם־מַיִם בְּשָׂשׂוֹן מִמַּעַיְנֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה, signifying that the Sanhedrin לומדין ושואבין *"learn and draw forth* (words of Torah, that is)". Another explanation for this phrase is given: From their disputes they "draw out" many words of Torah. And in the next phrase of verse 11 (שָׁם יִתְּנוּ צִדְקוֹת יְהוָה צִדְקַת פְּרָזוֹנָו בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אָז יָרְדוּ לַשְּׁעָרִים עַם־יְהוָה), פְּרָזוֹנָו is read as פזר, to scatter. Thus it is interpreted as if God showed צדקות in dispersing Israel.

The idea of God showing mercy in having dispersed Israel is developed by means of a parable: Here we have the story of a Roman commander and his disagreement with R. Judah regarding the compassion of Israel versus that of Rome. Citing I Kings 11:16, the Roman states that Israel left no one except one pregnant woman when they defeated Edom, reading זָכָר - which

in the verse means "male" - as זֵכֶר, "remembrance". To refute him, R. Judah brings a student to answer the charge. The disciple offers a parable, reciting it three times until it is grasped by the Roman. The gist of it answers the issue of dispersion in that God protects his treasure by dispersing it, not gathering it all in one place so that it may more easily destroyed. Once the commander understands, he rises immediately and praises God in words which by now are very familiar to the reader: ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שבחר בכם מכל באי עולם, and subsequently reveals the Romans' plans for destroying Israel, conceding that since they are dispersed, the execution of this plan is foiled. Thus we understand God's merciful action in dispersing Israel. In addition, R. Judah gets the Roman to admit that his people are not so compassionate as he originally purports to demonstrate, because they have plotted to destroy Israel. This is perhaps an answer to what was probably a common philosophical and theological problem in the author's time: the problem of being in exile or dispersed.

The chapter concludes with another comment on the phrase from Judges 5:11 as developed above. This time the focus is on the יְתַנּוּ צִדְקוֹת יְהוָה, the recitation by the people of the righteous acts of God: The author tells the story of a small town where the people came to build a house of study and when their neighbors saw this, they built one also and so on, until the whole land had many houses of study. Presumably these houses of study were to be utilized to tell of the righteous acts of God. Thus, as the verse goes on to say, אָז יָרְדוּ לַשְּׁעָרִים עַם־יְהוָה, perhaps meaning down to the gates of learning or of the synagogue. The author explicates all of these phrases to enhance his key points - God's true judgement, righteousness, and the importance of Torah study. The story continues, extolling the virtues of Torah study, proved with a reference to an earlier verse, Judges 5:8, which

the author takes out of its context to mean that God favors the new insights of those who study. Finishing the chapter with this verse, the end of which describes war in the gates (understood midrashically as gates of learning) he explains that there was no need for a sword or spear here, that expertise in Torah was sufficient to quell the uprising. The whole chapter is thereby framed by the praise of those who pray and study. Thus we finish the exposition of the Song of Devorah.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Twelve:**

Chapter 12 begins with a reference to what Israel was like in the period of the Judges, shifting the underlying focus of the last two chapters from the Judges themselves to Israel at the time of their rule. The author then presents a parable which is a metaphor for the way that God has treated Israel - they are like children who grew up in His house but did not respect what they were given. Thus they were given over to the dominion of other nations. However, as soon as Israel repented, God redeemed them, because as loving parent, God cannot resist the entreaties of His young children. The parable teaches as well that Israel is not assessed any fine without justification, that nothing happens to that is not deserved by them. God's judgement is fair. God does not punish Israel according to the full measure of punishment that they deserve. What may seem like harsh punishment in fact is a manifestation of God's mercy, since it could have been much worse. (The theme that God judges righteously and mercifully and accords Israel the right to be judged fairly before they are punished is by now very familiar to the reader. It is also perhaps the author's way of at once admonishing the people and at the same time delivering a message of hope, that God will redeem them.)

The author now takes up a series of possible objections to his thesis that whatever punishment befalls Israel is deserved by them, that God's judgement is fair. For example, the 42,000 Ephraimites slain in the days of Jeptha were killed because Jeptha made an improper vow and Phinehas neither tried to stop him nor released him from his vow. Both were acting from improper pride and self-importance. Since Jeptha nonetheless took his life into his own hands and saved Israel from the Moabites and Ammonites, God defended him against the contentious Ephraimites (see Judges 12:6).

(Also described in this verse is the challenge to the fleeing Ephraimites who were made to pass the test of saying the word שִׁבֹּלֶת. The author construes this as if it involves an idolatrous name, really saying שָׂא בול ["raise up Ba'al"], thus referring to idols of worship.) But in fact it was not Jeptha who slew the 42,000 but Phinehas who was ultimately responsible since 1) he did not release Jeptha from his vow and 2) he did not intervene in the conflict between the Ephraimites and Jeptha and reprove them. Not only was Phinehas responsible, says our author, but whoever has the opportunity to intervene in a conflict and does not do so, whoever has the chance to bring Israel back to God and fails to act, is ultimately held responsible for the outcome of his inaction. This theme is underscored in Ezekiel 33:7-9. The author has used the story of Jeptha to 1) illustrate fairness of God's judgement, and to 2) demonstrate the concept of moral responsibility as is stated next in the phrase לפי שכל ישראל ערבין זה לזה. This idea of shared responsibility is illustrated with a short parable of a compartment in a ship that splits apart. The splitting of the compartment causes the whole ship to begin to sink. Conveyed in Joshua 22:20 is the same idea, that if one member of Israel commits a transgression, all of Israel suffers. (Even today this idea has relevant bearing as we continue to be concerned that if one Jew does something wrong, all will be stereotyped as wrongdoers.)

The second paragraph deals with a second possible objection to the author's claim that God's judgement of Israel is always fair and merciful. The author again refers to an incident in the Book of Judges, this time the slaughter of 70,000 Benjaminites in the matter of the concubine in Gibeah. The author maintains that this happened because the Sanhedrin did not do its job: the Benjaminites did not know *derech eretz* because the Sanhedrin, whose job it was to teach Israel *derech eretz*, had not done so. As a result of

their failure, God's name was not praised as it should have been by the Benjaminites. The author brings in a quote from Avot 4:10 for support to his contention that one should engage in the study of Torah. The quotation adds further that if one desists from study of Torah, he will continue along a ruinous path. This quote is used here to illustrate and justify the situation of the Benjaminites: it was because of their neglect of Torah that God was about to destroy the world, since Torah was meant to teach *derech eretz* (and because they did not study Torah they did not learn it). Lev. 26:8 is linked to the concept of studying Torah for the sake of *derech eretz*. That is, even if one doesn't study Torah but learns *derech eretz*, he will be able to vanquish his enemies just as is described in the verse. But if one is *zealous* in Torah (if one studies Torah as well as practicing *derech eretz*), so much more so will he be able to do what is described in Deut. 32:30. The Benjaminites were slain because they did not know *derech eretz* or Torah. But in an ultimate sense, they were slain by the Sanhedrin, who were figuratively responsible for the deaths of the Benjaminites because they did not teach them. This story is another rendition of the story in the first paragraph. It reiterates the theme of all Israel being responsible for each other - the Sanhedrin is responsible for the deaths of the 70,000 in the same way that Phinehas was responsible for the death of the 42,000. In this way it also underscores the theme of the fairness of God's judgement and justice, that when punishment does occur there is a good and fair reason for it: the 70,000 were slain because of their lack of *derech eretz*.

The author continues to draw examples from the Book of Judges, referring now to the incident of the concubine in Gilead (Chapters 19-21). This incident too, illustrates God's compassion for Israel, the major theme of this chapter. This event (which led to the death of the Benjaminites) did not

take place as late in time (i.e., in the period of the Judges) as is recorded in Scripture, but actually occurred early, at the beginning of the Israelites' sojourn in the land, according to the midrash. The author explains that the story was placed out of sequence, later in the Book of Judges, because of God's compassion for Israel. God did this so that the other nations could not say that Israel had corrupted themselves so early upon their entrance into the land. The author finishes this explanation with a prayer in familiar phraseology - ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שרחמיו מרובין על ישראל לעולם וחס על כבודן כל מקומות מושבותיהן. The author returns us now to the theme of the High Priesthood and the Jeptha story, begun in paragraph one, stating that at this time (after the death of Jeptha) the high priesthood passed to Itamar's sons for 72 years until the sons of Eli befouled themselves. (In this way he continues the intimation that because of Phinehas' failure to act in the dispute between Jeptha and the Ephraimites, he lost his right to hold the office of High Priesthood). God bewails the fact that the descendants of both sons of Aaron - Eleazar and Itamar - have turned out to be equally reprobate, as in Isaiah 59:16 or 63:5. So, as detailed in I Sam. 2:27 and 2:30-35, the lack of proper conduct on the part of Eli's sons caused God to return the High Priesthood to the sons of Eleazar, namely to Zadok. The author links this back to another theme of catastrophic destruction: 4,000 were slain by the Philistines because of the deeds of the sons of Eli, and the Ark of the Covenant was captured. Then the author tells the story of the Ark and the Philistines, with his own embellishments. The author intimates that the Ark was captured because of Israel's lack of faith, lack of *derech eretz*, and disregard for Torah; this is why 30,000 were slain. Even the Philistines, although idol worshippers, had a sense of *derech eretz* and so they sent back

the Ark with a gift (see I Sam. 6:3). The moral meaning reiterated here yet again is of the importance of *derech eretz* and commitment to Torah.

The final paragraph wraps up the chapter and ties all of the ideas together in summary. Continuing the story of the Philistines from the previous paragraph, the author describes the punishment brought upon them. Like all punishments and rewards described in the chapter, this was just and deserved (the main theme of the chapter). The author notes the plague of mice that came upon them as the reason for their release of the Ark, described in I Sam. 6:5-6. He has the cows pulling the Ark "sing" its praises: this is supposedly described in I Sam. 6:12 by means of a wordplay: וישרנה is read not as "took the straight way" but as a derivative of שיר, "to sing". This singing emphasizes the beauty of the Ark but has little bearing on the main themes of the chapter. The author goes on to flesh out the story, saying that the Philistines took away the Ark coverings - this is presumably to explain why the Israelites were so easily able to look directly into the Ark. But they acted improperly in doing so, in a manner did not properly sanctify God's name. (Again we see the familiar repetition:
יתגדל ויתקדש שמו של הקב"ה בעולם מסוף העולם ועד סופו which serves rhetorically to illustrate the proper way to praise God's name.) The outcome is described in I Sam. 6:13, that the Israelites acted inappropriately and were not merely rejoicing because of seeing the Ark. For this reason 50,000 were slain, including the members of the Sanhedrin.

Here yet again the theme being reiterated is that proper respect, *derech eretz*, is what is expected by God and that the lack of it results in punishment. This point is summarized at the close of the chapter by repeating the rhetorical formulary - ומי הרג כל אילו ("Who is responsible

for the deaths of all of these people"?) Once more, the answer is that the responsibility for these deaths lay with those שלא היתה בהן דרך ארץ, ("who do not have within them proper conduct"). We return to the theme presented at the chapter's outset: ללמדך שלא חסר מישראל פרוטה אלא בדין. Nothing that God exacts from Israel by way of punishment is without proper and just judgement. This repetition of a familiar rhetorical phrase from the beginning of the chapter marks a summary recapitulation of the theme of not only this chapter but of the entire unit, Chapters 10 through 12. Many examples of this idea are enumerated, all of which we have seen before. From this we learn what the author's ultimate intentions were for this three-chapter unit: All underscore the idea that divine punishment or reward is the result of justice and fair judgement. This is summed up by the final line "In the measure a man metes out, it is meted out to him", supported by the words of Ps. 36:7, which reiterates that God's justice and judgements are fair and even merciful.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Thirteen:**

Opening Chapter 13 is a common phrase first seen at the end of Chapter 8, returning us to themes previously addressed there and at the beginning of Chapter 9: ....ישמור אדם דברים בלבבו שלא (....יאכל עם עמי הארץ) A man should not sit at table with certain kinds of people. Here is the next item in that series: A man should not sit at table with an עם הארץ, one who does not know or follow Torah. This connects to the previous chapter in emphasizing the importance of regard for, and study of, Torah and following *derech eretz*. One should not associate with עמי הארץ so as not to learn their ways. This idea is supported by Jer. 23:28 in which God himself says that the wheat should not be with the chaff, and is underscored by David's words in Ps. 26:4-9. Metaphorically, the wheat represents the scholars in Israel, while the chaff stands for the עמי הארץ. This is why one does not sit with an עמי הארץ. In contrast, one *should* sit with scholars, so as to learn their ways. [Interestingly, the author is using both the Talmudic and Mishnaic sense of the term עם הארץ. The Talmud uses the term to refer to an ignorant Jew, one who does not study Torah, while the Mishnah applies it to one who does not properly separate tithes.] This idea is supported by Abraham's example of hospitality in Gen. 18:3 - the importance of sitting and learning from scholars is so great that Abraham asked God to wait in order to provide hospitality for the wise visitors. (The next few sentences are related to the Abraham story but are parenthetical, merely showing that the angels did eat Abraham's food even though angels do not eat.)

The third paragraph opens with the characteristic: .....ברוך המקום ברוך הוא which emphasizes that God rewards those who have *derech eretz*, and practice this in demonstrating their love and fear of

God. The rest of the paragraph continues the idea that those who do God's will, who follow *derech eretz* and *tzedakah* will be rewarded. Each aspect of Abraham's hospitality to the angels is rewarded measure for measure: For instance, when his descendants wander in the desert for forty years and are in need of hospitality, God feeds them and accompanies them. At the start of the enumeration of these action-reward scenarios, a reiteration of the formulary praising God may be found: ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שאין לפניו משוא פנים. The rhetorical form used for all of these examples is: בשכר X נתן להן הקב"ה Y. Some examples are embellished with a description of how these rewards were carried out.

The author now illustrates his point about dining with the appropriate company by referring to the story of Gideon, who, like Abraham, prepared food for an angel - he too found favor in God's sight. However, another man, Manoah, did not find God's favor for he was an עם הארץ. The author cites verses from these stories to prove these points. Then he brings in two ideas: 1) denying bread or food to a visitor causes punishment, as can be learned from what happened to the city of Nob (see I Sam. 21), and 2) giving food can cause the spirit of God to rest even upon a false prophet, as substantiated by I Kings 13:18, where a false prophet who offers hospitality to another receives true prophecy. It is apparent that here the author got sidetracked from the theme of proper company and began to cite a plethora of references to giving food to a stranger.

The final paragraph summarizes the chapter, asserting that one should not dine with עמי הארץ, as in the examples provided above. It will have only bad results, such as the dissension described in Isaiah 9:19-20. Then, the author summarizes with a phrase which is similar to that which concludes Chapters 8 and 9:

ואם תלמיד חכם [הוא] מזלזל [את תורתו] ומחלל את שמו של אביו שבשמים ומאלמן את אשתו ומייתם את בניו ואינו ממלא את ימיו וקושר את שם רע לו ולבניו ולבני בניו עד סוף כל הדורות

"And if he is a wise man (and dines with inappropriate company), he thereby disrespects his Torah, profanes the name of his Father in heaven, widows his wife, orphans his sons, and does not live out his days, and brings a bad name upon himself and upon his children and his children's children to the end of all generations. "

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Fourteen:**

Chapter 14 also begins with the same phrase that began Chapters 13 and 9, but with a slight variation: ישמור אדם בלבבו - שלא ירבה שחוק שיחה ותיפלות. Like the previous chapter, this one addresses proper conduct, *derech eretz*. In this case, it does not speak to the axiom that a man should not share a meal with certain people, but to the concept that one should take care to restrain himself from flippancy, idle conversation and slander. Again the reason one should avoid such behavior is because (as we will see later), such behavior leads to punishment and bad things. The chapter also emphasizes the importance of, and reward for, Torah study and following the ways of Torah.

The author begins by enumerating what the evil results are for one who speaks flippantly (with שחוק). The whole section is a concordance of verses which include the word שחוק in negative contexts. In these examples, such as Avot 3:17 and Ex. 32:6, שחוק leads to many greater evils. Ex. 32:6, for instance, illustrates that שחוק leads to idolatry. This passage occurs in the Torah directly prior to the Golden Calf episode, thus the actions, the שחוק, lead to idolatry. Here the connection is achieved by means of a wordplay - צחק for שחק. The paragraph continues with a succession of biblical verses involving flippancy which all lead to bad ends. Next, God directly addresses the Israelites, telling them how he spends His time in Torah study, judgement and mercy. He has little time for idle laughter. (The logical conclusion is that people should model themselves on God's example. God is too busy with the right things of the world to have time for שחוק.) When does God have שחוק? Only when the nations of the world boast and provoke God. God is amused by this and laughs (has שחוק), as it is said in Ps. 2:1-4, "Those who utter vain things, the Lord *laughs* at them". Here, too,

the author has assembled a series of verses in which God is described as laughing. In some of these instances, the laughter is bittersweet (ואין שחוק יש לפני שחוק). The first example is somewhat cumbersome and does not include the word שחוק. The passage speaks about spices. The logical conundrum is why a certain spice is included with the others when it smells bad. The author's answer is that God's mercy is given to Israel at all times, both to the righteous and to the wicked (so that all are included, even those who smell bad). Another example, from Ps. 27:12-13, connects the word שחוק with the idea of *bittersweet* laughter, suggesting that although God laughs at the wicked in Israel, such laughter is not so enjoyable for Him because these people devour the righteous. The last example, which closes the paragraph, deals with the evil inclination. Although God regrets having created it, the presence of evil in the world also enables man to seek repentance. Thus God feels both regret and satisfaction when contemplating the evil impulse. The common theme of God's mixed emotions shows that while there is a reason for the evil impulse, there is a greater promise held out by the possibility of *teshuvah*.

Paragraph two opens with another suggestion of the type of punishment that will follow if one engages in שחוק שיחה ותיפלות, namely that this malicious gossip will follow him unto eternity. This continues the ideas begun above. The author then repeats the image of God sitting in heaven studying Mishnah and Scripture and passing judgement, reiterating the idea that one should learn from God's example. That concept is presented in the form of a dialogue between God and the soul of a man who has spent his life in idle pursuits and has just died. Because this scenario is a first-person conversation between God and man, the admonition is pictured as coming directly from God to all of us who might find ourselves having that

same conversation with Him upon our deaths. We are reminded that just as God has no time for idle pursuits, man should spend his time engaged in the study of Torah. The author goes on to explain the two types of עמל - toil in the Torah and toil in worldly affairs, intimating that God's toil (Torah) is preferable. (It is important to note that here the phrase "*derech eretz*" refers to worldly occupations and not to proper behavior, as this phrase is usually used in this text.) Bringing in Job 5:7, the author uses the verse to illustrate that there is no reward for worldly toil. However, toil in Torah *is* rewarding. The application of Prov. 16:26 (which like the Job verse has the word עמל, hence the connection) shows that indeed the study of Torah is the correct way to live in the world. This is developed by means of an alteration in the translation of a word: Here נפש is understood as meaning not "appetite" but "soul". Thus, "the soul that labors in Torah, Torah toils for him."

With the third paragraph the author brings us to the meat of the theme, the importance of Torah study. He gives an example of a person who labored in Torah, Aaron, who did so in order to expiate his responsibility for the great pestilence that fell upon Israel in connection with the sin of the Golden Calf. In expiation for this sin, Aaron taught the Shema, Tefillah and Torah to those who did not know them. This is what the Sanhedrin should have done at the time of the incident in Gibeah which the author addressed in Chapter 12. It is explained that this type of person is worthy of God's compassion, implying that each person should strive to be like Aaron and therefore worthy of God's compassion. Indeed, the reward for Aaron's behavior is made explicit in Scripture, Isaiah 53:11, "He shall see the fruits of his labor..." Strikingly, this verse also contains the word עמל, connecting it to the previous paragraph and to the definition of the right kind of toil. Developing the idea that man should conduct himself in a way that is

pleasing to God (a way that includes the right kind of toil), and thereby returning to the larger theme of *derech eretz*, the author outlines twelve rules of right conduct. The list is concluded with citations from Habbakuk 2:3 and Hosea 12:7 which urge one to wait patiently but expectantly for the Messiah to come. In the Messianic Age the Holy Spirit will be manifest in the words of a man who does so. The author then begins to enumerate what the first two rules refer to, showing them to be indicative of man's conduct in study, modesty in the academy, and active participation in discussions of Torah in order to avoid dozing in the middle of study. He cites Prov. 23:21 and Deut. 8:12-14 in order to illustrate that attention to the wrong things, such as overeating, can lead one to dozing. One's hunger should be not for food but for Torah. Furthermore, the author admonishes that one should not fear to ask questions in the academy even if he is ridiculed. Rather he should be completely engrossed in Torah and should ask forgiveness, for then will he remember his Torah learning by paying heed to the first four rules of conduct. Prov. 30:32 is understood to explain that asking forgiveness is really illustrative of being willing to suffer humiliation in order to learn and that in this humiliation, one might be forgiven by God. We are also reminded that for following or ignoring each of these rules there is an appropriate reward or punishment.

The opening phrase of the fourth paragraph is a repetition of the opening of paragraph two. The author again emphasizes that it is because of flippancy, gossip and idle talk that punishment and exile enter the world, as can be confirmed by Isaiah 9:16. Furthermore, whoever engages in this sort of behavior brings on other calamities, such as those described in Hosea 4:2. The author elaborates that one who acts in such a despicable manner brings punishment not only upon himself but upon those around him - enumerated

from his immediate circle outward in a clever literary development. As it says in Isaiah 5:25, "(It is because of man's actions) ...that the anger of the Lord has come against *all* of the people." Returning to the Hosea 4:3 verse, the author interprets that "This (man's action which has led to God's anger) is why the land mourns..." Further, the author admonishes those who do not reprove the wicked, cleverly developing the next set of verses in Hosea Chapter 4. He finishes the paragraph with the fifth verse, determining that whosoever does not reprove such a man shares in his punishment.

The next paragraph opens with a phrase similar to that which opened the chapter as a whole, the refrain begun in Chapter 9: ישמור אדם בלבבו - שלא.... Now the author advises his audience to keep far removed from sin. Even a small sin causes great problems, as is demonstrated by the thoughtless remark of Abraham in Gen. 15:8. The author also introduces an opposite: Even a small measure of respect brings great reward. Examples of both points are then given. The example of Moses being punished for his minor sins at the waters of Meribah is expanded upon to underscore the importance of even minor sins. Nevertheless, when Moses prays to God in the words quoted in Ps. 90, God responds that He remains mercifully disposed toward Israel. God only asks Israel to behave decently, imitating God's own eleven attributes of mercy. The reward for such moral behavior then follows automatically as does punishment for immorality. Thus the author ties in Ps. 15:2-5. God continues His speech to Moses, using stereotypic language כלום משוא פנים לפני בין גוי ובין ישראל ובין איש ובין אשה ובין עבד ובין שפחה. Then Ps. 36:7 is cited to show that when one's thoughts are turned to God he is rewarded and God is magnified, but when one thinks only of himself, he is diminished while

heaven remains glorified (as was the case with Moses at Meribah, cited earlier).

The next three passages are parables, examples of what befalls a person who fails to follow the preferred path. Each paragraph opens with the same phrase, מעשה באדם (בכהן) אחד, "*a story about a man....*" . The first is a story about the effects of flippancy, thus returning thematically to the first part of the chapter. It elaborates the punishment and calamities brought down upon oneself and one's family when he fails to reprove another for his idle talk.

The second parable relates a tale of a man who regrets not studying Bible or Mishnah. This man feels badly, so, in order to compensate, he praises God's name loudly. However, even this small deed is rewarded, underscoring the concept presented earlier, that even for a small good deed the reward is great.

The third illustration is yet another example of how bad deeds lead to total destruction. By having the main character in the story be a priest, an individual with high standing in the community, the author illustrates that no person is too exalted to be punished for his misdeeds. We see again the familiar refrain: ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שאין לפניו משוא פנים, which praises God for being an impartial and fair judge. Then the sages in the parable quote Talmudic law regarding the appropriate disposition of heave-offering and deduce from this that what is described in Prov. 19:16 pertains to one who has not dealt properly with the heave offerings, such as this particular priest. In order to effect this interpretation, the author renders the verse not as "he that despises his ways", but as "he that makes his ways despicable". This interpretation is backed up with Num. 18:32, the prohibition against profaning God's sacred gifts. All of these verses are

meant to emphasize the same point: One who transgresses will suffer great punishment, even death. This in summary is to teach the reader that only one who is well-versed in Torah should teach it to others, as is reinforced in the narrative (when the priest teaches Torah incorrectly, claiming that this use of the heave offering is permitted) and by the citation of Ps. 106:2. This returns us once again to the theme of the vital importance of the study of Torah.

Next we have a quote from Ecclesiastes 7:14, introduced by the formulaic הרי הוא אומר. The first half of the verse is said to portray God explaining to man that he was put on earth to do good deeds, study Torah and keep away from immorality. The second half is explicated to deal with the other side of man's nature: Man's adversity is due to his own wrongdoing and thus he should think about what he has done to bring this upon himself. God punishes man only in order to chastise him and keep him from continuing in this vein. Avot 1:7 is brought in to support the idea that God chastises only to teach one that he should consider his wrongdoing. Thus, he should not fall into despair upon beholding his punishment. This is further supported with Prov. 27:12 which is contrasted with Eccl. 7:14. The contrast is effected because of the similarity of the two phrases - ראה רעה and רעה ראה - in these verses. Because of their similarity, and the word ראיתם from Ps. 66:14, the author is able to tie all three verses together to shed light on the main subtext: ביום רעה ראה, *"In the day of adversity, consider."*

The next quotation is meant to illustrate the other side of God, not as punisher but as redeemer and protector. The story of Jacob's rescue in Jer. 31:10 illustrates that God redeems the weaker from the stronger, the major theme of this paragraph. The final application of the Jer. 31:10 verse is illustrated via Prov. 28:9 to demonstrate that if one does not admit his

wrongdoing, even his prayers are an abomination to God. Prov. 28:9 shows that a man himself is responsible for transgression. Avot 4:5 admonishes that even if one transgresses in private, he will suffer punishment publicly.

Similarly, the next paragraph opens with the citation of Ps. 133:1, preceded by a rhetorical prefix, כיוצא בדבר אתה אומר, which denotes the connection between the preceding admonition and its opposite; that rather than transgression, God desires that one live a good life and rewards him for such actions. The verse, הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד, is applied to Moses and Aaron, focusing primarily on the latter. If God addresses Moses in the language of joy, how much the more so does God do this with Aaron who is described as a peace maker and a practitioner of *derech eretz*. Following this, the author sets up scenarios which apply to Ps. 133:1 illustrating the good life which one might lead. The rhetoric here, too, exemplifies the verse: The man who does good in his old age is "brother" to the good man he was in his youth. His deeds early and late are "akin" to each other.

With the next paragraph the author closes the chapter. While demonstrating another application of the Ps. 133:1 verse, in which God and Israel are construed as being the אחים (who will sit and study together in the world-to-come), the verse introduces a *nehemta*. This final paragraph also summarizes all of the points laid out in the chapter. The *nehemta* paints a picture of how good things will be in the end of days, when God will sit in the academy, once again underscoring the importance of study as an emulation of God. God's message to them in that day will be that they shall see God's glory as described in Is. 33:17, and, that they shall "behold the land". The "land" is construed midrashically as the *halachot*. Thus, in that day they will understand all of the *halacha*. This whole paragraph connotes something of a

messianic picture. Malachi 1:5 demonstrates the greatness of God and that Israel will be witness to His justice. The story continues with God instructing Israel to study, and "keep the laws until I come;" a messianic reference. He instructs them to follow the words of Hosea 10:12: By studying Torah in this world, one receives his reward in the world-to-come. In following these commandments one seeks God. The author concludes the chapter with a measure of comfort, associating these verses with similar messages. One might consider who the audience is for whom the author is writing. Is his audience feeling disenfranchised, feeling that God has left them? Or do they not understand why they are being punished? Is he chastising people who are not keeping the *mitzvot*?

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Fifteen:**

Chapter 15 opens with two contrasting parables. The first one demonstrates God's goodness in having prepared for us the good things of this world, and reminds us that we should enjoy them and be grateful. The rhetorical pattern follows a common midrashic formula: "The king (God) invited his servant to a banquet one day, two days, etc. Because God created such wonderful things for us, על אחת כמה וכמה, how much the more so should we be grateful (for all the good things that God has prepared for us in this world)." The metaphor is that the pleasures of this world are like the foods at a lavish banquet. The ideas here naturally flow out of the previous chapter: at its conclusion the author described a picture of God's goodness and what God will ultimately bring to Israel as a reward in the world-to-come. Here, he admonishes them that they must be appreciative of the good things that God provides for them in this world while they are waiting for the ultimate goodness in the world-to-come. The thrust of the parable is that one should be grateful for the partial bounty which God provides now since it is a foretaste of what is to come. This first scenario is then contrasted with another parable in which the King's servants are ungrateful towards him. Returning to that favorite theme, *derech eretz*, the author asks rhetorically if ungrateful behavior constitutes *derech eretz*? Obviously, the message is that one should not spurn what God gives him now, before the ultimate reward. מזכן אילך, It follows, says the author, that what we must do is praise God who created the world and who gives us good things in this world which foreshadow the reward in the world-to-come. Here we see yet again the phrase particular to our author and his text, the phrase which is a benediction of God even as it serves as a means of progression in the rhetorical development - (ראוי הוא זרעו של יעקב) שיברך וישבח וירומם

ויגדל את שמו של הקב"ה שאמר והיה העולם ברוך הוא. This phrase is prefaced with the rhetorical gesture of Israel as Jacob's seed, those who are to be the inheritors of life in the world-to-come.

Further, regarding the world-to-come, the author begins answering some of the difficult questions of exile, questions which recur throughout this chapter. Why is it that Israel is still in exile? Why the delay before the "final banquet"? Why are we suffering? The author answers that these sufferings are visited upon us in order to purge us of our sins. Yet, God will redeem us because no nation other than Israel is to inherit the world-to-come. God has set that aside for his beloved. Jer. 31:8 is introduced initially as a prooftext that God will redeem Israel in the world-to-come. The author then deals with the verse's next phrase, "the blind and lame too, will be redeemed". The "blind and lame" are explained to be those who, while unlettered in Torah, have the reward of *derech eretz* because they do not pay attention to temptation and avoid transgression. The rest of the chapter follows from this verse's reference to the "blind and lame" among those who are to be saved. These, the ones who have *derech eretz* even though they do not know Torah, are the people described by R. Simeon in Makkot 3:15. Another interpretation of this verse states that the "blind" are the sages who devote themselves exclusively to rabbinic study and *see only* the perfection of God's Torah and God's ways, as described by Ps. 119:1 and 18:31. They too are blind to the temptations of evil.

The second paragraph explores further the concept of "defects" with respect to the study of Torah. This is a tangent that develops from the end of the last paragraph. The paragraph, in context, is parenthetical, playing further with the two interpretations of "blind and lame" already given. The author enumerates three types of such defects (the first and third types have

already been mentioned in the preceding paragraph). All are deemed worthy students of Torah but are not perfect. All three descriptions given are tied to Isaiah 42:16 and 18 as an example of those who are not full disciples in Torah. It is possible that these verses are brought in because they refer to another type of handicap similar to those in the Jer. 31:8 verse and are here also used metaphorically. The author concludes that it is still meritorious to have some knowledge of Torah and little regard for it, or little Torah but great *derech eretz*.

The third paragraph offers yet another interpretation of the "blind and lame" in the Jer. 31:7 verse. We are told that even men who know Torah but are dirtied by their evil ways have some merit, indeed it is difficult for God to destroy them. The remainder of the Jeremiah verse is applied to people who devote themselves completely to Torah. They are characterized as those who labor in Torah and go to the ends of the earth in search of wisdom, a slightly altered interpretation of the verse's meaning. The final clause in the verse, קָהָל גָּדוֹל יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה, "*a great company shall return here,*" is then seen as an assurance that all kinds of people, a great company, shall come to praise God. This reiterates the idea begun earlier that we must be grateful for God's mercies and ties it to the importance of Torah study by connecting this statement to Isaiah 11:9.

The fourth paragraph opens with a first-person narrative, characteristic of the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*: פעם אחת הייתי עובר ממקום למקום. The author describes an encounter with a man who knew Bible but not Mishnah, another instance of a "defect" in one's pursuit of Torah. The theme of the dialogue is that it is God who provides for man's sustenance and well-being. Were it not for God-given wisdom, man would be unable to provide for himself. This ties in with the

beginning of the chapter where we are admonished that we should appreciate all of the good things of this world because they come from God and signify His beneficence. The author additionally uses this dialogue as an opportunity to introduce several biblical quotations which support his thesis that man is set apart from animals by virtue of his capacity for knowledge. This is God's gift to humankind. He also introduces a second scenario, a parable of a king who had many children and servants. Because he wished to reprove them and they would not listen to what he had to say, he wrote his admonition on a letter to be displayed in public and made it known that those who read his letter would be given bread and sustenance. The bread and sustenance are, of course, Torah, the king is God, and those who are subject to reproof are either the nations of the world, or Israel. Because the text is grammatically ambiguous, the author's rhetoric may suggest that it was the nation of Israel that came to read the king's message or it may suggest that those *individuals* in Israel who come to study Scripture and Mishnah are like the ones who read the king's message in the parable. The paragraph concludes with a quote from Isaiah 33:6 which underscores the value of faith in God and the rewards of wisdom and knowledge which sustains one in this world until the end-time.

Continuing further the first-person narrative dialogue, the author's questioner asks him why words of Torah are so beloved. What he has done here is to essentially set up a rhetorical question-answer scenario in order to emphasize his theme: the value of Torah study and following in the ways of Torah. The author uses another parable to answer his questioner, explaining through its words that Torah teaches *derech eretz* and causes God to ascribe merit to Israel. In fact, words of Torah weigh more heavily in order to give

Israel merit for favor in the world-to-come. This is why words of Torah are more beloved by God than any of His other creations.

The sixth paragraph introduces another question proposed to our author. Like those questions put before him previously, it opens אמר לי רבי... and continues with the query. The problem that the questioner has is which he should put first, his love for Israel or the love for Torah. Our author answers with a verse from Prov. 8:22, commonly used to demonstrate that Torah was created first and thus, he says, is often put first. However, he goes on to offer Jer.2:3 to illustrate that in his opinion Israel should come first. This he further develops with another short parable, which is somewhat corrupted in the text. It seems to mean, however, that Israel is God's hallowed portion, as in Jer. 2:3, and thus can also claim first status on the basis of Jer. 31:2.

The final paragraph opens with another query in the same format as those which have preceded it. Once more our author closes the chapter with a *nehemta*. The parable which he presents and its *nimshal*, its real meaning, assure the reader that although Israel itself is flawed, although they are deficient in areas of Torah study and *derech eretz*, surely God will return to them as He promised to in the days of the exile from the Temple. The *mashal* presents flawed individuals in terms similar to those used in the opening paragraphs of this chapter: blind, lame, deaf. However, here these deficits are not construed positively - i.e., blind to transgression, deaf to evil ways, etc. - but as lacking in knowledge and in study of Scripture and Mishnah. Nevertheless, these are not fatal flaws because we are Israel and, as our author has explained above, Israel comes before Torah. Thus God will surely return to us as promised. Our author suggests that we plead for mercy and seek an entrance into Torah, as God made these entrances for us through the

words of the prophets. To take this a step further, we should seek an opening into the deeper meanings of Torah through verses from the Prophets. We should turn to God, as in Joel 2:12, and then God will lead us, as in Micah 2:13. Further, one should be eager for Torah. He concludes with praise of God who has taught us Torah and takes pleasure in sages and their disciples: (ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שבחר בחכמים ובתלמידיהם ששנו לנו את המשנה הוי גולה למקום תורה ואל תאמר שהיו תבוא אחרי שחביריך יקיימוה בידך ואל בינתך אל תשען) He again emphasizes the value of Torah study and of finding the proper scholar to study it with, one who is learned in Torah, quoting Avot 4:14 and a section of Prov. 3:5. (For as we have learned before, one should not learn Torah from an ignoramus, nor should one who is not fully knowledgeable endeavor to teach it to another.) It is interesting to note the author's response to his questioner for it is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand the questioner is deemed an *apikoros* - he has Torah but no Mishnah. Yet the author nevertheless responds charitably towards him, modelling *derech eretz* and the value of Torah.

In essence, Chapter 15 is a series of thematic reiterations and developments by the author through the use of his first-person narrative. In his dialogue with the questioner he is able to lay out through the device of parable the main underpinnings of his philosophy regarding Torah study, *derech eretz* and the reward for following these *mitzvot*. In this fashion he is also able to answer what may have been pressing questions of his day and have certainly been basic questions throughout Jewish history regarding reward and punishment (i.e., Is there any hope for those who are unable to study Torah simply because they are part of Israel? Will God return to Israel in its exile in the present day?) And he is able to do so using simple

rhetorical devices typical of his style - the first-person narrative dialogue in which the questioner asks: "My teacher, why is this so?," to which he answers with a parable that is summarized with proofs from various biblical texts.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Sixteen:**

Chapter 16 opens with a scenario parallel to the one set out in Chapter 15. The questioner is a friend of the previous questioner. He too knows Torah but not Mishnah. He begins questioning our author as to the biblical sources for various rabbinic rulings and customs, a Karaite-like inquiry. He asks at the outset whether our author can provide scriptural proof for ritual hand-washing. The author answers that for this and many other customs, explicit proof is not provided in Scripture because it was not necessary, rather Israel was given the opportunity to increase her merit by setting out the precepts themselves. He illustrates this with the rabbinic interpretation of the verse, Ex. 19:10, which deals with sanctification and with the Israelites washing (their clothes). From this, the rabbis inferred that "sanctification" means "purification"; i.e., through ritual immersion. Ritual hand-washing, then, is learned from Ex. 30:17-20 which also speaks of washing and of sanctification, although it refers specifically to priestly sanctification. However, since Lev. 11:44 and Lev. 19:1-2 refer to the sanctification of all Israel, not only the priests, ordinary Israelites should also perform ritual hand-washing, as R. Gamliel inferred. Thus the author has demonstrated the versatility and wisdom found in the rabbinic interpretation of Torah. Additionally, at the end of this paragraph he delivers a warning not to treat rabbinic prohibitions lightly, admonishing the questioner (and the reader) that it is a bad sign for a man to condemn the practice of ritual hand-washing. This might be further linked to the prohibition against teaching Torah if one is not fully versed in it, i.e., if one is ignorant of rabbinic interpretation.

The questioner is not satisfied with this answer and presses the issue further. There follows a series of questions regarding the biblical basis for

various rabbinic laws. Beginning with the phrase אמר לי, a common marker for the introduction of his question, he probes: My teacher, there is no scriptural prescription regarding slaughter by cutting an animal's throat (in the rabbinically kosher manner). Again our author refutes his claim, showing the method of reasoning by which principles of kosher slaughter are derived from Scripture. The author also uses this instance to teach a moral lesson, that one who deliberately makes a mistake in his slaughter (i.e., slits the animal's throat in the wrong place) in order to gain more profit is a transgressor. He praises God with that familiar phrase, ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שאין לפניו משוא פנים, to emphasize that God metes out just reward and punishment. Therefore, one who is dishonest in this manner will receive just punishment, having his possessions taken and redistributed to those he cheated, as is stated in Prov. 28:8.

The author's scenario is carried out still further with a third question posed to him. אמר לי, My teacher, his interlocutor asks, surely eating human blood is not a scriptural prohibition? The author again refutes this contention through the application of logical syllogisms to various scriptural texts. Using a *kal v'homer* syllogism, he proves that those verses which prohibit eating blood refer to human blood as well.

The fourth paragraph questions yet another rabbinic rule which forbids the eating of fat from an animal that has not been designated as an offering. The basis for the question is that Scripture explicitly forbids eating the fat of a designated animal but says nothing about an animal that has *not* been designated as an offering. However, using parts of Lev. 7:25 and Lev. 3:17, the author explicates section by section to show not only that this is prohibited, but also to demonstrate once again the versatility and perceptiveness of Torah. Torah provides the answers to all of these questions

if one merely knows how to interpret it properly (as the Rabbis do). He then cites Makkot 3:15 to his own thematic and homiletical advantage: It states that if one who refrains from actions such as eating blood, which are naturally abhorrent, gains great merit, how much the more so in the case of one who refrains from things to which his soul inclines (such as theft and sexual impropriety) will he and his future generations be rewarded.

The questioner addresses another issue to our author, regarding cheating a man who is not a Jew. In answer the author replies with the same phrase he originally used to answer the first query: דברין הרבה יש לנו וחמורין הן ולא צרך הכתוב לאמר לפיכך הטילן על ישראל אמר הן יבדילו אותן כדי להרבות את שכרן, *"We have many precepts which are strict, but it was not necessary for them to be written in Scripture. Therefore they were given as a responsibility to Israel to discern and enumerate for themselves in order to increase her own reward."* The author again uses this as an example to demonstrate the wisdom and versatility of Torah and of rabbinic interpretation. Giving an example of what is stated explicitly, Ex. 20:12-14, he agrees that there is no explicit prohibition against cheating a non-Jew. However, he refers to the entire corpus of Torah, using Isaiah 26:9 to demonstrate the range of Torah and the necessity that Israel be disciplined by its *entire* range. He reads the Isaiah verse as stating that "all inhabitants of the world have righteousness", that basic *derech eretz* is universal and Torah takes this for granted. From here, he extrapolates that there are eight reasons for which the world may be destroyed. He further demonstrates through the use of prooftexts that the former generations were rooted out of the world for having committed these sins, for they said to God, "Depart from us" (Job 21:14), thereby forsaking the teachings of Torah. He lays out examples of people who were rooted out of the world for their sins, citing

biblical references for each. These include Pharaoh and Sennacherib whom the author has used before as examples of wicked people. He concludes the paragraph with the contrast, the four reasons why the world continues to exist.

The sixth paragraph opens again with the questioner. This time he presents a scenario that happened to him. But it returns us to his previous question, regarding cheating a non-Jew. The author uses Lev. 19:13 to demonstrate yet again that Scripture does indeed prohibit such behavior. Indeed, we see in Ezek. 18:18 that a man who robs his neighbor shall die as a result of his iniquity!

The questions turn to a different matter in the next paragraph, that of sexual transgression. Which is a greater offense, incest with one's daughter or one's granddaughter? When the author responds that both are equally prohibited, the questioner notes that the Torah does not explicitly forbid incest with one's daughter. The author responds that this is simply a question of *kal v'homer*. If one is prohibited, does it not follow that the other is prohibited as well? The author proves this using Lev. 18:17-19 and reasons that since the one is forbidden, so is the other. The questioner poses another question of comparison in the following paragraph: Is a man's intercourse with a menstruant woman a greater offense than a woman's intercourse with a man who has a discharge? The author states that the former is the greater offense. But the questioner is not satisfied and poses the scenario of ritual immersion: Isn't the requirement that a menstruant immerse herself derived *by analogy* from the explicit scriptural ruling that a man with a discharge must immerse himself (i.e., if only the latter case is spelled out in Scripture, must it not refer to the graver offense)? Our author instead reasons *kal v'homer* that one who is unlikely to impregnate a woman, this man who

suffers a discharge, commits a lesser offense (by having intercourse) than does a menstruant woman, because she might become pregnant. Thus, we learn from this that a man who acts on the belief that Scripture does not require ritual purification by immersion for a menstruant woman, and advises his household that it is acceptable to touch vessels that have been touched by an unclean woman, will never be content in this world. This paragraph provides another example of a rabbinic ruling that is not explicitly stated in Scripture. It points out another transgression for which one might suffer punishment, a transgression that one who understands and lives by the wisdom of Torah would not commit.

The long paragraph which follows also cautions against relying only upon the explicit statements of Scripture to the exclusion of rabbinic interpretation. We are to learn from these examples the imperative that one should not listen to one who knows only Torah but not Mishnah, that *derech eretz* comes from the entire corpus of Torah. This scenario also describes a case of sexual impropriety which relates to improper conduct regarding a woman in the time of her menstrual impurity. The author brings in a story of a woman whose husband was a scholar but died very young. In her grief she consulted many of his friends but none had an answer as to why he had died so young. One time she happened upon our author in the marketplace and he asked her about her husband's conduct towards her during her impurity. Using biblical quotations from Lev. 15:28 and Ezek. 18:6-9, he is able to assure the woman that her husband's early death was due to his inappropriate conduct towards her when she was unclean. Further, he extends the scenario to show that it is out of God's love for Israel that He punishes them for their iniquities. No one is exempt, as we see in Amos 3:2. Further, he admonishes us that the reward for a good deed is another good

deed, but a transgression just leads to further transgressions (Avot 4:2). The author then illustrates this latter point at some length. A man who lies increases his transgressions, as well as the punishments which are visited upon him for various transgressions. Thus, whether or not this story was originally a tangent, the author utilizes it to serve his thematic focus. He finishes out the paragraph praising God who hallows His great name in an open manner (through just punishments for moral transgressions): ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שהוא מקדש את שמו הגדול בגלוי לעולם.

Next our author turns his attention to other types of people who live wickedly and are punished for their iniquities. Similar to what we have seen before, those who speak in a lewd manner, are flippant, are insolent and haughty are punished, as described in Ps. 37:17, Ps. 35:6, and Num. 17:33. God shall surely punish those who are wicked, warns our author, as it says in Amos 8:7, "I will not forget any of their [wicked] deeds."

In the next paragraph we are told that a catalogue of transgressors, because of their transgressions, will leave no inheritance to their children and will furthermore prevent their children from leaving an inheritance to their children. Why? Because, as Eccl. 1:15 says, "that which is crooked cannot be made straight".

The ninth paragraph offers a contrast to those wicked transgressors. We see that those who are humble and who overcome their evil inclinations will receive a reward from God and are beloved of Him. This thesis is supported by biblical texts. For example, regarding those who are despised but do not act in kind toward others, the author selects a verse from Isaiah 49:7 to show that those who are despised will be rewarded by God.

With the tenth paragraph our author returns to the issue of ritual purity vis-`a-vis seminal and vaginal emissions and discharges. He opens

with a scenario in which a man with a seminal discharge decides to ignore the scriptural requirement of ritual immersion, stating, "Who will see what I do in private?" This incident is similar to scenarios discussed earlier in the chapter. The author uses several quotations to prove that this type of practice will bring upon the transgressor a great punishment. For instance, a man who has an emission and does not immerse, will suffer a *chronic* discharge. This, says our author, is apparent from the repetition of the word איש in Lev. 15:2. The same is true of a woman who chooses to ignore the rabbinic requirement of ritual immersion after seeing a speck of blood during her period, or has a discharge of her husband's semen following intercourse. Again, she must not say, as did the man in the earlier example, "Who will see what I do in private?" Our author cites Lev. 15:25 which he interprets to mean that she will suffer *continuous* bleeding as a result of her transgressing the law. But, hearkening back to what we were told in paragraph six, we are again informed that if she repents, she will be healed. Parenthetically the author informs us that R. Ishmael and R. Meir gave different interpretations of Lev. 15:19. R. Ishmael says it comes to teach that menstruant woman are treated just like women who have a discharge - both require immersion. R. Meir understood it to support the *mitzvah* to be fruitful and multiply. For he understood the passage to be one which enhanced sexual relations between a man and a woman, because a man who can have all the food and drink he wants will not enjoy it. Thus, Lev. 15:19 comes to teach us that the abstention from sexual relations serves to renew their relationship every month.

The author opens the next paragraph praising God for having given Torah to Israel so that they might learn from it *derech eretz* and avoid multiplying sin in the world. ברוך המקום ברוך הוא שנתן דברי תורה

לישראל שילמדו מהן דרך ארץ שלא ירבו ענותיהן לעולם.

Whoever transgresses shall be smitten, as Prov. 23:29 states. The author now expounds this verse to advance his argument: "Who has woe and sorrow? He who drinks too much wine,"[6] using a wordplay between יָהִיר "arrogant" (Hab. 2:5) and מָהִיר "diligent" (Prov. 22:29). The Habbakuk verse is construed as reading "For wine deals treacherously with a diligent man." יָהִיר is not understood as "arrogant," but as מָהִיר "diligent". The drunken man is punished because of his sluggishness. God needs men to be sober so that they can perform their God-given tasks in this world properly. This is why drunkards are punished. Jer. 48:10 is brought in to seal this interpretation by admonishing that one who is sloppy in his work (presumably as a result of drunkenness) is cursed.

The author further expounds on the Hab. 2:5 verse, section by section. The verse suggests to him that a glutton and drunkard - one who eats and drinks to excess - is never satiated. Gluttony further leads him to commit other transgressions, and to tear down that which God has built up since the time of creation. Our author then returns to the Proverbs 23:29 verse with which he began, further illustrating the type of man who deserves and experiences woe: the one who has flattering lips, who slanders others, who cheats this fellows, and who approaches his wife while she is menstruating. All of these transgressions have been mentioned earlier in the chapter.

We turn now to the section of the chapter that Meir Friedmann blocks off separately, following the standard medieval printings. In the first edition (Venice) and the manuscripts, there is no break here. The section begins with

[6]The subject of wine and drunkenness taken up here may also be related to R. Meir's statement above that a man who has too much wine will not appreciate what he has.

another first-person account of our author's experience, when he sat in the academy in Jerusalem: פעם אחת הייתי יושב בבית המדרש הגדול בירושלים. The scenario is similar to those above, a student comes posing questions to him. The student asks why the first generations lived the longest lives. Our author answers that they were given longevity in order to test their conduct. Would they perform acts of kindness? The proof, he tells us, may be seen from the very first generations. We learn that of these ten, only the last one, Noah, was willing to show kindness not only to his father but to his grandfather as well. Thus, he was called righteous, as in Gen. 7:1. Furthermore, it is because of him that we know that the good are agents of blessing and that the wicked bring misfortune. In connection with this emphasis on long life, we learn in Gen. 6:4 that a man's years are 120. This teaches, says our author, that a life span of 120 years is deemed a blessing, and after this a person should not fear death but rejoice in it.

Likewise, one should rejoice over three things: the angel of death, the evil inclination, and the necessity of using the toilet. This the student questions and our author explains that fear of the angel of death is what causes man to act justly. Thus, the angel of death should be rejoiced over. We learn this from the first ten generations who lived long lives and so did not fear death and thus turned to wickedness. We should rejoice over the evil inclination because of Israel's conquest over it. For, as the author explains, if Israel had not conquered the evil inclination, the peoples of the world would not go up to Jerusalem in the end of days at Sukkot as pilgrims to bow down before God and pay homage to Israel. Ex. 23:17 refers to the Israelites going up to Jerusalem: "all your males shall appear before the Lord." Zech. 14:16 and 14:12, as well as Isaiah 66:20 and 49:23, are cited to indicate that not just Israel but all the nations of the world will go up to Jerusalem in the

messianic age. Further, at that time, the righteous will be freed of the evil inclination and they will thereby come eagerly to study Scripture and Mishnah, teach *derech eretz*, and do God's will. This the author offers as a *nehemta*, a comfort that this day will indeed come if Israel follows the way of Torah and keeps far from transgression. The student then questions the third point, that one should rejoice in needing to use the toilet. The need to use the toilet may be degrading because it reminds us of our similarities to the animals, says our author. But in the messianic time, God will remove this necessity from Israel. They will no longer be bound by this shame. Thus, the necessity for defecation should serve to remind us of the coming of the messianic age and give us cause for rejoicing. In that day Israel shall be the beloved nation to God described in Song of Songs 1:13-14. It is for these three reasons that we rejoice and praise God. The imperfections that are a part of us today serve to remind us of the perfection that we will achieve in the world-to-come.

The student asks how many prophets prophesied in Israel. The number given by the author, forty-eight, corresponds to the number of cities given to the Levites in Num. 35:7. The author maintains that this correspondence is significant. It is also said of the prophets that they did not add or subtract from anything in Torah. Thus, prophecy corresponds to what is already in the Torah and from the prophets one can learn the precepts of Torah. Here again our author addresses the theme of the wisdom and inclusiveness of Torah. He offers a parable which illustrates how Israel is instructed in all of the aspects of Torah. Yet, the parable also teaches the reader that he must enter into Torah and interact with all of it, including the Prophets and Writings. This is the way to show love and respect for God. He uses Song of Songs 8:13 to correspond to the parable. God's companions

(Torah, Prophets and Writings) yearn to hear Israel's voice in study. Isaiah 43:8 and 42:7 are cited to indicate that the blind and the deaf - those who do not study Scripture - are urged by God to study Torah, as we have seen in other chapters. The formulary used here as well as in other chapters equates those who do not study Scripture with the sages who completely devote themselves to the study of Torah and Mishnah yet fail to comprehend it. There is a strong negative connotation to this group.

The student asks why Isaiah was distinguished from among the other prophets. The author answers that it was because Isaiah took upon himself the challenge posed in Isaiah 6:8-9. Isaiah recognized that God desired Israel's repentance, even though He commanded Isaiah to prophesy harshly to them and seemingly to discourage their repentance. The author suggests that Isaiah recognized the sarcasm and irony in God's words (Is. 6:8-9). He knew that God did not mean what He said but rather that Isaiah should bring the people out of their blindness and deafness. The author's theological point is that God always desires Israel's repentance, even when it may *seem* that He does not. His intention is to diffuse the threatening aspect of God's words in Is. 6:8-9. Moreover, God knew that Isaiah would not argue with Him. He restrained his protest to the words of Isaiah 6:11, "How long?" Because Isaiah knew that good things would come to Jerusalem (see Zech. 2:8-9 and 8:4) he heeded the words of Avot 4:18, "Do not attempt to appease your fellow at the moment of his anger". Thus Isaiah held his tongue and behaved respectfully before God. Again, we should heed Isaiah's example, in this case by not lashing out in anger at God when it seems that He is punishing us. Instead, we should remain confident that our appeasement will succeed and that redemption will ultimately come to us.

The final paragraph offers a message of consolation for the reader. The student draws the following *kal v'homer* syllogism : Surely, if Isaiah prophesied God's kindness to Israel at a time when repentance was slight and words of Torah were few, then if Israel would repent at any time after the destruction of the Temple, God would embrace them, kiss them, and take them to His breast forever. It is thus intimated that if Israel turns and repents now, and walks in the ways of Torah, God will redeem us.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Seventeen:**

Chapter 17 opens with a quote from Ps. 24:4-5. At first glance it may seem to have no connection with the previous chapter, but one only needs to look at the verse and the verse which follows to see that, like the previous chapter, these verses deal with *derech eretz* - upright conduct - and its reward. A secondary connection is between Moses, mentioned here, and the theme of prophecy at the end of the previous chapter. Our author explicates Ps. 24:4, applying each phrase to an aspect of Moses: The phrase "clean hands" thus refers to Moses whose hands were clean from avoiding stealing, as it says in Num. 16:15. This is the pattern of explication followed with each phrase. One interesting explanation given is for the phrase וְלֹא נִשְׁבַּע לְמִרְמָה, "who has not sworn deceitfully". The author takes the verse Ex. 2:21 which contains the phrase וַיּוֹאֶל מֹשֶׁה, here meaning "And Moses was content" and compares it to I Sam. 14:24, וַיַּאֶל שָׁאוּל אֶת־הָעָם, where וַיַּאֶל means "And Saul *exacted an oath* from the people". Thus, in Moses's dealings with Jethro, Jethro exacted an oath from Moses just as Saul in I Sam. 14:24 had exacted an oath from the people. Therefore, the phrase refers to Moses. This is a clever although rather roundabout way of connecting all of these attributes to Moses. We see that because of all of Moses' righteous acts, he was given God's blessing, as in Ps. 24:5. Thus, we would do well to follow Moses' example.

The second paragraph begins with praise of God, a phrase common to *Tanna debe Eliyahu* in various metamorphoses: אבי שבשמים יהי שמך הגדול מבורך לעולם ולעולמי עולמים ותהא לך קורת רוח מישראל עבדיך בכל מקמות מושבותיהם. *"My Father in heaven, may Your great name be blessed for ever and ever, and may You have contentment from Israel Your servants, in every place that they dwell."* The author cites God's

attributes of patience and mercy in dealing with Israel in the past, implicitly entreating God to deal likewise with Israel now. He also praises God for not having been vengeful, nor withholding Torah from them despite all of their evil and despicable ways. Instead, God has recalled the good deeds of Israel and forgotten the bad deeds, as in Isaiah 65:17. Further, when our ancestors came to receive the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, God in His glory came down and allowed His great name to dwell with them. Thus, indeed, God is a generous God, as Isaiah 32:8 notes. The author thereby at once praises God for all of these benevolent actions, and reminds/comforts his audience that God will reward them for their good deeds, that their bad deeds will be forgotten and that God is with them. (Although they should, nonetheless, strive to be like Moses). The themes of this paragraph are typical of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* and are expressed in formularies which recur in earlier chapters.

The third paragraph extols the virtues of a wise man whose good deeds grow out of his wisdom. The author applies Song of Songs 7:2 with a curious twist. He compares this man to a foot that is comfortable in its shoe, as in the verse. Then he takes the second part of the verse and applies this phrase in a contrived manner, through a מה...אף syllogism Just as "the rounding of (a woman's) thighs" are concealed, so too, all the good deeds of such a man are concealed. His study of Torah, giving of *tzedakah*, his good deeds towards his wife and children are best done in secret (i.e., in private, modestly). Our author then offers another interpretation of פַּעֲמֵךְ in Songof Songs 7:2, associating the word with פעמים, "times". If there are times when you have knowledge of Torah, על אחת כמה וכמה "how much the more so", do you have *derech eretz*. God responds with: If there are times when My Name has been invoked to punish you, how much the more so in the future will My

Name be invoked to bless you. This, because you bind the words of Torah on your arm and head. This leads us into the next paragraph. Israel is now praised for distinguishing themselves by submitting to God's service. This is derived from Song of Songs 3:11, reading בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן as [ל] בנים המצוינים, "children who are marked, set apart, distinguished by their tangible signs of service to God".

The fifth paragraph opens with another comment, דבר אחר, on the verse, regarding King Solomon. The author begins with a phrase praising God's attribute of peacemaker, a quality that should be emulated by us. This is a common form of address in *Tanna debe Eliyahu*: במלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה שהוא מחכוון ועושה שלום..... The author reads בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה in Song of Songs 3:11 not as "And behold King *Solomon*" but as "And behold the King of *Peace*", who is, of course, God. He connects to this verses from Ezek. 3:12 and Job 25:2, angelic praises of God as peacemaker. Another דבר אחר comment on the verse praises the King of Peace - במלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה שהוא מחכוון ועושה שלום..... - who makes peace among all that He has created in the world. All of this material is traditional and has parallels in Pesikta deRav Kahana and Shir HaShirim Rabbah.

Paragraph six returns to comments which seem more in line with our author's own thematic progression. This דבר אחר relates the difference between God and a mortal king. A mortal king sits on a throne, and receives food, drink and sustenance from his servants and subjects. God, however, *provides* sustenance for his creatures (subjects) in addition to his other activities of Torah study, judgement, and *tzedakah*. As we have seen before, in Chapter 14, God spends a third of the day in study of Scripture and Mishnah, a third of the day in judgement, and a third of the day doing *tzedakah* (*tzedakah* includes providing sustenance for His creatures). Again,

our author is giving his audience an example of how they, too, should be like God.

The seventh paragraph presents another comparison of God to a mortal king. The focus of this paragraph is wisdom, a prominent theme. A mortal king sits on his throne and *learns* wisdom from the elders but, God *provides* the righteous with wisdom, understanding, knowledge and insight, as it says in Isaiah 40:29. Scripture also says that God changes the times and seasons and gives wisdom and knowledge, Dan. 2:19-22. The author has, of course, chosen this passage because of its reference to wisdom. He takes the verses phrase by phrase and applies them to aspects of God's benevolence, including proofs from other verses that speak of wisdom, Gen. 41:39 and Prov. 2:6. The Daniel verse is expounded according to traditional midrashic materials.

Paragraph eight continues the exegesis of the Song of Songs 3:11 verse, בְּעֲטָרָה שֶׁעִטְּרָה־לּוֹ אִמּוֹ. The author's comment upon this is that it refers to the Tabernacle which was crowned or distinguished by the colors of blue and purple. (This is traditional material from Pesikta deRav Kahana, Ch. 1.) His second explanation appears to be more relevant thematically. When Israel was in Egypt they did not change their language or their names. But the angels said that in their deeds Israel was just like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This section is somewhat unclear. It would seem that the tradition of Israel not having changes their names or language is presented as meritorious. Yet, because the angels are said to מרננים אחריהם, usually understood as "murmuring against them", a negative connotation, it is not at all clear what the message is here. We do not know if these acts are indeed to be understood as meritorious or contemptible.

In paragraph nine, the next comment upon this Song of Songs 3:11 phrase links the righteous behavior of the Israelites upon leaving Egypt to their crowning God (with their behavior). They crowned God by accepting the Torah, building the Tabernacle, and bringing offerings. Our author now returns to the theme of Torah learning and the theme of exile. We are told that we should learn from Israel's behavior when they went forth from Egypt: they followed after God without question, as in Jer. 2:2-3. This is why Israel was considered a holy portion in the world. Furthermore, our author tells us that when our ancestors went up to Mt. Sinai to accept the Torah, God vowed that if they refused the Torah, as had the other nations of the world, they would perish from the world. It was because Israel accepted the Torah and the yoke of the kingdom (thus "crowning" Him) that God came down to be with the people Israel and promised them what is said in Ex. 20:2, and Ps. 137:5-6; that I am Your God and I will not forget you. When Israel accepted the Torah, as in Ex. 24:7, God asked them to build a sanctuary for Him, asking each person to bring a תרומה, a voluntary contribution, for the building of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:1-8). This, too, the Israelites did willingly, without questioning why God needs any material offerings from humankind. Similarly, when God laid out the laws of Levitical purity and spelled out the matter of discharge from sexual organs and menstruation, the Israelites did not question these laws, but accepted them willingly. This hearkens back to the materials in Chapter 16. The entire section addresses the idea that Israel should obey God willingly, without hesitation or remonstration. After all, it was because their ancestors behaved accordingly, unquestioningly following the ways of Torah, that they were rewarded. To summarize, God will save you and make you a blessing, as in Zech. 8:13, if you follow my Torah unquestioningly, says our author.

"O my brothers and my people, listen to me", pleads our author in the opening of paragraph ten. He emphasizes that anyone can discern that there is no real difference between man and beast. How is it, then, that man sits with God in His presence? This, our author says, shows that something special was given to man by God, his soul and spirit. Further, says our author, Israel is special among all humankind in that, out of God's great love for them, they alone will be resurrected from the dust and given life again in the world-to-come, as described in Isaiah 66:22-14.

Regarding Israel in the wilderness, it is true that they befouled themselves by making the Golden Calf, but they did repent, albeit in secret, as our author learns from Ex. 33:8-10, (presumably because each man went "into his tent"). This concept is reminiscent of paragraph three where it was expressed that good deeds are best done in private. The author needs to discover some sign that Israel must have repented for the Golden Calf in order to further his theme of the efficacy and importance of repentance. The author tells us that this repentance provided the occasion for God to give Israel the opportunity to repent on Yom Kippur, out of His compassion, and as a way of ensuring His forgiveness through repentance.

We return to the theme of Israel's having taken upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom willingly. This was described in Joshua 24:15-16. The reward for their unquestioning acceptance, we are told, was that God was patient with Israel's backsliding during the days of the Judges. This repeats the motif expressed in the beginning of Chapter 12, that God treats His children indulgently and with forbearance, for they are His children. How was God's kindness apparent? In that they were blessed with many children, so Judges 8:30, 12:14, and 12:9, as read by the author. That is what is meant by Joshua 22:6, which speaks of blessing but also says that they went to their

tents, which, in rabbinic tradition, means that they went in to their wives for the purpose of fruitful procreation. This continues the theme of paragraph nine, that Israel crowned God by their immediate acceptance of the terms of the covenant; first at Sinai, and then in the days of Joshua, and even through their repentance for the Golden Calf.

Continuing the series, paragraph thirteen also describes Israel willingly taking upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom, this time in the days of Samuel. They did so with awe, as described in I. Sam. 7:8 , when they repented from sinning against God at Mitzpah and asked Samuel to pray for their deliverance. Further, in I Sam. 12:22-23 we see that Samuel did pray on their behalf. Our author uses this incident to remind us again that one who has the opportunity to save a person from sin but does not do so is himself a sinner, as we saw in previous chapters. Thus was the case earlier with the sons of Eli and Phinehas. Samuel demonstrated the importance of praying and saving a sinner in I Sam. 12:23. The reward for Israel having accepted the kingdom of heaven was that God came down from on high and remained with them in the war with the Philistines, as is described in I Sam. 7:9. The author addresses the issue of the offering of the lamb being referred to as כליל "complete". Why does it say this? To show that there was no time to skin it, as is demonstrated in I Sam. 7:10. Thus, God bestowed blessing upon Israel, as in I Sam. 12:22, because they offered an offering to God even as the Philistines were breathing down upon them.

Continuing the pattern of the previous two paragraphs, "In the days of....", the author describes events in the days of Elijah. In these days Israel became fearers of heaven. In these days Elijah built an altar, described in I Kings 18:32 and gave instruction concerning it, I Kings 18:34. The events described further show a miracle, the filling up of the whole trench with

water, in I Kings 18: 36-38. It was because of this that the people forsook idolatry and uttered the words of I Kings 18:39, professing complete faith in God. For the author, this is a further example of his theme that unwavering obedience to God brings reward and is the source of divine love. Our author sees in this story an example of why God loves Israel and showers them with reward.

Thus it was that in every subsequent generation God weeps for Israel, both publicly and privately. The author digresses as to why God weeps in private - because it is not befitting His honor to do otherwise. The citation of Jer. 8:23 in this context shows that God has compassion on all Israel. God wants to have compassion even on the wicked ones of Israel, hoping that their descendants will repent and redeem their misguided ancestors. This shows God's complete love and compassion for Israel. Then our author returns to a major thematic concept, the righteous and the wicked. The author tells us that God divides people into these two types. How are they distinguished? A righteous man studies Bible and Mishnah diligently from the age of thirteen onwards, learning from them the fear of heaven and *derech eretz*. When he enters into eternal life, God rejoices and expresses a wish that he might have a son who will fill his place, as is stated in Ps. 17:14. A wicked man, on the other hand, may begin to study Bible and Mishnah from the age of thirteen onwards, but departs to evil ways and ugly deeds. When he comes to enter eternal life, God sighs and pronounces the words of Malachi 3:17-18 over this man's offspring.

The next paragraph continues the immediate theme, that God has compassion even for sinners, as in II Kings 14:26-27. Why was Jeroboam different from all of the kings before him, was he not an idol worshipper? He was saved because he did not accept the slanderous words attributed by

Amaziah to Amos' prophecy, as described in Amos 7:10-11. Jeroboam did not believe the messenger. For this reason God gave the land to Jeroboam, as in Ex. 33:1 and Deut. 34:4. God also praised Jeroboam for restoring the border of Israel, described in II Kings 14:25. When Zechariah, the son of Jereboam, son of Joash, son of Jehoaz, son of Jehu became king, if he had repented he would have been deemed a righteous man in adversity. Without repentance, he would be deemed a wicked man in adversity. God does not discriminate between Israel and the other nations in punishment for their wickedness. [In relation to this, see the parallel in Eliyahu Zuta, p. 184, which emphasizes that God's providence is the same for Jew and gentile alike and that merit brings more merit, while wickedness brings more wickedness.]

The chapter concludes with the final instantiation of the pattern of what happened "in the days of....", in this case, in the days of Hezekiah, the king of Judah. We are told that in those days, Israel was busy studying Bible, Mishnah, Midrash Halacha and Aggadah. The reward for this was that at that time, God anticipated the plague that he would send at the end of days to smite the enemies of Israel, as promised in Zech. 14:12. This anticipation is described in II Kings 19:35. Moreover, God ordained a message of comfort for His people, which is the greatest measure in the world, as described in Isaiah 40:1-2. Our author further expands on this with a parable which demonstrates that, although Israel has sinned and has been wicked, God cannot distance Himself from His beloved Israel, as evidenced by Hosea 6:4 and Hosea 11:9, in which Ephraim is the infant and Israel is the mother. Thus, our author provides his reader with a formula for redemption and divine mercy through studying Torah and practicing *derech eretz*. Through these vehicles, the author offers the reader a promise that, despite his own sins and the sins of his people, God will not forsake him or them, that God's

great love for Israel will surely bring redemption and mercy for him and his people as in the days of Hezekiah.

Conclusion:

The preceding analysis has served to clarify Yaakov Elbaum's contention that there is indeed a unique rhetorical structure that unifies *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. It is apparent that this structure is not purely homiletical, nor is it based solely in biblical exegesis. Rather, it should be clear that this structure is developed from the presentation of thematic ideas. What we have outlined in the preceding pages is the rhetorical development, the structure of the text based in scriptural exegesis, thematic exegesis, and the recapitulation and development of tropes or signature phrases. However, it is also evident that the individuality of the text lies not in this aspect alone, but also in the thematic content which forms an interdependent bond with the rhetorical manifestation of the text. That is, the thematic development exacts an influence on the rhetorical presentation, but, the rhetorical presentation also influences the thematic development of the text. In the chapter which follows, we will explore the other side of this process, the development of ideational content.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Ideational Content of Chapters 7-17, A Thematic Analysis

In his study of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* (The Theology of Seder Eliahu: A Study in Organic Thinking), Max Kadushin attempted to "discover a coherent unity in rabbinic theology" because, "...we ought not to reconcile ourselves to accepting rabbinic theology as a congeries of ideas unrelated to each other, an inarticulated mass of separate concepts."[1] In utilizing *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, he included every possible statement in the Midrash in order to determine what he saw as the inherent relationship among the concepts. This relationship he called "organic thinking." Organic thinking, according to Kadushin is

> ...the product of group life. It belongs to those phenomena that develop in the group and that are handed down by social transmission, phenomena that include language and other social symbols and institutions.The distinctive qualities of any complex of organic thinking arise in ways no more mysterious -and no less- than do the distinctive qualities of any entity, animate or inanimate. We can break up water, for example, into hydrogen and oxygen; but the properties of neither can in any way account for the distinctive qualities of water.....In organic thinking then, the sum of the 'parts' does not equal the 'whole'.[2]

Kadushin's preliminary studies on organic thinking were developed through his work on *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. This study has been characterized by Richard Sarason as "a synthetic attempt to present an alternative method of writing a rabbinic theology. Like other works in that field, the presentation was topical, organizing rabbinic statements from various parts of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* under thematic rubrics...."[3] Although Kadushin himself stated that

---

[1]Kadushin, p. v.

[2]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[3]Sarason, p. 64.

the theology of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* could not be reduced to a logical system, he nevertheless, attempted to do just that in boiling down *Tanna debe Eliyahu* into four major concepts (God's lovingkindness, God's justice, Torah, and Israel) and then exploring these four themes by culling out of the text statements which related to each set or subset of rubrics and examining them in these thematic groupings.[4] Indeed, his attempts to synthesize the material led him to misconstrue many statements because, in focusing on the larger elements of rabbinic thought, Kadushin isolated the statements from the very literary and exegetical context in which these statements had been embedded.[5] But while Kadushin's attempt to develop an overarching organizing principle for all of midrashic literature is viewed today as being more of a contrived overgeneralization derived for the sake of proving his theory, his use of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* as the basis for his work was fortunate indeed.

First, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is

> ....probably the most amenable of all the midrashim to the kind of valuational and thematic analysis that he set out to perform. Although it contains a fair amount of exegesis, it is far more discursive than any classical midrashic document. It is basically a uniform work, the product of a single author, that expresses a strong and distinctive point of view, emphasizing the importance of Torah-study, repentance, piety (for example, prayer) and proper conduct as the ways mandated by God for humanity to achieve happiness in this world and life eternal in the world to come.[6]

Second, the very nature of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* itself fits the description of what Kadushin has defined as "organic thinking," particularly in its

---

[4]Kadushin, p. 31.

[5]Ibid., pp. 67-68.

[6]Sarason, p. 65.

juxtapositions of materials and quasi stream-of-consciousness modes of association. As we have seen in Elbaum's analysis of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, what we have before us is a composition in which the author tried to forge a link between midrashic structure and thematic content. While it is difficult to diagram the methodology that links the form and the ethical thematic content; the composition of the book in this way is what makes it unique and also what unifies it.[7] At one point there are thematic issues that structure the text and at another, formal, rhetorical and exegetical ones. But these cannot be separated from each other; this organizing principle is precisely what makes this text unique. So in utilizing *Tanna debe Eliyahu* as the basis of his work, Kadushin was able to more easily demonstrate "the complexity of rabbinic thought and the attention to nuance, context, and shading that must inform any synthetic study of rabbinic concepts.....[8]

We cannot ignore the fact that Kadushin missed "the larger statements that the author wished to make through his own arrangement and use of the individual statements..... Kadushin failed to point out the emphases which are unique to Seder Eliahu, giving instead the impression through his own rhetoric that everything in the document is typical of the classical literature."[9] We have seen in Chapter Three that one element of the author's structure relies on the textual elements (i.e. scriptural citations which serve as rhetorical building blocks) and rhetorical nuances. It is apparent from Kadushin's analysis of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* that one cannot understand this text by removing the thematic elements from their literary and rhetorical

---

[7]Elbaum p. 154.

[8]Sarason, p. 72.

[9]Ibid., pp. 67-68.

contexts. Instead, we must look at the thematic elements as part of the organic whole and understand how the content affects the rhetoric, as well as how, as we have seen in Chapter Three, the rhetoric affects the content. We must also consider to what extent the themes expressed in *Tanna debe Eliyahu* are conventional themes and whether the treatment of such themes common to other midrashic texts is conventional.

In Chapter Four we shall look at those elements which structure the text on another level, that of ideational content. Yaakov Elbaum defines this as the author's "desire to present a closed stylistic arrangement of ideas in a personal manner.....His desire was to present his words in an order and a structure (emanating) from the examination of the ideas."[10] Elbaum understands the nature of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* as stemming from the author's intent to present his words based on the examination of ideas instead of allowing the scriptural exegesis dictate the order and thematic exploration. And it is apparent to many midrashic scholars that the personality of the author is felt not only in his rhetorical deployment of materials, but in his unique and original interpretation of verses and themes. Braude describes the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* as "a master stylist - his Hebrew (is) lucid and flowing". Furthermore, it is clear that he presents his ideas in an orderly development. ".....There is no reason to assume," says Braude,

> that at the very opening of his work he would perpetrate what only a polite person might call 'a miscellany.' [For example] The fact that the theme of Adam's being driven out of the Garden of Eden is echoed both at the end of the introductory chapter (p.6), and at the end of the first part of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* (p. 164) prove the theme's importance to the structure of the work.[11]

---

[10]Elbaum, p. 185.

[11]Braude, "'Conjecture' and Interpolation in Translating Rabbinic Texts:

We might best understand the nature of our author's creation in terms of two points regarding biblical exegesis, as explained by James L. Kugel: The first is that "Most of the narrative expansions found in rabbinic midrash and other early texts have as their point of departure some peculiarity in the biblical text itself. That is to say, these expansions, whatever other motives and concerns may be evidenced in them, are formally a kind of biblical exegesis."[12] This is certainly apparent to us from the rhetorical analysis presented in the last chapter and from what we know about the nature of midrash itself. However, Kugel asks a question which is of particular interest to us: "...are we therefore to conclude that such narrative expansions constitute 'pure' exegesis, that they derive solely from the efforts of early exegetes to explain the meaning of biblical passages?"[13] Indeed this gets at the very essence of the task our author has set for himself. He wants to show his readers that there is more in the text that meets the eye. But we, in studying *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, must also ask another question, a chicken and egg proposal: Did the author begin with an idea and then search for biblical verses to support his ideas or did he start with the verse and search for its explanation within his own social and cultural understanding?[14] In the case of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, we know that the answer is a complex one. That is, we are able to see the development of ideas throughout the text, much more so than is typical of most midrashim. This demonstrates to us that the thematic ideas themselves form part of the main structure of the text.

Illustrated by a Chapter from Tanna debe Eliyahu", p. 78.

[12]James L. Kugel, In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publ., 1990), p. 247.

[13]Ibid., p. 248.

[14]Ibid., p. 250.

Nevertheless, there are those few ideas and exegeses of particular verses that seem unrelated to the main themes flowing through the passages. In those cases we glimpse an underlying structure built upon biblical verses which, while common to most midrashic exegesis, serves in this case only as tangential material.

Kugel's second point clarifies the nature of studying midrashic motifs and themes. He calls this process "..an exercise in 'reverse-engineering' ....It is the process by which engineers examine a finished product, some complex piece of equipment or machinery, and then try to recreate the thinking and procedures that led up to its having the form and components that it has."[15] Thus, we must ask "Is this expansion based on a single exegetical motif, or some combination? Are all the elements of the motif(s) integral to the exegesis?"[16] As we look at *Tanna debe Eliyahu* we must consider how these thematic elements come to be part of the text. Are they borrowed from other sources and is this why the author has included them here? Or do they serve a more literary purpose; is their function structural, used in the progression of the text's thematic development?

In Chapter Two, I gave a brief overview of Chapters 1-6 of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, according to Elbaum's analysis. We saw the development of themes and ideas throughout these chapters, focusing upon the importance of Torah study and the avoidance of sin for entrance into life in the world-to-come. In truth these are two of the major themes which are developed, deepened, and expanded in the majority of the text. The value of *derech eretz*, of repentance, and of emulating the examples provided for us by our righteous

---

[15]Ibid., p. 251.

[16]Ibid., pp. 251-252.

ancestors and by God Himself, are illustrated in the chapters which follow in clever parables and rhetorical schemes. God's love for us, His mercy and compassion for Israel, and the means He provides us to return to Him were introduced in the first six chapters. In the chapters which follow, other themes and concepts are introduced and amplified by our author as a means of expressing his ethical concerns and value concepts. We will now examine the element of ideational content in order to determine how its presentation and progression structures the text.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Seven:**

Chapter 7 opens with the theme of God's love for Israel. God's love for Israel is so intense that it is differentiated from His love for the other nations. Indeed, God puts Israel above all of the nations, and His favoritism for Israel has allowed Israel to gain entrance into God's inner sanctum (the חדרי חדרים of Song of Songs 1:4). In the second paragraph of the chapter, this inner sanctum is identified with the inner depths of the Torah which can provide salvation. One who draws near to Torah draws near to God. Thus we see the connection of Torah and Torah study to the theme of God's love for Israel, because the gift of Torah to Israel represents a concrete manifestation of God's love. The third paragraph develops the idea of this love and relates it to the image of the inner sanctum: God's fondness for Israel causes her to rejoice and causes God to compare us to Him. Indeed we are close to God like no other people. So we have a somewhat circular progression of ideas: God loves Israel above all the nations and thus brings them closer to Him, into the inner sanctum of Torah. When we draw near to Torah we draw near to God and are close to God. And God's fondness for Israel causes Him to compare us to Him for we are close to Him, unlike the other nations.

The fourth paragraph begins to explore a new idea which proceeds exegetically from the Song of Songs 1:4 verse, נַזְכִּירָה דֹדַיִךְ מִיַּיִן. Both God and Israel are comparable in their intimacy. Thus, just as God mentions the righteous, so too should Israel speak words of Torah. While God takes note of the deeds of the righteous and the pure, He also saves Israel regardless of their wickedness or righteousness. They will not be destroyed although they are not perfect like Jacob. There is a dialectical tension here: When God despairs over the wicked Israel, He turns (as if in consolation) to the righteous ones. But God also looks to the merits of the righteous ones to

intercede for, or save, Israel. It is interesting to note the expansion of ideas here: just as the author has begun with God's great love for Israel, setting her apart from the other nations, he now contends that although others may sin and be destroyed, there is a special quality inherent in Israel that promises God's protection. This promise is so great that God will save sinning Israel on account of the merit of the righteous. The efficacy of this merit is another manifestation of God's great love for Israel. Returning to the image חדרי חדרים (Song of Songs 1:4), the author expounds that there are many depths to God's Torah and we are to understand from this that God speaks to Israel on many levels through the medium of Torah. Indeed, our task, as delineated by our author, is to plumb its depths. In fact, God regards Israel as His own son and thus speaks intimately to Israel without barriers. This was developed through the example of Moses and the Tent of Meeting. It is presented as a stark contrast to God's relationship with the other nations and as such underlines the value of the gift of Torah to Israel, as a token of God's intimacy. We now see a further development of the theme of Israel's uniqueness, through the name by which we are addressed, as אדם. This idea is explored through a series of possible connotations of the word: upright, righteous, etc. And we see, nevertheless, that Israel is not perfect. However, even though God's glory and world would in no way be diminished if He were to throw out the sinning Israel, God's mercy causes Him to act lovingly toward Israel for the sake of His own name. This God does so that the nations will not see the profanation of Israel, but more importantly God is merciful to Israel because His love for them prevails over His justice.

The next paragraph seems at first glance to be tangential. The author begins with a semantic discussion of the words אדם and איש, continuing his treatment of Lev. 1:1-2. The author explains that the term אדם here is used

to include proselytes, (whose offerings also are acceptable), but to exclude gentiles. So perhaps this is not tangential at all as it relates again to the theme of Israel's chosen status. This theme is cleverly developed midrashically out of one of the secondary texts which has now achieved a primary focus. The author then picks up on the term גר, proselyte, now understood as referring to one who is a witness to the nations of the world. Perhaps there is a thematic connection here to Israel's having received Torah and turned from sin, whereas the nations of the world do not have Torah and thus very few have decided to become proselytes. However, it is also quite likely that this is simply a continuation of the tangent begun previously with the verse explication. In the next paragraph we in fact have returned to a further explication of Lev. 1:2 which is used here to show that the different names for cattle represent the different types of offerings accepted from among the sinners of Israel. However, we are informed that none are acceptable from apostates. Here we begin to return to the major theme, that God accepts repentance from Israel when they sin and return. But, for those who sin and do not return, there is no forgiveness. This theme of repentance and return will be picked up and developed further along, as will the theme of God's mercy and love in accepting repentant sinners.

Paragraph eleven again emphasizes God's love, this time for the righteous ancestors of Israel who merited this love because they followed the way of Torah even before it was revealed. Thus they were privileged to be called by, and equated with, God's holy name. We should note here again the connection of God's love with the giving of Torah to Israel. The further development now is that following the dictates of Torah is a *reason* for God to love Israel. The implication is obvious: We who have received the Torah should certainly be more ready to follow God's ways than the Patriarchs who

did so before the Torah was revealed. Further, one should infer the apparent message: If we follow God's ways, God's name will be ascribed to us and God will love us with a great love. It is interesting to see how the author has now turned from describing the state of affairs, that God loves Israel and gave us Torah because of that love, to detailing a prescription for how we can earn God's favor and love: by observing the precepts of Torah. The next three short paragraphs are examples of righteous people (the Patriarchs) whose actions are treasured by God and by whose actions merit was accorded to Israel. This ostensibly is a development of the concept of the righteous meriting God's love because they followed Torah. Here, too, these righteous men merited God's love for following His ways. Their merit is stored up, available to the future generations of Israel who symbolically appeal to that merit by offering up certain kinds of sacrifices whose details remind God of the Patriarchs.

We move from here into a discussion of the idea that a man should not think that his offerings can merit God's forgiveness if he continues to act in a vile manner. Rather, God desires good deeds and study of Torah even with a lean offering. Through a homiletical comparison of the details of the biblical offerings, the author articulates the message that God actually prefers lean offerings that are brought with the proper spirit, to fat offerings brought with the wrong spirit. The concept being underlined is that it is not the amount of wealth or riches that counts, nor the fattest bullock that one can bring to God, but a spirit of true piety and devotion. It is one's good intention that God desires. This theme is further developed in the next paragraph. Again it is reiterated that one should not think that he can bring an expensive offering and continue to do something evil. God would rather have Torah and good deeds. We are told that the reward for the study of Torah is that God pours

out still more Torah as a vessel pours out oil. The more that we study it, the more we become fluent in it. Furthermore, it is because of Torah that the nations of the world love God utterly, whatever fate befalls them.

Continuing the theme of God's love for us in giving us the Torah, the next paragraph states that Torah is the key to God's love, to God loving us and to our happiness, even unto death. (It should be noted that this paragraph also contains the reference to 984 CE, thought by many scholars to be a scribal interpolation that was supported by an interpretation which says that we love God over long periods of time.) Indeed, Torah deep within a man makes him tremble lest he be overcome by sin. For one who is overcome by sin will not achieve salvation. Only one who studies Torah and rabbinic tradition and serves the sages will do so. For, Blessed is the man within whom is Torah and who answers from Torah, states the author in the next paragraph. The final paragraph concludes with a *nehemta*, that God does not desire large sacrifices but rather study of Torah and good deeds. God desires true and sincere repentance. God forgives those who sincerely repent. They will not be punished but will be rewarded because God delights in rewarding those who do good. The message is this: therefore repent because God is merciful and will help you.

It is interesting to note the author's linear development of his themes: Whereas at the beginning of the chapter, God loves Israel and gives Torah as an expression of that love, it is now up to us to ponder the depths of that Torah, walk in its ways and devote sincere intention to God in order to be deserving of God's love and to gain entrance to its innermost depths. Cleverly the author has managed to rearrange his original thematic statements through rhetorical progression in order to create new ideas and point the

reader toward the moral messages. We now see that there is a reciprocal relationship between God and Israel which is mediated by Torah.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Eight:**

Chapter 8 opens with a deeper development of the theme of Torah study and knowledge, that of wisdom. The first paragraph illustrates the benefits of wisdom. The theme of wisdom is dealt with in greater depth later. The second paragraph returns to the ideas explored in the previous chapter. God (out of His great love) refrains from judging Israel out of jealousy and vengeance. God does not withhold the wisdom of Torah from them. Again we see theme that Israel, on the basis of some inherent quality, is held in higher regard by God than the other nations of the world. Indeed, God exacts vengeance and executes judgement upon Israel's foes according to what they deserve. But God judges fairly and is not wicked. In the remainder of the chapter, the author illustrates this point through the example of Pharaoh, sometimes pursuing his thematic agenda, at other times digressing from the main points simply for the sake of explication and exegesis.

We begin with the question of Egypt's harsh punishment. Why was their punishment so much greater than that of any other country that Israel entered into? Egypt, in keeping with God's fair judgement, deserved harsher punishment because their ways were more awful and evil than any other nation. Therefore, God punished Egypt through the instrument of Israel in order to restore respect for His name. The idea that Egypt was more evil than any other nation and that God judges and punishes fairly is played out again and again in discussing each of the ten plagues: First, we learn in paragraph four that the ten plagues came upon Egypt only because of their own evil devices; that is, God derived their punishment from what they had planned to do to Israel. This again underscores God's just judgement and punishment. God's punishments are meted out measure for measure so that the punishment fits the crime. Indeed, the plague of blood came upon Egypt

because they withheld water from the Israelites so that they had no way to cleanse themselves from their blood at the time of their menstrual impurity. The plague of frogs came because they had asked for frogs with which to hurt the Israelites. One by one, each plague is defined and the reasons that the corresponding punishment was fitting are delineated. One recurrent subtheme from paragraph 5 through 17 relates to the need for Israel to have provisions for ritual purity in order to produce offspring, and the Egyptians making such purification difficult or trying to make sexual union impossible so that Israel could not produce more offspring.

This subtheme is carried through the various examples of Egyptian punishment. The punishment is equated with the crime until paragraph 15. Here the plague of darkness does not appear to be the result of something the Egyptians did. Rather, the author explains that the Egyptians had darkness while the Israelites had light so that Egypt would not see Israel's own dead (who were punished on account of their own evil deeds) and think that God did not favor Israel. Again this picks up the theme of Israel meriting special regard from God simply because they are Israel. This is carried through in the next paragraph. Although the Egyptian decree was not as bad as it could have been, God accounted it to Egypt as if the worst had been done because this was their intention. This is how God judges all of the nations of the world. Israel, however, is not accountable unless a deed is actually done. Paragraph 17 describes the Egyptians as the spoilers of the vineyard of the Lord, the vineyard, of course, being Israel. And as such, they who tamper with it shall be rooted out of the world. Now we are given a clear statement as to why the deeds of Egypt were more wicked than those of any other nation and why they received such terrible (although just) punishment. Indeed, God would have flooded all of Egypt before then were it not for the skeptics and

unbelievers among the Israelites. It was for their enlightenment that God waited to destroy the Egyptians until the circumstances could only be construed as miraculous.

Further examples are then given of how God saves and redeems Israel. Furthermore, God does not need to be entreated by the great but will heed the cry of even the small. We find also that God is rancorous and vengeful toward the gentiles, although God restrains His anger against Israel. Those who plot evil against Israel are deemed as if they plots evil against God. Thus God is vengeful towards them and will protect His flock from such evil. The author concludes this thematic exploration with praise of God who roots out the wicked even as they intend to root out Israel. God will ensure that the wicked will perish and that the good will triumph. Thus, we have seen that God's love for Israel will grant them protection and redemption.

The final paragraph of chapter eight introduces a new theme, one that will be dealt with in the chapter that follows: A man should not enter into partnership with a heathen. The author explains that such a relationship can only result in oppression of Israel on the part of the heathen. Furthermore, such an association shows lack of respect for Torah, profanes the name of God, and it is as if the person who participates in the relationship surrenders his sons to idolatry. We might ask how this relates thematically to the previous materials in this chapter. The text is corrupt here, but it seems that the author is suggesting that Israel's enslavement by the Egyptians (dealt with earlier) was the result of Abraham having made a covenant with Abimelech, a gentile.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Nine:**

The opening of Chapter 9, a very short chapter with only three paragraphs, reiterates the formulary from the beginning of the previous paragraph, except that here one should not share a meal with a heathen. This is because one who does so will have great punishment imposed on him, as did Hezekiah. Through the example of Hezekiah we learn further that one should show proper respect and reverence for God, as one does for someone of higher station. And one should take care to be modest regarding his own mastery of Torah. Overwhelming pride in one's mastery of Torah will only lead him to other sins, for which God will surely root him out of this world. This is a reminder that God's compassion does not extend to those who act in an evil manner, who are disrespectful of the teaching of the Torah. And likewise, a man who sits with a heathen (and thereby shows lack of respect for God's Torah, as we learned earlier) will be punished (as were Hezekiah and Abraham).

The second section offers us an example of a righteous man, Elkanah, presented in contrast to Hezekiah who sat with heathens. For his actions Elkanah is rewarded with a righteous son, Samuel, while Hezekiah is punished with a wicked son, Menashe. This example is perhaps put forth to instruct the reader in the proper course of action. Indeed, the way of Torah is again the focus, for it is the one who directs others in the path of Torah and away from heathens and idolatry who is considered to be, like Elkanah, a righteous man. We see further that such a man can tip the scales of merit in Israel's favor. This certainly offers great incentive to the reader to follow Torah and avoid what the author cautions against. First, a single individual can have a great effect on the rest of the world, and second, failure to heed this message would seem to spell great punishment and destruction which

would be on one's own head. As another incentive, we see that such a man will be ascribed great merit; he will be given righteous offspring. There is a great emphasis here on having children and living on through them. This is also in sharp contrast to the words that described the effects of dealing with a heathen - one would thereby show disrespect for God and Torah, and raise his sons as idolators. Here, simply by following Torah and teaching it, one acquires righteousness and will be blessed with righteous offspring, and presumably with God's love. Once more we see further development of the concepts of God's love and giving of Torah, with Torah being the vehicle by which to gain not only merit but the true way by which one should live. The chapter is concluded with a recapitulation of the phrase which admonishes that one who sits with a heathen belittles Torah, profanes God, and turns his son to idolatry.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Ten:**

Chapter 10 opens with a reprise of the concept of receiving reward or punishment according to what one deserves. Devorah and Elkanah are paired because they both cause others to acquire merit through their good deeds. This teaches us that those who bring others to good deeds also acquire merit themselves. The author uses the story of Devorah's husband as exemplary of one who, although not a scholar, does good deeds to promote Torah. Although he is illiterate, he, too, is granted merit in the world-to-come. Thus the author has expanded the idea that the study of Torah is valued because it brings merit upon a man, and deals with the problem that perhaps not all men have the capacity to study Torah. Nevertheless, if they have good intentions and act accordingly, God cares more for them than for those who bring the greatest offering. (This was referred to in the passage in chapter 8 regarding God's preference for small offerings with pure intentions over large offerings with wicked intentions.) With this statement the author has brought in two new ideas: 1) one does not have to be a scholar to gain merit, one merely has to have *derech eretz* and perform good deeds; and 2) the theme of the world-to-come (which will be invoked time and again in reference to reward, in many instances to address the problem of why it seems that evil is rewarded and that those who are righteous are nonetheless suffering). In addition to meting out reward and punishment to man according to his due, God knows the hearts of mankind. And it is because of Devorah's wisdom that her husband will bring merit upon Israel. Thus the theme of wisdom returns.

Jezebel is presented as the opposite of Devorah and the author uses this contrast to drive home a sexist point, albeit a minor one among the themes he deals with: a good woman has the ability to make her husband

into a righteous man, whereas an evil woman can turn the heart of her husband towards evil, thereby bringing down punishment upon the people. Furthermore, we learn from Jezebel's example that the wicked will not have life in this world or in the world-to-come. God shall cause them to perish from the earth. Again the author is emphasizing the theme of reward for right action and just punishment for wickedness, as well as the concept of the world-to-come as being an important vehicle for reward. The third paragraph introduces another example of reward for those who are deserving. Like Omri, those who found great cities in Israel and bring proselytes to the religion of Israel will be rewarded. The fourth paragraph, beginning with the praise of God for measuring out to each man what he deserves, returns again to Devorah. She is another example of a righteous woman who taught Torah and was modest. Additionally, she was a wise judge in Israel, emphasizing again the value of wisdom and study coupled with righteousness.

Continuing with the Devorah story the author returns to the theme of God's redemptive capacity. God delivers Israel from her enemies by the hand of men like Barak, who do good deeds and are engaged in the study of Torah. We are also told that faith in God, such as that displayed by Barak, will accord one merit and earn him a good portion. Similarly, the tribes of Naftali and Zevulun merited their victories over the Canaanites because of the good deeds and *derech eretz* of their ancestors. (We also learn, in a subtheme, that a woman is considered worthy if she does her husband's will.)

In the sixth paragraph the author tells us of his own experience in the great academy where he learned that everything God gives to us is given with wisdom, knowledge and insight. This reiterates the goodness of wisdom and knowledge, as well as the love that God has for Israel in giving Torah and wisdom to us. But the author has considerably developed these themes by

now. We are also treated to another exploration of the relationship between men and women. Previously we learned that a wicked woman can bring about her husband's downfall whereas a good woman can turn him toward righteousness. Then we found that a worthy woman is one who does her husband's will. Now, as a result of the example that the author uses to show that God provides for us with wisdom and forethought - woman is given to man - we learn that a good woman must provide four things for her husband. This helps us to better understand the nature of women's status in rabbinic cultures. Because he has developed these ideas and concluded that a woman must keep her husband from sexual transgression, the author has a perfect metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel and is able to use it to underline another theme: A husband of flesh and blood may transgress and commit adultery when his wife grows old, but God will never depart from Israel. Additionally, God does not bear a grudge against Israel nor will God withhold Torah from them. God will cause their sins to pass away. Finally, we are told that a man who refrains from transgression and speaks the truth of Torah (a fundamental theme which was developed further in this chapter), is worthy to receive the presence of the Shechina. So here again we find the keys to entering into the inner sanctum of God's presence: Torah and *derech eretz*. What makes one worthy of this is now more clearly defined as the author develops and delineates his moral message.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Eleven:**

Chapter 11 continues the discussion of Devorah and Barak. Beginning with an investigation of Devorah's prophecy, our author states that God avenges Israel on account of their continuous praises of Him in synagogues and on account of their studying Torah. Thus, the message is that we should praise God without fail and study Torah and in this way bring reward to Israel and redemption to ourselves. Similarly rewarded is one who completes a *minyan*. And if one supports a scholar, it is as if he supports not only the scholar, his wife and family, but all who study with him as well (and thus the *mitzvah* and the reward are greater). This teaches us that *tzedakah* delivers from death. In this vein, the author quotes a well-known axiom from Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, "If one preserves a single life, it is as if he had preserved the entire world." The message given is again an expansion of the admonition that one should study Torah and praise God. We have learned that the study of Torah brings one closer to God and that even if one cannot study it, if his intentions and deeds are good he will be rewarded. Here we learn that supporting a scholar in his studies and performing acts of *tzedakah* also bring reward to oneself and the community.

We learn now that just as *tzedakah* delivers from death and brings reward, so whoever behaves justly, gives *tzedakah*, and supports others will be rewarded with peace. Additionally, whoever does all of these things will ransom Israel and God from exile. But, our author tells us, if Israel fails to follow these guidelines, then certainly truth is lacking in Israel. Contrasting the previous statements that Israel can actively redeem itself is Scripture's assertion that God is the redeemer. The author resolves this conflict by maintaining that God in His mercy and love for Israel will act to redeem Israel when we cannot effect redemption by our own deeds. Nevertheless, the

reader may infer from this the author's message, that one must live a good and just life in order to ransom Israel from their troubles at this time, for this is our responsibility in following the words of Torah. In any case, the thematic emphasis has now shifted to the problem of exile and how Israel might be redeemed in this life, rather than in the world-to-come. Again the author turns to Devorah to put in her mouth the words which describe the actions of the Judges of Israel, appropriate because of her own position as a Judge. He tells us that the Judges of Israel are pure and judge in a just manner. And from such just and righteous deliberations come forth learning and more words of Torah, ultimately leading to redemption. Then the same verse quoted to exhort these qualities is utilized to emphasize the theme of dispersion, to explain that God showed mercy in dispersing Israel.

We might infer from this that in the author's time the Jews longed to return and be redeemed from exile and further, from the emphasis that the author puts on doing justly, walking in God's ways and studying Torah, that they may have gotten discouraged, feeling that their efforts and prayers went unheeded - though this does not point to any specific period. In any case, dispersion and exile is another main theme which is returned to and developed throughout the text. We are told that the dispersion of Israel is a good thing, a message to the people that God knows what He is doing. And as this message is found near the end of the chapter, perhaps the author means it to serve as a comforting message, a *nehemta*. He relates this in a story, a clever parable, which demonstrates that dispersion is merciful and shows God's great protection for His people, again reiterating God's great love for the people Israel. The author closes the chapter reemphasizing Torah study and the new interpretations that come from diligent study and discussion with men learned in Torah. Further, Torah study can solve disputes that

weapons cannot. Thus it is vital that the people study Torah since it seems that Torah not only delivers from ignorance, from evil thoughts and deeds and brings reward, but additionally it solves disputes. The chapter is framed by the praise of those who pray and study.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Twelve:**

Chapter 12, continuing the storyline describing the Judges of Israel, begins with a parable that supposedly occurred in the days of the Judges. It is put here to reiterate once again that God treats the house of Israel as His own children, judging them fairly, punishing them when they do wrong, but redeeming them the instant that they repent. Again, the author tells us that nothing happens to Israel that is not the result of fair judgement. Indeed, God, out of His love for Israel and out of His compassion, mitigates Israel's punishment. We are not punished as severely as we deserve to be punished. If we think back to what occurred in the last chapter, we can see that the author is building a case here, using the themes he has addressed before: that the sufferings now experienced by the Jews are just and deserved, that we should not despair nor forsake God. Rather, we should try to live a more just and upright life, engaged in the study of Torah and acts of goodness. The author brings in other examples of God's just and righteous judgement, such as that against the 42,000 slain by Jeptha. And we learn further from that incident that one who has the opportunity to intervene and stop someone from evil action or bring him back to God but does nothing is held accountable. This seems to reframe a theme we saw earlier, that what one person does affects the whole community (if one acts justly or studies Torah, the reward comes to his family and community; but if he sins, the punishment falls upon all those around him as well). We see that all Israel is truly responsible for one another.

This same idea is emphasized in another vein in the next paragraph: One who has the opportunity to educate another in Torah and bring Israel back to God must do so. If he does not take advantage of the opportunity, the blood spilled is upon his head. This paragraph also underscores the

importance of *derech eretz*. For the 70,000 who were slain in Gibeah died because they lacked *derech eretz* (since no one had instructed them in the ways of Torah). The author continues to stress that nothing happens to Israel that is not the result of God's fair judgement. This is the reason that the succession of the high priests was changed twice. Both times the priests had failed to intervene to resolve disputes and, consequently, many Israelites were killed in battle. But although God's compassion for Israel is constant, His justice decreed that because of Israel's misdeeds, lack of respect for Torah, and lack of *derech eretz*, the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. And the author tells us that the 30,000 who died when the Ark was returned also were slain because of Israel's misdeeds and failure to conduct themselves properly. We are to understand that at the same time that God wants to be compassionate, we are nonetheless held responsible for our deeds. We cannot expect God to be understanding and merciful if we do not show our intention and make good on our end of the bargain. Indeed, the Philistines, although idolaters, possessed *derech eretz* and had the sense to act respectfully toward the Ark. If these idol worshippers could have the good sense to behave respectfully toward the token of God's presence and power, certainly we should be able to do so. We should not think that God acts unfairly or that we are not deserving of what is meted out to us.

Finally, concluding this chapter, the author recapitulates the major points of the entire unit of Chapters 10 through 12 through examples from this chapter: the importance of *derech eretz*, and the truth and righteousness of God's judgements. First, God punished the Philistines and they returned the Ark. But others were disrespectful of the Ark, such as those Israelites of Bet Shemesh, so they were justly punished. The author reiterates the value of *derech eretz* and revisits the idea that each one is responsible for others -

those who did not practice *derech eretz* were responsible for the death of those who were slain. Nevertheless, we see again that God rules justly. Neither reward nor punishment is meted out except through true judgement. And we learn from this that what one does is returned to him accordingly. Even as God's judgements are true, so are God's rewards given according to what one deserves. We are to learn from this that our very actions have an effect on what happens in this world, and we should thus be mindful of our behavior. This concludes the sustained - although elaborate and somewhat digressive - presentation of themes throughout these three chapters.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Thirteen:**

At the beginning of Chapter 13 we return once more to the theme of avoiding contact with the wrong type of people. Previously, avoiding contact with heathens was stressed because it leads one to the wrong path in life. Here, the author cautions against associating with Jews who are ignorant of Torah (עמי הארץ), which can lead to laxity and improper conduct. Rather, one should dine with scholars because one will absorb their learning. This is nicely illustrated in the case of Abraham's hospitality to the angels. At this point the author is leading us down a careful rhetorically constructed path which outlines the importance of Torah in learning right conduct, or *derech eretz*, and the reasons and rewards for following this path. Indeed, the author blesses God who rewards those who love and fear Him. He brings in a prime example of one who loved and feared God and was rewarded, Abraham. The stories about Abraham are used to illustrate that God does not favor one person over another, another theme which will be further developed in the chapters to come. But the most important message to come from the Abrahamic examples is that God rewards those who do good deeds. As God rewarded Abraham for his kindness to the angels, one who does good deeds will be rewarded. By extension, those who, like Abraham, treat scholars with respect and kindness (or as we saw previously, support them), and associate with men lettered in Torah will be rewarded.

The choice is made starkly apparent in the fourth paragraph, in the contrasting stories of Gideon and Manoah: sitting with a man who is lettered in Torah brings rewards whereas sitting with a man who is unlettered in Torah brings sure punishment. Similarly, denying bread to one who needs it (thus violating a *mitzvah*) brings punishment, while giving bread brings reward. And it follows from this that one who *eats* bread with an ignoramus

will find that his own words are ignored. He will find dissension within himself, and will be like one who worships idols. Further, our author warns, if the one who does this is himself a learned man, he negates his Torah learning, desecrates God's name, widows his wife, orphans his children, and brings a bad name upon the succeeding generations of his children's children to the end of all generations.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Fourteen:**

We learn at the beginning of Chapter 14 that one should not only avoid associating with the wrong kinds of people, but that one should also take care to guard against idol gossip, flippancy, and lewdness. These all lead to evil occurrences, which are enumerated, and to divine punishment. We should learn from God's example and spend our time in serious study, not in idleness or gossip. The issue of gossip and levity leads to the question of whether God laughs. The author uses this as a bridge to address the question of whether God enjoys watching the wicked suffer. He answers cleverly that although God laughs at the wicked and at the evildoers, God does not enjoy laughing at them. Furthermore, the author addresses the whole problem of evil in the world in this section. It turns out that God regrets having brought evil into the world with only one qualification: the presence of evil in the world allows for God's extension of mercy to those who repent. And repentance is truly a manifestation of God's goodness, for we know that God rewards those who repent. However, jesting, idle gossip and lewdness will follow you to eternity. There, God will ask why you did not learn from God's own example regarding avoiding these evil ways and devoting yourself instead to the pursuit of Torah.

The author moves on now to discuss in greater depth what it means to engage in Torah. Building on the idea of toil, he defines two types of toil: toil in Torah and toil in worldly affairs. The difference is, of course, in the reward: the reward for labor in Torah is great, whereas labor in worldly affairs promises only emptiness. We are now treated to examples which reiterate the theme of reward for labor in Torah: Aaron labored in Torah and taught it to many. He was rewarded. Indeed, we saw earlier that one who knows Torah and teaches it to others, as Aaron did, will be rewarded. Thus,

we should learn from this example. Because of labor in Torah, the Holy One has compassion upon a person and grants him a spirit of wisdom and understanding, knowledge and insight, and his portion is like that of the three Patriarchs. The author extrapolates further that in order to live a good life, there are twelve rules of conduct that one should follow. Some of these rules are then illustrated. If one follows these rules in his home, all the more so should he follow them in the academy in his conduct with fellow scholars. And why is this? Here our author leads us to a deeper understanding of the rewards of this action: By one's right conduct he will come to a greater understanding of Torah! However, the author admonishes, one should take care not to doze off while studying. He should actively participate in the study of Torah (Once more we are reminded that proper intention is half of the value). Moreover, one should not fear ridicule but should ask questions in a spirit of humility for it is only by careful and diligent study and by scrupulously obeying these rules that one will come to know Torah (which ultimately leads to knowing God). One should also remember that not only are these rules valuable for the sake of learning and for the sake of reward, but that just as there is a reward for each, there is an equally appropriate punishment for the failure to follow each one. That is, it is not just the loss of knowledge or of a good portion, but a negative punishment which will befall one who fails to keep the *mitzvot*.

The author then cautions that, as with previously discussed transgressions, a person who makes a habit of idle gossip and flippancy brings evil not only upon himself but upon the whole world! An illustration is given of how this type of action spirals outward, bringing evil upon one's family, neighborhood, city, country, and so on. And furthermore, we see that those who do not reprove such a man are to be blamed and punished as well.

This illustration is an extension of the previous admonition that one who sees a person doing evil and fails to warn him or to bring him back to God is held accountable and punished as well.

Regarding flippancy and idle gossip, even a small amount is still deemed a sin. We were instructed earlier that even a small offering is more pleasing to God if it is offered with the right intent than a large offering if it is offered with evil intent. We find here that even a small sin brings great punishment, but that a small good deed brings great reward. This is a result of God's goodness and mercy. It should be apparent by now that one should strive to emulate God in many ways, and here we are given a list of the eleven attribute of mercy which are God's. We should strive to emulate God in our own lives, by displaying these attributes ourselves. In this passage, in which God is describing his attributes to Moses, God reminds him that he shows no partiality between a heathen or and Israelite, a man and a woman, a manservant or a maidservant. All of them are rewarded or punished according to their deeds. This theme is now expanded: when any kind of person obeys God's command, he will be rewarded. We should take note of this and understand that when a man is mindful of the glory of heaven in his thoughts and action, the glory of heaven is magnified, as is his own glory. However, when he thinks only of himself, his glory is diminished while heaven's glory is not diminished. It should be quite apparent that the major theme our author has developed is that one must not only act in a proper manner, but that his intent should be focused similarly.

The sixth paragraph provides an example of one who has acted flippantly and thereby brought down great punishment not only upon himself but upon his family and surroundings as well. And we are told again that one who sees this and does not reprove his fellow will also suffer punishment.

While this is not a further development of that idea, it serves as a recapitulation of the major thoughts of the chapter as we come now upon shorter sections that reassemble the key points. Paragraph seven provides an illustration of the point made earlier, that even a small good deed is greatly rewarded. And paragraph eight uses the story of a priest who has transgressed to emphasize that no one is immune to divine punishment; if he has done wrong, he will be justly punished. Accordingly, the next paragraph addresses man's tasks on earth: to do good deeds and study Torah, and to distance himself from evil. But, if one is punished, he should consider why he is being punished. Punishment is brought upon a man only to rid him of transgression by purification and correction, and not out of spite or malevolence .

The concluding three paragraphs of the chapter shift focus away from man and his transgressions, to God and God's reaction to man's actions. God is portrayed as a redeemer, not a punisher. God will protect the weak and punish the wrongdoer. But, we are warned, if one does not admit his fault, God considers his prayer an abomination. Further, along the same lines, one who does wrong whether in public or private will receive punishment from God. Nevertheless, we should not think that God would punish a man unjustly. Rather God deals with man in a just and pleasant manner. God appreciates those who make peace between fellow men, who do good deeds and study Torah.

Finally, we see again the image of God sitting in the great academy and studying Torah, the message being that we should emulate God and that we are like God. Therefore, God rewards Israel out of His great love for them. In a *nehemta* ending to the chapter, the author underlines God's attribute of

justice with the message that God will come to redeem the righteous. Our task is to observe the *mitzvot* and wait upon the Lord.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Fifteen:**

In the chapter that follows, the concepts of reward and of living a good life in this world while waiting for the Lord are addressed. We are admonished that a man should be grateful for the good life that he has in this world. The author is now returning us to the theme of reward in the world-to-come and contrasting it with the goodness of life that exists in the here and now. It is because of the goodness that we receive in this world, the foretaste that God has given us of the world-to-come, that we should bless, praise and thank God. Again the author expands upon this theme, addressing the question of punishment in a different light: We wait here in this world in order to purge ourselves of our sins so that we can enter in a pure state into the world-to-come. This is an extension of the idea addressed in the previous chapter that punishment serves to purge us of our sins. However, the theme of God's love for Israel returns here in relation to the world-to-come: God intended no one but the seed of Jacob to inherit the world-to-come.

At the end of the first paragraph the author begins to address another aspect of reward and punishment: Those who avoid transgression are rewarded in the same manner as those who perform *mitzvot*. This is connected to the concept that those who are unable to study Torah can still gain merit and reward on the basis of doing good deeds and supporting the scholars. In any event, the author offers an opportunity for all people to have a place in the world-to-come if they are simply able to avoid transgression. This discussion proceeds out of the images in the Jeremiah 31:8 verse of the "blind" and "lame" who are to be redeemed with the rest of Israel. The author uses these images to discuss "defects" with respect to the study of Torah. Even such people can still gain merit from God if their intention is proper. We are returning once again to the theme of Torah study and its merits, now

interwoven with the theme of right intent. For it is apparent within these three examples that one must not only devote himself to Torah but do so wholeheartedly and with proper intent. The first example is of a man who is just but knows no Torah. Although it would seem that he should be looked down upon because he knows no Torah, we are told at the conclusion of the paragraph that God values those who are just but do not know Torah (this reiterates the theme that even one who knows no Torah but acts with *derech eretz* will have a share in the world-to-come). However, the status of the other two men is not so forgiving. Nevertheless, it is difficult for God to punish and destroy those who know Torah even if their actions do not follow from their learning. God would much rather lead them back on the path of repentance.

This should lead us to praise and thank God, who gives generously to all that He has created. Indeed, were it not for man's God-given wisdom, he could not even provide for himself. Everything we enjoy in this world is a token of God's beneficence. Returning once more to Torah, the treasure given to Israel, we see that indeed it is the wisdom given in Torah which sustains us. Out of God's great love for Israel we have been given Torah, the key to gaining entrance to the inner sanctum and divine intimacy. Because of God's great love He rewards Israel. However, man must work hard for that reward, he must study Torah and learn the path of God and follow it. This is what brings reward and sustenance to man. So in truth it is Torah, God's revelation to us, which sustains us.

Additionally, Torah tips the balance on the scales of merit in Israel's favor, teaches *derech eretz*, and guides us to life in the world-to-come. Thus it is more beloved by God than any of His handiwork. One might wonder, along this line of reasoning, whether Torah in fact is more beloved by God than

Israel. No, our author assures us. Israel is more precious to God because of its innate qualities and because they, and not any other nation, accepted the Torah from God.

The author continues on this line of comfort, answering questions regarding the destruction of the Temple and Israel's exile which obviously challenge the notion of God's love for Israel. Again, he emphasizes the theme of Torah study, *derech eretz* and *mitzvot*. When the Israelites took these up after the fall of the first Temple, God returned to them and rebuilt the Temple. The message is therefore that although Israel has faults, God will come and redeem us. But we have an obligation to God and we must help to bring about the redemption. The author's message to his audience is one of consolation and hope: because of God's love for Israel He has given us Torah, a means of finding the right path. We must live according to its dictates, praise God, study Torah and direct our hearts towards the good. This is the true path to the inner sanctum.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Sixteen:**

This chapter continues the narrative scenario begun in the previous chapter, a dialogue between the author and a non-rabbinic Jewish questioner. All of the questions deal with the scriptural basis for rabbinic enactments and prohibitions. The questioner tries to elicit from the author the reasons for certain rules and regulations that are not explicit in the Scriptures. Our author, in answering him, demonstrates that rabbinic interpretations of scriptural laws are in fact implicitly contained in Torah. Thus, he warns, one should not take rabbinic prohibitions lightly. As the author answers questions posed to him and explains that what is not immediately in plain view in the Torah is actually there, we see that the wisdom of Torah is indeed very great. The process of rabbinic midrash and of talmudic argumentation in and of itself is justified here by the author's dialogue with the questioner. In the first paragraph our author demonstrates the importance of ritual hand-washing, which allows him to make the not so subtle point that the obligation of holiness is incumbent upon all Israel, not just certain people. The second example also allows him to underscore this point. This example moves nicely into the prooftext which makes the author's point for him: One who gains wealth and power for himself by unjust means will lose his power and be exposed - he will be punished. This is simply a particular expansion on the theme of wrongdoing which was addressed earlier.

The next two paragraphs address the same issue that the questioner originally posed; whether Torah is so great in wisdom that it actually provides an answer to every situation. This is our author's contention and he cleverly uses these scenarios to prove his point. Further, he reminds us that reward for one who refrains from doing things to which his soul is naturally inclined is greater for himself, his family, and the generations to come. Thus,

are reminded that reward is based on merit. That is, God loves Israel enough to protect and reward her, but the means of that reward is through the ways expressed in Torah. And how much greater is the reward if it is truly earned. The author's further attempts to answer the questioner serve to address more explicitly the value of Torah: Israel is disciplined by all of Torah, both oral and written. And these teach us that there are eight reasons why the world may be destroyed. The list of these eight reasons includes some aspects of wickedness which we have seen thematically addressed previously: injustice, idol worship, incest, bloodshed, profaning the name of God, lewdness, arrogance, and slander. Our author tells us that for these reasons the former generations were rooted out of the world. Thus, we are being admonished to avoid these behaviors. (One might extrapolate further and recall that one person's acts have an effect upon all of Israel). Then he returns us to examples of wicked men whom we saw in previous thematic delineations - Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, etc. They were all rooted out of the world for their wickedness.

As a countervailing force, there are four reasons why the world continues to exist. These qualities, addressed previously in various guises, are enumerated for us. Then the questioner's own experience cheating a non-Jew is used by our author to admonish us that we should not be like him, for it is commanded that we not take advantage of any man, be he Jew or non-Jew. This is another example of what it means to walk the right path and thereby contribute merit so that the world will continue to exist.

The chapter continues with another attempt by the questioner to derail our author's contention that rabbinic interpretation is implicitly contained in the Torah. The topic, incest and sexual impropriety, is not the major thematic issue at hand. Rather, the author uses it as another example to

prove the versatility and wisdom of Torah. An extended narrative related by the author in this context further serves the theme that no punishment is undeserved, and that it is out of God's love for us that He punishes us for our transgressions. Left unchecked, transgressions beget more transgressions, just as good deeds beget more good deeds. Thus, one should avoid lying and transgression because they will only increase and thereby bring punishment upon himself, his family, and his community (as we learned previously). Our author tells us further that not only will punishment be visited upon the offender and his family, but that such punishments include leprosy that will afflict him until the day of his death, unless he repents. The author also uses the opportunity to denounce other types of wickedness and uses prooftexts to describe their punishments. But then he present the contrast: those who are loving and just, who suffer insults but do not insult others shall be divinely rewarded. We are given other examples of this, implicitly to instruct the reader in the proper moral and ethical conduct which is both implicit and explicit in Torah.

The author then returns to his earlier theme that rabbinic rulings are contained implicitly in the Torah, and that those who disregard them do so at their own peril. In each case, however, we are informed that one who repents will be forgiven. Blessed be God who gave Torah to Israel so that they might learn *derech eretz* and not multiply their sins, says our author. Then he reiterates again, with biblical examples, that one who transgresses will be punished. He moves on to disparage those who are able to study Torah and practice *derech eretz* and do not. Such a man adds to the transgressions of the world. Woe to the man who sees the world as belonging only to him. One who is arrogant, slanders others (like those who are prone to idle gossip, jesting and flippancy) is sure to add to the transgressions of the world. We

see that he in effect destroys all of creation. Thus, we revisit the idea that one man's actions have great effect on the fortunes of the rest of humanity.

At this point there is a chapter break in the standard printed editions, although not in the first edition and manuscripts. True, it seems that what we have just seen could be the end of the chapter, but in the next section our author does continue to address the issues of sin and punishment, *derech eretz* and reward. This next section opens with another first-person discussion between our author and a questioner, regarding the first generations of man. The author tells the questioner that the first generations were given longevity in order to test their moral conduct. And the examples given instruct the reader regarding the proper behavior expected in order to ensure long life. Indeed, we have seen that one of the rewards for proper conduct is long life, and one of the punishments for wickedness is being cut off and rooted out of this world. The concept of the good being rewarded and the wicked punished is elaborated here: the good are made agents of blessing while the wicked are agents of misfortune. And we are told further that this applies not only to Israel, but to all people. Thus, we should know that although God favors Israel, the rest of the world must take care to act righteously. Yet, life on this earth must end and the author, who has already extolled the virtues of the world-to-come, deems death and entrance into the world-to-come to be a joyous occasion for one who has led a full and upright life. He relates the paradox that there are three reasons for joy in the world: the angel of death, the inclination towards evil, and the necessity of using the bathroom. The questioner then asks how these seemingly unwanted items can lead to joy.

Our author teaches him that fear of death makes us righteous, that were it not for the impulse to do evil and Israel's having conquered it, the

nations of the world would not go up to praise God and Israel on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Indeed, he tells his listener, at the time when the nations of the world do so, the righteous will be freed of the evil inclination, they will eagerly come to the study of Bible and Mishnah, teach *derech eretz* and do God's will. What our author does here is to provide another *nehemta* at the end of the chapter as he provides answers to the ever-present problem of why there is evil in the world. The necessity to use the bathroom serves as a reminder that in the world-to-come, God will remove this need from Israel, as He will free them from the sway of death and the evil inclination. Thus we should praise God for His redemptive power.

The next paragraph appears at first glance to be unrelated to the preceding material. However, after a second look we see that the author is again propounding his view of the fullness of Torah - the books of the Prophets merely adumbrate what is already contained in the Torah. Furthermore, it is through the study and teaching of Torah, presumably in *all* of its parts, that one pays homage to God. Those who do not know Torah or do not comprehend it, are urged to study it further. The prophet Isaiah is then held up as a paradigm of respectful behavior in God's presence, for he held his tongue when God commanded him to set a snare for Israel, hardening their hearts against repentance. Isaiah's example also advances the author's perspective on theodicy - Isaiah held his tongue because he knew that God really does desire Israel's repentance, even when matters seem otherwise. Thus, we are counseled not to lash out in anger against God, but to hold our tongues in assurance that redemption ultimately will follow. The end of the chapter involves a *nehemta* which promises redemption if we truly repent, as Israel should have done since the time of the destruction of the

Temple. Then God would embrace us, kiss us, and bring us close forever, as He would have done for them.

***Tanna debe Eliyahu* Chapter Seventeen:**

This chapter opens with a quote from Ps. 24:4-5, which, like the previous materials, speak of the man who lives uprightly and receives reward. The verse alludes to the righteous example that Moses has set by being an honest man who does not steal or cheat, whose heart is pure in living a life according to Torah, and who avoids swearing in vain and thereby profaning God's name. We are told that, for his righteousness, Moses was rewarded with blessings from God and mercy from the God of His salvation (Ps. 24:5).

The second paragraph praises God and addresses the problem of Israel's wickedness and transgression. Our author comforts the people with the knowledge that, despite Israel's wickedness and indecencies, God did not wreak vengeance upon them, nor withhold Torah from them. Moreover, God remembered and accorded them merit for their good deeds while forgetting the bad things. Additionally, God, in His love and mercy, came down from His heavens and placed His great name with them. It seems that our author is at once admonishing his audience and offering them hope, admonishing them to turn from wickedness but comforting them with the knowledge that God will forgive their past misdeeds.

In the third paragraph we turn again to the theme of wisdom. Here we are told that a wise man's deeds come from his wisdom. In a new twist, the good deeds that a man does are best done in concealment. If, after all, a man does good deeds, his intentions must be in the right place and if he trumpets them in public perhaps he is not really doing them for the right reasons. Thus he should study Torah in private, give *tzedakah* in secret and do acts of lovingkindness for his family in this way. If a man has knowledge of Torah, how much the more so should he have *derech eretz*. This will surely find love

for him in the eyes of God. But what will be the reward for this? God's name shall be pronounced for a blessing over him and he will reap the blessings described in Prov. 4:8-9 and 3:16 - a crown of glory, length of days, riches and honor.

Further, God will reward him out of His great love by associating the Divine Name, the name of the Lord who brings peace, with his name. Our author picks up on the idea of peace as being a blessing bestowed upon Israel and describes the praise that the ministering angels bestow upon the Maker of Peace among all of His creations.

Our author now returns to an oft-repeated theme, one which provides the reader with a model for living as well as a means of identifying with God. In the comparison of God to a mortal king, he points out that only the Divine King requires no sustenance from His subjects, but constantly provides sustenance for them. One should strive to emulate God's example, spending his time in the study of Torah, doing *tzedakah*, and teaching the wisdom of Torah to others, as God does. In these two scenarios, we are also reminded of God's righteous judgement, His commitment to sustaining His people, and His great wisdom, given to us in Torah - themes prevalent throughout the text.

Our author continues the explication of Song of Songs 3:11, begun in the fourth paragraph. He addresses the problem of Israel in the wilderness, when they were not completely righteous. Nevertheless, they brought crowning glory to God. He tells us that we should learn from the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness, who followed after God without question and were thereby rewarded. This is why Israel is considered the Lord's hallowed portion. This was demonstrated by our ancestors' conduct at Mt. Sinai. When they went to receive the Torah, says our author, God vowed that

if Israel rejected the Torah as the other nations of the world had done, He would cause them to perish from this world and the world-to-come. However, because Israel accepted the Torah without qualification, God came down from the uppermost heavens and promised to be ever-mindful of them. The children of Israel accepted the Torah unquestioningly, as suggested by the words of Ex. 24:7, "We will do and we will hear." To test them God spoke to Moses requesting that they bring offerings for the Tabernacle. And although these items already belonged to God, nevertheless, the children of Israel brought them. So, too, did Israel unquestioningly accept God's laws. The message to the audience is that they, too, should obey God's will (as revealed in the Torah and its rabbinic interpretation) willingly and unquestioningly.

At the beginning of the tenth paragraph our author beseeches his audience to listen to him. Surely, he says, any man knows that we humans are no different from animals. What is it that sets us apart? What sets us apart is the soul and spirit which our benevolent God has placed within us. Not only this, but Israel's special qualities are such that none except Israel will God raise from the dust and give life in the world-to-come. This is the manifestation of God's great love for us. We see therefore, that God's great love for us will eventually redeem us. The author is holding out a beacon of hope to his audience, who may not have felt that there was hope for them or that God was listening.

Returning to Israel in the wilderness, we know that they committed wrongdoing, states our author, but they privately repented. Here he presents a recapitulation of the importance of repentance. Because of God's compassion for transgressors, His desire to have compassion upon those who repent, He gave us Yom Kippur as a vehicle for seeking forgiveness.

The author then returns to the theme of the reward that followed upon Israel's behavior when they willingly accepted the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. As a reward for their acceptance, God was patient with Israel's backsliding for three hundred years during the period of the Judges, as a father is patient with his son. At that time, God's blessing was apparent in their numerous offspring. Similarly, in the days of Samuel when Israel took upon themselves the yoke with awe, admitted their sins against God and asked Samuel to pray for them, God rewarded them by descending from Heaven and staying with them in the war against the Philistines. Also, our author learns from Samuel's having prayed on behalf of repentant Israel that one who has the opportunity to save a sinner, to guide him to repentance, must do so or he himself is called a sinner. This is a theme we have seen before, the idea that one who does not reprimand his fellow, or direct him towards repentance, is held accountable for his fellow's sin and punished accordingly. So, too, in the days of Elijah, God performed a miracle on behalf of Israel which turned Israel away from idolatry and toward God.

Our author tells us that because of Israel's acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, forsaking of idolatry, and proclaiming the oneness of God, the Holy One weeps for Israel in public as well as in private. Indeed, God has compassion even on the wicked among Israel, hoping their descendants will repent and redeem their ancestors. The major theme once again is God's love and merciful benevolence towards His people. The author moves from here to the theme of righteous and wicked men, outlining what it is that determines whether a man is righteous or wicked. The importance and value of Torah study, and of learning from it the fear of heaven and how to live a life characterized by *derech eretz*, are the key to a righteous life. Thus, we see that Torah study in and of itself is not enough; one must learn from it and

live by it. God, upon seeing a man who has lived righteously enter into eternal life, praises him and expresses the hope that the man will have a son to take his place. A wicked person, on the other hand, may begin to study Torah but does not learn from it. He takes a path of wickedness and evil deeds. Upon seeing such a man at his death, God sighs and hopes that he will have a son who will repent and bring him honor through his son. Thus, a person's sins are not just visited upon himself but upon his future generations. However, a son who repents can set right the remembrance of his father who was wicked.

We see in the example of Jereboam that God wishes to save the wicked and does not wish to punish sinners. Indeed, He was able to find merit in Jereboam, as the author spells out. The author also emphasizes that God's punishment is meted out equally to the wicked among the nations of the earth and to Israel alike.

Finally, he concludes the chapter with a message of hope and comfort. In the days of Hezekiah, he tells us, Israel was busy with the study of Bible, Mishnah, Midrash Halacha and Midrash Aggadah. Their reward for this was that God promised punishment for Israel's enemies. Further, God gave comfort to the people, despite their transgressions. The author's parable elucidates the forgiving, loving aspects of God who says to Israel that out of love He will not destroy Israel, nor come as an enemy. Rather, God will comfort Israel in His great love for them. The author notes that God has given Israel the means by which they may merit salvation - Torah and *derech eretz* - but, that above and beyond this, God holds out a great love and compassion for Israel. God is with Israel and will not forsake them, despite their shortcomings. Nonetheless, they must take it upon themselves to act in a manner befitting God's love.

Conclusion:

From our analysis of these eleven chapters it is not difficult to see how Kadushin was able to delineate his four main thematic categories. What must be apparent, however, is that it is not merely the presence of major themes which must be carefully analyzed, but their very development, embedded in the structure of the midrash itself. This is what makes *Tanna debe Eliyahu* the masterpiece that it is.

From this analysis of thematic development throughout *Tanna debe Eliyahu* we have seen that "its pericopes are coherent, well-developed expositions of specific themes, although (at times) it may often be difficult to follow the thread of the argument in the maze of incidental matter and tangential excursions."[17] But what makes this text unique is precisely that it does not follow standard rhetorical or thematic patterns. And although it may at times appear to be stream-of-consciousness writing, it should now be apparent that these organizing principles of the text are the key to unlocking the mystery of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. The author's gift is the intersection of rhetorical and thematic development which brought about a new mixture of content and form, the hallmark of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*.

[17]Werblowsky, p. 201.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Conclusions Regarding The Interrelation of the Form and Content of *Tanna debe Eliyahu*

Tanna debe Eliyahu is the work of a single author and its individuality lies in the fact that the text therefore presents an emphatic, distinct viewpoint. It is apparent from a thorough reading of this text that the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* was a *chacham*, a scholar and a teacher. He was a man of learning, a student of Torah and of the nature of people. Our author espoused a particular message, a message he saw reflected both in his textual study and in his understanding of the world. This ethical, moral teaching is what he wished to impart to others. Indeed, the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* believed strongly in his message, a reflection of the world which he believed to be manifestly evident in the texts and teachings of Judaism. It is this view that is crucial to an understanding of the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* text.

In in attempt to unlock the mystery of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* we have examined the text in context. That is, we have studied it structurally, rhetorically, to see how the pieces fit together. We have looked at what comes before, what follows afterwards, what rhetorical structures reappear again and again; the relationships that structure the form of the text. We have also investigated the thematic issues; the questions and problems which are addressed by the author and how the deployment of these ideas effectively structure the text's development. In this examination I have tried to look at *Tanna debe Eliyahu* as an entire rhetorical unit. In determining what it is that makes *Tanna debe Eliyahu* unique, it seems to me that Yaakov Elbaum is correct in insisting that one cannot isolate its content from the literary and exegetical context. Indeed, it is of crucial importance to recognize just how

greatly the medium is part of the message here. Ultimately, we must recognize that the meaning of the text is borne out to a great extent through its formulation and style.

As a result of this analysis I am convinced that the key to this jewel of haggadic literature *is* indeed the interplay between the rhetorical form and the thematic content of the text. This is what makes it a unique, substantial and original composition. In examining this text we must pay particular attention to its rhetorical logic, stylistics and patterns. It is through the use of rhetoric that our author is able to articulate his unique views. If we isolate statements from the literary and exegetical context within which they are found we will not gain an accurate understanding of what the author is attempting to convey in the text. In addition we must take careful note of the thematic interweavings, the ideational patterns and associations which present the author's ethical and moral message. It is not just the thematic arrangement which gets his message across but the rhetorical arrangements which provide a carefully crafted medium for the message. In this composition, the author tried to forge a link between midrashic structure and thematic content. The composition of the book according to this method is what makes it unique as well as what unifies it.

In analyzing the text, outlining its rhetorical form and its ideational content, it is easy to see that the text follows distinctive patterns, repetitions, and thematic development. For instance, the text is broken up into distinct sections. Chapters 1-6 form one unit, Chapters 7-17 a second unit and so on. That is not to say that these units are entirely separate from the other parts of the text. The text is one entire rhetorical unit. However, thematically, there are certain ideas which are developed in depth in one section which may be recapitulated in others, or may not be touched upon to a great extent

in other sections. The recapitulation of stylistic tropes which are attached to certain themes provide markers for those ideas. These tropes also help to tie the entire text together stylistically and make it apparent that this text is the work of one author. Additionally, the text is tied together by the global references to major themes whose recapitulation and development throughout the entire text provide the foundation for a thematic structure.

The major themes of the text as outlined by most secondary literature include the importance of Torah study, *derech eretz*, of living a life according to God's commandments, and the value of repentance as the way in which one achieves a good life on this earth and the reward of life in the world-to-come. I would also add another major idea to the themes highlighted by others, that of theodicy. The author devotes a great deal of his message to theodicy; how one is to understand God's actions, God's punishments, and the mercy of God. Indeed, event the punishments meted out by God are seen to be merciful. We are reminded that God does not desire vengeance, that God does not wish to punish humanity. Rather, God desires repentance and rejoices in our efforts not only to do good deeds but to perform acts with the right *kavanah*, or intention. The repetition of certain stylistic tropes and pious interjections reflects our author's theological understandings and may tell us something of his historical circumstance. These phrases emphasize the impartiality of God "who does not distinguish between men and women, servant and king". They also emphasize God's mercy, a quality of mercy that is so strong that God searches for ways to ascribe merits to Israel even when they sin, so as not to punish them too harshly. The God of our author is a loving, caring, merciful God who does not bring suffering and punishment down upon the people except to teach them to follow Torah and lead lives of *derech eretz*. Even

then, God seeks only to correct and lead Israel as a parent teaches His children.

The primary organizing principle of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* is thematic. It is not a midrash easily characterized as either homiletical or exegetical because the biblical texts chosen are utilized primarily for their thematic value and the themes provide the main framework on which this midrash is founded. Although the author makes use of common ideas and traditions, much of the material is original. The resulting text is a midrash which reworks some earlier traditions together with highly original and distinctive materials. Yaakov Elbaum's theory that the author of *Tanna debe Eliyahu* aspired to bring a distinctive mixture of content and form to the work, utilizing elements of exegetical form while introducing a different stylistic arrangement within his text, one that is based on thematic unity, is indeed a breakthrough in our understanding of this text. Elbaum himself stated that with this text we are "on the brink of an extraordinary phenomenon, the introduction of conceptual themes within the vehicle of midrash, combining the techniques of midrash with the literary method of the sages of musar literature."[1] As a result of my analysis of the text I am prepared not only to agree with Elbaum but to go one step further. While in form, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* may resemble a midrash because the author makes use of midrashic forms, in reality it resembles a *musar* homily much more closely than a midrash. In this work the author is trying to espouse ethics and morals, a particular world view, and a method by which one should live. He uses the forms of midrash, some common ideas and traditions, and perhaps even familiar midrashim in order to express his viewpoint, but he writes this text

[1]Elbaum, p. 146.

to serve a didactic moral purpose. Accordingly, the text is not midrash at all but is an ethical treatise, a *musar* homily.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source:

Friedmann [Ish Shalom], Meir, ed. Seder Eliahu Rabba weSeder Eliahu Zuta. Vienna, 1902.

Secondary Sources:

Brand, Joshua. "*Seder Tanna debe Eliyahu Rabba weZutta (zemano umehabro)*", in B.Z. Luria, ed., Zer ligevurot: The Zalman Shazar Jubilee Volume, pp. 597-617. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1973.

Braude, William G. "'Conjecture' and Interpolation in Translating Rabbinic Texts: Illustrated by a Chapter from Tanna debe Eliyahu", in Jacob Neusner, ed., Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty, volume 4, pp. 77-92. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975.

_____. "Novellae in Eliyahu Rabbah's Exegesis", in E. Fleischer and J.J. Petuchowski, eds., Studies in Aggadah, Targum and Jewish Liturgy, in Memory of Joseph Heinemann, pp. 11-22. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981.

Braude, William G. and Israel Kapstein (translators), Tanna debe Eliyyahu: The Lore of the School of Elijah. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981.

Elbaum, Yaakov. "*Beyn midrash lesefer musar*", in Mehqaré Yerushalayim besifrut ivrit 1, pp. 144-154. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981.

_____."Tanna de-vei Eliyahu", in Encyclopedia Judaica, volume 15, pp. 803-804. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971.

_____. review of Braude-Kapstein translation, in Mehqaré Yerushalayim besifrut ivrit 7, pp. 103-119. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985.

Epstein, J.N., philological notes, in Mabo lenosah haMishnah volume 2, pp. 762-767, 1302-1303. Jerusalem: Leifman Heller, 1948; second edition, 1964.

Fishbane, Michael. The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Kadushin, Max. The Theology of Seder Eliahu. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1932.

_____. Organic Thinking: A Study in Rabbinic Thought, esp. pp. 365-367. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1938.

Kugel, James. In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts. San Francisco: Harper Publications, 1990.

Mann, Jacob. "Date and Place of Redaction of Seder Eliyahu Rabba and Zutta" in appendix to article "Changes in the Divine Service Due to Religious Persecutions", pp. 249-251 and pp. 302-310. HUCA 4, 1927.

Margulies, Mordecai. "*Leva'ayat kadmuto shel Seder Eliahu Rabba*", in M.D. Cassuto et al. eds., Sefer Assaf, pp. 370-390. Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1953.

Mirsky, Samuel. "*Lemahuto shel Midrash Seder Eliyahu*", in Shanah beshanah, pp. 215-222. Jerusalem: Hekhal Shelomoh, 1964.

Sarason, Richard S. "Kadushin's Study of Midrash: Value Concepts and Their Literary Embodiment", in Peter Ochs, ed., Understanding the Rabbinic Mind: Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin, pp. 45-72. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

Stern, David. Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Strack, H.L. and G. Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash. Translated by Markus Bockmuehl. (esp. pp. 369-371). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Urbach, Ephraim E. "*Leshe'elat leshono umeqorotav shel sefer 'Seder Eliyahu'*" in Leshonenu 21, pp. 183-97. Jerusalem: 1956; reprinted in Urbach, Me'olamam shel HaZaL, pp. 418-433. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988.

Werblowsky, R. J. Zwi, "A Note on the Text of Seder Eliyahu", in Journal of Jewish Studies 6, pp. 201-11. London, 1955.

Zucker, Moses. Targumo shel R. Saadia Gaon laTorah, pp. 116-127, 205-219. New York: Philipp Feldheim, Inc., 1959.

Zunz, Leopold ed., Hanoch Albeck Hadderashot beyisrael, esp. pp. 53-57, 288-295. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1948, second edition, 1954.