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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

Ronald Stern

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

The Talmudic Origins of Rabbinic Counseling.

One of the most compelling interests of contemporary rabbinical students and rabbis is the pastoral relationship. Many factors impinge on this development either negatively, as in the rabbi's loss of many other signficant functions to communal functionaries, and positively, as psychology has demonstrated how significant interpersonal encounters can be in humanizing our lives. Judaism has not had as well defined and developed a tradition of "pastoring" as has Christianity. To a large extent then, the effort to explore the Jewish legitimacy of this effort and the authentic forms it might properly take is still in its infancy.

Having evidenced great sensitivty toward these questions in elective work on the intersection of theology and pastoral care, Ronald decided to investigate what models classic Jewish sources might provide for today's rabbis. This took a special measure of courage since it was not clear by what methodology one could do research on so amorphous a theme. Two expedients were decided upon, it being understood that this study was clearly envisaged as an initial historical foray into this field, one which Ronald hopes to pursue with enriched insight in further research. The field of inquiry was reduced to the Babylonian Talmud, a limitation which already indicates how vast the possible material might be.

By utilizing secondary literature on rabbinic thought and isolating certain terms which would lead him to accounts of personal rabbinic interactions, he then sought to establish a database for his study. This procedure yielded a rather varied and intriguing series of reports on rabbinic encounters related to marital issues, sickness, suffering, death and the like.

Ronald ingeniously organized the resulting material first substantively and then procedurally, with the latter analysis receiving more attention and comment. The whole was then rounded out by a comparison of what the data indicated was true of rabbinic interaction and its apparent underlying assumptions, with what contemporary thinkers, most notably Robert Katz and Don Browning, have said constitutes good present practice.

Thesis Report - Ronald Stern

The resulting study is characterized by diligence, imagination,

human sensitivity and Jewish depth. It is a fine example of what an initial entry into a difficult area might yield and I look forward to Ronald's future work in this field. I am therefore pleased to be able to reccomend the acceptance of this thesis.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz
Referee

April 2, 1990

THE TALMUDIC ORIGINS OF RABBINIC COUNSELING

by Ronald H. Stern

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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Referee: Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz

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To my wife Becky and my son Noah I offer my profound thanks. Were it not for the patience and support of my wife, Rabbinic School would have been a far less meaningful experience. And to Noah who gave me the inspiration to persevere as I looked into the radiance of his newborn face.

Finally, to Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz, my teacher whose often not so gentle rebukes enabled me to sift through the haze of my modern preconceptions and strive to understand the Rabbinic Mind.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the Christian tradition, Pastoral Care and its concurrent theology have developed into a highly refined discipline. When clergypeople function within their roles as pastoral counselors, they are aware of a vast network of theological underpinnings and methodological discussion. In a word, the individual is cognizant of the fact that Christian Pastoral Counseling has developed out of the Christian tradition. The level of sophistication achieved in this area is evidenced by the existence of a journal devoted exclusively to pastoral care (The Journal of Pastoral Care).

In contrast, Judaism, while valuing the concept of one individual's concern for another no less, has neither developed a coherent theology nor methodology of pastoral care.[1] It is clear that many rabbis engage in rabbinic counseling and are in fact aware of their role as counselor, yet most counseling technique draws heavily from the secular science of psychology, and perhaps even from Christian pastoral care, there is only limited cognizance that rabbinic care may be based on a rabbinic model which is quite ancient. Doubtless there is a characteristically "Jewish" component to this form of care-giving, however, it cannot be said that the rabbi or other professional is calling upon Jewish

[1] The term pastoral care, it will be shown, is a specifically Christian term arising out of Christian theology. Therefore, in the context of this paper, the term "Rabbinic Counseling" will be used, indicating that the method and theology of Jewish care-giving follows from a uniquely Jewish tradition.

conceptions of care and theology when functioning in his or her role as a counselor. To date, there has been a limited attempt to thoroughly examine Jewish tradition in a way that would provide the modern caregiver with a conception of engaging in a uniquely Jewish process of caregiving. Of note is the work of Robert L. Katz exploring the role of empathy in modern rabbinic counseling.[2]

There have been attempts to integrate Jewish thought and psychology. The works of Moshe Halevi Spero and Reuven P. Bulka[3] are such examples. However, these publications are more apologetic in nature and try to show that Jewish traditions and practice are not contrary to conceptions of modern psychoanalysis or other techniques. These authors have in a sense worked backwards, starting in modern times and attempting to choose those aspects of Jewish tradition which are not contrary to modern psychology and show how the two philosophies are in concert. Furthermore, the intended audience for these books is the community of psychologists and psychiatrists, not rabbis.

[2] See the following by Robert L Katz, "Counseling, Empathy, and the Rabbi," in *Rabbinical Counseling*, (Earl A. Grollman, ed. New York: Bloch Publishing, 1967), "Empathy in Modern Psychotherapy and the Aggada," (*Hebrew Union College Annual* 30 (1959)), as well as *Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

[3] Moshe Halevi Spero, *Judaism and Psychology: Halakhic Perspectives*, New York: Ktav Publishing, 1980.
Reuven P. Bulka, ed. *A Psychology and Judaism Reader*, Springfield, Ill: Charles C. Thomas, 1982.

In contrast, this paper will attempt to put aside the modern notions of psychology and counseling as much as possible and look to the Talmud for statements concerning the role of the rabbi when dealing with the life-crises of his constituency. By utilizing any dialogue between a distressed individual and a rabbi, it is hoped that a conceptualization of the Talmudic manner of helping and guiding another will be disclosed. In this way, the modern rabbinic counselor may be more aware of the continuity of techniques and their application in historical context.

MANNER OF SELECTION

As there exists no data base for this particular subject, the author had to derive an approach which would allow a somewhat efficient and comprehensive search of the material. The first step then, was to investigate material subjectively. So compendia which listed Talmudic material subjectively were initially examined. Thus the author began with *A Rabbinic Anthology* by C.B. Montefiore and H. Loewe. Pertinent material was examined and significant words were abstracted for later use. The *Encyclopedia Talmudit* and *Sefer Aggada* were investigated in the same manner. The *Encyclopedia Talmudit* is limited in that there are no volumes beyond the letter *tet*. Specifically, the topics such as *bik.ur h.o^lim*, and *g'milut h.asadim*, were investigated where possible. From this point, key roots and words were

discovered which could lead to further situations. These were:

1. אבל/אבילים
2. בקר/לבקר אצל-
3. חלה
4. חלש
5. מת
6. סלך/נסתלך
7. על לגביה
8. פקד
9. שכב

Otzar L'shon Ha-Talmud was utilized to find exact locations of key words and their derivatives in context. Finally, a page by page perusal of *En Yaakov* was undertaken for all possible counseling situations.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

The primary motivation for undertaking this project was to uncover characteristic techniques that were utilized by the rabbis in dialogues where they offered consolation or guidance for other rabbis or members of the community. The intervention may range from simple verbal advice or consolation to active intercession in which the rabbi seeks to change the variables of a situation. Dialogues were selected when the visitor or visitors are present because of a dilemma or crisis faced by the individual. The individual may also approach the rabbi for advice or the resolution of a problem to which the rabbi responds. It is important and critical to note that dialogues were not selected for their

method of conflict resolution nor for particular technique. The interest was to collect all possible material which fulfilled the broadest criteria. It was hoped that by erring on the side of excess, it would be possible to derive some basic conceptions and that various techniques would surface which might shed light on the rabbinic view of dialogue, intervention and relationships.

ORGANIZATION

When first collected, the material was organized into categories identified by common situations. Thus, all situations dealing with death were grouped, as were marital issues, sickness, bereavement and dying. Next, it was determined that the most effective method to derive useful information from the material was to group the material according to intervention techniques that were utilized by the rabbis. For this, it was necessary to review the material methodically and to attempt to glean techniques or styles of behavior. Using this approach, behavior was interpreted in order to categorize it in a manner that was by definition artificial (the rabbis engaged in no such qualification of their behavior). The whole process whereby this author has attempted to glean specific behavioral characteristics from the ancient text is clearly a projection of modern values to a time where such conceptions did not exist. The rabbis were probably less concerned with the

specifics of their behavior than with the details of the human relationship with God. However, it was necessary to conceptualize the material in this manner so that it could be useful for the modern interpreter of rabbinic dialogue.

Once the behaviors were ascertained, they were first grouped into two major subjective categories relating to content. All material which could shed light on the rabbinic world view, relationship to God and *Halakhah* were grouped in one cluster. Then all material which dealt with the exact nature of the interaction of the rabbi as consoler and guide for the distressed individual were grouped in a second cluster. Material which exemplifies the world view of the rabbis will be discussed in Chapter II, and material which characterizes technique will be explored in Chapter III.

Chapter II will explore those dialogues which may be characterized as notable for their substantive component. The dialogues here reflect the basic theological considerations which underpin the mode that the rabbis implemented when dealing with the world around them. It is possible to see the perspective toward *Halakhah* which the rabbis held and how this affected their interventional dialogue. Furthermore, and of great interest, it is possible to see the dialectic that existed between the rabbinic role as judge and administrator of justice for God's law and the desire for mercy. Both of these aspects are attributed to God, yet

for the human judge it was a constant challenge to achieve their balanced application.

Secondly, there are dialogues which are of interest because of the nature of their content. These will be discussed in Chapter III. The specific behaviors which were interpolated include: the role of rabbi as holy man; direct active intervention; reproach, rebuke and advice; encouragement and support; deference by the visitor toward the troubled individual; euphemistic language and metaphor; and finally: realism in the words of the visitor. These dialogues allow the reader to see the specific attitudes which the rabbis had for one another, the roles that they fulfilled for one another and the function that they might have played for the community. To apply an anachronism it may be said that these dialogues reflect the interpersonal aspect of rabbinic interaction.

There is significant overlap between the two major categories. Clearly, dialogue which is significant for content reflects aspects of the world view of the rabbis and dialogue which reflects the substance of their world reflects basic considerations such as interpersonal conduct.

CHAPTER II

Every word uttered by the rabbis and recorded in the text of the Talmud is affected by the world-view they held. In spite of the fact that the Talmud represents a dialogue condensed over a period of hundreds of years it is safe to say that there exists a predominant world-view. The passages discussed in this chapter will illustrate a number of conceptions which the rabbis held about the order of the world. Their perspective of reward and punishment was based upon Torah and its tenet that God was just and would administer justice according to clear very understandable guidelines. Within the context of the following passages, one does not see the dilemma of modern society inasmuch as it desires to know the absolute nature of God's intercession in human affairs; for the rabbis, God's presence was clear, irrefutable and absolute.

Correspondingly, Jewish law was the direct word of God. The rabbis sought to interpret God's law and apply it to the contemporary society. It was imperative that this law be applied exactly, and it was within the domain of the rabbi to determine the precise application of the law which represented God's desire. If and when flexiblity appeared to exist it was a result of a law or practice not being fixed and the preponderance of variant existent interpretations.

It becomes clear that these two aspects of rabbinic interventional dialogue: the theological and the legal, encompass the classic categories of God and Torah. The third category: Israel is in this case, the umbrella which covers all dialogues for it is the relationship between the individual of Israel which forms the basis of rabbinic dialogue.

Theology: Explaining the Ways of God

In Talmudic times, there was no doubt that God was directly responsible for any human condition or situation. The task of the rabbi upon visiting a distressed individual was to interpret the meaning behind God's intervention. That knowledge could then help the individual afflicted by Divine wrath assume a path which could either alleviate the affliction or at minimum, understand the cause of his or her distress.

COMFORTING THE BEREAVED

Ketubot 8b

In the following situation a child of R. Hiyya bar Abba has died, Resh Lakish comes to visit him and offer his condolences.[4] This text richly portrays the various words which may be offered to a mourner and even provides some response from the other rabbis as to the merit of the words of consolation. In the first section, Judah bar Nahmani (Resh Lakish's *meturgeman*[5]) incorporates Scriptural text into his words of comfort to Hiyya bar Abba.

> A story of R. Hiyya bar Abba, who was Resh Lakish's son's Bible teacher; some say he was his Mishnah teacher. His son died (R. Hiyya's). The first day, Resh Lakish did not go to visit him. The next day he brought Yehudah bar Nahmani and said to him: "Rise and say something about the child." He opened and said: *And Adonai saw, and spurned in anger His sons and His daughters*[6] in a generation where the fathers spurn the Holy One Blessed be He, He is angry towards their sons and daughters, and they die while they are still young.

The text is taken to show that when God is angry with the people of a generation the sons and daughters of the

[4] *Talmud Bavli*, Offprint of the Vilna Edition, Jerusalem: Tel Man Publishers. *Talmud Bavli*, Vocalized and Explicated by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Jerusalem: The Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1967-1989.

[5] The *meturgeman* is the individual who stood at the side of the lecturer and repeated in a loud voice and with embellishment that which the scholar said softly. (Soncino, Ketubot 8b, page 39, note 11).

[6] Deuteronomy 32:19. Unless otherwise stated, Biblical text is the author's own translation.

evildoers receive the brunt of God's retribution. Yet for R. Hiyya it bears a mixed message. Is the *meturgeman* claiming that R. Hiyya has done some evil to deserve this fate, or is he simply establishing the innocence of R. Hiyya's son? In either case the role of God in the administration and application of justice is clear.

The text continues with a alternative version of the situation which holds that the son was older, and the consolation that might have been offered in that case which was based upon Isaiah 9:16'. The Scriptural verse is similar in meaning to the passage from Deuteronomy. Regardless of the age of the son, the words of the *meturgeman* are problematic to the editor and the question is asked: "He came to comfort him and he grieved him greatly!?" The reply states that in fact the *meturgeman* is saying that R. Hiyya's son has died because of R. Hiyya's importance; he (R. Hiyya) is being held responsible for the sins of his generation, he has not sinned himself. Thus, the gist of the *meturgeman*'s comfort is actually seen to be a positive reflection upon R. Hiyya. However, one must ask if this was the intent of the *meturgeman*'s statement or an amelioration offered by a later

' *Therefore Adonai shall show no joy towards his young men, and towards the orphans, and the widows He will not have mercy because each one is profane and an evil doer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger is not turned away and His hand is still outstretched.*

Amora. It should be noted that in both cases, the innocence of the child is of primary concern.

Then, after attributing the death to God, the *meturgeman* affirms human faith in God by offering praise of God's resurrection of the dead. The prayer selected offers R. Hiyya consolation by reassuring him that his son will enjoy eternal life; one should not despair over the end of an earthly sojourn:

> He (Resh Lakish) said to him (*meturgeman*): "Rise and say something of praise for the Holy One Blessed be He." He opened and said: "The great God, abundant in greatness, might and power, abundant in wondrous deeds, who revives the dead by His word, who does greatness beyond reckoning and wonders beyond counting. Blessed are You Adonai who revives the dead."

Finally, the *meturgamen* offers words of consolation generally to all mourners. Here he states that the divine plan is such that all die and those left behind are filled with sorrow. It is the way of the world and humans must accept it. This consolation is offered with a blessing as well in which the *meturgeman* praises God for the comfort which God offers to the mourners:

> Our brothers who are exhausted and crushed by mourning, set your hearts to consider this: This fact remains eternal: It is a path from the six days of creation, many have drunk and many will drink; as the drinking of the first ones, so will be the drinking of the last ones. Brothers, may the Master of consolation comfort you. Blessed is the One who comforts the mourners.

The technique offered by the *meturgeman* in his consolation of the mourners provides insight into the rabbinic mind

and view of the functioning of the world. Consolation must be found through faith in God and acceptance of God's doctrine. The two blessings are also offered as consolation, in addition to praising God, the words of the blessing confirm doctrinal beliefs which in themselves may provide comfort to the mourner. Thus, through use of specific blessings as well as innovative interpretation of the Scripture the *meturgeman* exemplifies specific techniques of consolation.

Baba Kama 38a-b

In contrast to the above, in the following situation the words offered by the visitor appear to be far from consoling.

> Rav Shmuel bar Yehudah lost his daughter. The rabbis said to Ulla: "Rise, let us go and comfort him." He said to them: "What do I have to do with the consolation of Babylonians! It is blasphemy when they say: 'What could possibly be done?' That which is possible to do, they are doing." He (Ulla?) went alone to him and said to him: "*And God said to Moses do not distress the Moabite and do not contend with them in war*[*]. Now, what could have been on Moses's mind to make war without Divine sanction? Rather, Moses reasoned *a fortiori* by himself, he said: 'And what about the Midianites that only came to help the Moabites?' The Torah says: *Distress the Midianites and smite them*,[†] and the Moabites themselves, how much the more so (should they be smitten). The Holy One Blessed be He said to him: 'That which you have thought is not that which I have thought. I have to bring two fine doves from them: Ruth the Moabitess and Naomi the Amonitess.' And know this case is *a fortiori*. If for the sake of two fine doves

[*] Deuteronomy 2:9.

[†] Numbers 25:17.

> the Holy One Blessed be He had mercy on two great nations, and they were not destroyed, can we not reason that if Rabi's daughter had been pure and fitting that a good thing would come from her, how much the more so would she have lived."

R. Ulla's refusal to go appears to be because the Babylonians (R. Samuel bar Yehudah was one) refuse to submit their fate entirely to God when they ask what more could have been done. Although the sense of this sentence is not clear, the implication of the question may be that they might take extraordinary means to save the dying soul, and thus not simply accept Divine fiat. R. Ulla finds this to be objectionable and tantamount to blasphemy. In spite of his objection, R. Ulla goes. The words that he does offer R. Yehuda appear not to be comfort at all, but rather to challenge him for his blasphemy. He attempts to illustrate that if there was a purpose for R. Yehudah's daughter to live, she would have.

Using a Biblical text: *do not vex the Moabite and do not engage them in war*, the visitor offers R. Yehudah rather bitter consolation. He maintains that if God ordered Moses to spare the heinous Moabites in his battle against them because they would give rise to virtuous descendants, can we not be assured that R. Yehudah's daughter's life would have been spared if she had been upright and was to bring virtuous descendants to the world. In other words, the daughter deserved her fate. She was not worthy of living, nor were her offspring worthy of existing.

VISITING THE SICK

Throughout the Talmud rabbis visit one another when they are sick. This is clearly a fulfillment of the *Halakhic* injunction to visit the sick, yet it also becomes a vehicle for dialogue and interaction between rabbis. Often only cursory mention is given to the state of the sick individual and the text launches into a completely unrelated discussion. By comparison, in the cases to follow, the visitor does offer words which address the state of the sick individual.

Sanhedrin 101a

In both of the following cases, Rabbi Akiba comes to offer consolation to a seriously ill colleague. The consolation offered is based upon Akiba's understanding of God and the ways of the world. Akiba stresses that there is a plan and order for the world and that the sick individual should be consoled in knowing that he is not an exception, rather that he too will be a part of the process.

> Raba bar bar Hanah said: When Rabi Eliezer was ill, his students went in to visit him. He said to them: "There is powerful anger in the world!"[10] They began to cry but Rabi Akiba laughed. They said to him: "Why do you laugh?" He said to them: "But why are you crying?" They said to him: "Is it possible that a *Sefer Torah* be steeped in pain and we not cry?" He said to them: "It is for that reason that I am laughing! The entire time that I saw my master's wine not turn to vinegar, nor his flax smitten, nor his oil

[10] Implying that he was being punished.

> putrefied, nor his honey rancid I said (to myself): 'God forbid that my master received his reward in this world!' And now that I see our master in pain, I am happy."[11] Rabi Eliezer said to him: "Akiba, have I neglected anything from the entire Torah?" He replied: "You taught us our master *That there is no man who is righteous on this earth who does good and does not sin.*"[12]

This text portrays two behaviors which characterize aspects of rabbinic consolation. The disciples show pity; they acknowledge the rabbi's grief and pain and cry in sympathy and perhaps even empathy for they too share his suffering. Yet Akiba assumes quite a different approach. He laughs because he sees Rabbi Eliezer's sickness in this world as a guarantee that he will be rewarded in the world to come. According to rabbinic doctrine sufferings are the guarantor of life in the world to come.[13] Yet this does not pacify Rabbi Eliezer until Akiba reminds him of his own teaching.

[11] Because now R. Eliezer will receive his reward in the world to come.

[12] Ecclesiastes 7:20.

[13] C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology*, New York: Schocken Books, 1974, pages 544-548.

Sanhedrin 101a-b

Four rabbis go to visit the ailing R. Eliezer, three of them extol his virtues in this world and the next as a means of consolation. R. Akiba again provides a stark contrast to the words of the others, his message will be examined below. The words of the other rabbis will be examined on page 54.

> ...Rabbi Akiba said: "Suffering is beloved." He (R. Eliezer) said to them: "Support me that I may hear the words of Akiba my student who said that suffering is beloved." He said to him: "Akiba, from where do you get this?" He said: "I am expounding Scripture: *Mannasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem...and he did that which was evil in the sight of Adonai.*[14] And it is written: *The proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, the king of Judah copied*[15] Now would Hezekiah the king of Judah have taught Torah to the whole world and to his son Mannasseh not have taught Torah? But, all the troubles that he endured for him, and all the labors that he (Hezekiah) labored for him did not bring him to goodness only suffering (did this)."

Akiba then goes on to quote texts which show that God brought the sufferings upon Mannasseh and only these brought about his change to virtue. The clear message to R. Eliezer is that his sufferings are part of a Divine plan which cause humans to correct their sinful ways. In the analogy that Akiba develops between Mannasseh's situation and that of Eliezer, his message is that Eliezer's sufferings are pre-

[14] II Kings 21:1 ff.

[15] Proverbs 25:1.

cious because they work to bring him to the correct path. Reading this passage in context with the previous citation, it is possible to see that Akiba's message for Eliezer is that even a scholar is not without sin and beyond Divine admonishment.

Avodah Zarah 18a

The rabbis believed that they knew God's ways and could explain the pattern of events on earth. The visitor of a sick soul often provided his own interpretation of the events as they reflect the will of heaven and are meant as chatisement for an action of the sick person. In this passage R. Yosi ben Kisma is ill and R. Hanina ben Teradion comes to visit him. Teradion claims that Kisma's illness has occurred because he has taught in defiance of the Roman ban:

> Our Rabbis taught: When R. Yosi ben Kisma was ill R. Hanina ben Teradion went to visit him. Hanina said to him: "My brother, Do you not know that the rule of this nation has been ordained by heaven? For she has destroyed His House, burnt His Holy of Holies, killed His pious ones and caused the loss of His goodness, yet she still reigns.[16] Furthermore, I have heard that you continue to sit and occupy yourself with Torah, gather assemblies, and keep a scroll in your bosom?!"[17] He replied: "Mercy will come from the heavens." He said to him: "I am telling you words of reason and you say to me: 'Mercy will

[16] Which must mean that this is part of the Divine plan, otherwise God would not have allowed this to happen.

[17] In violation of the Roman ban. The implication appears to be: Why don't you give up and go along with it?!

> come from the heavens.' I wonder if they will not burn you and that Torah in fire." He replied: "Rabi, what is my status for the world to come?" He said to him: "All rests on the work of your hands." He said to him: "I once mistook Purim money for Tzedakah money and I distributed it to the poor." He said to him: "If this is so (if this is all) would it be that your portion were mine, and your inheritance mine."

In response to R. Teradion's analysis that R. Kisma will surely die if he continues to teach in defiance of the decree, R. Kisma affirms his belief that his suffering in this world will be followed by mercy in the world to come. R. Kisma does not doubt that the rule of Rome is by Divine ordination, yet he also recognizes his obligation to teach Torah. He knows that the promise for the world to come is equally Divine. He deduces that because he had devoted his life to teaching Torah in this world he will merit the reward of the world to come. Thus the debate of these two rabbis is essentially the question as to whether it is wise for an individual to risk a sure death with the faith that God will show mercy to him when he is killed. R. Teradion feels that one should not risk death in spite of the guarantee of mercy and R. Kisma is willing to take the risk, secure in knowing that he may rely on God's mercy. Yet, even as R. Teradion warns R. Kisma of his risk, he recognizes that the other is surely guaranteed a place in the world to come even as he doubts his own merit.

SUFFERING A LOSS

Berakhot 5b

All aspects of one's life were attributable to God in the rabbinic conception of the world. Even the state of one's financial affairs was also directly related to one's behavior and God's view of the actions. In the following text a rabbi's wine turns to vinegar. Other rabbis visit him and see a direct relationship between his financial loss and previous unscrupulous actions.

> Four Hundred jars of R. Huna's wine became sour.....they said to him: "Master should examine his affairs." He said to them: "Am I suspect in your eyes?" They said to him: "Is the Holy One Blessed be He suspect of making judgement which is not judgement?"[18]

At this point, the rabbis inform the master of his errors. He is reluctant at first to admit his error, but they quote an Aramaic proverb: "After stealing from a thief, taste of a thief." This is adequate proof for R. Huna who promises to rectify the situation, and the editor suggests that either the vinegar turned back to wine, or the price of vinegar rose as high as wine.

Excluding the reported outcome of the passage which appears to be a polemic about the reward for repentance, this text illustrates the faith that the rabbis had in God's justice and their ability to interpret it. The rabbis were sure that R. Huna had suffered his loss because of a specif-

[18] That is: Are you accusing God of being unjust?

ic action and they did not hesitate to tell him. For the rabbis, the punishment clearly fits the crime. R. Huna had neglected to give his tenants their lawful share of vine twigs. Thus, his punishment was through his own produce from the grapes.

The above passages present a picture of the rabbinic view of God's role in the world. There was not one aspect of their lives that was beyond Divine scrutiny and control. The visitor and the distressed individual had the same conception of the nature of the world, and the language used in consolation or interpretation was completely within the context of reality for both parties.

Halachah:

Punctiliousness and Extenuating Circumstances

It is often assumed that the rabbis were particularly stringent with regard to the law--stressing adherence in all eventualities. However, the rabbis constantly struggled with the dialectic of mercy and judgement. In their effort to emulate God, they often had to decide between absolute justice or mercy depending upon the needs of a particular situation. A number of dialogues that characterize interventional situations address this issue.

ILLNESS AND THE BEHAVIOR OF THE FAMILY

Sanhedrin 68a

> When R. Eliezer was sick, R. Akiba and his colleagues entered to visit him. He sat in his canopied bed, and they sat in his salon. That very day was *Shabbat* eve and his son Horkanus entered to remove his *tefillin*. He (the father) rebuked him and he exited chastised. He said to them to his (father's) friends: "It appears to me that my father's mind is deranged. He said to them (R. Akiba): "His (Horkanus') and his mother's minds are deranged, how can they neglect that which is punishable by stoning (to death), and attend to that which is punishable as a *shevut*!?"[1*]

The rabbis rebuke Horkanus for attempting to remove his father's *tefillin* while he and his and mother are neglecting a more serious law which is punishable by death. Although the text does not say what the violation might be, it can be assumed that the mother and son did something which violated a Divine ordinance which would be punishable by death.

The rabbis intervene in this case under *Halakhic* grounds. They observe behavior in the household of a sick rabbi. They see a transgression on the part of the son of the rabbi which is far more severe than that for which the son accuses the father. Thus, they chastise the son and his mother for committing a serious violation. They are not as quick to chastise the sick father for his violation of

[1*] "An occupation, [which] on Sabbath and Festivals, [is] forbidden by the Rabbis as being out of harmony with the celebration of the day." *Tefillin* is such an occupation. (Jastrow, Marcus, Ph.D, *A Dictionary* New York: The Judaica Press, 1971/1903, p. 1511).

rabbinic practice. It is difficult to conclude that the leniency is a result of R. Eliezer's sickness, however, the text does state that the sages were satisfied that his mind was clear because of this interaction. Thus it would seem that they do not treat his action with particular severity. However, in the case of the son and mother, it is impossible to allow the slightest flexibility because they have violated a clear Biblical injunction.

BEREAVEMENT

Moed Katan 20a-b

The following passages deal with the nature of mourning rituals for those who are related at various levels to the deceased. Where the situation is somewhat ambiguous, and the practice has not been explicitly set, it is possible to see some considerations among the rabbis for extenuating circumstances.

In the following case, a visitor sees that Raba is not observing the appropriate mourning ritual and in his punctiliousness he corrects Raba by doing that which is considered correct. As it turns out, this behavior offends Raba. Even by rabbinic standards, it is clear that this is not an appropriate way to go about consoling another.

> Raba was shattered by a misfortune. Abba bar Marta who was also called Abba bar Manyomi came to visit him. Raba sat on an upright couch, and Marta sat on an overturned one. He said (Raba):

> "How lacking in knowledge is that associate of the rabbis!"

Yet, the following passages from the same page of Moed Katan indicate that there are times when one should correct an individual for inappropriate mourning, especially if the person is not supposed to be mourning.

> The son of Mar Ukba's father-in-law died, he thought of sitting *shiva* and *sheloshim* for him (out of deference to his wife). R. Huna came to visit him. "Do you desire," he said to him, "to eat of mourner's food? They did not say out of respect for his wife, rather out of respect for (the death) his father-in-law or mother-in-law."

R. Huna corrects Mar Ukba for mourning and preparing to accept the food which is meant for a mourner. Only mourners may eat mourners fare. It is not appropriate to mourn, even out of respect to one's wife except for when her parents die. Thus, Mar Ukba is corrected even while in the midst of his mourning for a violation of Halachah.

The remainder of this folio side discusses the nature of how long one should mourn upon receiving tidings that have been delayed because of the physical distance between the mourner and the deceased. The variation among the answers indicates that mitigating circumstances could be considered. Perhaps because the exact nuance of the law had not yet been fixed.

R. Hanina received tidings about the death of his father. Upon consulting R. Hisda he was told to only mourn for one day. R. Nathan bar Ammi was told to mourn for only

one day for his mother. He objected and described a situation where mourning for longer was allowed. He stated that the limitation to one day applies for the other five nearest of kin, but not for a mother or father. Raba admitted that this may have been the opinion of another, but he did not share it.

From Raba's reply to Ammi, it can be seen that his chief concern is with the appropriate behavior given his understanding of Torah. Raba maintains this stance even over the objections of Nathan bar Ammi. It is clear that adherence to the practice is of more importance to Raba than flexibility in consideration of the other's desires. Yet, the fact that Nathan bar Ammi is able to bring contradictory evidence shows that other rabbis were able to find justification for alternative practices in this case.

Moed Katan 21a

The situation under discussion here is not specifically *Halakhic* rather the text is concerned with the customary responsibilities of a rabbi to the public at the time of his own grief. It is stated that a rabbi is expected to perform his duties in spite of his own loss.

> Raba bar bar Hana was shaken by an occurrence (bereavement), he thought that he would not go out to give his lesson. Rabi Hanina said to him: "If the multitudes need him, he does not refrain." He thought of calling his Amora (to give the lesson

> instead). Rav said to him: "We learned: 'Provided that he does not stand the *meturgeman* at his side.'"

The text eventually determines that it is satisfactory to use a *meturgeman* (see footnote 5) if one speaks first to another rabbi and then the he speaks to the *meturgeman*, the rabbi for whom the *meturgeman* is speaking may not speak to the *meturgeman* directly. In practice, the rabbi could expound his teachings in a soft voice and the *meturgeman* would elaborate and present them in a louder voice.

From the above situations, it becomes clear that the ancient rabbi found the law to be an irrefutable reality of life. When the application of the law had been established, there was no room for variation. However, there was some hierarchy in the application of legal rulings. In the case of R. Eliezer's son Horkanus (page 22), the rabbis could forgive the error of R. Eliezer who had not yet removed his *tefillin* in violation of a rabbinic ordinance, yet they could not permit the mother and son to violate a Divine commandment which was punishable by death. In the case of mourning rituals (page 23), it appears that flexibility was more a result of the unresolved nature of the law than of a conscious effort to permit alteration. In either case, it is possible to see the pre-eminent role that the application of the Divine will in the lives of humans had for the rabbi.

The Rabbi as a Holy Man

One of the aspects of the rabbi which most aided his capacity to provide healing for other people was the belief in the rabbi as a Holy Man who was somehow capable of powerful acts by virtue of his relationship to God. Thus a rabbi could perform acts because he was able to somehow channel the power of God to perform "godlike" acts.[20] Such is the case in two of the following examples. By virtue of their status the rabbis exercise extraordinary means to solve the conflict in the situation.

VISITING THE SICK

Berakhot 5b

> Rabi Hiya bar Aba was sick, Rabi Yohanan went to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings beloved to you?" He said to him: "Not them nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him.
>
> Rabi Yohanan was sick. Rabi Hanina went to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings beloved to you." He said to him: "Not them nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could Rabi Yohanan not raise himself? They said: "A captive cannot release himself from jail."

[20] The reader is directed to the following sources for additional information on this particular subject: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1971: on magic in the Talmud: vol 11, col 706-707; on divination see vol 6, col 116-118, also see unpublished Rabbinical Thesis by Susan Freeman-Graubart, entitled: A Theology of Healing from a Talmudic Perspective, 1990.

The vehicle of healing in this passage is the touch of one rabbi by another. (Accounts like this are found in Midrashic works as well, see Shir Ha Shirim Raba II, 16,2.) So there could possibly have been a belief or mythology in the efficacy of healing through touch. The question raised by this series of stories is not whether it is possible to heal another through touch, but if it is possible for Rabi Yohanan to heal himself as well as he can heal others. The conclusion is that a rabbi cannot perform the healing for himself, rather he must have another do it for him. Healing is a process which necessitates an "other".

Finally, it can be said that healing by physical contact was not considered magic by the rabbis. This was an objective healing technique which worked because it was within the rabbis' belief that God was willing to perform those acts on behalf of a sick rabbi.

MARITAL SITUATIONS

Rabbis were also approached to administer judgement in marital situations. The following is part of a collection of *aggadic* tales on situations of doubtful virginity where the husband has approached the rabbi with a complaint about his wife's virginity. The overriding concern which surfaces in all of the stories is the desire to maintain the marriage. The rabbis resort to numerous techniques to establish that the wife was indeed a virgin. Their resourceful-

ness is quite impressive as they sought to ascertain the validity of the husband's claim and the wife's counter-claim.

Ketubot 10b

> Someone came before Raban Gamliel and said to him: "Rabi, I have had sexual intercourse and I have not found blood." She said to him: "Rabi, I am still a virgin!" He said to them: "Bring me two handmaidens. One who is a virgin and the second not." They brought them to him. And he sat them upon a vat of wine. In the case of the woman who was not a virgin, its smell went forth. In the case of the virgin, the smell did not go forth. He then sat her (the wife, on the vat) and the scent did not go forth. He said to him: "Go, benefit from your possession." (the question is asked, why did he use the handmaidens?)...He thought, perhaps it is not established that the matter is good,[21] and one should not deal accidentally and lightly with the daughters of Israel.

This story is significant in that it illustrates various aspects of the rabbi's role and character. On one hand, he was an adjudicator, it was his responsibility to rule in specific situations, suspect virginity being one of them. On the other hand, people were willing to heed the rabbis' advice and would turn to him in a particular situation. Finally, divination was a completely acceptable method of determining facts in specific situations, this being one of them. An additional point is made concerning the attitude toward the women of Israel. The editor of this particular tale desired to promulgate the message that one should show

[21] The procedure used by Gamliel to establish the wife's virginity.

respect for the daughters of Israel and not deal whimsically with them. Perhaps because one might have thought that Raban Gamliel's method of divination was capricious. In fact, Gamliel conducted the initial test to be sure that this method would give accurate results. The additional passages from this folio which relate to the subject are discussed on page 36.

The body of citations above serve to shed light on the world of the rabbis. They were able to utilize many techniques which may seem bizarre to the modern observer because of the beliefs and practices which existed within their society. The rabbinic mode of intervention was possible because the rabbi was a Holy Man, one who had a different relationship to the law and to God than the commoner. In his role as interpreter of the law, he could be assured that God looked favorably upon him and could often be relied upon to act on his behalf. Rabbis responded to other rabbis because of the esteem in which they held each other and because they each knew the meaning of the words of consolation, rebuke or advice offered by the other. Words which seem harsh and uncaring to the modern were simply a statement of fact which both parties knew and accepted to be true. Additionally, critical to the rabbinic interface with the world was the structure of the rabbinic community, in that it was a relatively elite group of men who would come

to each other's aid when situations warranted (as is indicated by the body of this paper) and were constantly in contact with one another through their academies. The rabbi also looked with some disdain on the *am ha-aretz* (commoner) who was not schooled and did not take the time to become fluent in the Divine law. This served to exclusivize the rabbinic community even farther.[22]

Finally, it becomes clear that emotions were not of primary concern to the rabbi, rather the role and meaning of God as God interfaced with the mortal word represented the rabbinic preoccupation. Inasmuch as God directed and influenced the world, the rabbi was concerned with finding his role and the role of his followers within the Divine plan.

[22] Statements such as "Do not sever yourself from the community" (M. Avot II:5) and "Rabbi holds that a colleague prefers to transgress a minor prohibition so that a commoner should not transgress a major prohibition" (Eruvin 32a-b) point to the fact that the rabbis did see a dichotomy between their own colleagues and the commoners. Also see: Urbach, Ephraim, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 2 vols. Trans. Israel Abrahams, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975.

CHAPTER III

The rabbis exhibited a variety of approaches when visiting a distressed individual. It is possible to classify the material by specific techniques that were commonly practiced. These techniques range from behavior which actively intervenes in the life of the conflicted individual by influencing the outcome of a situation, to techniques which rely simply upon verbal instruction or direction.

This review and analysis of the literature spanning these behavioral categories will begin with an examination of the techniques which affect the life of the other most dynamically, and progress to techniques which appear to be less invasive.

ACTIVE INTERVENTION

The Rabbi as Holy Man

VISITING THE SICK

Techniques which may appear to our modern sensibilities as magic were often utilized by the rabbis as a means of adjudicating a situation or affecting change upon an individual. Specifically, intervention techniques which characterize the function of the rabbi as Holy Man and involve the healing of another by touch, or the use of techniques of divination to determine the viability of a claim of doubtful virginity are examples of this. The role of supernatural techniques and conceptions on the part of the rabbis has

been discussed in depth in the previous chapter and the reader is referred to the passages on page 27.

One additional passage is worthy of discussion at this location. Here, a rabbi advises his dying master of the proper countenance to assume when dying to assure a good omen, and countenances which one should avoid so as not to die under a bad omen.

Ketubot 103b

> But has it not been taught: When Rabi was ill, Rabi Hiyya visited him and found that he was crying. He said to him: "Rabi, why are you crying? Has it not been taught: 'Death while smiling is a good sign for him, while crying is a bad sign for him; his face turned upwards is a good sign for him, his face turned downward is a bad sign for him; his face towards the public is a good sign, towards the wall is a bad sign for him; his face greenish it is a bad sign for him, his face bright and flushed it is a good sign for him; he who dies on Shabbat Eve it is a good sign, at the end of Shabbat it is a bad sign for him; he who dies on Yom Kippur Eve it is a bad sign for him, at the end of Yom Kippur it is a good sign for him; he who dies with diarrhea it is a good sign for him because most of the righteous men die from diarrhea.'" He said to him: "I cry because of the Torah and Mitzvot."[33]

On one level, this story seeks to tell the reader the way that one should die to avoid an evil omen. One must be aware of one's countenance, composure and if at all possible affect the time of death so that the best possible omens may be in effect. In spite of the fact that the rabbis were opposed to witches and magical spells in principle, concern

[33] From which I will soon be separated.

with omens and bad signs was a part of the rabbis' life as well as that of their constituency.[24]

On a second level, if viewed as a dialogue between two individuals this might show the concern that the visitor had for the sick individual. However, it is difficult to analyze the response of the dying man. He responds as if he has only heard the initial question: "I cry because of (my impending separation from) Torah and Commandments."

Intervention to Change Circumstances

These cases portray situations in which the rabbi intervenes beyond mere words or acts to rectify the situation. In contrast to those interventional techniques discussed above, no magical or supernatural action is used.

FAMILIAL ISSUES

Baba Metzia 85a

R. Eleazar had a son who was extraordinarily beautiful, however he had used his beauty in a corrupt and immoral way. The text states that he had become a gigolo. Upon seeing this, Rabi determined that he would ordain him as a rabbi in an attempt to change his behavior. In this situation, Rabi intervenes actively in the life of R. Eleazar's son in a manner which he believes will change the son's behavior. He

[24] Joseph Dan, "Magic," **Encyclopedia Judaica**, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972, Volume 11, Column 706-707.

ordains the son as a rabbi believing that the title and responsibilities arising from such a position will bring about change from the son.

> Rabi entered the town of R. Eleazar bar Shimon. He said to them: "Does that *tzadik* have a son?" They said to him: "He has a son and every prostitute who is hired for two, hires him for eight." So they brought him and ordained him (a rabbi) and he entrusted him to R. Shimon the son of Assi the son of Lakonia his mother's brother. And every day he (the son) would say: "I am going to my town." He would say to him: "They have made you a sage, and spread a rabbinic robe over you and they have called you rabi and you say, I am going to my town?!" He said to him: "I swear that I have abandoned this!" When he grew up, he sat in Rabi's academy.

The text continues to prove that R. Jose as this changed man was known was indeed righteous. Citing the phrase: *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that wins souls is wise.*[28] Rabi praises both R. Jose as a sage and R. Shimon the son of Assi for changing the life of R. Jose.

Rabi's manipulation of R. Jose's life serves to completely change his behavior. Rabi intervenes so that he might affect the life of a dead colleague's son and attempt to set him on the right path. It would appear from this text that Rabi had no compunctions about intervening in the son's life. His chief concern was to return the son of a *tzadik* to the correct path.

[28] Proverbs 11:30.

MARITAL SITUATIONS: CONTROVERSY BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

Nedarim 66b

The following situations, all originating on the same folio of text, have a number of factors in common. Each deals specifically with a husband who vows to deny his wife sustenance for various reasons, the vow is eventually released by a rabbi. These cases serve to elucidate the role of rabbinic intervention in alleviating what could otherwise be a perilous situation for the wife. Without her husband's support she would have no means of survival save begging. In all cases, the rabbi must intervene in order to assure that the woman may return to her husband. Here again, as with the situations of doubtful virginity, it becomes apparent that one of the rabbis' goal is to preserve the marriage.

The first situation actually frames the entire section to follow because it sets the scene and develops the rationale for the rabbis' potential humiliation as a result of the husband's vow. R. Shimon and R. Yehudah debate the worth of permitting personal disgrace in order to save the marriage. A case is made for the toleration of temporary embarrassment and for refusal to accept humiliation in order to avert the habit of vowing.

> There was one that said to his wife: "*Konam*[36] that you enjoy me (my income) until you cause Rabi Yehudah and Rabi Shimon to taste of your cooking." R. Yehudah tasted and said: "If in the greater case that in order to make peace between man and woman the Torah says: Let My name which was written in holiness *be rubbed off in the waters of bitterness* in a case of doubt how much the more so should I (be defiled in a case that is clear)."[37] R. Shimon did not taste. He said: "Let all the children of the widow die and let not Shimon be moved from his place and furthermore, let them not get in the habit of vowing."

There is direct disagreement between R. Shimon and R. Yehudah on this matter, one believing that it is appropriate for a rabbi to be shamed as the condition of a foolish vow in order to achieve peace, the other denying such behavior in order to break the habit of making ridiculous vows and to avoid his own humiliation. R. Yehudah sees the ordeal for determining the guilt of a wife accused of adultery as a process which denigrates the Holy Name, thus he can permit his own disgrace in a lessor case such as this. R. Yehudah is willing to allow himself to function as a pawn in the arguments of husband and wife in order to maintain the marriage. Undoubtedly, his role as a public figure is part of the reason that he is the subject of this vow; and he

[36] This word is a substitute for *korban* and used for a vow of abstinence. It is used to introduce and frame a vow. It is sometimes translated as "forbidden." Jastrow, p. 1335.

[37] This text is very terse and the exact meaning is difficult to determine. This translation is presented as a reasonable approximation, which conveys the sense of the argument. The Biblical verse cited is Numbers 5:23: the ordeal of the adulterous woman.

takes this responsibility to the extent of achieving its absolution as well. In contrast, R. Shimon, also perceives himself as a public figure and one who may alter public behavior, yet he sees his denial to rescind the vow as an action which will result in fewer vows of this nature. He also refuses to allow himself to suffer the humiliation of being a subject of this husband's frivolous vow. Thus, both rabbis actively use their status in the community as a means of affecting change and making a statement.

A case which follows the above is of the same genre. A man makes a vow with the use of the word *konam* and R. Shimon B. Gamliel must allow the woman to expectorate on his garment to fulfill the terms of the oath. He permits her to perform the action. The text comments by stating that it is a great insult to do such a thing to R. Shimon b. Gamliel. Here again a rabbi permits himself to be directly involved in the affairs of a husband and wife in order to achieve peace in their household, yet at the same time, he must suffer humiliation.

In the next instance, a man swears to forbid his wife from benefitting from his support until she shows R. Ishmael that there is nothing beautiful about her. R. Ishmael proceeds to list various aspects of beauty which may exist and each one is found to be absent, or present in its diametric opposite in the woman. He proceeds to find absolutely nothing beautiful about her including her name and

thus he permits her to her husband. It must be recognized that the result of his refusal to find her completely ugly would force her to live as a beggar with no means of support. Thus, in his desire to preserve the marriage and permit the wife to continue to benefit from the husband he becomes a participant in a vow which undoubtedly has as one of its results the humiliation of the woman.

The final case portrays a marriage between a Babylonian and a Palestinian. Due to differences in pronunciation and language the wife repeatedly misinterprets the requests of the husband. Finally, when the husband asks her to break two candlesticks over the head of the *baba* (denoting threshold) she misinterprets him to mean over the head of Baba ben Buta who was seated in the doorway adjudicating a case. The startled Ben Buta asks her why she has done this and she replies: "Such has my husband commanded me to do." He then praises her for doing her husband's will and bears no grudge against her.

Because these stories appear in a series, one is led to assume that this is a genre. As a group, the texts make a statement about the gravity of vows and the role that all parties must play in following through on them. There may be, perhaps, a message of caution to the husbands in this case, that they do not make their vows lightly so as not to leave their wife unprovided for, nor shame the rabbi who is the subject of the vow.

In addition, it is possible to see the role of the rabbi in maintaining the marriage. In fact, each of these short vignettes address the same issue. Although the rabbi did not choose to become embroiled in a domestic conflict the issue was brought to him, thus confronted, he has the choice of either working to repudiate the vow or permitting the wife to live unsupported by her husband. One rabbi holds that it is his responsibility to achieve peace between husband and wife even over personal embarrassment. Another disagrees and holds up his own honor, and seeks to teach those who would vow a lesson. In all cases, at least one rabbi does participate in annulling the vow and does not ignore the situation.

MARITAL SITUATIONS: DOUBTFUL VIRGINITY

Ketubot 10a-b

In the following three cases a husband doubts his wife's virginity because no blood has been found on the sheets. The matter is brought before the rabbi who must determine the validity of the husband's claim. The rabbi must rely on close scrutiny of the case and resourcefulness to determine the wife's status before marriage because his determination could drastically affect her future. It can be seen that the rabbi takes his clue from the wife's statement as well as other factors of each case and proceeds to prove the husband's claim false.

> There was one who came before Raban Gamliel bar Rabi and said to him: "Rabi, I had intercourse (with my new bride) and I have not found any blood." She said to him: "Rabi, I was a virgin." He said to them: "Bring me the sheet." They brought him the sheet and he soaked it in water and washed it and he found upon it a few drops of blood. He said to him: "Go, benefit from your possession!"
>
> There was one who came before Raban Gamliel the elder and said to him: "Rabi, I had intercourse with my wife and I did not find any blood." She said to him: "Rabi, I am from the family of *Dorkati*, they do not have an menstrual blood and no blood of virginity." Raban Gamliel researched the matter among her woman relatives and found according to her words. He said to him: "Go, benefit from your possession! Happy are you that you merited the family of *Dorkati*."

In both cases the rabbi relies on the wife's testimony to assess the situation. Because she says that she was a virgin, the rabbi investigates the verity of her claim. The intervention technique consists of pursuing a hypothesis which seeks to obtain sufficient evidence in order to clear the woman. In the case of the woman from *Dorkati*, Raban Gamliel seeks to investigate the woman's word. It should be noted that this does not <u>prove</u> that she was a virgin, it only proves that her family has this peculiar trait. In spite of that fact, Gamliel accepts her affirmation as entirely valid.

The next case:

> There was one who came before Rabi and said: "Rabi, I have had intercourse (with my new bride) and I have not found any blood." She said to him: "Rabi, I still am and was a virgin, it has been years of dearth." Rabi saw that their faces were blackened, he commanded that they be brought to a bath, and be given food and water, and he brought

> them into a room, he (the husband) had intercourse and he found blood. He said to him: "Go, benefit from your possession." Rabi read concerning them: *Their skin is shrivelled upon their bones it is as dry as a twig.*[28]

Again a rabbi appraises the situation and prescribes the appropriate behavior. In this case he goes so far as to set up a condition by which the couple may have intercourse and the blood of virginity will be visible. By listening to the woman's words and not relying solely on the man's statement the rabbi is able to determine the facts and suggest a solution.

The phrase: "Go benefit from your possession!" (lēk zᵉkēh bᵉmiqahka) gives insight into the rabbinic view of the relationship between husband and wife. Had the wife not been a virgin, the marriage would not have been valid and the husband could not have "benefitted" from his possession. A phrase which implies the rabbinic perspective on the status of women as well as the role a wife was to assume for her husband. It is clear that the wife was considered the husband's property.

Overall, a number of points can be seen in these situations. Of prime importance is the rabbi's desire to gather all the facts to ascertain what appears to be the truth in the situation. Thus, he must rely on the wife's testimony as well as the husband's. As in the situation of vows on

[28] Lamentations 4:8.

page 36, the rabbis desired to keep a marriage whole. While it might have been easier to accept the man's testimony, in his role as judge, the rabbi must administer equitable judgement. As the arbiter in this case, the rabbi could prescribe behaviors, request evidence and make judgments and expect that he would be heeded.

VERBAL INTERVENTION

Reproach, Rebuke and Advice

The rabbinic imperative to reproach another for doing wrong is traced to Leviticus 19:17: *Reprove your neighbor, but incur no guilt because of him.* In Arachin 16b the rabbis derive an understanding of how one is obligated to correct a wrong which is found in another. The basic contention is that one must correct another for an error and persist in correcting that person until he or she threatens to strike out in frustration against the rebuking party.[29] While in none of the cases listed below does the rebuker even come close to physical injury as a result of the rebuke given, it is clear that there is no hesitancy to offer rebuke when the situation warrants. The ancient rabbi believed that it was his mandate, because of standards set by the Torah, to affect change regardless of the disposition of

[29] This information was obtained by the author in a study of *Arachin* 16b for Dr. Michael Chernick of Hebrew Union College.

the one called upon to change. At the same time, the rabbi saw that the behavior would result in Divine wrath and punishment and the individual had to change in order to escape the castigation which was sure to come. The first two examples serve to illustrate this point poignantly.

REBUKE TO THE SICK AND DYING

Ketubot 103b

The text from Ketubot 103b has been presented previously in this chapter under the heading "The Rabbi as Holy Man" because of its concern with omens and the world of superstition. The reader is referred to page 33. Here, R. Hiyya entered to find the dying Rabi weeping, he admonished him for assuming an improper countenance. In addition, he listed a number of other good and bad omens which affect the dying person. While it is not clear that this offered Rabi any consolation (he continued to weep and said: "I weep on account of Torah and Mitzvot" from which I will soon be separated), it is certain that both undoubtedly accepted the inevitability of Rabi's death. The sense of his words and concern of the speaker was to warn Rabi about the feared effects of dying under an improper omen so that Rabi might expire under the best circumstances.

MARITAL RELATIONS: SUSPECT VIRGINITY

As has been discussed previously, the rabbis were often called upon to judge the validity of a husband's claim of his wife's doubtful virginity. Should the husband be proved correct, the marriage could be annulled as the terms of the *Ketuba* would be invalid. If there was a question of impropriety on the part of the husband he could also be punished as a result of the claim that he has made against his wife. Note here that the rebuke extends even to the point of a beating.

Ketubot 10a

> There was one who came before Raban Gamliel, he said: "I have found an open opening!" Rav Nahman said: "Lash him with dried palm branches! Mabrakhta has beaten him!"[30]

The text goes on to clarify that R. Nahman orders a lashing only for one who has not been married before. In any case, the testimony of either man is believed. The lashing is given to a bachelor because in order for him to know the specifics of intercourse with a non-virgin he must have had experience, thus he is lashed. The reproach in this case is extreme, in spite of the fact that the husband is believed, he and others after him now know that they are risking a lashing if they question the virginity of their wives without having legitimate previous experience, for then they too

[30] Soncino, Ketubot 10a, p. 48 paraphrases Rashi: Mabrakhta was a place known for its harlots.

could be suspected of frequenting prostitutes. Needless to say this technique of rebuke has as one of its prime goals deterrence. The goal of this form of intervention is two-fold: on one level, the husband is punished for frequenting prostitutes, on the second level this punishment serves as a warning to unmarried husbands on their conduct before marriage. The result of such action by the rabbis could possibly be a reduction of claims of doubtful virginity brought against women and thus, the sparing of such contention on the wedding night.

Kiddushin 29b

Here, a rabbi's praise of his colleague is diminished by another rabbi who refuses to address the individual until he is married.

> Rav Hisda praised Rav Hamnuna to Rav Huna, (saying that) he was a great man. He said to him (R. Huna to R. Hisda): "When he comes to you, bring him to me." When he came, he (R. Huna) saw that he was not wearing a Sudra (a married man's garment). He said to him: "What is the reason that you are not wearing a Sudra?" He said: "I am not married." He (R. Huna) turned his face from him and said: "See to it that you do not see my face until you are married."

R. Huna based his opinion of R. Hamnuna on his own principle: *The one who is 20 years old and not married: all his days are in sin.*[31] Thus, it is his obligation to rebuke R. Hamnuna in order to turn him from the path of sin. If he

[31] *Kiddushin* 29b.

remained silent, he would be allowing the other to remain sinful before God and be negligent in his own duty to rebuke a transgression in another. Yet, at the same time, the severity of the statement cannot be missed. It is one of clear disapproval and challenges R. Hisda's statement about R. Hamnuna. R. Hamnuna may yet be a great man with regard to Torah, but it is unacceptable that he is unmarried.

From the above examples of rabbinic rebuke, it becomes clear that rebuke as a method of achieving change was accepted. While the scope of this paper is limited to dialogue, the discussion of reproach and rebuke in Arachin 16b is worthy of notice. Its exposition of rebuke as a Biblical imperative clearly makes the correction of sinful behavior of paramount importance to the rabbis. The limits on what can be said are few as long as it has potential to achieve the desired end. The rabbi who had direct access to the Torah of God and was well aware of the commandments could not fail to identify inappropriate behavior in another and seek its change. By the same token, the rabbi himself was not beyond reproach and when one rabbi observed the moral failings of another it was his obligation to admonish that person.

Kiddushin 31b

In this situation, a son comes to a rabbi for guidance about how he is to behave towards his parents. While it is clear that the rabbi expects the son to accept the instruction, it comes with no admonishments or condemnatory statements. Thus it has been termed: **advice.**

> R. Jacob ben Abbahu asked Abaye: "I, for instance, for whom my father pours out a cup (of wine) and my mother mixes it (with water) when I return from school, what am I to do?" (accept the act or not) "Accept it from your mother" he replied, "but not your father; for since he is a scholar, he may be affronted."

In this case the listener considers the subtle implications of seemingly benign behavior. This necessitates an understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal relations: would it be offensive for a scholar to pour wine for his son? The advice is offered with the consideration that it would indeed. Yet, at the same time, the father willingly pours the wine, so the son's refusal would be made as a sign of deference to the father's superior status. However, from the mother who is apparently accustomed to serving her son, the rabbi sees no problem.

NON-COERCIVE VERBAL INTERVENTION

Techniques in this category utilize modes of intervention which may be characterized as non-coercive. Whereas in the previous section, intervention often consisted of altering the situation so that the appropriate behavior could be

derived, or utilizing hostile language which might achieve the results, in this section, the language and the desired effects are more subtle. The speaker does not assume a confrontational manner when speaking and often the language is presented so as to be supportive or compassionate rather than explicitly seeking behavioral change.

Encouragement and Support

In the situations that fall under this category, the visitor seeks to soothe the grieved or sick individual through various means of encouragement. The language is such that it portrays the individual in a more positive light then he might otherwise see himself given the severity of the situation. In the second chapter of this paper, dialogues which shed light on theological principles of the rabbis were discussed. While many of these techniques establish the rabbinic world view, they also fall under the category of encouragement and support. By affirming theological principles the visitor seeks to comfort the person and enable him to find rest from his or her agitated state. A confirmation of one's place in the *olam haba* may serve as consolation, as R. Akiva did for R. Eliezer in Sanhedrin 101a (on page 15), or to flatter the bereaved individual by assuring him of his own greatness as was done in Ketubot 8b (page 10). The words of the visitor serve to recast or reinterpret the situation in such a way as to stress the

positive aspects and the prognosis for hope at the time when the individual is most unable to be optimistic.

Following are a series of instances which have not been seen previously and illustrate this point rather lucidly.

ILLNESS

Berakhot 5b

> Rabi Elazar was ill, Rabi Yohanan came before him. He saw that he was lying in a dark room, he revealed his arm and light fell forth.[32] He saw that Rabi Elazar was crying. He said to him: "Why are you crying? Is it because of Torah that you did not expound? Surely we have learned: 'One may have done much and another little (in exposition of Torah) as long as his heart is directed toward the heavens.' Is it because of food? Not every man can enjoy two tables.[33] Is it because of (the lack of) children? This is the bone of my tenth son." He said to him: "On account of this beauty[34] which will rot in the ground I cry." He said to him: "For that you surely have reason to weep." And the two of them cried. In the meantime he said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He said: "Neither them nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him.

It is clear that R. Elazar was in a particularly depressed state when R. Yohanan came before him. R. Yohanan's at-

[32] R. Yohanan was supposed to be so beautiful that light radiated from his body. (Soncino, Berachot 5b, p. 21, note 6).

[33] Soncino, Berachot 5b, p. 21: This world and the world to come. Some also interpret this to mean that there is so much food that it overflows one table and goes to the next.

[34] His own beauty or that of R. Yohanan, the text is not clear.

tempts to discover what might be troubling his colleague by suggesting some possible causes. R. Yohanan insinuates that R. Elazar might be harboring regrets, as he faces his potential mortality, of things that he might not have achieved in his life. The first, relates to R. Elazar's performance as a rabbi. If his life goal was indeed the exposition of Torah and he now sits potentially near death, then it is highly possible that he regrets teaching that he did not accomplish. A very reasonable and insightful hypothesis for one who is dedicated to scholarship, yet, this does not seem to be the cause. Then R. Yohanan guesses that it might be because of lack of sustenance; perhaps R. Elazar has lost his income, perhaps he is simply hungry. The consolation assures R. Elazar that his resources are plentiful, or alternatively that he may enjoy this world and the world to come. Issues which may well concern a dying man. Finally, he asks about R. Elazar's lack of progeny. His consolation is one of empathy--I, too, have lost my child. Yet, none of these are the actual reason for R. Elazar's weeping, when he tells R. Yohanan the cause, R. Yohanan weeps as well for his own mortality. The two men weep together as they confront the reality of human existence and the inevitability of death. R. Elazar's experience is all the more powerful because he sits on his own death bed.

The words of R. Yohanan represent an attempt by a rabbi to offer consolation through support and compassion. He

consoles R. Elazar by attempting to provide a rational evaluation of his state in the face of R. Elazar's misery. The healing finally consists of the rabbi functioning in his capacity as a Holy Man as he offers healing to the other through his magical touch. This action serves to identify this passage as one which also has relevance to the discussion of the rabbi as Holy man on page 27.

Sanhedrin 68a[33]

Another method of providing consolation to a sick rabbi is shown in the following passage from Sanhedrin 68a. Here the visitors do not ostensibly mention R. Eliezer's condition, rather they state that their purpose in coming is to study Torah. R. Eliezer expresses his displeasure at their delay in coming to visit him.

> When the sages saw that his knowledge remained with him, they entered and sat before him at a distance of four *amot*.[34] He said to them: "Why have you come?" They said to him: "We came to learn Torah." He said: "Why did you not come before now?" They said: "We did not have the opportunity." He said to them: "I will be surprised if they will die on their own accord." R. Akiba said to him: "Mine, what will it be?" He said: "Yours will be more harsh than theirs." He (R. Eliezer) moved his two arms and placed them on his heart and said: "Oy to you my two hands, you are like two books of the Torah that are wrapped up, much Torah have I learned, and much Torah have I taught; much Torah have I learned and I have not

[33] The passage directly preceding this and related to it was discussed on page 22.

[34] Perhaps because he was under a ban. See Baba Metzia 59b.

> gleaned from my masters even as a dog that laps at the sea; much Torah have I taught and my students have not gleaned from me other than like from paint in a tube....."

R. Eliezer then goes on to tell them of his magical ability to plant and collect cucumbers and his expertise concerning the rituals associated with leprosy. The visitors then ask him about some obscure halachic rulings and discuss the nature of the performance of magic.

It is clear that R. Eliezer is enraged by his disciples' and colleagues' failure to come and visit him sooner. In his anger he foretells of their unnatural deaths and R. Akiba is told that his will be even more violent. He then laments some of the frustrations in his own life. He and his disciples have learned so little of what there is in the vast repository of Torah. And even with his "limited" (which is really vast) knowledge, his disciples have often failed to ask him questions which would cause him to draw from his expertise. On their part, the visitors seem nonplused by his prophecy of doom and go on to ask him about some halachic finer points.

In what is unquestionably a complicated and involved text, one aspect of the intervention is clear. The visiting rabbis' behavior while spending time with their sick colleague does not emphasize his illness. They do not provide him with eschatalogical visions of his future, they do not console him with promises of the afterlife, nor do they

attempt to find an explanation for this sickness, rather they behave in much the same way that they might were R. Eliezer well and receiving them for the purposes of legal instruction. They do not even discuss the ban which may have been imposed upon him. It is impossible to say what the reason for this behavior might be, however, R. Eliezer's name appears quite frequently as one who is ill, implying that his condition might have been chronic. It is conceivable that the rabbis discovered that the most appropriate method for giving him solace was to behave as if conditions were normal and avoid dwelling on his infirmity. Thereby offering him encouragement and support by emphasizing the healthy aspects of his existence: his knowledge, his sharp mind, and his magical abilities. Additionally, they show respect and veneration for their master by studying with him in spite of the fact that he had been placed under a ban.

ILLNESS

Sanhedrin 101a-b

The rabbis also attempt to flatter the sick R. Eliezer by attributing a glorious existence to him in the world to come.

> Our rabbis taught: When Rabi Eliezer was sick, four elders went to visit him: Rabi Tarfon, Rabi Y'hoshua, Rabi Elazar ben Azariya and Rabi Akiba. Rabi Tarfon began and said: "You are better for Israel than a drop of the rains, because a drop of the rains is for this world, and Rabi is for this world and the world to come." Rabi Y'hoshua began and said: "You are better for Israel than the

> sun's orb, because the orb of the sun is for this world and Rabi is for this world and the world to come." Rabi Elazar ben Azariya began and said: "You are better for Israel than a mother or a father, because a mother and father are for this world, and Rabi is for this world and the world to come." Rabi Akiba began and said: "Suffering is beloved..."

That there is an *olam haba*, the rabbis take for granted, the individual's place in it is dependent upon his or her actions. The rabbis assure R. Eliezer that he will indeed inherit the world to come and his value is greater than any of the foundations of this world for he is valuable in both worlds. Just as the rains and sun cause plants to grow, and just as parents nurture children, so has R. Eliezer nurtured his disciples in this world and enabled them to reach the world to come, where R. Eliezer will also have a glorious existence. The remarks of R. Akiba are in contrast to those offered by the others and clearly have another purpose. These have been discussed in chapter II on page 17.

BEREAVEMENT

Four rabbis come to offer consolation to R. Yishmael for the loss of his sons. Some customs which the rabbis observed when visiting a mourner are exemplified here.

Moed Katan 28b

> Our rabbis taught: When Rabi Yishmael's sons died, four elders went in to comfort him: R. Tarfon, R. Yossi Ha-Galili, R. Elazar ben Azariya, and R. Akiba. R. Tarfon said to them: "Know that he is a great sage and an expert in homiletics, let not one of you interrupt the words of his companion." R. Akiba said: "I am the last."

Rabi Yishmael opened and said: "His sins were many, his bereavements were in close succession, he troubled his master (only) a first time and a second."[37]

R. Tarfon began and said: *"And your brothers all of the House of Israel mourn the conflagration*[38] are not these words *a fortiori*? Why if this can be said about Nadav and Abihu who did not even do one mitzvah; (as) the text says: *And the sons of Aaron presented the blood to him*, how much the more so is due to the sons of R. Yishmael?"

And R. Yossi Ha-Galili began and said: *"And all Israel made lamentation for him and buried him*[39] are not these words *a fortiori*? Why if it can be said about Aviya, Jereboam's son who did not even do one good thing about whom it is written: *for in him there is found some good thing*[40] how much the more so can good words be said about the sons of R. Yishmael!" ...(the text digresses to discuss what the "good word" of Aviya was)...

R. Elazar ben Azariya began and said: *"You will die in peace, and with the conflagrations of your fathers, the first kings which were before you, so will they burn you,*[41] are not these words *a fortiori*? Why if it can be said about Zedekiah, king of Judah who only did one commandment in that he raised Jeremiah from the mire, how much the more so can be said about the sons of R. Yishmael!"

R. Akiba then began and said: *"On that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning for Hadrimon in the valley of Megido.*[42] [Rab Yosef said: 'If it had not been for the *Targum* of this text, I would not have known what it said there: in that time, there will be great mourning in Jerusalem like the mourning of Ahav the son of Omri, who Hadrimon the son of

[37] The usage of the third person by R. Yishmael is a way of referring to himself euphemistically. So says Soncino, Moed Katan 28b, p. 187, note 6.

[38] Leviticus 10:6.

[39] I Leviticus 9:9.

[40] I Kings 14:13.

[41] Jeremiah 34:5.

[42] Zechariah 12:11.

> Tadrimon had slain and as the mourning over Ashya the son of Amon who was killed by Pharah Hagira in the valley of Megido.'] Are not these words *a fortiori*? Why if it can be said about Ahab the king of Israel who only did one thing good as it is written *the king was held up in his chariot against Aram*,[43] how much the more so can it be said about the sons of R. Yishmael."

First, it is important to note the instructions of R. Tarfon. The warning that he makes to the others not to interrupt one another is indicative of the way they were to behave before a sage, as well as before a mourner. This was not the time for rabbinic give and take, it was the time for consolation of this pained individual, thus the caution. An additional custom is given light here. Soncino[44] notes that it was customary to allow the mourner to address the visitors before they began to speak. Thus, the visitors do not speak until R. Yishmael acknowledges their presence.

By praising his sons over some of the lessor heroes of the Bible, the rabbis hope to offer R. Yishmael consolation. The rabbis do not say that R. Yishmael's sons may be mourned over the likes of Abraham, or Moses, rather they are compared to more average types. In this consolation, then, there is an attempt at veracity--the praise is not so superlative as to be unbelievable, rather it is realistic and, it appears, honest. The use of the *a fortiori* argumentation outside of legal discourse is notable in that it utilizes a

[43] I Kings 22:35.

[44] Soncino, Moed Katan, page 187.

hermeneutic principle to establish the praises for R. Yishmael's sons. The rabbis utilize their own idioms and logic when conversing with one another. An approach which could perhaps offer R. Yishmael more comfort by its familiarity. Finally, the rabbis do not try to exceed one another in praise, rather they all utilize relatively similar notions of greatness to extol the praise of R. Yishmael's sons.

Deference by Visitor Toward the Troubled Individual

In a manner that bears some resemblance to encouragement and support but is behaviorally distinct enough to warrant a different heading, the visitor displays deference towards the sick or bereaved individual as a means of consolation. In most cases the deference is, as expected, that of a disciple towards a sage, however there are some notable exceptions.

BEREAVEMENT

Baba Metzia 84a

R. Yohanan looses his colleague Resh Lakish. The two were accustomed to sparring with one another over various legal issues. One of their arguments was particularly fierce and R. Yohanan cursed him in exasperation and then refused to rescind the oath. As a result, Resh Lakish died and R. Yohanan was plunged into deep grief. His colleague Rabbi Eleazar comes to console him.

> The soul of R. Shimon ben Lakish rested, R. Yohanan was greatly distressed. The rabbis said: "Who will go to calm his mind? Let Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat go, who challenges him with decisions with regard to the law." He went and sat before him and to every matter which R. Yohanan said he said to him: "There's a baraita that supports you." He said: "Lakisha the son of Lakisha you are not! For he, when I would say a matter, would challenge me with 24 objections, and I would give 24 answers, which brought a broader decision; and you say 'there's a baraita which supports you.' Do I not know myself that what I say is right!?" Thus, he went and tore his garments and thus cried and said: "Where are you the son of Lakisha!? Where are you the son of Lakisha!?" Thus he cried until his mind was turned.

In this case, R. Eleazar attempts to ease R. Yohanan's grief by deferring to his knowledge of the law. His deference takes the form of complete agreement and support. This is all the more surprising given the rabbis' description of him in the same passage: he is known for his ability to challenge others with regard to law. Thus, when he comes before R. Yohanan and attempts this form of pacification he fails utterly. In fact, so much so that R. Yohanan is eventually driven insane by his grief. R. Yohanan is not eased by patronizing from a colleague who's deference R. Yohanan sees as diminishing his ability to establish more solid laws.

ILLNESS

Berakhot 28b

Again, R. Eliezer is sick, his disciples come to visit him and appeal to his wisdom and sagacity. A similar situation arises for Rabi Yohanan ben Zakkai, whose students come

to visit him and confirm their admiration of their master. The two stories are adjacent to one another and will both be presented here.

> Our Rabbis taught: When Rabi Eliezer was sick, his students entered to visit him. They said to him: "Our teacher, teach us the ways of life that we may merit through them life in the world to come." He said to them: "Be cautious concerning the honor of your friends, restrain you children from rote memorization, sit them between the knees of sages, and when you pray, know before whom you stand. By this, you will merit life in the world to come."
>
> And when Rabi Yohanan ben Zakkai was ill, his students entered to visit him. When he saw them he started to cry. His students said to him: "Light of Israel, Pillar of the Right-hand, Powerful Hammer, why are you crying?" He said to them: "If they were taking me before a king of flesh and blood who is here today and tomorrow in the grave, who was angry at me--his anger is not eternal anger. If he were to imprison me, his imprisonment is not eternal imprisonment. If he were to put me to death, his death sentence is not eternal death. And I am able to cause him to compromise with words, and bribe him with money. Even for this I would have cried. But now, they are bringing me before the King of Kings, the Holy One praised be He, He that lives and is established for ever and ever. If He is angry at me, His anger is eternal anger. And if He imprisons me, His imprisonment is eternal imprisonment. And if He puts me to death His death sentence is eternal. And I am unable to cause Him to compromise with words, nor bribe Him with money. And that's not all, but that I have before me two paths, one of *Gan Eden*, and one of *Gehinom* and I have no idea on which they will take me--and should I not cry?" They said to him: "Our teacher, Bless us!" He said to them: "May it be that the fear of heaven is upon you like the fear of flesh and blood." They said to him: "That's all!" He said to them: "O would that be! Know that when a man does a sin he says: 'O that a man won't see me!'"

In both cases, the response of the disciples to the ailing master is similar. Even as the individual lies in a dejected and depressed state, the disciples request that he perform an act which is based upon his status as a master. Yet at the same time, both blessings reflect the state of the ill individual. In both cases, the sick rabbis are given an opportunity to reflect upon their states and to apply that to the words they give to their disciples. Interestingly, both rabbis offer similar advice: "know before whom you stand" and "may the fear of heaven be upon you" (which of course may have something to do with the contiguity of the stories). As both rabbis contemplate their own mortality they focus on thoughts of God and the role of God in the human world.

PERSONAL DISTRESS

The rabbis recognized that it was possible to suffer serious emotional distress which warranted comfort in the same way as physical debilities. In the following case, R. Akiba comforts R. Y'hoshua by pointing out that his error in declaring the new month is not as severe as R. Y'hoshua thinks.

Rosh Hashanah 25a

> R. Akiba went and found Rabi Y'hoshua when he was distressed. He said to him: "Rabi, why are you distressed?" He said to him: "Rabi Akiba, it would be more fitting to him that he falls on his bed (sick) 12 months than that this decree should be

> decreed upon him."[45] He said to him: "Rabi, permit me to say something before you which you have taught me." He said to him: "Speak." He said to him: "Behold when it says *'atem*, *'atem*, *'atem* three times, *'atem* even if [you] are accidentally mistaken, *'atem* even if err purposefully, *'atem* even if you are misled by this language (of witnesses)." He said to him: "Akiba, you have comforted me, you have comforted me."

Akiba does not resort to his own hermeneutic, nor does he accuse R. Y'hoshua of error, rather he recalls the master's own teaching. By reflecting R. Y'hoshua's words back to him and showing him that he need not take the personal blame for setting an improper time for the new month because God has placed that job in human hands, Akiba comforts Y'hoshua.

Euphemistic Language and Metaphor

Another technique that represents perhaps the most passive means of intervention is the use of euphemistic language. Here, the person speaking to the distressed individual does not even use language which directly states the facts of what has happened. Euphemisms are used so as not to give direct mention to a affliction and not accidentally curse either the speaker or the listener. Alternatively, the rabbi may use euphemism as metaphor to clarify his point. Rather than utilize explicit language, which may not make the point as well, the rabbi illustrates with a parable to which the real-life situation may be likened.

[45] R. Y'hoshua is euphemistically referring to himself.

BEREAVEMENT

Moed Katan 20a-b

> It is taught about Rav, the son of Rabi Hiyya's brother, who was also the son of Rabi Hiyya's sister. When he came up there (the land of Israel), he (Hiyya) said to him: "Is (my) father still alive?" He (Rav) said to him: "(My) Mother is alive." He said to him: "Is (my) mother alive?" He said to him: "(My) Father is alive." He (Hiyya) said to his attendant: "Take off my shoes and walk after me (with) my things to the bath house."

Rav wishes to avoid the direct response to Rabi Hiyya's questions about his parents who have both died so he replies as if the questions asked by Rabi Hiyya were about the former's own parents. His obtuse response to Rabi Hiyya's questions is apparently enough to inform the latter of the state of his parents, for with no more information than the words of Rav, Hiyya begins the formal mourning rituals.

CONSOLING THE DYING

Moed Katan 28a

In the next two situations a rabbi who is dying is visited by his colleagues. The entire discussion about the process of dying is done euphemistically by both the visitor and the dying person. Yet, in spite of the circumlocutions, the rabbis are able to communicate with one another. The comments in parentheses represent this author's understandings of the euphemisms.

> Rav S'orim the brother of Rava was sitting before Rava, he saw that he was dying. He said to him: "Tell him (the Angel of Death), Sir, not to tor-

> ment me!" He said to him: "Sir, are not you his (the Angel of Death, because you are so close to death) best friend?" He said to him: "Since he has been sent away, my guardian angel does not care for me." He said to him: "Reveal yourself to me (after you have died, in a dream)." He revealed himself to him and he (Rav S'orim) said to him: "Did he, Sir, cause you pain?" He said to him: "Like the puncture of a blood letting instrument."
>
> Rava was seated before Rav Nahman, he saw that he was dying. He said to him: "Tell him (the Angel of Death), Sir, not to torment me!" He said to him: "Is not Sir an important man?" He said to him: "Who is important, and who is respected, and who is distinguished?" (at the time of death) He said to him: "Show yourself to me, Sir (in a dream after you have died)." He showed himself to him. He said to him: "Did he, Sir, cause you pain?" He said to him: "Like removing a piece of hair from milk. And if the Holy One Blessed be He said to me: 'Go to this world as you were,' I would not wish it, because of the fear of death."

The dying rabbi pleads with the visitor to intercede with the angel of death on his behalf. This is at once an expression of dying man's fear of death as well as pain that he may be suffering during his illness. The other responds in a way that implies his own limitations with regard to this request. As if to say, if you cannot relieve your distress given your propinquity to death, neither can I. Rav Nahman waxes philosophical in response to his own and Rava's inability to intercede with the process of dying and points out that in death, all people are equal. In both cases, the visitor's consolation for the dying man is as much to simply offering him comfort by his presence as to affirm the inevitability of the fate of the dying. Although

both may wish that the life will last longer, the truth is that nothing can be done, and both must acknowledge it. Then the visitor expresses his own concerns about dying by asking the dying person to appear to him in a dream and describe the process of death. (While this may strike the modern as an impossibility, to the rabbis, such a request was far from unusual.) Both respond that the moment of slippage into death is hardly painful at all, yet R. Nahman reports that the major problem with dying is the fear of death itself thereby expressing an eternal certainty.

DOUBTFUL VIRGINITY

Ketubot 10a

The power of a parable to clarify a point was known to the rabbis. In this case, there is not an attempt to moderate the news or avoid the situation as above, rather, the speaker wishes to clarify the issue and thus uses a metaphor to which the issue may be likened.

> Someone came before Raban Gamliel and said to him: "I found an open opening." He said to him: "Perhaps you inclined (so that you failed to penetrate properly)? I will illustrate it to you with a metaphor to which this matter resembles: To a man who was walking at the deepest time of night, he inclines (opens the door at an odd angle) and finds the door open, if he does not incline, he finds it locked." There are some who say that he said to him: "Perhaps you inclined intentionally, and tore loose the door and the bar?" I will illustrate it to you with a metaphor to which this matter resembles: To a man who was walking at the deepest time of the night, he inclined intentionally (breaking open the door) and finds the door

> open, he does not incline, and he finds the door locked."

Through the use of language and a metaphoric example, Raban Gamliel suggests to the man what may have happened. The absolute darkness is a metaphor for the situation of the couple's first intercourse, where it is clearly dark and there is probably more fumbling than graceful movement and which could probably lead to such an error on the part of the husband as one might do in absolute darkness. In the first instance, he suggests that the man attempted intercourse with his wife in a way that caused him to not feel the hymen or perhaps to miss the vagina altogether. In the second instance he suggests that the man penetrated with such force that he tore the hymen so that he did not feel it. In either case, Raban Gamliel places the burden of guilt on the husband and not the wife. The metaphor is used to make the case clearly to the husband concerning what has happened.

Realism or Pessimism in the Words of the Visitor

In the following cases, the visitor offers an interpretation of the situation which often gives it a more negative appraisal than that of the individual.

MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

Rosh Hashanah 17a

The visitor observes the grave state of the sick rabbi and mistakenly forecasts his immanent death.

> Rav Huna the son of Rav Y'hoshua was ill, Rav Papa entered to ask about him. He saw that he was very ill. He said to them: "Seize his possessions for the end." He recovered, and Rav Papa was ashamed to see him. He said to him: "What did you see? (in your illness)" He said to him: "It was indeed like this, (I was almost dead, as you thought) and The Holy One Blessed be He said to them: "Since he does not stand by his demands you will not stand by yours, as it is written: *forgiving iniquity and passing by transgression...*

Rav Papa sees Rav Huna's state and immediately assumes that the other is on the brink of death. So much so that he commands others to prepare the burial shrouds and other items which accompany the dead person upon his burial. He is found to be wrong and is ashamed, but Rav Huna tells him that in fact he was near death and received a reprieve from God.

Moed Katan 28a

> R. Yosef, when he was 60, made a festival day for the rabbis. He said: "I am excluded from *karet*."[44] Abaye said to him: "Granted, that you, Sir, are excluded from the years of *karet*, but as to the days of *karet*, who is excluded Sir?" He said to him: "Hold on to the half that is in your hand!"

[44] Divine punishment through premature of sudden death. Jastrow, p. 674.

Apparently, in the middle of R. Yosef's party, Abaye reminds him that there is not as much to celebrate as he might think--for he is still liable to receive Divine retribution. Abaye's message is that R. Yosef should not be unduly optimistic. Nevertheless, R. Yosef finds joy in his attainment of old age. Interestingly, neither individual in these two examples seems to distressed by the comments of the other. R. Papa was embarrassed for his part in declaring the falsely immanent death of R. Y'hoshua, but Y'hoshua is not particularly phased. Neither does it seem is R. Yosef when Abaye tells him that he is still susceptible to Divine wrath.

THE BIRTH OF A DAUGHTER

Baba Batra 16b

> Rabi Shimon the son of Rabi had a daughter born to him and he was very discouraged. His father said to him: "Increase has come to the world!" Bar Kappra said to him: "Your father has given you empty consolation, as it has been taught: the world could not be without males or females, but happiness to the one whose children are men and woe to him whose children are females. The world cannot be with out spice-sellers or tanners, happy is the one whose occupation is that of a spice-seller, and woe to him whose occupation is that of a tanner."

In addition to presenting a particularly dim view of female offspring, it is clear that Bar Kappra does not see the slightest reason to provide Rabi Shimon with any consolation

for his dejection over the birth of his girl. In fact, he feeds the fire by affirming his discouragement.

The material in this chapter characterizing rabbinic techniques of intervention illustrates that the rabbis were extremely resourceful in dealing with each other and their constituency. It becomes clear that their chief concern was not always the emotional well being of the distressed individual. Often the rabbis would confront the distressed person with their view of the harsh reality of the condition. Yet, this mode of interaction, while appearing harsh to the modern reader was nonetheless a reflection of what were probably accepted modes of interaction. It is possible that the listener might have even expected nothing less. The chief motivation for much rabbinic intervention was to set the individual on the correct path, whether that person was behaving wrongly at the moment of death, or making incorrect assumptions about an event in his or her life. This impetus grew out of the view of God and God's role in the life of the individual. Inasmuch as God was present as a factor determining the course of every person's life, it was imperative that each person strive to live their lives in accordance with God's wishes. When the person began to act as if he or she had lost touch with the desires of God, it was the rabbi's role to set them on the correct path.

CHAPTER IV

The task remains to determine the specific behaviors that are used by the rabbis once they are removed from the situational determinants. In other words, what techniques does the rabbi use across all situations which can be identified as peculiar to his mode of intervention. Once this is clarified, techniques of the modern rabbinic counselor may be discussed for the purposes of comparison.

ANCIENT RABBINIC INTERVENTIONS

VISITATION AND THE NATURE OF SOCIETY

First and foremost, it would be impossible to provide an adequate understanding of rabbinic behavior without stressing the communal aspect of their society. As has been discussed, the rabbi functioned in a society where he was closely affiliated with his academies and each academy's members were in constant contact during study, prayer and the derivation of *Halakhah*. The Talmud gives clear evidence that rabbis in different communities were in communication with one another either directly or through intermediaries. The structure of rabbinic society and its relationship to the Bible and God were uniform across the various Jewish communities and heretics were excluded. By virtue of the communal nature of rabbinic society one of the most basic aspects of rabbinic intervention was the simple act of

visiting another in times of distress. The concept of *bikkur holim* was derived from the Torah and applied by the rabbis. The rabbis often found themselves in one-another's presence offering words of consolation, advice, support or any other approach that the situation warranted. The nature of the community and the role that it played in each individual member's life can only be inferred from the writings that have been left behind. But, if these manuscripts are any indication, community and the role that one individual could assume for another in terms of guidance and support were of primary importance to the rabbis.

AFFIRMATION OF GOD'S WILL

As was stated, the Talmud gives evidence to a particularly uniform world view. The very nature of the process of establishing and perpetuating law through the particular discourse assured that uniformity was maintained. The rabbis' view of the world, its order and the role that God assumed in establishing and maintaining this structure formed the basis for their approach to the life and its problems. Thus, in situations where an individual was distressed for a particular reason, the cause of that distress could be traced directly to God. It became the role of the visitor to interpret the reason and rationale for the particular affliction. If it was possible to correct one's ways, it was the task of the rabbi to cause the individual

to change his conduct in order to correct the inequity and alleviate the symptoms of Divine justice. That behavioral change could be secured in any way that would achieve results.

An example of this may be found in Sanhedrin 101a-b on page 17. R. Akiba reminded R. Eliezer of the role of illness as a punishment for sin. He even accused R. Eliezer of a transgression--a particularly grave accusation for a disciple to make towards his master. In fact, R. Eliezer himself had taught that no one is free from sin, even a rabbi; yet, at the time of his illness, he had lost sight of this principle.

Another prominent aspect of the rabbinic view of the world was the belief in the world to come--the *olam haba*. In times of serious illness the distressed individual could be consoled with the knowledge that he was guaranteed a place in the world to come. In the case mentioned above, R. Akiba also reminds R. Eliezer that he is now guaranteed a place in the world to come as a result of his sufferings. Sufferings and good deeds in this world guaranteed a place in the world to come.

This concept was also affirmed for those who had suffered a loss. They could be consoled in knowing that their loved one had found a place in the world to come. Such was the order of the world.

THE ENFORCEMENT OF HALAKHAH

For the rabbi, proper human conduct was derived from the Torah. He was the chief interpreter of this system and as such represented the human embodiment of God's justice system. From this arose a two-fold role of administration of justice and assurance that the community would adhere to the law. At times of stress it was possible that the distressed people would fall short in their observance of Jewish law and practice. Thus, the rabbi often found it necessary to remind the community of their proper obligation to uphold the *Halakhah* even at times of severe stress.

In marital situations, the rabbi was frequently called upon to play the role of judge and enforcer of law. When a husband vows to deny his wife sustenance, the rabbi found himself thrust in the middle of domestic quarrels by virtue of his position in the community. The challenge was to determine the most just way of resolving the issue while balancing the realities and the requirements of Divine law. It was this dialectic which led R. Shimon (Nedarim 66b, page 36) to refuse to fulfill the terms of the vow, and R. Yehudah to permit himself to be shamed in order to permit the wife to return to her husband. Cases of doubtful virginity also called upon the rabbi to fulfill this dual role. As judge, it was imperative to determine the truth of the husband's claim against his wife, as enforcer of law the rabbi was prepared to declare the marriage invalid if his research

found validity to the husband's claim. The rabbi was well aware of the Divine imperative for marriage, thus, he sought to examine all possibilities in order to preserve the union. He may have also been cognizant of the importance of the marital union to the integrity of the Jewish community as well as the wife's interests and well-being.

Sometimes, the issue did not have to be specifically *Halakhic* to warrant rabbinic intervention. If there was behavior which violated the accepted standards of behavior a rabbi could intervene to correct the situation. Such was the case of Baba Metzia 85a (page 34) where the son was ordained a rabbi in order to set him on the correct path.

WORDS OF SUPPORT AND CONSOLATION

The words that the rabbis offered to one another as consolation or guidance show that they were quite aware of the uses and power of language. Biblical texts were utilized skillfully and words were used poetically to convey a sense of concern or guidance to the individual in need.

It has been shown that words of encouragement and support were often a means of offering consolation to the distressed soul. By showering praise on an individual the rabbis sought to moderate the pain that he or she was experiencing. Excessive praise could also be offered for the deceased as a means of offering comfort to the bereaved.

In a related way, the visiting rabbi might exhibit deference towards the sick or otherwise distressed individual. Here, the visitor seeks to confirm the stature or leaning of the other and by that, offer him comfort. Thus a sick master is visited by his disciples who are fulfilling the commandment to visit the sick. While in his presence, they request a blessing, an action which confirms his role as their master, and asserts their capacity as those who stand to benefit from him.

The rabbis also recognized the power and usefulness of metaphor and parable as a means of clarifying issues to their constituency. By utilizing stories and examples which serve to illuminate the situation, they found that an additional level of meaning could be conveyed. Euphemism was another linguistic tool at the rabbis disposal which could convey meaning. Euphemisms might be used to soften the blow of upsetting news, as in the case of Moed Katan 20a-b (page 63), or to avoid the mention of something which may bring a bad omen, or curse to the speaker as in Moed Katan 28a (page 63).

PROVIDING A SOBERING PERSPECTIVE

Finally, the visiting rabbi might offer his interpretation of a situation in order to clarify the individual's perspective. The rabbis were rarely hesitant to confront a person with "reality" as it was observed by the speaker.

This perspective may or may not be in concert with that of the individual. Thus, in the presence of a sick individual, a rabbi may discuss the reality of death, and its imminence to the individual (page 67). Or confront an older individual with the realities of his age, even as he stands ready to celebrate its attainment (page 67). A visitor might also attempt to encourage the ailing individual by demonstrating that his situation is not as bad as the invalid might imagine. However, in the example found in Berakhot 5b (page 50), this approach is unsuccessful.

COMPASSION AND SYMPATHY

Often, when rabbis visited another who was quite ill, the visiting rabbis would cry along with the sick soul. They too experienced the pain of the individual. This type of behavior was found in Sanhedrin 101a (page 15), and Berakhot 5b (page 50).

HEALING THROUGH TOUCH

Finally, it has been shown that the rabbi functioned in the capacity of a holy man, able to heal another through touch. As one so intimately connected to God and God's law, the rabbi could call upon special powers bestowed by God to help his fellow human.

MODERN RABBINIC COUNSELING: Robert L. Katz

The above discussion characterizes the techniques utilized by the ancient rabbis when intervening in the life of another for a multitude of reasons. The modern counselor also has reason to intervene in the life of his or her constituency. However, for the modern, the license to intrude is not quite as broad as that of the ancients. S/he is limited by a plethora of constraints ranging from the nature of our liberal society to the laws of the land. Additionally, the role that one individual may play for another has changed drastically. The definition of privacy as it exists today was not a factor in the rabbis' world. By virtue of his role as the Divine spokesman, the ancient rabbi could attempt all kinds of interventions which could not even be considered by the modern rabbi. In spite of all this, there are some areas where the role of the modern rabbinic counselor interfaces with that of the ancient rabbi. The following is a brief overview of a counseling technique which represents a model of modern rabbinic intervention. It represents the method which this author finds to be most acceptable from a Jewish perspective given the literature which exists discussing pastoral and rabbinic counseling. Once this has been presented, it will be possible to provide a subjective analysis of the relationship of the ancient and modern approaches to intervention.

In his book, *Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition*,[47] Robert L. Katz discusses the approach of the rabbinic counselor as it has developed and continues to develop within the Jewish tradition. This discussion of rabbinic counseling is most relevant to the present study because of its emphasis upon Jewish values, traditions and terminology in the discussion of modern notions of rabbinic counseling.

EMPATHY: THE OVERRIDING CONCERN

For Katz, the chief force affecting the style and approach of the rabbinic counselor is empathy. Only by empathetically experiencing the state of the counselee can the rabbi hope to achieve effective counseling. If the counseling progresses correctly, the counselee will receive a message of understanding and caring from the counselor. In this way, he or she will be able to trust the counselor and feel that the counselor experiences genuine concern for him or her. It is clear that Katz has developed a modern notion of the role of the rabbi; the force of the specific nature of Divine commandment has been greatly reduced if not eliminated.

Katz describes empathy as "imaginative role-taking."[48] The process whereby the counselor places him or herself in

[47] Robert L. Katz, *Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

[48] *Ibid.*, P. 54.

the other's role imaginatively in order to more completely understand the counselee's perspective. Emotional detachment remains inasmuch as it is necessary for the counselor to remain more objective in order to provide effective counseling. However, as much as possible, the counselor should experience the state of the other.

THE ROLE OF THE RABBI

Katz establishes that the rabbi functions as a *moreh derekh*, a moral guide for his or her congregation. He specifically states that this is different from the role of a psychological counselor who functions as a facilitator for the individual who is being counseled. When a rabbi engages in rabbinic counseling, that individual works with the assumption that his congregants will utilize problem solving capabilities that will allow rational, intelligent discussion under the context of a supportive relationship. If a congregant cannot function under that capacity, it is possible that the needs of the congregant are beyond the function of the rabbi as counselor.[49]

In the role of *moreh derekh* the rabbis seek to be "mentors of values" and "defenders of social justice."[50] In that role, they utilize techniques which allow then to

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 84-85.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

convey their beliefs to their constituency. Thus rabbis preach, teach, and provide moral perspective at all times when it is appropriate. A rabbi is a "change agent"[31] that seeks to use his or her training to effect a change toward a particular moral perspective and behavior in the congregation. Within this context, the values of the religious identity which the rabbi represents are the path toward which the rabbi directs the congregation.

At the same time, the rabbi must be aware of when to provide this perspective and the manner of presentation. A particular approach may not be appropriate at a given time. Excessively moralistic language and behavior can become more of a liability than asset. There are times when it is apropos to admonish another, cajole or even condemn the behavior of another, yet the rabbi in a counseling situation must exercise restraint and sensitivity to that person's needs and perspectives.[32]

The rabbi, by virtue of the position and its associated characteristics comes to embody the particular message and values of Judaism. Yet, in addition to this, the rabbi should personify values of growth and change. S/he must maintain a particular perspective and conduct in his or her own life. Rabbis are not neutral secular counselors. Indi-

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.

viduals come to them because of what they represent for the individual and the community.

CONVEYING THE MESSAGE

The basic styles of counseling as presented by Katz are the so called "consequentialist" and the "principlist." The principlist is committed to a particular perspective based upon his or her understanding of Jewish values. This person is more concerned with the presentation of the values than the impact that they may have on the individual. It is clear that this is not Katz's preferred mode of counseling interaction. The consequentialist may hold the values with the same degree of fervor and conviction, but this person is prepared to explore various consequences with the client. Through this exploration the rabbi may determine how the counselee responds to the values and together they may reach agreement as to how the values may be applied in the person's life.

Katz points to the concept of "moral inquiry" that has been put forth by Don S. Browning as an example of the relationship that must exist between the counselor and the counselee. The rabbi may have a specific moral viewpoint, but he or she must permit the congregant to engage in the process whereby that person will arrive at conclusions on his or her own, under the guidance of the counselor. This is in contrast to the moralizing and virtual reproof that

might be the counselor's first inclination.[33] Katz goes so far as to say that if a rabbi insists upon playing the role of *dayyan* or judge, then he or she may limit the counseling session to five minutes, pronounce the judgement and dismiss the individual. Here the rabbi exerts the authority that might be afforded by some members of the congregation toward a clergy person. The danger of exerting such authority is that it may exacerbate many of the conflicts that the counselee has with parents or other authority figures which often naturally surface in the congregant-rabbi relationship. These conflicts include power struggles, resentment, guilt and passive helplessness in the face of a problem that is not worked through.

Particular styles will surface as the rabbi attempts to be a *moreh derekh*. First and of primary importance for Katz is the capacity to be empathic. Without this ability to experience the feelings of the other person a rabbi may not be an effective counselor.

Katz provides an example of how this might function in the hypothetical case of a board member who comes to the rabbi and tells him that he is involved in an adulterous relationship:

> What is appropriate for the rabbi [to do]? To listen impassively? To indicated his appreciation for the discomfort being experienced by the adulterer? To be a confessor? To point out the possible injustice being done to the man's mis-

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

> tress as well as to his wife and children, to say nothing of himself?[84]

The rabbi may respond in many ways depending upon what s/he sees as the goal of the session. S/he does not have to be passively tolerant and accepting. S/he could offer a quick judgment which would have the effect described above, this is clearly not desired. Alternatively, the rabbi may be firm about the moral violations of such behavior without stopping the flow of communication. Language and responses may be chosen so as not to cause negative or rejecting feelings from the man. S/he may work to extend the dialogue so as to be a catalyst for change in this man's life. At some point, the rabbi would want to make clear the position of Judaism and his or her own position so that the perspective of the rabbi has been articulated. From here, the rabbi and the congregant may discuss the alternatives that exist for the man so that he may find a solution within the teachings of Judaism. If after many sessions, the man refuses to change his ways, it might be the rabbi may desire to exert him/herself in the role of a parental substitute and provide harsher judgment and perhaps even some form of verbal "punishment." But for this, the rabbi must analyze the situation quite completely to be sure that all other recourse is impossible. For if this approach is ineffective, the dialogue may be terminated.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

THE RABBI IN THE COMMUNITY: Don S. Browning

Katz's perspective of the rabbinic counselor establishes a particular model of rabbinic intervention, which is clearly that of a liberal, modern thinker. In order to allow a certain degree of flexibility for both the congregants and the rabbis it is necessary to permit that same flexibility with regard to the imperatives of Judaism. Recognizing that the process of change takes time and necessitates patience and forbearance on the part of the rabbi and the counselee betrays a modern perspective of humanity and its emotional capacities. Yet, at the same time, the points that differentiate the rabbinic counselor from the secular psychotherapist clearly make the rabbinic mode of counseling unique and establish that rabbinic counseling functions under a specific value system and cultural milieu. Don S. Browning has discussed this in his book entitled *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care.*[33] Here he establishes the role of the community and those structures which compose the system as part of the framework for pastoral care in the Christian tradition. To a great extent this conception holds true for the modern rabbinic counselor.

For Browning, pastoral care extends well beyond the boundaries of a clinical/therapeutic situation. While this is indeed one component of the discipline, pastoral care

[33] Browning, Don S., *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.

seeks to confront the wide ranging needs of all individuals having contact with the church. Browning has stated that the primary goal of pastoral care is to provide members of the church community with structure, character, identity and a religio-cultural value system out of which to live. Secondarily, pastoral care is concerned with emotional-dynamic issues that might inhibit an individual from living appropriately within the church community.[56] A further elaboration by Browning points to the specific concerns of pastoral care and emphasizes the general communal concern of this discipline. Here he states that pastoral care seeks to first incorporate members of the community into the disciplines and group goals of the church.[57] This might be understood as a desire to create "good Christians." Secondly, pastoral care seeks to assist persons in handling issues and conflicts relating to "existential developmental and interpersonal social strains." This area is identified specifically as pastoral counseling.[58]

It is necessary to understand the place that the church community has within the context of the secular community. In this way, the pastoral caregiver may be aware of the incongruities which may develop between the goals and mores

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[58] *Ibid.*

of the church and those of society. The pastoral caregiver should always be aware that s/he is implementing the goals of the church, and not the larger society. Part of the challenge of pastoral care is to work to relieve the tensions that exist between the society at large and the community of the church.[39]

This tension exists in the individual encounters of pastoral counseling as well. The exercise of pastoral care necessitates a grounding in the practical religious ethics and moral theology of the church. It is not appropriate for a religious counselor to provide advice or treatment which is contrary to its broadest goals and teachings, even though it may be acceptable within the context of secular methodology.

In contrast to the secular psychotherapist, the pastoral therapist and care-giver utilizes the context of culture in his/her care of the individual. To Browning, culture represents the symbols, stories and myths that work to orient a group cognitively. Our culture gives us a sense of coherence, regularity and commonality. Religion is an integral part of culture and just as cultures are impacted by the modern society so too is religion.[40] The difference between the secular and pastoral counselor is that while it

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 72-74, p. 88-90.

may be helpful for the secular counselor to be aware of the particular cultural orientations of the client, the pastoral counselor actually embodies the cultural norms of his/her religious society.

This may be applied to the Judaic framework in an analogous way. The community is that of the synagogue, and the larger Jewish community, its beliefs and values, culture, history and identity. To a great extent, the rabbinic counselor does seek to incorporate the client into the Jewish community, for any behaviors which are beyond the accepted norms are subject to criticism by the counselor individually or in larger contexts. The rabbi seeks to effect change on those who do not seek individual care through the different media which are at his/her disposal, and in cases where the individual seeks private care, the rabbi is able to encourage change and development on a more dynamic level.

The task remains to determine the interface between the modern approach to rabbinic counseling as well as its correlation in the model of pastoral care as presented by Browning and the behavior of the ancient rabbis. There are many aspects which will bear a significant relationship to modern care and of course, there are many aspects which are quite disparate. The final section will pursue that interface and it will be shown that some aspects of ancient rabbinic

dialogue and modern rabbinic care will be strikingly similar.

RABBINIC COUNSELORS ANCIENT AND MODERN: SIMILARITIES

The modern rabbinic counselor is the recipient of a tradition of rabbinic dialogue which has been perpetuated for thousands of years. Even though the structure of society has changed a great deal over the course of those years, many aspects of the role that the rabbi plays for his or her congregants have remained quite similar. First, we will examine the similarities of the two roles as they have been presented in this paper. Once this has been achieved, the dissimilarities will be examined.

THE ROLE OF THE RABBI IN THE COMMUNITY

The role of the rabbi in the community, while changing drastically with the advent of modern liberal Judaism, has nonetheless retained some elements of similarity with the ancient role. The ancient sage was a person highly respected by the community because of his learning and relationship to God. So too is the modern rabbi respected by virtue of his or her Judaic knowledge and familiarity with things holy. As a result of this capacity the laity respond to the rabbi in a particular way and the counseling situation is affected. It must be acknowledged that the ancient

rabbi often had the jurisdiction of the ruling authorities on his side whereas the influence afforded the modern rabbi in enlightened society is for the most part elective. Given this difference, which cannot be underestimated, the rabbis of both eras could expect that their advice would be heeded proportionally to their level of authority. Thus, the ancient rabbi, with the power to enforce albeit at times limited, could expect that his proclamations carried a great deal of weight. The modern rabbi is restricted much more drastically, and can only hope for the power of persuasion and any leverage he or she might command by virtue of the factors listed above.

The rabbi in society, whether modern or ancient embodied a particular ideology, belief structure, and culture. The content of the characteristics vary from ancient to modern, but the situation is virtually the same. A rabbi by virtue of the position and status in the community represents ideals and values which may be held by the members of the community. That individual may or may not manifest those values in daily life, but nonetheless the perception of the laity remains. The rabbi's own perspective could be clarified as well through sermons and other media. When the constituency of the ancient rabbi came before him a certain world view could be assumed. This in spite of the fact that there was probably great variety in the folk religion prac-

ticed by the masses.[1] The effect existed as well in the case of the disciple-master relationship where the two had studied with one another and were quite aware of the more intricate details of each other's thought. In a similar way, despite the great variety of religious nuance within the modern rabbinate, the individual approaching the rabbi could assume a specific world view. The expectations of the congregant and the extent to which the rabbi fills those expectations, or does not, serve as an additional unique variable in the counseling relationship.

To a large extent the rabbis, both modern and ancient play a major role in affecting the nature of their respective communities. For the modern rabbi, the community is a microcosm of the larger secular world and his or her effect is diminished by factors in the secular world. For the ancient rabbi, the influences of the non-Jewish world were also strong as given witness by the influence of Greek and Roman culture on Judaic thought and development. In spite of this, each era's rabbi engaged in a continuing struggle to establish the values of their own ideology and beliefs. For example, in the ancient world, the view of the after life, messianism and the nature of resurrection were not so well established as the Talmud might lead one to assume.

[1] See: Dr. Martin A. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths: Introduction to a Typological Approach to Early Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, Based on the Second Annual Rabbi Joseph Klein Lecture, Assumption College, 14 October 1979.

The rift between the Sadducees and Pharisees had as one of its components the disagreement over the world to come. And the split with Christianity provides evidence of conflicting ideologies. Similarly, one need not look too far to find ideological conflicts among movements in the present.

These conflicts were and continue to be manifested in counseling by the nature and style of the words of consolation offered by the rabbis. So too, does the guidance and advice given to another reflect the ideology of the speaker. In each case, the desire of the rabbi is for perpetuation of his (or her in modern times) doctrine, thus he (or she) chooses words and approaches towards guidance and consolation which reflect the broader perspectives which the rabbi seeks to propagate.

Katz depicts the role of the modern rabbi as a *moreh derekh* who utilizes various techniques to achieve this role. This, to Katz is the epitome of the rabbinic function in the modern world. All interactions with the congregation provide the rabbi with the opportunity to 'function as a *moreh derekh*. Yet for the modern, the authority is quite limited. The ancient rabbi was also a *moreh derekh* of sorts. For him the values which he sought to propagate were those found directly in the Talmud and Torah as he discerned them. Those values were based in a system of living which influenced every aspect of the Jew's life. The ancient rabbi's power of persuasion came from his authority as well as his

daily interactions, sermons and other times of interface with those who could be receptive. His role as the spokesman for God also gave him tremendous influence. However, for the ancient rabbi, Katz's process would be a poor standard, because he could not afford the luxury of a slow process of change which the term "guidance" acknowledges. The individual faced dire consequences directly from God if he or she failed to heed the command. From that perspective alone, there is a great difference in the role and affect of the ancient rabbi as compared to the modern.

One additional area impinges greatly on the manner of counseling and its content and shows a striking resemblance across the two cultures. These are the "meta-issues" which are not within the realm of that which is observable or measurable by science or technology: the notions of the world to come and resurrection remain topics of relevance to today's counselor. While the modern may not be as ready to affirm these beliefs with the same fervor and they do not have the same centrality as was once the case with the ancient rabbis, it remains possible to discuss these issues in the counseling or consolation setting. For humanity, the questions of what happens to a person after death have not lost relevance as time has passed and the rabbi is often called upon to provide some words of explanation or interpretation.

STYLES OF INTERVENTION

The simple act of visitation is perhaps the aspect which bears the greatest similarity without qualifications between the two rabbinic counterparts. The process whereby one rabbi goes to visit a sick, ailing, or otherwise distressed individual has been the same throughout the history of the rabbinate. The words may vary, the message conveyed may be worlds apart, but the simple human presence remains the same.

The quality of the counselor which Katz labeled as the "principlist" has a great deal in common with the ancient rabbi. The principlist's concern with the primacy of values over considerations of the impact that those values may have on the individual is analogous to the ancient rabbi's role as the proponent of Jewish law. The ancient rabbi could acknowledge little divergence in adherence to established law. There appears to have been a limited cognizance of the dynamic nature of emotions as they are understood by the modern. Yet, as has been shown by this paper, within their world they did portray a certain awareness of emotions and the effects of life crises on the individual. Yet in any case, emotions were inconsequential where the application of *Halakhah* was concerned. Of course, it must be mentioned that the expectations of the ancient constituent were vastly different from the modern counselee. And the words which seem harsh to modern ears may have been expected and ac-

cepted from the Talmudic rabbi. So for those individuals who emphasize Jewish values over emotional dynamics the ancient rabbi remains a counterpart behaviorally.

Katz's identification of empathy is also a common factor in the modern and ancient rabbinic models. The modern characterization has been discussed above, however the ancient representation of the empathic relationship remains to be examined. Many times, when disciples or colleagues went to visit an ailing rabbi, they too cried in his presence and lamented his pain and the loss of his abilities. (See Berakhot 5b, page 50 and Sanhedrin 101a, page 15) This, in a limited sense represents the ancient rabbinic characterization of empathy. The crying of the visitors signifies their identification with the plight of the dying, as well as the expression of their own loss.

Finally, the power of language is known to both the modern and ancient rabbi. The ancient rabbi's incorporation of Biblical text and poetic language as well as parable and metaphor into his message has been discussed. So too does the modern rabbi utilize these aspects of communication. The *drasha* is a technique whose power has not been lost, nor has the worth of a parable of metaphor. While at first glance, these techniques may appear to have utility exclusively in the homiletic arena, it is possible to incorporate such techniques in to one-on-one counseling situations as well. In Talmudic times, words of prayer were

offered to provide consolation for the distressed. Today, prayer serves a consoling purpose for many individuals. Very often the same prayer or its derivative which an ancient rabbi offered before a mourner or sick person serves to comfort an individual in the present day.

RABBINIC COUNSELORS ANCIENT AND MODERN: DIFFERENCES

The similarities between modern and ancient rabbinic intervention are based on universal aspects of the role of rabbi and congregant, the timelessness of certain values within Judaism and the nature of human interaction. Yet, at the same time, there is room for wide divergence. The very nature of society and change that it has undergone has served to completely alter many basic conceptions of ancient rabbinic society. These factors combine to make the modern approach to rabbinic counseling quite different from its ancient counterpart.

THE WORLD VIEW

In addition, the very understanding of cause and effect in the natural world and how situations develop is far removed from the ancient conception. These factors serve to drastically alter the way that the modern may speak to his or her constituency and the techniques that may be utilized for modern counseling.

The relationship of the modern liberal rabbi to God and God's law has undergone a tremendous change since the days of the Talmud. Whereas there remains a certain illusory conception on the part of the laity towards the rabbi's relationship to God and capacity to invoke God's intervention on humanity's behalf, when pressed, the modern might acknowledge that the connection is quite tenuous. In addition, the significance of law in the life of the liberal rabbi has been changed. There has been a tremendous increase on the emphasis upon the role of humanity in determining which aspects of the law have relevance and application to today's world. Thus, the rabbi's capacity to command behavior or obedience in God's name as the spokesperson for God's law has fallen to obsolescence. A rabbi may cajole, persuade and even command, but the congregant is quite free to assume his or her own course of action with little fear for Divine retribution. Autonomy in determining one's behavior *vis-a-vis* Judaic practice is a basic value of liberal Judaism which few could conceive of differently. Because God's law has been subject to standards of autonomy, the role of the rabbi as interpreter and enforcer of that law has been practically eliminated.

In the counseling situation this has transformed the rabbi's role into the capacity as it has been outlined by Katz and Browning. The rabbi has become a counselor who represents particular values and beliefs which may or may

not appeal to the counselee. The decision to approach the rabbi is willful and a multitude of other options exist for the conflicted individual to find solace. In this way, the rabbi must walk a much finer line. The ancient rabbi could risk offense in achieving his goals with the constituent. The modern must maintain a voluntary relationship in such a way that the distressed individual continues to choose to come. Should the rabbi's message become offensive or overly demanding the congregant is free to terminate the dialogue.

MODERN PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY

Finally, the understanding of and emphasis on the role of emotions in the life of humans has come to take a pre-eminent capacity over other factors. Modern psychology has done a great deal to alter conceptions of human functioning. Theories of human behavior have had a profound impact on the nature of rabbinic intervention in the lives of congregants. It would be a great contradiction for an individual schooled and sensitive to the intricacies of human behavior to utilize certain techniques of the ancient rabbis. Now, both parties in the counseling situation are cognizant of the process of human change and development and have accepted this conception as the operational norm. Both the rabbi and the constituent place a tremendous emphasis on emotions. As Katz has mentioned, the rabbi must cater his or her approach to the emotional needs of the client--adjusting to suit

different emotional needs. If the ancient rabbi had such a conception or approach, no evidence remains for us today.

In addition to this, psychological theory has given rise to an understanding of the nature of the relationship between the counselee and the counselor. The rabbinic counselor has learned the value of self-awareness in the counseling situation. S/he has learned that various techniques and approaches may be utilized depending upon the needs of the situation. Whereas no evidence exists to show that the ancient rabbi modified his behavior based upon notions of interaction between individuals, and knowledge of the dynamics of the interaction, it is clear that for the modern rabbi this has become an issue of primary concern. In fact, a desire to develop a uniquely Jewish understanding of this relationship was a motivating factor for this paper.

Whereas the basic techniques often show subtle variation in application and some even may continue to be used today, many basic conceptions of Judaism which formed the core of the models for ancient and modern rabbis have been drastically altered. The ancient rabbi's primary task was to interpret and enforce the adherence to God's law, secondarily, he sought to provide spiritual and physical health to his constituency. The comfort that he offered was usually not within the realm of what would be considered appropriate

in today's world. The modern rabbi seeks to accomplish the virtual opposite. By administering to the spiritual and emotional well-being of his or her community, the rabbi hopes to encourage a renewed adherence to the traditional Jewish values and customs. In spite of this, certain universal aspects have remained and these serve to define the link between the ancient rabbi and the modern rabbinic counselor.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The role of the rabbi as counselor is based on a long history of rabbinic involvement with the individual lives of the community. In the past, the rabbi functioned in a particular capacity which fulfilled a necessary purpose for both the preservation of Judaism and the well-being of the community. The guidance and consolation offered by the rabbi was based on his connection to *Halakhah* and relationship to God. Today, the rabbi also seeks to ensure the perpetuation and health of his or her community. However, there are many variables which have drastically changed the rabbi's ability to perform that task and the manner in which he or she may go about fulfilling that purpose. At the same time, many aspects of the ancient rabbinic approach continue to influence and provide a conceptual framework for the modern counselor.

THE CONTENT OF RABBINIC COUNSELING

In spite of the fact that the rabbi may be conscious of and utilize techniques which have been learned from the secular disciplines the rabbinic counselor functions in a role which is quite different from the secular counselor. As one whose perspective is based in a Judaic frame of reference and who is capable of incorporating unique elements from a particular cultural milieu, the modern rabbi

provides a singular perspective which is shared most closely with the ancient rabbi.

The ancient rabbi was immersed in his Jewish culture and identity, his entire world was defined by the unique perspective which his Jewishness afforded him. In addition, those people with whom the rabbi communicated generally shared his culture and belief structure. Thus, at times of crisis there was a particular well-known framework: there were established behaviors and techniques as well as conceptions of world order which could afford the distressed person security.

The modern rabbinic counselor strengthens his or her ability to provide solace by recognizing the significance of the cultural milieu in which he or she functions. Judaism has established rituals and behaviors for use in difficult situations yet to a large extent modern Jewry has forgotten them. It must become the rabbis' goal to acknowledge and emphasize the differences which make the Jewish orientation to the world distinctive. Once the Jewish response to crisis has become a part of the repertoire of not only the rabbi but the community as well an enhanced ability to cope with life situations within a common and familiar cultural framework will surface. As Browning has suggested, the rabbi must make his or her particular world view known to the members of the congregation so that they will be aware of the perspective of the rabbi in various situations.

Examples of such communities where the above system has been put into effect are numerous, and well known for their effectiveness. An example of a response within a particular Jewish framework is the period of *shiva* where all members of the congregation feel an obligation to console the bereaved. Congregations where the responsibility for consolation in the event of a death fall not only upon the rabbi but upon the entire congregation serve to provide the distressed member with a higher level of support. Communities that have developed a particular Judaic perspective also exhibit an enhanced ability to cope with the realities of human existence. Congregation Beth El in Sudbury Massachusetts is such an example. The unique perspective of the rabbi and his way of dealing with his Judaism have attracted a particular community which is known for its cohesion and particular approach to Judaic issues. Additional examples exist but go beyond the scope of this paper.

On an individual level, the rabbi will continue to engage in counseling from the perspective that has become familiar to those members of the congregation. Neutrality is not a characteristic of the rabbinic counselor. On the other hand, as Katz has stated, it is not always necessary to directly confront the counselee with the details of the rabbi's perspective on a situation immediately a certain degree of prudence is advised.

THE RABBI IN THE COMMUNITY

The rabbi is faced with the difficult task of integrating religion and society in a way that will find favor in the eyes of the congregation. The delicate task is made even more delicate by the fact that membership in Jewish communities is voluntary--in contrast to the ancient rabbi. Just as the rabbis of the Talmud spent a great deal of time studying their religion and its laws and values, so too must the modern rabbinic counselor. For in order to be informed about the principles of Judaism, they must be at his or her fingertips. Through the vehicle of the symbols of Judaism which defined his world the rabbi of the Talmud provided comfort and guidance. So too must the modern rabbi utilize the metaphors of Judaism. Parables, the use of Biblical and Talmudic text, as well as modern Judaic literature can serve the rabbi in creating the environment which fosters support within the Jewish framework. This would be achieved by incorporating Judaic images into sermons, *divrei Torah*, and even the more mundane interactions with congregants. The rabbi must come to embody the current state of Judaism. He or she should not be limited to the teachings of modernity, nor should he or she be limited to the teachings of the past, the challenge is to combine the continuum of history into a uniquely Jewish identity.

THE RABBI AND GOD

While the ancient rabbi would never have identified his belief in God as something separate from himself, or as something that could be studied in an abstract manner, he was able to verbalize and affirm his belief. In times of crisis this may have been particularly meaningful to the distressed person. The assurance that the sufferings of the individual would warrant the world to come and that a deceased friend or relative would have a place in the world to come could prove to be quite consoling. The modern counselor could emulate such behavior, not in terms of a deterministic world view like the ancient rabbi, rather in the ability to verbalize a well constructed coherent theology and understanding of the world. While it would probably not be advantageous to affirm particular aspects of faith at a time of crisis, it might be possible to fortify congregants by discussing such issues well ahead of time. All to often a congregant is suddenly in a situation of great difficulty and conceptions that have been held since childhood about God and the nature of the world are shattered. If the person had devoted some time to formulating a coherent theology he or she might have been strengthened as they confronted the loss of a loved one.

The ancient rabbinic familiarity with God and God's role in his life serves as a model for modernity. However, within the modern application it is necessary to permit and

acknowledge plurality. The specific view of God and the function of the world is not as important as that there is some well considered conception--as long as it remains within broad definitions of what could be termed "Jewish." Thus, it would be appropriate to conduct adult education sessions, sermons and other means of interaction as a way of bolstering the congregants knowledge and engaging in "defensive counseling."

THE CONTINUATION OF AN ESTABLISHED PRACTICE

It is important for the rabbinic counselor to see him or herself as a link in the continuing role of the rabbi as the guide and consoler for the congregation. This serves to base the individual in an identity and provide a frame of reference for the work that is being done. If the rabbi considers him or herself cut off from an ongoing process then there is very little to concretize the relationship to Judaism and its values. The individual may fail to see him or herself as responsible for maintaining the continuity that has existed throughout rabbinic history.

By establishing and strengthening the bond to history, the rabbinic counselor will be engaged in the dialectic that has troubled rabbis throughout history: the balance that must be achieved in the application of justice and mercy. Each generation resolves the issue differently, but it has become the ongoing Judaic process. The Talmudic rabbi was

constantly faced with the realities of human existence and the verities of Divine law. In the application of Divine law on earth the rabbi perpetually had to confront the limitations and shortcomings of humanity when confronted with Divine demands. At this juncture came the dilemma: when to acknowledge human shortcomings and permit a certain degree of leniency. The rabbi tended toward the more stringent side stressing the preeminence of law, yet devising techniques which would allow for human realities.

The modern rabbi engages in an analogous dialectic. Constantly aware of the demands of both the legal aspects of Jewish tradition and those which have been identified as moral and ethical the rabbi is confronted with the imperfections of human behavior. The example of congregants who engage in adultery, corruption and financial manipulations as well as more heinous crimes appear in every synagogue. Subtle indiscretions exist as well which might be within the accepted norms but clearly violate the Jewish imperatives for upright behavior. The rabbi must decide what his or her response will be to the situation of these congregants. Is it appropriate to condemn the individual for his or her transgression and to dismiss that person from the community? Or should the rabbi continue to maintain a relationship with the hopes that the person may eventually be turned to the correct path? An ancient counterpart to such a situation was examined in the body of this paper. In Berakhot 5b

(page 20) R. Huna failed to pay his workers the proper wages. The rabbis came to remind him of his duty and attributed the souring of his wine stores to the indiscretion. Similarly the rabbis come to visit R. Eliezer in spite of the fact that he has been placed under a ban. (See page 52) From these two texts it would appear that the rabbis value their responsibility to correct a wrong in another and their obligations towards a colleague more than the sanctions which may be applied for a sin. Thus, it might be possible for a modern rabbi to conclude that it is important to retain the contact with the individual both out of a desire to influence this person towards a particular path, and because of this person's previous connections to the community. The concern is that one factor in determining the verity of a value is a precedent which exists within the Jewish tradition as well as conclusions arrived at through personal moral inquiry.[42]

THE VALUE OF MODERN COUNSELING TECHNIQUE

At the same time that one recognizes the value of past approaches to rabbinic care, it is necessary to acknowledge the contributions of modern counseling technique. Thus the approaches of Katz, Browning and others become quite relevant. The modern reader of Talmudic dialogues is struck by

[42] This phrase is attributed to Don S. Browning in *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care.*

the bluntness of the rabbinic parlance and its lack of what we might call tact. The current notions of interpersonal relations dictate a different style of communication, one which attempts to take the emotions of the other into account. Then, through appropriate means of intervention, the rabbi may be able to initiate a process of gradual change within the individual. However it is imperative that the rabbi attempt to empathetically understand the feelings of the other.

In addition, significant knowledge can be gained from the modern understanding of human emotions and psyche. The more experience that a rabbi acquires in this field the more it may benefit his or her interactions with the congregation. An understanding of group dynamics from the discipline of social work may also enhance his or her ability to function as a group leader and facilitator.

A LAST WORD

This paper represents the culmination of a year of study of the Talmudic origins of rabbinic care. During this year the vast richness of the Talmudic wisdom has become even more apparent to this author. The rabbis achieved great insight into the confluence of human behavior and the demands of God. Their solutions were of a profound nature which illustrate the gravity with which they approached their task. The modern counselor approaches the obligation

with no less responsibility. For it is the rabbi who bridges the gap between the harsh demands of this world and its cold facts and the softer reality of human nature. There is no logic, no formula which determines human behavior, yet one can develop a sense of others and how to afford them opportunities for personal growth and security. This would describe the world of secular psychology were it not for an additional variable which the modern rabbinic counselor brings to his or her work: the issues of God, cultural identity, morals and ethics. The continuing challenge facing the modern is how to provide the guidance necessary to continue the process of human improvement while maintaining one's own perspective on what is true and good amidst the sea of eternal uncertainties.

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