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THE BOOK OF PROVERBS IN MIDRASHIC EXEGESIS

by

Emanuel Rose.

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master
of Arts degree and Ordination.

Referee: Professor Israel Bettan

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Summary

According to Solomon Buber, the Midrash to the book of Proverbs was written sometime before the time of Yehudai Gaon. He also believes that it was written in Babylonia. He carefully distinguishes this work from the Midrash to Psalms and Samuel which were printed at the same time.

The text of Midrash Mishle is incomplete as we have it. The collection is more in the style of commentary than Agada. It is characterized by a style which links one verse to another. This specific style penetrates the various methods of exegesis. The result of this procedure is that comparatively little material is introduced from other sources. This is especially noticeable in the case of the rest of the Bible. The work contains comparatively few legends, myths, or parables. One explanation for this is that the writer followed the style of a specific historical period.

A large part of this Midrash collection shows a certain homogeneity of style and viewpoint. There are a number of basic themes which appear again and again in the collection. The book of Proverbs itself is filled with references to the value of wisdom and truth. Consequently

much of the Midrash is devoted to this theme. Torah is identified with wisdom and truth, and becomes the frame of reference for almost all statements on these values.

God is conceived of as being omnipotent. Every action of man is subject to the control of God. Man is constantly under the watchful eye of either God or God's messengers, the angels. At the same time man is viewed as a free agent. He is able to determine his own actions. In that capacity he is under obligation to act in accordance with the laws of God.

There is a day of judgment on which man stands before God. At this time God determines man's fate. He is either punished, or joins the righteous ones in Gan Eden.

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I. The Buber Collection of Midrash Mishle

The Midrash collection to the book of Proverbs has been incorrectly referred to as Shochar Tov. This confusion arose because it was printed together with the commentaries to Psalms and Samuel in Venice. ⁽¹⁾ It was written at a different time and must be carefully distinguished from the other commentaries mentioned. ⁽²⁾ In the Aruch it is referred to as Agadat Mishle, ⁽³⁾ but primarily the collection with which this paper deals is entitled simply Midrash Mishle. The Buber edition of this Midrash is a composite of four manuscripts and two printed editions. ⁽⁴⁾ It is a very extensive piece of work, and is accompanied by an elaborate introduction which includes a history of the Midrash Mishle collection, and a detailed breakdown with references to the sources from which the editor or editors took quotations.

According to Zunz, Midrash Mishle was written between the years 1,000-1100. However, Buber rather convincingly asserts that it was completed a long time before this. He indicates that it contains references which would indicate the time of Yehudai Gaon. ⁽⁵⁾ As a further indication of an early appearance of the work, Buber points out that there is reference to it in Chananel's Sefer Miktsots. ⁽⁶⁾ The point here is that though Chananel lived approximately 990-1040, in order for him to have had this material at his disposal, it meant that much time had elapsed during which it was copied,

distributed, and made known. We may conclude then, that according to Buber, the Midrash Mishle was completed sometime before 756-769, the ruling dates of Yehudai Gaon, but later than the completion of the Babylonian Talmud. ⁽⁷⁾

It is the feeling of Zunz that the collection was written in Italy at the same time and place as the Midrash to Psalms. ⁽⁸⁾ This conclusion of Zunz is also denied by Buber. He attempts to prove that it was written in Babylonia, ⁽⁹⁾ which accounts for the many quotations from the Babylonian Talmud, whereas references to the Palestinian Talmud are lacking. In conclusion Buber states the following: "...and there is no doubt in my mind that it was arranged in Babylonia and therefore he (the editor) copied many statements from the Babylonian but it appears that the Palestinian Talmud was not before him and he did not include statements from it as (in the case of the) Midrash of Psalms and Samuel." ⁽¹⁰⁾ In regard to any similarity to the collection of Psalms he states that "they are separate Midrashim and one father did not rear them..." ⁽¹¹⁾

As for the text itself, Midrash Mishle is incomplete as we have it. In many instances only a few verses of a chapter are commented upon. It strikes the reader as being unusual for the following reason. As we shall attempt to illustrate in the next chapter one of the methods used in this commentary is for the editor to view a block of verses,

interpreting each of them in accordance with one basic point that is being stressed. The idea of the value of study is one of these main themes. Chapter four of Proverbs is filled with references to study, yet the first twenty three verses of the chapter elicit no comment in the Midrash. Furthermore, sections left without comment are generally blocks of verses, such as the above example, rather than a lack of comment on an occasional verse alone. On the other hand one might explain this absence of comment by saying that the editor considered the text to be so clear on the matter that he felt any comment would have been extraneous. However, it appears that there are too many examples of the block pattern to give any serious consideration to the latter statement. ⁽¹²⁾ In addition there ⁽¹³⁾ are full chapters which are completely without any comment. It would seem that much of the Midrash Mishle is either presently unavailable or has been lost. It is incomplete as we have it.

The editor or editors of the collection drew ⁽¹⁴⁾ material from many sources to use as illustrative references. It may be interesting to note the many selections which are taken from Pirke Avos. All of the statements are referred ⁽¹⁵⁾ to in detail in the Buber collection.

There have been ten printings of the Midrash ⁽¹⁶⁾ Mishle. The first edition was printed in Constantinople sometime between 1512-1517. Unfortunately this edition did

not carry the date of printing. However, the Midrash to Psalms was printed there in 1512; the Mechilta in 1515; the Midrash to Samuel in 1517. Buber therefore concludes (17) that it was printed sometime during this period.

Before closing this chapter it would seem fitting to say a few words about the Buber edition. His introduction to this work is a very extensive study of the text of the commentary. He indicates the origin of statements which have been borrowed from other sources. In great detail, he describes the difference between the manuscripts which he had at his disposal in editing this work, in determining the final text. In the footnotes to the commentary, he notes the differences in the texts with which he was working. In this one book, therefore, it is possible to run a comparative study on all the material which was at his disposal. The introduction also contains an alphabetical list of the Tanaim and Amoraim who are quoted in the commentary with a reference to the place where it appears. Also in the introduction is a detailed listing of the material which was taken from other sources classified according to the title of each source.

II. Methods of Exegesis

The style of Midrash Mishle itself is unlike many other of the Midrash collections. The interpretations follow a rather simple exegetical procedure being more in the form of a commentary than that of Midrash. The writer explained the text on the basis of the P'shat, and not in great length as is the custom in the Mid'rshe Agadot. Furthermore, the interpretations follow immediately upon the words of the text without the customary introductory statements as are found in other Midrashim, such as 'Thus R. Nathan began' or 'This is what Scripture says'.⁽¹⁾

In addition to the quality of being more commentary than Agada,⁽²⁾ the Midrash is characterized by a style which links one verse to another, and sometimes even one chapter to another. A comment on verse X often leads to verse Y which serves as the proof text, or as a further illustration of the point which is being stressed. This shall be demonstrated shortly.

A good bit of the Midrash shows a certain homogeneity of style and viewpoint. Many Talmudic and Midrashic statements are included.

It would now be in place to cite some examples of the style found in Midrash Mishle.

Following is an example of the most characteristic style that is found in this collection.⁽³⁾

- (4)
- v.1 Does not wisdom call, and understanding
raise her voice? From whence does she give
her voice? From the heavens of the world.
Thus Scripture says:
- v.2 In the top of high places beside the way,
where the paths meet, she stands. What is
written after it?
- v.3a Beside the gates at the entry of the city.
Because you call for wisdom, it stands by
your gate, wherefore it says 'beside the
gates'.
- v.3b At the entrance of the portals she cries aloud.
Because you sit and cry out concerning words
of Torah, she too cries out at your gates.
Therefore it says 'At the entrance of the
portals she cries aloud'.

Following is another example of the same style; a
verse from the text followed by a comment followed by the
next part of the verse which illustrates the result of the
comment.
(5)

- v.25a Let your eyes look directly forward.
At the time when you stand in prayer set
your eyes and heart toward your father in
heaven, if you do so
- v.25b Your gaze will be straight before you.
- v.26a Take heed to the path of your feet.

at the time when you go to the House of Study
v.26b Then all your ways will be sure.

One more example of this style will, I think,
give the reader a fuller taste of the approach of the
(6)
editor of Mishle.

v.4 The reward for humility and fear of the
Lord is riches and honor in life. If one
has acquired humility and fear of the Lord,
he merits riches and honor in life, and if
not,

v.5a Thorns and snares are in the way of the
perverse, and all who are sly

v.5b He who guards himself will keep far from
them.

Occasionally, this specific style is changed by
the introduction of a verse from an earlier chapter to
(7)
emphasize the thought that has been presented.

v.23 These also are sayings of the wise. Partiality
in judging is not good.

From this Solomon made it known to the wise
men that they should not favor anyone in a
case, why? 'it is not good'....

v.24 He who says to the wicked: 'You are innocent'
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations.

But if he reproves in judgment he brings a

good blessing to himself, as it says,

- v.25 But those who rebuke the wicked will have
delight and a good blessing will be upon them.

What is written after it?

- v.26 He who gives a right answer kisses the lips.

R. Levi said this refers to words of reproof.

Thus it is written:

- v. They are all straight to him who understands,
and right to those who find knowledge.⁽⁸⁾

Following is an example of the same style with a slight variation. In this case, a verse from a later chapter serves as the proof text.⁽⁹⁾

- v.2a For wisdom will come into your heart.

If you have acquired words of Torah they guard you.

- v.2b And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

For they make you and your soul and your knowledge pleasant, wherefore it is written:⁽¹⁰⁾

- v. If you are wise you are wise for yourself.

Another style which is very common in this Midrash collection is the devoting of a section to one central theme, utilizing successive verses to further develop the idea that is being emphasized.

- v.3a For the lips of a loose women drip honey. Be careful, my son, of a harlot that she should noy cause you to err through the words of her lips.
- v.3b And her speech is smoother than oil. That she should not make you impassioned at her voice.
- v.4 In the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword...just as a sword devours with both sides, so does a harlot destroy the life of man both in this world and in the world to come. What is written after it?
- v.5a Her feet go down to death. For she reduces man in this world to the depths of death. What are the depths of death? These are terrible sufferings.
- v.5b Her steps follow the path to Sheol. For even though he is judged with sufferings in this world, he is not saved from the judgment of Gehinnom in the future.
- v.6a She does not take heed to the path of life. My son, do not set aside the path of life, lest you stumble after the ways of the prostitute, why?
- v.6b Her ways wander and she does not know it. But if you hearken to the words of Torah,

and to the sayings of my mouth, you will never stumble. ~~What does it announce?~~

v.7 And now, O sons, listen to me. What does it announce?

v.8 Keep your way far from her. Why?

v.9 Lest you give honor to others. For she managed to take your honor from you, and the Glory of the Shechina.

v.9b And your years to the merciless. For you (11)
you will be given over to a merciless angel.

Of all the Midrashim in this collection, the following one immediately impresses the reader, because of the style. The author selects a Biblical story, in this case the story of Joseph, and intermingles it with successive verses from the text of Proverbs, plus his own comments. The result of this synthesis is a beautiful little story.

If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait (12)
for blood, let us wantonly ambush the innocent."

These are Joseph's brothers who hid and said: When will the time come that we may slay him? And when when he came near they said one to another, 'now is the hour, behold this is the moment'. The Shechina laughed and said: 'Woe to them concerning the blood of this righteous one', therefore it says 'let us wantonly ambush the innocent'. Of all of them none

wanted to save him except Reuben, as it is written: But when Reuben heard it he delivered him out of their hands. ⁽¹³⁾ He said to them 'come and I will counsel you', and they said to him 'what advice can you give us?' He said to them, 'let us cast him into this pit alive, so that our hands be not upon him', whence it is said: Like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit. ⁽¹⁴⁾ That he would go down to the pit untouched, and would not know what they were doing to him. R. Levi, son of Zavdi said, who let him down into the pit of all his brothers? You must admit that it was Simeon and Levi, as it is written: O my soul come not into their council, ⁽¹⁵⁾ but it was Reuben's desire to save him and to return him to his father, as it is written: that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. ⁽¹⁶⁾ And Reuben returned to the pit. ⁽¹⁷⁾ And where was he? R. Judah said, the fear of home was upon him, and when the trembling he came and looked into the pit and did not find him. Thus Scripture says: When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he rent his clothes. ⁽¹⁸⁾ R. Nehemiah says he was busy with sackcloth and fasting, but when he discontinued the sackcloth

and fasting he came and looked into the pit and did not find him. Thus Scripture says: 'Reuben returned to the pit' etc., and not this alone, but due to the fact that they sold him the Shechinah was laughing at them and saying to them: ⁽¹⁸⁾
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, not the thought which you think, and not the way which you think, for were it not ordained by me your council would be meaningless. We shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with ⁽¹⁹⁾
spoil. This was Josephs selling price, who was his fathers precious son, as it is written for ⁽²⁰⁾
he was the son of his old age. He was found to preserve life for them as it is written: for God ⁽²¹⁾
sent me before you to preserve life. 'We shall fill our houses with spoil' for they filled their homes with silver and gold from the treasures of ⁽²²⁾
Joseph...Throw in your lot among us. While Joseph sat he took..... etc.

Another style of interpretation which the commentator utilizes is the usage of names to explain a verse. The following two selections will amply illustrate this method.

v.4 Who has ascended to heaven? This refers to Moses.
Who has gathered the wind in his fists? This

refers to Aaron.

Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?

This refers to Elijah. Who has established

all the ends of the earth? This refers to

Abraham our father. What is his name? The

Lord is his name, as it is written, the Lord
(23)

is a man of war. What is his sons name?

Surely you know. This refers to Israel. As (24)(25)
it is written, Israel is my first born son.

... A rich man is wise in his own eyes. This refers

to Haman the wicked. But a poor man who has

understanding will find him out. This refers

to Mordecai. Another interpretation of 'A rich

man is wise in his own eyes'-this refers to P

Pharoah. Another interpretation of ' a poor

man who has understanding will find him out'-

this refers to Moses our teacher. Another

interpretation of ..!wise in his own eyes'-this

refers to Esau. Another interpretation of...
(26)

'will find him out'- this refers to Jacob.

A variation of this method is the reference to a body of literature instead of a proper name.

A just balance and scales are the Lords, all

the weights in the bag are his work. A balance-
this refers to Scripture; just scales-these are
the Laws; are the Lords-these are the traditional
interpretations; all the weights in the bag are
his-this is the Talmud, and all who do them will
(27)
in the future get a reward.

There is one more passage which I should like to quote. It
is in the same style as the preceding selections, but the
writer brings to this one a real sense of history combined
with a graphic imagination.

The Ants are a people not strong: This is
Babylonia. The Badgers are a people not mighty:
This is Media. Yet they make their homes in the
rocks:this is Ahasuerus and Cyrus who sought to
build the Sanctuary. The locusts have no king:
this is Alexander the Macedonian who in his unrest
drove all over the world like a locust that flies
in the air. The lizard you can take in your hands:
this is Edom;there was none hated as she was among
all the creeping things. If you have been foolish,
exalting yourself: this is Greece who made it
(29)
impossible for the wives of Israel to have children.
(30)
For pressing milk produces curds:this is Edom...

There are also sections which are devoted to word
problems. In the following cases the commentator explains

words which to his mind are superfluous on the surface, but when explained have place in the text.

The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel. Why 'son of David'? Does not everyone know that he was the son of David? (In order to show that) everything he did was in honor of David. 'King of Israel'-does not everyone know that he was the King of Israel? (In order to show that) everything he did was in honor of Israel. ⁽³¹⁾

Here is another example of the same problem.

Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. Two times corresponding to the two worlds; this world and ⁽³²⁾ the world to come.

In another case the repetition of a word is similarly solved.

The leech has two daughters: give give... Why is give stated twice? In the future Gehinnom is to cry out before the Holy One blessed be he and say, ⁽³³⁾ 'Give me the wicked'.

There are also cases in which the writer is concerned over specific meanings of words.

The words of Agur son of Jakeh of Massa. Agur-who girded his loins (stored up knowledge). Ben Jakeh-a son free from all sin and iniquity. Ha-

massa-that he bore the burden of the Holy One
(34)
blessed be he.

Here is another case where the writer is concerned with the meaning of a word, or more specifically, in this case, with the number.

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
but those who plan good, have joy. Why does Scripture say 'those who devise' and not 'one who devises'? These correspond to the two inner(kidneys)
(35)
which advise him--one for good and one for evil.

Only once in the text of Mishle does the writer of the commentary find a contradiction. He resolves it very smoothly, and simply.

Answer not a fool according to his folly-in a
place where they know both you and him. Lest you
be like him yourself-so that they should not say
'come and see the wise man arguing with the fool'.
Answer a fool according to his folly-in a place
where they know neither you nor him. Why? Lest
he be wise in his own eyes-that they should not
say were it not that he were not suspicious of the
things he spoke to him about, he would not be
(36)
quiet.

In the following case there is a great similarity with the

above example in the sense that there is a reconciliation of apparently contradictory statements. However, in this case, the writer brings in an objection from a different book. He then proceeds to resolve the problem.

Then you will understand the fear of the Lord. If a man hastens to do a Mitzva and words of Scripture, then they are found before him; therefore it says: and find the knowledge of God... but has it not already been said: to whom he wills he will give it? ⁽³⁷⁾ But if a man desires words of Scripture the Holy One blessed be he gives it to him, as it ⁽³⁸⁾ says: For the Lord gives wisdom.

There is another procedure which the commentator uses which is by no means uncommon to the collection. In these cases he takes a statement from the text of Proverbs and makes his point by simply quoting from the Mishna. He adds no comment of his own.

⁽³⁹⁾
And he watches all his paths. From this the sages said: know what is above you; a seeing eye and a hearing ear, and all your deeds are written ⁽⁴⁰⁾ in a book.

If you are wise you are wise for yourself. If you ⁽⁴¹⁾ scoff, you alone will bear it. 'If you are wise'-

this is said to scholars. It is taught in a Mishnah, If you labor in the Torah he has a great reward to give to you, but if you neglect the Torah you have many neglects against you.⁽⁴²⁾

The mention or suggestion of numbers always seem to stimulate some comment. There are many examples to be found in the commentary.⁽⁴³⁾ As the last example of the many styles which are utilized in this work I should like to give one example of this most common style. The text of Mishle states that there are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him. Though the six are explicitly stated in the text of Proverbs, the seven are not recounted. This absence stimulates the writers mind, who then proceeds to fill up the vacancy. For some reason, however, only six are recorded in the commentary.

There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him; haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among others. These are the seven which are an abomination to him; Idolatry, incestuous relations, murder, gossip, and everyone who deals insincerely with his friend, and everyone who does not say a thing in the name of its author.⁽⁴⁴⁾

III. Illustrative Material

(1)

As has been stated above, this compilation of Midrash Mishle is for the most part in the form of a commentary rather than that of Midrash. Consequently there are comparatively few legends, myths, or parables. The question may be asked why this is so. One answer may be that it followed a style of a specific historical period. On the other hand the following possibility might also be taken into consideration. The text of the Book of Proverbs itself is a very practical piece of writing. The P'shat in its very nature contains a relevant message. Its wisdom is practical wisdom for everyday life. Its relevance, it seems to me, is in the nature of the contents of the book. Hence there would be a certain futility in any attempt to make the text more fitting for the times. Perhaps this is one of the factors which explains the comparative lack of illustrative material. It is true, of course, that it would be difficult or perhaps impossible to substantiate such a hypothesis, but it is not out of place to consider the possibility.

Following are some examples of the illustrative material that is found in this work.

If you seek it (wisdom) like silver...R. Shimon ben Lakish said that if a man does not pursue

words of Torah they never pursue him. It is comparable to a man who has a business; if man does not pursue it, it does not pursue him. (2)

The writer definitely had a fine ability to depict in a very simple way the idea that was being stressed. Whether or not the idea was original with him is a separate question.

He who walks with wise men becomes wise. This is comparable to one who enters his perfume store; even though he does not sell any nor take any, he goes out and its smell goes out; the smell of his clothes is perfumed and the smell does not leave him the whole day. The companion of fools will suffer harm. This is comparable to one who enters his bathhouse. Even though he does not sell anything and does not take anything, his smell and the smell of his clothes is dirty, and his smell and the smell of his clothes does not move from him the whole day. (3)

2
slip of a
tanner

If you are wise you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, alone you will bear it. This is comparable to two men; one rich, one poor. The rich said to the poor every day-how many are my possessions! How much silver and gold I have! How many gardens and orchards I have! The poor man would answer him and say-even though you have all of this wealth I

do not have any enjoyment from it. Everything you have acquired, for yourself have you acquired it. So the Holy One blessed be he answers wise men and says to them-even though you have acquired wisdom, you have acquired it for yourself. Therefore it says: If you are wise you are wise for yourself.⁽⁴⁾

In the above cases the writer is concerned with making clear a general statement or situation which appears in the text. By sharing with the reader an experience which may be common to everyone, he is able to insure an understanding of the text. This style has a fixed pattern.

In the following example, the writer is concerned with emphasizing a specific idea rather than a general situation. Again, he attempts to draw a parallel to a common life experience.

The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him. Just as a man spreads a net and captures fish from the sea, so do his sins spread a net over the sinner to capture him.⁽⁵⁾

Not unlike the above example, the following one uses the same approach but introduces or rather superimposes an idea on the text, and in that way brings out the point.

Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise.
If you enter the Beth Hamidrash and see wise men

sitting and occupying themselves in discussion of Torah, bend your ear and listen to their words in order to do them. As it says: For it ⁽⁶⁾ will be pleasant if you keep them within you.

The following selection is different from the above cases because it attempts to explain the reason for the statement in Proverbs rather than the statement itself.

Partiality in judging is not good...if there was a wicked man involved in a case and he was wealthy one should not show partiality to him because of his money. For everyone will curse him and say to him-woe unto this one who has forfeited his life and favors him because he has money. As it says: He who says to the wicked 'You are innocent' will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations. But if he reproves in a case he brings a good blessing to himself. As it says: but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will ⁽⁷⁾ be upon them.

In the following example, the writer explains the situation by means of a parallel case, but at the same time directs the readers mind along a certain line of thought in order to emphasize a specific point that the writer wishes to super-

impose on the text.

I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the
vineyard of a man without sense. Just as in the
case of this field if a man does not plow it
and seed it, it brings up thorns and thistles:
by the vineyard of a man without sense: just as
in the case of this vineyard if a man does not
hoe or seed it, it brings up grass, so it is with
a scholar; if he does not deal with words of Torah
the result will be that he will seek the heading
of a chapter and will not find it, and the beginning
of a Masechta and will not find it. ⁽⁸⁾

The collection also contains a few legends. Too
well known to cite here in full are the legends about R.
Meir whose two sons died, ⁽⁹⁾ and Yochanan ben Zakkai who
⁽¹⁰⁾
managed to escape in a coffin.

IV. The Major Ideas

There are a certain number of themes which appear again and again in this collection. In this chapter I shall attempt to present these main ideas. They fall into a few categories: God, man, world to come, study, Israel-the nation, the land, the people, and angelology. There are of course many additional themes which occur on occasion, but I have not dwelled upon them simply because they do not occupy any major part of the work.

God is conceived of as being the one who has full control over everything that is in this world. Nothing happens without his consent.

The plans of the mind belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord...to inform you that everything is from the hand of the Lord, not from man; neither the thought of the heart nor the speaking of the tongue.⁽¹⁾

When man performs an action having one intention in mind, God permits the action only because it carries out something which God wants done. In the Midrash on the Joseph story God permits the selling of Joseph only because it paves the way for the role he was later to play in God's

plan. God says:

My thoughts are not your thoughts, ⁽²⁾ not the thought which you think, and not for the purpose which you think, for were it not ordained by me your council ⁽³⁾ would be meaningless.

Whatever is done is carried out at the direction of God even though man may feel that it is his action.

The King's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. Just as in the case of these waters, when you pour them into a pitcher you turn it to whichever side you want, so it is that when a man becomes a king his heart is given over to the Holy One blessed be he. If the world merits it the Holy One blessed be he turns the heart of the king to good decrees, but if the world is wicked the Holy One blessed be he turns his heart to evil decrees. No decree ever goes out from his mouth without first having come from the Holy One blessed be he. Therefore it ⁽⁴⁾ says he turns it wherever he will.

Furthermore nothing is done without having full knowledge of the action. Everything is seen by God. Nothing is hidden from his eyes.

He who sins...in secret...does not know that there

are guards with him in every place who go and report his actions to the Holy One blessed be he for the day of judgment.⁽⁵⁾

All men appear equal in judgment before God. No man receives special consideration.

When a man comes before him in judgment, he calls the righteous righteous and the wicked wicked, whether he is rich or poor.⁽⁶⁾

There has been no problem more confusing to mankind than the problem of freedom of will and determinism. It is no less a problem today than it was hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Whether in the context of a God concept or not the problem still remains and is debated endlessly. There are, however, degrees of concern. It would seem from the material under consideration that there was rather little concern over this question at the time of the writing of Midrash Mishle. On one hand one is impressed with the complete reliance on God who is the source of everything, who controls everything, who permits only those actions which he wills despite the efforts of man. On the other hand one can also see man as the moulder of his own destiny, as the determiner of his daily actions. When viewed side by side we are left with a seeming irreconcilable contradiction. We are left with a concept of an omnipotent God together

with the concept of man's freedom. Thus, in contrast to the above mentioned Midrashim, we find the following statements.

(That men may) receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity. Since it is the case that man was appointed as judge, he must discern how to exonerate the innocent, and
(7)
obligate the guilty.

Furthermore, man must be scrupulous in his judgment, for if he confuses issues he sins and at the same time causes
(8)
the whole world to sin.

Man determines his own fate. Commenting on the verse You are caught in the words of your mouth, the writer says: In the future the Holy One blessed be he will say to Israel-since you have neglected my laws, from your own
(9)
mouth I judge you.

There is a definite recognition by the writer of the influence which environment has upon the development of the individual. A righteous son of a righteous family does not sineasily because he stops and thinks
(10)
before acting. He does not act impulsively. In an earlier chapter the mashal of the man in the perfume
(11)
shop was mentioned. This serves as a fine example of the writers belief in the influence of environment. Similar to this recognition is that of the learning experience during youth in moulding the personality of

a child.

If a man studies in his youth it will not
depart from him in his old age. (12)

In another section it says:

If you educate your son in words of Torah
while he is a lad, he grows up with them... (13)

Man should perform righteous acts, for they are
regarded as if sacrifices had been offered. Righteous acts
are even more precious to God than sacrifices. (14)

Man must guard himself against evil talk for
it is equated with idolatry and even murder. (15) Anyone
who is friendly with a person and eats and drinks with
him, and then gossips about him is called evil by the
Holy One blessed be he. (16)

One of the most interesting statements about
man contains the thought that man sees in others a re-
flection of himself. Just as a man peers into a pool of
water and sees a reflection of himself, so does the contents
of a mans heart determine what he sees in other mens hearts. (17)

Prayer too played an important role in the life of
man. At the time when man prayed he was expected to direct
his eyes and heart toward his father in heaven. (18) Commenting
on the verse Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber, the
writer explains it in the following manner. "In order to rise
up (early) to prayer. (19) Not only are prayers heard, but they

are answered as well.

The plans of the mind belong to man, but the
answer of the tongue is from God. Every man
who pours out his supplication before the Holy
(20)
One blessed be he is given an answer.

There are many references to prayer in the commentary which
(21)
have been included from other sources.

Due to the great stress in the text on wisdom
and the value of study and knowledge it is a natural thing
that the Midrash contains much material on the subject. Were
one to select the theme most characteristic of this Midrash
collection it would be that of study and wisdom. There are
innumerable references to this theme.

Wisdom has built her house. The Holy One blessed
be he said: if a man has merited it and studied
Torah and wisdom, I consider it as though he has
(22)
sustained the whole world.

A wise son makes a glad father-when he studies
(23)
Torah.

There is a constant effort to interpret the practical
wisdom of the text of Proverbs in light of Torah.

Hear my son your father's instruction. What was
Transmitted (instructed) to you at Sinai concerning
honoring of father. And reject not your mother's

teaching. What they cautioned you at Sinai concerning honoring of mother. Another interpretation of hear my son your father's ⁽²⁴⁾
instruction-this is the Torah itself.

Truth and wisdom is constantly equated with Torah.

For my mouth will utter truth. To a man who ⁽²⁵⁾
sits and occupies himself with words of Torah.

Commenting on the verse Do not men despise a thief if he ⁽²⁶⁾
steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, the writer
equates or rather interprets hunger as referring to hunger
for Torah. He then introduces a quotation from Amos to
substantiate his view. Not hunger for bread, nor thirst ⁽²⁷⁾
for water but to hear the words of the Lord.

The famous phrase A good wife who can find is in ⁽²⁸⁾
one instance interpreted as referring also to Torah.

Torah is the principle thing. Life goes out to the ⁽²⁹⁾
whole world as a result of study of Torah. If one is in-
volved in the study of Torah, he never deserts the right ⁽³⁰⁾
way of life. Torah represents the middle path of life ⁽³¹⁾
from which none should stray. It keeps man from choosing ⁽³²⁾
the evil path.

The world to come played a big role in the
theological concepts of this period. Should man sin in

in this world, when the day of judgment would come, punishment would be decided upon and meted out in Sheol (33) and Gehinnom. (34) It is man who brings this punishment upon himself. By committing iniquities against others, man is punished in like manner.

God punishes those who transgress, and he cannot be bribed like man. (35) At the same time, however, righteous acts can help man for the day of judgment. (36) Repentance (37) and good deeds are a help to stay the evil decree.

The world to come will also bring reward to the righteous. The Midrash states that God created two worlds; one in which man is to do good deeds, and the other in which reward will be given. (38) A person who lies in bed at night and thinks about doing a good deed the next day will, in the future rejoice with the righteous ones in Gan Eden. (39) All who study Talmud, Halacha, and Mikra will receive a reward in the world to come. (40)

The writer had a very exalted view of Israel the people, the land, and the nation. He feels that in God's plan it plays an important role. In commenting on the verse Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith, than a house full of feasting with strife, the writer states that this refers to Eretz Yisrael. Even if man eats only bread and salt in Eretz Yisrael, if he lives there, he can be assured

of the life of the world to come. A house full of feasting with strife represents life outside the land of Israel.⁽⁴¹⁾ Furthermore, living in Israel atones for the sins of the dead. The question is raised about righteous men who die outside the land of Israel. The reply is that the angels take them and bring them to Israel.⁽⁴²⁾

The role of the people Israel is also of vital importance.

Come and see the praise and greatness of the Holy One blessed be he. Even though he has thousands and myriads of angels before him who serve and praise him he does not desire their praise, but rather the praise of Israel...

When is the Holy One blessed be he exalted in his world? At the time when Israel is in gathering places and in houses of study, and gives praise to it's creator.

...at the time when Israel is in gathering places and in houses of study and listen to tales from the wise...at that very time the Holy One blessed be he rejoices and is exalted in his world, and says to the ministering angels 'Come and see this people whom I have formed in my world-how they praise me!'.⁽⁴³⁾

Angelology too played a definite part in this

theological system as has already been indicated in many of the above Midrashim. The angels seem to accompany man⁽⁴⁴⁾ everywhere he goes, and report his actions to God.

The angels act as witnesses for God and actually carry out⁽⁴⁵⁾ some of his functions for him. The angels also have a place⁽⁴⁶⁾ to stay. They abide in a city-the heavens.

There are, of course, many other areas which are commented upon by the writer of Midrash Mishle. They touch upon many additional areas of life. However, let it suffice to say that their role in this work is secondary, and it is for this reason that no further comment shall be made.

Notes to Chapter 1

14. a. Mishnah-Avos, Shabos, Eduyos, Peah, Sota, Pesachim,
Uktzin, Edidin, Berachos.

b. Tosephta
c. Sifre
d. Bereshis Rabah
e. Mechilta
f. Pesikta d'rav Kahana
g. Vayikro Rabah
h. Midrash Shir Hashirim
i. Koheles Rabah
j. Talmud Bavli
k. Avos d'rabi Nasan

15. Introduction p.11 ff.

16. Introduction p.29,30.
 Venice 1547
 Prague 1613
 Amsterdam 1730
 Zalkova 1800
 Vilna 1833,1850,1861
 Stettin 1861
 Warsaw 1874

17. Introduction p.29.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. יְהוָה אֵלֶיךָ כִּבְתוּהָ ; דַּרְי נָתַן כֶּתֶב.
2. Weiss, Isaac ידוּרְשִׁין p.276.
 מִדְּרָשׁ מֵשֵׁלִי הוּא יוֹתֵר קְרוֹנָה אֶסְכְּנֶה עֲשִׂירֹת מֵאֶסְכְּנֶה הַמִּדְרָשִׁים
 הַקְדָּמוֹת, בְּדֶק שִׁירָשׁ הוּא אֶרְוֶה אֶעֱרֹךְ כִּבְתוּהָ דֶּל עֵי
 הַקְדָּמוֹת אֵלֶּיךָ הַקְדָּרֶה מֵשֵׁלִי לֹא הַמִּדְרָשִׁין אֶשֶׁר אֶסְכְּנֶה,
 אֶסְכְּנֶה מִשְׁכָּן דְּבָרֹד אִו מֵלֶכֶּ הַבְּדֶק הַזֶּה וְהַזִּיאֵק הַמִּדְרָשִׁין
 הַשְּׁלֵמִי אֵק הַמִּדְרָשִׁין מִקְדָּמֹת מִשְׁכָּן הַמִּדְרָשִׁין כְּשֶׁלֹּא.
3. Chapter 8:1-3.
4. All Biblical quotations are underlined. Statements not underlined contain the Midrashic statements.
5. 4:25,26.
6. 22:4,5.
7. 24:23-26.
8. 8:9.
9. 2:10,11.
10. 9:12.
11. 5:3-9.
12. 1:11.
13. Genesis 37:21.
14. 1:12
15. Genesis 49:6. The previous verse in this chapter clearly indicates that the reference is to Simeon and Levi.
16. Genesis 37:22.
17. Genesis 37:29
18. Isaiah 55:8.

19. 1:13.

20. Genesis 37:3.

21. Genesis 45:5.

22. 1:14.

23. Exodus 15:3.

24. Exodus 4:22.

25. 30:4

26. 28:11.

27. 16:11.

28. 30:25-33.

29. The phrase under discussion is: *There is no way that non-Jews*
We have no record that the Greeks despoiled the women. *though Jewish*
It may be that the use of the Mikve was forbidden which *marriage*
would have made it impossible for the women to have *cross*
intercourse if the law would have been strictly adhered to.

30. 30:25-33.

31. 1:1.

32. 8:34.

33. 30:15.

34. 30:1.

35. 12:20.

36. 26:4,5.

37. Daniel 4:22.

38. 2:5,6.

39. 5:21b.

40. Mishna Avos chapter 2.

41. 9:12.

42. Mishnah Avos chapter 4.

43. 5:9

8:34

9:1

20:2

22:20,22

23:5,29.

44. 6:16-19.

Notes to Chapter three

1. page 5.
2. 2:4.
3. 13:20.
4. 9:12.
5. 5:22.
6. 22:17,18.
7. 24:23-25.
8. 24:30.
9. 31:10.
10. 15:30.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. 16:1.
2. Isaiah 55:8.
3. 1:comment 65.
4. 21:1.
5. 9:18.
6. 1:comment 95.
7. 1:comment 36.
8. 1:comment 37.
9. 6:2.
10. 11:comment 18.
11. 13:20.
12. 13:25.
13. 22:6.
14. 21:3.
15. 6:12 comment 18; 25:18; 26:18.
16. 12:1.
17. 27:19.
18. 4:25.
19. 6:10.
20. 16:1.
21. 1:comment 39
8:comment 19
22:28
30:comment 10.
22. 9:1.

- 23. 15:20.
- 24. 1:8.
- 25. 8:7.
- 26. 6:30.
- 27. Amos 8:11.
- 28. 31:10.
- 29. 4:23.
- 30. 5:6.
- 31. 4:27.
- 32. 2:12.
- 33. 5:22.
- 34. 6:comment 18.
- 35. 6:32.
- 36. 11:comment 2.
- 37. 6:4.
- 38. 11:21.
- 39. 12:comment 2.
- 40. 16:11.
- 41. 17:1
- 42. 17:1 comment 3.
- 43. 14:comment 8.
- 44. 11:27.
- 45. 17:comments 3,4.
- 46. 21:22.

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