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THE HOMILIES OF EXODUS ~~ME~~DRASH RABBAH

Submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Rabbi and the degree of Master of  
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## EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH

### Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse a collection of midrashim called EXODUS ~~MIDRASH~~ RABBAH. Like Genesis and Leviticus Rabbah it consists of homiletical midrashim. Thus it is not a sermonical commentary on every word found in the book of Exodus - but rather an interpretation of many of its texts. As other haggadic midrashim, those in EXODUS ~~MIDRASH~~ RABBAH seek not so much to decree laws, as to admonish and inspire.

According to Zunz<sup>1</sup> the work was compiled about five hundred years after Genesis Rabbah or around the 11th century A.D. Some scholars, however, maintain that Zunz had the tendency to post-date the compilation of midrashic works by a century and therefore consider EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH a product of the 10th century. Whatever dating we accept, we can rest assured that the book was written when medieval, Jewish persecution was reaching its zenith.

EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH contains fifty-two chapters, none of which are uniform in size or composition. The first fourteen chapters are a running commentary on each verse of Exodus I-XI. Beginning with chapter fifteen to the end of the book, there are homilies and homiletical fragments to the first verses of the Scripture sections.

<sup>1</sup>Die Gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden (pg. 256-258)

Though there are theories which maintain that the book contains different and distinct compilations, it is beyond the ability of the author, however, to shed any light upon the subject. This is work for a midrashic critic, or at least for one who is acquainted with the many midrashic compilations. All the author can state from his own knowledge is that the text is often abbreviated and that the reader is frequently referred to other collections.

Every literary device is employed by the rabbis to enhance the texts of the Book of Exodus. Every type of text which Dr. Bettan mentions in his STUDIES in JEWISH PREACHING<sup>1</sup> is used. The transparent text, the obscure text, the text with theological incongruities, the allegorical text, etc., are all utilized. Every type of illustrative matter is used to elaborate upon these texts, such as the analogy, the proverb, the parable, the allegory, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Finally the author wishes to mention his method in analyzing EXODUS RABBAH. No reference was made to any other commentaries or books on EXODUS RABBAH because the author wished to approach the midrashim of EXODUS RABBAH without the influence or prejudice of any already established theories. First all the midrashim in the book were translated, but only those which seemed to have any significance were recorded. Then these recorded midrashim were classified and re-classified according to subject matter.

<sup>1</sup>Bettan - STUDIES in JEWISH PREACHING (ch. 1)

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

Thus the midrashim divided themselves into two main categories, those of a distinctly theological or religious nature, and those of a more secular or humanistic variety. The theological midrashim fell very naturally into what Dr. Bettan calls, "the three main themes of early preachers ..... the majesty of God, the grandeur of the Torah, and the unique destiny of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

It was more difficult to classify the secular midrashim because of the broad scope of their subject matter. However, some themes were found which were the most frequent and distinct, and these were used for classification. In order to bring further simplicity into the analysis of this book, these themes were still further broken into more specialized subjects. The midrashim which could not be subsumed even under the latter division were omitted. The only exception to this is that occasionally a midrash is included solely because of its literary worth. As a whole, however, this thesis is an analysis and a synthesis of the most significant and the most frequent midrashic themes in EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH.

<sup>1</sup>Bettan - STUDIES in JEWISH PREACHING (ch. 1)



how a gentile philosopher once asked, "How was the earth originally created?" They replied, "No man is expert in these things but go to Abbah Joseph the builder." So he went and found him on a sea<sup>c</sup>fold and said to him, "I have a question to ask you." The reply came, "I cannot descend because I am hired by the day, but ask anything you like." He then said, "How was the earth originally created. The reply was. "God took dust from beneath the throne of glory and cast it into the water where it became earth and the little pebbles that were in the dust became mountains and hills. This idea can be easily accepted for it says, 'a stone is heavy and the sand weighty'."<sup>1</sup>

In this passage we find that the concept of creation is essentially biblical in character, yet with the idea of dust from beneath the throne of glory and the mention of certain basic elements there are indications of more advanced thought. It is interesting to note further in this passage that the sages of old showed true humility in directing the gentile philosopher to a scholar and

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - Ch. 13:1



philosopher who was an ordinary worker. From other sources also we know that the rabbis treated the laboring man with great respect and urged their followers to combine scholarship with manual work.

Direct platonic influence is shown in another midrashic statement. "You will find that everything that God has created in heaven he has also created on earth."<sup>1</sup> This is the pith of platonic idealism, that is that the earth contains replicas of heavenly objects or imperfect essences of the divine essences in the heavenly museum. But the midrash goes on to state that, "Those that are below are dearer to him than those above."<sup>2</sup> Here one of the essential differences in Judaism, no matter how hellenized it may have become, from Greek platonic asceticism is well illustrated. According to the Greek doctrines all objects created in this world partake of imperfection or rather of illusion and hence all human striving is directed toward a knowledge of that which is beyond the world of sense reality. Judaism, however as reflected

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 33:4

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

by this midrash, even though it incorporates the basic Graecian idea of creation, nevertheless lends it a more realistic and this-worldly note. This is just another example of how Jewish teachers amalgamate the finest cultural traditions of their day with the basic traditions of their religion.

More advanced ideas and the beginnings of controversies that were to occupy theologians for hundreds of years hence are found in the discussion on creation by Rabbi Judah and Nehamia Simeon. Rabbi Judah asserts that "God created the light first and then the world. It is he says, "Like a king who wished to build a palace on a site which was plunged into darkness. So he kindled lights and torches in order to know where to lay the foundations. Similarly the light was created first."<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Nehamia claimed, "The world was created first for it is like a king who built a palace and then had it adorned with lights."<sup>2</sup>

In Rabbi Judah's assertion an emanation theory of creation similar to the neoplatonic

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 50:1

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

theory of emanation is suggested. Rabbi Nehamia's and Rabbi Judah's controversy is typical of the many theological controversies which have raged throughout the centuries as to whether or not God employed in creation another agency outside of himself. A great hindrance in the Rabbinical acceptance of the idea of an auxiliary in creation was their great fear of impairing the unity of the Godhead as well as their difficulty in conceiving of the nature of this auxiliary. The latter problem is reflected in Rabbi Simeon's question addressed to Rabbi Nahman, "Since thou art a master of Hagadah, can you tell me whence the light was created." He replied, "The holy one rapt himself in a garment and the whole world from end to end became resplendent with his brightness."<sup>1</sup>

b. Attributes

All the attributes commonly ascribed to God are found in the EXODUS RABBAH. They are portrayed, to be sure, in many ways such as through the use of parables, allegories, and fables. No matter what technique is employed the essential

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 50-1

purpose of the midrashim remains the same - to elevate the God of Judaism to a lofty ethical plain and to seek to instill his reality into the lives of men.

A beautifully poetic conception of God's forbearance is shown in God's answer to the angel who wanted to rejoice because Israel had crossed the Red Sea, whereas the Egyptians had perished. This God prohibits saying,

וְלֹא יִשְׂמַח אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכַדְתָּם וּבְהִמָּחֵם  
וְלֹא יִשְׂמַח אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכַדְתָּם וּבְהִמָּחֵם

"My legions are in distress and you wish to utter song before me."<sup>1</sup> Again in the commentary on the verse, "Now therefore send, hasten in thy cattle."<sup>2</sup> The midrashist exclaims, "See the mercies of God, even in his wrath he had mercy on their cattle and on the wicked. Because he sent the plague of hail only on the produce of the land, even warning them to protect themselves and their cattle that they should not be smitten by the hail."<sup>3</sup>

The omnipresence of God is stressed in a story about a Roman lady who once boasted about the superiority of her God to a rabbi, because

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 9:19

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 23:8

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 12-3

when God revealed himself in a thorn bush Moses merely hid his face, but when he beheld the serpent, who is her God, he fled. To this the rabbi answered, "Truly Moses hid his face from God and fled from the serpent, but why? From a serpent you can flee a few steps and you are saved but where can one flee from the Almighty, to whom belongs the entire world."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly God's omnipresence is stressed in the answer of a rabbi to a heathen, who asked wherefore God revealed himself in a lowly bush. To this the rabbi answered, "Were a carob or a sycamore tree you would have asked the same question, but still so as to give you an answer, it is to teach you that no place is devoid of God's presence, not even a lowly thornbush."<sup>2</sup>

The omnipotence of God is contrasted in several midrashim with the finiteness and limitation of the rest of creation. "All things exalt themselves over something else. Darkness exalts itself over the deep because it is above it, and the wind exalts itself over the water because it is above it, fire exalts itself over the wind because it is still above it, God is

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 3-16

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 2-9

exalted over everything, hence it says,

וְלֹא יֵשׁ עֲלָיו 'For he is highly exalted'<sup>1</sup>

For one higher than the high watches and there are none higher than he."<sup>2</sup>

In similar vein, Rabbi Abin states, "Four kinds of exalted beings have been created in the world, the most exalted of all living creatures is man, of birds the eagle, of cattle the ox, and of wild beasts the lion. All of these receive loyalty and greatness and they are set under the chariot of God. Why was this? So that they should not exalt themselves in the world and that they should know that the kingdom of heaven is over them."<sup>3</sup>

Evidently on the basis of the frequent defense of the unity of God, the Jewish thinkers must have had to defend this attribute more so than any other. Usually we find that the midrashim which stress the unity of God are in answer to gentile or sectarian philosophers. Such a group asked Rabbi Simlai, "Are there not many deities in the world?" He replied, "What makes you think so?" "Because, they said, it is written, *אֵלֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד*

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 14-1

<sup>2</sup>Exodus Rabbah - 23-13

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

'Did ever a people hear the voice of God?'<sup>1</sup>  
 To which he replied, "It does not say *אמר*  
 but *אמר*." Whereupon his disciples  
 said to him. "Oh, teacher you have thrust these  
 off with a broken reed, but what answer will  
 you give to us?" Rabbi Levy gave them this  
 explanation. " It says, *אמר* *אמר*  
*אמר* 'Did ever a people hear the voice of  
 God?'<sup>2</sup> What does this mean? Had it said,  
*אמר* *אמר* 'The voice of God is his  
 power,' the world would not have been able to  
 survive. But it says instead, *אמר* *אמר*  
 'The voice of the Lord is with power'<sup>3</sup> - that  
 is according to the power of each individual,  
 according to the individual power of the  
 young, the old, and the very small ones. God  
 said to Israel, 'Do not believe that there  
 are many dieties in heaven because you have  
 heard many voices, but know ye that I alone  
 am the Lord, thy God.'<sup>4</sup>

In addition to its stressing the oneness  
 of God, the above midrash is interesting in  
 that it emphasizes a theme common to EXODUS  
 RABBAH, that - religion should be administered

<sup>1</sup>Deut. - 4:33

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Psalms - 19:4

<sup>4</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 5:7

according to the amount or perscription that the individual can absorb. This advice as well as the maxim found in the ethics of the fathers *אין אדם יכול ללמוד יותר מן שכלו* "Know what to answer a heretic," is fulfilled here when the rabbi answers in an entirely different vain the heretics and then the scholars.

Not only biblical scholars today but many ancients observed the tremendous vocabulary of divine terminology. Many must have been the queries to why God was called such a name for example as *אני ה' אלהי* "I am that I am." The rabbis found the answer in the various attributes of God. "God is called according to his work. When waging war against the wicked, God is called Lord of hosts. When God is merciful, he is called, *אלהי רחמים* Hence the name, 'I am that I am', is in virtue of my deeds, for God's deeds are all embracing."<sup>1</sup>

#### c. Prayer

No loftier spiritual note is struck in EXODUS RABBAH than in the midrashim concerning prayer. Complete absorption, complete sub-

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 3:6



mersion is required for prayer. "One who is praying must not return the greeting even of a king, and if a serpent has entwined himself around his heel he must not cease."<sup>1</sup>

Prayer cannot be evoked by merely rational processes or talk about religion. "Why was no song uttered over the manna as over the well," asked the rabbis. "Because of the manna they spoke disrespectfully, for it says, *וְעַד הַיּוֹם* *וְעַד הַיּוֹם* 'But now our soul is dried away, there is nothing at all, but the manna.' God said, 'I desire neither your complaints nor your praises.' For this reason did he allow them to utter song only over the well which they loved."<sup>2</sup> Truly today also we find that prayer cannot rest solely upon a rational basis, but, that accompanying it must be that "ineffable mystical touch of communion with something higher."

Let it be understood, however, that prayer never meant to the rabbis the negation of practical human activities. Prayer is a supreme function but it is not the only function in life. God himself chastizes Moses at the Red Sea for *chides*

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 9:2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 25:7

praying too long. "My children are in dire distress and the sea shuts them in. The enemy is pursuing, and you stand here adding prayer on prayer."<sup>1</sup>

Then of what use is prayer? Does God heed the requests of his children? From the verse *וְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמָיו* "And satisfiest every living thing with favor," The rabbis deduce that since the verse does not say that every living thing is satisfied with food but rather with favor, that it means he grants to each one his requests or desires. "In the millenium too, God will grant the request of each individual. Should you wonder at this, then see what he has done for Israel in this world when he brought down for them the manna in which all kinds of flavors lodged so that each Israelite could taste therein anything he particularly liked."<sup>2</sup>

Here we have a very advanced notion on the idea of prayer -- that God guarantees man's fundamental aspirations in life if he but works diligently for them. The secondary ambitions are not thus necessarily satisfied. Phsycologically speaking every desire that is deeply sought affords

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 21-7

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 25:3

pleasure in its very expression whether it is satisfied or not.

One of the most beautiful midrashim in the entire book treats of God's conception of the prayer of Israel. "When Israel prays you do not find them praying all at the same time, but each assembly prays separately, first one then another. When they have all finished the angel appointed for the task takes all the prayers that have been offered in all the synagogues, weaves them into garlands and places them upon the head of God."<sup>1</sup>

No myth as this one of the angels collecting the prayers of man to place as a crown on God's head better emphasized this Jewish belief that prayers uttered to God by the children of Israel become and are considered as one.

#### d. Free Will and Determinism

The rabbis of EXODUS RABBAH for the most part teach a deterministic conception of life. They were probably influenced by the deterministic Mohammedan doctrines of the day. For all the midrashim, with only few exceptions, reveal God as quite a predetermining factor in human history. Commenting on a verse from Isaiah

אֵלֹהִים מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה  
אֵלֹהִים וְהַקֹּדֶשׁ יְהוָה  
וְהַקֹּדֶשׁ יְהוָה וְהַקֹּדֶשׁ יְהוָה

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 21:4

"Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient time things that are not yet done, my council stands and all my pleasure will I do."<sup>1</sup> The midrashist says, "God declares at the beginning what the end will be. He told Moses that his people would go astray."<sup>2</sup>

Similarly commenting on the *ויהי* in the verse *ויהי כן ויהי ערב ויהי בקר*<sup>3</sup> they say that, "Noah, Joseph were all predestined by God to do their tasks. Moses was also destined for salvation."<sup>4</sup> In general great men are predestined by God and all history is previewed by him. "Even while Adam was still a lifeless mass God showed him all the righteous people that would descend from him. Some there were who hung on Adam's hair, and others on his head. Some on his forehead, eyes, nose, and so forth."<sup>4</sup> Even the miracles of the Lord are preordained. In the explanation of the verse *וואלה הרים את מטק* "Lift up thy rod,"<sup>5</sup> the rabbis claim that no miracle took place at the Red Sea but that it was the nature of the sea to split at a certain time which was preordained by God. God never disturbs his laws he merely fulfills them.

<sup>1</sup>Is. - 46:10

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 9:1

<sup>3</sup>Exodus - 3:1

<sup>4</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 40:3

<sup>5</sup>ibid. - 21:7

And once God does decree, "He is at one with himself, and who can turn him?" "When God pronounces a decree on man none can revoke it. How hard Balam sought to curse Israel, yet he was compelled to bless. So Jonah tried to escape God's mission and Jeremiah tried to refuse prophesy. Even Moses was reluctant to go on his divine mission, but all in the long run were forced to listen to the ordained decrees of God." It is only in the moral realm, in the individual choice of good and evil that there enters in an element of what might be considered free will.

But also that freedom is hedged within a deterministic fence. Too much sinning negates the possibility of free choice. "When God warns a man once, twice, and even a third time and he still does not repent, then does God close his heart against repentance so that he should exact vengeance from him for his sins. Thus it was with wicked Pharaoh; God sent Moses five times to him and he took no notice. God then said, 'I will now add to thine uncleanness.'<sup>1</sup> This theme of man steeped in sin until he is unable to reform even if he desires appears frequently.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah 13:4

Even the choice of good seems at times to be dictated, not by free will, but by the influence of God. Commenting on the verse, "And I also withheld thee from sinning against me," the rabbis state, "to what is it like." "To a man who was riding an ass and who upon seeing a child in the street, jumped over it and no harm befell the child. Whereupon people began praising the ass because it had leaped over the child and did not injure it; but it's owner said, 'indeed had I not drawn at the reign in his mouth, he would have injured it.'"

"Likewise people said Abilemech was a pure man because he came not nigh unto Sarah. But God said to them, 'He did want to do so, but it was I who did not allow him; it was I who restrained him.'"<sup>1</sup>

#### e. Miracles

A most fascinating theme for midrashic preachers is the ascribing of unusual powers to God; especially his ability to preform things contradictory in nature. God is frequently portrayed almost in the Hegelian sense as a

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 20:1

unity of opposites. "The ways of God are unlike those of man, for a man inflicts a wound with a knife and heals with a plaster, but God heals with the very thing with which he wounds."<sup>1</sup> Frequently mention is made of how God with the same rod with which he smote Egypt and caused the waters of the Nile to smell brought great good unto Israel. With money, God can bless or curse.<sup>2</sup> Not only may he do things mutually opposed but he may do them at the same moment. "He puts to death and brings to life at the same time. He wounds and heals at the same time. If there is a woman giving birth; people going down to the sea, men travelling through deserts or who are incarcerated in prison, the one is in the east and another in the west, one in the north and one in the south, he gives them all simultaneously."<sup>3</sup>

In the verse

*וְיָבֹא מִן הַיָּם וְיִשְׁמַח מִן הַיָּבֵשׁ*

*וְיִשְׁמַח מִן הַיָּבֵשׁ*

4

we have another example of contradictory phenomena uniting to perform God's miracles. "Imagine two fierce legions who were always at war with one another,

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 50:3

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 26:2

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 28:4

<sup>4</sup>Exodus - 9:23

but when the King needed their services for his own battle he made peace between them so that both should carry out the order of the king. In like manner fire and hail are hostile to each other, but when the time came to war with Egypt, God made peace between them and both smote the Egyptians."<sup>1</sup>

Not only are the rabbis interested in elaborating upon the difficult miracles, but also in detecting and praising the every-day miracles. Like Wordsworth who tried to bring to the eye common every-day beauty that often escapes us, so they sought to show in every-day existence the great handy work of the divine. "Come and see how many miracles God performs for man and he knows it not. If man ate food it would go down his bowels and scratch him, but God created a well in his throat (a metaphor for saliva) which conducts the bread safely down."<sup>2</sup>

#### f. Sin

The fear of sin and the fear of the Lord are stressed as the most significant parts of the religious life. "A man who studies midrash,

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 12:6

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 24:1



halacha, and hagadah, but who has no fear of sin is left with nothing in his hand." "It can be compared to a man who said to his friend. 'I have a thousand measures of grain, a thousand of oil, and a thousand of wine.' His friend asked him, 'have you store chambers in which to keep them?' 'If you have then all those things are yours. But if you have not, then you have nothing.'"<sup>1</sup>

Sin is strongly punished and righteousness is greatly rewarded. The Egyptians for even the thought of drowning the Israelites where themselves drowned.<sup>2</sup> If God punishes for only thought of sin, how much the more for sin itself. The fear of the Lord, however, is rewarded by wisdom. "The midwife who feared the Lord and refused to heed Pharaoh's warning was *שפחה*. For that she gave birth to Moses through whom was given the Torah and Miriam who gave birth to Bezalel, the builder of the arc."<sup>3</sup>

The path to the fear of God is found within the individual's innermost being. Pharaoh asks Moses "Who is your God? I will

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:20

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:11

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 1:20

search in my library for a book that will tell me about him." Then when he states later, "My books know him not, there is no God such as the one in whose name you speak,"<sup>1</sup> we hear the sound of modern voices. For in like spirit today many refuse to accept God because they cannot find him in the shelves of the city library. To know God, the midrash suggests, you must be able to feel his presence penetrate the deepest realms of your heart and soul, and there, "in the still small voice," you will find him.<sup>2</sup>

Once the conviction of God becomes a reality no sacrifice is too great for his sake. "If the horse risks its life in the day of battle prepared to die for its master, then how much more should I be prepared to die in order to sanctify God's name."<sup>3</sup> Any perusal of the literature of the middle ages will show that this concept of 'kiddish hashem' more than once became a living reality in Judaism.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 5:18

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 33:5

## II. Torah

### a. Written and Oral

From a literary standpoint one of the finest homilies in the midrash is the one which describes the manner in which God gave Israel the Torah.

בשנתן הקד"ת את התורה צפוח לא  
 צוח, צליל פיה. שרלא קדח, אובחם לא  
 דפו, שרפוס לא אמרו קדוש, הים  
 פאנצדנצן תבריאור לא דברו אלה  
 הדואר אותך ומלכיש

"When God gave the Torah to Israel no bird twit-tered; no fowl flew; no ox lowed; none of the ophaniam stirred a wing; the seraphim did not say holy, holy, holy; the sea did not roar; the creatures spoke not. The whole world was hushed into breathless silence, and then the voice went forth, 'I am the Lord your God.'<sup>1</sup> As most constructive forces come in the quiet, so the Torah, expression of the highest creative genius, came when there was not even a ripple on the sea.

At Sinai the midrash claims not only the Bible was given, but all Jewish tradition. God says to Moses, in consoling him upon the destruction of the first tablets. "Do not grieve about the first tablets you destroyed, they only contain the Ten Commandements. But in the two tablets I am about

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 29:8

to give thee now there will also be laws, midrash and hagadah."<sup>1</sup>

The midrash, in the spirit of rabbinic Judaism, always consider the oral law equally as important as the written. The only difference between the two was that the Bible was given to Moses in writing, while the midrash, talmud and hagadah were given orally.<sup>2</sup>

In fact a certain amount of preference seems to be shown towards the oral tradition over the Bible. The uniqueness of Jewish tradition is pointed out in contrast to the Bible in which other peoples share.<sup>3</sup> However, both the written and oral are sacred and every detail in both is to be observed. Even that which appears trivial and illogical must be carefully observed. "When God gave the torah to Israel, he gave some commandements for a king. One of them

*וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ אִשָּׁה* "Neither shall he multiply wives unto himself."<sup>4</sup> Solomon questioned the wisdom of this decree. Whereupon the of

<sup>1</sup> Ex. Rabbah - 46:7

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 47:1

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Deut.-17:16

the word *אין* went up before God and said *אין*  
*אין* "No letter shall  
 ever be abolished from the Torah. Today he  
 abolished one letter, who knows but tomorrow he  
 will nulify the whole Torah."<sup>1</sup>

"If one knows the Torah but does not fulfill  
 it it is better for him that he had not been  
 born and that the afterbirth in which he lay had  
 been turned over his face."<sup>2</sup>

#### b. Reward

Most of the benefits and blessings which  
 have come upon the children of Israel have been  
 in the name of or through the fulfilment of the  
 Commandements of the Torah. That they might re-  
 ceive the Torah was the sole reason God brought  
 them forth out of Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Since Israel's existence in Eretz Yisroel  
 depended entirely upon their loyalty to the Torah,  
 they could not enter there before revelation took  
 place. Therefore, God did not lead them straight  
 to the land of Cannan via Egypt. "It can be  
 compared to a king who had a son to whom he  
 wished to bequeath an inheritance. But he argued

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 6:1

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 40:1

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 3:5

if I give it to him now that he is small, he will not know how to take care of it. I will therefore wait until my son learns how to write and can understand the value of my property; then will I bequeath it unto him. This is what God said. If I bring Israel into the land now before they have busied themselves with my commandments, then they will not know the meaning of heave offerings and tithes. No, I had better give them the Torah first and then bring them into the land."<sup>1</sup>

Many indeed are the midrashim which tell of the bounteous rewards which await Israel if they but heed the words of the Torah. On the verse *שׁוּעִבְךָ נַפְשְׁךָ* 'Hear and your soul shall live,'<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Simeon says, "See how beloved Israel are that he entices them. God said to them, 'When a man falls from the roof his whole body is bruised and when the doctor visits him he applies bandages to his head, hands, and feet. And all his limbs are covered with bandages. With me the case is not so. Man has 248 limbs and the ear is but one of them. Yet even though his whole body be stained with

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 20:15

<sup>2</sup>Is. - 55:3

transgressions, as long as his ears harken to the Torah the whole body is vivified."<sup>1</sup>

The highest rewards that man receives from Torah is the inspiration of the divine. Normally when a man acquires an object or an article from the market of material worth, he never gets the owner along with the object. But when a man knows and practices Torah he acquires both Torah and its giver. He obtains both knowledge and a greater communion with God.<sup>2</sup>

Though the reward for Torah is great in this world, still greater is its reward in the world to come. Or rather though the tangible results of knowledge of Torah are great, still greater are the spiritual and indefinable rewards of Torah.

"A merchant who was about to set on a journey heard that there were robbers on the route. What did he do. He exchanged all his merchandise for precious stones and pearls. When the robber stopped him and asked, 'What have you got?' He replied, 'Only some knickacks.' Then they inquired, 'What is their value.' He replied, 'Two or three sela.' Then they said, 'Shall we slay him for the sake of

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 27:9

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 33:1

these things -- let us leave him alone.' When he entered the city he opened his cases and sat down to sell the jewels. When the robbers entered the city and observed him selling they inquired as to their price. And he replied, 'This one costs twenty pieces, this one thirty.' Then they said, 'Was it not you who said they cost two or three sela?' He said, 'O, yes, but then I was in danger of my life, but now unless you give me their price you cannot have them.' So it is with Israel in this world. He who obeys the Commandments knows not their reward, but when they see the reward of the Commandments in the world to come they will be amazed, for the whole world will not be able to contain their reward."<sup>1</sup> In other words the human is not able to grasp with his finite mind the incalculable, spiritual rewards involved in the adherence to a divine pattern of life.

The point is made that present material reward negates spiritual blessing. "The story is told about a disciple of Rabbi Simeon who immigrated from Eretz Yisroel and came back wealthy. When the other disciples saw him they became jealous

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 30:22



and also desired to travel abroad. Becoming aware of this Rabbi Simeon brought them all forth to a certain village, near Maron, where he began to pray. 'Field be filled with golden dinars.' Immediately the field began to produce golden dinars before their gaze. He then said, 'if it is gold that you want, take all the gold you wish now, but you must know that he who takes riches now is taking his share of the world to come. For the sole reward for studying Torah is reserved for the world to come.'<sup>1</sup>

### III. Israel

#### a. Merit and Demerit

With few exceptions the midrashists find contemporary Israel (usually depicted as the Israel of Egypt) far from worthy of the spiritual possessions it enjoys. The concept of redemption because of the merit of the forefathers, one of the most common Jewish theological doctrines, is reiterated time and time again. The words *אני כהן* "I am black but comely,"<sup>2</sup> is interpreted as the community of Israel saying, "I am black on account of my own deeds, but I am comely on account of the deeds of my ancestors."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 52:3

<sup>2</sup>Song of Songs - 1:5

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 49:2, 23:11

"Just as the living vine is supported by dead stalks, so Israel alive and eternal lean upon their patriarchs who are dead."<sup>1</sup>

Again, "Why is Israel comparable to a bird? Just as a bird can only fly with its wings, so Israel can only survive with the help of its elders."<sup>2</sup>

By the merit of the forefathers the midrashist does not merely mean the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Other righteous people such as the prophets and saints also help to save Israel from destruction. Job is referred to as just such a person. "When Israel arose to depart from Egypt, the angel Samael arose to accuse them. It is comparable to a shepherd who was leading his sheep across a river when a wolf came to attack the sheep. What did the shepherd do who knew well how to deal with such emergencies? He took a large he-goat and threw it to the wolf, saying to himself, 'Let him struggle with this till we cross the river and then I will return to bring it back.' So when Israel departed from Egypt the angel Samael arose to accuse them, pleading before God. 'Lord of the universe till now they have been worshipping idols and now Thou dividest the sea for them.'

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 44:1

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 3:2

What did God do? He delivered into his hands Job, one of the counsellors of Pharoah. God reckoned - While he is busily occupied with him Israel will go through the sea, afterwards I will deliver Job."<sup>1</sup>

The rebelliousness of the Exodus Jews served frequently as a good springboard for the medieval preachers to lace into the shortcomings of their own Jewry. Such, perhaps, was the strategy behind the following homily. "God was about to seal the destruction decree against Israel when Moses took the tablets from Him in order to appease His wrath. It can be compared to a king who sent a marriage broker to bethroth a wife unto him, but while the broker was on his way, the woman corrupted herself with another man. What did the broker, who was entirely innocent, do? He took the marriage document which the prince had given him wherewith to bethroth her and tore it saying, 'It is better that she be judged as an unmarried woman rather than one married.'

"This is what Moses did when Israel perpetrated that act. He took the tablets, shattered them, as if to imply that had Israel foreseen the punishment

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 21-7

awaiting them, they would not have thus sinned. Moses moreover said: 'Far better that they be judged as having done it unintentionally than if they had willfully committed the act.'<sup>1</sup>

But not all the midrashim portray the people of Israel in Egyptian times as unworthy. Some went to almost the opposite extreme and portrayed them as a nation of saints. Israel was so pure in Egypt claims one rabbi, that there was only one immoral woman in the whole congregation, and her immorality was due to a misunderstanding. For when the husband of this Jewish woman had to go to work at cock crow, as all Jews did, an Egyptian went unto her and mistaking the man for her husband she was impregnated by him.<sup>2</sup> It was not because of the merit of the forefathers, argues another rabbi, that Israel was delivered from Egypt. But because the Israelites had perfect faith in God and in Moses, that God divided the Red Sea for them.<sup>3</sup>

#### b. God and Israel

The bond or covenant that was established between God and Israel at Sinai is no doubt a fundamental premise in Judaism. To understand the

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 43:1

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 1:33

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 21:7

covenant idea and the obligations it imposes upon both parties, is to understand the core of Jewish doctrine. The people need God, and God needs the people. God gives Israel protection in return for which Israel assumes as a 'nobless oblige' - a loftier pattern of living. In interpreting the verse, "'Come let us deal wisely with Him to destroy Israel,'<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Hama shows that the verse does not say 'with them' ( *an* ) - but 'with him' ( *if* ). This means that to destroy Israel, Pharaoh sought to destroy their God."<sup>2</sup> It is because of God that Israel is respected among the nations. "What did God do in Egypt for the sake of Israel? Rabbi Isaac, the blacksmith, gave an illustration from a queen who provoked the king - so he put her into prison and went away. Then he came back to her to the prison. He was asked, 'Why do you care about her?' He replied, 'As long as I am with her she will not acquire a bad name.' Similarly Israel were enslaved in Egypt and God, too, as it were, was exiled with them, both in Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia. The angels asked God, 'Why all the trouble for them?' The reply was, 'As long as I am with them they will not get an evil name.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 7:10

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:11

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 15:17

Commenting on the proximities of the two biblical verses *והיה אלקים* "Is God in our midst,"<sup>1</sup> and, *קמץ אלקים* "Amalek came,"<sup>2</sup> a midrashic preacher weaves the analogy; "Of a small child seated upon his father's shoulders, who beholding a friend of his father, called out. 'Have you seen my father?' 'You are riding upon my shoulders,' said the father, 'and yet you inquire of my whereabouts. I will cast you down so that the enemy may come and master you.' This is what God said to Israel. 'I have borne you on clouds of glory and yet you say, is the Lord among us. Let the enemy come and prevail over you.' Hence, and 'then came Amalek,'"<sup>3</sup>

Yet God is usually not so strict in his covenant relationship with Israel. For the most part he leans the other way to show great mercy and loving compassion. "Great was the love God showed to Israel in that he revealed himself in a place of idol worship and uncleanness in order to redeem them. He was like a priest whose *turemah* had fallen into a cemetery and who said to himself, 'what shall I do? To make myself unclean is impossible and to leave the *turemah* there is also

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 17:7

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 17:8

<sup>3</sup>Exodus Rabbah - 26:3

impossible. Better for me to make myself unclean once and then purify myself again, so that I do not lose my terumah altogether.' Our forefathers were God's terumah. For it says, 'Israel is the Lords hallowed portion.'<sup>1</sup> They were among graves 'for there was not a house where there was not one dead.'<sup>2</sup> God said, 'How can I redeem them? To leave them there is impossible - better that I should deliver them.'<sup>3</sup>

God is depicted as actually suffering with the pain of Israel. Speaking to Moses he states, "Do you realize I live in trouble just as Israel lives in trouble. Know from the place whence I speak unto you, from a thornbush, that I am, as it were, a partner in their trouble."<sup>4</sup>

Eloquent literary expression of God's fondness for Israel is given in the following midrash.

זאת תורת כהן יטבאל דומה  
 לעזב שפיה אל קר אהובג נחמה  
 קצג תהב פסל המלך אה יד  
 והצדיק והישיבה בקרובן עלו שמוח  
 מה יכו פצחיק' לא יצרו נסיו שמוח  
 מכבוד צמי נדיק.

<sup>1</sup>Jer. - 2:3

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 12:30

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 15:6

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 2:7

"To what could the assembly of Israel be compared? To a king whose beloved daughter was across the river. Whereupon he stretched out his hand to her, helped her to cross over, and then placed her in his coach as it is said, 'How beautiful are thy steps in sandle.'<sup>1</sup> 'Before I was aware my soul set me upon the chariots of my princely people.'<sup>2</sup>"<sup>3</sup>

### c. Nationalism and Internationalism

Both notes are struck throughout the book with homilies favoring nationalism in the preponderance. Those of a nationalistic sort vary from a fanatical chauvanism to an exalted cultural nationalism. Separate identity, ~~on~~ assimilation at all costs, is frequently the cry. "Israel cannot join with the idolaters of antiquity but must keep themselves apart. For even if an enemy decrees that they should desecrate the sabbath, abolish circumcision, or serve idols, they should suffer martyrdom rather than be assimilated with them."<sup>4</sup> Here, as in similar passages, we hear the echo of the religious persecutions during the days of the Maccabees or the Hadrians.

The woes of the people of Israel are ascribed

<sup>1</sup>S.S - 7:2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 6:12

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 15:11

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 15:8



to their assimilatory tendencies. The medieval preacher frequently calls upon the biblical verse to substantiate his tirade against assimilation or proselytism.

"Go down for thy people have become depraved."<sup>1</sup>

"It does not say, 'the people', but, 'thy people.'

Whereupon Moses said, 'Whence are they my people?'

God replied, 'They are your people - for I

instructed thee not to allow a mixed multitude

to be mingled with them, but thou being meek and

righteous did answer, 'The penitent must always

be accepted.' Knowing however what one day they

would do, I replied, No. Nevertheless I fulfilled

thy request with the result that it was just these

people who made the calf, being idolators of old,

and who caused my people to sin."<sup>2</sup>

Not only does the preacher disapprove of conversion, but he regards any efforts in that

direction as sinful.

"Behold for the Lord has given you the sabbath."

To you he hath given it but not to the heathen.

It is in virtue of this that the sages stated that

if some of the heathen observed the sabbath then

not only do they fail to receive any reward, but

they are considered to be transgressing."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 32:7

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 42:6

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 25:15

Not all the nationalistic homilies, however, are of a chauvinistic nature. Many of them stress the uniqueness of Israel as something entirely conditioned by their obedience to God. "When a man mingles oil with all other kinds of liquids, he does not know which is below and which above. But in the case of oil you will find it floating on top even after it has been mixed with every kind of liquid in the world. So are Israel as long as they perform the will of God; then they stand higher than the heathen."<sup>1</sup>

Though we have an element of nationalism in this midrash, one can hardly brand it as chauvinistic in character.

Similarly, we find no exaggerated nationalism in the interpretation of the verse, *כי תגור בארץ זר*

*לך* "The stranger shall not dwell on the street,"<sup>2</sup> wherein the rabbis insist that the stranger shall not be excluded from enjoying the privileges of the native born. *תקנה סו"ט*  
*אברהם אבינו* "God disqualifies no creature, but receives all," therefore, why shouldn't nations or individuals be satisfied with giving the stranger the privileges of the Israelite. But really the stranger has a

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 36:1

<sup>2</sup>Is. - 31:32

greater privilege. He has the opportunity of achieving the highest position in Israel. Of becoming an honored priest."<sup>1</sup>

Still loftier in its note of universalism are the following three midrashim. "The prophets said to Jeremiah, why do you say 'oh King of the nations?' All the other prophets call him, 'King of Israel.' To which he replied, 'I have heard him say to me, I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations, and therefore do I say, 'King of the nations,' thereby implying that if he does not spare his own children and his family, will he then spare others?'"<sup>2</sup>

"This is a rare note in the midrash for it emphasizes the non-uniqueness of Israel's affliction. It further shows that though Israel may be closer to God that he is still *אלה הקוים* 'King of the nations.' If he does not have mercy on Israel he surely won't have mercy on others. For God is the father of all mankind. Finally from the *קולות* (the plural form of the word *קול*) from the verse *והיה כולם קולות* "The people saw the voices," the rabbis deduce that the voice was divided into parts -- into the languages of many peoples. Spiritual possessions

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 19:4

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 29:7

are not limited to any one group. One group may cultivate them but they are accessible to all.<sup>1</sup>

#### d. Israel's Historical Lot

The historical lot of Israel is the most common to Jewish tradition and which to this day constitutes the theme of many a rabbinical sermon. It is to be an eternal people though enduring eternal suffering. On the verse *וַיִּבְרַח מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּרֹאשׁ הַבִּשְׁמֹט וַיִּבְרַח*

"And lo, the bush was burning with fire."<sup>2</sup> The rabbis asked, "why did God show Moses such a symbol. Because Moses thought that the Egyptians might consume Israel. Hence God showed him a bush which was burning but not consumed. Saying, 'Just as the fire is burning the thorn bush and yet it is not consumed, so Egypt will not be able to destroy Israel.'<sup>3</sup> Thou Israel is enduring terrible pain, yet it shall live on. God said to Moses *אֲנִי הָאֵל*

"I am that I am." The midrash takes this as meaning "I shall be he whom I shall be." "I will be with them in this slavery and they shall continue to be in slavery and I will be with them."<sup>4</sup>

The suffering of Israel is not, however, something completely inevitable. It usually occurs

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 5:9

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 3:2

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 2:5

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 3:5

when the religious life of the Jews dis-intergrates. Something then must come along to prod the Jewish conscience. It is usually suffering which does this work. As we have already seen in the midrash, as soon as Israel questioned God's existence along comes Amalek and threatens them.<sup>1</sup>

The suffering not only leads to contrition but to contribution. It is after Israel suffers that she yields her greatest cultural contributions. Drawing the analogy from *לעץ זית סוף ימים*  
 "A leafy olive tree, fair with goodly fruit,"<sup>2</sup> the midrashist says; "Just as the olive is marked out for shriveling while it is yet on a tree, after which it is brought down from the tree and beaten, and after it has been beaten is brought up to the vat and placed in a grinding mill where it is ground and then tied up with ropes, and then stones are brought, and then at last it yields its oil. So it is with Israel. The heathens come and beat them about from place to place, imprison them, and bind them in chains, and surround them with officers, and then at last does Israel repent of their sins and God answers them."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 17:7

<sup>2</sup>Jer. - 11:16

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 36:1

Though this may be interpreted as resignation or the preaching of submission to suffering, it is more likely that what the homiletician really meant to portray was, the steeling and refining process which occurs in those who can survive suffering.

But the day of Israel's suffering is not forever. She must be redeemed again. God will continue to redeem Israel from *מלכות רע* "The evil kingdom", just as he redeemed them from Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Then, *קם מן הארץ* "they shall rise up from the earth", for as long as Israel is on the bottom it must rise up. It is when it reaches its lowest degradation that the dawn of salvation must break forth upon the horizon. Israel will be redeemed; they must never give up hope.<sup>2</sup>

## B. Humanistic

### I. Vice and Virtue

#### a. Immorality

The rabbis were interested in all aspects of the moral life. If they were indefatigable in one sphere it was that of seeking to elevate all human acts to a higher ethical plane. Their manner was that of either upbraiding sternly the vice or

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 3:2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 1:13

exalting the virtues of the spiritual life. No phase of immorality or spirituality escaped their eye. Not only deeds, but even evil intentions were condemned by the rabbis. "'Wherefore wilt thou smite thy fellow?' It does not say, 'wherefore has thou smitten,' but, 'wherefore wilt thou smite thy fellow?' To teach us that from the moment one lifts up his hand to smite his fellow, though he has not yet smitten him, he is called wicked."<sup>1</sup>

Slander in particular was loathsome in the eyes of the medieval preacher and since there are so many midrashim condemning it, we can gather that it must have been prevalent<sup>u</sup> in many of the small towns which the preachers visited. So strenuously did they inveigh against it, that one rabbi maintained that the bondage of the Jewish people was due to talebearers.

Rabbi Judah said, "Moses was puzzled why Israel was enslaved more than other people. When he heard that his own people tattled on him because of his murder of an Egyptian, then he knew that they were not ripe for salvation."<sup>2</sup>

Moses, himself, was not above the practice. In a weak moment he too slandered Israel. In answer

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:34

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 1:35

to the question why Moses put his hand in his pocket and produced a snake for Pharaoh, the rabbis said, "The scales on the serpent are leprosy, so art thou Moses fit to be smitten with leprosy. Why did Moses put his hand in his bosom? For so is the practice of the slanderer to speak in secret."<sup>1</sup>

Sexual irregularity is regarded as the most offensive form of vice. "Immorality is worse than idol worship. In idolatry there is only jealousy on the part of God. When Israel, however, sinned in Shittim with immorality, twenty-four thousand of them fell. It can be compared to a princess who made love to a eunuch, so that the king was angry with her. When they reasoned with him; but it was only a eunuch with whom she had a flirtation -- his reply was, 'My wrath is due to the fact that she is accustoming herself to frivolity and immorality.' This is what the rabbis taught. Jestng and levity lead a man on to lewdness."<sup>2</sup>

The same idea is repeated in another midrash and is given as the reason why the section concerning the Nazaraite and the unfaithful woman

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 3:17

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 30:17



are found side by side in the Bible. "The Nazarite vows not to drink wine. Whereupon God says to him 'Thou hast made a vow not to drink wine in order to be removed from sin. Then do not say I will eat grapes and no sin will befall me.' Again a woman is called a vine for it says, 'Thy wife shall be a fruitful vine.' God said, 'Do not say I know I must not intimately associate with women, but I will take hold of her, or embrace or kiss her and still not be led unto sin.' For just as the Nazarite who vowed abstention from wine must abstain from grapes, so you must abstain from the slightest touch of any woman who is not your wife -- this is what Solomon cautioned, 'Can a man take fire into his bosom and his clothes not be burned?'<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>

The midrash is just telling us in the language of his day what the modern psychiatrist offers today as the best medium to avoid promiscuity -- that is the avoidance of "beginnings".

The preachers, however, are not satisfied with merely railing against sin. In several midrashim, almost in the spirit of condoning the transgression, they attempt to analyse the causes which gave rise

<sup>1</sup>Prov. - 16:27

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 16:2

to them.

כאשר תמצא את המילה 'ישבה' אתה תמצא חטא

"Whenever you find the word, 'yishevoh', you find some delinquency occurred there." The rabbis expressed this way the common proverb, "The devil finds work for idle hands." Yishevoh, just sitting, is one of the common grounds for חטא 'transgression'.<sup>1</sup>

But a more profound analysis of the cause of transgression is given by Rabbi Hunah. It is the effect of environment upon the moral life of individuals. It is a sermon which somewhat takes the startch out of the newness of some modern sociologists whose deductions are considered so revolutionary. "Rabbi Hunah's sermon is based on the sentence, אשר הוצאת מארץ מצרים" "Which thou hast taken out from the land of Egypt."<sup>2</sup> "Why, asks Rabbi Hunah, does he mention Egypt? It can be compared to a man who opened a perfumery shop for his son in a street frequented by harlots. The street did its work, the business also did its share, and his youth likewise contributed his part with the result that he soon fell into evil ways.

"When the father came and caught him amidst

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 41:1

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 22:11

the prostitutes, he began to shout, 'I will slay thee'. But his friend was there and said, 'Thou wert the means of destroying the character of his youth and yet thou dost shout at him. Thou didst ignore all other professions and has taught him only to be a perfumer. Thou didst forsake all other districts and has opened a shop for him just in the street where the prostitutes dwell.'

"This is what Moses said, 'Lord of the universe, Thou didst ignore the whole world and hast caused Thy children to be enslaved in Egypt where all worship lambs and from whom thy children have learned to do corruptly.'"<sup>1</sup>

b. Humility

Jewish leaders are often accused of lacking humility. Whether or not the early preachers were thus considered, we do not know. But, one thing is certain that in their sermons they exhorted their audiences to cherish <sup>and</sup> ~~if not~~ to cultivate humility.

"Humility was urged for scholars as well as laymen. Just as a bride keeps herself secluded the whole time she is in her father's house, none knowing her and only revealing her face when she is about to enter the bridal chamber, as if she were thus proclaiming. 'Anyone who can testify against me let him come and so do'. So must a

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 43:8

scholar be as retiring and humble as this bride, but he must be renowned for his good deeds just as this bride now makes herself known."<sup>1</sup>

Humility was especially ascribed to the character of Joseph. *סוף ספר בראשית*  
 "'And Joseph was in Egypt."<sup>2</sup> He was the same humble Joseph as a vice-regent in Egypt as he was as a slave."<sup>3</sup> Here is revealed the essential nature of humility. It emanates from a democratic instinct in man which impells him to keep contact with the people from whom he springs. For as soon as a leader loses humility he loses his people.<sup>4</sup>

Another great hero of Judaism, Hillel, is endowed with this quality by the rabbis. *משנה סוטה 10*  
 "My humiliation is my promotion and my promotion is my humiliation."<sup>5</sup> Here again we have the sound advice that there is no better time for the exercise of humility than when we succeed. The preachers obtained a particular delight in stripping the hallow off of sham, conceit, and arrogance. "Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning. Lo, he goeth out unto the water. Only in the

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 41:6

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 1:5

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:6

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 1:6

<sup>5</sup>ibid. - 45:5

morning did he go out to the water because Pharaoh used to boast that he was a God and did not require to ease himself. Therefore he used to go early in the morning to the water. God therefore told Moses to go to him at this crucial moment."<sup>1</sup> And call bluff to his vanity.

It is Rabbi Samuel who vests another Jewish hero, Aaron, the High Priest, with a truly rare form of humility.

*ip fa hnu1 pku1*

"And he shall see thee and rejoice in his heart."<sup>2</sup>

"The heart that rejoiced at the greatness of his brother is worthy of the urrim and thummin."<sup>3</sup>

Aaron did not begrudge the greatness of his brother Moses and he too was rewarded. To acknowledge greatness is in itself greatness.

#### c. Charity and Kindness

Even the anti-Semites will often acknowledge the fact that Jews, as a whole, are a charitable people. Though this may be ascribed to the peculiar historical circumstances which have made the Jews throughout the ages dependent upon each other, no small credit should be given to the medieval preachers for fostering a charitable spirit. Whether for crude, or for selfish reasons,

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 9:7

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 4:14

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 3:22

or for the most sublime motives, they still implored their flocks to give and give. "Giving to others does not reduce ones own property", says one Rabbi, "for the commandment is a lamp. Just as the light of the lamp is undiminished, even if a million wax and tallow candles are kindled from it, so will he who gives towards the fulfillment of any commandment not suffer a diminution of his possessions."<sup>1</sup> Similarly hospitality was equally exalted. "A man must respect one by whom he is hospitably received, even more than his father and mother."

Kindness, tenderness, and good etiquette are among other virtues commended by the medieval preachers. It was because of Moses' kindness to a dumb animal, the feeding of a little kid who was thirsty, that God thought him meritorious enough to be the leader of the flock of Israel. Thus Moses throughout EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH is portrayed as a character possessing all the desired amenities of life. When Aaron is mentioned before Moses in a certain passage in the Bible, it is because of Moses' deference for age.<sup>2</sup> When in the Bible it states that Moses ascended on high and

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 36:3

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 9:4

did not eat for forty days, the preachers claim, that Moses was just observing the divine pattern and exhort human beings to do likewise.

"If thou goest into a city thou must act according to its customs."<sup>1</sup> For inculcating the virtuous life among the members of their audience they could have taken no greater hero, no greater personage for emulation, than the character of Moses.

## II. Social Justice

### a. Slavery

Often one hears the charge that religion is reactionary - that its sole use is an anodyne to social effort. Whether this be true or not of modern organized religion, it was certainly not at all true of the religion the preachers of our midrash taught. A strong, healthy, progressive note is struck throughout the book. Indeed so outspoken is the preacher at times that we can well assume that the sermon was delivered at the jeopardy of losing his position. To truly appreciate the progressive spirit of the sermons, we must well realize the economic civilization in which they were delivered. If the tenth century dating of the book is correct, it was a period in which the

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 47-9

*This refers only to final reduction - most of the material dates way back*

✓  
 slave system was prevalent and in which feudalism was beginning to emerge. Thus any attack upon either of these institutions required the same audacity that would be required of a preacher today to denounce capitalism, or at least to inveigh against its evils.

That slavery was an accepted institution is evident from many midrashim. Reference is made to the fact that God treats Israel much differently than one treats the slave. "For usually when one purchases servants, it is on the understanding that they wash and anoint him, help him dress, and draw his carriage, and light the way before him."<sup>1</sup>

The wretched conditions to which these slaves were probably subjected can be gleaned from passages like the following. "We may illustrate by the case of a master whose slaves sinned against him, whereupon he commanded someone to give him fifty lashes. But the man went and administered a hundred lashes adding fifty of his own."<sup>2</sup>

Even as the modern worker is not docile under conditions of servitude, so apparently, there were slaves who likewise resisted their oppression.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 20:9

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 14:1



One slave owner asks another, "This slave whom thou offers me for sale, does he belong to the class of the rebellious slave or to the well behaved?"<sup>1</sup>

In a sermonette, glorifying God, the other type of worker of that day, the sharecropper or the tenant farmer is well depicted. "Even when we regard our actions we are filled with shame. Why is this so? Ordinarily one gives over his field to a tenant and the latter supplies the seed and labor, yet he receives an equal share of the crops. But the Holy One, blessed by He, is not like this. For though everything in the world is his, he also causes the rains to descend and the dews to spring forth. But all he asks for is a terumah."<sup>2</sup>

The various ways of exploiting men is depicted in a most modernistic manner in the following midrash. Commenting on the verse,

וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-עֲבָדֵי מִצְרָיִם  
 "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour."<sup>3</sup> One rabbi interprets the word

שָׁמְרוּ as meaning שָׁמְרוּ "gentle persuasion." In other words, persuasive or propagandistic means were used to exploit men, i.e. some day if you work hard enough you will become a slave holder yourself, or, you might marry the slave holder's daughter.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 43-9

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 41:1

<sup>3</sup>Exodus - 1:13

Another rabbi interprets the verse as meaning.

"What they got from the Israelites at first by gentle persuasion was later obtained by force."

"'And all the labor in the field'<sup>1</sup> - that no sooner had they finished their ordinary work than they were asked to cultivate 'the fields of the Egyptians and to do all other kinds of menial duties.'<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, the above passage was written at a time when the institution of slavery was breaking down. Men could not be compelled to a life of slavery by the usual persuasive shibboleths of the day and force was utilized. Thus whenever an economic system becomes weakened and can no longer live under the guise of the democratic cloak, persuasion gives way to force.

With hardly any exceptions the preachers of our book are found on the side of the slave or toiler. Commenting on the verse, "On the same day shall thou give him his hire."<sup>3</sup> The rabbis said, "It is like the case of a man who had bought a sheaf of corn which he placed upon his shoulder. And they walked in front of his donkey which was longing to eat it. What did its master do? He tied the sheaf higher up. Whereupon people said to him, 'Wretch, the animal has been running the

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 1:13

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:15.

<sup>3</sup>Exodus - 22:15

whole way for the sake of this and now you refuse to give it to him.' It is likewise with the hired servant. The whole day he has been toiling and suffering, hoping for his reward, and yet he is sent away empty handed. For so it is written, 'and setteth his heart upon it.'<sup>1</sup>"<sup>2</sup>

A plea for the welfare of the slaves of their day is introduced by the rabbis through the words of Moses. Upon seeing Pharaoh working the Jewish slaves mercilessly, he went up to Pharaoh and said. "If one has a slave and does not give them one day rest they usually die. If thou give not thy slaves similar rest they too will die." "Thus Pharaoh commanded, 'let them have a day of rest.' It was then that Moses ordained for the children of Israel a day of rest."<sup>3</sup> In this midrash we have an attempt to establish a truly social basis for the observance of the Sabbath.

The rabbis sought to alleviate the suffering of the downtrodden and to gain for them as much social equality as possible. "If a poor man says anything one pays little regard. But if a rich man speaks, immediately he is heard and listened to. Before God, however, all are equal, women, slaves, poor, and rich."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Deut. - 24:13

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:7

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 1:32

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 21:4

The listing of the ten tribes in the book of Exodus, not according to their birth from their mistresses, is illustrative of the fact that the children of Jacob's maid were accepted as equal worth with the others. Equal opportunity was afforded to servant's children likewise. *117 118*

*117 118 119* "The former were not considered any greater than the latter."<sup>1</sup>

By use of a pun on the word *117 118* (engraven) which the rabbis read as *117 118* (freedom), they teach of the transiency of that which is enslaved. What has freedom endures permanently. That which enslaves is temporal.<sup>2</sup>

#### b. Usury

Money lending was a common Jewish occupation in the middle ages because of the fact that Jews were excluded from the ownership or cultivation of any land. As common as money lending, was its concomitant practice, usury. There is not, however, a single midrash in the entire EXODUS RABBAH which condones usury. Rather, all of them condemn it as a vicious practice. On the text, *119 120* "Thou shalt not cause thy brother to take interest,"<sup>3</sup> the question is asked, "to what can interest be compared? To one bitten by a serpent who does not feel its bite until a swelling sets in. So usury is not felt until it has grown upon the debtor."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 2:1

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 41:9

<sup>3</sup>Leut. - 23:20

<sup>4</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:6

To make emphatic their tirade against usury, the rabbis show how neither God nor nature exact interest. "Those who exact usury say to God, 'why dost Thou not take payment from the world in which Thy creatures dwell; payment for the earth to which Thou givest drink; for the flowers which Thou makest to grow; for the lights which thou makest to shine.' God says to them, 'See how much I have lent and have not taken interest, and how much the earth hath lent and not taken interest, but I take the capital only which I have lent and she takes hers.'"<sup>1</sup>

Surely, with such a sermon, the preacher must have endangered his position. By preaching against the loan sharks, this rabbi was indeed 'biting the hand that fed him'. The same applies to the following midrash. "Observe how all God's creatures borrow from one another. Day borrows from night, and night from day, but they do not go to the law one with the other as mortals do. The moon borrows from the stars, and the stars from the moon - light from the sun, and sun from the light. God's creatures borrow from one another yet make peace with one another without law suits. But if man borrows from his friend he seeks to swallow him up with usury and robbery."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:16

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 31:16

Finally in accordance with their custom of not merely rallying negatively against an abuse, they invest with divine favor those who do not lend on interest. With the verse *לֹא יַעֲרֹךְ אִישׁ אֶת אֶרְכוֹתָיו לְאִישׁ אֶרְכוֹתָיו* "He hath not lent his money for interest" as their text, they state, "Come and see anyone who has riches and gives charity to the poor and does not lend on interest is regarded as if he observed all the commandments.<sup>1</sup>

### c. Poverty

Both because of the frequency with which it is mentioned and also because of the poignancy of its description we can gather that the poverty of the Jewish people in the middle ages was great indeed. Without any socialized concern over the plight of the poor man, we can readily understand why the rabbis on many occasions considered the poor man the equivalent of the dead man.

*אֵין שׂוֹאָה כְּפֹדֶת* "Nothing is harder to bear than poverty. For he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling, and upon whom all the curses in Deuteronomy have descended."<sup>2</sup>

Even Job preferred any kind of affliction rather than poverty. "There is nothing in the world

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:3

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 31:14

more grievous than poverty, the most terrible of all suffering. Our teacher said, 'All sufferings are on one side, and poverty is on the other. Do you require proof? Well, when satan was slandering Job before God, the Holy one said to him, 'What doest thou wish poverty or suffering?' Job replied, 'Lord of the universe, I am ready to accept all the troubles in the world but not poverty -- for if I go into the market without a perutah for buying, what shall I eat?'<sup>1</sup>

Only those who have lived in an atmosphere of poverty, or have tasted the pangs of hunger, can really appreciate the rabbi's descriptions of the mental and moral torture that accompanies the affliction of poverty - the passion for food and sustenance; the shadow of death that haunts their every moment.

If it is immoral to exact interest from the rich, how much more so from the poor man. "Do not bite the poor man as the serpent bit Adam and uprooted him and his descendents. Neither shalt thou see a poor man possessing houses or fields and seek an occasion to snatch them from him."<sup>2</sup>

The wealthy who oppress the poor in some form or other frequently turn to charity or palliative to soothe whatever pangs they might possess. In

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:11

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 31:13

one of the boldest passages in the entire midrash, a rabbi describes exactly the nature of this blood money. "He that augmenteth his substance by interest and increase, gathereth it for him that is gracious to the poor. This refers to Esau; but was Esau gracious to the poor? On the contrary did he not oppress the poor? Yes, but he was like those generals, commanders, and governors who invade cities, rob and plunder them, and on their return say, bring to us the poor people that we may support them. The popular proverb has it *היא שוכנת בלויים ונשקהם* 'She prostitutes herself for apples and distributes them among the sick.'<sup>1</sup>

#### d. Miscellaneous

In every generation there have been people who have fought or believed in the liberation of the exploited people or nationalities. They could not endure the misery of their brethren without protest. Though the Jew, because of his peculiar circumstances has usually been in the vanguard of the struggles for freedom, still there were always, in the camp of Israel, those that judiciously may be labelled as reactionaries. Today a wealthy Jew who refuses to take a stand on any liberal measure through fear of what the gentiles might say

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:18



is termed a "sha sha" Jew. Evidently there were many of these back in the middle ages. "Why", the midrash asks, "did God, blessed be His name, before whom there is no respecting of persons and who searches the heart, bring darkness upon the Egyptians? Because there were transgressors in Israel who had Egyptian patrons and lived in affluence and honor and were unwilling to leave. So God said, 'If I bring upon them publicly a plague from which they will die, the Egyptians will say, 'just as it has passed over us so it has passed over them.' On this account did he bring darkness upon the Egyptians for three days so that they, the Israelites, should bury their dead without their enemies seeing them."<sup>1</sup>

In general the EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH points to a socialized way of living. Emphasis is frequently put on the actional part of life. Non-reliance on faith or miracles alone is commanded. Miracles come only when men put forth the finest efforts in life. The Israelites went into the water even up to their nose before the sea was divided. Their faith did not paralyze activity.

But there apparently seems to have been a

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 14:3

division of opinion among the rabbis as to how far the individual should pursue the prophetic life. According to one, small steps in justice are all that are required. Caution from attempting to reform the world overnight is given. "Ascend the prophetic steps gradually even as the priests of old did."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, merely to be an influence for goodness and justice in the lives of others is tantamount to pursuing the righteous life yourself.<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Hannah, however, preaches against any compromise with ideals. A son of the Torah must *YAKO YAF DIGN* 'make his cheeks as a stone.'<sup>3</sup> There cannot be any 'either,' 'or', in regard to the fundamental principles of life. No material gain, no type of expediency can sever one from the basic ideals of justice.

Finally so ingrained was the desire for a better social life in many of the rabbis of this period, that their very concept of immortality was actually one of a socialized paradise in this world, or rather a description of how things could be in a world pursuing the prophetic teachings. It was a world, "with no more diseases, abundant harvest, no waste cities, no weeping or wailing in the world,

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 30:1

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 35:2

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 41:8

no sighing, all rejoicing, and lastly no more deaths and destruction in the world - for he will swallow up death forever and will wipe away tears from all faces."<sup>1</sup>

### III. Women

#### a. Status

From the references to women in EXODUS RABBAH it is not possible to say definitely just what was then the status of Jewish women. We have midrashim with varying opinions on this subject. Such a midrash as "A woman is not empowered to rebel against her husband, but can only deny her friend," would tend to emphasize the subservience of the female to the male.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand we have midrashim which exalt women and grant them full equality.

From the verse, "Surely as a wife treacherously departed from her friend."<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Judah stresses the fact that, "it does not say ~~והיא~~ from her husband, but ~~והיא~~ from her friend. Why? Because when a man marries a wife and lives with her some length of time his wife does not repudiate him even when he becomes impoverished. Saying to herself, 'Since, when he was rich he gave me food and clothes, I will not desert him now that he has become poor.' But if

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 15:21

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 32:2

<sup>3</sup>Jer. - 3:20

she is a harlot, if he provides for her, she acknowledges him. But when he ceases to do so, she will no longer acknowledge him."<sup>1</sup>

The status of childless women is referred to in the following midrash. "There was once a wise man who married a relative of his, and though he lived with her for ten years she did not give birth to a child. He then said to her, 'Seek a woman for me.' He further explained to his wife, 'I can really take a woman without thy leave only I desire thy forbearance.'"<sup>2</sup> From this we see that though bigamy was permitted on a man's part after ten childless years with a wife, the rabbis at least insisted that the utmost deference be paid towards the feelings of the first wife.

b. Merit

The woman is usually referred to as the most religious element in the family. Women are more susceptible to the religious appeal. They are the real educators of their children. "They are prompt in their fulfillment of the commandments."<sup>3</sup>

Many were the righteous women of antiquity. And for this their lot in childbirth was made easier. "For righteous women were not included in the decree pronounced on Eve."<sup>4</sup>

היו נאמנות בדבר נאמנות ושמירת מצוות  
נשים טובות

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 32:2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 37:4

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 28:2

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 1:23

"Israel was redeemed from Egypt on account of the righteous women of that generation." What did they do? They brought to their husbands in the field drink, fed them and anointed them, and had intercourse with them in the mounds of the field."<sup>1</sup>

Keen insight indeed, as well as sound advice, was imparted by the rabbi in this midrash to the women of their day, especially to the women of hard working men. "Learn from the women of Israel, " he indirectly exhorts them, "see how they first attended to all the wants of their husbands and then they even anointed them in order to increase their husband's love for them; a love which no doubt had somewhat cooled owing to their hard work."<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. Jewish Leadership

##### a. Pastoral Work

Understanding of, and devotion to the pastoral needs of a congregation is stressed in the midrashim dealing with Jewish leadership. The one who studies the Torah must never be too busy to deal with the personal problems of the heart, soul, and body, "A sage who knows halacha, midrash, and hagadah, to whom widows and orphans go to plead their cause, but who excuses himself on the plea, 'I am engaged in my study and have no leisure, ' is really shirking his duty."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:17

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 1:17

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 30:10

By their insistence upon the necessity of pastoral work, the rabbis were not ignorant of the many demands made upon a leader of a congregation. In fact, they bemoaned the dilemma which occurs when one takes pastoral duties too seriously, for then no time is available for study. If he studies too much on the other hand, there is the inevitable neglect of pastoral work. One rabbi complains, "I learned sixty laws concerning a grave that was plowed, but forgot them all because of communal duties."<sup>1</sup>

More perfunctory handling of pastoral duties, however, is not enough. There must be deep understanding and sympathy for the problems of the people. Moses shared the burdens of the suffering Israelites and the reward for his sympathy was revelation from God in a burning bush. He had put aside the idler's staff and worked shoulder to shoulder with his brethren. Then it was that God revealed himself to Moses.<sup>2</sup>

The true pastor must not wait for the people to come unto him, but he must go out unto the people and heal their wounds. Thus the midrash pays tribute to Samuel, the itinerant preacher who traveled among the people and handled their grievances with social justice. That the pastor who goes out among the

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 6:2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 1:32

people renders a greater service than the orator whose audience comes to hear him is proven in the midrash by the fact that "Moses had to come in and listen for God, whereas God came unto Samuel."<sup>1</sup>

Leadership is conferred upon a man who proves himself trustworthy in small matters. "The two leaders, Moses and David, were found trustworthy in tending sheep. Moses, for example, led the flocks to the farthest end of the wilderness in order to keep them from despoiling the fields of another."<sup>2</sup>

David, on the other hand, was chosen because of the rare understanding manifested in tending the flocks. "He would see that the weak and smaller sheep should graze upon the tender grass and he brought forth the sturdy sheep to eat the tougher grass."<sup>3</sup> The rabbis ascribed the popularity of David's leadership in general to his concern for the underprivileged and his caring for of all classes of people with equity. The midrashists show they had no illusions concerning the difficulties of leadership. They knew from practical experience that much maligning and many hard knocks are the lot of any leader. Especially is this true when one is serving the children of Israel, a people who from desert days were stubborn, quarrelsome, and rebellious.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 16:4

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 2:3

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 2:2

God tells Moses that his leadership would be unappreciated and that the people may even stone him, yet he should have patience with their shortcomings.<sup>1</sup>

The leader is the first to feel the afflictions the beset a community. "Woe unto the windows if the house falls. When there was no water in the desert the Israelites first began to quarrel with Moses. Moses, the light of Israel, was the first to feel the misfortunes that befell the house of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

No cowardice but a stoical attitude toward all their suffering is a requisite for every leader. Only great and courageous leaders can stand moments of crisis. When Moses and Aaron were supposed to go to see Pharaoh, together with the elders, concerning the liberation of the Hebrew people we find that the elders disappeared. "Where did the elders disappear to, the midrash asks? Our sages explained that when the crucial moment came they stole away furtively."<sup>3</sup>

Commenting on why the tablets were made of stone, scholars deduce that any leader who does not harden his cheeks as stone to receive all reproaches stoically, is not fit to merit the mantle of Torah.<sup>4</sup>

The key to the real greatness of a leader is given in the following midrash. Rabbi Nehimiah says, "As

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 7:2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 26:1

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 5:17

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 41:8



long as one is but an ordinary scholar he has no concern with the congregation and is not punished for its lapses, but as soon as he is appointed head and dons the cloak of leadership he must no longer say, 'I live for my own benefit, I care not about the congregation,' but the whole burden of the community is upon his shoulder. If he sees a man cause suffering to another and transgressing, and does not prevent him, then he himself is held punishable."<sup>1</sup> Surely no statement could be more condemning of leaders who refrain from involving themselves in the social well-being of their congregations. Surely no statement could better emphasize the fact that self-sacrifice and devotion to the people is the core of Jewish leadership.

#### b. Preaching

Special emphasis is placed in EXODUS RABBAH upon the content and style in preaching. Punning on the hebrew word *לשון* they say, "If one gives a discourse on the Torah which is not as pleasant to those that hear it as the bride is pleasing to her spouse, then it were best he should not have said it at all."<sup>2</sup>

It is evident throughout EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH, that the medieval preacher paid close attention to

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 27:7

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 41:6

the style of his preaching. In the more complete sermons, we find the texts developed in a highly polished and artistic form. Let us take, for example, the following funeral sermon based on the text

*יֵשׁוּעַ בְּיָמָיו הָיָה מְעֻלָּה מִן הַמֵּתִים*

"Better the day of death, than birth."<sup>1</sup>

"The day on which a great man dies is better than the day on which he was born; because none knows on the day that he is born what his deeds will be, but on his death his good deeds are published unto all.

It can be compared to two ships - one leaving the harbour, and the other entering. Whilst everyone was rejoicing over the one that was setting out on her voyage, few seemed to hail with pleasure the one arriving. Seeing which, a wise man reflected. 'I see here a paradox, for surely people should not rejoice at the ship that is leaving the harbour since they know not what conditions she may meet, what seas she may encounter, and what winds she may have to face. Whereas everybody ought to rejoice at the ship that has returned to the harbour for having safely set forth on the ocean and having safely returned."<sup>2</sup>

One should never indulge in sloppy preaching. Not so much oratorical thoroughness as mastery in scholarship, is the desired goal. From the verse,

<sup>1</sup>Ecc. - 7:1

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 48:1

וְכִי יִרְאֶה אֶת הַיְּהוָה וְיִסְתַּחֲפֶה וְיִפְּלוּ אֵלָיו וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ "Then did he see it and declare it,"<sup>1</sup> the rabbis teach, "Man must take an example from God and revise his lesson and hagadah or midrash prior to delivering them in public, and must not say, 'Since I know them so well I will say them when I begin my lecture.'"<sup>2</sup>

Not only public speeches should be watched, but all utterances of the leader should be delivered cautiously and accurately. The reason for this was not so much the fear that the preacher might get into trouble because of libelous statements, but rather because if he was not cautious in his words false interpretations of the words of God may be given. "His bread shall be given, his waters shall be sure," refers to God who commands those who study Toray. "Never say I understand anything thou doest not understand, neither prohibit to another that which thou permittest to thyself, but let all the utterances that proceed from thy mouth be reliable as were those that proceeded from Moses and I will make thee behold my beauty face to face."<sup>3</sup>

#### V. Psychological

The sermons of rabbis, as well as most religious

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 31:2

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 40:1

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 25:12

leaders, are often found boring because of their continuous harping on moralistic themes such as the shortcomings of their congregations. Whether or not this charge be true of today's spiritual leaders, it certainly cannot be made of the midrashists of old. For many are the midrashim and homilies which deal with no moralistic diatribe but rather aim to illuminate the many facts of human life. No theme was too trivial for their consideration. Even kisses and their nature were analysed by the rabbis. "A kiss to be significant must be backed with mercy and truth. It is like the case of a goldsmith to whom a coin was brought, the inside of which he noticed was of earthenware and the outside of gold. Later they brought him a coin entirely of gold. He said the first is a fake, the second is good. Thus Esau's kiss to Jacob was only dross, for he really wished to bite him. But the kiss of Aaron and Moses was of truth."<sup>1</sup>

Again, "All kisses are silly save three. The kiss of greatness, the kiss of parting, and the kiss on meeting after a period of separation." All others are selfish acts of personal satisfaction.<sup>2</sup>

The rabbis offer us much illuminating insight concerning the nature of wealth and poverty. They

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 5:13

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 5:1

realized the instability and insecurity of wealth, and with true dialectical insight saw how the wheel of fortune changes. *הנהגה כח מלך* "There is a wheel in the world. The poor man today may be a rich man tomorrow and vice versa."<sup>1</sup> The wealth of the rich should therefore be regarded as a trust and the rich man as a trustee to aid those less fortunate.

They were well acquainted with the human tendency of richer friends and relatives avoiding those who are poor. "It is human nature that when a man has poor relations he does not own them if he is wealthy. As it says, 'All the brethren of the poor do hate him.'<sup>2</sup>"<sup>3</sup>

Wherever money was involved the rabbis were scrupulous to see that the individual should not put himself in such a position as to incur the suspicion of others. Thus they warned that whenever finances of a community or a city are taken over by anybody, it should be by at least two people.<sup>4</sup>

Further when "One entered the Temple treasury to take out the money, he must not enter in a garment which folds or in felt shoes lest in the event of his becoming rich people should say he became rich from the temple's treasury. For a man must be above

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:2

<sup>2</sup>Prov. - 19:7

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 31:5

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 51:1

suspicion, above his fellows, as he must be morally clean before God."<sup>1</sup> These homilies of the rabbis must have been very effective for they based their appeal not merely on the ethical in itself, but upon an individual's pride in preserving his reputation. This according to modern psychologists, next to the appeal for self-preservation, is one of the strongest appeals existent.

We have another midrash of interest along the same direction. Elaborating on the verse,

*1185 1186 1187 1188 1189 1190 1191 1192 1193 1194 1195 1196 1197 1198 1199 1200*

"For ye shall not go out in haste, neither shall ye go by flight."<sup>2</sup> "Rabbi Huna says, This can be compared to a merchant who stopped at an inn a whole day and at night packed up all his belongings and proceeded farther on his travels. When the innkeeper awoke the next morning, she began to wail. 'Look at what the merchant has done. During the night he made off with all my belongings.' When the merchant heard this he thought to himself, 'What caused all the suspicion about me. The fact of my departing at midnight. I therefore make a solemn vow never to depart again during the night.'<sup>3</sup>

Further insight into the ways of human beings are shown by the following midrashim. The homilistician

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 51:2

<sup>2</sup>Is. - 53:12

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 19:7

is again utilizing the basic human appeals. When Jethro wished to have Moses come to meet him, he wrote in his letter. "Come out to meet me for my sake and should you be unwilling to do it for my sake, then do it for the sake of your wife. And if you are reluctant to grant my request for her sake, then do it for the sake of your children."<sup>1</sup>

In referring to the death of Pharaoh, the Bible states.

וַיִּפָּקֵד יוֹם מוֹת פַּרְעֹה  
וַיִּפָּקֵד יוֹם מוֹת פַּרְעֹה  
וַיִּפָּקֵד יוֹם מוֹת פַּרְעֹה  
וַיִּפָּקֵד יוֹם מוֹת פַּרְעֹה

"And it came to pass in the course of those many days."<sup>2</sup> "Was his death really spread over many days?"

The rabbis state, "no, they were called 'many' because they were days of trouble."<sup>3</sup> How often do days of misery and trouble seem to us like an eternity.

## VI. Miscellaneous

### a. Circumcision

As a whole we have subjected to classification and analysis mainly midrashim with a lofty ethical content, or with some deep insight into life. It would be a mistake, however, were we to believe that there is no crude or primitive thought in the book. Like the Bible itself, which it is expostulating, <sup>unending</sup> the midrash contains both the commonplace, as well as, the exalted, the magical, as well as the scientific. Especially crude are many of the midrashim in regard

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 27:2

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 2:23

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:40

to circumcision. A rabbi attempts to explain how Zippora knew that Moses was in jeopardy of his life because of his delay to perform the rite of circumcision over his child. The reason she knew he was in jeopardy was, "Because the angel came and swallowed Moses from his head to his circumcised membrane. Thus she recognized the great protective power of that membrane. So she thus cut off the foreskin of her son."<sup>1</sup>

"So beloved is circumcision, that Moses' punishment for its neglect was not suspended even for one hour. For this reason when Moses was on his way and delayed to circumcise Eliazer his son, immediately the Lord sought to kill him."<sup>2</sup>

EXODUS RABBAH is not wanting in angelology, number magic, and the calculations of the tetragrammaton.

They made for them a molten calf."<sup>3</sup> There were 125 centeneria of gold in that calf corresponding to the numerical value of the word *אֶלֶל* for *נ* equals forty, *ו* equals sixty, *י* equals twenty, *ה* equals five."<sup>4</sup>

Though midrashim of this sort might serve as a *פתיחה* "verbal opening" for some of our modern day critics to show the barbarism of the Jewish people, one must ever bear in mind that they were probably

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 5:7

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 5:8

<sup>3</sup>Exodus - 27:8

<sup>4</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 42:8



delivered well before the eighth century, and further that there is hardly an organized religion in this twentieth century which does not abound in <sup>ten</sup> rights and beliefs of similar superstitious and magical content.

b. Palestine

We have a few splendid midrashim on Jerusalem and Palestine which show the deep love the preachers of old had for the ancient homeland.

*108 ירמיה 118 חב 9 הארץ 15 רחמים*  
*22 ארץ 22 קרב*  
 "Fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth, even Mount Zion, the uttermost parts of the North, the city of the Great King."<sup>1</sup> "A merchant once went to Jerusalem to sell his merchandise, but after sitting there a whole day, he sold nothing. He then bitterly exclaimed. 'Is this the city of which people say that 'it is the joy of the whole earth.' An hour later he had sold all his goods and then he burst forth. 'Verily she is fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth.'<sup>2</sup>

Not even a utopian city could perhaps equal in intensity the spiritual greatness which the rabbis ascribed to the city. "There was a special counting house just outside of Jerusalem, where all accounts were gone into by merchants and anyone who wished

<sup>1</sup>Ps. - 48:3

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 52:4

to make up his accounts would resort thither so that he might not make his reckoning in Jerusalem and thus become distressed. As one must not be grieved, therefore it is 'the joy of the whole earth.'<sup>1</sup>

But though the rabbis showed this love for Palestine, they were far from unanimous in their belief that worship of God in that country was superior to worship elsewhere. When one rabbi maintained that the divine presence would never depart from the western wall, another rabbi retorted that when the Temple was destroyed, the divine presence was no longer in Palestine, but removed itself to heaven.<sup>2</sup>

#### c. Moses and the Righteous

As we have already mentioned, Moses appears throughout the book of EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH as the ideal of goodness and the acme of prophecy. Whatever virtue the preacher wished to sanctify, he incorporated into the life of Moses.

Moses was the author of all prophecy and from that source flowed all others. "Each prophet who arose repeated the prophecy of his predecessor in order to clarify his prophecy. Each one was fully occupied with his own save Moses who delivered all the prophecies of the others with his own, with the result that all who prophesied later were inspired by the prophecy of Moses."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 52:4

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 2:2

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 42:7

"You find that when God said to Moses, 'Go get thee down, thy people have dealt corruptly,'<sup>1</sup> that Moses still grasped the tablets in his hands refusing to believe that Israel had sinned, saying, 'Unless I see it I cannot believe it.' He did not break them until he had actually seen with his own eyes. Woe betide those who give testimony on what their eyes have not beheld! Was it then likely that Moses refused to believe God when he told him 'Thy people hath dealt corruptly.' Of course not, but Moses intended thereby to teach Israel a useful lesson that even when one hears a thing from the most trustworthy source he must not accept the testimony and act on his word till his own eyes have witnessed it."<sup>2</sup>

Not only Moses, but the ways of all righteous men are carefully scrutinized in the midrash. Commenting on why such an inferior substance as bulrush was used to protect Moses, the midrash says *אֲבִיר מִן הַיָּרְדֵּן וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל*  
 "The money of the righteous is dearer to them than their persons because they do not commit robbery. Since their money is hard earned, they spend it sparingly."<sup>3</sup>

Further, "It is customary for religious people to

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 32:7

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 46:1

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 1:25

name their children from some event which has occurred, so Moses called the name of his son *גֶרְשׁוֹן* (Gershon) for the miracle that God had wrought for him in the land of Median. For though he was a stranger there He caused him to prosper."<sup>1</sup> The righteous are ever eager to remind themselves of the blessings of God.

Furthermore distrust of God's righteous men is equivalent to distrust of God Himself. The midrash points out how the King of Egypt began by not acknowledging Joseph and ended by not acknowledging God.<sup>2</sup>

There are several midrashim which reveal the early preachers' desire for maintaining a healthy Judaism. They emphasized the ceremonial aspect of Judaism over the theological and theoretical. Judaism starts with discipline, first there is *מעשה* "action" and afterwards there is comprehension. The fact that you have the one, however, does not exclude the necessity of the other.<sup>3</sup> It is even alright to question the basic tenets of the belief. For at the beginning of the religious life blind belief is not necessary. Faith is a last resort and an ultimate acquisition. It is not the first approach. Tolerance is urged in the treatment of atheists and questioners of the faith --

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:40

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 8:1

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 27:8

for even Noah and other righteous figures of the past asked for signs. How much more so the wicked and the ordinary people.<sup>1</sup>

The strength of orthodox religion is supposed to lie in the fact that there is communal participation in its rites and duties. Thus the rabbis exhort. "Let all come and occupy themselves with the art in order that they may all merit the Torah."<sup>2</sup> True one individual made the instruments back in Biblical times but everyone was called upon to help with the ark so that they would all merit reward. Herein lies one of the secrets of the strength of orthodox religion. It gives everyone something to do.

But the midrashic orthodoxy was not a rigid one. In cases of emergency everything was permitted but that which violated the fundamental ethics of religion. "Everything may be used for healing save idolatry, immorality and murder. For example if one should say kill this man and thou wilt be healed, he should not listen."<sup>3</sup> How different is the spirit of this orthodox Judaism than the congealed lifeless, dogmatic Judaism of latter ages.

#### d. Literary Fragments

Though we have indicated throughout the thesis the various literary techniques employed by the rabbis to add vitality to their sermons, for the purpose of synthesis we shall mention some of the more common forms.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 9:1

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 34:3

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 16:2

The legend, for example, is frequently used to explain things and events whose cause is not given in the Bible. To show why Moses was ㇿㇿ ㇿㇿ "glib of tongue", the midrash presents the legend that "as a youth Pharaoh would play with him and he would take the king's crown off and place it on his head. The magicians became suspicious and wanted to kill him. Jethro however said, 'The boy had no sense, and suggested testing him by putting a gold vessel and a live coal before him. If he chose the former, said Jethro, he has sense. And then you should slay him. If he chooses the other do not slay him.' As Moses was about to put his hand on the gold vessel, the angel Gabriel thrust Moses' hand aside and placed it on the burned coal; then Moses put his hand in his mouth and burned his tongue with the result that he became slow of speech and tongue."<sup>1</sup>

Humor is not wanting in the book. In a discussion on the passage. "And the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. Rabbi Akiba said, it was one frog and it bred so rapidly it filled the land of Egypt. To this Rabbi Eleazar Ben Azariah said, 'Akiba leave homiletical material alone and turn to negaim and shiloth.' 'What business have you with hagadah. True there was one frog at first but he merely croaked and soon others came.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:31

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 10:5

Crispness and aphoristic conciseness are immediate distinguishing features of almost every midrash. How could one express more concisely the idea that since the Egyptians thought of drowning the Israelites, they themselves were drowned, than by the midrashic expression.

"They were boiled in the pot in which they themselves cooked."<sup>1</sup> יקרה אשכסו בה נחשלו

Or what could be more pungent than Rabbi Jonathan's curse over he who knows Torah and yet does not perform good deeds. וטב לו שלא  
והוא לא ראה מהפכה בשמים וזכר  
"Better that this man had never seen the light of day, and that the afterbirth in which he lay were turned on its face."<sup>2</sup>

Warmth, vitality, and vivid imagery are other common denominator features of all the midrashim. נצטרף  
הקדש בשמים והבית  
הדולק מראש ויד  
"The Holy One rapt Himself in a garment and the whole world from end to end became resplendent with His brightness."<sup>3</sup> Especially poetic are many verses where the midrashist puts words into the lips of God. עניינותי בשרת ואהם אלהים שירה

"My legions are in distress and yet wouldst thou utter song unto me."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 1:11

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 40:1

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 50:1

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 23:8

Beautiful prose oratory and rhetoric abound  
throughout the book.

וְאִם אִתּוֹ אֶת הַכֶּסֶף  
יָד בְּכֶסֶף טוֹב? אִם אִתּוֹ מַחְשָׁב לְכַסּוֹ  
מִיָּד עוֹלָם וְיִיחוּד מִמֶּנּוּ בְּחַדָּאִיוֹת וְחֶסֶד הַיְיָ  
יִרְם מִמֶּנּוּ לְחַיִּים מִן הָאֵל וְקוֹרֵב מִמֶּנּוּ  
"Does a man exchange a good thing for a bad one?"

Does he choose the piece of coal and disdain the  
pearl when both are placed before him? Yet they  
have forsaken life and chosen death. They who have  
rejected the living God and made for themselves  
a dead calf."<sup>1</sup>

Again, where can one find more beautiful hebrew  
than in a verse like this?

מִיָּד עוֹלָם וְיִיחוּד מִמֶּנּוּ בְּחַדָּאִיוֹת  
וְחֶסֶד הַיְיָ יִרְם מִמֶּנּוּ לְחַיִּים מִן הָאֵל  
וְקוֹרֵב מִמֶּנּוּ  
"They make their tears to flow like fountains till

the very fires of hell become cool with their tears."<sup>2</sup>

Even were we not able to cull one idea of  
homiletical, historical, or theological worth from  
EXODUS MIDRAH RABBAH, the beauty of the style of  
its many passages alone would render it an immortal  
piece of literature.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 42:2

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 7:3



### C. Conclusions

1. God, as ruler of a world permeated with his spirit, and man, as a potential vessel or recipient of divine blessing, are the most prolific themes found in EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH.
2. The theological and philosophical doctrines promulgated are eclectic in nature and, though strongly influenced by Greek thought, are developed in a decidedly Jewish mould.
3. The intention of the majority of the midrashim is to elevate the God of Judaism to a lofty ethical plain and to instill the reality of God into the lives of men and women. Thus God is portrayed as possessing the attributes of forbearance, omniscience, wisdom, and other qualities which the midrashic preachers wished their listeners to possess.
4. The preachers exhibit supreme tactfulness and practicality in the sermonical application of their religious doctrines.
5. As a whole the rabbis preached a deterministic conception of life, especially in the unfolding of historical events. Only in the moral realm does there enter some element of free choice.
6. To make the God concept vital in the lives of their people, the rabbis repeatedly show how the handiwork of God is exhibited in the most trivial things. God is also found in the hearts of men, if they but search

for him. No sacrifice is too great for God. Fear of God is the chief means by which man can express his dependence upon God.

7. Sin is a tremendous reality in the homilies. To guard people from even the thought of sin is the responsibility of religious leaders.
8. The oral and written Torah are considered equal in importance and sacredness. Divine inspiration in this world and life everlasting in the next, are God's most exalted gifts to man. Both result from an assiduous study of the Torah.
9. There are midrashim which advocate extreme nationalism as well as internationalism, though the former are in the majority. Assimilation is frequently attacked and given as the reason for much of Israel's suffering. The brotherhood of all men and the fatherhood of God are occasionally mentioned.
10. Israel's historic lot is that of an eternal people enduring eternal suffering. This suffering, however, usually serves to rededicate Israel to religious values.
11. The rabbis repeatedly assail vice and exalt virtues so as to inspire their people to a higher ethical life. Among the vices most frequently denounced are slander, arrogance, and sexual irregularity; while kindness, humility, and good manners are constantly lauded and

are incorporated, for the sake of emulation, into the lives of Jewish heroes of antiquity. Cognizance is made also of the environmental factor as a cause of vice and crime.

12. A strong progressive note runs through the entire book. Some preachers denounce the economic system of their day, (which was that of a slavery feudalistic nature), with great boldness. There is not a single midrash in the entire book where the preacher is not on the side of the slave, the poor, or the oppressed. Especially bold and vehement were the rabbis in their pronouncements against one of the common Jewish occupations of the day - usury.
13. The preachers, especially in the midrashim dealing with poverty, reveal a closeness to the suffering of their people and a profound sensitivity to their sorrows and suffering.
14. For social betterment, the preachers emphasize action as well as faith, and though progress can occur through evolutionary as well as revolutionary means, no compromise should be made with one's ideals.
15. There are varying opinions in regard to the status of women. For the most part, however, extreme consideration is shown for her feelings and tribute is paid to her religious nature.
16. Careful consideration of pastoral work is stressed.

A good leader must mingle with his people, prove trustworthy in small matters, show deep understanding, kindness, courage and self-sacrifice.

17. Preaching should be well prepared and accurate, lest the Torah be misinterpreted.
18. Many midrashim reveal a keen, psychological insight into the ways of human beings.
19. Though the book as a whole attains a high cultural and literary level, there are still several midrashim which are crude and portray the superstitions common to the middle ages.
20. Palestine (Jerusalem in particular) is looked upon as the spiritual paradise of ancient and modern Jewry. True worship of God, however, can be significant in any land.
21. Great leniency is shown in regard to theological beliefs. Practical Judaism is emphasized rather than the belief in theological doctrines.
22. In general the book is a tremendous storehouse of ideas, inspiration, beauty and eloquence. Its midrashim - though contributed by the religious spirits of centuries ago - still speak to us, arouse us, teach us, comfort us, "open their hearts to us as brothers." They are dynamic, robust, throbbing with vital religious messages. They are truly spiritual "lighthouses erected in the great sea of time."

REVISION OF INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS OF HENRY RABINOWITZ  
ON THE "HOMILIES OF EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH" WITH THE  
INCLUSION OF EXEGETICAL COMMENTS ON THE BOOK.

SUBMITTED AT THE SUGGESTION OF REFEREE  
DR. ISRAEL BETTAN FOR IMPROVEMENT  
ON ORIGINAL THESIS.

## EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH

### Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse a collection of midrashim called EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH. Like Genesis and Leviticus Rabbah it consists of homiletical midrashim. Thus it is not a sermonical commentary on every word found in the book of Exodus - but rather an interpretation of many of its texts. As other haggadic midrashim, those in EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH seek not so much to decree laws, as to admonish and inspire.

According to Zunz<sup>1</sup> the work was compiled about five hundred years after Genesis Rabbah or around the 11th century A.D. Some scholars, however, maintain that Zunz had the tendency to post-date the compilation of midrashic works by a century and therefore consider EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH a product of the 10th century. Whatever dating we accept, we can rest assured that the book was written when medieval, Jewish persecution was reaching its zenith.

EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH contains fifty-two chapters, none of which are uniform in size or composition. The first fourteen chapters are a running commentary on each verse of Exodus I-XI. Beginning with chapter fifteen to the end of the book, there are homilies and homiletical fragments to the first verses of the Scripture sections.

<sup>1</sup>Die Gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden (pg. 256-258)

Though there are theories which maintain that the book contains different and distinct compilations, it is beyond the ability of the author, however, to shed any light upon the subject. This is work for a midrashic critic, or at least for one who is acquainted with the many midrashic compilations. All the author can state from his own knowledge is that the text is often abbreviated and that the reader is frequently referred to other collections.

Every literary device is employed by the rabbis to enhance the texts of the book of Exodus. Every type of text employed by homilists is found in EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH. An attempt shall be made to indicate only some of the more common usages of texts.

At the beginning of every chapter and at the beginning of most homilies, a text is quoted from the book of Exodus. This verse however is frequently utilized to suggest another text upon which the midrashic sermon is developed. An example of this is, "And the Lord said unto Moses; 'rise up early in the morning'"<sup>1</sup>. This is the introductory verse;<sup>2</sup> however, the text which immediately follows it, "Behold, God doeth loftily in His power; who is a teacher like unto him?"<sup>3</sup> is the one upon which the ensuing homily is based.

The connection between the introductory biblical text and the main homiletical text is sometimes quite apparent. For example, in chapter 31, the proem commences with "if thou lend money to any of my people"<sup>4</sup> and the main homiletical text which

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 9-13

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - cpt.12

<sup>3</sup>Job. - 36-22

<sup>4</sup>Exodus - 22-24

follows, contains the same subject matter. "Well is it with the man that dealeth graciously and lendeth, that ordereth his affairs rightfully."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes however, the connection between the two texts is dependent upon one word which is common to both, or some obscure idea contained in both texts. For example, the only connection between the biblical text "Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt with Jacob; every man came with his household,"<sup>2</sup> and the main text, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes,"<sup>3</sup> seems to consist of the use of the word 'son' in both texts.

The connection between the introductory biblical and the main homiletical text in other sermons is often more obscure. In chapter 19, for example, the introductory text begins, "And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance of the Passover."<sup>4</sup> Immediately after this follows the main text, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness; and with its joy no stranger can intermeddle."<sup>5</sup> Between these two texts there seems to be no apparent connection.

However, there are many sermons which are introduced directly by the biblical verse. In fact in many chapters the biblical verse is repeated several times - for the compiler of the midrash used these biblical verses as a method in assorting sermons. Thus the biblical verse, "If thou lend money to any of my people,"<sup>6</sup> is used to introduce five different sermons in chapter 31, or the verse "Now Jethro.....heard,"<sup>7</sup> introduces ten different sermons in chapter 32.

<sup>1</sup>Ps. - 122-5

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 1-1

<sup>3</sup>Prov. - 13-24

<sup>4</sup>Exodus - 12-43

<sup>5</sup>Prov. - 14-10

<sup>6</sup>Exodus - 22-24



In regard to the main homiletical texts used in the poems there are those of the simple or transparent variety where the sermon context is easily derived from the text. For example, the preacher utilizing the verse, "As vapours and wind without rain, so is he that boasteth himself of a false gift,"<sup>1</sup> deduces the following thought. "He who promises to give a present to his friend and does not do so, is to be compared to clouds and wind and lightning which come but bring no rain with them."<sup>2</sup>

However, most texts present a challenge to the preacher and the meaning has to be extricated through the use of homiletical ingenuity. This variety of obscure text is quite common. A good example of this is the sermon based on the verse, "A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's vexation is heavier than they both,"<sup>3</sup> - the development of which is found on pages four and five of my submitted thesis.

Since there are so many anthropomorphic references in the book of Exodus naturally, actual theological incongruities and potential theological refinements serve as the textual pretexts for many sermons. Thus in the verse, "God thundereth marvellously with His voice,"<sup>4</sup> the manner in which God can be conceived of as a thundering forms the basis for a few sermons.<sup>5</sup>

An analysis of a single word in a text, or a play upon a word contained in a text are other devices the rabbis employed to develop their homilies. After stating the verse, "And when the people saw that Moses delayed (boshesh) to come down from the mount,"<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Prov. - 25-14

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 42-1

<sup>3</sup>Prov. - 27-3

<sup>4</sup>Job. - 37-5

<sup>5</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 5-8,9

<sup>6</sup>Exodus - 32-1

a rabbi commences his sermon by asking what does 'boshesh' mean? The answer he gives is, "That six hours had come (baw-shesh) and he had not yet descended, whereas Moses had promised them to bring the Torah after forty days."<sup>1</sup> Besides word-play there are several midrashim in which letters of a word are manouvered so as to yield desired meanings from texts, such as the midrash which proves that the calf of Aaron had 125 centenaria of gold by reckoning the numerical value of the word, "Masekah" in the text, "They have made them a molten (Masekah) calf."<sup>2</sup> (see page 77 of thesis)

Many of the midrashim, as we have already stated, do not appear as products of homiletical effort but rather seem to be running commentaries on various verses of the book of Exodus. This could be explained by the fact that often the homiletical development of the sermon was lost and only some exegetical comment contained therein was preserved. The following is an example of pure exegetical comment. On the verse, "See, I have called by name Bezalel,"<sup>3</sup> the rabbis comment, "He was one of the seven men who were called by various names. Some were called four names, like Elijah; Bezalel and Joshua were called six names, Moses seven, Mordecai two, Daniel five, etc."<sup>4</sup>

Frequently elaborated upon are the conversations that occur in the book of Exodus - especially the words of God to Moses. Explaining the text, "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn,"<sup>5</sup> rabbi Nehemiah said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, told Israel: 'When

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 41-10

<sup>2</sup>See page 77 of thesis

<sup>3</sup>Exodus - 31-2

<sup>4</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 40-3

<sup>5</sup>Exodus - 13-1

you enter the land you must set apart unto Me all that openeth the womb'; lest one should think that this setting apart was not to be done immediately."<sup>1</sup>

Also texts are used as a pretext for the rabbis to tell some interesting story, or some interesting story is invented by the rabbis to enhance the text. The well known story of how Rabbi Jose answered the Roman lady who claimed the superiority of her God over the God of Israel because Moses fled from before her God, the serpent, and merely hid his face before the God of Israel, is built upon the verse, "And Moses fled before it."<sup>2</sup><sup>3</sup> This seems to be an example of the pretextual use of a story; whereas the story of the king who instructed his servants to guard out-glass vessels for him seems to be definitely a story invented to enhance the text "Hear ye the words of the Lord, O House of Jacob." (quoted on page of this introduction)

Texts are very often used to prove or support the contentions of preceding texts. In one homily often we can find a great number of various texts either supporting the main idea of the homily or supporting various sentences within the homily. For example, in the last lines of Ex. Rabbah 9-13 over five different texts are employed one after the other. "And the house was filled with smoke<sup>4</sup>, therefore the smoke thereof shall go up for ever.<sup>5</sup> Hence does it say: The sound of an uproar from the city, a sound from the Temple; the sound of the Lord who rendereth recompense to His

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 19-9

<sup>2</sup>Exodus - 4-3

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 3-16

<sup>4</sup>Isa. - 6-4

<sup>5</sup>ibid. - 34-10

enemies.<sup>1</sup> Because of 'The sound of an uproar from the city, a sound from the Temple', as it is said: They have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn assembly<sup>2</sup>, therefore (will be heard): 'The sound of the Lord rendereth recompense to His enemies.'<sup>3</sup>

Frequently the same text which introduces the homily is repeated at its conclusion. In chapter 15 of EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH, for example, most of the midrashim both commence with the text, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months,"<sup>4</sup> and conclude with the same text. Finally at the end of many of the chapters we have texts quoted and almost without exception they are of a hopeful or optimistic nature.<sup>5</sup>

Varying types of illustrative material are found in EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH. As we have shown throughout the thesis, the fable is one of the more common illustrative forms employed by the rabbis. A well known fable or story of supernatural happening found in the book of EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH is the one told about Rabbi Simeon Ben Halafta who had no food for Sabbath only to go out and pray to God who in turn dropped a precious stone down for him from Heaven.<sup>6</sup>

Also veiled presentations in a figurative story of a meaning metaphorically implied are used to illustrate texts. The following allegory is an example of this. Upon the verse, "Hear ye the words of the Lord, Oh House of Jacob,"<sup>7</sup> the story is woven about a king who instructed his servants, "'Guard those two cut-glass vessels for me,

<sup>1</sup>Isa. - 40-6

<sup>2</sup>Lam. - 2-7

<sup>3</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 9-13

<sup>4</sup>Exodus - 12-1

<sup>5</sup>Chpts. - 15, 18, 23, etc.

<sup>6</sup>Exodus - 52-2

<sup>7</sup>Jer. - 2-4

and take the greatest care of them.' As he was entering the palace, a young calf standing nearby gored the servant, with the result that one of the vessels broke. The servant appeared before the king trembling, and when asked: 'Why are you trembling?' he replied: 'Because a calf gored me and made me break one of the two precious vessels.' The king thereupon said to him: 'That being so, you must be all the more careful with the second one.' This is also what God said: 'At Sinai, you prepared two cups -- "We will do," and "obey"; by making the golden calf, you have shattered one -- the "we will do," be very careful therefore with the second one -- "we will obey."' Hence, 'Hear ye the words of the Lord, O House of Jacob.'<sup>1</sup>

Uses of examples, analogies, parables, and proverbs, and legends, abound throughout the book and are alluded to throughout this thesis (quite specifically on pages 82-85). These illustrative forms are in turn illustrated by as varied a number of subjects as would either prove interesting to the congregations of the medieval preacher or at least fall within their knowledge or experience. The various types of human relationships are the most common subjects; such as the relationship between king and subject, father and son, master and slave, husband and wife, bride and groom, and rabbi and pupil.

References to royalty, its habits and experiences abound throughout. "It can be compared to a King's son who had been taken captive,"<sup>2</sup> "He can be compared to one who stoned a friend of the King."<sup>3</sup> "He can be compared to a princess, who having been taken captive by robbers was delivered by a King,"<sup>4</sup> are typical of the illustrative content of many midrashim.

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 27-9

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. - 20-12

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. - 1-8

<sup>4</sup>Ibid - 29-3

As we have shown on pages 52-57 of this thesis, almost equally as frequent are the references to the master-slave relation. Next in frequency are references to the husband-wife relationship. (mentioned on pages 64-65 of the thesis)

There are also many illustrations from the business world. For example illustrating the text, "But God led the people about,"<sup>1</sup> a homiletician says, "This may be compared to a merchant who bought a cow for domestic uses; but his house being near the abattoir, he bethought himself: 'I had better lead it home by another route, for if I lead it home past the slaughterhouse and it sees the blood therein, it will turn tail and flee.'" etc.<sup>2</sup> (Other examples are to be found on pages 75, 78, 79 of the thesis)

Many midrashim are illustrated by references to nature in general and animal and plant life in particular. Bird, donkeys<sup>3</sup>, and serpents<sup>4</sup>, are among the animals frequently mentioned. Rabbi Akiba said, "Why is Israel compared to a bird? Just as a bird can only fly with its wings, so Israel can only survive with the help of its elders, etc."<sup>5</sup> Homilies are woven around the hyssop plant<sup>6</sup>, the thorn bush, and the vine,<sup>7</sup> and the olive tree. On the text, "The Lord called thy name a leafy olive tree, fair with goodly fruit,"<sup>8</sup> a rabbi asks, "Was the olive the only tree after which Israel was called. Have they not also been called after every kind of handsome and noble tree? That they were compared to a vine, fig-tree, etc."<sup>9</sup>

In this introduction we have attempted to classify only

<sup>1</sup>Exodus - 13-18

<sup>2</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 20-17

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 20-1

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 31-7

<sup>5</sup>ibid. - 5-14

<sup>6</sup>ibid. - 17-27

<sup>7</sup>ibid. - 44-1

<sup>8</sup>Jer. - 11-16

<sup>9</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 36-1

the most reoccurring types of illustrative material. As we have already indicated however, illustrations from every sphere of life are found within the pages of our midrash. Angles,<sup>1</sup> ceremonial objects,<sup>2</sup> arena fights,<sup>3</sup> and even prize-fighters,<sup>4</sup> are used for illustrative purposes. In short nothing human was alien to the rabbis and their illustrative material was as broad as life itself.

Finally the author wishes to mention his method in analysing EXODUS RABBAH. No reference was made to any other commentaries or books on EXODUS RABBAH because the author wishes to approach the midrashim of EXODUS RABBAH without the influence or prejudice of any already established theories. First all the midrashim in the book were translated, but only those which seemed to have any significance were recorded. Then these recorded midrashim were classified and re-classified according to subject matter.

Thus the midrashim divided themselves into two main categories, those of a distinctly theological or religious nature, and those of a more secular or humanistic variety. The theological midrashim fell very naturally into what Dr. Bettan calls, "the three main themes of early preachers.....the majesty of God, the grandeur of the Torah, and the unique destiny of Israel."<sup>5</sup>

It was more difficult to classify the secular midrashim because of the broad scope of their subject matter. However, some themes were found which were the most frequent and distinct, and

<sup>1</sup>Ex. Rabbah - 5-8

<sup>2</sup>ibid. - 33-8

<sup>3</sup>ibid. - 27-7

<sup>4</sup>ibid. - 21-9

<sup>5</sup>Bettan - STUDIES IN JEWISH PREACHING (ch. 1)

these were used for classification. In order to bring further simplicity into the analysis of this book, these themes were still further broken into more specialized subjects. The midrashim which could not be subsumed even under the latter division were omitted. The only exception to this is that occasionally a midrash is included solely because of its literary worth. As a whole, however, this thesis is an analysis and a synthesis of the most significant and the most frequent midrashic themes in EXODUS MIDRASH RABBAH.